2007 Minnesota State Parks Research Summary Report

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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The Minnesota State Parks research projects were a cooperative effort of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation, and Office of Management and Budget Services; and University of Minnesota, Department of Forest Resources

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INTRODUCTION

Three research studies were conducted in 2007 to provide a better understanding of current and prospective visitors to Minnesota State Parks, and to inform marketing, planning, facility development, and park operations. One factor helped motivate the studies: Minnesota state park use—as with nature-based recreation participation in general—is exhibiting a troubling trend. After some 50 years of growth following World War II, nature-based recreation turned a corner in the 1990s, and is now exhibiting declining participation on a per-capita basis. The decline is broad based and national in scope. It covers Minnesota State Parks, national parks, state trails, hunting, fishing, boating, wildlife watching, and wilderness use. The primary driving factor behind the trend is the decline in participation by young adults (age 20 to 40) and their children, the generations that are clearly the future of nature-based recreation. Because of this generational shift in recreational involvement, the research studies paid particular attention to young adults and families with children.

The first research study was qualitative in nature. Five focus groups were conducted with young adults (age 20 to 40) from the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area (Reference 1). The groups were chosen to provide a wide range of perspectives on outdoor recreation participation and use of nature-based parks, including Minnesota State Parks:

Group 1: Males/females who have low to moderate involvement in outdoor recreation and are infrequent users of nature-based parks.
Group 2: Males/females who have moderate to high involvement in outdoor recreation and are infrequent users of nature-based parks.
Group 3: Females, with children at home, who have moderate to high involvement in outdoor recreation and are infrequent users of nature-based parks.
Group 4: Males/females who are moderate to high users of Minnesota state parks.
Group 5: Males/females who are moderate to high users of Minnesota state parks.

The focus groups covered leisure time use, outdoor recreation participation, and the factors that motivate and constraints recreation participation both in general and for visits to nature-based parks. The findings of this qualitative research—useful in their own right—guided the remaining two research efforts, a park visitor survey and a general population household survey.

The visitor survey was conducted in July and August of 2007. The survey covered the characteristics of the park trip (e.g., park activities, party composition), trip planning (e.g., sources of information), trip satisfaction, trip motivation, changes visitors would like to see to the parks, and the demographics of the visitors (e.g., age, race, education). To track trends, some of the questions in the survey were repeated from previous surveys.

The visitor survey was administered in all parks having resident managers, which is the large majority of parks accounting for the bulk of park visitation. Park visitors were intercepted as they departed the park and asked to participate in the mail-back survey. Overall, the survey produced 1,046 returns and had a 72 percent return rate. Survey responses are weighted by park visitation to make them more representative of the visitor population.

The final research study compared and contrasted frequent and infrequent park visitors in an effort to find potential strategies to boost park use. The survey covered state park use, motivations for visiting parks, constrains to park visitation, strategies visitors use to overcome constraints, park offerings that would attract more users, and respondent characteristics from both a general outdoor recreation and demographic perspective.

The survey was mailed to a sample of Minnesota households in fall of 2007. Due to the list bias going into the survey—the sample was drawn from households with listed telephone numbers, which include only 62 percent of households—survey responses can only be compared between respondent groupings. Projections to the entire Minnesota population cannot be made. The survey respondents are skewed to older adults: the median age of the survey respondents is 53, which is eight years older than the median age of Minnesota adults. Overall, the survey produced 774 returns and had a 50 percent return rate. Survey responses are weighted by regional populations to make them more representative of the Minnesota population.

The research studies were a cooperative effort of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Parks and Recreation, and Office of Management and Budget Services (OMBS); and University of Minnesota, Department of Forest Resources. Funding was provided by the DNR: Division of Parks and Recreation, Commissioner's Office, and OMBS, Land and Water Conservation Fund.

RESULTS

The findings of the three research efforts are interspersed within topical areas. The order of topics is as follows:

- Recent declines in nature-based recreation, including Minnesota state park use
- Characteristics of Minnesota State Parks visitors
- Characteristics of the park trip
- Motivations (or reasons) for visiting Minnesota State Parks
- Satisfaction with the park trip
- Perceived value for park fees paid
- Obstacles to park visitation
- Strategies visitors use to overcome obstacles to park visitation
- Changes current and prospective visitors would like to see in park facilities, services and programs
- Key findings for young adults and families with children

Recent declines in nature-based recreation, including Minnesota state park use

As noted in the introduction, one factor that helped motivate these research efforts is the recent decline in nature-based recreation. After some 50 years of growth following World War II, nature-based recreation turned a corner in the 1990s, and is now exhibiting declining participation on a per-capita basis. The decline is broad based and national in scope. It covers Minnesota State Parks, national parks, state trails, hunting, fishing, boating, wildlife watching, and wilderness use (Table 1—Reference 2).

There are two sets of figures in Table 1: per-capita change (first column of numbers) and change in numbers (second column). The per-capita change figures are the most useful for revealing the underlying popularity of an activity, because they factor out the influence of population growth or decline on the change value. Per-capita figures also permit direct comparisons between places that have different population changes, such as the nation and Minnesota.

Although all the state and national per-capita figures are negative, the Minnesota figures tend to be less negative. Minnesota parks declined on a per-capita basis some 10 to 12 percent, depending on how “new” parks that opened during the reporting period are treated. Same-park analysis is the most revealing for examining the underlying popularity of an activity. Two types of wildlife watching

Table 1

Indicators of nature-based outdoor recreation participation changes over the last 10 years for U.S. and Minnesota

Activity	Per-capita change in number of participants or visitation, 1996 to 2006	Change in number of participants or visitation, 1996 to 2006
U.S.		
Fishing participation (age 16+)*	-25%	-15%
Hunting participation (age 16+)*	-21%	-10%
National park visitation**	-19%	-10%
Away from home wildlife-watching participation (age 16+; "away from home" is over one mile from home)*	-15%	-3%
Total wildlife-watching participation (age 16+; includes "away from home" and "around the home")*	-1%	13%
BWCAW use (May-September overnight groups)****	-27%	-19%
Minnesota		
Resident anglers licensed in Minnesota (age 16+)***	-16%	-6%
Resident hunters licensed in Minnesota (age 16+)***	-9%	3%
Minnesota State Parks visitation, all parks***	-10%	-1%
Minnesota State Parks visitation, same parks over period***	-12%	-3%
Away from home wildlife-watching participation (age 16+; "away from home" is over one mile from home)*	*(data do not appear reliable for Minnesota, perhaps due to sample size; the Minnesota trends for fishing and hunting from this source do not compare well with the more reliable trends from license certifications, which are the basis of the trends shown in this table for Minnesota anglers and hunters)*	
Total wildlife-watching participation (age 16+; includes "away from home" and "around the home")*		
Minnesota use of BWCAW (May-September overnight groups)****	-27%	-20%
Recreational boating use*****	-15%	(stable to declining)

* Source: USFWS and U.S. Census Bureau. National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.

** Source: National Park Service visitation records (www2.nature.nps.gov/stats/)

*** Source: Minnesota DNR data on certified licensed hunters and anglers, and park visitation from Division of Parks and Recreation

**** Source: Data compiled form USFS records of May-September overnight group quota permits.

*****Source: Minnesota DNR, based on a series of regional boating studies in various parts of Minnesota.

are in the table: away from home, and total, which includes at- and near-home watching. The away from home watching is the most relevant from an outdoor recreation perspective, because the total figure is affected by in-home viewing of wildlife. Minnesota state bicycle trail data have not been added to the table because they have not been finalized, although it is known that trail use is declining like other nature-based activities.

The participation declines are most pronounced for young adults (under age 45) and their children. Every data set that permits age-based participation-rate analysis (participation rate analysis is the same as per-capita analysis) has the same relative patterns of steeper declines in the younger age classes. At the national level, evidence for this decline comes from fishing, hunting, wildlife-watching, and national park visitation (Reference 3). In Minnesota, evidence for this decline comes from fishing, hunting, state park visitation, and state bicycle trail use (Reference 4).

The age-class changes for Minnesota State Parks from 2001 to 2007 are a good example of this pattern (Table 2—Reference 5). The top box shows in some detail how visitation is shifting away from young adults and their children to older adults. The teen figure is positive, because teens are predominately arriving with older (45+) adults. When teens are combined with children, child/teen visitation declines from 32 percent to 29 percent from 2001 to 2007. The second box summarizes the changes into two age groupings: under 45 and 45 and older. Age 45 is close to the break between Generation X and Baby Boomers (43+ is the Baby Boomers and older generations). The shift in visitation is +/-10 percent, while the background population is shifting just +/- 3 percent. The bottom box is another measure of the aging of the visitor population. The median age of visitors has increased over 4 years, while the background population has increased just 1.4 years.

An important implication of the decline in childhood visitation is the effect it may have on later-life visitation. As part of the household survey, respondents were asked about childhood activities and about their current adult use of Minnesota state parks. Certain childhood activities are strongly associated with adult park visitation, while others are not (Table 3). The strongest association with adult park use is the direct experience with parks as a child. Thus, the decline in childhood visitation may have an influence on adult visitation decades later.

Table 2

Comparison of age distribution of Minnesotans visiting Minnesota state parks in 2001 and 2007*

(restricted to party sizes of 10 or less, due to the statistical impact of a few very large children's groups in 2001)

	--- *Visitation (percent)* --		**Change:**
Age class	**2001**	**2007**	**2007-01**
Children (<13)	25%	20%	-5%
Teens (13-18)	7%	9%	2%
Adults (19-34)	16%	12%	-4%
Adults (35-44)	21%	17%	-3%
Adults (45-54)	17%	20%	3%
Adults (55-64)	8%	15%	7%
Adults (65+)	7%	7%	0%
Total	100%	100%	0%

	--- *Visitation (percent)* --		**Change:**
Age class groupings	**2001**	**2007**	**2007-01**
Under 45	68%	58%	-10%
45 and older	32%	42%	10%
Total	100%	100%	0%
MN POPULATION**	--- *Population (%)* --		
Under 45	65%	62%	-3%
45 and older	35%	38%	3%
Total	100%	100%	0%

			Change:
Median age	**2001**	**2007**	**2007-01**
All visitors	36.7	41.3	4.6
Adult visitors (19+)	43.9	48.2	4.3
MN population**	35.7	37.1	1.4

* 2001 and 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor surveys.

** U.S. Bureau of the Census. Minnesota Single Year of Age and Sex Population Estimates: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2007.

Table 3

Association between childhood activities and visiting state parks today*
(table values are the percent of respondents who participated in an activity as a child)

Childhood Activities	Have not visited since 2002, if ever (percent)	Have visited since 2002, but not in last 12 months (percent)	Visited 1 to 4 times in last 12 months (percent)	Visited 5 or more times in last 12 months (percent)	Measure of association**
	---------- *Frequency of Minnesota State Parks visitation* ----------				
High association					
Visiting state or national parks	35.1%	53.8%	61.5%	74.9%	39.8%
Hiking/ backpacking	16.9%	35.7%	34.2%	55.5%	38.6%
Camping	51.5%	63.8%	60.2%	83.4%	31.9%
Canoeing/ kayaking	19.2%	25.5%	38.6%	49.8%	30.6%
Moderate association					
Snow skiing/boarding	21.3%	25.6%	32.0%	46.6%	25.3%
Visiting nature centers	16.0%	20.4%	26.2%	41.2%	25.2%
Gathering mushrooms, berries, or other wild foods	13.5%	21.8%	24.6%	35.5%	22.0%
Swimming in a lake or river	69.3%	72.9%	78.5%	86.4%	17.1%
Low association					
Motor-boating	33.7%	34.7%	34.6%	41.1%	7.4%
Horseback riding	27.1%	25.3%	33.0%	33.7%	6.6%
Snowmobiling	29.1%	29.1%	35.8%	34.3%	5.2%
Fishing	78.8%	75.1%	84.5%	83.1%	4.3%
Hunting	44.6%	53.3%	49.5%	48.6%	4.0%
None of the activities listed here	5.6%	1.4%	2.7%	1.4%	-4.2%

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks household survey.

** Measure of association is the sum of the three between adjacent group percents: moderate - low, high - moderate, and very high - high.

Characteristics of Minnesota State Parks visitors

The characteristics of park visitors are described in two ways: from an outdoor recreation perspective, and a demographic perspective.

More frequent park visitors, as compared with less frequent visitors, have greater involvement in outdoor recreation. Frequent visitors believe outdoor recreation is a more important part of their lives, they spend more days outside recreating each year, and they have more favorite outdoor activities (Table 4). Consistent with this, park visitors come from households with more anglers, hunters, and more recreation equipment (boats, snowmobiles, ATVs)(see Table 5—Reference 6). In short, park visitors—especially the more frequent visitors—are deeply embedded in the outdoor recreation subculture of Minnesota.

Table 4

General involvement in outdoor recreation and Minnesota state park visitation*

A. How important a part of your life is outdoor recreation?

	Frequency of Minnesota State Parks visitation			
Importance	Have not visited since 2002, if ever (percent)	Have visited since 2002, but not in last 12 months (percent)	Visited 1 to 4 times in last 12 months (percent)	Visited 5 or more times in last 12 months (percent)
Not important at all	11%	3%	1%	0%
Slightly important	20%	9%	7%	3%
Moderately important	35%	29%	31%	18%
Very important	35%	59%	61%	79%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

B. About how many days in the last 12 months did you go outside for recreation of all types (including walking, fishing, camping, biking, skiing, hunting, golfing, sightseeing and so on)?

	Frequency of Minnesota State Parks visitation			
Days	Have not visited since 2002, if ever (percent)	Have visited since 2002, but not in last 12 months (percent)	Visited 1 to 4 times in last 12 months (percent)	Visited 5 or more times in last 12 months (percent)
10 or less	11%	8%	2%	2%
11 to 50	31%	14%	22%	14%
51 to 100	23%	26%	18%	24%
101 or more	35%	52%	57%	60%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

C. When you recreate outdoors, what are your most favorite activities?

	Frequency of Minnesota State Parks visitation			
	Have not visited since 2002, if ever (percent)	Have visited since 2002, but not in last 12 months (percent)	Visited 1 to 4 times in last 12 months (percent)	Visited 5 or more times in last 12 months (percent)
Average number of favorite activities identified out of 33 possible choices	5.6	7.4	8.7	10.6

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks household survey.

Table 5

Do you or a member of you household have the following licenses or registrations?
(restricted to Minnesotans and Minnesota households)

Type of license or registration	*Percent of households having the license or registration:* Minnesotan state-park visitor households*	Minnesota house-holds in general**	Percent park visitor house-holds over general
Current Minnesota fishing license	57%	47%	21%
Current Minnesota hunting license	30%	24%	22%
Boat currently registered in Minnesota	46%	26%	77%
Snowmobile currently registered in Minnesota	14%	9%	58%
ATV currently registered in Minnesota	17%	10%	59%

* Source: 2007 Minnesota State Park Visitor survey.

** Source: MN DNR license and registration records (records downloaded in July 2006).

Current park visitors are more likely to have participated in certain activities as a child. The childhood activity with the strongest association with park visitation today is having visited a state or national park (Table 3). Other strongly associated activities are those frequently done in parks: hiking/backpacking, camping, and canoeing/kayaking. Some childhood activities have little association with adult park visitation. For example, fishing and hunting have a low association. These activities have about the same childhood participation across adults who are infrequent and frequent park visitors.

From a age-based demographic perspective, Minnesotans who visit Minnesota state parks are largely representative of the population under 19 years old, under representative of people 19 to 44, over representative of people 45 to 64, and under representative of people 65 and older (Table 6—Reference 7). The recent visitation shift from young adults (under 45) and children to older adults has contributed to these age-class patterns. In 2001, visitation was more skewed to young adults and children, and less skewed to older adults.

Visitors are more likely to come from non-metropolitan Minnesota, the same as was found in 2001 (Table 6). The metropolitan region has few state parks and, of those in the region, most are located at the periphery, making them less accessible. One state park (Fort Snelling), however, is located near the heart of the metropolitan region.

As was found in 2001, visitors are more likely to be white and non-Hispanic than the Minnesota population (Table 6). When race and ethnicity are combined, 97 percent of park visitors are white and non-Hispanic, compared with 86 percent of the population.

Consistent with 2001, park visitors have more formal education (Table 6). The percent with a bachelor's degree or higher is nearly 60 percent (59%), compared with 34 percent in the Minnesota population.

Park visitors have a higher median income than the Minnesota population (Table 6). The same was found in 2001.

Table 6

Demographic characteristics of Minnesotans who visit Minnesota state parks
(based on 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey)

A. Age distribution

Age class	Park visitors, 2007* (percent)	MN population, 2006** (percent)
Children (<13)	20%	17%
Teens (13-18)	9%	9%
Adults (19-34)	12%	22%
Adults (35-44)	17%	15%
Adults (45-54)	20%	15%
Adults (55-64)	15%	10%
Adults (65+)	7%	12%
Total	100%	100%

* Party sizes of 10 or less.
** Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

B. Origin region

Region of origin	Park visitors, 2007 (percent)	MN population, 2006* (percent)
Northwest	12%	7%
Northeast	5%	6%
Central	11%	14%
Southwest	16%	10%
Southeast	12%	9%
Metro	45%	54%
Total	100%	100%

* Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Table 6 (continued)

C. Race and ethnicity

	Park visitors, 2007 (percent)	MN population, 2006* (percent)
Race		
White	97.7%	89.3%
Non-white	2.3%	10.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	0.5%	3.8%
Non-Hispanic/Latino	99.5%	96.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
Race & Ethnicity		
White, Non-Hispanic/Latino	97.2%	85.9%
Non-white and/or Hispanic/Latino	2.8%	14.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

* Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

D. Educational attainment of Minnesotans (age 25+)

Educational attainment group	Park visitors, 2007 (percent)	MN population, 2006* (percent)
High school graduate or higher	99%	93%
Bachelor's degree or higher	59%	34%
(Post-graduate degrees)	(22%)	(not available)

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2006 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

E. Household income

Income class	Park visitors, 2007 (percent)	MN households, 2005-06* (in 2006 dollars)
under $30000	11%	(no detail)
$30000 to $39999	7%	
$40000 to $49999	12%	
$50000 to $59999	13%	
$60000 to $74999	18%	
$75000 to $99999	17%	
over $100000	22%	
Total	100%	
Median	*Between $60,000 and $74,999*	*$56,102*

* Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Characteristics of the park trip

This section is divided into three parts. The first part concerns the information sources and trip planning tools park visitors use. The second covers in-park activities, and the third covers characteristics of trips, including types of visitors, travel origins, travel distances, and park campers.

a. Information sources and trip-planning tools

When park visitors obtain information about Minnesota State Parks, they turn to three primary sources and a variety of secondary sources (Table 7). The primary sources include word of mouth (family and friends), a perennial leading information source, plus the Minnesota DNR website and Minnesota State Parks

Table 7

When you obtain information about Minnesota State Parks, what are your most important information sources?**

(table values are the percent of visitors indicating an information source as important)

Category	Information source	All users (percent)	Day users (percent)	Campers (percent)	Young adults, under age 43* (percent)
Minnesota DNR sources					
	The Minnesota DNR website	54%	52%	68%	63%
	Minnesota State Parks Guide	47%	46%	52%	38%
	Information at one or more Minnesota State Parks	36%	37%	34%	31%
	Minnesota State Park Traveler newspaper	14%	14%	15%	8%
	The Minnesota DNR telephone information center	5%	4%	10%	12%
	PRIM recreation maps	3%	3%	3%	1%
Explore Minnesota Tourism sources					
	Minnesota Explorer newspaper	26%	27%	24%	14%
	Explore Minnesota Tourism website	23%	24%	23%	24%
	Highway information centers	12%	13%	9%	12%
	Explore Minnesota Tourism phone information center	2%	2%	3%	4%
General sources					
	Family and friends	56%	57%	54%	64%
	Minnesota's State Highway Map	40%	41%	32%	33%
	Websites (general websites)	30%	30%	34%	28%
	Recreational opportunity maps and directories	14%	14%	12%	6%
	Chambers of commerce/convention and visitors bureaus	14%	15%	10%	10%
	Newspapers or magazines	14%	14%	9%	6%
	Other road maps	13%	14%	12%	12%
	Places I stay (e.g., resorts, campgrounds)	13%	13%	13%	11%
	Travel guides/agents	6%	7%	4%	5%
	TV or radio	6%	6%	3%	4%
	Outdoor equipment stores	6%	6%	7%	6%
	Boating/camping/sports shows	5%	5%	7%	3%
	Clubs or associations	4%	4%	4%	6%

* Generations X and Y

** 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

Guide, a hard copy publication. Secondary sources include the State Highway Map, information at another state park, general websites, and the newspaper and website of Explore Minnesota Tourism.

Campers, in 2007, depend primarily on the Minnesota DNR website, while day users depend primarily on word of mouth.

Compared with 2001, websites have risen as important information sources, while printed materials have fallen. From 2001 to 2007, the Minnesota DNR website rose from 34 to 54 percent, the Explore Minnesota Tourism website rose from 11 to 23 percent, and general websites rose from 21 to 30 percent. The leading printed material sources fell: the Minnesota State Parks Guide dropped from 41 to 36 percent, and the Explore Minnesota Tourism newspaper dropped from 32 to 26 percent. A DNR newspaper (Minnesota State Park Traveler) fell from 21 to 14 percent between 2001 and 2007.

Young adults (under 43—Generation X and Y), not surprisingly, depend more on websites, especially the Minnesota DNR website. The Minnesota DNR website is the leading information source for young adults, eclipsing word of mouth. Older adults (63 and older—pre Boomers) depend more on the traditional printed materials, especially the Minnesota State Parks Guide and Explorer newspaper. They also depend more on information from other Minnesota state parks and the State Highway Map. Baby boomers (43 to 62 years old) are in between the young and old with regard to information sources.

Whether the traveling party contains children and/or teens, or is adult only, has little effect on the ranking of important information sources.

On a closely related topic, park visitors were asked what tools and materials they use for trip planning and in-park information, and they were asked about the usefulness of these items. For trip planning, the primary sources are familiar: Minnesota DNR website and Minnesota State Parks Guide (Table 8). For in-park items, the leader is the park trail map, followed by informational brochures/maps and display/exhibits on natural features in the park.

Campers are greater users of trip-planning tools, probably because they are planning a more extensive park trip than day users. As noted above, campers rely heavily on the Minnesota DNR website. A fair portion of campers phone the parks.

Table 8

Use and usefulness of trip-planning and in-park tools and materials*

	---------- *Percent who used item* ----------			------ *If used, how useful? (percents for all users)* ------				
Trip-planning items	All users (percent)	Day users (percent)	Campers (percent)	Very useful (percent)	Moderately useful (percent)	Slightly useful (percent)	Not useful (percent)	Total (percent)
● MN DNR state park website on finding park information	34%	29%	64%	67%	27%	5%	1%	100%
● Minnesota State Park Guide for all parks	25%	23%	37%	67%	26%	6%	0%	100%
● Phone call to this park	13%	10%	29%	86%	10%	0%	4%	100%
● Phone call to MN DNR information center	4%	2%	12%	65%	27%	0%	8%	100%
● Email to this park	1%	1%	2%	86%	14%	0%	0%	100%
● Email to MN DNR information center	1%	1%	2%	57%	43%	0%	0%	100%
In-park items								
● State park/trail map for this park	66%	64%	78%	70%	22%	6%	2%	100%
● General informational brochure/map	48%	46%	61%	64%	31%	3%	2%	100%
● Displays/exhibits on learning about natural features in the park	44%	43%	48%	67%	28%	4%	2%	100%
● Brochures on learning about natural features in the park	32%	31%	40%	68%	26%	4%	2%	100%

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

Young adults and Baby Boomers use the Minnesota DNR website as their primary trip-planning tool, while older adults use the Minnesota State Parks Guide. For the in-park items, older adults use the learning-related materials more frequently. This learning orientation of older adults shows up consistently in the study results, including park activities and motivations for the park visit.

Whether the traveling party contains children and/or teens, or is adult only, has little effect on the ranking of trip-planning and in-park items.

In terms of usefulness, the leading trip-planning and in-park items receive high marks (mainly "very useful") and few low marks ("slightly useful" or "not useful"). For the major trip planning tools (Minnesota DNR website and Minnesota State Parks Guide), campers give higher marks than day users. The same pattern is found for the in-park items.

b. In-park activities

When in the park, visitors participate in one major activity and a wide variety of secondary activities. The major activity is hiking/walking, which 71 percent of visitors do (Table 9). The next leading activity—observing nature—is participated in by 37 percent of visitors. Sightseeing is the third leading activity, followed by picnicking and shopping. Learning about the natural and cultural features of the park are the next leading activities (self-guided nature walk, looking at kiosks/ exhibits, bird watching, and visiting historic sites). A similar pattern of activities was found in the 2001 study.

There is a great deal of commonality in activity ranking across user types (campers, day users), generations, and parties comprised of children and/or teens, or are adult only. A few notable differences do exist, however. Campers participate in more activities than day users, mostly because they are in the park longer. Campers are also more likely to engage in water-oriented activities (fish, swim, boat) and to bike. Older adults are more likely to engage in the less-active learning-related activities (looking at kiosks/exhibits, bird watching, visiting historic sites, sightseeing), and shopping; younger adults are more likely to engage in active water-related activities (swimming, canoeing/kayaking, fishing), and the active learning-related activity of taking a self-guided nature walk. Parties with children and/or teens are much more likely than adult-only parties to swim (especially), picnic, and fish. Swimming and picnicking are the second and third most important activities for parties with children (hiking/walking is the leading activity).

Table 9

Participation in activities in the park*

Activity	All users (percent)	Day users (percent)	Campers (percent)
Hiking/walking	71%	70%	82%
Observing/photographing nature	37%	37%	36%
Sightseeing	36%	37%	34%
Picnicking	29%	28%	34%
Shopping in the park's nature store	25%	25%	28%
Taking a self-guided nature walk	25%	25%	27%
Looking at kiosks or visitor center exhibits	25%	24%	27%
Bird watching	22%	21%	26%
Visiting historic sites	20%	20%	23%
Camping	19%	0%	100%
Swimming	19%	16%	36%
Did nothing/relaxed	19%	16%	37%
Bicycling	12%	9%	29%
Fishing	10%	7%	30%
Canoeing/kayaking	9%	9%	13%
Jogging/running	5%	5%	4%
Motorboating	4%	3%	12%
Taking a naturalist-led program	4%	3%	5%
Horseback riding	2%	1%	2%
Scuba diving	1%	1%	2%
Geocaching	1%	1%	2%
In-line skating/roller-blading	0%	0%	1%

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

Minnesota state park campers as a group are slightly younger than day users. Campers come in parties with children/teens in about the same proportions as day users. Tent camping is preferred by young adults (under 43), who use tents nearly twice as frequently as RV/trailers (64% versus 33%, respectively). Baby boomers (43 to 62) are about equally distributed between tent (43%) and RV/trailer (47%) camping, while older adults (63+) are predominately RV/trailer campers (77%) and few are tent campers (15%). Looked at within equipment types, about half of tent campers (51%) are comprised of young adults, with most of the rest coming from the Baby Boomers (46%), and few from older adults (3%). For RV/trailer campers, some are comprised of young adults (29%) and older adults (16%), but most are Baby Boomers (55%).

c. Trip characteristics

Adult-only parties comprise 57 percent of all parties, while the remaining parties have children and/or teens. Some 27 percent of parties contain another important family member, the pet.

Minnesota State Parks visitors come mainly from Minnesota (84%), with 16 percent from out of state (Table 10). Within Minnesota, the leading origin is the metropolitan area, which contains just over half the state population. Similar findings came from the 2001 study.

Most park visitors are day users (86%), with fewer being campers (Table 10). About half of all park visitors are day users coming from home, and half are on overnight trips away from home (day users on trips plus campers). The same was found in 2001.

Table 10

State Park Trip Characteristics*

Origin of visitor	Visitors 2007 (percent)	Visitors 2001 (percent)
Northwest MN	10%	8%
Northeast MN	4%	6%
Central MN	9%	11%
Southwest MN	13%	13%
Southeast MN	10%	11%
Metro MN	38%	36%
Minnesota subtotal	*84%*	*84%*
Outside of Minnesota	16%	16%
Total percent	100%	100%

Type of visitor	Visitors 2007 (percent)	Visitors 2001 (percent)
Day user from home	52%	49%
Day user on trip away from home	35%	37%
Day user subtotal	*86%*	*86%*
Camper	14%	14%
Total percent	100%	100%

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

Travel distances reflect the type the type of visitor. Campers travel further on average than day users (Table 11). Day users coming from home are evident in the high portion of day users within 50 miles of home (42%), and day-user on trips away from home are evident in the 44 percent of day users traveling 100 miles or more to the park. Travel distances are similar to those found in 2001.

Table 11

Travel distance from home for Minnesota State Parks visitors*

Miles from home	2007 visitors: Campers (percent)	2007 visitors: Day users (percent)	2007 visitors: All visitors (percent)	2001 visitors: All visitors (percent)
25 or less	11%	30%	27%	29%
26 to 50	11%	12%	12%	13%
51 to 100	23%	14%	15%	15%
101 to 200	31%	19%	21%	18%
over 200	25%	25%	25%	25%
Total percent	100%	100%	100%	100%
Median miles	*125*	*85*	*97*	*80*

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

When park visitors take trips away from home, they spend their nights in a number of different types of accommodations (Table 12). Some 20 percent of nights are spent inside the park. Outside the park, the most nights are spent in resorts/motels/bed and breakfast inns, followed by campgrounds, and cabins.

The equipment of Minnesota State Parks campers has remained largely the same since 2001. About half are tent campers, with most of the rest in recreational

Table 12

Where are your nights spent on this overnight trip away from home?*

(for park visitors on overnight trips)

Type of overnight accommodation	Percent of all nights
Campground in this state park	18%
Indoor lodging in this state park	2%
Subtotal: in this state park	*20%*
Resort, motel or bed & breakfast inn	34%
Other campground (public or private)	19%
Friend's or relative's house or cabin	16%
My cabin	6%
Other accommodation	6%
Subtotal: outside this state park	*80%*
Total	100%

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

vehicles and trailers (Table 13). Just over half of campers wanted an electric site, and most of them (82%—43% divided by 52%) got what they wanted; 18 percent, however, did not. For those *not* wanting an electric site, nearly everyone (96%—46% divided by 48%) got what they wanted.

Making a camping reservation rose from 50 to 57 percent of campers from 2001 to 2007. Most (83%) got their first choice of parks in 2007, similar to 2001. Satisfaction with the reservation system is predominately in the satisfied range (79%), but a fair portion of ratings are middling to negative (21%). Satisfaction with the reservation system appears to have increased a modest amount since 2001.

Table 13

State Park Camper Trip Characteristics*

Camping equipment	Campers 2007 (percent)	Campers 2001 (percent)
Tent	49%	49%
Pop-up trailer	14%	18%
Motorhome, 5th wheel, or hard-sided trailer	30%	29%
Stayed in camper cabin	3%	2%
Other	4%	2%
Total percent	100%	100%

Electric campsites	Campers 2007 (percent)	
Campers who wanted an electric campsite:	52%	
Got an electric site	43%	
Did not get an electric site	9%	
Percent that got what they wanted	*82%*	*(82%=43%/52%)*
Campers who did not want an electric site:	48%	
Got an electric site	2%	
Did not get an electric site	46%	
Percent that got what they wanted	*96%*	*(96%=46%/48%)*
Total	100%	

Campsite reservations	Campers 2007 (percent)	Campers 2001 (percent)
Made a reservation on this trip?		
"Yes"	57%	50%
"No"	43%	50%
Total	100%	100%
Was this park your first choice for a reservation?		
"Yes"	83%	80%
"No"	15%	18%
"Don't know"	3%	2%
Total	100%	100%
How satisfied with reservation system?		
"Very satisfied"	37%	37%
"Satisfied"	42%	37%
"Neutral"	10%	9%
"Dissatisfied"	5%	9%
"Very dissatisfied"	2%	6%
"Don't know"	4%	1%
Total	100%	100%

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

Motivations (or reasons) for visiting Minnesota State Parks

People are motivated to visit state parks to attain personal and social outcomes that add value to their lives. These outcomes are predominately in the form of experiences. Different visitors desire different experiences that benefit visitors in different ways.

The most important experiences to park visitors are to have fun while enjoying nature (Table 14). Next in importance is to escape personal, social and physical pressures. This is followed by social affiliation (being with family and friends), which in turn is followed by learning and exploring. Over half of park visitors want to exercise and feel healthier. To achieve and be stimulated is very important to nearly half of park visitors. What is not very important to visitors is the experience of meeting new people. These results are virtually the same as those obtained in the 2001 visitor survey.

Based on the results of the household survey, the reasons for visiting and for not visiting Minnesota State Parks is widely understood among frequent and infrequent park visitors, some of whom have not been to a state park in five years, if at all. What differentiates the frequent and infrequent visitors is the higher importance frequent visitors attached to attaining park experiences. Frequent visitors, in other words, exhibit higher motivation for the experiences they want to attain in the parks.

The ranking of experience importance is widely shared among day users and campers, across generations, and across parties with or without children or teens. There are a few notable differences, however. Older adults place greater emphasis on learning-related experiences (experience a sense of history, learn about nature), while young adults want more to achieve and be stimulated (taking risks, being active, feeling exhilarated, being adventurous). In terms of party-composition differences, adult-only groups place greater emphasis on experiences of silence, quiet and solitude. Parties with children and/or teens place greater importance on the children and the family: introduce children to the outdoors; spend time with family; and help family, friends and other develop outdoor skills.

How well are visitors able to attain these “very important” experiences? The large majority are able to “fully attain” these highly important experiences, which is good. Of the 28 experiences, 18 have a “fully attained” rate of 80 percent or higher for the “very important” experiences. A few experiences have relatively low

Table 14

Importance and Attainment of Minnesota State Parks Visitor Experiences*
(attainment scale: 1=did not attain, 2=slightly attained, 3=moderately attained, 4=fully attained)

Category	Experience	Experience "very important" to visit (percent)	"Fully attained" the "very important" experience (percent)	Mean attainment for "very important" experience (value 1 to 4)
		All park visitors		
Have a good time				
	Have fun	86%	86%	3.84
Enjoy nature				
	Enjoy natural scenery	81%	86%	3.84
	Enjoy smells and sounds of nature	72%	77%	3.74
Escape personal, social and physical pressures				
	Get away from life's usual demands	76%	86%	3.87
	Get away from crowds	68%	70%	3.55
	Rest mentally	64%	76%	3.68
	Experience silence and quiet	57%	73%	3.56
	Experience solitude	54%	71%	3.55
Be with family and friends				
	Spend time with family	74%	87%	3.88
	Spend time with friends	51%	88%	3.79
Learn and explore				
	Enjoy different experiences from home	67%	82%	3.78
	Explore and discover new things	62%	72%	3.68
	Try new things	43%	77%	3.68
	Learn more about nature	43%	75%	3.71
	Experience a sense of history	36%	82%	3.79
Exercise and feel healthier				
	Be active	65%	87%	3.82
	Feel healthier	53%	82%	3.78
	Get/keep physically fit	52%	81%	3.78
Achieve and be stimulated				
	Experience a sense of adventure	48%	87%	3.76
	Feel exhilarated	44%	80%	3.76
	Feel more self-confident	25%	89%	3.86
	Take some risks	24%	80%	3.65
Rest physically				
	Rest physically	42%	73%	3.70
Be introspective				
	Experience spiritual renewal	30%	79%	3.75
Teach others				
	Introduce children to the outdoors	54%	80%	3.77
	Help family, friends or others develop their develop their outdoor skills	28%	83%	3.78
Use equipment				
	Get a chance to use or test my equipment	18%	81%	3.73
Meet new people				
	Interact with new and varied people	12%	87%	3.75

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

attainment rates (70 to 75% “fully attained”), and these were the same low-attainment experiences in 2001. The experiences are from the escape personal, social and physical pressures category (get away from crowds, experience silence, quiet, and solitude), and the learn and explore category (learn more about nature, and explore and discover new things).

Some experiences have different attainment rates between day users and campers, across generations, and across parties with or without children or teens. Day users, as compared with campers, are more likely to “fully attain” some of the low-attainment experiences related to silence, quiet, solitude, and getting away from crowds.

Older adults (63+), as compared with young adults (42 or younger) have higher attainment rates across a wide array of experiences. To a lesser (but still noticeable) extent the same pattern is found when comparing Baby Boomers (43 to 62) with young adults. For young adults, the “fully attain” rate for “very important” experiences averages some 7 to 11 percent less than the Baby Boomers and older adults across all 28 experiences, and this pattern of differences is evident in all the experience categories. The average “fully attained” for “very important” experiences across all 28 experiences rises from a low of 76 percent for young adults to 82 percent for Baby Boomers to 87 percent for older adults. At the same time, importance ranking of experiences varies little across the generations. The reason for these differences in attainment is not known, but it appears the parks are not performing as well in this regard for the young adults in Generation X and Y.

Adult-only parties, compared to parties traveling with children and/or teens, are more likely to “fully attain” some of the low-attainment experiences related to silence, quiet, solitude, and getting away from crowds.

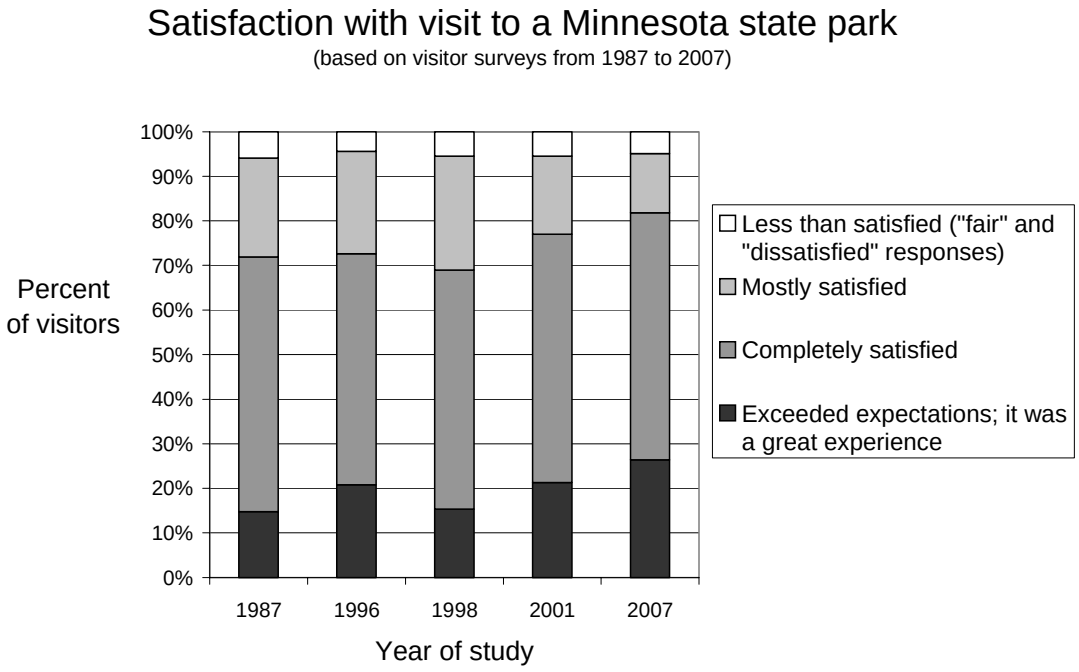
Satisfaction with the park trip

Park visitors were asked two global (or overall) questions on trip satisfaction, and a series of questions on satisfaction with specific items that are important for an enjoyable park visit. After presenting the overall and specific-item results, a final section will cover the association between the two.

a. Overall trip satisfaction

Overall visitor trip satisfaction has been measured in a consistent way for 20 years. The 2007 results have the highest satisfaction on record (Figure 1—Reference 8). For the first time, the two highest satisfaction ratings ("completely satisfied" and "exceeded expectations") surpassed 80 percent of visitor responses, with the less than completely satisfied ratings dropping below 20 percent for the first time.

Figure 1



Overall trip satisfaction is consistently high across type of user (camper, day user), day of week, generation of respondent, frequency of park visit, and type of visiting party (Table 15). Differences by park region tend to exhibit the largest variation, as was the case in the 2001 visitor study. In 2001 and 2007, the Northeast has the highest satisfaction and the Southwest has the lowest or second lowest satisfaction. In 2001, the Metro region had the lowest satisfaction.

The relatively high overall satisfaction ratings—coupled with the correspondingly relatively high satisfaction ratings for specific items described below—are a cornerstone of Minnesota State Parks marketing efforts. From a marketing perspective, trip satisfaction is product quality. Having a highly satisfying park

visit creates repeat customers (visitor retention) and helps recruit new visitors when current visitors share their satisfying experiences through word of mouth, a trusted form of communication.

A second global measure of trip satisfaction is the perceived trend in quality of the park experience. Results indicate that visitors who have been coming to Minnesota State Parks long enough to have a perspective on trends (taken here as 10 or more years) believe the quality has been improving over time (Table 16). Few believe the quality has declined.

This trend in perceived quality by longer-term users is *not* an indication that quality is automatically perceived as improving over time. Two other activities have been measured in a similar way, and both exhibit a perceived decline over time. The two others are the quality of Minnesota sport fishing (Reference 9) and the quality of forest recreation experiences in the Foot Hills forest area (Reference 10).

Table 15

Satisfaction Rating of Visit to the State Park*

(rating scale: 1=exceeded expectations, 2=completely satisfied, 3=mostly satisfied, 4=OK - could have been better, 5=somewhat dissatisfied, 6=very dissatisfied, 7=most dissatisfied; it was a miserable experience)

Breakdown Category	Rating of visit (average)
Overall (all visitors to all parks)	2.0
By type of user:	
Camper	2.0
Day user on trip away from home	1.9
Day user from home	2.0
By day of week:	
Weekends/holidays	2.0
Weekdays	2.0
By region of park:	
Northwest	2.0
Northeast	1.8
Central	1.9
Southwest	2.2
Southeast	2.1
Metro	2.0
By generation of survey respondent:	
Millennial and Gen X (up to age 42)	2.0
Baby Boomers (age 43 to 62)	1.9
Pre Baby Boomers (age 63 and over)	2.0
By frequency of visiting *this* park:	
First visit ever	2.0
One day in last 12 months (not first visit ever)	1.9
Two to five days in last 12 months	2.0
Six or more days in last 12 months	1.9
By type of party group:	
Group contains children (under 12) , but no teens	2.1
Group contains children and/or teens	2.0
Group is adults only (over 18)	1.9

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

Table 16

Over the years you have visited the parks, has the quality of your park experience declined or improved?*

(based on respondents who have been visiting Minnesota state parks for 10 or more years)

Response	Percent of park visitors
Greatly improved	12.4
Improved	50.3
Stayed about the same	25.4
Declined	6.4
Greatly declined	0.3
Don't know	5.2
Total percent	100.0

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

b. Satisfaction with specific items that are important for an enjoyable park visit

To get a more detailed view of trip satisfaction, visitors were asked, first, to rate the importance of 22 items for making their trip enjoyable and, next, to rate their satisfaction with these important items. Campers were asked four additional camping-related items. Satisfaction was only examined for items sufficiently important to the trip (taken here as "very important") to ensure that satisfaction was a crucial matter to the visitor. When an item is of high importance to the visitor, the satisfaction rating provides an indication of the success of the park in providing what visitors most desire in the park outing.

Many of the most important items for an enjoyable visit—identified by the frequency of "very important" responses—are the natural landscape features, including "beauty of the park", "a natural setting for the park", and "lakes and rivers in the park" (Table 17). As important, however, are staffing and maintenance items, which include cleanliness of the parks, protection of natural resources, helpfulness of park staff, and items related to visitor disturbances and sense of safety provide by park staff. Of the recreation opportunity items, "trails in the

Table 17

How important is this item to making your visit to the park enjoyable?*
&
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this item in the park?*

(importance scale: 1=not important, 2=slightly important, 3=moderately important, 4=very important)

Item group	Specific item	*Percent of importance responses "very important"* All users	Campers	*Satisfaction ratings for "very important" responses (percent)* Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Natural landscape								
	Beauty of the park	83		77	21	2	0	0
	A natural setting for the park	82		76	21	3	0	0
	Lakes and rivers in the park	79		64	28	4	3	1
Staffing and maintenance								
	Cleanliness of grounds and facilities	84		67	27	4	1	1
	Well protected natural resources	79		62	32	5	0	0
	Helpfulness of park staff	64		71	23	4	2	0
	Lack of disturbances by other park visitors	62		57	32	7	2	2
	Sense of safety provided by presence of park staff	54		60	27	11	1	0
	Availability of park staff to answer questions	52		68	25	3	2	1
	Someone to greet me when I arrive at the park	28		76	15	6	2	1
Recreation opportunities								
	Trails in the park	79		65	29	4	1	1
	Quality of facilities in the picnic grounds	52		60	26	6	6	1
	Safe places to swim	46		50	30	12	4	4
	Water recreation opportunities (fishing, boating, swimming)	43		59	26	9	4	2
Information and interpretation								
	General informational brochure/maps provided	60		62	31	5	1	1
	Learning about the park using a self-guided trail, brochure, kiosk, or other self-guided means	46		60	32	6	2	1
	Visitor center exhibits, videos, and displays	32		67	19	10	3	1
	Learning about the park from a staff-led program	19		67	19	9	2	3
Facilities and Services								
	Place or accommodations for pets in the park	30		64	21	7	4	2
	Accommodations for large family or social groups	27		64	25	7	4	1
	Availability of convenience items to purchase	18		62	17	12	4	5
	Availability of souvenirs to purchase	17		68	15	13	2	2
Camping (camper responses only)								
	Quality of the campground		89	61	33	4	1	1
	Quality of facilities in campground		84	56	31	8	4	2
	Secluded campsites		67	49	31	9	9	2
	Campground near lake or river		60	65	25	9	1	0

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

park" is the leading item, which is consistent with the leading park activity of hiking. Hiking along trails is the way most visitors appreciate the natural features of the park. Of the information and interpretation items, informational brochures/ maps are judge by 60 percent of visitors as "very important" to an enjoyable park visit. A similar pattern of item importance was found in the 2001 study.

These important items are widely shared across generations and among parties traveling with or without children and/or teens. Some notable differences do exist, however. For the generations, the young adults (42 and younger) judge water recreation opportunities (including swimming) as more important, and they judge learning opportunities and staff-provided items (e.g., helpfulness of park staff) as less important. In contrast, older adults (63+) judge learning opportunities and staff-provided items as more important.

For type of party, those traveling with children and/or teens judge water recreation opportunities (including swimming) as more important, and learning opportunities as less important. The adult-only parties are just the opposite: learning opportunities are more important, and water recreation less important.

Campers judge the "quality of the campground" and "quality of facilities in the campground" as the key items for an enjoyable park outing. Tent and vehicle/trailer campers are in agreement on the relative importance of the camping items. Tent campers judge seclude campsites as somewhat more important (71% "very important" compared with 62% "very important" for vehicle/trailer campers).

The large majority of visitors are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their most important items for an enjoyable park visit (Table 5). Satisfaction is especially high for the top-ranked natural landscape items, and is also high for leading staff items, including cleanliness of the parks, well maintained natural resources, and helpfulness of park staff. Satisfaction is also high for the main recreation opportunity, namely, trails in the park.

Compared with 2001, item satisfaction levels are mostly the same or higher in 2007, which is another indication of the higher satisfaction in 2007, and is consistent with the rise in overall satisfaction from 2001. Nineteen items (including camping items) can be compared between 2001 and 2007. Of these, nine showed increased satisfaction, nine showed the same satisfaction, and 1 showed a decrease (this analysis is based on mean satisfaction values rounded to the first decimal

place). The one that showed a decrease had a wording change between 2001 and 2007, although it is not known if the wording change affected the results.

Satisfaction levels with specific items vary little by generation of the respondent, or by type of party, whether traveling with or without children and/or teens.

A few items—even though the majority of visitors are "satisfied" or "very satisfied"—receive relatively low "very satisfied" percents (some 60% or below). This may be an indication of items in need of attention. Standing out in this way are two staffing and maintenance items ("lack of disturbance by other park visitors" and "sense of safety provided by presence of park staff"), three recreational opportunity items ("safe places to swim", "water recreation opportunities", and "quality of facilities in the picnic grounds"), one information and interpretation item ("learning about the park using a self-guided trail, brochure, kiosk, or other self-guided means"), and two camping items ("secluded campsites" and "quality of facilities in campground"). Similar results were found in 2001 for the lower-satisfaction items.

c. Association between overall satisfaction and satisfaction with specific items that are important for an enjoyable park visit

To examine the presence of any association between specific-item and overall satisfaction, visitors were divided into two groups based on overall trip satisfaction: completely or more satisfied, and mostly or less satisfied. Within these two groups, satisfaction with items judged "very important" were compared.

The two overall satisfaction groups agree strongly on what items are important and what items are unimportant for an enjoyable park visit (this extends to the camping items, too). They disagree on satisfaction with the individual items. The group with lower overall satisfaction is less satisfied across the items, but some individual items and item groups are especially less satisfying. As a group, recreation opportunities has the largest satisfaction gap, followed by facilities and services, and staffing and maintenance (Table 18). The group with the smallest satisfaction gap is the natural landscape. As a rule, the items with large satisfaction gaps are those with relatively low "very satisfied" responses identified in the previous section. For example, in the recreation opportunities group, the largest gaps are for the three items with the lowest "very satisfied" responses ("safe places to swim", "water recreation opportunities", and "quality of facilities in the picnic grounds"); and in the camping group, the largest gaps are for the two items with the lowest

Table 18

Comparison between overall trip satisfaction and individual-item satisfaction for visitors judging an item as "very important" for an enjoyable visit*

(item satisfaction scale: 1=very dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied, 3=neutral, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied)

		---------- *Overall trip satisfaction* ----------		
Item group	Specific item	Higher: Exceeded expectations and completely satisfied	Lower: Mostly satisfied to dissatisfied	Difference: Higher - Lower
Recreation opportunities				
	Water recreation opportunities (fishing, boating, swimming)	4.5	3.6	0.9
	Quality of facilities in the picnic grounds	4.5	3.7	0.8
	Safe places to swim	4.3	3.6	0.7
	Trails in the park	4.7	4.0	0.6
	Average	**4.5**	**3.7**	**0.8**
Facilities and services				
	Availability of convenience items to purchase	4.4	3.4	1.0
	Accommodations for large family or social groups	4.6	3.9	0.7
	Availability of souvenirs to purchase	4.5	4.1	0.4
	Place or accommodations for pets in the park	4.4	4.1	0.3
	Average	**4.5**	**3.9**	**0.6**
Staffing and maintenance				
	Lack of disturbances by other park visitors	4.5	3.9	0.6
	Sense of safety provided by presence of park staff	4.6	4.0	0.6
	Well protected natural resources	4.6	4.1	0.5
	Someone to greet me when I arrive at the park	4.7	4.3	0.5
	Helpfulness of park staff	4.7	4.2	0.5
	Cleanliness of grounds and facilities	4.7	4.2	0.4
	Availability of park staff to answer questions	4.6	4.3	0.3
	Average	**4.6**	**4.1**	**0.5**
Information and interpretation				
	Visitor center exhibits, videos, and displays	4.6	3.9	0.7
	Learning about the park using a self-guided trail, brochure, kiosk, or other self-guided means	4.6	4.1	0.5
	General informational brochure/maps provided	4.6	4.2	0.4
	Learning about the park from a staff-led program	4.5	4.4	0.0
	Average	**4.6**	**4.1**	**0.4**
Natural landscape				
	Lakes and rivers in the park	4.6	4.1	0.5
	A natural setting for the park	4.8	4.5	0.3
	Beauty of the park	4.8	4.5	0.3
	Average	**4.7**	**4.4**	**0.4**
Camping (camper responses only)				
	Quality of facilities in campground	4.5	3.5	1.0
	Secluded campsites	4.3	3.4	1.0
	Quality of the campground	4.6	4.0	0.6
	Campground near lake or river	4.6	4.3	0.3
	Average	**4.5**	**3.8**	**0.7**

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

"very satisfied" responses ("secluded campsites" and "quality of facilities in campground").

Based on this analysis, items identified in the previous section as lower satisfaction—which is an indication of items that may warrant additional attention—also include many of the top candidates for raising overall satisfaction, assuming item satisfaction can be increased.

Perceived value for park fees paid

The perceived value for park fees paid has been evaluated three times since 1996. Over this period, the perceived value of the annual entrance permit fell, although 80 percent of permit buyers still consider the price of the permit a "good" value (Table 19—Reference 8). For the daily entrance permit, the perceived value rose since 1996. The perceived value of camping fees rose between 1996 and 2001, declined since, and are now slightly lower than in 1996. In 2007, some two-thirds of campers (65%) consider camping fees a "good" value.

Table 19

For the money paid for an entrance permit (or camping), do you feel you are getting a good, fair, or poor value from Minnesota State Parks?*

Annual vehicle entrance permit

	Year measured		
Perceived value	1996	2001	2007
Good	85%	82%	80%
Fair	15%	17%	18%
Poor	0%	1%	1%
Don't Know	0%	1%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Daily vehicle entrance permit

	Year measured		
Perceived value	1996	2001	2007
Good	68%	72%	74%
Fair	29%	25%	21%
Poor	2%	2%	4%
Don't know	0%	1%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Camping

	Year measured		
Perceived value	1996	2001	2007
Good	68%	74%	65%
Fair	25%	23%	32%
Poor	4%	3%	2%
Don't know	3%	0%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%

* 1996, 2001 and 2007 Minnesota State Park visitor surveys.

Perceived values for fees paid are associated with the quality of the park experience and park facilities. High quality experiences and facilities, not surprisingly, lead to higher perceived values. For annual permit buyers who rate overall trip satisfaction at its highest ("exceeded expectations"), 90 percent believe the value of the permit is "good" (Table 20). The "good" value rating drops to 81 percent for those "completely satisfied" with the trip, and to 61 percent for those "mostly satisfied" or less satisfied. The same pattern can be seen for the daily entrance permit. For

Table 20

Relationship between perceived value of fees paid for an entrance permit (or camping) and trip satisfaction (or campground quality)*

Annual vehicle entrance permit

		Overall satisfaction with park trip		
Perceived value	All annual permit purchasers (percent)	Exceeded expectations (percent)	Completely satisfied (percent)	Mostly satisfied to dissatisfied (percent)
Good	80%	90%	81%	61%
Fair	18%	8%	17%	36%
Poor	1%	0%	2%	3%
Don't know	1%	2%	1%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Daily vehicle entrance permit

		Overall satisfaction with park trip		
Perceived value	All daily permit purchasers (percent)	Exceeded expectations (percent)	Completely satisfied (percent)	Mostly satisfied to dissatisfied (percent)
Good	74%	82%	83%	36%
Fair	21%	18%	13%	48%
Poor	4%	0%	3%	15%
Don't know	1%	0%	1%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Camping

		Satisfaction with the quality of the campground		
Perceived value	All campers (percent)	Very satisfied (percent)	Satisfied (percent)	Neutral to dissatisfied (percent)
Good	65%	79%	52%	30%
Fair	32%	21%	44%	60%
Poor	2%	0%	2%	10%
Don't know	1%	0%	2%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

* 2007 Minnesota State Park visitor surveys.

camping fees, a “good” perceived value is received from 79 percent of campers who are “very satisfied” with the quality of the campground, from 52 percent who are “satisfied”, and from 30 percent who are “neutral” to “dissatisfied” with campground quality.

A practical reason to measure these perceived values is to assess visitor acceptance of prospective fee increases. Visitors who believe they are receiving a “good” value (benefits outweigh costs) are the most likely to accept at least a small increase, while visitors who believe they are receiving a “poor” value are the least likely. To illustrate this, take an example from a 1996 survey. Park visitors were asked in 1996 if they would continue to buy an annual permit if the price rose from $20 to $23. For permit buyers who thought the current value was “good”, most (83%) indicated they would purchase the higher-price permit. The willingness to purchase the higher price permit dropped to 60 percent for permit buyers who believed the current value was “fair”, and to 22 percent who believed the current value was “poor”.

Obstacles to Minnesota State Parks visitation

What keeps people from visiting state parks? To answer this question, respondents to the household survey were asked to rate the extent to which 30 potential obstacles stand in the way of park visitation. The 30 obstacles were selected from the focus groups, the professional literature, and personal experience.

Individual obstacles were grouped together using principal components analysis, a common form of factor analysis. Most of the obstacles (27 of 30) were grouped through this procedure (Table 21). Primary (or core) obstacles are the most clearly representative of the group (had high factor loadings of .6 or larger), while the secondary obstacles are tied to this group more than any other, but the strength of the ties are not particularly strong (factor loadings of .35 to .58). As a result, the secondary obstacles are less clearly representative of the group, and they are not used in further analyses to represent the group.

To minimize the chance assignment of an obstacle to a group, the preceding analysis was conducted on three different classifications of the survey respondents: respondents who have not been to a Minnesota state park in the last 12 months, respondents who have visited in the last 12 months, and all respondents. To quality as a primary or secondary obstacle in a group, the obstacle had to meet the

Table 21

Obstacles groupings
(based on data from 2007 Minnesota State Parks household survey)

Obstacle group	*Type of obstacle*	Specific obstacle
GROUPS FORMED FROM PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS ANALYSIS		
Lack of time		
	Primary (core) obstacle	
		I don't have enough time.
		I have too many family obligations.
	Secondary obstacle	
		It is difficult to coordinate schedules with family/friends.
		The parks are too far from home.
Competing leisure activities		
	Primary (core) obstacle	
		I like to do other things for recreation.
		My friends/family prefer other activities.
Crowding in the parks		
	Primary (core) obstacle	
		The parks are too crowded.
Lack of information		
	Primary (core) obstacle	
		I lack information on what there is to do at the parks.
		I lack information on what activities are available for my children.
		I lack information on park locations.
	Secondary obstacle	
		Visiting the parks requires too much planning.
		I don't have the right equipment.
		My friends/family skill levels are different from mine.
		I don't know what to bring.
Concerns about the biophysical setting		
	Primary (core) obstacle	
		I dislike bugs.
		The weather is too unpredictable.
Park offerings		
	Primary (core) obstacle	
		The parks don't offer activities I want.
		The parks are closed when I want to visit.
Fears and personal discomfort		
	Primary (core) obstacle	
		I am afraid of getting sick (e.g. Lyme disease, West Nile virus).
		I fear crime/harm from other people.
		I am scared of wild animals.
		I am afraid of getting lost in the park.
		I am afraid of getting hurt.
		I don't feel welcome at the parks.
		I am afraid I would feel uncomfortable based on my race/ethnicity.
	Secondary obstacle	
		I have no one to go with.
		The park facilities are not clean or well maintained.
OBSTACLES UNGROUPED BY PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS ANALYSIS		
Lack of money		
	Primary (core) obstacle	
		I don't have enough money (e.g. equipment, travel, fees).
Lack of outdoor skills		
	Primary (core) obstacle	
		I don't have the right skills for most outdoor activities.
Health problems		
	Primary (core) obstacle	
		I have health problems

preceding criteria in at least two of the three classifications. For the primary obstacles—which are used to represent the group—most (12 of 19) met the criteria in all three classifications.

Three obstacles were ungrouped by the preceding statistical routine, and each became its own group.

Some obstacle groups have a large effect on keeping people from visiting Minnesota State Parks, while others have little effect. The obstacle group "lack of time" has the largest effect, and it is large for low, moderate, high and very high park users (Table 22). The large majority of respondents (78% to 87%) rated at least one of the core obstacles in this group as having a moderate or higher extent on keeping them from visiting state parks. After lack of time, the next highest obstacle group is competing leisure activities, which has a high extent on visitation for low to high park users, and a moderate extent on very high users.

A number of obstacle groups have a moderate extent on park visitation (park crowding, lack of money, lack of information, and concerns about the biophysical setting), and the rest are primarily of low extent, except for a few moderate cases for low park users (moderate extent for low users — lack of outdoor skills, and fears and personal discomfort; low extent for low users — park offerings, and health problems).

Strategies visitors use to overcome obstacles to park visitation

When confronted with an obstacle to park visitation, some people will successfully employ strategies to overcome the obstacle and make the visit, while others will not. A section of the household survey was devoted to potential strategies used to overcome obstacles. Potential strategies came from the focus groups, professional literature, and personal experience.

By knowing the key strategies people use to overcome obstacles, the park system can—when possible—move to ensure that the strategies can be effectively employed. In addition, the key strategies can be communicated to prospective park visitors about how others—facing the same obstacles they do—overcome the obstacles and visit Minnesota State Parks. Perhaps the same strategies would work for them.

Table 22

Obstacles that keep people from visiting Minnesota State Parks

(based on data from 2007 Minnesota State Parks household survey)

Extent of obstacles on visitation (see values below: high=51% or more, moderate=26% to 50%, low=25% or less):

Obstacle group	Low users (not visited since 2002, if ever)	Moderate users (visited since 2003, but not in last 12 months)	High users (visited 1 to 4 times in last 12 months	Very high users (visited 5 or more times in last 12 months)
	Park visitation class			
Lack of time	High	High	High	High
Competing leisure activities	High	High	High	Moderate
Crowding in the parks	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Lack of money	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Lack of information	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Concerns about the biophysical setting	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Lack of outdoor skills	Moderate	Low	Low	Low
Park offerings	Low	Low	Low	Low
Fears and personal discomfort	Moderate	Low	Low	Low
Health problems	Low	Low	Low	Low

Percent of respondents who rank the extent of any primary obstacle in a group as moderate or higher:

Obstacle group	Low users (not visited since 2002, if ever)	Moderate users (visited since 2003, but not in last 12 months)	High users (visited 1 to 4 times in last 12 months	Very high users (visited 5 or more times in last 12 months)
	Park visitation class			
Lack of time	78%	87%	85%	82%
Competing leisure activities	70%	69%	56%	44%
Crowding in the parks	36%	48%	39%	47%
Lack of money	38%	45%	50%	34%
Lack of information	45%	45%	43%	33%
Concerns about the biophysical setting	48%	37%	36%	33%
Lack of outdoor skills	28%	20%	16%	11%
Park offerings	23%	21%	16%	22%
Fears and personal discomfort	31%	18%	20%	15%
Health problems	21%	22%	15%	13%

Strategies are examined for people who: (1) faced a primary obstacle in the group at a moderate or higher extent, and (2) were a park visitor in the last 12 months. These criteria are designed to—as best as possible given the limitations of the survey—find people who faced obstacles and successfully employed strategies to overcome those obstacles and make the park visit.

In this section, strategies are aligned with obstacle groups. Obstacle groups are presented in order from those that have the greatest extent on visitation to those that have the least. Some obstacle groups have no associated strategies in the household survey, and ideas for these are discussed when the group discussed below (included here are lack of information, park offerings, and health problems).

a. Lack of time (high obstacle to park visitation)

Some of the leading strategies to overcome this obstacle are largely limited to personal initiative ("try to make outdoor recreation a priority", and "push myself harder to get out and do something"), but others can be facilitated from the outside. In this latter group are "try to plan ahead for park visits" and "take more short trips to the parks". The former can be facilitated by ensuring prospective visitors have ready access to all the information they require for trip planning, while the latter can be facilitated by communicating the wide distribution of parks in the state. In the focus groups, it was instructive to view the surprise of many current state visitors when shown the distribution of parks in the state. These visitors were unaware that parks were so widely distributed.

Lack of time (responses of park users in the last 12 months who experienced an obstacle in this group at a moderate or higher extent)

Strategy to overcome obstacles	Mean Frequency* (value 1 to 5)	*Frequency of using strategy to overcome obstacles* Never (=1) (percent)	Rarely (=2) (percent)	Sometimes(=3) (percent)	Regularly(=4) (percent)	Very often (=5) (percent)	Don't know (percent)	Total (percent)
● try to make outdoor recreation a priority	3.4	2%	13%	43%	19%	20%	3%	100%
● try to plan ahead for the park visits	3.2	5%	20%	36%	23%	15%	2%	100%
● take more short trips to the parks	3.1	4%	23%	42%	18%	10%	2%	100%
● push myself harder to get out and do something	2.9	7%	18%	55%	15%	3%	2%	100%
● get up earlier or stay up later to have more time to visit the parks	2.7	10%	35%	33%	12%	7%	2%	100%
● cut short other activities to make more time for park visits	2.4	14%	42%	36%	4%	1%	3%	100%

* Excludes don't know responses

b. Competing leisure activities (mostly a high obstacle to park visitation)

The top strategy is to choose activities that all party members can participate in. To facilitate this, ready access to information on park activities can be provided along with, perhaps, recommendations for different types of groups (e.g., groups with children). In the focus groups, many of the participants who do not visit parks—even if they were regular users of the outdoors—had little awareness of what their group could do in the parks. They were worried about having nothing to do, or not having something to do for a particular member of their group, many times a child.

Competing leisure activities (responses of park users in the last 12 months who experienced an obstacle in this group at a moderate or higher extent)

Strategy to overcome obstacles	Mean Frequency* (value 1 to 5)	Never (=1) (percent)	Rarely (=2) (percent)	Sometimes(=3) (percent)	Regularly(=4) (percent)	Very often (=5) (percent)	Don't know (percent)	Total (percent)
		Frequency of using strategy to overcome obstacles						
● choose activities that all of us can participate in as a family	3.3	12%	7%	29%	36%	13%	3%	100%
● try to find people with similar interests	2.8	18%	19%	35%	19%	8%	1%	100%
● try to find people to recreate with	2.8	18%	15%	42%	14%	9%	1%	100%
● go alone to if I don't have someone to go with	2.3	35%	23%	26%	8%	6%	1%	100%

* Excludes don't know responses

c. Crowding in the parks (moderate obstacle to park visitation)

Two primary strategies are used: “recreate at times when the parks are less busy”, and “go to different places in the parks”. Both of these can be facilitated with information on times of predictable lower use (e.g., shoulder seasons, weekdays, mornings) and by delineating park locations that are largely backcountry, where most visitors do not travel.

Crowding in the parks (responses of park users in the last 12 months who experienced an obstacle in this group at a moderate or higher extent)

Strategy to overcome obstacles	Mean Frequency* (value 1 to 5)	Never (=1) (percent)	Rarely (=2) (percent)	Sometimes(=3) (percent)	Regularly(=4) (percent)	Very often (=5) (percent)	Don't know (percent)	Total (percent)
		Frequency of using strategy to overcome obstacles						
● recreate at times when parks are less busy	3.4	6%	8%	39%	21%	20%	6%	100%
● go to different places within a park	3.4	7%	11%	31%	26%	19%	6%	100%
● go to different parks	2.6	21%	20%	31%	11%	8%	10%	100%

* Excludes don't know responses

d. Lack of money (moderate obstacle to park visitation)

The top strategies are: “participate in activities that are inexpensive or free”, and “improvise with equipment I have”. The latter would appear to be difficult to facilitate from the outside. The former might be facilitated through communication of the fact that—once you pay to get into the park—most everything else there free or inexpensive.

Lack of money (responses of park users in the last 12 months who experienced an obstacle in this group at a moderate or higher extent)

Strategy to overcome obstacles	Mean Frequency* (value 1 to 5)	*Frequency of using strategy to overcome obstacles* Never (=1) (percent)	Rarely (=2) (percent)	Sometimes(=3) (percent)	Regularly(=4) (percent)	Very often (=5) (percent)	Don't know (percent)	Total (percent)
● participate in activities that are inexpensive or free	3.5	10%	5%	30%	32%	21%	2%	100%
● improvise with equipment I have	3.1	14%	13%	31%	30%	9%	2%	100%
● share rides with others	2.6	27%	18%	30%	12%	12%	2%	100%
● set aside or budget money for park visits	2.4	34%	20%	24%	10%	9%	2%	100%
● borrow/rent equipment instead of buying it	2.3	37%	16%	28%	16%	3%	0%	100%

* Excludes don't know responses

e. Lack of information (moderate obstacle to park visitation)

No strategies are paired with this obstacle in the household survey. However, from the primary obstacles in this group, the type of information that prospective visitors lack is clear. Providing ready access to these types of information would be the tack to take. The primary obstacles were: lack of information on what there is to do in the park, what activities are available for my children, and park locations. Information on these same topics has been suggested above as ways to negotiate other obstacles. Additional information items play a role in overcoming other obstacles, as well.

f. Concerns about the biophysical setting (moderate obstacle to park visitation)

The strategies here are basically “be prepared”: wear appropriate clothing, use bug spray and sun screen. These strategies could be addressed as part of trip planning, which was a general strategy under the lack of time obstacle.

Concerns about the biophysical setting (responses of park users in the last 12 months who experienced an obstacle in this group at a moderate or higher extent)

Strategy to overcome obstacles	Mean Frequency* (value 1 to 5)	Never (=1) (percent)	Rarely (=2) (percent)	Sometimes(=3) (percent)	Regularly(=4) (percent)	Very often (=5) (percent)	Don't know (percent)	Total (percent)
		Frequency of using strategy to overcome obstacles						
● wear appropriate clothing	4.2	3%	1%	10%	49%	37%	0%	100%
● use bug spray	3.9	4%	5%	13%	48%	29%	0%	100%
● use sun screen	3.7	8%	6%	19%	37%	29%	0%	100%

* Excludes don't know responses

g. Lack of outdoor skills (moderate obstable for low users; low obstacle for other users)

None of the strategies connected to this obstacle is used with any frequency. Thus, there are no suggestions from the survey on this topic. For all but the most infrequent park visitor, this obstacle had a low effect on visitation.

Lack of outdoor skills (responses of park users in the last 12 months who experienced an obstacle in this group at a moderate or higher extent)

Strategy to overcome obstacles	Mean Frequency* (value 1 to 5)	Never (=1) (percent)	Rarely (=2) (percent)	Sometimes(=3) (percent)	Regularly(=4) (percent)	Very often (=5) (percent)	Don't know (percent)	Total (percent)
		Frequency of using strategy to overcome obstacles						
● try to improve my outdoor skills	2.3	30%	26%	28%	12%	3%	1%	100%
● go with friends/family who help me learn new outdoor skills	2.1	43%	18%	22%	11%	3%	3%	100%
● take lessons/classes to learn outdoor skills	2.0	47%	24%	13%	5%	7%	3%	100%

* Excludes don't know responses

h. Park offerings (low obstacle to park visitation)

No strategies are paired with this obstacle in the household survey. Based on the primary obstacles in this group, there may be little that can be done from the outside, except to ensure people have accurate information related to the primary obstacles. The primary obstacles are “the parks don’t offer activities I want” and “the parks are closed when I want to visit”.

i. Fears and personal discomfort (moderate obstable for low users; low obstacle for other users)

The top strategies involve taking steps to be safe and using orientation devices. These strategies do not address the full range of obstacles in this group (which includes fear of getting sick or getting hurt, and not feeling welcome or comfortable in the park), but are relevant to other obstacles in the group (fear harm from others, and afraid of getting lost in the park). To facilitate the full range of obstacles in this group would take some further work and/or creative thinking.

Fears and personal discomfort (responses of park users in the last 12 months who experienced an obstacle in this group at a moderate or higher extent)

Strategy to overcome obstacles	Mean Frequency* (value 1 to 5)	Never (=1) (percent)	Rarely (=2) (percent)	Sometimes(=3) (percent)	Regularly(=4) (percent)	Very often (=5) (percent)	Don't know (percent)	Total (percent)
		Frequency of using strategy to overcome obstacles						
● take steps to be safe (e.g. camp near others, take dog, carry pepper spray)	2.9	21%	17%	23%	25%	11%	3%	100%
● use orientation devices	2.8	20%	14%	42%	16%	8%	0%	100%
● talk to park personnel to resolve issues with other visitors	2.1	42%	20%	15%	9%	5%	9%	100%

* Excludes don't know responses

j. Health problems (low obstacle to park visitation)

No strategies are paired with this obstacle in the household survey. The survey did not further define what was meant by "I have health problems", so facilitating this issue would take further work. In other studies (e.g., recreational boating studies), many of the health problems involved mobility impairments, including difficulty walking, a bad back and poor balance. If the same is true here (and it must be at least partly true), then the obstacle could be facilitated by providing information on easily accessible offerings in the park, including opportunities for driving tours.

Changes current and prospective visitors would like to see in park facilities, services, and programs

As part of the visitor survey, visitors were asked about their support or opposition to some potential changes in park facilities, services, and policies. The household survey queried both prospective and current visitors about park offerings that might influence their decision to visit a state park. Together, the two efforts provide broad direction for the park system. The visitor survey results are discussed first, followed by the results from the household survey.

a. State park changes visitors support or oppose (responses of all visitors)

All park visitors were asked about 24 possible changes, while campers were asked about nine camping-related changes.

Of the 24 possible changes, nine are largely supported by all park visitors (mean support/opposition above 3.5)(see Table 23). The most supported change is to add more hiking trails. As noted previously, hiking is the primary activity in the parks and this is another reflection of its importance. Visitors also largely support adding

Table 23

How much do you support or oppose each possible change being made for Minnesota State Parks?*

(oppose/support scale: 1=strongly oppose, 2=mildly oppose, 3=neither oppose nor support, 4=mildly support, 5=strongly support)

Possible change	Average "oppose/support" response**	*Oppose/support response*						
		Strongly support (percent)	Mildly support (percent)	Neither oppose nor support (percent)	Mildly oppose (percent)	Strongly oppose (percent)	Don't know (percent)	Total (percent)
Changes visitors largely support								
● Provide more hiking opportunities.	4.1	38%	37%	20%	1%	1%	3%	100%
● Provide more self-guided learning opportunities and exhibits.	4.0	28%	39%	27%	1%	0%	5%	100%
● Provide the opportunity to take virtual tours of the parks on the State Park website (i.e., see what the park looks like and has to offer).	3.9	29%	34%	27%	4%	2%	4%	100%
● Provide more programs for children in the parks.	3.7	19%	36%	35%	2%	1%	6%	100%
● Do not expand the amount of development in state parks in order to protect remaining resources.	3.7	31%	25%	24%	7%	6%	6%	100%
● Provide more staff-led learning opportunities.	3.7	23%	25%	42%	2%	1%	7%	100%
● Provide more accommodations for people with mobility impairments.	3.7	20%	32%	36%	3%	2%	6%	100%
● Provide the opportunity to sign-up for emails on park happenings.	3.7	14%	39%	40%	1%	1%	4%	100%
Changes that receive moderate support and low opposition from visitors								
● Provide additional rustic camper cabins.	3.5	14%	29%	38%	6%	4%	8%	100%
● Provide more special events in the parks.	3.4	10%	27%	47%	7%	3%	6%	100%
Changes visitors are ambivalent about								
● Provide the opportunity for me to share and read stories and pictures about my park experiences on the State Park website.	3.3	10%	21%	52%	6%	3%	7%	100%
● Provide the opportunity to download GPS waypoints for locations within parks.	3.3	9%	22%	51%	3%	4%	10%	100%
● Provide the opportunity to download podcasts of park learning opportunities.	3.3	8%	22%	55%	3%	3%	8%	100%
● Provide more facilities for multi-family or group gatherings or camping.	3.2	7%	23%	51%	9%	4%	6%	100%
● Provide more opportunities to do geocaching in the parks.	3.2	6%	15%	51%	5%	4%	19%	100%
● Provide more horse trails.	2.8	4%	7%	52%	14%	10%	12%	100%
Changes that receive sizable support and opposition from visitors								
● Provide cell phone coverage near park visitor centers and campgrounds.	3.3	21%	29%	23%	8%	15%	3%	100%
● Provide more paved trails.	3.3	16%	26%	32%	12%	9%	6%	100%
● Develop more land in state parks for recreation use.	3.2	18%	23%	24%	17%	13%	5%	100%
● Provide more opportunities to ride mountain bikes.	3.1	11%	24%	37%	10%	13%	5%	100%
● Provide wireless internet access near park visitor centers and campgrounds.	2.7	11%	14%	31%	16%	24%	4%	100%
Changes visitors largely oppose								
● Provide more hunting opportunities.	2.4	5%	8%	34%	18%	27%	8%	100%
● Eliminate park entrance fees (i.e., drop annual and daily entrance permits).	2.4	8%	10%	24%	20%	34%	3%	100%
● Provide more opportunities to ride off-highway vehicles (e.g., ATVs).	2.0	5%	8%	15%	16%	51%	3%	100%

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

** Average value ignores "don't know" response

more opportunities to learn (self-guided and staff-led), and more programs for children. Two technology items are supported: virtual park tours, and opportunities to sign up for emails on park happenings. The service item of "provide more accommodations for people with mobility impairments" is largely supported by all visitors. The remaining item in this top-support group is to not expand the amount of development in the park in order to protect remaining resources. Although this latter item appears to be at odds with other visitor-supported items (e.g., more hiking trails, additional cabins), it can be interpreted as "add as little development as possible, and if you expand development, do it carefully".

The next group of changes is those with moderate support and low opposition, and includes more camper cabins and special events. These would be supported by those who want them, and opposed by few.

Visitors are ambivalent about a number of the possible changes. For these changes, a majority of visitors "neither support nor oppose" the change, and none is skewed strongly to either support or opposition. In this group are a number of technology items (sharing experiences on a website, downloading GPS locations, geocaching opportunities, and downloading podcasts). Also, included here are more facilities for multi-family or group gatherings, and more horse trails.

The next group of changes is comprised of potential polarizing changes. The group is characterized by sizable support and oppose contingents (each over 20%), with comparable percents in the middle ("neither support nor oppose"). Included here are changes that would make the park experience less "natural" and more "developed" in the eyes of some visitors, while others views them as added amenities: provide cell phone coverage, provide internet access, develop more park land for recreation, provide more paved trails, and provide more mountain biking opportunities. In the focus groups, participants who currently visit Minnesota State Parks responded positively and negatively to some of these changes. One participant was particularly adamant on the negative side, and told the park staff behind the one-way mirror to leave the parks she enjoys alone. In short, these are changes that should be made carefully, if or when they are made.

The last group comprises changes visitors largely oppose (mean support/opposition below 2.5). Included here are more hunting opportunities and more off-highway vehicle opportunities, which is strongly opposed by a majority of park visitors. Also here is the elimination of park entrance fees, which is opposed by a majority of visitors (54%). The survey did not ask people why they supported or opposed

entrance fees, but there are two likely reasons they support fees: paying a park fee gives the visitor a sense of personal ownership in park they enjoy visiting, which people like having; and an entrance fees provides comfort to visitors that the park is "managed" and potential disruptive individuals will be controlled. Enforcement people like entrance fees, because they are known to filter out potential troublemakers, who tend to go to places that are free and unmanaged.

The preceding pattern of support/opposition to changes is widely shared across user types (day users, campers), generations, and parties with or without children and/or teens. The only notable differences were between young (under 43) and older adults (63+), and the differences are modest in size. Older adults give more support to paved trails, staff-led learning opportunities, and accommodations for people with mobility impairments. Younger adults give more support to opportunities to ride mountain bikes, horse trails, and opportunities to do geocaching. Older adults oppose more mountain biking opportunities. Younger adults are less opposed—although they still oppose these changes—than older adults to off-highway vehicle opportunities and the elimination of park entrance fees.

b. Park camping changes that campers support or oppose

Campers were asked about nine camping-related changes in the parks; some of these changes were discussed above for all park visitors, but are included here because they have a direct impact on camping. Responses are broken out between tent and RV/trailer campers, because the two groups are frequently not in agreement on possible changes. Tent campers comprise about half of all Minnesota state park campers, and most of the rest are RV/trailer campers.

Tent campers and RV/trailer campers are together on supporting more spacing between campsites and opposing the elimination on non-reservable campsites (Table 24).

Tenters support and RV/trailer campers are ambivalent about a number of changes: providing separate campsites for tent and vehicle campers, providing more walk-in/cart-in campsites, and providing additional rustic camper cabins.

The next group contains changes RV/trailer campers support and tent campers are polarized, with sizable portions that support and oppose the change: more electrical hook-ups, and providing cell phone coverage near park visitor center and campgrounds.

Table 24

How much do you support or oppose each possible change being made for Minnesota State Parks?*

(oppose/support scale: 1=strongly oppose, 2=mildly oppose, 3=neither oppose nor support, 4=mildly support, 5=strongly support)

Possible change	Average "oppose/support" response**	*Oppose/support response* Strongly support (percent)	Mildly support (percent)	Neither oppose nor support (percent)	Mildly oppose (percent)	Strongly oppose (percent)	Don't know (percent)	Total (percent)
Changes all campers support								
● Provide more spacing between campsites.								
All campers	4.3	49%	30%	16%	2%	1%	2%	100%
Tent campers	4.3	54%	26%	15%	2%	1%	2%	100%
RV and trailer campers	4.2	44%	33%	19%	2%	0%	2%	100%
Changes all campers oppose								
● Eliminate non-reservable campsites and make all sites reservable.								
All campers	2.2	7%	11%	17%	20%	42%	2%	100%
Tent campers	2.3	9%	11%	17%	22%	38%	2%	100%
RV and trailer campers	2.1	6%	13%	17%	14%	48%	2%	100%
Changes tent campers support and RV/trailer campers are ambivalent								
● Provide separate campgrounds for tent and vehicle campers.								
All campers	3.4	21%	19%	45%	7%	6%	2%	100%
Tent campers	3.7	30%	24%	35%	3%	5%	3%	100%
RV and trailer campers	3.1	10%	15%	54%	11%	8%	1%	100%
● Provide more walk-in/cart-in campsites.								
All campers	3.5	18%	20%	49%	5%	1%	7%	100%
Tent campers	3.7	27%	24%	37%	5%	1%	6%	100%
RV and trailer campers	3.3	8%	17%	61%	5%	1%	9%	100%
● Provide additional rustic camper cabins.								
All campers	3.5	17%	25%	43%	7%	3%	4%	100%
Tent campers	3.6	18%	30%	39%	5%	2%	5%	100%
RV and trailer campers	3.3	12%	21%	49%	11%	4%	3%	100%
Changes RV/trailer campers support and tent campers have sizable portions that support and oppose								
● Provide more electrical hook-ups for campers.								
All campers	3.5	29%	19%	32%	10%	7%	2%	100%
Tent campers	2.9	12%	10%	44%	18%	12%	3%	100%
RV and trailer campers	4.2	48%	30%	18%	2%	2%	1%	100%
● Provide cell phone coverage near park visitor centers and campgrounds.								
All campers	3.5	28%	27%	23%	8%	12%	1%	100%
Tent campers	3.3	22%	25%	26%	11%	15%	1%	100%
RV and trailer campers	3.7	35%	27%	21%	5%	11%	1%	100%
Changes RV/trailer and tent campers have sizable portions that support and oppose								
● Provide wireless internet access near park visitor centers and campgrounds.								
All campers	2.8	15%	13%	30%	16%	24%	1%	100%
Tent campers	2.5	10%	12%	26%	19%	32%	1%	100%
RV and trailer campers	3.1	20%	15%	35%	12%	17%	2%	100%
Changes RV/trailer campers support and tent campers oppose								
● Provide more campsites for motorhomes and similar large rigs.								
All campers	2.9	13%	15%	34%	20%	17%	2%	100%
Tent campers	2.3	2%	7%	37%	24%	27%	2%	100%
RV and trailer campers	3.5	26%	24%	27%	14%	7%	1%	100%

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks visitor survey.

* Average value ignores "don't know" response

The next group is a change that is polarizing for both tent and RV/trailer campers, with sizable portions that support and oppose the change: provide wireless internet access near park visitor center and campgrounds. As with other potentially polarizing changes, this change should be made carefully, if or when it is made.

The last group has a change that RV/trailer campers support and tent campers oppose: providing more campsites for motorhomes and similar large rigs.

c. Park offerings that might attract more visitors

In the household survey, current and prospective park visitors were asked about programs, services, and facilities that might make them more likely to visit parks. This question was preceded in the survey by a question on interest in visiting parks more or at all. Only those with an interest in visiting parks are included in the analysis of park offerings, because they are ones with the highest potential to visit a park.

Minnesotans who have not visited a state park in the last five years, or ever, express little interest in visiting (38% had an interest)(see Table 25). Those that have been to a park in the last five years, but not in the last 12 months, have a much higher interest in visiting (71%). And those that have visited in the last 12 months have the greatest interest in visiting parks more (86% to 96%).

Table 25

Do you have any interest in visiting Minnesota State Parks at all or visiting them more often?*

	Frequency of Minnesota State Parks visitation			
Response	Have not visited since 2002, if ever (percent)	Have visited since 2002, but not in last 12 months (percent)	Visited 1 to 4 times in last 12 months (percent)	Visited 5 or more times in last 12 months (percent)
"yes"	38%	71%	86%	96%
"no"	23%	7%	2%	0%
"don't know"	39%	22%	12%	4%
Total percent	100%	100%	100%	100%

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks household survey.

If a respondent express an interest in visiting parks more, they were included in the analysis of park offerings that might make them want to visit more. The results show that all respondents—including those who have and have not visited in the last year—have a lot in common. They are looking for "high service" items like programs for children, programs on outdoor skills, special events, and equipment rental (Table 26). Virtual tours is an item of interest, too, as is facilities for group gatherings, and camper cabins. Interestingly, aside from the virtual tours, the other technology items have little appeal (wireless internet, download GPS locations,

Table 26

I might visit Minnesota State Parks at all or more often if . . . *
(only tabulated for those with an interest in visiting parks at all or more often)

Note: Table entries are mean values from the response scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=mildly disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=mildly agree, 5=strongly agree ("don't know" responses are ignored in the computation of the mean)

	Frequency of Minnesota State Parks visitation			
Item	Have not visited since 2002, if ever (percent)	Have visited since 2002, but not in last 12 months (percent)	Visited 1 to 4 times in last 12 months (percent)	Visited 5 or more times in last 12 months (percent)
● . . . *(for households with children under 13) I* could find park programs for my child/children	4.1	3.3	3.6	3.9
● . . . I could attend special events in the park	3.6	3.4	3.4	3.6
● . . . the park had equipment I could us or rent	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.7
● . . . I had the opportunity to take virtual tours of the park on a website	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.4
● . . . I had the opportunity to overnight in a rustic camper cabin	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.6
● . . . I could attend programs to develop outdoor skills	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.4
● . . . the park had facilities for multi-families or group gatherings or camping	3.2	3.4	3.3	3.2
● . . . I did not have to pay an entrance fee to get into the park	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.0
● . . . I was notified by email about park programs and special events	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.2
● . . . I had cell phone coverage near park visitor centers and campground	3.0	2.8	3.1	3.0
● . . . the parks had better places or accommodations for pets	3.1	2.7	2.8	3.0
● . . . I had the opportunity to do geocaching in the parks	2.8	2.8	2.5	2.8
● . . . I had the opportunity to download GPS waypoints for locations within parks	2.8	2.6	2.7	2.7
● . . . I had the opportunity to download podcasts of park learning opportunities	2.7	2.4	2.7	2.7
● . . . I had wireless internet access near park visitor centers and campgrounds	2.5	2.3	2.3	2.4

* 2007 Minnesota State Parks household survey.

download pod casts, opportunity to geocache). These same technology items are included in the visitor survey and results are similar. Visitors are ambivalent about them (close to "neither support nor oppose" on average), although the wireless internet change was polarizing, with sizable portions of visitors supporting and opposing the change.

Key findings for young adults and families with children

From the outset, a focus of this study was on young adults and families with children. They are the driving force behind the per-capita declines in Minnesota state park use and other forms of nature-based recreation. And, of course, they are the future of these activities. Not getting introduced to parks at a young age may well lead to less park use as an adult.

In this section, all of the major findings that make young adults and young families distinctive are drawn together. The collection of findings can provide direction on how to better reach and serve these important markets.

a. Information

Young adults (under 43—Generation X and Y) depend on websites, especially the Minnesota DNR website. The Minnesota DNR website is the leading information source for young adults, eclipsing word of mouth. The Minnesota DNR website needs to be fully capable of meeting the manifold information needs of young adults.

b. Activities and facilities

Parties with children are much more likely than adult-only parties to swim (especially), picnic, and fish. Swimming and picnicking are the second and third most important activities for parties with children (hiking/walking is the leading activity).

Visitor satisfaction with swimming, picnicking, and general water-recreation opportunities is relatively low (satisfaction ratings from visitors who identified the item as "very important" for an enjoyable park trip). Swimming receives the lowest satisfaction of the 22 non-camping facility, service, and program items.

Tent camping is preferred by young adults (under 43), who use tents nearly twice as frequently as recreation vehicles or trailers (64% versus 33%, respectively). And tent campers want some particular things: separate campgrounds for tent and vehicle campers, more walk-in/cart-in campsites, and more spacing between sites (vehicle campers want this last item, too).

Camper satisfaction with two important items (quality of facilities in campground, and secluded campsites) is relatively low, and may be in need of some type of attention (satisfaction ratings from campers who identified the item as "very important" for an enjoyable park trip). Both tent and non-tent campers rated these two items relatively low.

c. Motivations

Young adults want more than other visitors to achieve and be stimulated, including taking risks, being active, feeling exhilarated, and being adventurous. Park opportunities that offer these experiences could be marketed to young adults.

Parties with children place greater importance than other visitors on the children and the family: introduce children to the outdoors; spend time with family; and help family, friends and others develop outdoor skills. Park opportunities that offer these experiences could be marketed to families with children. This topic dovetails nicely with the next topic on programs.

d. Programs

In the household survey, current and prospective park visitors were asked about programs, services, and facilities that might make them more likely to visit parks. The results indicate that people are looking for "high service" items like programs for children, programs on outdoor skills, special events, and equipment rental. For those with children under 13 at home, park programs for children were ranked number one by most (three of four) visitation-frequency groups.

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