

**Expedited Approval for Visitor Surveys**  
**OMB # 1024-0224**

**Annual Report**  
**Fiscal Year 2000**



**Social Science Program**  
**National Park Service**

## **Background on Expedited Approval for NPS Visitor Surveys**

The National Park Service (NPS) preserves the nation's natural and cultural heritage and provides for its enjoyment by citizens and visitors from throughout the world. An accurate understanding of the relationship between people and parks is critical to achieving the mission of the National Park System: protecting resources unimpaired and providing for public enjoyment. Such understanding requires a sound scientific basis. Hence, social science research is a necessary and important function of the National Park Service.

As part of its Social Science Program, the NPS sponsors surveys of the public to provide park managers with information for improving the quality and utility of NPS programs. All information collection activities funded or sponsored by the NPS must be done in compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (P.L. 104-13) and implementing rules (5 CFR 1320) written by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

Since many of the NPS surveys are similar in terms of the population being surveyed (park visitors), the types of questions being asked (regarding visitors and visitor services), and research methodologies, the NPS proposed to OMB and received clearance for a pilot program of approval for NPS visitor surveys (OMB# 1024-0224 exp. 8/31/2001). The program presents an alternative approach to complying with the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA). The program was designed to provide several specific benefits. First, it would improve the opportunity for meaningful public comment by offering one public review period for the entire program of similar surveys. Second, it would increase federal government efficiency by reducing the personnel time and funding necessary to prepare and review the proposed collections of information. Third, it would assist researchers by simplifying the approval process for social science research. Fourth, it would improve the timely delivery of usable knowledge to NPS managers.

Annual reports are required as a component of the approval. This is the second annual report, summarizing activities in FY 2000. In this report, the program is referred to as the Expedited Approval for NPS Visitor Surveys.

## **Management and Oversight**

Separate management, oversight, and approval responsibilities are held by the NPS Social Science Program, DOI, and OMB. The NPS Chief Social Scientist, with the assistance of Social Science Program staff, provides guidance for submission and reviews all survey instruments for compliance with technical standards and program guidelines. The staff responsibility for the Expedited Approval for NPS Visitor Surveys has been assigned to Brian Forist. The Chief Social Scientist rejects survey instruments that do not comply with the requirements of the program. For submissions that comply with program requirements, the Chief Social Scientist determines the appropriate number of burden hours for the information collection, certifies that the survey instrument is technically acceptable and in compliance with the PRA, and transmits the individual instrument to OMB for final approval. If the NPS receives approval from OMB, the NPS allocates the OMB control number (and an NPS tracking number), survey expiration date and designated burden hours, and authorizes the principal investigator to use the approved instrument.

The Department of the Interior (DOI) office responsible for oversight of information collection activities (the Office of Policy Analysis) monitors NPS activities within the pilot program, provides policy guidance, and reviews annual reports.

The OMB Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) provides expedited review of NPS submissions under the program and notifies the Chief Social Scientist of approval (or the need for revision) within 5 working days.

The NPS Social Science Program developed guidelines, which describe the authorities, scope and the submission process for the program. The final guidelines, dated October 1, 1999, have been broadly disseminated to park managers and the social science community. In addition, the guidelines and associated forms are available as downloadable files on the NPS Social Science Program website at <[www.nps.gov/socialscience/tech/survey.htm](http://www.nps.gov/socialscience/tech/survey.htm)>.

## Fiscal Year 2000 Activities

FY 2000 activities under the Expedited Approval for NPS Visitor Surveys are summarized in Table 1. In FY 2000, there were 33 visitor surveys approved in 28 units of the National Park System. The total estimated burden on the public was 8,783.64 hours. The average survey placed a burden on the public of 266.17 hours.

**Table 1 – Fiscal Year 2000 Activities**

Survey #	PI's Last Name	Survey Title	Start Date	End Date	Burden Hours
00-E-001	Johnson	Effect of Fee Demo Prog. on Backcountry Users in Selected National Parks	06-Apr-00	30-Sep-00	648.00
00-E-002	Mestl	Missouri National Recreational River Recreational Use Study	01-Apr-00	30-Dec-00	60.40
00-E-003	Littlejohn	VSP Haleakala National Park Visitor Study	26-Mar-00	01-Apr-00	163.40
00-E-004	Littlejohn	VSP White House Tour and White House Visitor Center Visitor Study	30-Apr-00	10-May-00	184.90
00-E-005	Brown	Monitoring Social Conditions on Isle Royale National Park	01-Jun-00	30-Sep-00	308.00
00-E-006	Jacobi	Monitoring Visitor Behaviors on Acadia National Park Carriage Roads	01-Jun-00	31-Oct-00	33.75
00-E-007	Ham	Bear-Human Interaction Assessment/Yosemite National Park	12-Jun-00	30-Sep-00	467.00
00-E-008	Harris	Grand Teton National Park Visitor Survey	11-Jul-00	31-Oct-00	395.83
00-E-009	McNamee	Presidio Trails and Bikeways User Survey	08-Jun-00	15-Jun-00	161.00
00-E-010	Chilman	Ozark National Scenic Riverways Horse Trail Rider Survey	27-May-00	30-Dec-00	9.58
00-E-011	Krumpe	Glacier National Park Backcountry Visitor Study	09-Jun-00	29-Sep-00	537.50
00-E-012	Littlejohn	VSP USS Arizona Memorial Visitor Study	24-Jun-00	30-Jun-00	136.60
00-E-013	Garshelis	Bear-Human Interaction Survey, Voyageurs National Park	11-Jun-00	30-Sep-00	101.00
00-E-014	Harris	Grand Teton National Park Visitor Survey-Phase II	withdrawn by PI		0.00
00-E-015	Darby	Fish Creel Census and Design at Great Basin National Park	withdrawn by PI		0.00
00-E-016	Hall	Evaluation of NPS Sign Format and Design (Yosemite National Park)	01-Jul-00	31-Aug-00	254.70
00-E-017	Manfredo	Rocky Mountain National Park Visitor Study	20-Jun-00	23-Oct-00	114.00
00-E-018	Littlejohn	VSP Olympic National Park Visitor Study	07-Jul-00	16-Jul-00	233.50
00-E-019	Johnson	Denali National Park Backpacker Interview, Diary Survey, and Mail Survey	17-Jul-00	15-Nov-00	813.00
00-E-020	Manning	Denali National Park Backcountry Visitor Study	24-Jul-00	04-Sep-00	275.00
00-E-021	Manning	Mesa Verde National Park Use and User Survey	20-Jul-00	04-Sep-01	56.30
00-E-022	Manning	Carrying Capacity Research for Mesa Verde National Park	20-Jul-00	04-Sep-01	469.00
00-E-023	Littlejohn	VSP Eisenhower National Historic Site Visitor Study	23-Jul-00	29-Jul-00	136.20
00-E-024	Onwujuba	Urban Park Visitors' Expectation/Experience	28-Jul-00	13-Aug-00	267.00
00-E-025	Manning	Acadia N.P. (Schoodic Peninsula Section) Use and User Survey	24-Jul-00	04-Sep-00	106.30
00-E-026	Manning	Visitor Research for the Boston Harbor Islands	24-Jul-00	04-Sep-00	229.50
00-E-027	Littlejohn	VSP Badlands National Park Visitor Study	02-Aug-00	08-Aug-00	155.70

00-E-028	Littlejohn	VSP Mount Rainier National Park Visitor Study	18-Aug-00	27-Aug-00	204.30
00-E-029	Armstrong	Fire Island National Seashore Ferry Passenger Survey	24-Aug-00	26-Aug-00	33.60
00-E-030	Loudon	Marin Parklands Comprehensive Transportation Management Plan	01-Feb-01	31-Aug-01	671.00
00-E-031	Franz	GOGA: Water Shuttle Access Plan Visitor Surveys	28-Aug-00	31-Mar-01	667.00
00-E-032	Vogel song	Cape Hatteras National Seashore Preliminary Visitor Use Study	26-Aug-00	26-Oct-00	91.00
00-E-033	Townsend	Glacier National Park 2000 Survey of Visitors	26-Aug-00	01-Sep-00	412.50
00-E-034	Armstrong	Fire Island National Seashore Visitor Study	09-Sep-00	09-Sep-00	13.75
00-E-035	Nelson	GOGA: Marin Headlands/Ft. Baker Trans. Mngt. Plan Intercept Questionnaire	10-Sep-00	09-Sep-01	373.33
<b>Total Burden Hours</b>					<b>8,783.64</b>

## Effects of the Expedited Approval Process

There are several immediate effects derived from this pilot program. These include time savings, cost savings, reduction in burden on the public and increased peer review. The standard PRA survey approval process takes approximately six months once the first *Federal Register* notice is published. Under the expedited program, the approval time has been reduced to 45 days or less once a survey has been submitted to the NPS for review. A conservative estimate nets a time savings of approximately four and one half months per survey. In FY 2000, 33 surveys were approved under the program with an estimated time savings of 148.5 months. On average, it took 38 calendar days from initial submission, for a survey to be reviewed by the NPS Social Science Program staff, revised by the Principal Investigator as needed, certified by the NPS Visiting Chief Social Scientist, and approved by OMB.

The expedited approval process provides substantial cost savings for the federal government by reducing staff time required to review submissions. Table 2 shows that the approval process saves approximately \$1,343 per study. This second year of the program yielded a direct cost savings to the federal government of approximately \$44,319 (33 studies X \$1,343 per study).

**Table 2 – Summary of Time and Cost Savings**

Activity	Approx. Salary	Standard Approval Process		Expedited Approval Process		Cost Savings
		Average Review Time Per Study	Cost Per Study	Average Review Time Per Study	Cost Per Study	
Review and handling by Social Science Program staff	\$23.20/hr*	12.5 hours	\$290.00	3 hours	\$69.60	\$220.40
Review by Chief Social Scientist	\$39.07/hr*	7.5 hours	\$293.03	3 hours	\$117.21	\$175.82
Review by NPS Information Collection Clearance Officer	\$33.07/hr*	3 hours	\$99.21	None	None	\$99.21
Review by DOI Information Collection Clearance Officer	\$52.72/hr	2 hours	\$105.44	None	None	\$105.44
Review by OMB	\$45.96/hr*	3 hours	\$137.88	1 hour	\$45.96	\$91.92
Federal Register Notice Publication	\$325.00 per notice	2 per study	\$650.00	None	None	\$650.00
<b>Total Cost Savings Per Study</b>						<b>\$1,342.79</b>

\*Salaries are based on calendar year 2000 GS levels at step 5 for the Washington, DC area.

In addition to these direct cost savings, principal investigators also benefit by a significant reduction in labor required to prepare approval packages. The project manager for the NPS-sponsored Visitor Services Project (VSP) estimates a savings of 15 hours at an estimated cost of \$375 per study. The VSP conducted seven studies in FY 2000 for a total cost savings of approximately \$2,625. Estimating similar time savings to principal investigators for the 26 remaining studies conducted in FY 2000, an additional cost savings of approximately \$9,750 was incurred. The total cost savings to principal investigators is estimated to be \$12,375. Hence, the total amount of dollars saved by the federal government and principal investigators in FY 2000 is estimated to be at least \$56,694.

Burden on the public has been reduced by eliminating the repetitive *Federal Register* publications for substantially similar survey research. Extensive public review of the program as a whole resulted in effective and efficient public comment. Comments on the original proposal for the program of expedited approval were received from 15 individuals. Those comments were incorporated into the final submission to OMB.

Finally, the expedited approval process encourages principal investigators to have their survey instruments peer-reviewed prior to submission. This has resulted in higher quality studies that reduce burden on the public and ensure more accurate data.

## **Progress on NPS Initiatives**

In compliance with the pilot project approval, several initiatives are being undertaken by the NPS Social Science Program. These include: 1) research on survey methods, 2) strategic planning for visitor surveys, and 3) development of an archive of survey results.

Studies conducted by the NPS offer opportunities for methodological research useful to both the NPS and other agencies with similar user populations and data collection needs. Research on improving response rates, reducing non-response bias, improving survey and interview design, reducing sampling error, increasing validity of measures, and improving public review of survey instruments is important. Time and cost savings as a result of the expedited approval have allowed the NPS Social Science Program to fund and administer methodological research useful to the NPS and other federal agencies. In April 1999, the NPS contracted with Dr. Don Dillman of Washington State University to conduct research on response rates and visitor surveys. This research will be valuable for improving survey methodology. The results of this work are expected in May 2001. Copies of the final report and peer-reviewed journal articles will be provided to OMB once they are completed.

Another initiative is the development of a strategic plan for NPS visitor surveys. Currently, NPS surveys most often respond to park-specific requests for data to meet individual park management needs. While this approach successfully supports those parks which are able to provide funds and attract researchers, it does not necessarily contribute to needs of other parks or of the National Park System as a whole. Currently, the NPS Visitor Services Project (which accounts for nearly 1/4 of the visitor studies conducted in the National Park System annually) plans its

activities to ensure a diversity of parks (geographic and type of park unit) are surveyed. An advisory committee comprised of NPS managers selects priority parks to be studied following a set of criteria established in support of the NPS Strategic Plan. The results of the VSP efforts are summarized in the annual *Serving the Visitor* Reports and broadly distributed to NPS managers and the public.

The NPS Social Science Program is building a social science data and information archival system in consultation with scientists conducting NPS-sponsored visitor surveys. Currently, paper copies of information related to visitor surveys conducted under the expedited approval are maintained in the NPS Social Science Program office in Washington, DC. Strategies to archive research findings on the Social Science Program website and to link visitor survey data with other NPS scientific information are being explored. In FY01, the program has contracted (through competition) with Chico State University to have all data from the VSP studies ( $\approx 120$  individual park studies) combined into a single, queryable database. This should provide significant benefit to NPS managers at the regional and national level.

## **Future Plans**

The NPS Social Science Program is developing a brochure explaining the Expedited Approval for NPS Visitor Surveys and the standard PRA approval process. This brochure will be reviewed by DOI and OMB prior to publication. Broad dissemination to all park units, field offices of the NPS, and social scientists who conduct research in the National Park System is planned. The brochure will help clarify compliance with the PRA and allow NPS managers to better plan for social science research. Additional methodological research is also anticipated in FY 2001.

The NPS Social Science Program is preparing for renewal of the expedited approval program (current approval expires 31 August 2001). The program will include surveys of park visitors, potential park visitors, and residents of communities near parks.

In its second year, the Expedited Approval for NPS Visitor Surveys has proven to be useful, effective, and efficient. The NPS Social Science Program looks forward to continuing to work with NPS managers, social scientists, DOI, OMB and the public to ensure the success of this pilot program.

## **For Additional Information**

Dr. Gary Machlis  
Visiting Chief Social Scientist  
Phone: (202) 208-5391  
Email: gmachlis@uidaho.edu

Brian Forist  
Research Associate  
Phone: (202) 208-6330  
Email: bforist@uidaho.edu

Social Science Program  
National Park Service  
1849 C Street NW (3127)  
Washington, DC 20240