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To Conserve Unimpaired: The Evolution of the National Park Idea.

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horticulturalist John Bartram, including that of his son William Bartram, who had recently published (in 1791) a list of over 200 species of birds in his influential travelogue through the American South. The move could not have been more serendipitous for Wilson. William Bartram, at age 63, became his mentor and teacher in natural history, ornithology, and art. Only 5 years later, Wilson published the prospectus for *American Ornithology* and began the task of obtaining subscribers as he traveled, researched, and perfected his craft of drawing, engraving, and hand coloring his images of birds.

Wilson's goal was ambitious. He wished to produce the scientific accounts of each species of bird, and he possessed the literary skills to offer a readable text. His narrative was focused on the bird's diet, plumage, anatomy, behavior, niche, and economic impact—and to complement his scientific text were his illustrations. A great strength of *Alexander Wilson* is in its detailed account of the development of its subject's art as it progressed from sketches to hand-colored, copper plate engravings. Over 200 pages of text—nearly half of the book—are dedicated to the chapter "Illustrating *American Ornithology*." Combining excerpts from *American Ornithology* with nearly 100 illustrations from the Ernst Mayr Library of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University (and various other repositories), authors Edward H. Burtt Jr. and William E. Davis Jr. go to great length to analyze Wilson's choices of species and composition.

Wilson tended, at times, to place birds in settings in a manner more reminiscent of eighteenth-century bird illustrations, which, today, strike the viewer as stylistically awkward. His illustrations evolved from placing birds on stump pedestals or branches to those with background (albeit stylized) landscapes and accompanying ecological information. It is abundantly clear from his sketches—some are stunning portraits—that Wilson possessed an eye for detail regarding the anatomy, feathers, and behavior of his models. His preliminary drawings display an artist's insight that the engraved versions often lack. These remarkable works include a bald eagle with the talons of one foot sunk into a scavenged fish—a choice of inadvertent support for Benjamin Franklin's position that this bird was ill suited as the national bird. Burtt and Davis remark of a clapper rail that its "eye and its inset and placement are superior in the drawing, which is the case for many of Wilson's birds" (p. 214); that is, in this and other cases, Wilson's engraver had difficulties with eyes and bills.

Confident in his ability to sell his work by subscription, Wilson demanded of himself both wide and constant travel; at the same time, he continually observed and sketched birds. But this process literally exhausted him. By 1811, he had completed five volumes; 1 year later, he had nearly finished the sixth and was researching the last three. His savings were depleted, and his health had deteriorated. In 1813, at age 47, Wilson died, an apparent victim of dysentery. The ninth and final volume would be finished by an associate and published posthumously.

As a deist who saw a divine hand in nature, Wilson sought to portray a "simplicity of truth and nature" (p. 44). He wanted to demonstrate the importance of observation (a fundamental part of Wilson's methodology that derived from William Bartram's influence), and he believed in his scientific account of America's avifauna as a means to instruct the common man in the identification and general knowledge of endemic bird species. This book is a considerable achievement—not just in the understanding of Wilson himself but in that of the history of ornithology.

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THE BEST IDEA STILL BEING PERFECTED

To Conserve Unimpaired: The Evolution of the National Park Idea. Robert B. Keiter. Island Press, 2013. 368 pp., illus. $35.00 (ISBN 9781597266604 paper).

National parks are *institutions*—"the prescriptions that humans use to organize all forms of repetitive and structured interactions" (Ostrom 2005, p. 3). As such, they change in accordance with human interactions and values, responding to economic drivers, visitor patterns, politics, development, and sometimes even scientific information. The *idea* of a national park seems to change more slowly, however, exhibiting a sort of inertia. This tension, between the ideals and expectations of a national park on one hand and the realities of operating a park on the other, provides the theme to Robert B. Keiter's book *To Conserve Unimpaired: The Evolution of the National Park Idea.*

Although Keiter holds these two perspectives up as controversy, the tension is a healthy one (at least for those not having to run the parks themselves), because it engages the idealists, the managers, the politicians, the visitors, and the neighboring communities in a dialogue that should result in compromise. The national park is said to be the United States's best idea (a phrase that has been credited to various people, according to the author), but Keiter argues that the national park project is not one idea but many—wilderness area, tourist destination, recreational playground, commercial commodity, ancestral homeland, natural laboratory, wildlife reserve, and ecological cornerstone. The lodestar for US national parks is the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916, which contained the following mandate:

> The service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known

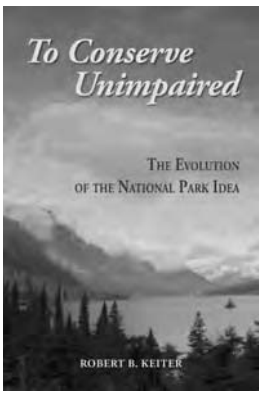
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> as national parks,… which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. (§ 1)

Inherent in this mandate is the long-standing struggle between conservation and public enjoyment; it is an internal conflict made greater by the dramatic increase in the use of national parks over the last century.

To Conserve Unimpaired details the major ideas that have shaped the American view of the national park. The book discusses several parks, using them as examples, then extends the argument to the national park system as a whole. It is a good book but a limited one—it neglects to address the influential roles, both positive and negative, that US national parks have played in the global effort to conserve protected areas. Perhaps this would be too much to expect from one book, but it would have been a powerful addition to this one. The chapters contain significant details about specific parks and key individuals, as well as arguments on the national park idea that are based on each park's needs and expectations. This approach leans toward the anecdotal and is frustrating in places. The author's previous work and experience skew his arguments toward a smaller geography than might have been desirable. In addition, there is a great deal of overlap between chapters, with some incidents and stories being repeated—and acknowledged as such by the author.

Keiter's decision to focus most of the book on individual parks and not on the whole system of parks is my biggest disappointment. The author states that individual park superintendents have great latitude in shaping what happens in their parks, but it is the national park system, both empowered and constrained by the Organic Act of 1916, that is the institution of most importance—and of greatest interest. The system *in toto* is given attention only near the end of the book and in a way that is not well integrated with the rest. To explain the long-term success of individual parks, the dialogue needs to be focused on system-wide policies. The US National Park Service has been taking important steps toward creating management objectives for its portfolio of protected areas. It has consulted broadly on how to address its responsibility for migratory animals that spend part of their lives in the parks. It is also now considering how certain animals and plants will move out of and into parks in response to climate change. And it is looking at important system-wide issues, such as lead pollution in and around all national parks.



There was a time when the conservation community treated national parks as if they were holy relics, to be revered by all but not touched. That was before we learned, through rough and tumble debate, that the US view of parks was not shared by many others in the world—or even in the United States, itself. Today, the US National Park Service is a part of the gritty fabric of life—like politics and even religion. It is a value-based institution whose long-term persistence requires measured accommodation and unflinching dedication. This is the lesson from *To Conserve Unimpaired*: The work on parks is never done.

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