



American Recreation Coalition

*Dedicated to the protection and enhancement of everyone's right
to health and happiness through recreation.*

February 8, 2008

Memorandum

TO: The Honorable Lamar Alexander
CC: LaTonya Miller
FROM: Derrick A. Crandall
SUBJECT: New Recreation Commission

We strongly support your concept of a new national commission to energize and unify recreation and conservation advocates across the nation. We recognize that there are many potential contributions arising from a new commission, and are pleased to share our counsel on priorities and strategies which would make a new commission most valuable and successful.

We believe that a commission created in 2008 should not focus on updating and revalidating the important work of ORRRC and PCAO – although we are certain that the new commission will cause many to reexamine the important work of the predecessor efforts. Rather, we believe that the new commission needs to explore the connections between the Great Outdoors, people and important societal needs including health, education and economic sustainability of communities.

Each year, we coordinate the gathering of some 150 leaders in recreation from the public and private sectors. All of the federal resource agencies, state park and tourism agencies, companies ranging from Disney to Coleman to KOA and key non-profits come together – and this year at Snowbird from January 13-16 we met to discuss how a new national commission could help in unlocking the benefits of our public lands and waters for all Americans, and especially urban youth. We are pleased to share the suggestions and recommendations of the participants, who are identified in an attachment to this memorandum.

Our participants devoted more than a day to deliberations involving the proposed commission. We began with a very important issue: ***is a new recreation commission an important and needed action?***

There was initial vigorous debate on this topic. Some argued that many commissions “address” issues but don’t “solve” them. Others were concerned that a

commission would delay needed Congressional action. The group reviewed the ORRRC and PCAO track records and concluded, unanimously, that history argued strongly that well-led commissions had served recreation policy in America well since 1960 and thus a new recreation commission should be created.

Next, participants discussed the primary objectives of the new commission and identified six primary goals:

- Redefine recreation as a valuable tool in health, education, economic sustainability of communities, national unity and family cohesiveness
- Reassess current recreation programs and facilities in light of lifestyle changes
- Unify all recreation and conservation advocates on priority actions
- Increase the visibility of successes in recreation and conservation, and especially successes built around partnerships
- Rebuild bipartisan political support and action
- Create an "umbrella" for diverse public and private organizations seeking to increase physical activity and to connect Americans with nature

Participants next developed a list of issues they believed the commission should address:

- Innovative funding strategies
- Interconnection of recreation and health – physical, mental and spiritual
- Recreation and conservation programs as tools to improved education, crime prevention and quality of life
- Connecting America's youth – and especially urban youth – with nature
- Meeting the recreation needs of senior Americans
- Appropriate roles for public and private recreation providers – current and future
- Overcoming inertia and jurisdictional barriers to changes in public needs and demands

Participants also addressed tactical and strategic issues involving the commission, its creation and composition. Here are the key recommendations:

- There are at least three alternatives for creation of the commission: legislation, executive order and independent (non-governmental) action in conjunction with a respected foundation/organization. Of these, the legislative option offers an obvious advantage of sanction by two branches of government but the least potential for prompt action. The executive order option could be timely but risks polarization, unless safeguards are incorporated for consultation with Congress on appointments and operations. The third option is intriguing and deserves consideration if a suitable and credible anchor can be identified. One suggestion from the group was for an emissary of the Rockefellers like Henry Diamond to be enlisted to approach Bill and Melinda Gates, Warren Buffett or an alternative acceptable source of support.
- There is urgency in getting the commission process underway. A commission that does not begin until mid 2009 would be unlikely to produce results in a

timely way for the Administration taking office in January 2009. On the other hand, there is an understanding that a commission appointed by the current Administration would have very real handicaps. For that reason, participants recommended that the commission be created by June 2008 but have two clear phases. Phase One, through early 2009, would focus on information gathering. Phase Two, beginning in early 2009 and lasting through May 2009, would involve development of recommendations. Participants felt that recommendations for action offered in June 2009 would be timely enough to be addressed by both new appointees and the Congress as it developed the 2010 budget. This strategy was closely tied to a strategy for commissioner appointments.

- **Commissioners:** Both previous commissions had fifteen appointees but the nature of the commissions was quite different. ORRRC had eight (8) Members of Congress; PCAO had four (4). In both cases, the members were divided evenly by party and chamber. PCAO found engagement of the Members of Congress to be a challenge, while Members of Congress were quite active in ORRRC. PCAO included a sitting governor, serving as chairman, and this provided a useful connection to non-federal public recreation providers, including state and local park agencies. Both commissions had powerful private sector members who brought substantial resources to the table – notably Laurance Rockefeller for ORRRC and Gilbert Grosvenor of National Geographic. And both had passionate advocates of the outdoors as commissioners, also forming networks of support and follow-through. Participants believe that a similar-sized commission with commissioners offering these three assets – links to state and local governments, organizational resources and bases of support – would be desirable. The participants urge an alternative to Members of Congress as full commissioners: “surrogates” named by the key Members of Congress. And finally, the participants recommended that at least two, and perhaps more, Administration officials be ex officio members of the commission – a step that would effectively involve the incoming Administration in the crucial Phase Two of the commission. One major departure from past commissions would be to seek active involvement from the Surgeon General of the United States.

- **Advisors:** PCAO created a group of commission advisors. It is noteworthy that the advisors DID NOT constitute a board or council, and never met. Yet the advisors demonstrated a viable means to be inclusive and to solicit and obtain support of crucial groups. For the new commission, carefully selected advisors might successfully enlist support from healthcare interests, from educational institutions, from the criminal justice system and more.

- **Pre-commission summit:** participants recommended an immediate convening of a carefully selected group to define commission goals and strategies and offer a clear public call for the creation of the commission. Laurance Rockefeller enlisted a small team to do this in 1983. Although the effort failed to provide the political lift needed in the House of Representatives, it did have a unifying result among recreation and conservation interests.

- **Studies:** participants were unanimous in stressing the value of new, national research as an integral part of the commission’s effort, and specifically urged

that the research be future focused and address not simply recreation participation but the relationship between recreation and other key issues, including health, use of technology, education and more. This research can and should be designed through public/private cooperation and can be done as a cost-share effort to achieve broad buy-in.

- Information gathering: while the previous commissions made effective use of hearings, the new commission should extend its outreach and information gathering still further and utilize blogs and more.

- Role of states, counties, cities and private recreation providers: both of the previous commissions had a federal focus, and federal programs and efforts remain an important issue. However, serving the outdoor recreation needs of the nation in the 21st Century will require stronger attention to state, county, city and private recreation providers, and integration of these provider networks.

Finally participants considered factors beyond the operational issues of the commission and made the following recommendations:

- Structure(s) for monitoring and advocacy: a new commission may, like past commissions, successfully create a repository of good ideas and spur unity among diverse interests, but a lasting institution outside of government – perhaps a biennial summit – is a worthy objective to retain focus and give rise to coalitions to achieve needed policy changes.

- Cooption of key organizations, including National Governors Association: key structures like NGA, NACo and others should be an important focus of the next commission, with an objective of follow-up roles and actions through these structures.

- Coordination of federal agencies: participants noted the creation of the Federal Recreation Council in the 1960's to coordinate the federal role in recreation and conservation. Some of this responsibility ultimately devolved to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, later the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service. Among the powers were a National Recreation Plan and dispersal of funds: LAWCON/LWCF and UPARR. Participants noted that extension of recreation programs beyond land-managing agencies would likely require a superstructure like CEQ, able to gain attention and support from departments as diverse as Justice, Labor and Education. And they reiterated that real power is associated with funds.

We hope these thoughts are of value to you. Even more importantly, we offer to draw together diverse interests to discuss these and other ideas over the next 30 days to aid your actions.

Derrick

DAC/

Attachment