

The Federal Interagency Task Force on Visitor Capacity on Public Lands and Waters

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Purpose: To present the Federal Interagency Task Force's perspective on visitor capacity

- Conceptual foundation of the Task Force: law, decision science, planning theory
- Eight key points

1. Visitor Capacity

- 1978 National Parks and Recreation Act
- everyday language
- public understanding and acceptance

2. A Visitor Capacity is a Number

- A whole number or numeric range
- Capacity is the supply, or prescribed number, of appropriate visitor opportunities that will be accommodated in an area at a particular time

3. A Visitor Capacity is a Legal Mandate

- National Parks and Recreation Act, Wild and Scenic River Act, National Forest Management Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act
- Capacity must be addressed in agency plans
- Capacity is a number

4. A Visitor Capacity is an Administrative Decision

- Responsible official
- Sound professional judgment
- Principled, reasoned, trackable, transparent, and reasonable
- Proactive (ripe)

5. A Visitor Capacity is a Fundamental Tool

- Capacity is a historic and common metric throughout natural resource management
- Visitor capacities are widespread across local, state and federal agencies

6. A Visitor Capacity Serves Multiple Purposes

- Demand/supply analysis
- Predictability for businesses and communities
- Helps to contrast management alternatives (choices)
- Trigger for resources or action
- Protect integrity of park-dependent experiences
- Risk management tool
- Enables timed-ticketing, reservation, and other visitation systems

7. A Visitor Capacity Decision Requires a NEPA-Compliant Planning Process

- The Magna Carta of environmental planning
- Purpose: Better and more legally defensible decisions
- Best time for deciding the future: the greatest mass of information, data, problem solving, creativity, staff focus, public input, and systematic analysis.
- Integrated and comprehensive decision making
- Agency plans are subject to NEPA

Capacity decisions **do not** require:

- ...a special planning process
- ...a special study, analysis or survey
- ...a special monitoring program
- ...a separate and isolated decision

7-con't. A Visitor Capacity Decision is Evaluated Across Management Alternatives

- management alternatives are the heart of the public planning process
- each alternative is an integrated and comprehensive prescription for the future
- capacity decisions are only a few of the many decisions necessary to describe an alternative
- clear, contrasting, and a reasonable range of alternatives allow for transparent, trackable, reasoned, and reasonable decisions

7-con't. Many Considerations go into Visitor Capacity Decisions. For example,

- Management objectives and standards
- Desired future conditions
- Intended park-dependent experiences
- Resource conditions and capability
- Management capability and infrastructure
- Best available science
- Public values
- Regional substitutes
- Recreation demand and trends
- Economic effects
- Potential consequences and risk

8. Monitoring is Important

- TF Principle #11: *A visitor capacity needs to be adaptive to new science, information, uses, technology, trends, conditions, and other circumstances of importance.*
- TF Principle #12: *The effectiveness of a visitor capacity depends on an adequate program of monitoring that is commensurate with the level of potential consequences, risk and uncertainty.*
- Monitoring is necessary but not sufficient to address visitor capacity decisions.
- Monitoring does not by itself determine a visitor capacity.
- Monitoring does not replace decision making within a NEPA-compliant public planning process