

# Pear Lake End of Season Report 2012

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Ellyse Deldin



Evening at the Pear Lake Ranger Station

## A. General Summary

The Pear Lake Ranger Station was staffed from June 24<sup>th</sup> through September 28<sup>th</sup>. This was my first season as the Pear Lake Ranger, so there was much for me to learn! I was very fortunate to have the previous ranger, Christina Gooch, hike out with me in early June and show me the ropes (solar system, phoenix maintenance, etc).

Due to the incredibly light snow year, the Lakes trail was snow-free by early June. The Tablelands was essentially snow-free by the first week of July. This enabled NPS stock (Packer Dan) to perform my mobilization (06/26) and demobilization (09/27). The wildflowers were abundant early in season, particularly the meadow penstemon and live forever on the Lakes trail. We had an unusual two weeks in mid-August with thunderstorms arriving at noon each day. The precipitation and cooler temperatures were a welcome relief from the hot summer. This storm

activity instigated only one fire in my patrol area – a tree was struck by lightning on the Alta trail. It remained small (¼ of an acre) because the fire crew was working on it shortly after it began. In late September, I assisted with the closure of the unstaffed Bearpaw Ranger Station (September 23<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>), prior to closing the Pear Lake Station.

**a. Pear Lake Statistics**

	Visitor Contacts	Miles	EMS	SAR	Fire Pits	OB Campers	Wildland Fire(local)
June/July	603	236	2	5	8	2	0
August	538	198	0	1	4	1	2
September	310	184	0	0	10	0	0
TOTAL	1451	618	2	6	22	3	2

**B. Visitor Services**

**a. Contacts**

**i. Dayhikers/Backpackers**

This season, day hikers barely outnumbered backpackers. There were days when I would encounter over 50 day hikers on the Lakes trail! The Alta trail was also busy with day hikers and backpackers this season. The most popular destinations for day hikers were Alta Peak, Panther Gap, Watchtower, and Heather Lake. Popular overnights included Mehrten Meadow, Pear Lake, Emerald Lake, and Moose Lake. I encountered fewer backpackers going cross-country this season. Those who were going cross-country tended to go to Moose, Lonely Lake, or somewhere in the Tablelands.

**ii. Stock**

The Lakes trail was quiet in terms of stock activity. Throughout the season I encountered NPS stock on the trail (Wolverton/Alta/7 Mile Hill) when they resupplied the Kaweah crew, delivered pellets to the cabin, and mob'd/demob'd me.



(b) (6)

was on the Lakes trail twice for a spot trip to Pear in late July.

**iii. Groups**

There were few organized groups in the Lakes area this season. I had 3 problematic parties in late-July: a boy-scout group and a Meet-Up group (both at Pear), and a Bearskin Camp group at Emerald. All groups were amenable to education and therefore I did not involve law enforcement. Happily, the three UC Santa Cruz groups were in complete food storage compliance this year! I encountered all of them in the Lakes area (on separate occasions) and they proudly showed me their bear canisters. The Pomona college groups, on the other hand, have not learned from last season. Both groups of 14 hiked together on the HST and then stayed together at Hamilton Lake! They received multiple warnings from myself (on Alta), 9-2-31 (at Hamilton), and 6-1-16 (on HST). They should be implicitly warned next season when they pick up their permits. Last season, both groups stayed at Mehrten Creek together, straying from their respective permits.

**b. Law Enforcement**

Law Enforcement was contacted once this season for a food storage violation at Mehrten Meadow. There were plenty of issues that arose throughout the summer, but I felt that they were handled effectively through education. I believe the area was successfully covered, even though I am a non-commissioned ranger.

**c. Search & Rescue, Medicals**

It was a busy year for SARs! In addition to those listed below, I was called out for 2 more (b) (6) that resolved before I could be flown. In terms of medicals, the Lakes area was quiet. There was one sprained ankle at Pear, but the individual refused medical attention and hiked out with assistance from his friends.

Date	Location	Type	Evacuation
06/13/12	Crystal Cave SAR	Missing researchers	Walked them out
07/04/12	Heather SAR	Missing couple	Self-rescue
07/22/12	Alta Mdw SAR	Resp. Issue	Self-rescue/Assist to trailhead
07/23/12	Tokopah SAR	Open fracture, Ankle	Litter/Ambulance
07/29/12	Bearpaw (Buck Creek) SAR	SPOT activation/sprained ankle	Heli
08/12/12	Lone Pine SAR	Severe constipation	Self-rescue (symptoms cleared by the time I arrived)



Leaving for the Bearpaw SAR from Pear Station LZ

### C. Use Patterns

On weekends, the Lakes trail tended to see more day hikers than backpackers. The majority of day hikers stopped at the Watchtower or Heather, but there were the more motivated individuals that made it to Pear or beyond. Pear was incredibly busy the weekend before 4<sup>th</sup> of July, but use tapered down after that. The final spike in visitation was Labor Day weekend. The Lakes trail was full by 0800 on that Saturday. On the non-holiday weekends, Pear and Emerald would have an average of 5 sites filled per campground and midweek, maybe up to 3

sites per campground. There were sporadically busy days midweek, but overall it felt like a relatively quiet summer.

#### **D. Natural Resources**

##### **a. Research Equipment**

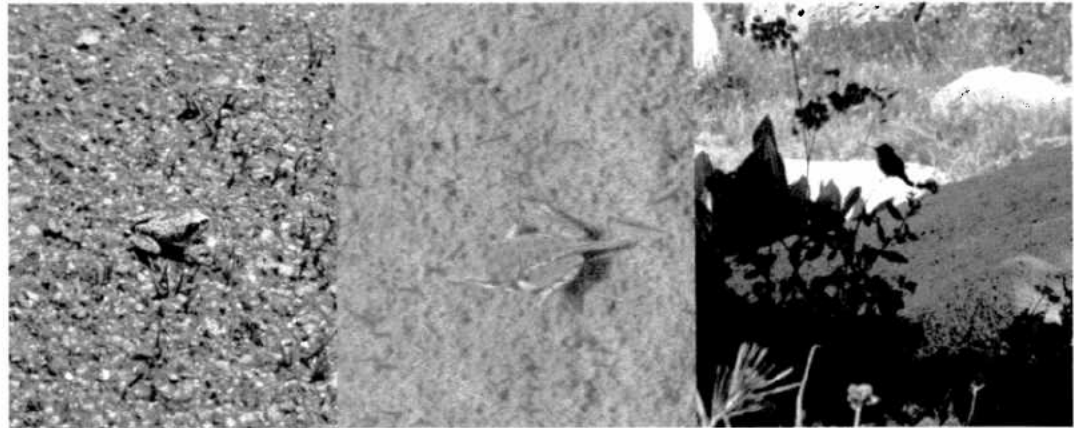
Kevin Skeen, Jim Sickman (UCR), and Mike were here in mid-July to repair the weather station at Topaz Lake. The research equipment at Pear, Emerald, and M3 would occasionally inspire questions from visitors, but I believe the researchers have done their best to make the equipment as unobtrusive as possible.

##### **b. Bear Activity**

There were quite a few bears on the Lakes trail this season! The majority of the activity was centered around the Lakes/Alta junction, Emerald Lake, and the Wolverton trailhead, with no sightings at Pear or Aster. A cinnamon yearling was particularly active around the lower Watchtower/Hump junction until August. A group of visitors did report seeing a large bear above Moose Lake in early July.

##### **c. Wildlife**

I saw many pikas, coyotes, rufous hummingbirds, and Clark's nutcrackers this season! The aforementioned birds were especially abundant around the station until late-July. The marmots were active as ever! I even came across a few dragging items out of a backpack at Emerald. There were the occasional reports of marmots damaging hiker equipment, but nothing significant. I saw two golden eagles on multiple occasions, circling above Topaz Lake and Silliman Crest. The most exciting find (for me) was the Pacific Chorus Frogs in the Tablelands! I found these small frogs in six tarns scattered around the Tablelands.



Pacific Chorus Frog grey form and green form

Hummingbird on Lakes trail

## E. Cultural Resources

No relevant cultural resources were noted this season.

## F. Backcountry Facilities

### a. Pear Lake Hut

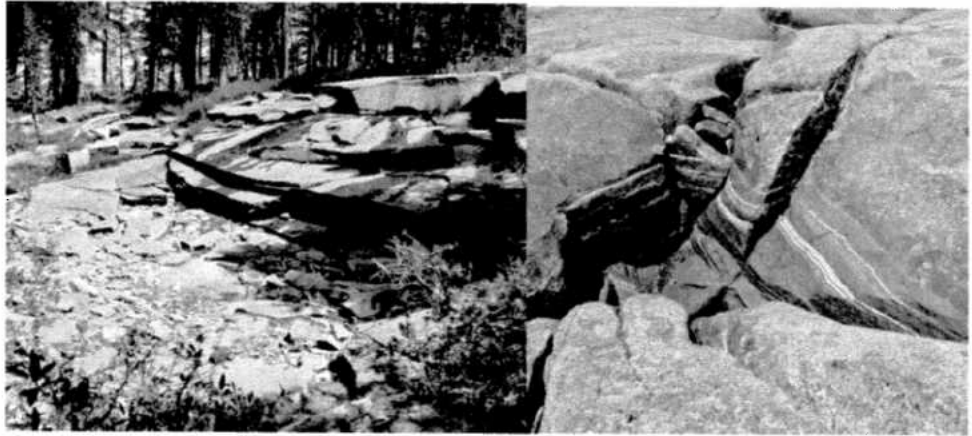
#### i. Solar

The solar system at the station was not functioning optimally this season. The problem began last year, but to my knowledge no one checked on the system, despite multiple requests from the previous ranger. It seemed to function slightly better than last season in that it did not continuously remain at yellow, but it never collected more than 4.5 amps on a sunny day. It could be that the panels are wearing out or that there is something amiss with the wiring. The heavy rains cleared the panels of pollen in August, but this did not improve functionality.

#### ii. Misc

The cabin is in beautiful condition! The roof and additional repairs made in 2009 are holding up well. One of the back windows was broken over the winter and Thor graciously hiked out in mid-June to replace it. The pellet stove is functional, but it groans and whines – it might be something to check out before next season. Additionally, Mike Cole (611) gave me the missing handle for a main level window! The Pear Lake drainage and Marble Fork both ran dry by the first week of August.

Fortunately I began collecting water early in season and found a supply of cubies in the attic to supplement my dwindling supply.



Pool behind the station in August

The very dry Marble Fork

#### **b. Phoenix Composting Toilets**

The Emerald toilet is in DESPERATE need of its solar system. By July, the toilets were so overwhelmed with flies that visitors stopped using them consistently. Instead, they did their business very close to the latrines, strewing toilet paper and feces all around the perimeter. It is unsanitary and fixing the panels should be a high priority for next season. Both latrines attracted much garbage and required maintenance at least once a week, if not more during busy weekends. They do remain a nice addition to the trail, keeping the level of toilet paper lower than it might be otherwise. I received many compliments on the latrines by both day hikers and backpackers (and complaints about the Emerald toilet flies July-September). The cleaning supplies (mops, brooms) were consumed by mice/rats over the winter – it may make a difference if these were bagged and placed in containers. There was also a dead marten or weasel in the lower level of the Emerald latrine. I am still not sure how it got in, but it died in the space between the two toilet accesses. There are obvious marmot holes surrounding the latrines – perhaps it entered through one of these and then became trapped. On the subject of latrines - midseason, I was happy to eradicate the graffiti on the door in the Emerald latrines that has been

there since 2008. I am waiting on white paint to finish the project as the person also painted the wall.



Broken panels at Emerald



Graffiti in the Emerald latrine

## G. Trails

### a. Trail Work

Frontcountry trail crew created a beautiful new trailhead at Wolverton! The old stairs were removed and new, gently graded stairs were built. They also shifted the trailhead bear boxes to one side and closer to the parking lot, rehabbed the use trails, and reworked the first mile of trail. Frontcountry and Kaweah crews logged the Lakes and Alta trails in early June, making life easier during the summer onslaught of hikers!



A new look for the Wolverton Trailhead!

### b. Trailhead Signs

A new trailhead sign for Wolverton was installed last season and does not need improvement.

**c. Trail Signs**

At the beginning of season, I ordered two new birdhouse signs for the campgrounds as they were in pitiful shape. The sign shop made beautiful new signs that were brought in with the bear boxes in late September. These will need to be installed next season and are currently stored in the station for winter. In late September, 6-1-15, 757-Benjamin, and myself installed a new sign at the lower Hump/Watchtower junction. We set it in crushed rock and stabilized it with large rocks, so the sign should remain in place for a long time. It is rather large and a bit of an eyesore, but will be useful for winter closing of the Watchtower.

We need another trail sign that indicates no camping and no fires at Heather. As the previous ranger noted, the Heather Lake sign should be moved or another one should be installed closer to the actual lake. I have suggested that once the new campground signs are installed, the old Emerald board should be moved to Heather (near the Pear/Emerald sign). I have made a map and welcome sign for Heather in anticipation of this move next season. It would also be beneficial to have a sign at Emerald stating "Pear Lake Ranger Station" with an arrow above the Pear Lake arrow sign. As for the Alta trail – it would be incredibly useful if we could install a "No Fires" sign at Alta Meadow. This would eliminate the confusion people consistently have regarding fire regulations at Alta Meadow. The Lakes trail would also benefit from a "No Fires Beyond this Point" sign, perhaps located at the upper Hump/Watchtower junction. This would emphasize to all hiking through that the Lakes area and Tablelands are off-limits for campfires.

**H. Camp Areas**

**a. Area Overview**

The Lakes area is a very popular destination for day hikers and backpackers alike. There was rarely a day on the trail that I did not encounter a mix of new backpackers along with the incredibly

experienced. This creates some interesting discussions – the new backpackers tend to find the toilets, bear boxes, and numbered sites helpful and welcoming. The more experienced backpackers sometimes look on with disgust at the toilets and are frustrated with the campsite limitations. This area draws so much use that I believe the aforementioned structures and regulations are a necessity. The day hikers alone could destroy this area with toilet paper and feces if it weren't for the toilets. Now if we could just create a new toilet for Heather Lake...

**b. Conditions**

**i. Lakes Trail**

The trail was in great condition thanks to trail crew! The only glaring imperfection on this trail is at the top of the Hump. This portion of the trail, especially coming up from Heather, is poorly defined. It fades into the rocks, prompting many a confused use trail. I attempted to clarify the trail with carefully placed rocks and branches, but trail crew will be capable of defining it in a more permanent manner.

As for the campgrounds, I replaced all of the campsite signs in early July. Most of them were faded or shattered – the carsonite is not a winter-friendly material. I also permanently relocated site 5 at Pear and rehabbed old site 5. There were a number of illegal sites at both campgrounds, but with the help of trailhead, we were able to plant very large rocks and branches. Early in season, I created signs for the campgrounds including: applicable min. impact practices, fishing regulations, and campground maps.





**New carsonite posts for the campgrounds!**

## **ii. Alta Trail**

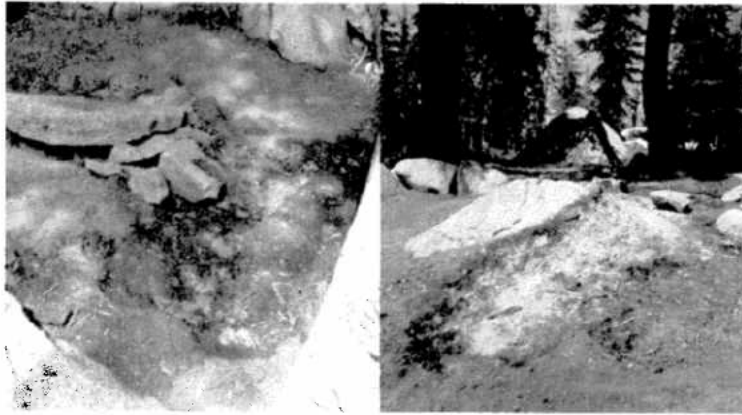
Alta was in great shape this season, with the exception of the notorious muddy area 1/2mi east of Panther Gap. This area has been problematic for years and has never been addressed (see photo below). The trailhead rangers were on the trail multiple times a pay period and between all of us, the camping areas looked great. Mehrten Meadow was heavily used this season, and seems to draw in backpackers who break the rules. Panther Gap was also in high use this year, but I encountered no problems with the backpackers using that camping area. The trail to the peak and meadow are in great shape. Interestingly, the loop from Alta Meadow to Moose was rather busy this year. I have to wonder if it was recommended on a blog, because many inexperienced backpackers came to Pear wanting to follow cairns to Alta Meadow! They were rather disappointed when I informed them of my destruction of cairns along that route. In fact, a SAR and a near-SAR both originated from that loop due to inexperience and poor decisions amongst backpackers.



**Bad spot on the Alta trail - 1/2 E of Panther Gap**

**c. Fire**

The majority of the fire rings I destroyed early in season appeared to be left over from winter (in the case of the Lakes trail, especially on the Hump). There were some particularly large fire rings left at Emerald and had probably been used multiple times before my season began. The most unusual location for illegal rings was the Watchtower trail! Just above the switchbacks, in line with the Watchtower, I discovered 3 large rings centered in the trail and approximately 1ft apart from each other. Unfortunately I never could find the guilty party. Sadly, there was also a remarkable increase in illegal rings on the Lakes trail during a cold spell in September. Additionally, I destroyed a few fire rings at Alta Meadow, around the Tablelands, Big Bird Lake, and at Hamilton Lake. Where fires were allowed, I rebuilt rings, usually decreasing their size and stabilizing the rocks comprising the ring. Sadly, there was an incident where an illegal fire ring spread into a surrounding area! This was called the Heather Fire, although it was about 2/10<sup>th</sup> mi SW of the top of the Hump. 52-Bravo and 2 members of crew 91 flew in and took care of this smoldering fire in about 3 hours. See photos below. It was originally reported by visitors to Ash Mountain Fire. I overheard the radio traffic and myself, 616, and 6-1-16 (they were visiting on lieu days) found the fire the next day.



The fire on the Hump: illegal ring; auxiliary fire

#### d. Food Storage

The food storage lockers are essential on the Lakes trail! If backpackers were in the campgrounds, the lockers were inevitably in use. However, I did encounter food storage violations in the Tablelands and on the Alta trail more frequently than I would have hoped. (b) (5)

(b) (5)

There is

no effective way to store food in that area other than a canister – people believe they will be able to easily find a tree or rock that will suffice, but that is simply not true. There are plenty of bears in the area along with coyotes and marmots – we need prioritize the health of the wildlife and create a canister requirement! The Alta trail is also in need of food storage lockers. I encountered many food storage issues this season with different groups, enough to warrant this suggestion: place a bear box at Mehrten Meadow. It would be great for those inexperienced backpackers that frequent the camp and being so close to the Alta junction, visitors could safely store their food while they visited the peak. If we are going to keep food lockers in the wilderness, then we should be consistent and place them in areas of high use/need.

In late September, trail crew arrived with two new food storage lockers! The lockers were in horrendous condition all season, as they were consistently filled with dead mice (backpackers killed them) and did not close properly. Unfortunately, because I was pulled away to assist with the

Bearpaw closing, I missed speaking with trail crew when they arrived with the lockers. This led to both new lockers being placed at Pear instead of one at each campground. Now there are 4 lockers at Pear, 3 of them clustered near the latrines! Hopefully next season these new lockers can be moved to a more useful location and the old locker can be taken out.



Crushed mouse in the lower Pear bear box

## **I. Permit System and Trailhead**

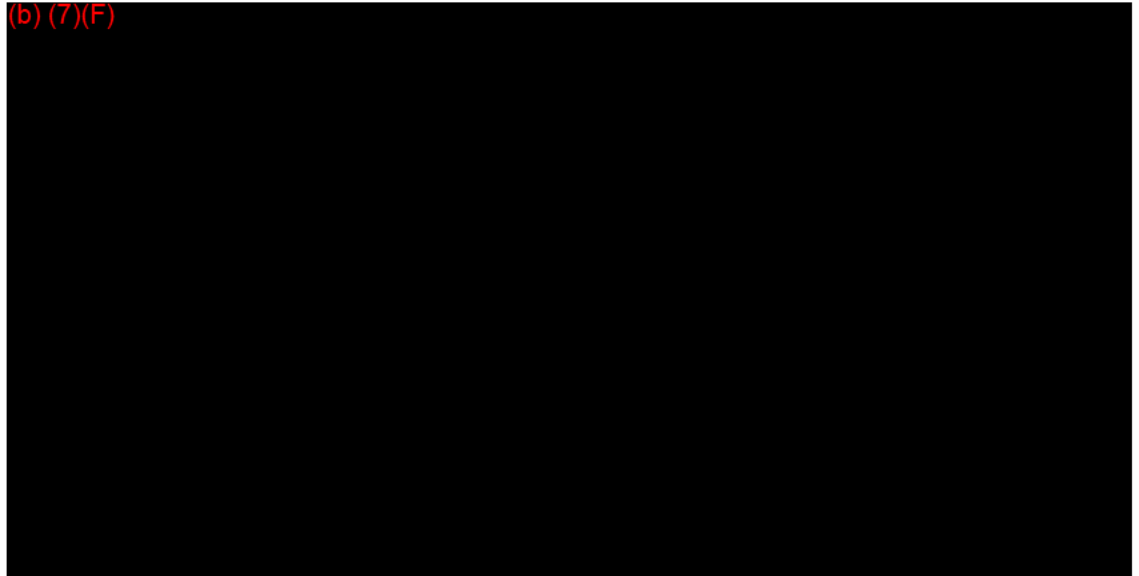
The majority of the backpackers left from Wolverton after obtaining a permit from Lodgepole Trailhead Desk. The permit system worked well this season as I only observed one night in which Pear was overfull while Emerald was empty. Communication with the trailhead rangers was fairly strong. It was often a challenge to contact them through the radio, likely because the VC is a loud place and would drown out the base station. I met with each trailhead ranger early in season to discuss communication and after that, I began to receive relevant notifications consistently. I appreciated their help with a number of projects, including rehab of some illegal sites at Pear and Emerald. They did a wonderful job educating visitors about rules and regulations! I am happy to say that all three of them made it out to the Lakes area so we could discuss area issues, routes, etc.



6-1-15 assisting with rehab at Emerald 6-1-7 and 6-1-16 ready for the hike

#### J. Radio Communications

(b) (7)(F)



#### K. Needs for Next Year

- New solar panels + system setup for Emerald latrine
- 2 full propane tanks
- 6 bags of woodchips
- Forms:
  - Comment Forms
  - BIMS
  - Lost Person Reports
- Duct tape
- Thumbtacks

- Paper towels
- Clorox wipes
- Self-adhesive shelf lining
- Dark green paint for carsonite posts
- Black paint for latrines+posts
- New cartridge for the Katadyn ProHiker filter

#### L. Recommendations

- Replace Emerald Solar system!
- Move the new Pear lockers to ideal locations and cut out the old one
- Install new birdhouse signs at the campground
- (b) (5)
- 
- Repaint interior of Emerald toilets (once paint arrives)
- Install a bear box at Mehrten Meadow
- (b) (5)

#### M. Relevant Inventory

- 2 full propane canisters
- All of the EMS equipment from last year is still intact
- Cabin supplies (dishes, pots, pans, etc)
- Ordered for next season via 613:
  - White paint for bathroom interior
  - Paintbrushes
  - 3 mops – 1 for each phoenix and 1 new mop head for the station
  - 1 broom for Emerald latrine



## 2012 Roaring River Wilderness Ranger End of Season Report

From: Cindy Wood, Roaring River Ranger

Through: Tom Parrack, Grant Grove Sub-district Ranger

Read and approved: --Signed-- Date: 11-15-12

Through: Ned Kelleher, Kings Canyon District Ranger

Read and approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To: Gregg Fauth, Wilderness Coordinator

Read and approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ROARING RIVER RANGER STATION

### END OF SEASON REPORT 2012

#### A. GENERAL SUMMARY

I was on duty at Roaring River Ranger Station from 7-5-12 to 9-29-12. During the season I patrolled 770 miles of trail. I patrolled 650 miles on stock and 120 miles on foot. I contacted 960 people during the season.

#### B. VISITOR SERVICES

##### a. Contacts

- i. 485 Backpackers
- ii. 245 Day Hikers
- iii. 135 NPS & USFS
- iv. 4 Hunters
- v. 19 NPS Stock Users with 116 head of stock, 30 Private Stock Users with 52 head of stock, 22 Commercial Stock users with 55 head of stock and 20 Day Riders with 25 head of stock.

##### b. Law Enforcement

Educational contacts were made concerning food storage, camping and grazing regulations.

##### c. Citations - None were issued this season.

##### d. Search, Rescue, Medical Incidents

Date	Location	Type	Evacuation
7-9-12	GG-Azalea CG	Hand/Wrist Injury	AMA
7-9-12	GG-S. of "Y"	MVA/Hand Injury	Ambulance Evac
7-29-12	Seville Lake	Kidney Stones/ ?	Helicopter Evac./411
8-18-12	Sequoia Lk Curve	MVA/Pregnant	Ambulance Evac
8-19-12	Lookout Peak	Altered Runner	Ambulance Evac
9-18-12	Dusy Switchbacks	Mule Wreck (14 Stock)	Evacuated Stock with 557

##### e. Fatalities

None

##### f. Weather

It was a very dry winter and summer. Roaring River was extremely low and most small creeks dried up before the end of August. Sugarloaf and Ferguson Creeks barely moved in September. In early July, most snow was melted off of Colby and Elizabeth passes. There was a huge rainstorm on Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, it rained about 1 ½ inches in 2 hours at the Roaring River Ranger Station, but it was limited to within ½ mile of the station.



## B. USE PATTERNS

### a. Backpackers

I thought with the dry weather and lack of snow, that there would be a big increase in early use, but there was not. There was slow steady use in July, and August with more use in September.

### b. Stock

Use by Commercial and Private groups was very low this year. Horse Corral Pack Station and Cedar Grove Pack Station said that the people who wanted to book longer trips last winter did not want to wait to see if their trips would be cancelled due to the possibility of no Commercial stock during the summer. It seems that most full service, longer trips are planned for and booked a year or more in advance. Horse Corral Pack Station also had very few or no resupplies to the Roaring River area, these are often for BSA, Fall School Groups or Nols etc. Many of these groups also make plans a year or more in advance.....or is it just the economy?

Administrative stock use for the trail crew was different this year. They sent a 2 person team in early to log the area trails in just a few days with minimal grazing. Then, the regular crew didn't move into the area until August. They spent little time in the Lakes or Comanche area, but moved right to the station area for 2 ½ weeks then to Ranger Meadow for 3 weeks, then back to the station for 1 week and out.

Many NPS employees hiked through the area this season. Most left me notes, as I was often out of the area to reduce area grazing or to do special projects in other areas.

NPS Rider training was conducted in the Grant Grove area for 3 employees on local trails, Erin Warrem, Pete Sawtell and Darren Riccio. Jim Gould from Grant Grove, Sandy Graben from Ash Mtn. and Erik Frenzel from Ash Mtn. came into Roaring River for training. I spent a week at Cedar Grove, to get there without the use of a truck and horse trailer, myself and Darren Riccio from Grant Grove rode down the old Forest Service logging route (Rex's Route) to get to the Don Cecil trail near Lookout Point to drop down to Cedar Grove. Since the Sheep Creek fire this trail has become much narrower with many burnt low leaning trees and other obstacles. Since the bridge at the Lodge is still out, we thought we would be taking the long way around via the road to get to the corrals. But the Kings River was extremely low and the stock could tell/smell the stock at the pack station and we were able to easily ride them across the Kings River from behind the Ranger Office. During the next week I combined horse training for 1 rider, Brian Singletary, on the flat trail to Roads End and a refresher for another rider, Phil Johnson, while enroute to do a resupply and take gear to Granite Basin and the Monarch Station. I packed out trash and old propane tanks and took another rider, Russell Weaver, back on the flat route. The trip to the Paradise Cache combined 2 riders, Mary Ann Dowd-Sussman and Jeffrey Sussman,(Suss) and the packing of gear and supplies to the cache. Mary Ann hiked out from Paradise Falls. The next day Suss and I continued to ride from the Paradise Cache to Castle Domes, where we viewed the recent fire and current hot spots and

fence damage/destruction. We rode back to the Cache and Suss continued on his own project work while I packed out an old propane tank and misc. trash. I packed my gear and two full tanks of propane back up the Don Cecil trail and back to the govt. corral at Sweeney Swamp. This time when I tried to take the horses across the Kings River.....they wanted nothing to do with it and I felt it safer to back off and ride the long route to the other bridge and through campgrounds to get to the trail head. Many campers enjoyed seeing the stock and pack animals.

Resource people came into Roaring River to check meadows and vegetation plots. A group checked vegetation on a fire project in the Sugarloaf area.

The Historic Preservation Crew came to the area to do work in September.

#### c. Commercial

It was unusual that I met very few commercial hiking groups, I don't know if I missed seeing them, as I was often out of the area, or if there was a drop in their use overall in the Parks or just in Roaring River area. The Sequoia High Sierra Camp seemed to have a regular or busier season this year with most hiking use going to Mitchell Peak and Seville Lake.

### C. NATURAL RESOURCES

#### a. Bear Activity

Bear sightings were common around the station and lower in both canyons during the summer. A lot more sightings than usual. One yearling "leggy" bear tried to walk into the Ranger Station, apparently liking the cooking smells of dinner. It was difficult for 2 of us to chase him off and he kept stopping and wanting to come back. This chasing and tossing small rocks continued whenever we saw him. I did bear incident reports and was able to get advice and hazing equipment from Danny Gammons. I ended up hazing him once more with a sling shot, all backpackers and trail crew were told to be extra careful with food storage and to yell and make him run if they saw the bear. After he cleared out the hornet nest that was attached to a down log in the backpacker camp a few times.....it was not rebuilt and he got no backpacker food.....and he seemed to move out of the area.

#### b. Wildlife

There seem to be fewer deer in the Roaring River area. A porcupine was seen near Grand Palace Meadow in September. A Pica was seen below Ranger Meadow in a rock pile area in late August. A lot of bears were observed during the season.

#### c. Vegetation

Aspen leaves in the fall had a very shiny, sticky, sweet smelling substance on the leaves. This occurred to green and turning leaves. This was something I had not noticed before and do not know if it is of concern.

Meadows were very dry this year. In July...most meadows seemed to be hitting their normal September dryness and were slower growing and had put out seeds very early.

I took several steps to curtail my own grazing this year. I dropped one animal to minimize my grazing numbers. I also rode out of the area if I was supposed to take two days off, which was most of the season. Thus, the stock would eat hay at Sweeney Swamp instead of grazing. I also tried to supplement with alfalfa pellets as much as possible. My two horses started out very thin and under fed, so I supplemented with COB/senior pellets both AM and PM if they were used that day. I tied and fed when appropriate. I also left the area to do other work and keep the stock out of Roaring River.

After seeing the meadows after some grazing and being much more aware of animal grazing nights, and what changes grazing has as it happens, I think the limits are very low. I am curious to see what the meadow monitoring shows. I will do some field assessment reports, now that I understand what they are. The meadow growth time was short this dry summer compared to other dry, normal or wet summers, but I still think the meadows can handle higher night use limits and I think many areas have more acres of grazing than are what are shown in the charts. Scaffold, for instance, may have an additional 5 to 10 acres that is on hillsides that my stock uses, or that they go into in the fall when those areas are dryer. Visitor stock may stay in the center of the main meadow, but experienced backcountry stock and NPS stock, look for and use the stringer meadows and open dry grasses in the area and know to move around or spend the night up in the warmer trees and then drop down to small areas when the sun is up. I also need to know more about the "percentage of meadow used" in the charts, this would also change the numbers quite a bit. It was a low stock use year, so if you added more trail crew use to scaffold, private or commercial on normal use patterns.....then I would have been out of grazing nights and either had to stay out of the area, or tied and fed pellets often at the station...which caused damage at the hitch rail and possible colic of animals if it happens too often. A separate holding area, large enough to let them eat pellets, drink water and have walking space would be great, it would be safer for the stock and keep more grazing or partially grazing/pellet use off JR Pasture or other meadows. It would be essential if pellets were going to be a regular routine in the future.

Bull Thistle Plants, 30 to 40, were found in the fall. After dropping the Moraine Ridge Drift Fence, I walked up through the meadow, along side Roaring River. I found 1 old campsite that I didn't know about and then I continued along the river where the springs near the "hilltop camp" run down the steep hillside and join Roaring River. On a normal year this is too wet and boggy to want to hike through. This year with the river low and most areas extra dry, I decided to hike along the river and found the plants. Most were already dead with the fluffy seeds on the ground or falling towards the river. Some were green with purple tops. There were 3 locations of plants within a hundred foot zone. I marked the area with cairns at each location and later, hiked over from the trail and took photos and put two cairns and a wood arrow in case Richard Thiel wanted to send in any crews this fall, as this is an area that they worked hard in the past to remove all Bull Thistle. The plants being so close to the water, 10 feet up in low water year, is a concern for shipping seeds down river.

## D. CULTURAL RESOURCES

### a. Prehistoric Sites

No new sites were found. Known sites were checked and no changes were found.

### b. Historic Sites

A large, 6 ft. diameter, snag fell on the Snow Survey Cabin. I discovered it on 8-20-12 when I rode back into Roaring River. I took photos and Thor checked it later in the summer. The Shorty Lovelace cabin in Cloud Canyon was much worse this spring with most of the front shakes gone and 2 big holes in the back roof. I think a bear broke most of them out while he was on the inside of the cabin.

In September, The Historic Preservation Crew, consisting of Thor, Woodrow, Brooks, Chris and their packer Sonny came in to Roaring River. They cleared the Lackey Cabin Roof of piles of pine needles. They replaced some shakes, caulked cracks in logs and put preservatives on the cabin. They also dug out the dirt that had been washed down the hill and had filled up against the back sill log and into the interior of the cabin, rotting the legs of the tool bench. They hauled this out and filled in at the hitch rails and also hauled out old moldy hay from last year and we burned this outside of the pasture, to decrease the chance of any seeds from the hay going into the pasture area. They dug down around the upright posts that support the porch, to keep them from rotting. They later came back and put on more preservative.

They next worked on the Cloud Canyon, Shorty's Cabin. There was much more to do than they had planned on and the shakes were harder to make than expected. I assisted with packing gear after their packer went out and bringing more tools from the station and the trail crew cache. While part of the crew worked on making enough shakes, not to just replace the expected few that were gone, but for the entire roof, the others worked on digging out the sill logs, replacing sill logs and header logs as needed and prying up the structure to replace these key logs, putting it all back together, fixing the bed, shelves and rack, putting on the roof shakes, putting on the preservative, raking out and naturalizing the area. I packed their camp and gear back to the station and they hiked back.

Next, I packed their gear out to Grant Grove to meet Sonny who would pack it to them at Vidette Meadow the next day. Meanwhile, after they did more preservative on Lackey Cabin, they hiked up Avalanche Pass trail with their backpack gear and the station chainsaw and worked on the Moraine Ridge Shorty's Cabin. They cut off the tree that fell on it a few years ago and possibly another tree...? They cleared the debris of logs that had been the "front wall and doorway" before the tree had hit the back of the cabin and caused the front wall to fall outward. They fixed the broken rafter that also caused the back wall, shelf, roof and fireplace to collapse. I hope they can do more stabilization to this cabin in the future. The shed roof had 2 layers....and is now down to one or none in some places. Thanks for a lot of great work!!!!

### Basque Sheep Herder Carvings/Arborglyphs

I am trying to find new carvings and get photos of all known local tree carvings. Also GPS locations in case of fire, etc. I have read that Yosemite also has carving on lodgepole like we do. Does anyone have more information on this? Is there a study or info we can get from Yosemite? Most info from the Reno website has east side carvings on Aspens and they are dated around 1930's. Our carvings are on lodgepoles, at higher elevation and have dates from the 1880's and 1890's. We may also have carving on aspens. But, these trees are falling or rotting and the information and art are being lost. I would like the museum or park or someone to get me the items I would need to do "rubblings" of these carvings before they are lost. The University of Reno's website mentions Rice Paper and some material, possibly charcoal, to use to make the rubblings. This would be a great project for next year.

## E. BACKCOUNTRY FACILITIES

### a. Ranger Station

No one came into the station uninvited over the winter, this may be due to me putting a lock on the one window shutter. One tree fell in the back yard, but it only hit the fire pit and did no other damage. The solar batteries were dead after the last few years of it being left at red. The low water made setting up the water system easier.

David Karplus came in mid season and checked and measured things at the station. Later, Phil Gross came in to add a siphon pump and valves to the water system intake area. He also put in a new charge controller to replace the faulty two that were there. The new one will be large enough to handle all three panels, the system got new wire and snap connections at the panels, so they can be carried separately and more safely out to the "rock". He also built a wooden vent, 2 inches above the refrigerator vent. This is supposed to take any bad air or gases out of the 2x5 wooden vent box to a small hole to the outside. I am just concerned that this may inhibit the flow and cause soot to build up and problems like the direct added vent pipe did in the past. I will monitor it closely next summer. The refrigerator was not sooty in the spring and ran fine all summer before this was added.

Phil said the siphon pump was attached solid to the line and that it would be best for me to pack in an old trash can and use it to cover the plastic siphon pump in winter to protect from snow and in summer to protect it from sun damage. Thanks to Ned Aldrich for the hard to locate can. I packed it in, painted it, packed it to the water system (thanks Rosy!) and put it over the set up.....and it was too short.....but I took off the black gizmo and put in a few rocks and it will work for the winter. Next summer, it should have a more permanent fix...Thanks for all the great work!!!

The water system still needs 1 or 2 screened draft intakes, one for the main line and one for the shorter temporary spring line.

Kings Packer (b) (6) and (b) (6) packed in "screw" together bear boxes. They replaced the smashed bear box at Ranger Lake and cut up and packed out the old box. They also replaced the back (west) bear box at Seville Lake. The new boxes are very light and have

plastic knobs. It will be interesting to see how they survive the winter. They are not as strong looking as the “bolt” together boxes the trail crew uses. If they are tweaked, the smooth plastic knobs make them difficult to open. The one at Ranger Lake has already become difficult to open and visitors may try to pry them open with some tool and cause further damage. Our current boxes have outside chains that can be pulled on if the box is tweaked due to snow damage. Regardless, they are better than not having anything. Thanks for the replacements!! And the work of hauling and installing!! There are photos of (b) (6) packing out the cut box and of packing in the new ones in my photo log. (b) (6) and mules were proud of the work.

#### b. Signs

There should be a “Ranger Station” sign added to the Avalanche Pass/Cloud Cyn Junction sign. I was told by many people this year that they did not realize that the station was 200 yards across the bridge.

The Forest Service Marvin Pass sign is still missing from Rowell Meadow and the Mitchell Peak sign is still missing. The people from the Sequoia High Sierra Camp have been blocking the main trail with big rocks, which I tear out, or they block it with limbs and put big cairns on the Mitchell Peak trail, which I tear out, or they put stick and orange flagging across the main trail, which I tear out.....this is because of the missing sign. It has caused trouble for many backpackers trying to get to Kanayer Gap and Roaring River who get lost and end up at Mitchell Peak. The other missing sign caused backpackers to miss the junction to Marvin Pass or to Seville Lake.

Grant Grove Trail head signs and trail signs are still needed.

#### F. TRAILS

a. I had the stock at the Grant Grove Stable in the spring and was able to ride some of the local trails and do some rider training. I was unable to ride Redwood Canyon, as a prescribed fire was burning. The late delivery of health stock also limited the amount of horse patrol in the Grant Grove area.

Grant Grove trails need better or replaced signs. There was some trail work done, but many trails still have numerous down logs and trouble spots at creek crossings or exposed culverts on old road sections. The Don Cecil trail needs work. Since the fire, a lot of the top section of trail has sloughed and it leaves a 1 foot wide trail with a crumbling edge and the stock break that off. There is a large log ¼ mile down from the top of the trail that is cut out too narrow for a pack animal to pass through. It also is in a bad slough area and stock can not go above or below it. There are also many burnt leaning trees and low hanging trees to rip you out of the saddle and a few uncut downed logs through the fire zone.

The trails in Roaring River area are mostly in good condition. There was a lighter winter and a lot fewer downed trees. However, most trees that fell seemed to hit fences.

## B. Problem Areas

**Drift Fences and Gates**.....they all need work. Most fences have many trees across them and need posts replaced and drop posts fixed. Many gates need rebuilt or uprights replaced. I rebuilt the Grasshopper H brace and Gate this spring and some posts.

**JR Pasture** - The fence needs to be repaired if not rebuilt. I cleared trees off the fence at the front gate and rebuild a section of fence and replace the posts on the entire east side, but there still are trees on the west end and north side that need to be cleared and sections rebuilt. This has been problematic and resulted in me losing more than half my grazing allotment there after the trail crew stock broke in on three different occasions this summer.

**Sugarloaf** – The fence needs a lot of posts added and the Sugarloaf hitch rail needs a new top rail put on the three good posts that I replaced a few years ago.

**Cement Table Camp** - The hitch rail at Cement Table Camp needs to be rebuilt.

**Lackey Pasture** – The fence needs at least 16 posts replaced and the gate needs rebuilt.

## C. Camp Areas

### a. Conditions

I completed a general clean up of most camps during the season. Seville and Lost Lake need a week of work to reduce fire ring size, take out the added huge rock and to scatter ashes and to obliterate some added rings.

b. Sanitation - The 2 pit toilets in the area could use new seats.

c. Fire Rings – 25 campfire pits were cleaned this season and 2 were obliterated.

d. Firewood Availability - Good

e. Food Storage – Two damaged boxes were replaced, one at Ranger Lake and one at the back,/west end of Seville Lake.

## H. PERMIT SYSTEM

### a. Trail heads

Most people had NPS permits from Lodgepole, Grant Grove and Cedar Grove and they were well informed. The stock people get less information about grazing or area specific information.

### b. Issuing Office

All were NPS permits and well informed, some stock groups were less informed.

## I. COMMUNICATIONS

(b) (7)(F)

[REDACTED]

(b) (7)(F), (b) (5)

#### J. NEEDS FOR NEXT YEAR

NPS STOCK: I need 2 – 3 good solid trail experienced lead horses or riding mules. They need to be ready to lead a string, carry beginner riders or injured people, be good and steady on rough trail, slick rock and on cross country routes and routes with lots of exposure like Colby and Elizabeth Passes

Also, stock needs to be trimmed and checked during the winter for safety. They need to have been shod for a couple of weeks before they are delivered to protect their feet or in case they are trimmed too short or quicked by a nail, it gives them a chance to heal before use.

Thanks to the corrals for delivering Hay along with the stock this year, this really helped. I did need to borrow hay from Horse Corral Pack Station at the end of the season and made arrangement for them to be resupplied. I hope that was done.

See Attached Warehouse Wish List

#### CONCERNS REGARDING ASSIGNED STOCK

At the beginning of the season, Red and Dudley were both very thin and emaciated. A week before they were to be delivered to Grant Grove I checked on them and they had yet to be shod. Even the mules were a lot thinner than normal in the spring.

At the last minute it was discovered that Red had a tooth infection. I offered to finish caretaking him, but he was not delivered with the rest of the stock. I informed the corrals I needed him for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade in Grant Grove or at least a replacement, but by the 3<sup>rd</sup> he had not arrived. I had not been notified and we were 1 horse short and District Ranger Ned Kelleher was not able to ride in the parade as planned. When I contacted the corrals, I was told that Red had lost even more weight, (a hundred lbs!), and they didn't want him seen in a parade. Okay, so why didn't I get a replacement delivered?

I also had loaned Mac to Kings Trails, because they were short of animals. Thus, I had to pack into Roaring River without Red, my main horse, and fewer pack stock. It also made horse training more difficult as Mac is not a lead horse and is more unpredictable than even Dudley. Dudley is still not my pick for a trail horse. He still falls a lot on rocky



terrain and definitely on slick rock!! When Red was finally delivered, he was extremely skinny and he was still way underweight after spending most of the summer trying to get him to add weight. But he came in tired and thin, while the other stock had been getting into work shape and used to the high elevation, so this made it even harder for Red to adapt. I also did patrols out of Cedar Grove on some new to me trails, which with questionable stock on unknown terrain,(yeah, that's when Dudley fell to his belly in a 100th of a second on slickrock) makes it more dangerous.

I have waited 9 years for a good replacement for Red. I believe it's been 5 years I've waited for a good replacement for Mike. Instead I only get animals which have been rejected by everyone else in the park or animals too young or unhealthy to be safely ridden.

Red is now at least 26 years old and Dudley is not now nor ever will be a trail animal. I requested Ernie for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade because Greg Feltis said they used him in the parade in Bishop and he was a good horse, yet he was not delivered. I also requested him for my main riding horse, but I was told no because he had to be kept available and couldn't go to the backcountry. However, I later learned that he was used in the backcountry by Sequoia Packer Sonny Ward. I would gladly use this horse in the summer and bring him out if he was ever needed.

## K. RECOMMENDATIONS

### Roaring River Ranger Station –

- Bulletin Board in front of Ranger Station needs rebuilt.
- One or two screened draft intakes for water system.
- (b) (5)
- The Ranger Station needs painted
- The flagpole at the station needs repaired/ replanted.
- The fence around the station needs replaced. There are numerous broken posts and rails.
- I need a water trough for use inside the fence at the station.
- Clamp needed for interior stove pipe.
- Check/Clean/Adjust refrigerator. (Thanks for cleaning the Stove Pipe and stove!!)
- The window screens at the station are ¼ to ½ inch too short and allow all sort of insects and rodents into the station. They need rebuilt or refitted.

Grant Grove Trail head “road” signs and trail signs.

Small bulletin boards for the 3 lakes

Need 2 chains (10 – 15 foot long each) to chain new light bear boxes to trees. (Ranger & Seville) Need 2 locks or bolts to connect them.

Need help from Trail Crew, VIPS or possible Backcountry Horsemen on Fence work and Hitch rail repair replacement.

## L. PERTINENT INVENTORY

1 ½ can horse feed/ sweet and dry cob mix  
1 can Alfalfa Pellets and 2 Bags  
0 large Mineral Block  
1 small white salt block  
5 full Propane tanks @ RS and 1 empty, 1 small tank full

3 sm. Fire extinguishers at RS, need to be packed out and recharged

\*\*2 larger fire extinguishers were brought out last year and didn't get recharged or returned

### NPS Warehouse Wish List:

1 doz. D Batteries	4 NPS Radio Batteries !!
1 doz. AA Batteries	1 doz C Batteries
6 9 volt Batteries	6 Orange firefighter note pads
6 Steno Pads	1 Duct Tape
12 Toilet Paper *****	10 Gunny Sacks
1 long extendable pole saw – light fiberglass with good blade (12-15 feet long)	
1 x large Channel Locks for Water System for white pipe repair clamps!! 6 – 8 inch jaws	
2 flat screw drivers	
Clamps, larger for 2 “ plastic pipe repair	
1 doz. spikes 12 to 14 inch for rebuilding hitch rails!!!!!!	

### NPS Corral Wish List

Lead Animals of course!

6 bags dry COB	6 bags Senior Feed
10 Bags Alfalfa Pellets	2 large mineral Block Salt
2 sm mineral camp salt	2 sm white camp salt
1 bottle of Penicillin and needles and syringes for Ranger Station and the same set up for Sweeney Swamp	
2 McFearsons or similar Salve (RS and Sweeney Swamp)	
3 green riding pads and 4 green pack pads	
1 gallon leather oil	
2 new matties	
4-6 old useable halters to keep at station for when unknown stock appears and I need to catch. I had some that were used/borrowed by the Maint. Trip a few years ago and I never got them or the lead ropes back.	

THANK YOU's !

Thanks to Carey at the Heliport and Greg for sending bandages and medicine to the Switchback SAR. Thanks to Kings Packer [b] for flying over and helping with the evacuation of 14 head of stock, many injured, and leading the way over Bishop Pass and holding up his string while I had to get off and cut a lash rope,....then again to get a lead rope from between an unknown mules leg...is this the one that kicks?.....and a third that I don't remember, but I remember the drop off! I think that's when I lost my brass name tag. Thanks to Trail Crew Tim who helped from the ground in many ways and then hiked out ahead in the dark to get us help from Rainbow Pack Station and helpers to unload stock and later to unsaddle and check injured stock etc. Thanks to Cody for keeping the wreck to a minimum and getting animals separated and later holding stock for us at the trail head and pack station and the rainbow packers. Glad it all worked out.

Thanks to the Chief Ranger for the 2 great "Wilderness Ranger" matties. They are great, but now used and in need of a few repairs!

Thanks for another great season, Cindy J. Wood

**MINERAL KING/KERN SUBDISTRICT (Little Five Lakes)**  
**END OF SEASON REPORT**  
**2012**  
**Christina Gooch**



Kaweahs over Long Lake

**A. General Summary**

This season the Little Five Lakes Ranger Station was staffed from June 30 through September 27. Though it was a relatively quiet season incident-wise, there was a steady stream of hikers traveling through the Little Five area, providing ample opportunity for valuable visitor contact and education. I think the number and importance of these contacts is amplified by both the vastness of the Little Five area and the lack of ranger presence in the adjoining, unstaffed Bearpaw and Kern patrol areas.

In addition to covering the Little Five patrol area, I made two week-long patrols into the Kern Canyon and station area, one in mid-July and one in late September. The station was demobilized with NPS stock on September 13, and was taken down on September 17 with the assistance of the Kern and Hockett trail crews. Though this early demobilization and station disassembly posed no major problems, it did render the last couple of weeks somewhat more challenging logistically.

Statistics: (Includes Kern patrol area)

	<b>Visitor Contacts</b>	<b>Miles</b>	<b>EMS</b>	<b>SAR</b>
June/July	103	235	1	0
August	268	218	1	0
September	158	170	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>529</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>

## **B. Visitor Services**

### **a. Contacts**

#### **i. Backpackers (518)**

Nearly all of my contacts this season were backpackers. As the Mineral King trailhead rangers did a thorough job of covering most of the trails within a day's hike from the trailheads, I was able to focus my patrols on the area east of the Mineral King Valley.

#### **ii. Day Hikers (11)**

The only day-hikers I encountered this season were in the Mineral King Valley before mobilizing to Little Five in late June and during a patrol out to Mineral King in early August.

#### **iii. Stock**

- Commerical: 8 people/14 animals total
- Private: 0
- Administrative: 5 people/14 animals total

#### **iv. Groups**

I contacted several organized hiking groups (commercial and non-commercial) staying in and passing through the Little Five area this season, including:

- Outward Bound (1) – passing through the Little Five area as part of a 22 day trip (11 people).
- UC San Diego (2) – first-year orientation groups, one making the loop from Sawtooth to Franklin and the other looping from Franklin to Sawtooth (14 people in each group).
- Boy Scouts of America (3) – at Little Five Lakes (11 people), Big Five Lakes (7 people), and Columbine Lake (13 people).
- Sequoia Natural History Association (1) – at Little Five Lakes (7 people).
- Sierra Club (2) – at Little Five Lakes (3 people) and Big Arroyo Patrol Cabin (7 people).

### **b. Law Enforcement**

I feel that having a non-commissioned ranger at Little Five worked well this season. I encountered very few situations that I felt required a law enforcement officer on scene, and when issues did arise, I was able to communicate with frontcountry law enforcement in Mineral King who were able to make contact with parties if necessary.

The most frequent regulation violations I encountered during the season included camping on vegetation (4), improper food storage (3), lack of wilderness permit (2), and an

illegal fire (1). I also encountered evidence of numerous illegal fires and improper waste disposal, but was unable to make contact with any of the responsible parties.

**c. Citations**

No citations were issued this season, as the few infractions I did encounter were addressed effectively through education.

**d. Search, Rescue, Medical Incidents**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Evacuation/Resolution</u>
6/21	Kern Ranger Station	Medical (Knee Injury)	Helicopter
8/23	Rattlesnake-Kern Jct.	Medical (Gen. Illness)	Helicopter
9/20	Columbine Lake	Medical (Back Injury)	Helicopter

There were no searches in the Little Five area this season. I was, however, involved in a search near Mount Langley on August 24-25.

**e. Fatalities**

There were no fatalities in the Little Five area this season.

**f. Weather**

Due to a dry winter, all trails and high passes in the Little Five area melted out relatively early this season. (Aside from several small patches on the north sides of Glacier Pass and Pyra-Queen Col, I encountered no snow along any of the routes I traveled all season.) The area received a fair amount of precipitation throughout the summer season, however, with long-lasting rain, hail, and thunderstorms nearly every day during several weeks during August and September.

**g. Fires**

There were two lightning-strike fires in the Little Five area this season, the Rattlesnake Fire (started 8/19) and the Willow Fire (started 9/10). Both of these fires were approximately 0.1 acre in size, and neither created significant smoke.

**C. Use Patterns**

**a. Backpackers**

The majority of the backpackers that I contacted this season were hiking in and out of Mineral King along loops over Timber Gap/Blackrock Pass to Sawtooth Pass or Franklin Pass to Sawtooth Pass. The High Sierra Trail corridor through the Big Arroyo and along the Chagoopa Plateau also received a significant amount of traffic. A smaller percentage of the backpackers I encountered were on routes that included Rattlesnake Canyon, Kern Canyon, Redwood and Bearpaw Meadows, or cross-country travel into Nine Lakes Basin, Kaweah Basin, and Picket Guard Creek. I also contacted a number of groups climbing in the Kaweahs.

**b. Stock (commercial and private)**

I encountered no private stock use and very little commercial stock use in the Little Five and Kern areas this season. The Little Five station was mobilized through Charlie

Mills' Pack Station on July 1. Charlie Mills also ran a spot trip into the Big Arroyo in mid-August. While patrolling the Kern Canyon I encountered one group from the Rock Creek Pack Station, and was aware of Golden Trout and Horse Corral Pack Stations also leading trips in the Kern and Rattlesnake areas. It appears that stock use in the Kern Canyon was lower this year than in previous seasons.

**c. Administrative**

Trail crews comprised the majority administrative use in the Little Five area this season. The Hockett Crew (with 12 head of stock) spent 12 nights near the Big Arroyo Patrol Cabin and 14 nights in Lower Lost Canyon. The Kern Crew joined the Hockett Crew east of Long Lake for 12 nights at the end of the season, and continued to graze the stock in Lost Canyon. Stock use totaled 144 nights in Big Arroyo and 197 nights in Lost Canyon. The Kern Crew also spent time in Rattlesnake Canyon early in the season, totaling 53 stock use nights at Cow Camp, and grazed on the Chagoopa Plateau while en route from the Kern to Long Lake, totaling 63 stock use nights in Sky Parlor Meadow.

The Construction Crew spent approximately two months at Sky Parlor Meadow, and were resupplied weekly via helicopter. The Historic Preservation crew was stationed at the Kern Ranger Station for several weeks in July, and were resupplied weekly by NPS stock. A 12-person CCC crew working on velvet-grass removal was also based at the Kern Ranger Station from early July to mid-September.

I also encountered one member of a Fish and Wildlife Service predator tracking crew (Jack Daniel) with 2 head of stock just north of the Kern Ranger Station on September 20. The crew was traveling throughout the Rock Creek, Little Five, and Kern areas throughout much of August and September.

**d. Commercial**

I contacted three commercial hiking groups this season, including one 11-member Outward Bound group in the Little Five Lakes area, and two Sierra Club groups, one with 3 members and one with 7 members, both at the Big Arroyo junction. All groups had valid commercial use permits.

**e. Aircraft**

I witnessed no low-flying aircraft in the Little Five area this season.

**D. Natural Resources**

**a. Bears**

I observed one yearling at Sky Parlor Meadow on August 9, and noted some evidence of bear activity along Rattlesnake Creek. Otherwise I observed very little bear activity in the Little Five area this season, and heard of no problematic bear encounters from hikers. I attribute much of this lack of ursine activity (or visibility, at least) to proper food storage – the great majority of the parties I contacted were carrying bear canisters, while a small percent were relying on bear lockers. Nearly all parties seemed vigilant about storage and maintaining a bear-proof camp. Thanks to the work of the Mineral King trailhead rangers and of previous wilderness rangers in the area, the bears in the Little Five area seem to be staying shy and wild.



### **b. Wildlife**

Coyote activity was high on Chagoopa Plateau, but they were rarely heard or seen elsewhere in the patrol area. I heard and observed pikas on a regular basis in the Little Five area and throughout most of the patrol area's higher elevations. I also encountered a rattlesnake in Lower Rattlesnake Canyon, a jackrabbit near Long Lake, and an abundance of deer throughout the patrol area. The station area continues to be inhabited by a bold and insolent host of marmots and ground squirrels.

### **c. Vegetation**

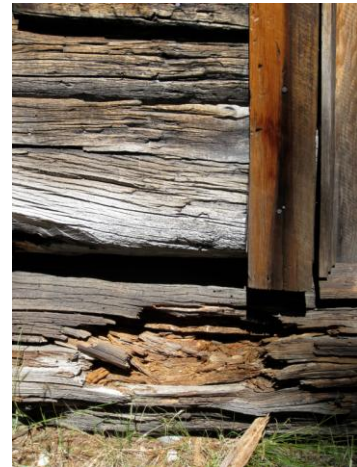
Due to this year's below-normal snowpack (as of May 4, snowpack was 27% of average in the Kaweah drainage and 6% of average in the Kern drainage) and early snowmelt, all of the meadows in the Little Five area opened on their projected dates this season. 9-2-32 will be completing residual biomass in Middle Rattlesnake in early October. The meadows became dry relatively early in the season, but by this time were seeing little, if any, stock use.

The effects documented in previous years of the Needleminer outbreak on lodgepole pines in the Big Arroyo was not particularly evident this season.

## **E. Cultural Resources**

### **a. Historic Sites**

The Big Arroyo Patrol Cabin remains in poor condition and is in need of repair. Many of the shingles have fallen from the roof (or perhaps been torn off and used as firewood), several of the logs around the base of the cabin are damaged, and the window panels are caving in, which could eventually provide access to the interior of the cabin. The Historic Preservation Crew is aware of the state of the cabin and had discussed working on the structure at the end of this season, but was unable to fit it into their schedule. I recommend getting work completed on the cabin as soon as possible so that its state does not continue to deteriorate.



## **F. Backcountry Facilities**

### **a. Ranger Station**

Yurt: The yurt was set up by 811, 8-1-17, and myself on July 1, and it appeared to have weathered the mild winter well. Several of the floorboards on the deck and the yurt platform are loose and/or warped, and will eventually need to be replaced. Also, the plexiglass window in the station door has developed a crack; a new sheet of plexiglass should be sent out when possible. As mentioned in last year's EOS report, the plywood storage box covers have been chewed on extensively by marmots, and replacement lids should be sent in next year (dimensions noted in the "Needs for Next Year" section of this document). A new tarp for winter use was brought in this season to replace the old, torn tarp.

Solar: The solar system seems to be in good working condition. The battery charge indicator light on the solar controller never dropped below green, providing adequate power for all needs at the station.

Toilet: The station privy platform is warped and appears to be cracking in places. Its condition should be monitored next season, as it may need to be replaced within the next year or two. (See photo.)



#### **b. Signs**

- i. The sign at the junction of the Kern Canyon and Chagoopa Plateau is bent and scratched, and should be replaced (see photo). All other signs in the Little Five and Kern areas are in good condition.



### **G. Trails**

#### **a. Trail Activities (work accomplished)**

The Construction Crew spent much of this season based at Sky Parlor Meadow (arriving on July 12 and demobilizing on September 19), completing a trail reroute on the High Sierra Trail east of Sky Parlor Meadow heading down into the Kern Canyon. They also removed four large stock-blocking downed trees from the trail climbing up to the plateau from the Big Arroyo Patrol Cabin, and cleared numerous downed trees on the trail between Moraine Lake and Sky Parlor Meadow.

The Hockett Crew arrived in the Little Five area on August 8. They spent approximately two weeks in the Big Arroyo and two weeks in Lost Canyon, clearing downed trees and performing basic trail maintenance throughout the area. The Kern Crew arrived in the area on September 5, teaming up with the Hockett Crew at a camp east of the trail near the Long Lake. The two crews spent approximately two weeks in this area performing blasting and reroute work on the Blackrock Pass trail.



#### **b. Problem Areas**

Lost Canyon Junction – There are numerous superfluous social trails at the Lost Canyon-Big Five junction, particularly in the area leading to the stream crossing and to the group site/trail crew camp on the west side of the stream.

Lost Canyon (west of the Big Five junction) – a number of social trails and areas of double braiding developed along the Lost Canyon trail late in the season, particularly along the sections most traveled by stock. There is also a persistently wet and muddy section of trail below the Upper Lost Canyon meadows that hikers attempt to avoid, widening the trail and spreading the impact to the nearby vegetation. This section deteriorated greatly throughout this particularly rainy season, and should be worked on next season. (See photo.)

Sawtooth Pass – The west side of Sawtooth Pass continues to be a problem area, as new social trails are created through the loose scree between the pass and Monarch Lake. I received several complaints from visitors regarding the difficulty of following this section of unmaintained trail.

Big Arroyo Junction – There are numerous social trails at the junction leading from the main trail to and among the campsites and to various river crossing sections. This web seemed to grow throughout the season, and I imagine the problem becomes even worse on high-water years when convenient crossing spots are more difficult to find.

Kern area – Several sections of trail in the Kern area are very rutted, washed out, and in overall poor condition. These include the trail from the Kern Station to Coyote Pass-Lakes junction, and the trail from the Kern-Rattlesnake confluence up to the junction with the Willow Meadow Cut-off. There are also a number of new trees that were blown down over the season that should be removed at the beginning of next season, and a large rock that has fallen onto and damaged one of the wooden boardwalks (see photo).



## **H. Camp Areas**

### **a. Area Overview**

The highest use camping areas in the Little Five patrol area are found along the Franklin-Sawtooth-Blackrock loops and along the High Sierra Trail, and include the Lost Canyon-Big Five junction, Columbine Lake, Lower Big Five lake, the Big Arroyo Patrol Cabin junction, and Moraine Lake. As these areas appeared to receive the most traffic and the greatest impact, I focused a significant amount of time in the sites making visitor contacts and performing campsite and fire ring rehab and maintenance. Camping use was also high but much more dispersed throughout Rattlesnake Canyon, Soda Creek, Upper Lost Canyon, the Upper Big Five Lakes and the Upper Big Arroyo. I observed moderate camping use at Little Five (a anomaly, perhaps – based on previous reports and conversations with hikers, it seems that the main Little Five campground typically gets much more use than it did this season), the Upper Big Five Lakes basin, throughout Rattlesnake Canyon, and at Little Claire and Forester Lakes. Camping use and impact was low and dispersed throughout the rest of the Little Five patrol area.

### **b. Conditions**



Due to a relatively quiet season in the Little Five area, I was able to get to and maintain many of the high-use camping areas throughout the patrol on a regular basis. These areas seemed to remain in good shape.

I was not able to put give as much time as necessary, however, to maintain as good conditions in high-use areas in campsites within the Bearpaw and Kern patrol zones, notably the Cliff Creek-Timber Gap junction, Pinto Lake, the Kern Hotsprings, and Upper Funston Meadow. (b) (5)

In addition to addressing the trail and stream crossing problems mentioned above, the Lost Canyon-Big Five junction would benefit from rehab work. One of the main, well-established campsites is within 100 feet of the stream, and the bear locker is within 25 feet of the water. (b) (5)

### c. Rehab/Restoration

On September 14, I collaborated with members of the Construction Trail Crew to rehab a large, problematic campsite and fire pit less than ten feet from the water at Moraine Lake. We removed the fire pit, planted rocks and logs, and covered the area with a thick layer of duff, getting rid of 4-5 persistent tent pads in the site.



On September 9, 8-1-2 and I worked on maintenance of the main Little Five camping area rehab project completed several years ago by Alison Steiner, filling in the rehabbed areas with more duff and logs and reinforcing the outlined established camping area. The original rehab work was excellent, and with regular upkeep impact in this potentially high-use area can remain as contained as possible.

I completed several other minor campsite rehab projects on illegal sites that cropped up during the season, including one site near the water at Lower Big Five, two near the water at Columbine Lake, one near the water at Little Claire Lake, and one next to the trail near Long Lake.

The restoration site completed by Alison last year near the Big Arroyo Patrol Cabin is holding up well, and shows no signs of having been used this season.

#### **d. Sanitation**

Sanitation was a moderate problem throughout the patrol area. Columbine Lake was by far the largest problem area, as I would pick up a full bag of toilet paper on every patrol to the area. This problem improved significantly throughout the season, however, as the trailhead rangers started stressing the waste issue to hikers heading to Columbine. Other problem areas included the main Little Five campground, the Big Arroyo Patrol Cabin area, and the Lost Canyon-Big Five junction.

#### **e. Fire Rings**

I believe the number and location of established fire rings in the Little Five area is appropriate. While I got rid of quite a few illegal rings in the beginning of the summer, only on several occasions did new fire rings get built in the vicinity of existing rings throughout the season, presumably due to crowding (at lower Big Five, the Big Arroyo Junction, and the Lost Canyon Junction).

I spent a significant amount of time on fire ring maintenance and trash removal in some of the higher use areas throughout the season, including Lower Big Five, the Big Arroyo Patrol Cabin area, Forester Lake and the Lost Canyon-Big Five junction. Each patrol to the Kern involved a great deal of fire pit maintenance as well, particularly since the area was so seldom patrolled this season. Fire pits in Rattlesnake and Upper Lost Canyon seemed to receive little use, and required very little maintenance. Pinto Lake continues to be a problematic area for illegal fires, as does the Cliff Creek-Timber Gap junction for oversized, trash-filled pits. As mentioned in previous EOS reports, I think this can be directly attributed to reduced wilderness staffing.

In addition to maintaining established fire pits, I destroyed and rehabbed 24 illegal fire pits this season. Based on previous end of season reports from the Little Five area, this is within low to normal numbers.

#### **f. Firewood Availability**

Firewood seems to be scarce in the immediate vicinity of the main camping areas at Moraine Lake and Big Arroyo Patrol Cabin. While this scarcity of downed wood does not currently seem to be posing problems in these areas, the situation should be monitored in future seasons. In all other areas where fires are permitted, firewood availability seems adequate.

#### **g. Food Storage**

I ran into relatively few problems with food storage compliance this season. Of the approximately 200 backpacking parties I contacted, about 85% were carrying approved bear-proof canisters. Roughly 10% were relying on bear boxes, and less than 10% were planning on counterbalancing their food.

## **I. Permit System**

### **a. Trailheads**

The communication with the Mineral King trailhead rangers was excellent this season. I was typically informed beforehand of large, potentially problematic, or otherwise noteworthy groups coming into the Little Five area, which allowed me to plan my patrols accordingly. Almost all of the trailhead rangers made it into the Little Five area at least once during the season, which I believe is extremely beneficial for providing accurate information when issuing permits for the area.

The trailhead rangers also did a fantastic job of covering the Mineral King Valley up to Franklin and Sawtooth passes, often dropping down to Columbine and Spring Lakes. Their presence in these areas gave me the freedom and flexibility to focus more attention on the rest of the rest of an already vast patrol area. More patrols to the Timber Gap-Cliff Creek and Pinto Lake areas would also be extremely beneficial in the absence of a Bearpaw ranger.

(b) (5)



### **b. Issuing Office**

Nearly all of the backpacking parties I contacted this season obtained their permits from either the Mineral King Ranger Station or the Lodgepole Trailhead desk. Both of these issuing offices did a good job of emphasizing regulations and minimum impact practices. I would recommend, however, that permit issuers more strongly encourage parties to carry bear canisters when the hiker's proposed method of food storage is hanging. Several of the groups I contacted that claimed to be hanging their food said that when obtaining their wilderness permit they were neither asked about their knowledge of proper counterbalancing techniques nor encouraged to consider carrying a canister instead. Since very few backpackers actually do counterbalance effectively, I feel that our permit issuers should strongly encourage all hikers not relying on bear lockers to carry canisters.

## **J. Communications**

(b) (7)(F)



(b) (7)(F)

**K. Needs for Next Year**

- 2 plywood boards for yurt platform storage boxes (32 ½” x 96”)
- Plexiglass window for yurt door (28 ½” x 31”)
- 1 bottle wood glue
- large screws for deck boards (2 ½ - 3 inch)
- S-hooks for yurt walls
- wiring for solar system (not filamented)
- EMS supply box/bag
- 4 burlap bags
- 4 large trash bags
- 1 tube caulk
- 1 grill lighter (for stove)
- 1 metal dust pan
- 4 rolls toilet paper

**L. Recommendations**

Recommendations have been made throughout this document. Main points include:

(b) (5)

(b) (5)

- Send in replacement plywood lids for the yurt platform storage boxes to prevent possible rodent damage to supplies over the winter.

(b) (5)

M. **Pertinent Inventory** (as of 09/27/2012)

Propane – 2 full 5-gallon propane canisters and 1 empty 10-gallon propane canister

EMS – See attached EMS equipment inventory list.

Maps –

Johnson Peak – 1	Lodgepole—2
Triple Divide—4	Silver City—2
Quinn Peak—1	Kern Peak—1
Kern Lake—1	Mt. Brewer—1
Mt Williamson—1	Mt Whitney—1
Mt Kaweah—4	SEKI General Park Map-1
Mineral King—3	SEKI National Geographic Trail Map-2
Chagoopa Falls—4	John Muir Wilderness/SEKI Map-1

Other –



3 chairs  
2 highlighters  
1 mechanical pencil  
various mosquito repellents  
1 bottle all-purpose cleaner  
24 wildlife observation forms  
21 CUA forms  
25 AUO forms  
15 hangers  
1 (old) rescue rope  
10 rolls toilet paper  
2 sponges  
3 rolls clear tape  
2 boxes matches  
9 tea candles  
24 AAA batteries  
15 burlap sacks  
25 small trash bags  
1 helmet  
2 small lighters  
2 mosquito nets  
1 pencil sharpener  
1 large pair of binoculars  
3 steno pads  
10 holey envelopes  
1 can Coleman white gas  
2 large fuel canisters

15 government pens  
5 sharpies  
4 regular pencils  
2 bottles dish soap  
7 food storage locker lists  
1 exotic plant observation form  
3 BIMS forms  
25 sheets laminating paper  
1 clean bedsheet  
1 yoga pad  
4 paper towels  
1 roll duct tape  
4 mousetraps  
1 box aluminum foil  
2 standup candles  
8 lithium AA batteries  
9 large trash bags  
2 face masks  
8 “flammable” stickers  
1 box thumbtacks  
30 SPF brochures  
1 stapler  
3 pocket pads  
1 legal pad  
1.5 cans denatured alcohol  
3 small fuel canisters



## 2012 Charlotte Lake Wilderness Ranger End of Season Report

From: Rick Sanger, Charlotte Lake Ranger

Through: Erika Jostad, Sierra Crest Sub-district Ranger

Read and approved: [Signature] Date: 10/18/12

Through: Ned Kelleher, Kings Canyon District Ranger

Read and approved: [Signature] Date: 11/7/12

To: Gregg Fauth, Wilderness Coordinator

Read and approved: [Signature] Date: 11/19/12

**Charlotte Area  
End of Season Report 2012  
Rick Sanger**

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End of Season report, Charlotte 2012.doc	This document
Daily Log.doc	Daily log of activity
Inventory.doc	Beginning of digital Inventory
Wildlife.doc	Wildlife observations
Stock Use.doc	Stock use form

### A. General Summary

This year, the station was staffed from July 1 to Sept 25. Winter precipitation levels were that of a “dry” year. The late start of patrol combined with an early melt resulted in many missed visitor contacts and more cleanup activity.

VIP Suzanne Sanger worked at Charlotte the entire season. She performed significant visitor assistance and resource protection, from cleaning of fire-rings to emergency services. Her presence greatly enhanced the services available in the Charlotte patrol area. Of particular note, her presence increased the safety of performing our duties.

#### **Notable Steps Forward (issues discussed in previous reports):**

The Charlotte meadow drift fence was rebuilt by trail crew.

Erik The Black’s John Muir Trail Atlas seems to have eliminated the camp at 10,800 in LeConte Canyon that was too close to water.

The “temporary” drift fence near center basin junction was removed.

### B. Visitor Services

#### **Miles & Contacts:**

Month	Miles	Vtr. Contacts
June/July	127	535
Aug	126	731
Sept	91	444
Tot	344	1710

#### **Law Enforcement**

6 citations (4 food storage, 1 no permit, 1 illegal fire (terms of permit))

Very numerous warnings for camping on vegetation and food storage.

#### **Search, Rescue, Medical incidents**

MEDICAL (several minor medical assists not tabulated)

9/2 mid-shin laceration, locate patient & do primary survey.

Helicopter evacuation.

SAR: None

### C. Use Patterns

#### **Backpacking:**

We only caught the very tail-end of PCT hikers coming through. This was due to our late entry into the backcountry, and an early melting of snow. After a brief lull, John Muir trail hikers became the dominant users.

I estimate the following usage for visitors I encountered

John Muir Trail N->S	70%
Rae Lakes Loop	10%
Other trailheads to Whitney	10%
Other	10%

I met members of the Yosemite Conservancy this year, who told me there were a record number of JMT hikers on the trail: 300 in 1998, 1967 in 2009, and 2100 with reservations or permits already issued as of late July this year. They said that the most popular times to start the JMT are Aug 1-15. They also mentioned that the system of limiting the numbers of hikers on the JMT is flawed in that users are opting to start their trip at unconventional trailheads to avoid quota restrictions, but that all those trailheads funnel into the trail itself. They are trying to come up with some sort of solution.

#### **Stock Use:**

Stock use was dominated by administrative resupplies of the trail crew (at Charlotte Lake), by Pine Creek Pack station (mainly doing day trips to drop JMT resupplies) and lastly Rock Creek Pack station with about 4 long trips that stopped off at Charlotte Lake.

#### **Climbers**

A significant number of folks are climbing Charlotte Dome. The trail crew staying at the drift fence early season said they were seeing a party every day to every other day. Although few stopped at the ranger station, I'd say a party every other day would be a good estimate of usage.

### D. Natural Resources

#### **Wildlife:**

Individual sightings were tabulated and accompany this document (Wildlife.doc). It was interesting that the number of deer in the area markedly increased starting in mid Sept. Although a few bears were seen in the area, no human/bear incidents were recorded

#### **Meadows**

Opening dates were not varied from Dry Year dates.

#### **Stock Impacts**

East Lake had significant usage, and was recommended for closure on Sept 18.

## **E. Cultural Resources**

### **Shorty's Cabin, Vidette Mdw**

I visited Shorty's cabin in Vidette Mdw and took pictures & video (submitted with other photos). I thought there used to be a "no camping" sign posted nearby, but did not see that sign.

The Historical cabin crew spent 2 days performing some temporary fixes to the cabin after my visit. Pictures of their work were also submitted.



### **Tehipite Cabin**

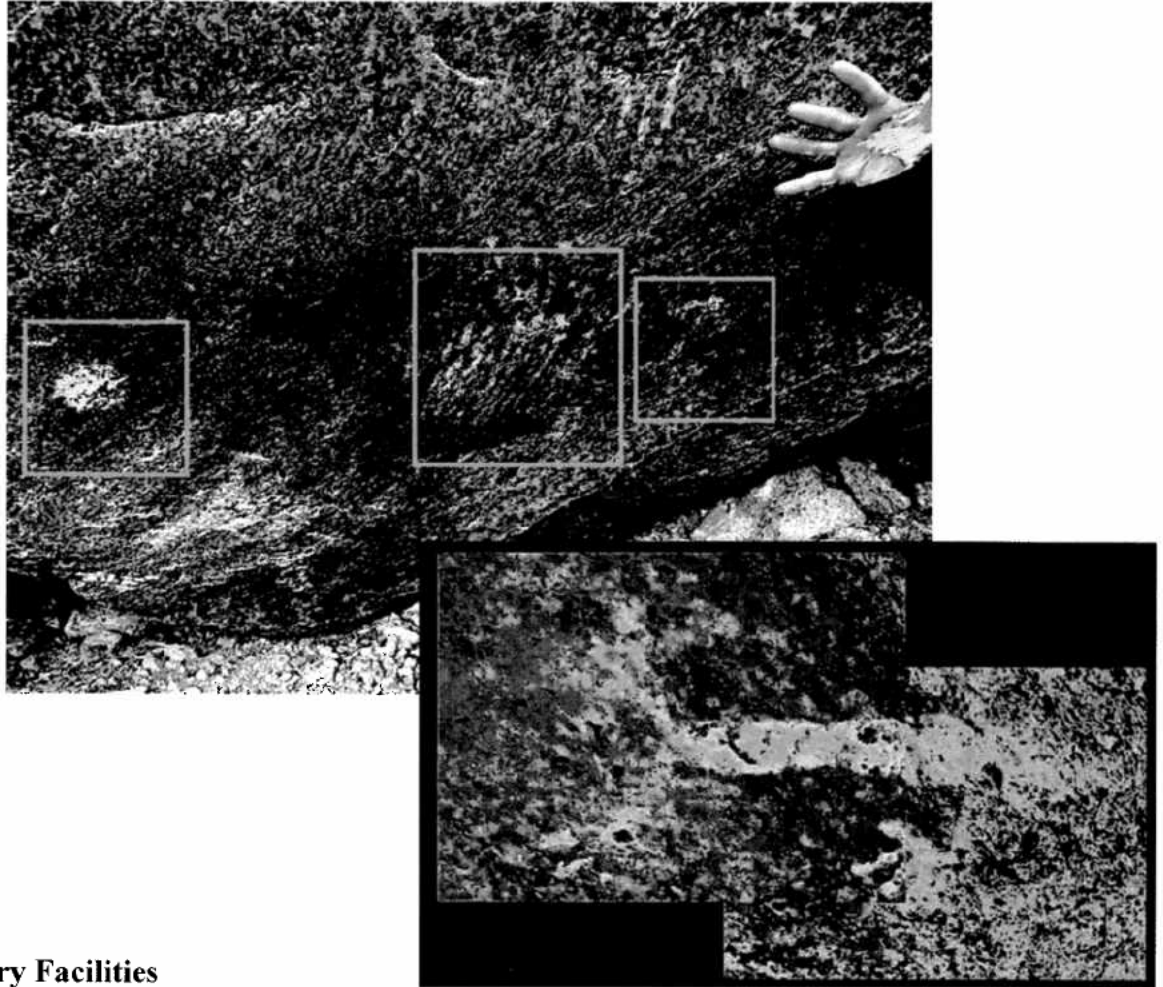
A picture of the Tehipite Cabin (now burnt down) was sent to me this year, taken in 1970. The image has been submitted with my other photos.



### **Pictographs**

Suzanne discovered pictographs under a boulder above bullfrog lake on 9/23/2012. We do not know if they have been recorded in park records. UTM (b) (3) (A) The color-modified picture below shows the three component

elements outlined. The color-modified insert shows a detail of the element on the right. Detailed original photos have been submitted.



## **F. Backcountry Facilities**

### **Kearsarge Lakes Bear boxes**

This year the wilderness committee decided to lock all the bear boxes in the Kearsarge Lakes area (4ca). The objectives were to 1) curtail the increasing problem with caches left in the boxes and 2) see what happens if bear boxes were to be removed from the area.

Three out of the 4 boxes were locked on July 5<sup>th</sup>, the fourth was locked on July 11. Information about the closure was distributed pre-season on the web and to the permit issuing offices. Signs were placed at the Onion Valley trailhead and the Kearsarge Lakes junction from Kearsarge pass. The signs said not only that the boxes were locked, but that food storage was available at Charlotte Lake.

#### **Results:**

Berner's resupplies at the sand flats seemed to go well. No cache was ever left at the ranger station due to a missed pickup.

Only one cache was found in the bear boxes (placed before the locks were installed.)

Several people were contacted returning to Onion Valley with caches they were going to store at Kearsarge lakes, but now could not

1 note at Kearsarge Lakes saying "We've left the Cache at Charlotte Lake"



Several parties were contacted at Charlotte Lakes that were resupplying JMT hikers, with more food than would fit into their canisters (using boxes at Charlotte)

Several parties were contacted at Vidette Meadows (where there are boxes) resupplying JMT hikers, with more food than would fit into canisters.

Several parties were contacted at Kearsarge lakes with resupply food, or food for a long trip, that would not fit into their canisters. (One was a Sierra Club group. Others had been to the lakes before, so did no research and thus had no idea the boxes would be locked. In these cases, food was taken to Charlotte by the Ranger. )

Several contacts were made with novice backpackers who were unaware that the food they brought would not fit into the canisters until they arrived at Kearsarge Lakes and found it to be the case.

Numerous contacts were made of people with extra food at Kearsarge lakes that did not know of the closure and did not see any of the signs.

Contact was made with a party without any canisters (or a permit)

Several contacts were made with moderately experienced parties at Kearsarge lakes with more food than would fit into their canisters.

Contact was made with a group that received a late resupply from Berner (8 pm) who were told to put any extra food not fitting into their canisters into the bear boxes by Berner, and upon finding them locked had no other option but to store food improperly.

Contact made at Vidette Meadows with resupplier who would have left the resupply in Vidette bear box if the party he was meeting hadn't shown up. (resupplies happening from west side too!)

**Thoughts:**

Between Mirth, Leslie and myself, consistent contacts were made with parties at Kearsarge Lakes with food storage issues.

As a representative area

(b) (5)



Cache Resolution

(b) (5)





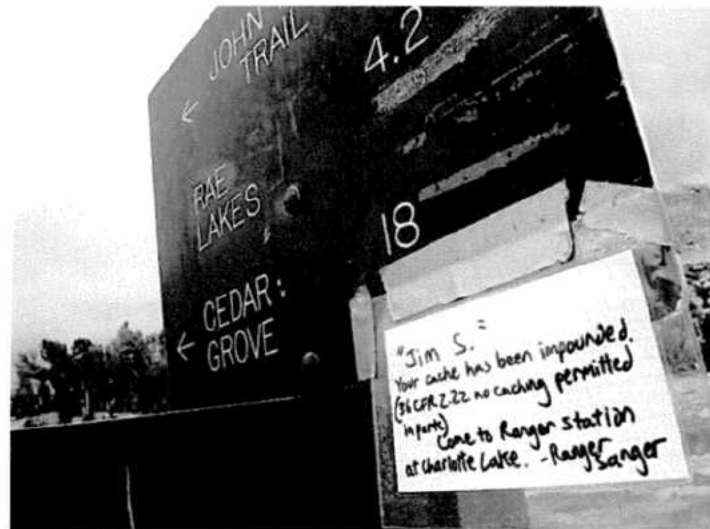
(b) (5)

Future Action

My belief is that we can expect that bear incidents will occur at Kearsarge lakes. Durkee, in past reports suggests keeping bear boxes available at locations that are 1-days hike away from trailheads. If 1 box were available at Kearsarge Lakes, this may curtail bear incidents, but we can expect a lot of abandoned food & trash to appear there.

(b) (5)

I posted a sign at the sand flats, strictly for educational purposes that seemed very effective in this regard: ““Jim S” Your cache has been impounded (36CFR2.22 no caching permitted in park) Come to ranger station at Charlotte Lake.” I received many inquiries about this “situation” and entered into many discussions about caching. I think a sign like this placed into any open bear box at Kearsarge Lakes would deter the placement of caches there! In any case, I will repost a similar sign in 2013.



A visitor suggested that a pop up window be incorporated into the “reservationsUSA” website that informs any user (with stated destination Kearsarge Lakes or Charlotte Lake) about bear box closure.

### **Charlotte Lake Patrol Cabin**

I agree with Durkee, the windows are the only part of the cabin needing attention. Every time I open them I was concerned that the glass would break out. They are not counterbalanced, so there is always the danger that the top half will fall down, or if the bottom half is propped open, that it will fall.

### **Snow Survey Shed Cleanup**

I cleaned out large mouse nests from the shed made in old wood stored in the shed, and some old food caches left in the shed. I found a tag with Alden Nash's name on it, so I guess this hadn't been done in a while.

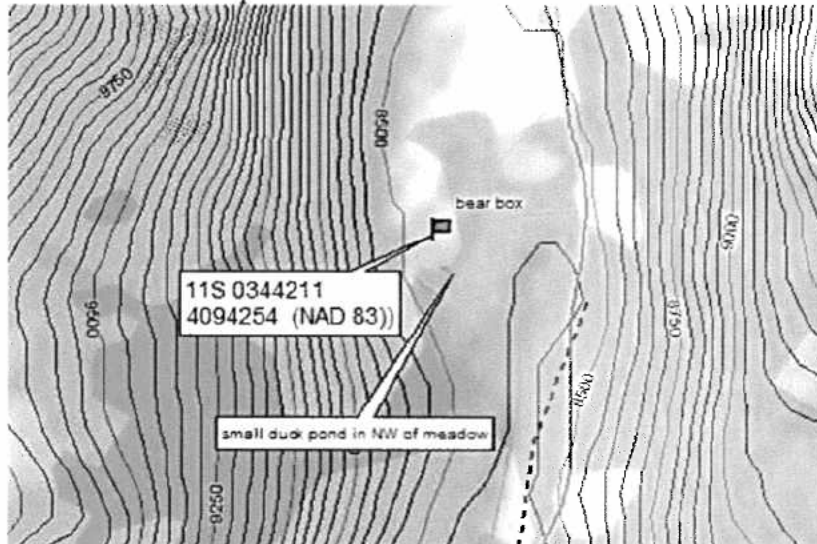
### **Other Bear Boxes**

I believe the bear boxes at upper Vidette, and Upper Bubbs (9900 ft level) could be successfully removed. These are located more than 1-days walk from trailheads, and most people passing through this area are planning to be at Whitney within 4 days.

It is unclear whether the box at Vidette meadow could be removed without problems, but perhaps.

The box at center basin *may* be important to serve PCT hikers, otherwise I'd guess it could be removed as well.

Rob Hayden (past ranger) visited this year and shared with me the history of the bear box in Blue Canyon. Evidently, it was rarely used, so they decided to make it into a ranger cache. Later, the lock was broken off by visitors, so was unusable as a cache. He visited the box in the spring and felt it could be removed. I visited the box in 2010 and the pictures are on file.



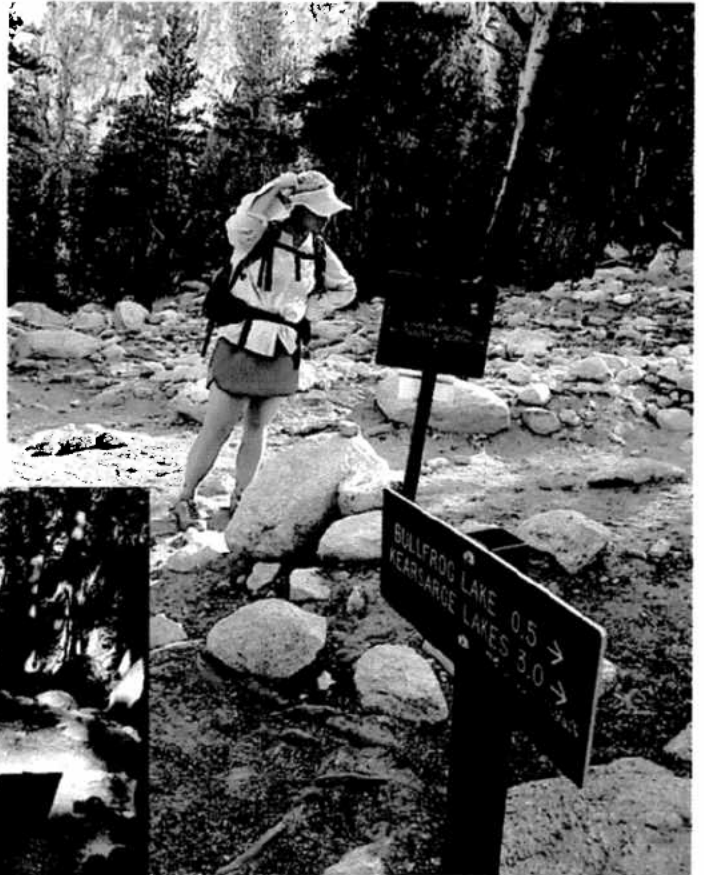
Additionally, it is unclear if the old precipitation gauge on burnt mountain is still there. If so, it should be removed from the backcountry.



**Signs:**

**JMT/Bullfrog junction**

There are 2 sign posts here, and 3 signs. These all should be combined onto 1 post. Also note that the sign pointing out the JMT North/South is behind a larger sign, making it invisible to PCT hikers heading north. The larger sign that IS visible has been modified by PCT hikers (see picture). The direction arrow has also been modified by hikers... and correctly so.



*Hole spacing is 15cm*

(b) (5)

### Fire sign at Wheelbarrow camp

The sign here is damaged – it appears someone *really* wanted to remove it. Also, some fires still appear at wheelbarrow camp, the highest treed area on the north side of Forrester pass. The sign needs to serve for PCT hikers coming north, and JMT hikers coming south. I

(b) (5)



### Fire sign at 10,000 ft, Bubbs Ck

The sign currently at this location says fires are not allowed above 10,000 ft in Kings Canyon, but does not indicate “beyond this point”

(b) (5)

(b) (5)

(6 3/8 in hole

### Signs near Bailey Bridge, Cedar Grove

The signs at this location are numerous and confusing. I believe that with some thought, the cedar grove rangers could consolidate the 2 posts and 4 signs located here.



### Unsigned post at Sphinx Junction

There is a post without ANY sign at Sphinx junction. I believe this could be removed by Cedar Grove staff

**Lake 10,800, LeConte Canyon**

Last year I posted a metal “No Camping” sign with an additional hand-written interpretive sign at Lake 10,800 – a place where YL frogs live, breed and lay eggs. The campsite here is too close to water, but very convenient and appealing. This year the sign was gone, despite it being strapped to a tree with metal strapping and a bolt!

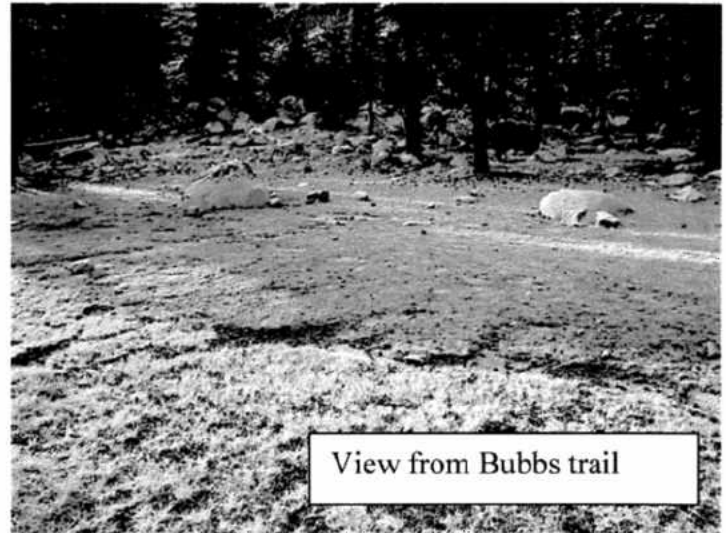
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### **Sign for Vidette Mdw site**

There is an area just downstream from the Vidette bear box that might benefit from a small (4x6) sign saying "Restoration site, No camping in this area" The site has marginal small sedges(?) and several campfires have been cleaned up here. It is vulnerable to trampling and may develop bare spots without some attention. The sign could be placed just out of site behind the rock shown below in the upper left where it would only be seen by campers about to pitch a tent.



## **G. Trails**

Thanks to the trail crew who stayed in the Charlotte Lake/Rae Lakes area this year. They did great work, were wonderful neighbors, and I found their camp to be effectively rehabbed after they left.

### **Ranger Station Trail**

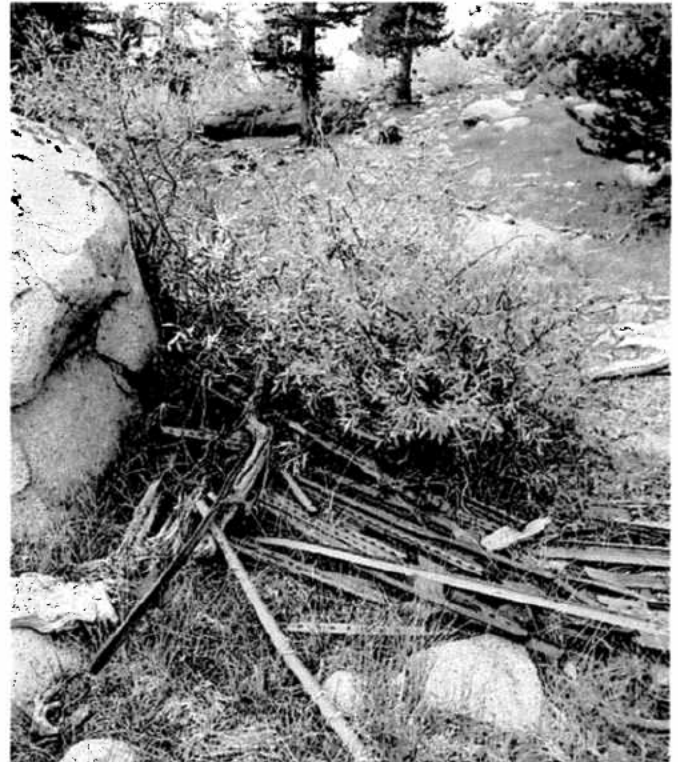
I would like to add the Charlotte Lake Ranger Station access trail to a list of possible future projects. It is rutted and has many loose rocks. A few steps and some re-work would make access for visitors easier, and repeated water-hauls by the ranger much safer.

### **Junction and East Lake Drift Fences**

These drift fences are not made to drop. Additionally, the east lake drift fence is largely held by metal "T" stakes. These aspects differ from any other drift fence I've encountered in the backcountry. There is a large cache of T stakes near the east lake fence, and a lot of wire segments lying around. Seems that this could be cleaned up.

### **Pedestrian Pass-thrus**

Installation of pass-thrus may help packers sleep at night.



## **H. Permit System/Visitor Information**

### **YouTube**

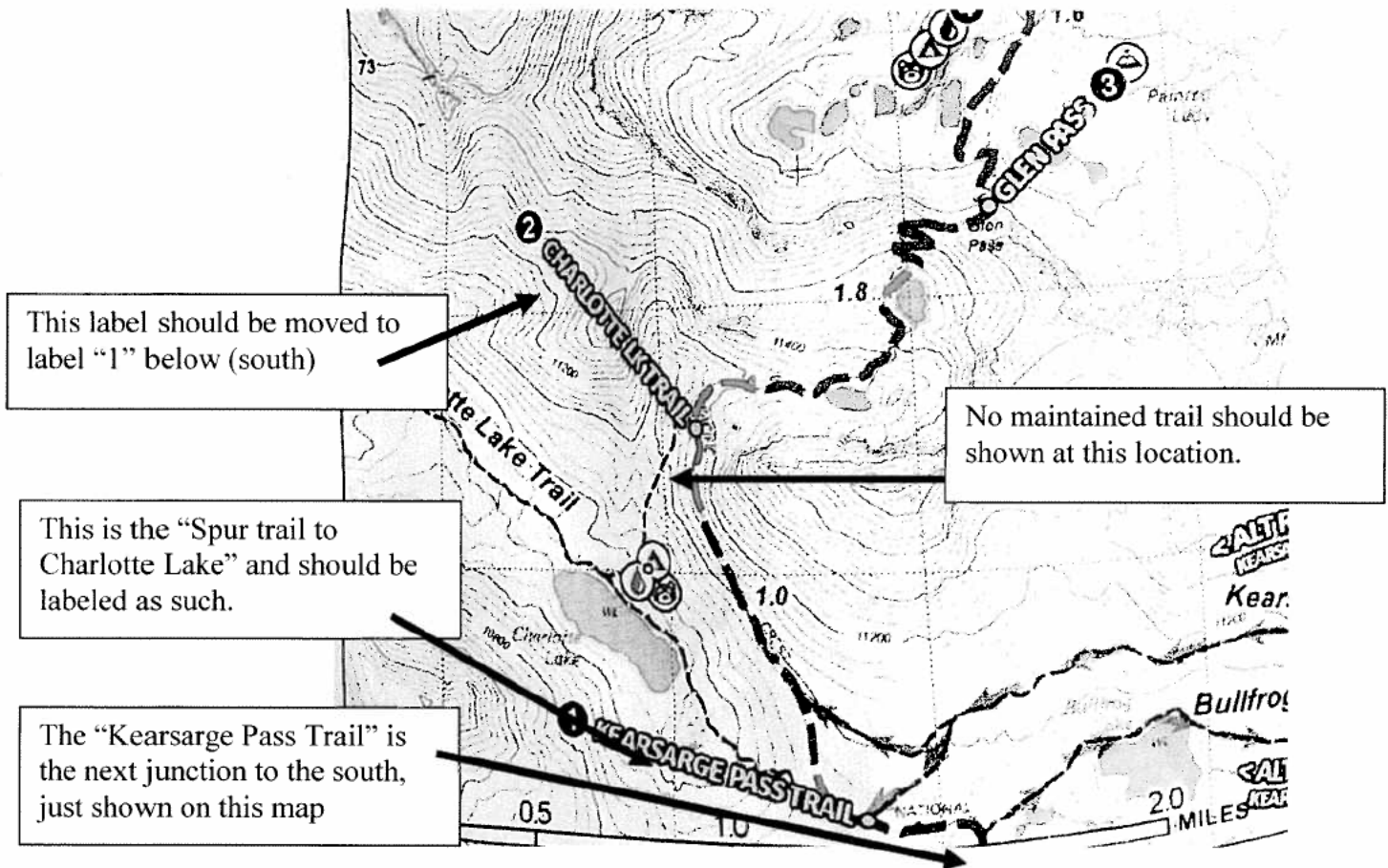
Several people mentioned seeing a video of me on YouTube that was filmed by a PCT hiker. They said it was helpful, and would be interested in

seeing more. The creation of short, educational videos for YouTube should be considered as an educational venue.

### **Erik The Black Correction #1**

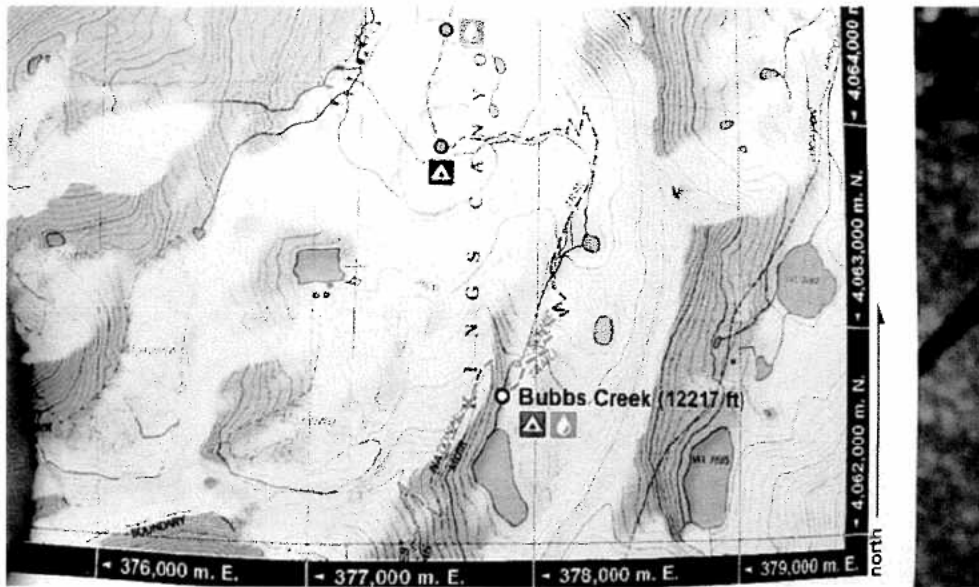
Erik The Black's John Muir Trail Atlas, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 54 shows a trail labeled as "The Charlotte Spur Trail to Rae Lakes" however, there is no maintained trail at this location. In reality, this is an unsigned "route" that some cross-country travelers take.

This route should not be published as a trail. Additionally, the actual trail to Charlotte should be labeled as such. See picture below



### **Erik The Black Correction #2**

Eric the Black's John muir trail atlas (1st ed) has a recommended campsite at the highest lake on the north side of Forrester pass. ("Bubbs Ck 12217", see photo) This site is at a very pristine lake at the head of Bubbs drainage and the sites are very exposed - only 2 or 3 small tent pads among large talus. One site is virtually on top of the outlet to this lake, thus too close to water. People like staging for Forrester, and there are legal sites at this location, but I believe the guide should at least include a note "Only 3 very exposed sites amongst the large rocks. Be sure to camp at least 100 ft from this pristine lake"



### **Modifications to Minimum Impact Restrictions flyer**

The 2012 flyer states that food-storage canisters are required on the Rae Lakes Loop. It is unclear from this language that they are also required at Kearsarge Lakes and all the way up Bubbs Creek. It would also be helpful to state that not only are canisters required, but enough canister space to store all food items! This eliminates someone from bringing 1 canister, and hanging all the food that won't fit in that canister. I suggest the wording be changed to:

(b) (5)

### **Faxing Permits to Sierra Club**

Most parties are required to pick up their wilderness permit in person. Evidently, the Sierra Club is an exception, and permits are faxed to these groups. This summer, one sierra club group with a faxed permit had more food than would fit into their canisters at Kearsarge Lakes. They were unaware of the bear box closure – presumably in part because of this policy.

### **I. Radio Communications**

### **J. Operations**

(b) (5)

A major user group, the Pacific Crest Trail hikers also seems to be the most careless about resource protection. Possible reasons might be: a focus on “making the miles,” insufficient education, and/or the diversity of regulations

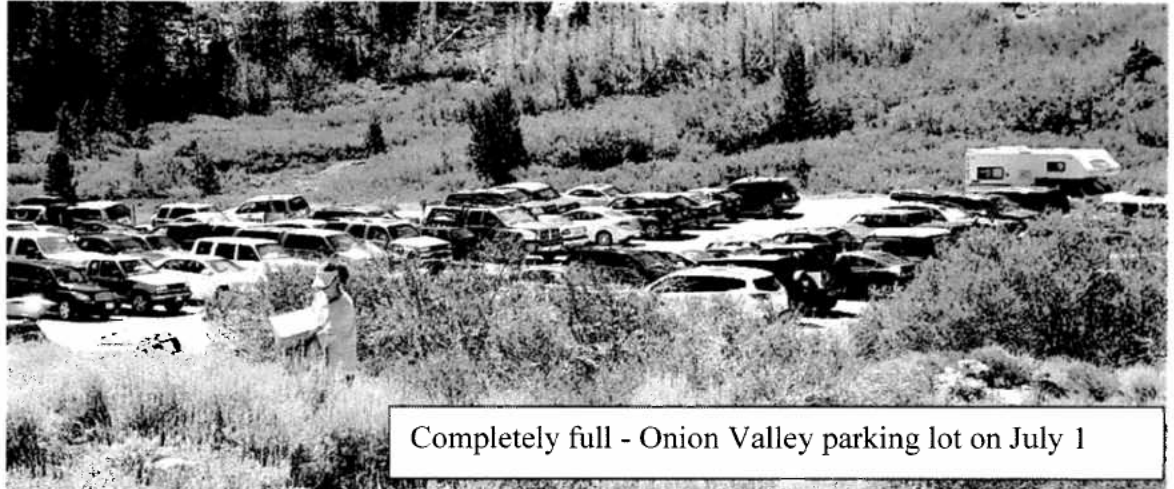


employed by the many jurisdictions thru which these hikers pass. Arriving after this user group has passed through makes the ranger's job one of backcountry janitor, cleaning up messes with no chance to educate.

A schedule of 5 days a week limits patrols in obvious ways.

A schedule of 9am to 5:30pm is also limiting, as most violations happen in camp, when tents are pitched on meadows, fires are built and food is hung (illegally) for the night. In the past, patrols were scheduled to 7 pm and allowed for these issues to be addressed.

Arriving later in the season makes timely assessment of meadow openings impossible. Charlotte Ck, Upper Bubbs and East Lake were due to open on the first day I entered the backcountry. Junction meadow was due to open 15 days *before* that.



Completely full - Onion Valley parking lot on July 1

(b) (5)

**Crabtree Ranger Station**  
**Serving the Whitney Area**  
**1970 Lorenzo Stowell ---- 2013 Rob Pilewski**

(b) (5)

**K. Recommendations**

(b) (5)

Thoughts for next year's projects

Cleanup Charlotte drift fence, consolidate barbed wire in Gardiner basin.

Photograph Shorty's in Gardiner. Station inventory

**L. Needs for next year**

**WAREHOUSE**

ITEM	QTY
Bags, Burlap	7 ea
Batteries, AAA size	8 ea
Dish gloves, green, size large	2 pair
Dish soap	25 fl oz
Dish sponge	1 ea
Duct tape for station	2 ea
Envelopes, Holey	3 ea
Garbage bags, large	About 10

Garbage bags, small, clear	About 20
Lighter, long fire lighter	2 ea
Paper towels (used 2 in 2010), used 1.5 in 2011	1 package
4x6 (5x7?) index cards (have 3x5)	20 ea
Pocket notebooks, brown cover	2 ea
Sharpie, Black marker	1 ea
Sharpie, Green marker	1 ea
Sharpie, Blue marker	1 ea
Sheet rock screws, 1.25"	handful
Steno pads	2 ea
sunscreen	1 bottle
Tags for gear, green waterproof	6 ea
Toilet paper	5 rolls
Pad of 8.5x 11" paper	2 each

**Non-Warehouse Items**

Isopropane for camping, 8 oz canister	4
Isopropane for camping, 4 oz canister	3
Teapot for cabin	1
4 mugs for station	4
1 liter platypus with hose and valve	2 each
Compendium	2012
End of Season Report	2012
Daily Logs	2012
Scotch tape	1 roll
Ace bandages	3 ea
Roller gauze	5 rolls
Dish towels	4 ea
Pillow cases (bring out old ones to wash	4 ea
Mattress covers (bring out old ones to wash)	3 ea
FireLogs	2 boxes?
Propane (have 2 ea med size, -25 lb tare -so should need about 1/2 of a med tank more for next season	1 med tank (25 lb tare)
Small screw for back of suz's radio	1
Full size Oxygen tanks (2 narrow tanks and 2 short tanks are at station)	3 ea
Mop for station	1
Voltmeter for station (I bring mine in every year)	1
Citations	10 ea
Map box: plastic file box for maps & dividers for it (17 different map areas)	1 ea
1/4" nylock nut for toilet seat	1 ea
Mt Kaweah topo	1 ea
Mt. Whitney topo	1 ea

**Second Priority**

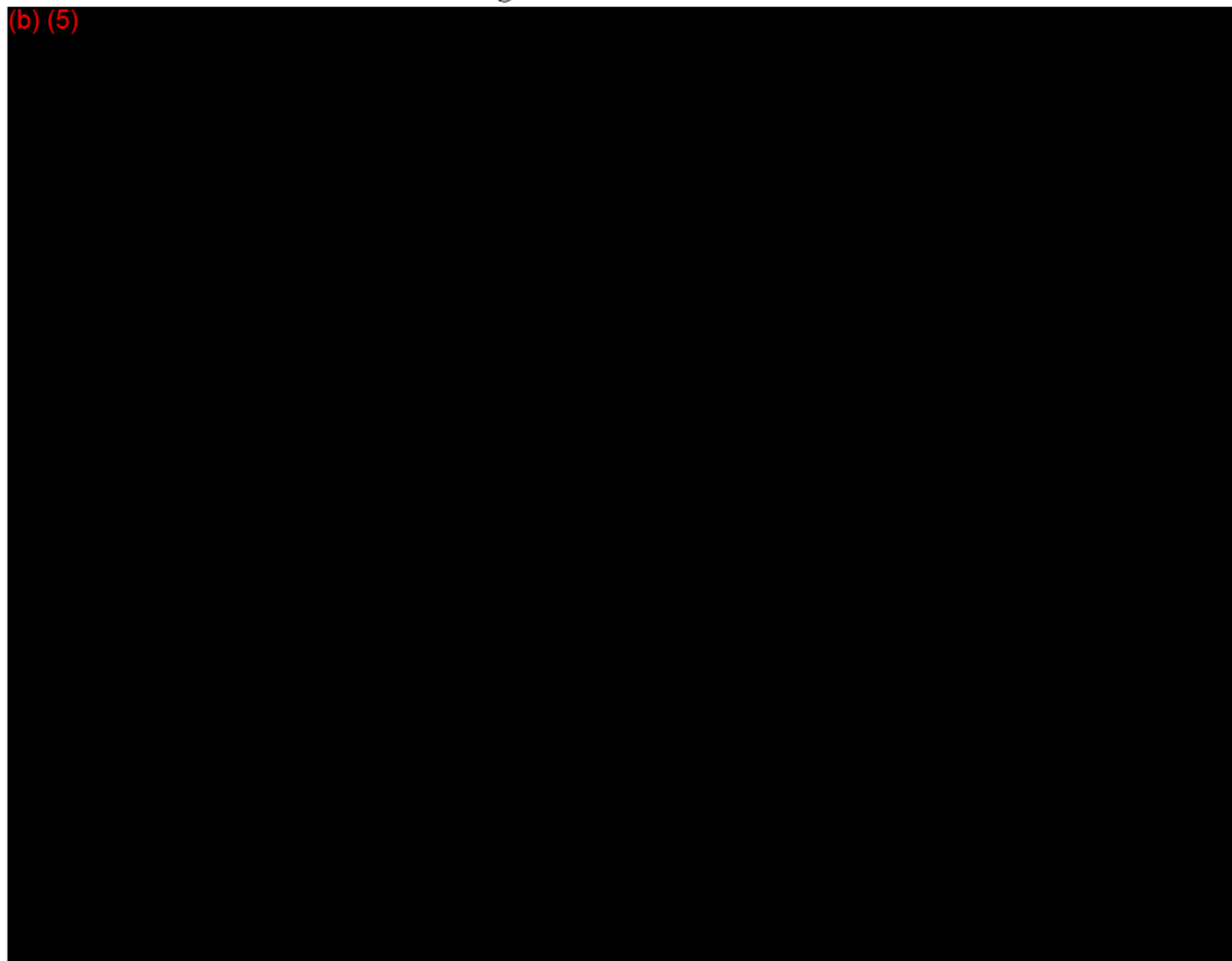
Print out old EOS reports (from george)	
Print out old EOS reports (from others)	
Rubbing alcohol	1 bottle
Chairs for station, 1 regular size camp chair with stiff cloth seat	1 ea
Bag valve for station?	
3-hole punch for station	
“quick lok” locking strap for 55 gal drum	1 ea

**For Rick to Pick up from Cache**

Ice Axe, light weight	<b>Bring from GG cache</b>
Snowshoes	<b>Bring from GG cache</b>
Microspikes	
sleeping bags	
Canister, bear	Bring carbon fiber regular
Titanium pot	
First aid kit for patrol	

**APPENDIX A: Notes from using GeoPro satellite Tracker**

(b) (5)



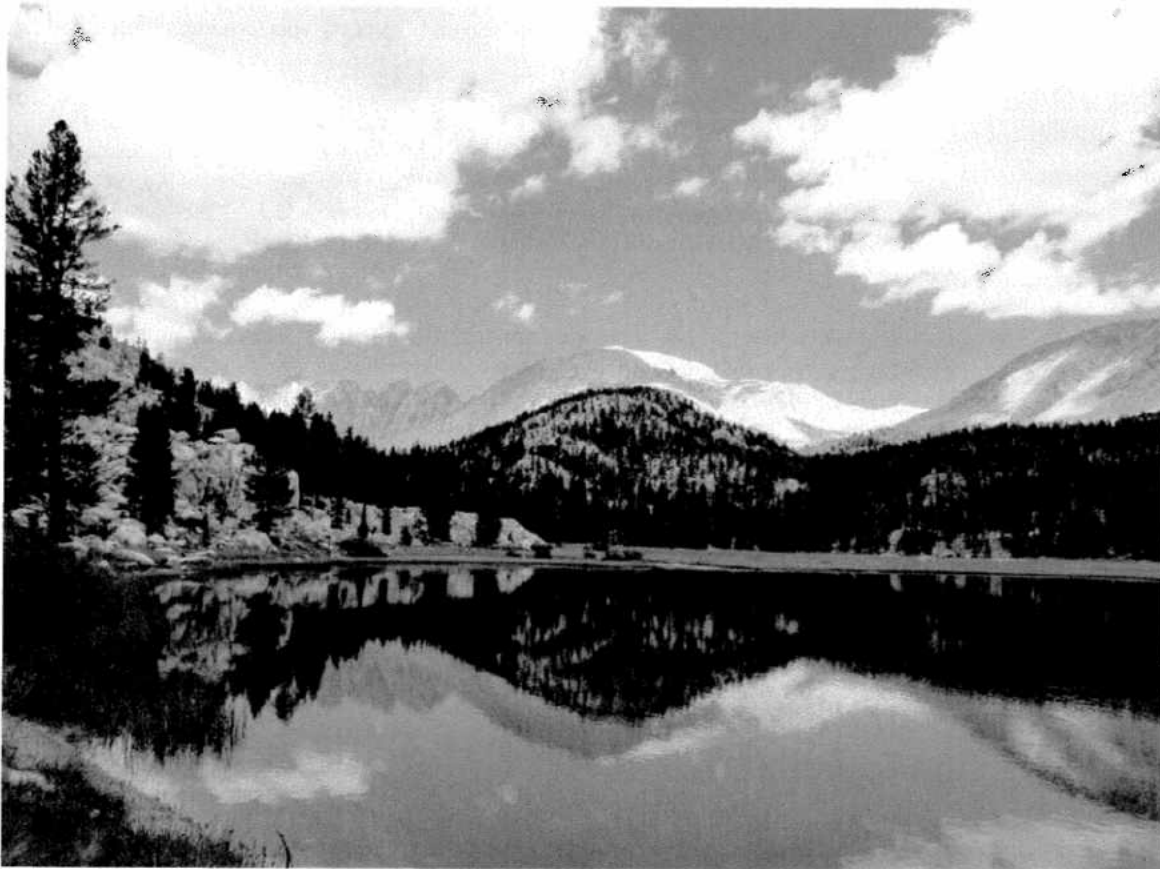
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(b) (5)



Rock Creek Ranger Station  
July 1 - September 26, 2012  
Ranger: David Alexander  
VIP: Elizabeth Curry



The view across Rock Creek Lake to Mt. Langley

A. Visitor Services

1. Contacts

a. Backpackers/Day Hikers

- i. Visitors passing through Rock Creek crossing area (approximated using an infrared, automated trail counter): >2,600
- ii. Period of maximum recorded visitors passing through Rock Creek (approximated using an infrared, automated trail counter): August 13-15<sup>th</sup>: 301
- iii. Commercial visitor contacts (wilderness permits checked): 227
- iv. Non-commercial visitor contacts (wilderness permits checked): 828
- v. Total visitor contacts (wilderness permits checked): 1055
- vi. Visitors found without a wilderness permit: 5 (3 parties)

b. Stock Observations:

- i. Total animal nights: 286 (75 nights: brought in feed and did not graze)
- ii. Horses/mules: 284
- iii. Burrow: 0
- iv. Llama: 2
- v. Commercial: 227
- vi. Private: 23
- vii. Administrative: 36

2. Law Enforcement/Citations:

Five parties were recommended for citations in the Rock Creek area this season. The first was a party of three, contacted near the ranger station, who were hiking the Pacific Crest Trail and who entered the park with a dog. Although they identified the dog as a service animal, it did not provide an approved service and the party was issued a citation and told to exit the park by the Crabtree ranger.

The second was a party of twelve found camping near the New Army Pass trail. They had no bear cans (the entire Rock Creek drainage is a bear can required area) and were storing their food in plastic garbage bags; they had constructed two campfires using grates that they specifically brought in for that purpose (they were camped 1,000 feet above the campfire cutoff elevation); and they had written a large "LAKE →" in charcoal on a rock.

The third was a party of two who were contacted on the PCT. They did not have a wilderness permit, they did not have a bear can, and they cached food for two days in the Lower Soldier Lake food storage locker (the lockers are intended for immediate use and caching food or leaving trash is prohibited, as the sign on top of the locker clearly states).

The fourth party was day-hiking from the Inyo N.F. and had climbed Mt. Langley with his two pet dogs. This area is of particular concern with unleashed dogs since big horn sheep reside in the area.

The fifth party was contacted while camped at Rock Creek crossing. They had entered the park with a dog and did not have a wilderness permit. After consultation with the Crabtree Ranger, the party was instructed to exit the park the next morning the same way that they came in.

While on temporary assignment to the Kern Ranger Station, a passing commercial pack party was contacted just inside the park boundary. The packer did not have any of the required paperwork (Commercial Use Authorization, Wilderness Permit or Photo ID) and was accompanied by a dog. After radio consultation with our superior, the party was denied entrance to the park and turned around.

It should also be noted that many parties were contacted who, through honest ignorance and/or oversight, were not adhering to the SEKI Minimum Impact Restrictions. In those cases, educational instruction was given and perhaps, a verbal warning, depending on the nature of the incident.

There were three incidents where such an education was required because the parties had not received the SEKI Minimum Impact Restriction handout (which is normally signed by both the issuing officer and the permittee). The park restrictions differ markedly from those outlined on the Inyo N.F. permit, including the specific requirement not to camp on vegetation and to pack out all trash, including used toilet paper. In these three cases, the parties hiked in, but their gear was dropped-off within the park boundary by a commercial pack station. The pack station had obtained the permit for their clients and had not given them the SEKI Minimum Impact Restriction handout. When wilderness



permits are obtained in person from the east-side visitor centers, the restrictions are explained, and the park handout is signed and stapled to the Inyo wilderness permit. Lacking this information, it is not surprising that all three parties were not adhering to the restrictions.

The ranger station was staffed with non-commissioned personnel this year and all citations were issued with the help of off-site law enforcement personnel.



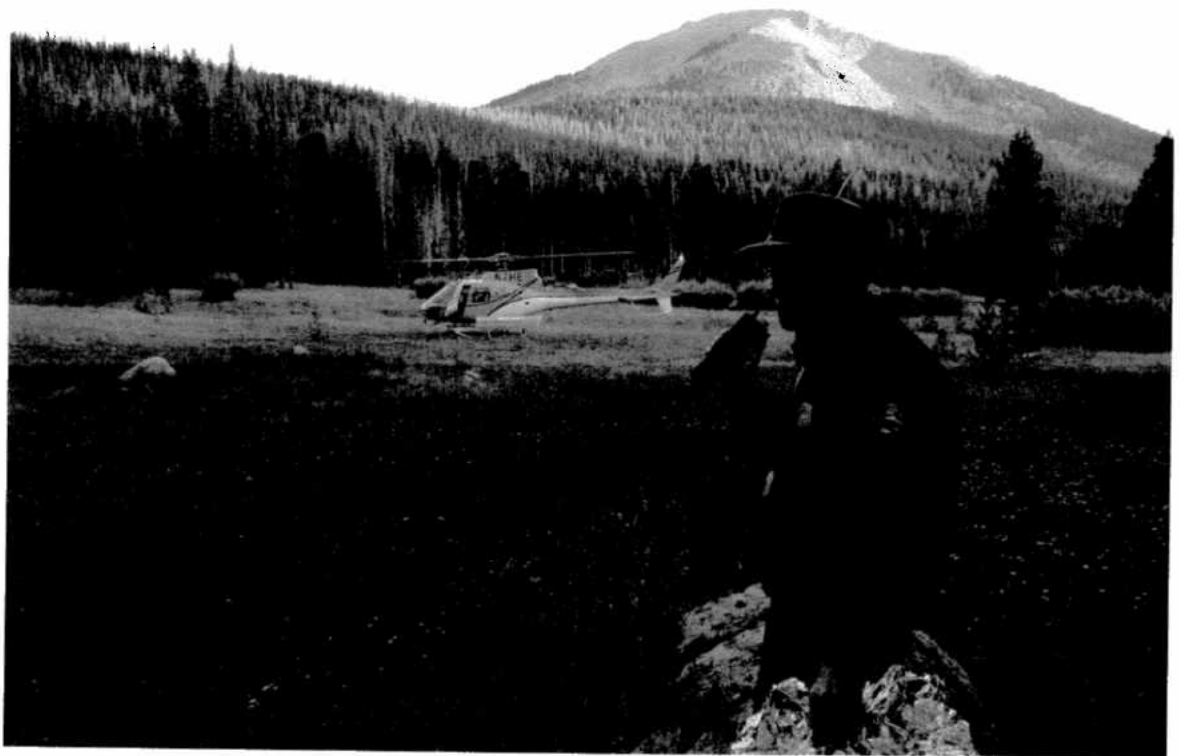
Pets taken in the park on a day-hike up Mt. Langley



Commercial party with a pet contacted at the Kern R.S.

### 3. SARs and Medicals:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Evacuation</u>
7-16-12	Sky Blue Lake	SAR: Party with abdominal pain Activated SPOT device	Helicopter due to remote location
7-23-12	Mt. Langley	SAR: Overdue hiker last seen near summit of Mt. Langley	Rock Creek ranger and VIP were mobilized via helicopter and participated in an extensive two-day search with multiple participants; subject found deceased
7-26-12	Rock Creek	Medical: 61-yr-old female fell crossing Rock Creek dislocating or fracturing her shoulder	Ranger assessed patient and arranged for RMC consultation; due to medical history, helicopter evacuation was advised; after a long wait, the patient was successfully evacuated



Coordinating medical evacuation

#### 4. Fatalities:

There was one fatality in the Rock Creek area this season. A day-hiker, leaving from the Inyo N.F., who had summited Mt. Langley, was found deceased below the eroded top section of the unmaintained trail over Old Army Pass. An extensive, two-day SAR that included two helicopters, 20+ people and two dog teams, ended when the victim was spotted in the cliffs below the trail in the Inyo N.F., just beyond the park boundary. The Rock Creek ranger and VIP were the first team in the area and participated throughout the search.

#### 5. Weather:

Historically low, winter snowfalls resulted in early pass openings and easier than normal river and stream crossings. Temperatures remained near normal during the season but rainfall exceeded normal levels. August and the beginning of September were unusually rainy, with week-long periods of afternoon thunderstorms and cloudy skies. The primary effect was to encourage hikers to attempt peak bagging and traversing high passes early in the day to minimize exposure to bad weather.

#### 6. Fires:

There were a number of small fires in the area that surrounds Rock Creek, but except for the monitoring helicopter flights, there were no effects felt. This was fortunate given the low snowfall and frequent thunderstorms of August.

There was an incident that occurred just before the rangers were mobilized, where a pair

of boys became separated from their party on Siberian Outpost. In an effort to attract help, and although they were within view of the PCT and its through-hikers, they systematically set fire to more than two dozen trees. This did not create a larger fire and it did facilitate a reunion, but it also did significant resource damage. The incident was investigated later in the season by the Crabtree and Mineral King rangers.



Trees deliberately set ablaze on Siberian Outpost

#### B. Use Patterns:

##### 1. Backpackers/ Day Hikers:

Because of the low snowfall and the early opening of the mountain passes, the usual throng of north-bound, PCT through-hikers had gone past by the time of the ranger's mobilization. As is usually the case, by mid-July, the area was busy with backpackers and stock-supported groups, mainly on Mount Whitney trips. Three-quarters of visitors to the area use only the few feet on either side of the PCT, straying from the trail only to set-up their camps. And the vast majority of those camped in the established camp areas at Rock Creek crossing and near the Ranger Station. There were only a handful of evenings (limited to the beginning and end of the season) when those camp areas were found empty.

The remaining use was concentrated in the Lower Soldier Lake area, which is a convenient, easy to reach and beautiful destination. On weekends it was always crowded often with all of the available campsites taken. To a lesser extent, backpackers also camped along the creek up the New Army Pass trail, either upon entering or before exiting the park. The Miter Basin again saw low usage, but perhaps a bit more than last year - our patrols there rarely encountered more than two other parties camping at once in the basin. The same low level use was seen in the Upper Soldier Lake area, as well as the camp area around the food storage box at Rock Creek Lake. The Funston Lake and Siberian Outpost areas saw very little visitation; only a few anglers and intrepid backpackers ventured there, especially since the low snowfall resulted in a completely dry Siberian Creek.

The continued concentration of use in these few areas is a positive development for both

the ecology of the lesser-used areas, as well as for the few visitors searching for a wilderness experience. But it also meant that the popular areas demanded great attention to minimize the impact of the heavy use. Picking up trash, used toilet paper, and attending to the campfire rings (and removing inappropriate campfire rings) on a near-daily basis was a necessary routine in order to maintain an adequate wilderness environment and to keep the areas from becoming overtaken by litter, campsite spread, and other forms of damage.

Day use in the park was limited to the ascent of Mt. Langley from base camps in the Cottonwood Lakes and Long Lake areas in the National Forest. This peak is an easily accessed 14,000+ ft. peak and continues to be a popular destination. Many hikers access Mt. Langley from Old Army Pass since it involves considerably less elevation gain and loss compared with the higher New Army Pass. Even early in the season, the side of Mt. Langley was completely covered with use trails, to the point that very little of it did not show a footprint. A designated and well-cairned trail is scheduled to be on the agenda for next year and will go a long way to spare the fragile alpine vegetation.

## 2. Stock:

Stock use was also dominated by Mt. Whitney. Of the 20 commercial stock groups that were contacted, few had an itinerary that did not include crossing Lower Rock Creek en route to Crabtree and then returning through Rock Creek. The stock supported trips to Mt. Whitney this season were almost exclusively run by Sierra Mountain Center, and their stock was provided by both Cottonwood Pack Station and Rock Creek Pack Station. We also contacted rare, stock-supported trips headed by California Alpine Guides and Southern Yosemite Mountain Guides.

The 286 head of stock spent most of their evenings this season tethered to the high-line in the demonstration stock camp at Lower Rock Creek crossing. One private party stayed a night at Nathan's Meadow.

There was a trend at the end of the season for commercial parties to stay at Rock Creek Lake. Sierra Mountain Guides desired to make their final day of the usual Rock Creek-Mt. Whitney-Rock Creek trip shorter and pushed their packers to stay at one of the camps that surround Rock Creek Lake and that are closer to the Horseshoe Meadow trailhead. Since the Rock Creek Lake meadows were closed this season, the stock for those groups grazed at Penned-up meadow in the lower Miter Basin. Last year Penned-up was forgotten and ungrazed; this year there were 30 nights of grazing - all in the last few weeks of the season. Cottonwood Pack Station packers learned that they were able to use ropes and tarps to close off the end of the meadow and could thus graze their horses there without a fear of them running back to the barn. This considerably reduced the feed expenses for Cottonwood Pack Station and I expect that this trend of using Penned-up meadow will continue and expand next season. The trail to Penned-up is unmaintained and has suffered due to this intensive use.

There were also 36 stock nights of administrative grazing at Lower Rock Creek crossing, mostly in support of the crew that was putting a new roof on the ranger station. The Lower Rock Creek meadows came very close to reaching their maximum number of grazing nights.

## 3. Administrative

Unlike last year, Rock Creek did not receive extensive administrative use this year. Because the ranger and VIP were no longer new to the area, the instructional visits from the meadow crew were not necessary. In addition, the military trip which usually goes through the area was cancelled and extensive and violent thunderstorms canceled a

second visit from the ranger's supervisor.

The area did benefit from two trips from the Lone Pine trailhead ranger on July 19<sup>th</sup> and September 15<sup>th</sup>. She is always a big help in maintaining some of the more heavily used areas and also made one day of residual biomass meadow monitoring much more enjoyable.

On July 6<sup>th</sup>, Chris Waldschmidt came on the first of two planned visits to go over our progress and answer our many questions in person. With his help, a new solar panel controller was installed which validated our concerns about the performance of the station's ten year old batteries. Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, his planned return trip was cancelled due to inclement weather.

On July 21<sup>st</sup>, a crew of four arrived to replace the roof on the ranger station and to stabilize and stain the wall logs. The work on the 12 by 20 foot cabin took them until August 11<sup>th</sup> to complete. From July 27<sup>th</sup> to August 8<sup>th</sup>, the Rock Creek ranger and VIP were on temporary assignment to the Kern ranger station.

#### 4. Commercial:

In addition to the commercial stock use mentioned above, we contacted six commercial groups on non-stock supported, backpacking trips. This doubled last year's total and hopefully the trend will continue. These trips were led by Call of the Wild, Southern Yosemite Mountain Guides and a newcomer this year, CP Biofuels LLC, DBA Trans-Sierra Club. One of the trips was a seven-day unsupported backpack across the park from Sugarloaf to Cottonwood Pass, but most of the others followed the usual Mt. Whitney route. There were no problems with the commercial backpacking groups and with just a few exceptions, the commercial stock-supported parties complied well with wilderness regulations.

#### 5. Aircraft:

Military over-flights are common in the patrol area and interruption by their loud exhaust (especially when they fly in tandem) is a common, intrusive, and wilderness obscuring occurrence. No low flying aircraft were reported in the area, but the low flyers reported by the Crabtree Ranger were loud in the Rock Creek area as well.

### C. Natural Resources:

#### 1. Bear Activity:

We did not observe our local bear this year, but we did encounter his scat on many occasions. Thankfully he is a shy fellow and has not been tempted by the backpackers' food, since they have been very good in complying with the bear canister requirement. Bear canisters are required throughout the Rock Creek drainage and of all the parties that we contacted, only four did not have a canister. That there were no bear sightings reported by any visitors is a testament to the effectiveness of the bear canister requirement.

#### 2. Wildlife:

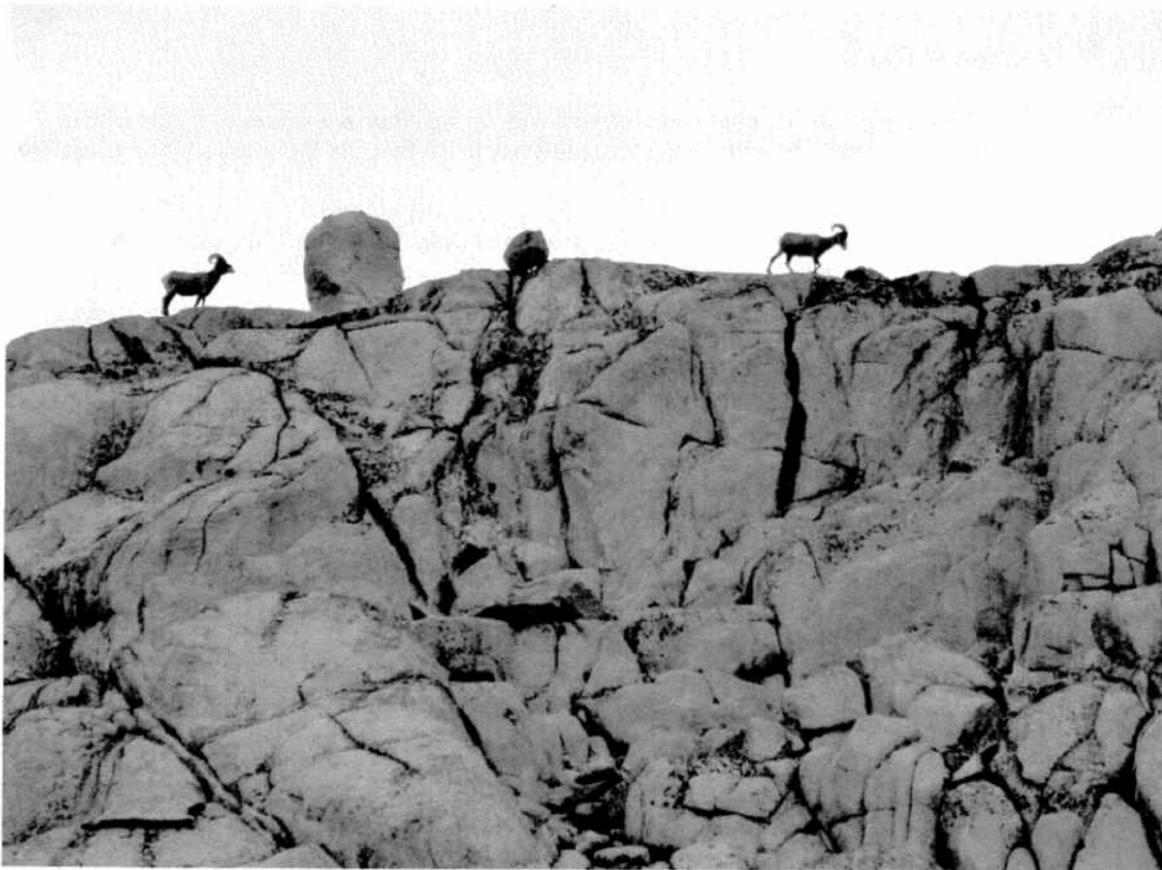
Bighorn sheep were observed both on the slopes of Mt. Langley and in the upper sections of Miter Basin. On one occasion we were able to observe a group of female sheep and a number of frisky, white lambs grazing in the shadow of Mt. Langley.

Coyotes were often heard howling at nights in the Miter Basin and on two occasions seen

on the trail, and on July 4<sup>th</sup> a mature Bald Eagle was witnessed fishing at Lower Soldier Lake (July 4<sup>th</sup>, Bald Eagle, Soldier Lake; quite the patriotic day!). There were also some unexpected raptor sightings, including an American Kestrel by Rock Creek Lake and a probable Short-eared Owl at Cottonwood Pass.

On two consecutive days in July, we were visited at the Rock Creek Crossing campgrounds by a young, inquisitive and surprisingly unafraid American Martin. His constant movement and incessant searching for prey made his visits a wondrous experience, but also a photographic disaster of blurred images.

I did notice that there were a greater number of young mule deer in the Rock Creek area. Because of the previous winter's high snowfall and the consequent lush growth of last summer, (they conceive in the fall, gestate over the winter and give birth in the spring; and their fecundity is related to resource richness at the time of conception) there was a noticeable increase in twins and even one triplet. But, this dry winter and reduced vegetation seemed to have resulted fawns that were undersized. The same phenomenon seems to have occurred with the Yellow-bellied Marmots. The meadows at Lower Soldier Lake and New Army Pass were crawling with the cute little young. This may be a tough winter for all of those small ones, but a good winter for the scavengers.



Big horn sheep above Sky Blue Lake in the Miter Basin

### 3. Vegetation:

The historically low snowfall resulted in a relatively unproductive vegetative season. The meadow vegetation shortened their growth cycle and went to seed early. The rains of August may have delayed this somewhat, but by the end of July the meadows looked as

golden as they did in September of the previous year. The grazing dates were not delayed this year and many of the meadows in Rock Creek opened before the ranger was mobilized. The combination of early opening and a moderate amount of administrative grazing resulted in close to the maximum number of grazing nights at the Lower Rock Creek Crossing meadows. This was the opposite of last year's usage which was extremely low due to delayed openings.

#### D. Cultural Resources:

##### 1. Prehistoric Sites.

No additional disturbing of the commonly visited prehistoric sites was observed. None of the visitors that we encountered asked about prehistoric sites and relics.

##### 2. Historic Sites:

The ranger station is a historic site; built in 1949 by the Department of Water Resources. It remains in very good condition and now has a new roof and staining.

##### 3. Ranger Station:

The ranger station over-wintered well with no unauthorized use noted by the winter survey crew. The main living area remains mouse-free, but the attic seems to have a few furry residents.

We extensively cleaned the walls, floors, and even the ceiling of the cabin at the beginning of the season and it proved again to be a very cozy home.

The solar unit worked well, but as noted in previous end of season reports, the batteries were installed in 2002 and after a decade of use should be considered for replacement. A new digital solar controller was installed and it conclusively shows them to be near the end of their useful life. The crew working on the cabin replaced the wiring connectors at the solar panels with a much more elegant arrangement. They also rerouted the wiring under the cabin to a much less exposed location.

As previously mentioned, the station had an old roof removed and a new one installed. The wall logs were inspected, treated where necessary and then given a coating of stain. The metal shutters were also given a new coat of paint. The station is in good condition and looks almost new.

During our stay in the Kern Ranger Station, we spent hours each day cleaning the interior and exterior grounds. It had not been given much attention in the past few seasons, and since the construction crew had solved some of the worst rodent entry problems, it was time to do a thorough cleaning. The VIP is especially to be commended in her diligence and we hope that the next residents there appreciate the effort and continue to keep it clean.





Construction crew installing new roof on the Rock Creek Ranger Station

#### 4. Signs:

Most of the area signs have been defaced by scratching, some with profane anti-government sentiments, which must be covered with a black marker each spring. This method is fairly effective, lasting the entire season, but if looked at closely, the scratched writing is still legible. The SEKI boundary signs show extensive scratching over "weapons prohibited" and the New Army Pass sign has actually been shot -replacement of these signs would benefit the park's image with the public. A discussion on the modification of current signage and proposals for additional signage to control inappropriate fire rings can be found in the recommendations section of this report.

As a reminder to visitors, we taped temporary signs to the food storage lockers at Lower Soldier Lake and Lower Rock Creek crossing. In the former case it was primarily intended to reduce the proliferation of fires in the area and it seemed to be effective. We also added a similar sign to the food storage locker at Rock Creek Lake, also to reduce the proliferation of fires in that area.

At Rock Creek crossing, the temporary sign was intended to steer larger groups of visitors to the more impacted camp area at Rock Creek rather than the smaller and sensitive camp area next to Guyot Creek. The sign also contained a map of the trail to Crabtree, as well as local campsite and fire ring placements. Attaching permanent signs of this nature to the top of the three bear storage boxes in the area would be an unobtrusive and effective step to positively modify visitor behavior.

We heard much confusion resulting from the signed trail to Lower Soldier Lake, since the current sign sends hikers to the side of the lake where there is a restoration area and

camping is not permitted. As a result, some hikers thought that there was no camping allowed around the entire lake. The camping areas on the other side of the lake are accessed by a trail marked only with a "Food Storage Locker" sign. To resolve that problem, we attached a temporary sign to the current post that directs campers to the proper trail leading to the opposite side of the lake. Replacement signs that incorporate these changes were requested last season.

It was also necessary to add a "Restoration Site No Camping" sign to the meadow by the campground near the ranger station trail. Park employees had used this area as a short-cut to lower Rock Creek crossing and backpackers had mistaken the area as a possible place for their tent. The new sign alleviated that problem and will allow the meadow to rebound.



Defaced boundary sign at New Army Pass that appears to have been shot (near edge)

#### 5. Other Facilities:

The stock demonstration camp's highline and boardwalk are in good condition. The convenience of the highline to stock users and the attractive group camping area nearby is the main draw of this heavily used area. The vast majority of commercial groups use this area, and by confining stock impact to this easily monitored and easily maintained site, the demo camp has a positive impact on the surrounding wilderness. Installing another shorter fixed highline nearby would be appropriate to focus impacts in one location when larger or multiple stock parties use the site. The commercial stock users at the demo camp were generally very responsible and should be commended for effectively mitigating the effects of stock pawing and manure production.

The downside to this facility is that it concentrates the grazing pressure on the part of the meadow closest to it, while the meadow on the south side of Rock Creek goes nearly ungrazed. Creating an additional stock camp on the south side of the creek and then alternating their use each year would be a good way to spread the grazing pressure over a wider area. This would require some effort by a construction crew, but the meadow would appreciate it.

The drift gate upright on the south side of the Rock Creek trail finally rotted out at the base and fell over. After many years recommending to have the upright replaced, the ranger constructed a large stone pile as a support. It is very sturdy and should now last an additional season. However, it does obstruct the trail somewhat and in an ideal world it would be replaced by the trail crew in 2013.



Rotted drift fence post repaired with rock pile

#### F. Trails:

##### 1. Trail Activities (work accomplished):

The trails from Cottonwood Pass in the Inyo N.F. to the west side of Mt. Whitney and through Rock Creek are some of the most heavily used in the wilderness sections of the entire park. In fact, according to last year's statistics, over ten percent of the commercial stock nights were spent in the Rock Creek area. In a single 48 hour period in August, over 300 hikers passed by on the PCT near the ranger station and for the season, the estimated number was well over 2,600.

Yet this year, the trail crew spent less time in the area than last year. Two members of the Kern crew left on foot from their camp in Sandy Meadow (7 miles from Rock Creek

crossing) on the morning of August 23<sup>rd</sup>, spent the night in the area, and hiked back to their camp in Sandy Meadow the following afternoon. Last year, was slightly better; two of the Kern crew stayed in the area for four days (September 2 - 6). It is not surprising that the heavy horse traffic, backpackers and day users in the area combined with a lack of attention from the trail crew has resulted in some very eroded and rough sections of trail.

This year we had the opportunity to spend a little more than a week in the beginning of August stationed at the Kern. It was much calmer than the Rock Creek area – during the whole period we encountered less than a dozen visitors. The velvet grass removal crew that spends the entire season in the area verified that they rarely saw non-administrative users. That area of the park seems to have received considerable attention from the trail crew. Hopefully, next year will be Rock Creek's turn and the area will get much needed trail work, especially the heavily used switchbacks leading up to Guyot Creek on the PCT, the heavily eroded section of the Siberian Pass trail where a parallel trail has developed, the heavily eroded and nearly unrecognizable sections of the New Army Pass trail, and the switchbacks on the PCT directly above the Ranger Station.

The low snowfall this winter resulted in a limited number of blow downs across the trails in Rock Creek. They were easily cleared by the ranger and VIP, with the exception of a large Foxtail Pine that was removed by the trail crew on a resupply sortie through the area. A small landslide occurred late in the season on the PCT on the switchbacks leading up to Guyot Creek that created a hazard for stock trains. The Ranger moved the smaller boulders to create a safer and more obvious path around the obstruction but a very large boulder remains to be moved next year.

The ranger split what winter wood was available after the trail crew cut up a downed tree with a chainsaw. Unfortunately, they ran out of gas and were able to get through only a portion of the tree. The additional wood required was cut by the ranger using a hand saw.

## 2. Problem Areas:

The huge number of use trails on the upper slope of Mt. Langley continues to be a significant problem in the Rock Creek area. There are ecological concerns from the trampling of alpine vegetation and the hikers' effect on the endangered bighorn sheep population, as well as safety concerns as hikers become lost following the wrong use trail. Establishing an official route to the summit, and having the trail crew mark it with large and obvious cairns, would go a long way to eliminating both problems.

As previously discussed, the trails in the area are in very rough shape due to heavy use. There are a number of problem spots: the trail near the Army Creek crossing has been eroding for many years, as has been noted in previous end of season reports - parallel trails have now developed on both sides of the original trail; the PCT switchbacks leading up to Guyot Creek and above the Ranger Station; the switchbacks and higher sections of the New Army Pass trail; and the "chute" section of the Rock Creek Lake trail.



Eroded trail near New Army Pass Trail junction

#### G. Camp Areas:

##### 1. Conditions:

Rock Creek crossing is by far the most used camping area, with the majority of the area's overnight visitors choosing to camp there. Lower Soldier Lake is the next most used camping area, with Guyot Creek and Rock Creek Lake lagging far behind in usage. Near daily patrols of the Rock Creek crossing area minimized the high use impact and kept the area tidy and appealing. We spent a number of days at the beginning of the season at



Lower Soldier Lake removing campfire rings and rehabilitating campsites. Frequent visits to the area, especially on weekends, kept the area free of new fire rings and kept use impacts to a minimum.

Replacing the sign on the food storage locker at Rock Creek crossing seemed to keep the impacts at Guyot Creek lower than they might otherwise have been, and kept many campers at the larger and more impacted Rock Creek campsites. A version of this temporary sign should be made permanent and attached onto the top of the locker.

## 2. Sanitation:

Again this year, sanitation control presented an ongoing challenge, especially in the heavily used Rock Creek area. Toilet paper, and even worse, long-lasting synthetic wipes, were a familiar sight in the woods surrounding the more popular campsites. Particularly disturbing was the complete lack of effort by some visitors to bury or disguise their leavings. Frequent patrolling by the ranger of these often used areas was necessary to keep the problem from getting out of control. Possible solutions to the problem have been given in many of the previous end of year reports. The most promising would be to have permit issuing offices give each backpacker an opaque, zip-lock, plastic toilet paper bag along with their wilderness permit. This would give the rangers a platform to discuss appropriate wilderness sanitation and would make it easier and less "gross" for visitors to comply with wilderness regulations.



Lower Soldier Lake toilet paper clean-up day

Official fire rings remain at Lower Rock Creek crossing and Nathan's Meadow. The Lower Rock Creek fire rings see constant use during the season and the others see occasional use. They are often enlarged and full of ash, partially burned trash, and half-burned logs. Near daily attention kept them at reasonable dimensions and in good condition.

The removal of illegal or inappropriate fire rings was a frequent necessity, and this season we removed countless numbers of them. Particularly disturbing were the fires built next to large boulders causing smoke and heat scarring that can only be painstakingly chipped away. However, the removal of these rings is essential since an intact ring signals to the next visitor that a fire is overlooked and/or allowed. Our visit to the Kern, where there had been no ranger for the last two seasons, revealed many inappropriate or hugely expanded fire rings that needed to be eliminated or reduced in size. Recommendations to minimize campfire problems can be found later in this report.

#### 4. Fire Regulations:

The 10,400 ft. fire limit implemented in 2009 has reduced the incidence of illegal fires in high elevation areas, but it has not eliminated them. Campfire rings are often found above the elevation limit. Recommendations to minimize this problem can be found later in this report.

#### 5. Food Storage:

The Rock Creek drainage is a bear canister required area and we contacted only a few parties that did not have one. This was true even of the PCT through-hikers that we contacted early in the season. The food storage lockers at Rock Creek crossing and Soldier Lakes are the most often used and many times this season they were filled with bear canisters. The down side of these lockers is that they are an attractant for caches, garbage, and discarded (and weighty) food and personal items. We removed many pounds of refuse (including a discarded ammunition box) and unwanted food items, which subsequently had to be packed out of the backcountry. If the food storage lockers were not there, it is likely that visitors would not so cavalierly abandon their possessions.

The bear canister restrictions work very well in this area. It would be my recommendation to remove the food storage lockers and expand the bear canister regulations to encompass the entire park. This would avoid all confusion about where canisters are required and additionally, our experience is that the restrictions are well tolerated and very effective in reducing bear/hiker interactions.



Trash and empty ammunition box found in food storage locker at Rock Creek Lake

#### H. Permit System:

##### 1. Compliance:

Of over 1,000 contacts with visitors in the park, only three parties did not have a valid wilderness permit. Compliance with the permitting system is nearly universal with both the commercial and private users.

##### 2. Issuing Office:

The issuing offices generally did an acceptable job of providing pre-trip wilderness travel information. However, the Lone Pine trailhead ranger encountered resistance from her superiors in her attempt to encourage her coworkers in the permitting office to adequately explain the park minimum impact restrictions. The office mainly deals with Mt. Whitney day use permits and is interested in processing them as quickly as possible. There were a number of instances where hikers complained to me, without prompting, that they did not receive adequate instructions. The Bishop office did not have these problems and their permittees were generally well informed. Problems sometimes occurred when a group leader, anxious to begin a trip, did not pay attention while the permitting office reviewed minimum impact regulations and/or neglected to read the minimum impact sheet.

The new Inyo reservation system resulted in a many wilderness permits being presented with "Unknown" itineraries. Hopefully that problem will be resolved over the winter as it presents major safety and use monitoring issues.



There was also an incident where a university group was issued a special use permit by Inyo N.F. and because they did not go through the usual channels, the group did not receive the SEKI minimum impact restrictions handout (a similar situation to the previously mentioned problem with wilderness permits obtained by commercial pack stations for their clients). In this case, it was a group of 15 who were planning to climb Mt. Langley when the ranger met them. That off-trail area is restricted to a maximum group size of 8 individuals, but they did not know of the restriction. If they had been required to obtain their wilderness permit in person, rather than through the mail, the situation would probably not have occurred.

I. Communications:

(b) (7)(F)



J. Needs for Next Year:

**Fuel:**

Three large propane tanks (one empty and one partial large tank remains at the station)  
10 small pocket rocket canisters

**Maps:**

1 Trails Illustrated SEKI, 1 Tom Harrison Whitney High Country, 1 Golden Trout Wilderness

**Medical:**

Assorted pain relievers, particularly acetaminophen  
Gatorade or other electrolyte replacement powder  
(BLS kit inventory and Patrol EMS inventory forms have been submitted showing additional supplies needed)

**Other:**

Logbook  
50 Commercial Use Monitoring Forms  
2 Roll duct tape  
2 thick rolls strapping tape  
1 thin roll strapping tape  
5 pocket note pads  
3 bundles paper towels  
4 boxes of matches  
16 C-batteries for trail counter (two sets as they need to be replaced mid-season)  
1 box large zip-lock plastic bags  
1 box small zip-lock plastic bags  
7 burlap sacks  
1 pencil sharpener  
1 large carabineer (for highline)  
10 large heavy-duty trash bags to line burlap sacks for backhaul  
40 small trash bags for camp clean-ups  
3 sponges  
10 rolls toilet paper  
Dish soap  
Candles  
8 packages AA batteries (lithium) for GPS and SAR large headlights

14 packages AAA-batteries (lithium) for headlights  
White cardboard for signs  
Plastic laminating stock for signs  
8 mousetraps  
Lightweight non-stick skillet  
Chef's knife  
New can opener  
4 plates  
New pressure cooker (current one leaks steam)  
Box grater

K. Recommendations:

(b) (5)



(b) (5)



L. Pertinent Inventory:

Fuel:

3 full and 3 partial 8-oz. pocket rocket canisters  
4 full and 1 partial 4-oz. pocket rocket canisters  
3 gallons white gas  
2 quarts ethanol  
1 partial large propane tank

Maps:

2 Mineral King (7.5 min)	1 Mt. Williamson (7.5 min)
2 Mt. Langley (7.5 min)	2 Cirque Peak (7.5 min)
1 Kern Lake (7.5 min)	1 Kearsarge Peak (7.5 min)
0 Kern Peak (7.5 min)	1 John Muir Wilderness (7.5 min)
2 Mt. Brewer (7.5 min)	1 Lone Pine (15 min)
3 Johnson Peak (7.5 min)	2 Kern Peak (15 min)
2 Chagoopa Falls (7.5 min)	2 Mt. Whitney (15 min)
6 Mt. Kaweah (7.5 min)	1 Golden Trout Sierra South
5 Mt. Whitney (7.5 min)	1 Inyo National Forest

Cabin Supplies:

0 quart size zip lock Bags	0 boxes Kleenex
14 light sticks (for SARs)	10 CUA forms
5 bundles paper towels	20 visitor contact log sheets

10 rolls toilet paper  
 0 bottles dish soap  
 30 clothes pins  
 1 lost-found report book  
 1 employee medical evaluation packet  
 2 exotic plant observation forms  
 20 wildlife observation forms  
 20 BIMS forms  
 5 burlap sacks  
 3 sheets laminating paper  
 2 cutter insect repellent sticks  
 2 bottles insect repellent  
 1 bag p-cord  
 2 bottles sunscreen  
 0 boxes thumbtacks  
 1 boxes aluminum foil  
 0 new mousetraps  
 2 boxes matches  
 7 notepads  
 1 roll duct tape

3 grain sacks  
 0 large trash bags  
 0 small trash bags  
 0 aluminum shovel heads  
 1 voltmeter  
 1 slingshot  
 1 laundry brush  
 1 bag cotton balls  
 2 patch kits  
 0 jar contact cement  
 4 pairs ear plugs  
 1 medium leather gloves  
 2 large leather gloves  
 1 box ballpoint pens  
 1 box #10 envelopes  
 2 8 1/2 x 11 notepads  
 4 D batteries  
 50 AA batteries (old, non-lithium)  
 0 AAA batteries  
 0 logbooks

First Aid Supplies (ALS):

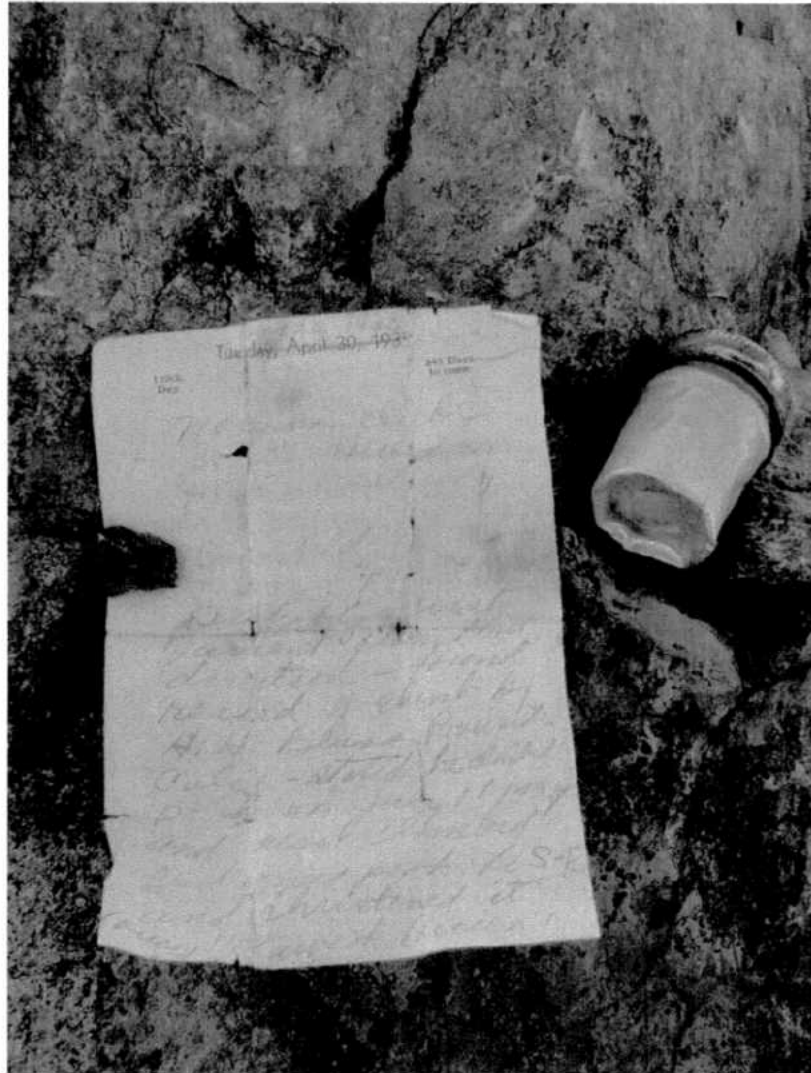
2 lactated ringer's injection USP 1000mL (exp. 9/11)  
 7 nu gauze (2x2, 4-ply)  
 Lots of alcohol pads  
 1 IV start kit with derma frame transparent dressing  
 1 primary IV set  
 1 small-bore T-port extension set (exp. 9/11)  
 1 sharps shuttle  
 1 sodium chloride 2 ml, 0.9% (exp. 11/09)  
 2 18G, 1 1/4" protect IV (exp 5/08 and 11/09)  
 1 20G, 1 1/4" protect IV (exp. 4/10)  
 1 roll tape

First Aid Supplies (BLS):

12 run sheets  
 0 follow-up instruction forms  
 15 SAR brochures  
 27 knuckle bandages  
 3 eye bandages  
 2 splinter out kits  
 20 steri strips  
 50 butterfly closures  
 1 readi-splint full arm  
 10 3x4 in. sterile pads  
 1 4x30" scotch cast 2 splint  
 30 3x3" sterile gauze  
 20 alcohol pads  
 3 povidone-iodine pads  
 1 4x15" scotch cast 2 splint  
 0 acetaminophen  
 15 aspirin  
 2 SAM splints  
 0 multi-trauma dressing  
 1 air splint  
 2 wound cleaning syringes

Lots of moleskin  
 2 nasal cannulas  
 1 2x5" yd gauze roll  
 2 4.5x4.5 yd gauze roll  
 4 4x4" gauze pads  
 10 emergency sunglasses  
 5 pair medium gloves  
 1 box large gloves  
 15 triple antibiotic ointment  
 25 2x3" gauze pads  
 15 2x2" gauze pads  
 0 Q-tips  
 1 bottle caladryl  
 0 pupil gauge  
 3 rolls athletic tape  
 100 band-aids  
 1 CPR microshield  
 1 c-spine collars  
 0 cardboard splints  
 3 menstrual pads  
 Digi-thermometer

# Tyndall EOS Report 2012 by Laura Pilewski



The contrast of last summer's abundance of water to this summer's drought was pretty amazing. Lots of people were taking advantage of the snow free peaks and passes. Many were already completing the John Muir trail as we rangers were hiking up the Whitney trail to merely begin our season. And, they never seemed to stop filing down from the north. I believe this was a record year for both permits issued for the JMT and those successfully completing it. The lack of mosquitoes, bears and high water crossings certainly made the backcountry more user friendly. I guess the trade off was less wildflowers and forage for the resident and non- resident grazers of the high country.

## **B. Visitor Services**

### **a. Contacts**

#### **i. Backpackers (approx. 2976 contacts)**

The JMT and PCT are super highways. The High Sierra Trail has a steady flow and, peak season, the Colby Pass trail seems to be an equally popular trans-Sierra route.

**ii. Day hikers** Once again, the record time for the JMT was beat (4 days!). I want to know the record for the slowest time! The day hikers in my area consist mostly of peak baggers hiking from a base camp.

**iii. Stock** Commercial groups brought approximately 47 head through the Tyndall patrol area. Since their clients stuck to the John Muir trail, they exclusively used the Tyndall and Wallace creek meadows for 37 and 31 nights respectively. The Kern Trail Crew had 12 head and spent most of their time in the Kern Kaweah (approx. 276 nights) and one week at Tyndall (72 nights). A few private stock groups passed through the JMT/PCT corridor and one private packer did a loop through the upper Kern area. Although not all groups were contacted, it is estimated they grazed eleven head for 41 nights. Overall, use was low and well distributed in the Tyndall patrol area for a total of 463 nights. All but one group consisted of horses and mules. That private group had llamas.

### **b. Law Enforcement/ c. Citations**

There were a small number of illegal campfires in the area especially when the PCT hikers came through early and late season. Camping on vegetation is still commonly seen, but rarely is anyone cited for this offense. We simply explain why it is inappropriate and have them move their camp. I asked my supervisor to follow up on two parties with improper food storage violations and one person who had hiked to the Kern Hot Springs without a permit.

It seems like we've almost turned the corner to a well intentioned Leave No Trace Crowd. Surely, there are still issues with toilet paper in the popular campgrounds and the occasional trash in a bear box but at least it's not littering the ground or hid under a rock or log. Virtually all visitors were respectful and followed the rules and regulations this summer.

**d. SAR & Medicals**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Evacuation</u>
7/20	Mt Langley	SAR	recovery
8 / 5	Sandy Meadow	poss. dehydration, recent hx cancer	helicopter
8/6	Crabtree RS	HAPE, NV	helicopter
8/7	Mt Whitney	SAR	found @Mirror Lk
8/10	Sandy Meadow	HAPE	helicopter
8/24	Wallace Ck.	dehydration, hyponutremia	self
9/3	Tyndall Ck/JMT	poss. dehydration, recent hx PE	helicopter

There weren't many **SPOT device** activations in Sequoia this season. There was one at Rattlesnake and the Kern where it sounds like it would have been better to have the Kern ranger on scene before flying the helicopter. A group of three, 15 year old young men wisely took a SPOT device on their High Sierra Trail adventure. However, it rained so much that their solar power batteries didn't get charged enough so that they could check in with their parents on a regular basis (I notified dispatch that they were doing fine). I did a welfare check on a person who had NV at Lake South America. They had texted their wife with a GeoPro, who, in turn, contacted dispatch regarding the situation. They ultimately refused any first aid and made it out on their own. Lastly, another person dropped their SPOT device along the trail this summer; always kind of comical.

**e. Fatalities (n/a)**

On a more grave note, a day hiker fell to his death off of Army Pass on his way down from Mt. Langley. Bad weather (lightning/hail/icy conditions) and a poorly placed cairn could have been contributing factors to his death but this is pending the results of investigation. Ironically, Army Pass was snow free this season, which is normally what makes this pass treacherous early season.

This search lasted for a few days. It was good experience to work with Karl Pearson and his son Andrew as a liaison in Lone Pine. It was refreshing to see the experience levels of some of the veteran Inyo and China Lake SAR team members. Despite having liaisons on the ground in Lone Pine, interagency communications are still difficult.

(b) (5)



## **f. Weather**

### **g. Fires**

Because of the dry winter (6% of normal snowpack in the Kern), by the time we arrived to our stations, virtually all passes were snow free, streams crossings were benign, and the meadows already had the appearance of autumn gold. Thankfully, we did get periodic rain throughout the summer. Thunderstorm activity seemed to be more common than in previous years. A few storms in particular had lots of lightning activity including one that hit all up and down the Sierra at 3:30 in the morning. In fact, a lightning bolt from that storm struck a tree a less than a mile from where I camped near Kern Point. Another two strikes caused small fires in Rattlesnake and Willow Creek drainages and one near Volcano Falls just south of the park boundary.

In the past, when these smokes were spotted via helicopter, they were reported over the radio so those in the field would be made aware of them. We park employees fully understand that once spotted they are safely managed. But, many visitors passing through the backcountry become concerned if they aren't told ahead of time (i.e. they worry about their safety and/or if they should rush out and report it). Plus, as controversial as wildfire management is, it is just good PR to know about these fires instead of saying "what fire?"

## **C. Use Patterns**

### **a. Backpackers**

The JMT/PCT is extremely popular. I bet the JMT is now one of the life-list goals for many and as mentioned previously, I wouldn't be surprised if this was a record year for both permits issued for the JMT and those successfully completing it.

### **b. Stock**

Virtually all stock use in the Tyndall area was commercial or administrative. Three small private groups came through during this season (two horse/mule parties, one llama party).

### **c. Administrative/Research**

The Upper Kern/Tyndall area remains a hub of research. The first to arrive was the I&M bird monitoring crew. Danny Boiano's Frog crew (Sean Auclair & Rosa Cox) immediately followed and would pay frequent visits to the ranger station between trips to Center Basin and Kern Point. They were always a pleasure to spend time with whenever they came through Tyndall and if I was away on patrol they would check the emergency message board. They also assisted with encounter surveys on Forester Pass. They were always hard at work and enthusiastic about their job of saving the Mountain Yellow-legged frog. They truly loved to explore the parks in which they worked.





(b) (6)

UCSC, returned to collect data for his project on "An early warning monitoring network for the assessing the impacts of climate change on stream ecosystems of the Sierra Nevada. His sites within SEKI are located in the Upper Bubbs and Tyndall drainages. The I&M Lakes Crew and Geologist William Hirt surveyed the Upper Kern for their respective projects. And three different crews surveyed meadows in the Tyndall and Wright Creek drainages. I assisted Cann, Hoff, Bake, and Pyrooz in the Wright Lakes area for an afternoon prior to being called out to a medical. Haultain & Frenzel were very fortunate to have this dedicated and knowledgeable crew cover so much ground this summer.

Thor and the history crew spent two nights working on the Tyndall Ranger Station and Sheepherder's cabin (see Backcountry Facilities). It is amazing the amount of work they accomplished this summer. The Rock Creek & Tyndall ranger stations along with the Whitney Hut look fantastic. A visitor even commented on the "new" Rock Creek Ranger Station!

Most recently, I had a nice visit with Chief Ranger Hendricks on his tour through the Upper Kern. He pulled off an ambitious itinerary over Shepherd's, Lucy's, and Longley passes to Sphinx Lakes/Cedar Grove. Despite this, he went out of his way to see the Tyndall Station and listen to my concerns within the patrol area.

#### **d. Commercial**

Commercial use was almost exclusively JMT supported trips. About half were stock supported. The other half were actually using "sherpas."

#### **D. Natural Resources**

##### **a. Bear Activity**

Bear sightings were very scarce this year. I hope that this does not ramp up efforts on bear box removal as it was not what I would call a very representative year. The Junction Meadow bear box in the Kern may need replacement next year as the door hinge is barely hanging in there. If the Center Basin/JMT box wasn't replaced in 2012 it might be worth replacing in 2013 (consult 116 for most recent observations).

##### **b. Wildlife**

My most unique sighting of the summer was that of a Ruddy Duck that spent at least two consecutive days on lower Mitochondria Lake feeding. Deer and Dark-eyed Junco were everywhere this season. But, unfortunately, pika calls seemed few and far between. Humming birds were also absent as there really weren't many wildflowers to drink from. And, the large flocks of American Kestrels and Ravens were absent due to the lack of grasshoppers/locusts of the Bighorn & Tyndall Plateaus. Late September/early October there was a big influx of American Coots on the algae rich alpine lakes. See Wildlife Observation Cards.

### **c. Vegetation**

Wallace Creek crossing and Tyndall meadows were grazed close to capacity this summer but use seemed well dispersed up and down stream. On the other hand, Wright Creek and Wallace Waterfall Meadows were untouched by domestic stock this year.

It appears that approximately thirty trees were blown down at the Frog Ponds during that November 30- December 1, 2012 Mono Wind event.

Due to the drought, warming climate conditions and or nutrient deposition, algae was evident in large amounts in every lake and stream in the high country (More than I have ever seen since I started my career in the back country in 1995).



### **E. Cultural Resources**

#### **a. Prehistoric**

Tyndall could use an updated map of archeological sites so they can be appropriately monitored.

#### **b. Historic**

The two historic cabins in the Tyndall area (Shepherd's cabin and the Powder Magazine in the Kern) look the same as the photos (w/ UTM's) from 2008. Campers still frequent these locations. In late 2010 someone hung a sign that said "Big Dogs" on the Shepherder's cabin so I removed it without any subsequent damage.

### **F. Backcountry Facilities**

#### **a. Ranger Station**

The Tyndall station is in superb shape. And, during a year when people are dying of hanta virus less than 200 miles away, it's nice to know it is still mouse proof. This won't last much longer though as the old mortar chinking is starting to deteriorate. There are two bags of cement presently at the station and they should be used before they get contaminated with water.

The cupola should either be removed or maintained. I don't believe it is historic. I do have the supplies to paint it and replace the missing wood. Perhaps, with assistance, I could repair or remove it next year. There also used to be two historic(?) benches (see photos 2009) for outside the cabin. One is gone (burned at some point in the past?) and the other is in pretty poor shape although visitors still attempt to sit on it. I gave Dave Yemm and Erika Jostad diagrams and measurements in 2009 for potential replacement.

Thor and the history crew paid a brief visit to paint wood preservative on the roof and they kindly swept the chimney while up there. The history crew did an incredible job on all cabin restoration work from the Kern to the summit of Mt. Whitney. It is amazing how

much work they accomplished with the difficult constraints of minimum tool compliance along with the tough working conditions they endured carrying heavy loads at high altitudes and in poor weather conditions. They also helped the rangers on several occasions with medicals in the Rock Creek and Crabtree areas. They were a welcome neighbor in the Kern this summer.

#### **b. Signs**

All are in place and functional. I removed two signs this year that were not placed by the park service. One was the aforementioned one at the Shepherd's cabin. The other was a plaque probably placed in the 1980's in memory of someone named Jessica. It was found in the upper Kern.



#### **G. Trails**

##### **a. Trail Activities/ Work accomplished**

Due to the light winter most trails still looked in pretty good shape. The Kern Crew prioritized their busy schedule and, decided to spend three weeks in the Kern Kaweah repairing the Colby Pass trail which is seeing increasing use. This seemed to be an appropriate place to spend more nights grazing as they stock tend to disperse well throughout the drainage and there normally isn't a high demand for commercial user nights. The crew skipped their stay at Cold Springs so I assisted the crew by brushing the upper Kern loop and removing this tree from the JMT early season.



There still is a short stretch of washed out trail damage along the Shepherd's Pass trail (approx. 75') that should be addressed next year. Josh Gabik stated that there are areas along the south side of Forester Pass that will need attention next year. His crew not only performed their regular trail duties this summer, but went above and beyond in helping their neighboring rangers with medicals and the history crew with the Whitney Hut.

As far as next season goes, the same ol' problem areas exist...

**b. Problem areas**

- 1) Check deteriorating walls & pins, south side of Forester Pass to ensure safe for stock travel.
- 2) Lake South America Col trail is washed out and needs work (& Re-route of trail adjacent to lake due south of the col as it is always a flooded meadow/trail early-mid season).
- 3) Super steep switchbacks just below tree-line Sequoia side of Colby Pass need steps and/or re-route with less grade.

Given visitation however, it sounds like Rock Creek might be the priority next season for maintenance. Perhaps, the order of the camps visited could be changed occasionally to reflect meadow opening dates, snow melt and visitor use (i.e., priority along the PCT/JMT for logging, etc.). Also, those camps that already have Knack boxes or nearby ranger stations could possibly be used to store items so there wouldn't be as much to move (i.e. stove, propane, etc.) by stock or helicopter.

One other note is that the unmaintained trail to Wallace Lake is now becoming quite overgrown with willows and has lots of downed trees. (b) (5)

(b) (5)

**H. Camp Areas**

All are looking pretty good, but need constant attention or rehab work in bear box campgrounds. I still would recommend removal of the bear box below the Tyndall ranger station. Although I think they are appropriate in certain locations, this one receives virtually no use and even less now that fires are not allowed below the ranger station. That is why it was occasionally used before (fires were not allowed upstream of here by the other bear box on the JMT). This camp area in general is rather poor due to widow makers and lack of flat ground without vegetation. I have already started rehab of this area. The bear box at the Frog Ponds could also be removed. I just don't see the need for three boxes in one square mile of wilderness.

## **I. Permit System**

Yosemite was still giving out old fire regulation information for Sequoia NP(11200' limit). I believe the Wilderness Office and Erika Jostad tried to resolve this issue since the summer of 2009 to no avail. After bringing this issue to Yosemite's attention once again in 2012, they simply stopped giving out info on SEKI's regulations altogether by crossing out both pertinent and outdated info. with a sharpie! Later this season, at least our minimum impact sheet was being given out in Yosemite, but this probably causes more environmental damage (twice as much paper) than the illegal fires. Ideally, the interagency John Muir trail regulation sheet should simply be updated! It is a nicely condensed, user friendly page for the entire 210 mile trail. And, people actually read it versus the verbose SEKI MI sheet. Keep in mind up to 4,000 visitors are utilizing this site specific information.

The PCTA also could use the second half of their permit (which is presently blank) to include a LNT synopsis and, maybe, a sentence of info from each major agency one passes through along the PCT. Also, with the advances in GIS, perhaps, an easy to read fire regulation map of these routes could be made.

**Trailheads** Mineral King did an outstanding job of coordinating patrols and exchanging information with the Little 5 Ranger. It would be nice to have the same communication with the east side trailhead rangers' patrol schedules that way we can coordinate projects or patrols better. For example, 119 patrolled Lake South America the day after I did. Had I known she was coming, I might have gone somewhere else or have waited a day to do a project together. Trailhead rangers are also a great resource to backfill stations when they are vacant. Of course, if their schedules are decided months in advance, it doesn't really help with real time issues or responses in the field. Individually, however, both Myrth and Leslie did a fantastic job and the park is lucky to have them both representing SEKI on the east side.

It would also be nice if there was more of a ranger presence on one of our most busy trails, the High Sierra Trail. I had multiple visitor reports of trash and overflowing fire pits in the Bear Paw area and west of Kaweah Gap. Somebody even found an abandoned raft at Hamilton Lake. This is the stretch of trail that is most highly impacted by novice hikers and is visible to the hundreds who pass through on their way to Mt Whitney. This is one of the areas where educating the public and setting the example are the most critical along their seventy mile journey across the pristine Sierra.

## **J. Communications**

(b) (7)(F)





(b) (7)(F)

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### **Encounter Surveys**

I participated in the encounter surveys whenever coincidental to my patrols. I also forwarded some to my neighboring frog crew as they frequented Forester Pass. Unfortunately, I did not receive the protocols or forms at Tyndall until August 3rd and by that time, Forester Pass was a low priority due to the lack of snow and therefore my patrol efforts were focused elsewhere for a change.

(b) (5)

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### **Training**

I really enjoyed the change of venue for training. Grant Grove seemed all around more accommodating for rangers who are required to use the campgrounds. The administrative camping area in Lodgepole has too small of occupancy for all the attendees and is way too noisy and does not have good showering facilities. Plus, Grant Grove is more centrally located for everyone and, overall, is a nicer place to take a walk pre/post training.

(b) (5)

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**K. Needs for next year**

Already submitted most...

-Gasket for Wild Ideas Bear Can (leaks when it rains)

EMS supplies still needed to complete inventory list(s):

-1 V-vac

-1 Large Trauma Dressing

**L. Recommendations/Projects for next year**

(b) (5)









## 2012 Le Conte Canyon Wilderness Ranger End of Season Report

From: George Durkee, Le Conte Canyon Ranger

Through: Erika Jostad, Sierra Crest Sub-district Ranger

Read and approved: [Signature] Date: 10/18/12

Through: Ned Kelleher, Kings Canyon District Ranger

Read and approved: [Signature] Date: 11/7/12

To: Gregg Fauth, Wilderness Coordinator

Read and approved: [Signature] Date: 11/19/12

## LeConte End of Season Report Durkee & Meier 2012

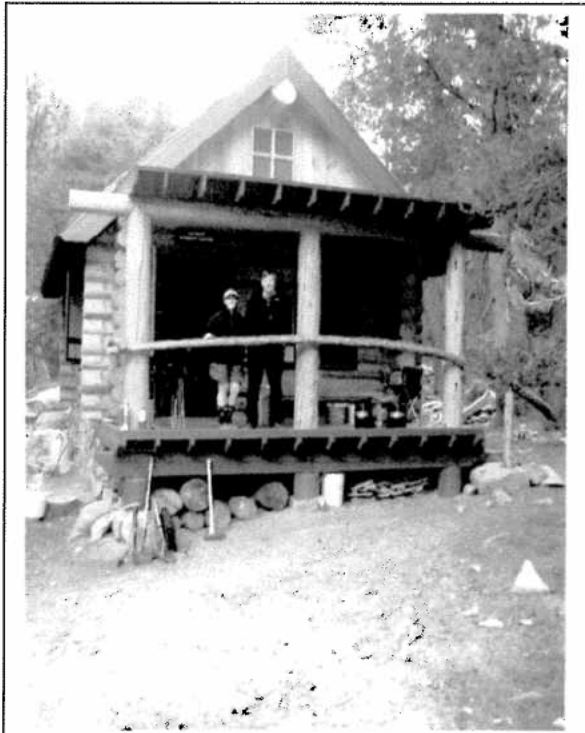


Figure 1: Deb Brenchley & Durkee, new LeConte Station 2012

### General Summary

Because of construction of the new ranger station, we didn't arrive until 8/1. Construction continued until about 8/10 when we moved into the station. A very dry year. Passes were open to stock very early and PCT hikers came through without problems starting in late May. A lot of medicals in the LeConte area. Many of them (about 7) were handled by the Marty and the construction crew in the two months before we arrived. They did a great job responding to these incidents – several of the serious and including one fatality. An “attaboy” award would be a very good idea... .

### Visitor Services

	June	July	August	September	Total
<b>Visitor Contacts</b>		40	1500	490	2030
<b>Miles Hiked</b>		20	210	80	310
<b>Stock</b>		Stock numbers not available until monitoring kit is back. But only about 4 commercial packers came through with a total of 80 or so use nights spread between Big Pete, Little Pete and Ladder. None that I know of at Grouse.			

## **Law Enforcement Incidents**

**Citations:** None

**Warnings:** 30: (camping on meadow; camped too close to water; food storage; food storage; sanitation).

**SAR & Medicals:** This was a major year for SARs and medicals. Something like 14 or more, half occurring before I came in for the season on 8/1. There were 3 fatalities – two climbing in the Palisades and one possible HAPE of a 14 year old boy at the lip of Dusy Basin. Several other HAPE, SOB, 3 requests for stock to get people out.

NPS and Rainbow packers had a wreck on the Dusy switchbacks, injuring both packers and requiring evacuation with, fortunately, minor injuries. About 10 NPS personnel and several helicopter flights were required to get the injured people and stock out.

**Fires:** A campfire-caused fire was reported at the upper Palisade Lake. Campers had put it out though it popped up once. It apparently was hot enough to scorch a tree up about 20'. It was reported to Fire and checked by air. No smoke was seen.

## **Ranger Station:**

The replacement ranger station was completed in early August and was an outstanding effort and accomplishment by all involved:

- Former Subdistrict Ranger Debbie Brenchley for submitting the original project proposal for three replacement stations around 2002. Who knew it would actually get funded??
- The dynamic team of Durkee & Karplus for the initial design and later consultation with other backcountry rangers on what features would make an effective and efficient living and working space.
- Gregg Fauth, John Austin, Durkee and, later, Nancy Hendricks for writing a brilliant and effective Environmental Assessment.
- The construction crew: Marty & Norma Maine, Dewey, Tim & Phil for their on-time and under budget completion and artisan-level work in completing the station.
- Erika Jostad for her exquisite taste in outfitting and furnishing the station to last for the next 100 years.

As discussed with Karplus, there were several mice caught (4). It's unclear whether this is a long-term problem. I plugged what might have been some gaps around both doors that may have taken care of the problem.

## **Solar**

I'm not sure the solar system is performing adequately. It's my guess that at least one battery (of four) is bad, not taking a full charge and so not allowing the other batteries to take a full charge. Just a few hours use of the two main lights will push the system into the orange warning (< 12.3 v) or even red (< 11.8 v). I switched out each battery in turn, hoping to troubleshoot the problem, but nothing definitive showed up. We'll need to use a load tester (Google: *Solar Battery Load Tester*—around \$40) next spring to figure it out and, likely, put in a new battery.

## Trails

A CCC crew of about 20 plus 4 NPS workers spent the summer in the Greater LeConte co-prosperity sphere. They first worked based near the confluence of the Middle Fork and Palisade Creek, working on some of the Golden Staircase and environs. Early August they moved up to Dusy Bench and worked on the Dusy Switchbacks. Their work on the Dusy Switchbacks was excellent – a number of large steps were replaced by smaller steps kinder to aging knees.

In addition, the CCC crew spent several days rehabbing the old ranger station site and archeological area. They did an excellent rehab job.

## Meadow Management



Figure 2: Roll Pit approx. 12' X 15' Big Pete Meadow

About 25 stock use nights at Little Pete Meadow were enough to implement meadow closure under MD-9. The impact was likely exacerbated because one group kept their animals loose during the day, with a horse tied up in camp. As a result, the mules stayed close to camp, concentrating the grazing and mechanical impacts. Nonetheless, the current estimate stock night capacity may need to be evaluated and adjusted.

The majority of stock use was the combined Rainbow and NPS strings. Early grazing (before I got there) was in the area of the confluence of the Middle Fork and Palisade Creek where the CCC were camped. In early

August, CCC moved to the Dusy Bench. Resupply trips brought feed and stayed on the bench.

## IBP/Concession contacts & comments

Nothing of note. All commercial operators had permits and ID and followed all regulations (High Sierra Pack Station, Rainbow Pack Station; North Lake Pack Station; Southern Sierra Mountain Guides).

## Bear incidents



Figure 3: Bear chased up tree by CCC.

One three or four year old bear was in the area for about 6 weeks. He was able to get some trail crew garbage that was inadvertently left out prior to being packed out but that was the only incident I was aware of. It's possible this bear was able to capture a fawn early in the season and definitely found an already dead fawn in early August. Scat was entirely grasses, vaccinium and Manzanita berries (from much lower in the canyon).

## Wildlife Observations

Saw a badger just a week after one was seen in the McClure area. A quick search of badger behavior makes it unclear if one would travel that far. Because there are

only 28 sightings in the park's wildlife database (60,000+ records), it would seem the odds favor it being the same individual.

### **Recommendations**

(b) (5)



## **Consumables Needed: LeConte for 2013**

### **Left at station:**

- 1 120v battery recharger
- 2 radio battery
- 3 sleeping bags (2 brand new Marmots)
- 1 large tent
- 1 small tank propane, full; 1 large tank ¼ full.
- 2 boxes food
- 4 Toilet Paper
- 2 National Geographic SEKI maps
- Assorted hiking guides, wildlife guides, Sierra Nevada Natural History
- Dishes & pans etc: excellent.

### **Need:**

- 1 Tank propane
- 15 Burlap bags
- 20 large plastic trash bags
- 5 paper towels
- 15 TP
- 2 Gal White Gas
- 3 rolls duct tape
- Oxygen low flow regulator
- Silverware drawer divider
- Absorbent dish towels
- Packs AAA batteries
- Possible 1 new 12v solar deep cycle battery
- Amperage load tester to determine if one of existing batteries has failed.

# Lodgepole Trailhead Report 2012

May 26 -September 22, 2012

Report by Bobby Vaughan

**Trailhead Rangers:** Bobby Vaughan, Kristen Clark, Sam Webster

## General Observations

2012 was another successful season for the Lodgepole Trailhead. We had one returning trailhead ranger (Bobby), and another (Kristen) who transitioned from the Lodgepole campground and thus had extensive experience of the parks. We were joined in June by Sam, who was finishing his education at the start of the summer. The Pear Lake Ranger (Ellyse) was a former Trailhead Ranger, and we enjoyed a great working relationship with her. We started our season on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May this year, and began by attending three training sessions, one with other Sequoia and Kings Canyon trailhead staffs, another with all the parks' wilderness rangers, and lastly a fee operations training. Kristen attended the Swiftwater Rescue training in Cedar Grove on June 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>.

We opened the permit desk on May 25<sup>th</sup>, and because of the low snow conditions and warm weather, were busy straightaway. We issued 96 permits in the last week of May alone, as compared to 4 last year! With only two rangers to start the season, it was difficult to conduct many patrols in May, but our experience with the trails helped in that regard. Once we were joined by Sam, we began our patrol rotations and had great hiking conditions for the duration of the season. We were joined in August by a volunteer (John), who came over from the Interpretation staff to assist us with patrols and projects. Sam initiated his first patrol on June 16<sup>th</sup>, and John hit the trail for us on August 18<sup>th</sup>.

Hiking conditions remained excellent all summer. We received very few storms, and warm temperatures into late September have kept the trails busy. Because of the extremely low amount of snow we received over the winter, the Front-Country and Kaweah trail crews were able to cut all the trees off of our trails very early in the season, which was quite helpful. Trail crews also replaced food storage lockers at Pear Lake, Bearpaw, Ranger Lake, and Buck Creek. Hopefully next year they will be able to replace the locker at Clover Creek, which had a problem this season with mice being able to get in and eat people's food.

Trailhead Rangers encountered the typical kinds of adverse situations on the trails that we normally do; dogs on the trail, o.b. camping, illegal fires, and improper food storage. We dealt with these issues through warnings and education primarily, and did not need much assistance from Law Enforcement.

Visitation was up on every trail, as the statistics on the next page show, from 2011 to 2012, we issued 311 more permits, had 889 more permitted backpackers, and 2,364 more visitor nights. Despite having many more hikers on the trails, it was a relatively quiet year for SAR in the sub-district, if not for the Parks as a whole. Trailhead rangers were able to contribute to several searches this year, and everyone got a helicopter flight.



### Permit Statistics/Use patterns (During Wilderness Desk Summer Season)

#### **Number of Permits Issued**

	May 25-31	June	July	August	September*	Total
High Sierra	37	81	174	169	90	551
Bearpaw	0	2	33	45	26	106
Alta	15	45	53	53	25	191
Pear Lake	28	98	94	112	67	399
Twin Lakes	16	54	77	101	51	299
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>1546</b>

#### **Number of Visitors**

	May 25-31	June	July	August	September*	Total
High Sierra	115	203	460	454	214	1446
Bearpaw	0	4	106	138	78	326
Alta	44	136	192	210	58	640
Pear Lake	79	271	254	361	207	1172
Twin Lakes	34	150	215	334	157	890
<b>Total</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>764</b>	<b>1227</b>	<b>1497</b>	<b>714</b>	<b>4474</b>

#### **Number of Visitor Nights**

	May 25-31	June	July	August	September*	Total
High Sierra	408	910	2636	2488	1048	7490
Bearpaw	0	10	223	291	167	691
Alta	82	305	572	847	156	1962
Pear Lake	151	271	483	860	474	2239
Twin Lakes	92	150	695	1163	470	2570
<b>Total</b>	<b>733</b>	<b>1646</b>	<b>4609</b>	<b>5649</b>	<b>2315</b>	<b>14952</b>

\*These statistics only reflect through September 22<sup>nd</sup>

### Patrol Work

The Lodgepole Trailhead staff hiked over 1,300 miles this season, and made contacts with 1,255 day-hikers and 1,791 backpackers! That means we made wilderness contacts with about 40% of the number of backpackers we issued permits for, greatly enhancing our ability to teach minimum impact techniques in the environment in which they are used. We were also able to perform a significant amount of resource work, removing nearly 200 lbs of trash from the wilderness, rehabilitating over 90 impacted wilderness campsites, and cleaning, rebuilding, or destroying over 100 fire rings.



## Projects

The trailhead staff assisted with and accomplished several projects this season. We inventoried and updated the signage on several winter ski trails, including the Old Lodgepole Road, Wolverton, Sunset Rock, Bear Hill, Clover Creek, and Panther trails. The staff assisted the law enforcement rangers on multiple occasions at the Wuksachi fire hall with cleaning and inventory projects. We repaired damages to the Panther Gap snow survey cache and restocked the equipment there. We helped Ellyse and Aaron replace the sign at the junction of the Watchtower and Hump trails, and took measurements for the sign shop for additional signage along the Lakes trail.

## Camping Areas

Most of the high-use camping areas saw increased visitation this year, with the exception of Panther Creek on the High Sierra Trail, which receives very little use because it is small and difficult to find. The most notable increases in use this year were Emerald Lake, Pear Lake, Twin Lakes, and Bearpaw. These areas were mostly well covered by a combination of trailhead and backcountry rangers. Mostly the increase in visitor use was mitigated by our efforts while on patrol, and there are no major degradations to report. The Twin Lakes are continues to be a problem site for illegal campfires, so that is a consideration for future staffs to remember.

## Permit System

The automated Wilderness Permit system was extremely problematic this year due to internet connectivity issues here in Lodgepole. Whenever internet service was interrupted, or even “blinked”, which was several times daily, the permit system froze and had to be restarted. Often it would freeze in the middle of writing a permit, which would often result in a much longer issuance process once the ranger finished the hand-written permit. Then the ranger would enter the information into the permit system when it came back on line, but this process sometimes stretched across shifts. This problem would be fixed if the network problems at Lodgepole are resolved. This year the Trailhead staff hand-wrote 718 permits, which was 46% of the total number of permits written this season.

## Miscellaneous

A couple of fun facts:

- We issued a permit to a pair of editors from *Backpacker* magazine, who published a feature on the Lakes trail on the *Get Out More Tour: 2012* blog.
- We had some private stock use on our trails this year. One tourist took a spot trip to Twin Lakes; when picking up his permit he said, “*I don’t know what’s more annoying, the mosquitoes or the tourists*”. A pair of llamas paid a visit to Cahoon Meadow. And a man took his burro up the Alta trail to Mehrten Meadow. When he woke up the next morning the burro was gone! Luckily he found it later that day on the Lakes trail.

## **Crabtree RS – 2012 (R. Pilewski)**

### **A. General Summary**

This was my 21st summer working as a commissioned wilderness ranger at SEKI. Visitation to the Crabtree Patrol area was higher than ever this summer. Mt. Whitney continues to be the magnet that draws people to the area, and the number of John Muir Trail (JMT) southbound hikers continues to rise. Commercial use in the Crabtree area was also up this season as both stock and hiker groups flocked to the "Whitney Zone" in record numbers.

I arrived at Crabtree on June 29th following 3 weeks of training and front country patrols. Because this field season followed one of the driest winters on record there was much catching up to do after arriving at Crabtree. Most meadows in the area had already opened to grazing and the throngs of PCT thru hikers had already taken a toll on park resources. There were many illegal fires at Crabtree and lots of trash and abandoned property as a result of no field rangers being present in June. The hike over Trail Crest to start the season showed an alarmingly dry high sierra and quite a contrast to the 2011 season. Conditions on the ground looked more like late Fall than early Summer and I observed several water sources that I rarely see dry up which were already bone dry.



### **B. Visitor Services**

Visitor services are a primary duty of the Crabtree ranger. The high volume of visitors to the area each summer insures that much time will be spent answering



questions, giving directions, and "educating" visitors on taking care of this National Park Wilderness. Because the highest, and infinitely accessible point in the lower 48 States resides in the Crabtree Patrol area there is a large number of novice wilderness users that require more coaching than more experienced users do. There are also 100+ day hikers on the 2 miles of the Mt. Whitney trail that are in the Park on most summer days. The USFS had a very minimal ranger presence on their part of the Whitney trail this summer and this too increased the work load of the Crabtree Ranger. This

lack of a ranger presence resulted in more hikers on Mt. Whitney without permits and the subsequent information that comes with the permit process. Conducting permit compliance on Mt. Whitney patrols has become an exercise in futility since the USFS

has done away with the "hang tag permits" (due to budget), and large parties are spread out on the trail with only one person carrying the permit. The best I can do is ask every 6th person or so for their permit in an effort to keep the visitors honest.

(b) (5)

**a. Contacts**

- i. Backpacker- 2,667
- ii. Dayhiker- 1,750
- iii. Stock- 241

**b. Law Enforcement**

(b) (5)



(b) (5)

**c. Citations**

I issued 4 citations this summer that included; pet (dog) in the NPS wilderness (2). One of these was to a person who thought they had a legitimate service dog, but could not state what task the dog performed other than emotional support by just being there. The other citations written this summer were for unlawful food storage in the Crabtree Lakes Basin where a party of climbers had their supplies packed in by stock and did not have the proper method for storing their overabundance of food, and for a illegal campfire at the Crabtree Campground.

#### **d. SAR & Medicals**

There was one major SAR this summer in the Mt. Langley area. All of the Kern wilderness rangers were involved and the search lasted for 2.5 days before the subject was found at Army Pass.

##### **MEDICALS--**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Evacuation</b>
7/25	Mt Langley	SAR	recovery
8/1	Crabtree RS	HAPE	helicopter
8 / 5	Sandy Meadow	poss. dehydration, recent hx cancer	helicopter
8/6	Crabtree RS	HAPE, N/V	helicopter
8/7	Mt Whitney	SAR	found @Mirror Lk,
8/10	Sandy Meadow	HAPE	helicopter
8/20	Crabtree RS	AMS/unknown medical	self with ranger
8/24	Wallace Ck.	dehydration, hyponutremia	self with ranger

assist.

There are numerous visitor assist ems calls throughout the summer. Many are at the Crabtree ranger station and are for such minor maladies as blisters, ams, muscle strains, and a wide range of ambiguous medical complaints. In this wilderness setting it is sometimes difficult to separate the people who require evacuation from those who require monitoring and encouragement. Medical control is a helpful tool, but it too can be difficult to paint an accurate picture for the docs in Fresno of what we are dealing with here in the wilderness,

#### **e. Fatalities**

There were no fatalities in the Crabtree Patrol area this summer. The Inyo NF had several serious incidents on their side of Mt. Whitney, though I am not sure of the outcome.

#### **f. Weather**

After spending 21 summers in the Southern Sierra one would think that I would have a reasonable handle on weather patterns and be able to predict day to day weather (based on forecasts, of course) with a reasonable degree of accuracy. This may as well have been my first time ever here, however, as all those years of experience meant nothing when it came to this summers weather. It was the cloudiest, and wettest August that I have experienced in the Crabtree area. One would think that it is redundant saying "cloudiest" and "wettest", but there were many cloudy days that did not bring a drop of rain. The precipitation events were very isolated. One day I left Crabtree in the late afternoon on a cloudless day to go on patrol to Wallace Lake which is maybe 2 air miles from Crabtree (7 by trail). There was a deluge waiting for me at Wallace Lake and these were the only clouds visible anywhere! Another night I lay down under the Lodgepoles under cloudless skies only to be awakened at 0200 by the most violent and wettest thunderstorms of the summer. On August 21st it was snowing



sideways at Crabtree Lakes and on September 10 we were still in the monsoonal flow coming out of the SE and bringing warm temperatures, rain and thunderstorms to the Southern Sierra. I realize that my 21 summers is a drop in the bucket geologically speaking, but it sure feels to me like global warming is changing the weather. It is warmer, weather is much less predictable, and weather events are more extreme. Anthropogenic climate change is happening and it is affecting everything within the boundaries of SEKI that we are mandated to "leave unimpaired for future generations". I think we would do well to do what renowned SEKI scientist Dr. Nate Stephenson says and "manage for change", cause' it's coming folks.

#### **g. Fires**

There were no wildfires in the Crabtree area this summer, or in the park in general that affected the area this summer. This came as quite a surprise after seeing the extremely dry conditions that dominated the high sierra in June and July. The clear air and skies were very pleasant as a result here in the eastern sierra.

There was an alleged "signal fire" that was set in a stand of old Foxtail Pine trees on Siberian Outpost before wilderness rangers mobilized to the field for the season in June. This fire burned up 24 of these iconic trees and caused lasting resource damage to the park. I made a site visit in August and took photos of the scene. Please refer to my field investigation report for more information. 8-1-2 conducted the rest of the investigation.



### **C. Use Patterns**

#### **a. Backpackers**

Backpackers constitute the majority of use in the Crabtree patrol area. There were more stock supported hiking parties this summer than in previous seasons. The JMT thru hikers originating in Yosemite and hiking Southbound thru SEKI to Mt. Whitney have perhaps become the biggest user group in the area. It would be good to get the permit data from Yosemite to see just how many permits they are issuing to southbound JMT hikers

The loop trips from Horseshoe Meadow and Onion Valley to Whitney Portal continue to bring many backpackers to the area from mid July thru August. Most Boy Scout troops do their trips at this time and many parties of 15 are contacted heading for Whitney one way or another. The exit quota on Trail Crest is full during the busiest of the summer months resulting in more overnight use in the Crabtree area and other SEKI areas. (b) (5)

(b) (5) Most visitors approaching Mt. Whitney from Horseshoe Meadow and Onion Valley would prefer to exit to Whitney Portal and many would not even be

spending the night on the east side, but merely passing thru on their way to Whitney Portal.

#### **b. Stock**

There was an increase in stock use this summer. Both commercial and administrative use brought high numbers of stock nights to the Crabtree area. This in large contrast to last year where the lingering snow kept the area and meadows without many stock nights. By mid-August Upper and Lower Crabtree, and Strawberry meadows were all closed to grazing after reaching capacity. This left only Sandy Meadow for area grazing opportunities and by seasons end we had far exceeded the "informal" limit of 300 nights with over 400 stock nights recorded. There was limited use of supplemental feed in the area with commercial users choosing to graze area meadows almost exclusively as opposed to carrying feed. A small amount of administrative use carried feed and kept their animals tied up at night.



#### **c. Administrative**

There was a lot of administrative use at Crabtree this summer. Sub-District Ranger Chris Waldschmidt visited all wilderness rangers in their respective patrol areas at the beginning of the field season. This gave us an opportunity to discuss the summer work plan, and here at Crabtree, to start planning for next seasons temporary ranger station while the new cabin is built on the existing ranger station site.

Meadow manager Erik Frenzel and the USFS range specialist were at Crabtree in August to look at area meadows. We spent a day surveying meadows and discussing management options.

The Kern Trail Crew was camped at Sandy Meadow and working in the area for a 4 week hitch from August 7th to September 4th. Crew leader Josh Gabik and crew did a fine job of maintaining area trails. Among other work accomplished they did a fine reroute of a section of the Crabtree "loop" near the PCT junction.

The History Crew, led by Thor Rickshiem, were in the area for a week in mid-August to perform much needed maintenance on the historic Mt. Whitney Hut. Unfortunately, their stint coincided with some of the worst weather of the summer making for difficult work conditions at 14,494'. They appeared unfazed by this obstacle, however, and did some fine work on this historic structure that thousands of park visitors see every summer. They painted the roof, shutters and door and did an outstanding job of removing the unsightly graffiti that has accumulated in the visitor side of the hut over the years. They built an awesome new door that should last for years on the visitors side. At the time of this writing it was still waiting on a few finishing touches before being hung.

Corey Cann and the 9-2-32 crew were in the area for 5 days surveying area meadows and advising this ranger on management priorities. It was great to have

them here and they did some great and important work surveying the many meadows of Crabtree.

David Karplus and ranger station builder guru Marty were at Crabtree in September to survey for the new ranger station. It was great to spend the time with them and get the lowdown on the plan for next seasons "cabin raising". The plan is solid and will go as smoothly as possible in this high use area.

#### **d. Commercial**

Commercial use in the area focuses around Mt. Whitney. Be it backpackers, stock users, or climbers, most commercial use occurs on or around Mt. Whitney. This season saw a huge spike in the number of commercial stock supported hiking trips. These trips primarily originate at Horseshoe Meadow, culminate in a hiking ascent of Mt. Whitney, and exit via the same route to Horseshoe Meadow. They are 5 night trips and utilize commercial pack stations to carry camp supplies from one location to the next. The reason that they exit back to Horseshoe Meadow rather than Whitney Portal is because the USFS does not allow commercial use on the main Mt. Whitney trail (east side). The primary pack station is Cottonwood Pack Station, with Rock Creek Pack Station also packing for some of these trips. They typically travel with 7 head of stock for groups ranging in size from 4 to 12 people. These trips are primarily sold by Sierra Mountain Center (SMC) out of Bishop, with REI subcontracting SMC for their trips. There was at least one, but sometimes 2 of these trips every week throughout the summer. This is a significant increase in use of this kind over previous summers. I did not have any issues with any of these trips. Their guides are professional and compliant with park regulations. They use wag-bags for their human waste while they are camped at Guitar Lake and pack it back out to Horseshoe Meadow. The stock aspect runs smoothly as well and they had it down to a routine operation by seasons end. I wrote commercial use monitoring reports on all commercial users and documented any problems or good work that they did. Please refer to these reports for specific numbers and other information. It should be noted that these trips constituted the majority of stock use in the area this summer. I do not think that any management action needs to be taken on this increase in commercial use, but it should be noted that it is indeed an increase in use in an already busy area.

Other commercial users in the area this summer were: Southern Yosemite Mountain Guides, Mt. Travel Sobek, High Sierra Pack Trains, Sequoia-Kings Pack Trains, California Alpine Guides, Call of the Wild, and Sierra Mountaineering International. Again, almost all of the commercial use in the Crabtree area has an element of Mt. Whitney in it, if not an exclusive reason to be in this part of the Park.

### **D. Natural Resources**

#### **a. Bear Activity**

I had reports of bear sightings at Kern River and Wright Creek this summer, but there were no incidents that I know of involving problem bears (or problem visitors). Almost all backcountry travelers are carrying bear proof cannisters or panniers

these days and even the long distance hikers arriving from Yosemite report very little in the way of bear activity.

#### **b. Wildlife**

This was the year of the deer. I observed more mule deer, including many fawns, in the Crabtree area than in any previous summers. There was an interesting report of a mountain lion stalking 2 climbers as they descended from high on the west slopes of Mt. Langley. I did not do pika monitoring this summer, however it did appear to me that there were less of these cute little critters around than in previous summers. (b) (5)



For a more detailed account of wildlife sightings this summer please refer to the wildlife observation cards.

#### **c. Vegetation**

Monitoring area meadows is a big part of the Crabtree rangers job responsibilities. All of the Crabtree Meadows were open for limited grazing by recreational pack stock this summer. This is the first summer in awhile that Upper and Lower Crabtree, Strawberry and Sandy meadows were all open to grazing. Strawberry meadow was restricted to use by private stock parties only and had a 55 night limit. After 21 nights by 1 private party with 7 head it was showing signs that it was time to close it. The dry conditions this summer were a contributing factor in this decision. Lower Crabtree was allotted 40 nights of grazing and it was closed in mid-July. Upper Crabtree was allotted 75 nights of grazing and was closed on August 14th. Sandy Meadow received the most grazing nights this summer with over 400 nights and was closed on September 4th. Sylvia and Erik have done a great job of guiding field rangers in the management of park meadows. It is a bit of a shell game here at Crabtree to monitor grazing impacts. Once packers turn their stock out at night to graze they drift to places that they have no control over. When lower crabtree was closed first this year there were several incidents of stock drifting from Sandy and Upper Crabtree and grazing Lower Crabtree. I also think that a stock party of 7 head drifted from Sandy meadow to Strawberry for a 24 hour period which is why the meadow showed more use than the 21 nights that were "reported". In an area like Crabtree it would be ideal if we could require stock users to have better control of their stock once they are turned out to graze. Some stock users are happy to have the opportunity to hand graze their animals in certain areas, or to use electric fences to control where their animals go for grazing. Most users maintain that turning the stock out at night and listening for the bell in the morning and "wrangling" the stock by going to find them, wherever they have drifted overnight is the right way to graze their stock. (b) (5)



## **E. Cultural Resources**

### **a. Prehistoric**

No prehistoric sites were observed this summer at Crabtree. I did not have the opportunity to visit any of the inventoried sites in the area.

### **b. Historic**

The Mt. Whitney Hut turned 103 years old this summer. It is still much revered by visitors to the summit of Mt. Whitney. The Historic Preservation Crew did some much needed maintenance on the Hut this summer. They removed Graffiti and spruced up the place with a paint job. The visitor side went without a door all summer as it was blown off this past winter and is in disrepair. This did not seem to affect the visitors experience and the crew should have the new door hung before next summer. Nice work Thor and crew!!

## **F. Backcountry Facilities**



**Ranger Station**



**a.**

If all goes as planned this was the last summer for the Crabtree Ranger Station that was built in 1971. It has functioned well for the past 41 years and I am thankful for the opportunity to have been the ranger for 13 of those summers. Construction on the new ranger station will begin as early as conditions permit next summer and should be completed sometime late summer. The cabin builders were at Crabtree this summer and have a good plan for the new station. They have included the ranger division in the planning process. The design and layout of the new station will make for a great improvement in this busiest of wilderness ranger stations.

There will be a temporary ranger "camp" out behind the construction site for the 2013 season. There will certainly be some challenges as we try to keep the visitors out of the construction zone, while still serving the public in an appropriate manner. Since there are so many more visitors to Crabtree than at Rae Lakes or LeConte Canyon we will have to be proactive with signage and try and get the visitors the information they seek without the typical visit to the "ranger station". I think it would be prudent to have a bulletin board type informational display down handy to the trail

junction. We also need to make sure the visitors can access the temporary ranger camp if needed without disturbing or being in the way of the construction zone.

## **b. Signs**

The only sign needs for the 2013 season is the aforementioned signage for the temporary ranger station. All other signs in the area are in good repair and offer accurate information to park visitors.

## **G. Trails**

### **a. Trail Activities/ Work accomplished**

The Kern trail crew performed routine maintenance on area trails in August. They did a nice reroute of a section of trail near the PCT junction. They also did some work at the ranger station and assisted the Historic Preservation Crew with their projects in the area.

### **b. Problem areas**

There were some big rocks that rolled onto the Whitney trail this winter, but are still easily passable to hikers. The dilemma of trying to move these rocks is the constant traffic on the trail and the threat of blitzing the trail below with any runaway rocks that might start rolling. The trail is totally serviceable and will be for years to come with routine maintenance. All of the trails in the Crabtree area received more stock use than previous seasons but remain in good shape. There are no major trail projects necessary and routine annual maintenance will keep the trails serviceable for years to come.

## **H. Camp Areas**

Conditions continue to improve at Guitar Lake due to the wag-bag, pack out your poop, program. I dispensed approximately 2,400 bags from Crabtree which was the most ever since we started 5 years ago. The majority of bags dispensed at Crabtree are to JMT hikers. Compliance of wag-bag use remains high and we should continue the program as is to continue the "clean-up" of Guitar Lake. It is no small task to get wag-bags to Crabtree and we should continue to push the dispensing of wag-bags at all permit stations for visitors entering the Whitney area and exiting to Whitney Portal. Guitar Lake remains the most popular overnight area at Crabtree, and perhaps the entire SEKI wilderness. This year saw even more overnight use at Guitar Lake due to the water sources above being dry, and the increase in JMT hikers. All other camp areas at Crabtree are looking good.

The camps around the bear boxes continue to be the most popular campsites. They are still used by many visitors and we should keep the ones in place that are already in use area. Bear Boxes serve the park resources as well as the park



visitors and much effort has already been made to place them in their current locations.

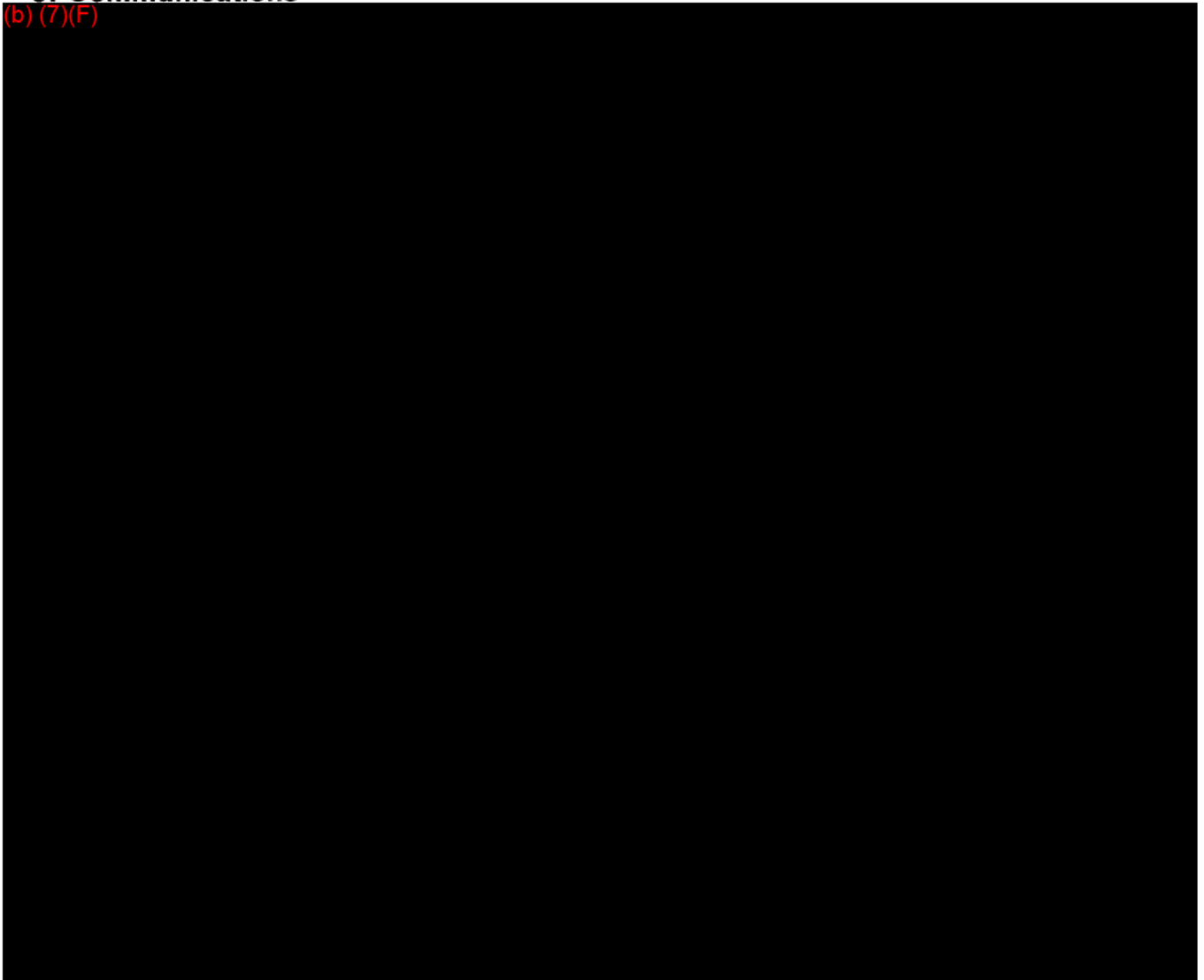
### **I. Permit System**

The permit system for hikers continues to function well. There were some issues with east side permit issuers telling hikers to pick up their wag-bags at Crabtree (rather than at the permit station). Since there is a limited supply of wag-bags at Crabtree and much effort to get them here it is better that folks pick up their wag-bags in Lone Pine. I think we should consider giving the permit station in Yosemite a nominal supply of wag-bags to dispense to southbound JMT hikers. They constitute a large volume of people who pick up bags at Crabtree.



### **J. Communications**

(b) (7)(F)



#### **K. Needs for next year**

\*A tent heater for the temporary ranger station.

\* A weather proof bulletin board to place at the ranger station junction. This would act as an informational display to try and keep all but essential traffic to going to the construction site of the new ranger station. The temporary ranger camp will be 1/4 mile behind the construction site and will be accessible to visitors, but we should also try and keep the traffic there to a minimum. The bulletin board will act as an informational sign to answer the basic questions that bring visitors to the present Crabtree Ranger Station.

**\*see below for inventory and station needs**

#### **Wag-Bag count for summer 2012**

**2,450 distributed**

**20 left at Crabtree for 2013 (need 24 boxes for next season)**

#### **L. Recommendations**

(b) (5)



(b) (5)





## 2012 McClure Meadow Wilderness Ranger End of Season Report

From: Dave Gordon, McClure Meadow Ranger

Through: Erika Jostad, Sierra Crest Sub-district Ranger

Read and approved: [Signature] Date: 10/18/12

Through: Ned Kelleher, Kings Canyon District Ranger

Read and approved: [Signature] Date: 11/7/12

To: Gregg Fauth, Wilderness Coordinator

Read and approved: [Signature] Date: 11/19/12

## McClure Ranger Station 2012 End of Season Report Ranger Dave Gordon

### General Summary

This was a much-drier-than-normal snowpack season (about 24% of the normal spring snowpack in the northern portion of the Park) -- this made for easier than usual crossings of passes and creeks. Visitation in the backcountry was very high beginning with a near-record amount of PCTers early season -- estimates indicate about 850 having started, about half of which make it to McClure (the 1/3 way-point of the 2,650 miles). Also, a record high number of JMT hikers were encountered all summer, with over 4,000 hikers having obtained permits from Yosemite to Mt. Whitney. Bugs in Evolution Valley were about average (bad in July and mostly gone by mid-August).

### Visitor Contacts / Patrols

	Visitor Contacts	Miles Patrolled
June (2 days)	61	16
July	638	173
August	763	197
September	451	126
Totals	1,913	512

Contacts were mostly with backpackers, except for about two dozen day hikers contacted near Piute Creek from Muir Trail Ranch. 22 stock groups were contacted (18 commercial, 1 private and 3 administrative) consisting of 31 stock users (including clients) with 121 horses/mules. Most commercial groups were from High Sierra Pack Station (18) and Muir Trail Ranch (3) with one additional group from Bishop Pack Outfitters.

### Law Enforcement

Almost every group contacted was checked for possession of a Wilderness Permit and asked how their food was stored at night. As with recent seasons, very few groups did not have bear-proof canisters and would hang their food -- those groups were given instructions for proper hanging. 19 verbal warnings (CAD Code SV) were given as follows: 11 - tents on vegetation; 2 - camp too close to trail; 1 - tent too close to creek; 1 - no permit; 1 - camp fire not extinguished; 2 - food left out of canister, unattended; 1 - private packer without grazing regulations. Notes were placed on tents at three campsites for being on vegetation, requesting that they move to bare ground. No citations were written this season, as violations were considered to be mitigated by extenuating circumstances.

### Search, Rescue, and Medical Incidents

Date	Location	Type	Disposition
6/29	Darwin Canyon	Chest Pain	Helicopter Evac.
7/27	Goddard Canyon	Back Injury	Helicopter Evac.
8/7	Wanda Lake	ALOC	Helicopter Evac.
8/27	Evolution Lake	Kidney Stone	Helicopter Evac
8/30	Goddard Canyon	Muscle Injury	Evac. by Horse
9/14	Wanda Lake	Ruptured Quad.	Helicopter Evac.

No searches occurred in the McClure patrol area. There were 10 EMS Visitor Assists (CAD Code EV): 3- advice for mild AMS; 2 - advice for sore knees; 5 - medical supplies given out (bandages, moleskin, hand balm for cracked skin, cold medications, and an ankle brace).

### **Weather**

The weather this summer was warm and mostly dry in June and July. August was warm and stormy with monsoonal flows bringing 20 days of rain and with threats of rain for an additional 5 days. September started stormy then turned pleasant, clear and cool for the last two weeks.

### **Fires**

On 9/15, a 1/10 acre fire was reported and investigated ¼ mile SW of Evolution Meadow near the JMT creek crossing – the fire was determined to be “human caused” (most likely a result of burning toilet paper). The “Evolution Meadow Fire” was extinguished by 5 firefighters working about 12 hours during the two days following the initial report.

### **Use Patterns**

Visitation was very high this summer from late June to late September. JMT hikers accounted for about 70% of contacts (almost all from Yosemite to Mt. Whitney). Other routes were reported as follows: about 10% N. Lake to/from S. Lake; 10% “PCTers”, early season; 5% to/from Florence Lake; 5% miscellaneous, including cross-country routes: Lamarck Col/ Darwin Bench, Davis Lake, upper Goddard Canyon, Ionian Basin, McGee Lakes and Lake 11,106'. Wanda Lake to Goddard Canyon via Davis Lake and North Goddard Creek has been especially popular due to information found on the internet.

Organized groups encountered consisted of 10 - Boy Scout troops, 1- Sierra Mt. Center, 2- Southern Yosemite Mt. Guides, 1- Sierra Club, 1- Call of the Wild, and 1- Eagle's Nest Foundation.

Stock usage was light to moderate in Evolution Valley and Goddard Canyon.

### **Natural Resources**

Belding Ground Squirrels were observed at McClure and Colby this season, as well as at Evolution Lake. A Badger was observed and photographed just below McClure Meadow on 7/31. Unusual bird sightings included a Golden Eagle, a family of Green-winged Teals (F + 6 ducklings), a Peregrine Falcon, a Northern Harrier, and an Osprey. No bears were observed or reported, and no coyotes were seen or heard (very unusual).

Most meadows received light grazing this season. Colby and Darwin Meadows were closed to grazing and were not grazed. RB monitoring was completed at Evolution, McClure and Colby Meadows – all look to be healthy at the end of September. Cony and Hell-for-Sure Junction Meadows were lightly grazed. Franklin Meadow did not get grazed, and appears very healthy.

Research crews visited Evolution Valley throughout the summer: Park Soils crews (twice); Invasive Plant Species crew, Meadows/ Stock use crew, and Lakes crew (water chemistry).



### **Ranger Station**

The cabin, solar system, propane system, wood stove, and outhouse are in good condition and are fully functional. Mice, which were not much of a problem last season, were prevalent this summer with about a dozen trapped in the living area, and about 30 trapped in the attic, in spite of stuffing cracks with foil and other barriers.

Two hazard trees (dead lodge poles) were flagged by Tom Warner near the Ranger Station: a 12" diameter tree about 30' to the SW, and an 8" diameter tree about 40' to the N.

### **Trails**

A trail crew of six worked in Goddard Canyon (out of Goddard Camp) for about three weeks, and then moved to Darwin Meadow and worked Evolution Valley and Evolution Basin for about four weeks. About a hundred trees needed clearing that had been blown down last winter. Several large boulders at Evolution Lake were blasted and removed from the JMT. A couple of JMT sections prone to early season flooding were worked to increase drainage.

### **Drift Fences**

The trail crew repaired and erected the three drift fences and they are mostly in fair shape and functional. The fence-gate below Evolution Meadow is in poor condition (barely functional) -- the vertical gate posts should be replaced next summer.

### **Camp Areas**

Three campsites that had been obliterated at Evolution Lake (too close to water or trail) were further discouraged from use by burying about twenty "iceberg" boulders throughout the sites. One site at the end of a peninsula near the outlet was also further obliterated by adding hundreds of egg-sized rocks amongst dozens of larger rocks.

142 fire pits were cleaned and/or reduced in size this season, and 35 fire pits were destroyed. About half of the destroyed fire pits were illegal (above 10,000 ft.) fire pits at McGee Lakes, Darwin Bench, Evolution Lake, and upper Goddard Canyon. Many of the destroyed fire pits were built in sensitive sites (granite slabs or meadows) or near an existing fire pit.

### **Permit System**

Most Wilderness Permits that were issued to hikers came with regulations attached, and provided thorough minimum impact camping information -- of course, not everyone reads "the fine print": many hikers do not know to pack out used toilet paper, to not burn foil/plastic containing food packaging, or to not build or modify fire pits; some don't know not to erect a tent on vegetation (a bigger problem this year), or how to hang food properly.

### **Communications**

(b) (7)(F)



(b) (7)(F)

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### Recommendations

(b) (5)

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3. I suggest that one (or two) gallon “zip-lock” bags for used T-P be given out to each hiker with Wilderness Permits. Labels on the bags could have sanitation instructions: pack out all used T-P, bury waste 6-8 inches deep and at least 100 feet from water.
4. The drift fence gate below Evolution Meadow is in poor condition and marginally functional. The 2013 early season trail crew would be best equipped to rebuild the gate, which will require new vertical gate posts.

(b) (5)

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**McClure Ranger Station**  
**Needs for 2013**

8	rolls toilet paper
20	small, clear plastic bags
8	large, brown plastic bags
6	mouse traps
1	7 ½ gallon propane tank
1	fireplace lighter
2	hand sanitizers
4	kitchen sponges
10	CUA Monitoring forms
10	AUO time logs
24	AA batteries
10	AAA batteries
2	packages paper towels
2	rolls duct tape
	steel wool for mouse-proofing

**McClure Ranger Station**  
**Consumables Inventory (on hand September 2012)**

4	gallons propane
6	propane canisters
7	rolls toilet paper
1	packages paper towels
3	quarts window cleaner
1	gallon simple green cleaner
1	gallon white gas (Coleman stove)
10	AAA alkaline batteries
4	AA alkaline batteries
0	AA lithium batteries
1/2	gallon bleach
1	quart laundry detergent
1/2	pint dish soap

2012 HOCKETT RANGER STATION  
END OF SEASON REPORT  
Joe Ventura, Hockett Ranger



#### **A. General Summary**

I arrived on station on July 1st, 2012. The Trail Crew led by Ray Vandersahl were already in their camp. The pasture fence was up and they had already had some nights of grazing in the pasture and the meadow. I put up an electric fence in the meadow and turned out my stock, a horse and three mules.

When I closed the station last season, Thor and his crew were still hard at work painting, and installing a new hinge system for the shutters, so I had not seen the finished project.

Wow! New paint, caulking, back splash on the sink counter, and the shutters. The place looked great. It made opening the cabin for the season so much simpler. In fact Eric Frenzel had already visited the meadows on the Hockett a few days before my arrival and had set up the solar and connected the batteries. So in less than three hours of my arrival, the shutters were open the screens installed, the cabin aired out, the floors washed and mopped and the water and propane going.

To summarize the season I have to say it was a quiet one. Only a handful of stock users visited the plateau and while the backpacker numbers were a little lower than in years

past, only a few attempted the loop from Mineral King, Farewell, Wet Meadow and out through Hockett or in reverse. More about that in Use Patterns.

I worked a schedule of 10 days on and 4 days off this season, and during my absence there was sign of visitor use, as evidenced by notes left on the bulletin board by visitors passing through at the station, or use at various camp sites in the area, however the impact was minimal, and suggested that there was very little use during my days off. As I slept in my own bed at home I always had thoughts of what was occurring in my patrol area, and what terrible things I would find when I returned. Never happened. Aside from a messy camp or two, all was well. The schedule worked well for me this season, allowing me time to take care of chores at home, or attend family functions. Going in and out though did result in a lot of miles on my stock, approximately 360 total miles.

## **B. Visitor Services**

### **Contacts**

- a. 118 Backpackers
- b. 29 Day Hikers
- c. Commercial; 8 people, 16 head, 4 nights. There was a spot trip of two people to Rock Camp, and a spot trip of unknown number of people to SFork crossing.  
Private users include 23 head of stock and 12 people. There was of minimal use at SF pasture, maybe 3 head one person on two different occasions. It seemed as though the user may have grazed his/her stock, and had no campfire. These events occurred during my absence from the area.

### **Law Enforcement**

- a. The Hockett RS is staffed as a non Law Enforcement position. There were no events requiring Law Enforcement intervention. I did receive a report as I was exiting the backcountry for my days off, of gunshots heard in the area of Sand Meadow. The reporting party had been camping at Hockett Lakes, exited the park and reported the incident two days later. On my return to the station several days later I checked the stock camps in and around Sand Meadow and observed that the camps had not been used in weeks, and could find no evidence of firearm use such as spent shells etc. This info was passed on to 812 at MK.

### **Citations**

- a. There were no citations or recommendations for citations.

## **Search, Rescue, Medical incidents**

- a. On July 3, 2012 at about 330 pm I returned to the Hockett RS from a hiking patrol. A note was left on the door of the station stating that a 34 year old male in their group had forgotten his diabetes meds at the trailhead. He was on his second day without his medication, and if he hiked out, it would take him two more days, making a total of 4 days without his diabetes medication. His vitals BP and pulse were elevated, he weighed over 340 pounds and could not hike a few steps uphill without resting. I offered him glucose which he self administered. I spoke with Karl Pierson 711 and he arranged to have the hiker evacuated by helicopter. He was flown to Ash Mtn, and transported by ambulance to KDDH in Visalia.

### **Fatalities**

- a. None

### **Weather**

- a. Weather was mild, average daytime temps about 70-75, but mornings in August and September recorded sunrise temps in low 20's and 30's. During mid August there were approximately 5 days of rain for several hours a day.

### **Fires**

- a. A lightning strike during one of the storms on August 14th, resulted in a small fire in the Dennison area. It resolved itself in a few days.

## **C. Use Patterns**

### **Backpackers**

- a. While the total number of backpackers was down some from previous years, those that did travel to the Hockett area stayed in the immediate area, taking day hikes to other parts of the patrol area. In years past Hockett was an overnight spot, during backpackers loop trips from Mineral King over Farewell, to Wet Meadow, to Hockett, and out on the Tar Gap back to MK, or in reverse. Only three groups that I am aware of tried this trip. In recent years the trail junction in Wet Meadow connecting to the Little Kern trail, has been increasingly difficult to find, resulting in hikers returning to Hockett extremely frustrated. Last year's Lion Fire in the Little Kern drainage burned through this area, obliterating any signage or landmarks for this trail junction.

The recommended route would be to hike east up to Wet Meadow from the Little Kern. We traveled this area in late September from the west. There used to be a wood sign directing one to Little Kern and Mineral King but it is gone.

There also used to be a sign further east on that trail that directed one to Quinn Patrol Cabin, but it too is gone. Complicating all this is brush and foliage that in years past served as landmarks (and the signs) are all gone, as a result of that fire. We found the trail junction to Quinn not on the ground but on the map of the GPS, which helped getting us in to the station. The Hockett trail crew cleared the trail from the station up to the boundary (about 3/4 of a mile) and is very identifiable, but past that boundary up to Wet Meadow, a GPS is a required tool.

Until the Forest Service signs the trail, hikers should travel east to west and carry a GPS

## **Stock**

- a. This was certainly a very unusual season in terms of Stock Use in the Hockett area. Only one full service trip by the Balch Park Pack Station, and two spot trips, is just unbelievable, and add to this that only two known private groups visited the area is simply astonishing. The meadows opened June 20th, no snow, the trails were clear, and everyone still stayed away. It is interesting to note that the two private groups were local Three Rivers residents.

## **Administrative**

- a. Administrative stock use was limited to the trail crew. The crew accomplished most of their work on the plateau from the Hockett trail crew camp near the station. They rode down to Quinn and back in one day clearing the trail. They rode to Blossom Lakes over Windy to Summit lake and back to the station. They kept 3 horses and 1 mule, while their packer was out. The packer would come in with their weekly resupply, and there would be a need to keep one or two in the pasture, and turn remaining mules and horses out. On occasion we would put one or two of their horses in an electric fence in the meadow with my horse. All this was done to keep the nights used in the pasture at a 100 nights. More use was pushed to the meadow requiring frequent movement of the fence. The crew moved to South Fork Crossing where there is no meadow to graze, so their stock was taken back to Atwell and I helped the Packer Tyler Willis lead the ten head out to Atwell. The crew remained at South Fork Crossing for 2 or more weeks, Tyler coming in for the crew's resupply and he would stay at Hockett each time.

The crew usually stays at Slims Meadow for two weeks when they leave Hockett, so that meadow received a rest this season. That meadow is comprised of short vegetation and is often partially under water. It was good for the meadow to get some rest this year.

My grazing was limited to Hockett and Quinn. I worked a ten on and four off schedule, where I would only graze in the Hockett Pasture the night before I

went out for my days off. I was better able to manage my nights in the pasture which was limited to a total of 100. The trail crew used up 60 nights(their number) and I had 41 including 21 nights in the pasture for the hunting patrol trip at the end of the season.

### **Commercial**

- a. Commercial use was easy to document. 16 head 3 nights at Rock Camp. This was the only use by Balch Park Pack Station.

## **D. Natural Resources**

### **Bear Activity**

- a. I saw plenty of bear tracks on the trail during my travels, primarily on the Atwell/Hockett trail, and the trail near Sand Meadow. VIP McDonald observed a single bear below the switch back on his way out on August 26th. Two hikers staying at Clover Creek on August 18th reported a female bear and cub in their camp and were very reluctant to leave or respond to their shouts. When the bears did leave the two packed up and left back to Atwell. They made a report, which I received and routed to the bear techs.

### **Wildlife**

- a. I observed a coyote numerous times, the first about July 11 and the last on August 13th. The first sighting was at South Fork Meadow, west of Rock Camp. The trail crew also observed it. I saw him several times in the fenced pasture at Hockett. How do I know it was one coyote and not duplicates? This little guy had an injured left foot or leg, and carried it off the ground as he traveled. When it stopped it would put the foot down gingerly. Didn't see him after the 13th.

### **Vegetation**

- a. All meadows remained lush during July and August. During the middle of August the plateau received a total of 4 days of rain, the heaviest gully washer occurring on the 16th. This kept the meadows looking green just a bit longer into the season.

Mareesa (I don't recall her last name ) and Brian Warner from the weed crew examined meadows on the plateau. She reported that in Hockett Pasture she observed several plants known as Sorrel Spurge(a herb) near the trail crew hitch rails, and in an open area of the pasture. She reports that Eric Frenzel



had observed these plants last year and she confirmed them. I don't know what happens next with this finding. She said that the spurge is also at the Atwell Corrals

## **E. Cultural Resources**

### **Historic Sites**

- a. Each year less and less remains of the old ranger station just outside of the trail crew camp area. The grinding hole site in the granite dome near the weather station at the south end of the meadow is well, with a few not so historic pestles placed in the holes.
- b. Several years ago Billy Hancock said that it was his belief that in Mitchell Meadow was an old cabin site. Without more information than that, on September 11th, VIP McDonald and I rode to the meadow in search of any sign of such cabin. We rode just inside the tree line of the entire meadow. We found saw cut stumps and on occasion a notch in a tree or two that may have been where a log may have been attached at one time. It would make sense that any camp or cabin site would be placed near water, and water does flow from the north into the meadow, and from the south east into the meadow, but not this time of the season. Only a stagnant pond remained on the very south edge of the meadow. No evidence of a cabin was found.

## **F. Backcountry Facilities**

### **Ranger Station**

- a. As mentioned in the the summary, all requested maintenance requested during the last few years and then some were completed by Thor and his crew last summer and fall. The backsplash behind the kitchen sink, replaced. The old hemp rope used as caulking between the logs was removed and or covered by foam and a filler, then the entire cabin painted. The windows were removed and weights and cords repaired so that the windows now remain open without support.
- b. Last year we noted that the water pump lost its prime after an hour or so and required some vigorous pumping of the handle to restore a prime. Thor determined that a new pipe bushing was required as the foot valve, (the long pvc tube that extends into the well) could not be tightened enough to prevent leakage. He replaced it and the pump now holds its prime. The downside is that this year that bushing and some of the old original plumbing is rusting, and that rust color and the taste of copper is found in the drinking water. I brought in a Brita water filter and reservoir and it works fine. Hopefully the plumbing issue can be reviewed and a fix suggested. At the very minimum the 4inch by 1X1/2 steel bushing could be replaced. It was extremely rusted at the end of the season, with the red coppery residue running down the sides of the pvc pipe. The water in the well and pump had always been drinkable until this year, and the only thing that has changed, is the replacement of the bushing. It was new last year and at the end

of the season it looked like it had been in place for years. The water in the well at the end of the season was crystal clear, suggesting that the rust and coppery taste is in the plumbing, beginning at the bushing.

c. The solar system is in excellent condition, maintaining a charge constantly anywhere from 13 to 14 plus volts. The batteries were installed in 2008. This year the solar panel was stored under one of the beds in the east bedroom. A new backup inverter and a backup replacement propane line are in the closet marked rangers closet. The propane line is the copper tubing that connects the propane tank to the regulator.

d. Somehow during the end of last season and the beginning of this season at least 4 of the window screens were found to be torn. Some just not cut, but gashes that were barely covered by the width of a piece of duct tape. The shutters cannot be secured from inside the cabin with the window screens in place. They must be removed and stored in the tack shed. The closing and securing of the new shutters requires that a hasp attached to the inside of the shutter, be placed on a ring on the window sill and then a standard snap placed on the d ring, preventing the hasp from being lifted, and therefore prevents the shutter from easily being pried off the window frame. Some screen material for the four screens and approximately 20 to 30 feet of 3/4 (?) beading and finishing nails could take care of the damage.

e. The privy was moved to a new location this year, should be good for 4 or 5 years. I only had to suggest it to the trail crew and it was done. Thanks. I offered to help with the project, however when I returned from my days off, it was completed

f. The right rear burner on the Western Holly stove began to leak this summer. VIP Mac and I took it apart and determined the on/off valve was the culprit. A message was delivered to Thor and he recalled that he worked on the stove last summer as the oven had some issues, so he cleaned all the on/off control valves. He said he may have cleaned that valve to well, and sent some "stove grease" to the station. We applied some to the brass facings of the valve and all is well. It is still a good habit to shut off the in line valve behind the stove when you leave for any length of time, just to be on the safe side.

g. Quinn Ranger Station also received repairs from Thor and the crew last year. New sill logs, the building leveled, and a coat of stain make the place look extremely well. The lockers, one used for food storage and the other for utensils and cookware and other supplies are hard to make rodent proof. The wall locker that contains all of the snow survey food is difficult to secure on top and bottom, and if it locked incorrectly the mice will have a field day with the food. To the right of the locker is a cabinet that contains paper goods, cookware and utensils. If the top and bottom slide bolts on the inside of the left door are not secured first, then mice will get in.

What I am trying to say here is that these two cabinets should be replaced. Is it possible that there is money for the State to replace these?

Speaking of the State, Mike Cole and Chris Waldschmidt I believe, are responsible for some new mattresses at Quinn. VIP McDonald and I packed them (3) into the station and designed a way to hang them. Put them on the pvc pipe sections and then use the p cord to secure the bottoms of the mattress. The bunks are dirty and dusty and it all transfers to the mattress when placed on the bed frames. 3 mattress covers(the military had a different name for them) are needed to keep them looking new. If four people are going to Quinn, only three will get to try the new mattresses, the fourth will get an old one to sleep on.

## **Signs**

- a. At least 3 signs are needed. And old wooden sign marked toilet with an arrow pointing to the right is falling apart. The sign directs visitors to a pair of pit toilets on the trail to Evelyn Lake, near the ranger station. The sign is attached to a wood post which is solid, so just the sign is required. I see several toilet signs outside on the east wall of the Wilderness Office, just below the windows of the conference rooms. Could one of the signs be unbolted from its metal post, taken to Hockett and installed on the wood post on the trail to Evelyn Lake?
- b. Is there a document that lists signs, their locations and information. A sign is missing from a metal post just outside of the Wet Meadow entrance. I don't know what information the sign states. There is a sign that says Blossom Lakes with an arrow pointing north Another sign states So.Fork Meadow with an arrow pointing west. Maybe the missing sign gave info for Windy Gap to the south. There is also sign post (no sign) at the intersection midway between Hockett Lakes and the junction to Sand Meadow and Hockett Meadow. There is a sign indicating that information but the the unadorned sign post is in such a position, that it may have indicated a direction for South Fork Meadow and an arrow pointing left (south/east)

If there is such a sign list, can I obtain a copy detailing the signs on the Hockett patrol area to keep at the station?

## **G. Trails**

- a. Trails are generally in good shape in the patrol area. Over the years, the trail crew has responded to mine or visitors requests, and or their own observations, and performed repairs or improvements. Last year the Construction crew constructed a causeway on the Atwell trail and Clover Creek, in a very wet and slippery section. The also rerouted the switchbacks down to Evelyn Lake. This year the Hockett trail crew installed a causeway on the west edge of the South Fork and Touhy Creek confluence. This has always been a wet, boggy, and muddy area.
- b. What needs attention next spring are two bridges, one just west of Rock Camp, and the other is the bridge just south of Horse Creek. The first has gaps between the planks that are getting larger each summer, causing stock to trip. The second bridge

may have a broken beam or sill log, as the first 2 or 3 planks approaching from the north are about an inch or two above the others and there is some definite creaking when stock travel on it.

c. There is a section of the trail between Windy Gap and just before Wet Meadow that could use some attention. A slick rock area exists, and maybe a step or two could make the area a bit safer for stock, which are the predominate users of that section of trail. Also on this section of trail is a boggy area that could benefit from a causeway.

## **H. Camp Areas**

### **Conditions**

a. The camps are adequate for the type of and degree of use they receive. In other words this year there was very little impact, as some of the camp sites were hardly used. The sites that required frequent attention were the backpacker camps near the station, the main camp at Horse Creek and the camps at Evelyn Lake. On the stock side Hidden Camp was used once, South Fork Pasture, maybe twice, and those visitors did not build a fire

b. Sanitation was not an issue this year because of the low visitor use. The backpacker camp near the station is not impacted as there are the two pit toilets several hundred yards away.

c. I rehabbed and cleaned over 25 times various camp fire rings. The worst is always the small stock camp at the confluence of the Touhy and South Fork. On occasion the pack station will spot a group there, but the fire pit is often a volcano, and filled with trash.

When Eric Frenzel and Corrie Cahn inspected the meadows early in the season they removed a fire pit in the meadow at Summit Lake. I removed a total of five this summer at from the lake area.

d. Firewood is readily available in all the campsites as down lodge poles are everywhere. At Evelyn Lake one has to hike back to the trail area to find wood but it is plentiful nearby.

e. There were no food storage issues this season. The bear box at Hidden Camp was designated for replacement by Trails. It was cut up and a new one installed. The remainder of the bear boxes are serviceable.

The food storage cable at Horse Creek finally was removed as we were unable to find a suitable group of trees to install it. We had repaired it twice, when one of the connecting trees fell, and the next year the new tree went down, and now it is gone.

### **Permit System**

- a. Not a lot of issues this season with permits from MKRS. One group left the permit on the dashboard of their vehicle at MK. Another left it in his vehicle. A call to MK determined that all had valid permits.
- b. When a stock party of 8 people and 13 head obtained a permit, MK notified me on the radio of their itinerary and allowed me to arrange my schedule to be near the station to contact them.
- c. Another time they advised of a large group of boy scouts and adults were coming to Hockett. That group arrived with a medical, and a member was flown out.
- d. A group of backpackers and one stock group entered the park via South Fork Campground. This has been a self issue point for many years. But at the beginning of last year visitors were required to obtain a permit from the Wilderness Office for backcountry travel from that trailhead. I do not know what type of signage is placed at the trailhead, but to drive up that windy road for 10 miles only to learn you have to go back to the highway and go another 7 or so miles to Ash Mountain can put people into a rough frame of mind.

### **J. Communications**

(b) (5), (b) (7)(F)



### **K. Needs for next year**

- a. The sleeping bags at both stations need cleaning. I believe I brought them all in about 2003. The four pillows at the Hockett RS are musty smelling and hard as rocks. Four new ones and some pillow cases would be nice. The ones at Quinn are newer

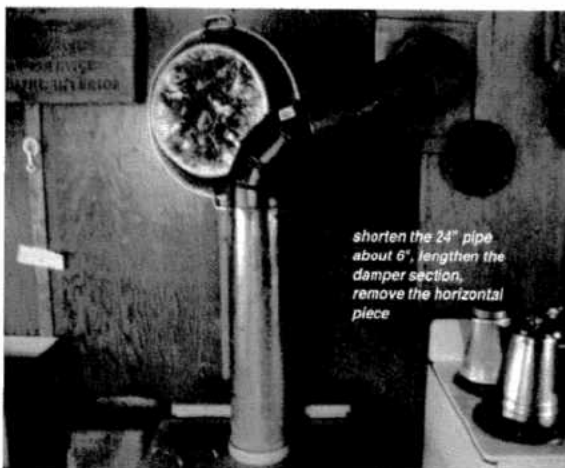
and have pillow cases. They need to be laundered next season if the bags come out for cleaning.

- b. 2 new signs to replace the ones at the entrance to the fenced pasture at Hockett. They both state "Government Use Only". Nearly every year the folks who check the weather stations at Wet Meadow and Hockett, come in on 5 or 6 head of stock and 5 or 6 pack animals. They stay at Quinn, last year at Slims, and last year at Hockett Pasture. They assume that because they are from the government (STATE) they advise their packer to set up camp in the pasture. The packer is always someone from Cedar Grove. Like a lot of things, if they asked and the grazing nights are near max, I could help with an electric fence or make some other offer of help. (b) (5)

## L. Recommendations

- a. The wood burning stove at Hockett does not draw well, and I hear complaints that it is difficult to get a fire started, and when it does get going, it is hard to keep it going. It does require that once the kindling gets lit and a few sticks of firewood are added, if one keeps the door open an inch or so until that load of wood takes off, then add some more until about 8 or 9 sticks are burning hot, then close the door. This has worked for me in the past with some degree of success.

This year, Kip Knapp the District Ranger visited the station for a hunting patrol. He looked at the stove and feels that the poor draw may be due to the stove pipe having two elbows, a horizontal 12inch section then another elbow, before entering the chimney. He thinks that if the horizontal section could be removed, the draw could be improved. He admits that doing so may place the flue closer to the fire-board on the wall.



A question for Thor?

a. Latches were placed on all the shutters. Prior to the installation of the hinges for the shutters, the only way to secure them was from the inside. With the new latches I installed, the shutters can be latched and locked from the outside, quite more securely. I inquired about 3 new 51 locks, but there were no cores available this season. I put on 3 locks I picked up at the hardware store, and the key for them is hanging inside the front door, with a key fob that explains what it is for. In the event that one gets lost, there are 2 more hanging on a nail in the snow survey closet. Typically, I only open the single shutter to the right of the front door(south wall) as doing so allows more light into the kitchen area. The other two shutters on the north wall of the bedrooms, but they have no blinds.

c. Which brings me to the issue of the blinds. They must be 20 years old and are falling apart. They don't go up easy without being coached along, and during the night, they roll up on their own. Thor says they are not available anymore and modern replacements are found only in white. (These are tan on one side and olive on the other side) He recommended that I bring out the worst ones and he will try to repair them. I brought out 5. They measure 31 ½' wide and 50 " long. There are a total of eleven in the cabin.

## **M. Pertinent Inventory**

- a. Propane: There are two tall tanks, one full the other half full, a five gallon tank is full. There are 3 empty tanks to go out next season.
- b. A complete electric fence with about 20 fiberglass posts is located under the bed in the east bedroom.
- c. There is a half bag of alfalfa pellets, a half bag of complete ration feed, and a 3/4 bag of COB in the grain barrel.
- d. A small jar of "Stove Grease" is in the tool drawer in the kitchen

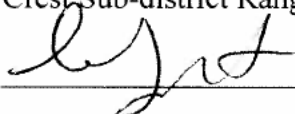
# Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park



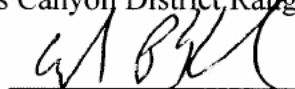
## 2012 Rae Lakes Wilderness Ranger End of Season Report

From: Dario Malengo, Rae Lakes Ranger

Through: Erika Jostad, Sierra Crest Sub-district Ranger

Read and approved:  Date: 10/18/12

Through: Ned Kelleher, Kings Canyon District Ranger

Read and approved:  Date: 11/7/12

To: Gregg Fauth, Wilderness Coordinator

Read and approved:  Date: 11/19/12



## **Rae Lakes Season End Report**



**By Dario Malengo**

## **A. General**

I arrived at Rae Lakes on July 3, 2012, via Glen Pass from Charlotte Lake. There was no snow on the pass, except for twenty feet that had been dug out by the trail crew - very different from the previous year when at this date there was snow all the way down to 8,000 feet.

5-5-1-1(Marty) set up the solar electric prior to my arrival at the ranger station. Signs of mice were everywhere - the cabin had obviously been an open door to mice all winter long. The marmots had chewed the treated supports under the front porch. The cabin was in good order after a little cleaning with soap and water. The mice continued to be a problem throughout the season and thirty-two were trapped. The mouse problem was kept under control by having five mouse traps set all the time, and the cabin was a comfortable home for the three months that I occupied it.

Rae Lakes continues to be a destination for many. There are three main groups of hikers that account for almost all the visitor use: the Rae Lakes loop hikers from Cedar Grove, the hikers coming in from Kearsarge Pass and the biggest group from the north on the John Muir Trail. John Muir Trail hikers have increased considerably over the last few years. Now the Rae Lakes area is in danger of being "loved to death". This area offers beautiful lake and mountain scenery. Almost all hikers coming through the area desire to camp here. As a result of this high use, the Park Service should evaluate the two-day camping limit. Changing the limit from one night to two has almost doubled the use here and is contributing to sanitation problems and over crowding, especially in the upper basin.

Because there was no ranger at Bench Lake, I patrolled that area when possible. The frog crew used Bench Lake as a base camp to service projects at Pinchot Lake, Upper Basin and Amphitheater Lake. Trailhead rangers 1-1-9 and 1-1-10 also patrolled the Bench Lake area. The Bench Lake patrol is more important every year because of the increase in John Muir Trail traffic. I counted forty-one John Muir Trail hikers, all going south to Mount Whitney, one day while hiking between Bench Lake and Rae Lakes.

Sixty Lakes Basin is popular for day hikers coming from Rae Lakes. Overnight campers also use the Sixty Lakes area. The main attractions are Mount Cotter for climbers and the many beautiful lakes for campers.

**1. Law Enforcement** – With the exception of two groups camped on vegetation, I did not observe any illegal activity again this season. The two groups complied when I asked them to move camp and I warned them not to camp on vegetation in the future. The only illegal fire pits found were at Arrowhead Lake, where I found one and 1-1-9 found three. Often there will be some trash left behind in the Bear Box on the peninsula and at Woods Crossing. The problem is minimal and is easily solved routine patrols.

**2. Search and Rescue** - There were three medical evacuations in the area from Bench Lake to Rae Lakes. The first one happened on mobilization day at Bench Lake. Evaluating the forty-five year old male, I found him suffering from extreme fatigue, shortness of breath and loss of equilibrium. With the helicopter already on the ground, 1-1-1 and I decided to fly him to Bishop with Morgan (heli-tac) as EMT. The next medevac was a male John Muir Trail hiker with a knee that gave out at Rae Lakes, after one hundred and fifty miles. I later found out later that he had surgery for a torn meniscus. The third medivac was a sixty-seven year old male with shortness of breath, fatigue and exhaustion. After hiking with his son from Bishop Pass to Rae Lakes. He was not able to keep food or drink down for three days. He was on five different heart medications, had a history of heart problems and had several ischemic events. What was this guy doing being on the John Muir Trail? Now that the John Muir Trails so popular it is a concern to us that visitors know how strenuous this hike is before they get started. Once you go over Bishop Pass and down to the John Muir Trail there is no easy way out.

Another serious medical evacuation took place at Arrow Peak where a climber had two broken arms from a fall. He activated his rescue device and was short-hauled by 4-1-2 that afternoon.

In addition, 1-1-1 responded to a call from a man with a deep cut on his foot at Twin Lakes. Considering the large number of hikers there are bound to be a few injuries and accidents.

**3. Service Incidents** - The biggest aid to visitors is being available in their time of need. That can be as minor as a weather report or as serious as a life-threatening case of pulmonary edema. The ranger works with other Park Service groups often. This season I had a lot of interaction with the Kings Canyon trail crew, fish crew, trailhead rangers, meadow monitors, inventory monitoring and Cedar Grove law enforcement.

The Woods Creek camp area needs to be visited often due to the large number of campers (often fifty or more for this small area) every night. There are not a lot of good camps above or below here being the reason. The toilet on the north side of the creek is an important feature and Woods Crossing. One sign on the John Muir Trail/Woods Creek trail junction alerts people to its existence. The area is a lot cleaner and sanitary when the toilet is operating. Although a bear damaged it twice this season, I was able to repair and bring it back into operation both times. We should keep this toilet operating in the future and that the maintenance should be shared by the rangers and maintenance.

I dug out all the fire-pits from Castle Dome Meadow up during my last patrol to Woods Crossing. I eliminated the fire-pit at approximately 9,300 feet, one and a half miles from Woods Junction, on the Mount King drainage. This vegetated area is not suitable for camping, but people do anyway because it is flat and below ten thousand feet.

## **B. Wilderness Protection**

Many campers stop at Arrowhead Lake or Dollar Lake before getting to Rae Lakes. Because of its proximity to water, Dollar Lake has limited camping close to water, but there are two good sites 100 feet away from water. We should allow some camping here for those who are just too tired to go any further.

The peninsula at Rae Lake gets most of the use. This area has several good sites and two bear boxes. At times there may be 50 or more campers using this area. The Sixty Lakes Junction has four camp areas, and these are full nearly every night. Campers like to get as close to Glen Pass as possible, and there are no campsites past this point. The isthmus also gets some use. It does not get too crowded like it used to before we put the bear boxes on the peninsula.

(b) (5)



1. Sixty Lakes Trail: The Sixty Lakes Trail needs to be a priority for maintenance. The trail is badly eroded on both sides of the pass, making it difficult for hikers and dangerous for stock. The one stock group who tried to go into Sixty Lakes had to turn back when one of the clients fell off his horse riding in. This trail is too dangerous for stock. Stock should not be allowed on this trail until it is repaired.
2. Baxter Lake Trail: The Baxter Trail is not maintained. It is possible, if hikers pay close attention, to follow it, but is not recommended for most hikers. Ducks mark the trail on the park side. The trail on the east side of the pass is also difficult to follow in places.
3. Dragon Lake Trail: Dragon Lake Trail is badly eroded and steep but easy to follow. This trail gets very little use and Dragon Lake gets only a few campers all season.
4. Fire Rings: It takes constant maintenance to keep the fire rings under control at Woods Crossing. They grow in size and number quickly. Roads End Rangers and 1-1-9 helped with maintenance this season.
5. Toilet: The toilet at Woods Crossing is helping a lot with sanitation there. I had to rebuild it twice this season due to bear damage. It is in very poor condition and should be prioritized for replacement with a new one. Maintenance and Rangers should share in this project. The location is perfect, and there is room for many more sites.

6. Frog Research : I am concerned that the field crews are being worked to the limit. The jobs require a lot of hiking and busy time with nets, electro-shockers etc., and with the crews having to hike out long distances for days off on their own time makes it easier for accidents. One incident involved 9-2-38 Cruz and Ratliff trying to find a short cut over South Dragon Pass to Onion Valley to maximize their time off. Their safety was endangered when they couldn't find a way down, and needed my detailed assistance on the radio to descend to Golden Trout Lake. Fortunately they finally arrived there at 1130 hrs., but did not make it to the trailhead until 0300 hrs. Perhaps hiking out should be counted as work time to prevent this situation.

### **C. Meadows and grazing**

Pack stock use in this area was fairly light. Rock Creek Pack Station had three trips with thirteen head each and grazed at Baxter Meadow and Woods Crossing one night each. Pine Creek Pack Station had three trips and grazed two nights at Baxter Meadow. High Sierra Pack Station grazed Baxter Meadow with seven head for one night. Trail crew pack stock grazed Woods Creek every week to resupply the trail crew. Three Corner Round grazed their burros three days at Twin Lakes and seven days in Upper Basin before exiting at Taboose Pass.

All meadows were very dry this year and there were no early season closures. The drift fence at Baxter Creek needs to be re-built. It is in very poor condition. The White Fork fence and upper Woods fence are in good condition. The Castle Dome fence was destroyed in this years Woods Creek fire. A lot of meadow trampling occurred when the Woods Creek fire was staged there.

### **D. Bears**

There were no bear incidents reported to me this season. A bear sighting was reported near Dragon Lake, and 1-1-1 and I observed one below Baxter Meadow. A bear did damage to the Woods Creek toilet this season, and it had to be repaired.

### **E. Wildlife**

Wildlife sightings this season included numerous mule deer with several large bucks foraging and resting near the ranger station. Other sightings included approximately twenty-five bighorn sheep ewes and lambs on the Baxter Trail above Dollar Lake (Figure 1). A falcon was seen at Cotter Lake and many other birds were also seen in the area.

### **F. Fire Rings**

All fire rings have been rehabbed below ten thousand feet, and the few above removed.

### **G. Ranger Station**

The new Rae Lakes Ranger Station is quite comfortable to live in. The main problem is that it leaks mice (thirty-two mice trapped). By setting traps the resident ranger can keep the population under control. But when the station is closed for the season, the mice will take over and a lot of damage will be done. (b) (5)

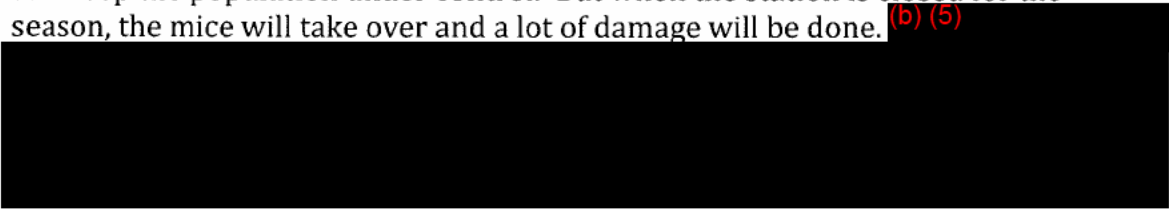


Figure 1. Bighorn sheep ewes and lambs, Baxter Trail above Dollar Lake, August 18, 2012

## H. Trails

The trail crew, led by 5-5-12, did good work building a new switchback on the Glen Pass trail. They also did a lot of rocking, and repaired some difficult riprap, replacing it with some beautiful rock steps, laid down perfectly by Kiwakiu.

What is now needed on the section from Woods Crossing to Rae Lakes is some general repair work: repairing blown-out retainer bars and adding new ones where there is a lot of erosion on the many slick-rock sections; fixing the many difficult sections; adding steps in between where there are some very high ones (over 12").

## I. CUA/Concessions Contracts

Yosemite Mountain Guides had one trip through Rae Lakes. (b) (6) was their packer and kept the stock, seven animals, at Baxter Meadow. (b) (6) was the group leader.

#### **J. Recommendations:**

- Use "Log Cabin" caulk to make the ranger station mouse-proof

(b) (5)



#### **K. Statistics**

Visitors Contacted	July-705	August- 1105	September-390	Total-2215
Miles Hiked	July-208	August-190	September-122	Total-520



**Inventory:**

- Kitchen Ware – everything essential is there: pots, pans, cast iron ware, pressure cooker, baking equipment...
- Oxygen: Two Jumbo D cylinders and two small cylinders
- Sleeping Bags: two - one poly and one down
- Tents: two - one two-man and one one-man
- Small Assortment of Tools: screw drivers, hammer, small saw, bow saw, and one cross-cut saw
- Propane Tanks: two - one 10 gallon (half-full) and one 5 gallon (one-third full).

**Needs:**

- Two ten-gallon propane tanks
- One mattress cover
- One hatchet
- Tape measure

**Additional Photos:**

#4-#8 Mouse holes in cabin

#9-#11 Ghost Camp Meadow

#12-#14 Castle Dome Meadow

## MINERAL KING RANGER STATION TRAILHEAD ANNUAL REPORT 2012

This report covers the time period that Trailhead (TH) Rangers worked and the Station (RS) front office was open to the public 5/25/2012-9/26/2012.

- Season began 5/22/2012 with park-wide TH training at Beetle Rock attended by Tor and Len for two days
- 5/24/2012 cash register training at MKRS and front office organization including SNHA set-up
- Fee Collector Margaret was already here and done the necessary early season cleaning in preparation for the above training.
- 5/25/2012 MKRS open to the public with 77 visitors. SNHA sales brisk. Less snow than previous seasons meant more people wanted to try wilderness trips; many trips were not ambitious and some aborted.
- Light visitation early June
- 6/10/2012 Alyssa and Jessica EOD and immediately were involved in almost two weeks of LE and EMT training.
- Jeff's EOD of 6/18 let him train with Tor re basic MKRS routines
- Adam, our VIP, came on 6/21 and attended park-wide Wilderness Ranger Training with Chris and Jeff
- Mary, the relief campground ranger, had an EOD of 6/25/2012
- Tor and Len at different times took the Operational Leadership Training.
- There was no Interpreter Ranger this season
- Staggered scheduling of the Trailheads and VIP meant 4 persons were on duty Saturday and Sunday. Len worked the RS front office Wednesday through Sunday; Tor and Jeff alternated front office duties on the Monday and Tuesday. Adam assisted on the busiest days.
- Trailheads not in the front office hiked, either day hikes or overnight trips.
- Trail reports were promptly written; most, if not all, hikes got reported.
- Early reports concentrated on conditions; latter reports concentrated more on what visitors were or were not doing.
- Illegal fire rings, trash, evidence of camping too close to water were concerns addressed.  
*See the attached Mineral King Trail Patrol Statistics*
- "Minimum Impact" talks have always been part of the Wilderness Permit issuing process and a copy of the minimum impact regulations is attached to the wilderness permit issued so visitor non-compliance is a big concern and needs to be further addressed
- Interestingly food storage in the wilderness is not usually a problem. SNHA's canister rental service at our RS may be significant here.
- Adam's and Tor's season ended early because of school (8/20 and 8/23 respectively)

- Front office basic arrangement is efficient but the front desk arrangement is awkward when two persons are staffing the desk and there are multiple functions to be done. The NPS credit card terminal needs to be near the NPS register; ideally the NPS register should handle credit cards as at Ash Mountain.
- For opening the RS, two staff with lock box keys must be present. This must be considered when doing scheduling. Usually the two are a campground ranger and a trailhead ranger. The campground ranger will assist further with opening if there is more than one party waiting for a permit.
- Closing goes well if the flag and the open sign can be brought in promptly at 1600 and the door locked. It can take two staff to close; one to protect the person doing the closing from interruptions. The campground rangers make a point of being available to help.
- Early season Tor had RS duty Monday and Tuesday. Mid-season Tor and Jeff took alternate weeks in the RS. Late season Jeff had to be in the RS Monday and Tuesday. These days were also Mary's days in the campground.
- VIP Adam has expressed a desire to return in some capacity to MK. He hiked well and was knowledgeable and sincere with visitors.
- Our statistics showed that we had a busy season from start to finish. *See the YEAR TO YEAR WILDERNESS PERMIT STATISTICS FOR MKRS.*
- The Wilderness Office and SNHA were very helpful in multiple ways.
- We suggest: a bridge over Franklin Creek, constructing a maintainable trail to Mosquito Lake #2 from either Miner's Ridge or Lake #1
- We heard that our trails were to be re-measured but do not know if that is happening.

## **MINERAL KING RANGER STATION FRONT DESK ACTIVITY SURVEY 2012**

From June 6 through July 31, NPS staff working the front desk tried to count how many times each day we had conversations on various topics. We divided the conversations into ten topics. "Entrance Station" was a topic and we almost always asked the driver of each vehicle if they had paid the entrance fee or had a park pass. We checked off "Wilderness Permit" every time backpacking was discussed, even on the 'phone. We counted conversations, not how many people were in the party we were talking with. The "SNHA" count reflects the number of purchases but occasionally includes a question about a book or map that was not purchased. The "Telephone" count was simply how many 'phone calls came in to 3768. The topics of 'phone conversations were marked in categories already indicated. Some questions fell outside of the usual topics and were counted as "general" such as helicopter activity, past forest fires, or geology. Also included were # of RS contacts. The chart below shows the average number for each topic each day and the range from least to most in one day.

<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>AVERAGE/DAY</b>	<b>LEAST</b>	<b>MOST</b>
Entrance Fees	8.4	0	28
Wilderness Permits	12.1	2	31
Day Hikes	7.3	2	16
Campground	4.5	1	11
Bear Canister Rental	4.0	0	15
Natural History	7.1	1	19
MK History	1.5	0	6
Weather	3.9	0	17
SNHA	7.2	1	19
Phone Calls	13.0	2	37
General	10.8	2	22
Ranger Station Contacts	87	23	154