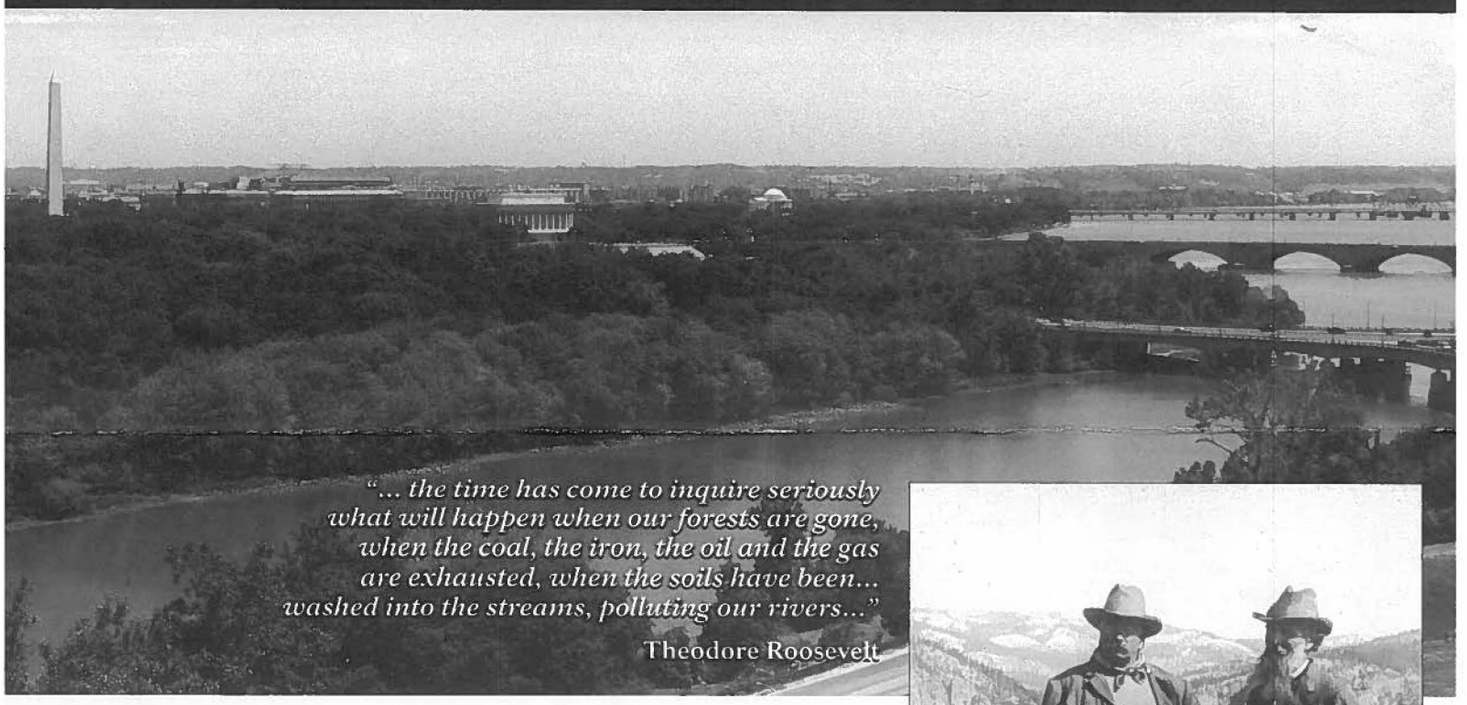
Theodore Roosevelt Island

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

George Washington Memorial Parkway



"... the time has come to inquire seriously what will happen when our forests are gone, when the coal, the iron, the oil and the gas are exhausted, when the soils have been... washed into the streams, polluting our rivers..."

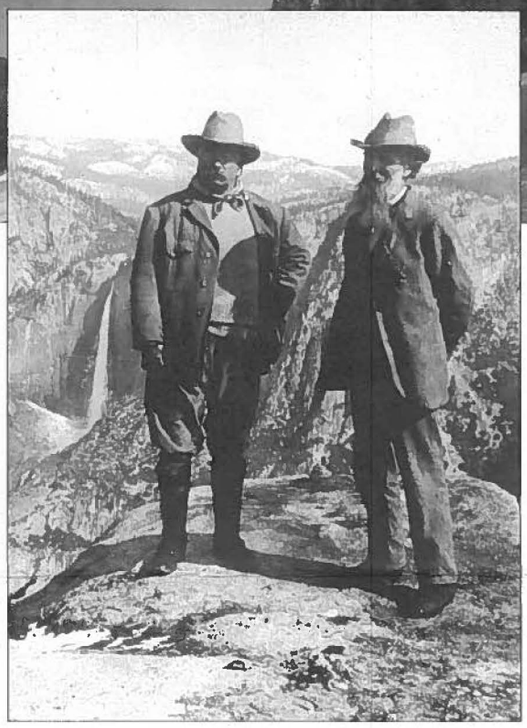
Theodore Roosevelt

A Memorial to a...

Naturalist
Visionary
President

Above: A view of Washington, DC and Theodore Roosevelt Island taken from above the George Washington Memorial Parkway in 1972 by Mary E. Curry

Right: President Roosevelt (left) with famous naturalist John Muir at Yosemite National Park in 1903



Statue of Theodore Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt Island, Washington, DC c. 1967

This wooded island is a tribute to the vision of our 26th President. His passion for the earth's natural places and foresight in planning for their preservation contributed to the conservation legacy we treasure today.

Born on October 27, 1858, in New York City, Roosevelt overcame health challenges of asthma and poor eyesight, and focused his attention on the outdoor world. He enjoyed collecting live animals and hunting "specimens" to study. As a youngster, he established his own natural history museum with items gathered from his neighborhood and family travels. By the time of his presidency, he was a well-known naturalist and outdoorsman. This background prepared him for many of the challenges of his administration.

As President, Roosevelt rose to a conservation crisis. Bison, beaver, and shore birds were fast disappearing, while other species had become extinct. Approximately four-fifths of the nation's prime forests had been cut to make way for farms and provide building materials and fuel. Years of continuous farming had compromised soil fertility.

His leadership changed the public's perception that America's natural resources were inexhaustible. Under Roosevelt's leadership, the Federal Government expanded its role in conserving our nation's resources:

- Roosevelt signed the Antiquities Act into law in 1906. This law has been used to protect magnificent cliff dwellings, ruins and missions discovered on public lands in the southwestern United States.
- Roosevelt provided public protection for nearly 230 million acres of land in the United States during his tenure in office. He created 18 national monuments 5 national parks, 150 national forests, 51 Federal bird reservations, and 4 national game reserves. The monuments included Devils Tower, Lassen Volcanic, Muir Woods, and the Grand Canyon (before it became a national park).
- He established the United States Forest Service, a Federal land management agency.

In the world of conservation, there are numerous tributes to Roosevelt. A subspecies of elk, which was discovered in Olympic National Park, was renamed *Cervus roosevelti*. In Brazil, his explorations of the River of Doubt led to its renaming as "Rio Roosevelt," as a tribute to his role in expanding knowledge of wetlands and rainforests. These accolades seem fitting for a President who was once late for a Cabinet meeting because he was watching birds.

Roosevelt's love of animals led to the creation of one of his most famous namesakes. Once, while on a hunting trip, his aides tied up an old bear for him to kill. His refusal to shoot the defenseless animal prompted a newspaper to draw a cartoon. The cartoon, published nationwide, inspired the creation of the "Teddy Bear," one of America's most beloved toys.

Additional Roosevelt Presidential legacies include:

- Support for women's and civil rights
- Driving force behind construction of the Panama Canal
- Negotiated an end to the Russo-Japanese War
- First American to win the Nobel Peace Prize
- Coined the term "White House"

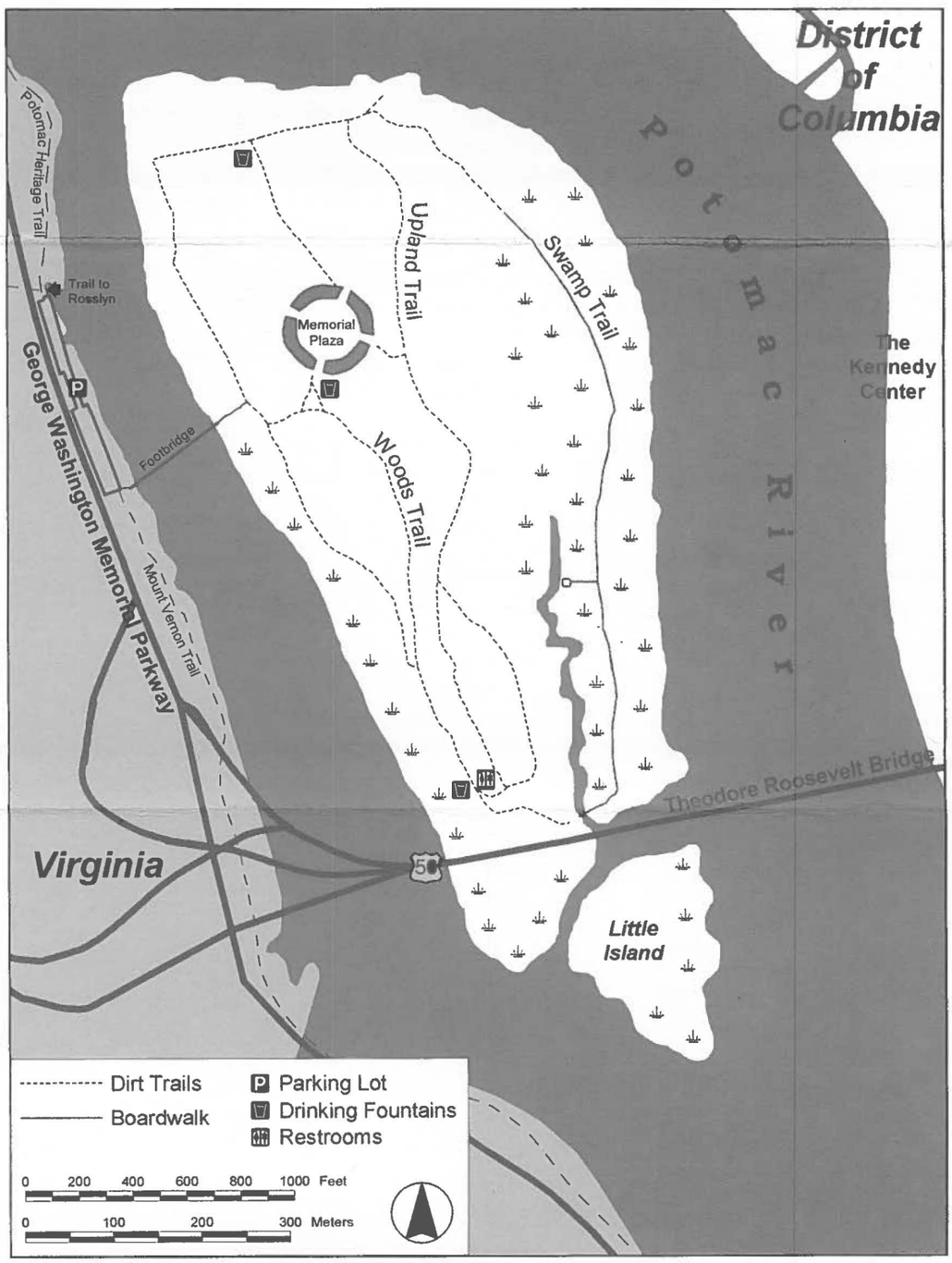
Theodore Roosevelt Memorial, c. 1967

Theodore Roosevelt Island

The Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Association (TRMA) purchased this island, as well as adjacent Little Island (for a total of 88.5 acres), in 1932. Later the same year, TRMA deeded the land to the Federal Government as a gift in memory of our 26th President to be maintained "as a natural park for the recreation and enjoyment of the public." TRMA retained responsibility for development of the memorial and hired Olmsted Brothers, a landscape architecture firm. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and the Civilian Conservation Corps created what has become the mature woodland sanctuary you see today. Years later, Architect Eric Gugler designed the memorial and Sculptor Paul Manship created the central statue. A dedication ceremony took place in October 1967.

The island has a diverse history. Evidence shows that Native Americans used the island as a seasonal fishing village. The site was named "My Lord's Island" when King Charles I granted it to Lord Baltimore. One owner, a sea captain, called it "Barbadoes" after his childhood home. In the 1790s, John Mason, son of George Mason IV (author of the Virginia Bill of Rights), built a brick mansion and cultivated gardens on the island. For years afterward, the island was a picnic resort. During the Civil War, the site served as a training area for the Union Army, including the "First U.S. Colored Troops."

Today, the National Park Service protects the island, while providing for public enjoyment. While you are here, savor the sounds of the outdoors as you travel through marsh, swamp and forest. Or, ponder the quotes on the granite tablets in Memorial Plaza.



PRESERVE, PROTECT, AND ENJOY!

- **Stay on marked trails.**
- **Keep pets leashed.**
- **Respect wildlife by not harassing animals.**
- **Please do not pick plants; leave them for other people to enjoy.**
- **Beware of poison ivy, stinging nettles, and ticks.**
- **Dispose of litter in trash cans.**
- **No bicycles allowed on the island.**

For more information contact:

George Washington Memorial Parkway
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Virginia District Ranger
McLean, VA 22101
703-289-2500

www.nps.gov/gwmp

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