

MAY 1928

# NATIONAL PARKS BULLETIN

VOLUME

9

NUMBER

55

## The Problem of Yosemite Forests

By ROBERT STERLING YARD

RECENT public discussion concerning privately owned lands in the extreme western part of Yosemite National Park north of the Yosemite Valley makes it necessary to differentiate between two national land purchase policies, which at first may seem in conflict.

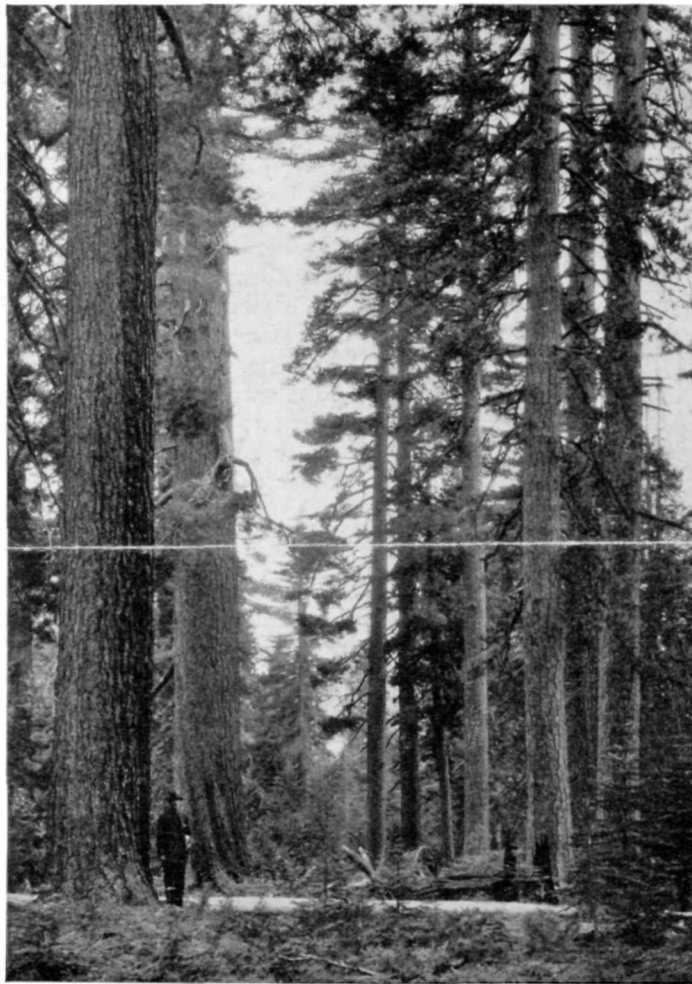
One of these concerns the original acquisition of national park lands. Perhaps no other Congressional policy has been observed more strictly for so many years as that governing land acquisition. Bills to buy lands for national parks and monuments have failed of report by the Public Lands Committee of the House from the beginning. The Temple Acts of 1925 and 1926 authorizing creation of national parks in the Great Smoky Mountains and the Blue Ridge specified that every acre must be presented to the nation as the condition of acceptance for national park inclusion. Congress has never lost sight of the danger of opening the door to careless land purchase. Even the provision of the Weeks Act confining national forest purchases to lands contributory to stream sources was confirmed by Congress as late as 1927 in the McNary-Woodruff Act.

The other policy concerns acquisition of areas of private (patented) land left within national park boundaries when the parks were first created. There are many such areas, chiefly of small size. If purchased at the time the parks were created, these would have cost a trifle compared with their cost today. Until 1916, no occasion arose for acquiring them. The

idea that private lands so high in altitude and remote from industry and travel could ever become a menace to the parks which enclosed them occurred to none.

Early in the present century, however, forested areas in Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks disclosed prospective timber values, and in 1912 Congress passed an act to facilitate acquisition of patented forest lands in Yosemite by giving in exchange equal values in decayed or matured timber which could be removed from the park without affecting scenic beauty. Also, in order to spare visitors the miserable spectacle of lumbering when lumbering time should come, it authorized acquisition of private forests near public roads by giving in exchange therefor timber of equal value, or well timbered park lands, in other parts of the park.

In 1914, the range of



PRIVATE FOREST DOOMED TO BE LUMBERED IN YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

acquisition was greatly broadened by an amendment authorizing "exchange of timber, or timber and lands, within Yosemite National Park and the Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests, for private lands and the timber thereon within the park." In other words, timber and lands in national forests outside Yosemite Park could be given to owners in exchange for patented holdings within the park.

Director Stephen T. Mather made a number of exchanges of park lands for private lands in Yosemite under these laws. He also raised private funds to purchase private holdings in Sequoia National Park, including several Sequoia groves; but the market value of all these properties advanced rapidly as soon as demand for them became known.

It was one of these prospective private purchases that brought about the first Congressional purchase of patented holdings in 1916. Threats to utilize for personal purposes magnificent Sequoia trees in a privately owned part of the Giant Forest, Sequoia National Park, led to Mr. Mather securing an option on 550 acres for \$70,000. Efforts to raise the money by subscription within the option period having failed, he applied to the House for an appropriation to take it up. This also failed, but at the end of the session, with the Senate's help, there passed, as an amendment to one of the general appropriation bills, an appropriation of \$50,000, which was promptly supplemented by a subscription of \$20,000 by the National Geographic Society to complete the purchase.

This act was not confirmed as policy until the Sixty-Ninth Congress authorized purchases of patented lands within national parks, during the session of 1927, one dollar of appropriation for each dollar raised by private subscription, up to \$50,000. Under this, two patented holdings were acquired, one each in Sequoia and Zion National Parks. The Seventieth Congress authorized another \$50,000 under similar conditions during the session of 1928. These appropriations can be drawn upon only to the extent that equal private subscriptions are first secured.

Meantime the Yosemite situation now under discussion was slowly developing. West of the park between the Merced and Tuolumne Rivers is a very large area of primitive sugar pine and yellow pine forest recently come to the axe. Almost entirely in private possession, this forest somewhat overlaps the western boundary of the National Park. Of the part of it which lies within Yosemite, about 11,000 acres, sixty per cent is privately owned, the remaining forty per cent being government property. The government and private holdings are checker-boarded, but so long as lumbering these private lands was not imminent the situation was not specially harmful. To be sure owners drove their cattle through the park lands to graze in meadows in the the private lands, and these cattle constantly strayed over into the park to the destruction of its wild growths, and had constantly to be driven out at great expense of rangers' time. It was a bad park situation at best which, when property

owners should desire to lumber, would become in a park sense impossible.

Superintendent W. B. Lewis of Yosemite National Park, having these grazing problems constantly on his hands, and fully alive to the wretched situation which would develop when lumbering time should come, proposed, as early as 1918, that this equivocal section should be cut out of the park. The director reproduced this recommendation in his annual report, where it attracted some attention from park students in California, particularly members of the Sierra Club. After a year's study, Mr. Lewis developed a definite plan, which was that 30,000 acres of park land intermixed with 6,540 acres of private holdings situated on the western edge of the park between the Tuolumne and Merced Rivers, should be cut out, the government lands, including the two tiny sequoia groves, Merced and Tuolumne, to go to the Forest Service. In compensation for this loss of area to Yosemite National Park, Superintendent Lewis proposed adding a greater partly forested area to the east side of the park.

Director Mather reserved decision on Mr. Lewis's proposition, but published it in full in his annual report of 1919 (p. 193-2) in order to discover the public reaction. As a result, many persons, particularly mountain lovers and experts in national park problems, made special inspections of both the areas concerned. The public reaction, so far as developed, was entirely favorable to the change. Mr. Mather, however, took no action, desiring the fullest possible public discussion. To this end, in his annual report of 1920 (p. 112) he briefly outlined the change as desirable and in the same number (p. 249) Superintendent Lewis rehearsed his plan, "urgently recommending" it.

This served again to call public attention to it, and it was discussed in various unofficial writings. Again, in his annual reports of 1921 and 1922, Mr. Mather called public attention to it, taking no action until all possible alternate plans should have developed.

For several years the situation was lost sight of under pressure of other system developments, during which money was raised for purchase of private holdings in Sequoia. Then, under encouragement from park planners in California, it developed in modified shape. A few miles north of the area under discussion and directly south of the Hetch Hetchy gorge, 2,322 acres of specially useful forest owned by Steinmetz and the Yosemite Lumber Company came to be regarded as specially desirable to acquire because of its high scenic value and the location, through it, of the proposed new Harden Lake road which the city of San Francisco is required to build under the Hetch Hetchy contract. Its heavy growths of sugar pine and yellow pine and frequent intervening meadows were judged particularly beautiful. It is known as the Cottonwood Tract from Cottonwood Creek which runs diagonally through it.

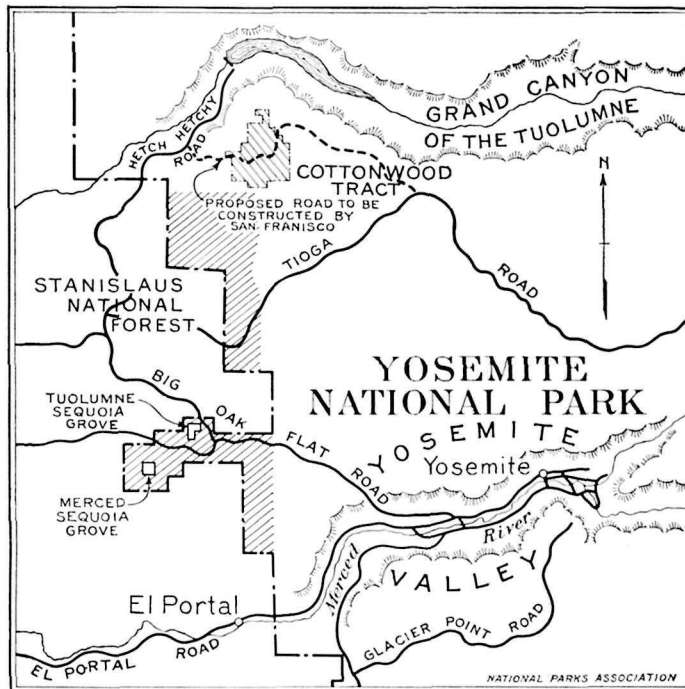
The new plan contemplated exchanging for the greater part of the Cottonwood Tract the lumber on park forests mentioned above as constituting forty

per cent of a tract of eleven thousand acres, the other sixty per cent of which was privately owned and due soon to be lumbered. It was proposed, after this exchange should be accomplished, to draw in the Yosemite boundary so as to exclude the entire eleven thousand acres from the park. Not only would this save most of the Cottonwood Tract and turn over to the Forest Service without cost, after lumbering, forty-four hundred acres for reforestation, but it would rid the park of seventy per cent of its entire patented land.

Meantime the owners of the great sugar pine forest west of the park had begun lumbering on a large scale, and had notified the government that presently they would reach the parts of their properties that lay within park boundaries. Meantime also objectors developed to exchanging park forests for private forests within the park, or to transferring park lands to the Forest Service under any conditions. These objectors considered the question only from the point of view of preserving forests perpetually from the axe, not at all from any national park point of view. To them, the principal purpose of national parks appeared to be forest preservation. The oft-published statement is not true, however, that all the sugar pine forest (Main Forest Belt) in Yosemite is included in the area that Superintendent Lewis proposed turning over to the Forest Service. Besides this, Yosemite contains many thousand acres of the finest sugar pine forest in existence in great stands both north and south of the Merced River, and Sequoia National Park contains many thousand acres more.

So it is that the Yosemite forest situation, having at last attracted wide public attention, at last has entered what is hoped is its final stage. Public sentiment, as expressed today, is clearly for acquiring all Yosemite's private holdings which lie within the Sierra's Main Forest Belt. If this is possible, it will greatly delight all concerned—even the lumbermen, who necessarily must receive full value for their holdings.

There are two ways by which acquisition is possible. These private forests may be purchased outright for cash, or they may be got in exchange for other lands or lumber of corresponding value owned by the United



Scene of Proposed Lumbering in Yosemite National Park. Shaded Areas are Those Chiefly in Private Ownership Affected by the Present Situation, a very small part of the great Sugar Pine Forests of the entire Park. Note the Cottonwood Tract

of these patented lands in cash when it could so easily pay for them in forests already in possession of the government. The same consideration discourages application to private purses for the whole or even half of the cost. When Congress can buy the lands without money, why, private givers ask, should they be solicited to present the government with three-quarters of a million dollars purchase money?

The Forest Service, custodian of the National Forests for the government, is reluctant to make these exchanges. It believes itself not warranted to turn any of its present Stanislaus National Forest over to private owners in exchange for lands which, because locked up in a national park, can never be lumbered. Besides, a percentage of gross income from lumber sales is due to local government under the law, and the proposed exchanges would stop income, which would be unfair to the localities. The Coordinating Commission of the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation has examined the lands on both sides of the park, and has reserved opinion for further investigation.

There is the situation. In such an emergency, perhaps solution can be brought about through adjustment, with the help of Congress, of Forest Service conditions. Perhaps, in the circumstances, the localities would forego their proportion of prospective lumber sales. Perhaps, in the circumstances, Congress would be willing to reimburse them.

In any case the tiny Merced and Tuolumne sequoia groves will be safe, for if they ever leave the park it will be to become national monuments.

States in some other national forest, perhaps the Stanislaus or Sierra National Forests adjoining.

To purchase them for cash will cost between a million and a million and a half dollars. This money must be raised by private subscription; or, under the precedents of the acts of 1927 and 1928, it may be that Congress will appropriate half, the other half to be raised by private subscription. That remains to be seen.

Under the act of 1914, however, exchanges may be effected with National Forest lands of equal timber value, and it is scarcely thought probable that Congress would agree to pay even half the cost

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3. To protect National Parks against whatever may tend to disturb their continuity of natural conditions or to diminish their effectiveness as supreme expressions of beauty and majesty in nature.
4. To promote use of National Parks for purposes of popular education and scientific investigation.
5. To promote a national recreational policy under which publicly owned lands of the nation shall be equipped for recreational service of the people so far as this is consistent with other requirements.
6. To protect wild birds, animals and plants, and conserve typical areas existing under primitive conditions.
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