The Cradle of Conservation

Theodore Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch, an Icon of America's National Identity

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The English word "icon" comes from the Greek word "eikón" which meant an image (picture, bust, statue, or emblem) considered holy or sacred, and adored and worshipped; or a revered and cherished belief (or superstition), such as eternal life after death. Icons therefore can be either tangible or intangible.

Because of America's short history of some 400 years since our European ancestors arrived on our eastern shores, coupled with an intense desire for rapid nation building, we have embraced a variety of icons, both tangible and intangible (i.e., people, places, values, and beliefs) while developing our unique national identity. The pilgrim, frontiersman, cowboy, industrial-capitalist, general, or astronaut—each archetype has a distinct place in our historical conscience of what this country stands for, and the type of people it took to wrestle and forge contemporary America from a wilderness initially inhabited by Indians. With each historic image or character-type goes a name, and today we celebrate a list of heroes who molded America into a great nation. Political leaders, moreover, enjoy a distinct place in our revered icons that represent nation building. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt: Each looms large in our American history and culture from atop Mt. Rushmore. To each we've attached a place: Washington is memorialized by Mt. Vernon and the Washington Monument; Jefferson by Monticello and the Jefferson Memorial on the Potomac; Lincoln by the log cabin in Kentucky and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Theodore Roosevelt has several "places" memorializing his legendary, restless place in our history: his birthplace in New York City, reminding us of his urban roots; his permanent home, Sagamore Hill, on Long Island; Roosevelt Island in the Potomac River in Washington, D.C., celebrating his presidency; and Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota memorializing his conservation legacy.

...TODAY WE CELEBRATE A LIST OF HEROES WHO MOLDED AMERICA INTO A GREAT NATION. POLITICAL LEADERS, MOREOVER, ENJOY A DISTINCT PLACE IN OUR REVERED ICONS THAT REPRESENT NATION BUILDING. GEORGE WASHINGTON, THOMAS JEFFERSON, ABRAHAM LINCOLN, AND THEODORE ROOSEVELT: EACH LOOMS LARGE IN OUR AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE FROM ATOP MT. RUSHMORE.

The tectonic plates—i.e., the core values—underlying our culture that give structural integrity and a distinctive identity to our nation are our deeply rooted beliefs, each an intangible icon: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; a belief and trust in God;

Endnotes are available for this article. If you are interested in receiving them, please contact the Club at 406/542-1888 or bcclub@boone-crockett.org.

On May 17-18, 2005, the American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP) sponsored a conference in Washington, D.C. focused on the major national wildlife concerns facing the nation. As Secretary of Interior Gale Norton was leaving the event, her director of external affairs asked Bob Model, Dan Pedrotti, and me to help the Department of Interior with a difficult problem they had been wrestling with for several years.

The "problem" was the inability of the National Park Service to purchase a ranch in North Dakota that bordered the Theodore Roosevelt National Park, which was the largest single piece of Theodore Roosevelt's historic Elkhorn Ranch remaining in private ownership. When we met 10 days later at the Department of Interior, a special assistant to the president appeared to attend this and several following meetings. That's when we recognized this project had President Bush's full support and attention.

The Boone and Crockett Club realized this greatly anticipated acquisition would have historic significance to the Club and nationally, which is why it was a high priority of the current administration. The activity of the ensuing 23 months has been epic and merits a chapter in the Club's legacy of facilitating the acquisition and expansion of treasured federal lands, such as the establishment of Glacier National Park in 1910 and Mt. McKinley National Park (now called Denali) in 1917.

The President's 2006-2007 Land and Water Conservation Fund budget placed the Elkhorn project at the top of the list, requesting $4.5 million. After a year of political haggling, a total of $4.8 million was finally approved to acquire the land. But the landowners had a competing offer from a private-sector land developer for $5.3 million. Rather than lose this historic site to a subdivider for $500,000, a leap of faith was made that this could be raised privately, and the deal was struck in late August 2006. A contract to secure the transaction was needed, with a simultaneous transfer to the U.S. Forest Service, the ultimate owner. Grant Parker, general counsel at the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, drafted the documents and the contract was signed on August 25, 2006.

A national fundraising campaign was immediately organized to cover the $500,000 shortfall. An application had previously been submitted to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), and in the nick of time, NFWF approved a challenge grant of $500,000. Settlement could occur timely, but the fundraising campaign launched earlier will continue until the challenge grant is met. The challenge funds will be used for habitat restoration, environmental remediation, water and riparian enhancement, and educational and interpretive programs and features.

Final closing on the Elkhorn Ranch occurred on April 25, 2007. This accomplishment and the way in which it was achieved by many, many people coming together in a quiet, cooperative approach to realize a dream reflects how the Boone and Crockett Club historically operated a century ago — and how that legacy in the American conservation movement continues today.

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freedom of speech; tolerance for dissent and different ethnic groups and religions; a democratic form of government; capitalism and the encouragement of entrepreneurship and human initiative. Notable intangible iconic core values that secure our identity as a Nation and which we cherish deep in our national pride have been memorialized by linkages with geographic places or sites that symbolize and ensure their perpetuation. Examples of such significant historic sites include the following: the Statue of Liberty symbolizes our freedom; Ellis Island symbolizes a land of opportunity, hope, and promise made up of immigrants who forged it with their own hands; Valley Forge memorializes the cost of our independence; Gettysburg and Antietam symbolically define the price we paid to maintain a union of separate but indivisible states, united into one democratic nation; the domed Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., is the symbol of our democratic form of government. The churches and cathedrals across America are not just mere places of worship, but with their steeples and bell towers are distinct symbols memorializing the nation's trust in God. Most of these geographic places and sites are sacred and revered because they are the tangible symbols of our national identity and pride to which are linked the intangible core values of our national identity.

Theodore Roosevelt joined naturalist John Muir in Yosemite Valley in 1903. From Roosevelt's 1905 publication *Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter*: *"There can be nothing in the world more beautiful than the Yosemite, the groves of giant sequoias and redwoods, the Canyon of the Colorado, the Canyon of the Yellowstone, the Three Tetons; and our people should see to it that they are preserved for their children and their children's children forever, with their majestic beauty all unmarred."*

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Nineteenth Century American Icons

While many of America's iconic core values come from our distinctive European ancestry, they were further embellished by the frontier spirit that conquered the wilderness continent. Some of these core values were defined in our Declaration of Independence (1776) and Constitution (1787), while others came later in our brief history. For example, the Bill of Rights amending the Constitution by adding ten additional "rights" was ratified in 1791, and the remaining 17 amendments were added between 1798 and 1992. The abolition of slavery through the Emancipation Proclamation (1863) and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1865) followed the Declaration of Independence by almost 90 years.

America's core value of conservation—i.e., the ethic of husbanding our natural resources for both their aesthetic and material values-evolved at the national level roughly another 25–30 years thereafter, depending upon which benchmark is used. The early 1870s, however, appear to have been the seminal moment. Noted historian and author John F. Reiger, in his remarkable study on the origins of conservation in America, ***American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation***, now in its third edition (2001), documents with original research the earliest conservation work in the nation of the anglers and fish culturists, followed by the foresters, wildlife naturalists, and bird watchers, beginning with game protection laws as early as 1708. The very earliest nineteenth-century conservationist efforts were localized New England, site-specific, grass-roots efforts to protect a specific woodland, stream, pond, or species. Localized concerns about protecting and perpetuating a specific natural resource generally resulted in the organization of local sportsmen's clubs to address the issue. However, the big issues that faced the nation-the broad national landscape size challenges of the day-required broad national support to galvanize into action the political will needed to address the monumental threats to America's natural resource base. That resulted in the formation of national associations and organizations which flowed up from the wellspring of early localized groups focused on a single species or site, thus seed-

ing the embryonic notions of conservation in America at the national level.

In attempting to trace the origins of the notion or idea of conservation, one cannot ignore George Perkins Marsh's 1864 book ***Man and Nature***, reissued in 1874 as ***The Earth as Modified by Human Action***, which Lewis L. Mumford calls the "fountainhead of the conservation movement." Marsh's first book was largely ignored because his attempts to check man's destruction of the country's forests belied America's optimistic belief that its resources were inexhaustible. However, in 1875, just one year after the reissuance of Marsh's book, there was formed the American Forestry Association, which in 1891 promoted, in unison with others, congressional approval for the President to establish forest reserves on public lands. Over the next 16 years, 194 million acres were set aside by Presidents Benjamin Harrison, Grover Cleveland, and Theodore Roosevelt. The American Fisheries Society was organized in 1870, and the U.S. Fish Commission was established in 1871. This was the first federal agency created to address the conservation of a specific natural resource; it was later merged into the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In 1872, America's first national park, Yellowstone Park, was set aside by the Congress "as a pleasuring ground for the people." Sound management of the park, however, didn't occur until passage of the 1894 Park Protection Act and the National Park Act of 1916 establishing the National Park Service, which provided for managed public use "without improvement" of the parks. Lord Bryce said the national park idea developed during this era was the best idea America ever had.

Naturalist writers of the day, in magazines and journals, led the way in focusing popular attention on the broad national landscape issues facing America. George Bird Grinnell and Charles Hallock popularized the word "conservation" in the magazine *Forest and Stream* beginning in 1873, and Grinnell thereafter started the Audubon Society in 1886 and *Audubon Magazine* in 1887, both of which promoted the protection of wildlife and birds. Theodore Roosevelt founded the Boone and Crockett Club in 1887, making it America's oldest wildlife conservation organization. John Muir followed by organizing the Sierra Club in 1892. As the noted writer, Western historian, and environmentalist Wallace Stegner observed: "Values, both those that we approve and those we don't, have roots as deep as creosote rings, and live as long, and grow as slowly. Every action is an idea before it is an action, and perhaps a feeling before it is an idea, and every idea rests upon other ideas that have preceded it in time.… The tracing of ideas—[in this case conservation]—is a guessing game. We can't tell who first had an idea; we can only tell who had it influentially, [and] who formulated it in a striking way… [so] that others could stumble upon it with the shock of recognition.… Once they reached that stage, [the origin of an idea is] as easy to trace as a gopher in a spring lawn."

The seminal individual who influenced the formulation of the idea of conservation and institutionalized it during this period in the late nineteenth century, and then implemented many of its very cornerstones during his Presidency (1901–1909), was Theodore Roosevelt. His name-then and now-became sacrosanct in and synonymous with conservation. America's public lands policy and its emerging natural resource policies thereafter forever changed from disposition to protection.

Conservation: A Manifestation of the Vanishing Frontier

The notion of conservation, which became a core value of America, was cultivated during the same period in the late nineteenth century when the perceived demise of the Western frontier occurred, as characterized in the writing of Theodore Roosevelt's four-volume epic saga of westward expansion, ***The Winning of the West*** (1889–1896), along with his related books and articles, and by historian Frederick Jackson Turner, who alarmed the nation by declaring the frontier closed in 1893.

Although the conservation movement was in large measure a movement to ensure sustainable production from our prairies, waters, and forests, it was, especially, a manifestation of America's desperate attempt psychologically to hold onto the wilderness of our vanishing frontiers from which we had forged a dynamic part of our national identity and character. Our pioneer spirit symbolizing resilience, toughness, strong-willed rugged individualism, and self-reliance became the unique quintessential American character type forged by the frontier spirit during the conquest of the original 13 states east of the Mississippi River prior to 1803. This frontier spirit was reinforced and embellished as successive frontiers followed the seven major political expansions of the country's boundaries over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Settlers believed that with each "new frontier" came the mandate of manifest destiny to conquer and assert dominion over the wilderness biblically decreed to the Judeo-Christian world by Genesis and Isaiah. The rugged frontiers of the past were the geography of our mind in defining our identity as a nation. Regardless of how we reach out today and interface with our wilderness places, we embrace and hold onto our frontier spirit forged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and thereby lay claim to our identity, the essence of the American being, born in the ethos of the perceived loss of the "final" frontier once we reached the Pacific and Alaska. Psychologically, we lose a part of our character and national identity without a mythical frontier mentality. The conservation of our lands—the idea, the act, and the places—became the symbolic manifestation of holding onto the vanishing frontier.

Two philosophical schools of thought formed on how these precious resources should be utilized. One followed Theodore Roosevelt's wise or multiple use approach, and the other followed John Muir's environmental philosophy that emphasized aesthetic or recreational value to improve the quality of life. However, both had a common objective, i.e., the preservation of our natural resources in perpetuity.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conservation—the care and husbanding and wise multiple use of our natural resources to enhance the quality of life and provide material value for our people—became institutionalized as one of America's cherished iconic core values. Two philosophical schools of thought formed on how these precious resources should be utilized. One followed Theodore Roosevelt's wise or multiple use approach, and the other followed John Muir's environmental philosophy that emphasized aesthetic or recreational value to improve the quality of life. However, both had a common objective, i.e., the preservation of our natural resources in perpetuity. Our forests, mountains, plains, prairies, and waterways provided wood to build our houses, energy to operate them, forage for our livestock, habitat for our wildlife, and recreational opportunities for our people, i.e., hiking, hunting, swimming, skiing, boating, and the scenic value thereof. These multiple uses came from conservation policies that limited extractive production and restored despoiled landscapes and polluted water and air, drawing upon the nation's resources for both their aesthetic and their material value: Use but don't abuse. Aldo Leopold elaborated on the concept of balancing conflicting approaches to the use of our natural resources: "The earth is… a community to which we belong, not a commodity it is our privilege to exploit." The transition continues today from the notion that man is master of the earth separated from nature with the biblical authority of manifest destiny to conquer it to the notion that man is simply an important participant in the greater web of life.

The conservation movement continued throughout the twentieth century in reality and mythology, rooting itself deeper into America's consciousness and identity. In 1934 The Wilderness Society was organized by Aldo Leopold, Bob Marshall, and others to take conservation to its next level of refinement—the designation of primitive areas as "wilderness" by congressional edict. Leopold's posthumous **A *Sand County Almanac*** published in 1949 became a manifesto igniting yet another revolution within the short history of the conservation movement in America. President John F. Kennedy tapped into this theme in the 1960s when he called on the country to forge "new frontiers." From this period a new zeal was generated to protect public lands as wilderness, completely unimpaired by mankind, which Wallace Stegner calls the highest refinement of the national park idea since the turn of the century. From this flowed the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the National Wilderness Preservation System, the National Trails System, National Wild and Scenic Rivers Systems, the Land and Water Conservation Act of 1964, the initial 1966 Endangered Species Act (later modified and expanded), and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970. Rachel Carson's ***Silent Spring***, published in 1962, made it clear that pollution was a principal conservation challenge of the future, and the Federal Water Quality Control Act of 1965 and Clean Water Restoration Act of 1966 promptly followed, together with a host of laws to protect the environment from toxic wastes and industrially polluted air and water. The era of preservationist environmentalism and a total revolution within America's conservationist consciousness had begun. The frontier mentality which President Kennedy exploited and from which the wilderness preservation concept flourished continues to define our national identity and conduct, a manifestation of our continuing attempt to recreate or reclaim the frontiers of our past.

> He [Roosevelt] believed strongly that if the American character was forged in the wilderness, it also needed to be renewed from time to time in the wilderness.

Today no other country in the world enjoys the unique legacy we cherish in our national parks, forests, wildlife and bird refuges, waters, and wilderness systems. These are nature's cathedrals where we reconnect with the universe and find peace and solitude, refuges for the redemption and repair of our souls. In these still places we find the vestigial heart of America's wilderness and the spirit of the frontier, long ago extinguished by the conquest of the West, yet coveted almost as a spiritual ideal or civic religion that gives strength to our very identity as an independent and free nation. This is why we embrace our national parks, forests, waterways, etc. with the passion and care and protection we harbor for these precious natural resources.

In these wild places our subconscious minds find America's now mythical frontier still alive and well and challenging-realized in both actuality and spirit. We can saddle up a horse and ride through virgin primeval forests and in wilderness areas uncut by highways, camp by azure blue jewel-like high mountain lakes and fish for our dinner, challenge our physical stamina with a backpack and walking stick climbing into high mountain valleys, watch eagles soar or bighorn sheep graze in lofty meadows amid brilliant wild flowers, hunt elk, deer, and turkey in quiet woodlands and valleys, run white-water rapids on a wild and scenic river, or ski technical black diamond runs in national forests. Whatever the activity, we can test our resilience, toughness, individualism, and self-reliance in a natural setting not unlike the frontiers of the early nineteenth century. The spirit of the frontier is synonymous with these defining elements of our identity. In this interaction with nature, we embrace the elements of our unique national identity forged on the frontier.

Author and historian Wallace Stegner eloquently synthesizes the connection between the forging of our national identity and the Western frontiers of an earlier century. "The remaining Western wilderness is the geography of hope.… [It] is hope's native home.… The American character has been largely shaped by the experience of successive frontiers.… Every time we go off into the wilderness, we are looking for that perfect primitive Eden.… All human endeavor has to come back to the wilderness for its justification and its new beginnings.… The result [is] the tendency to see the West in its mythic enlargement rather than as it is, and the corollary tendency [is] to take our clues from myths in an effort to enhance [our] lives."

Dr. Robert J. Moore, Jr., a historian and Roosevelt scholar, characterizes the historical transition of Theodore Roosevelt's frontier to contemporary times very philosophically:

An in-growing industrial frontier gradually replaced the outward-bound agricultural frontier of the 19th century, but the Western spirit of independence and freedom never changed. Cowboys still ride the range and drive cattle in

Roosevelt with the two Maine woodsmen he invited to manage the Elkhorn Ranch and build its several buildings. Wilmot Dow is on the left, Theodore Roosevelt is in the center, and William Sewall is on the right.

INSET: Roosevelt in the Badlands with his favorite horse Manitou. Roosevelt said of the horse, "He is a wise old fellow, with nerves not to be shaken by anything."

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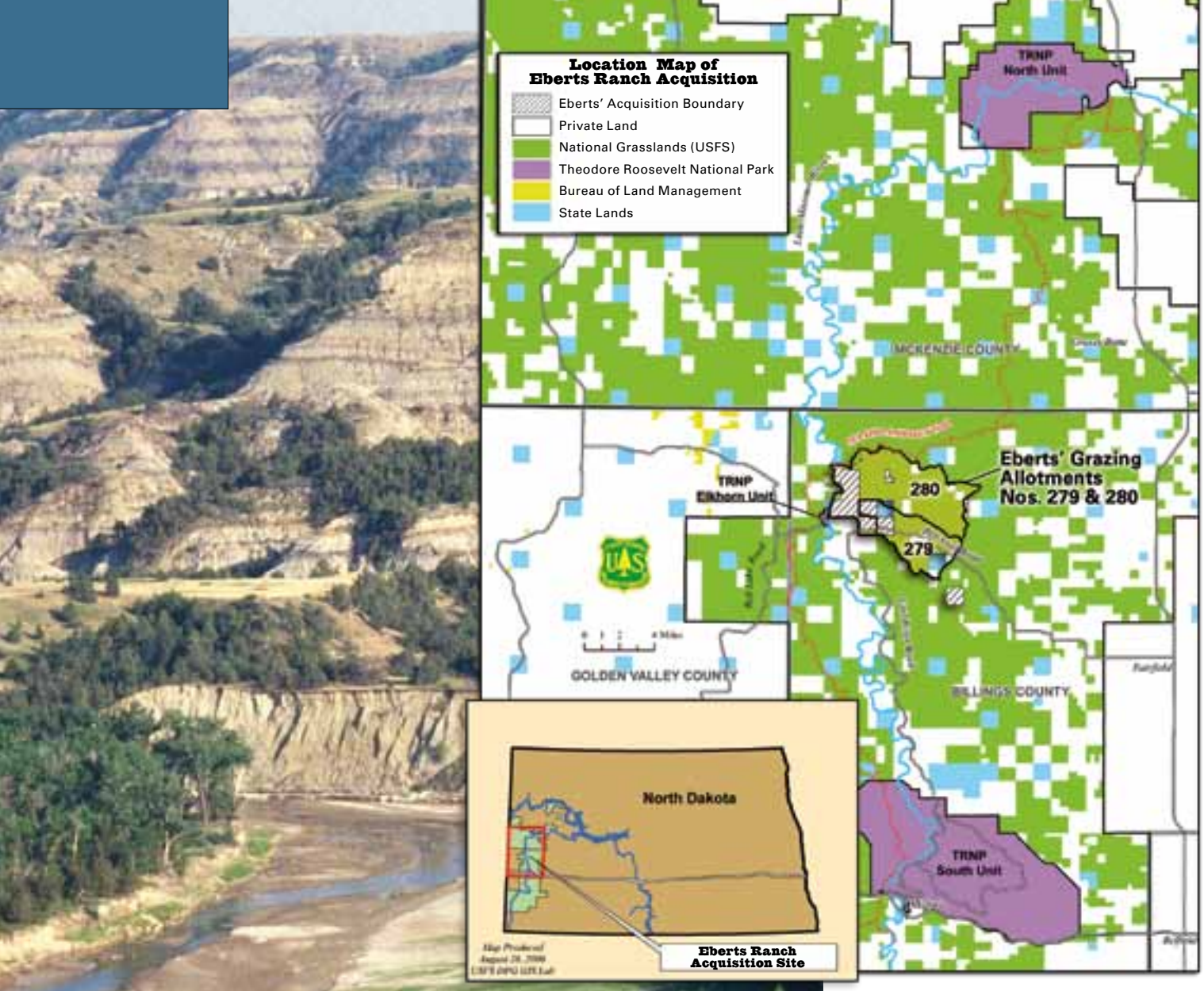
the West, the railroads still move freight through mountain tunnels dug in 1869 for the Transcontinental System, many American Indian people still live in tribal groups on reservations, still hold religious ceremonies, dances and powwows. Plows continue to break the plains, and hikers and skiers now go where fur trappers and mountain men once explored. The West is alive and vibrant, and retains the flavor of, if not the population of, the best days of the frontier.

But the West as a construct, as a thing, as an entity as Frederick Jackson Turner and Theodore Roosevelt once described it, is disappearing. The essence of the West was as a place where anyone, immigrant, eastern businessman, rich, poor, could go to refresh themselves, to relax, to try to become one with nature and the landscape. To hunt, to fish, to ride over the plains, is a dream that could be realized in America like few other places on earth. So little of America's land was tied up with ownership by the wealthy, and so much of it was open, that personal refreshment was possible in the wild places of the continent. Certainly Theodore Roosevelt took advantage of this aspect of the West in 1884 when grief led him to ranch in western Dakota. But he was mightily aware of the swift changes coming over the West: diminished wildlife of all kinds but especially big game, more and more fenced off areas, thicker settlement, the use of technology for transportation and to extract goods from the earth. All of these things contributed to a projected future in which people would no longer be able to use the West for the purposes of refreshment and communion with nature.

This was why Theodore Roosevelt was such a champion of the National Park movement and setting aside other federal reservations for the protection of landscape and wildlife. He believed strongly that if the American character was forged in the wilderness, it also needed to be renewed from time to time in the wilderness. These opinions were a direct outgrowth of having lived in the West and observed the swift changes that were taking place at first hand. TR was a historian, and he was able to project into the future the trends he saw happening in his lifetime. His creation of the Country Life Commission and calling of national conservation conferences in 1905 and 1908 while President, his concern with the loss of farmland and the agrarian lifestyle to urban modes of living, his urge to create national parks and monuments as well as large forest reserves, all attest to his thoughts and ruminations on this topic.

In a recent article, Edward J. Renehan, Jr., an author and TR scholar, commented on Theodore Roosevelt who himself made this very connection between conservation and our national identity:

Roosevelt likewise saw good stewardship of wild lands and wildlife as exercises in preserving the national identity of the United States. As Roosevelt pointed out on more than one occasion, the United



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States lacked the long political and cultural history found in other nations located on other continents. For this reason, Roosevelt argued that Americans must rely on the natural landscape of North America to form the backbone of their culture. Natural history was, after all, an important ancient element in the country's otherwise brief past. In this spirit, Roosevelt insisted that Yosemite and other great natural monuments must be left untouched forever.… [Roosevelt said] "they should be saved because of reasons unconnected with any return in dollars and cents. A grove of giant redwoods or sequoias should be kept just as we keep a great and beautiful cathedral. The extermination of the passenger pigeon meant that mankind was just so much poorer, exactly as in the case of the destruction of the cathedral at Rheims."

The Cradle of Conservation

Theodore Roosevelt's name is synonymous with the word conservation. He is the acknowledged father of conservation in

The central part of TR's Elkhorn Ranch is today the 23,550-acre Eberts Ranch and its grazing allotment. It lies between the north and south units of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, which total 70,447 acres. This is the viewshed across the Little Missouri River from the park's third unit, a 218-acre parcel that preserves the site of the Elkhorn's former ranch house, barns, corrals, and other structures. BACKGROUND: The North Unit of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park and the Little Missouri River.

America. His commitment to conserving our natural resources was conceived and born during his 3–1/2 years (1883–1887) of ranching and traveling in the Dakota and Montana Territories. His home ranch—the Elkhorn—was established and built on the banks of the Little Missouri River, 22 miles north of Medora, North Dakota, in what is today Billings County, ND. Theodore Roosevelt sought solitude and refuge in the remote Badlands of the Dakota Territory to repair his soul and heal from the emotional trauma of losing his wife and mother, who died of unrelated causes in the same house and on the same day, St. Valentine's Day, February 14, 1884, in New York City.

The Badlands where TR's Elkhorn Ranch is located are where the high plains in eastern Montana and those of North Dakota converge and literally erupt topographically with immense geologic diversity found nowhere else in America. It's North Dakota's best-kept secret. The Badlands are a biological oasis in the high plains, rich in diverse species of antelope, deer, elk, bighorn sheep, buffalo, birds, reptiles, and plant life. There exists no other such wildlife and ecological diversity for hundreds of miles in any direction. This oasis is further defined by its unique native archeology and history, both prehistoric and modern.

During his time in the Badlands, Roosevelt traveled by horseback extensively through what is today Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and the Dakotas. He came to recognize how vulnerable the Western lands were to the uncontrolled predation of man. He witnessed first-hand the destruction and pillaging of the West by rapacious logging and mining which polluted the rivers and despoiled the landscape; the decimation of game by commercial hunting for the purposes of feeding the laborers building the transcontinental railroads, the loggers, and the miners; the denuding of the prairies by stockmen overgrazing their sheep and cattle herds; and the pillaging of what was then its only national park—Yellowstone—set aside a mere decade earlier. TR wrote extensively about his experiences and the realizations that led to his devotion to conservation in America in six books between 1885 and 1907. Roosevelt's experiences in the Badlands and Montana Territory later resulted in his reputation as "the first conservation president," so characterized by his renowned contemporary and Pulitzer Prize winning biographer Edmund Morris:

> *TR once famously remarked, "If it had not been for my years in North Dakota, I would never have become President of the United States." In making this statement [Roosevelt] was alluding not only to the lessons in democracy he learned as a youthful rancher living on equal terms with pioneer settlers in the Badlands. He was also speaking of the dawning of his conservationist conscience, an attitude of reverence for the western wilderness, which succored him both spiritually and physically even as he saw how threatened it was by the spread of interstate commerce. This conscience, born in North Dakota, made him our first great conservationist-President.*

Morris has further characterized the dawning of Roosevelt's environmental conscience at the Elkhorn Ranch in the Badlands:

> *As one of many guardians of Theodore Roosevelt's memory, [the Badlands are the] very sanctuary where his environmental conscience matured. It is true that he was a nature lover long before he built the Elkhorn Ranch here, but it was not until he settled in the Badlands and discovered the vulnerability of this fragile ecology to profit-seekers from outside, that he began to ponder the policies that culminated in his unsurpassed achievements as our first conservation President.*
>
> *To my mind, there is no memorial of marble or bronze anywhere in the country that evokes the conscience of Theodore Roosevelt as powerfully as the Elkhorn bottom and its surrounding hills. It is a crucible of calm, a refuge from the roar of worldly getting and spending. The very disappearance of the ranch TR built here-except for a few foundation stones-emphasizes the transitoriness of human achievement, and the eternal recuperative powers of nature.…*
>
> *I fear in particular the most subtle and uncontrollable of all invasions of the wilderness, namely, noise.… Theodore Roosevelt… was acutely responsive to the beauty of natural sounds, and indeed to that tapestry of almost inaudible rustlings and ripplings which we clumsily call "silence." The Elkhorn bottom is one of the few places I know where a pilgrim becomes aware of this tapestry, and bears it as background to the beatings of his own heart.*

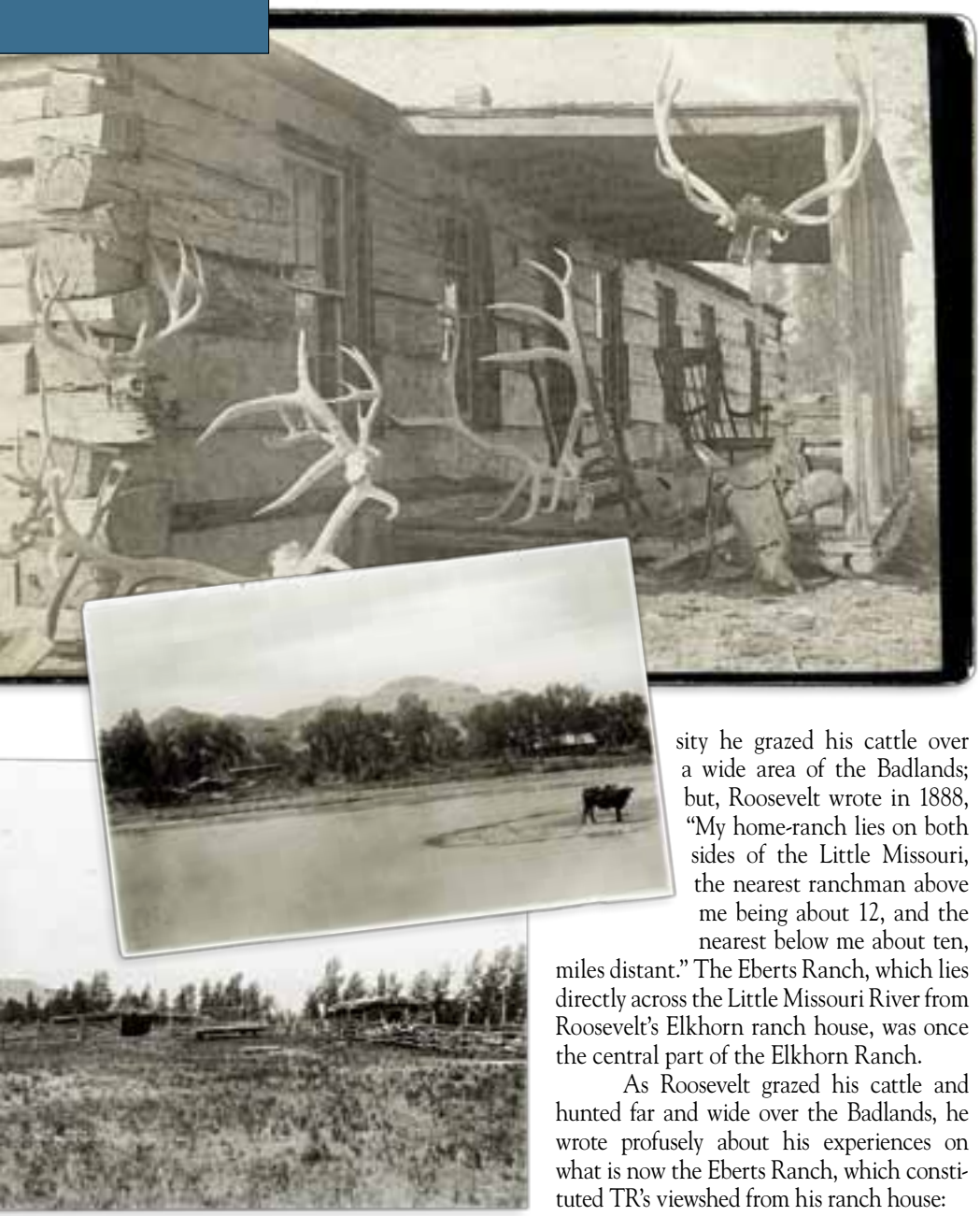
The Elkhorn Ranch and Theodore Roosevelt National Park

Theodore Roosevelt National Park (see map on opposite page) was established in the Badlands of North Dakota in 1934 as a regional park, which in 1947 became a memorial park, and later in 1978 a national park, to symbolize and memorialize TR's leadership and conservation legacy. Topographically the park's 70,229 acres are divided into two units (each bisected by the Little Missouri River), which are separated by some 35 miles. Right in the center of the Badlands between the two units is a 218-acre third unit where Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch buildings were located, also on the banks of the Little Missouri River, which was acquired in 1947. Surrounding this 218-acre parcel are private ranches, state lands divided into state school lands and state historical society lands, national grasslands, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, etc. The largest remnant of TR's Elkhorn Ranch still in private hands is a 5,200-acre ranch owned by the Eberts family, with grazing privileges on an adjacent 18,349-acre allotment in the Little Missouri National Grasslands. This ranch lies directly across the Little Missouri River from TR's Elkhorn ranch house, and provides the viewshed TR wrote so eloquently about.

In describing the Badlands around the Elkhorn Ranch, TR said:

> *I grow very fond of this place, and it certainly has a desolate, grim beauty of its own, that has a curious fascination for me. The grassy, scantily wooded bottoms through which the winding river flows are bounded by bare, jagged buttes; their fantastic shapes and sharp, steep edges throw the most curious shadows, under the cloudless, glaring sky; and at evening I love to sit out in front of the hut and see their hard, gray outlines gradually grow soft and purple as the flaming sunset by degrees softens and dies away; while my days I spend generally alone, riding through the lonely rolling prairie and broken lands.*

TR's insights which led to his conservation philosophy were forged here at the Elkhorn, which in turn gave rise to the American conservation movement as we know it today. Later in life, TR stated, "Had it not been for the years spent in North Dakota and what I learned there, I would not have been President.… Here, in the hills and plateaus, the romance of my life began." Moore characterized Roosevelt's



Finished in the spring of 1885 by Maine woodsmen, the logs selected for Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch House were hand-hewn cottonwood, some 30 feet long and one foot square, cut at the cabin site. LEFT: Roosevelt took these two photographs of his Elkhorn Ranch. The middle image shows the Ranch House from across the river. The bottom image shows the stables and corrals. According to the Assessor's Returns for Billings County, ND, Roosevelt paid property taxes on 20 horses kept at Elkhorn in 1886 and on 30 horses in 1889.

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Badlands experience as follows:

Certainly, if the genesis of TR's thoughts about wilderness and his conversion to the idea that resources (land, water, wildlife) are finite occurred anywhere, if his notion that the wilderness formed the collective character of Americans and America began at a specific location, if the idea that Americans need to periodically renew themselves in wilderness sprang from a location, it was from the prairie grasses and weird rock formations of the Badlands, the sites of TR's western ranches during the years 1883 to 1896. This period of time covers his relationship with the region from his earliest exposure until his last autumn hunt in the area before the press of national affairs took him away from his cyclical visits to North Dakota.

The boundaries of Roosevelt's ranch are not known exactly since out of necessity he grazed his cattle over a wide area of the Badlands; but, Roosevelt wrote in 1888, "My home-ranch lies on both sides of the Little Missouri, the nearest ranchman above me being about 12, and the nearest below me about ten, miles distant." The Eberts Ranch, which lies directly across the Little Missouri River from Roosevelt's Elkhorn ranch house, was once the central part of the Elkhorn Ranch.

As Roosevelt grazed his cattle and hunted far and wide over the Badlands, he wrote profusely about his experiences on what is now the Eberts Ranch, which constituted TR's viewshed from his ranch house:

My home-ranch… derives its name, "The Elkhorn," from the fact that on the ground where we built it were found the skulls and interlocked antlers of two wapiti bulls who had perished from getting their antlers fastened in battle.… The ranch-house stood on the brink of a low bluff overlooking the broad shallow bed of the Little Missouri, through which at most seasons there ran only a trickle of water, while in times of freshet it was filled brimful with the boiling, foaming, muddy torrent.… The river twisted down in long curves between narrow bottoms bordered by sheer cliff walls, for the Bad Lands, a chaos of peaks, plateaus, and ridges, rose abruptly from the edges of the level, tree-clad, or grassy, alluvial meadows. In front of the low, long ranch-house veranda was a row of cottonwood-trees with gray-green leaves which quivered all day long if there was a breath of air. From these trees came the far-away melancholy cooing of mourning-doves, and little owls perched in them and called tremulously at night. In the long summer afternoons we would sometimes sit on the piazza, when there was no work to be done, for an hour or two at a time, watching the cattle on the sand-bars, and the sharply channeled and strangely carved amphitheatre of cliffs across the bottom opposite… a strip of meadowland, behind which rises a line of sheer cliffs and grass plateaus. This veranda is a pleasant place… gazing sleepily out at the weird looking buttes opposite, until their sharp outlines grow indistinct and purple in the after-glow of the sunset.

TR's words are describing the very property and viewshed that are being purchased by the U.S. Forest Service (USDA). Ironic as it may seem, this very viewshed Roosevelt looked at every day over the Little Missouri River as he sat on the veranda of his Elkhorn ranch house has never been included in the national park or placed in public protection. Edmund Morris has reflected upon its significance:

Here one of our greatest Presidents repaired his soul, and acquainted himself with nature and the common man, after tragedies that might otherwise have struck him down. It is every bit as precious a public heirloom as Valley Forge and Ford's Theater, and its fragile beauty makes it particularly vulnerable to private profiteering and temporary expediency. In fifty years, when the oil trucks stop rolling, they will have other sources of supply [sic]; but if [the] Elkhorn is slashed across with concrete now, it cannot hope to recover.… You will honor his memory best by leaving the site undisturbed and undeveloped, so that its remoteness, tranquility, and silence… —its eloquent purity—… may speak for themselves, as they once spoke to him.

The Elkhorn Ranch is where the very legacy of the American conservation movement started-in the Badlands of North

Dakota. It is part of our cultural history and heritage. This is America's legacy to preserve, and North Dakota's to celebrate, because this is where our country's conservation movement was inspired, conceived, and born. One could call the Elkhorn Ranch the very cradle of conservation in America, the sacred ground of the conservation movement, a tangible Arcadian icon of America's cultural identity, which has been called "the Walden Pond of the American West." The U.S. Forest Service is purchasing the Eberts Ranch in two phases. In phase one, the back portion of the ranch was purchased in 2006, while in phase two, the remainder, which includes the most critical portion of the viewshed, will be acquired in 2007. Once the Elkhorn Ranch viewshed is completely in federal ownership and protected in perpetuity, the Elkhorn can truly join the list of other treasured historic sites of national significance and reverence that symbolize and define our unique American culture and identity. ■

ENDNOTES: If you are interested in receiving the endnotes for this article, please contact bcclub@boone-crockett.org.

Lowell E. Baier, while raised on a farm in the Midwest, spent several of his summers at his paternal grandfather's ranch in Montana where Peter Baier staked a homestead claim in 1915. Early in life, the author became a student of western history, with an emphasis on wildlife conservation. Baier holds a J.D. from Indiana University and a B.A. from Valparaiso University. He is currently a trustee of the Theodore Roosevelt Association and Executive Vice President of the Boone and Crockett Club.

Special Agent Eicher with Viola sporting the Elkhorn brand. The inset at right shows a close up of the Elkhorn brand on one of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's horses.

The day had been long and the ride difficult. As the two riders slipped through the Teton Wilderness, they came upon the Continental Divide and stopped at Two Ocean Pass. For a few moments they reminisced about a hunt that took place in this area during September 1891. The hunter was Theodore Roosevelt.

Two Ocean Pass got its name from a single creek that divides here, with one fork flowing east and one west. The forks of the creek were appropriately named Atlantic Creek and Pacific Creek. When Jim Bridger first wrote about this anomaly, few people believed him. But Roosevelt was so impressed by the area that he wrote, "There is no more beautiful game-country in the United States."

THE ELKHORN BRAND RIDES AGAIN

By Lucinda D. Schroeder

The abundance of game was precisely why in 2006, the two riders came to this area. Not to hunt, but to hunt for poachers who ruthlessly steal game from ethical hunters. The riders were Special Agents Tim Eicher and Dominic Domenici of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement. They were in this remote wilderness because areas like this are exactly where serious wildlife criminals go to poach game.

Eicher and Domenici, both stationed in Wyoming, are modern-day cowboys who reflect Roosevelt's ideals of accepting duty, and living the "strenuous life." Beginning their wildlife enforcement careers nearly 30 years ago, these agents were drawn to their work by what Roosevelt described as "living the hardy life of the wilderness and of the hunter in the wilderness."

Aside from being a hunter, Roosevelt was also a rancher. In ***Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail***, he wrote about his beloved Elkhorn Ranch in North Dakota. It was there that he designed a brand for his cattle and horses. The brand was registered in the Dakota Territory as the "Elkhorn Brand."

The idea of branding livestock originated with the ancient Egyptians and was later introduced to the American West by the Spanish who traveled north from Mexico. As opposed to the more elaborate Mexican designs, most American brands were simple. The Elkhorn brand fittingly resembles an elk horn with three points. Hired cowboys rode for the brand from 1884 to 1899 when Roosevelt reluctantly sold his ranch.

In ***Out on the Range***, Roosevelt explained the practice of branding for the benefit of his Eastern reading audience: "All cattle are branded, usually on the hip, shoulder, and side, or on any one of them, with letters, numbers, or figures in every combination, the outfit being known by its brand. Near me, for instance, are the Three Sevens, the Thistle, the Bellows, the OX, the VI, the Seventy-six Bar, and the Quarter Circle Diamond outfits. All brands are registered, and are thus protected against imitators, any man tampering with them being punished as severely as possible...."

But as time and history has shown, none of the brands of the Old West ever carried as much significance as the Elkhorn Brand. The cowboys who rode for it were fiercely loyal to the Elkhorn Ranch and the cowboy principles made famous by Theodore Roosevelt. Accepting a life of isolation and hard work, these cowboys understood the value of a strong character, and strived for it.

In ***The Roundup***, Roosevelt wrote about the characteristics of the American cowboy: "Meanness, cowardice, and dishonesty are not tolerated. There is a high regard for truthfulness and keeping one's word, intense contempt for any kind of hypocrisy, and a hearty dislike for a man who shirks his work... a cowboy will not submit tamely to an insult, and is ever ready to avenge his own wrongs; nor has he an overwrought fear of shedding blood."

In 2005, Special Agent Tim Eicher applied to the Wyoming Livestock Board to register the famous Elkhorn Brand for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The application was approved in June 2006, and shortly thereafter Eicher and Domenici branded their mountain horses and pack mules with Roosevelt's brand.

Today, in the Roosevelt tradition of cowboy, hunter, and conservationist, the Elkhorn Brand rides again in Wyoming. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service special agents now ride the brand as backcountry lawmen in the very areas that Roosevelt hunted and finally set aside for future generations. Their job is to catch wildlife violators and bring them to justice. The Elkhorn brand has become the symbolic connection between their work and the rich conservation legacy left by Roosevelt.

From his Cody office, Eicher said, "We support ranching, the cowboy way, and conservation. By getting the Elkhorn Brand registered for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we're making a statement about our principles."

While president, Theodore Roosevelt created the Forest Service and designated 150 National Forests, which included the Two Ocean Pass country. He also established several National Parks, Bird and Game Preserves, and Pelican Island, the first National Wildlife Refuge.

His actions established the philosophy that wildlife and wilderness should be protected for its own sake. As usual, Roosevelt said it best, "Wild beasts and birds are by right not the property merely of the people alive today, but the property of the unborn generations, whose belonging we have no right to squander."

God Bless you TR!