

## From the New Deal to War and Peace, 1933 through 1951

Along with the great influx of parks from the reorganization, the National Park Service undertook another mission in 1933 as President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched his New Deal: helping to relieve the great economic depression then gripping the nation. Under NPS supervision, the new Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) would employ thousands of jobless young men in a wide range of conservation, rehabilitation, and construction projects in both the national and state parks. At the program's peak in 1935 the NPS oversaw 600 CCC camps, 118 of them in national parklands and 482 in state parks, staffed by some 120,000 enrollees and 6,000 professional supervisors.

Besides its many park improvements, the CCC had lasting effects on NPS organization and personnel. Regional offices established to coordinate the CCC in the state parks evolved in 1937 into a permanent regional structure for management of the National Park System. Many of the landscape architects, engineers, foresters, biologists, historians, archeologists, and architects hired under the program's auspices remained on the rolls as career NPS employees.

The NPS had encouraged the state park movement ever since Stephen T. Mather attended the inaugural National Conference on State Parks in 1921. Mather told the gathering that state parks could protect deserving areas that did not meet national park standards but which could meet recreational needs beyond the proper scope of the NPS. Most states lacked any park system plans, prompting the NPS to advocate comprehensive new planning legislation as it became directly involved with state parks and recreational demonstration areas under the New Deal. The resulting Park, Parkway, and Recreation Area Study Act of 1936 enabled the NPS, working with others, to plan parkways and facilities at federal, state, and local levels throughout the country. Its first comprehensive report under the act, *A Study of the Park and Recreation Problem in the United States*, was published in 1941.

Horace Albright left the NPS for private business on August 9, 1933, just before the reorganization became effective. Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes named Arno B. Cammerer, who had served as associate director, to succeed him. A competent if not dynamic director, Cammerer found life difficult under Roosevelt's irascible Secretary of Interior but remained in charge of the greatly expanded organization until 1940. Ickes then persuaded Newton B. Drury, a respected conservationist who had headed the Save-the-Redwoods League in California, to lead the NPS.



The American Civil War ended at the McLean House at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia, in 1865. In the 1930s the portfolio of the National Park Service was enhanced with the addition of numerous properties that illustrated diverse chapters in American history. Historic American Buildings Survey photograph by Jack E. Boucher.

With America's entry into World War II in December 1941, Drury had to preside over a drastic retrenchment in NPS activity. The CCC program was dismantled, regular appropriations for the National Park System declined from \$21 million in 1940 to \$5 million in 1943, the number of full-time employees was slashed from 3,500 to fewer than 2,000, and public visits to the parks fell from 21 million in 1941 to 6 million in 1942. To free space in Washington for the war effort, unrelated government functions were exiled to other locations; NPS headquarters moved to the Merchandise Mart in Chicago and did not return until October 1947.

The war had other impacts on the System. Many of the National Capital Parks lands, including Potomac Park and the Washington Monument grounds, were covered with temporary office buildings and housing for the influx of war workers. Park hotels like the Ahwahnee at Yosemite were commandeered for the rest and rehabilitation of servicemen. The armed forces used Mount Rainier for mountain warfare training, Joshua Tree National Monument for desert training, and Mount McKinley for testing equipment under arctic conditions.

Some wartime pressures seriously threatened park resources. Timber interests sought to log Sitka spruce in Olympic National Park for airplane manufacture. Ranchers pushed

to open many western areas for grazing. Mining companies wanted to search for copper at Grand Canyon and Mount Rainier, manganese at Shenandoah, and tungsten at Yosemite. Campaigners for scrap metal eyed historic cannon at the Service's battlefields and forts. Drury successfully fended off most such demands, yielding only in exceptional circumstances.

As America redirected its energies to domestic pursuits after the war, accelerated development of river basins by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation posed a new round of threats to the System. The proposed Bridge Canyon Dam on the Colorado River would have impounded water through Grand Canyon National Monument into the adjacent national park; Glacier View Dam on the Flathead River in Montana threatened to flood 20,000 acres of Glacier National Park; the reservoir behind the proposed Mining City Dam on Kentucky's Green River would have periodically flooded the underground Echo River in Mammoth Cave; and dams on the Potomac above and below Great Falls would have submerged 40 miles of the historic Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. Bureau of Reclamation plans to flood wilderness canyons in Dinosaur National Monument with dams at Echo Park and Split Mountain on the Green River touched off a conservation battle recalling Hetch Hetchy. Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman's decision to support the project over NPS opposition contributed to Drury's forced resignation in March 1951. Congress later declined to approve the Dinosaur dams, however, and most other such proposals affecting parklands were dropped as well.

Arthur E. Demaray, long an NPS mainstay as associate director under Cammerer and Drury, became director for the eight months remaining before his retirement in December 1951. He was followed by Conrad L. Wirth, a landscape architect and planner who had led the Service's CCC program in the state parks. Wirth's major contribution as director, Mission 66, is touched on in the next chapter.

The Depression years saw no downturn in the growth of the National Park System. Expansion nearly ceased during the war but fully resumed thereafter. From the reorganization of 1933 to 1951, 59 of today's units were added to the rolls. Forty of them were historical areas, increasing the numerical majority attained by this category in the reorganization. Eleven were predominantly natural in character, and eight would be classified as recreational.

## **Natural Areas**

Two entirely new national parks, one national memorial park later redesignated a national park, and eight national monuments protecting natural features joined the System between August 1933 and 1951; and three essentially new national parks were formed or expanded from preexisting holdings. Seven of the national monuments were later converted to or incorporated in six national parks and a national seashore.

Everglades National Park in Florida was authorized in 1934 to protect the largest tropical wilderness in the United States. It was the only national park in the far southeastern states until 1980 and remains the only one of its kind. Congress authorized Big Bend National Park a year later to encompass more than 700,000 acres of wilderness country in southwestern Texas, including the Chisos Mountains and three magnificent canyons in the great bend of the Rio Grande. Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park, established in 1947 and re-

designated a national park in 1978, includes scenic badlands along the Little Missouri River and part of Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch in North Dakota.

During his first seven years in office Franklin Roosevelt routinely used the Antiquities Act to proclaim seven national monuments. Cedar Breaks protected a remarkable natural amphitheater of eroded limestone and sandstone in southwestern Utah; Joshua Tree preserved a characteristic part—initially 825,340 acres—of the Mojave and Colorado deserts in southern California; Organ Pipe Cactus incorporated 325,000 acres of the Sonoran Desert in southern Arizona; Capitol Reef preserved a 20-mile segment of the great Waterpocket Fold in south-central Utah; and Channel Islands protected Santa Barbara and Anacapa islands, the smallest in a group of eight off the coast of southern California. Joshua Tree, Capitol Reef, and Channel Islands later became national parks. A second Zion National Monument, proclaimed in 1937, was incorporated in the existing Zion National Park in 1956. Santa Rosa Island National Monument near Pensacola, Florida, was abolished only seven years after its proclamation in 1939, but the island returned to the System as part of Gulf Islands National Seashore in 1971.

Roosevelt's eighth national monument proclamation was far from routine. Its subject was Jackson Hole, Wyoming, discussed as a possible addition to Yellowstone National Park as early as 1892. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., visited the area in 1926 with Horace Albright, then superintendent of Yellowstone, and was disturbed to see commercial development on private lands despoiling the view of the Teton Range. With official encouragement and with-

Santa Elena Canyon on the Rio Grande, Big Bend National Park, Texas. Photograph by Ann Wildermuth/NPS.





out publicly disclosing his role and purpose, Rockefeller undertook to purchase more than 33,000 acres through his Snake River Land Company for donation to the United States. When the scheme became public, cattlemen, hunters, timbermen, and other local interests bitterly opposed the land's removal from grazing, logging, hunting, and taxation. Wyoming's congressional delegation came to their aid by thwarting passage of park enabling legislation. In response, Roosevelt in 1943 proclaimed Jackson Hole National Monument to accept Rockefeller's donation. The monument also included 179,000 acres from Teton National Forest adjoining the limited Grand Teton National Park that had been established in 1929.

Roosevelt's proclamation produced a storm of criticism about Jackson Hole in particular and use of the Antiquities Act to circumvent Congress in general. Bills were introduced to abolish the monument and repeal the act's proclamation authority. Legislation abolishing the monument passed Congress in 1944 but was vetoed by Roosevelt; the proclamation was also contested unsuccessfully in court. Meanwhile, the monument's foes saw to it that Congress appropriated no money for its management. A legislative compromise was finally reached in 1950, when most of Jackson Hole National Monument and the old Grand Teton National Park were incorporated in a new Grand Teton National Park of some 298,000 acres. The act contained special provisions for tax revenue compensation and hunting in the park; it also prohibited establishing national monuments or enlarging national parks in Wyoming thereafter except by congressional action.

After the Jackson Hole controversy, presidential proclamation of national monuments outside Wyoming nearly ceased as well. Only six more monuments were so established between 1943 and 1978. Two were natural features: Buck Island Reef in the Virgin Islands, ordered by President John F. Kennedy in 1961; and Marble Canyon, Arizona, proclaimed by President Lyndon B. Johnson on his last day in office in 1969 (and added to Grand Canyon National Park in 1975). The others were of mostly cultural significance: Effigy Mounds, Iowa, by President Harry S. Truman in 1949; Edison Laboratory, New Jersey, and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in Maryland (later expanded into the District of Columbia and West Virginia) by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956 and 1961; and Russell Cave, Alabama, by President Kennedy in 1961. President Jimmy Carter's 1978 proclamation of 11 monuments in Alaska, the most substantial use of the Antiquities Act to expand the National Park System, occurred under exceptional circumstances, to be discussed later. With the designation in 1996 of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah, President William J. Clinton revived the use powers granted under the Antiquities Act. Whereas previously stewardship responsibilities for national monuments were primarily assigned to the National Park Service, Clinton left Grand Staircase-Escalante under the Bureau of Land Management, and federal agencies other than the NPS have been similarly tasked under recent proclamations.

Olympic and Kings Canyon were the other two essentially new national parks originating in the period from 1933 to 1951 that encompassed existing holdings. Congress established Olympic National Park in Washington, incorporating Mount Olympus National Monument, in 1938 after an ardent campaign by park preservationists against timber interests. After a 50-year struggle involving power and irrigation proponents, lumbermen, ranchers, and hunters, Kings Canyon National Park came to fruition in 1940 to protect some 460,000 acres of

mountain and canyon wilderness on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada. It incorporated and superseded General Grant, one of California's three original national parks of 1890.

Four previously authorized national parks were formally established during the period after sufficient lands were acquired from nonfederal sources: Great Smoky Mountains in 1934, Shenandoah in 1935, Isle Royale in 1940, and Mammoth Cave in 1941. President Roosevelt also used the Antiquities Act to order significant additions to several existing national monuments before the Jackson Hole proclamation controversy prompted a moratorium on such actions. Death Valley was expanded by nearly 306,000 acres in 1937; 203,885 acres containing the spectacular wild canyons of the Yampa and Green rivers were added to Dinosaur in 1938; Glacier Bay received an additional 905,000 acres for wildlife and glacier protection in 1939; and 150,000 acres were added to Badlands that year.

### Historical Areas

With the 1933 reorganization, historic preservation became a major responsibility of the National Park Service. Two years later Congress confirmed the Service's role as the leading federal agency in this field by passing the Historic Sites Act of August 21, 1935—the most significant general preservation enactment since the 1906 Antiquities Act.

The Historic Sites Act stemmed from desires within the NPS for stronger legal authority for its accelerated historical programs and from desires beyond the NPS for greater federal assistance to historic properties. It began by declaring “a national policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States.”

To carry out this policy, the act assigned broad powers and duties to the Secretary of the Interior and the NPS. They were to survey historic properties “for the purpose of determining which possess exceptional value as commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States.” They were authorized to conduct research; to restore, preserve, and maintain historic properties directly or through cooperative agreements with other parties; and to mark properties, establish and maintain related museums, and engage in other interpretive activities for public education. There was also a general authority for acquiring historic properties—provided that no federal funds were obligated in advance of congressional appropriations.

This restriction, from a House amendment to the draft bill prepared in the Interior Department, effectively curtailed the envisioned addition of properties to the National Park System by secretarial action alone. The Secretary could designate “national historic sites” outside the System and accept their donation, but unless and until Congress provided funds for acquiring sites not donated and for administering those that were, the NPS could offer little more than moral support. Several additions up to 1951, including Salem Maritime in Massachusetts, Federal Hall and Vanderbilt Mansion in New York, and Hampton in Maryland, became national historic sites by secretarial designation under the Historic Sites Act before being brought into the System by congressional action.

Although the act was of limited value by itself in enlarging the System, its provision for a historic sites survey—institutionalized within the NPS as the National Survey of Historic



Visitors at cliff dwellings in Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado. Photograph by Russell Lee, August 1939, for the Office of War Information. Overseas Picture Division. Washington Division.

Sites and Buildings—proved valuable in identifying potential additions. Another product of the act, the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments (re-titled the National Park System Advisory Board in 1978), used outside experts in the cultural and natural resource disciplines to review selected properties and recommend those found nationally significant for secretarial designation or inclusion in the System.

The first secretarial designation under the Historic Sites Act was Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis on December 20, 1935. The designated area, fronting on the Mississippi River and encompassing 37 city blocks, was also the Service's first extensive urban responsibility outside Washington, D.C. Ironically, the designation served to justify federal expenditures for urban renewal and a modern memorial to western expansion rather than historic preservation. Most of the area was bulldozed, and the soaring Gateway Arch designed by Eero Saarinen was constructed as its centerpiece in the 1960s.

Salem Maritime National Historic Site was the first area so titled. Designated by Secretary Ickes on March 17, 1938, it included several important structures on Salem's waterfront dating from the city's maritime prominence in the 18th and 19th centuries. Hopewell Village, Pennsylvania, became the second national historic site on August 3, 1938. The CCC was put to work restoring portions of the site, a rural ironmaking plantation of the 19th century containing a blast furnace, ironmaster's mansion, and auxiliary structures. Its redesignation as Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site in 1985 reflected the historic name of the complex.

In 1948, responding to the recommendations of a study commission, Congress authorized another major historical project in an urban setting: Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia. Among the most important historic districts in the United States, the park includes Independence Hall, Congress Hall, Carpenters Hall, and other features associated with the achievement of American independence and the establishment of government under the Constitution. In 1959 it was enlarged by incorporation of the old Philadelphia Custom House (Second Bank of the United States), which had been designated a national historic site 20 years before. In New York City, Federal Hall and Castle Clinton joined the Statue of Liberty under NPS administration.

Six United States Presidents were honored by additions to the System during the period, furthering a trend that would ultimately number presidential sites second only to battlefields in the System's historical ranks. The Thomas Jefferson Memorial in Washington was authorized in 1934 and completed nine years later. Andrew Johnson's house and tailor shop in Greeneville, Tennessee, were acquired in 1935. Franklin D. Roosevelt's Hyde Park estate was designated a national historic site in 1944, while he was still President, and was donated after his death a year later. The residence of John Adams and his son John Quincy Adams in Quincy, Massachusetts, followed in 1946. As noted under natural areas, Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park was established in 1947. The first new battlefield park to be authorized was Monocacy, scene of an 1864 Civil War engagement in Maryland; but the lands were not donated as expected, and Congress had to reauthorize their acquisition with appropriated funds in 1976 to make the park a reality. Civil War battlefield parks in Virginia at Richmond, authorized in 1936, and Manassas, designated in 1940, were more readily achieved. Congress authorized Saratoga National Historical Park, New York, in 1938 to commemorate the pivotal Revolutionary War battle there. As noted previously, the National Cemetery of Custer's Battlefield Reservation, Montana, was transferred from the War Department in 1940 and redesignated Custer Battlefield National Monument in 1946 and Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in 1991.

Fort Jefferson National Monument, Florida, containing the largest all-masonry fortification in the Western Hemisphere, was the first historical monument proclaimed by Franklin Roosevelt, in 1935. (Congress renamed it Dry Tortugas National Park in 1992.) Congress authorized Fort Stanwix National Monument, New York, in 1935; but the NPS did not acquire the site on which it would reconstruct the colonial and Revolutionary War fort until 1973. The second historical monument Roosevelt proclaimed was Fort Laramie, Wyoming, in 1938—the first of several western military and fur-trading posts to join the System. Fort Vancouver, Washington, followed by act of Congress in 1948. Fort Sumter, the famous Civil War landmark at Charleston, South Carolina, was also transferred to the NPS that year by the Army.

Although sites representing political and military history predominated, a few areas representing other themes were admitted during the period. Two national historic sites representing commerce and industry—Salem Maritime and Hopewell Village—have been mentioned. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, running 185 miles from Washington, D.C., to Cumberland, Maryland, was acquired from the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1938 as



partial repayment of the railroad's government loans. This abandoned commercial waterway, built between 1828 and 1850, was proclaimed a national monument in 1961 and became the centerpiece of a national historical park a decade later. Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, famous for John Brown's raid and subsequent Civil War activity, was an important manufacturing center in the early 19th century. Congress authorized a national monument there in 1944 and an expanded national historical park in 1963. The first of several areas commemorating African Americans was George Washington Carver National Monument, authorized by Congress at the scientist-educator's Missouri birthplace just after his death in 1943.

### Recreational Areas

Another new group of areas came under National Park Service administration during the 1933–51 period. Some were based on roads or reservoirs—modern developments rather than natural or historic resources. Others were based on natural resources that did not necessarily meet national park or monument standards and that were set aside primarily to be developed for intensive public use. Hunting and other activities traditionally barred from national parks might be permitted in these places. The reservoir-based areas were officially titled *national recreation areas*; the others were variously named but also came to be known collectively as recreational areas.

Among them were parkways—elongated parklands containing carefully designed and landscaped limited-access roads intended for recreational motoring rather than high-speed

Created in close collaboration with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in 1942, Colonial Parkway is a scenic drive linking the colonial capital with Jamestown National Historic Site and the Yorktown battlefield, Colonial National Historical Park. Photograph by Cliff Dickey/NPS.



point-to-point travel. Parkways of this type originated in Westchester County, New York, during the second decade of the 20th century. Congress then authorized the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway connecting Potomac Park with Rock Creek Park and the National Zoological Park in the District of Columbia, although this four-mile parkway—a component of National Capital Parks—was not completed until 1936. The next federal parkway was the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway of 1928–32. As mentioned previously, it was incorporated in the larger George Washington Memorial Parkway, which the NPS acquired in the reorganization. During World War II the national capital parkway network was expanded with the authorization of Suitland Parkway, a landscaped access route to Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland, and the Baltimore–Washington Parkway, providing access to Fort Meade, Maryland. The NPS acquired responsibility for these parkways in 1949 and 1950 and later sought unsuccessfully to transfer them to Maryland. Since 1975 it has classed them as components of National Capital Parks rather than discrete National Park System units.

Colonial Parkway, providing a 23-mile scenic drive between Jamestown and Yorktown, Virginia, was the first federal parkway outside the national capital area. It was authorized in 1930 as part of Colonial National Monument and remains a component of the present national historical park. By far the greatest federal projects of this kind were the Blue Ridge and Natchez Trace parkways, authorized in 1933 and 1934. Rather than serving primarily local traffic, these protected recreational roads traverse long stretches of scenic and historic rural landscape. Both were begun as New Deal public works projects and soon became National Park System units.

Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park, personally promoted by President Hoover and begun as a Depression relief project under his administration in 1932, was the prototype for the Blue Ridge Parkway. After Franklin Roosevelt's inauguration, the National Industrial Recovery Act of June 16, 1933, authorized Secretary Ickes in his capacity as public works administrator to prepare a comprehensive public works program, including the "construction, repair, and improvement of public highways and park ways." Senator Harry F. Byrd, Sr., of Virginia and others seized the opportunity to propose a scenic parkway linking Skyline Drive to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Roosevelt and Ickes embraced the proposal, Virginia and North Carolina agreed to donate the right-of-way, and that December the NPS received an initial \$4 million allotment for the project. Jointly planned by the NPS and the Bureau of Public Roads, it was named the Blue Ridge Parkway and legally assigned to NPS administration in 1936. The popular 470-mile parkway, completed over several decades, alternates sweeping views of the southern highlands with intimate glimpses of Appalachian flora and fauna and traditional log structures.

During the early 19th century the Natchez Trace from Nashville, Tennessee, to Natchez, Mississippi, became an important route binding the Old Southwest to the rest of the country. Congress authorized a survey for a Natchez Trace Parkway along the historic route in 1934 and gave the NPS responsibility for its development and administration in 1938. In 2005, the last two gaps in the 444-mile parkway were completed, linking such features as Mount Locust, the earliest surviving inn on the trace, and Emerald Mound, one of the largest prehistoric ceremonial structures in the United States.

Proposals for other parkways proliferated during the 1930s, and many were revived after the war. Among them were an Appalachian Parkway continuing Skyline Drive to Maine and a southern extension of the Blue Ridge Parkway to Georgia; a Mississippi River Parkway; a southern extension of the George Washington Memorial Parkway to Wakefield (Washington's birthplace) and Williamsburg; a parkway from Washington to Gettysburg; and a Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Parkway along and atop the historic waterway.

These proposals had much appeal in the era before other well-engineered limited-access highways eased long-distance travel, but they also stirred opposition. The Wilderness Society was organized in 1935 partly to protest such ridgecrest roadways as the Skyline Drive and Blue Ridge Parkway, criticized as intrusions in the natural environment. In 1954 William O. Douglas, U.S. Supreme Court justice and wilderness advocate, led a highly publicized week-long hike along the C&O Canal to fight the parkway plan there, effectively killing it. Such stands by conservationists, the interstate highway program, and economic considerations virtually halted new parkway construction by the mid-1960s.

The National Industrial Recovery Act also authorized federal purchase of lands considered submarginal for farming but suitable for recreation. After acquisition by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, they were transferred to the Resettlement Administration and then to the NPS for recreational demonstration projects. By 1936 the NPS had set up 46 projects encompassing 397,000 acres in 24 states.

From the beginning it was intended that most of the recreational demonstration areas would be turned over to state and local governments, and in 1942 Congress provided the necessary authority. By 1946 the NPS had largely completed the conveyances but retained portions of several areas. Most of the retained lands were added to existing System units, including Acadia and Shenandoah national parks, White Sands National Monument in New Mexico, and Hopewell Village National Historic Site. Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park incorporated two recreational demonstration areas when established in 1947. Three recreational demonstration areas became discrete units of the System: Secretary Ickes used the Historic Sites Act to designate Bull Run Recreational Demonstration Area and additional donated land in Virginia as Manassas National Battlefield Park in 1940; Chopawamsic Recreational Demonstration Area, Virginia, became Prince William Forest Park in 1948; and part of Catoctin Recreational Demonstration Area in Maryland became Catoctin Mountain Park in 1954. The latter surrounds the presidential retreat inaugurated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as Shangri-La and renamed Camp David by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Prince William Forest and Catoctin Mountain parks were previously treated as outlying components of National Capital Parks; the NPS did not count them as discrete System units until 1968.

Greenbelt Park, Maryland, like Catoctin Mountain and Prince William Forest parks, lacks "national" status. The Public Housing Authority transferred it to the NPS in 1950 when the NPS acquired the adjoining Baltimore–Washington Parkway from the Bureau of Public Roads. Initially carried as part of National Capital Parks, the suburban park offers camping for visitors to the Washington area and other recreational facilities for nearby resi-

dents. Despite its purely local significance, the NPS began listing it as a separate System unit in 1975.

As noted above, fierce conservation battles were fought during the period against dams that threatened to inundate unspoiled canyons in and near certain national parks and monuments. There was some displeasure, then, when the NPS joined forces with the dam builders to administer recreational developments and activities at major impoundments. The first of these involvements came at Lake Mead in Nevada and Arizona, created by Hoover Dam. The Bureau of Reclamation completed the dam, then called Boulder Dam, on the Colorado River in 1935. The next year, under an agreement with Reclamation, the NPS assumed responsibility for all recreational activities on its reservoir at what was first titled Boulder Dam Recreation Area.

The responsibility became a major one, for Lake Mead at capacity is 115 miles long with 550 miles of shoreline, affording extensive opportunities for boating, swimming, and camping. By 1952 Davis Dam had been built downstream, impounding the 67-mile-long Lake Mohave, and the NPS acquired similar duties there. The total Lake Mead National Recreation Area, as it was renamed in 1947, covers both lakes and surrounding lands totaling nearly 1,500,000 acres, making it the largest as well as the first area with this designation in the National Park System.

The second permanent unit of this kind, Coulee Dam National Recreation Area in Washington, was established in 1946 under another agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation patterned after that for Lake Mead. The Grand Coulee Dam, completed in 1941, created Franklin D. Roosevelt Lake—151 miles long with a 660-mile shoreline. The NPS developed campgrounds, marinas, bathing facilities, and other amenities at some three dozen locations in what was redesignated Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area in 1997.

The NPS's other major recreational initiative during the period addressed seashores. In 1934 it surveyed the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and identified 12 significant areas deserving federal protection. Among them was Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, which Congress authorized as the first national seashore in 1937. Land acquisition lagged until after World War II; the Mellon family foundations then made substantial grants to help North Carolina purchase and donate the needed lands. The seashore encompasses almost 100 miles of barrier islands and beaches, providing an outstanding natural resource base for surfing, sport fishing, nature study, and other recreational activities.