

IT'S A GREAT IDEA

SUMMARY: Students will be introduced to the history of the National Park System and develop a management plan for a new national park.

GOAL: To provide students with an introduction about how a national park is established and developed.

OBJECTIVES: Students will (1) describe in writing how the National Park System was established (2) Develop a management plan for a new National Park.

GRADE LEVEL: Sixth through twelfth

TIME REQUIRED: Minimum of three 45 to 60-minute periods

LOCATION: Classroom

MATERIALS: Two-page Historical Brief - one per student. Student Activity Page - one per group. Map of Volcano National Park - one per group.

SUBJECTS: History/Social Science, Language Arts, Visual and Performing Arts

KEY WORDS: Natural and Cultural Resources, Conservation, Preservation, National Park, Development

BACKGROUND: The history of the National Park System is a fascinating study of how our political system works. The creation of national parks in the United States is a true extension of the ideals of democracy at work, the government being the agent for all people to live in a way conducive to promoting life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This is an excellent introduction for students to the implementation of the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Before the idea of national parks came to be, wilderness areas were viewed as places to be tamed and used for profit. The first person to propose a national park was artist George Catlin, who is best known for his paintings of American Indians. Other well known people of the 1800s, mostly authors and artists, gave romantic portrayals of America's wilderness that supported establishment of national parks. Included among these people are James Fenimore Cooper, Henry David Thoreau, Thomas Cole, and John Muir.

A two-page Historical Brief based on the book, The National Parks: Shaping the System (Mackintosh, Barry, 1991, Library of Congress), is provided. It has information about the background and philosophy that have led to the development of the National Park Service. The questions that accompany this activity are complex and require that students have time for individual reflection, group discussion, whole class discussion, research, and summation of their

own thoughts after working on answers. This is a purposeful departure from simple content questions and answers toward a thinking, meaning-centered curriculum. The teacher's role is to pose complex questions, to provide time and a variety of grouping strategies for working on answers, to facilitate the search for additional information and resources (using libraries, people, and computer networks as appropriate and available), and to model life-long learning as he/she becomes a partner with students to learn as much as possible about one of our greatest treasures, our National Park System.

INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE: This activity is best done in three 45-minute segments: (1) Reading, discussing, and answering the questions pertaining to the historical brief; (2) student development of a park management plan for Volcano National Park; and (3) management plan presentations by students.

Divide the class into groups of three to four students. Make sure that groups are heterogeneously grouped according to reading ability. If reading is problematic, one student per group could be the reader or the teacher could read the selection to the class. All students should have a copy of the written materials in hand so they can follow along and refer to materials when they are answering questions and doing activities. Begin by reading or having students read the Historical Brief. Discuss the information with the students. Students in small groups should read and discuss the questions. Each student will write his/her own answers. After the students have answered the questions, discuss their answers as a class. Next, each group will read the Student Activity Page. Using this information, each group will work together and write their plan for the new park.

EXTENSION/ENRICHMENT: (1) Research the artists or writers of the 1800s who influenced the way people thought about America's wilderness and parks, thus promoting the establishment of the National Park System. Learn more about this person and be prepared to share it with the class. (2) Many different lands fall under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service including national parks, national historic sites, national recreation areas, and national monuments. Choose one of these types of Park Service units and learn more about it. Be prepared to share what you learn with the class.

ASSESSMENT: Student work and presentations provide samples for assessment. For instance, when students give their presentation of their park management plan, does the plan show evidence of understanding the need to preserve and protect park resources while allowing visitor access? Does the plan reflect the mission and goals of the National Park Service? Written, visual, and oral presentations are all parts of a quality product and should be considered in the assessment process.

Historical Brief

The idea of preserving places in America as national parks was first discussed by artists, writers, and visionary citizens who wanted to see special places saved for all time and for all people to enjoy. John Muir was one of these people. He studied and traveled in wild places all over the United States and wrote about his experiences. His writings about a beautiful valley in California's Sierra Nevada mountains with sheer granite rock faces reaching heights of 4,000 feet, cascading waterfalls, and numerous meadows, flowers, and huge trees, introduced Yosemite to the world. In 1864 Congress designated Yosemite Valley and the nearby Mariposa grove of giant sequoia trees as a state preserve "upon the express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use, resort and recreation, shall be held inalienable for all time."

Between 1869 and 1871 trappers and explorers told amazing stories about an area called Yellowstone. Great geysers shot hot water out of the ground. Mudpots and hot springs gurgled and steamed. Elk, grizzly bears, wolves, and other wildlife were abundant on the rich land bounded by beautiful mountains. Some of the people who visited Yellowstone and saw its geologic wonders suggested that the area be preserved for public use. After much debate, Congress passed the Yellowstone Bill and on March 1, 1872 President Grant signed the bill making Yellowstone the first national park. It was "dedicated and set apart as a public park for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." At that time no money was set aside to take care of it. It was a park without caretakers. In 1886 the United States Cavalry began a 30-year span of army control of Yellowstone in an effort to protect it. As the troops rode into the Park, they passed wagonloads of logs being carted out. They encountered hunters camped by the rivers and saw tourists bringing out mineral specimens they knocked off geyser and hot spring formations. With no one to take care of the Park, it would not survive in its natural state. So, these early years depended on the military to protect our first national park.

National parks are established by acts (laws) of Congress. In the next 40 years, the national park idea sprang to life in America. With the establishment of Yellowstone as a national park, Congress and the American people felt a desire to protect more of America's "special places" as national parks. In 1890 Yosemite and Sequoia became national parks. Throughout the west many other beautiful places were made national parks by Congress. Mount Rainier, Crater Lake, Rocky Mountain, and Glacier National Parks were established. By 1916 the United States government oversaw 14 national parks, 21 national monuments, and two historic reservations. Management of these public areas was difficult because there was no single agency to take care of these national treasures.

It became clear that the national parks needed a single organization to administer and protect them. On August 25, 1916 legislation was signed that created the National Park Service "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein, and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." This new agency obtained its first money from Congress and prepared its first park policies to provide a purpose and methods for managing the national parks in order to meet its dual mission of preserving the parks in their natural state and providing for their enjoyment by the public. These national treasures were now more than just a collection of parks; they were now part of the National Park System managed by the National Park Service

The National Park Service was immediately faced with the challenge of wise park management and stewardship. This meant decisions had to be carefully made about where to build roads, trails, visitor centers, campgrounds, and other visitor service facilities. It was not an easy task to protect the parks and at the same time provide for public use and enjoyment.

Through the 1920s most national parks were in the western states where large areas of public land remained. If the National Park Service was to benefit more people, it would have to expand eastward where most of the population lived. Since most land in the east was privately owned, this provided new challenges. Congress said that parks in the east could be established but the land must be donated. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. was instrumental in providing funds for the purchase of lands in areas which are now the Great Smoky Mountains, Acadia, and Shenandoah National Parks. During the next decade, the National Park Service began to acquire and manage national historic parks in the east including Lincoln Memorial, Thomas Jefferson Memorial, and Gettysburg National Military Park. This expanded the view of parks, allowing cultural and historical places worthy of protection to be added which created a better-rounded National Park System.

The number and types of units in the National Park System has continued to grow, as well as the kinds of units. Currently there are over 390 units in the system. When new units are established, careful planning has to be made to balance development for people and preservation of the natural and cultural resources. Good management requires well thought out decisions.

Questions

1. In the late 1800s, the United States government had a terrible time managing the national parks. Why?
2. What are some of the things that happened that helped protect our parks and create a National Park System?
3. When Congress established the National Park Service in 1916, the purpose was “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein, and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” What does this mean?
4. Why do you think the National Park System is among America’s proudest and best loved places?

Student Activity Page

The first policies of the National Park System required that the parks be preserved in their natural state or for cultural/historical purposes and that enjoyment of the parks by the public be provided. This vision still guides the work of the National Park Service. Pretend that Volcano National Park has just been established. It is in the mountains (at elevations of 6,000 to 10,000 feet) with many beautiful lakes and streams. It is a land of volcanoes and has areas where hot springs bubble to the surface. It has a pioneer emigrant trail, historic settler buildings, and American Indian village sites. This new national park has no roads or visitor facilities and is within a two- hour drive of a major city. Your group has been given the task of deciding on the development and management of the Park. Your group must decide how to protect park resources (both natural and cultural) and still allow for visitor use. The decisions you make will be the Volcano National Park Management Plan. Include and justify any development that will be built. Explain how these activities will allow for enjoyment of the park's special features while preserving and protecting the Park for future generations. Be prepared to present your plan to the class.

Using the park map, decide where the road through the Park should go. Once you decide where to put the road, draw it on the map with a pencil. If you are sure of your decision about the road, trace your route with an ink pen.

You need to next decide which of the following development options are necessary and needed in the Park. Some of these may not be needed inside the Park and may be better placed outside of it. Remember to not disturb or place developments too close to natural or cultural sites such as Indian or pioneer sites, lakes, creeks, thermal areas, or volcanoes.

The park development options are numbered. Mark the number of each option your group selects in the place you want it to be on the map. Your choices are your plan for the Park. You may choose some of the development options more than once if your group thinks that they are needed in more than one location. Be ready to explain to the rest of the class why you made the decisions you did.

Park Development Options

1. Hotel
2. Campground
3. Picnic area
4. Gas station
5. Visitor center
6. Ranger station
7. Museum
8. Gift shop
9. Camper store
10. Nature trail
11. Bank
12. Restaurant
13. National park office

Things to consider when developing your park plan:

1. Areas off limits to people
2. Safety of visitors
3. Protection of wildlife habitat
4. Protection of lakes and streams
5. Protection of cultural and historical sites

Notes and Observations