

State Park Visitor Use and Satisfaction Study Overview

Internal team members

Brad Henley, Ben Vinci, Craig Preston, Jeff Thompson, John Carson, Kirstin Copeland, Krista Heiner, Mike Quartuch, Mitch Martin, Rob White, Roy McBride, Todd Farrow, Tom Waters, Torrey Davis, and Windi Padia

Background

Each year, millions of people visit Colorado's state parks. However, limited information exists about why people visit them, what they do while they are there, how long they stay, and the degree to which they are satisfied with their experiences. These data are critical to developing programs, communication efforts, and recreation opportunities that resonate with state park users.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of this effort is to develop and begin pilot testing a new research strategy for measuring state park visitor use, experiences, satisfaction, and overall economic contribution at all 41 state parks. Three specific objectives will guide this inquiry:

1. To provide a detailed description of state park visitors, including their recreation preferences, motivations, experiences, satisfaction and economic contribution, at a subset of state parks each year for 5 years.
2. To understand how motivations, attitudes and expectations of state park visitors influence user satisfaction.
3. To compare the overall efficacy of data collection techniques based on response rate and cost, with the overall goal of developing a long-term planning framework to enable CPW staff to collect visitor use and satisfaction data at all state parks over a 5-year period.

Research Methods

A variety of data collection techniques could be used to address both objectives. Three general approaches include:

- Intercept survey: Brief face-to-face survey with structured interview questions
- Online survey: Questionnaires are created via online platform such as SurveyMonkey and accessed by a web link to the survey instrument
- Mail-back survey: Questionnaires are printed, usually in booklet form, and handed out to the public, usually at park entrances

Pilot State Park Survey Locations

The pilot study will be conducted at eight state parks (four groups of two comparable parks) over a period of 12 months. Several criteria were used to select the eight state parks, including visitation, acreage, and campsite availability (Table 1). The parks selected in each group are similar across these criteria, allowing for a comparison of data collection techniques. The groups of parks differ across these criteria, allowing for a comparison of data collection techniques in various types of state parks.

Table 1: Pilot Study Sites

	Groups 1-2 (<150,000)		Groups 3-4 (150,000-350,000)		Groups 5-6 (351,000-500,000)		Groups 7-8 (>500,000)	
State Park	Rox-borough	Lory	Cheyenne Mountain	Stage-coach	Eldorado Canyon	Ridgway	Golden Gate Canyon	AHRA
Visitation (FY 2017)	143,000	148,000	193,000	179,000	384,000	412,000	866,000	866,000
Data Collection Technique	Mail-back survey	Intercept w/ online follow-up survey	Intercept w/ online follow-up survey	Mail-back survey	Intercept w/ online follow-up survey	Mail-back survey	Intercept w/ online follow-up survey	Mail-back survey

Pilot Study Timeline & Sampling Design

The field data collection for this project will span one year (April 2019 – March 2020). A detailed timeline can be found in the full study proposal attached.

To adequately sample the visitors at each state park, a total sample of 1,000 visitors is needed. This estimate assumes a minimum 20% response rate. Park visitation, use, and to a lesser degree visitor satisfaction, differ depending on the time of year. As such, a seasonal sampling schedule is required (Table 2). Table 2 highlights the number of visitors that need to be sampled at each park in each season, using both data collection techniques.

Table 3: Seasonal sampling schedule

Season	%	Technique A: Intercept (“n”)	Technique B: Mail-back (“n”)
Summer (May-Aug)	58%	580	580
Fall (Sep-Oct)	16%	160	160
Winter (Nov-Feb)	14%	140	140
Spring (Mar-Apr)	12%	120	120

*Sample size based on 1,000 total.

Future Considerations

Although this pilot focuses on testing new research strategies and data collection methods, future considerations will include incorporating IPAWS data and aligning the survey schedule as much as possible with the schedule for updating state park management plans. Please find the full study proposal attached for more details.