

Wilderness Stewardship Plan:

Party Size

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks
California



Party size refers to the number of people, or the number of people and stock in a single group. The size of parties traveling and/or camping together in wilderness is managed to preserve the opportunities for solitude of other visitors and to reduce adverse impacts on the natural quality. However, party-size restrictions also affect the unconfined nature of wilderness recreation, and can affect the kinds of trips available to visitors. Different party sizes are considered across the alternatives, based on the overall objectives of each alternative.

Desired Condition for Party Size – Party size would be set at levels high enough to allow for a variety of experiences, but low enough to protect wilderness character from impacts.

Status Quo (Alternative 1) – Existing Party Size Limits

<u>Type of Trip</u>	<u>Maximum Party Size</u>
Hiking on-trail (day-use)	25
Hiking on-trail (overnight use)	15
Hiking off-trail (overnight and day-use)	15
Area specific limits	Redwood Canyon – 10 Temporary limits in five specific areas where there is a maximum party size of eight people (see Chapter 2).
Stock on-trail (day-use: including spot, dunnage, and day rides)	People: 25 Stock: 20 Combined: 45 (with some lower exceptions)
Stock on-trail (overnight use)	People: 15 Stock: 20 Combined: 35 (with some lower exceptions)
Stock off-trail (overnight and day use in areas specifically designated for off-trail stock use)	People: 15 Stock: 20 Combined: 35
Area-specific limits	Temporary limits in five specific areas where there is a maximum party size of eight people/stock or combination (see Chapter 2).

Alternatives – Party Size

All of the action alternatives in the Wilderness Stewardship Plan (WSP) have three party-size limits: the total number of people, the total number of stock, and the combined total of people and stock. The combined total of people and stock allowed in a party may be lower than the sum of the maximum numbers of people and stock allowed. This is limited primarily to protect opportunities for solitude and to control impacts from very large groups on the natural quality at camps. Off-trail party-size limits are lower than on-trail party-size limits in order to preserve greater solitude and prevent informal trail development.

Factors contributing to the different proposed party sizes include the past 10 years of wilderness-use data, the results of a wilderness-visitor survey in 2011, and WSP public comments. Other factors such as simplicity, fairness, consistency with neighboring land-management rules, the existence of other means of controlling total use, existing and projected use patterns, and the effects of party-size restrictions on the practicality of diverse trips on foot or with stock also contributed to the proposals.

Between 2002 and 2012, the average party size was about three people, and the average party traveling with stock had about four people and about six animals. In 2011, based on permit data, about 98% of stock parties traveled with 15 head or less, and about 98% of all parties had 10 people or less.

Alternative 2 (NPS Preferred): Emphasize Site-Specific Actions to Protect Wilderness	Alternative 3: Emphasize Opportunities for Primitive Recreation	Alternative 4: Emphasize Undeveloped and Noncommercial Recreation	Alternative 5: Emphasize Opportunities for Solitude
Hikers	Hikers	Hikers	Hikers
On-trail (day use): 25 On-trail (overnight use): 15 Off-trail (day and overnight use): 12	On-trail (day use): 25 On-trail (overnight use): 15 Off-trail (day and overnight use): 15	On-trail (day use): 25 On-trail (overnight use): 12 Off-trail (day and overnight use): 8	On-trail (day use): 20 On-trail (overnight use): 10 Off-trail (day and overnight use): 8
Stock Parties	Stock Parties	Stock Parties	Stock Parties
Day Rides: 20 people; 20 stock; combined maximum 40 On-trail (camping): 15 people; 20 stock; combined maximum 28 Off-trail (all use) in areas specifically designated for off-trail stock use: 12 people; 12 stock; combined maximum 14	Day Rides: 25 people; 25 stock; combined maximum 50 On-trail (camping): 15 people, 25 stock; combined maximum 40 Off-trail (all use) in areas specifically designated for off-trail stock use: 15 people; 25 stock; combined maximum 40	Day Rides: 15 people; 15 stock; combined maximum 30 On-trail (camping): 12 people; 15 stock; combined maximum 20 Off-trail (all use) in areas specifically designated for off-trail stock use: 8 people; 7 stock; combined maximum 11	Day Rides: 13 people; 13 stock; combined maximum 26 On-trail (camping): 10 people; 13 stock; combined maximum 18 No off-trail stock use
<i>This table provides a brief summary of the alternatives related to party size. Additional site-specific restrictions for hikers and stock users vary between alternatives. The complete information may be found in Chapter 2 of the WSP/DEIS.</i>			

Why are we proposing to modify party sizes in wilderness?

The 2011 wilderness visitor survey found that large parties of more than 10 people on trails were noticed by 37% of visitors, all of whom felt that the presence of large groups detracted from their enjoyment of wilderness. Approximately 49% of wilderness visitors who responded to the visitor survey felt that the number of people in large groups should be smaller, 50% felt it should be the same, and 1% felt it should be larger. Recreation-ecology research has also shown that a relatively small amount of traffic off-trail can have a relatively large and lasting impact on natural resources compared to traffic on-trail.

Where can I find more information?

Party size is addressed as Element 6 under each alternative in Chapter 2 of the WSP/DEIS, and is analyzed in Chapter 4. In addition, Table 48 and Table 49 provide summary information that allows you to look at the differences between alternatives.

How can I submit comments?

The National Park Service uses a web-based system, called the *Planning, Environment, and Public Comment* (PEPC) system, to give people access to current plans and related documents that are open for review and comment. Go to <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/sekiwild> to find the WSP/DEIS and other documents and maps that will be helpful in your review. We encourage you to use this system to submit your written comments on the plan. Comments will also be accepted by mail or hand delivery, or by fax to:

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