

An Act for the Ages, An Act for All Ages Happy Birthday and Many Happy Returns

We'll be holding a year-long birthday party in 2006 on America's public lands. The Antiquities Act of 1906 – landmark legislation that made our government (and us) responsible for safeguarding some of the places and resources that define us as Americans – has hit the century mark.

For the past hundred years, the Act has helped us protect, appreciate and celebrate America's special places and the irreplaceable resources that are found there: the archaeological sites, fossils, and natural and geological wonders on our nation's public lands.

This short, one-page law – a testament to our national sense for deep history and direct language – protects more than just places. It protects our sense of who we are and where we come from.

The language of the act takes us back to a time when America was beginning to understand where it stood in the greater schemes of time and place. Our country was young, but we saw ourselves as a nation with a rich and complex legacy. We had antiquities—artifacts, sites, the tangible record of human achievements—that were the equal of any in the world. We had objects of scientific curiosity—great canyons, ancient forests, towering mountains—the likes of which were not found elsewhere. The farseeing legislators of 1906 found a way to recognize these national resources, and to make their study and preservation a national concern.

One hundred years ago we made it unlawful to “appropriate, excavate, injure, or destroy any historic or prehistoric ruin or monument, or any object of antiquity.” And we recognized the public good in naming monuments that recognized “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest.”

We've all been to some of the places Teddy Roosevelt and the presidents who followed him designated as a permanent legacy to the American people. Roosevelt established 18 national monuments, 12 because of their scientific interest, like the very first monument, Devil's Tower, in Wyoming, and six for their historic interest. Of those six original historic monuments, three—El Morro, Chaco Canyon, and Gila Cliff Dwellings—are in New Mexico, and three—Montezuma Castle, Tonto, and Tumacacori—are in Arizona.

Today, there are more than 100 historic or natural monuments across our country. Our Four Corners country—New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado—can proudly count more than 50 monuments within its borders.

Most of us can remember at least one visit to one of these special places. We've got the pictures in our albums, the maps with the push pins marking our travels, the old brochures and the souvenirs and the memories.

My agency, the Bureau of Land Management, has joined with the National Park Service and the Forest Service in managing some of the newest monuments. In New Mexico, we welcomed Kashe-Katuwe Tent Rocks to the fold in 2001. Since its designation, nearly 50,000 people have come to this monument each year to walk with their families, admire the astonishing hoodoos, spires, and tent rocks, or just to enjoy a quiet moment outdoors.

Across the West, the BLM is also working to preserve newly established monuments, such as Canyons of the Ancients, in Colorado, Agua Fria in Arizona, and the Grand Staircase-Escalante in Utah.

We'll be celebrating the 100th birthday of the Antiquities Act across the nation with programs as diverse as a federal fossils conference to be held in Albuquerque in May 2006; marking the Oregon Trail from Idaho to Baker City, Oregon; reclaiming short-cut trails in partnership with the Kokopelli Bike Club in Canyons of the Ancients Monument; recording rock art at Sears Point in southern Arizona; and locating the traces of the Old Spanish Trail as it crosses Utah.

And, of course, we'll be doing the other work of the Antiquities Act: safeguarding the nation's legacy of ruins, archaeological sites, fossils, historic and prehistoric monuments and structures, objects of scientific interest, and historic landmarks on the public lands.

You can join us for the party all year long (and long after that we hope) by safeguarding America's treasures yourself. We have plenty of room on our public lands for volunteers of all ages, stewards for our irreplaceable sites, and anyone who believes as we do in loving these resources and leaving them for future generations.

Check out our website for more information at www.blm.gov/heritage/adventures.

Happy birthday to us all, America, and may I be the first to wish you many happy returns to your national monuments and other treasures on our public lands.