

Information Crossfile management

VISITORS, UNGULATE MANAGEMENT, AND INTERPRETATION

Management of ungulates in the national park system has varied throughout the history of the parks. From 1900–30 attempts were made to increase numbers of ungulates and enhance viewing opportunities. Concern about the overabundance of ungulates was prevalent from 1930–40 and in 1941 through 1968 parks instituted control programs to limit ungulate numbers. Since 1970, when activist citizen groups emerged, public involvement in environmental decisions increased drastically. Because they want to view animals and preferably at close range, visitors have an interest in the management and welfare of wildlife in parks.

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However, surveys revealed that the American public has a poor understanding of ecological concepts and therefore as difficulty in the comprehension of resource management in parks. Examples are the opposition of the public to removal of the mountain goat from Olympic National Park (see photos) where this species is considered alien and the discontinued removal of exotic burros from the Grand Canyon.

R. G. Wright, writing in the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* (1998. A review of the relationships between visitors and ungulates in national parks. No. 26(3):471–76), suggests that interpretive programs in parks could play a more important role in educating the public about sound park-specific management of ungulates. Park interpretive programs could be strengthened if they regularly included (1) explanations of the effects of land-use adjacent to a park on the park and its wildlife, particularly migratory species; (2) explanations of the environmental, cultural, or ecological function of resource management; and (3) briefings on and explanations of impending management such as control of alien species or culling of overabundant animals.

Meeting the public's desire to see wildlife in parks without creating disturbance of the animals and without inviting well-meaning but inappropriate reversal of management is challenging and calls for innovative techniques. Because of budget limitations and fears of visitor dissatisfaction, some parks seem reluctant, for example, to have

visitors leave their vehicles and use public transportation to reduce disturbances of wildlife but increase



viewing. (An exception is Denali National Park, which tightly controls private vehicle use on a 130-km road; most visitors use public transportation.) Wright suggests that increasing public understanding of wildlife management in parks may be the only alternative of meeting the objectives of protecting wildlife in parks and retaining the support of the public. Visitors must be made to understand that parks were established as sanctuaries where animals can live in nature but are not to be placed on display, and that management of a park must be toward that end.

