

PEAR LAKE END OF SEASON REPORT SUMMER 2000

RANGER: CHRIS WALDSCHMIDT

This season the Pear Lake Ranger Station was staffed from June 23 to October 3. The primary patrol area consisted of the Lakes trail, the Alta trail, Moose Lake, and the Table Meadows/ Tablelands area, with less frequent patrols to Lonely Lake and Lion Lake.

VISITOR USE:

Visitor use was slightly down this year.

Lakes Trail:	Summer Season	<u>2000</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1997</u>
Permits Issued		421	426	288	459
Number of Visitors		1270	1200	802	1209
Visitor Nights		2787	3206	----	----

Alta Trail:	Summer Season	<u>2000</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1997</u>
Permits Issued		207	243	146	247
Number of Visitors		532	718	436	660
Visitor Nights		1593	1815	---	---

Total Visitor Contacts: 1832

AREA IMPACT:

On the Lakes Trail most of the impact occurred at Heather, Emerald, and Pear Lakes. All three areas received heavy use. Emerald and Pear Lakes are very popular backpacker destinations while Heather Lake is visited by large amounts of day hikers. I have not noticed any additional damage to natural resources over the last four summers in these locations.

In fact with camping permitted in numbered sites only and restoration area signs posted, I have noticed that some areas are slowly re-growing vegetation at Pear and Emerald Lakes. It is still very obvious that both lakes are heavily used due to the high volume of use in such a small area. This is especially noticeable at Emerald Lake, where there is more vegetation and less granite than Pear Lake.

I think the designated campsites should remain at both locations in order to minimize the total impact on the area. The designated camp sites help keep

the impact localized to areas that would probably remain in the same condition even if designated sites were not used.

For the third summer in a row there was a group of trail runners using the lakes trail for training. Their group consisted of 60-80 day users. I received noise complaints and complaints that the group was too large for a wilderness area from visitors. I agree with this and would like to see a limit on group size for day users.

All camping destinations along the Alta Trail do not appear to have any additional resource damage. This trail is less popular than the Lakes Trail and the same campsites are usually used by groups throughout the summer.

WILDLIFE:

I observed only one bear in the Lakes area this summer. It was yearling, and it appeared to be doing normal bear things. There were no reported bear incidents on the Lakes Trail. There were a couple reports of bears attempting to get food at Alta Meadow.

Moose Lake was the problem area this summer. There were four documented reports of a bear getting food from campers, and probably many unreported incidents. Due to the terrain and lack of trees at Moose Lake, food canisters are necessary for ALL food and trash in order to keep it from bears. Often groups will only rent one canister and the rest of their food and trash will remain stored unlawfully, or they will claim to use a 24 hour guard. Some groups ignore the warnings from the trailhead office and camp there without taking food storage precautions. If this problem continues next summer at Moose Lake, I strongly recommend a temporary requirement that all campers using this area to keep all food and trash stored in bear canisters.

I assisted a research group in searching for yellow legged frogs in the Tablelands area. We found at least three in one of the lakes. This was exciting because they were thought to be completely gone from the area. These frogs were probably the descendents of frogs that were reintroduced to this lake about ten years ago.

STOCK USE:

Stock was used this year to take my supplies to the cabin in June, and to bring wood pellets to the cabin at the end of summer for winter use. The Wolverton Pack Station took about 8 trips to the Pear Lake area to spot gear for researchers and visitors. The Alta Trail received very little stock use from the Seven Mile Hill Trail junction eastward. The Wolverton Pack Station used the Alta Trail from Wolverton to the Seven Mile Hill Trail for there frequent re-supplies to the Bearpaw High Sierra Camp and NPS trail crew. There was none

to very little use by private stock users on either trail. Both trails are still closed to overnight stock use.

MEDICALS:

It was a slow summer for medicals. I only made one radio call-in to UMC this summer. It was for a boy with chest pains who was able to walk out without assistance.

SAR's:

There was only one major SAR in the area, which occurred on the upper portion of the Seven Mile Hill Trail. It consisted of a carry-out by wheeled litter for a fractured pelvis.

LAW ENFORCEMENT CONTACTS:

This summer I gave out a number of verbal warnings for minor violations and issued 3 violation notices.

Violation Notices: O/B Camping (2)
Unlawful Food Storage (1)

TRAILS:

I performed minor trail maintenance as necessary and rehabbed areas where switchbacks were cut. I frequently knocked down ducks on the off trail routes from Pear Lake to Moose Lake and from Pear Lake to Alta Peak.

PEAR AND EMERALD LAKE TOILETS:

The multi-year project of getting the Pear and Emerald toilets marmot proof and in working order is almost to an end. Maintenance crews came out again this year and all of the necessary construction projects were completed, which include remodeling the toilet rooms, re-roofing, and re-siding the Emerald Lake structure. As of 10/3 the composting systems were still not working properly, but a lot of new equipment was flown to the toilets. Lodgepole Maintenance is planning to fly in on 10/18 to continue the project. Hopefully it will be completed at this time.

If these toilets are to remain in the backcountry they will need more frequent attention from the maintenance division. More timely repairs are

necessary so that we do not end up having to do a total rebuild again in the future. The repairs that were recently done were reported in 1996 or 1997 and to this date have still not been completed. I think it is appropriate for the ranger to continue the toilet room cleaning, turn the tines, and to make frequent inspections of the system, but it is necessary for someone with a better understanding of the systems to conduct the major repairs.

I would discourage the building of such toilets in the future. The units are extremely large for a wilderness area and the composting systems only work well when the weather is warm. In the winter they act as large holding tanks. The process of repairing these toilets has proven to be extremely expensive and in the current situation they appear to be a very low maintenance priority. The cost of repairs could be drastically reduced if the maintenance crews were required to walk in and out. They have been flying in and out with large amounts of personal gear.

LARGE GROUPS:

Once again I would like to express my concerns regarding large groups. I think it is very important to reduce the maximum group size from 15 people to somewhere around 6-8 people. This is especially a concern when it comes to cross-country travel. When groups become larger than about 6 people they tend to make more noise, which can be bothersome to other users. The amount of resource damage, especially in low visitation areas is increased. I hope this problem is not overlooked in the new Wilderness Plan.

Some type of violation occurred with almost every large group I came across again this year. They often chose poor campsite locations in order to all stay together, and frequently litter was left behind. This especially holds true for youth groups that usually do not have enough leaders to keep the group under control.

LODGEPOLE TRAILHEAD:

For the first time we had three rangers working at the Lodgepole Trailhead Office. I was happy to see this because it allowed for more trail coverage and the trailhead rangers a chance to become more familiar with the area. I hope money can be found to fund this third position again next summer.

The 2000 trailhead staff did a great job getting accurate information to backpackers. I saw more food canisters in the backcountry this year than I have in the past and I think this can be attributed to the trailhead staff and the knowledge they passed on to visitors. They had a genuine interest in their job and I think this is a very important quality for a trailhead ranger to have.

It would be nice to have a radio base station located in the trailhead office so that the trailhead rangers and backcountry rangers can communicate more

easily and so that trailhead rangers can keep better informed on issues occurring in the backcountry.

PEAR LAKE CABIN:

The cabin remains in good condition and at this time no repairs are needed. I replaced two windows this year that were intentionally broken by a group of skiers in the spring. I assisted Lodgepole Maintenance in emptying the Clivus Multrum toilet. Yuck! When I left, the cabin was clean and ready for winter operations.

NEEDED ITEMS:

- Headlamp batteries (4-6)

- Steel cooking pots (set of 2-3 sizes to replace some of the aluminum ones)

 - Pans are not needed.

- Duck Tape (1 large roll)