

Overcrowding in National Parks

Posted on June 27, 2018

National Parks and the Problem of Overcrowding

In today's overpopulated world, the conservation of the natural environment and wilderness is very imperative. National parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and the maintenance of space to expose nature not only enhance the beauty of a country but also benefit us in many ways. The aim of most of the natural parks is joint, i.e., to provide nature, recreation, walking, camping, and enjoyment opportunities to the people. The rocky coastlines, winding canyons, and deserts of 59 national parks in the US have been trademarks of vacations for generations. The United States has the privilege to flaunt some fantastic scenic environments for its people. The first natural park in the US was constructed in 1872 and named Yellowstone National Park. Other than parks, there are also wildlife sanctuaries maintained by countries with the purpose of protecting and safeguarding wildlife and providing them with the most natural environment. All the recreational sites are constructed with the goal of preserving wildlife and landscapes, with outstanding views of lakes, mountains, rivers, etc. Parks and sanctuaries also serve the purpose of preservation of history. A lot of national parks in the US have also maintained trail systems that offer wide-ranging routes for foot exploration. The national parks in the US not only attract visitors from within the country but also tourists from countries all around the globe. According to a report from the National Park Service Website in 2016, 30,971,689 people visited National Parks in the US. Amongst the most visited national parks include Great Smokey Mountain, Grand Canyon National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, etc. (Associated Press, 2016; DiLonardo, 2017; Turkewitz & Fremson, 2017)

Growth in Visitation and Environmental Pressure

If one delves into the history of US national parks, one can see that the government has always been open-hearted to its citizens, and everyone was allowed to visit the parks. Recently, however, the overcrowding in the national and wilderness parks of the US has started creating problems for management. Zion National Park emerged as one sufferer of this issue. The spokesperson of the park mentioned that an enormous amount of visitation had overwhelmed their infrastructure, facilities, backgrounds, landscapes, management plans, and resources. He was apparently of the view that they need to develop a feasible management plan so that the visitors' experience is enhanced. This is one of the many examples of the sufferers of the same issue. When parks are overwhelmed by huge visitations, not only is the preservation of resources difficult, but the individual user experience also deteriorates. Protection of the landscape is not the only purpose of such a place. These places hold inside of them a spirit that also needs to be preserved. Moving towards the most promiscuous national park in the US, Yellowstone National Park. An article published in "The Guardian" on August

24, 2016, claimed that the overcrowding in Yellowstone is creating problems for the management. It has raised severe concerns about wildlife preservation and safety, just like Zion and Yellowstone, but there are a lot of other parks that are facing similar issues. Let's discuss what kind of problems can arise due to overwhelming visitation.

Psychological and Management Effects of Crowding

Human psychology has a profound impact on how one behaves with one's fellow brother. Overcrowding can lead to an unusual demeanor of people which can create many problems for the management. Considering wilderness and national park overcrowding, the safety of the people becomes a little bit out of control. The number of visitors in the parks has exceeded too much, and it not only frustrates the visitors and tourists but also creates environmental problems for the management. In 2016, the National Park Service recorded 331 million visits, and the number has always exceeded that number since then. The facilities provided by the parks suffer too much because of the load. The violation between humans and animals and the flora & fauna of the park has increased. Some incidents get so severe that they end up becoming headline news. Human psychology is complicated to understand and manage. When the number of visitors becomes too much, and each demands facilitating and a natural environment, it becomes quite difficult to satisfy each of them. People often lose control over themselves and jump out of their cars when they see an animal like a bear. Behavior like this is natural but, at the same time, frustrating for the heads. The next section of the essay will focus on how we can deal with the overcrowding of the parks.

Arguments for Limiting Visitor Numbers

So, the big question here is whether we should limit the number of visitors to national and wilderness parks. If we just compare the number of visitors between two consecutive years 2015 and 2016, the number has increased by a whopping factor of 23.7 million. To answer such an awe-inspiring number, the spokesperson of the National Park Service said that national parks draw more visitors than themed parks like Disneyland, NBA, NASCAR, etc. combined. Yellowstone management also claimed that the increase in the number of visitors is not proportional to the park's capacity to handle. Due to some inhuman accidents in parks, rangers also issued several warnings about threatening wildlife and approaching them very close, etc. Such incidents can be avoided if the number of visitors is contained in an affordable but flexible number. However, the critical point is that the containment of visitors is not the only solution. Instead of abandoning people to enter the park, one can focus on the infrastructure of the parks to handle greater people. More walking paths can be introduced, parking spots can be expanded, and shuttle services can be increased. More funds and resources should be allocated to the park management to handle the significant visitations better. The landscape and the spirit of national and wilderness parks should be preserved.

References

1. "How A Surge in Visitors Is Overwhelming America's National Parks." *Yale E360*, e360.yale.edu/features/greenlock-a-visitor-crush-is-overwhelming-americas-national-parks.
2. DiLonardo, Mary Jo. "Should we limit visitors at national parks?" *MNN – Mother Nature Network*, Mother Nature Network, 3 Aug. 2017, mnn.com/earth-matters/wilderness-resources/stories/should-we-limit-visitors-national-parks.
3. Turkewitz, Julie, and Ruth Fremson. "National Parks Struggle With a Mounting Crisis: Too Many Visitors." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 27 Sept. 2017, nytimes.com/2017/09/27/us/national-parks-overcrowding.html.
4. Press, The Associated. "National Park Service considers visitor caps, expects record crowds." *The Denver Post*, The Denver Post, 29 May 2016, www.denverpost.com/2016/05/29/park-service-considers-visitor-caps-expects-record-crowds/.