

News from the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute Missoula, Montana, U.S.A.

BY VITA WRIGHT

"Wilderness to the people of America is a spiritual necessity, an antidote to the high pressure of modern life, a means of regaining serenity and equilibrium."

—Sigurd Olson

Recreation Fee Research Website

Due to increasing interest in public land recreation and efforts to control federal government spending, recreation services on public lands may not be adequate to meet future demands. Rather than continue to rely entirely on appropriated funding, the U.S. Congress authorized a Recreation Fee Demonstration Program in 1996 to examine the feasibility of generating funds from users for the operation, maintenance, and improvement of public recreation areas, including wilderness areas. Under this program, federal land managers around the country have initiated fee projects such as charges for permit reservations, use of campsites and trails, and vehicle parking.

The effectiveness of the program, including public response to user fees is currently under analysis. After three years of analysis, the Demonstration Program will conclude and Congress will determine whether to establish long-term user-fee legislation.

Researchers studying the effects of the Fee Demonstration Program presented preliminary results at a session called the "Societal Response to Recreation Fees on Public Lands," at the 7th International Symposium on Society and Resource Management, May 1998. Brief manuscripts from this session have been published on an Internet site (http://www.fs.fed.us/research/rvur/wilderness/recreation_fees.html) form will remain active until July 1999.

The following Leopold Institute manuscripts are on this website: (1) "Providing science input to management issues: defining and answering researchable questions—introduction to a case study of the Desolation Wilderness Fee Pilot Program" by Alan Watson, Daniel Williams, Christine Vogt et al.; (2) "Wilderness visitor perceptions and their attitudes toward the agency in predicting recreation fee level support" by Alan Watson and Christine Vogt; (3) "Support for recreation fees as a function of purpose of appeal" by Alan Watson, Annette Puttkammer, and Neal Christensen; (4) "The impact of place meaning and attachment on attitudes towards fees for wilderness use" by Daniel Williams and Alan Watson; (5) "Acceptability of fees for various recreation activities as a function of activity orientation and past fee behavior" by Annette Puttkammer and Alan Watson; (6) "Appropriateness to pay: is wilderness a unique recreation experience?" by Neal Christensen, Bill Borrie, and Daniel Williams; and (7) "Maximum and appropriate price for day use in the Desolation Wilderness" by Neal Christensen and Jerrell Ross Richer.

High-use wilderness destinations recreation impacts at high-use destinations are often severe and widespread, and visitors to these places frequently encounter other visitors. Thus, managers often struggle with decisions about when and how to regulate use at high-use destinations. Authors of a recent publication, *High-Use Destinations in Wilderness: Social and Biophysical Impacts, Visitor Responses, and Management Options* (Cole et al. 1997), analyzed six high-use destinations in three of Oregon and Washington's National Forest Wilderness areas as case studies. Their objectives were to describe

visitors to high-use areas, document current physical and social conditions, and discuss the likely costs and benefits of alternative management approaches. Authors quantified current recreation impacts on maintained trails, social trails, campsites, and lakeshores. They also conducted exit interviews with visitors to describe visitors and to quantify visitor encounter rates, responses to encounters, and management preferences.

Although resource impacts were substantial, they were highly localized and less pronounced than impacts reported for many wildernesses with lower use levels. Encounter rates during this study were high, exceeding those preferred by most visitors. However, most visitors reported the number of people encountered did not detract from their enjoyment as much as physical impacts, such as litter, vegetation loss, horse manure, and human waste. While 10 to 23% of those interviewed supported reducing current use levels, most supported site management approaches such as trail/site closures, revegetation programs, and visitor education to control impacts.

Although visitors were diverse, the typical visitor interviewed was an experienced wilderness user who received greater satisfaction from visiting wilderness than other recreation areas, expressed commitment to wilderness, and was exploring this area because she or he lived in a local urban area. Authors of this publication explored the costs and benefits of using visitor education, use reduction, and intensive site management programs to reduce recreation use impacts. They emphasized the need for managers considering use-reduction programs to address the impacts of displacing visitors to other wilderness and nonwilderness lands. This publication, Research Paper INT-RP-496, can be obtained from the Leopold Institute, P.O. Box 8089, Missoula, Montana 59807, USA. Telephone: (406) 542-4190. Fax: (406) 542-4196. E-mail: leopold_institute/rmrs_missoula@fs.fed.us.

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