

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Colorado Plateau Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (Cooperative Agreement # H1200-09-0005)

Park: Canyonlands National Park

Project Title: Recreation Impact Assessment Canyonlands National Park:
Colorado River, Green River, Islands in the Sky, and The Maze 2010-2011

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CPCESU Partner Institution: Northern Arizona University

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Abstract:

This project includes campsite monitoring along two river sections in a backcountry setting and dispersed recreation monitoring along roaded areas with motorized use in a primitive setting. The campsite monitoring along the river sections will focus primarily on “problem assessment” and collect data on recreational nodes along the river.

Dispersed monitoring with motorized use in primitive settings is a more challenging impact assessment process. (Note: In Canyonlands NP, motorized use is limited to street legal hi-clearance 4-wheel drive vehicles; ATV's and non-street legal vehicles are prohibited.) Not only are the recreation impacts concentrated in campsites, but they may also be distributed along the travel route. Motorized recreation travel is a prime activity in today's world and requires specialized monitoring techniques, such as a dynamic stream of information which tracks impacts along the route, to obtain the best view of the diversity of recreation impacts.

Mirroring the rest of the United States, the use of motorized vehicles has increased in Canyonlands NP. Over the last three decades, motorized recreation has expanded quickly in the United States and has become one of the most popular activities on all agency lands. The growth rate for motorized recreation participation increased by 42% between 1999/2000 and 2003/2004. This growth rate increase means that 23.8% of the U.S. population over 16 years of age participates in some type of dispersed motorized travel. Motorized use in dispersed recreation areas is dominated by 30-50 year old white males, however, there appears to be a number of new female entrants into the activity, along with new participants across a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Both income and education are bi-modal in their distributions with incomes showing high points at \$25,000-\$49,000/year and \$75,000-\$100,000/year. Similarly, education peaks at either less than high school education or some college. Along the same lines, there is also no doubt that **physical impacts** related to motorized recreational use are one of the major concerns for federal agency land managers. Motorized recreational travel can have impacts on roads, in terms of creating pull-outs, increasing road width, and affecting the distribution of ruts and road depth. Use can also compromise open areas, such as meadows, riparian areas, and hills/grades. In some cases, recreational users develop illegal "play areas" without agency support or consideration. In other situations, motorized recreational use can lead to intrusions of livestock areas, tanks and ponds, streambeds, and cultural/historic sites. Finally, dispersed motorized recreational use can lead to vegetative impacts, introduction of noxious weeds, soil erosion and disruption of fragile soil crusts. Beyond the physical impacts, motorized recreational use has secondary on-site impacts, such as noise pollution, dust production, and recreational conflicts between site users; these aspects, however, are not part of the current study.

This project seeks to provide current recreation impact assessment data for the identified area to the Park to aid in managerial decision making. In addition, a component of this project will be to summarize all available data and results from previous reports in an effort to determine impact trends that may indicate changes over time. Along the same lines, an additional goal of this project will be to develop an impact assessment protocol and implementation procedure that enables on-going data collection within the Park without extensive personnel and/or financial resources. Finally, this project will develop an internet access database for data storage and presentation. To encourage use of recreation impact assessment data, it is important that managers in Canyonlands have a easily accessible database of site variable information to assist in making future decisions related to visitor access and activities.

Keywords: Anthropogenic Issues- 4. Land Use