

## LeConte Year End Report--1997

George Durkee

### Stats:

Visitors Contacted	1050
Miles Hiked	650
Citations	2 (dog, no permit)
Warnings	35 (camping on veg.; unclean camp etc.)
Medevacs	3
Searches	1
Dead Mules	2

All quiet on the LeConte front this year--nothing of note happened. About time. We painted the inside of the cabin--once every 10 years whether it needs it or not!

Something has to be done about grazing use in the LeConte Canyon, especially at Big Pete Meadow. Big Pete was absolutely trashed this year. By October, the grasses in the southeast corner of the meadow (approx. 1 acre) were cropped to ground level; the sedge/grass in the southwest corner were cropped to about 3 inches. This is an outrage and can't be allowed to continue. The area looked like a pasture. The 2 associated camps were thick with dust and bits of manure. Rob Hayden had also looked at the area and said it's the worse he's ever seen it as well. The really bad news is: it was completely legal--no regulations were broken by the packers. There is STILL no limit on use nights. This meadow is, essentially, a wetland; it is NEVER dry enough to graze, yet we continue to allow grazing. It is likely that the estimate for stock use nights allowed (which is not enforceable anyway) is based on the acreage of the entire meadow. Because of trees downed by avalanche, only about 3 (?) acres (perhaps 1% of the whole meadow) are actually accessible by stock. A coordinated grazing plan for the entire drainage has to be worked out with Sylvia. If we start limiting Big Pete, the stock will just move to Little Pete, Ladder and Grouse.

Grouse meadow was also heavily grazed--unacceptably so, especially at the southern end. Most of this was by trail crew stock. Mark Berry, the packer, suggested that if he made 2 resupply trips per week (instead of the one he did this year) he'd spend fewer nights there. This would also mean fewer helicopter trips. To ease grazing pressure on Grouse, this would be worth looking into with Jerry.

### Recommendations:

1. Better training for permit issuers and USFS personnel on the east side. Incorrect information was given out this year on dogs permitted in Park; geography & food storage. A spring training session with NPS personnel can be done in combination with:
2. A training session for permittee packers & stations. More violations were seen this year than in any previous year: Morgan's station--packer left garbage; Draves was going to camp with stock at Dusy and go in to Rainbow Lakes until I told him it was illegal (clearly spelled out

regulations, which he apparently didn't read...). Rainbow also packed a party with a dog into Dusy (2<sup>nd</sup> hand information...); Three Corner Round (burros) did not check opening dates & where they could camp (even though this stuff is sent to them every year). Rob Hayden met them and turned them around. Alden talked to the owner late this year and said it was clear he was absolutely clueless on the reason the group was turned around; Craig London's group camped at upper Palisade Lake and built a fire and dug a latrine on meadow sod (but I can't prove it...) Also, because there was no practical choice, all 28 head on those two trips had to camp there. As such, I also recommend that "combined" trips not be allowed. Limited stock camps make it extremely difficult to have 2 trips from one pack station running parallel without camping together.

Suggest using Mark Berry, Ralph & Cindy to do at least one (maybe more) training sessions with all pack station owners & packers where possible. Pass out 'pocket rule sheet & map' (see #3). Tell them packers are REQUIRED to have in possession. Put the fear of the Lord in them.. .

Important points to cover are:

- ◆ Lash lines on **bare ground only** (spell out difference between bare ground and vegetation...)
- ◆ Minimum impact in camp--no "improvements" with rocks tables etc, disturbing, leveling ground (somebody dug up and moved over a dozen huge rocks at Big Pete stock camp--no idea why).
- ◆ All tents on bare ground only, fragile nature of alpine meadows--especially emphasize to client spot parties.
- ◆ No fires above 10,000' in Kings--emphasize to spot parties.
- ◆ REQUIRED to go over permit with spot parties point by point or lose privilege of issuing permits!
- ◆ Pack out garbage--carefully go through fire pit etc.

Perhaps emphasize that backpackers have been cheerfully going along with this minimal stuff for years--a lot of the current conflict between backpackers & stock users is the perception that stock users do not follow minimum impact camping. It's for their own good etc.

It also seemed this year that a number of packers were actually hostile to rangers (though not owners--Draves & Morgan were friendly). Over the years, I'm getting pretty tired of this sort of thing. We go out of our way to help these people; we cite far more backpackers than stock users (partially that's because it's easier to try to work with them, but I'll also cheerfully admit that I feel no confidence whatsoever the Administration is going to support me if I do cite one...) yet we're still seen as the enemy. Don't know what we can do about this one, but it gets tiresome.

3. Review and edit proposed card-sized rules & regulations with map of recommended packer camps (attached, except map which I'll ask GIS to make). Laminate and issue packet to all pack stations so each packer has one on a trip. Should also do same for each year's opening dates for each meadow and list on card.
4. Three Corner Round is back in action and assumes we've forgotten about them. REQUIRE

them to submit summer's trip itinerary to Ralph to be reviewed by area b/c rangers well before trip. They travel with up to a dozen burros and have a long history (since the 40s) of violating regulations: fires above limits; building & leveling camps; building trails; especially cross-country travel. I issued 7 citations in 1984, Alden 2 and Ralph Kumano 2. They are steeped in their own traditions and have made no effort to change to minimum impact practices. The last few years, they've required 3 medevacs--2 very serious. Warn them that if they have one more violation, we'll revoke their commercial use permit.

5. The continuing drift fence stuff... . I hate to admit it, but the chances of getting rid of drift fences &/or moving them so they make sense ('96 LeConte proposal) has close to zilch of a chance of implementation. Stock users still run the backcountry. Nonetheless, I've attached the SKC-54 Project Proposal form (actually, I've attached my proposal by subject area--stuff can be pasted in or I'll see if an electronic version of the form is available). It's worth noting that the first known proposal to get rid of a drift fence at Big Pete was by Sumner (1940!!): "...eventually it may have to be removed to discourage further overgrazing." Again in 1961 (Thede et al): "...recommended that the drift fence between Upper LeConte Meadows and Big Pete be removed."

What chance Durkee (1997)??

Good luck.

6. FYI: I'd like to put together a newsletter of research topics and results for the park next year. We (b/c rangers, but it seems true of all field personnel) never hear details about the intent & results of all the research being conducted in the park. For instance, the frog research going on right now is extremely interesting; same with the brief archeological survey in Upper Basin, but there's no way of finding out about any of this--it rarely trickles down to those in the field who should be explaining it to park visitors. My plan would be to have principle researchers write up a brief article on what they're doing, why they're doing it and what they've found out so far. It would be nice to have a summary (abstract) of what's going on to keep people informed. Might also be good for administrators to read to remind them there's meadows & streams out here... .

My current plan is to run it by Dave Graber, Nate Stephenson & Tweed for suggestions. Needless to say, I'd like to be paid for it (probably one PP), so maybe between a grant (?) from SNHA and any park money (CRO? Interp.? Ralph??) I could get something going. I'd aim for a 12-14 page newsletter to be put out to all employees in the spring. Probably your only role here is if you hear of any money floating around... .

7. Another weird one: It would be nice to have flight suits & helmets for each station or sized right and issued to each b/c ranger. Helitack often comes in forgetting to bring them. Jon Young says he can get them in quantity & free from Marine base near Joshua Tree. Contact him or maybe we could get them from Lemoore. We'd be so cool.