

Cool Views Activity – Muir and Pinchot: Respecting Each Other’s Differences Article

John Muir and Gifford Pinchot were two men who held very different ideas about the environment. John Muir believed that the wilderness should be *preserved*. Gifford Pinchot thought that the environment should be *conserved*. Both men were leaders in the environmental movement during the nineteenth century.

John Muir was a naturalist, explorer and writer who campaigned for the preservation of the American wilderness. He was born on April 28, 1838, in Dunbar, Scotland. At the age of eleven, his family moved to the United States. Living on a farm in Wisconsin, John learned about the beauty and usefulness of nature. As an adult, he founded the Sierra Club. His many books (such as, [The Mountains of California](#) and [Our National Parks](#)), articles and speeches helped to create many protected wilderness areas, including Yosemite National Park. To Mr. Muir, the wilderness was a place to be respected and revered without the intrusion of humankind. He saw foresters and other conservationists as meddling intruders into nature's world.

Gifford Pinchot was the first American to take up the profession of forestry and the first head of the U.S. Forest Service. He was outspoken in his manner and known to appoint women and African Americans to office during a time when most governmental leaders did not. He was born in 1865 to a wealthy family from Pennsylvania. He was educated in the best schools and traveled to Europe, where he learned about the concept of conservation in forestry. Gifford helped to popularize the idea of conservation in the United States. He believed that public wilderness areas could be used as a source of income for the country if the resources were handled wisely. As head of the Forest Service, he traveled all over the country educating people about the many uses of public lands, such as grazing, agriculture and lumbering.

Although John Muir and Gifford Pinchot had many disagreements about how public lands should be treated, they often found themselves working together on projects for the environment. Once they traveled together — along with several other people interested in the future — on an overnight government expedition to the Grand Canyon. As the two men walked together along a rocky canyon trail, they spotted a tarantula. Gifford raised his boot to step on the creature. John stopped Gifford by telling him that the tarantula had just as much right to be on the trail as they did. That evening, the two stayed up until midnight telling each other stories about their adventures in the wilderness.

Adapted from: [Environmental Issues \(Hand-On Minds-On Science Series\): Intermediate](#), by Pauline Chandler and [Environmental Portraits – People Making a Difference for the Environment](#), by Kim Sakamoto Steidl.