

America's National Park System: The Critical Documents, Lary M. Dilsaver. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham (2016). 506 pages, US\$58 paperback; **Challenge of the Big Trees: The History of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, Revised Edition**, William C. Tweed and Lary M. Dilsaver, George F. Thompson Publishing, L.L.C., Staunton, VA (2017). 400 pages, US\$38.50 paperback; and **Preserving the Desert: A History of Joshua Tree National Park**, Lary M. Dilsaver, George F. Thompson Publishing, L.L.C., Staunton, VA (2017). 472 pages, US\$38.50 paperback.

It is no exaggeration to say that much has changed with regard to the U.S. national park system since 1992. That year, which marked the culminating entry in the first edition of Lary Dilsaver's *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents*, also witnessed the rise of numerous issues that would shape national discussions of the park system for decades to come. These ranged from disputes over old growth forests and northern spotted owls, to concerns over the wild-life impacts of snowmobiles and other forms of recreation in the parks, to lingering questions over wildfire policy in the aftermath of the 1988 Yellowstone conflagration. For the past 25 years, park managers have grappled with these and other long running issues, from the threat of mining claims near park borders and the intensification of air, water, and noise pollution on visitor experiences, to questions over the social and economic diversity of park visitors themselves. In recent years, efforts to 'green' the parks have also gained in importance as has the need to address the impacts and causes of climate change. While few if any of these issues have been readily resolved, together they highlight the new kinds of challenges facing park managers at the start of the twenty-first century.

The 2016 centennial of the National Park Service Act offered an ideal opportunity for the agency and the nation to take stock of the national park system and chart a path forward for the next century. To help us all better understand where the national parks have been, and what their future might hold, it is only fitting that a newly revised and expanded second edition of Dilsaver's *Critical Documents* be released at this time.

But while the completion of such a work would constitute a major contribution for most scholars of park history, the amazingly prolific Dr. Dilsaver has found the Park Service Centennial a fitting occasion to spur the release of two additional books in 2017: a newly revised edition of *The Challenge of the Big Trees: The History of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* (with co-author William C. Tweed) and the single-authored *Preserving the Desert: A History of Joshua Tree National Park*. This review essay seeks to offer modest insights on all three of these masterful works in the order just described.

As in the first edition, the new version of *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents* includes the complete text (or key portions) of the most important documents related to the founding and evolution of the park system. Once again, the entries are arranged chronologically, beginning with the Yosemite Act of 1864. But rather than end in 1992, the second edition takes us up to 2012 in terms of documentation. After a brief Introduction in which Dilsaver offers a concise historical overview of the national park system, the volume is organized into nine chapters that align with key periods of development and change.

Early chapters cover the foundational laws and directives that both established the park system and set the initial course for policy in the areas of forestry and fire prevention, predator control, concessions and so on. Next come chapters detailing the New Deal Era and World War II that include FDR's executive order to incorporate national monuments, battlefields, memorials, and historic sites into the park system, the creation of the CCC, efforts to desegregate parks in the South, the battle over Teton National

Park, and the massive overhaul of visitor facilities and roads represented in the Mission 66 program. The years stretching from 1957 to 1980 are broken into three chapters that map out the evolution of management policies for natural and cultural/historical resources, the expansion and further differentiation of the system into newly formed unit types (e.g., recreation areas, wild and scenic rivers, national trails) as well as updated statements on fire, concessions, mining, and archaeological protection policies. This is followed by an account of the threats to the park system and responses to them between the years 1981 and 1996. This penultimate chapter presents the management priorities of Interior Secretary James Watt and illustrates the growing list of concerns detailed in a 1987 GAO report on threats to the nation's parks. It also includes a re-evaluation of fire policy and ecosystem management in the aftermath of the 1988 Yellowstone fires, a statement on the need for more science-based decision-making in park management, and a new policy toward the human and cultural remains found on public lands in the guise of the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

Brand new for the second edition is a ninth chapter covering the years 1997–2015 (though the most recent document dates from 2012). Documents explored in this chapter underscore the continued tension – and increasing politicization – contained within the Park Service's dual mandate to manage both for ecological protection and visitor recreation. For example, the issue of guns in the parks and a presidential memorandum on scientific integrity illustrates the growing role of partisan politics in park management. But the items presented here also look to the future. Several official NPS reports provide insight on agency perspectives for what the twenty-first century might hold for the national parks. In addition to this new chapter, the revised edition also includes four new documents located in previous chapters, and a new set of appendices that present a summation of several key federal laws and court rulings or opinions pertinent to the evolution of the park system writ large.

As before, the second edition covers all the 'biggies' – the well-known major legislative and policy-related documents that have arguably done the most to shape the national park system as we know it today. But significantly, it also includes lesser known yet vitally important documents that help fill in the gaps. These letters, memos, internal reports, and court decisions comprise some of the most insightful and powerful aspects of this fine volume. For in these writings we can actually hear the voice of historical figures as they articulate policy through the filter of their own personal values, priorities, and lived experiences.

While it is true that in our current electronic age most of the federal laws found in the book can be easily downloaded online, the same cannot be said of the ancillary material. Such works can only be found through painstaking research. And Dilsaver has done us a great service by combing through the mountain of potential documents pertaining to the history of the national parks, carefully weighing the relative merits of each, and winnowing them down to the select few for inclusion in this admirable collection. The result is an extremely valuable, superbly written, and well-balanced reference work that has enormous utility for researchers, students, resource managers, and anyone with a deep interest in America's national parks.

Similar conclusions can be offered for Dilsaver's second newly revised volume, *Challenge of the Big Trees*. Co-authored with NPS historian, William Tweed, this book presents a revision and update of a text first published in 1990 on the 100th anniversary of the founding of Sequoia and Kings Canyon (then known as General Grant) National Parks. Well written and meticulously researched, the book provides a detailed chronological history of the key actors, events, and policy initiatives that shaped conservation management in both parks.

Beginning with the physical geographic foundations of the parks in the southern Sierras, chapters trace the impacts of indigenous peoples on the land, the era of nineteenth century exploitation and development, and the first conservation efforts (including the fascinating and as yet unresolved mystery of the 1890 laws establishing the two parks). The evolution of early Park Service management practices is further explored through an account of the political battles leading to the 1940 establishment of Kings Canyon National Park, subsequent conflicts over agency jurisdiction, and debates over the balance between recreation and preservationist priorities (as illustrated in the famous legal battle between the Sierra Club and the Disney Corporation over the fate of Mineral King). The historic struggles over wilderness designation is also given critical attention.

Through it all the authors take pains to map out the broader system-wide implications of these issues and events following the premise that a deep historical treatment of individual parks can best illustrate larger-scale trends in the national park system as a whole, including the contextualized origins of many foundational and long-lasting policy decisions.

New for the revised version is a chapter covering the years 1990–2015. Here, Dilsaver and Tweed offer a thoughtful and thorough account of the development of the first new general management plan since the 1970s, new national monument and wilderness designations, and the further evolution of fire and wild-life management policy in an era of climate change. While there is perhaps room for further consideration of climate change impacts with regards to the preservation of the planet's 'largest living things', the authors correctly note that park management is forever a work in progress and there will always be a need for additional work to map out the causes and consequences of new and emerging developments.

In Dilsaver's third book (and second of 2017), *Preserving the Desert*, the author applies a similarly rigorous scholarly approach to produce a fascinating and highly readable history of Joshua Tree National Park in California's southern deserts. As before, the chapters are organized chronologically, but in this case the book opens with a stellar 45-page 'visual journey' of the park. Consisting of a series of beautifully rendered black and white and color photographs and maps, this unique introductory pulls the reader into the stunning landscape of Joshua Tree in a most powerful way.

The prose then begins with chapters organized into three parts: the first describes the early physical and human history of the region, including the early efforts by heiress Minerva Hoyt and others to preserve the land that culminated in the 1936 establishment of a national monument. Part II presents the struggles between 1936

and 1956 to protect the integrity of Joshua Tree Monument from proposed mining activity and commercial development on remaining privately held inholdings. Finally, part III recounts the attempt to secure congressional action to convert Joshua Tree National Monument into a national park, which finally came to pass in 1994 with passage of the California Desert Protection Act. The section also contains a final chapter and epilogue that, together, critically examine the challenges facing park managers in more recent decades. Topics range from budget shortfalls, inholding acquisitions and visitor overuse, to the difficulties caused by incompatible land uses on the park's borders, local air pollution, and the impacts of climate change.

An important theme running throughout this work is the challenge posed by deeply held societal values regarding what should count as beautiful, iconic or otherwise 'national park worthy' landscapes. The fight to overcome the persistent view of desert environments as 'waste lands' in order to recognize their unique aesthetic, ecological, and inherent value is one of the most poignant episodes found in this impressive history of Joshua Tree National Park.

Taken together, these three books provide a critically important window into the nuanced complexities of the national park system. Whether exploring the parks through the lens of official documents or individual park histories, Dilsaver (and Tweed) masterfully draws our attention to the most important issues, decisions, and events and proceeds to weave them into a much larger narrative of the role of national parks in American society. Moreover, with the publication of these three volumes, Dilsaver has offered up a career-worthy contribution to the literature in what amounts to a less-than-12-month period. This is an amazing feat for which the author deserves enormous commendation, even as he sets the bar disturbingly high for the rest of us.

On a final note, it must be mentioned that physically-speaking, all three books, but especially *Challenge of the Big Trees* and *Preserving the Desert*, are beautifully bound and presented tomes. With their high quality photographs and informative maps, these impeccably researched histories signify a major advance in our understanding of national park and conservation history that are also an absolute pleasure to read and to own.

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