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VISITOR DISPLACEMENT: IS IT INEVITABLE?

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Background & Management Issues:
Research on "displacement" of wilderness visitors has typically focused on users who cease to visit a place because of an increase in human use and evidence of human impact. Management actions, such as use limits, have been implemented to accommodate these impact-sensitive users who are able to achieve the experience they prefer only in wilderness. Despite past research on the subject, the link between high impacts and displacement of visitors remains tenuous. Another kind of displacement to which little attention has been paid may be occurring because of regulations intended to benefit wilderness "purists" – those primarily seeking solitude and a primitive setting. As a result, users who value freedom and a lack of regulations more than solitude may choose to go elsewhere or stay home.

Project Objectives:

To determine to what extent wilderness "purists" are displaced by high human use of an area.

To evaluate the potential for users to be displaced by regulations intended to limit use and impacts.

Project Description: Data were collected through visitor surveys administered at three popular trailheads in the Three Sisters and Mt. Jefferson wildernesses in Oregon. The first survey was conducted in 1991 when there were no use limits. In 1995, a permit system was adopted at the Obsidian Falls trailhead that allowed only 20 groups to enter the trailhead each day. The restrictions were phased in gradually, and in 1997 those without a permit were turned away. Although use at the Marion Lake and Green Lake trailheads exceeded limits set in the Forest Plan in 1991, the permit system was not implemented at these locations.

In 1997, a second visitor survey was conducted at the three trailheads. The authors hypothesized that between 1991 and 1997 the two non-permitted trailheads would show an increase in impact-tolerant users and displacement of "purists" by high use. Visitors to the regulated Obsidian Falls trailhead should be more regulation-tolerant in 1997 than 1991 visitors because those who value a lack of regulations more than they value solitude and a primitive setting should be displaced elsewhere.

Results:

Very little evidence was found from the data collected for displacement of "purists" due to increased use levels and human impact at the unpermitted trailheads.

The authors found strong evidence for displacement of visitors due to increased regulations at the Obsidian Falls trailhead.

Between 1991 and 1997, more people were displaced from Obsidian Falls by increased regulations than were displaced from Green and

Marion Lakes by high-use. The magnitude the regulation-displacement was greater than the magnitude of high use displacement.

- ✓ The authors noted that their methods may have been inadequate to find evidence of high use displacement, or that this type of displacement had occurred prior to the study.

Management Implications:

- The definition of displacement should be broadened to include all users driven from a particular destination due to changed conditions or management actions.
- With this more generic definition of displacement, displacement of some users is recognized as inevitable, and managers must make a subjective judgment about what conditions they choose to provide and which types of users they favor.
- In considering a management action (or lack of action) that will result in the displacement of users, managers are advised to consider the regional supply and demand for different recreational opportunities when making their decision.
- The authors recommend that managers of high-use wilderness areas clearly define their objectives, and the type of experiences they hope to provide. They suggest three possible courses of action: manage for the lowest displacement possible, implement use limits to favor solitude and minimal impacts, or manage for a diverse array of experiences.

Publications / Products:

- Hall, Troy; Cole, David. 2000. An expanded perspective on displacement: A longitudinal study of visitors to two wildernesses in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon. *In*: Cole, David N.; McCool, Stephen F.; Borrie, William T.; O'Loughlin, Jennifer, comps. Wilderness Science in a Time of Change Conference–Volume 4: Wilderness Visitors, Experiences, and Visitor Management; 1999 May 23-27; Missoula, MT. Proc. RMRS-P-15-VOL-4. Ogden, UT: Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station: 113-121. **Leopold Publication Number 391.** Read it here!

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