

## 1992 Annual Report, Little Five Lakes Ranger Station, by Tom Suk

### BEARS

Bears were the no. 1 problem in my area this year. There were numerous incidents involving food loss and property damage, but only one incident (to my knowledge) of aggressive bear behavior (bear raised hackles and growled at visitors at Cliff Creek).

Food lockers. The placement of a food locker at Columbine Lake has encouraged concentrated use in this alpine area. Large ~~amounts~~ amounts of toilet paper and human waste accumulated this year. The Little Five ranger cannot be expected to keep up with this problem. I recommend that we remove the locker at Columbine Lake, and actively discourage visitors from camping there, unless they carry portable food containers. (This strategy has worked reasonably well at Nine Lake Basin).

I recommend placing a locker in Lost Canyon at the Big Five junction. There are several sites for camping, adequate soils to bury human waste, and adequate wood for campfires. We could move the locker from Columbine Lake down into Lost Canyon.

Remember to make the appropriate changes on the list of lockers (draft wilderness plan appendices and "Backcountry Basics.")

This summer, the Mineral King and Lodgepole trailhead personnel began advising visitors not to camp between the food lockers at Hamilton Lakes and Big Arroyo (unless they carried portable canisters). This reduced the number of campers at Nine Lake Basin and upper Big Arroyo, and bear incidents fell dramatically. The locker at Big Arroyo became full beyond capacity several nights in August, and there were often more groups than firepits. Visitors built new firepits in several locations; one was built on duff and escaped (Sept 4-5). I removed all the new firepits because they were in bad locations (either too close to the historic cabin or on vegetation).

There are currently two maintained firepits near the Big Arroyo food locker... we need 2-3 more to handle peak-season traffic. We should: 1) replace the existing locker at Big Arroyo with a larger one, 2) construct approx 3 firepits in locations that would make the best campsites, and 3) attach a hand-drawn map to the locker directing visitors to the sites.

One option I explored in detail was to provide additional food storage capacity by installing a locker somewhere upstream. This would have the added benefits of reducing crowding at the historic cabin area, as well as provide a closer campsite for weary hikers coming over Kaweah Gap on the HST. Unfortunately, I found no location(s) that met all my criteria (i.e. at least 3 good campsites nearby, adequate soil to bury human waste, adequate wood for campfires). Perhaps the best location I found was the first grove of trees along the HST east of Kaweah Gap. This location is closed to fires, but it would afford a good stopover for visitors hiking over Kaweah Gap. Nine Lake Basin could be visited on dayhikes from this location. However, soils are shallow and concentrated use will probably create a human waste problem, and the isolated trees may pose a lightning risk. For the present, I recommend that we refrain from placing a locker at this location, and continue to recommend "no camping between Hamilton Lakes and the Big Arroyo junction." But it is critical to install a larger locker at the Big Arroyo, and develop 2-3 additional campsites there.

I continually receive complaints that the food locker at Pinto Lake is full. One locker does not provide sufficient food storage capacity many nights in July/August. We need a larger (or additional) locker at Pinto Lake. The present location is best.

Bear-resistant food canisters. The portable food containers are now available, and I began seeing significant numbers of people using them this summer. My observations indicate that the canisters will not solve our bear problems. Here's why:

Visitors can fit about 4 days of food in a canister. Carrying more than one canister is prohibitive. They often bring more food than will fit in the container, and often view the canister as "insurance," in case a bear gets their remaining food. Visitors carrying canisters are often much less careful (i.e. lazy) with their "extra" food. Sloppy food storage practices with their excess food will allow bear incidents to continue — even if everyone was carrying a canister.

I don't have any answers on this one, except to keep the lockers in the backcountry for the time being.

The canisters work great for people on short trips. Mineral King continues to loan the "old style" canisters to visitors. Every effort should be made to get a supply of the new containers to M.K. for sale and rental to the public.

## GRAZING

Little Five Lakes. The sensitive stringer meadow SE of the ranger station has been closed to grazing since 1978. The problem continues to be: horses and mules can't read, and stock released to graze anywhere in the Little Five area rapidly drift into the supposedly "closed" area, causing hoofprint impacts (see case/incident no.'s 200835, 200836, 201491).

Our options include:

- ① Ignore the trespass of stock into this area (as done 1978-present) and "sacrifice" the sensitive areas in order to continue current grazing practices
- ② Close the entire Little Five Lakes area to grazing
- ③ Install drift fences in an attempt to keep stock in the "Long Lake" drainage, and close the ranger station drainage to grazing. (The feasibility of this idea is still being explored as we go to press.)

Big Five Lakes. The sensitive meadow and streambank areas at the inlet of Big Five #4 are experiencing accelerated erosion due to continued hoofprint impacts. The opening dates listed in the draft wilderness plan will be insufficient to allow this area to heal. (See my memo to Sierra District Ranger dated Aug. '92, case/incident no. 200842, and my 1991 annual report, for photos and detailed discussion.)

Recommendation: prohibit grazing at Big Five Lakes.

## FIRES

The current campfire regulations are insufficient to protect trees in many areas. (As ground fuels are exhausted, visitors take firewood from standing trees.)

The elevational closure of 10,800' proposed in the draft wilderness plan does not make sense on the Great Western Divide. Furthermore, the site specific closure method proposed in the draft plan will create a complex system that will confuse

...IRES, cont'd)

visitors and agency personnel alike. My 1991 annual report contains detailed recommendations that would provide the simplest and most effective campfire regulatory program.

Ranger Lyness (1990) studied fuel production and recommended limits between 10,200-10,500 ft for drainages in the Little Five area. The elevational limits she recommended remain the most appropriate proposed to date (see her 1990 report).

## TRAILS.

Sawtooth Pass. The east side of Sawtooth Pass (from the pass to Columbine Lake) is in horrible shape. The route (I don't even call it a "trail") is hazardous and difficult to follow. I received numerous complaints about this route in 1991-92. Records indicate that it has been a concern for some time.

I recommend that we construct a trail for foot traffic only between Monarch Lakes and Columbine Lake. This would be easier, cheaper, and faster than building a stock trail. In the meantime, we should post signs at Columbine and Monarch Lakes stating: "ROUGH, UNMAINTAINED ROUTE BEYOND HERE" or: "ROUTE NOT MAINTAINED BETWEEN MONARCH AND COLUMBINE LAKES"

Let's at least be honest with our visitors if we can't afford to maintain safe trails. This route is hazardous and nearly impossible to follow.

(TRAILS, cont'd)

Big Five Lakes. The trail to upper Big Five Lakes is a mess. It should be re-routed out of the wet areas, or constructed through the wet areas to handle stock traffic.

### ARGUABLY MEANINGLESS STATISTICS

Wildlife observations (sent to Research Div):	260
signs installed	9
signs removed	13
<u>complaints</u> re: mice damage to food in bear boxes	11
balloons collected (what goes up must come down)	21
<u>compliments</u> re: handwritten messages re:	
minimum-impact (on station bulletin board, trail signs and food lockers)	26

### STATION PREFERENCE FOR 1993 (please!)

- 1st choice: Charlotte Lake
- 2nd choice: Roaring River
- 3rd choice: Tyndall Creek
- 4th choice: Rock Creek
- 5th choice: LeConte Canyon
- 6th choice: McClure Meadow
- 7th choice: Crabtree Meadow
- 8th choice: Rae Lakes
- 9th choice: Little Five Lakes

STATION NEEDS FOR 1993Items sent to Ash for winter storage:

- 2 10x12 tents
- 2 batteries for electric fence (charged!)
- 1 Tehema O<sub>2</sub> kit
- 1 heat shield for wood stove, approx 2'x3'  
white insulating material on back, metal  
(imitation wood grain) on the front

New items needed

- 1 sheet plastic to fit between tents
- 1 can opener (a good one, please!)
- 6 MT 500 batteries
- 12 D-cell batteries
- 10 AA-cell batteries
- 1 set, 7.5 min topo maps for all of Kern,  
Cliff Creek and Mineral King areas  
(These will make wildlife observations  
easier. Dave Graber will probably buy  
them if you ask.)
- 10 U.S. Government Messenger Envelopes

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9-11-92

by Tom Suk

Additional items for station needs list Little Five Lks 1993

- 1 roll strapping tape (NO "duct" tape; 2 rolls out there already)
- 2 rolls T.P.
- 1 plastic (nylon) spatula
- 1 cheese grater
- 2 bed sheets
- 2 pillow cases
- 1 tweezers (Uncle Bill's Tweezers, 838 Stannage Ave, Albany CA 94706)

emergency food left @ Little Five P.S.

- 1 lb. spaghetti pasta
- 1 can stewed tomatoes
- 1 sm. can tomato paste
- 2 cans tuna
- 1 can clam chowder
- 1 can clams
- 2 cans refried beans
- 1 sm. can salsa
- 2 pkgs. instant soup (1 cup ea.)
- 2 pkgs. instant oats (1 cup ea.)
- 3 cans beer

(in "bomb case" with stove, lantern and extra fuel)