

Managers and Researchers Examine Vandalism and its Prevention

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How are practitioners and researchers tackling the problem of vandalism? This question was answered by the participants of the International Symposium on Vandalism: Research, Prevention and Social Policy held in April in Seattle. Park, forest, and city managers; archaeologists; sociologists; psychologists; law enforcement experts; and others shared their approaches to the problem.

One approach is to examine the ingredients of anti-vandalism programs. Wilhem van Vliet, associate professor, University of Colorado, identified six main efforts of the programs presented at the symposium: 1) increase awareness of the community (including the employees of the park, forest, or city) that vandalism is a problem, 2) increase communication between groups involved, 3) obtain funding, 4) recruit volunteers, 5) get law enforcement support, and 6) make the targets of vandalism difficult to harm.

After a sudden increase in crime in the Caribbean National Forest, Puerto Rico, all these efforts were made. The result—a drop in criminal incidence from 86 in 1986 to 32 in 1987, as reported by District Ranger of the Forest, Daniel Nolan. Regarding projects to reduce vandalism of archaeological sites in the Coconino NF in Arizona, Peter Pilley Jr., archaeologist, said in addition to strong law enforcement and agency presence, “public involvement and the development of partnerships are the final key for promoting public responsibility and help in the protection of public resources.” The project in-

cluded children, ages 9 to 12, helping to excavate and develop interpretive sites and to clean graffiti from pictographs.

Another related approach to vandalism is to find out who the vandals are and why they vandalize property. Devon Brewer, student, University of Washington, closely observed one type of vandal, nongang graffiti writers. As in other papers presented about vandals at the symposium, Brewer and coauthors Harriet Christensen, social scientist, USDA Forest Service, and Mark Miller, associate professor, University of Washington, found that graffiti is a group activity of mostly 12- to 20-year-old males.

Researchers at the symposium presented papers analyzing a variety of management issues. Darryll Johnson, NPS rural sociologist, and Thomas Swearingen, research assistant, University of Washington, found signs near problem sites deter off-trail hikers, particularly signs warning “off-trail hikers may be fined,” which reduced off-trail hiking by 75 percent in the study.

Two hundred and fifty participants attended the symposium sponsored by the USDA Forest Service, University of Washington, and Vandalism Alert, Inc. and co-sponsored by NPS. Another symposium is planned for spring 1990 in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The proceedings from the 1988 symposium are being prepared jointly by the Park Service and Forest Service and will be available in 1989.