


**washington**

**Theodore Roosevelt  
Island**

Washington DC



“ultimately  
no nation  
can be great  
unless  
its greatness  
is laid on  
foundations  
of righteousness  
and decency.”

Theodore Roosevelt Island is an 88-acre wilderness preserve located in the Potomac River at Washington, D.C. It was authorized by Congress in 1932 to memorialize President Theodore Roosevelt's contributions to conservation.

#### Natural Resources Prior to Roosevelt

On the untimely death of William McKinley in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt was elevated to the Presidency at the youthful age of 42. By this time, the land, forests, and wildlife of America had been exploited for more than 100 years.

About four-fifths of America's prime forests had been leveled. Millions of acres of second growth seedlings had perished as loggers burned over their debris. The land was overcut, overplowed, overgrazed, and overmined. Soil fertility was becoming exhausted. Rainwashed hillsides eroded into gullies, rivers overflowed, and rich farmland was carried downstream, lost forever in river mudflats. Wildlife had been destroyed in appalling numbers—more than one-third of the wild bird population. Some native wildlife species had been totally destroyed, and buffalo, beaver, and seal were being rapidly eliminated.

The consequence of lost resources had not yet dawned on the public mind. But the new President was uniquely fitted to meet the challenge. His belief in conservation grew from his boyhood enthusiasm for outdoor life, recording his outdoor experiences and collecting scientific specimens. Even as President, he was recognized by professionals as an expert field naturalist.

Popular imagination was fired by the colorful and convincing “Teddy.” With characteristic gusto he scorned the old creeds: “. . . We have admitted the right of the individual to injure the future of the Republic for his present profit. The time has come for a change.” Sometimes he put it bluntly, as when he threw away a prepared speech and roared “I hate a man who would skin the land.”

#### Conservation Expansion by Roosevelt

Under Roosevelt, the Government became the chief instrument in rescuing the public domain. More than 234 million acres were reserved for conservation. During his tenure in office, the U.S. Forest Service was created and five National Parks, fifty-one bird refuges, and four game refuges were established. The nearly extinct bison herds were saved. The Reclamation Act authorized irrigation of the arid West, converting desert into fertile farmland. The Inland Waterways Commission was created to redeem waterpower resources for public use. The Antiquities Act authorized preservation of cultural and historical landmarks for the benefit of future generations.

In May 1908, a total of 34 States responded to a White House call for a Governors' Conference on Conservation to analyze and formulate solutions to the resources crisis. Roosevelt then named a commission to prepare the world's first inventory of a nation's natural resources. This was followed by a North American Conservation Conference. Soon thereafter, 41 States had created their own conservation agencies to carry on individually the work begun by

the National Government. Roosevelt had reached the American conscience at the grass-root level, and had made conservation an inseparable part of the democratic creed.

#### History of the Island

Theodore Roosevelt Island has borne a succession of names. The first white explorers called it “Anacostian” or “Analostan,” which was derived from a local Indian name. After 1632, when Charles I granted the island to Lord Baltimore, it became known as “My Lord's Island.” The next owner, Capt. Randolph Brandt, acquired the island in 1681, naming it “Barbadoes” after his old home in the West Indies. In 1717 the island was purchased by George Mason. His son, also named George Mason, is known for writing the Virginia Declaration of Rights and helping to draft the Federal Constitution.

The island remained in the possession of the Mason family for 125 years, and thus became known as “Mason's Island.” The second George Mason died in 1792, leaving the island to his son John, who built a fine brick mansion on it, converting the island into one of the finest farm estates in the area. Stagnant water behind a causeway, built from the Virginia shore to the island in 1805, eventually made it too unhealthy for the Masons, who moved away from the island about 1832.

Later owners made it into a pleasure resort—the scene of family picnics and organized outings. For some time after the Civil War, the island was owned by the Columbia Athletic Association, then the Analostan Boat Club, and the Washington Gas Light Company. It was purchased in 1931 by the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Association for the purpose of making it a gift to the American people. Acceptance was authorized by Act of Congress, May 2, 1932. Federal funds for construction of a permanent memorial were approved September 13, 1960, and work began in July 1963. Formal ceremonies on October 27, 1967, dedicated the memorial to the continuing spirit of the great conservationist.

#### The Memorial

Theodore Roosevelt Island is managed as a natural area in living tribute to the energetic President who frequently sought recreation in the solitude of the forest. Visitors today may retreat here, from the pressures of urban life, to gain renewal of spirit and deeper appreciation of man's relationship to his environment.

Appropriately, the formal memorial designed by Eric Gugler is located in the northern center of the island, lending itself to the natural surroundings. A 17-foot bronze statue of the Nation's 26th President, executed by Paul Manship, stands in front of a 30-foot high shaft of granite, overlooking an oval terrace. A step-down surrounding terrace is composed of a perimeter promenade encircled by a water-filled moat over which footbridges provide access to the memorial. From this terrace rise four 21-foot granite tablets, inscribed with the tenets of Roosevelt's philosophy of citizenship.

**nature** • There is delight in the hardy life of the open • There are no words that can tell the hidden spirit of the wilderness, that can reveal its mystery, its melancholy, and its charm • The Nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased and not impaired in value • Conservation means development as much as it does protection •

**manhood** • A man's usefulness depends upon his living up to his ideals in so far as he can • It is hard to fail, but it is worse never to have tried to succeed • All daring and courage, all iron endurance of misfortune make for a finer and nobler type of manhood • Only those are fit to live who do not fear to die; and none are fit to die who have shrunk from the joy of life and the duty of life •

**youth** • I want to see you game, boys, I want to see you brave and manly, and I also want to see you gentle and tender • Be practical as well as generous in your ideals. Keep your eyes on the stars, but remember to keep your feet on the ground • Courage, hard work, self-mastery, and intelligent effort are all essential to successful life • Alike for the Nation and the individual, the one indispensable requisite is character •

**the state** • Ours is a government of liberty by, through, and under the law • A great democracy has got to be progressive or it will soon cease to be great or a democracy • Order without liberty and liberty without order are equally destructive • In popular government results worth having can be achieved only by men who combine worthy ideals with practical good sense • If I must choose between righteousness and peace I choose righteousness •

# THEODORE ROOSEVELT ISLAND



## Natural History of the Island

Three major biological communities—swamp, marsh, and upland forest—provide a refuge for a variety of native plants and animals. The island is a wild vignette near the heart of metropolitan Washington, D. C.

Cattails, arrowarum, and pickerelweed in the marsh areas provide the habitat for marsh wrens, redwinged blackbirds, and kingfishers. Turtles, frogs, and muskrats abound in the waters below. Willow, ash, and maple trees root on the mudflats and create the swamp environment favored by the raccoon in his search for crayfish. The higher central spine of the island forms the upland forest with its characteristic elms, tulip trees, red maples, and oaks. Downy woodpeckers, chickadees, and wood thrushes share the treetops with gray squirrels, while cottontails and chipmunks find a haven on the forest floor below; red and gray foxes also have been known to inhabit the island.

The plants and animals, protected by law, may be observed in their natural environs on 2½ miles of foot trails.

## About Your Visit

The parking area is accessible from the northbound lanes of George Washington Memorial Parkway on the Virginia side of the Potomac. A pedestrian bridge connects the island to the Virginia shore. Telephone 202-426-6922 or 703-285-2598 for schedule of hours and services available. You do not need to use area codes if calling within the metropolitan area.

## For Your Safety

The memorial steps are unusually low and slanted. Be careful not to trip or fall while climbing the steps. They may be slippery when wet.

## Administration

Theodore Roosevelt Island is a part of the National Capital Region, which is administered by the National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Inquiries should be addressed to Theodore Roosevelt Island, Turkey Run Park, George Washington Memorial Parkway, McLean, VA 22101.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

was hington

national park service  
u.s. department of the interior

Theodore Roosevelt  
Island

Washington DC