

# CREATION OF GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

(A Thumbnail History)

The birth of present-day Grand Teton National Park involved controversy and a struggle that lasted several decades. Animosity toward expanding governmental control and a perceived loss of individual freedoms fueled anti-park sentiments in Jackson Hole that nearly derailed establishment of the park. By contrast, Yellowstone National Park benefited from an expedient and near universal agreement for its creation in 1872. The world's first national park took only two years from idea to reality; however Grand Teton National Park evolved through a burdensome process requiring three separate governmental acts and a series of compromises.

- The original Grand Teton National Park, set aside by an act of Congress in 1929, included only the Teton Range and six glacial lakes at the base of the mountains.
- The Jackson Hole National Monument, decreed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt through presidential proclamation in 1943, combined Teton National Forest acreage, other federal properties including Jackson Lake and a generous 35,000-acre donation by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. The Rockefeller lands continued to be privately held until December 16, 1949 when impasse for addition to the national park was resolved.
- On September 14, 1950, the original 1929 Park and the 1943 National Monument (including Rockefeller's donation) were united into a "new" Grand Teton National Park, creating present-day boundaries.

As early as 1897, Colonel S.B.M. Young, acting Superintendent of Yellowstone, proposed to expand Yellowstone's boundaries southward to encompass portions of northern Jackson Hole and protect migrating elk herds. In 1898 Charles D. Walcott, head of the U.S. Geological Survey, made a similar proposal, suggesting that the Teton Range be included as well as northern Jackson Hole. Neither the Interior Department nor Congress acted on either of these proposals. In 1916, a new bureau called the National Park Service was created within the Department of Interior. This bureau could promote park ideas both locally and at the national level with the creation of a Washington DC office. Director of the National Park Service, Stephen Mather and his assistant, Horace Albright affirmed their commitment toward park expansion in a 1917 report to Secretary of the Interior, Franklin Lane. The report stated that adding part of the Tetons, Jackson Lake, and headwaters of the Snake River to Yellowstone National Park is "one of seven urgent needs facing the Park Service." Mather and Albright worked with the Wyoming congressional delegation to draft a bill addressing expansion of Yellowstone's boundaries into the Teton country. Congressman Frank Mondell of Wyoming introduced the bill in 1918. The House unanimously approved a revised bill in 1919. However, the bill died in the Senate when Idaho Senator John Nugent feared the loss of sheep grazing permits with expanded park service jurisdiction. As historian Robert Righter states, "an opportunity had been lost. Never again would park extension be so non-controversial."

In addition to Idaho sheep ranchers, other groups opposed park extension; these included regional U.S. Forest Service personnel, Jackson Hole businessmen, and some area ranchers. In 1919 Yellowstone Superintendent, Horace Albright was unaware of the pervasive anti-park attitude in Jackson Hole. As a result, he was practically "run out of town" when he traveled to Jackson to promote his park enlargement vision. Ranchers worried that park extension would reduce grazing allotments; Forest Service employees feared the loss of jurisdiction on previously managed forest areas; and local dude ranchers were against improved roads, hotel construction and concessioner monopolies.

Proposals emerged to dam outlets of Jenny Lake and Emma Matilda and Two Ocean Lakes in 1919. Alarmed businessmen and ranchers felt that some form of protection by the National Park Service might be their only salvation from commercialization and natural resource destruction. Eventually, local and National Park Service interests merged at an historic meeting in Maud Noble's cabin on July 26, 1923. Participants included Yellowstone Superintendent, Horace Albright; Bar BC dude ranchers, Struthers Burt and Horace Carncross; newspaperman, Dick Winger; grocery storeowner, Joe Jones; rancher, Jack Eynon; and ferry owner, Maud Noble. They devised a strategy. Their plan sought to find private funds to purchase private lands in Jackson Hole and create a recreation area or reserve that would preserve the "Old West" character of the valley, basically creating a "museum on the hoof." With the exception of

Horace Albright, the attendees did not support a national park, "because they wanted traditional hunting, grazing, and dude-ranching activities to continue." In 1928, a Coordinating Commission on National Parks and Forests met with residents of Jackson and reached consensus for park approval. Local support and the Commission's recommendations led Senator John Kendrick of Wyoming to introduce a bill to establish Grand Teton National Park. Senator Kendrick stated that once he viewed the Tetons he "realized that some day they would become a park dedicated to the Nation and posterity..." Congress passed Senator Kendrick's bill. On February 26, 1929, President Calvin Coolidge signed this bill creating a 96,000-acre park that included the Teton Range and six glacial lakes at the base of the peaks. Since this fledgling 1929 park did not safeguard an entire ecosystem, Albright and the other participants of the 1923 meeting continued to pursue their dream of seeking private funds to purchase private lands in Jackson Hole.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. became involved in the Jackson Hole Plan after a visit to Teton country in 1924 and again in 1926. These visits highlighted not only spectacular Teton scenery, but also shabby developments littering the roadway from Menors Ferry to Moran and along Jenny Lake's south and east shores. Yellowstone Superintendent Albright seized an opportunity to explain to Rockefeller the essence of the Noble cabin meeting and the hope of protecting and preserving "this sublime valley" from unsightly commercial development. Rockefeller decided to purchase offending private properties with the intention of donating these lands for National Park designation. He created the Snake River Land Company as a purchasing agent to mask his association and keep land prices affordable, since landowners would have undoubtedly inflated their asking prices had they known of his involvement.

The Snake River Land Company launched an ambitious campaign to buy more than 35,000 acres for approximately \$1.4 million. What seemed like a simple and straightforward plan became 20 years of bitter debate, nearly tearing apart the Jackson Hole community. Intense hostility surrounded land acquisitions; attempts by Rockefeller to gift these properties to the National Park Service met resistance. Economic hardships suffered by ranchers during the 1920's helped ease some land acquisitions. Many ranchers were actually relieved to sell and get out of business during a time of economic difficulty. In 1925, ranchers circulated a petition in support of the private buyout countering anti-park opinions in Jackson Hole. Ninety-seven ranchers endorsed the petition's statement, "that this region will find its highest use as a playground...The destiny of Jackson's Hole is as a playground, typical of the west, for the education and enjoyment of the Nation, as a whole." Perhaps this quote has more credibility as a tacit admission that ranching in northern Jackson Hole was difficult, if not impossible, than it has as a genuine altruistic gesture by the ranchers.

Because allegations were made that the Snake River Land Company used illegal tactics during the purchase of properties, a Senate Subcommittee convened hearings in 1933 to investigate. When the hearings concluded, it was clear that claims about unfair business dealings by the Snake River Land Company and the National Park Service were groundless and both were exonerated. In 1934, Wyoming Senator Robert Carey introduced a bill in the Senate once again to expand park boundaries. One compromise of this bill dealt with reimbursement to Teton County for lost tax revenues. This bill and another drafted in 1935 failed. The tax issue and objections to including Jackson Lake because of dam and reservoir degradation fueled anti-park sentiments anew. During 1937 and 1938, the National Park Service prepared a document outlining the history of park extension and defending the importance of park status upon tourism. Again, anti-park sentiments flared and the expansion issue grew politically hotter. A group of locals calling themselves the Jackson Hole Committee vehemently opposed the park plan and encouraged the Wyoming delegation and Congress to do so as well. The park dream remained bruised and battered as controversy over enlargement continued into the 1940s.

After purchasing 35,000 acres and holding the land for 15 years, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. became discouraged and impatient with the stalemate surrounding acceptance of his gift. In an historic letter to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, he wrote that if the federal government did not want the gift of land or could not "arrange to accept it on the general terms long discussed...it will be my thought to make some other disposition of it or to sell it in the market to any satisfactory buyers." This threat persuaded FDR to use his presidential power to proclaim 221,000 acres as the Jackson Hole National Monument on March 15, 1943. Robert Righter believes that Rockefeller threatened to sell in order to provoke

governmental action. This bold action by Roosevelt provided a chance to circumvent obstacles created by Congress and the Wyoming delegation.

Local backlash immediately followed as park opponents criticized the monument for being a blatant violation of states' rights. They also believed the monument would destroy the local economy and county tax base. Hoping to force a confrontation, armed and defiant ranchers trailed 500 cattle across newly created monument land. The Park Service ignored this stunt but the drive focused national attention on the monument. Controversy grew more vocal and bitter, causing Wyoming Congressman Frank Barrett to introduce a bill abolishing the Jackson Hole National Monument; it passed both House and Senate. President Roosevelt exercised a pocket veto, killing the bill. The state of Wyoming responded to the veto by filing suit against the National Park Service to overturn the proclamation. The suit failed in the court system but the acrimonious local rift continued. The proclamation directed transfer of acreage from the Teton National Forest to the National Park Service. Since forest service administrators opposed the monument, the transition between jurisdictions provoked several vindictive deeds; one vengeful act involved gutting the Jackson Lake Ranger Station before turning it over to park staff. Local park supporters often faced hostilities and boycotts of their businesses throughout these turbulent years.

After World War II ended, the sentiment began to change in Jackson Hole. Between 1945 and 1947, bills were introduced in Congress to abolish the monument, but none passed. Local citizens began to realize that tourism offered an economic future for Jackson Hole. Eventually, attitudes became more agreeable toward park enlargement. By April 1949, interested parties had gathered in the Senate Appropriation Committee chambers to work out a final compromise. Though it took decades of controversy and conflict, discord and strife, the creation of a "new" Grand Teton National Park finally occurred on September 14, 1950, when Harry S. Truman signed a bill merging the 1929 park with the 1943 monument to form an enlarged 310,000-acre park. Preservation of the Teton Range, Jackson Lake, and much of Jackson Hole was finally placed in the hands of the National Park Service as a more complete ecosystem.

Difficulties of park-making define Grand Teton National Park and emphasize the visionary ideology of Horace Albright, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and several pro-park residents. Legislation for the new park contained significant compromises: 1) protection of existing grazing rights and stock driveways; 2) reimbursement to Teton County for lost tax revenues; 3) provision for the controlled reduction of elk within park boundaries; 4) agreement that in the future presidential proclamation could not be used to create a national monument in Wyoming; and 5) allowance for continuation of certain existing uses and access rights to forest lands and inholder properties.

Congress enlarged the park to its present size in 1950, "...for the purpose of including in one national park, for public benefit and enjoyment, the lands within the present Grand Teton National Park and a portion of the lands within Jackson Hole National Monument." The conservation battle for Jackson Hole coupled with the philanthropic dedication of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway shapes the character of this valley to the present day. Imagine how different the Teton landscape would look if unbridled development had prevailed over preservation of natural resources. In celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of Grand Teton National Park, we recognize and honor the dedication, perseverance and aspirations of visionary men and women who believed that the greatest good for the Teton countryside was as a "public park or pleasure ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people." As *Crucible for Conservation* author Robert Righter suggests, what these visionaries achieved was "**perhaps the most notable conservation victory of the twentieth century.**"

Written by Jackie Skaggs, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Coordinator with research, references and quotations taken from *A Place Called Jackson Hole* by John Daugherty, Park Historian 1980-1991 and from *Crucible For Conservation* by Robert Righter, currently research professor of history at Southern Methodist University in Texas)

January 2000