



Seattle Youth and their National Parks

Making Connections

Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/EQD/NRR—2013/662



ON THE COVER

Youth in national parks.

Photo courtesy of the National Park Service

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Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a case study about recreational behaviors, preferences and opinions of youth group members and youth group leaders in the Seattle, WA area and their potential barriers to visiting national parks in the Pacific Northwest. This case study used the focus group method to generate qualitative data. Five focus groups with youth in the Seattle WA area and two focus groups with youth organization leaders were conducted between August 16-21, 2012. Focus group discussions were audiotaped and transcribed. Thematic coding using a grounded theory approach was applied to analyze the qualitative data. Our results showed that both youth and youth group leaders were interested in and motivated to visit nearby national parks. Youth lacked awareness of their nearby national parks, but were enthusiastic about visiting and learning more about them. Youth group leaders needed information about how to access parks, in many cases perceived themselves as deficient in outdoor skills, and lacked logistical support from their youth organizations, but were eager to network with other organizations and with park managers. Other barriers were perceived difficulties of obtaining group permits, lack of transportation, and lack of logistical support from youth group organizations. Recommendations that arose directly from youth and youth group leader comments, included establishing a park ambassador/outreach position in order to create a network of youth organizations interested in visiting national parks, assembling a guide on how to bring youth groups to national parks, simplifying NPS permitting processes, and creating service opportunities for youth groups.

For more information about the Visitor Services Project, please contact the Park Studies Unit at the University of Idaho at (208) 885-2585 or the following website <http://www.psu.uidaho.edu>.

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About the Authors

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Background

While some studies suggest that youth are spending less time outdoors than their elders (Louv, 2005; Kimbell, Schuhmann & Brown, 2009), others have found that youth do go outdoors, but spend less time engaged with nature-based activities (Larson, Green & Cordell, 2011). Research also supports evidence that outdoor and nature-based activities play a beneficial role in children's health and development (Cleland, Crawford, Baur, Hume, Timperio, A., & Salmon, J., 2008; Thompson, Travlou, Roe, 2006), and that some youth, in particular urban youth and minorities, may not have equal access to outdoor experiences as do their non-urban, non-minority peers (Stodolska, Shinew, Acevedo, & Roman, 2013).

Because national parks are not typically located in cities, urban youth are less likely to have access to the natural areas found within a national park. In the case of Seattle and national parks in the Pacific Northwest, no less than eight units of the national park system are within two to four hours of the city, presenting an unusual situation in which large, natural areas are potentially within reach of Seattle's youth population. Urban youth organizations may serve as the connectors between young people and their national parks.

Since many youth organizations (particularly those serving at-risk and inner-city youth) focus on improving youths' wellbeing and teaching life skills (Schultz, Crompton, & Witt, 1995), it follows that facilitating outdoor experiences in national parks would be an appropriate activity for such groups. We found that although there has been substantial research on urban youth and the use of city park and recreation facilities, scientific inquiry into urban youth groups' use of national parks is lacking.

The National Park Service (NPS) has a significant presence in the Pacific Northwest, with 18 national park units in Washington and Oregon alone. The North Coast and Cascades Network (NCCN) works collaboratively on a variety of projects with regional significance. NCCN includes eight national parks: Olympic NP, North Cascades NP, Mount Rainier NP, Fort Vancouver NHS, San Juan Island NHP, Klondike Gold Rush NHP – Seattle Unit, Ebey's Landing NHR, Lewis and Clark NHP. This study is part of a regional project of the Youth Engagement Team (YET), a subset of the NCCN, which works to improve the way Pacific Northwest national parks reach audiences in the Seattle and Portland metro areas.

Klondike Gold Rush NHP, located in downtown Seattle, WA, serves as a portal for residents of the metro area to access information about national parks in the region. One component of this service is to maintain an information desk at the Seattle REI store that disseminates information, maps, and permits for these regional parks. Klondike Gold Rush NHP's role as the main portal to these parks also positioned them to be the main contact for this study about youth outreach. The purpose of this outreach is to make nearby national parks more accessible to the city's youth.

Youth organizations present one avenue for connecting with youth. Seattle has a wealth of organizations that serve its youth, and with which the NPS can make connections, including 13 YMCA's, and over 80 non-profit organizations featured in The Seattle Networking Guide (www.iloveseattle.org). In addition, the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department maintains 26 community centers, three teen centers, and four environmental learning centers.

President Obama's America's Great Outdoors (AGO) Initiative charged the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture, among others, to develop a 21st-century conservation and recreation agenda. The AGO's February 2011 report states: "Americans today have become increasingly disconnected from our great outdoors. We find ourselves cut off from the natural and cultural inheritance that has shaped our lives and history" (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2011). A related document reported on how the AGO Initiative would address the needs of America's youth, stating that "many Americans – especially young people – are losing touch with the outdoor places and traditions our country has always treasured. President Obama believes that for America to be at its strongest, we need healthy and accessible lands and waters and healthy and active youth who are connected to them" (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2012).

In order to help inform and guide Klondike Gold Rush NHP's outreach mission, park managers engaged the Park Studies Unit (PSU) at the University of Idaho to conduct a study of youth organizations in the Seattle area during the fall of 2012. The results of this study will be shared with the superintendents and key staff at each of the eight parks, and should help each park and the overall NCCN create a plan to reach out to the youth in the Seattle metro area through partnerships with the various youth groups.

About the parks

Olympic National Park

This wilderness park encompasses almost one million acres containing three major ecosystems: beaches, old growth rain forests, and rugged snowy mountains. The park is accessed via road from Tacoma and Seattle or a ferry. Portland is about 4 hours away and Seattle is a 2½ hour drive from the park. Entrance fees are \$5 per day or \$15 for 7 days' entry or \$30 for an annual pass. Children 15 years or younger are admitted free. Hiking, camping and nature exploration are the primary recreational activities at the park. In 2012 the park received 2.8 million visitors.

North Cascades National Park

A little over half a million acres of wilderness lands within North Cascades National Park are only 2½ hours from Seattle and 5 hours from Portland, OR. This park includes glaciated mountains and valleys, offering a variety of outdoor recreation such as camping, hiking, boating, and climbing. There is no entrance fee to get into the park. In 2012 there were 27,000 visitors.

Mount Rainier National Park

Mount Rainier National Park has a quarter million acres of wilderness with an active volcano at its center. The park's thirty-five square miles of permanent snow and ice make it one of the most glaciated parks in the contiguous US. Recreation in the park includes hiking, camping, climbing, and snow activities. Park entry fees are \$5 per day or \$15 for 7 days or \$30 for annual pass. Children 15 years or younger are admitted free. Travel from Seattle to the park is approximately 2 hours' drive and Portland is 2 ½ hours from the park. One million visitors entered the park in 2012.

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site

This historic site was originally a British commercial enterprise and headquarters for the Hudson Bay Company. It served as a supply depot for the Pacific Northwest and later as a military base. Today, reconstructed buildings and museum galleries tell the story of this historic location. It is about 2 ½ hours from Seattle and only a half hour from Portland, OR. Visitors over age 15 pay \$3.00 for a seven-day entrance pass to the site, which is open almost every day of the year from 9 am to 4 pm. In 2012 the park had 681,404 visitors.

San Juan Island National Historical Park

A significant border dispute between Britain and the United States is the focus of this historical island park. Visitors can view the two reconstructed military camps, watch re-enactments of the historical era, hike beautiful trails, observe wildlife, and enjoy boating or kayaking. Visitors over age 15 pay \$3.00 per fortification/day or \$5.00 for both fortifications for 7 days. Getting there requires riding a ferry and arranging additional transportation from the dock to the park. The estimated time to get to the park is 3½ hours from Seattle and 6 hours from Portland. In 2012 there were 261,139 visitors to the park.

Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park – Seattle Unit

In the heart of Seattle's historic district, just a few blocks from Pioneer Square, sits a brick building in which is preserved the story of the 1897 stampede to the Yukon gold fields an event which transformed Seattle from a small frontier town into a major American city. The Seattle unit of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park's visitor center, interactive museum and bookstore offer visitors an enriching experience. There are no entrance fees to the park. In 2012, this historical park received 60,198 visitors.

Ebey's Landing National Historical Preserve

This unique national park unit is a historical district in which people live and work. It preserves the features and patterns of settlement and development associated with Native American use and occupation, early pioneer emigration, New England sea captains' settlement, and military encampments. Visiting the park is like going back in time to a historic community. There is no entrance fee to the park, and it is accessed by ferry and also by road from the north of Whidbey Island. The trip takes approximately two hours from Seattle and 4½ hours from Portland.

Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail

A dozen historic sites along the Washington and Oregon coast comprise this national park unit. The historic trail is actually over 100 sites over 3700 miles, some of which are managed by NPS while others are in Washington and Oregon. Each location preserves and tells part of the story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Some locations have visitor centers or museums with guided tours and entrance fees. The website says fees vary from site to site. Portland is only 1½ hours from the closest location, Cannon Beach, and two hours from the furthest location. Seattle is

three hours from the closest location, Ilwaco, WA, and 3½ hours from Cannon Beach. In 2012, there were 201,704 visitors to the park.

Study Objectives

The objective of this project was to find out how the National Park Service (NPS) could augment its outreach to Seattle's youth, and strengthen the connections between national parks in the Pacific Northwest and young people in urban communities nearby.

Specifically, the study aimed to:

- Identify Seattle area youth organizations that would benefit from on-site and off-site programs offered by Klondike Gold Rush NHP and other national parks in the Pacific Northwest;
- Learn about these youth organizations and the recreational preferences of the youth they serve in order to guide appropriate National Park Service (NPS) outreach efforts;
- Determine the types of programs and the topics that would attract youth organization leaders and youth participants to become involved with outreach efforts.

Methods

Study Design

The focus group method of data generation was selected for this study as the most useful to generate data in a relatively short period of time and at a low cost. Focus groups are facilitated discussions about a specific topic. Unlike individual interviews, the focus group method relies on interactions and discussions between focus group members. Its success depends on how well the researcher facilitates the focus groups (Krueger, 1998). Group discussions about a specific topic can generate data more quickly than one-on-one interviews because each participant hears others' perceptions and experiences and can reflect and respond with their own thoughts on the subject.

The focus group approach has been widely adapted and proven beneficial in market, consumer, and social science research. This method is used to learn about how people feel about a specific topic and to find a range of opinions across several groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Six to twelve participants is the ideal number for each focus group. The participants in each group can

be diverse in demographic characteristics, but should be compatible enough to create a comfortable environment for open dialogue about the topic. In this environment the participants can freely express their opinions, ideas, and evaluations of a product, program, or service. We followed guidelines for focus group procedures from Krueger & Casey (2000).

Focus Group Script Development

Collaborative work with Klondike NHP staff defined this study's objectives and guided the development of the focus group discussion route. The discussion was designed to move from the general to the specific, beginning with broad questions about recreational behaviors and progressing to specific questions regarding access to national parks in the Pacific Northwest.

Participant Recruitment

This study sought perspectives from youth and adult leaders of youth organization. Adults may decide what types of programming to offer youth but may lack reliable data on the activities in which youth actually want to participate. In addition, the adults shared their opinions about the feasibility and challenges of taking on new activities. We chose to interview youth to determine which activities they would find most appealing, and to become aware of their needs and concerns.

Student Conservation Association interns at Klondike Gold Rush NHP and PSU staff generated a list of over 60 organizations that served youth in the Seattle area. These included non-profit organizations that served underprivileged youth such as community centers, private organizations, scout groups, and churches. The target sampling frame for the youth focus groups included Seattle youth, 14 – 19 years old, who participated in one of these youth groups in the Seattle area. The youth group leader focus group participants were also selected from this list. An invitational poster was emailed to the youth groups and individual leaders. A combination of these invitations and snowball sampling technique, in which individuals to whom we spoke shared contact information of other group leaders, proved to be an effective recruiting strategy. When contacting youth organizations leaders, we invited them to participate in a focus group, and/or asked them to allow us to hold youth focus groups at their facilities at their regular meeting times. Four youth group leaders scheduled youth focus groups at their organizations' regular meeting places. Twelve youth leaders accepted invitations to attend youth leader focus groups.

Focus Group Procedures

There were between four and eleven youth participants in each youth focus group. Youth group leaders obtained parental consent for the youths' participation. We had no contact with youth participants prior to the focus groups, and adult leaders monitored all focus group discussions. The two adult focus groups had five and seven participants each. The focus groups lasted from 45 to 90 minutes, depending on the number of participants. All focus groups occurred during November 11-16, 2012. During the two weeks following, phone interviews were conducted with three youth organization leaders who were unable to attend the focus groups. Adult participants received a reminder phone call or email several days prior to their scheduled focus group, as well as the day before.

These meetings were held in locations selected for their convenience to participants and access to necessary amenities such as parking, restrooms, and comfortable seating. The locations included three community centers, a Boys and Girls Club, the downtown Seattle YMCA office, and at Klondike Gold Rush NHP. Upon arrival at the focus group meeting place, the adult participants were greeted and asked to fill out a place card with their first name only. The youth participants were asked to add their age and zip code to their nametag. The procedures were explained, the Office of Management and Budget regulations and approval were presented, and permission to audio-record the sessions was verbally obtained. Two moderators were present to guide the discussions and take notes. To thank them for participating in the focus group, each youth participant received a postcard depicting a national park in the Pacific Northwest Area and a gift from the Klondike Gold Rush NHP bookstore. Parking fees were paid for the adult participants. Refreshments were provided to all participants during the focus groups.

Two researchers - one as moderator and one as note taker - were present during each focus group. Each focus group was recorded using a digital audio recorder. Within 24 hours of conducting the focus groups, the researchers did peer debriefing to ensure accuracy. Within three weeks of the end of the fieldwork, the focus group recordings were transcribed for analysis. Code names were used to protect participants' privacy.

In qualitative studies, sampling is often purposive rather than random. In addition, this type of research does not involve statistical analysis so no formula is used to determine the number of participants needed. We conducted focus groups until theoretical saturation was reached (where

new ideas or issues emerged). Krueger and Casey (2000) suggested that in a focus group scenario, three to five focus groups would generally provide enough samples to reach theoretical saturation. The more complicated the case to be investigated, the larger sample size will be needed. Upon completion of each session the two moderators compared notes to identify the themes emerging from the discussions. After four youth focus groups, both moderators concurred that theoretical saturation was reached, as no new ideas or themes emerged. Although the two adult focus groups provided useful data, it was determined that we needed more information. As we were unable to conduct additional focus groups in Seattle we chose to conduct phone interviews with adult youth group leaders who could not attend a focus group.

Data Analysis

Coding is a technique of assigning meaning, or themes, to various pieces of text. In this study, data were analyzed using an open-coding process. Using the focus group questions as a framework, the dominant themes were identified. Other themes arose organically from each discussion. This approach provided a structure to gather and group similar participant responses and create a cohesive picture of the focus group discussion results.

In this process, a researcher who was also present at the focus group discussions read the transcripts through several times while comparing them with the audio recordings, to become very familiar with the content of each.

Participants' comments were then evaluated for their specificity (level of detail), and extensiveness (repetition by different individuals). Since this is a pragmatic rather than a theory-based study, the operationalized themes include topic areas that relate to recreational preferences and awareness of parks as well as issues and suggestions regarding park visitation. Six major topic areas related to our research questions were discovered in the coded transcripts.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

Twenty-nine youths participated in four focus groups representing a range of ages and races/ethnicity. We asked youth participants' ages, and observed gender and race/ethnicity. Determination of gender and the race/ethnicity was based on a combination of characteristics such as skin tones, language spoken, names, and self-identification. The adult participants were not asked their age, but rather the length of involvement with their particular organization. Gender and race/ethnicity were observed. Tables 1 and 2 provide the demographics of the focus group participants. 1

Table 1. Youth participant demographics as percentage of total (n=29)

Demographics - Youth Group Members	
Age Group	Percentage
10-12*	32
13-15	50
16-18	11
19	7
Gender - Youth	
Female	46
Male	54
Race/Ethnicity	
African-American	36
Asian	29
Hispanic	14
White	21

*Target age was 14-19, however some youth groups included younger participants

Table 2. Adult participant demographics as percentage of total (n= 15)

Demographics – Group Leaders	
Gender - Adult	Percentage
Female	40
Male	60
Race/Ethnicity - Adult	
African American	13
White	87

Qualitative Findings

Section I. Youth focus groups

The youth groups were diverse in terms of age, gender, and race/ethnicity. The first focus group took place at Jefferson Community Center, located north of downtown Seattle, in the Beacon Hill neighborhood. The nine participants ranged in age from 14 – 19. This was a particularly congenial, talkative, and close-knit group, and referred frequently to the group being “like family.” This group was also very involved in community service projects.

Focus group number two was at Northgate Community Center, in Seattle’s Ballard Neighborhood. Four youth participated, between the ages of 12 and 16. It was a warm day, the meeting room was quite warm, and the two of teens were visibly tired. This group, being small, had less energy than other groups.

A third focus group took place at the Boys and Girls Club in Federal Way, south of Seattle. With 10 participants, this was our largest group, and although several of the participants were younger than our target age, participants were quite outgoing and talkative.

Our fourth focus group convened at the Meadowbrook Community Center, in the Queen Anne/Magnolia neighborhood of Seattle, and included five youths, ages 12 – 18. Three in particular were very outgoing and engaged in the discussion, and the other two, though shy at the outset, became more comfortable as we progressed. One participant had to leave early.

The focus group question route progressed from general questions about the attributes and activities of the youth groups to more specific questions regarding national park awareness and preferred activities in parks.

The following four topic areas, based on the focus group discussion guide, summarize our findings.

Topic Area 1: Attributes of youth groups

Participants were asked to describe their youth group and what they liked about it. A recurrent theme among responses to this question had to do with the social aspects of the groups. Being with friends, making new friends, having fun with friends, and being in a family atmosphere were common responses across all focus groups, and point to the importance of social

interactions within the youth groups. Participants in all four youth focus groups represented a diversity of races and ethnicities, and some youth mentioned that diversity and inclusivity were positive attributes of their youth group.

Well, meeting new friends and once you get to know everybody we're not just friends we're like one big family

Mandy

I like this group because like we're different races, we know each other, we're a huge family and like if one's down or something others will always try and help them through.

Daryl

Other attributes that participants liked about their youth groups were opportunities to have fun, relax, interact with adults/leaders, connect with other organizations, and to be productive or of service to their communities. Some participants specifically mentioned enjoying volunteering and community service activities.

I like that we're doing something productive, like not only do we get to hang out and have fun but we volunteer and stuff.

Evan

Topic Area 2. Group activities

Focus group participants were asked about their groups' activities. The following is a list of activities that were mentioned by the youth participants.

- Classes: photography; cooking; bicycle maintenance; Zumba; dance; weightlifting.
- Games/social activities: board games; card games; ping pong; pool; scavenger hunts; skits; video games; sleepovers.
- Sports: basketball; volleyball; bowling.
- Outdoor activities: boating; rock climbing; swimming; camping; canoeing; wake boarding.
- Field trips: visit Wild Waves water park; see movies; attend Sea Fair festival; visit City Council, touring U.S. Navy boats; museums.
- Volunteer activities: park clean up (trash pickup); weed/mulch in parks; attend teen advisory council.
- Other: Camp Brotherhood event

When asked about their favorite youth group activities, participants highlighted cooking classes, boating, volunteer work in local parks (litter pick up/weeding/mulching), bowling, basketball, and playing video games. For many participants the social component of each activity was an important factor. As Katleen stated, “field trips are fun because on the van we get to chat and do a lot of stuff and listen to music also.” Evan’s comment illustrates how the actual activity may be secondary to its social context and to its value to the community.

We do a lot of things, we hold events, we volunteer at parks, we hang out, go bowling, to Wild Waves. I think that all of them would be my favorite, not to be like corny or anything, but I like it, it’s fun, because the things that you do here really do affect like your entire community and a lot of the time when you have parents that have young kids that are coming here and they see a group of teenagers that are hanging out everyday, they’re having fun and being part of the community. I think they like that.

Evan

Topic Area 3. National park awareness, experiences

To ascertain youth participants’ levels of understanding of and prior experience with national parks, in particular those in the Pacific Northwest, we asked them to tell us what came to mind when they thought about national parks.

In general participants had little awareness of national parks. Those who did have some notion commented that parks are large land areas where plants and animals are protected, and that they are accessible to all. Some common misconceptions were that national parks are protected by the city, and that national parks can be places such as community centers, playgrounds, a state history museum, and theme parks.

I sort of think it means a park that everyone can go into, it’s not only one race. It doesn’t only have to be humans. It can be other animals like dogs and cats. Or anything like that. You got to try to save the parks from wildfires and chopping it down.

Peter

Many participants were aware of Mount Rainier, having seen its peak from the Seattle, and a few had visited Mount Rainier National Park. Some had heard of other famous national parks, such as Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone and Mount Rushmore, but very few had visited a park. Only one participant mentioned having camped overnight in a national park.

We asked participants about the types of activities they would want to do in national parks, which some interpreted simply as activities in the outdoors. While a few participants suggested things that would not usually occur in national parks, such as paint balling and dance contests, most mentioned activities typical of outdoor settings in national parks. Camping, hiking, exploring, fishing, and observing nature and wildlife were the most common responses. There was a lot of interest in overnight experiences. Again, participants emphasized the importance of the social nature of the activities, such as having “s’mores” around the campfire, sharing good food, and being with friends. For some, being with a group was a safer option than going alone.

I would go with friends and do lots of big things, go there, hike and if possible stay overnight.

Daryl

I would love to go like multiple day camping. I don't like just one night cause it is boring but if you go for a few days it's more fun. But I like the kind of camping where you never stay in one spot more than once.

Evan

Chase, who had camped with his family, felt that doing so with a group would provide a better experience because of the organization and information that would be inherent.

So I found that camping with a group of people, like in an organized program, is much more fun than camping with a family. I have felt like with a larger group you have more opportunities to do more things and with a family, it's not as organized and you don't get to utilize your time as much. '

Chase

After viewing pictures and hearing descriptions of NPS units in the Pacific Northwest, participants were encouraged to tell us what more they wanted to know about national parks. The following is a list of their questions.

- Are all the parks really big or not?
- Are any of the animals in the national parks endangered?
- Are there any national parks in California?
- Are there conifer trees?
- Are there trails there?
- By Mt. Bachelor there's the big lava flow. Is that part of the national parks too?
- Do they have a park in Washington DC?
- Do they have celebrations for the national parks? Like a certain celebration that they do every year?

- How do you tell direction when you don't have a compass?
- How does the National Park Service work at those parks?
- How high is Mt Rainier?
- How long do you think it would be to walk across from one end to the other end, like if you walk from like here to over here?
- How many hours [to get there?]
- How would you become a member (work for a national park)?
- I don't know if this is allowed in National Parks, but is there paint ball?
- If it's a national park wouldn't the animals have to be protected because it's national?
- If there was a big beast perhaps that was about to attack you, what should I do?
- If you run into any kind of poisonous plants, what should you use, for temporary relief?
- Is George Washington's house a memorial park or a national park?
- Is Mount Baker a national park?
- Is Mount Saint Helens a national park?
- Is Mount Vernon a national park??
- Is there a law that you have to pay money to go into national parks? Do you have to pay to go to any of these?
- Is there like any poisonous things in national parks?
- Is there still gold there (at Klondike Gold Rush NHP)? Do people still look for the gold?
- Just in case there is an avalanche and you're getting chased by one what would you do like where would you go if you're like running down the hill?
- So how do they become national parks?
- What do you do when you lose your equipment?
- What does it take for an area to become part of a national park?
- What if I didn't bring a charger for my phone and it died?
- What is the population? Like how many people go there?
- What kind of flowers do they grow?
- What kinds of animals?
- What plants should I watch out for?
- What should you bring, just in case an incident/accident happens
- What type of animals live there?
- What's the fastest route to get there?
- Where are the waterfalls?
- Would historic parks be like a national park?

Topic Area 4. Barriers to visiting national parks

Participants were asked about potential barriers they could imagine that might prevent them from visiting a national park. Many mentioned that they would hesitate to go without friends for several reasons: it would be boring to be without friends; they would feel safer in a group; they would rely on friends' knowledge to know what to do. There were many comments regarding potential dangers and hazards in national parks, including bears, snakes, and other wild animals,

avalanches, poisonous plants, and getting lost. For some participants, not knowing how to camp posed a barrier. Other concerns were about obtaining parental permission, cost, lack of transportation, and lack of interest.

With a group. I would be scared by myself so I have to have people.

Camille

I would also want to bring a friend because let's say someone has a heart attack, that's what happened to one of my friend's dad, and then he died out there because he was by himself. They said he could have made it.

Peter

Well some of the restrictions to the activities that we could want to do is that like sometimes you have to get parent consent and then you have to get the city to ok it, yeah and you have to get like budget.

Seth

Usually I don't like to be dragged to a museum that I am not interested in, but when I am interested in a museum it would be helpful to have free admission.

Chase

Well, I think that, not only what kinds of activities there are, but it's how you tell the kids or teens because not a lot of kids that I have met, they are not very opened minded. They prefer stay at home, watch TV or play videos games because stuff like that is how we are progressing. Kids like me always want to be outside, we want to have fun.... They have really short attention spans so you have to learn how to grab their attention and hold on to it. I think the way that you tell them is an important factor because if you start it out like something that they aren't even going to know what it is then they are just going to walk away

Meredith

Section II. Youth organization leader focus groups

A total of 28 youth organization leaders were involved in two focus groups and two phone interviews. The first focus group consisted mostly of individuals whose organizations' primary functions were to lead youth on wilderness trips, often to national parks. This focus group was held in a small office room at the Metrocenter YMCA in downtown Seattle. The second focus group was held in the Education Room of the Klondike Gold Rush NHP in downtown Seattle. The two phone interviews involved leaders whose groups engaged in a variety of activities primarily in an urban setting.

The following four topic areas, based on the focus group discussion guide, summarize our results.

Topic Area 1: Description and mission of youth groups

The youth leaders who participated in the focus groups represented a variety of non-profit and government-supported organizations that serve Seattle-area youth in many different ways. While some focus on specific areas such as community service internships, outdoor experiences, and arts exploration, each seeks to provide a safe environment with opportunities for youth to develop skills such as leadership, community-building, and healthy life choices.

While two of the youth organizations actively recruited youth from underserved populations and low-income groups, the others naturally attracted fairly diverse groups. Community center youth programs tended to reflect the demographics of the neighborhood in which they were located.

The following are some examples of mission statements shared by youth leaders.

We provide life-changing opportunities to teens by exposing them to the needs of the community and providing them with summer jobs.

Teens in Public Service

Camp Fire as an organization has rewritten most of its curriculum to include five different trails. We have trail to knowing me, trail to family and community, trail to the environment, trail to the future, and trail to creativity. So we try to have our youth be well rounded in everything. Our service learning is all in the family and community trail and it just really depends who the kids are, what their community service is.

Camp Fire

Seattle Parks and Recreation will work with all citizens to be good stewards of our environment and to provide safe welcoming opportunities to contemplate and build community.

Seattle Parks and Recreation

We hire youth and pay them an educational stipend. We hire youth ages 16 to 21 and they work on an organic farm on the edges of Seattle and sell their produce at the University District Farmer's Market. We hire homeless or otherwise underserved youth. Youth, as we like to say, with greater than the average barriers to employment and we do education around job skills, life skills, gardening, cooking, nutrition, all sorts of stuff like that.

Seattle Garden Works

Our goal is to get kids into the outdoors so they have a chance to learn about themselves and learn about others particularly cross cultural differences as well as having an appreciation for nature

YMCA Outdoor Leadership

Topic Area 2: Youth group activities

Youth leaders listed a myriad of activities and programs sponsored by their organizations, as shown in the following list. While not every group offered every activity listed, it nevertheless demonstrates the range of options available to Seattle's youth.

- Backpacking
- Bike maintenance
- Bike rides
- Bowling
- Coffee house management
- Music production management
- Barista training
- Camping
- Classes
 - Cooking
 - Dance
 - Business/entrepreneurial skills
 - Field trips
 - Fitness activities
 - Snowboarding lessons
- Gym activities
 - Basketball
 - Dodge ball
 - Rock wall climbing
 - Volleyball
- Outside speakers. Topics included:

- Career opportunities
- Civil/legal rights
- Finances
- Health issues
- Inspirational/motivational
- Service opportunities
- Photography/art activities
- Ropes course
- Summer jobs/ internships
- Summer/outdoor camps
- Swimming
- Volunteer activities/service learning projects
 - Exotic plant removal (e.g. blackberry bushes)
 - Trail maintenance/restoration
 - Valentines to Veterans
 - Visiting nursing homes

Youth leaders in community centers managed by the City of Seattle Parks and Recreation, which offer the most diverse array of programs and activities, indicated their youths' favorite activities included bowling, camping, gym activities, ropes courses and swimming. Other participants' programs were more focused on particular types of activities. But all participants agreed that their clientele enjoyed activities that were novel and that involved socializing with peers and meeting new people. Youth leaders emphasized that they supported activities with practical applications and outcomes, such as job training, exploring career options, gaining life skills, and that motivate youth to try new things. In addition, activities that can be described as novel, fun, hands-on, interactive, delivered with humor, and memorable, would be attractive to leaders and youth alike.

I think for the youth, the boys that we work with, they are most excited about the sense of adventure and something different and learning something that is off the mainstream instead of the traditional, like: you have to go to school and learn this you learn this you learn this. They can go out there and learn by doing. It's a

totally unique experience that teaches them life skills that they wouldn't have necessarily learned in a traditional school environment

Charlie

I think that food always motivates teenagers so we always have incentives with food that they like to cook, they like to eat. Music, I just think interactive so anything experiential that people would bring rather than obviously just talking to them but involving them so they have a little demonstration or something like that to get them excited

Erica

Most all of our speakers are really good. We've, kind of over the years, kind of brought in different people and some have worked better than others and we've kind of now got people we bring back again and again because we know that they're good. We've had the people who come in and do the teacher voice and talk to the youth as if they're talking down to them. They're more like meeting them at their level and engaging them in the presentation and kind of asking them what they know instead of telling them what they should know.

Richard

When asked to suggest the types of activities that (NPS) staff could offer to youth groups, leaders responded with the following ideas:

- Volunteer opportunities, with stipends
- Overnight camping
- Hiking
- Rafting
- Skiing/snow play

When asked to suggest the types of topics that might interest youth, leaders offered the following ideas:

- Awareness of national parks
- What are national parks?
- Why go to a national park? What can you do there?
- Career opportunities
- "Green jobs" in public lands
- Park history
- Natural history

Participants mentioned the importance of presenting topics that are relevant to youth, via speakers who are engaging, have a sense of humor, interactive, and are prepared to respond to youth who may have short attention spans. As 15 year-old Meredith aptly stated during one of the youth focus groups:

I have noticed, because I have gone to some centers, that when they will sometimes have rangers and they will want us to get in groups and get involved with wildlife and I have noticed that they talk about the park and they talk a little bit too much into the history to the point of where kids get bored in the middle and kids stop listening. They don't want to do the activity anymore because they don't even remember the activity anymore. I think that if you talk about the history for a while then you should bring that back to how it relates to say the wildlife you are going to go see and the activities you are going to do. Say you are going to talk about the different kinds of salmon, say in the locks, if you bring that back to fishing, it might get them a little more hooked. Or if you talk about kayaking or canoeing then that gets them back in the water.

Meredith

Topic Area 3: Bridges and Barriers

Significant portions of the adult focus group sessions were devoted to discussing how the NPS could support youth organizations' ability to engage with national parks, either in-park or at the youth organizations' locations, as well as the types of difficulties or barriers to visiting national parks. The type of logistical support needed varied with the type of activities in which the youth groups might engage. It was interesting that most participants assumed that an excursion to a national park implied an overnight camping component, rather than a just day trip. It follows that many participants said that in order to do activities at a park, their groups would need help with transportation; and for activities involving camping or backpacking there would be a need for equipment, as many groups don't own nor have access to backpacks, tents, stoves, etc. A need for equipment was usually paired with a need for guidance of how and where to camp and hike in national parks, and as importantly, how to obtain permits to do so. Several groups mentioned needing extra staff to chaperone trips to parks. Participants mentioned a need for financial support for in-park activities in the form of waivers for entrance and camping fees, and were willing to trade services, such as trail and campground maintenance, in exchange for fees. Small levels of financial aid, such as mini-grants, would help motivate some groups to bring youth to a park.

Cassie, a leader in an outdoor program that takes youth on expeditions to national parks and wilderness areas, talked about expanding her program to include students from low-income schools, and how small amounts of funding could support this new direction.

One of things we're doing is working with low-income schools to get some kids out this fall, and so that's the kind of thing where we'll definitely need grants help with, to support that kind of work. And that I think is a project that works particularly well with rangers, and outreach from the park. It's a different population and different expectations. And honestly, it's mini grants. It's \$500, \$1,000, mini grants that Washington Park Fund, that parks themselves, would be giving out, that would be financially a big incentive to small groups. Transportation is definitely a barrier, and all that adds up. But if it's like "hey, here's \$500" that's enough of a motivation. It's going to cost me more than that, but I will totally take my group of eight kids and go to the park for three days.

Cassie

We asked participants to list the kinds of barriers that would prevent them from taking their youth groups to a national park.

- Staffing and personnel
 - Lack of chaperones
 - Lack of staff
- Knowledge and experience
 - Lack of camping knowledge/experience
 - Lack of knowledge/experience of how to organize/plan a trip
 - Lack knowledge/experience about national parks
 - Lack of knowledge/experience of how to obtain NPS permits
- Logistics
 - Difficult to get permission from Seattle Parks and Recreation
 - Lack of connections/interaction with NPS
 - Lack of equipment
 - Lack of transportation
 - Liability issues
 - Limitations/restrictions on allowed travel distance for field trips
 - Parks are too far away
- NPS permit system
 - Difficult to schedule
 - Difficult to understand
 - Inconsistent between parks
 - Restrictions/limits on group sizes
 - Restrictions/limits on number of permits per year

An additional barrier mentioned was that teenagers would not be interested in participating in an activity if it did not appear to be relevant to their interests and needs.

I mean, yeah, just the whole transportation thing. I am working at a community center now and we don't have a van. So for me to take a day or two I would have to borrow a van from some other facility. Plus, if I have more than 10 teens, I need more vans obviously. With budgets like food and teens don't have, I assume, camping gear so where do I get those supplies?

Kyle

Well, you have to get a permit to take the van out of city limits. You have to get permission from your supervisor and your G.O. leader. Then you have to do emergency response plan, then you have to do a vehicle special assignment, so it is a lot of work involved with doing a camping trip and it takes money, just like everybody said, to be able to do it.

Reggie

Then also trying to connect them to the interest of the teens, that is very important. Because you can say we are doing this but you have to make it relevant to their own lives. I was at a Summit for some youth recently and all of them wanted like water slides. Okay water slides are nice, but really? So how do we make going camping at Mount Rainer relevant to them? Connecting the dots of why National Parks are so important. Unplugging, I mean we all want to unplug, but teens don't. Be without Facebook? So how do you connect the dots to make it relevant?

Caitlyn

Topic Area 4: Suggestions

Participants suggested a variety of ways in which the NPS could support youth organizations in overcoming barriers to accessing national parks and help them make connections with parks.

Create a centralized permitting office

Design a single NPS office or staff person to handle group permits for all national parks in the Pacific Northwest area, using simplified, standardized permitting procedures, to streamline the permit process. As an example, the U.S. Forest Service has a central office that handles use permits for all forests in the region.

Develop a “how-to” guidebook and/or web page

Assemble pertinent, specific information in a single step-by-step guide on how bring youth groups to each of the national parks in the Pacific Northwest, with information on permitting procedures, maps, hiking trails, campground locations and information, contact information, suggested equipment, emergency procedures, funding options, etc.

Facilitate networking between different youth organizations

Some groups have resources such as skilled staff, expertise, experience, and equipment that could be shared with others, if these groups were aware of each other, and of each other's needs. To streamline their outreach efforts, the NPS could communicate with groups via such a network, rather than individually. An organization such as the Washington's National Park Fund may be able facilitate networking.

Enhance positive communication between NPS and groups that want to use the park

As organizations seeking to provide outdoor experiences for youth are recognized as potential partners that share a common goal with the NPS, cooperative relationships can be forged.

Have park rangers visit organizations

Visits from park rangers to youth organizations for the purpose of generating interest in national parks would raise awareness and encourage groups to go to the parks. Pre-trip orientation sessions, presented by park staff, would help youth and youth leaders prepare for activities in the park.

Provide adult leader training and youth leadership training

Offering free training sessions on skills such as camping, backpacking, and outdoor leadership to youth group leaders would enable them to lead such activities, using safe, low-impact practices such as Leave No Trace. Providing similar opportunities for a selection of youth representing different organizations would gradually build a corps of peer mentors.

Provide incentives

Giving youth opportunities to volunteer in parks and be of service, in return for fee-free park experiences would encourage participation. Youth organization leaders would be motivated if they could visit a certain number of times per year, without fees and/or permits.

Provide on-site park orientation

Provide orientation sessions with a ranger and orientation materials to youth groups upon their arrival at the park.

Provide small grant opportunities, and grant-writing assistance

For many groups, funding for transportation, extra staffing, equipment, and food would be very helpful and would provide the incentive needed to organize trips to a park. A centralized granting office, such as the Washington's National Park Fund, may in a position to provide financial assistance.

In addition, some leaders highlighted the current trend that many people prefer to explore the national parks in organized groups, rather than alone, and suggested that NPS facilitate this by making it easier for organized groups, both non-profit and commercial, to access the parks.

Challenges and limitations

This study confronted challenges/limitations in three areas. First, due changes in NPS staffing at Klondike Gold Rush NHP, the time allotted to recruiting youth organization leaders was constrained. In addition, there were some last-minute schedule conflicts on the part of youth leaders. As a result, we only conducted two leader focus groups, whereas a focus group study typically consists of three to five focus groups. However, three additional youth leaders agreed to phone interviews, during which they were asked the same group questions as in the focus groups.

For the most part, the youth involved in focus groups were attentive and contributed to the discussions. In one case, the group was smaller than expected and as a result it lacked synergy and the participants seemed distracted. The moderators had to work harder to facilitate the discussion. Another group, though large, included several youth below the target age of 14-19 years.

Finally, after conducting two youth focus groups, moderators changed the order of the focus group question list and slightly modified the questions to improve the flow of the question route.

Recommendations

Although we set out to learn about the kinds of activities that NPS could do for youth groups, and how these could be facilitated, we also discovered that youth and youth organization leaders are enthusiastic about going to their nearby national parks, but that they face barriers to doing so, as discussed above. Youth group leaders came up with many practical solutions and suggestions to overcome some of the difficulties and barriers. Our recommendations follow, based on their suggestions.

1. Create a park ambassador/outreach position to carry out the following steps
2. Gather information
Using the list generated for this study as a starting point, contact directors of youth organizations in the Seattle area. Collect the following information:
 - a. Contact information
 - b. Mission statement
 - c. Demographics

- d. Previous experiences taking youth to national parks
 - e. Willingness/interest in visiting a national park
 - f. Type and level of assistance/support needed to take groups to national parks
 - g. Interest in joining network of youth groups with similar interest in NPS activities
 - h. Interest/ability to share expertise, equipment, other resources with other groups
3. Establish a Seattle Youth to National Parks network
- Create a database of organizations that respond to the information collection in Step 1. Facilitate meetings, publish an online newsletter or website in which organizations could exchange information, services, support, etc.
4. Create a park visit how-to guide
- Assemble a step-by-step guide for youth leaders on how bring youth groups to Pacific Northwest national parks with detailed information on obtaining permits, maps, hiking trails, campground locations and information, contact information, suggested equipment, emergency procedures, funding options, etc.
5. Streamline the permit process
- Investigate ways to simplify and centralize the group permitting process. Provide reduced-fee permits for non-profit/volunteer groups.
6. Present introductory and orientation activities
- Have NPS staff go to youth organizations and present educational programs on the national parks, to motivate groups and leaders to want to visit. For those planning a trip, prepare pre-visit talks and programs to help groups prepare for their visit.
7. Support opportunities for youth and youth groups to engage in service activities that benefit NPS, both in-park and at other locations.

Conclusion

We identified a group of Seattle area youth organizations and learned about the recreational preferences of the youth they serve in order to guide appropriate NPS outreach efforts. Through focus groups with youth and youth leaders, we determined the types of programs and the topics that would attract youth organization leaders and youth participants to become involved with outreach efforts. We also discovered some of the barriers to these groups' access to national parks, and listened to suggestions of how to bridge these barriers.

Most of the young people with whom we spoke appeared genuinely interested in embracing new adventures and novel activities, and were enthusiastic about engaging in outdoor activities. Of the many activities they enjoyed, volunteer work such as weeding and trail work in local parks, swimming, and boating were among their favorites. Doing these kinds of activities in a national park would add a level of interest and enrichment.

Few of the youth had ever camped overnight, yet many expressed interest in camping, allured by notions of spending time with friends around the campfire, watching wildlife, and exploring trails. Though many were aware of the existence of Mount Rainier because it is visible from the city, fewer were aware of the national park that bears its name, nor had many visited Mount Rainier National Park or any of the other national parks in the Pacific Northwest.

When prompted, the youth came up with many interesting questions about national parks, which could form the basis of ranger talks and presentations.

We found that the young people who frequented community centers are racially and ethnically diverse and many are accustomed to being involved in community service projects. For many youth, their youth group is like family. They enjoy spending time together, so much so that the nature of the activity may in some cases be secondary to the socializing that occurs during the activity.

The barriers to visiting national parks, as perceived by the youth, revolved around the need to go with a group, for reasons of safety, support, and social needs. Some understood that there might be difficulties with funding, and that some logistics would have to be addressed, such as obtaining parental permission, transportation, etc. Some participants expressed concerns about

dangerous wildlife, getting lost, and not knowing how to camp. Overall, the youth seemed interested in visiting parks, and undeterred by potential barriers to doing so.

Youth organization leaders expressed interest in increasing their group's engagement with national parks, but those who had had no previous experience with NPS were uncertain of how to do this. Many leaders created opportunities for their youth to engage in service activities and were always on the lookout for new opportunities to enrich their organization's young people in a safe and socially diverse environment.

Barriers to visiting national parks, as perceived by youth organization leaders, consisted of lack of knowledge and expertise, and lack of transportation, equipment, staff, and funding. In addition, youth leaders who had never taken their groups to a national park lacked understanding of how the NPS permitting system operates, while those who had taken their youth to parks voiced frustration with the complicated and inconsistent permitting systems between the parks and within individual parks.

Some groups that had ample experience bringing youth to national parks and had the appropriate equipment to do so were willing to make their expertise and gear available to groups that were lacking in these areas. Networking opportunities between youth groups, logistical and financial support, guidance, informational material, were some of the ways in which the NPS could help support youth groups' efforts to visit the parks.

As summarized earlier in this report, President Obama's America's Great Outdoors (AGO) Initiative includes a focus on America's youth and their relationship with the outdoors.

Representatives from the AGO team conducted "listening sessions" with youth across the U.S., resulting in an agenda for connecting youth to the outdoors. It consisted of four key goals:

1. Empower and enable youth to work and engage in service/service-learning in the outdoors;
2. Make the outdoors relevant to today's young people: make it inviting, exciting, and fun;
3. Ensure that all young people have access to outdoor places that are safe, clean, and close to home;
4. Build upon a base of environmental and outdoor education, both formal and informal.

The recommendations resulting from our study of youth and youth organization leaders in the Seattle area can help guide the National Park Service outreach program in the Pacific Northwest and make connections with Seattle's youth, while meeting AGO goals.

Appendix: Focus Group Discussion Guides

Focus Group Script for Group Leaders

Hello, my name is [MODERATOR], I work for the Park Studies Unit at the University of Idaho. We're helping Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park- Seattle Unit to conduct a study on the how Klondike and its sister parks (Mount Rainer National Park, Olympic National Park, and North Cascades National Park) can best serve Seattle-area youth through outreach programs. You were invited to this discussion session because of your expertise and experience in youth organizations. With your input, the National Park Service hopes to create high-quality programs to involve young people in national parks of the Pacific Northwest.

This discussion group has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget in compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act. The Office of Management and Budget control number and expiration date are available at your request.

Before we begin, I want to tell you that the information that we obtain here will only be used for the purposes of this study. I also want to inform you that we are audio recording the discussion. The conversation will be transcribed to create a summary of this session. These documents will be kept in a locked cabinet; we will not share the recording with anyone. We will use code names in transcript and the summary document if we need a citation, so that it will not reveal anyone's identity. Your comments are voluntary and confidential.

This focus group will take a maximum of 90 minutes to complete. During this time we invite you to the refreshment assortment on that table. The restrooms are located at [location].

We'd like to hear everything you have to say, so I'll ask you to speak one at a time. If you have something to share while someone else is speaking please raise your hand. I will make time for you to share when the person finishes. Finally, there are no right or wrong answers. All of your comments will be helpful to the National Park Service as it creates outreach programs for Seattle's youth.

Questions for the Group Leaders Focus Group

1. Please tell us about your group.
2. How would you describe your group's goals/objectives? (mission statement)
3. What activities has your group engaged in?
4. Which of these activities have your group members been most interested in? Why?

5. If outside speakers have been invited to address your group, what topics did they speak on?
6. What topics or subjects would be most relevant to your group members?
7. What topics or subjects would be most interesting to your group members?
8. Do you know what the National Park Service does and what it stands for?
9. Has your group ever visited Klondike Gold Rush NHP? If yes, please describe the activities the group did during the visit.
10. Has your group ever visited any of these other national parks in the Pacific Northwest: Mount Rainier National Park, North Cascades National Park, and Olympic National Park?
11. What kinds of activities, on-site and/or off-site, could Klondike Gold Rush NHS and these other parks offer to your group that would support your group's mission?
12. What type of support from the NPS, financial and non-financial, would make these activities more feasible for your organization (e.g. transportation, grants, equipment, food)?
13. Would your organization be interested in collaborating with other groups? What can NPS/KLSE do to help facilitate this collaboration?
14. Is there anything else you would like to say about how NPS/Klondike Gold Rush NHS could work with your youth group?

Focus Group Script for Youth Participants

Hello, my name is [MODERATOR], I work for the Park Studies Unit at the University of Idaho. We're helping Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Site to conduct a study on the how Klondike and its sister parks (Mount Rainer National Park, Olympic National Park, and North Cascades National Park) can best serve Seattle-area youth through outreach programs. You were invited to this discussion session you are a member of a Seattle-area youth organization. With your input, the National Park Service hopes to create high-quality programs to involve young people in national parks of the Pacific Northwest.

Before we begin, I want to tell you that you are here under your parents or guardian's consent. I will go around the room to make sure everyone has a copy of the consent form with your parents' signature. The information that we obtain here is anonymous and will not be used for any other purpose. I also want to inform you that we are audio recording the discussion. The conversation will be transcribed to create a summary of this session. These documents will be kept in a locked cabinet; we do not share the recording with anyone. We will use code names in transcript and the summary document if we need a citation, so that it will not reveal anyone's identity. Your comments are voluntary and confidential.

Mr. (Name) or Mrs. (Name) will sit in with us to observe the procedure but he/she will not participate in the discussion. This focus group will take a maximum of one hour to complete.

During this time we invite you to the refreshment assortment on that table. The restrooms are located at [location].

We'd like to hear everything you have to say, so I'll ask you to speak one at a time. If you have something to share while someone else is speaking please raise your hand. I will make time for you to share when the person finishes. Finally, there are no right or wrong answers. All of your comments will be helpful to the National Park Services as it creates outreach programs for Seattle's youth.

Questions for the Youth Groups Focus Group

The questions will follow an introduction explaining the purpose of the focus group. Photos of national parks will be used to help clarify Questions 4 and 5.

1. Which youth group do you belong to? (Ask only if different groups are represented)
2. What do you like most about being in this youth group?
3. Please describe some of the activities this youth group does.
4. Of all the activities this youth group does, which is/has been your favorite activity? Why?
5. Please tell us, if you know, what you think the National Park Service is, and what it stands for.
6. There are four national parks within 125 miles of Seattle: Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Site (right here in Seattle), Mount Rainier National Park, North Cascades National Park, and Olympic National Park. These parks are run by the National Park Service and belong to all Americans. Is there anything about any of these parks that you would like to know more about?
7. The National Park Service oversees 392 areas, including parks like Yellowstone, historic sites like Abraham Lincoln's home, and recreation areas like Lake Roosevelt (or Coulee Dam). Is there anything about the National Park Service that you would like to know about?
8. Have you ever been to an area such as a national park? If so, what do you like to do there?
9. Is there anything else you would like to say about youth group activities, national parks, or the National Park Service?

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