

## **Project Summary**

### **Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit**

**Project Title:** Development of Visitor Monitoring Programs for NCPN Parks

**Type of Project:** Technical Assistance

**Funding Agency:** National Park Service

**Other Partners/Cooperators:** University of Montana

**Effective Dates:** 9/1/2004 – 4/30/2006

**Funding Amount:** \$39,939

**Investigators and Agency Representative:**

NPS Contact: Thom O'Dell, National Park Service, NCPN, Canyonlands NP, 2282 Resource Blvd., Moab, UT 84532, ph: 435-719-2358, [thom\\_odell@nps.gov](mailto:thom_odell@nps.gov)

Investigator: R. Neil Moisey, College of Forestry and Conservation, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812, ph: 406-243-6673, [moisey@forestry.umn.edu](mailto:moisey@forestry.umn.edu)

#### **Project Abstract:**

The purpose of this project is to conduct an inventory of visitor monitoring programs currently in use in the 16 Northern Colorado Plateau Network (NCPN) parks, to develop protocols for standard methods and to provide guidance on expanded and improved methods and monitoring programs. This project will be conducted in two phases. The first phase will inventory the current monitoring methods used within the NCPN units. In the second phase, based on current methods and in consultation with park staffs, standard protocols will be developed, and monitoring strategies will be recommended based on information needs.

Visitor monitoring programs track overall visitation to each park unit and provide information about visitor patterns within each park. The majority of National Park visitors confine their activities to formal trails, park facilities, and front country areas with developed infrastructure (bathrooms, parking lots, etc). However, the pursuit of backcountry wilderness experiences such as solitude, wildlife viewing, hiking, and other activities that bring visitors to less developed areas of parks are also very popular. Depending on the type and intensity of activity, and the fragility of the habitats affected, dispersed recreational activities can have adverse impacts to both the ecosystem elements and processes and the visitor experience.

Several years ago, the National Park Service began developing a carrying capacity framework titled Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) (National Park Service 1997). As the name suggests, this planning framework is aimed at maintaining the quality of the visitor experience and protecting natural and cultural resources in the face of increasing visitor use. VERP is built upon the same basic principles and concepts that drive other contemporary carrying capacity and related planning/management frameworks, including Limits of Acceptable Change (Stankey et al.1985), and Visitor Impact Management (Graefe et al.1990).

Freimund et.al. (2002) developed a methodology to support application of VERP in Zion National Park. Their monitoring project focused on the four elements of the VERP framework that can benefit the most from empirical data: 1) collecting baseline data on visitor use and associated resource and social impacts, 2) identifying indicators and standards of quality, 3) monitoring indicator variables, and 4) management of visitor use to ensure that the standards of quality are maintained.

#### **Outcomes with Completion Dates:**

Final Products include: 1) Report of existing programs for visitation monitoring in NCPN Parks; 2) Database documenting existing visitation monitoring; and 3) Final Report on recommendations for expanded monitoring and draft monitoring protocols. Due January 31, 2006.

**Keywords:** visitor monitoring program, visitor use, Northern Colorado Plateau Network, University of Montana, VERP, social science, Inventory and Monitoring

**For Administrative Use Only:**

Date Annual Report Received:

Date Final Report Received:

Publications, etc. on file: