

Environmental Protection in the U.S. from the Sierra Club to the EPA

By USHistory.org, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.25.17

Word Count **426**

Level **500L**



A winter view of Crater Lake, which was established on May 22, 1902, by President Theodore Roosevelt as one of the first national parks. Photo from National Park Service

The United States was growing in the 1800s. It was becoming more industrial. Many factories were built. The environment was being destroyed though. Forests were shrinking. Animals were dying.

Sierra Club formed to help protect the environment

As cities grew, people wanted to preserve the environment. The Sierra Club formed in 1892 to help protect the environment. John Muir was the president of the Sierra Club. He worked hard to keep public lands from being ruined. When Theodore Roosevelt became president, he listened to John Muir.

Roosevelt loved the outdoors. He was dedicated to protecting the nation's public lands.



In 1903, Roosevelt went camping with Muir. They agreed certain areas should be left alone. Roosevelt made some places national forests. That meant no one could build on them. They were protected forever from axes and saws.

Interest in environment grows

People became very interested in the environment. They visited national parks. The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts formed to help children care about nature. Lots of new people joined groups like the Sierra Club.

By the 1950s, American factories and businesses had really harmed the environment.

Pollution, chemicals harmful to planet

Pollution into the air was creating smog in cities. Americans were leaving waste along the sides of the roads.

In 1962, Rachel Carson wrote a book called *Silent Spring*. The book was about DDT, a chemical. Farmers used it to keep birds away. DDT was killing birds, though.



The book got people worried about the environment. President Lyndon B. Johnson made laws protecting animals, water and the air. The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970.

EPA formed in 1970

In 1970, President Richard Nixon helped start the Environmental Protection Agency. The Endangered Species Act also protected wildlife.

There were two kinds of environmentalists. Conservationists were people like Roosevelt. They believed in using nature wisely. Preservationists were people like Muir. They said to just leave it alone.

Changes helped improve the environment

Nuclear power became more common in the 1970s. Nuclear power plants produce harmful waste. Many people were against nuclear power. Some groups protested against it. Then, President Jimmy Carter announced a plan. The U.S. would develop safer sources of energy.

Many environmentalists were disappointed. Not all their goals were reached. Still, major changes improved air and water quality.