

PATAPSCO

MARYLAND'S FIRST STATE PARK

1907

"The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago and the second best time is today!"

Fred W. Besley, Maryland's First State Forester

FORESTRY SERVICE NEEDED

A critical lumber shortage in the late 1800s called for reforestation efforts nationwide.

In 1906, John and Robert Garrett of Baltimore offered to the State of Maryland 1,900 cut-over acres of land in Garrett County if the state would start a forestry service to demonstrate forest management techniques.

The following year, 1907, a prominent Catonsville farmer, John Glenn, followed the Garrett example by donating 43 acres of his Hilton Estate (now the Patapsco State Park's Hilton Area) to start the Patapsco State Forest Reserve. One of the goals of this reserve was to slow the soil erosion from the slopes of the sparsely forested valley. High deposits of soil sediments were piling up behind dams and decreasing their energy output.

From 1912 on, Maryland routinely acquired more land for the Patapsco State Forest Reserve through both donation and purchase. The Forestry Department also managed, by agreement, adjacent private property. Trees were planted and forest fires were quickly extinguished. The goal of protecting the river's corridor with a forested buffer began to evolve.

EVOLUTION OF MARYLAND'S FIRST STATE PARK

Fact: Where land meets water, there you will find people recreating and enjoying the great outdoors!

Long before the Forest Reserve was started, people took their leisure along the Patapsco River. From the valley's mill towns and from Baltimore's summer heat they came by horse and buggy and trolley car. They came seeking the refreshment of cool forest glens and unspoiled places to fish, hike, picnic and to ride horseback along the Falls of the Patapsco. It must have resembled a Grandma Moses painting with picturesque mills, villages and old-time steam locomotives pulling trains over a trace cut by Native American hunters.

As early as 1910, the State Board of Forestry recognized both the demand for recreation and the value of demonstrating the reforestation efforts to park visitors. Newspaper articles and posters invited the public to use and enjoy "Patapsco State Park." While new trees were growing and visitors were having great times in the park, State Forester Besley and his mounted volunteer Forest Wardens (called Forest Patrolmen) demonstrated and taught forest conservation. People rallied behind the bold new effort of enhancing natural lands through public ownership, and the foresters were for the first time managing public forests for recreation, a new function for forest management.

The concept grew and in time the reserve's name was changed, first to "Patapsco State Park" and then to "Patapsco Valley State Park." Today the park follows the river through five counties for 32 miles and covers 15,000 acres. It begins near Sykesville in Carroll County and ends near Brooklyn Park in Anne Arundel County and the Baltimore Highlands in Baltimore County. In addition to being the first Maryland State Park, it is also one of the largest.

When we compare these outdoor recreation scenes from the 1920s with recreation activities at Patapsco Valley State Park today, we realize that the more things change, the more they remain the same.

