

## **RM-CESU -Project Report, FY 08**

**Project Title:** Resource and Impact Study of Longs Peak

**Park:** Rocky Mountain NP

**Funding Source:** Rocky Mountains CESU Research Funding

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### **Project Summary:**

This study will investigate the history of hiking, mountaineering, and technical climbing on Longs Peak since 1925 and the impact of these forms of recreation over time on the peak's natural and cultural resources. It will also analyze the changes in social identity, cultural values, and environmental perceptions of people who have hiked or climbed Longs Peak as well as changes over time in park management goals. This project will use an interdisciplinary approach involving: historical research in primary and secondary sources; assessments of existing natural and cultural resource studies and inventories; and assessments of existing social science studies concerning human recreation in natural environments. Through reconnaissance-level field investigation with park staff, this project will also identify categories of un-inventoried resources (for example, social trails) and impacts to resources (for example, damage caused to geological resources from technical climbing, litter, soil erosion) that ought to be inventoried or investigated in the future.

### **Objectives:**

Using an interdisciplinary approach, this project will:

1. Investigate the history of hiking, mountaineering, and technical climbing on Longs Peak since 1925 and the impact of these forms of recreation over time on the peak's natural and cultural resources
2. Analyze the changes in social identity, cultural values, and environmental perceptions of people who have hiked or climbed Longs Peak
3. Analyze changes over time in park management goals in relation to Longs Peak
4. Provide documentation (a comprehensive inventory of the peak's resources and impacts) to National Park Service managers to develop land and resource management plans, interpreting the area, managing visitors, following compliance directives, protecting wilderness resources, and planning for future visitor use surveys and research.

**Methods:**

- A) Documentary research
- B) Field investigation
- C) Information synthesis
- D) Report writing

**Project Results to Date:**

Since project inception in May 2008, the principal investigator and research assistants have focused on documentary research and information synthesis.

Graduate student, Catherine Moore, has focused her attention on the history of climbing and hiking on the peak. In addition, she has researched through primary and secondary sources the change over time in the way the park manages the peak. She has identified all studies now housed in the park that may deal to some extent with impacts to natural or cultural resourced on Longs Peak. Now that most of the documentary sources have been reviewed, Dr. Alexander and Ms. Moore will reassess the project status and create strategy for tackling the on the ground impact study. According to Dr. Alexander, they will "review and think about which of the questions in the task agreement we believe we can answer at this point, which we don't yet have answers to, and which may need to be somewhat modified."

Graduate student and Rocky Mountain Nature Association fellow, Cori Knudten, already produced a draft thesis focusing on cultural values. According to the most recent monthly report from Dr. Alexander, Cori is:

Developing two arguments of importance: first, she is demonstrating the value of Longs Peak to automobile tourists who never hike its trails or climb to its summit; and second, she is showing how and why Longs Peak is no longer the "key" attraction in ROMO but merely one of many attractions and sites that must be managed by park staff. She places the changing significance of Longs Peak within the context of park staff's efforts to deal with greatly increased travel to the park over the course of the 20th century as well as the somewhat contradictory values embedded in Mission 66 and modern wilderness ethics.

**Deliverables:**

Although not required by the task agreement, all drafts of outlines, bibliographies, and the thesis have been provided to the NPS key official for review. Monthly progress reports have been timely and of great assistance in keeping the project moving. This close communication between key official and principal investigator has kept this project on time and within budget. The first draft of the report to the park is due in August 2009. The final draft is not due until December 2009.