

## **CRABTREE YEAR END REPORT '89, Durkee**

**DISCUSSION:** Unusually low snow levels (40% of normal in the Kern) and a warm spring meant that hikers began using the area earlier and, I believe, in greater numbers overall than previous years. On the whole, though, it was a quiet season with no major incidents (6 medevacs & 3 citations). I received about 60 complaints from visitors about various aspects of stock use. This was about normal, though several visitors were more upset than usual. Apparently about half a dozen people wrote letters to the Park specifying their concerns. Although the number of complaints to me seems about the same as in previous years, I believe backpackers are showing an increased level of concern and frustration with what seems to be an increase in stock impact at specific sites brought on by an apparent increase in stock use. Craig London (Mt. Whitney Pack Trains) has shown on his stock trips that impact can be minimized by following a few basic rules. The permittee for the Kern area (Dennis Winchester) has consistently failed to take these rules seriously. A consequence is increased backpacker/stock user conflict.

Backcountry rangers have also been the subject of increasing complaints by stock users. This has been the result of stricter enforcement of existing regulations. Because we try to maintain a working relationship with our permittee users, many of us have allowed a "learning" period for new packers. Unfortunately, packers have a high turnover so we are constantly explaining park regs. to new packers from the same permittee. This becomes extremely frustrating for the ranger and often results in what appears to be more abrupt treatment for a new packer.

This has resulted in increasing disrespect for a ranger's authority on the part of packers. There were several instances where information was asked of a packer (I.D. in two cases) or information required and the packer refused to comply. There were instances where several of us in the field felt that inadequate support was given to the ranger in enforcing long standing regulations in deference to a packer or pack station. We need to clearly spell out our authority to the packers and establish law enforcement protocols for next season.

The State Snow Survey finally (after 13 years) gave us permission to remove their aerial markers (5 in the Kern) this year. All markers are now down and several have been flown out. Closer discussions with the Survey about what the NPS expected of them resulted in cleaner stations after winter use and in a smaller restocking trip (7 head of stock). There is still a problem with at least a couple of the winter surveyors bringing their dogs into the backcountry.

## **HUNTING PATROL**

I patrolled Siberian Meadow & Boreal Plateau opening weekend with Steve Gough (813). We saw no hunters nor any sign of them. Two fishermen we contacted at Rocky Basin Lakes said they saw two hunters camped at Big Whitney Meadow. Steve left for the Kern Station via Little

Whitney Meadow on 9/24 and saw no sign of hunters in the area and no fresh tracks. I continued patrolling the area until 10/1. I heard shots from the Rocky Basin Lake area on 9/27, but was unable to contact the hunters. There were no tracks approaching the Park boundary from that area nor in the Siberian Pass area. We should put up some "NPS Boundary" signs at the cross country pass from Rocky Basin Lakes and the Siberian Pass area. Probably about a dozen total.

Since there is a fair potential for problems when doing hunting patrol, Sierra District should be sure there is someone around the office to: A) keep track of rangers in the field--maybe even checking with them every few hours during the day and B) being available for advice in case of problems. There was no one in the office the first week of hunting season. I had called in mid-week when I thought a series of shots followed by voices came from inside the Park. I called in to give my position and check on the availability of backup. No one home. **If we're going to take poaching seriously and send out patrols to prevent it, we also have to make sure someone is around to be responsible for the safety of the rangers in the field.**

#### **NOTES ON A TALK WITH GARY HESTER (DWR Chief Flood Control Forecaster) 9/12/89**

He questioned the need for more sensor sites, saying that he didn't find 'real time' data that useful for the monthly forecasts since they kept changing. Also agreed with me that DWR should justify it's equipment year to year. Agreed that the snow surveyors provided sufficient data (at present) for his forecasts, but that there might be pressure in future to stop using them and rely solely on sensors to justify them. [NPS would have to put pressure on DWR A) opposing more sensors & B) maintaining surveyors as "Traditional Use"/non-intrusive.] He also hinted that there have been attempts to get cooperation with Corp of Engineers (?) to have just one agency responsible for sites in Parks. Tenous success. NPS might put pressure on to achieve this, saying it would be easier on us & result in less intrusion on B/C. He also suggested a meeting between DWR folks & B/C rangers as a means of easing tensions & discussing problems. I said that things seemed to be getting better (DWR had only 7 head of stock this season & 2 people--smallest group on record... ). Still, a meeting might not be a bad idea.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1) I completely agree with the Chief Ranger's memo of 9/6/89 that aesthetic considerations have to be factored into our stock management of alpine meadows. Many of the backcountry rangers have been advocating this approach for years. There are only a couple of places on the 220 miles of the JMT where a hiker may camp that is closed to stock use (Vidette meadow & Evolution Lake). Backpackers have a right to expect a certain number of camps be free of the smell of manure and urine (a frequent complaint) and to view meadows in a pristine and ungrazed condition--not cropped down to the height of a putting green, as many meadows in the late Fall are. In the Kern, I believe this can be done with minimal impact on stock users by closing off those basins which

receive little stock use (which is actually most of them) and so guarantee that hikers have places which will be unspoiled. This can be balanced by designating certain traditional stock sites as available to stock users only. Stock impact would thus be limited to only a few sites and stock users would be guaranteed that their favorite sites would always be available. This should cut down on backpacker complaints.

Our only criteria for management of backcountry meadows has been the opening dates which we base on the relative wetness of the meadow. We have no way of controlling the number of stock nights a meadow gets. We have been "monitoring" meadows for as long as I've been in this Park (13 years). It is time to start managing at least some of the more intensively used meadows (e.g. upper Rock Creek, middle Crabtree, Harvey Meadow) to prevent the serious aesthetic damage they usually show by August. It is quite likely that the shorter Fall grasses that are a result of high stock use also cause increased Spring erosion (suggested by Mike Newman and USFS range biologist Kathy Noland). There are signs this is happening in Harvey Meadow and may also be occurring in Milestone and perhaps upper Rock Creek. A system based on a total number of use nights per month should be established immediately for the more heavily used meadows. The nights could be divided up between the permittee packer, administrative use and estimated private use. The USFS has been using such a system for years (based on forage recovery, with no aesthetic component considered).

Specifically: Milestone, upper Tyndall, Wright and Crabtree Lake Basins can be completely closed to stock use without a serious effect on permittee packers. Wallace should be closed above the occasionally used stock camp about 2 miles above the JMT. Crabtree Meadows should be closed above the middle meadow (leaving the heavily used backpacking camp around the Station area free of stock use, but still allowing grazing in the two lower meadows). The Whitney trail should be closed once again to stock--the potential for an accident on this narrow, heavily used trail is too great. There is also no practical place to leave animals at the pass. The Crabtree lakes should return to a policy of no stock use above the pond 1/2 mile below the lower lake (the policy until 2 years ago). This will leave only a one mile hike to get to the upper lake for stock users--not a great hardship considering the damage that results from continued stock use of that unmaintained, poorly graded use trail.

Most of the pack station owners say their business is increasing. I believe this trend will continue as the more affluent Baby Boomers continue returning to the mountains as their children become older. Our meadow management plan is not prepared for an increase in stock use--it assumes stock use will stay the same or decline. Rangers in the field have no quantitative criteria for restricting grazing. This situation requires a more critical examination than it has received so far.

- 2) The fire limit on the eastern side of the Kern is too high. Generally, these are the high basins mentioned in Doug's memo. At 11,200' trees are extremely sparse and are mostly Foxtail. According to a recent study, Foxtails may have a tree ring record extending back

7,000 years. A lower limit would put fires down well into the Lodgepole forest where wood is more plentiful and the aesthetic impact not as great as at present. Lowering the fire limit to 10,800' would have minimal effect on backpackers since, according to my compliance checks this summer, more than 90% of hikers carry stoves. This proposed fire limit would also allow packers to continue to have fires at almost all of their traditional sites.

- 3) Apparently the permittee packers are allowed to issue wilderness permits to anyone who does business with them, even when they are only spotting food & equipment in for a group. At the very least, their authority to issue permits should be allowed only for people they actually pack in. They have consistently not been telling their clients of the Park's rules and regulations (Scattaregia and I have submitted several 343's on these incidents) and not issuing the Park regulation sheet with the permit. This is unacceptable. Dennis Winchester has not lived up to the agreement made when he was given permission to issue permits. As such, he should no longer be allowed this privilege.
- 4) Increasingly, backcountry rangers are being asked to keep closer track of duty hours and days off and to make necessary changes only within the limits allowed by timekeeping regulations. This has created a bookkeeping nightmare. Traditionally, most of us have not kept to the schedule assigned because it would be impossible to perform our duties within the periods designated as "work time". In the past, the assumption has been that things would "even out". I began keeping track of my actual hours worked this season (attached on separate report) and found that they don't. In June, July, August & most of September I found that a 10 to 12 hour day is the norm. Days off are impossible to observe because visitors constantly come by the station with questions. Additionally, incidents occur which demand our attention but which are not of sufficient seriousness to report as an incident requiring overtime. The alternative is to turn visitors away on our days off and before duty hours.

We are available--and often called on--on a 24 hour, 7 day/week basis over 4 1/2 months. In short, there is no practical way of scheduling us for an 8 hour, 6 day week and to expect us to do what needs to be done. There are, apparently, regulations which would allow us to be compensated for our time and also allow us to legally work the erratic schedule necessary to do our job. I will investigate several of these possibilities and submit some ideas later this winter.

CLOSING: Crabtree R.S.

- 1) Prop center beam.
- 2) Remove drain plug, put bucket under sink.

- 3) Put snow survey food on shelves & in metal cabinet.
- 4) Fill wood to window height out to end of metal cabinet; fill 2nd row approx. half that.
- 5) All axes inside.
- 6) 3 Gal. white gas inside or in Survey shed (same with propane bottles).
- 7) Take off screen door, store in shower.
- 8) Make sure food cabinet is closed & latched.
- 9) Close shutters.
- 10) Lock front door, outhouse & survey shed.