

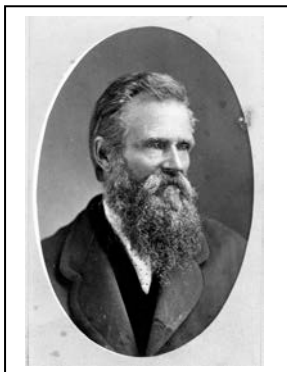
The California State Park Commission

By M. G. "Mike" Lynch

The first State Park Commission was formed on September 28, 1864 when Governor Frederick F. Low issued a proclamation accepting Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove from the Federal government and at the same time he appointed an eight-member board of commissioners to administer the area. This first commission was composed of members Frederick Law Olmsted, J.D. Whitney, William Ashburner, Israel W. Raymond, E.S. Holden, Alexander Deering, George W. Coulter, and Galen Clark. 18 months later, Clark would be appointed as the first Guardian or ranger at



Yosemite Valley 1865. Yosemite Commissioner Fredrick Law Olmsted is fifth from left in the middle row. Commissioner William Ashburner is fourth from the right in the front row.



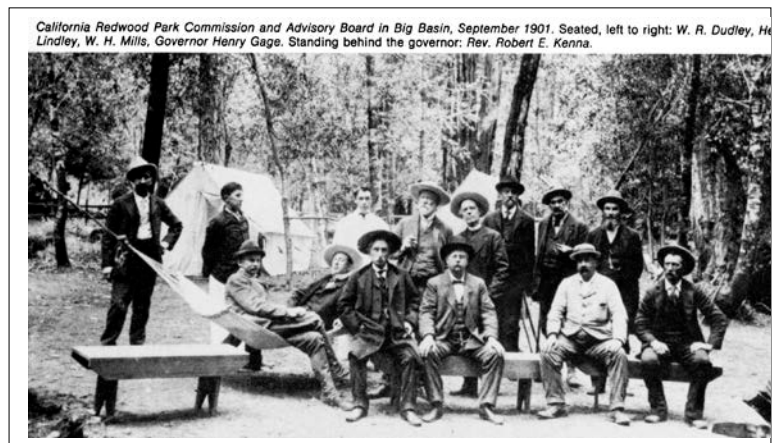
Galen Clark, one of the original Yosemite Commissioners and the first Guardian (ranger) at Yosemite.

Yosemite. Frederick Law Olmsted was the unofficial commission chairman. He was a landscape architect who had designed Central Park in New York City in 1858. The Yosemite Commission was officially titled, "The Commission to manage the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees Grove." From 1864 to 1906, when Yosemite was returned to Federal ownership, 53 Commissioners served on the state commission to manage the area.

The first commission overseeing a historic park was the "Board of Sutter's Fort Trustees" established in 1891, to manage the recently established Sutter's Fort donated to the state by the Native Sons of the Golden West. The first park ranger (titled Guardian at the time) at the Fort was William Todd was appointed in 1895 and reported to the Trustees. Trustees would later also manage Fort Ross when it was donated to the state in 1906.

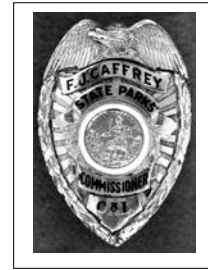
In 1901, the legislature established the California Redwood Park at Big Basin and the California Redwood Park Commission to oversee the area. In 1903, J.H.B. Pilkington was appointed the first Park Warden at Big Basin.

There were several other state park commissions formed during the following years including the Board of Monterey Custom-House Trustees (1901), The San Pasqual Battlefield Commission (1921) and the Mount Diablo Park Commission (1921). The first women park commissioner was Maude L. Dodge appointed in 1921 to the Mount Diablo Park Commission.



California Redwood Park Commission and Advisory Board in Big Basin, September 1901. Seated, left to right: W. R. Dudley, H. Lindley, W. H. Mills, Governor Henry Gage. Standing behind the governor: Rev. Robert E. Kenna.

In 1927, all the various independent state park commissions were consolidated into the first state-wide commission. The new State Park Commission had full control to "administer, protect and develop" the new Division of Parks and the newly minted "State Park System". The commission even selected the nominee for appointment as the Chief of the Division of Parks. The first Chief was Col. Charles Wing, who among his many other qualifications, had been a longtime commissioner on the California Redwood Park Commission.



Commissioner's badge issued to Father F.J. Caffrey in 1939.

The first State Park Commission, left to right: William E. Colby, Ray Lyman Wilbur, Henry W. O'Melveny, Frederick Russell Burnham, Senator Wilbur F. Chandler.



In 1959, the commission authority was changed to a more advisory and policy role, with the director having direct control and authority over the state park system. The commission name was changed to the California State Parks and Recreation Commission after 1964.

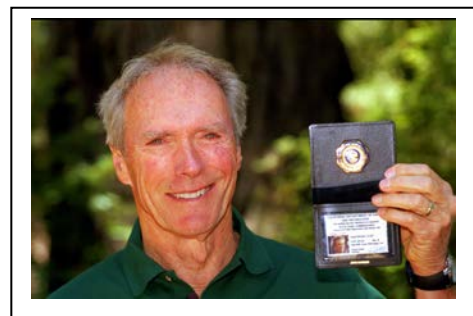


There have been many notable and distinguished state park commissioners over its nearly 150-year history. This included the first commission chairman Frederick Law Olmsted the noted landscape architect, Joseph Knowland the leading and long-time figure in the historic preservation movement, and many celebrity members including actor Leo Carrillo, entertainer Helen Reddy and more recently actor/director Clint Eastwood.



Helen Reddy

One of the outstanding figures in the park movement was Joseph R. Knowland (left). In 1921, Knowland was appointed to the Mount Diablo State Park Commission. He actively served over 20 years on the California State Park Commission, starting in the 1930's. Knowland is pictured here in 1934 with Madie D. Brown who was the first women appointed to the state-wide commission in 1931.



Clint Eastwood served as a state park commissioner from 2002 to 2008. He is holding up his Commissioner's badge.



2014 will mark the 150th Anniversary of California State Parks and the State Park Commission