



In the 19th century, landscape art introduced Americans to the scenic wonders of the country, places that inspired great curiosity and national pride. “Cathedral Rock, Yosemite,” by Alfred Bierstadt (1870).



National parks preserve the history of conservation in America. (Left) A long legacy of forest stewardship continues at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park (Vermont); (right) Murie Cabin, part of Murie Ranch, a national historic landmark within Grand Teton National Park (Wyoming).



The two Roosevelts stand out among American presidents for their wide-ranging involvement in conservation of natural and cultural heritage. Springwood, part of Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site (New York).



John Muir joined thousands of Americans who fought hard to keep Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park (California) from being dammed and flooded. Though the O'Shaughnessy dam was ultimately approved in 1913, organized dam opponents quickly rebounded and championed the legislation creating the National Park Service three years later in 1916.



In contrast to Hetch Hetchy, the battle over whether to build a dam at Echo Park in the Colorado portion of Dinosaur National Monument was one of the environmental movement's first major victories. In the middle foreground, Steamboat Rock and Echo Park at the confluence of the Green and Yampa rivers, Dinosaur National Monument (Colorado, Utah).



The National Historic Landmarks Program, overseen by the National Park Service, includes many buildings and other structures that are owned and managed by other agencies, organizations, and individuals. The U.S. Forest Service administers Grey Towers National Historic Landmark (Pennsylvania), the home of its first chief, Gifford Pinchot.



The 1916 law creating the National Park Service, known as the “Organic Act,” stated that the national parks were to be “for the benefit and enjoyment of the people” — words engraved on the Roosevelt Arch (named for Theodore) at the northwestern entrance of Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming.



America's great landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted helped usher in modern American conservation with his landmark 1865 Yosemite Report that called for "establishment by government of great public grounds for the free enjoyment of the people"—a prescription for a future system of national parks. This vault exhibit (left) and drafting tables (right) at Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site (Massachusetts) are part of his working office, where he designed numerous city parks, such as Central Park in New York City.



Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir at Glacier Point, Yosemite National Park (California), 1903.



The Harry F. Byrd, Sr. Visitor Center in Shenandoah National Park (Virginia) has an exhibit called “Within a Day’s Drive of Millions,” among the best in the national park system. Here you can learn about the difficult process of park-making. The exhibit includes poignant accounts of the displacement of local families in the wake of Shenandoah’s establishment, the impact and enduring footprint of the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the racial segregation and gradual desegregation of national park facilities.