



1908-04-21

Letter from John Muir to [Theodore Roosevelt], 1908 Apr 21.

John Muir

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Recommended Citation

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To Theodore Roosevelt

[Martinez, California
April 21, 1908]

Dear Mr President:

I am anxious that the Yosemite National Park may be saved from all sorts of commercialism & marks of man's work other than the roads, hotels, etc., required to make its wonders & blessings available for mankind. For as far as I have seen there is not in all the wonderful Sierra, or indeed in the world, another so grand & wonderful & useful a block of Nature's mountain handiwork.

¶ There is now under consideration, as doubtless you well know, an application of San Francisco Supervisors for the use of Hetch Hetchy Valley & Lake Eleanor as storage reservoirs for a City water supply. This application should I think be denied, especially the Hetch Hetchy part, for this Valley, as you will see by the inclosed description, is a counterpart of Yosemite, & one of the most sublime & ^{beautiful} important features of the Park, & to dam & submerge it would be hardly less destructive & deplorable in its effects on the Park in general than would be the damming of Yosemite itself. For its falls & groves & delightful camp-grounds are surpassed or equalled only in Yosemite, & furthermore it is the hall of entrance to the grand Tiolumne Cañon which opens a wonderful way to the magnificent Tiolumne Meadows, the focus of

04151

pleasure travel in the High Sierra ^{of the Park} & ^{the} grand central camp-ground. But should ^{it} Hetch Hetchy ^{be} submerged, as proposed, to a depth of (175) feet, not only would ^{the Meadows} it be made utterly inaccessible ^{along the Tuolumne} but this glorious canyon way to the High Sierra would be blocked.

¶ I am heartily in favor of a Sierra or even a Tuolumne water supply for San Francisco, but feel ~~anxious~~ ^{that} all the water required can be obtained from ~~other~~ ^{the twin valleys} near sources outside the Park, leaving Hetch Hetchy & Yosemite, to the use they were intended for when the Park was established. For every argument advanced for making one into a reservoir would apply with equal force to the other, excepting the cost of the required dam.

¶ The few promoters of the present scheme are not unknown around the boundaries of the Park, for ^{some of them} they have been trying to break through for years.

However able they may be as capitalists, engineers, ^{or even philanthropists} or lawyers, none of the statements they have made descriptive of Hetch Hetchy, dammed or undammed is true, but they all show forth the proud sort of confidence that comes of a good, sound, substantial, irrefragable ignorance of God's ~~the~~ works. For example the capitalist, Mr James D. Phelan, says "there are a thousand places in the Sierra equally beautiful as Hetch Hetchy; it is inaccessible nine months of the year, & is an unlivable place the other three months because of mosquitoes." On the contrary there is not ^{another} one of its kind

From here →

our wild mountain parks
are passed on, etc ←

to here —

These ^{sacred} ~~mountain~~ temples are the
holiest ground ^{that} the heart
of man has consecrated
& it behooves us all to do
our part in seeing that
our wild ^{national} parks
~~they~~ are passed on
unspoiled to those
who come after us
for they are national property
in which ^{all} every man has
a right & interest. ^{sacred}
temples the holiest places the
heart of man has consecrated
where the devout worshippers
may get in sight of God.
Last autumn
Wandering thru the yards
& grove of it with Keith
when the leaf colors were
ripe & the great ^{living} ~~great~~ ^{with a look of} ~~cliffs~~ ^{cliffs} looked at
the walls radiant with life &
beauty in repose.

in all the Park excepting Yosemite. It is accessible all the year, & is not more mosquitoey than Yosemite. "The conversion of Hetch Hetchy into a reservoir will simply mean a lake instead of a meadow." But Hetch Hetchy is not a meadow; it is a Yosemite Valley... [Engineer, Mr Marsden Manson also calls the Valley "a lowlying meadow" "a ~~mere~~ common minor feature" in no sense a natural curiosity or wonder" & to submerge it "would greatly enhance the beauty of the Park." ~~etc. etc. the lawyer Mr~~ Warren Olney another prominent promoter extols the beauties of reservoir. Though he has never seen the Valley seems to think that his voice is the voice of San Francisco, the Nation & of all the world's Nature Lovers.

¶ I pray therefore that ~~the~~ ^{the people of} California be granted time to be heard before this reservoir question is decided. For I believe that as soon as light is cast upon it, nine tenths or more of even the citizens of San Francisco would be opposed to it. And what the public opinion of the world would be may be guessed by the case of The Niagara Falls.

Faithfully & devotedly Yours
J M -

The President.

O for a tranquil camp hour with you like those beneath the Sequoias in Memorable 1903.