



Social Science Program
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Visitor Services Project

Serving the Visitor 2005

A Report on Visitors to the National Park System



University of Idaho
Park Studies Unit

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National Park Service Visitor Services Project

Prepared by:

Yen Le, Ph.D.

Assistant Coordinator, Visitor Services Project
Park Studies Unit

Margaret Littlejohn

Coordinator, Visitor Services Project
Park Studies Unit

Jennifer Hoyer

Research Scientist
Coordinator, Visitor Survey Card Project
Park Studies Unit

Dr. Steven J. Hollenhorst

Director, Park Studies Unit
University of Idaho

Dr. James Gramann

Visiting Chief Social Scientist
Social Science Program
National Park Service

The following organizations and individuals
contributed to the preparation of this report:

National Park Service
University of Idaho
Visitor Services Project Advisory Committee

Katie Gray
Marc Manni
Bret Meldrum
David Vollmer

Printing:

Insty-Prints, Moscow, Idaho

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<<http://www.psu.uidaho.edu>>. A copy of this
report can also be obtained by contacting:

Park Studies Unit
College of Natural Resources, Room 15
P.O. Box 441139
University of Idaho
Moscow, ID 83844-1139
(208) 885-2585

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Foreword

from the Director

The first few years of a new century encourage us to look both forward and back—to think about how things will change in the future and have changed in the past century. Humans naturally make comparisons, drawing from their observations and experiences. For example, visits to the National Park System have grown from a few million in the early years of the 20th century to over 273 million in 2005.

In the National Park System, trends in both visitor demographics and opinions provide important and interesting feedback for park managers. For example, managers may find that there are significant changes in the ways visitors are using parks, such as the trend of visiting historical parks, which are often located near neighborhoods where people live and work, for daily exercise. Tracking this type of trend is critical in planning for the future.



The consistent methodology of the Visitor Services Project (VSP) and Visitor Survey Card (VSC) offer park

to build a database using the results from 157 visitor studies in 133 national park units since 1988 and adding new data each year. The basis for the consistency built into the VSP process allows for easy comparison of results.

This newest edition of the VSP and VSC's annual report, *Serving the Visitor 2005*, allows a brief look at some of the trend data that is being gathered. By examining visitor ratings of the quality of services and facilities in the parks, trends can be followed over time. The National Park Service continues to serve the visitors well, judging from the results included in this report. We, the employees of the National Park Service, can be proud of the service we provide and continue to strive to do our best to serve the visitors.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fran P. Mainella". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Fran P. Mainella
Director

Introduction

Since 1916, the National Park Service (NPS), has preserved outstanding parts of America's landscape and history. The National Park System includes 388 parks that received over 273,000 recreational visits during 2005. To ensure that these visitors are being well served, the NPS uses visitor studies to help measure the quality of service. Surveying visitors on a regular basis provides valuable information to park managers about the quality of visitor experiences in the national parks.

Two types of studies—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 the park manager. The Park Studies Unit (PSU) within the Department of Conservation Social Science at the University of Idaho has been tasked with conducting these studies for the National Park Service (NPS). Since 1988, the PSU has conducted over 155 In-depth visitor studies (VSP studies) in over 130 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.

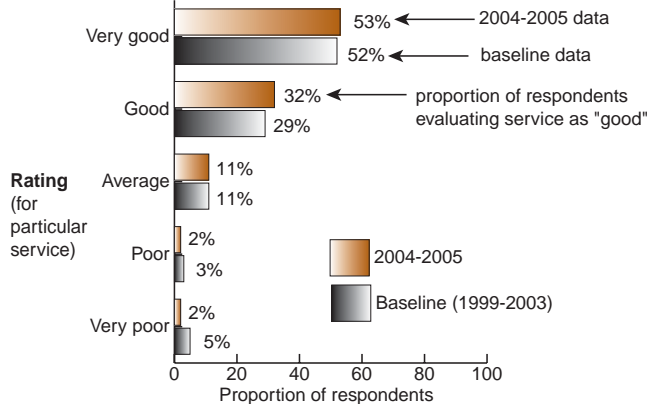
The PSU has used a visitor satisfaction card (VSC) for the past seven years to survey visitors at over 300 units of the National Park System. The VSC surveys continue to be used annually by NPS units to measure performance related to visitor satisfaction and visitor understanding of park significance. The survey 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.



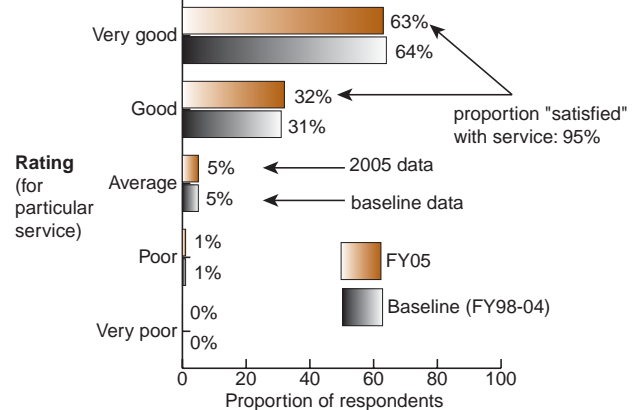
Lincoln Home National Historic Site, 2005

The first section of this report describes visitors' evaluations of 10 important services taken from the in-depth visitor studies in selected parks. The quality ratings by visitors in this report are indicators of visitor service and include only a few of the services provided by the NPS. In this section, each graph compares 2 years of current data (2004-2005), shown in color, with 5-year baseline data (1999-2003), shown in black. Highlighted in this year's report are the proportions of children (17 or younger) and seniors (aged 65 or over) among park visitors.

2004-2005: Number of parks represented; number of respondents represented; total percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.



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



Sample graph for in-depth visitor studies

Sample graph for visitor satisfaction card surveys

The second section includes visitor evaluations of services from the visitor satisfaction card surveys conducted in most NPS units. Included are 3 important service categories—park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities—as well as the overall rating used in reporting GPR performance. In this section, each graph compares current data (2005), shown in color, with a 7-year baseline of data (1998-2004), shown in black. Baseline data for some charts is missing due to changes made to the survey card for the 2005 survey season.

These revisions include the addition of a “value for entrance fee paid” question, and the addition of “sightseeing” in the “outdoor recreation” question. “Value for entrance fee paid” is the VSC 2005 highlight.

Appendix 1 at the end of this report describes the research methods and limitations of both types of studies. Appendix 2 lists the parks whose VSP visitor study data are included in this report and the website listing the parks where VSC studies were conducted.

Visitor Comments

it is always an enjoyable visit, this had made us want to visit other National Parks. Also, being at the park encouraged us to by Bikes to ride the trails.

Advertising parks to more people out of state.

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 5 parks (27 baseline parks) are shown in Figure 1.

- 88% of visitor groups rated the quality of visitor centers as “very good” or “good,” higher than the baseline rating of 80%.
- 9% rated the quality of visitor centers as “average,” lower than the baseline rating of 14%.
- 3% rated the quality of visitor centers as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 6%.

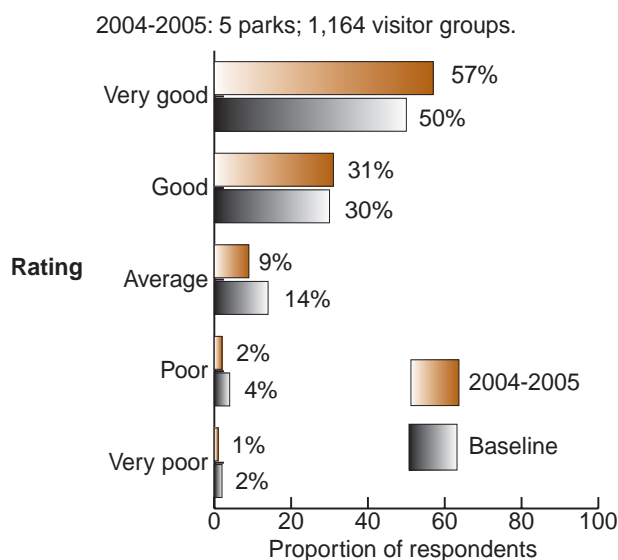


Figure 1: Quality of visitor centers

Park personnel

Park employees, such as rangers at entrance stations, maintenance employees, emergency response teams, and law enforcement officers are an important part of many visitors’ park experience. Visitors at 20 parks (31 baseline parks) rated the quality of park personnel at those parks, as shown in Figure 2.

- 92% of visitor groups rated the quality of park personnel as “very good” or “good,” higher than the baseline rating of 89%.
- 6% of visitor groups rated the quality of personnel as “average,” lower than the baseline rating of 8%.
- 2% of visitor groups rated the quality of park personnel as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 3%.

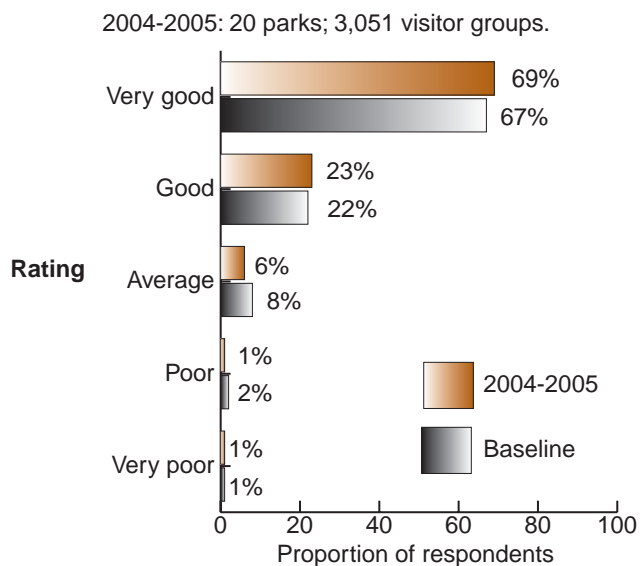


Figure 2: Quality of park personnel

Directional signs

Directional signs are important in helping visitors find their way around parks and locate services, facilities, and points of interest. Visitors at 14 parks (24 baseline parks) evaluated the quality of directional signs in and around those parks (see Figure 3).

- 75% of visitor groups rated the quality of directional signs as “very good” or “good,” less than the baseline rating of 78%.
- 18% of visitor groups rated the quality of directional signs as “average,” higher than the baseline rating of 15%.
- 7% of visitor groups rated the quality of directional signs as “very poor” or “poor,” slightly higher than the baseline rating of 6%.

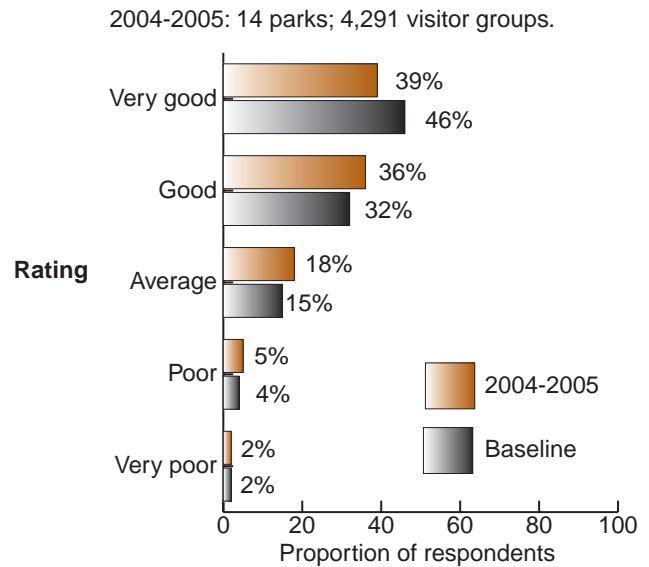


Figure 3: Quality of directional signs



Congaree National Park, 2005

Visitor Comment

We were very glad we stopped there. We were impressed with the information panels, and the ranger explaining some things to us. We have NHS passport books, and we were glad to be able to stamp our books.

NPS Facilities

Restrooms

Restrooms are an essential park service. Figure 4 shows the visitor groups' ratings of the overall quality of restrooms in 18 parks (39 baseline parks).

- The quality of restrooms was rated as “very good” or “good” by 75% of visitor groups, higher than the baseline rating of 72%.
- Another 18% of visitors felt the restrooms were “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 19%.
- 7% rated the restrooms as “very poor” or “poor,” slightly lower than the baseline rating of 8%.



Cuyahoga Valley National Park, 2005

2004-2005: 18 parks; 5,158 visitor groups; total percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

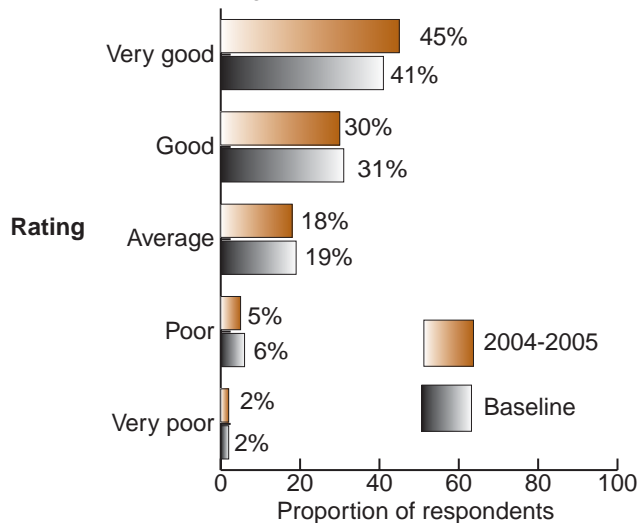


Figure 4: Quality of restrooms

Visitor Comments

To make the campsites accessible to all. More Handicapped sites need to be available. Make sure people who reserve Handicapped sites actually need the electricity.

I enjoy being able to ride long distances. I also like that a lot of the trail is shaded. I enjoyed seeing different animals along the way

Campgrounds

Camping is a central part of some visitors' park experience. Visitors at 6 parks (20 baseline parks) were asked to rate the quality of NPS campgrounds in those parks.

- 79% rated the campgrounds as “very good” or “good,” compared to the baseline rating of 78% (see Figure 5).
- Another 16% responded that the campgrounds were “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 14%.
- 5% rated the campgrounds as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 8%.

2004-2005: 6 parks; 742 visitor groups.

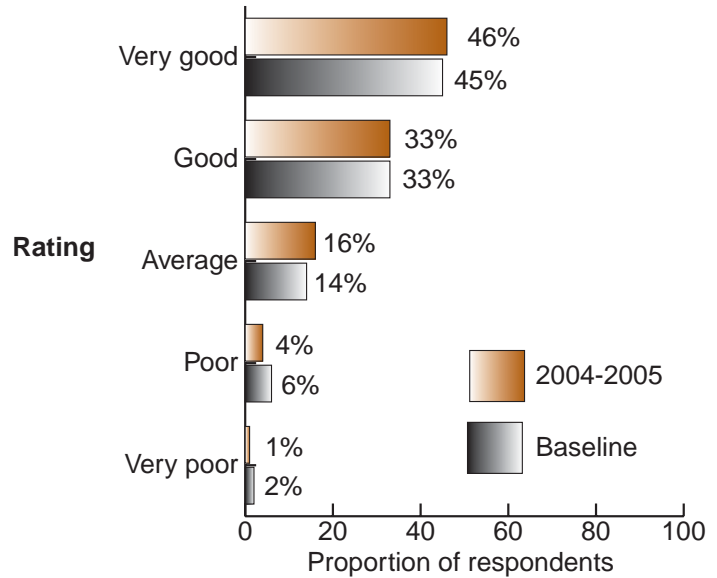


Figure 5: Quality of campgrounds

2004-2005: 11 parks; 970 visitor groups.

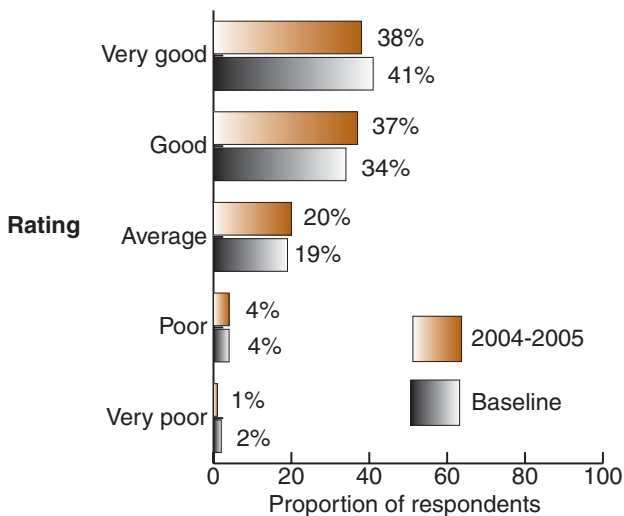


Figure 6: Quality of picnic areas

Picnic areas

Picnicking is a traditional activity that many visitors enjoy. Figure 6 shows how visitors at 11 parks (24 baseline parks) rated the quality of picnic areas in those parks.

- 75% of visitor groups rated the overall quality of picnic areas as “very good” or “good,” equal to the baseline rating.
- 20% rated picnic areas as “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 19%.
- 5% of visitor groups felt the overall quality of picnic areas was “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 6%.

Interpretive Services

Ranger Programs

Ranger programs include guided walks and tours, campfire programs, and living history demonstrations. In 20 parks (38 baseline parks), visitors were asked to rate ranger programs, as shown in Figure 7.

- 88% of visitor groups felt the quality of ranger programs was “very good” or “good,” slightly higher than the baseline rating of 87%.
- 9% responded that ranger programs were “average,” equal to the baseline rating.
- Another 3% rated ranger programs as “very poor” or “poor,” less than the baseline rating of 4%.

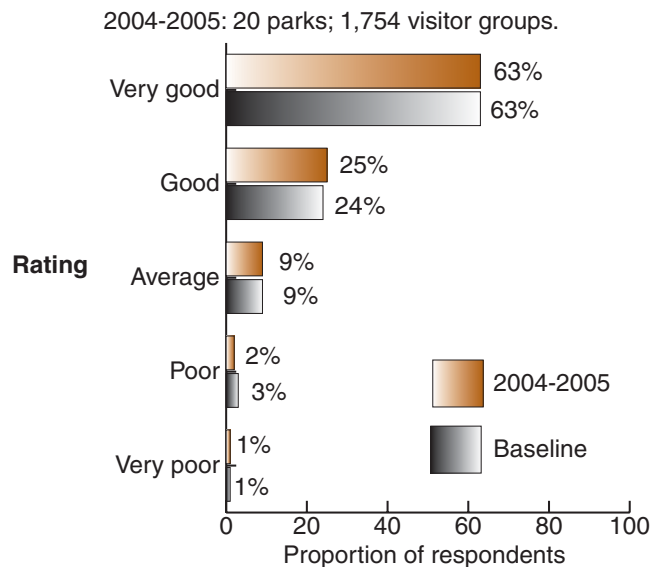


Figure 7: Quality of ranger programs

Exhibits

Exhibits in visitor centers, museums, and along roadsides and trailsides are a valuable interpretive service offered in parks. As shown in Figure 8, visitors at 20 parks (34 baseline studies) 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 78%.
- Another 14% of visitor groups felt the quality of exhibits was “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 17%.
- 3% of visitor groups rated the overall quality of exhibits as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 4%.

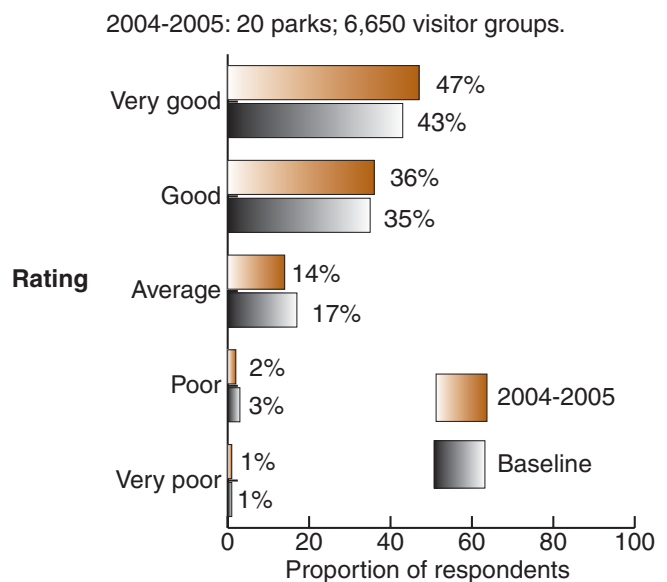


Figure 8: Quality of exhibits



Johnstown Flood National Memorial, 2005

Visitor Comments

I feel the Memorial as is tells the story very well. The visual impact of the ceiling 3-D display, the movie, photos, lighted 3-D map of the flood path were all very moving.

Staff very nice, need more exhibits! Very nice over all

Park brochures

Most parks have a brochure with a map and basic information to help visitors plan their visit. The brochure is usually distributed to visitors as they enter the park or arrive at a visitor center. Figure 9 shows the ratings by visitor groups at 22 parks (36 baseline parks).

- 86% of visitor groups rated park brochures as “very good” or “good,” slightly higher than the baseline rating of 85%.
- 11% felt the quality of brochures was “average,” lower than the baseline rating of 12%.
- 1% rated the overall quality of park brochures as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than to the baseline rating of 3%.

2004-2005: 22 parks; 7,194 visitor groups.

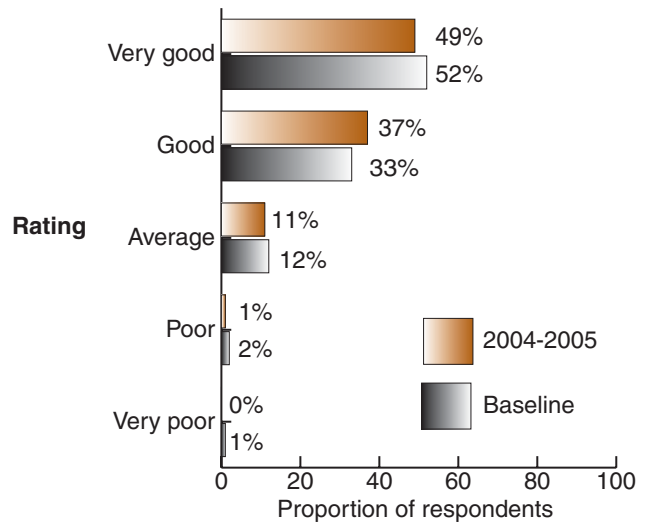


Figure 9: Quality of park brochures

Concession Services

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

Lodging

Only one park in the 2004-2005 studies had lodging within the park (11 baseline parks); interpret the results with caution.

- 69% of visitor groups rated quality of lodging as “very good” or “good,” compared to the baseline rating of 75%, as shown in Figure 10.
- 20% felt the quality of lodging as “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 17%.
- 11% rated quality of lodging as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 8%.

2004-2005: 1 park; 102 visitor groups; total percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

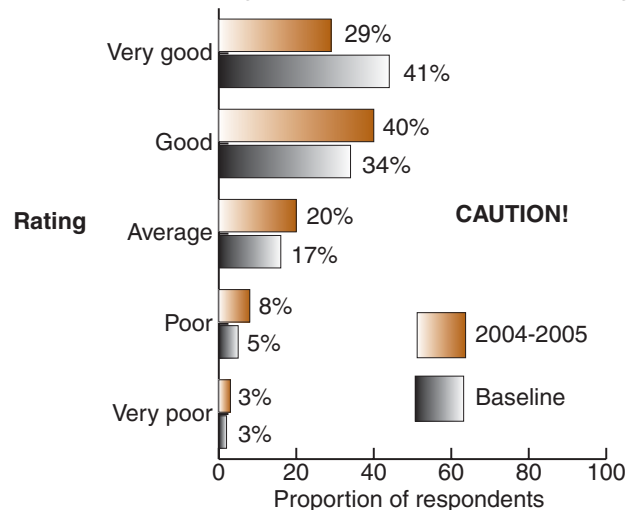


Figure 10: Quality of lodging

Food services

Only one park in the 2004-2005 studies had food services within the park (13 baseline parks); interpret the results with caution.

- 55% of visitor groups rated the quality of food services as “very good” or “good” compared to the baseline rating of 65% (see Figure 11).
- 39% felt the quality of food services as “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 22%.
- 6% rated quality of gift shops as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 13%.

2004-2005: 1 park; 300 visitor groups; total percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

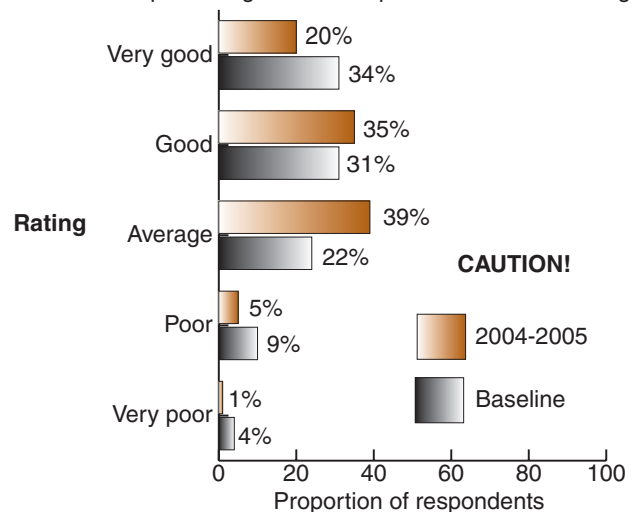


Figure 11: Quality of food services

Gift shops/bookstores

Gift shops in parks provide visitors with an opportunity to take home souvenirs from their park visit.

- 71% of visitor groups at 20 parks (35 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.
- 23% felt the quality of gift shops was “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 21%.
- 4% rated quality of gift shops as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 6%.

2004-2005: 20 parks; 2,158 visitor groups.

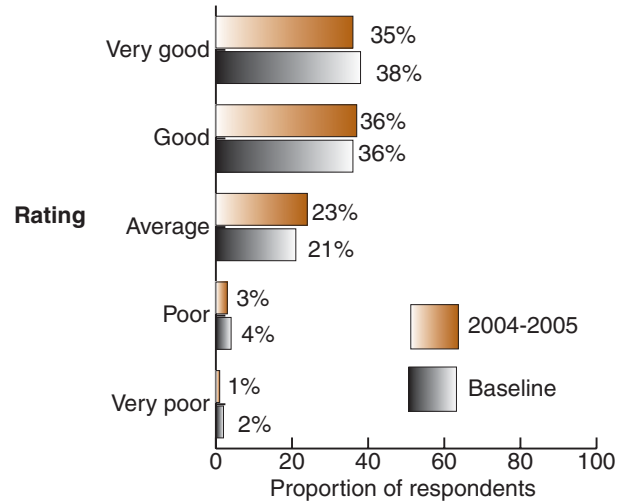


Figure 12: Quality of gift shops

Visitor Comments

- preserve the solitude + cleanliness
 - add more land for preservation
 - Keep the public informed
 - Do Not add restaurants etc...
 - Keep park clean and quiet -
 - let the natural elements be the allure.
-
- More showers in campgrounds.
 - Continue with recycling programme + environmental awareness.
 - Do not overdevelop park.



San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, 2005

Overall Quality of Services

The services evaluated by the in-depth visitor studies are indicators of how well the NPS is serving the public. Figure 13 shows ratings of 12 visitor services based on 33,628 respondents at 22 parks (61 baseline parks). These ratings are an index created by combining the ratings for the individual services.

- Most visitor groups (81%) rated the overall quality of services as “very good” or “good,” slightly higher than the baseline rating of 79%.
- 14% rated the overall quality as “average,” compared to the baseline rating of 15%.
- 4% felt the overall quality of services as “very poor” or “poor,” lower than the baseline rating of 6%.

2004-2005: 22 parks; 33,628 visitor groups;
total percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

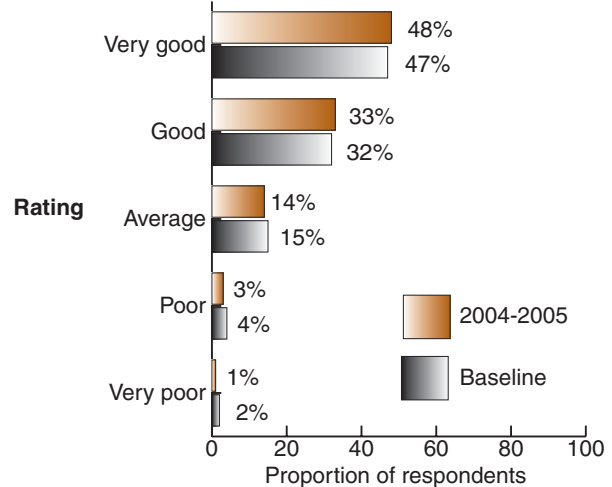


Figure 13: Overall quality of services



Yosemite National Park, 2005

Visitor Comments

We love the park. We think the improvements of the last 10 years have been great. This is an ideal park.

- (1) Better maintenance of outdoor facilities and signage
- (2) Displays/info of natural communities and park mgmt of them to enhance/recreate site conditions for visitors (incl. invasive species)

VSP Highlight: NPS visitor age trends

According to the NPS Public Use Statistics Office, the number of recreational visitors to the entire NPS system declined during 2000-2003, but increased during the 2004-2005 period. There may be many reasons for this fluctuation, including, but not limited to, the effects of 9/11, unusual weather patterns, and the increase in gas prices. Visitation to NPS units by children (aged 17 or younger) may be decreasing for several reasons, including the declining proportion of children in the U.S. and declining interest in the outdoors relative to other activities such as computers and video games. The proportions of children and senior citizens (aged 65 or over) visiting parks may also vary by time of travel and park type.

Families with children may not be able to travel during school time (spring, fall, and part of winter) while senior citizens with less time constraints may travel during school time to avoid the crowds. In addition, senior citizens and children may have physical limitations preventing them from participating in certain activities. Thus, parks with

more cultural/historical resources are assumed to attract larger proportions of children and senior citizens than parks with nature-based resources.

Data from 135 VSP studies from 1992 to 2005 show that the proportions of children and seniors among park visitors remained relatively constant over time (see Figure 14). The average proportion of visitors aged 17 or under was 20.5% (range 2% to 60%). The average proportion of senior citizens aged 65 or older was 10.7% (range 2% to 33%). Note that these proportions were only based on data about personal groups; organized groups such as school groups or elder hostels were excluded. Thus the proportions presented in this report may be lower than the actual proportions.

Two analyses of variance with three factors—year of study, time of travel (during school time vs. summer and holidays), and park type (cultural/historical vs. natural)

—were conducted. The results show that the proportions of children and senior citizens among park visitors has not changed over time. Time of travel had a significant effect on proportion of children.

As shown in Figure 15, the proportion of children visiting NPS units during summer and holidays is significantly higher than during the school year.

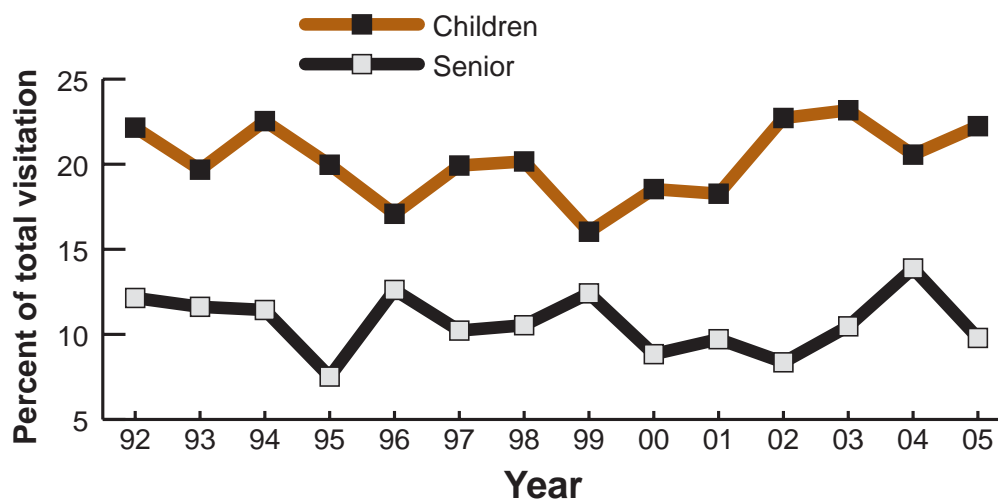


Figure 14: Proportions of park visitors who are children and seniors

The proportion of total park visitors aged 65 or over did not change over time. However, senior citizens' decision to visit a NPS site was affected by both time of the year and park type. As shown in Figure 16, senior citizens prefer to visit during times when school is in session. The proportion of senior citizens visiting cultural/historical parks is not significantly different from those who visit natural resource-based parks during school time. In the summer time, however, the proportion of senior citizens to natural resource-based parks is significantly lower than that at cultural/historical parks.

While these VSP data results are of interest, VSP studies were not conducted annually for the entire National Park System, so conclusions about the total number of children and senior citizens visiting parks cannot be made.

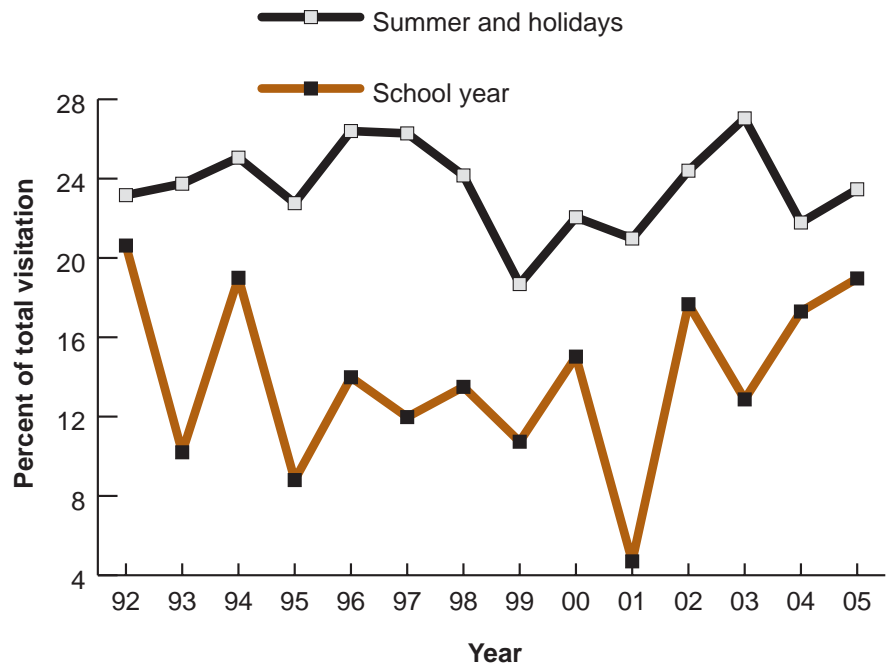


Figure 15: Proportion of children visiting NPS units at different times

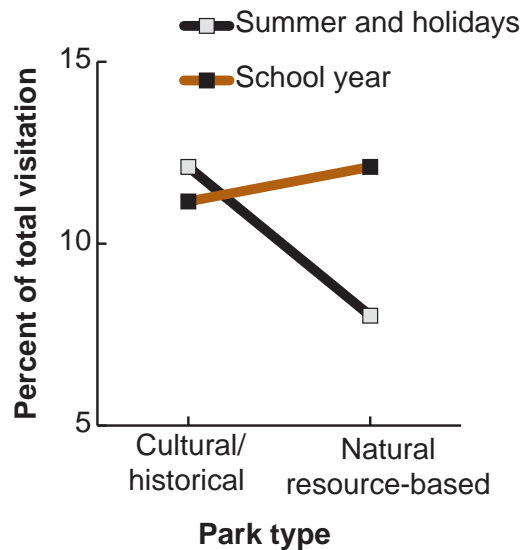


Figure 16: Proportion of senior citizen park visitors

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 by 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 and ask them 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. In early 1998, the NPS completed the development of a standardized visitor satisfaction card. The card has been used annually (since 1998) by most NPS units to measure performance related

to visitor satisfaction. In 2005, the visitor satisfaction card was completed by a sample of visitors at 305 national park units. At year's end, a total of 28,947 visitors had completed and returned the visitor satisfaction card.

On the following pages are graphs showing visitor evaluations of the quality of services within 3 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."



Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, 2005

Visitor Comment

*I had a very enjoyable visit,
and I will recommend your site
to all my friends and family members.*

Park facilities

Visitor opinions of 5 key indicators are used to measure visitor satisfaction with park facilities.

These indicators are:

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

Most visitors (90%) were satisfied with these park facilities provided within the National Park System, equal to the baseline rating (see Figure 17).

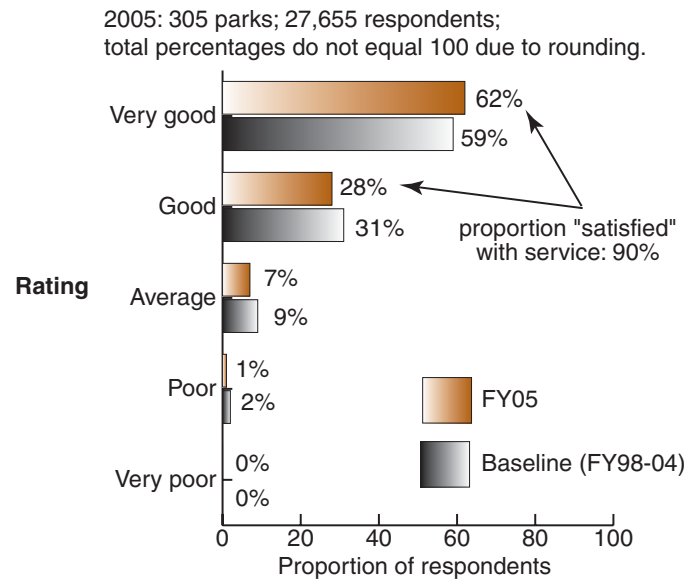


Figure 17: Combined index for satisfaction with park facilities



Timpanogos Cave National Monument, 2005

Visitor Comment

*It is gorgeous. I'm awed every time I come. The shuttle works very well. Continue reducing valley traffic. Valley facilities are good. Upgrades are great.
Thank you!*

Visitor Services

Visitor opinions of 5 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, and
- value for entrance fee paid

The majority of visitors (92%) were satisfied with these services provided within the National Park System, as shown in Figure 18.

* Baseline data are not available due to the addition of the “value for entrance fee paid” question in the FY05 survey card.

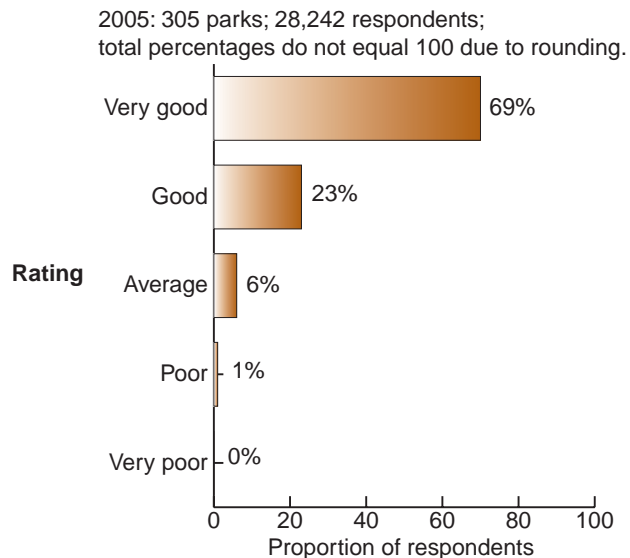


Figure 18: Combined index for satisfaction with visitor services

Recreational Opportunities

Visitor opinions of 2 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 (93%) were satisfied with these recreational opportunities provided within the National Park System.

* Baseline data are not available due to the inclusion of “sightseeing” in the “outdoor recreation” survey question.

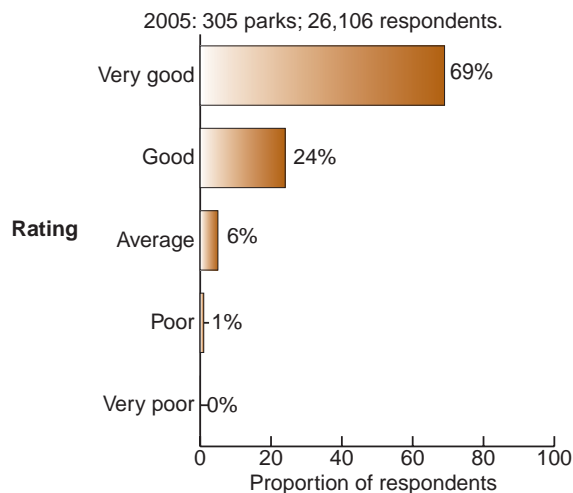


Figure 19: Combined index for satisfaction with recreational opportunities

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 satisfaction card includes an overall quality question used as the primary measure of visitor satisfaction. This question asked 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, a visitor is 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 28,947 respondents in 305 units in the National Park System. In 2005, this satisfaction level (96%) equals the baseline rating.

The visitor satisfaction 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 305 parks which successfully completed a 2005 visitor satisfaction survey, 233 parks (76%) met the annual servicewide goal of 95% visitor satisfaction. Most parks (282 or 92%) of the 305 parks had a visitor satisfaction rating of 90% or greater.

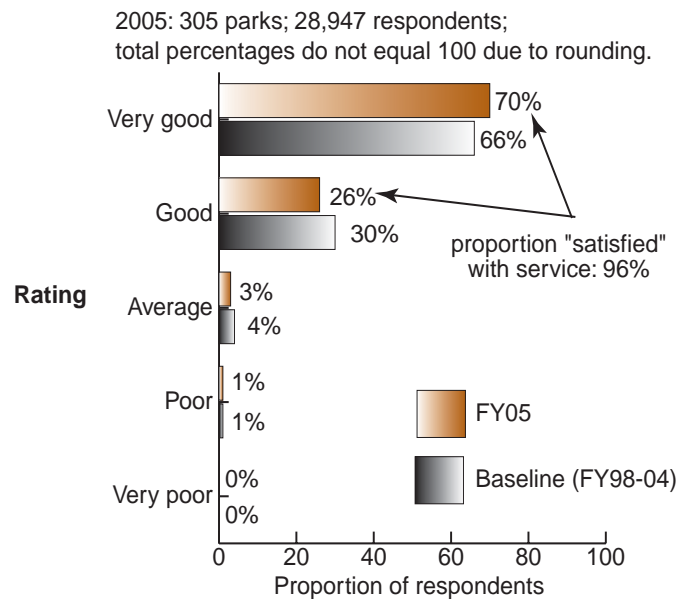


Figure 20: Overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities

Visitor Comment

Really enjoyable visit. Should be more publicized. We were unaware of this wonderful place until it was in the state paper.

The results from the visitor satisfaction card surveys at individual parks were combined to produce a satisfaction rating for each individual NPS region. Figure 21 shows the 7 regions and the percentage 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 satisfaction card results can 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.

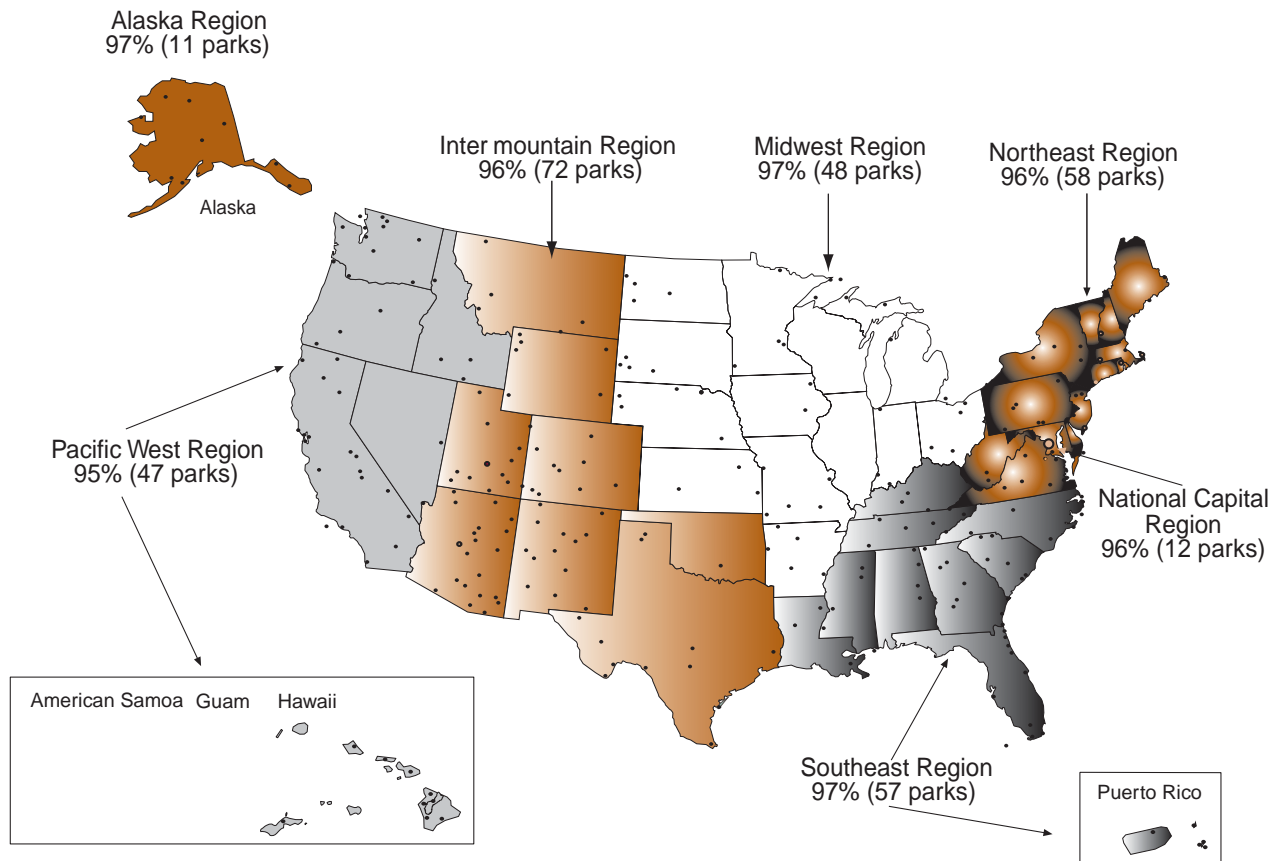


Figure 21: Percentage of visitors satisfied overall, by NPS region, 2005

VSC Highlight: value for fee paid

In 2005, “value for entrance paid” question was added as an additional indicator for visitor services. Due to space limitations, “sightseeing” and “outdoor recreation” were combined into one category. Because this was the first year that the “value for entrance fee paid” question was asked, baseline data is not available to conduct a cross-comparison. As shown in Figure 22, in 2005 among 22,956 visitors who rated value for entrance fee paid in 305 parks:

- 92% of visitors rated the value for the entrance fee paid as “very good” or “good.”
- 7% felt the value for entrance fee paid as “average.”
- 1% rated the value for entrance fee paid as “very poor” or “poor.”

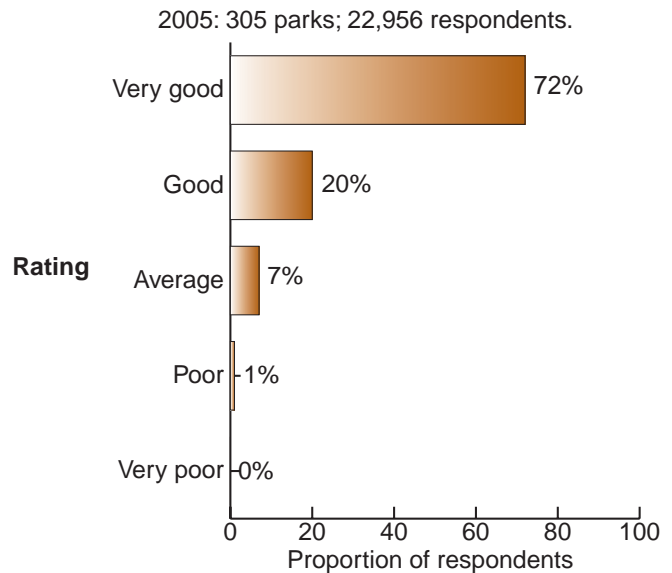


Figure 22: Value for entrance fee paid

Visitor Comments

PLACE SIGNAGE AT THE ENTRANCE TO
INFORM VISITORS THAT YOUR \$5 PASS
IS GOOD FOR SEVENDAYS FROM PURCHASE.
I WALKED THRU A WEEK BEFORE BUT
DIDNOT PURCHASE A PASS. HAD I
KNOWN I WOULD HAVE GOTTEN ONE.

I THINK ITS IMPORTANT NOT TO CHARGE FOR
ALOT OF MISC. THINGS IN THE PARK. IF YOU
NEED TO CHARGE MORE FOR SHUTTLES, I'D
RATHER PAY UP FRONT WITH ENTRANCE FEE.

Conclusion

Both the in-depth visitor studies and the visitor satisfaction card 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 improve all aspects of park operations, the NPS can continue to protect resources and provide high quality visitor services.



Fort Sumter National Monument, 2005

Visitor Comments

It is a beautiful and well
maintained park. Two of our group
were originally from Texas, and they
were very impressed (and surprised!) that
OK had such a place. Thank you for
providing such a wonderful place to visit!

We love to visit the park
for walking, swimming and
just relaxing.

Research Methods

VSP Visitor Studies

The in-depth visitor studies conducted by the VSP are based on systematic surveys of park visitors. A random sample of visitor groups is chosen to represent the general visitor population during a 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. For these situations, the survey period is extended beyond 10 days until 300 questionnaires are distributed.

The sample is usually “stratified,” or distributed by entrance or zone, depending upon park characteristics. Sample size and sampling intervals are based upon estimates using the previous year’s visitation statistics. Results are usually accurate to within 4 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 (2-minute) interviews are conducted as visitors arrive at a sampling site. 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 visitor groups contacted that decline to participate) currently averages 7%. The response rate (the proportion of visitor groups that return their questionnaire) currently averages 76%. A respondent is a member of a visitor group (at least 16 years of age) who voluntarily accepted and returned the completed questionnaire for the group. However, the whole group was asked to provide their input and opinions when answering the questionnaire. Non-response bias was 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). 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 2005, the VSP offered an online option for completing the survey for the first time, so 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, such as Spanish. These limitations apply to all studies of this type.

Visitor Survey Card Studies

The visitor satisfaction card surveys have a somewhat different methodology than the in-depth visitor studies. For each survey, park staff select an interval sampling plan based on the previous years' visitation. In each park, 400 visitor satisfaction cards are distributed to a random sample of visitors during a 30-day study period. Results are usually accurate to within 6 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 1 percentage point. These results are statistically significant at the .01 level.

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

Returned cards are electronically scanned, and the data 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 satisfaction card surveys administered in 305 parks in 2005 averaged 26%. A test for non-response bias was conducted by comparing the results for the same question from both the visitor satisfaction card and the 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 satisfaction card surveys 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 is a "comment card" type survey where no demographic data is collected nor are multiple contacts with potential respondents made, resulting in a lower response rate than traditional "Tailored-design" surveys by Dillman (2000).

VSP Visitor Studies List

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

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

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, Wisconsin
Arches National Park, Utah
Badlands National Park, South Dakota
Big Cypress National Preserve, Florida
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
Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, Kentucky
Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Ohio
Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, Ohio
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
Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve, Alaska
Grand Canyon National Park – North Rim, Arizona
Grand Canyon National Park – South Rim, Arizona
Great Sand Dunes National Monument & 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
Johnstown Flood National Memorial, Pennsylvania

Joshua Tree National Park, California
Kenai Fjords National Park, Alaska
Keweenaw National Historical Park, Michigan
Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, North Dakota
Lassen Volcanic National Park, California
Lincoln Home National Historical Site, Illinois
Manzanar National Historic Site, California
Mojave National Preserve, California
New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, Massachusetts
New River Gorge National River, West Virginia
Nicodemus National Historical 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
Rock Creek Park, Washington, D.C.
San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, California
Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, New Hampshire
San Juan National Historic Site, Puerto Rico
Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks and Sequoia National Forest, California
Shenandoah National Park, Virginia
St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, Wisconsin/Minnesota
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

Visitor Survey Card Studies

The data for visitor satisfaction card surveys in this report came from 305 NPS units. Reports are available online at:

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

For more information about the Visitor Services Project, contact:

Dr. Steven J. Hollenhorst

Director

Park Studies Unit

College of Natural Resources

University of Idaho

P.O. Box 441139

Moscow, ID 83844-1139

(208) 885-7911