

## **The National Forest Commission of 1896**

Meanwhile, there were efforts in Congress to change the procedure for establishing Federal forest reserves. In the summer of 1896, the National Forest Commission, the brainchild of the National Academy of Sciences, was funded by Congress. The commission, which consisted of Charles Sargent (chair), Henry L. Abbot, William H. Brewer, Alexander Agassiz, Arnold Hague, Gifford Pinchot (secretary), and Wolcott Gibbs (member ex-officio) traveled throughout the West touring existing forest reserves and areas where new reserves were proposed. John Muir and Henry S. Graves accompanied the commission on parts of their investigations. Although members of the commission disagreed with one another much of the time, they did agree on the need for Mt. Rainier and Grand Canyon National Parks and on a number of new forest reserves.

On February 22, 1897, President Cleveland, as a result of the Commission's recommendations, proclaimed 13 new forest reserves in the West, known thereafter as the "Washington's Birthday Reserves." The following forest reserves were established: San Jacinto and Stanislaus in California; Uintah in Utah; Mt. Rainier (renamed from Pacific and enlarged) and Olympic in Washington; Bitter Root, Lewis and Clarke, and Flathead in Montana; Black Hills in South Dakota; Priest River in Idaho; and the Teton and Big Horn in Wyoming. The furor of opposition to these forest reserves was unprecedented, and the outcry resulted in Congress passing certain amendments to the 1897 Sundry Civil Appropriations bill.

*Excerpt from "The USDA Forest Service – The First Century".*