

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
HORACE M. ALBRIGHT TRAINING CENTER  
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FOREST CONSERVATION POLICIES

A majority of the areas of the National Park System were established to protect some of the finest examples of our nation's scenery including representative samples of most native forest types. Congress acted as early as 1864 to protect forest lands by granting to the State of California, Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove, and stipulated that these tracts should be held for public use and recreation.

The creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872 was perhaps the beginning of our basic philosophy and policy, however. The act establishing the Park stated that the area ". . . is hereby reserved and withdrawn from settlement, occupancy, or sale under the laws of the United States, and dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." Further, the Secretary of the Interior was given the power to issue regulations to ". . . provide for the preservation from injury or spoilation, of all timber, mineral deposits, natural curiosities, or wonders within said Park and their retention in their natural condition." In 1890, Sequoia, General Grant, and Yosemite were created. The intent of Congress to preserve and protect the forest in these parks is stated in the act creating Sequoia National Park: ". . . whereas the rapid destruction of timber and ornamental trees in various parts of the United States, some of which trees are the wonders of the world because of their size and limited number growing, makes it a matter of importance that at least some of the said forest should be preserved."

These early laws set the pattern under which the parks were administered prior to the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916. The policy stated in that act that the Service should promote and regulate the use of the national parks, monuments, and reservations by such means and measures as would conform to the fundamental purpose of the areas. This purpose ". . . is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife 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."

After the Service was established, there were a number of historic,

military, cemetery and recreation areas acquired which required a revised forest administration policy. In the military and historic areas vegetation is not left natural but is maintained as it was during the period represented. In some instances individual trees are quite important and are given special, individual care to prolong their life. In recreation areas and memorials vegetation is usually not natural, or in many cases not even native to the particular location involved, and the policy practiced in this instance is simply to present a pleasing appearance and perhaps provide comfort in the form of shade through the planting of trees.

In some few cases, even in national parks, trees are planted to provide screening, physical barrier or ornamentation. When this occurs, species native to the area are used.

When the Service was established authorization was provided for the destruction of such animals and plants as may be detrimental to the use of the parks. This legislation also empowered the Secretary of the Interior to permit grazing within any national park, except Yellowstone. Consequently, some grazing is permitted by the Service. In the west where many of the permits are life tenure, grazing will eventually be eliminated; however, in the east, grazing may add to the historical scene represented by the area and will be continued on an annual basis.

Exotic plants are not permitted in the natural areas and only permitted in historic areas when it can be shown they were planted and/or were growing at the period represented. Periodic eradication programs are required to insure these standards are met.

Vista clearing and thinning operations within the national parks are usually not desirable, although in some cases they may be necessary to provide full enjoyment of major attractions or to perpetuate the species concerned.

No cutting of live or dead trees for forest products is permitted except as specifically provided by law or regulation. Exceptions are where such utilization shall be incidental to necessary clearing for rightsof ways, building sites, vista clearing, fire hazard reduction, cleanup operations, insect and disease control, hazardous tree removal, or maintaining a historic scene.

The Act of September 20, 1922, authorized the Secretary of the Interior to protect public forests from fire, insects, and disease which has given rise to definite policies concerning these destructive agents. Fire is considered the greatest threat since it not only can cause serious injury to the vegetation and wildlife, but also may destroy valuable property and human life. Fire suppression takes

precedence over all other park activities except the saving or safeguarding of human life.

The policy pertaining to forest insects and disease is to endeavor to maintain the forests free of all introduced insects and disease, and to protect against epidemics of native pests in areas of heavy use. Protected areas include campgrounds, roadsides, village areas, important scenic areas, White Pine Blister Rust control areas, severe fire hazard areas, areas set aside for forest research, and areas of historical significance.

Remote areas within parks, possessing no special scenic value and not of high fire hazard which are little used or seen by the public may be omitted from insect or disease control plans unless there are other special factors which make their protection necessary.

In addition to the conservation policies already mentioned, the Service engages in soil and moisture conservation activities. These are directed toward repairing damage caused by accelerated types of man-caused erosion. In most cases, they are concerned with correcting conditions created by nonconforming uses before the areas were established as Service areas.

As stated in the Administrative Manual, Volume VI, Protection of Vegetation and Land, soil and moisture conservation encompasses not only the development and initiation of land use plans specifically designed to prevent soil and water resource deterioration and the rehabilitation of damaged resources; sound soil and moisture conservation practices must also be an element in all protection, development and management programs in the parks. These practices should result in the prevention, reduction or elimination of conditions or uses that cause accelerated erosion in the parks.