MDC case study: Tourism in the UK national parks

The UK's National Parks include some of the country's most beautiful natural landscapes, including coasts, mountains and forests. In 1949, the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was passed in order to protect the UK's areas of natural beauty and ensure that everyone could enjoy them today and in the future.

There are currently 12 national parks across England and Wales, including Dartmoor, the New Forest, the Lake District, the Peak District, the Yorkshire Dales and Snowdonia.

Case Study: Lake District National Park

![Grasmere in the Lake District](image)

The Lake District National Park was created in 1951. Covering 880 square miles, it is the UK's largest national park and receives 12 million visitors a year. People come to the Lake District for many reasons, including hill walking, rock climbing, mountain biking, fishing and boating. They also come to visit historical buildings, or just to enjoy the beautiful lakes and mountains.

Balancing different interests

The park is managed by the National Parks Authority (NPA), which attempts to balance the conflicting priorities of different park users. For example:

- The protection of the park's environment, wildlife and natural features - things that can be harmed by excessive tourism. This is not only the Authority's job, but is also powerfully lobbied for by conservation and wildlife groups.

- Tourists who come to enjoy the park need roads, parking, accommodation, shops and restaurants which are not necessarily going to be good for the countryside.

- Local businesses may want to encourage more and more visitors.
• Farmers, who may be concerned about damage to fences and livestock by walkers and their dogs.
• Local residents, who may be worried about congestion, littering, noise pollution and the erosion of footpaths.

If these different interests are not carefully balanced, the result could be damage to the environment, local people becoming upset or even hostile, and tourists being put off visiting the park.

**Sustainability in the Lake District**

Here are some of the measures that have been adopted to help maintain the Lake District for future generations:

![The Lake District](image)

• The National Trust and other conservation groups have undertaken footpath maintenance. Some paths have been rebuilt or access restricted to reduce the effects on paths and vegetation.

• Public transport has been improved and subsidised, for example the Langdale Rambler bus service. Visitors are encouraged to use the buses instead of bringing their cars into the national park.

• Restricted parking zones have been set up in some villages, for example in Elterwater. The car park on the edge of the village has been expanded and parking on grass verges and near houses has been restricted.

• Raising awareness of conservation issues for visitors with posters and leaflets at tourist information and visitor centres.

• A 10mph speed limit was introduced on Windermere in March 2005. The lake had become congested with powerboats and water skiers and noise from the speedboats was spoiling the lake for other users such as swimmers and canoeists. There was also concern that the wake from powerboats has caused shore erosion and that boats had contributed to
pollution and the disappearance of reed beds in the lake. Conservationists welcomed the new speed limit, but speedboat owners, water-skiers, and boat companies around the lake objected to the change. Businesses have been affected and boat users have had to find alternative lakes.

**Conservation and management in the Lake District**

The popularity of tourism in the Lake District means there is a demand for more visitor facilities such as hotels and leisure complexes, car parks, marinas and cable cars.

Many of the impacts of tourism are positive, but others present challenges which need to be overcome if tourism in the Lake District is to be sustainable.

**Advantages of tourism**

- Tourism provides employment and income for local people.
- People choose to stay in the area, which maintains other essential services such as schools and hospitals.
- Services provided for the use of tourists - e.g. leisure facilities - also benefit local people.
Problems

- Employment can be seasonal and wages low.
- House prices in the area can rise due to a demand for second homes.
- School leavers often look for work in larger settlements due to low wages and high house prices. This causes rural depopulation.
- Local shops on the margins of profitability often close to make way for more profitable gift shops and tea rooms. This leaves local people without essential services, e.g. butchers and greengrocers.
- Traffic causes pollution and narrow roads can become congested in high season.
- Large numbers of hikers cause footpath erosion, which is expensive to repair.
- Water sports cause erosion of lake shores and there can be conflicts of interests between different lake users.

Towards sustainable tourism

If tourism is to be sustainable then the impacts on local people, the economy and the environment need to be balanced. To achieve this there needs to be cooperation between different interest groups. In The Lake District, the parties involved include:

- Lake District National Park Authority
- National Trust (who own a proportion of the land)
- other land owners
- hotel and leisure industry
- conservation groups, e.g. RSPB
- local people and businesses
Possible strategies to achieve sustainable tourism could be:

- Restricting the number of cars and visitors - although this would have an impact on income from tourism.
- Fundraising to repair damage done to the natural environment and footpaths - but who should pay?
- Education of local people and tourists about sustainable tourism - but who will pay for this?

Underpinning any sustainable strategy is the successful involvement of the local people. With their cooperation, positive outcomes are far more likely.

Source: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/geography/tourism/tourism_uk_rev5.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/geography/tourism/tourism_uk_rev5.shtml)