

Suggestions on the Governance of Illegal Crossing of Nature Reserves in Sichuan Province

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, illegal crossing incidents have frequently occurred in multiple nature reserves in Sichuan Province, posing a serious threat to public safety, social public resources, and the ecological environment of the protected areas. This article analyzes the problems in the governance of illegal crossing in Sichuan Province, such as incomplete pre-approval mechanisms, difficulty in controlling spontaneous crossing behavior, insufficient law enforcement linkage, limited actual law enforcement methods, and serious online misleading. To effectively address these issues, this article suggests adopting measures such as improving pre-approval and filing mechanisms, strengthening social supervision and intelligent supervision, clarifying regulatory authorization and exploring delegated law enforcement, strengthening network supervision and adopting public opinions, in order to better adapt to the actual needs of illegal crossing governance in Sichuan Province.

Keywords: *Illegal crossing of nature reserves, Pre-approval authorization, Law enforcement, Social supervision.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Sichuan Province is one of the western tourism resource rich areas, with a large number of distinctive and monopolistic natural tourism resources. [1] However, with the increasing popularity of topics such as "crossing the human forbidden zone of Ailao Mountain", "exploring the enchanting Wawu Mountain", and "uncovering China's Bermuda Black Bamboo Gully" in recent years, some tourists are no longer satisfied with traditional outdoor tourism projects. Instead, they disregard legal prohibitions and enter nature reserves (hereinafter referred to as "reserves") for illegal crossing activities such as walking, overnight stays, picnicking, photography, and exploration in pursuit of adventure and excitement. In Sichuan Province, incidents of illegal crossing of protected areas such as Wolong, Four Girls Mountain, Gongga Mountain, and Daocheng Yading have become increasingly common in recent years.

Blind crossing not only threatens one's own safety, but also poses multiple dangers such as hypoxia, getting lost, extreme weather conditions, inadequate logistical support, and invasion by wild

animals.[2] It consumes public rescue resources and causes multiple incidents of being trapped or killed, such as the tragic incidents of one person killed in the illegal crossing of Wolong in June 2019 and one person killed in the illegal crossing of Gongga Mountain in May 2024. Moreover, blind crossing behavior artificially disrupts the ecological balance of the protected area, causing irreversible damage to the already fragile ecological environment. In view of this, the authors believe that it is urgent to analyze the problems faced by the governance of illegal crossing in Sichuan Province and take practical and effective measures to curb the increasing trend of illegal crossing.

2. THE EXISTING PROBLEMS FACED BY THE GOVERNANCE OF ILLEGAL CROSSING IN SICHUAN PROVINCE

2.1 *Imperfect Pre-approval Mechanism for Legal Crossing, and Being Difficult to Control Spontaneous Crossing*

"The Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Nature Reserves" explicitly stipulate that

illegal crossing of the core area of nature reserves is generally prohibited, and entry into buffer zones that meet specific purposes and have been approved is allowed. As for conducting tourism activities within the experimental area, the management agency of the protected area will independently design and implement relevant management plans. However, the 2018 "Sichuan Provincial Nature Reserve Management Regulations" and the 2023 "Sichuan Provincial Tourism Regulations" only reiterated the above provisions and did not add any pre approval procedures regarding the legality of crossing behavior. Therefore, the management agencies of protected areas in Sichuan Province have the right to take proactive pre management measures within the experimental area to control crossing behavior. However, in practice, only a few protected areas such as Four Girls Mountain have implemented simplified requirements for hiring guides and pre-registration, while the vast majority of other protected areas have not yet established or improved such pre management procedures.

In addition, due to the complexity of the natural geographical environment and the spontaneity and randomness of crossing behavior, the control of illegal crossing is extremely difficult. Firstly, the protected areas in Sichuan Province are not completely enclosed in management, and the landform varies due to differences in altitude, geological structure, and water and heat distribution conditions, providing travelers with the possibility of freely choosing irregular paths to enter the protected areas based on the difficulty level. Secondly, most of the protected areas in Sichuan Province, except for some scenic spots, are undeveloped and uninhabited, lacking transportation and communication facilities, making it difficult to deploy modern monitoring equipment to achieve comprehensive real-time monitoring. Thirdly, the specially established protected area management bureau has certain management capabilities, and its personnel allocation and equipment resources are insufficient to achieve effective coverage of the entire protected area. Taking the Yadang Nature Reserve as an example, the developed area of the reserve is 32.44 km², [3] and there are still over 1,000 km² of undeveloped areas. The management conditions and management area are significantly different, making it impossible to implement a comprehensive crackdown on illegal crossings.

2.2 Insufficient Linkage Between Fine Punishment and Law Enforcement, and Limited Actual Law Enforcement Measures

According to current laws, the forestry, agriculture and other administrative departments in Sichuan Province are responsible for comprehensive management, while the Reserve Management Bureau, as a public institution under the administrative department, is directly responsible for the daily management and specific work of the reserve. However, in practical operation, taking the Yadang Reserve as an example, the Reserve Management Bureau often faces difficulties when imposing fines on illegal crossing behavior due to a lack of direct regulatory authorization or indirect delegated law enforcement power. Therefore, in practice, it still needs to rely on close cooperation with the public security department and adopt a joint law enforcement approach. This collaborative model inevitably leads to the complexity of the fine process, and the execution of fines often fails to truly serve as a deterrent and warning due to the lack of timeliness.

At the same time, in the actual law enforcement process, in order to improve management efficiency and effectively respond to the increasing number of illegal crossing behaviors, the management bureau of the protected area tends to intervene with relatively mild measures such as persuasion, criticism and education, and rarely applies fine punishment. This actually limits the diversity and severity of its law enforcement methods, and also makes the pressure and deterrence faced by the perpetrator insufficient, resulting in low illegal costs, leading to the occurrence of malicious incidents where the parties intentionally violate the law again, such as in October 2024, when an illegal passerby in the Yadang Reserve was persuaded to leave and then returned, and maliciously destroyed monitoring facilities.

2.3 Rampant Internet Misconduct, and Diversified Social Public Opinion Reactions

At present, the mixed quality of tourism works on online platforms has to some extent aroused people's longing for primitive dangers. Some self-media deliberately exaggerate the scenery of dangerous areas such as deep mountains and canyons to cater to the public's curiosity, conceal and downplay potential risks, and provide many

false information and strategies, resulting in misleading information to the public. [4] Taking the Ailao Mountain National Nature Reserve in Yunnan Province as an example, in recent years, Ailao Mountain has gradually become the "traffic code" in the eyes of some tourism and exploration bloggers, attracting most tourists to follow suit. In September 2025, the local Chuxiong Management Bureau issued a notice prohibiting any unit or individual from entering Ailao Mountain Nature Reserve without authorization. All entrants must go through the application, approval process, and accept supervision to curb the escalating incidents of unauthorized intrusion and adventure. [5]

At the same time, the attitude of public opinion towards illegal crossing is not entirely consistent. On the one hand, traditional views advocate for a severe crackdown on it. On the other hand, there are also voices that suggest reflecting on the current imbalance between supply and demand of tourism resources and adopting more moderate and rational approaches to address it. At present, the practice of uniformly prohibiting crossing the core area of protected areas, the scarcity of legal crossing channels, and strict restrictions on outdoor activity management have become key factors exacerbating the supply-demand contradiction.

3. COUNTERMEASURES AND SUGGESTIONS ON STRENGTHENING THE GOVERNANCE OF ILLEGAL CROSSINGS IN SICHUAN PROVINCE

3.1 Establishing and Improving the Pre-approval and Filing Mechanism for Legal Crossing

To make up for the deficiencies in the pre management mechanism of legal crossing of protected areas in Sichuan Province and effectively reduce the probability of illegal crossing, it is urgent to establish and improve the pre-approval and filing mechanism. Therefore, when initially constructing this mechanism framework,

Sichuan Province can refer to the relevant experience of Shaanxi Province, especially the provisions of the 2019 "Shaanxi Qinling Ecological Environment Protection Regulations" and the 2015 "Shaanxi Tourism Regulations" on the pre-approval and filing procedures for legal crossing. Drawing on the legislative experience of Shaanxi Province,

Sichuan Province can add similar provisions for prior approval and filing, as well as responsibility clauses, in the tourism regulations. It is required that legal crossings in protected areas must be approved by the protected area management bureau in advance and filed with the sports administrative department at or above the county level. Those who fail to fulfill their filing obligations shall bear legal responsibility. On this basis, further research will be conducted on the feasibility of adding safety responsibility commitment letters, mandatory hiring of certified guides or caravan, and mandatory bringing or renting of Beidou emergency alarm equipment and other safety conditions in the approval practice to ensure the safe and orderly conduct of crossing activities. In addition, the management bureau of the protected area should promptly review, evaluate, handle, and archive applications, and provide opinions or reject applications with problems or significant risks. After evaluation, applications with complex and dangerous routes may be subject to safety requirements such as restricting the applicant to a group and increasing the proportion of guides. For applications that meet the requirements and have controllable risks, the approval process can be simplified to improve management efficiency. The approval and filing system help the competent authorities to grasp the crossing plan in advance, incorporate the originally random crossing behavior into orderly supervision, and quickly integrate local resources for rescue in case of danger.

3.2 Strengthening Volunteer Participation in Social Supervision and Promoting Intelligent Supervision of Drones

To address the problem of limited staffing and inadequate supervision in supervisory units, it can be solved by strengthening volunteer participation in social supervision and promoting intelligent supervision of drones. Specific measures include, the first is to increase the number of regulatory personnel by openly recruiting patrol volunteers from the society, and set up full-time and part-time patrol positions to achieve round the clock inspections. The second is that the protected area can establish campus cooperation with universities, relying on their talent advantages to attract college student volunteers to participate in patrol work. For example, in 2021, Sichuan Wanglang Protected Area cooperated with Duke Kunshan University to recruit volunteers to participate in field work. The third is that the protected area can promote the intelligent supervision of drones, establish a drone

supervision system, and use the real-time images transmitted by them to check whether there are any abnormalities in the patrol routes. Taking the Ganjiahu Haloxylon ammodendron Reserve in Xinjiang as an example, it took the lead in establishing Xinjiang's first unmanned aerial vehicle patrol base by the end of 2023. The base uses an automatic monitoring system, pre-set multiple monitoring routes, and unmanned aerial vehicles automatically return to the base after completing inspection tasks, achieving unmanned full coverage of nearly 400,000 acres of supervised area in the protected area.

3.3 Enhancing the Law Enforcement Authorization of the Protected Area Management Bureau and Exploring the Entrusted Law Enforcement Model

To avoid the problem of poor timeliness of fines caused by unclear understanding of its own administrative penalty authority and collaborative law enforcement with public security departments in the practice of law enforcement by the protected area management bureau, it is first necessary to clarify the bureau's understanding of its own law enforcement authority granted by regulations. Article 34 of the "Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Nature Reserves" clearly defines that the management agencies of nature reserves are officially granted partial administrative penalty powers, including the power to impose fines for unauthorized entry into the reserve or disobedience to management within the reserve. This regulation establishes the qualification of the protected area management bureau as the statutory administrative law enforcement subject, which can independently exercise the power of punishment in its own name. Secondly, grassroots protected area management bureaus should carry out professional training, legal interpretation and other activities to deepen their understanding and recognition of law enforcement authority, eliminate misunderstandings of unauthorized law enforcement caused by deviations in understanding regulations, and ensure the efficient and accurate conduct of law enforcement activities. Finally, as a public institution, the enforcement authority of the protected area management bureau can also be obtained through entrusted enforcement. According to the "Administrative Penalty Law of the People's Republic of China", the environmental protection administrative department can delegate the power of administrative penalty to the protection zone management bureau through delegated law

enforcement. In local practice, in 2021, the Yunnan Provincial Forestry and Grassland Bureau also recognized in the "Reply to the Proposal on Standardizing Nature Reserve Management Institutions as Administrative Units or Public Management Units to Address the Issue of Administrative Enforcement Power" that the enforcement power of the Nature Reserve Management Bureau comes from two methods: regulatory authorization and delegated enforcement.

3.4 Flexibly Adjusting Law Enforcement Efforts Based on Actual Situations

In actual law enforcement, law enforcement personnel should adjust the severity of punishment according to the situation. For those who accidentally enter the protected area due to unfamiliar road conditions or navigation errors, measures such as registering information, copying rules and regulations, etc. will be taken to criticize and educate them, and then guide and persuade them to return. Individuals who intentionally violate regulations by crossing protected areas will be subject to strict fines in accordance with the law, and rescue costs will be borne by themselves. Especially for those who repeatedly violate the law and evade punishment, law enforcement agencies may impose a maximum fine on each offender within the scope of administrative penalty discretion as a form of punishment. At the same time, in addition to the existing "tourist blacklist" system, the management bureau of the protected area can introduce a credit punishment mechanism to submit notices to transportation, banking, customs and other departments for "tourism uncivilized behavior records" that comply with the "Interim Measures for the Management of Tourism Uncivilized Behavior Records" of the National Tourism Administration and have been identified through its relevant procedures, in order to increase the cost of illegal passage for violators.

3.5 Integrating Multiple Network Regulatory Forces, and Combining Cleaning and Rectification with Opinion Absorption

Firstly, online platform enterprises should strengthen the review of content that includes themes such as "exploration" and "going deep into uninhabited areas", and strictly confirm the authenticity of their information and the legality of their behavior. For works involving potential risks, official warnings should be promptly issued to

remind users to pay attention. For works involving illegal time travel, it is necessary to prompt warning measures should be taken to control the traffic of the works and promptly delete them. Secondly, the management bureau of the protected area should start building an information supervision center to quickly identify and respond to misleading content that clearly contains risks and spreads false information, actively communicate and cooperate with online platforms to ensure timely clearance of such information. The government's online supervision department should pay attention to online public opinion, strictly implement the supervision responsibilities of online platforms, and regularly organize special clean-up and purification actions for "illegal crossing". Finally, the tourism administrative department also needs to actively listen to and absorb reasonable suggestions from the public, take measures such as developing new outdoor tourism routes and planning sports events, and actively respond to the current booming trend of new outdoor tourism. Taking Ailao Mountain Reserve as an example, in response to the recent wave of exploration in Ailao Mountain, Xinning Yi and Dai Autonomous County, Yuxi City, Yunnan Province, organized staff to conduct on-site surveys and developed the first boutique hiking route in the Ailao Mountain area, which will be officially opened to the public in October 2024.

4. CONCLUSION

Sichuan Province is a province with abundant natural and ecological resources in China. Currently, incidents of illegal crossing of nature reserves occur frequently, which not only cause irreversible damage to the natural ecological environment of the reserves, but also give rise to multiple hidden dangers such as public safety risks and social resource waste. The many problems currently faced by Sichuan Province in the governance of illegal crossing are essentially structural contradictions between institutional supply, regulatory capacity, and public demand. This article focuses on establishing a pre-approval and filing mechanism, promoting social supervision and smart supervision, clarifying law enforcement authorization, and exploring credit punishment. It not only emphasizes filling regulatory gaps through institutional improvement, but also emphasizes the integration of technological means and social forces. It also takes into account the reasonable needs and rational control of outdoor time travel activities by the current public. In the future, when addressing the issue of illegal crossing, Sichuan Province should

continue to optimize institutional design, strengthen departmental collaboration and public participation. While strictly guarding the ecological protection red line of Sichuan Province, it is necessary to encourage the exploration and development of legal and compliant outdoor boutique tourism routes, popularize the concept of ecological protection and rational utilization of resources, guide the public to replace disorderly crossing with civilized experience, and achieve the organic unity of ecological value, social value, and economic value of nature reserves.

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