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Comments: Under the reforms of St. Louis, there were often examinations of old verbal agreements between a lord and the feudal peasants of his land. The concern was with the justice of any given arrangement, and the litmus test was the long-standing traditions concerning the use of resources.

It may happen that a peasant cut down three trees from the forest for his winter firewood, and the noble would object to the amount. He might argue that it was only 2 trees agreed to be cut per household, and that was the rate set four generations before. The rejoinder may be that winters were shorter in great-grandpa's time, or that for the last three generations always took 3, or 4, and that 3 was less than usual.

Special judges were appointed to learn the facts of each case and make a ruling. Sometimes it would be that the formal agreement trumped the informal, or sometimes the recent norms took standing over older norms discarded years before; maybe even vice versa.

It is this sort of position that the NFS finds itself in: judging between the land and the users of the land. There are many factors to consider, ecological, recreational, economical, etc.

My personal belief is that policies should be first and foremost pro-human and pro-use. This is the idea behind the phrase, "Man was not made for the Sabbath." Any judge that would elevate the status of nature over man should (and I mean this literally) take his/her own life, for the very fact of existence necessitates the use and impact of natural resources.

A second point to consider when considering land-use is the current norms around it. Climbing is part of the use and culture of the Red River Gorge ecological area and has been awhile. It is always possible to go back to a time in history when this wasn't so, just as it is always possible to go back to a time when the NFS did not exist, nor did the United States of America, nor native tribes in North America, nor humans in the world. (Sauce that is good for the goose is sauce that is good for the gander.)

Climbing is very well self-regulated, as well. Guidance and suggestions are always welcome to help climbers minimize impact on the land. However, a heavy-handed diktat approach is adversarial to a group that has made good efforts at achieving similar goals.

When considering land-use regulations, ultimately I urge you to favor use in its current forms, and to resist the regulatory urge that, in practice, steals joy from those who would comply and spurs rebellion from those who would not.