

UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOR IN FOREST CAMPGROUNDS

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ABSTRACT. A 3-year study indicates that nuisance behaviors, law violations, vandalism, and littering in forest campgrounds are more extensive than is generally believed. All campers share responsibility for the problems. Violations occur because of ignorance of, lack of understanding, or a willingness to disregard rules. Control measures are discussed, including an incentive system utilizing monetary and nonmonetary rewards, which was used successfully to control littering in a large forest campground.

VANDALISM, nuisance behavior, littering, and violation of rules and regulations are major recreation management problems. The direct costs of replacing vandalized facilities and restoring areas that have excessively deteriorated from careless and indifferent use are increasing at an alarming rate, while other inappropriate behavior decreases the quality of recreation experiences.

In our studies, we focused on the activities of recreationists and the attitudes of campground officials as related to depreciative behavior. To simplify the studies and to concentrate on the areas where depreciative behaviors are more prevalent, only intensively developed forest campgrounds that attracted large numbers of people were studied.

Data reported here were collected at Lake Kachess campground in the Wenatchee National Forest, although supplementary data were collected in similar campgrounds. The campground is characterized by heavy use, highly developed facilities, opportunity for water-oriented activities, and resident rangers.

THE EXTENT OF DEPRECIATIVE BEHAVIOR

During the summer of 1968, we used systematic participant-observation techniques to record depreciative behavior without disturbing campers or influencing their actions. Our observers mingled unobtrusively with other campers in selected areas and recorded specific information on all depreciative acts observed. The data collected included a description and classification of the act, personal characteristics of the offender, apparent cause or motivation for the act, reaction of those involved and of other campers, official action taken, and apparent results.

Types of Depreciative Behavior

Because we looked harder and more systematically, we saw more problem behavior than the average camper would see. Although we observed many depreciative acts, our attention was drawn to a continual series of major and minor violations carried out by people who were either unthinking

or considered themselves above a particular rule.

Nuisance acts were the most common; they accounted for half of all depreciative behavior reported (50 percent). Legal violations were the next most frequent, accounting for about one-third (37 percent), followed by acts of vandalism (13 percent). Of the nuisance acts observed, almost 80 percent involved pets running loose; the remainder included excessive noise, violations of privacy, sanitary offenses, and hazardous behavior such as throwing rocks in the swimming area.

Most legal violations involved campground rules, followed by traffic violations and littering. Only a handful of civil law violations were observed. Theft was infrequent in number of occurrences, but was expensive.

About 60 percent of the vandalism acts were directed at campground facilities, and only 30 percent involved the natural environment. Public, not private, property was usually the target of vandals in the cases we observed.

Who Was Involved?

One interesting and unexpected finding was that teenagers and children committed depreciative acts in roughly the same proportion as they appeared in the campground, although they differed somewhat in the type of acts committed. According to our observations, teenagers were most likely to violate campground rules, including traffic regulations, and were less likely than adults or children to commit nuisance acts.

Children, usually while playing in groups of two or three, were responsible for most acts of vandalism, which were directed primarily at campground facilities. But the most frequent types of inappropriate behavior for children were nuisance acts most often involving pets and violations of privacy.

Adults committed nuisance acts most frequently and were a close second to teenagers in violations. When adults were observed in vandalistic acts, it usually focused on the natural environment rather than on campground facilities. These adult acts involved individuals rather than groups.

Our observations indicated that campers of all ages share responsibility for depreciative behavior. Contrary to popular belief, as evidenced in some current literature, teenagers did not commit a disproportionate amount of depreciative acts. Instead, preteenage children in groups of two or three appeared to be a major cause of expensive damage to facilities. This suggests that stricter parental supervision of children might eliminate much of the expensive vandalism problem in campgrounds.

Why Did They Do It?

The observed depreciative acts were classified as to their apparent motivation: whether they appeared to be committed for entertainment, as a matter of convenience, as sheer disregard for rules and effects on others, due to ignorance of rules, or because rules interfered with some desired goal.

Most of the nuisance acts, especially those involving pets, stemmed from ignorance of rules; but other nuisance acts such as excessive noise, violations of privacy by children, and throwing rocks appeared to be the result of deliberate disregard of the effects on others.

Vandalism of facilities most often reflected disregard, but almost one-fourth of these acts seemed to be for entertainment. For example, most vandalism by children occurred during play. Adult vandalism involving the natural environment, such as chopping on trees in the campground, was most often done for entertainment and to a lesser extent was due to ignorance of rules or the consequences of the act.

Rule violations were usually the result of sheer disregard of known regulations as exemplified by littering and use of motorbikes on campground roads and trails. In a number of incidents, rules were violated because they interfered with other desired goals. For example, a full campground often resulted in illegal camping in the picnic area.

Indifference to consequences and observance of laws only if convenient may be a primary determinant of this sort of misbehavior, especially among adults.

Thus depreciative acts are apparently committed for a variety of reasons, and

several approaches seem logical for their control. For example, better presentation of rules, education programs to increase camper awareness of the consequences of certain acts, and stricter enforcement of regulations are necessary to reduce problems of the type discussed here.

The data suggest, contrary to some prevailing opinion, that depreciative behavior is not always the result of "slobism" and vandals running wild through our Parks.

Who Was Affected?

Campground facilities, the natural environment, and other people all suffered from depreciative behavior. In total, other people were impinged upon in about 60 percent of all the depreciative incidents observed. As a result, it was surprising to note their indifference. More than 80 percent of the depreciative acts observed were committed when other people were around. In more than 90 percent of these cases, no perceptible reaction by adjacent campers could be observed. People either ignored the acts, were indifferent to the act, or did not see anything happen.

In the small percentage of cases where onlookers reacted, the most common response was to comment to others about the incident. In a few cases, people were obviously upset but took no action. Even when acts of vandalism were committed in view of adjacent campers, remedial action was observed only one time. In this case, the camper went to get a ranger. Certainly such indifference creates a climate in which depreciative behavior can and will occur with little consequence to the offender.

What Action Was Taken?

Campground rangers were present at less than 10 percent of the depreciative incidents observed. Data were insufficient to support or reject the concept that the presence of rangers serves as a deterrent to depreciative behavior, although it is believed that this is true.

In almost all of the cases in which a ranger was present and did take some action, the offender was cooperative. Indifferent or uncooperative behavior was observed in only a few cases, and this was

when the offender was reprimanded for violation of campground rules. In these cases, violators complied with the ranger's instructions about two-thirds of the time.

Repetition of the act was the most common type of noncompliance after confrontation with the ranger. It appeared that repeated violations reflected camper judgments that the rules were either unnecessary or that they interfered with other recreational activities or goals.

CONTROLLING DEPRECIATIVE BEHAVIOR

It is one thing to point to problems and quite another to provide workable solutions. We do not know, at this point, how to solve all the problems we observed. However, in addition to the points suggested earlier, certain broad guidelines may be useful.

To begin, we should recognize that the campground community, like all communities, contains a broad range of deviant behavior. Problems arising from these behaviors will increase and become more complicated as the camping population grows. Old standards, rules, management policies, and approaches will become obsolete. Recognition of the problems and new efforts to cope with them are imperative.

Administrators must recognize that working with the people who use public parks is a challenge of the first magnitude. Camping in highly developed campgrounds has become a social experience; we must design campgrounds, develop policies and rules, and train rangers with this in mind as much as the necessity for preserving the environment.

The data suggest that rules intended to control certain types of unwanted behavior in campgrounds must be clearly analyzed as to their effects on recreational activities before they are implemented. If the public cannot see their worth and the underlying rationale, then these rules will most likely be violated. It is therefore important that reasons underlying rules and regulations are clearly communicated. Adoption of common campground rules and standards of enforcement by the different agencies would also help to remove some of the

confusion that exists regarding appropriate behavior.

If strengthening the police powers of park authorities is not the complete solution, it is certainly an important ingredient. Most campground rangers seem to resist the role of policeman and find it difficult to confront the public in an authoritarian manner. Yet the enforcement aspect of their job will become increasingly important. In future recruitment and training, this should be recognized.

In addition, the legal authority of most agencies is extremely limited; and unfortunately this weakness is recognized by the worst offenders. Cooperating law-enforcement agencies are often overworked and unable to respond, particularly during periods of peak use. Legal changes, whereby campground rangers could be made more effective, should be explored.

Police tactics, of course, cannot solve all of the problem without a greater degree of public awareness and cooperation. The loss of personal freedom to the average camper would be too high if we took all measures necessary to completely eliminate deprecative behaviors. But they can be reduced if security measures are backed by public recognition of the problem.

Above all, the individual camper must be made to shoulder much of the burden. Noninvolvement can no longer be tolerated. Campers must begin treating deviance in parks as they would treat it in their own front yards. They must take on the burden of direct intervention by vocally stating their disapproval of wrongdoings and, if necessary, summoning campground personnel. Campground rangers must begin to actively encourage campers to help.

EXPERIMENTAL CONTROL OF LITTERING

One means of involving campers directly in the control of a problem behavior—littering—was tested during the summer of 1970. In this study, an incentive system was used to encourage the picking up of litter, first in a movie theater and subsequently in a large forest campground.

Theater Phase

Over a 14-week period, we measured the littering behavior of children at kiddie matinees in two theaters to determine the effects of traditional antilitter measures including direct appeals, antilitter films, litter bags, additional trash cans, and the effects of new approaches such as tangible rewards contingent on antilitter behavior. Theaters were selected for this preliminary phase of the study only for their convenience as a place where alternative procedures could be tested.

We found, in general, that under normal conditions, only 16 to 19 percent of litter in the theater was properly disposed of in trash cans. Doubling the number of trash cans in the theater and placing them in more conspicuous places had little or no effect on litter disposal.

Showing a Walt Disney antilitter cartoon before the scheduled movie slightly increased disposal of litter, but to a total of only 21 percent, which actually represented no effect because it so closely approximated normal antilitter behavior.

The first real effects were noted when litter bags were handed out "for your use while in the theater," which raised the litter disposal rate to 31 percent. When litterbags were combined with firm instructions to the audience to "please put all of your refuse in the litterbags and deposit them in trash cans before leaving the theater," the litter deposited in trash cans rose to 57 percent.

However, outstanding results occurred when tangible incentives were offered for proper litter disposal. When children were offered 10 cents for every full litter bag deposited in the lobby, 94 percent of the litter in the theater was properly discarded. Likewise, when children in another theater were offered a free ticket to a special movie for each full litter bag, 95 percent of the litter was deposited in the trash cans.

These results indicate the ineffectiveness of traditional antilitter procedures (with the possible exception of litterbags and explicit, personally delivered instructions) and the dramatic effects of even a small incentive on antilitter behavior.

Campground Phase

The objective of the foregoing experiment was not to develop methods to clean up theaters but rather to determine if established principles of behavior could be applied to encourage antilitter behavior and to compare such efforts with conventional litter-control methods. As a result of the findings from the theater experiments, we conducted a similar experiment in a forest campground to evaluate the applicability of an incentive system for litter control in a campground environment.

Two types of litter were measured in the campground: that thrown down by campers and that planted by the research staff. Planted litter was necessary to insure a relatively constant level of litter and to determine which types of litter were most likely to be picked up—under both normal conditions when no incentives were offered and under reinforced conditions when the incentive system was in effect. The litter planted included beverage cans, deposit and nondeposit bottles, and crushed brown paper bags.

The campground phase of the study lasted 2 weeks. During the first weekend, under normal conditions, litter levels rose steadily from Friday through Sunday and declined slightly on Monday. During this time, all but 9 percent of the deposit bottles were picked up, while 30 percent of the nondeposit bottles, 54 percent of the cans, and 59 percent of the paper bags remained on the ground.

During the second week, we contacted seven families and offered their children small incentives for picking up litter—Junior Forest Ranger Badges, Smokey Bear Shoulder Patches, chewing gum. During this weekend, the litter count dropped, with a dramatic effect. Whereas during the first week only deposit bottles consistently disappeared, all types of litter were picked up while the incentive program was in effect. In fact, except for 5 percent of the cans, 3 percent of the paper bags, 5 percent of the nondeposit bottles, and 3 percent of the deposit bottles, everything else was collected by the children.

These results clearly indicate that for litter with a built-in value such as return-

able bottles, nothing additional is needed to encourage picking up. For other types of litter, providing an incentive for collection and proper disposal is necessary. Under the incentive conditions, all types of litter had a value and as a result were likely to be disposed of properly.

The feasibility of methods such as the one presented here should be noted. The incentives handed out in the campground were worth approximately \$3.00, and the time to implement the incentive system was approximately 2 man-hours. If the litter had been collected by campground personnel, an equivalent job would have taken 16 to 20 hours and would have cost \$50 to \$60.

Both traditional and a newly proposed incentive method for combating litter were tested in these experiments. At least in the two theaters and the campground, traditional methods were grossly ineffective compared with incentive systems. Judging from the condition of the Nation's highways, parks, cities, and forests, traditional methods have not been greatly successful in these areas either. Appropriate disposal facilities, properly designed educational campaigns, and use of litterbags are certainly important in solving part of the litter problem; but new approaches are obviously necessary if we are to approximate a reasonably complete solution.

The incentive method successfully used in these studies offers a promising approach. That such programs may result in a dramatic reduction in litter is justification enough, but the biggest payoff may be the values and behavior learned by children who have been tangibly rewarded for their antilitter efforts. Although some schools of thought might debate on philosophical grounds the value of rewards in the learning process, such an approach is well founded in theory and is substantiated by research.

CONCLUSION

Solutions to behavior problems are not easy to come by in any environment, least of all in public recreation areas where the appropriateness and consequences of many

behaviors are ill-defined. It is likely that recreation-area managers will be faced with an increasing number and variety of problems of a depreciative nature as user populations grow and diversify.

We are just beginning to learn how to cope with depreciative behavior, but one thing seems clear—conventional wisdom about who causes problems or why people behave as they do cannot be accepted as fact. Such “folklore” may be unfounded and lead to further problems. For example, *all* vandalism in parks is *not* caused by “drunken teenage punks” who blow up outhouses and rip down signs to impress

their friends. However, accounts of this sort dominate some of the current literature.

Our research indicates that depreciative behavior, at least in well-developed forest campgrounds, is widespread and that *all* campers share responsibility for the problem.

Finally, the approach taken in the experimental control of littering holds promise for managers of recreation areas. By structuring the environmental factors that control behavior, many imaginative programs are possible. We need not, and must not, limit ourselves to the traditional methods for controlling inappropriate behavior.

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