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SIERRA CREST SUBDISTRICT 1998 END OF SEASON REPORT

During the 1998 season in the Sierra Crest we took another step forward to address backcountry management concerns identified from previous years. We concentrated on furthering our research on the status of backcountry meadows spending several days on site with Meadow Management personnel. We identified meadows receiving use within established guidelines and showing signs of resource damage. Revision of the Meadow Management Guideline was discussed and agreed upon.

Subdistrict staff were closely involved in assisting the research on the Mountain Yellow Legged Frogs in the 60-Lakes Basin. With the assistance of the researcher Vance Vredenburg, and the data he has collected, we identified a potential conflict with current levels of use in the 60-Lakes Basin and the protection of the sensitive frog populations.

Subdistrict staff supported the revision of the Wilderness Plan by completing and submitting Wilderness Workbooks and GIS Infrastructure maps and project statements.

In the Bench Lake patrol area: Park Archeologist, Tom Burge, completed the second year of archeological site inventory in the Taboose meadow area. Burge concurred with the proposed trail reroute project submitted to the Kings Canyon Trails Foreman in 1997. The proposal is awaiting prioritization and funding.

The South Fork of the Kings River received specific attention in the removal of illegal fire rings and rehabilitation of 2 campsites located within 50 feet of the river. Ranger Edens noted more success this year over last year in maintaining sites without fire rings.

The Bench Patrol Ranger noted that Striped Mountain Lakes are becoming a popular fishing spot. As an example of the extent of this use, VIP Clum spent two full days in the Striped Mt. Lake area concentrating on the removal of fire rings and rock walls. Ten days later, Ranger Edens returned to the area and removed two new fire rings and 3 new rock walls.

Projects identified for Bench Lake Ranger next year: Build a new pit toilet, replace damaged ranger station floor, and enforce food storage violations with violation notices.

In the LeConte patrol area: Several days were spent in the LeConte area with Meadow Management Sylvia Haultain. Big Pete meadow, Little Pete meadow, and Grouse meadow were evaluated. Proposal submitted to the Meadow Management office in 1997 was discussed. Signs of potential overgrazing of Big Pete meadow were identified. The opening date for Big Pete was delayed until October 1st due to the continued wet condition of the meadow. The closure served two purposes; protection of the sod against deep hoof cuts in the wet ground, and the delay in grazing may provide opportunity for meadow recovery.

Projects identified for LeConte Ranger next year: Removal of snow survey site on the Dusy Bench, removal of several hundred nails in trees along the ridge south of the snow survey course, and the removal of three old aluminum and one wooden sign in the Dusy basin.

In the McClure patrol area: An increase in bear activity was noted from the Goddard Bridge to upper Colby Meadow along the Evolution Valley. Reports of food being taken in these areas by a single adult, black bear. Bear activity lasted a period of one week then stopped.

A proposal for the renovation of the historic McClure cabin was discussed in detail with Thor, the Sequoia maintenance employee responsible for Park restoration work. The structure base logs need replacement. The proposal includes the installation of a loft, window, and removal of the current ceiling on the interior of the cabin.

Projects identified for McClure Ranger next year: Replace "No Camping" sign at Muir Hut, and complete cleaning and sanitation of ceiling storage in cabin, concentrate visitor education on food storage and wildlife protection concerns.

In the Rae Lakes patrol area: The proposal to restrict grazing and overnight stock use in the 60-Lakes Basin was discussed with Meadow Management Sylvia Haultain and frog researcher Vance Vredenburg during an extended on-site visit. A recommendation has been submitted to Wilderness Management to restrict stock use in the 60-Lakes basin to day trips only.

Meadow Management spent several days in the Rae Lakes patrol area to observe the condition of the meadows along Baxter Creek, Woods Creek, Twin Lakes, and Woods Lake areas. Areas of resource damage were identified, and stock party size and grazing limits were evaluated.

Suggestion submitted to reduce stock party size on the White Fork meadow to relieve grazing pressure.

Proposal submitted to wilderness management for the consideration of change in the current camping regulations in the Rae Lakes basin to a 3-night maximum and will include camping in the 60-Lakes basin.

Projects identified for Rae Lake Ranger next year: Rehabilitation and re-vegetation of campsites around Dollar Lake, and supervise the repair of identified food storage boxes in the Woods Crossing and Rae Lakes camp areas.

In the Charlotte Lake patrol area: Two food storage incidents occurred that involved injury to persons and posed an immediate need for management action. A temporary food storage restriction was initiated on 8/25/98 requiring the use of food storage boxes and/or individual canisters and prohibiting any food hangs within the Rae Lakes Loop areas and upper Bubbs creek. As reported by the patrol ranger, this restriction dramatically reduced the number of incidents in which bears obtained food. Several reports were received throughout the summer of aggressive bear behavior along the Bubb's Creek drainage to include the Center Basin and Wheelbarrow Camp areas. The food storage compendium revision submitted in 1997 has not become effective to date.

The Charlotte area received trail signs and informational bulletin boards for the Charlotte Lake, Kearsarge Lake, and Vidette Meadow areas. New signs delivered to the ranger station on the demobilization flight limited ability of the ranger to post due to lack of time.

Contacts with the USFS Wilderness Rangers on Kearsarge Pass and the cooperation between agencies have supported the efforts of both agencies to educate the public and enforce food storage requirements and wilderness permit requirements. Parties contacted on the Pass without the required permits were turned back to Onion Valley. A sharp increase in the use of food canisters was noted in all patrol areas, partially due to the restrictions enforced by the USFS out of Onion Valley. Saturdays and Sundays were found to be the days of the heaviest visitation over Kearsarge Pass, and in the Kearsarge Lake and Charlotte Lake areas.

Projects identified for the Charlotte Ranger next year: Install anodized backcountry signs and new bulletin boards, supervise work of volunteers working in Kearsarge Lake, Vidette Meadow, and East Lake/Lake Reflection areas, scrap and paint food storage boxes, attach new notices,

repair southeast window frame and ranger station door.

The Subdistrict did not observe any use of river corridors as seen in the 1997. This year there was a noted increase in travel to the Gardiner Basin. One suspected reason for this increase is due to the availability of a new 7 ½' USFS map showing an approximate route through Charlotte Lake to the Gardiner Basin. The Charlotte Ranger reported that the mapped route was only about 70% correct.

The following is a summary of incidents and actions from the summer of 1998:

Visitor Statistics:

Contacts: 5950

Total miles covered by Wilderness Rangers:

2915

Total number of Violation Notices issued: 3

- 1-Illegal fire
- 2-No Wilderness permit

Numerous verbal warnings issued:

Illegal fires, trash disposal/burning, noise violations, food storage violations, camping violations (too close to water/on vegetation/unclean camp).

Total number of Medivacs: 12

- 1-BLS Fractured ankle (Pinchot Pass)
- 1-ALS Fatigue/suspected AMS (Gardiner Basin)
- 1-ALS Kidney Stone (Ionion Basin)
- 1-ALS Three day illness/suspected ectopic pregnancy (LeConte)
- 1-BLS Dislocated Shoulder (Rae Lakes)
- 1-BLS, Knee injury (Glen Pass)
- 1-ALS Seizure (Charlotte Lake)
- 1-BLS Leg Laceration (Milly's Foot Pass)
- 4-BLS AMS, Knee injury, Sprain/Strain ankle, Fractured ankle (McClure)

Uncounted number of minor medicals:

Sprained/strained ankles

Sprained/strained knees

Hypoglycemia, high altitude sickness, dehydration, two cases bear caused human injury due to improper food storage (Center Basin and Bullfrog Lake areas).

Search and Rescue:

1 Major SAR, 4 days duration, in Gardiner Basin area

1 Hasty SAR's in Rae Lakes area

Stock:

Total contacts: 117 horses and mules at Charlotte
3 horses at Bench Lake (private party)
39 horses and mules at LeConte
2 horse/mule parties passed through Rae Lakes (exact number unknown)
1-horse death in Bench Lake area (Trail Crew)

District Cooperation:

Kern Subdistrict Ranger Klump responded to two medivacs in the Sierra Crest Subdistrict, one at Charlotte Lake, and one on Milly's Foot Pass.
Sequoia District personnel assisted on four-day Clayton SAR operation.
Sierra Crest SDR conducted backcountry patrol and visitor contact through Kern Subdistrict from Forester Pass to Mt. Whitney.

Overflights:

6 Military low flyers at Bench Lake, reported.
2 Civilian low flyers at Bench Lake, reported.
4 Military low flyers at Rae Lake, reported.

Subdistrict Accomplishments/Benefits:

Participated in 6-day ski across High Route with SNHA group.
Participated in 3-day ski patrol from Piute Pass, over Alpine Col, and out Lamark Col.
Completed Swift Water Rescue training course conducted at Cedar Grove, July, 1998.
Conducted meadow evaluations of Rae Lakes, 60-Lakes Basin, Twin Lakes, Woods Lake Basin, and LeConte Canyon meadows were conducted with Sylvia Haultain, Meadow Management office.
Contacted BC Rangers at all subdistrict stations, evaluating resource concerns and project proposal assignments in each area.
Provided medical (CPR) assistance to the Inyo National Forest in the Grass Lake area.
Conducted 40 hours Trailhead, BC Ranger, and VIP/SCA training.
Conducted Fitness training class and PEB testing at seasonal LE Refresher course.
Bench Lake Ranger Station floor was rebuilt using supplies on hand after collapse from winter 1997.
LeConte Ranger station, broken window replaced, new pit toilet dug.

Volunteers

Steve Nave: Total VIP hours 187
Pete Clum: Total VIP hours 175
Paige Meier: Total VIP hours 406
Vance Vredenburg: Contacted a total of 77 visitors with information unrelated to frog research project.

Service projects completed:

East Lake/Lake Reflection fire pits cleaned out, rebuilt, trash removed.

Assisted Rae Lakes Ranger dropping Drift Fences and conducting residual biomass in 60-Lakes Basin and Castle Domes meadow.

Assisted Frog research; collecting and counting, in 60-Lakes Basin.

Assisted digging new pit toilet at LeConte Ranger station.

Removed Fire pits and rock walls at Striped Mt. Lakes.

Removed/reduced fire pits along Bubb's Creek and East Lake campsites.

Service Projects completed by BC staff:

Campsite closure of 2 sites too close to water. Rehabilitation of site and fire ring removal at South Fork of Kings River. Bench Lake ranger noted reduced camping impact and no recurring illegal fire rings.

A total of 675# trash removed from Backcountry

A total of 385 Fire Pits removed, reduced or rehabilitated throughout Subdistrict.

Wilderness issues identified:

- ❖ Food Storage problems throughout the Subdistrict:
Improvements noted in Kearsarge Lake area as a result of enforcement by USFS for individual food canister requirement.
- ❖ Propose installation of a larger, food storage box at the Center Basin, JMT junction.
- ❖ Propose installation of larger food storage boxes in heavy use areas only, not placing new boxes where none were previously located.
- ❖ Support mandating the use of bear canisters along the Rae Lakes Loop; **enforceable from Memorial Day to Labor Day.** Canisters should be free to visitors, deposit required.
- ❖ Support elimination hanging food from our regulations. Compendium proposal submitted in 1997. No action taken to date.
- ❖ Food storage for stock users: Initiate new policy for use of bear- proof panniers in both Parks, effective in 3-5 years. During phase-in period, permit use of an electrified "hot-wire" wrapped around food in combination with a 24-hour guard. (Two levels of negative reinforcement).
- ❖ Consider a maximum of three nights camping in the Rae Lakes Basin. Removing one-night limit at Rae may reduce impacts at Charlotte. Include 60-Lakes basin in this proposal.
- ❖ Continue enforcement of the one night camping limit at Charlotte Lake done from July 4th- Labor Day. Improvement noted in numbers of visitors; overcrowding not a problem.
- ❖ Proposal submitted to protect bog area of Big Pete Meadow; consider fencing out stock,

reducing party size limits, or closing a portion of the meadow to stock.

- ❖ Resource damage to 60-Lakes Basin due to stock parties presence; proposal submitted to close area to overnight stock use, day use okay.
- ❖ Submitted 1997 proposal to Wilderness Management to reduce the number of people permitted for cross-country travel to 6-8 (consistent with YOSE) and to reduce group size to 10-12 per party. No action taken to date on this proposal.
- ❖ Park needs to identify position/policy for treating all stock users equally, llama parties should not be receiving special concessions; i.e. permitted to camp closer to trailheads.
- ❖ Prioritize Taboose trail reroute proposal for funding in 1999.