TACTIC 22: ENCOURAGE USE OUTSIDE OF PEAK USE PERIODS

PURPOSE
In many areas, visitor use is highly concentrated in time—during certain seasons, on weekends, and on holidays. This can create serious crowding problems at these times, even though such problems are minimal at other times. The severity of crowding problems could be reduced if some use could be shifted to less popular times of the week or year.

DESCRIPTION
Under strategies I and II, we described techniques for reducing use either in the entire wilderness or in selected problem areas. This technique involves shifting the timing of use, without either spatial shifts or a reduction in total use. The advantages of visiting the area outside of peak use periods can be advertised, usually with data on the current distribution of use at different times and availability of campsites. This could be geared to calendar dates or seasons and/or weekdays vs. weekends. Efforts to encourage off-season use might point out other possible advantages besides lower use, such as fewer biting insects, fall color, and so on. Brochures, information on maps, and news releases are some specific tools that could be used.

CURRENT USAGE
Unknown. Quite a few National Parks and concessionaires within parks have been advertising the advantages of off-season visits. For this and other reasons, the concentration of use in summer has declined in a number of wildernesses. Brochures and other information sources commonly suggest taking midweek trips, when use levels are lower than on weekends.

COSTS TO VISITORS
Low. Visitors can react as they will to information provided. Any effect on their decisions occurs offsite, during the planning stages of trips.

COSTS TO MANAGEMENT
Low. Information must be prepared in a fashion that convinces some visitors to shift the timing of their trips.

EFFECTIVENESS
In many areas, the timing of use is concentrated by a short, “comfortable” use season, opening dates of fishing and hunting seasons, and such factors as the area’s proximity to sources of visitors. Areas that are far from populated areas are likely to experience less pronounced peaks of use on weekends and holidays. This technique may not be effective in remote areas with a short, comfortable use season. Where there seems to be a chance to shift the timing of use, this technique can be a low-cost partial solution to crowding problems.

COMMENTS
Shifting some use from weekends to midweek is unlikely to have undesirable side effects. In some situations, however, resources are particularly fragile during off-seasons (for example, wildlife may be more prone to disturbance or soils may be water saturated). This possibility must be considered when attempting to shift use to low-use seasons. Another factor to consider is the acceptability of increased crowding during off-seasons. Visitors seeking high levels of solitude may already be using off-season periods, and they may be negatively affected by increased use during these periods.

SOURCES