

CONSERVATION COMPASS

B&C and the U.S. Forest Service — Together Since the Beginning

The Forest Service (FS) just held its 100th-anniversary celebration in Washington, D.C. The Club was recognized for its seminal and continuing role in establishing, retaining, and supporting the national forests. It all began with a “rider” to the Sundry Civil Service Act of 1891 authorizing the President to create Forest Reserves by executive order. This amendment was requested by Secretary of Interior John C. Noble, encouraged by Arnold Hague, head of the Biological Survey — both Club members. Some western Congressmen set out to overturn it. The Club’s founder, Theodore Roosevelt, and George Bird Grinnell (the “father” of Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks and a Club member) led the charge to create public support for the Reserves.

In 1896, Club member Gifford Pinchot was named secretary of the National Forestry Commission named to determine the Reserves’ future. The commission included five prestigious scientists, of whom three favored treating the Reserves as “preserves.” Pinchot and Hague did most of the work and concluded the only way to hold onto the Reserves was through regulated use.

While the commission debated, Cleveland set aside another 21,279,840 acres only 10 days before leaving office. The next day, the Senate voted to nullify that action and turn over the Reserves to the states. Hague and Pinchot enlisted club member Congressman John F. Lacey to amend the Appropriations Act to allow timber sales, thereby delaying action. When both Houses voted to eliminate the Reserves and adjourned, Cleveland, at Club members’ behest, exercised a pocket veto.

McKinley (with Roosevelt as Vice-President) succeeded Cleveland, and the westerners renewed their attacks. Meanwhile, Pinchot and Hague enlisted Club member Charles D. Walcott, Director of the Geological Survey, to help in saving the Reserves. Pinchot said, “Walcott saved our bacon...” by persuading influential congressmen that “the Forest Reserves, properly managed, could be a great benefit...” Meanwhile, the Club, in a rare overt action, financed a petition campaign throughout the West supporting retention of the Reserves. The results convinced McKinley to stay the course — but, only if the Reserves were to be used.

In 1889, Pinchot was appointed Chief of the Forestry Bureau in Agriculture with ten employees. Pinchot endowed a Forestry School at Yale to train the foresters that he hoped he would soon need and continued to lay groundwork with Club members for support when the time was ripe.

In early 1900, Pinchot established the Society of American Foresters, with Roosevelt and Hague among the founders. Now, Pinchot had both the Club and the Society of American Foresters in his corner.

Less than a year after election, McKinley was assassinated, and Roosevelt became President. Pinchot helped prepare Roosevelt’s inaugural address, which proposed moving the Reserves into Agriculture under the Bureau of Forestry.

Roosevelt summoned Club members C. Hart Merriam (head of the Biological Survey), his assistant T. S. Palmer, and Congressman John F. Lacey (chair of the House Committee on Public Lands) — to map out a course to transfer the Reserves to Agriculture and establish the Forest Service.

On January 2-6, 1905, The American Forestry Association hosted the First American Forest Conference with Pinchot “pulling the strings from behind the curtain.” It recommended the transfer of the Reserves and the creation of the Forest Service.

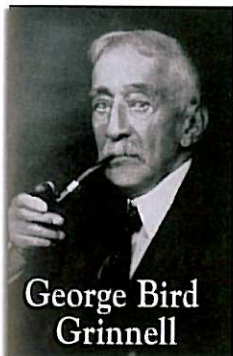
On February 1, 1905, Roosevelt signed the Transfer Act of 1905, moving the Reserves from Interior to Agriculture and creating the Forest Service with Pinchot as the first chief.

Over the 100 years since, the Club maintained keen interest in the national forests and the Forest Service. Eight of 15 chiefs in the “long green line” of the Forest Service have been Club members.

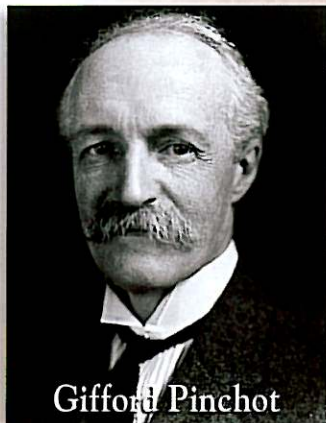
At the Centennial, the Forest Service acknowledged, with gratitude, the Club’s history of support for the agency and the national forests. But now we must look forward to the next 100 years. If the national forests are to remain a keystone in the continued vitality of wildlife — and of big-game species — and the hunting grounds of the common man and woman, the Club must maintain its vigilance and support to ensure active management of those lands to achieve multiple-use objectives. The Club built its support for the Forest Reserves on the basis that these lands were for appropriate use of the people. That was good strategy then and now. The challenge will increase as the nation’s population grows more and more removed from the land, and hunters continue to decline as a percentage of the population. ■



Jack Ward Thomas
B&C PROFESSOR OF
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
The University of Montana



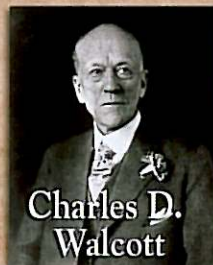
George Bird
Grinnell



Gifford Pinchot



John F. Lacey



Charles D.
Walcott



C. Hart Merriam