Preservation and Tourism: The Story of National Parks and Monuments

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The Antiquities Act was passed on June 8, 1906. The Act enables the president to restrict the use of public land owned by the federal government for national monuments without getting congressional approval. The Act limits the land to the smallest area that will allow for proper care. This has been broadly interpreted and has caused much controversy. The Act has been enabled more than 100 times.

In August of 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed a bill that created the National Parks Service. The act charged the agency to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects . . . and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” Today there are 58 national parks in the United States.

Great Sand Dunes National Park (2004): Made a National Monument in 1932, This is the most recently created national park. Located in Colorado.

The National Park Service Act created a standard for regulated tourism in the national parks. The NPS began to promote tourism and provide concessions for those visiting the parks. Millions of tourists visit the parks and monuments every year. The Service was also able to provide for the preservation of key features in the parks. Because these regulations were much stricter for national parks than they were for national monuments, over twenty national monuments were converted into national parks. Bill Clinton caused controversy with the Antiquities Act by designating Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument (1.3 million acres) in 1996. Controversy continues into the Obama administration with talk of designating two additional areas of Utah as national monuments.