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# The Negative Effects of Tourism on National Parks in the United States

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**Johnson & Wales University**

**Providence, RI**

**The Negative Effects of Tourism on National  
Parks in the United States**

**By Lauren Finnessey**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted to  
Johnson & Wales University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Bachelor of Science under the Honors Program**

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## **Chapter I:**

### **Tourism Causes Negative Impacts in National Parks**

Tourism is one of the largest industries worldwide, and travelers commonly visit national parks because of the peaceful scenery they offer. While tourists love to see these natural environments in their undisturbed states, they are often times adding to the degradation of these parks. Tourists can harm the environment in many ways, and may be unaware of what they are doing. Many visitors are there to see the beauty in nature and are focusing on enjoying themselves and not what they are leaving behind. Actions such as trampling vegetation and parking in areas that are not designated for parking can add to the destruction of the land. Companies that run air tours and snowmobile tours are adding to the enjoyment of the visitor, but may not pay attention to how they are affecting other visitors as well as wildlife. Because of the amount of tourism in these areas, many problems arise and these issues have been brought to the attention of the public in order to save and maintain these areas from further harm.

The negative impact of tourism on national parks is a global problem. Parks in all countries and continents struggle with these issues and are looking for ways to minimize their affects. Other countries like England, Canada and some Asian countries are trying to reverse the impacts that tourists have on their natural preserved areas. Limiting research to only the United States in this thesis narrows the focus and creates an image of this problem on a smaller scale. This study will bring attention to the problem on a smaller scale and from there the big picture can be inferred.

Limiting research to national parks within the United States also leaves out the even smaller relative to the national park, which is the state park. Tourists and the

negative environmental impacts they cause threaten state parks just as they threaten national parks. State parks have also been threatened due to their cost for rangers and upkeep. In New York, many state parks were shut down for a period of time due to budget costs. Protestors wrote in and pined for these parks to stay open and they were successful. Parks are a great destination for those who are on a budget, and closing them would have been detrimental to travelers. <sup>1</sup>After saving the parks from being closed, people should be aware of their importance and understand that they should reduce the negative impacts that people have on the parks in order to keep them around for generations to come.

Tourism in national parks is a growing trend due to the economic standing of the country and the increase in interest of “ecotourism”. Travelers want to spend time in natural and peaceful areas, but with growing numbers of tourists comes an increase in problems. An example of this would be a “soft ecotourist”. Soft ecotourists have anthropocentric tendencies, which means they view themselves as the most important beings in the world. Because of this, their dedication and knowledge of environmental issues is not as deep as their “hard ecotourist” counterparts, and the level of engagement they want with nature is “relatively shallow”. Soft ecotourists prefer experiences where they can access accommodations, dining, toilets, and parking lots. Fortunately, soft ecotourists generally limit themselves to short experiences, that usually last only a day, and are guided by knowledgeable tour leaders (Weaver 43-44).

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<sup>1</sup> John Boyd Thacher State Park in the Capital Region of New York was closed for a brief period of time due to budget issues. Those who enjoyed everything the park had to offer sent in letters and protested in the Capital, which brought about the re-opening of the park. This dedication proves that many people use these parks as travel destinations and would be unhappy without them.

Hard ecotourists, on the other hand have a strong connection to the environment and believe their activities should “enhance the resource base”. They prefer physical activity and close contact with nature (Weaver 43-44). Even though some tourists are more conscientious about their actions in the parks than others, all tourists have some degree of negative impact on the environments to which they travel and national parks suffer greatly as major ecotourist destinations. Tourism adds to the depletion of resources as well as provokes changes in ecosystems. Cars, snowmobiles and airplanes may be the biggest threat to these areas, causing pollution and natural disturbances.

More and more people are recognizing the threat that tourism has on the environment and are trying to rectify the problem. The National Park Service is trying to bring parks closer to their natural state, eliminating noise and lessening traffic in certain areas. Wildlife also suffers greatly from tourists and the National Park Service, as well as many travelers, recognizes the need to save these areas from further abuse. There are many different things that can be done to help save and protect these parks, ranging from limiting visitors and vehicles, to management planning and laws. The most important action, however, is educating tourist on the issues and providing information on what individuals can do to help.

## **Chapter II:**

### **A Brief History of National Parks**

The National Park System in the United States consists of 394 units: 123 historical parks, 74 monuments, 58 national parks, 25 battlefields and military parks, 18

preserves, 18 recreation areas, 10 seashores, four parkways, four lakeshores, and two reserves. These areas cover over 84 million acres across the United States. The nation's first national park was Yellowstone National Park, which was established on March 1, 1872. These areas are very special and have many unique characteristics. About 278 threatened or endangered species have their habitat in these parks. The world's largest carnivore, the Alaskan Brown Bear, the highest point in North American, Mount McKinley, the world's largest living things, Giant Sequoia trees, the longest cave system in the world, Mammoth Cave National Park, the country's deepest lake, Crater Lake, and the lowest point in the Western Hemisphere, Badwater Basin, are all contained within these national parks. These parks also contain 17,000 miles of trails and 1.5 million archeological sites (National).

In 1882, a park was considered to be a "carefully cultivated" landscape, maintained by gardeners and inhabited by residence. The idea of a park being a vast expanse of wild land filled with animals had not even been thought of. But that is what George Caitlin, a painter, who specialized in American Indians, experienced in the western Great Plains when it was untouched by extensive American development. While witnessing the beauty of this land, he wrote, "what a beautiful and thrilling specimen, for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world in future ages! A nation's park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty (Our National 10)!"

His idea was ahead of its time, but many years later, as the United States border kept expanding, many adventurers got to experience the same thrill as Caitlin had. The discovery of Yosemite in 1851 set events into motion that would eventually lead to

legislation protecting the land for future generations. Members of an armed battalion searching for Indians to drive off their land were the first white men to enter Yosemite Valley. Lafayette Bunnell, a doctor in the party, was astounded by the beauty he saw and thought they should give it a name. Four years after Bunnell decided to call this area “Yosemite,” a second group of white men, led by James Mason Hutchings began exploring Yosemite Valley with two Indian guides. Hutchings hoped to find fortune in the land by promoting the scenic beauty and running a tourist hotel. This was an early sign that these natural lands would become a popular destination for tourism. In 1859, Hutchings brought a photographer to this area, the images and stories spread, and tourists became eager to see these areas for themselves (The National). In 1864, during the U.S. Civil War, the junior senator of California, John Conness, introduced a bill to Congress, which proposed setting aside a “large tract of natural scenery for the future enjoyment of everyone.” On June 30, 1864, Abraham Lincoln signed a law to preserve more than 60 square miles of land. This land, which encompassed Yosemite Valle and the Mariposa Grove, was transferred to the state of California with the stipulation that it would be preserved for “public use, resort, and recreation (The National).”

Hutchings took this opportunity and purchased one of the two hotels in the valley and began charging people to see Yosemite. He continued to expand his private operations and began exploiting the land. It wasn't until later that these precious lands would be protected from independent exploitation (The National). As before, this was a signal that these destinations would bring in a numerous tourists, and that negative impacts would be sure to follow.

Between 1869 and 1870 many different groups of explorers began venturing into the area that would become Yellowstone National Park. Henry Washburn, a member of the August 1870 U.S. cavalry escort, realized that the wilderness they had explored should not fall prey to “private exploitation” and a national park “must” be established. In the next months more groups went to explore this area and on March 1, 1872 the Yellowstone Park Act became a law. This law stated that the area was, “reserved and withdrawn from settlement, and dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people,” and thus the first ever national park was born (Our National 11-12).

John Muir, known as the father of the National Park System worked hard to get Yosemite the same approval as Yellowstone, and on October 1, 1890, Congress voted and Yosemite became a National Park. That same day General Grant National Park was established, and a week earlier Sequoia National Park was established. In 1903, Muir took President Theodore Roosevelt on a four-day trek through Yosemite, which left Roosevelt with the mindset that the park should be expanded. Roosevelt worked hard to preserve large areas of land, and during his presidency, Crater Lake, Mesa Verde, and Wind Cave became national parks. He also preserved the Grand Canyon, Mount Lassen and Petrified Forest, all of which later became national parks (Our National 12-13). Before Roosevelt left his presidency he also had Congress declare eighteen national monuments. The reasoning behind declaring these lands “national parks,” was to preserve nature, however, the additions of new parks often was joined by the desire to promote tourism. Railroads in the west lobbied for many of these early parks so that they could build large hotels in order to increase their business (National Park Service



History). In 1919 the first Eastern National Park was declared in Maine, which is known today as Acadia National Park. In 1934, Everglade National Park in Florida was given authorization for preservation (Our National 12-13).

In the 1920's and 30's visitors began pouring into national parks. Most arrived by car and the parks were not ready to handle the influx of tourists. Attendance soared and people were using these parks as playgrounds. Early park leaders thought that the best way to protect the parks was to encourage more visitors. This worked; however, the increase in numbers brought about an increasing demand on the parks, which put the balance between preservation and use to the test (The National). Signs were set up to educate people on the scenery and wildlife and museums were filled with mounted animals and geological artifacts. This is when problems really started to arise. Tunnels were being cut through trees as educational visuals; coals were being dumped over the cliffs of Glacier Point in order to amuse visitors. Roads were built and crowding became a problem. It was then that the negative impacts of tourists began, and they have just been getting worse with time. Many have recognized the need to act in order to keep these areas preserved, but with numbers increasing every year, the efforts to reverse these impacts becomes harder (Our National 14).

## **National Park Service:**

### **Who They are and What They Do**

By 1916, the Interior Department of the US Government has assumed responsibility for 14 national parks as well as 21 national monuments (National Park Service History). Because of the increasing number of parks and monuments, government officials decided that the parks needed to be managed by a public governmental sector. Secretaries of the Interior had asked the Army to send troops to Yellowstone and parks in California in order to help manage them. Military engineers

developed park roads and buildings. They also enforced regulations against hunting, the cutting of wood, and vandalism. They did their best to serve those who were visiting these parks. Unfortunately, the parks were vulnerable to others interested in them and it was clear that the park movement was weak.

Distraught by the mismanagement of the parks, Stephen T. Mather, a Chicago business man, complained to the Secretary of the Interior, Franklin K. Lane. Lane invited him to Washington to serve as his assistant for park matters and Horace M. Albright became his aide. Mather and Albright emphasized the economic value of the parks as tourist destinations and their campaigns received support from National Geographic, The Saturday Evening Post, as well as many other popular magazines. Mather received funds from seventeen railroad companies to create the National Parks Portfolio and a bureau of the U.S. Department of the Interior called the National Park Service was created on August 25, 1916, to manage all national parks (National Park Service History).

The mission of the National Park Service is as follows:

‘to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the world life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations (National).’

Along with the National Park Service, the National Parks Conservation Association was created, in 1919, to help protect and enhance these parks. Their mission is to

“...fight against threats to the integrity of the parks; to advocate the highest standards of national significance for the addition of new units to the National Park System and for protectively managing the parks and their natural and cultural resources; and to promote the public understanding and appreciation of the parks and promote educational and inspirational uses of the parks (Butcher 501).”

The National Park System produces a large volume of tourists, from both domestic as well as foreign travelers. These visitors have major benefits for the United States' economy and the balance of trade with other countries (McLean 201). Visitation to these parks has increased exponentially over the years. In the 1920's visitation in parks amounted to about one million visits. In 2010 the total visits numbered approximately 281 million (National). These parks are a popular tourist destination for many Americans seeking a taste of nature. Since there are increasing numbers of tourists visiting these areas every year, the impact they have on the environment in these areas is immense (Kreag 17). Over the past 50 years, tourism has become a major cause of environmental damage when it should be a “force for enhancement and protection (Mason 70).” Whether it's noise pollution from cars, or trampling vegetation, tourists are harming the land. National parks are fragile environments that need extra effort exerted in order to preserve them for future generations (Kreag 17). Many things are being done to try to reduce and reverse this impact. Limiting the amount of tourists during certain times of year, offering shuttle services, limiting air tours, promoting the “take in, take out” policy, and educating the public about these issues are all measures that have been

put in place to lessen the impact tourists are causing. Without these actions future generations will not be able to enjoy these peaceful scenic areas.

Tourists come into national parks and many have no regard for the area they are visiting. Some tourists go to these parks to enjoy the scenery and to get closer to nature, but many people are destructive because they do not know any better. Some problems faced by areas due to tourism include: ignorance, lack of capability, lack of ability, lack of realization, lack of appreciation and lack of agreement. Tourists do not always know how precious and fragile these areas are and thus neither appreciate the beauty of where they are nor realize how much harm they can and are inflicting. Environmentalists and those promoting the protection of nature often see tourists as the “scourge” of the environment (Butler 201-202). Some tourists may still believe in the “anthropocentric” approach to nature. This means they believe that nature is only there to serve human interest and promote human welfare. The concern for the environment is of little or no importance and human welfare is the “ultimate objective” (Boker). Rights for nature and the natural environment have become more important as time goes on, but there are still those who have no regard for nature and are destroying it without any care.

### **Chapter III:**

#### **Negative Impacts Caused by Tourists and Ways to Reverse Them**

There are three main sources of impact left on national parks by tourists: depletion of national resources, pollution, and physical impacts. Tourism generates land degradation, air and noise pollution, littering, trampling and the alternation of ecosystems. All of these areas of impact not only risk the well being of the land, but also the species that call these areas home (Environmental).

With the growing number of visitors to these parks, crowding becomes a major problem. In the National Park Service's Natural Resource Challenges, park officials acknowledge the issue, saying, "Parks are becoming increasingly crowded remnants of primitive America in a fragmented landscape, threatened by invasions of nonnative

species, pollution from near and far, and incompatible use of resources in and around parks (McLean 201).” Crowding can minimize the ability to enjoy these scenic areas and also lessens the quality of the parks natural resources (Butcher 494-496). If visitation is uncontrolled or visitors overuse the land, landscapes, historic sites can degrade.

Crowding can also produce large amounts of stress, annoyance, anger and other attitudes that will lessen the peaceful experience that tourists seek in national parks (Kreag 8, 11).

If the carrying capacity has been reached many negative things start occurring in the park, which is a sign that there is too much crowding (Boo 22).

The consistent visitation from tourists can disrupt wildlife in drastic ways. The massive amounts of visitors can disturb the breeding cycles of animals and alter their natural behaviors (Kreag 8). Animal behavior starts changing once crowding begins. Nesting patterns of birds change, the numbers of animals begin to reduce and in worst case scenarios species can become extinct (Boo 22-23).

Many national parks have tourist facilities, such as bathrooms or information centers. These areas are also impacting the land. They reduce some of the natural landscape of the area and can be considered aesthetic degradation. Though many tourist facilities in national parks try to keep the theme of nature involved, they are not always in sync with the surrounding areas (Coccosis 7).

Airplanes, cars, buses, and recreational vehicles such as snowmobiles or jet skis can cause noise pollution. These vehicles can cause stress and hearing loss for humans and also cause distress towards wildlife. These noises can cause animals to alter their “natural activity patterns” (Environmental). Something as simple as viewing animals in their natural habitat can cause distress to these animals (Weaver 108). Bryan Faehner,

the National Parks Conservation Association's associate director for park uses has said that, "we live in an increasingly noisy world, and the national parks are a place where people can go to breathe a sigh of relief, to clear their minds and to listen to the world around them, and not to experience the static that comes with from lawnmowers, car alarms and ringing cell phones." Noise pollution is a major distraction that ruins the peaceful identity of a national park (Kirkwood). The two largest causes of noise pollution in national parks are aircrafts leading tours and snowmobiles roaming over these naturally quiet areas. The noise from these planes and snowmobiles can be heard in even the most remote areas of the parks (Butcher 483).

People travel to national parks to be with nature and to hear the natural sounds that nature has to offer. Unfortunately, at many parks, the buzzing of site-seeing planes or helicopters interrupts those sounds. Karen Trevino, the head of the Park Service's Natural Sounds and Night Skies program, conducted research on grey owls in Yosemite that show that owls, "plunge under as much as a foot of snow to get a mouse that they can hear beneath the surface." Many species rely on their hearing for life's activities and the artificial noise created by humans "masks the ability of an animal to hear those sounds." This is a major problem in these parks because the animals lifestyles are being altered and in many cases, harmed (Kirkwood).

At the Grand Canyon air-tours have been the source of major noise impacts that disturb tourists who are walking through the park as well as the wildlife. Many bighorn sheep at Grand Canyon National Park are exposed to helicopter flights, which have led to a reduction in their winter foraging efficiency. If these tours continue to harm the natural patterns of these animals the result could be detrimental to the survival of these species



(Weaver 108). Moreover, the number of flight tours has dramatically increased. During the summer there is more than one flight per minute and that is also increasing. Other parks affected by this type of noise pollution are: Zion, Canyonlands, Mesa Verde, Glacier, the Great Smokey Mountains, and Acadia National Park.

On December 21, 1996, the Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, announced that new restrictions on air-tour flights over the Grand Canyon would be put into effect. The new rules restricted flights over 80 percent of the park as opposed to only 45 percent. A curfew was put on flights and there was a limit on the number of aircrafts that could engage in commercial air-tours (Butcher 483-486). A 500-meter buffer was also put in place between helicopters and the longhorn sheep in order to help protect their foraging (Weaver 109). Unfortunately, there was no limit to the number of flights that could occur and flight routes above major trails were not shifted (Butcher 483-486). If the National Park Service is allowed to evaluate the impacts of air transportation on national parks then air-tour plans can be developed that avoid well-traveled areas and critical wildlife habitats. This will allow visitors to experience the parks with the same natural quiet that past generations have been able to witness (Kirkwood).

In addition, snowmobiles have become a big problem in parks such as Acadia, Yellowstone and Voyageurs National Parks. Snowmobile noise in Acadia echoes off the mountains and hinders the quiet in large areas of the park. As winter visitation increases in Yellowstone, snowmobile congestion has become a major problem (Butcher 485). In the winter of 2000, there were 76,271 people who went to Yellowstone on snowmobiles. This number was higher than the amount of tourists who came in cars, snowcoaches and skis. "A survey of snowmobile impacts on natural sounds at Yellowstone found that

snowmobile noise could be heard 70% of the time at 11 of 13 sample sites, and 90% of the time at 8 sites. At the Old Faithful Geysers, snowmobiles could be heard 100% of the time during the daytime period studied. Snowmobile noise even drowned out the sound of the geysers erupting (Environmental).” At Voyageurs a plan for a snowmobile route through the “heart” of the park has been proposed and it seems as though it will be established, despite fears that this will ruin the park’s quiet and will hurt the wildlife in that area (Butcher 487).

Other sources of noise pollution aside from airplanes and snowmobiles, include human commotion, generators and boats. The Everglades and Rocky Mountain National Park both have campgrounds that run on generators. However, both parks have either “stilled” their generators or have at least ensured that some of their campgrounds are generator free (Barringer).

In many parks, excess amounts of motor vehicles being driven in the park have caused traffic congestion and different parks have adapted a variety of solutions. Automobiles were first allowed in Yosemite in 1913, which made this park a very popular tourist destination very quickly. However, these vehicles have now become one of the “leading causes of adverse conditions in the park (Chiriboga).” According to Kari Cobb, a Yosemite Park Ranger and Spokesperson, “Increase in park attendance is great, but it also means general park deterioration, mostly because of cars.” Rising numbers of tourists with cars with no indication of a decrease is not good for the parks. Many tourists spend the day driving through the park as opposed to staying overnight because of a lack of lodging areas, which creates even more traffic. Since there is not always enough parking many people create their own parking spots, which has deteriorated parts

of the landscape. Yosemite implemented a General Management plan and that established one-way traffic patterns. A shuttle bus began bringing people in so that cars were eliminated from the east end of Yosemite Valley, and in the Mariposa Grove section of the park, tram tours began (Chiriboga).

During the average peak-season day in Zion National Park, about 1,700 motorized vehicles enter the park. Parking overflows from the designated parking areas and force people to park on the sides of roads, which creates an unsafe environment and can block parts of the park's trails. In parks such as the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Mariposa Grove, and Chiricahua National Monument, shuttle services have been implemented in order to lessen the amount of vehicles entering the parks. Both the Grand Canyon and Yosemite are researching and proposing more "comprehensive transportation solutions" for the major traffic congestion they face (Butcher 489-492).

Littering is also seen as a major problem for national parks; however, litter has little impact on the environment in terms of ecological health. The biggest problem with litter is its negative effect on environmental aesthetics and the degradation of visitor experience because of it. Many of these parks allow camping and often hiker spend the whole day or a few days exploring these areas. Food supplies and other waste materials are brought into these parks, and often, much of it is left behind, which effects the environment around it, especially the animals.

Some parks have implemented the "Leave No Trace" program in order to educate and promote minimal impact skills and wild land ethics, many of which focus on not littering and what to do to prevent litter from building up in national parks. There are seven principles to "Leave No Trace," one of which really focuses on keeping litter at

bay. This program promotes the “pack it in, pack it out” idea. This means that whatever tourists bring in, they should make sure that they bring it out. Items such as food wrappers and water bottles should be taken out of the parks upon exit, and not left for the wildlife to get a hold of. It also gives proper directions on how to take care of human waste. When backpacking or camping in one of the National Parks, human waste should be deposited in a hole at least 6 inches deep and 200 feet from any water, camp or park trails. By following these guidelines, many national parks, such as Shenandoah National Park, promote wildlife preservation by keeping litter and waste to a minimum (Shenandoah).

Visitor impacts, caused by things such as walking, hiking, backpacking, rock climbing, horseback riding, camping, vehicle use and biking, have great negative impacts on national parks as well. Vegetation is being trampled, soil is being compacted, and ecosystems are being destroyed because of the growing amounts of tourists coming into these areas (Butcher 493-496). Trampling is a universal problem (Newsome 84). Trampling is caused by tourists using the same trail over and over again without a resting period and can cause damage that can eventually lead to the loss of biodiversity. When tourists stray off park trails or make current trails wider, the damage can be even worse. When vegetation is trampled, stems can be bruised and broken, plant vigor and regeneration is reduced, cover ground is lost and there can be a change in species composition (Environmental). Trampling can eliminate tree seedlings, which results in the loss of trees in that area, while damage to roots reduced their capacity to capture nutrition. When the composition of vegetation is compromised, there is a loss of biomass and the species diversity is reduced. All of this combined results in a loss of biodiversity

in the area (Newsome 85). Trampling also impacts the soil. When soil loses organic matter, there is a decrease in air and water permeability, run off is increased and erosion is accelerated (Environmental).

Erosion is a bigger issue that brings about even worse problems. It's a chain reaction, leading to surface run off. There is a higher chance of landslides, avalanches, damage to natural features, and damage to riverbanks. Such a simple thing as trampling can cause so much destruction. Tourists may think that they are not causing damage since it is just them, but if every tourists tramples the earth a little bit it adds up causing massive destruction that eventually might not be reversible (Hunter 14). When too many visitors cause destruction to land areas, the image of the area is destroyed and some may no longer see it as "wilderness," causing many nature tourists, or ecotourists, to stay away from those areas (Boo 23).

Yosemite suffers from immense trampling damage. The years of trampling damage from visitors walking has cause the soil to become very sensitive. This makes it hard for California Black Oaks to grow. Seedlings find it very difficult to grow due to trampling. The inability of these trees to grow causes broader problems because they are the homes of many animals such as bears, squirrels, and birds. Some of Yosemite's most well known attractions are the meadows, but these also suffer from overuse and trampling. The soil becomes sensitive and small animal nests are permanently damaged. The parks service at Yosemite has tried to reverse these affects as best it can. It has set up plastic tubes in the ground, which are used to preserve seedlings; these are contained in roped off areas. Volunteer groups have also worked to restore Yosemite's meadows and fences have been put up to preserve these areas (Chiriboga).

Many people recognize the issues faced by national parks and are trying to do something about them. As mentioned before, the National Park Service and other organizations are trying to implement new rules and management programs that will help reduce the impact that tourists have on these areas. Sustainability is a trend that many park managers are working towards, and many visitors recognize the impact they have and are advocating for these parks to go back to their natural, peaceful state.

There are numerous ways that society can help protect these precious land areas. Laws, government contribution, regulation and management planning are generally viewed as the solution to these problems, and are done by the groups established for the protection of these parks. However, the public can also help these parks by raising awareness, and by making monetary donations to fund the innovations needed to restore the parks for future generations (Environmental).

The idea that national parks need to be preserved goes back decades to the Wilderness Act of 1964. The purpose of this act was to establish a National Wilderness Preservation System for the good of the people. This act defines wilderness as:

“...an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions (The Wilderness).”

This act states that these areas are for the use of the American people as long as they are left unimpaired for “future use and enjoyment as wilderness (The Wilderness).” This act is there to protect these areas and the wildlife within them and to gather information on the use and enjoyment of these wilderness areas. In the Prohibition of Certain Uses section of this Act it states that no permanent road should be within any designated wilderness area unless it is necessary to meet requirements for the administration of the area (The Wilderness). Congress has designated over 106 million acres of federal land as wilderness. Out of this, 44 acres are within 47 national parks. This totals 53 percent of the National Park Systems land. Many other national park areas are “recommended” or “proposed” wilderness and will remain so until their status is acted upon by Congress (Wilderness).

Recreation is possible in wilderness areas, but mechanical transport is rarely allowed. However, hiking, fishing, camping, watching wildlife and photography is still allowed and can still harm these areas. Most people do not actually enter these wilderness areas, however, and they remain a backdrop to the developed areas of the park. Congress has directed four federal land management agencies to manage these areas in order to preserve them. They also are instructed to restore the natural character of these when possible. These agencies include: the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service (Wilderness).

Some other Acts have been put in place in order to protect these areas from further destruction. The National Environmental Policy Act was created in 1969 with this purpose:

“To declare a national policy which will encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment; to promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere and stimulate the health and welfare of man; to enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation; and to establish a Council on Environmental Quality (NEPA).”

Congress recognized the impact that human activity had on the environment as well as the importance of restoring and maintaining the quality of the environment. The Federal government, along with state and local governments, promote the “general welfare” and “maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony.” It is up to the Federal Government to use all practical means to maintain this policy. They do this by coordinating Federal plans, functions, programs, and resources (NEPA).

The National Park Service is one of the main departments that focus on National Parks and the negative impacts that they suffer. Management plans for all National Parks are created in order to help reduce the amount of damage done to the parks and to try to return them back to their natural, untouched state.

The National Park Service superintendent in charge of Yellowstone National Park has stated that:

“Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding 20 million acre Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem comprise the largest intact wild ecosystem in the lower



48 states. All native vertebrates are present. Natural disturbances, native species, and ecological processes interact with relatively little human intervention (McCool 144).”

Yellowstone, while still suffering from tourism’s wrathful impact, has maintained a sustainable nature-based tourism destination due to careful management training. While they suffer issues such as snowmobiles and other tourism impacts, they try to follow the National Park Service Management Policies as best they can. The National Park Service “promotes activities that are ‘inspirational, educational, or healthful, and otherwise [are] appropriate to the park environment’ and forbids uses that impair park resources or values, or that a[re] contrary to the purposes for which the park was established (McCool 143).”

Entrance fees are mandatory for many National Parks, and others take donations from those willing to help preserve the parks. These fees and contributions are used to pay for the protection and management of the areas of the parks that are environmentally sensitive (Environmental). Of the 394 national parks in the national park system, only 147 charge entrance fees. These fees range from five to twenty-five dollars. The money stays with the National Park Service and is used to enhance services and facilities. This money is not used to revert the parks back to a more natural state, but there is a lot of public support to protect these special areas (National Park).

## **Chapter IV:**

### **Further Research**

Many forms of research are used to compile a solid description of the subject at hand. While much research comes from textbooks and news articles, other sources, such as interviews and surveys, can often produce important insights. Both of these other methods were used to obtain different views of the subject of tourism in National Parks. These methods provide a first hand perspectives on the challenged of ecotourism.

When interviewed, Doctor Eldad Boker, a professor at Johnson & Wales University who specializes in planning and developing tourist destinations and is a “pioneer” in the study of eco-tourism research and development, offered some insight on tourism’s impact on United States National Parks. According to Doctor Boker people travel for four different reasons, first in order to experience the scenic beauty of the land, second to experience it before it is “too late”, thirdly to get “away” from the normal routine of travel, and lastly to be close to nature. Many people believe that they should experience these destinations because they are concerned that these areas may become developed, overrun by other tourists, or they will not have the opportunity later in life. The four main negative impacts of tourism suggested were too much congestion, pollution and garbage, carbon monoxide footprint and the destruction of local species and habitats. Of these, the most destructive impact is from those who do not follow the “leave with no trace behind” rule. These people leave evidence of their trip and thus negatively impact native species, changing their ways of life and taxing their resources at these sites.

Boker suggests that if things continue the way they are currently, without any sign of change or reversal, National Parks will cease to exist, as we know them today. Species will continue to be destroyed and many will eventually become extinct. There will not be enough resources to protect, sustain and improve the current conditions of the park systems and thus it will continue to diminish.

Boker believes that in order to successfully reduce these negative impacts a couple of things should happen. First, the number of tourists allowed to visit parks should be set up by a “carrying capacity.” There should be a limited amount of activities

that tourists can do at each area and entry fees should be assessed based on each visitor. Imposing a penalty for those who stray from the rules could also help minimize the negative impacts that people have on these natural areas.

The success of sustainability and the trend towards it depends fully on the nature and the details of the sustainable trend. Calling a protective plan sustainable may not be sufficient to restore these park areas. In order to be successful, the trends towards sustainability should be detailed, strictly enforced and built upon the specific needs of each specific national park (Boker).

An interview with another Johnson & Wales University professor, Kathleen Drohan, brought about similar ideas. Professor Drohan specializes in eco-tourism and adventure travel. Drohan believes that people travel for two main reasons: to learn about the history and to enjoy nature. Many people travel to national parks for educational purposes. Places such as the Boston Freedom Trail, Roger Williams National Park and the Statue of Liberty are all national parks that are visited for class trips in order to learn about the history behind the location. Others travel to parks such as Yosemite in order to enjoy the nature, hike, play, and rock climb among other outdoor activities. During these visits, Drohan says that the most damaging impacts tourists have on these environments are that of trail wear and tear and littering. Littering attracts wildlife, which can alter the ecosystems and interrupt or alter their lives. If nothing is done about this the future of these parks could be uncomfortable and unsafe.

Drohan considers education to be an important factor in reducing these impacts. Starting education at a young age will allow future generations to understand the importance of helping the environment. As they grow, these ideas will be passed down to

subsequent generations. She also believes that by going through these national parks with guides and taking advantage of historical tours could help build awareness and impacts may be reduced when following someone who knows their way around. Finally, making trashcans available in popular areas and putting up signs that say things such as “stay on the path” or “don’t litter” may be effective in reducing these impacts (Drohan).

A survey of 95 students from four hospitality classes at Johnson & Wales University provides insight into the impacts tourism has on National Parks from a younger perspective. The classes include: one section of Ecotourism, two sections of Dynamics of Tourism and one section of Leadership in Recreation/Leisure Settings. These classes were chosen because of their close association with tourism and outdoor recreation. Ecotourism is an upper-level course that “explores and emerging dimension of tourism.” In this class students “investigate the impact of specific environmental issues on tourism, including water pollution, air pollution, habitat destruction, ect, and focus on the impact of tourism on the physical, biological and cultural environment” (JWU). Dynamics of Tourism covers the “economic, cultural, and social functions in the planning and development of the tourism industry” (JWU). Finally, Leadership in Recreation/Leisure Settings is a course where different leadership qualities and styles are discussed. Students in this class “examine a selection of program activities and guidelines for presenting and developing them effectively. Focus will be on developing, leading and evaluating activities based on varying participant requirements” (JWU). The students in these classes are learning information that gives them the insight needed to effectively respond to the survey given.

The results may not be 100% accurate due to some unanswered questions, confusion about what was being asked and human error. Some questions allowed for multiple answers. Thirty-five of those surveyed were males, while the other sixty were females. There were two freshmen, fourteen sophomore, thirty-seven juniors and forty-one seniors surveyed. Ten students generally travel under 100 miles to go on vacation, twenty-four travel between 100 and 300 miles, twenty-two travel between 300 and 500 miles, and forty-four travel over 500 miles for vacations.

97.89% of those surveyed knew what a National Park was. 54.84% of those surveyed had visited a National Park before. Many of those who have visited a National Park have visited multiple parks. The survey given listed a number of National Parks: Great Smoky Mountain National Park, Grand Canyon National Park, Yosemite National Park, Yellowstone National Park, Olympic National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, Zion National Park, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Grand Teton National Park, Acadia National Park and a line for Other. Students were asked to choose all parks that they had visited. Out of the 95 students surveyed, four had been to Great Smoky Mountain National Park, nineteen had been to the Grand Canyon, four had been to Yosemite, thirteen had been to Yellowstone National Park, one to Olympic National Park, ten to Rocky Mountain National Park, three to Zion National Park, two to Cuyahoga National Park, three to Grand Teton National Park, eight to Acadia and twenty students have been to other parks not listed on the survey.

When asked, "Do you believe tourists pose as a threat to the environment in national parks?" 66.32% of those surveyed said yes, while 33.68 said no. Following that question, students were asked to choose which of the following poses the greatest threat

to these parks: air pollution, crowding, noise pollution (cars, planes, ect.), litter, and recreational development or trampling of vegetation. Some students only chose one threat, while other students chose multiple threats. According to the students, the most significant threat to national parks is littering. 68% thought littering was the biggest or one of the biggest threats. The next biggest threats were air pollution (31%), trampling of vegetation (27%), and noise pollution (20.00%). Both crowding and recreational development came in last with 19% each.

The following two questions deal with sustainable tourism and sustainable management practices. 64% of students surveyed knew what sustainable tourism is, while the other 32% did not know, or were unsure. Those who did not know what sustainable tourism was were asked to skip the following question, “Do you think that following sustainable management methods will help minimize these threats?” 13% of those who answered yes to the prior question said no, a sustainable management method would not help minimize these threats. 85% of students surveyed believe that it is important to save these areas from the negative impacts.

The last question on the survey was an open-ended question asking, “What are some things that could be done to preserve National Park?” Students came up with many great ideas that could help preserve these areas. Some common ideas include limiting the number of tourists allowed, implementing stricter littering policies/adding trash cans, setting aside areas where tourists cannot go, creating new laws to protect the parks and enforce rules more thoroughly, and educating people about why it is necessary to preserve the parks. A few students thought that having a “National Park Awareness” day would be a great way to inform people about why it is necessary to protect national parks.

**Chapter V:**  
**Education is the Key to Success**

Education and involvement is the key to reversing the negative impacts that tourists have on national parks in the United States. Many of the actions that are being taken to reverse the impact of tourists on National Parks are just slowing down the degradation of the land. Tourists will continue to negatively impact these areas unless there is continual education about why it is necessary to save the parks. Once educated, being a part of the solution will get more people to care about the problem at hand. Having good management plans or implementing sustainable practices are good ideas, but if people are not aware they are in place, they might not be as effective. If they are educated about all these ideas and principles it will be easier for them to follow the guidelines to help protect the areas they enjoy visiting.

The National Park Service professionals work with over 3,000 counties across the United States to preserve their history and create recreational activities. They strive to



obtain public engagement and work closely with state and local governments, nonprofit organizations and private citizens. The National Park Service, along with their partners has obtained great results. More than 85,000 properties have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places, more than 1,000 National Recreation trails have been designated and they have conserved rivers and turned surplus federal land into local parks. The National Park Service website offers many ways to get involved. In order to get involved one can, volunteer, join a park Friends Group, make a donation, work or partner with them and find ways to do one's part and revitalize your community. NPS officials believe that public involvement will help ensure that national parks are relevant and should be preserved. They promote child involvement with their Junior Ranger and Web Ranger programs. They also team up with both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to get older children involved (National Park).

In December of 1999, the director of the National Park Service asked the National Park System Advisory board to prepare a report, on the purpose and prospects of the National Park System for the next 25 years. The Board recommended that the National Park Service, "embrace its mission," as an educator. The National Park System was told to become a more significant part of the country's educational system, providing formal and informal programs for students and learners of all ages, both within and outside of the parks boundaries. They also recommended the encouragement of the study of the United States' past and "public exploration and discussion of the American past." They also suggested encouraging collaboration between the parks and other recreational systems at all levels, including federal, regional, state and local. This would help build an outdoor recreation network that would be accessible to all Americans (McLean 202).

All of these ideas would help create awareness for the parks and would keep people mindful of what they are doing and bringing into the parks. Knowledge can help prevent harmful acts and can describe ways to reverse the impacts that have already affected the environment.

“Keep America Beautiful” is an organization whose mission is, “engaging individuals to take greater responsibility for improving their community environments,” and whose focus is on litter prevention, waste reduction and beautification of the community. They do this by holding individuals responsible, having public-private partnerships, volunteering, and most importantly, education. According to “Keep America Beautiful,” education is “the key to encouraging positive behaviors towards community improvement.” Education, for them, is the starting point for “changing attitudes and behaviors.” They teach the fundamentals of litter prevention, resource preservation, responsible waste management and ways used to reduce, reuse and recycle. Leading corporations sponsors some of their educational programs and national organizations and federal agencies help develop them. These programs are used to educate students and more than 1.75 million students were exposed to a “Keep America Beautiful” classroom program or informal educational presentation in 2006 (Mission). By teaching younger students the importance of keeping the environment clean, they will be more likely to follow these standards as they grow up. In return they will teach further generations and hopefully negatives impacts that humans create will begin to lessen as more and more people are educated about the issues.

Leave No Trace is a national program that is designed to assist those who love the outdoors with decisions about how to reduce their impacts when doing such things as

hiking, camping, picnicking, snowshoeing, running, paddling, fishing or climbing, among many others. They are both an educational and ethical program, as opposed to being a set of rules and regulations. The “Leave No Trace” outdoor ethics guidelines are a great source for education about keeping our national parks safe from damaging impacts. This national program promotes the protection of wild lands through research, partnerships, and more importantly, education. Through this education, “Leave No Trace” builds awareness, respect, and appreciation for these precious lands. “Leave No Trace” works closely with the National Park Service as well as the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in order to educate all who visit these public lands in order to minimize their recreational impacts (Leave).

There are seven main principles to this program, all of which can be applied to any natural setting in order to minimize human impact on the natural environment. These principles can be learned and used whether you are hiking, camping, or just driving through a park on a nice day. The seven principles include: plan ahead and prepare, travel and camp on durable surfaces, dispose of waste properly, leave what you find, minimize campfire impacts, respect wildlife and be considerate of other visitors.

The first step to preserving the national park you are visiting is to plan ahead and be prepared. Make sure that the park’s regulations and guidelines are known and that there is awareness of what can and cannot be done in that park. It is also good to schedule a trip avoiding a time of high use where impact is already at a higher level. When traveling, staying on durable surfaces, such as established trails and campsites, is important in order to avoid trampling vegetation. Creating new trails or following short cut trails is not good because it increases trail erosion. Whatever is brought into the park,

should be is taken out of and all human waste should be disposed of properly, away from water sources, campsites and walking trails, and buried deep enough in the ground.

Plants, animal, rocks and artifacts are protected items and should be left for all to enjoy.

By taking pictures or sketching, these things can be remembered, but not destroyed.

Check to see if campfires are allowed in the national park you plan on visiting and follow any guidelines they have if fires are allowed. In some parks, such as Shenandoah National park, campfires are prohibited in the back county. Respecting the wildlife while visiting a park should be a priority because it is their home. Observe wildlife from a distance, with binoculars if possible, and make sure that the animals do not change their behavior. If they change their behavior it means you are too close. Leaving food for the animals is not good because it does not give them the proper nutrition that they need and all the food they do need is found within their natural habitat. Finally, being considerate of other visitors is both polite and respectful. People visit parks for many different reasons so excessive noise and damaged surroundings can take away any sense of solitude someone might find in one of these parks (Shenandoah).

Learning and educating others about these simple principles can protect many areas of national parks from negative impact. Once knowledge is gained, it is easier to recognize what is happening and to do something about it. Steps should be taken to educate people from a young age so that they recognize the importance and act on it as they grow up. If we continue to educate our youth, they will become the teachers and future generations will know the importance of keeping these national parks safe from negative impacts, and will be able to enjoy them like their parents and grandparents did.

## Term Glossary

**Crowding:** large numbers of persons gathered closely together.

**Depletion:** to decrease seriously or exhaust the abundance of supply of.

**Erosion:** the process by which the surface of the earth is worn away by the action of water, glaciers, winds, waves, etcetera.

**Hard Ecotourist:** tourists that have a strong connection to the environment and believe their activities should “enhance the resource base”

**Keep America Beautiful:** an organization whose goal is to engage individuals to take greater responsibility for the improvement of their community environments

**Leave No Trace:** A list of outdoor ethics guidelines that educate people about keeping environmental areas safe from damaging impacts

**Littering:** to strew a place with scattered objects, rubbish, and etcetera.

**Natural resources:** the natural wealth of a country, consisting of land, forests, mineral deposits, water, and etcetera.

**National Park:** an area of scenic beauty, historical importance, or the like, owned and maintained by a national government for the use of the people.

**National Park Service:** a division of the Department of the Interior, created in 1916, that administers national parks, monuments, historic sites, and recreational areas.

**National Parks Conservation Association:** An association created to protect and enhance America’s National Parks for present and future generations.

**Nature Tourism:** travel or vacationing to natural areas with a focus on wildlife and promotion of understanding and conservation of the environment.

**Noise Pollution:** unwanted or harmful noise, as from automobiles, airplanes, or industrial workplaces.

**Soft Ecotourist:** tourists without a deep understanding of environmental issues and who are more focused on their needs and wants than those of the environment

**Sustainable Tourism:** tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future.

**Tourist:** A person who is traveling, especially for pleasure.

**Trampling:** to tread heavily, roughly, or crushingly.

**Wildlife:** wild animals and plants collectively.

**Yellowstone:** The first established National Park in the United States

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