

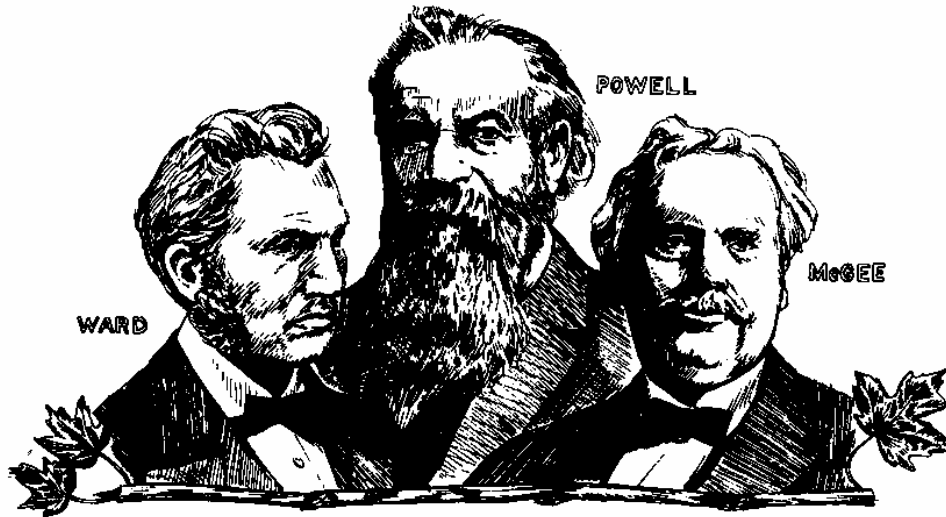
A woodcut-style illustration of a forest stream. The scene is rendered in shades of brown and black, with fine lines and cross-hatching for texture and shading. In the foreground, a stream flows from the bottom center towards the middle ground. Two ducks are visible in the water, one slightly ahead of the other. The banks are lined with large, gnarled trees whose trunks and branches frame the central scene. The background shows a dense canopy of trees, with light filtering through. The overall style is reminiscent of early 20th-century nature illustrations.

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CENTENNIAL MINI-HISTORIES OF THE FOREST SERVICE

Origins of the Conservation Movement

3 Origins of the Conservation Movement



First use of the term “conservation” in print to mean the protective management of forest and associated natural resources (in the United States) is credited to **Dr. John A. Warder (1812–1883)**, first president of the American Forestry Association. A horticulturalist and fruit grower by avocation, Warder called an organizational meeting of the new American Forestry Association on September 10, 1875, while in Chicago to attend a meeting of the American Pomological Society. In an invitation to its second meeting, Warder stated that one purpose of the AFA was the “fostering of forest-planting and conservation.”

George Perkins Marsh had earlier expressed the concept but not used the term itself. Three other 19th-century philosopher-scientists, in addition to Marsh, provided the theoretical framework for the conservation movement of the early 20th century: **John Wesley Powell (1834–1902)**, **Lester Frank Ward (1841–1913)**, and **William J. McGee (1853–1912)**, all shaped the first conservation movement. Their basic message was that a balance existed in nature that humans needed to respect in developing and managing natural resources. The applied key to early conservation theory was watershed management: Forested basins influenced water-flow essential to irrigation, navigation, waterpower, and potable water. Forest reserves—and reservoir construction—were required to ensure proper management of watersheds for those four uses.

All four theoreticians of the conservation movement shared common traits; they grew up in rural areas and were devoted to nature study in their youth. Self-trained in various natural sciences, they synthesized their observations,

learning to create an “ecological” theory of resource management. Marsh went on to write *Man and Nature*, while Powell explored the Grand Canyon as a geologist and was later director (1881) of the U.S. Geological Survey. McGee and Ward were fellow employees in the USGS, Ward working in paleontology and McGee in geology and hydrology. Later, Powell and McGee worked together at the Bureau of American Ethnology.

Influenced by Marsh's work and discussions with his colleagues McGee and Ward, Powell's survey of arid lands in the west led to his *Report on the Arid Lands of the United States*, in which he argued for new land-use policies and agencies to ensure viable settlement of these fragile lands. He resigned in 1894 when Congress restricted his proposed program for management of these lands. Yet, his influence continued to shape policy such as the 1902 Reclamation Act. The message of Powell in his writings and USGS programs was that humans and nature were interdependent. To ensure the efficient and lasting uses of resources then called for cooperative planning on the part of the public and private sectors.

The conservation movement was formally launched at the 1908 Governors' Conference on the Conservation of Natural Resources, which McGee helped **Gifford Pinchot (1865–1946)** organize. Neither claimed original credit for the conservation concept since the ideas on forestry, irrigation, and conservation spring from many sources including **John Muir (1838–1914)** of Sierra Club fame; **Charles Sprague Sargent (1841–1927)** the founder and editor of *Garden and Forest* magazine and author of *Report on the Forests of North America* (1884) for the Tenth Census (1880), the major national survey of forest conditions; and **George Bird Grinnell (1849–1938)** editor (1876) of *Forest and Stream* magazine and a quiet but effective influence on pioneer legislation affecting national parks, national forests, and wildlife.

Advocacy of forest reserves on Grinnell's part stemmed from his interest in wildlife; he founded the Audubon Society of New York in 1886 and later was director of the subsequently created national chapter for 26 years. He founded the Boone and Crockett Club in 1887 with **Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919)**, who later enrolled Gifford Pinchot in the club. Thus the streams and eddies of personal and intellectual contact among many different lives were connected by the strand of the concept of conservation. Not until the revival of conservation in the 1960's in the guise of ecology did the holistic thinking of people like Marsh and Powell gain wide recognition in the world of science in regard to natural resources.