

Recreationists Need to Give Back



In the river, fishermen are fishing. In the hills above the rivers, hikers are walking and backpackers are camping, mountain bikers are riding and horseback riders are packing and climbers are scaling. And downstream, canyoneers are exploring and sightseers are looking and birders are stalking ...

It's good people get outside and appreciate the land. But behind this boom is a nagging question: Where is the accompanying boom of people standing by the land? Where is the army of defenders fighting to keep the "public" in our public land?

Outdoor recreationists claim to be environmentally aware, and they preach the right to use public lands. For too many, though, calories burned while playing is all the energy they have for the land.

"Sentiment without action is the ruin of the soul," said Henry Thoreau 150 years ago. It's still true. It's time to give back, folks. To be environmentally aware means to be environmentally active, and the right to use our public lands comes with the responsibility to do something for those lands.

Why? Here a few good reasons, just for starters.

- Because recreation – and the places needed for recreation – needs to be recognized for its importance to everyone. It's the nature of our present world: Although the land has a right to exist for its own intrinsic reasons, in modern society uses must justify themselves economically and politically. Here, silence is not golden, it's fatal.
- Because recreationists need to improve their images. Believe it or not, for example, some people think bicyclists are idiotic trail and road Nazis, that rock climbers are rude little children with no respect for private property, and that hunters are armed drunks. It takes effort to dispel these harmful ideas. It takes education. It takes involvement. Until then, expect more rules and regulations and lock-outs.
- And lastly, the most obvious and moral reason: Because love and defense go hand in hand. Because once it's gone, it ain't coming back. Because if we don't do it, who will? Because our kids – and our kids' kids – are going to need these places, these sacred, sane spaces, even more than we do now.

So, sure, spend the day boating, floating, casting, climbing, wandering, riding ... then, sure, go sharing stories about your great days in the sun. But after that, there's that meeting to go to, that letter to write, that place to defend, the river to fight for, that voice of yours to raise ...

The land needs it.