

**A Living Legacy: America's national parks: 12/12/2017
by Mark Real**

My essay tonight builds on the paper I presented in **2007** about the insights I gained while travelling to 75 countries visiting historic sites, museums and national parks.

My **2012 essay** focused on US presidents and the challenges and opportunities they faced.

It recounted the unlikely and often little-known relationships among incumbent and former presidents including: Democrat Harry Truman with Republican Herbert Hoover; Republican Dwight Eisenhower with Democrat Jack Kennedy; and Republicans George Herbert Walker Bush and George W Bush with Democrat Bill Clinton.

In Columbus, two original and critically reviewed plays involving presidents were authored by local playwright and Kit Kat member Herb Brown.

In my last essay, I also described how I set a goal to collect and read a book about every president. To meet that goal, I collected over 400 books covering every president and read at least one book about every president.

To meet my second goal of visiting a site for every president, I visited 64 sites in 20 states and the District of Columbia. Many of these sites were operated by the National Park Service and had well-maintained hiking trails.

Building on these previous essays, tonight's paper also involves US presidents, travel, hiking and the National Park Service.

I have named tonight's essay A Living Legacy: America's 59 National Parks. The goal of this essay is to discuss the history and current state of national parks. In the course of that discussion, we will learn about some forgotten presidents and a little-known Ohioan who became a national leaders for parks and we will examine how America is inspiring national parks around the world. We'll also try to illuminate the current debate about national monuments in Utah.

The slides accompanying my presentation tonight are from parks my wife and I visited together.

I am dedicating tonight's paper to the late club member Tad Jeffrey who loved the Franklin County Metro Parks, soon to open its 20th park.

America's national parks are for everyone for all time. This was the theme of the Ken Burns PBS series "The National Parks: America's Best Idea" aired locally by WOSU in 2009 (Thank you, Tom Rieland) The series pointed out that the wealthiest families had always set aside land for their own private enjoyment. But, America, as a democracy, was different. Public parks allowed citizens from all walks of life to experience the outdoors.

The National Geographic Society points out that **the idea of protecting national treasures for future generations dates back to the founding fathers.**

Thomas Jefferson wrote about the uniquely American idea of protecting nature, creating free public areas in the outdoors and the dangers of cutting down too many trees.

In the 1830's, President **Andrew Jackson** signed a law protecting the unique Hot Springs in Arkansas.

In the 1860's, US Senator John Conness from California was concerned about threats to the unique natural beauty of the 60-square mile Yosemite Valley, home to spectacular waterfalls and mountains. The senator persuaded Congress to enact a law transferring the ownership of Yosemite to a protective trust in the State of California.

The law required that the land be preserved for public use and could never be sold to private owners.

The senator persuaded **President Abraham Lincoln** to sign the law in the midst of the Civil War in 1864. While many cities had landscaped public parks, the law Lincoln signed was the first time a country had set aside a large tract of wilderness for public use.

Once Lincoln signed the law, the Governor of California appointed Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed New York City's Central Park, to lead a commission to manage Yosemite Park.

To illustrate the need to protect natural settings, Olmsted cited Niagara Falls as an example of a beautiful natural wonder that was now overdeveloped. Every scenic overlook on the American side was privately owned and charged a fee. Huckster guides pestered families.

By contrast, Switzerland strictly preserved the natural beauty of the Alps and had benefitted economically. Tourists came to see the pristine mountains, stayed in hotels and ate in local restaurants. Preserving Yosemite as a scenic park would create a financial asset for the surrounding area.

Today, to be considered for designation as a national park, a place must meet three criteria:

- 1) It must possess a **unique** natural, cultural, or recreational resource.
- 2) It must be in **need of protection**, and
- 3) **no organization other than the National Park Service** would be able to protect it.

National Parks Were Developed to Protect Unique Places including:

- Crater Lake in Oregon, the nation's deepest and clearest lake.
- Mammoth Caves in Kentucky, the world's longest labyrinth of caves.
- Redwood and Sequoia National Parks in California where massive trees have been growing before Jesus was born.

America's national park system today

Today, the National Park Service manages 417 sites comprising 84 million acres across all 50 states.

Seventy-eight of these sites are national monuments created by a proclamation of a president and did not require approval by Congress. We will learn more about these monuments shortly.

Congress has created 19 types of designations of national park sites.

For example, the **12 sites in Ohio** managed by the National Park System include the homes of Presidents James Garfield and William Howard Taft which are national **historical sites**. The Hopewell Culture National **Historical Park** near Chillicothe, Ohio chronicles the prehistoric Hopewell Indian culture of 2,000 years ago.

Tonight, however, we will focus on the **59 national parks which required both an Act of Congress and the signature of the president**.

These **59 parks are located in 24 states plus American Samoa and the US Virgin Islands**. They include heavily visited parks such as Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee as well as little-visited locations such as Congaree National Park near Columbia, South Carolina.

Only 11 of these 59 parks are east of the Mississippi River while 48 parks are in the west. Those in the west include nine parks in California and eight parks in Alaska.

It is important to note that **four percent of land east of the Mississippi River is owned by a federal agency, while 47 % of land in 11 western states is under federal control or protection** depending on your perspective. Some western parks predate statehood. This east-west tension continues to shape today's debate about parkland. (New York Times January 5, 2016)

The first national park in the world was located in the west. Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming was established by Congress and signed by President **Ulysses Grant** in 1872.

Every president since Benjamin Harrison in 1890, except for Grover Cleveland, has signed laws creating a national park. Some of these their contributions have been largely forgotten. This remarkable consistency in public policy is largely unknown.

The Wilderness Society named 13 presidents to its Hall of Fame. Some of their selections may surprise you.

We have already discussed Presidents Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Ulysses Grant. The other ten Hall of Fame members included:

Benjamin Harrison visited Yellowstone National Park three times as a senator and became concerned about overdevelopment. Consequently, he supported limiting the number of acres leased to hotels. In **1890, he signed laws creating the second, third and fourth national parks-Sequoia, Yosemite and Kings Canyon National Parks in California.** He also helped create national forests.

Grover Cleveland learned about the weak protections from poaching and unauthorized lumbering at Yellowstone and supported increased protection of the park. He was a strong supporter of national forests which is why he is in the Hall of Fame

Teddy Roosevelt is the president most identified with conservation and national parks. Roosevelt, whom Mark Twain called “The Tom Sawyer of Politics” was an enthusiastic conservationist.

When he took office in 1901 there were only five national parks. By the time he left office seven whirlwind years later, there were ten national parks

Historian Douglas Brinkley (an Ohio State alum) summarized Roosevelt’s conservation record: “He made conservation a household word.”

Woodrow Wilson signed a law creating the National Park Service in 1916 to promote and protect national parks; he also signed laws creating eight national parks-Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, Acadia National Park in Maine, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Haleakala National Park in Hawaii, Lassen Volcanic National Park in California, Zion National Park in Utah, Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona and Utah and Denali National Park in Alaska to, designated Dinosaur National Monument in Colorado to protect an important scientific site.

Franklin Roosevelt established the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression. The Corps engaged three million previously unemployed young men in preserving national park lands, planting trees, restoring grasslands, building state parks, constructing scenic byways and laying out hiking trails.

FDR signed acts of Congress establishing seven national parks thus increasing the number of parks from 19 to 26: Great Smoky Mountains

National Park in Tennessee and North Carolina, Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, Olympic National Park in Washington State, Isle Royale National Park in Michigan, Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, and Big Bend National Park in southwest Texas.

Roosevelt made the **National Park Service the sole federal agency** responsible for overseeing all national parks and federally-owned historic sites including Gettysburg and other Civil War sites, the Statue of Liberty, Mount Rushmore, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial and more.

John Kennedy signed a law creating Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona to protect 200-million-year-old forests and worked to create the Cape Cod National Seashore.

Lyndon Johnson signed laws creating three national parks- Canyonlands National Park, Utah, Redwood National Park in California and North Cascades National Park in Washington.

Jimmy Carter signed laws creating nine new national parks, including seven in Alaska.

Bill Clinton signed laws creating seven national parks including Death Valley National Park in California, Saguaro National Park in Arizona, Joshua Tree National Park in California, Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park in Colorado, Great Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado and Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio.

Barack Obama signed a law redesignating Pinnacles Monument in California as Pinnacles National Park, the 59th national park. He also set aside large tracts of land as national monuments.

Other conservation presidents

William McKinley signed a law creating Mount Rainier in Washington as the fifth national park. It had been a national forest but John Muir and other conservationists reported that there was weak protection.

William Howard Taft signed a law creating Glacier National Park in Montana.

Warren Harding signed a law creating Hot Springs National Park in 1921.

Herbert Hoover-signed a law creating Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico.

Calvin Coolidge-Signed laws creating Bryce Canyon National Park in Utah and Grand Tetons National Park in Wyoming.

Harry Truman-Signed a law creating Everglades National Park, created two national monuments.

Dwight Eisenhower- signed a law creating Virgin Islands National Park, created two national monuments; added 70 miles of Pacific coastline to Olympic National Park.

Richard Nixon signed laws creating Capitol Reef and Arches National Parks in Utah and Guadalupe Mountains National Park in Texas.

Gerald Ford signed a law creating Voyageurs National Park in Minnesota

Ronald Reagan signed laws creating Great Basin National Park in Nevada and the National Park of American Samoa.

George H W Bush-signed a law creating Dry Tortugas National Park in Florida.

George W Bush-signed a law creating Congaree National Park in South Carolina.

There is more detail about which presidents helped create which parks in the online essay

To summarize, 21 presidents in both parties signed laws creating national parks. As a result, the number of national parks grew from 38 in 1972 to 59 today.

As one example of this remarkable history of bipartisanship, we happened upon a little-noticed bronze plaque in Canyonlands National Park in Utah which acknowledges President Franklin Roosevelt for designating it as a national monument in 1937, Dwight Eisenhower for enlarging the monument in 1958, Lyndon Johnson for enlarging it in 1969 and Richard Nixon for signing the law establishing it as a national park in 1971.

No mention is made of their political affiliations.

Despite this continuity among presidents, Filmmaker Ken Burns was surprised to learn that the majority of Americans believe that national parks have always been with us and will always be with us.

As we shall see next, it took bipartisan support to create and protect most of our parks.

For example, In Colorado, a federation of women's' clubs were concerned about theft of Native American artifacts at Mesa Verde, a unique ancient Indian cliff dwelling. They petitioned Congress to protect this unique site. President Teddy Roosevelt signed an Act of Congress in 1906 creating Mesa Verde as the 8th national park.

The **Rockefeller family** (so ably captured by Rick Herrmann in his essay) played a large role in creating Virgin Islands National Park, Great Smoky National Park in Tennessee, and Shenandoah National Park in Virginia and connecting the last two with the Skyline Drive.

In some places such as Acadia National Park in Maine, the Rockefellers joined with other landowners to offer to donate thousands of acres of private land to the National Park Service to create a national park.

In the mid 1920's John Rockefeller Jr. and his family visited the Grand Tetons Mountains in Wyoming where they "recoiled at the creeping blight of hot-dog stands, gas stations and gaudy billboards that were beginning to clutter the countryside around Jackson Hole, Wyoming, according to biographer Ron Chernow.

To protect the remaining wilderness, Rockefeller surreptitiously created the Snake River Land Company which purchased over 33,000 acres in the area. He intended to donate this land to the National Park Service.

Local landowners were told the buyer was a cattle rancher. When it was revealed that Rockefeller was the buyer, there was strident opposition to creating a park, some of it fueled by the east-west tension I outlined at the beginning of this paper.

Opponents included the three Wyoming members of Congress who delayed the transfer of Rockefeller's gift until 1943 when President Franklin Roosevelt created the Jackson Hole National Monument which accepted the gift from Rockefeller.

In 1950, a compromise expanded Grand Teton National Park to include the Jackson Hole Monument. In return, future presidents were barred from creating a national monument in Wyoming unless Congress approved.

Today, tourism has a sizeable impact in Wyoming. The seven Wyoming sites managed by the Park Service attracted nearly seven-and-a-half million visitors in 2016. **The economic benefits from national park tourism in Wyoming were estimated to be 945 million dollars in 2016.**

The proposed Kenai (keeneeye) Fjords National Park in Alaska was fiercely opposed by the Chamber of Commerce and City Council in the 1970's as threatening local jobs.

However, five years later, tourism emerged as a crucial sector of the local economy. As tourism grew, the Chamber of Commerce began placing the nearby national park at the top of its marketing materials. Spurred on by the continuing growth in tourism-related business, the city council quietly rescinded its resolutions denouncing the park and called for expanding parkland.

The latest figures show that over 2.7 million visitors to 24 Alaska Parks managed by the National Park Service created nearly 1.3 Billion dollars in economic benefits for local gateway communities in 2016.

Understanding national monuments

We referred to the century-long controversy surrounding **national monuments** earlier tonight. The immediate issue is whether the President has the authority to reduce the size of national monuments.

Congress approved the Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities and National Monuments in 1906 following numerous reports about the looting of ancient American Indian ruins. This new law protected "historic landmarks and historic and prehistoric structures" and "other objects of historic or scientific interest." It also made any unauthorized disturbance of a prehistoric ruin a federal crime.

In order to allow federal officials to act quickly, the Act provided the president with exclusive authority-without Congressional approval- to

preserve historic places by creating national monuments. These monuments can only be created from land already owned or controlled by the federal government. The Act did not give the president the authority to confiscate private, state or local land.

President Teddy Roosevelt designated the first national monument, a huge 1,200-foot-high rock outcropping called Devils Tower in Wyoming considered sacred territory by American Indian tribes. Years later, this unique site was featured in the popular film “ET.”

Roosevelt also designated the Grand Canyon, Lassen Volcanic Peak in California and Mount Olympus in Washington State as unique monuments, all of which Congress later approved as national parks.

16 presidents from both political parties have designated 157 national monuments in 31 states. Twenty-nine of these monuments have become national parks.

Every president since Teddy Roosevelt, has exercised this executive authority except for presidents Nixon, Reagan and George Herbert Walker Bush.

President **Obama** designated 34 sites as national monuments more than any president.

Most monuments have not been controversial. For example,

The home of Ohioan Charles Young in Wilberforce was designated by **President Barack Obama** as a national monument in 2013. Young’s parents were slaves, but he became only the third black man to graduate from West Point and the first to be placed in charge of a national park.

President Donald Trump recently proclaimed the home of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers as a national monument in Mississippi.

Utah is at the heart of the national monuments controversy.

Tourism ads urge visitors to visit the “mighty five” national parks in Utah. The National Park Service reports that **more than 14 million visitors to 13 Utah**

sites managed by the National Park Service generated over one billion dollars in economic benefit for the state's gateway communities.

Earlier this year, President Donald Trump ordered US Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke to review 27 national monuments designated by Presidents Bill Clinton, George W Bush and Barack Obama. Secretary Zinke recommended reducing the size of some protected lands by as much as two-thirds and President Trump has issued executive orders to do so.

Those who support keeping the monument at its current size seek to protect natural habitat, wildlife, American Indian artifacts and dinosaur fossils and avoid a precedent that could lead to more commercial activity in national parks. Unlike most national parks, the high-profile Bears Ears Monument in Utah permits hunting and fishing for personal recreation.

Those seeking to reduce the size of the monuments say the size of protected land is too large, prohibitions against commercial mining, lumbering and grazing are unreasonable and local land use control is superior to policies generated by federal agencies.

Conservation, fishing and hunting groups and Native American Tribes are suing to stop this sharp reduction in protected lands. Outdoor apparel companies, including REI and Patagonia, criticized the Governor of Utah for his support for reducing protected land and moved their annual trade show from Utah to Colorado. In fact, today's Columbus Dispatch contains an article titled "Zinke, House GOP escalate feud with outdoor retailer."

While the tone of the debate is regrettable, this debate highlights a tension that has existed since the founding of national parks: do park policies serve all Americans, including future generations, or just those who live or do business in the immediate vicinity?

Stay tuned...the president's power to reduce the size of national monuments has never been tested in court.

From their beginning, national parks have faced competing demands in their mission to **both promote and protect park land.**

America's national parks are more popular than ever. **The number of visits increased from 80 million in 1960 to 220 million visits in 1980 to 331**

million visits in 2016. These increases raise the concern that we are “loving the parks to death.”

The Park Service reports that visitors created \$18 Billion in economic benefits for gateway communities.

But, In peak season, **some of the best-known parks experience traffic jams and long lines for information, rest rooms and food service.**

To reduce auto traffic and pollution in the busy season, some popular parks ban cars but provide natural gas-powered shuttle buses and a special entrance for cyclists and hikers. These same parks are considering adopting timed entry tickets.

The popular Muir Woods National Monument protects huge old growth redwoods near San Francisco but has limited parking and long lines of vehicles waiting for a parking place. Muir Woods will soon require every vehicle to have a reservation or be turned away. The new system is expected to reduce traffic bottlenecks, lower pollution from idling vehicles and cut the number of visits from 1.1 million to 924,000.

The National Park Service estimates it has a **backlog of \$ 11 billion in deferred maintenance.** Many visitor centers and staff housing were built decades ago.

The President has proposed to reduce the Park Service’s budget and to increase seasonal entrance fees at 17 of the most-visited parks. There is concern that fee hikes would reduce moderate-income visitors who are already less likely to visit parks. Proponents point out that park fees for a carload are less expensive than tickets to amusement parks.

As the number of visits increase and funding decreases, the national parks still have a duty to protect the parks.

At least 13 national parks face proposed mining, oil drilling or oil pipelines. Some **hikers ignore signs** advising them to bring sunscreen and water in hot weather and then have to be rescued. Some visitors use their cell phones to request a helicopter rescue because they are “tired.”

Finally, some say the national parks should be **adding more parkland** in anticipation of a growing population.

What is clear is that America's national parks need our attention as attendance continues to grow.

It surprises some people to learn that **Ohio is home to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park in the Cleveland and Akron area, one of the 59 National Parks**. Most years this park attracts more than two million visitors which ranks it among the top dozen parks in attendance.

The tenacious work of Democratic Congressman John Seiberling from Akron, Ohio to create the only national park in Ohio is not well-known.

Cleveland's polluted Cuyahoga River caught on fire in 1969 and became a national rallying point to improve the environment.

Nonetheless, creating this National Park was not easy.

In 1971, in his first term in Congress, Seiberling co-sponsored a bill to create a national park along the banks of the Cuyahoga River between Cleveland and Akron. The bill went nowhere.

Seiberling's theme, the former rust belt can be green, resonated with many of the three and a half million residents of the Cleveland-Akron-Canton area eager to escape the image of the Cuyahoga River catching fire.

In 1972 and 1973 Seiberling assiduously built bipartisan support in Ohio and in Congress.

In response, Congress passed a law in 1974 creating the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area. The head of the park service lobbied then-President Gerald Ford to veto the bill.

Seiberling, calling on the bipartisan good will he had cultivated, enlisted influential Republican Congressman Ralph Regula from the Canton area as an ally. Regula then asked powerful National Republican Party Chairman Ray Bliss, from Akron, to contact Ford, who was on a ski vacation in Colorado.

Bliss was blunt. “Ford should sign the legislation if he wanted to carry Ohio and he should veto it if he wanted to lose the state.” Ford, who had spent a summer as a ranger in Yosemite National Park, signed the bill.

Seiberling continued to build support; and in 2000, Congress voted to re-designate the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreational Area as the 57th national park with 33,000 acres. President **Clinton** signed the law.

Today, there are posters along the park’s 125 miles of trails contrasting a rusting auto junkyard in 1970 with new heron rookeries in the same spot today.

Efforts to open or expand parks are underway in more than 100 countries as diverse as Vietnam, China, Russia and India. The Nature Conservancy credits America’s National Parks for inspiring these efforts.

We’ve enjoyed hiking in national parks in South Africa (Kruger), Namibia (Etosha), Croatia (Plivitce), Malaysia (Taman Nagara), France (Gorge du Verdon) Rwanda (Volcanoes) Iceland (Pingvellir) and Scotland (Trossach) and Wales (Snowdonia) last summer.

In February, we plan to visit two national parks in Sri Lanka that have reopened after a decades-long civil war. These parks are home to Asian Elephants, leopards, water buffalos and sloth bears.

On a personal note, my wife Sue, who survived numerous visits to presidential sites, and I have a **new goal, which is to visit every one of America’s 59 national parks**. Dick Emens has already made impressive progress toward this goal.

Over the past 14 years we have visited 35 parks in 17 states and the US Virgin Islands.

We plan our trips to allow two or three days of hiking in each park. As Mike Abrams pointed out in his essay in October the benefits of the outdoors are well documented

We prefer to stay at the parks’ lodges to increase our time outdoors and to take advantage of park ranger educational programs. At night, we enjoy dark

skies programs and books by outdoor writers such as Wallace Stegner as well as mysteries set in national parks.

We need to visit 24 more parks in 13 states to reach our goal of visiting all 59 national parks. Eight of these parks are in Alaska, a few of which can only be reached by air taxi. Two parks are in Hawaii plus one is in American Samoa.

Hmm...could this be a possible topic for my Kit Kat essay in 2022?

In closing, all of us have a duty to protect this living legacy for future generations.

We should be proud that America continues to set an example for the world by opening its national parks to everyone for all time.

Sources-Books

The National Parks: America's Best Idea by Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns

The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America by Douglas Brinkley

Rightful Heritage: Franklin D Roosevelt and the land of America by Douglas Brinkley

A Passion for the Land: John F. Seiberling and the Environmental Movement by Dan Nelson

The Big Burn by Timothy Egan

Guide to National Parks by National Geographic **National Parks of America** by Lonely Planet

A Year in National Parks: Lassoing the Sun by Mark Woods, 2016

Titan: The Life of John D Rockefeller Sr. by Ron Chernow

Articles

National Parks Magazine

"Why the Federal Government Pens so Much Land in the West" New York Times January 5, 2016

"Muir Woods to become first in national park system to require year-round vehicle reservations"

San Jose Mercury, November 16, 2017

Guide to the National Park Washington Post August 2016-
The Presidents and National Parks –White House History
The Presidents Who Gave us our Best Parks-National Geographic 6/02/16
**“Rockefeller and the Secret Land Deals That Created Grand Teton
National Park; Washington Post, Dec 4, 2004**
Nature Conservancy Special Issue on National Parks 2016
Washington Post Guide to America’s National Parks 2016
Monuments Protected Under the Antiquities Act National Parks
Conservation Association –January 13, 2017
Novels: Authors CJ Box and Nevada Barr have written several mysteries set in
national parks
Websites: National Park Service, White House