

INTERPRETIVE THEME DEVELOPMENT FROM FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND VISITOR CENTER EVALUATIONS AT THE SPRUCE KNOB-SENECA ROCKS NATIONAL RECREATION AREA, WV

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Abstract

The typical visitor to the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area (NRA), part of the Monongahela National Forest, WV, is two out of three times most likely a first time visitor (Siniscalchi, Pierskalla, and Selin, 2003). A majority of these first time visitors go to the Seneca Rocks Discovery Center (visitor center), which serves as a central hub of information and orientation. In addition, the NRA also anticipates a further influx of new visitors upon completion of Corridor H, a highway that will link the District of Columbia-metro area to many of the tourism offerings of the NRA. The purpose of this study is to compare first time and repeat visitors' first impressions of the Spruce-Knob Seneca Rocks NRA in order to develop interpretive themes that will highlight the offerings of the NRA. First impressions were collected during the summer of 2004, when a team from West Virginia University, in collaboration with the Forest Service, completed a visitor survey for the NRA management plan revision. According to Lewis and Schneider (2002), first impressions research can give an honest and accurate snapshot of the present, allowing for creative visualization of the future. Interpreting first impressions and visitor center data resulted in expanded interpretive themes detailing specific topics of importance to visitors, desired interpretive offerings, and increased opportunities for visitor center relevance. First impressions data also suggests that experience influences first impressions.

Interpreting first impressions will contribute to greater understanding of the messages extended by places and the role of visitor centers in contributing to the desired future impressions of places.

1.0 Introduction

Within the boundaries of the Monongahela National Forest, WV is the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks NRA. Established in 1965, the 100,000-acre Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks NRA was the first NRA established within a national forest, and stands as a unique resource designed to highlight exceptional recreational opportunities (McKim 1970, p. 58). A National Recreation Area (NRA) is generally established to provide an area of recreation near a large concentration of population (Douglass 2000, p. 43). The NRA "lies within a day's drive of about one-third of the population of the United States." (Background Information, nd). However, the typical visitor to the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks NRA is two out of three times more likely a first time visitor (Siniscalchi, Pierskalla, and Selin 2003). The purpose of this study is to compare first time and repeat visitors' first impressions of the Spruce-Knob Seneca Rocks NRA in order to develop interpretive themes that will highlight the offerings of the NRA.

1.1 Nature of the Problem

Understanding visitor first impressions and evaluations of the Seneca Rocks Discovery Center are vital as the NRA anticipates the completion of Corridor H. Corridor H is a highway that will link the District of Columbia metro area to many of the tourism offerings of West Virginia. The influx of new visitors demands that the NRA understand their specific needs. Impressions are one way to discover some of the inherent and ascribed meanings that visitors associate with the resource (Larsen 2002). "The audience ultimately decides if the resource has value. The audience determines if they will care enough about the resource in order to support the care for the resource." (Larsen 2002, p. 19). The research questions developed to guide this study reflect the importance of understanding the NRA visitor as a first time or repeat visitor.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are first-time and repeat visitors' first impressions of the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks NRA?
2. How do first-time and repeat visitors' evaluate the Seneca Rocks Discovery Center?
3. How can the NRA use first impressions data to aid the first time visitor in discovering their connection with the NRA as a place?

Though the purpose of this study weighs heavily on first impressions data, the value of the study also stems from information collected on Discovery Center use and general audience makeup. All aspects of the study work together to lend greater significance to the first impressions collected by increasing the contextual information base. The conceptual framework is based upon first impressions, sense of place and interpretation. The chi-square and t-test were used to compare first time and repeat visitors. To consider interpretation, first impressions, and sense of place as concepts that become stronger when interwoven, the following selection of literature highlights some of the many common threads among the three concepts.

1.3 Linking First Impressions, Interpretation, and Sense of Place

“While any individual can apply imagination to create a personal sense of place, much of what a person knows about places, or feels about places, or does in places, is initially mediated by others.” (Stokowski 2002, p. 372). An opportunity may exist at any site to reach out to visitors by providing information in some form that mediates their development of a sense of place. According to Enos Mills, “Each interpreter should strive to communicate a sense of place or a sense of historic meaning in a personal, individualized manner.” (Beck and Cable 2002, p. 2). If visitors are directed to the information they need to achieve their ideal experience, several events probably happened. It is likely that interpretive efforts were successful, impressions were of high quality and eventful, and ample opportunity to develop a sense of place existed.

“Just as solid interpretation helps the visitor begin to value the place, another benefit is preservation of

the area.” (Beck and Cable 2002, p. 42). Noting that site stewardship may be one manifestation of sense of place, it seems that interpretation could likely spark the process. Goldman, Chen, and Larsen (2001) write that, “Interpretive outcomes such as care and responsible citizenship do not arise out of a void, however; they require a sense of relationship, a sense of being connected to something that is bigger than oneself” (p.4). The authors also write that incorporating the meanings found in the resource in interpretive efforts will likely increase visitors' ability to connect to the site. Therefore, good interpretation may become great after considering visitor impressions for theme development. Bridging between impressions, interpretation, and sense of place, thoughtfully developed themes present the best of a site to a diverse audience.

2.0 Method

This study sought to not only describe visitors, but also delve deeper into the visitor's mind for valuable, self-reported information. Employing methods that result in qualitative data require attentive strategies to accurately understand the meanings behind the results. Content analysis has been applied to achieve an increased understanding of some of the qualitative data critical to this study regarding first impressions.

The Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks NRA is divided into two units, and a randomized sampling strategy sought to represent the many different recreational opportunities offered within each unit. Three sampling zones (total of eight study sites) were identified across the Spruce Knob unit. The remaining two sampling zones (total of 10 study sites) were included in the Seneca Rocks unit. A mixed-methods survey was developed as an instrument that combined open-ended, yes/no and Likert-type scale measurements. The instrument was issued as a semi-structured interview with a self-administered portion.

The instrument was designed to meet the four objectives outlined for this study: compile and analyze visitor first impressions for recurring topics; compare first time visitors' and repeat visitors' first impressions and evaluations of the Seneca Discovery Center; develop interpretive themes based upon first impression topics;

and increase the understanding of the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks NRA visitor. Quantitative analysis using SPSS reduced visitor data into specific informative segments. Suggested interpretive themes for the NRA were derived from participant's first impressions, after impressions were consolidated topically through content analysis.

2.1 Content Analysis

The coding of statements proceeded by placing them into initial topical categories, collapsing related categories, and finally into broad topical categories with a series of subtopics derived through emergent analysis. The statements coded were participant responses to the question, "What was your first impression of the NRA on this trip?" Analysis was computer aided, using WordStat 4.0, specifically QDA miner which allowed for coding within context. Each first impression was coded for the topical categories it represented. For example, the first impression, "I saw the rocks. Wow! They were magnificent. The most beautiful place on earth." was coded as follows: the statements "I saw the rocks", "Wow!", and "They were magnificent" were coded as Seneca Rocks. The remaining statement, "The most beautiful place on earth." was coded as beautiful. First impressions were not limited to fitting into one topical category, as this example illustrates.

To systematically collapse initial topical categories, two guidelines were followed. Topical categories were collapsed when frequencies were less than three, as Berg writes, "a safe rule of thumb to follow is the inclusion of at least three independent examples for each interpretation." (1989, p. 107). To help ensure the reliability of each topical category, two raters coded each statement, and the inter-rater reliability was 71 percent. All of these topics were compared against each other for frequency among first-time visitors and repeat visitors. Suggested themes for interpretation were then derived from the four broad topical categories, with the subtopics guiding additional possibilities for effective interpretive themes for that broad topic. These themes are indicative of possible interpretive programming/devices that would address the interests of the visitor, and can be modified to meet the different needs of first time or repeat visitors.

3.0 Results

The results of this study are organized into five main areas: survey participation and sampling, characteristics of the National Recreation Area visitors, comparing first time visitors to repeat visitors, visitor first impressions and themes, and visitor evaluations of the Discovery Center. Overall, 235 individuals were asked to participate in the visitor survey, and 176 (75%) gave consent. Of these, 164 completed the qualitative portion of the survey (70% of the consented participants) and 119 completed the qualitative and quantitative sections, resulting in a completion rate of 51 percent of those initially asked to participate and 68 percent of those that consented. The site sampling schedule resulted in nearly half (45%, n=79) of the respondents coming from the Seneca Rocks, zone 1, with smaller portions from Spruce Knob Lake, zone 4 (21%, n=36), Judy Springs/Gandy Creek, zone 5 (17%, n=30) and Smoke Hole and Spruce Knob (zones 2 and 3) having less than 10 percent of those sampled.

3.1 Characteristics of the National Recreation Area Visitors

The sample (n=172) was nearly evenly distributed among females (44%) and males (56%). Respondents varied in age from 18 to over 70, with the largest contributing age being 18. Nearly 95 percent (n=171) of respondents indicated their race as white. Most visitors were employed (61%, n=170), and student (20%) was the second highest employment category. Nearly 50 percent (n=168) of visitors were married with children. Most visitors (27%, n=167) reported their education level as some college and about 42 percent of visitors have a college degree. Visitors reported varied income levels, with just over 50 percent earning up to \$59,000 per year. Visitors typically traveled in groups, and West Virginia residents made up 47 percent (n=176) of the sample.

3.11 First-time Visitors Compared to Repeat Visitors

Nearly one-third of participants were new visitors to the NRA. The repeat visitors indicated how often they frequented the NRA in the past year, with 29 percent (n=118) reporting one additional visit. Repeat visitors also indicated if their rate of visitation in the past year was more, less, or about the same as when they first started visiting. Sixty-seven percent (n=101) of these

visitors felt their visitation was about the same rate. Repeat visitors were more likely to be employed, married with children, and report larger incomes. First-time visitors traveled in significantly larger groups. First-time visitors had a mean age of 33, and repeat visitors were older, with a mean age of 44.

3.12 Visitor First Impressions and Themes

Ninety-one percent (n=174) of study participants reported being aware that they were within a National Recreation Area. When asked to reveal how they became aware of the NRA, most visitors cited past experience, reading a sign/map, or learning from their family and friends. Fifty-six percent (n=164) of visitors agreed that knowing they were in a NRA influenced their impression of the area. Visitor first impressions were initially reviewed together, and Table 1 reports the frequency counts for all the codes. Four topical categories were developed as umbrellas for the 18 subtopics coded. The reliability of codes was checked and indicated a 71 percent inter-rater reliability. The raters agreed even more on the noncoded portions of first impressions at 89 percent frequency of agreement. An 83 percent frequency of agreement between all coding possibilities was realized.

Table 1 shows each of the 18 codes and the frequency of each for all visitors. The frequency count of codes for first time and repeat visitors is organized under the four main topical category headings that were later used for theme development. The four topical categories human experience, natural resources, aesthetics, and facilities and services and their accompanying subtopics formed the basis of theme development. The topical category of aesthetics has the highest frequency of all four topical categories. Under the topical category of aesthetics, the code beautiful (n=55) had the highest frequency out of all eighteen codes. Other codes that were high in frequency were tranquility (n=25), clean (n=24), and condition (n=24).

Significant results ($p \leq 0.05$) were found when comparing first time and repeat visitor first impressions between the four umbrella categories of human experience, natural resources, aesthetics, and facilities using a weighted chi-square statistic (Table 2 and

Table 1.—First Impression Category Frequencies

First impression topical categories	Visitor first impressions (n=167)		
	mean \pm SD	freq	(%)
Human	19.0 \pm 5.7	38	(12.9%)
Experience			
Travel		15	(39.5%)
Experience			
Prior Experience		23	(60.5%)
Natural Resources	9.7 \pm 4.6	68	(23.1%)
Seneca Rocks		16	(23.5%)
Scenery		14	(20.6%)
Recreation		10	(14.7%)
Activities		4	(5.9%)
Water		9	(13.2%)
Climate		11	(16.2%)
Rural		4	(5.9%)
Flora and Fauna			
Aesthetics	31.3 \pm 15.9	125	(42.5%)
Clean		24	(19.2%)
Beautiful		55	(44.0%)
Tranquility		25	(20.0%)
Attachment		21	(16.8%)
Facilities and Services	12.6 \pm 8.6	63	(21.5%)
Condition		24	(38.1%)
Visitor Center		6	(9.5%)
Campsite		19	(30.2%)
Availability		10	(15.9%)
Regulations		4	(6.3%)

Figure 2). The chi-square was weighted by proportion of sample size by group to account for the different sample sizes. First time visitor impressions were higher than expected for the human experience category, and remained significant after applying the Bonferonni correction ($p=0.013$). Consequently, the chi-square statistic was applied to each individual subtopic code to check for significant differences (Table 3). Individual chi-squares were used because of the dependence of coding between topics and subtopics. The subtopics of prior experience ($p=0.002$) and tranquility ($p=0.032$) were significantly higher for first time visitors. After applying the Bonferonni correction ($p=0.013$), only the subtopic of prior experience remained significant.

Table 2.—First Impression Topical Categories Frequency and Significance†

First impression topical categories	First time visitor	Repeat visitor	χ^2	p
	Freq (%)	Freq (%)		
Human Experience	30 (88.2%)	4 (11.8%)	9.12	0.003* **
Natural Resources	39 (57.4%)	29 (42.6%)	1.02	0.312
Aesthetics	46 (56.1%)	36 (43.9%)	1.81	0.178
Facilities and Services	40 (65.6%)	21 (34.4%)	0.14	0.708

*values are significant at $p \leq 0.05$

**values remain significant after Bonferonni correction $p=0.013$

†Note: due to the dependence between topics and subtopics, these results should be interpreted with caution

Table 3.—First Impression Subtopic Frequency and Significance

First impression subtopics	First time visitor	Repeat visitor	χ^2	p
	Freq (%)	Freq (%)		
Human Experience (n=38)				
Travel Experience	9 (75.0%)	3 (25.0%)	0.71	0.399
Prior Experience	21 (95.5%)	1 (4.5%)	9.1	0.002* **
Natural Resources (n=68)				
Seneca Rocks	11 (68.8%)	5 (31.3%)	0.21	0.649
Scenery	7 (50.0%)	7 (50.0%)	1.06	0.303
Recreation Activities	5 (50.0%)	5 (50.0%)	0.76	0.384
Water	3 (75.0%)	1 (25.0%)	0.45	0.500
Climate	4 (57.1%)	3 (42.9%)	0.61	0.436
Rural	5 (45.5%)	6 (54.5%)	0.76	0.384
Flora and Fauna	4 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2.32	0.128
Aesthetics (n=125)				
Clean	16 (69.6%)	7 (30.4%)	0.39	0.531
Beautiful	33 (61.1%)	21 (38.9%)	0.11	0.743
Tranquility	21 (84.0%)	4 (16.0%)	4.62	0.032*
Attachment	16 (80.0%)	4 (20.0%)	2.41	0.121
Facilities and Services (n=63)				
Condition	14 (58.3%)	10 (41.7%)	0.25	0.616
Visitor Center	4 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2.32	0.128
Campsite	10 (52.6%)	9 (47.4%)	0.92	0.336
Availability	8 (80.0%)	2 (20.0%)	1.21	0.272
Regulations	4 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2.32	0.128

*values are significant at $p \leq 0.05$

**values remain significant after Bonferonni correction $p=0.013$

The four resulting themes were derived from the topical categories of human experience, natural resources, aesthetics, and facilities and services.

Theme 1: Human Experience

Our own background and experience helps us connect to the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area as a place.

Theme 2: Natural Resources

The resources of the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area symbolize tangible experiences and intangible ideals.

Theme 3: Aesthetics

The Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area surrounds us with beauty and immerses us in tranquility.

Theme 4: Facilities and Services

The human footprint within the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area is limited, but welcomes us in inviting ways.

3.2 Visitor Evaluations of the Discovery Center

Nearly 50 percent of the visitors to the NRA made the Visitor Center part of their trip. Most visitors frequent the center on their first or second day in the NRA. Visitors typically report spending a half hour in the center during their visit. The visitor center is well received, but only 52 percent of the participants agree that the hours are reasonable. An overwhelming 89 percent of visitors were satisfied with their time at the Visitor Center. Visitors were asked to indicate if any one display stood out in their mind (n=35), and 26 percent responded that the large relief map caught their eye. The children's sandprint box was the second most mentioned exhibit (17%). Visitors also suggested new ways for the Discovery Center to inform visitors, such as photo points and typical flora and fauna of the area. Comments on the Discovery Center were compiled, and were positive and supportive outside of concerns about the center's open hours

In order to evaluate the services provided by the Discovery Center specifically, several items were

compared for significance between first-time and repeat visitors, and can be seen in Table 13. Out of 55 total first-time visitors, a little over half (n=29) visited the Discovery Center. Only about one-third of repeat visitors (n=37) chose to frequent the Discovery Center again. However, the chi square test ($p < 0.05$) determined there was no significant difference between first-time and repeat visitors' choice to visit the Discovery Center. Both first-time and repeat visitors did not differ in their choice of day in trip to visit the Discovery Center or in how much time spent during their visit.

An 18-item inventory regarding Discovery Center services and effectiveness did reveal some differences between first time and repeat visitors. All of the significant items were higher for first time visitors. The significant items were: the exhibits enhanced my experience at the NRA, I was satisfied with my time at the Visitor Center, I enjoyed the displays at the Visitor Center, I would go to the Visitor Center again in the future, and the Visitor Center met my expectations. Only two items remained significant after the Bonferonni correction was applied; the exhibits enhanced my experience at the NRA and I would go to the Visitor Center again in the future. The complete 18 item inventory results can be seen in Table 4.

4.0 Discussion

Significant results were found when analyzing demographics, first impressions and the Discovery Center inventory. Regarding demographic variables, repeat visitors were more likely to be employed, report a household income ranging from \$20,000 to \$59,000, and report that they were married with children. Because repeat visitors are typically employed and indicate a reasonable income, they likely have sufficient resources to visit the NRA more than one time. Repeat visitors are likely more often married with children because they are slightly older, and at a different lifecycle stage than the first time visitors who are predominately single with no children. First-time visitors typically visited the NRA with a larger group than repeat visitors. New visitors may feel more comfortable exploring a new area with family/friends or visit the NRA with individuals who already have experience.

Table 4.—Comparison of First Time and Repeat Visitors Discovery Center Inventory

	First time visitor (n=29) mean ±SD	Repeat visitor (n=37) mean ±SD	t	p
The hours were reasonable	1.6 ± 1.5	1.5 ± 0.9	1.9	0.069
The Visitor Center was easy to find	2.2 ± 1.0	1.0 ± 2.6	1.9	0.064
The staff was approachable	1.9 ± 1.2	1.2 ± 1.9	0.3	0.792
The staff was easy to identify	2.4 ± 1.0	1.0 ± 2.4	0.2	0.845
The staff was knowledgeable	1.3 ± 1.6	1.6 ± 1.5	0.5	0.608
The staff was helpful	1.5 ± 1.7	1.7 ± 1.7	0.5	0.587
The staff was friendly	1.7 ± 1.3	1.3 ± 1.5	0.6	0.584
The staff suggested appropriate destinations based on my needs	0.4 ± 1.3	1.3 ± 0.7	0.9	0.366
Printed materials were organized	2.0 ± 1.4	1.4 ± 2.5	1.6	0.116
Printed materials were easy to read	1.9 ± 1.6	1.6 ± 2.3	1.3	0.209
Printed materials were helpful	1.5 ± 1.6	1.6 ± 2.1	1.7	0.093
The exhibits enhanced my experience at the NRA	1.7 ± 1.5	1.5 ± 2.5	2.4	0.018**
The exhibits generated thought about the resources of the NRA	1.4 ± 1.7	1.7 ± 1.8	1.0	0.334
I was satisfied with my time at the Visitor Center	2.1 ± 1.4	1.4 ± 2.7	2.2	0.038*
I enjoyed the displays at the Visitor Center	2.1 ± 1.3	1.3 ± 2.7	2.2	0.031*
I enjoyed the lectures/informational talks at the Visitor Center	0.8 ± 1.5	1.5 ± 0.3	1.5	0.133
I would go to the Visitor Center again in the future	1.8 ± 1.7	1.7 ± 2.6	2.7	0.011**
The Visitor Center met my expectations	2.0 ± 1.5	1.5 ± 2.7	2.3	0.026*

*values are significant at $p \leq 0.05$

**Bonferonni correction $p=0.025$

Note: The scale ranged from -3 to 3, completely disagree to completely agree, with a neutral choice as 0.

First impressions were compared after they were coded. The four main topics of human experience, natural resources, aesthetics, and facilities and services were compared for any differences between first time and repeat visitors. The topic of human experience was found to be significantly different from the other topics. Further investigation into the subtopics that comprise the human experience category showed that first time visitors would mention prior experience in their first impression more often than repeat visitors. This could be explained by the

efforts of first time visitors to find a way to relate to a new site by linking similar attributes to previously known experience. First time visitors also mentioned tranquility within their first impressions more often than repeat visitors.

The last category of significant results to explore deals with comparing first-time and repeat visitors' evaluations of the Discovery Center. All of the significant items for evaluation of the Discovery Center were higher for

first-time visitors. The significant items were: the exhibits enhanced my experience at the NRA, I was satisfied with my time at the Visitor Center, I enjoyed the displays at the Visitor Center, I would go to the Visitor Center again in the future, and the Visitor Center met my expectations. These items suggest that the Discovery Center is targeted to first time visitors, and may need to provide for opportunities for repeat visitors.

4.1 Management Implications

The study outlines the existing impressions of the NRA, and offers interpretive themes that management can use to script effective messages to the target audience. It is crucial to collect this information to further assist management in recognizing what aspects of the NRA are meaningful to visitors. In the interest of the Monongahela National Forest, the fact that sense of place can be ascribed in ways other than repeat visitation is vital.

Visitors to the NRA are complex, and are looking for and noticing the tangible and intangible resources of the NRA. Based on the differences among first time and repeat visitors impressions and Discovery Center evaluations, a few recommendations could expand the scope of NRA offerings. Managers should concentrate interpretive efforts around the themes identified in this study, and include themes not mentioned that are of particular importance to the enabling legislation of the NRA. Managers should consider rotating exhibits within the Discovery Center to benefit repeat visitors.

Because past experience is such a compelling contributor to first impressions, for managers to connect to visitors, interpretive efforts need to incorporate past experience. Considering that many visitors come from the D.C.-Baltimore area, and especially if they are first time visitors, interpretive products could relate D.C.-Baltimore area specific examples to Seneca Rocks to enhance visitors' connection to the NRA. For example, relating the height of famous and familiar structures such as the Washington monument to the height of Seneca Rocks makes a new site relevant.

Visitors are likely on vacation, and efforts to connect to visitors should be enjoyable, not intense or difficult to follow. Simply asking a visitor where they are from

validates their past experiences, and a savvy interpreter may be able to turn a simple question into an interpretive opportunity. To reach both first-time and repeat visitors, interpretive efforts should employ universal concepts. Ideas such as family, home, change, and survival are universal concepts. Interpretive themes that encompass universal concepts have a good chance at helping a visitor connect at some level. Finally, because the natural resources and aesthetics of the NRA are such popular topics in visitor first impressions, many visitors may be ready to understand the concepts driving regulations at the NRA to maintain these attributes. Perhaps repeat visitors would be even more likely to grasp onto management directives, because they appear to be comfortable with regulations. By collaborating with local communities and user groups, managers could enlist their help to incorporate the findings of this study. Managers should not underestimate the abilities of their audience to experience the variety of attributes associated with the NRA if they present any topic thematically and in an enjoyable, relevant and organized manner (Ham 1992).

4.2 Recommendations for Future Research

The benefits of content analysis to compress large amounts of data into understandable topics and themes will continue to benefit managers of all sites. Visitor comments on a variety of issues should be reported to managers after being consolidated through content analysis. The method of content analysis to handle qualitative data is not new, but could be applied as a fresh methodology for a variety of purposes, especially in the field of interpretation. At a basic level, continually applying content analysis to interpretive products could reveal and allow for the tracking of trends. In general, content analysis has been used as a qualitative method for theory development within the field of interpretation. However, WordStat can build on this by adding a quantitative grounding for empirical work in interpretation. For instance, the National Park Service qualifies interpreters by rating their products and services. Applying WordStat to analyze non-personal products would be one method to standardize ratings and remove subjective bias and/or confirm ratings reviewers give. Developing a dictionary of words for interpretive professionals to use consistently for content analysis would be a natural step to realize the benefits of this type

of analysis. This coding dictionary should be empirically derived, and would likely be amended when used in a site-specific manner. This study suggests content analysis as a method that adds a quantitative element to theme development, and this idea should be applied and tested across sites.

In conclusion, applying first impressions to the field of recreation has been a worthwhile approach to understanding how visitors interact with a site. First impressions are a snapshot in time, but they help site managers understand the image they currently portray, and can allow for innovative growth based on desired future conditions. Developing four themes for the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks NRA from the results of this study provide direction to managers in meeting the needs of their audience. The themes from this study can be tailored to first time or repeat visitors to enhance their experience. Two-thirds of the NRA visitors are coming for the first time, and the NRA anticipates more once Corridor H is completed. As these new visitors come to the NRA, managers need to be prepared to meet their needs, provide them opportunities to connect with the resources of the NRA, and to foster development of a sense of place.

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