

PRESERVING *the* COMMON WEALTH



Glacier National Park Poster, Between 1936 and 1939
Image: WPA Federal Arts Project, Library of Congress



Protecting National Treasures

In 2011, Ken Burns and PBS did a six-part series called [The National Parks: America's Best Idea](#). We could argue over whether or not the parks and our national forests are America's absolute-number-one-best-idea, but they would almost certainly make everyone's top-ten list.



It's hard to stand in a national park or national forest without feeling a deep sense of gratitude: Gratitude to The Almighty for creating such wonders, and to the humans who cared enough to preserve them.

Concessionaires and entrepreneurs might have been willing to develop some of our natural treasures on a for-profit basis. But a Yellowstone Inc. would not have belonged to all of us. And who knows what might have happened if a private developer decided that Yosemite or Glacier National Park could be put to a more profitable use?

Working Toward a Cleaner Environment

Over the past half-century, state and federal agencies have adopted standards for smokestack emissions, sewage treatment, automobile emissions, hazardous waste disposal and pesticide use. Meeting these standards costs money, and those costs are reflected in the higher prices we pay for a broad range of things—higher sticker prices on cars, bigger water bills, higher utility rates, and more. But on balance, environmental regulations have helped to improve the quality of the air we breathe and the water we drink.

The environment isn't yet as clean as it could be, but it is a lot better than it was—and far better than it is in places around the globe where regulation is minimal and enforcement is nonexistent.



Wire Mills along the Monongahela River, Donora, PA, 1910
Image Credit: Library of Congress