

## How a Presidential Prerogative Preserved a Park

By John Kendall

On the afternoon of September 30, 1937, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was riding up Lincoln Street in Port Angeles. His limousine stopped at the county courthouse where he made some remarks to the estimated 1,300. Included was this: "I think you can count on my help in getting the National Park," then the caravan headed toward Lake Crescent.

On his way, the president was probably bracing himself for when he would meet many U.S. Forest Service officials and two National Park Service officials to discuss making Mount Olympus National Monument a National Park. Four presidents had already changed the Olympic Peninsula, and this president possessed the power to create a National Park—everybody knew that—but some who met FDR that night wanted no National Park, or, failing that, a small, insignificant one, leaving the remaining Peninsula's forests facing eager loggers.

Why would a large National Park be controversial? Why so many Forest Service representatives and so few from the Park Service? When the night was over, they would learn that FDR stood for Forestry Done Right.

First, a look back:

In 1872, part of Wyoming Territory became the world's first National Park. Yellowstone was preserved for the American people in theory, but realistically then too remote for them to enjoy. "From the first, then," wrote one historian, "the National Parks served corporate profit motive, the Northern Pacific [Railroad] having imposed continuous influence on the Yellowstone Park proposal." Also, neither a federal agency nor funds was created to manage it—that would fall to the cavalry. Seven more National Parks were created before 1902, including Mount Rainier.

The Forest Reserve Act of 1891 gave the president the authority to create Forest Reserves "to improve and protect the forest ... to furnish a continuous supply of timber to the use and necessities of citizens of the United States." At this time, only Congress could establish National Parks. President Grover Cleveland established Olympic Forest Reserve in 1897, one of 13 reserves. Encompassing 2,188,000 acres, two-thirds of the Peninsula, "it was by far the largest as well as the most valuable Forest Reserve in the nation," wrote Tim McNulty, "and timber interests in Washington state lost no time mounting a campaign to wrest it from public hands." The Interior Department would manage it. On the forest-selection committee were two men who would dominate national discussion regarding managing such federal lands: John Muir and Gifford Pinchot. They would champion competing visions. Muir lacked political power but his writings made up for that. He wanted strict preservation of lands deemed so worthy. Pinchot promoted scientific, sustainable use of forested land.

President William McKinley reduced the reserve twice. Now fertile forest lands were open to all. Some were settlers, but eventually timber barons and land syndicates took over. Native Roosevelt elk were being slaughtered—most for their teeth, which became fashionable watch fobs—which got public attention.

At Pinchot's urging, in 1905 Congress transferred Forest Reserves from the Interior Department to the Agriculture Department. Also, the Bureau of Forestry became the U.S. Forest Service with Pinchot as chief forester. He attended the best forestry schools in Europe. He appointed like-minded underlings, creating a professional cadre of foresters.

Then, in 1906, another president changed the Peninsula again. Theodore Roosevelt signed the Antiquities Act of 1906, which gave presidents the power to establish National Monuments for historic and scientific interest. Over the next three years he created five. Two days before he left office, Theodore Roosevelt signed a proclamation—written by Pinchot—creating Mount Olympus National Monument. It excluded west-side forests and rivers where elk roamed from the monument. Forest Reserves became National Forests in 1907. Olympic National Forest encircled the monument; often similar practices and timber policies existed in both.

Pinchot publicly disagreed with a decision by President William Taft, so he fired Pinchot. He was elected Pennsylvania's governor twice and promoted his style of conservation until Pinchot's death in 1946.

As World War I loomed across Europe, spruce along the Peninsula's west/wet side became instantly valuable for Allied biplanes. To accommodate a spruce harvest, in 1915 President Woodrow Wilson reduced the monument by half. A quick boom followed in railroad construction from west of Port Angeles, along the north shore of Lake Crescent to east of Forks to bring the spruce to a Port Angeles mill. The war ended before any spruce reached the mill.

Finally, in 1916 the government created an agency to manage its 15 national parks. The National Park Service also managed some monuments, while Mount Olympus National Monument remained under Forest Service control. FDR changed that in 1933; now controlled by the Interior Department, the local monument was now managed by the Park Service. Its first director, Stephen T. Mather, was a wealthy Chicago businessman who got the job from Wilson's interior secretary because both were fraternity brothers. He added parks and sometimes arranged his rich friends to

become park concessionaires. Mather "emphasized the 'enjoyment' clause in his mandate," wrote McNulty. "The roads, resorts, golf courses and entertainments he brought to Mount Rainier and other newly designated parks increased their popularity but lost critical preservationist support in the Northwest when the Olympic Peninsula needed it most." He died in 1930, a year after he resigned.

During the Depression of the 1930s, efforts were underway to make the monument a National Park. One of FDR's New Deal projects, the Civilian Conservation Corps, made men available to build trails, bridges and shelters—badly needed for this primitive monument.

Even during the '30s, the Peninsula's Olympic Mountains were still called "the last wilderness" in the contiguous states. The Peninsula was out of the loop, literally, until the 375-mile Olympic Highway Loop (U.S. 101) was completed in 1931, finally connecting Grays Harbor with Forks. Timber—its harvesting, movement to mills or ports, along with processing at mill towns around the Peninsula—remained the economic mainstay. Would tourists flocking to a National Park replace that?

Briefly, here are forces against and for creating a National Park worthy of the name:

"While there was considerable local support for the establishment of Olympic National Park, particularly around Port Angeles and Forks," a Forest Service official wrote his superiors, "there was strong opposition in the Grays Harbor area."

Big Timber—mills, logging operations big and small—were united against it, along with local chambers of commerce, including Seattle, and the Washington State Planning Council. To them, "overripe" or "mature" trees must be logged. Individuals included Thomas Aldwell, long-time Port Angeles booster, and Asahel Curtis, a Seattle nature photographer who, oddly, hated all preservation. Politicians representing Grays Harbor County in the state and national capitals aligned with Big Timber along with the *Aberdeen Daily World* and the Democratic governor. Perhaps the brashest booster was William B. Greeley. As assistant forester with the Forest Service, he pushed a program of having state and local governments cover fire protection, reforestation and tax relief—opposed by Pinchot. "The program was a failure and the public was saddled with a permanent subsidy to the timber industry," wrote Carsten Lien. "Because it greatly broadened the Forest Service's base of political support, however, it could claim success. Meanwhile, on the Olympic Peninsula, the timber situation was worse than ever as the maximization of profit during the roaring 1920s drove the forest liquidation strategies even harder. The Forest Service's own statistics for Grays Harbor County told it all. "In general, cut-over lands logged prior to 1920 have become better restocked than those logged since 1920." Then, "On May 1, 1928, Greeley abruptly resigned to take up the work that would occupy the rest of his life—heading the West Coast Lumberman's Association," wrote Lien. "His major task in that role would be to keep government-owned timber flowing from the public forest to mills owned by his employers."

Local groups lacked money and clout of industrial and business groups, but a group of three—two New Yorkers who only saw the Peninsula one time each and a newspaper editorial writer from St. Louis—comprised the Emergency Conservation Committee, a major, effective, pro-park, nationwide voice. Willard Van Name, Rosalie Edge and newspaperman Irving Brant produced widely distributed pamphlets and letters to influencers bringing attention to Big Timber's local misdeeds and the need for a National Park. The *Port Angeles Evening News* supported a park. On the day FDR visited, this front-page headline assured readers: "BET YOUR SHIRT ON IT/THERE'LL BE A PARK." U.S. Rep. Monrad C. Wallgren, an Everett-based Democrat who represented the north Peninsula, advanced the issue by introducing three congressional bills regarding a future park. Each measure included different size requirements, which forced discussing park boundaries. Muir's pleas to retain virgin forests now remained in his writings; he died in 1915, and the organization he founded, the Sierra Club in 1892, was not the preservation power it is today. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes was a powerful pro-park ally in the other Washington.

The Park Service and Forest Service were rivals—especially in areas like the Peninsula, where, if a National Park was created with a National Forest surrounding it, the two agencies would work side by side. "During this period, even though the Park Service had responsibility for the National Monument, the agency didn't have a big presence on the Peninsula—a ranger with a manager at Mount Rainier," said McNulty. "The Forest Service oversaw the National Forest and operated ranger stations around the Peninsula."

"To the argument that the Forest Service was the proper custodian of natural wonders, he [Park Service's Mather] replied, with some justification, that in the care of the Forest Service natural beauty would always be measured against utilitarian values and beauty would come out the loser," wrote an observer. "Trees on National Forest land, he said, were viewed as a crop." The Park Service director warned in 1935: "With the exception of Alaska, this is America's last frontier forest. Yet these superb monarchs of Douglas fir, spruce, hemlock and cedar, the likes of which cannot be reproduced within 500 years, are menaced with destruction unless given the protection of National Park status."

Forward to that night at Lake Crescent Lodge. The Forest Service was tasked with planning this part of FDR's 15-day tour of four Western states. The Forest Service worked with the Secret Service to provide the presidential party with vehicles, guards, drivers and guides. It would be the only chance the agency had to directly influence FDR regarding Peninsula timber management. Thirty-five Forest Service employees, two U.S. senators, Wallgren and his Grays Harbor counterpart awaited FDR, and, if the Forest Service had its way, no one from the Park Service.

Brant, besides being an effective pro-park public advocate, was FDR's adviser on conservation. He warned FDR there would be no Park Service personnel there that night.

The morning after the visit was announced, Preston Macy, custodian of Mount Olympus National Monument while stationed at Mount Rainier, "and Major O.A. Tomlinson, superintendent of Mount Rainier National Park, went together to the Seattle headquarters of the Forest Service," wrote Brant. "They asked to be included in the president's drive around the Peninsula. They were flatly turned down. Reading that Mr. Roosevelt was to spend a night at the Lake Crescent lodge, they tried to reserve rooms there. They were told that the Forest Service had taken over the entire lodge for the night of the presidential visit

"Back to the Forest Service went Macy and Tomlinson and applied for rooms at the lodge. Again, an emphatic No. Then, on the morning after the president reached Seattle, the Forest Service telephoned to Macy and Tomlinson and gave each of them a terse message: 'You will be in the president's party in the trip around the Peninsula. Rooms are reserved for you tonight at the Lake Crescent Lodge'"

After dinner, Tomlinson and Macy met FDR for about 30 minutes. Then regional forester Clarence J. Buck entered. The president was prepped, persistent, persuasive and prescient; if Forest Service bureaucrats predicted a patrician pushover, they were in for a surprise.

"A table was placed before the president and Buck spread out a large map ... , " wrote Tomlinson. "Glancing at the map the president said to Buck, 'You are not allowing a large enough National Park. I am thinking 50 years ahead when this state will have a large enough population and will need extensive areas for recreational purposes.'"

Irving Clark of the Seattle Mountaineers reported what happened next: "Buck led off with arguments against creation of a National Park, giving detailed statistics to portray to devastating effect upon the timber economy of the Olympic Peninsula. The president listened without saying a word until Buck finished the recital. Then he said: 'Is that the situation? I thought it was this way.' The president then proceeded ... to refute every statement Buck had made. When questioned by the president, Buck admitted he was correct." Buck then discussed timber needs; FDR's rejoinder was the same.

Then the Grays Harbor congressman pressed FDR about losing local jobs. "The president responded that 5 billion feet of timber is but a drop in the bucket compared to the 119 or 120 billion feet already logged on the Peninsula," wrote Tomlinson, "and that there need be no worry over the comparatively small amount reserved, which is far more valuable for its recreational use than for lumber."

After the meeting, Tomlinson wrote FDR "stands for a large National Park."

The president delivered on July 29, 1938, when he signed a bill establishing the park; sections of National Forest surrounded it. Totalling 634,000 acres, there was provision he could expand those boundaries later. "It is entirely likely," wrote Lien, "that the moment the Olympic National Park bill passed was truly its final opportunity, the last moments of the last war-free Congress." World War II began in Europe the following year.

FDR expanded the park in 1940 and 1943, and President Harry Truman in 1953. Added were the Queets River valley and two coastal strips.

"Today, Olympic National Park preserves some of the finest, old-growth, temperate rain forest on the planet, and visitors from around the world contribute hundreds of millions to our local economy," said McNulty. "Peninsula residents owe a profound debt of gratitude to the visionaries who fought for the creation of Olympic National Park. Theirs was a gift to the world."

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This article, which originally appeared in *The Jefferson & Clallam County Seniors Sunset Times*, April 2023, [reprinted here with permission] was inspired by Lien's *Olympic Battleground: The Power Politics of Timber Preservation*, published in 1991, and, sadly, out of print; his quotes are from that book. McNulty's written quotes are from *Olympic National Park: A Natural History*, now in an updated edition. Brant's quotes are from *Adventures in Conservation with Franklin D. Roosevelt*, which included Clark's quotes. Tomlinson quotes are from confidential memos to his bosses in Washington, D.C. Copies are on file in special collections at University of Washington libraries.