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EDITOR

NATIONAL PARKS

Public Attitudes, Use, and
Visitor Demographics

Environmental Research Advances

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ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH ADVANCES

NATIONAL PARKS
PUBLIC ATTITUDES, USE,
AND VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS



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PREFACE

In 2008 and 2009, the National Park Service (NPS) conducted its second Comprehensive Survey of the American Public (CSAP2), a nationwide survey consisting of 15-minute interviews with more than 4,000 respondents across the United States. Information was obtained on public attitudes and behaviors related to programs and services provided by the NPS, as well as on demographic characteristics of recent visitors and non-visitors to the National Park System. This book provides an overview of these surveys with a focus on the racial and ethnic diversity of National Park System visitors and non-visitors.

Chapter 1 – In 2008 and 2009 the National Park Service (NPS) conducted its second Comprehensive Survey of the American Public (CSAP2), a nationwide telephone survey consisting of 15-minute interviews with more than 4,000 respondents across the United States. Several questions contained in the first NPS comprehensive survey conducted in 2000 (CSAP1) were replicated in this second iteration. Both surveys obtained information on public attitudes and behaviors related to programs and services provided by the NPS, as well as on demographic characteristics of recent visitors and non-visitors to the National Park System. CSAP2 was designed, administered, and analyzed on behalf of the NPS by the Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center (WYSAC) at the University of Wyoming.

This technical report describes results from CSAP2 for the nation as a whole. For some questions, the report also compares responses between recent visitors and non-visitors and between residents in each of the seven NPS administrative regions.

Chapter 2 – In 2009 the National Park Service (NPS) completed its second Comprehensive Survey of the American Public, a nationwide telephone survey consisting of 15-minute interviews with 4,103 respondents across the United

States. Both landline and cellular phone numbers were randomly sampled, and interviews were conducted in Spanish as well as in English.

As one of a series of technical reports from the survey, this paper compares major racial and ethnic groups on their visitation behavior and on related attitudes and opinions about the National Park System. Race is a social classification based on perceived differences in physical characteristics, whereas ethnic status is based on a shared cultural characteristic such as national origin. Thus “African American” and “white” are racial categories, but “Hispanic American” is an ethnic category reflecting ancestral ties to Spain.

The present report is part of an ongoing effort by the NPS to understand how different population groups relate to the National Park System.

Chapter 3 – In 2008 and 2009 the National Park Service (NPS) conducted its second Comprehensive Survey of the American Public (CSAP2), a nationwide telephone survey consisting of 15-minute interviews with more than 4,000 respondents across the United States. Like the first NPS comprehensive survey in 2000 (CSAP1), this research provides policymakers with a wide-ranging source of information about how both visitors and non-visitors relate to national parks, national monuments, and other units of the National Park System.

As one of a series of technical reports based on the survey data, the present paper has a limited objective: to highlight the most comparable findings from the two national surveys, and to place those particular comparisons in the context of methodological differences essential to their interpretation.

CONTENTS

Preface		vii
Chapter 1	National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public, 2008–2009; National Technical Report <i>Patricia A. Taylor, Burke D. Grandjean and Bistra Anatchkova</i>	1
Chapter 2	National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public, 2008–2009: Racial and Ethnic Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors <i>Patricia A. Taylor, Burke D. Grandjean and James H. Gramann</i>	107
Chapter 3	National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public, 2008–2009: Broad Comparisons to the 2000 Survey <i>Patricia A. Taylor, Burke D. Grandjean and Michael Dorssom</i>	133
Index		157

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Chapter 1

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF THE
AMERICAN PUBLIC, 2008–2009;
NATIONAL TECHNICAL REPORT***

*Patricia A. Taylor, Burke D. Grandjean
and Bistra Anatchkova*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008 and 2009 the National Park Service (NPS) conducted its second Comprehensive Survey of the American Public (CSAP2), a nationwide telephone survey consisting of 15-minute interviews with more than 4,000 respondents across the United States. Several questions contained in the first NPS comprehensive survey conducted in 2000 (CSAP1) were replicated in this second iteration. Both surveys obtained information on public attitudes and behaviors related to programs and services provided by the NPS, as well as on demographic characteristics of recent visitors and non-visitors to the National Park System. CSAP2 was designed, administered, and analyzed on

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behalf of the NPS by the Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center (WYSAC) at the University of Wyoming.

This technical report describes results from CSAP2 for the nation as a whole. For some questions, the report also compares responses between recent visitors and non-visitors and between residents in each of the seven NPS administrative regions. Highlights include:

1. Almost half (47%) of American adults responding to the survey could name a valid National Park System unit they had visited during the previous two years. Using this definition of recent visitation, the District of Columbia in the NPS National Capital Region recorded the highest percentage of visitors among its residents (71%), followed by the Alaska Region (60%). The lowest percentages of recent visitors lived in the Southeast (39%) and Midwest (41%) regions. [See the detailed tabulations for question Q6c in the main report, below.]
2. Recent visitors differed significantly from non-visitors in the type of vacation trips they preferred. Visitors more often said they liked trips to experience nature “a lot” (65% vs. 42%). Visitors also liked trips to see historical places or exhibits more than non-visitors did (51% vs. 38%). Conversely, visitors were less inclined than non-visitors to like trips to spas or resorts (27% vs. 40%). By smaller margins, recent visitors to NPS units were also less attracted to theme parks, out-of-town sporting events, cruise ships, and casinos [Q9].
3. When recent visitors rated various experiences on their last visit to a national park unit, 68% said that viewing the sights of nature “added a lot” to their enjoyment. Other experiences adding a lot to the visit included seeing distant or unobstructed views (58%), getting away from the noise back home (57%), relaxing physically (56%), getting away from the bright lights back home (52%), and hearing the sounds of nature (50%) [Q11].
4. Nationally, 70% of visitors reported viewing or photographing animals or plants during their most recent visit, while 60% said they had hiked or jogged at least 30 continuous minutes. Less commonly reported were water activities (20%) and snow sports (5%). Visitors living in the Pacific West (85%) or Alaska (83%) were most likely to have viewed or photographed animals and plants. The areas with the highest percentages of residents who hiked or jogged during their visit were the Pacific West Region (73%) and the Intermountain Region (65%) [Q14].

5. On their most recent visit to any NPS site, 78% of visitors recalled viewing outdoor exhibits, 78% had read a park brochure, 73% went to a visitor center, 63% viewed indoor exhibits, and 51% talked informally with a ranger. While some of the services are not available at every NPS unit, those reported by less than half of all visitors included watching movies or videos about the site (39%), attending a ranger-led activity (35%), attending a cultural demonstration or performance (21%), and being involved with the Junior Ranger Program (4%) [Q15].
6. When visitors who had used more than one of these services were asked which one added the most to enjoying their visit, the highest percentage chose viewing outdoor exhibits (22%), followed by attending a ranger-led activity (17%), talking informally with a ranger (13%), and going to the visitor center (12%) [Q15j].
7. The vast majority of visitors got from their home to their most recently visited NPS unit by car, truck, or SUV (84%); however, 15% also traveled by plane on a portion of their trip [Q16]. Of those who went by car, truck, SUV, or RV, 15% used a rental vehicle during at least a part of their trip [Q16a].
8. When asked why they did not visit more frequently, non-visitors most often said they “just don’t know that much about National Park System units”; 32% of non-visitors strongly agreed with this statement, compared to only 8% of visitors. Non-visitors also strongly agreed that hotel and food costs in parks are too high (25%), that it takes too long to get to a park unit from their home (23%), and that reservations have to be made too far in advance (15%). Visitors viewed these three factors as the main constraints on their visitation, but the proportions of visitors who strongly agreed (13%, 11%, and 13%, respectively) were lower than among non-visitors [Q17].
9. Less than 5% of both visitors and non-visitors strongly agreed that parks are unsafe places to visit, that NPS employees give poor service, or that National Park System units are unpleasant places for them to be [Q17].
10. Respondents with children in their household were asked how much they agreed or disagreed that “my children are not interested in visiting National Park System units.” Among visitors, less than 5% strongly agreed, while 70% strongly disagreed. For non-visitors there was 10% agreement and 57% disagreement with this statement [D9a].

11. Among visitors, 6% strongly agreed that high entrance fees are a deterrent to more frequent visits; for non-visitors, the figure was 12% [Q17].
12. In response to an open-ended question, 38% of visitors and 45% of non-visitors said that the most important thing the NPS could do to encourage them to visit more frequently would be to advertise, publicize, and provide more information. Less than 7% of both visitors and non-visitors suggested lowering entrance fees or making admission free as a way to encourage them to visit more often [Q18].
13. Members of the public can assist parks in many ways. When asked if they were aware of specific methods of assistance before the survey, 75% of visitors said they knew they could donate money to parks, and 58% of non-visitors said the same. The possibility of volunteering time also was well known, especially by visitors (62%). However, the majority of both visitors and non-visitors were unaware of opportunities to donate equipment or artifacts or to join a park's friends association [Q23]. Among those who were aware of any of these ways to help parks, most visitors (61%) and even more non-visitors (79%) reported that they had never done any of them [Q24].
14. Both visitors and non-visitors were asked about the importance of "hearing the sounds of nature" for enjoying an experience in the "wild or undeveloped areas of a large national park." About equal numbers of both groups replied that this would be very important for their enjoyment (74% of visitors and 76% of non-visitors) [Q25]. When asked about the importance of hearing "cultural and historical sounds" in parks such as Gettysburg, Valley Forge, or Mesa Verde, 56% of visitors and 60% of non-visitors said this would be very important to their enjoyment [Q27].
15. Respondents were asked their opinion of the statement that "I should be able to go to a national park and not hear mechanized sounds like engine noise and cell phones when I am in wild or undeveloped areas." Among visitors, 49% strongly agreed, as did 45% of non-visitors [Q26]. On a related question, 38% of visitors and 39% of non-visitors strongly agreed that "aircraft flights should be limited over wild and undeveloped areas" of large national parks [Q28d]. Similarly, 34% of visitors and 36% of non-visitors *disagreed* strongly that "jet-skiing and snowmobiling should be allowed in these parks" [Q28k].

16. Respondents were asked about several recreation and natural resource management issues in large parks such as Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, or Great Smoky Mountains. More than three-quarters (77%) of both visitors and non-visitors strongly agreed that such parks should be free of water pollution from outside sources [Q28g], and substantial majorities also said they should be free of externally caused air pollution (63% of visitors; 71% of non-visitors) [Q28e].
17. Both visitors (64%) and non-visitors (65%) agreed strongly that large national parks should provide basic visitor facilities, such as roads, trails, restrooms, and water fountains. However, they were less supportive of major facilities such as lodges, restaurants, and stores, with only 22% of visitors and 28% of non-visitors strongly agreeing that these should be provided [Q28].
18. Among visitors, 26% strongly agreed with the statement “plants that do not occur naturally in these parks should be removed,” while 12% strongly disagreed. Non-visitors were sharply divided on this issue: 23% strongly supported removal, but an almost identical proportion strongly opposed it [Q28a].
19. A similar division is evident on a question about removing non-native animals: 18% of visitors strongly agreed with removal of animals that do not occur naturally in the parks and 15% disagreed. Among non-visitors, 25% strongly favored removal, with 22% strongly against this [Q28b].
20. A majority of both visitors (54%) and non-visitors (58%) strongly endorsed the statement “animals that used to occur naturally in these parks should be brought back.” Less than 8% of either group expressed strong disagreement [Q28c].

Detailed results on all of the questions in CSAP2 are provided in the tables of this national report and in separate regional reports. The main report that follows begins with an explanation of the survey methods.

In addition to this National Technical Report, the following companion reports will also be published.

- Racial and Ethnic Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors
- Broad Comparisons to the 2000 Survey
- Parks as Preferred Vacation Destinations
- Opinions on Park Management Issues

- Soundscapes Report
- Regional Reports (seven)
- Non-Response Bias Report

INTRODUCTION

This is the national technical report of the 2008–2009 National Park Service (NPS) Comprehensive Survey of the American Public. Although the NPS obtains opinion data from visitors in several ways, the comprehensive survey is unique because it is the only national survey conducted for the NPS that interviews both visitors and non-visitors to the National Park System.

The first NPS Comprehensive Survey of the American Public (CSAP1) was conducted in 2000 by Northern Arizona University. It generated a series of reports now archived on the NPS Social Science Division website at <http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/>.

In 2009, the Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center (WYSAC) at the University of Wyoming completed the second iteration of the comprehensive survey (CSAP2). Like the previous survey, CSAP2 was conducted by telephone interview on a nationwide sample. The second survey sought to provide updated information on some of the questions asked in the 2000 survey, while also addressing additional topics and refining the survey methods.

The present report tabulates the national-level results for each item in the CSAP2 questionnaire and provides technical details on the methods. Tables are also reported comparing recent NPS visitors to non-visitors and showing breakdowns across the seven NPS administrative regions.

In addition, seven separate regional reports have been produced for distribution on the NPS website referenced above. A series of topical reports is also available separately that examine differences across major racial and ethnic groups, compare results over time between CSAP1 and CSAP2, and address other methodological and substantive issues.

SURVEY METHODS

Both CSAP1 and CSAP2 were designed to represent not only the opinions of the U.S. population as a whole (adults in the 50 states and the District of

Columbia), but also those of residents in each of the seven NPS regions. As in 2000, the U.S. territories of American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico were excluded from the sample. To maintain comparability with CSAPI, the regional calling areas departed slightly from the administrative boundaries used by the NPS, since telephone area codes and regional boundaries do not coincide. For purposes of the survey, the National Capital Region calling area included only the District of Columbia (area code 202), although this region also administers some parks in Virginia, Maryland, and West Virginia. For example, Theodore Roosevelt Island (in the Potomac River) is administered by the National Capital Region (NCR), but the park lies within the state of Virginia. Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in West Virginia also is administered by the NCR, as is Antietam National Battlefield in Maryland. As was done in CSAPI, households in these latter states were included in the calling area for the Northeast Region.

The seven calling areas were as follows:

- Alaska Region (AKR) – the state of Alaska;
- Intermountain Region (IMR) – states of Arizona, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming;
- Midwest Region (MWR) – states of Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin;
- National Capital Region (NCR) – District of Columbia;
- Northeast Region (NER) – states of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia;
- Pacific West Region (PWR) – states of California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington;
- Southeast Region (SER) – states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

In tables presenting regional data, the regions are displayed from west to east (which also generally reflects the percentage of park lands in each region from highest to lowest).

Sampling Issues

The data for this study were developed from a national sample of residential landline telephone numbers and cell phones. The sample was obtained from an established vendor of sampling services (Marketing Systems Group) and was generated using Random Digit Dialing methods (RDD).

Landline and Cell Phone Samples

In planning the sample, a number of issues had to be considered. First, because of the rapid increase in cell-only and cell-reliant households throughout the U.S., a sample of landline telephones can no longer be taken as representing the population (Brick *et al.*, 2007; Keeter *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, a separate sample of cell phone numbers (randomly generated from the known area codes and telephone prefixes dedicated to cell phones) supplemented the primary landline sample. Cell phones were not included in the CSAPI sample.

Regional Subsamples

Second, as in the 2000 survey, the landline sample was disproportionately stratified to produce approximately 500 completed interviews from residents in each of the seven NPS regions. The survey ultimately generated 3,550 completed landline interviews, spread almost evenly across the regions.

The cell sample was not pre-stratified by region. Cell phone users are, on average, more mobile than the general population, and the area code in which a cell phone was issued may not represent the area code where the individual resides.¹ For this study, the portion of the sample from cell phone numbers produced an additional 553 completed interviews nationwide.

Landline respondents initially were assigned to a region based on their telephone area code. However, a few landline respondents reported living in a different state from that indicated by area codes. During analysis, respondents in both the cell phone and landline samples were assigned to NPS regions based on their answers to a question about their state of residence (asked in the introductory section of the questionnaire). In the final tally of 4,103 landline and cell interviews, the regional totals ranged from 492 in the National Capital Region (D.C.) to 622 in the Northeast Region, as shown in the following table.

Number of Respondents Nationally by NPS Region

National	AKR	PWR	IMR	MWR	SER	NER	NCR
4,103	548	603	614	611	613	622	492