ABSTRACT. The damming of Hetch Hetchy Valley and the epic battle between John Muir and Gifford Pinchot over their competing visions for the future of Yosemite has often been represented as a benchmark in the history of the American conservation movement. However, more than two decades before Hetch Hetchy's fate was decided, another nearly forgotten battle helped define the role of wildlands preservation, this time in the contested landscape of Yellowstone. In 1883 the politically powerful Northern Pacific Railroad attempted to monopolize commercial interests within Yellowstone and breach the park's boundary with a spur line to a neighboring gold mine. Opponents, including federal scientists and outspoken members of the emerging conservation movement, feared this initial violation of park space was the precursor to additional locomotives carrying tourists deep into the heart of Yellowstone, ruining its spirit of wilderness forever. This article reconstructs those competing visions for the Yellowstone landscape and illustrates how Americans' perceptions of wildlands preservation and the national park idea changed during the last decades of the nineteenth century.

INTRODUCTION

The battle between John Muir and Gifford Pinchot over the damming of the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park has been called the most famous dispute in the history of American conservation and the national parks movement (Runte 1997; Shabecoff 2003; Nash 2001). This struggle, which came to a head in 1912-1913, illustrated the stark differences between preservationists, led by Muir, and conservationists, led by Pinchot. Preservationists valued the aesthetic and spiritual value of wilderness, while conservationists valued the efficient and scientific use of natural resources. But more importantly, some have argued that Hetch Hetchy represented the first time that the competing visions of wildlands protection and commercial development were debated before a national audience. Furthermore, the event galvanized support for wildlands preservation, turning scattered sentiment into a national movement (Kline 2000; Nash 2001). Without disputing the importance of Hetch Hetchy, my research suggests we must first look at a case study two decades earlier when conservation leaders such as George Bird Grinnell, George Graham Vest, and eventually John Wesley Powell, fought to stop an equally significant commercial development where the national parks movement was born. The outcome of this battle in early Yellowstone National Park marked a noticeable shift in public perceptions about the concept of a national park, served as a catalyst for the nation's emerging conservation movement, and heightened awareness of the concepts of protecting watersheds, timber, and wildlife habitat.

The establishment of Yellowstone by Congress in 1872 has been described as a monumental act of idealism that sparked a new kind of land ethic and a global preservation movement (Frome 1992). As such, the management policies developed there, ranging from establishing acceptable levels of commercial development to deciding which types of tourist activities would be allowed, shaped the future of preserves in the United States and abroad. There were both positive and negative aspects of this legacy. The popularity of Yellowstone encouraged other grassroots attempts to establish American parks and many were eventually successful. Efforts to protect and expand Yellowstone were also responsible for creating what became the first national forest lands (Smith 1999). On the negative side, however, the removal of Native Americans in Yellowstone inspired a policy of Indian dispossession that continued for several decades (Spence 1999). And as Richard West Sellars (1997) has noted, the policy established in Yellowstone of leasing key sites to private resort developers was sometimes copied verbatim in subsequent national parks, arguably creating a legacy of overdevelopment.

The significance we attribute to Yellowstone today, however, was far from apparent during the park's early years when it was virtually ignored by the government. Without even a rough management plan for guidance, park officials learned by trial and error, literally field testing the concept of a national park. It was a tenuous time for the young institution. The first major trial for Yellowstone managers came during an 11-year period beginning in 1883. Officials of the Northern Pacific Railroad, exemplars of America's burgeoning industrial economy, already controlled the chain of hotels at key attractions within the park, and hoped to continue exploiting the region with additional rail lines. But first the Northern Pacific had to convince the public that railroads and national parks were compatible.

At odds with this vision for developing the country's only national park was the idea espoused by a growing number of federal scientists and conservationists--that the Yellowstone plateau was valuable for its wildlife habitat and watersheds. Both values would have been threatened by the proposed railroad developments. People living near Yellowstone in Montana also added their voice to the debate. Many locals craved the jobs and wealth that would have come with development, and looked hopefully to the day their territories would achieve statehood. Despite those feelings, nearby residents also worried about Yellowstone's wildlife, and fought to improve the park's management.

With so many competing visions, Yellowstone, and with it the entire concept of a national park, could have followed many different paths. Instead of being identified today as the protected core of the 18 million-acre Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, Yellowstone could have been dissected by tourist-carrying locomotives with trinket shops and theme restaurants dotting the rail lines. Instead of the Lamar Valley being so rich in wildlife it has been called the American Serengeti, this area of the park could have been filled with...
time-share condominiums and guest ranches. Many aspects of national parks that we take for granted today took shape during the formative years in our earliest national parks.

This article reconstructs the debate over the proposed railroad to illustrate the various conflicting visions for this first-of-its-kind public landscape. The outcome of this conflict is illustrative of the continuing challenges of park managers trying to find the balance between preservation and economic development. Recent examples in Yellowstone include battles over winter snowmobile use, wolf reintroduction, and the killing of bison once they leave the protection of the park. As Mitchell (2000) has argued, the meanings of landscapes are continually contested as part of our ongoing "culture wars." Such conflicts within national parks are of particular interest to geographers because these sites represent landscapes of ideology, where the park becomes a symbol of the values, the governing ideas and the underlying philosophies of the dominant culture (Meinig 1976). Historian Mark David Spence (1999, 7) has noted that "as America's holiest shrines, national parks reflect a whole spectrum of ideas about nation, culture and even natural origins." The study of national parks has traditionally been the work of historians, yet has been steadily gaining more attention from geographers (Foresta 1984; Dilsaver 1990a, 1990b; Dilsaver and Tweed 1990; Demars 1991; Palka 1995; Meyer 1996; Young 1996; Wyckoff and Dilsaver 1997; Benton 1998; Dilsaver and Wyckoff 1999; Smith and Wyckoff 2001).

YELLOWSTONE AND THE NORTHERN PACIFIC: EARLY PARTNERS

Setting aside an area the size of Delaware and Rhode Island combined in 1872 for its aesthetic and geologic significance was an amazing accomplishment for such a young country. Yet the initial momentum for wildland preservation was short lived, and Yellowstone remained America's only national park until 1890 when Sequoia and Yosemite were established (Foresta 1984; Mackintosh 1991). Yellowstone was virtually ignored by Congress for the first six years of its existence and the act that set it aside was vague. The Interior Secretary was responsible for protecting the park from "injury or despoilment," yet there were no specific laws for governing the region and no funding for enforcement, road building or even to pay salaries (Hampton 1971). Yellowstone's first superintendent had to volunteer his time, and as a result, only visited the park twice in almost five years. It was not until six years after the park's establishment, in June of 1878, that Congress finally set aside $10,000 to "protect, preserve and improve" the park.

It was this atmosphere of neglect and vulnerability within the park that awaited the Northern Pacific's transcontinental line when it reached Montana Territory in 1882. Unquestionably the railroad took advantage of the uncertainties in early Yellowstone, however, its involvement began much earlier. The story of the establishment of Yellowstone cannot be told without acknowledging the behind-the-scenes influence of Northern Pacific officials (Schullery 1997). Nathaniel Langford, who became the first park superintendent, had been a member of General Henry D. Washburn's exploration team into Yellowstone in 1870, and had met with Northern Pacific financier Jay Cooke before the trip began. Cooke and Langford plotted how to draw attention to the future railroad route through Montana Territory, and Langford was hired to provide publicity for the expedition. As part of this assignment, Langford wrote two articles for Scribner's Monthly (June 1871 and February 1872), and delivered 20 lectures on the beauty of the Yellowstone region (Haines 1977). Cooke also realized the benefit of having pictures to promote Yellowstone, and so helped pay for artist Thomas Moran to accompany geologist Ferdinand Hayden on his survey expedition in 1871. Moran produced 16 watercolor paintings (Zenen 1997), which in conjunction with Hayden's official report of his exploration and the images of expedition photographer William Henry Jackson, convinced Congress to protect Yellowstone (Hyde 1990; Runte 1997).

If Yellowstone set precedents for the concept of national parks, so too did the railroads for American big business. Expanding railroads were key players in the nation's drive to industrialization (Chandler 1965). The great expansion of railroads across the United States following the Civil War had already brought far-reaching changes to western landscapes by the 1880s. The majority of the transcontinental railroads had received government subsidies in the form of land grants, for example, and had used this acreage to generate money from land or timber sales (Broadbent 1997).

The grant to the Northern Pacific, 47 million acres, was the largest ever offered. It gave the Northern Pacific effective control for up to 100 miles on either side of the right-of-way and thus considerable political weight (ise 1920). Through its subsidiary companies, the corporation controlled significant mineral and timber resources throughout the entire Northwest. Their leaders were lords of the realm, and, once in possession of this land, they "classified and packaged according to the salable characteristics" of each locale (Magoc 1992, 69).

THE RAILROAD PROPOSAL

The proposed Northern Pacific spur would have cut across the northeast corner of Yellowstone, snaking its way 55 miles from Montana along the Lamar River to reach the small mining community of Cooke City, just outside the park. Various proposals for the railroad would have given the Northern Pacific control of as much as a mile-wide corridor along the proposed route. Transporting ore and equipment to and from the Cooke City mines was the stated purpose of the spur. However, railroad opponents believed that its construction was merely a way to get a commercial "foot" in the door, and that the true goal was to build an additional line carrying tourists to all the major attractions within the Park.

Railroad officials were aware of the outset that the Yellowstone region held potential for mining. Prospectors had been on Crow Indian land along the banks of Soda Butte Creek just outside the northeast corner of the park since the mid-1860s, and by the 1870s, this area was known as the New World Mining District. In 1880, Jay Cooke, Jr., son of the Northern Pacific financier, promised to extend a spur line into this area when the main line reached Montana. The elated miners, believing that such a spur would ensure the development of a prominent mining center, named their town Cooke City after their benefactor (Hampton 1971). Two years later Congress eliminated Crow Indian title to the New World District, and thereby opened the area to development (Haines 1977).

As soon as the Northern Pacific's transcontinental line reached a point roughly 50 miles north of Yellowstone, railroad crews began building a line to the park from present-day Livingston, Montana, through the Paradise Valley. By 1883, this line reached Cinnabar, Montana, its terminus, a few miles from the park's northern boundary (Fig. 1). Railroad officials quickly organized a celebratory junket into the preserve, which they began calling "Wonderland" in promotional literature. They invited eastern investors, European royalty and news correspondents from both continents. Even President Chester A. Arthur toured the park that summer with a few key policy makers--a trip that generated tremendous publicity. Quickly, Yellowstone catapulted into the national consciousness as articles about Arthur's adventures appeared daily in the press for at least three weeks (Bartlett 1985). As geographer Judith Meyer (1996) has noted, Yellowstone's sense of place grew from the perceptions of these early visitors.

[FIGURE 1 OMITTED]
By 1883 Cooke City was booming. Town boosters predicted nearby ore bodies would match those of Leadville, Colorado, and the town boasted two gold smelters, two sawmills, three general stores, two hotels, and several saloons and brothels. Much of the profit, however, was eclipsed by the high cost of transporting materials overland the 55 miles that separated Cooke City from Cinnabar, the terminus of the Northern Pacific Yellowstone line (Avant Courier 1886). Montana mining inspector G.C. Swallow, an ardent supporter of the proposed spur, claimed rail access would have added 20 dollars of profit per ton to the “millions of tons” of ore around Cooke City (Enterprise 1890).

Although the distance was short, a direct route between Cooke City and Cinnabar was not possible. The Beartooth Mountains, which climb to elevations above 12,000 feet, tower above Cooke City just to the north. To the West are more mountains and rugged country. The most practical route was to follow Soda Butte Creek southwest into Yellowstone. The route would then have followed the broad valley of the Lamar River until it joined the Yellowstone River above Tower Falls and then continued west until it reached Cinnabar (Fig. 2).

THE LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

Yellowstone’s neighbors were typical of many Americans of the time. They believed that industrialization and nature were compatible. Railroads were a mechanism that would “annihilate distance” and, like a divining rod, “unearth the hidden graces of landscape” (Marx 1964). Many believed the railroads, in opening the West, would bring forth a new version of Jefferson’s pastoral vision for America. Ralph Waldo Emerson, among other notables, saw the railroad as an instrument advancing America’s claim to be nature’s nation (Magoc 1999).

The belief that park managers could both protect and develop Yellowstone was evident in many letters to the editor of Montana newspapers. Often within the same letter or article, a local business owner would decry the slaughter of Yellowstone’s wildlife or damage being done to geothermal features, but then predict huge profits when areas within the park were opened to coal mining or some other form of resource extraction. “The park is too large—larger than any cause whatever demands,” the Avant Courier reported in 1881. “It includes mineral districts which should be segregated, and as additional tracts valuable for mineral may be discovered, the act of establishing the park should be so amended that they may be legally occupied by settlers.” The article went on to chastise the government for damage occurring to the park’s natural resources and to demand the establishment of a police force to protect the geyser basins from vandalism (Avant Courier 1881).

As the above letter illustrates, local residents also had a fairly narrow view of the types of landscapes that were worthy of protection within a national park. These included the spectacular geysers, hot springs, mud volcanoes, and other geothermal features. The stunning Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone and massive Yellowstone Lake were also prized by locals (Smith 1999). However, there was no shortage of wilderness in the Northern Rockies, and the landscape outside the geyser basins and the heavily traveled Grand Loop looked similar to areas just outside the reservation boundary. Local supporters of the proposed spur to Cooke City voiced this feeling. In the words of G. C. Swallow (1890), the outspoken Montana mining inspector: “All well know there is not a single natural feature north of the Yellowstone and Soda Butte creek that is mentioned in the guide book as worthy of the tourists’ attention.” In fact, when federal scientists later argued that the railroad would damage critical watersheds, timber and wildlife habitat, it was the first time the northeast corner of the park had been publicly assigned any value (Smith 1999).

Business owners in the two Montana communities closest to Yellowstone also hoped to profit from the railroad proposal and future developments. Bozeman was established on the trail to the gold mines in 1864 about 90 miles to the northwest. Livingston was a product of the new Northern Pacific line located 65 miles north of the park. A coalition of business owners published a letter in the Avant Courier (1884) asking, “Is there an inscrutable, mysterious, spirituous something about the National Park that a railroad would desecrate? Is there a hole in the ground which gurgles and sputters hot water, so sacred that commerce and civilization” should not pass that way? Another railroad enthusiast was General James S. Brisbin, a rancher south of Livingston in the Paradise Valley. He predicted that a substantial new mining town would not just benefit mining interests, but enhance the value of every acre of agricultural land in the vicinity. Criticizing a congressman who opposed the railroad, Brisbin said the development of Montana was more important than the “inviolate maintenance of a mere show wilderness, uninvaded by the signs and accompaniments of civilization. If gold or silver were found in the Park, a way would be devised to obtain it” (Enterprise 1885).

Editors of the Bozeman Avant Courier and Livingston Enterprise newspapers were shameless boosters of their communities and argued relentlessly for entering Yellowstone with a rail line. With that being the case, it is difficult to determine from the written record how much local opposition existed. However, there was a brief uprising against the development and corporate America by one newspaper editorial writer:

It is true the titled foreigner and the codfish aristocracy of America ... would prefer to ride to and through the Park in a palace car, to gaze at the geyser, canons, waterfalls ... But to build a railroad there means to foster a corporation soul-less and exacting: to pay tribute for viewing the wonders which by right should ever remain free as the air we breathe ... There should remain in America at least one spot free from the despoiling hand of the grasper after wealth; a locality where the natural formations will not suffer from direct contrast with artificial constructions (Avant Courier 1883a).

The uprising was short-lived because the writer had apparently written his tirade while the owner of the newspaper was out of town. About three weeks after the editorial was published, the Avant Courier’s owner returned home and reversed the newspaper’s stand:

The idea that a narrow gauge road would necessarily mar the beauties, or in any serious degree destroy the natural attractions of that section of country, in this age of progress and rapid transit, is hardly worthy of serious consideration. The construction of a railroad through the Yellowstone would cut as much of a figure on its superficial area as a thread of silk through a map of the United States, and no more ... (Avant Courier 1883b)

Finally, one last motivation driving local support for the Cooke City spur line was the fear that if a railroad did not enter the park through Montana, it would enter instead through Wyoming or Idaho, and thereby rob them of the mining spoils. Some people believed that it was not a question of if a railroad would enter Yellowstone, but simply which railroad would first earn the right (Magoc 1999).

The Union Pacific Railroad, for example, at least briefly considered the possibility of a feeder road from its main line across southern Wyoming.
THE NATIONAL DEBATE

With such strong local support for developing Yellowstone, winning approval in Congress for the spur must have appeared at first to be a sure bet. Such approval probably would have happened if not for two key factors. First, strategists for the Northern Pacific decided to lay the groundwork for a second profit-making scheme while they waited for the company’s main line to reach Montana. Tourism, they thought, might make as much money as hauling mining ore, and so they plotted to take control of leases for hotels and transportation within Yellowstone. This maneuvering attracted national attention and soon created a public-relations nightmare. Second, as public awareness of Yellowstone grew, so too did the attention of federal scientists and conservationists, who had different visions of what values should be protected within a national park. They fought to protect their vision of Yellowstone, much the way John Muir would later fight for Yosemite.

Before Yellowstone could become a successful summer resort luring tourists for the Northern Pacific, it needed hotels, restaurants and adequate access to the major attractions. With no government funding for these improvements on the horizon, officials of the Northern Pacific saw an opportunity to seize exclusive development rights. In 1882, Patrick Conger had been named Yellowstone’s superintendent. He was the brother of Senator Omar D. Conger of Michigan, a long-time supporter of the Northern Pacific. With Conger in Yellowstone and friends in the Interior Department, the deck was stacked in favor of the railroad (Magoc 1999).

The Northern Pacific quietly established a unit to develop the needed tourist services called the Yellowstone Park Improvement Company. In September of 1882, Acting Secretary of the Interior Merritt L. Joslyn granted this company exclusive rights to hotels, stages and telegraph service within the park. Under the lease agreement the Improvement Company would pay only two dollars per acre for 640-acre sections surrounding all of the park’s most desirable sites. The lessees also were to have the right to cut timber for construction and fuel, and to farm some areas of the park (Grinnell 1883). They even received exclusive rights to put steamers and other boats on Yellowstone Lake.

Carroll T. Hobart, a section superintendent for the Northern Pacific, led the subsequent construction. He cut timber wherever he found it in the park and contracted with local hunters to supply meat to his crews (Bartlett 1985). Hobart’s crews built sawmills, and erected the 250-room National Hotel at Mammoth Hot Springs. This hotel was 414 feet long and 54 feet wide. It reached four stories in height at some places and consumed 1.6 million board feet of park timber (Fig. 3).

The Improvement Company’s rapid and heavy-handed progress in Yellowstone quickly came under attack, and local support for the Northern Pacific began to slip. After company officials were accused of killing game within the park to feed their workers, for example, the Bozeman Avant Courier (1883c) published the following editorial against the “Despoliation Company”:

What a glorious place for a slaughterhouse! Here we [the Improvement Co.] can secure all the meat necessary to feed the men in our employ, without the difficulty attendant upon taking care for cattle or the expense consequent upon a purchase from a butcher. Such doings are infamous. Let it be known that there is no law to protect game, and no one will argue that it will not become extinct.

A more powerful voice against the leases and the killing of wildlife came from George Bird Grinnell, editor of Forest and Stream magazine. A noted explorer and sportsman, Grinnell was later largely responsible for the establishment of Glacier National Park in 1910 (Ise 1961; Runte 1997). His contribution to the Yellowstone debate began when he published at least 26 articles on the subject within four months beginning in December of 1882. In one article entitled “The Park Grab,” he reported that the plot to monopolize the “people’s Pleasuring Ground” was flourishing (Grinnell 1883). A few voices were raised against the Northern Pacific, “but with a powerful lobby to back them, and no opposition from the Interior Department, the grabbers have little to fear” (Grinnell 1883). When the Improvement Company began construction of its first hotel in Yellowstone before a lease was finalized, an incensed Grinnell wrote the following editorial:

With a boldness that is astonishing, they have absolutely gone on and begun to build their hotels thus virtually taking possession of a government reservation, using timber which is not theirs, and killing the government game and fish to feed their employees. They have seized a portion of the public territory and declare that the revenue to be derived from it shall flow into their own pockets (Grinnell 1886a).

The Improvement Company’s Yellowstone leases also attracted the ire of the broader public. A good example is the passionate letter to the editor of the New York Times in December of 1882 that called the Improvement Company’s proposal a scare to give away the national park. “Let the people see all the articles of this lease,” he wrote. “Let them scan it closely, and they will then cry ‘Shame on the dominant party that passes this deed of greed! Shame on the Administration that permits it! Shame on the men who accept it’!” (Parker 1883). Times editors also joined the fray, reporting that some sort of “hugger-mugger” was being practiced with the park leasing. They accused the federal government of turning Yellowstone over to speculation because it could not take proper care of the land.

It is a shame that a great and rich Government like ours should seem to be incompetent to defend and preserve a reservation made for public enjoyment. It would be a humiliating confession of weakness, if, unable to defend the park, Congress should decide to let the Interior Department lease the domain to speculators, and land-grabbers (New York Times 1883).

Northern Pacific officials probably did not suspect it at the time, but through the wrath of George Grinnell, they had become a lightning rod for the emerging conservation movement. Grinnell, together with his close friends, General Philip Sheridan and Senator George Graham Vest of Missouri, knew how to cause considerable trouble for the railroad officials.

Grinnell had known Sheridan for many years. When Grinnell was attending Yale, the general had made it possible for the young student to accompany General George Custer on his 1874 expedition to the Black Hills (Magoc 1999). 20 Grinnell also had joined Captain William Ludlow’s reconnaissance of Yellowstone in 1875, which gave him his first glimpse of the wonders of the region, as well as the destruction of park wildlife by poachers (Hutton 1985) (Fig. 4).
General Sheridan had traveled through Yellowstone during the summers of 1881 and 1882 and reported with dismay that, with the arrival of the railroad, the park had been rented out to private parties for the purpose of making money. Sheridan was also concerned about the slaughter of wildlife there by commercial hunters and suggested expanding the park by 3,344 square miles to create an additional preserve for the "large game of the West, now so rapidly decreasing." Sheridan's plan would have nearly doubled Yellowstone, expanding the boundaries 40 miles to the east and 10 miles to the south (Sheridan 1882).

Vest, the Missouri Senator, became an outspoken supporter of the park after accidentally overhearing a discussion in a saloon in Dakota Territory. Several men were bragging about a "shrewd business deal they had swindled from the Interior Department" (Magoc 1999, 62). Vest discovered the men were talking about the Improvement Company's leasing monopoly of Yellowstone, and he returned to the East to begin working with Sheridan on legislative remedies. While Grinnell flayed the Northern Pacific on the front page of Forest and Stream and Sheridan used his political connections to work behind the scenes in Washington, Vest used his position as chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories to promote protective legislation for Yellowstone (Magoc 1999).

By the end of 1883 when the Northern Pacific began efforts to breach park boundaries, it had been bloodied in the press over the leasing scandal and company officials knew they would not get a free ride on their spur proposal. Moreover, with the publicity from President Arthur's trip, more Americans than ever were aware of Yellowstone's wonders. And thanks to the improved access to the park by rail, visitor numbers were skyrocketing. This also played a role in the confrontation.

It also soon became clear that the Northern Pacific was coveting a greater prize than Cooke City. The company had surveyed the interior of the Park for an additional track that would carry tourists (Congressional Record 1892; Magoc 1999). Grinnell reported that surveyors for various railroad companies had "overrun" Yellowstone and that their wooden stakes could be found even in the most secluded valleys (Grinnell 1886b). Opponents of the spur feared just such a development. The new spur would set a precedent, they said. Soon, proposals would be made to circle the interior of the park and then who knew what might come.

The legislative battle over the spur produced a stalemate of sorts for a decade. Senator Vest and his supporters killed any bills that would have allowed railroads to enter Yellowstone. In response, railroad proponents in Congress attached riders that would have permitted the spur construction to any of Vest's bills that sought additional funding or other protections for the park. Vest was then forced to kill his own bills.

The Northern Pacific's supporters in Congress used similar arguments to those of local residents—that nothing "important" would be put at risk. In February 1884, the Senate Committee on Railroads reported in favor of one such bill, quoting Henry Gannett of the U.S. Geological Survey, that a spur railroad could not "injure the park as a pleasure resort," because it "traverses a region in which there are no objects of interest ... which differ in no essential particular from similar scenery elsewhere." The committee reported that its members "have not felt justified in permitting a mere pleasure-ground, of however great interest, to be a barrier to the development of important and material interests of the country ..." (Senate 1884).

Railroad supporters also tried to win sympathy for the downtrodden Cooke City miners, who were described as sitting on a mother lode with no way to make their operation successful. The House Committee on the Public Lands pronounced the Cooke City mining district to be the "most valuable and extensive" in the world. More than 1,500 claims were awaiting the "vitalizing touch" of a railroad. The committee then quoted Northern Pacific engineers who claimed the route through the Park was the only feasible way to bring down the exorbitant freight charges of $40 to $60 per ton (House 1892).

Some members of Congress used the debate about the proposed spur to challenge the entire concept of a national park. Was it a good use of public money? Senator John Ingalls of Kansas, for example, had problems with the high cost of operation. "I should be glad, as I said before, if this whole project would be abandoned," he said of Yellowstone. "There are other natural objects of interest in this country, the canons of the Colorado, and inaccessible mountain summits, and cataracts, and caverns in the earth, and other objects ... I think the original segregation of this territory from the public domain was a mistake, a mistake that is becoming more apparent as time goes on ..." Ingalls suggested returning Yellowstone to the stewardship of private citizens (Congressional Record 1884a).

As debate over the railroad intensified, Grinnell and his Forest and Stream magazine continued to lead the public attack against what he called the "park grabbers." His arguments were often emotional and sometimes exaggerated. Many focused on aesthetics and wildlife. He even predicted that the park's rivers and springs would all dry up because sparks from the railroad would destroy the forest (Grinnell 1890). While an obvious overstatement, fires caused by locomotives were common, and the threat of forest fires in Yellowstone was a consistent argument used against the spur proposal.

Grinnell also was aware of Americans' dislike of monopolies. With the railroad leasing scandal fresh in people's memories, he pushed hard on this front and his strategy proved effective with both the public and members of Congress. He reminded his readers that Yellowstone was the "people's park," and that the efforts of the Northern Pacific to gain exclusive rights to tourist hotels and rail transportation would violate this precept. An editor of the New York Times agreed with Grinnell. After a bill to provide funding and management for Yellowstone was killed three times because riders for the spur were added, he wrote:

The House Committee is willing to sacrifice the rights and the privileges of the whole people of the United States to a petty local interest. That is the wrong point of view. The people of the South and of the East have equal rights in the Park with the people of Montana, and Congress should protect them in their enjoyment (New York Times 1890).

Harper's Weekly joined the fight as well, arguing that Montanans had no more right to defame the "nation's park" with a railroad than did citizens of Washington, D.C., to "set up cigar and candy stands" on the landing of the Washington Monument (Magoc 1999, 131).

The "people's park" argument against monopolizers became a rallying point for several congressmen. Senator John A. Logan of Illinois, for example, made this impassioned speech on the Senate floor:

The Congress of the United States seems to be a mere football to be used according to the desires of men who wish to see everything in this Government for their own personal gain. There is not a government on earth, I believe, except our own...
that if it owned this beautiful park would allow it to be invaded or interfered with or used for any purpose accept that which it was contemplated by the bill that was first passed reserving it ... (Congressional Record 1884b)

Senator Daniel W. Voorhees of Indiana also made a strong plea for the park. "If this is to be done," he said, "then it is just as well to throw open this reservation that we have set aside and be done with it and let each person go in for a grab" (Congressional Record 1884b).

ECOLOGICAL VALUES

While Grinnell, Vest, and others tried to evoke a sense of national pride in Yellowstone, a group of federal scientists, Army officers, and bureaucrats began to advance a new argument for protection—its important watersheds and its wondrous wildlife. This group included Arnold Hague, a scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey; W. Hallett Phillips, a special investigator for the Interior Department; Lieutenant Dan Kingman of the U.S. Army Engineers; and several Army officers working as acting superintendents of Yellowstone. These men had become the "experts" on Yellowstone and their views were often quoted by the national press and included in committee hearing reports.

Hague, a professionally trained geologist, had worked with Clarence King on his 1870 survey of the fortiieth parallel. When Major John Wesley Powell became director of the U.S. Geological Survey in 1883, he assigned Hague to Yellowstone. Hague, in turn, invited Grinnell to join him on an 1884 survey of the park and the two became lifetime friends (Reiger 1975; Broadbent 1997).

Hague's primary concern for Yellowstone was protecting its timber, which he argued would maintain healthy watersheds, and he was also concerned about the railroad's impact on wildlife. Not only did he take a firm stand against the railroad for these reasons, he also pushed for Yellowstone's expansion: "If timber lands near the source of four large rivers are to be carefully guarded by national legislation. There is no better place to begin the work than right here at the headwaters of the Yellowstone and Snake, which send their waters from the heart of the continent to both the Atlantic and the Pacific" (Hague 1889).

Phillips, an attorney who came from a well-known family in Washington, D.C., was appointed by the Secretary of the Interior to investigate the management of Yellowstone. Phillips spent the summer of 1885 in the park and returned with a thorough report detailing problems and threats. Most important, he summarized what he thought were the key caretaking responsibilities: protecting wildlife, "preserving the park as much as possible in a state of nature," and maintaining "the natural forests in a region where so many great rivers of the continent find their source" (Phillips 1885). Needless to say, Phillips was critical of railroads entering Yellowstone, and he predicted ruinous forest fires caused by locomotive sparks. He also argued that the Lamar Valley was "one of the wildest portions of the reservation, within which the herd of buffalo, sole remnant of the once mighty herds," now roamed (Phillips 1885).

Lieutenant Dan Kingman, a third important authority on the new park, was assigned to Yellowstone in 1883 by the U.S. Army Engineers to bring professionalism to the design of interior roads. While completing this work he joined other Army officers managing Yellowstone who spoke out against any railroads. "I have given this subject the most careful thought and study," he said, "and I should regard their introduction as the most serious injury that could be inflicted upon the park ... and the construction ... would be especially deplorable because it seems so unnecessary" (House 1894).

FINAL ATTEMPTS

Weary of fighting to enter the park by the 1890s, Northern Pacific officials and other railroad proponents turned to two other tactics. First, they proposed reducing the size of the park so that the spur would no longer have to actually enter Yellowstone. Wyoming Senator Francis E. Warren introduced such a bill on February 26, 1892, which would have removed the northeast corner of the park. This maneuver seemed at first to be viable because George Vest, Yellowstone's champion in the Senate, did not oppose the bill. As he testified on the Senate floor: "I confess, with considerable humiliation, that I have been defeated, and I have found ... that a persistent and unscrupulous lobby are able to do almost what they please with the public domain." Without the spur entering park boundaries, no precedent or monopoly would be created, and this had been the core of the senator's opposition (Congressional Record 1892). Warren's bill thus passed the Senate, but Congressmen were no more willing to downsize Yellowstone than they were to let a railroad cross its border, and the bill died in the House. When a similar attempt was made the following year, House Public Lands Committee Chairman Thomas McRae argued that the park should remain dedicated for the "benefit and enjoyment" of the entire country, and that the boundaries should remain intact (Cramton 1932).

The second strategy for railroad lobbyists, this time in 1894, was to win approval for a more "environmentally friendly" railroad. Electric engines, cleaner and quieter, would have eliminated the fire hazard, although they would have required the construction of power generators on two waterfalls along the Yellowstone River. The bill for an electric railroad faltered, as did others before it, to Senator Vest's counterclaim for improved protection, funding, and management for the park (Haines 1977).

The debate over the above strategies from the 1890s demonstrates how critical the earlier scandals and charges of monopolization were to the defeat of the Northern Pacific's plans. The electric railroad received some endorsements by those who had previously fought against the spur, including that of engineer Hiram Martin Chittenden, a staunch supporter of the park. He believed that new technology would not pose as serious a threat to the timber and wildlife (Chittenden 1920). Moreover, if railroaders had been successful in segregating the northeastern corner of the park, many of the arguments against the spur line would have disappeared or have been greatly diminished. Without the previous decade of leasing scandals and broadly published reports of poaching Yellowstone wildlife by construction crews, an electric railroad running adjacent to Yellowstone might easily have come to pass.

The last serious attempt to build the line to Cooke City was a bill in 1894 to allow a steam-powered railroad through the park. This plan, however, came up against an adverse report issued by the House Committee on the Public Lands, one which cited opposing testimony by an impressive group of men: acting Yellowstone superintendent Captain George Anderson, General Sheridan, Lieutenant Kingman, Hague, and Phillips. Even the director of the U.S. Geological Survey, John Wesley Powell, warned that, if the spur line was approved, Congress would then have to grant future requests until the park was "webbed with the arteries of intercourse and commerce, and cease to exist as the creature" established by the legislation of 1872 (House 1894). The writing was clearly on the wall. Late in 1894, Northern Pacific president Thomas E. Oakes announced that his company would no longer consider a spur to the Cooke City mines.

CONCLUSIONS
The scientific arguments made by Hague, Phillips, and Kingman, and the continuous coverage of park issues in Forest and Stream, the New York Times, Harper's Weekly and other publications had turned the tide of public opinion against the proposed spur line. This fact was demonstrated by a poll taken of park visitors in 1892. They voted five to one against the spur line (Chittenden 1920). As Chris Magoc has argued (1999), only places that Americans know well, both personally and through the mass market, can be saved from the rapid pace of development. Whereas Yellowstone avoided industrialization in this way, the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite was drowned by the city of San Francisco because of its isolation and lack of tourist access. Ironically, much of the public awareness and access by tourists needed to defeat the railroad proposal was created by the Northern Pacific itself through its marketing efforts to boost passenger numbers. Once the line reached the park's northern boundary in 1883, annual visitor numbers increased five-fold due largely to this publicity. By 1890 more than 53,000 people in total had witnessed Yellowstone firsthand (Haines 1977).

It took thousands of Americans setting foot in and experiencing Yellowstone before it could make the leap in public perception from public-lands experiment to national icon. Annual reports from the Interior Department and other documents reflected this change. In 1885 Interior Secretary L.Q.C. Lamar received a letter from Wyoming's territorial governor urging the resolution of laws and jurisdiction because "the park has now assumed a national importance" (Warren 1885). The Interior Secretary's 1886 annual report echoed this theme. So did that of Investigator Phillips, who argued that the increasing visitor numbers justified Congress's original wisdom of setting aside its lands: "The Park has now assumed such national importance as to imperatively call upon Congress to provide some system of justice by which the Park and the public visiting it can be protected" (Phillips 1885).

The victory of Yellowstone's supporters over the Northern Pacific signaled a shift in the way many Americans viewed the region. Historian Alfred Runte has argued that "worthless lands" were protected in our early national parks. By worthless he meant an apparent lack of valuable resources, or potential for settlement or agriculture. As evidence for this claim in the case of Yellowstone's establishment, Runte (1997) cited language in the congressional debate when park supporters assured their peers that there was nothing to lose in the bill's passage. Comparing these early records with those from the railroad debates illustrates a remarkable change in how this place was viewed. The battle waged by park supporters elevated the ecological and aesthetic values of wildlands to new heights and infused the idea of a national park with relatively new concerns about watershed sanctity and habitat protection. No longer was Yellowstone considered worthless—it had become a contested landscape—known to have a vast potential for tourism development, possibilities for settlement, and nearby mineral resources. Yet these traditional values were subordinated, as Americans became aware of the wildlands being protected and Yellowstone became a sacred place.

NOTES

(1.) Mackinac Island in Michigan became a national park in 1875, but later returned to state management.

(2.) Grinnell was given the opportunity to join Custer's doomed journey to the Little Big Horn, but fortunately chose instead to take a job with Forest and Stream.

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