Strategy I. Reduce Use of the Entire Wilderness

TACTIC 2: LIMIT LENGTH OF STAY IN THE ENTIRE WILDERNESS

PURPOSE
Provided that this technique does not result in more frequent visits, total use (visitor-days, for example) will be reduced as length of stay is reduced.

DESCRIPTION
Such a limit could be a regulation with a specific time limit or, through information, visitors could be asked to keep lengths of stay short. A permit system would be necessary to provide a record of entry date and a means for enforcing a regulation limiting length of stay.

CURRENT USAGE
Common. For example, Glacier National Park limits stays to 6 nights. Usually limits are not intended to reduce use, however. They are most common where demand greatly exceeds established use limits (such as on whitewater rivers). In such places length-of-stay limits augment a direct limit on numbers of users (tactic 1), allowing more visitors access to a limited number of permits.

COSTS TO VISITORS
Low to moderate. Costliness depends on allowed length of stay. Costs are low under the most common current limit of 14 days. Shorter limits would be more costly. Costs are high for visitors who desire the experience of an extended wilderness trip but cannot take a long trip. Costs are incurred onsite, affecting the trip itself, although negative effects can be reduced by making visitors aware of regulations during the planning stages of their trip.

COSTS TO MANAGEMENT
Low to high. Costs will be high unless a permit system is already in effect; if so, additional costs will be low. If limits are regulated, costs are incurred due to the need to develop and maintain a mandatory permit system and to enforce limits. Otherwise the primary cost is information dispersal.

EFFECTIVENESS
Unlikely to reduce total use appreciably. Most wilderness visits are short. Almost half of visits are for less than a day, and the average stay for overnight users is only 3 days (Washburne and Cole 1983). Therefore, length-of-stay limits usually would reduce use very little. Limits would generally have to be a week or less, completely precluding even moderate length trips, before a length-of-stay limit would reduce total use substantially. Stay limits would tend to shift use distribution toward the periphery of areas, with resulting shifts in impacts.

COMMENTS
In our opinion, such limits are justified only where demand greatly exceeds use limits, total use is directly limited by permit, and a substantial proportion of parties desire a trip that exceeds proposed stay limits. Under these circumstances, limits would allow access to more visitors, although changing the type of experience for those who wanted to stay longer. Length-of-stay limits in selected popular parts of the wilderness-without limits elsewhere-would usually be equally effective and still provide opportunities for extended wilderness trips. Even though few visitors take trips with very long stays, such trips seem important in relation to wilderness values. Eliminating the chance for long trips seems unfortunate. Encouraging day-use in place of camping seems inconsistent with wilderness goals.

SOURCES
None