Strategy V. Modify Type of Use and Visitor Behavior

TACTIC 30: DISCOURAGE OR PROHIBIT PETS

PURPOSE
Pets can be considered unnecessary to the wilderness experience, and they can have a significant impact on wildlife and other visitors. Dogs can carry Giardia, but so do many other animals and people. Prohibiting or discouraging pets will reduce these impacts. On the other hand, it will also eliminate opportunities for a traditional use of wilderness that some visitors value highly.

DESCRIPTION
Either use a variety of communication techniques to persuade most visitors to not bring pets, particularly dogs, which are the primary concern, or establish and enforce a regulation prohibiting them.

CURRENT USAGE
Common. Pets are prohibited in National Park wilderness. They are rarely prohibited in wildernesses managed by other agencies, although managers of more and more areas discourage visitors from bringing pets, dogs in particular.

COSTS TO VISITORS
Low to high. Costs depend on the number of visitors affected. Although few data are available, parties with pets are probably more common in most wilderness areas than parties with stock; they are still a minority, however. Costs to visitors who travel with pets would be high. Some of them visit National Forest wildernesses because they cannot travel with their dogs in National Parks. Costs could be particularly high for visitors who travel alone and enjoy the companionship of a pet; this is particularly significant for women traveling alone who bring a dog, in part, for protection. Such costs could be reduced by allowing pets in certain parts of the area or by providing opportunities for recreation with pets of a similar type and quality outside the wilderness. Asking visitors not to bring pets retains freedom of choice, but it may make certain visitors feel guilty about bringing pets and place most of the cost on conscientious visitors.

COSTS TO MANAGEMENT
Low to moderate. Political costs would generally be less than with attempts to prohibit stock use, despite the probability that a larger clientele would be affected. Principal costs involve dissemination of information and enforcement if a regulation is established.

EFFECTIVENESS
While a prohibition on pets is likely to largely eliminate problems with pets, there is little evidence that pets cause substantial problems. Observations suggest that asking people not to bring pets is less effective than a prohibition.

COMMENTS
Generally, pets could be allowed but prohibited in places where or at times when wildlife disturbance is likely or in places where visitors who dislike dogs or other pets could go and not meet parties with them. This option is probably more easily defended than a complete ban.

SOURCES
None.