From Promotion to Preservation: Robert Sterling Yard and the Foundations of the American Environmental Movement.

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A Thesis in the Field of History for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts

Harvard University

November 2007

Abstract

This thesis hypothesizes that despite his early role in promoting the National Parks for American business, Robert Sterling Yard eventually left several significant conceptual, educational, and legal legacies in American environmentalism that reflected a larger cultural transition toward environmental preservation. It utilizes the writings of Robert Yard from the National Park Service, National Park Association, the Wilderness Society and the writings of his environmental contemporaries along with relevant secondary sources on environmental, intellectual, and social history. By examining Yard’s writings in comparison to his contemporaries, it hopes to identify his contributions to early American environmentalism. Overall, this thesis concludes that Yard’s personal transition away from promotion to preservation mirrors a larger cultural move toward environmental preservation at mid-century.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the effort of Lisa Szefel in the review of this thesis. Truly, it would not have happened without her. Additionally, the patience and support of Vanessa Bittermann was irreplaceable, as always.

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**Introduction**

In a 1935 letter to Benton MacKaye, the father of the Appalachian Trail, Robert Marshall, a founder of the Wilderness Society wrote: “Bob Yard is nothing less than a wonder. You and he make an inspiring team, and Harvey [Broome] and I sleep better nights for having two such dogged watch dogs on the job up at headquarters.”[[1]](#footnote-0) By 1935, Yard was seventy-four years old, and had spent the last twenty years working in leadership and publishing roles in three of the first organizations to promote the ideals of land conservation and preservation in the United States: the National Park Service; the National Parks Association; and most recently the Wilderness Society.[[2]](#footnote-1) Yet despite Yard’s influence at many decisive moments in the early American environmental movement, the standard historical narrative often overlooks his contribution.

 Yard’s contemporaries Stephen Mather, Horace Albright, Aldo Leopold, and Robert Marshall, are frequently identified as the primary architects of American environmental protection. In this thesis I will shift this historical perspective, by situating Yard closer to the center of early American environmentalism. Yard’s career as an advocate for the environment mirrors the trajectory of American activism, beginning with a shift from conservation (i.e., active resource management) to preservation (i.e., limiting land use). Previously, few had argued for preservation, but with increasing pressures of urbanization and industrialization during the early twentieth century, by the end of Yard’s career in 1945 the idea of wilderness preservation had moved into the mainstream. Within two decades, the federal government under President Lyndon Johnson’s leadership codified the wilderness concept with the Wilderness Preservation Act of 1964.

I demonstrate that despite Yard’s initial role in promoting, or rather marketing, land usage with the National Park Service, he soon became a significant contributor to the early preservation movement by initiating several significant legacies. First, in stressing the educational role of the Parks over recreational or commercial use, he laid the foundation for the modern educational and interpretive function of the Park Service. Second, Yard’s ideas of “the forest primeval” and “complete conservation” stood at the fore of the preservation concept, making him central to its creation and eventual use in legislation. Third, by setting early precedents in defending the Parks from commercial exploitation, he established the tradition of preservation over conservation as a fundamental Park and environmental principal. Finally, by working to define a framework of protection based on acceptable use, he helped make the eventual reality of areas with less or no use possible, such as the federally designated Wilderness Areas of today.

My research draws on several primary sources, beginning with the writings of Yard, including his early work for the National Park Service from 1914 to 1918, his writing for the National Parks Association from 1918 to 1933, his book *Our Federal Lands* published in 1928, and his writing at the Wilderness Society from 1935 to 1945. From those texts, I derived Yard’s concept of the environment, and his evolving thoughts on appropriate use. To do so, this thesis locates Yard’s work in the context of two periods in American culture: the Progressive Era from the late nineteenth century to 1919, and interwar period from 1919 to 1945. Using secondary sources, I situate Yard’s influence on strategy and policy in the larger context of American thought and politics at the municipal, state, and national level. My project not only covers the work and influence of Yard, it also intends to fill a gap in the current intellectual and cultural history of the period by demonstrating how the preservation concept grew out of a tradition of American thought about man’s relationship to nature and about national values.

Yard was pivotal in the creation of the National Park Service (NPS). His books, the *National Parks Portfolio* and the *Glimpses of the National Parks*, educated the public and Congress on the need for a National Park Service, arguably for the scenic, educational, and inspirational value of the Parks. Using publicity skills developed at the *New York Sun*, *Century Magazine*, and the *New York Herald*, Yard wrote those books as the core of a publicity campaign that rallied Americans and Congress to create the National Park Service as a separate entity from the Forest Service and the War Department. In August 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed into law the Park Service through what has come to be known as the Organic Act, which defined the NPS’s role as “to conserve the scenery and natural and historic objects and 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.”[[3]](#footnote-2)

Yard’s work with the fledgling National Park Service served as a springboard for his second career in land conservation and preservation. From 1916 to 1918 he served as the head of the NPS’s Educational Division, a title that reflects Yard’s concept of publicity as product of public education, rather than manipulative marketing or propaganda. However, he quickly became disillusioned with the Park Service’s push for ever-increasing recreational use, as unengaged and mechanized recreation threatened to destroy the primitive quality of the Parks. To emphasize the importance of educational use, in 1918, Yard organized prominent Washington, D.C. citizens and scientists, including Secretary of the Smithsonian Charles Wolcott and former Congressman William Kent, into the National Parks Education Committee, which grew quickly to become the National Parks Association (NPA). Furthermore, the Parks Association served as one of America’s first land use watchdogs, and Yard spent the next fifteen years at the NPA defending the Parks from commercial encroachment and the degradation of overuse and overexpansion. On leaving the NPA, Yard became a founder and the President of the Wilderness Society for its first ten years. Calling itself “a disclaimer of the biotic arrogance of homo americanus,” it expounded “a new attitude – an intelligent humility towards man’s place in nature”[[4]](#footnote-3) and argued for reducing certain land use to a bare minimum. The Wilderness Society, and this idea of minimal use, eventually formed the intellectual foundation of the Wilderness Act.

In each of these roles, Yard’s personal transition from promotion of the wilderness to conservation, and then to strict preservation, reflected American cultural thought that began to question the value of a society based on mass consumption of products and experiences. This thesis will also address how Yard’s concept of the environment changed and reflected America’s cultural transition into modernity. Authors like Thoreau and Twain identified the changes modernization brought to the America landscape in the late nineteenth century, and Yard’s work often faced the outcomes of these changes: urbanization, the growing influence of corporate enterprise, the rising automobile culture, and the environmental impact of the new mass leisure. Larger cultural forces often dictated the responses that became his environmental career.

The environmental ideals that Yard evolved frequently opposed the cultural changes of modernity and mechanization in America. Particularly after World War I, industrialization had moved the worker off the land and into the city factory. As workers began to see satisfaction in their work shrink, they looked for renewal in outdoor venues and to express their individuality with the leisure time, and disposable income they gained in exchange. Through this new mass leisure Americans increasingly found satisfaction in the consumption of mechanized outdoor travel, and this created both a demand for outdoor venues like the National Parks and the time, money, and mobility to reach in numbers never before economically possible. Modernity and mechanization had presented both the problem and the solution for the worker. For Yard, however, recognizing the ills of modernity moved him away from promoting undeveloped places to the masses, to working for reduced use.

My work builds on, but significantly departs from, three recent works of scholarship that examineYard’s role in early environmentalism. *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*,by Marguerite Shaffer, analyzes early twentieth-century domestic tourism in America and its significance as a site for the construction of national identity. Using the slogan “See America First” as the focal point, her chapters connect several themes: the end of western expansion; the rise of corporate influence; the marketing and creation of the National Parks; the new cultural power of the automobile; writing about tourism; and tourism as modern consumption. Arguing that “the emerging tourist industry in the United States actively promoted tourism as a ritual of American citizenship,” which Shaffer deems “national tourism,” she shows it to be simultaneously a rejection of Victorian social norms, European cultural superiority, and the negative aspects of modernity. [[5]](#footnote-4)

Insofar as Shaffer examines Yard’s work*,* she identifies Yard’s most significant accomplishments, particularly his publicity work for the Parks. She insists that, during this initial period, Yard was primarily concerned with supporting economic development and that his major task was defining Park land as an asset rather than wasted “unusable” land. She does note his early focus on the educational and research value of the Parks, but does not address this as a unique contribution. Rather, she argues that when Yard spoke for the greatness of the Parks he synonymously argued for America’s unique greatness. My research shows her summary misinterprets some of Yard’s early work by emphasizing this nationalism. Additionally, Shaffer does not discuss any of his work beyond the National Park Service after 1919, which constitutes the bulk of his environmental contribution.

Whereas Shaffer focuses on Yard’s work with the National Park Service, John Miles, in *Guardians of the Parks: A History of the National Parks and Conservation Association,* covers Yard’s fifteen years with the NPA, a Park education advocacy group he organized in 1919. Commissioned by the NPA for its seventy-fifth anniversary, *Guardians of the Parks* sets out to document major themes in its history, rather than present an original thesis. Miles identifies four primary themes in the Parks Association: a constantly changing organizational identity; vigilance in strong standards for the Parks; frequently changing leadership, from Yard onward; leadership in discussion about Park use; and a strong stance against commercial development. Originally, the NPA intended to promote education and research in the Parks, but during Yard’s term it served as a platform for the defense of Park standards against commercial proposals. Miles states that “Yard’s stance was a strategy of the association – hold the line on national Park ideals more resolutely than any politician or government official could.”[[6]](#footnote-5) This resoluteness was possible due to the NPA’s independence from government politics and corporate profit. Miles provides a useful overview of the National Park Association during Yard’s term of leadership, but has essentially written a celebratory narrative rather than a critical analysis. Similar to Shaffer, Miles does not take up the larger significance of Yard’s role in creating an organization that would set several legal precedents in land usage. Nor does he place Yard in a larger context of the evolution of environmentalism.

*Driven Wild* by Paul Sutter uses the automobile and the roads that cut into preserved lands as the core conflict and instigator of the environmental movement in America, and what made the Wilderness Society necessary. He argues that the automobile represented the modern mechanized disassociation from nature while simultaneously providing, literally, the vehicle for individuals to escape the negative aspects of their modern lives in nature. To support this argument he analyzes Yard along with other founding members of the Wilderness Society, including Aldo Leopold, Benton MacKaye, and Bob Marshall.

Unfortunately, Sutter takes the common view of Yard as “not one of his generation’s great thinkers” even when in the same sentence saying he “resisted change when the majority of his preservationist colleagues were busy crafting position more amenable to the growing popularity of outdoor recreation.”[[7]](#footnote-6) I argue that Yard’s staunch resistance to recreation and commercial encroachment demonstrated not merely obstinacy, but a careful awareness of the perils of compromise. Compromises in congressional legislation had resulted in dams at Hetch Hetchy, and Kings and Tehipite River canyons that profited utilities and farmers, while submerging wild areas. By centering his arguments on use, Yard helped create the logical framework that remains essential to the defense of preserved lands, as without a clear definition of acceptable use law and policy become open to interpretation and potential abuse.

Sutter believes that Yard’s willingness to allow tourist development detracted from his wilderness advocacy, as the term would be used in the 1930s. This conclusion disparages Yard’s contribution in three ways. First, it discounts Yard’s concept of “complete conservation,” a starting point for the wilderness idea needed for the eventual existence of the Wilderness Society. Second, it ignores Yard’s overarching educational intent for any Park visitation, a natural limiter on development. Finally, it overlooks Yard’s prescience in using a “purist” argument against not just roads, but dams, logging, and mining. Each of his Forest Service counterparts: Leopold, MacKaye, and Marshall tolerated such encroachments to varying degrees until the 1920s and 1930s.

Yard articulated key conceptual, legal, and organizational legacies and created the practical organizational tools necessary to achieve the aims of his ideas in several ways. First, he was the first to focus on the value of preserved lands for educational and research use. Second, his call for complete conservation began a critical concept on which future activists could build. Finally, his legal battles against commercial and recreational overuse in the Parks established important precedents for the early environmental movement. The few scholars who have examined Yard have diminished the value of those contributions as secondary to others in his field from 1915 to 1945. They work from the standard narrative of the period and do little to reassess Yard’s contribution to environmentalism.

This thesis constitutes two chapters and an epilogue. The first addresses the period from the beginning of American environmentalism in the late nineteenth century, to the years immediately following the First World War. It provides the background for the people and organizations that addressed the growing need for conservation, preservation, and unified management of the land, exploring the work of John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, and Stephen Mather as examples. This chapter also investigates the economic forces that brought the NPS into existence and the cultural forces that fostered a return to the land ethos.

Focusing on the period from 1919 to 1941, the second chapter analyzes Yard’s work with the NPA and the Wilderness Society, evaluating the significance of his work in both organizations, including argument for educational use and legal defense of the land. This chapter also traces Yard’s shift away from conservation toward preservation, situating it in the context of American interwar culture. This period corresponds with President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal policies of the Depression, recovery, and his concept of environmental stewardship. Aldo Leopold’s contribution is covered here as well.

The epilogue connects Yard’s achievements with the foundational legislation that firmly established protective environmental laws during Lyndon Johnson’s presidency. The Wilderness Act of 1964 is a direct result of Yard’s contribution at the Wilderness Society. While the Act does not address educational goals, it is otherwise a direct reflection of Yard’s final definition of acceptable use in public protected lands.

**Chapter 1**

**Recognizing Decline: the Need for American Environmentalism, 1880 - 1919**

No wonder, then, that the American public is overjoyed with its recently realized treasure, and that the Government looks confidently to the rapid development of its new-found economic asset. The American public has discovered America, and no one who knows the American public doubts for a moment what it will do with it.

-Robert SterlingYard, *The Book of the National Parks*, 1919

 With Europe closed to travel during the First World War, American tourists looked to their own continent for places to vacation and travel. In this they received guidance from President Wilson who, like Grant and Roosevelt before him, identified the wilderness as a formative part of the American character. Perhaps the most influential booster of domestic tourism was American corporate interests who, instead of seeing nature as a place of contemplation identified it as a resource for profit. Poor governmental funding for nascent environmental protection programs allowed economic opportunism at the cost of the land. Recognizing this, early environmentalists began to decry the lack of protection, and worked to define and demonstrate a value in undeveloped spaces that could motivate the public to protect the undamaged lands that remained.

In 1914, Robert Sterling Yard stepped into the gap that lay between profit and protection as opposing concepts for the function of wilderness. At the age of fifty-three Yard gave up his career in business for a vocation in environmental protection. Working with corporate, conservation, and preservation organizations to institute legal protection, he understood the give and take of the political process, but his strength often lay in a cranky adherence to principle and willingness to call attention to inconsistencies. This staunch adherence helped him during the founding periods of three key organizations in the beginnings of modern U.S. environmentalism: the National Park Service, the National Park Association, and the Wilderness Society. Prolific in his writing, he single-mindedly and at times single-handedly worked to educate the public about the importance of protected lands. In many ways he was a man ahead of his time as few contemporaries conceived of wilderness and animal protection in the purist terms preservationists eventually assumed. Beginning with the standard concept of wild space as a tourist attraction to be passively observed, Yard’s views shifted first to land conservation, and finally to preservation. Yard’s personal change in perspective in turn mirrored significant concepts in American thought and culture regarding nature in the Progressive era.

While Robert Yard built a career as a journalist and publisher in New York City in the late nineteenth century, the issues that he addressed in his second career as an environmentalist were taking shape. Imperialist, business, and agricultural expansion came to take precedence over humans and wildlife on an increasing scale. President Grant for instance, encouraged the destruction of western American Buffalo populations as a means to starve and pacify Native Americans. His Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano stated:

The buffalo are disappearing rapidly, but not faster than I desire. I regard the destruction of such game as Indians subsist upon as facilitating the policy of the Government, of destroying their hunting habits, coercing them on reservations, and compelling them to begin to adopt the habits of civilization.[[8]](#footnote-7)

The demand for land in the West that came with Manifest Destiny ultimately brought the Buffalo to near extinction, and destroyed the primary food source, nomadic way of life, and, finally, the resistance of the Plains tribes. By the 1870s Native Americans were largely marginalized through the final Indian War battles, and the reservation system.

Westward expansion continued apace as U.S. lands became subject to increased logging, mining, and destruction of wildlife in the name of progress. In the 1880s, however, small initiatives began to counter environmental degradation. The Division of Forestry was established by Congress in 1881 to manage lumber production on federal lands, and reduce over-cutting by industry. In 1885 the U.S. Biological Survey was founded partially from concern over the Passenger Pigeon’s impending extinction due to mass commercial hunting in the Midwest. Killed for their inexpensive meat or to be used as fertilizer, the wild Passenger Pigeon population that numbered between three and five billion at the beginning of the nineteenth century was reduced to zero by 1900.[[9]](#footnote-8) Many bird populations across America were subject to increased hunting for the decorative value of their feathers, prompting George Bird Grinnel to form the first Audubon Society in 1886.[[10]](#footnote-9)

In 1890 the Census Bureau found that the western frontier no longer existed, and historian Frederick Jackson Turner described the closing of an era. Turner’s “frontier hypothesis,” that America’s character resulted from the existence of the frontier, “revolutionized American historiography and eventually made itself felt in economics and sociology, in literary criticism, and even politics.”[[11]](#footnote-10) This closing of the West aroused a new American concern for protecting remaining open spaces. Simultaneously, the rise of the Progressive reform movement took place in urban America, with a reliance on professionals and scientific expertise to resolve the problems of modernity.[[12]](#footnote-11)

Concurrently, corporate industry began to see the economic value in scenic tourism, and companies whose financial interest were more aligned with protection began to compete with hunters, loggers, mining companies, and developers. In 1872, three years after the completion of the trans-continental railroad, President Ulysses S. Grant set aside 3,400 acres of wilderness in Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana as Yellowstone National Park, the first National Park. While private businesses contributed to the creation of Yellowstone, their interests were not altruistic. Hoping for a monopoly on tourist transportation revenues, the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, as financed by Jay Cooke and Company, convinced Ferdinand Hayden, Director of the Geological and Geographic Survey of the Territories, to introduce the bill Grant signed.[[13]](#footnote-12) John Reiger identifies Jay Cooke, a quintessential capitalist of his time, as the primary motivator in the creation of Yellowstone saying he “had actually been interested in establishing a park in the Yellowstone months before the Hayden expedition visited the region.”[[14]](#footnote-13)

Similarly, the Great Northern Railroad, in the area to become Glacier National Park, began to extend track into wild areas not to enable the extraction of resources, but rather to bring tourists to view them in a natural state. In promoting nature as a product to be consumed, the railroads had simultaneously found a potentially inexhaustibly profitable use for undeveloped land, along with a new need to protect it from scenically destructive use such as logging and mining. Eventually, in order to protect their new investments in tourism, they had to partner with the government in developing a new “brand” to protect these places: the National Parks. Sustained corporate profit led the way to conservation.

Recognizing the damage wrought by the profit motive in the West, and with access to leaders in the field of politics, business, and publishing, John Muir became active in environmental protection in the late 1880s. Muir had developed a love for the Yosemite Valley through direct and quasi-religious experience in the outdoors.[[15]](#footnote-14) He believed that “thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity; and that mountain Parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigation rivers, but as fountains of life.”[[16]](#footnote-15) Camping in June of 1889 with Robert Underwood Johnson, the associate editor of *Century* magazine, Muir agreed to write a series of articles for the protection of the Sierra Mountains in California. Johnson hoped to use Muir’s writing as the foundation of a publicity campaign designed to create Yosemite National Park. Johnson’s political influence combined with Muir’s inspirational writing helped the area become the second national Park in September of 1890. As the national Parks designation did not come with administrative funding, Muir founded the Sierra Club in 1892 to provide protection.

Muir’s message and the Sierra Club came at a propitious time in American cultural development. Americans were beginning to embrace environmental protection as never before, recognizing the impact of humans on the land they inhabited. Roderick Nash contrasts Thoreau’s experience with Muir’s:

While he lived, Thoreau’s supporter’s consisted of a handful of personal friends. His writings went unsold and his lectures were sparsely attended. The general public regarded the Walden Pond episode as incomprehensible at best. Muir, on the contrary, was highly successful and nationally acclaimed in spite of the fact that most of his thoughts were simply restatements of the Transcendentalists’ case for wilderness.[[17]](#footnote-16)

This cultural shift to acclaiming Muir for substantially the same message that had been ignored fifty years earlier is significant in that it represents a national recognition of environmental degradation, and the beginning of organized rejection of damaging practices. This growing denunciation of unmanaged economic expansion over preservation served as the foundation of the environmental movement and resulted in both conservation and preservation.

On other protection issues, amateur groups such as Theodore Roosevelt’s Boone and Crockett club received help from American presidents. During the administration of President Benjamin Harrison, his Secretary of the Interior John Noble along with William Hallett Phillips an attorney and active member of Theodore Roosevelt’s Boone and Crockett club, quietly pushed through Congress an amendment to a general land law: Section 24. Historian John Reiger argues for the significance of the Boone and Crockett club saying that it, “and not the Sierra Club, was the first private organization to deal effectively with conservation issues of national scope.”[[18]](#footnote-17) Regier’s argument holds here, as using Section 24 by decree, President Harrison set aside the first fifteen federal forest preserves, totaling 13 million acres. Four years later, in an end-of-term declaration, President Cleveland brought federal protection to a further 21 million acres. Such actions dismayed corporations and the western Senators and local politicians who represented them. According to John Muir, those Senators made “complaints …in the name of poor settlers and miners, while the wealthy corporations are kept carefully hidden in the background.”[[19]](#footnote-18) While preserving the land legally, Section 24 did not provide much actual protection as decrees lacked funding for enforcement. Ultimately, they remained subject to illegal timber cutting by corporations, and added to the administrative confusion of these lands, with the War Department, Department of the Interior, and Department of Agriculture each involved in overlapping capacities. Regardless, Section 24 served as a first step toward legal protection.

Executive involvement in conservation received a further boost when in 1901 Theodore Roosevelt became President and prioritized conservation. His first speech to Congress included recommendations for forest and water conservation programs and, in 1903, he created the first National Bird Preserve at Pelican Island, Florida. [[20]](#footnote-19) Pelican Island served as the foundation of the Wildlife Refuge system in America, and was the first of fifty-three refuges that Roosevelt would designate. After a tour of Yosemite Valley with John Muir in 1903, Roosevelt expanded the Yosemite National Park at Muir’s request.[[21]](#footnote-20) However, Roosevelt’s legacy was not that of Muir’s preservation but of conservation, as influenced by Gifford Pinchot, Roosevelt’s Director of the Forest Service.

Gifford Pinchot typified the new ideal of professional management and efficiency that the Progressive movement held forth as the answer to a wide range of social issues. President Cleveland had appointed Pinchot to lead the National Forest Commission, which became the primary organization for the promotion of conservation in America, the precursor of the Forest Service. Pinchot believed that “the natural resources of the Nation” now belonged “to all of the people.”[[22]](#footnote-21) Additionally he thought that federal lands should be actively managed in the Progressive spirit of the “greatest good for the greatest number in the long run.”[[23]](#footnote-22) Pinchot defined the “greatest good” as including private logging, recreational use, and active wildlife management such as hunting. He quickly found support from corporations that depended on access to federal lands for their profits. Muir had originally met Pinchot in the 1890s, and as the respective early leaders of preservation and conservation they soon found themselves at odds over a proposed dam in California.

More than any other example, the battle for the Hetch Hetchy Dam in Yosemite demonstrates the split between preservationist like Muir and conservationist like Pinchot. In 1906 the city of San Francisco applied to the Department of the Interior for water rights to Hetch Hetchy valley, then part of Yosemite National Park thought to be inviolate. The application included rights to build a dam inside the Park and transform the valley into a lake. As one of the first encroachments on the new National Park system, it sparked a divisive battle between John Muir and the Sierra Club on one side and the Mayor of San Francisco James Phelan, along with water utilities and other conservationists on the other. Recognizing that a larger precedent would be set by his decision, Secretary of the Interior Ethan Hitchcock rejected the application as inappropriate use of the protected site, but after his retirement in 1907 his successor approved the application. For the next five years Congress and the national media hotly debated the decision, with both sides employing extensive publicity and lobbying campaigns. Muir compared the valley to a cathedral and likened its flooding to a desecration, while politicians in San Francisco argued that such preservation resulted merely in waste of a needed resource. After years of court battles in 1913, President Wilson signed the Raker Bill at the recommendation of new Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane, which approved the construction of the O'Shaughnessy Dam and the flooding of Hetch Hetchy. [[24]](#footnote-23) This victory for conservation John Muir viewed as the great environmental loss of his career, both for the natural destruction that ensued and for the precedent it set in the National Parks.[[25]](#footnote-24)

Throughout his career, Roosevelt was a believer in active management rather than hands-off preservation. In 1905 he convinced Congress to create the Forest Service, with Pinchot as its leader, and began a program of conservation that eventually designated 40 million acres of National Forests, including Mount Olympus in Washington and the extensive Alaskan Tongass and Chugach reserves. Similarly, under the Antiquities Act of 1906, he created the Grand Canyon National Monument and eighteen other monuments including Muir Woods in California. At the recommendation of Pinchot, he helped to establish organizations, such as the Reclamation Service, which eventually built the Roosevelt and Hoover dams and irrigated farm land in the West. This prioritization of conservation over preservation set an ongoing precedent in water use and active forest management by initiating governmental involvement in active management. During his presidency from 1901 to 1909, Roosevelt eventually set aside 200 million acres in National Forests, Parks, and nature preserves.

Roosevelt was not alone in the growing interest in the environment at the turn of the century as Americans began to pine for their pastoral past. To great acclaim Thoreau’s collected works were republished in 1906. In his writing Thoreau provided forceful articulations of the discontent and alienation from nature wrought by the new mechanization of life and work. Originally published to limited sales in 1854, *Walden* found an audience fifty years later decrying the dissonance of machinery and the new pace of life: “The whistle of the locomotive penetrates my woods summer and winter, sounding like the scream of a hawk sailing over some farmers yard, informing me that many restless city merchants are arriving within the circle of the town, or adventurous country traders from the other side.”[[26]](#footnote-25) The growing interest in negative portrayal of mechanical progress demonstrates public dissatisfaction with the changes that modernity brought to America, and the search for an escape.

Thoreau himself presented in *Walden* the solution that the public eventually flocked to for escape: “national preserves” or rather National Parks. Roderick Nash points to this saying, “Near the end of the essay Thoreau defended wilderness as a reservoir of intellectual nourishment for civilized men. Next he asked: “why should not we… have our national preserves…in which the bear and panther, and some even of the hunter race, may still exist, and not be ‘civilized off the face of the earth’ – our forests not for idle sport or food, but for inspiration and our own true recreation?”[[27]](#footnote-26) Yard eventually championed many of the themes Thoreau identified here, particularly national preserves to be used for intellectual inspiration, not idle entertainment. In working to create the National Parks, Yard helped to fulfill this vision, and in directing the Parks toward an education mission he stayed true to Thoreau’s concept of use.

Along with Thoreau, several other cultural artifacts demonstrate America’s growing dissatisfaction with modernity at the turn of the century. Leo Marx identifies a few early examples in *The Machine in the Garden*:

We recall the scene in Walden where Thoreau is sitting rapt in a reverie, and then penetrating his woods like the scream of a hawk, the whistle of a locomotive is heard; or the eerie passage in Moby-Dick where Ishmael is exploring the innermost recesses of a beached whale and suddenly the image shifts and the leviathan’s skeleton is a New England textile mill; of the dramatic moment in Huckleberry Finn when Huck and Jim are floating along peacefully and a monstrous steamboat suddenly bulges out of the night and smashes straight though their raft.[[28]](#footnote-27)

These images of nature dramatically interrupted by machines conveyed early concerns for the effect of progress on nature. By the early twentieth century these concerns had spread out to a public recognizing the disadvantages of development and beginning to look for physical and mental escapes back to the woods. The wilderness books of Jack London and Gene Stratton Porter became best-sellers.[[29]](#footnote-28) In 1908 Roosevelt created the Commission on Country Life and its director Liberty Hyde Bailey proposed the first back-to-the-land movement.[[30]](#footnote-29) The Boy and Girl Scouts of America, founded in 1910 and 1915, provided opportunities for city and suburban children to escape urbanization to camp and hike. Finally, visiting the nascent National Parks became popular vacations as Henry Ford’s automobile democratized travel, making it accessible to Americans of lower incomes, and providing them an escape from industrialization. The National Parks began to serve as a recreational salve for modernity.

Increasingly automobile served as a mediator for the modernization in the lives of many Americans. Historian David Louter says that: “Thus, coming to terms with the automobile, like coming to terms with technological progress itself, redefined the meaning of national parks as places of *windshield wilderness*, where it was possible for machines and nature to coexist without the same industrial transformation that was affecting other parts of the nation.”[[31]](#footnote-30) As America industrialized, workers looked for a middle ground between the factory and the fields they had left behind. Essentially the automobile served as a bridge between Americans previous existence in nature and the new daily reality in mechanized environments like factories. By being in nature *and* in a machine it helped America transition between the two.

Population growth and urbanization in the early twentieth century further fuelled the desire for Americans to escape the crowds in the city, and for preserving natural places to escape to. Alfred Runte demonstrates the change in America: “By 1920 the population growth of the country had surpassed 100 million, two and a half times the figure when Yellowstone became the first national park in 1872. Moreover, half the population in 1920 lived in cities and towns with 2500 or more residents, up from only one in four Americans living in urban areas in 1870.”[[32]](#footnote-31) America, previously a country of limitless spaces, began to face the root cause of all environmental problems: population. With increasing scarcity, open space gained a new value and the need for the National Parks was born.

**Environmental Promotion: The National Park Service**

Robert Yard’s second career in environmentalism came from America’s changing concept of the value of the wilderness, governmental efficiency initiatives, and an old personal friendship. In the 1910s pressure from the American Civic Association, the Sierra Club, and the tourism industry aligned with the Department of the Interior’s goal to bring efficiency to the various federal government agencies charged with overseeing the environment. As it stood, the Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture administered and promoted travel to the Parks, while the Army patrolled them for poaching and destruction of scenery. This division often led to supervisory confusion, and brought attention from Progressives interested in centralizing management under professional administrators.[[33]](#footnote-32)

In 1913 Secretary of the Interior Lane began working on a campaign to convince Congress to create a separate Park service to unify management.[[34]](#footnote-33) Echoing the common business rhetoric of the day, Lane saw the Parks as “a great economic asset which had theretofore been entirely overlooked by the Federal government.” [[35]](#footnote-34) With that, he hoped to appoint an Assistant Secretary of the Interior who could motivate Congress to create the Park Service, then become its first director and run it as a growing financial success. When a college friend, Stephen Mather, challenged Lane to improve the management of the Parks, Land offered Mather the job of doing it himself. A self-made borax millionaire and accomplished environmental amateur, Mather welcomed the opportunity to become a professional in the field, accepting Lane’s job offer in 1914.[[36]](#footnote-35) It was in this role that Mather launched the second career of Robert Yard by offering him the role of Director of Education, and asking him to generate the publicity campaign for the creation of the National Parks.

Yard was born in Haverstraw, New Jersey, in 1861 and was graduated from Princeton in 1883. He married Mary Belle Moffat in June of 1895 and they had one daughter Margaret.[[37]](#footnote-36) The first thirty years of his career were spent in newspaper and magazine publishing, first as a journalist and then as a publisher. In the 1880s he had worked with Mather at the *New York Sun*, and then continued on to the *New York Herald*, before transitioning in 1913 into magazines with a move to the genteel periodical *Century*. Yard examined current trends and business models in *The Publisher*, a book published in 1913 that showcased his expertise in that area. His next stint as Sunday editor at the *New York Herald* lasted until Mather recruited him. Yard transferred the skills garnered in each of these roles to the Park Service, and applied modern public relations techniques in creating the campaign that created the Parks.

The publicity campaign that Yard created to motivate the public, Congress, and President Wilson to found the National Parks occurred at a time when marketing, advertising, and public relations were becoming increasingly professionalized and sophisticated. Publicity, intended to educate an audience in a range of choices, was giving way to advertising. Rather than seeking to educate the reader, advertising hoped to exert influence, moving the audience to consume one particular product, service, or experience. As historian David Kennedy concluded in *Over Here: The First World War* *and American Society*: “Publicity became in the postwar decade little more than an adjunct to the new economy of consumerism, as the fledgling industry of advertising adopted the propagandists’ techniques of mass communication and persuasion.”[[38]](#footnote-37) Simultaneously, the war brought an end to vacation travel to Europe. American tourism, automobile, and railroad companies took this opportunity to encourage vacationers to “See America First” and to encourage travel to the Parks.[[39]](#footnote-38)

Yard did not abandon the tenets of publicity for advertising in his work at the NPS. Initially he simply advertised the parks in the business-minded spirit of the 1920s, but he increasingly returned to educational publicity in drawing visitors to the Parks. Yard wrote prolifically, making the Parks newsworthy in themselves, thus magnifying his efforts by interesting other writers. He eventually characterized this publicity as, “a tidal wave of newspaper and magazine publicity that in time passed far beyond all control.”[[40]](#footnote-39) Yard generated interest by creating a body of articles and books about the Parks illustrated extensively, with high quality black and white photography. Perhaps the most important book in this group was the *National Parks Portfolio*. Largely financed by a consortium of railroads, with Mather himself paying the remaining balance, Yard distributed 275,000 free copies of the 270-page book to influential Americans, including each member of Congress. This book educated its reader about the beauty of the Parks and the need for their unified management under a single organization.

The *Portfolio* typified Yard’s initial role as a promoter of the Parks in the 1910s. The first result of his new career in environmentalism, the *Portfolio* encouraged scenic consumption and the passive witnessing of Park spectacles. Descriptions of natural beauty are followed by details demonstrating the ease of accessibility and the comfortable lodging found in the Parks. Yard intends to convince readers to give their tax dollars to the creation of the Park service, and their recreational time to a visit of the Parks. The first edition of the Portfolio is significant in that it enabled the Park Service to develop the Congressional backing needed, and increased Park visits three-fold in the first five years of the Park Service’s existence.[[41]](#footnote-40)

While the bulk of the *Portfolio* is spent selling the National Park Service and tourism, it also starts on themes that expand through Yard’s career: educational use and scenic quality. Each chapter in the *Portfolio* describes one of the nine National Parks that Yard held in the first order of scenic quality. Here he begins an argument against visually substandard National Parks, what he calls, “National Parks of less popular interest: Sully’s Hill, Wind Cave, Casa Grande.”[[42]](#footnote-41) Designated prior to the existence of the Wildlife Refuge or National Monument systems, these areas received Park status as a way to protect either the historical artifacts or geological features they contained. Yard took issue with these areas having National Park designation, however, and their omission from the Portfolio was intentional. He believed these Parks were not of equal scenic quality to the others and, by ignoring them in the *Portfolio,* he begins the defense of National Parks brand quality that persisted throughout his career.

The *Portfolio* also introduces Yard’s growing interest in the pedagogic function of the National Parks, and began to stress the educational role that he saw for them. In chapters covering Glacier National and Rocky Mountain Parks he used the term “museums of nature.”[[43]](#footnote-42) Yard intended these museums to serve as pristine examples of nature for study. Subchapters on geology detail the inherent historic value of the untrammeled natural spaces. To lend credence to convictions about education, Yard quoted from J.S. Diller of the United State Geological Survey: “Apart from its attractive scenic features, Crater Lake affords one of the most interesting and instructive fields for the study of volcanic geology to be found anywhere in the world.”[[44]](#footnote-43) This statement touches on both Yards’ early criteria for the creation and protection of a Park: scenic quality and their value for educational use. Ultimately, Yard hoped to move the purpose of the Parks toward this vision of them as beautiful outdoor classrooms.

Yard was not the only contributor to the Parks Portfolio, and not all contributors shared the same vision for the Parks. In the introduction to the Portfolio, Franklin K. Lane, the Secretary of the Interior, represents the business and automobile-friendly environment that characterized the 1910s. Lane clearly hoped to develop the Parks as a profitable venture and recognized the importance of the automobile to Park revenue. He wrote that his “aim is to open them [the Parks] thoroughly by road and trail and give access and accommodation to every degree of income.”[[45]](#footnote-44) With the opening of Yellowstone to autos in 1916, at the behest of auto touring companies wanting increased access to the Park, he began realizing his goal. [[46]](#footnote-45) That year Mather personally purchased the existing Tioga road in Yellowstone and gave it to the Park, but Lane understood that further funding for Park roads depended on Congressional appropriations. Lane used the Portfolio for an appeal to Congress for roads building:

If congress will but make the funds available for the construction of roads over which automobiles may travel with safety (for all the parks are now open to motors) and for trails to hunt out the hidden places of beauty and dignity, we may expect that year by year these parks will become a more precious possession of the people, holding them to the further discovery of America and making them still prouder of its resources, esthetic as well as material.[[47]](#footnote-46)

Yard took the nod from his Director, and did his best to build interest in visiting the Parks by including in the *Portfolio* their motor-accessible beauty and the availability of inexpensive automobile campsites.

Accordingly, the *Portfolio* combines arguments for commercial development alongside declarations of the beauty of unspoiled nature. Yard’s rhetoric contains allusions to preservation, titling, for example, a subchapter on the Crater Lake National Park, “The Sea of Silence,” a reference to the San Franciscan poet Joaquin Miller’s 1904 poem of that title:

The plan is now to build, have the government build, a drive around the lake so that all these points may be considered in a single day from a carriage. And a great hotel is planned. And a railroad must be made to whisk you through the life-and-vigor-giving evergreen forests of Arden. Well, so be it, if you must so mock nature and break this hush and silence of a thousand centuries, but I shall not be here. No hotel or house or road of any sort should ever be built near this Sea of Silence. All our other parks have been surrendered to hotels and railroads. Let us keep this last and best sacred to silence and nature.[[48]](#footnote-47)

This passage represents one of Yard’s first criticisms of development, and an early effort to protect pristine nature in lesser developed Parks. “The Sea of Silence” was published in *Sunset*, a magazine underwritten by the Southern Pacific Railroad to advertise travel along its routes west of the Mississippi. Presumably, the railroad corporations who paid for the printing of the *Parks Portfolio* and *Sunset* allowed arguments for reducing development as they were not perceived as a threat to their expanding access. At that time, few effective organizations to resist such development existed.

Yard went a step further by openly advocating legislation for land protection in the *Portfolio*. In a section called “Other People’s Sequoias” he warns that a pure profit motive would lead to natural ruin as owners of private land in Sequoia, “cannot be expected to forego profit when, with the Park’s inevitably increasing popularity, these holdings acquire earning ability.”[[49]](#footnote-48) From this he foresees hotels in the trees and lunch platforms among the branches of the Sequoias. To prevent this, he urges that the reader write in support of the Sundry Civil Act of March 3, 1915, which allowed the Secretary of the Interior and the government to accept land gifts by private citizens. Previously, the government was unable to accept private land grants designated by the owner to remain as public space. This Act allowed them to give land to the government with specific stipulations on use.[[50]](#footnote-49)

The *Parks Portfolio* mirrors American social culture in the 1910s through its stereotypical portrayals of individuals who are not wealthy and Anglo-Saxon − its target audience. The great wave of immigration from 1883 to 1924 brought a wider range of immigrants from outside of Western Europe, arousing fears of class, racial, and religious disintegration among Anglo-Saxon elites.[[51]](#footnote-50) This growing concern with race increasingly combined with existing entrenched discrimination to keep minorities out of the country and out of public view, and the *Parks Portfolio* is no exception. For example, Native Americans, by then long subdued in North America, appear in the *Parks Portfolio*, but no other minorities are represented. Additionally, repeated references to Christian biblical stories also appear in the *Portfolio*. These together assure the potential visitor that the Parks remain the domain of the Anglo-Saxon Christian.

Yard’s favoritism appears in the *Parks Portfolio* in its depiction of seemingly wealthy, fashionable, and invariably Caucasian tourists enjoying the Parks. These tourists objectify Native Americans who are repeatedly shown as servant guides or as simply another natural wonder to be observed along with scenery and wildlife. Yard glosses over the U.S. history of Native American expropriation of land and forced resettlement by presenting the subchapter “Purchased from Indians.” A photograph titled “Clearing After the Storm” shows Native Americans living peacefully in Glacier National: hunting for their livelihood and living in traditional shelters.[[52]](#footnote-51) While this way of life may have existed marginally on some reservations, it had largely been destroyed by 1915 through federal efforts to kill the Bison and relocate Native Americans. In a figurative sense the “Storm” represents efforts to end the Native American way of life and the “Clearing” as acceptance of their new role as peaceful scenery in the National Parks. Similarly, reference to the purchase of Glacier National serves to smooth over the European seizure of the West and much of the land that eventually became the Parks.

 This undercurrent of elitism runs across Yard’s career not only with respect to racial minorities but also with respect to the American lower classes that gained access to the Parks through automobile camping. “For Robert Sterling Yard’s generation, the quality of park landscapes rather than equality of access to the parks had been preservationists’ major concern,” says Alfred Runte. Where once the economics of expensive train travel and hotel stay limited park access, increasingly the Parks became open to what Yard saw as the uneducated masses. As more and more Americans were financially able to emulate the wealthy through nature leisure in Parks, Yard began to be concerned with the environmental impact that mass leisure brought. His writing began to address thoughtless passive tourism in its calls for educational use.

By 1919 Yard had produced three editions of the *National Parks Portfolio* and he found his interest in acting as a nature booster for the railroads and auto industry flagging. That year’s edition of the *Portfolio* reflected his growing distaste for the consumption of the wilderness, and argued in earnest for a deeper understanding of the land through study. He lamented that the uneducated tourist remained ignorant of the geological history that shaped America: “the glacier-hollow valley of Yosemite, the stream-scooped abyss of the Grand Canyon, the volcanic gulf of Crater Lake, the bristling granite core of the Rockies, and the ancient ice-carved shales of Glacier National Park: all are one – just scenery, magnificent, incomparable, meaningless.”[[53]](#footnote-52) In addition to this superficiality, he derided the parochialism and sentimentality of a Park visitor who asked him if Yosemite Falls was “the highest unbroken waterfall in the world?”[[54]](#footnote-53) To Yard, this woman symbolized the Parks as a mild form of passive entertainment; “she was conscious of no higher emotion that the cheap wonder of superlative.” In earlier editions of the *Parks Portfolio* Yard himself subtitles a photograph of Yosemite Falls “Highest Waterfall in the World.”[[55]](#footnote-54) Now deeming the uneducated observance of scenery as “meaningless,” he not only calls attention to this passive tourism, but also recognized his role in creating the stream of gawking wonder seekers in the Parks.

 In Yard’s 1919 *Book of the National Parks*, financed and published by Scribner’s rather than the railroads, he begins to address the historical mistreatment of Native Americans for profit. Yard decries that when “the pilgrim fathers landed in Massachusetts; the white man pushed the Indian aside” and that the land was shaped “long before the white man appeared to drive the native out.”[[56]](#footnote-55) This language implies Europeans had culpability in pushing Native Americans off the land that became the Parks. He also criticized key institutions in that process, including the church and the military by recounting the conquering of the Southwest in terms unflattering to Europeans: “Hand in hand the priest and the soldier boldly invaded the desert. The zealous priest imposing his religion upon the shrinking Indian, the priest did not hesitate to invoke the soldier’s aid for so holy a purpose; the soldier used the gentle priest to cloak the greedy business of wringing wealth from the frugal native.”[[57]](#footnote-56) Yard ties this conquest to Columbus who “himself was as eager for gold as he was zealous for religion.”[[58]](#footnote-57) This critique of European settlement of North America marks one of his first steps in recognizing the complexity of environmental preservation.

 Yard also uses his “museum of nature” argument for preservation in the *Book of the National Parks* to protect pristine conditions and animals. He argued that in order to provide the most authentic sites for research, the land in the National Parks had to be cordoned off. He explains that, “It aims to preserve nature’s handiwork exactly as nature made it,” and that, “Originally the motive in park-making had been unalloyed conservation.”[[59]](#footnote-58) He takes an even stronger stance on the treatment of animals, saying: “It is not too late to look upon wild animals as fellow heritors of the earth, possessing certain natural rights which men are glad rather than bound to respect. It is not too late to consider them, with birds and forests, lakes, rivers, seas, skies, a part of nature’s glorious gift.” and that, National Parks, he declares, protect wild animals as friends.[[60]](#footnote-59) Yard’s view of animals as “fellow heritors of the earth,” deserving “rights” was rare in the early twentieth century, certainly a unique contribution to environmentalism at that time.

In conjunction with the *National Parks Portfolio*, Yard produced the smaller *Glimpses of Our National Parks* as a platform to protect the National Parks from a new set of detractors. Intended for a broader audience, *Glimpses* cost less to print and was distributed for free to the public by the Park Service. In it, Yard argues again for scenic quality as a principal element of the Park brand. In the 1920s, Congress began to receive proposals for Parks brought by politicians and businessmen who began to recognize the economic value of the designation “National Park.” For their own localities these boosters asked the question: “Why should we not have national parks, too?”[[61]](#footnote-60) but Yard argued for State Park status for these areas instead. Yard states that, “it is good policy faithfully to maintain the trade-mark ‘National Parks of America’ at its present high level; to which end wisdom advises against calling new reservations national Parks whose scenic sublimity falls short of those which now exist.”[[62]](#footnote-61) As his environmental career continued, Yard increasingly used this qualitative argument *against* economically motivated National Park proposals of poor scenic quality. This change is a clear movement away from promotion for economic expansion, to larger concerns for the future of the Parks and their lands.

In *Glimpses*, Yard also refers back to an American literary tradition that honors both nature and Native Americans in his argument for complete conservation in the Parks, stating that they “are not properties in a commercial sense, but nature preserves”[[63]](#footnote-62) and, as such, “they remain under nature’s own chosen conditions. They alone maintain ‘the forest primeval.’”[[64]](#footnote-63) The term “forest primeval” is likely a reference to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *Evangeline.* In the 1850s, Longfellow had been among the first Americans to take up Native American themes in his poetry. *The Song of Hiawatha* shows the coming of the white man as the destruction of Native American culture and environment. In it, Hiawatha foresees the Europeans:

I beheld, too, in that vision

All the secrets of the future,

Of the distant days that shall be.

I beheld the westward marches

Of the unknown, crowded nations.

All the land was full of people,

Restless, struggling, toiling, striving,

Speaking many tongues, yet feeling

But one heart-beat in their bosoms.

In the woodlands rang their axes,

Smoked their towns in all the valleys,

Over all the lakes and rivers

Rushed their great canoes of thunder.[[65]](#footnote-64)

At the end of the poem Hiawatha leaves on a westward journey and dies in the West. Yard’s allusion to Wordsworth simultaneously condemns European-American treatment of Native Americans and of the environment. Here Yard is borrowing from American literary tradition to bolster his argument, another tactic in protection of the people and environment conditions in place before the coming of Europeans.

After three years of producing the *National Parks Portfolio*, *Glimpses of our National Parks*, and finally the *Book of the National Parks*, Yard’s increasing interest in preservation and educational use began to create tension among his co-workers at the Parks Service. When Stephen Mather suffered a breakdown in 1917, a result of over-work creating the Parks, his assistant Horace Albright and Yard vied for leadership of the Park Service.[[66]](#footnote-65) Yard eventually yielded leadership, but soon thereafter Albright denied Yard’s request for educational funding. Yard realized that he needed to look outside the Park Service for support to realize his goal of prioritizing education over consumption. Having helped increase annual Park visitation from 334,799 to 919,504 between 1915 and 1920, Yard began to question the meaning of his work: was it publicity of pristine places for education, or was it simply advertising for American tourism industries?[[67]](#footnote-66) Looking to create an organization to fit his concept of use in the Parks, in the spring of 1918 Yard began to organize the National Parks Education Committee as an independent voice for educational use.

**Chapter 2**

**Different Goals: the Splintering of American Environmentalism – 1919 to 1941**

Danger to the National Parks comes from three sources: (1) From industrial companies that want to use the parks for profit; (2) from communities which want to attract profitable motor crowds by offering local national parks developed and maintained at the expense of the national government; and (3) from one-idea enthusiasts for unlimited recreational expansion who call for new and enormous national parks, irrespective of established standards.

- Robert Sterling Yard, *National Parks Bulletin* 49, 1926

By 1919 the initial phase of environmentalism in America passed and its founders like Horace Albright, Gifford Pinchot and Robert Yard divided around whose definition of appropriate use would be implemented. Commercial interests challenged the ability to protect newly designated lands and the divisions between developers, conservationists, and preservationists widened. From this division came new techniques in land protection, as environmentalists sought to develop strategies to achieve their disparate goals. Allowing commercial use versus preservation became the critical factor in identifying where particular environmentalists and their organizations stood, as Yard transitioned from the National Parks Service to the National Parks Association, disillusioned by the compromises of conservation in the NPS. In the 1930s, Roosevelt’s New Deal policies brought greatly increased funding for public works projects, particularly roads, in public lands. By then, Yard had completed his move away from promoting the land, through conservation, and onto pure preservation with the Wilderness Society. This brought him into conflict with former allies at the Park Service, with Congressmen, and with federal initiatives, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps. These divisions often determined American land use in the twentieth century.

**Protection through Education: The National Park Association**

Robert Yard founded the National Parks Association when he realized advocacy for educational use in the Parks required an organization independent of the National Park Service and the government. In June of 1918 Yard published a declaration of need stating: “The big fruits of the national park movement, which…has its roots in the heart and mind of every American, can…be cultivated only by an organization of the people outside of government, and unhampered by politics and routine.” [[68]](#footnote-67) At the NPS, Yard had seen that the politics of Congressional funding unduly influenced the direction of the Parks, and that business swayed Congress. As a result, he realized that NPS goals were moving toward tourists and their dollars, and away from educational use. Yard met with the Secretary of the Smithsonian Charles Wolcott and they brought together the initial members of the National Parks Education Committee, the precursor of the NPA. With Stephen Mather’s initial financial backing, Yard began a membership drive that increased the NPEC’s membership. This allowed its formalization as the National Parks Association, with Yard as Executive Secretary.

Yard initially hoped to address the issues of commercial encroachment and passive tourist consumption of the Parks with a general argument of preservation for educational use. However, in a discussion about increasing NPA membership, Mather recommended that the NPA find a specific Park issue to motivate the public around, rather than relying on an argument for the general value of education. From that recommendation, Yard began to look for a specific Park issue to become involved with to demonstrate the worth of the NPA to potential members. In doing so Yard embarked on the strategy that dominated his time with the NPA: legal and legislative defense of Park resources. Yard intended an educational role for the NPA − publishing research papers, creating a photographic slide service, and acting as a liaison to libraries − instead it started on the role it repeatedly filled: protecting the Parks from Congress and corporations.

 In the winter of 1919, Yard found an issue to motivate the public around in two starving Yellowstone elk herds, and began a campaign to feed and protect them from hunting as they ranged beyond Park borders in search of food. The NPA raised funds for the elk, brought attention to their hunting, and put a Park issue unaddressed by the NPS in front of the public. The public response brought the elk food and protection from hunting. Ultimately, the issue allowed Yard to demonstrate his strength in publicity to a new audience of potential NPA members, and grow membership to over eight hundred by 1920.[[69]](#footnote-68) This increase put the NPA on a solid financial footing for what Yard repeatedly called “The War on the National Parks”: a series of legislative challenges by business in the 1920s to bring hydroelectric dams into the Parks.[[70]](#footnote-69)

In 1920 private interest introduced a bill to Congress for the Federal Power Commission to have the ability to grant electric power and irrigation rights in public lands, including in the National Parks. Yard immediately communicated this encroachment on the protected status of the Parks to the membership of the NPA:

If Congress grants one single irrigation privilege in any national park, no matter how little it injures the park, or allows one new national park to be created subject to the Water Power Act, it destroys the historic principle of Complete Conservation[[71]](#footnote-70) which alone differentiates national parks from national forests.[[72]](#footnote-71) It opens the door. Entire commercialization of all national parks logically and inevitably will follow.[[73]](#footnote-72)

The NPA’s membership wrote to President Wilson in response and extracted a promise to veto the bill. This promise resulted in a second round of communication from western Senators to Wilson explaining that he would lose reelection votes if the Act were not signed. This second communication spurred by agricultural and utility interests in the West. Fearing lost votes, Wilson signed the Federal Water Power act of 1920, to the NPA’s surprise. Immediately, Yard began publicity efforts to have the National Parks exempted from the Act. He created an alliance with the Appalachian Mountain Club founded in 1876, and Sierra Club founded in 1892, to bring the issue to public attention.[[74]](#footnote-73) Eventually, Yard’s efforts in alliance resulted in the Jones-Esch bill exempting *existing* National Parks from development, but continued to allow the development of water power in future Parks.[[75]](#footnote-74) A partial victory, this exemption for existing Parks left the door open to future battles over commercial use in new Parks.

Increasingly, commercial use became the crux of the division between conservationists and preservationists. Yard hoped to keep his rigid preservation standards, but often faced conservation professionals who had to make environmental compromises to maintain the influence of their positions and organizations. The elk issue, the Water Power Act and subsequent use debates gave the Park Association the issues it needed to establish itself as a new force in protection, but they also caused a division between the Park Association and Parks Service. In 1921, Representative Barbour (R - CA) introduced a bill to create Roosevelt-Sequoia National Park, an enlargement of Sequoia National Park. As a new Park, the expansion fell under the auspices of the Water Power Act without restrictions on dams or other water development. Steven Mather supported the expansion, as did California Senator James Phelan, who had been the Mayor of San Francisco during the Hetch Hetchy debate, and one of its instigators. Yard believed that this expansion would set a dangerous precedent and urged NPA membership to oppose the bill, creating a disagreement between himself and his old friend Mather. This conflict eventually cost Yard and the NPA one of their primary contributors, and resembled Yard’s final budget conflict with Albright at the NPS. Such differences became a recurring theme in Yard’s career, and occasionally hindered his work as his peers labeled him a purist.

With World War I just ended, Yard took up a modified rhetoric of war for defense of the Parks. The language of war allowed Yard to create urgency around the complex legal issues that might otherwise be ignored by the public, and thereby increased the effectiveness of the NPA. His language in defense of the Parks became increasingly militaristic at the National Parks Association. He repeatedly used phrases such as “The War on Yellowstone,” and “The War on the National Parks,” in the first edition of the *National* *Parks Bulletins* of the early 1920s.[[76]](#footnote-75) Reference to World War I terminology is even more explicit in National Parks Bulletin 15 as he refers to the Water Power Act as “an enemy flanking movement, which nevertheless may enable us meantime to straighten our line.” This sets the usurpers of the Parks in line with enemies of America, a parallel drawn to elicit emotion and action in its reader. In this usage of war as a term for environmental degradation Yard again echoes Thoreau: “This winter, they are cutting down our woods more seriously than ever….It is a thorough process, the war with the wilderness.”[[77]](#footnote-76) Yard’s ability to integrate cultural history and the current public mind served as one of several strengths in defense of the Parks.

World War I influenced Yard’s work in other ways as he began to use the term propaganda in a negative sense, a shift from his earlier usage. After the war, the American public realized that the nationalist propaganda that had shaped public opinion for involvement in the war had been used to make the unprecedented bloodshed possible. This changed the term propaganda from having a comparatively positive connotation in America previous to World War I, to a strongly negative meaning after it. So much so that almost immediately after the war President Wilson disbanded the Creel Commission with no funding for the archiving of its work.[[78]](#footnote-77)

The appointment of Albert Fall as Secretary of the Interior in 1921 by President Harding brought the next chapter in Yard’s war to defend the National Parks. As a Senator (R - NM), Fall had proposed a National Park in an existing New Mexico Native American Reservation in both 1913 and 1916, and as Secretary he proposed it again on land that bordered his personal ranch. This All Year National Park was described by Yard as “a number of little wooded spots, miles apart in the valley bottom in the Indian reservation, plus a bit of bad lands 40 miles away, plus a sample of gypsum desert 38 miles away, plus a Reclamation reservoir 90 miles away, all these across deserts of heavy sand.”[[79]](#footnote-78) This did not fit the scenic standards that Yard used as a framework for appropriate new Parks. Fall’s potential financial benefit due to the proximity of his land made the proposal further suspect. Yard published his perspective in the *National Park Bulletin* and spoke against the bill in Congress in 1923. In that hearing, Fall insisted on applying for the more profitable National Park designation rather than compromising to the offered National Recreation Area status. The bill failed due to his refusal, and Fall soon became the focus of the Tea Pot Dome oil scandal resulting in a conviction for bribery.[[80]](#footnote-79)

Yard recognized the coming problem of the automobile in the Parks before most environmentalists: As early as 1922 he wrote: “The majority now come in motors. Thus while we are fighting for the protection of the national park system from its enemies, we may also have to protect it from its friends.”[[81]](#footnote-80) By the mid to late 1920s falling car prices created an unprecedented increase in ownership and mechanized recreation. With the rise of the automobile and visitation in the Parks, recreational use became the primary concern of Yard and the NPA. Yard recognized the change in the *National Parks Bulletin* saying: “The era of outdoor recreation has rushed upon us with the speed of the automobile…. Ungoverned and ungovernable, at least it can be directed.”[[82]](#footnote-81) Yard disliked both the environmental impact of the numbers of people in the Parks and what they came to the Parks for: mechanized recreation rather than education. He hoped to direct use toward education through his contribution to the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation held in 1924.

President Coolidge called the Conference to create a national policy and expand recreational access for Americans. The NPA and the American Forestry Association received the task of surveying the recreational resources of federal lands and eventually produced a report critical of Park Service recreational expansion. Yard believed that, “The playground feature overshadowed the primary purpose of the Parks and tended to increase the pressure for ill-advised additions to the Parks which were simply pleasant outdoor playground areas and nothing more.”[[83]](#footnote-82) The shift toward recreational use via automobile was just beginning at this time, but would increase steadily until the fight against automobiles and roads dominated the environmental agenda in the next decade.

 At the National Conference, Yard met Aldo Leopold, at that time a National Forest Service employee working to establish wilderness areas inside existing federal management systems. The two debated the need for a wilderness area system separate from the National Parks, and what might be appropriate use in those new areas. Leopold believed that the Parks could have within them wilderness areas, and even allow hunting in those areas. Yard, however, argued for a new and separate land status that would allow only foot travel and no hunting of native wildlife.[[84]](#footnote-83) This protection of animals is a unique contribution of Yard’s. Soon after the Conference, Leopold returned to southern New Mexico and helped create the first designated Wilderness Area as a part of Forest Service land, the Gila. However, his original proposal suggested an alternate title for the area, “The Gila National Hunting Ground” and this title may better reflect his interest in protecting the area. Leopold is frequently credited with originating the wilderness concept, but his idea of use was less strict than Yard’s when it came to the protection of native species. As early as 1924 Yard’s definition of appropriate use included preservation of animals, a definition that Leopold’s conservation did not embrace.

 The battle over appropriate Park land use persisted into the late 1920s and early 1930s, becoming a national issue as Eastern and Southern businessmen and politicians recognized the economic value of the National Park designation and showered Congress with proposals. In each of these cases Yard’s guiding criteria for disagreeing with the proposal was primarily scenic, and thereby difficult to objectively quantify. Previously, Yard had used scenic criteria for park creation, as “scenery provided the primary inspiration for national parks and, through tourism, their primary justification,” but now he used it as an argument against Park creation.[[85]](#footnote-84) Yard thought that these proposals were based on dollars rather than scenic significance of the areas proposed. Shenandoah Park and Mammoth Cave Park, proposed in 1926, represented clear examples of financially motivated proposals to Yard. Similarly he initially resisted a proposal for the Everglades National Park in 1934. He later supported the Park’s creation after realizing that the designation could help protect the myriad bird species there. The qualitative nature of Yard’s scenic argument against these Parks repeatedly served as a weakness pointed to by Park boosters. From this, he continued to search for objective criteria beyond scenery in both Park creation and Park protection.

The stock market crash of 1929 that marked the start of the great depression hit the National Parks Association particularly hard. As President, Herbert Hoover believed that federal government involvement in the recovery was unnecessary and, he looked to state and local governments, as well as volunteer organizations to engineer recovery. This was Federal policy, to much public outcry, until Franklin D. Roosevelt became president in 1933. With personal and public fortunes on the ebb, NPA membership declined steadily from 628 in 1931 to less than half that number in 1933.[[86]](#footnote-85) This, combined with the freezing of NPA assets due to the failure of its bank, left it unable to pay staff salaries and expenses in 1933. With that, Yard stepped down as active General Secretary and became Editor of Publications, a role he fulfilled from a distance until 1942.

Franklin Roosevelt’s Presidency marked a turn toward federal involvement in the nation's economic recovery. Fifth cousin to Theodore Roosevelt, FDR continued Theodore’s conservation practices during his term from 1933 to 1945 and used them as a tool for economic relief. Relief took the form of jobs through the Public Work Administration (PWA), Work Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Established in March of 1933 the CCC eventually employed three million men in land development and reclamation throughout the continental United States and Alaska.[[87]](#footnote-86) Much of this labor and cost focused on land improvements, frequently road and trail building in the National Parks. In 1933 the Park Service had a total road budget of $7.5 million but received a supplementary $17 million two-year budget through the CCC. Eventually the CCC employed 156,000 men in state and National Parks between 1933 and 1942.[[88]](#footnote-87) This CCC road building reflected the nation-wide increase in paved roads during the 1930s and ‘40s that allowed easier access for greater numbers to shrinking wild areas. These CCC programs served to bolster the economy but the roads they created inaugurated a new series of threats to the American environment. Public demand for better roads to, and in, federal lands became a primary concern for environmentalists and they found the objective measure they had been searching for in “roadlessness.” Yard saw the automobile as responsible for destructive changes in the American landscape. “It is the automobile, agent of material progress, destroyer of deserts, leveler of mountains and annihilator of time and distance that must bear that charge.” he lamented.[[89]](#footnote-88) By pointing to the automobile in 1932, Yard identified the pivotal environmental issue of the decade: the rise of personal machinery in the forms of cars, boats, and airplanes that invaded the visual and auditory solitude environmentalists sought. Eighty years after Thoreau, this issue facilitated Yard’s final step in his journey to becoming a strict preservationist.**Transition to Preservation: The Wilderness Society**

By 1935 Yard had expanded his environmental view beyond the National Parks and beyond both promotion and conservation to preservation. In the *Living Wilderness*, the periodical of the Wilderness Society, he summarized his time at the National Parks Association and identified the mission of the Wilderness Society:

Ten years of warfare in congress saved the National Parks System from water power and irrigation, but left the primitive decimated elsewhere. What little of it is left is passing before a popular craze and an administrative fashion. The craze is to build all the highways possible everywhere while billions may yet be borrowed from the unlucky future. The fashion is to barber and manicure wild America as smartly as the modern girl. Our duty is clear.[[90]](#footnote-89)

The “duty” he points to is for the Wilderness Society to fill a gap in environmental leadership. He recognized that “the reason for prevailing helplessness is failure in leadership” and that while “each sees the wilderness crashing around” them, that “none could plan and lead without tragic sacrifice of its own responsibilities.”[[91]](#footnote-90) Yard believed the Wilderness Society could function as that leader, and unify the disparate resources of its contributors. From this duty the Wilderness society was born in 1935, with Yard as its Executive Secretary.

Financially, the Wilderness Society relied on Robert Marshall, who initially paid all salaries. This continued a pattern in which Yard relied on a wealthy benefactor to enable his environmental work, as he had at the national Park Service under Stephen Mather. Yard contacted Marshall in October of 1934 through their mutual acquaintance John Merriam and mentioned the founding of an “Organization to Preserve the Primitive.”[[92]](#footnote-91) Marshall responded by giving Yard and Merriam precedence for the idea of the Wilderness Society: “I should say you and Dr. Merriam started the ball rolling in March, then H.A. Anderson came along in July and the Benton MacKaye, Harvey Broome and I came along in August.” Marshall’s 1930 article, “The Problem of the Wilderness” likewise decried the invasion of roads. [[93]](#footnote-92) The son of a wealthy constitutional lawyer he not only financed the Wilderness Society during its founding but left a portion of his sizable personal fortune to it upon his death at thirty-nine in 1939.[[94]](#footnote-93) Marshall’s financial contribution allowed the members of the Wilderness Society to refine their environmental concepts, as Yard did during his time there.

Throughout his career Yard had seen humans as observers regarding nature with appreciation as a painting in a museum, and implicitly that nature was separate from humans. He did not often refer to man as a part of nature, but this perspective changed at the Wilderness Society. Cofounders Bob Marshall, Aldo Leopold, Benton MacKay, Ernest Oberholtzer, Harvey Broome, Bernard Frank, and Harold C. Anderson strove for a Wilderness Society that acted as “the focal point of a new attitude – an intelligent humility toward man’s place in nature.”[[95]](#footnote-94) Seeing man as part of nature, rather than separate or dominant over it represents a unique contribution of the Wilderness Society. Once humans are a part of nature, then there is a connection between human actions and environmental outcomes both intentional and unintentional. From that humans can hope to protect part of nature, even from unintentional outcomes, by removing themselves from permanent habitation.

At the Wilderness Society Yard joined a group in the vanguard of environmental thought in the 1930s. These few “called for an end to road building so that new “wilderness” areas would be preserved for those who were willing to invest the time and energy into packing their way in.” [[96]](#footnote-95) Aldo Leopold in particular viewed nature as something to enjoy ruggedly. Leopold had spent his early career with the National Forest Service in the southwest and Forest Product Lab in Madison, Wisconsin, before becoming a Professor of Game Management at the University of Wisconsin in 1933. His 1949 *Sand County Almanac* defined a “land ethic” that spoke to human beings as citizens of the land: “[A] land ethic changes the role of Homo Sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it.”[[97]](#footnote-96) Leopold believed in man as a part of nature, with the reasoning skills to serve as a scientific conservator, but simultaneously recognized the limitations of man’s ability. His writing for the Wilderness Society reflected this, stating, “all land-use technologies – agriculture, forestry, watersheds, erosion, game, and range management – are encountering unexpected and baffling obstacles which show clearly that despite the superficial advances in technique, we do not yet understand and cannot yet control the long term interactions of animals, plants, and mother earth.”[[98]](#footnote-97) His use of “not yet” echoes the Progressives’ faith in man’s ability to control his environment, but also speaks to a new humility in the face of nature. This humility was a function of Leopold’s recognition of unintended consequences.

Leopold’s placement of man in nature implicitly challenged America’s previous cultural assumptions about religion and technology. Roderick Nash takes this up pointing to the “Judeo-Christian tradition, with its concept of man as superior to other living things by virtue of being made in the image of the Creator. The commandment (Genesis 1:28) which gave man dominion over his environment encouraged arrogance rather than respect.”[[99]](#footnote-98) Leopold instead viewed man as, “only fellow-voyageurs with other creatures in the odyssey of evolution.” Yet there was one important difference: technology had given man the “whip-hand over nature,” the ability to bring about extensive changes in the environment.”[[100]](#footnote-99) Here Nash identifies an underlying assumption of environmental consumption: that it is man’s right as the earth was made for him. Leopold rejected this and identified the key difference between man and animal, the technology that allows humans to reshape their world. Identifying man as part of nature does for environmental degradation what Darwin’s theory of evolution did for man’s elevated concept of himself. It shifts humans to being part of a system rather than above it.

Robert Yard’s shifting concepts of wilderness and primitive reached a final definition at the Wilderness Society. In the “Platform of the Wilderness Society,” Yard clearly identified the culprit in the wilderness: national boosters and corporations. Here he delineates wilderness, “the environment of solitude,” as valuable a commodity as coal and timber, and that it had public utility which should not be accessed for private gain.[[101]](#footnote-100) This declaration speaks to a recurring problem with environmentalist arguments for restricting use – the commercial value of the land they hoped to restrict. By comparing wilderness to a “public utility” Yard hoped to give wilderness an economic standing that legitimized its economic disuse, in terms those interested in developing it might respect. Finally he speaks of the scientific value of uninterrupted areas, and says that much of the damage to public lands has been wrought by “powerful, country-wide organizations.” The Platform of the Wilderness Society simultaneously identifies the problem, explains why it is important, and places blame. Having defined these, what remains is a plan for what is to be done in response: a clear structure of use and disuse in preserved wilderness lands. Yard addressed this in subsequent sections.

Yard defined five categories for preservation areas in “Types of Wilderness.” This follows the “Platform of the Wilderness Society” and suggests an explicit structure of use. “Extensive Wilderness Areas” would have no mechanized disturbance, be large enough to travel a week in without crossing one’s own trail, and an individual must depend on his or her own effort for survival. “Primeval Areas” include virgin tracts in which the normal processes of nature remain unaltered, and so are of surpassing scenic and scientific value. “Superlative Scenic Areas” represent places that, if destroyed, there is no visual substitute for them, such as the National Parks. “Restricted Wild Areas” serve as areas near cities that remain free of sights and sounds of mechanization, even if in a smaller area than “Extensive Wilderness Areas.” Finally, “Wilderness Zones” are strips of land along mountain ridges, and river bottoms that might be crossed by rail or road still retain primitive travel along them.[[102]](#footnote-101) In defining “Types of Wilderness” Yard arrived at his and the Wilderness Society’s recommendation for use and the logical framework he had been working toward throughout his environmental career. It serves as the last stage in his move to preservation by combining his new themes of opposition of automobiles, and recreation and ongoing themes of scenery defense and scientific value. Finally, he had found an objective framework that encompassed all his concerns for the environment.

 From 1919 to 1941, Robert Yard spent the second half of his career wrestling with a preservation ethic then publicizing it. What began as work in publicity at the National Park Service, he realized, had become advertising encouraging invasive and passive consumption of wild spaces. His National Parks Administration hoped to address this passivity by encouraging active involvement in the land through education, but again Yard’s work was unexpectedly redirected, this time toward legal defense of public spaces. Ultimately he arrived at the Wilderness Society where a framework of disuse, rather than appropriate use became the norm. Over those two decades Yard traveled from a Progressive’s faith that the public would choose to value environmental resources if educated about them, to the acceptance that his fellow citizens held a different hierarchy of values, one that often privileged economics over environmental consequences, intended or not. This realization brought Yard to a final argument for disuse that would take root in the Wilderness Act of 1964, one of the many future outcomes of Robert Yard’s career.

**Epilogue**

**The Legacy of Robert Sterling Yard, 1946 - 1966**

Today’s progressive view of nature conceives the American people using and enjoying it for the needs of everyday living, for pleasuring, and as an inspiration for happiness and achievement; but it specially conceives it necessary to save those parts of our slender remaining roadless areas which are worth more for study, relaxation, and the wilderness type of recreation than for picnicking, motoring, and commercial activities; also it believes that remaining primeval areas which are museums of creation, often also remarkable for scenic grandeur and extraordinary natural beauty, should be carefully protected, undisturbed, for observation, scientific study, and appropriate types of enjoyment.

-Robert Sterling Yard, *The Living Wilderness*, 1945

 Robert Sterling Yard died in 1945 in Washington DC, but his environmental legacy continues in the work of the organizations he created and contributed to: the National Park Service; National Parks Association; and the Wilderness Society. His personal vision of use shaped those organizations, and in part increased public recognition of environmental problems in the 1960s. Yard’s personal journey from that of tourism promoter to an environmental preservationist is seen in the issues he focused on respectively at the NPS, NPA, and the Wilderness Society: interpretive use; legal defense against industrial, agricultural, and recreational commerce; and the fight against mechanized overuse of shrinking wild spaces. For thirty years, Yard worked on those issues, and, through them, he identified many of the coming environmental problems both inside the Parks and out, setting several legal precedents along the way. But Yard’s legacy is not a simple one, as his career both contributed to, and helped to address the environmental issues of the decades that followed his death.

The dichotomy of Yard’s contribution to environmentalism appears most clearly in his work at the Park Service. Intending to publicize the Parks for educational and inspirational use, ultimately Yard helped create recreational overuse though his marketing. Between 1916 and 1941, visitation to the National Parks increased by a factor of 58 from 360,000 to 21 million annual visitors.[[103]](#footnote-102) By 1955 that number more than doubled to 56 million, and that with Park land acquisitions slowing. In 1955 Director Conrad Wirth devised a Park usage plan to mirror the interstate highway plan of the Eisenhower administration. This program, Mission 66, brought approximately one billion dollars into the Parks between 1956 and 1966, primarily for the expansion of roads and improvements to facilities for automobile visitors.[[104]](#footnote-103) By 1966 this increased easy access to the Parks and brought 133 million visitors annually. Similarly, 135 million people visited the National Forests recreationally in 1964, up from 27 million in 1950, with the National Forests having a 60% increase in road mileage between 1945 and 1960.[[105]](#footnote-104) These roads, in part, are a result of the demand created by Yard in his early promotion of the Parks.

Clearly, Yard had not intended to overrun the Parks with careless visitors, and he later hoped to mitigate his early marketing by encouraging education use in the Parks. His founding of the National Parks Association demonstrates this regret in unwittingly fostering a careless tourism market. From his work at the NPA, the National Parks Service soon adopted the educational guidelines put forth by Yard and implemented them through the Educational Advisory Board of the NPS over the next twenty years. This shift toward interpretation by the Park Service is a result of Yard’s prodding and of funding becoming available, through grants, for interpretation from private sources. Having seen the Yavapai Interpretive Center, a project created by Yard and Merriam, the Laura Spellman Rockefeller foundation chose to provide grants for the new educational role of the Parks with donations for Yavapai and a similar center in Yellowstone. In short, both the creation of the National Parks Association, and the creation of those interpretive test projects that spurred public interest can be directly linked to Yard, thereby to the interpretive mission of the Parks. By the 1950s, education had become a popular aspect of a Park visit, as identified in *Shaping the System*, the National Park Services official early history:

In the field of interpretation, “living history” programs ranging from military demonstrations to farming became popular attractions at many areas. Environmental interpretation, emphasizing ecological relationships; and special environmental education programs for school classes reflected and promoted the nation’s growing environmental awareness.[[106]](#footnote-105)

This focus is also identified in the Parks current mission statement, Heritage Education: *“*Educating Park visitors and the general public about their history and common heritage.”[[107]](#footnote-106)Part ofYard’s legacy at the NPS, from his work at the NPA, is that he promoted the nation’s growing environmental awareness, and fought to bring to the Park visitors an environmental lesson beyond the spectacle of the Parks.

Aside from the educational legacy of the NPA, its legal legacy is also Yard’s. Shortly after his death, several proposals put forth by commercial interests threatened Parks that Yard had supported in the Grand Tetons, Olympic Mountains, and the Florida Everglades. Similarly, dam proposals reminiscent of Yard’s battles over Yellowstone dams began to crop up again in Glacier National Park, Kings Canyon, and Dinosaur National Park. The defense against these proposals used precedents set by the NPA during Yard’s career. Particularly, the defeat of the dam in Dinosaur National Monument served as a turning point inAmerican environmentalism, as it brought together several organizations in an effort to protect a space, and further to preserve it permanently through proactively increasing protection rather than simply continuing to respond to threats. The NPA led this effort, in a direct continuation of Yard’s work in the 1920s.

Yard’s move to the Wilderness Society connects him to the Wilderness Act, a seminal legislation against recreational overuse, particularly the roads needed to access wild spaces easily and often carelessly. As early as 1935 Yard regretted his part in initially advertising the Parks and worked to undo his marketing with subsequent work against roads and mechanization at the Wilderness Society. He decried it in the first issue of the *Living Wilderness* in 1935:

Primitive America is vanishing with appalling rapidity. Scarcely a month passes in which some highway does not invade an area which since the beginning of time had known only natural modes of travel; or some last remaining virgin timber tract is not shattered by the construction of an irrigation project into an expanding and contracting mudflat; or some quiet glad hitherto disturbed only by birds and insects and wind in the trees does not bark out the merits of “Crazy Water Crystals” and the mushiness of “Cocktails for Two.”[[108]](#footnote-107)

Clearly, between 1945 and 1966 the fight against development was lost with Mission 66 and the interstate highway system bringing roads to every part of America inside and out the Parks. Yard’s work at the Wilderness Society did help limit roads in wild spaces eventually. In 1963 Starker Leopold, Aldo’s Leopold’s son, produced a report contributing to the creation of the Wilderness Act. In it, he echoed the work of his father and Yard, saying:

As a primary goal, we would recommend that the biotic associations within each park be maintained, or where necessary recreated, as nearly as possible in the condition that prevailed when the area was first visited by the white man. A national park should represent a vignette of primitive America.

His reference to “vignette of primitive America” recalls Yard’s original rhetoric and scenic intent in preserving the Parks as pristine. The eventual passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964 realized more of Yard’s intent. It states, “there shall be no commercial enterprise and no permanent road within any wilderness area designated by this Act,” further “no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport” and ultimately defines wilderness itself, “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”[[109]](#footnote-108) Here finally is the legal culmination of Yard’s struggle to define objectively what is to be protected: wilderness, “an area where man himself is a visitor,” and what it is to be protected from: increasing population, commercial enterprise, roads, and mechanized transport.

Since its inception in 1914 the National Park Service has grown to 83.6 million acres. In doing so it has protected scenic American spaces and provided an example to Park makers worldwide. Since 1916 the National Parks Association has contributed to the educational mission of the Parks, fought for their defense, and continues to meet evolving threats such as global warming as it has since the 1970s. The Wilderness Society has defined sustainable and appropriate use, brought about the Wilderness Act, and ultimately protected over 600 million acres of United States public land from commercial and recreational overuse. Each of these organizations benefited from Robert Yard’s progress from promotion to preservation.

Through the NPS, NPA, and Wilderness Society Yard’s personal environmental transition reflected American cultural trends from the late nineteenth century into the mid twentieth century. In the span from Thoreau to Yard, the American public recognized the value of protecting open spaces as their daily life became increasingly urbanized and repetitive with modernity. Unbridled economic expansion was failing them. The Progressives hoped to reform the ills of modern living through conservation, but as that era passed without definitive answers the public began to look for escapes, often in their automobiles, and often to the Parks. The Parks functioned as surrogate for the personal freedoms Americans lost in modernity. But the splintering of conservation around use brought preservation. Its adherents spoke to the new humility of the American public, and a desire for “true” wilderness beyond the conservation of the Parks. This humility is represented by the Wilderness Act’s argument for simply reducing use, the environmental answer Yard ultimately arrived at with the Wilderness Society.

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1. John Miles, *Guardians of the Parks: A History of the National Parks and Conservation Association* (Washington, DC: Taylor and Francis, 1995), 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Conservation is used here, and throughout as a reference to managed land use, which includes logging, mining, grazing, and recreation. Preservation is a reference to the concept of limited use, where no resources are extracted from the land, and active management is minimized or eliminated. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Miles 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Aldo Leopold, “Why the Wilderness Society?” *Living Wilderness* 1 (September 1935): 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 2001), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Miles 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild:**How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Robert Allen Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy 1865-1903* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. A.W. Schorger, *The Passenger Pigeon: Its Natural History and Extinction* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Frank Graham, *The Audubon Ark: A History of the National Audubon Society* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Henry Smith Nash, *Virgin Land: the American West as Symbol and Myth,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. More a set of political philosophies than a cohesive movement, Progressives improved the efficiency of government, expanded corporate oversight, addressed social justice, and protected the environment. Progressivism began in America in the late nineteenth century as a response to the problems of mass urbanization, industrialization, and immigration, and was championed by Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Taft, and Woodrow Wilson. Progressives addressed corruption in politics, monopolies in business, and brought about social reforms such as the eight-hour workday, the minimum wage, workers’ compensation, child labor laws, and female suffrage. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. John F. Reiger, *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation,* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press), 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. John Muir, *Our National Parks* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 160 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. John F. Reiger, *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation,* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1998), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. John Muir, “Much is Said,” *Harper’s Weekly*, June 5, 1897, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. W. Todd Benson, *President Theodore Roosevelt's Conservation Legacy* (Philadelphia: Infinity Publishing, 2003), 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. Stephen Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter’s Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-century America,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. Fox 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. Fox 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. Fox 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
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