

DISTINCTION BETWEEN
NATIONAL PARKS AND NATIONAL FORESTS

The National Park idea had its true beginnings in the creation of Yellowstone National Park on March 4, 1872. "As a public park and pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people."

National Park areas are selected and set apart because of their outstanding scenic or natural values. These values must be such that the park will be of national importance and contain features which cannot be readily duplicated. They do more than simply foster recreation--Secretary Lane defined the policy governing the selection in a brief statement of May, 1918, addressed to Director Mather in which he said: "In studying new park projects you should seek to find scenery of supreme and distinct quality, or some natural feature so extraordinary or unique as to be of national interest and importance. You should seek distinguished examples of typical forms of world architecture." The National Parks constitute one of the "finer things" with which our recreation and education--both mental, inspirational and spiritual will be associated. Secretary Hoover addressing the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation in 1925, said in part: "My own thought is that the National Parks--the parks within the responsibility of the Federal Government--should be those of outstanding scientific and spiritual appeal, those that are unique in their stimulation and inspiration." The American Society of Landscape Architects, Committee on National Parks and National Forests, gives the following "justifying value" of a National Park. "We hold that the only justification for creating and maintaining a National Park is the existence of natural conditions of such grandeur, on such a magnificent scale, or with such unique or outstanding importance among all of similar kind throughout the country that the people of other and distant parts of the United States cannot afford to let them be destroyed."¹

The National Forests, on the other hand were created for the purpose of insuring a continuous supply of timber, the regulation of stream flow, and the conservation of range resources. The National Forests are administered so as to make them of the most possible use to the most people. This original policy was laid down by the Secretary of Agriculture in a letter to the Forester under date of February 1, 1905, in which he said:

"In the administration of the National Forests it must be clearly born in mind that all land is to be devoted to its most productive use for the permanent good of the whole people, and not for the temporary benefit of individuals or companies. All the resources of the National Forests are for use, and this must be brought about in a thoroughly prompt and businesslike manner under such restrictions only as will insure the permanence of these resources. You will see to it that the water, wood and forage of the forests are conserved and wisely used for the benefit of the home builder first of all, upon whom depends the best permanent use of lands and resources alike.--In the management of each forest local questions will be decided upon first, but with as little restriction to minor industries as possible. Sudden changes in industrial conditions will be avoided by gradual adjustment after due notice, and where conflicting interests must be reconciled the question will always be decided from the standpoint of the greatest good to the greatest number in the long run."²

Thus we see the distinction between the national parks and national forests--the one created to preserve for present and future generations outstanding scenic and inspirational values, and the other to conserve the forests for all legitimate uses and to regulate stream flow, so that the greatest good to the greatest number will be the result. They differ also in that they are under separate government administrative departments--the National Parks being under the Department of the Interior, while the National Forests are under the Department of Agriculture.

From the foregoing discussion, it would seem logical to conclude that as far as outdoor recreation is concerned the National Forests will apparently take care of this form of land use more intensively and generally than the National Parks because the National Parks tend to become natural museums, concerned more with the educational, inspirational and spiritual values than with the purely recreational values as they are commonly thought of.

Even with these distinguishing differences the National Forests and National Parks still remain alike in many ways. Both contain aesthetic values of outstanding merit and both were created for the purpose of serving a well-defined need in American Civilization.

¹Letter from Charles H. Ramsdell to Frederick Law Olmsted, Chairman Committee on National Parks and National Forests, A. S. L. A., November 6, 1929--Copy of letter from files of Dr. Cox, a member of this Committee.

²U.S.D.A. Mis. Pub. No. 99, Government Forest Work in Utah, 1931.

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