

Preface

When the U.S. Congress granted Yosemite Valley to the people of California in 1864 and withdrew from private entry a portion of northwestern Wyoming as Yellowstone National Park in 1872, it set national precedents for reserving expansive parcels of open land as public parks. Since those years national parks, monuments, historic sites, seashores, and recreational areas have proliferated, reaching every state in the union but Delaware and embracing more than 375 discrete units comprising 83 million acres. The National Park Service and its allies have successfully, for the most part, fended off concerted efforts to tap these reserves for extractive purposes, helping other land-management agencies slow a centuries-long trend of exhausting the public domain.

Despite its many achievements, the National Park Service in recent decades has been roundly criticized by many sectors of U.S. society, including its intermittent allies among congressmen, preservationists, businessmen, and public users. The history at hand, though narrowly descriptive of issues and events of an administrative nature at Grand Canyon National Park from 1919 to the present, is also attentive to this judgmental shift toward the eighty-three-year-old organization born at the apogee of U.S. progressivism and so immediately successful. A principal argument is that fundamental causes of the perceived about-face derive not as much from specific agency decisions, which have proved remarkably consistent for nearly a century, as from a maturing comprehension of ecology and an understanding of true “preservation,” or what Stephen Mather called “complete conservation.” As park administrators, scientists, and others gained a better understanding of what is required to allow ecosystems to evolve along their own paths, the ambition of some to implement such knowledge collided head on with demographic, economic, and political trends observable in the western United States since the mid-nineteenth century, trends that have so far thwarted otherwise good intentions to fully protect national park flora and fauna.

This conclusion derives from consideration of Grand Canyon and national park history within a broad framework of world-system theory, a method of historical inquiry that shifts analysis from the actions of individual nations to worldwide trends of the past five hundred years. The historical model also focuses on a single, expanding, capitalist economy that by the early twentieth century had captured world markets, labor, and natural resources, but posits more than a Marxist view of world economies. Immanuel Wallerstein argues in *Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization* (Verso, 1995), and I contend in the context of national park history, that world capitalism has engendered a pervasive social system in which the scope of capitalistic rules

has grown ever wider, the enforcers of these rules ever more intransigent, the penetration of these rules into the social fabric ever greater, even while social opposition to these rules has grown ever louder and more organized

It is within the contexts of these “rules” that native peoples, explorers, settlers, exploiters, capitalists, ecologists, tourists, interest groups, park administrators, and governments have acted and reacted in the canyon region since the mid-nineteenth century, virtually unquestioned until a century later when “social opposition” gained a viable national voice.

It will be a relief to most readers that I do not relate park history within the intricate “vectors” and vocabulary of world-system theory, but rather limit contextual relationships to several of the more noticeable and destructive elements of the modern era explained by that paradigm. First and foremost, of the 4,300 internal and external threats to the national parks identified in the NPS internal study, *State of the Parks—1980* nearly all can be traced to the sole malady of expanding populations, which fulfills our culture’s need for more consumers as well as cheap laborers.

“Overpopulation” is a relative condition defined here simply as a number of human beings beyond the land’s carrying capacity given sound ecological constraints. Many argue that there is no such number, that human inventiveness facilitated by man-made contrivances always has and always will accommodate periodic irruptions of human beings. But such answers evade questions of human sanity, recreation, and nature’s survival—older and newer objectives for the national parks—and merely inform us that we *may* have the wherewithal to feed, clothe, and shelter ever-teeming masses of our own species if we do not look closely at ecological costs. These costs include sprawling industrial and residential development, resource “enhancement” and extraction, and pollution, which together pose the greatest long-term threat to ecological preserves.

Overpopulation is not immediately perceived as a primary culprit in the public’s collective imagination because, among other reasons, humans have adjusted over generations to “crowding”—another condition that defies definitive measure. People regard spaces to breathe, reflect, and recreate relative to their everyday lives. Every year more than a hundred million people escape cities worldwide to visit the western parks, yet despite long lines at entrance stations, traffic jams, competition for in-park hotels and restaurants, and congestion at scenic points, they return home believing that they have briefly escaped their hectic lives. To help illustrate, consider a survey of a thousand people who rafted the Colorado River through Grand Canyon in the early 1990s: Despite congestion at Lees Ferry, multiple parties vying for campsites, and the reverberation of outboard motors, fully 91 percent considered theirs a “wilderness” adventure. This sample reveals a present-day desire for safe, comfortable, and speedy wilderness trips (safety in numbers, comfort through technology) but also an ignorance of past experiences when visitors could remain weeks without seeing or hearing but a handful of others. It also tells us that a sense of crowding in the parks is relative to ever-sprawling urban environs and helps explain why park administrators historically have chosen and can still choose crowd management over limitations on tourist numbers.

Overpopulation is a relentless threat to western lands and park experiences, exacerbated by the continuing realization of today’s historical system and its economic component, capitalism. Historian Donald Worster and others with insights similar to Wallerstein’s (including Roderick Nash and Max Oelschlaeger) have expanded and refined the modern era’s definition in societal as well as economic terms. Key elements of particular relevance to the survival of national parks and western ecosystems include mankind’s notion of separateness from and superiority over nature, and the erosion of religious and secular ethics as constraints

on human behavior. Worster, in *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), observes that economic theorists like Adam Smith inculcated a new ethic within the European populace as transoceanic migrations quickened following the fifteenth century, to treat the earth and each other with a

frank, energetic self-assertiveness, unencumbered by too many moral or aesthetic sentiments.... They must learn to pursue relentlessly their private accumulation of wealth. They must think constantly in terms of money. [They must look at everything as a commodity—land, resources, labor—and demand] the right to produce and sell those commodities without outside regulation or interference

One does not have to look beyond Americans’ movement west in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to understand unchecked capitalism’s power to wreak havoc on the natural landscape. Its early manifestations like clear-cutting, overgrazing, strip and hydraulic mining, and impoverishment of soils proved so destructive that by the turn of the twentieth century they had triggered alternative ideologies, conservationism and preservationism, which after a hundred years have only modestly limited destructive development. Commodity sale and purchase, however, have implications that travel beyond confrontations among exploiters, conservers, and the land. A global consumer society in relentless pursuit of commodities directly spurs resource extraction on lands that nominally remain in the public’s hands, or within the hands of nations half a world away.

Threats to the national parks and other public lands emanating from population growth and pervasive capitalism are magnified by fundamental dogmas of American democracy that are destructive to nature despite their attraction to humanity. Among these are unrestrained access to cheap land whether private or public, individual “rights” that are more loosely defined today than a century ago, federal goals to achieve a large yet stable middle class, equal opportunity for all, and freedom from government interference (except as financier) in the pursuit of private wealth. Although U.S. political and social systems have become more restrictive in the wake of growing populations, the propagation of democratic principles, distorted to fit anyone’s selfish interpretation, has left its psychological stamp on Americans loathe to give up their pioneer heritage, both real and imagined.

Perhaps no aspect of our democratic legacy is as threatening to the western parks as the fable of rugged individualism. Framers of the Articles of Confederation and U.S. Constitution briefly debated Hamiltonian suggestions to sell the public domain to swell the national treasury versus

Jeffersonian ideals of democratic land distribution, then selected the latter course because ordinary citizens had already chosen it in their mad dash westward. Driven by romantic spirit or lack of opportunity in the East and lured by the promise of land or yet-unexploited resources, seven generations of families and exploiters rushed to fill the continent's habitable spaces, dismember its forests, mine its precious minerals, and kill its indigenous inhabitants, flora, and fauna. The federal government encouraged and bankrolled these "rugged individuals" with transcontinental wagon roads, liberal railroad grants, preemption and homestead laws, territorial and state land grants, permissive mining laws, ample military protection, and democratic rhetoric.

Technological advance and its universal application, like overpopulation, capitalism, and misplaced notions of American democracy, also poses a multifaceted threat to western lands and is intricately intertwined with our economy, eagerly embraced by governments and peoples alike. It is, of course, a key differentiation between humans and other animals, which emerged in our dim, deep past and has been quickening ever since. But it is only in the last few centuries that invention, accelerated by industrial and scientific revolutions, has interacted with capitalism and eroded ethical restraints to produce environmentally destructive and dehumanizing results. It would require a lot of pages to simply categorize technological threats to the natural environment, but industrial smog, emissions of a billion internal-combustion engines, pesticides, and chemical fertilizers are but a few of the more deadly, their effects extending far beyond points of origin or application.

It is useful to consider an administrative history of our western parks within these manifestations of the modern world-system to illustrate that public agencies, like the rest of us, are ensnared within its interlocking, mutually reinforcing tenets. Land managers have severely limited and mostly short-term options to protect the lands in their care. It is also essential to consider the history of our parks in terms of contemporary goals, political options, and levels of knowledge. Many critics of the National Park Service write as if one relatively small federal agency has had the authority, foresight, and expertise to make all the correct policy turns, and they have defined "correct" in terms of recent attitudes toward preservation applied retroactively. Historians call this "presentism," the judgement (typically the condemnation) of past actions through lenses of current learning and values. In popular parlance it is akin to "Monday-morning quarterbacking," but whatever we call it, this form of criticism is essentially useless. Past decisions and actions should be considered in contemporary contexts, and past contexts compared to the present to determine what has changed and what may now be possible. Doing so

in this history has led to my overall conclusions that little has changed of significant ecological consequence, little is possible within the present world-system other than momentary compromise gleaned from the political tension between entrenched practice and theoretical alternatives, and that the NPS as a politically controlled federal bureau could not have managed much differently had it wanted to.

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This book is an administrative history of Grand Canyon National Park with a target audience of park employees and others concerned with how the park has been managed over the years. It therefore falls short of a comprehensive history of the canyon and its environs. First, I omit an introduction to the region's natural history that may be found in a number of very good books in print. These include Jeremy Schmidt's *A Natural History Guide Grand Canyon National Park* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), Rose Houk's *An Introduction to Grand Canyon Ecology* (Grand Canyon Association, 1996), L. Greer Price's *An Introduction to Grand Canyon Geology* (Grand Canyon Association, 1999), *Grand Canyon Geology* edited by Stanley S. Beus and Michael Morales (Oxford University Press, 1990), and Wendell A. Duffield's *Volcanoes of Northern Arizona: Sleeping Giants of the Grand Canyon Region* (Grand Canyon Association, 1997).

It was also necessary to omit the stories of native residents and most of the explorers, exploiters, and settlers of the canyon region to afford more space to the park's development under federal bureaus and concessioners. Fortunately, this earlier history was the focus of my book, *Living at the Edge: Explorers, Exploiters and Settlers of the Grand Canyon Region* (Grand Canyon Association, 1998), which I hope the reader will consider as a companion volume to this administrative history. *Living at the Edge* does not explicitly argue canyon events in the context of western incorporation by the United States and world-capitalism, but the story, which ends in the 1920s, can be interpreted in that manner, and its conclusions are consistent with this history.

In addition, there are a number of good books that address particular aspects of the canyon's early history. Some that I have found useful are *Quest for the Pillar of Gold: The Mines & Miners of the Grand Canyon* (Grand Canyon Association, 1997) by George H. Billingsley, Earle E. Spamer, and Dove Menkes; Al Richmond's *Cowboys, Miners, Presidents & Kings: The Story of the Grand Canyon Railway* (Northland Publishing, 1989); and P. T. Reilly's *Lee's Ferry: From Mormon Crossing to National Park* (Utah State University Press, 1999). This list also includes J. Donald Hughes' *In the House of Stone and Light* (Grand Canyon Natural History Association, 1978); Richard and

Sherry Mangum's *Grand Canyon-Flagstaff Stage Coach Line: A History and Exploration Guide* (Hexagon Press, 1999); William C. Suran's *The Kolb Brothers and Grand Canyon* (Grand Canyon Natural History Association, 1991); and Margaret M. Verkamp's *History of Grand Canyon National Park* (Grand Canyon Pioneer's Society, 1993), edited by Ronald W. Werhan.

I was not afforded the opportunity to relate the participatory roles of the six major historical tribes long associated with the canyon, the role of other ethnic minorities and women, or environmental history to any fulfilling extent. These are significant omissions since the topics are not comprehensively addressed elsewhere, and their explication would add to an understanding of past management practice. Unfortunately, limited space, other-directed research, and the simple truth that these people as well as non-human species have been marginalized in past management equations all required their omission. There are a number of good books, however, that touch on these topics without addressing canyon management issues, among them Polly Welts Kaufman's *National Parks and the Women's Voice: A History* (University of New Mexico Press, 1996) and Betty Leavengood's *Grand Canyon Women: Lives Shaped by Landscape* (Pruett Publishing Company, 1999). Barbara J. Morehouse's *A Place Called Grand Canyon: Contested Geographies* (University of Arizona Press, 1996) is a thoughtful study of park boundaries as perceived by many interest groups, including some of the tribes, and there are a fair number of books on the tribes themselves. Among the more analytical are Edward Spicer's *Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico, and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533-1960* (University of Arizona Press, 1962); *Paths of Life: American Indians of the Southwest and Northern Mexico* (University of Arizona Press, 1996) by Thomas E. Sheridan and Nancy Parezo; and Thomas D. Hall's *Social Change in the Southwest, 1350-1880* (University of Kansas Press, 1989).

With space and audience limitations in mind, I settled on a political, economic, and developmental history that also identifies the origins and evolution of major challenges confronting managers today. Issues are generally introduced when they have worked their way up to the top of administrators' priority lists. For example, material on the environment and science-based management does not appear until the narrative reaches the 1970s. Major themes include the significance of varied economic interests in the creation and sustenance of the National Park Service and Grand Canyon National Park and the intimate relationship of concessioners and park managers who joined to "polish the jewel" by creating, cultivating, and accommodating an international tourism market. Chapters are segmented along lines of NPS management direction as it has evolved in the past

eighty years or within developmental periods that have been defined or influenced by two world wars, an intervening economic depression, tourism as an export economy and alternative to more traditional extraction, the varied plagues of industrial tourism, and conflicts introduced by increased knowledge concerning environmental protection.

Chapter one is a reconsideration of material presented in *Living at the Edge*, retained in this history to introduce developments in northern Arizona following the arrival of the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad. More attention is paid to changing economies, land use, and debates concerning political and economic control as the canyon metamorphosed from unregulated segment of the public domain to forest reserve, national monument, and national park. European Americans who arrived with the rails are portrayed not only as pioneers but as federal agents and scouts essential to the region's ensuing incorporation by the United States and by world-capitalism. Events at Grand Canyon during these years, 1882 through 1919, also illustrate the escalating conflict between unregulated development and progressive concepts of conservation first addressed by the U.S. Forest Service.

Chapters two and three chronicle formidable successes achieved under early NPS directors Stephen Mather, Horace Albright, and Arno Cammerer during the prosperity of the 1920s and depression of the 1930s. While the agency suffered through a few years of postwar financial retrenchment, Mather and Albright lost no time articulating its principal goals and objectives. When appropriations increased significantly in the mid-1920s, they embarked upon a mammoth infrastructural building program that was completed prior to the outbreak of World War II, thanks to New Deal dollars and desperate low-wage laborers.

The "founding fathers" are portrayed as consummate businessmen with a definitive agenda to create and operate the park system as a federally subsidized tourist business replete with aggressive marketing strategies, plans for horizontal and vertical expansion, and concerted efforts to protect, enhance, and sell their products—parks with unimpaired scenery—to national and international consumers of moderate means. Casting them in this way helps illustrate their sincere belief that remote and apparently worthless lands might be saved not only for altruistic reasons, which were considerable, but as commodities that could be sold repeatedly without degradation. This method of examination reinforces my conclusion that the National Park Service was, and still is (though perhaps to a slightly lesser degree), an agency ensnared by world-capitalism, and it also helps organize the historical inquiry. Another conclusion is that NPS administrators, infused with progressive fervor, endowed with considerable business savvy, and allied with a supportive U.S. Congress and myriad business interests,

brilliantly succeeded in their early goals to raise the National Park System, and especially Grand Canyon, to a viable national institution through visitor enticement and accommodation.

Chapter four begins with the effects of World War II on the park system generally and Grand Canyon National Park specifically, but ends after the war with administrators' first intimations that something had gone awry with the envisioned park experience. The catalyst for change is the emergence of the United States as the world's economic power, reflected in postwar prosperity among more of its citizens. An enriched populace returned to the national parks in droves and for the first time, managers viewed tourists with some trepidation as they arrived in unending lines of air-fouling automobiles, in greater numbers, demanding more and better facilities. They arrived, too, with innovations like motor homes, motorized rubber rafts, small planes, and helicopters, posing heretofore unforeseen visitational issues.

Chapter five continues with congressional, NPS, and concessioner reactions to the tourist onslaught, what I have termed the "infrastructural last hurrah" because the massive rebuilding program called Mission 66, which lingered at Grand Canyon into the 1980s, represented the last time inner-park construction would be posited as a *sole* approach to increased visitation.

Chapter six outlines administrators' attempts through history to manage the canyon's natural resources, a subject that demands its own study but here serves only to balance the record vis-à-vis those who judge NPS resource policies in terms of intentional "facade management." Although early managers, as at all the western parks, were most atten-

tive to the canyon's scenic attributes, they were also concerned (if often wrong) about ways to best maintain its biological health. Science-based management later gained political backing and therefore a foothold in the parks, but following World War II administrators became embroiled in a maze of issues derived from regional immigration, technological innovations, and democratic demands, all of which have since complicated park management and inhibited ecological protection.

In Chapter seven, I summarize the experience of past visitors and historic park planning leading to the 1995 Grand Canyon General Management Plan, which is critiqued from an historical perspective. It is not my intention to offer sweeping alternatives because, as the book reveals, administrators, whether or not they believe in radical management change, have neither the mandate nor the ultimate authority to effect it.

Throughout the book I often use the terms "administrators" and "park managers" rather than identifying specific individuals. This is to some extent intentional, as I came to view superintendents, their assistants, rangers, and others involved in decision-making as interchangeable beings working under guidelines set for them by national and regional directors, headquarters' planners, secretaries of the interior, and the U.S. Congress. By these standards, some administrators were very good, others mediocre. A few had their own agendas; most did not. Superintendents, who have always had considerable leeway in management within set parameters, are all identified in the appendices with their years of service. Other administrators, as many as I could find, are identified in photographs, along with a few additional illustrations that I hope add a bit more life to the narrative.