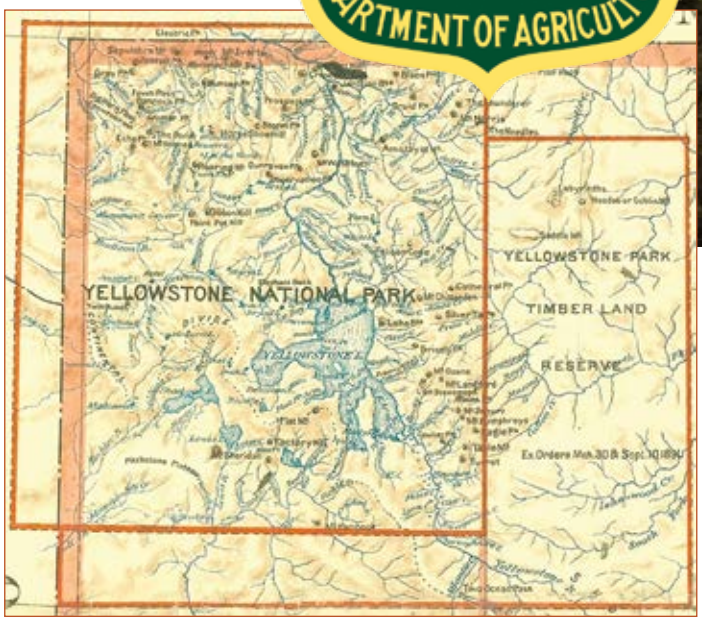
CREATING A NATIONAL FOREST SERVICE

Much has been written about how sportsmen saved North American big game species from complete annihilation at the turn of the twentieth century. And yet, what about the hundreds of millions of acres of timberlands that were viewed as yet another resource to exploit, to quickly line the pockets of private interests? That resource was on the chopping block as well.



In March 1891, President Harrison established the Yellowstone Timber Land Reserve to the east of the park.

Early members of the Boone and Crockett Club understood that our nation needed timber for both homes and railroads. At the same time, they understood that those timber reserves were not infinite, especially if left solely in the hands of private interests. For this reason, they took on the Herculean task of creating a system that would conserve this resource for generations, and it all started with the world's first national park.

THE TREES OF YELLOWSTONE

Carl Schurz was a political refugee from Germany, member of the Boone and Crockett Club, and Secretary of the Interior in 1877. In matters of conservation, he was way ahead of his time, according to James Trefethen, author of *An American Crusade for Wildlife*. He was one of the first public officials to understand the interconnected web involving forests, water supply, and wildlife. Schurz voiced his concerns to the American Forestry Association and others, but his pleas to curb exploitation of the nation's forests gained little legislative traction.

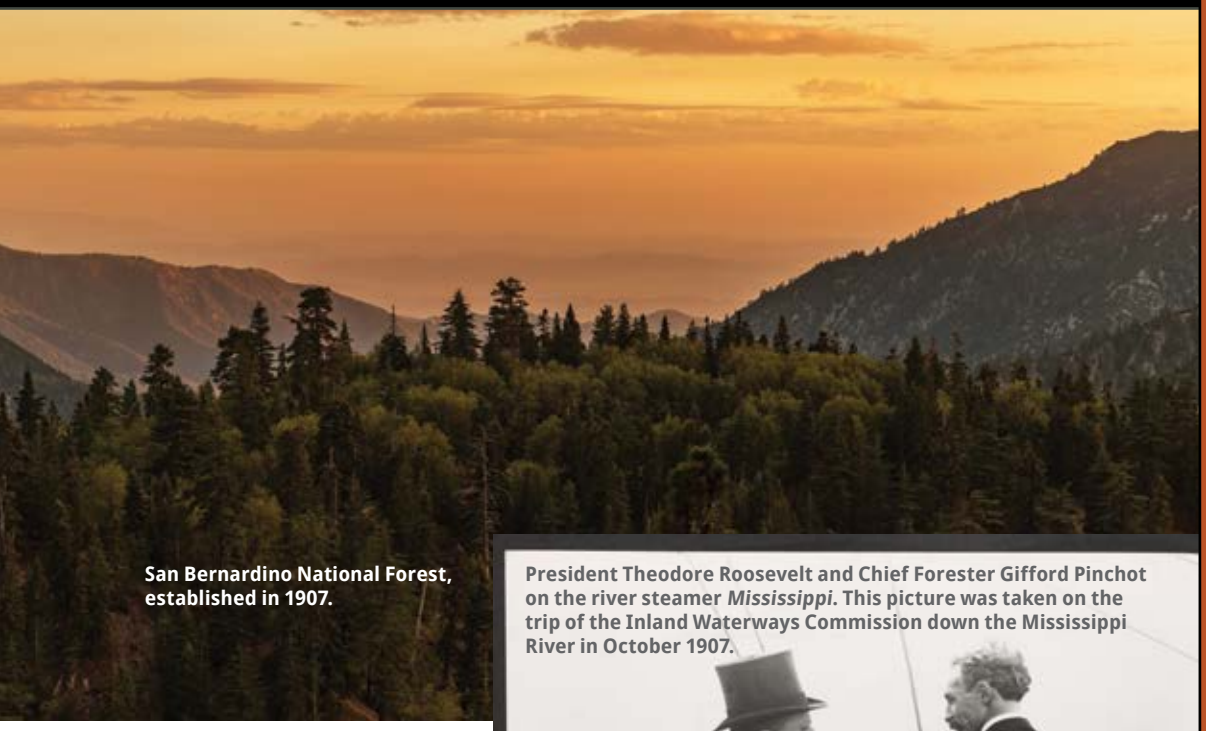
If nothing else, his ideas likely paved the way for passage of the Forest Reserve Act of 1891. Heartily championed by the Boone and Crockett Club and member Arnold Hague of the U.S. Geological Society, the law included a one-sentence rider (Section 24) that allowed the President of the United States to create forest reserves by executive order. A month after passing the act, President Benjamin Harrison created the Yellowstone Park Timberland Reserve to protect the area around Yellowstone National Park. In addition, the act set aside more than 13 million acres of timberland in western states and territories.

THE RISE OF PINCHOT

After the government put large chunks of land off limits to homesteaders and railroad tycoons, it needed to take stock of what was actually on those lands. In the summer of 1896, a seven-member National Forest Commission, which included a 31-year-old forester named Gifford Pinchot, took on the enviable task of surveying these lands. Pinchot, along with Henry Graves (both Boone and Crockett Club members) would travel the West by packstring for three months, touring existing forest reserves and areas where new reserves were proposed. Thanks to their extended camping trip, the commission recommended to President Cleveland the addition of 21.3 million acres to the forest reserves. On February 22, 1897, President Cleveland proclaimed 13 new forest reserves in the West.

A few months later in June, the Organic Act was signed into law, which served as a rough outline for the future of forest management. The act stated that forests were intended to supply timber and fresh water in a sustainable way. It also allowed the General Land Office (GLO) to hire employees to oversee the forest reserves for public use. Prior to this, the GLO, which was established in 1812, was notorious for giving land away to logging and railroad interests. Gifford Pinchot was hired to work for the

PJ DELHOMME
CRAZY CANYON MEDIA



San Bernardino National Forest, established in 1907.

President Theodore Roosevelt and Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot on the river steamer *Mississippi*. This picture was taken on the trip of the Inland Waterways Commission down the Mississippi River in October 1907.

The Impact Series is dedicated to showing how sportsmen, members of the Boone and Crockett Club in particular, saved the wildlife and wild places of the United States. Early members of the Boone and Crockett Club comprised the movers, shakers, and initiators of the American conservation movement. They were hunters, anglers, explorers, lawmakers, soldiers, and, above all, conservationists. These members established laws that allowed our wildlife resources to flourish. They also protected landscape-scale geologic marvels and American icons like Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Denali, and many, many more. These members may no longer be with us, but their legacy remains. This series aims to honor their accomplishments and remind us of the good work still to do.

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GLO in the summer of 1897, but ironically, he was no fan of the agency. His job was to continue his surveys of the forest reserves and recommend ways to manage them.

In July 1898, President McKinley appointed the 32-year-old Pinchot as chief of the 11-person Division of Forestry within the Department of Agriculture, but the forest reserves were still under the management of the GLO. Big changes were soon in store for our nation, though, when McKinley was assassinated, and Pinchot's good friend, Theodore Roosevelt, became President of the United States.

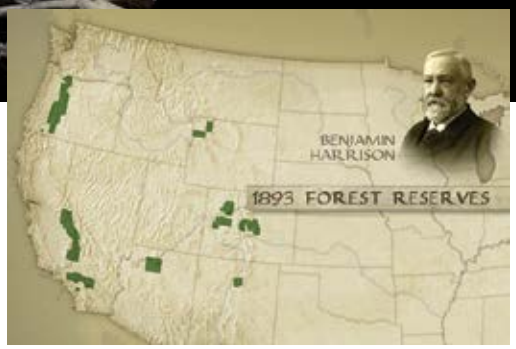
A FOREST SERVICE

Gifford Pinchot was born with a mouthful of silver spoons. Much of his family's wealth came from clear-cutting huge swaths of Eastern forests, and then selling the cleared land to farmers. Pinchot understood the benefits of how the land could provide wealth and resources, but he also understood that the waste of a resource for one-time personal gain was short-sighted.

Pinchot and Roosevelt had much in common, including membership in the Boone and Crockett Club. In fact, Roosevelt personally sponsored Pinchot's membership to the Club in 1897. Pinchot, according to author James Trefethen, was Roosevelt's main advisor on all things relating to natural resources. But Roosevelt was his own man, and he also entertained the ideas of preservationist John Muir. Together, Pinchot and Roosevelt would "manage" forests employing a rather new concept at the time called conservation. When Roosevelt became president in September 1901, conservation would charge full steam ahead.

By the end of President Roosevelt's first term, he had set aside 20 million acres of forest reserves thanks to Section 24—that one sentence rider in the Forest Reserve Act of 1891. When he was re-elected in 1904, Roosevelt

This logjam on the Mississippi River near Little Falls, Minnesota, was reported to be six to seven miles long and took lumberjacks and horse teams over six months to free (c. 1894).



A visual display showing the growth of the forest reserves in 1893 and to the national forests in 1908. Courtesy *The Greatest Good: A Forest Service Centennial Film*.

wasted no time shuffling agencies and personnel to more effectively manage the nation's ever-growing forest reserve system.

In 1905, Pinchot's dream of sustainable forestry finally happened. By signing the Transfer Act of 1905, President Roosevelt transferred more than 63 million acres of forest reserves from the GLO in the Department of the Interior to the Department of Agriculture where Pinchot served as the head of the Division of Forestry. In March, the Division of Forestry was renamed the United States Forest Service with Pinchot as its first chief. Two years later, forest reserves officially became national forests.

Together, Pinchot and Roosevelt would use their collective ingenuity to head off potential legislation in 1907 that would have restricted the creation of new national forests in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, and Wyoming. Roosevelt couldn't veto the legislation. Instead, Roosevelt proclaimed 21 new forest preserves and expanded 11 of them, establishing 16 million acres of national forest. These would become known as the midnight forests. In his second term alone, President Roosevelt set aside 80 million acres of land—an area the size of New Mexico.

THE FOREST SERVICE TODAY

When Roosevelt kept his word that he would not seek a third term, Taft took over and fired Pinchot in a rather scandalous affair in 1910. Another Boone and Crockett member (and camping buddy of Pinchot), Henry S. Graves became the second chief of the Forest Service. Over the years, numerous members of the Boone and Crockett Club would serve as the organization's chief.

Today, the Boone and Crockett Club continues to provide input to agencies and lawmakers on the value of sustainable conservation, especially when new legislation is proposed. Forest health and collaborative conservation are key focus areas for the Club. With a little luck and a whole lot of work, America's forests will continue to be an example of the sustainable conservation that both Pinchot and Roosevelt envisioned more than a century ago. ■

Ranger Griffin locating distant forest fires using a map and compass from the top of the Mt. Silcox Lookout Station, while on fire patrol duty on August 3, 1909—Cabinet National Forest (now Lolo National Forest).