National Parks & Protected Areas: Approaches for Balancing Social, Economic, and Ecological Values


The first chapter of National Parks & Protected Areas: Approaches for Balancing Social, Economic, and Ecological Values begins with the oft-quoted Wallace Stegner statement that "National parks are the best idea we (Americans) ever had." Readers of this book will learn how to keep that "best idea" alive and functioning to enhance the social, economic, and ecological benefits of national parks and protected areas.

The stated purpose of this book is to "enhance the science and management of national parks and protected areas by improving the understanding of (1) the causes and consequences of the underlying social, economic, and ecological values of protected areas; (2) how interaction of human and ecological processes influences functions and values of protected areas; and (3) ways to improve the design, evaluation, and implementation of management actions and policies for balancing social, economic, and ecological values of protected areas." The authors' hope is that the material presented "advances the understanding and science-based management of national parks and protected areas."

The geographic scope of this book is focused on national parks in the western United States and Canada, particularly Yellowstone National Park. However, there are several examples from countries outside of North America and the use of World Conservation Union (IUCN) designations and the discussion of concepts in light of those designations lend an international flavor to the book.

Natural resource law expert Joseph Sax notes, "Parks are cultural creations; ideas spun from our laws and the social values they reflect." The first four chapters of the book present background information on these "cultural creations" and expound upon the legal status and multiple values of national parks and protected areas in North America. The first two chapters answer such questions as, Why do we have national parks?, Who manages national parks?, What are the designations, classifications, and purposes of national parks?, and Why is national park management challenging? The third and fourth chapters present a thorough treatment of the cultural, social, economic, and ecological values of national parks, economic and ecological concepts range from carrying capacity to decision analyses to carrying capacity to decision analyses. The first two chapters are followed by two chapters (9 and 10) that present case studies to illustrate the real-world application of the concepts and approaches found in previous chapters. The inclusion of many examples and case studies throughout the book is a strength.

Chapter 11 focuses on the future and how to reduce external threats to protected areas, which is often the biggest challenge facing park managers. The balance between visitor satisfaction and protection is a theme throughout the book.

Chapter 12 serves as the synthesis of the book. The concluding chapter presents 10 major topics that have been discussed throughout the book that can be used to produce social and ecological values from protected areas.

This book would serve as a useful tool for faculty and an excellent textbook for graduate students in such disciplines as geography, anthropology, economics, natural resource management, recreation development, and biological sciences. The chapters and the numerous case studies are essential and of interest to all undergraduate students in these fields.

The senior author is Tony Prato, an associate professor of economics in the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Missouri-Columbia. He is the director of the School of Agricultural and Resource Economics, and director of the Missouri River Institute of Conservation. Dan Fagre, a research ecologist and global change scientist at the USGS Science Center, Washington, D.C.

Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, said, "He is a better citizen with a national park card." Anyone who has the privilege of living here who has toured the national parks and protected areas faces the challenges and an uncertain future. Applied economic analyses and approaches presented in this book are essential to the creation of better citizens in North America and the protection of national parks and protected areas exist.

Department of Horticulture, Forestry and Recreation Resources
University of Missouri-Columbia