



Wallowa Lake State Park, 1950

CHAPTER 3

All the Comforts of Home: **Parks for the People (1950-1956)**

In 1957, Parks Superintendent Chester Armstrong wrote, “In the beginning, as with every infant, the State Parks Department had to learn to walk before it could run, and it had to learn in the shaky years following its birth in 1929. But like most lusty youngsters it survived childhood bumps and spills to reach a vigorous maturity in which it efficiently administers the far-flung 56,000 acres of the state parks system.” When Armstrong spoke of these wobbling early years before the parks system could stand on its own feet, he was looking at the era of Sam Boardman. Boardman had approached park development as an extension of the divine, a one-man quest to save the beautiful scenes of Oregon. Armstrong considered Boardman’s era to have been one of acquisition, a frenzied race to secure the landscape against encroaching forces. In contrast, Armstrong would characterize his own tenure as one of development. As he began his superintendency in 1950, the demands on park property had already changed drastically, as had the ways in which visitors wished to experience nature. Armstrong focused on building structures to maintain a growing park system, finding ways to expand recreational opportunities for Oregonians, and planning for the future of leisure and wealth that the country felt it was owed after the long hardships of the Depression and World War II.¹⁰⁵

The 30 years following World War II brought not only a shift in the pragmatic development of the State Parks system but a change in the goals of the system, and the outlook of those who would run it. Boardman had looked at nature as a means of connecting to a spiritual purpose—a somewhat elitist view of nature as a pristine piece of eternal design. Armstrong and the three men who would follow him as superintendents in the 1960s and 1970s asked different questions of the landscape. The men in this period looked to a bright future, where the gems set aside at the system’s birth could be widely enjoyed by “the people”—a category that gradually expanded over the decades.

After Samuel Boardman, everything seemed up in the air. In the 1950s, the “recreation” Boardman had reluctantly suffered became core to the identity of Oregon State Parks, starting with the snowballing popularity of camping. And in

105 “Parks Department Progress,” *Personnel Observations* 8:3, July-August 1959, Folder: Biography, Box: Chester H. Armstrong Papers, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection, Oregon State Parks and Recreation, Salem, OR.

a time of unprecedented American prosperity, more people questioned the continuing marriage of convenience between parks and highways that Sawyer had counseled (see Chapter 1). In this new era of growth, some wondered, did the “vigorous maturity” of the expanding system mean that it was time to push for a new and independent department? Or was the old bargain still the best way to safeguard park goals? And in the meantime, where could they put all these people?

A General Urge to Escape:

Camping Comes to Parks and Popular Consciousness

In 1950, Chester (Chet) Armstrong took over a state park system that was bursting at the seams. Sam Boardman had been adept at acquisitions in an era of austerity. But the caution and central control he had stressed as Parks Superintendent made him reluctant to adapt the parks system to the overwhelming demands of a prosperous populace. Armstrong, Boardman’s successor, had been with the Highway Department since 1914, rising steadily through engineering positions before serving under Boardman from 1948 to 1950. Boardman was less than eager to turn over the reins (see Chapter 2), and he remained a towering presence in park issues even after his death in 1953. Armstrong would have to adapt to postwar prosperity and population surges that would make Boardman’s policies and procedures impossible. This period was not defined by Depression-era austerity or the magnetic and outspoken presence of a founding father, but a postwar abundance and a growing park bureaucracy designed to diffuse a central authority figure. Armstrong’s tenure, from 1950 to his retirement in 1960, was defined by an unparalleled surge in attendance, from 2 million to 10 million visitors. The visitation surge was jarring enough. But these new park attendees, part of a burgeoning middle class, had new demands. The people demanded campsites.¹⁰⁶

Sam Boardman, loath to admit that camping could be a necessary addition to his parks, had made only limited plans during his tenure to allow for campers. In 1948, 17,500 campers stayed at the indoor facilities at Silver Falls, the first sanctioned overnight guests to use Oregon State Park property. Boardman’s reluctance to allow campers was rooted in fears of despoiling the natural environment for future Oregonians. He believed that building modern amenities for campers would surely damage the scenic views that he carefully created. In his 1948 Progress Report, Boardman grumpily admitted to the public appetite for camps, conceding that “these camps are popular and fill a desirable youth requirement that is increasing in keeping with the rapid growth of the contiguous population.” When Armstrong took over, the state park system bowed to political and popular reality. In 1951, just after Boardman’s retirement, the boom in overnight camping facilities began. Initially, overnight

¹⁰⁶ “Biography: Armstrong,” Folder: Biography, Box: Chester H Armstrong Papers; “Astrup to Succeed Armstrong to Post” *Oregon Statesmen* Dec 20, 1960, Folder: Mark Astrup Oral History File, Box: Staff Biographies and Oral Histories, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

outdoor camping was introduced to two of Oregon's parks: Wallowa Lake and Silver Falls. Silver Falls had the capacity for 40 tent camps and 10 trailer camps. At Wallowa Lake, there were 10 trailer spots and 47 tent campsites. Both were immediately popular. Many more parks followed suit as the decade continued. Unimproved camping areas might be as simple as a clearing, but the amenities enjoyed in the most developed sites of the early postwar era were quite similar to the facilities available to campers today. Campers at the new sites had access to restrooms, showers, laundry, water, electricity, stoves, and sewer outlets.¹⁰⁷

In the 1951-1952 Progress Report, Armstrong pondered what might account for the surge in visitation and the new push for camps. He gave some credit to better highway systems and advertising. He noted "an increase in the number of low cost camp grounds making travel more attractive to persons in the lower income brackets." And he echoed Boardman's guess that "a general urge to escape for a time from the noise and confusion of everyday life to more pleasant and quieter surroundings" played a role. This "urge to escape" coupled with the means to do so was a nationwide trend. An increase in disposable income and vacation time in the 1940s and 50s led middle-class families into nature for vacations. In the same period, much of the public land on which people had once freely camped was being developed, logged, cordoned off, or otherwise made unavailable. More free time and less free space pushed camping to the forefront of parks.¹⁰⁸

Although Boardman preferred to ignore it, the desire to camp as a means of escaping modern chaos was not new, arising alongside the parks movement. Recreational camping was mentioned at least as early as the 1860s, when upper class men and sometimes women spent weeks on outdoor camping excursions, usually hiring local scouts or bringing servants to attend to the more monotonous aspects of camp life, like cooking. The natural landscape had long been thought to heal the body and soul of those immersed in it, and the budding state and national parks systems fed the urge for untouched wilderness. Still, these trips were limited by the expense and time they took to plan, leaving them available largely to the wealthy elite.¹⁰⁹

The automobile modernized the camping experience and democratized its participants. As soon as people had cars, they drove them to scenic spots for

107 "Annual Records on State Parks Land and Related Areas, 1948," Folder: Annual Report to NPS - Statistics, Acreage, and Expenditures, Box: Chester H. Armstrong Papers; "THE OREGON STATE PARKS IN 1951" *ibid.*

108 "Twentieth Biennial Report of the Oregon State Highway Commission," 16, Folder: Progress Reports, 1951 - 1952, Box: Progress Reports, 1951 - 1958, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

109 Historian Terrance Young places the beginnings of modern recreational camping with the publication of "Adventures in the Wilderness" a how-to guide on camping in the Adirondacks by William H.H. Murray published in 1869 which brought national attention to the practice; Terence Young, *Heading Out: A History of American Camping* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017): 9. Camping enthusiasts sometimes trace a beginning to William Gunn's 1861 school trips to introduce his students to the love of the outdoors (and prepare them for the Civil War). Paula Gibson Krimsky, "Reading, Writing, and the Great Outdoors: Frederick Gunn's School Transforms Victorian-era Education," *Connecticut History* July 18, 2019. The differences between camping and earlier forms of recreational outdoor overnighting can be difficult to parse—see for example Francis Galton's outrageously racist *The Art of Travel; or, Shifts and Conveyances Available in Wild Countries* (London: John Murray, 1855), or Aaron V. Brown's use of the term "camping out" as a clearly well-worn idiom in an 1833 letter to James K. Polk—James Knox Polk, *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, ed. Herbert Weaver (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), p. 193.

rest and relaxation. Indeed, this inclination was a signature part of the parks movement in Oregon (see Chapter 1). In addition to providing access to remote wilderness (though sometimes with great difficulty), the Model T was also a fine camper, and DIY enthusiasts attached tents and cookstoves to running boards to create makeshift camp trailers. Henry Ford himself encouraged this use of his product, leading his own camping excursions with a rotating group of wealthy men he coyly dubbed “The Vagabonds.” This group came to include titans of industry like Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and Harvey Firestone; naturalist John Burroughs; and, in the summer of 1921, President Warren G. Harding. Although the name “Vagabonds” evoked a romantic fantasy of the purportedly carefree life of the wandering poor, the press releases for these camping trips showed car-camping as a luxury for men of refinement who wanted a taste of nature. The average American might not be able to afford all of the amenities of “The Vagabonds,” whose inclusion of cars full of chefs and supplies in their Model T entourage harkened back to the wealthy outdoor recreationists of the previous century. But these well-publicized journeys encouraged the intrepid middle class and some working-class families to “See America First” and the auto road trip was born. Highways could provide not only scenic drives, but scenic destinations. A 1924 article in *Sunset* magazine touted this newfound vacationing option, noting that the automobile and auto camping made vacations “cheaper than staying home.”¹¹⁰

Not only were these trips affordable, but camping aficionados regularly linked them to the “pioneer spirit” long romanticized in American popular culture. This notion of “pioneer spirit” was even less moored to historical reality in the 1950s than it had been in the 1920s, never mind the actual pioneer experiences of the 19th century. The new “pioneer spirit” consisted mostly of enjoying the outdoors and cooking food over fires. The celebrations of the killing of Native people and the seizing of their land that had been ubiquitous in the 19th century and into the 1920s (see Chapter 1) continued to be recreated in children’s games. But killing was no longer considered by young adults to be a constituent part of the “pioneer spirit.” What was now celebrated was the feeling of freedom in the out-of-doors, available by car whether the camper was playing pioneer, playing Indian, or just playing around.¹¹¹

110 James B. Twitchell, *Winnebago Nation: The RV in American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 71; Bill Ramsey, “The Adventures of the ‘Four Vagabonds’; 1921: Camping with the President,” *Model T Times* July/August 2018, pp. 24–27. For information on early motor camping and its impact on the popular consciousness, see Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910–1945* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979); Emily Post, *By Motor to the Golden Gate* (New York: D. Appleton, 1916); Virginia Scharff, *Twenty Thousand Roads: Women, Movement, and the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Young, *Heading Out*, 95.

111 Marc James Carpenter, “Pioneer Problems: ‘Wanton Murder,’ Indian War Veterans, and Oregon’s Violent Past,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 121:2 (Summer 2020): 156–185. Playing Indian—that is, non-Native people performing caricatured “Indian” actions in approximation of “Indian” costume—had also long been one means of mystifying the experiences of the out-of-doors. This was practiced in some public and private parks, and persisted into the 1950s and beyond. Phil Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), esp. chap. 4; William Harcourt, “To Camp Indian Style,” *Boy’s Life* June 1952, 12–13; Young, *Heading Out*, 103.

With the freedom of the automobile came the formation of rigid camping facilities and the prohibition of camping in certain sensitive areas. As state park systems began to be built in the early 20th century, park officials throughout the nation quickly realized that the “camp where you are” rules popular in earlier eras would no longer do. The US Forest Service began to create professionally managed campgrounds in 1918 to contain and control the crowds. The most widely used planning tool for camps, one that continues to inform many state and national parks even today, was created by botanist Emilio Pepe “Doc” Meinecke. A career government employee who consulted for several federal departments, “Doc” Meinecke designed new campgrounds at Yosemite between 1926-1932, meant to keep overcrowding from damaging the popular park. Meinecke proposed that campers could be “guided by suggestion” through one-way roads and well-placed boulders or foliage that could act as a fence. The placement of picnic tables and fire pits would encourage motor campers to stay in these campsites, rather than forge their own path and risk damaging the park. One thing Meinecke refused to plan for was the travel trailer, which he called “a highly objectionable and questionable feature.” But Meinecke’s maxim of guidance by suggestion could be applied to trailers as well as cars, and remains a core part of camp planning.¹¹²

By the time Boardman was expanding Oregon State Parks in the 1930s, perceptions of camping had changed. The Great Depression turned the novel experience of auto camping into a necessity, as unemployed families packed into their cars to search for work, many driving into the American West hoping to find financial stability. Auto camps like Henry Ford’s “Vagabonds” had been associated with upper- and middle-class camping vacations in the 1920s. In the 1930s, automobile camps were associated with transient labor, Hoovervilles, and houselessness. Actual vagabonds were less welcome than Ford and his chefs had been. Some free auto camps created in earlier eras were even dismantled to discourage the “unsavory” classes from congregating. When Boardman was building the state parks of the 1930s, he did not include camping amenities. He no doubt shared the popular conception of auto campers in the period—not as well-heeled outdoor adventurers, but as unwashed masses that posed a threat to his pristine parks. Boardman wanted park visitors who could afford to retire to a hotel or a private camp come nightfall (see Chapter 2). People likely camped in parks throughout the Boardman era, but without much direction, organization, or encouragement from the park designers or officials.¹¹³

Postwar prosperity reinvented and reinvigorated the reputation of motor camping. The expanding middle class wanted to see the country in style, and hastily constructed motorhomes, campers, and tents were replaced with a

112 Young, *Heading Out*, 134, 151 - 172, 229 (quote on 134); Terence Young, “‘Green and Shady Camps’: E.P. Meinecke and the Restoration of America’s Public Campgrounds,” *George Wright Forum* 31:1 (2014): 69 - 76; Linda Flint McClelland, *Building the National Parks: Historic Landscape Design and Construction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 276 - 284.

113 Belasco, *Americans on the Road*; Roger Brandt, “Auto Courts of the Illinois Valley, a Baseline Inventory: Southwest Oregon Highway 199 and Highway 46,” (Self-published, 2013).

booming industry of travel trailers and motor coaches that combined mobility with amenity. While some vacationers preferred the hardscrabble nature of the tent camp, more and more Americans saw the allure of a modern cabin on wheels to ferry them across the American landscape. It was in this era that Oregon State Parks opened to campers. They aimed to appeal not to those who wanted to experience nature without any hint of modernity, but rather the recreation crowd, weekenders from the populated Willamette Valley who valued plumbing over pristine nature.

One of the most iconic trailers of this era was the Airstream, designed by Wally Byam, born and raised in Baker City (two hours south of Boardman, Oregon). During a vacation in Oregon from California, Byam was inspired to design a hardbody trailer, purportedly to appease his wife, who was unimpressed with tent camps. Developed in the 1930s, this form of nomadic vacationing entered into the mainstream by the 1950s, even inspiring the 1953 film *The Long, Long, Trailer* starring Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball at the height of their television fame. The Airstream may have been inspired by a trip to Oregon, but Oregon State Parks had to scramble to carve out space for trailers as camping became a quintessential middle-class summer activity in the 1950s. Streams of visitors demanded affordable, accessible facilities big enough for the bulky new vehicles, and park designers swiftly adapted.¹¹⁴

From the early development of camping facilities in Oregon State Parks, at least half of the overnight sites were designed for vehicles or camping trailers rather than tents. This type of amenity-laden camping required larger areas and more infrastructure support. It also created a clear distinction for the public and personnel between the backpackers “roughing it” in the woods and the State Park camper, snuggled in bed. This choice to appeal to the recreational camper over the backpacker defined the new conception of a typical park visitor. Boardman had envisioned his visitors in the mold of John Muir, wanderers in the woods marveling at the splendor of nature. Armstrong shaped parks for family campers in the style of Lucille Ball. They were out for a weekend to relax, not a strenuous outdoor experience.

After the success of Wallowa Lake and Silver Falls, the first two improved camps constructed on State Park property, Armstrong and his staff put their energies to the rapid expansion of camping within most state parks. In his 1952 Annual Report, Armstrong wrote

A new procedure was inaugurated in the Oregon State Parks in 1952 with the opening of overnight camping developments in 30 areas throughout the state. Of this number, 28 camps are of an unimproved nature ranging in size from four to fifteen campsites and provided with tables, wood stoves, water and latrine facilities.

114 On *The Long, Long, Trailer* and the mini-genre of trailer pictures that followed see Twitchell, *Winnebago Nation*, 37 and 114 - 116; Bruce Hampton, “The Airstream Brand at 75: Born On the 4th of July, Wally Byam Went On to Create an American Icon,” *RV Business* 57:2 (2006): p. 32+.

Wallowa Lake and Silver Falls remained the only areas that a trailer could stay in 1952 with full hookups but the next year, Emigrant Springs would join Wallowa Lake and Silver Falls with trailer camping facilities. Improving parks for the benefit of campers was no easy task. The camps in Emigrant Springs, 18 trailer sites and 32 tent camping areas, cost \$35,244 to create—about 10 times the yearly salary of a ranger at the time. Advertising these new camps, the *Oregonian* noted that they had

All the Comforts of Home – In the improved camp sites the camper can enjoy use of a camp stove, standard camp table, rest rooms with hot and cold running water, showers, utility room for laundry and ironing, power outlets for trailer, water and waste hook ups.

In 1953, a two-page spread in the *Sunday Oregonian* touted the ease of camping in state parks, now scattered throughout the state. “If you want the fun of camping without undergoing too much physical exertion and hardship, pack the family, food and sleeping bags in the car and drive to one of the convenient overnight campgrounds operated by the Oregon State Parks system.” That year, overnight camping numbers soared while day use attendance dropped slightly. The most popular camp was Wallowa Lake, with 11,731 campers. The second full season of camping, in 1953, saw a 44% increase in use across the system, with 29 parks offering camping. Most of this new capacity was unimproved sites, as parks scrambled to build the infrastructure to accommodate demand.¹¹⁵

Armstrong and his staff had anticipated a boom in camping in 1952 and knew the parks system as it had been was ill equipped to handle the hordes. A vast new constituency would expect camping at all major parks. But that didn’t mean there would be space for them. Boardman had not considered campsites in his property acquisitions, because Boardman had not wanted campers in “his” parks. Thus, while rhetorically the Oregon State Parks system was moving away from an era of acquisition, new land was needed to make space for overnight guests in existing parks, and new funds to build the amenities they desired. As Armstrong wrote in his Progress Report that year,

much national publicity has been given recently to public camping in federal, state, and local areas, and, while there has been public camping in some state and many federal areas for some years, the popularity of this mode of vacationing has greatly increased in the post war years, it is now possible to cover much of the country and stay in public camps allowing travellers

115 “The Oregon State Parks in 1952,” Folder: Reference Data - Activity and Betterment Report, 1952, Box: Chester H. Armstrong Paper.; Of course, Oregon State Parks did not, at the time, employ many professional rangers. United States Bureau of the Budget, “The Budget of the United States Government: Appendix” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954), 340; “State Parks Division: Overnight Camping, October -1953,” Folder: Reference Data - Overnight Camping 1953 – 1963, Box: Chester H. Armstrong Papers; “State Park Camping” *Oregonian* June 21, 1953, p. 91; “The Oregon State Parks in 1953,” p. 1, Folder: Progress Reports, 1953. Box: Progress Reports, 1951 – 1958, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

freedom of attire and schedule, “home cooked meals” pleasant places to stay each night and vacations of relatively low cost.

Campers in 1953 paid 75 cents per campsite per night with a limit of one week. Sites with electricity were one dollar. At a time when the average hotel cost \$5 a night and average monthly rent in Oregon was cresting \$50, vacationing for a \$1 a night seemed like a low-cost option. The one-week limit was probably imposed in part to keep people from simply moving to the parks full-time. Camping in



Bigger vehicles and travel trailers became firmly ensconced in the camping landscape of the postwar era.



state parks had captured the attention of vacationers, and, as a result, attendance was soaring. By 1955, Oregon ranked first in per capita attendance of all state parks in the nation.¹¹⁶

A decade later, one *Oregonian* article boasted that the era of “roughing it” in the wilderness was long over. “Today’s camper in Oregon can enjoy outdoor life relaxed in a lounge chair, watching his favorite TV program as his steak is being broiled over a brick fireplace next to his \$5,000 camp trailer.” The article noted that “[e]very park visitor likes the idea of ‘roughin it’ but not too rough.” This vision of camping was costly to realize, and the Highway Department was frequently more focused on road building than on funding fripperies. Pressure to keep those amenities affordable for visitors meant that improvements would take longer to pay for themselves.¹¹⁷

A more bureaucratic and systematic approach to park administration led, for the first time, to attempts to determine who was actually visiting parks, and for what reason. According to surveys taken in the 1950s and 1960s, park visitors were largely young families or retirees, many of them coming to camp in trailers or station wagons. A 1957 survey revealed that Portland area residents made up more than half of the visitors to the parks that were surveyed, though they represented less than a third of Oregon’s total population. The theory that parks were a means for citizens to escape urbanity appeared to be a reality on the ground. By 1960, there were 11 million visitors spending \$170 million in Oregon and going to what was now 175 state parks.¹¹⁸

Many of the original boosters of Oregon State Parks had hoped that parks would attract out-of-state tourists to see the wonders of Oregon—and spend some money on the way. Anecdotal evidence suggested this had always been so. Wally Byam, the creator of Airstream, was hardly the only Californian touring Oregon in the 1930s. New attention to statistics showed that out-of-state visitors were a significant portion of the influx of visitors in the 1960s. A 1964 survey of visitors in 19 state parks revealed that 59% of campers were from out of state. According to the same survey, Californians made up about 15% of the total number of campers in Oregon—a significant portion that was sometimes inflated in the minds of more xenophobic Oregonians. The average camper stayed 2.5 days in the campground and enjoyed sightseeing, swimming,

116 “Oregon Parks Pace Use by Citizens,” *Oregonian* Sept 18, 1955, p. 31.

117 “Twentieth Biennial Report of the Oregon State Highway Commission,” 17, Folder: Progress Reports, 1951 – 1952, Box: Progress Reports, 1951 – 1958; “State Parks Division: Overnight Camping, October -1953,” Folder: Reference Data - Overnight Camping 1953 – 1963, Box: Chester H. Armstrong Papers; U.S. Census of Housing, “Median Gross Rents By State, 1940 – 2000,” <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/tables/time-series/coh-grossrents/grossrents-unadj.txt>; Seymour Freegood, “The Hotels: Time to Stop and Rest,” *Fortune* 68 (July 1963). Whether the \$1/night actually was a low-cost option depended in large part on the upfront costs of a camper or similar; see F. B. Green, “Recreation Vehicles: The Economics of Ownership,” *Journal of Consumer Affairs* 12:2 (1978): pp. 364 – 372; “Pioneers Really Had To Rough It” *Oregonian* Sept 5, 1965, p. 92.

118 “The State Park Visitor in Oregon,” 3 – 11, Folder: Visitor Surveys, Box: Publications- Rules, Surveys, and Reports, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; “Camp Happy Urbanites,” *Oregonian* Apr 17, 1957, p. 14; “State Parks, Hosts to 11 Million, Expect Event More Visitors in 1961,” *Oregonian* Jan 3, 1961, p. 14.

and sunbathing. By 1969, 63% of campers came from out of state, and both day users and overnight campers listed “loafing” as one of their top activities while in state parks. That year 56% of campers surveyed were in trailer or truck campers, and the majority of them were middle-class families. As people spent more time in parks, a perceptible new appetite for programs and educational information began to grow. Campers wanted to hear from naturalists, walk guided nature trails, and read interpretive signs.¹¹⁹

The Growing Future

Planning Parks in the Age of Optimism

In the midst of this exponential growth of the 1950s, Chet Armstrong looked ahead, attempting to anticipate the needs of Oregonians in the distant future of 1975. The resulting 1956 report estimated that the population of Oregon by 1975 would swell to 2.5 million people, that visitation in state parks would be 12 million – 15 million people each year, and that the state parks budget would need to double to keep up with demand. Experts also assumed that automation and workplace efficiencies would continue to shorten the work week, which they supposed would be down to 37.1 hours by 1975, and that there would be nearly a month of vacation time for all middle-class workers by that date. As the State Parks Advisory Committee wrote, “It is anticipated that the per capita income throughout the nation will continue to rise in the years ahead and in another ten years the average family will be spending $\frac{1}{4}$ more than it does now. Leisure time is also expected to increase due to a shorter work week and additional days for vacations.” The population estimate was about right—Oregon’s actual population in 1975 was 2.33 million. Everything else was wildly off.¹²⁰

Neither leisure nor prosperity increased. Bouts of inflation, depression, and eventually stagflation over the next decades meant that the budget for the park functions Armstrong was concerned about would by 1975 be lower in constant dollars than it had been in the 50s. The American full-time workweek had already stopped shrinking by 1956, and by 1975 was north of 43 hours. The expected month of vacation time had also failed to materialize for most Americans—and paid vacations would continue to shrink after the 1970s. In 1956, the report concluded that “it appears that the national trend is towards increasing recreational use in the next 20-year period, barring a nationwide catastrophe such as war, or a crippling depression, and the local trend is anticipated to be even more pronounced.” The early 1970s, of course, would see both the Vietnam

119 In 1969, 63% of survey respondents listed an income of over \$10,000 “The State Park Visitor in Oregon”: A Report of the 1964 State Park Travel and Use Survey,” Folder: Visitor Surveys, Box: Publications-Rules, Surveys, and Reports; “Here’s What We’re Doing,” *Oregon State Park Times* 1:3, Oct-Nov, 1963, p. 4, Folder: Staff Newsletter – Park Times – 1963 to 1964, Box: Publications – Staff Newsletters, 1963 – 1994, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

120 “A 20 Year Program for Oregon State Parks” (1956), pp. 1 – 9, Folder: Administrative-Park Planning-“A 20 Year Program for Oregon State Parks,” (1956), Box: Strategic Plans, 1956 – 2012, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; “Report of the State Park Advisory Committee” (July 16, 1956), p. 51, Folder: State Park Advisory Committee, 1956, Box: Meetings and Events, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.



Popular parks like Rooster Rock (above) and South Beach (right) both see intensive use, then as now.



War and a crippling depression. Armstrong assumed that there would be an ever-increasing rush of new visitors to the parks every few years, flush with wealth, freedom from long hours, and newfound mobility.¹²¹

While the [1956] report overestimated the future fortunes of the country, it underestimated the popularity of the parks. The visitation numbers for 1976 were 30,852,000, double the projections from 1956. Presumptions of prosperity may not have panned out, but the new focus on planning for people was prescient. But what would the people want?¹²²

121 By 1975, Oregon Parks and Recreation had taken on many more responsibilities than had been imagined in the 1950s, so straightforward budget comparisons are difficult. Portland State University Center for Population Research and Census, "Population Estimates, Oregon Counties and Incorporated Cities" *Oregon Population Estimates and Reports* 31 (1975); John D. Owen, "Workweeks and Leisure: An Analysis of Trends, 1948 - 75," *Monthly Labor Review* 99:8 (1976): 3 - 8; Deborah M. Figart and Lonnie Golden, "Introduction and Overview: Understanding Working Time Around the World," *Working Time: International Trends, Theories and Policy Perspectives*, Deborah M. Figart and Lonnie Golden, Eds. (New York: Routledge, 2000). Our use of "depression" rather than "recession" here is in recognition of the long-term damage the economic downturns of the early 1970s inflicted on American workers and wages, and the particularly damaging effects on Oregon specifically (see Chapters 5 and 6). For those who measure economic health exclusively by the national Gross Domestic Product and the stock market, the economic crisis of the 1970s was only a recession.

122 Lawrence C. Merriam, *Oregon's Highway Park System, 1921 - 1989: An Administrative History, Including Historical Overview and Park Directory* (Oregon Parks and Recreation Dept, 1992), p. 43.

Amidst a rising tide of visitors, the State Parks Advisory Committee predicted a deluge of boats. Leisure time, they were assured, would turn maritime. Boat ownership had tripled since the 1940s. If that trend continued as was assumed, in 20 years the majority of American households would have boats. This was emblematic of the assumptions of perpetual prosperity common to the 1950s. While boating became an important part of Oregon Parks and Recreation, even at the peak of recreational boating in the 1960s probably only around 3 in 20 Oregon households owned boats. The crowds, however, kept growing and growing.¹²³

Building on this look to the future, Mark Astrup, who took over as Superintendent in 1961 following Chet Armstrong's retirement and remained for two years, created the Oregon Outdoor Non-Urban Parks and Recreation Study. This study was designed not only to survey Oregon State Parks, but all parks in Oregon. This report would determine whether the recreational needs of Oregonians were being met and where state parks might best enable recreation. Astrup noted that the most important shift that this plan created was a movement to "people-use":

a pretty striking change in emphasis between the Boardman days, when we were preserving landscape qualities and scenic treasure, to the days here in the early sixties, when we were beginning to notice that people had specific needs and requirements.

Astrup retained Armstrong's sense of urgency in this pivot to recreation. Identifying "overnight camping and [of course] boating facilities" as "areas of critical need for the future," he urged state and county governments to "give attention to getting sites now while land is available." The push for acquisition continued in the period of development. And in 1956, after decades of rumbling amidst park boosters, an old idea was finally given a hearing. Was it time, many asked, for the expanding state parks system to separate from Highways and become its own department?¹²⁴

123 "Report of the State Park Advisory Committee" (July 16, 1956), p. 51, William L. O'Neill, *American High: The Years of Confidence, 1945 – 1960* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986); Donald Watson Christensen, "An Evaluation and Criteria for Implementation of a Recreational Motorboat Educational Licensing Practice in Oregon," PhD Diss. Oregon State University, 1978, pp. 1, 69 – 70. Boat ownership tends to be undercounted, as counts are based on registration and not all boat types need to be registered.

124 "Report of the State Park Advisory Committee" (July 16, 1956), p. 52; "A 20-Year Program for State Parks," (Apr 3, 1956), p. 2; Mark Astrup, "Interview with Mark Henry Astrup, Third Superintendent of Oregon State Parks," Interview with Elisabeth Walton Potter, May 9, 1981, pp. –14 – 15, Folder: Administrative History—Oral History—Mark H. Astrup, Superintendent 1961 – 1962, Box: Staff Biographies and Oral Histories, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; "Park Usage Climb Seen" *Oregonian* Nov 5, 1961, p. 20.

Glorified Highway Waysides: **Should Parks be a Separate Agency?**

Every leadership generation in Oregon State Parks faced the question of whether to remain a part of the Highway Department or strike out as an independent agency. In the 1950s, the number of park visitors was doubling every few years, and a national movement towards more robust parks and recreation programs put a spotlight on the money and resources needed to manage a growing system. As it had been from its inception, Oregon State Parks under Armstrong was still a wing of the Highway Department. But as the scope, goals, and budget of the parks programs grew, some wondered if it was time to get out from under the highway administration.

As with most issues of state, the question hinged on money. Roads had a stable income from the gas tax, plus a strong position for state funding, and a portion of those monies went to the parks. If parks were a separate agency, would funding dry up? Or were parks already losing out on their fair share of money because of the growing needs for interstates? Park administrators and advocates like Sam Boardman and Robert Sawyer had long debated this question, with Boardman arguing that “park men,” not “highway men,” should control park budgets (see Chapter 2). In 1955, amidst a national flowering of parks movements, the question caught the attention of the Oregon state legislature. Governor Paul Patterson convened a state advisory committee on state parks to settle the question. The committee was asked to research other state park systems, hold public meetings, and examine the inner workings of Oregon state parks as compared to other state parks. In 1956, Oregon would determine the fate of the highway parks system.¹²⁵

According to Governor Patterson, the call for this meeting had been building for years. The Recreational and Natural Resources Committee of the Portland Chamber of Commerce seemed to lead the charge. Members had been longtime allies of Sam Boardman, and were instrumental in gathering his papers and cementing his legend after his death. Echoing Boardman’s wishes, in 1954 the Portland Chamber of Commerce called into question the suitability of the Highway Department to manage parks. The main issue they identified was insufficient and unstable funding. The Chamber suggested that a fixed 3% of highway funding should be earmarked for the park system. This proposal would have increased the budget for parks from around \$1 million dollars to around \$1.5 million dollars. It also would have guaranteed that park funding could not be diverted to other highway projects. And the Chamber argued for a separate parks commission to administer these funds.

Armstrong reacted to this call for independence with a public response published in the *Oregonian*, saying that “the Oregon park system is well-managed and prospering under the present conditions. . . . there is no valid reason

125 “Report of the State Park Advisory Committee” (July 16, 1956).

for separation.” Armstrong argued that the funding received by parks through highway commission allocation was adequate. Highway Commissioner Milo McIver agreed with Armstrong, stating that “there is no proof Oregon would be better off with a separate commission.” He argued that the park system was in good hands and rated favorably among other state park systems. Armstrong, who had worked for the Highway Department for over 40 years, held firm to the notion that parks and highways benefited from a symbiotic relationship, in part because parks were located along highways and dependent on their maintenance. He noted that park systems in other states also fell under the umbrella of other agencies, most commonly Natural Resources—which could put park priorities in conflict with the interests of extractive industries. There was no proof, Armstrong argued, that the Highway-Park relationship in Oregon was any worse than that.¹²⁶

Armstrong and McIver’s assurances did not quell the debate. In June of 1954, another article appeared in the *Sunday Oregonian* editorial page titled “Freedom for Our Parks”. Citing the continued growth of the state population and the disappearance of free public lands, this article cast doubt on the Highway Commission’s ability to manage a resource so valuable to future generations. The Highway Department was:

a state agency that, quite properly, is chiefly concerned with the practical problems of building highways and bridges... There are well founded doubts among the lovers of the outdoors that the responsibility of acquiring new parklands for the aesthetic needs of the future should... be left in [their] hands.

Now this was not just an issue of funding, but also one of philosophy. The editorial asked: can highway men, who are largely engineers, builders, and bureaucrats, understand the needs of nature? The stance of the Portland Chamber of Commerce and the editorial staff of the *Oregonian* was an unequivocal “no”. They wrote, “members of the highway department are men of unquestioned diligence and ability, in their specialized field. But it is doubtful that they are well qualified, by temperament or training, to give the state what it should have in a parks program tailored for the future.”¹²⁷

Sam Boardman’s mastery of public perceptions continued after his death. The press in 1954 seemed to be attacking the new leadership just as much as the structure of the park system. Boardman had preached the fundamental importance of acquisition, the more the better. By that metric, Chet Armstrong’s modest growth seemed almost like standing still. As the same editorial put it:

The department still is wedded to the notion that state parks should be glorified highway waysides, and has failed to take

126 “Oregon Parks Setup Backed,” *Oregonian* May 13, 1954, p. 19.

127 “Freedom for Our Parks,” *Oregonian* June 6, 1954, p. 42. Sentence order in the block quote adjusted for clarity.

advantage of opportunities to acquire choice sites because they have not been located adjacent to travel routes. It has also expressed the view that the limited funds set aside for park purposes should be used for maintenance alone rather than in the purchase of new areas.

They suggested a full split of the state system to a separate agency and that “such a commission could equip itself with a parks superintendent and staff trained and experienced in the specialized task of making the most of our scenic assets.” The newspaper went on to boldly claim that this separate agency would fulfill the dreams of the recently deceased Sam Boardman “rightly known as the father of Oregon parks.” Chet Armstrong, only 4 years into his job, seemed to be fighting a ghost. Forced by public demand to develop campsites, he was then derided for a lack of new park acquisitions. Armstrong was also called on the carpet for his background in highway engineering, rather than park administration—even though Boardman himself had taken the same path to the top.¹²⁸

When writing a history of Oregon State Parks almost a decade later, Armstrong mentioned the controversy but deliberately noted that this discussion predated his tenure:

[P]rior to 1950, a feeling was developing among many people of the state and groups that the parks were not being properly managed by the Highway Commission. These people believed, however erroneous it may have been, that the Highway Commission had an improper conception of parks.

Armstrong made his feelings clear: “highway men” were “park men.” The “erroneous” belief that parks should stand on their own came from the idealistic notion that funding could be easily obtained. And despite the accusations of the Portland Chamber of Commerce and the attitudes of some in the Highway Department, acquisitions had not stopped in the Armstrong era. But there were serious questions about the best way forward for a park system scrambling to keep up. Chaired by William Tugman—like Sawyer before him a newspaper editor and park advocate—the governor’s commission groped for answers.¹²⁹

One of the first tasks the committee chose was to check in with the neighbors—state park systems in California and Washington. Almost immediately, the committee discovered that the rampant growth and funding issues that were straining the Oregon system were also hitting neighboring states. In touring Washington parks, the committee noted that Washington, like Oregon, “had been forced to recognize. . . that it would be impossible to meet the demand for overnight camping facilities.” The key difference between the states was not demand but supply: Washington’s parks were funded directly through the legislature. While this opened up the option for more funding based on need, the

128 “Freedom for Our Parks” *Oregonian* June 6, 1954, p. 42.

129 Chester H. Armstrong, *Oregon State Parks: History, 1917 – 1963* (Salem: Oregon Highway Dept., 1965), p. 36.

committee found a real fear among Washington park system stakeholders that, if the political ground shifted, the parks budget might crack apart. While Oregon's park leadership constantly had to appeal to Highways for a piece of their guaranteed funding, the Washington park system depended on the public to lobby legislators for parks funding. Though at the time of their visit the parks budget in Washington surpassed that of Oregon, Tugman and his committee felt a palpable uncertainty about future funding among those they talked to on their tour. "[K]eep [the] park program out of politics," one representative "emphatically" told them, "where it is sure to be if parks must depend on the legislature for an appropriation." The Washington way was a mix of the tantalizing and the terrifying, the possibility of greater funding and independence weighed against fear of fickle funding in the future.¹³⁰

The committee also observed the mammoth California state parks system, managed under the state Natural Resources Department. Like Oregon and Washington, California in the 1950s was struggling to keep up with the influx of campers. What set California apart was money. Amidst legislative clashes and compromises over oil extraction from public lands in the 1930s and 1940s, California state parks earmarked a percentage of all state royalties from offshore drilling along the coast. The Oregon committee visited at a particularly flush time—more than \$30 million reserved for parks had finally been cleared of years of legal impediments by 1954, and the dedicated portion of future royalties had risen to 70%. This lucrative arrangement was generating \$7 million dollars a year for California parks by 1956, seven times the budget for Oregon's parks. This stable funding source likely contributed to the other key difference between Oregon and California in the 1950s. California state parks already had dedicated resources for interpretation and educational programs during the summer months—programs that were extremely popular with visitors. Interpretive programs in Oregon parks, where they existed, tended to be local and/or unfunded. It would be another decade before Oregon formally allocated any state park resources toward education. The visiting committee was impressed by the scale of California's system, but couldn't think of a funding source analogous to the offshore oil that had enabled its recent capital investments. In the 1950s California parks served less as a model than a dream, a vision of what might be accomplished if Oregon state parks could somehow get their hands on millions of dollars. The committee had to head back home without a clear recipe for success from the neighbors.¹³¹

130 "Report of the State Park Advisory Committee" (July 16, 1956), pp. 19 – 22.

131 "Report of the State Park Advisory Committee" (July 16, 1956), pp. 19 – 21; David Vogel, *California Greenin': How the Golden State Became an Environmental Leader* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), Chap. 4; Melissa Tyler et al., "California State Parks: Preserving Our Natural and Cultural Treasures," (Exhibit, California State Archives, 2014; digital adaptation by Jessica Herrick, 2016). The Parks Advisory Committee briefly discussed the possibility of opening land to limited offshore drilling as a source of revenue in 1961. Neither the drilling nor the discussion of it moved past the exploratory phase. State Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, March 3, 1961, pp. 4 – 8, Folder: State Park Advisory Committee Proceedings, 1956 - 1972, Oregon Parks and Recreation Collection; Shayla Norris-York, "Oregon Bans Offshore Drilling ... Again?" *Portland Monthly* Apr 4, 2019.

The Public Would Just Raise H- - - : **Funding Fears in a Time of Plenty**

The fight for parks funding in this era was frequently over priorities within the existing Highways budget. When the committee returned to Oregon and began holding hearings in 1956, austerity was not a concern. The public demanded more and better parks, and tax revenues at the time were going nowhere but up. But could a demand for costly new roads swallow up funding for parks? Some advocates for a separate park system thought so. Road building was taking center stage as an issue of national defense. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 put a nationwide focus on road improvements. The large increases in federal funding that came with this new focus might not be enough. In the grip of the Cold War, few would publicly argue against road expansions for national security. Ernest B. McNaughton, President of the pro-parks Oregon Roadside Council, voiced his support for the Highway Department's focus on interstate improvements. But he warned that given this urgent focus, "the park development and operation program has about the position of a pet dog."¹³²

And many echoed Boardman's belief that highway men just didn't know parks. Thornton Munger, a retired forest scientist who was also a member of the Roadside Council, doubted that the men hired to direct the development of highways were qualified to handle the complexities of a state park system. "Businessmen chosen to direct the multi-million-dollar highway program," he proclaimed, "are not apt to find the time to develop adequately the aesthetic, sociological, and scientific factors involved in providing an adequate, well-balanced, fully functioning park system." According to Munger, the Highway Commission was simply "frying bigger fish." Munger continued by enumerating these failings, largely focusing on acquisition but mentioning also the lack of educational and cultural work done in the parks, something that a separate agency, he believed, would have the resources and legal standing to undertake.¹³³

Munger was not the only conservationist skeptical that highway people would be able to handle the varied and growing needs of the park system. The Audubon Society of Oregon echoed Munger's concerns, calling for "the employment of trained personnel and emphasis on nature preservation and study in the park program." David Duniway, the Oregon State Archivist, spoke of the importance of historic sites and wished that there was a mechanism within the park structure to save historic buildings. Martha Ann Platt of the Mazamas Mountaineering Club urged the separation of parks in an effort to preserve those areas that could not be reached by auto travel. The Highway Commission,

132 "Minutes of the Oregon State Parks Advisory Committee Hearing on State Parks," 5, Folder: State Park Advisory Committee, 1956, Box: Meetings and Events, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection. The metaphor chosen implies either that McNaughton maintained the pet-keeping standards of an earlier era, or that he was more concerned about control than funding—after all, the pet dog still gets fed. On changing norms for dog care, see Katherine C. Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

133 "Minutes of the Oregon State Parks Advisory Committee Hearing on State Parks," 7 – 8.

Platt argued, knew nothing of the treasures of Oregon beyond the roadsides, nor should they be expected to.¹³⁴

Every time, the Advisory Committee brought the conversation back to money. Birds, mountains, and historic homes were worth saving, but who was going to pay for it? Reflecting on the restrictions of the current budget, Tugman noted,

Now one gentleman yesterday [almost certainly Duniway] suggested that something should be done to preserve the old buildings in Salem which were occupied by Charlie Sprague's Statesman for many years, a rather unlovely old Victorian structure, and I can assure you that if we took any considerable part of highway revenue to do that job, the public would just raise —, and I think they'd be justified.

For Tugman, this was a numbers game. The resources were thin, and highways offered a feeling of safety for the citizens of Oregon during a period of growing atomic threats. The voting public would be appalled to see any significant amount of money diverted from that purpose to save a bird or a building. Maybe parks would be safer nestled in the Highway Department? A separate park agency might allow for a more highly trained staff to manage state parks, but that didn't mean the money would follow.¹³⁵

Ever Be On the Watch for Sabotage: **The Parks Committee and the Spirit of Sam Boardman**

As more and more Oregonians spoke to the committee, the crux of the parks issue became one of intention. Who were these parks for? Why had Oregonians donated the lands? And most strikingly, as person after person asked—what would Sam Boardman have us do? Cap Collier, a longtime park supporter and donor, wrote in opposition to a separate parks system, saying:

“these people gave the Highway Commission[,] for the use of the traveling public[,] these areas for Highway Parks. I am sure it would be a breach of trust now to turn these into an utterly different type of park entirely divorced from the idea for which they were created.”

Whether or not the land was donated specifically to be administered by the Highway Commission, Collier's larger point was one of legacy. Specifically, Boardman's legacy. Collier had worked closely with Robert Sawyer and Sam Boardman, and the 1950s brought swift changes to their established

134 “Minutes of the Oregon State Parks Advisory Committee Hearing on State Parks,” 11, 30, 34.

135 “Minutes of the Oregon State Parks Advisory Committee Hearing on State Parks,” 77.

authority over the park system. Camping added a stressor, and Boardman's former allies did not have the same rapport with Armstrong and his ilk, in part because Boardman had been characteristically unwilling to accept the change in leadership. The Roadside Council and the Audubon Society looked to the future, to what parks might become with specialized leadership. Men like Collier looked back at the hardscrabble glory days of the 1930s, when specialization was a hindrance, not a requirement, and "recreation" was "not our function." Although the larger question of the future of parks was important, these meetings also had to grapple with a legacy of parks as the work of a few tough men who did everything. That vision was neither accurate nor sustainable, but it was held in wildly high regard. Sam Boardman loomed large in these proceedings.¹³⁶

Marshall Newport Dana, representing the Portland Chamber of Commerce, argued that the combination of extensive natural assets and a rapidly changing set of needs for recreation and preservation in the state of Oregon meant that there must be a separate, and permanently funded, parks agency. He used as proof a survey of recreation areas in the Pacific Northwest, noting a 300% increase in use from 1947 to 1954. To bolster his bona fides, Dana reminded the committee that he had been closely associated with parks for the last 45 years, a regular friend to Sam Boardman and the parks system. Dana argued that far from supporting things as they were now, Sam Boardman would have stood against the "crude, conservative, economical attitude that would have parks as an afterthought." He echoed Boardman's florid language when he claimed that trips to parks give those urbanites from developed states the wings to "fly into areas higher than they have ever known." In response, Tugman took a moment to stand up for the Highway Commission. "I think it's an unwarranted assumption – on the part of many people, that the State Highway Commission as such is lacking in provision or is unsympathetic toward the development of a park system or it fails to understand what parks should be." Tugman then said, perhaps exasperated with the navel-gazing idealism of the day's hearing "we haven't cut on the oil wells that they have in California." Talk all you want about what parks should be, Tugman seemed to imply. The money simply wasn't there.¹³⁷

Arthur Kirkham, a radio journalist, in addition to recalling the holy image of Sam Boardman, brought along relics. Kirkham pulled out some of Sam Boardman's letters on the future of parks and read them verbatim. Boardman, writing in 1943, had claimed that, "The park system has been wheedled, mostly by yours truly... a poor way... If it came through the people we would have double the acreage today. It is easy to turn down the Parks Superintendent, but not so easy to turn down the people." Boardman's letter conveyed a longing for

136 "Minutes of the Oregon State Parks Advisory Committee Hearing on State Parks," 29; State Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, March 3, 1961, p. 3, Folder: State Park Advisory Committee Proceedings, 1956 – 1972.

137 "Minutes of the Oregon State Parks Advisory Committee Hearing on State Parks," 48 – 55.

a park commission to guide his work, “a personnel schooled in park matters, an understanding heart, not a combative one.” In 1950, as he was preparing to retire, Boardman had written “Ever be on the watch for sabotage of the things I have kept through the years.” Kirkham continued on, quoting instances in which Boardman longed for a parks commission, a dedicated staff, and an appropriate budget that would allow for the protection of his parks. Boardman had written in 1952, in perhaps a pointed reference to his successor, “You can’t have engineers interjecting emery dust on the forward bearing of park progress.”¹³⁸

In what might have been the most unguarded exchange of the hearings, Charles Keyser, a park consultant for the City of Portland, proclaimed in a letter that “a park system will not be happily contained in a drawer of a bureau of another field.” “[I]f the Highway Commission continues to regard the Park Department as a stepchild with no promise of ever showing a genuine disposition to be park-minded,” he spat, “perhaps a keel hauling at least would be in order sooner rather than later.” At the suggestion that he and other committee members could not be “park-minded,” Tugman fired back:

It might surprise you to know that some of us were very close friends of Sam Boardman, Jessie Honeyman, Mrs. Jackson, Mrs. Roche and the MANY Oregon people who have made notable contributions to Oregon’s parks. Some of us have spearheaded campaigns for parks, playgrounds, recreational facilities in our home towns and many have a deep personal interest in Oregon history and in resource and wildlife conservation. If we are... “practical” people with some concern for costs[,] taxes[,] and such unpleasant necessities, we can bear up under that epithet, but it seems to me you are quite unfair in the implications you make.

The question, originally one of pragmatism, became over the course of these hearings a question of who could rightly guard the park system. Armstrong, present throughout, spoke up only briefly, when asked for clarifications on policy. Boardman may have been dead for three years, but his voice was heard at more length than his living successor.¹³⁹

On March 22, 1956, the State Parks Advisory Committee was called to order to make final recommendations on whether the State Park system should be a separate agency. Tugman, perhaps still fuming from his exchange with Charles Keyser, noted that “during the hearings the various groups had been asked repeatedly for their ideas on financing these additional programs, but none had such a suggestion.” The hearings and fact-finding had been wide-ranging, but in the end no one had come up with a convincing enough argument that

138 “Minutes of the Oregon State Parks Advisory Committee Hearing on State Parks,” 67 – 68.

139 “Minutes of the Oregon State Parks Advisory Committee Hearing on State Parks,” 115 – 121.



By the end of 1958, the State Parks Advisory Committee was done with the question of Parks Division control and funding. Cars, highways (and their money) again reigned supreme, and Parks remained part of the Highway Commission.

funding for park priorities would expand with independence. The general consensus of those in attendance was summed up by Frank Logan of Bend, Oregon, who voiced cautious support for “the suggestion of a park advisory committee appointed under the State Highway. It would satisfy most of the people who are complaining.” And at least for a while, it seemed to.¹⁴⁰

Oregon State Parks would remain a part of the Highway Department, but with a new committee separate from highways providing guidance and advice. The first meeting of the State Parks Advisory Committee (appointed in 1957) was held on September 19, 1958 and seemed to solve the question of park administration. Funding would remain under the control of the Highway Commission, but those park enthusiasts who doubted the efficacy of the highway men could, it was hoped, put their trust in an independent committee appointed to oversee park issues. While the issue of a separate parks department was put to bed, the issues brought to the 1956 hearing would have implications well into the 1970s. The clamoring in 1956 for a professionalized staff and a focus on history and conservation initiatives would take root in the 1960s and 1970s—but not without some bumps along the way.¹⁴¹

140 “Meeting Minutes, March 22, 1956,” p. 1, Folder: State Park Advisory Committee Proceedings 1956 – 1972.

141 State Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Sept 19, 1958, p. 1, Folder: State Park Advisory Committee Proceedings, 1956 – 1972; “The Oregon State Parks in 1958,” p. 1, Folder: Progress Reports, 1958, Box: Progress Reports, 1951 – 1958.