



# 125 YEARS OF THE SIERRA CLUB

## THE FIRST 50 YEARS



U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt (left) and John Muir, on Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park. By Underwood & Underwood 1906, Public Domain

In 1907 the Sierra Club opposed a plan to dam and flood the Hetch Hetchy Valley within Yosemite National Park to meet the water needs of a growing San Francisco. The Club saw this as a violation of the protected status of national parks.



In 1905 the Sierra Club had one of its first conservation victories when John Muir convinced President Theodore Roosevelt to back a proposal to transfer management of Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove from the state of California back to the federal government, thereby making Yosemite National Park whole.

**LET EVERYONE HELP TO SAVE THE FAMOUS HETCH-HETCHY VALLEY  
AND  
STOP THE COMMERCIAL DESTRUCTION WHICH  
THREATENS OUR NATIONAL PARKS**

To the American Public:  
The famous Hetch-Hetchy Valley, next to Yosemite the most wonderful and important feature of our Yosemite National Park, is again in danger of being destroyed. Year after year attacks have been made on this Park under the guise of development of natural resources. At the last regular session of Congress the most determined attack of all was made by the City of San Francisco to get possession of the Hetch-Hetchy Valley as a reservoir site, thus defrauding ninety millions of people for the sake of saving San Francisco dollars.

As soon as this scheme became manifest, public-spirited citizens all over the country poured a storm of protest on Congress. Before the session was over, the Park invaders saw that they were defeated and permitted the bill to die without bringing it to a vote, so as to be able to try again.

The bill has been re-introduced and will be urged at the coming session of Congress, which convenes in December. Let all those who believe that our great national wonderlands should be preserved unmarred as places of rest and recreation for the use of all the people, now enter their protests. Ask Congress to reject this destructive bill, and also urge that the present Park laws be so amended as to put an end to all such assaults on our system of National Parks.

Faithfully yours,

*John Muir*

November, 1909.

Read carefully pp. 20-21 and help to save the Park.

Although John Muir and the Sierra Club lost their battle when the valley was lost in 1913, their strong and public opposition ultimately resulted in a widespread conviction that national parks should be held inviolate. Many proposals to dam national parks since that time have been stopped because of the efforts of citizens inspired by John Muir, and today there are legitimate proposals to restore Hetch Hetchy.

John Muir had long advocated the creation of a bureau to oversee and protect the national parks. After Muir's death in 1914, the Sierra Club continued to advocate for its establishment. On August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed an act creating the National Park Service. The first director, Stephen Mather, was a Sierra Club member.

Helping to protect redwoods, defeating plans to dam parts of Yellowstone NP and King River, establishment of Kings Canyon NP and enlargement of Sequoia NP were some of the other major campaign successes over the next quarter of a century.

***“These temple-destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar. Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people’s cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man.”***

Muir was an ardent campaigner against the flooding of Hetch Hetchy and this quote and his campaign letter to the American public leaves no doubt as to the strength of his opposition.

Hetch Hetchy Side Canyon, c. 1908  
By William Keith - Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Public Domain