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July 2024

1950 "Dinosaur Monument Threatened" Nature Magazine Editorial

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Recommended Citation

Westwood, Richard W., "1950 "Dinosaur Monument Threatened" Nature Magazine Editorial" (2024).

Dinosaur National Monument. 19.

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Dinosaur Monument Threatened

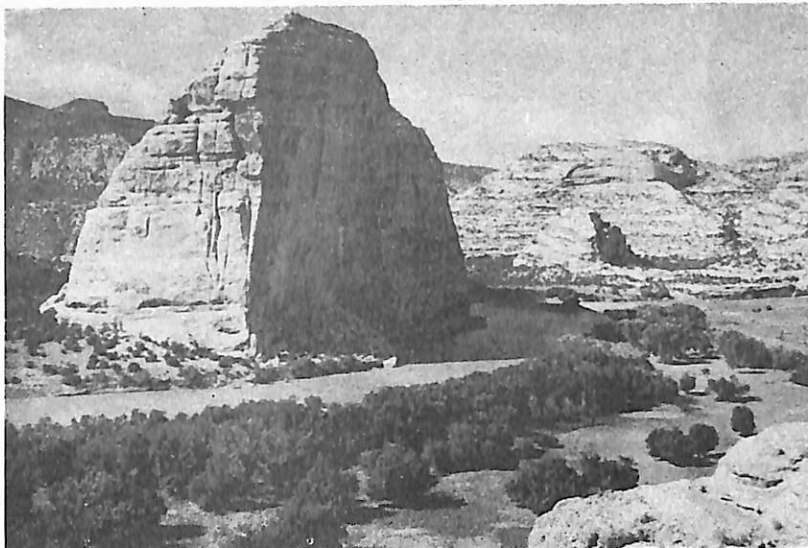
An Editorial

DINOSAUR National Monument includes 327 square miles of spectacular canyons in north-eastern Utah and northwestern Colorado. Within it are found, also, a dinosaur "quarry," Indian archeological remains and an interesting variety of plant and animal life. The scenery is outstanding. Through parts of the monument flows the rapid, curving Yampa River, entering from the east, while the Green River enters the area from the north through the wild and spectacular Lodore Canyon.

This is a reservation worthy in every respect of being preserved for posterity as a National Monument. It is the only area in the National Park system that tells the story of the upper Colorado River. Dinosaur has not, however, been developed for public use, due to lack of appropriations, although the National Park Service has complete plans for such development. Also, there hangs over this Monument that sort of threat that increasingly confronts these public reservations of ours. It is the threat of exploitation for power through the erection of the Split Mountain and Echo Park dams. The former dam, 245 feet high, would dry up the Green River for several miles, creating a reservoir that could be maintained at a fairly consistent level. While there would be recreational possibilities in such a body of water, the surrounding picturesque terrain would be irretrievably scarred and the lowlands below the dam ruined.

Echo Park Dam, which would tower to 525 feet above the present river level, would have even more disastrous effect upon the Monument. The scenery and the value of the Yampa Canyon would be impaired for many miles. A widely fluctuating reservoir, with all the hideous results that that connotes, would be created. Geological formations of outstanding value would be inundated, and the beauty and life on the canyon floor destroyed.

As is usually the case, local chambers of commerce, sniffing the money that would come into the area, are thumping the tub for the two projected dams. The estimated cost of this project is \$207,100,000. Although this is a power program, it is being represented locally largely as an irrigation plan. A deluge of telegrams to



Steamboat Rock towers 800 feet above the bend of the Yampa River. If the dam project is carried through, it would be flooded up to within three hundred feet of the top, and, of course would deeply inundate the lowlands along the river bed. Roads, transmission lines, quarry sites, structures and town sites would also intrude upon the natural scene at the expense of the National Monument area.

Congress and to the Secretary of the Interior is being inspired by busy chamber of commerce secretaries. The usual attack on bureaucrats is being played to the hilt.

It is curious how all such assaults upon the integrity of National Parks and Monuments follow the same pattern. A local, special and selfish interest is magnified — often distorted — all out of proportion to the greater national interest. The long-term value of the area to *all* the people is ignored. The possibility of arriving at comparable results by relocating projected dams elsewhere — possible in the case of Dinosaur — is sloughed over. Those whose responsibility it is to preserve and wisely administer the handful of areas, foresightedly set aside for all time, are attacked.

Dinosaur National Monument was established in 1915; enlarged in 1938. It is a notable area. It can and will be made more readily available to the public when funds are forthcoming. It should not be ruined by a short-sighted drive for exploitation that robs all Americans for the benefit of a few.

It would be comforting to be able to feel that the outstanding areas presumably preserved inviolate in National Park or National Monument status will remain so. However, this threat to Dinosaur is typical of other threats — to Glacier, Kings Canyon, Olympic and Grand Canyon National Parks; to one National Monument after another. The integrity of these areas *must* be maintained. Letting down the barriers that protect one area weakens the defenses of all such reservations against the greed of exploiters. All conservationists and Nature preservationists should let their Congressmen know how they stand, also.

Reprint of an editorial by Richard W. Westwood
in the April 1950 issue of Nature Magazine