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1913-11-07

Letter from Charles N. Elliot to John Muir, 1913 Nov 7.

Charles N. Elliot

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Cambridge, Mass.,

November 7, 1913.

Dear Mr. Muir:

I thank you for your letter to me of October 25th and for the pictures and papers which accompanied it.

I have always been opposed to the use of the Hetch Hetchy Valley as a water supply for San Francisco, and have repeatedly testified against the scheme. I think the best thing I can now do in defense of the Valley is to write a letter to Senator Hollis of New Hampshire, a young Democratic politician in whom I feel an interest and who has some respect for my opinion. I shall endeavor to put the argument compactly, in the hope that it will influence his action, and be used by him in discussions with his brother Senators. I believe that President Wilson's opinions on the subject are sound, and I hope he will be able to use his influence with Democratic Senators to defeat the bill on the sixth of December.

(Later.) I beg to enclose a copy of the letter I have sent to Senator Hollis.

Sincerely yours,

Charles W. Eliot

John Muir, Esq.

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COPY.

Cambridge, Mass.,

November 7, 1913.

Dear Senator Hollis:

The final vote on the present bill to transfer the Hetch Hetchy Valley from park uses to San Francisco water and power uses is to be taken in the Senate, I believe, on the 6th of December. Thinking that you have an open mind on the subject, and that you understand the value of parks in general, large or small, national, state, or municipal, I beg leave to put before you in compact form the arguments against the use of Hetch Hetchy Valley as a water and power-supply for San Francisco.

In the first place, the presumption is strong against alienating to other uses any territory which has once been appropriated to park uses. All reservations made for purposes of public health and enjoyment derive a large part of their power to give satisfaction and pleasure from their unquestioned permanence, from the people's sense that these open spaces with their woods, shrubs, grass, and flowers, are to be enjoyed generation after generation, so long as the government which created them shall endure. If Congress or a state legislature may be expected to alienate them at will, or to destroy parts of them from time to time, the people's sense of security in such possessions will be lost, or much impaired. Moreover, as the population of the country increases the need and value of parks of all sorts will surely increase; so that the passing generation should not part with public possessions which are already useful, but will surely be much more useful in the future. The granting of the Valley to San Francisco would be a bad precedent.

Secondly, enjoyable park areas ought not to be diverted or applied to other

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public uses such as city water-supplies, unless it can be shown that the need is extreme, and can be met from no other source. This is not at all the case in regard to a water supply for San Francisco. There are plenty of other available supplies. The city wants to use the Hetch Hetchy Valley merely because it will probably cost less to get a water supply from that source than from any of the nearer sources, and it can also make the Valley the source of saleable mechanical power.

Thirdly, far the most profitable use of the water which might be stored in the Hetch Hetchy Valley, the interests of the whole state and of the country being considered, would be its use for irrigation purposes on the farming lands which lie within easy reach of the Valley. If any large amount of water is to be stored in the Hetch Hetchy Valley in the immediate or the remote future, it should be for the irrigation use, and not for the urban and suburban uses of far-away San Francisco. The time may come when the Hetch Hetchy Valley ought to be converted into a lake- to its great injury as a health and pleasure resort- but it should be for the purpose of increasing the food supply raised on a large area of the state's arable but too dry lands. If that time should come, it would be a heavy public loss if San Francisco had already secured its water supply from the Hetch Hetchy Valley, and so made it impossible to convert hundreds of square miles of arid lands not far from the Valley into highly productive agricultural areas.

I venture to hope that you will become in the Senate a vigorous defender of all the national parks we have and an advocate of new national parks in New England. Why should not the hilly, wooded parts of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut supply some national parks? The

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New England brooks and rivers need such parks in perpetuity, and need to have them policed, developed, and conserved by national authorities. Why should only the Western part of our country be given such advantages?

Very truly yours,

(Signed) Charles W. Eliot.

Hon. Henry F. Hollis.

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