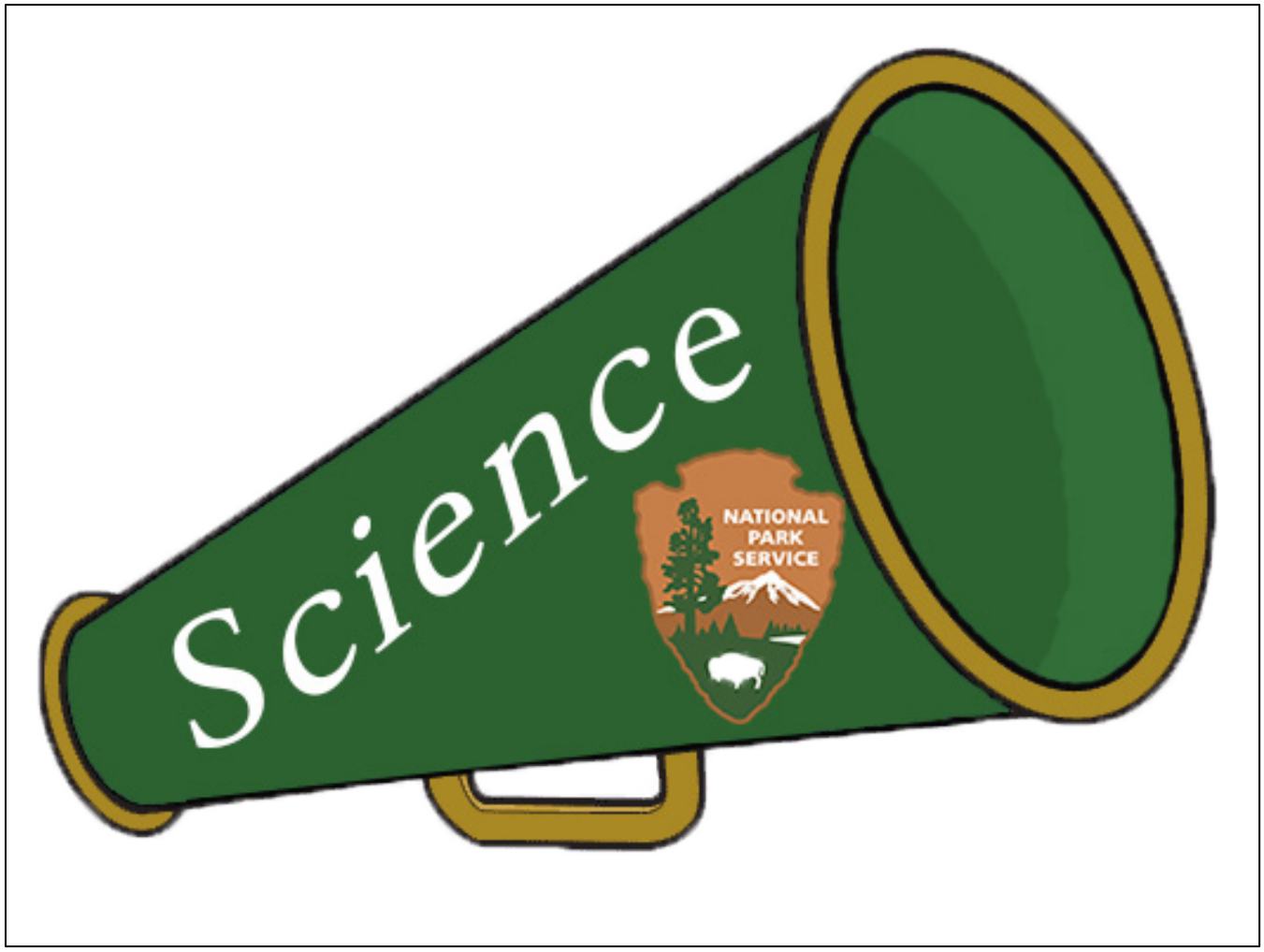
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Natural Resource Stewardship and Science

Great Lakes Network Communication Evaluation

2022

Natural Resource Report NPS/GLKN/NRR—2022/2458



ON THE COVER
The bullhorn was a popular mode of communication in an earlier time.

Great Lakes Network Communication Evaluation

2022

Natural Resource Report NPS/GLKN/NRR—2022/2458

Ted Gostomski

National Park Service
Great Lakes Inventory and Monitoring Network
2800 Lakeshore Drive East
Ashland, Wisconsin 54806

September 2022

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Natural Resource Stewardship and Science
Fort Collins, Colorado

The National Park Service, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science office in Fort Collins, Colorado, publishes a range of reports that address natural resource topics. These reports are of interest and applicability to a broad audience in the National Park Service and others in natural resource management, including scientists, conservation and environmental constituencies, and the public.

The Natural Resource Report Series is used to disseminate comprehensive information and analysis about natural resources and related topics concerning lands managed by the National Park Service. The series supports the advancement of science, informed decision-making, and the achievement of the National Park Service mission. The series also provides a forum for presenting more lengthy results that may not be accepted by publications with page limitations.

All manuscripts in the series receive the appropriate level of peer review to ensure that the information is scientifically credible and technically accurate.

Views, statements, findings, conclusions, recommendations, and data in this report do not necessarily reflect views and policies of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute endorsement or recommendation for use by the U.S. Government.

This report is available in digital format from the Great Lakes Network website and the Natural Resource Publications Management website. If you have difficulty accessing information in this publication, particularly if using assistive technology, please email irma@nps.gov.

Please cite this publication as:

Gostomski, T. 2022. Great Lakes Network communication evaluation: 2022. Natural Resource Report NPS/GLKN/NRR—2022/2458. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado. https://doi.org/10.36967/2294045

NPS 920/186269, September 2022

Contents

Page

Figures v

Tables v

Abstract vii

Acknowledgements vii

Introduction 1

Methods 3

Results 7

Question 1: In what capacity do you work for the park? 7

Question 2: What division are you part of? 7

Question 3: Do you know about natural resource monitoring programs conducted by Great Lakes Network staff in your park? 8

Question 4: How do you hear about Great Lakes Network monitoring programs in your park? 9

Question 5: Which of the following do you use, and how often? 11

Question 6: Please rank these from the most to the least useful 13

Question 7: Any comments or suggestions you would like to offer regarding GLKN communications? 14

Question 8: Everyone is busy, but we all have a preferred way to keep in touch with what's going on. What is your preferred way? 16

Conclusions 17

"Connection Is the New Currency" 18

Figures

Page

Figure 1. Employment types for 91 respondents to the 2022 GLKN communication evaluation survey. 7

Figure 2. Division representation for 91 respondents to the GLKN communication evaluation survey. 7

Figure 3. Number of respondents familiar or not with Great Lakes Network monitoring programs occurring in their parks. 8

Figure 4. Number of respondents, by division, familiar or not with Great Lakes Network monitoring programs occurring in their parks. 9

Figure 5. How respondents typically hear about the network and our monitoring programs. 10

Figure 6. How respondents, by division, typically hear about the network and our monitoring programs. 11

Figure 7. How respondents use and share network communication products. 11

Figure 8. How respondents, by division, use and share network communication products. 12

Figure 9. "Usefulness" of network communication products, from 1 to 6, as ranked by the staff in network parks. 13

Figure 10. "Usefulness" of network communication products, ranked from 1 to 6, by division. 14

Figure 11. Preferred methods of contact for park staff. 16

Tables

Page

Table 1. Comments and suggestions provided by 14 respondents to the GLKN communication evaluation survey. 15

Abstract

The Great Lakes Network conducts occasional surveys to evaluate our communication with network parks. Information gathered from the surveys helps us to assess our current modes of sharing information with parks and refine them where necessary. In early 2022, the staff at each of the nine Great Lakes Network parks were asked to complete a survey evaluating the communication efforts of the network office. The survey was created in Microsoft Forms, and a link to the form was sent to the "All Employee" email lists for all nine network parks (total of 571 people). The survey was open for four weeks (17 January through 11 February 2022). Responses were anonymous and each person could only complete the survey once. Ninety-one (91) responses were received, a response rate of 16%. The majority of respondents were permanent employees (86%) and most (74%) knew of the network monitoring programs occurring in their parks. Survey responses were summarized by pooling all responses and by division (Administration, Interpretation, Maintenance, Protection/Law Enforcement, Resource Management). The network's newsletter continues to be the product that is most highly rated and broadly read by park staff, followed by resource briefs, Natural Resource and Data Summary reports, and "News for Parks" emails. Most respondents hear about us through email, and that is the medium by which they prefer to be contacted. Nevertheless, as we move away from hard-copy reports and briefs, we should consider another way to maintain two forms of contact with our parks. An option for this is discussed.

Acknowledgements

I greatly appreciate the reviews provided by N. Chambers and A. Wondrak Biel. Their thoughtful suggestions helped improve the presentation of the data and how I interpreted it.

Introduction

The Great Lakes Network conducts occasional surveys to evaluate our communication with network parks. Information gathered from the surveys helps us to assess our current modes of sharing information with parks and refine them where necessary. The first two surveys were conducted in 2010 and 2017. The timing of each survey generally coincides with the transition from one communication plan period to the next.

Methods

The survey was created in Microsoft Forms and set up so that responses were anonymous. No identifying information was collected. A link to the form was sent to the "All Employee" email lists for all nine network parks (total of 571 people after removing network staff from the lists). The survey opened on 17 January 2022 and remained open for four weeks, closing on 11 February 2022. Reminders were sent to the "All Employee" email lists each week (27 January, 2 February, and 9 February). Respondents could only complete the survey once.

Respondents were asked to answer eight questions (four if they were unfamiliar with the network's monitoring programs):

1. In what capacity do you work for the park? (choices below)
    - ☐ Permanent
    - ☐ Seasonal
    - ☐ Volunteer
    - ☐ Other (text field)
2. What division are you part of? (choices below)
    - ☐ Administration
    - ☐ Interpretation
    - ☐ Maintenance
    - ☐ Protection/Law Enforcement
    - ☐ Resource Management)
3. Do you know about natural resource monitoring programs conducted by Great Lakes Network staff in your park? *If answer was "no," respondent skipped to Question #8*.
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
4. How do you hear about Great Lakes Network monitoring programs in your park? (Please check all that apply)
    - ☐ Email
    - ☐ Publications
    - ☐ Presentation by network staff
    - ☐ Mentioned in a staff meeting
    - ☐ Other (text field)
    - ☐ I don't hear about you, but I know you exist

5. Which of the following do you use, and how often? (Respondents select one option for each of the six communication products listed)
    - Natural Resource Reports (NRR) and Data Summaries (NRDS) (please check one)
        - ☐ Read and File for future reference
        - ☐ Read and Circulate to others
        - ☐ Don't Read, but Do Circulate to others
        - ☐ Don't Read, Don't Circulate (i.e., trash)
    - Resource briefs about network monitoring (please check one)
        - ☐ Read and File for future reference
        - ☐ Read and Circulate to others
        - ☐ Don't Read, but Do Circulate to others
        - ☐ Don't Read, Don't Circulate (i.e., trash)
    - Network newsletter, "The Current" (please check one)
        - ☐ Read and File for future reference
        - ☐ Read and Circulate to others
        - ☐ Don't Read, but Do Circulate to others
        - ☐ Don't Read, Don't Circulate (i.e., trash)
    - "News for Parks" emails (please check one)
        - ☐ Read and File for future reference
        - ☐ Read and Circulate to others
        - ☐ Don't Read, but Do Circulate to others
        - ☐ Don't Read, Don't Circulate (i.e., trash)
    - Great Lakes Network website (please check one)
        - ☐ Read and File for future reference
        - ☐ Read and Circulate to others
        - ☐ Don't Read, but Do Circulate to others
        - ☐ Don't Read, Don't Circulate (i.e., trash)
    - Great Lakes Network Facebook page (please check one)
        - ☐ Read and File for future reference
        - ☐ Read and Circulate to others

- ☐ Don’t Read, but Do Circulate to others
- ☐ Don’t Read, Don’t Circulate (i.e., trash)

6. Please rank these from the most (1) to the least (6) useful.

   Natural Resource Reports/Data Summaries

   Resource Briefs

   Newsletter, “The Current”

   “News for Parks” emails

   GLKN website

   GLKN Facebook page

7. Any comments or suggestions you would like to offer regarding GLKN communications? (text field)

8. Everyone is busy, but we all have a preferred way to keep in touch with what's going on. What is your preferred way? (choices below)

   - ☐ In-person (includes phone calls)
   - ☐ Email
   - ☐ Facebook
   - ☐ Something else? (text field)

Results

Past surveys yielded return rates of 12% (2010) and 14% (2017). We received 91 responses to the 2022 survey, a response rate of 16%.

Question 1: In what capacity do you work for the park?

Among 91 respondents, most (86%) identified as permanent employees, with an equal number of seasonal and "other" employment types (Figure 1). "Other" work arrangements were contractor, subject-to-furlough, and term employee.

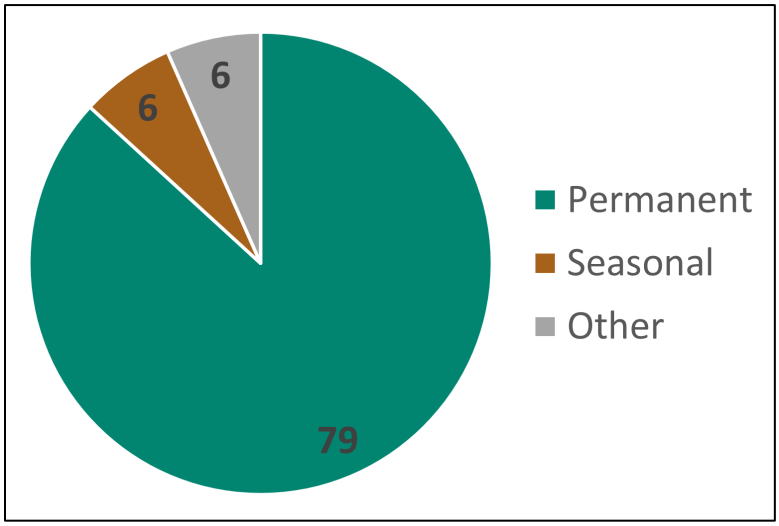


Figure 1. Employment types for 91 respondents to the 2022 GLKN communication evaluation survey.

Question 2: What division are you part of?

Most respondents (25) were resource management employees, followed by interpretation (22) (Figure 2).

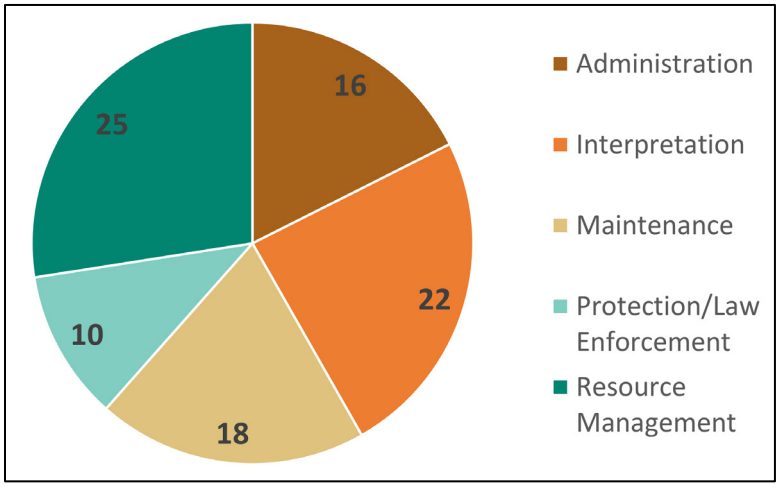


Figure 2. Division representation for 91 respondents to the GLKN communication evaluation survey.

Question 3: Do you know about natural resource monitoring programs conducted by Great Lakes Network staff in your park? (If answer is "no," skips to Question #8)

The majority of the 91 respondents (74%) were familiar with network monitoring programs going on in their parks (Figure 3). Those who answered "no" to this question were immediately sent to Question #8 before exiting the survey.

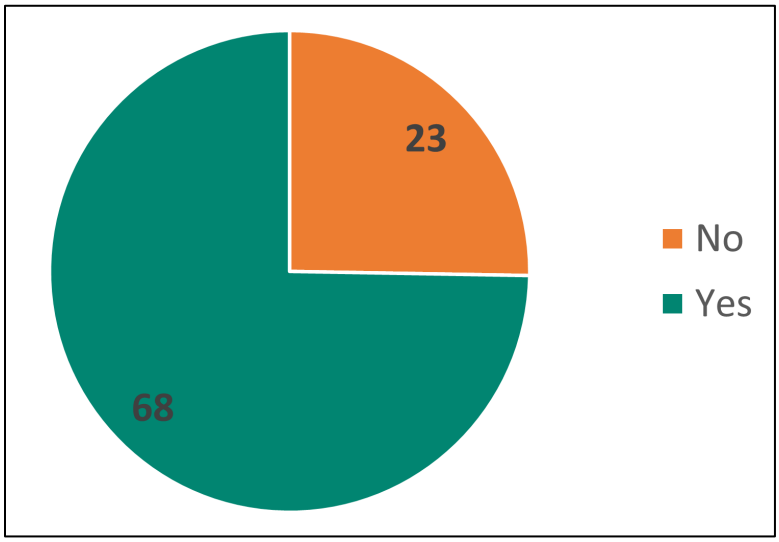


Figure 3. Number of respondents familiar or not with Great Lakes Network monitoring programs occurring in their parks (n=91).

Breaking down the data by division, at least half the respondents knew about network monitoring programs, regardless of what division they were in (Figure 4).

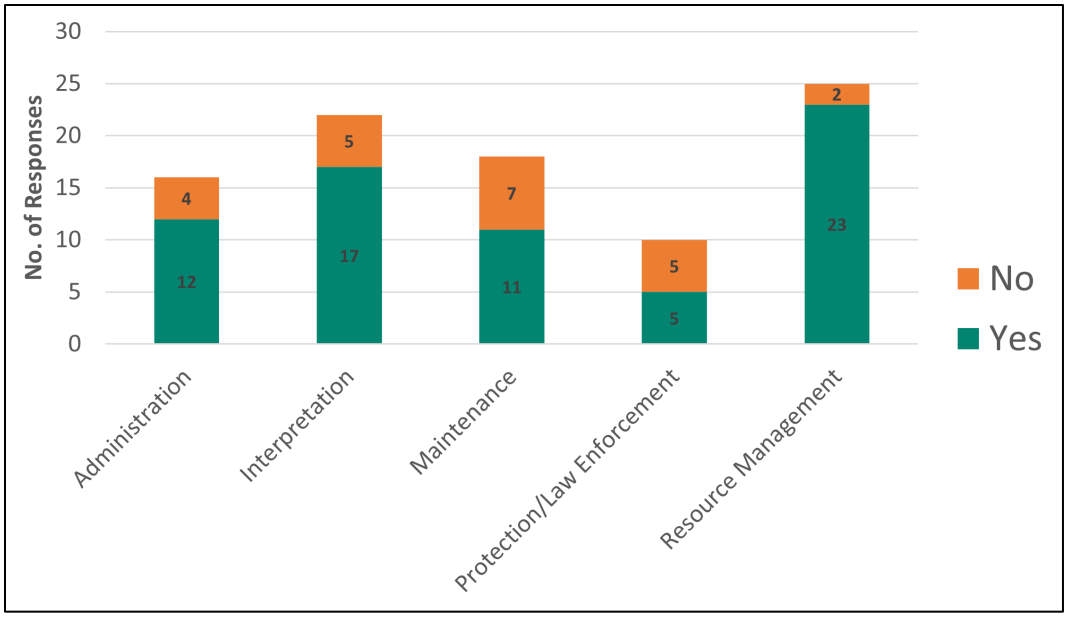


Figure 4. Number of respondents, by division, familiar or not with Great Lakes Network monitoring programs occurring in their parks (n=91).

Question 4: How do you hear about Great Lakes Network monitoring programs in your park? (Please check all that apply)

Most park staff (51) hear about the network by email, and for seven respondents, that is the only way they hear about us (Figure 5). Mention of us in a staff meeting (37) and publications (36) were the next most likely ways people hear of us. "Other" ways respondents noted were:

- Social media
- Collaboration; Work directly with GLKN on monitoring efforts within park; Staff needing compliance completed for projects; Talks in the field
- Word of mouth; Personnel; Sometimes from APIS staff

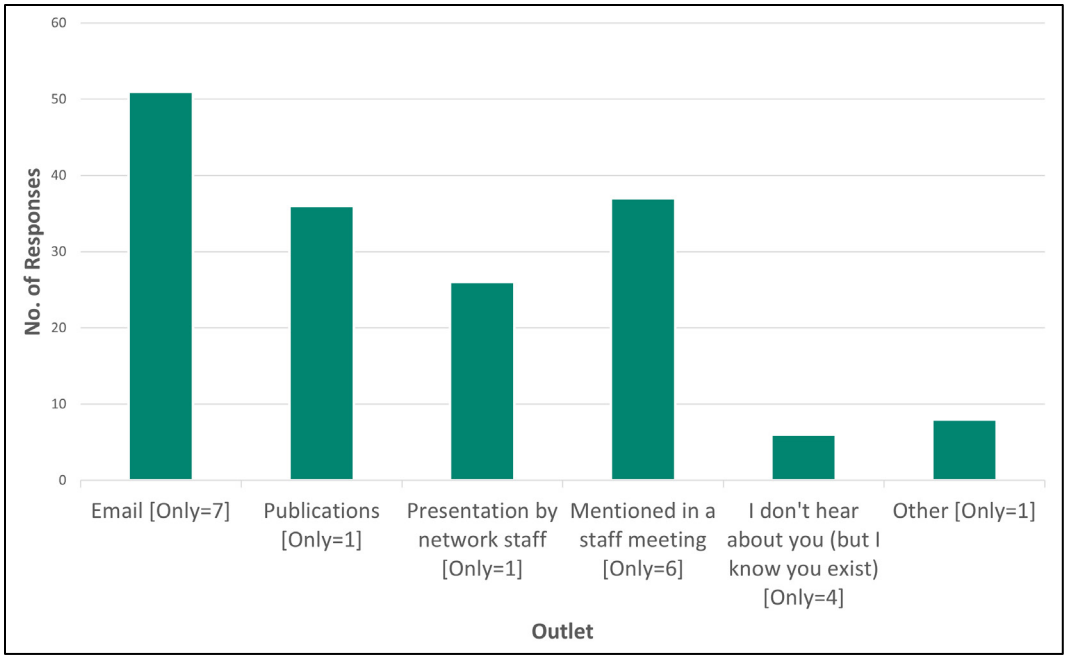


Figure 5. How respondents typically hear about the network and our monitoring programs (n=68). "Only" numbers in brackets are the number of respondents for whom that particular outlet is the only way they hear about the network.

Breaking the data down by division reveals how employees use a suite of outlets to hear about our work (Figure 6). It is interesting to note that Interpretation employees occupy the largest proportion in each outlet except publications.

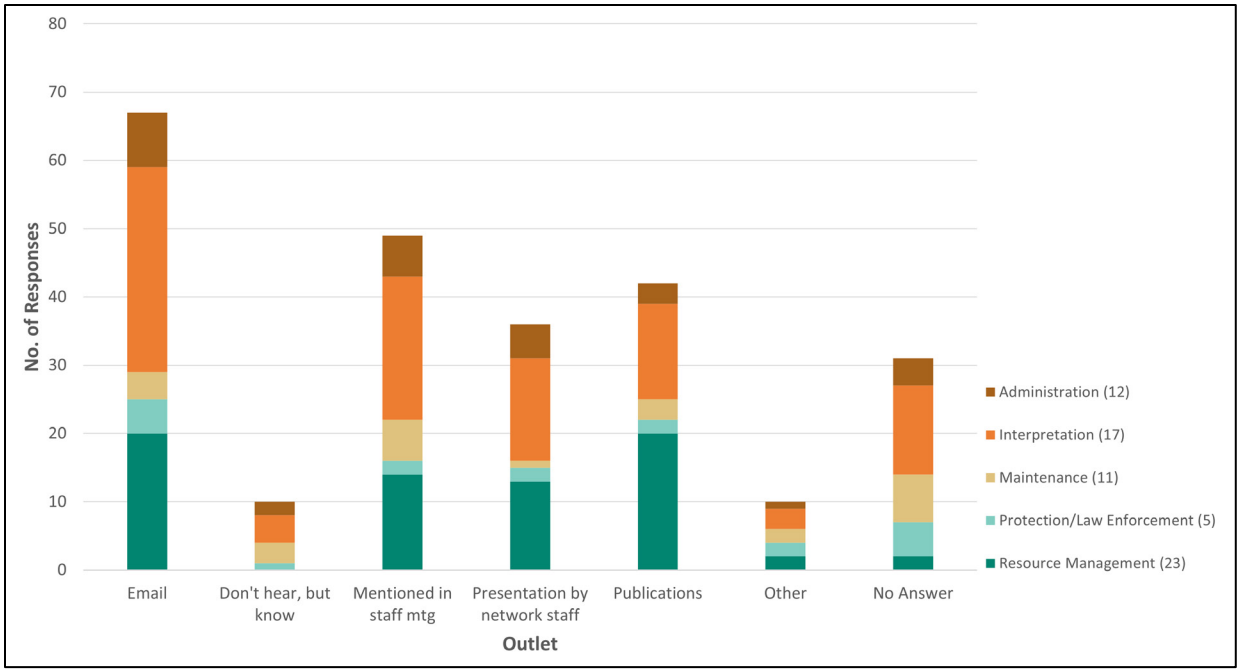


Figure 6. How respondents, by division, typically hear about the network and our monitoring programs (n=68). Number of respondents shown in parentheses after each division name.

Question 5: Which of the following do you use, and how often?

The Current newsletter and Natural Resource Reports or Data Series Reports (NRR/NRDS) were the most often read and filed items (30 responses each), followed closely by "News for Parks" email (29), and resource briefs (27) (Figure 7). However, in terms of total items read (whether filed or circulated afterwards), *The Current* and resource briefs are the leading products, with 55 and 53 responses, respectively.

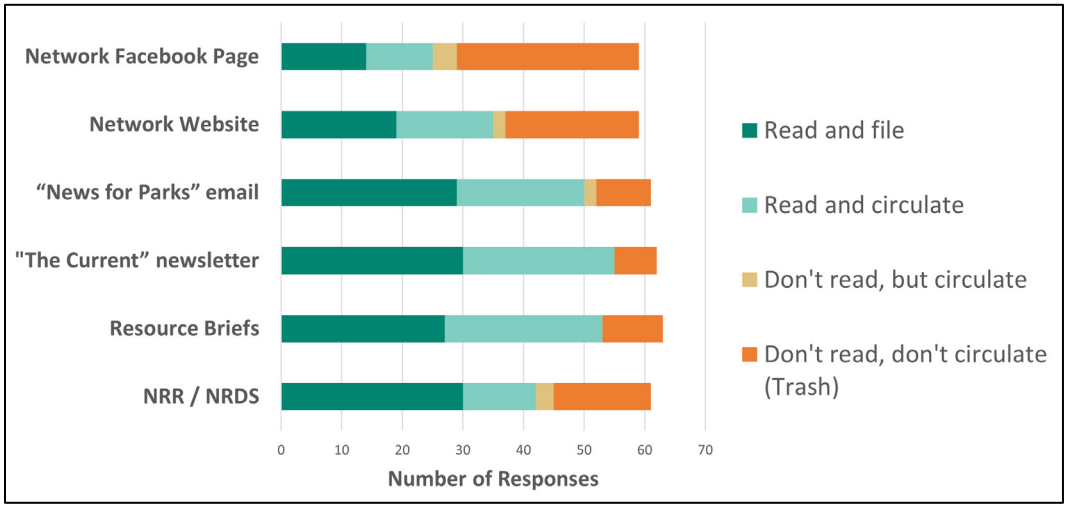


Figure 7. How respondents use and share network communication products (n=68).

By division, the most notable items are those that staff do not use or circulate (i.e., trash; shown in orange in Figure 8). For Administrators, those things are primarily the network website and Facebook. Interpreters do not trash much of anything, while Maintenance employees are trashing more than they use, with the exception of *The Current*. Protection/law enforcement staff are tuned into the "News for Parks" email and *The Current*, while resource management staff are using resource briefs, *The Current*, and "News for Parks" emails almost as much as the Natural Resource Reports (Figure 8).



Figure 8. How respondents, by division, use and share network communication products (n=68). Number of respondents shown in parentheses after each division name. "NRR/NRDS" = Natural Resource Report/Natural Resource Data Summary. "n/a" = no answer given.

Question 6: Please rank these from the most (1) to the least (6) useful.

Park staff ranked Facebook the least useful product, while the newsletter ranked first for one-third of respondents, followed by reports and resource briefs (Figure 9).

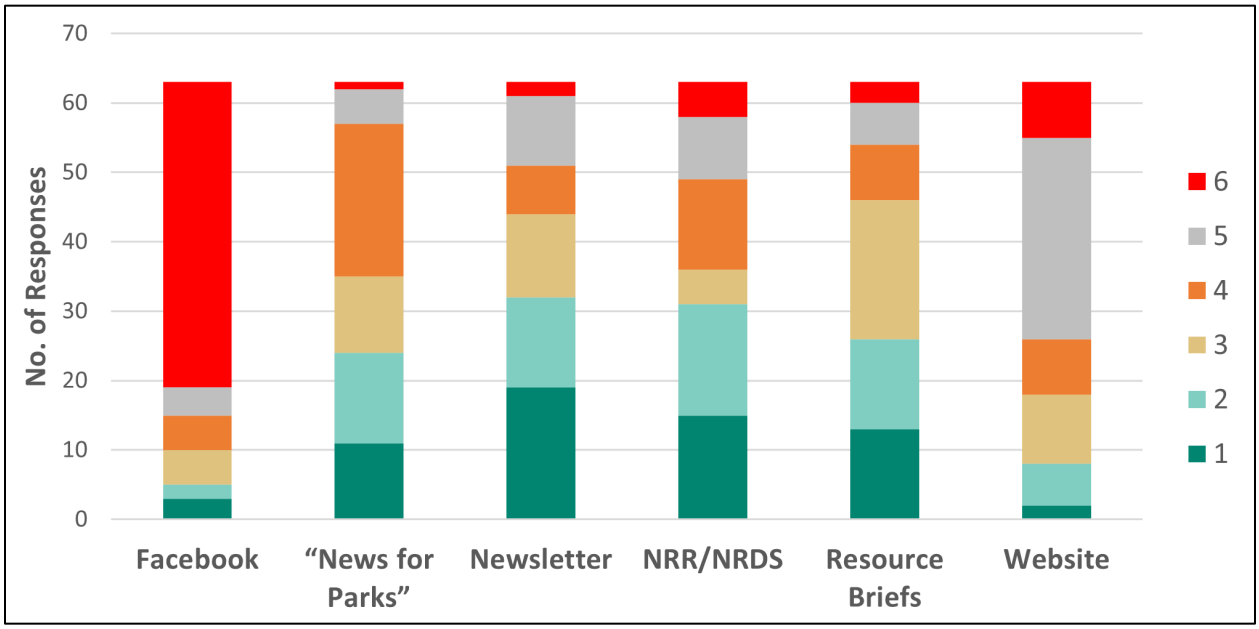


Figure 9. "Usefulness" of network communication products, from 1 (most useful) to 6 (least useful), as ranked by the staff in network parks (n=63).

By division, the newsletter was the most useful item for Administration and Protection/Law Enforcement staff (Figure 10). "News for Parks" emails and resource briefs were ranked first by most Maintenance staff. Interestingly, when first and second most useful items are combined, the Natural Resource Reports and Data Summary Reports (NRR/NRDS) were the most useful item for Maintenance (Figure 10). Interpretation staff do not show a preference to any one item except that they do not use the network website. Combining first and second choices, though, yields the newsletter as the most useful item for interpreters. As expected, NRR/NRDS reports were ranked first by about half of Resource Management staff.

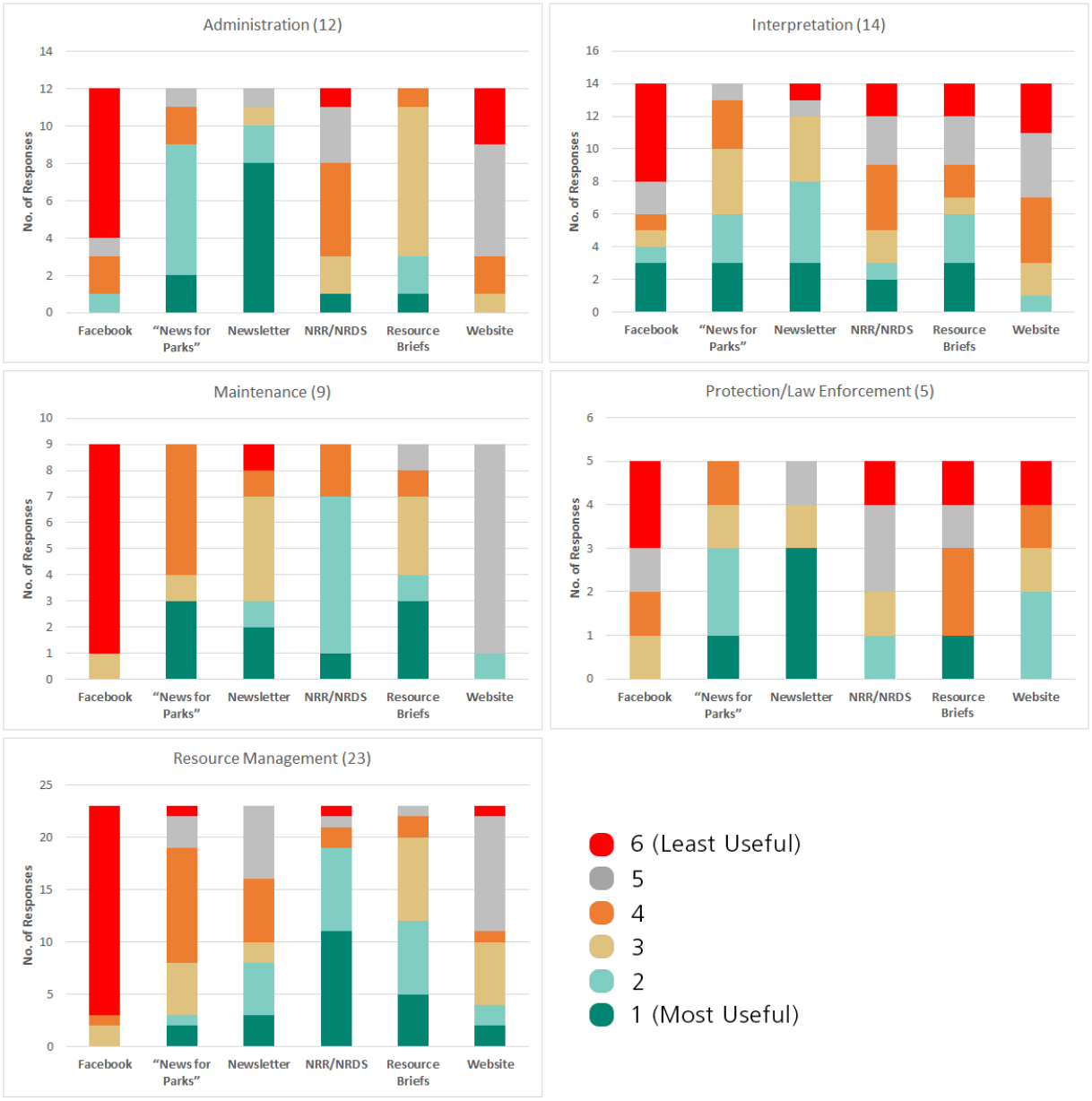


Figure 10. "Usefulness" of network communication products, ranked from 1 (most useful) to 6 (least useful), by division (n=63). Number of respondents shown in parentheses after each division name. "NRR/NRDS" = Natural Resource Report/Natural Resource Data Summary. "n/a" = no answer given.

Question 7: Any comments or suggestions you would like to offer regarding GLKN communications?

Twenty comments were received in response to Question 7. The substantive ones are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Comments and suggestions provided by 14 respondents to the GLKN communication evaluation survey.

Division	Comments
Administration	I wish there was more sharing of GLKN projects within the park, by the program managers involved. Examples would be brown bag lunches, virtual presentations. Also, what about a monthly "brown-bag lunch" at 12:00 hosted by GLKN? Could be updates on GLKN as a whole or bring in different speakers/project managers from other parks to present. I would gladly eat my lunch at my desk and watch a virtual program monthly.
	…I do get emails forwarded … such as the Current. Our park staff do not often convey nor interpret much of what is done in the field and I feel that is a shame. There are great projects that cross my desk for funding but I know very little about them and they are in my backyard. So if I don't know, I'm guessing our Interp Rangers, nor public does. Research is less useful if not shared with those who can opt to fund it more.
Interpretation	Could we get an email about the current and historic levels of Lake Michigan on a quarterly basis?
	Email it to me and I can read and file! Bonus points if it has picture, infographs, and links to web pages that I can put it on our [Facebook] page!
	This survey is helpful in that I wasn't aware of some of the communication sources
	Work with each park on a GLKN series of posts for Instagram and [Facebook] on the specific monitoring work being completed in that park. Rather than only featuring on the GLKN [Facebook] page
Maintenance	Why [send this survey to] all employees? That's thousands of deletes by busy employees with other duties. Temporary employees sharing computers during a pandemic need the barrage of information minimized not added to.
Protection/Law Enforcement	Thanks for all you do! The more we can communicate about these things, the better.
Resource Management	For Question 6, the order does not necessarily reflect the value placed on the products. Even if news for parks and the Current are ranked 4 and 5, that doesn't mean I don't read and find value in their existence. I find both useful to learn what's going on elsewhere, which is valuable to me. I do not use Facebook at work. Question 5: I don't necessarily save everything I look at on the GLKN website, because I'm expecting it will be there next time I need it and I don't have enough space to save everything.
	I have been impressed with communication between GLKN and park staff
	In above question, I don't know what 4, 5, and 6 are [“News for Parks” emails, GLKN website, and GLKN Facebook page]. They are not critical to my job at the moment so N/A is the rating I would give. I am an Outdoor Rec Planner.
	…GLKN in general is a great outfit with a long-standing commitment to doing good science and helping parks however possible. Thanks for everything you do and the countless times you have been of assistance
	The GLKN facebook page is certainly useful—I just use that resource less than the others, but believe it is critical for getting news out to non-NPS folks. Just wanted to make that note—I ranked it last but it is an important resource. All of those listed are.
	You're doing a great job! Thank you for keeping us informed!

Question 8: Everyone is busy, but we all have a preferred way to keep in touch with what's going on. What is your preferred way?

Most park staff (74 of 91 respondents, or 81%) prefer to be contacted by email. Second-most preferred method (9% of respondents) is in-person conversation including phone calls (Figure 11).

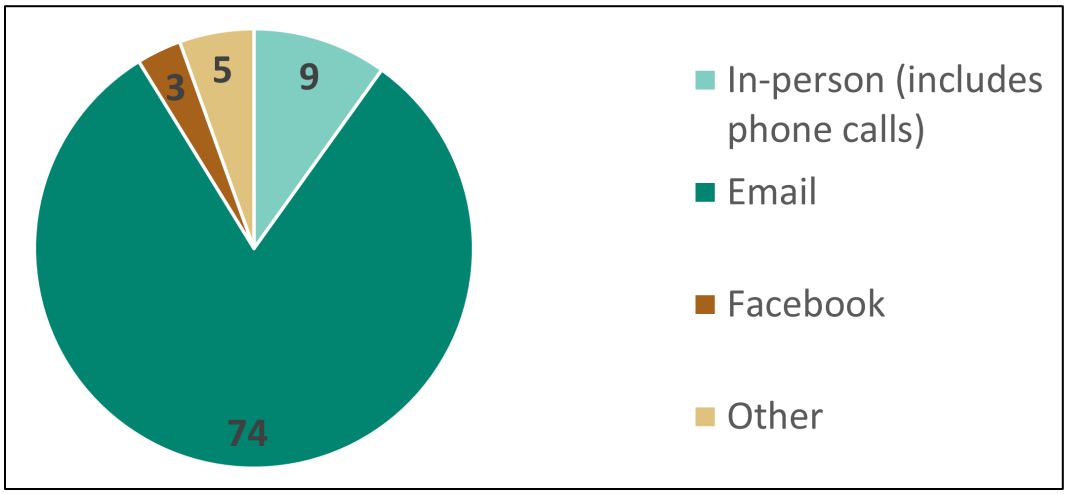


Figure 11. Preferred methods of contact for park staff (n=91).

"Other" preferred methods of contact were:

- *Being informed about a blog/website that I could check when I'm looking for the latest info about the Great Lakes Network. (Is there one? I'm not on Facebook.)* [Administration]
- *Dependent on topic and complexity; email is good for many things, in-person or phone as-needed for more in-depth or complex topics/communication.* [Resource Management]
- *I choose to not know* [Resource Management]
- *None* [Maintenance]
- *Newsletters are great* [Protection/Law Enforcement]

Conclusions

Where do people look for information in 2022? They go online, they use Google searches. It has been standard practice for the network to ensure people see and hear things from us in at least two different ways—electronically and in hard copy. We have tried to reach people in the way they prefer to be reached, in the way they choose to learn. We used to print reports and send multiple copies to the parks along with a link to the digital file in IRMA. We would print resource briefs and newsletters and send them to the park for distribution to both staff and the public. Between the spring of 2009 and the fall of 2018, we distributed an average of 350 hard copy newsletters twice a year to the nine network parks and a mailing list of interested citizens, partners, and colleagues. We have not printed a newsletter since the Fall 2018 issue. Now the newsletter is only available as a PDF in IRMA, linked to the network website, and we are considering adding it to the website as a "shared content" article.

The Current newsletter continues to be the product that is most highly rated and broadly read by park staff, followed by resource briefs, Natural Resource and Data Summary reports, and News for Parks emails. Are there implications of this for how we communicate with our parks? All of these are "non personal" or passive forms of communication. And none of these are printed in hard copy anymore, not since 2014 for reports and 2018 for resource briefs and the newsletter. We have switched to all digital content despite the website's mediocre rating and our attempt to consolidate park-specific information into individual park pages for easy reference. On the other hand, almost everyone wants to stay in touch by email, so we are still reaching people in the way they prefer to be reached.

The number of respondents who do not know who we are was small in each division, but overall accounted for 25% of the respondents. Our work is intended to help park managers make informed decisions, so are those 25% not responsible for such decisions? Similarly, an overall return rate of 16% is small, but that small sample size tells us something too. Namely, that there is a relatively small group of people in any given park who concern themselves with what the network does. Maybe we can think smaller when we consider who our audience is and be more intentional about reaching them instead of broadcasting to a larger audience.

What we are learning through our monitoring can also be useful in enhancing the visitor experience and public understanding of park resources. We have generally left public outreach to the parks, but if our information is not getting to front-line interpreters, then it's not getting to the public. How can we improve that connection? One way may be to work more closely with park webmasters to integrate network content with park web pages, first by making sure there is a listing element on the desired web page then ensuring that our articles are tagged appropriately for that listing element to capture and display them.

But if we build it, will they come? A little over one-third of respondents (35%) said they "do not read" the website (see Figure 7), and 58% rated it fifth or sixth in usefulness (on a scale of 1–6, with six being the least useful; see Figure 9). This raises the question of when and how park staff use websites. Can we advertise our website differently? Does the content need to be more easily accessible or its applications to park management and storytelling made more apparent? Comments

received from respondents do not give us much sense of direction (see Table 1). Interpreters mention wanting information to supplement park Facebook posts or a desire for basic information such as historic and current water levels on Lake Michigan, while administrators express an interest in more sharing of information.

"Connection Is the New Currency"

In a 2021 survey of resource managers who worked in parks covered by an I&M network, 74% of respondents rated person-to-person communication as "highly important" to decision-making and/or planning for park projects (Palumbo and Gostomski, unpublished data). However, only 9% of the total respondents (3% of resource managers) to this GLKN survey said they prefer in-person conversations (including phone calls) (see Figure 11, responses by division not shown).

Should we, as one person suggested in this survey, consider a lunch-time webinar series for our parks? This would renew the two-pronged approach of digital and physical content presented to parks—PDF files and in-person presentations. It is also a more targeted approach, as we could tailor the presentation to the audience (resource managers, superintendents, interpreters, or all staff), and we could help park staff make connections with our data rather than leaving it to them to figure out on their own. And, as recently heard from an NPS employee outside of our network, "connection is the new currency." Doing a presentation, whether in person or virtually, puts a face to a name and gives people a chance to ask questions and hear answers. Maybe that is the one take-away suggestion we could try.

The Department of the Interior protects and manages the nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provides scientific and other information about those resources; and honors its special responsibilities to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated Island Communities.

NPS 920/186269, September 2022



Natural Resource Stewardship and Science
1201 Oakridge Drive, Suite 150
Fort Collins, CO 80525