

4. Why do we need national parks?

Aim

This activity explores the importance of national parks.

Background

Victoria's national parks and reserves system contains a wide range of ecosystems and species, and plays a vital role in protecting indigenous plants and wildlife. Some of these ecosystems have been protected in national parks for many years and were not subjected to broad scale clearance for agriculture or timber harvesting. Other ecosystems, protected in parks relatively recently, have been severely depleted and many of their species are now rare and at risk of extinction.

The natural values of the parks are in varying condition and face many on-going threats such as weeds, pest animals, and too much or too little fire. Parks Victoria manages these threats to parks, and helps park visitors to understand the importance of protecting the natural, cultural and aesthetic values of parks.

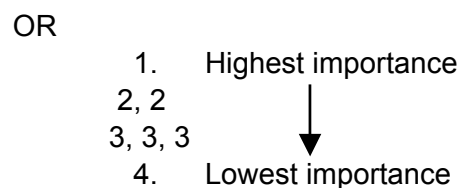
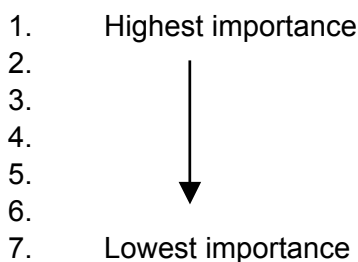
Materials (per group)

- Resource sheet 4: Why do we need national parks? Statements (The Statements could be enlarged on a photocopier) and Explanations (of why we need national parks).
- A2 poster paper.
- Scissors and coloured pens or pencils.

Alternatively, this activity could be done electronically.

Activities

1. Divide into groups of four. In your group cut out the statements and the explanations given in the resource sheets. Discuss what each might mean. (Optional: Create artwork to accompany each statement and explanation.)
2. Place the explanations with the statements they appear to support. You may add some explanations of your own from the group discussion.
3. 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 so that you may have an arrangement like the second ranking shown below.
4. 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 group.



4. Why do we need national parks?

Statements

To help protect the natural environment including our native plants.

For peoples' enjoyment and recreation.

For studying the natural environment.

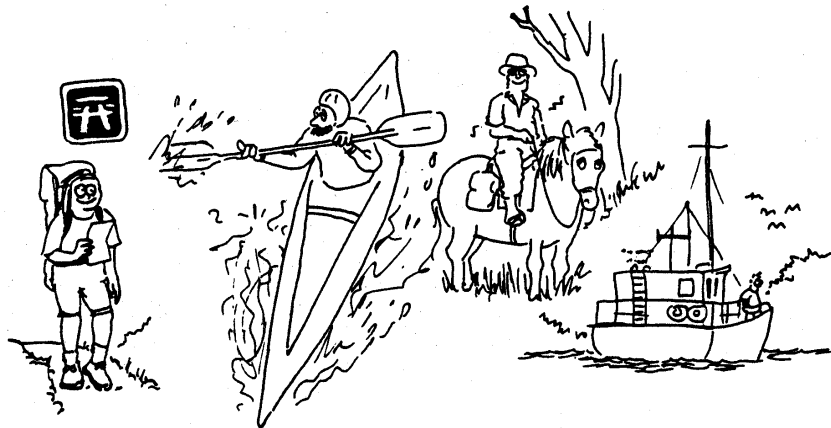
For their economic value:

- to attract tourists.
- visitors spending in the nearby towns.
- maintaining a healthy environment.

To protect rivers and water catchments.

To protect signs of human history.

For their intrinsic value and for future generations to enjoy and learn from.



Explanations

As part of the spread of European settlement over the past 200 years, agricultural and urban development have had a severe impact on our 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.

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.

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 1994 it was estimated that visitors to Grampians National Park in western Victoria contributed nearly \$400 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 past Koori (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.

