

VISITORS

Wilderness Use in the Next 100 Years

BY WILLIAM E. HAMMITT and RUDY M. SCHUSTER

The density and diversity of wilderness use will increase during the next 100 years. However, these increases will not be uniform throughout areas and activities. The three primary influences will be (1) a shift in the type of wilderness user (2) diverse and efficient recreation uses, and (3) niche/experiential use.

Wilderness Users Will Change

Demographic shifts forecast that the U.S. population will double within the next 100 years and that immigration will account for a large portion of it. Today,

72% of the population is white; less than 50% will be white in 100 years. Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and others who were previously unaware of wilderness, as well as international recreationists, will account for a larger portion of wilderness users. These new users will bring epistemologies that are incongruent with the "American Wilderness Ethic" that was originally used to found the Wilderness Preservation System. Increased cultural pluralism will result in an expanded Wilderness Ethic. While "purists" will maintain the Wilderness Ethic, new users will adapt the ethic to be congruent with their epistemologies. New user groups with varying demands will attempt to (1) pressure administrators to ease wilderness regulations (2) de-list some existing wilderness areas, and (3) enact less rigorous regulations in future areas added to the system.

The structure of the average work week is changing in the United States. "Rising competitiveness . . . with low job security provides a powerful incentive for workers to acquiesce to employers' demands for long hours . . . this results in less time for other pursuits" (Bell, 1998, pp. 57-58). As a result of increased popularity of wilderness activities and a decrease in time to pursue leisure activities, day use will account for the largest increase in wilderness use by volume. A certain portion of the new users engaging in day use of wilderness will be short-term participants and quickly replaced by other new users. Other new users will continue to participate and move toward more special-

ized activities. As a result of this process, day use will continue to increase, and more involved wilderness activities, such as overnight use and extended trips, will have a delayed increase.

Wilderness Use/Intensive Management

The perceptions and desires of wilderness users will change considerably over the next 100 years. Users will demand more efficient use of their limited time when visiting wilderness and more intensive management of resources to facilitate that use, resulting in easier accessibility and less effort and self-reliance.

Users will maximize leisure time through extensive trip-planning methods, including computer/Internet sources (e.g., topographic maps on CD-ROM, National Park websites, BWCA trip planning sites), guidebooks, videos, and a fast-expanding telecommunications network of wilderness information. Wilderness trip planning, and actual trips, may take on the efficiency of "pseudo AAA—planned for you" visits in the future. The decrease in leisure time, increase in wilderness information, and accessibility will interact resulting in users opting for more structured wilderness adventures.

Wilderness users will increasingly rely on outfitters, guides, and outdoor education services to facilitate ecotourism and wilderness adventures. Facilitated wilderness adventures that are "sold" using photographs, detailed



Will the future wilderness visitor venture only as far as Video Adventure? Photo by Alan Ewert.



Llamas and other pack stock may serve more and more visitors in the wilderness of the 21st century. Photo by Alan Ewert.

accounts of what will be encountered, and other marketing techniques will be a significant factor altering the character of the traditional wilderness experience. Senior citizens, day users, families, and organized groups will find these aided, userfriendly wilderness trips desirable. These "wilderness clients" will find it difficult to differentiate between experiences provided by outfitters and guides and more traditional, self-reliant wilderness experiences. Users engaging in this type of wilderness recreation will have high and specific expectations of what they will receive for their money. In addition, the effort required to gain the experience necessary to participate in specialized wilderness activities will decrease as access to facilitated experiences increases. Traditional socialization methods for novices to acquire knowledge and skill will continue, but increased outfitter and guide socialization and facilitated experiences will produce a quantitatively and qualitatively different wilderness user.

Niche/Experiential Use

More wilderness users desire to enhance the "wild" in wilderness by en-

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gaging in high-adventure, high-risk activities. These adrenaline related activities require certain niche resources in wilderness. They are valued by their users, may be genetically motivated, and will only increase in the future. High-adventure, high-risk experiences in wilderness may be as dominant in the next 100 years as backpacking solitude is today.

In conclusion, the density and diversity of wilderness use will change during the next 100 years. The challenge for wilderness managers and policymakers will be to meet the needs of these new users, while ensuring the health and protection of wildlands. **IJW**

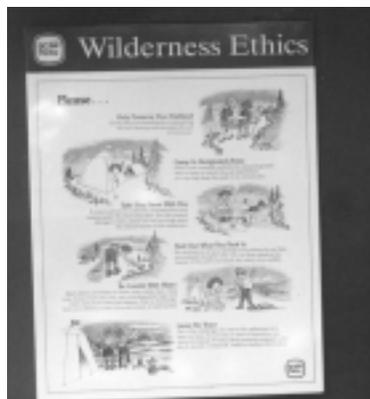
WILLIAM E. HAMMITT and RUDY M. SCHUSTER work in the Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management and Forest Resources Department at Clemson University. E-mail: hammitw@clemson.edu.



Some of the finest solitude in the NWPS is now found in the desert wilderness in the Southwest. Photo by Marilyn Riley.



Nothing beats the beauty and solitude of the wilderness. Photo by Alan Ewert.



Signs and posted regulations are increasingly common in wilderness areas. Photo by Alan Ewert.