



Rocky Mountain National Park

Backcountry Use at Rocky

The Question: *Who is using the backcountry in Rocky Mountain National Park? Why are they here and what do they want?*

Having completed a Backcountry/Wilderness Management Plan in 2001, managers at Rocky Mountain National Park realized the need for better information about the people using backcountry and wilderness areas. Specifically, park managers wanted to know more about the visitors themselves, why they were in the backcountry, what their needs were, and what they know about wilderness management. Having this information would facilitate management decisions that better serve the park and its visitors.

The Project: *Distribute 1,000 surveys to people as they leave the backcountry and statistically analyze the data.*

Between July and September of 2002, George Wallace, Jeffrey Brooks, and Matthew Bates supervised the distribution of 1,000 surveys to people at trailheads and at the Backcountry Office. Usable surveys returned amounted to 682. The information gathered was compiled and statistically analyzed.

The Results: *The average backcountry user is a 47 year old who lives on the Front Range and hikes 9 miles in 7.8 hours without knowing what designated wilderness is.*

The average backcountry user is 43 years old. 67% of backcountry users have an annual household income of between \$50,000 and \$100,000 and 94% live in Colorado's Front Range. 43% of people surveyed have been in the backcountry at Rocky more than 6 times while 9% have never been in any backcountry at all. 24% of people surveyed were staying overnight in the backcountry for an average of 1.9 nights and hiking an average of 18 miles.



30% of backcountry users felt crowded at some point.

The other 76% were day-hikers walking an average of 9 miles in 7.8 hours. The top reasons for going into the backcountry were the enjoyment of the backcountry itself, to pursue a specific activity, to be with friends or family and to be alone.

41% of people surveyed encountered park employees in the backcountry and 85% of those encounters were positive. 25% of people reported seeing too many people during their trip. Negative behaviors witnessed by staff and visitors included littering, inappropriate disposal of toilet paper, harassment of wildlife, graffiti writing, development of social trails, use of cell phones, pagers, radios, and collection of plants or other specimens.

72% saw additional wilderness designation as moderate to extreme in importance but most people lacked an accurate understanding of what wilderness designation is and what the ramifications would be.



9% of backcountry users are here to be with family or friends.