

Charlotte R.S. Year End Report—2000

George Durkee

“I have a terrible lucidity at moments when nature is so beautiful. I am not conscious of myself any more, and the pictures come to me as if in a dream.” — Van Gogh (1853-1890)

STATS:

Visitors Contacted	1200
Miles Hiked	680
Citations	3 (2 Fire; 1 No permit)
Warnings	40 + (camping on veg.; food storage; close to water, etc..)
Medivacs	2— both by stock, minor medicals
Searches	0
Medicals	2

SUMMARY

Yet another surprisingly quiet year at Firebase Charlotte. A normal snow pack, but an early spring melt allowed easy access to hikers by mid-June. The snow survey, which used the cabin only for two nights, left it relatively clean.

Three Corner Round came through, staying for several days and Charlotte Meadow. This was one of the best led trips I've seen in many years of working with them. Excellent leadership resulted in a clean camp and happy campers.

Brian Berner, owner of the Onion Valley Pack Station, has said that he's unable to take out trash because he's prohibited from using the concession owned dumpsters at USFS campgrounds. We've had a previous and informal arrangement with that pack station that they could use a secure 50 Gal. drum for dropping off food caches for through hikers. Since we'll now need this drum for garbage, that arrangement will no longer be possible. Berner should be informed of this.

In September I did give him permission to use the Bullfrog trail when doing spot trips to Vidette. This is a long day and the use of the lower trails saves him an hour or so— important with shorter fall days. We'd already been allowing him to drop spot trips at Kearsarge Lakes and Jerry Torres said that the trail is built to stock standards and that he had no objection to stock use on that trail. He was told that this was for after labor day only; for spot trips and that no grazing was allowed. Should it be decided that this informal arrangement can be continued, these points should be emphasized to him again. In addition, though, shortly after talking to him on his way back from Vidette Meadow to Onion Valley, I found his stock tracks had cut the trail on the last switchback into Vidette—both directions. A log book entry from a previous ranger notes that he had done this in '96. He should be told that should this happen again, he'll be cited (I haven't seen him since the incident).

Recommendations

- 1) There is currently a one night limit for Rae Lakes, Charlotte Lake and Kearsarge Lakes.

This regulation is a relic from the '70s and is no longer needed. I have not enforced it when I've been here and things don't seem overly crowded as a result. We should have as few regulations as possible and this is one that can go. If we need to regulate use for specific places, it should be done by using the entry quotas and updating the dispersion models.

- 2) The upper Vidette meadow (approx. ½ mile above the lower Vidette drift fence), is receiving more stock use than that small meadow is capable of sustaining. This is resulting in serious propagation of stock trails near the river, stream bank erosion, "roll" pits, trail erosion and mechanical (hoofprint) damage to a nearby Sphagnum meadow. Photos and documentation are on file with Sylvia Haultain.

We should work out a plan in consultation with Sylvia to *temporarily* close this meadow to allow for recovery. I suspect, at the very least, this meadow needs a 3 to 5 year rest period to recover from damage as a result of this overuse. Following recovery, we would then set a carrying capacity appropriate to the area. In the meantime, stock can use the meadows beginning ½ mile above it without any inconvenience.

We could experiment with leaving the upper drift fence down to increase the available forage. If, as a result of not putting up that fence, stock does not drift up to the closed Center Basin area or cause impact in the Yellow-legged Frog habitat of upper Bubbs Creek, then the fence itself could be removed entirely. We could also experiment with allowing the major users of this area (Cedar Grove and Onion Valley) to store pellets or other feed in a box they could place at the next camp up. They could then feed their animals from that source and allow them to roam for only a few hours, thus reducing impact in the area. We might also consider a similar plan for East Lake—reducing stock impact above that drift fence as well.

- 3) We need to look seriously at our drift fence policy. With the increasing and successful use of electric fences, I believe it's possible to remove a number of fences that exist only to prevent stock from drifting too far from packer's camps—which is possibly with as many as 80% of all fences in Kings Canyon. Current Wilderness Management plan says that fences will not be maintained only for the convenience of packers, but to protect areas from resource damage. Few of these fences protect park resources.

Working with the pack stations and encouraging the experimental use of such electric fences for short duration trips (overnights by Cedar Grove PS at East Lake & upper Vidette) we could likely reduce localized impacts on some meadows. Combined with use of grain or pellets and short grazing periods, we could maintain present use patterns which might not otherwise be possible if carrying capacities of meadows are shown to be lower than they are currently receiving.

- 4) Someone put the Charlotte Meadow fence back up last fall after I'd taken it down for the season and did not drop it when they left. As a result, it had extensive damage after being up all winter. It will require probably 2 to 3 days of work by the trail crew next season—cutting new posts (approx. 20); fixing the gate (now rotted & collapsed); removing fence attachments from living trees (approx 15); and stringing new sections of wire. It also appears that a stock group camped at Kearsarge Lake last Fall after I left, though damage was minimal.

- 6) People leaving food caches in bear boxes became quite a problem this year. Some were left as long as 2 months. None had names on them indicating people knew the practice was questionable. I probably removed around 100 lbs. of unclaimed food this season from several boxes. I suggest we put a sign at the Onion Valley trail head (where all the people leaving such caches start) telling people that's illegal (abandoned property) and that caches will be confiscated after 24 hours (see sign request).