

Trail Encounters and Occupied Campsite Monitoring

Trail encounter and campsite occupancy monitoring has been used in a number of wilderness areas to help measure use and use patterns and help determine trends. While these indicators are not the only useful indicators, and perhaps not the primary indicators in all cases, this technique has produced meaningful results and it is easy to accomplish using field crews or volunteers.

Trail Encounters

What is measured:

- The number of people and/or groups that pass the monitor during a period of time.

Why is this type of monitoring needed:

- Crowding is often defined by meeting more people along a travel route than is acceptable to visitors or managers.
- If managers or visitors perceive crowded conditions along trails the data produced by this type of monitoring can provide actual use data for planning or management action purposes.

How is the monitoring accomplished:

- Field crews or volunteers travel their normal routes and carry a tally sheet or pocket notebook (see Trail Encounters and Occupied Campsites booklets example in this toolbox).
- Data to be recorded includes the number of visitors and/or groups, the type of user (hiker, stock user, etc.) and the location and time of the encounter is recorded.
- Typically the number of encounters is observed as the encounter occurs and the data is recorded immediately afterwards with no effect on the visitor's experience.

Who can do the monitoring:

- Field crews and volunteers (with training)
- Note – Often monitoring by volunteers who follow a normal recreation visit travel pattern is a more accurate measure than monitoring done by a wilderness ranger who travels around the wilderness for work priorities.

How is trail encounter monitoring data stored and queried:

- At this time INFRA-Wild is not fully developed and will not accommodate this type of monitoring data. Simple spreadsheets often suffice.

How is trail encounter monitoring data used:

- Trail encounter monitoring data is best used as part of an overall monitoring program that measure visitor use as well as resource conditions.

- The data is useful for collaborative planning processes and in setting design conditions and standards for management plans.
- Note – if the area has a required permit or registration system encounter monitoring books or tally sheets can also be used to record number of visitors who obtained a permit or registered.

Occupied Campsites

What is measured:

- The number of campsites that are occupied at each destination area each night, week, month, or season.

Why is this type of monitoring needed:

- Crowding is often defined by user experience at camps which includes the number of occupied campsites seen or heard.
- If managers or visitors perceive crowded overnight use conditions at destination areas the data produced by this type of monitoring can provide actual use data for planning or management action purposes.

How is the monitoring accomplished:

- Field crews or volunteers travel through the destination camping areas during the times when campsites are most likely occupied (late afternoon or early evening) and carry a tally sheet or pocket notebook (see Trail Encounters and Occupied Campsites booklets example in this toolbox).
- Data to be recorded includes the number of occupied camps, number of visitors and/or groups, the type of user (hiker, stock user, etc.) and the location and time of the monitoring.

Who can do the monitoring:

- Field crews and volunteers (with training)
- Note – Often monitoring this type of monitoring leads to a visitor contact opportunity for providing wilderness information and education. It is typically preferable to make the visitor contact rather than be observed recording data with no explanation.

How is occupied campsites monitoring data stored and queried:

- At this time INFRA-Wild is not fully developed and will not accommodate this type of monitoring data. Simple spreadsheets often suffice.

How is occupied campsite monitoring data used:

- Occupied campsites monitoring data is best used as part of an overall monitoring program that measures visitor use as well as resource conditions.
- The data is useful for collaborative planning processes and in setting design conditions and standards for management plans.

- Note – if the area has a required permit or registration system encounter monitoring books or tally sheets can also be used to record compliance or the number of visitors who obtained a permit or registered