

2.1.4.10 Wilderness Interpretation and Education

Interpretation can best be defined in the words of Freeman Tilden, in Interpreting Our Heritage as “An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”

Wilderness education is perhaps the most important tool for ensuring the protection of wilderness resources and character. National Park Service Management Policy calls for an effective public wilderness education program to be developed and maintained.

The program is to:

"...promote and perpetuate public awareness of, and appreciation for, wilderness character, resources and ethics, while providing for acceptable use limits..."

The program is also to focus on:

"...fostering an understanding of the concept of wilderness that includes respect for the resource, willingness to exercise self-restraint in demanding access to it, and an ability to adhere to appropriate, minimum-impact techniques; and encourage the public to use and accept wilderness on its own terms..."

Rocky Mountain National Park is dedicated and mandated to provide interpretive and educational activities that assist the visitor in understanding the problems and issues of management and resource values, as well as promoting safety consciousness, enjoyment, and respect for the Park. Wilderness values were one of the primary reasons the Park was founded and enabled. Through the Park's Interpretive program, these values are shared with the American public and park visitors from around the world.

Through the Park's Outreach Program, this mandate is expanded to reaching other publics that may never visit, or that live in neighboring communities. Coordination with neighboring land management agencies, which administer wilderness, will be a priority to ensure consistency in wilderness educational messages.

The Park will follow guidance set forth in the newly developed NPS Wilderness Education and Partnership Plan. There are three basic objectives for educational programs administered by the National Park Service:

- To foster public understanding and appreciation of the National Parks and their significant cultural, natural, and recreational values and through this understanding, support preserving them.
- To encourage and facilitate appropriate, safe, and minimum impact use of the parks.
- To promote public understanding and acceptance of the Service's policies and programs.

2.1.4.10.1 Themes. Interpretive themes provide a broad base to communicate specific messages to ensure the preservation and protection of wilderness values. Significance statements about the wilderness are the guides to specific topics and programs. These are the stories through which the values of wilderness are conveyed to the public and NPS staff. The themes are the building blocks for interpretive products and services. Themes are intended to

encompass wilderness as a whole, but at the same time used to focus in on specific park issues of concern.

Rocky Mountain National Park's Interpretation and Educational Program will be based on NPS Wilderness Educational and Partnership Plan and park specific wilderness themes. Individuals will have the freedom to use the educational style and technique which works for them; however, the specific personal and non-personal services will tie off of and capture the essence of the broader themes which include:

- Some wildlands are most valuable when left in their natural state. Visitors will be encouraged to examine the content and intent of the Wilderness Act and the National Wilderness Preservation System.
- Wilderness is a foundation for a healthy and diverse ecosystem. It plays a significant role in the overall health of natural ecosystems.
- Wilderness is preserved in order to retain its primeval character and natural conditions, which is a special place for humans to examine their relationship to the natural world.
- Wilderness offers opportunities for personal renewal, inspiration, artistic expression, pride of ownership of a shared heritage, and the prospect of hope for the future.
- Wilderness provides opportunity for physical and mental challenge, risk and reward, renewal, self-reliance, solitude, and serves as a haven from the pressures of modern society.
- Individual and societal support to the idea of wilderness and appropriate use and behavior is imperative to the future of wilderness. Visitors will be encouraged to develop and participate in Leave No Trace travel and camping ethics.
- Wilderness provides a unique setting for teaching ecosystem stewardship and interdisciplinary subject matter. Wilderness education will include the mitigation of impacts to wilderness resources.
- Wilderness is a place where research can uncover information about natural processes and living systems in a relatively undisturbed setting.
- Humans can become connected to the past through cultural and archeological study and discover how humans interaction with wildlands occurred.

2.1.4.10.2 Audiences. Rocky Mountain National Park will take a multi-faceted approach to wilderness education and outreach that will span all management divisions, and will be directed at a wide variety of audiences. These efforts will be directed not only at park visitors, but will target populations that might never visit the Park, but who may live in the area, region, or other parts of the country. Efforts will also be made to educate park staff on the meaning and scope of wilderness preservation as it applies to the mission of RMNP, and the National Park Service. The NPS identifies 7 broad audiences. Each may be broken into more specific target audiences. These include:

- NPS, concessionaire, and cooperating association staffs
- Wilderness visitors
- Park visitors
- Student education program participants (e.g., schools, Girl and Boy Scouts)
- Neighboring communities
- Urban communities
- Non-government organizations including friends groups

The new NPS Wilderness Education and Partnership Plan will be the cornerstone of internal and external education efforts.

2.1.4.10.3 Internal Education. In order to build support for the concept of wilderness management in RMNP, the logical starting point is educating park, concessionaire, and cooperating association staffs about the need for and ramifications of aligning management decisions with consideration of the Wilderness Act. Employees are also citizens of the surrounding gateway communities, and often times find themselves acting as “ambassadors” for the Park in their day-to-day lives. Their daily conversations with friends, neighbors, and relatives has a profound impact upon perceptions of the Park in the local community. It is essential that all employees have a working knowledge of the management requirements of a wilderness area such as Rocky Mountain. More importantly, helping employees develop a deep appreciation of wilderness as an enduring resource is imperative.

The exceptional wilderness character of the backcountry of RMNP is often easy to take for granted. The compelling story of wilderness and its heritage in historical context to development of the continent must be conveyed. The Park at every opportunity should discuss the basic requirements of wilderness management and messages of the Park with employees.

Internal education efforts will include all employee, division and work unit meetings. The Park Wilderness Program Specialist, and other staff with an in-depth knowledge of wilderness, will be available to talk with individuals or groups of employees and provide park specific training. Wilderness topics and issues should be a part of annual seasonal training sessions (e.g., ranger, trail crew, resource crew, interpreter). Wilderness information will be incorporated in seasonal handbooks.

Employees are encouraged to attend regional and national wilderness training courses as well as participant in local university and long distance wilderness correspondence courses with the approval of their supervisor. Outreach programs and training to park volunteers (individuals and groups), concessionaires and the Rocky Mountain Nature Association should be conducted as necessary.

2.1.4.10.4 External Education. Educational efforts will serve both the visiting and non-visiting public. These efforts can be categorized as “personal”, and “non-personal” services.

2.1.4.10.5 Personal Services. Personal Services are those that involve direct contact between park staff or those acting in conjunction with the Park, and the public. These services include interpretive, education, and outreach programs, and other special programs. All services that occur within the backcountry/wilderness will be conducted within group size recommendations established by this plan (Section 2.1.3.1.1). The following are on-going or planned wilderness education efforts.

Formal Interpretive Programs. Rocky Mountain National Park offers a variety of programs that focus either directly on wilderness as a resource, or use related themes to convey wilderness values. Examples of programs which indirectly provide wilderness messages include:

General programs about ecology such as:

- Nature walks.
- Wildlife programs about Rocky Mountain mammals and their need for undeveloped habitat.

- Cultural history programs which describe the interaction of early peoples with nature in primitive settings.
- Photography programs by Kodak which use landscape aesthetics.
- Children's Junior Ranger programs which provide "hands-on" activities about wilderness ethics, and
- Evening programs in which people rediscover the wilderness of the night sky.

The Park offers an hour and a half long interpretive program to the visiting public called Treading Lightly, which is offered in the evening at various campground amphitheaters. The program discusses wilderness ethics and presents the Leave No Trace principals of wilderness travel.

Roving Interpretive Programs. These offer the possibility of giving short message impressions about wilderness to front country visitors at overlooks, campgrounds, and visitor centers. Seasonal rangers will be trained to emphasize these values in their visitor contacts.

Leave No Trace Programs. The Park will conduct Leave No Trace presentations to local community groups and organizations. The Park's Education and Outreach Program will be an instrumental part of sharing Leave No Trace messages. The emphasis with this program is with youth groups such as the scouts and other outdoor groups. Through the Park's Rocky Mountain Corps of Discovery, children from underrepresented populations have experienced Leave No Trace through ranger lead hiking and camping activities. The principles of Leave No Trace are listed in Appendix G.

Education Programs. The Park's Heart of the Rockies Education Program provides curriculum based activities to school aged children. The program uses the "Wilderness Box" activity trunk developed by the Forest Service's Region 2 office as an adjunct to certain units of study. The Wilderness Box is used mostly in visits to schools by park rangers.

Outreach Program. Each year the Park's Outreach Program presents programs to many diverse community organizations about management issues. Wilderness programs are presented to Rotary and Lions Clubs, Chambers of Commerce, conservation groups such as Audubon and the Sierra Club, and civic group such as the League of Women Voters.

Lyceum Programs. The Park has an active Lyceum Program that offers Saturday night programs to the general public at the Beaver Meadows/Headquarters Visitor Center. Outside speakers of renown make presentations about topics in their field. Future plans call for Lyceum speakers about wilderness.

Artist-In Residence Program. The Artist-In-Residence program attracts nationally recognized artist who work with a variety of mediums to express the inspiration of RMNP. Many visual artists have produced works depicting the grandeur of the Park's wilderness landscape. These artists share the production of their works with visitors as part of the experience. This program should have a special "wilderness landscapes" theme for an upcoming season.

Rocky Mountain Seminars. The Rocky Mountain Nature Association, a non-profit friends groups of RMNP, sponsors an acclaimed seminar series during the summers. Many of the nature seminars offer indirect wilderness themes. An effort should be made to offer a multi-day seminar specifically about wilderness values as a backcountry experience.

Elderhostel. The Park should participate in Elderhostel programs coordinated by the YMCA of the Rockies. Rangers can lead participants on guided hikes in the Park, and have emphasized wilderness ethics and values.

March For The Parks. Each year the March For The Parks walk raises money for non-profit organizations that support national parks. A wilderness theme year should be used to generate public support for wilderness management of RMNP.

2.1.4.10.6 Non-personal Services. Non-personal services are those which contact both visitors and non-visitors through other than face-to-face means. Examples include print and electronic media, permanent exhibits, temporary displays, and information kiosks.

Park Film. The Park's orientation film that is shown continually in the Beaver Meadows/Headquarters Visitor Center is dated and will be replaced in the near future. At that time, it should include a stronger wilderness message and focus.

Press Packets. These should be developed and distributed by the Park's Public Information Officer to an extensive media contact list. The packet would include an official briefing paper containing the Superintendent's statement about the wilderness values of RMNP.

High Country Headlines. The Park produces a seasonal newspaper distributed to all visitors who pass through the entrance gates, mailings and to many other through outreach programs. The paper has featured articles about the wilderness values of RMNP, and Leave No Trace techniques. These stories will continue to be featured in future issues.

Permanent Exhibits. Currently, no permanent exhibits dealing solely with wilderness are offered in the Park's visitor center. Future facility renovations should incorporate wilderness theme exhibits.

Temporary Displays. A temporary conference type display indirectly featuring wilderness values has been produced and used in different venues. The display can be modified to emphasize a more direct wilderness message. The display could be set up at venues in the gateway communities such as Chamber of Commerce information centers, libraries, and commercial conference facilities.

Site Bulletins. A site bulletin about the wilderness values and resources of the Park should be produced for public distribution. The Park already has a large variety of site bulletins about different topics, and it may be more appropriate to infuse wilderness messages into the existing publications. Leave No Trace messages should be included in all appropriate bulletins.

Printed Informational Pieces. The Park is considering producing specialty information pieces about the Park and interpretive program offerings to be distributed to local guest facilities and restaurants. A wilderness piece should be included in these publications.

Infomercial on local Cable TV channel. The Park should work with the local cable TV station to produce a short informational piece about wilderness and Leave No Trace to be aired periodically.

Sales Items. The Rocky Mountain Nature Association will be encouraged to procure and offer sales items that promote wilderness and Leave No Trace.

Internet Web Site. The RMNP web site will include a description of the Park's wilderness resource, the significance and benefits of wilderness and how to enjoy wilderness without damaging it. The site will provide links to other important wilderness and related web sites.