



Carrying Capacity Project Underway

In line with the generally recognized need to define the level of human use that can occur in a given natural system before resource degradation takes place, the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA) is assisting the NPS in a new attempt to define carrying capacity in parks.

In 1978, Congress passed the National Parks and Recreation Act (P.L. 95-625), Section 604 of which states that: "General management plans for each unit (of the NPS) shall include, but not be limited to: *** (3) identification of and implementation commitments for visitor carrying capacities for all areas of the units."

NPCA, funded by a foundation grant, has contracted with the University of Maryland to examine the current state of carrying capacity development for land managing agencies. The first step will include a literature search of all research, with emphasis on research from the parks. The final product will serve as an initial evaluation and synthesis, documented in a

report with recommendations. The final synthesized approach to determining carrying capacity will then be tested in several park areas, as methodology refinement and improvement continue.

The stated goal is to provide some consistency in park management's approach to human user limits.

NPCA is appointing a 30-person panel to overview the process and review recommendations. In all, about 15 NPS employees will participate, including superintendents, representatives from sociology (Don Field), DSC, and WASO (Ro Wauer). NPS participation will include two or three meetings and some review of materials by mail. NPCA is considering a symposium on carrying capacities upon completion of the contract work.