

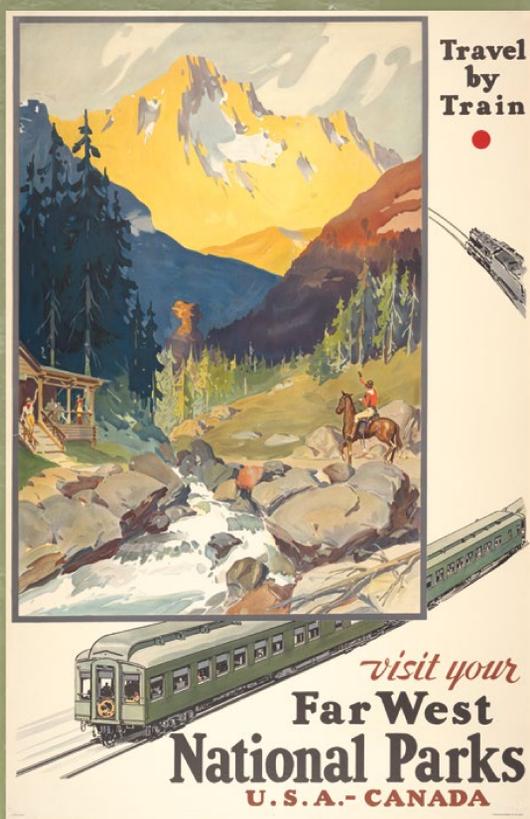


# Wisconsin's John Muir

An Exhibit Celebrating  
the Centennial of the  
National Park Service

**“Oh, that glorious  
Wisconsin wilderness!”**

“Everything new and pure  
in the very prime of the  
spring when Nature’s pulses  
were beating highest and  
mysteriously keeping time  
with our own!”



**“Wilderness is a  
necessity...”**

Mountain parks and reservations  
are useful not only as fountains of  
timber and irrigating rivers, but as  
fountains of life.”

**This exhibit was made possible through generous support from  
the estate of John Peters and the Follett Charitable Trust**



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# Muir in Wisconsin

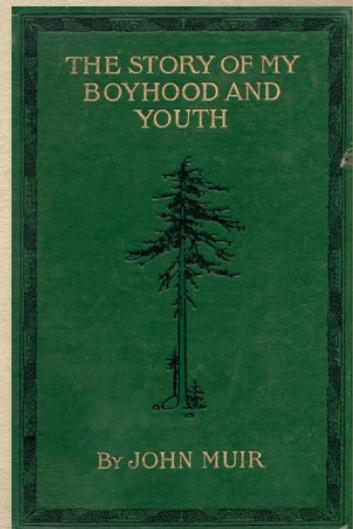


MUIR'S LAKE (FOUNTAIN LAKE) AND THE GARDEN MEADOW  
Sketched from the roof of the Bur-Oak Shanty

**“When we first saw Fountain Lake Meadow, on a sultry evening, sprinkled with millions of lightning-bugs throbbing with light, the effect was so strange and beautiful that it seemed far too marvelous to be real.”**

John Muir (1838–1914) was one of America's most important environmental thinkers and activists. He came to Wisconsin as a boy, grew up near Portage, and attended the University of Wisconsin. After decades of wandering in the mountains of California, he led the movement for national parks and helped create the Sierra Club. But for much of his life, Muir's call to protect wild places fell on deaf ears.

Muir studied science in Madison but quit in 1863 without a degree, **“...leaving one University for another, the Wisconsin University for the University of the Wilderness.”**



San Francisco, March 27, 1913.

Mr. M. S. Griswold,  
28 Putney Block, Waukesha, Wis.  
My dear old Friend & Teacher:-

I was delighted with your long letter recalling our happy university days. The older we grow the more fondly do we look back to the days of youth and early manhood when all the world lay before us to choose our ways. A first volume of autobiography entitled "My boyhood and Youth", has just been published by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. of Boston, and as soon as I receive copies I will take great pleasure in sending one to you suitably inscribed. I am sure you will read with lively interest the account I give in full of my first lesson in botany from you while we stood together under an overhanging branch of a locust tree near the steps of the North dormitory. The book is mostly a boy's book, giving an account of my school days in Scotland and life on a Wisconsin farm, and then going to the University, the book ending with my University studies when I started off into the wilderness.

*Muir's letter to the classmate who taught him botany at UW*



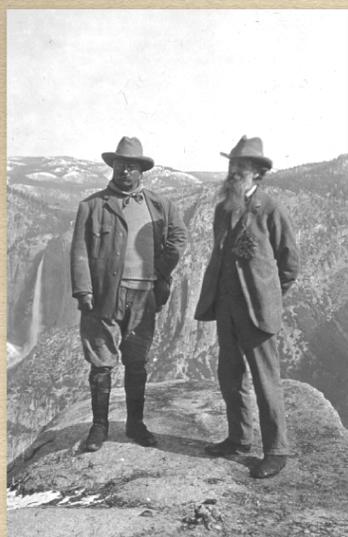
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# The Movement for National Parks



*Yosemite Valley*

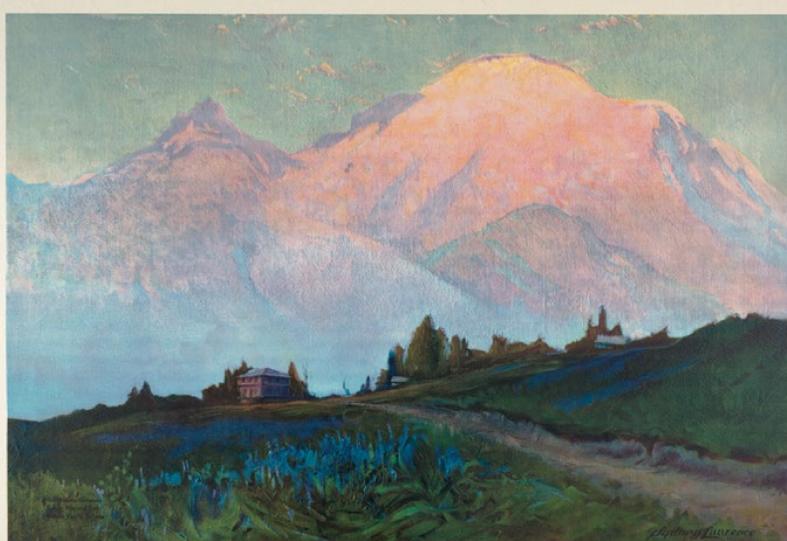
“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike.”



In 1872, Congress named Yellowstone the first national park. Muir began lobbying for conservation two years later. By 1890 he had helped establish Sequoia National Park and secured federal protection for Yosemite.

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt spent three days camping with Muir in Yosemite. Roosevelt went on to create five more national parks, 55 wildlife refuges, 18 national monuments, and 150 national forests.

In 1916, Congress created the National Park Service to manage the parks.



The New Yakima Gateway to  
**RAINIER NATIONAL PARK**



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# Wisconsin's National Forests, Lakeshores, Trails & Refuges

The federal government began protecting fragile areas in Wisconsin in 1913. Federally protected lands now preserve 2,700 square miles of natural habitat in our state. These include the following places:



ASHLAND, LAKE SUPERIOR AND THE APOSTLE ISLANDS.

**1913.** The Gravel Island and Green Bay National Wildlife Refuges off the Door Peninsula.

**1924.** Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge along the Mississippi River.

**1933.** Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest across 12 northern Wisconsin counties.

**1936.** Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge along the Mississippi River in Trempealeau County.

**1939.** Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in northern Juneau County.

**1941.** Horicon National Wildlife Refuge in Dodge and Fond du Lac counties.

**1968.** Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway in northwestern Wisconsin.

**1970.** Apostle Islands National Lakeshore in Lake Superior.

**1979.** Fox River National Wildlife Refuge in Marquette County.

**1980.** Ice Age National Scenic Trail, nearly 1,200 miles along the edge of the last glacier.

**1980.** North Country National Scenic Trail, entirely across northern Wisconsin.

**1989.** Driftless Area National Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Wisconsin.

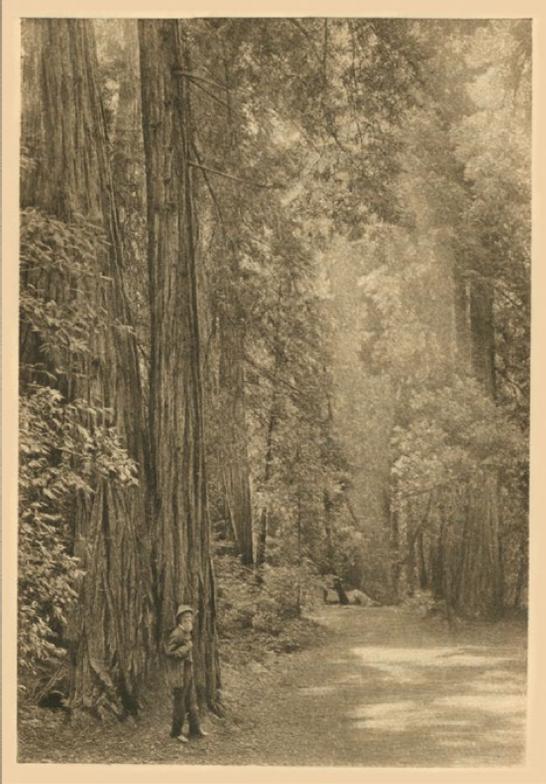
**1998.** Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge on Lake Superior near Ashland.



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# Muir on Trees and Forests

“The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness”



In December 1874, Muir climbed a ten-story pine to ride out a storm in its top branches:

“I kept my lofty perch for hours, frequently closing my eyes to enjoy the music by itself, or to feast quietly on the delicious fragrance that was streaming past... never before did these noble woods appear so fresh, so joyous, so immortal.”



But most of Muir's contemporaries saw forests simply as an economic resource. Between 1870 and 1910, loggers cut down two-thirds of all the trees in northern Wisconsin. In some counties, more than 90% of all trees were cut, leaving vast tracts of barren land.

“Any fool can destroy trees. They cannot run away; and if they could, they would still be destroyed -- chased and hunted down as long as fun or a dollar could be got out of their bark hides, branching horns, or magnificent bole backbones.”

Sustainable forestry only began late in Muir's lifetime and professional reforestation efforts started only in the 1930s.



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# Muir on Birds and Hunting

“With red-blooded playmates, wild as myself, I loved to wander in the fields to hear the birds sing...”



*Passenger Pigeon*

Of all God's feathered people that sailed the Wisconsin sky, no other bird seemed to us so wonderful...”

In Muir's youth during the 1850s, millions of passenger pigeons migrated in flocks so large they blocked out the sun. Some Wisconsin roosts occupied every tree for more than 100 miles.

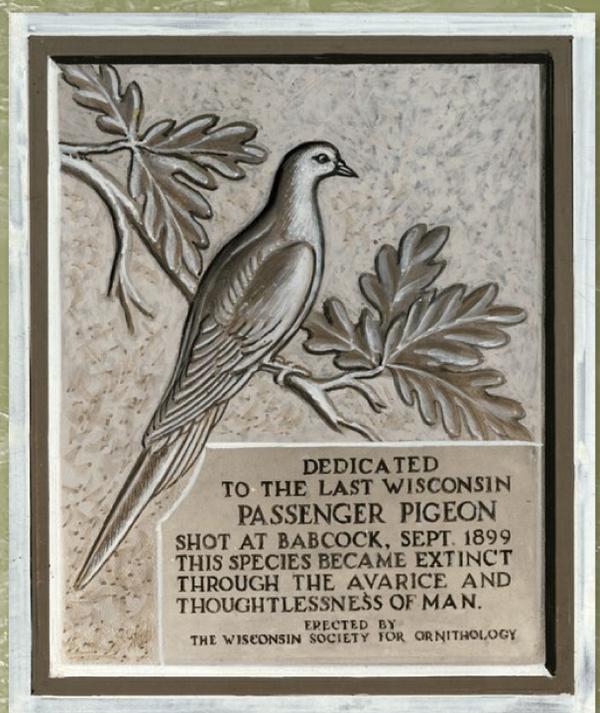
Yet by the time he died in 1914, not a single passenger pigeon was left alive.

Passenger pigeons are only the best-known extinction. Between 1878 and 1918, Midwestern market hunters killed three million birds each year. Besides the passenger pigeon, 24 other bird species were eliminated from at least one Midwestern state.

## Muir admired birds and deplored this over-hunting:

“I have often been delighted to see a pure, spiritual glow come into the countenances of hard business-men and old miners, when a song-bird chanced to alight near them. Nevertheless, the little mouthful of meat that swells out the breasts of some song-birds is too often the cause of their death. Larks and robins in particular are brought to market in hundreds.”

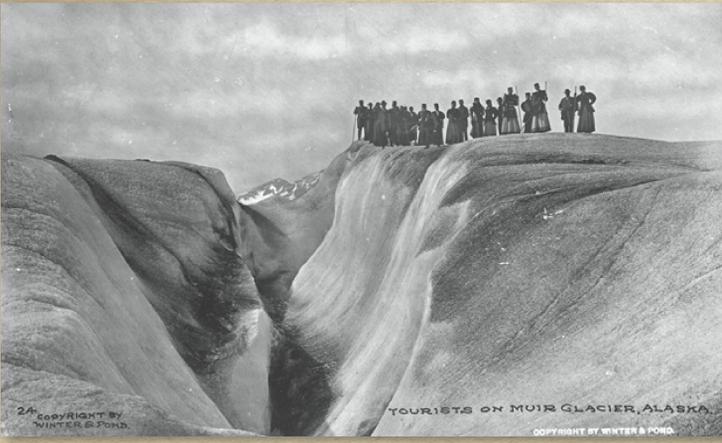
The wholesale slaughter of birds only ended after Muir's death, with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Conservation efforts since then have restored most species to viable populations but others, like the passenger pigeon, have vanished forever.



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# Muir on Glaciers and Climate

**“How much longer this little glacier will live will, of course, depend upon climate and the changes slowly effected in the form and exposure of its basin.”**



During the 1870s, Muir studied remote glaciers in California and Alaska and described how warming climates had affected them over the centuries.

Since his death in 1914, air pollution and greenhouse gases have warmed the atmosphere and dramatically accelerated such changes. A century ago, 150 glaciers populated Glacier National Park. Today, only 25 survive.

**“Pollution, defilement, squalor are words that never would have been created had man lived conformably to Nature.”**

Muir first visited the Alaskan glacier named for him in 1879. This black-and-white photo shows its 300' high terminal moraine in 1892. The color photo was taken from the same spot in 2005. The terminal moraine has retreated 30 miles upriver and the inlet is now filled with open water.

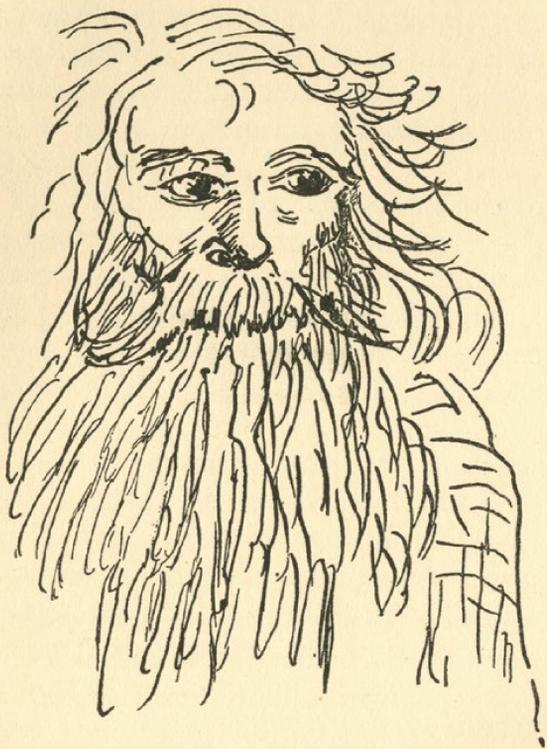
Similar glacial retreat has been found around the globe as the earth's atmosphere has warmed.

Scientists at the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts predict that our state's growing season, crop selection, storm severity, soil stability, lake levels, and public health will all be powerfully affected in the years to come by the warming climate.



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# Muir's Legacy



A SELF-PORTRAIT  
Drawing in letter of February 23, 1887  
to Miss Janet Douglass Moores

“I wandered away on a glorious botanical and geological excursion, which has lasted nearly fifty years and is not yet completed, always happy and free, poor and rich, without thought of a diploma or of making a name, urged on and on through endless, inspiring, Godful beauty.”



Muir felt a mystical reverence for nature, which he viewed as sacred:

“Oh, these vast, calm, measureless mountain days, inciting at once to work and rest! Days in whose light everything seems equally divine, opening a thousand windows to show us God.”

If Muir were alive today, he'd point out that we can have pollution, extinctions, and droughts or we can recognize nature's miracle and create a better world. And as an activist he'd ask each of us, **“What are you going to do?”**

## Learn More

The Internet Archive ([www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)) offers free downloads of all Muir's books in epub, pdf, txt and other formats.

The Digital Public Library of America ([www.dp.la](http://www.dp.la)) shares hundreds of free texts and thousands of free photos related to Muir.

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