

Season End Report
Tyndall Creek
June 21-September 27, 2002
Paul Larson

I entered Tyndall Ranger Station on the 21st of June following two weeks of training. I hiked up Shepherds Pass encountering snow on the east side of the pass at 11,800 ft, just below the crest. There was significantly less snow in the area compared to last year. Tyndall and Wallace creeks were easily crossed on the JMT/PCT. Forester Pass was virtually snow free on its south-facing slope, and the ranger station wintered well despite being broken into this winter.

A. General Observations

Contacts

Backpacker- 1257

Stock- 284 mules, horses, and burros were observed around the Tyndall area this summer. This number greatly increased over last year's use. Most of the parties being commercial and more specifically Rock Creek pack station, Cottonwood pack station, and Sequoia/Kings pack train. These parties are traveling over Shepherds Pass despite its difficulty and primarily grazing Tyndall meadows with a few spot trips to Wright Lake basin and Lake South America. Impacts were heavy and restrictions should be considered specifically in Tyndall meadows to curb the impacts received this season.

Law Enforcement

Educational talks and verbal warnings were the primary means of dealing with violations in the Tyndall area. Improper food storage, abandoned food and garbage, illegal fire pits, and resource damage from stock use was the bulk of the issues addressed. Although in most cases it's my experience that backcountry users want to do the right thing. The issue is they just might not know what that is. With better education, and not citations, we as rangers are able to convey more of a respect compliance of the issues above, rather than the typical authority figure out to ruin their experience. There are occasions where a fine is warranted but these situations are rare in the backcountry.

Medical, BLS, Transports

A few minor medicals were seen through out the season. A broken ankle was treated while I was in Lodgepole for high-angle rescue training. Most of the medicals dealt with blisters, sore knees, and altitude related sickness. All parties were questioned and relayed information on where I could be contacted if the problem persisted. None of the parties followed up. I assisted a boyscout group off the summit of Mt. Whitney to the Whitney portal on the evening of July 7th. The troop leader failed to make a proper decision to turn his group back. After 14 hours they reached the summit at 6 p.m. Fearing a potential epic I escorted the scouts, ages ranging from 10-12, to the trailhead. We reached the portal at 3 am, 23 hours after these scouts set out for the summit of Whitney. Two parties were flown out of the Tyndall area early in the season. One medivac occurred on the 8th

of July near Mt. Tyndall for low blood sugar, and the second on the 11th of July for an airway compromise. Both of these occurred while I was Lodgepole for high-angle rescue training.

Searches

A search was conducted in Kings Canyon in late August for a forest Service employee doing frog research in Dusy basin. He attempted to climb Mt. Whichell and didn't show up the previous day. A search proceeded. His body was found on the east side of the mountain a few days later. Little else is known.

Weather

Weather this summer can easily be summed up in a few words, dry and smoky. By mid-August creek and river levels were running the same c.f.s. as when I left last year at the end of September. Eleven days of insignificant precipitation at Tyndall mostly in Late June and early July were observed.

Fires

The McNally fire in the south end of the park was a pressing issue since its start on the 21st of July. Within days the fire erupted and smoke and falling ash were consistent problems the following weeks. Other than haze and the smell I was little affected by the fire. It raged on for weeks eventually closing access to the Golden Trout Wilderness and jeopardizing Cindy Wood (312) and her station in the Kern. When all was contained roughly a month and a half later over 150,000 acres had burned.

On the 20th of August at Wallace Creek I encountered a fire that had been abandoned. The fire had already begun working itself into the duff surrounding the fire ring. I spent the next hour extinguishing the fire.

Bubbs Creek trail as well as a section of the JMT around the Palisades was closed for a stint due to fire. Other small fires burned through out the park but insufficient knowledge is known about them.

B. Use Patterns

Backpackers

Most of the trail use by backpackers is centered along the JMT/PCT. Passes were nearly snow free very early in the year allowing backpackers to access the backcountry early in the spring. This was evident but the many illegal fire rings and trash encountered in bear boxes. JMT hikers were first seen in mid July and held steady until I left in late September. Climbing parties in July are the majority of the cross-country travel early and give way to fishing parties in August and September. Food storage and illegal fires are the nemesis. The difficulty in understanding the regulations in specific areas is the main contributing factor to these violations. I would encourage universal regulations between the two parks to standardize these confusing rules.

Stock

Meadows around Tyndall all opened on the specific "open" dates previously established. I contacted the first stock group on the 12th of July and use continued until I left in late

September. Tyndall meadow received significant use this year compared to last. Stock camps and high line areas were hit the hardest. Erosion and shearing were also witnessed. Wright Lake basin and Sheep Camp also were used heavily mostly by commercial outfits for spot fishing trips. Lake South America, the upper Kern, and Wallace Lake, continue to be a popular area for day rides and overnight trips for small stock parties. Milestone basin had a single stock party for two nights. These stock parties hit Tyndall with significant resource impacts. Not only limited to the camps and meadows themselves but also to trails making them up to 6 feet wide in areas. Sequoia/Kings pack station was seen cutting trails with a stock train. This practice practically creates a new trail itself. If we are to keep this area in a pristine state, action must be taken to prevent any additional damage to the parks resource.

Administrative

The Kern trail crew stayed at the stock camp below the station for a week in mid-July.

Military Overflights

Two overflights were reported in the Tyndall area this season. The first was reported on August 3rd. An F-16 was seen flying over Tawny Point (12,300+) at an elevation of 15,500 ft. This same aircrafts elevation around Mt. Whitney was around 14,000 ft. The second was reported on the 24th of September flying over Mt. Cal Tech. This was a F-18 and I was not given a follow up on this overflight.

C. Natural Resources

Bear Activity

There was not a reported bear related food reward in the Tyndall area this season although a few were seen. The Vidette Meadow to WheelBarrow camp continues to be a hot spot for bear activity. Education by Dave Gordan (116) and I have helped curb these break-ins but there continues to be a constant supply of stories by hikers that have stayed up all night due to the "bear in camp".

Wildlife

Unusual amounts of Mule deer were seen this summer. I contribute this to the mild winter and availability of accessible winter foliage. A family of Golden eagles has residence in the upper Kern and was seen on a regular basis. The Crabtree short-tailed weasel was seen in late September. A sow and two cubs were observed in Wright Lakes basin in late June and were periodically reported by observant hikers.

D. Cultural Resources

Archeological Sites

Frequent trips made to upper Tyndall Creek and Sheep camp revealed obsidian flakes and few projectile points. An archeological crew was in the Kern drainage and reported finding many new sites one being in the Tyndall area near Lake 3442m on the Mt. Brewer 7.5min. quad map.

E. Patrol Cabin

Tyndall Ranger Station

The station was broken into sometime this winter. The locks were sawed off and food and firewood were used. There were no signs of vandalism. The solar system was rewired and works without any hitches (finally). The chimney was cleaned and an ample supply of firewood is still available for next years use.

Drift Fences

The only drift fence in the Tyndall patrol area is located on the Tyndall Creek Kern River confluence. This fence was rebuilt in 2001 by the Kern trail crew.

Signs

Temporary signs were placed in bear boxes informing the public to take there trash with them when they leave, this also included anything left in their fire pits. It was difficult to gauge if this had an impact or not. I was still picking up abandoned trash bags at these sites.

F. Trails

Problem Areas

- Shepherds pass trail is still in need of an overhaul. In June, when the snow is still melting, portions of the trail 50m long are completely submerged in water. Sections of the trail are difficult to find encouraging multi trails and trampling vegetation.
- Lake South America Trail to the JMT. There is a saddle that has become a free for all over the sandy scree, creating erosion problems and difficult stock and backpacker travel. Consideration of trail work in these areas would be appreciated.

G. Camp Areas

Conditions

Tyndall Creek crossing, the Frog Ponds, Wallace Creek, and Junction Meadow are the most frequently used campsites. All these sites have bear boxes and food storage is rarely an issue at these sites. 4-5 tent pad sites are located at these places with a few less used, remote sites close by. Impacts in these areas include t.p. blooms, illegal fire rings, damaged trees for firewood use, trampled vegetation, and garbage.

Fire Rings and Firewood Availability

Three sided fire rings are located at Wallace Creek, Junction meadow, and a few campsites along the Kern. Most of these sites are stripped baron of all firewood resulting in visitors taking limbs from surrounding trees. I have dismantled 22 illegal fire rings throughout the season mostly in the upper Kern headwaters. This area gets hit by illegal fires constantly. Nearly every time I visited this area I would end up dismantling another fire ring. Half the problem is the confusing fire regulations. Depending on which drainage you're in dictates what elevation fires are allowed, if they're even allowed at all.

Park visitors already are bombarded with enough regulations and restrictions. A universal fire rule in Sequoia would be most helpful.

Food Storage

A majority of the people coming through Tyndall have food storage containers in compliance with the regulations north of Forester Pass and also utilize the bear boxes in the area. Food storage off the JMT/PCT is another issue. Many parties traveling off-trail or into the more remote areas of Tyndall have inadequate food storage. This is a combination of misinformation and lack of knowledge. I have not had a report of a bear obtaining food in the Tyndall and I feel that it's just a matter of time before it happens. A universal food storage rule would easily take care of this concern.

H. Permit System

Trailheads, Issuing Offices

Most of the traffic I have encountered has obtained their permits through Lone Pine, Mineral King, or Cedar Grove. Most information given has been accurate through the west side. The east side or more so the Lone Pine office on several occasions has given visitors the wrong or misleading information. I would be good for all new employees to be solid on the park and forest regulations.

I. Needs For Next Year

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| -Duct tape | -Maul |
| -Matches (strike anywhere) | -Window cleaner |
| -Propane (7gal.) | -Oxygen masks |
| -Utility cord | -nasal canulias |

J. Recommendations

-Keep AUO and sixth day overtime for Tyndall Ranger

This is critical to the preservation of the resource. The less coverage we administer in these use areas the more difficult it is to get a handle of the specific problems encountered. The Tyndall area is vast and remote requiring this extra day of patrol. Two days of idle time is too much. With the loss of AUO to the area the visitors in need of information regarding pass conditions, regulations, cross-country routes ect. will be limited to my hours of operation, and will be turned away without proper information. This would result in a higher frequency of accidents and resource impacts. The prevention of even one medivac or stampeding of a pristine meadow would more than pay for itself in the instatement of AUO for this ranger.

- Stock restrictions at Tyndall
- Universal fire rule
- Universal food storage regulations
- Trail restoration on Shepherds Pass and Lake S. America
- Leave-No-Trace stock training

- Food storage locker at Wheelbarrow camp (north of Forester)
- Blow-up Mt. Whitney shelter
- Make sure pack stations are familiar with park rules and regulations
- Better communication between NPS and Inyo NF Rangers regarding regulations