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Summary

The most common activity among Lost Coast Trail users is hiking—be it day hiking or overnight backpacking. Nature study/enjoying scenery and wildlife viewing also rate as important activities during the summer months.

The primary motivation for recreation among LCT visitors is to enjoy the sights, sounds and smells of nature (90% rated it as very important). Solitude is also very important to visitors. Providing for quality outdoor experiences, then, should entail adequate resource protection and provide opportunities for achieving solitude.

Thus it follows that most visitors felt use limits should be implemented when overuse occurs. Comments regarding how to determine when overuse occurs revolve around themes of abundance of litter, disturbance of wildlife, and crowding.

For all visitors, the most preferred and commonly used source of information is friends and relatives. Additionally, visitors feel this source of information is very helpful, overall. First-time visitors to the LCT used friends and relatives most frequently, but also used maps quite frequently as well. First-time visitors were also more likely to contact the BLM for information than were experienced users. The internet is quite popular among users—21% of all visitors indicated using it as their primary source of information. Most respondents indicated using the BLM webpage, but also many were unsure of which webpage they had viewed.

Though a minority of visitors had Leave No Trace exposure (pamphlet or video), knowledge of LNT practices is generally high, with the majority of visitors aware of the correct practices. Compliance with LNT practices, on the other hand, is not as pervasive as is desired. It appears that most visitors are doing the right practice, but the comments included by respondents illustrates the frequency of bad habits. Very common comments for noncompliance include being uninformed about practices, and not contacting the BLM prior to the trip. Practices that people listed as not having complied with commonly included washing in streams, human waste disposal, and not having or not properly using bear canisters.

In an effort to minimize bear encounters use of mandatory bear-proof food storage canisters has been implemented along the LCT. Nearly 84% of overnight visitors reported using bear-proof food storage canisters. Of these, 70% rented the canister(s); 27% owned the canister(s), and 3% both owned and rented canisters. Eighteen visitors (9% of our sample) said they did not know they were required to use a bear-proof canister; this was also the most common reason given for not using one (13 visitors), followed by not having/owning one (5), not wanting to carry the extra weight (3), and canisters being too expensive (3). Nine percent (9%) of our sample also incorrectly identified hanging as a correct method of food storage along the LCT. Fourteen groups reported that a bear visited their campsite; 13 of those groups used a canister. Nevertheless, 3 groups using a canister reported that a bear still obtained food. These visitors indicated that despite using a canister, some food was inadvertently left out of the canister, or there was too much food and/or trash to fit into the canister.

Although only 26% of visitors reported reading the Leave No Trace Outdoor Skills and Ethics pamphlet provided by the BLM, visitors who did read it were more likely than expected to use a

canister than those who did not read it (chi-square=6.3). First-time visitors to the LCT were also more likely than expected to use a canister than were return visitors (chi-square=17.7). Primary information source used by visitors in trip planning influenced their use of canisters (chi-square=39.4). All 37 visitors who reported the BLM as their primary source of trip planning information used a canister; those who reported friends or relatives as their primary information source were less likely than expected to use a canister. Miles traveled to visit the LCT also influenced use of canisters (chi-square=58.8); visitors living within 100 miles of the LCT were less likely than expected to use a canister, while those living more than 100 miles away were more likely to use a canister.

Support for the required use of canisters was strong—85% of visitors indicated they would somewhat (20.5%) or strongly (64.5%) support the required use of canisters. Support for the installation of bear-proof food storage lockers at popular backcountry campsites was mixed: 49% of visitors were in favor, 32% were opposed, and 19% were neutral.

Support for two other regulations was moderately high – 73% of respondents supported a ban on campfires during fire season, and 63% supported a required campfire permit (including stoves during fire season).

Several questions new to the 2003 survey asked visitors about hypothetical and actual encounters with BLM rangers along the Lost Coast Trail. 70% of visitors supported (38% strongly, 32% somewhat) having non-law enforcement backcountry rangers on the trail to provide information. Only 42% supported (18% strongly, 24% somewhat) having law enforcement rangers patrol the backcountry, while 39% of visitors opposed (21% strongly, 18% somewhat). Only 37% of visitors supported (13% strongly, 24% somewhat) having non-law enforcement backcountry rangers visit their campsite, while 46% opposed (21% strongly, 25% somewhat).

However, responses of visitors to actual encounters with various BLM employees were quite favorable. Although only one third of visitors reported encountering a BLM ranger in the backcountry, 77% who met a ranger felt that the experience was positive; 46% said it was educational and/or helpful. Only 4% felt the encounter was negative, and only 6% said the encounter, whether positive or negative, interfered with their experience.

Selected trends from 1997 to 2003

In 1997, the mean importance rating for solitude was 3.7, and the mean ability to achieve solitude was 3.42 (both measured on a 5-point scale with 5 being most important and most fully achieved). In 2003 solitude importance was 3.45 and ability to achieve solitude was 3.22. Both mean importance and ability to achieve solitude were slightly lower in 2003 than in 1997. This potentially could be evidence of the beginning of a shift in the visitor population, known as visitor displacement and succession, in which visitors who highly value the importance of solitude and are more sensitive to crowding, over time stop visiting an area as it becomes more heavily used, and are essentially “replaced” by visitors who are more tolerant of the reduced opportunity for solitude.

In 1997, the average “least number of encounters with other groups on the trail in a single day” was 2.5; in 2003 it was 2.9 (even after removing two large outliers). The average “most encounters in a single day” was 6.4 in 1997 and 7.8 in 2003 (again, after removing two large outliers). For “number of other groups camped within sight or sound,” the average “least number in a single day” was 0.7 in 1997; in 2003 it was 1.0 (after removing one large outlier); the average “most number of other groups camped within sight or sound in a single day” was 2.2 in 1997 and

3.3 in 2003 (again, after removing one large outlier). In the 1997 study, 12% of respondents felt they had too many trail encounters; in 2003 21% felt this way. In 1997, 70% said they had neither too few nor too many trail encounters; by 2003 this number had dropped to 59%. For groups camped within sight or sound—in 1997, 20% of respondents said they had too many other groups camped within sight or sound of them; in 2003, this number had increased to 29%. In 1997, only 10% of respondents reported that “too many people in the area at the same time” was a major to moderate problem; by 2003 this number had risen to 16.6%.

Visitors’ perceptions on limiting use of the Lost Coast Trail have remained steady from 1997 to 2003. As in 1997 (47%), the plurality of 2003 respondents (49%) felt that no limits are needed now, but that limits should be implemented if/when overuse occurs in the future. However, given the possibility of visitor displacement and succession described above, one would expect the responses to this question to remain steady even in the face of increasing use.

In 1997, 27% of respondents felt that the behaviors of others interfered with their enjoyment of the Lost Coast Trail, whereas in the present study only 16% reported such conflict. This is likely due to the elimination of OHV’s from Black Sands Beach, as 58% of the interference in 1997 was due to OHVs. In 2003, the plurality of the interference came from hiking groups (39%) and groups camped within sight or sound (34%).

From 1997 to 2003, how visitors felt about controls on use has not changed greatly. On the list of possible use limit strategies, the largest change was for the item “limit the maximum number of people per group,” which changed from a mean score of 2.5 in 1997 to 2.1 in 2003, meaning there is more support for this action in 2003 than there was in 1997 (1=strongly support; 5=strongly oppose). In fact, this use limit strategy was the second most strongly supported of all the use limit strategies in 2003 (after the item “achieve better spacing by providing better information on when heavy use occurs”). Also, when asked in a separate question, “Do you feel there should be a limit to the size of groups visiting the LCT?” 55% of respondents answered Yes in 2003, up from 49% in 1997. Support for limiting the size of groups appears to be solidifying. Group size limits of 5-6, 8, or 10 people per group seem to have the most support. Not surprisingly, we note that the percentage of respondents reporting “too many large groups” as a major to moderate problem increased from 7% in 1997 to 10.6% in 2003.

Willingness to pay has not changed significantly since 1997. In 1997, 83.3% of respondents indicated they would be willing to pay to visit the Lost Coast Trail; this number dropped to 80.9% in 2003.

Litter appears to be less of a problem now than in 1997. In 2003, only 12% of respondents reported that litter along the trail or in campsites was a major to moderate problem, down from 30% in 1997. The percentage of respondents reporting human waste as a major or moderate problem dropped from 14% in 1997 to 7.6% in 2003.

Trail conditions seem to be improving somewhat – in 1997, 12% of respondents reported trail maintenance as a major to moderate problem; this dropped to 7.5% in 2003. In 1997, 22% of respondents said “trails poorly marked” was a major to moderate problem; this dropped to 14.4% in 2003.

In 2003, only 2.9% of respondents said that “motor vehicle tracks visible on the beach” was a major to moderate problem, down from 19% in 1997. Also, either there are fewer low flying aircraft, or else visitors are simply not as bothered by them – in 1997, 9% of respondents reported low flying aircraft as a major to moderate problem; this number dropped to 4.3% in 2003.

Finally, there are some improving trends in terms of the grades that visitors gave the BLM for providing services and facilities, as follows (since a grade of A=1, B=2, C=3, and D=4, the lower the score, the better the grade).

	<u>1997</u>	<u>2003</u>
Clean restrooms	2.6	1.48
BLM people in the area are professional and competent	2.0	1.42
Able to leave a phone message for managers	2.4	1.84
Telephone requests handled without delay	1.9	1.45
Brochures/maps clearly communicate information about recreation opportunities	2.3	1.88
Information signs at trailheads have necessary information	2.4	2.03
Prompt response to written requests	2.0	1.57
Helpful directional signs to the area	2.7	2.43