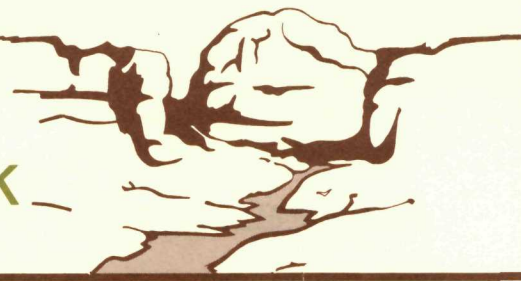


# INFOBRIEF

## Capitol Reef National Park



### RESOURCES UPDATES, 1990

#### LATEST ON ISSUES

Grazing--Since the purchase of grazing permits began in 1988, 70% of grazing cattle have been removed from the park. Also, the staff has initiated a fencing project to inhibit trespass from outside the park, while studies will chart a course for "restoration" of lands where cattle no longer roam. In a sense, grazing is no longer a major issue, even though some allotments will be held by cattlemen well into the next century.

Fremont River Dam--The Wayne County Water Conservancy District has proposed the construction of an earthen dam to produce hydroelectric power and increased irrigation water on the Fremont River, 9 miles west of the point where it enters the park.

The National Park Service (NPS) is concerned that a dam might impact the river's pristine natural values. The dam could cause downstream changes in water temperature, flow rates, and sedimentation, all of which could affect the riverine environment within the park.

Increased awareness of the Fremont River and concern about possible effects of the dam has caused the NPS to suggest the river for listing on the National Rivers Inventory. Inventory status could result in the river being designated as a Wild and Scenic River of national significance.

The NPS is concerned about the dam project but at this time does not take a position either objecting or not objecting to it. Intensive study and data gathering by the NPS is underway while the proponents complete their own required environmental effect studies. When those proponent studies are completed and reviewed, the NPS will develop an official position.

Power Line Changes--The Garkane Power Company maintains a utility corridor across the park and some of the corridor is visible to visitors using Highway 24 or the Scenic Drive in historic Fruita. The NPS has agreed to the replacement of existing 12.5 kilovolt lines and poles with a 34.5 kilovolt system, based on the power company's assertion that the change is necessary to continue adequate subscriber service to the east of the park.

For some time, the NPS has taken a position that the existing 12.5 kilovolt line approaching and running through the historic pioneer settlement area of Fruita is intrusive. Telephone lines were moved underground in 1986.

In response to the power company's desire to increase the power handling capabilities of the existing line (taller poles and bigger cable), the NPS sought special Federal funding for undergrounding in 1987, but was not successful. Garkane Power Company affirms that they have no funds for undergrounding any portion of a new 34.5 kilovolt system.

Burr Trail Road--Controversy continues over paving this scenic 66-mile road, 8.4 miles of which lies within Capitol Reef National Park. Minimal funding, administrative appeals and litigation have slowed Garfield County's paving project.

At present, realignment and roadbed preparation work to the west of the park have not affected the portion of the road within the park. The NPS will exercise authority over all construction and realignment within the park that might impact park resources.

#### ORCHARD CHANGES

Workers have removed an orchard of old peach trees from an area next to the campground amphitheater. They are replacing them with nut trees, all almonds.

The baskets long used to protect young trees from damage by deer are time-consuming to build. In the old days, farmers kept the deer population low by hunting. Orchard workers are experimenting with a protective plastic tube device that circles the young tree and is less intrusive than the old baskets. The tube also protects against the gnawing of rodents.

## OTHER MAMMALS AND PEOPLE

When the pioneers moved onto the land between the Fremont River and Sulphur Creek, they had an enormous effect on native plants and animals. Mule deer were soon hunted for food and to reduce their destructive browsing on young fruit trees. Striped skunks were shot as pests, keeping their tendency to proliferate in the presence of increased human garbage in check. The creation of orchards and fields created an ideal habitat for the yellowbelly marmot, which usually favors higher elevations. Marmots, too, were shot as pests.

In the 1960s, as the last farmers sold their land to the National Park Service (NPS) and visitors began to arrive in force, a 70 year-status quo was upset. A new land manager, the NPS, was charged with protecting both the historic and natural resources, including animals. The deer population began to grow enormously and threaten newly replanted orchards of young, tender seedlings. Skunks proliferated, sustained by camper food and garbage. Marmots grew in number. Beaver appeared.

The complexities of the ebb and flow of animal populations in Fruita are under study; meanwhile, pragmatic mitigation of conflict problems is underway. Skunks are live-trapped routinely in the summer and relocated to more remote sections of the park. Still, there are always several to be seen (or smelled) at night and rangers instruct campers on food and garbage discipline.

Marmots are on the move too, since an increase in their numbers in the mid-1980s. Rangers have arranged for new homes in the nearby Dixie National Forest where marmots will be no threat to young fruit trees. Meanwhile, studies will determine what is an "appropriate" number of marmots for the Fruita area.

The deer population, which peaks at about 120 each fall is a continuing problem for preservation of the historic orchards. Since the 1960s, orchard workers have been forced to use large baskets around trees or build high fences to enclose young orchards. Although in the early 1980s it was determined that many deer had to be removed, trapping and relocation efforts proved to be too difficult and costly at that time.

The deer dilemma needs further study and may not be resolved for some time. A warning about deer! Don't feed them. Two years ago a young buck that was handfed began knocking people down when he wanted more. He had to be destroyed by rangers.

Beaver impacts on cottonwoods along the Fremont increased markedly in the late 1980s. Rangers are protecting some trees while studying the beaver.

## INSECT INSIGHTS

Nothing seems to spark more visitor concern each spring than the voracious appetites of tent caterpillars in the Fremont River valley. Some visitors are outraged that park rangers seem to be allowing the caterpillars, which produce one generation a year, to "kill the trees."

Experience has shown that cottonwood trees, even when totally defoliated by a particularly heavy population of caterpillars, almost always replace all the eaten leaves very quickly. While they are doing so, it's "not a pretty sight" for many visitors, to be sure.

Even if it were financially feasible to spray all the trees of the long Fremont River valley, NPS policy discourages killing one life form in preference to another or to promote "aesthetics." Further, sprays presently available kill other less "offending" insects, including butterflies.

Some controlling is done near the historic/administration areas to prevent defoliation of orchard and shading trees, where the latter may be "drought-stressed" and in some real danger from a complete defoliation. A spray used contains the non-persisting *Bacillus thuringiensis*, a microbe deadly to caterpillars and some other insects, but harmless to humans.

## HISTORY PRESERVED

A team of historic structure artisans is rehabilitating pioneer era buildings in the Fruita area. Last year, the team--on loan from Bryce Canyon National Park--repaired the Behunin Cabin and re-roofed the 1890-built schoolhouse. This season they are working on the blacksmith shop and finishing the schoolhouse.