



Assateague Island National Seashore

Visitor Attitudes and Experiences Associated with the
Oversand Vehicle Zone and Backcountry Camping Areas

May 2008



Visitor Attitudes and Experiences Associated with the Oversand Vehicle Zone and Backcountry Camping Areas at Assateague Island National Seashore

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May 2008

Completed in accordance with Sub Agreement 62 of the National Park Service –
Indiana University Cooperative Agreement CA 2670-97-001



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Executive Summary

This report describes the results of Assateague Island National Seashore's Oversand Vehicle (OSV) and Backcountry visitor telephone survey conducted from November 2007 to January 2008. Surveys were administered to a total of 43 OSV users and Backcountry area users. The goals of this study were to (1) gather information about user attitudes regarding current management practices of the OSV zone and backcountry camping areas and (2) provide data for a more in-depth written survey to be administered following completion of this report.

OSV User Results:

- 74% of the OSV survey participants cited their main reason for visiting the OSV zone was to surf fish. Another 32% cited visiting the beach, surfing, or swimming.
- Over half of the OSV respondents stated that they visited the park from 1 to 20 times a year (64%). Twenty-nine percent stated that they visited the OSV zone 21 to 100 times a year.
- Indicators of a quality experience in the OSV zone were an uncrowded beach and catching a lot of fish. Respondents also stated the opportunity to drive on the beach, not wait in line to get on the beach, and see wildlife were positive attributes of the OSV zone.
- Experiences that detract from OSV user experiences include difficulty in getting onto the OSV zone during the summer weekends (32%). Closures and overcrowding of the OSV zone were also identified as detractors from their experience.
- An important natural feature identified by many OSV respondents is the wildlife (71%). The undeveloped island and natural beach landscape were cited next, followed by the opinion that nothing on the island was more important than anything else.
- Fifty-eight percent of OSV respondents stated that the natural features they listed were very important to them and that these were the reasons they visited the zone.
- 45% of OSV respondents stated the National Park Service is doing a good job of managing the OSV zone and that the NPS should leave things the way they are now.
- Almost half of the OSV respondents, 45%, stated that they look for places that are away from the crowds or where they believe they will have the best chance to catch fish.
- Sixty-one percent of respondents stated that they had not experienced any conflicts while in the OSV zone. Those that mentioned conflicts discussed poor driving habits, limited access to the zone and conflicts between users of the zone or other users of the backcountry area.
- Fifty-two percent of OSV respondents expressed that they had not experienced any problems. Others mentioned problems with the management of the zone, safety issues and comfort issues such as bathrooms.
- Thirty-five percent (35%) of survey respondents identified the purpose of ASIS to include both preservation of natural resources and public recreation opportunities.

Backcountry User Results:

- 58% of the backcountry survey participants cited kayak trips as the main reason for visiting the backcountry area.
- Two thirds of respondents stated that they visit the park once a year (75%).
- The number one attribute mentioned by backcountry respondents was camping in secluded campsites.
- 33% of the backcountry users cited concerns about the OSV users and their close proximity to the backcountry campsites and campers, stating that this detracted from their visit.
- Sixty-seven percent of backcountry users cited both the natural and undisturbed state of the barrier island ecosystem and seashore, and the wildlife as the most important features.
- 100 % of respondents stated that the features they listed were very important to extremely important to them and that these were the reasons they visited the zone.
- 50% of backcountry respondents stated that more protection of the resources is needed, including more restrictions on visitor use activities such as reduction or elimination of the vehicles on the beach.
- Several backcountry respondents stated that they go kayak or canoe camping to the first or second campgrounds.
- Sixty-seven percent of backcountry respondents stated that they had not experienced any conflicts while in the backcountry area. Others cited the multiple uses of the area, which includes hunting, backcountry camping, and OSV use, to be in conflict with one another.
- Forty-two percent of respondents expressed that they had not experienced any problems. Others cited mixed-use issues and problems with the campsites.
- Fifty percent of backcountry survey respondents identified the purpose of ASIS to include both preservation of natural resources and public recreation opportunities.

Comparison of OSV Users and Backcountry Users

- Participants from both groups' surveyed frequently cited three indicators of quality – the lack of crowding in the area, the opportunity to catch fish and the availability of well-maintained campsites at ASIS.
- Respondents from both groups identified the wildlife on land and in the sea as the most important natural feature.
- The types of detractors from their experiences differed between groups (difficulty accessing the zone and closures of the zone for OSV users; difficulty finding the campsites for backcountry users).
- Of a combined 27 respondents, 63% stated that they did not experience any conflicts. Respondents that either experienced conflicts or were aware of conflicts differed greatly in the type of conflict they reported depending on their use of the area.
- More backcountry users identified natural resource protection as a main purpose of ASIS than did OSV users - 42% and 26% respectively.

Background

Assateague Island National Seashore (ASIS) is an important regional destination visited by more than 2 million people annually, showcasing one of the few remaining undeveloped barrier island environments along the Mid-Atlantic Coast. The National Seashore includes approximately 48,000 acres of land and water, and more than 37 miles of high-quality ocean beaches.

The 1982 ASIS General Management Plan designated two subzones within a portion of the park's Natural Zone (the predominant management zone, also referred to as the "backcountry"). The first of these is the Traditional Recreation Subzone, located along the Atlantic Ocean side of the island from the south end of the development zone to the Maryland/Virginia State line. Within this subzone, Oversand Vehicle (OSV) use is permitted on designated routes largely confined to the ocean beach. At present, the designated OSV route includes approximately 12 miles of ocean beach and two spur roads to the bay side of the island in Maryland, and about 3.5 miles of ocean beach in Virginia along Toms Cove Hook (Figure 1).

The second backcountry subzone is the Primitive Subzone. This area abuts the Traditional Recreation Subzone and includes the entire land west to the Island's bay side. The Primitive Subzone includes primitive backcountry campsites on both the ocean and the bay side, which are accessible from both water and land. Users of the Primitive Subzone typically engage in a variety of recreational activities including swimming, fishing, seasonal deer and waterfowl hunting, camping, kayaking and canoeing, hiking and beachcombing.

The juxtaposition of the Traditional Recreation and Primitive Subzones often places users of the respective areas in close proximity to one another. This is particularly true at the two ocean-side campgrounds located immediately adjacent to the OSV route. The potential for conflict is created when visitors hike or paddle for long distances to reach the remote sites, and then end up camping adjacent to an OSV user on the beach. Many of the visitors who choose to experience the backcountry on foot or by non-motorized vessel are looking for quiet and solitude when camping in the backcountry. At present, these qualities are unavailable to users of the ocean-side campsites resulting from OSV use in the Traditional Recreation Subzone.

The proliferation of sport/utility vehicles during the 1990s has significantly increased demand for access to the OSV zone. Formerly infrequent closures have now become commonplace on summer weekends, the result of a 145 vehicle limit for the OSV zone. The problem is aggravated by a trend towards large numbers of self-contained vehicles entering the OSV zone on Friday and remaining through the weekend. Current regulations allow for properly equipped vehicles to park overnight in an area referred to as the Bullpen. This overnight use precludes many day users from gaining access to the OSV zone on Saturdays and Sundays.

These and other issues have generated visitor frustration and discontent with the current management practices of the OSV zone and backcountry camping areas.

Objectives

This study was conducted to provide guidance for the development of a larger quantitative study (planned to be conducted in 2008/2009) that will develop information to help formulate better management strategies for the ASIS backcountry. The objective is to develop information about contemporary OSV and other backcountry uses, and the nature and expectations of visitors to the backcountry. The results will assist park management in revising the ASIS General Management Plan by providing currently unavailable information for decision-making related to backcountry management and OSV use.

Methods

Interviews were conducted with 31 OSV users and 12 backcountry users who purchased backcountry camping permits or OSV zone vehicle permits in 2006. The potential respondents were divided by their home state, and randomly selected from the entire pool of permit holders in numbers equivalent to the percentage of overall permittees from that state. Percentages were calculated using the total number of permits sold at both the Maryland and Virginia Entrance Stations to get a true representation of all users. Selected visitors were called in advance to request their participation by NPS park staff. If the visitor agreed their name was added to the survey participant list. Each name was contacted 3 times to participate in the telephone survey. Each potential respondent was also given the option to not participate in the survey at that time. A total of 36 backcountry visitors and 71 OSV visitors were called. A total of 31 OSV visitors and 12 backcountry visitors agreed to participate in the survey. The following chart shows the participants by state and use.

| States Represented: OSV Visitor | Number of Respondents | States Represented: Backcountry Visitor | Number of Respondents |
|--|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Delaware | 1 | Delaware | 2 |
| Maryland | 14 | Maryland | 6 |
| Pennsylvania | 8 | Pennsylvania | 1 |
| Virginia | 8 | Virginia | 2 |
| | | New York | 1 |
| Total | 31 | Total | 12 |

Figure 1: Respondent Totals by Zone and State

Survey Design

The Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands developed and designed two surveys and an interview guide with input from ASIS staff. One survey was developed for the OSV users and the second survey for the backcountry users. The surveys were peer reviewed by NPS managers, the Senior Research Associate with the NPS's Social Science Program, and Indiana University professors. A pretest was conducted on 9 participants. Adjustments were made to the survey instruments to address concerns or issues raised by the reviewers and the pre-testing. The United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB) reviewed the final survey instruments and interview guide and issued its final approval: OMB Approval #1024-0224 (NPS #07-047).

Survey Procedure

Telephone interviews were conducted between November 2007 and January 2008. The surveys took an average of 11 minutes each to complete. A standard script was used to begin the conversations. Upon agreement to participate in the survey, participants were then asked 11 questions. The surveyor would clarify questions upon request. Information collected is not attributed to any individuals. If a visitor refused to participate, their refusal was recorded.

Saturation Point

The researchers concluded that a saturation point was reached by the time 31 telephone interviews had been analyzed for OSV users and 12 backcountry user interviews had been analyzed.

Research has shown that data saturation can occur upon the completion and analysis of as few as twelve interviews, and that additional interviews are unlikely to result in new themes.¹ This result is supported by the Consensus Theory (Romney et al, 1986)² which is based on the principle that experts tend to agree more with each other (with respect to their particular domain of expertise) than do novices, and uses mathematical proof to support the case. Romney, Batchelder, and Weller (1986) found that small samples can be quite sufficient in providing complete and accurate information within a particular cultural context, as long as the participants possess a certain degree of expertise or understanding about the domain of inquiry (“cultural competence”). This was the case with participants in the current study, as they all had knowledge of the OSV zone and their experience.

Data Analysis

Each survey had a total of 11 questions. Questions were both short answer and open ended. Results from the short answer questions were analyzed and compiled into tables citing frequency of response by respondents. Open-ended questions were categorized and grouped by common themes. The results are also shown in table format with examples of participant responses.

Limitations

Like all surveys, there are limitations that should be considered when examining the results. These include the following:

1. Participants self-selected themselves by volunteering for the survey, even though participants were selected randomly.
2. Participants were selected from a single year of visitation, therefore representing only a snapshot assessment, so results cannot necessarily be attributed to visitors during other years, nor can longitudinal trends be determined.
3. Surveys were conducted after a visit, so visitor recall may not be accurate. What visitors say they did may not truly represent their actual behavior.

¹ Greg Guest, Arwen Bunce and Laura Johnson. 2006. How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability. DOI: 10.1177/1525822X05279903

² Romney, A., W. Batchelder, and S. Weller. 1986. Culture as Consensus: A theory of culture and informant accuracy. *American Anthropologist* 88:313–38.

4. This survey is limited to opinions and experiences of users of the OSV zone and the backcountry areas and the results are not attributable to visitors who visit other areas of the National Seashore.

Oversand Vehicle Survey Results

Reasons OSV Users Visit the OSV Zone

Respondents were asked what their reasons were for visiting the OSV zone. OSV users cited a variety of reasons for visiting. As indicated in Figure 1, surf fishing was cited by 74% of the participants. Thirty-two percent of respondents cited the beach, surfing or swimming. Other users cited the area as a great place to relax and get away from the crowds.

| Reasons For Visiting the OSV Zone | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| Surf fishing | 23 |
| The beach, surfing and swimming | 10 |
| Relaxing and enjoyable | 6 |
| Solitude, away from all the people | 6 |
| Driving on the beach | 5 |
| Camping | 3 |
| Duck hunting | 3 |
| Sharing this place with their children or grandchildren | 2 |
| Campfire | 2 |
| Claming and looking for shells | 2 |
| Accessibility for handicapped | 1 |
| Seeing the great views | 1 |
| Kayaking | 1 |
| Training for Search and Rescue | 1 |
| Very Convenient | 1 |
| Visiting this area all my life | 1 |

Figure 2: Cited Reasons for Visiting OSV Zone

Average Number of Visits a Year

Respondents were asked to indicate the average number of times a year they visit the OSV zone. Over half stated that they visit the park from 1 to 20 times a year (64%). Twenty nine percent stated that they visit the OSV zone 21 to 100 times a year. One respondent stated that he visited the zone over 100 times a year.

| Average Number of OSV Visits a Year | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| 1 to 10 times a year | 10 | 32% |
| 11- 20 times a year | 10 | 32% |
| 21-49 times a year | 6 | 20% |
| 50-100 | 3 | 13% |
| Over 100 | 1 | 3% |

Figure 3: Average Number of Visits per Year (OSV)

Indicators of Quality for the OSV Respondent

The top two indicators of a quality experience in the zone mentioned by OSV respondents were that the beach in the zone was not crowded and that they caught a lot of fish. OSV respondents also stated that the opportunity to drive on the beach, not wait in line to get on the beach, and seeing wildlife were positive attributes of the OSV zone.

| Comment | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| Uncrowded beach | 13 |
| Catching fish | 13 |
| Driving on the beach | 9 |
| No waiting in line to access OSV zone | 6 |
| Wildlife to see | 6 |
| Entire zone open | 6 |
| Sharing the experience with friends and family | 2 |
| Peace and quiet | 2 |
| Recreation | 2 |
| Finding clams and shells | 2 |
| Availability of camping | 1 |
| Air pumps working | 1 |
| Ability to fish all day and night | 1 |
| No traffic getting in | 1 |
| Clean | 1 |
| Other Comments | |
| Nice weather | 10 |
| Good surf and tides | 5 |
| No insects | 2 |

Figure 4: Quality Indicators (OSV)

Experiences that Detracted from the Visit

OSV respondents listed a variety of experiences that detracted from the quality of their experience in the OSV zone. The most frequently cited concern was the difficulty in getting onto the OSV zone during the summer weekends (32%). The next most frequently cited response was that nothing detracted from their experience (23%). Closures and overcrowding of the OSV zone were also identified as detractors.

| Comments | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| Difficulty getting on OSV zone during summer weekends | 10 |
| Nothing detracted from my experience | 7 |
| Closures of the OSV zone | 6 |
| Overcrowding of the OSV zone | 5 |
| Backups at the park entrance station | 2 |
| Removal of the back road | 2 |
| People staying too long in the bullpen | 2 |
| Too many people in the OSV zone during the Camporee | 2 |
| Bad driving habits | 1 |
| Poor driving conditions due to ruts on beach | 1 |
| Confusion about permits / multiple permits | 1 |
| Entrance Station automated gate broken | 1 |
| Poor campground maintenance | 1 |
| Permit fees too high | 1 |
| Overprotection of the birds | 1 |
| Need more rangers to monitor zone | 1 |
| Activity limits for wildlife protection | 1 |
| Unfamiliarity with the tides | 1 |
| Other Comments | |
| Insects | 4 |
| Mother nature / inclement weather | 3 |

Figure 5: Detracting Factors (OSV)

Natural Features Cited by OSV Respondents

OSV respondents identified important natural features that are located within the OSV zone. The most frequently identified feature was the wildlife, including birds and ponies (71%). The undeveloped island and natural beach landscape were cited next, followed by the whole island, meaning that no single thing is more important than any other single thing.

| Comments | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| Wildlife (ponies, birds, deer, foxes) | 22 |
| Natural Beach and landscape undeveloped area | 18 |
| All of it. Nothing is more important than the other | 11 |
| Sand Dunes | 9 |
| Sea Life (fish, dolphins) | 6 |
| Solitude / Quiet | 3 |
| Pristine Ocean | 3 |
| Clean Beach | 2 |
| Grasses | 2 |
| The shoreline | 2 |
| Bayside | 2 |
| Wooded areas | 2 |
| Sand bars | 1 |
| Clams | 1 |
| Other Comments | |
| Not crowded with people | 5 |
| Beach combing | 1 |
| Island history | 1 |

Figure 6: Important Natural Features (OSV)

Importance of Natural Features to OSV Users

Fifty eight percent of respondents stated that the natural features they listed were very important to them and that these were the reasons they visited the zone. In addition, 39% of respondents stated that the natural, undeveloped beach was very important to them.

| Comment | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| Very important | 18 |
| A natural undeveloped beach environment | 12 |
| Fishing is most important to me | 7 |
| No other areas where you have access to drive on a pristine beach and see these features | 6 |
| The solitude and ability to be away from crowds | 6 |
| Not for me to decide | 1 |

Figure 7: Importance of Natural Features (OSV)



Balancing Protection of Resources and Recreation Activities in the OSV Zone and the Backcountry Areas

Figure 8 indicates that 45% of respondents stated the National Park Service is doing a good job of managing Assateague Island’s OSV zone and that the NPS should leave things they way they are now. Several respondents made suggestions and comments. Respondent suggestions and ideas are grouped by themes below.

| Comment | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| NPS is doing a fine job now and should leave it as it is | 14 |
| Continue protecting nesting birds by roping off areas but allow more access during these times | 7 |
| Increase enforcement activity and protection of resources with more rangers, law enforcement and community involvement | 7 |
| Reopen the back road to keep pressure off the beach environment and allow for safe exit and entry onto the beach | 2 |
| Reexamine management of the bullpen | 1 |
| Keep fishermen and swimmers apart | 1 |
| I have no idea | 2 |

Figure 8: OSV Suggestions for Improvement

Where Respondents Go in the OSV Zone

Several respondents stated that where they go in the zone varies by visit. Other respondents looked for spots away from the crowds or the closet open spot. Other OSV users mentioned specific places that are good for fishing.

| Comment | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| Varies by visit—we can go all over the zone | 9 |
| Away from the crowds | 5 |
| Closest open spot | 4 |
| South of the bullpen | 4 |
| Half a mile to one mile down | 3 |
| The bayside | 3 |
| As far down as possible | 2 |
| The bullpen | 1 |
| Within the first 3 miles | 1 |
| A couple of miles; sometimes even to the end | 1 |
| Kilometer marker 24 | 1 |
| To the hunting blind | 1 |

Figure 9: OSV Destinations

OSV Respondents' Reasons for Going to Certain Areas in the Zone

Forty-five percent stated that they look for places that are away from the crowds or where they believe they will have the best chance to catch fish. Other respondents mentioned looking for shells or good places to swim.

| Comment | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| To get away from the crowds | 14 |
| To find a good spot for fishing | 14 |
| To find shells | 4 |
| To swim at particular locations | 2 |
| To access bayside hiking and clamming areas | 2 |
| To get away from fishermen | 1 |
| To hunt ducks from particular blinds | 1 |
| To see good views | 1 |
| Be close to the bullpen | 1 |
| To view wildlife | 1 |

Figure 10: OSV Destination Reasons

Conflicts Experienced by OSV Respondents

Sixty-one percent of respondents stated that they had not experienced any conflicts while in the OSV zone. Thirty-nine percent of respondents identified conflicts. Conflicts identified by respondents are grouped by themes below.

| Comment |
|--|
| OSV user's who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not know how to drive on the beach • Drive too fast • Are unsure of right of way protocols • Litter |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When beach access is limited, users are forced too close together • The restricted number of vehicles allowed on the beach is in conflict with a public that would like more access to the OSV zone |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicts between the OSV users and other visitors that do not like vehicles on the beach • Conflicts between uses such as fishing and swimming |

Figure 11: Conflicts in OSV Area

Problems Identified by OSV Respondents

Fifty-two percent of OSV respondents expressed that they had not experienced any problems. Thirty-six percent of OSV respondents expressed that they had some type of a problem and some of these respondents had additional comments. See their responses, grouped by theme, in figure 12.



| Problems Identified | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| Management of the Zone: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many beach closures throughout the year without notification for bird protection • Vehicles left in the Bullpen for the entire weekend prevents others from accessing the zone • No weekly passes available for out-of-town visitors • Closure of the back road • Long lines to get onto the zone • Limited access to the VA side • Sandy Hook Beach too narrow • Weekend festivals filling up the zone | 13 |
| Safety Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vehicle breakdowns • Hidden debris while driving • Visitor's not putting out fires on the beach • Speeding • Drivers not paying attention to fishermen | 5 |
| Comfort Issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No restrooms available in the zone • No insect control • Limited access on Virginia side • Prohibition of alcohol (Virginia side) • Litter | 5 |

Figure 12: Problems Identified in OSV Zone

Purpose of ASIS Identified by OSV Respondents

The mission of the NPS is to conserve the scenery, the natural and historic objects, and the wildlife in United States' national parks, and to provide for the public's enjoyment of these features in a manner that will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

Thirty-five percent (35%) of survey respondents identified the purpose of ASIS to include both preservation of natural resources and public recreation opportunities. One respondent stated, "I think it is there to preserve the area for the future generations to see what the coast was like before it was inhabited. I cannot think of any other place that is protected like this for hundreds of miles."

An additional 35% stated the park is mainly there for recreational uses. For example, one respondent stated, "The Island is there for everyone to enjoy, anybody and everybody in all modes, canoeing, fishing, four wheel driving. It is a place to go and get away from it all. It is a beautiful island and it has not changed, hardly at all."

Finally, 26% stated the main purpose of ASIS is resource protection. One respondent stated, "I believe that they are there as establishment to ensure preservation of that area and portions of the land because of the species that live there and not just the ponies."

| Purpose of ASIS | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| Identified both resource protection and visitor enjoyment as the main goals of ASIS | 11 |
| Identified natural resource protection as the main goal of ASIS | 8 |
| Identified preservation for recreational uses as the main goal of ASIS | 11 |
| No idea | 1 |

Figure 13: Purpose of ASIS

Open Comments

Finally, respondents were asked if they had any additional information that they would like to share with management. Many of the respondents reiterated their wish to keep the OSV zone open for vehicles. Reasons given varied from convenience to accessing remote areas, to a necessity from two handicapped respondents, who would not be able to visit this part of the beach otherwise. For example one participant stated, “It is really a neat thing to do, to just drive on the beach and get away from the crowds and enjoy the quiet along the ocean.” Another participant stated, “I think a compromise can be reached to protect the ecology and allow people to use the area. There is a lot of talk right now about problems and it would be very disappointing if the area was shut down.” The main themes are presented in Figure 14 below.

| Common Themes | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| Management of the OSV Zone <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep the OSV zone open for vehicles to drive on Keep larger areas of the beach open when partial closures are necessary | 18 |
| Permits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer weekly permits for visitors from out of town The new permit prices are too high for some users | 3 |
| Other Suggestions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer more tire inflators at the exit Add more pull-offs or signs at the entrance of the park so that people do not hold up traffic watching the wildlife Add fishing reports from the rangers on the NPS website so visitors can plan good times to visit Try to reduce the lines into the OSV zone | 4 |

Figure 14: OSV Open Comment Common Themes



Backcountry Survey Results

Reasons Backcountry Users Visit the Backcountry Areas

Backcountry respondents were asked what their reasons were for visiting the backcountry areas. Backcountry users cited a variety of reasons for visiting the area. As indicated in figure 15, 58% of the participants cited kayak trips as the main reason for visiting the backcountry area. Established campsites that are available from the water were cited by 50% of the participants. Respondents also stated that the park is very beautiful and in a good location.

| Reasons | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| Kayaking | 7 |
| Camping at established sites / campsites accessible from the water | 6 |
| Very beautiful and good location | 6 |
| Not crowded | 4 |
| Enjoy the outdoors | 3 |
| Go to a protected natural area | 3 |
| Backpacking | 2 |
| See the wildlife | 2 |
| Take photographs | 1 |
| Surf fishing | 1 |

Figure 15: Reasons for Visiting Backcountry Areas

Average Number of Visits a Year

Respondents were asked to indicate the average number of times a year that they visit the backcountry area. Three-quarters (75%) of respondents stated that they visit the park once a year. Two respondents stated that they visit the backcountry four times a year. One respondent stated that they visited the backcountry area twice a year.

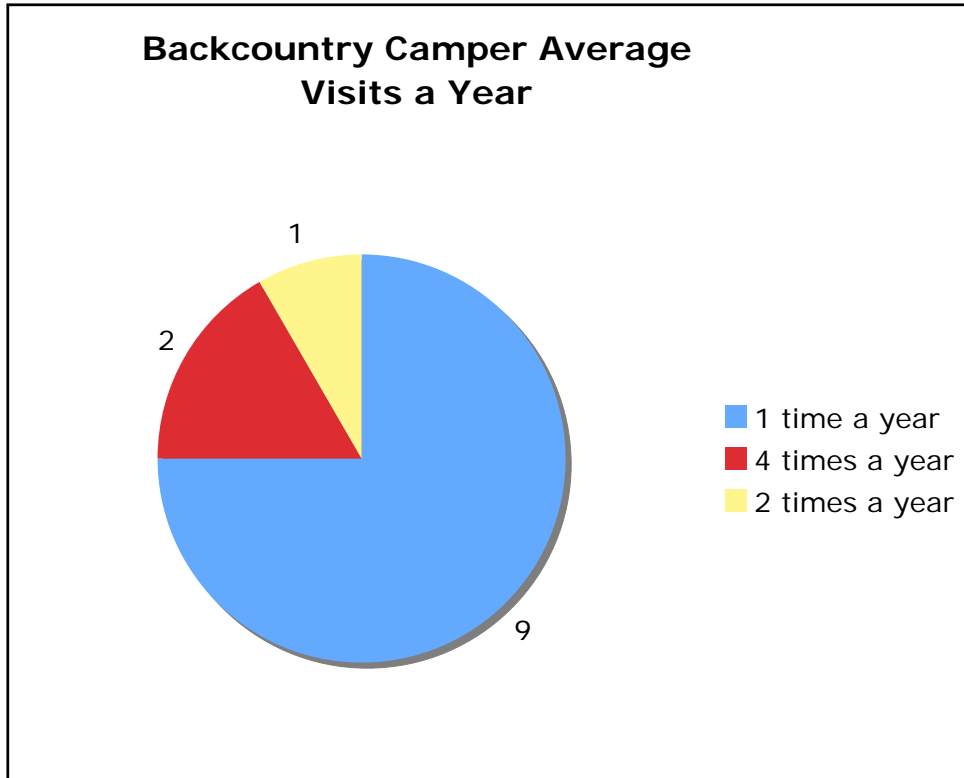


Figure 16: Backcountry Camper Average Visits per Year

Indicators of Quality for the Backcountry Respondent

The number one attribute mentioned by backcountry respondents was camping in secluded campsites with no-one else there. Respondents also stated that being in a natural park and having fewer OSV users on the beach made their visit enjoyable.

| Comment | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| Secluded campsites with no-one else there | 4 |
| Beautiful natural park | 3 |
| Fewer OSV users on the beach | 2 |
| Not crowded | 2 |
| Camping at well maintained campsites | 2 |
| Access to backcountry is by foot traffic only | 1 |
| Plenty of water | 1 |
| Catching fish | 1 |
| Easy landings | 1 |
| | |



| Other Comments: | Frequency |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Good weather | 4 |
| Less mosquitoes | 3 |
| Good company | 1 |

Figure 157: Backcountry Quality Indicators

Experiences that Detracted from the Visit

Backcountry respondents listed a variety of experiences that detracted from the quality of their experience. The most frequently cited concern, at 33%, was the OSV users and their close proximity to the backcountry campsites and campers. Another concern cited was the difficulty finding and landing at the first campsite from a canoe or kayak. Participants also cited the insects as a problem although the majority stated that they know this is just part of the experience.

| Comment | Frequency |
|---|------------------|
| OSV users driving on the beach and their close proximity to the backcountry users | 4 |
| Difficulty finding and landing at the first campsite | 2 |
| Nothing has detracted from my visit | 1 |
| Duck hunting | 1 |
| Personal vehicle was vandalized in the parking lot | 1 |
| Litter | 1 |
| Unclear how much water to bring | 1 |
| Hiking out there and finding all the campsites full | 1 |
| A hornet's nest in the port-a-potty | 1 |
| No access to wood or water | 1 |
| Other Comments: | |
| Mosquitoes and Chiggers | 5 |

Figure 168: Backcountry Detracting Factors

Natural Features Cited by Backcountry Respondents

Backcountry respondents identified important natural features located within the backcountry. Sixty-seven percent cited both the natural and undisturbed state of the barrier island ecosystem and seashore, and the wildlife as participant's most important features. The next most cited by participants, at 33%, was the bay environment and the beach, followed by the salt marsh and the sand dunes.

| Comment | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| Natural undisturbed barrier island seashore and ecosystem | 8 |
| Wildlife | 8 |
| Bay environment | 4 |
| The beach | 4 |
| The salt marsh | 3 |
| Sand dunes | 3 |
| Vegetation | 3 |
| Wetlands | 1 |
| Tranquility | 1 |
| Insects | 1 |

Figure 179: Important Natural Features (Backcountry)

Importance of Natural Features to Backcountry Users

One hundred percent of backcountry respondents stated that the features they listed were very or extremely important to them and that these were the reasons they visited the zone.

| Comment | Frequency |
|---------------------|-----------|
| Extremely important | 1 |
| Very important | 11 |

Figure 2018: Importance of Natural Features (Backcountry)

Balancing Protection of Resources and Recreation Activities in the OSV Zone and Backcountry Area

Figure 20 presents results showing 50% of respondents stated that more protection of the resources is needed, including more restrictions on visitor use activities such as a reduction or elimination of the vehicles on the beach. Forty-two percent of respondents stated that the National Park Service is doing a good job of managing ASIS and that they should leave things the way they are now.

Some examples from respondents include “I think they should have more protection; they do a pretty good job and give access but they could limit how they give access. Whether it is fewer days of the year or certain activities that are more destructive being banned to those that are less destructive” *[sic]*. And, “It is not as good as an experience now because we did not see as many animals. Seems like they were all hiding in the dunes, the ponies and such.” Another respondent stated, “I think ASIS does a good job allowing recreation activities and it is nicely balanced since it is permitted. ASIS has a nice natural ocean and bay habitat, which is great because so much is built up around it. It is also accessible, but limited and they try to maintain the habitat and the wildlife as natural as possible.”



| Comment | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| More protection of the resources are needed and restriction of activities, especially vehicle access to the beach | 6 |
| Keep it the way it is now | 5 |
| Less wildlife to view now | 1 |

Figure 191: OSV/Backcountry Balance

Where Respondents Go in the Backcountry Areas

Several respondents stated that they often go to the Pine Tree campground. Other respondents' cited Pope Bay campground or that it varies depending on the purpose of their visit.

| Location | Frequency |
|---------------------|-----------|
| Pine Tree Campsites | 9 |
| Pope Bay Campsites | 3 |
| Stateline Campsites | 1 |
| Varies | 3 |

Figure 202: Backcountry Destinations

Backcountry Respondents' Reasons for Going to Certain Areas in the Zone

Several respondents stated that they go kayak or canoe camping. Other respondents mentioned campsites that are a good distance to travel in a day's time.

| Comment | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| Kayaking or canoe camping | 5 |
| Camping | 4 |
| Hike around | 2 |
| Pine Tree campsite is a good distance to paddle to | 1 |
| I like the distances between the sites | 1 |
| First campsite is close and convenient to hike in and out | 1 |
| The landing at the second campsite is easier | 1 |

Figure 213: Backcountry Destination Reasons

Conflicts Experienced by Backcountry Respondents

Sixty-seven percent of respondents stated that they had not experienced any conflicts while in the backcountry area. Fifty percent of respondents identified conflicts or concern, which are represented in figure 23. One respondent stated, "When you are expecting a serene experience, it is shocking to have the cars there. Everyone is nice, but the vehicles took away from our experience and I do not think those users are great matches. The park should separate the users."

| Conflicts Identified | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| None | 8 |
| Vehicle access to the beach is in conflict with backcountry users accessing the area by foot and canoe or kayak | 4 |
| Hunting is in conflict with backcountry camping | 1 |
| The park should keep handicapped access because that is the only way they can get to this part of the beach or the park | 1 |

Figure 224: Backcountry Conflicts

Problems Identified by Backcountry Respondents

Forty-two percent of respondents expressed that they had not experienced any problems. Other respondents expressed problems that they experienced such as the incompatibility of the current uses of hunting, camping and OSV users in all the same area. Other problems identified by Backcountry users are represented in Figure 24.

| Problems Identified | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| None | 5 |
| Mixed use of hunting, camping and vehicles all together | 3 |
| Need better signs and markers for getting to the campsites | 2 |
| Campsites too close together and not enough of them | 2 |
| I have to tell my kids to look both ways before they cross the beach because of the vehicle traffic | 1 |
| Litter | 1 |
| No secure places to park your car | 1 |
| Need more access to the beach side | 1 |

Figure 235: Backcountry Problems Identified

Purpose of ASIS Identified by Backcountry Respondents

The mission of the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) is to conserve the scenery, the natural and historic objects, and the wildlife in United States' national parks, and to provide for the public's enjoyment of these features in a manner that will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

Fifty percent of survey respondents identified the purpose of ASIS to include both preservation of natural resources and public recreation opportunities. One respondent stated, "Like any national park it is a way to preserve nature in a way that people can enjoy it in a safe and well-protected environment. It is in a natural state, not commercialized, people can enjoy the way it used to be not the way that seashores have become."

An additional 42% stated the main purpose of ASIS is resource protection. One respondent stated, "The biggest [purpose] is to protect that ecosystem."



| Purpose of ASIS Frequency | |
|---|---|
| Identified both resource protection and visitor enjoyment as the main goals of ASIS | 6 |
| Identified natural resource protection as the main goal of ASIS | 5 |
| Identified preservation for recreational uses as the main goal of ASIS | 1 |

Figure 246: Purpose of ASIS (as Identified by Backcountry Users)

Open Comments from Backcountry Respondents

Finally, backcountry respondents were asked if they had any additional information that they would like to share with management. Many of the respondents reiterated that they thought the park was doing a good job and that they had a great experience at the park. The main themes and the frequency they were cited are shown in Figure 26 below.

| Comment | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| I think they are doing a good job | 2 |
| Campsite reservations are booked out too far in advance | 2 |
| It is great that we have managed to have a park in this place even though I complain about the vehicles on the beach. | 1 |
| We parked at the visitor's center and we rode our bikes across. We found out we had to pay more for bikes than what we had already paid for car permit. Bicycles pedestrians should have free entry to limit congestion. | 1 |

Figure 257: Backcountry Open Comments

Comparison of Results from OSV Respondents and Backcountry Respondents

Common Indicators of Quality for OSV Users and Backcountry Area Users

OSV users and Backcountry users surveyed frequently cited three indicators of quality – the lack of crowding in the area, the opportunity to catch fish and the availability of well-maintained campsites at ASIS. Both groups also cited uncontrollable factors such as the weather and insects as influencing their experience.

| Backcountry Area Users and OSV Users | Frequency |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| Not crowded, no-one out there | 15 |
| Nice weather | 14 |
| Catching Fish | 11 |
| Less insects | 6 |
| Well maintained campsites | 3 |

Figure 268: Common Quality Indicators

Common Natural Features Identified by OSV and Backcountry Respondents

Respondents from both groups identified the wildlife on land and in the sea as the most important natural features. They also identified the natural undisturbed barrier island and beach ecosystem as important natural features. The sand dunes, vegetation and tranquility were also cited.

| Features | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| Wildlife/Animals/Sea life | 37 |
| Natural undisturbed barrier island seashore and ecosystem | 30 |
| Sand dunes | 12 |
| Vegetation | 7 |
| Quiet, tranquility | 4 |

Figure 279: Common Important Natural Features

Both respondent groups overwhelmingly stated that natural features were very or extremely important in their reasons for visiting Assateague Island National Seashore.

Comparison of Experiences that Detracted from the Visit

The types of experiences differed between the groups (difficulty accessing the zone and closures of the zone for OSV users; difficulty finding the sites for Backcountry users). The most common experience detracting from the visit of Backcountry users was OSVs on the beach and their close proximity to the campsites and users of the backcountry areas. A common complaint mentioned by both respondent groups was the uncontrollable issue of insects, mentioned 21% of the time. Seven OSV respondents stated that nothing detracted

from their experience while one respondent from the backcountry users stated that nothing detracted from their experience.

Common Conflicts and Problems Identified by OSV and Backcountry Respondents

A combined 27 respondents, 63%, stated that they did not experience any conflicts. Respondents that either experienced conflicts or were aware of conflicts differed greatly depending on the use. OSV users had more concerns with other OSV users, such as driving too fast, fishing and swimming too close together, and poor driving techniques. Backcountry users' main concerns were that the mixed uses in the backcountry (hunting, driving on the beach, camping, etc.) conflict with one another. Forty-nine percent of respondents stated that they were not aware of any problems. Problems identified by respondents varied greatly and included management of the zone and safety issues for OSV users and concerns about the mixed uses allowed in the backcountry areas. Both user groups identified litter as a common problem.

Purpose of ASIS Identified by Both OSV and Backcountry Respondents

More backcountry users identified natural resource protection as a main purpose of ASIS than did OSV users, at 42% and 26% respectively. From both groups a total of 17 respondents (40%) identified both resource protection and visitor enjoyment as the main purpose of ASIS. The remaining respondents stated that the main goal of the park was either only preservation or only recreation. Thirty-six percent of OSV respondents stated the park's purpose is the preservation of recreational uses. There is an opportunity here to further educate both user groups on the purpose of ASIS.