

Manipulating Nature's Paradise

National Park Management

under

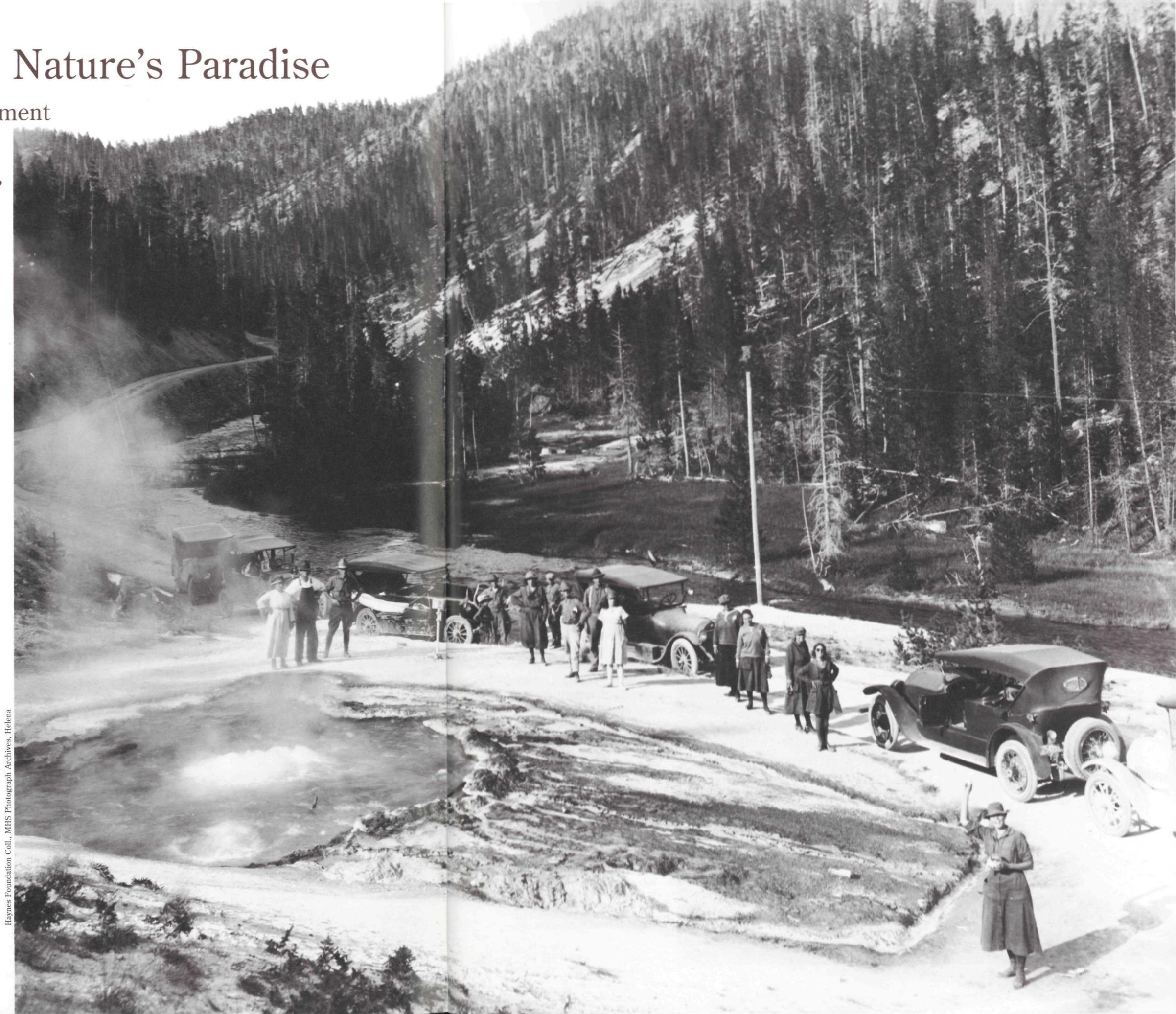
Stephen T. Mather,

1916–1929

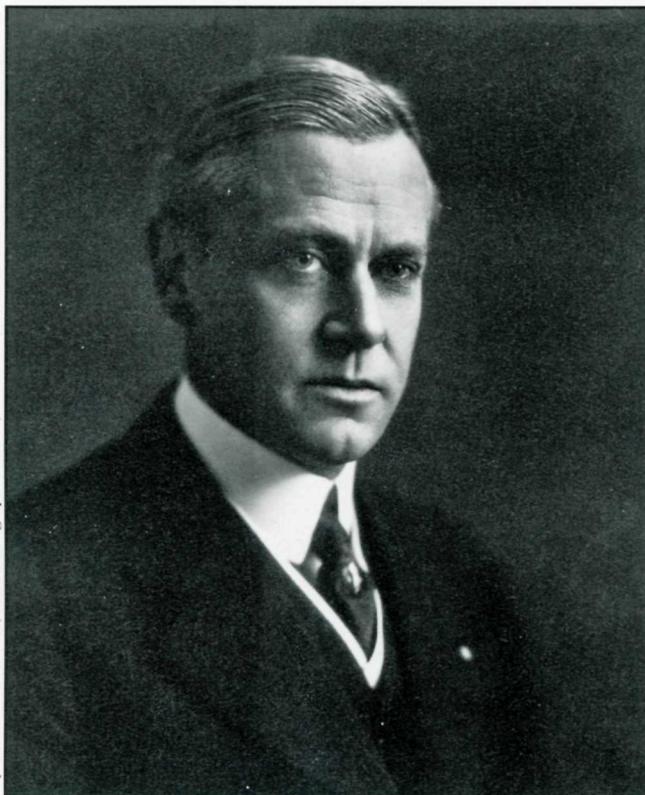
by Richard West Sellars

Controversies over national parks continually make headlines as the National Park Service encounters public debate on fire control, restoration of wolf populations in Yellowstone, intensive development of the Yosemite valley, and other issues. Such debates raise fundamental questions concerning the purpose of the parks: Why were they set aside by Congress? Were they primarily meant to be vacation areas for public enjoyment? What role should science play in caring for the parks, and how much effort should be made to preserve their natural conditions? When the National Park Service came into being in the early twentieth century the answers to these questions seemed quite clear. They were heavily weighted in favor of public use and enjoyment rather than preservation, and they fostered management practices that altered the national parks forever.

Tourists at Beryl Spring,
Yellowstone Park, 1920



Haynes Foundation Coll., MHS Photograph Archives, Helena



Stephen T. Mather, ca. 1922

After establishing Yellowstone National Park in 1872 and subsequently other parks such as Sequoia, Yosemite, and Glacier, Congress created the National Park Service in August 1916 to oversee this growing system of scenic reserves. The 1916 legislation, known as the park service's Organic Act, mandated that the national parks be treated differently from other public lands where extraction of natural resources was encouraged to enhance America's economic growth. The park service was given a truly distinctive mandate:

to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein 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 generations.¹

The charge to leave the parks "unimpaired" became the principal standard for national park management. Today, some observers assume that this mandate has from the beginning meant that the National Park Service's primary purpose has

1. Hillary A. Tolson, *Laws Relating to the National Park Service, the National Parks and Monuments* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1933), 10.

2. Historians of the national parks take differing views of the Organic Act's primary purpose. John Lemons and Dean Stout, argue in "A Reinterpretation of National Park Legislation," *Environmental Law* (Northwestern School of Law of Lewis and Clark College), 15 (Fall 1984), 53, 65, that the Organic Act's primary mandate is to preserve park resources: "the purpose of natural parks is to preserve pristine ecological processes" (p. 53); and that "the most basic fiduciary duties of the

been to preserve park resources such as wildlife, fish, and forests in their natural condition.² But a close look at early park service management discloses substantial flaws in that assumption.

In fact, the new mandate to leave the parks unimpaired changed the direction of national park management very little from the pre-1916 focus on preserving the parks' scenery and popular game animals and providing good fishing opportunities for public enjoyment. Stephen T. Mather, the National Park Service's principal founder and first director, generally adhered to the policies and practices set by the United States Army and civilian superintendents who had overseen the parks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries before Congress created the park service. Instead of setting new directions for park management, the immediate effect of the Organic Act was to strengthen national park leadership. It brought the parks under efficient, coordinated supervision and enabled Mather to accelerate park development for public use and enjoyment.

National park management under Mather's direction from 1916 to 1929 should be considered the park service's initial administrative interpretation of its legislative mandate, reflecting the service's perception of Congress's true intent regarding the parks. As the Organic Act's chief proponent, Mather surely had a clear understanding of congressional intent. And, indeed, widespread support of his administration of the parks suggests that the service met its mandate much as Congress and the public wished.³

Nevertheless, extensive alterations of the parks' natural conditions occurred during Mather's tenure. The National Park Service did not follow a policy of noninterference with nature, nor did it limit its operations to park protection activities, such as patrolling boundaries or attempting to stop vandalism to natural features. Instead, under Mather the service manipulated nature in the parks in two fundamental ways—through development and construction to accommodate tourism and by direct interference with flora and fauna.

Stephen Mather, a wealthy Chicago businessman educated at the University of California, had

[National Park Service] are to reduce development and promote preservation of resources" (p. 65). Similarly, Robert B. Keiter, "National Park Protection: Putting the Organic Act to Work," in *Our Common Lands: Defending the National Parks*, ed. David J. Simon (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1988), 81, argues that the Organic Act "sets forth an impressive, unambiguous resource preservation mandate." And Alston Chase, in *Playing God in Yellowstone: The Destruction of America's First National Park* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 6, comments that the National Park Service's "sole mission is preservation." By contrast, Alfred Runte, in *National Parks: The American Experience* (1979; 2nd ed. rev., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 82-105, emphasizes the parks' tourism and economic potential as key motivating factors for the legislation establishing the National Park Service.

joined the campaign for a national parks bureau early in 1915. Polished and at ease with the rich, powerful, and famous, he was also frenetically enthusiastic. His biographer referred to him as "the Eternal Freshman" who was "almost pathologically fraternal."⁴ Mather developed an intense loyalty to the national parks, and soon after passage of the Organic Act his friend, Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane, appointed him as the National Park Service's first director. Fervently idealistic in his drive to preserve America's great scenic areas, Mather devoted his energy, and much of his own money, to effective promotion of the national park cause, using finely honed business skills that had enabled him to amass personal wealth as head of a borax company with mines in the West.

As one of his principal goals, the aggressive new director sought public acceptance and support for the parks by opening them to greater tourism to increase their popularity. He asserted that with national parks, "the greatest good to the greatest number is always the most important factor determining the policy of the service."⁵ In his crusade to popularize the national parks he courted their chief constituencies, the tourism industry and the traveling public. Railroad companies had for several decades campaigned to attract vacationers to fill the hotels they built in or near Yellowstone, Glacier, Mount Rainier, and other parks.⁶ And the emerging fascination with automobile travel fit perfectly Mather's plans to

develop the parks and thereby increase their accessibility and popularity.

Working closely with his top assistant, Horace M. Albright, who had a pervasive influence on national park policy during this period and who became the park service's second director, Mather succeeded in his transformation of the parks, which he had proclaimed in 1916 to be "greatly neglected."⁷ By the time his health forced him to resign in January 1929, the parks had undergone extensive development involving virtually every type of construction needed to support tourism and park administration. Shortly after Mather's resignation, Albright summed up park development that occurred before and during Mather's tenure by reporting that the service was responsible for "1,298 miles of roads, 3,903 miles of trails, 1,623 miles of telephone and telegraph lines." Furthermore, national parks had campgrounds, museums, park office buildings, and many other facilities.⁸

In effect, during the Mather era the service came to regard national parks as being "unimpaired" as long as their development was restricted to that which supported tourism and was fitting to the natural scenery. That is, parks must be appropriately developed for tourism. With highways winding through majestic park landscapes and with rustic log and stone buildings and bridges, much of the development was designed to harmonize with the scenic beauty and thus seemed not to impair the parks. For instance, the

Samuel T. Woodring, chief ranger at Yellowstone National Park; Stephen T. Mather, head of the National Park Service; and Horace M. Albright, superintendent of Yellowstone, (left to right) stand with their hands on a gate made from elk antlers at opening ceremonies of Yellowstone National Park's northern entrance in 1926.



service in the 1920s constructed rustic-style headquarters buildings in parks such as Sequoia, Grand Canyon, Glacier, and Mount Rainier. Ranger stations were built in many parks, some in a "trapper cabin" style suggestive of the fur trade era and particularly favored by Mather. And park concessionaires often erected splendid rustic structures including Sequoia's Giant Forest Lodge, the Phantom Ranch in the depths of the Grand Canyon, and the spectacular Ahwahnee Hotel in the Yosemite valley.⁹

These attractive facilities seemed to complement the parks' scenic majesty and helped draw increasing numbers of visitors each year. Yet the service rejected numerous tourism-related proposals, sometimes after considerable internal debate over what constituted appropriate park development—in essence, what would impair the parks and what would not. A plan to suspend a cableway to carry visitors across the Grand Canyon, for example, had Horace Albright's support but not Mather's and was ultimately defeated. Similarly, a proposal for an elevator alongside the 308-foot lower falls of the Yellowstone River enjoyed even less support and was never built.¹⁰

Although much of the construction allowed in the parks was designed to blend with the natural settings, some development necessarily consisted of less aesthetically pleasing facilities including parking areas, water storage and supply systems, electrical power plants, sewage systems, and garbage dumps. Moreover, tourism development often went beyond basic accommodations to embrace such amenities as a golf course and even a race track in Yosemite, which was used for several years in the park's "Indian Field Days" celebrations. Mather himself encouraged public golf courses in Yosemite and Yellowstone, believing that tourists would stay in the parks longer if they had more to entertain them (Yellowstone never got its golf course).¹¹ He also advocated that where

feasible the parks should be developed for winter sports; and beginning during the last weeks of Mather's directorship Horace Albright led an aggressive campaign to host the 1932 Winter Olympics in Yosemite. Although the service lost out to Lake Placid in this effort, Yosemite initiated a winter sports carnival in 1931 using facilities developed during Mather's time, such as a toboggan run and ice rink, to attract hundreds of off-season tourists.¹²

While the service developed the parks for tourism as it deemed appropriate, it gained acclaim on the other hand by opposing commercial and industrial development proposals that did not relate to tourism and that were considered inappropriate in national parks. Mather especially feared such potential intrusions, believing they would spoil the majestic beauty and dignity of park landscapes and diminish the public's enjoyment. Perhaps most abhorrent of all the schemes for large developments such as dams, power plants, mines, irrigation projects, were plans to divert water from Yellowstone's lakes and streams to irrigate farms in Idaho and Montana, which Mather successfully fought in the 1920s.¹³ In effect, intrusive proposals like those in Yellowstone were seen as potentially serious impairments that would frustrate the National Park Service's efforts to meet its basic mandate from Congress. By excluding such commercial and industrial intrusions, the service saved the parks' natural resources from great harm.

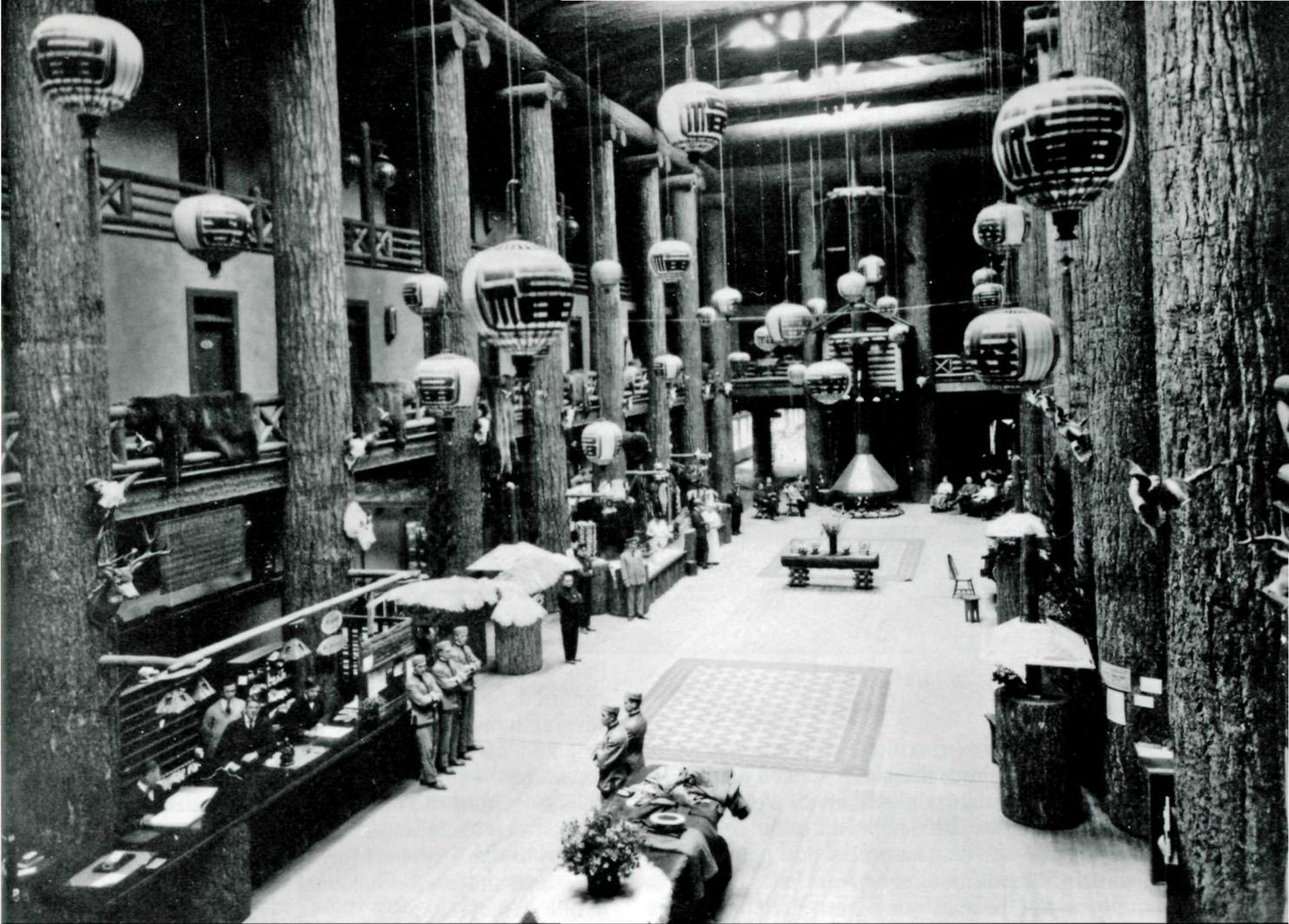
Beyond overseeing development and use, the National Park Service was required to care for the parks' flora and fauna. In managing these resources the service did not, however, attempt to maintain truly natural conditions. Rather, it sought to present to the public an idealized setting of tranquil, pastoral scenes with wild animals grazing in beautiful forests and meadows bounded by towering mountain peaks and deep canyons. This vision did not allow for violent disruptions like raging forest fires that blackened the landscapes, or flesh-eating predators that attacked popular game animals. Such an approach amounted to a kind of "facade management" in the parks, intended to preserve scenery, the resplendent facade of nature. And, to many, maintaining a serene, verdant paradise seemed to mean that natural conditions were being kept "unimpaired."

3. Although Mather's appointment as director became official in April 1917 when the park service was formally organized, as assistant secretary of the interior he was in effect already in charge of the parks when the Organic Act was passed in August 1916. On the meaning, interpretation, and implementation of the Organic Act to date see Richard West Sellars, "The Roots of National Park Management: Evolving Perceptions of the Park Service's Mandate," *Journal of Forestry*, 90 (January 1992), 16-19; and Richard West Sellars "Science or Scenery? A Conflict of Values in the National Parks," *Wilderness*, 52 (Summer 1989), 29-38.

4. Robert Shankland, *Steve Mather of the National Parks* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 20, 36.

5. Stephen T. Mather, "The Ideals and Policy of the National Park Service Particularly in Relation to Yosemite National Park," in Ansel Hall, ed., *Handbook of Yosemite National Park: A Compendium of Articles on the Yosemite Region by the Leading Scientific Authorities* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921), 80.

6. Alfred Runte, in *Trains of Discovery: Western Railroads and the National Parks* (1984; rev. ed., Niwot, Colo.: Roberts Rinehart, 1990), 9-61, gives an extended discussion of railroad interest in national parks.



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

An impeccably dressed staff awaits tourists in the majestic yet rustic lobby of the Glacier Park Hotel in East Glacier, Montana.

Also, in seeking to present a romanticized version of nature, the National Park Service from the very first saw no need for in-house scientific expertise to help manage the parks. As indicated in the 1918 “Lane Letter,” the major national park policy statement of Mather’s time, the service was to use scientists of other bureaus. It should “utilize their hearty cooperation to the utmost.”¹⁴ The service borrowed scientists from bureaus such as the Biological Survey, Bureau of Fisheries, Bureau of Entomology, Bureau of Plant Industry, and United States Forest Service, all of which practiced traditional utilitarian management, emphasizing resource manipulation and consumption. Mather apparently believed that the mandate to leave the parks unimpaired could be fulfilled through strategies similar to those used in traditional land and resource management.

7. See quote in *Annual Report of the Superintendent of National Parks for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1916* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), 1.

8. Horace M. Albright to Ray Lyman Wilbur, March 5, 1929, entry 6, Record Group 79 (hereafter RG), National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NA).

Indeed, under Mather the National Park Service steadily built its own landscape architecture and engineering capability to develop the parks for tourism. Thus, its willingness to rely on biologists from other bureaus to manage national park flora and fauna suggests how much greater was the service’s interest in recreational tourism than in fostering innovative strategies in nature preservation.¹⁵ With the park service committed to using the scientific expertise of other federal bureaus, natural resource management under Mather was, to a large extent, imitative rather than innovative. Nearly always intended to assure public enjoyment of the parks, the service’s manipulation of nature was mainly an adjunct to its tourism management.

For example, the National Park Service accepted almost without question the policy, long-established by the United States Army and civilian park super-

9. William C. Tweed and Laura Soulliere Harrison, “Rustic Architecture and the National Parks: The History of a Design Ethic,” typeset manuscript, 1987, chap. 3, pp. 2-12, chap. 4, pp. 6-9, copy courtesy of authors; Ned J. Burns, *Field Manual for Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, [1941]), 6-10.

10. Shankland, *Steve Mather*, 207-8.

intendents, of controlling predators to ensure the safety of popular game species such as elk and deer. Efforts to kill predators in the parks were also in accord with the ongoing, nationwide campaign to control carnivorous enemies of domestic livestock, as demanded by farmers and ranchers and promoted by the Biological Survey. Indeed, with extensive support from Biological Survey experts, the National Park Service practiced predator control with thoroughness, killing the species seen as detrimental to public enjoyment from wolves, cougars, and coyotes, to bobcats, otters, martens, and foxes. At one point even pelicans were hunted in Yellowstone to protect both native and introduced trout populations. Predator control was particularly effective on some species. By the mid-1920s wolves and cougars had been virtually eradicated from several parks.¹⁶

Determined to keep the national parks unimpaired, the service acted as though the predators themselves were impairments, threats to be dealt with before they destroyed the peaceful natural scene it wished to maintain. Bloodthirsty predators had no place in the beautiful, pastoral parks, at least not in large numbers.

The National Park Service changed its predator control policy only gradually during the Mather era. Under pressure from the American Society of Mammalogists, the Boone and Crockett Club, the New York Zoological Society, and other organizations, the service reconsidered its policy of killing carnivores. By the mid-1920s aggressive predator control had diminished in the national parks. And by the end of Mather's administration in early 1929, the service had narrowed its predator policy to one of limited control. Only major predators were to be targeted. They were to be killed only under certain conditions and were not to be fully eradicated.¹⁷ Although observed in varying degrees by different park superintendents, this modification of predator control was the most sub-

stantive change in natural resource management policy to occur during Mather's directorship, yet the change came only after populations of major predators had been eliminated or seriously reduced in some parks.

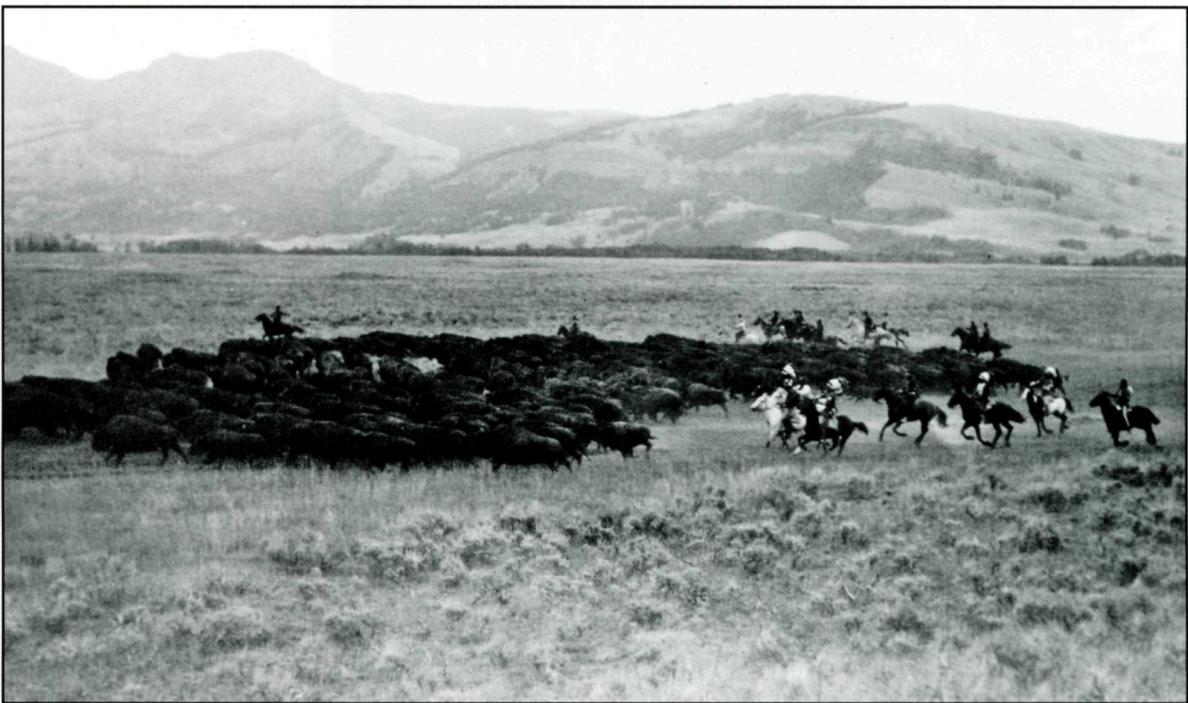
While the park service sought to eliminate predators, it used ranching methods to sustain other species, especially spectacular game animals. Perhaps nowhere was ranching more apparent than with management of Yellowstone's bison. Aware that bison had been near extinction in the United States, the service continued the intensive bison management program begun during the army's administration of the park. With activities centered at the Buffalo Ranch in the Lamar valley of northeastern Yellowstone, the park's "Chief Buffalo Keeper" allowed the animals to roam the valley under the watchful eye of a herdsman during the months when forage was readily available, then rounded up and corralled the herd at Buffalo Ranch for a period of time in the winter. The confined buffalo were fed hay harvested from several hundred acres of plowed, seeded, and irrigated park land. In the corrals, the keepers separated the calves, castrating many of the young bulls to control the breeding population. Surplus bison were slaughtered for market or given to nearby Indian tribes. Moreover, the park held roundups and even occasional stampedes for the public's enjoyment.¹⁸

The park service, following precedents set by army and civilian superintendents, gave constant attention to other large mammals the public enjoyed such as elk, deer, and antelope. Somewhat like domestic livestock ranchers, superintendents sought to maintain proper big-game populations, with population size based upon how many animals the range would sustain without becoming overgrazed. Indeed, the service's concern for grasses in national parks focused not so much on grassland as an aspect of nature to be preserved, but more on its value as rangeland, that is, as a food source to support game animals. To augment the food supply, the park service continued the army's practice of feeding hay to the animals during winter when snow cover limited pasturage available for grazing and browsing.¹⁹

11. Alfred Runte, *Yosemite, the Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 144, 156. On Mather's interest in golf courses see Stephen T. Mather to E. O. McCormick, December 16, 1920, entry 6, RG 79, NA; and John Ise, *Our National Park Policy: A Critical History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), 198. Neither golf course was built. However, when the service acquired lands in the Wawona area of Yosemite, a golf course was already there and remains in use today. For a time, Yellowstone employees golfed on an abandoned army rifle range.

12. On Horace M. Albright's support for the Winter Olympics in Yosemite, see Horace M. Albright to James V. Lloyd, February 13, 1929, entry 17, RG 79, NA. See also, Runte, *Yosemite*, 152-53.

13. On the Yellowstone dam proposals see *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1920* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920), 21-30. See also Ise, *Our National Park Policy*, 307-16; and Horace M. Albright, as told to Robert Cahn, *Birth of the National Park Service: The Founding Years, 1913-1933* (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1985), 100-102, 105-7, and 113-14. Schemes to tap the waters of Yellowstone Lake would recur in the 1930s, but were unsuccessful. See Aubrey L. Haines, *The Yellowstone Story: A History of Our First National Park* (2 vols., Yellowstone National Park, Wyo.: Yellowstone Library and Museum Association in cooperation with Colorado Associated University Press, 1977), 2:344-46.



Herders stampede buffalo in Yellowstone Park in 1925 to create a feeling of the "Old West" for tourists.

Fearing an excessive increase of some big-game populations in the parks, however, the service obtained authority from Congress to ship "surplus" animals to state and federal preserves and to city parks and zoos across the country. By the early 1920s Yellowstone had become, in Mather's words, a "source of supply" and a "distributing center" for certain species, with the park having shipped game animals to twenty-five states, plus various locations in Canada.²⁰ Again adopting traditions established by its army and civilian predecessors, the service set up park zoos to ensure that tourists saw the more popular animals. Yosemite had zoos, and, in addition to its other wildlife displays, Yellowstone established a zoo at Mammoth Hot Springs, exhibiting bison, bears, coyotes, and even a badger.²¹

Perhaps of all large mammals, bears were most subjected to management practices specifically aimed at public enjoyment. Especially popular were the "bear shows" at park garbage dumps, where visitors, seated in bleachers and protected

by armed rangers, could enjoy watching numerous bears feeding at close range. The shows had originated in the earliest decades of the national parks when dumps were established near newly constructed hotels. Aware that bears were probably the parks' most popular animals, the service continued the shows. But as tourism increased, so did conflicts between bears and people in campgrounds, near hotels, and along roadsides. In some instances problem bears were sent to zoos. Yet park rangers sometimes shot the most recalcitrant animals, as in Sequoia, where by the 1920s this practice had become common.²²

The park service altered fish populations more than that of any other wildlife in the national parks. Although hunting game in the parks was illegal, the service aggressively promoted sport fishing, making it a premier national park attraction. To ensure successful fishing, hatcheries were built in Yellowstone, Glacier, Mount Rainier, Yosemite, and other parks.²³ Lakes and streams were stocked with both native and non-native fish. Some national park waters, Crater Lake for instance, had

14. Albright actually drafted this policy statement, but it became known as the "Lane Letter" after Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane issued it under his signature. Franklin K. Lane to Stephen T. Mather, May 13, 1918, entry 17, RG 79, NA. The statement is reproduced almost in entirety in Albright and Cahn, *Birth of the National Park Service*, 69-73.

15. Professional engineers and landscape engineers (later landscape architects) made up two of four divisions in the service's first formal organizational chart approved in July 1919. Russ Olsen, *Administrative History: Organizational Structures of the National Park Service, 1917-1985* ([Washington, D.C.: National Park Service], 1985), 36-37. By contrast, wildlife biologists had no voice in national park management until after Mather's career ended. Even then, the wildlife biology program was privately funded at first. Lowell Sumner, "Biological Research and Management in the National Park Service: A History," *The George Wright Forum*, 3 (Autumn 1983), 5-7.

16. Victor H. Cahalane, "The Evolution of Predator Control Policy in the National Parks," *Journal of Wildlife Management*, 3 (July 1939), 230-31; National Park Service, "Policy on Predators and Notes on Predators," 1939, typescript, various pagination, Central Classified File 715 (hereafter CCF), RG 79, NA.

17. National Park Service, "Policy on Predators and Notes on Predators," CCF 715, RG 79; Albright to Wilbur, March 5, 1929; Cahalane, "Evolution of Predator Control Policy," 235.

18. Curtis K. Skinner, et. al., "History of the Bison in Yellowstone Park," [with supplements], 1952, typescript, 6-10, Yellowstone National Park Archives, Mammoth, Wyoming; National Park Service, "The Bison in Yellowstone National Park," November 13, 1943, entry 19, RG 79, NA; Margaret Mary Meagher, *The Bison of Yellowstone National Park*, National Park Service Scientific Monograph Series, no. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1973), 10-27.



Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming

Tourists fill bleachers to watch bears dine at an incinerator in Yellowstone Park, a practice discontinued in 1940.

been barren of fish before army and early civilian superintendents, followed by the park service, undertook fish-planting programs. To operate the hatcheries and manage the stocking, the service relied upon the Bureau of Fisheries, an agency devoted to assisting the nation's commercial-fishing industry and sport-fishing enthusiasts. Also, game and fish commissions in such states as California, Colorado, Washington, and Oregon worked closely with the park service in fish management.²⁴

In addition, the park service extensively altered the conditions of the forests under its jurisdiction. It sought to protect timbered areas from two major threats, fire and insects, of which, fire, the "Forest Fiend" as Mather called it, seemed the greater threat.²⁵ Mather continued forest management practices begun in the nineteenth century, and he relied heavily on United States Forest Service expertise. Even though the forest service had a fundamentally different mandate for land management, providing for harvest of a variety of re-

sources, the park service unhesitatingly accepted the forest service policy of total fire suppression. In accord with the thinking of the time, and seeking to keep its forests green and beautiful, the park service viewed suppression of all park forest fires, including those begun by natural causes, as fully compatible with its mandate to preserve the national parks unimpaired.²⁶

Moreover, the park service called upon the Bureau of Entomology to help combat forest insect infestations. In many instances insects killed trees throughout extensive areas of the national parks, affecting the scenic beauty. Spraying and other methods for reducing insect populations in the national parks were often focused on areas most important to the visiting public, including special scenic areas and road and trail corridors. Extensive spraying to control forest diseases such as blister rust, did not get fully under way until after Mather resigned. Insect infestations also threatened vast areas of public lands adjacent to the parks. Therefore, similar to fire control, insect

19. On the park service's management of large grazing and browsing animals in Yellowstone see Don Despain, Douglas Houston, Mary Meagher, and Paul Schullery, *Wildlife in Transition: Man and Nature on Yellowstone's Northern Range* (Boulder, Colo.: Roberts Rinehart, 1986), 14-57, 72-110. On elk management in Yellowstone see Douglas B. Houston, *The Northern Yellowstone Elk: Ecology and Management* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1982).

20. "The Yellowstone as a Source of Supply," in *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1921 and the Travel Season 1921* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), 38; *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1923 and the Travel Season, 1923* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923), 24.

21. Shankland, *Steve Mather*, 269; *Report of the Director of the National Park Service, 1921*, 39; Runte, *Yosemite*, 130-34; Skinner, "History of the Bison in Yellowstone Park"; Horace M. Albright, "Our National Parks as Wildlife Sanctuaries," *American Forests and Forest Life*, 35 (August 1929), 507.

22. Paul Schullery, *The Bears of Yellowstone*, (1980; rev. ed., Boulder, Colo.: Roberts Rinehart/National Park Foundation, 1986), 81-99; Runte, *Yosemite*, 136-40; Lary M. Dilsaver and William C. Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees: A Resource History of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* (Three Rivers, Calif.: Sequoia Natural History Association, 1990), 145-46.

23. *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1922 and the Travel Season 1922* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 39; *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1925 and the Travel Season, 1925* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1925), 6-7.

24. David H. Madsen, "Report on Fish Cultural Activities," April 5, 1935, typescript, CCF 714, RG 79, NA; *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1929 and the Travel Season, 1929* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1929), 26-27.

25. Mather, "Ideals and Policy of the National Park Service," 79.

control operations frequently spread across boundaries between national parks, national forests, and other public lands, even though the mandate to leave national parks unimpaired differed substantially from the policies governing adjacent areas.²⁷

As it implemented its mandate to leave the parks unimpaired and to provide for public enjoyment, the National Park Service faced only limited and infrequent protests over its management, an indication that the service was treating the parks in a manner generally satisfactory to Congress and the public. In fact, much of the park service's natural resource management seemed clearly sanctioned by the Organic Act. For instance, the act permitted the service to "control the attacks of insects or diseases" that might threaten a park's scenic features and to "provide ... for the destruction" of animals and plants "detrimental" to park use. Moreover, the act made it clear that the parks were to be managed for the perpetual enjoyment of the public. Among other things, the National Park Service could grant "privileges, leases, and permits for the use of land for the accommodation of visitors."²⁸ And far from objecting to Mather's administration of the parks, Congress created new national parks and provided increased funding for development, especially near the end of Mather's tenure as director when Congress launched a ten-year, \$51 million program to improve park roads and build new ones.²⁹

Mather's aggressive promotion and development of the national parks reflected his fervent belief in their great social value as sources of public recreation, health, and welfare. Upon his death in 1930, tributes poured in from Congress, conservation groups, businessmen, and friends across the country.³⁰ Such national respect further suggests that Mather's emphasis on developing parks and opening them to public use had met with widespread approval.

During the Mather years, objections to the service's management of nature, even as expressed by professional scientific organizations, were infrequent. Both the Ecological Society of America

and the American Association for the Advancement of Science passed resolutions in the 1920s against introduction of non-native species in national parks.³¹ Yet these two statements stood virtually alone and hardly represented a sustained effort to criticize the service's treatment of natural resources. The protests that built up in the mid- and late 1920s against the killing of predators were likely the most severe criticism from conservationists that national park management faced during Mather's time.

Perhaps the most penetrating critique of the park service's treatment of natural resources came from Charles Adams, a biologist at Syracuse University who had conducted research in Yellowstone. Following an examination of natural conditions in several national parks, Adams published an article in *The Scientific Monthly* in 1925 urging that park management come in line with the emerging science of ecology. He examined such programs as fire, wildlife, and fish management, concluding that the service must develop an ecological understanding of its natural resources. As Adams put it, if the service was to preserve the parks "in any adequate manner ... there must be applied to them a knowledge of ecology."³²

Adams referred to the "theoretical" policy of maintaining the parks as wilderness, a policy to which the service had "not adhered." The service was not meeting what he believed to be its true mandate, the preservation of natural conditions in the parks.³³ Adams's critique was important as an early effort to promote ecologically based management of the national parks and thus to interpret the Organic Act in that regard. Yet perhaps even more important was that it had little, if any, effect on national park policies. The National Park Service under Mather was strongly set on a different course.

Mather and other founders of the National Park Service have sometimes been identified as "aesthetic conservationists," concerned about

26. Ansel F. Hall to the director, October 29, 1928, containing "A Forestry Policy for the National Parks," entry 17, RG 79, NA; John D. Coffman, "John D. Coffman and His Contribution to Forestry in the National Park Service," typescript, n.d., 34-35, National Park Service Archives, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia; Stephen J. Pyne, *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 296-97.

27. *Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service, 1925*, 7; Ansel F. Hall, "Minutes of Meeting of the Regional Forest Protection Board, San Francisco, California," February 16, 1928, entry 17, RG 79, NA. The policy of concentrating on areas important to the public was re-emphasized in the service's 1931 forest policy statement that "remote areas of no special scenic value and not of high fire hazard, little used or seen by the public ... may be omitted from insect control plans ...," National Park Service, "A Forestry Policy for the National Parks," typescript, 1931, p. 7, entry 18, RG 79, NA.

28. Tolson, *Laws Relating to the National Park Service*, 10.

29. *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1928* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1928), 169.

30. Shankland, *Steve Mather*, 287-91.

31. For the Ecological Society's resolution and the park service's response see Charles C. Adams, "Ecological Conditions in National Forests and in National Parks," *Scientific Monthly*, 20 (June 1925), 569-70. For the association's statement see "A Resolution on the National Parks Policy of the United States," *Science*, 58 (January 29, 1926), 115. See also, R. Gerald Wright, *Wildlife Research and Management in the National Parks* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 37.

32. Adams, "Ecological Conditions," 563.



Ralph H. Anderson, photographer, National Park Service

preserving lands for their great scenic beauty as opposed to the “utilitarian conservationists,” exemplified by Gifford Pinchot and the United States Forest Service, which sought sustained consumptive use of natural resources.³⁴ Certainly through its determined efforts to preserve the scenic facade of nature, the park service under Mather focused on aesthetic conservation. But as practiced during the early decades of the National Park Service, the nurturing of forests and certain game species that contributed most to public enjoyment had a strongly utilitarian cast and was, to a degree, even commodity oriented, such as with fish management. During the Mather years natural resource management was indeed practiced as a kind of ranching and farming operation in that it was intended in part to maintain the productivity and presence of favored species. Thus, just as it was virtually impossible to separate the basic idea of national parks from tourism development and economics (a connection going back to the Northern Pacific Railroad’s sup-

33. *Ibid.*, 584.

34. These differing concepts are discussed in Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 189-98; and Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967; 3rd ed., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 129, 135-39, 180-81.

35. Lane to Mather, May 13, 1918—the “Lane Letter.”

36. The inscription is quoted in Shankland, *Steve Mather*, 291. Additional castings of this plaque were placed in many other units of the national park system in 1991 to commemorate the park service’s seventy-fifth anniversary.

port for the Yellowstone National Park legislation in the early 1870s), so was it also difficult to separate the treatment of specific park resources (bears, fish, and forests, for example) from the promotion of public enjoyment of the parks that fostered tourism and brought economic benefits.

The basic concept of setting lands aside as national parks, the development of the parks for tourism, and the detailed management of nature in the parks—none of these ran truly contrary to the American economic system. The establishment of national parks prevented a genuinely free-enterprise system from developing in these areas and required a sustained government role in their management. But this was done in part as a means of protecting recognized scenic values, which through tourism also had clear economic value. With the national parks, aesthetic and utilitarian conservation overlapped to a considerable degree. Frequently the differences between the two were not distinct. The national parks, in fact, represented another cooperative effort between government and private business, notably railroad, automobile, and other tourism interests, to use the resources of publicly owned lands, particularly in the West.

37. Adams, “Ecological Conditions,” 567-68; 589-90.

38. On the 1930s park service science program, see Richard West Sellars, “The Rise and Decline of Ecological Attitudes in National Park Management, 1929-1940,” forthcoming in *The George Wright Forum*, 10 (no.s 1, 2, and 3, 1993).

The tranquil setting of deer feeding in the Yosemite valley at the base of Half Dome exemplifies the aesthetic value found in the national parks' romantic scenery.

Through the park service, the federal government collaborated with business to preserve places of great natural beauty and scientific interest, while also developing them to accommodate public enjoyment, thereby perpetuating an economic base through tourism.

Furthermore, with no precedents and no understanding of how to keep natural areas unimpaired, the newly created National Park Service could believe that it was truly preserving the parks. Especially because use and enjoyment of the parks were unmistakably intended by the Organic Act, harmonious development of public accommodations became a means of keeping the parks "unimpaired" *within the essential context of public use*; and during Mather's time, public use was far less intensive than it would later become.

It is also important to note that, in the context of the times, in comparison with other public and private land management policies encouraging traditional consumptive use of resources, the national parks were much more oriented toward the preservation of nature. Generally perceiving biological health in terms of attractive outward appearances, the service seemed to believe that it could fulfill what Mather called the "double mandate" for *both* preservation and public use. The service could preserve what it considered to be the important aspects of nature while promoting public enjoyment of the parks. For instance, the 1918 Lane Letter, the principal national park policy statement of the Mather era, embraced these two goals without any suggestion of contradiction. It asserted that the parks were to remain "absolutely unimpaired," but also stated that they were the "national playground system."³⁵

Similarly, the park service's faith in the importance of development and its compatibility with maintaining natural conditions in the parks found expression on no less than the bronze plaque honoring Stephen Mather, cast shortly after his death and placed in many national parks and monuments. The plaque's inscription noted that in laying the "foundation of the National Park Service" Mather had established the policies by which the parks were to be "*developed and conserved unimpaired*" for the benefit of future generations (emphasis added).³⁶ This assertion—in effect restoring the organic act's principal mandate and affirming

the belief that developed parks could remain unimpaired—would epitomize park service rationale and rhetoric from Mather's time until at least the end of the first half-century of the service's history. By that time (the mid-1960s) increased postwar tourism and a rising concern for ecology would have revealed much more clearly the inherent conflicts between park development and preservation.

Biologist Charles Adams recognized in 1925 that the United States Forest Service had gotten underway with the advantage of a forestry profession already developed in Europe in the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, he believed that the national parks were a "distinctly American idea," with European precedents for parks being limited to "formal park design rather than large wild parks," such as those in the United States. Adams noted also that there had been "no adequate recognition" that "these wild parks call for a new profession, far removed indeed from that of the training needed for the formal city park or that of the conventional training of the forester."³⁷ In effect, America's national parks required more than "facade management"—more than the conventional landscape architecture and game and forestry practices applied by the National Park Service.

Not until the 1930s would a small group of wildlife biologists within the service begin to shift park management toward ecologically sound practices. Yet the shift would be erratic and very slow. At all times it would have to contend with the emphasis on recreational tourism that Mather firmly established and that ever since has remained the most influential factor in national park management.³⁸

Indeed, the National Park Service during the Mather era excelled in park development, building on precedents it found in landscape design and in tourism and recreation management to make the parks enormously inviting. And, although operating under a unique and farsighted mandate to keep the parks unimpaired, the newly established bureau relied on precedents of traditional forest, game, and fish management. The park service practiced a selective kind of preservation, promoting some elements of nature, opposing others—altering natural conditions largely in an attempt to serve the other part of its mandate, the public's enjoyment of the parks. 

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*The Castle Geyser, Upper Geyser Basin,
Yellowstone National Park, 1874*

Thomas Moran

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VOLUME 43 NUMBER 2 SPRING 1993

2

MANIPULATING NATURE'S PARADISE

NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT UNDER
STEPHEN T. MATHER, 1916-1929

Preserving wilderness by human design

14

JOURNEY TO WYOMING

AN EXCERPT FROM ETHEL WAXHAM'S
JOURNALS AND LETTERS

A real-life parallel to Owen Wister's *The Virginian*

*Edited by Barbara Love
and
Frances Love Froidevaux*

26

'THE PILGRIMAGE OF A FUNNY MAN'

BOB BURDETTE'S NORTHWEST TOUR OF 1888

Daily life of a humorist's travels in Montana and the West

Lewis O. Saum

38

LANDSCAPES OF OPPORTUNITY

PHASES OF RAILROAD PROMOTION OF THE PACIFIC
NORTHWEST

Selling the West as a scenic marvel and productive Eden

Carlos A. Schwantes

52

RAILROADING ON THE GREAT DIVIDE

IMAGES OF THE MILWAUKEE ROAD'S
WESTERN MAIN LINE

The life, times, and legacy of a once great railroad

Dale Martin

HISTORICAL COMMENTARY 62

THE URBAN WEST AND
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Carl Abbott

ESSAYS ON THE WEST 69

TRAGEDY AND BEYOND: NORMAN MACLEAN'S
YOUNG MEN AND FIRE, A REVIEW

Harold P. Simonson

THE NEW WESTERN HISTORY GOES TO TOWN 73

Howard N. Rabinowitz

MONTANA REVIEWS 78

Listings

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR 92

Cover

By 1871 when Thomas Moran made his first trip west, he was a respected Philadelphia artist. After illustrating "The Wonders of Yellowstone," an article by Montanan Nathaniel Langford, for *Scribner's Monthly*, Moran was determined to see the West for himself.

Through connections with A. B. Nettleton, office manager for Jay Cooke, head of the Northern Pacific Railroad, Moran joined the U.S. Geological and Geographical Survey headed by Ferdinand V. Hayden. The railroad, no doubt, intended to use Moran's work for promotions, but the road's financial troubles precluded spending such sums for advertising.

Later Northern Pacific promotions, however, are based on Moran's work. Among the artist's many illustrations that helped focus national attention on the region later incorporated into Yellowstone National Park, is the chromolithograph reproduced on the cover, *The Castle Geyser, Upper Geyser Basin* (1874, 8¼" x 12½"). Illustration courtesy the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.