

## Nature : National Park System

The U.S. national park system includes 376 areas and covers a total land mass of 130,000 square miles. That's an area larger than Taiwan! The park system includes national parks, national monuments, national historic sites and national scenic trails.

The first national park to be established in the U.S. and in the world was Yellowstone National Park. It was opened in 1872. The national park system was created by Woodrow Wilson in 1916 with the formation of the National Park Service. The purpose of this system was to set aside areas of great natural beauty to be protected and administered by the government for the enjoyment of the people. Now, tens of millions of people visit the spectacular scenery offered by national parks in the U.S. every year.

The most famous national parks is the Grand Canyon. The phenomenal colored walls of the canyon were formed through erosion by the Colorado River, which still snakes through the canyon about one mile below the canyon rim. The formation of the canyon began about five million years ago when the river began to very gradually carve out the canyon as we know it today. Some of the rocks found at the bottom of the canyon may be as much as two billion years old! The Grand Canyon was established as a national park in 1919 and is now visited by over five million people every year.

The largest of the national parks is Wrangell-St. Elias National Park in Alaska. It covers an area of over 13,000 square miles, or about the size of the state of Maryland. It is home to Mt. Saint Elias, which is the second highest peak in the U.S. Here you can also find the largest group

of glaciers in North America. The park is a natural habitat for a wide variety of wildlife, such as mountain goats, moose, grizzly bears, wolverines and porcupines.

As urbanization and industrialization gradually take their toll by wiping out areas of natural beauty in the U.S., the national park system guarantees that our most spectacular natural treasures will be preserved for all to see for generations to come.