



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Pacific Northwest Region
Westin Building, Room 1920
2001 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98121

IN REPLY REFER TO:

N16(PNR-DD-R)

May 7, 1984

CRMO

MAY 10 '84

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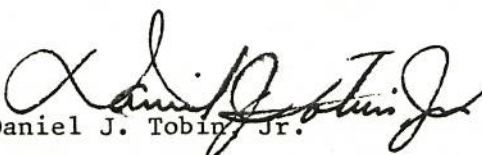
Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Craters of the Moon National Monument

From: Regional Director, Pacific Northwest Region

Subject: Backcountry Management Plan

The enclosed plan has been approved. Please note the deletion on page 4, Fire Management. This was deleted by Dick Hoffman after consultation with Neil King of your staff on April 23, and your subsequent phone approval to Paul Larson on April 24, 1984. Prescribed natural fire is not authorized in your current Resource Management Plan. However, NPS-18 allows considerable latitude in suppression strategies based upon environmental and economic considerations. The options of confinement and containment are encouraged when justified. This allows you to develop a rational suppression plan based upon the circumstances of individual fires.


Daniel J. Tobin, Jr.

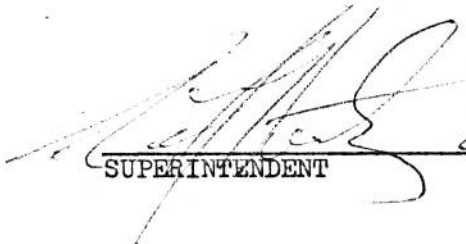
Enclosure

BACKCOUNTRY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Craters of the Moon National Monument

1984

RECOMMENDED BY:

 2-8-84

SUPERINTENDENT DATE

APPROVED BY:

 4/26/84

REGIONAL DIRECTOR DATE

BACKCOUNTRY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Introduction

Craters of the Moon National Monument's backcountry includes land within and outside of a designated wilderness area. The term "wilderness", as used in this plan, refers to congressionally designated areas which are subject to management guidelines set forth in the 1964 Wilderness Act and NPS policies regarding such areas. The term "backcountry", refers to land which is undeveloped and essentially natural in character. Therefore, backcountry includes but is not limited to that portion of the monument designated as wilderness.

Currently, backcountry use is extremely light (an average of less than 245 backpackers per year from 1975 to present) and resource impact is minimal. This plan addresses management of the current use load but also includes strategies for reducing human impact and ensuring recreation experience in the event of a dramatic increase in use.

Resource Description

Most of the monument's backcountry lies within the wilderness area (established October 23, 1970), south of the developed area along the Great Rift on the Snake River Plain. The wilderness is 43,243 acres (67 square miles) and comprises about 80 percent of the monument's total area. It includes nine miles of the Great Rift, a weak zone in the earth's crust which resulted in the area's geological phenomena. The backcountry contains cinder cones, spatter cones, lava flows, lava tubes, tree molds, and various other formations. Though most of the landscape is rather barren, plants grow in cracks where windblown soil accumulates and on the cinder cones and older lava flows where soil is formed from weathered cinders, lava materials and decayed vegetation.

The most conspicuous plant is the Limber Pine, which in moister sites precedes the climax community of sage brush, rabbit brush, antelope bitterbrush and grass. This diverse vegetation supports an equally diverse fauna. The largest animal is the mule deer though in the past a sub-species of Grizzly and the Bighorn Sheep once roamed the lavas.

The climate is arid and windy with summer highs in the 90's (F) and winter lows below 0° (F). These factors have a strong influence on the kind and character of the plants and animals that subsist here. Water is extremely limited.

Use

Though most visitors appreciate the backcountry strictly as part of the monument's scenery, the rugged terrain does attract a limited number of hikers. The Great Rift, which extends nine miles into the wilderness, is the most heavily used portion of the backcountry. An abandoned fire access

road extends roughly five miles to the northwest side of the Sentinel Cone and is now used as a trail by most backcountry visitors.

Day use---Most hiking groups are small, ranging from one to five people, with the exception of college groups who frequently have 15 to 20 people. Accurate day-use figures are unavailable since there are no trail registers in the monument, but based on number and duration of vehicles in the trailhead parking lot and personal observations in the backcountry, the number of day hikers appears to be fairly low.

Overnight use---Overnight stays are restricted to the wilderness area (except in winter) and require a backcountry permit. Backpacking groups are usually small, averaging two to three persons per party. Backpackers seldom stay out more than one or two nights since water must be carried along with other supplies. Few people camp beyond Sentinel Cone and only a small percentage day hike beyond this point---mainly to Fissure Butte, very rarely to Vermillion Chasm near the southeast corner of the monument.

At present, there are no established campsites and backpackers are free to choose whatever area suits them. The only restrictions are: 1) parties must stay within the designated wilderness boundary (except in winter), 2) parties must be at least one mile from the Tree Molds Trailhead before making camp and 3) open fires are prohibited.

Winter use---During periods of snow accumulation (mid-November to mid-April) the Seven Mile Loop Drive is closed to motorized vehicles. In many ways the frontcountry becomes the backcountry during the winter months since visitors must ski or snowshoe to travel beyond the headquarters area. Day use is common on weekends with good weather, (four to eight skiers per day) while weekday use is sporadic. Overnight use is rare since fires are not permitted and temperatures are frequently below zero. Visitors who choose to stay out overnight usually do so in the Caves Area where camping is allowed only during the winter. Visitors seldom enter the wilderness during the winter since they must ski or snowshoe three to four miles just to reach the wilderness boundary.

Public Information

The following information is given to persons who inquire about hiking opportunities and/or request a backcountry permit:

- the kinds of clothing and equipment necessary
- dangers of backcountry travel and precautions to be observed by the user
- regulations pertaining to backcountry use
- water is not available

Additional information is provided in the park newspaper provided at the entrance station.

Seasonal staff members are given a one day orientation in the wilderness at the beginning of each summer and are encouraged to explore the backcountry on their own time in order to provide visitors with accurate, up-to-date information.

Horses

A special permit is required for backcountry horse use and users must register at the Visitor Center at least 24 hours before their trip. Party size is limited to 40 head and overnight stays are prohibited. Horses are restricted to a designated route as specified in the permit, and must comply with all applicable CFR regulations. Each group is responsible for cleaning up the loading/unloading area after the trip.

Backcountry Patrols

Should the backcountry use increase to a point that warrants ranger patrols, then such patrols will be scheduled on a regular basis with emphasis placed on seeking maximum contact with backcountry visitors. Additional duties will include cleaning of camping areas and trails, minor repairs of signs and minor maintenance of trails.

Development

Trails will neither be built nor maintained in the Wilderness. The area is essentially flat and well supplied with deer trails. A constructed trail route would create channeled traveling rather than the dispersed type of use desired. At this time, campsites need not be designated nor built.

Waterholes

Since 1920, many of the waterholes have dried up or appear to be doing so. While there appears to be no immediate danger of their complete disappearance, they are difficult to find and hikers would be foolish to depend on them for their needs. Since drinking from waterholes also presents the possibility of contracting Giardia and/or other conditions associated with untreated water, all visitors are told to pack in enough water to sustain them for the duration of their stay. The waterholes are unique natural features worthy of preservation. The small quantity of water in them is also very important to wildlife - especially birds. The USGS map, revised in 1983 deleted water hole designations.

Fires

Wood fires are prohibited throughout the monument. Backpackers are encouraged to take chemical stoves.

Sanitation

As an overall policy, everything packed in must be packed out. Proper sanitation requires that human waste be disposed of in cinder fields and at least one hundred yards away from any water sources. Should visitor use increase to the point that sanitation facilities are required such as pit toilets, the Forest Service Wallawa-type toilet is recommended as the most effective and compatible to the backcountry scene. Garbage pits will not be provided or allowed in the backcountry.

Signing

Signs in the backcountry will be few and simple in design and text. Destination signs will be placed only at trailheads and trail junctions. Because of the lack of trails that run any great distance, no mileages will be placed on signs for destinations less than one mile. Existing signs in the wilderness will be maintained and replaced as needed but no additional signs will be installed. Signs and posts will be constructed of unpainted wood with routed and burned-in one inch Gothic capital letters. Posts will be firmly implanted at least 24 inches deep. Base of sign or text will not be more than 24 inches above ground level. Signs will not be attached to trees, rocks or any other natural features.

Caches

The storage of water, supplies and/or equipment by the public is not permitted.

Research

Research of the natural community and systems in the backcountry is encouraged provided that the physical and biological resources are not modified and that the aesthetic values and recreational enjoyment of visitors is not diminished. A special permit is required for research projects.

Search and Rescue

Since the monument has proprietary jurisdiction, the Butte County Sheriff is primarily responsible for search and rescue operations. However, the park maintains a rescue cache capable of outfitting a six-person team and provides back-up assistance and equipment to the sheriff as directed. SAR operations will be reported in accord with the Pacific Northwest Regional Emergency Operation Plan.

Fire Management

Man-caused fires, or any fires which threaten major portions of the landscape, developed facilities, or neighboring land outside the monument, shall be extinguished. ~~Natural-caused fires of moderate size which will burn themselves out against lava barriers will be kept under surveillance, but extinguished only when compelling reasons demand. XXX~~

Carrying Capacity and Future Management

As previously noted, the number of visitors using the monument's backcountry is currently low. At this point, it is impossible to accurately determine the number of visits per unit time which would cause an unacceptable level of impact; however, such impact will probably come from backcountry camping rather than day-use. Therefore, the number of overnight stays (compiled from

permits) will continue to be tabulated monthly. Likewise, the popular camping areas along the trail between the trailhead and the Sentinel Cone should be monitored for adverse impact. If this area shows signs of overuse and/or if the number of permits issued per month rises dramatically, the following alternatives will be considered:

- 1) Use overnight records to determine a ceiling on number of permits issued in a given time period.
- 2) Create "camping zones" and restrict the number of permits issued for those zones which have been adversely impacted.
- 3) Close impacted areas to camping until they recover.