

George Melendez Wright

FACT SHEET

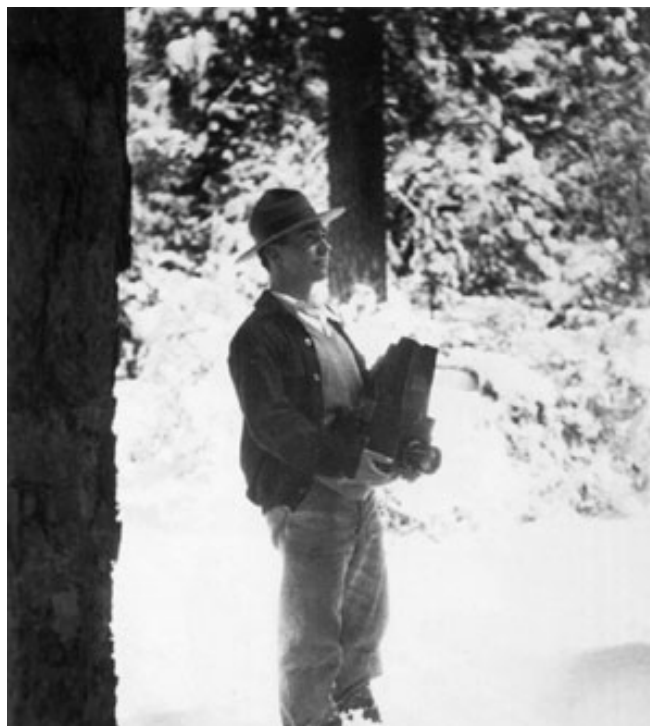
Importance

George Melendez Wright worked as naturalist with the National Park Service from 1927 until his untimely death in 1936. Wright advocated grounding natural resource management in scientific research and led the first surveys of wildlife within the national parks. The report he helped author, known as Fauna No. 1, was a landmark in National Park Service policy. Fauna No. 1 stated that park environments should either be restored or allowed to exist with as little human interference as possible.

Career and Influence

George Wright, born in 1904, began formulating his principles of scientific management when he studied forestry at the University of California Berkeley. In 1927 he accepted a position as assistant park naturalist at Yosemite. While at the park, Wright became concerned with a number of wildlife management issues, including the decreasing population of Tule elk and the exploding population of deer. Wright realized that the National Park Service, which in its short history as an agency had focused its management of the parks on increasing recreational opportunities for tourists, had little scientific expertise or existing research to inform the management of wildlife and other natural resources.

Determined to increase the profile of scientific research within the agency, Wright offered to personally fund a wildlife survey program. Director Horace Albright approved the idea, and the surveys—the first of their kind in the national parks—began in 1929. In 1933 the final report on the surveys, *Fauna of the National Parks of the United States: A Preliminary Survey of Faunal Relations In the National Parks*, was published. Fauna No. 1, as it was called, was the “first comprehensive statement of natural resource management policies” for the Park Service. Its recommendations were “unprecedented” in Park Service policy (Sellars 1997). The report recommended restoring park fauna to a “pristine state” when possible and also reducing the level of human manipulation of wildlife populations. Actions such as fish stocking and the wholesale eradication of predator species, which had proceeded unchallenged up to that point, came under scrutiny. As a result of the report, support for scientific research within the Park Service increased. The number of biologists within the Park Service grew from three to twenty-seven, and in 1933 a new Wildlife Division was created with Wright at its head.



NPS PHOTO

George Melendez Wright

Wright foresaw many of the concerns that later became a focus of Park Service attention in the late twentieth century. He recognized that parks were not islands but were in fact deeply affected by changes occurring in the lands around them. Sadly, Wright was killed in an automobile accident in 1936. Following his death, support for biological research in the Park Service waned. By 1940, the remaining biologists had been transferred out of the Park Service to the U.S. Biological Survey, and it would not be until the 1960s that wildlife biology experienced a resurgence within the Park Service.

References

- Emory, Jerry and Pamela Wright Lloyd. 2000. George Melendez Wright: 1904-1936: A Voice on the Wing. *The George Wright Forum* 17, no. 4: 14-45.
- Sellars, Richard West. 1997. *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press.