

## GIFFORD PINCHOT

As Euro-Americans spread across our continent, they cleared land for agriculture and consumed raw materials for industry. The “public domain,” land that belonged to the federal estate, was essentially without protection. By the 1880s, this misuse was no longer tolerable, and efforts began to maintain, protect, and manage these lands for the public welfare. One great American—Gifford Pinchot—came to be credited in American history as the early champion of “conservation.” This is his story.

Pinchot was born August 11, 1865, to one of America’s wealthiest families, and educated in private schools in New York City, Paris and then Phillips Exeter Academy. As a youth, he camped and hunted the Adirondacks with his father, who encouraged the youngster to consider forestry as a profession. But there were no forestry schools in America. What few foresters there were had been born and trained in Europe. Gifford entered Yale, took basic science courses, graduated in 1889, and immediately left for an 18-month tour of Europe.

While abroad, he met with leading foresters and, for a few months, studied silviculture at the highly reputed French Forestry School. European forestry was basically timber farming: trees were planted, raised, and harvested.

**CONSULTING FORESTER**  
Upon returning to the United States, Pinchot became a “consulting forester.” In western North Carolina, George W. Vanderbilt had established the Biltmore Estate by purchasing a number of smaller land holdings. Cut-and-burn tactics to create

grazing pastures by previous owners had ravaged the properties. Vanderbilt hired Pinchot to manage his remaining forests.

Gifford divided the estate into compartments, surveyed their forest conditions, devised a specific management plan for each, and did basic forestry research. Despite the elimination of grazing, the estate was able to turn a small profit from cordwood and timber sales. The federal government would later purchase the Biltmore Estate to create the Pisgah National Forest.

Business was good, and, Pinchot hired a fellow Yale alumnus, Henry Graves. Graves would go on to be Gifford’s right-hand man in the early days of the Forest Service, the first dean of Forestry at Yale, and Pinchot’s successor as the second chief of the Service.

In 1896, the American Academy of Sciences appointed a 7-member National Forest Commission to develop a forest policy. The one non-academy member on it was America’s only native-born forester, 31-year-old Gifford Pinchot. Pinchot and Graves toured the western lands by horse and pack

animals for three months, catapulting Pinchot into becoming the Commission’s most knowledgeable member and its secretary. The Commission recommended to President Cleveland the addition of 21.3 million acres to the forest reserves. The western states, not having been consulted, were incensed and became antagonistic toward any federal conservation program, a sensitivity from which some still haven’t recovered. Pinchot, however, had gained both prominence and influence.

By 1898, Pinchot became frustrated and left Biltmore. He looked on it as an experiment in “practical

Boone and Crockett Club members have come from a cross-section of famous accomplished people whose lives and careers have written and recorded the history of this country since the late 19th century. They have been naturalists, scientists, explorers and sportsmen, writers and academics, artists, statesmen and politicians, generals, bankers, financiers, philanthropists, and industrialists. Their diversity of ideas and activities during their careers have made the Boone and Crockett Club rich in its fellowship and achievements.



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Gifford Pinchot working at his desk, date unknown.



WHO'LL STAND BY HIM?  
THE CHIEF FORESTER AND THE CONSUMING ELEMENT.

Illustration from the September 1909 edition of *PUCK* magazine showing Pinchot, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, fighting alone against a raging forest fire. The caption asks, "Who'll stand by him?"

forestry," while Vanderbilt viewed it as a pleasuring ground. While at Biltmore, Pinchot had also consulted for the states of New York and New Jersey, as well as for private land holdings. In New York, Pinchot would establish a friendly and mutually respectful relationship with a conservation-oriented governor by the name of Theodore Roosevelt.

### THE NATION'S FORESTER

On July 1, 1898, President McKinley appointed the 32-year-old Pinchot as Chief of the 11-person Division of Forestry within the Department of Agriculture. Yet the Division had no forests to manage; the forest reserves belonged to the General Lands Office within the Department of Interior. Undaunted, Pinchot assisted states and private landowners to establish management

plans, charging fees only for larger holdings. Even the Department of Interior asked his advice concerning management of the forest reserves but the General Lands Office rejected his recommendations. The department grew.

Pinchot was a public relations master, lecturing extensively and publishing numerous articles in the popular press on the benefits of forest management. He lobbied Congress effectively. Roosevelt sponsored him into the Boone and Crockett Club. After his election as vice-president in 1901, Roosevelt took an avid interest in the Division of Forestry and urged expansion of the reserves. When President McKinley was assassinated later that year, Roosevelt ascended to the presidency, and promoted the Division of Forestry into the Bureau of Forestry to enhance its importance.

President Roosevelt

and Forester Pinchot became an incomparable team. By the end of Roosevelt's first term, the reserves had expanded to 92 million acres. In 1905, the forest reserves were moved from the Department of Interior to the Department of Agriculture. The Bureau of Forestry was renamed the United States Forest Service. Two years later, the forest reserves became the national forests. Pinchot's intent was to manage the national forests in a true utilitarian fashion, whereby they would contribute their full share to the welfare of the people in a sustainable fashion. Only grazing for a fee and under forestry supervision was allowed. Waterpower development was authorized to generate electricity, control floods and regulate water flow.

By 1906, the Forest Service had grown to 2,500 employees and was responsible for 200 million acres. The esprit de corps was high. Despite Pinchot's closeness to Roosevelt, the service was kept non-political. Field men were encouraged to make decisions based on local circumstances. Pinchot supported his rangers and supervisors, and if a forester had difficulty in sheep and cattle country, he had Pinchot, Roosevelt, and, if needed, the army behind him.

Pinchot took every opportunity to get into the field to hunt, camp out, and work with the crews.

He worked long hours. His parents had moved to Washington and he lived at their home, often inviting his staff over for informal sessions. It was during these meetings that the Society of American Foresters was founded in 1907. His family gave Yale

\$300,000 to create America's first school of forestry.

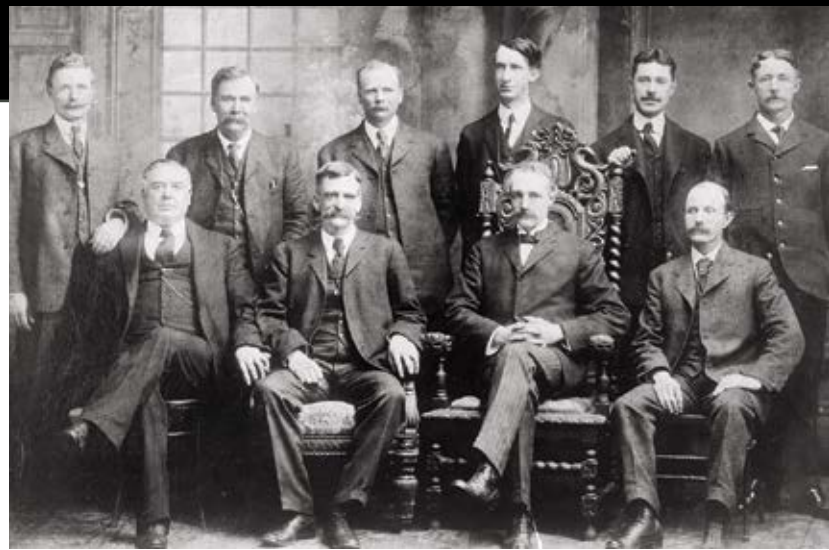
Pinchot established a research function to the young Forest Service, looking into such topics as tree growth rate and soil requirements in different ranges and climates. He investigated methods of fire prevention and control. Pinchot's research teams revived studies on the mechanical properties and uses of different woods. In 1910, he opened the Forest Products Laboratory, a joint venture between the Forest Service and the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

Pinchot spurred Roosevelt to create the Inland Waterways Commission, to which he, of course, was appointed, again acting as secretary. The Commission developed a federal cooperative policy on navigable waterways for power development, irrigation, flood protection, and domestic and industrial water use. Pinchot, with somewhat typical panache, considered the recommendations "one of the great conservation documents of American history."

Pinchot had his detractors, however. Word in the Forest Service was that he never forgave a man his mistake. Western states opposed "Pinchotism," claiming the Service restricted agriculture and mining development, competed with private lands for timber sales, obstructed hydroelectric plant construction, and removed land from taxation. Miners and sheep ranchers objected to the high user fees. Prominent western newspapers labeled him "Czar Pinchot" and "Gifford the First."

In 1907, to counter Pinchot's assertiveness, Congress attached an amendment to

The *Use Book* Committee at their 1905 meeting to discuss revisions. The *Use Book* is a document that is updated on a regular basis and serves as the Forest Service manual for regulations and instructions needed to guide the public and the forest officers. Pictured in the front row, from left: Rufus King Wade, Seth Bullock, Gifford Pinchot, and Albert Franklin Potter. In the back row, from left: B.H. Crow, Daniel S. Marshall, R.E. Miller, Edward Augustus Sherman, Leon F. Kneipp, and Edward S. Mainwaring.



the agricultural appropriations bill forbidding the president from establishing any more national forests in six western states. Roosevelt quickly proclaimed 21 new national forests in those same six states, and then signed the appropriations bill just before midnight on the last day of the year.

Perhaps Pinchot's most controversial stance occurred as he butted horns with John Muir. San Francisco's citizens were extremely apprehensive about their limited water supply, especially after the 1906 earthquake and fires. By damming the Tuolumne River in the Hetch Hetchy Valley, the city would have adequate water and electricity. However, the Hetch Hetchy was within Yosemite National Park. Secretary of Interior Ethan Allen Hitchcock repeatedly denied petitions to proceed with this project. Indeed, there were closer sites available. Pinchot countered Muir and influenced the vacillating Roosevelt. Secretary Hitchcock resigned and was replaced by a more cooperative James R. Garfield, who approved the permits. This fundamental split between Pinchot's utilitarian and Muir's protectionist view of conservation exists in various forms to this day.

In general, Garfield had cooperated with his boss's conservation agenda. When Taft, with Roosevelt's backing, was elected president in March 1909, he replaced Garfield with Richard Ballinger, a corporate lawyer, who immediately reversed some of the policies of the previous administration.

Roosevelt, Pinchot, and Garfield had done in the public interest anything the law did not forbid; Taft and Ballinger would only do what the law allowed. Pinchot and Ballinger clashed and Pinchot became publicly insubordinate. Ten months after taking office, Taft fired Pinchot. Roosevelt, still on his African safari, was furious. This was the start of Roosevelt's break with Taft and run for the presidency as an independent in 1912.

Because the Pinchot-Ballinger dispute had been very public, the concept of conservation received much limelight. The upshot was that conservation became established as a fundamental public policy.

### PENN'S WOODS

For the next decade, Pinchot continued his conservation efforts, mainly through the National Conservation Commission, which he himself had organized in 1910. The group successfully prevented the attempted transfer of the national forests to the states. Pinchot moved to Pennsylvania, ran unsuccessfully for the United States Senate, and became a vigorous critic of that state's Department of Forestry. His criticisms eventually forced the Forestry Commissioner to resign and Pinchot in 1920 was chosen as his successor.

Despite the somewhat shoddy manner attaining his appointment, Pinchot improved the department immensely. He launched a public relations program to garner public support. The

state purchased land to secure an adequate future timber supply. His foresters consulted for private landowners. Nurseries were established and seedlings were distributed. The state's forestry school became a four-year BS program. Roads and trails were created in the state forests to allow the public greater access to campsites and recreational areas.

Pinchot ran successfully and served two terms as Governor of Pennsylvania (1923-1927 and 1931-1935). Here, again, he emphasized conservation. Even when he returned to life as a private citizen, his interest in conservation never waned. His somewhat long and perhaps self-serving autobiography, *Breaking New Ground*, was published posthumously after his death on December 4, 1946.

Pinchot, in a sense, played the progressive Republican movement's Lancelot to Roosevelt's King Arthur. For ten years, from his governorship through his presidency, Theodore was the quintessential reformer, with Pinchot often at his side. Characteristic of the reformers of his day, Pinchot was unabashedly optimistic and fervently nationalistic. He favored greater economic equality, pursued problems scientifically and rationally, and attacked his opponents with a moral righteousness bordering on a religious crusade.

Not unexpectedly, Pinchot had both his champions and his detractors. His ego was large, and he gave himself too much credit for initiating the conservation movement. In reality, that movement had many sources and many instigators, and became a force when its different streams coalesced into a broadly based current. Pinchot's primary concerns were the proper use and preservation of the nation's trees, minerals, and water resources. His emphasis was to provide a sustainable source of wood products through proper forest management. Seldom did he mention wildlife, despite being a hunter, avid fisherman, and member of the Boone and Crockett Club.

But wildlife can't survive without habitat. And well thoughtout, scientifically based government programs can indeed complement the conservation efforts of private citizens. For those reasons alone, Pinchot was a major player in the early wildlife conservation movement. Roosevelt, in his autobiography, stated that, "among the many public officials who under my administration rendered literally invaluable service to the people of the United States, he [Pinchot], on the whole, stood first." "Gifford the First" indeed deserves a place of honor in conservation's hall of fame. ■