



Lake Clark National Park and Preserve

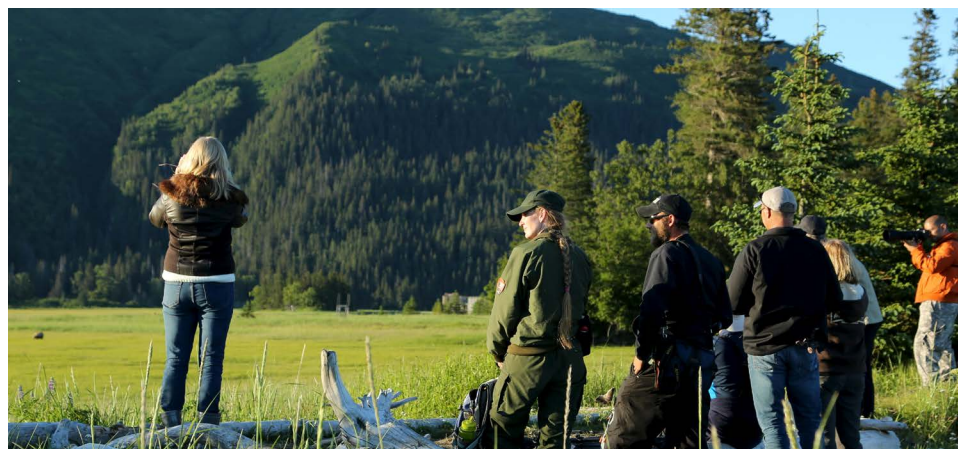
Visitor Use in Lake Clark

Understanding visitor use patterns across the parks and over time allows park managers to assess where rangers and staff need to be stationed and where impacts to resources (such as trampling) may need to be monitored or mitigated in the future. Likewise, visitor use patterns may also inform commercial business operators (such as guides or air taxis) by providing insights to the areas currently visited and the timing of visits, details that are helpful when planning their services.

Park Visitation Increases

Over the last ten years, the number of visitor use days reported by businesses operating in Lake Clark National Park and Preserve (NP&Pres) has increased from approximately 4,000 days to almost 17,000 days. Most of this increase has been on the Cook Inlet (coastal) side of the park. In 2017, Crescent Lake, Silver Salmon Creek, and Chinitna Bay were the most highly visited places in the park, together accounting for over 75% of visitation (over 10,000 days combined). Crescent Lake has seen a phenomenal growth in visitor use, increasing from around 700 reported visitor use days in 2008 to approximately 5,000 in 2017, a seven-fold increase (Figure 1).

Approximately two-thirds of the visitation occurs in July and August. In spite of the increase in visitation over ten years, the timing of the visits has stayed about the same (Figure 2). The three most popular activities at the park are bear viewing, sport fishing, and photography (Figure 3).



NPS

Bear viewing is the most popular activity at Lake Clark NP&Pres.

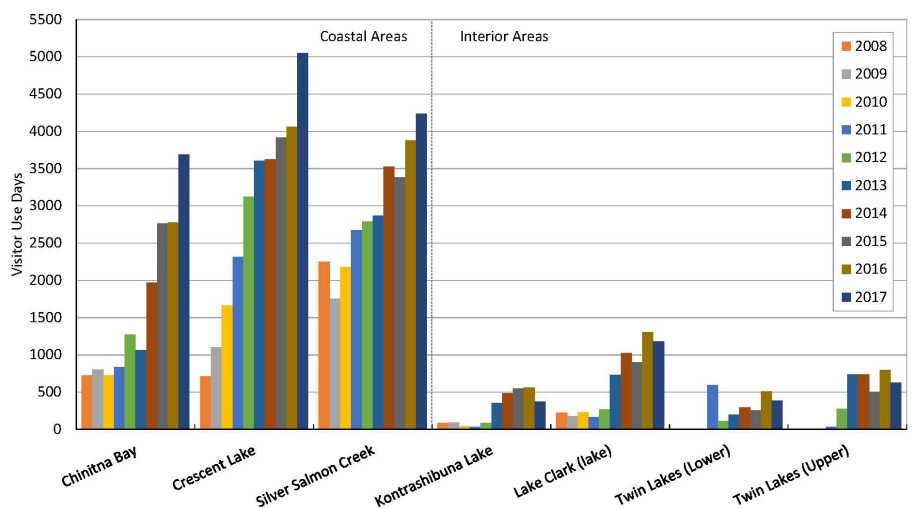


Figure 1. Silver Salmon Creek, Crescent Lake, and Chinitna Bay are the most-visited locations in Lake Clark NP&Pres. This graph shows total visitor use days by location (2008-2017) for the three most-visited locations on the coast and the interior. Upper and Lower Twin Lakes were broken out separately starting in 2011 and thus data are shown only after 2011. [Data from the Lake Clark NP&Pres CUA database 1/23/18]



There has been significant growth in the number of visitors coming to Lake Clark NP&Pres to participate in these activities. The number of visitor use days reporting bear viewing as their main activity has risen from approximately 1,000 people in 2007 to about 6,500 in 2017, more than a six-fold increase.

The number of reported user days focused on sport fishing and photography has tripled in this same period of time. The percentage of people that are either bear viewing or photographing in the park is approximately 57%, with 23% sport fishing. The number of reported visitor use days for all other activities has stayed relatively constant, with air taxis seeing an increase in recent years (Figure 3).

Methods

Remote Alaska parks do not have entrance stations to count people visiting the park. Some local visitation occurs, but the vast majority of visitors to Lake Clark NP&Pres use a lodge, guiding service, or air taxi operator. These commercial operators pay a fee for each visitor they bring to the park, and report back to the park the number of visitors, activities visitors are engaged in, and where within the park visitors go. Each park is divided into areas, roughly corresponding to watersheds. Areas with concentrated use have been sub-divided into smaller areas to provide more specificity. The data collected by commercial operators are the primary means to quantify and understand visitation patterns and public uses in Lake Clark.

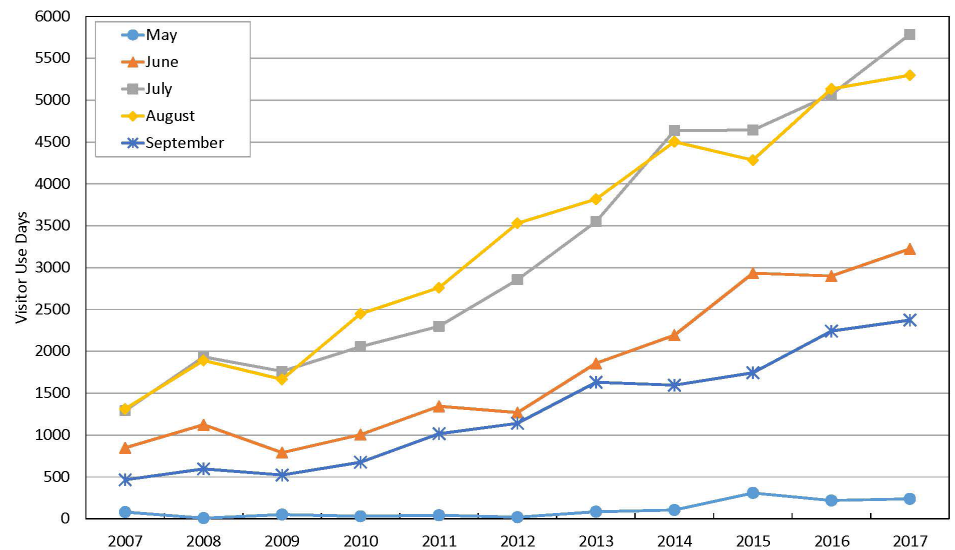


Figure 2. The number of visitor use days for May-September for 2007-2017. [Data from the Lake Clark NP&Pres CUA database 1/23/18]

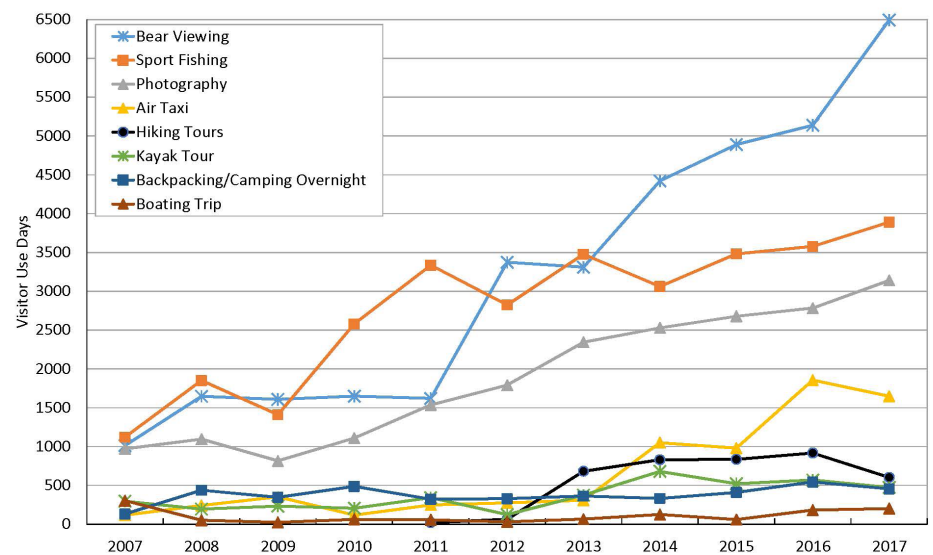


Figure 3. In recent years, bear viewing has surpassed sport fishing as the most popular activity. The number of visitor use days for each of the main activities in Lake Clark NPP from 2007-2017. [Data from the Lake Clark NP&Pres CUA database 1/23/18]

A "visitor use day" is defined as each day a visitor is at the park engaging in some activity. Visitors who spend several days in the park will be counted each day according to where they go and what they do. This information is valuable for understanding how visitors enjoy the park and to identify potential management issues.