

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Social Science Program



## Expedited Approval for Visitor Surveys (OMB # 1024-0224) FY 2001 Annual Report



Photograph courtesy of Terry Bergerson

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## **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 presented 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 third annual report, summarizing activities in FY 2001. 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, the Department of the Interior (DOI), and OMB. The NPS Visiting 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,

Research Associate.

For submissions that comply with program requirements, the Visiting Chief Social Scientist determines the appropriate number of burden hours for the information collection, certifies that the survey instrument and research methodology is technically acceptable and in compliance with the PRA, and transmits the individual survey package 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 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 Visiting 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 under the initial approval, dated October 1, 1999, were broadly

disseminated to park managers and the social science community. New guidelines reflecting program changes for FY 2002 have been prepared and disseminated. The current 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 2001 Activities**

FY 2001 activities under the Expedited Approval for NPS Visitor Surveys are summarized in Table 1. In FY 2001, 34 visitor surveys were approved. Survey work was conducted in most units of the National Park System. One of the surveys approved was the NPS Visitor Survey Card, a Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) compliance survey conducted in approximately 330 units of the National Park System. The remaining 33 surveys were conducted in 52 park units. The total estimated burden on the public for all surveys approved in FY 2001 was 14,517.94 hours. The average survey in FY 2001 placed a burden on the public of 455.49 hours. The mean burden on each individual respondent was 19.25 minutes.

**Table 1 – Fiscal Year 2001 Activities**

OMB Survey Number	P.I. Last Name	Survey Title	Start Date	End Date	Burden Hours
01-001	Lee	Petrified Forest National Park Visitor Survey	01-Feb-01	31-Jan-02	243.30
01-002	Golding	A Survey on Visitor Safety in the National Park System	01-Jan-01	15-Sep-01	3,463.26
01-003	Hoger	NPS Visitor Survey Card	01-Jan-02	31-Dec-03	3,520.00
	Gallagher	Fort Sumter National Monument: Charleston Harbor Water Taxi Study, Resident & Non-Resident Visitor Surveys	withdrawn by PI		0.00
01-005	Anderson	Theodore Roosevelt National Park Visitor Use Study	15-Feb-01	15-Nov-01	508.50
01-006	Littlejohn	NPS Visitor Services Project: Biscayne National Park Visitor Study	03-Mar-01	11-Mar-01	107.00
01-007	Keith	Recreation User Group Survey on Colorado River Portion of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area	16-Apr-01	31-Oct-01	215.00
01-008	Ham	Human-Bear Interaction Assessment - Yosemite National Park, California	01-Jun-01	30-Sep-01	316.67
01-009	Anderson	Niobrara National Scenic River Visitor Study	15-May-01	03-Sep-01	307.00
01-010	Johnson	Yukon-Charley River Floater Entrance Survey, Diary Survey, and Exit Survey	01-Jun-01	30-Sep-01	208.00
01-011	Littlejohn	NPS Visitor Services Project: Colonial National Historical Park - Jamestown Island Visitor Study	24-Jun-01	30-Jun-01	136.60
01-012	Manning	Carrying Capacity Research for Long House at Mesa Verde National Park	01-Jul-01	03-Sep-01	78.00
01-013	Manning	Acadia National Park (Isle au Haut Section) Use and User Survey	01-Jul-01	04-Sep-01	206.30
01-014	Eisenberger	Visitor Experience and Media Effectiveness, Rocky Mountain National Park/Yellowstone National Park	21-Jun-01	29-Jul-01	415.00
01-015	Vogelsong	Cape Hatteras National Seashore Visitor Use Study	20-Jun-01	31-May-02	782.80
01-016	Parman	Front End Evaluation/Mt. Rainier National Park	06-Jul-01	08-Jul-01	26.70
01-017	Manning	Yosemite National Park Backpacker Visitor Survey	26-Jun-01	05-Sep-01	843.00
01-018	Manning	Visitor Research for the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area	26-Jun-01	03-Sep-01	260.40
01-019	Roggenbuck	Appomattox Courthouse National Historical Park Visitor Study	25-Jun-01	31-Oct-01	221.80
01-020	Power	An Evaluation of Transportation and Congestion in Yosemite Valley	27-Jun-01	31-Aug-01	93.30
01-021	Roggenbuck	Fossil Butte National Monument Visitor Study	25-Jun-01	25-Sep-01	331.10
01-022	Johnson	Kenai Fjords National Park: Social Science Data Collection to Support VERP Planning @ Exit Glacier	20-Jun-01	30-Sep-01	487.00
01-023	Manning	Saratoga National Historical Park Visitor Survey	01-Jul-01	03-Sep-01	151.30
01-024	Manning	Acadia National Park (Schoodic Peninsula Section) Use and User Survey	01-Jul-01	04-Sep-01	103.10
01-025	Shettel	Front-End Evaluation for Effective Media at Shenandoah National Park	07-Jul-01	07-Jul-01	5.60
01-026	Vaske	Visitor Crowding at Congested Areas of Rocky Mountain National Park	30-Jul-01	20-Oct-01	122.50
01-027	Manning	Acadia National Park (Schoodic Peninsula Section) Visitor Survey	07-Jul-01	04-Sep-01	55.00
01-028	Littlejohn	NPS Visitor Services Project: Shenandoah National Park Visitor Study	15-Jul-01	21-Jul-01	175.50
01-029	Simmons	NPS Visitor Services Project: Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore Visitor Study	29-Jul-01	04-Aug-01	97.25
01-030	Heimlich	An Investigation of Communication Processes in U.S. National Parks	25-Jul-01	23-Aug-01	335.91
01-031	Morelli	Grand Teton National Park Travel Survey	06-Aug-01	13-Aug-01	186.50

01-032	Littlejohn	NPS Visitor Services Project: Crater Lake National Park Visitor Study	03-Aug-01	09-Aug-01	116.75
01-033	Simmons	NPS Visitor Services Project: Valley Forge National Historical Park Visitor Study	11-Aug-01	19-Aug-01	153.80
01-034	Bahr	Goosenecks State Park Current and Potential Visitor Survey (Glen Canyon NRA/Natural Bridges NM)	15-Aug-01	31-Oct-01	112.00
01-035	Schneider	Apostle Islands National Lakeshore Visitor Study	15-Sep-01	01-Dec-01	132.00
Total Burden Hours					14,517.94

### 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 2001, 34 surveys were approved under the program with an estimated time savings of 153 months. On average, it took 31 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 \$1,369 per study. This third year of the program yielded a direct cost savings to the federal government of approximately \$46,546 (34 studies X \$1,369 per study). 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 six studies in FY 2001 for a total cost savings of approximately \$2,250. Estimating similar time savings to principal investigators for the 28 remaining studies conducted in FY 2001, an additional cost savings of approximately \$10,500 was incurred. The total cost savings to principal investigators is estimated to be \$12,750. Hence, the total amount of dollars saved by the federal government and principal investigators in FY 2001 is estimated to be at least \$59,296.

**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	\$24.08/hr*	12.5 hours	\$301.00	3 hours	\$72.24	\$228.76
Review by Chief Social Scientist	\$40.56/hr*	7.5 hours	\$304.20	3 hours	\$121.68	\$182.52
Review by NPS Information Collection Clearance Officer	\$34.33/hr*	3 hours	\$102.99	None	None	\$102.99
Review by DOI Information Collection Clearance Officer	\$54.73/hr	2 hours	\$109.46	None	None	\$109.46
Review by OMB	\$47.71/hr*	3 hours	\$143.13	1 hour	\$47.71	\$95.42
Federal Register Notice Publication	\$325.00 per notice	2 per study	\$650.00	None	None	\$650.00
Total Cost Savings Per Study						\$1,369.15

\*Salaries are based on calendar year 2001 GS levels at step 5 for the Washington, DC area.

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. 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.

In 2001, the NPS Social Science Program submitted an extension request for the program of expedited approval. That extension request expanded the program to include surveys of park visitors, potential park visitors, and residents of communities near parks. OMB clearance was granted on 19 September 2001 (OMB# 1024-0224 exp. 9/30/04). It is estimated

that in addition to surveys of park visitors the NPS will submit up to 10 surveys for approval each year under the expedited program that would previously have fallen outside the program's scope. The positive result is more savings in time and cost to the federal government (NPS, DOI and OMB) and principal investigators, and a further reduction in burden on the public.

**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.

The NPS contracted with Dr. Don Dillman of Washington State University to conduct research on response rates and visitor surveys. This research is valuable for improving survey methodology. A technical

report, *Structural Determinants of Response Rates to 102 National Park Satisfaction Surveys, 1988-1999*, was delivered in January 2001.

Strategic planning for visitor surveys has been postponed due to the NPS revising its Strategic Plan and GPRA goals; planning for visitor surveys will be integrated into this process.

The NPS Social Science Program is building a social science data and information archival system in consultation with scientists conducting NPS-sponsored visitors surveys. A written plan for archiving results has been prepared and materials are being archived 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 contracted (through competition) with Chico State University to have data from the VSP studies (~120 individual park studies) combined into a single, queryable database. That work is underway.

### **Future Plans**

The NPS Social Science Program is developing a brochure explaining the expedited and standard PRA approval processes for NPS-sponsored surveys. 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. The brochure will be distributed in early 2002.

New guidelines for the Expedited Approval for NPS-Sponsored Public Surveys, the extended and expanded program of approval, will be distributed in January 2002. They will be sent to park managers, regional and support offices, and posted on the NPS Social Science Program website. These guidelines replace prior guidelines and instructions.

In its third 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 valuable program.

### **For Additional Information**

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