

Acadia

The next 100 years

This summer, Acadia National Park turned 100. Born on July 8, 1916, when President Woodrow Wilson forever safeguarded 5,000 acres on Mount Desert Island, the park has evolved from a getaway for the wealthy to arguably Maine's most precious natural resource.

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While great fanfare accompanied its centennial celebration, a century is but a blink of an eye for the park, long ago scoured and sculpted into Maine granite by the force of glaciers.

Today, the pressures exerted on the park are man-made. Acadia, established under the tenets of preservation, must contend with the realities of change.

At sea, climate upheaval could lead to rising tides and more violent storms that threaten to remake the park's signature craggy coastline. Cruise ships are docking in nearby Bar Harbor in record numbers, buoying a regional economy that clings to its small-town appeal.

On land, those who live and work in the park's shadow both depend on and lament its popularity. Acadia draws more people each year than reside in the entire state, apparent in the choking summertime traffic that clogs its gates. Park officials strive to welcome scores of visitors who endanger Acadia's largely pristine scenery with their very presence.

But those who value the park will ensure its protection long into the future. This summer, some will meet Acadia for the first time, perhaps over a meal of popovers and chowder on the lawn at Jordan Pond House. Others will sink their toes into the sand at Echo Lake and remember with fondness their childhood vacations. A few may gaze into the clear night sky from the peak of Cadillac Mountain and wonder what's written in the stars for one of Maine's most treasured and iconic landscapes.

Join us as we explore the outlook for Acadia's next 100 years.

Stewards of the environment

Between blocks of pink granite, vehicles and bicyclists slowly climb the winding road to the top of Cadillac Mountain. The ocean sparkles below,

and overhead not a cloud floats in the pale blue sky. It is mid-May, and tourists are just starting to filter into Acadia National Park.

Near the summit of the mountain, within sight of the road, two botanists crouch by a raised bed garden filled with native plants. Inspecting leaves and blossoms, they scribble on waterproof notebooks as black flies swarm around their heads.

The experimental garden — the first of its kind in Acadia — is helping researchers understand which of the park's native plants will adapt to increasing temperatures because of climate change.

Many have already succumbed. Acadia has lost about 20 percent of the plant species that existed in the park a century ago.

"When you look at the park — if you're a visitor or you're looking at a photo — it's hard to tell the changes that have happened," said Abe Miller-Rushing, Acadia's science coordinator. "We still have plants. We still have a lot of plants. You're going to come and see lots of green, but you won't necessarily see that one of every five plant species is gone."

The information gleaned from the experimental garden will be used to restore vegetation on the park's mountains, including Cadillac, a major destination for visitors.

"It's totally a new thing [for the park], to be thinking about what it means to manage change," Miller-Rushing said. "If you're trying to keep ecosystem processes functioning, maintain ecological integrity, what does that look like?"

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Top: Jordan Pond in Acadia National Park. In the background are The Bubbles.

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Center: People ride bikes on the Carriage Trails in Acadia National Park in June.

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Bottom: The sun rises at Otter Cliff in Acadia National Park in January 2015.

