

Human Activities

Protocol: Visitor Use

Parks Where Protocol Will Be Implemented: ALAG, ANIA, KATM, KEFJ, LACL

Justification/Issues Being Addressed: Human presence can have unexpected and significant effects on ecosystems and ecosystem processes. Humans can serve as a vector for exotic species and, through habitat change, decreased competitive ability of resident species. Heavy use can fragment the landscape for sensitive wildlife, modify wildlife behavior through conditioning, and lead to overfishing, or overharvest in focal areas.

To effectively manage and protect national parks, information is needed concerning visitor use parameters. For example, information about the spatio-temporal distribution of visitor use can help managers identify potential recreation-related threats to the natural resources of an area and the quality of visitors' experiences. While in some cases it may be possible to monitor visitor flows through on-the-ground observation, this becomes increasingly difficult in large remote Alaskan parks that receive dispersed use.

Methods to determine park visitation vary between and within park units, and no rigorous written protocols exist.

Specific Monitoring Questions and Objectives to be Addressed by the Protocols:

Questions:

- How is the number of visitors (nature-oriented tourists) changing in SWAN parks?
- How is the type of visitor use, timing of visits, and areas of use changing in SWAN parks?
- How are visitors accessing SWAN parks and where are modes of access changing?

Objectives:

- Track annual numbers of recreational visitors in SWAN parks.
- Document how timing of visits, activities, and destinations of visitors change over 5-year periods.
- Monitor 5-year trends in points of visitor origin and entry into SWAN parks.

Basic Approach: Of the five park units within SWAN, only KEFJ is road-accessible from major population centers. Visitor access is primarily by small aircraft, frequently via direct flights to back-country areas from towns 10 to 160 miles (16 to 257 km) distant. Parks currently do not require visitor registration or permits, and are unlikely to do so in the near future. With few well-defined gateways, large management areas, and small staffs, a combination of direct and indirect methods is the only practical means to estimate park visitation.

Utilizing the recommendations of the Visitor Use Estimation Working Group Draft Report (2002), as well as input from the LACL and KATM Concessions Chief and the LACL Chief of Resources, the following techniques will be assessed and refined into a visitor use protocol:

- 1) Direct visual observations by NPS personnel at specific, focal locations such as bear viewing areas, staging locations for wilderness float trips, high-use fishing spots, or popular back-country hiking areas.
- 2) Indirect estimation through minor revision of the incidental business permits (IBPs) process.
- 3) Aerial surveys.
- 4) Compliance checks on IBPs.

Principal Investigators and NPS Lead:

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- Dorothy Mortenson, NPS-SWAN (NPS Lead)

Development Schedule, Budget, and Expected Interim Products:

FY2006 Select principal investigator.

Develop contract/cooperative agreement (\$70,000).

FY2007 Draft protocol (\$28,812).

FY2008 Test.

FY2009 Implement.

Literature Cited:

Visitor Use Estimation Working Group. 2002. Working Group Draft Report, National Parks Service, Alaska Region.