

University of Colorado Law School

Colorado Law Scholarly Commons

Who Governs the Public Lands: Washington?
The West? The Community? (September 28-30)

1994

9-30-1994

Integrating Public Land and Local Community Planning Objectives: The Rocky Mountain National Park Experience

Homer L. Rouse

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.law.colorado.edu/who-governs-public-lands-washington-west-community>



Part of the [Administrative Law Commons](#), [Business Organizations Law Commons](#), [Environmental Policy Commons](#), [Forest Management Commons](#), [Land Use Law Commons](#), [Natural Resources and Conservation Commons](#), [Natural Resources Management and Policy Commons](#), [Property Law and Real Estate Commons](#), [Public Policy Commons](#), and the [State and Local Government Law Commons](#)

Citation Information

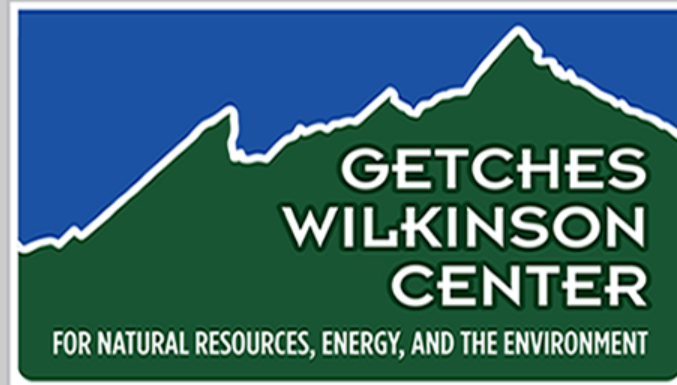
Rouse, Homer L., "Integrating Public Land and Local Community Planning Objectives: The Rocky Mountain National Park Experience" (1994). *Who Governs the Public Lands: Washington? The West? The Community? (September 28-30)*.

<https://scholar.law.colorado.edu/who-governs-public-lands-washington-west-community/16>

Reproduced with permission of the Getches-Wilkinson Center for Natural Resources, Energy, and the Environment (formerly the Natural Resources Law Center) at the University of Colorado Law School.



William A. Wise Law Library
COLORADO LAW
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER



Getches-Wilkinson Center Collection

Homer L. Rouse, *Integrating Public Land and Local Community Planning Objectives: The Rocky Mountain National Park Experience*, in *WHO GOVERNS THE PUBLIC LANDS: WASHINGTON? THE WEST? THE COMMUNITY?* (Natural Res. Law Ctr., Univ. of Colo. Sch. of Law 1994).

Reproduced with permission of the Getches-Wilkinson Center for Natural Resources, Energy, and the Environment (formerly the Natural Resources Law Center) at the University of Colorado Law School.

SEARCHING FOR INTEGRATION: SOME MODELS

Homer L. Rouse
Superintendent
Rocky Mountain National Park

INTEGRATING PUBLIC LAND AND LOCAL COMMUNITY PLANNING OBJECTIVES: THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE

Second Annual Western Lands Conference
Natural Resources Law Center
University of Colorado
Boulder, Colorado

September 28-20, 1994

**Integrating Public Land and Local Community Planning Objectives:
The Rocky Mountain National Park Experience.**

I. The Context of Rocky Mountain National Park

A. Established in 1915

1. Enos Mills, who championed the creation of the park, described its resources as follows:

"Around Estes Park, Colorado, are mountain scenes of exceptional beauty and grandeur. In this territory is Longs Peak and one of the most rugged sections of the Continental Divide of the Rockies. The region is almost entirely above the altitude of 7,500 feet and in it are forests, streams, waterfalls, snowy peaks, great canyons, glaciers, scores of species of wild birds, and more than a thousand varieties of wildflowers."

2. The enabling legislation for the park succinctly describes its purpose:

"dedicated and set apart as a public park for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the United States...with regulations being primarily aimed at the freest use of the said park for recreational purposes by the public and for the preservation of the natural condition and scenic beauties thereof
(*Act of January 26, 1915. 38 Stat. 798*)

- a. Dual Mission: Preservation and Use

B. Size is 265,294 acres

1. A small park when compared to other "natural" western parks

- a. 1/8 the size of Yellowstone

- b. Receives the same visitation (3 million per year).

C. Park boundaries primarily follow section lines

1. Do not respect natural process
2. Park does not contain a complete ecosystem

- D. RMNP lies within or adjacent to four Colorado counties
 - 1. Three of the four counties are experiencing significant population growth
 - 2. 1980 - 1990 census
 - a. Boulder 19%
 - b. Grand 7%
 - c. Larimer 25%
- E. Two primary gateway communities
 - 1. Estes Park
 - a. 35% population growth 1980-1990
 - b. Primarily single family home development
 - 2. Grand Lake

II. External threats

- A. The Wilderness Society listed RMNP as one of the 10 most endangered parks in the country (*Ten Most Endangered National Parks*. May 24, 1988)
 - 1. The park is relatively small
 - 2. It is not a self-contained ecosystem
 - 3. The park is located near a major metropolitan area (Denver)
 - a. Earlier this year (1994) the Rocky Mountain News (Denver) conducted a survey of its readership
 - (1) RMNP was favorite day trip destination
 - (2) RMNP was favorite place to watch wildlife
 - 4. Extensive development is occurring on private lands adjacent to the park
- B. Adjacent land development has the potential to degrade the park in the following ways
 - 1. Marring of scenic vistas both out of and into the park
 - 2. Loss of nighttime sky
 - 3. Loss of natural quiet and wilderness experience
 - 4. Fragmentation of wildlife habitat

5. Conflicts over management
 - a. The park is managed for natural process.

Conflicts can arise over:

- (1) Wildfire management
- (2) Control of exotic plants
- (3) Control of insect pests

- C. According to Luther Propst of the Rincon Institute, "Poorly managed growth in wilderness gateway communities can cause the loss of those distinctive qualities that attract sustainable economic development in the first place." (*Steward of the Environment: Rocking K's Rincon Institute. Urban Land, June 1991*)

III. Addressing the issue

- A. The management staff at RMNP recognizes that:
 1. The park cannot be managed as an island; its long-term health is inextricably linked with adjacent private and public lands
 2. That the park and its gateway communities share a symbiotic relationship
 - a. As the No. 1 tourist attraction in the state of Colorado, the economies of gateway communities depend on the park.
 - b. The park depends on the gateway communities to provide the services that the park does not provide (automotive services, lodging, dining, etc.)
 3. To sustain the natural environment, economy and social well-being of RMNP and its neighboring communities will require interjurisdictional cooperation....a blurring of our mutual boundaries.
 4. In these days when we must exercise fiscal restraint, protecting the most critical resources will require nothing short of a partnership effort

- a. Landowners
- b. Land managers
- c. Government leaders
- d. Universities

IV. Partnerships

A. Gateways to the 21st Century

Brought together 130 people primarily from the four counties around the park to explore the future of RMNP and the borderlands of the park. The No. 1 priority for action:

"Land management agencies and others should identify those lands that are critical to (a) the long-term health of the bioregion; or (b) to visitor experience (i.e., vistas, access, etc.); or (c) to the cultural and social fabric of the area. Landowners, communities and counties should work together to establish development standards, guidelines, and/or other strategies to protect critical lands or cultural resources." (*Gateways to the 21st Century: Workshop Proceedings*. Resource Management Division, Rocky Mountain National Park, 1994)

B. Colorado Rockies Regional Cooperative

RMNP is a partner in this organization whose purpose is to promote knowledge and understanding of the natural and human resources of this region, to encourage wise use of these resources through research; integration, and updating; education; and the demonstration of principles for ecosystem management; and to create and develop a means of cooperation among resource management agencies, educational institutions, organizations, the private sector and citizens.

C. Man and the Biosphere (MAB)

An international program established in 1971, MAB is designed to provide knowledge, skills, and human values to support harmonious relationships between people and

their environment. RMNP has been designated as a biosphere reserve, and Superintendent Homer Rouse is an alternate Director of the organization.

D. USDA Forest Service

Two-thirds of the border of RMNP adjoins the Arapaho-Roosevelt N.F. The park has established an excellent working relationship with the USFS through semi-annual meetings between both staffs to discuss management issues and other activities of mutual interest. The USFS is taking the lead in acquiring some land that is critical to the park.

E. Town of Estes Park

The town is currently updating its comprehensive plan. The park has been "at the table" during all phases of the development of the plan.

F. Spur 66 neighborhood

The park, Town and several other partners have applied for a Great Outdoors Colorado (GO-CO) grant to develop a neighborhood plan for an area that borders the park. The goal of the plan is to identify and protect critical lands while guiding future development.

G. Larimer County

There will be a parks and open space tax on the November ballot in Larimer County. A portion of the funds will be earmarked for the acquisition of critical open space. Park staff has been active in the campaign for this ballot initiative.

H. Peak to Peak Scenic Byway Interest Group (SBIG)

Park staff has participated with this group to develop a corridor management plan for the Peak to Peak Scenic Byway.

V. Outreach

A. "Heart of the Rockies Adventure Guide"

The park secured a grant from the Pugh Charitable Trust to develop an environmental education guide for

elementary, middle and high school students.

B. "Balance Beyond the Boundary"

The Division of Interpretation has developed a series of slide programs that explore the issues that transcend the boundaries of the park. For example, "Passages" deals with wildlife management issues.

VI. Conclusion

- A. To sustain RMNP and our neighboring communities we must be as visionary as those who first established this national treasure as a national park.
- B. There are difficult decisions that must be made
 - a. Land use
 - b. Transportation
 - c. Wildlife management
 - d. Wildfire management
 - e. Economics
 - f. Etc.
- C. As stewards, park management is committed to being an active participant in partnership efforts aimed at defining the future of the region.