

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

In Recognition of the Centennial of Our National Parks

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In 1946, when the Forest History Society began, collection and interpretation of materials about the national parks was incidental to preserving records of the forest products industry and the federal agency tasked with ensuring a timber supply, the Forest Service. The Society's focus on working forests and forest products naturally led to a strong relationship with this agency.

The National Park Service, on the other hand, initially presented fewer opportunities. Its mission, as defined in its organic act, was "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner...as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." To interpret those "natural and historic objects" for the public's enjoyment, in 2000 I estimated the Park Service employed some 180 historians, whereas the Forest Service, even at its height in the 1970s and 1980s, never had more than five at the national office. That number dropped to only one full-time historian by the end of the century. The Park Service simply had less need of the Forest History Society's services.

Although interactions evolved more slowly with the Park Service, the Society nevertheless has long had interest in documenting the national parks and the National Park Service itself. In 1959, two years after launching the *Forest History Newsletter*, the Society published an article about the Park Service's archival collections on lumbering in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. After the newsletter became the *Journal of Forest History*, scholarly articles included "The Army and the National Parks" (1966), "Mount Rainier National Park: First Years" (1966), and "The National Park Service and the First World War" (1978).

In 1990, the aligned interests of the Park Service and the Society were made explicit in a special issue of the journal, by then called *Forest & Conservation History*. The issue explored how public and private interests have overlapped from the earliest days of the national park system, including the challenge of managing concessions in the parks, a concern the Park Service continues to grapple with today. The clash of values between protecting scenery and managing tourist access explored in the 1990 special issue would be a central theme in future scholarship.

By that time, the Forest History Society had formalized its ongoing relationship with the Park Service by electing agency professionals to its board of directors. Since 1988, there has been nearly continuous Park Service representation on the Society's board. Directors included Park Service historians Barry Mackintosh (1988–1991), Richard Sellars (1993–1999), and Janet McDonnell (2005–2006). Others who have served include John Dennis, Deputy Chief Scientist (2006–2009); David Louter, Chief



of the Cultural Resources Program for the Pacific West Region (2009–2013); and Nora Mitchell, Director of the National Park Service Conservation Study Institute (1999–2005). Donald Stevens, Chief of History and National Register Programs for the Midwest Region (2013–present) was instrumental in making possible the issue you are reading today.

In 1996, the Society's journal merged with that of the American Society of Environmental History to become *Environmental History*. Articles related to national parks continued to be periodically published, notably Rolf Diamant's "Reflections on Environmental History with a Human Face: Experiences from a New National Park" (2003).

Diamant, then the superintendent of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in Woodstock, Vermont, aimed to provoke reflection on the management of historic places and the challenge of making them exciting, relevant centers of learning. He has contributed a thought-provoking article to this issue as well.

National parks have also been highlighted in the Society's membership magazine, *Forest History Today*. In 2007, the magazine reprinted a column by historian Hal Rothman (the first editor of *Environmental History* and author of numerous Park Service–focused histories), titled "Why the Nation Needs National Parks." The magazine has explored other Park Service–related topics, publishing pieces on wildfire and the wildland-urban interface, the national parks and road construction, and individual parks—Grand Canyon, Great Smoky Mountains, and Haleakala.

Since the 1950s the Forest History Society has conducted more than 300 oral histories of workers and leaders in forestry and conservation, some of whom have addressed the national parks and National Park Service administration. Our historic photograph collection has numerous images from the national parks, including the first photograph of Yosemite, taken in 1855. Ken Burns used our images in his documentary *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*. Before-and-after images of several national parks can be found in our new Repeat Photography portal, at www.repeat-photography.org.

Photos are not the only searchable items in our online databases, of course. A recent search on the phrase "national parks" yielded references to 632 books, 943 articles, 133 dissertations and theses, and 378 archival collections. More than 50 collections housed in the Society's archives have information related to the national parks.

This special issue of *Forest History Today* is another way the Forest History Society can help diverse audiences learn about the national parks and our most treasured landscapes. We are proud to provide this collection of articles in recognition of the National Park Service's centennial in 2016. □