

A Brief History of New Hampshire State Parks

Publicly-minded citizens gave land with forests and scenery to the state of New Hampshire as early as the late 1800s. The first parcel of land given was on Pack Monadnock Mountain in Peterborough in 1891, and is now known as Miller State Park. The Forestry Department was established in 1903 to manage the growing collection of state owned land. The state made some appropriations for acquiring forest lands. Many of the areas first acquired possessed attractive features such as lake shores, unusual and spectacular vistas, and curious rock formations.

The first substantial development of State Park areas occurred in the 1930's. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt established the Federal and State Work Relief programs, which allowed for the development of a wide variety of park facilities, including Milan Hill, Hampton Beach and Monadnock State Park. Development included entrance roads, parking areas, bathhouses, water and sewerage systems, picnic areas, hiking trails, campgrounds, and service buildings. In 1937, the New Hampshire Legislature recognized that funding was required to properly manage the assets represented by the state parks, and implemented service charges for the use of State Park facilities.

In 1950, the State Reorganization Act placed Crawford Notch State Park, Mount Sunapee State Park, the Cannon Mountain Aerial Tramway, and three historic sites under the responsibility of the Recreation Division. In 1951, the State Recreation Fund was established to support operations, maintenance and expansion of the State Park System. Revenues received from fees and rentals from all state recreational areas were deposited in this account, but the fund was rarely sufficient to meet the operating costs for the park. From 1951 through 1963, there were only four years that showed income in excess of expenses. In other years, the legislature appropriated funds to cover the remaining expenses of running the state parks. The state's general fund was used to pay for operating costs of the state parks in the 1960s.

The Department of Resources and Economic Development was created in 1961, and included the Forestry and Recreation Division as one of its subsections. In the same year, a \$9,000,000 bond was authorized and used to expand the park system, adding properties and developing facilities such as Greenfield and Pawtuckaway state parks. The 1970s and 1980's saw very little change to the State Park System, but once again funding through the general fund became an issue.

In 1991, a non-lapsing dedicated fund, known as the State Park Fund, was established to fund park operational expenses from revenues collected within the state park system.

Also in the 1990s, the state park system acquired the Umbagog Campground and formed a partnership with the Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge to manage their campsites, the Mount Sunapee Ski Area was leased to a private entity, and \$6,000,000 in capital improvements was invested in Cannon Mountain Ski Area.

The turn of the millennium saw additional creative management opportunities with the acquisition of the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters easement that guarantees public access to 142,000 acres of private timberland, the signing of the Monadnock lease with the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests and the Town of Jaffrey, and most recently, the 2008 establishment of the Bureau of Historic Sites.