Privatizing the National Parks
Good or Bad?

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History

• 1 March 1872 – establishment of 1st national park
• 1992
  – 76.5 million acres of federal land
  – 275 million visitors
• Current National Park System
  – 38 Parks
  – 257 areas of interest
    • Monuments
    • Historic sites
    • Seashores
Policy History

• 1916 – National Park Service Act “Organic Act”
  “to conserve the scenery and the natural historic objects and the wildlife 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”

How?
Allows nothing but recreation…leads to conflict between local residents and national environmental groups

• 1930’s – President Roosevelt’s New Deal
  – Lack of wildlife management
  – Rampant road development and building construction within the parks
Causes for New Management Ideas

• High Maintenance Costs ($$$$$$$$$
• Degradation of Resources from Overuse
• Harm to Wildlife

• Feelings of East vs. West
  – Inhibits governance

Parks for Recreation or Preservation?
Privatization

- **Private Ownership**
  - Single owner may have a greater vested interest in maintaining the resource
  - Problems with determining who can be an owner – must have the same intentions that the nation does

- **Private Management**
  - Management may not have the same vested interest because it is not theirs in the end
  - No issues of owners
  - Managers will have to manage according to directions from the national level
Privatization of Common Pool Resources

- Ostrum’s 5 categories of types of privatization within a common pool resource
  - Access
  - Withdrawal
  - Management
  - Exclusion
  - Alienation

This model is sturdier than strict privatization of ownership or management
  - Allows for discourse among multiple people
  - Easier adhesion to original purpose with multiple actors
Case Study

Michigan State Land Privatization

*No example of large scale privatization of national parks*
Background

- State of Michigan owns around 4.5 million acres of land.
- 590,000 of this is designated for recreational use.
- As of 1997, the Department of Natural Resources was $20 million in debt.
- State is asking for permission to purchase 690 square miles of the upper peninsula.
Problems With State Ownership

• Unfair advantage over private owners
  – No Taxes
  – Natural Resources Trust Fund
    • Limit recently raised from $200 million to $500 million

• Government inefficiency thwarts environmental progress
  – Pollution Trading for water clarity improvement.
Interview:
Michael LaFaive (Senior Economist)

• “What you own you take care of. What everyone owns falls to disrepair.”

• Logging industry pioneered reforestation.

• Removes maintenance burden from the state.

• Encourages individuals to preserve resources.

• “Incredible ability of nature to replenish itself.”

• Logging is beneficial
  – National Park fires last summer
Recommendation

- Do NOT privatize the national parks
  - Based upon the difficulties in finding suitable owners who will continue to protect the environment in the manner intended, makes privatization an illogical next step in trying to remedy the current problems with national government control of the national parks