

Cascades a testament to vigilance

Oregonians have a long-standing commitment to protecting the forests of the Cascade Mountains. President Clinton's Forest Conference was just the latest round in a century of controversy and debate about the fate of the Cascades' forest lands.

Just 100 years ago, on Sept. 28, 1893, President Grover Cleveland created the Cascade Range Forest Reserve. With the stroke of a pen, he set aside 4,492,800 acres of forest land as a public reserve, off-limits from private acquisition under settlement, mining and timber laws.

The reserve extended 12 miles on either side of the Cascades from the Columbia River to just north of the California border. The Cascade Reserve was primarily established to protect Oregon's forests and the headquarters of its principal rivers from the increasing claims of land speculators, grazing and timber interests.

Concern about the use of Oregon's forest lands clearly surfaced by 1880. The *Oregonian* declared its concern about "the steady advance made by the wood-choppers upon the groves surrounding the city . . ." and whether there would be "... a time when the inhabitants of America will look upon the indifference of the people of this age as guilty of an irremediable wrong in this matter." By the mid-1880s, citizen groups began in Oregon and nationwide to try to place off limits — reserve — certain public lands from acquisition under the nation's land laws.

Crater Lake was the first area in the Cascades to be protected. In 1886, William Steel, later to found the Mazamas mountaineering club, led the effort to convince President Cleveland to protect the lake and its surroundings. In 1889, Salem's Judge John Waldo started a campaign to make the entire Cascade

duce the size of the reserve. Those concerned about the protection of the nation's forest lands thought that reduction of the Cascade Reserve threatened all the country's forest reserves. William Steel and the Mazamas, together with John Muir and the Sierra Club, organized a national campaign to protect the reserve.

Waldo wrote a lengthy letter to the president strongly urging the continued protection of the Cascade Reserve. He wrote: "There are educational uses in mountains and the wilderness which might well justify a wise people in preserving and reserving them for such uses . . . Not only fields to toil in, but mountains and wildernesses to camp in, to hunt and fish in, and where, in communion with untrammelled nature and the free air, the narrowing tendencies of an artificial and petty existence might be perceived and corrected, and the spirit enlarged and strengthened."

Cleveland did not reduce the Cascade Reserve. Today it forms the core of the Mount Hood, Willamette, Deschutes, Umpqua, Rogue River and Winema National Forests as well as Crater Lake National Park.

We have been left a great natural legacy. The continuing debate about Oregon's forest resources is possible only because of the visionary and tireless efforts of Oregon's first conservationists. They set the example of how knowledgeable and committed citizens can protect the forests and wild places they love.

All Oregonians have an obligation to continue what they began: to protect what so many others fought to preserve. That is our inheritance and our responsibility.

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Guest Opinion

Ronald Eber

Range a reserve. Waldo, an Oregon legislator and avid explorer of the Cascades, introduced a memorial that called on Congress to create a Cascade Forest Reserve. It declared the forests of "little commercial value . . ." but their "preservation" of "paramount value and importance." The Cascade Range was to be "set apart and kept free and open forever as a public reserve park and resort for the people of the State of Oregon and the United States." The memorial passed the House but was stopped in the Senate by grazing interests.

By 1891, national concern about the loss of forest lands forced Congress to act. The land Revision Act of 1891 authorized the president to reserve commercial and noncommercial forest lands as public reservations. However, the act did not specify any particular policy on the use of the reserves.

The first reserve established in Oregon was the Bull Run Watershed. On June 17, 1892, President Benjamin Harrison set aside 142,080 acres to protect the city of Portland's water supply. The next two reserves were both set aside by Cleveland in 1893. The Cascade Range Reserve closely followed the area proposed by Waldo. The Ashland Reserve included 18,560 acres to protect the city of Ashland's Bear Creek watershed.

In 1896, Oregon's congressional delegation made a concerted effort to significantly re-