



Discovering Alabama

Teacher's Guide

Alabama State Parks

Suggested Curriculum Areas

Social Studies
Geography
Environmental Studies

Suggested Grade Levels

4–12

Key Concepts

Public Lands
Natural Heritage
Land Preservation

Key Skills

Map Reading
Inquiry
Creativity

Synopsis

Alabama has 22 state parks, providing outdoor and recreational enjoyment in every part of the state. "Alabama State Parks" visits all of these, recounts the history of how the parks were established, and highlights the many values they offer. An overarching theme of the program underscores that our state parks are public lands, set aside for public use and ultimately belonging to the citizens of Alabama in determining the future care and management of this special natural heritage.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA



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Alabama Department Of
Conservation and Natural Resources
State Lands Division

Before Viewing

1. Place students in small groups and give each group an Alabama state highway map. Have the groups examine the map for the location and name of Alabama's state park nearest your school. Allow 5–10 minutes for the groups to list ways they think state parks are different from other kinds of parks (city parks, neighborhood parks, amusement parks, etc.).
2. Discuss with the class Alabama's variety of state parks (for example, each park represents particular aspects of the state's natural diversity, from mountainous regions to the coastal area).

While Viewing

Have the students note the many values and benefits of Alabama's state parks as presented in the video.

Video Mystery Question: Who owns Alabama's state parks and who ultimately has the responsibility of caring for the future of our state parks? (Answer: We, the public, do.)

After Viewing

1. Return students to small groups to spend 10–15 minutes listing and discussing the many values and benefits of Alabama's state parks.
2. Discuss with the class the values of Alabama's state parks and the role of our state parks as a public heritage.

Extensions

1. View other *Discovering Alabama* programs that feature protected public natural areas. Examples include "Sipsey Wilderness," "Alabama National Forests," "Little River Canyon Preserve," "Delta Revisited," "Forever Wild," and "Forever Wild Renewed."
2. Assign individual or group research projects on topics related to Alabama's state parks. Possible topics include, for example, C.C.C. history, the geological or biological characteristics of each park, annual visitor use/frequency, and, on a more complex level, the challenges and issues that pertain to park management and operations.

Philosophical Reflections

There have been conflicting views about the wisdom of government-designated public parks since the creation of America's first national parks. Frequently the conflict is between those who believe that these public lands properly serve the "common good" and those who believe that such public lands are contrary to the fundamental principles of private-property ownership and free-market economics. Which of these two differing perspectives do you suspect is more prevalent in your community? Which do you think is more prevalent in Alabama at large? Imagine what Alabama would be like if every acre in our state was in private ownership, i.e., if there were no public lands and no state parks. Imagine what Alabama might be like if some day our state parks become privately owned properties.

Nature in Art

Review several works of art that are related to natural settings (for example, the paintings of George Catlin). Have students, independently or in groups, spend time at an Alabama state park and artistically capture (draw, paint, or photograph) some natural aspect of the park that is especially appealing.

Community Connections

Arrange a field trip to the nearest state park. Learn about its history, geology, flora, and fauna."

Additional References

- Howard, Blair. *State Parks of the South*. Hunter Publishing, 1994.
- Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Yale University Press, 2014.
- Crompton, J.L. "Forces Underlying the Emergence of Privatization in Parks and Recreation," *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 16, no. 2 (1998): 88–101.
- "State Parks," *Encyclopedia of Alabama* (encyclopediaofalabama.org/)
- "National Parks—A Brief History" (usparks.about.com/library/weekly/aa012598.htm)
- "National Park Service History," nps.gov/history/history/electronicresources.htm

Interesting websites

- nps.gov (National Park Service)
- alapark.com

Parting Thoughts

In his essay, "Tragedy of the Commons," Garrett Hardin argues that lands belonging to the public actually belong to no one. In other words, Hardin contends, land set aside as public land for the "common good" are without individual owners who feel a personal sense of responsibility for the proper care and management of the lands. And, indeed, examples of inadequate care and management can be seen in several areas of government-run public resources, including some parklands. Occasionally, this is due to bureaucratic bungling; more often, it is a consequence of limited funds. However, never have I known Alabama state-park personnel to be anything less than very proficient and fully committed to the proper and careful operation of our state parks. Of course, available state funds can vary from year to year, depending upon economic realities, and this can pose difficulties for Alabama's state parks and invite predictable political debate.

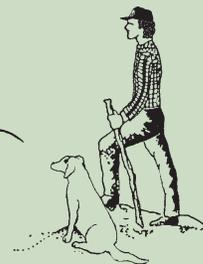
Political wrangling about park funding typically involves efforts to change the method of park operations and sometimes to change the status of park lands themselves. For example, there are Alabamians who yet today advocate that state-park lands be sold back to private ownership. Fortunately, this view has not gained large support. A more popular advocacy is for greater private–public partnering in Alabama state parks. (A number of private commercial vendors already operate within the state parks, usually to serve a particular need or function, and in many instances this works well for the public and for the state.) Properly arranged, private–

public partnerships can be helpful in the operation of public lands.

*Meanwhile, the belief that state parks "must pay their own way" is a persistent argument with potential to threaten the essential purpose of state parks. The argument is certainly reasonable up to a point. And Alabama state parks already meet a significant portion of operating needs via private vendor arrangements, gate fees, user fees, lodging income, and other means. However, the founding philosophy for our state parks (and our national parks) is to preserve important parts of our **natural heritage as public domain**. In my opinion, this fact is not well understood by some who would promote the conversion of our state parks to heavily commercialized profit-making ventures, more to the liking of the profit seekers than to those of us who are attracted to our state parks for the beautiful and peaceful natural settings. Thus my concluding words at the end of *Discovering Alabama's "Alabama State Parks": Alabama state parks—your parks, my parks, our public heritage. And what will the future hold for Alabama's state parks? As outdoor interests vary, as economics change, as politics shift, what new demands and pressures might bring consequences for Alabama's state parks? The future of this special natural heritage—our public heritage—is ours to guard and protect.**

Happy outings,

Dr. Doug





Discovering
Alabama

Activity/Information Sheet

Alabama State Parks

- 1 Bladon Springs State Park
- 2 Blue Springs State Park
- 3 Buck's Pocket State Park
- 4 Cathedral Caverns
- 5 Cheaha State Park
- 6 Chewacla State Park
- 7 Chickasaw State Park
- 8 DeSoto State Park
- 9 Florala State Park
- 10 Frank Jackson State Park
- 11 Gulf State Park
- 12 Joe Wheeler State Park
- 13 Lake Guntersville State Park
- 14 Lake Lurleen State Park
- 15 Lakepoint Resort State Park
- 16 Meaher State Park
- 17 Monte Sano State Park
- 18 Oak Mountain State Park
- 19 Paul M. Grist State Park
- 20 Rickwood Caverns
- 21 Roland Cooper State Park
- 22 Wind Creek State Park

Alabama State Parks & Counties

