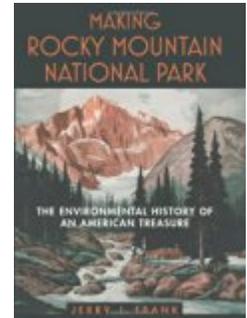


**Jerry J. Frank.** *Making Rocky Mountain National Park: The Environmental History of an American Treasure.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013. xiv + 253 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-1932-0.



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Making a national park is not an easy matter. It often involves a range of human and nonhuman actors, contested ideas about nature and culture, and diverse and dynamic environments, all operating at multiple geographic scales. Jerry J. Frank reminds us of this complex task in his study of Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) in Colorado. One of the many ways that Frank distinguishes his work is by the care he takes in addressing the multitude of cultural, social, and political consequences of national park creation. Instead of offering a direct narrative about the park's history, Frank chooses to frame his book thematically around tourism and ecology and discusses how these forces shape national park creation and maintenance in the western United States.

*Making Rocky Mountain National Park* offers a highly readable and well-researched account of the park from the late nineteenth century to the 1990s. Frank adds his voice to a growing crowd of scholars who are reexamining national parks and their role in shaping broader discussions about

the meaning of preservation, conservation, nature, and wilderness. Too often, national parks are seen as timeless places or simply backdrops for human action. However, they are dynamic political and social places shaped by the ideas, intents, and plans of multiple groups that must reach some sort of compromise to create and maintain these protected landscapes. Frank encourages his readers to rethink their ideas of nature and culture by making strong, clear, and consistent arguments about the need to include humans and human history in ideas about what nature is and how humans interact with it. Frank adds his voice to a growing line of scholars who apply this approach to national parks (notably, James W. Feldman's *A Storied Wilderness: Rewilding the Apostle Islands* [2011]) and offer case studies that bring additional depth and detail to William Cronon's encouragement to understand nature as inclusive of human history.[1]

Rocky Mountain National Park was founded in 1915, at a time of expansion and growth of tourism in national parks. Starting with the devel-

opment of the road and trail system, Frank explores the history of human environment interactions in RMNP through the waxing and waning of management policies for and physical landscape development to support driving, hiking, forest and fire management, wildlife viewing, fishing, and skiing. This refreshing and detailed environmental history of the park often intersects with larger trends in U.S. history. For example, skiing as a popular recreation in the years following World War II benefited from rising affluence, increased free time, and new materials that spurred innovative advances in recreational equipment and the development of ski resorts. Frank's work also confirms the value of using the lens of environmental history to explore modern recreation and tourism. Although this field is growing, there is much good work to be done for a variety of outdoor recreation pursuits. Frank reveals political undercurrents that shape the making of a national park as a cultural practice with far-ranging consequences for a variety of human actors, including federal agency officials, tourists, tribal nations, and business managers.

Frank's work builds on the scholarship of environmental historians and historical geographers who focus their work on human-environment interactions in public lands and protected areas. In 1992, Lary Dilsaver and Craig Colten noted that new historical environmental geographies were emerging that challenged notions of the environment as a "passive backdrop for the erection of a cultural landscape or an inert medium upon which economic and social systems operate" (p. 1). Frank seamlessly takes up this call by arguing that RMNP is "not a history that has unfolded across a passive stage" (p. 2). He succeeds in this task in each chapter. For example, in the context of elk management policies, Frank suggests that "to grasp the connections between managing elk for the satisfaction of tourists and the natural world—we would do well to see the park from the perspective of the willow or a beaver." He continues by citing the complex and interdependent

ecological relationships between elk, willow, and beaver that were altered by the reintroduction of elk and the establishment of RMNP that "created a unique set of circumstances that tied human desires to the natural world in new ways" (p. 137).

Some problems, particularly with visual materials, limit the book's effectiveness. The book includes thirty-one historic photographs; however, these images are used more as footnotes than as critical pieces of visual evidence to support the claims in the book. Frank tells a place-based story yet he veers away from a valuable asset to support his findings and guide the reader—a map. Indeed, there is not one map in the entire book. No map to focus the reader and inform them of the important regional context of RMNP in the western United States; no map of the park itself showing readers the roads and developed areas discussed in the book; no maps of the ski resorts, lakes, rivers, forests, or other locations that consume whole chapters of the book. This is not an oversight. Frank clearly states in his preface that "rather than compiling hundreds of pages of maps to honor the complexity of the historical and spatial process at work, I will instead leave this important work to geographers." One wonders, however, at the discord of this claim in a book where the importance of place and space so clearly influence the research and findings. Frank suggests that the "maps obscure more than they reveal," questioning the complexity of mapping "a herd of elk, or mountain pine beetle outbreak, or fire regime" at various temporal scales (p. xii). True, cartography does involve the principles of generalization, simplification, and other cartographic standards described with pluck in Mark Monmonier's *How to Lie with Maps* (1996). However, maps that could have fortified *Making Rocky Mountain National Park* are not impossible to construct. In today's fruitful period of interdisciplinary scholarship between historians and geographers and with staff cartographers contracted through university presses, one wonders how much richer this book would have been with even

a few maps. For example, based on his careful research and well-documented findings, it would be interesting to see Frank's version of the spatial impact of the Estes Park Fish Hatchery in RMNP through a series of maps showing the locations of specific streams and trout stocking stations and their variations over time. Other maps showing the distribution of trees affected by the 1918 fire in RMNP or the extent of pine beetle infestation and distribution of Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933 would offer new spatial insights to Frank's detailed descriptions of these events.

These issues aside, Frank offers a highly readable volume that will be of interest to park visitors and scholars interested in environmental history of the United States, national parks and protected areas, wildlife conservation, the American West, tourism, outdoor recreation, and natural resource management and policy. Frank builds his account based on sources from a variety of national and regional as well as public and private collections and archives. His bibliographic notes cite specific collections and documents in RMNP's on-site archive and library that will be valuable to other scholars exploring this park's history of fire and forest management, road building, Civilian Conservation Corps, elk management, development of Hidden Valley Ski Area, native versus invasive species, and trout and fisheries management. The book, suitable for upper-division undergraduate or graduate seminars, is a fine example of contemporary scholarship informed by contemporary theories of nature and culture yet accessible to a variety of audiences.

#### Note

[1]. See William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* (1996): 7-28; and William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996).

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