

“It is my belief that what is being accomplished will conserve our natural resources, create future national wealth and prove of moral and spiritual value not only to those of you who are taking part, but to the rest of the country as well.”

-President Franklin D. Roosevelt to the CCC on July 8, 1933

See America First (1880-1940)

Following the Civil War and Reconstruction, Americans were faced with a changing nation. The government was busy constructing the **Transcontinental Railroad**, Civil War veterans and their families were trying to heal from the national conflict, and an influx of immigrants from around the world were moving to the United States. In an effort to promote national travel through the railroads, and to create a unified national identity, the United States enacted the **See America First** movement.

See America First encouraged people to travel via railroad throughout their own country to see the historic sites and parks that canonized American culture and identity. Prior to the Twentieth Century, Americans regularly took their vacations in Europe. When World War I broke out in Europe in 1914, travel abroad ceased for safety reasons.

War amplified patriotism, and tourism was a way to preserve nationalism. It became fashionable to travel throughout the United States and collect souvenirs that represented the national heritage. This patriotic movement boosted the economy through rail travel and tourism, while creating a renewed interest in natural and historic sites.



See America First poster, 1911
Library of Congress



Paris Mountain State Park bath house, built between 1936 -1940 in the traditional CCC style structure.
Library of Congress

President Roosevelt and the New Deal

Through conflicts and challenges of **World War I**, the **Great Depression**, and the **New Deal**, the Twentieth Century provided Americans with new opportunities to discover their national identity, which had always been tied closely to the land.

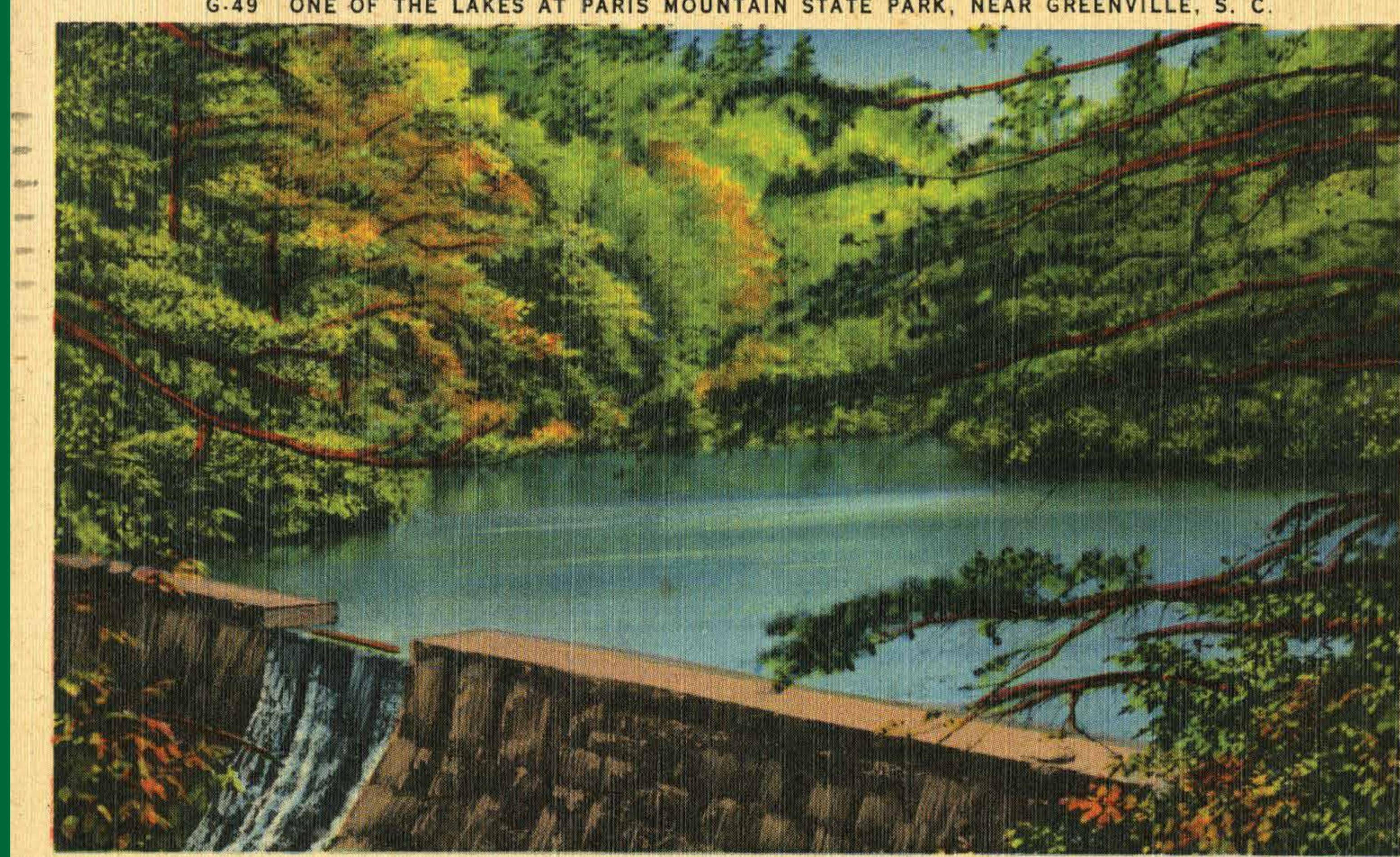
During the Depression, **President Franklin D. Roosevelt** stressed the importance of preserving the nation's parks. He felt they should serve three purposes, foremost as an educational opportunity, then a spiritual journey, and finally, a recreational retreat.

Civilian Conservation Corps (1933-1942)

On Sunday, May 7, 1933, President Roosevelt outlined his New Deal Program through one of his famous **Fireside Chats**. His plan included offering jobs to the unemployed through the **Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)**, and by doing this he would be providing employment and preserving the State and National Parks. The CCC put millions of young men to work planting three billion trees, building trails, and constructing structures at parks around the country.



Civilian Conservation Corps workers building a fence in Georgia, 1941. *Library of Congress*



Postcard of Paris Mountain State Park near Greenville, SC
South Carolina Historical Society collections.

The CCC and the South Carolina State Parks

In South Carolina, Cheraw State Park was the first of sixteen state parks and six wayside parks created by the CCC. Landowners donated 34,673 acres which they had deemed unsuitable for farming. Paris Mountain State Park, near Greenville, hosts several CCC trails and structures built between 1936 and 1940.

The CCC also focused their efforts on forest protection since much of the unused farmland had been repurposed for unregulated timber harvesting. Today's state and national park systems are a direct product of the New Deal and the Civil Conservation Corps efforts.