

RUNNING UPHILL: URBANIZATION, CONFLICT, AND VISITOR USE AT KENNESAW MOUNTAIN NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK

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Abstract.—At the Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield, operated by the National Park Service (NPS) near Atlanta, differing uses – including walking for fitness, horseback riding, and organized cross-country running team practices on the trails – conflict with the NPS mission to protect the historic resources of the site and lead to conflicts among visitors. NPS managers at Kennesaw Mountain instituted a temporary permit program for organized running teams during October 2006. They also monitored visitor acceptance of the permit program and completed an assessment of visitors' perceptions of crowding. This paper discusses the impacts of urban sprawl, visitor management in terms of crowding, and user conflicts on National Park sites. Particular focus will be given to research methods used to address these issues and to the challenge of resolving user conflicts while protecting historic and natural resources.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Located in the metropolitan Atlanta region of Georgia, Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park (KMNBP) was set aside by the War Department in 1917. The Park was transferred to the Department of the Interior as a unit of the National Park Service in 1933. Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park is the site of a Civil War battle in which 5,350 soldiers were killed between June 19 and July 2, 1864. The

2,888-acre park is home to historic earthworks, cannon emplacements, and monuments. The purpose of the park is to protect the site and interpret the remnants of one of the most intense battles of the Atlanta Campaign (National Park Service, n.d.c).

Atlanta today is far different than it was when the park was created. Greater metropolitan Atlanta is now the most rapidly growing urban center in the United States, with approximately 1 square mile being developed every 2 weeks during 2006. In 1990 the population of metro Atlanta was just under 3 million; today the population has reached almost 5 million, and encompasses 28 counties surrounding the city. It has been projected that over the next 25 years, metro Atlanta will add another 2 million people (Harris, 2007).

Green space plays an especially important role in providing recreation opportunities in urban environments (Walker, 2004). Every day the Atlanta region reportedly “lost 54 acres of trees and gains 28 acres of asphalt, concrete and impermeable surfaces” (Harris, 2007). Development, coupled with high real estate values, has resulted in few public recreation sites available in the region. The lack of outdoor recreation opportunities has resulted in unsustainable overuse and crowding at KMNBP.

KMNBP was visited by almost 1.4 million people in 2006, making it the second-most visited national battlefield in the country, behind Gettysburg National Military Park. Visitation during 2007 is well on its way to being the highest of all time (National Park Service, n.d.a). Different uses of the park include walking for fitness, horseback riding, and organized cross-country running teams training on the trails, all of which are activities that conflict with the NPS mission to protect the historic resources of the site. This leads to conflicts among various types of visitors.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Intensity of involvement and activity type have been shown to be significant predictors of 1) why people use a recreation area; and 2) how they perceive various aspects of a site (Lee, Scott, & Moore, 2002). Several studies have also identified factors that influence perceptions of crowding, such as motives for recreation, preferences for the experience, and norms of specific groups of visitors (Roggenbuck & Schreyer, 1977; Schreyer & Roggenbuck, 1978; Absher & Lee, 1981; Bultena, Field, Womble, & Albrecht, 1981; Graefe & More, 1992).

Research by Vaske, Carothers, Donnelly & Baird (2000) suggests that more out-group than in-group conflict exists in outdoor recreation – e.g. pedestrians tend to report more conflict with bicyclists than with other pedestrians. A number of studies have looked at recreation conflict among different user types, including hikers and mountain bikers (Watson, 1991; Ramthun, 1995); canoeists and motorboaters (Lucas, 1964; Stankey, 1973; Lime, 1977; Ivy, Stewart & Lue 1992); and hikers, horseback riders, bikers and motorcyclists (McCay & Moeller, 1976). Studies of crowding norms and conflict at recreation sites have focused more on wilderness and backcountry areas; more research needs to be done to understand visitors' crowding norms in urban environments such as KMNBP.

3.0 CONFLICTING USES AT KMNBP

Visitation numbers for KMNBP reflect the rapidly growing population of greater Atlanta. Park attendance was 784,310 in 1990; in 2006, it was almost 1.4 million (National Park Service, n.d.a). Intensive and conflicting park uses present a challenge to the NPS whose mission includes both protecting the historic resources of the site and providing for visitor experiences. Local people use the park for a variety of recreational activities including walking and jogging for fitness, biking, birding, and horseback riding. Organized running teams are a particularly large contingent of local recreational users; teams from at least 25 local high schools and colleges regularly use the trails at KMNBP for practice, especially in

late summer and fall. Most did not travel to the park together as a team, however; they arrived separately in private vehicles which put an enormous strain on the park's limited parking areas.

These comments from the Atlanta Journal-Constitution online blog in 2007 reflect some of the tension around recreational usage and overusage at KMNBP:

"...Face facts, y'all, that is a recreational park. The civil war is over and has been over for 150+ years!!! Now it's just some woods and a hill where people jog, walk and bicycle..." (John, 2007)

"For some reason the name is Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park. It should be renamed Kennesaw Mountain National Recreation Area for what it actually is...If you travel the SE you'll quickly realize there's about a zillion Civil War parks. Losing one is no loss..." (Bob, 2007)

"THIS COUNTRY IS HEADED TOWARDS A NEW CIVIL WAR ...NOBODY WILL CARE ABOUT THE OLD CIVIL WAR IN A FEW MORE YEARS." (Harold, 2007)

The park management does not face total opposition, however. Another quote from the same blog read:

"...if we forget what happened in our past then we might repeat it in our future...If there are not enough Park Rangers to patrol the park then maybe we should contact our representatives..." (Sharon, 2007)

One specific pressing concern for the managers of KMNBP is maintenance of Kennesaw Mountain Drive, the road leading to the top the mountain. Built between the 1930s and the 1950s, the road provides vehicular access to a panoramic view of the region from the mountaintop and helps give visitors a greater understanding of the historical importance of the mountain. Interpretive signs point out the geographic features of the region and explain how they influenced

the strategy of the Confederate and Union armies during the Atlanta campaign. Mountaintop access is considered critical to interpreting and understanding the park's historic significance (National Park Service, n.d.b).

Kennesaw Mountain Drive, however, poses a number of safety risks. The 1.5-mile road is only 20 feet wide (4 feet less than a standard road), and is on a 12 percent grade. Approximately 80 percent of the road has less than 1 foot of shoulder, including large sections with no shoulder at all before the steep drop-off (National Park Service, n.d.b). The road is used on a regular basis by walkers, runners, bicyclists, and people in motor vehicles. A 2003 engineering study by the Federal Highway Administration identified major safety concerns with the mixed usage of Kennesaw Mountain Drive (D. Brown, NPS, personal communication 2006). A 2004 analysis by federal transportation planners strongly recommended developing safe alternatives for pedestrians and bicyclists (National Park Service, n.d.b). Many mountain-road users recognize these dangers and have shared their concerns with the park staff (D. Brown, NPS, personal communication 2006).

4.0 MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

4.1 Running teams

NPS managers at KMNBP instituted a temporary permit program for organized running teams in October 2006. They subsequently monitored visitor acceptance of the permit program and assessed visitor perceptions of crowding at the site. The program requires all organized running groups that want to practice or train on trails in KMNBP to apply for a Special Use Permit. The KMNBP superintendent has elected to waive the usual permit fees for running groups provided that: 1) they comply with the conditions of the permit; and 2) that the park is able to sustain trail conditions and effect necessary trail repairs through adequate levels of volunteer support. All Special Use Permits specify the day(s) of week, time period, parking location, and staging area for warm-up. Due to the high volume of visitors at KMNBP, a maximum of two organized running groups

will be scheduled for each of four areas of the park on the same day during the same time period.

Permit holders are strongly encouraged to use buses or vans to travel to the site. Groups not using buses or vans are required to carpool four people to a vehicle. Due to overcrowding at the Visitor Center/Museum and its parking lot, organized running groups are only allowed to access the Center if they arrive by bus. As a requirement of the Special Use Permit Policy, groups are also required to attend a presentation given on-site by a park ranger prior to their first visit. The presentation focuses on established trail etiquette, which includes staying on the designated trails, running no more than two abreast on wide trail segments (single file on narrow trail segments), allowing faster runners to pass without having to go off-trail, and alerting other trail users when you approach them from behind (e.g. say "Passing on your left").

4.2 Road safety

As of this writing, the park management staff is seeking comments from stakeholders on alternatives for managing the mountain road; they will consider and evaluate the comments within the framework of the park's legislated purpose and NPS management policies. Any management solution selected must allow vehicular access to the top of Kennesaw Mountain for interpretive purposes and must provide for visitor safety. The following four Mountain Road Alternatives were presented by Superintendent Dan Brown at a public meeting held on March 27, 2007 (and are available to the public on the park's website, <http://www.nps.gov/kemo/parkmgmt/publicinvolvement.htm>):

1. Improve foot trail for accessibility – The existing foot trail to the top of Kennesaw Mountain was developed to provide pedestrian access to the mountaintop but is rocky and steep (with grades sometimes exceeding 22 percent). This alternative would reroute and redesign sections of the trail to make it accessible to all, including baby strollers and wheelchairs. The road would be left open to

private vehicles and bicycles, except on weekends and holidays when the shuttle would run (as it currently does).

2. Expand shuttle service – This alternative would incorporate an expanded shuttle service (9 a.m. to 5 p.m. 7 days a week), with a designated lane for pedestrians on the Mountain Road. The road would be closed to private vehicles but bicycles would continue to be allowed on the road in the shuttle lane.
3. Schedule user groups – Under this alternative, a schedule would be implemented separating users by times of day and day of the week (weekdays versus weekends). Pedestrians and private vehicles (including bicycles) would not share the road at any given time.
4. Combine elements of alternatives #1-3 – This alternative would allow for improvement of the foot trail, along with scheduling user groups by times of day. (National Park Service, n.d.b)

During the process of choosing an alternative management plan, the Park management staff is allowing all users on the road – including pedestrians, bicycles, and motor vehicles. For the time being, additional signs have been installed instructing pedestrians to use the proper side of the road, ranger patrol has been increased to enforce and educate visitors on the rules of the road, and citations are being issued to bicyclists and motorists exceeding the posted speed limit of 25 mph on the road. Pedestrians also are being encouraged to use the foot trail to reach the top of the mountain (D. Brown, NPS, personal communication 2006).

Kennesaw Mountain has also been identified as a “Globally Important Bird Area” (National Audubon Society, n.d.). Scientific research on the park’s bird population is ongoing and organized birding outings conducted by NPS volunteers are included in the park’s interpretive programs. Mountain Road is closed to all vehicles during bird research activities and birding events; this policy will remain in place in the future as Mountain Road management changes are implemented (National Park Service, n.d.c).

4.3 User fees

The U.S. Congress has passed legislation permitting NPS sites to collect daily and/or annual entrance fees, with 80 to 100 percent of those funds being used for improvements at the site. KMNBP will be introducing a user fee schedule in late 2007 and will be allowed to keep 100 percent of the funds raised; the park is considering implementing the National Park Service’s standard user fees:

- Daily pass at \$5 per person if entering by foot, bicycle, or bus
- Daily pass at \$10 per vehicle (excluding buses)
- Annual pass at \$20 per vehicle (or per family if not entering by vehicle)
- Annual pass that includes \$5 for the shuttle bus (if decision is made to close Mountain Drive to personal motor vehicles)

5.0 ASSESSMENT

Permanently closing Kennesaw Mountain Drive to private motor vehicles, keeping it open to bicycles and pedestrians, and offering an expanded daily shuttle service are very viable solutions to the current safety problems on the road. Many National Parks already have areas which are accessible only by a shuttle service (Miller and Wright, 1999; White, 2007). Charging user fees at KMNBP, including a fee for using the shuttle service, would alleviate much of the funding pressure that the park currently faces.

In addition to expanded shuttle service at KMNBP, other shuttle options should be investigated. Currently, the park uses a full-sized yellow diesel school bus as a shuttle but a cleaner, quieter, more fuel-efficient vehicle is needed. The steep incline on the mountain road may preclude use of all-electric vehicles as a shuttle but smaller buses or natural gas-powered vehicles may be more energy efficient options.

The on-site visitor intercept surveys currently being conducted are expected to help park management staff make decisions about changes in management strategies to address the issues of safety and overcrowding. Survey questions related to visitors’

perceptions of the park's meaning(s) may also inform management decisions and suggest future directions for visitor education. By examining different user groups' perceptions of conflict and crowding on the roads and trails, park staff will be able to identify trends related to the needs of individual groups and the sources of conflict between groups. Survey information may also help park managers anticipate levels of support or opposition to various management proposals.

Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park is certainly not the only U.S. historic site where urban sprawl is causing use conflicts. Valley Forge National Historic Park on the edge of Philadelphia is facing similar overcrowding and use conflict issues. Manassas National Battlefield Park in Virginia has also recently been designated a globally important bird area by the Audubon Society and the site is under the threat of sprawl from Washington, D.C. At these and other national parks, NPS management is constantly struggling with the inherent conflicts between preservation of national historic features and recreational site use in the face of overcrowding and urban sprawl. It is important to find innovative management solutions so that the country's historic places are not lost under the feet of running teams and dog-walkers.

6.0 CITATIONS

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