

Coos County Democrat ▶

WSPA shows "The People's Forest: Story of the WMNF" at the Rialto

by Edith Tucker
write the author



Master of Ceremonies David Govatski, left, Dr. Catherine Amidon, founding director of the Museum of the White Mountains at PSU; Interim Director Ben Amsden of PSU's Center for Rural Partnerships, and producer David Huntley were on hand on Thursday night for the first Coös County screening of "The People's Forest," sponsored by the Weeks State Park Association (WSPA). Photo by Edith Tucker. (*click for larger version*)

July 31, 2013

LANCASTER – "The People's Forest: the Story of the White Mountain National Forest," a new 48-minute documentary by producer David Huntley, had its first showing in Coös County in front of nearly 170 people at the Rialto Theater on Thursday night, thanks to the generosity of the movie theater owners Dave Fuller and Greg Cloutier plus the sponsorship of the Weeks State Park Association (WSPA) that ordinarily presents its programs in the Weeks Lodge atop Mt. Prospect.

"The People's Forest" makes it clear that Lancaster native John Wingate Weeks of Newton, Mass., for whom the Weeks Act of 1911 is named, played a pivotal role in the creation of the

WMNF by forging a coalition of concerned citizens and stakeholders from all walks of life, including his capitalist colleagues from Massachusetts whom he represented in Congress. A highly successful businessman himself, he recognized that it was under the Interstate Commerce Clause of the Constitution that the headwaters of navigable streams could be protected, including the Merrimack River on which vast mills in Manchester and Lowell, Mass. depended, as well as the Connecticut, Androscoggin and Saco Rivers. Southern N. H. and eastern Mass. then as now depended on the water flow and hydroelectric power originating in the northern reaches of the Granite State.

The movie, that includes vintage footage from U. S. Forest Service archival promotional black-and-white movies plus occasional re-enactments filmed elsewhere, also features a number of New Hampshire experts on why at the turn of the 20th century the White Mountains were stripped of much of their timber, causing erosion and wildfires. This encouraged men and women to fight to have Congress succeed in allowing the federal government to buy land to create the Eastern National Forests. Most of the commentators who were filmed also served as members of the Weeks Act Centennial Committee: Dave Govatski of Jefferson of the WSPA; historian Rebecca More, a Weeks' descendent; WMNF Supervisor Tom Wagner; Jane Difley, president-forester of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests; Policy Director Susan Arnold of AMC; and Jasen Stock of the N. H. Timberland Owners Association.

Producer, director, and scriptwriter David Huntley of Moore Huntley Productions, whose great-grandfather immigrated to Berlin from Norway in 1903 and worked for the Brown Company for 40 years, wore his Limmer hiking boots for his introductory talk on Thursday night. Huntley said he had worked in the AMC hut system and was thrilled to have been tapped to make the film, which cost approximately \$200,000, including monies spent to clean up USFS archival films.

Huntley thanked the many people who researched the story as well as those at PSU who preserve and make accessible the region's rich history. A short 14-minute version is already available on the web. The longer version will likely be on TV at some point during the coming year.

Govatski and More were on hand on Thursday night as were Committee members Rebecca Oreskes of Milan and Prof. Vince Lunetta of Bethlehem, plus WSPA president Dave Tellman of Bethlehem and vice president Lynne Holland of Jefferson, Will Abbott of the SPNHF, and retired county forester Sam Stoddard of Lancaster, a WSPA board member.

Project partners were also represented, including Dr. Catherine Amidon, founding director of the Museum of the White Mountains at Plymouth State University (PSU) and Ben Amsden, Interim Director of PSU's Center for Rural Partnerships.

<http://www.newhampshirlakesandmountains.com/Articles-Coos-County-Democrat-c-2013-07-30-158267.113119-WSPA-shows-The-Peoples-Forest-Story-of-the-WMNF-at-the-Rialto.html>