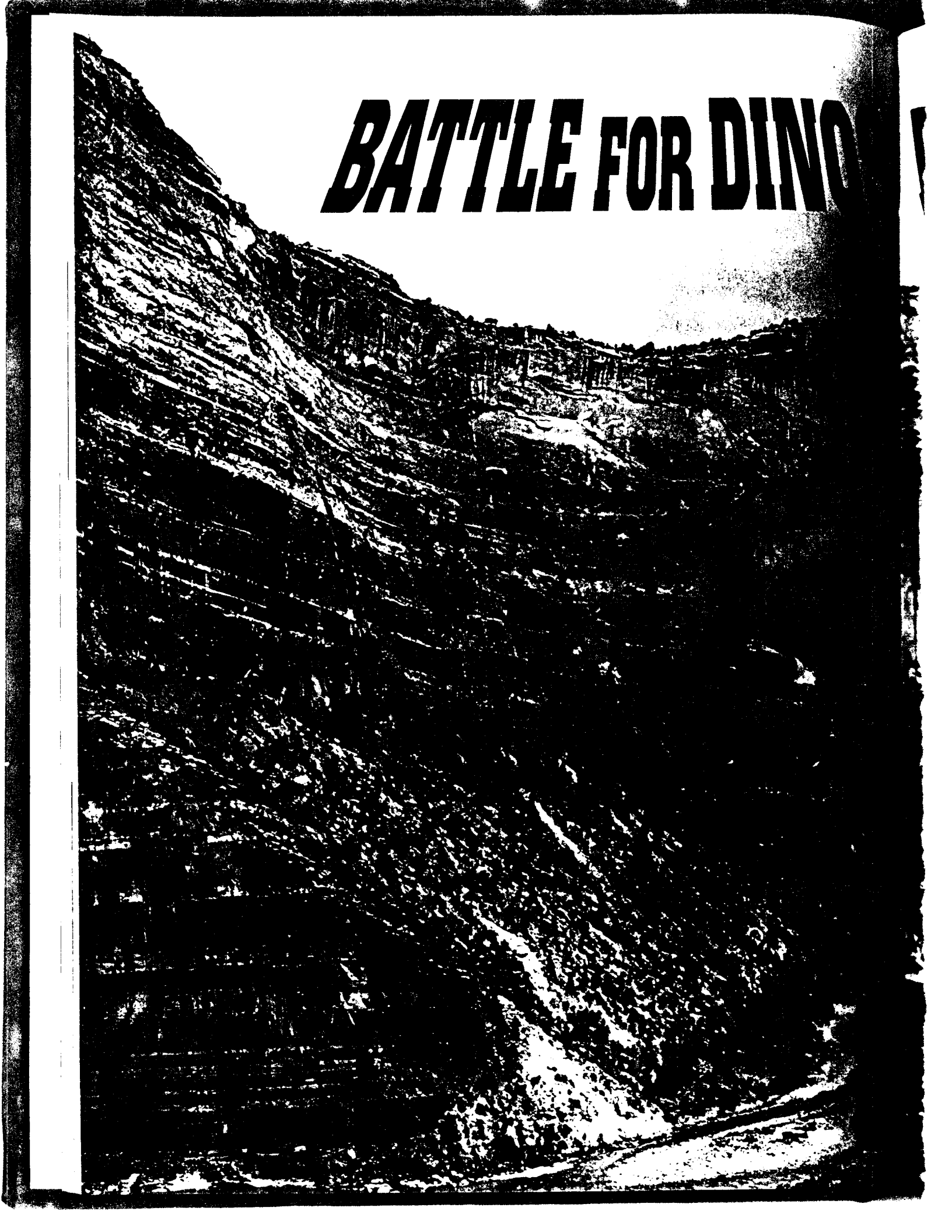
BATTLE FOR DINO

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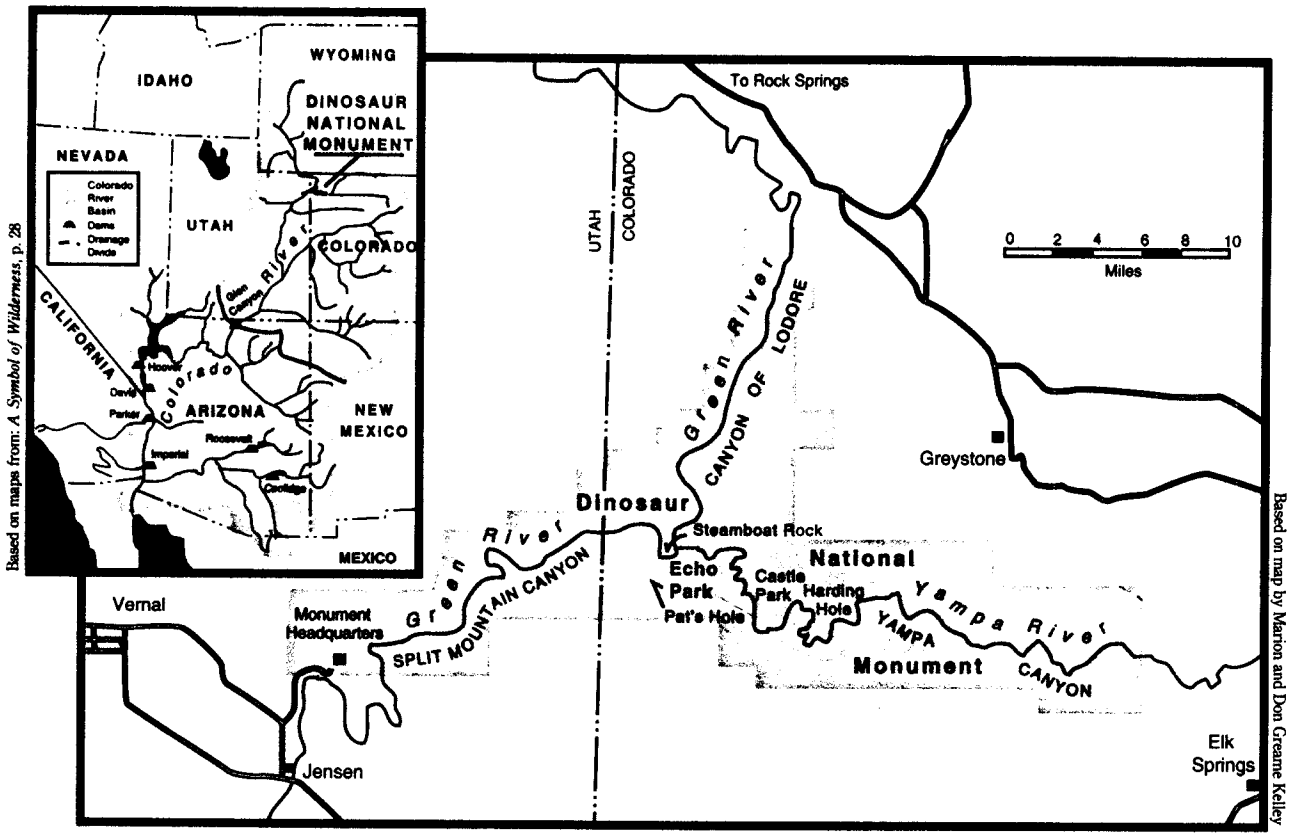
Echo Park Dam and the Birth of the Modern Wilderness Movement

by Mark W. T. Harvey

The best-known conflict over public lands and scenic preserves in the United States in the mid-1950s centered on a proposal by the Bureau of Reclamation to build a large dam near Echo Park inside Dinosaur National Monument. First suggested by the bureau in 1946, the dam threatened the remote and relatively unknown section of the national park system that spans the border between Utah and Colorado. The bureau wanted to build this dam on the Green River in a high-walled canyon near the center of the monument. Echo Park, a picturesque valley just upstream from the dam site, along with miles of nearby Lodore Canyon and Yampa Canyon, would have been buried beneath several hundred feet of water.



Features of Dinosaur National Monument are shown on the large map. The Monument's site at the north end of the Colorado River Basin is located in the insert. Warm Springs Bend in the Yampa Canyon (pictured on the preceding page) would have become part of Echo Park Reservoir. (George Grant, photographer, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia)

Beginning in 1949 wilderness enthusiasts and conservation organizations joined forces to defend the scenic preserve by mounting a national campaign against the dam. Determined to prevent the magnificent scenery from being flooded, they sought to reaffirm one of the founding principles of the national park system: scenery in the national parks should be left unimpaired for future generations. Led by Howard Zahniser of the Wilderness Society, Ira Gabrielson of the Emergency Committee on Natural Resources, Fred Packard and Sigurd Olson of the National Parks Association, and David Brower of the Sierra Club, conservationists badgered Congress to find an alternate site for the dam. Finally in 1956 Congress agreed. Echo Park Dam would not be built. By forcing the Bureau of Reclamation to back down, conservationists secured a major victory on behalf of the national park system and wilderness preservation. As Roderick Nash and other historians have recognized, the defeat of Echo Park Dam proved to be a milestone for the fledgling wilderness movement and a critically important episode prior to the Wilderness Act of 1964.[1]

While historians have been aware of the significance of the Echo Park battle for some time, they have not examined it thoroughly in context of the wilderness movement, national park history, or history of the American West after the Second World War. In the broadest sense, the controversy over Echo Park revealed a generational clash in American conservation and environmental history, a clash that became a prominent theme in the West in the postwar era.

Earlier in the twentieth century, federal conservation agencies like the Bureau of Reclamation, Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management had become deeply enmeshed in the economy of western states, setting the stage for a series of sharp conflicts with preservationists who became increasingly more powerful and effective after 1950. The Echo Park controversy was the first of these conflicts in the postwar era, an early sign that the West would be a constant battleground for two distinct generations, those who came before World War II and those who came after the war, in the nation's environmental history.

The Bureau of Reclamation was deeply rooted in the Department of the Interior and was part of the bedrock of the nation's conservation establishment. Created in 1902, the agency had been a keystone in

1. Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3d ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 209-19. The National Parks Association was later renamed the National Parks and Conservation Association.

the Progressive Era conservation movement. By building dams, canals, and irrigation and power facilities, the Bureau of Reclamation sought to make efficient use of the West's water resources. By the end of World War II, the agency had a substantial presence in the region with offices in Billings, Denver, Salt Lake City, and other cities. Its dams and power plants were part of the fabric of many western state economies. Backed by steadily increased appropriations from Congress, the bureau expanded across the West throughout the 1940s with major projects along the Columbia River, the tributaries of the Missouri River, and the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. The agency also had a major presence along the lower stretches of the Colorado River, where it had erected giant Hoover Dam to control flooding and generate hydroelectric power for the Southwest; Parker Dam, connecting the Colorado River Aqueduct to greater Los Angeles; and the All American Canal, which transported Colorado River water west to the Imperial valley.[2]

With the lower Colorado basin taking the lion's share of the great river, states upstream became increasingly restless and eager to use their own share of the water, to which they were entitled under the Colorado River Compact of 1922.[3] World War II brought increased population growth, federal spending, and industrial development to states in the upper Colorado basin, including Wyoming, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah. These states now demanded that the bureau provide dams and power plants to encourage their growth.

The bureau responded with the proposed Colorado River Storage Project, a series of dams and power plants to be constructed along the upper Colorado River and its tributaries. As part of this project (known as CRSP), large storage and power dams were slated for Glen Canyon, south of the Utah-Arizona border, and at Echo Park, just below the junction of the Green and Yampa rivers within Dinosaur National Monument. Although Glen Canyon Dam was to provide substantially more water storage and power, Echo Park Dam took on special importance because of its function in capturing Yampa River water for Utah and because of its role in the Central Utah Project, a part of CRSP.[4]

The Bureau of Reclamation announced plans for CRSP with a two-year flourish of publicity beginning in 1947. Joined by the Utah Water and Power Board and state water engineers from Utah's upper basin neighbors, bureau officials circulated throughout the region, touting the merits of CRSP for ranchers, farmers, rural electrical cooperatives, and urban dwellers. Many residents close to Dinosaur National Monument anticipated a business boom with the construction of Echo Park Dam and a further boost to their economy from tourists visiting the reservoir.[5] Newspapers such as the Denver *Post*, Salt Lake *Tribune*, and *Deseret News* heralded the dam and CRSP regularly. Soon Echo Park Dam became a much proclaimed instrument of economic growth and diversification, a symbol of progress and prosperity to one of the West's emerging subregions.[6]

While most Americans in the early Cold War era believed in dams and the numerous benefits they provided, some people were dubious about the bureau's concept of managed rivers. World War II and the postwar period proved to be a watershed in the evolution of popular attitudes toward nature. Increased income, rising living standards, and higher levels of education all worked to usher in a postindustrial society and an "advanced consumer economy."[7] These trends contributed to a shift in public attitudes toward preservation of the environment. With the middle class less worried about fulfilling basic living needs and having greater amounts of leisure time, this growing segment of the populace expressed a desire to enjoy what one historian has called "amenities" of life, including vacations to parks, forests, and wilderness areas.[8]

These changes underpinned the growth and activism of the postwar generation of preservationists, represented by such groups as the National Parks Association (NPA), Wilderness Society, and Sierra Club. Keen to promote their agendas in the western states, preservationists sought to take advantage of the great travel boom that followed the war, when millions, ready to celebrate the nation's victory with a long-delayed vacation, took to the highways. Americans now could afford to travel to places distant from their homes. National forests and especially national parks were primary destinations, and Americans descended on them in record numbers.[9]

National parks and monuments in the West took on special meaning to preservationist groups. The NPA had special regard for the large scenic parks in the West, partly out of fear that the National Park Service was lavishing funds on historic sites, presidential birthplaces, cemeteries, and battlefields in the

2. Norris Hundley, Jr., *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water, 1770s–1990s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 220-30.
3. Ibid., 209-13.
4. Salt Lake *Tribune*, April 9, 1946.
5. Ibid., April 4, 1954.
6. Ibid., October 16, 1949.
7. Samuel P. Hays, "Three Decades of Environmental Politics: The Historical Context," in *Government and Environmental Politics: Essays on Historical Developments Since World War Two*, ed. Michael J. Lacey (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 22.

eastern United States, many of which had been absorbed into the park system in the 1930s. With the NPA anxious that the agency now favored "cannonball parks," *National Parks* magazine began to highlight "primeval parks" in the West to distinguish them from the gamut of eastern sites. The NPA lauded scenic qualities of Mount Rainier National Primeval Park, Glacier National Primeval Park, and other scenic parks, primarily in the West.[10] "Primeval parks" demonstrated that Americans could protect the most significant portions of the country as samples of the "original" North American landscape.[11] The NPA's focus on "primeval parks" coincided with the growing activism of the Wilderness Society in the American West. In 1947 the Society first announced plans to begin a campaign for creating a national wilderness system, which fueled its desire to maintain primitive areas in national forests as well as safeguard the western scenic parks from private interests that sought access to them.[12]

Such rising hopes of the NPA, Wilderness Society, and other groups quickly faded in the postwar years, as logging, mining, and grazing escalated on public lands. From the middle to late 1940s, preservationists witnessed numerous threats to Forest Service primitive areas and to several national parks and monuments in the West. Timber firms, ranchers, and other private interests sought access to the resources within Olympic and Kings Canyon national parks as well as to Jackson Hole National Monument.[13]

From the preservationists point of view, an even more dangerous threat came from the Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation, federal dam-building agencies that introduced plans to dam rivers in several national parks in the West. The Corps of Engineers, responding to heavy flooding along the Columbia River, considered a dam along the north fork of Montana's Flathead River, an upstream tributary that formed Glacier National Park's western boundary. Water backed up by Glacier View Dam, according to a special commission studying the national parks, threatened to inundate "20,000 acres of the most primitive portion" of the park, including winter range for elk and white-tailed deer. After much wrangling, the corps agreed to a dam at Hungry Horse, outside Glacier Park, but similar proposals by the Bureau of Reclamation followed. In 1948 the bureau indicated an interest in building dams on the Colorado River within the Grand Canyon, threatening both Grand Canyon National Park and Grand Canyon National Monument.[14]

On the heels of these proposals the bureau announced the Colorado River Storage Project, with dams slated along the Green River below Echo Park and at Split Mountain Canyon in Dinosaur National Monument. Conservationists regarded the proposal as a grave threat to the national park system. Echo Park Dam would submerge the lower portions of the Green and Yampa rivers for some forty miles upstream from their confluence and, they contended, the heart of Dinosaur Monument would be transformed from a "primeval" wilderness into an artificial lake. Fred Packard of the NPA wrote that "many of the outstanding geological and scenic features of the monument, including Pat's Hole, Echo Park, Castle Park, Harding's Hole, and the famous Canyon of Lodore would be destroyed."[15]

The NPA asserted that the dam would establish a precedent for using natural resources in national parks for commercial purposes and thus provide an opening wedge into other national parks and monuments. The association warned that Echo Park and Split Mountain dams must be deleted from CRSP or the beauty of Dinosaur Monument and the foundation of the national park system would be lost.

When taken alongside other plans for dams in the Grand Canyon, Glacier, Kings Canyon, and Mammoth Cave national parks, preservationists viewed the plan for Dinosaur as obstreperous, overbearing, and insensitive to a tradition of preservation as embodied in the national park system. At the core of their concerns was the belief that national parks were supposedly the best-protected type of public land preserve. They sprang from the National Park Service Act of

8. Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955–1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2-5.

9. "Annual Report of the National Park Service," in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for Fiscal Year Ended 30 June 1947* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1947), 344.

10. William P. Wharton, "The National Primeval Parks," *National Parks Bulletin*, 13 (February 1937), 3-5; Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, 2d ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 132.

11. The notion of protecting samples of the "original" landscape is sprinkled throughout many preservationists' writings in the immediate postwar era. See Aldo Leopold, "Wilderness," in *A Sand County Almanac, And Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 188-92.

12. News release, July 6, 1947, folder 28, box 29, Wilderness Society Papers (hereafter Wilderness Society Papers), Western History Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado (hereafter DPL).

13. Weldon F. Heald, "The Squeeze Is On the National Parks," *National Parks*, 24 (January–March 1950), 3-4.

14. Fred Packard, "Grand Canyon Park and Dinosaur National Monument in Danger," *National Parks*, 23 (October–December 1949), 11-13; "Glacier View Dam," *National Parks*, 22 (October–December, 1948), 3-4; Waldo Leland and Frank Setzler to Morris L. Cooke, March 31, 1950, box 18, Records of the President's Water Resources Policy Commission, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri (hereafter Truman Library).

George Grant, photographer, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

John Wesley Powell in 1869 named the glade at the confluence of the Yampa and Green rivers Echo Park because of the echo created by the eight-hundred-foot rock wall at the site (right). Named by Powell, Echo Rock later was renamed Steamboat Rock.

1916, which stipulated that the parks be conserved "unimpaired" for future generations.[16] National parks had been dedicated for preservation. If they were unsafe from intrusion, there could be no further advances in the preservation of public lands. Howard Zahniser, a leader in the Wilderness Society, wrote that the Echo Park controversy centered on "the sanctity of dedicated areas."[17]

Mounting pressures to use resources in the national parks and monuments greatly influenced National Park Service Director Newton Drury, who stood at the center of the Echo Park controversy from 1949 until early 1951.[18] Drury fiercely disputed the proposed dam with Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Michael Straus. At the center of their argument was the role of the National Park Service in managing "national recreation areas," such as reservoirs behind the bureau's dams. The park service had taken administrative control over these areas, including Lake Mead behind Hoover Dam, in the 1930s, and Drury had further expanded that role in the war years, in part because the agency wished to aid local economies.[19]

After the war, the Wilderness Society, NPA, and other preservationists made clear to Drury their distaste for the agency's management of reservoirs. They considered such a task incompatible with the agency's responsibility to preserve and protect the "primeval parks."[20] Drury now found himself pressured to combat the Echo Park proposal, and he did so in several letters to Commissioner Straus in the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. Their hostile exchange soon came to the attention of Secretary of the Interior Oscar Chapman.[21]

Chapman sympathized with the National Park Service, but his primary loyalties lay with the Democratic Party and with the Truman administration's interest in expanding federal management of western rivers. Furthermore, Chapman was under pressure from the Atomic Energy Commission to help supply electrical power reserves in Utah and the mountain West, reserves needed to aid in the testing of the atomic bomb. These factors weighed heavily in his decision, announced in June 1950, to support the bureau's dam below Echo Park.[22]

Infuriated conservationists told Chapman he had taken a step to encourage "the raiding of the national park system."[23] Drury, for his part, was not surprised with the decision. He later recalled that "the great Bureau of Reclamation was . . . like the state of Prussia in the German empire, where everything was weighted in its favor." As for Chapman, Drury told an interviewer long afterwards that the secretary was "very much in the position of the mahout who rides the elephant and thinks he's guiding it but is really being carried along. That wasn't true of men like

15. Fred Packard, "Grand Canyon and Dinosaur," 12; Devereux Butcher, "Stop the Dinosaur Power Grab," *National Parks*, 24 (April–June 1950), 61-65; Fred Packard to Phillip Sirotkin, August 26, 1955, box 34, Wilderness Society Papers.

16. Quoted in Barry Mackintosh, *The National Parks: Shaping the System* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Interior, 1985), 18.

17. The remark appears in the minutes of the 1956 annual meeting of the Wilderness Society Council, box 18, Wilderness Society Papers.

18. For an alternate interpretation of Newton Drury's role in the early stages of the controversy, see Susan Rhoades Neel, "Newton Drury and the Echo Park Dam Controversy," *Forest & Conservation History*, 38 (April 1994), 56-66.

19. Mackintosh, *National Parks*, 52. See also Susan Rhoades Neel, "Irreconcilable Differences: Reclamation, Preservation, and the Origins of the Echo Park Dam Controversy" (doctoral diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1990), 122-30.

20. Olaus Murie to Oscar Chapman, January 20, 1951, National Park Service Records (hereafter NPS Records), 1951–1953, Dinosaur National Monument, Jensen, Utah; Robert W. Righter, *Crucible for Conservation: The Creation of Grand Teton National Park* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1982), 89-92, 127; Butcher, "Dinosaur Power Grab," 61-65.

21. Newton Drury to Oscar Chapman, December 30, 1949, NPS Records, 1945–1950.

22. Fred Packard to Phillip Sirotkin, August 16, 1955, box 34, Wilderness Society Papers; Arthur Carhart to Bernard DeVoto, March 11, 1954, box 120, Arthur Carhart Papers, DPL; Press Release, Secretary of the Interior, June 27, 1950, box 14, Bryant Stringham Papers, Department of Special Collections, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

23. Carhart to Chapman, June 30, 1950, Central Classified Files, Bureau of Reclamation (microfiche copies of these records in author's possession).

Sierra Club

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National Park Service, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

Bernard Devoto (above) in January 1954; David Brower (upper left), Sierra Club executive director at the time of the Echo park controversy. Interior Secretary Oscar Chapman (left) greets National Park Service Director Newton Drury in December 1949 (lower left). Growing disagreement between the two men over CRSP dams led to Drury's resignation in April 1951.

[Harold] Ickes, but it surely was true of Chapman as Secretary of the Interior."[24] The director soon became completely alienated from Secretary Chapman, and under pressure from the latter, resigned his position on April 1, 1951. Drury's ouster provoked another outcry from conservationists, who were now galvanized against the Echo Park Dam and determined to protect Dinosaur National Monument.[25]

Bernard DeVoto launched the conservationists' national campaign against the dam in July 1950, with a hard-hitting article in the popular *Saturday Evening Post*. A native of Utah and a historian and writer based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, DeVoto had recently been converted to the conservation cause. His article—"Shall We Let Them Ruin Our National Parks?"—cast the showdown over Echo Park in dramatic terms and brought the controversy into living rooms across the country. Should the dam be constructed, he warned, "Echo Park and its magnificent rock formations would be submerged. Dinosaur National Monument as a scenic spectacle would cease to exist."[26]

During the next five years, DeVoto, along with leaders of the NPA, Wilderness Society, Sierra Club, Izaak Walton League, and other conservationists, denounced the bureau's plan as a threat to the integrity of the national park system. If the dam were permitted, it would not only severely intrude into Dinosaur Monument, it would greatly weaken barriers safeguarding all national parks and monuments. Any weakening of the park system, so they argued, would hamper efforts to establish a national wilderness system.[27]

Led by U. S. Grant III, a retired engineer from the Army Corps of Engineers, preservationists suggested that dams be built at alternate sites outside of Dinosaur. They argued that such sites were equally efficient if not more efficient for capturing water and producing power.[28] Grant, along with David Brower and Richard Bradley of the Sierra Club, also questioned the bureau's argument that inclusion of the Echo Park Dam in CRSP would minimize evaporation from the big reservoirs. Through careful scrutiny of the methods of calculating evaporation, they forced the bureau to concede that the amount of water it hoped to

24. Drury's two quotes appear in an oral history, "Parks and Redwoods, 1919–1971," conducted from 1960–1970 by Amelia Fry and Susan R. Schrepfer, vol. 2, 1972, p. 523, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter Bancroft Library).

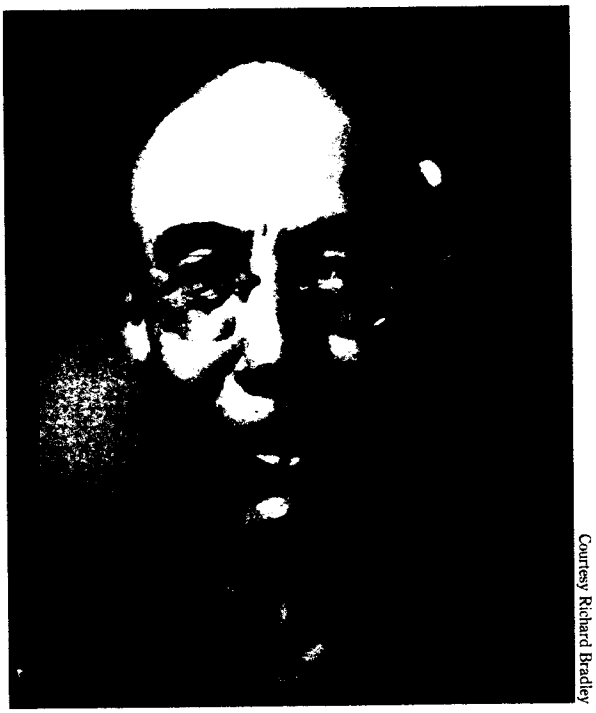
25. Letters from numerous conservationists protesting Drury's removal are in folder labeled, "National Park Service, 1948–1953," box 54, Official File of Harry S. Truman, Truman Library; Denver *Post*, February 28, 1951.

26. *Saturday Evening Post*, July 22, 1950, p. 42.

27. Howard Zahniser to John Saylor, July 29, 1955, folder 9, box 34, Wilderness Society Papers.

28. U. S. Grant III, "The Dinosaur Dam Sites Are Not Needed," *Living Wilderness*, 15 (Autumn 1950), 17-24.

Courtesy Richard Bradley



Courtesy Richard Bradley

Richard Bradley (above) was a Cornell University physics professor at the time of the Echo Park battle. Six of his brothers and his father, Harold Bradley (right), joined him in contesting the dam.

save by erecting the dam was not as great as it had originally deduced and that alternate sites could be used. As one possible alternative, conservationists suggested increasing the height of Glen Canyon Dam, a suggestion that later proved embarrassing to their side.[29]

Besides questioning the bureau's arrangement of dams and its evaporative statistics, preservationists found that publicizing the beauties of canyons along the Green and Yampa rivers in Dinosaur National Monument was their most effective strategy. With DeVoto's article as inspiration, others produced essays and illustrations about Echo Park for the *Sierra Club Bulletin, Living Wilderness, National Parks* magazine, and other publications. David Perlman of the San Francisco *Chronicle* joined a Sierra Club float trip in 1954 before writing several articles that testified to the historic and scenic resources that would be flooded. Editorials against the dam appeared in the Washington *Post*, Milwaukee *Journal*, San Francisco *Chronicle*, and New York *Times*.[30]

In the summer of 1952 Harold Bradley and two of his sons floated the Yampa River to Echo Park. Longtime wilderness activists and members of the Sierra Club, the Bradleys produced a short film highlighting the unique beauties of the rivers and high-walled canyons. "The experience," Harold Bradley later wrote, of "threading our way through this superb gallery of matchless pictures displayed in ever-changing vistas, left us aghast at the thought that Bureau of Reclamation engineers are calmly planning the destruction of the Monument."[31] Bradley's film offered scenes of his family running their kayaks through rapids, eating lunch on quiet beaches, and gazing up at massive cliffs of Weber sandstone. The movie proved vital to the Echo Park campaign. It revealed the excitement of a new sport to a coming generation eager to experience the wilderness.[32]

The film sparked great interest within the Sierra Club. Club members, enchanted with scenes of swift rivers and sheer rock walls, discovered an entirely new kind of wilderness—strikingly different from the Sierra Nevada—but to them equally compelling and deserving of greater exploration. The Yampa and Green rivers and the canyons of Utah and Colorado offered a unique landscape of white, pink, and red cliffs, rushing white water, and desert vegetation. Bradley's film awakened Sierra Club members to a region unknown to most of them and to the majority of wilderness lovers across the country.[33]

His film also helped to inspire Sierra Club river trips through Dinosaur during the following summers. Bradley knew that floating the rivers would acquaint club members with breathtaking scenery and provide them with a taste of the great wilderness experience that he and his two sons had had

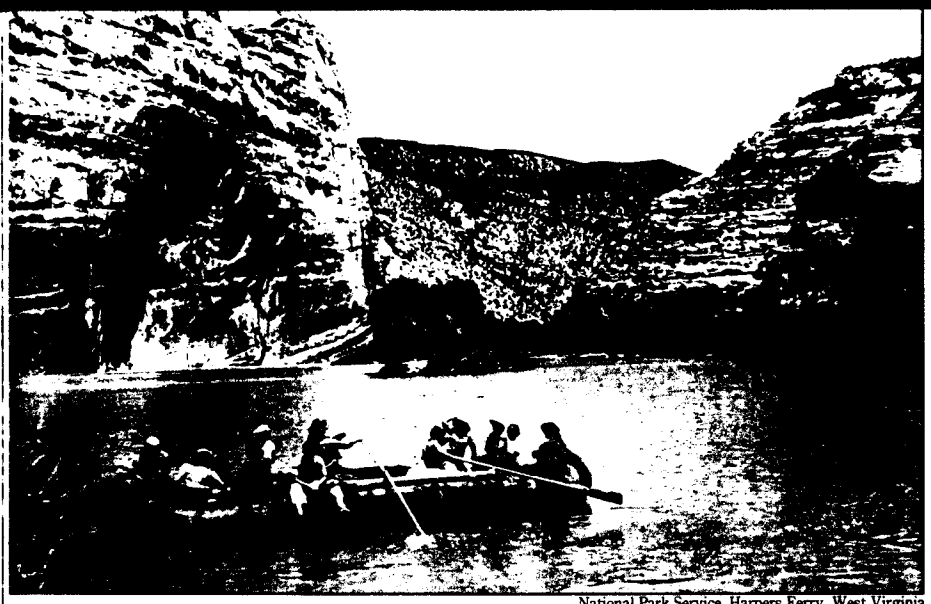
29. On the preservationist position on Glen Canyon Dam see Mark W. T. Harvey, "Echo Park, Glen Canyon, and the Postwar Wilderness Movement," *Pacific Historical Review*, 60 (February 1991), 43-67.

30. Washington *Post*, June 6, 1954; New York *Times*, May 15, 1954; San Francisco *Chronicle*, July 7, 1954. See also Joseph C. Bradley, "This, Your Land, Is In Danger," Madison *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 20, 1953. The Council of Conservationists published a pamphlet listing nearly a dozen newspaper editorials against the dam. The pamphlet is found in box 114, Harold Bradley Papers (hereafter Bradley Papers), Sierra Club Records, Bancroft Library.

31. "The Dinosaur Case," *Garden Club Bulletin* (March 1953), 85.

32. Richard Bradley, interview with author, June 17, 1988, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

33. Ibid.



National Park Service, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

Many Sierra Club members toured Dinosaur National Monument for the first time by floating the river in summer 1953.

the summer before. He also believed that successful float trips would demonstrate that river running was not a dangerous sport—clearly not as risky as the proponents of Echo Park Dam wanted everyone to think. Some two hundred club members, guided by local river runner Bus Hatch, took a float trip through the monument in the summer of 1953 without incident, helping to refute the argument that "the river run is exceedingly dangerous, while the lakes will presumably be safe."[34] Participants of the river trips considered them a great success, with Harold Bradley concluding that "practically all came out filled with wonder and enthusiasm."[35]

The river trips also gave birth to another film of Dinosaur, "Wilderness River Trail." Shot by professional photographer Charles Eggert, it was the first film produced by the Sierra Club that featured both sound and color.[36] By the end of 1953 the Sierra Club had made copies of Eggert's film available across the country, courtesy of the American Alpine Club in New York, the Appalachian Mountain Club in Boston, the Izaak Walton League in Chicago and Denver, and the Mazamas in Portland. "Wilderness River Trail" caught the attention of thousands of conservation and wilderness enthusiasts around the country.[37]

No one enjoyed the Sierra Club float trips or felt as moved by the scenic beauty as David Brower, recently appointed the club's executive director. Brower first learned of the Dinosaur matter from Martin Litton, who wrote articles on the controversy for the Los Angeles *Times* and told Brower that he thought the Sierra Club was doing too little to fight the dams.[38] Brower had assured Litton that the club's role would change. Brower exhibited an intensity and uncompromising manner reminiscent of John Muir during his long and ultimately unsuccessful effort to save Hetch Hetchy, the valley in Yosemite National Park inundated by a dam early in the twentieth century. Having just attained leadership in the Sierra Club, Brower's sense of Muir and the club's past loomed large in his mind. Muir's passionate appeals to save Hetch Hetchy had been drowned out by more powerful voices, and as Brower first became aware of the threat to Echo Park he seemed to hear echoes of Muir resounding in the canyons of the Green and Yampa rivers, calling him and the club to action. Hetch Hetchy was an old and deep wound in the Sierra Club, and in Echo Park Brower saw an opportunity to make it heal.

Brower's ability to captivate the public with images and descriptions of wilderness areas turned out to be his greatest gift. Influenced by photographer Ansel Adams, Brower understood the enormous power of still pictures and films in sparking public awareness of places worthy of being preserved. His publicity skills also emerged brilliantly in a book, *This Is Dinosaur*, published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1955.[39] Brower believed that while films and articles in various publications had been of great value in publicizing the monument, an illustrated book would bring the spectacular beauty of Dinosaur to a larger audience. The "primary object of the book," he wrote, "is to let the people know what's there, [and] whether it is to be a milestone or a headstone—this question is for the people and Congress to decide."[40] In Alfred

34. Harold Bradley, "Danger to Dinosaur," *Pacific Discovery*, 7 (January–February 1954), 4; news item, *Sierra Club Bulletin*, 38 (February 1953), 11-12.

35. Bradley, "Danger to Dinosaur," 8; Ruth Aiken to Harold Bradley, June 23, 1953, box 114, Bradley Papers.

36. David Brower, *For Earth's Sake: The Life and Times of David Brower* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1990), 306.

37. Richard Bradley interview, June 17, 1988; news item, *Sierra Club Bulletin*, 39 (February 1954), 2; David R. Brower, "Environmental Activist, Publicist, and Prophet," an oral history conducted 1974–1978 by Susan R. Schrepfer, p. 113, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library.

38. Michael P. Cohen, *History of the Sierra Club, 1892–1970* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 156.

A. Knopf, Brower found a publisher who had a deep love for the national parks and for conservation. Knopf had long supported the parks and decided that a volume of essays about Dinosaur would be a fitting way to demonstrate his long love affair with them.

Brower approached Wallace Stegner to edit the work. Having just published *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*, a biography of John Wesley Powell, Stegner seemed a natural choice. Stegner had immersed himself in western history for nearly a decade while writing the book on Powell. He had written about the canyons through which Powell had gone, and, having lived part of his youth in Utah, he had a feel for the Colorado River and Plateau.

Stanford University Libraries, Stanford

Wallace Stegner in 1961

Stegner agreed with Brower that the book should seek to reveal the vast size and enormous beauty of the monument and demonstrate its national significance in the park system. Stegner insisted in his preface that the authors deliberately chose not to "make this book into a fighting document" because too much "bad feeling and bad prose" had already been generated by Echo Park Dam. *This Is Dinosaur* had a different aim, to provide a survey of "the national resource [and] its possibilities for human rest and recreation and inspiration."[41]

This Is Dinosaur became the first book-length publication in conservation history that sought to publicize a park or wilderness preserve and contribute to a preservation campaign. Filled with colorful pictures of Echo Park and "its magic rivers," the book was equally impressive for its excellent essays. Knopf himself furnished an essay, insisting that "the very special purposes of recreation, education, refreshment, and inspiration for which Parks and Monuments have been set aside prohibit many economic uses which are thoroughly legitimate elsewhere."[42] To help ensure the book's effectiveness, Knopf agreed to donate a copy to each member of Congress. Brower, wanting to leave no doubt about the book's message, included a foldout brochure inside the back cover displaying a picture of mud flats at Lake Mead created by Hoover Dam. A quote from Interior Secretary Douglas McKay served as the photograph's caption: "What We Have Done At Lake Mead is What We Have In Mind For Dinosaur."[43]

The Echo Park campaign had been launched to reaffirm the nation's commitment to the national park system—to strengthen the National Park Service Act of 1916 with its mandate to conserve the parks unimpaired for future generations. But over the course of the battle the fate of the monument became inextricably tied to wilderness preservation, thanks to all the intensive publicity of Echo Park and the canyons of Dinosaur, where the spectacles of rock and white water captured the essence of "wild" land to a new generation of preservationists. *This Is Dinosaur* offered the clearest exposition of the relationship between parks and wilderness, owing largely to Stegner's eloquence. A memorable passage foreshadowed the language of Stegner's "Wilderness Letter," written in 1960, and that of the Wilderness Act of 1964. In *This Is Dinosaur* Stegner wrote:

> It is legitimate to hope that there may [be] left in Dinosaur the special kind of human mark, the special record of human passage, that distinguished man from all other species. It is rare enough among men, impossible to any other form of life. It is simply the deliberate and chosen refusal to make any marks at all. . . . We are the most dangerous species of life on the planet, and every other species, even the earth itself, has cause to fear our power to exterminate. But we are also the only species which, when it chooses to do so, will go to great effort to save what it might destroy . . . in the decades to come, it will not be only the buffalo and the trumpeter swan who need sanctuaries. Our own species is going to need them too. It needs them now.[44]

This flourish of publicity over Echo Park did not sit well with public opinion in the upper basin states. To most residents there, it seemed odd that an all

39. Wallace Stegner, ed., *This Is Dinosaur: Echo Park Country and Its Magic Rivers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955); ibid., 2d ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Roberts Rinehart, 1985).

40. Sierra Club press release, March 31, 1955, folder 4, box 34, Wilderness Society Papers.

41. Stegner, *This Is Dinosaur*, 1st ed., v.

42. Ibid., 2d ed., 85.

but unknown national monument had suddenly become a powerful symbol of wilderness. Proponents of the dam sought to counter the image of a precious preserve. They asserted that the National Park Service had agreed to the dam as early as the 1930s, when the boundaries of Dinosaur had been enlarged around the Green and Yampa rivers. Utah Senator Arthur Watkins contended that the necessary "power withdrawals" had been established by the Federal Power Commission in the 1920s.[45] These arguments clinched the case in favor of the dam in the minds of people throughout the upper basin. Any lingering doubts vanished once the battle reached Congress in 1954, and southern California's strident opposition to the bill became evident. Now residents of the upper basin felt sure that those who protested the Echo Park Dam were "mainly pawns of . . . California groups seeking to hog Colorado River water."[46] On the strength of these arguments, members of Congress from the upper basin refused to surrender the controversial dam.

Late in 1955 they changed their minds. By October of that year, the CRSP bill had been effectively blocked in the 1954 and 1955 sessions of Congress, not only because of pressure from preservationists but from other groups as well. Farm states in other regions of the country opposed the legislation, charging that agricultural surpluses depressed commodity prices and that additional cultivated land would exacerbate the problem.[47] Some members of Congress denounced the bill for its costly irrigation projects and its questionable cost accounting.[48] California water and power interests also continued to oppose the legislation. Upper basin lawmakers finally concluded that the bill stood no chance of passage without being changed, and the key interest group in the coalition of opponents were the preservationists. At a crucial meeting in Denver in early November, upper basin senators, led by Democrat Clinton P. Anderson of New Mexico, resolved to eliminate Echo Park Dam from the bill in hopes of winning approval for the rest of the CRSP project (including Glen Canyon Dam) in the following session.[49] Conservation groups, representing several million Americans, at once withdrew their opposition and swung their support to the bill, clearing the way for its passage. President Dwight Eisenhower signed the bill on April 11, 1956, with a provision that prohibited dams in any area of the national park system along the Colorado River.[50]

The successful effort to preserve Echo Park and Dinosaur National Monument proved to be a milestone in the history of the American environmental movement. By blocking the dam, the coalition of organizations resoundingly reaffirmed the sanctity of the park system and strengthened the mandate that parks be conserved "unimpaired," contained in the National Park Service Act of 1916. While it can hardly be said that defeat of Echo Park Dam ended all threats to parks, it became substantially more difficult to offer serious proposals for dams, mines, or other intrusive structures inside park boundaries. Even in the more famous conflict over the Grand Canyon in the 1960s, the Bureau of Reclamation did not propose to locate its dams inside the national monument or national park, but just outside their boundaries. With the Bureau thus claiming that the two dams posed no direct intrusion, the Grand Canyon controversy revolved around how the dams might alter the "living Colorado."[51] Since the 1960s threats to parks have come increasingly from sources such as oil and gas drilling companies and power plants outside the

Clay Johnson, photographer

Innumerable rock art treasures that decorate canyon walls in Dinosaur such as the example above in Yampa Canyon would have been obliterated by Echo Park Dam.

43. Ibid., 1st ed., brochure insert.
44. Ibid., 1st ed., 17.
45. Senator Watkins's argument can be found in the *Congressional Record*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., March 28, 1955, vol. 101, pt. 3:3806-19. For other arguments see Denver *Post*, March 9, 1954; and *Deseret News*, April 17, 1954.
46. Casper, Wyoming, *Tribune-Herald*, August 29, 1954. See also Salt Lake *Tribune*, June 11, 1954.
47. The Colorado River Storage Project Act was first introduced in Congress in 1950 by Utah Senator Arthur Watkins. Congress did not debate the bill fully until 1954.
48. As an example, see remarks by Illinois Senator Paul Douglas, *Congressional Record*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., April 19, 1955, vol. 101, pt. 4:4634-41; see also the statement of the Engineers Joint Council, Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *Hearings on S. 1555 on Colorado River Storage Project*, 83rd Cong., 2d sess., 1954, pp. 681-85.

Courtesy Edward Zahniser

Howard Zahniser, about 1959

parks, rather than from intrusive developments within their boundaries. The successful outcome of the Echo Park battle fortified the barriers of national parks and monuments against such threats.

In another way, the outcome of the controversy enhanced the power of many conservation groups, who discovered a remarkable degree of strength when they united in a common cause. Some seventy-eight organizations joined the Echo Park campaign, far outnumbering the handful that aided John Muir with the Hetch Hetchy battle.[52] Numbers alone did not guarantee victory, of course. The single-interest groups had never before worked together on this scale, and they spent much time formulating strategy and coordinating efforts. Yet no one could deny the impressiveness of their coalition. Irving Brant, historian and former adviser to the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration on conservation issues, told President Harry Truman early in the controversy that it was the first time he could recall so many groups "having been stirred up to a joint campaign." Later Brant told Adlai Stevenson that "there is no issue on which conservationists are more deeply stirred, or which has done more to galvanize them into a nationwide organization."[53] Harold Bradley recalled that the controversy unified "the conservation forces into a single, very formidable fighting force," while New York *Times* columnist John Oakes, who had done much to publicize the threatened monument in his columns, wrote that it demonstrated "what strength the conservation movement has at last achieved in the United States." Almost exactly thirty years after the end of the controversy, Oakes recalled in an interview that Echo Park had been "of vital importance in demonstrating for the future that these kinds of battles could be won."[54]

The controversy had special significance for those organizations most interested in parks and wilderness—the Sierra Club, the National Parks Association, and the Wilderness Society. Small by today's standards, with only a few thousand members each, these groups could not exert much pressure on Congress by themselves, and they had to count heavily on larger bodies like the National Wildlife Federation and Izaak Walton League. But if the larger groups provided essential political clout, the preservationists had the most to gain, for the threat to Echo Park provided them with an excellent opportunity to laud "primeval parks" and to incorporate their agenda into the broader conservation movement. The Wilderness Society gained national attention from the battle and took advantage of the triumph to resume its campaign for a national wilderness system. Echo Park offered the society a major opportunity to publicize the kind of pressures on public lands that its leaders contended would soon eliminate remaining parcels of wilderness unless they were permanently protected by Congress.[55]

Howard Zahniser, executive secretary of the Wilderness Society, had recognized at the outset that upholding the integrity of the park system must precede establishment of a national wilderness system. Zahniser was encouraged immeasurably by the campaign's success. To him, the outpouring of public support demonstrated something that he already deeply believed: that the last remaining wilderness offered a type of outdoor experience unavailable elsewhere and that an important segment of the public was willing to help protect such lands. Zahniser, whose role in the Echo Park controversy has been for too long overshadowed by Brower's, took satisfaction that the public had spoken decisively. On the very same day that President Eisenhower signed the CRSP legislation, Zahniser sent a letter to key mem-

49. "Actions of Conference on Upper Colorado River Legislation," copy in box 356, Joseph C. O'Mahoney Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie; Howard Zahniser to Olaus Murie, November 4, 1955, folder 11, box 79, Wilderness Society Papers.

50. William Dawson and Wayne Aspinall to Edgar Wayburn, January 26, 1956, box 114, Bradley Papers; Horace Albright, Ira Gabrielson, and Howard Zahniser to Usher Burdick, January 23, 1956, box 8, Usher Burdick Papers, Special Collections, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.

51. Runte, *National Parks*, 189-96; François Leydet, *Time and the River Flowing: Grand Canyon* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1964).

52. Nash, *Wilderness*, 212.

53. Irving Brant to Harry S. Truman, February 16, 1951, Brant to Adlai Stevenson, September 7, 1957, box 21, Irving Brant Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

54. Harold Bradley to Fred Smith, November 12, 1957, box 114, Bradley Papers; New York *Times*, January 1, 1956; John Oakes, telephone interview with author, February 27, 1986.

55. "Echo Park Controversy Resolved," *Living Wilderness*, 20 (Winter-Spring 1955-56), 23-43.

bers of Congress asking them to sponsor a bill for a national wilderness system.

While Zahniser found encouragement, David Brower and the Sierra Club gained a new public image and an important new place in the pantheon of conservation organizations. Echo Park proved to be a key episode in the club's history, bringing an end to its traditional focus on the Sierra Nevada and launching the club from its California base into the national conservation arena. Brower developed his own national reputation from the Echo Park battle. In his first major campaign as executive director of the club, he became renowned as a bold champion of wilderness and a fierce combatant against those who threatened it—in this case, the Bureau of Reclamation. Everyone involved with the campaign considered him invaluable and understood him to be a new voice for conservation that was bound to be heard from again. More than any of his counterparts, Brower knew instinctively how to grab public attention for threatened preserves. He knew the power of pictures and films: "Wilderness River Trail" and *This Is Dinosaur*, two highly successful tools of the campaign, had been his ideas. He knew how to dramatize a sense of place, and Echo Park and the canyons of Dinosaur lent themselves to rhetorical flourish about the merits of wilderness. Brower spearheaded new tactics of wilderness propaganda. He developed filmmaking and book publishing skills that became essential weapons in the campaigns of the 1960s to establish Point Reyes National Seashore and North Cascades and Redwoods national parks and in the battle over dams in the Grand Canyon.

Perhaps the greatest impact of the controversy was in the American West. In regional terms, the elimination of Echo Park Dam from CRSP brought to an end the first great clash between water developers and preservationists and established a major theme of environmental conflict in the West for the next two generations. For westerners involved in the battle, the memories of the great conflict remained for years to come. Residents of small towns near Dinosaur Monument, like Vernal, Utah, remained bitter after the loss of the dam, and such memories linger even today.[56] One reason they persist is that the passions of the battle have hardly disappeared in many parts of the West where resentment against "environmentalists" remains strong. The loss of Echo Park Dam caused rural westerners to be aware of a new force in their lives, a force that seemed to many of them to be ignorant of water and power needs in their region, but which nevertheless seemed able to determine their fate. Local people sensed it might be a force not easily turned back, and in their frustration some of them found a new dimension to the old colonialism that held sway in the region's past. Conservationists from the urban East and the West Coast had now become a force to be reckoned with. Echo Park clearly had thrust guardians of the public lands into prominence.

From the vantage point of those who won, Echo Park not only reversed the verdict of Hetch Hetchy but proved to be an important victory at the dawn of a new era in the West. To the opponents of the dam in Dinosaur, the Bureau of Reclamation, with its concept of managed rivers and natural resources, had become associated with loggers, miners, and ranchers in viewing nature's bounty as a resource to be exploited. By defeating Echo Park Dam, conservation groups turned back the development-minded interests in a decisive way. The battle taught them much about the economic, political, and technical aspects of water projects in the West and instilled in them a skepticism of the Bureau of Reclamation. According to the bureau's opponents, the Echo Park affair exposed the bureau's "credibility gap," and they would carefully scrutinize bureau projects in the years ahead. By successfully challenging the bureau's tight grip on information about the Colorado River and water "development," a core of wilderness activists emerged from the conflict with an understanding of evaporation rates, the legal complexities of the Colorado River Compact, and the economics of large water and power projects. This body of knowledge carried over into subsequent wilderness and water controversies.[7]

Still, while gaining an understanding of the bureau proved helpful in future clashes, the bureau in many ways set the terms of the Echo Park debate and for subsequent development of the Colorado River. Despite their eventual triumph in eliminating the Echo Park Dam from the Colorado River Storage Project, conservationists proved unable and unwilling to block approval of Glen Canyon Dam, and, much to their regret, some priceless scenery disappeared beneath its reservoir. The fate of Glen Canyon added to their bitterness toward the bureau.[58] Further controversy ensued when they accused the bureau of reneging on its agreement to protect Rainbow Bridge from Lake Powell. In the mid-1960s conservationists challenged the bureau's efforts to construct two dams

56. Roy D. Webb, *If We Had a Boat: Green River Explorers, Adventurers, and Runners* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986), 136.

57. David Brower, interview with author, July 24, 1985, San Francisco, California.

58. Harvey, "Echo Park and Glen Canyon," 44-45; Eliot Porter, *The Place No One Knew: Glen Canyon on the Colorado* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1963).

59. Wallace Stegner to author, July 14, 1984 (in author's possession).

National Park Service, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

The Green River, after merging with the Yampa River, appears in the lower right just below Steamboat Rock. The view looks east from Harper's corner into Echo Park and Yampa River Canyon.

in the Grand Canyon. All of this testified to the bureau's substantial power in the American West in the decades following World War II. The Echo Park controversy gave birth to an icy relationship between the bureau and wilderness champions. By the 1960s and 1970s their contention had grown into a virtual cold war.

Despite disappointments over Glen Canyon and Rainbow Bridge, the battle for Echo Park opened an exciting new region of wild and scenic wonders to many of those involved in the campaign. The controversy brought the Colorado River and Plateau into the consciousness of the Sierra Club, National Parks Association, Wilderness Society, and other groups. Here was a region largely unknown to most wilderness enthusiasts who were more familiar with forested and alpine areas like the Adirondacks, Lake of the Woods, Grand Tetons, and High Sierra. Dinosaur Monument and Glen Canyon offered a new kind of wilderness terrain, one dominated by canyons, mesas, and a vast array of geologic features carved in the earth's surface by millions of years of river flows. The Dinosaur controversy—and the battles it ignited at Glen Canyon and Grand Canyon—brought the canyons and rivers of the Southwest into the spotlight, and the region thereafter became a focal point of environmental activism in the American West.

The Echo Park affair represents the classic tale of environmental controversy in the American West. Indeed, the battle initiated a pattern of conflict between the kind of managed use of natural resources that became woven into the fabric of the West in the first part of the twentieth century and the postwar interest in wilderness and environmentalism. The struggle has played itself out across the West in the decades since the Echo Park battle. From the energy boom of the 1970s to the Sagebrush Rebellion to the spotted owl, westerners have faced the same difficult and sometimes agonizing conflict between the traditional brand of conservation, first espoused by Gifford Pinchot and Theodore Roosevelt to ensure a constant supply of water, timber, and rangelands, and the postwar interest in preserving the aesthetic qualities of public lands.

In a letter in 1984, Wallace Stegner wrote that Echo Park was "in many ways . . . a key squabble, the interests involved are the classical and unavoidable interests, the warring points of view, the endlessly repetitive exploitation v. preservation points of view."[59] In that sense, Echo Park is a story that lies at the birth of the modern American West. It is a touchstone for a pattern of conflict that has shaped the region's history in the last half century.

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