

Recreation and Wilderness

In: The Forest Protection or Custodial Management Era, 1910-1933

In the early 1920's, there was an increasing need for improved recreational facilities on the national forests. A good part of this need was caused by the increasing use of the forest roads and trails by recreationists' automobiles. As more cars became cheaper, reliable, and available, more people were willing to spend some of their free time in the mountains, at lakes, and along streams—as long as these areas were easily accessible. Existing roads and highways had to be improved. In this same era, the Forest Service began to use trucks and automobiles—a significant change from the days of the horse, packhorse, and mule.

Numerous special-use recreation resorts, which provided for developed recreation facilities in popular areas, began operation on the national forests. Long-term summer home leases were allowed to give people greater use of the national forests. Hundreds of new campgrounds were opened as many thousands of people now owned or had access to automobiles.

One of the Forest Service's first wilderness advocates was Arthur H. Carhart, a landscape architect. In the late 1910's and early 1920's, his innovative ideas, which involved leaving some forest areas intact (no development) for recreational use, received limited support. He proposed that an area around Trapper's Lake on Colorado's White River National Forest remain roadless and that summer home applications for that area be denied. He developed a functional plan for the Trapper's Lake area to preserve the pristine conditions around the lake and convinced his superiors to halt plans to develop the area. Later, he recommended that the lake region of the Superior National Forest in northern Minnesota be left in primitive condition and that travel be restricted to canoe. This plan was approved in 1926 and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area was dedicated in 1964. Carhart, however frustrated by what he felt was a lack of support from the Forest Service, resigned in December 1922.

Aldo Leopold, author of the *Sand County Almanac*, however, took up where Carhart left off. In 1922, Leopold made an inspection trip into the headwaters of the Gila River on New Mexico's Gila National Forest. He wrote a wilderness plan for the area, but faced opposition from his own colleagues who thought that development should take precedence over preservation. His plan was approved in June 1924 and the 500,000-acre area became the first Forest Service wilderness—the Gila Wilderness. Leopold transferred to the Forest Products laboratory, the same year, and then resigned from the Forest Service in 1928. Five years later he began teaching at the University of Wisconsin, where he had a profound influence on students and the public.

In 1929, the Forest Service published the L-20 Regulations concerning primitive areas that were basically undeveloped areas, many of which would later become wildernesses. Regional Offices were required to nominate possible "primitive areas" that would be maintained in a primitive status without development activities—especially roads. Within 4 years, 63 areas, comprising 8.7 million acres were approved. By 1939, the total acreage in primitive classification had increased to 14 million acres.

Many new forest fire lookouts (houses and towers) were built in the early 1920's, while two-way radios were becoming more practical and used extensively to communicate during forest fires. The Clarke-McNary Act of

1924, an extension of the Weeks Act, greatly expanded Federal-State cooperation in fire control on State and private lands. Many States formed fire protection associations.

Forestry research came into “full swing” with the establishment of two new experiment stations in 1922. Today, there are seven experimental stations scattered across the country, with 72 research work unit locations.

The natural resource controversy of the early 1920’s was over a huge increase in the number of mule deer on the Grand Canyon Federal Game Preserve (established in 1906) on Arizona’s Kaibab National Forest. In 1906, the deer herd numbered only about 3,000, but after almost 20 years without being hunted and with predator control, the herd exploded to more than 100,000 animals. The Forest Service sought to reduce the number of deer on the refuge to prevent many from starving. In 1924, the case went to the U.S. Supreme Court—that ruling allowed the Forest Service to hunt excess deer to protect wildlife habitat.

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