The Pharisee Spirit:  
Gifford Pinchot in Colorado

One of the more important aspects of the conservation controversy in America at the turn of the twentieth century was the conflict it bred between the movement's leader, Gifford Pinchot, and angry westerners opposed to it. In a day when the insurgent West\(^1\) condemned federal land policies and conservation officials as a matter of course, it disliked no one more than Pinchot. As the wealthy, privileged eastern patrician come to employ "conservation" on the pioneers' land, he symbolized all they hated and feared; and, because he did, they fought him and his doctrine for the better part of two decades all across the West. It achieved them little; from the beginning to the end of the conservation era, Pinchot dominated his antagonists as perhaps no other man of his day—with the possible exception of Theodore Roosevelt—could have. And it was this fact that made their long, bitter confrontation particularly unique.

The conflict, of course, revolved around the question of land—its use or its preservation. At the end of the nineteenth century the philosophy of westward-moving pioneers was simple: the land was theirs to do with as they pleased. That their creed often led to land and resource devastation apparently was unimportant to them; raised, as they had been, on the concept of the West as the "Garden of the World," where resources were inexhaustible, they found no difficulty in justifying their actions. Never questioning the idea of the "Garden," imbued with vague ideas of "freedom" and "rights" and "progress," they took—and often annihilated—the land. Their "mission," as they conceived it, was to spread civilization across the West; if they wasted some of the nation's trust in the process, it

\(^1\) The term "insurgent" was one applied to the anti-conservationists by those who favored conservation. In time it became the most popular term in usage. See, for example, Denver Republican, Mar. 19, 1909.
mattered little. What mattered was civilization then. Future generations could take care of themselves.

The philosophy of Gifford Pinchot went completely against the grain of traditional pioneer thought. As a professional forester, federal official, and political progressive, he championed the legitimate development of the West; but, at the same time, he stubbornly opposed those who despoiled the land—the monopolistic corporations, the timber barons, large cattlemen—and those pioneer farmers who took up the land, destroyed it, and moved on. In a particularly patrician way he saw himself and the conservation philosophy that he embraced as the last barrier between the important natural resources of the West and their ultimate extinction at the hands of land raiders. In an almost dialectical war against the "vested interests," he envisioned himself as the last defender of the "little man" in his own generation—and of his children in the next. To Pinchot, conservation—economically and socially—was a necessity, not a luxury; it enhanced man's environment, stabilized him, provided him with an atmosphere in which he might reach his fullest potential. As Pinchot's wife wrote, years after the conservation era had passed,

conservation to him was never a vague, fuzzy aspiration. It was concrete, exact, dynamic, the application of science and technology to our material economy for the purpose of enhancing and elevating the life of the individual. The conservation he preached . . . dealt . . . first, last, and always with human beings. . . . To Pinchot, you see, man himself was a natural resource, the basic and primary resource for whose material, moral, and spiritual welfare the conservation doctrine was invoked. . . . Believing as he did that the planned and orderly development of the earth and all it contains was indispensable to the permanent prosperity of the human race, conservation in its widest sense became to him a philosophy of guiding principles through which such prosperity might be achieved, a bold, creative affirmation in ethical and spiritual terms of our faith in the dignity of man as a child of God.²

That western pioneers never clearly understood the workings of Pinchot's mind was perhaps the central tragedy of the conservation era. His ideas, to frontiersmen, simply made no sense. It was incomprehensible to them, for example, that Pinchot would proclaim

himself champion of the "little man"—and then both lock up western timberlands that little men considered imperative to survival, and campaign for a leasing program on the vast grasslands of the Great Plains. It made little difference to them that—theoretically, at least—Pinchot advocated and promoted the idea of maximum land use, especially in the West. The fact remained that the Forester's rhetoric—standard progressive rhetoric—about economic and political equality, the perfection of the environment, efficiency, future generations, and the quality of life meant nothing to simplistic, impulsive, often ignorant frontiersmen whose lives never had and never would revolve around intellectual abstractions. The Pinchot philosophy, to them, was little more than a manifestation of eastern arrogance, another attempt—not unlike the gold "conspiracy"—on the part of the East to subvert the social and economic power of the West and its people. As contrived as the idea might have been, countless westerners believed it in the years when "conservation" came to Colorado and the rest of the West. And they still believed it two decades later when the back of their anticonservation movement was finally broken.

Pinchot had legions of western enemies, but no state produced more than Colorado, beginning with its first introduction to the Forester in the spring of 1898. After a tour of the West in 1896 and 1897 with Grover Cleveland's controversial National Forestry Commission (sent to determine the feasibility of creating more forest reserves in the region), Pinchot returned to Washington with a personal recommendation to the President that a number of reservations be created in Colorado. His action created a feeling of outrage in a state already chafing under five withdrawals made since 1891. Particularly galling to Coloradans was the fact that Pinchot's recommendations came after he had spent less than five days in the state. He himself later remarked that he "rode to the top of Pikes Peak in a stage, saw Cripple Creek in all its lurid glory, and made a partial acquaintance with the five Colorado reserves." And on the basis of the "partial acquaintance," including time spent in areas already withdrawn from entry, he had advocated the inclusion


of millions of additional acres of Colorado wilderness into forest reserves.

At the same time that he was lobbying for new federal reservations in the Colorado Rockies, Pinchot also attempted to influence the course of federal land policy in the state in other ways. In a report to the Secretary of the Interior in 1898 he recommended that, due to its "deteriorated condition," the grazing range on the White River Timber Land Reserve near Glenwood Springs be closed. The report stunned White River pioneers. In the northwest quadrant of the state, where cattle raising was the linchpin of the entire economy (and where local settlers had already warred against federal reservation policies for six years), Pinchot's ideas earned him immediate opposition. The result was the same elsewhere. In his 1898 report he also deplored the breakdown of law on the Pikes Peak Timber Land Reserve in the central Colorado Rockies and urged that the government use its might to curb depredations on the land by cattlemen and timber cutters. Lamenting the fact that, as of 1898, "practically no forests deserving of the name" existed on the reserve because of the lawless incursions of local settlers, he added, angrily, that "in no part of the country . . . are the rights of the government and its property more disregarded than in this part of Colorado." Local settlers said little in reply, but most certainly they took note of the action.

If it was possible for Colorado insurgents to ignore Pinchot during the early stages of the conservation movement, by the summer of 1901 they could no longer; by that time, as head of the Forestry Bureau in the Department of Agriculture, an ascending, influential federal official, he was the cardinal agent of conservation in America. More precisely, he was also instrumental in the latest innovation on the western reserves: the establishment of a system of grazing permits and rules and regulations designed to curtail the growth of range monopoly, stop overcrowding and overgrazing on the ranges, and contain the cattlemen's incessant brushfire wars. Stockmen, especially those in northwestern Colorado, were incensed to the

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7 Report of the National Academy of Sciences, 1898 (Washington, 1898), 47.
extent that they demanded Pinchot's appearance in Colorado to justify the plan. To their surprise he came.

On the morning of July 17, 1901, Pinchot, for the first time, came face to face with the insurgents. The place was Cripple Creek, a tawdry, ramshackle mining camp lumped at the southeast base of Pikes Peak on the edge of one of Colorado's most agitated reserves, the occasion was the twelfth annual convention of the influential Trans-Mississippi Commercial Congress. Before a large, silent audience in the sweltering Cripple Creek Opera House, Pinchot presented the government's case for conservation. His theme was simple: "The general prosperity of the country," he said, was "ultimately bound up with the protection and preservation of the forests. . . . In a very real sense the end of civilization may be described as the founding of homes . . . and forestry is therefore the handmaid of civilization." The speech received no applause. Cripple Creek, a boomtown surviving off adjacent forests, was no place for an eastern conservationist to speak of forestry; the "handmaid of civilization" there was exploitation, not preservation. In response to Pinchot's plea for understanding, the congress passed a resolution condemning the new reserve permits and regulations as "unnecessary for the protection of the forests," and demanding their abolition. In dealing with westerners, Pinchot clearly had not done well. But he gained experience that would benefit him in his next meeting with them.

In the fall of 1901, with the death of William McKinley and the succession of Theodore Roosevelt to the presidency, Pinchot became the new overseer of the federal government's conservation program. Under McKinley he had had little actual authority, but under the conservation-minded Roosevelt he was delegated considerable power. Combining then, as he had in the past, "the moral fervor of an evangelist and a politician's intuition," he made quick and extensive plans to expand the federal program throughout the West. Speaking before a meeting of the American Forestry Association in Denver that September he laid his views on the line. In unequivocal terms he called for the "immediate extension of forest

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8 Trans-Mississippi Commercial Congress, *Proceedings of Twelfth Annual Convention* (Cripple Creek, Colo., 1901), 266.
reserves in almost every locality in the West.” Speaking of Colorado in particular, he declared that it had “no more pressing need than the extension of the reserve system over her forest lands.”10 The response to the idea was predictable; already “thoroughly hated by free-born American citizens who did not see why they ‘hadn’t the right’ to cut down just as many trees as they wanted,”11 Pinchot came under more attacks than ever before. Voicing the feelings of many, both in the fall of 1901 and later, Denver physician Charles Sirois branded the Forester an “impractical dreamer, a rapacious, venal, petty aristocrat bent on destroying everybody.”12

In the early months of 1902, as Pinchot acted to implement his ideas, he brought the so-called “transfer issue” to the West. For a number of years he and other conservationists had urged Congress to transfer jurisdiction over the nation’s forest reserves from the Interior Department, which had no forestry bureau, to the Agriculture Department which did (under Pinchot). Their reasoning was sound in that over the course of a decade the vast lands contained in the western reserves had progressively deteriorated under the incompetent administration of the Interior Department. Through a bill introduced into Congress in early 1902 Pinchot sought to have the transfer made; once done, he planned to revitalize the demoralized ranger corps, contain both fires and settlers who decimated the land, and employ enlightened forestry practices to the wilderness, hopefully to the benefit of both present and future generations.

Desiring no change, Colorado anticonservationists relentlessly fought the idea from the first. It was their feeling that over the years they had learned to coexist, however unpeacefully, with the Interior Department and its policies (and its lax enforcement of the law); but under Pinchot, they reasoned, their lives would be made much more difficult. In a congressional address in June, 1902, Colorado representative John Bell bitterly declared that he wanted no transfer: “We have, with great patience and endurance, found out what the theory of the Secretary of the Interior is. We have now come to a point where we can deal with him. . . . Must we now learn

10 Denver Republican, Sept. 29, 1901.
12 Denver Republican, June 2, 1905.
to conform to another chief's way of running these reserves and be a shuttlecock between the two departments? We want none of it in Colorado."\(^{13}\)

For three years the insurgents fought the transfer idea successfully. But on February 1, 1905, Congress passed the Pinchot bill (which anticonservationist Colorado Senator Henry Teller called a measure with "neither law nor sense behind it").\(^{14}\) Insurgent Coloradans well understood the implications of the bill. In the agitated Colorado back country, Red Cliff rancher John Mims disgustedly complained that

the idea that anyone in the peaceful pursuit of private enterprise . . . can [under Pinchot's policies] be prosecuted as a trespasser on his own land is repugnant to the principles of American liberty and the spirit upon which our institutions are trying to stand. . . . And I am chagrined that our great government, through Pinchot, has become so cheapened as to say to you and me that we are aliens in our own country.\(^{15}\)

And, speaking for many western slope settlers, the Eagle County Blade charged that as "the absolute monarch and dictator" over much of Colorado, Pinchot exercised "a greater power of dominion over it" than did "the monarch of any country on the globe." "The fellows who spilled the tea in Boston Harbor," said the Blade, "were not the only ones who had a righteous cause for revolution."\(^{16}\)

Meanwhile, other issues continued to polarize Pinchot and the insurgents. In late 1903, in the midst of the transfer controversy, President Roosevelt created a Public Lands Commission, composed of Pinchot and two other high government officials, to travel through the West and conduct public hearings on the two most provocative conservation issues of the day—the leasing of the grazing lands of the public domain and the continued establishment of forest reserves. Pinchot and Frederick Newell of the Reclamation Service scheduled two meetings in Denver, in January and August of 1904. Prior to the first meeting, the anticonservationists—chiefly cattlemen—prepared for Pinchot. There were those, of course, who did not intend to dissent. But for most of the men who went to Denver

\(^{13}\) U. S., Congressional Record, 57th Cong., 1st Sess., 1902, XXXV, Part 6, 6204.

\(^{14}\) Pinchot, Breaking New Ground, 258.

\(^{15}\) Denver Republican, May 10, 1905.

\(^{16}\) Eagle County Blade, May 1, 1905.
the singular objective was to “protest against the reserves and public land conditions,” to “impress upon Pinchot . . . the belief . . . that forest reserves in their present form were injurious.”

On the morning of January 22 the Commission opened hearings at the Denver Chamber of Commerce building. As he had at Cripple Creek three years earlier, Pinchot took the floor to present the government’s case for conservation. But after his brief address, the day belonged to the insurgents. Behind volatile Plum Creek cattleman Elias Ammons and state senator Edward Taylor, the dissidents resolutely stated their opposition to the Roosevelt-Pinchot forest reserve program. While Colorado pioneers had “no objection to the reserves themselves,” said Ammons, they opposed the “destruction of the people who have gone and built up homes” in the mountain country. No federal policy, added Taylor, superseded the right of men to own their own land and “establish their own lives in the wilderness.” Several hundred cattlemen and homesteaders filled the hall with cheers. Pinchot sat quietly and made no comment. When the insurgents turned to leasing, their argument was similar: the “martyrdom” of a generation of pioneers had earned them the “right” to the open range, free from federal interference. Leasing, argued cattleman George Downing of Glenwood Springs, operated “against the little man who has worked and built up this great empire in the West.” Concluded Taylor: “The streams and the mountains are his! Uncle Sam has been paid a thousand fold for the land by the blood and bones of these people.”

On January 25, after two more days of hearings, Pinchot and Newell left Denver for Salt Lake City. Colorado insurgents were not satisfied with their performance; if they had expected to convert Pinchot to their cause, they had failed to do it. They had trumpeted their “rights” for three days, but they had produced no changes—nor even any promises of change—in federal policy. Pinchot had stood firm. But seven months later, on August 3, when the second round of hearings began, the anticonservationists were prepared to try again.

18 Proceedings of a Conference Between Special Land Commission Appointed by President Roosevelt and Prominent Stockmen of the West (Denver, 1905), 280, 292.
19 Ibid., 258–259, 334.
The first day's proceedings, held in the ballroom of the Brown Palace Hotel, were dominated by Ammons; Pinchot, coatless and sweating, was attacked in anticonservation "testimony" lasting most of the morning. Ammons' primary theme was the incompetence of Pinchot and his Bureau of Forestry "underlings" who, claimed the cattleman, "never saw the west side of the Mississippi River." Angrily, continually pounding his fist on the table where Pinchot sat, Ammons maintained that the reserve network in Colorado was gradually "destroying" the homes and lives of pioneers who had built up the territory. The entire reservation movement, he claimed, was "oppressive," and along with it so was Pinchot's "rule." In alienating westerners, Ammons concluded, the Forester was "punishing the best friends he ever had." If Pinchot had any thoughts on the charges, he said nothing. As he had in January, he sat, impassive, and made no reply.

The next day, August 4, the insurgents continued their attacks, this time behind J. H. Halley of Delta, the virtual dictator of the cattle country of northwest Colorado. In a furious afternoon-long harangue against Pinchot and his policies, he finally nettled the Forester. Complaining, in particular, about the government's creation of the Battlement Mesa Forest Reserve in western Colorado, Halley maintained that "the government agent in charge [of defining its boundaries] forgot his spectacles, and in going on the land mistook sagebrush for giant trees and generally mucked things up. The consequence was that I was beaten out of my range." Springing to his feet, Pinchot shouted that "we give you the best in the shop." From that point on the hearings were marked—if they had not been before—by open hostility between the Forester and the Coloradans.

On August 5 the hearings ended; Pinchot boarded a train for Washington on August 6, leaving behind him a group of bewildered dissidents. Once again, despite their best efforts, they had failed to dissuade Pinchot from his policies.

In mid-June, 1905, four months after Pinchot had won the transfer battle (and at precisely the moment the President was creating

20 Ibid., 299–301.
21 Ibid., 301–302.
22 Ibid., 304.
thirteen new forest reserves in the Colorado mountains), the government announced the institution of grazing fees on all federal reservations, effective January 1, 1906. The government's reasons, as usual, were sound. Despite the application of grazing permits and other rules and regulations on forest reserves, their ranges still were in a state of gradual deterioration. Conservationists, led by Pinchot, believed that a grazing tax might alleviate the distress of the mountain ranges both by driving marginal operators off it (by making the cost of grazing their livestock prohibitive to them) and by providing revenue for reseeding programs and scientific range experimentation. Pinchot himself explained the government's goals: the protection and conservative use of all forest reserve grazing land, the "best permanent good of the livestock industry" through the care of the grazing lands, and the "protection of the settler and home builder" against "unfair competition in the use of the range."23

Predictably, Colorado insurgents strongly opposed the plan; and because they held Pinchot personally responsible for it, they instantly invited him to return to Colorado to defend himself and the government's position. "Confident that President Roosevelt would not let this grazing tax thing go on" after he had "heard the evidence from both sides," Pinchot's opponents planned a massive rally at Glenwood Springs in December.24 The Forester was to be there. Looking ahead to the meeting, Edward Taylor noted that "we have profound respect for Mr. Pinchot, but the rules he has enumerated for Colorado are Utopian."25 It was his belief—one shared by others—that if the rules could be exposed as such, they might be rescinded. And in the process, too, the insurgents hoped they could discredit Pinchot in the eyes of Roosevelt.

On the cold, snowy morning of December 4, two hundred cattlemen crowded into the Glenwood Hotel for the year's major encounter. Their hopes, as usual, were high; the Glenwood Avalanche-Echo had called for a general "rising up" of the "hardy pioneers of the forest,"26 and, doubtless, most of them expected precisely that. Their leader, as in past confrontations with Pinchot, was Ammons,

23 Pinchot, Breaking New Ground, 269.
26 Ibid., Oct. 19, 1905.
who opened the meeting with a scathing attack on the tax. But Ammons was by no means alone. Throughout the morning others followed him, all of them focusing on the theme of federal "oppression." Robert Steward of Plateau, for example, called the reservations, the fees, the entire federal system, "odious." The tax, warned Mesa rancher John Dittman, was enough to "cause an ordinary man to rebel." Throughout the morning Pinchot sat in the front row of the convention and listened intently to the cattlemen. Then, in the afternoon, they listened to him.

For an hour and a half, after a break at noon, the Forester addressed the insurgents. Urbane, confident, effusing good fellowship, his rhetoric simple and persuasive, Pinchot seemed to beguile his audience. His message to the dissidents was simple: the grazing tax would be enacted and any cattleman who used the range would pay it. As uncompromising as Pinchot's position was, however, the dissidents made no move to dispute it. When the Forester terminated the address, the ballroom remained silent; after five months of planning to discredit Pinchot, and even after hearing a clearly antagonistic address by him, for some reason the insurgents found nothing else to say. The next day Pinchot left Glenwood for Washington; and once again he left without having been "cornered" by his opponents. He had, in the words of a disgusted local newspaper, "thrown a wet blanket" over the dissidents for good, an achievement made all the more remarkable because it had been done on their own home grounds.

One month later, in mid-January, 1906, Pinchot returned to Colorado to attend the annual convention of the National Livestock Association in Denver and to meet privately again with Colorado insurgents. Looking ahead to the meeting, the proconservation Denver Republican predicted little conflict; most cattlemen, it said, were "practically agreed on the main outlines of the Pinchot policy." But the mood of the cattlemen belied the assertion; the men who drifted into Denver through the January snows were in a distinctly hostile mood, "tired," as one of them said, "of being regarded as intruders" on their own land and "weary of the constant

27 Ibid., Dec. 7, 1905.
28 Ibid., Nov. 28, 1905.
29 Denver Republican, Jan. 24, 1906.
fight” for their rights.\textsuperscript{30} And it remained their feeling that the only way to recoup their “rights” was to discredit Pinchot.

On January 29 insurgent leaders met with Pinchot in a gruelling four-hour night meeting at the Brown Palace. When it ended the \textit{Rocky Mountain News} reported that the Coloradans, “amid a feeling of determination and enthusiasm . . . never manifested before,” had “roasted” the Forester.\textsuperscript{31} The \textit{Denver Republican}, however, insisted that the meeting had been harmonious, that Pinchot had told the cattlemen—as he had before—that the grazing fees would be enforced, and that the insurgents had offered no argument.\textsuperscript{32}

The next day the cattlemen met again with Pinchot—and this time by \textit{any} account he silenced them. As he had at Glenwood, he calmly and rationally presented the case for the grazing tax; and, as they had at Glenwood, the insurgents unaccountably listened without rebuttal. The \textit{Republican}, reporting on the meeting, effusively called it a “love feast,” the “most peaceful gathering ever known in the history of the livestock industry.” Emphasizing the “magic” influence of Pinchot over the irate stockmen, the newspaper described the meeting:

\begin{quote}
In truth, the stockmen were disarmed. . . . Mr. Pinchot is one of the most diplomatic men who has come out of the East. Aroused last spring when they were ordered to pay a tax for the use of the forest ranges, the stockmen came down to meet the terrible Pinchot, who stood as the representative of those who would rob them of their ancient privileges. . . . Instead of a fiendish individual, though, the stockmen met a suave, polished gentleman who is exceedingly friendly . . . and is ready to meet them halfway in all good suggestions.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

The insurgent press, however, was less impressed by the spellbinding powers of Pinchot than by what it considered a lack of resolution on the part of the anticonservationists. The furious \textit{Glenwood Avalanche-Echo} charged that the cattlemen had “given up,” that rather than fight Pinchot, they had sold themselves out

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Denver Record-Stockman}, Jan. 12, 1906.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Rocky Mountain News}, Jan. 30, 1906.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Denver Republican}, Jan. 31, 1906.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}
by “currying favor” with him.\textsuperscript{34} Equally disgusted by the “spectacle” of cattlemen “falling all over themselves going around on the quiet to secure concessions” from Pinchot, humbling themselves, becoming “servile to the autocratic government,” the \textit{Gunnison News-Champion} warned them of the “danger” of such practices: “The history of the world,” it wrote ominously, “does not show a case where the tyrant has failed to appear when invited.”\textsuperscript{35} There was more to Pinchot’s mastery of the cattlemen, though, than their vacillation. Even the bitter \textit{Avalanche-Echo} ruefully admitted that Pinchot had been too crafty for the “average cattleman of the Continental Divide,” too “diplomatic and genteel,” too “smooth” to be outflanked.\textsuperscript{36} Much truth lay in the admission, not just regarding the Denver debacle but regarding the past half dozen years.

Throughout 1906 Colorado continued to debate forest reserves and grazing taxes; but the year’s major issue was the government’s increasing determination to institute a system of leasing on the grasslands of the western public domain. Fully convinced that western grazing lands needed to be as carefully protected by the federal government as the mountain ranges were, Pinchot headed the movement; and, because he did, Colorado anticonservationists again invited him to come to the state to defend his position. As usual, they made no attempt to conceal their contempt for him. “Has there ever been,” mused the \textit{Gunnison News-Champion}, “such an example of the Pharisee spirit in national affairs?”\textsuperscript{37}

On January 22, before the annual Colorado Cattle and Horse Growers Association convention at Denver’s Albany Hotel, Pinchot faced his old antagonist, Elias Ammons. Ammons began with a standard anti-leasing speech, recorded by the \textit{Denver Times}:

In an eloquent and earnest plea, Ammons . . . denounced the [leasing] idea. . . . “This is a question between the nation and the state. It is a question of whether we are going to have control of our own lands or the government is going to become a landlord and place it under a system of tenantry. . . . Will you turn over this land to Prince Pinchot under a system as foreign to our principles as is the government of Russia?”\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Glenwood Avalanche-Echo}, Feb. 8, 1906.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Gunnison News-Champion}, Mar. 20, 1906.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Glenwood Avalanche-Echo}, Feb. 16, 1906.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Gunnison News-Champion}, Jan. 4, 1907.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Denver Times}, Jan. 23, 1907.
Pinchot took the floor after Ammons’ speech, calmly replying that while he agreed in the full protection of all men’s rights, leasing—like forest reserves—was necessary and inevitable. The obdurate cattlemen, he said, needed to recognize the fact: “The wisest thing the cattlemen could do would be to break this bronco themselves.”  

For once, however, the insurgents stood firm. Apparently swayed more by Ammons’ rhetoric than Pinchot’s, the Association resolutely refused to support the Forester with pro-leasing resolutions. “Gifford Pinchot is down and out,” crowed the *Glenwood Avalanche-Echo*. “Mr. Pinchot boasted that he could handle the stockmen of the West . . . but he failed. . . . Now Colorado cattlemen are singing, ‘Great is E. M. Ammons, who put Mr. Pinchot to rout.’”  

That night Ammons was rewarded with a boisterous victory banquet. Predictably, the insurgents’ rejoicing was premature; despite the events at Denver, neither Pinchot nor the leasing idea had been seriously damaged. The leasing concept gained momentum throughout 1907; the forest reserves continued to expand; and Pinchot’s prestige and power grew with them. The insurgents, their initial elation quickly gone, noticed the trend and stepped up their attacks on the Forester. Sometimes humorous, sometimes acid, their ideas never changed:

Wise old guy this Baron Pinchot,  
Seeks to fence in all the earth,  
While we sit and watch his doings  
In a manner full of mirth.  
Wonder if when he gets through here,  
He will journey up to the skies,  
No telling, how he flies.  
And while you’re building fences  
Of barbed wire and the like,  
Remember that the cowboys  
May decide to go on strike.  
Maybe when they’re through with you  
And you their wrath have felt,  
Your pet scheme will be blasted,  
And your scalp hang from their belt.  

39 *Denver Republican*, Jan. 23, 1907.  
40 *Glenwood Avalanche-Echo*, Jan. 24, 1907.  
In early 1907, while they assailed him at the Albany and in the back country press, Colorado insurgents also, for the first time, began to oppose Pinchot in Congress. When the annual agricultural appropriation bill came up in the Senate in January, for example, Thomas Patterson of Denver led a week-long assault against Pinchot, his department, and conservation in general. Focusing on both the size of Pinchot’s personal salary and the size of his requested appropriations, Patterson charged that there had been “a glamour and romance attempted to be thrown over this whole forest reserve business.” “The man at the head . . . is raised to the attitude of a great benefactor of the human race . . . Mr. Pinchot is a very good man—but not much better than a good many others. He is a man who rides a hobby—a hobby that if ridden with judgment might accomplish some good, but I am satisfied that Mr. Pinchot is riding his hobby to a fall.” Despite it all—the attacks of Patterson and others—Pinchot received both a raise and increased appropriations for his department. As before, the insurgents failed to thwart him.

If the insurgents were unhappy with Pinchot’s victory, they were more than consoled by a rider they attached to the agricultural appropriation bill (at the instigation of Coloradans Patterson, Henry Teller, and others) severely limiting the power of the president to create future forest reserves in the United States. On March 5, 1907, however, four days before he signed the bill into law, Roosevelt—with Pinchot’s advice and planning—created twenty-one new forest reserves throughout the West. Though Colorado escaped the effects of the action, its insurgent element was outraged—primarily at Pinchot. Speaking of his “collusion” with Roosevelt to destroy the West, one Colorado newspaper wrote that “very few of the autocratic monarchs of the world would so dare to set aside the will of the people this way.” And, finally, two weeks after the proclamation of the “Midnight Reserves,” the Colorado state legislature called for a massive public lands convention to be held in Denver in June to settle the conservation question once and for all. The alleged reason for the meeting was to “discuss” the course of conservation with federal officials; but

42 U. S., Congressional Record, 59th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1907, XXXXI, Part 4, 3538.
43 Steamboat Pilot, June 5, 1907.
the insurgents made no secret of the fact that its real purpose was to seek the repudiation and reversal of Pinchot's policies once and for all.

After several months of preparation, the meeting—the Denver Public Lands Convention—was gavelled to order at the Broadway Theater on the morning of June 18, 1907. While Pinchot and other federal officials sat in the audience, the insurgents carried the first two days. Behind Teller, Patterson, Ammons and others they sounded the same familiar theme that the land "belonged" to them. Teller articulated the feeling of them all when he said, "We cannot remain barbarians to save timber. I do not contend that the government has the right to seize the land, but I do contend that we have the right to put it to the use that Almighty God intended. The wealth of the state belongs to the people here and not the federal government."  

Not until the morning of June 20 did Pinchot speak. Confident, as always, a picture of eastern elegance in his black tailored suit, he walked across the floor to the podium, ignoring catcalls from the crowd, and confronted the assembly: "If you fellows can stand me," he quipped, "I can stand you." The central theme of his address was the value of the forest reserve system to the nation. On the critical subject of the grazing tax he explained, as he had many times before, that the government would "give the small man in the grazing proposition the best of it every time." In response to accusations of arrogance and demagoguery, he quietly replied that he "resented them with every fiber of my being." In conclusion he asked the cattlemen and others for their cooperation in the matter of conservation: "Speak to your people," he said, "that they may go forward."  

When Pinchot returned to his seat, a small group of insurgents, led by Colorado Congressman Robert Bonynge, took the floor to attack the speech. Bonynge, in particular, castigated Pinchot ("whose popularity," wrote one insurgent newspaper later, "was lowered several degrees when Bonynge was finished with him").

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44 Denver Republican, June 19, 1907.
46 Pueblo Chieftain, June 28, 1907.
47 Basalt Journal, June 29, 1907.
Others followed, most notably Thomas Patterson and Colorado's other anticonservation congressman, John Shafroth. Shafroth, normally one of Pinchot's most persistent critics, was relatively gentle. "I recognize the work Mr. Pinchot has done for all of us," he said, "but I think the people who live here know better than he what needs to be done." The abrasive Patterson was not so kind, lashing out intemperately at Pinchot (who, wrote a local newspaper, "loomed before his eyes like the yellow peril").

That afternoon the convention debated and passed a package of resolutions critical of the government's conservation policies. After years of anticonservation, antigovernment agitation in and around Colorado, Pinchot and other Roosevelt men had expected the worst: resolutions harsh, radical, and irrational. But while the resolutions were critical, and while they did call for sweeping changes in federal land policy, at the same time they were moderately worded—mild, almost conciliatory in tone. There were many reasons for the surprise, one of them being the presence of Pinchot at the convention. Assessing his impact would be difficult; but in that his direct, forceful attitude, his logical words, and most of all his consistently calm and dignified demeanor had changed minds for almost twenty years, it was not unreasonable to assume that it had happened again. Whatever the cause, though, Pinchot survived the Denver trial handsomely—and he helped his cause in the process.

Pinchot returned to Washington in late June, and, briefly, he savored his triumph. Writing to a friend a few days after the Denver convention, he happily reported that "we had a great time and we were by no means eaten up." In a way his words summed up the story of his last ten years in Colorado. He had had a great time. And he had by no means been "eaten up."

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48 Pueblo Chieftain, June 28, 1907.
49 Colorado Springs Gazette, June 22, 1907.