

Title Under Congressman John Young

PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

By

Congressman John Young

The proposed Padre Island National Seashore legislation is one of the most important legislative programs pending in Washington today and is of the utmost significance to South Texas and the nation. There has been legislation introduced to this end in both the House and the Senate. Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas has introduced S. 4 in the Senate, and Congressman Joe Kilgore and I have introduced H. R. 5013 and H. R. 5049 respectively in the House of Representatives. The two House bills are identical, but there are differences between the House bills and the Senate bill. This is not unusual in the bicameral system of legislation, and I am confident the differences that exist can and will be reconciled in the normal legislative process--either in the respective committees of the House and Senate, or assuming the House bills and the Senate bill pass their respective bodies, then in Conference Committee between the House and Senate.

It is my purpose here to discuss some of the problems pertaining to the establishment of a National Seashore on Padre Island and to compare the legislative proposals that have been introduced to this end.

Dimensions

One of the most important considerations in the establishment of any park is, of course, its size. There are those who have contended that Padre Island's entire 117-mile length should be converted into a National Seashore Area, but the National Park Service in a survey dated February, 1959, recommended 88 miles as the maximum suggested for park purposes, leaving a certain amount of land at each end of the Seashore for private development. The National Park Service recognized that the public needs a certain amount of private development as well as public development in a project of this nature. Page 21 of the Field Investigation Report of the National Park Service states as follows:

"Optimum boundaries suggested for a Padre Island National Seashore embrace an 88 mile stretch of the island. These suggested boundaries leave out the northern 10 miles and southern 15 miles of the island so as to provide space for the expansion of tourist developments already begun at the ends of the island."

Page 22 of the Report states as follows:

"Development should be held to a minimum within the area boundaries to preserve the beach and island generally in its natural condition. All overnight accommodations and other commercial facilities should be encouraged to develop outside the boundaries on private land excluded for that purpose."

The National Park Advisory Board has approved the National Park Service's recommendation.

President John F. Kennedy and Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall have endorsed the Padre Island National Seashore, but so far neither has publicly expressed a view as to what the size of the Seashore should be. Secretary Udall has positively stated that he is not an "all or nothing man" and would determine for himself his recommendations as to size.

Congressman John Young's Position on Size

I have always favored the establishment of a National Seashore on Padre Island and have taken the position consistently that the size should be adequate to meet the needs of the public--both present and future. In this respect it is my feeling that an 88-mile Seashore would certainly be amply large, while anything smaller than 50 miles would not be large enough to meet the future needs of the public.

The Senate bill provides for 88 miles, while the House bills provide for 65 miles. The 65-mile figure chosen for my bill represents about a midway point between the 88 miles which I consider the maximum requirement and 50 miles which I consider to be the smallest amount that could be considered. Now, if the 65-mile bills pass the House, does this mean that the Padre Island National Seashore will be 65 miles in length? Very likely not. If the 88-mile bill passes

the Senate and the 65-mile bills pass the House, the differences would be resolved in conference between committees of the House and Senate, and in all probability the final mileage figure would be somewhere in the neighborhood of 75 to 80 miles. So, as a practical matter, the 65-mile provision in the House bills does not represent a rigid size stipulation, but rather a good starting minimum from which the ultimate size determination will very likely be scaled upward in the normal process of bicameral legislation. The apparent size difference could diminish sharply if not disappear altogether. So, the size question is not a serious problem.

In connection with the quality or condition of the Island being proposed for a National Seashore, there is attached to the National Park Service Survey an exhibit, which is a reproduction of a photograph of a portion of the magnificent Padre Island Beach, with the following notation:

"The finest beach observed was in the vicinity of the Port Mansfield Cut. Beach like this extends for possibly 25 miles north of the cut."

Serious Problems

There are other problems of importance from a parliamentary and practical standpoint. In order to give the proposed Padre Island National Seashore legislation the best possible chance to pass the House of Representatives, Congressman Joe Kilgore and I have introduced identical bills. Inasmuch as the proposed National Seashore Area is wholly located within the two Congressional Districts which it is our honor and responsibility to represent, it is not likely that the House of Representatives would pass any legislation affecting our Districts in which we did not concur or in which we were in substantial disagreement. The introduction of identical bills, however, is not to be taken as a guarantee that our bills will pass, because they still must run the gauntlet of legislative process both in committee and in the House. But, at least, they are not foredoomed to failure as they very likely would be if Congressman Kilgore and I were in basic disagreement. Again, differences between our bills and the Senate bill, once both Houses have acted, would be resolved in Conference Committee between House and Senate.

Protection of Naval Installations

The suffering economy of South Texas would indeed receive a serious, if not fatal, blow if anything jeopardized, impeded, or inconvenienced the Naval Air Training Program to the point that the Navy decided to cease operations in the area. The Navy has ground targets on Padre Island that are within the proposed National Seashore Area and which are absolutely essential to the existence of the Corpus Christi Naval Air Station, the Kingsville Naval Auxiliary Air Station, and the Naval Air Station, Chase Field, Beeville.

I have secured a letter from the National Park Service stating that the Navy will be permitted to use the targets so long as it has any need to do so. There seems to be some question, however, as to the type of practice ammunition contemplated in the National Park Service letter.

The House bills provide that the Secretary of the Interior shall enter into written agreement with the Secretary of the Navy guaranteeing that the Padre Island National Seashore will in no way impede or interfere with the Naval operation in the area. The Senate bill has no provision with respect to protection of the Naval Air Activity.

Roadway on Padre Island

It is my feeling that the interests of the public would be better served and the establishment of the National Seashore would be better justified by the construction of a suitable roadway through the National Seashore Area and connected with the county road systems at each end of the Island. The comfort and safety of the public requires a suitable road. The Island Seashore would be more easily accessible, and "through" traffic would be removed from the beaches where families with children will be swimming and playing. Also, in times of inclement weather and dangerous tide conditions, the visiting public could be removed safely from the Seashore Area. There has been ample experience to demonstrate that regardless of all that specially detailed officers could do it was extremely difficult to prevent "through" traffic from speeding among the children on the beaches, and well nigh impossible to prevent people from traveling down the beach during

inclement weather conditions. Without an adequate roadway, it is very possible that we would be creating either a useless area or a potentially dangerous area.

Page 2 of the Field Investigation Report states as follows:

"Padre Island is now readily accessible from the mainland by means of toll causeways at each end. While this has resulted in accelerated development, particularly at the southern end, the vast remaining portion of the island remains essentially a wilderness that can be traversed only by jeep or other four-wheel-drive type of vehicle. The surfaced road at the north end of the island terminates at the Nueces County Park, although passenger cars may proceed down the beach for about 25 miles. At the south end, a surfaced road extends up the island for about 5 miles from Isla Blanca Park, operated by Cameron County. Travel beyond this point is along the beach and, by passenger car, is unpredictable at best."

Page 22 of the Report states as follows:

". . .To preserve the island's primitive character, it would seem wise to keep the central section of the island roadless. In the other portions, a road system behind the barrier dunes would provide access to the beach without intruding upon the natural scene."

The House bills provide for the construction of a roadway from the north end to the south end of the Seashore Area with connecting roadways to the county road systems at each end of the Island. The Senate bill has no provision with respect to roads.

Production of Minerals

The survey of the National Park Service recognized that acquisition of the mineral interests was not necessary and that the Seashore could be suitably developed along with properly regulated mineral production. Accordingly, the House bills provide that the Secretary of the Interior shall permit the mineral owners to retain their mineral interests, whereas the Senate bill provides that the Secretary of the Interior may permit the mineral owner to retain the minerals. The House bills make it mandatory; the Senate bill makes it permissive.

Page 19 of the Field Investigation Report states as follows:

"Oil and gas exploration and production, both on the island and offshore, are proceeding rapidly, and it is almost certain that all mineral rights on Padre Island are under lease. It also appears that most of the mineral rights have been separated from the surface ownership, making it unlikely that mineral rights can be secured. While petroleum activity poses a definite problem, it is believed that much can be done to lessen its interference with scenic and recreational values, and to reconcile the two uses of the island for the duration of the oil and gas recovery period through cooperative effort."

To attempt to acquire the mineral interests would involve astronomical and prohibitive costs and would likely foredoom the whole project to failure.

Problem of Cost of Acquisition

Probably the most serious question involved under both the House bills and the Senate bill is one that has received little attention in the various commentaries on the proposals. I refer to the cost of acquisition of the National Seashore Area.

The House bills provide for \$5,000,000, whereas the Senate bill provides for \$4,000,000. Whether either of these figures is realistic is, of course, conjectural. It is impossible to determine in advance with any degree of certainty what the acquisition of lands of this nature will cost. But it is hoped that the sums authorized both in the Senate and House bills will prove adequate to meet the acquisition cost.

Conclusion

The proposed Padre Island National Seashore is a highly meritorious project which should be of great benefit to South Texas and the nation. It is not unusual that a project of this magnitude would pose problems of various kinds. I am confident that these problems can and will be solved. It is incumbent upon all who are interested in the securing of a National Seashore on Padre Island to approach the matter with a fair and cooperative spirit and to extend every influence at our command to effectuate a realization of this worthwhile project.