

Recreation Use on Federal Lands in Southern Nevada

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Executive Summary

Providing for appropriate, diverse, and high quality recreation use of southern Nevada's lands and ensuring responsible visitor use is an ongoing challenge for Federal agencies that manage much of this land (fig. 1.1). This chapter examines recreation on these Federal lands and addresses Sub-goal 2.4 in the SNAP Science Research Strategy (table 1.1). The demands for various types of recreational opportunities are discussed and the ways in which Federal agencies can provide quality recreational experiences without compromising resources are explored. Also discussed are current visitor use patterns and services provided by the designated recreation areas in southern Nevada.

Two significant factors influence recreationists and the natural resource base that supports outdoor recreation in Nevada. One is the fact that the State of Nevada ranks first in Federal land management (over 87 percent of Nevada's land is administered by the Federal government); and the second is the highly urbanized population of the state (94 percent resided in urban areas in 2000). The rapidly growing population of southern Nevada results in an increase in recreational demands on the area's public lands, and an associated shift in demographics brings changes in recreation tastes and preferences.

Outdoor Recreation Issues

The Nevada Division of State Parks (NDSP) developed the 2003 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), which provides review and study of recreation use within the entire state. The intention of the plan is to increase and improve the quality of outdoor recreation opportunities to meet the needs of the citizens of Nevada as well as the state's many visitors. The dominant concern of respondents to the study was to keep Federal lands open for a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities while protecting the state's natural resources.

Snap Interagency Recreation and Wilderness Planning

There are four Federal land management agencies in southern Nevada with eight congressionally designated resource areas. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees Red Rock Canyon and Sloan Canyon National Conservation Areas (NCAs). The National Park Service (NPS) administers Lake Mead National Recreation Area (NRA). The United States Forest Service (USFS) manages Spring Mountains National Recreation Area (NRA). The United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) has the Desert National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which is comprised of four distinct National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs): Ash Meadows NWR, Desert NWR, Moapa Valley NWR, and Pahrangat NWR.

In 2002, the Federal managers of SNAP directed the four agencies (BLM, NPS, USFW, and USFS) to conduct interagency recreation management and to form the Interagency Recreation Team. The team's vision is to provide interagency collaboration in the planning and management of recreational opportunities, facilities, and services while honoring the natural setting and complementing the quality of life in Southern Nevada. The SNAP Recreation Team initiated recreation visitor sampling on all SNAP lands using a single monitoring program based on the USDA FS National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) program. Collectively, these NVUM reports provide comprehensive statistics on recreation use, visit characteristics, visitor spending, and the satisfaction of recreationists with recreation opportunities and resource conditions.

There were differences in the popularity of recreation choices across agencies, as management objectives, topography, and recreation resources differ from agency to agency. For example, on BLM lands there was a greater percentage that listed driving for pleasure and rock climbing as primary activities; water-based recreation was most prevalent on NPS lands; viewing wildlife was listed as the primary activity on USFWS lands; while camping was listed as the primary activity on USFS land. The overall rating of the four SNAP agencies indicated that the vast majority of visitors surveyed were at least "somewhat satisfied" with their visit.

Regional Trail Planning and Outreach

Partnerships between agencies (Federal, state, regional, and local), non-profits, businesses, individual citizens, and community partners played a critical role in the establishment and management of trails in southern Nevada. The proposed 113-mile Vegas Valley Rim Trail would serve to bind many land management areas, recreational destinations, municipalities, and agencies together.

The cities of Las Vegas and Henderson have completed open space plans designed to provide a ring of open space and wildlands that will encircle the Greater Las Vegas area and protect scenic, ecosystem, and cultural resources. Most of the corridor rests on BLM-managed lands, suggesting the need for continual coordination between the local community and Federal agency.

Knowledge Gaps and Management Implications

Southern Nevada's rapidly increasing population has resulted in an increase in recreation demands on public lands, while an associated shift in demographics has altered recreation tastes and preferences. There are changes in visitor types to a more urban population who expect more expensive recreation enhancements.

These changes in the population impact the profile of recreation in the area and highlight the need for understanding the needs of a multi-cultural urban population. Additional information and management strategies are needed to meet future demands and trends. Funding of recreation areas and facilities with support staffing must be sufficient to keep pace with these increasing demands.

Southern Nevada's growing population influences recreation activity on Federal lands and impacts the area's natural resources. While these areas are beneficial to human population as healthy retreats from urban life, they are essential as habitat for many native species of flora and fauna. Therefore, it is imperative to consider the effects of increasing recreation demands on natural resources. Cooperation and collaboration between the four Federal land management agencies and with southern Nevada's adjacent communities is necessary to achieve the goals of promoting natural and cultural resource stewardship while providing appropriate and sustainable recreation opportunities. For a complete discussion of topics in this executive summary, see *Chapter 10, Recreation*

Use on Federal Lands in Southern Nevada in “The Southern Nevada Agency Partnership Science and Research Synthesis—Science to Support Land Management in Southern Nevada” (RMRS-GTR-303).

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