

PROJECT SUMMARY
Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Project Title: Exploring Rocky Mountain National Park visitors' information sources, communications, and perception of wildlife management practices

Type of Project: Research
Discipline: Social Science
Funding Agency: National Park Service
Other Partners/Cooperators: Colorado State University
Effective Dates: 7/1/2008- 10/31/2010
Funding Amount: \$24,998

Investigators and Agency Representative:

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Project Abstract: Over the last 50 years, the Rocky Mountain NP, Colorado elk population has grown to the extent that it is having detrimental effects on the park vegetation and ecosystems. With the increased numbers, elk have damaged vegetation in the riparian zones in both the summer and winter elk ranges. Therefore, the National Park Service finalized a 20 year, flexible elk management plan in February 2008 that calls for the reduction of the elk herd. The NPS needs to determine the level of stakeholders' understanding of the elk management plan and needs to devise a communication plan to help the public understand the elk reduction strategy. The objectives of this social science study are: (1) determine ROMO visitors' (stakeholders') (a) frequency of thinking about wildlife management practices, specifically elk management, (b) sources of information about current and proposed elk management practices for ROMO, (c) frequency and intensity of information seeking on wildlife management and elk. (2) assess ROMO visitors' (a) knowledge of wildlife and especially elk impact on vegetation, (b) awareness of proposed management practices, fencing, lethal controls (culling), birth control methods, aversive conditioning, (c) perceptions and attitudes toward proposed management practices, (d) understanding wildlife management practices. (3) assess selected factors that may influence visitors' knowledge, awareness, communication practices, and understanding of wildlife management and specifically elk biology; such factors may include ROMO visitation frequency, socio-economic factors, and environmental concerns and attitudes.

For this pilot study, CSU cooperators will conduct modified focus group sessions, and a limited survey of park visitors. They will plan in-person focus groups with Estes Park and Grand Lake residents, and then Web-based and conference call-based focus groups of in-state visitors, and out-of-state visitors.

Outcomes with Completion Dates: Due by July 31, 2010

1. Questionnaires and objectives for focus groups and pilot mail survey.
2. Recruitment materials (announcements, letters, posters, questionnaire)
3. Sampling scheme, questions, and materials (e.g., PowerPoint presentation) for focus groups and pilot mail survey (to be approved by Colorado State University's Institutional Review Board/Human Subjects Committee, the National Park Service [NPS] Social Science Division, and the Office of Management and Budget).
4. Recruitment training materials for park volunteers and staff.
5. Transcriptions of focus groups.
6. Analysis and interpretation of quantitative data and focus group data.
7. End-of-project report including results.
8. Presentation of results to park staff.
9. Monthly updates of progress to NPS Key Official

Keywords: focus groups, wildlife viewing, elk reductions, communications plan, Social Science, Rocky Mountain NP, Colorado State University