Homelessness and Long-term Occupancy in National Forests and Grasslands

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INTRODUCTION

What’s in Store?

• Introduction
• Methods
• Results
• Management implications
• Concluding remarks
INTRODUCTION

Homelessness in the U.S.

SUBPOPULATION TRENDS, 2005-2013

www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/the-state-of-homelessness-2014
INTRODUCTION

Homeless on Public Lands

Virtually no data or literature on the incidence of homeless on public lands

- Proceedings of the 2nd Symposium on social aspects and recreation research – USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station, 1994
- Tynon & Chavez, Crime in national forests, 2006
- Southard, Homeless campers living on rural public lands, 1997
- Bottorff, Campi, Parcell, & Sbragia, Homelessness in the Willamette National Forest, 2012 MPA Thesis
INTRODUCTION

Homeless on Public Lands

Southard’s (1997) typology

• Voluntary nomadics
• Economic refugees
• Separatists

INTRODUCTION

Homeless on Public Lands

Why stay on public lands?

- Fear losing custody of kids or pets
- Lack of services in city
- Psychological illness
- Addiction/substance abuse
- Safety
INTRODUCTION

Homeless on Public Lands

Impacts

• Violations and criminal behavior
• Damage to natural and cultural/archeological features
• Conflict with other users
Methods

Qualitative

• Interviews with knowledgeable informants
• Rapid appraisal approach
• Next step is a web-based questionnaire for USFS LEOs
Results

• 4 interviews
  – Sociologist
  – 1 USFS Ranger
  – 2 USFS LEOs

• Terminology
  – Non recreational campers
RESULTS

Non Recreational Camper Impacts

Impacts on natural features

- Illegal fire pits/rings
- Damaged or removed vegetation (chopped down trees, cleared brush)
- Erosion, soil compaction and damage
- Riparian area damage (trampling sensitive areas)
RESULTS

Non Recreational Camper Impacts

Impacts on natural features (cont’d)

- Illegal fishing
- Poaching/illegal hunting
- Trash/litter and pollutant dumping
- Polluting streams/water
RESULTS

Non Recreational Camper Impacts

Impacts on other visitors

• Recreational users may be afraid or uncomfortable when homeless are around
• Begging, asking for food or cigarettes
• Break in to vacation homes adjacent to NF lands
RESULTS

Non Recreational Camper Impacts

Impacts on other visitors

• Steal wood from USFS or other structures
• Smells, sounds
• Syphon gas from vehicles
• Criminal acts within NRC
  - Assault & battery
  - Domestic violence
  - Rape
RESULTS

Non Recreational Camper Impacts on Management

- Dealing with non recreational campers takes time. Time away from other duties
- Costs and effort at clean up – USFS contracts out for trash removal and site clean up
- USFS not designed to accommodate the homeless
RESULTS

Non Recreational Camper Impacts on Management

- Coverage is a significant problem – non recreational campers typically very spread out
- Regulations are adequate, but need people to enforce them
- Cross agency reporting/tracking system
Potential Management Approaches

• Provide basic education programs to reduce environmental impacts
• Designate fee-free sites for extended stays
• Use non recreational campers as labor (clear brush) in return for food or stay
• Create stewardship philosophy – make them allies instead of opponents
Concluding Remarks

• Managing homeless occupancy on national forest lands is a persistent challenge for forest service law enforcement and staff.

• Homeless campers on national forests often have substantial impacts on the natural and social environment.

• No set policy for management exists and there is currently little research on homeless impacts on national forest lands.
Thank you. Questions?

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