

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

**Annual Report
Fiscal Year 1999**



**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. 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) describe the process for approving such information collections. This approval process takes approximately six months and has significant impact on the public, park managers and social scientists. Since many of the NPS surveys are similar in terms of the population being surveyed, the types of questions being asked and research methodologies, the NPS proposed to OMB an alternative approach to comply with the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA). Several benefits were discussed. First, it would improve the opportunity for meaningful public comment. Second, it would be more efficient for the federal government by reducing the level of personnel and funding necessary to prepare and review the proposed collections of information. Third, it would assist researchers by simplifying the approval process for research. Fourth, it would improve the timely delivery of scientific knowledge to NPS managers.

During the summer of 1998, the NPS Social Science Program worked closely with OMB and submitted a proposal for a programmatic approval for NPS visitor surveys. This proposal outlined a three-year pilot project that is narrow in focus, covering common survey activities undertaken in the National Park System. It described an alternative approval process for a program of information collection from one specific segment of the public-park visitors. The proposed programmatic approval process would cover the general subject of national park visitors and visitor services. Extensive public comment was sought both through the *Federal Register* (*Federal Register Vol. 62 No. 189 pgs. 51133-51143 Sept. 30, 1997 and Vol. 63 No. 146 pgs. 40731-40732 July 30, 1998*) and by more direct solicitation of those likely to have an interest in the proposed program. These public comments were addressed and incorporated into the final proposal.

The proposal was approved by OMB as a three-year pilot project (OMB# 1024-0224 exp. 8/31/2001). Annual reports are required as a component of the approval. This is the first annual report summarizing activities in FY 1999. In this report, the pilot project is referred to as the Expedited Approval for NPS Visitor Surveys.

Management and Oversight

Management, oversight, and approval responsibilities are as follows. The NPS Chief Social Scientist provides guidance for submission, and reviews all survey instruments for compliance with technical standards and program guidelines. 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 and expiration dates 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, survey expiration date and designated burden hours, and authorizes the principal investigator to use the approved instrument. An appeal process is available to principal investigators if a submission is not approved.

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 project, provides policy guidance, and reviews annual reports.

The OMB Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) provides expedited review of NPS certified instruments submitted 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 interim guidelines, which described the authorities, scope and the submission process for the program. These interim guidelines were released on February 1, 1999. After working under the interim guidelines for approximately six months, informal comments were solicited and received from principal investigators that used the new approval process. These comments and the experience with management of the program were incorporated into the final revision of the guidelines dated October 1, 1999. The final guidelines 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 website at www.nps.gov/socialscience/tech/survey.htm.

Fiscal Year 1999 Activities

FY 1999 activities under the NPS Expedited Approval for Visitor Surveys are summarized in Table 1. In FY 1999, there were 25 visitor surveys approved in 30 units of the National Park System. The total estimated burden on the public was 5,708.2 hours.

Table 1 – Fiscal Year 1999 Activities

NPS Survey #	P.I. Last Name	Survey Title	Start Date	End Date	Burden Hours
99-001	Littlejohn	Big Cypress National Preserve Visitor Study	2-Jan-99	10-Jan-99	152.0
99-002	Littlejohn	San Juan National Historic Site Visitor Study	21-Feb-99	27-Feb-99	144.0
99-003	Littlejohn	St. Croix National Scenic Riverway Visitor Study	25-Jun-99	3-Jul-99	128.0
99-004	Littlejohn	New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park Visitor Study	20-Jul-99	26-Jul-99	80.0
99-005	Johnson	Yukon Charley River Floater Survey (Entrance, Diary, Exit)	1-Jun-99	30-Sep-99	227.0
99-006	Westphal	Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Trip Fact Sheet	12-Jun-99	12-Sep-99	336.0
99-007	Moss	Glacier Bay National Park Visitor & Vessel Owner Use Survey	1-Jun-99	31-Aug-01	121.0
99-008	Littlejohn	Rock Creek Park Visitor Study	8-Jul-99	14-Jul-99	200.0
99-009	Littlejohn	Kenai Fjords National Park Exit Glacier Visitor Study	5-Aug-99	11-Aug-99	120.0
99-010	Littlejohn	Lassen Volcanic National Park Visitor Study	15-Aug-99	21-Aug-99	80.0
99-011	Lime	1999 Recreation Fee Demonstration Study	1-Jun-99	30-Jun-02	108.0
99-012	Manning	Appalachian National Scenic Trail User Study	1-Jun-99	31-Oct-99	2062.5
99-013	Daigle	Acadia National Park Shuttle Bus Survey	1-Aug-99	6-Sep-99	166.0
99-014	Stutzman	Navajo National Monument Visitor Survey	1-Aug-99	30-Sep-00	66.7
99-015	Littlejohn	Glacier Bay National Park Visitor Study	23-Jul-99	1-Aug-99	200.0
99-016	Manning	Carrying Capacity Research for Yosemite Valley	1-Aug-99	6-Sep-99	390.0
99-017	Manning	Yosemite Valley Use and User Survey	6-Aug-99	9-Aug-99	180.0
99-018	Shacklett	Yosemite Shuttle Bus Rider Survey	6-Aug-99	8-Aug-99	30.0
99-019	Shacklett	Yosemite Valley Tour Bus Passenger Survey	6-Aug-99	8-Aug-99	19.0
99-020	Baughman	Recreation Flow Preference at Chattahoochee River NRA	1-Sep-99	31-Oct-99	67.0
99-021	Turrentine	Yosemite Overnight Study	withdrawn	by principal investigator	
99-022	Turrentine	Yosemite Bicycle Study	withdrawn	by principal investigator	
99-023	Meehan	Cumberland Gap National Historical Park Visitor Study	9-Oct-99	17-Oct-99	128.0
99-024	Anderson	Glen Canyon National Recreation Area Visitor Study	1-Oct-99	30-Nov-00	321.0
99-025	Anderson	Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Visitor Study	1-Oct-99	31-Dec-00	122.0
99-026	Anderson	Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore Visitor Use Study (3 seas.)	1-Dec-99	31-Dec-00	195.0
99-027	Lime	Devils Tower National Monument Visitor Study	1-Oct-99	30-Nov-99	65.0
Total Burden Hours					5708.2

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 1999, 25 surveys were approved under the program with an estimated time savings of 112.5 months.

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 \$1,100 per study. This first year of the program yielded a direct cost savings to the federal government of approximately \$27,500 (25 studies X \$1,100 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	10 hours	\$232.00	3 hours	\$69.60	\$162.4
Review by Chief Social Scientist	\$39.07/hr	6 hours	\$234.42	3 hours	\$117.21	\$117.21
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	\$45.96/hr	3 hours	\$137.88	None	None	\$137.88
Review by OMB	\$45.96/hr	3 hours	\$137.88	1 hour	\$45.96	\$91.92
Federal Register Notice Publication	\$250.00 per notice	2 per study	\$500.00	None	None	\$500.00
Total Cost Savings Per Study						\$1108.62

*Salaries are based on 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 12 hours per study. The VSP conducted seven studies in FY 1999 for a cost savings of nearly \$2,000. Estimating similar time savings to principal investigators for the 18 remaining studies conducted in FY 1999, an additional cost savings of approximately \$5,000 was incurred. Hence, the total amount of dollars saved by the federal government and principal investigators in FY 1999 is estimated to be at least \$34,500.

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.

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 2000. 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. Consultation with park managers and social scientists indicates this strategic planning effort represents a significant undertaking. Currently, the NPS Visitor Services Project (which accounts for nearly 1/3 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. 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 will begin a broader strategic planning effort for all NPS visitor surveys in FY 2000. The plan will be developed in consultation with park managers, social scientists, NPS and DOI officials, and OMB.

The NPS Social Science Program is beginning to build a social science data and information archival system in consultation with scientists conducting NPS-sponsored visitors 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.

Future Plans

The NPS Social Science Program is developing a brochure explaining the expedited approval process 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 2000.

In its first year, the NPS Expedited Approval for 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

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