

**Sierra Crest End of Season Summary**  
**Summer 2000**  
**Debbie Brenchley, Sierra Crest Sub-District Ranger**

This was my first summer as the Sierra Crest Sub-District Ranger. Once the backcountry rangers were mobilized, I spent time familiarizing myself with the area and getting an overview of areas of concern. I was impressed by the vastness and beauty of the Sierras.

**SIERRA CREST STAFF:**

George Durkee	Charlotte Ranger Station
Bob Kenan	Rae Lakes Ranger Station
Rob Hayden	Leconte Ranger Station
Dave Gordon	McClure Ranger Station
Pete Clum (VIP)	

**TRAINING:**

Seasonal law enforcement training was the week of June 12 – 16. The training was well done and I heard positive comments from the backcountry rangers. I recommend a time commitment of 1 – 4 hours in future training sessions to specifically address backcountry scenarios, problems, and/or techniques.

This year doctors from UMC presented 1.5 days of EMT training. It was great training and most participants were eager for more. It was recommended to try two full days next year.

The Stock LNT class in June was a good introduction to minimum impact techniques. This class should be continued and include participation from rangers, trail crew, and packers.

Other training included aircraft overflights, wildlife management, meadow management, concession management, CPR, search skills, patient packaging, emergency response, and SEKI Update.

**MOBILIZATION:**

Organization is the key. Moving 3 thousand pounds of gear takes a bit of coordination and effort. Training and availability dates pushed the mobilization to July 1. This seemed to be a late start for the backcountry rangers, especially with a slightly less than normal snow year. Backcountry rangers were limited to one flight (approximately 600 pounds). This received a lot of grumbling from the rangers, but everyone managed. Many less essential items were left behind including signs and supplies to repair the stations. Mobilization cost came to \$1,560 with flights to McClure, Leconte, Bench and Rae. The daily rate was charged to a fire account which saved \$1,600. The Charlotte station was mobilized by trail crew packers which saved additional money.

**DEMOBILIZATION:**

The trail crew packers were able to demob McClure, Leconte, Rae and Charlotte ranger stations.

**MCCLURE AREA:**

McClure, Colby and Darwin meadows were too wet to open on the “normal” year schedule. This has consistently been the case for the past few years. Opening dates should be adjusted accordingly. Darwin meadow was opened a month later than its “normal” July 15 opening. Even in mid-August the east end of the meadow was fairly wet. Use was discouraged which reduced use to less than 50 stock nights. Still the meadow received damage. Further action is needed to protect this resource.

Communication was hampered at the beginning of the season due to repeater problems. The radio shop was able to repair the problem in July. The backcountry ranger currently has a MT-1000 radio with telescopic antenna. This radio has the best reception of the portable radios, but relies on disposable batteries. We need a system for recharging MT-1000 batteries from the solar panel. Currently, the McClure ranger uses Sierra National Forest dispatch as a back up. The Inyo National Forest frequencies should also be programmed into the radio.

Lamarck Col has received resource damage from hikers. There is a way trail from Lamarck Lake over Lamarck Col through Darwin Basin to the Pacific Crest Trail. On the Forest Service side the trail is very obvious and easy to follow until the permanent snow field just below the col. The actual way trail crosses the first notch (eastern), but many people miss this and continue to the third notch. Route finding is more difficult if you cross on the third notch. A myriad of crisscrossing trails covers the NPS side of the col. This has caused resource damage in the loose rocky soil. Current steps to mitigate further damage include marking the upper section of the col (east notch) with cairns and providing route information to hikers. Further action may be necessary.

Another alternative for the creek crossing just below Evolution Meadow should be considered. During high water this site is just above some rapids. Hikers tend to continue upstream until they find a "safer" spot. Even in September when the water level was low, hikers were walking upstream to look for a dryer alternative. Due to the continued foot traffic, the old trail on the south side of the creek is not recovering and impacts to vegetation and the banks of the creek continue.

**LECONTE AREA:**

Visitors to the Dusy Basin area continue to have food storage problems. A rash of events occurred at the end of July which were reported by a visitor. This included the bear ripping the tents at the CCC trail crew camp. A proposal requiring approved food storage containers has been submitted. This is a joint effort with Inyo National Forest to require food canisters in the Bishop Pass corridor. It will be interesting to see how the canister requirement effects Leconte Canyon.

Ranger Rob Hayden has continued to discourage use of the Big Pete stock camp due to sensitive plants in the meadow. This seems to be helping to limit resource damage to the meadow. I walked through the meadow in September and it still had a wet boggy section where a small stream flows through. Big Pete and Grouse meadows opened two weeks later than the "normal" schedule. Little Pete opened a week later than "normal".

The Leconte area had the most medicals this summer with 4 medivacs and 3 stock-evacs.

The Pacific Crest Trail in the Leconte area will need some attention soon. There are sections of deep trenching near Big Pete meadow. The section below the Golden Staircase needs to be brushed.

I received a few verbal complaints from visitors about the lack of bridge over Palisades Creek. This is a hazardous crossing. Visitor disappointment about the lack of bridge is increased because the footings of the old bridge are still visible.

**BENCH AREA:**

The Bench area did not have a full time ranger due to lack of funds. Volunteer Pete Clum covered the Bench area when he was available.

The existing tent platform has been disabled by snow and weather. A new platform will need to be built when the station is staffed again.

There was a small, 2 acre fire between the PCT and Bench Lake. Fortunately, it occurred when Pete was in the area and he was able to call it in. Helitak responded and dealt with the fire.

The trail in the meadow below Taboose Pass is horrible. There are one foot to 3.5 foot deep eroded sections that are impossible to hike on. Other sections are muddy or totally covered in vegetation. It is very easy to miss the trail. Resource damage continues as visitors try to wade through the fragile meadow area. A proposal to reroute the trail was submitted in November 1997. Hopefully, trail crew will have funding to work on the area soon.

There was at least one questionable incident of helicopter use in the Bench area. I admit that helicopters are useful and can be considered the minimum requirement in many circumstances. I still feel we should be careful when using them in Wilderness. Pete was patrolling one day and found the helicopter inbound for the Bench Station. He called on the radio and found they were stopping for lunch. Fortunately, Pete was able to get back to the station and used the opportunity to fly out some garbage.

**RAE LAKES AREA:**

The food storage requirement for the Rae Lakes Loop was successful this summer. Rae Lakes Ranger Bob Kenan did give a few warnings for visitors without a canister, but overall compliance was good. This regulation should be continued and possibly extend the dates. Currently, the canister requirement is from Memorial Day to Labor Day, yet bear incidents continued at Junction Meadow throughout September.

This was the first year restricting stock use in 60 Lakes Basin. The Rae Lakes ranger only noted one stock drop trip to the area. This restriction should continue especially with the potential of the Yellow-legged frog being listed as endangered.

**CHARLOTTE LAKE AREA:**

Upper Vidette meadow looks like a playground for stock instead of a natural meadow. There are numerous stock trails, vegetation damage, roll pits, stream bank erosion, and mechanical (hoof print) damage to a Sphagnum meadow. Action needs to be taken to prevent further damage. Possibilities include closing the meadow for a few years to allow it to recover or to strictly limit stock use.

The East Lake stock camp has damage to trees, a surprising lack of ground vegetation, and piles of manure near any tree small enough to get a rope around. The grazing meadow (a quarter mile upstream from the lake) has erosion and vegetation damage. This area also needs action to limit future damage.

Junction Meadow is another heavily used stock site. The experience of traveling through this area is much like crossing a well used pasture complete with gate and fence. This was the first Sierra meadow I visited. My visions of knee deep flowers, grasses and sedges were disappointedly replaced by the reality of inch tall grass with manure piles. Fortunately, there are other meadows in much better condition.

Managing the meadow resources and allowing stock use is obviously a difficult task. Although Upper Vidette, East Lake and Junction Meadow are separate meadows, any action in one meadow will most likely effect the others.

Ranger George Durkee recommended that the one night camping limit be removed from Rae Lakes, Kearsarge Lakes and Charlotte Lake.

**GENERAL:**

The maintained trails seemed to be in fairly good shape. There were sections that need work, but following the maintained trail system is pretty straightforward. It is interesting that we don't sign junctions to unmaintained trails, but most maps do not indicate what trails are maintained or not. My concern is making sure we provide visitors with good information.

I was surprised to find quite a few campsites that were too close to water or the trail. Hopefully, we will be able to assess some of the camps next summer.

Radio communications got off to a shaky start. Evolution, Windy and Gould repeaters all had problems at the beginning of the season. The radio shop was able to fix the repeaters, but it took a couple of weeks since many resources were already committed to working on the Forgotten repeater. It may help to get antennas for the ranger stations, especially Leconte, Bench and Rae Lakes.

It was difficult for me to communicate when I was on the eastside. I was out of range of the SEKI radio system for most of the drive to the eastside and all of the time hiking in until I reached the crest. I learned the location of payphones on the eastside in order to facilitate communications. A cell phone or combined cell/satellite phone would be more effective and efficient.

The lack of internal communication was interesting. Since I was new, it is possible that I just didn't know either how things work or who to ask. It would be nice to know when other divisions or groups would be working in the Sierra Crest. I was hiking into the Bench area, when a visitor asked what the helicopter was doing the previous evening. I ended up grilling the visitor to try to get information, just in case it was an illegal operation. It was probably our helicopter rechecking the Bench Fire. It might be possible to list backcountry activities on the

backcountry bulletin board. We could include fire activity, trail crew locations, resource crew locations, and other special projects or patrols.

Trips to the eastside included contacts with Inyo National Forest offices, pack stations, and the Bishop BLM office. Many of the eastside trailheads have limited, if any, information on the Park. Onion Valley seems to have too many signs and some with conflicting information.

Trying to provide visitors with information seems to be challenging. A person backpacking in Kings Canyon could obtain a permit from a variety of locations including a NPS permit station, a Forest Service permit station, the Pacific Crest Trail Association if they are through hikers, or a pack station if they are on a drop trip. I contacted one group who had a permit issued from a Forest Service station. Their permit simply had "Park" on it. The party was frustrated because they tried unsuccessfully to get information on fishing regulations. At the Wilderness Manager meeting in Yosemite, the idea of a joint training between permit issuing stations was recommended. We should support any training or other efforts for communications between agencies.

This year the backcountry rangers took a more active role in monitoring the IBP users. Concession management developed a monitoring form for the rangers. It was good to be able to provide information to concession management especially since they were able to follow up on specific cases.

Food storage is another issue for the backcountry. The Rae Lakes Loop food canister requirement worked well this past year. We should continue to strongly encourage food canisters in the backcountry and require it where necessary. Eventually, the Parks should consider a parks-wide requirement. One step to take in the interim is to remove the guarding from the food storage regulation.

I was able to visit each backcountry station three times during the summer. It was good to touch bases with the backcountry rangers, bring in their mail, and discuss issues.

**Visitor Contacts and backcountry patrols (Brenchley)**

	<u>Miles</u>	<u>Visitors</u>	<u>Stock</u>
May	51.5	42	0
July	151.6	125	32
August	177.3	333	23
September	68.4	117	5
October	<u>27.2</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>0</u>
Totals	475.6	659	61

**Sub District Totals**

3,067 miles hiked  
6,606 Visitor contacts

**Law enforcement incidents**

Citations: Illegal fire 3, No permit 1, Dog 1  
107 Verbal warnings given

**Overflights**

1 Military low flyer in Leconte Canyon

**Medical incidents**

7/13	Dusy Basin	Achilles Tendon tear	Medivac
7/15	Helen Lake	Broken Leg	Medivac
7/16	Wheelbarrow camp	Injured foot	Stock-evac
7/18	Rainbow Lakes	Altitude sickness	Medivac
7/ ?	Leconte	Exhaustion	Stock-evac
8/7	Twin Lakes	Diabetic/torn esophagus	Medivac
8/10	Wanda Lake	Intestinal Illness	Medivac
8/11	Leconte	Sore knee	Stock-evac
8/11	Dusy basin	Exhaustion	Stock-evac
9/17	Dusy basin	Diabetic 12 yr old	Medivac
9/28	Paradise Valley	Broken Leg—assist to Cedar	Medivac

Numerous other minor medicals—blisters, sprained knees, lacerations, fish hooks

**Searches**

8/15	Bench	Search for overdue hiker
8/21	Palisade Basin	Search for possible climbing accident
9/6	Lamark Col	Search—assist to Inyo
10/15	Monarch	Search—assist Cedar Grove