



# Recreation Research Update



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## Volunteerism Study: California State Park Campground Hosts

The California State Park System (CSP) campground hosts (CHs) volunteer many more hours than the typical CSP volunteer, and need to be looked at separately. A new report by Jim Absher (PSW) and Dan Wegner (CSU-Long Beach) presents the first look at CHs from a management perspective, including who they are, why they volunteer, and the factors that contribute to retention and satisfaction. The report is based on a mailback questionnaire from 187 CHs spread geographically across the State.

The results show that CHs are older, more likely male, less educated, with lower incomes, and usually in some stage of retirement. Word of mouth is a very important recruitment channel: other volunteers or friends/family/social contacts account for over half (56%) of the mentions. Park staff/rangers (30%) is also important. Other venues also provide recruitment opportunities: CHs volunteer for other causes, notably religious (37%) or social (33%) ones.

Enjoyable aspects of being a CH are related to helping others (99% agreement), constructive use of time (95%), learning new things (94%) and meeting and working with other volunteers (90%). This underscores that volunteering as a CH is based on a complex mix of social, personal and altruistic dimensions. Other data suggest that CHs are focused on: impacting visitors' experiences (87% very important), followed by teaching people about the park (85%) and giving information or presentations (82%). Being part of the state park family was very important as well (76%). The CH experience may be improved if they have: a chance to learn more new things (67% agreement), more opportunities to help visitors (58%), more responsibilities as a volunteer (58%), or more time to work with park staff (49%). These suggest a strong concern for improving ways to assist visitors and being involved with park staff. Finally, there was nearly universal agreement with the statements about pride in the CH duties (94% strongly agree). Coupled with the very high overall satisfaction ratings (78%) it is clear that the CSP is doing a fine job of creating meaningful and rewarding opportunities for CHs. Nonetheless, CHs may be different from other state park volunteers, and thus have unique needs. If managers of volunteers want

to retain CHs, and have them speak highly of their volunteer experience to potential recruits, attending to improvements would seem important. Results indicate that communication by supervisory staff could be improved. *For more information about this study contact Jim Absher at 909-680-1559.*

## Wildland/Urban Interface Within Fireprone Ecosystems

The wildland/urban interface presents many challenges within fireprone ecosystems. One of these ecosystems is the Big Sur region of the Los Padres National Forest, a popular destination due to its scenic beauty and spectacular coastal range environment. Debbie Chavez and Bill Hendricks, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, are cooperatively conducting a study to examine issues related to recreation and fire management at Big Sur. The first study phase took place during summer 2001. Data were collected on randomly selected days and at eight randomly selected day-use and overnight recreation sites. Four hundred ninety-eight visitors completed the on-site questionnaire.

Respondents were mostly Californians (78.5%), white (80%), with some college education (85%). Reported household income was above \$55,000 (55%), with some above \$75,000 (38%). Activities during their trip to Big Sur were camping, hiking, walking for pleasure, beach combing, picnicking, wild/marinelife viewing and sightseeing. The top three primary activities were camping, surfing, and sightseeing.

Recreation constraints were measured with a 4-point scale. The highest mean scores for recreation constraints due to fire management were: no fires in pits/grills, decreased air quality, traffic delays due to fire suppression, decreased visibility due to smoke from a fire, and developed campground closure due to a fire.

How often fire management practices were observed and their influence on quality of visit was examined with a 5-point scale. The highest rated observed fire management practices were fire works prohibition, evidence of a wildland fire, prescribed fire evidence, and fire restrictions when backpacking. Fire practices that most influenced visit quality were: large bonfires, no fires in pits/grills, and evidence of campfires in non-designated areas.

Place attachment was measured with an 11-item scale. A t-test was conducted to determine if place attachment varied by subjects who had visited Big Sur previously and those who had not. There was a significant difference for all 11 items. Overall mean scores were above 3.5 on a 5-point scale for 7 of the items.

The results suggest that Big Sur visitors are rather homogenous, very educated, report high household incomes, and are attached to Big Sur. They do not seem to be overly concerned with fire management, although they do report some recreation constraints that may deserve attention by managers. *For further information please contact Debbie Chavez at 909-680-1558.*

### **Recreation and Environmental Activities: A Study at Three Lakes**

Research examining recreational participation and environmental activities at three lakes in southern California was recently completed by Pat Winter and Deanne McCollum (both at PSW). Data were gathered from 1,049 recreationists through an on-site survey at a state park recreation area, a regional county park, and a Forest Service picnic area. All three sites have multiple picnicking locations around a lake. In addition, recreationists can participate in fishing and boating, and all three locations offer overnight camping on-site or very close by.

The majority of respondents participated in outdoor recreation at least several times a month. Half of that time or more was spent in natural resource settings such as parks, lakes, streams, forests and campgrounds. Hiking/walking, swimming, camping, picnicking and fishing were the most frequently mentioned recreational activities.

The state park recreation area and regional county park respondents were more ethnically and racially diverse than the forest visitors were. More than one half reported Latino/Latina ethnic identities at the first two sites, while about one-quarter identified with this same group at the forest site. The overall listing of ethnic identities was also much broader at the state and regional parks (23 and 20 categories used respectively) compared to the forest site (11 categories used).

At least one-fourth expressed an interest in helping with an on-site clean-up or restoration effort at each location, and between one-fifth and one-fourth had participated in a similar effort in their community or a natural resource setting within the past year. Membership in environmental organizations, donations of money to environmental groups, or calls to political

representatives regarding environmental issues were less likely.

Amount of recreational participation, as well as percentage of recreational time spent in natural resource settings, were positively related to willingness to volunteer in a park clean up or restoration effort. They were also positively related to actual participation in a clean-up effort in the community or a natural resource setting. *For further information please contact Pat Winter at 909-680-1557.*

### **Unit Publications**

Absher, J.; Wegner, D. 2002. **Volunteer study: Campground hosts at California State Parks.**

Unpublished report. Riverside, CA: USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station. 37 p.

Chavez, D.J. 2001. **Managing outdoor recreation in California: visitor contact studies 1989-1998.** Gen. Tech. Rep. PSW-GTR-180. Albany, CA: Pacific Southwest Research Station, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture; 100 p.

Chavez, D.J.; Knap, N.E. 2002. **Adaptive management at the Falls Picnic Area: Pre-renovation survey research.** Unpublished report. Riverside, CA: USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station. 23 p.

Chavez, D.J.; McCollum, D.; Olson, D.D. 2002. **Day use series: 2001, the San Bernardino National Forest.** Unpublished report. Riverside, CA: USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station. 31 p.

Raettig, Terry L.; Elmer, Dawn M.; Christensen, Harriet H. 2001. **Atlas of social and economic conditions and change in southern California.** Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-GTR-516. Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station. 66 p. [also available on CD (pc format)]

Thapa, B; Graefe, A.R.; Absher, J.D. 2002. **Information needs and search behaviors: A comparative study of ethnic groups in the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests, California.** *Leisure Sciences* 24 1, 89-107.

Winter, P.L.; McCollum, D. 2002. **Recreational participation and environmental activities at Meadow's Edge Picnic Area, San Bernardino National Forest.** Unpublished report. Riverside, CA: USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station. 32 p. (Similarly titled reports available for Frank Bonelli Regional Park and Lake Perris State Recreation Area.)