

America's First Forester

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“Without natural resources, life itself is impossible. From birth to death, natural resources, transformed for human use, feed, clothe, shelter and transport us. Without abundant resources prosperity is out of reach” - Gifford Pinchot

It is hard to imagine that by 1850 an estimated 75% of New Hampshire land was cleared for agriculture. By the early 1900's, much of the northern forest was being cut at an unprecedented rate to provide timber for the growing nation. These large cuts were unsustainable and often resulted in huge fires started by old logging railroads. Much of the White Mountain National Forest was clear-cut and burned around the turn of the century.

Today a walk in the woods will tell you a different story. Over 85% of New Hampshire is forested, making it the second most forested state in the union. The timber industry is the third largest industry in New Hampshire and many million cords of wood are commercially harvested each year on public and private lands. Thousands of people travel to New Hampshire every year to enjoy our natural resources.

Forestry is the science of managing land for a sustained yield of timber products. It was created in Europe and brought to America over 100 years ago by a man named Gifford Pinchot. Pinchot studied forestry in Nancy, France, since no Universities in the U.S. offered a forestry program in 1885. During his studies he became a convert to the practice of selective harvesting of timber resources. Pinchot graduated in 1891 and returned to the United States to apply his new found passion.

Pinchot was appointed as the chief of the U.S. Division of Forestry in 1898, and by 1901 he was a trusted friend of President Roosevelt. After his inauguration in 1901, Roosevelt held a meeting with Pinchot to begin planning a national conservation policy. The two men worked closely together and in 1905 Pinchot became the first chief of the new United States Forest Service.

Pinchot restructured and professionalized the management of the National Forests and greatly increased their number and area. Together with President Roosevelt, 150 national forests covering 172 million acres had been created by 1910. Under Pinchot's leadership, the US Forest Service developed a strong utilitarian philosophy that forests could produce timber products **and** be maintained for the use and enjoyment of future generations. Pinchot phrased this philosophy as “The greatest good for the greatest

number, in the long run” emphasizing that forest management consists of long term decisions that affect all people.

There is some debate over who was the “Father of American Conservation”: George Bird Grinnell or Gifford Pinchot. I would have to say that Grinnell was the first person to popularize the importance of conservation and Pinchot was the first person to utilize science to put conservation to work. Pinchot believed that conservation and forest management went hand in hand. Pinchot practiced an unrelenting concern for the protection of the American forests. His scientific principles of systematic forest management helped guide the conservation of our forests in a very utilitarian way which benefited all people and helped build the quickly growing nation.

After his term as Forest Service Chief, Pinchot lived an activist lifestyle and continued to provide leadership in the management and protection of our forests. Over the last 100 years many men and women have been trained in the science of forest management at universities across the country. Foresters have learned how to cut trees for our present needs while simultaneously growing trees for future generations. For most foresters the greatest challenge is how to use, protect and enhance all of the forest’s attributes that we “the greatest number” enjoy every day. Without the actions of Gifford Pinchot, this science, philosophy and lifestyle would be very different today.