

Public lands: Preserve or develop?

http://www.ccge.org/resources/learning_centre/classroom_activities/public_land_preserve_develop.asp

Time

Four to five hours

Materials

- Four or five photocopies of maps of your province
- Photocopies of a blank Venn diagram

Overview

This lesson introduces students to the various ways that public lands are valued, used, and managed in Canada. Students will compare and contrast different types of public lands, then simulate the decision-making and communication involved in converting private land to public land, taking into consideration the location, terrain, and climate of the land, as well as the needs and desires of the region's residents. Students will imagine that they are able to bequeath a parcel of land to their province or territory for public use, and then create an argument for the best use of the property.

Objectives

Students will:

- Compare and contrast the characteristics of various public lands, including national forests, wilderness areas, national and provincial parks, wildlife sanctuaries, recreation areas, national historic sites.
- Consider the best use for pieces of public land in their province or territory
- Create a proposal to persuade legislators and the public about the best use for a hypothetical piece of public property by emphasizing its cultural, economic, and environmental values

Geographic Skills

- Asking Geographic Questions
- Acquiring Geographic Information
- Organizing Geographic Information
- Analyzing Geographic Information

Suggested Procedure

Opening

Begin by asking students to think of places they have seen on vacations, on television, in photographs, or in movies. As they are conjuring up those images, ask them to think of the ways the land is used at each of these locations and generate a list on the board. Possible responses may include extracting natural resources from forests or bays, growing and harvesting crops on farms, building or developing homes and businesses in towns and cities, preserving beaches and parks for recreation purposes or for aesthetics, and leaving natural ecosystems alone.

Ask students if they know who decides how land is used. Explain the difference between privately owned lands and public lands. Tell them that during this lesson they will be examining the problems and challenges associated with converting private land to public land.

Have students work in pairs to research and analyze two types of public lands, choosing from wilderness areas, national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, recreation areas, and historic sites.

Distribute copies of the blank Venn diagram. Have students use the Venn diagram to note the similarities and differences of the two types of public lands. Once the pairs have completed their comparisons, develop a list of the common characteristics of all the types of public lands on the board. Then list the unique characteristics of each.

Ask the students their opinions about how governments should decide the purposes and uses for particular pieces of land. Explain that they will have an opportunity to be the decision-makers regarding a hypothetical parcel of public land.

Development

Prior to this lesson, identify four or five parcels of undeveloped land in your province. If possible, try to select parcels with varying terrain and location. Organize students into four or five small groups. Provide each group with a map of your province, indicating the group's assigned parcel of land. Explain that each group of students represents a family that owns a large parcel of land and wishes to generously donate it to the province or territory. The group is charged with determining the best usage for the land and presenting its plan to provincial or territorial legislators and residents.

Have students begin by identifying characteristics of their assigned land, including the terrain, climate, and location. Is the land in a city, a suburb, or a rural area? Is the area surrounding it residential, commercial, or open space? Are there public lands nearby? What roads provide access to this land? Are there forests, fields, creeks, or rivers on the property? What type of vegetation is found on the property? What wildlife lives in this area? Are there any buildings already on the property?

Once the groups have familiarized themselves with their property, conduct a brainstorming session about possible uses for the public lands. Their ideas might include the following:

Preserve its natural environment. Setting up natural preserves on the land with limited human intrusion would allow native species to return, preserve the land's biodiversity, and benefit the health of the inhabitants of the entire surrounding area.

Create a park for recreation. Designating the land as a national or provincial park would guarantee open spaces for hiking, swimming, and other outdoor activities, and would provide the community with a safe and scenic place to convene.

Create a cultural centre. Designating the land as a historical site would allow the land to be used as an education centre. Museums, statues, and preserved historic buildings could teach visitors about the history and ecology of the community.

Allow businesses to develop. Allowing development on the land could raise revenue and help revive the community's economy. Casinos, golf courses, a city mall, or even a new garbage dump could be built.

Give each group adequate time to decide how it thinks its land should be used. Have the groups develop a proposal to the provincial or territorial legislature that outlines what they believe is the best use of the land. Proposals should include a description of the property, a map of the space, and an argument for the proposed plan.

Closing

Explain to students that prior to presenting their plan to the provincial or territorial legislature they need to gain the endorsement of supporters. Have each group present its plans to the rest of the class. The class members can represent various parties (for example, neighbouring communities, newspapers, environmentalists) as they question and challenge the proposal. Once each group has presented its proposal to the class, discuss the challenges each group

faced in getting approval from the rest of the community. Discuss what might happen next in the process. Who would have the final decision about the property?

Suggested Student Assessment

Have each group write or act out a public service announcement (PSA) for a local newspaper, television station, or Web site advocating its plan for the land. The PSA should convince the audience that the plan is in the best interest of the people and makes the best use of the land in its natural form.

Extending the Lesson

Stage mini-debates between economic developers and open-space environmentalists. Give each side time to develop as many reasons as possible for developing land for residences or businesses, or for keeping space as public land. Invite teachers or administrators to act as judges and moderators as students discuss reasons for their positions.

Have students create a brochure for their new public land. Include a map that shows locations of activities and natural features.

Have the students look for other examples of land-use debates throughout Canada. Have them research a current or historical dispute in which different people value land for different reasons (for example, First Nations land claims in most provinces).

Using their math skills, have students create a map to scale of their parcel of land.