

# Great Smoky Mountains National Park

*Essential Questions: How did Roosevelt's New Deal contribute to the creation of the Great Smokey 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 benefitted as much. Development of land near the park's borders has also sparked controversy. Many citizens feel that 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* 1<sup>st</sup> edition. 1998. Print.

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Use the text to complete the matching exercise below.

_____ The individuals who had the initial idea for the national park at the Smoky Mountains.	A. John D. Rockefeller
_____ 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