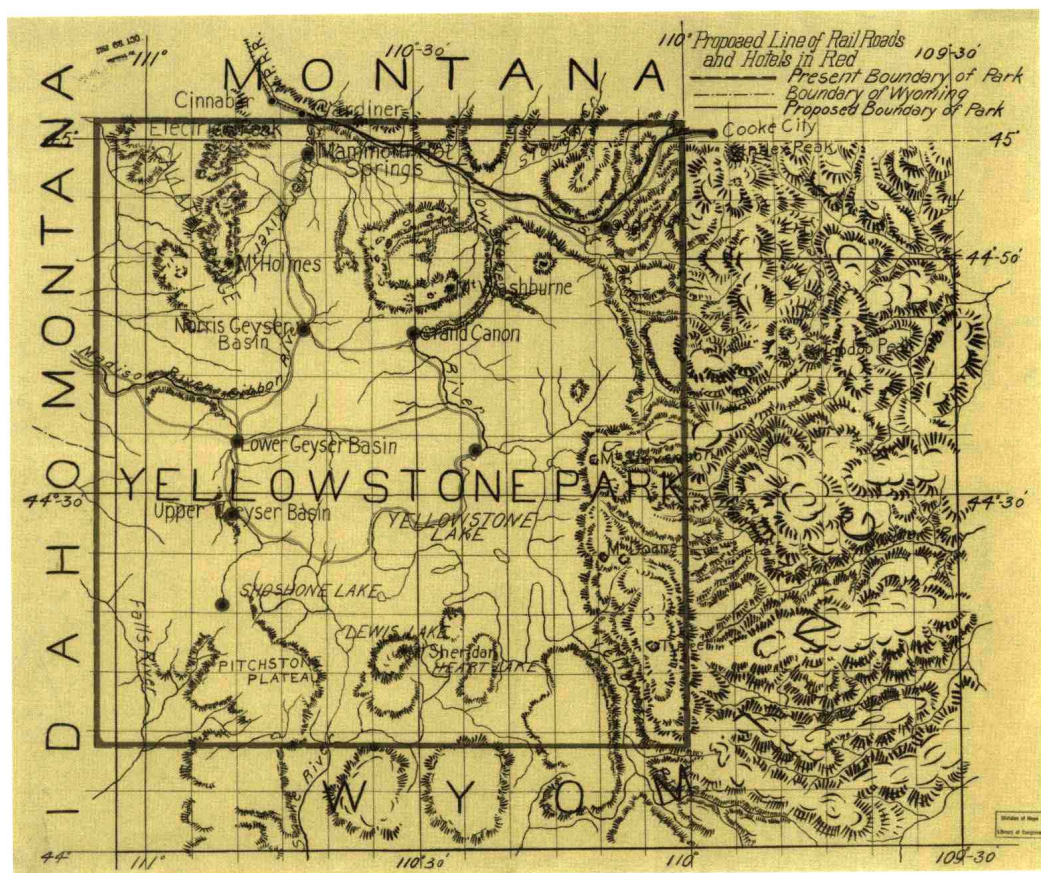


# NATIONAL PARKS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Practice and Policy in the United States



Edited by  
GARY E. MACHLIS and DONALD R. FIELD

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We, of course, are indebted to the authors whose work is collected in this volume. Their willingness to participate and contribute is testament to the importance of national parks and rural development.

Gary E. Machlis

Donald R. Field

January 2000

# Foreword

It is not what we have that will make us a great nation; it is the way in which we use it.

—President Theodore Roosevelt, July 4, 1886

Beginning with President Roosevelt and Yellowstone National Park in 1872, Americans have placed a unique priority on preserving and protecting our nation's natural and cultural heritage. One could argue that on that same day, Roosevelt formed the first “gateway” community—a neighboring town or village, often rural—that is adjacent to a national park and provides much of the needed infrastructure and services for the park itself. Today, as much as any, the complex relationship between specially protected areas and the people who live and work in cities and towns around them has become a central policy question engaging park superintendents, politicians, and the public.

Much has changed since Roosevelt spoke eloquently and often about the need to conserve, maintain, and develop our natural resources. From biotechnology opportunities to recreation, or questions over boundaries and access, the people designated to manage our parks have faced many pressing issues with some success, and some confrontation. These decisions need always be made with the knowledge that a distinct symbiosis exists between the parks and their adjacent communities.

America's National Park System has set an impressive standard for environmental stewardship, but the relationship between park and small business, or park and homeowner, has never been as clear. As we progress in a new century, the challenge to maintain the complex economies of the West, while nurturing an appreciation for our natural and historic heritage, becomes even greater. Careful analysis and debate that intersects with public determination will yield the results we need to insure both goals of healthy parks and vibrant economies.

The authors of *National Parks and Rural Development* seek to capture and explain their views as to how we best sustain this ongoing relationship and

develop solutions to the debates that exist between local communities and parks. Most importantly, each scholar offers a number of ideas, analyses, and new questions in search of answers—valuable contributions if we are determined to keep both Roosevelt’s charge alive and our rural economies growing.

Senator Craig Thomas (Wyoming)

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# Introduction



This is a book about national parks and rural development and the connection between them. The central thesis is that national parks and rural development in the United States have been, are, and will continue to be intertwined. The thesis has three main elements. First, national parks play an important role in regional rural development, and a critical role in gateway communities. Second, regional rural development and the growth or change of gateway communities have a powerful influence on national parks—their resources, management, and visitors' experience. Third, this relationship has implications for policy, management, and research relevant to both national park and rural development decision makers, as well as those interested in parks and the citizens of rural areas.

All who visit a Yellowstone, Denali, Bryce Canyon, or Yosemite National Park (NP) quickly recognize the park's importance in the local economy and region. Visitors (and employees) need access, food, fuel, and housing, in addition to environmental education, recreational opportunities, and the inspiration found in these special places. Parks create transportation routes, energy grids, water and waste systems, housing needs, and business opportunities—all of which provide varying contributions to rural development. At the regional level, such a contribution can be significant to modest—Yosemite NP is an economic engine for several California counties, yet has a minor role in the immense California economy. For gateway communities—the towns and cities that border public lands—national parks can often be *the* economic engine, and play a dominant role in all aspects of community life. For the community of West Yellowstone and many other gateway communities, the role of national parks in their future is significant, critical, and enduring.

At the same time, rural development and the growth of gateway communities have immense impacts on the national parks. Development, such as that occurring in the city of Gatlinburg outside Great Smoky Mountains NP or in communities on Mount Desert Island adjacent to Acadia NP, increases demand for natural resources. Water is a prime example, and the demands for water in South Florida are both critical to the fate of Everglades NP and a warning of future crises. Development requires infrastructure to deliver resources and distribute waste products, garbage, and sewer effluent. The pipelines, roads, leach fields, and transmission cables outside Mount Rainier NP, or in Tusayan near Grand Canyon NP, are testimony to the engineering requirements of rural development.

Development leads to increased population, which leads to increased housing, and in turn to habitat fragmentation in often critical landscapes adjacent to park boundaries. Saguaro National Monument (NM), once outside the city of Tucson and now surrounded by the modern Tucson metro area, is an example at the extreme—with wildlife, water, habitat, vegetation, air, noise, and light pollution impacts from rapid development atypical for even the rural West. Development increases visitation by making parks more accessible. Yellowstone

NP in winter requires the special staging grounds and infrastructure of the few gateway communities prepared for winter recreation. The town of Cruz Bay, where available land for a school or playground is scarce, serves as the sole staging area for many tourists to Virgin Islands NP. Civil War battlefields are encroached on by rural development in Virginia; Denver's immense population growth and urban expansion has had its impacts on Rocky Mountain NP.

Emerging economic alternatives (such as cottage industries spawned by the electronic revolution), along with the quality-of-life attractions of national park areas, lead to increasing numbers of year-round and/or seasonal residents. These residents take advantage of proximity to park resources and increase the number, diversity, and demand of needed visitor services. The attraction of suburbia (and subsequent real estate values) adjacent to Santa Monica Mountains National Recreational Area (NRA) is testimony to the importance of parks as a quality-of-life amenity. Corporate location in rural America has its developmental impacts as well. When the Sony Corporation invests in facilities near Springfield, Oregon (a gateway to Crater Lake NP), or US West locates in Boulder, Colorado (near Rocky Mountain NP), the impacts are felt in the rural regions near parks. The result is that park management, of everything from fees to fires, must respond to rural development occurring outside park boundaries.

The relationship between rural development and national parks has significant implications for policy, in the fields of both rural development and park management. Policymakers interested in rural development—at the local, state, and regional levels—ignore the role of national parks and historic sites only at the peril of their strategies' success. Tribal governments, from those representing the Ute near Mesa Verde NP, to the Navajo at Canyon de Chelly NM, to the Miccosukee in Everglades NP, must deal with parks and protected areas as part of the landscape of development, or be unlikely to succeed in improving the quality of life of tribal members. And federal policymakers for the national parks—the current administration, Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, and Commerce (all concerned with rural development), Congress, the National Park Service (NPS) director, regional administrators, park superintendents, and park advocates—all must consider and decide park policy in light of rural development adjacent to the parks.

Hence, national parks and rural development are intertwined, and it is the purpose of this book to explore and assess this relationship.

## Definitions

Throughout this book, the term “national parks” is used in a general sense, referring to all units within the National Park System. The system contains national parks, monuments, recreation areas, historic sites, historical parks, battlefields, lakeshores, seashores, and others. The book will employ the acronyms used by

the NPS to designate national parks (NP), national monuments (NM), and the twenty-seven other kinds of NPS units (for a list of these abbreviations and acronyms, see appendix I). While each designation implies variation in how the unit was established, or in legal statutes, regulation, and policy, all are commonly managed by the NPS under its authority and mission. The mission of the NPS is derived from its Organic Act of 1916:

To conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life 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 (16 U.S.C. Sec. 1).

Importantly, rural development issues are as relevant to NPS recreation areas, historic sites, seashores, and other designations as they are to the traditionally defined national parks.

Rural development, a core concept in this book, can carry many different meanings. While chapter 1 provides an extensive discussion of various definitions, rural development as referred to in this book is defined as *economic prosperity, diversification, and sustainable community development that expands local opportunities and does not compromise quality of life or environmental protection*.

Hence, rural development encompasses economic development in the traditional sense of job and wealth creation, but extends further to include issues of quality of life and conservation of resources.

## Change at a Critical Time

This book is prepared at a critical time. National parks in the United States, for all their supposed permanence, are changing in significant ways, as are the rural regions of the country. A general overview of conditions may be useful in providing a context for the chapters that follow.

Some of these changes are social and economic in nature. Rural economies across the United States are in flux, powered by a decade of national prosperity and their share of the capital investment and discretionary wealth. Rural regions and communities are less isolated than they used to be, and they are increasingly affected by regional and national economic shifts—from manufacturing to service, from postwar family agriculture to modern large-scale agribusiness, from analog to digital communication, from railroad station to airport as core transportation hub, and so forth.

In rural America, many extraction-based economies (such as timber, mining, and fishing) are being replaced by more service-oriented economies, such as tourism. No longer isolated from global markets, now connected by information technology, business firms are seeking (in addition to profitability) rural environments that provide amenities to support the workplace and excellent living

conditions for employees and their families. For some towns, such as Leavenworth, Washington, near North Cascades NP, the shift is all-significant (covering everything from jobs to architecture) and reasonably successful. For other communities, such as the northern Minnesota towns near Voyageurs NP, the transformation is minimal, the frustrated expectations disheartening.

Migration of people to amenity-rich regions adjacent to parks is one reason for these economic changes. Counties adjacent to Yellowstone NP are growing at rates much faster than the rest of rural America; the same pattern holds for counties adjacent to wilderness areas. Many people moving to rural areas near parks migrate with their own businesses or work as telecommuters. Others are retirees, whose transfer payments in the form of investments, social security payments, and savings can represent a significant economic flow for small, rural communities. Communities such as Estes Park, Colorado (near Rocky Mountain NP), and St. George, Utah (near Zion NP), have experienced significant increases in retirees making these communities their home.

This in-migration to rural regions can have modestly transforming effects. For gateway communities such as Moab, Utah, near Canyonlands NP and Arches NP, in-migration can dramatically change the local population mix and demographic characteristics of the community. Citizens' reactions to the social and economic issues confronting a gateway community—such as growth planning, environmental restrictions, and provision of services—can sometimes be divided by “old-timers” vs. “newcomers,” creating the continuing need to perceive these communities not as monolithic cultures but as often-fractured and competing interests.

These social and economic changes contribute to regional environmental changes in the rural landscape surrounding parks. Economically sound, environmentally sustainable, productive, rural industry is well practiced in rural America—examples of sustainable fishing, ranching, mining, agriculture, forestry, and other traditionally rural enterprises are often the norm, not the exception, and these patterns have long had a profound effect on rural landscapes and the environmental context of contemporary rural development. Examples of short-term outlook and poor practices are unfortunately also common—witness Forks, Washington, and its historical struggle with federal land management near Olympic NP. The result is that policies that protect fisheries from overexploitation, endangered species from extinction, and old-growth forests from unnecessary harvest have had a role in the changing rural landscape perhaps as much as the unsustainable nature of these abuses themselves.

Rural development, population growth, and habitat loss are often linked in cycles of land conversion. As rural populations grow (almost entirely from in-migration), land-use practices near parks are subject to significant change. Traditional large farms and ranches are subdivided to create more real estate for development. Five- and one-acre “ranchettes” replace larger holdings, making

land management actions from weed control to groundwater protection more difficult. Scarce acreage for commercial development is pressured to absorb additional service businesses, further threatening traditional land use. This conversion of land use can cause the loss of wildlife habitat and environmental buffers that provide protection to water sources and forests. Often the conversion has impacts inside the parks—examples include the expansion of Jackson Hole adjacent to Grand Teton NP, or the growth of Miami and Dade County near Everglades NP.

This is a critical time for changes within parks as well. Partly as a function of the external pressures described above, significant biophysical and ecosystem-level changes are occurring inside the national parks. Air quality is degraded at numerous national parks (Grand Canyon NP and Great Smoky Mountains NP are prime examples), and water quality problems can be particularly damaging to plant and animal species (such as mining-related pollution on the Yellowstone River in Yellowstone NP).

Hence, development is an issue of concern *within* as well as outside parks. Increasing infrastructure and demand for visitor services within parks can create some of the same problems as development adjacent to parks—sewage discharge, lowered water quality, air pollution, overtaxed transportation systems, and more. Yosemite Valley in Yosemite NP confronts infrastructure and population pressures equivalent to a moderately sized city. Noise pollution (such as that from personal watercraft) can be disturbing to both wildlife and human populations; helicopter overflights in Grand Canyon NP have significant visitor impacts. Light pollution (from house lights, commercial lighting, and industry) can degrade night skies inside parks—Saguaro NM and surrounding Tucson, Arizona, is an emerging example.

In numerous cases, the NPS both attempts to ameliorate such problems (its laudable sustainable-design program) and contributes to their spread—maintaining antiquated sewer systems, running unnecessary noisemaking machines, installing lighting without light shields, and more. Importantly, rural development is both the large-scale conversion of arable land and the small-scale use of gas-powered leaf blowers. The changes wrought on park environments are both widespread and obvious, and localized and subtle. Responsibility for these pressures is widely shared.

One of the most significant changes inside national parks is the sheer increase in their popularity and use. Visits to national parks increased by more than 66 million people from 1980 to 1998, a 30 percent increase. These increases are not spread evenly throughout the National Park System. Some parks, such as Chattahoochee River NRA, have experienced significant increases (for Chattahoochee, more than 2.5 million *additional* annual visits) since 1980. Other parks, such as Cape Cod NS, have seen visitation levels remain constant, or like North Cascades NP, modestly decline.

In addition, the demographic character of the visitor population is changing, with park managers greeting a new clientele. While the “average visitor” has never existed, the diversity of visitors is likely to increase further in the next decade. The potential mix of visitors is changing. Ethnic minority populations are increasing (with Hispanic Americans overtaking African Americans as the largest minority group), and these increases are often localized in regions of the country with numerous national parks (such as Arches NP, Canyonlands NP, and others in the Southwest, or Everglades NP and Biscayne NP in South Florida). Hence, the ethnic diversity of visitors is likely to expand, bringing new recreation styles, uses, and needs to national parks and their gateway communities.

As the baby boomers age, and the ranks of the retired, affluent, healthy, and mobile senior citizenry expand, the national parks are likely to be attractive targets for their attention and visitation. An aging park-going population will create new challenges for park managers, as they move to provide services (such as interpretation and facilities) relevant to and required by seniors. Increased international tourism, encouraged by economic development in other countries, ever-expansive jet travel, and the realization that foreign visitors can mean high profits for the U.S. tourism industry, will also alter the mix of visitors, and the nature of rural development in parks and gateway communities. Those affected will not only be the obvious international “favorites” such as Grand Canyon NP, Mesa Verde NP, or Yellowstone NP, but other National Park System areas near international entry points—for example, foreign visitation originating at Miami International Airport contributing to a change in visitors to Big Cypress National Preserve (NPRES).

The result is not only a change in visitors, but changed visitor experiences. Many visitor experiences in the National Park System have surprising stability. Viewing the Grand Canyon, climbing the Statue of Liberty, walking the fields of Gettysburg, and hiking in the North Cascades remain largely similar experiences year after year. Yet rural development adjacent to parks has the potential to alter the visitor experience.

A visit to a national park is not merely the actual park visit alone. Travel to the region, staging activities in the gateway community (such as eating, spending the night, shopping, and sightseeing), and travel to the park itself are all part of the visitor’s experience. It is no surprise that visitor experiences can be affected by the character of the communities surrounding parks. The impacts can be positive, due to amenities or charm of traditional towns (Fredericksburg, Virginia, and its efforts to serve as an effective gateway for four Civil War battlefields), or negative in cases of poorly planned, overly developed, and ill-functioning “tourist traps” (Pigeon Forge, near Great Smoky Mountains NP, is often used as a classic example).

The changes that have been occurring are not limited to broad social or envi-



ronmental trends. New forms of management are emerging. In recent years, more dialogue and collaboration is occurring between the communities and parks—or more precisely between community leaders, citizens, and park managers. One example is the Canyon Country Partnership, which includes Arches NP and Canyonlands NP, Bureau of Land Management officials, advocacy interest groups, the private sector, and county representatives. Other examples include the Cuyahoga Valley Communities Council (Cuyahoga Valley NRA), the Teton County Economic Development Council (Grand Teton NP), and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition (Yellowstone NP and Grand Teton NP). Park managers are becoming more active (with some controversy) regarding development in lands surrounding the parks, for they realize that such development will affect park management.

Similarly, citizens and gateway communities are increasingly demanding participation in decision making. A new association for gateway communities has recently been formed, the National Alliance of Gateway Communities. The group's mission, as stated in its brochure, is "to support policies and programs that enable gateway communities to achieve essential economic growth and vitality while maintaining and preserving the social, cultural, and environmental values of their citizens." Its establishment is indicative of the importance gateway communities place on public participation in park management.

In addition, there is a significant and growing relationship between national parks and other units of natural resource management. National parks, wildlife refuges, state forests, national forests, public and private reserves, tribal lands, and others are all part of a continuum of resource preservation critical to our nation's quality of life. The result is that new management strategies are emerging that create alliances between local communities, the NPS, and other federal agencies.

Innovation is increasing. Land trusts (such as the Aspen Valley Land Trust), comanagement of adjacent lands (such as the use of Regional Advisory Councils in Alaska), and new cooperative agreements involving a range of federal, state, and private partners are being used to permit collaboration in order to promote preservation. At this important juncture in the history of rural development and national parks, there is a real sense that invention—or in the language of the Clinton administration, "reinvention"—of government bureaucracy and methods is both possible and encouraged.

## Why This Book Now

If, as we have argued, this is a critical time of change for national parks and rural development, why this book now? The answer lies, in part, in the current state of knowledge provided by the research and policy communities.

As several of the following chapters describe, the role of U.S. national parks