

Timeless Ground

I sigh in contentment as I lay on my paddleboard, soaking in the sharp, woody aroma of the towering evergreens, the warm sunshine tickling the crystal-clear water, and the sound of real laughter—that is rarely heard before—around me. I am at Custer State Park, a breathtaking glimpse of South Dakota’s true beautiful nature. Though the world around me is changing everyday, state parks will stay and serve as living time capsules for communities now, and generations to come. They are vessels that cherish memories forever.

During my most recent visit to Custer State Park, my cousins from South Korea visited South Dakota, they were practically in a whole new world. However, they never knew the true beauty of South Dakota until we took them swimming at the perfectly cool waters of Center Lake, and strolling next to Sylvan Lake in Custer State Park. I will never forget my cousins pointing out and admiring the turtle they saw, nor will I forget the care-free joy on their faces as they tried splashing me with water repeatedly.

State parks are invaluable to me not only because they preserve wildlife and natural habitats, but because they create a welcoming environment where my family can actually “unplug,” and connect, without the distractions and chaos of modern times. In fact, though I love hiking, paddleboarding, and most other outdoor activities, my most favorite part about every visit to Custer State Park, or any state park, is the peace. The quiet stillness of the world around me. The gentle, calm rippling of the water. The sound of birds chirping, loved ones laughing, and trees swaying. There are no obnoxious cars playing ear-splittingly loud rap music, or constant notifications plaguing phones, but only the tranquil freedom of the great outdoors.

All in all, unlike a childhood toy that can go away once you grow out of it, state parks remain unchanged, and they act as a fixed point between generations. I know the power of the fact that, thanks to state parks, I can one day return to the same lake with my own children. State parks are not just flimsy tourist attractions, instead, they are timeless grounds for the memories of future generations.