

State's 'economic engine' started with a North Country land deal



Retired White Mountain National Forest officer David Govatski looks on while Catherine Amidon, director of the Museum of the White Mountains at Plymouth State University, points to a national forest location on a map. The museum celebrated the 100-year anniversary of the first land purchase for the forests on Thursday.
DAN SEUFERT

One hundred years ago this month, a North Country lumber baron sold 7,000 acres of land in Benton to the U.S. government, a parcel that became known as the White Mountain Forest Reserve.

By DAN SEUFERT

Union Leader Correspondent

PLYMOUTH — One hundred years ago this month, a North Country lumber baron named E. Bertram Pike sold 7,000 acres of land in Benton to the U.S. government, a parcel that became known as the White Mountain Forest Reserve.

Four years later, after the government acquired a more acreage, President Woodrow Wilson formally established the White Mountain National Forest, which has since become "the economic engine of New Hampshire," according to retired White

Mountain National Forest officer David Govatski, who is on the advisory board for the Museum of the White Mountains.

The museum, which opened about a year ago, did not miss the chance to celebrate the event, holding a celebration Thursday called "A Century of Success: The Museum of the White Mountains."

"We're commemorating the first acquisition for what became the White Mountain National Forest, one of New Hampshire's jewels," Govatski said.

Govatski said that after the federal government bought the first land from Pike for the market price of \$13.25 per acre, it began amassing more land in northern New Hampshire and Maine.

Wilson formally established the White Mountain National Forest in 1918, after the Weeks Act was approved by Congress. Now, the forest is nearly 800,000 acres and each year attracts several million visitors who hike, camp, climb and ski.

Catherine Amidon, director of the museum, said Thursday's event was an important milestone for the museum, which is preparing to celebrate the centennial of the establishment of the forest in 2018.

The museum is circulating a petition, Amidon said, to place a state historic marker at the edge of the first land purchase in Benton.

She said the forest, like the museum, is a place for open learning.

"The national forest is not about any one of us, it's about all of us. It's something we all enjoy," she said.

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