

Linking Visitor Flows and Patterns of Use with General Management Planning in Saguaro National Park

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Saguaro National Park is a superb example of the Sonoran Desert ecosystem, featuring exceptional stands of saguaro cacti, important wildlife habitat, associated mountains and significant cultural resources. The park has become a top destination for local, national and international visitors who come to see and experience its natural beauty. Along with this popularity has come the increased demand for new types of recreation use, such as mountain bicycles, pack goats, llamas, and baby strollers on trails and increased variety of access for the disabled are having significant impacts on the park. Proliferation of trails in sensitive areas, traffic congestion and conflicts between recreation activities are posing huge challenges to the parks management. While these problems are not surmountable there is a need to develop a more systematic way to understand the dynamics of visitor use patterns throughout the park in relation to the increasing use and demand for new access and opportunities. The purpose of this study is to examine through inventory, monitoring and simulation the underlying the spatial and temporal patterns and distribution of visitor use in Saguaro National Park. This project is part of a larger effort to address visitor use and resource management concerns as part of the General Management Plan for the park. This paper will provide an overview of the inventory and monitor methods used to document baseline visitor use distribution, patterns of use and visitor opportunities and experiences that will be used as part of the GMP. In addition discuss the use of a travel simulation model to replicate baseline visitor use behavior and subsequently to test the feasibility and effectiveness of GMP alternatives.