Strategy I. Reduce Use of the Entire Wilderness

TACTIC 1: LIMIT NUMBER OF VISITORS IN THE ENTIRE WILDERNESS

PURPOSE
To limit total use directly so that the social and/or ecological impacts of use are reduced.

DESCRIPTION
Require a permit to visit the wilderness and limit the number of permits. Permits are usually issued for groups rather than individuals, and quotas are usually set to limit the number of entrants per day. A more complicated system seeks to prevent the number of visitor groups from exceeding an established number at any time. To do this, with the variation in lengths of stay that always exist, requires a system for calculating numbers of visitors present per day. In effect, the number of expected departures on any day determines how many visitors can enter that day. Various options for allocating and issuing a limited number of permits, such as advanced reservations, first-come, first-served, lotteries, etc., exist (Stankey and Baden 1977).

CURRENT USAGE
Rare. Most areas that limit number of visitors also control internal use distribution (tactic 9).

COSTS TO VISITORS
Low to high. Costs depend on the proportion of visitors who cannot obtain permits and the difficulties associated with applying for a permit. Costs are high for visitors who are denied access to the wilderness on the desired date, especially repeatedly, but low for some visitors with flexible schedules. Visitors tend to support actions limiting use where necessary (Fazio and Gilbert 1974; Stankey 1979). Moreover, if advance reservations can be made, costs are incurred offsite and can be limited to the planning stages of trips. Thus, areawide use limitation does not restrict visitor freedom and spontaneity as much as use limitation techniques that control internal use distribution. Costs can also be high, however, for visitors with unpredictable leisure schedules if the application process demands advance planning. If use is reduced substantially, visitors who obtain permits may find conditions more enjoyable.

COSTS TO MANAGEMENT
Moderate to high. Costs are associated with development, maintenance, and enforcement of the permit system. Extended office hours and special locations for issuing permits are often necessary to minimize costs to visitors.

EFFECTIVENESS
This is likely to be an effective means of maintaining the status quo. But current problem areas are unlikely to improve substantially because internal use distributions are unaffected. Some redistribution from peak times to times of lower use is likely. This technique is most useful in small areas where use must be limited, but where the existing distribution of use and impact is acceptable. Tactic 9 (limit number of visitors in problem areas) is more generally useful.

COMMENTS
Visitor dissatisfaction can be minimized by clearly communicating the need for use limits. Varying needs of visitors are served best by issuing permits such that (1) access can be obtained during the planning stages of trips (by allowing for advance reservations or a lottery) and, also, (2) allowing some opportunities for spontaneous trips (by leaving some permits available first-come, first-served on or immediately preceding the start of the trip). Usually a specified percentage of permits is available for advance reservations and the remainder for drop-ins. Visitors generally find lotteries less acceptable than other rationing techniques, unless they have had experience with lotteries (as on some whitewater rivers). All tactics involving permits or fees have the side benefit of causing direct contact between managers and visitors, which provides a communication opportunity.

SOURCES