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Crater Lake National Park
Medford, Oregon
October 5, 1959

Memorandum

To: Regional Chief of Interpretation, Region IV

From: Field Research Biologist Adolph Murie

Subject: Restoration of Bighorn and Beaver to Craters of the Moon National Monument

Some time ago I received your letter of September 10, 1959, together with Superintendent Henderson's memorandum suggesting the introduction of beaver and bighorn in Craters of the Moon National Monument. Since I planned to go past the Monument on my annual leave, I postponed comment until I had again seen the area and discussed the project with Superintendent Henderson. On my way east I stopped at Monument Headquarters and learned that Superintendent Henderson was in the hospital. Ten days later I again dropped in at the Monument and was taken to the area involved in the proposed restorations by Chief Clerk Johnson, and I talked very briefly with Superintendent Henderson at his home.

The area where the restorations would be made lie north of the main highway and comprise some 5 or 6 square miles of hills. These hills continue northward beyond the Monument, at least some of which, I was told, are grazed by domestic sheep.

In my opinion the monument area is too limited in extent for the proposed introductions. The grass, bitterbrush, and sagebrush in the area would, of course, support a few bighorn along with the deer that now spend a part of the year on the monument. But there is no certainty that the animals would remain in the monument. Under primitive conditions it is likely that the bighorn here wandered to higher country in summer and that might be expected to happen now, and if they did there is no certainty that the animals would return to the monument. But even though the animals should remain in the area the ecological relationships would be cramped and artificial and would probably require detailed management. They would tend to be a showpiece rather than part of a satisfactory ecological situation. There are many areas in the country

where bighorn introductions would be much more advisable. Because overgrazing is so widespread over the west it is especially pleasing to observe the flourishing bitterbrush and other species growing in the monument. These comments are not meant to give a full picture of the situation; suffice to reiterate that the area seems just too small for introducing bighorn.

The beaver habitat consists of about a mile or so of stream. The important beaver foods noted are aspen, chokecherry, alder, and willow, all present in limited amounts. It seems best to leave the vegetation growing under current conditions. If beavers were introduced the food supply would no doubt soon be eliminated. There is the possibility that any beaver ponds erected would increase the amount of willow available, even though other species would be sacrificed. But that is problematical and it is likely that introduced beavers would soon eliminate their food supply.

Superintendent Henderson is to be commended for submitting the proposals for consideration, but nevertheless I feel that we should be conservative in these matters and defer action in all such proposals for a few years, even when generally endorsed, in view of complications inherent in such projects

Adolph Murie
Field Research Biologist