

Why Tahoe never became a national park

By Abby Stevens, Moonshine Ink

When John Muir visited Lake Tahoe in 1888 and saw the devastating effects of the loosely regulated timber business, he felt deep-seated sadness, and grieved for the loss of the old growth forests. By 1897 Muir was crusading to make Tahoe a national park. He knew it would be a gritty and uphill battle.

Scott Lankford, a professor at Foothill College in Silicon Valley, delves into the argument behind the effort to turn Lake Tahoe into a National Park in his 2010 book "Tahoe Beneath the Surface". He describes how in order to achieve his goal, Muir formed unlikely alliances behind closed doors with powerful businessmen.

The main targets Muir needed on his side were Elias Jackson "Lucky" Baldwin, owner of the Pacific Stock Exchange and the newly opened Tallac House on the South Shore, and Edward Harriman, the powerful and rich owner of Southern Pacific Railroad. Muir convinced both of these men that if Tahoe were to become a National Park, tourism would increase, benefitting both of their businesses. After some persuasion, the two men agreed.

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