



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATIONAL CAPITAL PARKS
1100 OHIO DRIVE SW.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20242

IN REPLY REFER TO:

LIZ NCP(MIRR)

MAR 29 1976

Memorandum

To: Superintendents, All Areas, National Capital Parks

From: Associate Director, Park System Management, National Capital Parks

Subject: Wilderness/Backcountry Management Task Force Report

Please consider the enclosed Task Force Report for informational purposes at this time. Although "Wilderness/Backcountry" is a relative term it is realized that the opportunity to implement the recommendations of the report is rather negligible in National Capital Parks.

Abner M. Bradley

Enclosure





United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

FEB 20 1976

Memorandum

To: WASO and Field Directorate

From: *Hugh / Drotos*
Acting Associate Director

Subject: Wilderness/Backcountry Management Task Force Report

The full report of the task force is enclosed. It represents the thoughts of a diverse and experienced group of managers. The innovations by park personnel in this field is evident. It is now time to glean the best techniques for each of these facets of management and draw them together into a cohesive Servicewide program.

This program will be incorporated into guidelines in the very near future. However, you are requested to begin to adjust your programs, wherever possible, to accommodate the general intent of these recommendations. This should help reduce some of the confusion this coming season to the visitors, caused by the present variety of park approaches to these activities. This request is being sent in advance of the prepared guidelines to allow you time to organize funds and personnel into a well-managed program as soon as possible.

Raymond L. Freeman

Enclosure



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WILDERNESS/BACKCOUNTRY
TASK FORCE REPORT

January 1976

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this management program is to perpetuate the backcountry resources with a minimum of inconvenience and restriction on the visitor but reinforced by regulation. Where there are rational differences in area operations, this is acceptable, but because uniformity facilitates visitor understanding, some recommendations will result in standardized field operations.

Research was viewed as a tool to refine the ongoing management program, not as a product for which all management must wait.

Discussion of each topic was followed by alternative formulation and, finally, recommendation of a course of action. The report of the task force covers the objective, alternatives, recommendations, and discussions for each topic in that order.

Park backcountry and wilderness were not differentiated so far as management practices are concerned. The framework of the existing policies adequately addresses the implications of pending wilderness designation. We do not anticipate any significant change in use patterns or management needs following designation. Some increase in backcountry use may be expected because of the additional notoriety.

The subjects discussed by the task force are listed showing priorities initially expressed by 23 of the more heavily used field areas. It is significant that the first eight relate directly to the magnitude of use. The other subjects also reflect the increasing pressures on the basic resources by visitors.

There were several subjects that were discussed but no formal recommendations drawn up due to time restraints. Several of the lower-ranked topics were considered to have been adequately handled at the meeting in conjunction with other closely related subjects.

Some of the subjects which were not discussed to any great extent dealt predominantly with local matters unique to one park. These included: international boundary and water source management. There was no effort to discuss fire management or vegetative complexes at this meeting. Those subjects were deferred to the pending fire management task force which should address these matters within the next year.

Bear/human conflict has been addressed in a limited way in regard to user-group conflicts. The technique used at Mount McKinley appears to have significant possibilities. Areas of known grizzly denning and/or feeding activity are closed to backcountry camping. The permit system

Discussion: Excessive resource impact should be prevented and the opportunity for solitude assured by some form of limitation.

The volume of use may be controlled or distributed by two basic approaches: control over access, trailhead quota; and control over destination, by use of designated sites or zones.

Designated site capacities focus use on pre-selected areas, concentrating impact, hopefully, on durable sites and to some extent limiting user flexibility. Zone capacity applies to larger areas with visitor selection of any camping spot within that area.

Regardless of the approach to limitation, use of a park tends to follow patterns and trails or beaten paths and campsites develop. Modified, or a combination of techniques may be needed to meet the objectives in a park. Some confusion exists in regard to the zone concept of use. It does not necessarily disperse use uniformly over the area. Either of these techniques must be monitored to prevent resource deterioration and provide for sufficient visitor solitude. Almost all backcountry "problems" today are affected by the level of use, or could be improved through reduction or manipulation of user.

The maximum party size for overnight use should be controlled. Those parks with statistics indicate the majority of all parties today have four or less members. Use of the backcountry/wilderness by large parties should be discouraged. Each area should undertake to determine the party size that meets the needs of the local conditions through monitoring or research. Possibly a more acceptable technique would be to permit general use of the area by parties of eight or less with groups of 9-25 being accommodated only in certain areas. In this manner, all parties could be treated in a uniform manner.

Limits on the length of stay were discussed with a wide variety of figures suggested. Within the comprehensive system, some standardization is desirable for the sake of visitor trip planning.

The possibility of developing limits on the amount of use a given site should receive per year was also brought out.

STOCK USE

Because of the unique characteristics associated with stock use, they will be addressed separately from the other use limits. However, they do fall under the same general objective for limitation.

Alternatives considered: Limit the numbers of stock in a party. -- Designation of those areas where stock may be permitted. -- Control over grazing to minimize the impact of what stock use does take place.

Recommendations: With only a few exceptions, the recommended maximum number of stock per party was 15. Lower limits may be set by parks in order to meet the needs of their programs. Parks should proceed to designate those areas that are open to stock so that the public may be informed. Grazing should be phased out as an adverse impact to the perpetuation of these natural systems.

Discussion: Only a few parks presently permit grazing by recreational stock; most now require feed to be packed in with the party. This does involve about 20#/horseday so can add to the total size of a pack trip. Where grazing is not permitted, hitch racks or corrals should be provided to secure stock and protect the area. Corrals require more material and space for construction and would generally have to be restricted to use by one party, limiting their desirability. Hitch racks should be provided for day use destination areas also to avoid excessive impact and sanitation problems.

The vast majority of this use is presently under National Park Service control through either concessions or special use programs. These permits, contracts, and programs should be reviewed to ascertain if they are contributing to the overall backcountry management objectives, or if they serve only as a source of permittee income.

Grazing should be terminated to permit a more natural vegetative ground cover and, in some cases, contribute to historic fuel loading and continuity of ground cover.

A common hazard of all limited or capacity systems is that they tend to fill all options. In this way use records cease to reflect where the visitors wanted to go, and reflect where the visitors were permitted to go. This phenomenon also tends to put equal impact on all sites, whether they can uniformly withstand it or not.

PERMIT SYSTEM

Objective: To monitor or control use, and to gather necessary management information.

Alternatives: Among the alternatives considered were individual park permits, as are now used in 34 areas within the Service. These take various forms and require a variety of information from the users. -- A Servicewide permit that would provide added uniformity for the visitors and allow

adoption of data systems providing feedback in a uniform manner to areas throughout the Service. It would also be more economical to print the permits. -- The last alternative would be the adoption of interagency permits. These would have a format compatible with adjacent agencies.

Recommendations: The task force preferred the interagency permit format. Within the capabilities of the standardized format there would be two basic options available at the park's discretion. The first format would be used by the parks issuing a high volume of permits. It would be provided in tablet form, and designed for optical character reader input eliminating the intermediate step of keypunching. This has significant cost benefits. An additional facet of this program would be the optional use of a small tag to identify the permittees within the backcountry.

The second basic form would be the pack tag permit similar to the permit utilized on a trial basis in 1975 by six areas. The prime contrast in formal layout of the tag would be that it would incorporate a write-in capability for destination.

In addition to the format and form of the new permits, the group recommended that the management information summary output provide not only the data required by managers analyzing the use but also generate the monthly use reports.

Discussion: The target date of January 1977 was set for the new permits. The field areas will utilize present permits for the 1976 season. There are only a few points of contrast remaining between the National Park Service permit and the U. S. Forest Service wilderness format. Every effort should be made to reconcile these points promptly to allow review of the proposed compatible format by the agencies and distribution of the finalized permits by the target date. The need for common formats has been expressed by both Western and Pacific Northwest Regions and Forest Service personnel. The common user public will be the beneficiary of such a move.

BACKCOUNTRY RESERVATIONS

Objective: To facilitate advance planning by visitors and spread the workload in the areas where requests exceed backcountry capacities.

Alternatives considered: Three basic approaches to backcountry reservations were considered. These include a Servicewide reservation system which would be handled on a national basis. A second approach was to standardize the systems for reservations but have them handled individually by the parks. The last consideration was for a park-by-park system as now exists in 13 parks.

Recommendations: Where demand exceeds the backcountry use limits, a certain percent of this quota should be covered by a reservation system. The percent to be reserved and the mechanics of the system would be set by the individual park with some form of validation documenting the intended visitor's arrival for the trip.

Discussion: About one-third of the areas issuing permits offered reservations in 1975. Considerable variation exists in the manner in which they are accepted, the percent of capacity committed, and the timing of the reservation in relation to the planned trip. This diversity inhibits national publicity and acceptance of the programs. Regional and local announcements fail to reach the national public. Only one park made more than 50 percent of the sites available through advance reservations. All but one park accepts requests for reservations as of January 1 of each year. One park uses reservations all year, but the other parks take reservations for only the period of Memorial Day to Labor Day. The trend is to extend this season, especially on weekends. Both mail and phone requests were accepted but confirmation of issuance was by mail.

IMPACT MONITORING AND CONTROL

Monitoring

Objective: Document the form and magnitude impact on the park resources so as to initiate timely corrective action.

Alternatives considered: Several techniques were discussed as means for monitoring these remote sites. They included the use of photo plots, code-a site evaluation cards, transects, preferred area indicators, and visitor survey.

Recommendation: That some form of documented monitoring be established in all backcountry/wilderness areas. This may include both resource and sociological monitoring.

Discussion: In order to determine if changes are taking place and their magnitude, an objective indicator is needed. A monitoring system can serve that purpose. The initial effort is the largest; selecting the system and collecting the baseline information. Follow-up could be made at fixed intervals or when some significant change in use was known to have taken place. Any monitoring system should be capable of assessing the results of both day and overnight use.

Control or Correction of Impact

Objective: Correct or at least stabilize the areas which are presently receiving visitor impact.

Alternative considered: The direct treatment of the area being impacted or shifting the use away from those impacted areas.

Recommendations: The application of one or a combination of both of these alternatives should be undertaken to rehabilitate or at least hold visitor impact of the area to an acceptable level.

Discussion: Continuing degradation of these areas is unacceptable. Use must be balanced against the resilience of the natural systems to maintain themselves. In the absence of rehabilitation, only very light use can be tolerated in many systems. The combination of user limits and minimum overt rehabilitation will permit somewhat higher, and probably more acceptable, levels of use over time and still perpetuate the approximation of a natural scene. Hand work of scarification, drainage, and erosion control, and use of native plants should suffice except in exceptionally deteriorated areas. It may be desirable to adopt a technique of utilizing only 50 percent of the feasible sites at any one time and rotating use back after rehabilitation followed by an interval of 5 or so years. Constructed trails may also prevent proliferated beaten paths.

SANITATION

Solid Waste

Objective: To minimize litter in the backcountry.

Alternatives considered: That the National Park Service collect and haul out debris from locations from the backcountry. The second alternative is that the visitor pack out all that he packs in to the backcountry.

Recommendations: The visitors should be required to pack out all that they pack into the backcountry. One exception to this would be where combustible products might be disposed of in fires, where authorized. Any remaining unburned material would be packed out as with the other debris.

Discussion: Increased education, signing, and enforcement is also needed. A particular problem is the dumping of trash into human waste facilities. This disables more complex systems and fills up the more primitive pit privies, compounding impact in more heavily used areas.

Water and Sewage

Objective: Provide reasonably sanitary conditions throughout the backcountry.

Alternatives considered: The first would be no facilities. The second intermediate level would involve providing minimum facilities. Ultimately, the consideration of providing modern developed facilities.

Recommendations (Water): Users would not be directed to water sources such as lakes, streams or springs for drinking water. Visitors should be directed to provide their own sterilization of water from sources available. In this case no facilities are recommended.

Discussion: Because of the impracticality of providing maintenance for water resource facilities in remote areas, it was determined to be both realistic and desirable to eliminate all such facilities from the backcountry.

Recommendations (Sewage): Follow strategy of progression from individual cat-hole to pit privy to vault-type facility. Consideration should be given to the alternative solution of reduction of use prior to each step. Depending upon statistics, user limitations, site disturbance, and costs of all use levels should be determined for all problem areas.

Discussion: The solving of the sewage problem directly influences the seriousness of the water problem. Most areas of moderate to heavy backcountry use feel this is potentially their most serious problem. It is most critical where heavy day use occurs. Overnight use usually is more dispersed and involves significantly fewer visitors.

The progression of systems also involves changing impacts. The "cat-holes" may be unacceptable due to excessive surface disturbance. Likewise, the need to dig new pit privies too frequently per unit of time indicates a need to shift to vaults. Unsatisfactory soil or water table conditions are also major factors dictating the solution.

PUBLIC RELATIONS - INTERPRETATION

Objective: Communicate the full spectrum from ethics through management programs to employees and the user public. De-emphasize the pure, scenic, "it's nice to be here" article that tends to "sell" more use in favor of well done, colorful but meaningful presentation of wilderness/backcountry use and management programs.

Alternatives considered: One alternative would be to utilize the Service-wide systems of communications only. A second alternative would involve the use of all Service media and also the available public media to achieve these objectives.

Recommendations: Wilderness/backcountry ethics, management programs, policies regulations, outdoor skills and trip preplanning should be communicated to all those employed in the parks and to all the user public so that needed management programs can be implemented with public support. Only through this type of approach can understanding be increased.

All variety of media needs to be utilized at the park, Region, and nationwide.