

BACKGROUND SUMMARY PACK CREEK BEAR/HUMAN STUDY PROPOSAL

Situation

Pack Creek bear reserve (upper Seymour Canal, Admiralty) has become popular for observing and photographing brown bear. Annual visitation has grown to some 250 people. The majority of this use occurs from mid-July to early September, at the height of bear use. Pack Creek has been featured on international television and in newspaper and magazine articles. We anticipate visitor use to continue to grow at Pack Creek.

The Forest Service, through the years, has invited people to Pack Creek by maintaining a bear observation tower, identifying the bear viewing opportunity in publications, maps, and visitor information programs. This would suggest some responsibility to the visitor, but the safety of the visitor is left to their own sense of caution and the benevolence of the bears. Pack Creek is essentially unmanaged. Visitors arrive, photograph, view, and travel freely through the area. People and bears mix in an unplanned and often unpredictable way. To date, no serious maulings have occurred. Dave Hardy, of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, has suggested that visitor use has increased to the point that human/bear conflicts are likely. ADF&G experience at McNeil River (Alaska Peninsula) provides a model for maintaining a viewing opportunity while providing safety for both bear and visitors (see attached letter to ADF&G from John Craighead).

Proposal

The Pack Creek Research Project will develop recommendations to be utilized in a joint ADF&G and Forest Service human/bear management plan. The study will be conducted through a contract with the University of Idaho Wilderness Research Center. Field work is scheduled to begin in early June of 1981 and continue until mid-September, 1981. Two research techniques will be employed to obtain information: observation of bear movements, and concentration and distribution of a questionnaire to Pack Creek visitors. This information will be utilized in identifying locations for safe bear viewing with minimum disruption of normal bear behavior. A progress report with partial data analysis will be submitted to the Admiralty Island National Monument Manager on December 1, 1981. The final paper reporting data and management recommendations for Pack Creek will be submitted by June 15, 1982. The 1981 bear observations should begin to build baseline data for future observations.

Management

The Admiralty Interim Guidelines (to be published in late February) target a joint Forest Service and ADF&G management plan for Pack Creek as part of the comprehensive Admiralty plan (due by Spring of 1982). The University of Idaho proposal is an opportunity to provide information on which to base the management of Pack Creek. The proposal from the University is being reviewed by the Forest Service and ADF&G. ADF&G has agreed to help redesign the bear observations, provide some quality control during the study, and provide some equipment support.

The Forest Service will proceed with the University only with ADF&G's support and involvement of the proposal. This is essential to assure the results will be utilized to the fullest extent possible in developing a joint management plan.

Alternatives

There are currently two alternatives for research at Pack Creek. Alternative 1 is preferred. However, an additional \$5,000.00 will be required in addition to the \$5,000.00 provided by the Admiralty Island National Monument.

1. A contract with the University of Idaho Wilderness Research Center would permit full use of a survey. Use of a survey would permit gathering of detailed visitor information such as visitor movement, length of stay, and attitudes towards management. Estimated cost of Alternative 1 would be \$10,000.00.

2. The second option is to hire a GS-5 Wilderness Ranger at Pack Creek to observe bears and have visitors fill out a short response form. Obtaining detailed visitor information would not be possible due to Office of Management and Budget restrictions on Federal employees surveying visitors. Estimated cost of Alternative 2 would be approximately \$5,000.00.

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