What is the maximum about of people that can visit a monument before their numbers begin to destroy it? Tourism began to become an industry in the mid nineteenth century, as steamships and railroads made travel affordable to a greater number. John Muir (1838-1914) advanced the idea that a monument’s use should be regulated, and he lobbied government tirelessly to take up this responsibility and enforce it at gunpoint through military force. His other greatest intellectual accomplishment was to persuade Americans that their virgin natural landscapes were equivalent to Europe’s monuments and deserved of the same specialized preservation from alterations that threatened their aesthetic integrity. In 1864, President Lincoln signed the Conness Bill into law, ceding ownership of Yosemite and the adjacent Mariposa Grove to the State of California. This was the first time in history that a government had purchased and committed to preserving scenic natural lands (not a garden or city park) simply for public enjoyment. Lured by the novelty, Muir visited the Yosemite Valley in 1869 and found employment building a sawmill for James Mason Hutchings, the area’s first tour operator. Over the years, he grew horrified at the damage done by tourists, and was enraged by the encroachment of sheep farmers and loggers on public land. Starting in the 1870s, he wrote articles for leading magazines like Overland Monthly, Scribner's and Harper's Magazine, which made him nationally famous. When the State of California would not commit to enforcing regulations, Muir and Robert U. Johnson, editor of Century Magazine, successfully lobbied Congress to create the Yosemite National Park (1890), which made it possible for the United States Army's Fourth Cavalry Regiment to enforce bans on sheep grazing and logging. Marrying in 1880, Muir joined his father-in-law’s fruit ranching business, but continued to travel widely. He became increasingly active in wilderness preservation, cofounding the Sierra Club in 1892. His address to the meeting of the Sierra Club held on November 23, 1895, excerpted here, summarized his theory of appropriate use, and related it to forceful regulation and ongoing management of historic natural resources. Near the end of his life he fought a losing battle against the construction of a dam in the Hetch Hetchy Valley of Yosemite, which today supplies water to San Francisco. Muir died in Los Angeles in 1914.

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