

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

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Essential Questions: How did Roosevelt's New Deal contribute to the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park? What were the short term and long term consequences of the park?

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park began as the idea of Mr. and Mrs. W.P. Davis of Knoxville, Tennessee. The Davis' had visited a number of national parks in the west and thought that Smoky Mountains were just as deserving of status as a national park. The Davis's did not know that the federal government was also looking for a location to designate as a national park in the eastern United States. W.P. Davis brought the idea to the attention of other prominent members of the Knoxville community. They formed the Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association in December, 1923. The park would have a dual purpose. It would preserve the natural beauty of the area, while also promoting economic development of the region.

The Southern Appalachian National Park Committee, the government group responsible for choosing the location of the new park, toured potential sites in 1924. The group refused an invitation to come to Knoxville, but did allow members of the Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association to make a presentation during their stop in Asheville. The group used excellent photographs taken by James (Jim) Thompson to present their case to the members of the committee. A week later some of the committee members hiked to Mt. LeConte and witnessed the beauty of the mountains firsthand. On December 13, 1924, the government announced that the Great Smoky Mountains would be one of two national parks in the south.

Despite the good news there were still a number of obstacles standing in the way of the park. The first was control of the land itself. The western parks had been created out of lands that belonged to the federal government. The land in the proposed boundaries of the park was owned by private individuals and large timber corporations. Secondly, the federal government was not responsible for providing funds to purchase land. North Carolina and Tennessee both agreed to contribute two million of the ten million dollars required. Schoolchildren and citizens pledged one million dollars, but the members of the Conservation Association would have to raise the rest. They contacted Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller as potential donors. Ford was not interested, but on March 6, 1928, Rockefeller agreed to donate five million dollars in memory of his mother.

The park's supporters soon found that many landowners in the park were not interested in selling. The largest landowners were timber companies who depended on the old-growth trees harvested in the mountains. The state took the five largest companies to court and was eventually able to force them to sell. However, the combination of legal fees and unfulfilled pledges due the Great Depression meant the project no longer had enough funding.

President Roosevelt rescues the project by using some creative language to justify using federal funds to purchase land for the park despite a provision in the original law that forbade federal funds to be used. Roosevelt and Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior, justified the expense as necessary to enlarge and expand the effectiveness of the Civilian Conservation Corp. The Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) was used as the labor to build roads, bridges, and trails throughout the park.

While some small families were eager to sell their farms and seek better opportunities elsewhere, other residents did not wish to leave. The small farms were not very economically valuable, but many of them had been in the same family for generations and represented important family and community connections. Some residents, like the Walker sisters, sold their land but were allowed to remain for their lifetime under a leasing agreement. Others were forced out under the law of eminent domain. Some of the buildings that represented the communities that existed before the park were preserved, but most were dismantled or burned.

On September 2, 1940, President Roosevelt dedicated the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In the following years, the park has become a destination for nearly ten million visitors each year. Tourism has become the leading industry for some counties located near the park, while others have not benefited as much. Development of land near the park's borders has also sparked controversy. Many citizens feel that the beauty of the mountains is being obscured behind hotels, shopping malls and billboards. The dual purpose of the park to preserve natural beauty while encouraging development continues to create conflicts and opportunities for people who live and work near the park.

Sources: Wampler, Kathy. "Unit Plan: The Great Smoky Mountains: How Knoxville Leaders "Won" A National Park." *Teachamericanhistory.org*. East Tennessee Historical Society. 2000. Web. 27 July, 2014 < <http://www.teachamericanhistory.org/File/kwamplerera8.pdf>>

"Great Smoky Mountains National Park". *Tennessee Encyclopedia and History and Culture* 1st edition. 1998. Print.

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Use the text to complete the matching exercise below.

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_____ Committee responsible for choosing the location of the park.	B. Franklin D. Roosevelt
_____ The photographer whose photos helped get the park approved.	C. James (Jim) Thompson
_____ Name of the benefactor who donated five million dollars to help fund the park.	D. Mr. and Mrs. W.P. Davis
_____ Name of the president who helped arrange funding for the park.	E. CCC
_____ Program that provided labor for construction inside of the park.	F. September 2, 1940
_____ Date on which the park was dedicated.	G. Southern Appalachian National Park Committee

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What were some of the consequences of the park's formation?

Answers will vary.

Creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park

The following set of documents were transcribed from originals in the holdings of the McClung Collection of the Knox County Public Library

*Letter-Written to members of the Knoxville Automobile Club from Russell W. Hanlon, Secretary)
McClung Collection, Knoxville, TN*

October 26, 1922 Dear Sir:

As you know, I have accepted the Secretary ship of the Knoxville Automobile Club, which is a large undertaking, especially, if I carry out my plans to make our Automobile Club an organization of real service and value to the Automobile Owner of this community.

You are no doubt impressed with the importance of the good road movements that are now under way on a very large scale in this community, and you will be pleased to know that the Knoxville Automobile Club has been selected as the logical organization to push this work.

The Knoxville Automobile Club represents the voice to the Automobile Owner, and YOUR MEMBERSHIP is essential to the ultimate success of the projects for good roads that we are now undertaking.

The stronger our membership, the more powerful our voice will be on matters of importance to Automobile owners, and on the subject of securing good roads.

As a person friend of mine, I am going to ask you to become a member of the Knoxville Automobile Club, and at the end of your year's membership, I will let you be the judge as to whether your membership fee has been an investment or a donation.

The great \$75,000,000 proposed bond issue for the construction of permanent hard surfaced highways throughout Tennessee is the big issue today, and it will take the combined effort, support and cooperation of every Automobile Owner to secure this vast improvement.

You can signify your support to our work by becoming a member of the Knoxville Automobile Club.

Your signature to the enclosed application will not only be appreciated by the supporters of good roads in Tennessee but will also be an indication of your confidence in the writer.

I am,

Yours most sincerely,

Russell W. Hanlon Secretary

Article. The Journal and Tribune. Author, Russell Hanlon, Secretary of the Knoxville Automobile Club. Knoxville, Tennessee. March 4, 1923

Impassible Highways Are Causing Loss of Millions Tourist Money Detouring East Tennessee Mud Florida and North Carolina Among Southern State To Cash In On Good Roads Quarter of Million Tourist Head North

Appeal Made For System Of Roads To Enable Motorists to Pass Through State

Hundreds of people throughout the State of Tennessee are becoming interested in what threatens to be one of the most vital questions yet to confront the people of this state. Those who have made a study of this vast possibilities for increased revenue from tourist travel realized just how much money is lost to this state, due to bad roads, for tourists will not travel over bad roads if it is possible to reach their destination over good roads, even though the distance is greater.

North Carolina is today enjoying a prosperity, such as a few years ago was undreamed of, the very person who thought a Bond Issue for road improvement an unwise debt, are today the staunchest boosters of this modern Method of financing, and are the first to argue in favor of more and more road building.

Roads Bring Prosperity

Tourists from every part of the country are endeavoring to be routed through North Carolina for the notoriety of the state's good roads has spread over the county like wildfire and every part of that state is feeling the advantages and prosperity that comes with the advent of good roads.

California has been famous for several years as the land of sunshine and smooth highways and the state is yearly cashing in on the great travel that seeks the alluring slimes and roads, which are said to have no equal in the entire United States.

Florida easily estimates that \$50,000,000 in outside money will be left there as a result of this winter's travel.

Tourist Shun Tennessee

Less than one percent of this great influx of travel came through East Tennessee, although our country is far more beautiful than either of the two routes which they necessarily had to take to reach Florida, and due to the well known condition of our roads very few of them will come through East Tennessee when they state back north.

The Tennessee Good Roads association , which is an organization consisting of good roads advocates from every section of the state, has prepared a bill which is to be presented to the state legislature and will be introduced in the name of the automobile owners of the State of Tennessee, which provides for a \$75,000,000 bond issue, to cover a period of seven and one-half years to be issued and spent at the rate of \$10,000,000 per year. This bill provides for a 4,00 mile system of permanent hard surfaced roads, which will give this state a connected link of roadway that will compare favorably with any of our sister states, and place us in position to cater to the great transcontinental and north and south travel.

Motorist Would Pay

This bill provides that a sinking fund be created by posting all the license tag tax, which last year amounted to \$1, 500,000. The ad valorem tax, which has been used on the roads for several years, and which last year, amounted to \$800,000. In addition, there will be levied a two-cent per gallon gasoline tax upon all the gasoline consumed in the state. The gasoline consumed last year amounted to \$800,000. This makes a total of \$3,200,000 which would pay the \$75,000,000 bond issue in a period of 30 years.

It is easy to see that all of the figures are based in a very conservative way, not providing for the annual increase in gasoline consumption, but the leaders of the movement figure that this amount derived by the increase will create a maintenance fund for the roads that are being built during the seven and one-half years of time during which the program extends.

Opportunity Knocking

If the 140,000 automobile owners of this state wish to give to the 3,300,000 people of this state a complete system of hard surfaced road, and to pay for it out of their own pockets and the people of the state refuse the offer it would be an opportunity last that would cost the state millions of dollars, would leave Tennessee among the unprogressive states of the Union would discourage immigration, would discourage outside business from locating here, and would give other states a lead on us that it would take many years to recover.