

Consequently the permit was denied and apparently lay dead for over 3 years. "We thought it over and done with," John Gottschalk, Director of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries, told me a couple of months ago. "Gosh, but we were asleep." It was not, however, so much a case of protectors of public interest being caught off guard as of skillful persistence by the developers, who apparently comprise a national group of investors with elaborate connections.

They are represented, for instance, by the law firm of McCormack and Bregman—the former being the nephew of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. John McCormack. Contacts were made by the law firm with Members of Congress. At least one or two Congressmen were induced, for one reason or another, to back away from the issues at Hunting Creek. Contacts were made with the Secretary of the Interior, a man who, among his many achievements, has charted a whole course for safeguarding the Potomac shoreline as a model for the treatment of many rivers. But in this case the Secretary was brought to his knees and surrendered, ordering Assistant Secretary Stanley Cain to withdraw previous objections.

On February 21 the Corps of Engineers conducted a public hearing in Alexandria. The National Park Service and Bureau of Sport Fisheries were not permitted by their Department leadership to testify and provide professional judgment. "The applicants were able to find someone in the Department who could give them a green light," Representative Reuss, appearing in behalf of Representative Moss and himself, declared during the hearing. He quoted a personal letter from an Interior Department biologist, Francis Uhler, who refused to be silenced but insisted on following his own pathway of conscience and conviction with a statement that the mouth of Hunting Creek should be preserved as "the most important feeding grounds for diving ducks along the fresh tidal waters of the Potomac."

On March 8 the President issued his proposal for a Potomac National River, warning (in words drafted at the Interior Department) that "failure to act now will make us the shame of generations to come." This led me to feel the hour had come for the Secretary of the Interior to stand up in defense of Hunting Creek, and of the integrity of his own Department.

First, however, I wanted to reassure myself that the cause was just.

I phoned Director Gottschalk, who said, "Our report of 1964 is still valid. The marshes below will deteriorate. But the effect of this fill in itself is not our primary concern. We must choose: either we make the Potomac a model river or we make it a ditch."

Then I called Director George B. Hartzog, Jr., of the National Park Service, who said, "I am deeply disturbed. I agree completely with Mr. Gottschalk. I am worried about the process of decisionmaking and where it may lead."

These two comments were good enough for me, even though apologists at the political level in the Department kept saying, "We can't win them all, you know, and we don't always exercise control. Besides, the damage has been done to most of the estuary. The rest isn't worth saving."

But Joseph Penfold, conservation director of the Izaak Walton League, who has been fighting the battle of Hunting Creek, said, "Sure, this bit of stream and tidal estuary have been badly damaged, though not beyond restoration. We could complete the destruction by granting the subject permit, and then the next one to the north, and then Jones Point would be just about worthless as a piece of green shoreline for the public—so that could be turned over for development, too. Then we can follow with Dyke Marsh to the south, and another hundred miles of estuary down the Potomac. The point is that vast estuarine areas, the 67 percent of California, the 50 percent of Long Island's south shore, have been lost—lost by attrition, small piece by small piece."

I talked to the Secretary of the Interior and then wrote him a letter asking for a recapitulation of the professional judgment of the National Park Service and Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, and for an expression of his own personal views. The response came to me in the Secretary's behalf from David S. Black, Under Secretary of the Interior, who provided a long letter with many words and little substance.

What substance there was amounted to a denial of professional competence in the Park Service and Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, a disavowal of the best judgment of these two agencies, which I find disturbing and utterly frightening. For what happens along the banks of the Potomac today can happen anywhere tomorrow in our parks, forests and wildlife refuges, wherever the land developers and land despoilers decide to press the button, hire the right attorneys, and apply the squeeze to the political leadership.