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D.C.

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS
OF THE COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS IN
SUPPORT OF S. 2636, A BILL TO PROVIDE FOR THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF A CAPE COD NATIONAL SEASHORE PARK

My name is Miriam DeWitt. I wish to thank this Committee for the opportunity to appear today and testify in favor of the establishment of the proposed Cape Cod National Seashore Park. My husband and I are voting residents of Provincetown and own property there. We are in favor of S. 2636 because we believe that establishment of a National Seashore Park is the only way to save Cape Cod. We are convinced this bill will accomplish that commendable purpose while being fair to all parties concerned.

Cape Cod is highly worth saving. It is still beautiful -- in places. A Cape Codder knows where to find these places -- places where, like Thoreau and Henry Beston, he can refresh body and spirit in contemplating a lonely sweep of sand and sea, or a moor where small houses seem to grow out of their grey-green background. A seasoned Cape Codder knows where to go, but a stranger to the Cape driving out Route 6 from Orleans to Provincetown, or driving to Highland Light and the cliffs where Thoreau "put all America behind him", often wonders aloud if he mightn't better have stayed home or gone to Maine.

I am a seasoned Cape Codder. I have spent many summers and some winters on the Cape since my family first when there in 1912. Each year it is harder to find the real Cape Cod, to get away from the clutter of ill-planned cottages, of motels, neon signs, bulldozer scarred woods and scalped hills that have been scraped clean of trees and topsoil. It is harder to get away from the signs of man's stupidity, of his neglect of the beauty that brings him his livelihood.

Route 6, once a magnificent road, is looking more and more like Route 28 from Hyannis to South Yarmouth, now a solid line of motels and gas stations. It has become what Bernard DeVoto calls a "linear slum". Each year the blight spreads further along the side roads, into the woods, over the moors and out to the shores. It spreads further and further into the sections designated for the National Seashore Park. "Pretty soon," a friend told me the other day, "there won't be anything to save."

If there is to be a National Seashore Park worthy of the name, speed is essential.

I have just come from Cape Cod, where in the last few days I saw a number of recent developments on land designated for the Park. Most, or perhaps all of these, were started after the Eastham hearings. Overlooking Nauset harbor, not far from the Coast Guard station, within sight of Henry Beston's "Outermost House", the Johnson-Rogers real estate firm has bulldozed a road through the pine and cedar woods. Seven-tenths of a mile of road front has been divided into 32 numbered lots. Lot 13 includes the site where Deacon John Doane, first settler of Eastham, built his house in 1644, where his descendant, Honorable John Doane, placed a stone marker in 1869, and where trees were planted in 1951 in honor of three women who, as a bronze plaque says, "have striven tirelessly to preserve the ideal and memory of John Doane." A boulder blocks the old road to the Doane marker.

A little further north, on the shore of Salt Pond, close to Route 6, a motel has just been built in the middle of one of the most beautiful views on the entire Cape -- a vista of ponds and inlets framing an upland dotted with cedar. This too is on land designated for acquisition by the Park.

Also within the proposed Park are two houses under construction, started after the Eastham hearings, on Chequesset Neck in Wellfleet. A little further on, on Griffin Island, a very expensive house is under construction on a brand-new section of road that has been bulldozed through woods across the road from a development of the Wellfleet Real Estate Co.

I have been told by two old residents of the following developments in Truro: To the left of Highland Light, towards the Coast Guard station, new houses have been built in the past two months. In the woods along the road to Meadows Beach are several recent houses. Sand is still being removed from a pit behind the Chamber of Commerce Information Booth in Truro.

These are just a few examples of the destructive trend. Park legislation should be enacted at this session of Congress. Soon it will be too late.

Nearly everyone I talked to favors this bill. Over 400 people have signed this letter and these petitions in favor of the National Seashore Park. These are just a small proportion of those favoring its establishment. Many whose homes would be in the Park are wholeheartedly for it, feeling that only in this way can they escape engulfment by a tidal wave of honky-tonk.

The bill is extremely fair. It will not deprive people of their homes, and by the same token, these homes will remain on the tax rolls providing income for the towns. I understand that although 70% of the area of Truro would be in the Park, its tax income would be reduced by only 11%.

Through the Advisory Council, the people of the Cape will have a voice in the operation of the Park. I share with many others the hope that there will be a minimum of development for recreation. Recreation -- or re-creation -- is the product of unimproved nature. There are enough roads of access to the ocean at present. The rest should be left for wildlife and humans who like to use their legs. There should be no road along the ocean.

Inclusion of Route 6 within the Park, making it a limited access highway, as suggested by Dr. Chermayeff at the Eastham hearings, would add greatly to the attractiveness of the area and provide further for the needs of those who must view nature from a car.

I believe the three-acre limitation on present home sites is unnecessary. Owners should be allowed to keep more acreage provided they do not develop it. The chief object of the Park is to keep the Cape wild. Landowners can do this as well as the Park Service at no cost to the taxpayers.

Establishment of the Cape Cod National Seashore Park along these lines will still leave the towns with sufficient space for economic growth. The towns do not need unlimited acreage in which to spread out over the hills and seashores. Such so-called growth merely destroys the attractiveness of Cape Cod and drives away the visitors who form the backbone of the region's economy. The needed economic growth of the towns will come through soaring property values which will go hand in hand with the establishment of the Park. Thank you.

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