

Conservation Matters

A monthly column focused on conservation education, as the result of collaboration among several area conservation commissions and organizations. If your town's commission or conservation organization would like to contribute articles, please contact Jessica Tabolt Halm jesshalm78@gmail.com

Title: Theodore Roosevelt, conservationist

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In the run up to his appointment as Secretary of the Interior, Ryan Zinke said that he was a Roosevelt conservationist. Following his appointment as Secretary, Zinke has reduced the size of many of our national monuments and has proposed offshore drilling along all of our coasts except for Florida. Perhaps, as Seth Meyers says, on his show, it's time for a "closer look" as to what it means to be a Roosevelt conservationist.

Theodore Roosevelt, our 26th president, was perhaps one of our most active presidents. He was born in New York City in October of 1858 and died at his home in Oyster Bay, Long Island, in January of 1919. In between he served as: Police Commissioner for the City of New York, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Governor of New York, member of the NY state assembly (a number of times), 25th Vice President of the United States, and following the death of McKinley, the 26th President of the United States. His travels took him to all four of the five continents. His visit to Panama to view the construction of the Panama Canal was the first visit of a president of the United States to a foreign country while in office.

In terms of his relationship to nature, his life is somewhat of a paradox. He was an avid sportsman and his homes were lined with trophy animals from North and South America and Africa, yet at the same time he was a competent naturalist and wrote many articles and books about animal life. His intent throughout his life was to preserve as much space for animal and plant life. As President he was able to do this, often against Congressional wishes. He worked with Gifford Pinchot and turned the Bureau of Forestry into the US Forest Service (1905). During his time as President he was able to add thousands of acres to the holdings of the Forest Service, including the establishment of 150 National Forests of which the Shoshone National Forest was the first. In NH, the White Mountain National Forest was established in 1918. He enabled the passage of the National Antiquities Act in 1906 and set aside 18 National Monuments. Although we don't have any National Monuments in NH, we do have the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site (established official in 1977). During his tenure in office, five new national parks were added (it wouldn't be until 1916 the National Park Service was established). There are no National Parks in NH, although the proposed Great North Park would include some of northern NH.

In his travels throughout the United States and particularly during the time he was in Florida awaiting passage to Cuba where he would later lead the charge up Santiago Hill, he realized that many bird species were being decimated by the hat makers of NYC. Often rather than simply pulling the plumes from the birds, the bird hunters would simply kill the birds for their plumes. Roosevelt was disturbed by this action and he was able to set aside 51 bird preserves. The history of these refuges is fairly complex. The US Fisheries Commission was established in 1871. The Division of Biological Survey was established in 1896. The two groups went through a number of name changes, but in 1940 they were fused and housed in the Department of the Interior as the US Fish and Wildlife Service. In New Hampshire there are four refuges under the control of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. They are: Great Bay, John Hay, Umbagog, and Wapack National Wildlife Refuges.

In the period of time following the deaths of his mother and his first wife, Roosevelt escaped to the Dakota territory (now South Dakota) where he purchased a large amount of acreage. During this time of grieving he gained solace by performing "cowboy tasks" and hunting. Even after his subsequent marriage to his second wife, he returned to the ranch. The ranch is now part of the US National Park System as the Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Given the information in the preceding paragraphs, one can easily see what values a Roosevelt conservationist should demonstrate. Persons desiring additional information should query Wikipedia or check out of the library, *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America* by Douglas Brinkley.