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Linking the 2010 Census to National Park Visitors

Natural Resource Technical Report NPS/WASO/NRTR—2014/880

ON THE COVER
Visitors at Grand Canyon National Park
Photograph by: Jerry J. Vaske

Linking the 2010 Census to National Park Visitors

Natural Resource Technical Report NPS/WASO/NRTR—2014/880

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Executive Summary

The “Linking the 2010 Census to National Park Visitors” project compared visitor characteristics from the Visitor Services Project (VSP) survey data with demographic and economic data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. The project was divided into four tasks.

Task 1 Identify parks, and groups of parks, to include in a comparison with the 2010 Census data.

Task 2 Cross-link the VSP database for selected parks with the 2010 Census data to answer specific research questions.

Task 3 Describe the research conducted in Tasks 1 and 2 and present the comparative analysis findings.

Task 4 Develop a web-based tool that allows users to look up changes in demographics between the 2000 and 2010 Census for counties adjacent to all Nation Park units. The URL for that website is: http://warnercnr.colostate.edu/nps-vsp/

Five research questions were examined:

1. What are the general economic and education backgrounds of national park visitors?
2. What are the ethnic and racial backgrounds of national park visitors?
3. What are the age distributions of national park visitors?
4. How do visitors from local communities obtain information about the park versus those from more distant communities?
5. What park activities or characteristics appear to attract visitors from local communities versus those from more distant communities?

Methods

A total of 128 VSP studies conducted between 2001 and 2011 were included in the analysis. All 18 National Park designation types and all seven NPS regions were represented in the database and analyses.

ZIP code information in the VSP database was used to create local versus non-local communities. We defined community as county, based on the ZIP codes within a county. We further defined local communities as those counties that have some portion of the park within the county. Non-local communities were counties that did not have a National Park.

The analyses also included the following VSP variables: (1) education, (2) household income, (3) ethnicity (Hispanic or not), (4) race, (5) age, (6) sources of information used by national park visitors, and (7) activities of NPS visitors.

Results

Compared to the general public, national park visitors are highly educated. About one-third (32%) of the individuals in the 2010 Census held a Bachelor's or Graduate degree. By contrast, nearly two-thirds of NPS visitors reported this level education.

People in the 2010 Census reported lower income levels than national park visitors. For example, 20% of individuals in the Census earned $100,000 or more, compared to nearly a third (32%) of national park visitors.

In the 2010 Census, 16% of the U.S. population was Hispanic; only 7% of NPS visitors reported this ethnicity. Census data suggest that 72% of the population is white. The overwhelming majority of visitors in the VSP database were white (95%).

The 2010 Census reported that 13% of the population was in the 18-24 age range. By comparison, only 4% of the respondents in the VSP database were 18-24. The 25-34 age bracket was also underrepresented in the VSP data. For the over 65 age category, the percents from VSP (15%) and the Census (17%) were similar.

Most visitors (87%) reported that they obtained information about the park prior to their visit. Among those visitors that obtained information prior to their visit, the primary sources of information were previous visits and word of mouth. Previous visits were the primary source of information for both local and non-local visitors although much more so for local visitors.

Among the 14 activities examined, three-quarters (76%) of respondents reported sightseeing during their visit. More than 50% also noted going to the visitor center and day hiking. Another 40% mentioned creative arts (e.g., photography, painting, drawing). Bicycling (9%) and horseback riding (3%) had the lowest participation. Non-local visitors participated in sightseeing (79%) and creative arts (43%) much more than local visitors (48% and 16%, respectively). Local visitors did more bicycling (22%) than non-local visitors (7%).

Project Background

The Visitor Services Project (VSP), an initiative of the National Park Service (NPS) Social Science Program, began in 1983 when the NPS collaborated with the University of Idaho's Park Studies Unit to collect data about park visitors. Questions included on VSP surveys cover a variety of topics (e.g., demographics, trip planning, travel expenditures, evaluation of facilities and services, opinions about resource management issues, and evaluation of activities). These questions can be one of three types: (1) core (i.e., intended to be included on every VSP survey), (2) common (i.e., intended to be asked frequently on VSP surveys), and (3) customized (i.e., intended to provide information specific to a park unit). Through 2011, the VSP has conducted over 269 surveys.

The "Linking the 2010 Census to National Park Visitors" project compared known visitor characteristics from the VSP survey data with demographic and economic data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. The project was divided into four tasks. Task 1 identified parks, and groups of parks, to include in a comparison with the 2010 Census data. Task 2 cross-linked the VSP database for selected parks with the 2010 Census data to answer specific research questions. Task 3 resulted in this report describing the research conducted in Tasks 1 and 2 and presenting the comparative analysis. Task 4 involved the development of a web-based tool that allows users to look up changes in demographics between the 2000 and 2010 Census for counties adjacent to all National Park units. The URL for that website is:

http://warnercnr.colostate.edu/nps-vsp/

Research Questions

1. What are the general economic and education backgrounds of national park visitors?
2. What are the ethnic and racial backgrounds of national park visitors?
3. What are the age distributions of national park visitors?
4. How do visitors from local communities obtain information about the park versus those from more distant communities?
5. What park activities or characteristics appear to attract visitors from local communities versus those from more distant communities?

Methods

Identifying Parks for Inclusion in Study

There were three primary considerations when identifying parks for analysis: (1) differences in park and visitor characteristics, (2) time differences between when the VSP park data were collected and the 2010 Census, and (3) agency needs. The following describes how these considerations were incorporated into the research approach for Task 1.

Park and visitor characteristics can be used to identify groups of parks and individual parks. Park characteristics included: (1) the seven administrative regions of the NPS (i.e., Alaska, Northeast,

Intermountain, Midwest, National Capital, Pacific West, Southeast), and (2) park designation (e.g., National Monument, National Historic Site, National Park, National Seashore). Visitor characteristics may include: (1) facilities / programs used, and (2) activity participation.

Task 1 required consideration of the research questions in Task 2. Each of these questions was answered at varying levels of aggregation. First, analyses were performed across all parks in the VSP datasets. Second, the questions were analyzed relative to each NPS region and each park designation. Finally, at the specific park level, the interactive website displays 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census data (i.e., sex, age, race, ethnicity, household size, income) and the percent change for all counties adjacent to the park. Results are displayed numerically and graphically.

Given the focus on the 2010 Census data, the length of time the VSP park data are relevant to the 2010 data was considered when identifying parks. The demographics, the economic status, and even the ZIP code of communities can change over time. A conservative timeframe would have only included surveys from 2006 to 2011 (i.e., those closer to the 2010 Census than the 2000 Census). A liberal time frame would include VSP surveys from 2001 (i.e., after the 2000 Census) to 2011. Table 1 demonstrates the resulting number of studies that would have been included in the comparison with the 2010 Census data for both timeframes and all of the available data. To include as many studies as possible, we analyzed all studies from 2001 to 2011 (N = 128). The response rate for the studies in this timeframe ranged from 39% to 88% (M = 69.14, SD = 9.58). Appendix A lists the specific studies that were included in the analysis.

Table 1. Number of Studies Based on Included Study Years

Study Years	# of Studies
1988 – 2011	249
2001 – 2011	128
2006 – 2011	81

Project Variables

National Park Service Designations

There were 18 official National Park System designations represented in the VSP database from 2001 to 2011 (NPS, 2000; Table 2). This report includes only those studies that represent official NPS designations (i.e., N = 128). In other words, we eliminated two DOI employee commuting surveys that are not included in National Park System designations. We also eliminated three additional studies from Task 2 (Research Questions 4 – 5): (1) Blue Ridge Parkway (2007), (2) Blue Ridge Parkway (2008), and (3) Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park. These linear parks cover too much geography to allow for community or county-based analysis to be appropriate or meaningful.

Table 2. Number of studies for each National Park System designation (2001 – 2011)

NPS Designation	# of Studies
National Battlefield	4
National Battlefield Park	1
National Historical Park	14
National Historic Site	23
National Lakeshore	4
National Monument	19
National Memorial	2
National Military Park	2
National Park	35
National Park and Preserve	3
National Parkway	2
National Preserve	4
National River	1
National Recreation Area	7
National Reserve	2
National Seashore	3
National Wild and Scenic River or Riverway	1
Other NPS Designation	1
Total Studies	128

National Park Service Regions

The National Park Service is divided into seven geographic regions: Northeast, National Capital, Southeast, Midwest, Intermountain, Pacific West, and Alaska. All of the regions were represented in the VSP database from 2001 to 2011 (NPS, 2003; Table 3).

Table 3. Number of studies for National Park Service Region (2001 – 2011)

NPS Region	Number of Studies
Alaska	2
Northeast	22
Intermountain	23
Midwest	26
National Capital	4
Pacific-West	24
Southeast	27
Total Studies	128

The number of studies by park designation (Table 2) and region (Table 3) illustrates that for some designations and regions the numbers are small (e.g., 1 National Battlefield Park study, 2 studies in Alaska). Consequently, it was not appropriate or meaningful to further parse the data by individual visitor characteristic variables.

United States ZIP Codes

ZIP code information in the VSP database was used to create local versus non-local communities. We defined community as county, based on the ZIP codes within a county. We further defined local communities as those counties that have some portion of the park within the county. Non-local communities were counties that did not have a National Park.

VSP Variables

Education

Some VSP studies in the 2001–2011 timeframe measured education for only one respondent; other investigations recorded education for every member in a group. In these latter investigations, if a group consisted of a father, a mother and two children, four education variables were recorded. To be consistent across studies, we included only the education of the respondent. The number of response categories and the labels associated with those categories for the education variables were also not always consistent across the studies from 2001 to 2011. For example, some studies included four response categories; other investigations had five or six response options. Those that included six responses tended to separate Master's and Doctoral degrees, while those with five categories combined these two degrees (i.e., Graduate or Professional Degree). For purposes of this report we used the question: "For you only, what is the highest level of education you have completed?" with the following response categories: (1) some high school, (2) high school grad (or GED), (3) some college, (4) bachelor's degree, and (5) graduate or professional degree.

Household Income

The income question asked: "Which category best represents your annual household income?" Similar to education, income was coded four different ways that were not compatible. The response categories that were used by the majority of studies were kept for analysis. These included: (1) Less than $24,999, (2) $25,000 – $34,999, (3) $35,000 – $49,999, (4) $50,000 – $74,999, (5) $75,000 – $99,999, (6) $100,000 – $149,999, (7) $150,000 – $199,999, and (8) $200,000 or more.

Ethnicity (Hispanic or Latino)

Some VSP investigations measured ethnicity for one respondent; others recorded ethnicity for up to seven group members. For consistency, we used only one respondent per group. This question asked: "For you only, are you Hispanic or Latino?" Responses were coded as (0) no or (1) yes.

Race

Some VSP studies included ethnicity along with race in the same question. For these studies, the ethnicity categories were eliminated from the data prior to analysis. Similar to other variables in the VSP database, race was sometimes recorded for only one respondent; other times for the entire group (up to 7 members). We used only one respondent per group. The question asked: "For you only, what is your race?" Because respondents were allowed to check all that applied, five dichotomous variables were used in the analysis: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and white. Each of these variables was coded as (0) no or (1) yes.

Age

Although the wording varied somewhat, most VSP studies asked: "For yourself and each member of your group, please indicate: Your age on your last birthday." If more than one age was given, we selected the first number given. This assumes that the first age provided was that of the respondent. Age was coded as a continuous variable in the VSP database. To be consistent with the U.S. Census data, age was collapsed into the following categories: (1) 18-24, (2) 25-34, (3) 35-44, (4) 45-54, (5) 55-64, and (6) over 65.

Sources of Information

Most VSP studies asked respondents about their sources of information prior to their visit. For example, "Prior to this visit, how did you and your personal group obtain information about [NPS site]? Respondents first indicated whether or not they had obtained information prior to the visit (no or yes). If yes, they were then provided with an area-specific list of options (e.g., web site, friends/family, school program, television show, NPS sites). Each of the area-specific options was coded as (0) no or (1) yes.

Activities

Although the wording varied somewhat, most VSP studies asked: "On this visit, in which activities did you and your personal group participate within [NPS site]?" Each site provided an area-specific list of activities. Across all VSP studies, a total of 34 different activity related questions were asked. Not all of these activities were relevant to all locations. To simplify the analysis, this report focuses on the respondents' activities during that visit. Some activities were combined into logical groupings. For example, fishing, fish tours and hunting were collapsed into a single variable called consumptive activities. Backcountry camping and wilderness camping were combined into a camping variable. Other activities such as stargazing were eliminated from the analysis because so few people indicated participating. Exercise was dropped from the analysis because it was too general. In total, 14 activities were included in the analysis. Each of these variables was coded as (0) no or (1) yes.

Results

Education Level

Compared to the general public, national park visitors are highly educated (Table 4). About one-third (32%) of the individuals in the 2010 Census held a Bachelor's or Graduate degree. By contrast, nearly two-thirds of NPS visitors reported this level education.

Table 4. Education level of national park visitors compared to the 2010 Census

	National Park Visitors (VSP Database)		2010 Census
Educational Attainment	**Number**	**Percent**	**Percent**
Some High School	433	2	16
High School Diploma / GED	2,935	11	30
Some College	6,021	24	30
Bachelor's Degree	8,112	32	16
Graduate Degree	8,099	32	16

Education Level by National Park Service Region

The overall education pattern in Table 4 was also evident when examined by region (Table 5). More than 60% of the visitors to the Alaska (71%), Intermountain (64%), Midwest (61%), National Capital (68%), Northeast (65%) and Pacific West (68%) regions held advanced degrees (i.e., bachelor's or graduate degree). The Southeast region was somewhat of an exception; 54% reported this level of education.

Education Level by National Park Service Designation

With the exception of visitors to National Recreation Areas (46%), over half of the visitors to the other NPS designations had earned a bachelor's or graduate degree (Table 6). Visitors to National Battlefield Parks and National Historic Parks were the most educated; 70% or more of these individuals were college educated. At the other end of the continuum, those reporting only "some high school" ranged between 1 and 4% across all National Park designations.

Table 5. Education level of national park visitors by National Park Service region

NPS Region	VSP Data Percent	2010 Census Percent
Alaska		
Some High School	1	11
High School Diploma / GED	9	30
Some College	19	36
Bachelor's Degree	39	15
Graduate Degree	32	8
Intermountain		
Some High School	2	18
High School Diploma / GED	11	27
Some College	23	31
Bachelor's Degree	32	16
Graduate Degree	32	8
Midwest		
Some High School	1	13
High School Diploma / GED	13	32
Some College	25	31
Bachelor's Degree	33	16
Graduate Degree	28	8
National Capital		
Some High School	1	15
High School Diploma / GED	8	21
Some College	22	21
Bachelor's Degree	30	21
Graduate Degree	38	23
Northeast		
Some High School	2	14
High School Diploma / GED	12	31
Some College	22	26
Bachelor's Degree	30	18
Graduate Degree	35	11
Pacific West		
Some High School	2	17
High School Diploma / GED	7	25
Some College	22	32
Bachelor's Degree	33	17
Graduate Degree	35	9
Southeast		
Some High School	2	18
High School Diploma / GED	17	31
Some College	27	29
Bachelor's Degree	28	15
Graduate Degree	26	7

Table 6. Education level by National Park Service designation

NPS Designation	% Educational Attainment				
	Some High School	High School Diploma / GED	Some College	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree
National Battlefield	1	8	23	32	37
National Battlefield Park	1	6	20	38	36
National Historical Park	1	8	21	31	39
National Historic Site	1	10	22	32	35
National Lakeshore	1	12	25	32	30
National Monument	2	13	27	31	27
National Memorial	3	18	29	27	23
National Military Park	4	14	28	33	23
National Park	2	11	22	32	33
National Park and Preserve	1	9	19	39	32
National Preserve	--	--	--	--	--
National River	2	16	28	31	24
National Recreation Area	4	20	30	26	20
National Reserve	--	--	--	--	--
National Seashore	--	--	--	--	--
National Wild and Scenic River & Riverway	1	8	30	38	23

-- = no data available

Household Income

Household income among national park visitors was normally distributed (Table 7). Six percent earned less than $25,000 and another 6% made $200,000 or more; about a quarter (24%) had a household income of between $50,000 and $74,000. People in the 2010 Census reported lower income levels. For example, 24% earned less than $25,000. It should be noted that the VSP data were not adjusted for inflation.

Table 7. Household income of national park visitors compared to the 2010 Census

Household Income	National Park Visitors (VSP Database)		2010 Census
	Number	Percent	Percent
Less than $24,999	352	6	24
$25,000 to $34,999	450	7	11
$35,000 to $49,999	681	11	14
$50,000 to $74,999	1513	24	19
$75,000 to $99,999	1209	19	12
$100,000 to $149,999	1216	19	12
$150,000 to $199,999	466	7	4
$200,000 or more	367	6	4

Household Income by National Park Service Region

Household income varied by NPS region (Table 8). More than 20% of the visitors to the Northeast (22%) earned more than $150,000. Only 11% of visitors to the Midwest region reported this level of income. Less than 10% of visitors to any region were in the lowest income bracket (< $24,999).

Table 8. Household income by National Park Service region

	% Household income category							
NPS Region	**LT $24,999**	**$25,000 to $34,999**	**$35,000 to $49,999**	**$50,000 to $74,999**	**$75,000 to $99,999**	**$100,000 to $149,999**	**$150,000 to $199,999**	**$200,000 or more**
Alaska	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Intermountain	4	6	10	21	23	21	8	7
Midwest	6	8	11	26	20	19	7	4
National Capitol	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Northeast	3	3	9	22	22	20	11	11
Pacific West	8	6	6	21	19	19	11	9
Southeast	5	7	13	23	18	21	7	6

-- = no data available

Household Income by National Park Service Designation

For those earning $150,000 or more, household income by NPS designation ranged from 27% for those visiting National Historic Parks to 8% among National Reserve visitors (Table 9). Four percent of the visitors to National Historic Parks / Sites and National Recreation Areas reported earning < $24,999, while 10% of National Reserve visitors made that income level.

Table 9. Household income by National Park Service designation

	% Household income category							
NPS Designation	**LT $24,999**	**$25,000 to $34,999**	**$35,000 to $49,999**	**$50,000 to $74,999**	**$75,000 to $99,999**	**$100,000 to $149,999**	**$150,000 to $199,999**	**$200,000 or more**
National Battlefield	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
National Battlefield Park	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
National Historical Park	4	6	5	16	20	22	12	15
National Historic Site	4	7	10	26	21	19	8	6
National Lakeshore	7	7	12	26	19	18	5	5
National Monument	7	9	12	26	22	17	5	3
National Memorial	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
National Military Park	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
National Park	5	6	11	23	20	21	8	6
National Park and Preserve	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
National Preserve	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
National River	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
National Recreation Area	4	5	9	17	16	26	12	12
National Reserve	10	10	11	29	18	15	5	3
National Seashore	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
National Wild and Scenic River & Riverway	8	6	11	27	16	19	7	5

-- = no data available

Ethnicity

In the 2010 Census, 16% of respondents were Hispanic; only 7% of NPS visitors reported this ethnicity (Table 10).

Table 10. Ethnicity of national park visitors compared to the 2010 Census

	National Park Visitors (VSP Database)		2010 Census
Ethnicity	**Number**	**Percent**	**Percent**
Hispanic	932	7	16
Not Hispanic	13,234	93	84

Ethnicity by National Park Service Region

Hispanic ethnicity by NPS region ranged from 4% (Intermountain) to 16% (Southeast) (Table 11). Comparatively, the percent Hispanic from the 2010 Census data were 42% (Intermountain) and 12% (Southeast). Based on the Census data, Hispanic national park visitors were underrepresented in all regions except the Southeast.

Table 11. Ethnicity of national park visitors by National Park Service region

	% Hispanic	
NPS Region	**National Park Visitors (VSP Database)**	**2010 Census**
Alaska	--	6
Intermountain	4	42
Midwest	1	7
National Capitol	2	10
Northeast	4	13
Pacific West	7	44
Southeast	16	12

-- = no data available

Ethnicity by National Park Service Designation

Eleven percent of national park visitors in the VSP database were Hispanic, but none of the respondents to National Seashores reported Hispanic origins (Table 12). Low numbers of Hispanic respondents (i.e., < 5%) were also evident at National Battlefields, National Historic Parks / Sites, National Monuments, and National Memorials.

Table 12. Ethnicity of national park visitors by National Park Service designation

NPS Designation	% Hispanic	NPS Designation	% Hispanic
National Battlefield	2	National Park	11
National Battlefield Park	--	National Park and Preserve	5
National Historical Park	4	National Preserve	7
National Historic Site	3	National River	--
National Lakeshore	--	National Recreation Area	7
National Monument	4	National Reserve	--
National Memorial	1	National Seashore	0
National Military Park	3	National Wild and Scenic River & Riverway	--

-- = no data available

Race

The overwhelming majority of visitors in the VSP database were white (95%, Table 13). One percent or less were black / African American or Native Hawaiian / other Pacific Islander. By comparison, 72% of those in the U.S. Census were white, 13% were black or African American, and less than 1% were Native Hawaiian.

Table 13. Race of national park visitors compared to the 2010 Census

	National Park Visitors (VSP Database)		2010 Census
Race	**Frequency**	**Percent[1]**	**Percent[1]**
One Race			97
American Indian/Alaska Native	331	2	1
Asian	418	2	5
Black or African American	160	1	13
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	31	<1	<1
White	18,859	95	72
Some Other Race			6
Two or More Races			3

[1] total percentages do not equal 100 because visitors could select more than one answer

Race by National Park Service Region

When race was examined by NPS region, between 91% (Pacific West) and 97% (Midwest) were white (Table 14). The percent black or Native American ranged from 0% to 2% across regions. None of the VSP surveys in Alaska or the National Capital region included race related questions.

Table 14. Race of national park visitors by National Park Service region

NPS Region	American Indian / Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Native Hawaiian	White
Alaska	--	--	--	--	--
Intermountain	2	2	0	0	96
Midwest	2	1	0	0	97
National Capitol	--	--	--	--	--
Northeast	1	3	2	0	96
Pacific West	2	8	1	1	91
Southeast	2	1	1	0	97

[1] total percentages do not equal 100 because visitors could select more than one answer

-- = no data available

Race by National Park Services Designation

Among the specific NPS designations (Table 15), the percent white ranged from 90% (National Battlefields) to 98% (National Monuments, National Seashores, National Wild and Scenic Rivers and Riverways).

Table 15. Race of national park visitors by National Park Services designation

NPS Designation	% American Indian / Alaska Native	% Asian	% Black or African American	% Native Hawaiian	% White
National Battlefield	2	3	8	0	90
National Battlefield Park	3	1	3	<1	94
National Historical Park	1	3	2	0	96
National Historic Site	2	1	<1	<1	97
National Lakeshore	2	3	1	<1	95
National Monument	2	1	<1	<1	98
National Memorial	2	1	1	<1	96
National Military Park	--	--	--	--	--
National Park	1	3	1	<1	96
National Park and Preserve	--	--	--	--	--
National Preserve	4	1	1	<1	96
National River	--	--	--	--	--
National Recreation Area	2	2	1	<1	96
National Reserve	--	--	--	--	--
National Seashore	<1	2	<1	0	98
National Wild and Scenic River & Riverway	3	<1	0	0	98

1 total percentages do not equal 100 because visitors could select more than one answer

-- = no data available

Age

The 2010 Census reported that 13% of the population was in the 18-24 age range (Table 16). By comparison, only 4% of the respondents in the VSP database were 18-24. The 25-34 age bracket was also underrepresented in the VSP data. For the over 65 age category, the percents from VSP (15%) and the Census (17%) were similar.

Table 16. Age of national park visitors compared to the 2010 Census

	National Park Visitors (VSP Database)		2010 Census
Age Category	Number	Percent	Percent
18-24	2,104	4	13
25-34	6,751	12	18
35-44	12,099	21	18
45-54	15,576	27	19
55-64	13,475	23	16
Over 65	8,599	15	17
Total		100	100

Age by National Park Service Region

Similar to the overall statistics, the youngest two age categories were underrepresented in the VSP data. The "over 65" age group was overrepresented in Alaska.

Table 17. Age of national park visitors by National Park Service region

NPS Region	VSP Data Percent	2010 Census Percent
Alaska		
18-24	2	14
25-34	8	20
35-44	14	18
45-54	25	21
55-64	31	16
Over 65	19	11
Intermountain		
18-24	4	14
25-34	11	19
35-44	20	18
45-54	26	19
55-64	23	15
Over 65	16	15
Midwest		
18-24	3	13
25-34	10	17
35-44	23	17
45-54	27	20
55-64	23	16
Over 65	15	18
National Capital		
18-24	5	17
25-34	14	25
35-44	26	16
45-54	26	15
55-64	19	13
Over 65	9	14
Northeast		
18-24	3	13
25-34	11	17
35-44	21	17
45-54	29	20
55-64	22	16
Over 65	14	18
Pacific West		
18-24	5	14
25-34	14	19
35-44	22	18
45-54	26	19
55-64	21	15
Over 65	12	16
Southeast		
18-24	3	13
25-34	11	17
35-44	19	17
45-54	25	19
55-64	25	16
Over 65	17	18

Age by National Park Services Designation

Less than 10% of the VSP respondents at any of the NPS designations were in the 18-24 age group (Table 18). For the middle two age groups (i.e., 25-34 & 45-54), the percentage of visitors at all of the designations were comparable. For the "over 65" category, the percent varied by designation. For example, for National Historic Sites and National Preserves, over 20% of the visitors were in the oldest age group. On the other hand, less than 10% of National Lakeshore, National River, and National Wild and Scenic River visitors were over 65.

Table 18. Age of national park visitors by National Park Service designation

	Age Categories					
NPS Designation	**18-24**	**25-34**	**35-44**	**45-54**	**55-64**	**Over 65**
National Battlefield	3	11	20	27	24	15
National Battlefield Park	4	8	20	23	28	17
National Historical Park	4	11	23	29	21	12
National Historic Site	2	9	16	23	28	22
National Lakeshore	4	13	26	30	17	9
National Monument	4	12	23	26	20	14
National Memorial	3	8	26	28	22	13
National Military Park	4	12	23	23	23	14
National Park	4	13	21	26	23	13
National Park and Preserve	3	9	18	26	27	16
National Preserve	3	9	16	25	27	21
National River	6	16	24	30	15	9
National Recreation Area	4	14	19	27	22	15
National Reserve	3	15	20	24	24	13
National Seashore	2	9	25	31	20	12
National Wild and Scenic River & Riverway	8	14	30	30	11	6

Sources of Information

Most visitors (87%) reported that they obtained information about the park prior to their visit (Table 19). Among those visitors that obtained information prior to their visit, the primary sources of information were previous visits and word of mouth (Table 20). Previous visits were the primary source of information for both local and non-local visitors although much more so for local visitors. Non-local visitors were more likely to use NPS maps or brochures (37%) and travel guides (33%) and websites (30% NPS websites, 17% other websites) than local visitors. Local visitors were slightly more likely to get information from newspaper or magazine articles (17%) than non-local visitors (10%).

Table 19. Information obtained prior to visit by local vs. non-local visitors

Information obtained prior to visit?	**Overall %**	**Local %**	**Non-local %**
Yes	87	86	87
No	13	14	13

Table 20. Sources of information used prior to visit by local vs. non-local visitors

Information Source	# of Studies	Count	Overall %	Local %	Non-local %
Previous visit or experience	122	20,887	46	70	42
Word of mouth (e.g., friends, relatives)	125	19,277	42	43	41
NPS park brochure / map	81	10,023	35	19	37
Travel guide / tour book	123	13,678	30	9	33
NPS website	124	12,735	28	16	30
Other website	120	6,977	16	8	17
Newspaper / magazine articles	121	4,919	11	17	10
Television or radio programs	116	2,504	6	5	6
Visitor center, non-park	110	3,179	8	5	8
Local businesses (hotels, shops, etc.)	66	1,322	6	4	6
Inquiry to park via phone, mail or email	125	2,432	5	4	5
Social media*	19	64	1	2	1
Other	125	3,751	8	10	8

* Social media only included in 2010 and 2011 studies.

Sources of Information by National Park Service Region

The pattern of information sources was similar across all regions with the exception of Alaska (Table 21). Visitors to Alaska were less likely to have used previous visits (15%) as a source of information, possibly indicating more first time visitors than other regions. The majority of visitors to Alaska used travel guides (57%) followed by word of mouth (46%). Visitors to Alaska were more likely to use television or radio than other regions, while visitors to the Midwest were slightly more likely to use visitor centers (13%) than in other regions.

Table 21. Information by National Park Service region

	Source of Information					
NPS Region	Previous visits	Word of mouth	NPS brochure	Travel guide	NPS website	Other website
Alaska	15	46	26	57	30	22
Intermountain	46	46	40	35	33	19
Midwest	46	39	32	24	24	12
National Capital	56	41	32	20	20	13
Northeast	44	40	29	28	22	15
Pacific West	46	42	36	33	34	18
Southeast	48	39	35	25	23	13

Table 21. Information by National Park Service region (continued)

NPS Region	Source of Information					
	Newspaper / Magazine	TV / Radio	Visitor center	Local businesses	Inquiry to park	Social media
Alaska	14	18	--	--	7	--
Intermountain	10	8	6	5	6	1
Midwest	13	5	13	5	4	1
National Capital	11	2	3	--	4	--
Northeast	10	3	8	5	4	1
Pacific West	10	6	5	7	6	2
Southeast	11	5	9	6	5	1

-- = no data available

Sources of Information by National Park Services Designation

More than half (52%) of visitors to National Memorials obtained information from NPS brochures and maps.

Visitors to National Park and Preserves were least likely to have used previous visits, probably because 2 of 3 of these studies were in Alaska. Similar to visitors to the Alaska region, they were most likely to use travel guides as a source of information (51%).

Visitors to National Wild and Scenic River and Riverways indicated that they obtained information via word of mouth (72%). Riverways visitors also indicated using local businesses (22%) as a source of information more than visitors to other types of parks, and less likely to use travel guides (6%).

Table 22. Information by National Park Service designation

NPS Designation	Source of Information					
	Previous visits	Word of mouth	NPS brochure	Travel guide	NPS website	Other website
National Battlefield	33	28	22	20	17	6
National Battlefield Park	31	20	36	23	32	6
National Historical Park	40	37	33	33	19	20
National Historic Site	31	35	28	25	22	9
National Lakeshore	60	48	27	21	30	12
National Monument	39	38	37	26	21	10
National Memorial	42	47	52	43	24	14
National Military Park	42	30	15	10	26	9
National Park	48	43	41	36	37	19
National Park and Preserve	22	46	33	51	28	19
National Preserve	48	45	37	26	23	14
National River	47	38	--	19	16	17
National Recreation Area	58	50	19	17	22	20
National Reserve	66	55	26	18	22	10
National Seashore	58	46	11	17	17	13
National Wild and Scenic River & Riverway	42	72	--	6	29	29

-- = no data available

Table 22. Information by National Park Service designation (continued)

NPS Designation	Source of Information					
	Newspaper / Magazine	TV / Radio	Visitor center	Local businesses	Inquiry to park	Social media
National Battlefield	10	4	6	1	1	--
National Battlefield Park	9	3	8	7	5	1
National Historical Park	10	3	8	8	4	<1
National Historic Site	16	6	10	4	4	1
National Lakeshore	10	2	13	2	6	--
National Monument	7	3	10	3	3	1
National Memorial	11	13	11	8	4	--
National Military Park	21	6	7	--	2	--
National Park	11	8	6	6	6	1
National Park and Preserve	12	14	5	2	7	--
National Preserve	11	5	6	4	10	2
National River	8	5	9	--	2	--
National Recreation Area	9	2	6	5	6	1
National Reserve	12	1	4	1	4	--
National Seashore	16	3	8	8	5	--
National Wild and Scenic River & Riverway	10	1	8	22	16	3

-- = no data available

Park Activities

Among the 14 activities examined, three-quarters (76%) of respondents reported sightseeing during their visit (Table 23). More than 50% also noted going to the visitor center and day hiking. Another 40% mentioned creative arts. Bicycling (9%) and horseback riding (3%) had the lowest participation. Non-local visitors participated in sightseeing (79%) and creative arts (43%) much more than local visitors (48% and 16% respectively). Local visitors did more bicycling (22%) than non-local visitors (7%).

Table 23. Participation in park activities across all studies

Park Activities	# of Studies	Count	Overall %	Local %	Non-local %
Sightseeing[1]	58	23,346	76	48	79
Audiovisual / Visitor Center	53	11,175	54	40	55
Day Hiking	86	22,175	53	51	54
Creative Arts[2]	84	14,998	40	16	43
Water Activities[3]	36	7,458	36	33	37
Historic Tour / Historical Research	22	1,999	27	16	28
Birding	25	3,241	26	20	27
Picnic	85	8,319	21	17	22
Guided Tour[4]	86	7,714	20	14	21
Camping[5]	58	5,236	17	15	17
Fishing / Hunting	41	2,509	12	16	11
Climbing / Mountaineering	16	1,088	11	10	11
Bicycling	34	1,883	9	22	7
Horseback Riding	21	385	3	1	4

1. Scenic Drive and View Scenery
2. Photography, Painting, Drawing, Writing, etc.
3. Beach and Boat Tour and Water Activities
4. Ranger Guided Tour and Self Guided Tour
5. Backcountry Camping, Wilderness Camping, and Developed Camping

Note: Local visitors are people from the counties adjacent to the park unit.

Park activity by National Park Service Region

As might be expected, park activities varied by NPS region (Table 24). For example, 93% of Alaska respondents listed sightseeing, compared to only 51% of National Capital visitors. Alaska visitors were four times more likely to take a guided tour compared to Pacific West visitors (56% vs. 13% respectively). Historic tours / research were listed by 44% of the Midwest region visitors, but only 1% of the National Capital respondents. This is a result of the Midwest parks that were included in the sample (e.g., See Appendix A for historic sites from the Midwest).

Bicycling was popular in the Midwest (31%), National Capital (22%) and Northeast (21%), but less common in Alaska (3%) and the Intermountain (3%) parks. On the other hand, fishing and hunting were reported by nearly 50% of the Alaskan visitors (47%), while these consumptive activities were listed by only 5% of the Midwest visitors. Such differences reflect: (a) the availability (or lack there) of these activities in different regions and / or (b) the specific parks that were included in the sample.

Table 24. Participation in park activities by National Park Service region

	Activities						
NPS Region	Sightseeing[1]	Audiovisual / Visitor Center	Guided Tour[2]	Historic Tour / Research	Picnic	Day Hiking	Camping[3]
Alaska	93	94	56	--	14	41	46
Intermountain	83	50	16	12	24	52	16
Midwest	61	53	25	44	16	51	24
National Capital	51	41	22	1	19	67	12
Northeast	56	72	32	29	20	52	11
Pacific West	84	53	13	--	24	54	20
Southeast	77	55	24	18	20	55	13

1. Scenic Drive and View Scenery
2. Ranger Guided Tour and Self Guided Tour
3. Backcountry Camping, Wilderness Camping, and Developed Camping

Table 24. Participation in park activities by National Park Service region (continued)

	Activities						
NPS Region	Creative Arts[1]	Birding	Bicycling	Climbing / Mountaineering	Horseback Riding	Water Activities[2]	Fishing / Hunting
Alaska	65	31	3	2	--	18	47
Intermountain	45	21	3	5	3	43	22
Midwest	27	19	31	--	<1	56	5
National Capital	22	11	22	8	1	15	6
Northeast	17	14	21	10	2	40	12
Pacific West	48	17	4	20	7	27	10
Southeast	45	37	6	3	3	28	11

1. Photography, Painting, Drawing, Writing, etc.
2. Beach and Boat Tour and Water Activities

Park activity by National Park Services Designation

Participation in recreation activities varied by NPS designation. Sightseeing, for example, was noted by a majority of all respondents, but was more common for those visiting National Battlefields, National Military Parks, and National Seashores (over 90% for all 3 designations) than those respondents visiting National Historic Sites (51%) or National Lakeshores (56%). As might be expected, respondents visiting National Historic Parks listed historic tours / research as an activity (44%). Surprisingly, only 1% of the visitors to National Historic Sites mentioned participating in historic tour / research. We suspect that these visitors did not consider themselves as doing research and therefore did not list the activity. Day hiking and camping were common in parks within NPS designations where these activities were available.

Table 25. Participation in park activities by National Park Service designation

NPS Designation	Sightseeing [1]	Audiovisual / Visitor Center	Guided Tour	Historic Tour / Research	Picnic	Day Hiking	Camping
National Battlefield	93	94	56	0	14	41	46
National Battlefield Park	83	50	16	12	24	52	16
National Historical Park	61	53	25	44	16	51	24
National Historic Site	51	41	22	1	19	67	12
National Lakeshore	56	72	32	29	20	52	11
National Monument	84	53	13	0	24	54	20
National Memorial	77	55	24	18	20	55	13
National Military Park	93	94	56	0	14	41	46
National Park	83	50	16	12	24	52	16
National Park and Preserve	61	53	25	44	16	51	24
National Preserve	51	41	22	1	19	67	12
National River	56	72	32	29	20	52	11
National Recreation Area	84	53	13	0	24	54	20
National Reserve	77	55	24	18	20	55	13
National Seashore	93	94	56	0	14	41	46
National Wild and Scenic River & Riverway	83	50	16	12	24	52	16

1. Scenic Drive and View Scenery
2. Ranger Guided Tour and Self Guided Tour
3. Backcountry Camping, Wilderness Camping, and Developed Camping

Table 25. Participation in park activities by National Park Service designation (continued)

NPS Designation	Creative[1] Arts	Birding	Bicycling	Climbing / Mountaineering	Horseback Riding	Water Activities[2]	Fishing / Hunting
National Battlefield	65	31	3	2	0	18	47
National Battlefield Park	45	21	3	5	3	43	22
National Historical Park	27	19	31	0	0	56	5
National Historic Site	22	11	22	8	1	15	6
National Lakeshore	17	14	21	10	2	40	12
National Monument	48	17	4	20	7	27	10
National Memorial	45	37	6	3	3	28	11
National Military Park	65	31	3	2	0	18	47
National Park	45	21	3	5	3	43	22
National Park and Preserve	27	19	31	0	0	56	5
National Preserve	22	11	22	8	1	15	6
National River	17	14	21	10	2	40	12
National Recreation Area	48	17	4	20	7	27	10
National Reserve	45	37	6	3	3	28	11
National Seashore	65	31	3	2	0	18	47
National Wild and Scenic River & Riverway	45	21	3	5	3	43	22

1. Photography, Painting, Drawing, Writing, etc.
2. Beach and Boat Tour and Water Activities

Conclusions

Based on a comparison of the 2010 U.S. Census and national park visitors in the VSP database, park visitors differ from the general public on nearly all economic and demographic characteristics. First, national park visitors are more highly educated than the general public. Nearly two-thirds of NPS visitors held a Bachelor's or Graduate degree; about one-third (32%) of the individuals in the 2010 Census reported this level education. Second, NPS visitors earned more income than the general public. A third (32%) of national park visitors earned $100,000 or more, compared to 20% of individuals in the Census. Third, ethnically and racially, NPS visitors are more homogeneous than U.S. citizens in general. Only 7% of park visitors were Hispanic (16% of the U.S. population is Hispanic) and the overwhelming majority of visitors (95%) in the VSP database were white (72% of the population is white). Fourth, the youngest age groups (18-24, 25-34) of park visitors are underrepresented when compared to the U.S. Census. Only 4% of the respondents in the VSP database were 18-24; 13% of the U.S. population is in this age range. For the over 65 age category, however, the percents from VSP (15%) and the Census (17%) were similar.

Most visitors (87%) reported that they obtained information about the park prior to their visit. Among those visitors that obtained information prior to their visit, the primary sources of information were previous visits and word of mouth. Previous visits were the primary source of information for both local and non-local visitors although much more so for local visitors.

Among the 14 activities examined, three-quarters (76%) of respondents reported sightseeing during their visit. More than 50% also noted going to the visitor center and day hiking. Another 40% mentioned creative arts. Bicycling (9%) and horseback riding (3%) had the lowest participation. Non-local visitors participated in sightseeing (79%) and creative arts (43%) much more than local visitors (48% and 16%, respectively). Local visitors did more bicycling (22%) than non-local visitors (7%).

Discussion

There are both conceptual and methodological explanations / implications for the similarities and differences noted between the VSP respondents and the U.S. Census data.

Conceptual Explanations

Household Income

Based on the comparison between the 2010 Census and the VSP data, national park visitors in the upper income brackets are overrepresented and those in the lower income brackets are underrepresented. The former reflects the fact that those who earn more have more disposable income. The latter raises questions about the impact of entrance fees on low income people (More & Stevens, 2000).

Requiring visitors to pay recreation fees for using publicly owned natural resources is often controversial (Bowker, Cordell, & Johnson, 1999; Martin, 1999). Proponents have argued that fees (1) promote equity by charging those who actually use the resource (Crompton & Lamb, 1986), (2)

enhance economic efficiency (Sanderson, 1995), and (3) generate revenue for natural resource agencies who typically confront severe budget constraints (LaPage, 1994). Alternatively, some authors have expressed concern over the potential displacement of visitors due to the federal recreation fee program (Schneider & Budruk, 1999), especially for individuals who cannot afford the fees (More, 1999). Others have questioned the appropriateness of fees in recreation areas such as wilderness that have traditionally been provided by tax dollars (Trainor & Norgaard, 1999; Williams, Vogt, & Vittersø, 1999; Vogt & Williams, 1999).

The controversy regarding the benefits and costs of user fees at public recreation areas stimulated theme issues in two journals. Articles published in the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* (Volume 17, number 3, 1999) focused on public sector fees and pricing issues, while the theme issue in the *Journal of Leisure Research* (Volume 31, number 3, 1999) concentrated on societal responses to recreation fees (Watson, 1999). These articles, as well as other collections of fee demonstration related research (McCollum, Puttkammer, & Chivers, 1999), greatly expanded the knowledge base regarding the recreation fee program, particularly as it applies to areas managed by the National Park Service (e.g., Krannich, Eisenhauer, Field, Pratt, & Luloff, 1999; Lundgren, 1996), the Forest Service (e.g., Absher, McCollum, & Parker, 1999; Winter, Palucki, & Burkhardt, 1999; Williams et al., 1999) and the Fish and Wildlife Service (Taylor, Vaske, Shelby, Donnelly, & Browne-Nuñez, 2002; Vaske, Donnelly, & Taylor, 1999).

Overall, this research shows that low-income families spend less time in outdoor recreation, including visits to national parks, than higher-income families; but fees are probably not the reason. Residents in New Hampshire and Vermont, for example, were asked if a $5 increase in access fees would affect their visitation. Forty-nine percent of low-income respondents said yes. But when told that access fees had already increased over the previous five years, 60% of the low-income respondents were not affected or had simply paid the increases (More & Stevens, 2000).

Costs do affect low-income families' decisions to not visit national parks, but are costs related to travel and the purchase of goods, not fees. Income has the most influence on whether a family travels. Texas residents with incomes of more than $20,000 per year were 60% more likely than lower-income residents to participate in outdoor recreation away from home, and 30% more likely to participate in outdoor recreation close to home (Lee, Scott, & Floyd, 2001).

People living near parks have low travel costs, and recreation fees could affect low income people's decisions to visit public lands. To address this concern, managers might consider: (1) recreation vouchers, coupons, or rebates could be distributed to the poor, (2) occasional free days to improve access for the poor, or (3) some areas could be free of fees, with operating expenses covered from fees at other sites. Recreation policy, however, may not be appropriate for addressing this concern. Because poor people use the parks less, they might like to see the tax dollars spent elsewhere rather than on public lands.

Ethnicity and Race

Findings indicate that Hispanics and other non-white visitors are underrepresented in the VSP database. Le (2012) offers at least four possible explanations for this result. First, national parks may

attract and / or discourage certain visitor segments. For example, racial and ethnic minorities may hesitate to visit public lands because of past discrimination (Stodolska, 2005). Other researchers (e.g., Duncan & Duncan, 2003; Schelhas, 2002) have suggested that historical discrimination (e.g., segregation) has resulted in perceptions that parks cater to white recreational needs. Minority groups may feel uncomfortable in these recreational settings (Floyd & Gramann, 1995) and perceive fewer opportunities to access public parks compared to whites as a result of segregation (Abercrombie, Sallis, Conway, Frank, Saelens, & Chapman, 2008; Johnson-Gaither, 2011).

Second, some segments of the population may have different setting preferences. Hispanics in southern California, for example, perceived developed campground amenities (e.g., fire rings, picnic tables) as more important than did white visitors (Baas, Ewert, & Chavez, 1993). White visitors considered natural features (e.g., quiet surroundings) as most important, while Hispanics considered developed amenities (e.g., toilets, campsites) as most important (Irwin, Gartner, & Phelps, 1990). Compared to white visitors, more Hispanics preferred well-maintained facilities (cleanliness, shaded trails, picnic areas) over natural features (Cronan, Shinew, & Stodolska, 2008; Tinsley, Tinsley, & Croskeys, 2002). Recreational facilities at urban parks were rated higher in importance by Hispanics than white visitors (Ho, Sasidharan, Elmendorf, Willits, Graefe, & Godbey, 2005).

Third, different population segments may differ in their activity preferences. Hispanics were generally less likely than white visitors to participate in wildland recreation activities (Bowker et al., 2006). White visitors preferred camping as far away from others as possible, while Hispanics did not mind sharing space with others (Irwin et al., 1990). Compared to white visitors, Hispanics were more likely to engage in consumptive activities (e.g., hunting) than nonconsumptive activities (e.g., bird-watching) (Burger, 2004). In California, white visitors were more likely than Hispanics to seek educational information and more likely to approach rangers (Thapa, Graefe, & Absher, 2002). Others researchers (Parker & Winter, 1998), however, have found that Hispanics and non-Hispanics were equally interested in printed materials (e.g., brochures, maps). These studies suggested that Hispanics are not interested in participating in educational activities and may use informational publications for different purposes.

Fourth, there are differences in how people visit parks. Hispanics have been repeatedly shown to be more likely to visit parks with other people, while whites are more likely to be alone (Byrne, Wolch, & Zhang, 2009; Tinsley et al., 2002; Loukaitou-Sideris & Sideris, 2009). Family groups, especially those with children, are more common among Hispanic than white visitors to parks (Byrne et al., 2009; Loukaitou-Sideris & Sideris, 2009; Shaull & Gramann, 1998). In terms of group size, Hispanics tended to visit parks in larger groups (average 5.7 persons) than did whites (3.8 persons) (Hutchison, 1987). Hispanics also tend to camp with more people (M = 12.9 people) compared to white visitors (M = 6.9 people) (Irwin et al., 1990). In day-use areas, Hispanics spent more time at a site than white visitors (Cronan et al., 2008; Loukaitou-Sideris & Sideris, 2009; Tinsley et al., 2002). Some researchers (e.g., Lee et al., 2001; Dwyer & Barro, 2001) have shown that Hispanics prefer public recreational sites closer to home, while white visitors are more willing to travel long distances.

Age

Our findings suggest that younger age groups are underrepresented in the VSP data. Recent research highlights the growing decline in nature-based pursuits (e.g., visiting parks, camping) in American society, especially among the younger generations (Kareiva, 2008). In addition, a number of kids spend a majority of their time indoors. This phenomenon has been coined "videophilia," the tendency for an individual to spend a majority of his/her free time in front of a TV, computer, or other electronic device (Zardic & Pergams, 2007).

This disconnect from the natural world has led some to argue that an increasing number of young people suffer from "nature-deficit disorder" or (NDD), characterized by a lack of contact with the natural world. NND has been attributed to decreased time in natural areas, parental fear, "stranger danger," and the lack of role models that help facilitate the exploration and cultivation of a love for nature (Bruyere, Teel, & Newman, 2009; Louv, 2005). In contrast, those who spend quality time in nature, tend to have less physical and psychological problems (Mayer, Frantz, Bruehlman-Senecal, & Dolliver, 2009).

A troublesome consequence of NDD relates to the ability to effectively recruit young people who will be the future environmental stewards. The relationship between childhood experiences in nature and environmental stewardship in adulthood is well-documented (Chawla, 1998, Wells & Lekies, 2006). With this growing trend there is a propensity towards losing the next generation of conservationists and environmentalists. According to Weigl (2009), this decline is due to the change in student population demographics. The majority of students are coming from more urban and suburban centers where they spent little time outside growing up and have no desire to do so now. The amount of time spent in nature is the main influence on environmental attitudes and activism.

Methodological Explanations

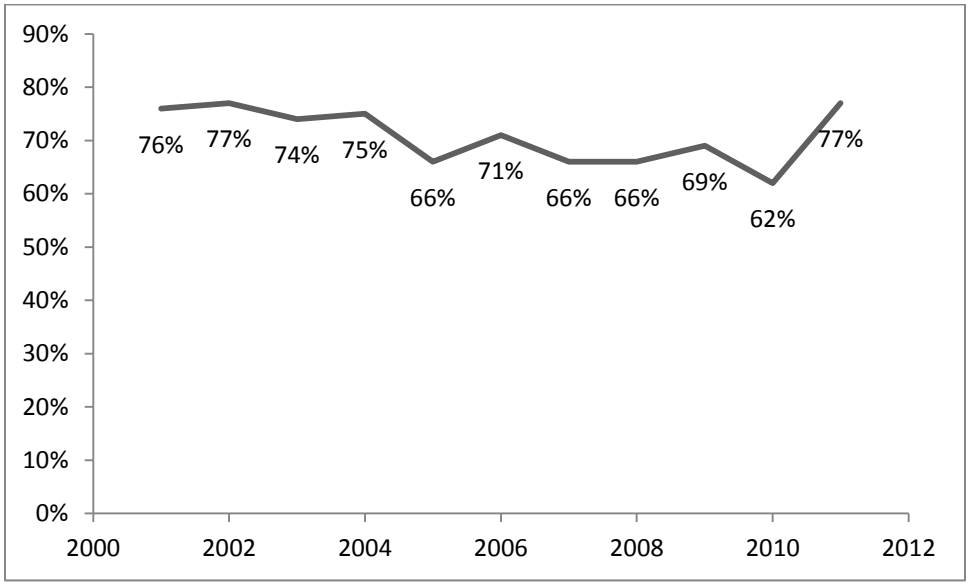
There are also some methodological explanations that should be considered when evaluating the similarities and differences noted between the U.S. Census data and the VSP respondents. For example, Census data are based on individual people; the VSP respondents reflect person visits. It is theoretically possible that a person could be in the data more than once. In addition, there are other constraints that limit the representativeness and generalizability of the VSP.

First, site selection is not random. Individual parks request to be included in a VSP survey. Those parks that make this request may not be representative of all parks in the system. Second, it is not always clear from the reports published for each project that individual respondents were selected randomly. Without random selection of respondents, findings may not be representative of the visiting population. Third, some projects attempted to contact individuals throughout the year to reflect seasonal differences in visitors' perceptions and reported behaviors. Other studies, however, only sampled people for a few days. Results from these latter investigations, may not even generalize to the season when the data were collected.

Fourth, as noted earlier, the response rates for the individual projects in the 2001–2011 timeframe ranged from 39% to 88%. When response rates are low, the researcher cannot be confident that the respondents share similar attitudes / behaviors as non-respondents. With multiple individual VSP

projects in a given year, it is possible to take an average of the responses per year. Figure 1 displays the results of this analysis. The response rates by year ranged for a low of 62% (2010) to a high of 77% (2002, 2011). An earlier article (Rookey, Le, Littlejohn & Dillman, 2012) examined VSP survey response rates 1988 to 2007. Overall, the response rate for that time period was 76%. The response rates, however, declined about 10% from the late 1980s to 2007.

Figure 1. Survey response rates by year



General Methodological Considerations

As noted in the methods, not all variables were measured consistently. For example, in some studies education, income, ethnicity, and race were measured for only one respondent; other investigations recorded these variables for every member in a group. The number of response categories and the labels associated with the categories for the education and income were also not always consistent across the studies. For example, some studies included four education response categories; other investigations had five or six response options. Those that included six responses tended to separate Master's and Doctoral degrees, while those with five categories combined these two degrees (i.e., Graduate or Professional Degree). Income was coded four different ways that were not compatible. While these differences are irrelevant for a given study, they are important in meta-analytic reports such as this where the goal is to compare across studies. The authors encourage NPS survey designers to maintain consistency in how variables are measured.

Although not presented in this report, another article (Roemer & Vaske, in press) produced from this overall effort examined a core VSP question: "Overall, how would you rate the quality of the visitor services provided to you and your group?" That manuscript used 177 VSP projects, covering a 17-year period (i.e., 1995 to 2011). Responses were coded on a five-point scale: very poor, poor, average, good, and very good. For some projects, very good was coded as 5; other studies coded this response category as 1. For an analysis from a single project, the direction of the coding does not

really matter as long as the researcher understands the coding. When comparing across studies, consistency in coding is crucial.

Finally, a Ph.D. dissertation that is being produced out of this project is merging VSP data with psychographic data available from the market research firm Nielson. Nielsen's PRIZM® data combines geo-demographic data with observed and reported consumer behavior to segment the U.S. population into 66 distinct segments that can be grouped into 11 Lifestage Groups and 14 Social Groups. Whereas the segments are grouped by characteristics like income, education, occupation and home value, the Social Groups are based on urbanization and socioeconomic rank. The Lifestage Groups are based on age, socioeconomic rank, and the presence of children at home. Merging existing data from VSP with the Nielsen data expands the analytic possibilities without any additional data collection costs.

Concluding Thoughts

Recent research has suggested a decline in visits to national parks (Shultis & More, 2011). In response, the NPS has focused on identifying major external "challenges" related to building visitation. For example, the agency has moved to bolster and redefine their educational efforts to reach new audiences, particularly youth and minority groups in urban areas. The VSP database and comparative analyses such as this report can facilitate where the agency should concentrate its efforts.

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Appendix A

Table A1. List of studies (2001 – 2011) by National Park System designation and National Park Service regions (N = 128)

Study Location	Region	Designation
Denali National Park & Preserve	Alaska	National Park and Preserve
Katmai National Park & Preserve	Alaska	National Park and Preserve
Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site – 2010	Intermountain	National Historic Site
Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site – 2007	Intermountain	National Historic Site
Golden Spike National Historic Site	Intermountain	National Historic Site
Capulin Volcano National Monument	Intermountain	National Monument
Chiricahua National Monument	Intermountain	National Monument
Fossil Butte National Monument	Intermountain	National Monument
Rainbow Bridge National Monument	Intermountain	National Monument
Timpanogos Cave National Monument	Intermountain	National Monument
Arches National Park	Intermountain	National Park
Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park	Intermountain	National Park
Bryce Canyon National Park	Intermountain	National Park
Capitol Reef National Park	Intermountain	National Park
Grand Canyon National Park – North Rim	Intermountain	National Park
Grand Canyon National Park – South Rim	Intermountain	National Park
Grand Teton National Park	Intermountain	National Park
Grand Teton National Park - Laurance S. Rockefeller Preserve	Intermountain	National Park
Rocky Mountain National Park – 2010	Intermountain	National Park
Rocky Mountain National Park – 2011	Intermountain	National Park
Yellowstone National Park	Intermountain	National Park
Zion National Park	Intermountain	National Park
Zion National Park	Intermountain	National Park
Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve	Intermountain	National Park and Preserve
Chickasaw National Recreation Area	Intermountain	National Recreation Area
Curecanti National Recreation Area	Intermountain	National Recreation Area
Glen Canyon National Recreation Area	Intermountain	National Recreation Area
Glen Canyon National Recreation Area	Intermountain	National Recreation Area
Fort Larned National Historic Site	Midwest	National Historic Site
Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site	Midwest	National Historic Site
Herbert Hoover National Historic Site	Midwest	National Historic Site
James A. Garfield National Historic Site	Midwest	National Historic Site
James A. Garfield National Historic Site – Non OVM	Midwest	National Historic Site
James A. Garfield National Historic Site – OVM	Midwest	National Historic Site
Knife River Indian Villages National Historical Park	Midwest	National Historic Site
Lincoln Home National Historic Site	Midwest	National Historic Site
Minuteman Missile National Historic Site	Midwest	National Historic Site
Nicodemus National Historic Site	Midwest	National Historic Site
Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park	Midwest	National Historical Park
Keweenaw National Historical Park	Midwest	National Historical Park
Apostle Islands National Lakeshore	Midwest	National Lakeshore
Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore	Midwest	National Lakeshore
Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore	Midwest	National Lakeshore

Table A1. List of studies (2001 – 2011) by National Park System designation and National Park Service regions (N = 128) (continued)

Study Location	Region	Designation
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore	Midwest	National Lakeshore
Mount Rushmore National Memorial	Midwest	National Memorial
Agate Fossil Beds National Monument	Midwest	National Monument
Effigy Mounds National Monument	Midwest	National Monument
George Washington Carver National Monument	Midwest	National Monument
Homestead National Monument of America	Midwest	National Monument
Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial	Midwest	National Monument
Pipestone National Monument	Midwest	National Monument
Cuyahoga Valley National Park	Midwest	National Park
Wind Cave National Park	Midwest	National Park
Niobrara National Scenic River	Midwest	National Wild and Scenic River or Riverway
Monocacy National Battlefield	National Capital	National Battlefield
Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park	National Capital	National Historical Park
Harpers Ferry National Historical Park	National Capital	National Historical Park
Catoctin Mountain Park	National Capital	Other Designation
Richmond National Battlefield Park	Northeast	National Battlefield Park
Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site	Northeast	National Historic Site
John Fitzgerald. Kennedy National Historic Site	Northeast	National Historic Site
Martin Van Buren National Historic Site	Northeast	National Historic Site
Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site	Northeast	National Historic Site
Boston National Historical Park	Northeast	National Historical Park
Colonial National Historical Park (Jamestown)	Northeast	National Historical Park
Independence National Historical Park	Northeast	National Historical Park
Minute Man National Historical Park	Northeast	National Historical Park
New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park	Northeast	National Historical Park
Valley Forge National Historical Park	Northeast	National Historical Park
Women's Rights National Historical Park	Northeast	National Historical Park
Johnstown Flood National Memorial	Northeast	National Memorial
Fort Stanwix National Monument	Northeast	National Monument
George Washington Birthplace National Monument	Northeast	National Monument
Acadia National Park	Northeast	National Park
Shenandoah National Park	Northeast	National Park
Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area	Northeast	National Recreation Area
Gateway National Recreation Area – Floyd Bennett Field Visitor Study	Northeast	National Recreation Area
New River Gorge National River	Northeast	National River
Fire Island National Seashore	Northeast	National Seashore
Fire Island National Seashore - Resident	Northeast	National Seashore
John Muir National Historic Site	Pacific West	National Historic Site
Manzanar National Historic Site	Pacific West	National Historic Site
Kalaupapa National Historical Park	Pacific West	National Historical Park
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, AK	Pacific West	National Historical Park
San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park	Pacific West	National Historical Park
Craters of the Moon National Monument & Preserve	Pacific West	National Monument
Devils Postpile National Monument	Pacific West	National Monument

Table A1. List of studies (2001 – 2011) by National Park System designation and National Park Service regions (N = 128) (continued)

Study Location	Region	Designation
John Day Fossil Beds National Monument	Pacific West	National Monument
Lava Beds National Monument	Pacific West	National Monument
Oregon Caves National Monument	Pacific West	National Monument
Pinnacles National Monument	Pacific West	National Monument
Crater Lake National Park	Pacific West	National Park
Death Valley National Park	Pacific West	National Park
Death Valley National Park	Pacific West	National Park
Hawaii Volcanoes National Park	Pacific West	National Park
Joshua Tree National Park	Pacific West	National Park
Joshua Tree National Park	Pacific West	National Park
Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks and Sequoia National Forest	Pacific West	National Park
Yosemite National Park	Pacific West	National Park
Yosemite National Park	Pacific West	National Park
Yosemite National Park	Pacific West	National Park
Mojave National Preserve	Pacific West	National Preserve
City of Rocks National Reserve	Pacific West	National Reserve
Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve	Pacific West	National Reserve
Cowpens National Battlefield	Southeast	National Battlefield
Fort Donelson National Battlefield	Southeast	National Battlefield
Stones River National Battlefield	Southeast	National Battlefield
Carl Sandberg Home National Historic Site	Southeast	National Historic Site
Ninety Six National Historic Site	Southeast	National Historic Site
Ninety Six National Historic Site – Encampment	Southeast	National Historic Site
Ninety Six National Historic Site – Non Encampment	Southeast	National Historic Site
San Juan National Historic Site	Southeast	National Historic Site
Horseshoe Bend National Military Park	Southeast	National Military Park
Kings Mountain National Military Park	Southeast	National Military Park
Fort Sumter National Monument	Southeast	National Monument
Biscayne National Park	Southeast	National Park
Congaree National Park	Southeast	National Park
Dry Tortugas National Park	Southeast	National Park
Everglades National Park	Southeast	National Park
Everglades National Park	Southeast	National Park
Everglades National Park	Southeast	National Park
Great Smoky Mountains National Park	Southeast	National Park
Great Smoky Mountains National Park	Southeast	National Park
Mammoth Cave National Park	Southeast	National Park
Blue Ridge Parkway	Southeast	National Parkway
Blue Ridge Parkway	Southeast	National Parkway
Big Cypress National Preserve	Southeast	National Preserve
Big Cypress National Preserve – ORM Permit Holder – Actual	Southeast	National Preserve
Little River Canyon National Preserve	Southeast	National Preserve
Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area	Southeast	National Recreation Area
Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Ft. Raleigh National Historic Site, and Wright Brothers National Memorial	Southeast	National Seashore

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.

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