

Stokes Nature Center
History & Lore of Logan Canyon Podcast Series
Establishing a Forest Reserve

Logan Canyon is one of the most scenic areas of the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. It offers an abundance of recreational opportunities, including skiing, hiking, kayaking, and camping. However, it was not always viewed as a recreational resource.

During the late 19th century, huge timber harvests and overgrazing led to the deterioration of Logan Canyon. Irrigation and drinking water in Cache Valley became so polluted that residents debated whether to petition President Theodore Roosevelt to intervene to preserve Logan Canyon and its river. At the urging of several concerned citizens, the Cache County Commission called for a public meeting to discuss the issue. On February 15, 1902, citizens from throughout the county gathered and after much debate, voted almost unanimously in favor of petitioning the president.

President Roosevelt sent a grazing expert named Albert F. Potter to survey the canyon. Potter estimated that around 150,000 sheep grazed in the Utah portion of the Bear River Mountains in 1901. He concluded that the canyon had indeed been overgrazed and the trees over-harvested. So in May 1903, President Roosevelt signed a proclamation establishing the Logan Forest Reserve. The designation covered 107,540 acres in and around Logan Canyon.

During his visit to Salt Lake City in spring of 1903, Roosevelt made a formal address to the citizens of Utah. He said “do not let the mountain forests be devastated by the men who overgraze them, destroy them for the sake of three years' use and then go somewhere else, and leave so much diminished the heritage of those who remain permanently on the land.”

The General Land Office appointed John Fell Squires, a 56-year-old barber from Logan, to serve as Forest Supervisor. James Leatham, a farmer and school teacher from Wellsville, became the first ranger. These two men comprised the entire forest management team for the new reserve. They fought the occasional forest fire and introduced a permit system for grazing. When the system was first introduced, Squires and Leatham issued 17 permits for a total of 33,950 sheep. This is less than a quarter of the number of sheep that grazed there in 1901.

Logan Canyon slowly returned to a state of ecological health. Today, the canyon continues to be used and managed for multiple purposes, including recreation, power production, and forest products. As stated by Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the Forest Service, National Forests should “provide the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people in the long run.”

Sources:

U.S. Forest Service Website: <http://www.fs.fed.us>.

Sweeney, Michael S. *Last Unspoiled Place: Utah's Logan Canyon*. National Geographic Society, 2008.

Johnson, Michael W. “Whiskey or Water: A Brief History of the Cache National Forest.” *Utah Historical Quarterly*. 73.4 (Fall 2005).