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Author(s): Sara E. Dant Ewert

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Easterner: So, where are you from?
Westerner: Idaho.
Easterner: Oh right, where they grow all that corn. I'd always pronounced it Iowa.

Peak Park Politics

The Struggle over the Sawtooths, from Borah to Church

SARA E. DANT EWERT

Idaho has long suffered from somewhat of an inferiority complex. Especially in the West, national parks are a coveted status symbol, and Idaho is the only western state without one. With attendant national exposure, economic revenues, and tourist draws, national parks are also tourism's crown jewels.¹ To Idahoans since the turn of the 20th century, a national park seemed to promise an antidote to obscurity; it would place Idaho firmly on both the national map and the itineraries of wealthy travelers from around the world. Yet Idaho remains parkless—and not for lack of effort. One pundit wrote that Idahoans “began thinking national park almost as soon as they could spell tourist.” Their campaign, spanning more than 50 years, focused on the spectacular Sawtooth Mountains. It came up short. A frustrated supporter later recalled, “Sawtooth National Park was often conceived but never born.”² Significantly, the struggle to save the Sawtooths not only showcased federal battles over control of public lands but also mirrored a national trend away from the primacy of resource extraction and toward environmental preservation. In 1972, after a long battle for the park, Idaho's champion, Senator Frank Church, finally secured the Sawtooth National Recreation Area for the state. But even he could not get a park.³

The Sawtooth Mountains pierce the

skies of central Idaho. With 42 peaks jutting more than 10,000 feet into the clouds and with 180 gemlike lakes, this compact range forms the headwaters of five important tributaries to the Columbia River system. The first known inhabitants of the region, located approximately 75 miles east of Boise and 40 miles north of Sun Valley, were a band of the Shoshone Indians known as the Sheepeaters. In the early 19th century, a few trappers and explorers from the Hudson's Bay Company moved into the area in search of pelts, but the discovery of gold in the 1860s and silver in the 1870s triggered an influx of whites. In 1879 these miners provoked the Sheepeater war, which effectively eliminated these nomadic Indians by resettling them on the Fort Hall Reservation in eastern Idaho. When the mining boom subsided by the turn of the century, ranching took hold. Agriculture proved marginal in this high, cool region, but sheep ranching flourished.⁴

Despite the Sawtooths' early history of extractive industry, sentiments for conservation coexisted with those for development. In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt created a forest reserve of almost 2 million acres in response to severe overgrazing. The next year he expanded the reserve to nearly 3.5 million acres, which subsequently became the Sawtooth, Challis, and Boise national forests. Further preservation came in 1937, when the United States

Forest Service set aside more than 200,000 roadless acres around the peaks as the Sawtooth Primitive Area. Yet for many Idahoans, only a national park designation was apt for the “Alps of America.”⁵

In 1911, Jean Conly Smith and the Idaho Federation of Women's Clubs began the crusade to establish a national park in the Sawtooths. Spurred by the energetic “See America First” movement intended to encourage American tourists to explore their own country before traveling abroad, the federation joined forces with the Idaho State Automobile Association to form the See Idaho First Association. In addition to touting the scenic wonders of the region, the association advocated an aggressive road-building program to pave the way for tourists. Its persuasive campaigns attracted the support of Idaho's congressional delegation, which in 1913 took up the cause.⁶ Though the national park proposal died that year in committee, Idaho residents started talking. The 1915 Wood River *Times* proclaimed that a Sawtooth national park would “aid development of Idaho, advance prosperity, and further the well-being of its people. . . . it is a golden fact that Idaho needs to appreciate her scenery.”⁷ And at the 1915 world's fair in San Francisco, the award-winning Idaho exhibit featured a lighted model of the Sawtooths entitled “The Switzerland of America.”



The aptly named Sawtooth Mountains have been called the Alps of America, yet Congress has not deemed them worthy of national park status. (S. Ewert)

Persuaded by public opinion, Senator William E. Borah and Congressman Addison T. Smith reintroduced national park legislation in 1916. A 1917 House Report argued, "There is no section in the entire Rocky Mountain or Pacific coast States which possesses more magnificent mountain scenery and picturesque lakes."⁸ Indeed, the *Idaho Statesman* editorialized, "The Grand Canyon awes you. Rainier overwhelms. Yellowstone fascinates. But the Sawtooth region welcomes you. . . . It is loveable."⁹

The fate of the 1916 park bill mirrored that of its predecessors, however, in part because opponents found much that was not lovable about a Sawtooth national park. Key opposition arose from area mining, logging, and ranching interests, which feared that establishing a national park would further erode resource use. The region's mines and miners had created a steady demand for commercial timber and livestock; a restrictive park designation would jeopardize supply. Already angry over the grazing fees and federal management that accompanied national forest designation, sheep ranchers in particular

fought the proposal. Other problems also elicited concern. Few tourist accommodations existed in this rather remote region of Idaho—who would come if there were no place to stay? Transportation to the area was rough, and some believed that the Galena Grade, a portion of the only road through the Sawtooth region, was too steep and dangerous for general traffic. Robert Marshall, chief geographer for the United States Geological Survey, called the grade "practically prohibitive to automobiles and . . . so steep and dangerous on both sides of the divide for a distance of about 3 miles that small pine trees are cut at the summit and tied to the rear of the machines for additional brakes."¹⁰

Although Senator Borah had been both a strong critic of the Forest Service and an advocate of the park proposal, he was also realistic about these limitations and mindful of resource industry critics. One historian remarked that "Borah's passion for a park was barely visible. He helped introduce a bill but didn't put himself out."¹¹ After touring the region in 1915, Borah had in fact concluded, "Whether man ever frames

the record to read 'National Park,' God has made it and placed it there."¹² Congressman Smith and others held out for an official designation; they contended that a national park would so impress tourists "with the favorable opportunity for investments and home building" that many of them would "conclude to remain and help to develop the State's resources." But Congress was not persuaded.¹³

Perhaps more important, the Sawtooth park proposal revealed the contentious turf war emerging between the U.S. Forest Service, in the Department of Agriculture, and the newly created National Park Service, in the Department of the Interior. To the Forest Service, the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916 amounted to a federal reprimand. By that year, Congress had set aside 12 national parks, carved primarily out of existing Forest Service lands, and the agency naturally assumed that they would eventually fall under its jurisdiction. But the agency's utilitarian mandate made the parks vulnerable, as the bitter 1913 loss of the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park proved. The historian Richard Sellars notes, "The national park movement pitted one utilitarian urge—tourism and public recreation—against another—the consumptive use of natural resources." In 1916, jurisdiction over the nation's parks and monuments passed into the hands of the National Park Service.¹⁴

The acrimony engendered by this transfer immediately ignited the Sawtooth proposal, pitting these two agencies against one another in a contest over carving yet another park out of a forest. The acting secretary of the interior, Andrieus A. Jones, heartily endorsed the creation of the park, urging that it “be enacted into law at the earliest practicable date,” though he recommended changing the name to Idaho National Park. Despite his reservations about the Galena Grade, the USGS’s Robert Marshall concurred. The secretary of agriculture, D. F. Houston, did not. His report declared that “without doubt a desire for road construction is one of the principal reasons for advocating the creation of a national park.” Noting that fully 90 percent of the proposed park fell within the national forests, Houston also argued that the line between national forest and national park “may, and should be clearly drawn and maintained. It would seem both unwise and unnecessary to lock up as a park a big mountain area, the primary use of which now and always must necessarily largely be as a producer of public wealth.” The Sawtooth proposal, he concluded, would “make the area to all intents and purposes a national forest in everything but name,” and for these reasons “this department does not approve of the passage of the bill.”¹⁵

These drawbacks put national park legislation on the back burner for the next 20 years. In the mid-1920s, however, a self-described promoter and Idaho transplant named Robert Limbert took it upon himself to publicize the wonders of the Sawtooths and thereby revived interest in a national park. Limbert believed that tourism would ultimately supplant mining and logging as Idaho’s leading source of revenue. Capitalizing on the See America First campaign, he urged tourists to “Begin with Idaho.”¹⁶ He envisioned a winter sports playground to rival any in Europe. The Sawtooths, he said, “have often been referred to as the ‘Switzerland of America.’ Perhaps the simile



Map: S. Ewert.

would be more apt if the Alps of Switzerland were referred to as the ‘Sawtooths of Europe.’” Hailey, Idaho, he added, was to be “the St. Moritz of America.”¹⁷ In an effort to realize this vision, he opened a dude ranch at Redfish Lake in 1928, hoping to attract rich easterners hungry for a taste of “wild Idaho.”¹⁸ He also toured the nation, distributing photographs and literature to passengers on the Union Pacific Railroad and showing spectacular film footage of the Sawtooths to spellbound easterners. One prominent magazine editor, when shown photos of the Sawtooths, sputtered, “Do you mean to tell me that you people have a region like this and have never done anything with it? What’s the matter with you

Idaho people—are you dead?” The tactic worked.¹⁹

As Idaho suffered through the Great Depression, a Sawtooth national park seemed the perfect ticket to prosperity and a panacea for debt. One supporter wrote that the “principal reason for wanting national designation of a district that will grease its skillet with bear meat and spit through its teeth regardless of the name is the tourist trade.” Limbert’s campaigns had certainly raised national awareness of Idaho’s unique landscapes, and at the time, tourism ranked as Idaho’s third leading business, yet the state auto association noted that “people go from one [national park] to another and see as many

as they can in their vacation days. . . . they circle entirely around Idaho where lies the region that would make the finest national park of all." In 1936 Senator James P. Pope introduced legislation calling for a national park roughly 30 miles long and 8 to 15 miles wide. A supporter of the proposal observed, "Idaho offers her hospitality to the nation in exchange for a name."²⁰

But Pope's bill encountered hostility almost immediately, in part because by the 1930s the park service had begun to adopt a preservationist stance that threatened traditional land uses. Despite support from various wildlife federations, opposition proved too powerful. Resource interests again aligned to oppose park designation. Boise Valley irrigators joined this coalition, fearing that the park would close off future dam and water storage sites. These local interests gained an influential ally in the Union Pacific, which operated in nearby Sun Valley and favored private development. Senator Pope also lacked support from the rest of Idaho's delegation. Though Borah had earlier sided with park advocates, by the 1930s, with economic losses mounting and a growing population center in Boise concerned about the loss of irrigation potential, he reversed himself and opposed the park. Pope was simply no match for the Lion of Idaho. Of the two congressmen, both of them Democrats, one, Compton E. White, also joined with antipark interests, and the other, D. Worth Clark, remained undecided. The Sawtooth bill died.²¹

Though the park proposal perished, the renewed interest prompted action by the Forest Service. In the 1920s, it, like the park service, had begun to reevaluate its management policies, particularly regarding wilderness areas. As a result, in 1929, the Forest Service created two new designations: research reserves, sites preserved for scientific and educational purposes; and primitive areas, which would provide the "nature lover and student of history a represen-

tation of conditions typical of the pioneer period."²² In the Sawtooths, these new classifications enabled the agency to address the concerns of park advocates while maintaining control of the region. In 1937, just one year after Pope introduced park legislation, the Forest Service delineated the Sawtooth Primitive Area, more than 200,000 acres intended to "prevent the unnatural alteration or impairment of unique natural values."²³ This aggressive move encroached on park service responsibilities and helped perpetuate the rivalry between the two agencies. The same year, the Sawtooth National Forest supervisor announced plans for a program of "extensive recreational development" to include new trails, roads, and campground facilities.²⁴

With park advocates placated, the Sawtooth national park dream retreated into dormancy, awaiting a new champion. He appeared in 1956,

In the mid-1920s, Robert Limbert singlehandedly revived interest in a Sawtooth national park, carrying his enthusiasm for Idaho's scenic wonders around the nation. (Craters of the Moon Collection, Boise State University Library)



and his name was Frank Church. Ironically, as one observer remarked, "Frank Church and the outdoors didn't seem to go together."²⁵ Trained as a lawyer and more comfortable in three-piece suits than in jeans and boots, Church nevertheless brought a passion for outdoor Idaho to his work as a senator. In his 1956 campaign, he relentlessly emphasized his bright vision of Idaho's future: "Idaho is like a young giant, still unaware of his promise." If elected, he promised, he would "get on with the important job of building Idaho."²⁶ Barely 32 years of age when he took office, Church, as one journalist observed, soon "established himself as the outstanding political personality of the state." Early in 1960, the senator suggested a feasibility study for carving a national park out of the Sawtooth Primitive Area, thereby initiating yet another concerted effort to win national recognition.²⁷

Church was an astute politician. A liberal Democrat in an increasingly conservative state, he knew that to gain broad support for a park he must assuage the fears of the park's traditional opponents: mining, ranching, and timber interests. The feasibility study was a shrewd coalition-building vehicle. The proposed study site comprised federal land almost exclusively. Much of what the boundaries encompassed lay high on the peaks—fragile terrain; "a National Park could be created here without harm to the grazing, lumbering, and mining that takes place elsewhere in the surrounding region."²⁸ If the study supported a park, he declared, "I believe it would damage no one, while I'm confident it would prove to be of immense economic value to all of central Idaho."²⁹ To gauge public response, Church mailed out thousands of postcard ballots to constituents asking for their opinions about his proposed study. As one newspaper reported, "After reading editorials in several . . . newspapers we got the idea that Senator Frank Church might have bitten off more than he could chew when he an-

nounced his intention of trying to create a national park in the Sawtooth Mountains. . . . it looks like the bite he took might turn into a pretty nice feast." Of the 8,000 ballots returned, more than 77 percent favored the study.³⁰

Armed with this public mandate, Church introduced legislation in April 1960 to study the advisability of creating a national park in the Sawtooths. The report would provide invaluable information about the impact of a park on the established economy of Idaho.³¹ Moreover, since nearly all of the proposed study area fell within the existing Sawtooth Primitive Area, he was sure that the foreseeable effects of a park would be overwhelmingly positive. A park, he believed, would act "as a magnet in drawing the whole country's attention to Idaho as a vacation wonderland."³² It would also have another goal: preservation. "This lofty wilderness can best be safeguarded in its natural, unspoiled state, and preserved for future generations, if embraced within a national park."³³

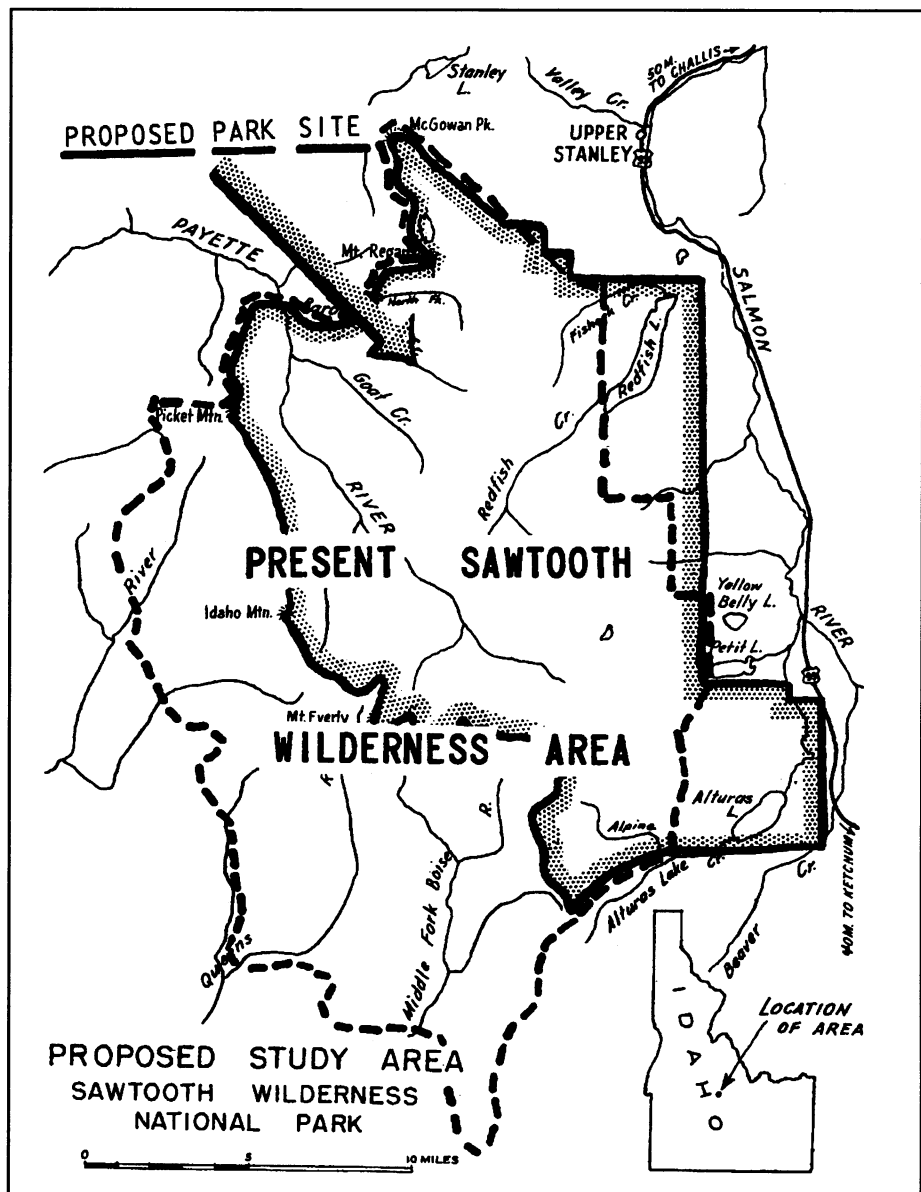
In proposing the study, the senator directly addressed the troublesome federal agency conflict. "Probably no jealousy between two Government agencies has ever matched that which exists between the Forest Service and the National Park Service," he noted. His bill recommended that the park study be carried out jointly by the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior. With tourists already crowding into the Sawtooths, "to leave this problem to the Forest Service, with its limited resources . . . seems to me to be self-defeating," said Church. In his opinion, there was "no question but what the Sawtooth Primitive Area can best be protected and preserved, if included within a national park."³⁴

Church's postcard balloting had incited debate across the state. Not surprisingly, opposition to his study proposal emerged immediately from the Idaho cattlemen's association and various

sporting groups that feared the loss of grazing lands and access to big game hunting. Several chambers of commerce and the Bannock County Farm Bureau also aligned themselves in opposition.³⁵ Some of the criticism was partisan. But Church had been cunning. He had proposed only a study, not a park, and for the first time vigorous public condemnation of the resource industry appeared. Newspaper editors across the state excoriated the short-

sightedness of the naysayers. "It is incomprehensible that Idaho would oppose such a study," exclaimed the Emmett *Messenger-Index*.³⁶ The publisher of the Pocatello *Intermountain* admitted, "The fact is that we are politically and strategically among the weakest states in the union, if we are not the weakest."³⁷ The Arco *Advertiser* stated, "It has been proven statistically that National Parks create tourist trade, and tourist trade brings into the state a con-

This early 1960 map shows how shrewdly young Frank Church fashioned the proposed national park study area largely from the existing wilderness area in order to win support from the ranchers, miners, and loggers who had the most to lose from restrictions on the public domain. (Frank Church Papers, BSU Library)



siderable slice of revenue.”³⁸ After noting that in 1959 more than 62 million people visited the national parks, an increase of more than 4 million from the previous year, the Lewiston *Morning Tribune* wrote, “What is surprising is the apparent indifference among some Idahoans to what this all could mean to our own state.”³⁹

Despite this support, Church believed that the battle for the study and the park itself could be better fought at a later date, and he allowed the bill to die in Congress. No doubt he was calculating carefully. He was young, a first-term senator, and the junior senator from Idaho. He was still gaining experience and gathering political strength. In 1961 and 1962, he would manage the floor debate on the controversial Wilderness bill in the Senate. As the 1962 election approached, his father-in-law asked, “How do you expect to win? . . . All the organizations that count are against you: the cattlemen, the woolgrowers, the mining association, the forests products industry . . . [and] the chambers of commerce.” But a Harris poll revealed that Idaho voters approved of Church’s record by a 3-2 margin, and his personal popularity rated a whopping 6-1.⁴⁰ The former Arizona congressman Morris Udall explained that “Church had a real good feel for the land, the wilderness, and conservation in its best sense. . . . he was simply willing to run some risks for what he believed and not to do the easier, popular thing.”⁴¹ In 1962 he campaigned hard, shaking hands across the state and listening to constituent concerns. One Republican remarked, “To me, he’s Idaho.” Indeed, Church was Idaho to almost 55 percent of the voters on election day, as he secured three-fourths of Idaho’s counties and a second term in the Senate.⁴²

Encouraged by victory, and now Idaho’s senior senator, Church championed the Sawtooth park plan with renewed vigor and a long-term strategy. In September of 1963, he proposed creation of the



Although he began his career in Idaho more comfortable in suits than in jeans, Frank Church soon became synonymous with “the land, the wilderness, and conservation in its best sense,” according to one observer. (out059, Church Papers, BSU Library)

Sawtooth Wilderness National Park. Drawing upon his, and the nation’s, growing appreciation for wilderness, the unusual name was also the senator’s attempt to unite prowilderness forces with park advocates, to bridge a philosophical gap in Idaho’s environmental politics at the time. The unique designation sought congressional protection of the Sawtooth Primitive Area as wilderness, while it gave the state the advantages of a national park. Church’s proposal caused the National Park Service a great deal of consternation because the agency regarded the addition of *wilderness* to the park name as a critique of its management of national parks. “We will want to consider carefully the impact of such a proposal on the Department’s traditional insistence that a national park be just that.”⁴³

Church was playing a delicate game. A wilderness-only designation meant the Forest Service would continue to man-

age the region. A national park classification would transfer the lands to the National Park Service. But a wilderness national park? Church urged Congress to look favorably on the bill—“Idaho needs this park . . . as do the people of the country”—even though he anticipated stiff opposition and probable defeat.⁴⁴ The measure, as he later admitted, “was primarily designed to provide the vehicle for a thorough feasibility study by both the Forest and National Park Services”; it was to be a feat of cooperation in a history of contention. Church got what he wanted. The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior recommended congressional deferral until they could issue a joint analysis of the Sawtooth proposal.⁴⁵

Although the bill mandated inter-agency cooperation, a spirit of détente was already flourishing between the two departments during the 1960s. Secretaries Orville Freeman and Stewart

Udall declared a truce in the agencies' long-term feud. Collaboration was evident in the 1965 joint report on the Sawtooths, which stated that "greater recognition and management emphasis must be given the exceptional outdoor recreation values in the Sawtooth Recreation Complex." It recommended *either* a national park managed by the park service *or* a national recreation area managed by the Forest Service, as appropriate.⁴⁶ Building on this recommendation, in April 1966, Church introduced two bills in the Senate. The first reiterated the Sawtooth Wilderness National Park proposal. The second, cosponsored by his Republican colleague, Len Jordan, called for the creation of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. Though similar to the park in size, the national recreation area allowed greater latitude for hunting, mining, lumbering, and grazing. In June, to gauge public response to these proposals, the Senate Parks and Recreation Subcommittee, chaired by Church, convened public hearings in Sun Valley. Testimony overwhelmingly favored the national recreation area as "the lesser of two evils."⁴⁷



In 1966, Len Jordan, right, and Frank Church cosponsored the bill to create the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, amended it in 1970 to include the White Cloud Peaks in the midst of the ASARCO threat, and ultimately saw it through Congress in 1972. (dci26, Church Papers, BSU Library)

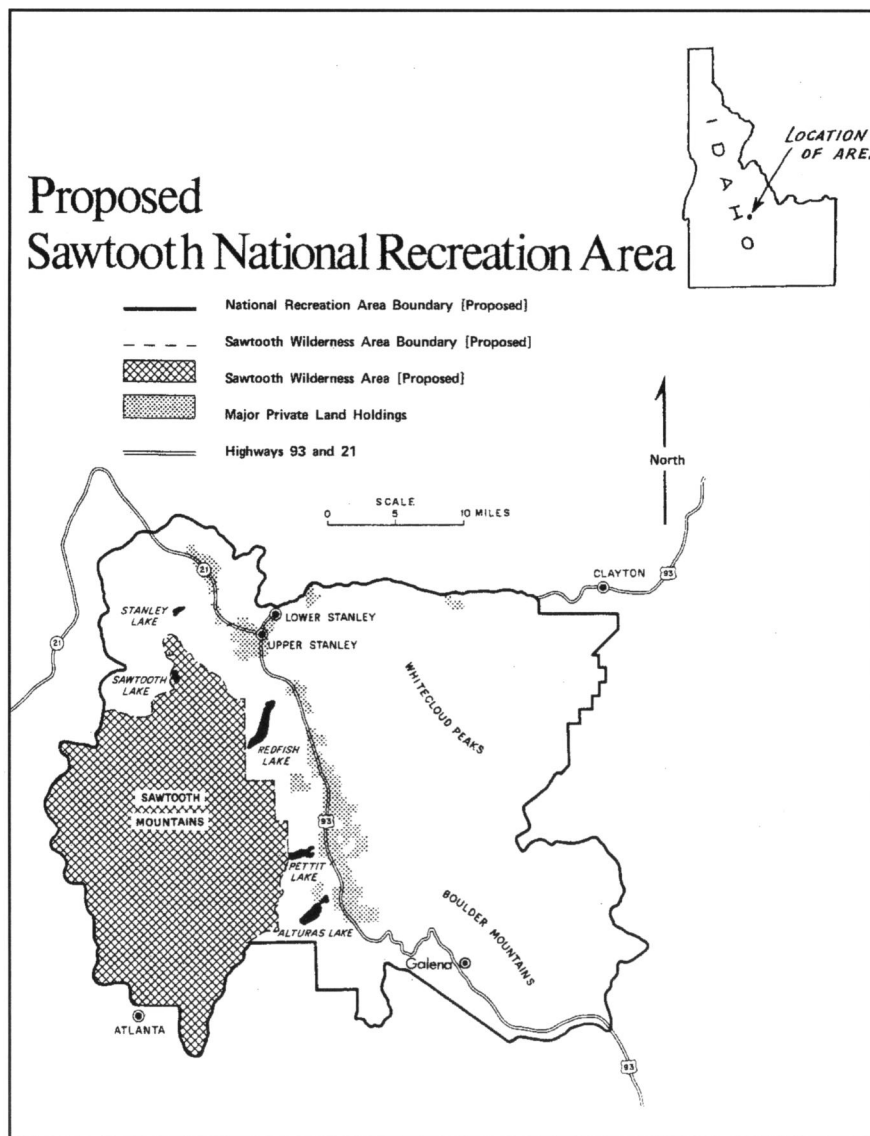
To Church, the message was clear. Idaho's common-sense mandate called for protecting "this magnificent mountain area . . . in a manner which will be least disruptive of established interests and traditional uses."⁴⁸ Proponents of the national recreation area proposal argued that the Forest Service had already done a commendable job of protecting the Sawtooths: "Here was an area with a long history of established uses and a long record of resource utilization; and yet it still looks like a park!"⁴⁹ National environmental groups like the Sierra Club, however, urged Church to continue to push for a park. Always a pragmatic politician, Church believed that "if we begin with the Recreation Area, we might eventually have a park—but if we go back to the park proposal now we might never have even the Recreation Area." In 1967 the Church-Jordan bill sailed through

the Senate but got bottled up in the House Interior Committee. In the coming year, however, a compelling turn of events brought a new urgency to preserving the Sawtooths.⁵⁰

In the summer of 1968, research teams from the New York-based American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) combed the unprotected Sawtooths looking for molybdenum, an element used as an iron and steel alloy in automobile and airplane production. They found a mother lode at the base of Castle Peak in the White Clouds, a range immediately adjacent to the Sawtooths and perhaps even more spectacular.⁵¹ To extract the ore, ASARCO filed with the Forest Service to build roads and establish an open-pit mine. A 350-foot-deep, 700-foot-wide, 7,000-

foot-long hole, the mine would process 20,000 tons of material daily, 99.5 percent to be deposited in waste piles and settling ponds.⁵² The mine's environmental impact would be significant. Yet when questioned about the effects of blasting on wildlife, ASARCO's chief geologist explained: "Well, it sounds like thunder. And if it sounds like thunder, then it's a normal ecological feature, so why worry about it?"⁵³ Under archaic mining law dating from 1872, the Forest Service had neither the authority to prohibit or restrict the mine nor the ability to regulate the method of operation. A primitive area was thus vulnerable; perhaps a park was not.⁵⁴

The costs of the mine would be high. Although ASARCO predicted that the mine would create 350 new jobs, spawn



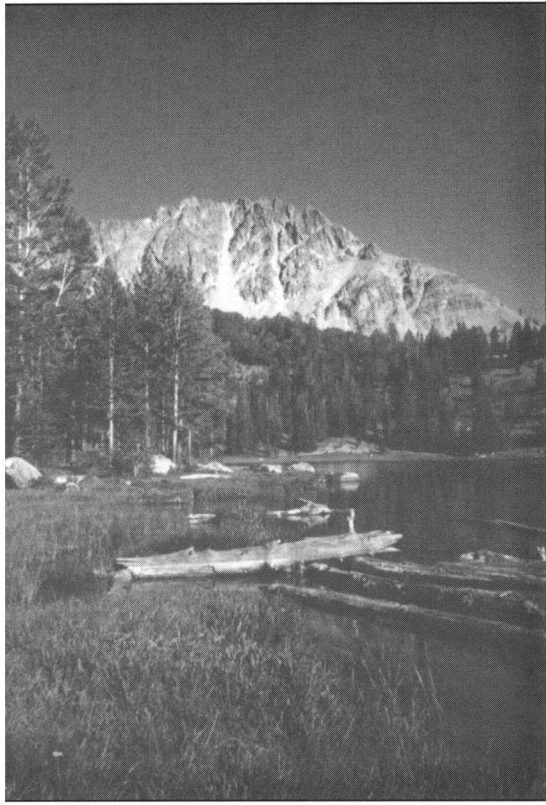
This map of the much-expanded national recreation area accompanied a mailing to Jordan-Church constituents in March 1971. (Fred Hutchinson Papers, BSU Library)

500 spin-off businesses, and generate \$1 million per year in taxes, environmental reports indicated that new roads would encourage further mineral exploration and exploitation and that the mine itself would destroy fishing in the lakes and pose a contamination threat to the East Fork of the Salmon River. Molybdenum was hardly a strategic metal. At the time of the White Clouds controversy, the United States exported fully 25 percent of its annual production.⁵⁵ The conservationist Russell Brown, head of the Greater Sawtooth Preservation Council, challenged prof-

itability claims for the mine. He argued that ASARCO would cost Idaho taxpayers millions of dollars for new roads, new classrooms and teachers, and unemployment and welfare payments "when the mine inevitably shuts down." But the value of an Idaho national park, he noted, could exceed the estimated worth of the ASARCO claims "in less than two years; and of course, this income would continue indefinitely." Thus the White Clouds mining proposal, Brown concluded, was "not just a crime against nature, it's a bum business deal."⁵⁶

Opposition to ASARCO's plan exploded across the country, but nowhere more violently than in Idaho, provoking a siege mentality that accelerated efforts at preservation and unified diverse coalitions. Though conservation organizations like the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, and the Greater Sawtooth Preservation Council continued to push for a park (with the catchy phrase "Park or Pit"), a striking collection of interests, including ranchers, miners, and loggers, spoke in favor of protecting the Sawtooths as a national recreation area.⁵⁷ Throughout the state, editorials appeared blasting the proposed mine. The *Idaho Statesman* declared that "the state is not so desperate for dollars that it must be anxious to sacrifice the crown jewels of its natural heritage to relatively short term dollar benefits."⁵⁸ And the *Messenger-Index* proclaimed the White Clouds "absolutely incompatible with an open pit molybdenum mine, and would not be [compatible] even if survival of the nation was thought to depend upon it."⁵⁹ On the national level, the former secretary of the interior Stewart Udall railed against the destruction of the pristine White Clouds: "In the past, the myth of endless resources blinded us to the horrible results of reckless mining practices on our public lands."⁶⁰

Calling "failure to annex the White Clouds . . . a crime against Nature," Church and Jordan hastily amended their national recreation area bill to include the threatened peaks. "There are some places of transcendent beauty that must be kept remote in order to be saved," Church argued, and "if we fail to preserve them, no sanctuary will be left for those who must occasionally escape from the cars and the crowds."⁶¹ In 1970 the measure passed unanimously in the Senate only to stall again in the House Interior Committee. Instead of providing the vigorous leadership needed to bring it to the floor, Congressman James McClure, an Idaho Republican, offered lukewarm support. Uncomfortable with the last-minute inclusion of



This view of Patterson Ridge in the White Clouds shows the quartz peaks that even without snow look dazzlingly white. (S. Ewert)

the White Clouds, he questioned “whether the State of Idaho can afford to lock up the abundant natural resources of the area, or whether we should rely on the proven theories of multiple-use.” The bill died, but the issue did not.⁶²

In the summer of 1970, Idaho’s Republican governor, Don Samuelson, stepped into the fray on the side of ASARCO, claiming that the industrialists “aren’t going to tear down mountains. They are only going to dig a hole.”⁶³ He critically misgauged the issue. He characterized spectacular Castle Peak as “nothing but sagebrush on one side and scraggly trees on the other.”⁶⁴ The chair of the Idaho state parks board resigned in disgust. Cards and letters from across the country swamped the governor’s office urging Samuelson to reconsider his position. Moreover, Samuelson was up for reelection. The 1970 gubernato-

rial race quickly became known as the White Clouds Race and enabled Cecil Andrus, a Democrat and Church ally, to ride over the incumbent by championing preservation: “The most important long-range issue is the protection of our magnificent Idaho environment. We must not allow irreplaceable natural resources to be destroyed for temporary economic gain. We cannot tolerate the abuse and destruction of the White Clouds.”⁶⁵

In March 1971, a finally united Idaho congressional delegation introduced legislation to create a national recreation area encompassing the Sawtooth, White Cloud, and Boulder ranges. The bill also proposed wilderness status for the Sawtooth Primitive Area and called for the secretary of the interior to complete a national park feasibility study for the Sawtooths by the end of 1974. The Idaho legislature memorialized Congress to pass the bill, and the Department of Agriculture report on the recreation area conveyed the imminence of the mining threat to the White Clouds.⁶⁶ On January 26, 1972, the same day the measure passed in the House of Representatives, the *New York Times* editorialized that “not only should there be a permanent ban on new mining claims, but all existing claims should be quashed. Marginal economic benefits do not justify despoiling White Cloud Peaks.”⁶⁷

Finally, nearly 60 years after the campaign to protect the Sawtooths began, Congress set aside 756,000 acres as the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, including 216,000 acres of wilderness. Enacted on August 22, 1972, the law included a total mineral withdrawal for the recreation area, which effectively blocked ASARCO’s molybdenum-mining operation. Furthermore, the act gave the secretary of agriculture the unprecedented authority to manage private lands within the recreation area. This rather remarkable establishment of a “scenic easement” insured that land speculation and subdivision could

not mar the historic landscape of the Sawtooths.⁶⁸ Thus, in June 1973, the Forest Service canceled a massive planned subdivision in Obsidian, Idaho, called Swiss Village, charging that it detracted from the area’s “natural, scenic, historic, [and] pastoral values.”⁶⁹

The act also directed the secretary of the interior to complete, by 1975, a comprehensive analysis of the feasibility of a Sawtooth national park. The national recreation area status protected the region’s fragile environment but also preserved resource rights so long as they did not negatively affect the natural setting. As of 1991, the annual timber harvest in the Sawtooths could build 78 average-sized homes; the grazing allotment provided enough red meat for 428,000 “quarter-pounders.”⁷⁰ The mayor of nearby Ketchum concluded, “Around here it’s not environment versus jobs. It’s environment is jobs.”⁷¹

The success of the Sawtooth crusade seemed to confirm the bumper sticker slogan “Idaho Is Stronger with Church in the U.S. Senate.”⁷² Yet despite the senator’s tireless efforts on behalf of the Sawtooths and White Clouds, some environmentalists blasted him for “failing to stand by his initial convictions when the heat was put on him” and backing “away from the [park] proposal . . . for fear of alienating the mining and forest products industries.”⁷³ But the head of the Idaho Environmental Council, an affiliate of the Sierra Club and the Greater Sawtooth Preservation Council, assured him that “it’s pretty well felt throughout the conservationists forces that we owe you the bulk of the thanks.”⁷⁴ As Church saw it, the national recreation area was “the most I could get at this time.” Indeed, for more than 10 years the disagreement among Idaho’s congressional delegation had doomed Sawtooth preservation, in any form, to failure. To a concerned constituent, Church wrote, “I would like, naturally, to achieve the park with one stroke of the legislative pen but . . . I work in a political forum,



Among his Senate successes Frank Church could count the 756,000-acre Sawtooth National Recreation Area, which, if it was not the national park that so many Idahoans wanted, protected that area from mineral development and from development that would alter its scenic beauty. (out010, Church Papers, BSU Library)

where success usually depends on some measure of accommodation. I try to be effective without compromising end objectives.”⁷⁵

Like many, Church hoped that the Sawtooth National Recreation Area would eventually evolve into a national park. But in 1980, he lost his ability to fight for the park when the right-wing conservative Steve Symms narrowly defeated him in a particularly nasty campaign. Symms was no environmentalist; he once even quipped that he saw “some advantages to having a hamburger stand on every peak.”⁷⁶ And in 1984 Idaho lost Church, who succumbed to pancreatic cancer at the age of 59. Just before his death, Congress appended his name to the largest roadless area in the continental United States at the time: Idaho’s Frank Church–River of No Return Wilderness.

As the century wound down, Idaho still waited for a park. Sputtering attempts to revive the park movement met with predictable failure. When the long-awaited Sawtooth national park study had emerged in 1976, Idaho papers editorialized that a national park “should be considered an alternative of last, extreme resort,” since the designation would amount only to a “governmental flip-flop,” given the restrictive language already governing the national recreation area.⁷⁷ In 1986, Congressman Larry Craig, a Republican with a solid anticonservation record, raised the subject of a park, though it was outside his district. When local opposition flared, he beat a hasty retreat. Two years later, the *Los Angeles Times* naïvely concluded that the “key is for Idaho members of Congress to agree on a proposal and to be convinced that it would be good for Idaho and its

economy.”⁷⁸ These rumblings did stir the Forest Service, however. Perceiving the park proposals as criticism of its management, the Forest Service began advocating “showcase recreation management” for the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and increased its annual budget.⁷⁹

The problem with the Sawtooths, one historian explains, is that they “too closely resemble the Grand Teton Mountains to warrant national park status, and a significant number of Idahoans simply do not want a national park to draw crowds of outsiders to the scenic area.”⁸⁰ Nonetheless, Idaho continues to promote tourism in the state by trumpeting the “unhurried, uncrowded abundance of natural and scenic splendor” in this “undiscovered America.”⁸¹ In 1997, 1.5 million visitors enjoyed the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. Yet even after the legislative battles of the 1970s receded in the collective memory of Idahoans, the dream of a park refused to die. In 1998, Forest Service personnel and budget cuts led the Sawtooth National Recreation Area manager Paul Ries to lament, “When I got here people made it very clear to me that we were a recreation area, not a park. And that that was better. Now, it would almost be easier if they just made it a park and had somebody else run it.”⁸² Perhaps another park champion will emerge someday.

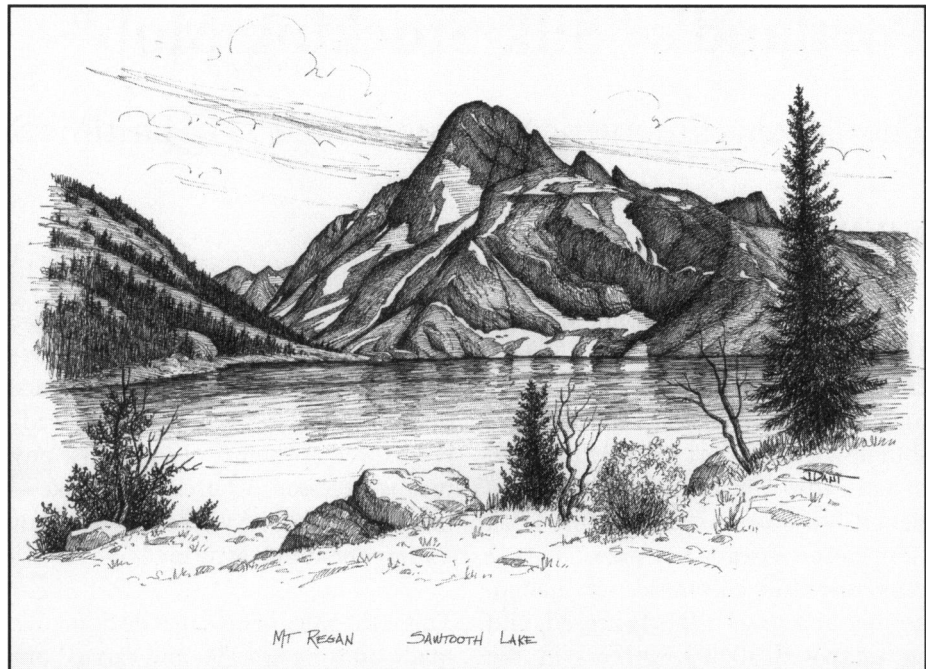
Sara Ewert is an instructor at Washington State University, where she completed her Ph.D. in history in May; her dissertation, “The Conversion of Senator Frank Church: Evolution of an Environmentalist,” explores the environmental politics of Idaho’s four-term senator. Her current research is on the 1964 Land and Water Conservation Fund.

VISITORS TO NATIONAL PARKS, 1908-15

PARK	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915
Yellowstone	19,542	32,545	19,575	23,054	22,970	24,929	20,250	51,895
Yosemite	8,850	13,182	13,619	12,530	10,884	13,735	15,145	33,452
Mount Rainier	3,511	5,968	8,000	10,306	8,946	13,501	15,038	35,166
Crater Lake	5,275	4,171	5,000	4,500	5,235	6,253	7,096	11,371
Glacier				4,000	6,257	12,138	14,168	14,265
Rocky Mountain								31,000

SOURCE: 64th Cong., 2d Sess., 1917, H.R. 1356, p. 5 (Serial 7110).

2. Dick d'Easum, *Sawtooth Tales* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1977), 212, 216.
3. Written accounts of the Sawtooths are sparse, and most fall into the guidebook category. Two predominantly anecdotal texts are d'Easum's and Esther Yarber's *Stanley-Sawtooth Country* (Salt Lake City, 1976). Although academic articles focused exclusively on the Sawtooth national park struggle do not exist, brief mention of the issue appears, for example, in Pat Ford, "Now Idaho Wants National Parks," *Reopening the Western Frontier* (Washington, D.C., 1989), 183-87, and Carlos Schwantes, *In Mountain Shadows: A History of Idaho* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1991), 233-34. Technically, a remote 31,488 acres of Yellowstone National Park spill over into Idaho, and some people have argued, unsuccessfully, that the 1965 creation of the Nez Perce National Historical Park constitutes a national park for Idaho.
4. 92d Cong., 2d Sess., 1972, S.R. 92-797, pp. 3014, 3015 (Serial 12971); U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, *Sawtooth National Recreation Area: Serving the People, Caring for the Land* (Washington, D.C., 1991), 13. In the Sawtooths are the headwaters of the Salmon River, its East Fork, the South Fork of the Payette River, and the North and Middle forks of the Boise River. The Sawtooths are a compact range, roughly 35 miles long and 20 miles wide.
5. S.R. 92-797, p. 3015.
6. See *Idaho First, Idaho Club Woman*, Vol. 3 (December 1912), 17-19, Vol. 4 (January-February 1914), 33, Vol. 5 (January 1915), 35; Nicholas Casner, "'Two-Gun Limbert': The Man from the Sawtooths," *Idaho Yesterdays*, Vol. 32 (Spring 1988), 4; 64th Cong., 2d Sess., 1917, H.R. 1356, p. 1 (Serial 7110).
7. Quoted in d'Easum, 213. Congressman Burton L. French of Idaho first proposed a Sawtooth national park in Congress in 1913.
8. H.R. 1356, p. 8.
9. *Idaho Statesman* (Boise), Jan. 2, 1916.
10. D'Easum, 216; H.R. 1356, p. 8 (qtn.). Around 1900, Ketchum, Idaho, was the leading shipping point for sheep and lambs in the United States; Yarber, 346-48.
11. D'Easum, 219. Also see Marian C. McKenna, *Borah* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1961), 113.
12. Quoted in d'Easum, 215.
13. H.R. 1356, p. 4.
14. Richard W. Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven, Conn., 1997), 15-16.
15. H.R. 1356, pp. 7, 8, 11.
16. Casner, 4 (qtn.), 5.
17. Hailey (Idaho) *Times-News-Miner*, Jan. 6, 1927.
18. Casner, 9.
19. *Times-News-Miner*, Jan. 6, 1927. Limbert's publicity pamphlet billed him as "The Man from the Sawtooths." The Union Pacific ultimately distributed 100,000 copies of a 54-page promotional pamphlet on the Sawtooths as a result of Limbert's efforts; Schwantes, 172.
20. *Idaho Statesman*, July 26, 1936.
21. Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, 3d ed. (Lincoln, 1987), 110; *Capital News* (Boise), Sept. 1, 1936, March 16, 1937.
22. Donald C. Swain, *Federal Conservation Policy, 1921-1933* (Berkeley, Calif., 1963), 137-38.
23. G. B. Mains, *Report on the Sawtooth Primitive Area* (Boise, 1936), 1.
24. Ray Mitchell, "New Recreation Projects Slated for Sawtooths," *Idaho Statesman* (clipping, 1937), Idaho State Historical Society, Boise.
25. Randy Stapilus, *Paradox Politics: People and Power in Idaho* (Boise, 1988), 34.
26. "Build Your Idaho," 1956 Frank Church campaign video, 11.1, box 1, Frank Church Papers, Boise State University (BSU) Library.
27. LeRoy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting the Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* (Pullman, Wash., 1994), 66.
28. "Washington—On the Line" (Church newsletter, February 1960), 2, 1.1, box 92, Church Papers.
29. "Statement by Senator Frank Church Regarding a Feasibility Study for a Sawtooth Wilderness National Park," Jan. 18, 1960, *ibid.*
30. *Congressional Record*, 86th Cong., 2d Sess., 1960, pp. 7567, 7570 (qtn.).
31. *Ibid.*, 7566, 7567.
32. "Washington—On the Line," 1.
33. *Congressional Record*, 86th Cong., 2d Sess., 1960, p. 7567.
34. *Ibid.*, 7566, 7567.
35. Idaho Cattle Feeders Association, Inc., "Resolution No. 3," ca. 1960, and Twin Falls Chamber of Commerce, "Resolution," Feb. 5, 1960, both box 9, Gracie Pfof Papers, University of Idaho, Moscow; *Idaho State Journal* (Pocatello), Feb. 9, 1960.
36. The only state agency to support Church's proposed feasibility study was the Ada County Fish and Game Department. "Idaho for Parks," Emmett (Idaho) *Messenger-Index* (clipping, February 1960), box 4, Fred Hutchinson Papers, BSU Library.
37. "Church Proving His Worth in Sawtooth Plan," Pocatello (Idaho) *Intermountain* (clipping, February 1960), *ibid.*
38. "What about a National Park in the Sawtooth Mountains," Arco (Idaho) *Advertiser* (clipping, February 1960), *ibid.*
39. Lewiston (Idaho) *Morning Tribune*, Feb. 11, 1960. Visitorship in the Sawtooth region increased 465 percent between 1959 and 1962.
40. Frank Church to Weldon F. Heald, July 17, 1963, 1.1, box 93, Church Papers; Ashby and Gramer, 149 (qtn.), 153.
41. Rod Gramer interview with Morris Udall, June 8, 1979, MS 173, Rod Gramer Papers, BSU Library.
42. Ashby and Gramer, 153 (qtn.), 155.
43. *Idaho Statesman*, Sept. 6, 1963; Max N. Edwards to Church, Aug. 28, 1963 (qtn.), box 4, Hutchinson Papers. Church became Idaho's senior senator in 1962 after the death of Henry Dworshak (R). Len B. Jordan won the special election that year by defeating the former Congresswoman Gracie Pfof (D). A conservative Republican who began to moderate his stance by the end of the 1960s, Jordan won a full term in 1966. On wilderness, Church remarked, "This country is big enough to leave some of its land alone as a sanctuary for those who, from time to time, feel the need to get away from it all. Otherwise we'll turn this country into a cage"; quoted in Stapilus, 36.
44. *Congressional Record*, 88th Cong., 1st Sess., 1963, p. 18306.
45. *Ibid.*, 89th Cong., 2d Sess., 1966, p. 9303; Orville L. Freeman to Henry M. Jackson, March 18, 1964, and Stewart Udall to Jackson, March 23, 1964, 1.1, box 93, Church Papers.
46. *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City), June 4,



- 1966; Forest Service and National Park Service, *Sawtooth Mountain Area Study Summary* (San Francisco, 1965), 37 (qtn.).
47. *Times-News* (Twin Falls, Idaho), June 14, 1966 (qtn.). The subcommittee consisted of Church, as chair, Jordan, and Frank Moss (D-UT). Jordan was not supportive of the wilderness designation: "I strongly urge no change in the designation of this or any other large area in Idaho"; "Statement Presented by U.S. Senator Len B. Jordan to Hearing on U.S. Forest Service Proposal to Create Sawtooth Wilderness Area from Present Sawtooth Primitive Area" (Sept. 4, 1963), 4, 1.1, box 93, Church Papers. Most of those in favor of the park represented out-of-state organizations such as the National Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club, and Mazamas, a mountain-climbing club from Portland.
 48. "Washington Report" (Church newsletter, July 1966), 1, box 16, Hutchinson Papers.
 49. Virilis Fischer, "Seesaw in the Sawtooth," *American Forests*, Vol. 72 (November 1966), 79.
 50. Church to Dave Hand, May 6, 1969, 2.3, box 1, Church Papers. The Sawtooth National Recreation Area legislation stalled in the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, chaired by Wayne Aspinall (D-CO).
 51. Stapilus, 37. The White Clouds, a small area roughly 8 by 10 miles, earned their name because their quartz summits look like clouds from a distance. As recently as 1883 they spewed ash and steam for a stunned group of miners; d'Easum, 93-94.
 52. Russell A. Brown to editor, *New York Times*, April 4, 1972; *Congressional Record*, 91st Cong., 1st Sess., 1969, p. 13911.
 53. Quoted in Donald Jackson, "Whose Wilderness?" *Life*, Vol. 68 (Jan. 9, 1970), 110.
 54. *Congressional Record*, 91st Cong., 1st Sess., 1969, p. 18232.
 55. Stapilus, 38; *Idaho State Journal* (Pocatello), May 14, 1969.
 56. *Idaho Statesman*, Sept. 16, 1969.
 57. Wendell Pigman to Church (memo), "Subject: House Hearings on H.R. 6957," June 9, 1971, box 4, Hutchinson Papers; *Congressional Record*, 91st Cong., 1st Sess., 1969, pp. 13911-13. The White Clouds controversy also provoked the formation

- of the Greater Sawtooth Preservation Council, backed by the Sierra Club, which reissued the call for a national park comprising roughly 1.3 million acres.
58. *Idaho Statesman*, May 11, 1969.
 59. *Messenger-Index*, May 15, 1969.
 60. Stewart L. Udall, "The Mining Law of 1872 Must Be Scrapped," *National Wildlife*, Vol. 8 (June-July 1970), 9.
 61. "News Release from Frank Church," July 22, 1969, box 4, Hutchinson Papers.
 62. *Messenger-Index*, July 31, 1969.
 63. Quoted in Stapilus, 38.
 64. *Idaho Statesman*, Aug. 3, 1969.
 65. Quoted in Stapilus, 17.
 66. 92d Cong., 2d Sess., 1972, S.R. 92-797, pp. 3013, 3020; *Congressional Record*, 92d Cong., 1st Sess., 1971, p. 8515.
 67. *New York Times*, Jan. 26, 1972.
 68. 86 *Statutes at Large*, 612, 615 (1973).
 69. *New York Times*, June 17, 1973. In total area the Sawtooth National Recreation Area is a little larger than the state of Rhode Island. Normally, national recreation areas do not exclude mining interests, but the Sawtooth bill contained unique language to protect the White Clouds from ASARCO's mining venture.
 70. *Sawtooth National Recreation Area*, 1.
 71. Quoted in Ford, 185.
 72. Ashby and Gramer, 153.
 73. Carol Payne and Margaret Carpenter, *Frank Church, Democratic Senator from Idaho*, Ralph Nader Congress Project: Citizens Look at Congress (Washington, D.C., 1972), 17.
 74. Pete Henault to Church, Aug. 31, 1970, 4.1, box 6, Church Papers.
 75. Church to Mrs. Frederick R. Ward, June 28, 1971, box 93, *ibid.*
 76. Rod Gramer interview with Steve Symms,

- June 3, 1980, MS 173, Gramer Collection. Church lost to Symms by only 4,262 ballots. His supporters placed some of the blame on President Jimmy Carter, who conceded defeat before the polls closed in the West, but the Reagan revolution and Idaho's growing conservatism were also key factors. Symms joined Congress in 1972, winning the First District seat vacated by James McClure, who replaced the retiring Len Jordan in the Senate.
77. *Post Falls Register*, Aug. 1, 1976.
 78. *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1988; Ford, 185-86.
 79. Ford, 186.
 80. Schwantes, 234.
 81. *Idaho Official Highway Map* (Boise, 1997), back cover.
 82. "Paying to Play in the Sawtooths," *High Country News*, Oct. 13, 1997, p. 12, "Managing Scenery, Wildlife and Humans," *ibid.*, Feb. 16, 1998, p. 12 (qtn.). In 1924 Congress set aside Craters of the Moon National Monument. Idaho waited 64 years for its next addition to the national park system, the City of Rocks National Historical Reserve and the Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument, both created in 1988.