



Project Impacts

NSRC-FUNDED RESEARCH FINAL REPORT

Personal Contact Remains Effective Form of Mountain Summit Visitor Education and Stewardship

PROJECT AWARD YEAR AND TITLE:
2012

Managing Sustainable Recreation/Tourism on Mountain Summits of the Northern Forest

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Unmanaged impacts of recreation and tourism can often result in unacceptable changes in resource conditions and quality of visitor experience. Minimum impact education programs aim to reduce impacts of recreation by altering visitor behaviors.

NSRC researchers applied 3 on-site minimum impact education treatments on the trails and summit area of Sargent Mountain in Acadia National Park, Maine. Treatments, designed to encourage visitors to stay on marked trails and minimize off-trail travel, included a message delivered via personal contact, an ecological-based message posted on signs along the trail, or an amenity-based message posted on signs along the trail. A control condition of current trail markings and directional signs was also assessed. Researchers evaluated efficacy of the messaging through the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking of visitor travel and a survey.

Spatial analysis of GPS tracks revealed that personal contact led to less dispersion of visitors on the mountain summit with a 39-47% reduction in potential impact area when compared to the other treatments and control. Posted signs were ineffective at limiting off-trail use beyond what can be accomplished with trail markers and directional signs. Thus, personal contact by a uniformed ranger or volunteer may be the most effective means of message delivery for on-site minimum impact education. Off-trail behavior on the summit recorded by GPS tracks was considerably higher than self-reports via the survey, indicating a disconnect between perceived and actual behavior. Visitors tend not to notice resource impacts and few acknowledge causing impacts. Findings support continuation of the caretaker, steward, and ridgerunner programs on Northern Forest summits.



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