

Issue: Conservation

Reform Leaders: John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt

Source: Our Forest and National Parks, by John Muir, 1901

“So far our government has done nothing effective with its forests, though the best in the world...and then has left its fields and meadows, forests and parks, to be sold and plundered and wasted at will, depending on their inexhaustible abundance. Now it is plain that the forests are not inexhaustible, and that quick measures must be taken if ruin is to be avoided...Uncle Sam is not often called a fool in business matters, yet he has sold millions of acres of timber land at two dollars and a half an acre on which a single tree was worth more than a hundred dollars....The methods of lumbering are as yet grossly wasteful. In most mills only the best portions of the best trees are used, while the ruins are left on the ground to feed great fires, which kill much of what is left of the less desirable timber, together with the seedlings, on which the permanence of the forest depends....”

Source: President Theodore Roosevelt’s Letter to Congress on the state of the nation’s resources, 1908

“The great basic facts are already well known. By the middle of the [20th century] perhaps one hundred and fifty million Americans, and by the end very many millions more, must be fed and clothed from the products of our soil. With the steady growth in population and the still more rapid increase in consumption, our people will hereafter make greater and not less demands per capita upon all the natural resources for their livelihood, comfort, and convenience. It is high time to realize that our responsibility to the coming millions is like that of parents to their children, and that in wasting our resources we are wronging our descendants....” “The function of our Government is to insure to all its citizens, now and hereafter, their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. If we of this generation destroy the resources from which our children would otherwise derive their livelihood, we reduce the capacity of our land to support a population....”

Source: Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir on Glacier Point, Yosemite Valley, California, ca. 1906

