

# EDITOR'S NOTE

by James G. Lewis

Recently I was rereading a special issue of *Runner's World* magazine on trail running. It came out around the same time as the centennial of the Weeks Act, March 1, 2011. I find that when I reread something months later, I look at it with fresh eyes and often pick up on ideas that I may have missed the first time. Plus I love the feeling that comes from reading something again, of letting the information really seep into my marrow, so that it becomes a part of me.

One article was about what the author called the “crown jewels” of running trails around the United States. What struck me this time—now reading it after I had absorbed information about the consequence and legacy of the Weeks Act into my bones—is how many of the trails are on eastern national forests, trails like the Shut-in Trail in the Pisgah National Forest, on land once owned by George Vanderbilt. And I thought: These forests are in America’s marrow, in many ways. The first national forests created under the Weeks Act run along the spine of the Appalachian Mountains, but the need for and desire to protect those lands must have been in the marrow of conservationists a hundred years ago. And it is still today.

I think that desire to preserve forests is part of the American character. The United States was the first country to create a national park, an action taken to protect the unique landscape of the Yellowstone area. The landscapes protected by the Weeks Act should also be celebrated. They may lack the wonder and spectacle of Yellowstone, but they have a beauty that draws millions of visitors every year. Most people may never walk through those landscapes, those Weeks Act forests; they may even drive through them oblivious to the fact that they are in a national forest, save the green and white sign that says “entering” and “leaving” with little fanfare, if they notice them at all. But when they turn on their faucets and there is clean water, or they step outside and cannot see the air they breathe, they are enjoying the benefits of those forests. And it’s because of the courage and vision of the men and women who have come before us, who recognized or simply acted upon an urge to protect those lands, that we have those forests today. It’s because of the courage of today’s conservationists that we continue to have those lands—their vision for how to expand those areas will be recognized and celebrated by future generations, too. Several of them are sharing their ideas on the pages of this magazine.

If you can, visit those forests. Walk, hike, bike, or run a trail; fish or hunt or camp on those lands; paddle down a river or on a lake that exists because the forests still exist. If you can’t get to those forests, bring them into your home—buy products derived from those forests and made by those who make their living from it, support an organization that fights to preserve them, read about the land and its amazing flora and fauna, or watch a film

about them and revel in their grandeur. As for me, I’ll keep reading about the men and women who have dedicated their lives to the cause of conservation, who helped preserve the land that holds the trails on which I want to run, and absorbing that information into my marrow.

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There are many people to thank for their help with this issue. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to the authors themselves for taking time out of their busy schedules to contribute such thoughtful and thought-provoking pieces. Many of the contributors presented their work at a symposium organized in large part by Al Sample and the Pinchot Institute for Conservation Studies last summer at Yale University. It was there that I first heard many of these ideas; it is a far superior issue because of that symposium. This issue would not exist without the support of the Pinchot Institute and Al. He has been a long-time friend to the Forest History Society. Through his efforts, the Pinchot Institute provided the funding for this issue, for which we are grateful.

One of the presenters was Char Miller, my friend and mentor. After the initial session, we discussed what presentations would fit best in the issue. He not only contributed an article but also consulted and advised on this issue. As always, I profited a great deal by working with him and learned even more from him.

Dave Govatski, a retired forester on the White Mountain National Forest, kindly provided the images of the signed copy of the law that begin the issue. To see even a photo of President Taft’s signature on the law gave this historian quite a thrill. Look for the book Dave is coauthoring with Chris Johnson on the Weeks Act, a major, much-needed examination of the subject, due out in 2012.

As usual, Kathy Hart of Zubigraphics has done an extraordinary job of designing the issue and helping keep me straight. Also doing her usual extraordinary job of copy editing and advising was Sally Atwater; although new to *Forest History Today*, Dianne Timblin did an extraordinary job of both as well.

This special issue is the largest we’ve ever done, with three times the number of articles as a normal issue. The feature articles are loosely organized by themes: the first seven articles cover the history of the act, the next four look at its implementation at the state level, and then the last six discuss conservation today and tomorrow. Because of the number, I could write two more pages describing the individual contributors and their articles. Instead, I’ll close with this: At the beginning of 2011, I thought I knew a great deal about the Weeks Act. After reading these articles, I now know more about its history *and* its future. Not only that, but reading them has reinvigorated my love of the national forests. I hope you’ll feel the same way, too. □