

For one or more National Parks in MEDC's, examine the challenges which have arisen as a result of the increased use of the area for recreation and tourism.

The idea of the National Park came from America, when Yellowstone was made the world's first National Park in 1872. The purpose of this was to "conserve natural scenery, wildlife and historic sites and objects and to provide for public enjoyment of these areas." The idea spread throughout the world, including to Britain where in 1949 an act was passed creating 10 national parks. Britain at the time was suffering from overpopulation and urban sprawl, and this threatened its scenic areas, therefore they created the national park to:-

- Conserve the beauty of sensitive environments from development which would otherwise spoil them.
- To permit access to and encourage employment within the area.
- To support local communities whose live and work within the National Park.

With these aims in mind, Britain has since developed 12 National parks and other countries have followed the example, all adopting similar aims. However National parks have been faced with many challenges and still are today. Some of the most prominent challenges that face the National parks are these which arise from the concept of a place being "loved to death". When problems arise due to the tourism and recreation. It is these issues that I will be addressing in this essay.

One of the difficulties is to uphold sustainable management, this means to manage the park to meet the needs of the present without badly affecting the future. When addressing any issue within a National park this has to be considered, however this is difficult as people may be greedy, and want all they can achieve in the present ignoring that this may bring hardship in the future. All those involved in the National park have to work together to use their assets to bring economy and tourism to uphold without abusing the parks.

This becomes relevant when facing every challenge. Tourists are a huge asset to the parks and are after all one of the most important features "To permit access to the park". However tourists also bring many of the problems. Many parks have experienced the problem of overcrowding, when tourists swarm to "honey pot sites". For Example in the past 20 year's park visitation in the USA has doubled. People over the last decade have begun to crave more exciting holidays out and about. Parks such as "Grand Canyon" are experiencing over crowding and serious congestion in certain areas such as "the south rim", yet other more remote areas are hardly being visited at all. There are two basic strategies for the overcrowding problem. One is to limit the amount of visitors that enter the more popular parks. A second option is to reduce the number of visitor facilities of the parks, and only provide the bare minimum. This would decrease the number of visitors in the park because they would be forced to go outside the boundaries to get information, food and lodging. Theoretically this will leave the parks to the dedicated hikers and campers, and will ease traffic congestion in the more popular

parks. However both of these strategies run the risk of economic loss, which is an issue many National Parks may not be able to afford.

Along with tourist congestion comes the traffic congestion. This has become a major problem in recent years due to increased vehicle ownership of the public. This is particularly relevant in British national parks e.g. The Lake District, where there may only be one route in, which may be a small and winding road. Not only does this cause problems and delays for the visitors themselves but also the local community, who may have their everyday life disrupted by delays and jams. Again this is difficult to manage, as new and larger roads may “spoil” the parks natural beauty and may be difficult to plan for, with planning laws within the parks.

Along with traffic congestion comes the issue of pollution, with so many cars there is a lot of exhaust fumes being emitted into the environment. This may be damaging not only for the parks ecosystem but for the larger picture also. At Great Smoky Mountains, ozone pollution has violated federal health standards more than 175 times since 1998 and is damaging 30 species of plants. Again there is little that can be done about this by the management. However some parks have introduced “park and ride” schemes e.g. In Snowdonia, you can take the Sherpa bus, and to promote the usage of this you also get a free guided walk. Traffic pollution is not the only type that causes problems; the air pollution from human sources that plagues national parks comes primarily from burning fossil fuels-coal, oil, and gas. This is caused by power plants and industrial facilities as well as from cars, trucks, planes, trains, and construction equipment. There is also a problem with light pollution, stemming from urban settlements within or close to the parks. This causes problems for visitors who want to star gaze, to escape the dull skies of the cities and admire the clear skies. "Protecting dark night skies in our National Parks is as vital as protecting clean air, water, wildlife and the sounds of nature," said Thomas Kiernan, president of the conservation organization.

More directly linked to the visitors themselves is the mess they leave in their path. Litter from packaging just abandoned, the remnants of fires and camp sites. However this can be dealt with the installations of bins and rules such as the one Dartmoor stating “backpacker camping can occur providing you do not pollute and stay at least 100 metres from the road”. Parks in America have made even stricter rules insisted that campers can only stay in designated areas, which are regularly cleared by wardens and there are many bins provided.

Tourists when visiting a park, bring with them cars and their contents, which they abandon for their “walk in the wilderness”. This creates an ideal hot spot for crime. Car break-ins have become increasingly common in the designated car parks. To solve this, parks such as Yellowstone in the USA, have introduced park wardens and 24 hour CCTV surveillance to deter crime and try catch the criminals themselves.

One of the main attractions to many parks is the nature and wildlife found within it, however tourists bring problems to this also, not only through pollution. Also through destruction of their natural habitat, noise pollution, and the plain fact that tourists may scare the animals out of their natural home. Tourists may also have a more bizarre effect on the wildlife, for example in Yosemite, where the Black Bears, have become so used to the people, that they have become tame, they are no longer are afraid of humans and therefore pose a threat as they are still to a

certain extent still wild and certainly unpredictable. The influx of tourists has also turned many of the bears to a life of crime, breaking into camp sites and even cars to forage for food.

Overuse of a park, may also cause erosion of paths and more dangerously areas not pathed. This is a particular issue in such parks as Brecon Beacons where hill walking is a popular activity. There is at least 45 kilometres of footpaths cross this area and they are used by over 80,000 walkers each year. Unfortunately, the Old Red Sandstone which forms much of the area is relatively soft and footpaths are easily eroded. This has caused dramatic changes in the last 50 years. Trampling damages the surface vegetation and eventually kills it. Other features suffer from erosion such as dry stone walls, which may collapse when climbed over too frequently.

There are also positive challenges facing the National Parks. These occur when good things are brought to the park and these are a challenge to sustain. An example of this is in the Lake District, where water sports on the lakes has proved a huge hit and has brought many visitors and economic gains. However many of the locals complain of the noise and disruption, the management has to fight to keep both parties happy by coming up with a strategies to suit both.

All the benefits of tourism that are brought to the park by tourism and recreation have to be sustained and kept as benefits and this within itself is a challenge for the management. The fact that national parks are an ever changing concept along with the ever changing landscape means that challenges are constantly arising and needing dealt with, it is up to the management to deal with these in a sensible way thus abiding to the original aims of the parks and keeping the parks an exciting place for people to visit.