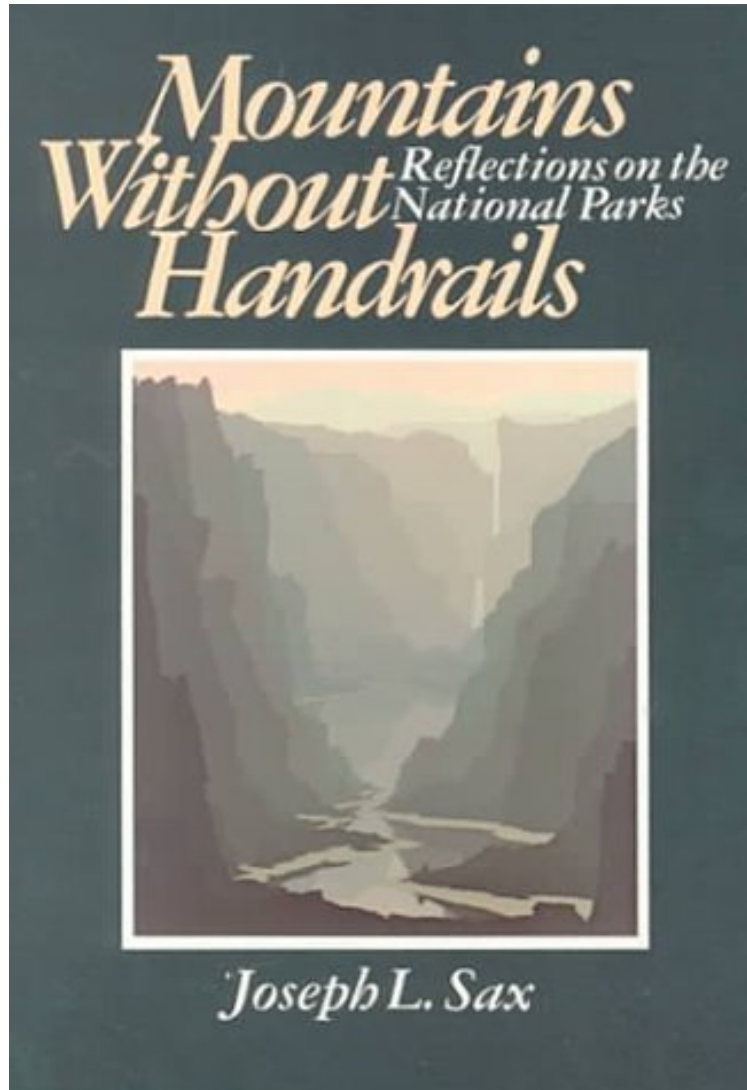


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Mountains Without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks

Joseph L. Sax

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this question (in 1980) in the context of US National Parks, which being public lands, require a management policy that takes account of the public's presence in these parks. Should we preserve the wilderness of these parks without qualification, or should nature be tamed and modified enough to accommodate those who wish to experience wilderness with modern comforts and without the trouble of personal effort and self-determination? Do we need to provide entertainment for these people, give them a structured experience, provide resorts and a rural simulation of that urban environment they ostensibly have come to the wilderness to leave? Should National Parks become grand resorts with nature as a mere backdrop, nature-enhanced amusement parks, or should these parks be managed to limit the incursion of urban life and ready made entertainment? Shouldn't nature be a place where you have to find your own way, discover for yourself what there is to hold your attention, and not be rushed or directed how to respond? If not there, where? What is the place of nature in our lives? Should there be a National policy that preserves nature and allows us to experience it as a true wilderness? Or should we democratize nature, alter it to fit an egalitarian politics?

Focusing on the long-standing and bitter battles over recreational use of our national parklands, Joseph L. Sax proposes a novel scheme for the protection and management of America's national parks. Drawing upon the most controversial disputes of recent years---Yosemite National Park, the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon, and the Disney plan for California's Mineral King Valley---Sax boldly unites the rich and diverse tradition of nature writing into a coherent thesis that speaks directly to the dilemma of the parks.