

Visitor measuring and monitoring challenges on remote national forests: The case of Alaska, USA

Robert Burns, Alan Graefe, Don English

Abstract — The purpose of this project was to identify and evaluate the set of issues associated with recreation use studies measuring and monitoring in Region 10 of the USDA Forest Service (Alaska), and more specifically within the Chugach and Tongass National Forests. The unique environment and conditions of Alaska have long posed significant challenges to recreation monitoring efforts, and several previous efforts have been undertaken to address this topic, both internally (Reed, 2003) and externally (Stynes, 2006). The US Forest Service uses the National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) protocol to measure and monitor visitor use on all of its national forests. In 2000, an initial attempt to measure visitor use on the Tongass National Forest was conducted. Only 138 of 165 planned sampling days were completed, resulting in a completion rate of 84 percent (USDA 2001). This was the lowest achievement rate among all regions, which averaged 95 percent overall. An in depth review suggested that weather was not a factor and that the low accomplishment rate was attributable to personnel and strategic problems experienced by the sample districts. Approximately 12 interviews were conducted, along with a review of literature focusing on this issue. A series of approximately 20—25 recommendations were made to managers as a result of the review and interviews. It is intended that the results of this review will ultimately aid in customizing the survey protocol and instruments for the National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) and related recreation use monitoring studies in this region.

Index Terms — Alaska, recreation use, national forests, visitor monitoring.

