

Feared crowd fails to visit Yosemite Park

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, Calif. (AP) — A feared influx of cars and people failed to inundate Yosemite National Park over the Memorial Day weekend.

Hoping to avoid the traffic jams and crammed parking lots of a week earlier, Yosemite officials warned that they would shut entrances if too many people descended on the park during the three-day weekend.

They didn't have to. "It's nice, it's really nice," park spokeswoman Debi Drake said Sunday. "There are a lot of people, but it's not like it was a week ago when we were gridlocked at 10 a.m."

Delays of up to five hours

were predicted in television announcements, newspapers and on highway signs.

"The word obviously got out that we only had so much space," said Kris Fister, another park service spokeswoman. "People heeded the advice we gave them."

Just a week before, tourists without reservations were forced to wait up to three hours as all the park's entrances were temporarily closed.

Park officials blamed the closures on heavy winter snowfall which blocked access to two major roads within Yosemite and forced tourists into a smaller portion of the park's wilderness. The heavy winter precipi-

tation — following a six-year drought — also has rejuvenated wildlife and waterfalls, attracting more sightseers.

A week ago business was thriving for Ray Standley, owner of the Fish Camp General Store near Yosemite. Expecting even more tourists for the Memorial Day weekend, he stocked up. But on Sunday sales were slow, only about half of last year when a record 73,565 people and 25,367 cars entered the park during the holiday weekend.

"I've had days in the middle of the week better than the day I had yesterday," he said. "You stock up heavy for this and then you get shot down. Let's just say

it costs."

Standley said the park service may have too sternly warned visitors to stay away.

"If you're thinking of coming up to Yosemite and you knew you had to wait that long, I don't think you'd come," he said. "I do believe they could strike a happy medium. A five-hour wait is one heck of a long time."

Those who did make the trek were happy they came.

"The worry was whether the park would be able to keep people away, and they've done it dramatically," said visitor Scott Harms of Danville.

"It's gorgeous — the rivers are gorgeous," said Rae Sullivan of Los Angeles.

Officials question tough drug laws

(AP) — Eighteen-year-old Mike Aguirre is serving 51 months in federal prison for selling small amounts of the drug LSD, an offense that might have drawn probation and a short term in jail if the case had been prosecuted in state court.

Some lawyers and judges are questioning tough sentencing guidelines for federal drug convictions, saying the government may be wasting money by locking up people for minor crimes.

"Are we winning the war on drugs, or are we spending the treasury to satisfy some political program?" asked U.S. District Judge James Redden of Portland.

Last February, Aguirre, of Central Point, was homeless, moving from one friend's house to the next, delivering pizzas and trying to stay in school. Eventually he landed in the home of a fellow track team member, Steve Thomson, whose parents were very helpful, Aguirre says.

"I had no place to live," Aguirre said of Dan and Judy Thomson. "They would feed me and help me out with things."

But last February, the couple were arrested for dealing in LSD. Aguirre was charged in the same federal case for selling small amounts of the illegal hallucinogen.

Aguirre was sent to prison for 51 months under a complex set of federal rules aimed at getting tough on drug crimes.

Even though Congress is considering changes in federal prison sentencing guidelines, critics say the revisions don't go far enough.

"I think we're wasting an enormous amount of money," said Redden. "I think we've tried this approach long enough to at least convince me we're going down the wrong track."

In its "The State of Criminal Justice" report in February, the American Bar Association noted that violent crime is increasing while drug use is decreasing nationwide. Yet federal efforts are increasingly focused on punishing drug crimes, the report noted.

The number of drug offenders in federal prison has more than doubled since 1981. Currently, almost 60 percent of the prison inmates are serving time for drug violations, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

In 1991, the federal government spent \$10.8 billion annually for drug law enforcement. Meanwhile, the federal expenditure was \$1.4 billion for drug abuse prevention and \$1.7 billion for drug treatment, according to U.S. Department of Jus-

tice. Some critics say the sentencing guidelines are merely a political tool for Congress.

"A whole lot of this is based on politics — which political party can seem to be the toughest on crime to placate the public," says Nkechi Taifa, legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union in Washington, D.C. "I really feel the whole public debate on crime needs to shift."

Taifa says the law should provide more prevention and treatment programs and conserve expensive prison beds for violent offenders.

But supporters of the tough sentencing guidelines say they reduce crime.

The number of methamphetamine laboratories operating in the state has declined since the guidelines were adopted. So have drug-related crimes like burglaries and bank robberies, says Assistant U.S. Attorney Barry Sheldahl, chief of the criminal division for the district of Oregon.

The guidelines also have met other goals that led Congress to establish them, Sheldahl says, including a "truth in sentencing" policy that prevents early parole.

Campsites will be busy this summer

(AP) — Solitude will be hard to come by this summer at public campgrounds throughout Oregon.

"It's a madhouse," said Richard Wilde, a spokesman for the Oregon State Parks Division. "I would say it's going to be another very busy summer. The major thing is to plan ahead."

Although finding a spot at one of the division's 50 campgrounds may be difficult, a Willamette National Forest spokesman says there's usually an open site somewhere in the forest's 83 campgrounds.

"I would certainly say it's going to be an average or better year, unless the weather continues to be dreary all summer," said Randy Dunbar, recreation staff officer for the Willamette National Forest.

Of the 50 state campgrounds, 13 accept reservations and are rapidly becoming booked for the summer.

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