

The Creation of Grand Teton National Park

Evolution of a Dream

The birth of present-day Grand Teton National Park involved controversy and a struggle that lasted several decades. Opposition to expansion of governmental jurisdiction in Jackson Hole, combined with a perceived loss of individual freedoms, helped to fuel anti-park sentiments—which nearly derailed establishment of the original national park. In contrast, Yellowstone National Park benefited from an expedient and near universal agreement for its creation in 1872. The world’s first national park took just two years from idea to reality. Grand Teton National Park, however, materialized over 50 years through a burdensome process requiring a series of compromises and three separate governmental acts:

The initial Grand Teton National Park—set aside by an act of Congress in 1929—included only the Teton Range and six glacial lakes at the base of the mountains.

The Jackson Hole National Monument—decreed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt through presidential proclamation in 1943—combined Teton National Forest lands with other federal acres, plus Jackson Lake and a 35,000-acre donation by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. The Rockefeller properties continued to be privately owned until December 16, 1949 when an impasse for inclusion into the initial national park was resolved.

On September 14, 1950, the original 1929 Park and the 1943 National Monument (including Rockefeller's acreage) were united into a ‘new’ Grand Teton National Park, with its current, more expansive boundary.

An Idea is Born (1897-1919)

As early as 1897, Colonel S.B.M. Young, acting superintendent of Yellowstone, proposed to expand Yellowstone's boundaries southward to encompass portions of northern Jackson Hole and protect migrating elk herds. In 1898 Charles D. Walcott, head of the U.S. Geological Survey, made a similar proposal, suggesting that the Teton Range get included along with northern Jackson Hole. Neither the Department of the Interior nor Congress acted on either of these early proposals.

In 1916, a new bureau—labeled the National Park Service—was created within the Interior Department. This brand-new bureau could promote ideas both locally and at the national level through creation of a Washington DC office. The first director of the National Park Service, Stephen Mather, and his assistant, Horace Albright, affirmed their commitment toward expansion of Grand Teton National Park in a report to Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane in 1917. Their report stated that adding part of the Tetons, Jackson Lake, and headwaters of the Snake River to Yellowstone National Park was "one of seven urgent needs facing the Park Service." Mather and Albright worked with the Wyoming congressional delegation to draft a bill addressing the expansion of Yellowstone's boundaries into Teton country. Congressman Frank Mondell of Wyoming introduced the bill in 1918, and the House unanimously approved a revised bill in 1919.

However, this bill failed because Idaho Senator John Nugent feared the loss of sheep grazing permits with expanded Park Service jurisdiction. As historian Robert Righter stated, "An opportunity had been lost. Never again would park extension be so non-controversial."

A Fledgling Park Emerges (1919-1929)

In addition to Idaho sheep ranchers, other groups opposed park extension; these parties included regional U.S. Forest Service personnel, Jackson Hole businessmen, and several local ranchers. Horace Albright, serving as superintendent of Yellowstone, was unaware of the pervasive anti-park attitude in Jackson Hole in 1919. As a result, he was practically "run out of town" when he arrived in Jackson to explain and promote his vision for a 'grand' national park. Ranchers worried that expansion of Park Service jurisdiction would reduce grazing allotments; Forest Service employees feared their loss of authority over previously managed areas; and dude ranchers opposed potential road improvements, hotel construction, and concessioner monopolies.

In 1919, several proposals emerged to dam the outlets of Jenny Lake and Emma Matilda and Two Ocean lakes. Alarmed local businessmen and ranchers gradually admitted that some form of protection by the National Park Service might just be their only salvation from commercialization and unwanted destruction. As a result, local residents gathered at Maud Noble's cabin on July 26, 1923 for a significant meeting with the Park Service. The participants included: Yellowstone Superintendent Horace Albright; Bar BC dude ranchers, Struthers Burt and Horace Carncross; newspaperman, Dick Winger; grocery storeowner, Joe Jones; rancher, Jack Eynon; and ferry owner, Miss Noble. The group devised a strategy. Their idea, dubbed the Jackson Hole Plan, sought to find private funds to purchase private lands to create a recreation area or a reserve that would preserve the 'Old West' character of the valley, basically creating what they called a "museum on the hoof." With the exception of Horace Albright, the other attendees did not support a national park, because they wanted traditional hunting, grazing, and dude-ranching activities to continue.

A coordinating commission on national parks and forests met with Jackson Hole residents in 1928 and reached consensus for park approval. Local support, and the commission's recommendations, led Senator John Kendrick of Wyoming to introduce a bill to formally establish a Grand Teton National Park. Senator Kendrick said that once he saw the Tetons he, "realized that some day they would become a park dedicated to the Nation and posterity..." The U.S. Congress passed Senator Kendrick's bill, and President Calvin Coolidge signed it on February 26, 1929, creating a 96,000-acre park that included the Teton Range and six glacial lakes at the base of the peaks. Because the 1929 Park did not protect a complete, all-encompassing landscape, Albright and the other participants of the 1923 meeting continued to pursue their dream of seeking private funds to purchase private lands in the Jackson Hole valley.

Rockefeller's Interest Grows (1929-1943)

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. became involved in the 'Jackson Hole Plan' after two visits to northwestern Wyoming: once in 1924 and again in 1926. These visits captured his attention and interest for not only the spectacular Teton scenery, but also the shabby developments littering the roadway from Menor's Ferry to Moran and along the shores of Jenny Lake. Yellowstone Superintendent Albright seized an opportunity to explain to Rockefeller the essence of the Noble cabin meeting and the collective hope of protecting "this sublime valley" from unsightly commercial development. Rockefeller decided to purchase "offending private properties" with the intention of donating those lands for national park designation. He created the Snake River Land Company as a purchasing agent to mask his association and keep land prices affordable, since he knew landowners would undoubtedly inflate their asking prices if they knew of his connection.

The Snake River Land Company launched an ambitious campaign to buy over 35,000 acres for approximately \$1.4 million. What seemed like a simple and clear-cut plan developed instead into 20 years of bitter struggle, nearly tearing apart the Jackson Hole community. Intense hostility surrounded land acquisitions, and attempts by Rockefeller to gift the properties to the National Park Service met with strong resistance. Economic hardships suffered by ranchers during the 1920's helped ease some acquisitions. Many ranchers were actually relieved to sell and get out of business during a time of economic difficulty. In 1925, several ranchers circulated a petition in support of the private buyout, which countered conflicting opinions by Jackson Hole neighbors. Ninety-seven ranchers endorsed the petition's statement which stated, "...this region will find its highest use as a playground...The destiny of Jackson's Hole is as a playground, typical of the west, for the education and enjoyment of the Nation, as a whole." Perhaps this sentiment bears more credibility as an outright admission that ranching in Jackson Hole was difficult—if not impossible—than it does as a genuinely selfless act by the ranchers.

A Valley in Discord (1943-1950)

Because allegations were made that the Snake River Land Company used illegal tactics during the purchase of properties, a Senate subcommittee convened hearings in 1933 to investigate. When the hearings concluded, it was clear that claims about unfair business dealings by the Snake River Land Company and National Park Service were unjustified, and both agencies were exonerated. Wyoming Senator Robert Carey introduced a bill in 1934 to once again expand park boundaries. A compromise of this bill dealt with the reimbursement to Teton County for lost tax revenues. This bill, and another drafted in 1935, failed in the U.S. Senate. The tax issue, along with objections about including Jackson Lake because of the dam and reservoir, fueled anti-park sentiments all over again. During 1937 and 1938, the National Park Service prepared a document outlining the history of park extension and defending the importance of national park status on tourism. Again, divided sentiments flared and the expansion issue grew politically hotter. A group of locals calling themselves the Jackson Hole Committee vehemently opposed the park plan and encouraged the Wyoming delegation and Congress to follow their lead.

The park dream remained bruised and battered as controversy over park enlargement continued into the 1940s.

After purchasing 35,000 acres and holding the land for 15 long years, Mr. Rockefeller became discouraged and impatient with the stalemate surrounding his generous gift. In a famous letter to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Rockefeller wrote that if the federal government did not want the gift of land or could not "arrange to accept it on the general terms long discussed...it will be my thought to make some other disposition of it or to sell it in the market to any satisfactory buyers." This threat persuaded FDR to use his presidential power to proclaim 221,000 acres as a Jackson Hole National Monument on March 15, 1943. Robert Righter believes that Rockefeller threatened to sell in order to provoke action. His bold threat provided FDR with the motivation and a reason to circumvent obstacles created by Congress and the Wyoming delegation. Local backlash immediately followed as park opponents criticized the National Monument for being a blatant violation of states' rights. They also believed the Monument would destroy their local economy and rob their county tax base. Hoping to force a confrontation, armed and defiant ranchers trailed 500 cattle across newly created monument. Park officials ignored this stunt, but the cattle drive focused national attention on the Monument.

The controversy grew more strident, prompting Wyoming Congressman Frank Barrett to introduce a bill to abolish the Jackson Hole National Monument. The bill passed both the House and Senate, but President Roosevelt exercised a pocket veto to nullify it. In yet another attempt to overturn the proclamation, the state of Wyoming responded to the President's veto by filing suit against the Park Service. Although that suit failed in the court system, the acrimonious battle continued. The proclamation directed transfer of lands from the Teton National Forest to the National Park Service, which simply motivated Forest Service administrators to oppose the Monument as well. Transition between federal jurisdictions provoked several vindictive deeds; one vengeful act involved gutting Jackson Lake Ranger Station before turning it over to Park Service staff. Throughout these turbulent years, local park supporters often faced hostilities and boycotts of their businesses.

The Storm Passes

After World War II ended, attitudes began to change in Jackson Hole. Between 1945 and 1947, bills were introduced in Congress to abolish the Monument, but none passed. Local citizens slowly began to realize that tourism offered an economic future for Jackson Hole that they couldn't previously imagine. Eventually, opinions about park enlargement became more congenial. By April 1949, interested parties had gathered in the chambers of the Senate Appropriation Committee to work out a final compromise. Though it took decades of controversy and conflict, discord and strife, the establishment of a 'new' Grand Teton National Park finally occurred September 14, 1950, when President Harry S. Truman signed a bill merging the 1929 Park with the 1943 Monument to form a single enlarged 310,000-acre unit. Preservation of the Teton Range, Jackson Lake, and much of

Jackson Hole was finally entrusted to the National Park Service as a less divided and more intact natural environment.

Difficulties in the ultimate creation of Grand Teton National Park illuminate and emphasize the visionary goals of Horace Albright, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and other citizens who were pro-park. Legislation for the 1950 Grand Teton National Park contained significant compromises: 1) protection of existing grazing rights and stock driveways; 2) reimbursement to Teton County for lost tax revenues; 3) provisions for the controlled reduction of elk within park boundaries; 4) agreement that in the future, presidential proclamation could not be used to create a national monument in Wyoming; and 5) allowance for certain existing uses and access rights to forest lands and inholder (private) properties.

Heritage Preserved

Congress enlarged Grand Teton to its present size, "...for the purpose of including in one national park, for public benefit and enjoyment, lands within the present Grand Teton National Park and a portion of the lands within Jackson Hole National Monument." The conservation battle for Jackson Hole coupled with the philanthropic dedication of Mr. Rockefeller continues to impact the character of Jackson Hole to this very day. Imagine how different the Teton landscape would look if unbridled development had triumphed over preservation of natural resources. In celebrating Grand Teton National Park's 50th anniversary, we recognize and honor the dedication, perseverance and aspirations of visionary men and women who believed that the greatest good for the Teton landscape was to create a "public park or pleasure ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people." Robert Righter, author of *Crucible for Conservation: The Struggle for Grand Teton National Park*, asserts that what these visionaries achieved was "perhaps the most notable conservation victory of the twentieth century."

Credits

The *Creation of Grand Teton National Park* was written in January 2000 by Jackie Skaggs, 50th anniversary coordinator, with research, references, and quotations taken from *A Place Called Jackson Hole* by John Daugherty, Park Historian 1980-1991 and also from *Crucible For Conservation: The Struggle for Grand Teton National Park* by Robert Righter, research professor of history at Southern Methodist University in Texas. Footnote: This historic sketch was slightly revised in 2013 by Jackie Skaggs, current public affairs officer for Grand Teton National Park.

