

## ***Monday Morning Washington Update – November 24, 2008***

Continuing negative news on employment and the economy makes the emphasis of the new Obama Administration on these issues a certainty. Little federal funding or Oval Office time will be available for programs that don't play a role in generating good economic news in the near term. What does that mean for recreation?

First, it means that we have to champion recreation needs that are traditionally viewed as "infrastructure," including roads to and through parks and forests and other recreation sites. In addition to a huge new surface transportation bill due from the next Congress – \$75 billion or more annually for five years – chances are high that the second-wave stimulus bill of January 2009 will include billions for public works projects that can be underway within 12 months.

Second, it makes a re-do of the Civilian Conservation Corps a very good bet. Expect well over 250,000 young Americans to be offered short-term jobs on public efforts over the next two years, hopefully many on public lands. Quick employment, useful training and earned educational stipends will be popular with Congress and the state agencies very concerned about rising unemployment claims and anxiety about financing of education.

Third, it creates new opportunities to highlight the vital role of federal lands and waters in travel, tourism and recreation, and to devise programs that spur recreation visits.

And fourth, it provides an important argument for not closing and reducing public access to federally-managed lands and waters. This is especially important because we know that at least some of those who emerge as leaders in the new Obama Administration will be drawn from the ranks of those who served under President Clinton, and who associated visitation with environmental threats.

A viable strategy for recreation interests over the next several years will be to encourage the active involvement of other federal officials in federal lands matters. We'll need to get the Department of Commerce (new Secretary-designate Bill Richardson, now Governor of New Mexico) involved as an advocate of tourism, and the Department of Health and Human Services (new Secretary-designate Tom Daschle, former Senator from South Dakota) involved as an advocate for active lifestyles. We will be investigating support for an executive order by President Obama that requires an assessment of the impact of a federal action on jobs – just as NEPA and the Endangered Species Act require assessments of impacts on the environment and on wildlife, fish – and even insects.

The significance of the economic downturn for recreation will also produce some interesting serendipities. In a recent meeting with U.S. Representative Sam Farr (D-CA-17), we learned several interesting things. First, businesses appear to have neglected building relations with Members of Congress seen as liberal in philosophy.

The Congressman had *never* met with the auto dealers in his district until this month, although he has served the Carmel/Monterey region for 14 years in the Congress and 12 years before that in the California Assembly. When the meeting finally occurred, he reported that the dealers were surprised to find out that he was sympathetic and wanted to help them face the challenges of the current situation. And he told us that he, and other Members, were ready to sit down with recreation leaders to see how public/private cooperation could create new “green infrastructure” and sustainable communities – he feels there is much to gain once we overcome a communications vacuum and bridge a difference in terminology. In fact, he wants to make these meetings – in Congressional Districts across the nation – a focus of the Congressional Travel and Tourism Caucus, which he co-chairs.

We also see opportunities in innovative approaches to resolve festering challenges. One creative ally of recreation interests, and a seasoned political veteran, recently urged us to readdress the controversy of winter travel in Yellowstone National Park in a way that would reposition the issue of environmental impact of snowmobile use. Imagine, she suggested, if the impacts of snowmobile use in winter were offset by reductions in emission of greenhouse gases in warmer weather, when zero-emission vehicles and other strategies are technically more feasible – paid for with a charge on winter visitors. Wouldn't this give the Democratic governors of Montana and Wyoming new tools to negotiate with opponents of snowmobile use on the park's snow-covered roads?

And a final note: we continue to feel that the passion for connecting kids with nature and the need to promote more physical activity by youth are key arguments for a federal policy promoting recreation. We feel that June 13, 2009 – the second National Get Outdoors Day – and its 100+ metro events – will unite not only the recreation community but also health, tourism and education interests in a new and exciting way. In addition to the immediate benefits of introducing fun outdoors activities to those who rarely visit the Great Outdoors, we'll be inviting American families to make pledges to be more active and inviting them to countless “**EChO-EVENTS,**” fun times away from the cities where our new enthusiasts will be offered special opportunities to enjoy time on federal and state public lands.

We expect announcements about key figures overseeing environmental and public lands issues to be made by December 15<sup>th</sup>, and are already working to be certain that briefing materials and questions for use during the confirmation hearings in January are set to go. More on that soon.

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