Gifford Pinchot was the first Chief of the United States Forest Service. He was a Republican and a Progressive. Pinchot is known for reforming the management and development of forests in the United States and for advocating the conservation of the nation's reserves by planned use and renewal. He called it "the art of producing from the forest whatever it can yield for the service of man." Pinchot coined the term "conservation" as applied to natural resources.

"The Origins of the Conservation Movement"

“[…] The forest and its relation to streams and inland navigation, to water power and flood control; to the soil and its erosion; to coal and oil and other minerals; to fish and game; and many another possible use or waste of natural resources- these questions would not let him be. What had all these to do with Forestry? And what had Forestry to do with them?

Here were not isolated and separate problems. My work had brought me into touch with all of them. But what was the basic link between them?

Suddenly the idea flashed through my head that there was a unity in this complication- that the relation of one resource to another was not the end of the story. Here were no longer a lot of different, independent, and often antagonistic questions, each on its own separate little island, as we had been in the habit of thinking. In place of them, here was one single question with many parts. Seen in this new light, all these separate questions fitted into and made up the one great central problem of the use of the earth for the good of man.

It was WJ McGee [U.S. Geological Survey Chief]… who defined the new policy as the use of the natural resources for the greatest good for the greatest number for the longest time. It was McGee who made me see, at long last and after much argument, that monopoly of natural resources was only less dangerous to the public welfare than their actual destruction.

Very soon after my own mind was clear enough to state my proposition with confidence, I took it to T.R. [Theodore Roosevelt]. And T.R., as I expected, understood, accepted, and adopted it without the smallest hesitation. It was directly in line with everything he had been thinking and doing. It became the heart of his Administration.

Launching the Conservation movement was the most significance achievement of the T.R. Administration, as he himself believed. It seems altogether probable that it will also be the achievement for which eh will be longest and most gratefully remembered.”

-Gifford Pinchot (1947)

1. How did Gifford Pinchot come to understand the conflicting interests over timber, water, mineral, and fish and game usage on public lands?

2. According to Pinchot, what was the primary goal of the conservation movement?

3. How was Pinchot able to transform his ideas into public policy?
John Muir was one of the first modern preservationists. His letters, essays, and books telling of his adventures in nature, and wildlife, especially in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, were read by millions and are still popular today. His direct activism helped to save the Yosemite Valley and other wilderness areas. The Sierra Club, which he founded, is now one of the most important conservation organizations in the United States. His writings and philosophy strongly influenced the formation of the modern environmental movement.

“The Preservation of the Hetch Hetchy Valley”

“[…] Hetch Hetchy Valley, far from being a plain, common, rockbound meadow, as many who have not seen it seem to suppose, is a grand landscape garden, one of Nature’s rarest and most precious mountain temples. As in Yosemite, the sublime rocks of its walls seem to glow with life, whether leaning back in repose or standing erect in thoughtful attitudes, giving welcome to storms and calms alike, their brows in the sky, their feet set in the groves and gay flowery meadows, while birds, bees, and butterflies help the river and waterfalls to stir all the air into music- things frail and fleeting and types of permanence meeting here and blending, just as they do in Yosemite, to draw her lovers into close and confiding communion with her.

Sad to say, this most precious and sublime feature of the Yosemite National Park, one of the greatest of all our natural resources for the uplifting joy and peace and health of the people, is in danger of being dammed and made into a reservoir to help supply San Francisco with water and light, thus flooding it from wall to wall and burying its gardens and groves one or two hundred feet deep. This grossly destructive commercial scheme has long been planned and urged (though water as pure and abundant can be got from sources outside of the people’s park, in a dozen different places), because of the comparative cheapness of the dam and of the territory which it is sought to divert from the great uses to which it was dedicated in the Act of 1890 establishing Yosemite National Park. […]

That any one would try to destroy such a place seems incredible; but sad experience shows that there are people good enough and bad enough for anything. The proponents of the dam scheme bring forward a lot of bad arguments to prove that the only righteous thing to do with the people’s parks is to destroy them bit by bit as they are able. Their arguments are curiously like those of the devil, devised for the destruction of the first garden- so much of the very best Eden fruit going to waste; so much of the best Tuolumne [River] water and Tuolumne scenery going to waste. Few of their statements are even partly true, and all are misleading.

[…] Landscape gardens, places of recreation and worship, are never made beautiful by destroying and burying them. […] These temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and, instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, life them to the Almighty Dollar.

Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people’s cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man.”

1. What arguments does John Muir make against the damming of Hetch Hetchy Valley?

2. How does Muir use religious imagery to help make his points?

3. How would Muir’s views on wilderness preservation compare with Pinchot’s views on Conservation?