



Recreation Research Update



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Customer Service and Fees at Mono Basin Scenic Area

Visitor use patterns, customer service perceptions, and attitudes toward recreation user fees at the Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center (VC) and related sites were studied. The Mono Basin Scenic Area (MBSA) is located in east central California. The VC and other lakeside recreation sites are run as part of a multi-agency partnership among the Forest Service, California State Parks and a non-governmental agency, the Mono Lake Committee. Fees are charged at the VC and one lakeshore site, South Tufa, (ST). Other locations on the lake had no entrance fees.

A total of 598 interviews were completed at sites within the MBSA during the summer of 1998. A follow-up mail survey was sent to 436, and responses were received from 270 individuals (61.7% response rate).

Key findings about the customer service and fee related issues are reported, including a comparison between those contacted at the visitor center and those contacted at other MBSA sites. The report has three main sections: visitor profile, customer service and fee attitudes/preferences.

Visitor Profile: Most of the respondents at both the Visitor Center (68%) and all lakeshore sites (79%) reported that they had never been to the site before. Also, most respondents from both locations reported that their visit was a side trip en route to another destination (84%).

One-third of the VC patrons also visited ST during their trip, whereas nearly half (45%) of respondents interviewed at other sites around Mono Lake said they were also visiting the VC. Respondents from the VC spent approximately 40 minutes per visit. Respondents from other sites spent about 54 minutes per visit at the site.

Customer Service: Customer service attributes rated most important by respondents included: staff knowledge and ability to answer questions, staff friendliness and courtesy, and information about the natural and cultural history of the area.

Attributes receiving the highest satisfaction ratings included: staff friendliness and courtesy, appearance and maintenance of the area, and safety and security at the area. At the VC, satisfaction ratings exceeded the corresponding importance ratings for all customer service attributes examined.

At ST, two service attributes (roadside signs and directions and bathroom cleanliness) received higher importance ratings than their corresponding satisfaction scores. At other MBSA sites, many customer service attributes received higher importance ratings than their corresponding satisfaction scores, reflecting the lower level of facilities and services offered at these sites.

Fee attitudes/preferences: Most respondents interviewed at both the VC (86%) and other sites (85%) reported that they were unaware of the MBSA Fee Program prior to their arrival. Also, 67% of those contacted at VC and 31% at ST reported not paying an entrance fee. Most of these did so because they had already paid (e.g. Golden Eagle, Age, Access Pass) or did not try to enter the VC.

Thus, non-compliance is relatively small even though the fee may have been unanticipated. However, 32% of the VC respondents indicated they did not want to pay a fee to enter the building. Most of these were unwilling because their visit was simply a bathroom or in-transit stop (72%).

The vast majority of respondents at all sites felt all of the current types of entrance passes were priced "about right." When asked how the fee revenue should be spent, each suggested area of expenditure received strong support. The highest support was shown for the "Restoration of wildlife, stream, and lake habitat," with about two-thirds (66%) voicing "strong support." Next came "Resource protection from human impact" (51%) and "Educational programs, exhibits, and written materials" (51%).

Summary: Overall these results suggest that the MBSA VC functions best as a free site in conjunction with related fee sites, and that many people casually drop by en route rather than seek it out as a destination. Often it is a first-time visit, suggesting a particular user segment. Customer service levels and experiences received are at a high level. Staff interactions are especially important. The results also suggest that the fee program is well accepted in principle but suffers from a lack of general knowledge about the need to charge and the good that can result. Resource protection expenditures of fee revenues are rated above improvements in recreational experiences, but both receive strong support.

For more information please contact Jim Absher at jabsher@fs.fed.us, or call (909) 680-1559.

Carrying and Social Capacity in the Wildland Urban Interface

Urban National Forests are those located within 1-hour drive of one million or more people. Large numbers of recreationists are commonplace at interface sites. At some sites there are so many visitors that sites are closed to additional visitors who were hoping to recreate at those sites. One area, located on the Angeles National Forest in southern California, is frequently closed to additional visitation because of the crowded conditions. Debbie Chavez, in cooperation with Marcia Marx, California State University at San Bernardino, collected data from visitors to the Angeles National Forest site in order to learn more about recreation patterns and the preferences of visitors for handling crowded conditions. The site studied was the San Gabriel Canyon. The Canyon is situated off Highway 39 by the city of Azusa. The Canyon offers a variety of recreational options including picnicking, off-road vehicle riding, hiking, camping, horseback riding, stream play, sightseeing, fishing, and mountain biking.

Within the Canyon there are multiple recreation sites. Visitors to these sites were approached by data collection teams during summer weekends in 2000. Sites and dates were randomly selected, and all site visitors age 18 and above were contacted. Self-administered surveys were available in English and Spanish. Data were collected from 187 visitors. More than half the respondents were male (56%). All respondents were between the ages of 18 and 68 (average age was 34). Just over half had more than a high school education (54%). The majority of Canyon respondents were Hispanic/Latino (64%). Most other respondents were white (28%), though several were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Native American, Middle Eastern, or mixed heritage. While the majority primarily spoke (48%) and read (59%) English, substantial numbers primarily spoke (30%) or read (30%) Spanish. Though half the respondents were born in the U.S. (51%), another 38% were born in Mexico.

Many respondents traveled an hour or less to arrive at the Canyon (47%). Most were repeat visitors (68%) and had visited 1 – 3 times before in the past year (76%). Most

respondents visit during the summer (84%) with most visits on Saturday or Sunday (82%), and most plan to return in the next 12 months (76%). Of all the respondents, 64% had visited other outdoor recreation sites in the last 12 months, though 25% had not. Of those visiting other sites, most had been to 2 – 4 sites including Big Bear Lake, Lake Isabella (near Bakersfield), Santa Fe Dam, Cachuma Lake (Santa Ynez), Sequoia, or Mt. Baldy. A large number of respondents (61%) said they would consider recreating at sites similar to the Canyon if the Canyon was too crowded and the road was closed to additional traffic, though 13% said they would not (others were unsure). Of those willing to recreate elsewhere, 29% said they would travel less than 1 hour, 30% said one hour, and 31% said 1 ½ hour to 3 hours. In terms of miles willing to travel most said 5 to 50 miles (5-25 miles 29%, 30-50 31%). Most respondents wanted information about: streamside areas (52%), best times to visit area to avoid crowds (49%), ways to keep the area natural looking (48%), or ways to protect the wild area (46%), places similar to the Canyon (40%).

Many of these respondents appear ready to be re-directed to other sites if the Canyon is closed to additional use. However, the sites chosen need to be located within a reasonable distance time and mileage-wise. Managers must consider all the options available to them including teaming with other agencies and groups to serve the populous and diverse southern California. The next challenge is to locate the limited alternative sites in this distance that can accommodate added visitation.

For additional information about this study please contact Debbie Chavez.

American Indians: Sense of Place and Contested Terrain

An exploration of sense of place and contested terrain among American Indians in Washington state and Canada was conducted through cooperative agreement with Leo McAvoy and Mark Carlson (University of Minnesota), and Dan McDonald (Malaspina University-College), and assisted by Nuu-chah-nulth students at Malaspina University-College.

Sense of place is of interest in outdoor recreation and land management research, and adds understanding of how people view the land, including attachments to certain places. The lengthy cultural relationship many American Indians have with particular pieces of land is one example of sense of place.

A number of American Indian/First Nation tribal groups span the United States/Canadian border, and therefore interact with varying

governmental and legal structures found in each country. One such group is the Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka) people of Washington state (the Makah on the Olympic Peninsula) and British Columbia (on Clayoquot Sound). These communities are adjacent to large tracts of publicly owned land that are used extensively for outdoor recreation and resource extraction. The researchers explored contemporary meanings of place held by the Nuu-chah-nulth people, the historical relationships over contested terrain, and their potential influence in contemporary sense of place among American Indians.

Archival records were compiled, and interviews were conducted with selected Canadian tribal members. Controversy surrounding whaling among the Makah precluded interviews with tribal members.

Contested terrain is a term used to describe the controversy between a dominant society's sense of place and the competing views of minority people's sense of place (Said 1993, Pulido 1996). Conflicts arise when groups who do not share the same norms and values about resources have a vested interest in those resources. For example, fisheries may symbolize ancestral ways of life that derive spiritual and religious meanings to one group, as well as food and an economic base. Conversely, those fisheries can symbolize valued commodities and essential livelihood to a competing group.

Evidence of the three forms of place attachment outlined by Williams and Patterson was found. The most evident was the cultural/symbolic sense of place, where place creates a sense of historical, spiritual and cultural significance for a whole group. Testimony during hearings over land uses, including whaling, reveals a strong sense of attachment to the land, and the struggle to maintain spiritual and cultural traditions in the face of competing land views from outside agencies. The second form of sense of place, instrumental/goal directed, was also revealed. One interviewee from the Nuu-chah-nulth depicted the First Nations relationship with the land as one of guardianship, not ownership. As guardians, they are to look after creation and all that is within it. The chief oversees the tribal guardianship of the land, and delegates caretakers to look after particular streams and such. This has become less effective in accomplishing sustainable management as the chief has lost authority over particular resources, now managed by governmental agencies. Individualistic meanings of place were virtually absent, and when mentioned were focused on deeply imbedded family meanings and histories.

The researchers provide the following suggestions for natural resource managers: 1) Be aware of the depth and significance of sense of place meanings to American Indians;

2) Be aware that the way federal, state and provincial lands were obtained for park and forest areas affects how American Indians feel towards, and interact with those lands and those who manage them; 3) Debates over natural resources may symbolize cultural reclamation and the ability of tribal people to determine their own destiny; 4) Traditional practices like hunting and gathering should be allowed, accommodated and honored in a way that respects the viability of the resource; 5) Local decision making, cooperative resource management, and co-management options for lands that were traditionally held and used by American Indian peoples need to be seriously considered; 6) Be aware of a heightened sense of cultural values attached to places in and near American Indian tribal areas; 7) Be aware that sense of place will most likely be revealed through a communal/tribal orientation in issues of contested terrain; and 8) Consider the effects of planning and management on all members of "community" including humans, the natural world, elders, and ancestors.

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Recent Publications

Absher, J.; Graefe, A.; Kyle, G. 2001. **Customer Service in a Fee Environment: Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center.** RWU-4902 Technical Report. Riverside, CA: USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station.

McAvoy, L.; McDonald, D. 2001. **American Indians: Sense of Place and Contested Terrain.** Technical Report. PSW-98-0010CA.

Tierney, P.T.; Dahl, R.; Chavez, D. 2001. **Cultural diversity in use of undeveloped natural areas by Los Angeles county residents.** *Tourism Management* 22: 271-277.