

It's the Environment
Hooray for Parks, Forests, Seashores and Natural Areas

Summertime is vacation season in the US and millions of people take the opportunity to get away from home and visit one of the many parks, forests, seashores, and other areas set aside for preservation and recreation. At ESC we are no exception and have spent time walking in the woods, mountain climbing, boating, and otherwise experiencing these calming and soothing places. In Richmond we have the James River, just as St. Louis has the Pine River (and both are being cleaned up), and of course Wyoming has the grand and magnificent Yellowstone National Park.

We recently had a chance to visit Yellowstone and neighboring Jackson Hole for a week; it was not a quiet week! Between sight seeing, watching wildlife and waiting for geysers, we were busy from sun up to sun down. The national park is huge, well managed by the federal government and as rich in human history as it is in flora and fauna. Traffic really does come to a stand still to watch bison, elk, bear, and antelope. Bison often occupy the parking lot at the Lake Resort, and we watched an elk saunter across the parking lot to graze on the grass just beyond.

From Wyoming to the sandy beaches of the southeast is a long trip, and so cruising the Carolina coast is a brief drive by comparison. The heat and humidity of the Carolina coasts remind one that the coastal habitat is nothing like that of the mid-continental mountains. And while the 6500 foot elevation in Jackson, WY can literally takes one's breath away, there are no crabs or shrimp to catch in Wyoming. The beaches offer a respite and reminder that we live on a water rich planet. North Carolina's national seashore is part of the dynamic coastal barrier island system, and is also carefully managed by the federal government.

Most recently, we enjoyed an accidental diversion into the Jefferson National Forest of Virginia, not far from Natural Bridge. As we drove the narrow switch-back roads up the mountains towards the Blue Ridge Parkway, we passed lush forests and tempting trout streams. Few homes or structures of any sort greeted us, and we thought of how inviting it was to go camping here, away from the city lights, nearby highway (I 81) and the metropolises of Richmond, Roanoke and Northern Virginia. The Jefferson National Forest is another federal government success story.

How sad if we were to let all this grandeur, this wonder, our natural resources and places of respite and renewal slip away for lack of commitment. I, for one, am proud that we, as a people, have sought to maintain so many areas for recreation, protecting water and air quality, maintaining wildlife and habitat, and keeping our planet in order for those to come.

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