

# Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks: One Hundred Years of Preservation and Resource Management

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In 1990, when Sequoia National Park marks its centennial, Kings Canyon National Park will celebrate its fiftieth birthday. These contiguous parks in the southern Sierra Nevada constitute one of the nation's finest wilderness regions. The history of their establishment represents a major success story in preservation efforts in the United States, and the account of their management adds a valuable chapter to the history of the National Park Service.<sup>1</sup>

Such success did not come easily. The creation of Sequoia resulted primarily from the determined efforts of a few San Joaquin Valley residents, and the expansion of the park and establishment of Kings Canyon came only after extended battles and compromises. The history of their management reveals the transiency of policies that depend on changing public awareness, lobby groups, and leadership.

Between 1772, when Europeans first sighted the Sierra Nevada, and the discovery of gold at Sutter's mill in 1848, few white people set foot in the Sierra Nevada.<sup>2</sup> Not until 1858 did cattleman Hale Tharp make the first known visit by a white person to the mountainous area east of the central San Joaquin Valley that became Sequoia National Park. Guided by local Indians, he traveled to Giant Forest, one of the finest concentrations of giant sequoias, where he later established a summer cattle camp. Although the Indians appealed to Tharp to protect their land, nothing could prevent the increasing influx of settlers into the Sierra foothills. Smallpox,

scarlet fever, and measles devastated the Indians. The survivors retreated into the high mountains and crossed the Sierra to the east. The Indians of Kings Canyon met the same fate.<sup>3</sup>

Soon shepherders, prospectors, and lumbermen in pursuit of their trades entered the Kings-Kern-Kaweah watersheds in the Sierra east of Fresno and Visalia. Following the great California floods and drought of 1862-1864, shepherders from the southern San Joaquin Valley drove their flocks north and east into the highest mountains in search of grazing land. Unfortunately, sheepherding practices at that time, combined with a complete lack of governmental control over the use of public land, resulted in widespread damage to the mountain watersheds. When sheep entered the mountains as the snow melted each spring, their sharp hoofs cut deeply into the moist soil, severely damaging the meadows. Sheepherders' fires, set in the fall to clear away brush and deadfall, ran unchecked over the mountain slopes.<sup>4</sup>

Fires and overgrazing alarmed some explorers of the Sierra. In 1873, Clarence King noted that the Kern Plateau, which had numerous meadows and lush grass when he had visited earlier, now appeared as a "gray sea of rolling granite ridges."<sup>5</sup> Two years later, John Muir vividly described the threat to Kings Canyon's fragile beauty. He urged that the forests be protected so the spring run-off would be sure to provide enough water for the San Joaquin Valley during the dry summer months. In Muir's opinion, "sheepmen's fires" did a great



The General Sherman Tree in Giant Forest is the largest living thing on earth.  
*Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.*

deal more damage than lumbermen's axes or mill fires.<sup>6</sup>

Prospectors also participated in the early exploration and utilization of the Kings-Kern-Kaweah watersheds. Their extensive prospecting came to little except for one strike at Mineral King. The discovery of silver in 1873 touched off a rush to this high mountain valley. With the completion of a road into the isolated mining camp by the end of the decade, Mineral King reached its peak of development. The boom soon ended, however. With the failure of the mines, the toll road passed into the hands of the county and became a public highway. A few summer tourists, attracted by the cool mountain air, built cabins and continued to visit the valley each year.<sup>7</sup>

In the meantime, discovery of the big trees elsewhere in the Sierra Nevada had attracted worldwide attention. In 1852, a hunter named A.T. Dowd, tracking a wounded bear, stumbled on the stand of giant sequoias now known as the Calaveras Grove of big trees. Together with Yosemite Valley, the enormous trees became a mecca for tourists. While the coastal redwood reached a greater height and the bristlecone pine of California's White

Mountains was older, no other species of tree came even close to matching the giant sequoia in sheer bulk and grandeur.

In the 1860s lumbermen entered the forests of the Kings and Kaweah watersheds. At first lumber mills served only local communities, but the completion of the Southern Pacific Railroad line through the San Joaquin Valley in the mid-1870s opened more distant markets. Although pine and fir trees provided most of the lumber, many giant sequoias were cut to provide shakes, fence posts, and grape stakes. The worst was yet to come. Log flumes, introduced in 1889, opened previously inaccessible timberlands to loggers. Perhaps the finest stand of giant sequoias, in the Converse Basin, fell quickly.

Danger to the General Grant Grove first stimulated interest in protection of the giant sequoias of the Kings-Kaweah watersheds. As early as 1864 the Brewer expedition, in its report to the state of California, noted that big trees to the west of the grove were being cut for fence posts. Israel Gamlin established a squatter's claim to part of the grove in 1872 and completed a rough road to haul timber to the valley below. Three years later, within the very shadow of the General Grant tree, two men

Lumbermen Bill Mills (left) and S.D. Phips stand before the Mark Twain Tree in the area of modern Grant Grove in Kings Canyon National Park. They felled the tree in 1891 to provide exhibition sections for New York and London. Photograph by C.C. Curtis. Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.





The Kaweah Colony celebrates completion of their access road to the plateau of Giant Forest with a picnic in 1890. Soon thereafter their land ownership claims were suspended and Sequoia National Park created. *Photo by C.C. Curtis. Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.*

took nine days to fell an enormous tree and then set fire to its stump. Two 16-foot sections were cut into sections that could be shipped and reassembled in the East. But visitors at the exhibit the next year thought the whole thing was a hoax. How could a tree be that big? Beginning in 1878, editorials in the *Visalia Delta* criticized the destruction of the forests, including the cutting of giant sequoias for exhibit.<sup>8</sup>

In 1880 Theodore Wagner, the United States Surveyor General for California, wrote to the registrar of the United States Land Office in Visalia to request that four sections in the Grant Grove be suspended from entry, temporarily prohibiting anyone from claiming the land under existing land laws. He was responding to the concerns of Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz, several scientists, and a growing number of local citizens who advocated protection of the big trees. In the following year, General John F. Miller of California introduced into Congress the first bill to establish a park.<sup>9</sup> The measure died in committee, however, perhaps because the proposed park was so large and would be opposed by timber and grazing interests.

In 1885 fifty members of the Cooperative Land and Colonization Association, with the intention

of founding a utopian community, filed ownership claims on extensive tracts of land in Giant Forest under the Timber and Stone Act. They next sought capital for a railroad to connect with a road they planned to build from the foothills to the forestlands. When the railroad plan failed, they formed a joint stock company, the Kaweah Cooperative Commonwealth Company, and constructed an 18-mile road through rugged country to the edge of Giant Forest.<sup>10</sup> After setting up a portable sawmill, the colonists produced a small amount of lumber.

While a government land agent examined the Kaweah Company's land claims, local residents in Tulare County initiated a determined drive to protect the Sierra forests by having Congress permanently withdraw large tracts of land from the market. There were precedents for such action. Congress had granted Yosemite Valley to California in 1864 for "public use, resort and recreation." It was the first area in the country specifically set aside to be preserved for all future generations. As such, Yosemite marked the real beginning of the national park system, even though Yellowstone, created in 1872, was the first officially designated national park. Yosemite did not achieve this status



The two most important individuals in the history of Sequoia National Park stand before a big tree in Giant Forest. George Stewart (right), a Visalia newspaperman, led the fight to create the park in 1890. Colonel White served as superintendent for most of the period 1920 to 1947 and shaped both its development and preservation. *Photo by Lindley Eddy. Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.*

until 1890, and the valley actually remained under state management until 1906.

Farmers in the San Joaquin Valley wanted to protect the watershed on which they depended for irrigation, and they also wished to preserve the groves of giant sequoia remaining in public ownership as scenic and recreational areas. With these goals in mind, George W. Stewart, editor and publisher of the *Visalia Delta*, spearheaded the movement to protect the southern Sierra Nevada.<sup>11</sup>

Stewart became concerned when the state of California tried to acquire parts of the Grant Grove in 1889 as indemnity school land, and several private individuals also filed on part of the same grove. Although the grove had been withdrawn from the market in 1880, Congress had done nothing to guarantee its permanent protection. Stewart warned of the damage sheep and manmade fires could cause to the watershed and the valley below. Also, increasing numbers of vacationers needed protected areas for summer recreational use.

The *Delta's* editorials soon attracted local attention, and members of the Tulare County Grange called a meeting for October 9, 1889, in Visalia. Prominent residents from Fresno, Kern, and Tulare counties who attended agreed unanimously to petition Congress to establish a national park.

When Stewart and Tipton Lindsey, former receiver of the U.S. Land Office, drew a map of the proposed reservation, they expanded it to include the entire western slope of the Sierra from the present Yosemite National Park in the north to the southern end of the forest belt in Kern County. They wished to protect all major rivers flowing from the mountains into the San Joaquin and Tulare valleys.

A few months later, Stewart and his local supporters—including John Tuohy, Frank Walker, and Lindsey—became alarmed over rumors that the federal government was about to open the Garfield Grove—south of Giant Forest—to private land ownership under the Swamp and Overflow Act, Timber and Stone Act, and other statutes. Lumbermen coveted the timber, and sheepmen desired access to mountain meadows. Letters sent from the *Delta* office to interested groups and influential people from coast to coast warned of the danger to the world's largest trees, the giant sequoias. Lindsey notified Congressman William Vandever, initiating a full-scale campaign for a park.

By the end of July 1890, Vandever introduced a bill for a national park in the township that included the Garfield Grove.<sup>12</sup> The *Delta's* campaign attracted the support of *Garden and Forest*, *Forest and Stream*, and other publications. The California Academy of

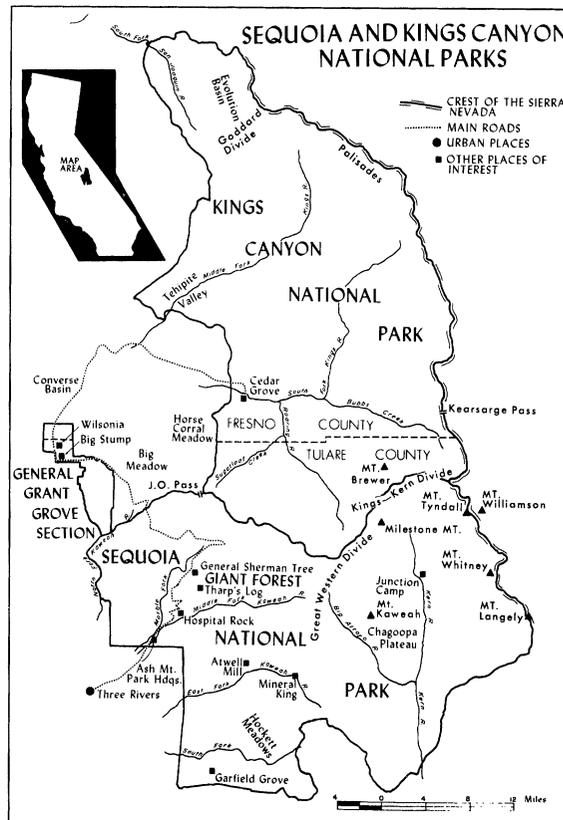
Sciences, American Association for the Advancement of Sciences, and American Forestry Association also adopted resolutions favoring the park bill. Such support brought results; President Benjamin Harrison signed the bill on September 25, 1890. Sequoia National Park became the nation's second national park, created eighteen years after Yellowstone. The enabling act provided that two townships plus four sections be withdrawn from settlement, occupancy, or sale, and that they be set apart as a public park or pleasure ground for the enjoyment of the people.<sup>13</sup>

Wanting to see all the forests of the Sierra preserved, Stewart declared in the *Delta* that the first important step in a great work had been taken. Believing that the Kings and Kern canyons and other desirable areas could be added later, park advocates had not clamored for a large park because of the imminent danger to the Garfield Grove. They felt that any effort to secure a larger park, which would have included much privately held land, would be sure to fail without an educational campaign that they had no time to conduct.

On October first, less than one week after creation of the park, Congress passed a second bill that

established Yosemite National Park, tripled the size of Sequoia, and set aside the Grant Grove as a small separate national park.<sup>14</sup> The measure came as a complete surprise to Stewart and others who had initiated the movement and worked so hard for the first bill. Daniel K. Zumwalt, a resident of Visalia and a land agent of the Southern Pacific Railroad who visited Vandever in Washington, has been credited with proposing both Grant National Park and the expansion of Sequoia, as well as for lobbying on behalf of establishment of Yosemite National Park. He had a personal interest both in protecting the watershed and preserving the giant sequoias. He knew of the 1889 petition and subsequent correspondence of the park advocates. More important, the Southern Pacific had long been concerned about protecting the water supply of the San Joaquin Valley, and it recognized that national parks would attract tourists and increase business.<sup>15</sup> Support by the powerful Southern Pacific helped win the day for Sequoia, Yosemite, and General Grant national parks.

The Kaweah colonists, however, were shocked and dismayed by the news of the October first legislation. To make matters worse, a special land



*Courtesy of the Sequoia Natural History Association.*

agent of the Department of the Interior reversed a previous report and ruled unfavorably on the colony's already-filed land claims in Giant Forest. Despite widespread support of the colonists by many residents of Tulare County, who respected the time and labor they had invested, Secretary of the Interior John Noble ruled against the colonists' land claims in April 1891. The government even denied compensation for the road they had built.<sup>16</sup>

**T**he creation of the three national parks in California marked only the first step in protecting the Sierra watershed. Further prompt action was clearly needed. Within a decade, the population of Fresno and Tulare counties had more than doubled. The California State Board of Forestry frankly admitted that lack of funds prevented proper fire control. And as most of California was still the property of the national government, the state looked to Washington for legislative help.

Fortunately, in March 1891, Congress passed legislation that permitted the president to proclaim permanent forest reserves—today's national forests.<sup>17</sup> Protectors of the Sierra could now propose that land be set aside in forest reserves or national parks; it mattered little that no clear distinction between the two kinds of reserves existed at that time. In April, Stewart recommended that Sequoia and General Grant national parks be extended eastward to the summit of the Sierra Nevada. John Muir and Robert Underwood Johnson, editor of *Century Magazine*, both of whom had played a leading role in the establishment of Yosemite National Park, also continued to agitate for a large forest reserve in the southern Sierra.

In October, the commissioner of the General Land Office directed Special Agent B.F. Allen to investigate the forest reservation proposed in the Tulare County petition of 1889.<sup>18</sup> The petition had requested that the government reserve a tract of land embracing over 200 townships. On Allen's recommendation, the commissioner withdrew 230 townships from settlement under federal land laws, pending investigation of these lands. While an "Anti-Park Association," led by local sheepmen and lumbermen, protested that the forest reservation would hurt local prosperity, most residents of the San Joaquin Valley either approved the withdrawal of land or were neutral.

Early in 1892, Johnson suggested to Secretary Noble that President Benjamin Harrison reserve all of the Sierra Nevada above a certain altitude. If that were done, Johnson reasoned, later, at a moment of less urgency, Congress could convert some of it

from forest reserve to parkland. He dreamed of an eventual large national park incorporating the southern Sierra.

Special Agent Allen redrew the boundaries he had been investigating to exclude arable land in the foothills, thus eliminating a good deal of potential opposition to the proposed reserve. When he completed his report in early 1893, he stressed the dependence of the economic future of the San Joaquin Valley on the protection of the watershed. Finally, on February 14, Harrison signed a proclamation establishing the Sierra Forest Reservation—a vast area of over four million acres stretching from Yosemite National Park on the north to a point well south of Sequoia National Park.<sup>19</sup>

While park advocates had presumed the adjacent Kings and Kern watersheds—part of the new forest reserve—might soon be added to Sequoia and General Grant national parks, pleas for park expansion fell on deaf ears. In 1905, the Department of Agriculture gained jurisdiction over all forest reserves and soon changed the name to national forests. Under Forest Service policy of multiple use and sustained yield, grazing and logging remained options on national forests of the Sierra Nevada. The Sierra Club and other park advocates continued to call for permanent preservation of outstanding scenic areas in national parks.

In 1911, California Senator Frank Flint introduced a bill to create a vast national park in the southern Sierra.<sup>20</sup> Earlier, William Colby of the Sierra Club had proposed a series of national monuments in the Kings River Canyon, Tehipite Valley, and other scenic areas, and Robert Marshall of the Geological Survey had initiated a plan for a large park incorporating both the Kern and Kings river watersheds. Advocates argued that an enlarged Sierra park would increase government appropriations, attract tourists, and stimulate the local economy.

But many local people opposed the enlargement. Stockmen, who paid only a small fee for grazing on national forest lands, would be excluded from a park. Hunters opposed the elimination of such a large hunting area. Prospectors claimed that much valuable ore would be excluded from use, and lumber interests decried the loss of valuable timber. Others argued that the natural features of the Sierra already had protection through their ruggedness and inaccessibility. Chief U.S. Forester Henry S. Graves insisted that all proposals for new national parks be deferred until a Bureau of National Parks was created.

The 1913 loss of the Hetch Hetchy Valley of Yosemite National Park to a dam site to provide

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water for San Francisco made park enlargement in the southern Sierra seem all the more important. Under heavy pressure, Congress established the National Park Service in 1916. Stephen Mather, its first director, led prominent guests into the Sierra to gain support for park expansion.

Opposition intensified, however. Cattlemen in the San Joaquin Valley still coveted summer grazing lands in the mountains; the Forest Service argued that any future park should exclude timber, mineral, and grazing lands of commercial value; the Los Angeles Bureau of Power and Light planned major dams at Cedar Grove in Kings Canyon and Tehipite Valley; its rival, the San Joaquin Light and Power Company, filed applications for its own power sites; and local irrigationists defended their need for the water and hydroelectric power of the Kings River.

The contest between rival interests ended in a standoff and left the door open for negotiations. The Federal Power Commission decided that Los Angeles had no immediate need for hydroelectric power from the Kings River and that the city's claims interfered with the park proposal. The Park Service and Forest Service, after lengthy discussions, compromised on drawing boundary lines. In the end, however, the irrigationists succeeded in excluding the whole Kings Canyon watershed from the proposed park expansion, claiming that they would need sites for future hydroelectric power projects. Mather and the Sierra Club, which had played a central role in the negotiations, decided to settle for what they could get—the Kern Canyon and the Sierra Nevada around Mount Whitney—and to work for a power-free Kings River park later. A Sequoia National Park enlargement bill received the president's signature on July 3, 1926.<sup>21</sup>

Discussions continued through the late 1920s on proposals to add the Kings Canyon region to the national park system. Once more, however, park advocates and irrigation and hydroelectric power interests could not agree on whether the area should be preserved for its wilderness and recreational values or for the construction of dams. Little happened until 1935, when Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes proposed a bill to establish Kings Canyon National Park and announced that the new park would be treated as "primitive wilderness."<sup>22</sup> This meant access would be restricted to a state highway, then under construction, that was not to be extended farther than the canyon floor of the south fork of the Kings River. The Sierra Club, after receiving assurances that the Park Service would not overdevelop the region for

recreational purposes, actively supported the park movement.

Ickes's park proposal, however, met with sharp criticism. Many valley commercial interests feared the Park Service would prohibit development, especially dams for hydroelectric power and irrigation. They favored continued administration by the Forest Service with its more utilitarian approach. Local Forest Service officials, opposed to the growing national park system, fought to defend its management principles and the land under its jurisdiction.

After a major battle in Congress, the contending parties reached a settlement. To win the support of the irrigationists, Ickes and local congressman Bertrand W. Gearhart supported separate legislation to develop the Pine Flat reservoir and related reclamation development projects to the west of the park. In addition, the dam sites of Cedar Grove on the south fork of the Kings River Canyon and Tehipite Valley on the middle fork were excluded from the proposed park, leaving the door open to future development. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the park bill on March 4, 1940, thus ending the lengthy struggle to establish Kings Canyon National Park.<sup>23</sup>

The park was perhaps the best compromise possible at the time. The Park Service gained a magnificent mountain wilderness of more than 450,000 acres. The small General Grant National Park, created in 1890 and administered jointly with Sequoia National Park until 1933, was converted into a part of the new Kings Canyon National Park. Since 1943, the neighboring parks of Sequoia and Kings Canyon have been administered jointly.

In the years that followed, the city of Los Angeles made new proposals for water and power development, not only in Tehipite Valley and at Cedar Grove, but within the park itself.<sup>24</sup> The Sierra Club objected, and the Federal Power Commission ruled once again against the applications. Although Cedar Grove and Tehipite Valley together embraced relatively few acres, they were important to the park. Cedar Grove represented the one area in Kings Canyon that could be reached by automobile and that could be developed for use by tourists; Tehipite Valley, dominated by a remarkable granite dome that rose high above the middle fork of the Kings River, provided a noted wilderness attraction.

The Forest Service had earlier agreed to Park Service management of Cedar Grove, but uncertainty about the ultimate fate of the south fork of the Kings River Canyon had blocked its development. When alternative dam sites, especially at Pine Flat, were identified downriver, the irrigationists finally

withdrew their opposition to including the contested areas in the park. In 1965 Congress added Cedar Grove and Tehipite Valley to Kings Canyon National Park.<sup>25</sup>

Just as the decades-old battle over Kings Canyon ended, controversy broke out over Mineral King, just south of Sequoia National Park.<sup>26</sup> Excluded from the park in 1890, the former mining community had remained a quiet summer camping area ever since. The Forest Service administered the valley as part of Sequoia National Forest and, after 1926, as a game refuge. With the enlargement of the park that year, the valley became an enclave, surrounded on three sides by national park lands.

Responding to rapid increase in outdoor recreation following World War II, the Forest Service invited proposals from private developers for a ski resort at Mineral King. Due to the high estimated cost, especially of the construction of an improved road, no acceptable developer could be found until the 1960s. Early in 1966, the Forest Service granted Walt Disney Productions a preliminary planning permit for a year-round resort. The Disney proposal included a Swiss-style village, ski-lifts to serve 20,000 skiers daily, and parking for 3600 vehicles. The Sierra Club argued in opposition that, if it were developed, Mineral King would sustain irreversible damage and that its wilderness values made the valley worthy of national park status.<sup>27</sup>

When Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall approved a proposal to construct an improved road across national park land into the valley, the Sierra Club responded, filing suit in 1969 in United States District Court for an injunction to block federal officials from issuing permits. Three years later, the United States Supreme Court upheld a ruling by the United States Court of Appeals that the club did not have the legal standing necessary to pursue the lawsuit. The court, however, left the door open for the club to amend its original complaint in the district court. Faced with further delays and possible defeat in the courts, disappointed by the California legislature's refusal to fund improvements of the road to Mineral King, and aware of growing public opposition to its plans, Disney looked elsewhere for a resort site. In 1978, Congress ended the controversy by adding Mineral King to Sequoia National Park.<sup>28</sup>

Looking back on the creation of Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, it is clear that various commercial interests—lumbermen, stockmen, hydroelectric developers, irrigationists, resort developers—managed to block broadly supported efforts to expand the national park system. It often appears

that support for parks prevailed in Congress only when economic interests had been satisfied. On the other hand, the establishment of Kings Canyon as a wilderness park in 1940, and the more recent addition of Mineral King to Sequoia National Park, represent important steps toward protecting the ecological integrity of the national parks. Kings Canyon became one of the first parks specifically recognized for its wilderness qualities, and the protection of Mineral King, in the face of the determination of the Disney Corporation, marked a milestone in American preservation history.

**T**he campaigns to establish and enlarge Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks make up only one facet of their history. A parallel story concerns their management. Park managers and citizens asked how these national parks could best serve the public interest. Would they be best administered as natural preserves, or as recreation areas? These questions proved difficult to answer, and to this day no real agreement has been reached on the meaning and purpose of the national parks.

To begin with, Congress in 1890 provided no instructions or funding for Sequoia National Park.<sup>29</sup> At the request of Secretary of the Interior John Noble, the Secretary of War sent troops to protect the national parks of California from trespassers and vandals, a practice earlier introduced in Yellowstone. But the troops lacked authorization to patrol the Sierra Forest Reserve, and there were not enough soldiers for this purpose anyway.

Protection of just the parks proved difficult at first. When soldiers first arrived in June 1891 and camped outside the park at Mineral King, they found many parts of Sequoia inaccessible, even to patrols on horseback. Hunters killed game, particularly deer, as winter snows forced the animals down from the high mountains. Shepherders persisted in driving their sheep across the poorly marked park boundaries and remained largely immune to punishment for repeated illegal entry. Wholesale devastation from overgrazing and fires resulted.

In 1898, Lieutenant Henry B. Clark, acting superintendent at Sequoia, pondered the purpose of a national park: "Is it a playground for the people, a resort for the tourist, a mecca for travelers, a summer house where the inhabitants of crowded cities can repair and fill their lungs with the pure air of mountain and forest?"<sup>30</sup> If so, he concluded, Sequoia was a failure, for its scenic wonders remained inaccessible. Clark and others urged construction of a road to the giant sequoias. In response

in 1900, Congress finally authorized \$10,000 for the protection and improvement of the park. These funds allowed for repair of the old Kaweah Colony road and its extension into Giant Forest. Completed in 1903, Colony Mill Road opened the door at last to the general public visiting Sequoia National Park. From this time on, the early trickle of tourists grew slowly, but inevitably, into a steady stream.

In spite of the valuable service provided by the military guard, the continued use of troops had its drawbacks. Soldiers, assigned temporarily, could neither know the parks well nor take the same interest in their protection that park rangers did. The almost annual rotation of acting army superintendents, each with his own interests and ideas, made continuity of management policy all but impossible. Whereas some superintendents called for protection of the wildlife, others urged removal of all predatory animals to protect "the deer and other smaller animals and game birds."<sup>31</sup>

Civilians were first employed in Sequoia and General Grant in 1898 during the Spanish-American War and then steadily after 1900. Park ranger Ernest

Britten provided the first winter protection for the parks from 1900 to 1905, and Walter Fry took on the responsibility until 1914. By that year, the military had withdrawn permanently, and Fry assumed full authority over the park's management. He inherited a park that had changed little since its establishment in 1890. It was still little known and almost wholly undeveloped. Lack of a consistent policy by the military superintendents and by the Department of the Interior continued to cause confusion.

The situation promised to change after August 25, 1916, with the establishment of the National Park Service. The new agency, with a small, committed staff of professionals, became a permanent advocate for the parks. It set forth a well-intentioned, but often contradictory, administrative guideline that caused no end of difficulty for future park managers: "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life . . . and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future



The U.S. Cavalry administered Sequoia and General Grant national parks from 1891 to 1913. *Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.*



Captain Charles Young (seated front-center) was the only active, commissioned black graduate of West Point when he served as park superintendent in 1903. During his park stint he supervised completion of the first road into Giant Forest. Here he poses with several of his men and the road crew.  
*Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.*



Early concession facilities concentrated at Giant Forest, where visitation increased markedly after the first auto arrived in 1910, as shown in this photograph. *Photo by Howard Hays. Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.*

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generations."<sup>32</sup> How the parks could be preserved unimpaired and enjoyed by the public at the same time remained to be seen.

Two Californians, Stephen Mather and Horace Albright, took the lead in the formation and early operation of the Park Service, Mather as the first director and Albright as second-in-command. They were familiar with Sequoia and General Grant national parks and with their problems. For example, each summer hardy visitors on horseback or in stagecoaches struggled up the steep and narrow Colony Mill Road. After 1913 occasional automobiles, which chugged up the same dusty road, frightened the horses. At Giant Forest, visitors found ramshackle camps with inadequate water and sewage systems. In addition, private land claims in and around Giant Forest and the Grant Grove, acquired prior to 1890, threatened the parks with development and deterioration.

Mather first tackled the problem of private land inholdings. For more than two decades, military superintendents had tried to buy 3877 privately-owned acres, scattered in many different plots. Captain Charles Young had even managed to obtain an option on most of these lands for about \$19 per acre. Yet time and again a frugal Congress had rejected requests for appropriations.<sup>33</sup> To help overcome this obstacle, Mather offered to match congressional funding with private donations. Between 1916 and 1927, he cajoled money from the National Geographic Society and wealthy industrialists and contributed more than \$50,000 from his own pocket. With the eventual approval of Congress, the Park Service bought most important inholdings, with the notable exception of a 160-acre plot near the Grant Grove. This area, developed in 1919 for summer cabins, remains today as Wilsonia Village.<sup>34</sup>

The campaign to acquire privately-owned lands had been best left in Mather's hands. The development of tourist and resource management policies, however, needed strong local leadership. Mather found such a person in Colonel John Roberts White. Oxford educated and recently returned from the Great War, White had met Albright while canvassing Washington for a job. In only eight months he advanced from temporary ranger to assistant superintendent at Grand Canyon National Park. In June 1920, he assumed the superintendency of Sequoia and General Grant. He would play a leading role at the two parks for most of the next quarter-century.<sup>35</sup>

Like Mather and Albright, White believed the best way to preserve the parks was to make them popular with the public. This meant new roads and visitor centers, more trails, and advertising to

explain park wonders. Construction of a new road began in 1922 to replace the inadequate Colony Mill Road. The new route, via the middle fork of the Kaweah River, provided much easier access for automobiles. Plans soon included a thirty-mile link between Sequoia and General Grant. The "Generals Highway" would allow visitors to drive into one park and out the other in the same day. Indeed, with great fanfare, it opened to Giant Forest in 1926, and nine years later connected both parks. Construction of axial roads to Crescent Meadow, Lodgepole, and Wolverton, plus a state highway to Cedar Grove, virtually completed the present road network of Sequoia and Kings Canyon.<sup>36</sup>

As road construction proceeded, Mather looked for ways to improve the concession services at Giant Forest and Grant Grove. He believed a single concessioner would provide the best service and be the most accountable. Fortunately, some small local operators in the parks declined to renew their options, and after one trial monopoly failed, Mather convinced an old business friend, Howard Hays, to take over the Sequoia and General Grant operations.

With Mather's promise to support development, Hays and his brother-in-law George Mauger began operations in 1926, just as the new road opened to Giant Forest. After moving the dining and retail facilities to the new road, Hays began replacing old, dilapidated cabins with new ones. Between 1926 and 1930 the concessioner built more than two hundred cabins and tent-tops at Camp Kaweah, Pinewood Auto Camp, and Giant Forest Lodge. Hays and Mauger also rebuilt cabins in Grant Grove, but said their primary interest would remain Giant Forest, where the chief tourist attractions and the greatest opportunities for profit were to be found.<sup>37</sup>

The 1926 addition of the Mount Whitney country to the park also demanded attention. White regarded access to backcountry wilderness as essential to educating visitors in the ways of nature. A trail-building program received vigorous support from the Sierra Club, whose members sought expanded opportunities to explore and enjoy the new alpine parkland.<sup>38</sup>

The Park Service, which inherited a network of former Indian, livestock, and military trails, soon undertook construction of two highly publicized special trails. The John Muir Trail, from Yosemite to Mount Whitney, began as a state project in 1915. Completed in 1933, the trail linked Sequoia to its more famous northern neighbor. White took a greater interest in the second project, known as the

The Auto Log has been a major Giant Forest attraction since the earliest cars arrived. *Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.*



High Sierra Trail. This carefully designed trail connected Giant Forest with Mount Whitney and provided easy access to the backcountry for hikers and people on horseback. By 1934, Sequoia's trail system, like its road system, was virtually complete.<sup>39</sup>

With the expansion of the parks' infrastructure during the 1920s, visitation to Sequoia and General Grant increased markedly. Mather and Park Service personnel sought further ways to encourage the visiting public to participate in park advocacy. Radio addresses, newspaper articles, and public speeches by White and others helped. The most effective means, however, began with inauguration of an "interpretation" program in Yosemite in 1920. Two years later Walter Fry introduced the program at Sequoia with a series of now-familiar guided walks, campfire programs, and museum displays. This service proved so successful and dovetailed so nicely with White's ideas of visitor education that by 1931 he had manipulated his budget and the National Park Service's Washington office, and had successfully created a department of naturalists. The impact of the program can be gauged only by its overwhelming popularity.<sup>40</sup>

Interpreting the natural world became a Park Service trademark in the 1920s, but park management left much to be desired. In keeping with the prevailing misconceptions about wild animals, wildlife was handled on a good animal/bad animal basis, much as it had been under the military super-

intendents. Good animals included deer—often made tame by visitor feeding—while bad animals included any that preyed upon good animals. Thus mountain lions, coyotes, and bobcats were systematically trapped or poisoned. Fire suppression became truly effective with the addition of new fire roads, specially trained crews, and regular funding. Although well-intended, vigorous fire fighting also resulted in the dangerous accumulation of inflammable materials. World War I had brought a return of cattle grazing to Sequoia, a wartime expediency that Mather and his new agency diplomatically allowed. It took until 1930 to remove the livestock—an early lesson to the Park Service that a policy once established, no matter how destructive, was hard to reverse.<sup>41</sup>

**D**uring the first decade and a half of Park Service administration, visitation to the two parks increased more than eightfold, as tourists enjoyed the new road, filled the new cabins, hiked the new trails, and attended the new campfire programs. Although most visitors thought the parks were well run and fully protected, White and many of his staff during the late 1920s began to suffer doubts about the efficacy of park management policies. The construction and publicity had succeeded in drawing unwieldy crowds. On July 4, 1930, more than 2000 cars carrying some 4300 people had entered the park. White grimly recorded

the scene at Giant Forest, where a jostling, honking, mechanical jam spilled out of the parking lots and alongside roads. Campsites overflowed onto access roads, and trash littered built-up areas. Visitors ran shouting through the groves, scaled fences protecting the best-known sequoias, and engaged in every form of amusement from softball to square dancing. Lost in the disarray was the inspiration of the massive sequoias. In the face of such intensive recreational use, the original idea of a park as a preserved area faded. White realized that development for tourists had gone too far and that a park experience should encompass more than fun and frolic.<sup>42</sup>

Even before road and housing construction were complete, Colonel White began to suggest new goals for park planning—goals of “atmosphere preservation” and visitor education. In order to avoid the mistakes of the past, White, who felt a personal responsibility for the two parks in his charge, declared himself an obstructionist—ready to block or remove any policy or development that threatened the parks’ natural atmosphere. Additional impetus for this policy came from profes-

sional landscape architects, who advised White on almost every decision.<sup>43</sup>

From the mid-20s through the mid-40s, the last two decades of his superintendency, White tried to recreate the parks in the image of his vision of natural preservation. Because of an unusual combination of circumstances, he achieved remarkable success. His seniority and experience, coupled with eloquence and diplomacy, gave him an air of command rare in the Park Service. The Great Depression placed a powerful tool in his hands; White took charge of as many as 1100 men of the Civilian Conservation Corps, choosing projects within the parks and allocating labor. Had he been given this opportunity earlier in his career he might have built roads and buildings, opening thousands of acres to recreational development. Now he used the CCC to maintain and replace existing facilities, to landscape large areas of the visitor complexes, and to develop special attractions like Crystal Cave, Tunnel Log, and the stone staircase up Moro Rock.<sup>44</sup> The CCC also increased White’s influence indirectly. In administering this huge program nationwide, the Park Service developed a system of regional



Prior to the 1930s, scientific wildlife management did not exist in Sequoia National Park. Predators were systematically eliminated because they harmed deer and other animals popular with visitors. Shown here in the late 1920s (left to right) are mountain lion hunters Clarence Fry, Jay Bruce, and George Brooks, with Park Superintendent John White. *Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.*



The Civilian Conservation Corps operated in Sequoia National Park from 1933 to 1941, primarily building roads and trails and landscaping. *Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.*

offices and functional divisions that still exist. During the early days of this expanded bureaucracy, the Park Service director and his Washington office became more distant from local park decisions, thus creating a temporary power vacuum into which Colonel White stepped.<sup>45</sup>

The opening round in the battle to control park development occurred in 1927. Barely a year after concessioner Howard Hays came to Sequoia, White suggested he abandon plans to develop the area of Giant Forest and instead develop the less environmentally sensitive pine-forested valley at Lodgepole. Hays reacted with alarm. Citing visitor preference for "sleeping beneath the Big Trees," he went over White's head to appeal directly to Mather, who supported his position. Thus, the first round in what became Sequoia's greatest management battle went to Hays and his company.<sup>46</sup>

Although White acquiesced for a time, his consuming interest in restoring Giant Forest to its natural state led him to confront the concessioner again in 1931. Hays requested permission to add a few cabins to a housing complex known as Giant Forest Lodge. Recalling the distressing images of the previous Fourth of July, White rejected the

application and again proposed that the company evacuate the grove. Hays again went over White's head with similar success. This time, however, Horace Albright, the new National Park Service director, recognized the need for some restrictions on construction. He established a so-called "pillow limit" for the lodge area.<sup>47</sup> Park planners later identified this decision as the first limit of its kind in any national park. Pillow limits on other Giant Forest complexes soon followed.

White successfully blocked other new developments. He defeated a proposal for another road from Ash Mountain to Giant Forest via the middle fork of the Kaweah River. According to White, a proposal for a widely promoted high-altitude highway to run the length of the Sierra Nevada died when he refused appropriations to build the portion in Sequoia.<sup>48</sup> He also blocked installation of electric power lines in Giant Forest and rejected a variety of proposals, ranging from golf courses and dance halls to hayrides and cable cars. Again and again, citing potential damage to the "atmosphere" of the parks, White assumed the high moral ground and portrayed prodevelopment forces as tawdry and greedy.

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Despite pillow limits, the problem of crowding in Giant Forest continued to concern park planners. White and his assistants explored different strategies for restoring the grove's inspirational atmosphere. They limited the amount of time campers could stay at the four government campgrounds. They encouraged winter use, hoping it would distribute visitors seasonally. Instead, it added to the swelling numbers. When they encouraged the concessioner to add improvements to Kings Canyon and Grant Grove, the offer was spurned as unprofitable. Park planners moved some government administration and maintenance buildings from Giant Forest to Lodgepole Valley, but they were too few to make a difference. They even pondered redesigning the road system to decrease auto traffic. Nothing worked or promised any real hope except full removal of concession facilities from the grove.<sup>49</sup>

As the new decade of the forties dawned, White maneuvered to gain even tighter control over park planning and the concessions. The onset of World War II halted nearly all development and resource management programs in the national parks. Nationwide, visitation dropped by 80 percent, the parks' budget suffered a drastic cut, and the ranks of Park Service and concession employees declined sharply.<sup>50</sup> Given the respite, planning for future development accelerated. In Sequoia, concessioners Hays and Mauger hoped to replace some of the older Giant Forest cabins after the war and to expand the visitor complex. Superintendent White hoped for a return to CCC-type labor, for repair of roads and trails neglected during the war. He also hoped a combination of luck and pressure would enable him to remove concession facilities from Giant Forest. In order to strengthen his position, White called on his traditional allies, landscape architects. To a person, they recommended removal of concessions.

Unfortunately, White's control over local development decisions weakened after the war when the Washington office reassumed the reins. The imminent termination of the concessioner's contract in 1946 intensified direct negotiations between Hays and the national office. Feeling powerless, White railed against the concessioner, the policy of lengthy contracts for monopoly concessions, and what he regarded as usurpation of his duties. When Hays received a temporary extension of his contract, the colonel bitterly predicted that the concessioner would forestall his contract termination by obtaining indefinite contract extensions until a more amenable Park Service administration took over.<sup>51</sup>

White's acrimony henceforth proved a stumbling block in the concession contract negotiations and in 1947 resulted in his forced retirement. The era of John Roberts White, of local control, and of atmosphere preservation had ended. One of the most powerful superintendents in the system, White was replaced by a more pliant and development-minded man, Eivind Scoyen. A few years later, Park Service Director Newton Drury and Regional Director Owen Tomlinson also retired, to be replaced by people less committed to restoring Giant Forest to its natural state. Finally, in 1952, Hays and Director Conrad Wirth signed a new contract that ignored the question of Giant Forest. White's prediction proved remarkably accurate. The loss of this battle for Giant Forest marked the diminished influence of landscape architects and the philosophy of atmosphere preservation.

During World War II and its aftermath, Congress had provided minimal financial support for the national parks. While visitation to Sequoia and Kings Canyon increased nearly 125 percent between 1940 and 1955, for example, funding increased at less than half that rate. Partly in an effort to garner public support, the Park Service advocated a major development program, Mission 66. At the two southern Sierran parks, the project included three new visitor centers, extensive new employee housing, and expansion of park infrastructure.<sup>52</sup> Some in the Park Service feared Mission 66 would damage the parks and wondered what would save the "preservation" side of the Park Service's charter.

Science provided a possible answer through the application of ecological principles to park management.<sup>53</sup> Pioneering wildlife biologists Aldo Leopold and Joseph Grinnell helped shape future policy through their writings and by placing their students in the Park Service.<sup>54</sup> In the southern Sierra, forest pathologist Emilio Meinecke contributed with a 1926 study of human impact on Giant Forest.<sup>55</sup> In the 1930s scientific resource management gained a foothold in Sequoia and Kings Canyon, as well as nationally. George M. Wright, an independently wealthy scientist, funded a program of wildlife surveys in the national parks that revealed the inadequacy of earlier preservation efforts. Wright became the first national chief of the Park Service's Wildlife Division, but his untimely death in 1936 left it rudderless. The onset of World War II then eliminated his division and the incipient Park Service program of ecological management.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, some impetus from this ecological concern continued. At Sequoia and Kings Canyon, research scientist Lowell Sumner experimented

with a deer reduction program, discontinued the Bear Hill show (a bizarre tourist attraction with bleachers surrounding a bear-infested garbage dump), institutionalized predator protection, and encouraged studies of backcountry meadows.<sup>57</sup> Meinecke issued another report on Giant Forest in 1944 in which he reinforced his earlier warnings about threats to the big trees.<sup>58</sup> This was followed in 1955 by a report of a special commission investigating damage to the sequoias in Yosemite National Park.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, a burst of activity from 1947 to 1951 produced several extensive reviews of back-

During the 1960s, as the environmental movement caught hold, the philosophy of ecosystem management came to the fore. In 1963 a committee of scientists commissioned by Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall released a path-breaking report named after its chairman, A. Starker Leopold.<sup>62</sup> Relying in part on data from Sequoia National Park, the report spelled out ecosystem preservation as the best means to protect the national parks for future generations. It insisted that all management policies allow or mimic natural processes. This meant removal of some development, the complete

Giant Forest Village in August 1953 demonstrated the problem of overcrowding in a sensitive environment. With the exception of the gas station, the facilities and crowding are still present in 1990. *Photo by Wayne Alcorn. Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.*

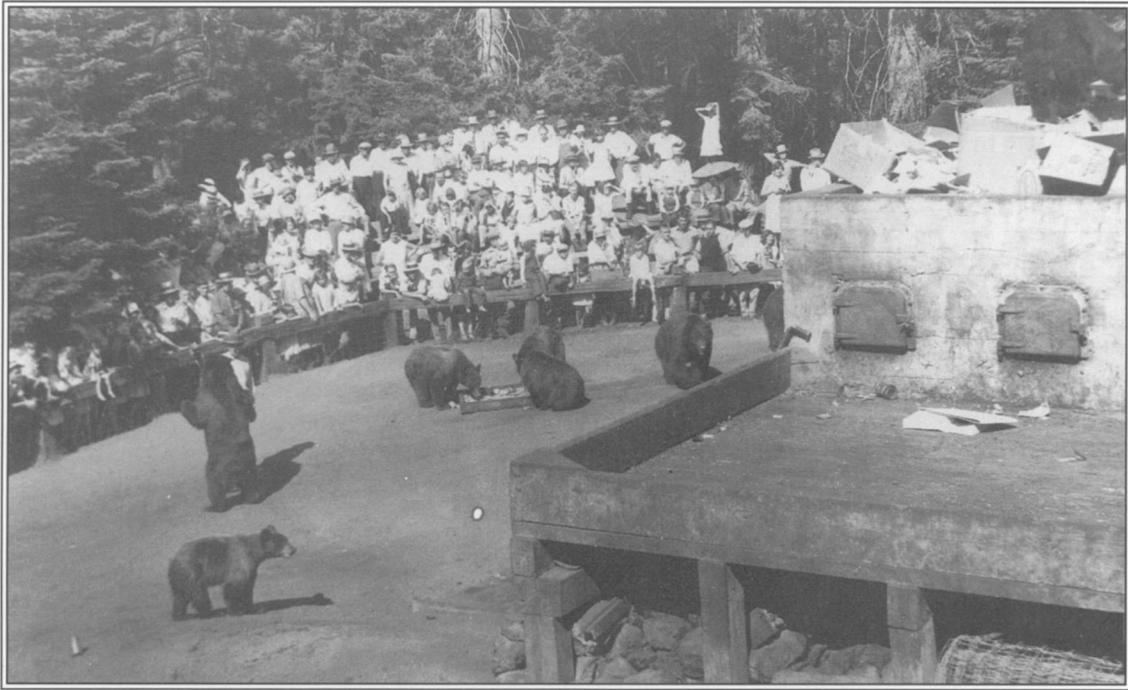


country resources in Sequoia and Kings Canyon. These were followed by a specifically commissioned scientific appraisal of backcountry meadows by Carl Sharsmith.<sup>60</sup>

Then, in 1959, ecologist Richard Hartesveldt released the first of several studies on giant sequoias, challenging policies that had allowed construction and suppressed fires among the big trees.<sup>61</sup> In questioning fire suppression, Hartesveldt struck at one of the oldest and most dearly held directives of the earlier preservation policy. He argued that older trees were endangered by abnormal accumulation of fuel around the base of their trunks, and pointed out that sequoia seeds rarely germinated in areas choked with vegetation. Periodic fires, he concluded, would clear the debris, solving both problems.

reorientation of resource management, and a vigorous program of scientific research. Udall ordered the Leopold Report implemented as the major policy guide for all national parks.

Faced with a groundswell of public environmentalism and the hard evidence of scientists, Congress in the 1960s passed important legislation that altered Park Service policies and planning. In 1964 the Wilderness Act provided a means for protecting roadless and undeveloped areas, much as the founding act of Kings Canyon National Park had done nearly a quarter century earlier.<sup>63</sup> In 1969, Congress passed the National Environmental Protection Act, requiring federal agencies to prepare statements on the environmental effect of all major federal projects and to propose alternatives to mitigate damage. Preservation groups, whose



Bear feeding was a major attraction in Giant Forest from the early National Park Service years until 1940. Its cancellation due to its “unnaturalness” turned garbage-hungry bears loose in the campgrounds to the dismay of rangers and visitors. *Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.*

membership was growing rapidly because of the environmental movement, became the loudest and most persistent participants in public planning.<sup>64</sup>

At Sequoia and Kings Canyon, the impact of these changes first affected the backcountry. The 1961 publication of a *Backcountry Management Plan* followed reports on meadow ecology, a massive litter cleanup, and tighter controls over hikers and large parties of tourists on horseback or using pack animals. The plan became a blueprint for all other backcountry parks in the system. In it the Park Service called for some meadows to be closed to livestock use, and for the establishment of meadow and trail monitoring, litter cleanup programs, and better organization of research projects. As the 1960s progressed, park planners closed more meadows to visitors using livestock and, in some cases, even to backpackers.

While the environmental movement led the Park Service to confront its problems of livestock use, litter, and meadow damage, it also encouraged increasing numbers of backpackers to enter the backcountry. Annual visitation to the Sequoia and Kings Canyon backcountry jumped from 8000 in 1962 to more than 44,000 in 1971.<sup>65</sup> Armed with its ecological agenda and faced with the risk that people might love the delicate wilderness to death, the Park Service took a novel and important step. In

1972, in cooperation with the Forest Service, rangers began issuing wilderness permits that limited the number of people allowed into the most popular areas of the backcountry. For the first time the Park Service limited the number of people visiting a park area. That it did so on the basis of ecologically-based principles was even more remarkable.<sup>66</sup>

The combination of public concern for preservation and ecological planning also affected development plans elsewhere in the southern Sierra parks. Shortly after the creation of Kings Canyon National Park in 1940, San Joaquin Valley businessmen had proposed a major recreation complex outside the park at Cedar Grove. Concessioners Hays and Mauger, lacking interest in that area and fearing construction of a reclamation dam, refused to build visitor facilities in the canyon. With the addition of Cedar Grove to the park in 1965, the threat of reclamation ended. In the ensuing planning process for the area, the Park Service scaled down its own development plans in the face of opposition by park users, the Sierra Club, and others.<sup>67</sup>

Upon acquisition of Mineral King, the Park Service encountered similar public opposition to development. Although the Disney plan of the 1960s had called for a major resort, most people who participated in a public hearing rejected development.<sup>68</sup> In the resulting *Mineral King Comprehensive Management*

Despite cessation of cattle and sheep grazing, massive erosion continued in the backcountry from overgrazing by horses and mules. Studies such as the one underway in this 1949 photo show the damage along popular trails. *Photo by Lowell Sumner. Courtesy Sequoia National Park Archives.*



*Plan* (1980), the only change in the status quo was a decision to eliminate existing leases and cabins upon the deaths of their owners.<sup>69</sup>

Meanwhile, the Leopold Report of 1963 had a profound impact. Park scientists at Sequoia and Kings Canyon attempted to correct past mistakes with programs to eliminate exotic plant and wildlife species that had been introduced in the past, to reestablish native species such as golden trout and bighorn sheep, and to separate bears from campers.<sup>70</sup> The most startling change came in fire management. In 1964 Hartesveldt began experimenting with controlled fires in the sequoia groves. The successful regeneration of giant sequoias that resulted from these experiments encouraged the Park Service to establish a permanent policy of prescribed burning and monitoring natural fires. By 1969, the program was fully underway and has since gained widespread public acceptance.<sup>71</sup>

Of all management issues, development at Giant Forest remained the most difficult. In response to a report by a blue-ribbon Park Service panel, the government moved campgrounds, picnic areas, and most of its structures out of the area by 1972.<sup>72</sup> However, the concessioner's more than 350 buildings remained scattered throughout the forest. In

1980 the Park Service released its *Giant Forest Development Concept Plan*, which called for the relocation of concession facilities to Clover Creek just north of Lodgepole.<sup>73</sup> Despite Park Service and public support for removal and the weakness of Howard Hay's old argument that the public demanded to "sleep beneath the Big Trees," the new concessioner, Guest Services, resisted moving its buildings.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Park Service continued to struggle with its original mandate: to provide for recreation, while protecting the parks unimpaired for future generations. At Mineral King, cabin leaseholders searched for ways to maintain their presence in the valley. In the backcountry, livestock use associations successfully defeated a plan that would have drastically reduced their access. Fishermen forced the Park Service to continue stocking some lakes and streams in spite of the unnaturalness of the procedure.<sup>74</sup> The controversy ignited by the explosive Yellowstone fires of 1988 temporarily forced a return to fire suppression in all the parks. Although the ban was lifted in Sequoia and Kings Canyon in December 1989, the fire management question and the whole philosophy of ecosystem management continues to be

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rigorously scrutinized.<sup>75</sup> And at the Giant Forest, the removal of concessions remains uncertain. As the concession company negotiates its next contract for 1992, no one can say what twist of circumstances may again be a reminder that parks are human creations, set aside by human design and controlled by human ideas and interests.

As the first century of Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks draws to a close, ecological preservation seems well established as the operating management philosophy. Yet it is just a philosophy, a set of current beliefs and practices. The future of Sequoia and Kings Canyon rests in the hands of those who will manage their preservation and use in the century to come. CHS

*See notes beginning on page 219.*

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The Keyhole prescribed burn was conducted on June 22, 1987, in Giant Forest. Sequoia and Kings Canyon scientists pioneered research and development of Park Service fire management. *Photo by Elizabeth Knight.*