

INTRODUCTION

150th ANNIVERSARY

1849 - Creation of the “Home Department”

The mission of the Department of the Interior is to protect and provide access to our Nation’s natural and cultural heritage and honor our trust responsibilities to Tribes. This mission has substantially changed over the last 150 years since Congress created the Home Department or Department of the Interior to oversee Indian Affairs, explore the western wilderness, direct the District of Columbia jail, mark boundaries, conduct the census, and conduct research on geological resources. The Department’s first budget totaled approximately \$5.3 million. The westward movement was summed up by Horace Greeley’s advice, “Go West, young man, go West!” The “forty-niners” hurried across the

“Great American Desert” to reach the gold fields of newly acquired California.

1899 - The first great conservation era

Interior’s budget totaled \$161.4 million, primarily for the General Land Office, Pension Office, and Indian Office. Frederick Jackson Turner had declared that “the frontier was closed” at the Columbia Exposition in Chicago in the summer of 1893. John Wesley Powell had explored the Colorado River and argued that the west (and eventual States) should be delineated on logical watersheds rather than political boundaries. “Seward’s Folly,” the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867, added substantial acreage to the public domain.



Yellowstone had been created as the first National Park in 1872 based on reports from the Hayden expedition and spectacular paintings and photographs by Thomas Moran and William Henry Jackson. The prophets of the fledgling conservation movement such as John Muir and George Bird Grinnell preached preservation of the natural landscape. President Theodore Roosevelt would establish the first National Wildlife Refuge in 1903.

1949 - Post war growth

Interior's budget totalled \$500 million, with 62 percent of funding allocated to the Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power Administration for water development and irrigation projects as the nation's great dam building era continued. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Interior Secretary Harold Ickes had shepherded the nation through the Great Depression and transformed the role of the Federal government — and the management of our natural and cultural resources — through innovative programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The post war economy and increased leisure time, the baby boom, and the development of the interstate transportation system led to increased interest and enjoyment of the Nation's natural and cultural resources. Now that most of the "desirable" public domain had been homesteaded, Reorganization Plan No. 3 of 1946 combined the General Land Office and the Grazing Service into the Bureau of Land Management. The Everglades National Park was created in 1947. Increasing public interest and the courage of visionaries like writer (and former FWS employee) Rachel Carson would lead to passage of significant legislation including the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Wilderness Act.



1999 - On the verge of the next millennium

The Department has entered a third era in the conservation movement. Landscape scale approaches seek to preserve and restore the Nation's natural and cultural resources, while ensuring the Nation's economic development needs. Successful efforts include the Florida Everglades, Bay-Delta restoration, and the President's Forest Plan in the Pacific Northwest. The 1999 budget request totals \$8.1 billion to support 69,100 park rangers, biologists, geologists, engineers, and school teachers delivering quality services to the American people.

The popular National Park System comprises over 376 units and 83 million acres visited by 275 million people annually. The National Wildlife Refuge System has grown to 512 refuges covering 93 million acres visited by 30 million people each year. The public lands, once called the "land that no one wanted," administered by BLM, now produce \$1.2 billion annually from oil, gas, and coal, as well as an additional \$400 million from timber and grazing, while 74 million people vie for recreation, wildlife, and wilderness opportunities.

The U.S. Geological Survey is the Nation's premier natural science agency providing cutting edge cartographic, geologic, biologic, and hydrologic research and monitoring techniques to guide land and resource management decisions. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has made great strides in promoting self-determination of American Indians and Alaska Natives. The Bureau of Reclamation manages, develops, and protects water and related resources. The Minerals Management Service supervises the production of some one million barrels of oil per day from the Gulf of Mexico Outer Continental Shelf. The Office of Surface Mining supervises the reclamation of abandoned mine lands.