



INTRODUCTION

The last day of the Thirtieth Congress, March 3, 1849, was also the eve of President-elect Zachary Taylor's inauguration. The House of Representatives and the Senate were busy at work on two bills: the first, to find a formula for giving the newly-acquired territory of California a civil government. The second, no less contentious, was also related to the recent enlargement of the national domain: legislation to create a Cabinet agency known as the Home Department, or Department of the Interior. The bill to create such a Department passed the House of Representatives on February 15, 1849. Two weeks later, the bill reached the Senate floor and late in the evening of March 3, the Senate voted 31 to 25 on the House-passed bill. President Polk was waiting in the Senate chambers and signed the bill creating a Department of the Interior.¹

In 1849, when the Congress created the Interior Department, it charged it with managing a wide variety of programs. In the last half of the 19th century, these programs ran the gamut of overseeing Indian affairs, exploring the western wilderness, directing the District of Columbia jail, constructing the National Capital's water system, managing hospitals and universities, improving historic western emigrant routes, marking boundaries, issuing patents, conducting the census, and conducting research on the geologic resources of the land.

Following the conservation movement at the beginning of the 20th Century, the Department's mission has focused on the preservation, management, understanding, and use of the great natural and cultural resources of the land based on an increasing sense of the fragile nature of those resources. Charged with such a mission, the Department has the responsibility to ensure that the Nation's investment in these resources is cultivated to guarantee the optimum environmental, recreational, cultural, and economic benefits to the American people, both now and in the future.

The Department's mission is to conserve, restore, and protect the Nation's precious natural and cultural heritage for future generations, and at the same time, continue to develop resources in a sustainable manner; honor past commitments and trust respon-

sibilities to Tribes and Alaska Natives; use science to support our management of lands and resources; and improve communities through improved science and technical assistance. The Department will meet these challenges with new approaches and solutions. Guardianship and stewardship will earmark the Department's efforts in restoration of resources. Landscape scale approaches will seek to restore and preserve the Nation's natural and cultural bounty, while ensuring that economic development needs can be met. The Florida Everglades, the California Bay-Delta, and the President's Forest Plan in the Pacific Northwest evidence the success of restoration efforts.

The Department of the Interior's budget covers a broad spectrum of activities, including operation of parks by the National Park Service; operation of wildlife refuges and implementation of the Endangered Species Act by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; management of lands and resources by the Bureau of Land Management; delivery of quality services to American Indians and Alaska Natives by the Bureau of Indian Affairs; mineral leasing and revenue collection by the Minerals Management Service; research, data collection, and scientific activities to support other Interior bureaus and other agencies by the U.S. Geological Survey; water resources programs managed by the Bureau of Reclamation; regulation and restoration of surface mining activities by the Office of Surface Mining; implementation and oversight of Indian trust management reforms by the Office of the Special Trustee; and assistance to U.S. Territories and other insular areas.

¹ Robert Utley and Barry Mackintosh, *"The Department of Everything Else: Highlights of Interior History,"* 1988, pp 1-2.