

Sound Planning Needed To Protect Future of National Parks

THIS year the United States in particular and the world in general celebrate the centennial of the establishment of Yellowstone as the world's first national park", Mr P. H. C. Lucas, New Zealand's Director of National Parks and Reserves, said in an address in New Plymouth to the Taranaki Branch.

"The changes which have taken place in Yellowstone National Park since 1872 are a warning to New Zealand of the need for sound and far-sighted management planning if national parks are to continue to serve their primary aim of preservation of outstanding natural areas and if they are not to become merely recreational playgrounds transferring many of the environmental and social problems of cities to the wilderness."

Mr Lucas said that in its early years Yellowstone's relatively few visitors had come by public transport; now, most of its 2½ million visitors a year came in private vehicles, many with sophisticated camping equipment, including dune buggies, trail bikes, and power boats. The concentration of traffic near Old Faithful Geyser had led to the introduction of a one-way road system, pedestrian crossings, and extensive car parking areas. The result was that many people visiting Yellowstone today saw Old Faithful against a backdrop of roads, car parks, and hotels. Camping grounds had continued to expand and crime and drugs had come to Yellowstone with the crowds to the extent that specially trained law enforcement rangers had to be employed.

In coming in great numbers to enjoy a wilderness atmosphere visitors had changed a wilderness scene to suburbia. To improve the situation, camping and accommodation facilities are being moved away from Old Faithful, which will become a day-use area.

Moral for New Zealand

"The moral of Yellowstone for New Zealand," said Mr Lucas, "is to keep development of New Zealand's national parks to the minimum necessary to provide for a level of public use that is compatible with preservation of natural values."

Mr Lucas said that to achieve a balance between preservation and use management

plans were being prepared for all national parks in New Zealand. These identified scientific, wilderness, natural environment, and facilities areas and provided a basis on which the National Parks Authority and national parks boards could assess proposals for development. By this it was hoped to retain the natural atmosphere of the national parks, which was their greatest attraction to visitors.

More New Zealanders than ever were visiting their national parks and many were seeing them as benchmarks from which to study the changes man had made in the environment outside the parks. Adult education, university, and school parties were using parks more, and school study groups were now coming from Australia. All this placed a heavy burden on the small corps of 50 rangers and other park staff. Last year the number of visits paid to New Zealand's 10 national parks had been estimated at more than 1½ million.

"An informed and sympathetic public is vital to the future of national parks, and though some people are quick to criticise official agencies for power projects and powerlines in national parks, they are too often casual about litter and fire. This emphasises the fact that the preservation of national parks during the next 100 years will depend as much on the concern of individuals as on park administration bodies."

Waikaremoana Lodge Fund

It is unfortunate that those who donated to the fund to build a lodge at Waikaremoana have had to wait so long. The site which had been allocated to the Society was withdrawn when the park planning requirements caused a halt to the building of further lodges in the Aniwaniwa Valley.

Since then the Society has made strenuous efforts to obtain a site, but so far has not been able to obtain an advantageous one. We have hopes that in time Lake House may yield such a site, but meantime, we must wait on planning and other procedures, which will take some time yet.