



# the JOHN WEEKS STORY

*a chapter in the history  
of American Forestry*

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Let's start this story from the top of Mount Washington in the White Mountain National Forest of New Hampshire. It is mid-July. The bleak atmosphere on this rock-strewn peak contrasts sharply with the soft green hazy mountain passes in the distance. Near weathered Summit House, the cog railway disgorges its load of visitors. Many of them don coats or sweaters, for there's a nip in the air and summer has been left behind at the base of the mountain.

An occasional car, bearing a family of sightseers, rounds the final turn after having made the laborious ascent on a twisting unpaved carriage road through dense woodlands at the start of the trip, then up among hardy birches and firs, up farther into a zone of stunted trees, up still farther above the timberline where only some grasses and lichens survive, then up-up-up again where all finally is rock.

Tourists and hikers pick their way across the crest absorbed in the scenic beauty of this forested country with its wild areas, ski trails, mountains, and valleys that beckon to every kind of outdoor enthusiast.

As visitors return to the warmer clime below, they head toward other scenic attractions, nearby resorts, or camp and picnic areas on the National Forest. Campers coming down on the cog railway are close to the Zealand campground where tents and trailers nestle in cool woods near a clear, fast-running stream. Those descending by car turn northward to the Dolly Copp Recreation

Area in the shadow of towering Mt. Madison. Here, on the banks of the Peabody River where fishermen try their luck, scores of campsites are laid out in forest surroundings—a restful vacation spot for camping families in a vast outdoor playground purchased by the Federal Government and purposefully managed for man's use and enjoyment.

At the season of this story, to enjoy the wonders of Nature and the fun of outdoor living is the sole concern of most users of the White Mountain National Forest. So, also, on over 20 million acres of other forest lands purchased for the National Forest system, hundreds of thousands of people enjoy themselves in the out of doors during these exhilarating days in mid-July and on through the summer.

But though recreationists abound in all seasons, and recreation is one of the prime values on these public lands, other important activities are going on all of the time in all of these National Forests. Along a turbulent stream, a Forest Service crew is busy filling wire enclosures or gabions with rock in order to stabilize the channel and thus prevent serious erosion. A mature tree that has lived its useful life falls to the hum of a saw as a timber area, its marked trees sold to the highest bidder, is harvested under Forest Service specifications. In small openings here and there deer browse. Their food and living space needs have been worked out by wildlife specialists, thereby adding beauty to the woodlands and providing future sport for hunters. Throughout the East, in National Forests work and play go on amid green lands that are managed to produce continuing quantities of water, wildlife, timber, and forage as well as recreational opportunities for us and for posterity ■

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Campers on the Dolly  
Copp Recreation Area,  
White Mountain National Forest,  
New Hampshire



## Looking Backward

The story behind the scenery and forest activities of this and all other eastern National Forests is the story of John Weeks and the Weeks Law. March 1, 1961, marked the 50th anniversary of the law's enactment. A brief glance into the past will place this measure in perspective and point up its significance.

During the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the general notion of natural resource conservation, with a particular interest in forestry, was beginning to make itself strongly felt in this country. Thoughtful people were alarmed at the rapid rate our forest resources were being used up. Lumbering operations of the day appeared to be very destructive. Even more destructive were the fires that inevitably followed in the logging slashings, and the reburns that followed the first burns. A public philosophy of free land and cheap timber prevailed. And the industry that used the timber had taken on the form of a migrating one.

To those who were concerned about these matters, it seemed necessary to do at least two things. Some system of fire protection had to be started. And some action had to be taken to bring a degree of stability into the way forest lands would be managed.

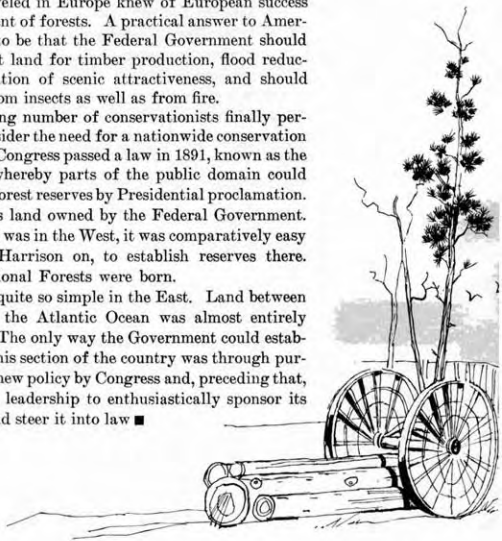
People who had traveled in Europe knew of European success in long-term management of forests. A practical answer to American problems seemed to be that the Federal Government should own and manage forest land for timber production, flood reduction, and the preservation of scenic attractiveness, and should protect these forests from insects as well as from fire.

The small but growing number of conservationists finally persuaded Congress to consider the need for a nationwide conservation program. As a result, Congress passed a law in 1891, known as the Forest Reserve Law, whereby parts of the public domain could be set aside as Federal forest reserves by Presidential proclamation. The public domain was land owned by the Federal Government. Since much of this land was in the West, it was comparatively easy for Presidents, from Harrison on, to establish reserves there. Thus, the western National Forests were born.

However, it was not quite so simple in the East. Land between the Great Plains and the Atlantic Ocean was almost entirely in private ownership. The only way the Government could establish forest reserves in this section of the country was through purchase. This required a new policy by Congress and, preceding that, a man with vision and leadership to enthusiastically sponsor its necessary provisions and steer it into law ■

The Nation's timber resources seemed inexhaustible in the early logging days

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Soil erosion which frequently followed timber harvesting and forest fire reduced soil productivity and the ability of the land to support people

## Conservation Interest in the East

During the 1880's, several persons and organizations urged passage of legislation that would allow the Federal Government to establish forest reserves in the East by buying up private lands. Among the first were Reverend C. D. Smith of North Carolina and Dr. Henry O. Marcy of Massachusetts. Individual efforts gave way to organizational methods with the formation of the Appalachian National Park Association in 1899. This occurred in Asheville, N.C., under the forceful leadership of Dr. Chase P. Ambler. The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests was formed 2 years later.

In 1901, the first-named organization was instrumental in persuading five Southern States to pass legislation granting their consent to Federal purchases of land within their boundaries for the establishment of public forest reservations. During the same year, the campaign for Federal legislation began in the United States Congress when Senator J. C. Pritchard of North Carolina, speaking for the Appalachian National Park Association, unsuccessfully sought to have Congress authorize such a park in the southern Appalachians.

During the next 10 years over 40 attempts were made in Congress to pass a forest purchase law. The first bill simply called for the Federal purchase of land in certain designated States. Later bills became more specific. They advocated watershed conservation or the protection of headwaters of navigable streams. Objectors argued on such bases as doubtful constitutionality of Government land purchase for the purpose of growing timber or protecting scenery, the cost, or inadequate justification of such purchases ■

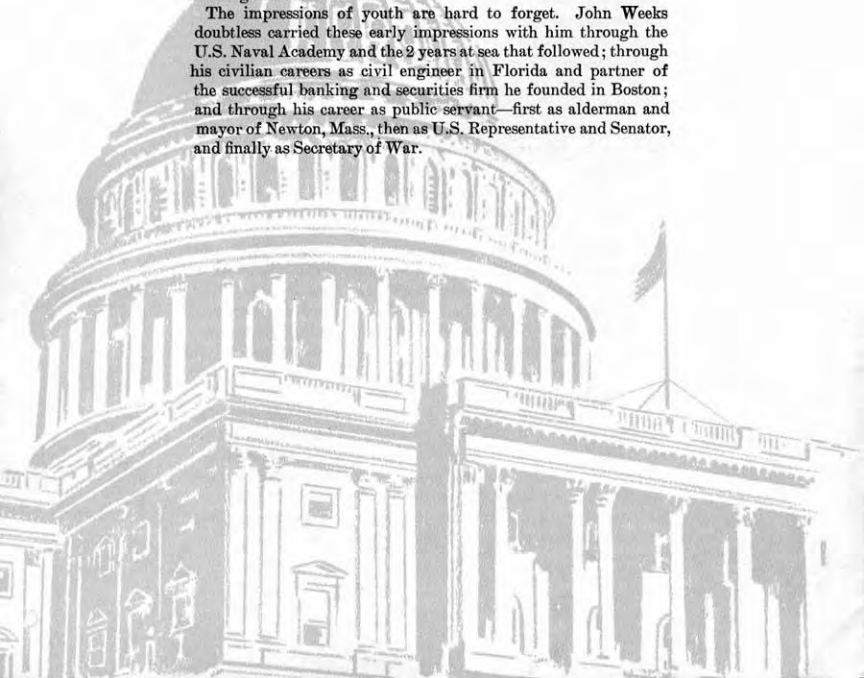


## A Leader Appears

A difficult situation may exist for years before circumstances produce the man who can handle it. In a campaign that aimed to win Congressional approval for the purchase of private forest lands, almost 10 years elapsed before a man appeared who could achieve this aim. His name was John Wingate Weeks and he came to Washington in 1905 as a Congressman from Massachusetts—the year that 60 western forest reserves with some 56 million acres were transferred from the Interior Department to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Forest Service was organized.

Born in 1860 on a rugged northern farm in the hills of New Hampshire, John Weeks was exposed in his youth to this enchanting land of woods, mountains, and lakes. There, too, he saw forests falling so that a young Nation could build—saw acres of slash and commercially useless trees replacing the once cool and inviting forest environment.

The impressions of youth are hard to forget. John Weeks doubtless carried these early impressions with him through the U.S. Naval Academy and the 2 years at sea that followed; through his civilian careers as civil engineer in Florida and partner of the successful banking and securities firm he founded in Boston; and through his career as public servant—first as alderman and mayor of Newton, Mass., then as U.S. Representative and Senator, and finally as Secretary of War.



## The Final Push

When John Weeks makes his entrance into our story, it is the year 1907, his third year as member of the House of Representatives from Massachusetts. This is the year when, by Act of Congress, the Federal forest reserves throughout the country become known as National Forests. Speaker of the House Cannon, who thinks the time is not yet ripe for a forest purchase measure, has appointed Weeks to the House Committee of Agriculture despite the fact that Weeks favors such a measure.

Speaker Cannon says to Weeks, on his acceptance of the position (as disclosed in a letter written some years later by Weeks to Gifford Pinchot, first American-born forester and foremost conservationist of his day), "I am not putting you on the Agricultural Committee because I expect you to make my views yours. In fact, I would not put you there, or give you any other appointment of responsibility, if I thought you would—and I want to say this, that if you can frame a forestry bill which you, as a business man, are willing to support, I will do what I can to get an opportunity to get its consideration in the House."

The new member of the Agricultural Committee loses little time in drafting a bill. In it, he proposes that receipts from already established forest reserves be used by the Federal Government to purchase lands on or near the headwaters of navigable streams. The bill is introduced in April 1908. Congress does not act on it.

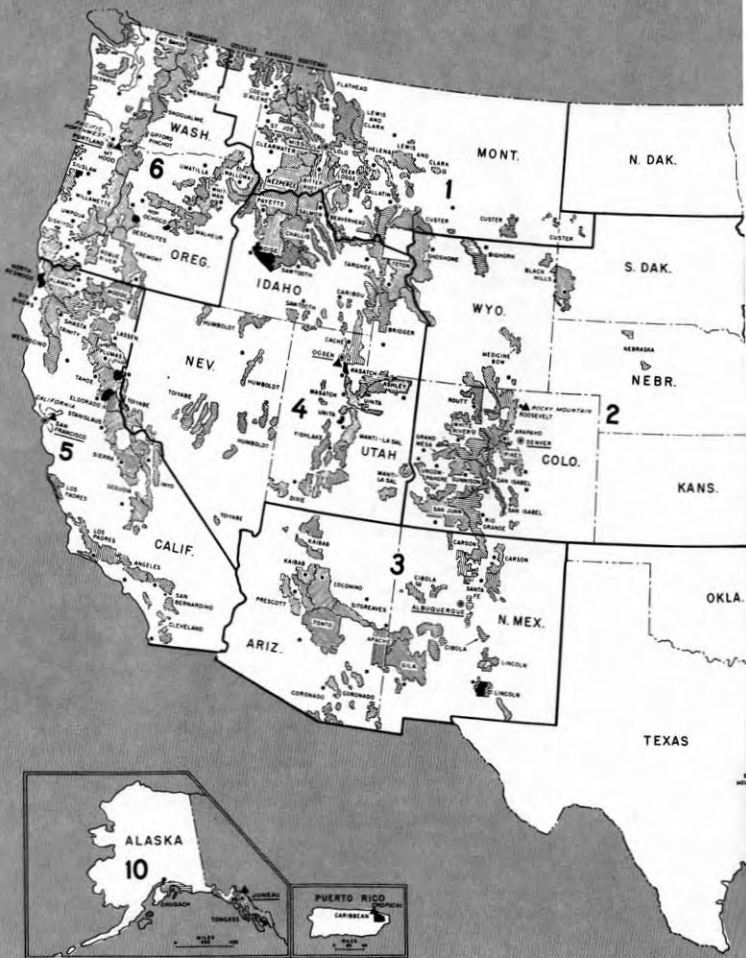
In July 1909, John Weeks presents another bill calling for the purchase of forest reserves. In December of the same year, Senator Gallinger of New Hampshire introduces an identical bill in the Senate.

On June 24, 1910, the House passes Congressman Weeks' bill.

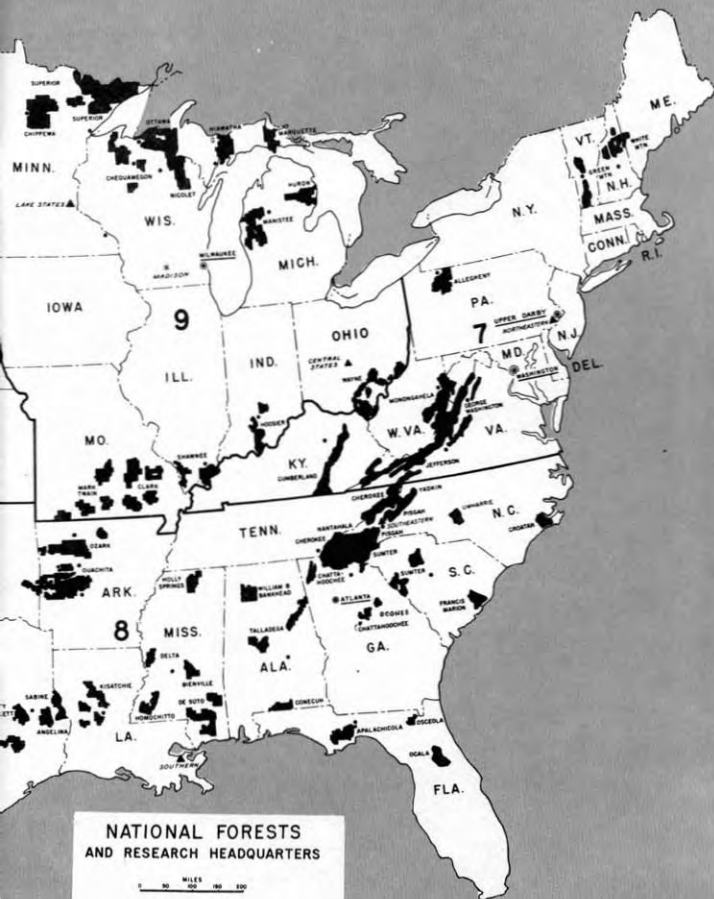
The following day the Senate, receiving the bill from the House, agrees to substitute it for the Gallinger bill.

On February 15, 1911, the Senate passes this measure. Two weeks later, it is signed by President Taft and becomes Public Law 435.

The 10-year campaign is over. John W. Weeks, who carried the legislative program started by others, has set in motion the machinery that will purchase, not only for the East but for all sections of the country, forest lands outside the public domain whose inclusion in the National Forest system will benefit all Americans. Equally important, the law has established the principle of planned financial cooperation between Federal and State Governments in resource conservation programs, a step which will go far in protecting and developing renewable natural resources to meet the Nation's needs ■







## WEEKS LAW UNITS

- NATIONAL FORESTS AND PURCHASE UNITS
- REGIONAL BOUNDARIES AND NUMBERS
- REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS
- \* SUPERVISOR'S HEADQUARTERS
- ▲ FOREST AND RANGE EXPERIMENT STATIONS
- ① LABORATORY (MADISON, WIS.)

## The Weeks Law

Passage of the Weeks Law began a new chapter in the pages of American forest conservation. Now it was possible for the Federal Government to purchase private forest land, incorporate it into the National Forest system, and bring it to a high, all-round level of productivity by applying the best methods of forest management. The intent of the law made it quite clear that forestry was here to stay.

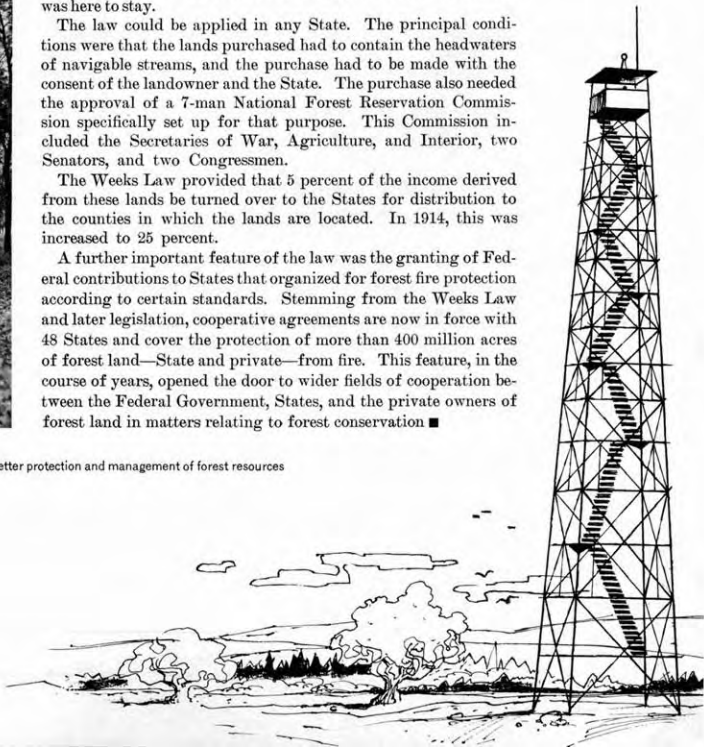
The law could be applied in any State. The principal conditions were that the lands purchased had to contain the headwaters of navigable streams, and the purchase had to be made with the consent of the landowner and the State. The purchase also needed the approval of a 7-man National Forest Reservation Commission specifically set up for that purpose. This Commission included the Secretaries of War, Agriculture, and Interior, two Senators, and two Congressmen.

The Weeks Law provided that 5 percent of the income derived from these lands be turned over to the States for distribution to the counties in which the lands are located. In 1914, this was increased to 25 percent.

A further important feature of the law was the granting of Federal contributions to States that organized for forest fire protection according to certain standards. Stemming from the Weeks Law and later legislation, cooperative agreements are now in force with 48 States and cover the protection of more than 400 million acres of forest land—State and private—from fire. This feature, in the course of years, opened the door to wider fields of cooperation between the Federal Government, States, and the private owners of forest land in matters relating to forest conservation ■



The objective: Better protection and management of forest resources





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Protection and  
management of forested  
watersheds—a key  
provision of the  
Weeks Law



## The Law Goes Into Action

In the same year that the bill became law, the first purchase was made in North Carolina and 8,100 acres became the nucleus of the Pisgah National Forest. In New Hampshire, land began to be bought in 1913, until today over 700,000 acres of purchased woodlands make up the White Mountain National Forest. Thus, the two States where the first early moves favoring a Federal conservation policy in the East occurred now contain within their borders the fruits of the long campaign.

Land purchases continued apace under the Weeks Law, and National Forests in the eastern half of the country both expanded and grew in number. Today there are 48 out of a total of 155 National Forests whose entire or major acreage was purchased under this law.

Most of the acquired lands had suffered from excessive timber cuttings, fire damage, and erosion. But they were still invaluable lands, for within most of them lay the headwaters of important rivers. The Forest Service took over the damaged lands and, by systematic application of forestry and protective measures, brought great improvements to the watersheds and other forest values.

On what is now the Monongahela National Forest of West Virginia, for instance, frequent forest fires and timber removal in the areas encompassing the headwaters of the Ohio and Potomac Rivers were major causes of destructive floods in the valleys below. Under the Weeks Law, about 800,000 acres of this damaged forest land were acquired. Under Forest Service management, vegetation has been restored to the highland slopes, thus providing cover which controls erosion and reduces flooding in downstream channels. A program of rehabilitation and water impoundment accomplished similar results on lands purchased for the Cumberland National Forest in Kentucky.

Between 1911 and 1924, when fire cooperation provisions of the Weeks Law were superseded by the Clarke-McNary Law, the number of cooperating States in fire control activities increased from 11 to 29, and the area of State and private lands protected rose from 61 million to 178 million acres. By establishing this principle of cooperation, the Weeks Law was an important factor in helping to reduce the number of forest fires and the extent of fire damage ■

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Early day forest  
fire patrolman



Forest survey:  
1912 style

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Cold Mountain:  
Pisgah National Forest,  
North Carolina



## A Tenfold Rise in Value

The 48 Weeks Law National Forests have proved productive of values, benefits, and resources over the years.

Aside from their important function of stabilizing the headwaters of navigable rivers, they provide more than 6 million people and numerous farms, industries, and communities with clear, pure water.

During 1960, over 1.3 billion board feet of timber, worth \$22.4 million, was taken out of these eastern forests. Harvesting was conducted in such a way as to maintain or improve the land's ability to produce crops of timber for the future.

During the same year, these National Forests counted 25 million visits—out of a total of 92 million visits for all National Forests—from picnickers, campers, hunters, fishermen, winter sportsmen, and other recreationists. The intangible values arising from this use are incalculable.

The initial investment of \$94 million used in purchasing forest lands and an additional \$163 million expended to rehabilitate and develop them are small compared with their current appraisal value, which exceeds \$1 billion.

Statistics do not move about in National Forests. But people do, people with their many activities. Here are activities reflected in plenty of good water for every purpose, less danger from floods, fewer forest fires, flourishing local industries based on a continuous wood supply, and happy people enjoying their leisure time among trees, lakes, and mountains. From these, it is evident that the eastern National Forests have flourished once the Weeks Law made their existence possible.

The precedent the Weeks Law set in placing fire protection on a cooperative basis has benefited State and private forest lands immeasurably. This is more than merely a better coping with the fire hazard. Of equal importance has been the later enactment of legislation that invited cooperative ventures in such forest resource activities as tree planting, forest management, and the processing of forest products. Federal, State, and private land managers working together to their mutual advantage have better protected the native woodlands and made them more profitable and more enjoyable ■

## A Boy and His Dream

As we started this story on a mountaintop, so let us end it there. The mountain is Mount Prospect; the State, New Hampshire again; the time, the mid-1870's. A farm lad comes here frequently to sit and enjoy the spectacular vista. There is something about the panoramic sweep of mountain and sky that draws him to this spot again and again. His eyes take in the majestic thrust of the Presidential Range in the White Mountains, the distant Green Mountains of Vermont, the pattern of farms of the Upper Connecticut River Valley, the Kilkenny Range, and Percy Peaks. The boy loves this spot. When he grows up and makes his mark in the world, he will build his home here. As any sensitive boy must feel about the land of his youth, he would not want to see it changed unrecognizably when he returns to it in his later years. Only protection and wise use could see to that.

The boy, of course, was John Wingate Weeks. He never forgot the scenes of his boyhood and, largely because of this, was able, as legislator and conservationist, to help restore beauty and usefulness to American forest lands. Today on Mount Prospect, his home stands as a memorial to the efforts that led to the establishment of eastern National Forests and to the spirit of beneficial cooperation between the Federal Government and State and private forest owners ■



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Presidential Range:  
White Mountain  
National Forest,  
New Hampshire