Strategy II. Reduce Use of Problem Areas

TACTIC 9: LIMIT NUMBER OF VISITORS IN PROBLEM AREAS

PURPOSE
Reduce the number of visitors to problem areas directly through a permit system.

DESCRIPTION
A limited number of permits are issued for problem areas. Permits can be issued for specific trailheads, travel zones, individual campsites, or campgrounds.

CURRENT USAGE
Infrequent, but implementation of rationing systems that control internal use distribution is becoming increasingly common. It is currently much more common in the National Park Service than elsewhere. But managers of most wildernesses perceive a need for rationing in the future. Rationing by trailhead, travel zone, or camping area is about equally common at present.

COSTS TO VISITORS
Low to high. Costs depend on how much demand exceeds the supply of permits (this affects the probabilities of visitors being denied access), how visitors obtain permits, and whether permits are issued for trailheads, travel zones, or campsites. Clearly, costs increase as the likelihood of obtaining a permit decreases. Except for a few places during peak use periods, permits are now difficult to obtain only on a handful of wilderness whitewater rivers. Costs to visitors in reduced freedom and spontaneity increase from systems where permits are issued for trailheads to those where permits are issued for travel zones to those where permits are issued for specific campsites. Limiting use by travel zones or campsites restricts visitors’ freedom of movement within the area. Trailhead quotas do not limit movement within the area, although some visitors may not be able to enter at their first-choice location. Permits can be made available first-come, first-served, by reservation, or through a lottery. Each favors a select clientele. Local visitors are favored by the first-come, first-served approach; visitors who are able to plan far ahead are favored by the reservation and lottery approaches. Most areas use a combination of approaches to minimize costs for individual clienteles. Lotteries are currently confined to whitewater rivers where demand greatly exceeds the supply of permits.

COSTS TO MANAGEMENT
High. Costs are incurred in developing and maintaining a system for allocating and distributing permits and enforcing permit compliance. Lotteries and reservations are more costly than a first-come, first-served system. Managerial costs also decrease as the level of control of internal use distribution decreases, because compliance problems are reduced. Thus, trailhead quota systems are less costly than systems based on travel zones or campsites.

EFFECTIVENESS
This technique is an effective means of reducing use in problem areas. It can be useful in dealing with crowding problems. When combined with techniques that influence the location of use (strategy III) and visitor behavior (strategy V), it can also help mitigate campsite deterioration, wildlife disturbance, and packstock impact problems.

COMMENTS
As before, the consequences of increased use and impact elsewhere must be considered. It is usually undesirable to spread use uniformly, as this does not provide diversity of conditions and experiences. Trailhead quotas generally provide the optimum balance between effective control of internal use distribution and allowing visitors free and spontaneous movement. Several simulation models exist that can help match trailhead quotas to desired use (Peterson 1977) and encounter levels (Shechter and Lucas 1978; Potter and Manning 1984; Rowell 1986). Providing opportunities for both advanced planning and last-minute trips, by issuing some permits by reservation and others first-come, first-served, also seems desirable. Visitors tend to support use limitations where they are perceived as necessary to prevent overuse. But visitors who are not familiar with lotteries tend to dislike them. Most visitors strongly dislike being required to stick to a fixed itinerary—a common requisite when permits are issued for travel zones and particularly for specific camping areas.

SOURCES