



2022 Socioeconomic Research of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

Report on 2022 Data Collection



Full Moon above the Sierra Blanca in the Sangre de Cristo Range.

NPS / PATRICK MYER

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Otak, Inc.,¹ RRC Associates, Inc.,² University of Montana³

¹Otak, Inc.

Portland, OR

²RRC Associates, Inc.

Boulder, CO

³University of Montana

Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research

Missoula, MT



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.

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Please cite this publication as:

Otak, Inc, RRC Associates Inc., University of Montana. 2026. 2022 Socioeconomic Research of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve: Report on 2022 Data Collection. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.36967/2319392>

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Abstract

A strong mandate and need for socioeconomic monitoring are expressed in the NPS strategic goals for science, in statements by the NPS leadership, and the report of the Second Century Commission. Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve (Great Sand Dunes) embarked on a multi-component visitor use study to better understand a variety of major topics around visitation. As part of this major effort, a parkwide socioeconomic visitor survey was conducted in June of 2022. Over a 10-day sampling period, visitors were intercepted and asked to provide details about their experience at the park. The study uses a two-phased survey methodology to capture a representative sample of visitor information, characteristics, and behavior: (1) an on-site intercept survey conducted via tablet, and (2) a follow up (mail-back and/or online survey) for full trip details. This report informs core issues of visitor use management and develops a deeper, contemporary understanding of who visits Great Sand Dunes and what they do during their visit. The results are organized by these two phases and are intended to assist park managers in understanding current utilization and perception of park resources, operations and potential issues, as well as to facilitate communication and decision-making processes within the park and between the park and its local partners and stakeholders.

Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) has both a strong mandate and need for socioeconomic research. This is expressed in the NPS strategic goals for science, in statements by the NPS leadership, in the report of the Second Century Commission, NPS Next emphases, and through the Department of the Interior priorities for 2018–2022. Additionally, a recent U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report identified the needs to better understand and monitor customer experience dimensions where results more directly link to investments made. The need for socioeconomic research and monitoring also was identified in an external review of the NPS Social Science Program and supported in the 2008 Interior Appropriations Bill Joint Explanatory Statement.

Partially in response to a larger-scale push for more visitor use management research, Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve (Great Sand Dunes) deemed it critical to begin looking into socioeconomic and visitor use issues to help support future management decisions at the park. Therefore, this study is part of a multi-component project to help understand visitor use at the park. The purpose of this component of the study is to inform core issues of visitor use management, management solutions, and to develop a current and deeper understanding of who visits Great Sand Dunes National Park, what they do during their visit, and their spending profile. Results are meant to be used on a parkwide scale and represent the primary user base of the park.

The results of the study are aimed to assist Great Sand Dunes National Park managers in understanding current utilization and perception of park resources, operations, and issues that may exist due to increasing visitation, and facilitating communication and decision processes within the park and between the park and its local partners and stakeholders. Visitor spending data is not included in this report and is presented as part of the NPS's Visitor Spending Effects for 2022.

The study was conducted by a large-scale research team from Otak, Inc., RRC Associates, and the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at the University of Montana. On-the-ground data collection was performed by Gaia Environmental Consulting.

Methods

The study used a two-phased survey methodology to capture a representative sample of visitor information, characteristics, and behavior:

- 1) An on-site intercept survey conducted via tablet, and
- 2) A follow-up (mail-back and/or online) survey for full trip details.

This comprehensive two-phase approach provides the necessary information to make on-the-ground decisions using immediate feedback from the intercept survey while also capturing key in-depth information on visitor spending profiles and trip characteristics for long-term planning. Additionally, the tablet survey was kept brief to ensure the visitor's experience was not altered. The methods also permit a larger sample to be collected on key questions of interest.

Study Area

The Great Sand Dunes local area map is shown in Figure 1. The local area around Great Sand Dunes consists of Saguache, Rio Grande, Alamosa, Conejos, and Costilla counties in Colorado. Within Great Sand Dunes, the study area was comprised of 4 locations. Table 1 shows more details about sampling locations. The locations and volumes of surveyor effort were determined based on historic visitor volumes and distribution across the park's main areas.

Table 1. Information about sampling locations in Great Sand Dunes.

Intercept Site	Number of Completed Intercept Surveys	Percent of Completed Intercept Surveys
Visitor Center	403	42.5%
Dunes Lot	527	55.6%
Campground / Overflow Parking (limited surveying)	7	0.7%
Castle Creek (Limited surveying)	11	1.2%

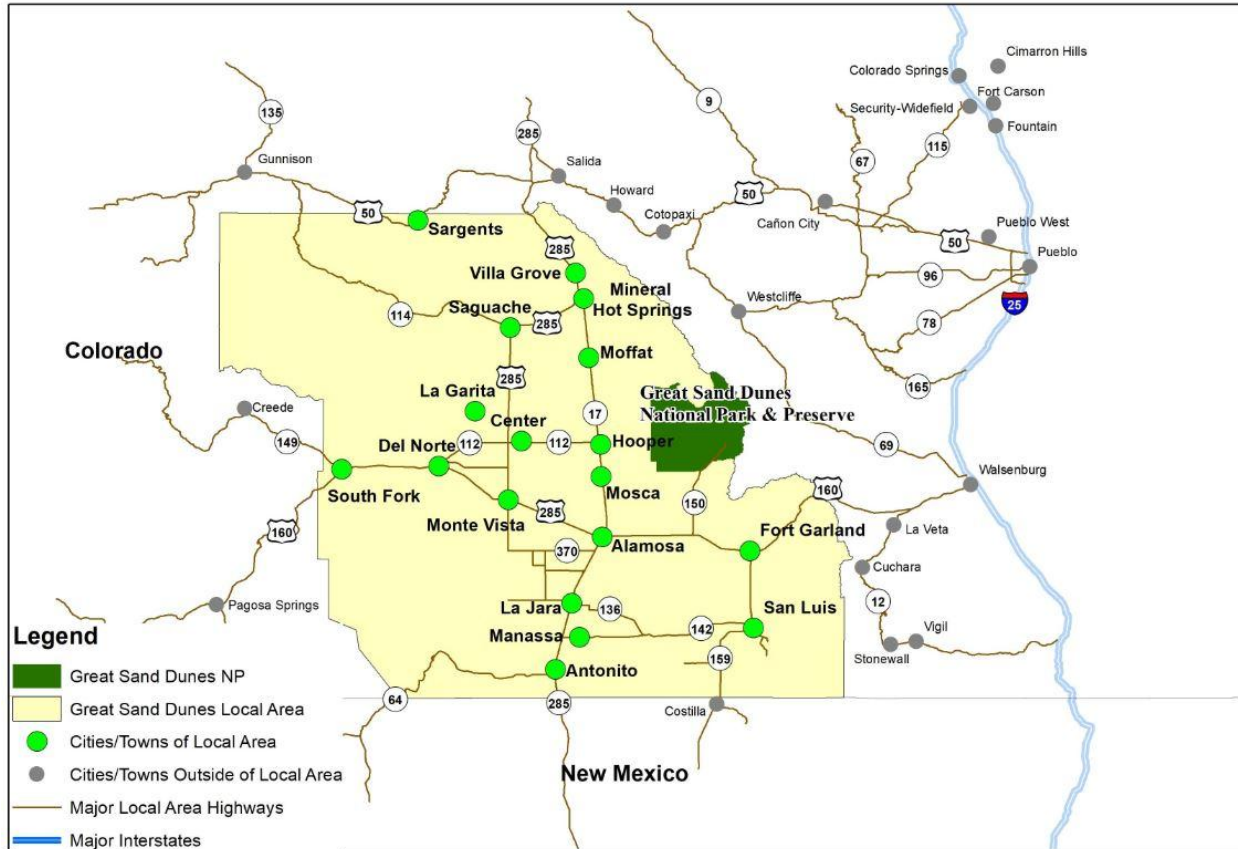


Figure 1. Great Sand Dunes National Park local area map.



Two hikers appear tiny on a massive dune ridge illuminated by the setting sun.

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Sampling Period and Procedure

Intercept Survey

The on-site intercept survey was developed to collect rapid visitor information via tablet-based responses, which were then analyzed and provided for park managers within several weeks of conclusion of data collection. This effort allowed for swift management action, if needed.

The intercept sampling was conducted during the period of June 9th - 19th, 2022. A sample of visitors were intercepted while visiting Great Sand Dunes across the designated locations listed in Table 1, above. The majority of respondents were visitors on foot at these locations.

Surveyors approached potential respondents at the site to introduce the purpose of the study and ask them to participate in a short 5–7-minute survey about their experience in Great Sand Dunes (NPS 2022). If the visitor was eligible (at least 18 years of age, not a Great Sand Dunes employee, and had not previously taken the survey) and agreed to participate in the study, the surveyor verbally administered the survey questions and recorded the responses on a handheld tablet device. If the visitor did not agree, surveyors asked if they would be willing to answer three non-response bias questions (see Tables 4–6). Upon complete or partial refusal, the surveyor would thank the visitor for their time, log the nonresponse, and approach the next visitor group.

At the end of the intercept survey, visitors were invited to participate in a follow-up survey by mail-back or online response. Those who agreed to participate were given an envelope containing a printed copy of the follow-up survey and hyperlink and instructions for accessing it online. As part of the intercept protocol, surveyors logged a unique identifier (four-digit code) from the envelope into the tablet for future connection to the follow-up survey.

Therefore, four potential outcomes were possible when intercepting visitors (see Table 2):

- 1) Complete refusal, refusing to answer any questions, including non-response bias questions;
- 2) Partial refusal, answering non-response questions but nothing further;
- 3) Complete intercept, but refuse to take follow-up;
- 4) Complete intercept and take follow-up.

During the sampling period, 3-4 surveyors were stationed simultaneously at different sampling sites. Start times varied day-to-day and by location to capture a diverse sample of visitors across Great Sand Dunes. Each surveyor worked nine 7-hour days (six hours data collection and one-hour lunch break) and rotated between several sites. Each surveyor had one day off during the 10-day sampling window. Due to a positive COVID-19 case, the sampling plan was adjusted to accommodate one less surveyor for part of the sampling period. However, a sufficient volume was still obtained based on visitor use statistic figures.

Table 2. Response outcomes – Great Sand Dunes intercept Survey.

Outcome	Total
Eligible visitors contacted	1,039
Complete refusals	50
Partial refusals (non-response questions completed)	39
Intercept surveys completed	949
Follow-up surveys distributed	921
Intercept response rate	91.3%
Follow-up acceptance rate	97.0%

Mail-back/Online Survey

The follow-up mail-back/online survey was distributed to participating respondents who completed the intercept survey and then agreed to take a follow-up survey after completing their trip to Great Sand Dunes. This method extended data collection and asked participants to complete the survey after their visit either through a postage-paid envelope provided to them, or online via a provided survey link. The follow-up survey covers visitor trip spending details, travel patterns, and perceptions of their recent visit (NPS 2022). Both the intercept survey and the follow-up survey were tagged with a unique identifier (four-digit code) for each respondent so their on-site tablet responses could be paired with their follow-up responses. Joining the two datasets provides a more complete picture of connecting in-park experiences and post-visit perceptions.

At the end of the intercept survey, respondents were asked for their physical mailing address or email address. This allowed for a reminder postcard or email to be sent to all contacts about a week following the end of each data collection period. This postcard or email thanked them for their original participation and encouraged them to complete the follow-up if they had not already done so.

Three weeks after postcard mailing/initial email follow-up, a second contact (with the same unique IDs) was delivered to all outstanding addresses/emails, noting that the individual's completed questionnaire had yet to be received. The mailed survey packets included replacement surveys and postage-paid, self-addressed return envelopes. A final contact was mailed/emailed to all remaining non-respondents four weeks after sending the second contact (i.e., first full replacement survey).

Table 3 shows response rate for the follow-up mail-back/online survey.

Table 3. Response rate – Great Sand Dunes follow-up mail-back/online survey.

Outcome	Total
Follow-up surveys distributed	921
Valid follow-up surveys completed	344
Response rate	37.4%

Nonresponse Bias Analysis

To account for potential biases between respondents and nonrespondents, three questions were asked of eligible visitors contacted who did not wish to participate in the on-site intercept survey. These three questions can then be compared to both those who completed the intercept survey only, and those who completed both the intercept and follow-up surveys. With an intercept survey response rate of 91.3%, concern over *intercept* nonresponse is muted. Tables 4 through 6 below show results of bias testing between intercept-only and full survey respondents.

Using a p-value of 0.05, the distribution of responses did not significantly differ for any of the measured variables between respondents and non-respondents. Based on these measurements, there is not measurable bias due to non-response in this study.

Table 4. Non-Response bias question: “Are you a permanent or seasonal/second home resident of the local area around Great Sand Dunes?”.

Response	Frequency: Full survey respondents	Percent: Full survey respondents	Frequency: Intercept-only respondents	Percent: Intercept-only respondents
Yes	2	0.6%	13	2.1%
No	341	99.4%	593	97.9%

*p-value: Cannot test due to low “Yes” responses.

Table 5. Non-Response bias question: “Do you currently live in the United States?”.

Response	Frequency: Full survey respondents	Percent: Full survey respondents	Frequency: Intercept-only respondents	Percent: Intercept-only respondents
Yes	335	97.7%	592	97.7%
No	8	2.3%	14	2.3%

*p-value: 0.98

Table 6. Non-Response bias question: “On this trip away from home, have you [and your personal group] stayed, or will you stay overnight away from your permanent residence either in Great Sand Dunes and/or within the local area?”.

Response	Frequency: Full survey respondents	Percent: Full survey respondents	Frequency: Intercept-only respondents	Percent: Intercept-only respondents
Yes	225	65.6%	397	65.5%
No	118	34.4%	209	34.5%

*p-value: 0.98



In fall, cottonwood trees around the dunes turn deep gold and snow showers begin to blanket the peaks.

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Results

Intercept Survey Results

The following section provides results of the 949 visitor intercept surveys conducted in Great Sand Dunes National Park from June 9th - 19th, 2022. All results are presented in this report, regardless of sample size, which varies by question. Caution is recommended in the interpretation of figures with sample size lower than $n=30$. Categories on some questions may not sum to 100% due to rounding differences and/or the opportunity to select more than one response option.



Horseback riders pause before descending from Music Pass into the upper Sand Creek basin, part of Great Sand Dunes National Preserve.

NPS

Questions 1–2: Visitor Residency

First, respondents were asked to indicate if they were permanent or seasonal residents of the local area around Great Sand Dunes. If they did not reside permanently or seasonally in the local area, they were asked if they currently live in the U.S., and if so, for their ZIP code. Figure 2 depicts responses to this group of questions.

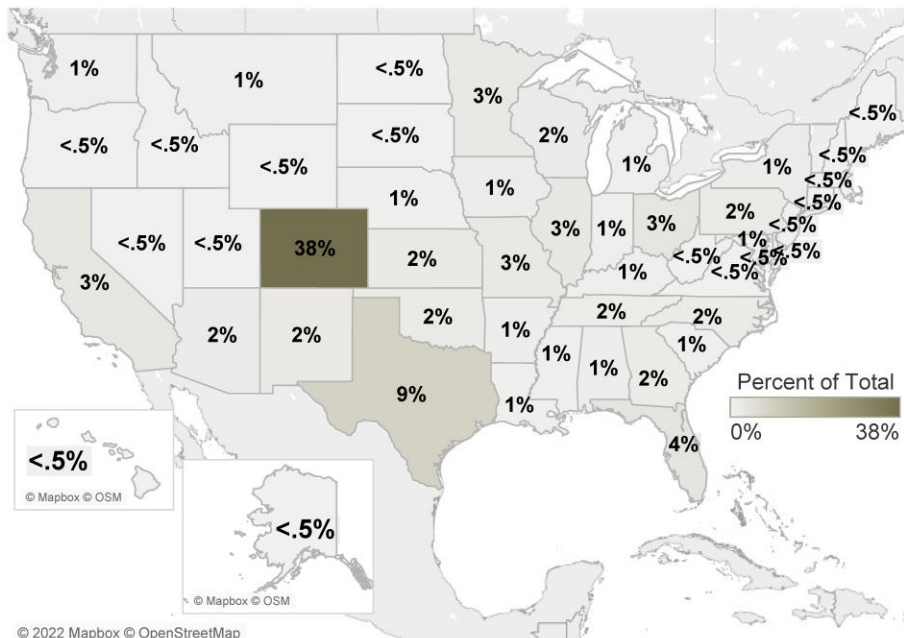
Are you a permanent or seasonal/second home resident of the local area around Great Sand Dunes?



Do you currently live in the United States?



Respondent States (Percentage of U.S. respondents only)



Top 10 States

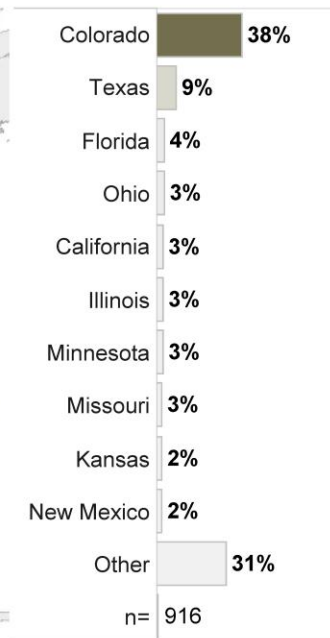


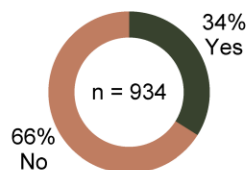
Figure 2. Visitor local residency status and geographic origin of domestic visitors to Great Sand Dunes.

- Just over 1% of all respondents stated that they were either permanent or seasonal residents of the local area around Great Sand Dunes.
- There was a large geographic concentration of visitors from Colorado (38%) (where Great Sand Dunes is located).
- Among the 98% of respondents currently residing in the U.S., 38% reside in Colorado, followed by 9% from Texas, 4% from Florida, and 3% from a variety of states such as Ohio and California.

Question 3: Trip Purpose

If respondents indicated that they were not permanent or seasonal residents of the local area, they were asked about the overall purpose for their trip away from home (Figure 3).

[If not local/seasonal resident] Was your visit to Great Sand Dunes the primary purpose for your overall trip away from home?



[If not the primary purpose for your overall trip away from home] Was your visit to Great Sand Dunes...?

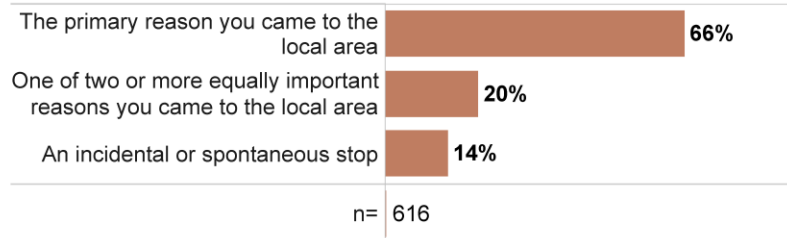


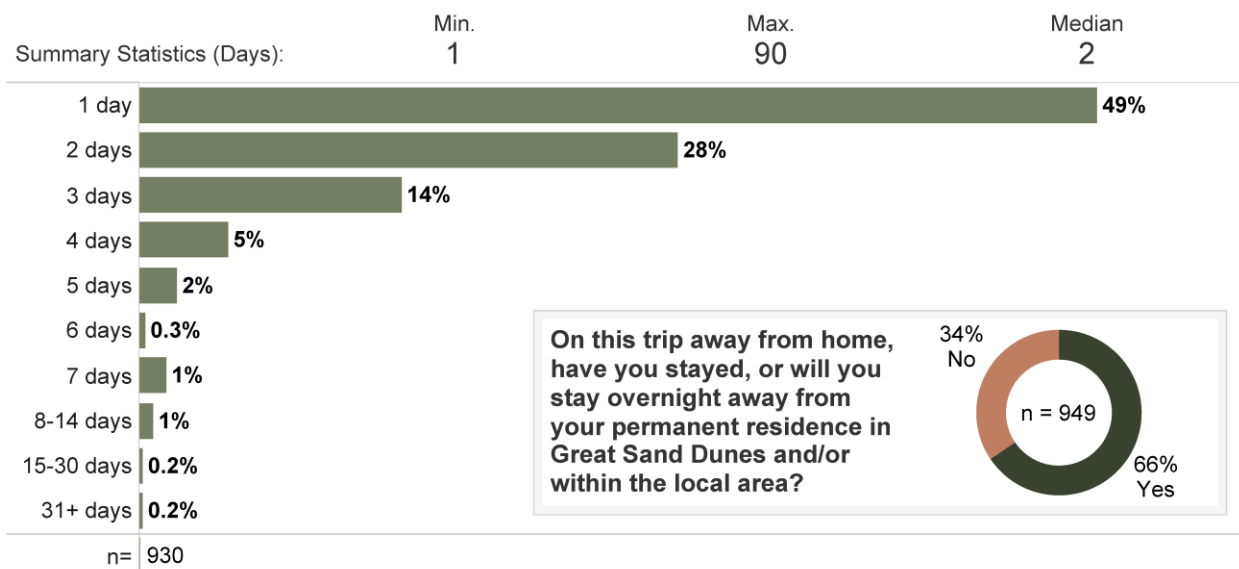
Figure 3. Role of Great Sand Dunes in overall trip purpose.

- For two-thirds of non-local respondents (66%), visiting Great Sand Dunes was not the primary purpose for their overall trip away from home.
- Among those respondents for whom Great Sand Dunes was not their primary trip purpose away from home, 66% stated that their visit to Great Sand Dunes was the primary reason they came to the *local area*, while another 20% indicated that it was one of two or more equally important reasons to come to the local area, and 14% said it was an incidental or spontaneous stop.

Question 4: Length of Stay

If respondents indicated that they were not permanent or seasonal residents of the local area around Great Sand Dunes, they were asked how many days they planned to spend within that local area, including days spent in the park. All respondents, regardless of residency, were asked whether they would be staying overnight away from their permanent residence within the local area. Responses to both of these questions are depicted in Figure 4.

[If not local/seasonal resident] How many days are you planning to spend in the local area (including the days you spend in Great Sand Dunes) on this trip away from home?



On this trip away from home, have you stayed, or will you stay overnight away from your permanent residence in Great Sand Dunes and/or within the local area?

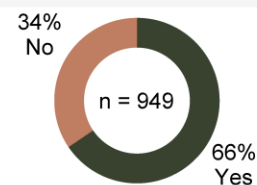


Figure 4. Time spent in the local area around Great Sand Dunes.

- Almost half of non-local respondents (49%) spent one day in the local area, while 28% spent 2 days, and 14% spent 3 days. The median length of stay was 2 days.
- Additionally, 2/3^{rds} of all respondents (66%; including permanent/seasonal residents) had stayed or planned to stay overnight away from their permanent residence in the park and/or in the local area.

Questions 5-6: Overnight Visitors

If respondents indicated that they stayed overnight in the local area, they were asked about the type(s) of accommodation they used or planned to use while there (Figure 5).

[If staying overnight in local area] On this trip, what type of accommodations do you expect to use while in the local area? Please mark all that apply

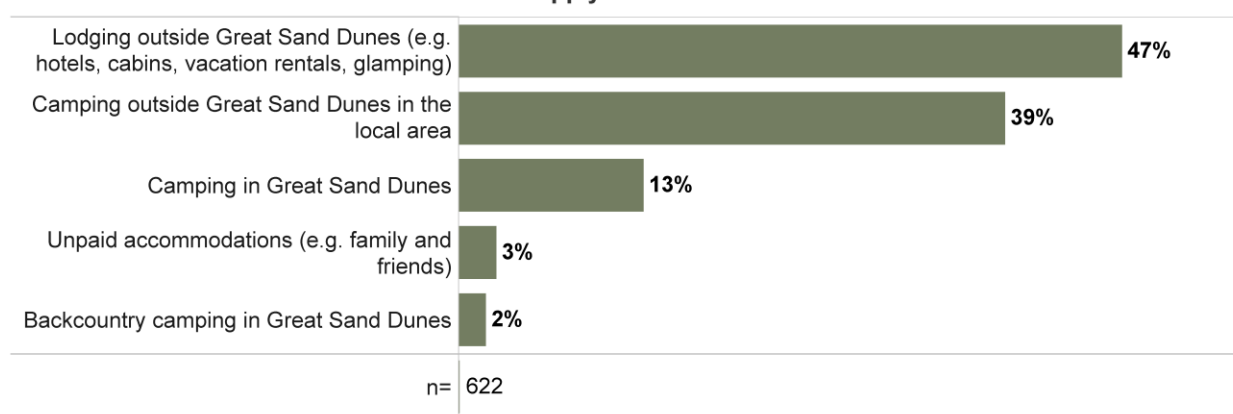


Figure 5. Accommodation types used in the local area around Great Sand Dunes.

- Just under half of overnight respondents (47%) stayed in lodging outside Great Sand Dunes in the local area.
- This was followed in prevalence by camping outside the park in the local area (39%), and camping in Great Sand Dunes (13%).

Respondents who camped in Great Sand Dunes were asked in which campground(s) they had stayed or planned to stay (Figure 6).

[If camping in Great Sand Dunes] In which campground(s) did you or will you stay? Please mark all that apply

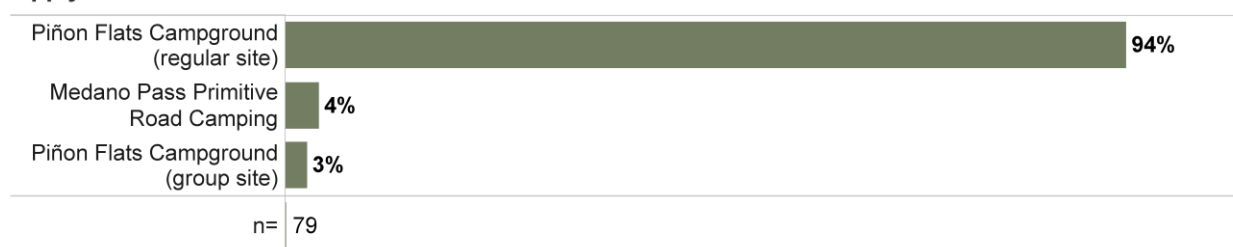


Figure 6. Campground use within Great Sand Dunes.

- Almost all visitors who camped in Great Sand Dunes stayed in the Piñon Flats Campground (regular site) (94%), with very small percentages staying in Medano Pass Primitive Road Camping (4%) and the Piñon Flats Group Site (3%).

Respondents were then asked to indicate the number of nights they spent or would spend in each accommodation type (Figure 7).

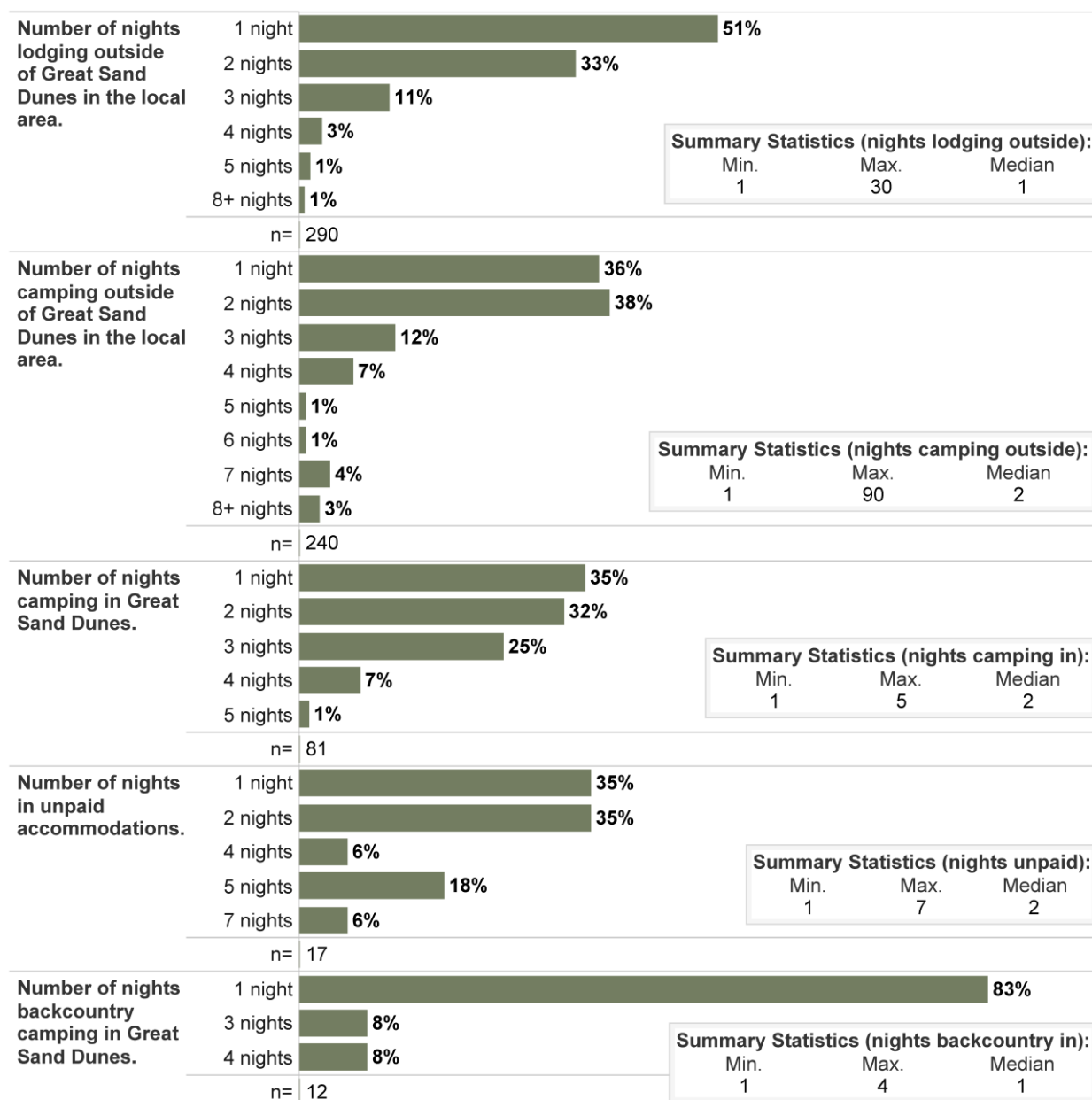


Figure 7. Number of nights spent in the local area around Great Sand Dunes, by accommodation type. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, [Table A-1](#).

- Among the 47% of overnight respondents who lodged outside of Great Sand Dunes in the local area (per Figure 5), median length of stay was 1 night. Over 80% lodged 2 nights or fewer in the local area this trip; 95% spent 3 nights or fewer.
- Among the 39% of overnight respondents who camped outside of Great Sand Dunes (per Figure 5), median length of stay was 2 nights, with the majority (74%) staying just 1 or 2 nights.
- Among the 13% of overnight respondents who camped in Great Sand Dunes (per Figure 5), median length of stay was 2 nights. Just over 2/3rds (67%) of campers were spending 2 nights or fewer camping in the park this trip.
- Among the 5% of overnight respondents who stayed in unpaid accommodations or backcountry camping (per Figure 5), median length of stay was 2 (unpaid) or 1 (backcountry) nights. Sample sizes are small for both of those accommodations.

Questions 9-11: Party Characteristics

Respondents were asked to indicate how many adults (18 or older) and children (under 18) were in their personal group during their visit to Great Sand Dunes (Figure 8). A personal group was defined as the visitor and companions with whom they visited the park, such as a spouse, family, and/or friends, but visitors were informed not to account for the larger group with whom they may have traveled, such as a school, church, scout, or tour group.

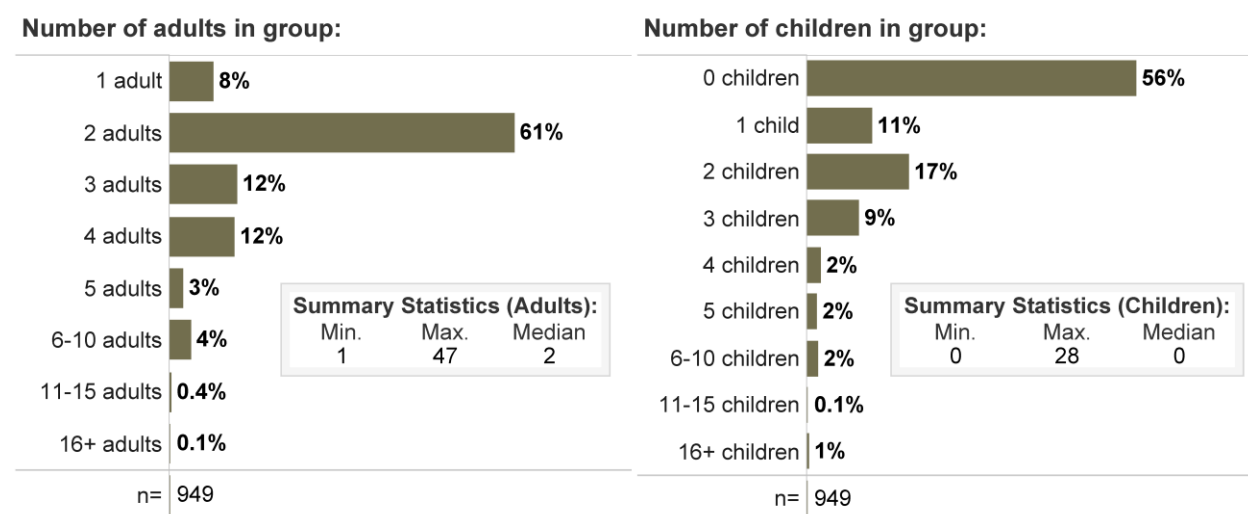


Figure 8. Number of adults and children in respondent's personal group while visiting Great Sand Dunes. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, [Table A-2](#).

- The median number of adults per group was two. Most groups (61%) included 2 adults.
- The majority of groups (56%) did not include any children.

Respondents were then asked to provide the age of each member of their group (Figure 9).

What are the ages of each of the adults and children in your group?

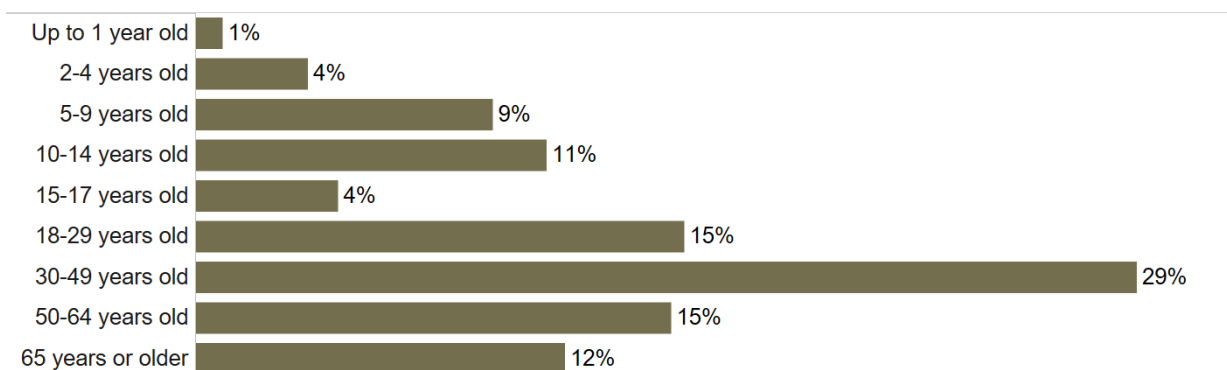


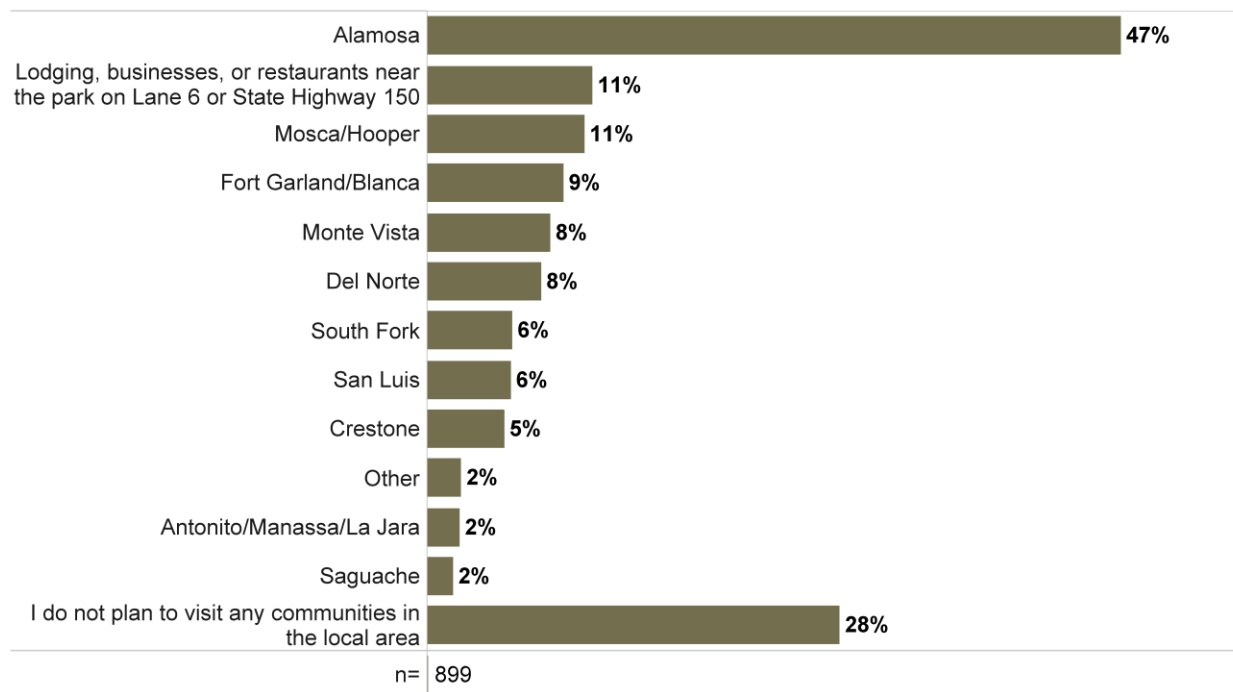
Figure 9. Age distribution of all members of respondent's personal group while visiting Great Sand Dunes.

- The most common age of the adults and children in a personal group was 30-49 years old (29%), followed by 50-64 and 18-29 years old (15%, each), and 65+ years old (12%).
- Children (i.e., visitors under 18 years old) accounted for a combined total of just 29% of group members.

Questions 13-14: Local Communities

To build a more detailed understanding of the impact of Great Sand Dunes on the surrounding local area, respondents were given a list of nearby communities and asked which one(s), if any, they had already visited or planned to visit during their trip. Visiting a community was defined as stopping to do or buy anything, such as purchasing gas or groceries or dining. Those respondents who had previously indicated that they were staying overnight in the local area outside Great Sand Dunes (i.e., paid lodging outside the park, camping outside the park, or staying in unpaid accommodation outside the park) were then asked which local community (or communities) from that list was (or were) closest to their accommodations. Responses to both of these questions are shown in Figure 10, below.

Which communities have you already visited or do you plan to visit outside Great Sand Dunes while in the local area? Please mark all that apply



What communities are closest to where you stayed or are staying at your accommodation(s) outside Great Sand Dunes in the local area? Please mark all that apply

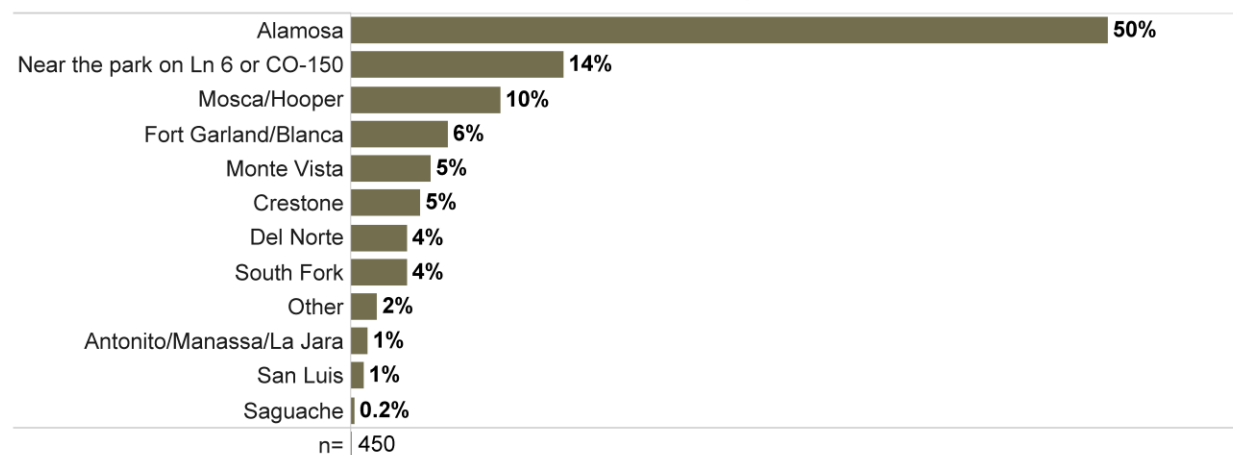


Figure 10. Communities visited outside Great Sand Dunes while in the local area.

- When asked which communities they visited (or planned to visit) outside of Great Sand Dunes, Alamosa (47%), lodging/businesses/restaurants near the park on Lane 6 or Highway 150 (11%), and Mosca/Hooper (11%) were the most commonly selected.
- If the visitor was staying overnight, about half were planning on staying near Alamosa (50%) with 14% staying near the park on Lane 6 or Highway 150.

Questions 15-18: Park Use Characteristics

First, respondents were asked to indicate if they planned to visit Great Sand Dunes for more than one day, and then a series of follow-up questions about the length of time they might spend in the park (Figure 11 and Table 7).

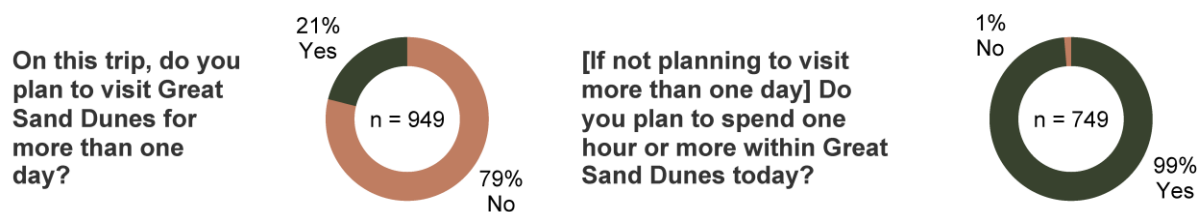


Figure 11. Duration of the respondent's trip to Great Sand Dunes.

Table 7. Amount of time spent within Great Sand Dunes

Question	n	Min.	Max.	Median
[If not planning to spend one hour or more] How many minutes do you plan to spend within Great Sand Dunes today?	10	2	45	30
[If planning to spend less than a day, but one hour or more] How many hours do you plan to spend within Great Sand Dunes today?	735	1	16	3
[If planning to visit at least one day] How many days do you plan to spend within Great Sand Dunes on this trip?	203	1	5	2
[If planning to visit at least one day] On how many different days do you expect to enter the park?	200	1	5	2

- While visiting Great Sand Dunes, most visitors (79%) did not plan to spend more than one day in the park.
- Among the 79% of visitors who did not spend more than a day in Great Sand Dunes, Almost all respondents (99%) planned to spend one hour or more in the park. The median length of time spent in the park among this group was 3 hours.
- The remaining 21% of visitors planned to visit for more than one day; among those visitors, the median length of stay was 2 days.
- Those respondents who spent at least one day in the park were also asked on how many different days they expected to enter the park; the median answer was 2 days.

Next, respondents were asked to indicate the most recent entrance they used to enter Great Sand Dunes (Figure 12).

Which was the most recent entrance you used to enter Great Sand Dunes?

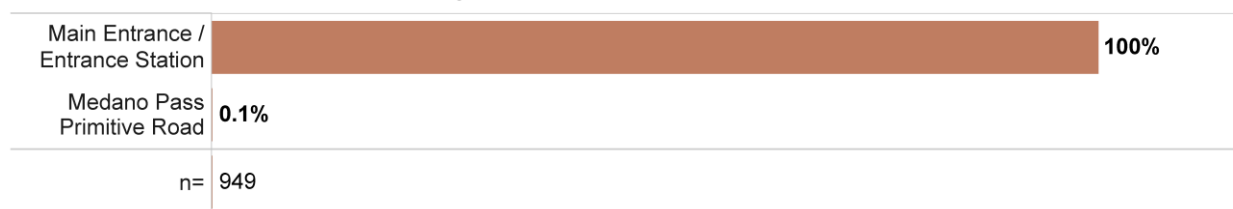


Figure 12. Most recent entrance used to enter Great Sand Dunes.

- The Main Entrance/Entrance Station was the most commonly used entrance to Great Sand Dunes (nearly 100%) with only one visitor using the Medano Pass Primitive Road.
- Due to park geography and proximity of intercept sites to entrances, the results for most recent entrance used were impacted by the volume of visitors intercepted at various sites.

Respondents were also presented with a list of locations within Great Sand Dunes and asked to indicate if they had been to, or planned to visit them, that day (Figure 13).

Considering your visit today, have you been to or do you plan to visit any of the following locations within Great Sand Dunes? Please mark all that apply

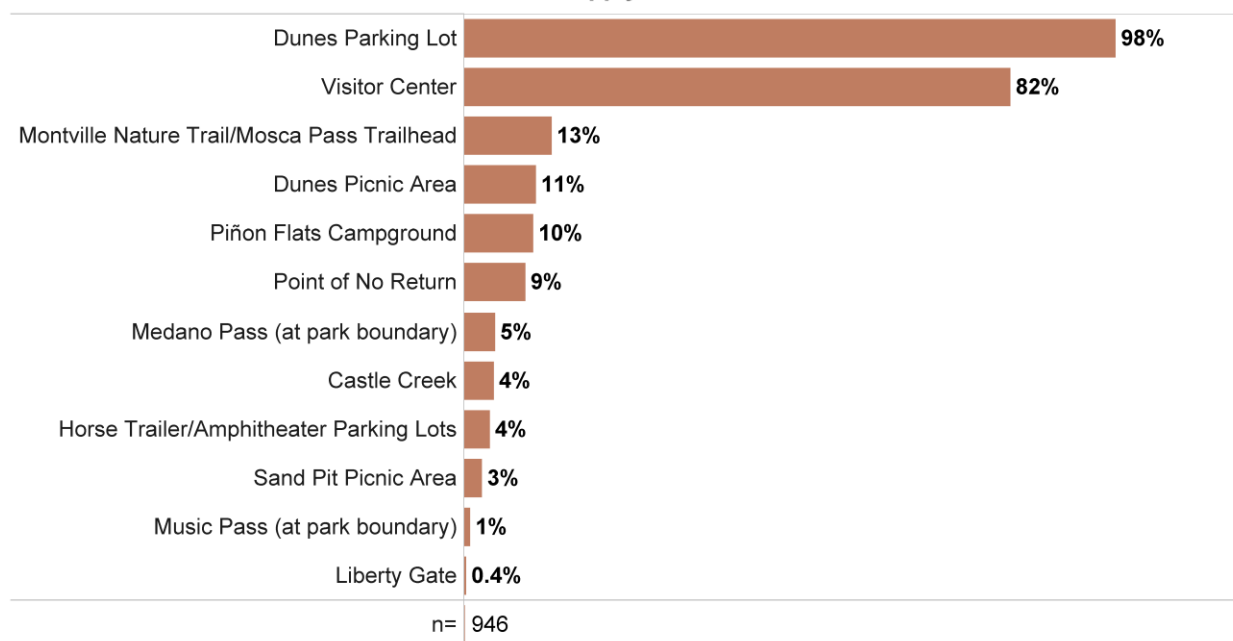


Figure 13. Park locations visited during the most recent trip to Great Sand Dunes.

- The most commonly visited location in Great Sand Dunes was the Dunes Parking Lot (98% of respondents had either been there or planned to visit it on their trip), followed by the Visitor Center (82%).
- Liberty Gate was the least-visited location from the list provided, with only 0.4% of respondents reporting having visited or planning to visit.

Question 19: Transportation

Visitors were asked about the form of transportation they used to enter Great Sand Dunes on the day they were surveyed (Figure 14).

Which of the following forms of transportation did you personally use to arrive or enter Great Sand Dunes today?

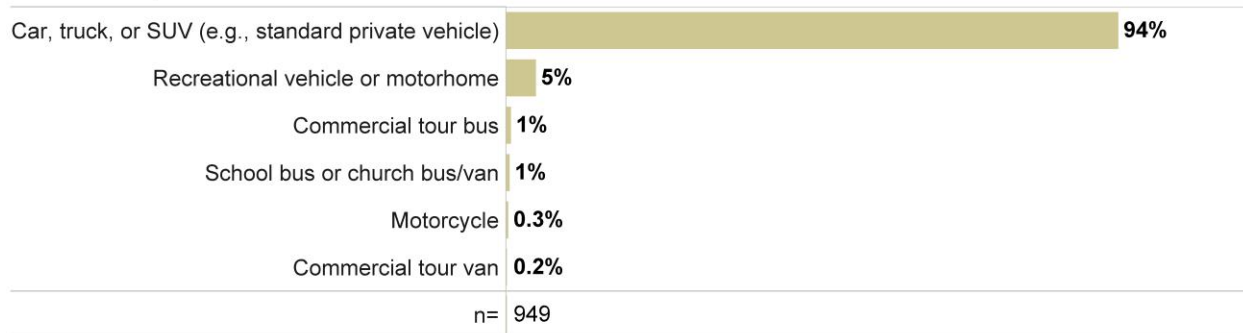
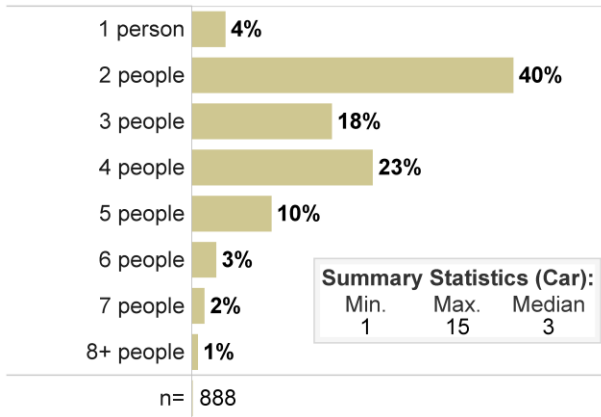


Figure 14. Form of transportation used to enter Great Sand Dunes on the day of the survey.

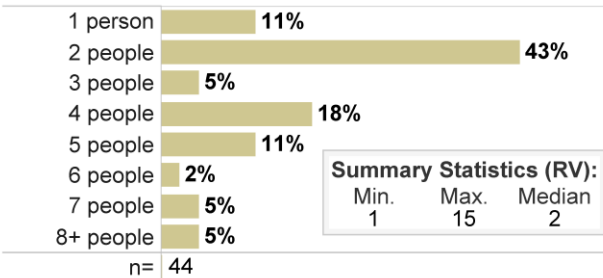
- The majority of respondents (94%) reported that they used their car, truck, or SUV to enter Great Sand Dunes on the day of the survey.
- This was followed distantly by use of a recreational vehicle or motorhome (5%).

If respondents entered the park using a multi-passenger private vehicle (i.e., car, truck or SUV; recreational vehicle or motorhome; or motorcycle), they were asked to indicate how many people were travelling in or on that vehicle (Figure 15).

[If entered by car, truck, or SUV] Including yourself, how many people were traveling in your vehicle when you entered Great Sand Dunes?



[If entered by RV/motorhome] Including yourself, how many people were traveling in your RV when you entered Great Sand Dunes?



[If entered by motorcycle] Including yourself, how many people were traveling on your motorcycle when you entered Great Sand Dunes?

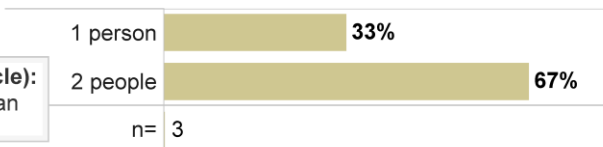


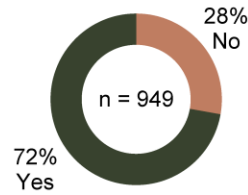
Figure 15. Number of people in or on respondent's vehicle when entering Great Sand Dunes. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, [Table A-3](#).

- Approximately 40% of respondents traveling by car reported two people. The next common group size was 4 people (23%), followed by 3 people (18%).
- Just under half of respondents entering Great Sand Dunes by RV/motorhome reported travelling in a group of 2 people (43%), followed by 4 people (18%).

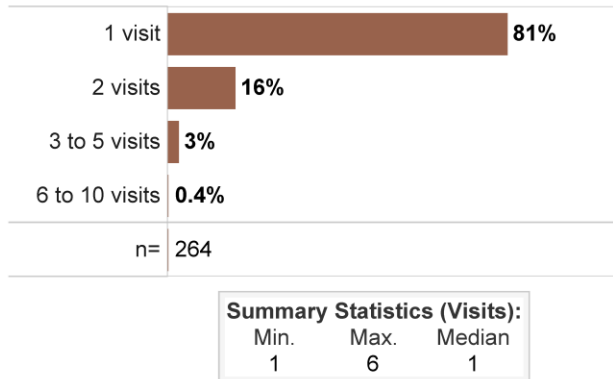
Question 21: Previous Visits to Great Sand Dunes

Respondents were asked if they were first time visitors to Great Sand Dunes. Repeat visitors were then asked how many visits they have made to Great Sand Dunes in the last 12 months and the last five years (Figure 16).

Are you a first-time visitor to Great Sand Dunes?



[If not first-time visitor] Including this visit, how many visits have you made to Great Sand Dunes over the past 12 months?



[If not first-time visitor] Including this visit, how many visits have you made to Great Sand Dunes over the past five years?

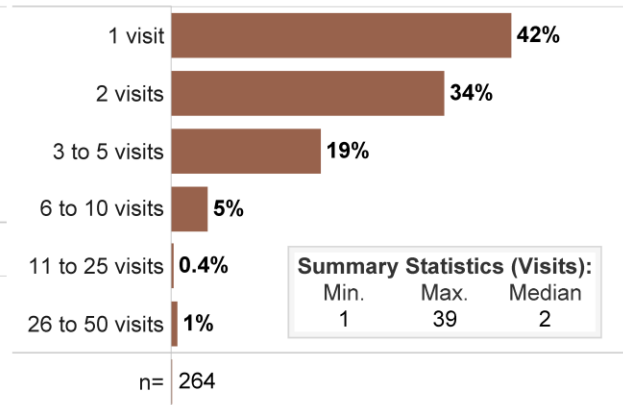


Figure 16. Previous visits to Great Sand Dunes. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, [Table A-4](#).

- Most respondents (72%) were on their first ever trip to Great Sand Dunes.
- Among the 28% of respondents who were repeat visitors, the majority (81%) were on their first visit in the past 12 months (i.e., had last visited more than a year ago).
- Additionally, most repeat visitors (42%) had not visited more than once in the past 5 years.
- The median number of visits made in the past 5 years was 2, including the current trip; 1.4% of repeat visitors had made more than 10 visits in the past 5 years.

Question 22: Previous Visits to Other NPS Units

Finally, respondents were asked how many visits they made to other NPS sites over the past 12 months (Figure 17).

How many visits have you made to other NPS sites over the past 12 months?

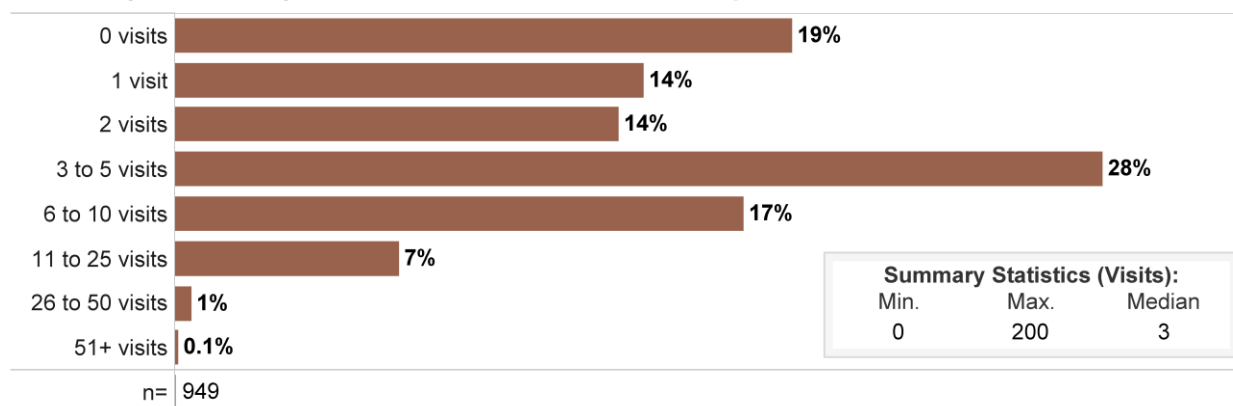


Figure 17. Visits made to other NPS sites within the past year. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, [Table A-5](#).

- Four out of five visitors (81%) had made at least one visit to other NPS site(s) in the past year.
- The median number of visits made to other NPS site(s) in the past 12 months was 3, and a combined 53% had made 3 or more visits in the past year.



Panorama of Children in Medano Creek with Dunes and Mount Herard.

NPS

Follow-up Survey Results

The following section provides results of the 344 follow-up visitor surveys received by mail-back or online following fieldwork conducted in Great Sand Dunes National Park in Summer of 2022.

Again, caution is recommended in the interpretation of figures with sample size lower than n=30, and categories on some questions may not sum to 100% due to rounding differences and/or the opportunity to select more than one response option.

Questions 1–2: Information about Great Sand Dunes

First, respondents were asked what sources they used to obtain information about Great Sand Dunes prior to their trip, and whether they had the information they needed on their trip (Figure 18).

Prior to this trip, how did you obtain information about Great Sand Dunes? Please mark all that apply

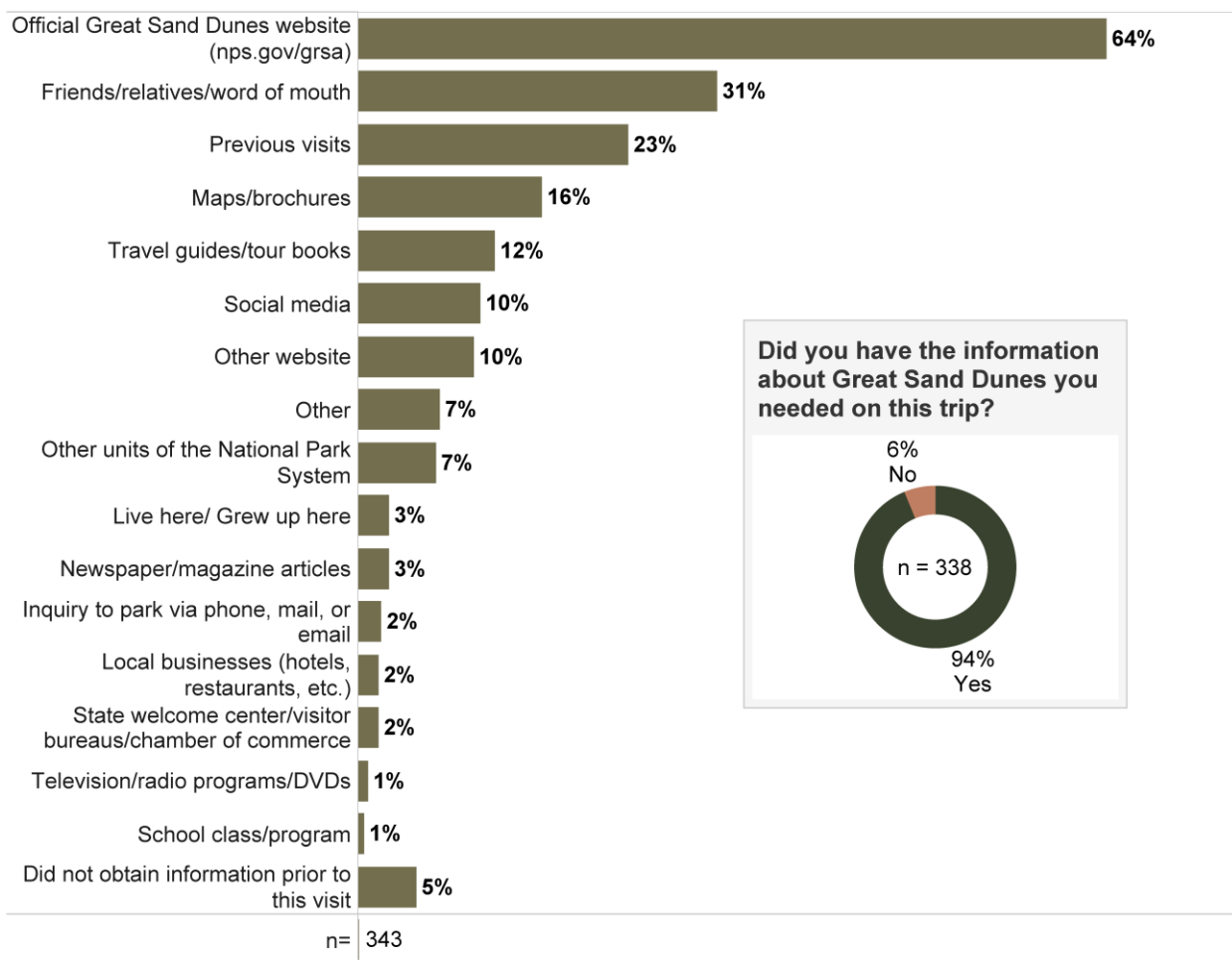


Figure 18. Sources used to obtain information about Great Sand Dunes prior to the trip.

- The most used resource was the official GRSA website, with 64% of respondents reportedly using it. The second most common source was friends/relatives/word of mouth (31%), followed by previous visits (23%), maps/brochures (16%), and travel guides/tour books (12%).

- In a follow-up question, 94% of respondents said that they had the information about Great Sand Dunes that they needed on their trip, while 6% indicated that there was information that they needed but did not have.
- In an open-ended follow-up question, those who did not have the information they needed on this trip were asked to elaborate. These comments are provided as an accompanying document for review.

Question 3: Transportation

While in the intercept survey, respondents indicated a mode of transportation they used to enter the park on the day of the intercept, the follow-up survey asked respondents to select all forms of transportation they personally used to travel from their home to Great Sand Dunes on their trip (Figure 19).

Please list all forms of transportation you personally used to travel from your home to Great Sand Dunes on this trip. Please mark all that apply

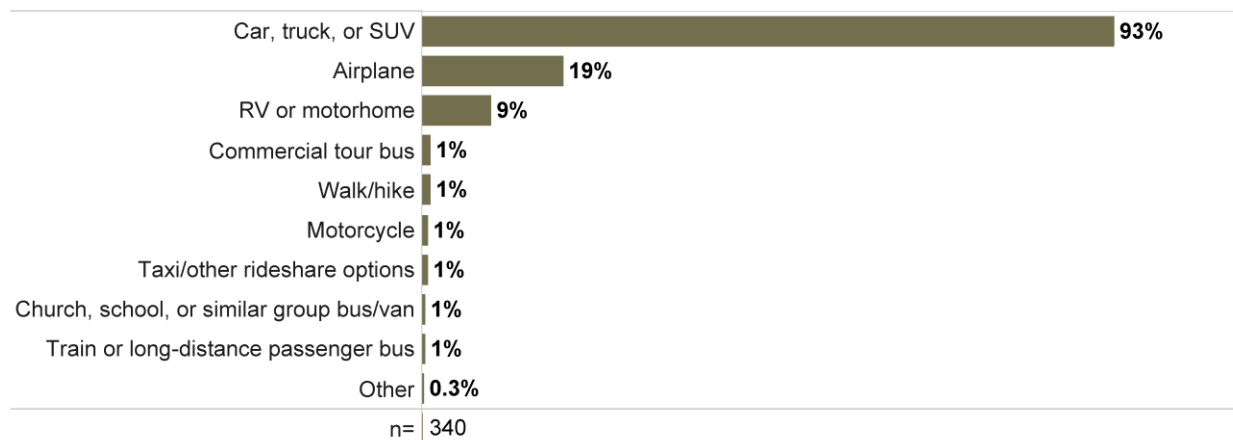


Figure 19. Forms of transportation used to travel from home to Great Sand Dunes on the recent trip.

- Nearly all respondents (93%) used a personal vehicle, such as a car, truck, or SUV, at some point during their trip from home to Great Sand Dunes.
- The second most common mode of travel was an airplane (19%), followed by RV or motorhome (9%).

Question 4: Travel Party Composition

Respondents were asked what type of group they were with during their visit to Great Sand Dunes on the day of the survey (Figure 20).

What type of group were you with, during your visit to Great Sand Dunes on the day you were contacted for this survey?



Figure 20. Travel party composition during Great Sand Dunes visit.

- About 42% of respondents explored Great Sand Dunes with their family.
- Just over 1/3rd (36%) visited Great Sand Dunes with their significant other or spouse on the day of the survey.

Question 10: Entrance Fees

Respondents were asked to indicate which type of entrance fees applied to them personally on their most recent trip to Great Sand Dunes¹ (Figure 21).

On this trip to Great Sand Dunes, which one of the following entrance fees applied to you personally?

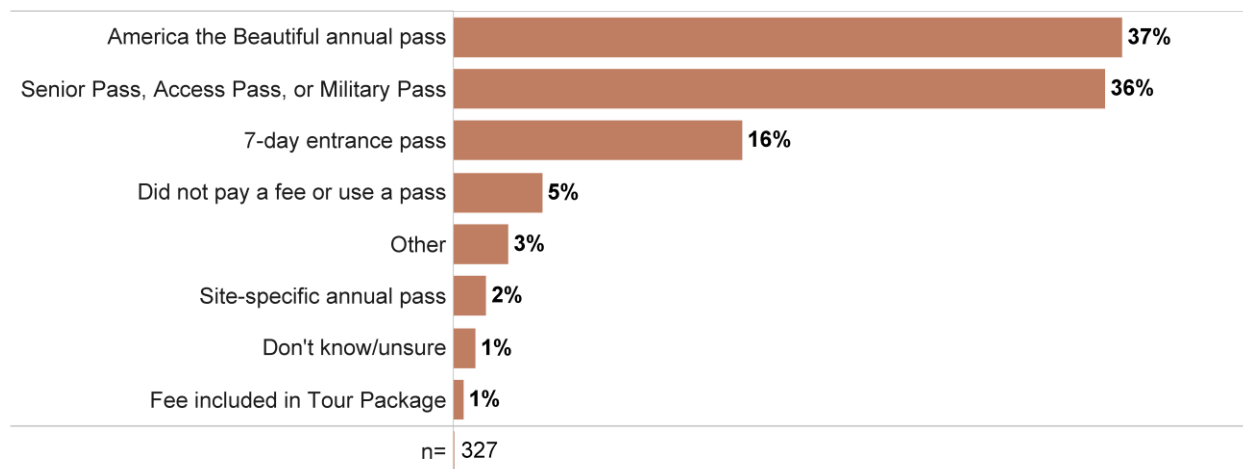


Figure 21. Entrance fees to enter Great Sand Dunes on the most recent trip.

- Over a 1/3rd of respondents (37%) reported using an America the Beautiful annual pass, and another 36% entered using a Senior Pass, Access Pass, or Military Pass.

- In contrast, 18% of respondents entered using a Great Sand Dunes-specific pass or fee (i.e., annual pass or 7-day pass).

Questions 12-14: Trip Characteristics

Respondents were asked if they visited other National Park Service sites on their trip away from home (Figure 22).

Did you visit any other National Park Service sites on your trip away from home?



Figure 22. NPS sites visited on trip away from home.

- Just under 2/3rds (63%) of all respondents had visited other NPS sites on their trip, while 37% identified Great Sand Dunes as the only NPS site they visited while away from home.
- In an open-ended follow-up question, those who had visited other NPS sites on their trip were asked to list which one(s). These comments are provided in an accompanying document.

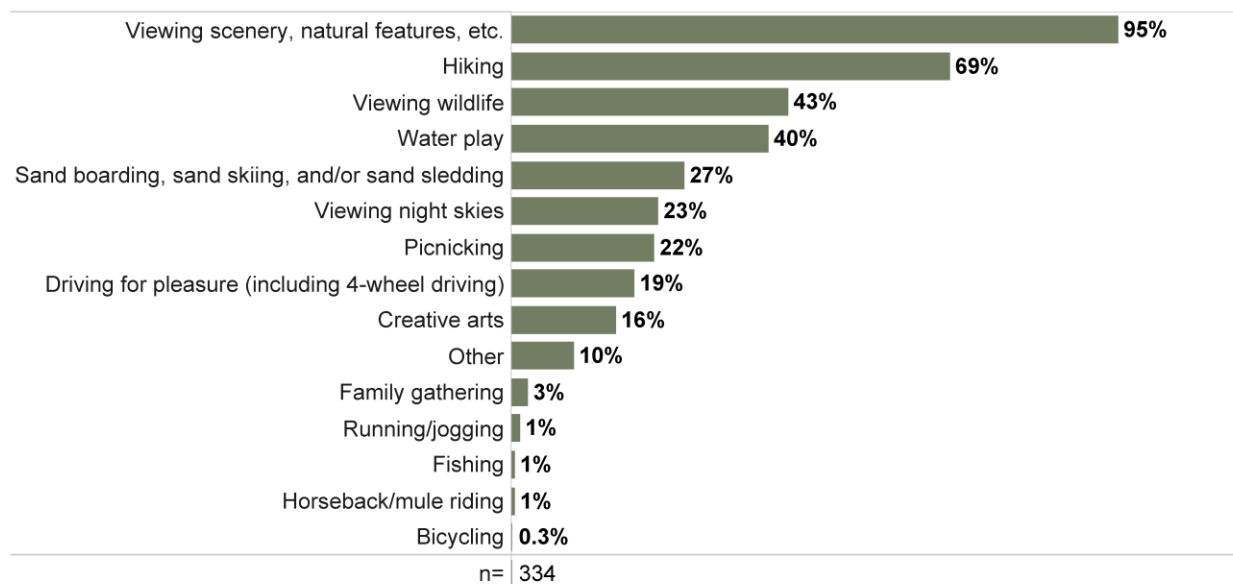
Survey respondents were then asked to identify all activities that they participated in while visiting Great Sand Dunes, and which of those was their primary activity (Figure 23).



Pair of elk in grasslands below Frosted Dunes.

NPS/PATRICK MYERS

On this trip, in which of the following activities did you personally participate in while visiting Great Sand Dunes? Please mark all that apply



And which was your primary activity during your visit to Great Sand Dunes on the day you were contacted for this survey?

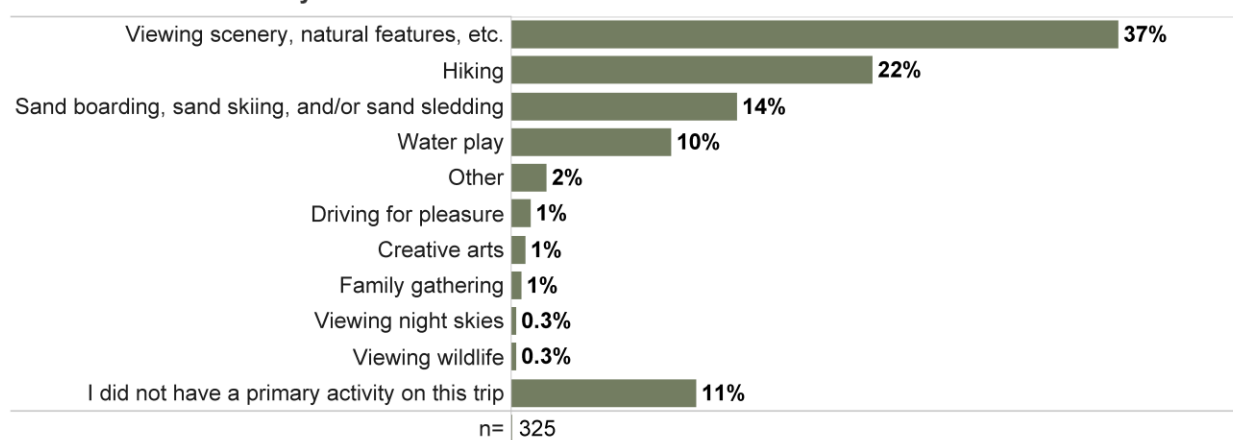


Figure 23. Participation in activities at Great Sand Dunes.

- Almost all visitors reported viewing scenery, natural features, etc. (95%), hiking (69%), and viewing wildlife (43%).
- Bicycling, horseback/mule riding, fishing, and running/jogging were all uncommon activities (reported by 1% or fewer of respondents).
- Most respondents (37%) reported viewing scenery, natural features, etc. as their primary activity, followed by hiking (22%).
- Notably, while nearly half of respondents reported viewing wildlife during their trip, almost no respondents identified this as their primary activity.

Questions 15–16: Reasons to Visit

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of various reasons to visit Great Sand Dunes on their trip, then asked which of those was the most important reason for them to visit Great Sand Dunes (Figure 24).

How important to you were each of the following reasons or motivations for visiting Great Sand Dunes on this trip?

Rating Category	n=	Percent Responding				
		1 - Not at all important	2 - Slightly important	3 - Moderately important	4 - Very important	5 - Extremely important
To spend time with family/friends	324	8%	3%	8%	31%	50%
To view wildlife or natural scenery	331	2%	2%	8%	39%	50%
To visit a National Park Service site	326	4%	8%	18%	34%	37%
To relax	328	7%	9%	20%	33%	32%
To get physical exercise	326	7%	12%	26%	33%	21%
To hear the sounds of nature/quiet	319	11%	21%	22%	27%	20%
To learn more about nature	320	5%	13%	23%	40%	19%
To learn more about American history and culture	320	10%	15%	26%	33%	17%
To experience solitude	317	24%	27%	22%	16%	11%
To view dark night sky/stars	305	31%	15%	23%	20%	10%
Other (if specified)	18	28%		6%	11%	56%

Rating categories sorted in descending order by percent answering "5 - Extremely important" (With "Other" anchored at bottom)

And which was the most important reason for you to visit Great Sand Dunes on this trip?

To visit a National Park Service site	31%
To view wildlife or natural scenery	30%
To spend time with family/friends	24%
To learn more about nature	5%
To relax	2%
Other	2%
To experience solitude	2%
To get physical exercise	1%
To learn more about American history and culture	1%
To view dark night sky/stars	1%
To hear sounds of nature/quiet	1%
n=	324

Figure 24. Reasons or motivations to visit Great Sand Dunes. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, [Table A-6](#).

- Most visitors chose spending time with family and friends (50%) and viewing wildlife or natural scenery (50%) as extremely important reasons for their trip to Great Sand Dunes.
- Other important reasons were visiting a NPS site and to relax (37% and 32% of respondents, respectively, rated them as extremely important).

- The least important reasons were viewing dark night sky/stars and experiencing solitude (only 10% and 11% of respondents, respectively, reported them as extremely important, and 31% and 24% of respondents, respectively, rated them as not at all important).
- The most common response about the most important reason was to visit a National Park site (31%), followed by to view wildlife or natural scenery (30%), and to spend time with family/friends (24%).

Questions 17–19: Programs, Services, and Learning

Respondents were asked to identify all programs and services that they personally participated in Great Sand Dunes during their trip (Figure 25).

On this trip, in which of the following programs and services did you personally participate within Great Sand Dunes? Please mark all that apply

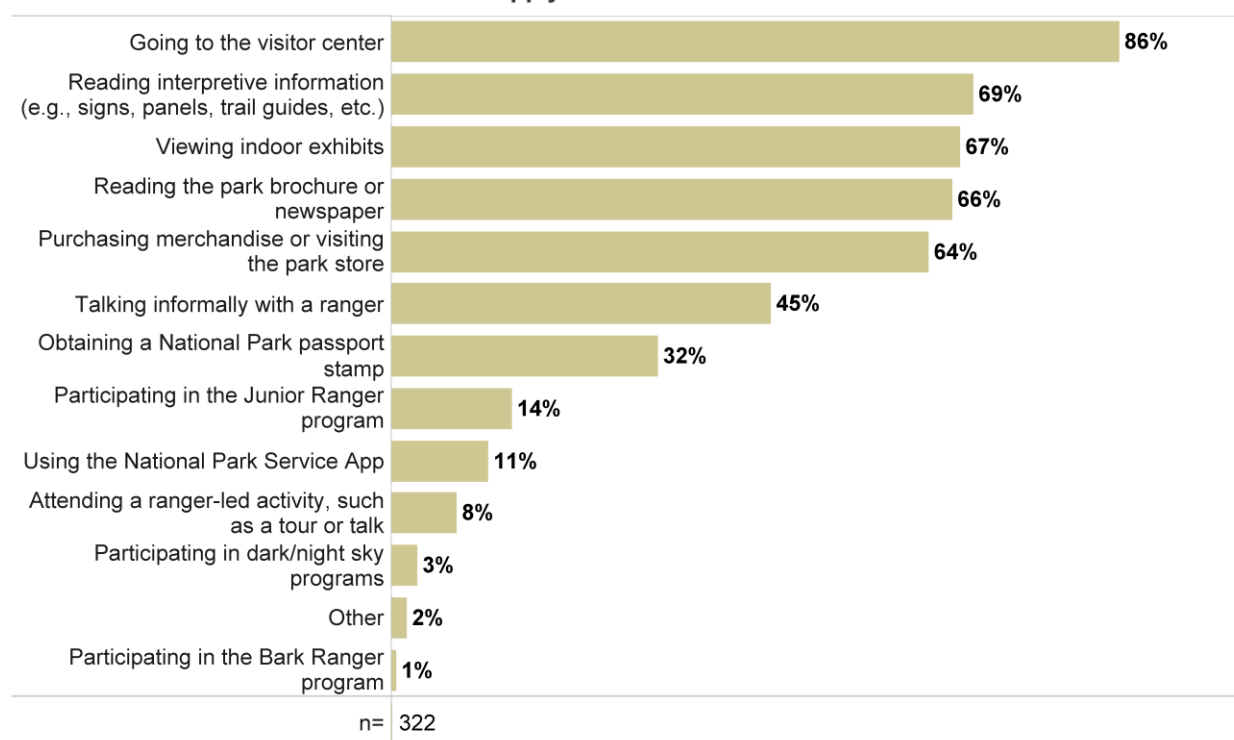


Figure 25. Programs participated while visiting Great Sand Dunes.

- The two most-used programs and services were going to the visitor center (86%) and reading interpretive information (69%).
- Several other programs were engaged in by over 60% of respondents: viewing indoor exhibits (67%), reading park brochure or newspaper (66%), and purchasing merchandising or visiting the park store (64%).

Two follow-up questions asked if respondents learned anything from park staff, programs, and/or exhibits about American history, nature, and/or culture, and what specific subjects they would like to learn about in the future (Figure 26).

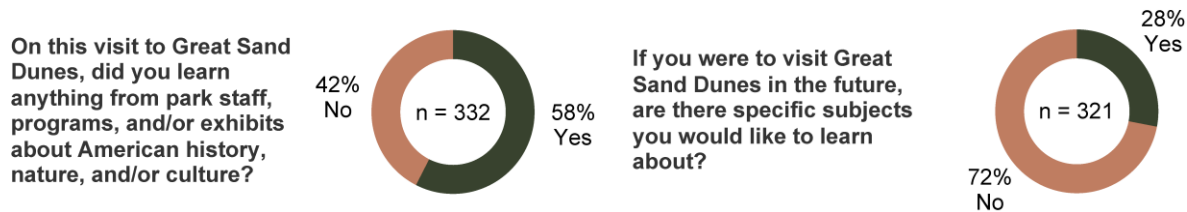


Figure 26. Learning.

- Over half of respondents (58%) reported that they learned something from park staff, programs, and/or exhibits about American history, nature, and/or culture.
- Just under a third of respondents (28%) reported that if they were to visit Great Sand Dunes in the future, there are specific subjects they would like to learn about.
- Respondents who said yes to either of these two questions were asked to elaborate. These comments are provided as an accompanying document for review.

Questions 20–21: Use of Devices

Two survey questions were focused on the use of electronic devices, their importance, and the quality of service provided. First, respondents were asked which personal electronic devices they used while in Great Sand Dunes (Figure 27).

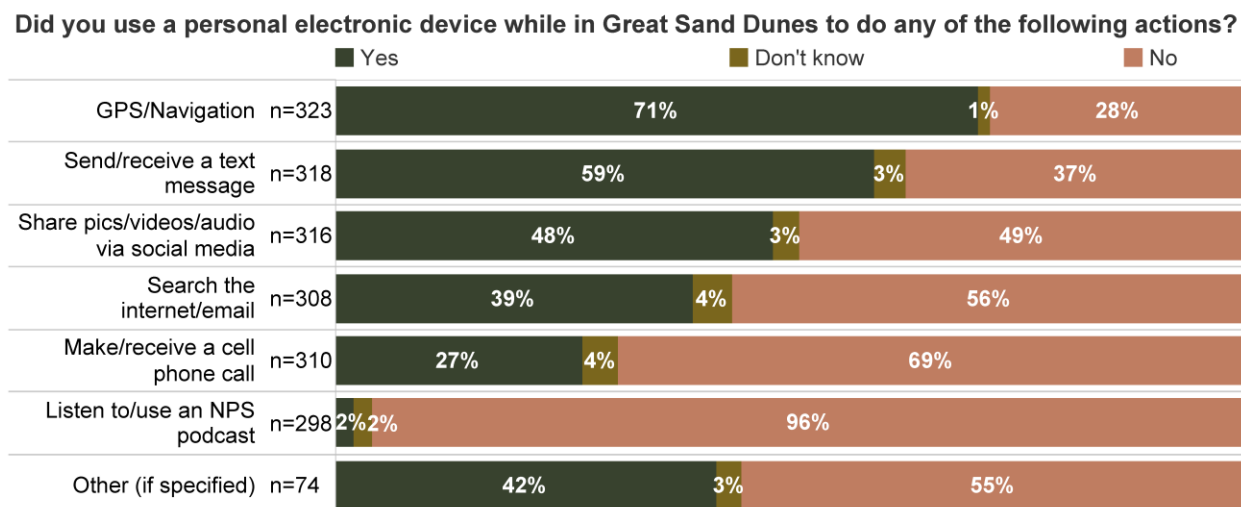
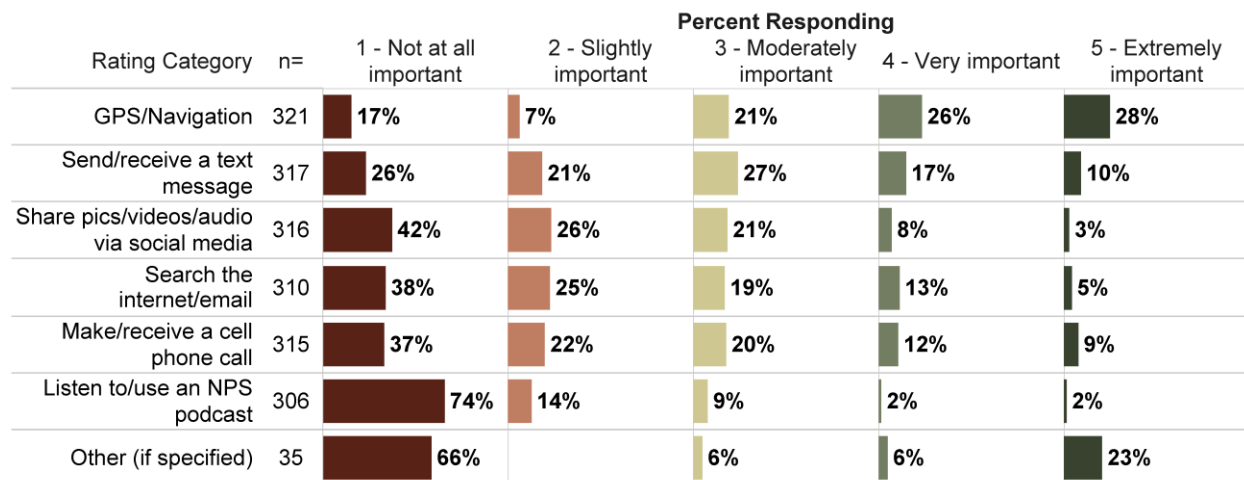


Figure 27. Use of personal electronic devices while visiting Great Sand Dunes. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, [Table A-7](#).

- Almost three-fourths of respondents (71%) reported using a personal device for GPS/Navigation, and over half of respondents (59%) reported sending/receiving a text message.
- Conversely, only 2% of respondents listened to or used an NPS podcast.

Then, respondents were asked to rate both the importance of each of these electronic device uses (Figure 28), and the quality of their service (Figure 29).

How important to you was it during your visit to Great Sand Dunes to use personal electronic devices to do each of the following?



Categories sorted in descending order by percent answering "Yes" to "Did you use a personal electronic device while in the park to do any of the following actions?" (With "Other" anchored at bottom)

Figure 28. The importance of use of personal electronic devices while visiting Great Sand Dunes. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, [Table A-8](#).

- The most important uses of devices were GPS/navigation and texting (28% and 10% of respondents, respectively, rated them as extremely important).
- Listening to and using an NPS podcast was rated as extremely important only by 2% of respondents, and not at all important by 74% of respondents.
- Overall, device usage seemed to be only moderately important for most visitors at GRSA.

How would you rate the quality of service to do each of the following?

Rating Category	n=	Percent Responding					Not applicable
		1 - No service	2 - Poor	3 - Average	4 - Good	5 - Very good	
GPS/Navigation	268	4%	11%	27%	19%	21%	18%
Send/receive a text message	269	6%	15%	28%	17%	14%	21%
Share pics/videos/audio via social media	265	8%	15%	18%	15%	10%	35%
Search the internet/email	258	8%	18%	23%	10%	9%	31%
Make/receive a cell phone call	264	7%	17%	22%	15%	8%	32%
Listen to/use an NPS podcast	246	7%	6%	9%	4%	2%	73%
Other (if specified)	69	6%	4%	6%	6%	3%	75%

Categories sorted in descending order by percent answering "Yes" to "Did you use a personal electronic device while in the park to do any of the following actions?" (With "Other" anchored at bottom)

Figure 29. Quality of service of personal electronic devices while visiting Great Sand Dunes. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, [Table A-9](#).

- GPS/Navigation was rated as very good or good by 21% and 19% of respondents, respectively. However, 4% of respondents reported that they had no service with 11% reporting poor service for this category.
- Most respondents had at least some option to use various device services, with less than 10% of respondents reporting no service for any single device use.
- A large percentage of respondents (73%) said that listening/using an NPS podcast was “not applicable” to them.

Question 22: Physical Difficulties

Respondents were asked if anyone in their personal group had a physical condition that made it difficult to access or participate in park activities or services during their visit to Great Sand Dunes. If such condition was identified, respondents were asked to specify the type of difficulty (Figure 30).

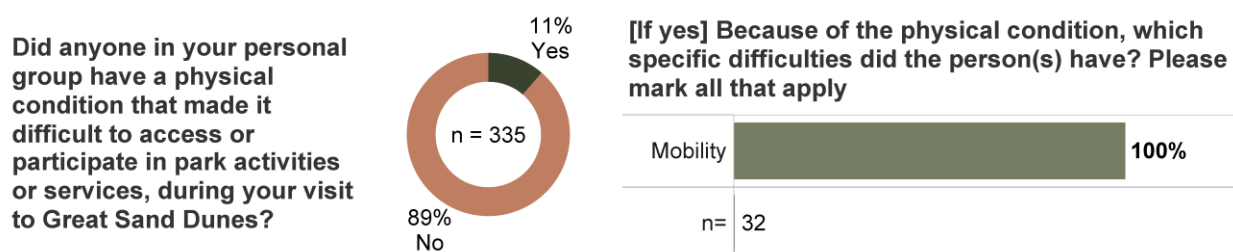


Figure 30. Physical difficulties while visiting Great Sand Dunes.

- The majority of respondents (89%) reported that nobody in their personal group had a physical condition that made it difficult to access or participate in park activities or services during their visit to Great Sand Dunes.
- Among the 11% of visitors who identified at least one difficulty, 100% reported mobility issues in their group.

Questions 25-28: Visitor Experience

Respondents were asked if their visit to Great Sand Dunes met their expectations (Figure 31).

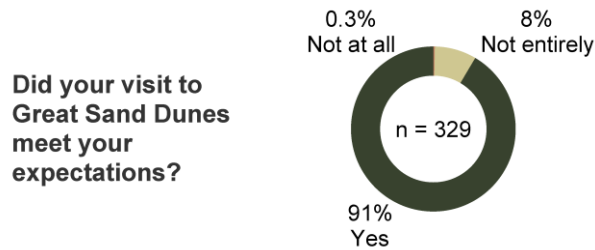


Figure 31. Meeting Great Sand Dunes expectations.

- The majority of respondents (91%) reported that their visit to Great Sand Dunes met their expectations, while 8% of respondents said it did not meet their expectations entirely, and only 0.3% respondents indicated that it did not meet their expectations at all.
- In an open-ended follow-up question, respondents who indicated that Great Sand Dunes did not meet their expectations were asked to elaborate. These comments are provided as an accompanying document for review.

Respondents were then given several statements about Great Sand Dunes and asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each given statement (Figure 32).

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Rating Category	n=	Percent Responding					Don't know / not sure
		1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Somewhat Disagree	3 - Neither Agree nor Disagree	4 - Somewhat Agree	5 - Strongly Agree	
Great Sand Dunes is a safe place to visit	330	2%	1%	2%	9%	83%	4%
Natural resources in Great Sand Dunes are in pristine condition	328	1%	5%	12%	34%	45%	4%
Historical and cultural features in Great Sand Dunes are well maintained/preserved	329	2%	3%	13%	24%	42%	16%
Vandalism and crime are not a problem at Great Sand Dunes	329	3%	1%	14%	12%	39%	30%
Great Sand Dunes is not accessible to a person with physical disabilities	330	5%	12%	19%	22%	6%	37%
Great Sand Dunes is too crowded	330	14%	21%	32%	27%	5%	1%
The entrance fee for Great Sand Dunes is too high	328	29%	20%	28%	6%	2%	16%

Figure 32. Rating Great Sand Dunes experience. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, [Table A-10](#).

- From all the statements listed, “Great Sand Dunes is a safe place to visit” received the most consensus with a combined 92% of respondents saying they either strongly or somewhat agree with it. That was followed by “Natural resources in Great Sand Dunes are in pristine condition” and “Historical and cultural features in Great Sand Dunes are well maintained/preserved” (79% and 66% of respondents, respectively, strongly or somewhat agreed with these statements).
- Conversely, “The entrance fee for Great Sand Dunes is too high” and “Great Sand Dunes is too crowded” received the least agreement, with only a combined 8% and 32% of respondents, respectively, either somewhat or strongly agreeing with these statements.

Next, respondents were asked to rate the quality of park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities in Great Sand Dunes (Figure 33).

How would you rate the quality of the park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities in Great Sand Dunes?

Rating Category	n=	Percent Responding					Not used or not available
		1 - Very poor	2 - Poor	3 - Average	4 - Good	5 - Very good	
Park map or brochure	328	0.3%	1%	6%	30%	52%	10%
Value for entrance fee paid	325	0.3%	1%	13%	21%	49%	16%
Restrooms	328	1%	2%	11%	31%	48%	6%
Visitor Center	329	1%	2%	16%	25%	46%	10%
Assistance from park employees	330	1%	2%	9%	20%	45%	23%
Outdoor recreation	322		1%	9%	25%	45%	21%
Walkways, trails, and roads	330	0.3%	2%	15%	38%	44%	1%
Learning about nature, history, or culture	328		3%	12%	29%	37%	18%
Exhibits (indoor and outdoor)	329	2%	6%	20%	28%	32%	12%
Commercial services in the park	329		2%	16%	20%	27%	35%
Campgrounds and/or picnic areas	330			5%	15%	19%	61%
Ranger programs	325			5%	5%	15%	75%
Other services (if specified)	61	3%	2%	3%	2%	10%	80%

Figure 33. Rating the quality of Great Sand Dunes facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, [Table A-11](#).

- Almost all facilities had 50% of respondents rating their facilities as good or very good with a few exceptions where the facility was not used or not available (e.g., campgrounds and/or picnic areas and ranger programs).
- Less than 10% of visitors rated any facility as poor or very poor. Facilities were generally very well rated for GRSA.

Finally, respondents were asked to rate overall quality of the park facilities, visitor services, and recreation opportunities (Figure 34).

Overall, how would you rate the quality of the park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities in Great Sand Dunes?

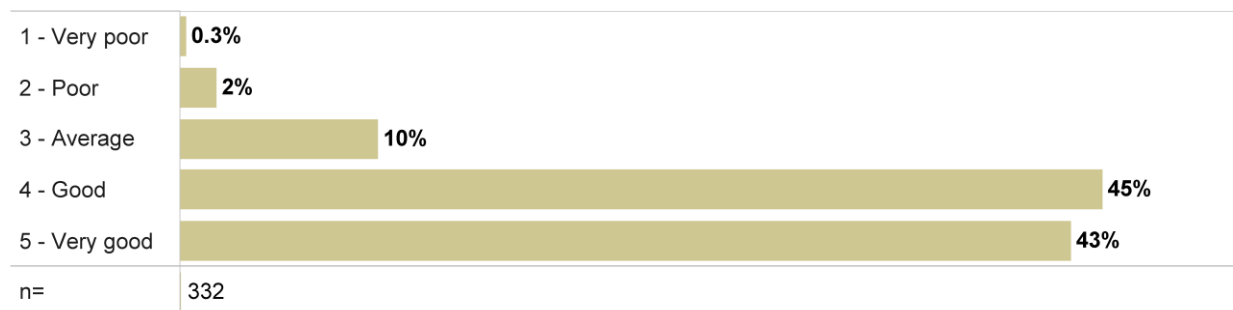


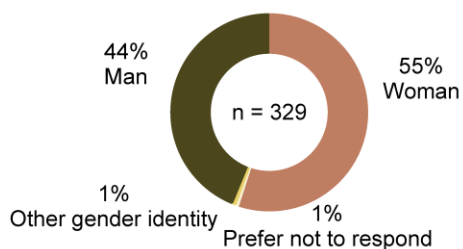
Figure 34. Rating overall quality of Great Sand Dunes facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities.

- In general, about half of respondents (43%) rated the quality of the park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities in Great Sand Dunes as very good, and another 45% rated them as good.
- Just about 1 in 8 visitors rated the overall quality as average or below (combined 12.3%).

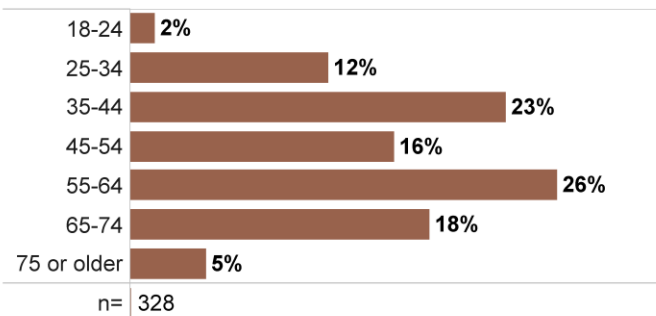
Questions 31-39: Background/Demographics

In the final section of the follow-up survey, respondents were asked various questions about their personal and household demographics. Figure 35 depicts descriptive statistics for respondent gender, age, and education.

What is your gender?



What is your age?



What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

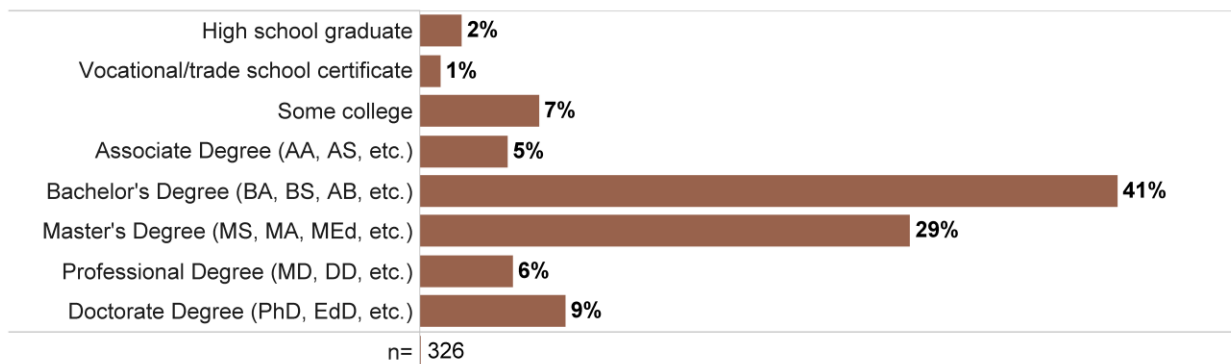
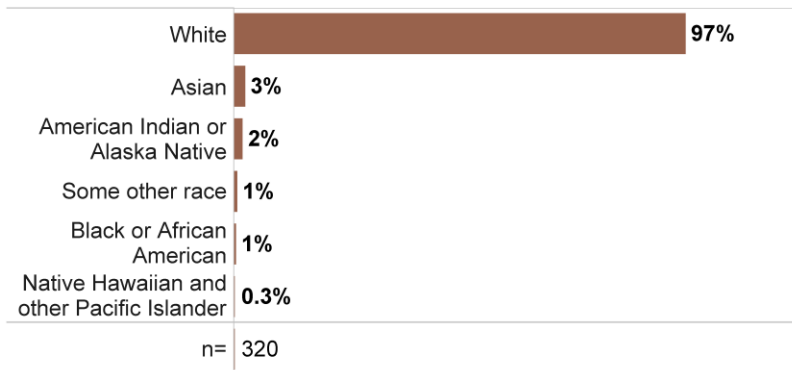


Figure 35. Respondent demographics: gender, age, and level of education.

- Follow-up survey respondents were slightly more likely to be women than men, though the sample was relatively balanced (55% vs 44%).
- The most common age categories were 55-64 years old (26%), 35-44 (23%), and 65-74 (18%). The least represented age group were 18-24 years old (only 2% of the participants surveyed).
- Most survey respondents were highly educated, with a combined 85% having some college degree, and a plurality (41%) holding a bachelor's degree.

Respondents were also asked to identify their race(s) and if they were of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin (Figure 36).

What is your race? Please mark all that apply



Are you of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin?

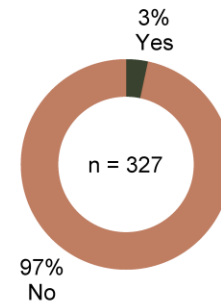
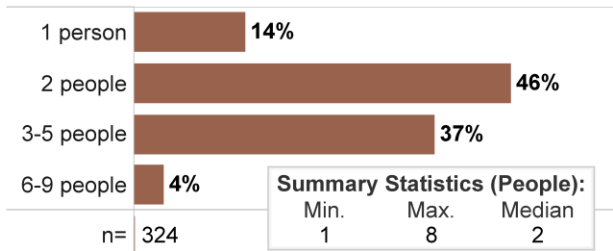


Figure 36. Respondent demographics: race and ethnicity.

- The majority of respondents (97%) were White, while 3% were Asian.
- Most respondents (97%) were not of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin.

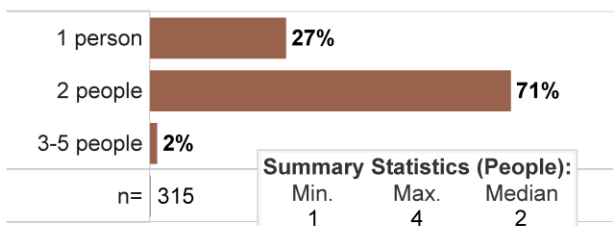
At a household level, respondents were asked to report annual income and number of contributors, as well as how many people (adults and children) live in their household (Figure 37).

Including yourself, how many people are in your household?



Summary Statistics (People):		
Min.	Max.	Median
1	8	2

Including yourself, how many people contribute to your annual household income?



Summary Statistics (People):		
Min.	Max.	Median
1	4	2

Which category best represents your annual household income?

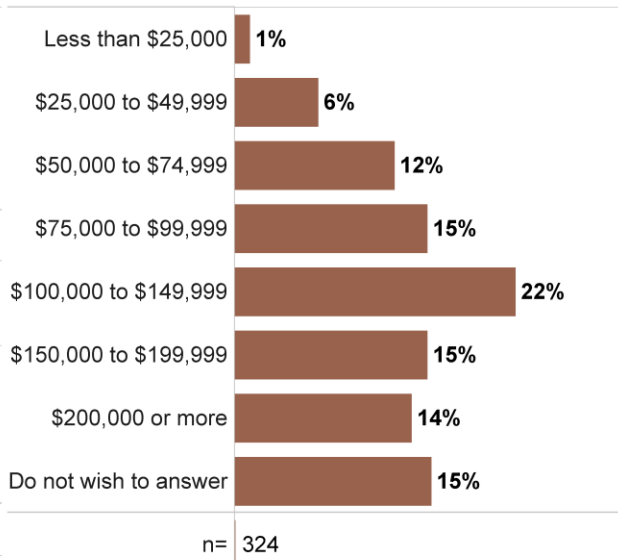


Figure 37. Household demographics: annual household income and household size. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, [Table A-12](#).

- Almost half of respondents (46%) had 2 people in their household, followed by 3-5 people (another 37%).
- In addition to being highly educated, Great Sand Dunes visitors are also relatively affluent. Over 1/3rd of respondents (37%) reported that their annual household income was between \$100,000 and \$199,999, and another 14% earned \$200,000 or more.
- Most respondents (71%) came from a dual-income household.

Finally, respondents were asked about their language preference (Figure 38).

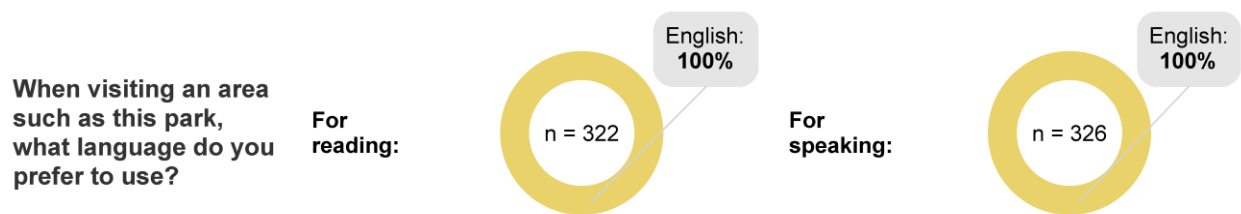


Figure 38. Respondent's language preference.

- While 3% of respondents were of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin, the overwhelming majority of respondents (100%) preferred to use English both for reading and speaking when visiting an area such as Great Sand Dunes.
- No respondents preferred Spanish for either reading and/or speaking.

References

National Park Service (NPS). 2022. 2022 Socioeconomic Monitoring of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve: Visitor intercept and post-trip surveys.
<https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2319391>

Appendix A: Accessible Tables

This appendix contains accessible tables with data from figures found in the body of the report. Table captions include hyperlinks to the corresponding figures.

Table A-1. Data from [Figure 7](#). Number of nights spent in the local area around Great Sand Dunes, by accommodation type.

Accommodation Type	n	Min.	Max.	Median
Backcountry Camping in Great Sand Dunes	12	1	4	1
Camping in Great Sand Dunes	81	1	5	2
Camping outside Great Sand Dunes	240	1	90	2
Lodging in Great Sand Dunes	290	1	30	1
Lodging outside Great Sand Dunes	17	1	7	2
Unpaid accommodations	12	1	4	1

Table A-2. Data from [Figure 8](#). Number of adults and children in respondent's personal group while visiting Great Sand Dunes.

Age Category	n	Min.	Max.	Median
Adults	949	1	47	2
Children	949	0	28	0

Table A-3. Data from [Figure 15](#). Number of people in respondent's vehicle when entering Great Sand Dunes.

Question	n	Min.	Max.	Median
[If entered by car, truck, or SUV] Including yourself, how many people were traveling in your vehicle when you entered Great Sand Dunes?	888	1	15	3
[If entered by RV/motorhome] Including yourself, how many people were traveling in your RV when you entered Great Sand Dunes?	44	1	15	2
[If entered by motorcycle] Including yourself, how many people were traveling on your motorcycle when you entered Great Sand Dunes?	3	1	2	2

Table A-4. Data from [Figure 16](#). Previous visits to Great Sand Dunes.

Question	n	Min.	Max.	Median
[If not first-time visitor] Including this visit, how many visits have you made to Great Sand Dunes over the past 12 months?	264	1	6	1
[If not first-time visitor] Including this visit, how many visits have you made to Great Sand Dunes over the past five years?	264	1	39	2

Table A-5. Data from [Figure 17](#). Visits made to other NPS sites within the past year.

Question	n	Min.	Max.	Median
How many visits have you made to other NPS sites over the past 12 months?	949	0	200	3

Table A-6. Data from [Figure 24](#). Reasons or motivations to visit Great Sand Dunes.

Rating Category	Average	n
To visit a National Park Service site	3.92	326
To experience solitude	2.64	317
To hear the sounds of nature/quiet	3.24	319
To learn more about nature	3.56	320
To learn more about American history and culture	3.31	320
To spend time with family/friends	4.12	324
To get physical exercise	3.49	326
To view wildlife or natural scenery	4.34	331
To relax	3.75	328
To view dark night sky/stars	2.64	305
Other (if specified)	3.67	18

Table A-7. Data from [Figure 27](#). Use of personal electronic devices while visiting Great Sand Dunes.

Device Use	n
Make/receive a cell phone call	310
Send/receive a text message	318
Search the internet/email	308
GPS/Navigation	323
Share pics/videos/audio via social media	316
Listen to/use an NPS podcast	298
Other (if specified)	74

Table A-8. Data from [Figure 28](#). The importance of use of personal electronic devices while visiting Great Sand Dunes.

Device Use	Average	n
Make/receive a cell phone call	2.33	315
Send/receive a text message	2.65	317
Search the internet/email	2.21	310
GPS/Navigation	3.39	321
Share pics/videos/audio via social media	2.05	316
Listen to/use an NPS podcast	1.43	306
Other (if specified)	2.20	35

Table A-9. Data from [Figure 29](#). Quality of service of personal electronic devices while visiting Great Sand Dunes.

Device Use	Average	n
Make/receive a cell phone call	2.99	264
Send/receive a text message	3.23	269
Search the internet/email	2.93	258
GPS/Navigation	3.50	268
Share pics/videos/audio via social media	3.08	265
Listen to/use an NPS podcast	2.55	246
Other (if specified)	2.82	69

*Average excludes "Not applicable."

Table A-10. Data from [Figure 32](#). Rating Great Sand Dunes experience.

Rating Category	Average	n
Great Sand Dunes is a safe place to visit	4.76	330
Great Sand Dunes is too crowded	2.87	330
Natural resources in Great Sand Dunes are in pristine condition	4.23	328
The entrance fee for Great Sand Dunes is too high	2.18	328
Vandalism and crime are not a problem at Great Sand Dunes	4.17	329
Great Sand Dunes is not accessible to a person with physical disabilities	3.22	330
Historical and cultural features in Great Sand Dunes are well maintained/preserved	4.21	329

*Average excludes "Don't know / not sure."

Table A-11. Data from [Figure 33](#). Rating the quality of Great Sand Dunes facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities.

Rating Category	Average	n
Visitor Center	4.26	329
Exhibits (indoor and outdoor)	3.94	329
Restrooms	4.33	328
Walkways, trails, and roads	4.25	330
Campgrounds and/or picnic areas	4.35	330
Assistance from park employees	4.41	330
Park map or brochure	4.48	328
Ranger programs	4.41	325
Value for entrance fee paid	4.39	325
Commercial services in the park (food, lodging, gifts, rental, etc.)	4.12	329
Other services (if specified)	3.67	61
Learning about nature, history, or culture	4.22	328
Outdoor recreation (sightseeing, camping, bicycling, boating, hiking, etc.)	4.43	322

*Average excludes “Not used or not available”

Table A-12. Data from [Figure 37](#). Household demographics: annual household income and household size.

Question	n	Min.	Max.	Median
Including yourself, how many people are in your household?	324	1	8	2
Including yourself, how many people contribute to your annual household income?	315	1	4	2