

## The Flamingo Lodge: Florida's Mission 66

Kyle Pierson, St. Petersburg College



**Fig. 1.** Flamingo Lodge Visitor Center, 1967. Photograph courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.

Conrad Wirth, a second-generation National Parks Service (NPS) landscape architecture leader, knew he was about to break a tradition that defined his father's generation, but he believed it was the best choice. Members of the American Planning Association respected the Wirth name; Theodore Wirth and Fredrick Olmsted Sr. worked together, and both of their sons followed them into the profession. But as the new director of the NPS, it was Conrad who introduced modernist architecture to the national parks believing it was the only way to manage a crisis of overcrowding. When Theodore died, Olmsted, Jr. wrote a note of condolence to his friend Conrad and included an affirmation about their shared ethic: the "a deep-seated, constant and compelling interest in and sympathy with, the people using the parks" (Carr

Lalh.org 14). Olmsted was referring to Conrad Wirth's tenacious defense of Americans using *their* national parks. In 1951, when Wirth was appointed the next director, he was already thinking about how to reinvent America's public lands via modernist architecture. In size and scope, it was an audacious plan, but he believed in the optimism that it represented and could pull the parks back from the brink of collapse. One of the first places he wanted to start was Flamingo, Florida.

To find Flamingo using Google Maps, drop a locator pin where the beach meets Florida Bay. Follow the driving directions from Homestead, then fork off U.S. Hwy.1 and cut through 38-miles of palmetto scrub, traveling southwest until the road dead ends at two pink buildings connected by a catwalk. Visitors might be confused. The building isn't impressive; but as one of ten test cases to transform the NPS, it's monumental.

When Wirth was promoted to be director of the National Parks Service, the 53-year-old was already established in his career, and inheriting both a crisis and an opportunity. The emergency can be summed up by this 1953 TV jingle: "See the USA in your Chevrolet/America's asking you to call...." Young families responded in droves, only to sit in their station wagons breathing exhaust fumes from the cars idling in front of them at the entrance. Between 1948 and 1949, the number of park visitors jumped from an estimated 7,482 to 94,927 (Blythe 2017, Appendix B:Visitation, 75). Visitors flocked to the parks looking for a wilderness vacation but found overcrowded campsites and long lines at the restrooms. Facilities were so neglected during the war years that in a 1955 *Landscape Architecture* article, "The Shocking Truth About Our National Parks," Wirth said, "Some of the camps are approaching rural slums" (Stevenson 1955, 57-60). He wanted the expanding middle class to use the NPS, but he also wanted them to derive spiritual meaning and personal inspiration from the landscape.

As director, the strategic thinker worked to allocate funds to build new roads and open visitor centers. He formulated a ten-year plan, starting in 1955 and expected it to culminate on the Park Service's golden anniversary in 1966; he named the plan "Mission 66." The rationale was to secure 10 years of continuous funding to ensure that the money would be there until the mission was complete. Because the parks were in such disrepair, a



**Fig. 2.** Entrance to Everglades National Park, 1953, Photograph courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.

steady flow of money was critical to stabilize them within a decade. Wirth unveiled the Mission 66 proposal during a public service conference, and received enthusiastic support, which spurred him on to commission *Our Heritage*, a fundraising booklet to present to Congress later that year. On the cover, a Caucasian family strides forward: Mom, Dad, Brother, Sister, superimposed over the photo of the Liberty Bell. These were models of the “ideal American family and the most desirable park visitors” (Shumaker 15)<sup>1</sup>. In 1953, even before the booklet was printed, Wirth hired a well-known naturalist writer, Freeman Tilden, to compose *The Fifth Essence* to explain the theory behind Mission 66 (Tilden 2007, “Tilden’s Writing on National Parks”). The two men agreed that educating the public was the key to the parks’ preservation and its congressionally sanctioned objective “to provide for the enjoyment of parks and yet leave them unimpaired for the benefit of future generations” (Tilden, “Tilden’s Writing on National Parks”). Tilden wrote that the Park Service’s “chief aim of interpretation is not instruction but provocation” Tilden credits a park administration manual with this concise statement, “Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation; protection” (Craig 2007, 65). Accordingly, Wirth created the Division of Interpretation, with the director reporting to him, a signal of how important education was to the success of the mission. And he did one other thing. He justified dropping

the rustic style of architecture because it was too expensive to build and a distraction from the landscape. Instead, he opted for “Park Service Modern” as a simpler, cleaner, more transparent building that didn’t stand in the way of its surroundings with window walls for an unobstructed view (Allaback, “Modern Architecture in America” np).



**Fig. 3.** Entrance to Everglades National Park, 1974.  
Photograph courtesy of State Archive of Florida, Florida Memory.

### **Modernism in the new national park**

In an address to colleagues, the director said, “Old traditions seem to have determined standards far beyond their time” (Wirth, 1980, np). He won the support of President Dwight D. Eisenhower who approved the request for \$700 million for the Mission 66 modernization program, but the goodwill didn’t last long. Detractors complained that the industrial look of contemporary architecture violated the NPS’s mission.

Architecture communicates a powerful message, and the landscape designer brought up in the rustic tradition realized that modernism spoke to the future. Two decades before, during the heyday of national park building in the 1930s, the country embraced regionalism, a celebration of local arts and culture. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) under The New Deal built massive rock, post-and-beam, and clay buildings and dubbed the

look “NPS Rustic.” The style of architecture became set in stone in 1918 when the Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane issued an unofficial mission statement known as The “Lane Letter.” He stated in the letter that preservation of the wilderness and construction of roads, trails, buildings, and other improvements must “harmonize” with the landscape (Carr NPS Design tradition in the 21st Century, 7). The word ‘harmonize’ was understood to mean “regionally appropriate.”

Thirty years later, imagine a suburban family of the 1950s looking forward to escaping the hustle of the city to spend a laidback week in the country expecting stone lodges and log cabins and finding buildings made of glass and steel. Modernism, also called the International Style, was increasingly puncturing city skylines. The backlash was inevitable. At first, the NPS resisted the look as a style out of place in the parks. In fact, in 1954, the service declined a Yosemite Valley restaurant designed by Frank Lloyd Wright claiming it was too much of a distraction (Vieth, “The Mission 66 Mission”). By the end of WWII, the excitement over Regionalism had died down and the Space Age had replaced it. But traditionalists wanted the NPS architecture to continue designing rustic-style buildings - or no buildings at all. To further complicate matters, there was an underlying prejudice in the conservationist argument not to expand the national parks.

Ernest Swift, the director of the National Wildlife Federation, was a fierce critic of modernism. Senior editor at the Library of American Landscape History, Sara Allaback, describes Swift’s dire prediction if the style was allowed to define the parks. He thought that opening the parks to all would risk turning the nation’s jewels into slums (Allaback, “A New Style”). From his point of view, Mission 66 “prostituted the scenic grandeurs of our national parks by accommodating too many visitors in buildings like Jackson Lake Lodge [Grand Teton National Park]” which he called, a “concrete monstrosity built for that sub-species of Homo sapiens called the tourist. If John Steinbeck had needed source material in writing *The Grapes of Wrath*,” Swift added, “he could have studied park visitors” (Carr 2007, *Mission 66: Modernism and National Park Dilemma*, 159 ). Swift’s remarks reveal the elitist attitude that Wirth feared. Yet, he faced the conundrum that the more people who used the parks, the more roads, parking lots, and comfort stations were needed. Conservationists saw Mission 66 as a NPS road-building program.

Rustic buildings in some parts of America recall the noble American ideal of a time of bucolic craftsmanship, timber framing, stone floors, rock walls, and chimneys rising over wide-open hearths, ski lodges, and chalets. In the Everglades, authentic architecture might be expressed as an open-air chickee hut topped with a thatched roof of dried palm fronds. Under the old philosophy of “traditional” styles, a Florida park’s visitor center might resemble a Key West plantation with a charming wraparound porch and shutters. But, “authentic/traditional” architecture can be as deceiving as a Stuckey’s with a plantation facade on the interstate, only to discover an ordinary gas station behind the illusion. Grand Canyon National Park Architect Mary Colter designed several vernacular buildings such as a Hopi house, a fantasy cave she imagined as a hermit’s home, and a “geological fireplace” from stones that “echo” the layers found in the Grand Canyon. But these too were replicas. Yet Colter’s work was so beloved that people assumed what they were seeing was a true representation of the West. However, Wirth believed imaginary structures might perpetuate false impressions and that the windows should frame nature, not be the show.

National Parks Association Board Member Devereux Butcher vigorously defended the rustic style. In 1952, he wrote an article, “For a Return to Harmony in Park Architecture,” railing against putting contemporary buildings in the Great Smoky Mountains and Everglades. Others used his argument to chastise the park service for violating the “long-established policy of designing buildings that harmonize with their environment and with existing styles.” Butcher called modernism an “eyesore,” “hideous,” and “ugly beyond words to describe.” Two of conservationist’s most vocal opponents of Mission 66, landscape photographer Ansel Adams, and environmentalist David Brower, of the Sierra Club, objected to development in the national parks (Allaback, *Mission 66 Visitor Centers*: “Modern Architecture in the Parks” np). They joined in the rally to stop Modernism, but it was too late. As early as 1941, the NPS had already stepped a toe into the 20th Century. Architect Eldridge T. (Ted) Spencer designed a concession for Yosemite National Park calling for a flat roof, window walls, and stark geometric framing (Kinsley 18). National Parks Service Director Newton B. Drury (1940 – 1951) approved the plan, opening the door to early modern “service centers.” Later, Wirth coined the term “visitor center” and it



became the centerpiece for Mission 66. Flamingo was earmarked as one of the first visitor centers to be built, but the national park didn't exist in the Everglades yet.

### **Flamingo: Three steps toward a national park**

The first step in developing Flamingo into a National Park began in 1944 when President Roosevelt signed the act allowing the Department of the Interior to acquire the land. The park boundaries were expanded by 500,000 acres when the NPS assumed ownership of state land. When Florida purchased 134,880 more acres from the Model Land Company in 1948, it started the process for the NPS to buy out residents' property in the Flamingo fishing village (Blyth 2017, E-6). A few owned small commercial fish houses that refused to sell and balked at the NPS offer. Flamingo was a lawless frontier, especially for those who were trying to protect the wildlife. This remote village became infamous when Guy Bradley, Florida's first game warden, was killed defending wading birds from plume hunters. When Bradley attempted to arrest a poacher, the man shot him at point blank range killing Bradley instantly. Any law enforcement officer who confronted these territorial rebels had to be prepared for a fight. In 1910, according to the U.S. Census, only 49 people lived in Flamingo and Cape Sable and they were mostly trappers, plume hunters, itinerate carpenters, fisherman, and farmers raising bananas, guavas, limes, coconuts, sugarcane. ("Reclaiming the Everglades: South Florida's Natural History 1884 to 1919"). Some were bootleggers, and later, drug smugglers. It was not exactly the wholesome image the National Park Service cultivated. Author Stuart McIver in *True Tales of the Everglades* "Flamingo" reported that the place was so overrun with rats feeding off sugar cane husks, that they imported 600 cats from Key West to get rid of the vermin. About the only thing that could tame the swamp was the National Park's law enforcement.

Dan Beard (1947-1958) was first to hold the job as Everglades Park's first superintendent. As a wildlife technician, Beard supported the NPS position to evict property owners to rid the area of "certain undesirables" who constituted "pest holes...taking alligators, crocodiles, waterfowl, wading birds and fur-bearing animals" (Blythe 2017, 153, n.). Some of the owners of small

fisheries in the Park rented homes to fishermen, who were always in debt to the camp businesses - making them tenant farms. This practice validated the NPS policy against private companies profiting from public lands. Beard discovered that “two families who still lived in the park began selling beer and sandwiches and renting rooms to sport fishermen at Flamingo” (Blythe 2017, 153). It was a perfect example of what Devereux Butcher calls a “wildcat” concession. In his book, Butcher has no mercy for these entrepreneurs, calling them “festering spots” where property owners ran commercial businesses such as “summer cabins, hotdog stands, motels...” (Butcher 355). Among those properties, north of Flamingo in Chokoloskee, was “Bloody Ed Watson’s” place. Watson murdered the outlaw Belle Starr and was rumored to have killed 57 others. The infamous Glades mystery inspired author Peter Matthiessen to investigate the Edgar J. Watson story. Matthiessen used his research to write *Killing Mr. Watson*. After his own neighbors murdered E.J. Watson, a squatter on the property convinced the NPS to let him live on the remains of the Watson plantation until 1951. He was the only one whose house was spared when the park service burned others (Blyth 2017, E-6). On eviction day, one business owner wanted to shoot it out with the NPS, but his wife persuaded him not to. With all the inhabitants vacated, it cleared the way for the NPS to absorb Flamingo and other Ten Thousand Island properties within their boundaries.

The second crucial step was to develop a site plan. Before Wirth conceived of Mission 66, he was already working to expand the Everglades Park to include the Flamingo village. He had negotiated with Florida Governor LeRoy Collins. Collins agreed to help the NPS on the condition that the service would build a lodge, but Wirth resisted the idea. He didn’t think the service should operate resort style hotels; instead, the main destination should be a visitor/interpretation center and the architecture should not make a specific regionalist statement (but it should fit the landscape). The United States Secretary of the Interior Julius Krug backed state politicians who favored massive recreational development. Krug came from a background with the Tennessee Valley Authority and the war production industry. The industry insider and the state representatives compiled an initial master plan calling for accommodations for a thousand people and camping and picnicking facilities that could handle another



thousand (Blythe 2017, 178). Wirth was dead set against lodging at Flamingo (he did not oppose camping). But state representatives tied the land exchange into a guarantee that Flamingo would have a lodge. The director continued to stall on giving his approval.

As one of his 10 test cases to expand, redefine, and to *spiritually* connect Americans to their parks, Flamingo played an important role. One thing was clear, Flamingo had to be accessible by car. Wilderness supporters and biologists fought hard against building any roads into wild areas. In the end, the existing Ingraham Highway was improved and extended to reach Flamingo (Blythe 2017, 184).

The governor sided with activists such as founder of the Everglades National Park John Pennekamp to guarantee overnight accommodations in the park. Pennekamp wielded influence as a member of the Everglades National Park Commission (1945-1947), and he was an editor at the *Miami Herald*. In mid-1956, the fight for overnight lodging at Flamingo renewed when Pennekamp wrote an editorial accusing Wirth of double-talk and demanding to know: “Why can’t people sleep in the Everglades National Park?” Pennekamp considered the no-lodge position to be “preposterous.” He was in favor of building a lodge since most of the political powers wanted to be sure they got their part of the bargain (Blythe 2017, 206). Advocates for the Everglades National Park always envisioned lodging in the park, some with visions of grandeur.

Ironically, the original defender of the Everglades, Marjory Stoneman Douglas once mused at the possibilities: “Hotels maintained by the Park Service will be situated on the loveliest of the outer beaches along the Keys or at Cape Sable” (Blythe 2017, 176). She identified a high spot (probably a shell midden) between Flamingo to Northwest Cape Sable as an ideal spot for development. She made this remark in 1933, over a decade before she published *The Everglades: River of Grass*. Today, it’s hard to believe that she would envision resort hotels and golf courses as part of the plan to develop Flamingo.

By 1954, development plans still omitted lodging, but the project moved forward. Wirth selected two principle south Florida architectural firms: one to represent the state and one to represent the NPS, both were modernists. Miami based Everglades Park Company (EPC) supervised the onsite work.

NPS architect Cecil Doty, who “thoroughly embraced Modernism,” drew the site plans (Blythe 2017, 187). The plan featured a visitor center building with horizontal lines and a low profile to mimic the long seashore and to overlook Florida Bay. Doty’s design put the main operations on the second floor because the ground floor was likely to flood in a hurricane. The progressive design revealed Wirth’s philosophy to include all Americans. Doty put a wheelchair accessible ramp prominently in the front of the building.

Upon review, Pennekamp discovered there still was no lodge included in the site plan; as a result, he pressured Wirth to add it. Finally, the NPS director agreed to include overnight accommodations if visitors were forced to leave the park at the end of a day. The distance between the town of Homestead and Flamingo is about an hour by car. In 1957, Collins signed the property over to the NPS only when Wirth reluctantly gave a verbal agreement to incorporate the lodge. After a decade of wrangling, the park service was ready to start the third phase of development.

The third phase of completion launched when Thomas C. Vint, a trained Beaux-Arts style architect, was assigned to coordinate the design of the Flamingo Visitor Center. By this time in his career, he too became a devotee of modernism. He was National Parks chief of landscape architecture from 1927 until he retired in 1960. Before joining the park service, he worked for Lloyd Wright, Frank Lloyd Wright’s son, and favored the rustic style for most of his career. But, after WWII, Vint agreed that preserving the parks for all into the future had to take a modern approach. He also advocated for easy access and interpretive guides in the park as the best way for the public to truly appreciate the landscape. Vint supervised many of the Mission 66 projects.

The Flamingo proposal called for an interpretive center, restaurant, marina, campgrounds, boat rentals, camping, picnicking, a ranger station and NPS housing. Vint ordered Eero Saarinen chairs, Herman Miller sofas, and Florence Knoll tables to furnish the center. The EPC hired Coral Gables architect Harry L. Keck to integrate a restaurant, gift shop, gas station, and public services building into the master plan. Thomas Vint also hired Keck to design the Flamingo NPS visitor center, restaurant, and the marina. On March 1, 1957, the Main Park Road to Flamingo opened and nine months

later, the visitor center opened shortly afterward, completing the complex of five buildings, including the contested two story 103-room motel. The following year, 94 campsites, five comfort stations, and a camp tender's residence were added. In 1960, the park service added a pool on the grounds of the motel.

The surrounding landscape offered hiking trails converted from roads cut in the 1920s. These included the Coastal Prairie, Mangrove, and the Snake Bight Trails. Eventually, the NPS constructed boardwalks around Bear Lake and the Rowdy Bend. As Wirth predicted, cars continued to be the most popular way to get around the parks, and when Flamingo opened, rangers led auto tours on some of the trails (Blythe 2017, 192 - 193).



**Fig. 4.** Camping at Flamingo, 1960. Photograph courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.



**Fig. 5.** The Flamingo Lodge included a pool. However, after two hurricanes, the lodge was demolished and the pool was filled in 2006. Photograph courtesy of National Park Service.



**Fig. 6.** Example of Everglades truck tour, 1973. Photograph courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.

### **Flamingo takes off**

In 1957, after a decade of work, Wirth celebrated the completion of the Flamingo Visitor Center. Today, tourists park their cars at the visitor center and walk upstairs, or use the ramp to the interpretive access on the second story. On the opposite side, the catwalk leads to a (closed) restaurant. Beneath the bridge, park benches sit under the blue shade cast by the teal walkway overhead. Sixty-one years later, the long horizontal structure hugging the shoreline looks tropical and *weathered*, but it is there. If the traditionalists had insisted on a Key West style structure, they might as well paint a giant target on the roof too. Flamingo is a hurricane magnet. A serene wooden structure undoubtedly wouldn't stand the test of time. Four years after the park opened, Hurricane Donna devastated Flamingo with 143 mph winds. The storm blew cabins off their foundations and destroyed the surrounding mangrove forest. It wouldn't be the last time hurricanes ripped through the saw grass.

In 1961, a political storm was also brewing for Wirth, an adept politician. Complaints persisted that Mission 66 encouraged development, especially road building, too strongly. In February, *The Atlantic* published an article that put modernist choices under the spotlight. At first, Secretary Udall

defended his director; but later he conceded the Tioga Road at Yosemite National Park and the Flamingo Motel in the Everglades National Park were “mistakes” (NPS National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation, Mission 66 Era Resources of the National Park Service, Sec. No. E 42). Ansel Adams and other conservationists began calling Wirth’s road construction “bulldozers of bureaucracy” (NPS National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation, Sec. No. E 36). Sec. no.E p 36). The Wilderness Act established a legal definition of wilderness, but the US Forest Service administrators struggled to define the term “multi-use” within forests. The following year, Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, an exposé that revealed how the overuse of the pesticide DDT threatened to drive the iconic American eagle into extinction. This report shocked the public into paying more attention to environmental policies. Wirth would have enjoyed the limelight if President Kennedy had lived. Jacqueline Kennedy wrote to inform him that he would have received a Citation of Merit for his service to the NPS in the Rose Garden on July 4, 1964. President Kennedy loved the Rose Garden “because it brought him such peace.” She said JFK started to receive Heads of State there instead of at Andrews Air Force Base (Wirth, chap. 13). By then, the Wilderness Act, had passed the Senate in 1963, but was stalled in Congress. Secretary of the Interior Steward L. Udall’s book, *The Quiet Crisis* was a *New York Times* best seller. Meanwhile, conservationists continued to blame Mission 66 for overdevelopment. After his retirement, Wirth calculated that 1,570 miles of roads were “reconstructed” and 1,197 miles of new roads were built “mostly in new areas” (NPS National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation, Mission 66 Era Resources of the National Park Service Sec. no. E p 36). The main park road in the Everglades National Park was one of those new roads. He would argue that the numbers proved his success. The plan managed traffic while expanding park use, thus protecting sensitive environments (*New York Times* 1964). In his 1963 Progress Report, he noted that national parks grew by 27 new areas and 100 visitor centers.

In his career retrospective, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, Wirth wrote that, “The national park system exists for the benefit of all the people, and it must be so managed that its natural and historic values will be available, let us say, in the year 2066, when Joe Doaks and Agnes Hobbleskirt will be born. Such

is the responsibility of the service, or, if you prefer, the bureaucrats” (Wirth, chap. 12). But in 1964, he had already confronted some powerful people, including Udall, and he stepped down.

## **Hurricanes take back Florida Bay**

The last frontier at Flamingo is a tattered a maze of islands, creeks, and bays, containing not even so much as a mile of continuous seashore. The marina is the launching site for deep-sea fishing and kayaking trips into Florida Bay. Roseate spoonbills fly low across the water; ospreys nest on poles, while herons and egrets wade nearby. The Everglades is the only place on earth where crocodiles and alligators swim in the same lagoon, a phenomenon that proves that the park is on a marginal landscape.

The beaches of Florida Bay probably became beaches as a result of repeated storm surge washing away mangroves and leaving only sugar sand in the wake. In recent history, Hurricane Andrew hit the Everglades in 1992; in 2005, Katrina and Wilma blasted the lodge with a 10-foot waves causing catastrophic damage. The one-two punch rocked the 58-year old concrete block lodge. Finally, in 2009, the Flamingo Lodge was beyond repair and it was closed. The park sent out a request for bids on a contract offering \$6 million for rebuilding and operating the complex for 10 years, but did not receive any offers. The location, 90 minutes from Miami, discouraged at least one bidder. In 2013, the park proposed building solar powered eco-cottages, but only one was built, and they still did not receive any bids on the job. The NPS sweetened the offer by doubling the concession contract from 10 to 20 years.

Then in 2016, Flamingo got a boost when The South Florida National Parks Trust applied for funds during a national “Vote Your Park” contest and it came in seventh, earning 64,155 votes, enough to qualify for a \$250,000 grant offered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, American Express, and National Geographic. Finally, Guest Services Inc. agreed to reimagine the lodge and restaurant and to rebuild it on pilings 17-feet above sea level (Staletovich, 2017). Guest Services Inc. now plans to supply 40 cottages and 40 tents and oversee operations for 20 years. Besides



the cottages, the company will revamp the old restaurant, and restore and manage the marina, dockside store, canoes, kayaks, and houseboat rentals. Contractors estimate that the total renovation will cost about \$6 million.

Ten years after it closed, Flamingo Lodge inspires nostalgic tributes. Pat Hotchkill Hoffa recalls in a guestbook comment what life was like when she lived at the Flamingo lodge as a child.

[My] Mother and her Husband worked at Flamingo Lodge for many years. and as a kid we lived at the employee dorms and went to school in Florida City and Homestead. There where seven kids that lived down in Flamingo at that time. The pool fence was put in with little doors so the coons could come and go and not break up the fence by Bob. Smart man. My moms husband was head of the Maintance dept. his name was Bob Hoffa and my mom was head of housekeeping dept. her name was Marcie Hoffa. many good memories.. i used to help in the Kitchen when i was a kid and loved every min. of it.. My mom was the first to also drove the Tram when they started that. i would also go with her alot on them Tram Trips.. My mom and manager of Flamingo was in the freezer at the time of the hurricane.. when my mom told me about what she had seen when they came out she said all the birds and wild life was just so so sad... my mom loved her job and loved that place. that was her world... so sad to see the pictures of the pool and hotel area. i have many nice pictures and good memories though. (Pat Hotchkill Hoffa, who left this comment at [nationalparkstraveler.org](http://nationalparkstraveler.org) on April 2, 2019)

In 1964, two years short of the park's golden anniversary and the projected end date of Mission 66, the plan was rebranded as [ironically, since wilderness advocates objected to new roads], "The Road to the Future" and new initiatives were introduced as phases of an ongoing program. When he stepped down at age 67, Wirth could look back on many accomplishments. Besides improving the NPS roads, he added new wilderness protections by creating the National Seashore and Lakeshore National Recreation Areas. This classification helped protect several miles of coastline in Florida from development. Under Mission 66, the Fort Caroline National Memorial was established on January 16, 1953 (Wirth, chap. 11). Wirth redefined the image of the park service into the next century. For example, the St. Louis Arch designed by Eero Saarinen was also a Mission 66 project. Altogether,

when Wirth retired, he had been employed by the National Park Service for 33 years, making him the longest-serving director in its history (Barnes 1993). By 1966, the country had spent about \$1 billion on park expansion and improvements. But Conrad Wirth's lasting legacy is his commitment to educating the public about why we as citizens ought to value our national geography and appreciate how our National Parks shape the American identity. But, more importantly, Wirth would hope the parks would always remain a source of spiritual renewal for generations to come.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup>In the article *People of Color and Their Constraints to National Parks Visitation*, David Scott and KangJae Jerry Lee argue that “Americans routinely and often unconsciously view White people and their behavior positively and represent *the* standard for evaluating what is good and moral. In contrast, people of color and their behavior are regarded with suspicion, stereotypes, and notoriety. A White racial frame permeates how American institutions operate, including park and recreation delivery. Since its inception, the NPS has codified appropriate behavior and ways of experiencing national parks that are rooted in 19th-century White middle- and upper-class ideas about respectability and decorum” (Scott and Lee, *The George Wright Forum*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2018).

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