

# Wilderness lands are hurt by overuse

(AP) — Americans looking for a pristine wilderness experience on remote U.S. Forest Service lands increasingly are finding trashy campsites, unsafe trails, unhealthy water and pollution.

And forest service officials recounting these problems also are warning that because of tight money and growing land use, conditions are likely to worsen among the 32 million acres of official wilderness under their control.

"We're falling behind," George Leonard, associate USFS chief, told the House Interior public lands subcommittee. Chairman Bruce Vento, D-Minn., said it was the first-ever congressional review of the condition of wilderness areas protected from development under a landmark 1964 law.

"WILDERNESS areas are now literally being loved to death" by burgeoning numbers of backpackers, some of them ignorant of backcountry etiquette and hygiene, said Greg Hansen, a ranger from the Superstition Wilderness in Arizona's Tonto National Forest.

Richard LaBorde, supervisor for two areas in California's Inyo National Forest, said overuse has been avoided by setting trailhead quotas and requiring campers to obtain permits.

But he said the areas' two rangers

are able to contact only 7 percent of the visitors to brief them on backcountry manners. Trail reconstruction is eight years behind schedule, causing safety and erosion problems, he said.

LaBorde said all visitors are told to purify water before drinking it. And to combat improper sanitation practices by campers, there are now two solar toilets on the popular Mt. Whitney trail, he said.

ANNE FEGE of the Forest Service explained that solar toilets are portable enclosures that have solar collectors to generate heat to dry out and compost human waste.

LaBorde said grazing by pack animals owned by commercial outfitters is nearing the land's grazing capacity and that concentrated use of some campsites "has left many barren scars on the landscape."

"Our efforts to regain some sort of natural condition to these areas have been weak," said LaBorde, adding that he has "had very little success" in getting forest service support for revegetation efforts.

Leonard and the six rangers at the hearing said more money is needed to manage the wilderness areas.

Vento agreed, saying that only 32 cents a year is being spent on each wilderness acre, compared to \$8.39 per acre for general forest service lands.

Since 1984, Congress has doubled the number of wilderness areas to 352. It also has doubled the wilderness budget to about \$15 million. Leonard said, however, that this "doesn't give us the resources to get ahead."

THE RANGERS from the field continually emphasized one point: Beyond one headquarters job in Washington, there are no full-time jobs as wilderness rangers and no

forest service career track in wilderness management.

As a result, there is little overall management planning, considerable turnover among skilled field people and little time for rangers to do much more than keep a cursory watch on the remote acreage under their domain.

"The reality of a person only working five months is that there is little planning time available," said Linda Merigiano, the ranger respon-

sible for the 116,500-acre Jedediah Smith Wilderness in Wyoming.

She said that because of tight money, 63 percent of her trail system is substandard and deteriorating. She estimated it would cost \$162,295 for labor and materials to repair the trails.

"Most of the impacts occurring in the Jedediah Smith Wilderness result from visitor ignorance of appropriate camping and traveling behavior," said Merigiano, adding that

she couldn't get \$50 to put together a slide show about proper camping techniques.

She said that despite the requirements of the Targhee National Forest Plan, her area lacks an assessment of its campsites.

Lee Kirsch, the ranger for three areas in Colorado's San Isabel National Forest, said such assessments in her areas found 85 percent of the campsites violating wilderness regulations.

## OU profs teaching eye surgeons

Two Oakland University professors have become video stars in a training tape for ophthalmic surgeons. Barry Winkler and Michael Riley were among basic researchers and clinicians who participated in a Los Angeles conference on ophthalmic surgery. The program was sponsored by Alcon Laboratories of Fort Worth, Texas.

The OU professors participated in a panel discussion that was taped and that will be distributed worldwide.

The goal is to help surgeons evaluate irrigating fluids that may be used during surgery. Both Winkler and Riley are faculty in the OU Eye Research Institute.

Winkler explained: "When you open the eye, because the eye is under pressure, what can happen is that the fluid will leak out of the eye."

"So essentially, what surgeons do is to pump in a fluid to maintain the intraocular pressure, and it also helps maintain the moisture of the cornea, during cataract surgery, for example."

IF A WRONG solution is used, or an incorrect solution, there can be post-surgical problems like clouding of the cornea or problems in the retina, he said.

The scientist warned that "body tissues tolerate only small changes both in the pH (acidity) and pressure,

so quality control of the solution is critical."

Winkler and Riley were invited because they have been doing related research under support from Alcon and the National Eye Institute.

Some years earlier, Winkler published some work on the role of the bicarbonate ion which is part of the buffering system which controls pH in the eye. He found that retinal function is best preserved when you have the bicarbonate ion in the medium bathing the tissue as opposed to having a substitute.

SURGEONS BEGAN using intraocular irrigating solutions in the early years of the 20th Century, he said.

These irrigants affect the corneal endothelium, which in turn impacts on corneal swelling and clarity, so surgeons experimented with a variety of solutions that would cause the fewest surgical problems.

Winkler said he and Riley have no vested interest in Alcon or any firm. "Our interest is strictly from the basic science side," Winkler said.

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