

“Going to the Mountains is Going Home”

Constructing Early Twentieth-Century American Wilderness and National Parks

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by

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ABSTRACT

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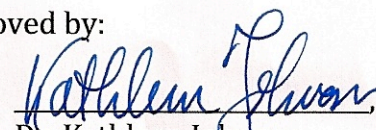
The interest for this thesis stemmed from existing critical discussions of the difference between the landscapes demarcated by the words “wilderness” and “wildness.” For example, in *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau pointedly uses the word “wild,” rather than “wilderness” to describe his surroundings at Walden Pond. This sparked critical discussions about the landscape of mid-nineteenth century Massachusetts, and the ways in which that landscape would or would not qualify as “wilderness.” This thesis, then, takes up similar questions: What is the difference between “wildness” and “wilderness?” Can “wilderness” be given a concrete definition, or is the definition always changing based on cultural viewpoints? How do national parks protect “wilderness?” Or, do they even protect “wilderness” at all? The thesis then moves into an interdisciplinary approach toward attempting to understand the American fascination with wilderness and the American relationship with national parks that stems from that fascination.

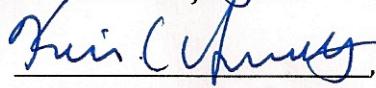
In order to make an attempt at answering these questions, this thesis incorporates three areas of historical research, before bringing all lines of research together into a final argument. The first section looks at the history of “wilderness” as a cultural concept: the development of the word and its connotations in Europe, the ways in which the word was applied to the American landscape as immigrants from Europe settled in North America, and the ways in which the understanding of “wilderness” has changed into an idealized form. The second section considers the history of American national parks, and how tourism has functioned in the process of creating the national parks. Then, the third section examines the government documents that created the National Park Service in 1916, and the ways in which the creation of the National Park Service changed both American national parks and the American “wilderness” ideal. Finally, the last section brings these lines of inquiry together in a study of 1916 issues of the *Saturday Evening Post*, *National Geographic*, and *Harper’s Weekly*, which give insight into the ways in which the American public regarded wilderness and national parks at the time of the establishment of the National Park Service.

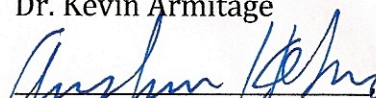
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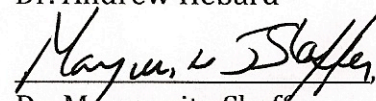
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Introduction

The quote from which I take my title, “‘Going to the Mountains is Going Home’: Constructing Early Twentieth-Century American Wilderness and National Parks,” appears in John Muir’s 1901 book, *Our National Parks*. In this text, Muir attempted to reconcile his desire to protect American landscapes in national parks with his knowledge of the damaging development and tourism that those parks brought in. He wrote, “Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as foundations of lumber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life” (Muir 1). To me, this quote captures the essence of what I attempt to understand throughout this thesis: the American fascination with wilderness and the American relationship with national parks that stems from that fascination.

The idea for this thesis ultimately came from my efforts to, in some way, combine my English Literature and Environmental Science majors. Not surprisingly, my English classes had not discussed environmental issues to any great degree; nor had my Environmental Science classes worked with literary texts. So, this thesis began with an Undergraduate Summer Scholars project, during which I studied the history of environmental literature. The focus of that work was to look at the ways

in which more literary texts, like Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) or Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), presented environmental issues to the American public, and the ways in which those texts played a part in or affected the American environmental movement. As I worked through texts ranging from Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1836 essay, "Nature," to Janisse Ray's *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (2000), however, I was captivated by one word that appeared over and over again: wilderness. This interest stemmed from critical discussions of Thoreau's use of the word "wild," rather than "wilderness," to describe Walden Pond, and from John Muir's ecstatic descriptions of the wilderness to be found in the Yosemite area in *The Mountains of California* (1894). I began to wonder: what is the difference between "wildness" and "wilderness?" Can "wilderness" be given a concrete definition, or is the meaning always changing based on cultural viewpoints? How do national parks protect "wilderness" (or do they protect "wilderness" at all)?

This thesis takes up those questions, and moves into an interdisciplinary study of the issues surrounding wilderness and national parks. Not only did I analyze the texts I used for my research with principles of environmental science and literary theories in mind, but I also looked at texts using historical analyses and American studies theories. Specifically, I studied the history of the wilderness ideal in America, and the history of American national parks. In addition, I researched some of the science behind the claim that historically, national parks have not adequately protected the environment—whether that environment can be defined as "wilderness" or not. I brought these areas of research together as I analyzed

articles about national parks from the 1916 issues of the *Saturday Evening Post*, *National Geographic*, and *Harper's Weekly*, which gave insight into the ways in which the American public regarded national parks.

I chose to focus all my research on one year in American culture as a way to gain insight into a formative moment in the construction of the national parks. The logical choice was 1916, the year in which the National Park Service was created. The creation of the National Park Service seemed to act as a sort of culmination of all the national park and wilderness history that I had studied, and the publications from that year really brought those issues together. Before I get into the details of my work, I would like to map out what was happening in the United States in 1916, to give the reader a sense of how the creation of the National Park Service fit in with its historical moment.

1916 was a year during which the United States was on the verge of great change. The world was at war and the United States' entrance into the First World War was imminent. Much was changing within the nation as well: labor laws were being developed, women's rights were expanding, the political atmosphere was shifting, the fields of science and technology were widening, the United States was beginning to focus on imperialism in the Caribbean, and—most importantly for my study—attitudes toward the environment were changing. Before I delve into a more in-depth discussion of changing attitudes about the environment, I will briefly sketch out some of the major shifts in cultural ideologies regarding the war and the

other social issues listed above, which will give insight into the culture in which the creation of national parks and establishment of a National Park Service became important.

Although the United States would not enter World War I until April of 1917, preparations for the possibility of war began much earlier. In 1916, the United States was working under Woodrow Wilson's Preparedness Program, which had originally been proposed by Theodore Roosevelt almost immediately after the war began in Europe. As the sinking of the "Lusitania" brought the war closer to home, however, Wilson began to recognize the necessity of preparing for war. The Preparedness Movement planned for increased production of ships and other wartime necessities, as well as increased training of army recruits. The passage of the National Defense Act of 1916, which provided for a vastly increased National Guard and Reserve Officer Training Corps programs at colleges and universities across the country, further prepared the United States for war. The effects of the war in Europe were also felt in the American national parks. As American tourists were prevented from going abroad by the war, they turned to American tourist destinations, including the national parks, bringing attention to the ways in which the national parks could be developed into lucrative businesses.

In addition to changes in tourism, 1916 was the year in which two laws were passed to restrict labor in the United States. First, the Adamson Act provided for an eight-hour workday for railroad workers. Then, the Keating-Owen Act limited child labor by making the interstate sale of goods produced by child laborers unlawful.

Though the Supreme Court later ruled that the Keating-Owen Act was an unconstitutional regulation of interstate commerce, the passage of these bills shows that attitudes toward the rights of laborers were progressing. Like the war, these changes in labor laws also set up changes for American national parks. The changes in labor laws, particularly the Adamson Act, would have affected the ways in which railroad companies operated, which—because rail lines to the national parks were the primary way tourists reached the national parks—would have then affected the parks themselves by making them more accessible to tourists and thus facilitating more travel to the national parks.

Though American women would not gain what could be called their most important right—the right to vote—until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, women’s rights were changing in 1916 as well. The most controversial women’s issue that arose in 1916 concerned women’s reproductive rights. In that year, Margaret Higgins Sanger opened the first birth control clinic in New York City, which, by the 1940s, would develop into Planned Parenthood. Emma Goldman, who worked closely with Sanger on women’s reproductive issues, was arrested in 1916 for lecturing on birth control. The publicity surrounding her arrest effectively made the use of birth control and women’s reproductive rights national issues. One way advancements in women’s rights appeared in national park history was in women’s writing—as women’s rights progressed, women’s writing was increasingly present in debates regarding the future of the national parks. In addition, the national parks provided a space in which women could exert their growing freedoms. In the

national parks, women were able to be seen in public away from their homes and their duties as wives and mothers; women were also able to interact with nature in ways that had previously been barred for them.

The political atmosphere began to change in 1916 as well, in that it began to expand beyond the purview of white, upperclass males. Woodrow Wilson was re-elected in the presidential election of 1916, so the political environment of the United States did not change in terms of its president. However, 1916 saw the appointment of Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court as its first Jewish Justice. Brandeis would serve for the next twenty-two years. It appears that this was not a universally accepted change—in my research into the popular publications of 1916, I found a series of articles in *Harper's Weekly* that addressed the controversial position of Jewish-Americans in American society. These articles discussed such issues as “The Case for Intermarriage” (January 8), “Jews and College Life” (January 15), “Schools, Colleges, and Jews” (January 22), and “How Should Jews Be Treated?” (January 29). It appears that these articles would have been purposely published to coincide with Brandeis’ appointment, which occurred at the end of January 1916. An interesting note is that the hotels and resorts in American national parks did not restrict entrance based on religion, like many other elite hotels did. So, the parks acted as an exception to the rule, welcoming Jewish-Americans in spite of the extensive discrimination of the time. 1916 also saw the first woman elected to Congress, as Jeanette Rankin won the election for one of Montana’s two congressional seats.

As part of the Progressive Era's focus on modernization, 1916 also saw the rapid expansion of science and technology. Perhaps the most important developing technology in the United States during this time period was the automobile. In 1916, seven years after the Ford Motor Company produced the first Model Ts, over half a million Model Ts were sold. The use of automobiles was also becoming more widespread (by 1916 about one third of farmers owned an automobile), partly as a result of advertising initiatives that promoted the automobile as a necessity for modern life. Production of automobiles was also expanding to various companies—in one January 1916 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, I found advertisements for seven different automobiles, including models made by Cadillac, Willys-Overland Company, Dodge, and Oakland. In addition, government bills like the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916 planned for future increases in automobile travel. These changes in how Americans travelled would in turn create considerable changes in the national parks. Not only would tourists access the parks in a different way, in personal automobiles rather than by train, but also the parks themselves would have to be developed differently—now abiding by new labor laws—for the advent of the automobile tourist by building better roads, service stations, and parking lots.

In 1916, the United States really began to focus on its imperial prospects in the Caribbean. In 1915, United States marines had occupied Haiti, in an attempt to keep German settlers in Haiti from building a military base on the island. Moreover, 1916 was the year in which the United States added the Dominican Republic to its occupied territories in the Caribbean, as it invaded Santo Domingo. In addition, the

United States signed a treaty agreeing to the purchase of the Danish Virgin Islands in 1916. It could be argued that the quest for an expanded American empire abroad was replicated in the way in which the American government had gained the land for the national parks at home. Most, if not all, of the national parks in existence by 1916 had simply been taken from Native Americans, with no consideration as to whether that land had been their homeland, their hunting grounds, or their sacred spaces. In a way, the national parks were used in the same ways as American imperial lands—as a way to promote American ideals.

Finally, the National Park Service was created with the passage of the National Park Service Act in August of 1916. This act was the culminating event of years of debate over how the national parks should be protected, and whether there should be an overarching government bureau to oversee all national parks. The passage of this act also exemplified the changing attitudes that Americans held toward their natural resources and wildlands—after decades of exploitation of the American landscape, Americans began to turn more toward an appreciation of their environment. This shift had perhaps begun with the founding of the Sierra Club in 1893, which was the first citizen organization devoted to advocating for the protection of the environment. The new focus on environmentalism resulted in a more nationalized desire to protect the future of national parks, wildlands, and natural resources, albeit a desire that was constantly in conflict with the older ideas of expansion and development at all costs.

My thesis begins with an examination of the function of wilderness in American culture. I look at differing viewpoints on the definition of wilderness, including both scholars who believe that wilderness is a tangible space and those who believe that wilderness is completely culturally constructed. This research helped me develop my own definition of “wilderness,” which I put in opposition to my own understanding of “wildness”; coming to some conclusion on what each of these words connotes was important to me, because it has long been a contested subject. Most of my research for this chapter developed around the question of how the idea of wilderness has developed and functioned throughout American history. I look at the ways in which historical attitudes toward wilderness have shifted—from the fear that early American settlers felt toward their wilderness environments, to the pride in the vast landscapes of the American West that developed in the early twentieth century, to the realization that American wild areas were quickly disappearing and the subsequent desire to protect them. Then, I look into the question of how “wilderness” is constructed. In so doing, I ask: was the “wilderness” that European settlers encountered really “wild?” Finally, I argue that the importance scholars have placed on defining wilderness is perhaps misplaced, and that the more important issue should really be to protect what “wildness” remains.

The second chapter of this thesis deals with the history of American national parks. Through an examination of what a national park was historically meant to protect, I argue that national parks are not necessarily the exemplars of

“wilderness” or the “natural” that we often view them as today—rather, protecting the environment was only one piece of the reasoning behind the establishment of national parks. A study of the idea of “created” parks plays into this argument: if national parks were established to protect wilderness, why did park officials have to work so hard to create the *feeling* of wilderness for park visitors? Lastly, I look into the history of tourism (both American tourism in general and tourism to the American national parks) and the See America First movement, and argue that the ways in which the changing nature of tourism in the United States and the promotion of national parks were presented through the See America First movement was extremely influential in the choices made to develop the American national parks.

My next chapter analyzes the government bills that created the National Park Service: an April 1916 hearing before the Committee on Public Lands and the 1916 National Park Service Act itself. I wanted to give a summary of these government bills in order to give the reader a sense of the changes that the creation of the National Park Service implemented. In addition, these documents are important to my study because they are mentioned by name in the popular publications of 1916 that I discuss in my fourth chapter. It seems that the American public was well informed about what exactly these bills were changing. The bills, particularly the hearing before the Committee on Public Lands, serve to further my argument about the reasoning behind the establishment of national parks—while the creation of the National Park Service was certainly an important step in enacting uniform

conservation standards for the national parks, it had the potential to perpetuate an even stronger shift toward conservation. The fact that it largely did not have those effects, my thesis contends, shows that the national parks were still being used more for their touristic and nationalistic functions than for their conservation functions.

In the final chapter of my thesis, I examine several popular publications of 1916—the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Harper's Weekly*, and *National Geographic*, as well as a publication put out by the soon-to-be National Park Service, called *The National Parks Portfolio*. I study the periodicals themselves—the way they were set up, what kind of authors contributed pieces, what type of issues they each focused on, whether there was photography and illustration—and the ways in which each of these publications presents (or does not present) the passage of the National Parks Service Act and the creation of the National Park Service. I argue that the articles surrounding the creation of the National Park Service in general promote the same ideas of tourism and development that were the foundation of the establishment of the parks in the first place, but that several exceptions show that these ideas were beginning to change.

Wilderness and American History

The function of wilderness in American culture has long been a contested subject. Is wilderness a tangible place—can a piece of land meet certain criteria in order to be considered wilderness? Is wilderness a cultural construct, an idealized vision of the natural world that can never actually occur in nature? Is it a combination of the two? These questions are taken up in *Desert Solitaire* (1968), Edward Abbey's work defending the undeveloped nature of the national parks. In this classical environmental treatise, Abbey meditates on what makes wilderness so enticing to Americans. He writes:

Wilderness. The word itself is music. *Wilderness, wilderness...*We scarcely know what we mean by the term, though the sound of it draws all whose nerves and emotions have not yet been irreparably stunned, deadened, numbed by the caterwauling of commerce, the sweating scramble for profit and domination. Why such an allure in the very word? What does it really mean? Can wilderness be defined in the words of the government officialdom as simply 'A minimum of not less than 5000 contiguous acres of roadless area'? This

much may be essential in attempting a definition but it is not sufficient, something more is involved. (Abbey 207-208)

Abbey's questions, which are similar to my own, form the backdrop for this section of my research. In looking at different definitions of and conceptions regarding wilderness, I hoped to learn what Abbey's "something more" was, and, in the end, to determine whether defining wilderness is even important at all.

Defining Wilderness

My first understanding of "wildness" as separate and different from "wilderness" came from Henry David Thoreau's pointed use of the word "wild" instead of "wilderness" in *Walden*, his 1854 discourse on living life apart from society. *Walden* is often cited as the work that led to the American environmental movement, and the observations about nature that Thoreau made during his year of isolation at Walden Pond are said to be the forerunner of modern ecology. One of the most striking things about his text, then, is the fact that Thoreau was actually not entirely isolated from society at Walden Pond. Though Thoreau's cabin was indeed secluded, it was a mere thirty minutes away from his mother's home, and Thoreau often entertained visitors and continued his work in Concord, Massachusetts.

On choosing the location for his experiment in living simply, Thoreau wrote, "I have thought that Walden Pond would be a good place for business, not solely on account of the railroad and the ice trade; it offers advantages which it may not be good policy to divulge; it is a good port and a good foundation" (Thoreau 16).

Clearly, being completely isolated was not Thoreau's goal, but rather he wanted to support himself and live simply in nature as an experiment—"a rejection of an urban life dominated by commerce, where men have become 'tools of their tools,' a gesture understood as the rediscovery of an alternative identity and a possible freedom," as ecohistorian Timothy Clark has put it (Clark 27). Clark notes Thoreau's word choice when describing the environment surrounding his cabin: "Thoreau does not use the term wilderness, which would suggest a large unsettled area implausible for Massachusetts in the 1840s, but wild. This suggests a more fluid quality, less localizable and in part a function of human attitudes" (Clark 33). Clark further illustrates this point when looking at the history of the word "wild," saying, "The term wild has emerged in environmental criticism as a distinctive aesthetic/ecological and moral category...The term stresses that element of anything that is resistant to human control, prediction, or understanding, 'the unmanaged energy of nature' manifest in even the densest cities in weeds that push through small cracks in the pavement or fissures in a wall" (Clark 33). It was from this basis that my own understanding of the word "wild" really began to solidify—I began to form my argument that the word "wildness" would refer to the landscapes that remain natural¹, and are even perhaps largely untouched, but that do not meet

¹ It is worth noting that definitions of words like "natural" are also contested. In this thesis, when I refer to a landscape as being "natural," I mean that it has not been used for harvesting resources, that its ecosystems are intact, and that it is on a somewhat large scale, but that it does not fit the "wilderness" ideal. Therefore, "natural" is more closely aligned with "wildness."

the “wilderness” ideal. The term “wildness” has been important throughout my research, particularly my research into the national parks themselves, because it must be noted that the national parks do protect “real,” physical landscapes—whether that landscape be a geyser or a mountain—that do exist. The difficulty comes in resolving the question of how these “real” landscapes are related to the “wilderness” ideal, and, to me, the word “wildness” provides that resolution.

Michael Lewis’ definitions of “wilderness” and “wildness” in *American Wilderness: A New History* were the most influential in developing my own understanding of the terms and their differences, though I do not agree with the entirety of Lewis’ argument. Like Clark, Lewis argues that wilderness is set apart from wildness:

Wilderness is a concept devised by humans to define a particular type of wild environment—with its plants, animals, and ecosystems—and it is entirely appropriate to declare that wilderness, as distinct from wildness, must be large on a human scale. Wild nature can be found everywhere; wilderness cannot. The grass that grows in the seam of a concrete sidewalk is as wild as a bear in the Brooks Range of Alaska. No one, though, should question that one is in wilderness, the other is not, and learning to appreciate wildness need not replace an appreciation of wilderness. Too often, the two are treated as opposed categories. (Lewis 6)

I agree with Lewis' assessment of "wilderness" as being "a concept devised by humans," and that "wilderness" and "wildness" are two separate things; I do not necessarily subscribe to the ways in which he describes the difference between "wilderness" and "wildness," however. Lewis seems to understand "wilderness" as being different from "wildness" based on size. While an area of Alaska and grass growing in a sidewalk crack are equally wild, Lewis suggests, the Alaskan landscape is "wilderness" because it is on such a large scale. I would argue, instead, that "wilderness" and "wildness" differ not based on size, but based on their natural qualities—to me, "wilderness" is the ideal of nature untouched by humans, which is not actually attainable, and "wildness" refers to a landscape that is as natural as possible, but is not completely untouched. Although Lewis does specifically state that "wilderness" is an idea devised to define a particular type of environment, his mention of "wilderness" being difficult to find (as opposed to "wildness," which is present everywhere) and his call for "wilderness" appreciation makes it seem as though he still does think of "wilderness" as a specific place. Lewis' definitions of "wilderness" and "wildness" acted as a springboard for creating my own definitions of the terms, but in the end I felt that Lewis' definition relied too much on the idea that "wilderness" is a tangible place.

After I had begun to develop my own definitions of "wild" and "wilderness," I attended a lecture by William Cronon that complicated those definitions. In his lecture, called "Values on the Land: City and Country in the History of American Landscape," Cronon argued that although there are many ways to study or to

classify a landscape (using history, geography, geology, etc.), looking at a landscape with cultural issues in mind is the most important. He divided landscapes into categories of wild, pastoral, suburb, and city, but noted that these are cultural, not natural distinctions. In addition, he said that these distinctions are relative, only existing in relation to each other. By Cronon's definition of relative landscapes, there *is* concrete "wilderness," so long as there are other landscapes that are not as wild. As I have already said, I think that "wilderness" is a culturally constructed ideal that can never be reached. With Cronon's argument in mind, I modified my definitions to allow for the idea that the ways in which "wilderness" is understood is partially dependent on what other landscapes were present in any given historical moment or location.

I had come into this research with the idea that defining "wilderness" was not as simple as setting up criteria that a piece of land must meet in order to be considered "wilderness." Based on my analyses of Thoreau, Clark, Lewis, and Cronon, I agree with the idea that "wilderness" is a piece of completely untouched land, but I argue that this is an ideal, rather than an actual occurrence in nature. Even if there were a remote piece of land, which had never been physically touched by a human, it would still have been "touched" and affected by the environmental changes human activity causes—like climate change or pollution. The environment is always already changed by human activity, whether humans are aware of those effects or not. I finalize my own definitions of "wilderness" and "wildness" in this way: I would argue that "wilderness" is a culturally created ideal, which does not

exist in nature; however, I would also argue that the American “wilderness” ideal has shifted along with American culture. I then define “wildness” in the way that “wilderness” has historically been understood—as the natural environment. In general, I understand “wildness” as being comparatively unspoiled land, although I do argue that “wildness” can encompass the range of natural features that might be encountered in everyday life—from weeds growing in the cracks of a sidewalk to huge sections of relatively undisturbed landscape.

History of the “Wilderness” Ideal

In order to support my argument on the changing nature of the American “wilderness” ideal, I begin with a history of the ways in which humans have related to their “wilderness” environments. From the word’s European roots, which fuelled the fear that early American settlers felt toward their wilderness environments, to the pride in the vast landscapes of the American West that developed in the early twentieth century, to the realization that American wild areas were quickly disappearing, the way in which “wilderness” has been understood in American culture has undergone several shifts.

The arguments that Roderick Nash makes in his seminal work, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, are essential to understanding this history. Nash gives an overarching history of the “wilderness” ideal, including both its origins in Europe and its development as it was applied to the New World and eventually assimilated into American culture. He begins his history with the first appearance of the word

“wilderness” in northern European languages, in which the word meant a forested area. He notes that for Europeans in the Middle Ages, wilderness was often associated with evil:

If paradise was early man’s greatest good, wilderness, its antipode, was his greatest evil. In one condition the environment, garden-like, ministered to his every desire. In the other it was at best indifferent, frequently dangerous, and always beyond control...While inability to control or use wilderness was the basic factor in man’s hostility, the terror of the wild had other roots as well. One was the tendency of the folk traditions of many cultures to associate wilderness with the supernatural and monstrous. (Nash 9-10)

As early American settlers emigrated from Europe, they brought this fear of the wild with them. Applying this historical fear of an uncontrolled environment to the settlement of the New World helps explain why settlers were so determined to conquer and control the American wilderness.

The European conception of wilderness as a frightening space that needed to be controlled began to shift before the American conception of wilderness did; this makes sense, since European wild lands would have been largely decimated long before American wild lands reached that point, leading to the American impulse to preserve what wild areas were left. Nash quotes Alexis de Tocqueville as saying, in 1831,

In Europe people talk a great deal about the wilds of America, but the Americans themselves never think about them; they are insensible to the wonders of inanimate nature and they may be said not to perceive the mighty forests that surround them till they fall beneath the hatchet. Their eyes are fixed upon another sight...the...march across these wilds, draining swamps, turning the course of rivers, peopling solitudes, and subduing nature. (quoted in Nash 23)

Because Europe was largely settled by this point—and had been for centuries—Europeans had begun to appreciate the aspects of untouched land that were not available on their own continent, while American settlers were still intent on conquering the wilderness of the New World and carving out a place for themselves within it. Later, Nash discusses in more detail the European transition from fear of to respect for wilderness. He says,

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Europeans laid the intellectual foundations for a favorable attitude [toward wilderness]. The concept of the sublime and picturesque led the way by enlisting aesthetics in wild country's behalf while deism associated nature and religion. Combined with the primitivistic idealization of a life closer to nature, these ideas fed the Romantic movement which had far-reaching implications for wilderness. With the flowering of

Romanticism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, wild country lost much of its repulsiveness. It was not that wilderness was any less solitary, mysterious, and chaotic, but rather in the new intellectual context these qualities were coveted. (Nash 44)

These new ideas in the European mindset toward wilderness likely fueled de Tocqueville's confusion at finding that the American attitude toward wild spaces had not progressed in the same manner. The changing European mindset toward wilderness would soon be mimicked in American thinking, however, as American wilderness also became a disappearing commodity.

That shift in the American understanding of "wilderness" would take some time, however; many American settlers held on to the beliefs that equated wilderness with evil well into the nineteenth and even twentieth century. Nash writes:

Wilderness not only frustrated the pioneers physically but also acquired significance as a dark and sinister symbol. They shared the long Western tradition of imagining wild country as a moral vacuum, a cursed and chaotic wasteland. As a consequence, frontiersmen acutely sensed that they battled wild country not only for personal survival but in the name of nation, race, and God. Civilizing the New World meant enlightening darkness, ordering chaos, and changing evil into

good. In the morality play of westward expansion, wilderness was the villain, and the pioneer, as hero, relished its destruction. The transformation of a wilderness into a civilization was the reward for his sacrifices, the definition of his achievement, and the source of his pride. (Nash 24-25)

It is interesting that Nash used the phrase “acquired significance” in relation to settlers’ fear of wilderness—he seems to be arguing that the earliest settlers did not view wilderness as evil, but only began to buy into the old European traditions when they had such difficulty carving a living out of the American wilderness. I would disagree with this point, and modify Nash’s statement to argue instead that American settlers had always feared wilderness, but as they faced the extreme difficulties of frontier life, there may have been a brief shift back to the older European traditions of associating wilderness with evil.

Daniel Philippon describes the beginnings of a shift in the historical associations that come with the word “wilderness” in *Conserving Words*. Philippon was clearly influenced by Nash’s work (he even quotes Nash in his own argument). He writes that it wasn’t until the suppression of wilderness came to fruition that Americans began to think of wilderness as an endangered commodity or as something that needed to be protected:

As Roderick Nash indicates, ‘Ancient biases against the wild are deeply rooted in human psychology and in the human compulsion to understand, order, and transform the

environment in the interest of survival, and later, of success. Wilderness was the unknown, the disordered, the uncontrolled. A large portion of the energies of early civilizations was directed at defeating the wilderness in nature and controlling it in human nature'...Only with the rise of romantic aesthetics and cultural nationalism in early-nineteenth-century America, and with the reduction of actual wilderness areas (and the corresponding growth of cities) that accompanied the closing of the frontier in 1890, did the notion of wilderness appreciation begin to take root. (Philippon 172)

Philippon's description depicts the first shift in the American understanding of "wilderness" that I have referred to, from historical European fears of the wild to the protection of wilderness that Americans were beginning to seek by the end of the nineteenth century.

The shift away from fear of the wild first appears with the American appreciation for "nature." The shift toward appreciating "wilderness" was not yet complete, however—as Nash discusses, "nature" referred to rural life in which the natural environment was present but controlled; this was not nature as we might view it today, separate from human development. He writes: "Enthusiasm for 'nature' in America during the pioneering period almost always had reference to the rural state. The frequent celebrations of country life...reveal only a contempt for the wild, native landscape as 'unimproved' land. When wilderness scenery did appeal, it

was not for its wildness but because it resembled ‘A Garden or Orchard in England’” (Nash 33). To me, this is the beginning of the marked turn toward appreciating and wanting to protect American wilderness. While the settlers described here had certainly not arrived at the point of wanting to protect wilderness, it seems to me that the shift began when the settlers felt they had conquered the wilderness—then they were in a position to realize what drastic changes they had made to the landscape and to view wilderness as a disappearing commodity, rather than only focusing on subsisting off of the land.

A famous essay by Frederick Jackson Turner, first read as a speech to the American Historical Society in Chicago in 1893, gives a nineteenth-century insight into the changing nature of the relationship between Americans and their wilderness landscapes. Turner based his essay on an 1890 message from the Superintendent of the Census, which said, “Up to and including 1880 the country had a frontier of settlement, but at present the unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line. In the discussion of its extent, its westward movement, etc., it can not, therefore, any longer have a place in the census reports” (Turner 1). This would seem to imply that there were still areas that had not been settled or that could be classified as wilderness, but that there was no longer a western border beyond which no settlement had occurred. Turner, rather than being concerned about the lack of unsettled land remaining, seemed to see the closing of the frontier as “winning a wilderness,” in which what wilderness might remain would soon be

conquered. He considered the westward expansion of American settlement and the conquering of the wilderness as part of the ideological agenda upon which the United States was founded, saying:

Behind institutions, behind constitutional forms and modifications, lie the vital forces that call these organs into life and shape them to meet changing conditions. The peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people—to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life. (Turner 2)

Turner saw westward expansion as the first step in the evolution of an American civilization in the western United States—after the first settlers arrived and conquered the wilderness, small farming communities developed, followed by more dense communities, and finally by industrialized cities (Turner 11). It was this type of rapid development that would result in massive losses of “wilderness” in the western United States, leading eventually to the realization that what wild areas remained needed to be protected.

At the time, though, Turner did not seem to mourn the closing of the frontier or the loss of wilderness, at least not in terms of any ecological changes that the loss of wilderness might bring about. Instead, as he focused on the ways in which

American society was founded upon the ideal of wilderness, Turner showed some concern about the cultural changes that might follow the closing of the frontier. He discussed the idea of American civilization being recreated each time the frontier line moved forward, and then the subsequent return to primitive life at the frontier line as it moved west again, saying, "In this advance, the frontier is the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization" (Turner 3).

Turner's classification of the land west of the frontier line as "savage" implies that he was in fact in favor of the closing of the frontier, and looked forward to settlement of the entire United States. At the same time, Turner romanticized the power of wilderness over the American settler. He wrote,

The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails.

Little by little, he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs, any more than the first phenomenon was a case of reversion to the Germanic mark. The fact is, here is a new product that is American...Thus the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines. (Turner 4)

It seems that, rather than being in awe of the power the environment holds over settlers, Turner was glad for the changes it caused, which made westward expansion a peculiarly American institution. Turner's romanticized view of the relationship between American settlers and their wilderness environments, which obviously did not lead him to conclude that wild areas should be preserved, can be seen as a forerunner of that shift. Soon, Americans would begin to realize that unless the remnants of their wild environments were preserved, they would lose the benefits of their relationships with wild nature.

John Muir's *Our National Parks* (1901), another historical work, finally shows the shift toward a mourning of the loss of "wilderness" and a desire to protect what "wilderness" remained. By the turn of the twentieth century, several national parks had been established, showing the increased American interest in protecting wild areas. In general, Muir seemed to have positive feelings about the future of the national parks, but he was concerned that national parks would not be enough to protect wildness. He wrote:

None of Nature's landscapes are ugly so long as they are wild; and much, we can say comfortingly, must always be in great part wild, particularly the sea and the sky, the floods of light from the stars, and the warm, unspoilable heart of the earth, infinitely beautiful, though only dimly visible to the eye of the imagination. The geysers, too, spouting from the hot underworld; the steady, long-lasting glaciers on the mountains, obedient only to the sun; Yosemite domes and the tremendous glamour of rocky cañons and mountains in general, —these must always be wild, for man can change them and mar them hardly more than can the butterflies that hover above them. But the continent's outer beauty is fast passing away, especially the plant part of it, the most destructible and most universally charming of all. (Muir 4-5)

Here, Muir attempted to reassure himself that even if humans managed to completely destroy their environment and the wildness that surrounded them, there were certain things, like the sun and the sky, which were impossible for humans to change.

Though numbers of visitors to national parks had been increasing, Muir argued that in general the parks could still be classified as "wilderness" areas:

Notwithstanding the outcry against the reservations last winter in Washington, that uncounted farms, towns, and

villages were included in them, and that all business was threatened or blocked, nearly all the mountains in which the reserves lie are still covered with virgin forests. Though lumbering has long been carried on with tremendous energy along their boundaries, and home-seekers have explored the woods for openings available for farms, however small, one may wander in the heart of the reserves for weeks without meeting a human being, Indian or white man, or any conspicuous trace of one. (Muir 24)

Though Muir was ahead of his time, eventually Americans would come to understand “wilderness” as Muir did, as an area that had not been used for resources, and which was large enough that one could wander for days without meeting another person.

Nash’s argument on what it was that made Americans recognize their “wilderness” environments as being valuable builds on Muir’s insights, pinpointing the national shift toward concern for protecting wild areas. He writes that it was not until the early to mid-nineteenth century that,

American nationalists began to understand that it was in the *wildness* of its nature that their country was unmatched. While other nations might have an occasional peak or patch of heath, there was no equivalent of a wild continent. And if, as many suspected, wilderness was the medium through which God

spoke most clearly, then America had a distinct moral advantage over Europe, where centuries of civilization had deposited a layer of artificiality over His works. (Nash 69)

The developing sense of American cultural identity in contrast to a European cultural identity would become very important in the first decades of twentieth century, and would solidify the American desire to protect wild areas.

Marguerite Shaffer demonstrates the extent of the effect this shift had on American cultural identity in *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*. She argues that the ways in which the American natural landscape was understood were based in the ways in which the European natural landscape was understood:

American wilderness had long been understood in the context of European precedent. Since the eighteenth century nationalistic Americans, anxious about the status of the New World in relation to the Old World civilization and tradition, looked to the American landscape with its abundant natural resources and its magnificent scenery to compensate for America's lack of an ancient past. The vast wilderness of the American continent became pristine nature, uncorrupted by the hands of man and reflective of God's imminence. Scenic and sublime wilderness in America offered a natural legacy representative of American exceptionalism and even

superiority over Europe that moved beyond human accomplishment and into God's realm. Writers, artists, cultural critics, and the like inscribed their own nationalistic desires and values onto the American landscape, implying that sublime scenery and natural richness evinced God's blessings bestowed on the New World. The cultural significance of American wilderness gained meaning from the implicit comparison to Europe. An idealized European civilization became the touchstone for America's natural legacy. To celebrate American wilderness was in some ways to declare that America was superior to the Old World. (Shaffer 73-74)

So, "wilderness" or the natural landscape became important as many Americans began to believe that the United States really did have natural beauty, even natural beauty that was far superior to that found in Europe. Because the American history of destruction of wild areas was based in European tradition, and American settlers were often trying to emulate or create the type of life that was common in Europe, it is ironic that the appreciation of wilderness and the creation of national parks were dependent on an American feeling of inadequacy in relation to Europe.

We have seen the shifts in American understandings of "wilderness" environments—from fear to appreciation to pride—in the relatively brief period between the first European settlers' arrival in the New World and the turn of the twentieth century. Within that time, American settlers had managed to decimate

the majority of the natural American landscape, which was the driving force behind these changes in thinking. In general, when I have referred to “wilderness” in this section, or have quoted other scholars’ discussions about the American relationship to “wilderness,” I have been referring to areas of the United States that had not yet been settled by white European immigrants. Now, the question becomes, how “wild” was this unsettled “wilderness?”

How “Wild” is “Wilderness?”

An essay by Melanie Perreault in Lewis’s *American Wilderness*, called “American Wilderness and First Contact,” can be put into conversation with Nash’s history of American wilderness to show that “wilderness” may have in fact not been as “wild” as the word would suggest. Like Nash, Perreault argues that interactions with wilderness were extremely important in frontier life. Whereas Nash associates North America before European settlement with untouched wildness, or at least with a state of savagery, however, Perreault argues that although Europeans idealized and feared the untouched wilderness of North America, there really never was such a thing. She writes:

Whether it was an Aztec premonition from 1511, a Puritan choking down his anxiety as he approached Massachusetts Bay in 1630, or a Virginian calculating next year’s tobacco market in 1632, all of these confrontations with the American wilderness reveal the centrality of nature during the first

meetings of Europeans and Native Americans during the early contact period. Europeans depicted American wilderness as a virtual paradise, a commodity-producing warehouse, a frightening malevolent entity, or a blank slate waiting to be brought to its full potential. But with very few exceptions, Europeans did not encounter a raw, untamed wilderness in America; they naturally established colonies in environments most fit for human occupation, where Native Americans already lived. And where Native Americans went, they altered the wilderness and transformed it into something else. As an *idea*, the notion of untouched wilderness held great significance for Europeans and Native Americans alike during the early colonial efforts, but as a literal place, it did not exist, at least not in the areas where sustained contact took place.

(Perreault 16)

So, if there truly is such a thing as untouched “wilderness,” Perreault argues that only Native Americans would have actually encountered it—by the time white Europeans arrived in the New World, the wilderness had been changed, and was always already changed as Europeans moved westward. This argument is very significant to all of American wilderness history, but in particular to the last shift in American “wilderness” understanding that I have laid out. What does it mean for the American sense of national identity that “wilderness,” the basis of much national

pride and a source for cultural identity, is something that those European-Americans who drew pride from it had never encountered—or indeed, that the “wilderness” actually formed the homelands of Native American cultures?

The question of how “wild” “wilderness” really was turns out to be a hotly contested subject. In “The Wilderness of History,” Daniel Worster attacks historians like Perreault, who argue that North America was not truly wilderness before European settlement. Instead, he argues that

Some revisionist historians now argue that ignorant Europeans, animated by “virgin land” fantasies and racial prejudices, had it all wrong. The continent was not a wilderness; it was a landscape thoroughly dominated and managed by the native peoples. Indians, not low rainfall and high evaporation rates, created a vast sweep of grassland all the way from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, and they did so by constant burning. They herded the bison like domesticates in a big pasture. They cultivated the wild plants and made a garden of the place. All over the continent, they completely civilized a wasteland long before the white man got here. (Worster 222)

Worster is using some sarcasm to make his point here—historians like Perrault do not argue that a significant natural feature like the Great Plains was entirely created by Native Americans, nor do they argue that the American landscape was a

“completely civilized wasteland” before the arrival of European settlers. While Perreault does state that North American wilderness never existed, she seems to mean that European settlers never experienced North American wilderness, because they settled in areas that had already been somewhat domesticated by Native Americans.

My own argument, then, would fall somewhere between Perrault’s and Worster’s. I agree with Worster that there is only so much that a relatively small population of Native Americans with fairly simple technologies at their disposal could have done to affect their environment. However, I would argue that the Native Americans did domesticate their environment to some extent; it would be difficult to argue that a human population had no effect at all on its environment. Perreault’s argument that European settlers colonized those areas of the American landscape which had already been inhabited by Native Americans seems very credible to me—why would Native American populations have been continually pushed west if the European settlers weren’t taking over the established areas where Native American communities had lived and hunted? Thus, I would argue that the American landscape which European settlers encountered was not entirely domesticated by any means, but that it was almost certainly not the empty, untouched “wilderness” that Europeans idealized.

Does Defining Wilderness Matter?

So, after all this discussion on the history of wilderness and different definitions of wilderness, I come to this question: does defining wilderness really matter? To me, it seems that understanding wilderness to a certain extent is important. Daniel Philippon writes:

It is thus important to note that ‘wilderness’ is not a real thing that exists out in the world, which some definitions get us ‘closer to,’ but that it is a thing we make—both as a place and an idea—through our definition of it. Understanding ‘wilderness’ this way—as a rhetorical construct—does not necessarily diminish its importance, but it does help us recognize that both wilderness areas and the idea of wilderness are only as important as our definitions are persuasive, and that the persuasiveness of our definitions depends in large part upon their historical context, including the scientific, political, recreational, intellectual, and institutional factors at work in a particular historical moment.

(Philippon 171)

I would agree with Philippon, in that “wilderness” is a rhetorical construct, and that understanding that “wilderness” has meant different things throughout American history and that it can be defined in different ways does not make it any less important.

On the other hand, I believe that spending too much time concentrating on defining “wilderness” or on determining whether a piece of land qualifies as “wilderness” is detrimental to the actual protection of whatever “wild” areas do remain. Nash addresses this point when he writes, “For the first three decades of this century no one believed that wilderness preservation meant more than simple designation. You drew a circle on a map and concentrated on keeping things like roads and buildings out. What happened inside the wilderness boundary did not seem important by comparison” (Nash 320). Instead of working to protect “wilderness,” early preservationists only concentrated on determining what was “wilderness” and what was not, and drawing a line between the two. This, of course, is not helpful to protecting wild areas, and in fact was often detrimental to the environment.

I tend to agree with parts of both Philippon’s and Nash’s arguments—I think that unless we can understand or define “wilderness” enough to defend it, wild lands will continue to be lost; on the other hand I think that spending too much time trying to define “wilderness” takes away from environmental preservation, which would also lead to loss of wild lands. In the end, I think that the fact that there is even a debate over whether defining “wilderness” is important shows the extent to which the idea of “wilderness” has embedded itself into the American understanding of our environment, and can act as a facilitator for more effective protection of “wild” lands.

American National Parks

There is an American idealization of national parks: when someone hears the words “national park,” their first thoughts are likely of a large, natural area, in which wildlife is protected and which offers various opportunities for recreational activities. But the history of American national parks has not been so straightforward. As Alfred Runte writes in his introduction to his critical examination of *National Parks*, “there has been a tendency among historians to put the national parks on a pedestal, to interpret the park idea as evidence of an unqualified revulsion against disruption of the environment. It would be comforting to believe that the national park idea originated in a deep and uncompromising love of the land for its own sake...But in fact, the national park idea evolved to fulfill cultural rather than environmental needs” (Runte xx). Since the creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, national parks have raised more questions than they have answered: should national parks be open for natural resource use? Should national parks be open for recreational purposes? What should be the balance between protecting nature and attracting tourists?

This chapter of my thesis looks at the history of national parks and at the ways in which the above questions were addressed leading up to the creation of the National Park Service in 1916. I examine what a national park was historically

meant to protect, arguing that national parks did not necessarily protect the environment in the ways we expect today. Part of this argument includes the idea of having to create a “wilderness” in the national parks. Then, I look at the history of tourism to American national parks, and the ways in which the See America First movement promoted tourism to the parks, arguing that tourism was the main impetus for expanding the national park system.

History of American National Parks

In the prologue to *National Parks*, Alfred Runte gives a succinct history of the national park idea in the United States. He writes that the national park idea is relatively recent: “With the possible exception of the Greeks and Romans, therefore, the park idea as now defined is modern in origin; only recently has it come to mean both protection and public access” (Runte 2). Runte goes on to explain that in the United States, the national park idea developed out of or alongside the city park idea, citing Central Park as an example of a city park that was created during the same time period as the first national parks: “Central Park set a precedent for preservation in the common interest more than a decade before realization of the national park idea” (Runte 4). According to Runte, what motivated the development of the national park idea as separate from the older, more established city park idea, was the vastness and emptiness of the American West. He writes: “Unlike those who sought relief from the crowdedness and monotony of city streets, proponents of the national parks unveiled their idea against the backdrop of the American West.

Grand, monumental scenery was the physical catalyst” (Runte 5). Although city parks and national parks were similar in purpose early on in the history of the national park idea—both acted as spaces in which people could escape city life and experience nature—what began to separate the national park idea were the large areas of land that the national parks set aside.

What, then, did the national parks protect? In the introduction to his book on the history of national parks, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, Richard Sellars addresses this question, which has been a driving force in my research. Sellars writes:

The central dilemma of national park management has long been the question of exactly what in a park should be preserved. Is it the scenery—the resplendent landscapes of forests, streams, wildflowers, and majestic mammals? Or is it the integrity of each park’s entire natural system, including not just the biological and scenic superstars, but also the vast array of less compelling species, such as grasses, lichens, and mice?
(Sellars 4)

Sellars goes on, throughout his book, to argue that it is the scenery in national parks that has long been seen as the primary attribute of those areas, and that this has led to a current national park system in which science does not play a large enough role. This fits in with my own argument, which is that national parks often do not protect

an entire ecosystem, but that they instead protect only very specific aspects of the scenery to be found in the area.

Part of my argument, however, is that although national parks rarely protected an entire ecosystem, in a way focusing on only protecting scenery did allow for conservation of areas that might otherwise have been left unprotected. Runte states that “Monumentalism, not environmentalism, was the driving impetus behind the 1864 Yosemite Act” (Runte 29). Much of the land that has been protected in national parks can be considered “monumental,” as the parks consist of rugged mountains and canyons. Monumentalism was not the only driving force behind the establishment of national parks, of course—if, for example, it had been decided that there was economic potential in the Yosemite area at the time that Yosemite National Park was being considered, the monumental scenery would not have mattered. But, because there is a correlation between rugged, monumental landscapes and “worthlessness” in terms of possibility for economic gain, national parks like Yosemite *were* protected. Of Yellowstone, Runte argues again that environmental aspects of protecting the park were not even a recognized issue, but that the park was protected solely because of its “monumental” features and its uniqueness: “Nor was Yellowstone so large because it was meant to protect wilderness; Americans were still ambivalent about wild country. Like Yosemite Park, Yellowstone owed its existence to more immediate concerns. Similar to the natural phenomena of the High Sierra, Wyoming’s fabled wonderland of geysers, waterfalls, canyons, and other ‘curiosities’ appealed to the nation as a cultural

repository” (Runte 34), and, “Like the discovery of Yosemite Valley and the Sierra redwoods, the revelation of Yellowstone to the world offered the United States still another opportunity to acquire a semblance of antiquity through landscape” (Runte 41). In the end, I would argue that while monumentalism did effectively protect certain aspects of the American landscape, such policies were extremely limiting in terms of actually protecting wildlife or entire ecosystems.

My main argument about the creation of the national parks—that although national parks did not originally focus on protecting the environment, they did do so to some extent—is supported by Roderick Nash’s work in *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Nash takes a bit of a different angle, arguing that the idea of protecting “wilderness” areas had gained popularity in the United States, but that any actual “wilderness” or environmental preservation was an accidental byproduct of protecting natural resources for future economic gains. Nash uses Yellowstone as his example, writing:

Yellowstone’s initial advocates were not concerned with wilderness; they acted to prevent private acquisition and exploitation of geysers, hot springs, waterfalls, and similar curiosities. In New York the decisive argument concerned the necessity of forested land for an adequate water supply. In both places wilderness was preserved unintentionally. Only later did a few persons begin to realize that one of the most

significant results of the first national and state park had been the preservation of *wilderness*. (Nash 108)

Whether we look at one scholar's argument or all three, my original point is supported—while the original focus of establishing national parks was not protection of the environment, environmental protection did still occur.

How Should Parks Be Used?

One of the main debates early on in the creation of the American national park system was the question of how the national parks should be used. Should they be used for resource extraction? Should they be used for human recreation? Should they be used for landscape preservation—because, although I have argued that protecting the environment was not the central concern when the national parks were created, I would still argue that environmental preservation was an issue that played into debates on how the national parks were used.

The debate over these questions resulted in different areas of the national parks being used for different purposes, as Sellars explains. He describes national parks as having areas that were accessible to tourists and areas that remained “backcountry”—essentially dividing the national parks into areas that were considered true wilderness and areas that were supposed to represent wilderness to the public. Sellars writes, “Given the size of many of the parks, the extensive tourism development that would take place would still leave thousands of acres of undeveloped park ‘backcountry’—a factor that would become increasingly

important in national park preservation concerns” (Sellars 12). He further describes the idea of backcountry in parks under first director of the National Park Service Stephen Mather’s jurisdiction: “...Mather declared that he did not want the parks ‘gridironed’ with roads. He would limit road development to leave large areas of each park in a ‘natural wilderness state,’ accessible only by trail” (Sellars 61). This idea was fascinating to me, and brought up more questions regarding the purpose of national parks: Wasn’t the *point* of a national park, at least purportedly, that it protected wilderness, and therefore shouldn’t the entirety of the park be considered wilderness? How did development for tourism fit into the ideas of wilderness? Indeed, how did the development for tourism affect the backcountry wilderness of the parks—did the development change or damage habitats and ecosystems, which then changed or damaged habitats and ecosystems in other areas of the park that hadn’t been developed?

Sellars addresses my first three questions when he writes that early park managers assumed that their manipulation of nature did not seriously affect the “natural” state of the land: “in effect, they defined natural conditions to include the changes in nature that they deemed appropriate. Thus the proponents [of park development] habitually assumed (and claimed) that the parks were fully preserved” (Sellars 23), and, “...the founders assumed that, in effect, *undeveloped* lands were *unimpaired* lands—that where there was little or no development, natural conditions existed and need not to be of special concern. The ongoing manipulation of the parks’ backcountry resources, such as fish, forests, and wildlife

seems not to have been viewed as impairing natural conditions” (Sellars 45). It is interesting to think that the argument that parks were preserved in spite of human changes may actually be correct, although at first such a claim sounds completely outdated—but when we consider that there is no such thing as untouched “wilderness,” and that national parks were not exactly pristine areas before they were preserved, considering nature with some human changes as being “natural” and “preserved” is not such a far-fetched idea. It is, however, somewhat jarring to realize that these changes were not only occurring in areas where tourist development was implemented, but in the backcountry of national parks as well.

My last question ties into Sellars’ main argument, which asks how scientific study could take a much larger role in park management, so that questions similar to mine would be answered *before* the development was done. He states:

With park development simulating resort development elsewhere in the country, perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the parks was their extensive, protected backcountry. The location of roads, trails, hotels, and other recreational tourism facilities only in selected areas meant that much of the vast park terrain escaped the impact of intensive development and use. Offering the only real possibility for preservation of some semblance of natural conditions, these relatively remote areas would constitute the best hope of later

generations seeking to preserve national park ecological systems and biological diversity. (Sellars 22)

Because so much area within parks was developed without considering the ecological implications of building roads and lodges and visitors' centers, the backcountry areas were the only remaining protected areas that might reflect "natural conditions." But again, we cannot ever know if those natural conditions really existed in the backcountry, because scientific studies were not done before tourism development was implemented, meaning that we have no way of knowing what effect that development might have had on the backcountry.

In the end, though, I'm not sure that I completely agree with Sellars' argument. I do agree that the mindset of early national park officials—"without facilities to accommodate the public, a national park would be 'merely a wilderness, not serving the purpose for which it was set aside, not benefitting the general public'" (Sellars 63)—was not conducive to successfully protecting land and ecosystems in their natural state. However, I don't think that the concentration on protecting scenery, rather than species, completely leaves the species that inhabit national parks out of the equation. By protecting the habitats that species within the national parks populated, the early park officials were by default protecting the species as well. In fact, they often preferentially protected some species over others—bears and bison were protected in Yellowstone National Park, but wolves were actively hunted, for example. These efforts show that naturalists and national park officials had not yet begun to think about interconnectedness between animal

populations (or any species population) or the larger picture of ecological protection. Even outside of the efforts to protect specific species, however, other species were protected within national parks; this protection was simply more inadvertent.

Created Parks

The connection between the creation of national parks and the creation of “wilderness” is an interesting one. Of course, “creating” national parks is necessary to have them protected by law, but “wildness” should occur naturally, without human aid to “create” it. But, because the purpose of national parks is said to be to protect wilderness, the creation of national parks and the creation of “wilderness” are intertwined. Throughout the history of the national parks, projecting a certain image became increasingly important, as debates over uses of the national parks continued.

John Muir’s perspective on creating national parks is particularly useful, because he was writing at the time of the establishment of the earliest national parks. In some of his later writing, Muir promoted the idea of national parks as being predominantly for human use and enjoyment, using language that implied the “creation” of natural landscapes. In *Our National Parks* (1901), Muir wrote on the Black Hills Reserve, saying, “In the million acre Black Hills Reserve of South Dakota, the easternmost of the great forest reserves, made for the sake of the farmers and miners, there are delightful, reviving sauntering-grounds in open parks of yellow

pine, planted well apart, allowing plenty of sunshine to warm the ground” (Muir 13). This description of the park as being “open,” and of the trees as being “planted” fits in with the idea of national parks as being spaces created for human recreation. Though Muir did not literally mean that the trees had been planted, he promoted the idea that the parks were laid out for human use, advocating for the change in the American understanding of natural areas as frightening “wildernesses” that I discussed in my chapter on wilderness. In his description of the Bitter Root reserve, Muir again promoted the idea of parks as happy spaces, describing the trees, streams, and animals as being in harmony: “Perhaps the least known of all this grand group of reserves is the Bitter Root, of more than four million acres. It is the wildest, shaggiest block of forest wildness in the Rocky Mountains, full of happy, healthy, storm-loving trees, full of streams that dance and sing in glorious array, and full of Nature’s animals, —elk, deer, wild sheep, bears, cats, and innumerable smaller people” (Muir 16). In this case, Muir does not describe trees as being planted or the landscape as being created, but a reader gets the same sense of the national park as a garden-like place, functioning better on its own than it ever could with human intervention, but still somehow created for human enjoyment. While it is difficult to make a definite argument about Muir’s intentions, I do think that Muir purposely wrote about the national parks in language that would portray the idea that national parks were created for human use—though Muir primarily advocated for protection of the natural environment in the national parks, he would have understood that debates on the uses of national parks were still ongoing.

One thing that really made me think about the extent to which national parks are “created” in order to project a certain image was a comment that John Herron made during his speech at the Miami University’s Third Nature Symposium. Herron commented on the emblem of the National Park Service, which features a buffalo, saying that the sketch of the buffalo was done while the artist was looking at a



The emblem of the National Park Service.

stuffed buffalo, rather than at a living animal. While the buffalo in the National Park Service emblem is only shown as a silhouette, with little enough detail that it might not have mattered whether the artist was looking at a living or stuffed animal while doing the drawing, this struck me as being really odd. National parks are touted as protecting “wilderness” and protecting

wildlife. Bison herds were specifically protected in Yellowstone National Park beginning in the late nineteenth century, several decades before the National Park Service was created. And yet, the National Park Service didn’t take the trouble to find a live buffalo to sketch when they were choosing their symbol? This seems to show that the National Park Service was not as concerned with protecting whatever real, tangible manifestation of wilderness that they could, but were instead concerned with creating the *appearance* of wilderness.

Tourism to National Parks

As the previous sections of this chapter have shown, the issue of tourism pervaded all aspects of the establishment and use of national parks. One reason that protecting the natural environment was not the issue at the forefront of decisions regarding the creation of national parks was that government officials wanted to protect monumental landscape features, which they hoped would become tourist destinations. Debates over use of national parks centered around the question of how much the parks should be developed to accommodate tourists. Parks were even presented as having been created for tourists, with trees having been planted in a garden-like arrangement to appeal to park visitors. I would argue, then, that tourism was the main impetus for the expansion of the national park system at the turn of the twentieth century, and for the eventual creation of the national park service.

Marguerite Shaffer's text, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*, helped me situate the development of the national parks as tourist destinations within the development of American tourism as a whole. Shaffer writes that until the nineteenth century, for Americans who had the resources and leisure time for tourism, traveling to Europe was more appealing than traveling within the United States: "...the majority of Americans with the means to travel were more interested in traveling abroad than in confronting their own country's poor roads and inadequate lodgings. As the exceptional travelogues reveal, domestic tourism in the United States remained a rare elite activity with no established economic

infrastructure until the early nineteenth century” (Shaffer 12). Here, tourism is implicitly defined as something relaxing, that one does during leisure time—tourism did not involve trekking across undeveloped land and dealing with lack of amenities. When domestic tourism began to become popular, Americans generally travelled west, rather than touring the eastern half of the nation. However, western tourism still fit into the past precedent of being leisurely and relaxing; the first western tourists were not wandering through the Sierra Nevada studying native species. They were, rather, travelling in luxury train cars, staying in resort-style hotels, and taking guided tours of the national parks. Shaffer writes, “The early western tourist experience was confined to scenic views from railroad tourist cars and resort life at exclusive luxury hotels. Tourists interested in a more intimate encounter with scenery had to suffer long, uncomfortable carriage rides. Many preferred the comfort and cosmopolitan atmosphere of luxury hotels and plush Pullman Palace cars to the wild and barren landscapes of the West” (Shaffer 25). So, while a “wilderness” experience, or at least a more natural tourist experience, was available, many tourists chose the comforts of luxury travel packages instead. Thus, the parks had to develop in ways to attract and accommodate these elite tourists.

I would argue that tourism was not a universally developing phenomenon, however; it was in fact a very limited one. Only those who had the resources and leisure time to spend on travel could be tourists, which made tourism a white, middle- to upper-class privilege. Shaffer writes, “Tourism, as a form of consumption, allowed white, native-born middle- and upper-class Americans to

escape the social and cultural confines of everyday life to liminal space where they could temporarily reimagine themselves as heroic or authentic figures” (Shaffer 5). People of lower classes or different races weren’t offered the same mode of escape from everyday life, however. Indeed, though national parks, as they developed into tourist destinations, were promoted as “America’s parks” or as spaces in which all Americans were welcome, they were not—in fact, the parks often specifically excluded African Americans. In response to National Park Service proponent Robert Sterling Yard’s assessment of the national parks as being a melting pot where one could meet people of all different backgrounds from all over the country, Shaffer writes, “What Yard didn’t mention was that the Park Service consciously discouraged African Americans from visiting the parks...Thus the ideals of democracy, the nation, and the citizen defined by park advocates and the Park Service were embodied by a newly emerging dominant class that was becoming a predominantly white, middle- and upper-class constituency in the twentieth century” (Shaffer 125-126). Even national parks that were specifically advertised as being welcoming to everyone did not live up to that ideal: “Although Hill described the park as ‘everybody’s Park,’ distinct ideals about class were embedded in his vision of Glacier. The Americans he was addressing included those elites who commonly travelled to Europe...’Everybody’ for Louis Hill signified those like himself, established, upper-class, white Americans” (Shaffer 64). So, when national parks and tourism to national parks acted as the basis for a developing sense of

national identity, as I will discuss below, that identity was actually limited to a very specific group of Americans.

As has already been made clear, tourists to the national parks were arriving by train. The development of new ways of travel—first, the western rail lines, and later, the advent of the automobile—were important in the development of domestic American tourism, particularly to the national parks. In her introduction to *See America First*, Shaffer had discussed the changing American way of life—which included new technologies for travel and new models of consumption—in terms of leading to the development of domestic American tourism: “As a national transportation system and communication network spread a metropolitan corridor across America, as methods of mass production and mass distribution created a national market, as corporate capitalism begot an expanding middle class with time and money to spend on leisure, tourism emerged as a form of geographical consumption that centered on the sights and scenes of the American nation” (Shaffer 3). She goes on to argue that, “...national tourism, as it emerged between 1880 and 1940, was integrally involved in a larger cultural dialogue about shared national identity and an ideal of mobile citizenship that affirmed and legitimized the social, economic, and political relations of modern consumer culture” (Shaffer 6). To me, it is intriguing to think about the ways in which the creation of national parks were a part of a larger national development during this time period—again, tourism was the most important factor in the expansion and development of the

national park service, and tourism to the national parks only developed alongside these other advancements.

In fact, during the first decade of the twentieth century, the national parks and other American tourist destinations were completely managed by the companies that made travel to those destinations possible. When Shaffer writes about the national parks and other natural spaces that later became national parks (predominantly in the west), she describes them as being managed and even created by tourism and the entities, such as railroad companies, that made tourism possible. She states that

In building lavish resort hotels, in promoting natural wonders, and in advocating for the creation of national parks, transcontinental railway companies such as the Southern Pacific, the Northern Pacific, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe, and, most notably, the Great Northern linked tourism with their mission of nation building and the national mythology of Manifest Destiny and in the process instituted a national tourism that depended on technological, economic, and social infrastructure of the modern nation-state. (Shaffer 42)

Here, we see that not only did the companies like the Northern Pacific, the Southern Pacific, and other rail lines create and manage the national parks, but they also created the sense of national identity that was beginning to form in relation to the national parks.

To me, one of the most striking arguments Shaffer makes is that tourism created the natural landmarks we recognize today, which can be put into conversation with the ideas of creating national parks (in terms of passing legislation to protect the park area) and of creating wilderness. She writes,

Tourist industries used the strategies of modern marketing to develop and promote brand-name tourist destinations that would attract a national clientele. In the process, they created and marketed tourist landscapes as quintessentially American places, consciously highlighting certain meanings and myths while ignoring others, deliberately arranging historical events and anecdotes, intentionally framing certain scenes and views into a coherent national whole. (Shaffer 4)

While the legal protection of landscapes was used to create national parks, I would agree with Shaffer that protection of national parks would not have even gotten as far as passing legislation, without the increased tourism to parks. It was not until the national parks became tourist destinations that many of them were protected—again supporting the idea that national parks were much more created spaces to attract tourists than they were created spaces to protect wildlife. I see this marketing of tourist destinations as also being a sort of conversation: without the natural features and beautiful landscapes, tourism to those destinations would not exist, but without tourism, those natural landscapes might not be protected as national parks or, perhaps, even be recognized as being beautiful.

Looking at John Muir's later works with Shaffer's history of tourism in mind helps illustrate the changing nature of American tourism at the turn of the twentieth century. Though much of *Our National Parks* (1901) takes on the same sense of attempting to catalogue the landscapes of the plant and animal species in the national parks as Muir's earlier works—Muir devotes chapters to the animal species and to the bird species of Yosemite National Park, as well as to the “wild gardens,” forests, and streams of Yosemite—I noticed that Muir takes a different tone when he describes these features than he did in his earlier writings. In *The Mountains of California* (1894), Muir described the landscapes and species of the Sierra Nevada and of the Yosemite area lovingly, and seems to strongly resent human-induced changes to the environment. In *Our National Parks*, however, Muir presents the national parks as welcoming spaces for visitors to enjoy nature and to have a “wilderness experience,” as well as areas where natural resources were readily available. To me, this does not necessarily show a change in Muir's opinions about the protection and appropriate uses of Yosemite and other national parks, but shows that he had learned to work with the general opinions about tourism and national parks of the time period, and how he needed to present the landscapes and species of the national parks in order to get the protection he wanted for them.

From the first sentence of *Our National Parks*, Muir's changing focus is noticeable. He seemed excited that people were interested in visiting national parks, writing, “The tendency nowadays to wander in wilderness is delightful to see. Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out

that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as foundations of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life” (Muir 1). To me, Muir’s enthusiasm at this aspect of the development of the national parks seems genuine, not just a part of his attempts to work within the dominant ideas surrounding national parks. For much of his time in California, Muir had been alone in his scientific exploration of the Sierra Nevada, and most of the people he encountered were likely taking part in industries that harmed the environment. So, it seems reasonable to me that Muir would be excited to find that people were interested in visiting the national parks and sharing in his enjoyment of the scenery and species of the national parks as they were. His excitement comes with reservations, however, as demonstrated when he writes:

This is fine and natural and full of promise. So also is the growing interest in the care and preservation of forests and wild places in general, and in the half wild parks and gardens of towns. Even the scenery habitat in its most artificial forms, mixed with spectacles, silliness, and kodaks; its devotees arrayed more gorgeously than scarlet tanagers, frightening the wild game with red umbrellas, —even this is encouraging, and may well be regarded as a hopeful sign of the times. (Muir 2)

Here, Muir seemed to be slightly concerned that people were concentrating their energies on areas like city parks and gardens that were not as wild and therefore

not as important to protect as national parks, and that visitors were not necessarily behaving appropriately when they did visit a national park or other more natural area. In the end, Muir concluded that any interest was good, and saw any interest in nature as promising. As the realities of creating a park became more and more clear, it seems that Muir realized the importance of tourism in imparting his ideas for protecting the wilderness

Although Muir had described the landscape of the Sierra Nevada as “happy” in *The Mountains of California*, in *Our National Parks* he began to focus more on the “welcoming” aspects of the national parks. He made an effort to present the parks as places that visitors would find beautiful, welcoming, and easy to access, rather than as frightening wildernesses. As he moved into discussion about specific parks, Muir wrote:

The wildest heath and pleasure grounds accessible and available to tourists seeking escape from care and dust and early death are the parks and reservations of the West. There are four national parks, —the Yellowstone, Yosemite, General Grant, and Sequoia, —all within easy reach, and thirty forest reservations, a magnificent realm of woods, most of which, by railroads and trails and open ridges, is also fairly accessible, not only to the determined traveler rejoicing in difficulties, but to those (may their tribe increase) who, not tired, not sick, just

naturally take wing every summer in search of wildness. (Muir 12-13)

Again, Muir welcomed visitors to the national parks, and presented the parks as welcoming spaces for visitors to enjoy. Still working within a system that wanted national parks to be welcoming spaces for recreation and vacationing, Muir promoted the reservation as a space that was friendly to visitors and in which everything was peaceful and happy.

Increased tourism did not occur without detrimental effects to the national parks, despite the fact that tourism had in fact helped to create the parks. Sellars notes that, "Over time, accommodation for tourism in the national parks would become truly extensive and have enormous consequences for the parks...Allowing tourists to stay overnight in the parks meant that hotels, restaurants, campgrounds, garbage dumps, electrical plants, and water and sewage systems would sooner or later be seen as indispensable" (Sellars 10). I read this text early on in my research, and until then I had not really considered that historically, national parks were viewed as businesses. But a 1910 article called "Making a Business of Scenery," which Sellars quotes, makes that fact painfully obvious, listing demands for national parks:

We want our national parks developed. We want roads and trails like Switzerland's. We want hotels of all prices from lowest to highest. We want comfortable public camps in sufficient abundance to meet all demands. We want lodges and

chalets at convenient intervals commanding the scenic possibilities of all our parks. We want the best and cheapest accommodations for pedestrians and motorists. We want sufficient and convenient transportation at reasonable rates. We want adequate facilities and supplies for camping out at lowest prices. We want good fishing. We want our wild animal life conserved and developed. We want special facilities for nature study. (qtd. in Sellars 28)

I find the last three demands amusing—first, because national parks were purportedly created for the protection and study of landscapes and the species that inhabit them (though I have argued that this was not successful, nor was it always the most important factor in establishing national parks), and second, because the demands involving nature are tacked on at the end of a long list of other demands that would make successful protection of land and species almost impossible. Once again, it is shown that tourism usually came before all other considerations when national park development was concerned.

See America First

The most widespread and influential movement—perhaps even the only organized movement—for promoting the national parks as tourist destinations was the See America First movement. This movement tapped into a growing sense of inferiority that Americans felt in relation to their European counterparts: Americans

felt culturally inferior to Europeans because Europe could claim ancient historical sites and famous architecture and art, while the United States did not have the same long cultural history. Yet the growing recognition of the United States' natural beauty and the expanding national park system gave Americans a sense of identity based on natural, rather than cultural, assets. Runte writes:

These claims [about the natural wonders of the United States], however trivial from today's perspective, then filled an important intellectual need. For the first time in almost a century Americans argued with confidence that the United States had something of value in its own right to contribute to world culture. Although Europe's castles, ruins, and abbeys would never be eclipsed, the United States had 'earth monuments' and giant redwoods that had stood long before the birth of Christ. Thus the natural marvels of the West compensated for America's lack of old cities, aristocratic traditions, and similar reminders of Old World accomplishments. (Runte 22)

And, as appreciation for the United States' scenic beauty grew, so did the impetus for protecting certain natural features.

As I was studying Runte's argument, one thing that bothered me was that in comparing the natural assets of the United States to the cultural assets of Europe, he was trying to compare two entirely different things. However, Shaffer explains that

The story of See America First was not simply about the development of tourism in the West, it was also about the negotiation of national identity. Just as southerners and Midwesterners were engaged in inventing a shared public history in the aftermath of the Civil War in an effort to come to terms with the emerging urban-industrial nation-state, so westerners sought to fuse their history and identity with that of a modern nation-state. (Shaffer 36)

This makes more sense to me (and is perhaps what Runte was getting at)—having national parks and other tourist destinations gave Americans a sense of identity, and it was this sense of identity based in natural assets that was comparable to the sense of identity Europeans felt based in their cultural assets.

The See America First campaign solidified the sense of national identity that Americans were beginning to draw from their national parks. The campaign, which began at the See America First Conference in 1906, was originally unsuccessful. It was not until the beginning of World War I that the campaign really began to take hold, when tourists were forced to redirect their travels to destinations within the United States. Thus, the start of World War I was a boon for American national parks: Shaffer writes, “The outbreak of World War I in August 1914 marked a pivotal moment for the promotion and status of the national parks. The war effectively evicted American tourists from European resorts and attractions. Simultaneously, it intensified the discourse of patriotism and loyalty in the United

States” (Shaffer 100). Again, when American tourists no longer had any other choice but to do their traveling within the confines of the United States, the See America First campaign became more popular. And, as domestic American tourism became more widely practiced, Americans began to come to the conclusion that their own nation really did have strong, identity-making features, perhaps even a natural history that could compete with the cultural history of European nations.

The history of the national park idea in the United States is a relatively short but varied one, encompassing all sorts of aspects of changing American society—changes in technology and transportation, changes in personal relationships with natural environments, changes in touristic practices, and even changes in the United States’ relationship with the rest of the world all played a part in the creation of the national park system that we are familiar with today. Tourists began to travel via train and personal automobile, meaning that the parks of the American west were more easily accessible, but also that the parks had to develop to accommodate these new kinds of travelers. Americans began to appreciate “wilderness” as a valuable and disappearing commodity, meaning that they were more likely to travel to a national park that promised them a “wilderness” experience. Americans began to travel to tourist destinations within the confines of the United States, meaning that the national parks became tourist destinations. Americans began to realize that their natural history was in some ways comparable to European cultural history, meaning that the national parks became powerful symbols of American identity.

What did not play as large a role as we might expect today was the desire to protect natural environments by the establishment of national parks. Instead, the changing mindsets surrounding tourism and national identity were the driving forces behind the establishment of American national parks, and eventually, behind the creation of the National Park Service.

Creating a National Park Service

This chapter looks at a bit of the history surrounding the creation of the National Park Service, and then delves into the government documents that actually created the National Park Service. This analysis serves less to advance any argument of my own than to give the reader a sense of what the average American citizen in 1916 would have known about the creation of the National Park Service. Because these government bills were mentioned by name in publications like the *Saturday Evening Post*, it seems that the public (or, at least the readership of these periodicals—likely a middle-class, well educated readership) was well informed about what the different bills proposed and what changes the creation of the National Park Service would implement in the existing national parks. That being said, I do still argue that the way in which these bills discuss the national parks furthers the idea that national parks were created more to attract tourists than to preserve environments.

Changes in the American National Park System

At the time of the creation of the National Park Service in 1916, there were fourteen existing national parks in the United States. Yellowstone was the first park to receive the moniker of “National Park” in 1872, though Yosemite had already

been protected as a state park since 1864. Sequoia, General Grant, and Yosemite, officially becoming a national park, followed in 1890. These first parks were followed in quick succession by Mount Rainier in 1899, Crater Lake in 1902, Wind Cave in 1903, Mesa Verde in 1906, and Glacier in 1910. Three more parks were established immediately before the creation of the National Park Service, with Rocky Mountain established in 1915, and Haleakala and Hawaii Volcanoes both established in 1916. Two of the parks established before the National Park Service have since been disbanded: Platt was established as a national park in 1902, but later joined with the nearby Arbuckle Recreation Area to create the Chickasaw National Recreation Area, and Sullys Hill was established as a national park in 1904, but was later transferred to the management of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Before the National Park Service took over in 1916, there were also between twenty and thirty (by different counts) National Monuments under various individual managements. These monuments included areas that would later become national parks, like the Grand Canyon, and other areas that would remain national monuments, like Devil's Tower and the Gila Cliff Dwellings.²

Before the creation of the National Park Service in 1916, each national park was managed individually, often by the railroad companies that made travel to the parks possible. As the number of parks and monuments that were protected continued to grow, and as tourism to these spots became more and more popular,

² For more information on these parks, see Mackintosh, "The National Park Service: A Brief History."

the need for a governing body to oversee all the parks became clear. National parks historian Richard Sellars writes, “The various widely scattered parks and monuments had no centralized, coordinated management. National park supervisors officially reported to the secretary of the interior, but in reality to a ‘chief clerk’ who was involved with diverse bureaus in the Department of the Interior and paid scant attention to the parks. To many, it seemed obvious that a new bureau was needed to manage these areas in an efficient, businesslike way” (Sellars 29). The result of this need was the advent of a movement, led by conservationists, to create the National Park Service.

Conservationists hoped that the creation of a National Park Service would provide for stricter and more unified conservation standards among the parks. Alfred Runte, another national park historian, writes that preservationists saw the “absence of a separate government bureau committed solely to their [the parks’] welfare and management” as “the major threat to the future of the national parks” (Runte 97). Without a unified governing body, preservationists feared that the national parks would not be able to reach their full potential, and that development, particularly to accommodate tourists, in national parks would continue to happen. This was a very real fear, as the Hetch Hetchy dam in Yosemite had only recently been constructed despite park regulations on development. Runte writes:

Without permanent safeguards for the reserves, all efforts to broaden the role of the parks to include fostering patriotism, worker efficiency, and commercial success seemed pointless.

Although each national park was the responsibility of the secretary of the interior, the Hetch Hetchy affair underscored the lack of continuity in decision-making. In 1903, for example, Secretary Ethan Allen Hitchcock disallowed the dam permit, but his decision was overturned five years later by his successor, James A. Garfield. Another serious discrepancy was the absence of uniformity among the park acts themselves. As the primary illustration, J. Horace McFarland contrasted 'the Yellowstone—having a satisfactory, definite, enabling act,' with 'the Yosemite—being no park at all but actually a forest reserve.' The nonexistence of 'national legislation referring to the federal parks in general terms' also dismayed preservationists, as did what McFarland called 'confused and indefinite' management procedures. (Runte 97)

Runte paints a picture of a confused, disordered system of national parks prior to 1916, and thus a governing body was needed to make a unified national park system which could adequately protect the existing national parks, as well as whatever parks might be established in the future.

While Sellars presents the movement toward creating a National Park Service as simply attempting to unify America's national parks, and Runte states that preservationists thought the creation of the National Park Service would provide for better protection of the parks, Ian Tyrrell presents the situation in a

much different light. In his article titled “America’s National Parks: The Transnational Creation of National Space in the Progressive Era,” he writes, “not until after the Hetch Hetchy Valley proposal to dam part of Yosemite National Park heated up in 1908 did anything resembling a concerted national park ‘movement’ emerge. The 1916 act creating the National Park Service followed as a reaction to and de facto compensation for the Hetch Hetchy debacle, and the parks were popularized in a key national construction of the environment” (Tyrrell 5). Tyrrell’s assessment adds a new angle to the conversation, and is the argument that I most agree with. Preservationists had been trying to get stricter conservation standards implemented in the national parks for some time. The need for a unified park management would have been becoming obvious as the system of national parks had slowly grown over the preceding two decades. It was not until the decision to dam Hetch Hetchy—following a long and drawn out and controversial debate—was made that preservationists and legislators alike realized just how defenseless the national parks were without some kind of unified management. Though the legislators who would end up creating the National Park Service, and who had earlier supported the damming of Hetch Hetchy, may not have felt quite the sense of guilt over their earlier decision that Tyrrell suggests, that event did draw attention to the fact that without a unified National Park Service, the areas preserved as national parks were not adequately protected.

According to Sellars, there were four main activists in the movement for a National Park Service: J. Horace McFarland was the president of the American Civic

Association, which was a leader in the “city beautiful” movement; Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. was a landscape architect; Stephen T. Mather was a businessman from Chicago, who would go on to be the first director of the National Park Service; and Horace M. Albright was Mather’s assistant (Sellars 30-31). These men were active throughout the process of creating the National Park Service, attending national park conferences, dealing with opposition from the United States Forest Service, compromising with legislators in order to get support for the National Park Service bill, and writing sections of the National Park Service bill itself.

The compromises the National Park Service proponents made were perhaps their most important work. These compromises included amendments to the bill itself—Sellars gives the example of Mather, who opposed allowing livestock grazing in the national parks, agreeing to provide for grazing in the bill in order to gain support from Congressman William Kent, who owned a ranch and who would become one of the main legislative supporters of the bill. The compromises also included minor adjustments to make sure that the bill presented the National Park Service in an appealing light: Runte notes that some of the opposition to the National Park Service that Mather and other activists faced came from the name originally proposed for it, the National Park Bureau. He writes,

Some members of Congress were antagonistic to the formation of still another full-fledged bureaucracy. Accordingly, in January 1912 preservationists renamed their proposed organization the National Park *Service*. As distinct from the

word 'bureau,' 'service' implied that the new agency would not have as much political power. Others noted the significance of changing the title to suggest that the National Park Service, rather than starting off as superior to its existing rivals—especially the Forest Service—in reality must compete with them directly for its own federal funding and support. (Runte 99)

Such compromises made the idea of a National Park Service more popular with legislators, which was of course necessary if the National Park Service bill had any hope of passing.

Hearing Before the Committee on Public Lands, April 1916

On April 5th and 6th, 1916 the House of Representatives' Committee on Public Lands held its first hearing on the National Park Service bills, William Kent's H. R. 8668 and John Raker's H. R. 434.³ The hearing lasted for two days. Various proponents of the National Park Service Act, including Stephen Mather and J. Horace MacFarland, made statements detailing the problems with the current national park system and the ways in which the implementation of a National Park Service would solve those problems. Predictably, many of the issues discussed dealt with tourism

³ I was unable to find the original Kent and Raker bills. Because most of the scholarly sources I consulted only quote the transcript of the Committee on Public Lands hearing, it would seem that the original bills are simply not readily available.

and the ways in which the creation of a National Park Service would benefit tourism to the parks.

Richard B. Watrous, Secretary of the American Civic Association, opened the hearing by clarifying that the proposed park service would indeed be a *service*, rather than a *bureau*. He further clarified the nature of the proposed National Park Service, saying:

This is a business undertaking, Mr. Chairman. We have 14 national parks and a good many more national monuments. They have had to be administered as individual undertakings. We are in the position of a man with a great manufacturing institution, manufacturing a variety of products, possibly, but having no harmonious arrangement for them. We simply want to bring into the administration of our national parks a uniform management for them which may be directed from the offices here in Washington with the proper assistance out in the parks themselves. The interesting thing about it is that as the situation now is the creation of the national park service does not involve the creation of a new corps of workers. We have the workers in the Department of the Interior, which is the father and the mother of the parks. (Watrous 5)

Here, Watrous really tried to sell the idea of the National Park Service—he put it in terms of a business model, which the Committee on Public Lands would likely have

been familiar with, and then worked to allay any fears about labor within the new park service, noting that the National Park Service could be staffed by people already working in the Department of the Interior and in the parks themselves.

To conclude his statement, Watrous invoked John Muir, calling him the “father of the national parks” and saying, “Mr. Chairman, there was no more enthusiastic advocate during all his life, until the very day he died, of the bureau of national parks than the late John Muir” (Watrous 10). This continual use of John Muir to bring attention to any and all issues surrounding the national parks is fascinating, because Muir may in fact not have agreed with many of the changes in the park system that were taking place. Based on my readings of *The Mountains of California* and *Our National Parks*, I would argue that Muir would have advocated for the creation of a National Park Service based on the potential for stricter and more unified conservation regulations, but that he would have been disappointed in the proposed National Park Service’s focus on tourism and development of the parks.

Robert Sterling Yard, a national parks publicist and the author of the *National Parks Portfolio* (1916), then compared the American national park system with Switzerland’s, playing upon the nationalistic feelings that had developed out of the national parks. He stated:

Now, we can match Swiss scenery, feature by feature, and while we do not beat them in all respects, nevertheless, point for point, we will win in Glacier National Park alone. And that is simply in one of our national parks; it is, to say nothing of Mr.

Taylor's Rocky Mountain National Park, where there is some magnificent scenery that will balance off a great deal in the Alps. There is nowhere in the world anything that equals our Grand Canyon—nothing anywhere; you can not find it. All the other geysers in the world put together do not equal what we have here in the Yellowstone. There is no other Yosemite Valley in the whole wide world. (Yard 62)

Yard seemed to be playing into the Committee's patriotic emotions, hoping to promote the wisdom of creating a National Park Service that could connect and manage all of these beautiful spots into something that was comparable to the Alps or other European tourist destinations. While Yard did not specifically mention tourism in this statement, his comparison of American national parks and tourist destinations like the Swiss Alps implied that if a National Park Service were created to manage the parks, tourism in the United States could equal or surpass tourism to Europe.

The National Park Service Act

The National Park Service Act itself was the main reason I chose to focus my primary research on 1916, because it functioned as a turning point in the history of American national parks. The revised bill, which had been passed by the Committee on Public Lands following its hearing, laid out exactly what the National Park

Service would be responsible for. It was presented to Congress by John Raker on May 17th, 1916.

The revised National Park Service Act provided for the creation, “in the Department of the Interior a service to be called the national park service, which shall be under the charge of a director, who shall be appointed by the Secretary and who shall receive a salary of \$5,000 per annum” (Raker 1). The bill also laid out several permanent positions, for an assistant director, a chief clerk, a draftsman, and a messenger, and allowed for any other positions the Secretary of the Interior felt necessary. The National Park Service headed by these officials was to “promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations...by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of said parks, monuments, and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (Raker 1). The Act finally gave the Secretary of the Interior “the supervision, management, and control of the several national parks and national monuments which are now under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, and of the Hot Springs Reservation in the State of Arkansas, and of such other national parks and reservations of like character as may be hereafter created by Congress” (Raker 1), and the power to “make and publish such rules and regulations as he may deem necessary or proper for the use and management of the parks,

monuments, and reservations under the jurisdiction of the national-park service” (Raker 2). The National Park Service Act was officially signed into law by Woodrow Wilson on August 25, 1916.

Ratification of the National Park Service Act

Though the language of the National Park Service Act took a strongly preservationist bent, the effect was not necessarily what proponents of the bill expected. The bill stated that the purpose of the national parks and the National Park Service was to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations,” but the most important issue became not the enjoyment of future generations, but rather of current generations. As I discussed in my chapter on the national parks, early park managers believed that the ecosystems present in national parks were adequately protected, even with developments to accommodate tourism. So, national parks continued to be developed to attract tourism, with detrimental effects to the environment. It is important to note, however, that Mather, Yard, and other park service proponents did not necessarily see tourism and protection as being opposed, the way we do today; instead they saw tourism as popularizing the aesthetic of “wilderness,” which would in turn lead to more protection for the national parks. And, this is not to say that the National Park Service did not in any way fulfill its goals—I do believe that the National Park

Service was successful in enacting more uniform conservation standards among the different parks—it is just to say that the results of the National Park Service Act were not entirely in line with the language of the act itself.

Runte corroborates this point when he argues that the National Park Service Act was not perfect—it allowed for livestock grazing in the parks, for example—but the national parks as protected and managed under the National Park Service were in considerably better shape than they had been before the creation of the National Park Service. He concludes,

The defense of the parks, in any event, had been elevated from the throes of indifferent management to the full responsibility of the federal government. At last esthetic conservationists had an agency of their own to counter the ambitions of those who considered Hetch Hetchy merely the opening wedge in gaining access to all of the public domain, including the national parks and monuments. (Runte 104)

As I stated above, although I do not think the National Park Service immediately fulfilled all its preservationist goals, I do think it was a step in the right direction.

I think Sellars' argument, which saw the creation of the National Park Service as reconciling the preservationist and utilitarian views held by different groups associated with the national parks, speaks to one of the most important functions of the new National Park Service. He writes:

The support of Kent, Raker, and Lane [who had previously supported the damming of Hetch Hetchy, and took a utilitarian view toward natural areas] for the National Park Service Act represented an accord between the aesthetic and utilitarian branches of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century conservation movement...Creation of the National Park Service had been urged partly on the basis of need for efficient management of the parks; and, efficiently run, the parks (with majestic scenery as the basis of their economic value) could be the essence of 'foresight and restraint' in the use of natural resources to benefit future generations. (Sellars 43)

The creation of the National Park Service benefited both preservationist and utilitarian sides of the national park issue, which had long been opposed, allowing the conservation movement and the promotion of tourism to the national parks to move forward simultaneously.

National Parks in Popular Literature, 1916

I have shown that the understanding of wilderness in American culture, the construction of American national parks, and the creation of the National Park Service were very much controversial issues, at least to conservationists and in government debates. But was the general American public aware of these issues as they were being debated? Which side did the majority of American citizens take in the debates over how national parks should be used and whether a National Park Service was necessary? A study of several periodicals from 1916—the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Weekly*, and *National Geographic*—shows that these issues would have been well known among the readership of the publications, and likely among the American public as a whole.

In fact, one of the main ways in which proponents of the National Park Service Act chose to promote the issues surrounding national parks was to encourage popular periodicals to publish articles about the parks. Richard Sellars writes:

Mather also gained widespread media attention for the national parks, encouraging two highly popular magazines, the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *National Geographic*, to give the parks special coverage. The latter publication devoted its April

1916 issue to the 'See America First' theme, praising America's scenic landscapes and touristic destinations and presenting photographs and text on the national parks. With funds from the railroads and from Mather himself, Robert Sterling Yard produced the *National Parks Portfolio*, which illustrated the beauty of the parks, promoting them as tourist destination points. Yard distributed this literature to influential people across the country. (Sellars 42)

The publication of these pieces was clearly important in lobbying for the National Park Service Act. They showed that the general American public was aware of the issues surrounding the creation of the National Park Service, that the American tourist was indeed interested in visiting the national parks, and that the creation of the National Park Service was widely supported. Thus, I argue that these articles promote the same mentality as was a foundation of the establishment of the parks in the first place—that American national parks were to be used primarily for tourism, but that several exceptions show that this mentality was beginning to change.

The Saturday Evening Post

I turned first to the *Saturday Evening Post*, because of Sellars' mention that it published articles on the National Park Service. The *Saturday Evening Post* was a publication for general readership—in 1916 it was a weekly publication that included a mixture of serialized fiction and non-fictional, political essays—so it

seemed that it would be a good indicator of American feeling on various national issues. As I expected, I found that the *Saturday Evening Post* published several articles on the National Park Service, showing the steps the National Park Service Act was going through on its way to being enacted.

In my research into the government bills that created the National Park Service, I also found that the *Saturday Evening Post* was invoked as an indicator of American sentiment by those who supported the National Park Service Act. In his statement at the hearing before the Committee on Public Lands, Richard Watrous said,

I will only say that the great magazines, the weekly papers, and the daily papers are printing from week to week and from day to day news articles, and every now and then an illustrated article about the parks. I might cite the *Saturday Evening Post*, which has had an editorial in it every two or three weeks for the past three months by its managing editor, Mr. George Horace Lorimer, in very marked approval of the idea of having a national park service. (Watrous 5)

Not only was it important that the *Saturday Evening Post* was publishing articles on the national parks, but it was important that those articles were supportive of the creation of a National Park Service. Once again, these articles proved to be very influential in lobbying for a National Park Service.

The *Saturday Evening Post's* advocacy for a National Park Service began in its January 1, 1916 issue, which featured an editorial by the *Post's* editor, George Horace Lorimer. The article, called "National Park Service," introduced the *Post's* readership to the changes that the creation of a National Park Service would entail, saying:

A very simple bill to unify the management of the national parks will come before Congress this winter. It provides for a bureau in the Department of the Interior, in charge of a director who shall receive six thousand dollars a year, with such clerical, technical and other assistance as the Secretary of the Interior deems necessary; and for an advisory board of three members, to serve without pay, on whom the director may call for engineering, landscaping and like advice. (Lorimer 22)

Lorimer's reference to the park officials "engineering" and "landscaping" the parks is telling: although the article does not in any way refer to the state of "wilderness" in the national parks, it seems that Lorimer saw the parks as being a created wilderness, engineered or landscaped in order to maintain a natural appearance. And, while Lorimer does not refer to tourism in relation to the national parks in this editorial, tourism is implicitly brought into the conversation—why else would park officials work to "engineer" and "landscape" a natural area, if not to attract tourism?

Already, the *Saturday Evening Post's* position on the national parks became clear: the national parks were primarily to be used for tourism.

A February 12, 1916 editorial by Lorimer is one of the exceptions to the *Saturday Evening Post's* focus on tourism to national parks. The editorial, titled "Parks for Posterity," praised the national park system for its history of protecting scenery. Lorimer wrote:

A prime object in establishing the National Parks was to preserve their scenic attractions for future generations. They have been managed pretty exclusively to that end. The scenery is all there for future generations to enjoy. But scenery does not wear out with use, like clothing. The big travel to the San Francisco Exposition was only one of many signs that this generation has a lively interest in it; and not even Yellowstone Park has been made as available for present inspection as it might have been. (Lorimer 24)

This article, as I mentioned, can be seen as evidence of the beginnings of a shift toward equating tourism to the national parks as being potentially damaging, rather than thinking about attracting tourism as being the best way to protect the parks. But the shift was by no means complete; Lorimer still referred to the growing interest in traveling to the American national parks, and to the ability of the national parks to withstand the growing number of people who wished to "use" them. While I would agree with Lorimer that infinite numbers of people can *look* at a piece of

scenic landscape without wearing it out, I think he failed to account for the other changes that come along with increased numbers of tourists—like development of roads and hotel accommodations—and the effects that those changes might have on the scenery. Lorimer's belief that the national parks could be used or developed to some extent without harming the environments they were meant to protect refers back to a point I made in my chapter on national parks: that, at this point in the history of the national park system, park managers simply did not know enough about the ecosystems that parks protected to realize that development did affect those ecosystems. They were thinking in terms of localized parts of the landscape, rather than in terms of an entire ecosystem.

Lorimer's next editorial, in the March 18, 1916 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, explicitly brought up the issues surrounding tourism to the national parks for the first time. Lorimer played into the sense of inadequacy that Americans had felt about their lack of national identity, and put the American national park system in competition with the Canadian national park system. He wrote:

We are told on what we believe to be good authority that there were more visitors to the national parks of Canada in 1915 than to those of the United States. The reason is very simple. It is not at all that Canada's national parks are superior to ours in natural attractions. It certainly is not that there was more travel to the western part of Canada last year than to our

Pacific Coast. It is just because Canada manages her parks intelligently, and we do not. (Lorimer 26)

Lorimer assured his readership that the American national parks were in no way inferior to Canada's, and noted that all the elements needed to make the American national park system the best in the world were present—the only thing that was missing was a unified park management to pull all those elements together. Once again, Lorimer called for the national parks to be made into better tourist attractions, and by placing importance on a National Park Service's ability to construct those tourist attractions, he made preservation in national parks a far less important issue.

Like Lorimer, a writer named Herbert Quick seemed to see the creation of a National Park Service as being a way to promote development in the parks, rather than to further protect them. Quick's article, which was published in the June 24, 1916 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* and was titled "Handling the Parks," was much longer than Lorimer's editorials. Almost immediately, Quick moved into his critique of the current state of tourism in American national parks, arguing that if the parks were better managed, much of the money that American tourists were spending in Europe could be kept at home. He argued further for development in the national parks to attract that tourism:

I would rather see the Rocky Mountain National Park, which one can reach in forty-eight hours from Chicago, full of well-paid guides, waiters, rangers, foresters, horses, motorcars,

chalets, hospices and hostelries, than to see the sustenance for them lugged over to Europe—and left there. I should prefer to see similar developments in the Yellowstone National Park, Glacier National Park, Mount Rainier National Park, the Yosemite, Crater Lake, Sequoia and the Grand Cañon of Arizona. (Quick 17)

Again, like Lorimer, Quick saw the creation of the National Park Service as making management of the national parks more uniform, so that they could be developed equally.

It rapidly became obvious that Quick's idea of what constituted necessary development was quite different than Lorimer's, however, as he began to argue for the national parks to be developed in the same manner as an amusement park. He wrote:

Meantime you and I want to take some of our vacations in the National Parks. As tourists, what we want is that the parks shall be under management as intelligent and obliging as that of any commercial park or amusement association as to taking care of us when we get there, and as good as the traffic department of a live railroad system in telling us how to go and transporting us after we start. What the parks need, if they are to compete with Europe and Canada, is the amusement genius of Coney Island, raised to the level of the wonders with which it

must deal and the varying demands of the tourist public; and the efficient traffic ability of the best railroad system, or the transportation skill of the most enterprising commercial club of the livest Western city. (Quick 45)

Up until this point in the article, I had agreed to some extent with Quick—the national parks did need a unifying governing force, like a National Park Service, in order to be efficient and effective, and, in order to attract tourists, some level of development needed to be done. But this part of the article starts to veer away from what the National Park Service, if created, would be able to do. Here, Quick seemed to advocate a complete devotion of the national parks to the tourist, without giving any thought to protection of landscapes and wildlife, which would have been beyond the scope of the National Park Service.

Quick also advocated for the expansion of the national park system through elevating certain landmarks from national monuments to national parks. Then, he once again advised development, writing,

One of these monuments, the Grand Cañon of the Colorado, is as large as a fair-sized Eastern state. It is a monument in two senses—a monument in the legal sense, and a monument to our national indecision. We knew that it should never pass into private hands, and we had no idea what to do with it; so we canned it as a National Monument. It should be made into a National Park and developed. It is the most wonderful thing in

the world in the way of scenery; but it needs roads, trails, hotels, guides, and everything that goes to make up a recreation ground, save what Nature gave it. (Quick 48)

This passage was the most fascinating to me out of Quick's whole article, and really solidified my own argument, which was that tourism was the most important factor in creating the National Park Service. Quick was writing about the *Grand Canyon* here—a stunning natural feature, one of the most impressive natural features in the United States, and, arguably, in the world. And yet that feature alone, “what Nature gave” the area, was not enough to attract tourists? Had Quick and other National Park Service proponents really been worried about protecting the natural features in national parks, the Grand Canyon would likely have been one of the first areas protected. And yet, even there, Quick argued for “improvements” like roads and hotels. Once again, Quick focused only the development and revenue aspects of national parks, and did not mention at all the environmental benefits of protecting wild lands.

Another of Lorimer's “National Park Service” editorials, appearing in the July 1, 1916 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, gives an insight into a more preservationist viewpoint on elevating certain national monuments to national park status. Lorimer argued that the national monuments were not as well protected as the national parks (which, of course, were not always well protected either): “The Yellowstone is now a National Park, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior; but the matchless Grand Cañon of the Colorado is merely a Monument,

under the direction of the Secretary of Agriculture—public enjoyment of it being obstructed by a lot of mining claims, which there is no good means of getting rid of under present conditions, as Mr. Van Loan⁴ recently explained in this weekly” (Lorimer 22). Even as Lorimer argued against the destruction that natural resource extraction might cause to a natural feature like the Grand Canyon, he once again grounded the issue within the goal of attracting tourists. This time, though, while Lorimer did seem concerned with mining in the Grand Canyon in terms of how it would affect tourism, tourism seems like a more secondary concern. His separation of human activities into categories of resource extraction and tourism is also interesting—today we might see resource extraction and tourism as being different points on a continuum of destructive forces, but it appears that at the time, tourism was actually viewed as a method of preservation.

Lorimer’s final editorial on the national parks for the year took a drastically different viewpoint toward the National Park Service. It appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*’s December 23, 1916 issue, and was called “Framing the Great Picture.”

Lorimer wrote:

In some rather small ways we could wish the Government would strike a little higher note with regard to the National Parks. It is too indulgent to the national indifference to

⁴ It is unclear which article Lorimer refers to, as Charles Van Loan was a sportswriter who often contributed baseball stories to the *Saturday Evening Post*. It is possible that the article Lorimer refers to is actually Quick’s article, or that Van Loan had written an article on national parks and monuments before 1916.

sightlines. It does not seem to be aware that purblind people, who leave a generous litter of tin cans, rumpled newspapers, refuse food, and like unpleasant objects, in their wake, are keeping their hats on in church, and need to have their manners corrected. An effective driving home of the idea that pleasure in visiting the Parks is not heightened by unsightly buildings and garbage would be a good thing. (Lorimer 20)

Here, Lorimer advocated for *less* tourism and development, in stark contrast to his previous calls for national parks to be developed in order to attract tourism. The reason behind his change in viewpoint is difficult to determine—had Lorimer really felt this way all along, but, knowing that his editorials were important in lobbying for a National Park Service, had he written what he knew Congress needed to hear in order to pass the National Park Service Act? Had the increase in tourism and development in the few short months following the creation of the National Park Service already had such detrimental effects on the parks that Lorimer completely changed his mind? Whichever the reason, I feel that Lorimer's change in opinion represents the beginnings of a larger shift in public opinion on the national parks—no longer did tourists just want a resort-like experience when they visited the parks, but instead they were beginning to want a balance between comfortable accommodations and preservation of wild lands.

Harper's Weekly

While the *Saturday Evening Post* revealed more editorials about the national parks and the National Park Service, I turned to *Harper's Weekly* to look for more political pieces on the National Park Service. The "Journal of Civilization" seems to have undergone some sort of change at the beginning of 1916, however, which made it more similar to the *Saturday Evening Post* and, as we will see, the *Atlantic Monthly*.

The one article in the 1916 issues of *Harper's Weekly* that (possibly) relates to the national parks and the creation of a National Park Service was very unclear. However, unlike the articles and editorials in the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Harper's Weekly* article focused solely on conservation, rather than tourism and development. This article would be an example of the changing mindset I have mentioned, which was beginning to move away from a completely utilitarian view of the national parks. The article, from the February 12, 1916 issue, was extremely short, by an unnamed author, and was titled "The Conservation Outlook." The entirety of the article is as follows:

Unless all signs fail, a broad and enlightened conservation program will go through, Republicans cooperating with Democrats, and old-fashioned anti-conservationists yielding gracefully because of the principle included in the new bills, that the national government will not use its power where the wise action of the states makes it unnecessary. Having made

that general prophecy, we shall follow it up in an early number
with a statement of the conservation situation in detail. (145)

Although the article never specifically stated what the “conservation situation” was, it seems to be referring to the passage of the bill that would create a National Park Service. The “broad and enlightened conservation program” likely referred to the idea that, without a National Park Service, it was too easy for incidents like the damming of Hetch Hetchy to occur. With the advent of a National Park Service, however, preservation of the national parks was thought to be much more complete. The reference to “Republicans cooperating with Democrats” would seem to suggest the work of the two Congressmen who presented the original National Park Service bills—William Kent was a Progressive Republican, while John Raker was a Democrat. The indication that this bill was even attractive to “old-fashioned anti-conservationists” likely came from the amendments that were made to the original bill, including that certain areas of the national parks would be open to livestock grazing. Interestingly, however, the hearing before the Committee on Public Lands did not take place until April, and the amendments to the National Park Service Act happened in the summer of 1916, while this article was published in February. Perhaps, because the article is only meant to be a “general prophecy,” it refers to the *potential* for the National Park Service bill to unite government officials from both parties and all levels of utilitarian and preservationist attitudes. Finally, the statement that “the national government will not use its power where the wise action of the states makes it unnecessary” is the most difficult to decipher, since the

National Park Service Act would create a federal government agency to oversee the national parks. Again, it is possible that this article did in fact not refer to the creation of the National Park Service or the work to pass the National Park Service Act, but perhaps the editors of *Harper's Weekly* simply hoped that the national parks would be able to retain some of the character they had possessed under their individual management, rather than being completely changed by the overarching governing body. In any case, it is significant that the article focuses on conservation, in light of the other periodicals' focus on tourism and development.

Unfortunately, *Harper's Weekly* was incorporated into another periodical called the *Independent* in May of 1916, so the promised longer article on the details of the "conservation situation" never materialized.

The *Atlantic Monthly*

I turned next to the *Atlantic Monthly*, which was similar to both *Harper's Weekly* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, but with a slightly more literary focus. Given the similarity in content between the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Harper's Weekly*, then, it is interesting to note that the *Atlantic Monthly* issues of 1916 did not mention National Parks or the creation of the National Park Service at all. This becomes even more interesting when one looks into the *Atlantic Monthly's* history of publishing articles by John Muir. Between 1897 and 1901, the *Atlantic Monthly* published six essays by John Muir: "The American Forests" (August 1897), "Among the Birds of the Yosemite" (November 1898), "The Yosemite National Park"

(August 1899), “The Forests of the Yosemite Park” (April 1900), “The Wild Gardens of the Yosemite Park” (August 1900), and “The Fountains and Streams of the Yosemite” (April 1901). These essays would eventually become chapters of Muir’s *Our National Parks*, published in November of 1901. In 1911, the *Atlantic Monthly* published excerpts from the journal Muir kept in 1869 (the journal was published as *My First Summer in the Sierra* soon after). So, the question becomes: why did the *Atlantic Monthly* choose not to publish articles on the creation of the National Park Service, so soon after it had published Muir’s essays? Did the editors of the *Atlantic Monthly* simply feel that the issues surrounding national parks had been covered recently enough that they did not need to cover the creation of the National Park Service? Were the literary essays that Muir wrote on the national parks more appealing to the *Atlantic Monthly*’s readership, or more in line with the goals of the *Atlantic Monthly*, than the more political articles that could have been written about the creation of the National Park Service? Had subscribers to the *Atlantic Monthly* reacted badly to the Muir essays it had previously published? These are all questions that I have not been able to answer, but they are compelling nonetheless. To me, it seems likely that the lack of articles on the creation of the National Park Service was due to some combination of the above possibilities, or perhaps the *Atlantic Monthly* simply expected the National Park Service bill to pass easily, and did not feel that there needed to be any debate about it. One final possibility is that Stephen Mather did not approach the *Atlantic Monthly* about writing on the National Park Service—Sellars does not mention that National Park Service proponents

encouraged publications other than the *Saturday Evening Post* and *National Geographic* to write about the National Park Service bill.

National Geographic

I chose *National Geographic* as the final periodical I wished to study because, while many of the articles in the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Harper's Weekly* focused on world issues, like World War I, or national issues, like prohibition, *National Geographic* generally did not focus on the important political issues of the day. Instead, articles read like travel guides to different regions of the world: "The World's Strangest Capital" (March 1916), "A Little Journey in Honduras" (August 1916), and "The Luster of Ancient Mexico" (July 1916). The only articles which incorporated current issues did so in a manner similar to the typical *National Geographic* travel guide-type articles, such as "The Cradle of Civilization: The Historic Lands Along the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers Where Briton is Fighting Turk" (February 1916).

And yet, as Sellars mentions, the April 1916 issue of *National Geographic* was devoted to promoting the See America First movement, which was certainly a current issue. It would seem that because it was a current issue dealing with tourism, however, that an article on the See America First movement fit within the purview of *National Geographic*. The entire issue was made up of one article called "The Land of the Best," by Gilbert H. Grosvenor. The first pages of the article introduced the See America First theme: Grosvenor argued that too many American

tourists were visiting Europe, rather than staying in the United States and visiting the various parks and tourist attractions that the United States had to offer. He then argued that while Europe had much more art and architecture to attract tourists, the United States had scenery and natural features that could not be found anywhere else in the world:

It is true that one finds more ancient culture in Europe. It is also true that he finds more splendid architecture. And likewise it is true that he finds there better art; for before America was born into the family of nations Europe had castles and cathedrals and masterpieces of art and sculpture. But in that architecture which is voiced in the glorious temples of the sequoia grove and in the castles of the Grand Canyon, in that art which is mirrored in the American lakes, which is painted in geyser basins and frescoed upon the side walls of the mightiest canyons, there is a majesty and an appeal that the mere handiwork of man, splendid though it may be, can never rival. (Grosvenor 327)

By playing into Americans' growing nationalistic pride in their natural landscapes, Grosvenor hoped to promote tourism within the United States. And, because much of this tourism would be directed toward the national parks, Grosvenor once again brought tourism to the forefront of the ongoing conversation surrounding the national parks.

Despite the focus on the See America First theme, Grosvenor seemed to see the purpose of his article as being more about adding to the literature on American tourist destinations than about promoting tourism. Of course, the two goals were intertwined—a growing body of literature on American tourist spots would naturally promote tourism to those spots. Moreover, Grosvenor blamed the lack of promotional material about American tourist spots for the history of American tourists visiting Europe rather than staying within their own nation. He wrote:

When one comes to examine the literature of America for the tourist, one is amazed at the contrast between that literature and what he finds from other countries. Baedeker publishes a guide-book in three volumes to tell about Italy, and one volume to tell about the United States and Mexico. One can find more literature about the geysers of New Zealand than about those of the Yellowstone (although the Yellowstone contains more geysers than all the rest of the world); more about the troglodytes of northern Africa and Asia Minor than about the cliff-dwellers of Arizona and New Mexico, though the latter were much more ingenious and more amazing in their achievements. (Grosvenor 328)

Grosvenor saw it as his job to rectify this situation through his *National Geographic* article, though he was careful to say that no magazine article could possibly cover all of the “places of scenic and historic interest in our country” (Grosvenor 328).

Unlike the *Saturday Evening Post* articles, Grosvenor's made absolutely no comment on the efficacy of national parks in terms of protecting important American wildness, or on the creation of a National Park Service; he simply discussed the tourist attractions within each park, as well as other tourist information such as hotel accommodations. The descriptions of the National Parks read like a travel guide, which of course correlated with Grosvenor's goal of attracting tourists to vacation spots within the United States. Each park was given its own section of a few paragraphs. Within each section, the main tourist attractions of the park were described—Old Faithful for Yellowstone National Park and Longs Peak for Rocky Mountain National Park, for example. The descriptions of several parks contained accounts of the accommodations and amenities that were available to tourists: of Glacier National Park, Grosvenor wrote, "This park covers an area of 1,534 square miles, and maintains such an excellent chain of chalets, hotels, and trails that the tourist can see its many attractions in comfort" (Grosvenor 411). In the case of Glacier, Grosvenor even counted a neighboring Native American reservation as an amenity that tourists would be interested in: "As the Blackfeet Indian Reservation adjoins the park, the visitor has the added touch of charm that Indian life gives to any wild place" (Grosvenor 411). Yosemite in particular was described in the manner of John Muir's later writings; it was rapturously described as a happy, welcoming space for visitors. When one reads this passage, it seems very likely that Grosvenor was familiar with Muir's descriptions of Yosemite:

No words can adequately describe the majesty and friendliness of the giant redwood trees of the Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks, the stately granite domes and sharp pinnacles, the roaring white cascades, the deep, dark canyons; the fragrance of meadows carpeted with lupine, columbine, evening primrose, mariposa lily, shooting-star, pride of the mountain, etc., and the many sweet-scented pines and cedars, among which are flitting countless songsters dressed in as lovely colors as the flowers. In this fairyland, the lover of outdoor life can camp for months in summer without taking tent or raincoat, for it never rains here in vacation time.

(Grosvenor 413)

Grosvenor quipped that not only were the national parks more beautiful than anything that could be found in Europe, but they were so well equipped to accommodate tourists that even the weather cooperated! These guide-book descriptions of the national parks advanced the idea that national parks were only for tourist use. The passage above does not say, “look at all the species of wildflowers the national parks have helped preserve and protect,” rather it says, “look at all the species of wildflowers that are here *waiting for you*.” Focusing on the ways in which the parks were welcoming for tourists implied that without a steady stream of tourists to enjoy the parks, the parks were useless. In addition, the guide-book style of Grosvenor’s article would have helped Americans feel a sense of pride

and ownership of their national parks the way Europeans felt a sense of pride and ownership of their cultural history—now, American national parks were just as worthy of being written about as European landmarks.

Though he took the time to describe each park individually, Grosvenor never forgot the main point of his article—to compare the American landscape favorably to the European tourist destinations. In the section on the Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks, he wrote:

Switzerland, the playground of Europe, visited annually (until 1915) by more than 100,000 Americans, cannot be compared in attractiveness with the High Sierra of central California. Nothing in the Alps can rival the famous Yosemite Valley, which is as unique as the Grand Canyon. The view from the summit of Mt. Whitney surpasses that from any of the peaks of Switzerland. There are no canyons in Switzerland equal to those of the Kern and the King rivers, which contain scores of waterfalls and roaring streams, any one of which in Europe would draw many thousands of visitors annually. (Grosvenor 417-418)

Grosvenor went on to argue that, “Though the parks are remote from the Atlantic coast, they are not so distant as the playgrounds in Europe, and are reached by the tourist much more easily and quickly” (Grosvenor 421). So, Grosvenor implied, while their beauty in comparison to the European vacation destinations should have

been enough, the national parks were also more convenient to travel to, if tourists needed the added incentive.



"The Giant Geyser of Yellowstone National Park," *National Geographic*.



"Alpine Flowers in Rainier National Park," *National Geographic*.

The photography that accompanied Grosvenor's article showed a marked contrast to the text of the article. While Grosvenor's text implied that the national parks were primarily for tourist use, and thus described roads, hotels, and other amenities that tourists might be interested in, the photographs did not depict any of those things. Instead, the photographs showed monumental, majestic landscapes. Some of these photographs did incorporate Native Americans or tourists into scenes of park life, but even then the human figures were dominated by the natural features in the photograph—which may have been in itself an appeal for tourism.

Grosvenor's article was accompanied by dozens of photographs, some of which were hand-colored, like the one of Mount Rainier National Park, above. The use of so many photographs fits in with the guidebook-like nature of Grosvenor's article: not only were readers presented with a verbal description of the ways in which American national parks exceeded the tourist attractions of Europe, but they were able to see beautiful photographs of the places they were being encouraged to visit.

Following the April 1916 issue of *National Geographic*, several advertisements referring to visiting national parks appeared⁵. Two of the advertisements were for parks themselves, with promotions for the railroads that had service to those particular parks as secondary advertisements. Because, as Marguerite Shaffer notes in *See America First*, tourists during this period reached national parks almost exclusively by train, the method of advertising the two together would have been especially effective. One other advertisement for a national park was especially interesting,



Advertisement for Glacier National Park, *National Geographic*.

⁵ Because of the way the volumes were set up in the library where I conducted my research, it is difficult to tell which advertisements belonged to which issue. Advertisements were grouped together in devoted sections between the monthly issues, so determining whether a set of advertisements belonged to the issue preceding it or the issue following it is problematic. The advertisements I discuss may have belonged to either the April or May 1916 issues.

because it did not advertise an American national park at all. Instead, it advertised the Canadian Rockies and Canadian National Park. This is ironic for several reasons. First, it is ironic in light of Grosvenor's article, which encouraged American tourists to visit national parks and other tourist spots within their own country. Secondly, it is ironic in light of the *Saturday Evening Post's* comparison of the Canadian national park system and the

American national park system—the proposed American National Park Service was to in some

ways emulate the Canadian National Park Service, in order to compete with tourism to the Canadian national parks. Why, then, would *National Geographic* print an advertisement for a Canadian national park? It seems likely that this was not a deliberate choice on the part of *National Geographic*—they probably published advertisements for almost anything, as long as they received payment—but the fact that a Canadian national park chose to advertise in an American publication could point to the extent to which Canadian and American tourist destinations were in competition with each other.



Union Pacific Railroad Advertisement for Yellowstone National Park, *National Geographic*.

It is also interesting to consider whether these advertisements were meant to go along with Grosvenor's article (or as a response to it, if they were in the May issue). It seems possible that they appeared in the spring, when people would be planning summer vacations, and just happened to coincide with Grosvenor's article. However, in *See America First*, Shaffer mentions that national parks often advertised with the magazines which gave them publicity: "The Great Northern rewarded those papers and magazines that published articles on the park by purchasing advertising space from them. Hill instructed Kennerly to 'always have an ad in these high-class papers when they give Glacier Park a write-up, that is the best time to use them. Later when there is no story, there is no advertising value. Wish you would see that it is so arranged hereafter'" (Shaffer 77). Because of the prevalence of advertisements for the national parks that also bear the name of a railroad company, Grosvenor's article seems the likely reason for the national park advertisements that appeared in the April 1916 issue of *National Geographic*.



Advertisement for Canadian National Park, *National Geographic*.

The National Park Portfolio

The *Saturday Evening Post*, *Harper's Weekly*, and *National Geographic* articles discussed above were all written by people who did not have any professional

connection to the national parks, and thus offer insight into the different ways in which the American public interpreted the ratification of the National Park Service Act. To determine what kinds of information about national parks were being published by people connected with the national parks themselves, I turned to a book called *The National Parks Portfolio* by Robert Sterling Yard. At the time of the *Portfolio's* original publication, in 1916, the National Park Service had not yet been officially created, but Yard was associated with the movement to create a National Park Service. He was influential in promoting the National Park Service Act and in the creation of the National Park Service itself, and by the time of the sixth printing of the *National Parks Portfolio* in 1931, which was the version I was able to access, he was listed as a former editor for the National Park Service.

In her book about the national park movement, *See America First*, Marguerite Shaffer calls *The National Parks Portfolio* "an expensive picture book" (Shaffer 102). She writes:

The portfolio was composed of a series of pamphlets describing Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia, Mount Rainier, Crater Lake, Mesa Verde, Glacier, and Rocky Mountain, the most prominent national parks, in addition to one on the Grand Canyon National Monument. Each park description was illustrated by a number of dramatic photographs, interspersed with brief tables providing an overview of all the parks and bound together in an expensive cloth folder. (Shaffer 102-103)

Although the 1931 reprinting covered more parks—by that point the Grand Canyon had been upgraded from national monument to national park status, and other



"Half Dome, From Near Washington Column," *the National Parks Portfolio* (1916).

parks had been established, including Acadia in Maine and Zion in Utah—I agree with Shaffer's assessment.

The National Parks

Portfolio's verbal depictions of the national parks seemed to be secondary to the visual depictions.

Shaffer also notes the ability of the photographs to create American icons out of national park scenery and the presence of humans in the photographs: "The many

photographs captured scenic views from their most

alluring perspective, transforming the national landscape into more iconographic images. In a number of photographs solitary viewers or groups of sightseers were pictured surveying the landscape, in effect worshipping the natural icons that

embodied the nation” (Shaffer 104). As in Grosvenor’s *National Geographic* article,



"The Yosemite Valley from Inspiration Point, Showing Bridalveil Falls," *The National Parks Portfolio* (1916).

there was a disconnect between Yard’s commentary in *The National Parks Portfolio* and the photographs that he chose to include. While the text of *The National Parks Portfolio* directed tourists to the most easily accessible landmarks and to the best hotel accommodations, the photographs depicted tourists communing with remote, majestic nature.

The National Parks Portfolio chose not to include any commentary on the creation of the National Park Service, which is interesting in light of the fact that Yard was so active in promoting the National Park Service Act. In addition, each park was treated separately; there was no discussion of the parks in relation to each other or any argument for a unifying governing force like the National Park Service. Perhaps the *Portfolio* was meant to be a longer lasting publication; it seems to have been less about promoting the national parks in a political nature for the short term than about promoting tourism to and appreciation of the national parks for years to come. This type of depiction of the national parks is very similar to that found in *National Geographic*, in that it described each park only in terms of what monuments or tourist hot spots it contained, it focused much of its attention on how tourists could get to the park and what accommodations were available to them there, and it used photography to show impressive scenes of the parks.

Shaffer connects *The National Parks Portfolio* with the idea of the See America First campaign, saying, “Both *The National Parks Portfolio* and *Glimpses of Our National Parks* [another pamphlet published by Robert Sterling Yard] were meant to educate Americans about the ‘wonders’ of their own country, to instill a scenic patriotism that would unite the touring public in support of national parks” (Shaffer 103). I noticed this seeking after tourist support for the national parks almost immediately: in the first section, on Yellowstone, Yard wrote, “If you want to enjoy our Yellowstone—if, indeed, you want to even *see* it—you should make your minimum twice five days; two weeks is better; a month is ideal” (Yard 27). This

statement is reminiscent of John Muir's pleas for tourists to stay in the national parks for longer periods of time, in order to really see the natural offerings of the parks and to have a "wilderness" experience, rather than being chauffeured around and never really getting to know the parks. The feeling here is different, however. In *The National Parks Portfolio*, Yard didn't promote a "wilderness" experience in the same way Muir did—while Muir hoped that visitors would have some sort of spiritual connection with the wild spaces of the national parks, Yard seemed to want tourists to have only a *superficial* "wilderness" experience. He wanted tourists to stay long enough to see all the main attractions within the parks, and to enjoy the resort-style accommodations of the national parks, but he did not seem to be concerned with giving tourists the opportunity for arriving at any deep connection with nature.

Yard's reference to *our* Yellowstone in the quote above is reminiscent of Muir's use of *our* in reference to the national parks (as in the title of his book, *Our National Parks*), though the two uses give strikingly different impressions of the national parks. Muir's use of "our" seemed to imply that the national parks were a valuable national asset that belonged to all Americans and that should be appreciated by all Americans. Though Muir was not necessarily in favor of tourism, because of the developments and changes it caused in the national parks, he did recognize that the national parks gave Americans an opportunity to get close to nature that they would not have had otherwise; his use of "our" suggests the universal right to have a "wilderness" experience or a relationship with nature.

Yard's use of "our," on the other hand, feels much more stilted. Like Muir, Yard advocated that tourists have a more extensive relationship with their national parks, and he drew added meaning from the sense of shared national identity that Americans were beginning to feel in their national parks in the early twentieth century. However, Yard's "our" feels too utopian—by 1916, Yard was referring to established national parks which often purposely excluded people of certain races or classes.

Though Yard evoked John Muir when he referred to "our" national parks, he specifically invoked Muir in *The National Park Portfolio's* section on Yosemite National Park. Yard wrote, "John Muir loved the valley and crystallized its fame in phrase. But still more he loved the national park..." (Yard 31) and went on to quote Muir's description of all the natural features the park contained. Once again, I do not find this understanding of Muir's position on national parks to be in line with my own readings of Muir. Based on my readings of Muir, it seems that Muir wanted to protect the area that ended up being included in Yosemite National Park, but that he felt that a national park, with its development and catering to tourists, was not the most effective way to protect the landscape. So, I would argue that Muir did not "love" the national park, but merely accepted it because it was the only way to preserve the wildness of the Yosemite Valley and the Sierra Nevada region, which he *did* love. Muir had died in 1914, so it is interesting that he continued to be utilized as the "father of the national parks" (as he was during the hearing before the

Committee on Public Lands) or as a symbol of appreciation for the national parks after his death, when these readings of his work were perhaps not quite accurate.

While it would be difficult to make a definitive argument as to why different publications took different angles on the issues surrounding national parks and the creation of a National Park Service in 1916, it was gratifying for me to see that the articles in the *Saturday Evening Post* and *National Geographic* can be read as supporting my arguments—that the creation of the National Park Service was an important issue of the day, that it was debated in popular periodicals, and that to the average American, the creation of the National Park Service was important because of the effects it would have on tourism. The ways in which the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's Weekly* present (or do not present) these issues might seem to undermine my arguments, but I feel that the differences are not so significant. Neither publication ignored issues of national parks or conservation; the *Atlantic Monthly* simply seems to have focused on the writings of John Muir rather than on the creation of the National Park Service, and *Harper's Weekly* ran out of time to print its article on conservation as it combined with the *Independent*. In the end, I feel that the focus of the articles on the creation of the National Park Service generally promoted tourism and development—the same strategies that were used to get congressional support for the National Park Service—but that several exceptions to this rule show that national park proponents were beginning to turn more toward an attitude of conservation.

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