

OUR FEDERAL LANDS

From conquest and treaty to conservation, the story of our public lands has been a contentious one.

The Birth of a Nation



1776 The Declaration of Independence is signed.

1781-1802 The states cede "western lands" to the central government to create the public domain.

1783 Treaty of Paris is signed; U.S. gains more than 270 million acres east of the Mississippi River, not including the original 13 colonies.

1785 The Land Ordinance is created to manage land growth and the legal sale and settlement of public lands.

1789 The U.S. Constitution gives Congress the "... power to dispose of and make all needful rules and regulations respecting the territory and other property belonging to the United States."

1803 Louisiana Purchase nearly doubles the size of the U.S.; Ohio becomes the first state created from the public domain.



1804-06 Lewis and Clark Expedition.

1812 The General Land Office is created as a branch of the Treasury Dept. to administer and dispose of federal lands.

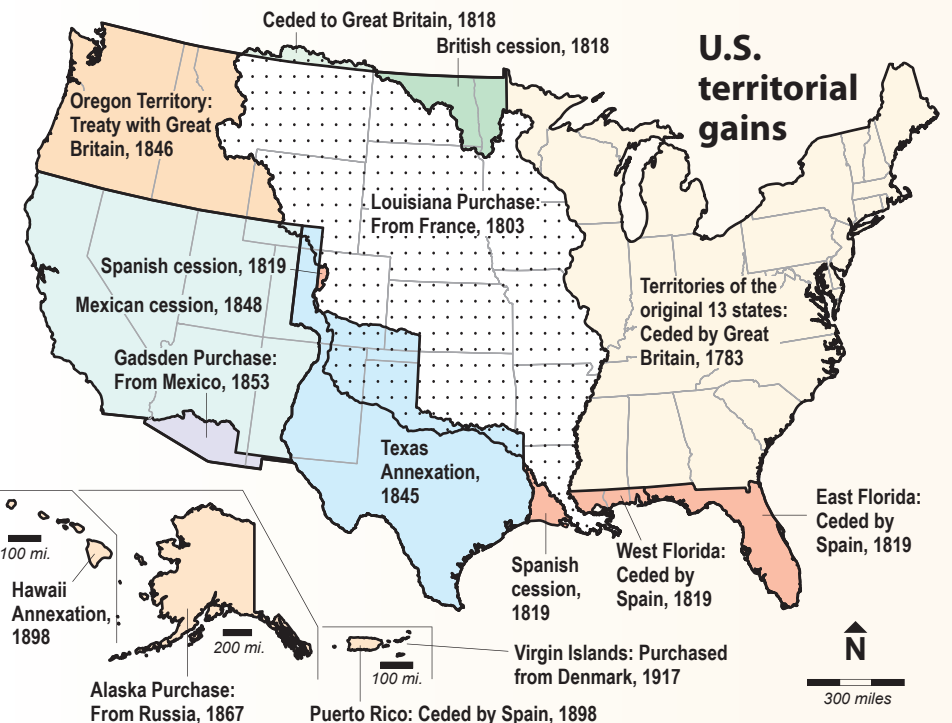


1819 Florida acquired through a treaty with Spain, adds more than 46 million acres to the public domain.

1824 Office of Indian Affairs is established within the Department of War.



This rendering by Charles M. Russell depicts the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804-06) meeting indigenous peoples on the Lower Columbia River.



Westward Expansion

1840s The great westward migration begins on the Oregon Trail.

1845 The Republic of Texas is annexed by the U.S.



1846 Oregon Compromise with Great Britain gives U.S. claim to Pacific Northwest lands south of the 49th parallel.

1848 Mexico cedes California, other western lands to the U.S.

1849 Department of the Interior is established. The General Land Office is transferred to the new department.

1853 Gadsden Purchase with Mexico adds 19 million acres in the Southwest.



1862 Homestead Act entitles settlers to 160 acres of public land, provided they reside on and cultivate the land for 5 years.

1867 Alaska Purchase from Russia adds 365 million acres of public land to the U.S.

1872 General Mining Law identifies mineral lands as a distinct category of land subject to exploration and occupation. Also, Yellowstone becomes the first national park in the U.S.

1877 Desert Land Act allows the dispersal of 640-acre tracts of arid public land to homesteaders upon proof they reclaim the land through irrigation.



1889 Oklahoma Land Rush begins.

The Conservation Movement

1891 The Forest Reserve Act or "Creative Act" allows the president to set aside forest reserves from the public domain. President Benjamin Harrison puts 13 million acres into forested reserve. Largely regarded as the beginning of the "conservation movement."

1893 McRae Bill authorizes 15 forest reserves.

1897 The "Organic Act" authorizes funds for administration of forest reserves from the Department of the Army to the General Land Office. President Grover Cleveland creates 21.4 million acres of forested reserveland. His successor, President William McKinley, adds 7 million acres.



1905 Congress transfers management of forest reserves to the Department of Agriculture,

eventually leading to the creation of the U.S. Forest Service.



1906 Antiquities Act permits federal protection of prehistoric, historic and scientifically significant sites and create national monuments.

1907 An amendment to the Ag Bill strips presidential power to create reserve land through executive order. President Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot create 16 million acres of reserve land before the law goes into effect.

1913-19 Several western state legislatures pass resolutions calling for ceding unreserved federal lands to the states.



1928 District land offices reduced to

29 from a high of 123 in 1890.

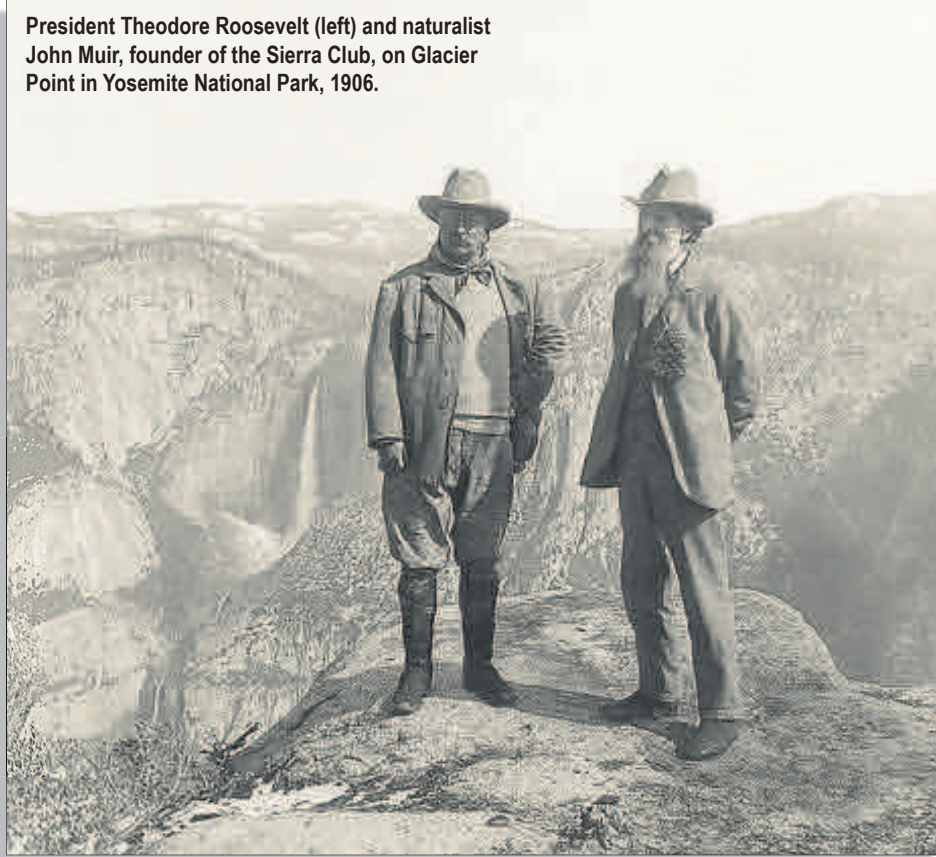


1929 The Great Depression begins; President Herbert Hoover proposes unallocated federal lands be ceded to state control. A subsequent bill fails to gain congressional support.

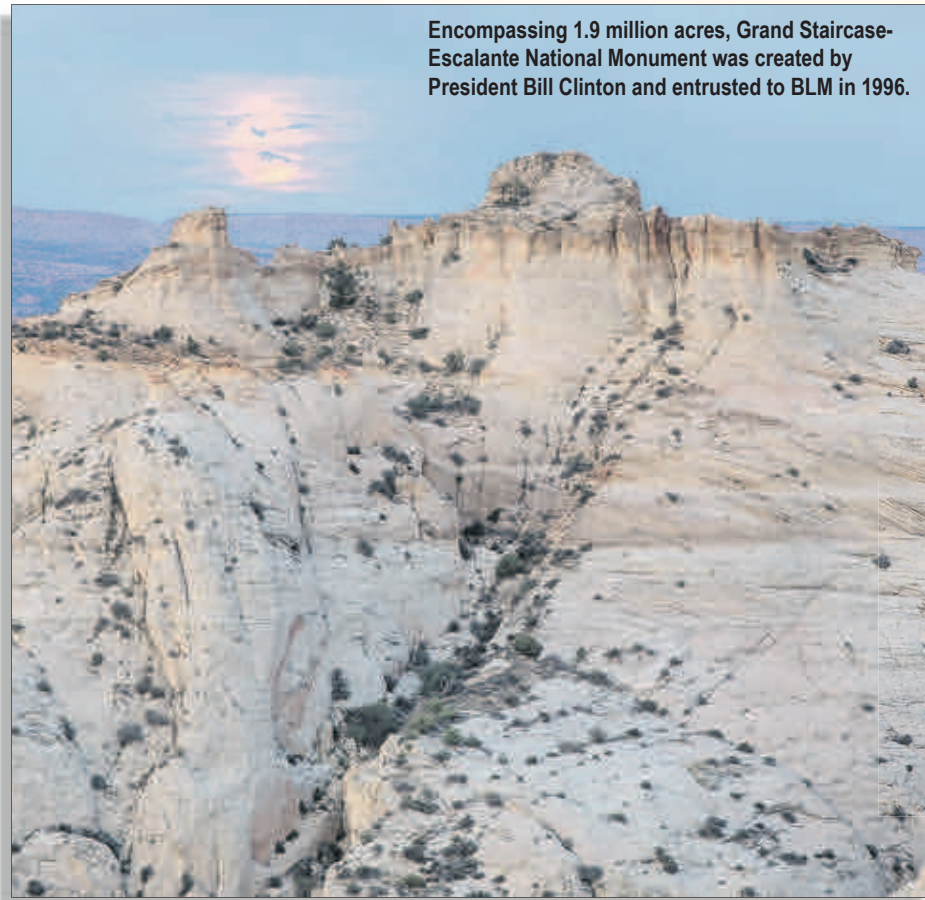
1934 Taylor Grazing Act places 80 million acres, mostly rangeland, into grazing districts to help protect against overuse.



1940 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is created within the Department of the Interior.



President Theodore Roosevelt (left) and naturalist John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, on Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park, 1906.



Encompassing 1.9 million acres, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was created by President Bill Clinton and entrusted to BLM in 1996.

The Immutable Public Lands

1946 Sen. Edward V. Robertson introduces legislation calling for ceding unreserved federal lands to state control; U.S. Grazing Service and General Land Office merge to form the Bureau of Land Management.



1959 Alaska formally admitted to the Union; Hawaii becomes 50th state.



1964-75 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution marks American escalation in Vietnam conflict.

1964 Public Land Law Review Commission is established; Wilderness Act extends protection to

underdeveloped federal lands to preserve their natural condition.

1966 National Historic Preservation Act expands protection of prehistoric, historic properties.

1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires all federal agencies to assess their environmental impact.

1970 President Richard Nixon creates the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a non-cabinet government agency to monitor and enforce environmental laws.

1973 Endangered Species Act provides federal protection to threatened plants, animals and the ecosystems they rely upon.

1976 Federal Lands Policy and Management Act requires public lands remain in federal ownership and maintained for multiple use; repeals all pre-existing Homestead Acts, phasing out homesteading.

1979 Nevada and four other western states pass legislation calling for the

return of BLM-managed lands to the states. The "Sagebrush Rebellion" gains political allies in President Ronald Reagan and Secretary of the Interior James Watt.

1990 The Northern Spotted Owl is designated a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, thereby affecting timber sales on federal land within its range.



1996 Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is designated as BLM's first national monument.

2008 BLM-managed lands are officially designated as the National System of Public Lands.

Today The federal government owns and manages approximately 630 million acres, roughly 28 percent of the 2.3 billion acres that make up the U.S. land base.