Preserving Our National Parks

Video Activity

Preservation
Preservation is about deciding what's important, figuring out how to protect it, and passing along an appreciation for what was saved to the next generation. Preservation is hands on.

National Park Service archeologists, architects, curators, historians, and other cultural resource professionals work in America’s nearly 400 national parks to preserve, protect, and share the history of this land and its people. This includes:
- 27,000 significant structures in national parks
- 66,000 archeological sites in national parks
- 115 million objects in park museum collections

The National Parks Conservation Association
America's national parks are the touchstones of our shared history and culture. In some ways, they represent the soul of the nation. They represent our hopes, our dreams, our struggles. They are our absolute best places.

We believe that America's national parks and historical sites embody the American spirit. They are windows to our past, homes to some of our rarest plants and animal species, and places where every American can go to find inspiration, peace, and open space.

Lands End: Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
Lands End is an astoundingly beautiful natural wonder nestled between urban San Francisco and the Pacific.

"At every turn of the trail on this wild and rocky northwestern corner of San Francisco, there is another stunning view. Along the way you’ll see hillsides of cypress and wildflowers, views of old shipwrecks, access to the epic ruins of Sutro Baths, pocket beaches, and a new Lookout Visitor Center."

Video:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Khh2r-d33w

Discussion:
Discuss the importance of preserving our national parks
Discuss the following 10 issues national parks are facing
Issues Facing National Parks
Nationalgeographic.com

1. Untold Stories
The term "national park" conjures up thoughts of big, natural landscapes like Grand Canyon and Yosemite. But two-thirds of the National Park Service's 392 areas were created to protect historic or cultural resources, from colonial Boston to New Mexico's Chaco Canyon. And many of those parks lack the money and staff to use those resources to their fullest.

“We have an incredible collection of museum artifacts, and 45 percent of the Park Service collections have not even been catalogued,” says James Nations of the nonprofit National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). “We’ve got stuff, and we don’t even know what we’ve got, and we don’t have places to store it. We’re missing opportunities to tell the story of America through our national parks.”

2. Crumbling History
National parks protect the historic buildings in which America’s history was made, places like Independence Hall, Ellis Island, and the San Antonio Missions. But some of these hallowed edifices are crumbling and in desperate need of repair. They’re a big part of a $9.5 billion maintenance backlog that plagues the park system.

“We need to preserve and maintain those buildings because the stories are written in the stone and the bricks,” NPCA’s Nations says.

3. Wildlife Management
No park exists in isolation, and that fact is becoming increasingly clear as the areas surrounding parks are developed for living space, agriculture, mining, forestry, and more. The iconic species protected inside the parks don’t recognize boundaries and must often move in and out of the parks to feed, mate, or migrate. If larger ecological wildlife corridors can’t be maintained to include the lands outside of parks, many species may not survive within them either.

4. Foreign Invaders
National parks are inviting places, especially for non-native species that can cause havoc once they move in. Plants and insects often hitchhike to our shores on boats or airplanes while other species, like snakes, are intentionally imported for the exotic pet trade. When turned loose with no competition, invasive species can run amok in an ecosystem and send a park’s native residents toward extinction.

More than 6,500 non-native invasive species have been found in U.S. national parks. Seventy percent of them are plants, which encroach on a staggering seven million acres (2.8 million hectares) of our national parklands.

5. Adjacent Development
A Canadian company hopes to site North America’s largest open-pit gold and copper mine right next to Alaska’s remote Lake Clark National Park. Uranium prospecting is currently under way on the rim of the Grand Canyon. Sugar producers have long fouled waters with phosphorus pollution and disrupted critical flows to the Everglades.

What happens on a park’s borders can dramatically impact the environment inside the park itself. Mining, petroleum prospecting, clear-cut lumbering, and other developments are generally prohibited inside parks—but they still pose serious threats to water quality, clean air, and other vital aspects of the park environment.

6. Climate Change
If Earth’s climate continues to change as scientists predict it will, the national parks will be impacted like the rest of the planet. Glaciers may melt away, as indeed they are at Glacier National Park in Montana. Fire seasons may grow in length and severity, and the landscape may shift under the feet of the parks’ wild residents.

“Changes in temperature and precipitation can push species out of their previous ranges towards softer temperatures, either upwards in elevation or northward,” says Nations. “But they don’t recognize where the boundary is and in many cases that land is owned by someone else.”

7. Water Issues
Some parks are already feeling drier these days, as increasing human demand shrinks supplies on which aquatic species depend. In Florida's Biscayne National Park, where freshwater arrives from the highly compromised Everglades ecosystem upstream, a freshwater shortage is becoming an issue even though 95 percent of the park remains covered with seawater.
Ten parks are touched by the Colorado River and its tributaries, which are being drained of water by the growing cities and farmlands of an increasingly thirsty West. Less reliable precipitation on a warmer, drier Earth would make this growing problem worse.

8. **Air Pollution**

Great Smoky Mountains National Park in the Southeast wasn’t named for its smog, but it is one of many parks seriously affected by the problem. Air quality issues originate outside the parks. At Great Smoky, power plant and industrial emissions are blown by winds to the southern Appalachians and trapped there by the mountains.

Air quality problems choke off views, poison plants, and even foul water. Recent air quality data show a glimmer of hope—visibility and ozone concentrations are stable or improving in most parks. However, in too many cases, stable means simply preserving a subpar status quo.

9. **Transportation Troubles**

National parks are the destination of many a great American road trip. But too many roads within the parks themselves are in disrepair and some pose a real danger to drivers. The same goes for many parts of the parks’ transportation infrastructure, from shuttle buses to hiking trails.

Repairs are always under way but it will take time and money to truly set things right. More than half of the Park Service’s $9.5 billion maintenance backlog is earmarked for the transportation infrastructure that enables people to actually visit the parks.

10. **Visitor Experience**

Popular parks like Yosemite face overcrowding issues that would have amazed John Muir. Managers must balance open access with negative impacts on visitor experience and on park environments.

Today’s visitors also use parks in new ways. Snowmobilers prowl Yellowstone and pilots fly visitors over the Grand Canyon. Mountain bikers, motorboaters and many others all hope to enjoy their favorite pastimes in their favorite parks.

Does allowing such activities enhance the park experience or detract from it? Managing preferences and park usage conflicts is a growing challenge for administrators—but NPS Chief of Public Affairs David Barna says the top priority is clear.

“When we have to make a choice between recreation and preservation, we will always choose preservation,” he says, “and our decision will be based on our mandate, policies, and good science.”