Strategy III. Modify the Location of Use Within Problem Areas

TACTIC 20: DISCOURAGE OR PROHIBIT OFF-TRAIL TRAVEL

PURPOSE
By encouraging or requiring visitors to stay on trails, use and impact are concentrated along the existing trail system. Areas away from trails remain undisturbed, and unofficial trail systems should not develop.

DESCRIPTION
Restrictions could be in the form of either regulations or suggestions to avoid off-trail travel. They could be applied only to types of use with a high potential for causing impact (such as large parties or parties with stock) or to all visitors. They could also be applied only in certain areas (such as fragile environments or areas of critical wildlife habitat).

CURRENT USAGE
Unknown. Prohibiting or discouraging people from shortcutting switchbacks is a common action. Suggesting that visitors walk in the trail tread rather than on the side of the trail also is a common element of low-impact educational programs. Some areas prohibit off-trail stock use, and a few areas have smaller party size limits for off-trail travelers.

COSTS TO VISITORS
Most visitors use trails and prefer to stick to them (Lucas 1980); for these, costs are negligible. For visitors who do want to travel off-trail, costs are high. Costs can be reduced by providing alternative areas for off-trail use and by informing visitors of restrictions and why they have been imposed.

COSTS TO MANAGEMENT
Low to moderate. Costs involve information dissemination and enforcement if off-trail travel is prohibited. Enforcement of a regulation would be difficult because off-trail visitors would be particularly difficult to locate.

EFFECTIVENESS
As a general policy, it is doubtful that this technique would have much effect. It can be a useful means of avoiding problems caused by particularly destructive types of visitors in currently undisturbed areas. Thus, it may be most useful to discourage or prohibit off-trail travel by certain types of users in certain places.

COMMENTS
Given the difficulty of enforcement, discouragement of off-trail travel is probably preferable to regulation.

SOURCES
None.