

## Retro Designs in New Hampshire State Parks

By SCA Interpretive Ranger, Ellie Holter

Have you ever noticed that many of the state parks in New Hampshire seem to follow the Mid-Century modern architecture style? That is because several parks within the state were established or updated between the mid 1950s and the early 1970s!

So what happened to enact this change? In 1961, the Forestry and Recreation Commission was replaced by the Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED), under which the state parks operated. That same year, the then Governor Powell sponsored an unprecedented nine-million-dollar bond issue (Chapter 263 of the 1961 session), which was then passed late in that years legislative session. These funds went towards the Park Expansion Project, whose goal was to improve existing parks and begin planning for future parks.

Many of the parks we know and enjoy today were developed at that time. Namely, Pawtuckaway State Park, Greenfield State Park, and Wallis Sands State Park. While these three parks opened during this time and each has retained most of its original buildings, infrastructure from those decades is still dotted around the state in many other parks.

You can find bathhouses, pavilions, visitor centers, and snack huts built in the mid-century modern style in several parks. Designs for these buildings were inspired not only by the fashion of the time but also by the new developments in technology, which allowed for greater efficiency. The standard for bathhouse configuration, which we still follow to this day, was set at this time. The National Park Service also introduced the idea of a visitor center in the Mission 66 Park Initiative of 1956, and this had a great impact throughout the country. Other technological developments, such as insulated glass, also came about at this time.

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Sunapee



Addition to Mt. Sunapee base building

Greenfield



Greenfield State Park

Pawtuckaway







Neal's Cove Store, Pawtuckaway State Park



Historic view, Neal's Cove Store at Pawtuckaway State Park

## Wallis sands



Wallis Sands State Park under construction, 1963



**WALLIS SANDS  
on the SEACOAST**

Planning a swim? Try Wallis Sands, at Rye, one of your newest State parks, Route 1-A, South of Portsmouth. There's a fine sandy beach, 800 feet long, 150 feet wide even at high tide, a brand new bathhouse, lifeguard and first aid services, easy parking and refreshments. Wallis Sands is near enough to historic Portsmouth for a pleasant after-swim drive. Swim at Wallis Sands today. 50c per car includes use of bathhouse all day.

**enjoy your state parks**  
New Hampshire Division of Parks  
Concord, New Hampshire

*Portsmouth Herald, July 30, 1964*



Original Drawing for Wallis Sands State Park Main Building, 1964

All Photos From : New Hampshire State Parks Mid-Century Modern (1945-1975) Historic Context Study

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Mid-century modern design focused on clean lines and minimalism to convey a sleek, modern feel. They also used a great deal of wood paneling and beams, which, in combination with floor to ceiling windows and skylights, created a space that felt open and connected with the outdoors. These structures often used angular shapes, but due to the design choices mentioned, the space in and around them flows seamlessly, creating a grounding, comfortable environment. All across the country, you can find Mid Century Modern design in parks and public spaces because after the Second World War, there was a great increase in the size of America's Middle Class and the mobility of that group. More people were buying cars and looking for a place to recreate, so park creation went through a big boom.

“New Hampshire's State Park system is composed of parks of all types – recreational parks, parks sited along lakes and seashores, wilderness parks, parks centered around historic sites and geologic marvels, and simple waysides or picnic areas. The improvements made to New Hampshire's State Parks in the 1945-1975 period reflect the leisure time activities of an increasingly mobile and affluent society, the evolution of park planning from the pre-World War II model of the CCC period, and the impact of modernist



architectural design. Like the 1930s, the 1960s represented a high point in terms of investment in the park system and is no less important” (NH State Parks Historic Context Study 2019).

To learn more about the development of New Hampshire’s parks from the year 1945 to the year 1975, I would recommend that you visit the source listed below, which contains a Historic Context Study from 2019 focused on the topic.

[New Hampshire State Parks Mid-Century Modern \(1945-1975\) Historic Context Study](#)

Sources:

[Architectural Digest - Midcentury-Modern Architecture: Everything You Should Know About the Funky and Functional Style](#)

[New Hampshire State Parks Mid-Century Modern \(1945-1975\) Historic Context Study](#)

[Classic Modern: Midcentury Modern at Home](#)

[By Deborah Dietsch, Flowing Spaces, Casual Living, p.26](#)