



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 Trends

Over the 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, with a sharp decrease in 2020 due to the pandemic. Even with the reduction in visitors in 2020, Brooks Camp and Moraine Drainage had higher visitation compared to other popular spots (Figure 1).

Hallo Bay, Geographic Harbor/Amalik Bay, Kukak Bay, and Swikshak Lagoon are some of the most visited locations on the Katmai coast, in a normal year, adding up to over 5,000 visitor use days per year (Figure 1). The annual variation in visitation to sites is probably due to the change in the timing and magnitude of salmon runs connected to fishing and bear viewing opportunities. Figure 2 shows that most of the visitation for Katmai NP&Pres occurs in July and August. Normally about 70% of the visitor use days occur during these two months.

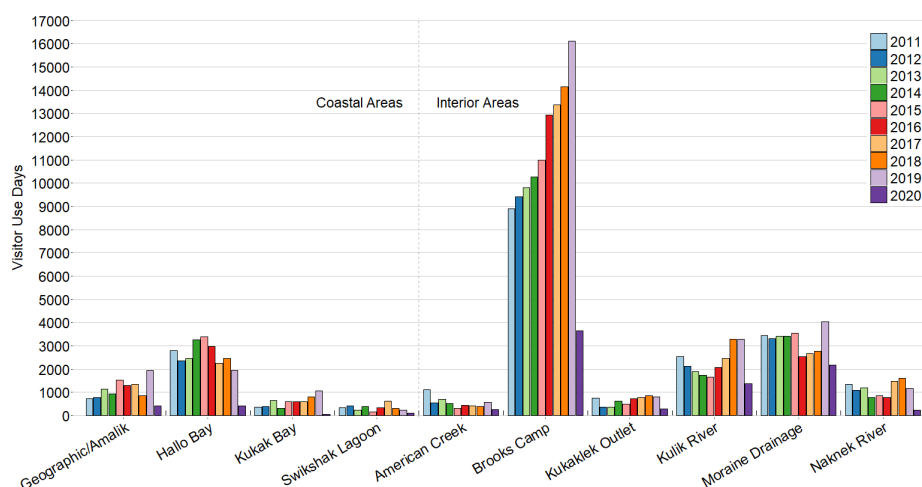


Figure 1. Visitor use days by year for select locations (2011-2020) in Katmai NP&Pres, as reported by the commercial use operators. [Data from the Katmai NP&Pres CUA database 3/08/2021]

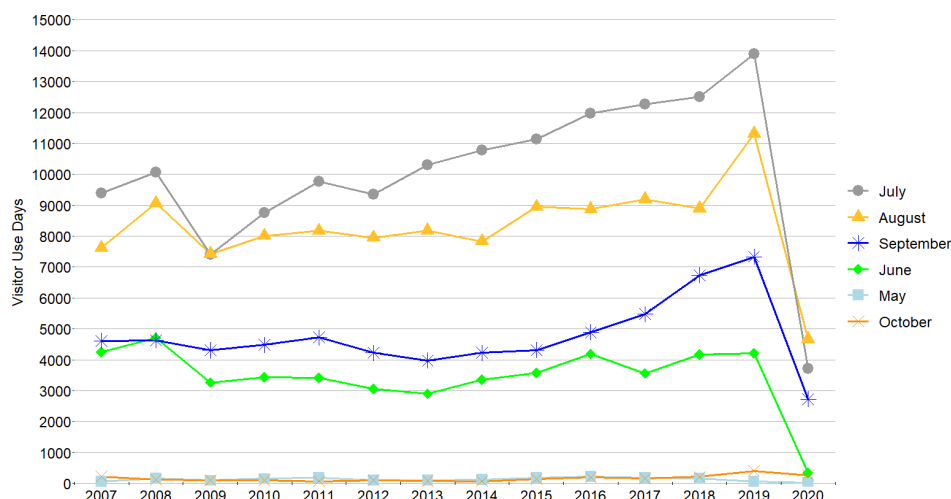


Figure 2. Monthly visitor use (May-October) for the years 2007-2020 in Katmai NP&Pres. [Data from the Katmai NP&Pres CUA database 3/08/2021]



Figure 3 provides a snapshot of where visitation occurred for select months in 2020. Brooks Camp was closed in June but received almost 2,000 visitor use days in July when the bear numbers on Brooks River are at their peak. In August, visitation spread out among other locations (Figure 3). The three main activities reported by commercial operators are sport fishing, bear viewing, and air taxi; these activities are not mutually exclusive (Figure 4). In 2020, the visitor use days for sport fishing showed the smallest drop. This might be from folks taking advantage of deals offered by commercial operators with the loss of normal summer travel.

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 within the park visitors go. 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.

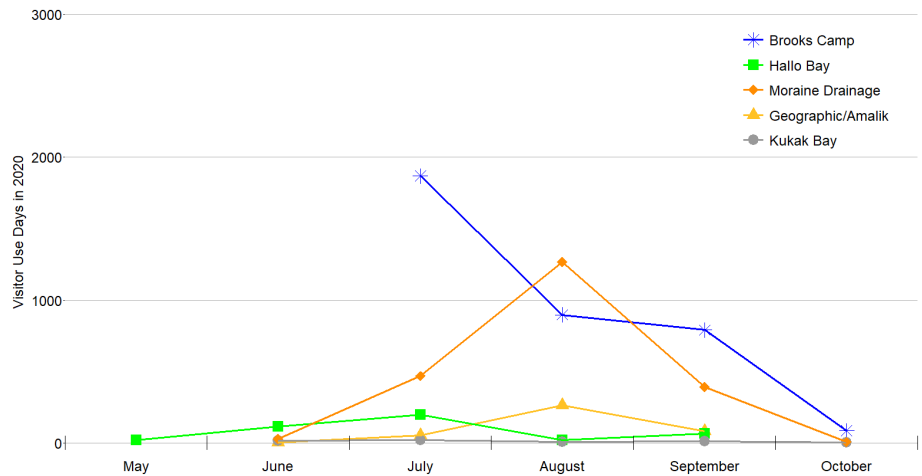


Figure 3. Areas with the highest visitor use by month in 2020. Areas represented are some of the most visited locations in Katmai NP&Pres. [Data from the Katmai NP&Pres CUA database 3/08/2021]

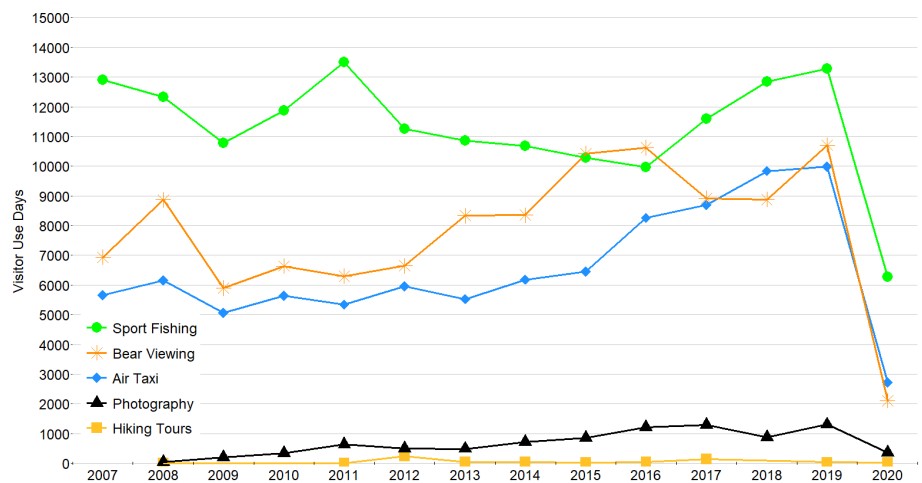


Figure 4. Visitor use days by activity as reported by the commercial operators working in Katmai NP&Pres, 2007-2020. Sport fishing, bear viewing, and air taxi services continue to be the most popular activities in Katmai. [Data from the Katmai NP&Pres CUA database 3/08/2021]

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.

Contact

Tim Shepherd, NPS-SWAN, tim_shepherd@nps.gov

Southwest Alaska Inventory and Monitoring Network
<https://www.nps.gov/im/swan/>

