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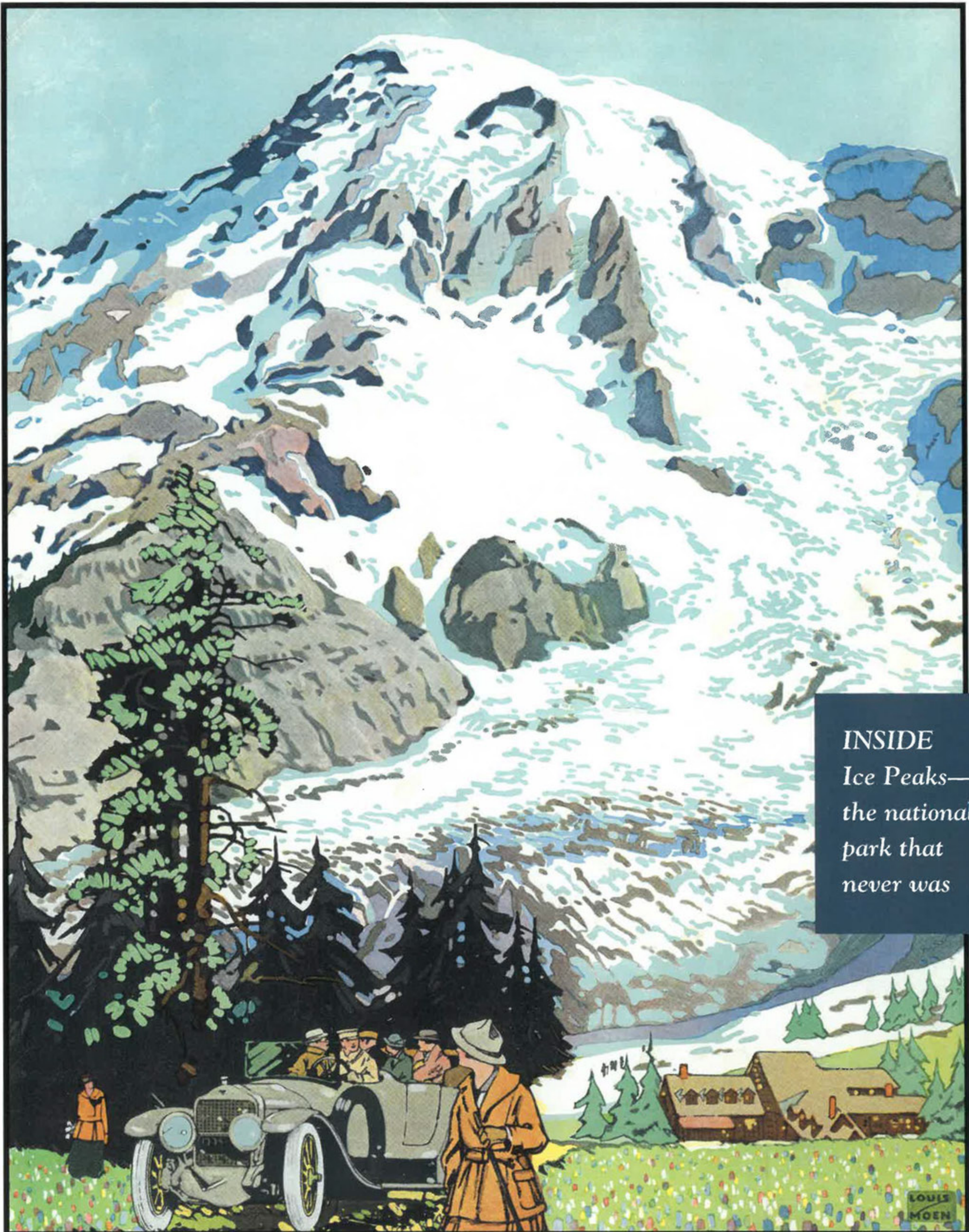


INSIDE
Ice Peaks—the national park that never was

WASHINGTON STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Ice Peaks National Park

The Spectacular Failure of a New Deal Idea

By Lauren Danner

In the 1930s the United States Forest Service managed five million acres of forestland in Washington's Cascade and Olympic mountains. But in 1937, flush with New Deal cash and empowered by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's support for conservation, the National Park Service set its sights on a new national park along the Cascade summit from Canada to the Columbia River. The park proposal brought the Park Service and the Forest Service into direct conflict for the first time in Washington's Cascades, and it attracted the attention of the Washington State Planning Council, a state group charged with resource and land planning. The controversy over the proposed Ice Peaks National Park foreshadowed later disputes between the two federal agencies over land management in the Cascade Range, and shows how local activism influenced land planning.

Distant view of Mount St. Helens from Mount Rainier National Park, c. 1925.

View from Mount Adams's summit: Mount Rainier to the north, with Mount St. Helens peaking above the cloud cover in the west.

The Forest Service and Park Service had been at odds since the latter was created in 1916. This stemmed in part from the fact that both competed to manage the same lands and any gain by one meant a loss for the other, leading to what historian Hal Rothman described as "a degree of territoriality rivaled only by medieval despots." But the conflict also had roots in the agencies' different core values.

Created at the height of the Progressive Era, the Forest Service's mission was to conserve the nation's forests, relying on scientific management to ensure the common good. Gifford Pinchot, the first chief of the Forest Service, ran the agency under the guiding utilitarian philosophy of "the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run." Pinchot regarded the national forests as a resource to be used and organized the Forest Service accordingly, although the agency was essentially a caretaker of the resource in the 1930s. He decentralized management so that decisions were made at the local level by foresters hired from the surrounding communities, encouraging close relations between the local Forest Service office and area residents. In contrast, the Park Service was formed to consolidate management of the rapidly increasing number of national monuments and parks and to preserve them for the enjoyment of the American public. Under the leadership of Steve Mather, a businessman who understood the power of advertising, the Park Service used sophisticated promotion and mass marketing campaigns to bring people to the parks and to generate political support. These different fundamental values led the agencies' first leaders to implement starkly contrasting approaches to land management.

At first each bureau targeted different audiences. But after World War I, with the rise of the automobile and the emergence of a leisure-seeking, mobile middle class, the Park Service and Forest Service increasingly found themselves at odds over land use issues. By the mid 1920s the Park Service was the "political equal" of the Forest Service, and the groundwork was laid for more heated land management disputes. This was the case in the early 1930s, when the Park Service proposed a massive national park in the Cascade Range.

By the early 1930s the Forest Service managed millions of acres of forest in the Cascades. This included several areas of the northern Cascades set aside for wilderness-oriented recreation, such as the 233,600-acre Glacier Peak-Cascade Recreation Unit, and the 172,800-acre Whatcom Primitive Area. The latter unit, near Mount Baker and the Canadian border, had been created in 1931. Established in 1929 as a response to public pressure to acknowledge recreation as a forest resource, a new policy allowed regional foresters to create "primitive areas," an administrative designation requiring that the area be used for recreation, education, and preservation of natural values—and other uses, such as logging and grazing, as determined by the regional forester. The regional office could change or eliminate such areas at will. Nonetheless, primitive area designations gave the Forest Service an effective tool to preempt the Park Service, its most prominent rival in land management.

In 1933, at the beginning of the New Deal, the National Park Service was, in the estimation of author Donald Swain, "expansive, confident, vigorous, and effective"—and influential enough to compete with the Forest Service on conservation issues. At the same time, demand for recreation was growing, and it became clear that the country needed a large-scale, land use planning effort. Three things happened that year that brought the two agencies into closer conflict in the Cascade Range.

First, an executive order created the National Resources Board and mandated a national land planning survey. The resultant 11-volume report included a 280-page treatise on recreation prepared by the National Park Service. Among its recommendations were 22 areas that warranted study for possible inclusion in the national park system, including the Cascade Range in Washington and Oregon, most of which was

The idea for a national park encompassing the peaks of the Cascade Range had been broached before.

already national forest land. At about the same time, Mount Rainier National Park superintendent Owen A. Tomlinson was quietly urging his superiors to study the "outstanding snow peaks and certain rugged wilderness" in the Cascades for a "Five Ice Peaks National Park."

Second, a presidential order mandated that all national monuments not managed by the Park Service were to be transferred immediately. It was a visceral blow to the Forest Service, which managed numerous monuments including Mount Olympus in Washington—nearly 300,000 acres encompassing some of the finest forests in the world.

Third, the Forest Service was completing its own survey of American forests, which recommended that the Whatcom Primitive Area be increased to more than a million acres. But the forester in charge of Region 6 (Washington and Oregon) resisted the idea. Many western regional foresters felt there were enough primitive areas already, but the New Deal expansion of the Park Service and increasing public demand for recreation prompted some to rethink their position.

A 1934 Forest Service recreation report urged, "The Pacific Northwest needs at least one extremely large Primitive Area, which must be of sufficient scope and remoteness to satisfy the most rigid wilderness qualifications.... There is growing sentiment among a considerable portion of the general public which demands the setting aside of primitive areas at all possible points." By 1935 regional foresters were creating primitive areas partly to preclude Park Service expansion. That July, Whatcom Primitive Area was expanded to 801,000 acres and renamed North Cascade Primitive Area. Finally, the Forest Service was "giving much belated, vigorous attention to forest recreation," but the Park Service was doing the same thing.

As part of the recreational land planning effort undertaken by the National Resources Board, in 1937 the National Park Service studied an area of the Cascade Range in Washington between Mount Adams and Mount Baker to determine its suitability as a national park. It concluded that an "Ice Peaks" national park stretching from the Columbia River to the Canadian border, including Mount Baker, Glacier Peak, Mount St. Helens, Mount Adams, and Mount Rainier (a national park since 1899), would "outrank in its scenic, recreational, and wildlife values any existing national park and any other possibility for such a park within the United States." The proposed park excluded almost everything below timberline, leaving the forests open for logging. The report argued that the region's geology, glaciation, and volcanism made it nationally significant, and suggested that the cachet of a national park would increase tourism and provide economic benefits. But Superintendent Tomlinson, working in the Northwest and intimate with its politics, warned the home office that the North Cascades would be the "most bitterly opposed for park status of any area that is being considered."

The idea for a national park encompassing the peaks of the Cascade Range had been broached before. In 1889, an Oregon state representative had introduced a memorial to Congress asking that the Cascade Range summit along the entire length of the state be set aside to protect wildlife, scenery, recreation, game, forests, and watersheds. And in 1929 Willard von Name, a prominent conservationist and park activist, published a treatise on the state of the national forests and parks, recommending "at least two or three more national parks in the Cascade Mountains in Oregon and Washington...primarily with the purpose of saving some tracts of the marvelously beautiful fir and hemlock forests of these mountains." A 1928 federal report had recommended that two million acres in the North Cascades be set aside as a national forest wilderness area; it may have partly inspired the creation of the much smaller Whatcom and Glacier Peak units.

Some Forest Service staff thought the idea of a Cascade summit park "manifestly absurd" and suspected the Park Service was simply trying to stimulate public interest so that smaller parks could be proposed later with greater chance of success. Others felt that a portion of the region, perhaps the scenic country at the head of Lake Chelan, could be offered as a national park, throwing a bone to the Park Service without giving up too much Forest Service timber. And at least one advocate of national forest wilderness urged the Forest Service to set aside even more.

In autumn 1938 the Forest Service's director of recreation and lands, Bob Marshall, traveled to Washington to inspect the North Cascade Primitive Area. Marshall, a longtime wilderness proponent renowned for his hiking abilities—30-mile day hikes were typical—had pushed for the North Cascades to be made a wilderness since the early 1930s, but his voice was one of only a few supporting Forest Service wilderness areas at the time. Marshall worried about what would happen if the National Park Service took over the North Cascades, and wrote as much to Seattle conservationist Irving M. Clark: "I know and you know perfectly well that if this area should be made a park, it would have roads extended into its heart."

In the meantime, the National Resources Board released its 1938 report on recreation, suggesting that the Cascade volcanoes and adjacent areas that "display at its best the virgin forest of the Pacific Northwest" be studied for possible inclusion in the national park system. Together, the Park Service and Forest Service formed an interdepartmental committee to study the Cascades. Staff members were ordered to refrain from public comment—pro or con—on any proposals for new parks, suggesting that the committee represented an effort to reach agreement without a high-profile fight.

The fact that the federal government was on record as investigating the park potential of the Cascades did not faze the Washington State Planning Council, a group created by legislative directive in 1934 to make recommendations on appropriate use of the state's natural resources. The idea of planning

Dwight Watson photo; UW Libraries, Special Collections, #UW21875z

"You know perfectly well that if this area should be made a park, it would have roads extended into its heart."

commissions had roots in the New Deal, and many states had formed such groups by the mid-1930s. Among its other duties, the council provided information on the state's planning activities and resources to the National Resources Board.

Business and resource industry leaders dominated Washington's governor-appointed group. As historian Carsten Lien noted, "The council had always followed the direction given it by the timber industry." In April 1937 the Washington Planning Council voted to study the Cascades proposal "with a view to safeguarding the right to develop natural resources within the boundaries of such a park, if established." But the fight for the rich timber stands on the Olympic Peninsula proved more compelling for the next two years. When the Ice Peaks idea resurfaced, the council was losing a bitter, desperate battle to keep in Forest Service hands the Olympic Peninsula forests that were not part of Mount Olympus National Monument. After Olympic National Park was established in 1938, the council revisited the Ice Peaks proposal with renewed resolve—no one, especially the Park Service, was going to deprive the state of yet more forestland. The council's sentiment reflected the attitude of many in Washington who resented the heavy-handed tactics of Interior Secretary Harold Ickes. Well-known for his acerbic and confrontational style, Ickes had tried unsuccessfully to get the Forest Service transferred to his purview under a new Department of Conservation—a chilling prospect in a state so dependent on timber

In July 1939 the council appointed a Cascade Ridge Committee to study all the lands within the five national forests that would be affected by the Ice Peaks proposal—an area of about 12,650 square miles, or two and a half times the area of the Park Service study. The Park Service-Forest Service Interdepartmental Committee invited the Washington Planning Council to participate in its study as well. The council accepted but also continued its own, broader investigation. Irving Clark, a key local player in the Olympic fight, wrote Marshall that the council had appointed "loggers and lumber men and Forest Service officials and University of Washington Forestry School professors as a conservation committee." The president of the Central Washington College of Education was named chair, and public hearings were scheduled to discuss the "highest and best uses of the general Cascade Mountain area."

The hearings took place from October to December 1939 in Tacoma, Ellensburg, Wenatchee, Yakima, Bellingham, Everett, and Longview. Seattle, the center of Washington's pro-Olympic Park movement and of most preservation sentiment, was pointedly excluded. Instead, timber-reliant towns on either side of the Cascades hosted the hearings. Representatives from the timber, minerals, game, winter sports, and grazing industries testified repeatedly that the Cascade peaks should not be made a park. Bitterness over Olympic National Park infused the hearings. Again and again witnesses said they were opposed to a park that was imposed, especially by Eastern nature lovers and without input from the state's citizens. The vaunted (if unrealized) mineral potential of the northern Cascades was also noted, with dire warnings about disastrous economic consequences for local communities if the park were to be created. Finally, resource industry officials argued vehemently against the removal of more land to federal management (this despite the fact that the land studied was already under Forest Service jurisdiction).

Newspaper articles dutifully reported the growing opposition. A *Tacoma Journal* article pondered, "Just why Secretary Ickes is so anxious to have the Cascade mountain range created into a national park is hard to understand. Why the entire section should be locked up and millions of dollars of potential natural resources barred from the use of the people of the state is something no one knows." The *Wenatchee World* argued that the park would sequester timber and freeze mineral exploration, and worried about who would have jurisdiction over the new highway through Stevens Pass. Oregon journalist Richard Neuberger, later a United States senator, warned, "Citizens in the timbered Pacific Northwest...gloomily predict this fencing off of raw materials may extend to every forest vista in the region."

The regional Forest Service office, while participating in the joint study, also had orders from Washington, D.C., to fight the proposal by emphasizing the potential loss of resources—an argument echoing that made by local opposition. The resource industries were worried enough by late 1939 to form a new organization, the Washington State Resources Federation, explicitly to fight "the creation of any new National Park, or further additions to any existing National Park in the State of Washington." Unlike national forests, which held timber in trust for later utilization, national parks were supposed to preserve everything within their boundaries for scenic enjoyment—including timber, the lifeblood of Washington's economy.

Meanwhile, Marshall was back in the North Cascades in September 1939—this time with a group that included Senator John Coffee of Washington—still urging the Forest Service to at least double the size of the North Cascade Primitive Area: "[N]o part of the whole United States is so well adapted for a wilderness as the country between Stevens Pass and Harts Pass," he wrote in his report. He recommended that an additional 795,000 acres be added to the existing primitive and recreation areas, creating a new Glacier Peak Wilderness that would have encompassed much of the North Cascades.

About the only group on record as favoring a national park was the Northwest Conservation League, the local branch of a national group that had fought tenaciously for Olympic National Park. Executive secretary Margaret Thompson, a Chelan teacher and writer who was passionate about preserving mountain scenery, took the lead in the Cascades fight, suggesting that an Ice Peaks National Park could allow mining while retaining its important geologic and scenic values. She warned that timber's economic dominance was

Asahel Curtis photo; Washington State Historical Society, Special Collections, 1943.42.15868

waning, that new sources of revenue needed to be developed, and argued that the national park label carried cachet that would guarantee steady income from tourism. For her trouble, Thompson returned home after speaking at an Ellensburg conference to find that a delegation of "mining men" had urged the local school board to fire her (she kept her job).

In March 1940 the National Park Service submitted its report on the Cascades to the Washington State Planning Council, supposedly for use in the council's final report. Noting that the Forest Service had already removed some 1.8 million acres of Washington's national forests from commercial use, the Park Service suggested these areas should be considered for national park status.

In addition, the Park Service believed Mount St. Helens, Mount Stuart, Mount Adams, and the northern end of Lake Chelan and Horseshoe Basin were worthy of national park status. The report suggested that mining be allowed in many of the new park areas and that 25 percent of revenues generated by the parks be returned to adjacent counties. At about the same time, Superintendent Tomlinson wrote privately to Margaret Thompson that he hoped recreational development at Grand Coulee could be a bargaining chip for a summit park. This was a far cry from the original suggestion of a park encompassing the range's summit along the length of the state—although it still encompassed several million acres—and put the Forest Service in the awkward position of having to reject some of its original assessments of areas under its jurisdiction.

Although the Forest Service had set aside several areas ostensibly to preserve scenic and recreation values, it now contended that, except for the volcanoes, "the summit country is scenically dull, uninteresting, and reputedly much inferior to large areas in the Rocky Mountains and elsewhere in the West." Furthermore, the region did not meet national park standards for accessibility: "When considered from a national viewpoint the whole study area is extremely remote, being genuinely convenient to only two million people out of the entire population." And, the Forest Service argued, the proposed parklands contained valuable timber and mineral resources that would become accessible as technology became more sophisticated. Finally, creating new national park areas in the high Cascades would simply cause unnecessary agency overlap: the Forest Service was already managing the areas appropriately, so why add another layer of federal bureaucracy?

In early June 1940 the Washington Planning Council published a summary version of its study in pamphlet form. The brochure began, "The importance of [the Cascades] to the economic well-being of the state is self-evident." The rest of the text praised the Forest Service for its 30-plus years of "broad and careful supervision" and expounded against a park. "The West has progressed too far in the development of multiple use practices to return to the obsolete single use principle, save in quite exceptional cases." The implication was clear: the Cascades was not an exceptional case. In addition to recommending that the Forest Service remain in charge, the council suggested that "the people of the state be consulted and their prevailing sentiment be respected in considering and deciding upon any change in federal control or operation" of the reserves.

Asahel Curtis photo; WSHS, Special Collections, 1943.42.10801

Climbing party on Mount Baker, c. 1908. Glacier Peak (background) and Mount Baker were both part of the Ice Peaks National Park proposal.

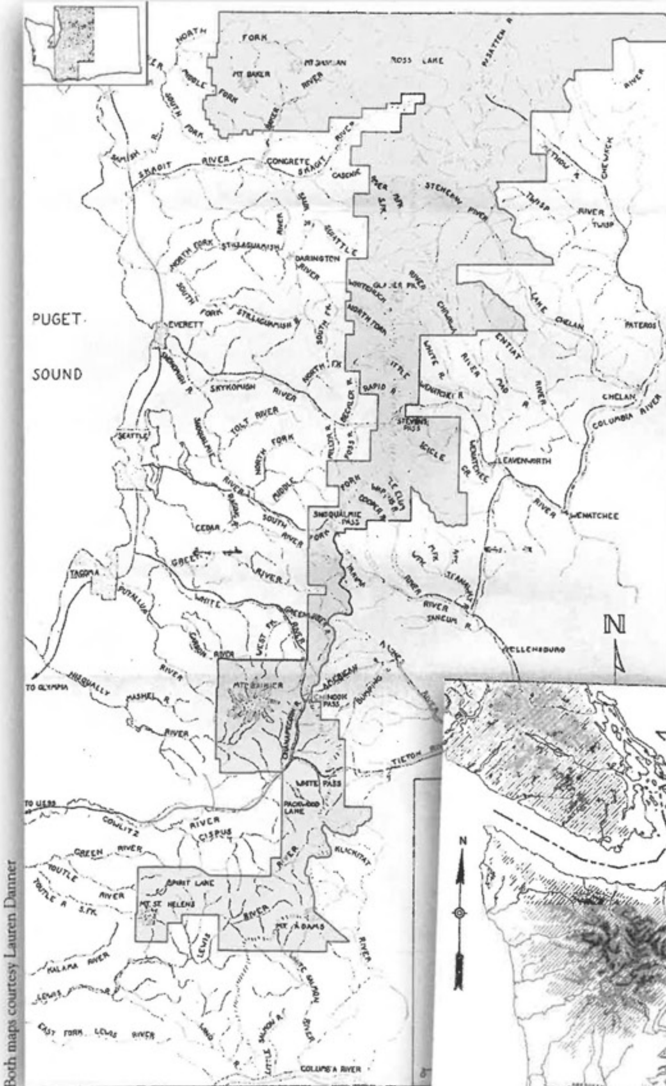
That the council anticipated a positive reception is evident in its publication plans: 5,000 copies of the pamphlet and at least 2,500 copies of the full 132-page report were printed and mailed to newspapers, chambers of commerce, schoolteachers, county government officials, banks, businesses, logging companies, and granges across the state. Still more were sent to Washington's congressional delegation and to Forest Service staff throughout the state. The council prepared a 14-minute radio script and asked supporters to encourage their local stations to broadcast it; at least a half-dozen stations did.

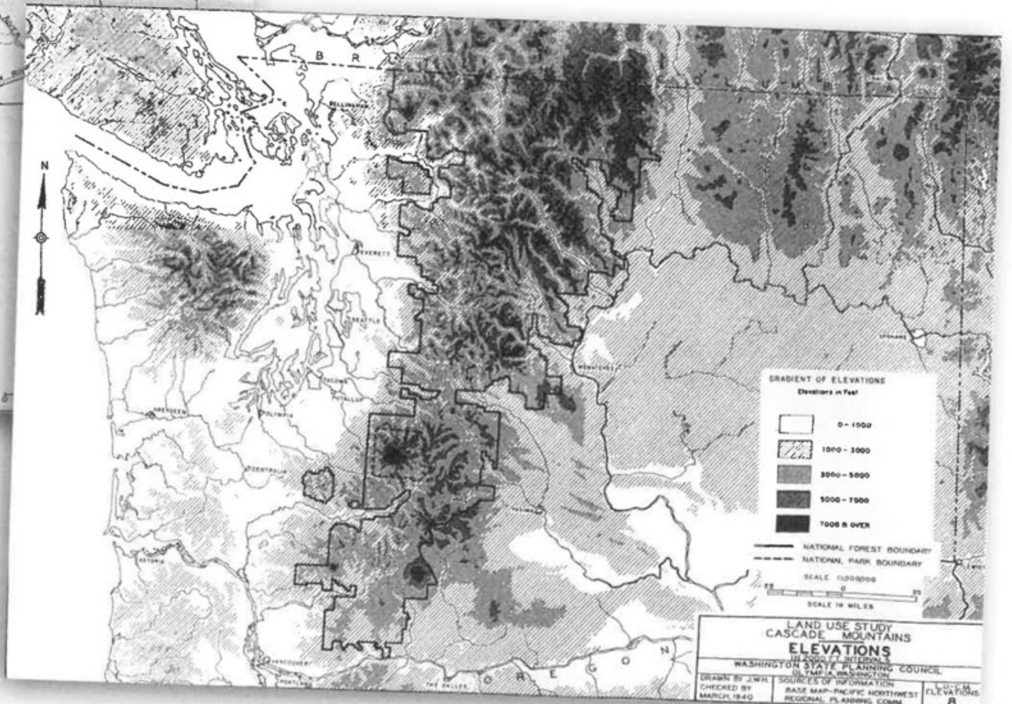
The Park Service responded frostily to the Cascade Mountains Study, suggesting the council had been unduly influenced by the groundswell of opposition, that the 1939 hearings had been stacked against the park idea, and that Park Service statements were purposely excluded from the report. Park Service acting director Arthur Demaray chided planning council chairman Ben Kizer: "I note your statement that the data supplied by [Park Service] field representatives was of great value to you in compiling this report. At the same time, I am aware of the fact that you included in your report none of that valuable data, and that you did not use the official statement of national park policy…but that you used instead a statement the inadequacy of which the director had called to your attention." The inclusion of thousands of square miles of forestland in the planning council study was another sore spot. "[T]heir study encompassed great areas of national forests regarding which there had never been the slightest consideration for national park status," a Park Service official noted. "[T]his report is another gesture against the Park Service."

It was also apparent that the Olympic National Park controversy had soured the council on the prospect of an increased Park Service presence in Washington. When the

head of the interdepartmental committee met with planning council members, he was told that "the Department of the Interior and Secretary Ickes had erred grievously in not accepting the Planning Council's recommendation for the Olympic National Park." In fact, the Cascade Mountains Study specifically warned against a bill then being considered that would have allowed the president to declare national recreation areas. The council's true feelings toward the Park Service and Ickes were evident in its analysis, sparked in part by the effort to move the Forest Service to a new, Ickes-controlled Department of Conservation: "[W]henever an influential Secretary of the Interior, spurred on by his National Park Service, could persuade a President that all recreational activities of the federal government should be consolidated in the National Park Service, the President with a mere signing of his name...could release vast acreages from the federal forest reserves and the next moment...transfer these vast acreages from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of the Interior." The Park Service later noted that opposition to Ice Peaks was likely "stimulated by the then controversial establishment of Olympic National Park in 1938."

Regardless of internal politics amongst the Washington State Planning Council, Forest Service, and Park Service, the planning council's report generated statewide support. Hundreds of letters praising the Cascade Mountains Study poured into the council's offices; chambers of commerce, school boards, businesses, and local government officials all agreed with the report's recommendations. Seeking to save face, Interior Secretary Harold Ickes disavowed any knowledge of a proposed national park in the Cascades, stating only that the area was under study to determine its suitability. Considering that Ickes had been receiving updates on Ice Peaks from the director of the Park Service since at least 1938—a draft bill for a park had been floated in early 1939, and Ickes had received an internal memo about public sentiment on the proposal less than a month earlier—this was disingenuous at best. In fact, Tacoma's *News Tribune* suggested that Ickes's "surprise" at learning of the proposal "evidences that political heat has been turned on in Washington, D.C." Demoralized by public opinion, abandoned by its leader, and trying to resolve administrative issues in





Both maps courtesy Lauren Danner

ABOVE: ***Screened area shows the National Park Service's proposed boundaries for a Cascade Range national park.***

RIGHT: ***This Washington Planning Council study map was somewhat misleading regarding the area under consideration for national park status.***

Olympic National Park, the Park Service backed down.

The Ice Peaks issue did not go away, though. In July 1940, *Mining World*, a trade magazine published by planning council member and outspoken resource industry booster Miller Freeman, ran a small article titled, "Conservation: Should it Serve—or Only Save?" It skewered the National Park Service and Secretary Ickes for their "ambition" and ongoing competition with the Forest Service, which "for decades have threatened Western states, their cities, their agriculture, and their natural resource industries." Protests against Olympic National Park were ignored, Freeman wrote, and now the Park Service had its eye on the Cascade Range. Acknowledging that the boundaries of the potential Cascade peaks park were unclear, Freeman nevertheless argued that such a park would decimate mining and other resource industries. Finally, he noted, the planning council—composed of nine "outstanding citizens of the state"—had issued a report whose findings "apply in large degree to all Western states, and directly to those where National Park Service ambitions threaten to close important areas." The remainder of the article reprinted the council's brochure.

Washington State Historical Society, Special Collections, 1997.1.41

Mount Rainier became the nation's fifth national park in 1899.

Secretary Ickes wrote an irate reply, charging that Freeman was "obviously biased." The council's study was "a smoke screen...fifty-six pages of nothing new"; it simply supported the council's preconceived opinion that Forest Service management was superior. By expanding the original study area to include all of Washington's national forests and their abundant resources, the council had preempted any possibility of recommending a national park. Furthermore, Freeman had "played down" Ickes's statement that he would recommend that mining and prospecting be allowed in any Cascade peaks park. Finally, Ickes criticized Freeman's support of the "multiple-use" concept of Forest Service management, saying that it was a "meaningless expression.... The main problem in land planning is to determine the most profitable use or combination of uses to which an area may be put." If one use promises profitability—be it recreation or logging or watershed protection—that use must be dominant.

Freeman promptly replied, printing his and Ickes's letters in the September 1940 *Mining World*: "Frankly, the people of the West have no faith in...the National Park Service." Westerners preferred Forest Service management, which promoted wise use of public lands, not "dedication solely to recreation." Freeman then sent all three letters to President Roosevelt, with a cover letter saying that Ickes was trying to undermine the federal-state cooperation in resource planning Roosevelt was trying to encourage. The president responded a month later, supporting Ickes and suggesting that the Washington Planning Council was predisposed against the Park Service even before commencing its study. Freeman elected not to print the president's reply in *Mining World*.

With that last dust-up, the Ice Peaks proposal faded. Superintendent Tomlinson, who had headed the interdepartmental committee, met with Freeman and another planning council member, Seattle businessman Nathan Eckstein, in October 1940. Eckstein told Tomlinson that "Secretary Ickes is too ambitious and has included a great deal of unnecessary forested lands in the [Olympic] peninsula." Freeman was more strident, railing against Ickes in a "tirade." Several months later, though, Tomlinson wrote a colleague, "My guess is that some time there will be more of the Cascades given national park status."

He was right. In the late 1930s Washington was still largely a one-resource state; its economy was heavily dependent on lumber and any attempt to "lock up" that resource met hostile opposition, as demonstrated by the planning council's reaction. Ice Peaks failed in part because of residual anger over the creation of Olympic National Park, viewed by many as taking valuable timber out of production, and in part because the Park Service simply could not compete with the Forest Service for the affection of most Washingtonians. As if to underscore the point, after the planning council's report was released, the Forest Service's acting chief wrote to the council's executive officer, "[O]ur respective organizations have so much in common, so many similar objectives and ideals, that any type of relationship other than the friendly and cooperative one which now exists would be quite unthinkable." While that relationship did remain mutually supportive, public support for the Forest Service would erode over the next two decades, as land use issues put the agency into direct conflict with the Park Service over land use issues in the North Cascades. This time, the Park Service would come out ahead, with the creation of North Cascades National Park in 1968.

Lauren Danner is outreach and planning coordinator for the Washington State Historical Society where among other duties she runs Washington History Day. She is currently working on a book about the creation of North Cascades National Park.

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