



What is the Rainbow Family of Living Light?

The Rainbow Family is a loose-knit group of people who are into alternative lifestyles. They gather on National Forests to discuss political and environmental issues, pray for world peace, and celebrate life. They describe themselves as having no leaders and no organization.

Who can be a Rainbow?

Anyone who would like to be. They come from all walks of life and from a variety of backgrounds.

What is the National Gathering?

The Rainbow Family holds a national gathering once a year. Since 1972, the event has taken place on a different National Forest during the Fourth of July holiday and has grown in size, sometimes attracting more than 25,000 people. Smaller local and regional gatherings occur during other times of the year.

How does the Rainbow Family decide where to gather?

At the end of each annual gathering, members form a "vision council" to discuss the location of the following year's event. In Arkansas in 2007, they voted to come to Wyoming in 2008. It is unknown at this time exactly what part of the state the gathering will occur at this time.

How and when is the specific site selected?

During the spring and early summer, Rainbow scouts research and visit areas to find a suitable location - according to their standards. Scouts may visit local Forest Service offices requesting information and maps. Sometime around June 10-15, the "spring council" occurs, often at the location of the annual gathering. The specific location and time typically is not revealed to the Forest Service until it happens.

When does the National Gathering begin?

Within one week of the "spring council," about 1,000-2,000 attendees arrive on site. There will be a continual build-up of Rainbows, which may reach as many as 25,000+ people by June 30. Once the site is determined, the Rainbow Family will utilize Internet resources and informational recordings to let Rainbow Family members know the location and directions to the site.

When does the gathering end?

The event peaks on July 4th. After that, there is a drastic reduction in attendance. However, there is a group of Rainbow's that stay to clean up and rehabilitate the site. There may be other "stragglers" as well that remain for a couple weeks.

How do 25,000 people live in the woods?

As soon as Rainbow Family members select a site, they set up a welcome tent, camping and social areas, parking and shuttle areas, health care areas, several "kitchens," they develop water sources, and dig trench latrines. There is no fee for attendance, but they collect donations for food and other necessary items for distribution. They designate special areas for group gatherings, families' w/children, men, women, and party goer areas to name a few. Attendees are advised to bring their own camping gear. Family members use campfires exclusively to cook on. This could be a significant issue during the spring and summer of 2008.

What social impacts can we expect?

A certain percentage of gathering participants engage in criminal or socially unacceptable behavior such as public nudity, civil disobedience, drug trafficking, drug and alcohol abuse, assaults, theft and confrontations with law enforcement or local residents. In addition, abandoned or disabled vehicles and traffic congestion and parking for 4-6,000 vehicles presents significant challenges. Juvenile runaways are also known to frequent these events.

What resource impacts may occur?

Typical potential resource impacts include: compacted soil, water quality degradation, sanitation issues, sensitive archeological sites, Threatened and Endangered plant and animal species, and potential for fire danger.

How does the Forest Service manage this event?

The Forest Service formed a National Incident Management Team (NIMT) in 1997 to cover Rainbow Family national gatherings. The objectives of the 2008 NIMT are:

- Address health and safety risks to the public and participants
- Minimize environmental impacts with Law Enforcement presence and action
- Recognize and mitigate social and political impacts
- Respect civil rights of all public
- Gain compliance from the Rainbow Family in the permitting process
- Locate a suitable site for gatherings before they occur.
- Utilize unified command. The NIMT is working in partnership with state, county, and local law enforcement, health, and other organizations. Informational meetings involving the NIMT, the Forest Service, other Federal agencies and state agencies have taken place in Cheyenne, Wyoming in March 2008.

What about the Special Use permit?

The Forest Service requires a Special Use Permit for every group of 75 or more that wants to hold a meeting or event on National Forest System lands. The Rainbow Family

has consistently refused to comply with the permit process. Since they claim to have no leaders, no one member speaks for the Rainbows or has been willing to obtain a permit.

The Forest Service began prosecuting Rainbow Family members for failing to obtain a permit in 1996. While the Rainbow Family has a constitutional right to have this event, Federal courts have clearly stated they also have a legal responsibility to attain the required permit.

However, in both 2007 and 2008 the Department of Agriculture has directed the agency to participate in a pilot project to test the feasibility of using an operating plan in lieu of a Non-Commercial Group Use Permit for the National Rainbow Gathering only. The pilot does not extend to other regional or local gatherings.

Who pays for management of the event?

The Forest Service Washington Office LE&I will fund the Law Enforcement response but does not provide extra funding to the local unit where event occurs.

Are there impacts or costs to the local unit where the event occurs?

There will be time, financial, and other issues on the Forest and District where the event occurs, likely in the areas of:

- Providing support to the National Incident Management Team
- Gathering site surveys by specialists
- Resource work – site rehabilitation planning and implementation
- Assistance in appropriate community contacts
- Increased need to provide information to potential forest visitors
- Guidance with local agreements and MOU's
- Communications with employees
- District work priorities may need adjusting
- Diverse opinions among employees about the gathering and Forest Service management activities
- Double standard issues as it relates to operating plan in lieu of permit

In the event that the gathering occurs on a National Forest in Wyoming (Region 2 or Region 4), a joint communication plan will be in place to keep employees, the public, and Forest Service cooperators informed.

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