

We Need a White Mountain National PARK

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The White Mountain National Forest, in New Hampshire and Maine, is the largest tract of public land in New England. The national forest encompasses the headwaters of five major river systems as well as 48 peaks [above 4,000 feet elevation](#), including the highest in the northeastern United States, 6,288-foot [Mount Washington](#).

In the late 1800s these forests and waters were privatized and opened to devastating forest liquidation. By 1902, concerned citizens called for the White Mountains to be saved as [a national park](#). Instead, a national forest was [established in 1918](#) under the Weeks Act — introduced by a New Hampshire native, Congressman John W. Weeks — with the goal of restoring and protecting the ravaged landscape.

For decades, the U.S. Forest Service focused on land acquisition and allowing the forest to recover. As a result, the landscape is once again dominated by expansive hardwood and coniferous forests, free-flowing rivers, clear ponds, and lush wetlands. These forests and waters are home to sensitive species that are losing habitats across New England, such as the [Canada lynx](#), [Indiana](#) and [northern long-eared](#) bats, [peregrine falcon](#), [wood turtle](#), [White Mountain fritillary butterfly](#), [White Mountain tiger beetle](#), [small whorled pogonia](#), and [brook trout](#). They also offer one of the best chances in the Northeast to restore extirpated species such as the [eastern wolf](#), [cougar](#), and [Atlantic salmon](#). As a connector between the Maine Woods to the east and the Green Mountains and Adirondacks to the west, this forested landscape will be increasingly important as climate change shifts plant and animal habitats. It will also be [vital in accumulating carbon](#), which can help to mitigate climate change.

The White Mountains are only 130 miles from downtown Boston, and within a day's drive of 70 million people. Their spectacular scenery and wild open spaces attract more than [6 million visitors](#) each year — more than most national parks. People come to this high country to enjoy more than 1,200 miles of [non-motorized trails](#) — including a 90-mile section of the famed [Appalachian Trail](#), six designated [wilderness areas](#), spectacular [Wildcat Brook National Wild and Scenic River](#), and scenic backcountry roads such as the 35-mile [Kancamagus Scenic Byway](#).

Despite its natural wonders, only one-fifth of the national forest is permanently safeguarded as wilderness. The rest is increasingly vulnerable to Forest Service sanctioned [intensive logging](#) — a sad return to the failed exploitation of the past. Interior wildlife habitats are being [fragmented by clearcutting](#), including in thousands of acres of [roadless areas](#) that could qualify for wilderness designation. This logging is releasing large amounts of carbon into the atmosphere when there is an urgent need to [increase forest carbon storage](#) in the region.

Industrial development pressures are a growing threat. The Forest Service endorsed the [Northern Pass energy transmission corridor](#), which would have cut through the

forest if it had not been defeated by public opposition. The agency holds a conservation easement on the public Nash Stream Forest to the north, yet it is condoning [illegal and destructive off-road motorized vehicle use](#) — an ominous sign for future policy on the national forest itself. White Mountain National Forest officials could allow the clearing of forests for wind energy development, [as has happened](#) on the nearby Green Mountain National Forest in Vermont. A developer is seeking to build [a hotel or other tourist facilities](#) at the top of ecologically fragile Mount Washington.

[Past efforts](#) to transfer these lands to the National Park Service did not succeed. Now, however, [growing public opposition](#) to aggressive Forest Service logging and other development could fuel a resurgence of the idea. The incorporation of the existing national forest in an 890,000-acre **White Mountain National Park** would end logging, prevent construction of a new hotel and other intensive development, and greatly enhance the now-minimal public visitor education and recreation programs. The park would include the adjacent [Nash Stream Forest](#), a state-owned tract which is being damaged by logging and off-road vehicle abuse. As with most [Alaska parks](#), a portion of the White Mountains could be designated as a National Preserve, which would allow continued hunting and operation of several existing [ski areas](#) and [Appalachian Mountain Club huts](#).