Conservationists and the Battles to Keep Dams Out of Yellowstone: Hetch Hetchy Overturned

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Abstract

Between 1919 and 1938 irrigation interests in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming repeatedly tried to construct reservoirs in Yellowstone National Park by damming several large park lakes and Bechler Meadows. Conservationists of the time joined forces with Horace Albright and Steven Mather of the National Park Service to oppose the dams. Ultimately successful in all their efforts, their key victory came in 1923 when they defeated an attempt to dam Yellowstone Lake. This victory reversed the loss of protected status for national parks that had occurred just ten years earlier at Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park. By chronicling the protracted conflict over dams in Yellowstone, I illustrate that the conservationists (including Mather and Albright) reestablished the fundamental preservation policy of the national parks and empowered the newly created National Park Service to carry out its mission of park protection. This effort was the key battle in proving national parks and wilderness to be inviolate to industrial, exploitive uses. Conservationists both defined and tested the inviolate policy in Yellowstone; their battles in Dinosaur National Monument and the Grand Canyon cemented it into place.

Introduction

Far off, there lies a lovely lake
Which rests in beauty, there to take
Swift pictures of the changing sky,
Ethereal blues, and clouds piled high.

When black the sky, when fall the rains,
When blow fierce winds, her face remains
Still beautiful, but agitate,
Nor mirrors back their troubled state.

Within a park this treasure lies, —
Such region ne'er did man devise —
The hand of Mighty God, alone,
Could form the Park of Yellowstone.

Deep gashes score its rugged face,
Where mighty rivers fall and race,

Where upflung pinnacles stand high,
With aeries crowned, whence eagles fly.

From some deep caldron, does it seem,
Come boiling springs that hiss and steam,
And Sullen mouths pit bubbling mud
Like o'erfed cattle retching cud.

There splendid geysers fling in air
Their plumes of mist — a sight most rare —
And terraced springs lip o'er the rocks
Enrobing them with crystal frocks.

Forever thus inviolate
May this our heritage of State
Untroubled lie, our Country's trust,
Protected from men's greed and lust,

Lest they the lesson fail to learn,
That though they struggle, pray and yearn,
God's wasted gifts come not again;
Men's follies — these, alas, remain!

Remain to rob the future ones
Who follow us, our daughters, sons.
They share with us, not ours alone,
Is beautiful Lake Yellowstone.

Molest it not, nor seek to bind
Its water, lest we find
'Tis not the Lake, alone, that can
Be dammed, — but soul of ruthless Man!

—Anna Elizabeth Phelps, "Yellowstone Lake" (1938)

Yellowstone's southwest corner is called "Cascade Corner" because it contains twenty-five well-known and seventy-two lesser-known waterfalls (Rubinstein, Whittlesey, and Stevens 2000). It was highly contested terrain in the 1920s and 1930s. Irrigators from Idaho, to which state the local rivers drain, attempted to dam the Bechler River and its tributaries at several different times in order to store water for summer irrigation. Not to miss having its piece of the pie, Montana irrigators proposed the same thing on Yellowstone Lake. Both groups tried numerous times and in different ways to accomplish their goals, but neither group ever succeeded. Park administrators and conservationists nationwide rose to the defense of the park, defeating the irrigators time and again.

The battle pitted farmers struggling for economic survival against conservationists attempting to uphold the integrity of national parks. Local agricultural interests took on powerful national preservation interests. Gifford Pinchot's utilitarian conservation dominated public lands policy during this era, but in this case the preservationists won out and Yellowstone's waters were not impounded.

Coming hard on the heels of the Hetch Hetchy controversy in California (see Cohen 1988), many conservationists grasped the parallel in this battle. Unlike Hetch Hetchy, however, the park protectors won, establishing the policy that national parks were and are inviolate to industrial, exploitive uses. This policy, as with most such policies, would be tested time and again, both in Yellowstone and in other parks, such as Dinosaur National Monument in Utah in the 1950s. While the policy continues to be tested today, it was the dam battle of Yellowstone that reversed the Hetch Hetchy precedent, thereby illustrating that parks are to be preserved inviolate.

This story will relate the conflict between reclamationists and conservationists over dams in Yellowstone from 1915 to 1938. I will examine the motives of both sides and the methods they used to further their ends. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of the significance of this "battle" in national park conservation history. Because the conservationist victory was so important in national park history, I will focus primarily on their efforts to prevent the dams, while attempting to present the irrigators' perspective.

The First Round of Dam Proposals: "Hands Off the National Parks!"

Background. In much of Idaho and western Montana, geography challenges agriculture. Areas that receive adequate annual precipitation for agriculture are generally too high and cold to support it, while areas warm enough for agriculture do not generally receive sufficient rainfall. Farmers have typically solved this problem by irrigating their cropland with water from the moist mountains. In the early part of the twentieth century, natural river flows provided enough irrigation water during most summer seasons, but in extreme droughts even large rivers such as the Snake were completely dewatered by irrigators (Fiege 1999). At such times, the irrigation channels ran dry, leading to the failure of the farmers' crops. The summer of 1919 was one such summer; farmers in Idaho lost over $10 million in failed crops.

To solve such problems, irrigators throughout the West began damming the region's rivers in the early 1900s to store the excess spring runoff for later summer use. In this way, they provided themselves with a form of natural insurance against the inevitable drought. Drawn upon in all years, the reservoirs were especially important during times of drought. Reservoirs such as the Jackson Lake Reservoir in Wyoming (upstream on the Snake River) were built during this period.

Beginning in 1915, farmers in eastern Idaho's Fremont and Madison counties began to search for a reservoir site to provide themselves with more reliable irrigation. They formed the North Fork Reservoir Company to pursue the reservoir, and focused on a potential dam site on the Falls River in Yellowstone's Cascade

Corner (Berlin 1915; Colonel of Cavalry 1915; Hillman 1916; Martin 1917; Albright 1985; Bartlett 1985; Fiege 1999). The U.S. Geological Survey had identified this potential site in its planning for the Jackson Lake Reservoir in 1902-1903 (U.S. Geological Survey 1904: Plate 34). When the drought of 1919 struck, the farmers increased their agitation for the reservoir. In their favor was the political climate of the era, which favored reclamation, and the Hetch Hetchy precedent, which made damming in national parks possible. Against them, however, were zealous leaders of the recently established National Park Service (NPS) and its growing group of supporters in the conservation community. The stage was set for controversy.

The battle: three major threats. Under the auspices of the Fremont–Madison Reservoir Company (evidently descended from the North Fork Reservoir Company), the farmers approached Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane to receive permission to build two dams in the Bechler region (the second dam on Mountain Ash Creek, a tributary to the Falls River). They also persuaded Senator John Frost Nugent and Representative Addison Smith of Idaho to introduce bills into Congress in early 1920 enabling the Bechler dams. On 6 April, the Senate passed Nugent's bill, S. 3895, with little opposition, but the House version (H.R. 12466) stalled (Lovin 2000). The farmers also proposed damming Yellowstone Lake and diverting its waters under the Continental Divide via a tunnel they would construct, but this proposal was never introduced into Congress *(Livingston* [Montana] *Enterprise,* 7 December 1919; McMillen 1920).

With missionary zeal the farmers promoted the Falls River project. They were Pinchot's yeoman farmer, extending American society throughout the interior West. They noted that

> Idaho is dependent entirely on the development of its agricultural resources by irrigation for further growth and prosperity. This development can only progress by the conservation of our water resources through the construction of storage reservoirs....[The Falls River reservoir] will be entirely devoted to the creation of happy farm life and prosperity....At a time when the world is largely filled with unrest, due to Bolsheviki activities in Russia and elsewhere,…it is well to remember that the owners of farm property and the people who are tilling their own soil are not Bolsheviki but really constitute our most loyal and patriotic American citizens (Fremont-Madison Reservoir Company 1920).

Agriculture, and thus reclamation, were the cornerstones of the great society all Americans wanted.

The Falls River project was only the first of three substantial reclamation threats to the integrity of Yellowstone that surfaced in 1920, as farmers throughout the region attempted to conserve the region's water with dams in Yellowstone. The second major threat arose from the discussions of a Livingston, Montana, group called the "Yellowstone Irrigation Association." This group formed in December 1919 to promote the construction of a dam at Fishing Bridge, the outlet of Yellowstone Lake. The stored water could then be sent down

the Yellowstone River to irrigate farmland in the lower Yellowstone valley. Senator Tom Walsh of Montana formalized this proposal with a bill he introduced on 7 December 1920 *(Livingston Enterprise,* 7 December 1919). This group later tried to unite Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Wyoming, and Utah in a collective reclamation raid on the national parks ([Mather] 1920; *Northern Wyoming Herald,* 28 July 1920; Ise 1979). The interstate coalition, however, was weak at best, and so the Irrigation Association focused its efforts on the Yellowstone Lake dam.

Like the Idaho farmers, the Montana irrigators envisioned a better society in the Yellowstone Valley if the Yellowstone Lake dam were built. They felt it would both reduce the damaging floods wrought by the Yellowstone River and also provide enough water to irrigate up to a million acres. Promoters believed the dam and consequent agricultural development would thereby stimulate development of the region's cities; the population of Livingston, for example, was forecast to reach 50,000 *(Livingston Enterprise,* 19 March 1920). Utilitarian conservation ideas are evident in their rhetoric:

> The volume of flow in the Yellowstone river is twenty-six times as much during the flood period in the spring as it is during the irrigation season in the late summer.…The river becomes a veritable torrent. This enormous volume of water runs to waste. Not only is there a waste of water and energy but the raging torrent does a damage that runs into the hundreds of thousands, even millions of dollars (Yellowstone Irrigation Association 1921).

The third significant threat came from Congress' passage of the Water Power Act on 10 June 1920. This act created the Federal Water Power Commission, which promoted irrigation and hydroelectric development on federal lands, *including the national parks.* While not as immediate a threat to Yellowstone's integrity, the act posed a broader threat to the National Park System in general, because it gave this commission blanket authority to impound waters in the parks without congressional approval. Reclamationists saw the act in another light, as one would expect: they believed that "the greatest beauty in the world is the beauty of use;" and "[i]f the United States is to compete with Europe in foreign trade it must at least have cheap power for industrial use" *(Electrical World* 1920).

By the end of 1920, Yellowstone was facing a three-pronged attack on its integrity. Should any of the three proposals pass, Yellowstone would cease to exist as a pristine national park. Because Yellowstone was the gem in the crown of the National Park System, a weakening of its protection would probably lead to the fall of the entire system. What happened in Yellowstone, then, was key to the future of wilderness preservation in the United States. The reclamation threat, while supported by well-meaning people, did indeed have far-reaching implications.

Conservationist response. NPS and its conservationist supporters, then, were faced with an attack that threatened to make Hetch Hetchy commonplace throughout the National Park System. Park supporters responded in 1919 and

1920 with an aggressive campaign to protect national park integrity. They began with immediate action to stymie dam surveying efforts in the parks, then followed that by publicizing the threats to the parks in the popular and conservation press and urging readers to write in defense of the parks. Political and civic actions rounded out their repertoire of defensive actions. The odds were long, though, given the reclamation fervor of the day. Still, if they could not defend Yellowstone's integrity, what would remain of the national parks?

Secretary of the Interior Lane favored reclamation, and was thus sympathetic to the proposal of the Fremont–Madison Reservoir Company. He ordered NPS Director Stephen Mather not only to allow a reclamation survey of the area but also to follow that with a report *favoring* the project. There is evidence to suggest that Mather did not originally oppose the dams. In a letter to him, J. Horace McFarland of the American Civic Association stated: "I view with deep regret and great alarm the fact that you have formally consented to the passage of the bill,…and have apparently advised the Secretary of the Interior to interpose no objection to it" (McFarland 1920b; *Livingston Enterprise*, 28 May 1920). Regardless of whether this is true, it is clear from his following actions that Mather strenuously opposed the dams. As director of the country's newest public conservation agency, he was not about to endorse another such Hetch Hetchy degradation of the National Park System. So, he initially dragged his feet on the report, then lost the order directing him to do it, then determined to resign if he indeed had to submit it (Bartlett 1985). The report he finally did submit was adverse to reclamation, stating:

> I can not submit at this time anything but an adverse report on this project, and urge upon you as strongly as I can the necessity for taking no favorable action upon it. Should I take any other view, as I see it, I would be violating the obligations imposed upon me as Director of the National Park Service, which is to so administer Yellowstone Park that it be preserved in its natural state unimpaired for future generations (Mather 1920b).

Lane was intent upon surveying Yellowstone's reclamation possibilities, however. On 28 July 1919, he directed that a permit be given to I.B. Perrine of Twin Falls, Idaho, to make a preliminary reclamation survey of the Falls River Basin and all four of the park's large lakes. Acting NPS Director Arno Cammerer telegrammed this information to Horace Albright, the superintendent of Yellowstone, who responded in a telegram:

> Any or all of these projects will ruin absolutely Yellowstone Park for public use. Hetch Hetchy project in Yosemite [is] insignificant in comparison. Public condemnation of these projects will be a thousand times more vitriolic.…Fall River Basin might well be surveyed but am sure construction [of] dam will cause wiping out our biggest moose herd (Cammerer 1919; see also Albright 1919).

A few days later, Lane carried through with his directions, granting the permit to Perrine, who was thus headed to Yellowstone for his survey. To warn Albright, J.J. Cotter of the Interior Department sent an encoded telegram stating:

"Unvouched seamanship sardachate toponym to perrine to subacute preliminary venge in fistful." Decoded, the message meant, "Secretary of the Interior has given authority [to Perrine] to make preliminary surveys in Yellowstone Park" (Cotter 1919). Alerted by the telegram, Albright scrambled to stymie Perrine. Because it was late in the tourist season, he sent the horses that Perrine would need for his survey to winter pasture early, and directed the boat company to put up its boats for winter storage (Albright 1985; Bartlett 1985). These actions kept Perrine from fully surveying the park, but he was still able to survey the Falls River Basin and Yellowstone Lake, and recommended both for impoundment (Bickel [n.d.]). Even though Albright was able to partially deflect the irrigators' onslaught, they had obtained enough information for their needs, and the threat persisted.

To help protect the parks against such threats, Mather had helped form the National Parks Association (NPA; today's National Parks Conservation Association) in 1919. Led by Robert Sterling Yard, the young organization jumped into the dam fray the following year. Yard editorialized against the dams in his organization's journal and issued a special magazine whose lead article was entitled "Hands Off the National Parks" ([Yard] 1920a). He consistently urged association members and the public "to the defense" ([Yard] 1920b). Realizing that his small circulation was inadequate for the size of this challenge, he pulled together a network of "more than 12,000 clubs and associations throughout the United States, representing paid memberships of nearly four million people in opposition to the dams" (Yard 1922a). The Appalachian Mountain Club, Sierra Club, Mazamas, and Mountaineers assisted him in setting up regional organizations to address the issue in Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle. Yard's network of groups was impressive and diverse:

> By Christmas [1920], the organizations actively at work included business associations of various kinds, chambers of commerce, teachers'clubs and federations, shooting and fishing clubs, manufacturers' associations, patriotic leagues, automobile associations, travel and outing clubs, universities, bar associations, nature study clubs, political clubs and all the greater scientific associations in the land (Yard 1922a).

Yard also networked with the country's women's organizations, specifically thanking them twice in the *National Parks Bulletin* for their strong stance against the dams ([Yard] 1920c; [Yard] 1921a; see also McMillen 1920). The number of cooperating associations bears witness to the gravity of this threat upon the idea of the national park.

Some of Yard's most active allies were the conservation groups in existence at the time. For example, the Audubon Societies of America sent out 25,000 circulars calling for letters in opposition to the dams and soliciting donations, which they used as a "National Parks Defense Fund" *(Bird Lore* 1921b). Yard was successful in uniting virtually all the country's conservation groups in opposition to the dams, including the Sierra Club (Sierra Club 1920), Boone and Crockett Club *(Livingston Enterprise,* 12 December 1920), and National Geographic Society

([Yard] 1921a). Of all the groups, though, his, the NPA, was most consistent in its defense of Yellowstone and was arguably the leader of the conservationist battle against the dams (Miles 1995).

Yard and Mather knew that the national parks were David battling the reclamation Goliath. They had to reach as wide an audience as possible, so they also published defenses of Yellowstone in popular or civic magazines. Both men were well connected with the leading conservationists of the day, such as George Bird Grinnell, Emerson Hough, McFarland, and the editor of *The Outlook,* a popular magazine similar in style to *The Nation* or *The Independent.* The editor (who remains unidentified, his or her name not being given on the masthead) closely supported Yard in opposing the dams and was clearly the opposition leader in the popular press.

Together, the American conservationists worked against the dams throughout 1920 and 1921. They frequently reported on the congressional progress of the dams and urged readers to write their representatives in opposition (see *National Parks Association Bulletin,* no. 10, 25 June 1920; no. 11, 30 September 1920; no. 13, 20 November 1920; no. 14, 22 December 1920; no. 15, 10 February 1921; nos. 16 and 17, both 20 March 1920; and no. 19, 23 May 1921; see also *The Outlook,* 7 July 1920, 28 July 1920, 8 September 1920, 6 October 1920, and 12 January 1921). Reclamationists were busy, too, promoting the dams. Five key issues emerged in the rhetoric, with the reclamationists and conservationists at loggerheads. An examination of these themes follows.

Major theme 1: dangerous precedent. Conservationists deplored the fact that if these dams were permitted, they would set a dangerous precedent, opening all national parks for commercial exploitation. McFarland, president of the American Civic Association, was the first to see this threat. In an article in *The Independent* on 8 May 1920 he called Smith's bill "the entering wedge of commercialism" (McFarland 1920c). Yard picked up on this fear shortly thereafter, and repeatedly articulated it: "One thing we certainly know, and that is that *the granting of even one irrigation privilege in any national park will mark the beginning of a swift end; within five years thereafter all our national parks will be controlled by local irrigationists, and complete commercialization inevitably will follow"* ([Yard] 1920d: 6; emphasis in original). He strongly felt that this was a nationally significant threat, stating: "[The Walsh bill] constitutes the most insidious and dangerous blow ever aimed at American Conservation, because it seems to ask for so little while really demanding the entire National Parks System, for if Congress grants Senator Walsh his way with Yellowstone it cannot refuse to grant others their way with other national parks" ([Yard] 1921b: 1). Mather agreed with Yard and McFarland, stating that "one misstep is fatal" ([Mather] 1920: 34)

The Hetch Hetchy precedent was indeed a welcome mat for the irrigationists. In its literature promoting the dam on Yellowstone Lake, the Yellowstone Irrigation Association noted that "[t]here is already a dam in Yosemite park, by congressional permission." Although the association went on to argue that Hetch Hetchy was not a precedent, they clearly knew about it—and were promoting the

same idea in Yellowstone (Yellowstone Irrigation Association 1921). Downplaying the similarity did not remove the threat.

Conservationists were quick to grasp the Hetch Hetchy parallel, and knew the Yellowstone attacks were key to overturning its precedent. *The Outlook's* editor was the first to articulate the parallel in an article entitled "Another Hetch Hetchy," published 7 July 1920. Evidently, the editor felt that the Hetch Hetchy story was so well known that he did not include explanation of it or of its parallel to Yellowstone in that article *(The Outlook* 1920a). McFarland made the parallel more explicit in *The Outlook* three weeks later, but seemed to downplay Hetch Hetchy's significance, perhaps out of fear it would be repeated. For example, he felt that the Yellowstone dam situation was more significant than Hetch Hetchy because the dams on Yellowstone Lake would ruin a key feature of Yellowstone, where the dam at Hetch Hetchy did not impair Yosemite's key feature, the valley. Further, he felt that the fact that few people would benefit from damming Yellowstone, as opposed to the great numbers of San Franciscans who benefited from damming Hetch Hetchy, made the Yellowstone dams all the more egregious (McFarland 1920d). Further evidence that conservationists saw, and feared, the parallel is the fact that they referred to Hetch Hetchy only two more times through 1938—in Mather's annual report for 1920 and in an article by Hough in *The Saturday Evening Post* the same year ([Mather] 1920; Hough 1920).

Fear of a dangerous precedent was a very common theme articulated in the literature at that time. Table 1 summarizes other authors and journals that mentioned it in some way.

Major theme 2: populism. Irrigators felt they needed the dams to build democratic society in the West—the same thing Easterners had already done. When they encountered opposition to their dam proposals, they felt as though the Easterners were intruding into someone else's business, as if wealthy elites were dictating how they should be allowed to run their lives. "I am getting a little tired," said Major Fred Reed, managing director of the Idaho Reclamation Association, "of having everything that the West tries to do, opposed by those super-men of the East, who stand with their heads in the clouds, agitating against the constructive development of the West..." ([Reed] 1920: 7). This was a common perception at the time, particularly repeated in the *Livingston Enterprise:*

> Montana shall never build up manufacturing industries in Yellowstone National park if George Byrd [sic] Grinnell, professional conservationist and writer of New York, can prevent. That Montana capital is getting ready to exploit Yellowstone park and turn it into one vast factory in [is] Grinnell's latest nightmare.…Mr. Grinnell should stick to his legitimate field *(Livingston Enterprise,* 11 May 1920; see also *Livingston Enterprise,* 4 June 1920, and *Boise Statesman,* 26 April 1920).

Yet, the national parks are national property, so the conservationists justifiably felt the dams intruded upon public property. The populism argument—that few would profit at the expense of the many—was articulated especially by *The*

Outlook. The few to profit were the irrigationists, who clearly stood to gain by damming Yellowstone waters. The many to lose were the citizens of the United States, who owned Yellowstone and would lose its resources under water. Writing in *The Outlook*, McFarland characterized irrigationists as a thoughtless minority:

> That their claims and desires are as wholly selfish as that of any others who would take the public property for private benefit is also obvious.…[I]t will cost more money if these men must pay, as other irrigation farmers now pay, for developing their own sources of water. They desire, to put it plainly, to profit at the public expense…(McFarland 1920d: 578).

The Outlook found the fact that some dam proposals called for government financing of the dams to be particularly galling: "It is bad to have natural resources, which belong to the people, taken by private interests; it is worse to have these resources used for exploiting the people who really own them; it is unbearable to require the people to pay for building the plants to be used in the exploitation" *(The Outlook* 1920b: 68). The magazine's editor continued questioning these "anti-Progressive" dams into the next year (Waugh 1921).

The populist argument took other tacks as well. Mather, for example, in his report to Lane, noted that other reservoir sites were available (such as Henry's Lake on the upper North Fork of the Snake River), but would involve the pur-

Table 1. Other authors and journals that argued against the precedent of damming in national parks.

Author/Journal	Relevant Quote
Joseph Bird Grinnell (1920).	"There is now before Congress a bill that alarms all conservationists because it threatens the integrity of the Yellowstone, our most important national park, and if it should pass would establish a precedent for commercial demands on other national parks all over the country."
Field and Stream (1920, n.p.).	"Let us, the people, create our own precedent right here, with this 'beneficent' bill. Let us demand that Congress declares itself by soundly defeating this sneaking beginning of a great conspiracy to destroy the glory of our national parks, …"
Robert Sterling Yard (1920, 208).	"The irrigation attack is centered on Yellowstone Park, but its success will furnish precedent for a score or more of projects already organized to seize the waters of other national parks."
Emerson Hough (1920, 95).	"It was only the prompt objection of Secretary Payne that kept irrigation dams out of Yellowstone Park. The other parks would have been merely a matter of detail. It would have been Hetch-Hetchy everywhere."
William E. Colby and William Frederic Bade (1920, n.p.).	"Lose no time in writing to the three men … who represent you in the Senate and the House, … that Congress establish the policy of holding our parks inviolate against all commercial exploitation."
Bird Lore (1921a, 65).	"Already other commercial interests are looking forward to repeating the benefit from the precedent they expect to be set by Congress in passing [the Smith Bill]."
Colorado Mountain Club (1920, n.p.).	"Such legislation is vicious in itself and would create a precedent dangerous, insidious, and utterly at variance with the interests of the whole people…"

chase of private lands. He felt that the irrigationists were pursuing the Yellowstone sites because they were less expensive, and wondered: "Are we justified in allowing the use of national park lands just because they belong to the government and could be developed with less expense?" (Mather 1920b). Other authors who used such populist arguments against the dams included Hough in "Pawning the Heirlooms," a very influential *Saturday Evening Post* article, and T. Gilbert Pearson of the Audubon Society (Hough 1920; [Pearson] 1921; see also *American Forestry* 1920).

Major theme 3: landscape character. Irrigators believed that their dams would not threaten, but would rather enhance, park resources. The Bechler dam "will result in replacing what is now mostly an unattractive swamp with a mountain lake" (Swendson 1920: 6). The swamp had "no value or scenic beauty, but [was] infested with flies and mosquitoes during the summer months." Besides eliminating the swamp and its pests, the reservoir and its attendant roads would provide greater access to this area of the park, thereby reducing the fire danger (Bickel 1920: 8). In a similar manner, the Yellowstone Lake dam would enhance the park by replacing Fishing Bridge, a "rickety old pile structure," with "[a] permanent, artistic bridge." Further, the topography surrounding Yellowstone Lake was steep, meaning few banks of mud would be created and few trees drowned through inundation (Yellowstone Irrigation Association 1921).

As one would expect, conservationists felt differently. They thought nature was beautiful in its intact condition. For them, extolling the virtues of the threatened areas was another successful argument, though they found themselves scrambling to determine just what the virtues of the Bechler region were, as it was not well known (almost fifty years after the park was created!). To answer the question, William C. Gregg, a New Jersey member of the NPA, explored the area in 1920 and again in 1921. He was very impressed at the waterfalls in the Bechler region, stating "those areas of the park contain divine beauties of which the men who fixed the limits of the park had no knowledge whatever.…[We] found more falls and cascades than in all the known parts of the park put together" (Gregg 1921: 469). Likewise, he claimed that the "Bechler Valley is the widest, most level and most beautiful in the Yellowstone National Park" (Gregg 1920: 83). His findings were widely reported in the press at the time ([Mather] 1921).

Besides its beauties, the Falls River basin was important for wildlife, particularly for moose. As with most wildlife, moose populations were reduced throughout the West at this time, with the Bechler region remaining a stronghold for them. Conservationists noted the obvious implications of the Bechler dams for moose: "If Congress passes [the Smith] bill, Congress will sign the death warrant of one of America's noblest wild animals…the famous Yellowstone moose" *(Field and Stream* 1920; see also Hough 1920; Mather 1920a).

Yellowstone Lake's virtues were easier to promote, as the lake was well known. Dams there would flood important resources overlooked by the irrigators, such as the white pelican rookery on the Molly Islands and geothermal features such as the Fishing Cone at West Thumb. Mather and Albright estimated

that a 25-foot dam on Yellowstone Lake (the average of the various proposals) would flood about 9,000 acres, much of that in the low-lying Pelican and upper Yellowstone river valleys. In flooding them, "several thousand acres of the finest feeding grounds for elk, deer, and other game would be made worthless" ([Mather] 1920: 26; see also *The Outlook* 1920c; Mather 1920a; Hough 1920; [Yard] 1921b). George Shiras III (for whom the Shiras subspecies of moose found in the northern Rockies is named) publicized the resources of the remoter portions of Yellowstone Lake in *Forest and Stream* in February 1921. He noted: "By raising the Lake to the proposed level, all the sand beaches, coves, and all the islands…would be obliterated, while the water would cover the lower delta of the Yellowstone for a number of miles," thereby destroying important waterfowl and moose habitat (Shiras 1921).

Conservationists such as Gregg frequently used emotive and quasi-religious language to describe the area, thereby conferring such values on the place and stimulating public response. Gregg's description of the "divine beauties" of the Bechler region is one example, as is Hough's descriptions of Yellowstone as a place made by God, an "heirloom," and a place "sacred, never to be parted with" (Hough 1920: 12). Yard used such imagery as well, stating that "the essential quality distinguishing National Parks…is their condition of untouched Nature, their status as museums of the original American wilderness…" ([Yard] 1920b: 2). Conservationists consistently used such language to describe Yellowstone, giving it a sacredness that made the proposals to exploit it all the more offensive.

Major theme 4: reservoir characteristics. Reservoirs are ugly when drawn down, exposing bare mud along the shores. Irrigators were aware of this problem, and tried to minimize the "virtual" impact of that mud. For example, Idaho's Commissioner of Reclamation, Warren G. Swendsen, stated that "it is true, upon certain years of extreme drouth, [reservoir water] will be drawn out for irrigation uses, or partly so, at least during the period of perhaps two or three months" (Swendsen 1920). Swendsen's use of qualifiers befits his governmental position. Others felt that some sacrifice in beauty was necessary to build the good society: "Beauty is only skin deep; but usefulness combined with beauty is a wonderful combination and a blessing to those who have this, and a joy to all" (Bickel 1920). Note the theme of utilitarianism here, a theme far more common in reclamationist literature than that of natural sacredness. Irrigators believed in what they were doing, failing to see how dams could threaten the national park idea.

The conservationists found the muddy banks of a reservoir an easy weak spot to attack. Facilitating their dam opposition was the presence of Jackson Lake just south of the park, a handy example of what an irrigation impoundment would do to Yellowstone's natural scenery. The U.S. Reclamation Service (now Bureau of Reclamation) had raised the level of the natural Jackson Lake with a dam in 1907 (expanding it further in 1911 and 1916), but failed to log the inundated trees at that time. Consequently, there were "dead trees everywhere about its boundaries [that] pollute the water and kill the fish" ([Mather] 1920: 23). Further, as irrigators gradually drained the lake to its natural level every summer, they exposed a bathtub ring of mud around it. Conservationists found this deplorable; for exam-

ple, *The Outlook* noted that "the gradual drawing down of [Yellowstone Lake's] water ... will almost certainly leave those shores slimy, marshy, and depressing, just as the same process has utterly ruined the once notable beauty of Jackson Lake…" *(The Outlook* 1920c: 255; see also McFarland 1920d; [Mather] 1920).

Major theme 5: factual problems. In their zeal to see the dams built, proponents may have exaggerated their benefits. For example, they felt that both the Yellowstone Lake and Bechler sites were the only or best sites available, when in fact there were other potential sites downstream (Swendsen 1920; Yellowstone Irrigation Association 1921).

Conservationists were quick to note the factual problems evident in the promoters' proposals. In his "Pawning the Heirlooms" article, Hough noted several problems. First, a dam on Yellowstone Lake would do little to control the floods plaguing the lower Yellowstone River valley, because many large tributaries joined the Yellowstone downstream of the lake and upstream of the suffering communities. Next, he pointed out an obvious dam site at Yankee Jim Canyon, about fifteen miles north of the park. This site would more effectively control floods, and would not inundate park land (recall that conservationists such as Mather made the same point regarding the Falls River Basin dam). Finally, he speculated that a dam on Yellowstone Lake "would disarrange and probably sometimes wipe out both falls of the Yellowstone River; would ruin the Grand Canyon some or all the time, leaving it the pathway of a mill-pond creek" (Hough 1920: 98).

In testimony at a congressional hearing on the Walsh proposal (see below), George Goodwin, chief engineer of NPS, concisely articulated the same points. Additionally, he noted that the additional six feet of water storage that Walsh's dam would produce was only adequate to irrigate 20% of the acreage claimed by Walsh ([Yard] 1921b; see also Mather 1920c). In the end, none of the dam sites downstream were ever used.

Initial controversy resolved. Going into 1921, then, reclamationists had the upper hand, merely because theirs was the cause célèbre throughout the West. Although conservationist strength was growing, Yellowstone's integrity was uncertain at best, and doubtful at worst. National parks faced the gloomy potential of destruction.

Yet, the tide turned. As 1921 unfolded, Congress made decisions on the various dam proposals—all in favor of Yellowstone preservation. The conservationists' advocacy against the dams had its desired effect: public opinion turned against the various dam proposals. In February 1921, both the Smith and the Walsh bills met their fate. The Smith Bill was the first to die when it was not brought to a vote in the House before the session closed. Although Smith reintroduced it the following year, it did not go anywhere.

The Walsh bill was the next to see action. Hearings on it were scheduled for the start of the next congressional session, but when five members of the Yellowstone Irrigation Association arrived in Washington, Walsh held a surprise hearing on Washington's Birthday, and did not invite any dam opponents. It goes without saying that testimony at that hearing was favorable to the dams, using the

same flood control and irrigation arguments. Walsh did hold a hearing for the opponents, but tried to catch them off guard by holding it earlier than planned (on 28 February 1921; Haines 1996). This actually turned out to be somewhat providential, since Albright was then present in Washington. Four nights before the second hearing, he met with several other prominent conservationists such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Yard, and George Goodwin, to work on their responses. They broke up about midnight and went home (Albright 1921).

At the hearing, Albright spoke as expected, repeating many of the themes already discussed, such as deploring the submergence of valuable park resources. Olmsted spoke in opposition to the removal of management authority from NPS (Olmsted 1921). McFarland, Yard, and the new Secretary of the Interior, John Payne (who was more of a park defender than his predecessor Lane was) argued that the dam would open all national parks to exploitive commercialism: "when once you establish the principle that you can encroach on a national park for irrigation or water power, you commence a process which will end only in the entire commercialization of them all" ([Yard] 1921c: 3; see also [Yard] 1921b). Goodwin pointed up the factual problems inherent in the proposal. The conservationist testimony, especially Goodwin's, "made such a shambles of the arguments of the promoters that the Walsh bill was not reported" out of committee (Ise 1979: 313). At least for now, the conservationists had won.

Walsh, however, was not so easily defeated, for he reintroduced his bill in 1922, and got the support of (another) new Secretary of the Interior, Albert Fall. Fall was initially ambivalent about the dam, but eventually stated the "Yellowstone dam will be built" ([Yard] 1922: 1). Walsh needed to get an identical bill introduced into the House, but the August 1922 election in Montana defeated his plans when Scott Leavitt, a conservationist opposed to the dams, was elected. Timing, again, was key—and fortunate (for the conservationists, anyway): Fall's involvement in the Teapot Dome scandal broke about the same time as the election. Anyone associated with him, such as Leavitt's opponent, did poorly (Ise 1979; Haines 1996). Further, Senator John Kendrick of Wyoming came out in opposition to the dam at about the same time. Leavitt's election and Kendrick's opposition combined to kill Walsh's bill for the time being, and the conservationists won again *(Billings* [Montana] *Gazette*, 15 September 1922).

The Water Power Bill's threat was addressed last. Upon learning of the new authority, Mather protested to Secretary of the Interior Payne. He in turn protested to President Woodrow Wilson, who unfortunately felt compelled to sign the act or risk losing support of several western states in the upcoming election. He did, however, exact a pledge from the bill's sponsors to amend the bill in the next congressional session to exclude the national parks (Miles 1995).

Yard, knowing that pressure for that amendment would be key to its actual passage, galvanized support among his allies nationwide. Probably due to that pressure, Senators Walsh of Montana and Wesley Jones of Washington, two of the bill's sponsors, kept their promise on 3 March 1921 (U.S. Congress, Senate 1921: S4554). They were reluctant to do so, but probably acted in response to public pressure, as Yard indicated in an article announcing Wilson's signature to

the amendment: "The campaign's greatest achievement…was…the impression made upon Congress of the people's determination to hold their national parks and monuments in complete conservation" ([Yard] 1921c: 1; see also Shankland 1970). With the passage of this amendment, the third of the major reclamation threats to Yellowstone passed away—all three defeats occurring within two months!

Conservationists attributed their victories to their publicity campaign. Albright claimed that "the 'Pawning the Heirlooms'article and Mr. Gregg's article have absolutely stopped the irrigation legislation.…Several Wyoming papers have republished the 'Heirlooms' story." He also felt the publicity turned *local* sentiment against the dams: "[E]qually important, [the articles] have served to align Wyoming against all schemes of every kind that threaten commercialism of Yellowstone Park; they have split sentiment in Montana in such a way that all of thinking people have come over to our side; and they have established large doubts in the minds of lots of people in Idaho" (Albright 1920).

Acting NPS Director Cammerer credited publicity of a different sort. He felt that by publishing their proposals, the irrigators led to their own undoing, because the public was horrified to see just what they proposed to do to the park (Cammerer 1923). Finally, letters written by thousands of Americans to their representatives must certainly have swayed those politicians *(Christian Science Monitor* 1921). Conservationists drew upon a national audience, while the irrigators' audience was only regional; the larger national audience made the conservationists successful—and would continue to do so in the years ahead.

Inviolate policy is established. As time would tell, defeating these three threats turned the tide in favor of protection. For example, when Congressman Smith reintroduced his Falls River proposal in 1923, Albright stated: "I am not very much afraid of this Fall River Basin project any more" (Albright 1923). Likewise, Mather felt that in amending the Water Power Act, "Congress placed itself on record, upholding the inviolability of the national parks" ([Mather] 1921: 22; see also [Mather] 1924: 5). Dam proposals would surface time and again through 1937, but after the 1921 victories, these proposals went nowhere. Conservationists drew no more parallels with Hetch Hetchy in the next fifteen years, suggesting the emergence of a new, important policy of park security. Hetch Hetchy's precedent was overturned, replaced by a new policy of inviolability. National parks were secure.

The opening address of the 1923 summer tourist season in Yellowstone provides further evidence that the tide had indeed turned. There, John Wesley Hill spoke for President Harding and (still another) new Secretary of the Interior, Hubert Work, and announced, "it is at last the established policy of the Government that our national parks must and shall forever be maintained in absolute, unimpaired form, not only for the present, but for all time to come" ([Yard] 1923a: 2; Haines 1996). Hill's speech was widely reported as policy-setting. For example, NPA celebrated the fact that President Harding thus became the "first President to announce publicly a general Administration policy of absolute, uncompromising conservation for the National Parks System and every

one of its component units" (Irrigation Scrapbook, 1921–1928).

Harding himself visited Yellowstone later that summer, where he stated that "commercialism will never be tolerated here so long as I have the power to prevent it." In August 1923 President Coolidge announced that he would maintain his predecessor's policies, Harding having died shortly after visiting Yellowstone ([Yard] 1923b: 1; Albright 1985). The amendment to the Water Power Bill, the defeat of the Walsh and Smith bills, and Hill's speech collectively established the inviolate policy; from here on out, all battles were a defense of it, rather than the more daunting battle of establishing policy in the first place.

Reaffirming the Policy: "Keep the Looters Out!"

Now that conservationists had established important policy, they had to defend it. Droughts were inevitable, and irrigation was essential for agriculture in the area. Consequently, reclamationists were persistent, which gave the conservationists ample opportunity to uphold the new policy. Senator Walsh soon provided the first challenge to the policy when he introduced two more bills to dam the outlet of Yellowstone Lake in December 1923. With respect to the first of these bills, Yard noted that Walsh had "changed the ugly word 'dam' to the pretty word 'weir,' which means dam" ([Yard] 1924a: 6). The other bill would have appropriated $10,000 for a reclamation survey of Yellowstone Lake. Walsh could not raise that money in Montana itself, so his bill directed Congress to finance the survey (Ise 1979). Secretary Work, though, reported adversely on the bills the following spring, stating:

> [A]bsolute preservation should be the unwavering policy of Yellowstone administration, for inestimably valuable and precious as this great park now is to the Nation, it will prove of increasingly greater value with each passing year as the common heritage of coming generations.…Any plan for the commercial exploitation of the park must therefore, in my opinion, by the very nature of its aims and purposes, immediately be foredoomed to failure, and I therefore can not recommend favorable consideration of the pending measure (Work 1924).

Work's letter effectively killed the two bills. Senator Walsh was not to be heard from again, although the idea of damming Yellowstone Lake persisted.

Compared with earlier dam proposals, Walsh's last two bills garnered little opposition, perhaps because Work was so staunchly protective of the parks, or perhaps due to the strength of the policy established in 1921. Still, the NPA remained opposed to the Walsh bills, as did *The Outlook,* which published one article restating their former position: "Hands Off the National Parks!" *(The Outlook* 1923: 357). Women's clubs continued to be active in opposing the dams. For example, the General Federation of Women's Clubs declared for "defending national parks, maintaining their standards and perfecting protective laws…until Congress definitely recognizes the National Parks System as a beneficent national institution whose conservation and highest standards must by no means be imperiled, but maintained for the Nation's benefit for all time" ([Yard] 1924b: 5).

Conservationists enjoyed a reprieve for a couple of years, but in 1926

Representative Addison Smith of Idaho concocted another plan to build dams in Cascade Corner. Smith could see the futility, after the conservationist victory in proving national parks inviolate, of attempting to build his dam *within* the park. He reasoned, then, that if he could not build Idaho's dam in the park, why not cut that land out of the park? Eliminating Bechler Meadows from Yellowstone was precisely the proposal he made in 1926 (he had circulated the idea as early as 1921; see Smith 1921; Little 1921; *Boise Idaho Statesman*, 10 August 1921). Further, to make the excision palatable to his opponents, he offered a carrot in exchange for the 12,000 acres of Bechler: the addition to the park of the 64,000-acre Fremont Game Reserve, which was just west of the park and north of Bechler. Smith linked this proposal to a bill regarding other boundary changes for Yellowstone that was circulating at the same time, and threw his support behind the addition of another 200,000 acres to Yellowstone, the Yellowstone River headwaters area, on the park's southeast side. President Coolidge, perhaps too tempted by the prospect of adding the spectacular headwaters area to Yellowstone, endorsed the measure (Lovin 2000). Smith's proposal was very popular in southeast Idaho, where 1,500 people stacked a hearing in favor of the Bechler dam in 1926 *(Boise Idaho Capital News,* 19 August 1926).

Conservationists did not appreciate the compromise, however. Both NPA and *The Outlook* launched vigorous attacks against the proposal in 1926 and 1927. They recycled many arguments from their successful campaigns earlier in the decade. NPA used its strongest language to date to describe the inviolability of national parks, stating: "A National Park…should be as sacred as a temple" (van Dyke 1926: 8). Both organizations published descriptions of the Bechler area: an article by Horace Albright in the *National Parks Bulletin* (Albright 1926; see also Albright 1928) and one by Eleanor Marshall Thurman, extension secretary of the American Civic Association, in *The Outlook.* Thurman eloquently concluded her article by stating that "In my six days [in the park] I saw no other section which offered such facilities for the man or woman or family seeking to spend a few days of quiet and peace away from the honk and fumes of automobiles, the noise and smoke of trains, and the hue and cry of the typical tourist" (Thurman 1926: 435). The groups again compared the proposed reservoirs to Jackson Lake's "low-water horror of muck," "deprecated desolation," ([Yard] 1927: 17) and "gaunt skeletons of timber and its ugly mud shores" (Thurman 1926: 434; see also *The Outlook* 1926b). They also questioned whether it was "good national policy to establish a precedent for cutting large areas out of national parks to serve local purposes" ([Yard] 1927: 17; see also Albright 1928), and answered: "Before ever Idaho was a State this land was reserved for the people of the Nation. No State has a right to it. No special interest has any business there. Americans, keep the looters out" *(The Outlook* 1926a: 229).

Of the two magazines, *The Outlook* staged the more novel campaign against what it called "The Yellowstone Grab." In three different issues, the editor poked fun at, or criticized, Idaho's residents. In the first article, the editor compared Idaho's per capita wealth and automobile ownership to that of other U.S. residents, finding figures "that [do] not make Idaho look impoverished." The editor

then wondered why "Idaho wants to take land that belongs to the American people…and put it to making more money for the people of two of her counties" *(The Outlook* 1926a: 229–230). In the second article, the editors suggested that irrigation proponents might be blinded to the area's beauty by their agricultural needs: water for their sugar beets. The editors then rhetorically asked, "What is beauty to a beet?" *(The Outlook* 1926c: 301). In the final article, they offered basic lessons in American geography to teach Idahoans that Yellowstone belongs to the nation, not Idaho, and wondered: "[C]annot somebody provide a fund for sending Idaho editors to school to relearn their geography?" *(The Outlook* 1926d: 394). In these three articles and throughout its yearlong campaign, *The Outlook* consistently cried "Hands Off!" to "the looters," and "invite[d] the co-operation of public and press in its campaign for the maintenance of the integrity of Yellowstone National Park" *(The Outlook* 1926a: 230). Specifically, they called upon the public to write their congresspersons *(The Outlook* 1926e: 554).

The matter festered for a number of years, finally ending up before the Yellowstone National Park Boundary Commission, which Congress established in February 1929 to render judgment on all the boundary revisions. The commission spent two weeks examining the contested areas, and held hearings on the matter in Cody and Jackson in 1929 (Lovin 2000). As Albright forecast, opposition to the Bechler excision ran strong in Wyoming; those present at the hearings were nearly united "against giving Bechler Meadows over to any commercial or irrigation project" (Albright 1926: 6). Some sportsmen's groups such as the Wyoming division of the Izaak Walton League and the Montana Sportsmen's Association opposed the project as well (Lovin 2000).

The commission delighted the conservationists in 1930 by ruling against the irrigationists, listing two primary factual reasons. First, "[t]he Bechler River meadows are of scenic charm and afford an engaging foreground to natural features of unusual interest,…[including] the beautiful falls of Dunanda, Silver Scarf, and Ouzel.…This region with its setting and surroundings forms a worthwhile part of the Yellowstone Park." Second, "there is an available site on the Teton River, outside of the Yellowstone National Park, which in [the committee's] judgment proves to be more economical and serviceable to the local irrigation interest than the proposed Bechler River site." Perhaps the strongest statement was the commission's conclusion: "Therefore, in the absence of a demonstrated public necessity, the commission finds that it is unnecessary and undesirable to break into the integrity of the Yellowstone National Park by the elimination of the Bechler River meadows from its boundaries" (Yellowstone National Park Boundary Commission 1931: 9). Once again, the inviolate policy was upheld: taking bites from national parks for commercial purposes was not appropriate. Irrigators would have to find another site for their dams.

Interestingly, the commission also endorsed the construction of a road from Idaho through Bechler Meadows and Canyon to Old Faithful to make the area more accessible to the public, and the addition of the Yellowstone River headwaters–Thorofare region to the park (Yellowstone National Park Boundary Commission 1931). The Bechler road was never built, and Wyoming sportsmen

defeated the headwaters proposal because they did not want to lose valuable hunting territory. In the end, the failure to add the headwaters area to Yellowstone ironically resulted in greater protection for it, because NPS would have constructed a road over Two Ocean Pass and up the east side of Yellowstone Lake to make the area accessible to the public (Haines 1996). By retaining that area in the Teton National Forest, the area was kept in its wilderness condition.

For the next four years, dam proposals involving both the Bechler region and the park's large lakes continued to circulate. There may have been collusion between the three local states in a project to dam Yellowstone Lake, sending some reserved water downstream to Montana while diverting the rest through a tunnel bored under the Continental Divide to the Snake River and thence to Wyoming and Idaho. All of these plans, however, failed when the three-state triumvirate fell apart in the early 1930s (Haines 1996). These plans received little overt attention from conservationists, perhaps because Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes strongly opposed all of them (Bartlett 1985).

Clearly, conservationists were generally successful throughout this period in upholding national park integrity. The final round of the "war" began in 1937 when Congress approved the Colorado-Big Thompson project, which involved the construction of a tunnel under Rocky Mountain National Park to bring west slope water to the dry Front Range cities (Bartlett 1985). Rocky's integrity seemed violated, even though the tunnel did not mar the surface of any portion of the park. Whether it violated Rocky's integrity or not, the tunnel project soon woke the sleeping reclamation giant outside Yellowstone and inaugurated the final dam battle. Idaho's irrigationists reasoned that if it was acceptable to tunnel under Rocky Mountain, what could be wrong with damming Yellowstone Lake and tunneling its water over to the Snake River? Idaho Senator James P. Pope and Representative Compton I. White introduced bills into Congress in 1937 to effect precisely such a project (Yard 1938).

Once again, NPA swung into action, despite enduring the greatest financial stress of its history (Miles 1995). The venerable Robert Sterling Yard editorialized against the project in 1938. Seasoned by his previous efforts to defend Yellowstone, Yard saw the many parallels with the dam battles of the early 1920s. For example, he noted that the Idaho irrigationists again called their proposed dam a "weir," echoing Senator Walsh's moniker. He suspected that Walsh "shivers in his grave, for he wanted those waters for Montana!" He echoed himself and John Payne in stating: "'When once you establish the principle that you can encroach on a National Park for irrigation or water power, you commence a process which will end only in the commercialization of them all.'" As expected, Yard called for vigorous defense against the irrigation bills (Yard 1938: 11).

Again, many different organizations passed measures in opposition to the dams, including the Sierra Club (Chapman 1938), *Nature Magazine* (1938), the American Association for the Advancement of Science (Cammerer 1938b), the Prairie Club (Lehman 1938), the Emergency Conservation Committee (Edge 1938), the Izaak Walton League (Cammerer 1938a), and The Wilderness Society (The Wilderness Society 1938). As with the previous battles, they used many of

the same arguments. *Nature Magazine,* for example, recycled the precedent argument, stating: "Give them an acre and they'll soon have a whole watershed" *(Nature Magazine* 1938: 426).

President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited Yellowstone in 1937 and promised to oppose any reclamation dams involving Yellowstone Lake. Realizing already the economic value that an intact Yellowstone Park possessed, the Wyoming State Planning Board advised against the dams in 1937 (Greenburg 1937). Even the Secretary of the Swedish Government Committee on Planning for Recreation, Professor L.G. Rommell, opposed the dam: "If commercial interests should be allowed to encroach upon Yellowstone Lake, this would mean far more than despoliation of a place.…It would be a terrific blow to the entire National Park idea which could not fail to have its repercussions throughout the world" (National Park Service 1938: 4).

Given the level of opposition to this proposal and the record of conservationist successes in the previous two decades, it comes as little surprise that Idaho's proposals were defeated. Both bills died in their respective committees on Irrigation and Reclamation in 1938 ([Yard] 1938a; [Yard] 1938b; Bartlett 1985). With them died the last serious proposal to dam any of Yellowstone's waters.

Interestingly, a compromise of sorts had been struck for the Idaho irrigators three years before. The Bureau of Reclamation agreed to add two dams to the Minidoka project, one of them the Grassy Lake Dam at the head of Cascade Creek, a tributary to the Falls River (Haines 1996). The Grassy Lake Dam is only about one hundred yards from Yellowstone's south boundary. The reservoir is much smaller than the Bechler reservoir would have been, but does serve the needs of Idaho's irrigators in dry years. Still, the fact that Idaho's irrigators jumped on the irrigation bandwagon in 1938 with their proposal to impound Yellowstone Lake speaks to their devotion to reclamation—or to the resiliency of dinosaurs.

In Montana's case, the Yellowstone River never was dammed, although the Bureau of Reclamation proposed a large dam just upstream from Livingston at the Allenspur dam site in 1972. As with the dams in Yellowstone Park, citizen opposition and testimony stopped this dam, preserving the Yellowstone as the nation's longest remaining free-flowing river outside of Alaska (Wilkinson 1992).

Conclusion

After nearly two decades of fighting, the war seemed to be over. Through it, conservationists established, tested, and interpreted a new policy for the national parks: that they are inviolate, inappropriate as places for commercial exploitation. In winning every battle and the full war, conservationists overturned the defeat at Hetch Hetchy. In so doing, they proved both themselves (as conservation groups) and the nascent NPS capable of adequately protecting their charges. At least in the parks, *preservation* prevailed over *conservation.*

Why did the conservationists win at Yellowstone when they had lost just a few years earlier at Yosemite? There are several likely reasons. By the time of the

Yellowstone battle, NPS existed and was able to act aggressively to defend the park. This, the first major attack to national park integrity faced by NPS, gave it the opportunity to prove that it was not to be pushed around as the new kid on the block. In successfully defending Yellowstone, NPS proved itself an agency capable of protecting its parks. Hetch Hetchy, in contrast, was in part victim of administrative neglect: while the Army did an admirable job protecting Yosemite, they were not as zealous a protector of it as the NPS administrators were in Yellowstone.

Furthermore, Yellowstone benefited in another way from the unique position of its battle in time: not only was there now a National Park Service, but there was also a National Parks Association. This private group of individuals was expressly devoted to preservation of the national parks, and acted repeatedly to defend Yellowstone. It is true that Yosemite had its Sierra Club, but the Club at that time was primarily an outing association, not as much a conservation group. Indeed, the Hetch Hetchy issue deeply divided the Sierra Club; while it responded in defense of the park, its defense was not as vigorous as that of NPA with Yellowstone. NPA had no such division; it cut its teeth on the Yellowstone dam battle, galvanized conservationists nationwide in support of preservation, and stuck to its cause tenaciously.

Additionally, the balance of people who stood to profit versus those who stood to lose from the two dams had shifted. All the residents of San Francisco stood to benefit from the Hetch Hetchy Dam, whereas a relative few irrigators stood to benefit from the Yellowstone dams. Only a few people knew Hetch Hetchy well enough to sense the aesthetic loss of damming it; by contrast, almost all visitors to Yellowstone stood to lose in the damming of Yellowstone Lake. The Montana and Idaho irrigators were unable to overcome this sensitive weakness, whereas San Francisco derived strength from its large numbers.

Finally, and perhaps most important, there was no formal policy at the time of Hetch Hetchy against dams in national parks. As this article has detailed, the Yellowstone dam battle established that policy by 1923. But, the Yellowstone dam battle would probably not have been won without Hetch Hetchy. In a way, the country needed a Hetch Hetchy somewhere in the national parks to illustrate what did not belong in them, to demonstrate that national parks should be inviolate. It may be easier to actually see what is wrong in a park than to imagine it; Yosemite provided the illustration of what not to do in Yellowstone.

Given the popularity of utilitarian conservation in the time between the two presidents Roosevelt, it is somewhat surprising that reclamation was stopped in Yellowstone. The fact that this strong public policy was stopped speaks to Yellowstone's strength as a preservation icon, to the zeal of those defending the park, and to the popularity of the national park idea. Although the irrigators had the best of motives in mind, their desires were irreconcilable with the preservation of Yellowstone. Moreover, their attacks on the park affirmed and cemented its preservation; few would think of tampering with Yellowstone in the future.

The policy was broadened to all national parks with the Echo Park controversy in Dinosaur National Monument in the 1950s, and with the Grand Canyon

dam controversy in the 1960s. In both of these battles, the Bureau of Reclamation proposed placing large dams in the national parks, but was prevented from doing so by conservationists. David Brower, leader of the Sierra Club, was a leading figure in both of these latter efforts, effectively leading conservationists on nationwide campaigns against the dams. As with the later rounds of dam proposals in Yellowstone, these two battles reaffirmed that national parks are inviolate.

Conservationists established a very strong principle with Yellowstone. Indeed, it is one that they defended perhaps too vigorously in future years, when the question of including Jackson Lake in Grand Teton National Park came up in the 1930s. After using it for years as an example of ugly commercialism, conservationists were hard put to support its inclusion in the proposed park. Believing that any industrial use did not belong in national parks, and nervous about opening the door to the irrigators again, organizations such as NPA and the Wilderness Society opposed its inclusion, into the late 1940s (The Wilderness Society 1938; Righter 1982). Clearly, they had good reason to uphold the policy. However, it can be argued that all policies need exceptions—wisely chosen ones, of course. The magnificence of the Tetons perhaps justified such; certainly the ticky-tack commercialism already present there in the 1940s did. Eventually, conservationists made that exception with Jackson Lake, in such a way that more cries for national park reclamation did not appear. They were able to have their cake and eat it too.

It seems as though each generation of Americans must relearn the important lesson of national park inviolability. In 1991, the Clear Rock Resources Company of Sheridan, Wyoming, proposed still another dam at Fishing Bridge: an eleven-foot dam that would have raised the level of Yellowstone Lake by five feet. As the reclamationists did sixty years earlier, Clear Rock promoted the dam's benefits, suggesting that its low profile "will make [it] nearly invisible to traffic crossing Fishing Bridge" and that it "would have a stabilizing influence on lake levels with potential benefits for the lake shore environment…" (Barker 1991). In response, NPS, thanks to the strong policy established earlier, was able to quash this threat with only one letter two weeks later (Ponce 1991). Still, this surprising proposal does bear truth to what Yard wrote in 1938 at the conclusion of the final dam battle: "[T]he threat has been staved off, [but] for as long as the waters of Yellowstone Lake are kept inviolate they will be a continual challenge to irrigationists.…The fight for Yellowstone will be a continuous affair" ([Yard] 1938a). National parks are secure, but only as long as they are defended.

Epilogue

After two hours of hiking in the rain across Bechler Meadows in Yellowstone, my friend Dave and I arrive at the fern-covered mouth of Bechler Canyon. The flat meadows offer glimpses of the Tetons through the clouds to the south. Now, though, the trail gradually begins to climb up the canyon through an open forest of huge spruce and fir trees. Right at the mouth of the canyon we see Ouzel Falls, the first of many we would pass the next two days.

We hike on through intermittent showers, crossing narrow log bridges, eating huckleberries, and stopping for breaks at Colonnade, Iris, and the recently renamed Albright Falls. In another three miles we finally arrive at our campsite, known as Three River Junction, for the three forks of the Bechler River that come together there: the Phillips, Gregg, and Ferris forks. That evening we carry our cook stove a mile farther upstream to the hotpot on the Ferris Fork, eating supper between bouts of soaking. The hot springs warming this fork are so large that we choose our desired water temperature by walking up or downstream. After the long day, we relax well into the evening, returning to our tent after dark (and stumbling over roots when the batteries in our only flashlight fails on the way back). The next day we follow the Ferris Fork farther upstream to another four waterfalls, then retrace our steps and hike out to our car in sunshine. We pass many hikers and fishers en route, as well as several moose. The last hike of my first summer in Yellowstone, I would be lured back to this marvelous—and undammed—corner of Yellowstone many more times.

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