

## FYI WILDERNESS ACT

In addition to national parks and national forests, the United States has wilderness areas. In 1964, realizing that the growing population would strain the natural resources of the country, U.S. Congress enacted the Wilderness Act, which set aside large pieces of

land to be retained in their primeval state: “areas where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

Use of these areas is highly restricted. Although there have been exceptions made, in general, the following are not allowed in federal wilderness areas:

- Commercial enterprises,
- Permanent or temporary roads,
- Motorized or mechanical vehicles, including boats, snowmobiles, and bicycles, and
- Landing of aircraft.

Even with good intentions, ecotourists still may have a negative impact on a destination. How do individual tourists threaten the natural environment? One way is simply by blazing trails while walking through nature. One person walking through a wilderness area may not have any significant impact on the area, but 10,000 people within a short period certainly will. The simple action of trampling grass multiplied by 10,000 can lead to erosion of land. For example, several of New York State’s Adirondack Mountain peaks are now bare owing to hiker traffic. And driving through a natural area can cause more damage. The manufacture and promotion of “off-road” vehicles may be the biggest threat to nature. To view ever more remote areas, travelers and tour operators are venturing farther into our national forests and parks, scaling fragile rock formations, and converting dirt paths into rutted mud holes. Left unchecked these actions can cause irreparable harm.

Since its birth, ecotourism has been defined in various ways and used as a marketing term with growing popularity for any number of tourism attractions and tours. It has come to encompass a wide variety of nature-based activities, from hard to soft. This explosion in the use of the term makes some tourism experts now maintain that the word ecotourism “has been applied so widely that it has in many regards become meaningless (p. 1168).<sup>21</sup> Table 13.1 provides some examples of the common terms that have been adopted as descriptors and lumped together to describe ecotourism and related activities.

David Weaver says such dismay over what many consider to be indiscriminate use is not necessary and suggests today’s ecotourism should be defined as “a form of **nature-based tourism** that strives to be ecologically, socio-culturally, and economically sustainable while providing opportunities for appreciating and learning about the natural environment or specific elements thereof” (p. 105).<sup>22</sup> Weaver suggests ecotourism now encompasses the following three core elements.

1. Attraction of natural environments, so ecotourism is nature based.
2. Emphasis on learning as an outcome of ecotourism for the tourist that differentiates ecotourism from other more hedonistic forms of “nature-based” tourism, such as Sun, sea, and sand; skiing, trekking, or rafting.
3. High desire for sustainability of the natural attraction and the native people of the region.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 13.1** Common Terms Used to Describe Ecotourism and Related Activities

| Adventure Tourism  | Green Tourism        |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Low-impact tourism | Nature-based tourism |
| Rural tourism      | Sustainable tourism  |
| Wilderness tourism | Responsible tourism  |