

# Serving the Visitor 2006

*A Report on Visitors to the National Park System*

National Park Service Visitor Services Project

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2007

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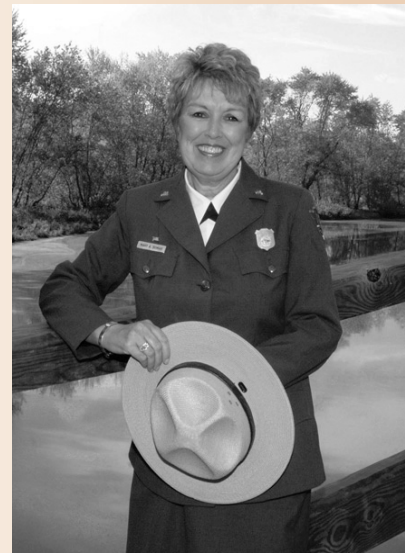
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# Foreword

## *from the Director*

As the National Park Service begins preparation for its centennial celebration in 2016, it is a good time to assess how the agency and its services have changed since passage of the “Organic Act” legislation. The recently released Centennial Initiative (visit website: [www.nps.gov/2016](http://www.nps.gov/2016)) addresses how the National Park Service plans to meet the expectations of the American people and to enhance the connection of people with their parks.

In 2006, people made almost 273 million visits to the 391 units of the National Park System. While no visitor studies recorded visitor evaluations of their experiences during the early years of the National Park System, recent studies show that visitors place great value on national parks. One Visitor Services Project survey quotes a visitor as saying, “*Everything possible should be done to keep the parks and surrounding areas as pristine and natural as possible, no matter what the cost. These treasures cannot be replaced, regained, or improved upon.*”



The Park Studies Unit, a partnership between the National Park Service Social Science Program and the University of Idaho, gathers demographic data and feedback from national park visitors and manages both the in-depth visitor studies of the Visitor Services Project and the Visitor Survey Card. Since 1988, the Visitor Services Project has collected data on how visitors evaluate their experiences in selected parks, conducting over 165 visitor studies in over 140 parks. In 1998, the Visitor Survey Card Project began measuring the quality of visitor experiences at all parks in order to meet Government Performance and Results Act visitor satisfaction requirements. These two types of visitor studies provide vital feedback to NPS managers at all levels.

This thirteenth edition of the Park Studies Unit’s annual report, *Serving the Visitor 2006*, continues its tradition of comparing visitors’ most current quality ratings for selected park services and facilities with those of recent years. Highlighted this year is an analysis of gas prices and travel trends among national park visitors. This report shows that visitors give high quality ratings to their national park experiences. To maintain these high marks, or improve them, *servicing the visitor* will continue to be a critical objective for every NPS employee and partner.

Mary A. Bomar  
Director

# Introduction

Society is changing and communications are becoming more technological. These changes affect national parks in many ways. Park managers need to hear what visitors are saying regarding their changing ways of learning. The Centennial Initiative is challenging us to reconnect people to their parks through exposure, technology, and connections. Children especially need to experience the parks in a way that relates to them. To help achieve this goal, park managers need input from park visitors, and visitor studies provide an effective means of connecting visitors to park managers.

The Park Studies Unit (PSU) within the Department of Conservation Social Sciences at the University of Idaho currently conducts two types of studies for the National Park Service (NPS): the Visitor Services Project (VSP) in-depth visitor studies and the Visitor Survey Card (VSC).

Both provide important data on how well the visitor is being served, as well as feedback for park managers. Since 1988, the PSU has conducted more than 165 in-depth visitor studies (VSP studies) in over 140 units of the National Park System. Through these customized studies, park managers obtain accurate information about visitors—who they are, what they do, their needs, opinions, and suggestions about improving park operations.

Park managers have used these data to improve operations and better serve the public.

The PSU has used a visitor survey card for the past nine years to survey visitors at over 300 units of the National Park System. The VSC surveys are conducted annually at NPS units to measure performance related to visitor satisfaction and visitor understanding of park significance. These results allow park managers to report performance in accordance

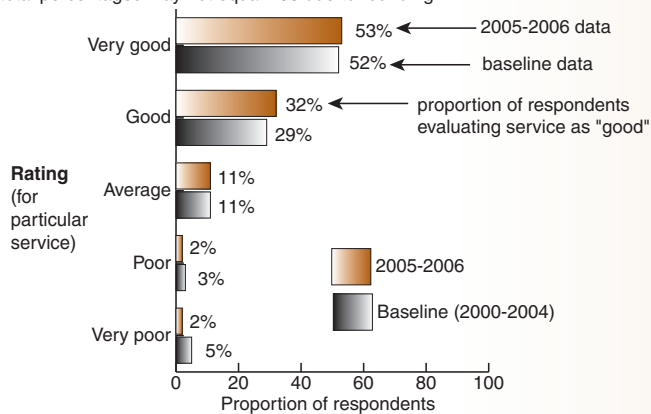
with the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA). In addition, the results can be applied to management needs, such as improving the design of park facilities, identifying general strengths and weaknesses in visitor services, and employee training. Results are reported in park specific, cluster, regional, and systemwide combined reports.



Zion National Park, 2006

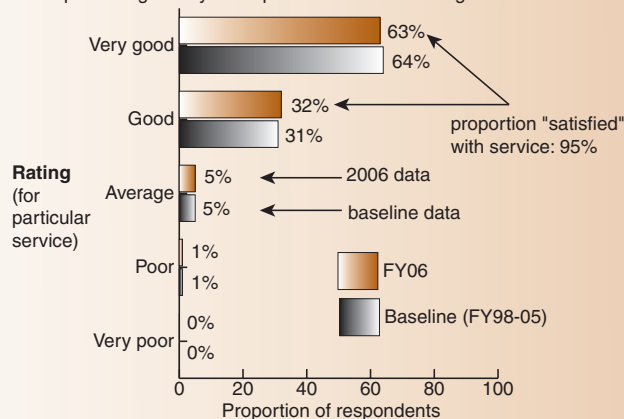
The first section of this report describes visitors' evaluations of 13 important services taken from the in-depth visitor studies in selected parks. The quality ratings by visitors in this report are indicators of visitor satisfaction and include only a few of the services provided by the NPS. In this section, each graph compares two years of current data (2005-2006), shown in color, with five-year baseline data (2000-2004), shown in black. Graphs that show results for less than five parks are labeled with "CAUTION!" since data gathered from such a small number of parks should be interpreted and used cautiously.

2005-2006: Number of parks represented; number of respondents represented; total percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.



Sample graph for in-depth visitor studies

2006: Number of parks represented; number of respondents represented; total percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.



Sample graph for visitor survey card studies

Highlighted this year is information about the distance that visitors traveled from home to visit the parks.

The second section includes visitor evaluations of services from the Visitor Survey Card studies conducted in all NPS units with visitors. Included are three important service

categories—park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities—as well as the overall rating used in reporting GPRA performance. In this section, each graph compares current data (2006), shown in color, with an eight-year baseline of data (1998-2005), shown in black.

## Visitor comment

Beautiful! Had a great time. Park Rangers were very friendly & helpful. Park was very well maintained. Please continue to preserve the history of park & don't get too commercial.



# VSP Visitor Studies

## General Services

### Visitor centers

Visitor centers offer information, publications for sale, and other services to help visitors enjoy their park visit. The ratings for the general quality of visitor centers in five parks (21 baseline parks) are shown in Figure 1.

- 89% of visitor groups rated the quality of visitor centers as “very good” or “good,” higher than the baseline rating of 69%.
- 9% rated visitor center quality as “average,” lower than the baseline rating of 13%.
- Less than 3% rated the quality of visitor centers as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 8%.

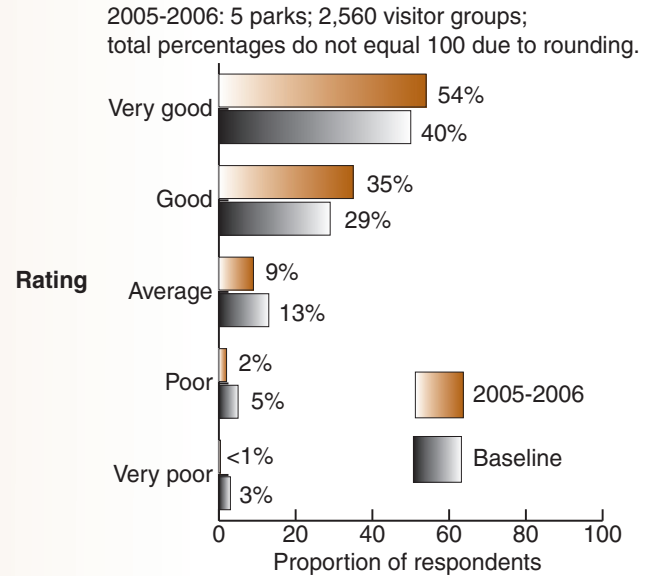


Figure 1: Quality of visitor centers

### Park personnel

Park employees, such as rangers at entrance stations, maintenance employees, emergency response teams, and law enforcement officers are important to many visitors' park experience. Visitors at 20 parks (33 baseline parks) rated the quality of park personnel at those parks, as shown in Figure 2.

- 91% of visitor groups rated the quality of park personnel as “very good” or “good,” higher than the baseline rating of 89%.
- 7% of visitor groups rated the quality of personnel as “average,” equal to the baseline rating.
- 2% of visitor groups rated the quality of park personnel as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 3%.

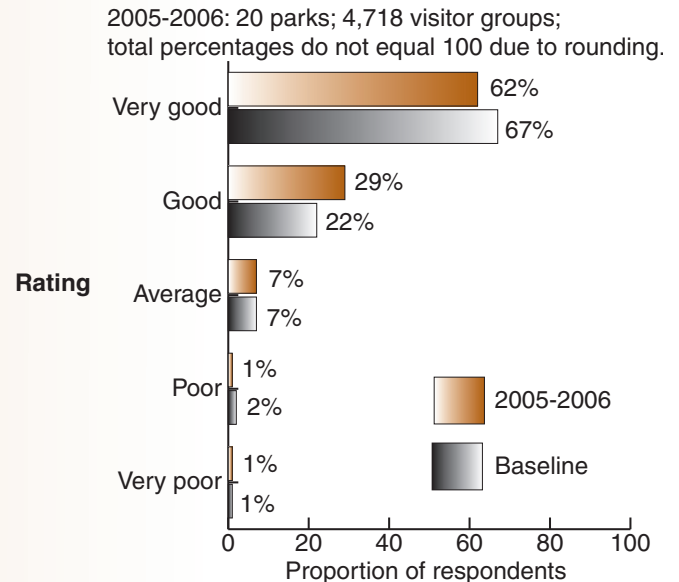


Figure 2: Quality of park personnel

## Directional signs

Directional signs are important in helping visitors find their way around parks and locate services, facilities, and points of interest. Visitors at nine parks (24 baseline parks) evaluated the quality of directional signs in and around those parks (see Figure 3).

- 77% of visitor groups rated the quality of directional signs as “very good” or “good,” lower than the baseline rating of 78%.
- 17% of visitor groups rated the quality of directional signs as “average,” higher than the baseline rating of 15%.
- 6% of visitor groups rated the quality of directional signs as “very poor” or “poor,” equal to the baseline rating.

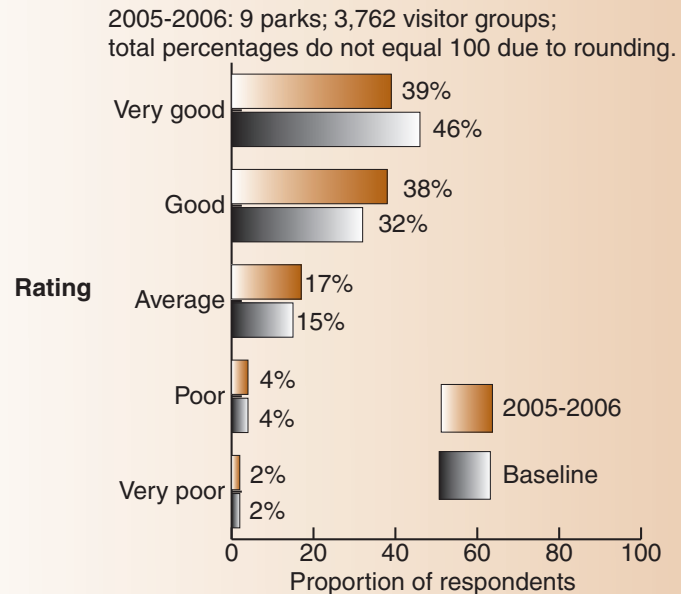


Figure 3: Quality of directional signs



Nicodemus National Historic Site, 2005

## Visitor Comments

*Keep up the high quality park  
Rangers! They seemed to love what they do  
and are very good at it!*

- ① Need a better coordinated VC
- ② Need more information on Cave tours  
Such as where on the map, and specific  
gathering point (use numbers or signs)



# NPS Facilities

## Restrooms

Restrooms are an essential park service. Figure 4 shows visitor groups' ratings of the quality of restrooms in 18 parks (36 baseline parks).

- The quality of restrooms was rated as “very good” or “good” by 77% of visitor groups, higher than the baseline rating of 75%.
- Another 17% of visitor groups felt the restrooms were “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 18%.
- 6% rated the restrooms as “very poor” or “poor,” slightly lower than the baseline rating of 7%.

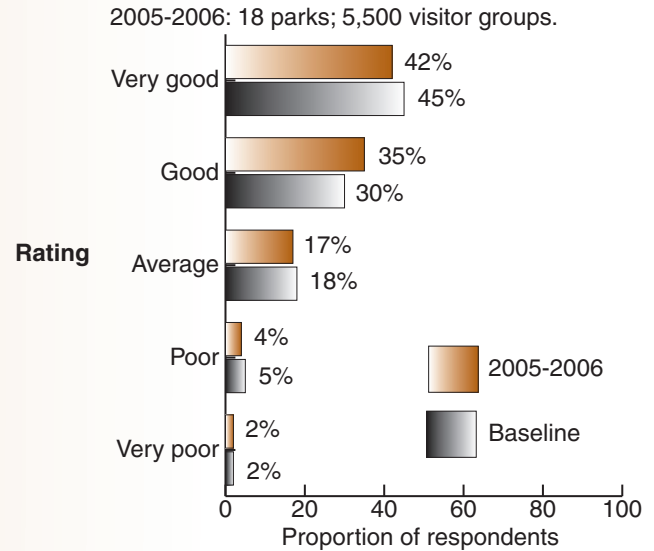


Figure 4: Quality of restrooms

## Visitor Comments

Every time I visited the women's restrooms in the visitors center, there was someone cleaning. I don't remember ever being in a cleaner public restroom. GOOD JOB!

Need showers, electric & water at all Campgrounds



Chickasaw National Recreation Area, 2005

## Campgrounds

Camping is a central part of some visitors' park experience. Visitor groups at five parks (17 baseline parks) were asked to rate the quality of NPS campgrounds in those parks.

- 79% of visitor groups rated the campgrounds as “very good” or “good,” compared to the baseline rating of 80% (see Figure 5).
- Another 16% rated the campgrounds as “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 14%.
- 4% rated the campgrounds as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 6%.

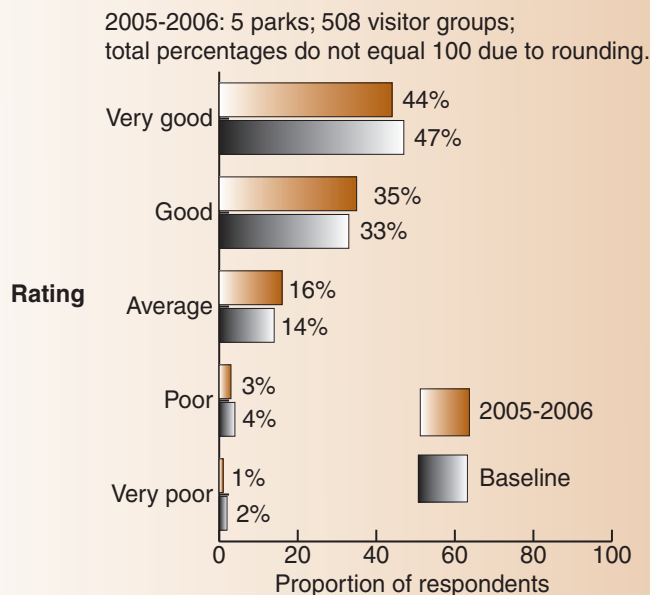


Figure 5: Quality of campgrounds

## Picnic areas

Many visitors enjoy picnicking in national parks. Figure 6 shows how visitors at 11 parks (22 baseline parks) rated the quality of picnic

- areas in those parks.

75% of visitor groups rated the quality of picnic areas as “very good” or “good,” equal to the baseline rating.

- 21% rated picnic areas as “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 19%.

4% of visitor groups felt the quality of picnic areas was “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 6%.

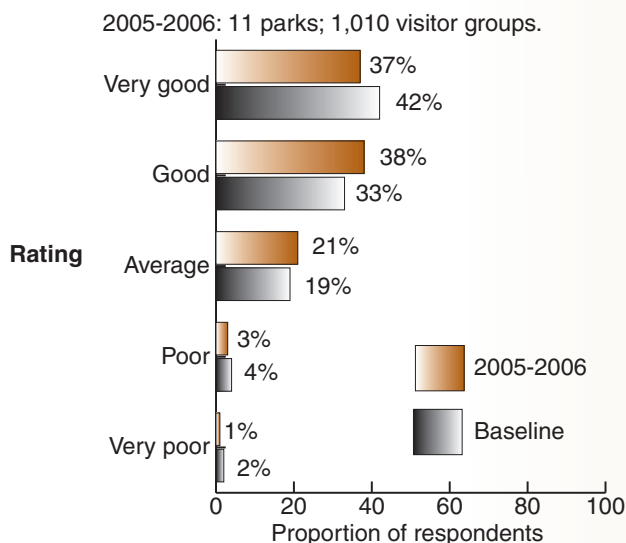


Figure 6: Quality of picnic areas

# Interpretive Services

## Ranger programs

Ranger programs include guided walks and tours, campfire programs, and living history demonstrations. In 19 parks (37 baseline parks), visitors were asked to rate ranger programs, as shown in Figure 7.

- 89% of visitor groups felt the quality of ranger programs was “very good” or “good,” higher than the baseline rating of 87%.
- 9% gave ranger programs an “average” rating, equal to the baseline rating.
- Another 3% rated ranger programs as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 4%.

2005-2006: 19 parks; 2,074 visitor groups; total percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

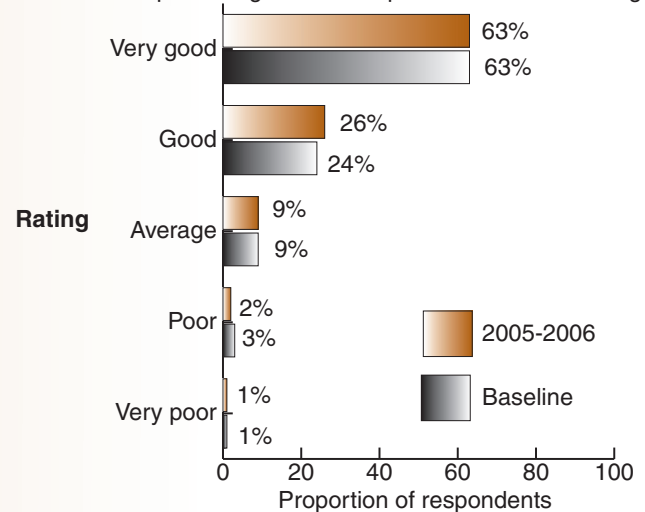


Figure 7: Quality of ranger programs



Mammoth Cave National Park, 2006

## Visitor Comments

We love Ranger hikes or talks. Personal interaction always ↑ the fun & learning/info retention more than reading a pamphlet or signs.

good junior ranger program - not too detailed, but enough to teach them new stuff.



Denali National Park and Preserve, 2006

## Visitor Comments

Don't build it up too much. It's quite lovely as it is. Perhaps the best solution would be having rangers around who could offer more info (as opposed to fixed exhibits/signs).

NEED MORE INTERPRETIVE SIGNS + INFORMATION

## Exhibits

Exhibits in visitor centers, museums, and along roads and trails are a valuable interpretive service offered in parks. As shown in Figure 8, visitors at 18 parks (35 baseline parks) evaluated the quality of exhibits in those parks.

- 83% of visitor groups rated the quality of exhibits as “very good” or “good,” higher than the baseline rating of 80%.
- Another 16% of visitor groups felt the quality of exhibits was “average,” equal to the baseline rating.
- Less than 3% of visitor groups rated the overall quality of exhibits as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 4%.

2005-2006: 18 parks; 5,797 visitor groups; total percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

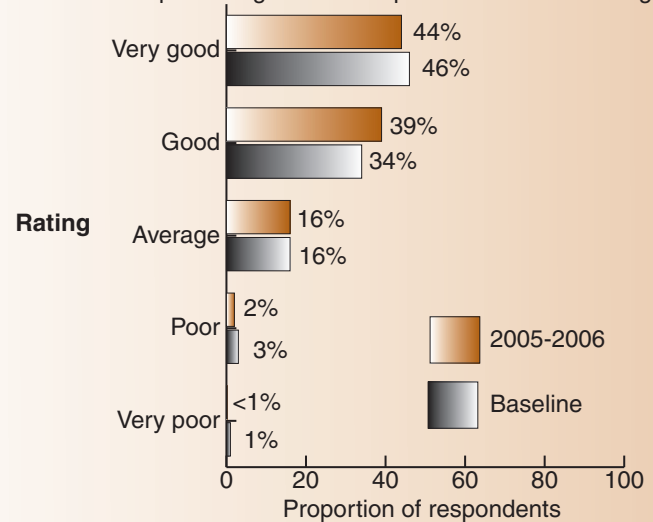
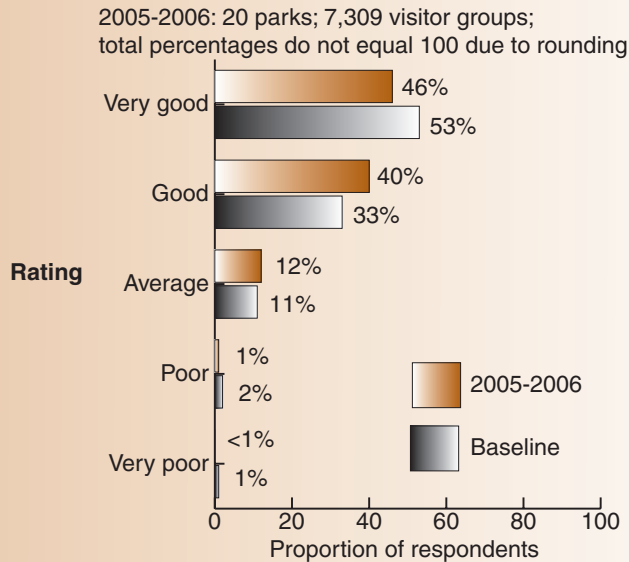


Figure 8: Quality of exhibits



**Figure 9: Quality of park brochures**

## Park brochures

Most parks offer a brochure with a park map and basic information to help visitors plan their visit. Visitors usually receive the brochure as they enter the park or arrive at a visitor center. Figure 9 shows the ratings by visitor groups at 20 parks (35 baseline parks).

- 86% of visitor groups rated park brochures as “very good” or “good,” equal to the baseline rating.
- 12% felt the quality of brochures was “average,” higher than the baseline rating of 11%.
- Less than 2% rated the overall quality of park brochures as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 3%.

## Visitor Comments

self guided walking/hikes, the paper maps were very helpful, landscape was open allowing visitor to see, nice scenic hike along river

Better signage or more detailed maps would be helpful, as would more guard rails on highway.



*Yellowstone National Park, 2006*



# Concession Services

Concession services include lodging, food services, and gift shops, since many parks have hotels, motels, restaurants, cafeterias, or snack bars within their boundaries.

## Lodging

Fewer than five parks in the 2005-2006 studies had lodging within the park (seven baseline parks); interpret the results with caution.

- 72% of visitor groups rated the quality of lodging as “very good” or “good,” compared to the baseline rating of 73%, as shown in Figure 10.
- 22% felt the quality of lodging was “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 18%.
- 7% rated the quality of lodging as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 9%.

2005-2006: 4 parks; 437 visitor groups; total percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

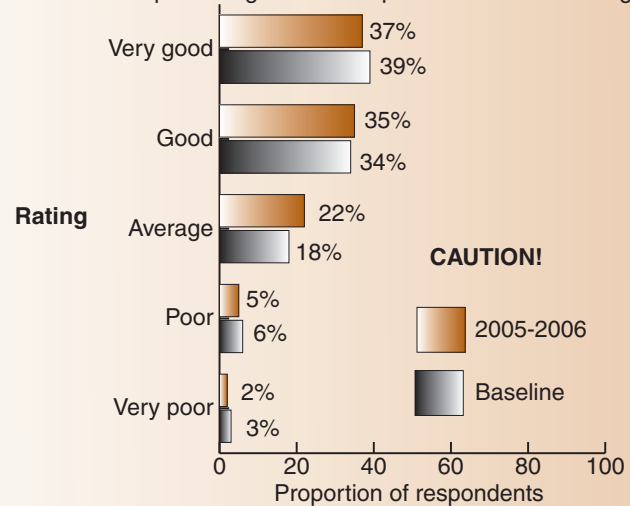


Figure 10: Quality of lodging

## Food services

Figure 11 shows the visitors’ quality ratings of food services in five parks in the 2005-2006 studies (nine baseline parks).

- 61% of visitor groups rated the quality of food services as “very good” or “good,” equal to the baseline rating.
- 30% felt the quality of food services was “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 24%.
- 9% rated the quality of food services as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 15%.

2005-2006: 5 parks; 846 visitor groups.

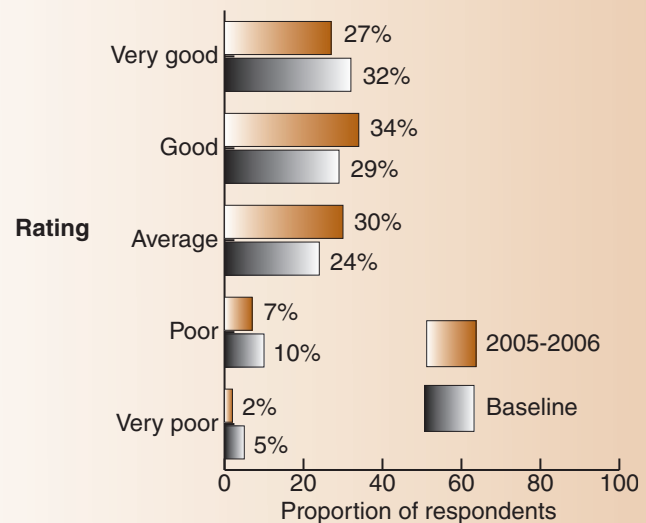


Figure 11: Quality of food services



## Gift shops

Gift shops in parks provide visitors with an opportunity to take home souvenirs from their park visit. Fewer than five parks in the 2005-2006 studies had park gift shops; interpret with caution.

- 71% of visitor groups at four parks (eight baseline parks) rated the overall quality of gift shops as “very good” or “good,” lower than the baseline rating of 74%, as shown in Figure 12.
- 26% felt the quality of gift shops was “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 21%.
- 3% rated the quality of gift shops as “very poor” or “poor,” compared to the baseline rating of 6%.

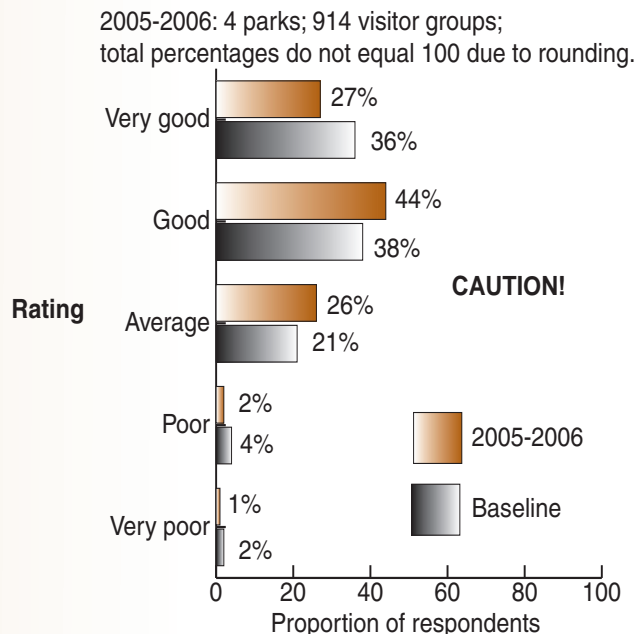


Figure 12: Quality of gift shops

## Park bookstores

Park bookstores/museum shops are operated by non-profit organizations, not as concession services. They sell publications and other educational materials to help visitors learn more about the parks.

- 75% of visitor groups at 18 parks (29 baseline parks) rated the overall quality of park bookstores as “very good” or “good,” lower than the baseline rating of 77%, as shown in Figure 13.
- 21% felt the quality of park bookstores was “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 19%.
- 4% rated the quality of park bookstores as “very poor” or “poor,” equal to the baseline rating.

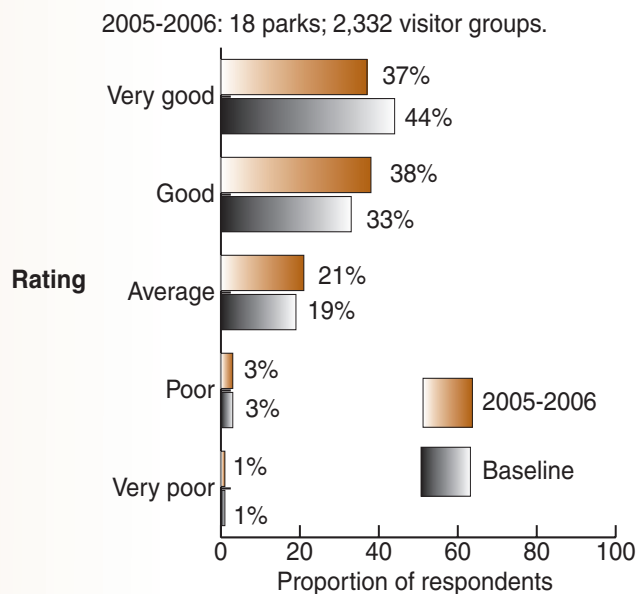


Figure 13: Quality of park bookstores

# Overall Quality of Services

The evaluations of services from the in-depth visitor studies are indicators of how well the NPS is serving the public. Figure 14 shows ratings of 13 visitor services based on 37,767 respondents at 20 parks (42 baseline parks). These ratings are an index created by combining the ratings for the individual services.

- Most visitor groups (82%) rated the overall quality of services as “very good” or “good,” slightly higher than the baseline rating of 80%.
- 15% rated the overall quality as “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 14%.
- 4% felt the overall quality of services was “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 6%.

2005-2006: 20 parks; 37,767 visitor groups;  
total percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

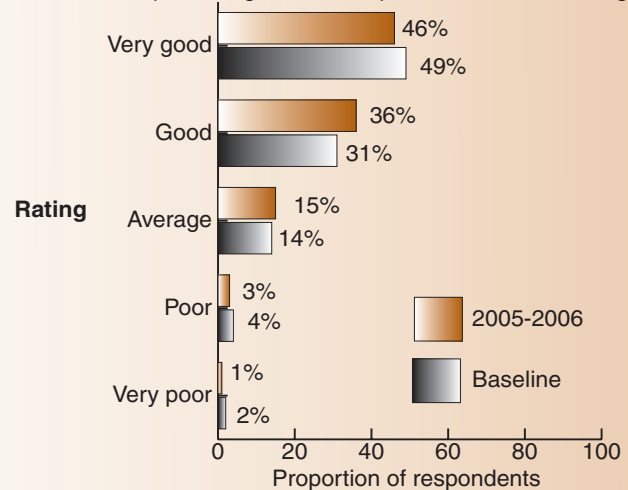


Figure 14: Overall quality of services



Golden Spike National Historic Site, 2006

## Visitor Comments

Keep the prices low, for many families it tough to vacation. Many opt out of nature when the prices are the same as entertainment,

Great place for family vacation- something for everyone. Our campground hosts were best ever encountered

# VSP Highlights

## U.S. Visitors to National Parks 1997-2006

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, the domestic and international travel behaviors of U.S. residents have been fluctuating since 2001. Fewer U.S. residents are traveling to either international or domestic destinations. Figure 15 compares the number of U.S. residents traveling abroad to NPS visitation during the 10 years from 1997-2006. A similar pattern occurs with international travel and NPS visitation. Travel increased before 2001 and declined from 2001-2003. However, there was some recovery in both domestic and

international travel after 2003.

One of the potential reasons for the decline in visitation to units of the National Park System may be the increase in gas prices. It is suspected that U.S. residents not only travel less, but also travel shorter distances as gas prices increase. Figure 16 compares the average distance from home for 78,630 visitors to 81 national parks from 1997-2006 and the average gas prices during the same period. The average distance from home was calculated based on

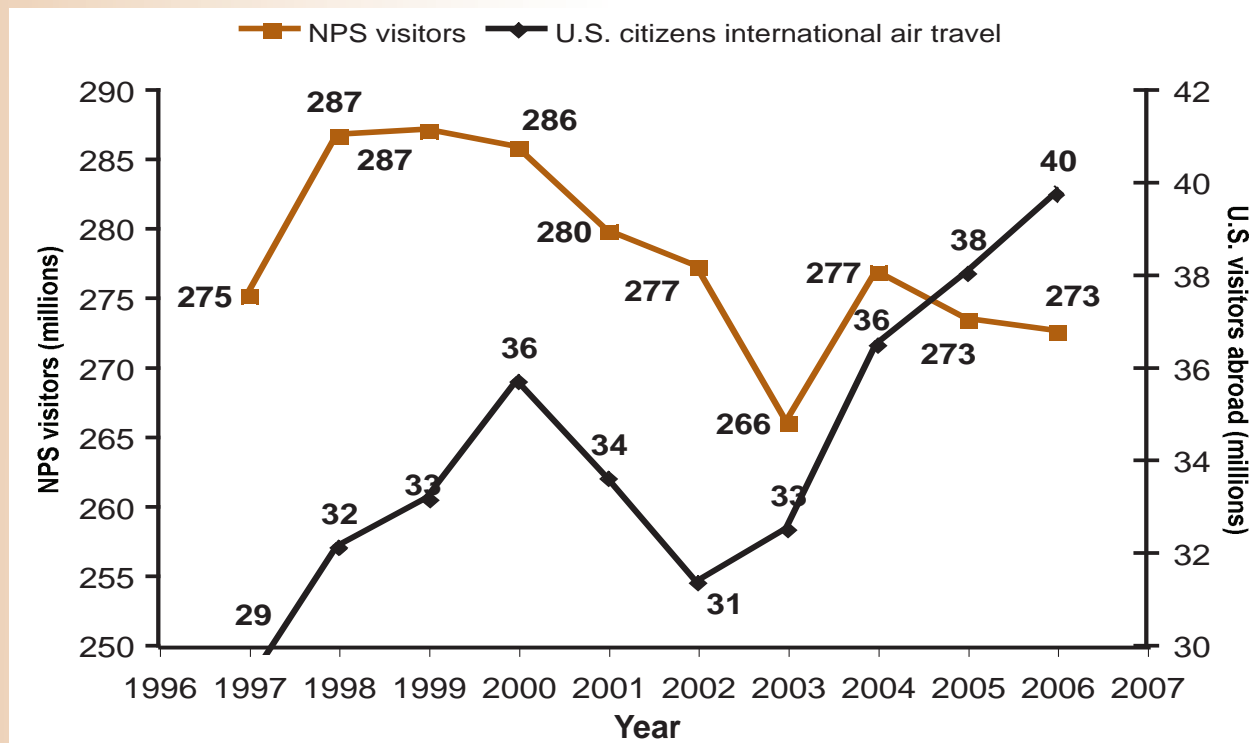


Figure 15: U.S. resident international travel vs. NPS visitation

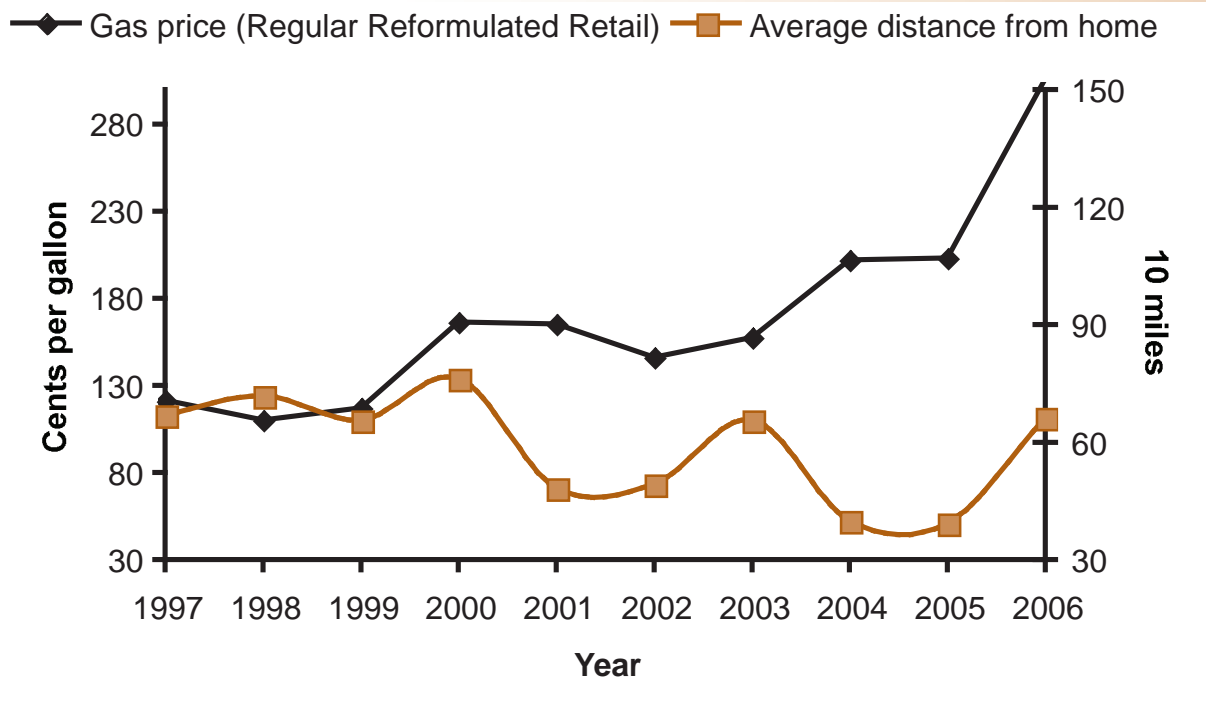


Figure 16: Travel distance from home vs. gas prices

the zip codes of VSP survey respondents and average gas prices were quoted from the U.S. Department of Energy. Although not a census of the whole National Park System, data from over 78,000 visitors to 81 national park units (excluding Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, and Guam) show the strong negative correlation between travel distance and gas prices. The travel distance to national park units shows almost a mirror image relationship with the increase in gas prices. Travel distance tends to decrease when gas prices increase and vice versa.

Another factor that may affect travel is people's concern about safety, which may prevent them from traveling away from home. Because few

parcs in the 1997-2006 VSP studies chose to ask questions about safety perceptions, it is not possible to generalize about visitor safety perceptions in parks over time. However, opinions of 16,910 visitor groups in 15 national parks from 1997-2006 show that visitors to these parks generally viewed national parks as safe environments and travel destinations. The proportion of visitor groups who felt "very safe" or "safe" in a national park setting ranged from 82% to 93%. The proportion of groups who felt "unsafe" ranged from 3% to 9%. There are small variations between parks, but the overall pattern has not changed over time. National parks are perceived by the public as safe places to be.

# Visitor Survey Card

In 1993, Congress enacted the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). This law requires all federal agencies to set goals and report progress toward those goals. One of GPRA's purposes is to promote "...a new focus on results, service quality, and visitor satisfaction" for the American people. The NPS is following the lead set forth in GPRA by setting agency goals to better manage its resources and services.

For the natural, cultural, and recreational resources in NPS care, and for the people served, GPRA requires the NPS to report how its goals are being met. One way to measure these goals is to survey visitors about the quality of their experiences while visiting NPS units, i.e. measure visitor satisfaction.

The NPS is measuring visitor satisfaction to meet GPRA requirements. Since 1998, the NPS has used a standardized Visitor Survey Card annually at most NPS units to measure performance related to visitor satisfaction. In 2006, the Visitor Survey Card was

completed by a sample of visitors at 307 national park units. At year's end, a total of 30,454 visitors had completed and returned their survey card.

On the following pages, graphs show visitor evaluations of the quality of services within three important service categories—park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities. These ratings are an index created by combining the ratings for individual indicators within the service category. For this section, and for GPRA requirements, a visitor is "satisfied" when he or she rated a service as either "very good" or "good."



*Kings Mountain National Military Park, 2006*

## Visitor Comment

*I felt that I really got my money's worth.  
A fabulous experience.*



# Park Facilities

Visitor opinions of five key indicators are used to measure visitor satisfaction with park facilities. These indicators are:

- visitor centers
- exhibits
- restrooms
- walkways, trails, and roads
- campgrounds and/or picnic areas

Most visitors (91%) were satisfied with these park facilities provided within the National Park System, compared to the 89% baseline rating (see Figure 17).

2006: 307 parks; 29,079 respondents;  
total percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

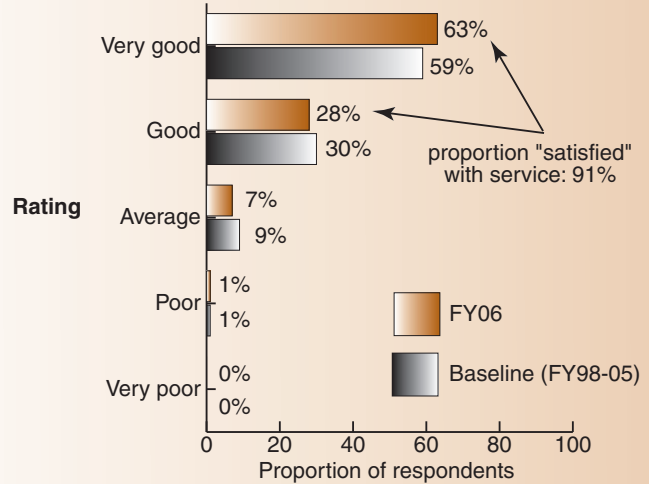


Figure 17: Combined index for satisfaction with park facilities



Devils Postpile National Monument, 2006

## Visitor Comment

Improve trail, <sup>very</sup> close to River to disperse crowd + allow more to enjoy its scenic value. If crowd is too large, stop advertising. Run buses until sunset.

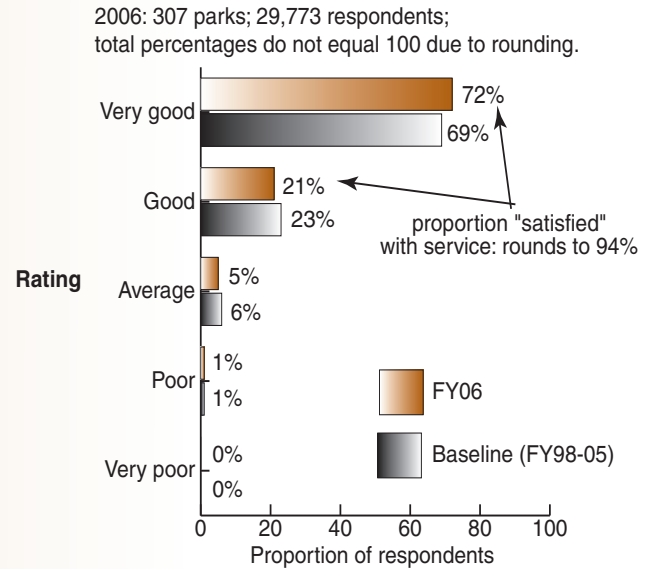


# Visitor Services

Visitor opinions of five key indicators are used to measure satisfaction with visitor services provided in the parks. These indicators are:

- assistance from park employees
- park maps or brochures
- ranger programs
- commercial services in the park
- value for entrance fee paid

The majority of visitors (94%) were satisfied with these services provided within the National Park System, as shown in Figure 18. The baseline rating was 92% for quality of visitor services.



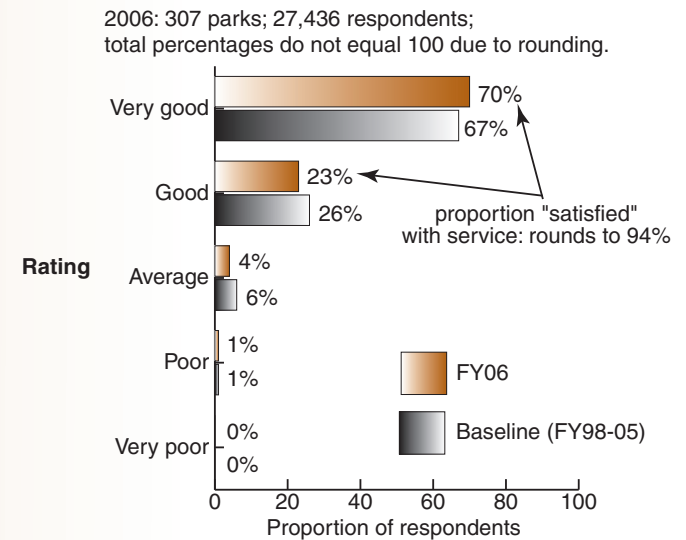
**Figure 18: Combined index for satisfaction with visitor services**

# Recreational Opportunities

Visitor opinions of two key indicators are used to measure visitor satisfaction with recreational opportunities provided in the parks. These indicators are:

- learning about nature, history, or culture
- outdoor recreation and sightseeing

As shown in Figure 19, most respondents (94%) were satisfied with these recreational opportunities provided within the National Park System, higher than the baseline rating of 93%.



**Figure 19: Combined index for satisfaction with recreational opportunities**

# Overall Quality of Facilities, Services, and Recreational Opportunities

NPS units are required to annually report performance related to a broad list of GPRA goals. Visitor satisfaction is one of these goals. The NPS 1999 GPRA goal IIa1 (visitor satisfaction) states that “95% of park visitors are satisfied with appropriate park facilities, services, and recreational opportunities.”

For GPRA reporting purposes, the visitor survey card includes an overall quality question used as the primary measure of visitor satisfaction. This question asks visitors to rate the “overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities.” Visitor responses to this question are used to calculate each park’s visitor satisfaction rating. Again, visitors are considered “satisfied” if their response to this overall quality question was either “very good” or “good.”

Figure 20 shows the overall quality rating based on 30,454 respondents in 307 units of the National Park System. In 2006, the satisfaction level was 96%, higher than the baseline rating of 95%.

## Visitor Comments

BEAUTIFUL SIGHTSEEING, NICE AND RELAXING WALKS IN THE NATURE.

Continue to provide good access while also protecting the environment, we all come to see. Continue to limit vehicles, walking and trams are great.

The Visitor Survey Card results show strong evidence of excellent visitor service across the National Park System. The NPS has demanding GPRA goals for visitor satisfaction. Of the 307 parks that successfully completed a 2006 Visitor Survey Card study, 241 parks (79%) met the annual servicewide goal of 95% visitor satisfaction. Most parks (291 or 95%) of the 307 parks had a visitor satisfaction rating of 90% or greater.

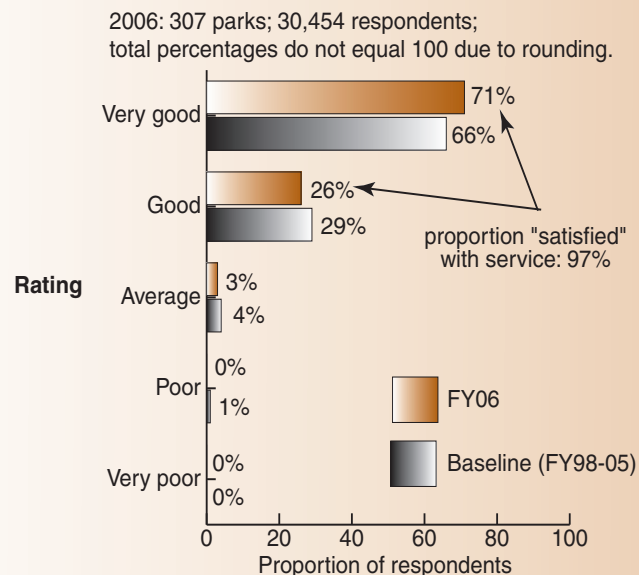
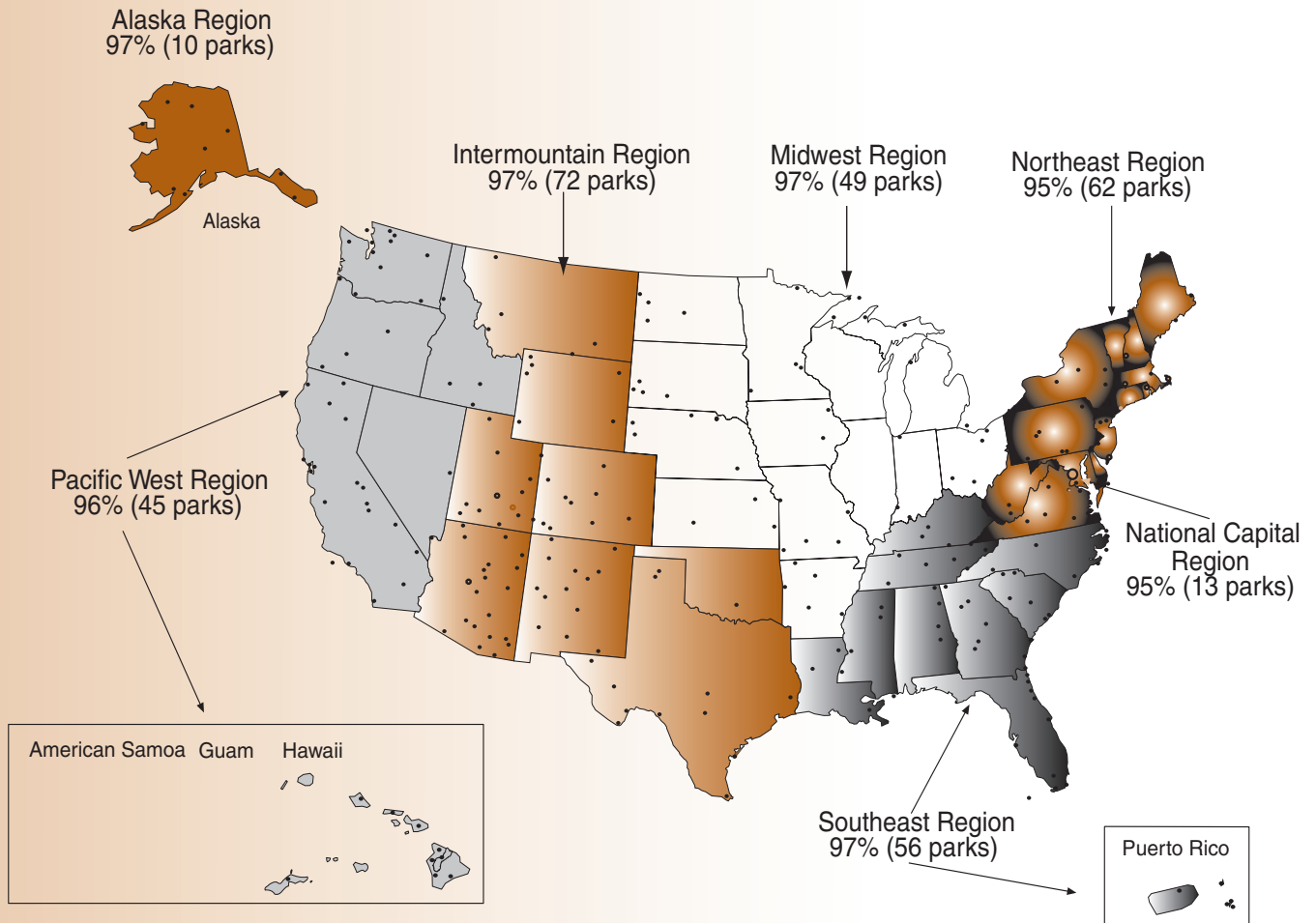


Figure 20: Overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities

The Visitor Survey Card results at individual parks were combined to produce a satisfaction rating for each individual NPS region. Figure 21 shows the seven regions and the proportions of park visitors satisfied overall with appropriate facilities, services, and recreational opportunities. Regional overall visitor satisfaction scores are very similar, ranging from 95% to 97%.

The Visitor Survey Card results provide parks with benefits beyond simply meeting annual GPRA reporting requirements. These results can be useful in planning, operations, management, and research related to the national parks. The results allow park managers to better understand visitor needs, protect natural and cultural resources, and improve visitor services.



**Figure 21: Percentage of visitors satisfied overall, by NPS region, 2006**

# Conclusion

Both the in-depth visitor studies and the Visitor Survey Card studies asked visitors to rate the overall quality of the services provided during their visit.

The study results included in this report show that visitors are largely satisfied with the quality of services they are receiving in the National Park System.

By monitoring visitor satisfaction through different types of visitor studies, and using the information to plan and improve all aspects of park operations, the NPS can continue to protect resources and provide high quality visitor services.



*Monocacy National Battlefield, 2006*

## Visitor Comments

you are doing a wonderful job  
considering the pressures of an  
expanding population.

Preserve and Protect all the beauty,  
plants, and animals, habitat, etc.  
Enlarge the park boundaries if possible,  
to protect more of the general area.

We all thoroughly enjoyed our visit.  
The grounds were well-kept + clean;  
the exhibits educational + informative;  
The employees were all cheerful,  
pleasant + ready to help in any  
way. Well done!

I would like to see more information about  
the science going on in the park. What are  
the questions being addressed, and why? This is  
esp. important if research is funded by entrance fees.

# Research Methods

## VSP Visitor Studies

The VSP in-depth visitor studies are based on systematic surveys of park visitors. A random sample of visitor groups is chosen to represent the general visitor population during a limited (usually 7 to 10-day) study period. In 2005, the VSP started conducting surveys for very small parks that receive less than 300 visitor groups during a 7 to 10-day period. In these situations, the survey period is extended beyond 10 days until 340 questionnaires are distributed.

The sample is usually “stratified,” or distributed by entrance or zone, depending upon park characteristics and visitor use patterns. Sample size and sampling intervals are based upon the previous year’s visitation statistics. Results are usually accurate to within six percentage points for simple questions, and are somewhat less accurate for more complex ones. The results are statistically significant at the .05 level. This means that if different samples had been drawn, the results would have been similar 95 out of 100 times.

VSP personnel hold an on-site workshop with park staff to develop the survey questionnaire and plan the study. Standard demographic questions are included in each survey, and park managers can include additional “customized” questions to meet their information needs. In addition, questionnaires include open-ended questions in which visitors are asked to provide comments about their visit.

Short (two-minute) interviews are conducted as visitors arrive at a sampling site. The purpose

of the interviews are to distribute the mail-back questionnaires, collect data for a non-response bias check, and obtain mailing addresses for follow-up reminders. The refusal rate (the proportion of visitors contacted that decline to participate) averages 7%. The response rate (the proportion of visitors that return their questionnaires) averages 75%. A respondent is a member of a visitor group (at least 16 years of age) who voluntarily participated in the survey by accepting the questionnaire for the group. However, the whole group is asked to provide their input and opinions when answering the questionnaire. Non-response bias is checked based on both individual and group characteristics using respondent age and group size to detect the differences between respondents and non-respondents (from initial interview data).

The data are coded, entered in computers, and analyzed using appropriate statistical software (i.e. SAS, SPSS). For this report, some data were entered by the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center at Washington State University and others were entered by VSP staff at the University of Idaho. Responses to open-ended questions (in which visitors write comments) are categorized and summarized by VSP staff. In 2006, the VSP offered an online option at two parks. Thus, part of the data were actually entered into the database by the respondents.

In-depth visitor studies have several limitations. Responses to mail-back questionnaires may not reflect actual behavior or opinions. The results cannot always be generalized beyond the study



periods. Visitor groups that do not include an English-speaking person may be under-represented, although parks may elect to use questionnaires in additional languages. These limitations apply to all studies of this type.

## Visitor Survey Card Studies

The Visitor Survey Card studies use a somewhat different methodology than the VSP in-depth visitor studies. For each survey, park staff select an interval sampling plan based on the previous year's visitation. In each park, 400 visitor survey cards are distributed to a random sample of visitors during a 30-day study period. Results are usually accurate to within six percentage points. For individual park reports, results are statistically significant at the .05 level. This means that if different samples had been drawn, the results would have been similar 95 out of 100 times. For the National Park System as a whole, results are accurate to within one percentage point. These results are statistically significant at the .01 level.

Park staff are trained to distribute survey cards according to a standard set of survey instructions and guidelines. A standardized visitor survey card that includes the same set of service-related questions is used for each park. In addition, the card includes open-ended questions to evaluate visitor understanding and obtain overall feedback.

Returned cards are electronically scanned, and the data is coded and prepared by Visual Input Systems Analysts, Incorporated, located in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The response rate (the

proportion of visitors that return their survey card) for the Visitor Survey Card studies administered in 307 parks in 2006 averaged 28%. A test for non-response bias was conducted by comparing the results for the same question from both the Visitor Survey Card and the VSP in-depth visitor studies. The data were gathered in the same parks, seasons, and survey locations. The results of this test suggest that non-response bias was not significant.

For individual park reports, frequency distributions are calculated for each indicator and category. At the end of the calendar year, responses from individual park surveys are combined to create reports at the cluster, region, and systemwide levels. Data from parks with less than 30 returned cards, or from parks with discrepancies in data collection methods, are omitted from these reports and *Serving the Visitor*.

The Visitor Survey Card studies have several limitations. The data reflect visitor opinions about the NPS unit's facilities, services, and recreational opportunities during the survey period. The results do not necessarily apply to visitors during other times of the year, or park visitors who did not visit one of the survey locations. Visitor groups that do not include an English-speaking person may be under-represented. These limitations apply to all studies of this type. In addition, unlike the VSP studies, the VSC studies use a "comment card" which collects no demographic data, nor do they make multiple contacts with potential respondents. This results in lower response rates than traditional "Tailored-design" surveys by Dillman (2007)



## VSP Visitor Studies: 2000-2006

The data for in-depth visitor studies in this report came from the following NPS units. The questionnaires and final reports are available online at:

<http://psu.uidaho.edu/vsp.reports.htm>

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, Wisconsin  
Arches National Park, Utah  
Badlands National Park, South Dakota  
Biscayne National Park, Florida  
Catoctin Mountain Park, Maryland  
C&O Canal National Historical Park, Maryland  
Capulin Volcano National Monument, New Mexico  
Chickasaw National Recreation Area, Oklahoma  
Colonial National Historical Park (Jamestown), Virginia  
Congaree National Park, South Carolina  
Cowpens National Battlefield, South Carolina  
Crater Lake National Park, Oregon  
Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve, Idaho  
Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Ohio  
Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, Ohio  
Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska  
Devils Postpile National Monument, California  
Dry Tortugas National Park, Florida  
Effigy Mounds National Monument, Iowa  
Eisenhower National Historic Site, Pennsylvania  
Everglades National Park, Florida  
Fort Stanwix National Monument, New York  
Fort Sumter National Monument, South Carolina  
George Washington Birthplace National Monument, Virginia  
Golden Spike National Historic Site, Utah  
Grand Canyon National Park – North Rim, Arizona  
Grand Canyon National Park – South Rim, Arizona  
Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve, Colorado  
Haleakala National Park, Hawaii  
Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, West Virginia  
Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, Pennsylvania  
John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, Oregon  
John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site, Massachusetts

Johnstown Flood National Memorial, Pennsylvania  
Joshua Tree National Park, California  
Katmai National Park and Preserve, Alaska  
Keweenaw National Historical Park, Michigan  
Kings Mountain National Military Park, South Carolina  
Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, North Dakota  
Lincoln Home National Historical Site, Illinois  
Mammoth Cave National Park, Kentucky  
Manzanar National Historic Site, California  
Mojave National Preserve, California  
Monocacy National Battlefield, Maryland  
New River Gorge National River, West Virginia  
Nicodemus National Historic Site, Kansas  
Olympic National Park, Washington  
Oregon Caves National Monument, Oregon  
Outer Banks Group (Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Ft. Raleigh National Historic Site and Wright Brothers National Memorial), North Carolina  
Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Michigan  
Pinnacles National Monument, California  
Pipestone National Monument, Minnesota  
San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, California  
Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, New Hampshire  
Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks and Sequoia National Forest, California  
Shenandoah National Park, Virginia  
Stones River National Battlefield, Tennessee  
Timpanogos Caves National Monument, Utah  
USS Arizona Memorial, Hawaii  
White House Tours and White House Visitor Center, Washington, D.C.  
Yosemite National Park, California  
Zion National Park, Utah

## Visitor Survey Card Studies

The data for Visitor Survey Card surveys in this report came from 307 NPS units. Reports are available online at:

<http://psu.uidaho.edu/vsc.htm>