

Name: _____

America's Natural Treasures: Exploring Our National Parks

Introduction to National Parks

The United States has an amazing system of protected lands called national parks. These special places preserve nature, wildlife, and history for everyone to enjoy - now and in the future. The National Park Service takes care of these lands, making sure they stay beautiful and safe. Today, there are 63 spectacular national parks across America, plus hundreds of other protected areas like national monuments and historic sites.

The Birth of an Idea

The world's first national park was Yellowstone, created in 1872 when President Ulysses S. Grant signed a law to protect its geysers, hot springs, and wildlife. This started a new idea that some places are too important to belong to just one person or company. Later, President Theodore Roosevelt helped create many more parks to protect America's natural wonders. In 1916, the National Park Service was formed to manage all these special places.



Theodore Roosevelt

Types of National Parks

Our national parks protect many different environments:

- Mountain parks like Rocky Mountain and Great Smoky Mountains
- Desert parks like Death Valley and Joshua Tree
- Forest parks like Redwood and Sequoia (home to the world's tallest and largest trees)
- Volcanic parks like Hawaii Volcanoes and Mount Rainier
- Coastal parks like Acadia and Channel Islands

Famous Park Features

- Some parks protect unique natural wonders:
- The Grand Canyon's colorful rock layers tell a story millions of years old
- Yellowstone's Old Faithful geyser shoots hot water high into the air
- Yosemite's Half Dome and El Capitan attract rock climbers worldwide
- The Everglades protect rare alligators and panthers
- Glacier National Park has melting glaciers that formed its beautiful lakes

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Wildlife Protection

National parks provide safe homes for animals:

- Bears, wolves and bison roam Yellowstone
- Sea lions and whales live in Channel Islands
- Bald eagles nest in Olympic National Park
- Manatees swim in warm Florida springs
- Desert tortoises crawl slowly through Joshua Tree

Park Rules Help Protect Nature

Visitors follow important rules:

- Stay on marked trails to protect plants
- Never feed wild animals (it makes them sick)
- Take only pictures (leave flowers, rocks and artifacts)
- Use binoculars to view wildlife from a safe distance
- Carry out all trash to keep parks clean

Fun Ways to Explore Parks

Families can:

- Hike scenic trails (from easy walks to challenging climbs)
- Attend ranger programs to learn about nature
- Camp under starry skies (many parks have campgrounds)
- Complete Junior Ranger activities to earn badges
- Take scenic drives to amazing viewpoints

The National Park Service motto is "to protect and preserve." Thanks to these parks, future generations will always have wild places to explore and enjoy!

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1. What year was Yellowstone established as a national park?

a) 1776

b) 1872

c) 1901

2. Name one type of environment protected by national parks.

3. How are rules like "stay on trails" and "don't feed animals" connected to protecting parks?

4. Compare the features of two different national parks mentioned in the passage.
