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### Book Review: Creating Wilderness: A Transnational History of the Swiss National Park

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## Book Reviews

**Patrick Kupper. *Creating Wilderness: A Transnational History of the Swiss National Park*. Trans. Giselle Weiss. (The Environment in History: International Perspectives). New York: Berghahn Books, 2014. Pp. x, 266. Hardback, \$95.00**

Patrick Kupper's *Creating Wilderness* offers a compelling discussion of the development of the Swiss National Park. In order to fully explore the creation of the Swiss National Park, Kupper employs both comparative and transnational methodologies. Throughout the book Kupper compares Yellowstone National Park and the Swiss National Park because, as he contends, both national parks embodied different models of nature protection. Where Yellowstone was "based on the close association of state-supported conservation and public recreation," the Swiss National Park "promoted a close alliance between nature conservation and scientific research and put into place an exceptionally strict protection regime" (3). Kupper asserts that this difference between the two models was attributable, in part, to different conceptions of wilderness in the United States and Switzerland. In the United States, people saw wilderness as endangered and "national parks were established to preserve the remaining bits of American wilderness" (4). In contrast, "Swiss wilderness was no longer considered a given but rather something that had disappeared a long time ago. Consequently, before it could be preserved, it had to be (re)produced" (4). This difference fuels one of Kupper's central arguments: that wilderness cannot exist; it has to be created and is thus a historical process. Kupper also argues for another important difference between the United States and Swiss models: in the Swiss National Park, "alpine tourism became the bogeyman whereas it served as a shining example for tourist development in the American national parks" (187). Therefore, Kupper describes the similarities and differences between the two national parks in order to describe different models of nature protection. In addition to his comparative analysis, Kupper employs a transnational methodology to describe how the global circulation of ideas and

people influenced the Swiss National Park. Thus, as he explores local developments, Kupper also pays close attention to the international dimensions of the story.

In six chapters, Kupper unveils a fascinating narrative. Chapters one and two analyze the birth and early years of the Swiss National Park. During the first decade of the twentieth century, Kupper argues, the Swiss developed and brought to fruition the idea of the Swiss National Park. The Swiss neither wholeheartedly embraced nor wholeheartedly rejected the Yellowstone model. Rather, they adopted only the elements they found useful and thus created their own model of nature protection. Chapter three explores some of the frictions associated with the Swiss National Park, particularly struggles between park officials and local authorities. Kupper contends that this relationship has always been fraught and remains tenuous to the present. Tension remains because the park has not built familiarity, trust, or ties with the community. Chapters four, five, and six are particularly compelling. In these three chapters Kupper addresses the theme of “total protection.” Kupper argues that the founders of the Swiss National Park intended to allow nature full reign within the borders of the park. The problem with this desire, of course, was that at no point in the history of the park did humans allow nature full reign. Kupper forces readers to think about the limits of total protection. For one, popular animal species appeared to receive preferred treatment, which was hardly in line with the idea of total protection. Additionally, Kupper inquires if it is possible to reconcile the principle of non-intervention with frequent human interventions in nature. Examples of frequent human interventions include releasing ibex into the park and putting up artificial salt licks for easier access as a food supply for animals. What developed, Kupper concludes, was total protection with some flexibility.

*Creating Wilderness* succeeds on several fronts. By deftly blending environmental and transnational history, Kupper places himself in the forefront of a trend in the historiography to think about the international dimensions of environmental history. In addition, Kupper makes an important contribution by analyzing

the similarities and differences between the Yellowstone and the Swiss National Park models. Kupper convincingly demonstrates that the Swiss model was not merely a copy of its United States counterpart. Furthermore, Kupper highlights one of the benefits of transnational history. Rather than merely observing the movement of ideas across national borders, Kupper analyzes how these ideas are modified to fit different contexts and how these modifications can have tremendously important effects. *Creating Wilderness* will appeal to anyone interested in Switzerland, the United States, and environmental history and will likely prove useful in graduate seminars on environmental history, methodology and theory, and global history.

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