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## Now a treasure, Monongahela Forest was a wasteland when created 100 years ago

By Rick Steelhammer Staff writer May 3, 2020

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Seneca Rocks rises behind the Monongahela National Forest Discovery Center in eastern West Virginia in June 2017. AP file photo/



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Stretching across 921,000 acres in 10 West Virginia counties, the Monongahela National Forest encompasses the state's highest peaks, cleanest streams, largest expanses of forest and most remote tracts of wilderness.

Now the second-largest national forest in the Eastern United States, the Mon draws visitors from across the region to hike and bike its trails, fish and paddle its waters, climb its cliffs and bask in its natural beauty.

But the rugged mountain terrain that would become the Monongahela National Forest was a patchwork of barren, eroded, logged-over land when President Woodrow Wilson signed the documents creating it 100 years ago last week.

During the 40 years preceding Wilson putting ink to paper on April 28, 1920, logging activity was at its peak in West Virginia, producing an estimated 30 billion board feet of lumber, according to the West Virginia Encyclopedia. In the process, the state's 16 million acres of virgin forest was depleted to less than 500 acres.

Slash — the tree tops and limbs removed from felled timber — was left on the ground, and during periods of dry weather fueled massive fires that sometimes burned to the mineral level of the underlying soil. During periods of rain, steep slopes devoid of vegetation posed no check to erosion and stream flooding.

In fact, it was a then-record flood that swept through Pittsburgh in 1907 that set in motion a plan to buy land in the Monongahela River's headwaters area, which in turn led to the creation of the new national forest.

The mid-March flood sent huge volumes of muddy water bearing large blocks of ice into downtown Pittsburgh, killing 12

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- John McCoy: Fishing-license moratorium was a nice gesture, but will cost sportsmen dearly
- Kanawha library board Zoom meeting disrupted by child pornography, racial slur
- Air Guard flyovers set Wednesday for 30 WV hospitals
- COVID-19 tore through a black Baptist church community in WV. Nobody said a word about it
- Prep football: Putnam coaches mull COVID-19 game plan for workouts
- June bankruptcy auction scheduled for Charleston's Highland Hospital
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- Dr. Marsh raises concern as key WV COVID-19 metric trends upward
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people, iding an estimated 300,000 steelworkers and leaving the city without telegraph, telephone and electrical service.

"There is probably not a man, woman or child in Pittsburgh who did not feel the effect of the flood, directly or indirectly," according to a March 15, 1907, Pittsburgh Press article.

The cause of the flood was traced directly to the denuded slopes surrounding Monongahela River tributary streams, including the Cheat River. In 1907, West Virginia's state geologist, I.C. White, and members of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce were among those appearing at congressional hearings to speak in support of an act that would provide funding to buy and reforest logged-over, privately owned headwaters tracts.



With money from the Weeks Act, named in honor of its sponsor, Rep. John Weeks, R-Mass., the first parcel of land to become a part of the Monongahela National Forest was bought in 1915 – the 7,200-acre Arnold Tract near Parsons in Tucker County. In the five years that followed, assorted parcels totaling another 46,900 acres were added, giving West Virginia's first national forest a total of 54,000 acres at the time of its creation.

The Mon had only one ranger district, the Cheat, when it opened, and a headquarters in the Tucker County community of Gladwin.

The worst economic times of the past century, the Great Depression of the 1930s, proved to be the period of greatest growth for the Monongahela. Additional money for infrastructure projects were made available as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program. A number of Civilian Conservation Corps camps were established in the forest, where CCC crews built roads, trails, bridges, fire towers, ranger stations, campgrounds and picnic areas.

Additional money was also available to add new parcels of land to the forest. By 1942, the Mon had grown to include more than 800,000 acres.

In 1942 and 1943, more than 100,000 U.S. Army soldiers learned to scale cliffs, load and guide pack mules over difficult terrain, fire mortars and send messages with pigeons in the Seneca Rocks, Dolly Sods and Gladwin areas.

The first National Recreation Area was carved out of a 100,000-acre section of the forest in 1965 to create the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area. During the following 10 years, visitor centers were built at Seneca Rocks and Cranberry Mountain.

The 1907 Weeks Act, created in response to concerns over flooding on land now managed by the Mon, is a legacy that has served the forest well beyond its creation date. Funding to acquire 98 percent of the 921,000 acres that now make up the Monongahela National Forest came about through provisions of the Act.

More information, exhibits, photos and stories about the Monongahela National Forest's 100-year anniversary can be found on its website at [fs.usda.gov/mnf](https://fs.usda.gov/mnf).



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Kanawha County Government Reporter

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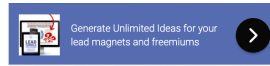
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Dolly Mae Beard



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### FUNERALS TODAY

Funerals for Wednesday, May 13, 2020

Arnold, Mary - 2 p.m., Wallace Funeral Home, Milton.  
Belcher, Raymond - 1 p.m., Belcher Cemetery, Belcher Road.  
Miller, Josephine - 1 p.m., Emma Chapel Cemetery, Liberty.  
Randolph, Judy - 4 p.m., Siniaville Cemetery, Statts Mill.  
Schoolcraft, Ruth - 1 p.m., Fidler & Frame Funeral Home, Belle.  
Smith, Carl - 2 p.m., Haven of Rest Memory Gardens, Red House.  
Woolwine, Dorsey - 11 a.m., Montgomery Memorial Park, London.

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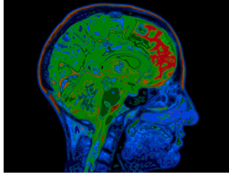
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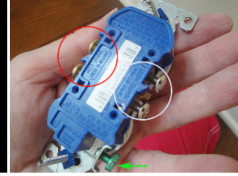
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







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