

The lady left me no alternative but to pursue the issue. The details I subsequently discovered are sordid and stench. They reach far beyond the local setting of a potential land fill threatening a resting ground of diving ducks in their involvements and implications. But let us pick up the trail at the start and follow the smells where they may lead.

Hunting Creek empties into the Potomac at the southern border of Alexandria, Va., a dozen or so miles downstream from the heart of the Nation's Capital. It is an historic stream associated with the comings and goings of the master of Mount Vernon, the great shrine that lies about 6 miles south. The stream is crossed near its mouth by the George Washington Memorial Parkway, an eminently worthy component of the national park system.

For thousands of years, or longer, the shallow waters at the mouth of Hunting Creek, touched by tidal inflow from the sea, have provided fertile feeding and resting areas for large numbers of gulls, terns, and diving ducks. In recent years the inner tidelands of the creek have been badly damaged by construction of an Interstate Highway interchange and by unsightly and smoking dumps, part of a landfill awaiting high-rise development by the Marriott motel, hotel, and restaurant family and others. These latter projects were bitterly and bravely protested by the Valley View Citizens Association before the Supervisors of Fairfax County. Their protests were in vain, alas, but then several of the supervisors were later indicted, along with the county planning director and assistant planning director, for complicity in a wide range of real estate adventures.

Despite these intrusions into the estuary, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife reported in 1964 that between 3,000 and 5,000 scaup and ruddy ducks winter in the vicinity. "Because of the importance as a diving-duck feeding ground of this shallow, open-water section in the embayment at the mouth of Big Hunting Creek, every effort should be made to protect this feeding area against destruction by either filling or dredging," the Bureau declared. "These shallow open waters, together with adjacent marshes, compose an unsurpassed opportunity for the conservation, enjoyment, and study of aquatic life in the vicinity of our Nation's Capital."

This testimony, offered by the finest wildlife professionals, echoed and supported fully by the park professionals, was later to be shamefully disavowed and discounted, for reasons that in due course will become clear.

For the present, the statement was occasioned by the introduction and passage of a bill, H.B. 591, in the Virginia Legislature authorizing the sale of 36 acres of estuarine streambed at Hunting Creek, owned by the Commonwealth, to an individual and a private firm. The individual, as it developed, is associated with the pension fund of a large labor organization. No quarrel there—unions have as much right to invest in real estate as anybody else—but the sole sponsor of H.B. 591, Delegate James M. Thomson, a lawyer of Alexandria, is known far better as a stalwart of good old free enterprise and States' rights than of public land rights, civil rights or labor's rights. Strange bedfellows.

The National Park Service felt so strongly about the Hunting Creek issue that it protested and appealed to Virginia authorities. For one thing, high-rise apartments would mar the view of the Potomac. For another, they would overload and commercialize traffic on the Parkway. Further, any development at this estuary would have demonstrable effect on the recently acquired Jones Point Park, which juts into the Potomac nearby. The safest and shortest access to the new park, assuring maximum public benefit, logically should be directly from the Parkway. But this would become impossible with high-rise development.

The Commonwealth turned its back on the Park Service and on the broad needs of its own people. However, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has the jurisdiction over navigable waters and must issue permits for dredging, filling and excavation. Thus the views of public agencies and citizen groups in Alexandria and Fairfax County were presented to the corps. "The obstruction resulting from bulkheading and filling will alter natural silting processes at the mouth of Hunting Creek," declared the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. "Ensuing development on the proposed fills will constitute a disturbance factor which will adversely affect waterfowl and shore bird utilization in the general area and seriously obstruct public observation and enjoyment from the National Park Service's access area at Jones Point." This position was buttressed by expressions of interest and support by several Members of Congress, including Representatives John Moss, of California; Henry Reuss, of Wisconsin; and others—all good men, concerned with the welfare of the national river as well as with affairs in their home districts.