

Why do we have national parks?

Background

National parks and other protected areas are important for a variety of reasons. Ask most people what they think is the most important reason for having parks and they're likely to tell you about the protection of flora, fauna, scenery and historical features, and about recreation and tourism.

All these are important values; however parks are also well recognised for bringing social benefits in terms of the physical, mental and spiritual health of individuals and the community - as recognised by the Healthy Parks, Healthy People campaigns in Victoria and other states.

Parks also bring measurable direct and flow-on economic benefits to local, regional, state and national economies. These economic benefits are a key enabler for communities to function and prosper, allowing them to build social cohesion, social capital and healthy communities.

Aim

To explore the importance and value of national parks.

Activities

1. Divide into groups of four.
2. In the group cut out the statements and the explanations provided. Discuss what each might mean.
3. For more learning, students might like to do further research into the value of national parks to help support their discussion.
4. Place the explanations with the statements they appear to support. You may add some explanations of your own from the group discussion. (Optional: Create artwork to accompany each statement and explanation.)
5. Rank the seven statements and their supporting explanations in order of importance according to the opinions of the group. Some may be of equal importance.
6. Arrange this ranking on your poster. Add illustrations and extra information of your own if you wish. Make sure that you have an appropriate title and that you include the date and names of members of your team.

Statements

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To help protect the natural environment including native plants and animals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For peoples' enjoyment and recreation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To study the natural environment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For their economic value: to attract tourists, visitors spending in the nearby towns,
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintaining a healthy environment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To protect rivers and water catchments.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To protect signs of human history.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For their intrinsic value and for future generations to enjoy and learn from.

Explanations

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As part of the spread of European settlement over the past 200 years, agricultural and urban development has had a severe impact on native plant and animal communities. At least 20 native mammal species and 6 plant species have become extinct in Victoria and many more are in danger of extinction. To fully protect these species from human activity and natural disaster it is important that their protected habitat is as large as possible.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People come to national parks to enjoy scenery and fresh air. They also like to picnic, walk, climb, swim or just relax. Some areas are especially zoned "wilderness" to allow people to experience an environment that has little evidence of human activity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education and study are carried out in national parks to help us understand how undisturbed natural environments work. We can then deal more effectively with environmental problems occurring in disturbed environments. We also learn to enjoy and appreciate the natural environment more by observing and studying it.

- National parks have many values, some of which are difficult to estimate in money terms. However, people do spend money on transport, food, accommodation and other services when visiting national parks. In 2002 it was estimated that visitors to parks in Victoria contributed nearly \$960 million to Victoria's economy each year.
- National parks help keep our environment healthy and productive, and this has economic benefits. Protecting areas in a healthy, natural state helps reduce soil salinity, reduce greenhouse gases and conserve a wide range of native plants and animals. Some of these plant species have been or may be developed for use in agriculture, medicine and industry.
- Protecting rivers and their catchments is important in the production of clean water. An undisturbed cover of natural vegetation allows rainwater to filter slowly through the soil and into rivers, preventing erosion and muddiness of the water. This allows us to have clear drinking water.
- Many national parks contain evidence of Aboriginal culture - such as paintings, burial grounds and ceremonial sites. There are also some buildings and other evidence (e.g. gold mining remains) from early European settlement that are protected in national parks.
- Even if they do not visit national parks, many people want to know that large natural areas will still be there in the future for their children and grandchildren to enjoy and learn from. It is important that their unique natural landscapes are protected. This is an emotional or spiritual value - it relates to people's feelings of security, hope, worth and satisfaction.