

75th Anniversary of the Weeks Act  
and the White Mountain National Forest

It is an honor for me to be here at this historic place to participate in the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Weeks Act and the White Mountain National Forest. It's good to see so many people and so much enthusiasm about something so dear to the Forest Service's heart.

As we look back 75 years ago to 1911 when the Weeks Act was signed, and compare the conditions of the forest then with today, we have a lot to be proud of:

--75 years ago in this country, we had a "cut out, get out" philosophy. Reforestation was not in our vocabulary because there was always another virgin forest to move on to.

--Forest fires burned uncontrolled over the land, denuding the hillsides and causing flooding and soil erosion, making our streams run brown with mud choked with debris.

--We had a sterile forest with the once abundant wildlife gone.

--The forests were being sacrificed in our headlong rush to build a country. We had not yet learned how to blend conservation and wise use of our natural resources into our successful economic system.

Winston Churchill once said, "You just can't let events drift along until it's too late. Someone must take bold, timely action to change trends.

And this we did! And it was here in New England where the Nation's conservation leadership first began to emerge. The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests played a prominent role along with Congressman Weeks, who we are honoring today.

---

Remarks by F. Dale Robertson, Associate Chief, Forest Service, USDA, at the Newcomen Society luncheon commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the Weeks Act and the White Mountain National Forest, June 19, 1986, Bretton Woods, NH

At the turn of the century, the idea of purchasing land by the Federal Government was a revolutionary idea. It was a departure from a century-long policy and tradition of disposing of the public domain in order to build the Nation. In fact, there was a big debate in Congress over whether it was even constitutional for the Federal Government to buy land. As with most new ideas, strong resistance set in and strong opposition formed. Part of the opposition was House Speaker Joseph Cannon who declared "not one red cent for scenery." We saw the establishment of a National Forest as a waste of money and stopped earlier efforts in their tracks. But, fortunately, people here in New Hampshire had the persistence and staying power to "keep at it" and finally prevailed. And for this, the rest of the Nation, and particularly those of us in the Forest Service, are thankful and indebted to the people and early conservation leaders here in New England. The roots of the Forest Service and the conservation movement run deep to this part of the country.

Well, 75 years later, as we meet here in the heart of the White Mountain National Forest and have opportunity to visit this forest later this afternoon, we can't help but be proud of what we have accomplished--we, being the people and Forest Service working together in partnership. We once again have a beautiful, bountiful forest that is serving the people.

And, thanks to the Weeks Act and strong public support, there are 50 such National Forests in 15 States east of the Great Plains. Not only can people enjoy hiking along the Appalachian Trail on the White Mountain, George Washington, Jefferson, Pisgah, Cherokee, and Chattahoochee National Forests, but also enjoy canoeing the lakes and streams of the Superior National Forest in Minnesota, hunting in the loblolly pine and cypress flats of the Kisatchie National Forest in Louisiana, or camping and picnicking in any one of the 50 National Forests throughout the East.

These National Forests in the East were created by the people. In fact, the Weeks Act required the consent of the State in order for the Forest Service to acquire land. The Forest Service strongly believes in trying to manage these lands for the maximum benefit of the people. To do this, it is most important that the people be involved and take pride in what is happening on their National Forests. As you know and as we are experiencing here on the White Mountain, there are, at times, disagreements on how these lands should be managed. But, we're trying to work cooperatively with you, the people of New Hampshire, to resolve these different viewpoints through the Forest Plan.

From my perspective in Washington, D.C., for whatever that's worth, the White Mountain National Forest is truly a model of this "Forest Service/people partnership" that we are striving so hard to attain. We're proud of the White Mountain National Forest and what's going on here in New Hampshire and, furthermore, we're looking forward to the next 75 years with enthusiasm and excitement.

Thanks for the invitation, and I plan to put on my calendar in 2011 to join you again at your 100th anniversary.