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CENTENNIAL MINI-HISTORIES OF THE FOREST SERVICE

Big Game, Wildlife, and Other Conservation Causes

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Early forest conservation advocates were fueled by differing personal agendas. For example, one group that indirectly supported the creation of the forest reserves—the Boone and Crockett Club—had as its first priority preservation of big game habitat. When examined historically the legacy of wildlife management in the Forest Service may be said to have begun (in part) with the founding of the Boone and Crockett Club in 1887 by Theodore Roosevelt.

The future president (1901–1909) started this “club of American hunting riflemen” based on his experience in the Badlands of South Dakota. There he had been an explorer and rancher and witnessed the slaughter of game as railroads entered remote areas, bringing settlers and trophy hunters. After returning to New York to resume his political career, he held a dinner attended by a diverse group of writers, scientists, explorers, and political leaders. What they had in common was outdoor experience in the West and big-game hunting and he used these ties to unite them in the Boone and Crockett Club. The group became an important nucleus of the conservation movement. Aside from Gifford Pinchot, another member of the club was to play an influential role in advising Roosevelt on natural resource issues, George Bird Grinnell.

Mass slaughter of the bison in the western plains in the 1870’s had awakened another observer to the plight of America’s big game. Grinnell traveled west in this period as part of a scientific and exploratory group. Wild animals were

being slaughtered in great numbers by market hunters, who supplied game to urban restaurants and markets, and by agents for dealers in pelts and feathers. Some game laws existed, but enforcement was weak because the public was only minimally concerned.

Only a wealthy few hunted strictly for recreation, usually on the protected lands of their estates. By mid-century these sportsmen began to band together in clubs that were as much wildlife conservation lobbying groups as social ones. One target was to eliminate market hunting for waterfowl on the Chesapeake Bay. This was part of a larger effort to end market hunting altogether, prevent spring shooting of game birds, and spur enforcement of existing game laws.

Law suits against New York City restaurant owners helped end the practice of market hunting. In other locations, the crusade took longer. Yellowstone Park, created in 1872, was a refuge for bison and other big game, which attracted poachers and hunter-tourists until the army took over the park's management in 1886. Yet, there was no legal way of bringing vandals and game killers to trial, a situation that led members of the Boone and Crockett Club to rally against the ravages suffered by Yellowstone Park. This protest fit the club's goal of "preservation of the big game of North America."

Although never large (about 100 core members), the club's membership was influential: powerful opinion molders such as Senator **Henry Cabot Lodge** (1850–1924); **Owen Wister** (1860–1938), the novelist; General **William Tecumseh Sherman**; and **Albert Bierstadt** (1830–1902), renowned landscape painter, as well as many who became active in the conservation movement, such as Gifford Pinchot, **Madison Grant** (1865–1937), founder of Save the Redwoods League; **Arnold Hague** (1840–1917) of the U.S. Geological Survey; **C. Hart Merriam** (1855–1942), head of the U.S. Biological Survey; and George Bird Grinnell, who was then editor of *Forest and Stream* magazine, were members. Grinnell used the magazine to publish an expose of poaching in Yellowstone Park, a cause around which the club had first rallied. Thus it is credited with helping push for the 1894 Yellowstone Park Protection Act—laying the basis for the idea that national parks should be wildlife sanctuaries and wilderness. Earlier the group had supported the advocates of the forest reserves in their efforts to promote the 1891 act. After all, it fit the goal of the club to enlarge the boundary of Yellowstone Park with the first reserve, and the reserves provided permanent habitat for wildlife.

Reference

Trefethen, James B. 1975. *An American crusade for wildlife*. New York: Winchester Press and Boone and Crockett Club.