

2004 Denver Annual Meeting (November 7–10, 2004)

Paper No. 210-9

Presentation Time: 10:30 AM-10:45 AM

DESIGNING A NATIONAL PARK: DISCUSSIONS OF ISSUES SURROUNDING NATIONAL PARKS

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As part of an integrated course in Geology of the National Parks, students design their own National Park (Black Rock Desert National Park) following the criteria set out by Congress for Park designation. Students present papers and discuss whether and how the area to be set aside meets these criteria (or doesn't). A series of student papers form the basis for further discussion of issues of broad societal and geologic relevance in the Parks and other protected places. For example, one discussion topic focuses on Natural Resources in the Parks. Students write informative and position papers on a range of resource issues, from mining (not allowed by statute) to geothermal to biogeochemical (e.g., extremophiles in Yellowstone). The papers are posted to a class website for everyone to (hopefully) read before class, which sets the groundwork for discussion. The lessons learned from existing Parks is then applied to our further discussion of Black Rock Desert National Park. Other topics we tackle include: Basic geological, biological and cultural aspects of the Black Rock Desert; Economic impact case studies of having a Park located nearby; Natural hazards and their management (e.g., volcano hazards, fire hazards); and Human impacts on the Park. We sum up at the end of the semester as students take a poll of the population (at a local mall) to see what the people think, and then debate whether and how Black Rock Desert could or should be made into a national park.

The course is designed as a senior-level, non-major course with limited enrollment (30) that integrates knowledge across a broad spectrum of the university core curriculum. The students who enroll generally represent a broad spectrum of majors, and each major can contribute to discussion in his/her area of expertise. In addition to the discussion described above, the course includes more traditional lectures and hands-on exercises in introductory geology, and has proven successful in engaging most students.

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[General Information for this Meeting](#)

Session No. 210

[Innovative Approaches to Teaching “Geology of National Parks”: Tales from the Classroom, Field, Page, Web, and Beyond](#)

Colorado Convention Center: 603

8:00 AM-12:00 PM, Wednesday, November 10, 2004

Geological Society of America *Abstracts with Programs*, Vol. 36, No. 5, p. 488