

1991 Vermont Gathering Report

NATIONAL RAINBOW FAMILY GATHERING 1991

GREEN MOUNTAIN NATIONAL FOREST ROCHESTER RANGER DISTRICT VERMONT

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1991 Rainbow Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Each year the Rainbow Family of Living Light congregates on a national forest of its choosing to celebrate their bond with the Earth and to pray for world peace and healing. They have met in a different national forest in a different state for the past 19 years. Attendance ranges from 5,000 to 35,000. In 1991 the Rainbow Family gathered in the Green Mountain National Forest for its 20th annual gathering. This was the first national gathering held in Vermont and the northeastern United States.

The Rainbow Family is a self-described tribe of ex-hippies and other more recent followers who are seeking a meaningful alternative to the mainstream American lifestyle. They claim to be a self-sufficient and self-reliant society, although this claim is rarely realized. There is no apparent leader or formal leadership structure. They believe in human equality and all members have an equal say in decision-making and an equal share of power. They govern themselves by consensus. They advocate tolerance and acceptance of all beings and beliefs which results in a group with diverse, and often divergent values.

As American citizens, Rainbow Family members defend their first amendment rights to free speech and peaceful assembly on public land. They traditionally choose National Forest System land for their gatherings because of the natural and isolated setting. They also prefer the low key approach with which the Forest Service manages these lands as compared to the more highly regulated national parks. In 1988, the Rainbow Family's constitutional right to gather on public land was upheld by a federal district court in Texas.

FOREST SERVICE ADMINISTRATION OF THE GATHERING

The Green Mountain National Forest was the lead agency administering the 1991 gathering. Other cooperating agencies included the Addison, Caledonia, Orange, Rutland, Washington, Windham and Windsor County Sheriff's departments; the Vermont State Police and departments of Fish and Wildlife, Health, Human Services and Social Services; the US Border Patrol and the US Marshall Services. The event was managed as a large social gathering. The primary management objectives were to provide for the health and safety of all and to minimize any negative environmental and social impacts.

THE 1991 RAINBOW GATHERING - A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

During the 1990 Rainbow Gathering, the Rainbow Family "visioned" the New England biosphere for their 1991 gathering. Family members scouted the Allegheny, Finger Lakes, Green Mountain and White Mountain national forests throughout the winter and spring of 1990-91 in search of an appropriate site. On May 30, 1991, in last minute Rainbow style, the Family announced its selection of the Rob Ford Meadows within the Green Mountain National Forest. A seed camp of 200-300 Family members arrived to prepare the site for the event. They developed water sources; built latrines, kitchen and camp sites; and cleared brush for parking areas. Much of the work was slow, but they were basically ready when the masses arrived at the end of June.

The official gathering took place between June 29 and July 7. The gathering resembled a very large family reunion. People met and greeted one another, exclamations of "welcome home heard continually. Most activity was spontaneous. July 4TH was the culmination of the gathering, with traditional rituals observed. Thousands of Family members met at main meadow for the silent peace vigil from sun-up until noon with boisterous celebrations following. After the July 4th event people gradually left the gathering.

Following the gathering, Family members began cleaning up the trash and garbage left behind and rehabilitating forest resources that were impacted by the masses. The clean-up crew, varying in size from 200 to 1,000 people, worked diligently for four weeks. On August 5, Forest Service officials conducted a final inspection of the area and declared the clean-up and rehabilitation work complete and acceptable. The 1991 National Rainbow Gathering was over.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Beginning June 29, Rainbow gatherers steadily entered the Rob Ford site at a rate of 2000-3000 per day. Attendance peaked on July 4 with an estimated 16,000 people on site. Participants left the gathering at a slightly faster rate than they arrived, with as many as 5,000 exiting on July 7. By July 10, only 1000 Rainbows remained. Despite the masses of people, the event concluded with relatively few serious reportable incidents.

The most significant event of the gathering was the death of an 11-week old infant on June 29; apparent cause of death Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. There was one birth reported. There was one assault arrest and numerous traffic citations and warnings issued. Law enforcement officials made several drug arrests. Two men were charged with possessing and selling substantial amounts of LSD. There was one unreported and unsubstantiated rape. In addition to the infant death, the local emergency squad assisted in one back injury and 5 drug overdoses. There were no water-borne, food-borne or infectious disease problems at the event.

KEY MANAGEMENT CONCERNS

From the start three issues concerned the Rainbow Family and Forest Service officials alike: water, parking and "A" Camp. These same issues plague the Family year after year. In addition, Forest Service officials were concerned about their ability to administer a gathering of 16,000 people without any formal agreements or commitments from the Rainbow Family.

WATER - The Rainbow Family was determined to provide adequate water from natural sources rather than truck in bulk water as they did in 1990. They eventually tied into two surface water brooks and piped water into the site on June 30. Despite abnormally dry weather, the system surprisingly kept up with demand during the entire gathering.

PARKING - Parking for an estimated 3000 to 4000 vehicles was needed. Two available meadows on NFS land provided parking for 1400 vehicles. The Rainbow Family ignored Forest Service advice to arrange fee parking on nearby private land. When the meadows filled up, parking overflowed onto forest roads where one-side-only parking was permitted. This required the Family to shuttle thousands of people from parking areas to gathering access points.

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