

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

Make restoring Hetch Hetchy a goal for second century of the National Park Service

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BY SPRECK ROSEKRANS

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Paddle a canoe past flamingos in the Everglades. Touch the Grand Canyon's sandstone walls. Marvel at Yellowstone's buffalo, elk, and moose amid geysers spewing steam from underground volcanos. Walk the lush forests in the Great Smoky Mountains.



Since 1916, the National Park Service has protected these lands for us, for our children, and for generations to come. But the full measure of protection which our national parks enjoy today came with a price – the loss of Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley.

By the early 20th century, Congress had created a handful of national parks. They were run separately with no common vision. Parks were patrolled by the U.S. Army. Early advocates proposed creating a single agency to manage and protect our national parks. Pro-development forces opposed the idea, fearing harm to timber and other extractive industries.

The conflict came to a head in 1913 when San Francisco lobbied Congress for permission to dam the Hetch Hetchy Valley – a project the City had been pursuing for decades. Local newspapers ridiculed naturalist John Muir and the “nature lovers and fakers” who dared stand in the way of “progress”.

The nature lovers pushed back, persuading more than 200 newspapers nationwide to write editorials which opposed building a dam in Yosemite National Park for “parochial” interests. Debate captivated the U.S. Senate for six days in early December. San Francisco prevailed in the end, built the O'Shaughnessy Dam and flooded Hetch Hetchy Valley. Our national consciousness, however, had been raised forever.

Three years later, a remorseful Congress passed the once controversial “Organic” Act, creating the National Park Service to ensure that our parks would be managed as a single system for national benefit. Subsequent proposals to build dams in Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon were defeated. Since Hetch Hetchy was dammed 100 years ago, no significant development has been allowed in any of our national parks.

Our national parks are more popular than ever. Visit them and find not only a plethora of your own countrymen, but citizens from countries around the world, many of which did not have the foresight to preserve some of their own very special places.

As we celebrate the centennial of the National Park Service, Hetch Hetchy remains underwater. Multiple studies have shown, however, that improvements to San Francisco's system would allow undiminished deliveries without storing water in Yosemite – making Hetch Hetchy's restoration possible. Not a drop of water need be lost.

Imagine another Yosemite Valley – perhaps one with fewer roads and shops. Families picnicking along the river as they watch a valley return to life. Restoration inspiring communities across the United States and around the world. We do not need to live with mistakes of the past.

What better way to begin the second century of our national parks than by undoing the destruction done to Yosemite and by bringing the Hetch Hetchy Valley back to life?

Spreck Rosekrans is Executive Director of Restore Hetch Hetchy