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Comments: I run the website focused on the Boundary Waters, and I have gathered a lot of permit data. A trend that bothers me and many others is the prevalence of cancelling permits just before a trip, especially for entry point permits that were previously sold out. Cancelling a permit just before a trip does not allow enough time for someone else to see it and plan a trip, thereby depriving that individual of the experience.

During 2023, 5680 permits that were previously sold out were returned to the pool. Of those 5680, 1780 (31%) were eventually rebooked.

2373 of the 5680 were cancelled within two weeks of the permit date. Only 384 of the 2373 (16%) were rebooked. The percentage of rebookings vastly improve if the permits are cancelled over 2 weeks before; it improves to approximately 38%. Another significant jump happens at about 2 months before the permit date; the rebooking percentage is around 45% then.

Especially concerning are the permits that are cancelled the day of the permit. Individuals may have cancelled these permits a couple days prior, but the system does not return the permits to the available pool right away. (I understand the reasons for this, and I agree that it is needed to avoid the buying and selling of permits.) 780 permits became available the day of permit date, many times in the afternoon or the evening of the permit date. Only 4 of these 780 permits were used.

I have attached an analysis with summarized numbers. The original data is available upon request.

The only permits in the analysis above are ones for entry points and dates that were completely sold out at some point during the year. These tend to be the popular and hard-to-get permits, and so this trend is concerning with these entry points. Many more people could be enjoying the wilderness at their preferred entry points.

If the permit reservation system remains the same, I propose that permit cancellations within 2 weeks of the permit date do not be given refunds. Currently the nonrefundable period is only 2 days before the permit date, and the data shows that people are waiting until 2 days before to cancel. Extending the nonrefundable period to 14 days would encourage people to cancel sooner and allow others to use the permits.