

Project Summary

Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Project Title: Identify Data Needs and Develop Protocols to Support Wilderness Character Monitoring in Rocky Mountain National Park

Discipline: Social Science
Type of Project: Research
Funding Agency: National Park Service
Other Partners/Cooperators: 7/15/2012 - 11/30/2014
Funding Amount: \$26,127

Investigators and Agency Representative:

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Project Abstract: Rocky Mountain National Park (ROMO) was officially designated as Wilderness in March, 2009. The Wilderness Act of 1964 and NPS Management Policies (2006) mandate that federal land managers preserve the "wilderness character" of lands designated as part of the national wilderness preservation system. Wilderness character is defined in terms of its untrammled, undeveloped, and natural qualities along with its recreational opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. For example, ROMO has recently implemented an Elk and Vegetation Management plan to restore meadow habitat and hydrologic conditions. This project includes the installation of large fences in wilderness areas within the park to deter elk and deer from over-browsing willow and aspen. Restoration efforts improve the natural quality of wilderness but fencing detracts from the undeveloped quality. It is incumbent upon ROMO managers to document and understand the positive and negative effects of these types of management actions in order to evaluate decisions and track changes in the park's wilderness character. Moreover, the Wilderness Act is considered a non-degradation policy and land managers are tasked with improving the qualities that define an area's wilderness character. As such, ROMO park management is obligated to determine the baseline conditions of the park's wilderness character. These baseline conditions will be used to estimate long term positive and negative effects to wilderness character and subsequently to inform park management decisions to improve wilderness character throughout the park.

Outcomes with Completion Dates:

Background- Literature Review	August 2012- November 2012
Study/Sample Design	December 2012-May 2013
Study Implementation	May 2013- September 2013
Data Analysis & Report Writing	September 2013- March 2014
Final Management Workshop	May 2014
End Date of project	November 30, 2014

Keywords: wilderness, wilderness character, monitoring, portals, management, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado State University