Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall today appealed to the increasing millions of visitors to Interior-administered recreation areas throughout the United States to "arrive safely, play safely, and return home safely."

During the peak vacation period now beginning, areas managed by the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Bureau of Reclamation will experience more than 173 million visitor-days of use, far greater than the 1964 total, the previous record year, Secretary Udall said. The 1964 figure was approximately 162 million.

Secretary Udall said that newly opened Federal recreation areas, the bargain-rate Federal Recreation/Conservation Sticker, and the "See the U.S.A." campaign will motivate more people to seek the out of doors for enjoyment.

"The hundreds of sites we administer for the public have been freed of as many hazards as possible," Secretary Udall commented. "Safeguards have been increased, but protective devices cannot be installed for all the millions of acres, both in land and water, that form the public-use areas. The public 1 s regard for its own safety will be equally effective in curbing accidents."

Secretary Udall said the intensified accident-prevention efforts in the Department are part of President Johnson's "Mission SAFETY -70," which calls for a 30 percent reduction in Federal work injuries by 1970. The program emphasizes not only increased safety among Government workers, but for all people who visit Federal parks, forests, buildings, and other sites.

The five Interior agencies administering public-use areas reported that .operative safety work with non-Federal groups has been exceptionally helpful handling a greater number of visitors. They range from cleanup campaigns to water-safety classes.

Following are summaries of the recreation opportunities, the anticipated 1965 use, and safety programs:

Fish and Wildlife Service

The Fish and Wildlife Service administers nearly 300 National Wildlife Refuges totaling about 28 million acres, including lakes and streams. These areas are managed primarily for various species of wildlife, but use by the public is welcome as long as the basic purposes of the refuges are not jeopardized. Picnicking, swimming, boating, fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, and wildlife observation are among the activities.

Visitor days this year are expected to total about 15 million in keeping with the steady eight percent increase per year in recent years.

Water safety and fire prevention are stressed. New-style wooden life preservers have replaced conventional preservers and loss to vandalism has dropped considerably. Public awareness is helping

prevent damage to signs and other safety installations. Designated swimming areas now are roped-in during periods of peak use. Roads have been improved to curb vehicular accidents.

Bureau of Land Management

Although it has no method for making an accurate estimate of the number of visitors to public land areas, the Bureau of Land Management reports there has seen a "tremendous upsurge" in recreation use of the 464 million acres it administers in 11 Western States and Alaska. The Bureau now operates 112 recreation sites on the public lands in Utah, New Mexico, Nevada, California, Idaho, Oregon, Wyoming, and Alaska. Other public land areas available for recreation are in Washington, Arizona, Montana, and Colorado.

Picnicking, camping, hiking, water skiing, swimming, fishing, hunting, and even gold-panning are among the wide range of outdoor recreation activities found on the public lands.

Whenever possible, the Bureau of Land Management provides signs, guardrails, clean drinking water, comfort stations, boat-landing sites, and other facilities. BLM, however, must lean heavily on public cooperation in preventing accidents. This is because of the great expanse administered and the remoteness of many of the most appealing areas.

Many communities, recognizing the value of tourism, have helped the Bureau improve safety by removing broken glass and other hazardous materials left by visitors. In Las Vegas, Nevada, public-spirited citizens participated in a cleanup day at the Red Rocks Canyon site being developed by BLM.

Bureau of Indian Affairs

Of the approximately 50 million acres of Tribal and Allotted Land administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the following are available for recreational purposes: More than 8 million acres of land, 332,000 water-surface acres, 363 miles of streams, and 66 miles of lakeshore.

Reservations offer outstanding opportunities for fishing, hunting, hiking, picnicking, camping, and nature study. In 1964 the public spent more than 2,800,000 visitor days enjoying recreational sites. This year's total is expected to exceed 3,000,000. At many locations on land under Bureau of Indian Affairs jurisdiction, public recreation facilities have been developed by commercial enterprises. These include resorts, motels, swimming and picnic areas, and boating equipment.

Whenever possible, the Bureau will utilize the services of Job Corps members to increase the number of safety installations to protect the public, including warning signs, fencing, and guardrails.

Bureau of Reclamation

The Bureau of Reclamation administers more than 200 water-oriented recreation areas in the 17 Western States. These consist of 3.5 million acres of land and 1-1/3 million acres of water surface. Thousands of additional acres will be added this year when Yellowtail Reservoir in Montana-Wyoming and Clark Canyon Reservoir in Montana begin to fill.

Visitor-days' use of Reclamation recreation areas is expected to exceed 36 million this year, continuing a trend that has been a 50 percent increase since 1960.

For the ninth successive year, the Bureau is conducting "Operation Westwide,“ a safety program

developed in cooperation with the American Red Cross. The program emphasizes water safety and accident prevention to reduce drownings in irrigation ditches, lakes, canals, and other installations built by the Bureau.

The Bureau reports that about $10 million annually is being invested by public agencies, concessionaires, camp operators, and others to build public-use facilities at Reclamation areas, such as access and interior roads, parking areas, beach equipment, camp and picnic grounds, comfort stations, drinking fountains, docks, and boat-launching ramps. In addition, fences and similar protective devices are being installed to supplement the large number already in place to protect the public.

Eight new or expanded recreation areas were opened at Reclamation projects during the past year.

National Park Service

The National Park Service administers more than 200 areas throughout the United States which are destined to handle a new high of 110 million visits this year compared with the 102 million total of 1964. In addition, visits to sites in the National Capital Parks area will total about 9 million.

Thus far, 1965 visits to Park areas are running about 7 percent ahead of 1964.

Including the nine new sites authorized by the 88th Congress, the Park Service now administers more than 26 million acres of Federal land for public use.

Many additional safety improvements have been made in efforts to protect visitors during the 1965 season. These include handrails along danger zones, abrasive coatings on slippery walking surfaces, more fire-prevention equipment, a larger number of warning and direction signs. The Service is appealing again to feminine visitors to avoid wearing high heels while walking in rugged areas.

Water safety has been improved by providing rescue boats and maintaining air patrols at key locations. The popular Lake Mead Recreation Area, which had more than three million visits last year, will have 12 trained lifeguards at supervised swimming beaches. Wherever possible, latest weather information will be posted at boat-launching areas. To help keep water-based accidents to a minimum, the Park Service distributes safety leaflets, regularly inspects boating equipment of concessionaires, and maintains safety patrols at such special events as ski races, raft races, and regattas.