

OUTDOOR RECREATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES

by Lloyd Barnhart

OVER THE PAST DECADE we have begun to realize the negative effect man has had on the natural world. We now run around like the proverbial chicken searching out reasons for this desperate situation and the key to getting ourselves out of it.

Legislation and education often are proposed as the keys to solving the environmental crisis. True, legislation can prevent some forms of environmental destruction, but can it bring about fundamental changes in our attitudes? Can legislation help to develop a positive environmental attitude in the mind of a young boy or girl? Probably not!

How about education? Can we teach attitudes—positive attitudes relating to the environment? Perhaps, but only in a limited sense. We can teach facts, and facts (the interpretation of such) do influence attitude development. It is important, however,

to realize that the development of attitudes, particularly those relating to the natural world, is dependent upon many, many factors outside the realm of formal education. Thus, the effect of education must be viewed as limited.

Appreciation of, and respect for, our natural environment often is developed through participation in outdoor recreation activities. Nearly all forms of outdoor recreation are dependent upon environmental quality. To fish, we must have clean waters suitable for inhabitation by those species we desire to catch; to hunt, we must have natural habitat which will support our game animals; to enjoy hiking and camping, we need land area which has not been marked or despoiled by civilization; to enjoy gardening, we need rich, fertile soils and clean air. Because this is so, the recreationist must seek out certain en-

vironmental characteristics if he is to enjoy his chosen activity. Thus, the first thing outdoor recreation does is to reacquaint and reunite man with the natural world—that natural world from which he is far removed in his technological, urbanized society. It develops within the individual a *personal* interest in quality natural resources.

One might argue that the environmental interests of the recreationist are specific and selfish. True, his initial motives may be selfish, but soon the horizons of his interest broaden to the point where the benefits of his

concern reach far beyond himself. The young hunter, for example, takes up his sport with an interest in shooting rabbits, or squirrels, or whatever. Now obviously hunting depends upon more than mere populations of specific game animals. Availability and quality of other resources, including soil, water, air, and vegetative cover, all have a profound effect on hunting. Therefore, as our young hunter grows and learns, his interest and appreciation will, by the very nature of his activity, expand to encompass all these other major resources in

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