

Listening to the Land

Soundscape research reveals unique resource worth protecting

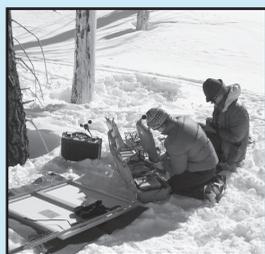
The distant call of a great horned owl, the thundering of a waterfall, the cry of a far off coyote, the wind singing through the pines...

Natural sounds and natural quiet are a valued resource at Devils Postpile National Monument. They are just as important as the native plant and animal communities and unique geological formations in the area.

Natural sounds and natural quiet comprise part of a park's *soundscape*. The term soundscape refers to the total acoustic environment in a particular area, including sounds people experience. This consists of both natural and human-caused sounds. The natural soundscape is managed as a park resource with a truly unique and inherent value, and as an important element of the National Park experience. As you explore Devils Postpile, take some time to listen to and enjoy the Monument's unique soundscape.

The Organic Act of 1916 states that National Parks were established "to conserve the scenery, the natural and historic objects and the wild 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." The soundscape of a National Park, like water, scenery, or wildlife, is a valuable resource that can easily be degraded or destroyed by inappropriate sounds. As a result, soundscapes require careful management if they are to survive unspoiled for years to come.

So how do non-natural sounds affect Devils Postpile National Monument? Airplanes, cars, buses, boom boxes, car alarms, park operations, motorized equipment, and vehicles all create noise that may compromise a visitor's experience. These sounds carry easily, and can be heard a fair distance away.



Soundscape researchers inspect equipment during a ski patrol last winter.

Inappropriate soundscapes also affect the wildlife community. For example, studies have shown that songbirds that live in noisy places must sing louder than areas that are quieter. Birds forced to sing at a higher volume have to expend increased levels of precious energy to attract a mate or warn of predators. Acoustic ecology is an emerging science, and we are just beginning to understand that the acoustic niche of many wildlife species' vocalizations have an interconnected relation to each other. Think of it as the "orchestra of nature."

As visitation to parks has increased dramatically in the past 25 years, the effects of noise and the significance of a natural soundscape have become more apparent. Between 2005 and 2006, the National Park Service conducted acoustic monitoring within the Monument to determine the nature of its soundscape. The results from the study will provide park managers with information to better manage Devils Postpile's soundscape, as well as to ensure these important resources are left "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

For more information about the Natural Sounds Program, visit www.nature.nps.gov/naturalsounds.

Keeping Wildlife Wild...

Many people visit National Parks to enjoy wildlife viewing. It is a rewarding experience to see wild animals in their native environment. It is also our duty to observe wildlife responsibly. And while some animals may appear friendly and approachable, it is important to remember that these animals are wild and can still be dangerous. Treat all wildlife with caution and respect. We can safeguard the welfare of animals by never feeding or approaching them, for this will help ensure they will continue foraging for natural food in natural areas.



...And Being Bear Aware!

Seeing a bear in the wild is usually a memorable experience at Devils Postpile. Bears, however, are commonly sighted in human areas, usually in search of a free meal. They soon learn to identify coolers, bags, and cans by smell and appearance. Once they have located the scented items, little deters them—even the seemingly impenetrable metal of a car door.

It is a pattern that is difficult to break. Bears remember that human areas provide food rewards, and it is a challenge to return them to their natural diet. These bears then begin to lose their natural fear of humans and may become aggressive during an encounter. Remember, a fed bear is a dead bear. So what can we do to help the bear situation?

In Campgrounds:

- Proper food storage is required both day and night in the campground. Place all scented items (food, toiletries, etc.) in the bear-resistant food lockers provided.
- Keep a clean camp; give no reasons for bears to investigate.

While Day Hiking:

- Use the bear-resistant food locker next to the Ranger Station.
- Dispose of all refuse in the bear-resistant trash cans and dumpsters.

What to do if you encounter a bear:

- If you see a bear while hiking on the trail, make some noise and back up slowly; give the bear some space and the option to leave the area.
- If a bear is sighted in a campground, make lots of noise (clap, yell, bang pots) and stand together in a group if possible. Report all bear sightings to a Park Ranger.

For more information about bear awareness, please visit www.SierraWildBear.gov as well as www.KeepMeWild.com.

The Enduring Resource of Wilderness

Recognizing a Fundamental Experience

"I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in." So wrote conservationist John Muir, noting the connection between wild places and the inner-self.

Wilderness means different things to different people, but for many it is a special resource. Wilderness values are nearly unlimited, including ecological, recreational, scientific, historical, inspirational, and educational.

In 1964, Congress enacted landmark legislation that permanently protected some of the most natural and undisturbed places in America. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Wilderness Act into law on September 3, 1964, "to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness."

Defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964, wilderness, "in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." The Wilderness Act goes on to describe wilderness as a place "retaining its primeval character and influence" where there are "outstanding opportunities for solitude."

Over ninety percent of Devils Postpile National Monument is designated wilderness, making it an excellent area to explore. To learn more about wilderness areas in the Sierra Nevada go to: www.sierranevadawild.gov.

Wilderness Permits and Regulations

Wilderness permits are required for all overnight backcountry trips adjacent to Devils Postpile National Monument. Overnight backpacking is not permitted within the Monument itself. Permits are available at the Devils Postpile Ranger Station, the Mammoth Lakes Ranger Station, or from the Inyo National Forest's

Wilderness Permit Office at (760) 873-2485. Trail quotas are in effect from May 1 through November 1 for the John Muir and Ansel Adams Wilderness areas. For more information about wilderness permits, please visit: www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild.

While we have many opportunities to recreate in the wilderness, we also have the responsibility to help protect these special areas. Educate yourself and your group on proper wilderness ethics and regulations. Follow these simple guidelines to help "Leave No Trace" during your backcountry visit:

- Bear-resistant canisters are mandatory for overnight travel in most of the Ansel Adams and John Muir Wilderness areas. They are available for rent at all ranger stations and most sporting good stores.
- Stay on designated trails to prevent erosion of slopes.
- Pack out everything you pack in.
- Always camp on durable surfaces, at least 100 feet or more away from meadows, streams, and lakes.
- Bury human waste at least 6" deep and 100 feet away from campsites, water, and trails.
- Limit group size to no more than 15 people.

For more information about backcountry ethics and the Leave-No-Trace Program, visit www.lnt.org.



Did you know?

Mice have been heard on sound recordings drumming their feet on the ground to warn of danger.