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GOVERNOR COOPER'S SPEECH
at the dedication of the
GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

September 2, 1940

MR. PRESIDENT, SECRETARY ICKES, GOVERNOR HOEY, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Tennessee gladly meets with her mother-state, North Carolina, in this pleasant hour when a great national resource is dedicted by a great American—President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

If you, Mr. President, as do many others, believe with the Poet Kilmer that a tree may be lovelier than a poem, then here is a vast forest wonderland of beauty surpassing even the beauty of poetry for all Americans to enjoy.

Beneath these veil-like mists of the Great Smokies that the mountain dwelling Cherokee Indians called the Great Smoke are 129 varieties of native trees, and 18 non-native trees.

There are 200,000 acres of virgin hardwoods in this range, one of the largest stands left in America.

The lower slopes are covered by beech forests. There are fine stands of yellowwood, or "gopher trees," which, according to tradition among some of the mountain people, was the wood out of which Noah's Ark was constructed.

Some of the red spruce here are more than 400 years old.

Maple, oak, buckeye, basswood and chestnut trees reach tremendous growth in the Great Smoky Mountains; and many shrubs of these peaks attain tree-like dimensions.

The yellow poplar or tulip tree often attains a height in this area of 200 feet, and a diameter of nine feet. More commonly found are the moun

tain laurel, sometimes towering to forty feet.

William Bartram, the first botanist to report in detail his findings in the Great Smoky Mountains, listed 3,710 varieties of plant life, including mosses, liverworts, fungi, lichens, and ferns; and 1,500 species of higher plant life.

In summer months, the kaleidoscopic colors of the Great Smokies are brought out by the violets, trillium, trailing arbutus and phlox; the azalea, wild tiger lilies, laurel and rhododendron.

Geologists tell us that here we have the oldest mountain formation on the North American continent, and one of the oldest known to the world.

The park area is 54 miles long, 19 miles wide, contains more than 400,000 acres, and 16 of its peaks are more than 6,000 feet in height.

Within a 600 mile radius of the Great Smoky Mountains live two-thirds of the people of America.

This is among their greatest recreational assets. They are but a day and a half drive away at most, or an overnight train ride, or an hour or so by plane. The park holds a major place in the entire recreational program of America.

But scenic beauty and recreational features are not the only assets of the Great Smoky Mountains.

They play a gigantic, silent role in National Defense, Mr. President.

Along with adjacent national forests, this park, by the preservation of its forests, conserves the normal watershed of the Tennessee River, which, with its TVA power and navigation development, is a strategic factor in all considerations of our national defense.

This range is a natural barrier to an enemy, even in days when fighting is largely from and in the air.

This is natural protection for inland country. These towering peaks contribute to the status and security of the Tennessee Valley as "the inner citadel of the nation."

Tennessee, realizing this fortunate relationship in the development of a favored, natural region, has, under direction of the State Planning Commission, organized the "Great Smoky Mountains Regional Planning Commission," on which today I want to offer President Roosevelt and Governor Hoey honorary membership.

This regional commission is looking toward years which we shall not see, but which shall find the full potentialities of the region realized in long range planning for the happiness and security of our people.

There are some immediate plans projected by this commission---including a system of roads which will make the park easily accessible from any approach. Recreational facilities to supplement those already provided are being planned.

Wildlife restoration is another objective of this development program, one already bringing definite results.

Before establishment of the park, wildlife was being tragically depleted in this area. Now we note the satisfactory return of bears, deer, smaller furred mammals and birds. There are 180 varieties of birds now listed in the Great Smokies, and further studies are under way. Hunting and trapping are prohibited; but during the fishing season, there are 600 miles in these mountains of what many sportsmen say are the finest trout streams in America.

Unlike the great National Parks of the West, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a gift of the people to the Government, not a gift of the

Government to the people. The western parks were set aside from the Public Domain, whereas the lands of the Smoky Mountains Park were privately owned, and purchased with private and state funds, and deeded to the Government. Nearly \$5,000,000 was raised by private donations from citizens, and from city and state appropriations. This sum was matched by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Foundation.

This dedication today is the climax of a dream almost 50 years old.

With extreme pleasure, Tennessee joins in this ceremony of formal dedication of a great gift of the people to their fellow Americans.