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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wilderness--Myth Versus Fact

MISSOULA, Montana---How reliable are statements such as "Only the wealthy can visit wilderness" and "Wilderness is incompatible with the concept of multiple use"? And is it true that "We are heading toward a situation where a preponderant share of our public lands will be locked up in wilderness"?

According to research by George H. Stankey, USDA Forest Service research social scientist at the Forestry Sciences Laboratory on the University of Montana campus, these statements aren't true. Stankey, who is on the staff of the Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, outlined his findings in "Myths in Wilderness Decision-Making" in a recent issue of the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation.

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"In view of the availability of such information," Stankey writes, "the persistence of such statements as 'only the wealthy can visit wilderness' suggests a disturbingly low level of knowledge on the part of many people who seek to influence the wilderness decision-making process."

Stankey's article is based on the findings of several research efforts conducted since 1960. All types and locations of wilderness recreation areas were studied in order to form a basis for comparison in costs, leisure time, and other factors influencing their use.

Findings of the research scientists show that costs of using wilderness and other undeveloped areas are less than costs of the more developed areas. Assertions that large amounts of vacation time are necessary for a wilderness vacation have also been proved false. Rather, Stankey explains, whether or not a person visits a wilderness area is a function of the complex--and admittedly little understood--preferences of the individual. These preferences, he says, are influenced by life styles and other socio-psychological factors, such as state of life cycle, membership in conservation organizations, and education.

"Of course, education is closely related to income," Stankey noted. "In fact, education probably

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is a more important consideration than income in determining the underlying causal factor or factors that form or change recreation preference. The point is, any attempt to explain wilderness use solely in terms of a single socio-economic characteristic, such as income or leisure time, can only result in erroneous conclusions."

Another false belief is that wilderness is not compatible with the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960. Section 2 of the act states that establishment and maintenance of wilderness areas is consistent with multiple-use management. The act further states: "That some of the land will be used for less than all of the resources. . .with consideration being given to the relative values of the various resources, and not necessarily the combination of uses that will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output. . . ." Stankey also said that some of the conflicting demands often are difficult to measure in the marketplace.

How about that statement that a preponderant share of public lands will be locked up in wilderness?

As of December 31, 1969, there were 9,929,102 acres in the Nation's preservation system. This represents only one-half of 1 percent for the 48 States. At the same time, U.S. Census experts say

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the Nation's population will double in 70 years. Stankey estimates that the maximum size the Wilderness System might achieve is about 70 million acres, or 3 percent of the Nation.

For copies of the study, write for "Myths in Wilderness Decision-Making" to USDA, Forest Service, Information Services Branch, Federal Building, Missoula, MT 59801.