



Visitor Use in Katmai

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 Katmai National Park and Preserve (NP&Pres) has fluctuated between 25,000 and 37,000 per year. For the ten years of data used in Figure 1, visitation has been increasing with a strong showing at Brooks Camp and Moraine Drainage, this past year.

Hallo Bay, Geographic Harbor/Amalik Bay, Kukak Bay, and Swikshak Lagoon are some of the most visited locations on the Katmai coast, which combined represent over 5,000 visitor use days per year (Figure 1). The annual variation in visitation to sites could be due to changes in the timing and magnitude of salmon runs that in turn may affect fishing and bear viewing opportunities. Figure 2 shows that most of the visitation for Katmai NP&Pres occurs in July and August, with about 70% of the visitor use days occurring during these two months. July visitation in the park continues to grow

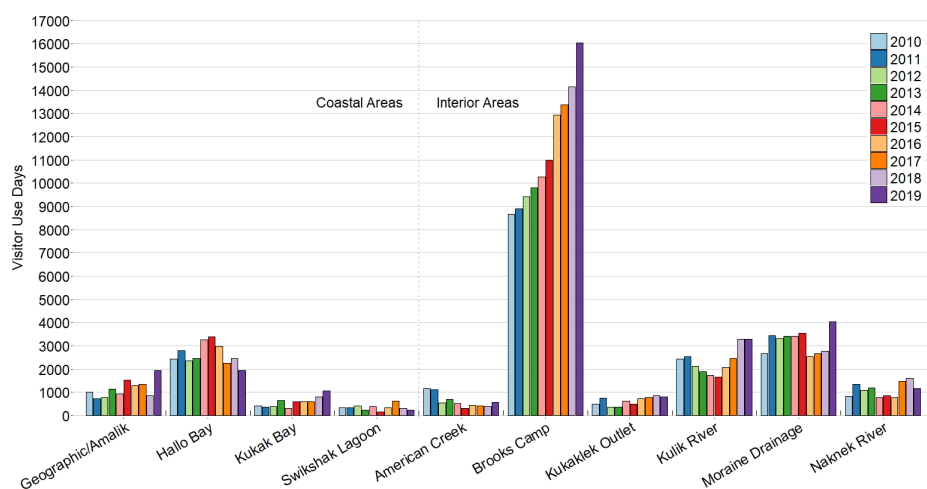


Figure 1. Visitor use days by year for select locations (2010-2019) in Katmai NP&Pres, as reported by the commercial use operators. [Data from the Katmai NP&Pres CUA database 3/16/2020]

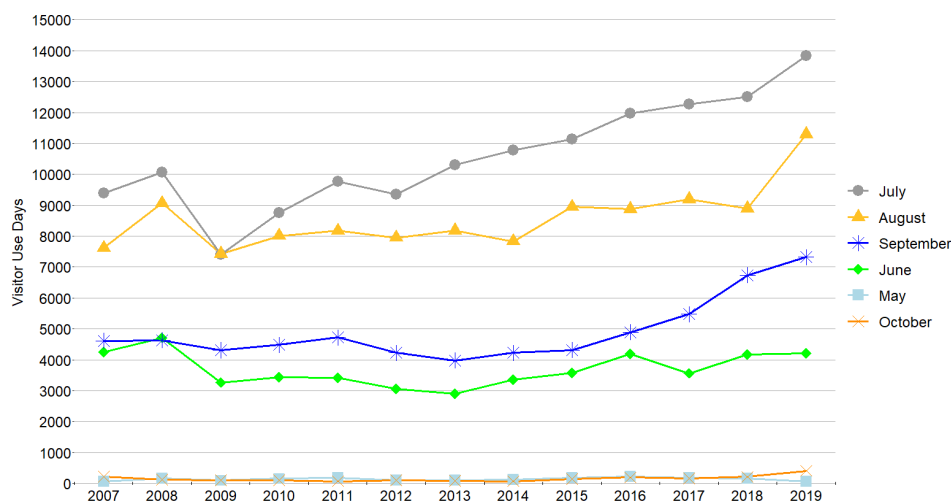


Figure 2. Monthly visitor use (May-October) for the years 2007-2019 in Katmai NP&Pres. [Data from the Katmai NP&Pres CUA database 3/16/2020]



(approaching 15,000 visitor use days in 2019), whereas visitation in June has remained relatively stable.

Figure 3 provides a snapshot of where visitation occurred for select months in 2019. Brooks Camp received almost 9,000 visitor use days in July, when the bear numbers on Brooks River were at their peak, and much less visitation in the other months. In August, visitation spread out among other park locations (Figure 3). The three main activities reported by commercial operators were sport fishing, bear viewing, and air taxi; these activities are not mutually exclusive (Figure 4). Other reported activities, such as hiking tours and photography continue to make up a very small percentage of visitor use days.

Methods

Remote Alaska parks do not have entrance stations to count people visiting the park, but the vast majority of visitors to Katmai 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 visitors go within the park. Each park is divided into areas roughly corresponding to watersheds. Areas with concentrated use have been subdivided into smaller areas to provide more specificity regarding the location of use. The data collected by commercial operators are the primary means to quantify and understand visitation patterns and public uses in Katmai.

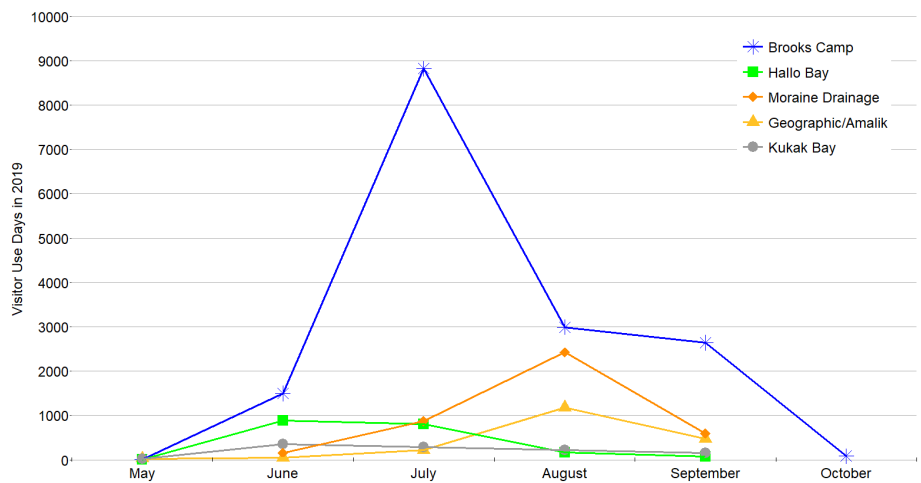


Figure 3. Areas with the highest visitor use by month in 2019. Areas represented are some of the most visited locations in Katmai NP&Pres. [Data from the Katmai NP&Pres CUA database 3/16/2020]

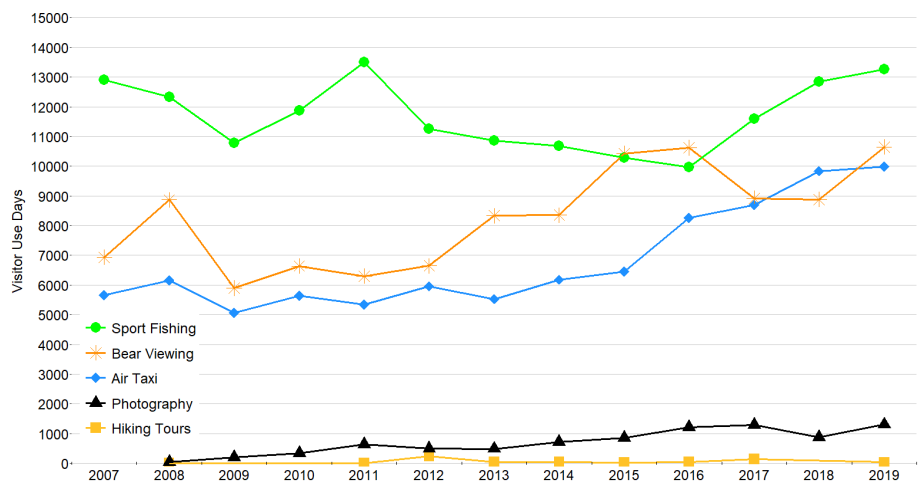


Figure 4. Visitor use days by activity as reported by the commercial operators working in Katmai NP&Pres, 2007-2019. Sport fishing, bear viewing, and air taxi services continue to be the most popular activities in Katmai. [Data from the Katmai NP&Pres CUA database 3/16/2020]

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.