

National Parks and National Forests

A Statement by

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

and

THE FOREST SERVICE

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE





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Though millions of people annually visit both national parks and national forests, or receive benefits of one kind or other from them, many of our citizens do not understand the essential differences between the two.

Actually there is a very real distinction between national forests and national parks. They are operated differently and were founded with different concepts and aims. Each has its distinct place in the Federal Government's conservation program and in the life of our country.

National parks are administered by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior.

National forests are administered by the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture.

There are important differences in the acts of Congress under which national parks and national forests are established, in the purposes of the two, and consequently in their management. Some of the major differences are briefly given here.

National parks are established, individually, only by act of Congress. Though dedicated to the primary purpose of preserving, for public enjoyment, superlative examples of the scenic and majestic in nature, they serve other important purposes, such as wildlife conservation and the regulation of stream flow through watershed protection. As a rule, only lands containing outstanding scenic, geologic, or other natural exhibits are included. The law requires that they be admin-

istered to provide for public enjoyment "in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." They are thus, in a sense, great outdoor museums. Only such developments are permitted as are needed for the protection and administration of the areas or required for the comfort and convenience of those who visit the parks for the inspiration and recreation they offer. Research into and interpretation of the natural phenomena of these areas are an important part of the Service's work.

The National Park System also includes national monuments, which are areas of historic, prehistoric, or scientific significance. It includes, in other categories, many areas of special historic interest. There are 28 national parks, 5 national historical parks, 85 national monuments, 10 national memorials, 11 national military parks, 10 national cemeteries, 6 national battlefield sites, 2 national battlefield parks, 12 national historic sites, 3 national parkways, 1 national memorial park, and the national capital parks—a total of 173 areas covering approximately 21,854,000 acres. In addition, the National Park Service administers a national historic site, under agreement with the Department of the Army, and 3 national recreational areas, on reservoir sites, under agreements with the Bureau of Reclamation.

National forests are established by proclamation of the President, or, in some States, only by act of Congress. The earliest national forests were established by reservation of lands in the public domain. Under authorization of the Congress, lands may also be acquired for national forest purposes by purchase, donation, or exchange.

National forests are administered for the protection, development, and use of timber, water, range, and other resources

in the public interest. A basic purpose is the management and protection of watersheds, to safeguard water supplies, prevent erosion, and reduce floods. Timber resources are managed to contribute toward a permanent supply of lumber and other forest products and to serve as demonstration areas of forest management for the benefit of private timber owners and operators. National forest ranges are managed to provide a sustained supply of forage for the grazing of livestock. The forests are managed also to preserve their beauty and attractiveness for the recreational enjoyment of the people; to maintain a favorable habitat for wildlife; and in other ways to make their resources contribute to the economic stability and welfare of the Nation.

All these resources are handled under a coordinated plan of management known as "multiple use." This means that a national forest, as a whole, is managed for the sustained production of a variety of products and services. Timber may be sold for cutting under practices which assure continuous production; livestock are permitted to graze under supervision; water may be used for irrigation, power, domestic supplies, etc.; mining is permitted; hunting and fishing are allowed under State laws; recreational opportunities are developed. The objective is the highest total of continuing public benefits and services.

There are 150 national forests, containing approximately 180,000,000 acres. The Forest Service also maintains 12 regional forest and range experiment stations and a Forest Products Laboratory for research into the basic facts necessary for proper management and utilization of all forest resources; and conducts programs to encourage and support better management and protection on forest lands in State and private ownership.

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