

Project Summary

Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Project Title: GTSR Corridor Management Plan-Visitor Management Research

Type of Project: Research
Discipline: Social Science
Funding Agency: National Park Service
Other Partners/Cooperators: University of Montana
Effective Dates: 6/1/2012 - 9/30/2016
Funding Amount: \$368,494 [FY13: \$251,572; FY12: \$116,920]

Investigators and Agency Representative:

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Project Abstract: As the Going-to-the-Sun Road (GTSR) rehabilitation project nears completion, Glacier National Park (Glacier) must prepare for a transition of the GTSR shuttle system. It was initially implemented in 2007 as mitigation during construction to reduce congestion on the road and provide alternative means for visitors to travel across the GTSR. The transit system has been extremely successful, seeing increasing numbers of riders each year. However, it has affected overall use patterns and changed how visitors recreate in the GTSR corridor, enabling more visitors to hike trails that are now linked by the transit system, increasing use of trailhead parking areas and enabling more visitors to visit the backcountry. An integrated transportation and visitor management plan for the GTSR is needed to ensure the long term sustainability of both the world class visitor experiences and the natural, cultural and scenic resources within the GTSR corridor.

During 2012-2016, University of Montana researchers and managers of Glacier National Park will provide information needed to inform development of the GTSR Corridor Management Plan and environmental impact statement. The type of information will include:

1. Establishing the relationship between actual visitor transportation patterns with parking lot occupancy and use levels on adjoining trail systems.
2. Determine the relationship between those use levels and locations with impacts to visitor experiences, wildlife, vegetation and physical park properties.
3. Gain visitor evaluations of the social impacts of these use levels (at both parking lots and on trails connected to the GTSR) and their reactions to potential management interventions that would protect resources to varying degrees.
4. Model visitor flow patterns under varying scenarios of demand and access.
5. Use this output to inform, develop and evaluate alternatives for corridor management that would be considered in a plan and environmental impact statement, including review and involvement by the public and stakeholders, and, 6. Develop tools for efficient monitoring of selected baseline indicators over time and identify adaptation responses if conditions change.

The multi-year planning effort will complete a plan to manage transportation and visitors in the GTSR corridor. The research and findings will be incorporated into a corridor management plan and an accompanying environmental impact statement for the Going to-the-Sun Road corridor that will guide the park in managing the visitor transportation system, visitor use in the corridor and protect park resources.

Outcomes with Completion Dates:

2012/13 Annual Interim Report due on 5/30/13
Interim Annual report for 2013-14 on May 30, 2014
Completion report: December 1, 2016

Keywords: management plan, environmental impact statement, shuttle, transportation, park visitors, impacts, Going to the Sun Road Corridor, Glacier National Park, University of Montana