

Recreational Developments

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

In the Forest Service's early days, it was against legislation to create a National Park Service (NPS) to manage the national parks (the act passed Congress in 1916). To counter the recreation component of the new NPS, the Forest Service initiated an extensive outdoor recreation program, including leasing summer home sites and building campgrounds in many national forests. The first Forest Service campground was developed in 1916 at Eagle Creek on the Oregon side of the Columbia River Gorge on the Mt. Hood National Forest. Apparently, the first cooperative campground was constructed in 1918 at Squirrel Creek on the San Isabel National Forest near Pueblo, Colorado, at the time Federal funding was lacking and communities saw the need for better camping and picnicking facilities on the national forests.

RECREATION ON THE NATIONAL FORESTS

Adapted from E. Gail. Throop's 1989 Conference Paper and L.C. Merriam, Jr.'s, article in *Encyclopedia of American Forest and Conservation History* (1983), Vol. 2: 571-576

Although recreation was not specifically included in the Forest Reserve Act on 1891, it could be reasonably inferred to be included among the compatible uses of the forest reserves. The Organic Act of 1897 and implementing regulations allowed many activities on the forest reserves (renamed as national forests in 1907), including camping and hunting. Most important was the potential for these visitors to start fires: "Large areas of the public forests are annually destroyed by fire, originating in many instances through the carelessness of prospectors, campers, hunters, sheep herders, and others, while in some cases the fires are started with malicious intent. So great is the importance of protecting forest from fire, that this Department will make special effort for the enforcement of the law against all persons guilty of starting or causing the spread of forest fires in the reservations in violation of the above provisions." Before the first forest rangers of the General Land Office (GLO) took to the woods in the summer of 1898, picnickers, hikers, mountain climbers, campers, hunters, and anglers—individually and as families and other groups—were among the regular users of the forest reserves.

The first legislation to recognize recreation in the Forest Reserves was enacted February 28, 1899. The Mineral Springs Leasing Act permitted the building of sanitariums and hotels in connection with developing mineral and other springs for health and recreation. The act stated that regulations will be issued "for the convenience of people visiting such springs, with reference to spaces and locations, for the erection of tents or temporary dwelling houses to be erected or constructed for the use of those visiting such springs for health and pleasure." The revised GLO regulations set forth in the 1902 *Forest Reserve Manual* stipulated to the right of the public to travel on the forest reserves for pleasure and recreation. However, recreation was considered to be secondary to the need for forest management, especially through grazing opportunities and later through timber harvesting.

In the 1905 *Use Book* there were statements noting that the national forests served many purposes, some of which were related to early recreationists: "The following are the more usual rights and privileges... (a) Trails and roads to be used by settlers living in or near forest reserves. (b) Schools and churches. (c) Hotels, stores,

mills, stage stations, apiaries, miners' camps, stables, summer residences, sanitariums, dairies, trappers' cabins, and the like...." The 1907 *The Use of the National Forests* book (public version of the *Use Book*), included such statements as: "*Playgrounds*.—Quite incidentally, also, the National Forests serve a good purpose as great playgrounds for the people. They are used more or less every year by campers, hunters, fishermen, and thousands of pleasure seekers from the nearby towns. They are great recreation grounds for a very large part of the people of the West, and their value in this respect is well worth considering."

By 1913, the annual Forest Service report raised the issue of the need for sanitary regulation to protect public health. The report also listed 1.5 million "pleasure seekers," of whom a little over 1 million were day visitors, in the 1912—1913 fiscal year. Campers, including those who engaged in hunting, fishing, berry or nut picking, boating, bathing, and climbing totaled 231,000 and guests at houses, hotels, and sanitariums came to 191,000.

The Forest Service undertook development of recreation facilities in the national forests as early as 1916. The first official campground was the Eagle Creek Campground along the Columbia River Highway in Oregon's Mt. Hood National Forest. It was a "fully modern" facility with tables, toilets, a check-in station, and a ranger station. In the summer of 1919, nearly 150,000 people enjoyed the Eagle Creek facilities.

At the same time, the Forest Service was opposed to the creation of a National Park Service to administer the national parks. At one time, the Forest Service proposed that it could manage all the national parks, but, obviously, this was not approved by Congress. When the United States Department of the Interior National Park Service was established in 1916, it was given a dual role--preserve natural areas in perpetuity and develop the parks as recreation sites.

Early in 1917, the Forest Service hired Frank A. Waugh, professor of Landscape Architecture at Massachusetts Agricultural College, Amherst (now University of Massachusetts) to prepare the first national study of recreation uses on the national forests. *Recreation Uses in the National Forests*, Waugh's 1918 report on the status of recreation noted that some 3 million recreation visitors used the national forests each year. He summarized the types of facilities found in the forests--publicly owned developments consisted almost entirely of automobile camps and picnic grounds, while the private sector provided fraternal camps, sanatoria, and commercial summer resorts. In addition there were "several hundred" small colonies of individually owned summer cabins. With the first crude recreation use figures, collected during the summer of 1916, he figured a recreation return of \$7,500,000 annually on national forest lands. Waugh did not address winter sports, as it was just beginning on national forest--as early as 1914, the Sierra Club was conducting cross-country ski outings on California's Tahoe National Forest.

Although the development of recreation on the national forests was a slow progress during the period from 1919 to 1932, it was not an era without controversy and change. Responsive to the need for improved public service, the agency generally supported the idea of professional planning and design. To this end it hired a "recreation engineer," landscape architect Arthur Carhart, in 1919, to begin recreational site planning. The year 1920 marked the completion of the first forest recreation plan for the San Isabel National Forest in Colorado. Carhart proposed that summer homes and other developments not be allowed at Trappers Lake on the White River National Forest in Colorado. In 1921, he surveyed the Quetico-Superior lake region in

Minnesota's Superior National Forest where he recommended only limited development. It eventually became the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

In 1921, while attending the first National Conference on State Parks, Carhart discussed national forest recreation uses. He was challenged by Park Service Director Stephen Mather who stated that recreation was the work of the National Park Service, not the Forest Service. Differences of opinion over recreation had been a source of controversy between the agencies for decades. The National Conference on Outdoor Recreation in 1924 criticized the two agencies for over development of their recreation programs. The conference went so far as to accuse the National Park Service of swapping the concept of preserving the Nation's natural wonders for the concept of the creating a "people's playground."

Arthur H. Carhart and Aldo Leopold believed that wilderness was a recreational experience unmatched by the drive to develop areas for heavy recreation use. The Gila Wilderness--the nation's first wilderness--was established on the New Mexico's Gila National Forest in 1924. Carhart later wrote that "there is no higher service that the forests can supply to individual and community than the healing of mind and spirit which comes from the hours spent where there is great solitude."

Early in the decade, while ground was gained on the budgeting front, professional expertise in planning and design was lost. Arthur Carhart resigned because of what he perceived as a lack of support for recreation in the agency--he was not replaced by a person trained in the landscape design disciplines. At the time, only three regions---Northern, Pacific Southwest, and Pacific Northwest---had personnel assigned to recreation duties. Other Regions either indicated too little recreation activity to merit specialized personnel or a determination to develop their own forester-recreationists.

Throughout the decade of the 1920's, the Forest Service pursued a cautious conservative recreation site development policy. Generally, that policy held that the recreation role of the national forests was to provide *space* for recreation. Publicly financed recreation facilities remained limited in number and usually simple in nature. Yet by 1925, there were some 1,500 campgrounds in the national forests. This policy of limited development of national forest recreation sites fit both the philosophical outlook of the forest managers and the budgetary goals of the Coolidge and Hoover Administrations and of Congress.

A National Plan for American Forestry (the Copeland Report) was prepared by the Forest Service in 1933. The section on recreation was written by collaborator Robert Marshall. In May 1937, Bob Marshall filled the new position of Chief of the Division of Recreation and Lands. He had a strong and long-lasting influence on recreation policy and development, especially that of wilderness. Using mainly Civilian Conservation Corps labor, the Forest Service built recreation structures from coast to coast. Under Marshall's guidance, a tremendous variety of facilities were built, many of them elaborate, that were unprecedented in the Forest Service. Facilities such as bathhouses, shelter, amphitheatres, downhill ski areas, and playgrounds were part of large recreation complexes. Recreation was established as a national administrative priority of the Forest Service.

Following World War II, Americans aggressively sought an improved quality of life that included active participation in all forms of outdoor recreation. The socioeconomic influences of the post-war baby boom, increased affluence, increased leisure time, and improved transportation systems and population mobility led

to unprecedented growth in demand for outdoor recreation. Visitors to the national forests were seeking hunting and fishing opportunities, developed campgrounds, downhill ski areas, picnic areas, wilderness experiences, water access, and hiking trails. The supply of recreation sites was soon overwhelmed by this demand.

In 1958, Congress Created the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission to review the overall outdoor recreation opportunities in the United States. When the final report was printed in 1961, the commission made a number of recommendations that have affected forest recreation. The commission recommended passage of the Wilderness Act—which was signed into law in 1964--and the creation of a Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in the Department of the Interior. Interior Secretary Stewart Udall appointed Edward Crafts, former Forest Service Assistant Chief, as the agency’s first Director.

At the start of the 1960’s, there was another surge in the national interest in the “great outdoors.” This ushered in the era of growing national recreation interests and the desire for preservation of land and history. This was also an era when America looked to the Federal Government to solve the Nation’s problems and provide for social needs of the citizen’s. The Wilderness Act of 1964 created the National Wilderness Preservation System. National Recreation and Scenic Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and National Scenic Trails legislation followed throughout the next two decades.

In 1985, President Reagan established the President’s Commission on America’s Outdoors to review existing outdoor recreation resources and to make recommendations that would ensure the future availability of outdoor recreation for the American people. The thrust of this commission was away from Federal centralism and strongly toward public-private partnerships. The Forest Service response to socioeconomic changes of this period took the form of an exciting and imaginative national initiative, the National Recreation Strategy. The preferred tool to meet this strategy was the development of partnerships between other public and private providers of outdoor recreation. This strategy is operational and significant progress toward the objectives has been made.

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