

1890 Yosemite National Park Debate

Yosemite is one of our nation's most valued national parks. However, Yosemite's significance has not always been appreciated. Prior to 1890, only a small segment of today's 1,200-square-mile park was protected by government, and, before 1864, none of it was protected by law. Most people had a utilitarian point of view: use the land. In other words, land is valuable for its economic use—for mining, agriculture, logging, or grazing livestock.

Fortunately, some Americans recognized the importance of preserving natural treasures such as Yosemite. Through Muir's writing and lectures, many Americans became aware of the grandeur of Yosemite. By camping with President Theodore Roosevelt in Yosemite, Muir persuaded the president to create the National Park system and preserve America's natural treasures.

This debate allows you to enter John Muir's world of 1890. Through researching and role playing the battle to protect Yosemite as a national park, you may gain an understanding of our nation's early voices debating the value of setting aside vast tracts of land as parks. Furthermore, you may gain insight into many of today's environmental arguments and understand the many factors affecting any land use decision.

DIRECTIONS: Each team will be assigned one role in the debate. Working with your team members, develop the points and arguments your character will want to make.

- How does your character value the environment?
- What are his beliefs?
- How would he try to persuade others to share his point of view?



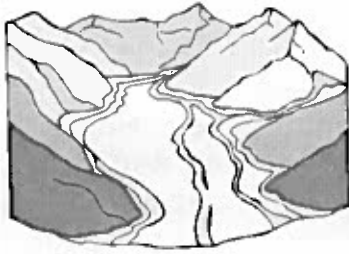
Frederick Law Olmstead

You are a landscape architect and conservationist. You are active in California's environmental issues. You have designed Central Park in New York. You feel strongly about protecting the scenic beauty of Yosemite.

John Muir

Your goal is to protect the entire ecosystem of Yosemite and to include two complete river systems in the boundaries of Yosemite. You have rallied a great deal of support for your vision to preserve Yosemite and other natural places.





Israel Raymond Ward

You are the state representative of Central American Steamship Transit Company of New York. You helped write the letter for the Yosemite land grant of 1864 and believe in the protection of areas of scenic beauty. You not only believe in the preservation of Yosemite, but you insist "the wonders be inalienable forever."

Private Landholders

You own a small piece of land in Yosemite and believe in the right to private property. If Yosemite is declared a national park, you will have to move to a new place or pay to live where you do.

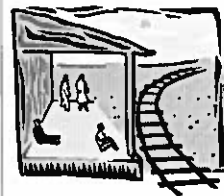


Citizen

As a citizen, your tax dollars will pay for land with which you will not be directly involved. You don't believe you should have to pay to support public land.

Senator from California

You will not support land being protected as a park until the land has been proven economically useless, with no possibilities of grazing, agriculture, mining, or logging.



Railroad Company Owner

You think that protecting Yosemite as a national park will bring tourism into the area and this will bring money into your company.

Shepherd

You graze sheep in the high Sierra meadows. You have been doing this for many years. If Yosemite is declared a national park, you will have to sell your sheep or find a new area for them to graze.

