

# The Heart of the Matter

*New essential reading on parks, protected areas, and cultural sites*

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***Managing Outdoor Recreation: Case Studies in the National Parks***, by Robert E. Manning and Laura E. Anderson. Cambridge, MA: CABI, 2012.

*Reviewed by Robert G. Dvorak*

ALL THOSE WHO HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to enter Yellowstone National Park through its north entrance have been met with the unmistakable Roosevelt Arch. Its message represents to all visitors a critical mandate of the national park system: “For the benefit and enjoyment of the people.” However, this is not the only imperative for the national park system and its managers. The 1916 Organic Act also dictates that these parks are to be managed “in such manner and such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” Therein lays the challenge for those managers that must preserve, protect, and administer our national parks in response to the nearly 300 million visits that occur annually. How do we provide for public enjoyment of the national parks while protecting park resources? More specifically, how can we manage outdoor recreation within the national parks in a systematic and scientific way?

In their new book, *Managing Outdoor Recreation: Case Studies in the National Parks*, Robert E. Manning and Laura E. Anderson strive to make information on successful recreation management approaches more accessible to both professionals and students. They propose a systematic approach for identifying and implementing appropriate outdoor recreation management practices. This approach is grounded in the relevant scientific and professional literature and represents Manning and Anderson’s fundamental belief that outdoor recreation should be “managed by design, not by default.” It intends to provide a mechanism for addressing the broad range of management problems across the diverse units of the US national park system.

Part I of *Managing Outdoor Recreation* draws on the scientific and professional literature to create a foundation for a systematic approach to outdoor recreation management. It begins with an important review of several conceptual frameworks, such as the dual mission of public use and preservation in parks, parks as common property resources, and the operationalization of carrying capacity in a recreation management context. Manning and Anderson continue by describing the concept of limits of acceptable change, the identification of indicators and standards of quality, and how these concepts integrate into a threefold framework that

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considers the environmental, social, and managerial components of any park and outdoor recreation context. The review of these frameworks reminds us of the challenges of managing recreation in a park and natural resource context, and how these challenges should be met by practices that are both adaptive and objective-focused.

Following these conceptualizations, the next chapters examine the impacts of outdoor recreation and illustrate several management practices and strategies to address and mitigate these impacts. Impacts to park resources are described; specifically, effects on soil, water, vegetation, air, and wildlife. Manning and Anderson also consider impacts that have become increasingly more important in parks and natural area protection, such as those to soundscapes, the night sky, and historical and cultural resources. Impacts to the visitor experience are also examined. Issues related to crowding, visitor conflict, and depreciative behavior are discussed to understand how the quality of the experience in parks can be degraded. Lastly, the various impacts of recreation on facilities and park services are profiled. From attraction sites like Old Faithful in Yellowstone National Park, to the trails, interpretive facilities, campsites, and roads within parks, recreation use has recognizable and documentable effects on park infrastructure.

The authors acknowledge that a variety of management practices have been created to prevent and mitigate the impacts of recreation on park resources, visitor experiences, and park facilities. Many of these practices have been found to be effective. However, it is both important and useful to organize these practices into a classification system that can illustrate the diversity of alternatives and management objectives available to managers and planners. Manning and Anderson illustrate such a classification system based on four basic strategies: increasing supply, reducing the impact of use, increasing the durability of the resource/experience, and limiting use. Within these basic strategies, a range of potential tactics and practices exist. The authors organize these practices into six basic categories: information/education, use rationing and allocation, rules/regulations, law enforcement, zoning, and facility development/site design/maintenance. This classification system is supported by an extensive review of the literature and relevant examples of empirical research. To the reader, this is a clear strength within this section of the book, as the conceptualization of each tactic and practice may be considered for its appropriateness within various recreation management contexts.

In closing Part I of the book, Manning and Anderson propose a management matrix as a systematic and comprehensive way of thinking about managing the potential impacts of outdoor recreation. This structure of this matrix includes the 16 problems of management concern (resource, experiential, managerial) and the six categories of management practices within the four management strategies (increase supply, reduce impacts of use, increase durability, and limit use). In this manner, the matrix creates 96 interactions between the problems and potential practices. Collectively, it represents 384 potential ways in which management practices might be used to address problems (and these options are extensively described throughout the appendices of the book). To illustrate an example, a park may be facing the problem of impacts to wildlife due to recreation use. To address this problem, managers may select the strategy of “reducing the impact of use.” Within this strategy, an appropriate practice may be to inform and educate recreation users about this problem. These information and educational efforts may focus on promoting alternative times to visit that minimize

wildlife impacts, informing visitors about acceptable/unacceptable behaviors, and promoting alternative sites to disperse use.

The matrices that Manning and Anderson propose might best be described as a “taxonomy” of potential recreation management actions. At first glance, it may appear overly reductionistic and lacking freedom. However, this is not the apparent intent or utility. The authors are very clear the focus of this systematic approach is targeted at outdoor recreation, not all management aspects within a park or protected area. While interactions between range and resource management do exist within a park planning and management context, their approach is predicated on a belief that prescriptive planning that is issue- and objective-driven is necessary for professional outdoor recreation management. Such an approach also provides the means for explicit consideration of all possible management practices that apply to the range of outdoor recreation management problems.

The book continues in Part II by illustrating how these management matrices can be utilized. A series of 20 case studies within the US national park system are presented, each selected to represent as many of the 16 categories of management problems and the four management strategies and related practices as possible. This compilation is of immense value to the park planner, manager, outdoor recreation instructor, and student. Not only are the “crown jewels” of the national park system represented, but also what could be considered the “crown jewels” of issues related to outdoor recreation in parks. From winter use in Yellowstone National Park to river management on the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon, the case studies represent some of the most controversial and iconic problems that managers have faced in the last 25 years. In addition, many important issues and contexts that are often overlooked or ignored are featured. Threats to underwater resources in Biscayne National Park are described. Efforts to manage the quality of the night sky at Chaco Culture National Historical Park are examined. The development of a shuttle system in Zion National Park is investigated. In each of these cases, the impacts from outdoor recreation are explored and addressed utilizing diverse management practices and tactics.

The approach taken for each of these case studies is also very refreshing and accessible to the audience. Instead of relying heavily on philosophical debate, each case study focuses on the “on-the-ground” actions taken by managers and the results of these decisions. The context of the issue and location are also adequately given, allowing the reader to consider the success of management practices and potentially how such actions and their implications may be applied to similar issues and challenges.

In the final part of the book, Manning and Anderson reflect on lessons learned and provide a series of principles for managing outdoor recreation. They begin their reflection by re-emphasizing the dual mission of parks for providing public enjoyment while protecting park resources and the quality of the visitor experience. They also repeat the importance of a management-by-objective framework, which constitutes a rational, transparent, and traceable means for managing outdoor recreation. An important theme that emerges within these principles, though, is the importance of professional judgment in decision-making. Despite the application of the matrix that Manning and Anderson propose, its intent appears not meant to absolve management of the value-based judgment and decisions for which they are responsible. Circumstances and nuances regarding any outdoor recreation issue still

frame the context of management, “and after reasonable efforts to inform themselves, managers must ultimately exercise their professional judgment” and select those actions which are most appropriate. The authors further caution management of the temptation to rely on those management practices that are familiar, administratively easy, or commonly used. They also encourage that management should focus on the impacts of recreation use, not the use itself. A focus on the latter favors use limitations, generally seen as a management option of “last resort.”

Consideration of the systematic approach and matrices presented in *Managing Outdoor Recreation* does raise several interesting topics of debate. First, despite best intentions, what are the risks to flexibility and creativity in advocating for such a management approach? While the authors do caution against relying on those practices that are familiar or easy, does such an approach encourage the acceptance of “default” management actions? Are such tendencies a greater risk to the neophyte professional or student of outdoor recreation management? It may be worth greater reinforcement that responsibility falls upon managers, planners, and educators alike to embrace inventiveness and flexibility within the iterative, adaptive process of a management-by-objective framework. Second, could the matrices consider other factors that influence and are related to the quality of the visitor experience? While crowding, conflict, and depreciative behavior are issues that influence visitor experiences, other aspects of the experience can be threatened through recreation use. Experiences have been considered as emergent, dynamic, and meanings-based. Individuals’ identities and values influence these meanings and are associated with both the lived experience and the specific outdoor context. Such concepts are not immediately represented in the current matrices, but are important considerations in both outdoor recreation and protected area management. In fairness, these were not necessarily within the scope of this text and integrating meanings and the emergent, lived experience within Manning and Anderson’s systematic approach may be possible. These considerations may be most appropriate and best represented within the framework when management goals and objectives are being formulated, as a means to further represent the visitor experience, meanings, and values associated with a given protected area.

Manning and Anderson conclude by reminding us that outdoor recreation “should be managed by design, not by default.” This text makes an important contribution in furthering this principle of outdoor recreation management. For both recreation professionals and students alike, it is an accessible resource that articulates and demonstrates diverse options and actions available to managers and practitioners. The included cases studies provide concrete examples of management in action, while the framework and principles described are critical concepts that all professionals and student should investigate and understand within their professional practice. Thus, *Managing Outdoor Recreation* is an important contribution in the ongoing professional practice of outdoor recreation management in parks and protected areas.