

Gifford Pinchot

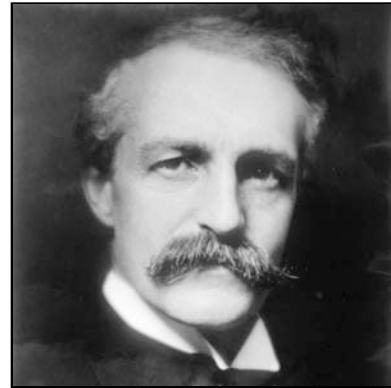
1865–1946



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Gifford Pinchot was America's first professionally trained forester. A progressive politician, Pinchot created policies that have protected the environment for decades.



As you read the biography below, think about how Gifford Pinchot influenced conservation policies in the United States. Why did Pinchot believe it was important to protect the environment?



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It was during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt that the U.S. government began actively protecting the environment. Roosevelt set in motion many new government policies regarding land use. He also appointed Gifford Pinchot, a well-known forester, to promote conservation. Conservation is the movement to preserve natural resources, such as soil, vegetation, and water.

The son of a wealthy merchant, Gifford Pinchot was born in Simsbury, Connecticut, in 1865. His father had been interested in forestry, and from an early age Gifford Pinchot was taught the beauty of the environment.

Pinchot graduated from Yale in 1889. He continued his studies in several European countries, studying forestry there because no academic programs in forestry then existed in the United States. In the 1890s he began putting his knowledge to use managing George Vanderbilt's 8,000-acre Biltmore estate. He surveyed forests for the state of New Jersey and for several private landowners in the Adirondack Mountains located in northeastern New York.

In 1896 Pinchot was appointed to the National Forest Commission. Two years later he became head of the Division of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture. Supported by President Roosevelt, Pinchot became a well-known conservationist. In 1898 he was appointed chief of the U.S. Forest Service (a job he held until 1910), where he established many government regulations for commercial land use. He supported use of the forests for mining, grazing, lumbering, railroads, and irrigation, but all under strict control of the government.

After William Howard Taft became president things changed. Taft's secretary of the interior, Richard Ballinger, allowed several people to illegally purchase public land in Alaska in 1910. Pinchot accused Ballinger

The Progressives

Biography

of not enforcing conservation policies. The result was that Pinchot was fired by President Taft. The Ballinger-Pinchot affair, as it was known, left many people feeling that Taft was not committed to protecting the environment.

Pinchot moved on. He helped Theodore Roosevelt form the progressive Bull Moose Party. He also became a state forester in Pennsylvania. In 1914 he made an unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Senate, and in 1923 he became governor of Pennsylvania.

During his two terms as governor, Pinchot helped settle a coal mining strike and improved the efficiency of the state's government. He was most proud, however, of paving miles of dirt roads in the countryside, which provided jobs for many of the state's unemployed during the Great Depression.

Pinchot continued to be active in trying to protect the environment. He helped get legislation passed that allowed the forest reserves to be expanded through purchase. He also helped win passage of the Water Power Act of 1920, which began federal regulation of the power industry, and federal control over water power sites on public land.

Pinchot died of leukemia in 1946. He left his mansion, Grey Towers, in Milford, Pennsylvania, to the U.S. Forest Service to use as a museum and training center for foresters.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Contrast** What similarities exist between the environmental issues of Pinchot's era and the environmental issues of today?

2. **Evaluate** Was Pinchot successful in creating policies that help protect the environment? Explain.

ACTIVITY

Oil drilling in Alaska has been a hotly debated environmental topic for many years. Do some research about this subject and create a poster for or against oil drilling. Present the poster to the class and explain your point of view.