Reading the Landscape: Park Profiles 2013 – 2014

Social Assessment White Paper No. 3

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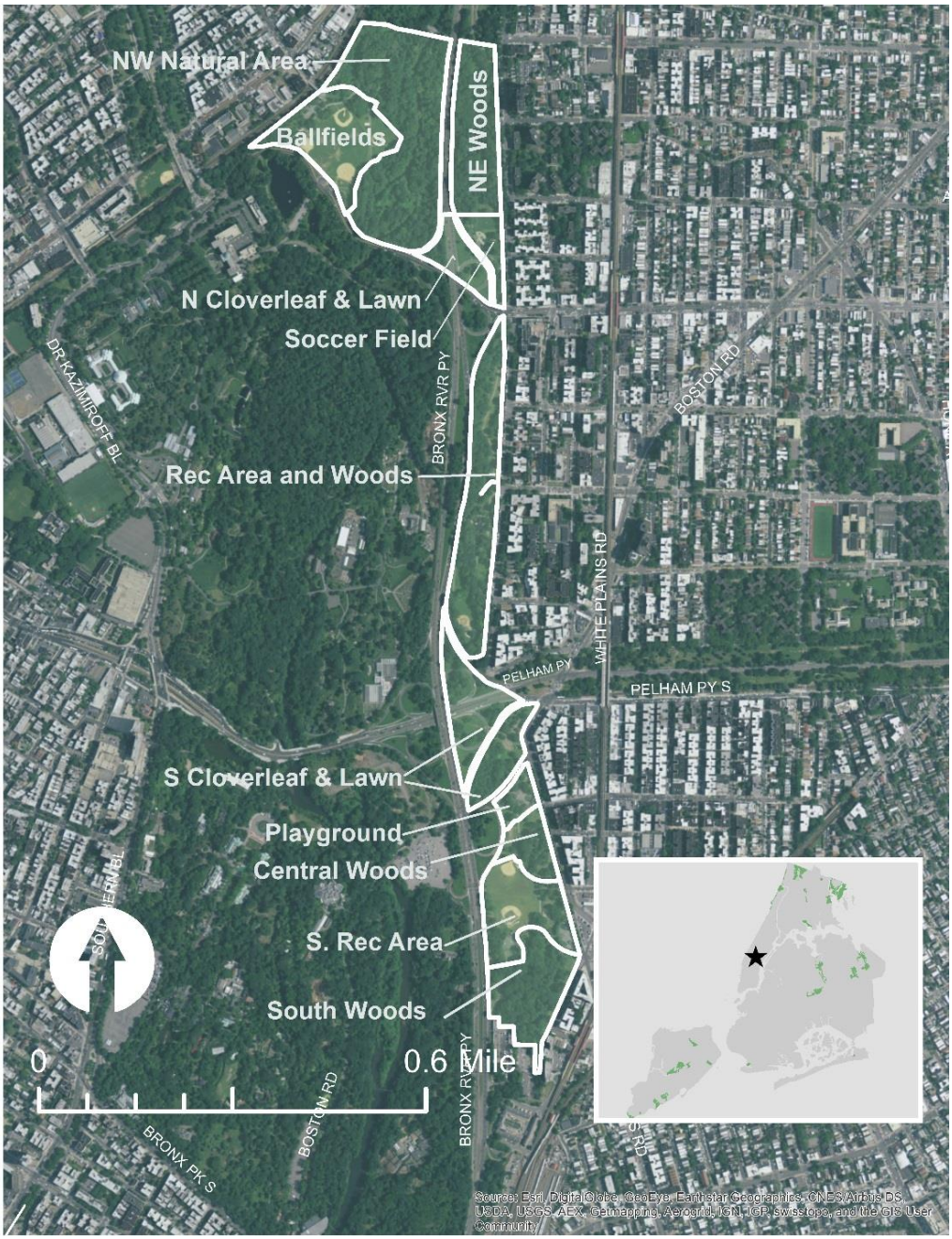
Overview

These park profiles summarize and explain findings from each of our 39 park locations in New York City. Data presented in each profile are from three visits to each park in summer 2013 or summer 2014, with three types of data collection: direct human observations, signs of prior human use, and rapid interviews. The profile format is as follows: a site map, narrative syntheses of findings, illustrative photographs, summary bar graphs and tables of quantitative observations, tables and discussion of major themes that emerged from onsite park user interviews. Park profiles are arranged in alphabetical order by borough.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

BRONX: Bronx Park Profile



Zone Names			
Ballfields	NE Woods	Rec Area and Woods	Soccer Field
Central Woods	NW Natural Area	S Cloverleaf & Lawn	South Woods
N Cloverleaf & Lawn	Playground	S. Rec Area	

I. Park Narrative

Bronx Park is a mid-sized, 132-acre[1] park located in the center of the borough. It is a long, multi-use park that is adjacent to large attractions such as the New York Botanical Gardens and the Bronx Zoo. The park has a number of different users throughout its zones, and based on interviews, we learned that the long-time park users have noticed a significant, positive change in the park over the decades.

Bronx Park is in a residential area with many co-op apartment buildings, most notably the first co-op building in the United States just across the street from it. It is accessible by train (the 2 and 5 lines) as well as by highway (the Bronx River Parkway). The community around the park is diverse and multilingual. The area is walkable and has a number of local businesses and services. Due to its proximity to the Bronx Zoo, the roads around Bronx Park are generally high traffic thoroughfares.

The park has many playgrounds, some recreational areas, mowed lawns, and a long greenway. As a result, the users are diverse. We saw small children and their caretakers, generally grandparents, in the playgrounds. Recreational areas were heavily used by youth playing sports. The baseball fields at the northern end of the park were overgrown and appeared to be unused; however, the recreational fields south of Pelham Parkway were heavily used. On the weekend, the soccer fields by Allerton Avenue were in high use: multiple teams and many dozen players were present. Nearby, the newly-built skate park was also in high use. The greenway is a part of the Moshulu greenway, which loops around much of the Bronx. There, we observed a few cyclists, and many walkers, runners, dog walkers, and other exercisers.

Most of the park users interviewed come from the local neighborhood; many of them live only "two blocks away." Interviewees spoke Russian, Spanish, English, and other languages. Spanish speakers represented multiple nationalities including Dominicans, Mexicans, and Colombians. Interviewees recounted a dark history of the park during the height of the drug epidemic in the 1970s and 1980s. They spoke of a park littered by syringes and plagued by murders, mugging, and theft.

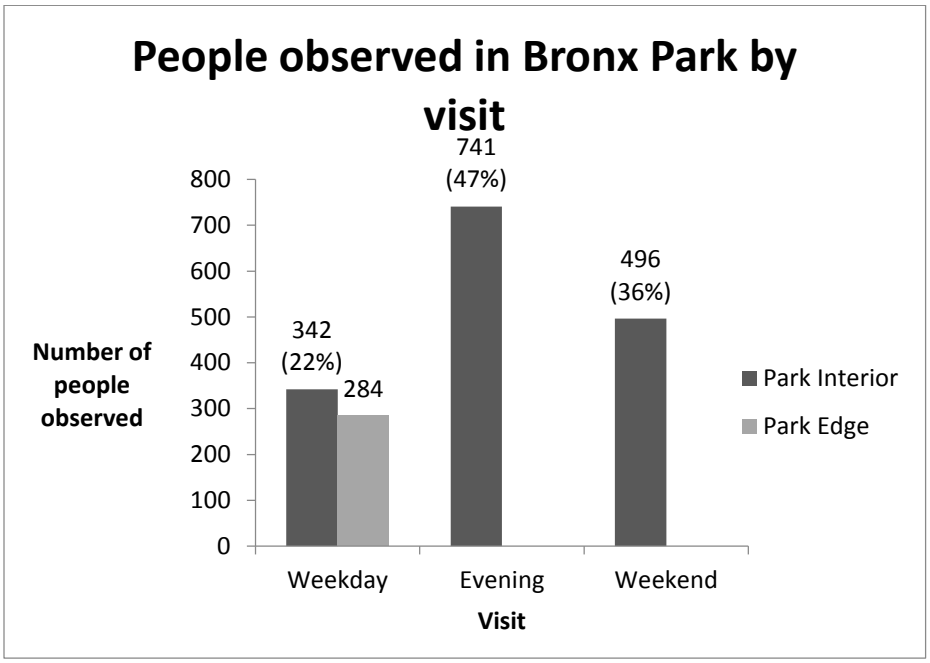
Interviewees contrasted those days with today. The park is experiencing a resurgence perhaps in part due to investments by NYC Parks and local community-based organizations, such as the Bronx River Alliance, to improve the park and clean up the Bronx River. Park users noted the marked change and appreciate it. They refer to years past when they would not come to the park and now gratefully acknowledge the safety and scenery of the park. As a result, the improvement in the park appears to be having a positive effect on the community.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

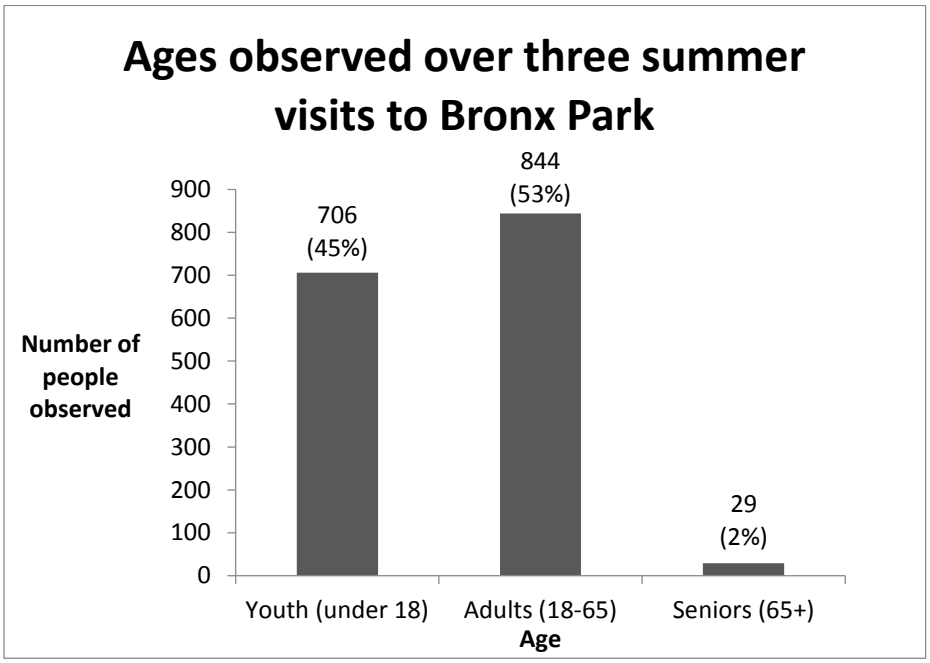
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

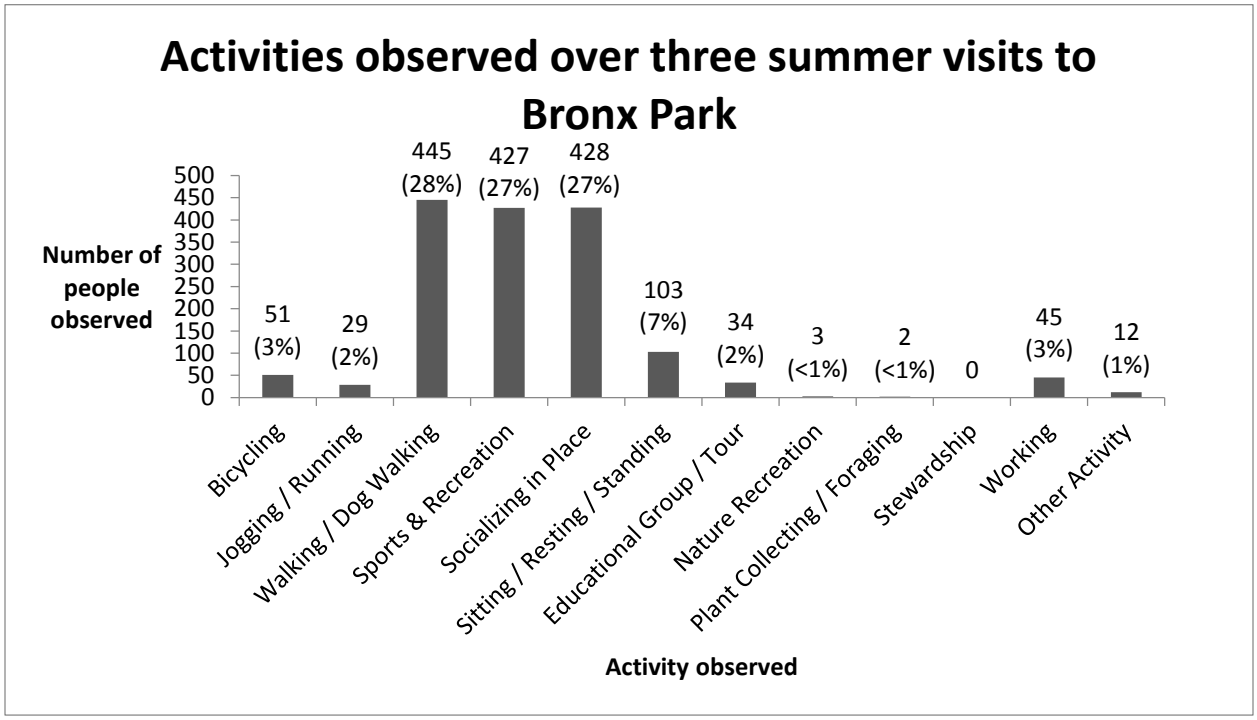


Who are they?



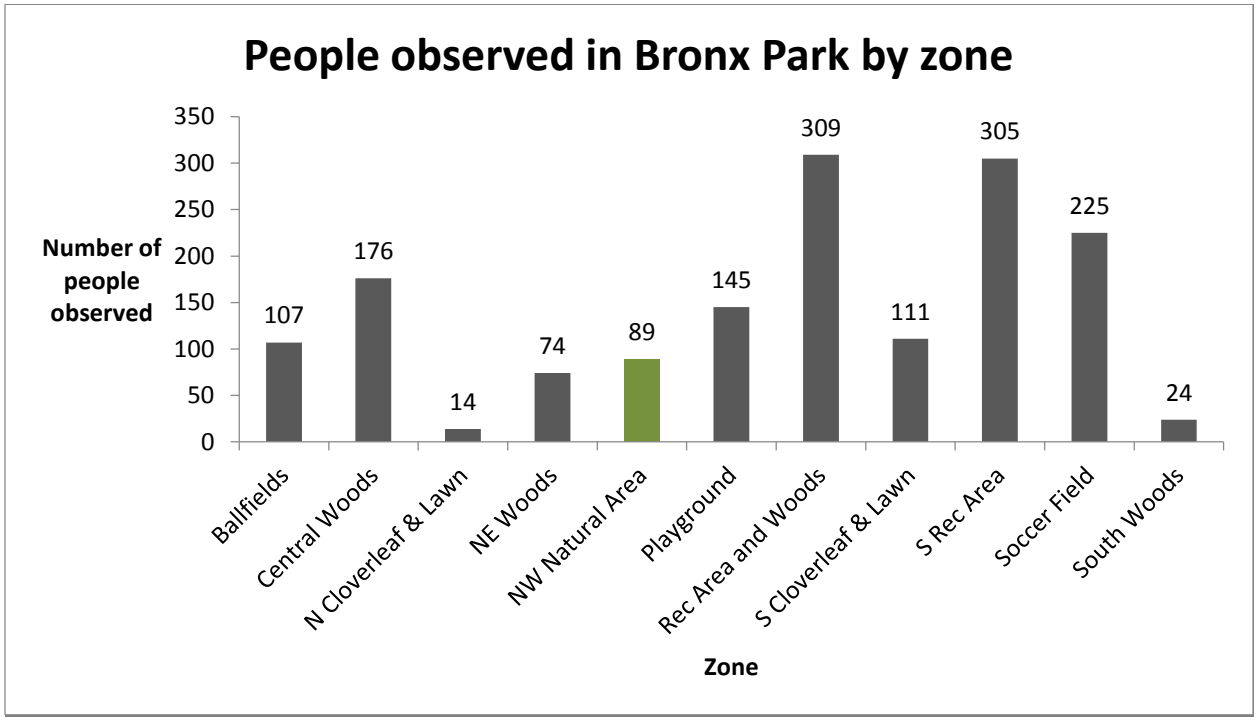
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone											
	Ballfields	Central Woods	N Cloverleaf & Lawn	NE Woods	NW Natural Area	Playground	Rec Area & Woods	S Cloverleaf & Lawn	S Rec Area	Soccer Field	South Woods	**Total**
Bicycling	1	8	1	5	15		3	6	2	8	2	**51**
Jogging / Running	1			17	2		5		1	3		**29**
Walking / Dog Walking	21	83	12	40	44	6	62	92	42	37	6	**445**
Sports & Recreation	7	1		5	1	56	115		128	114		**427**
Socializing in Place	72	43		4	10	62	97	11	72	43	14	**428**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	4	4	1	3	9	20	21		19	20	2	**103**
Educational Group / Tour									34			**34**
Nature Recreation					3							**3**
Plant Collecting / Foraging	1							1				**2**
Stewardship												**0**
Working		37				1	2	1	4			**45**
Other Activity					5		4		3			**12**
Total	**107**	**176**	**14**	**74**	**89**	**145**	**309**	**111**	**305**	**225**	**24**	**1579**

Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by time of visit and age group.

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	10	28	13	**51**	16	35		**51**
Jogging / Running	1	6	22	**29**	1	28		**29**
Walking / Dog Walking	165	151	129	**445**	167	269	9	**445**
Sports & Recreation	43	238	146	**427**	258	167	2	**427**
Socializing in Place	63	255	110	**428**	218	204	6	**428**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch	24	48	31	**103**	8	83	12	**103**
Educational Group / Tour	34			**34**	31	3		**34**
Nature Recreation		3		**3**	3			**3**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering			2	**2**		2		**2**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**
Working	2	5	38	**45**	3	42		**45**
Other Activity		7	5	**12**	1	11		**12**
Total	**342**	**741**	**496**	**1579**	**706**	**844**	**29**	**1579**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)										
Sign	Ballfields	Central Woods	N Cloverleaf & Lawn	NE Woods	NW Natural Area	Playground	Rec Area & Woods	S Cloverleaf & Lawn	S Rec Area	Soccer Field	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box											**0**
Damaged / Vandalized Property											**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area			1		1						**2**
Fire pit				1	1						**2**
Garden in Park											**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals			1		1	2			1		**5**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places	1		1	1				1			**4**
Informal Trails	1		3	5	14	6	6	1	1	1	**38**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol								1			**1**
Other Sign				1	5	1	2				**9**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers				2	1	1					**4**
Substantial Dumping or Debris					1						**1**
Total	**2**	**0**	**6**	**10**	**24**	**10**	**8**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**66**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Bronx Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of an informal garden in the park, chalk drawings, and an informal sign for a party.

Sociability Observed by Zone

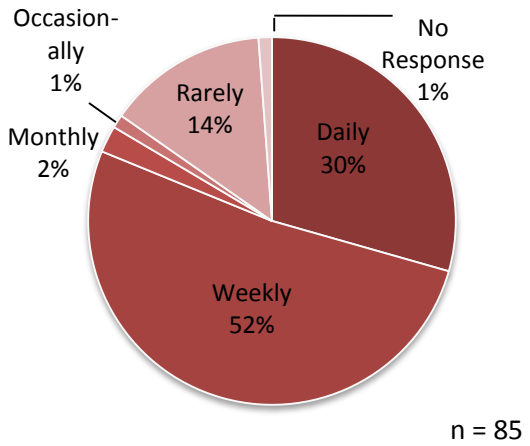
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Ballfields	2	2	1	5	**10**
Central Woods	4	15	8		**27**
N Cloverleaf & Lawn	3	3	1		**7**
NE Woods	5	8			**13**
NW Natural Area	3	4	3		**10**
Playground	1	6	4		**11**
Rec Area and Woods	8	14	7	1	**30**
S Cloverleaf & Lawn		8	2	2	**12**
S. Rec Area	3	11	13	1	**28**
Soccer Field	5	7	8	4	**24**
South Woods		1			**1**
Total	**34**	**79**	**47**	**13**	**173**

III. Interviews with Park Users

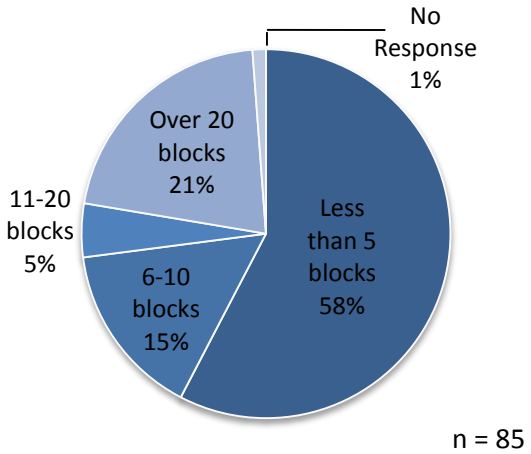
Eighty-five park users were interviewed in Bronx Park, of which 49% were male and 51% were female. Eight-five percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 15% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 84%.

The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 82% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It is also a crucial local resource, with 73% of users traveling less than 10 blocks away. At the same time, the park is drawing people from a distance, with 21% of users traveling over 20 blocks to reach the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Kids	36	42%
Sports & recreation	16	19%
Walking	14	16%
Nature-outdoors	11	13%
Relaxing	10	12%
Socializing	6	7%
Dog	4	5%
Community program	3	4%
Exercise	3	4%
Arts and culture	2	2%
Nature recreation	1	1%
Working	1	1%
Total Respondents	**85**	

Most of the park users we interviewed were in the park with their *kids* (42%) or engaging in physical activity, which included *sports and recreation* (19%), *walking* (16%), *dog walking* (5%), and *exercising* (4%). Many respondents were also enjoying the *outdoors* (13%) and cited the weather, the sun, and fresh air as reasons for coming to the park. Some respondents were in the park to *relax* (12%) or *socialize* with others (7%). During our weekend visit, a street fair was being held, so some respondents had come to the park specifically for that *community program* (4%) while one respondent was *working* at the event (1%). We encountered some respondents who were at the park for *art and cultural* activities (2%). One interviewee was participating in *nature recreation* (1%) and was foraging for mulberries for her pets.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

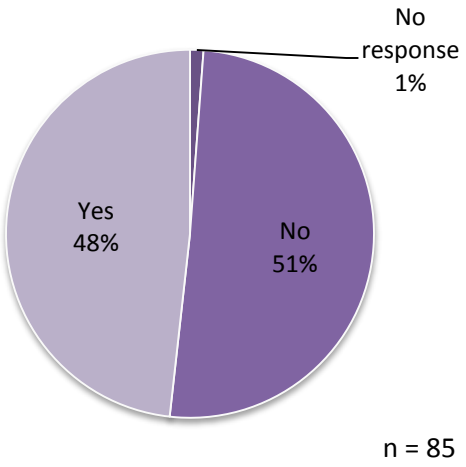
Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	37	44%
Refuge	14	16%
Quality	13	15%
Activity	10	12%
Amenities	9	11%
Enjoyment	7	8%
Sociability	6	7%
Place attachment	5	6%
Social ties	3	4%
Nature-outdoors	3	4%
Ambivalence	2	2%
Explore	1	1%
Access	1	1%
Total Respondents	**85**	

Bronx Park is a valuable *local* resource, and most parks users chose to visit because it is close to home (44%). Respondents also described the park as a *refuge* (16%) that is "quiet," "peaceful," and a place where they could "relax." Many respondents visited the park because of its characteristics; they like the types of *amenities* present (11%), the *activities* they could participate in (12%) – mainly sports and cultural events, and the *quality of the park* (15%), in that it was "clean," "not as crowded," and "better than any other park." Some simply spoke of their *enjoyment* of the park (8%) and described the park as "pretty," "beautiful" and "good." The park is also an important social space: some respondents were at the park for its *sociability* (7%) or its "friendly atmosphere" and other were there because of *social ties* (4%) to friends or family members who brought them to the park. Some respondents spoke of their deep *place attachment* (6%) explaining they had been visiting the park regularly for over a decade or since they were youth. A few visitors were at the park to *enjoy the outdoors* (4%), *explore* the park for the first time (1%). One respondent cited *access* (1%) as the reason she was there and that this was the only park close to where she lived. Finally, some respondents were *ambivalent* (2%) and did not have a reason for why they were visiting.

"The things that stand out to me about the work that I've done this summer is listening to other people's stories/relationships to the park. One encounter that [we] had in Bronx Park was with a couple of homeless men in the park who live/hangout in the park. They have an attachment to place -- they named the area "birthday cake" where a tall tree used to stand in the middle of a circular plaza. They missed the tree that was there."

Vignette from field researcher's notes on Bronx Park

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



Bronx Park includes a number of wooded and trail areas, so we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. Nearly half of respondents interviewed said yes (48%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas.

Out of the respondents who said yes, the majority of respondents participate in physical activity in natural areas: *walking* (49%), *exercising* (15%), and *biking* (10%) were common activities. Respondents also spent time *enjoying nature and the outdoors* (17%) or *engaging in nature recreation* (15%), such as bird watching. Some respondents saw natural areas as a place to *relax* (12%) while others expressed *concern* (12%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about safety. Respondents also saw natural areas as places to *socialize* (7%), *spend time with kids* (7%), and engage in a*rt and cultural activities* (7%), such as reading. Some also saw natural areas as a *free space* (7%) to do what they wanted even if the activities were unsanctioned (i.e., "use the bathroom"). A few respondents noted *prior engagement* (5%) with natural areas in the past, often when they were younger. One respondent was *working* (2%) in the natural area looking for cans. Finally, one respondent said that he went to natural areas to watch baseball/soccer games (*sports & recreation*, 2%), perhaps indicating his perception of those areas as part of the woods, wetlands, or trail areas.

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	20	49%
Nature-Outdoors	7	17%
Exercise	6	15%
Nature recreation	6	15%
Relaxing	5	12%
Concern	5	12%
Biking	4	10%
Socializing	3	7%
Kids	3	7%
Arts & culture	3	7%
Free space	3	7%
Prior engagement	2	5%
Working	1	2%
Sports & recreation	1	2%
"Yes" Respondents	**41**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Preference	17	40%
Potential	13	30%
Fear-Concern	11	26%
No response	1	2%
Access	1	2%
Life course	1	2%
"No" Respondents	**43**	

Forty-three (51%) respondents said that they do not go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, the majority *preferred to go to other parts of the park* (40%). We classified some respondents as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (30%) because they were previously unaware that these areas existed or did not have a specific reason for not visiting those areas. Some respondents expressed *fear or concern* (26%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about safety, mosquitoes, or rats. One respondent noted that the natural area was difficult to *access* (2%) because it was across from a highway. Finally, one respondent was at a stage in her *life course* (2%, "the kids are too small") that made her reluctant to go to natural areas. Out of the 51% of respondents who said that they did not go into natural areas, one was actually interviewed in a natural area but did not realize it – this respondent noted that he tended to stay near the ballfields.

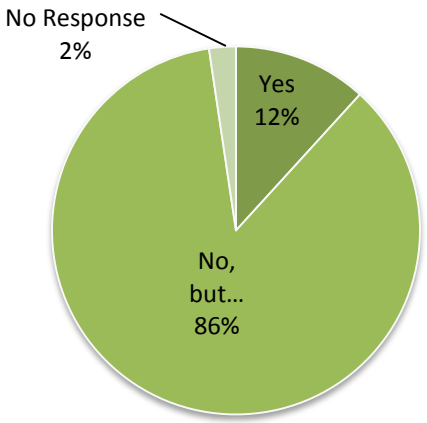
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

The most commonly visited site types for Bronx Park users were other *named NYC parks* (42%), such as Pelham Bay Park and Van Cortlandt Park. *Beach and waterfront areas* (22%) were also popular. Many respondents said they *don't go anywhere else outdoors* (21%), indicating the importance of Bronx Park in their everyday lives. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	36	42%
Beach-waterfront	19	22%
Nowhere else	18	21%
Zoo / Aquarium	7	8%
Out of town	7	8%
No response	6	7%
Sports	3	4%
Botanical garden	2	2%
Streets	1	1%
Barbecue	1	1%
Playground	1	1%
Total Respondents	**85**	

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 85

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and only 12% of respondents directly identified as doing so. One of those who said "yes" mentioned his affiliation with the Wildlife Conservation Society. Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

At one end of the spectrum, a few respondents were involved in *other forms of civic engagement* (n = 2), such as volunteering for the fire and police departments. Some answered that they take part in *self-led stewardship* (n = 3) outside the context of a group while others had *pro-environmental beliefs* (n = 2), such as the importance of recycling.

Some respondents had the *potential to become stewards* (n = 37), because they had given no thought to participating in stewardship or they actively wanted to but were not at present. A number of respondents *lacked awareness* (n = 9) of groups they could join. One respondent was *self-critical* and expressed embarrassment that she was not involved in stewardship while another respondent spoke about her connection to stewardship through her *work* for 311. Finally, some respondents said that they had *no time* (n = 20), *no interest* (n = 1), and/or cited *other barriers* (n = 1) such as illness.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
BRONX: Pelham Bay Park Profile

Zone Names			
E Ballfield	Memorial Grove	Playground	S Woods & Lawn
Field	Nature Center	Rec Area	Woods & Landfill
Hunter Island	Offramp Lawn	Rodman's Neck	Woods & Marsh
Marsh	Orchard Beach Area	S Ballfield	

I. Park Narrative

Pelham Bay Park is an enormous, varied, and somewhat fractured 2,031-acre[1] park at the northeastern edge of New York City. It contains a greenway, natural areas, recreation space, a golf course, fishing spots, and the extremely popular Orchard Beach. Like Van Cortlandt Park or Flushing Meadows, it is difficult to provide one singular narrative for Pelham Bay. Instead, it can be thought of as distinct zones, and many users understand the park this way. This narrative describes the beach, the southern landscaped areas, the natural areas, and the greenway. The golf course and putting areas of the park were not assessed.

The Orchard Beach Area is one of the most heavily used zones of any park we visited. There were several hundred visitors each day to the beach. Different sections of the beach have a distinct sense of place and atmosphere. Some people come to the beach to swim for exercise or get sun, while for others it is a social place. Many people hang out at the beach all day, setting up chairs and stereos. There are obvious "regulars" who greet each other and have their spots. The manicured lawn space behind the beach is a popular spot for barbeques for a wide range of people, particularly in weekends. Perhaps because of the high usage, many visitors complained there were not enough trash cans and picnic tables in this barbeque space. In general, this area has many users, particularly seniors, who expressed their "Bronx pride" and explained they had been coming here since they were little.

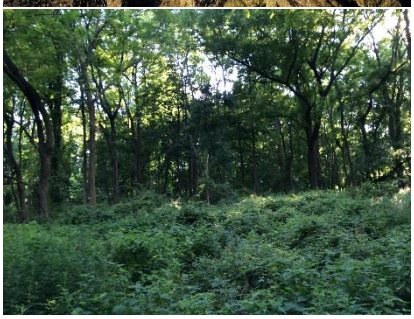
The southern landscaped areas of the park have a different sense of place compared to the northern areas where the beach is located. These areas are used for recreation, fitness (particularly the track), and socializing. On the weekends there were many barbeques in the area. There was also a fair amount of trash and litter in this section. Interestingly, many visitors who we approached immediately asked if they were "in trouble."

Most of our observations of park use in the natural areas were at fishing spots. During our visits, the majority of trails were not being used and were overgrown. We saw many ticks in these areas, and few people on the trails. We saw some users in the natural area hanging out, many of whom were openly smoking or drinking. We also saw many plastic bags, cigar wrappers, and beer bottles. There were informal trails to fishing areas throughout the natural areas. Fisher folk in this zone shared their local ecological knowledge about what fish to release or use as bait. Interviewees explained that they come here because it is their regular spot, and they have been coming for years. There were several older men who were fishing alone as well as groups of younger people. One man interviewed said that he did not eat fish caught near the landfill because the mob used to bury dead bodies in it.

The greenway was heavily used in sections. In particular it was used for exercise by bikers or runners. A few of the cyclists who we spoke with came all the way up to the greenway in Pelham from Manhattan. Not many people could be interviewed on the greenway because they were exercising but those we spoke with said they only went on the paved trails and not into the woods, suggesting that the wilderness areas may not be heavily used.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

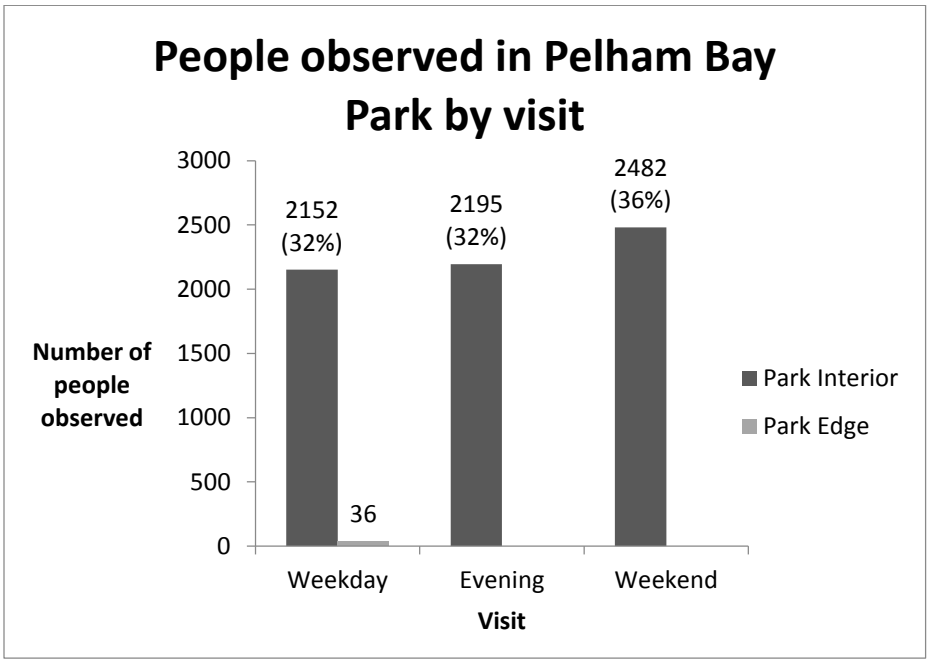
Hundreds of people from throughout the city and the Bronx in particular, appear to use Pelham Bay Park each day. Visitors use the areas discussed above, as well as the many green areas near highways, memorials, the golf course, and an equestrian center.



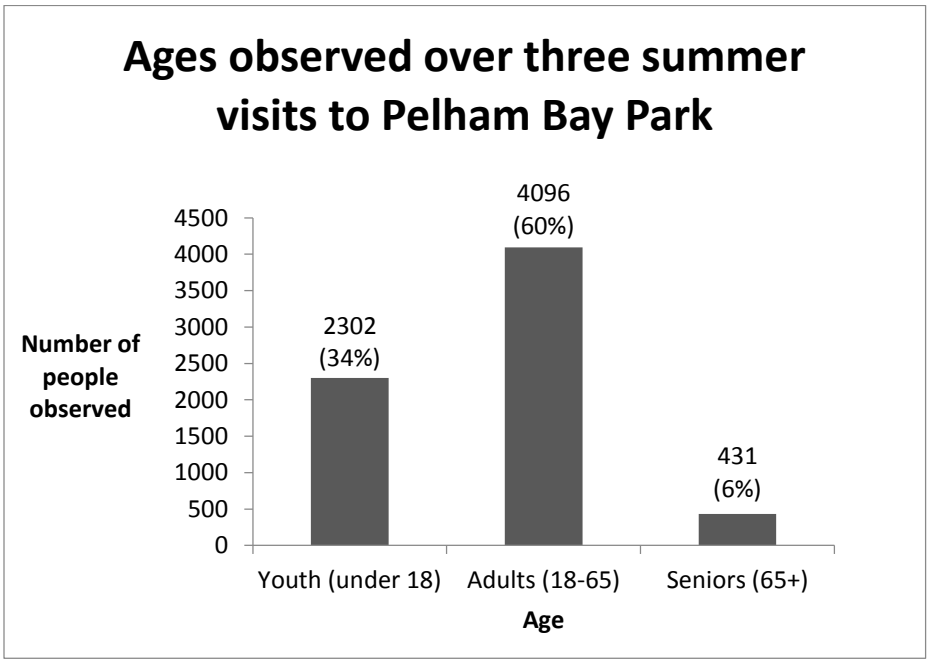
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

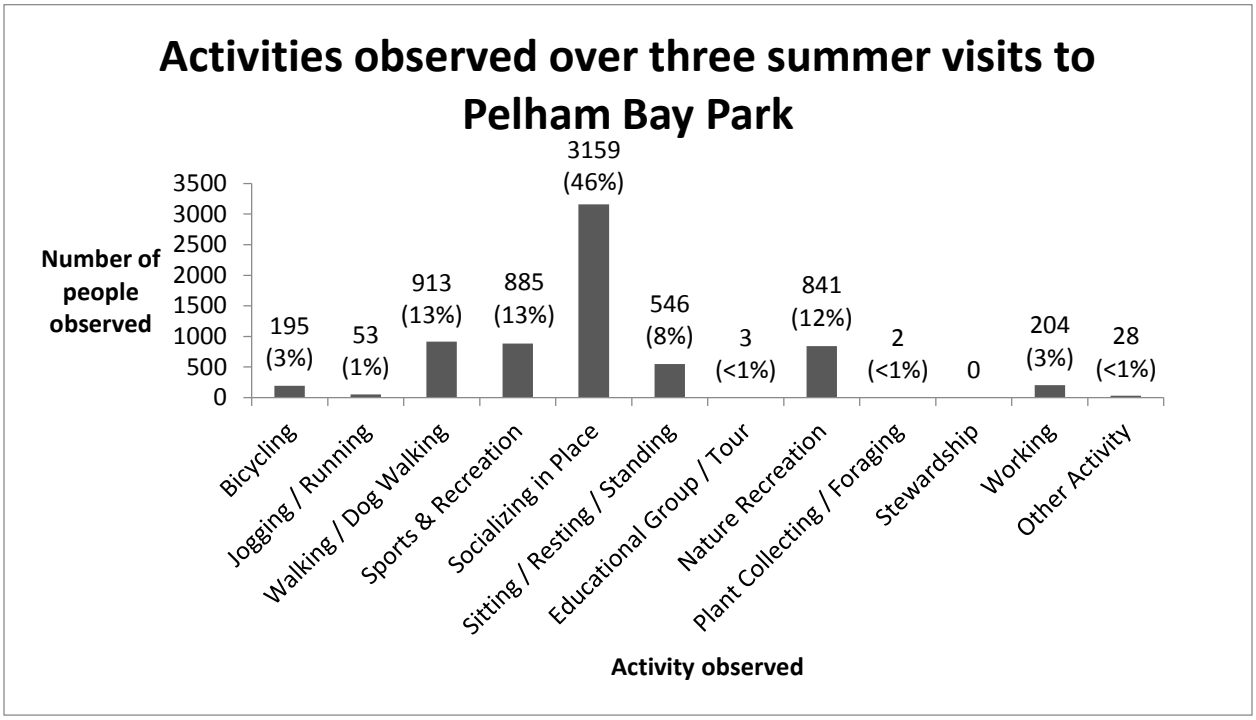


Who are they?



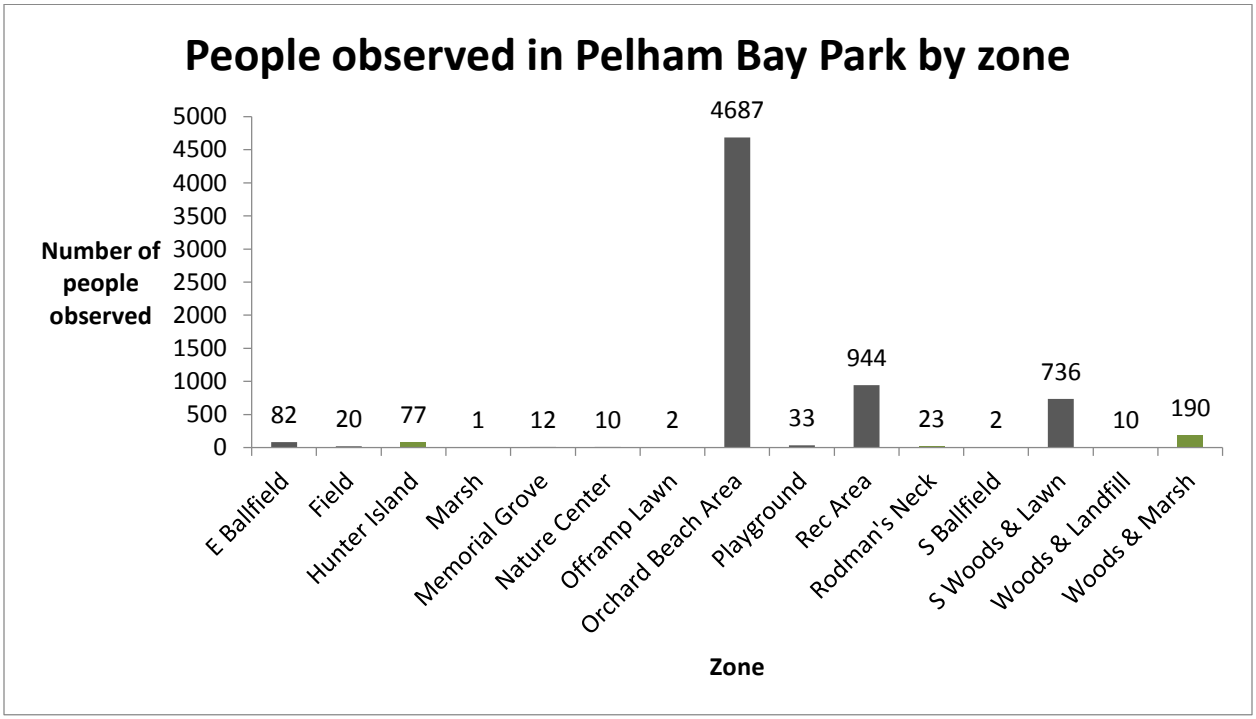
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone															
	E Ballfield	Field	Hunter Island	Marsh	Memorial Grove	Nature Center	Offramp Lawn	Orchard Beach Area	Play-ground	Rec Area	Rodman's Neck	S Ballfield	S Woods & Lawn	Woods & Landfill	Woods & Marsh	**Total**
Bicycling	3	11	1		6		1	31		17	4		48	2	71	**195**
Jogging / Running		2	1					8		21			12		9	**53**
Walking / Dog Walking	2	7	31	1	3	2	1	576		109	3		158	4	16	**913**
Sports & Recreation					3			334	8	507			31		2	**885**
Socializing in Place	75		16			2		2420	24	182		2	414		24	**3159**
Sitting / Resting / Standing			10			3		414	1	83			33		2	**546**
Educational Group / Tour										3						**3**
Nature Recreation			17					745		4	8		8		59	**841**
Plant Collecting / Foraging			1										1			**2**
Stewardship																**0**
Working	2					3		138		18	8		25	4	6	**204**
Other Activity								21					6		1	**28**
Total	**82**	**20**	**77**	**1**	**12**	**10**	**2**	**4687**	**33**	**944**	**23**	**2**	**736**	**10**	**190**	**6829**

Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by time of visit and age group.

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	63	52	80	**195**	36	146	13	**195**
Jogging / Running	27	13	13	**53**	5	48		**53**
Walking / Dog Walking	267	313	333	**913**	263	599	51	**913**
Sports & Recreation	226	309	350	**885**	524	346	15	**885**
Socializing in Place	745	1007	1407	**3159**	821	2092	246	**3159**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch	165	184	197	**546**	44	405	97	**546**
Educational Group / Tour		3		**3**			3	**3**
Nature Recreation	538	243	60	**841**	578	259	4	**841**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering	1	1		**2**		1	1	**2**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**
Working	117	47	40	**204**	20	183	1	**204**
Other Activity	3	23	2	**28**	11	17		**28**
Total	**2152**	**2195**	**2482**	**6829**	**2302**	**4096**	**431**	**6829**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)												
Sign	E Ballfield	Field	Hunter Island	Marsh	N Ballfield	N Woods	Nature Center	Orchard Beach Area	Rodman's Neck	S Woods & Lawn	Woods & Landfill	Woods & Marsh	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat box													**0**
Damaged / Vandalized Property					1				1		1	1	**4**
Encampment / Sleeping Area									2		1	1	**4**
Fire pit			1	2					1	5	1		**10**
Garden in Park					1								**1**
Graffiti, Art, Murals			1	1						7		15	**24**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places		1		2						4		1	**8**
Informal Trails	1	3	23	3	1				10	25	6	29	**101**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol										1			**1**
Other Sign		4	3	2				2	11	2	6	18	**48**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers				1			1		4		1	4	**11**
Substantial Dumping or Debris					1	4			2	1	3	7	**18**
Total	**1**	**8**	**28**	**11**	**4**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**31**	**45**	**19**	**76**	**230**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Pelham Bay Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of 'hangout' spots and play equipment.

Sociability Observed by Zone

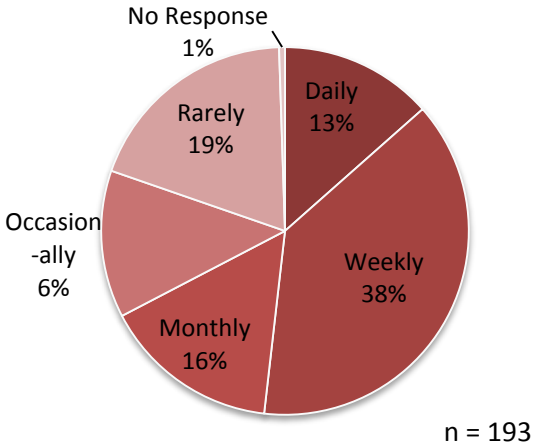
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
E Ballfield				2	**2**
Field	1	5			**6**
Hunter Island	3	16	4		**23**
Memorial Grove			1		**1**
Nature Center	1				**1**
Orchard Beach Area	3	341	390	26	**760**
Playground		1	4		**5**
Rec Area	10	79	61	16	**166**
Rodman's Neck		4			**4**
S Ballfield		1			**1**
S Woods & Lawn	11	56	62	9	**138**
Woods & Landfill		2			**2**
Woods & Marsh	2	13	9	1	**25**
Total	**31**	**518**	**531**	**54**	**1134**

III. Interviews with Park Users

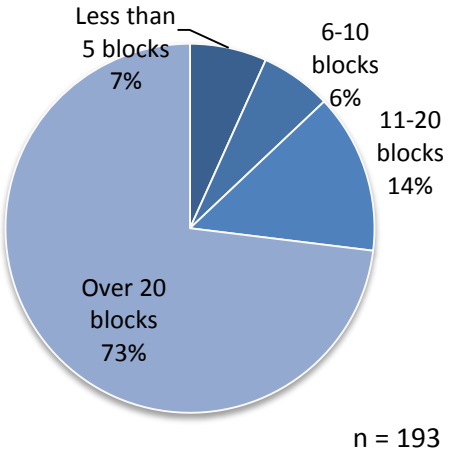
One hundred ninety-three park users were interviewed in Pelham Bay Park, of which 60% were male and 40% were female. Eighty percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 20% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 80%.

The park plays a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 51% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park also appears to be a destination park: 73% of users travel over 20 blocks to reach the park while only 13% of users travel less than 10 blocks away.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Relaxing	59	31%
Socializing	35	18%
Nature recreation	26	13%
Kids	26	13%
Nature-outdoors	25	13%
Beach	24	12%
Walking	13	7%
Sports & recreation	11	6%
Dog	10	5%
Exercise	7	4%
Arts & culture	3	2%
Working	3	2%
Biking	2	1%
Spiritual	2	1%
No response	1	0.5%
Total Respondents	**193**	

Most respondents were in the park *relaxing* (31%): many were "hanging out," "chilling," or "get[ting] away from stress." Pelham Bay Park also appears to be an important social space. Many were in the park *socializing* (18%) at barbecues, family reunions, birthday parties, etc. or spending time with their *kids* (13%). *Nature recreation* (13%) activities, including fishing or swimming, were also popular, and many were at the park to *enjoy nature and the outdoors* (13%). Because many people were interviewed at Orchard Beach, going to the *beach* (12%) was a common response among respondents. A number of respondents were at the park engaging in physical activity: *walking* (7%), *sports & recreation* (6%), *dog walking* (5%), *exercise* (4%), and/or *biking* (1%). Some were engaged in *art and cultural activities* (2%) like dancing, enjoying music, or reading. A few were *working* (2%) as life guards or catering a barbecue. Two people interviewed were at a baptism (*spiritual*, 1%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

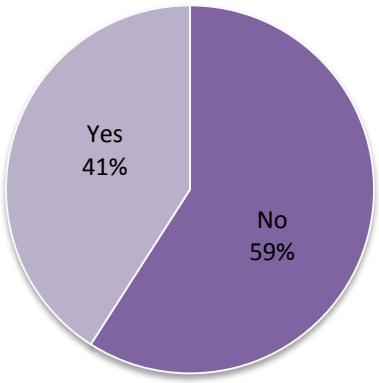
Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	70	36%
Place attachment	38	20%
Refuge	29	15%
Amenities	28	15%
Quality	25	13%
Access	25	13%
Nature-outdoors	20	10%
Sociability	18	9%
Enjoyment	18	9%
Activity	12	6%
Social ties	7	4%
Explore	4	2%
Ambivalence	1	1%
Total Respondents	**193**	

Although most of the visitors to Pelham Bay Park come from over 20 blocks away, many respondents came because it was close to their homes (*local*, 36%). We also spoke with interviewees who had strong *place attachment* (20%) and had been coming to the park for decades—one respondent had been coming to the park for 50 years. Respondents also saw the park as a *refuge* (15%) and described it as a place that was "quiet", "peaceful" and a place to "forget about all the problems you have". The huge variety of *amenities* were also a draw (15%), and respondents visited because of the barbecue areas, beach, courts and fields, playgrounds, shooting range, trails, and more. Many respondents liked the quality of the park (13%) and described it as "clean", "spacious", or "not crowded". Ease of *access* (13%) also drew many respondents. Some respondents visited Pelham Bay Park because they like *nature or the outdoors* (10%). A fair number were also at the park because of its *sociability* (9%): they were there to spend time with their friends or family or just generally "nice people". Some interviewees visited because they *enjoyed* (9%) the park -- they "love" the park or think that it's "beautiful" or "fun". Others were at the park because of specific *activities* (6%) like swimming, fishing, or working as a lifeguard. A number of respondents were at the park because of *social ties* (4%) to friends or family who lived near the park or recommended it. Finally, a few respondents were *exploring* (2%) the park for the first time and one had specific reason for visiting the park (*ambivalence*, 1%).

"Pelham Bay Park has a number of fishing spots all along its vast coastline. Many if not all of them are hidden, unofficial, and informal. Most fishers congregated around Eastchester Bay… All of them were racially diverse… However, they were all men except for two women who seemingly came with their husbands. People who came to the fishing spots from different walks of life end up connecting to some level at the fishing spot. Often, the same people who come to use them regularly also maintain these spots meticulously and with care. There is a sense of peace, tranquility, and escape for those who come fish in these spots."

Vignette from field researcher's notes on Pelham Bay Park

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 193

Pelham Bay Park includes a number of wooded, wetland, and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. Some of the respondents interviewed said yes (41%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas.

Out of the respondents who said "yes," the most common answer was *nature recreation* (38%), which includes people fishing, viewing wildlife, camping, etc. Many respondents would do some form of physical activity like *walking* (35%), *exercising* (6%), *biking* (4%), or *sports and recreation* (1%). Respondents mentioned going to natural areas to enjoy *nature and the outdoors* (20%), *relax* (14%), and/or *socialize* (10%) as well. A few of the respondents talked about going to natural areas in the past (*prior engagement*: 5%). There were some respondents who were *concerned* (4%) about being in natural areas because of the heat, ticks, or accidentally coming across other visitors engaging in illicit activities. Others would participate in *art and cultural activities* (4%) like photography or listening to music. Some respondents would go to natural areas with their *kids* (4%). Two respondents would participate in *stewardship* (2%) in natural areas, and one respondent saw the natural areas as a *free space* (1%) to do any activity even if unsanctioned (i.e., "go to the bathroom").

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature recreation	30	38%
Walking	28	35%
Nature-Outdoors	16	20%
Relaxing	11	14%
Socializing	8	10%
Exercise	5	6%
Prior engagement	4	5%
Biking	3	4%
Concern	3	4%
Arts & culture	3	4%
Kids	3	4%
Stewardship	2	3%
No response	2	3%
Sports & recreation	1	1%
Free space	1	1%
"Yes" Respondents	**79**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Preference	15	58%
Potential	5	19%
Fear-Concern	3	12%
No response	3	12%
"No" Respondents	**26**	

Twenty-six respondents (59%) did not go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, the majority *preferred to go to other parts of the park* (58%). We classified some respondents as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (19%) because they were previously unaware that these areas existed or did not have a specific reason for not visiting those areas. A few also expressed *fear or concern* (7%) about insects, safety, or even bears, which made them reluctant to visit natural areas. Out of the 59% of respondents who said they did not go to the wooded, wetland or trail areas, 5 were interviewed in a natural area but did not realize it. Many were fishers or just passing through to another part of the park.

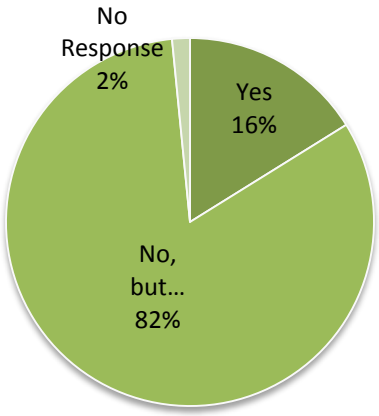
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

The most commonly visited site types for Pelham Bay Park users were *beach and waterfront areas* (37%), such as Coney Island, Jones Beach, or Rockaway Beach. Many respondents also went *out of town* (31%) to places on Long Island or upstate New York for example. Other *named NYC parks* (29%) such as Central Park or Van Cortlandt Park were also popular. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Beach-waterfront	71	37%
Out of town	59	31%
Named NYC Park	56	29%
Nowhere else	36	19%
Nature preserve	16	8%
Zoo / Aquarium	6	3%
No response	5	3%
Amusement	4	2%
Botanical garden	4	2%
Streets	2	1%
Local	2	1%
Community facility	1	1%
Greenway	1	1%
Playground	1	1%
Total Respondents	**193**	

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 193

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and 16% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Some who said yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type(s) of group in which they participate (listed below). Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

At one end of the spectrum, a number of respondents articulated a *pro-environmental ethic* (n = 17), such as the importance of recycling and generally being "friendly to earth." Some participated in *self-led stewardship* outside the context of a group (n = 13) or were involved in *other civic engagements* (n = 4), such as working with handicapped children, seniors, or volunteering at the food bank. A few *worked* (n = 3) for stewardship groups.

Most respondents had *no specific reason* (n = 41) for not participating in stewardship or *lacked awareness* (n = 17) about groups or opportunities to participate in stewardship. Some respondents had the *potential to become stewards* (n = 12), because they had given no thought to participating in stewardship or they actively wanted to but were not at present. Others were *self-critical* (n = 3) and expressed embarrassment that they were not involved in environmental stewardship. Some *participated in the past* (n = 2) but were not at present. Two were at *life courses* that prevented them from participating, and one had *social ties* to a friend who participated in stewardship. Finally, some respondents said that they had *no time* (n = 36), *no interest* (n = 11), and/or cited *other barriers* (n = 2) such as health problems.

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Environment	6	38%
Civic	4	25%
Religious	3	19%
Friends of park	2	13%
Community garden	1	6%
Total	**16**	

Named Stewardship Groups:

- Boy Scouts
- Food Bank of NYC
- Free the Poor
- Friends of Hudson River Park
- Friends of Soundview Park
- Habitat for Humanity
- MillionTreesNYC
- NYC Parks Department
- Westchester Land Trust
- World Wildlife Fund
- Youth Ministry for Peace and Justice

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

BRONX: Riverdale Park Profile

Zone Names
N Woods
S Woods

I. Park Narrative

Riverdale Park is a long, 53-acre[1] park near the edge of the Hudson River in the Riverdale neighborhood of the Bronx. It is mostly wooded and is designated as Forever Wild. There are a few informal trails that crisscross the woods leading from one edge to another. The park has no focal attraction, but its secluded location and thick wooded areas make it an attractive place for local residents to get away. During our visits, the park generally had low usage during daylight hours.

The Riverdale neighborhood is an affluent neighborhood in the northwestern corner of the Bronx. There are many large single-family homes, especially along the edge of the park. Some homes have direct access into the park, as there is no barrier between the private property and park property. The long edge of the park is a quiet, tree-lined road that has no sidewalks. It is a low-use road that primarily serves the residences on its blocks.

We rarely observed people in the park itself. There were a few joggers and exercisers along the edge, and there were only a few dog walkers and joggers in the northern end of the park. Of the people we encountered, most if not all were from the local neighborhood. Many of the park users interviewed reported feeling very safe, and we heard birdsong throughout the woods. We also observed a number of signs of human use. In the S Woods zone, we observed a large clearing with considerable amounts of trash and a tree with words "Smoke & Drink" pointing to the clearing. We surmised that many users likely visit during the night. We also learned from a local resident that a MillionTrees planting event occurred in this zone along with other forest restoration activities.

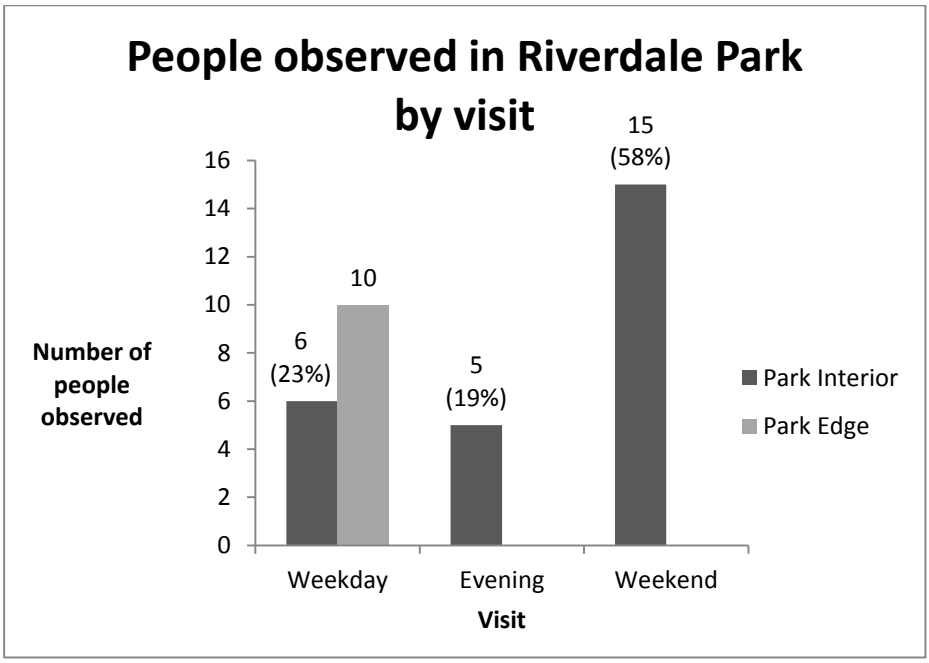
The large tracts of Forever Wild areas help give a quiet, serene sense to the park and the surrounding neighborhood. Despite the low usage, Riverdale Park appears to provide valuable green space for the surrounding neighborhood and for wildlife.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.



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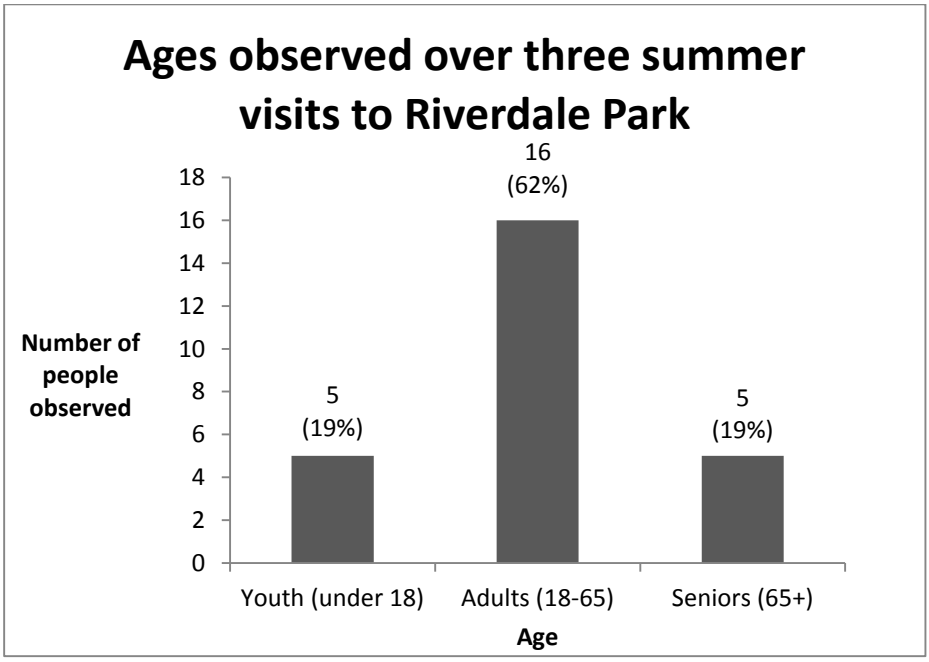
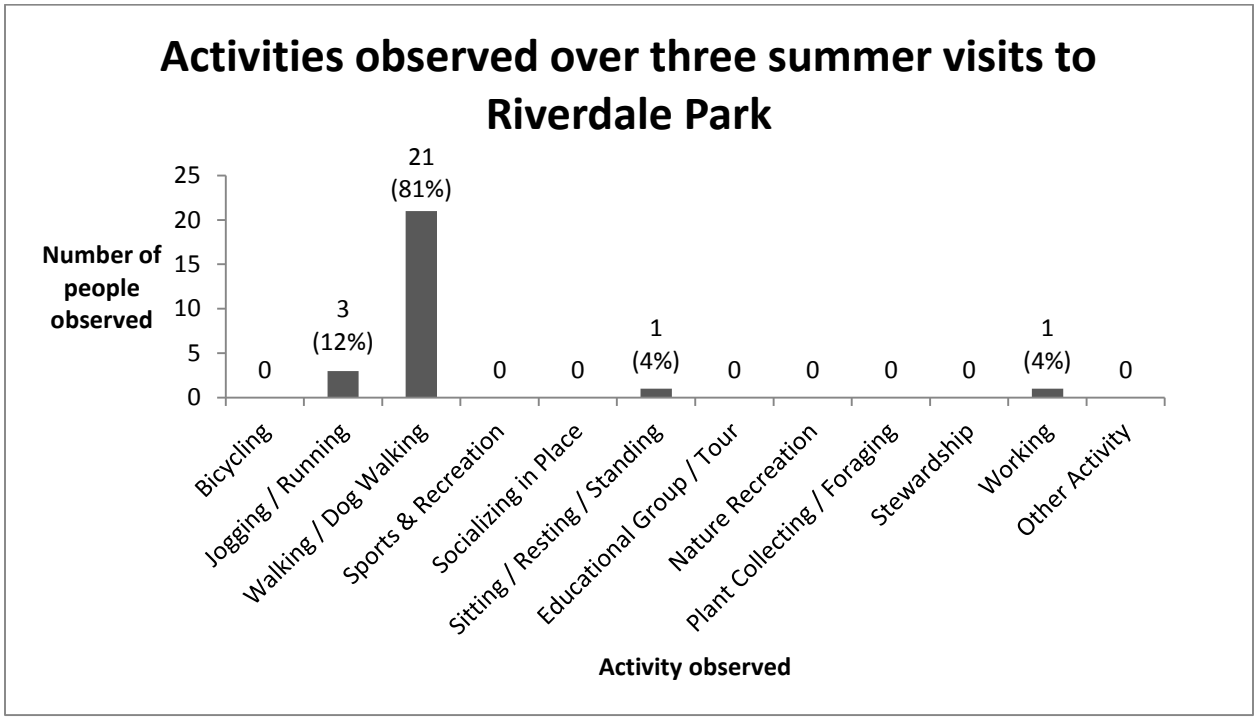


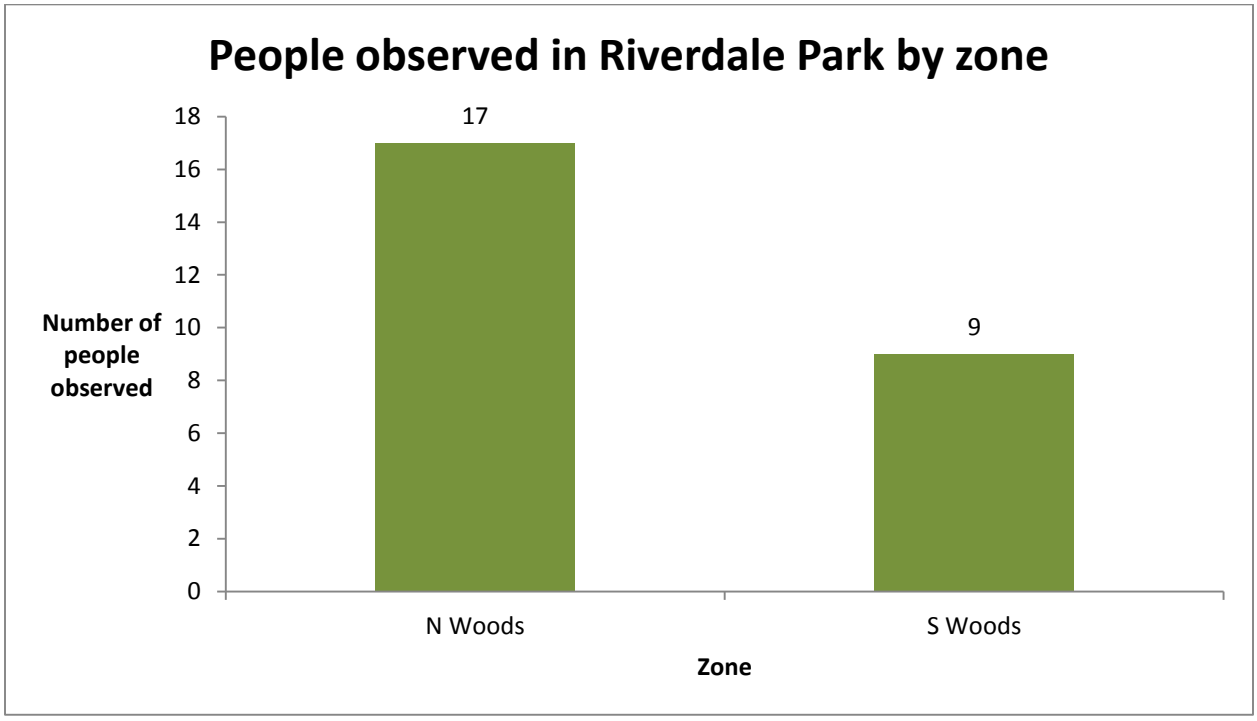
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone, time of visit, and age group. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Zones			Time of Visit				Age Group			
	N Woods	S Woods	Total	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling			**0**				**0**				**0**
Jogging / Running	3		**3**	2	1		**3**		3		**3**
Walking / Dog Walking	14	7	**21**	3	3	15	**21**	5	11	5	**21**
Sports & Recreation			**0**				**0**				**0**
Socializing in Place			**0**				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing		1	**1**		1		**1**		1		**1**
Educational Group / Tour			**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation			**0**				**0**				**0**
Plant Collecting / Foraging			**0**				**0**				**0**
Stewardship			**0**				**0**				**0**
Working		1	**1**	1			**1**		1		**1**
Other Activity			**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**17**	**9**	**26**	**6**	**5**	**15**	**26**	**5**	**16**	**5**	**26**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)		
Sign	**N Woods**	**S Woods**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box			**0**
Damaged / Vandalized Property	3		**3**
Encampment / Sleeping Area	14	7	**21**
Fire Pit			**0**
Garden in Park			**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals		1	**1**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places			**0**
Informal Trails			**0**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol			**0**
Other Sign			**0**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers		1	**1**
Substantial Dumping or Debris			**0**
Total	**17**	**9**	**26**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Riverdale Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of graffiti, a flyer, and debris.

"In the [South Woods zone], we found a big hang out area that is at the bottom of a very small hill. Covered by tall trees and no other mid- or understory to distract, this space was ideal for a large group of people to hang out. There were a few fire pits, a few logs made into informal seating, and a little garbage strewn about. Before descending the slope into the hang out, we saw silver writing on a black spray painted background on a tree reading "Smoke & Drink" with an arrow pointing to the hang out. This space, more than others that we've seen in parks, seemed like a popular, well-used spot by teenagers. The little bits of graffiti, the fresh coal / ash, and the well-trodden trail that really isn't too deep into the park are all signs of this."

From vignette on Riverdale Park

Sociability Observed by Zone

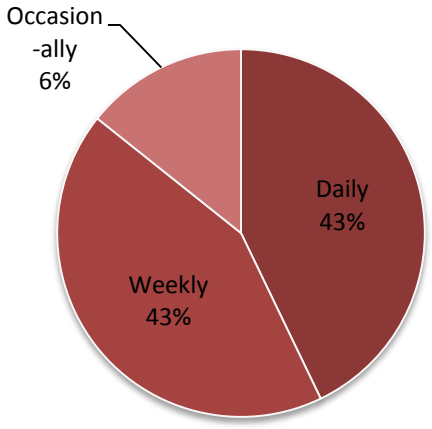
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
N Woods	8	1	1		**10**
Total	**8**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**10**

III. Interviews with Park Users

We interviewed seven park users in Riverdale Park, of which 29% were male and 71% were female. Fifty-seven percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 43% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 88%.

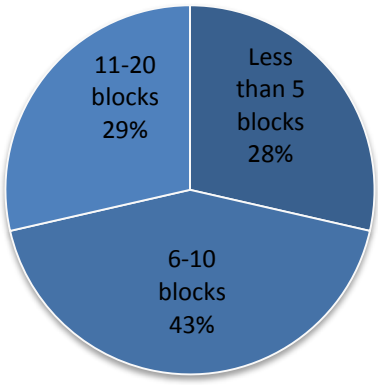
The park plays a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 86% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park appears to be an important neighborhood park: 71% of users travel less than 10 blocks away and no users interviewed traveled more than 20 blocks.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 7

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 7

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

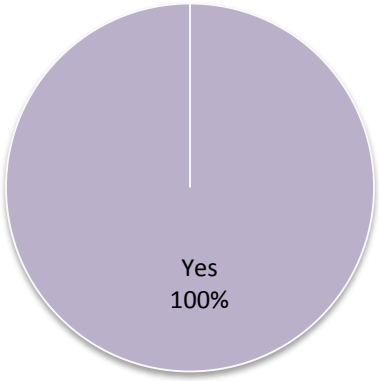
Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	7	100%
Dog	3	43%
Nature recreation	1	14%
Total Respondents	**7**	

All respondents we interviewed were *walking* (100%) although a subset were specifically *dog walking* (43%). One respondent was participating in *nature recreation* (14%) or hiking specifically.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Amenities	3	43%
Sociability	2	29%
Refuge	1	14%
Nature-outdoors	1	14%
Activity	1	14%
Enjoyment	1	14%
Ambivalence	1	14%
Local	1	14%
Total Respondents	**7**	

Most people were at the park because of the *amenities* (43%), specifically the dog park. Some also were there because of the *sociability* (2%) of the park and being able to interact with other dog walkers and dogs. One respondent was in the park because it was meditative (*refuge*, 14%) and she "loved non-manicured parks" and "lots of trees" (*nature-outdoors*, 14%). One interviewee visited the park for specific *activities* (14%), jogging and dirt biking. Another interviewee said that she "love[s]" the park (*enjoyment*, 14%) while one expressed *ambivalence* (14%) and noted that the northern end of the park was overgrown. Finally, one respondent visited because she lived nearby (*local*, 14%).



n = 7

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?

Pelham Bay Park includes a number of wooded, wetland, and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. All respondents said yes (100%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas. The majority would *walk* (71%) in natural areas. One respondent would write (*arts & culture*, 14%) or *relax* (14%) by meditating. One respondent would engage in *nature recreation* (14%), specifically fishing, although he admitted that he did that in the past (*prior engagement*, 14%).

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	5	71%
Arts & culture	1	14%
Relaxing	1	14%
Nature recreation	1	14%
Prior engagement	1	14%
"Yes" Respondents	**7**	

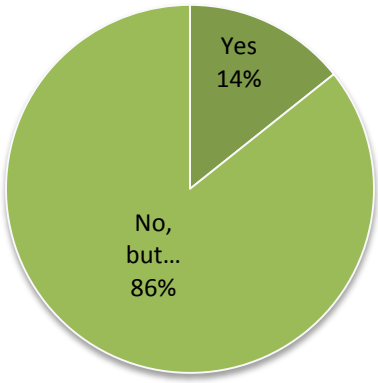
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	4	57%
Out of town	3	43%
Nowhere else	2	29%
Nature preserve	1	14%
Dog park	1	14%
Botanical garden	1	14%
Beach-waterfront	1	14%
Total Respondents	**7**	

The most commonly visited site types for Riverdale Park users were other *named NYC parks* (57%) such as Van Cortlandt Park. Many respondents also went *out of town* (43%) to places such as Florida or Redwood National and State Parks. For some, they *don't go anywhere else outdoors* (29%), indicating the importance of Alley Pond Park in their everyday lives. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 7

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and 14% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

One respondent was involved in *other civic engagements*, such as human rights, while another articulated a *pro-environmental ethic* and "prayed for [the environment] every night". An interviewee lacked *awareness* and never had the opportunity while another had *no specific reason*. Finally, one respondent had *no interest* and another cited *other barriers*, such as age.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

BRONX: Seton Falls Park Profile

Zone Names
High Rock Playground
Woods
Rec Area

I. Park Narrative

Seton Falls Park is a small, 34-acre[1], mostly Forever Wild-designated park in the northern area of the Bronx. Of the 34 acres, there are two small zones that contain playgrounds. The playgrounds in the Rec Area zone abuts the public school that shares the block with the park. High Rock Playground is a very small mowed area on the eastern edge. The park generally has low but engaged use.

Seton Falls Park is in the Baychester neighborhood of the Bronx. It is a quiet neighborhood with many single-family houses. The roads around the park are local roads with low traffic. The park is very easily accessible by all sides. The park is thickly wooded and well-marked and well-maintained signs offer a warm welcome into the park. Interestingly, this park was one of the few parks we surveyed in New York City that offered a wheelchair accessible entrance into the park, in particular, into the Forever Wild area.

The woods in the park are deep and old. However, the park appears to have suffered a lot of damage due to Hurricane Sandy. Many trees were uprooted, resulting in a loss of the canopy in the park. The evidence of the fallen trees is still present (as in many other parks), but nearly all the trees were cut through to make the paths accessible. Many park users we interviewed noted the sense of seclusion the park provides. They appreciate the privacy and quietness of the park. In addition, many users remarked about the wildlife in the park. They noted the many colorful birds, squirrels, and other animals.

Park users we observed were generally adults. There were generally small groups or single people (generally men) in the park. Even during the weekend, the park was not very crowded. The few users we interviewed appreciated the space and considered it an asset to the neighborhood. They were mostly local people who did not have to travel very many blocks to get there.

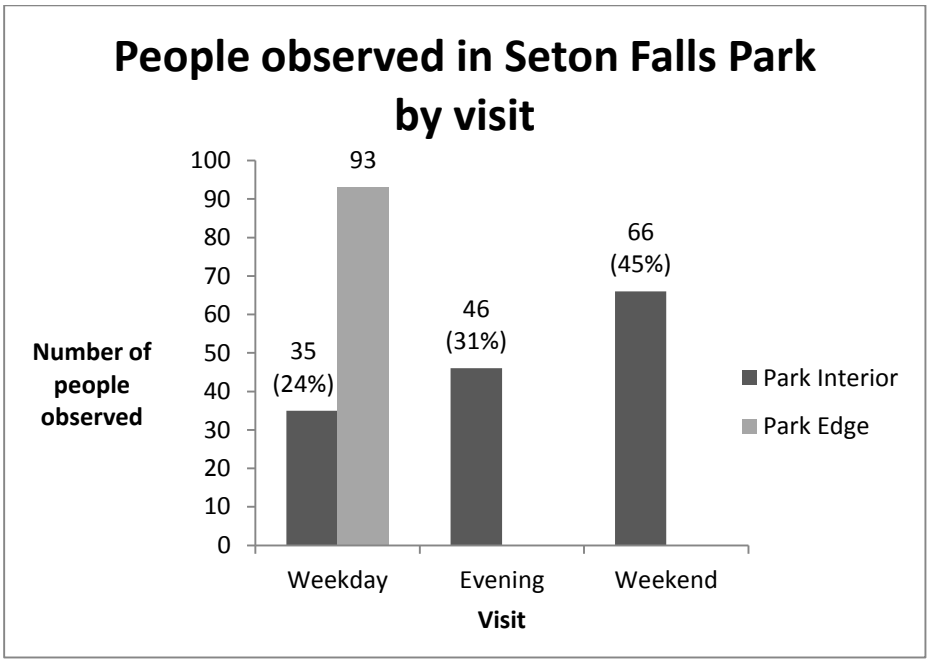
Seton Falls Park is a small, green oasis in the northern end of the Bronx. It is valued local resource, and many in the community consider it to be a refuge, particularly the large expanse of the Forever Wild zone.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

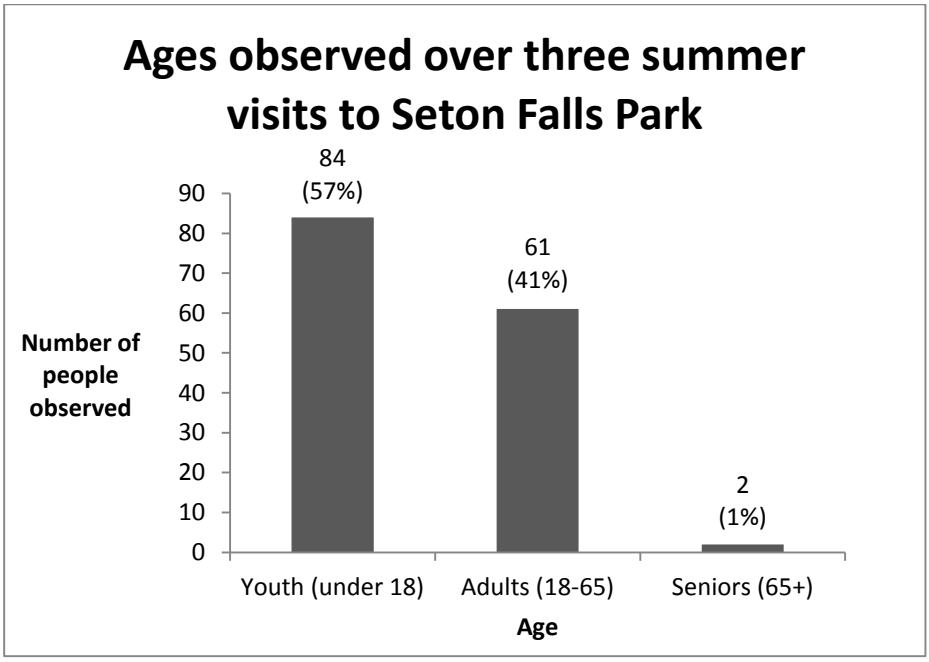
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

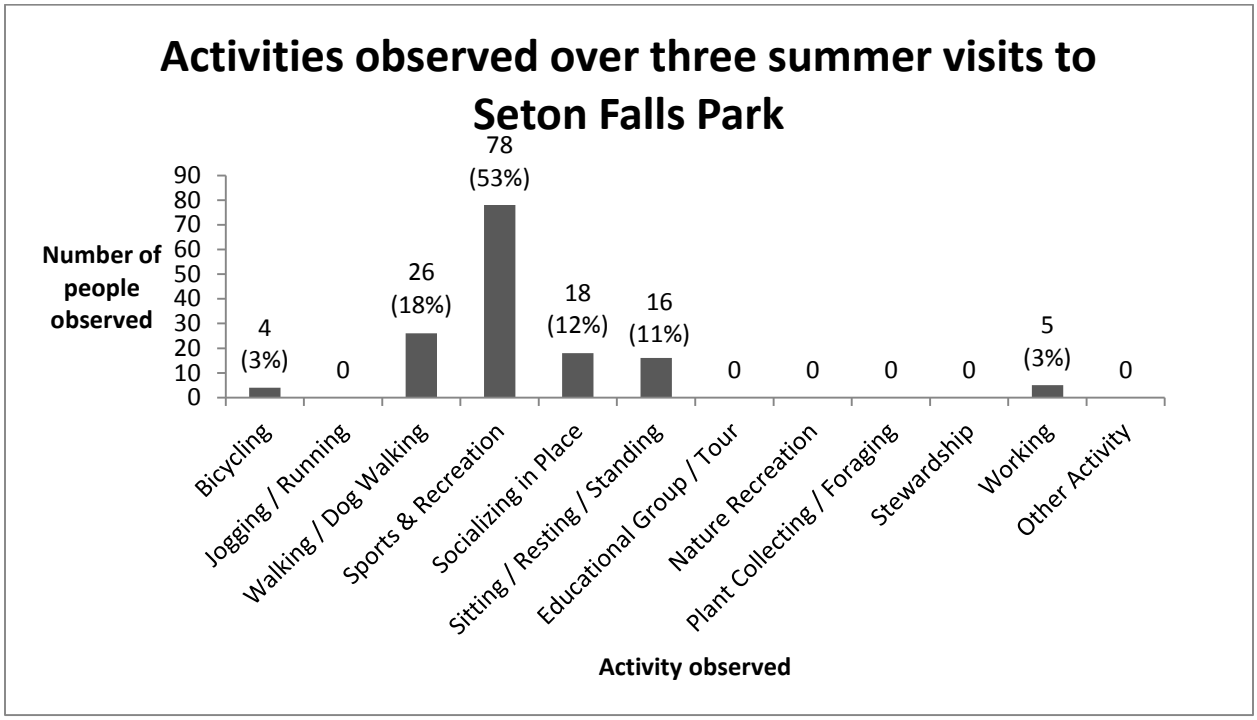


Who are they?



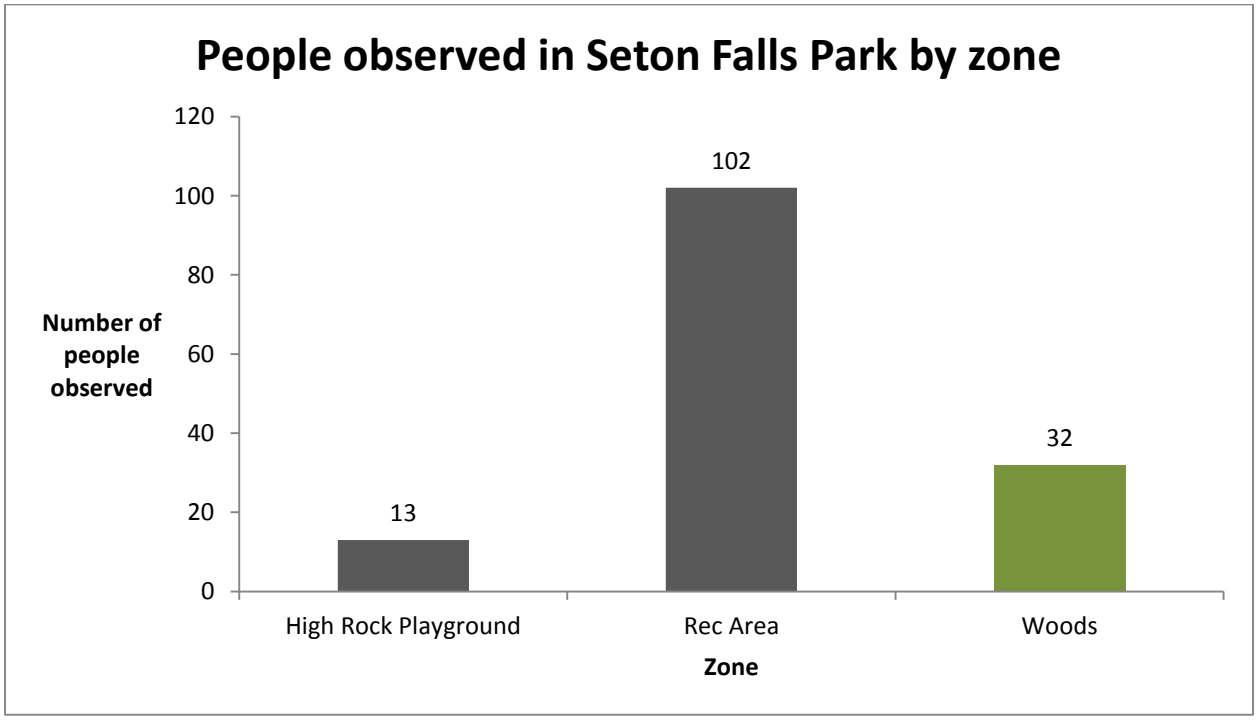
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone, time of visit, and age group. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Zones				Time of Visit				Age Group			
	High Rock Playground	Rec Area	Woods	Total	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	2	1	1	**4**		1	3	**4**	2	2		**4**
Jogging / Running				**0**				**0**				**0**
Walking / Dog Walking		6	20	**26**	4	13	9	**26**	6	20		**26**
Sports & Recreation	6	71	1	**78**	23	20	35	**78**	66	12		**78**
Socializing in Place	1	10	7	**18**	2	7	9	**18**	6	12		**18**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	4	9	3	**16**	3	5	8	**16**	4	12		**16**
Educational Group / Tour				**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation				**0**				**0**				**0**
Plant Collecting / Foraging				**0**				**0**				**0**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**				**0**
Working		5		**5**	3		2	**5**		3	2	**5**
Other Activity				**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**13**	**102**	**32**	**147**	**35**	**46**	**66**	**147**	**84**	**61**	**2**	**147**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)			
Sign	**High Rock Playground**	**Rec Area**	**Woods**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box	2	1	1	**4**
Damaged / Vandalized Property				**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area		6	20	**26**
Fire Pit	6	71	1	**78**
Garden in Park	1	10	7	**18**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	4	9	3	**16**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places				**0**
Informal Trails				**0**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol				**0**
Other Sign				**0**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers		5		**5**
Substantial Dumping or Debris				**0**
Total	**13**	**102**	**32**	**147**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Seton Falls Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of chalk drawings near the playground, a sign of stewardship, and a memorial.

Sociability Observed by Zone

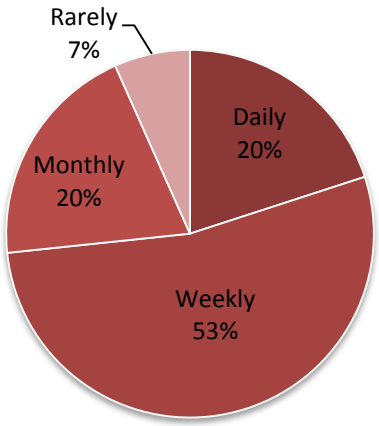
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
High Rock Playground		1	3		**4**
Rec Area		3		1	**4**
Woods	4	6	2		**12**
Total	**4**	**10**	**5**	**1**	**20**

III. Interviews with Park Users

We interviewed 15 park users in Seton Falls Park, of which 60% were male and 40% were female. Eighty-seven percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 13% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 88%.

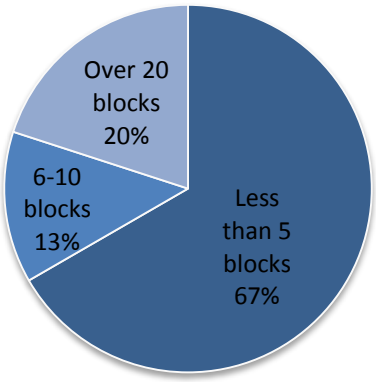
The park plays a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 73% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park also appears to be an important neighborhood park: 80% of users travel less than 10 blocks away while 20% of users travel over 20 blocks to reach the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 15

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 15

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Kids	6	40%
Relaxing	4	27%
Walking	2	13%
Sports & recreation	2	13%
Dog	2	13%
Arts and culture	2	13%
Spiritual	1	7%
Nature-outdoors	1	7%
Total Respondents	**15**	

The majority of respondents were in the park with their *kids* (40%). Many were also in the park to *relax* (27%), *walk* (13%), participate in *sports & recreation* (13%), or *walk their dog* (13%). Some were engaging in *art and cultural activities* (13%) by reading or listening to music, for example. One respondent was meditating (*spiritual*, 7%) in the park and another was listening to birds (*nature-outdoors*, 7%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

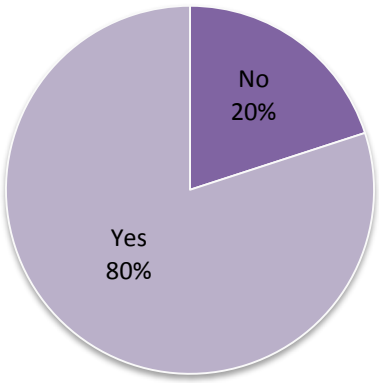
Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	5	33%
Amenities	4	27%
Place attachment	3	20%
Quality	3	20%
Refuge	3	20%
Access	2	13%
Nature-outdoors	2	13%
Sociability	1	7%
Enjoyment	1	7%
Total Respondents	**15**	

Most respondents were in the park because it was *local* (33%) and close to where they lived. Many also visited the park because of its *amenities* (27%) such as the playground, sprinklers, and areas for dog walking. Some visited because of their strong *place attachment* (20%), with one respondent saying that he has been visiting the part for 45 years. The *quality* of the park (20%) also attracted some visitors who described the park as "clean" or "big" while others also saw it as a *refuge* (20% - see vignette below). A few found the park easy to *access* (13%) or were in the park to be with *nature and the outdoors* (13%). One respondent liked the *sociability* of the park (7%) while another simply *enjoyed* being in the park (7%).

"We saw two men – one younger and one older – who both used the park as a space to enjoy solitude. The older man brought a fold out chair and a book bag of books and magazines. He set up by a big stump and was reading just off the path. We found the young man sitting on the wooden steps of the northeastern part of the park. He was smoking marijuana and listening to his music. He made us listen to his music as well. He said he came here because it is peaceful."

Vignette from field researcher's notes on Seton Falls Park

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 15

Seton Falls Park includes a number of wooded, wetland, and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. The majority of the respondents interviewed said yes (80%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas.

Out of the respondents who said "yes," the most common answer was *walking* (58%) followed by *nature recreation* (42%), such as wildlife viewing. Some would go to natural areas to *exercise* (17%) or *relax* (17%) as well. Finally, one respondent saw the natural areas as a *free space* (1%) to do any activity even if unsanctioned including "bury animals there."

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	7	58%
Nature recreation	5	42%
Exercise	2	17%
Relaxing	2	17%
Free space	1	8%
"Yes" Respondents	**12**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Fear-concern	2	67%
Potential	1	33%
"No" Respondents	**3**	

Three respondents (20%) did not go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, the majority expressed *fear or concern* (67%) for their safety. We classified one respondent as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (19%) because he expressed interest in hiking or walking around in the future.

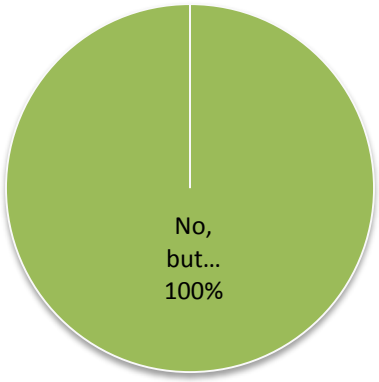
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Out of town	4	27%
Named NYC Park	3	20%
Nowhere else	3	20%
Beach-waterfront	3	20%
Nature preserve	2	13%
Amusements	1	7%
Sports	1	7%
Playground	1	7%
Total Respondents	**15**	

The most commonly visited site types for Seton Falls Park users were *out of town* (27%): for example, respondents mentioned New Rochelle or Bear Mountain State Park. Many respondents also went to other *named NYC parks* (20%) such as Van Cortlandt Park or Inwood Hill Park. Some respondents said they *don't go anywhere else outdoors* (20%), indicating the importance of Seton Falls Park in their everyday lives. See table above for the full list of responses in rank order.

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



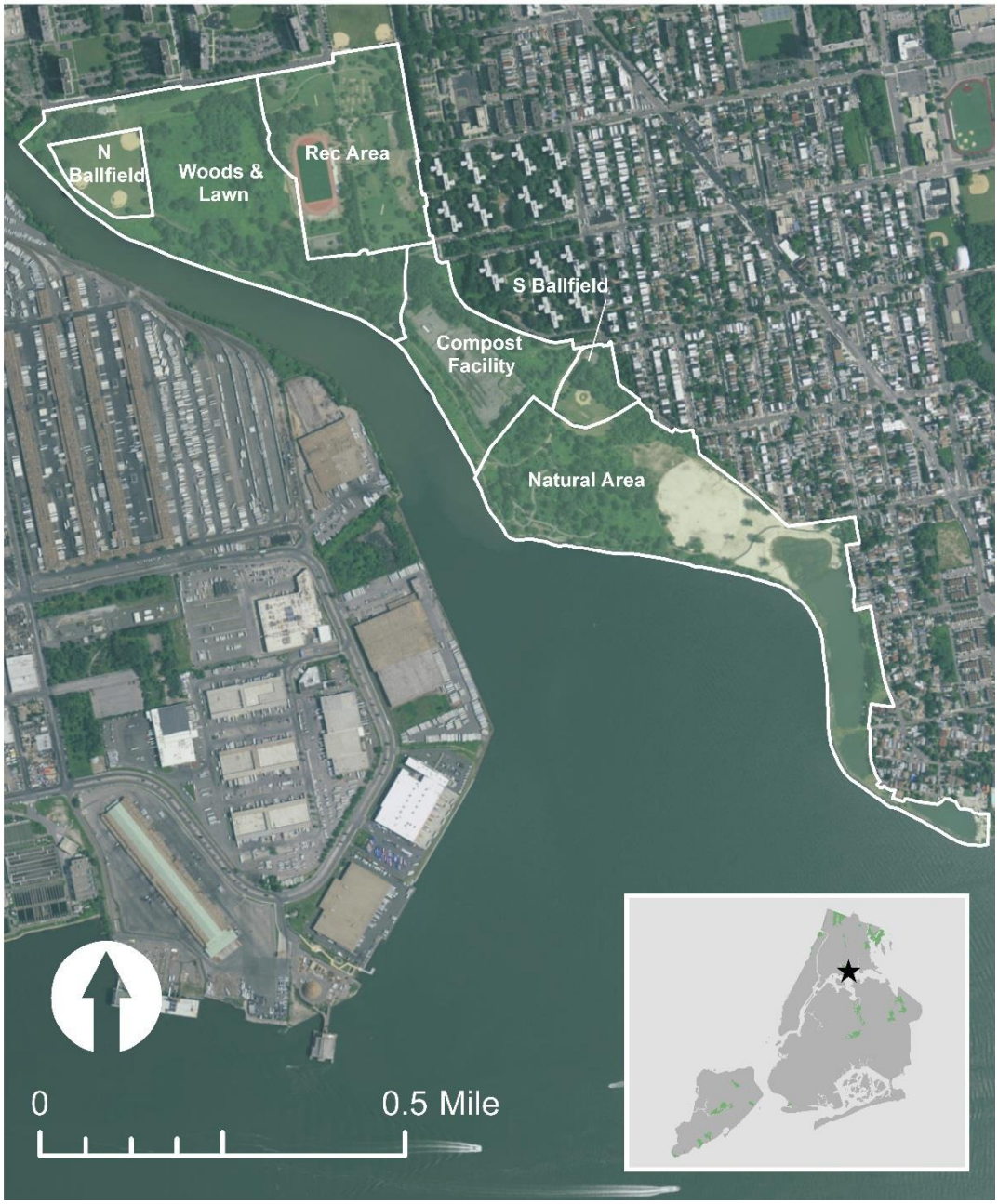
n = 15

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and none of the respondents directly identified themselves as doing so. Although no interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

One respondent was involved in *other civic engagements*, such as volunteering for homeless children. Another participated in *self-led stewardship* outside the context of a group. Some respondents expressed a *desire to engage* in stewardship (n = 2) even though they were not at present while others had *no specific reason* (n = 2). One respondent had *social ties* to a relative who planted trees. *Lack of awareness* was one interviewee's reason for not being involved. Finally, some respondents said that they had *no time* (n = 6), *no interest* (n = 1), and/or cited *other barriers* (n = 2) such as geography.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

BRONX: Soundview Park Profile



Zone Names	
Compost Facility	Rec Area
Natural Area	S Ballfield
N Ballfield	Woods & Lawn

I. Park Narrative

Soundview Park is a 155-acre[1] park in a residential section of the Eastern Bronx. The park contains a mixture of Forever Wild-designated areas, landscaped zones, waterfront fishing, baseball fields, and a track. The edge of the park is primarily the Soundview Houses, a public housing complex containing several large brick buildings. Co-operative buildings and small single-family homes also surround the park. The majority of park visitors we interviewed are neighborhood residents who come to the park to have barbeques, fish, participate in sports, exercise, or socialize. This park is an integral part of the community's identity; one visitor stated he had been coming to the park for over 50 years. The natural areas seem to have little to no use in this park as they were mostly fenced-off though we observed the use of a paved greenway that goes through wooded areas. In the landscaped and manicured sections, there was a great deal of open space and little to no trash observed. While we saw very few visitors during our weekday and evening visits, the park was bustling during the weekend.

The Rec Area is the most heavily used area of the park. On a weekday, there were few users in this zone, but during our Saturday visit we saw several hundred people out barbequing. These barbeques were some of the largest we saw all summer, with a few drawing over 40 people. The gatherings were very elaborate with generators, decorations, gas grills, and furniture. We observed a noticeable amount of diversity within barbeque groups. Most visitors interviewed at barbeques said they chose to come here because it was convenient and in the neighborhood. The baseball fields, empty on a weekday, hosted several games on Saturday. These games drew large crowds and featured adult players with matching uniforms.

The paved greenway through the park attracted visitors for exercise. People came to jog, stroll, or walk their dogs. We talked to one family who enjoyed this area of the park because it was near the water and they could experience nature near their home while roasting marshmallows.

The Natural Area or the fishing area of Soundview Park is slightly separated from the rest of the park. It was a popular spot for fisher folk on our Saturday visit. Notably, this is one of the only places where we observed a woman fishing alongside men. We also observed some stares when we came by, and one man shouted at us, "Newcomers, huh?" There was a law enforcement agent checking fishing licenses during our visit, and she noted that she personally knew many of the fishers, and they all seemed to have a good rapport.

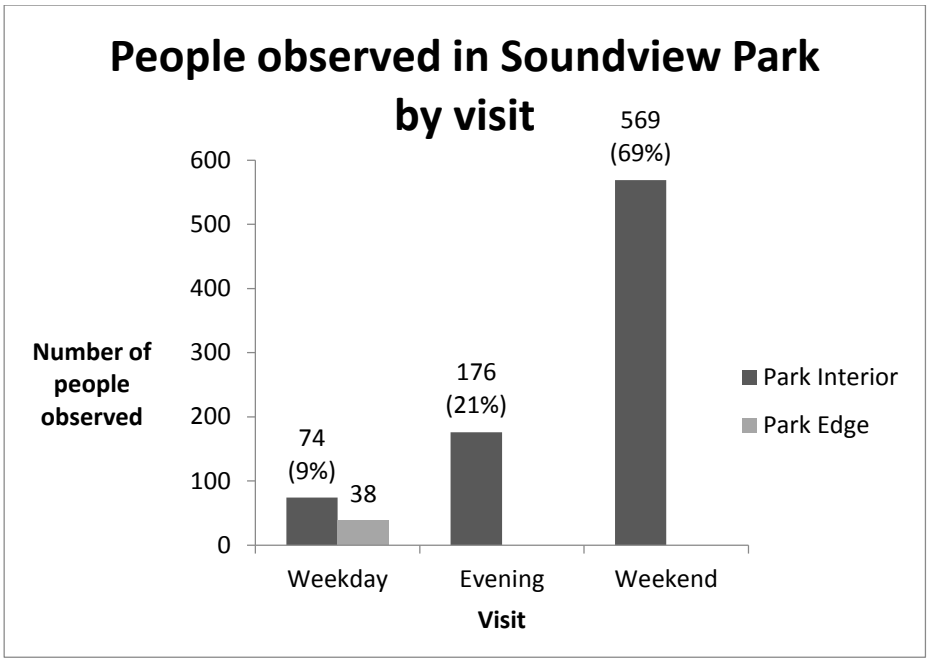
Soundview Park seems to be a major site of socialization and community connection during the weekends as we observed with barbeques, fishing, and baseball games. There were few visitors during the week, perhaps indicative of people's regular work schedules. The park is very well-maintained in some regards with very little litter, but the water fountains were also not working during our visits and the woods are inaccessible due to being either fenced off or impenetrable. In general, visitors to the park have positive associations with and attitudes towards Soundview.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

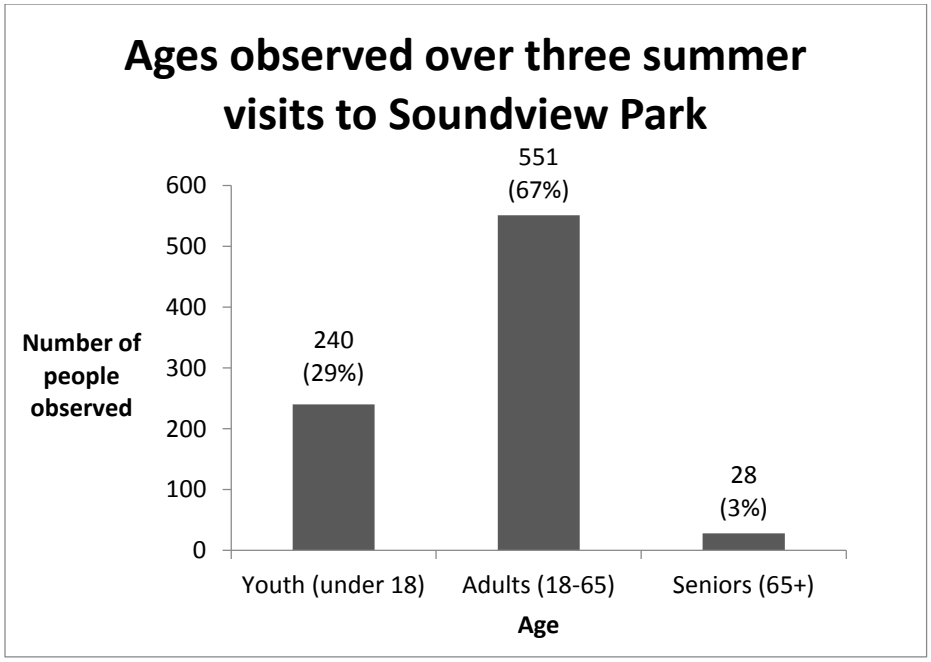
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

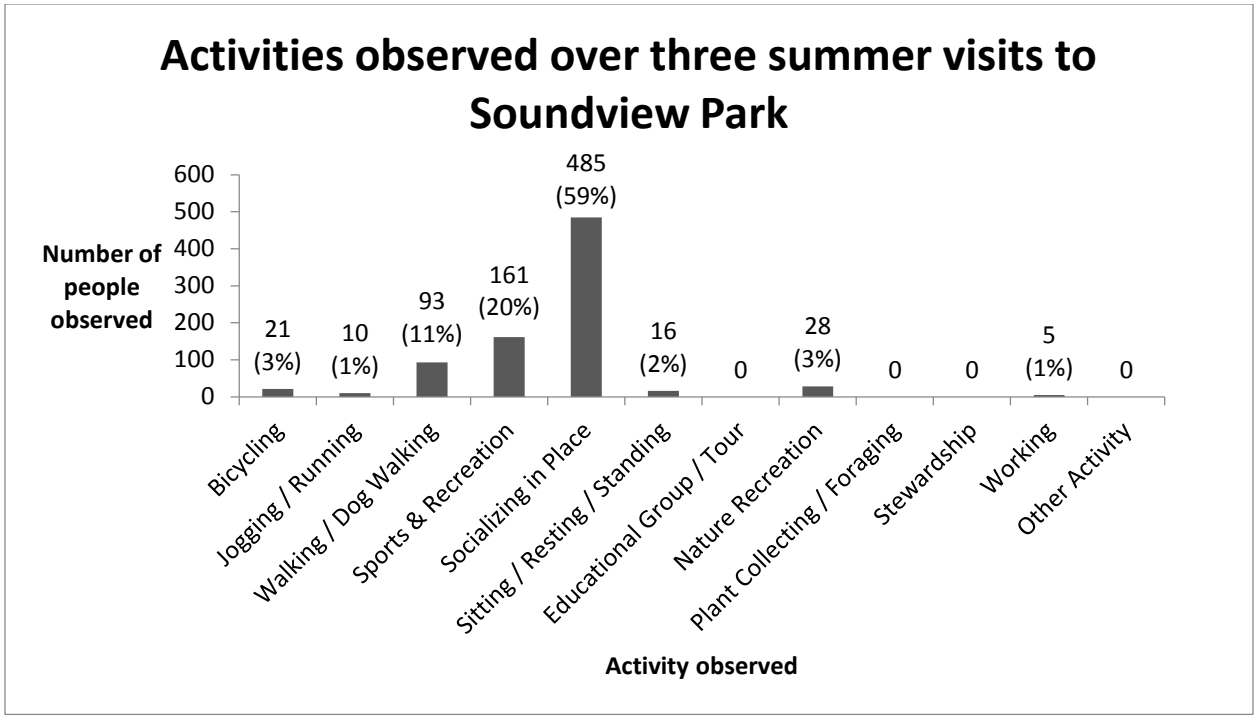


Who are they?



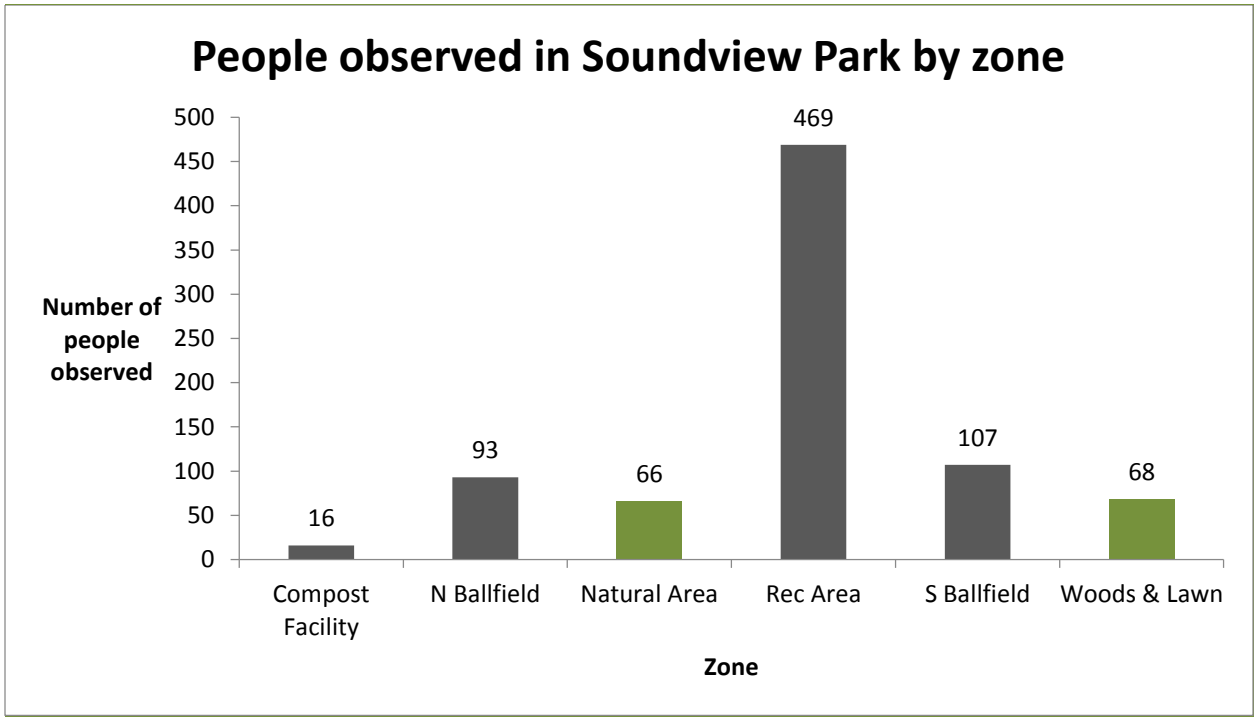
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone						
	Compost Facility	N Ballfield	Natural Area	Rec Area	S Ballfield	Woods & Lawn	Total
Bicycling	5		1	9		6	**21**
Jogging / Running			2	4		4	**10**
Walking / Dog Walking	7	3	12	43	9	19	**93**
Sports & Recreation		54	7	53	47		**161**
Socializing in Place	4	36	10	349	49	37	**485**
Sitting / Resting / Standing			2	11	2	1	**16**
Educational Group / Tour							**0**
Nature Recreation			28				**28**
Plant Collecting / Foraging							**0**
Stewardship							**0**
Working			4			1	**5**
Other Activity							**0**
Total	**16**	**93**	**66**	**469**	**107**	**68**	**819**

Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by time of visit and age group.

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	9	7	5	**21**	8	13		**21**
Jogging / Running	2	5	3	**10**		10		**10**
Walking / Dog Walking	18	30	45	**93**	30	60	3	**93**
Sports & Recreation	12	51	98	**161**	37	124		**161**
Socializing in Place	17	72	396	**485**	157	307	21	**485**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch	3	11	2	**16**	3	12	1	**16**
Educational Group / Tour				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation	10		18	**28**	5	20	3	**28**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering				**0**				**0**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**
Working	3		2	**5**		5		**5**
Other Activity				**0**				**0**
Total	**74**	**176**	**569**	**819**	**240**	**551**	**28**	**819**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)						
Sign	**Compost Facility**	**N Ballfield**	**Natural Area**	**Rec Area**	**S Ballfield**	**Woods & Lawn**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat box							**0**
Damaged / Vandalized Property							**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area							**0**
Fire pit						1	**1**
Garden in Park			1				**1**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	4	2	2				**8**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places			1		1		**2**
Informal Trails					1	5	**6**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol			1				**1**
Other Sign	1	1	2				**4**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers	1		5				**6**
Substantial Dumping or Debris			1				**1**
Total	**6**	**3**	**13**	**0**	**2**	**6**	**30**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Soundview Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of signs for the Soundview Park Summer Festival, chalk drawings, and a birdhouse.

Sociability Observed by Zone

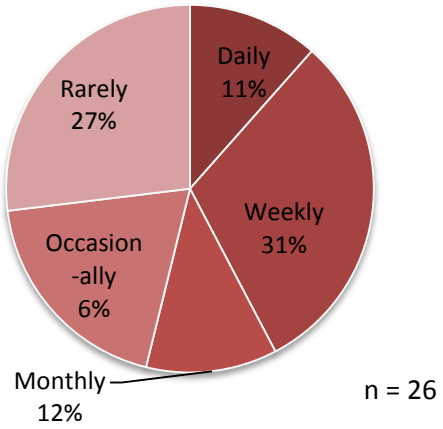
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Compost Facility	1	4			**5**
N Ballfield	1	1	3	1	**6**
Natural Area	1	7	9		**17**
Rec Area	2	3	31	6	**42**
S Ballfield	4	1	11	1	**17**
Woods & Lawn	5	6	5	2	**18**
Total	**14**	**22**	**59**	**10**	**105**

III. Interviews with Park Users

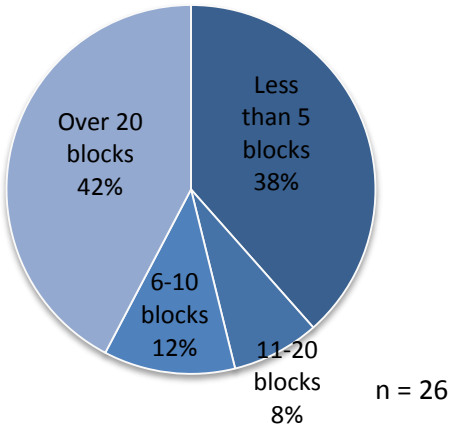
Twenty-six park users were interviewed at Soundview Park, of which 80% were male and 20% were female. Ninety-two percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 8% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 68%.

The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 42% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park also appears to draw users from near and far: 42% of users travel over 20 blocks to reach the park while 46% of users travel less than 10 blocks away

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Socializing	13	50%
Walking	5	19%
Nature rec	5	19%
Kids	2	8%
Sports & recreation	2	8%
Relaxing	1	4%
Dog	1	4%
Nature-outdoors	1	4%
Total Respondents	**26**	

Soundview Park is an important social space, and many respondents were at the park *socializing* (50%) or spending time with their *kids* (8%). For some respondents, the park provides space for physical exercise like *walking* (19%), *sports & recreation* (8%), or *dog walking* (4%). A few respondents were engaging in *nature recreation* (19%) like fishing. One respondent was *relaxing* (4%) while another was "taking [in] fresh air" (*nature-outdoors*, 4%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

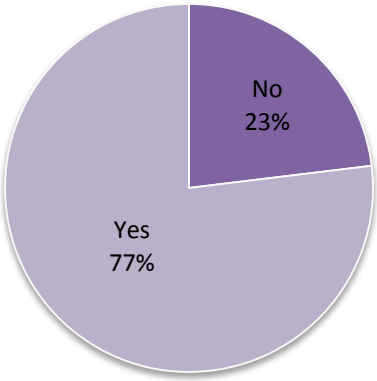
Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	11	42%
Nature-outdoors	5	19%
Sociability	4	15%
Place attachment	4	15%
Access	3	12%
Enjoyment	2	8%
Explore	2	8%
Social ties	1	4%
Refuge	1	4%
Quality	1	4%
Amenities	1	4%
Activity	1	4%
Total Respondents	**26**	

For many respondents, Soundview is a *local* resource (42%), and they visit because it is close to where they live. Many respondents also visited the park to be with *nature and the outdoors* (19%). A fair number of respondents were in the park because of its *sociability* (15%), and there were in the park to meet up with friends and family. Some had strong *place attachment* (15%) and had been coming to the park for years—in one case, for 50 years (see vignette). Respondents also found that the park was easy to *access* (12%). Some simply visited because they *enjoyed* (8%) the park. A few were *exploring* (8%) the park even though they lived far away or described the park as "off the main path." One respondent was in the park because his companion lived nearby (*social ties*, 4%). For one respondent, the park was a *refuge* (4%) and he described the park as "beautiful, calm, good." Two respondents visited because of specific characteristics of the park: one liked the size (*quality*, 4%) and *activities* (4%) offered; another spoke of the *amenities* (4%) available for her children.

"The man… has been visiting the park for over 50 years. He grew up in the Soundview Houses and has lived his whole life in the area. He said that he couldn't live in the area if not for the park. [He] recently had gone through open heart surgery and was spending time in the park as part of his recovery. He described the changes the park had gone through, saying it has been redone seven times in his lifetime and used to be a sacred site for American Indians. He also talked about the gang violence that had previously plagued the park and how it personally impacted his family. Regardless of these negative associations, [he] is deeply passionate about the park and regularly called it 'his park' telling us he loved being in nature."

Vignette from field researcher's notes on Soundview Park

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 26

Soundview Park includes a number of wooded, wetland and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. The majority of respondents interviewed said yes (77%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas. Out of the respondents who said yes, the most common answer was *biking* (30%). The natural areas are also a place where respondents would *socialize* (5%) and be with *nature and the outdoors* (20%), especially the water and wetlands. Some respondents would engage in *nature recreation* (20%) like fishing or watching boats go by. Others would *exercise* (15%) or *walk* (15%). A few would *relax* (10%) in natural areas, and one respondent would go natural areas to walk with his *kid* (5%).

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Biking	6	30%
Socializing	5	25%
Nature-Outdoors	4	20%
Nature recreation	4	20%
Exercise	3	15%
Walking	3	15%
Relaxing	2	10%
Kids	1	5%
"Yes" Respondents	**20**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Preference	5	83%
Potential	1	17%
"No" Respondents	**6**	

Six respondents (23%) said that they never go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, the majority of them *preferred to go to other parts of the park* (83%). We classified one respondent as

having the *potential to go to natural areas* (17%) because he was previously unaware that these areas existed. Out of the 23% of respondents who said they did not go into natural areas, one was actually interviewed in natural areas but did not realize it. He happened to be fishing in the park.

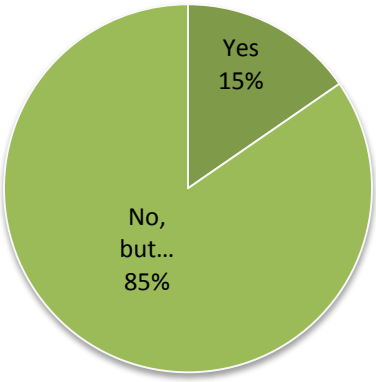
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nowhere else	9	35%
Beach-waterfront	7	27%
Out of town	6	23%
Named NYC Park	6	23%
Nature preserve	1	4%
Playground	1	4%
Streets	1	4%
No response	1	4%
Total Respondents	**26**	

Most respondents said that they *don't go anywhere else outdoors* (35%), indicating the importance of Soundview Park in their everyday lives. *Beach and waterfront areas* (26%) like Jones Beach State Park were popular for some. Respondents also liked to travel out of town (23%) to places like Long Island or upstate New York. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 26

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and 15% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Some who said yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type(s) of group in which they participate (listed below). Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

At one end of the spectrum, a number of respondents participated in *self-led stewardship* (n = 2) outside the context of a group or articulated a *pro-environmental ethic* (n = 2), such as recycling and composting. One respondent participated in *other civic engagement* through church.

Most respondents had *no specific reason* (n = 6) for not participating in stewardship. Others *lacked awareness* (n = 3) of groups or opportunities to participate in stewardship. One had *participated in the*

past but was now at a *life course* that prevented him from participating. Finally, some respondents said that they had *no time* (n = 6), *no interest* (n = 1), and/or cited *other barriers* (n = 1) such as distance.

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Civic	2	67%
Religious	1	33%
Total	**3**	

Named Stewardship Groups:

- Boy Scouts
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- Police Athletic League

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

BRONX: Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park Profile

Zone Names
N Woods
S Woods

I. Park Narrative

Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park is a small, 9-acre[1] park located on the southern end of the Riverdale neighborhood in the Bronx. It is primarily in a residential area with a MetroNorth train stop nestled between the park and the shorefront. Typically, the areas in this park would be classified as green strips between major thoroughfares, as they are small, wooded, and generally unused. Nevertheless, they provide a shady, quiet oasis in this part of the Bronx.

The neighborhood around the park is mostly residential with a mix of single-family houses and tall apartment buildings. There is no through traffic that runs by the park: it is at the end of a loop road. The train station is at the shorefront itself, and there is a limited amount of parking spaces available in a small make-shift parking lot as well as long the downhill road that leads to the station. In addition to the tree canopy that covers much of the park, the structure of the Henry Hudson Bridge looms over much of the park, soaring many meters into the air.

The same structure generally divides the park in two: one side southeast of the bridge and other northwest. The southeast side of the bridge is accessible and has a few paths in it. The area at the foot of the bridge has a large clearing and a few paths from different ends that lead to it. It was a shaded area, and we found a man playing with his dog in it. The other large zone on the southeastern side has a single formal trail that goes through it. This leads to a rock that looks out onto the Harlem River / Inwood Hill Park area. It is a private, secluded part that can only be reached by the one formal trail. We saw a couple there together during one visit. The northwestern side is largely inaccessible with only one formal trail that goes through it. The only park instructions sign is at the entrance of that formal trail.

We observed little human use in the park. Most people simply bypass the park going to and from the train station. Others in the area occasionally use it for walking their dog or taking a walk, however, these users are few and far in between. There is some dumping in the park. We found Styrofoam cathouses near the southernmost tip of the South Woods zone.

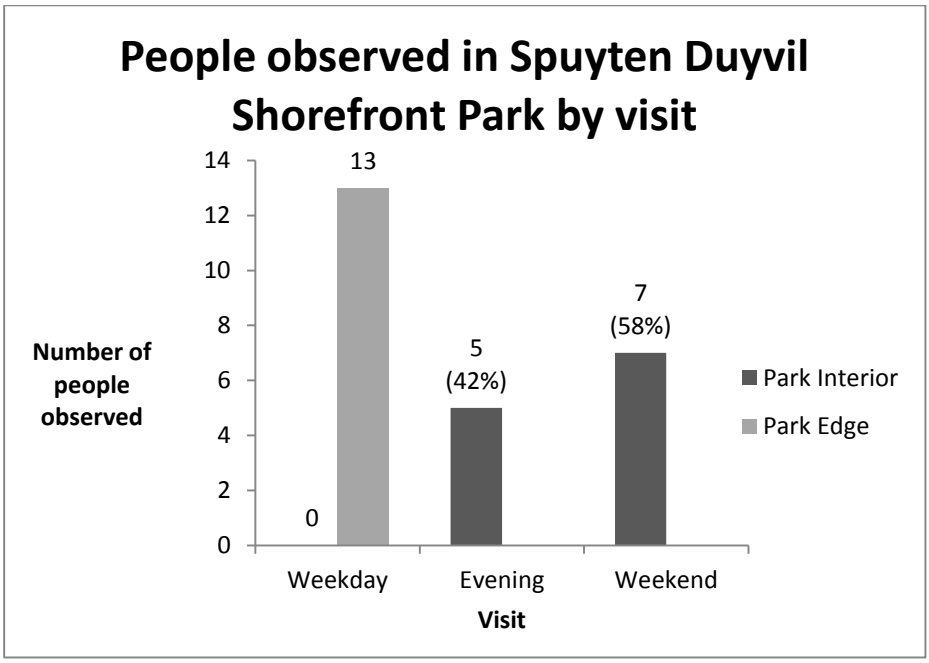
Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park is a reprieve in another otherwise dense urban setting. However, its location and lack of programmed space may be reasons why it gets little use. Nevertheless – and perhaps for those exact reasons – it remains an interesting park to explore.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

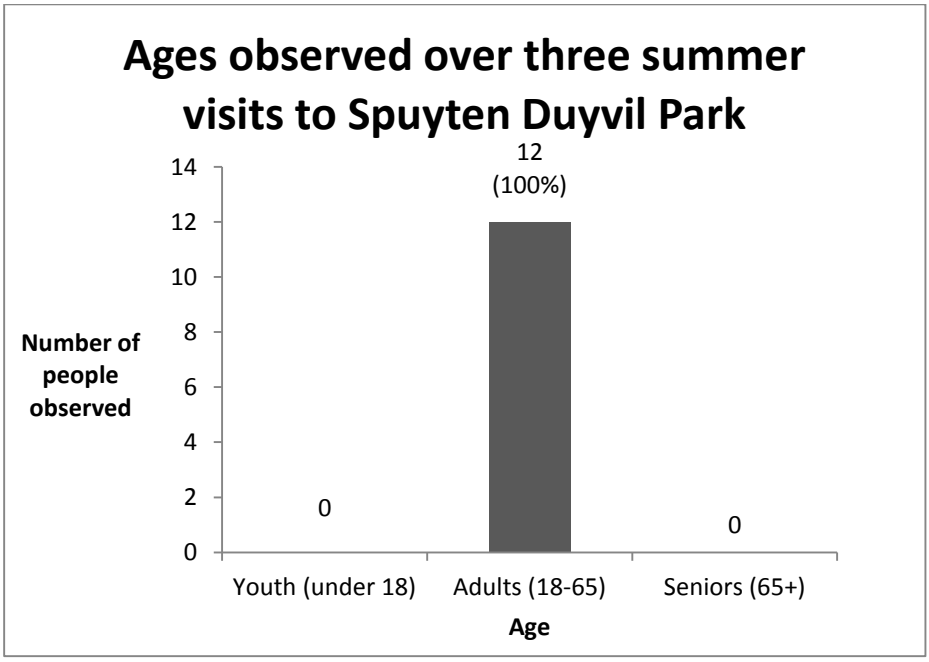
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

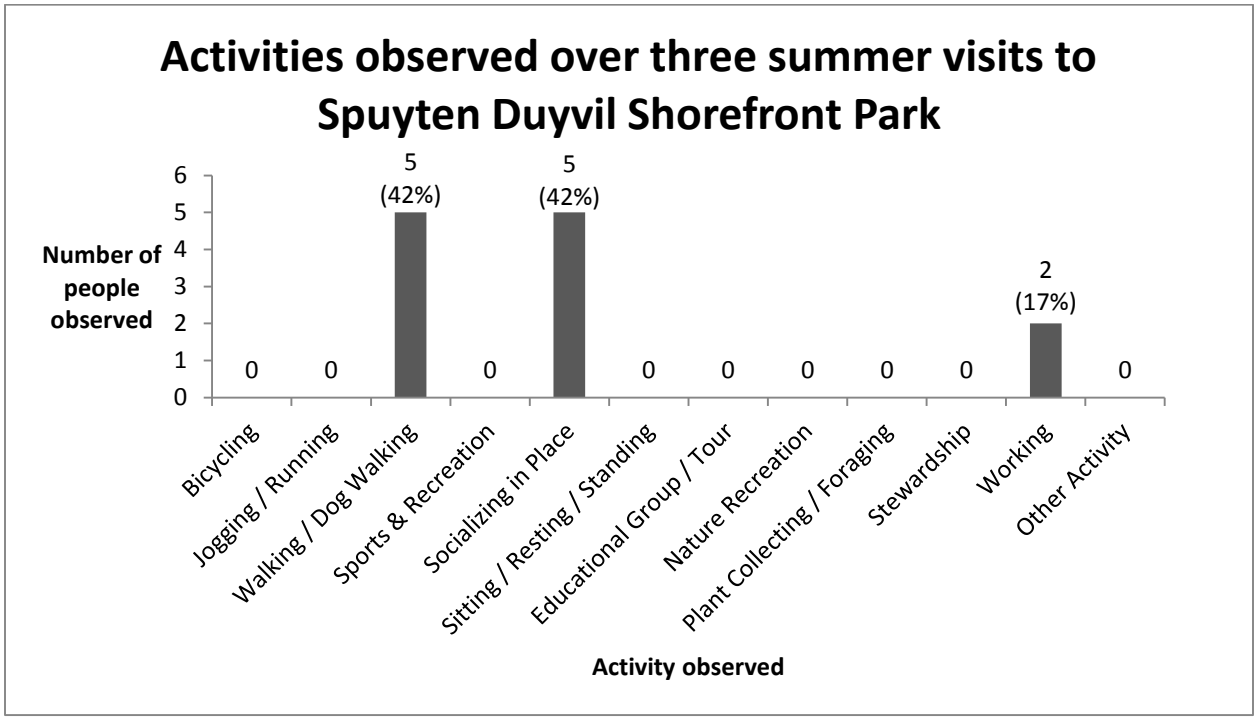


Who are they?



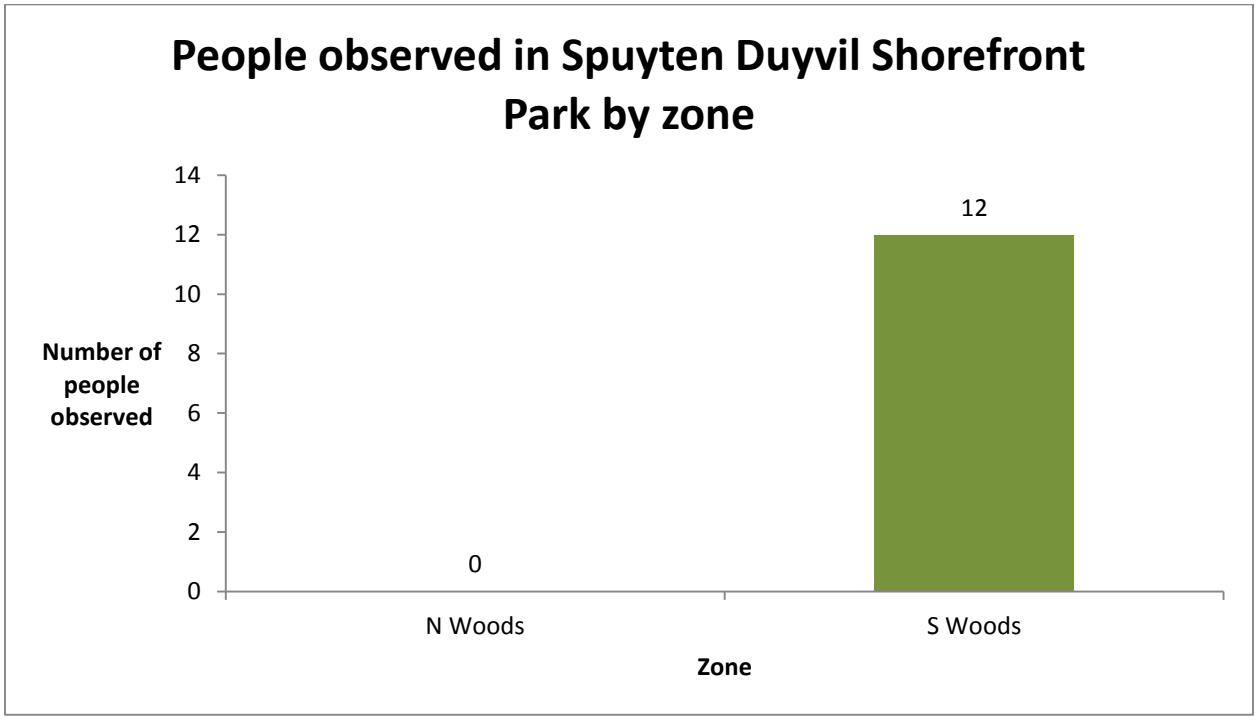
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone, time of visit, and age group. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Zones			Time of Visit				Age Group			
	N Woods	S Woods	Total	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling			**0**				**0**				**0**
Jogging / Running			**0**				**0**				**0**
Walking / Dog Walking		5	**5**		1	4	**5**		5		**5**
Sports & Recreation			**0**				**0**				**0**
Socializing in Place		5	**5**		2	3	**5**		5		**5**
Sitting / Resting / Standing			**0**				**0**				**0**
Educational Group / Tour			**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation			**0**				**0**				**0**
Plant Collecting / Foraging			**0**				**0**				**0**
Stewardship			**0**				**0**				**0**
Working		2	**2**		2		**2**		2		**2**
Other Activity			**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**0**	**12**	**12**	**0**	**5**	**7**	**12**	**0**	**12**	**0**	**12**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)		
Sign	**N Woods**	**S Woods**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box		1	**1**
Damaged / Vandalized Property			**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area			**0**
Fire Pit			**0**
Garden in Park			**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals		5	**5**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places			**0**
Informal Trails		6	**6**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol			**0**
Other Sign			**0**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers		2	**2**
Substantial Dumping or Debris		2	**2**
Total	**0**	**16**	**16**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Spuyten Duyvil Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of boxes with holes cut out (perhaps as animal shelters), debris, and graffiti.

Sociability Observed by Zone

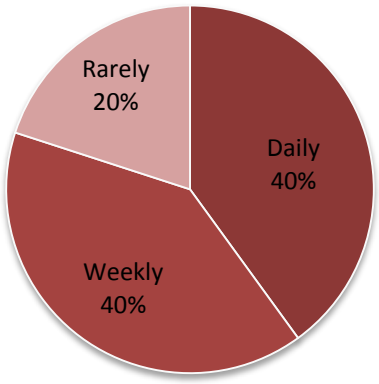
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
S Woods	2	2	1		**5**
Total	**2**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**5**

III. Interviews with Park Users

Five park users were interviewed in Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park, of which 80% were male and 20% were female. All interviewees were between the ages of 18-65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 100%.

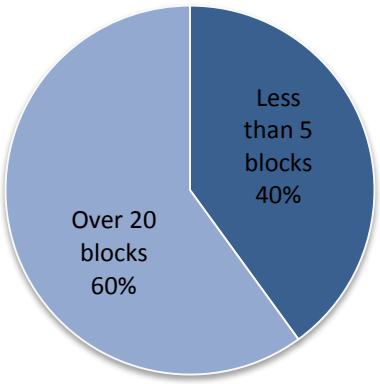
The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of respondents, with 80% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park also appears to draw users from near and far: 60% of users travel over 20 blocks to reach the park while 40% of users travel less than 5 blocks away.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 5

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



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The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Dog	2	40%
Nature-outdoors	2	40%
Walking	2	40%
Relaxing	1	20%
Total Respondents	**5**	

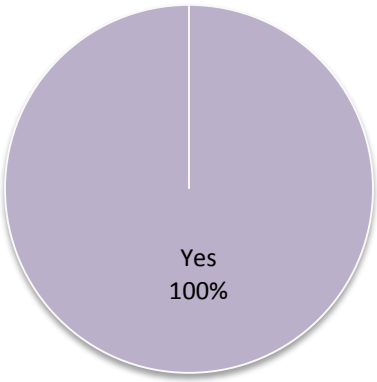
Two respondents were both *dog walking* (40%) and *walking* (40%). Two were in the park to enjoy *nature and the outdoors* (40%) – they noted they were "seek[ing] the urban forest." One respondent was *relaxing* (20%) and "enjoying a day off" in the park.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	3	60%
Explore	2	40%
Refuge	2	40%
Quality	1	20%
Amenities	1	20%
Nature-outdoors	1	20%
Total Respondents	**5**	

Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park Park is a valuable *local* resource for respondents who visited the park because they lived nearby (60%). At the same time, some respondents were *exploring* the park (40%) for the first time because they were "checking out the neighborhood." A few saw the park as a *refuge* (40%) and described it as "quiet." One respondent liked the *quality* (20%) of the park and visited because the park was not too crowded. Another respondent visited because of the *amenities* (20%) at the park, specifically for his dog. Finally, one respondent chose to come to the park because it was "cool" and "shady" (*nature-outdoors*, 20%).

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 5

Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park includes a number of wooded, wetland and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. All of the respondents interviewed said yes (100%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas. Respondents said they would engage in *nature recreation* (40%), such as bird watching or plant identification. Some would *socialize* (40%) or *relax* (40%) in natural areas. One respondent would *walk* (20%) while another would mountain *bike* (20%).

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature recreation	2	40%
Socializing	2	40%
Relaxing	2	40%
Walking	1	20%
Biking	1	20%
"Yes" Respondents	**5**	

Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

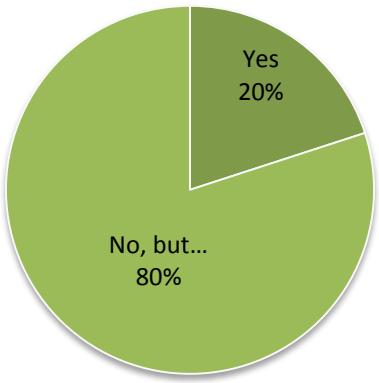
Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	3	60%
Nature preserve	1	20%
Nowhere else	1	20%
Out of town	1	20%
Total Respondents	**5**	

The most commonly visited site types for the Spuyten Duyvil Park users that were interviewed were other *named NYC parks* (37%) like Inwood Hill Park or Riverdale Park. One respondent would go to *nature preserves* (20%) that happened to be *out of town* (20%). Another respondent *does not go anywhere else outdoors* (20%), suggesting that Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park may play an important role for some users' everyday lives.

"[We] came across a very enthusiastic couple… who had walked to the Bronx from upper Manhattan and were exploring different neighborhood parks to inform where they will eventually settle. They looked like they were in their 30s, were carrying a large camera, and were very excited to be interviewed. They said that they were 'dreaming about when we can live near a park.' They had already explored and loved the many parks of upper Manhattan, including Inwood Hill Park, Fort Tryon, Highbridge and Swindler Cove… [D]uring one of their many visits to Inwood, they looked across the river and saw the patch of green that is Sputyen Duyvil and wanted to go investigate… They said, unprompted, that 'we seek the urban forest' and that city parks are a 'critical aspect of our existence' because parks 'feel like a part of the fabric of the city and connect us to our primordial existence.' In addition to scouting for a home and planning their future together, they said they enjoy walking, hiking, bird watching, photography, and plant identification."

Vignette from field researcher's notes on Spuyten Duyvil Shorefront Park

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?

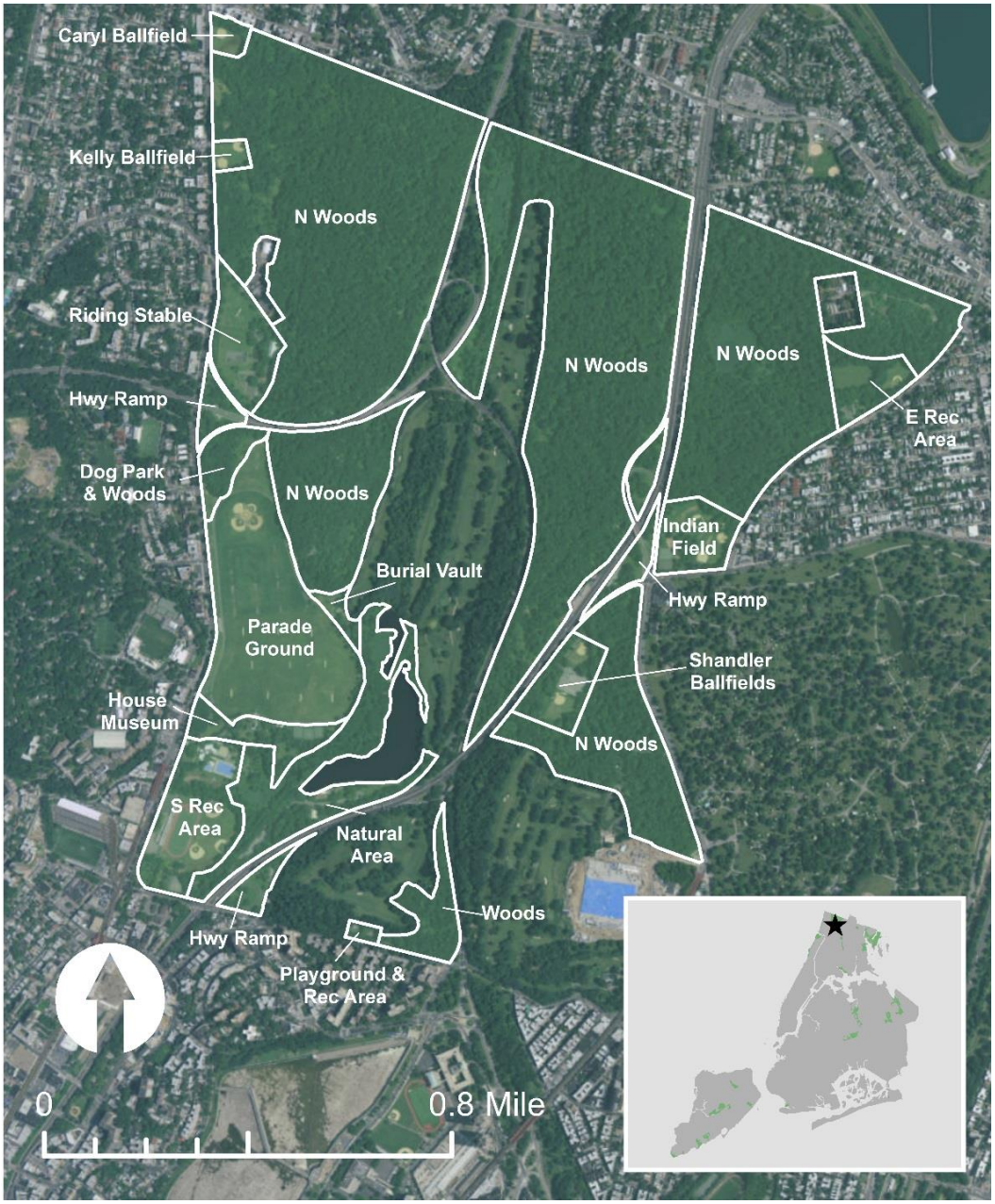


n = 5

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and 20% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, some articulated a *pro-environmental ethic* (n = 2), such as an interest in "adding green spaces in our [educational] curriculum." Some respondents expressed a *desire to engage* in stewardship (n = 2) even though they were not at present. One respondent had *no specific reason* for not participating in stewardship and another had *no time*.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

BRONX: Van Cortlandt Park Profile



Zone Names			
Caryl Ballfield	Hwy Ramp	Natural Area	S Rec Area
Dog Park & Woods	Indian Field	Parade Ground	Shandler Ballfields
E Rec Area	Kelly Ballfield	Playground & Rec Area	Woods
House Museum	N Woods	Riding Stable	

I. Park Narrative

Van Cortlandt Park is so large and varied that four different visitors could go to the same park and have four hugely different experiences. Van Cortlandt Park stretches over 1,037 acres[1] in northwestern Bronx. The surrounding neighborhoods are primarily residential, and its northern edge abuts Yonkers and Westchester County. At most of its edges, the park is distinctive from the neighborhood, with clear entrances and boundaries.

The park can be roughly divided into the following types of areas: wooded natural areas, recreation spaces, an equestrian center, and a golf course. The wooded areas were described by interviewees as "calm," "peaceful," "relaxing," "beautiful" and that one could "get lost in them"—in a positive way. These woods feature dense and tall forests. There are a few well-marked and paved trails in the wooded sections, where we saw the most visitors to the wooded areas. There are also many more rugged trails that are harder to follow and less well-marked. Based on interviews, some visitors liked the wild feeling of these trails, but we saw few users on them, so perhaps others see their unkemptness as a deterrent. In some sections of the woods, we observed large amounts of debris indicating that users had been drinking alcohol, smoking or engaged in other unsanctioned activities. At the same time, during our visits, we observed that the woods are used by people to exercise: we saw joggers and walkers, particularly in the northwestern section of the park. Based on interviews, we learned that Van Cortlandt's forests are a meaningful place for visitors and give them a sense of wild nature in the city. While deep in the woods, visitors do not hear street traffic or see ambient light, but instead can hear crickets and see red-tailed hawks.

Van Cortlandt's recreation areas are extremely popular. The track area consistently had dozens of people using it to exercise. In the evenings it was even busier, with people socializing while also running or walking. The landscaped areas were also host to many barbeques, in particular on the weekend. Visitors set up elaborate parties and barbeques, some with roped off areas and catering burners. There are also several playgrounds with many visitors. Typically, the people we interviewed in the landscaped areas did not visit the woods for safety concerns or because they come to Van Cortlandt for the playground or just to barbeque. In some ways, the park is divided between users of the natural areas and users of the recreation areas.

The golf course and equestrian center make up the remainder of the park. We did not assess the golf course, because of it is managed separately from the rest of the park, and we were unable to interview anyone in the equestrian center. However, one person we interviewed spoke proudly of the Van Cortlandt Park Golf Course as the first public course in the country (it was opened in 1895) and was visiting the park to use the golf course.

Van Cortlandt is a beautiful and loved park. The natural areas are immense though not very heavily used. This may be because some of the trails are difficult to follow or because visitors to the recreation

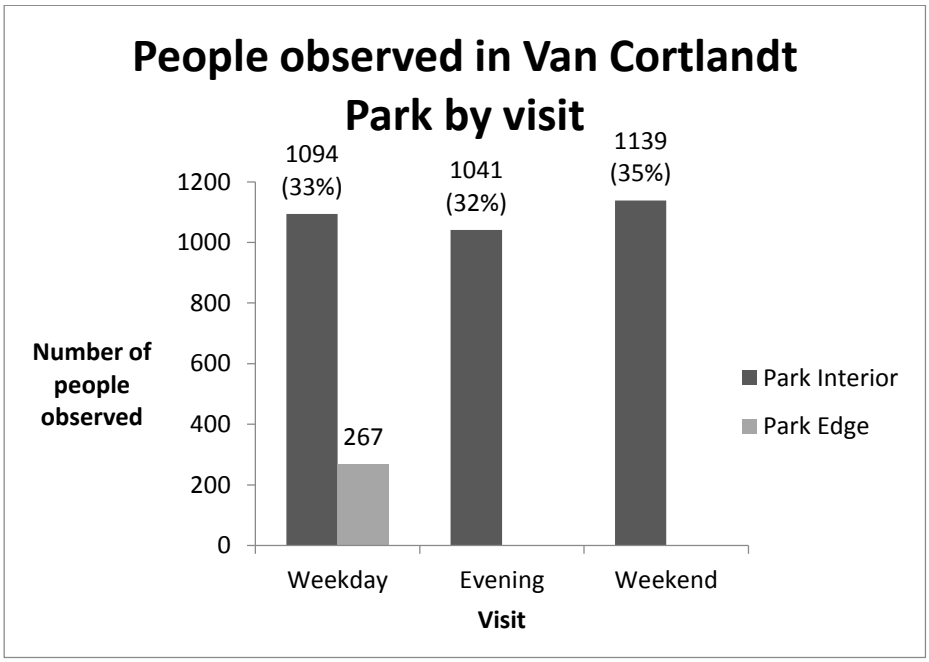
[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

areas often do not go into the wooded areas. From interviews, we found that there is some contention around visitors to the natural area who engage in illegal park activities such as drinking alcohol or taking illicit drugs. Regardless, the park is an asset to the community as it is a place for people to experience nature, exercise, spend time with friends or family, and form community.

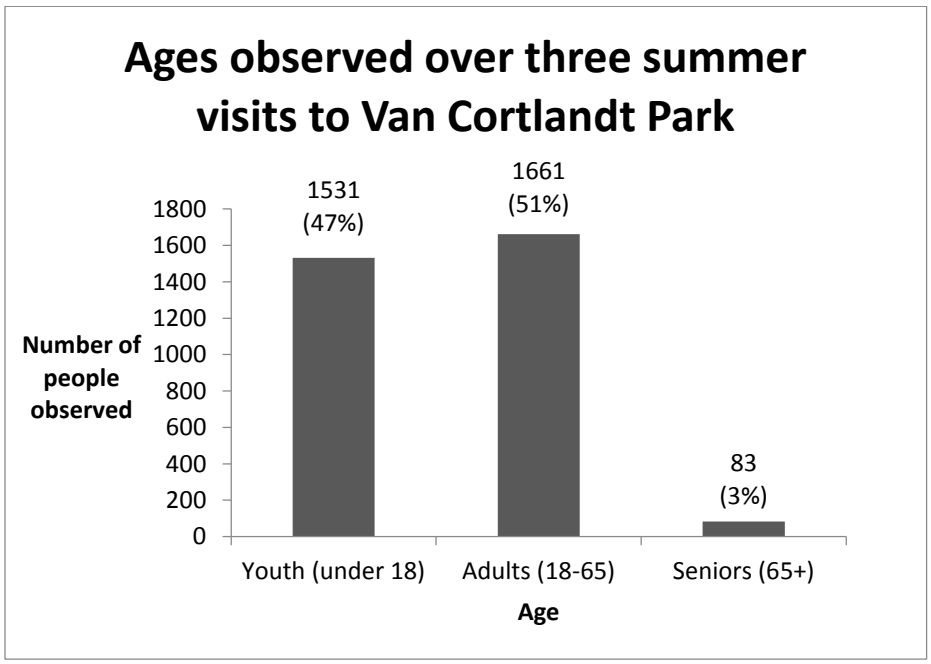
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

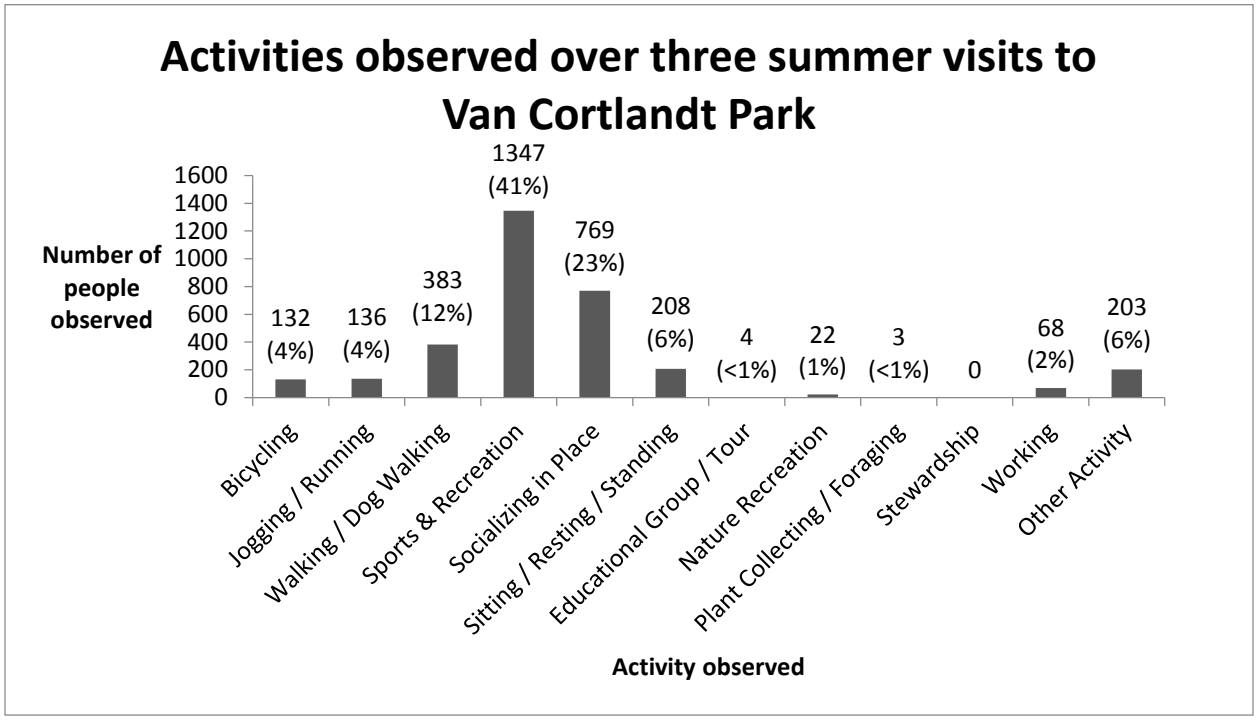


Who are they?



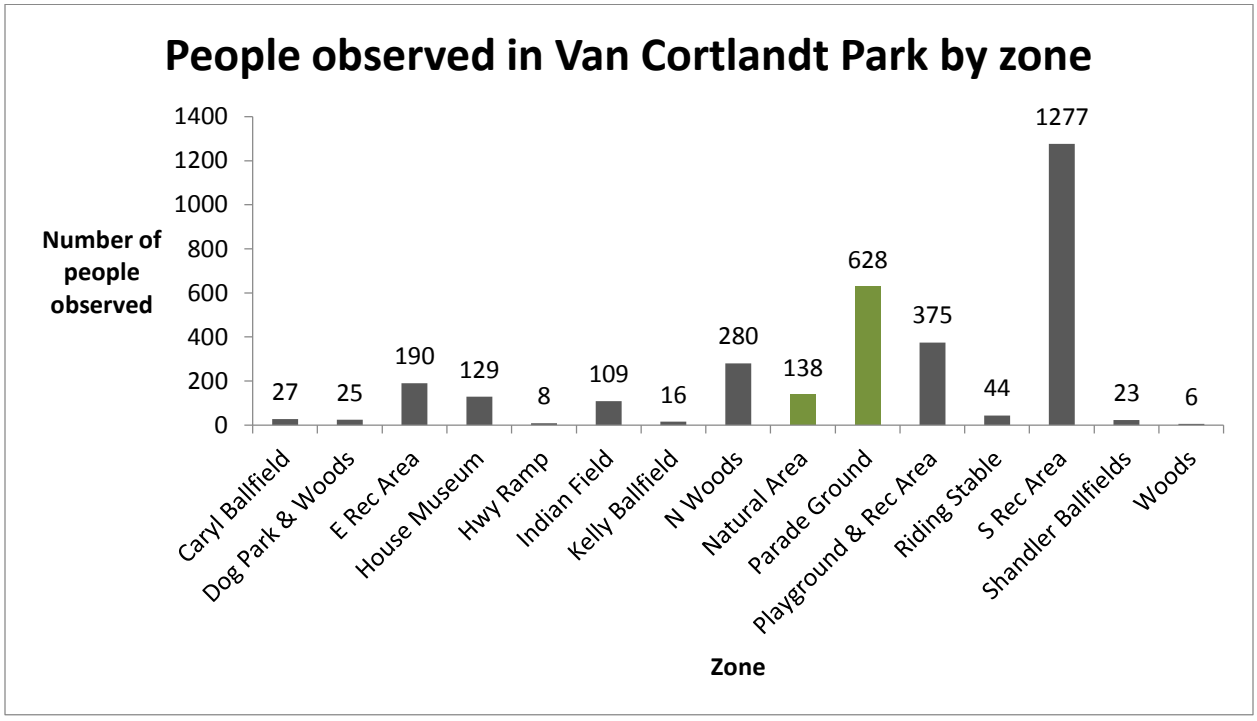
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone															
	Caryl Ballfield	Dog Park & Woods	E Rec Area	House Museum	Hwy Ramp	Indian Field	Kelly Ballfield	N Woods	Natural Area	Parade Ground	Playground & Rec Area	Riding Stable	S Rec Area	Shandler Ballfields	Woods	Total
Bicycling		2		8		1	1	9	21	50	4		34	2		**132**
Jogging / Running		2		4				45	14	53			18			**136**
Walking / Dog Walking		12	9	39	7	9	3	72	51	89	4	4	80		4	**383**
Sports & Recreation	6	8	126			41	10		1	350	123	1	681			**1347**
Socializing in Place	19		27	32		33		119	20	64	32	12	395	16		**769**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	1	1	28	34		19	2	1	18	21	16	2	63		2	**208**
Educational Group / Tour				4												**4**
Nature Recreation				5					8			6		3		**22**
Plant Collecting / Foraging									3							**3**
Stewardship																**0**
Working				3	1			34	2	1	7	14	4	2		**68**
Other Activity	1					6					189	5	2			**203**
Total	**27**	**25**	**190**	**129**	**8**	**109**	**16**	**280**	**138**	**628**	**375**	**44**	**1277**	**23**	**6**	**3275**

Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by time of visit and age group.

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	43	25	64	**132**	36	88	8	**132**
Jogging / Running	28	59	49	**136**	17	108	11	**136**
Walking / Dog Walking	133	107	143	**383**	84	267	32	**383**
Sports & Recreation	410	466	471	**1347**	935	408	4	**1347**
Socializing in Place	128	298	343	**769**	246	513	10	**769**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch	86	70	52	**208**	36	158	14	**208**
Educational Group / Tour			4	**4**	2	2		**4**
Nature Recreation	12	7	3	**22**	11	8	3	**22**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering		1	2	**3**		3		**3**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**
Working	58	6	4	**68**	40	27	1	**68**
Other Activity	196	2	5	**203**	124	79		**203**
Total	**1094**	**1041**	**1139**	**3275**	**1531**	**1660**	**83**	**3275**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)																
Sign	**Caryl Ballfield**	**Dog Park & Woods**	**E Rec Area**	**Highway Ramp**	**House Museum**	**Hwy Ramp**	**Indian Field**	**Kelly Ballfield**	**N Woods**	**Natural Area**	**Parade Ground**	**Playground & Rec Area**	**Riding Stable**	**S Rec Area**	**Shandler Ballfields**	**Woods**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat box								3		1					4		**0**
Damaged / Vandalized Property								3				1			4		**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area								2	2					1	5		**0**
Fire pit	2							3				1	1	2	9	2	**0**
Garden in Park																	**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals		1		1				24	4		1	3			34		**1**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places			1		1			1	1			16		4	24		**0**
Informal Trails	7	6	7	2		2		84	14	3		1	1	6	133	7	**6**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol				39				2	1			1			43		**0**
Other Sign	3		1				2	16	18				1		41	3	**0**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers		1		6				14	2	3		7			33		**1**
Substantial Dumping or Debris				1				5	1						7		**0**
Total	**12**	**8**	**9**	**49**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**157**	**43**	**7**	**1**	**30**	**3**	**13**	**337**	**12**	**8**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Van Cortlandt Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of an offering of eggplants, a mural, and a structure made of tree branches.

Sociability Observed by Zone

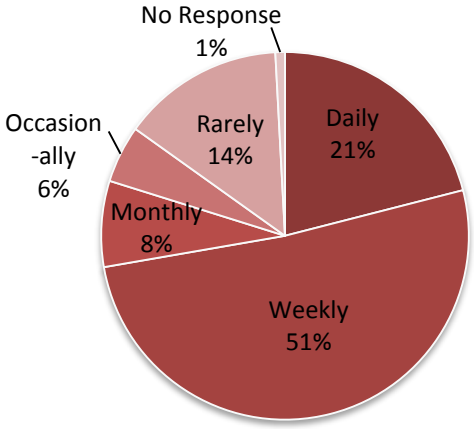
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Caryl Ballfield			5		**5**
Dog Park & Woods	6	2	1		**9**
E Rec Area	3	2	10	2	**17**
House Museum	5	14	13		**32**
Hwy Ramp	1		1		**2**
Indian Field	1	5	4	2	**12**
Kelly Ballfield	3		1		**4**
N Woods	8	14	13	4	**39**
Natural Area	2	16	4		**22**
Parade Ground	7	24	20	11	**62**
Playground & Rec Area	1	10	10	16	**37**
Riding Stable		3	3		**6**
S Rec Area	3	36	60	10	**109**
Shandler Ballfields	1	1	2		**4**
Woods			1		**1**
Total	**41**	**127**	**148**	**45**	**361**

III. Interviews with Park Users

One hundred nineteen park users were interviewed in Van Cortlandt Park, of which 56% were male and 44% were female. Eighty-two percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 18% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 77%.

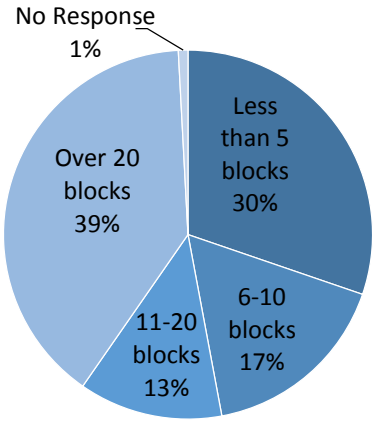
The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 72% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park also appears to draw users from near and far: 39% of users travel over 20 blocks to reach the park while 47% of users travel less than 10 blocks away.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 119

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 119

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Kids	36	30%
Socializing	23	19%
Walking	22	18%
Exercise	11	9%
Sports & recreation	10	8%
Relaxing	8	7%
Nature-outdoors	8	7%
Nature recreation	8	7%
Dog	4	3%
Biking	4	3%
Working	2	2%
Spiritual	2	2%
Arts and culture	1	1%
Community program	1	1%
Total Respondents	**119**	

Van Cortlandt Park is an important social space, and many respondents were spending time with their *kids* (30%) or *socializing* (19%). It is also where respondents go to for physical activity, such as *walking* (18%), *exercising* (9%), *sports & recreation* (8%), *dog walking* (3%), and biking (3%). A number of respondents were also in the park to *relax* (7%) or be with *nature and the outdoors* (7%); they were "enjoying some fresh air" or "enjoying the weather." Some were engaging in *nature recreation* (7%) such as fishing, hiking, feeding birds, or taking nature photos. A few respondents were *working* (2%): for example, one was a babysitter. Others were in the park for *spiritual* activities (2%), such as meditating. One respondent was reading (*arts and culture*, 1%) while another was participating in a *community program* (1%), a cancer walk.

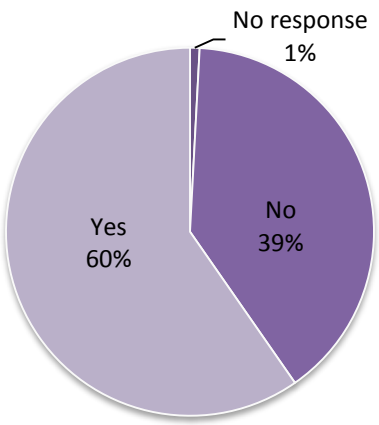
Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	45	38%
Quality	23	19%
Refuge	21	18%
Amenities	18	15%
Activity	14	12%
Nature-outdoors	12	10%
Enjoyment	10	8%
Access	10	8%
Sociability	9	8%
Place attachment	9	8%
Explore	5	4%
Total Respondents	**119**	

The majority of respondents visited the park because it was *local* (38%) and close to home. Many also remarked on the *quality* (19%) of the park: for example, there was "room to play" or it was clean. The park was a *refuge* for many (18%) who described it as "peaceful," "quiet," or "good for the brain." The *amenities* (15%) also attracted a number of respondents who liked the trails, dog park, or amenities for children. Some respondents were in the park do specific *activities* (12%), such as sports or exercising, while others were in the park to engage with *nature and the outdoors* (10%). Simple *enjoyment* (8%) of being in the park or ease of *access* (8%) also drew some respondents. A few also had strong place attachment to the park (8%) and had been coming to the park for decades – one particular respondent has visited the park regularly for 40 years. Finally, there were respondents who were

exploring (4%) the park because they had heard about it through a book or had been meaning to see the park for a while.

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 119

Van Cortlandt Park includes a number of wooded, wetland and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. The majority interviewed said yes (60%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas. Out of the respondents who said yes, most would engage in physical activities, such as *walking* (54%), exercise (31%), or biking (10%). Many also participate in *nature recreation* (30%) by hiking, fishing, taking photos of wildlife, or collecting bugs, for example. Similarly, some would go to natural areas to *nature and the outdoors* (10%). A few expressed *concern* (6%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about safety, especially one respondent with kids, while others liked to take their *kids* (4%) to the woods to "pretend to be in a jungle" for example. Some would photograph wildlife or the scenery (*arts & culture*, 4%), *relax* (4%), and/or *socialize* (3%) in natural areas. A small number mentioned that that they used to go natural areas when they were younger (*prior engagement*, 3%). One respondent had participated in a tree planting event (*stewardship*, 1%), another would work (1%), and finally, one respondent saw the natural areas as a *free space* (1%) to do any activity even if unsanctioned, such as smoking marijuana.

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	38	54%
Exercise	22	31%
Nature recreation	21	30%
Biking	7	10%
Nature-Outdoors	7	10%
Concern	4	6%
Arts & culture	3	4%
Relaxing	3	4%
Kids	3	4%
Socializing	2	3%
Prior engagement	2	3%
Stewardship	1	1%
Working	1	1%
Free space	1	1%
"Yes" Respondents	**71**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Potential	21	45%
Preference	19	40%
Fear-concern	9	19%
Life course	3	6%
"No" Respondents	**47**	

Forty-seven respondents (33%) said that they never go to natural areas. We classified most respondents as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (45%) because they were previously unaware that these areas existed or did not have a specific reason for not visiting those areas. Some *preferred to go to other parts of the park* (40%). A few expressed *fear or concern* (19%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about insects, safety and/or getting lost. Finally, some respondents were at a *life course* (6%) – having small children – which made them reluctant to go to natural areas. Out of the 39% of respondents who said they did not go into natural areas, 4 of them were actually interviewed in natural areas but did not realize it. Many of these users were simply passing through the natural area and on their way to other parts of the park.

"We saw one man walking briskly in the woods. During our conversation with him, we learned how important the park was to his well-being. The man had worked as a contractor in Manhattan for more than 20 years. Recently he'd suffered a major accident at work putting him in the hospital for some time. After being in the hospital he was inspired to go back to school to become a radiology technician and "get his life together". It was summer, so he was on vacation from classes and had the opportunity to spend more time outside. He now walks almost every day in the park for exercise and to help recover from his accident. He says the park is 'like my backyard'."

Vignette from field researcher's notes on Van Cortlandt Park

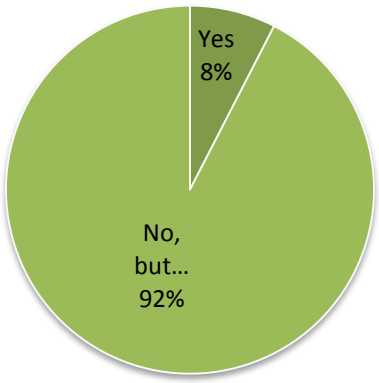
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

The most commonly visited site types for Pelham Bay Park users were other *named NYC parks* (43%), such as Central Park or Pelham Bay Park. *Beach and waterfront areas* (26%), such as Jones Beach State Park or Coney Island were also popular. Many respondents also went *out of town* (31%) to places on Long Island or upstate New York for example. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	51	43%
Beach-waterfront	35	29%
Out of town	19	16%
Nowhere else	18	15%
Nature preserve	11	9%
No response	7	6%
Amusements	5	4%
Playground	4	3%
Botanical garden	3	3%
Sports	2	2%
Greenway	2	2%
Local	2	2%
Zoo / Aquarium	1	1%
Streets	1	1%
Dog park	1	1%
Nature center	1	1%
Total Respondents	**119**	

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 119

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and only 8% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Some who did say yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type(s) of group in which they participate (listed below). Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

At one end of the spectrum, there were respondents who expressed a *pro-environmental ethic* (n = 5), such as recycling or donating to environmental groups, or were *working* (n = 2) for environmental organizations. Some participated in *self-led stewardship* (n = 3) outside the context of a group and others participated in *other civic engagement* (n = 4) such as serving in the military.

A large number of respondents had *no specific reason* (n = 36) or lacked *awareness* (n = 17) of groups or opportunities to participate in stewardship. Some respondents expressed a *desire to engage* in stewardship (n = 2) even though they were not at present while others were *self-critical* (n = 2) and were apologetic. One respondent had *prior engagement* with stewardship even though he wasn't at present while another respondent had *social ties* to a sibling who is involved in stewardship. One respondent was at a *life course* that prevented her from participating. Finally, many respondents had no time (n = 25), no interest (n = 10), or other barriers (n = 5) such as health, language, geography, or income.

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Environment	3	60%
Friends of park	1	20%
Animal	1	20%
Total	**5**	

Named Stewardship Groups:

- Friends of Van Cortlandt Park
- MillionTreesNYC
- New York-New Jersey Trail Conference
- Wildlife Conservation Society

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
BROOKLYN: Calvert Vaux / Drier-Offerman Park Profile

Zone Names	
E Natural Area	Playground
W Natural Area	Recreation Area

I. Park Narrative

Calvert Vaux / Drier-Offerman Park, more frequently called Calvert Vaux Park, is a 78-acre[1] park in southern Brooklyn. The park is mostly bordered by Gravesend Bay and operates as three distinct and separate sections. There was no cohesion between the sections, and we had to drive to get between a few of them.

The natural areas are partially inaccessible, and we saw a number of homeless encampments. W Natural Area is fenced off for soil contamination removal and is full of mugwort. Parts of it are marshy, due to the waterfront setting of this park. The E Natural Area is in a rather hidden zone behind the parking lot of Home Depot and CubeSmart Storage. There is some signage for the park, but it is difficult to imagine that visitors would come to this zone unless they had already known it was there. Walking through this section is pleasant because it had a wide, clearly-marked, wood-chip covered path. There are wild grasses and a few benches. Because this area is on Gravesend Bay, it has a strong marine smell.

The Recreation Area seems like two completely different areas between weekdays and weekends, clearly pointing to the need to assess parks at multiple points in time. During the week, the fields are almost completely unused. During our weekday visit when it was particularly humid, they also had an acrid and sulfuric smell. On a Saturday afternoon visit though, these fields were bustling with activity. We counted over a hundred young people participating in sports—soccer, baseball, and football. Adults were watching their children and socializing with each other. Everyone with whom we spoke stated that they only came to the fields for their children's sporting events and were not regular visitors outside sports games and practices. These fields are large with plenty of parking access, which may be why they attract visitors for large sporting events. In the Recreation Area, we also saw a group of a dozen people practicing nature photography, perhaps photographing birds.

The Playground was the only section that saw any consistent use between weekends and weekdays. This area is a typical neighborhood playground with recreation equipment and basketball courts. This section was well kept with little to no litter and well-functioning equipment. Many of the people we encountered were speaking either Russian or Spanish. People typically visited the park because it was close to their homes and convenient. We saw a few families with young children on the playground equipment, and many teenaged boys on the basketball courts.

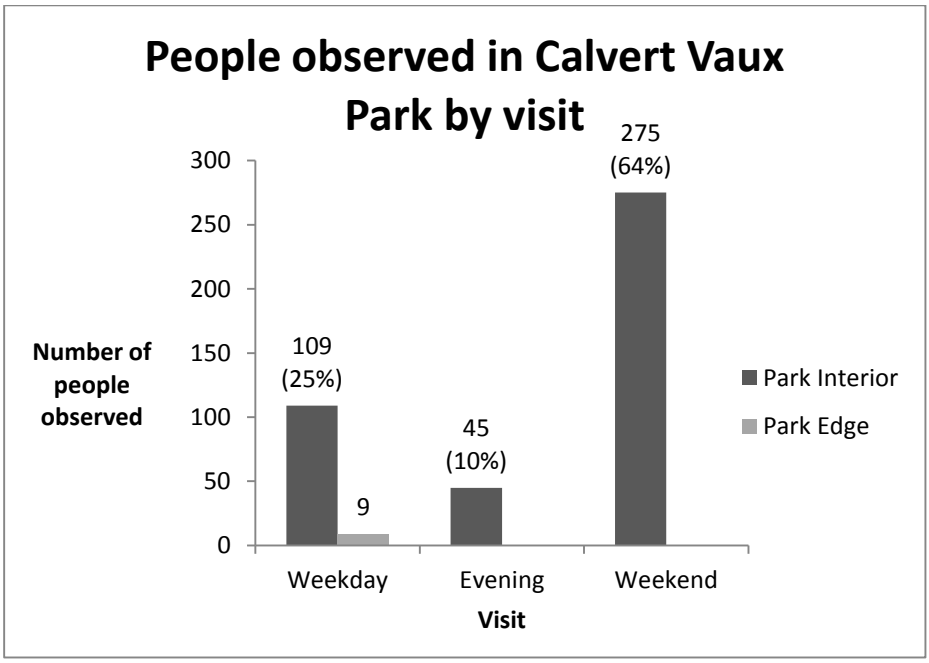
Calvert Vaux Park has the potential to offer many different resources to this neighborhood. It offers sports fields, natural areas, waterfront, and recreational spaces. Due to the fragmented nature of the park, many visitors only go to the sports fields or playground and do not see the full range of the park.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

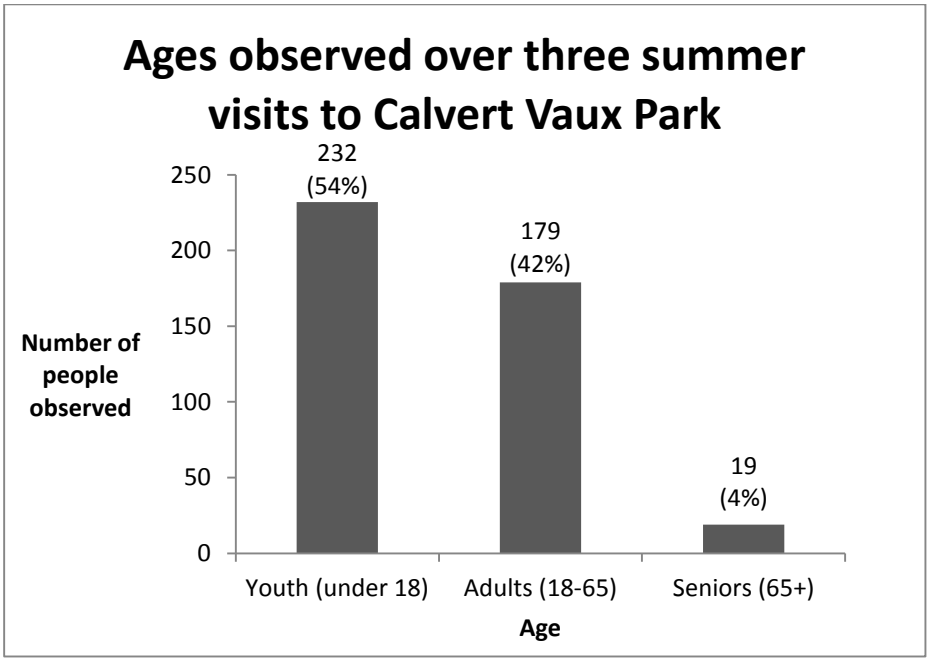
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

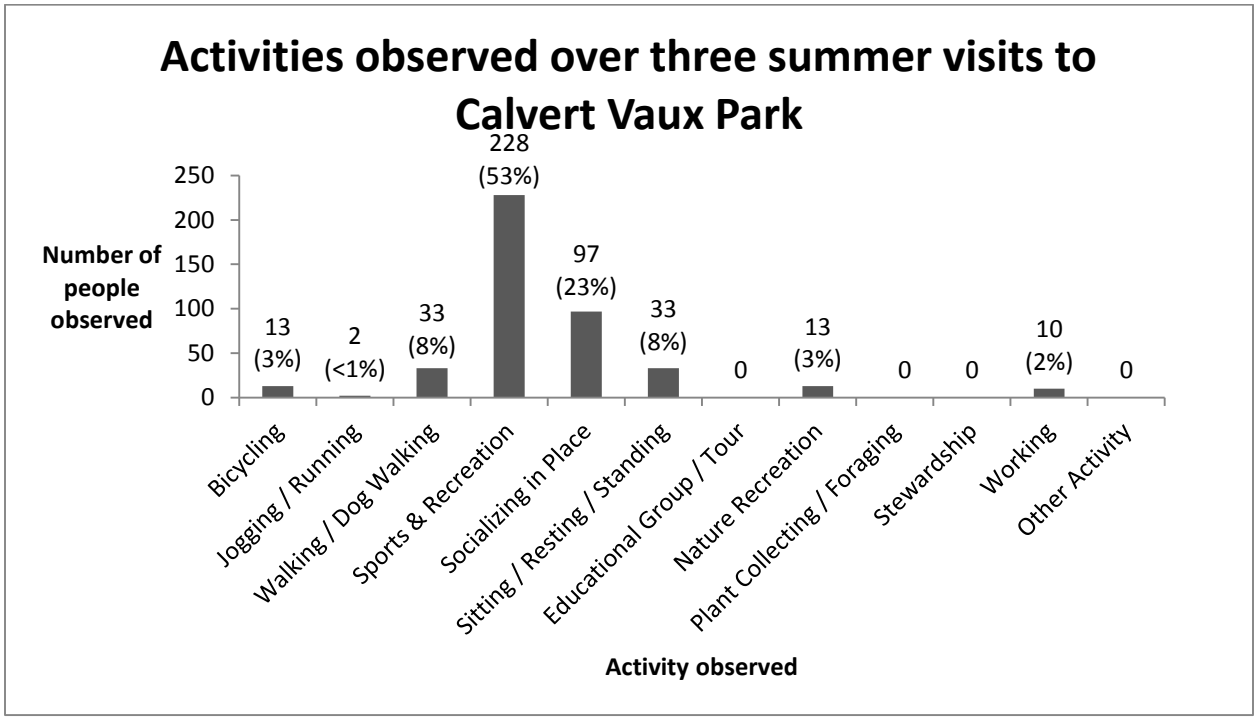


Who are they?



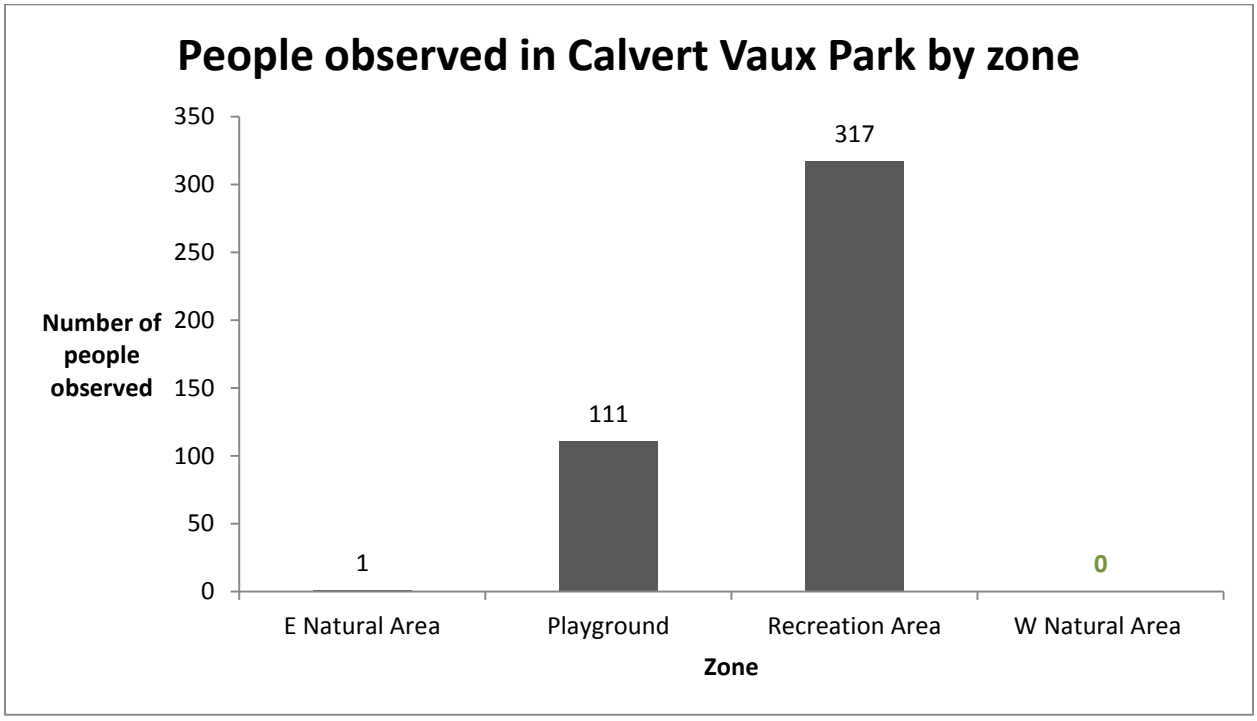
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone, by time of visit and age group. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone					Time of Visit				Age Group			
	E Natural Area	Playground	Rec Area	W Natural Area	Total	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling		2	11		**13**	4	1	8	**13**	6	6	1	**13**
Jogging / Running			2		**2**	2			**2**		2		**2**
Walking / Dog Walking		4	29		**33**	8	7	18	**33**	13	19	1	**33**
Sports & Recreation		59	169		**228**	66	22	140	**228**	166	56	6	**228**
Socializing in Place		20	77		**97**	14	3	80	**97**	34	57	6	**97**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	1	21	11		**33**	12	11	10	**33**	12	17	4	**33**
Educational Group / Tour			13		**13**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation					**0**			13	**13**	1	12		**13**
Plant Collecting / Foraging					**0**				**0**				**0**
Stewardship					**0**				**0**				**0**
Working		5	5		**10**	3	1	6	**10**		9	1	**10**
Other Activity					**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**1**	**111**	**317**	**0**	**429**	**109**	**45**	**275**	**429**	**232**	**178**	**19**	**429**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)				
Sign	**E Natural Area**	**Playground**	**Recreation Area**	**W Natural Area**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box					**0**
Damaged / Vandalized Property					**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area	2				**2**
Fire pit	1				**1**
Garden in Park					**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals				4	**4**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places					**0**
Informal Trails	2		3	14	**19**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol					**0**
Other Sign					**0**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers				1	**1**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	4	1		3	**8**
Total	**9**	**1**	**3**	**22**	**35**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Calvert Vaux Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of an elaborate encampment and Russian graffiti.

Sociability Observed by Zone

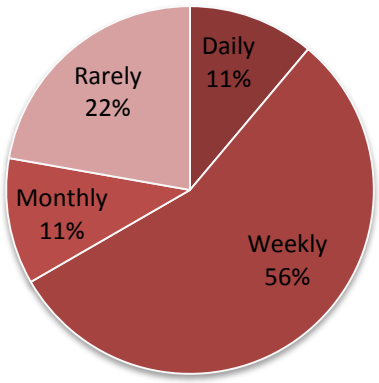
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
E Natural Area					**0**
Playground		10	10	2	**22**
Recreation Area	3	12	15	8	**38**
W Natural Area					**0**
Total	**3**	**22**	**25**	**10**	**60**

III. Interviews with Park Users

Nine park users were interviewed in Calvert Vaux Park, of which 33% were female and 67% were male. Eighty-nine percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 11% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 53%.

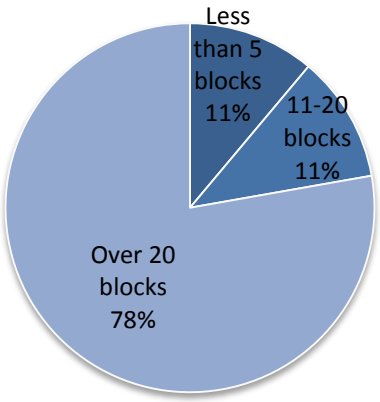
The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 67% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park also appears to be a destination park: 78% of users travel over 20 blocks to reach the park while only 11% of users travel less than 10 blocks away.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 9

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 9

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Sports & recreation	6	67%
Kids	2	22%
Relaxing	1	11%
Total Respondents	**9**	

The majority of respondents were in the park participating in some form of *sports and recreation* (67%) – many were playing or watching soccer or softball. Some parents had brought their *kids* to the park (22%), and one respondent had come to the park to *relax* (11%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

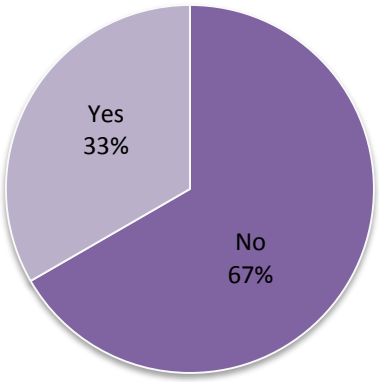
Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Activity	6	67%
Local	2	22%
Refuge	1	11%
Total Respondents	**9**	

Most of the respondents were in the park because of the specific *activities* offered (67%). Two respondents worked or lived close by so the park is also a *local* resource (22%). One respondent chose to come to the park because it was a *refuge* (11%) in that it was "quiet" and "safer."

"There were numerous sports games going on with over a hundred children playing soccer, baseball, and football. The youth soccer team "The Brooklyn Italians" was a particularly big draw with many families coming to watch their children play. All of the people we interviewed in [the recreation area] were there for the games and only came to the park for games or practices. There was a fair amount of ethnic and racial diversity among these users."

From debrief notes on Calvert Vaux Park

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 9

Calvert Vaux Park includes some wooded, wetland and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. Some respondents said yes (33%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas**.** Out of the respondents of who said yes, all of the respondents *walked* (100%) in natural areas, and one of them also liked to be by the water (*nature-outdoors*, 33%).

Six respondents (67%) did not go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, the majority of them *preferred to go to other parts of the park*

(67%). Some expressed *fear or concern* (33%) about being in natural areas. Finally, we classified one respondent as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (17%) because he did not have a specific reason for not visiting those areas.

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	3	100%
Nature-Outdoors	1	33%
"Yes" Respondents	**3**	

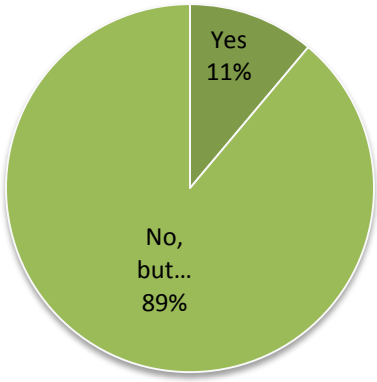
Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Preference	4	67%
Fear-Concern	2	33%
Potential	1	17%
"No" Respondents	**6**	

Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Beach-waterfront	4	44%
Named NYC Park	3	33%
Out of town	2	22%
Streets	2	22%
Nature preserve	1	11%
Nowhere Else	1	11%
Total Respondents	**9**	

The most commonly visited site types for Calvert Vaux Park users were *beaches and waterfront parks* (44%), like Coney Island Beach. Other *named NYC Parks* (33%) were also popular: for example, respondents listed Bay Park and Theodore Roosevelt Park. Respondents also mentioned traveling *out of town* (22%) more generally like to Massachusetts or Pennsylvania and walking along *streets* (22%) in neighborhoods like Bay Ridge. One respondent went to state parks generally, which we classified as *nature preserve* (11%). Finally, one respondent *did not go anywhere else outdoors* (11%), which indicates that Calvert Vaux Park is an important and perhaps sole outdoors space for some.



n = 9

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and only 11% of respondents directly identified as doing so. One respondent who did say "yes" mentioned the general type of group, a shooting club, in which he participates. Most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, and most had *no specific reason* for why they were not involved (n = 4). One respondent had *participated in the past* and was *open to participating* again. Another respondent *lacked awareness* (n = 1) and did not know of any groups. Finally, some respondents simply had *no time* (n = 2).

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

BROOKLYN: Canarsie Park Profile

Zone Names	
Ballfields	Natural Area
Lawn	Skate Park / Cricket

I. Park Narrative

Canarsie Park is a 130-acre park[1], including 55 acres of Forever Wild natural area. Located in Brooklyn, it is bordered by Seaview Avenue to the north and the Belt Parkway to the south. The neighborhood to the north consists of single and multi-family residential homes, often with manicured lawns and gardens, seating areas, and porches.

Our field research crews were well-acquainted with Canarsie Park as it was the Brooklyn reporting location for the Jamaica Bay Restoration Corps (JBRC) field crew members and was the location where we conducted training on the social assessment protocols. The site is large and well-used by the community, including by a large proportion of people engaged in exercise and sports activities on the exercise equipment, cricket pitch, courts, and the new skate park. Users were aware of the resources that had gone into park enhancements and maintenance, and often thanked the JBRC corps members for their work in caring for the site. Construction was ongoing in a portion of the park that was fenced in and closed off. Despite feeling that they were already familiar with the park, the JBRC crews experienced a sense of discovery as they explored the natural areas through this study. Indeed, among the woods, wetlands, and the hill, there are clear signs of use –including informal trails, homeless encampments, litter and dumping, graffiti, used condoms, fishing equipment and debris, and improvised seating. The crew also came upon a pair of lovers seeking a secluded sport, a group of friends taking refuge in the woods, and a family engaged in fishing.

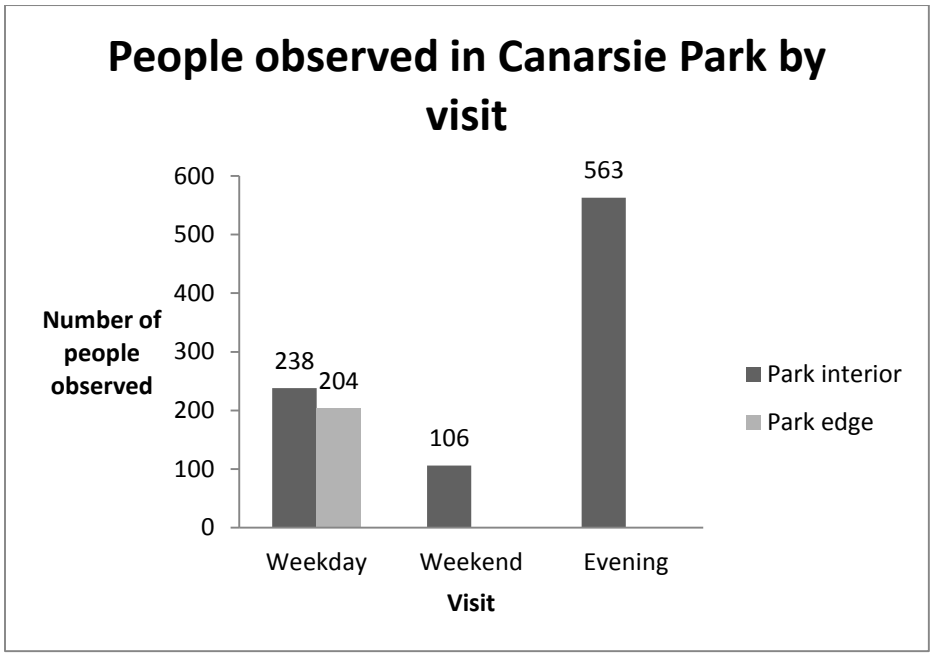
Users of the park are diverse. While most users were African American, West Indian/Haitian, the crew also observed users who were East Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, and white. The park is used by all ages and at all times of day. On the weekend visit, the crew observed the first annual "Canarsie Day", with many local agencies and community groups available to support families impacted by Sandy. Translations were offered in Creole/French for the large Haitian community. Many sports teams were playing, family and church picnics were occurring and the crew saw a large banner for the Guyanese Wives Association. The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 67% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It is also a crucial local resource, with 62% of users traveling from less than 10 blocks away; and 47% of users said they choose to visit Canarsie Park because it is serves as their local park. At the same time, the park is drawing people from a distance, with 31% of users traveling over 20 blocks to reach the park. In some cases, the sports and exercise facilities at the park were known to users and served as an attractor – with residents of Flatbush and East New York traveling to the park in order to use the amenities.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp files, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed.

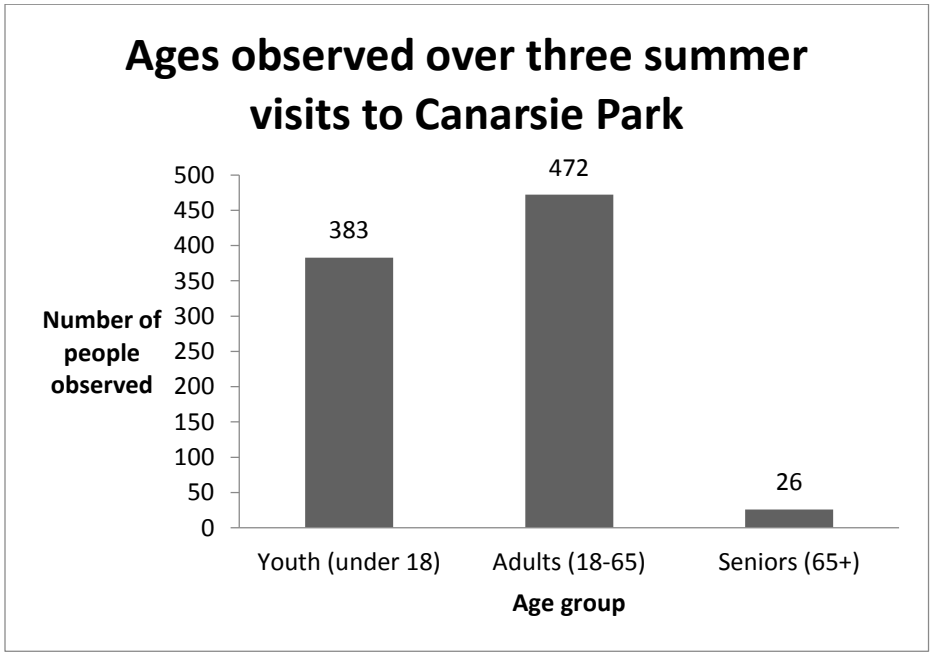
II. Field Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

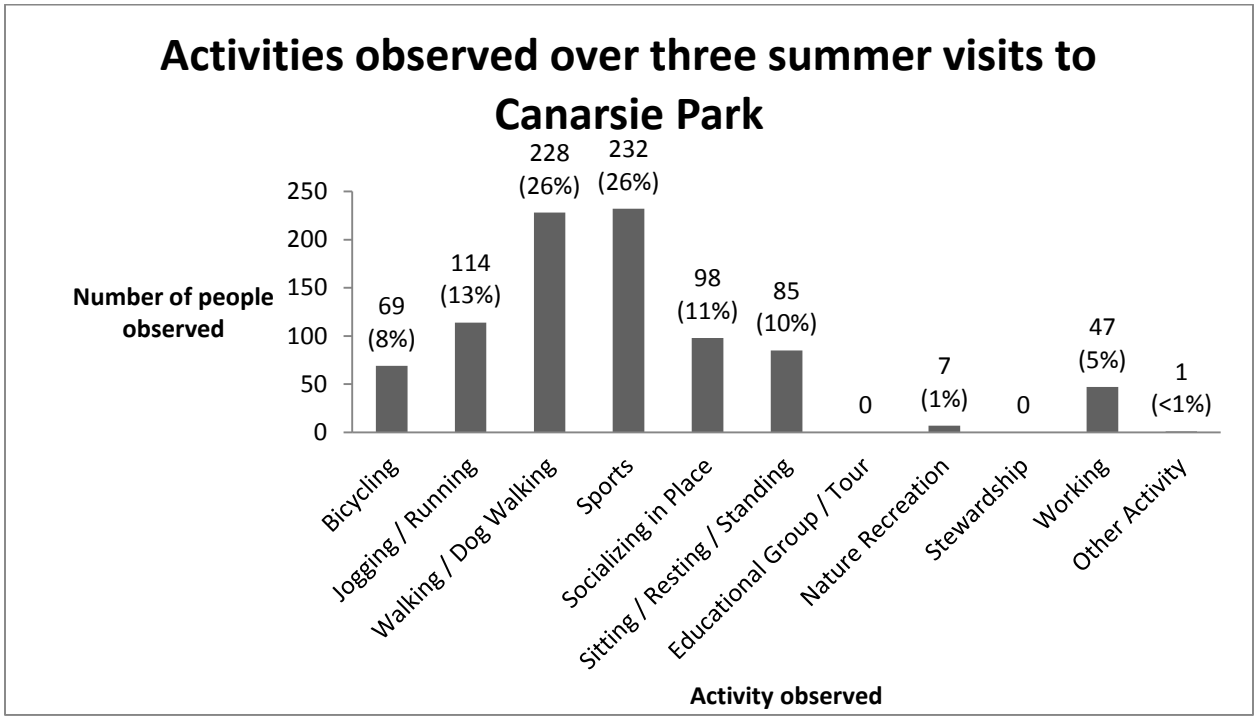


Who are they?



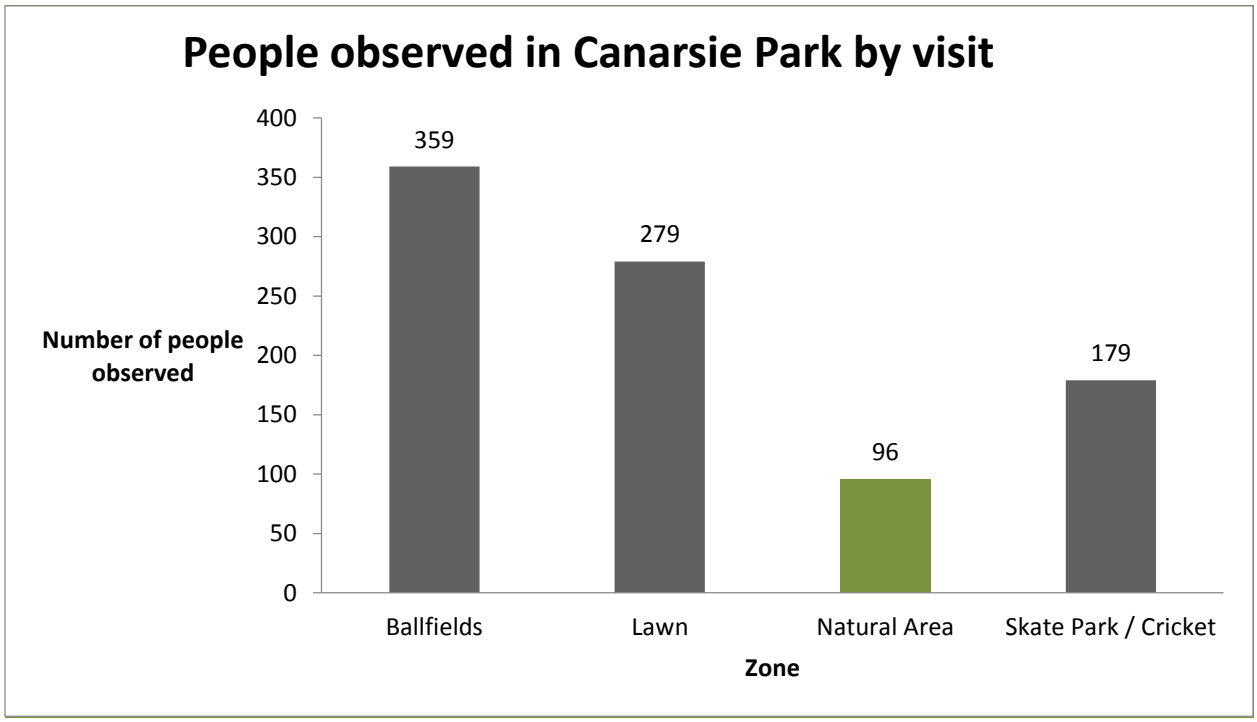
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Human Activities Observed by Zone in Canarsie Park. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone					Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Ballfields	Lawn	Natural Area	Skate Park	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	22	31	8	8	**69**	20	4	45	**69**	40	29		**69**
Jogging / Running	65	35	9	5	**114**	40	6	68	**114**	53	53	8	**114**
Walking / Dog Walking	65	115	25	23	**228**	81	10	137	**228**	85	135	8	**228**
Sports	113	24	23	86	**246**	37	46	163	**246**	163	83		**246**
Educational Group / Tour					**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation		12	7		**19**	12		7	**7**	4	15		**19**
Stewardship					**0**				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	51	21	4	9	**85**	6	2	77	**85**	19	63	3	**85**
Socializing in Place	14	38	7	39	**98**	2	37	59	**98**	31	61	6	**98**
Working	26	3	9	9	**47**	40		7	**47**		47		**47**
Other Activity			**1**		**1**		1		**1**			1	**1**
Total	**356**	**253**	**93**	**179**	**907**	**212**	**106**	**563**	**907**	**383**	**472**	**26**	**907**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)				
Sign	**Ballfields**	**Lawn**	**Natural Area**	**Skate Park / Cricket**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bird Box / Pond			1		**1**
Encampment / Sleeping Area	1		3		**4**
Garden in Park		3			**3**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	8	9	8	1	**26**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	1	6	1		**8**
National Flags	1				**1**
Nature Recreation		12			**12**
Other (Note)*	4		3		**7**
Other Signs, Flyers & Stickers	9	2	14	7	**32**
Sitting Places & Dining		1	3		**4**
Sporting / Play Equipment	7	1	2	1	**11**
Sports		14			**14**
Trails	3	3	8	5	**19**
Total	**34**	**51**	**43**	**14**	**142**

*Crews were instructed to take note of any other noteworthy or unique observations that stood out to them in each park. For Canarsie Park, other signs of activity included a tarp on a tree and a chain lock on a fence.

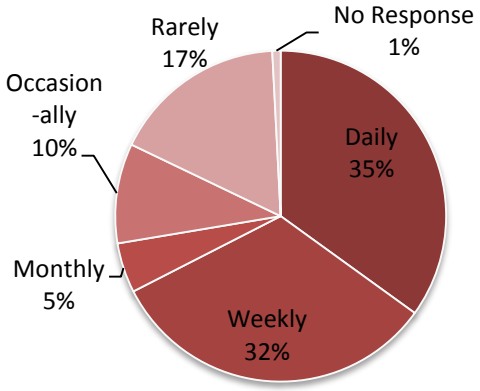
Sociability Observed by Zone

Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Lawn		40	26	16	**82**
Ballfields	1	18	11	6	**36**
Natural Area	2	4	11		**17**
Skate Park / Cricket		6	7	4	**17**
Total	**3**	**68**	**55**	**26**	**152**

III. Interviews with Park Users

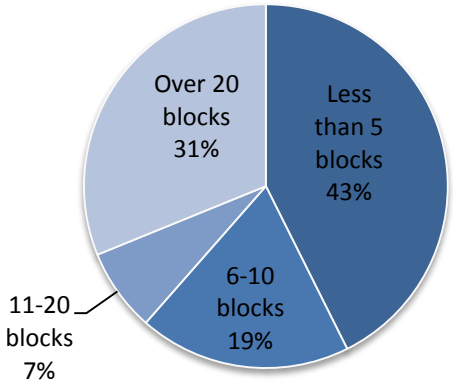
One hundred and twenty-three park users were interviewed in Canarsie Park, of which 54% were male and 37% female (9% unidentified). Seventy-seven percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 9% were estimated to be over the age of 65 (14% unidentified). We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 67% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It is also a crucial local resource, with 62% of users traveling from less than 10 blocks away. At the same time, the park is drawing people from a distance, with 31% of users traveling over 20 blocks to reach the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 123

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 123

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Exercise	34	28%
Kids	30	24%
Sports-Recreation	20	16%
Walking	18	15%
Relaxing	15	12%
Socializing	14	11%
Nature-Outdoors	12	10%
Dog	5	4%
Biking	3	2%
Nature-Recreation	3	2%
Spiritual	3	2%
Working	2	2%
Arts and Culture	1	1%
Stewardship	1	1%
Total Respondents	**123**	

The park is being used for a range of physical activities, including *exercise* (28%), *sports and recreation* (16%), *walking* (15%), and *biking* (2%). Interviewees mentioned a wide assortment of sports including basketball, cricket, and skateboarding. Exercise included fitness walking and jogging and using the exercise equipment on the trails. Some games were casual pick-up games among friends, but other games featured active spectators watching the event from bleachers (e.g. at cricket matches).

It is also a place for social interaction of many forms: for *kids* to play (24%), for *socializing*, through barbecues and picnics (11%), and for walking *dogs* (4%). Youth users are prominent—particularly at the playground and skate park—and included not only children, grandchildren, cousins, nieces and nephews, but also children under the care of babysitters. Clearly, the park is an attractor for use by children during the summer season when kids are out of school. (Comparing these trends with data from throughout the school-year would require additional research.) The weekend visit occurred during a community event, the first annual "Canarsie Day" that featured resources and tents from local civic organizations and was accompanied by large scale family and church barbecues. Despite signs prohibiting barbecuing, the crew found evidence of disposed charcoal.

While less common, some users engage with the park in a very different way than the sports and recreation and socializing practices described above. These users interact with the *outdoors*—including several mentions of the "fresh air" and the "breeze" (10%) and engage in *nature recreation*—including fishing and foraging (2%). They also engage in *spiritual* practices—including ministry and meditation (2%), and play guitar (*arts and culture,* 1%). These users were encountered in both the natural area woods as well as in the more manicured lawn spaces of the park.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	65	53%
Amenities	21	17%
Nature-Outdoors	13	11%
Activity	9	7%
Refuge	8	7%
Place Attachment	7	6%
Social Ties	7	6%
Enjoyment	5	4%
Sociability	3	2%
Total Respondents	**123**	

The primary reason people choose to visit Canarsie Park is that it is a form of nearby nature and open space that is "local", "convenient", or "close by" (*local*, 53%).

Users are attracted to the *amenities* (17%), which include not only the physical features and park infrastructure, but also the quality of the amenities, the way in which they are maintained, and the size of the park. In some cases, the sports and exercise facilities at the park were known to users and served as an attractor – with residents of Flatbush and East New York traveling to the park in order to use the equipment and amenities. Users commented on the investment in the facilities that had occurred at this site. While users were not asked to rate the park, six interviewees commented on the superlative quality of the park, calling it "one of the best", "the best", or "the cleanest".

Other reasons for visiting were less common. Respondents identified specific material attributes of being *outdoors in nature* (11%), including breeze, shade, sun, and water. Others mentioned again the unique *activities* that they could do in this site (7%)—referring back to the prior question—and often focusing on sports and exercise. Others sought out the sense of *refuge* (7%) that comes from being outside, using language like calm, health, peace, tranquility, solitude, and serenity. Users mentioned having *social ties* (6%) to the site through family and friends and developing *place attachment* over time (5%) -- e.g. because of growing up nearby. Some simply identified *enjoyment* of the site (4%), using language like "I like it", "I love it", or noting the beauty of the site. Finally, some users mentioned that the park is a space for *sociability* and social gatherings (2%).

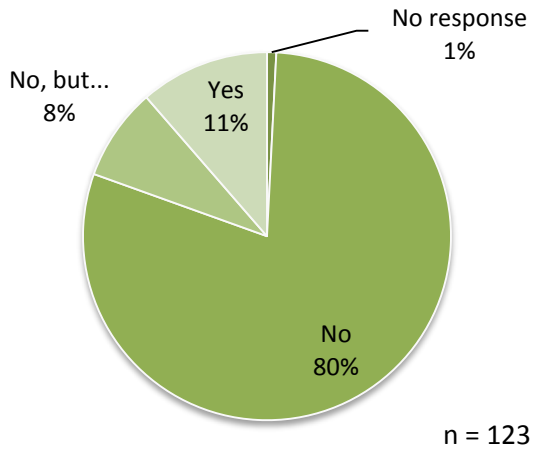
Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit.

The most commonly visited site for Canarsie Park users were *sports facilities* (13%), *beach-waterfronts* (10%), and *out of town* locations (4%). See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Sports	16	13%
Beach-Waterfront	12	10%
Out of Town	5	4%
Playground	5	4%
No Response	4	3%
Nowhere Else	4	3%
Barbecue	3	2%
Amusements	2	2%
Local	2	2%
Amphitheater	1	1%
Garden	1	1%
Greenway	1	1%
Schoolyard	1	1%
Streets	1	1%
Urban Farm	1	1%
Named NYC Park(s)	1	1%
Zoo or Aquarium	1	1%
Total Respondents	**123**	

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 123

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, so it is not surprising that just 11% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Those that did say yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type of group in which they participate, both of which are listed below.

No, but…

In addition to outright replies of 'yes' and 'no' a number of respondents gave answers that indicate other forms of environmental engagement. Many articulated a *pro-environmental ethic* that they expressed through statements about caring about the environment or taking on individual actions, such as responsible consumption and recycling (40%). Others engaged in *self-led stewardship* outside the context of a group –such as picking up their own trash in a park or having a private garden (20%). Interviewees also described *other forms of civic engagement* beyond the environmental realm (10%).

Others mentioned their *engagement through work*—such as an environmentally related career (10%). Finally, others expressed the *desire to engage* in stewardship (10%) or *having done so at another stage in life*, but not at present (10%).

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Religious	6	40%
Environment	4	27%
Sports-Recreation	3	20%
Civic	1	7%
Friends of Park	1	7%
Total	**15**	

Named Stewardship Group

- Canarsie Community Tennis Association
- Citizens for a Better Life
- Environmental Club at MS 31
- Friends of Prospect Park
- Green City Force
- Green Peace

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

BROOKLYN: Four Sparrow Marsh Profile

I. Park Narrative

Four Sparrow Marsh is a 50-acre[1] natural area bounded by Mill Basin, Flatbush Avenue, and the Belt Parkway in Brooklyn. The interior of Four Sparrow Marsh contains an active homeless encampment and trails that are overgrown with poison ivy. Thus, field research crews had difficulty walking through the site. Tracks showed evidence of park users biking on the edge of the marsh next to the Belt Parkway, but no one was observed during field research visits.

We observed numerous birds singing at this site. In 2005, the NYC Parks Department confirmed that 17 bird species were breeding in Four Sparrow Marsh, including salt marsh sharp-tailed sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacutus*) and willet (*Catoptrophorus semipalamtus*). Four Sparrow Marsh provides locally significant wildlife habitat for these sensitive native species.

II. Field Observations

No humans were observed in Four Sparrow Marsh. We therefore present only our observations of signs of human use.

Detailed Counts

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp files, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

Sign	Total
Encampment / Sleeping Area	**1**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	**1**
Other (Note)*	**1**
Trails	**3**
Total	**6**

*Crews were instructed to take note of any other noteworthy or unique observations that stood out to them in each park. For Four Sparrow Marsh, the 'other' sign of activity was flagging left by the Department of Transportation to indicate tree pruning.

III. Interviews with park users

No humans were encountered, and no interviews conducted in Four Sparrow Marsh.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

BROOKLYN: Fresh Creek Nature Preserve Profile

Zone Names	
West Wetland	Nature Trails
North Wetland	South Fields
East Wetland	

I. Park Narrative

Fresh Creek Nature Preserve is a 40-acre site[1] comprised entirely of natural area (Forever Wild wetland). Located in Brooklyn, it is bordered by Flatlands Avenue to the northwest and the Belt Parkway to the southeast. The neighborhood southwest of the park is primarily made up of small single family homes, while the area to the northeast contains the large apartment buildings of Starrett City. Park users and those walking at the edge of the park were primarily African American, Latino, South Asian, or Russian.

This park is comprised of several distinct areas, including the large natural and largely inaccessible wetland area surrounding Fresh Creek, a well-maintained trail area near Starrett City, and some ballfields in a southern section of the park. Many more people were observed on the edge of the park than inside the park, which reflects the fact that only the Nature Trails and South Fields zones were accessible to park users. These are also the zones where most people were observed, although a few visitors were observed walking, sitting, bird watching, praying, or fishing in the wetland areas. Walking, resting, and socializing were popular activities on the nature trails, with about half of the people in this zone observed in pairs. Most people in the South Fields were engaged in some sort of exercise, including golfing (though it is not a golf course or driving range). Park users in this zone were also observed fishing at the water's edge or picking through a dumpster on the park boundary. Most signs of activity were also observed in the South Fields zone, including trails, art/graffiti, tools and other signs of construction or debris.

The field research crews also observed that a lack of recreation or exercise facilities might have led to the low numbers of park users observed. There also appeared to be some signs of neglect in the parks, including inaccessible docks on the water, a damaged fence and other debris likely from Hurricane Sandy, and areas overgrown with invasive plants like phragmites and mugwort. In addition, the crew observed a heavy smell of sewage throughout the site.

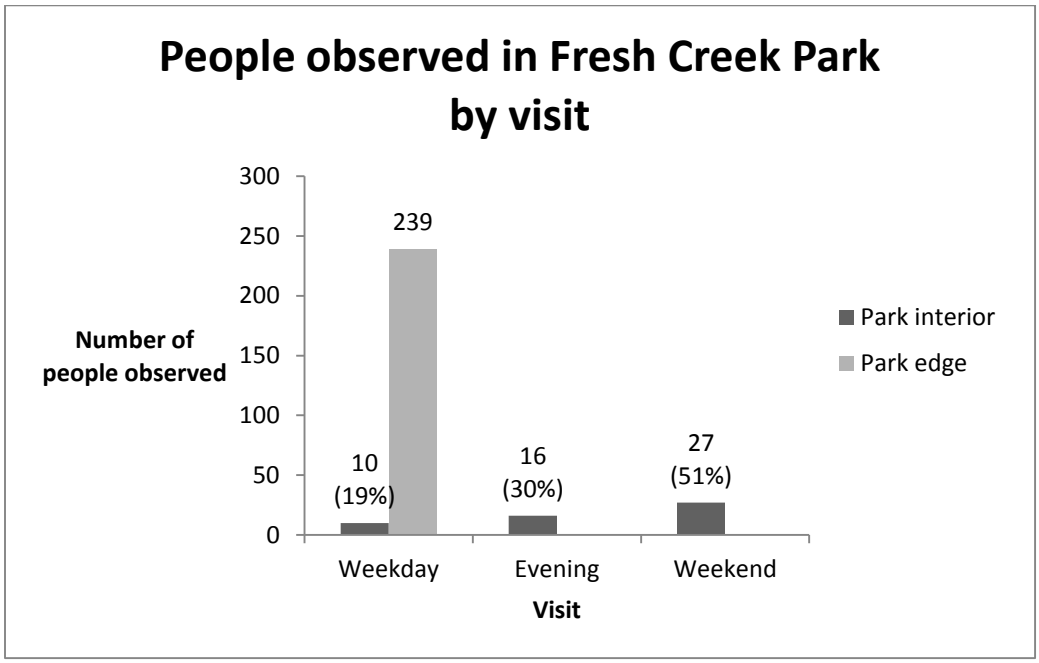
The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 67% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It is also a crucial local resource, with 73% of users traveling from less than 10 blocks away; and 53% of users said they choose to visit Fresh Creek Nature Preserve because it is local.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp files, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

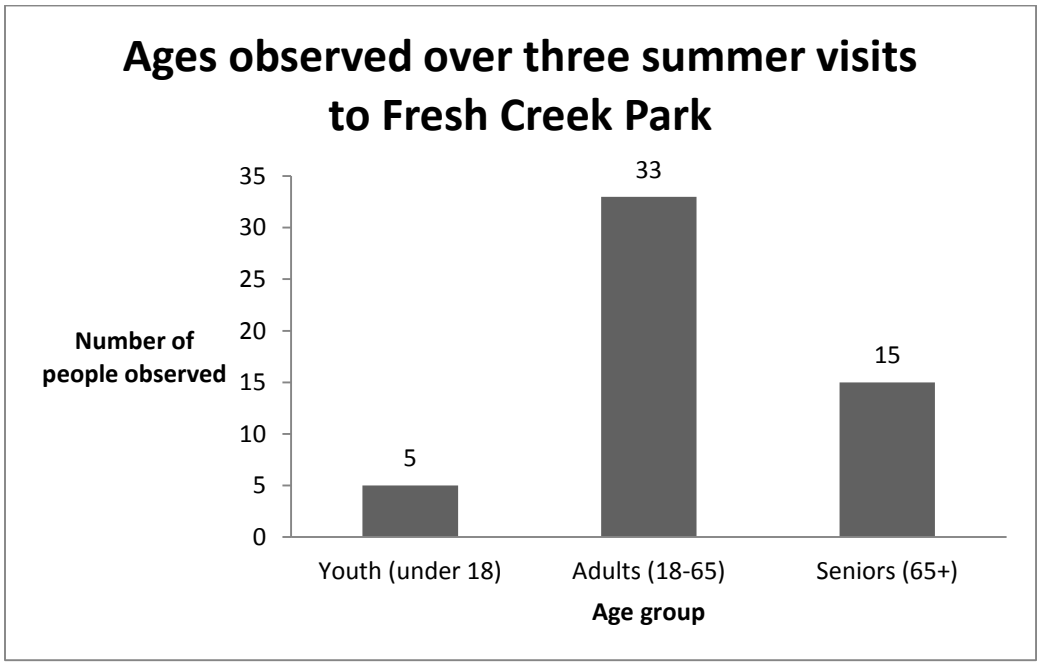
II. Field Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

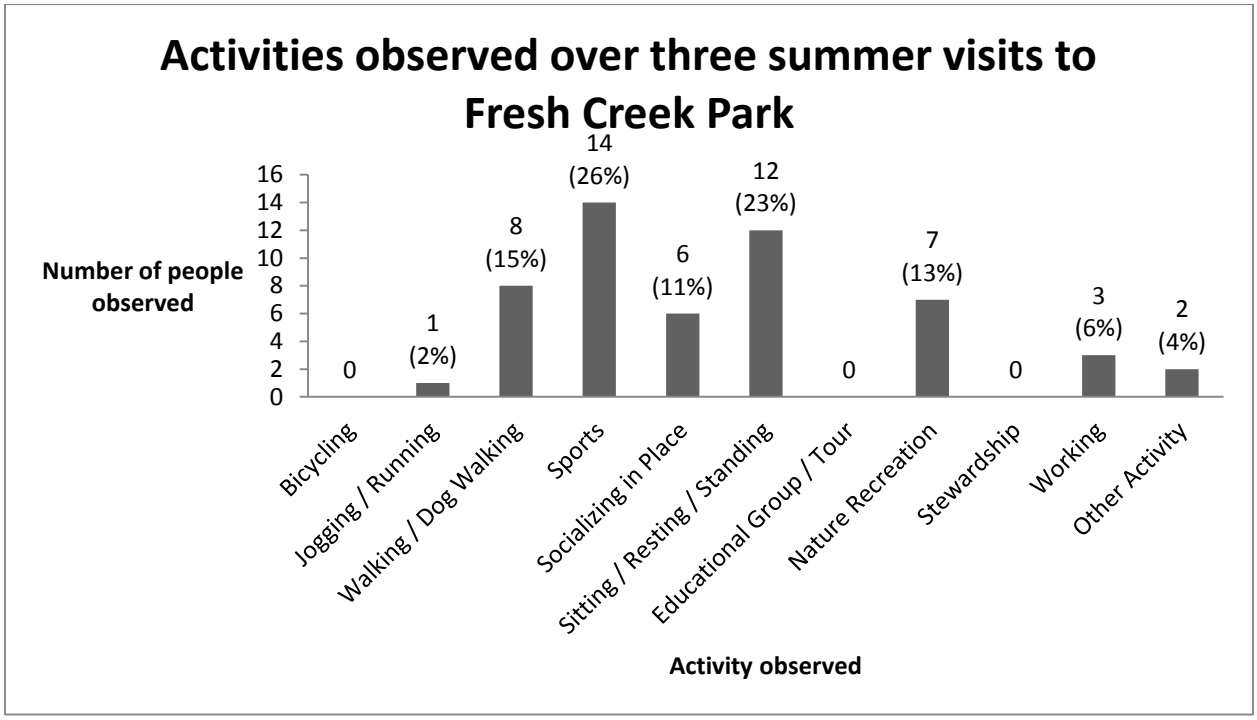


Who are they?



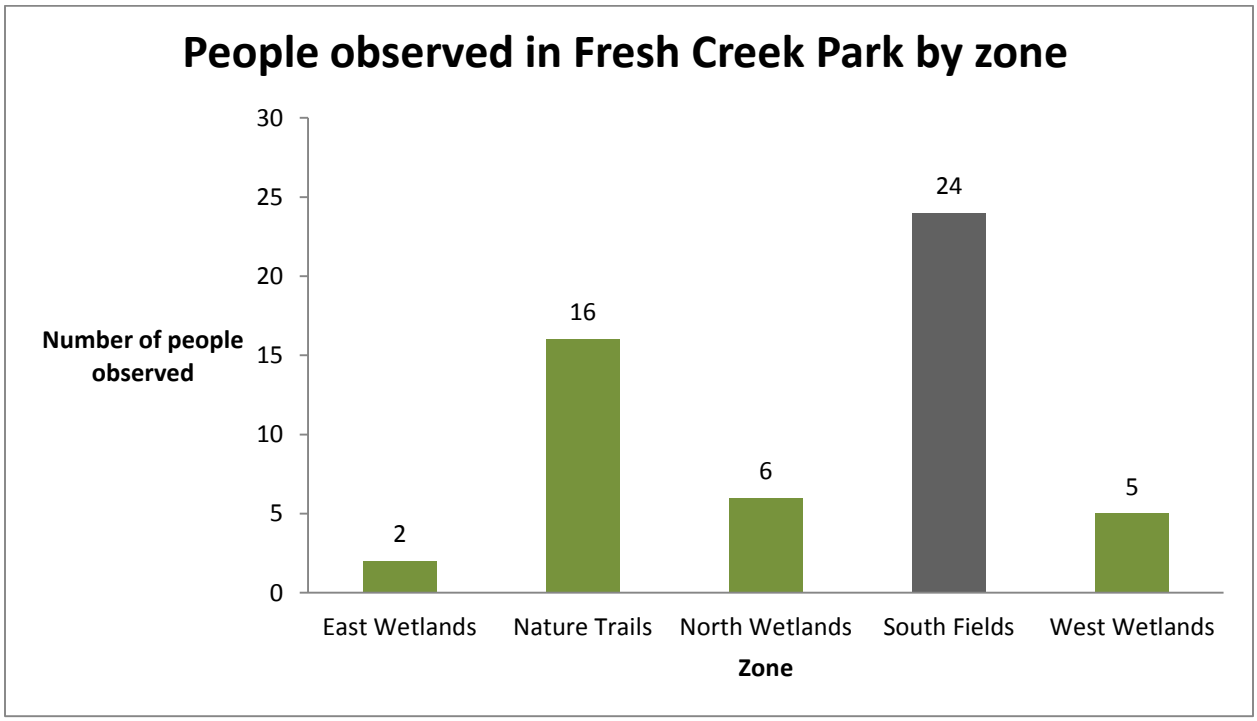
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Human Activities Observed by Zone in Fresh Creek Park. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone						Time of Visit				Age			
	East Wetlands	Nature Trails	North Wetlands	South Fields	West Wetlands	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling						**0**				**0**				**0**
Jogging / Running				1		**1**		1		**1**		1		**1**
Walking / Dog Walking	2	4		2		**8**	4	2	2	**8**	2	2	4	**8**
Sports				14		**14**	1	11	2	**14**		11	3	**14**
Educational Group / Tour						**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation				4	3	**7**		4	3	**7**	2	5		**7**
Stewardship						**0**				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing		5	6	1		**12**		9	3	**12**	1	3	8	**12**
Socializing in Place		6				**6**	2		4	**6**		6		**6**
Working		1		2		**3**	3			**3**		3		**3**
Other Activity					2	**2**			2	**2**				**2**
Total	**2**	**16**	**6**	**24**	**5**	**53**	**10**	**27**	**16**	**53**	**5**	**33**	**15**	**53**

Signs Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)					
Sign	**East Wetlands**	**Nature Trails**	**North Wetlands**	**South Fields**	**West Wetlands**	**Total**
Graffiti, Art, Murals				6		**6**
Substantial Dumping or Debris		2		1		**3**
Other (Note)*	2			6	1	**9**
Sitting Places & Dining			6	1	1	**8**
Sporting / Play Equipment				2		**2**
Trails	3	5		4		**12**
Total	**5**	**7**	**6**	**20**	**2**	**40**

*Crews were instructed to take note of any other noteworthy or unique observations that stood out to them in each park. For Fresh Creek Nature Preserve, other signs of activity included observation decks, tools, and some unidentifiable structures.

Sociability Observed by Zone

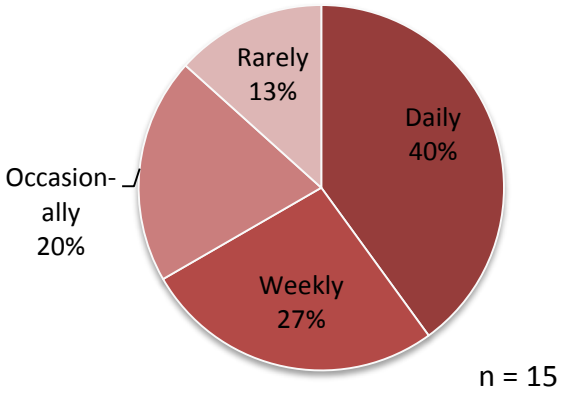
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
East Wetlands		1			**1**
Nature Trails	1	7			**8**
North Wetlands		3			**3**
West Wetlands		1	1		**2**
South Fields	1	3		1	**5**
Total	**2**	**15**	**1**	**1**	**19**

III. Interviews with Park Users

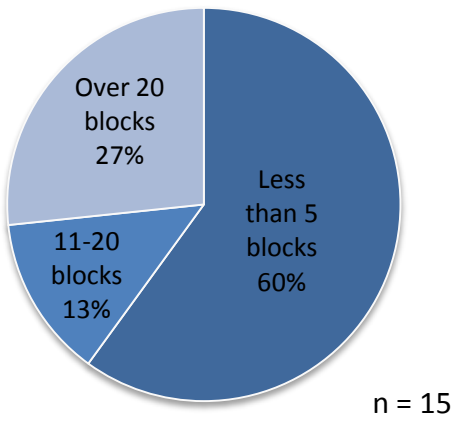
Fifteen park users were interviewed in Fresh Creek Park, of which 80% were male and 20% female. Sixty percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 40% were estimated to be over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 88%.

Two-thirds of park users visit the park daily or weekly (67%). Sixty percent of those interviewed traveled less than 5 blocks to get to the park, but a significant number (27%) traveled more than 20 blocks, revealing that the park is used both by locals and those that travel a distance to visit.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature-Recreation	3	20%
Nature-Outdoors	3	20%
Arts and Culture	2	13%
Relaxing	2	13%
Spiritual	2	13%
Sports-Recreation	2	13%
Walking	2	13%
Dog	1	7%
Exercise	1	7%
Kids	1	7%
Socializing	1	7%
Working	1	7%
Total Respondents	**15**	

Park users interviewed were engaged in a variety of activities—enjoying nature, relaxing, reading, practicing spiritual activities, and participating in various types of exercise/sports. It is not clear that one type of activity dominates the park use, although the number of interviews was relatively low due to the lack of park users observed. "Getting fresh air" and enjoying or viewing the water were uses mentioned by more than one person, revealing the importance of the park's environmental attributes. One person also reported bird watching and gathering mulberries, enjoying both the plants and animals in Fresh Creek Nature Preserve.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for visiting park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	8	53%
Refuge	5	33%
Nature-Outdoors	4	27%
Activity	2	13%
Enjoyment	2	13%
Amenities	1	7%
Place Attachment	1	7%
Total Respondents	**15**	

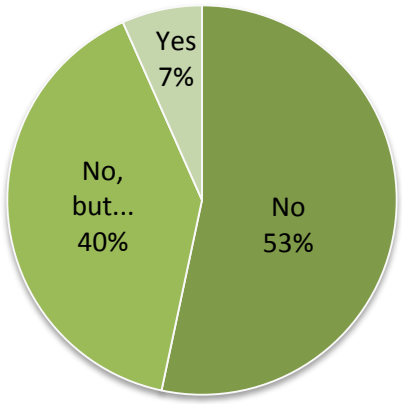
Many respondents chose to visit Fresh Creek Nature Preserve because it is a *local* park (53%), but also because of the particular natural environment (*nature-outdoors*, 27%) and sense of *refuge* that it provides (33%). Words like "peace," "quiet," and "serene" were used to describe the park, as well as the idea that "no one is here to bother us." One person remarked that there is "no other place out here to read in peace and quiet without seeing one million people."

Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nowhere Else	4	27%
Beach-Waterfront	3	20%
Named NYC Park(s)	3	20%
Sports	2	13%
Barbecue	1	7%
Garden	1	7%
No Response	1	7%
Zoo or Aquarium	1	7%
Total Respondents	**15**	

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit. Fresh Creek Nature Preserve users most commonly reported *not visiting anywhere else* in the outdoors, indicating the importance of the park in their everyday lives. Those interviewed also reported visiting *waterfront* sites (20%) and *other NYC parks* (20%). See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 15

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, so it is not surprising that just 7% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Those that did say yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type of group in which they participate, both of which are listed below.

No, but…

In addition to outright replies of 'yes' and 'no' a number of respondents gave answers that indicate other forms of environmental engagement. Some indicated that they *would like to* find an opportunity to engage in environmental stewardship (67%), while others did so through their *work* (17%) or *at home* (17%).

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Environment	1	100%
Total	1	

Named Stewardship Group

- Bronx River Alliance

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

BROOKLYN: Marine Park Profile

Zone Names	
Lenape Playground	North Ballfields
Nature Center & Trails	Skate Park
Natural Area	South Ballfields

I. Park Narrative

Marine Park is the largest park in Brooklyn at 678 acres (including 341 acres of natural areas).[1] White Island is an inaccessible restoration site that we did not include in our assessment, nor did we visit the golf course that is on Marine Park property. We did assess six zones: the north and south ballfields, the natural area, skate park, nature center and trails, and Lenape Playground. It is clear that the human use across these different zones is highly varied. In the northern area, use is concentrated around the park infrastructure – which itself can create deep place attachment. For example, both seniors using the bocce court referred to the area as "our home", as did younger adults and teens on the basketball court, who reported visiting 7 days a week and participate in active park maintenance and stewardship of their "second home". Similarly, parents and children report using the water feature near-daily in the summer, and seniors identified the community center as a key hub. Users are incredibly diverse in terms of race and ethnicity – including Spanish-speaking Latino users from a number of different countries, Russian-speaking users, Chinese speaking users, African Americans, and Italian Americans.

Interestingly, many users did not identify the southern portion as part of Marine Park – they considered Marine Park the name for the programmed, active recreation area to the north. Some used vernacular names such as "Snake Park" and "the weeds" and "the water". High use in the southern area is concentrated around the baseball fields, which are actively stewarded by local residents – with gardens in parks, murals on storage containers, custom signage, and community groups holding keys to the field. The edge along Gerritsen Avenue shows many signs of community engagement, including murals, banners, a community garden, a local library, churches, and local social clubs – so it is not surprising to find the high engagement and stewardship of the programmed areas of the park in the south.

Other use in the southern portion is concentrated along the beach, starting at the dead end of Gerritsen Avenue, where cars park and a city bus turns around, and then fanning up along the beach edge along Shell Bank Creek. The beach invites fishing, clamming, crabbing, sun tanning, jet skiing, and boating. We encountered fewer people on the trails throughout the natural areas (more on the weekend), but the natural areas show many clear signs of human use – ranging from socializing spots like fire pits to constructed dirt bike jumps to treads from motorized bikes – to signs of dumping (cars, large debris) and burning. This area of the park is a place to get away – to have unique encounters with nature and to socialize away from the watchful eye of the public. Our teams do not collect data at night, but the signs of fire pits and drinking debris indicate active use at night.

The overall use pattern showed least use during the day, increased use in evening, and peak use on the weekend. It is important to note that daytime site visits occurred during a major July heat wave, which contributed to people seeking refuge in shade, water features, and community centers – but also to less active recreation in the sun during the day. Seventy-six percent of interviewees indicated that they use

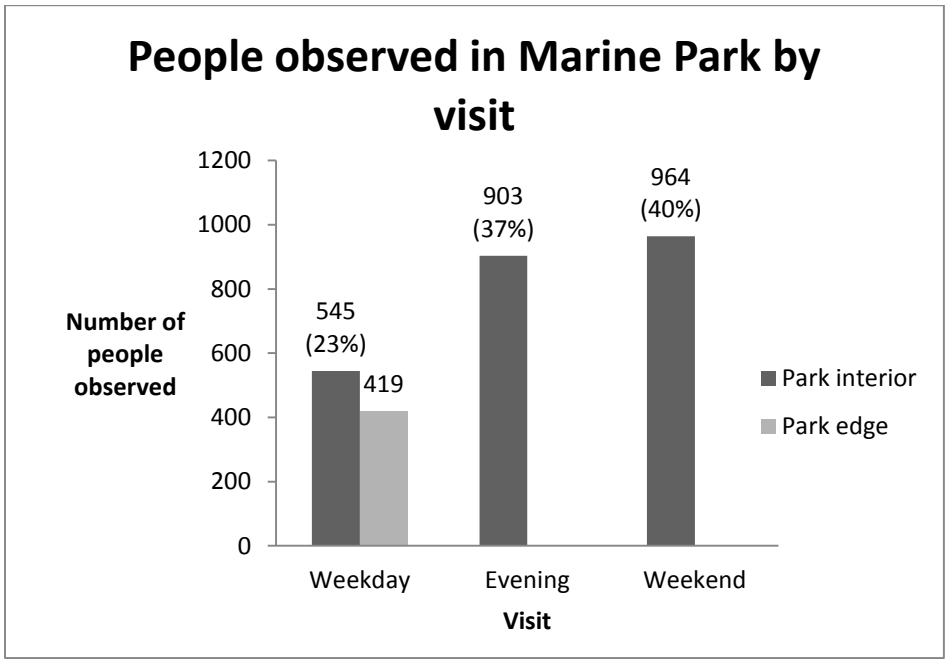
[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Forever Wild acreage was calculated using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

the park on a daily or weekly basis, and 49% of users travel from less than 10 blocks away. The most common thematic response to why people choose to come to this park is that it is local or proximate (45%). While users were not asked to rate the park, 13 users said that the park is “one of the best”, “special”, “quieter”, “more peaceful”, or their “favorite”. One user said, simply, “People here care, not like at other parks.”

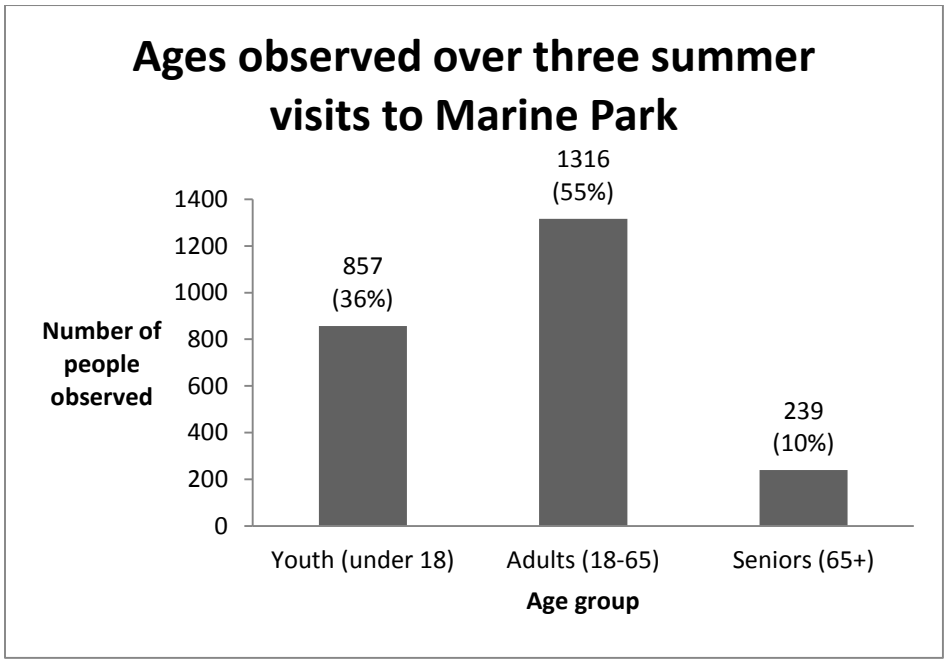
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

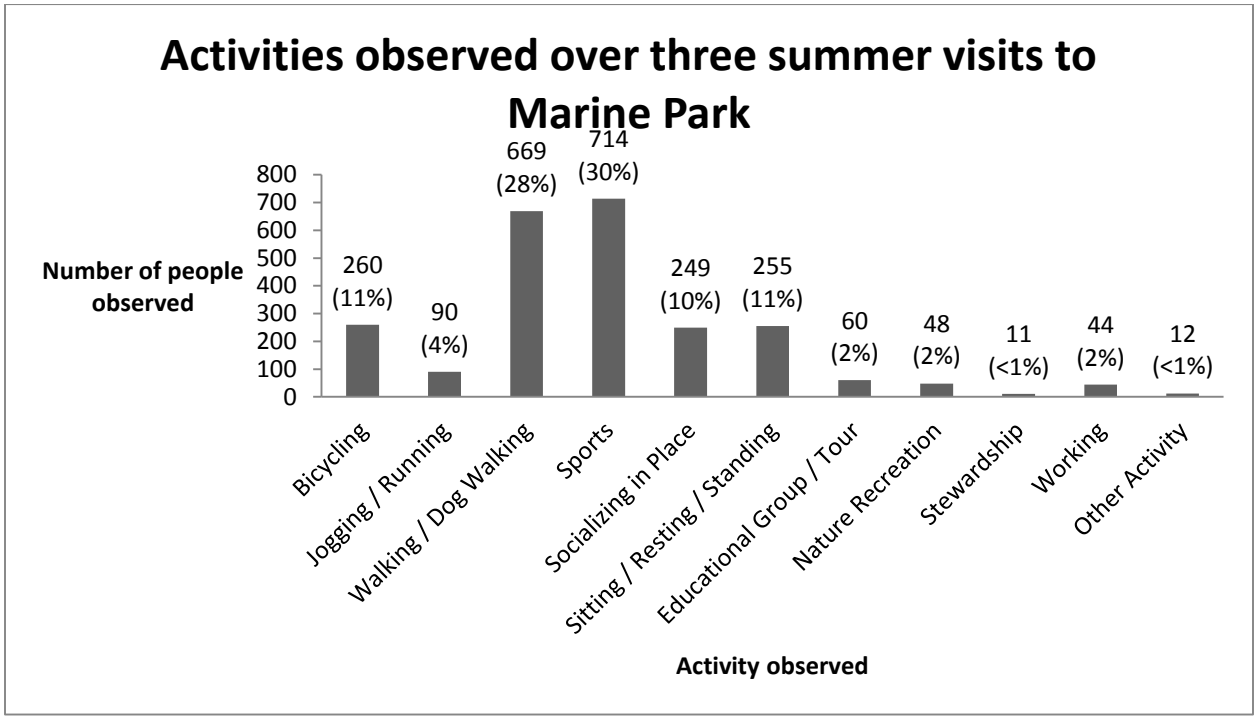


Who are they?



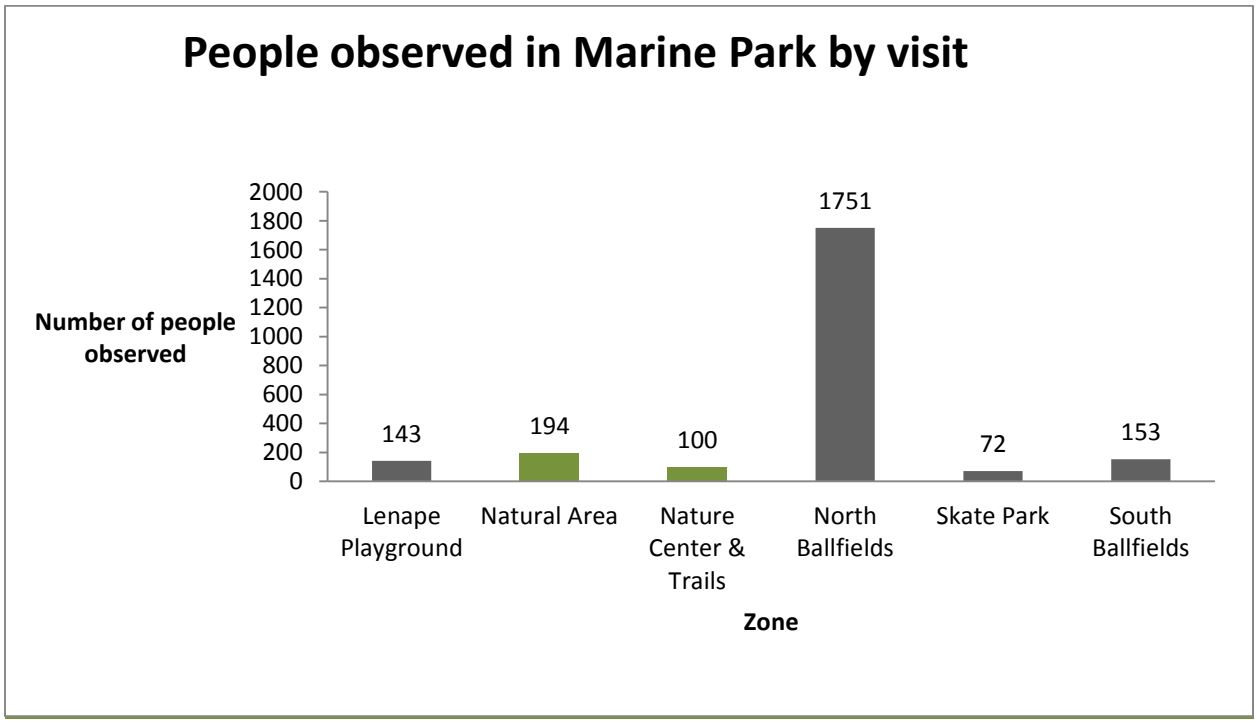
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone, by time of visit and age group. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone							Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Lenape Playground	Natural Area	Nature Center & Trails	North Ballfields	Skate Park	South Ballfields	Total	Evening	Weekday	Weekend	Total	Adults	Kids	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	3	24	13	213	4	3	**260**	143	55	62	**260**	93	150	17	**260**
Jogging / Running	1	5	7	77			**90**	36	25	29	**90**	76	7	7	**90**
Walking / Dog Walking	28	67	50	491	26	7	**669**	339	102	228	669	417	142	110	**669**
Sports	48	1		539	26	100	**714**	181	167	366	**714**	304	378	32	**714**
Educational Group / Tour				60			**60**		60		**60**	5	55		**60**
Nature Recreation		43	5				**48**	41		7	**48**	27	13	8	**48**
Stewardship		6	3		1	1	**11**			11	**11**	10		1	**11**
Sitting / Resting / Standing		13	11	193	8	30	**255**	98	71	86	**255**	174	38	43	**255**
Socializing in Place	59	16	2	166	5	1	**249**	51	40	158	**249**	160	68	21	**249**
Working	4	10	9	9	1	11	**44**	2	25	17	**44**	43	1		**44**
Other Activity		8		3	1		**12**	12			**12**	7	5		**12**
Total	**143**	**193**	**100**	**1751**	**72**	**153**	**2412**	**903**	**545**	**964**	**2412**	**1,316**	**857**	**239**	**2412**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)						
Signs	**Lenape Playground**	**Natural Area**	**Nature Center & Trails**	**North Ballfields**	**Skate Park**	**South Ballfields**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Bird Bath / Bat Box			1				**1**
Community Bulletin Boards / Institutional Signs	2						**2**
Encampment / Sleeping Area		4					**4**
Garden in Park			2	1			**3**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	14	2		8	15	11	**50**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	1	8		2			**11**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol	1	2			1		**4**
National Flags					1		**1**
Other (Note)*	3	3	12	5		1	**24**
Other Signs, Flyers & Stickers	3		8	6	4		**21**
Sitting Places & Dining			2	1			**3**
Sporting / Play Equipment			1	2			**3**
Trails		20	12	4	2	9	**47**
Total	**24**	**39**	**38**	**29**	**23**	**21**	**174**

* Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Marine Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example: an abandoned boat in the tidal mud, a safety bulletin board, and images of the nature center and salt marsh.

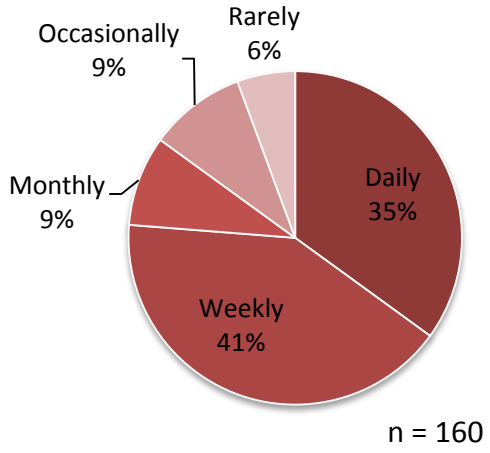
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Lenape Playground			1		**1**
Nature Center & Trails	10	16	6		**32**
Natural Area	11	12	10	2	**35**
North Ballfields	67	183	110	9	**369**
Skate Park	9	9	3	1	**22**
South Ballfields	2	2	5	3	**12**
Total	**99**	**222**	**135**	**15**	**471**

III. Interviews with Park Users

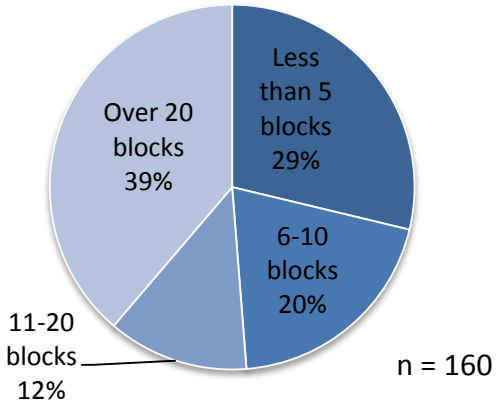
One hundred and sixty park users were interviewed in Marine Park, of which 50% were male and 47% female (3% unidentified). Seventy percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 27% were estimated to be over the age of 65 (3% unidentified). We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The interview response rate was 91%.

The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 76% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It is also a crucial local resource, with 49% of users traveling from less than 10 blocks away. At the same time, the park is drawing people from a distance, with 39% of users traveling over 20 blocks to reach the park – including by car and bicycle—with some interviewees coming from Long Island and Queens to use the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Sports & Recreation	45	28%
Walking	30	19%
Kids	29	18%
Relaxing	20	13%
Nature-Outdoors	19	12%
Dog	15	9%
Nature-Recreation	11	7%
Exercise	8	5%
Socializing	6	4%
Arts and Culture	5	3%
Working	5	3%
Biking	4	3%
Stewardship	4	3%
Community Center	3	2%
Spiritual	2	1%
Total Respondents	**160**	

In the observations of human activities, 36% of users were youth. These data corroborate with the interview data, where 18% of respondents said that they were using the park because it had amenities and spaces for *kids*. Respondents mentioned not only children, grandchildren, cousins, nieces and nephews, but also children under the care of babysitters. Clearly, the park is an attractor for use by children during the summer season when kids are out of school. (Comparing these trends with data from throughout the school-year would require additional research.) Just as amenities for youth can attract users, so can space to walk *dogs*, which was the reason that 9% of respondents gave for being in the park.

The park enables physical activity, with a range of uses from *sports and recreation* (28%), to *walking* (19%), to *dog* walking (9%), to *exercise* (5%), to *bicycling* (3%). The assessment team observed hubs of high use around the basketball and bocce courts, the water feature/playground, and the community center. The track serves as a place for walking, running, biking, and even exercise with free weights – we found a number of personal trainers and athletes using this area, with several making suggestions of needed improvement to exercise equipment. All of these amenities are clustered at the northern end of the park and they serve as a crucial anchor to connect users with the park. A number of interviewees—particularly seniors—were met on their way coming or going to the center for programs. It is important to note that some of our fieldwork was conducted during a major heat wave, and the nature center was serving as an air conditioned refuge point for the community, with ping pong and board game activities, and a space to get away inside. Some respondents specifically mentioned *arts and culture* programming (3%) and the nature center programs (*community center*, 2%) as the reason they were in the park. The two respondents using the park for *spiritual* practices (1%) were handing out religious leaflets.

At the same time, Marine Park also provides opportunities for communing with nature through: *relaxation* (13%), interacting with *outdoors* (12%), *nature recreation* (7%), and *stewardship* (3%). While fewer numbers of people are using the southern natural areas, they are connecting with the resources in a very different way – such as sitting in the woods, fishing and clamming in the water, and relaxing on the beach.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for visiting park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	72	45%
Amenities	54	34%
Refuge	31	19%
Enjoyment	26	16%
Nature-Outdoors	25	16%
Place Attachment	8	5%
Activity	6	4%
Sociability	6	4%
Social Ties	5	3%
Total Respondents	**160**	

The primary reason people choose Marine Park to visit is that it is a form of nearby nature and open space (*local*, 45%). They are attracted to the *amenities* (34%), which include not only the physical features and park infrastructure, but also the quality of the amenities and the way in which they are maintained. Others sought out the sense of *refuge* (19%) that comes from being outside, using language like calm, health, peace, tranquility, solitude, and serenity. Others simply identified *enjoyment* of the site (16%), using language like "I like it", "I love it", or noting the beauty or pleasantness of the site. Respondents also identified specific material attributes of being *outdoors in nature* (16%), including breeze, shade, sun, and water. Some respondents gave rich detail about their history of *place attachment* with the park (5%), including decades-long connection with the site. Others mentioned again the unique *activities* that they could do in this site (4%)—referring back to the prior question. Finally, some reflected on the park as a space for *sociability* and social gatherings (4%) and to which they have *social ties* (3%) through family and friends (e.g. living nearby).

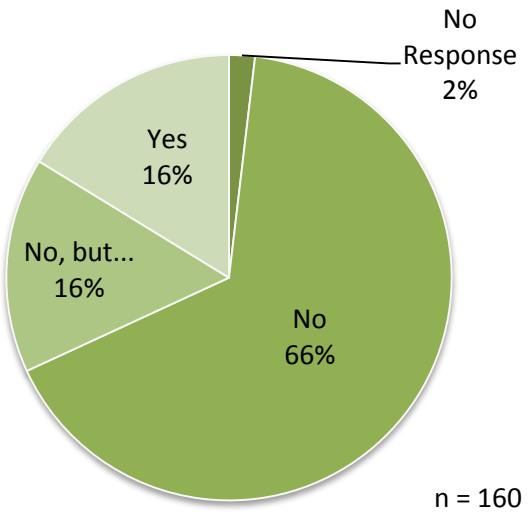
Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit, shown here.

The most commonly visited site types for Marine Park users were *beach and waterfront* areas (34%) and *other named NYC parks* (25%). In addition, 14% of respondents said that they *don't really like to go anywhere else outdoors*, indicating the importance of Marine Park in their everyday lives. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Beach-Waterfront	55	34%
Named NYC Park(s)	40	25%
Nowhere Else	23	14%
Out of Town	18	11%
No response	10	6%
Sports	6	4%
Local	3	2%
Nature Preserve	3	2%
Amusements	2	1%
Botanical Garden	2	1%
Community Facility	2	1%
Playground	2	1%
Wildlife Refuge	2	1%
Zoo or Aquarium	2	1%
Barbecue	1	1%
Schoolyard	1	1%
Streets	1	1%
Total Respondents	**160**	

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, so it is not surprising that just 16% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Those that did say yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type of group in which they participate, both of which are listed below.

No, but…

In addition to outright replies of 'yes' and 'no' a number of respondents gave answers that indicate other forms of environmental engagement through *self-led stewardship* outside the context of a group –such as picking up their own trash in a park or having a private garden (20%). Many articulated a *pro-environmental ethic* that they expressed through statements about

caring about the environment or taking on individual actions, such as responsible consumption and recycling (24%). Interviewees also described *other forms of civic engagement* beyond the environmental realm (16%). Others mentioned their *engagement through work*—such as an environmentally related career (8%). Finally, others expressed the *desire to engage* in stewardship (8%) or *having done so at another stage in life*, but not at present (24%).

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Environment	10	30%
Religious	6	18%
Sports-Recreation	6	18%
Civic	5	15%
Unknown	2	6%
Culture	1	3%
Friends of Park	1	3%
Police	1	3%
Youth	1	3%

Named Stewardship Groups:

- Audubon (*mentioned multiple times)*
- Boy Scouts
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
- Environmental Work Group
- Gerritsen Beach Cares
- Knights of Columbus
- Littoral Society
- Marine Park Association
- Mill Basin Civic Association
- MillionTreesNYC
- The Nature Conservancy
- Queens Hall of Science
- Salt Marsh Alliance
- Salt Marsh Nature Center
- Sierra Club
- Wildlife Conservation Society

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
BROOKLYN: McGuire Fields Park Profile

Zone Names
Ballfields
Natural Area

I. Park Narrative

McGuire Fields is a 72-acre park[1], including 8 acres of Forever Wild natural areas. The park is located in Brooklyn and is bordered by Paerdegat Basin, East Mill Basin, the Belt Parkway, and the neighborhood of Bergen Beach.

The park was primarily a place for youth and adult visitors, as opposed to seniors, who made up only 2% of park users observed. Sports, sitting/resting, and walking/dog walking were by far the most common activities observed in McGuire Fields, all taking place in the ballfields. Ninety-eight percent of park users were observed in the ballfields, with only six park users in the natural area across all three visits. However, graffiti/art, debris, and informal trails were observed in the natural area indicating signs of human use. The ballfields also contained many signs of human use, including a particularly large number of community signs/flyers/stickers.

McGuire Fields appears to be maintained by the community rather than just by the NYC Parks Department and the field research crews noted the excellent condition of the park's comfort station. Many sports teams and summer camps appear to use the fields and have posted signs with their names and rules. The edge of one baseball field was being used as an informal dog run because it provided an enclosed space. Dog walkers were observed to be a prominent group of park users, and some expressed concern over the lack of a dog park and wanted to see one built. Dog waste bag dispensers were clearly set out by the community.

McGuire Fields contained a large amount of social activity, with many pairs, small groups and large groups observed. Park users were not ethnically diverse and were observed to be primarily white in McGuire Fields. Fifty percent of users traveling from less than 10 blocks away, and 47% of users said they choose to visit McGuire Fields because it is serves as their local park.

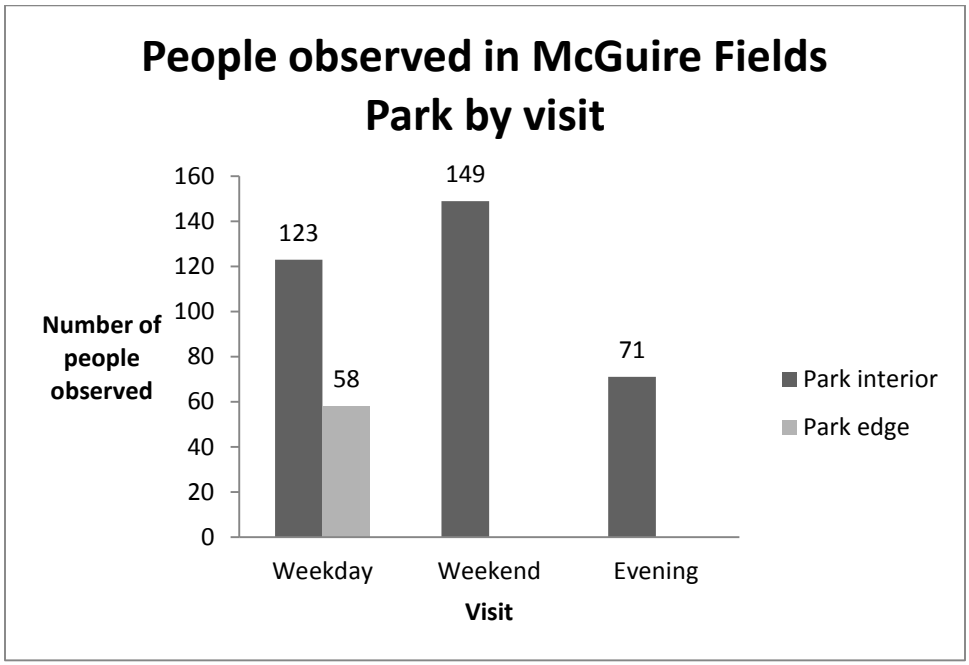
This park was significantly impacted by Hurricane Sandy, which was apparent in the interviews and also in the significant debris observed in both zones of the park. Signs of construction and homes for sale were commonly seen in the park vicinity. The field researchers also interviewed park users whose homes were flooded and or destroyed in the storm.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp files, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

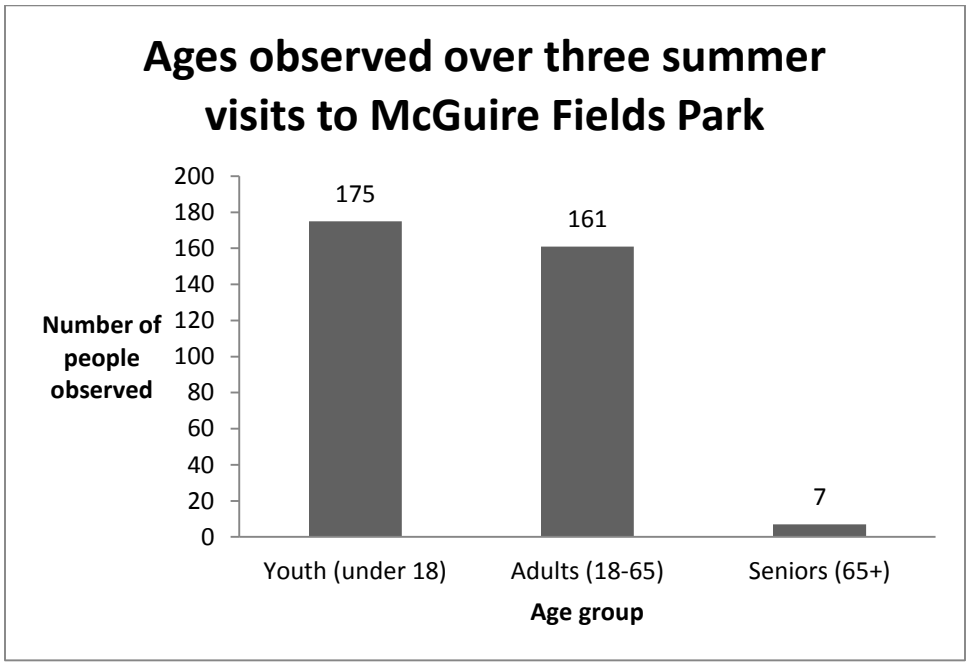
II. Field Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

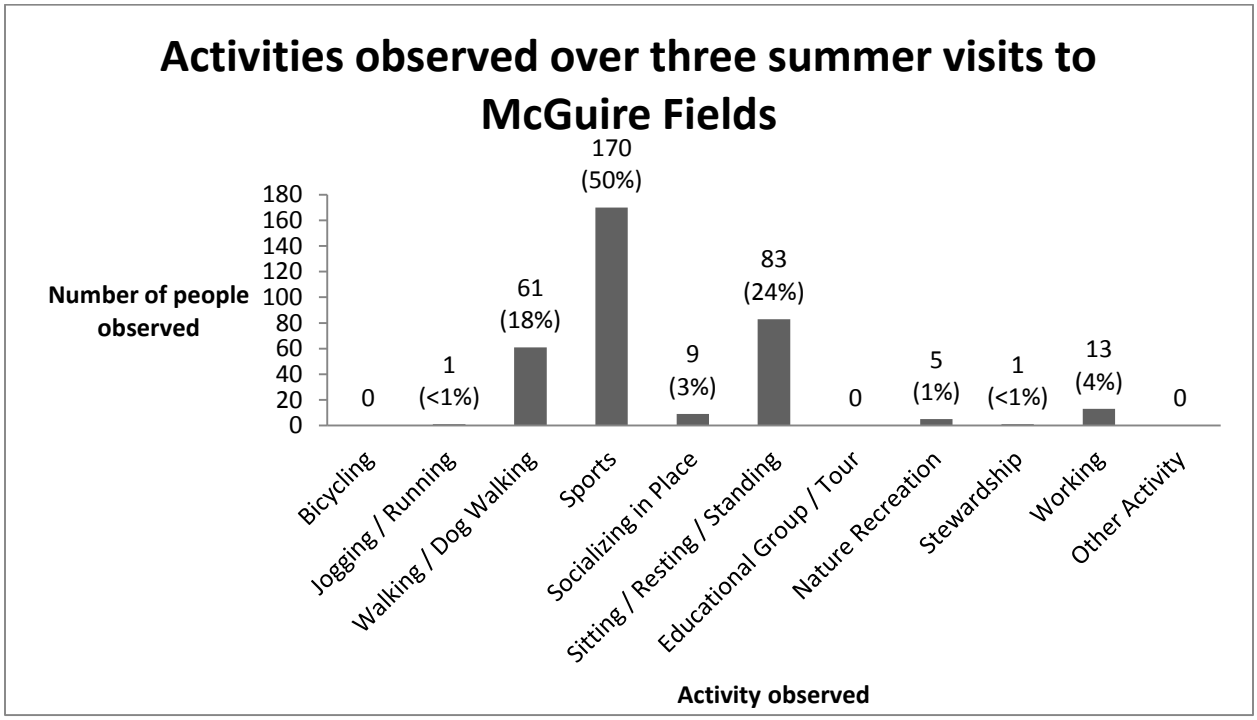


Who are they?



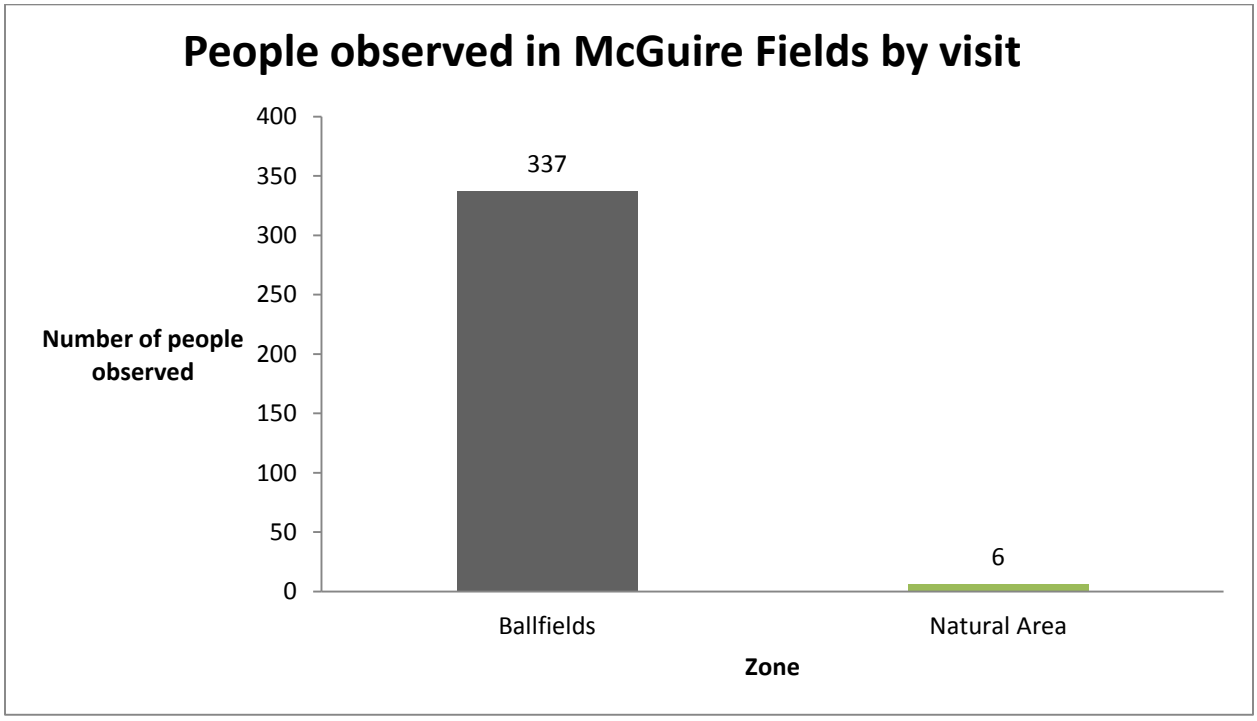
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Human Activities Observed by Zone, Time of Visit, and Age Group in McGuire Fields. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone			Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Ballfields	Natural Area	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling			**0**				**0**				**0**
Jogging / Running	1		**1**	1			**1**		1		**1**
Walking / Dog Walking	61		**61**	36	14	11	**61**	17	44		**61**
Sports	170		**170**	57	75	38	**170**	132	38		**170**
Educational Group / Tour			**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation	5		**5**	5			**5**		5		**5**
Stewardship	1		**1**			1	**1**		1		**1**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	83		**83**	6	60	17	**83**	19	57	7	**83**
Socializing in Place	9		**9**	5		4	**9**	6	3		**9**
Working	7	6	**13**	13			**13**	1	12		**13**
Other Activity			**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**337**	**6**	**343**	**123**	**149**	**71**	**343**	**175**	**161**	**0**	**343**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)		
Sign	**Ballfields**	**Natural Area**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box	2		**2**
Community Bulletin Boards / Institutional Signs	3		**3**
Garden in Park	2		**2**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	5	10	**15**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	3	5	**8**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol	5		**5**
Other (Note)	5	8	**13**
Other Signs, Flyers & Stickers	55		**55**
Sporting / Play Equipment	4		**4**
Trails		10	**10**
Total	**84**	**33**	**117**

*Crews were instructed to take note of any other noteworthy or unique observations that stood out to them in each park. For Broad Channel American, other signs of activity included tidal debris and informal breaks in the fence.

Sociability Observed by Zone

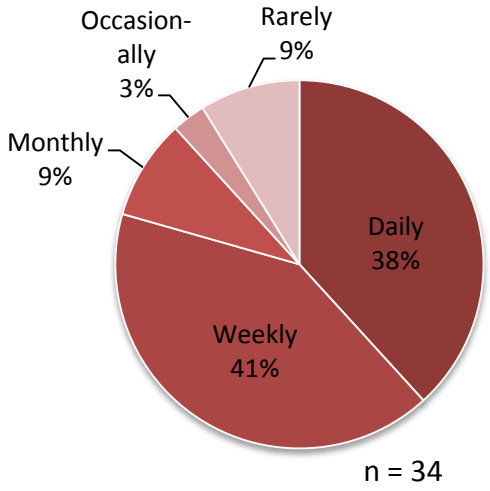
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Ballfields	1	27	31	4	**63**
Natural Area		1			**1**
Total	**1**	**28**	**31**	**4**	**64**

III. Interviews with Park Users

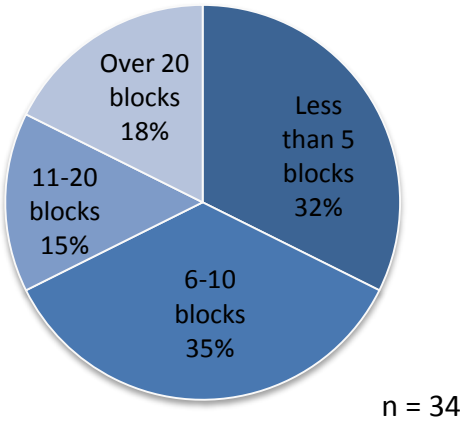
Thirty-four park users were interviewed in McGuire Fields, of which 53% were male and 47% female. Eighty-two percent (82%) of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 15% were estimated to be over the age of 65 (3% unidentified). We did not interview park users under the age of 18.

A large majority of McGuire Fields park users visit the site frequently, with 79% coming daily or weekly. In addition, most park users interviewed were local, with 67% coming from less than 10 blocks away. Still, 18% did travel more than 20 blocks, showing that this is also an important site for park users that come from outside the immediate community.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



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Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Kids	18	53%
Sports-Recreation	16	47%
Nature-Outdoors	7	21%
Dog	3	9%
Walking	2	6%
Working	2	6%
Arts and Culture	1	3%
Exercise	1	3%
Nature-Recreation	1	3%
Relaxing	1	3%
Socializing	1	3%
Total Respondents	**34**	

Respondents commonly described engaging in activities with *kids* (53%) and were also often participating in or watching *sports* (47%). Some park users also described *enjoying the weather or the outdoors* (21%). Other activities were less commonly engaged in, including interacting with *dogs*, *walking*, *working*, *reading*, *exercising*, *nature recreation*, *relaxing*, and *socializing*.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	17	50%
Amenities	15	44%
Enjoyment	3	9%
Refuge	2	6%
Nature-Outdoors	1	3%
Place Attachment	1	3%
Sociability	1	3%
Social Ties	1	3%
Total Respondents	**34**	

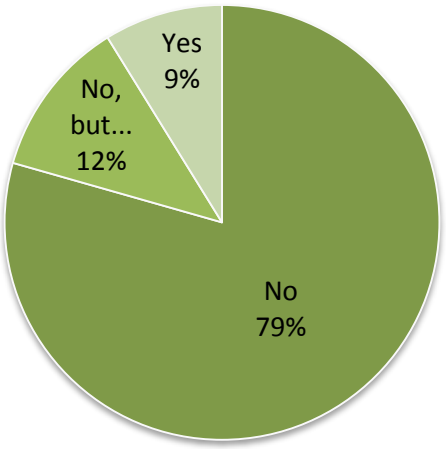
The most common reason people gave for choosing to visit McGuire Fields was that it is *local* (50%) followed by the *amenities* (15%). These amenities include sports facilities, cleanliness, and plenty of space. Other park users expressed *enjoyment* of this park in particular (9%) or a sense of *refuge* (6%). One person remarked that they visit the park because it is “secluded” and “not many people know about it.” Other reasons for visiting McGuire Fields included *nature*, *place attachment*, and social reasons.

Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as *social connectors* between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit. The most commonly visited sites for McGuire Fields park users were *other NYC parks* (44%); the full list of responses is shown to the right.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF TOTAL**
Named NYC Park(s)	15	44%
Nowhere Else	9	26%
Beach-Waterfront	5	15%
Amusements	2	6%
Sports	2	6%
Local	1	3%
Playground	1	3%
Streets	1	3%
Zoo or Aquarium	1	3%
Total Respondents	**34**	

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 34

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, so it is not surprising that only 9% of interviewees directly identified as doing so. For those that did say they participate in stewardship, several specific groups are named below. Most of the named groups are related to youth and/or sports and recreation.

No, but…

Finally, in addition to outright replies of 'yes' and 'no', three respondents answered that they take part in stewardship *through their work*. One additional interviewee expressed a desire to participate in environmental stewardship.

Stewardship Group Type

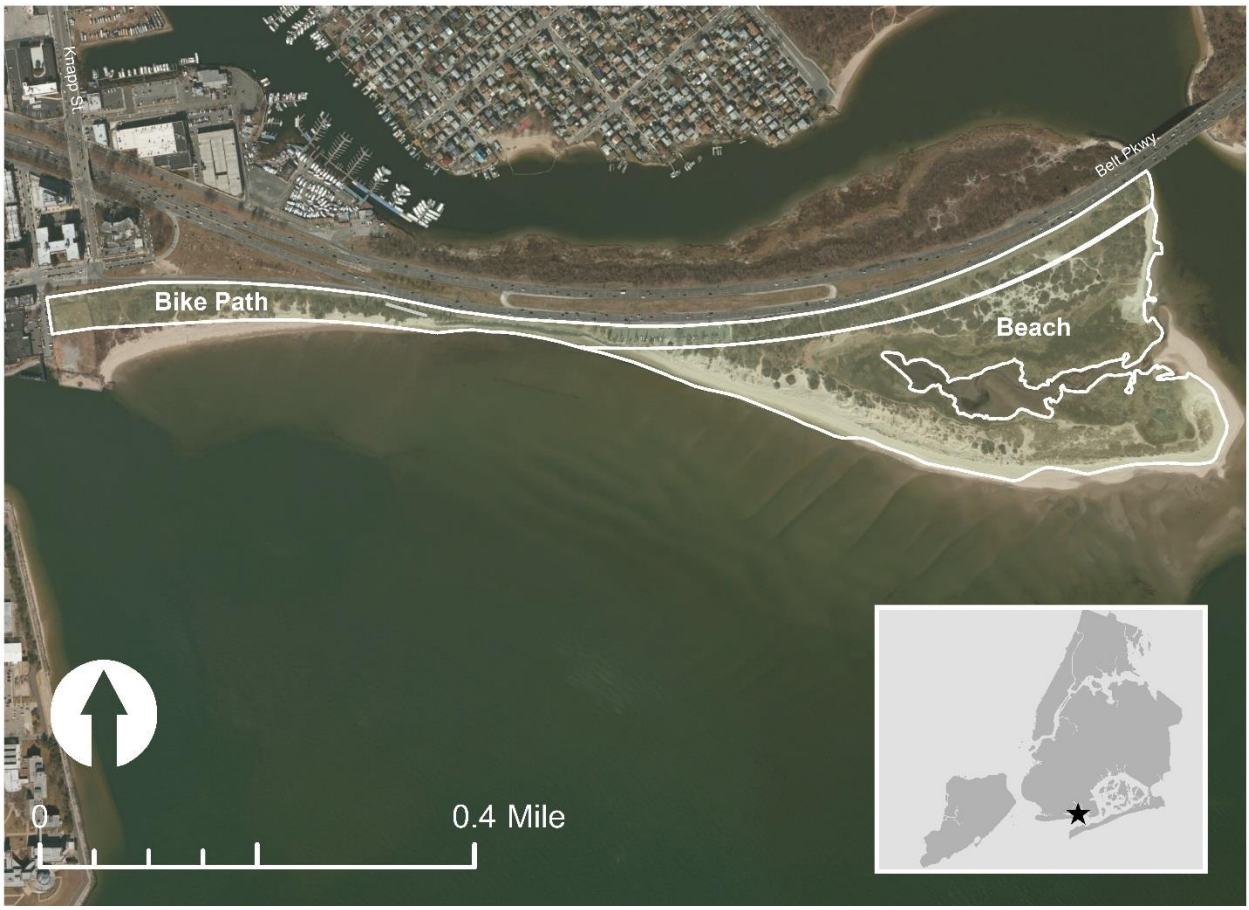
THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Environment	4	40%
Civic	2	20%
Community Garden	1	10%
Friends of Park	1	10%
Professional	1	10%
Sports-Recreation	1	10%
Total	**10**	

Named Stewardship Groups

- Bergen Beach Youth Association
- Bocce Club
- Carmine Carro Community Center
- Forest Hills Little League
- Marine Park Civic Association
- Millennium

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

BROOKLYN: Plumb Beach Profile



Zone Names
Bike Path
Beach

I. Park Narrative

Plumb Beach is an approximately 54-acre,[1] mostly linear site in Brooklyn that is situated south of the Belt Parkway along the Rockaway Inlet. It consists of a bike path that is part of the Shore Parkway Greenway / Jamaica Bay Greenway, a parking lot and comfort station, some interior scrub trees and grasses, a meandering stream, and a beach. The beach is managed by the National Park Service as part of Gateway National Recreation Area, and the greenway is managed by NYC Parks and the DOT. Crews observed that even when the greenway is hot in the full sun, the beach area remains breezy and cool.

Plumb Beach is a known destination for unique forms of nature recreation—including viewing horseshoe crabs that mate and lay eggs on the site, as well as kitesurfing, fishing, and beach-going/bathing. Because the site is not programmed with sports fields, people are seeking out this site as a place to interact with the wind and the water. Some interviewees made explicit comparisons between Plumb Beach and other more manicured and managed beach sites (such as Coney Island, Brighton Beach, and Rockaway Beach). Although this site had more trash and debris on the beach, it had a feeling of seclusion and a quality of being 'undiscovered' that people enjoyed. A group of particularly devoted users meet daily on site with their dogs to allow them to play in the tide and the sand in a leash-free environment. In addition to being regular users, this group was well attuned to the ecology of the site and has territorial feelings, stating "this place is ours". Other common users include sunbathers, fishers, and other dog walkers. The greenway also attracts a number of cyclists, walkers, and joggers, as it serves as an uninterrupted, car-free route along Jamaica Bay, leading out toward the rest of Gateway and an access route to the Rockaways.

Users were diverse, with a range of languages and ethnicities observed, including: Latino (with some interviews conducted in Spanish), Eastern European, East Asian, Middle Eastern, African American and White. Several users interviewed spoke Russian and one fisher identified as being from Bangladesh. We observed both able-bodied and disabled users of the beach. For the most part, all users were adults and seniors –this is not a beach used often by kids. Almost all of the fishers were male. These men fish both on the beach, but also on a concrete street-end pier that sits just behind the parking lot that is adjacent to Plumb Beach.

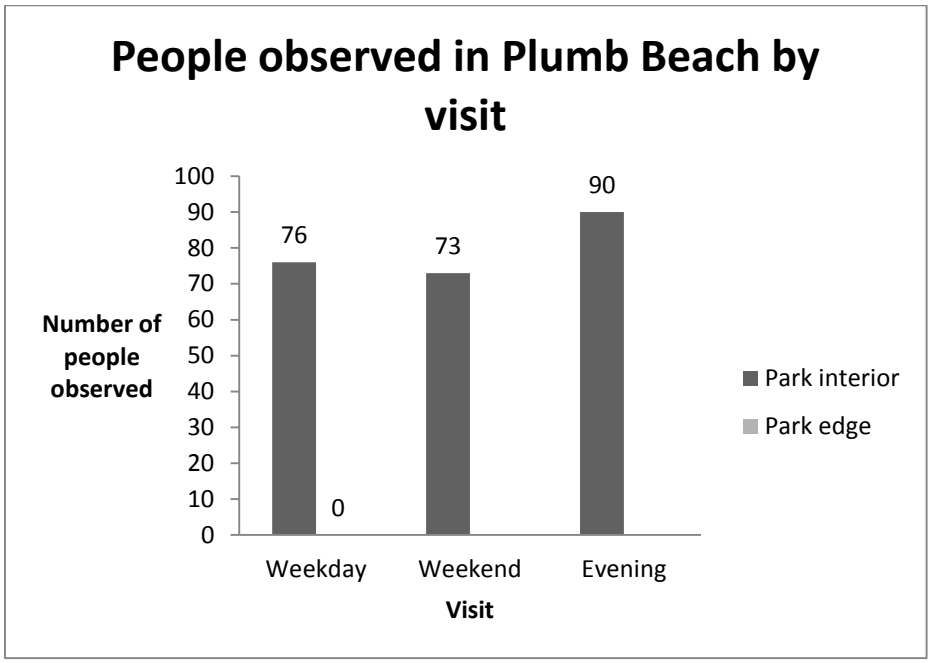
The site was heavily affected by Sandy and is undergoing beach stabilization and restoration efforts. Heavy machinery for moving sand was seen on site, along with plastic structures used to help stabilize the beach, and restoration plantings. Most users visit frequently; 65% of the respondents are either daily or weekly visitors. The majority of park users come from over 20 blocks away (68%). This reflects the fact that the site is cut off from adjacent neighborhoods by the Belt Parkway, and that the site attracts distance cyclists, among other users.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp files, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

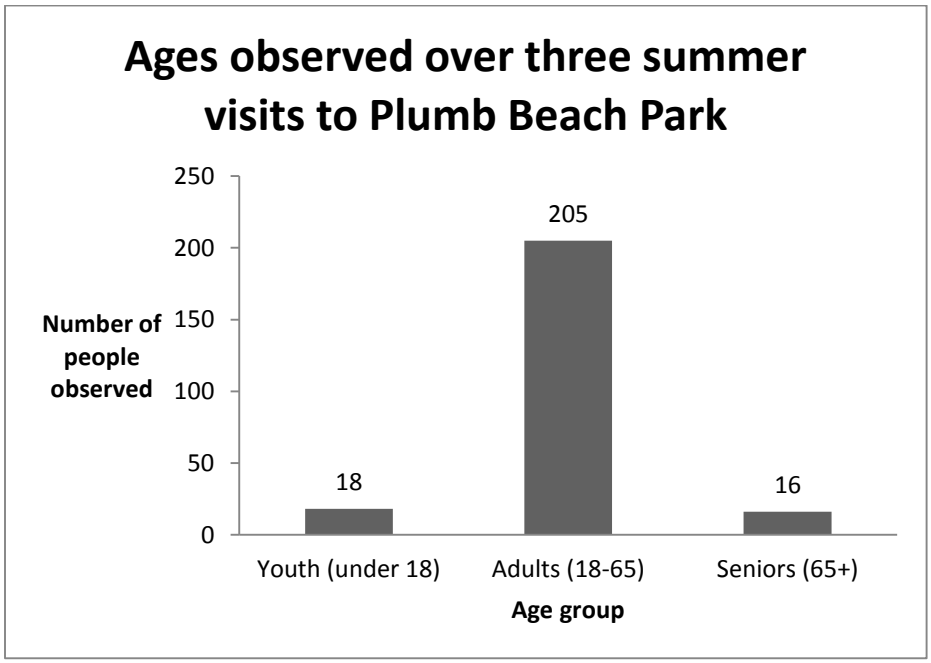
II. Field Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

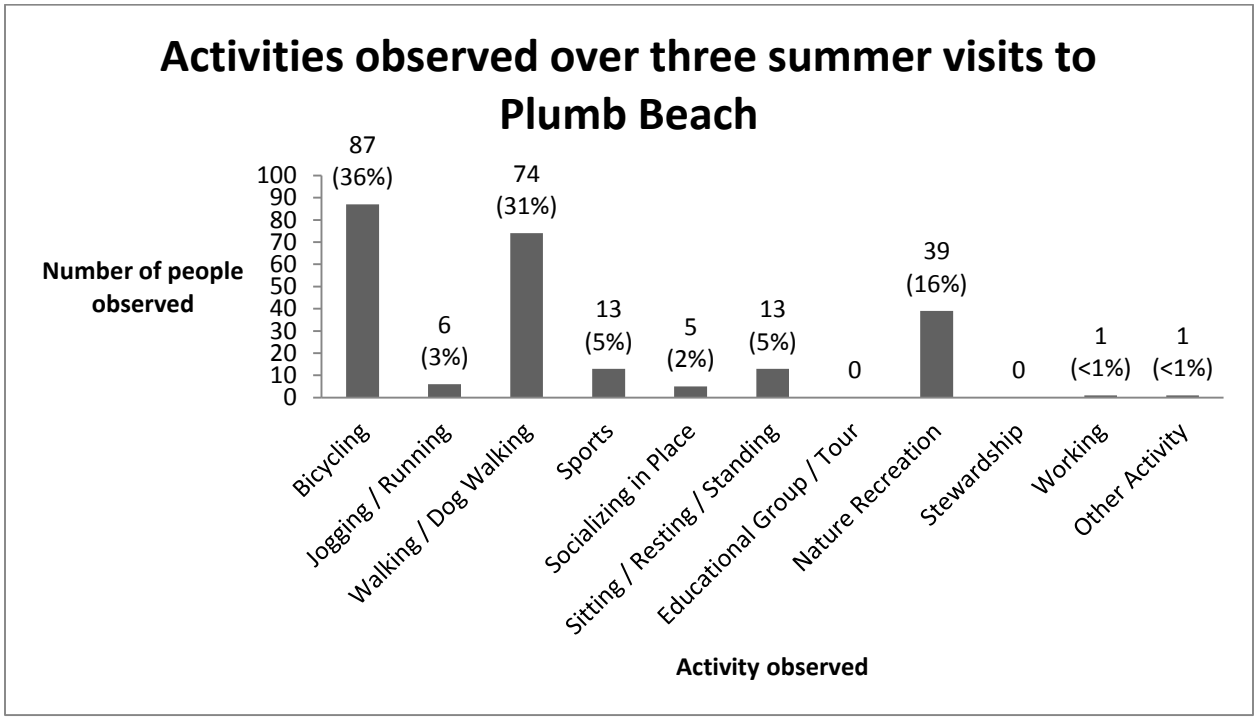


Who are they?

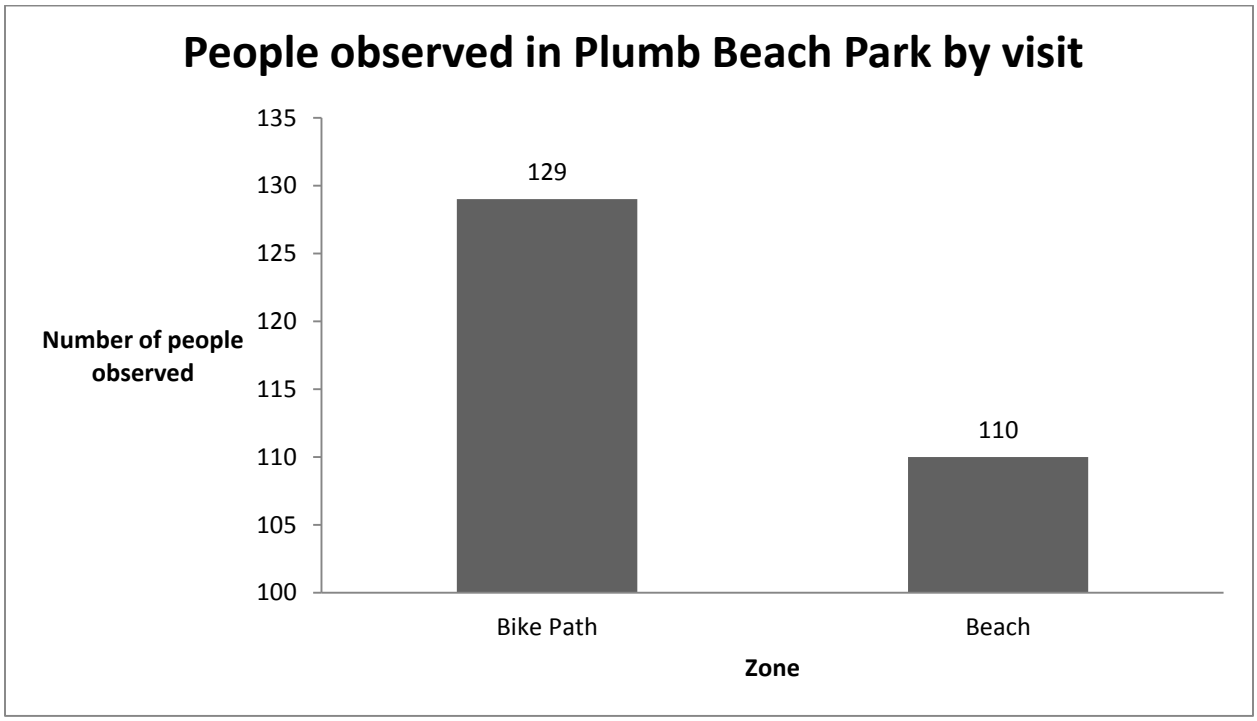


What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?



Detailed Counts

Human Activities Observed by Zone, Time of Visit, and Age in Plumb Beach.

Activity Observed	Park Zone			Time of Visit				Age			
	Bike Path	Beach	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	86	1	**87**	53	13	21	**87**	12	70	5	**87**
Jogging / Running	6		**6**		4	2	**6**		6		**6**
Walking / Dog Walking	29	45	**74**	13	28	33	**74**	4	65	5	**74**
Sports		13	**13**			13	**13**		11	2	**13**
Educational Group / Tour			**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation		39	**39**	5	19	15	**39**	2	37		**39**
Stewardship	6	7	**13**				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing		5	**5**	5	3	5	**13**		11	2	**13**
Socializing in Place			**0**		5		**5**		3	2	**5**
Working	2		**3**			1	**1**		1		**1**
Other Activity			**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**129**	**110**	**239**	**76**	**73**	**90**	**239**	**18**	**205**	**16**	**239**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

Sign	**Bike Path**	**Beach**	**Total**
Community Bulletin Boards / Institutional Signs		1	**1**
Damaged / Vandalized Building	1		**1**
Encampment / Sleeping Area	1	1	**2**
Fire Pit	1	2	**3**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	43	19	**62**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	2	2	**4**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol	1		**1**
Other (Note)*	2	10	**12**
Other Signs, Flyers & Stickers	9	3	**12**
Sitting Places & Dining	1	6	**7**
Trails	21	5	**26**
Total	**82**	**49**	**131**

*Crews were instructed to take note of any other noteworthy or unique observations that stood out to them in each park. For Plumb Beach, other signs of activity included Sandy debris, food for feral cats, and a fish prep station.

Sociability Observed by Zone

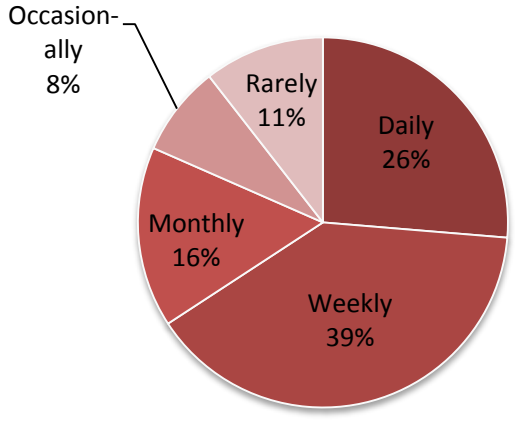
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Bike Path	10	16	3		**29**
Beach	6	10	4		**20**
Total	**16**	**26**	**7**	**0**	**49**

III. Interviews with Park Users

Thirty-eight park users were interviewed in Plumb Beach, of which 66% were male and 33% female. Seventy-nine percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 21% were estimated to be over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 84%.

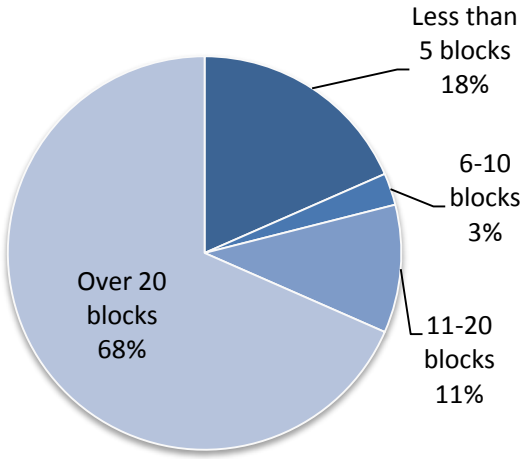
Most of the users visit the site frequently –daily and weekly users make up 65% of the respondents. While 18% of users live within five blocks of the site, the majority come from over 20 blocks away (68%). This reflects the fact that the site is cut off from adjacent neighborhoods by the Belt Parkway, and that the site attracts distance cyclists, among other users.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 38

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 38

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Biking	9	24%
Dog	8	21%
Walking	8	21%
Nature-Recreation	7	18%
Nature-Outdoors	5	13%
Relaxing	5	13%
Socializing	4	11%
Exercise	3	8%
Kids	1	3%
Sports-Recreation	1	3%
Total Respondents	**38**	

Many of the users of Plumb Beach are using the greenway as a site for *biking* (24%) and *exercise* (8%). *Walking* (21%) and *dog* walking (21%) were common both on the greenway and on the beach—with the beach serving as a unique leash-free play area for dogs. Some of the most devoted users of the site use the beach daily to gather with their dogs and *socialize* (11% of respondents used the site in order to socialize). Other common activities included *nature recreation* (18%), interacting with *nature and the outdoors* (13%), and *relaxing* (13%). Because the site is not programmed with sports fields, people are seeking out this site as a place to interact with the wind and the water. It is a notable countertrend, compared to other parks, that *sports-recreation* (3%) and using the site with *kids* (3%) were relatively uncommon activities.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	14	37%
Nature-Outdoors	12	32%
Refuge	10	26%
Activity	6	16%
Place Attachment	4	11%
Amenities	3	8%
Enjoyment	3	8%
Sociability	1	3%
Social Ties	1	3%
Total Respondents	**38**	

Although the majority of users come from more than 20 blocks away, they still identified as using the site because it is a form of nearby nature that is *local* and accessible (37%). This shows that even traveling 20 blocks – particularly if uses a bicycle or car – NYC Parks are serving local residents.

Many of the reasons for visiting the park correspond to its use as a nature recreation destination. Respondents identified specific material attributes of being *outdoors in nature* (32%), including breeze, shade, sun, and water that they seek out at this site. As well, others sought out the sense of *refuge* (26%) that comes from being outside, using language like calm, health, peace, tranquility, solitude, and serenity. Users noted the difference between this beach and other more programmed and supervised beaches, and appreciated the sense of seclusion here. Others mentioned again the unique *activities* that they could do in this site, such as kitesurfing, seeing horseshoe crabs, and sunbathing (16%)—referring back to the prior question. A few respondents expressed deep *place attachment* to the site (11%), cultivated over many years of consistent visitation. Others simply identified *enjoyment* of the site (8%), using languages like “I like it”, “I love it”, or noting

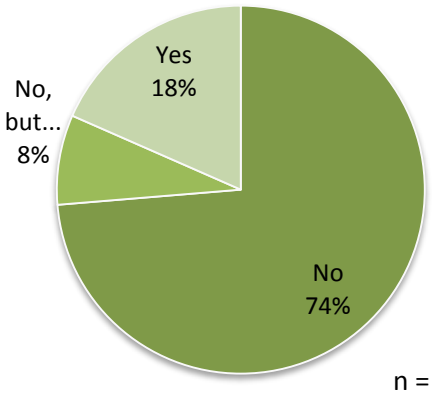
the beauty or pleasantness of the site. Finally, one respondent reflected on the park as a space for *sociability* and social gatherings (3%) and to which they have *social ties* (3%) through family and friends (e.g. living nearby).

Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit. The most commonly visited site for Plumb Beach users were *beach-waterfronts* (55%). In addition, 21% of respondents said that they *don't really like to go anywhere else outdoors*, indicating the importance of Plumb Beach in their everyday lives. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Beach-Waterfront	21	55%
Nowhere Else	8	21%
Out of Town	5	13%
Greenway	3	8%
Streets	3	8%
Dog Park	1	3%
Named NYC Park(s)	1	3%
Total Respondents	**38**	

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 38

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, so it is not surprising that only 18% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Those that did say yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type of group in which they participate, both of which are listed below.

No, but…

In addition to outright replies of 'yes' and 'no' a number of respondents gave answers that indicate other forms of environmental engagement, or the potential for future engagement. Two respondents said that they *would like to* engage in stewardship (67%) One respondent engaged in *self-led stewardship* outside the context of a group –such as picking up their own trash in a park or having a private garden (33%).

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Environment	4	57%
Civic	1	14%
Community Garden	1	14%
Transit	1	14%
Total	**7**	

Named Stewardship Groups

- American Littoral Society
- Green Peace
- The Nature Conservancy
- Transportation Alternatives
- World Wildlife Society

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
MANHATTAN: Fort Washington Park Profile

Zone Names	
Lawn & Young Woods	N Woods
Lighthouse	Rec Area
Lily Brown Playground	S Woods

I. Park Narrative

Fort Washington Park is a medium-sized, 103-acre[1] park along the western edge of upper Manhattan. It is between the Henry Hudson Parkway and the Hudson River. Accessible by a number of footbridges and the Manhattan greenway, Fort Washington Park is a hidden treasure among green spaces in the city.

Fort Washington is a destination park for many and a pass-through park for others. There are a number of recreational attractions as well as scenic and natural features. The park is home to many tennis courts, a number of soccer fields, and a high-use greenway that was used by many bicyclists, joggers, and walkers throughout our assessment. The dominant feature of the park section north of the George Washington Bridge is the greenway; aside from the greenway, the rest of the park property in that section is inaccessible. The southern parts of the park feature other attractions as well as the greenway. The main scenic attraction is the Little Red Lighthouse under the George Washington Bridge, and it is a well-maintained area with gravel around it. Many people come there to take pictures, and we saw many visitors in pairs or with children. Unlike other parts of waterfront parks in Manhattan, this area does not have any barriers to the waterfront. As such, we observed people fishing or sitting close to the water in pensive contemplation.

Despite the interesting mix of greenway and park space in the southern section, some interviewees complained about the dangers of high-speed bicycling. They recounted witnessing others on the greenway getting hurt and expressed anxiety about crossing the greenway. In some places, such as by the tennis courts, the greenway is the only way to get through for everyone: bicyclists, walkers, joggers, and general park users there for other purposes. There are official park signs regarding speed limits on the greenway, but per our casual observation, these often go unheeded.

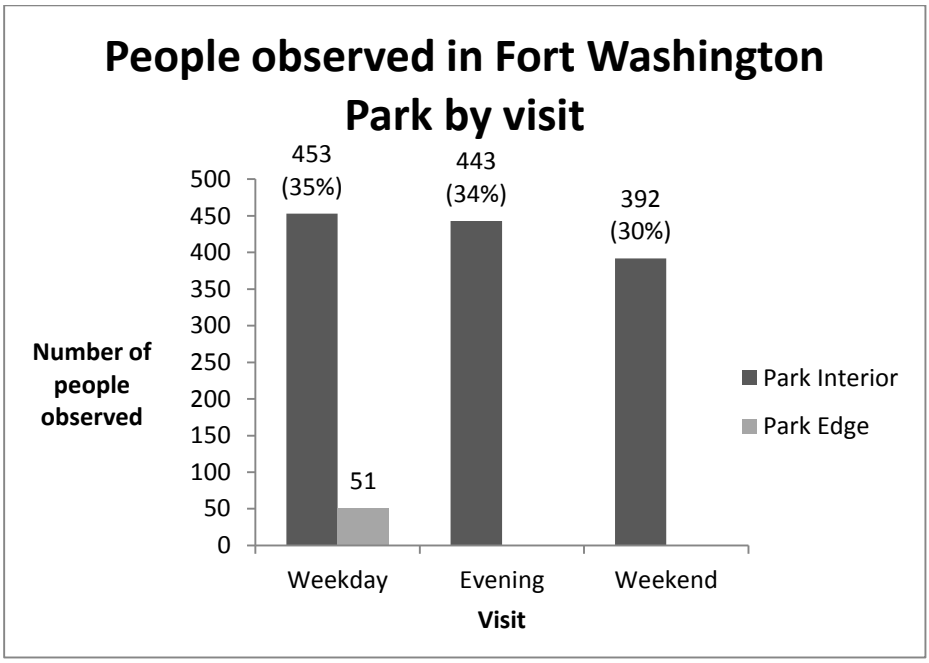
In some of the wooded areas, we saw homeless encampments. Some of these had pieces of furniture, tarp covers, and belongings while others were sparser. Further south, on Riverside Drive, there is a playground and across the street, a dog park. Many of the dog park users we interviewed are happy with the park. Just outside of the dog park, a community group tends to a small garden. Overall, Fort Washington Park has a lot to offer park users.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

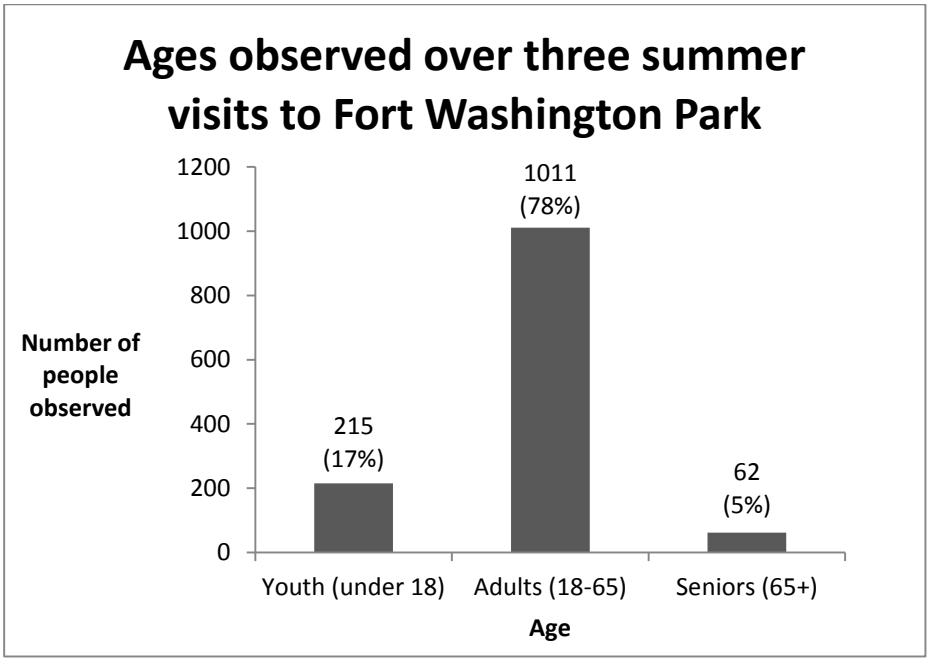
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

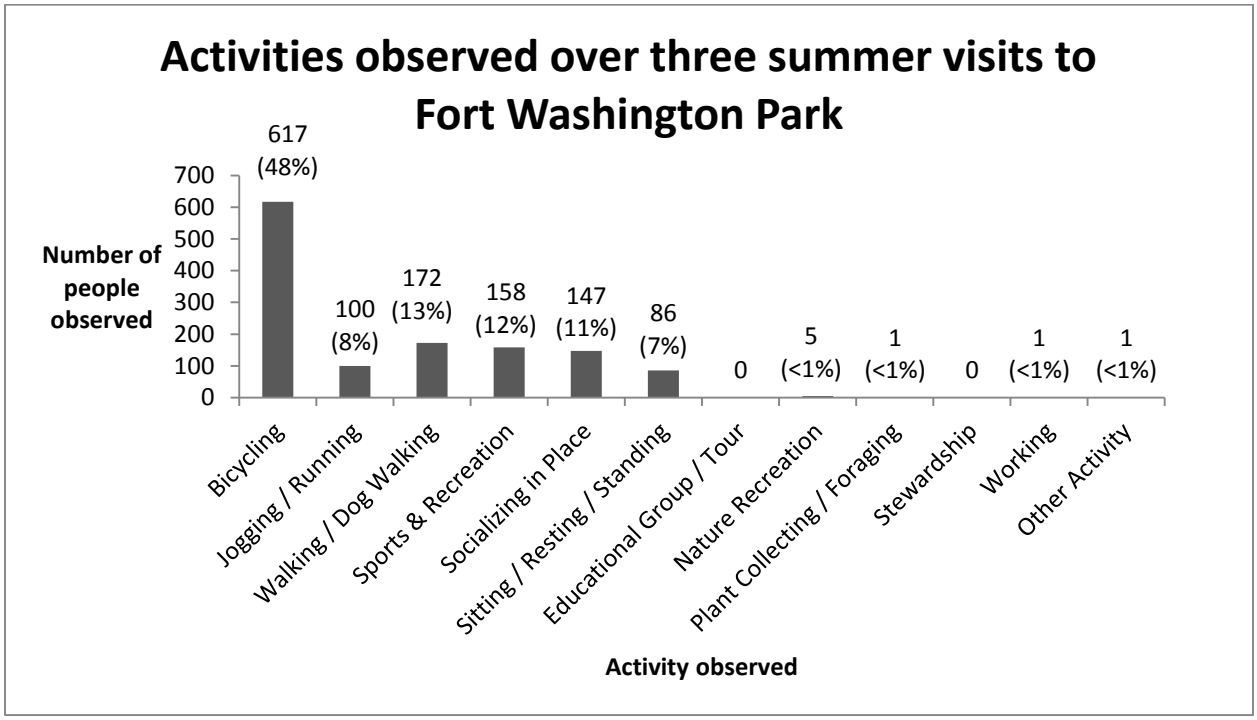


Who are they?



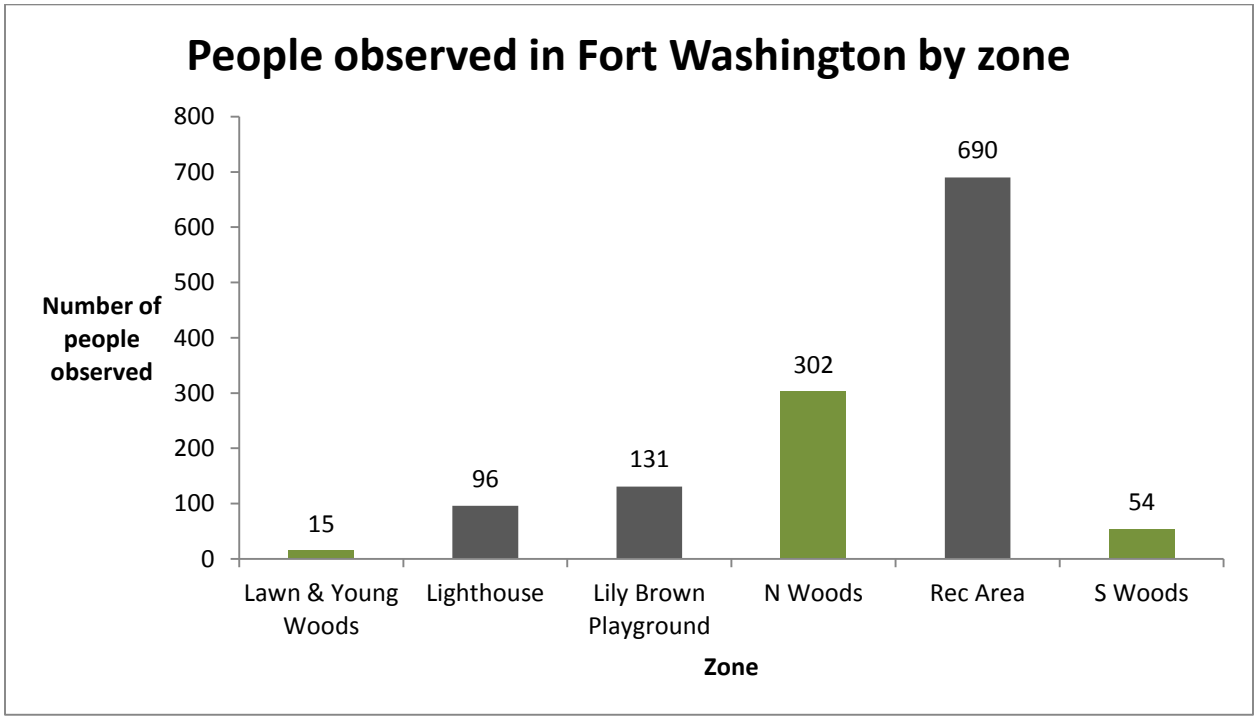
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone						
	Lawn & Young Woods	Lighthouse	Lily Brown Playground	N Woods	Rec Area	S Woods	Total
Bicycling		36	2	216	360	3	**617**
Jogging / Running	1	2		38	54	5	**100**
Walking / Dog Walking	5	12	9	40	76	30	**172**
Sports & Recreation	9	1	73	2	71	2	**158**
Socializing in Place		35	26	3	77	6	**147**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch		9	20		49	8	**86**
Educational Group / Tour							**0**
Nature Recreation				3	2		**5**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering					1		**1**
Stewardship							**0**
Working		1					**1**
Other Activity			1				**1**
Total	**15**	**96**	**131**	**302**	**690**	**54**	**1288**

Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by time of visit and age group.

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	216	191	210	**617**	23	557	37	**617**
Jogging / Running	29	29	42	**100**		97	3	**100**
Walking / Dog Walking	90	51	31	**172**	44	121	7	**172**
Sports & Recreation	22	76	60	**158**	76	78	4	**158**
Socializing in Place	53	59	35	**147**	68	74	5	**147**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch	40	32	14	**86**	4	76	6	**86**
Educational Group / Tour				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation	1	4		**5**		5		**5**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering	1			**1**		1		**1**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**
Working		1		**1**		1		**1**
Other Activity	1			**1**		1		**1**
Total	**453**	**443**	**392**	**1288**	**215**	**1011**	**62**	**1288**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)						
Sign	**Lawn & Young Woods**	**Light-house**	**Lily Brown Playground**	**N Woods**	**Rec Area**	**S Woods**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat box				1			**1**
Damaged / Vandalized Property							**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area				2		5	**7**
Fire pit					2	1	**3**
Garden in Park						1	**1**
Graffiti, Art, Murals		1		3	5	4	**13**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places				3	3	4	**10**
Informal Trails	1	2		14	1	10	**28**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol							**0**
Other Sign			1	5		1	**7**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers		1		2		1	**4**
Substantial Dumping or Debris				1		1	**2**
Total	**1**	**4**	**1**	**31**	**11**	**28**	**76**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Fort Washington Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, an image of an informal dock, the many informal sitting places, and a garden near the dog park.

Sociability Observed by Zone

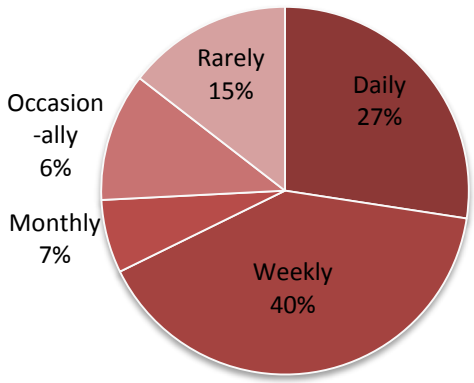
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Lawn & Young Woods	1				**1**
Lighthouse	1	13	5		**19**
Lily Brown Playground	1	4	4		**9**
N Woods	4	17	5		**26**
Rec Area	2	68	26	1	**97**
S Woods	13	6	3		**22**
Total	**22**	**108**	**43**	**1**	**174**

III. Interviews with Park Users

Sixty-two park users were interviewed at Fort Washington Park, of which 60% were male and 40% were female. Eight-two percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 18% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 91%.

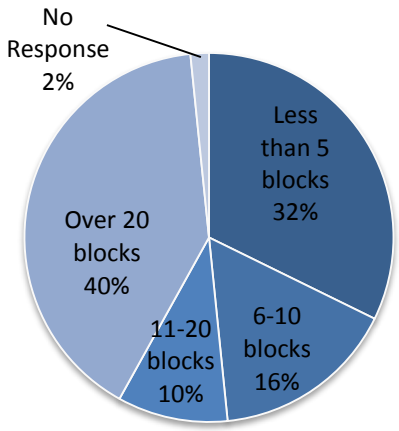
The park plays a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 67% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park also appears to draw users from near and far: 40% of users travel over 20 blocks to reach the park while 48% of users travel less than 10 blocks away.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 62

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 62

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	18	29%
Relaxing	12	19%
Kids	12	19%
Dog	8	13%
Biking	7	11%
Socializing	7	11%
Sports & recreation	4	6%
Arts and culture	4	6%
Nature rec	4	6%
Nature-outdoors	4	6%
Exercise	2	3%
Stewardship	1	2%
Working	1	2%
Total Respondents	**62**	

Most park users interviewed were engaging in some form of physical activity: *walking* (29%), *dog walking* (13%), *biking* (11%), *sports & recreation* (6%), or *exercising* (3%). Many had also come to the park to *relax* (19%) or spend time with their *kids* (19%). Some respondents were in the park to *socialize* (11%) over bingo, a barbecue, or a picnic. A number of respondents were participating in *art and cultural activities* (6%), such as photography, reading, or listening to music. Respondents were also participating in *nature recreation* (6%), like fishing, or experiencing *nature and the outdoors* (6%). One respondent was gardening in the small community garden by the dog run (*stewardship*, 2%), and one respondent *worked* (2%) for NYC Parks, specifically in Fort Washington Park.

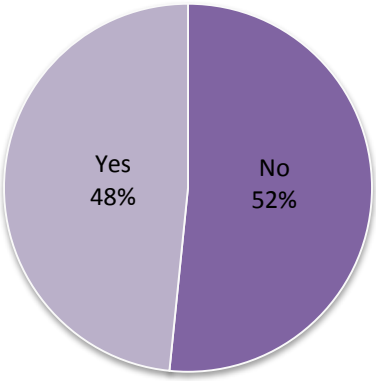
Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	24	39%
Nature-outdoors	15	24%
Amenities	10	16%
Enjoyment	10	16%
Refuge	9	15%
Explore	8	13%
Activity	7	11%
Quality	6	10%
Place attachment	5	8%
Access	4	6%
Sociability	3	5%
Ambivalence	1	2%
Total Respondents	**62**	

Fort Washington Park is a valuable *local* resource, and most parks users chose to visit because it is close to home (39%). Many respondents were also at the park to *enjoy nature and the outdoors* (24%) because "the weather is so nice" or the "fresh air." Many respondents visited the park because of its characteristics; they liked the types of *amenities* present (16%), the *activities* they could participate in (11%) – mainly walking and exercising, and the *quality of the park* (10%), in that it was "clean" and "big." Some respondents visited because they simply *enjoyed* (16%) the park and thought that it was "beautiful" and "nice." Others saw the park as a *refuge* (15%) and liked that it was "quiet," "safe," and "we can be in peace." While some were first-time visitors who were *exploring* (13%) the park, others had a history of strong *place attachment* (8%) to the park and had been coming for over 25 years. Ease of *access* (6%) attracted some respondents while others visited the park for its *sociability* (5%) and could spend time with their kids or

others at the park. Finally, one respondent was *ambivalent* (2%) and had no specific reason for why she was in the park.

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 62

Fort Washington Park includes a number of wooded and trail areas, so we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. Nearly half of respondents interviewed said yes (48%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas.

Out of the respondents who said yes, the majority of respondents participate in physical activity in natural areas: *walking* (60%), *biking* (27%), and *exercising* (20%) were common activities. Respondents also saw natural areas as a place to *relax* (7%) and *enjoy nature and the outdoors* (7%). While one respondent expressed *concern* (3%) about safety, another liked to walk with his *kids* (3%) in the woods. Finally, one respondent listened to music in the wooded areas (*arts & culture*, 3%) one was a *worker* (3%), and one responded that he tended to stay near the playground (*sports & recreation*, 3%).

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	18	60%
Biking	8	27%
Exercise	6	20%
Relaxing	2	7%
No response	2	7%
Nature-Outdoors	2	7%
Arts & culture	1	3%
Concern	1	3%
Working	1	3%
Kids	1	3%
Sports & recreation	1	3%
"Yes" Respondents	**30**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Preference	14	44%
Potential	7	22%
Fear-concern	7	22%
No response	3	9%
Access	2	6%
"No" Respondents	**32**	

Thirty-two respondents (52%) said that they did not go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, the majority *preferred to go to other parts of the park* (44%). We classified some respondents as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (22%) because they were previously unaware that these areas existed or did not have a specific reason for not visiting those areas. Some respondents expressed *fear or concern* (7%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about teenagers, getting

lost, and safety. A few respondents also noted that it was difficult to *access* (6%) the natural areas, which were located on a hill. Out of the 52% respondents who said that they did not go into natural areas, six were actually interviewed in a natural area but did not realize it. Half of them were in a section of the natural area that was landscaped, and others were walking or biking through the park.

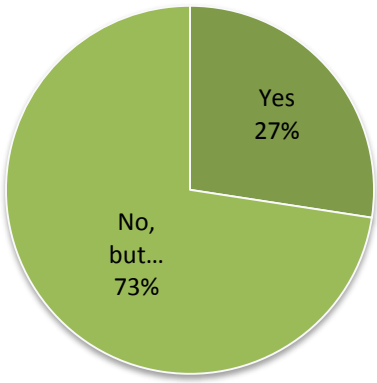
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	41	66%
Out of town	12	19%
Beach-waterfront	9	15%
Nowhere else	6	10%
Streets	4	6%
Nature preserve	3	5%
Local	2	3%
Playground	2	3%
Botanical garden	2	3%
Dog park	1	2%
No response	1	2%
Greenway	1	2%
Total Respondents	**62**	

The most commonly visited site types for Fort Washington Park users were other *named NYC parks* (42%), such as Central Park and Riverside Park. Many liked to go out of town (19%) to places upstate, in New Jersey, in Massachusetts and others. *Beach and waterfront areas* (15%), such as Coney Island were also popular. Some respondents said they *don't go anywhere else outdoors* (10%), indicating the importance of Fort Washington Park in their everyday lives. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 62

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and 27% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Some who said yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type(s) of group in which they participate (listed below). Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

At one end of the spectrum, some respondents had *pro-environmental beliefs* (n = 5), such as the importance of recycling while others take part in *self-led stewardship* (n = 2), such as helping clean up the park. A few were engaged in *other forms of civic engagement* (n = 2) by being involved with the

local community board and volunteering with NY Cares for example. One had experience *working* with LEED certification, a green building certification program.

Many respondents had *no specific reason* (n = 14) for not participating in environmental stewardship or lacked *awareness* (n = 3) of groups they could join. We classified a few respondents who had the *potential to become stewards* (n = 2) because they had previously given no thought to participating in stewardship. Finally, some respondents said that they had *no time* (n = 11), *no interest* (n = 1), and/or cited *other barriers* (n = 2) such as health reasons.

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Environment	5	63%
Culture	1	13%
Transit	1	13%
Sports & recreation	1	13%
Total	**8**	

Named Stewardship Groups

- American Museum of Natural History
- Central Park Conservancy
- Greenpeace
- Heifer International
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- New York-New Jersey Trail Conference
- Transportation Alternatives
- Wildlife Conservation Society
- World Wildlife Fund

"Under one of the trees, we found this man sitting on a beach towel and listening to music. When we approached him for an interview, he said that the greenery in this park reminds him of home – the Caribbean islands. He said this was a good waiting spot while his mother comes back from working in New Jersey. In the meantime, he came here to sit and enjoy the peace. (This last statement was a little bizarre to us because he was sitting a few meters from the Henry Hudson Parkway.) He went on to describe how he missed home and all the green spaces and activities there."

Vignette from field researcher's notes on Fort Washington Park

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

MANHATTAN: Inwood Hill Park Profile

Zone Names	
E Rec Area	Woods & Bike Path
Payson Playground	W Rec Area
Woods	

I. Park Narrative

Inwood Hill Park, a 175-acre[1] park, is one of the most diverse parks we visited. This diversity applies to the park users, the kinds of use, the landscape itself, and the attitudes towards the park. Located on the northwestern edge of Manhattan, the park contains playgrounds, recreational areas, wooded areas, and a greenway. Inwood Hill Park is also historically important. Native Americans known as the Lenape used to live in this area, and it contains the site where Manhattan was alleged to be originally sold. The surrounding neighborhood is primarily middle-class. There is a large Dominican population in the area, as well as a Russian population.

The landscape of Inwood Hill can be understood as having two distinct sections, the landscaped areas and the wooded areas. The wooded areas of the park contain some of the oldest and tallest trees in the city. This area is also distinctively hilly and gives visitors the opportunity to hike along varied topography. There are a few well-marked and paved paths through these areas, but there are also many informal trails. There is no clear signage or map for trails, so it is easy to feel lost in the wooded areas. This feeling can be attractive for some visitors but is also a barrier for others to visit, as they do not want to get lost in the area. There is also a large amount of trash and broken street lamps on some portions of the paths. At the same time, these areas offer breathtaking views of the city, the Hudson River, and the New Jersey Palisades from the wooded walking trails.

The landscaped areas of Inwood Hill are similar to many others throughout the city. The park contains numerous baseball diamonds, a couple playgrounds, areas for barbeques, and walking paths. What is distinctive about this park are the water views. Several users commented on the breeze produced by being on the water that had a cooling effect. This park also contains a large playground with water features, a sandbox, and numerous structures for climbing. The playground was a major draw for many park users.

Visitors to this park see it as part of the neighborhood, and the majority of visitors traveled from just a few blocks away. The park also has close ties to family for many people, with some users visiting the park with family members, while others have been coming here their entire lives and remember coming as children. It is seen as an asset of the neighborhood by visitors. On the other hand, some users commented on how the woods are a place where drugs are sold and other illicit behaviors. In general people had positive views of the park, but for a few people there were negative associations, usually with the wooded areas.

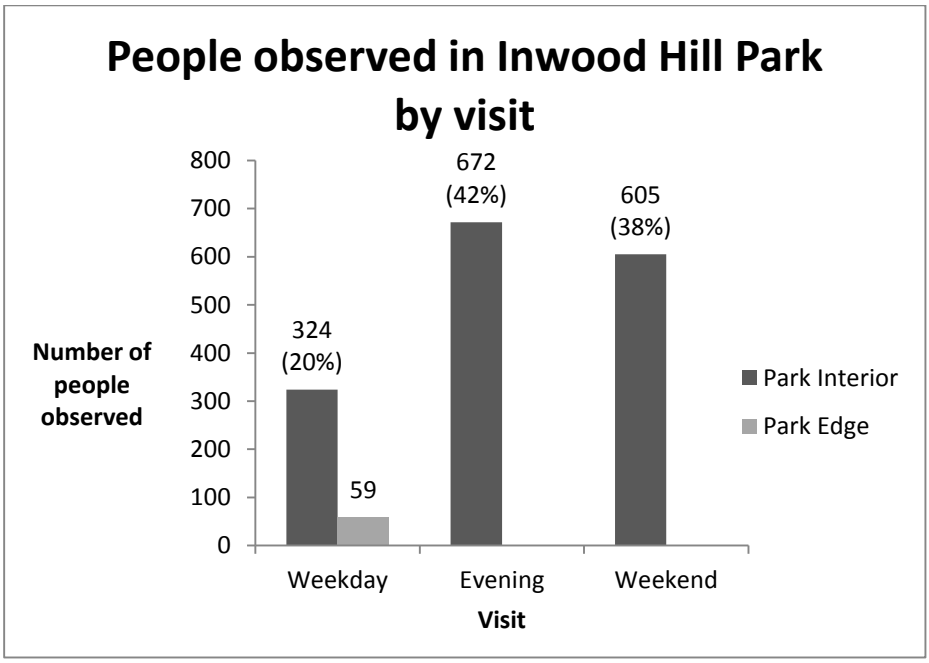
Inwood Hill Park is a neighborhood space that gives users the opportunities to socialize, exercise, explore nature, and relax. The wooded areas are the most controversial section of the park, with some visitors seeing them as areas of crime while others appreciate them for their beauty and the ability to "escape" into nature.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

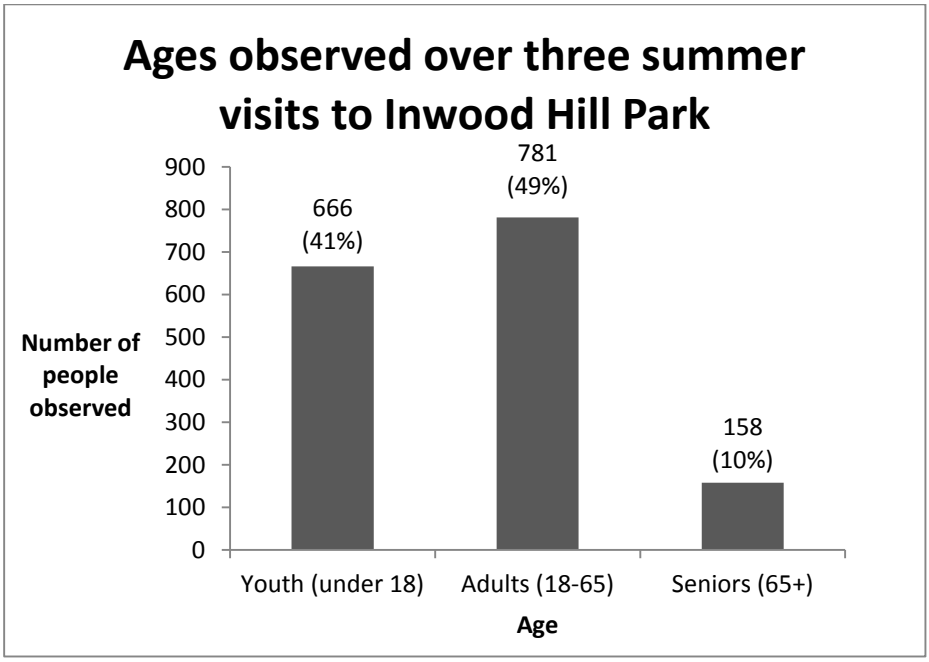
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

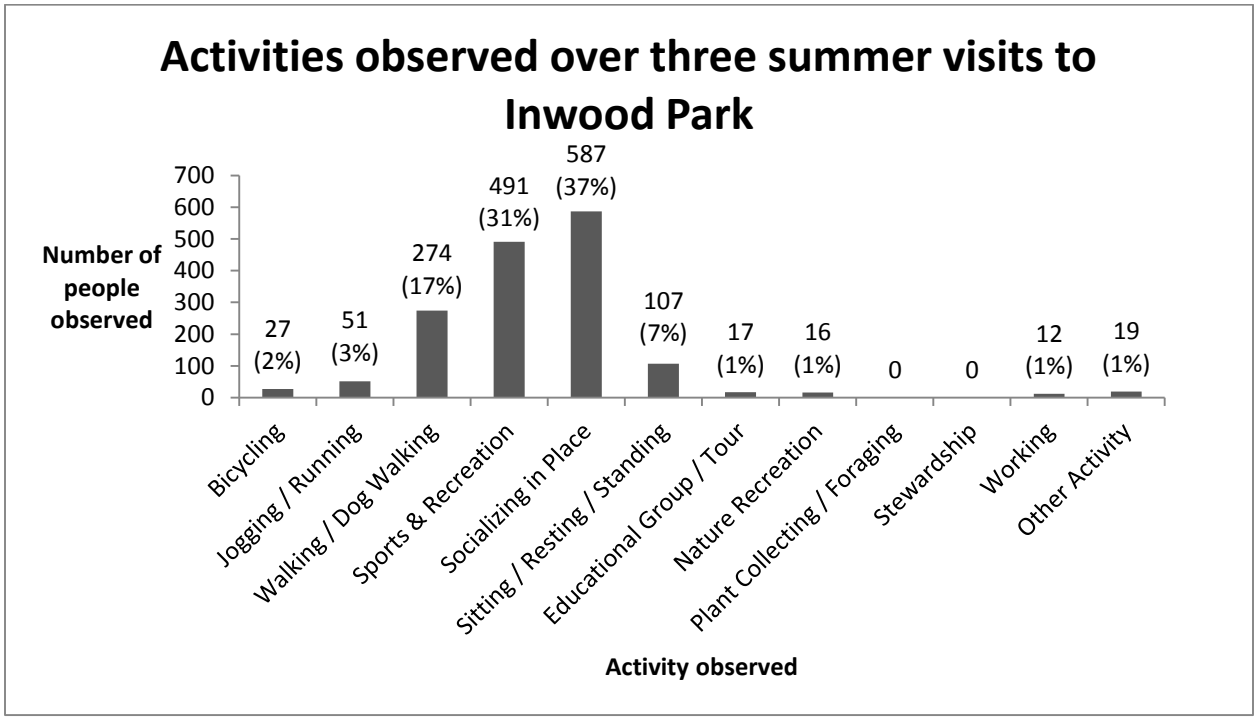


Who are they?



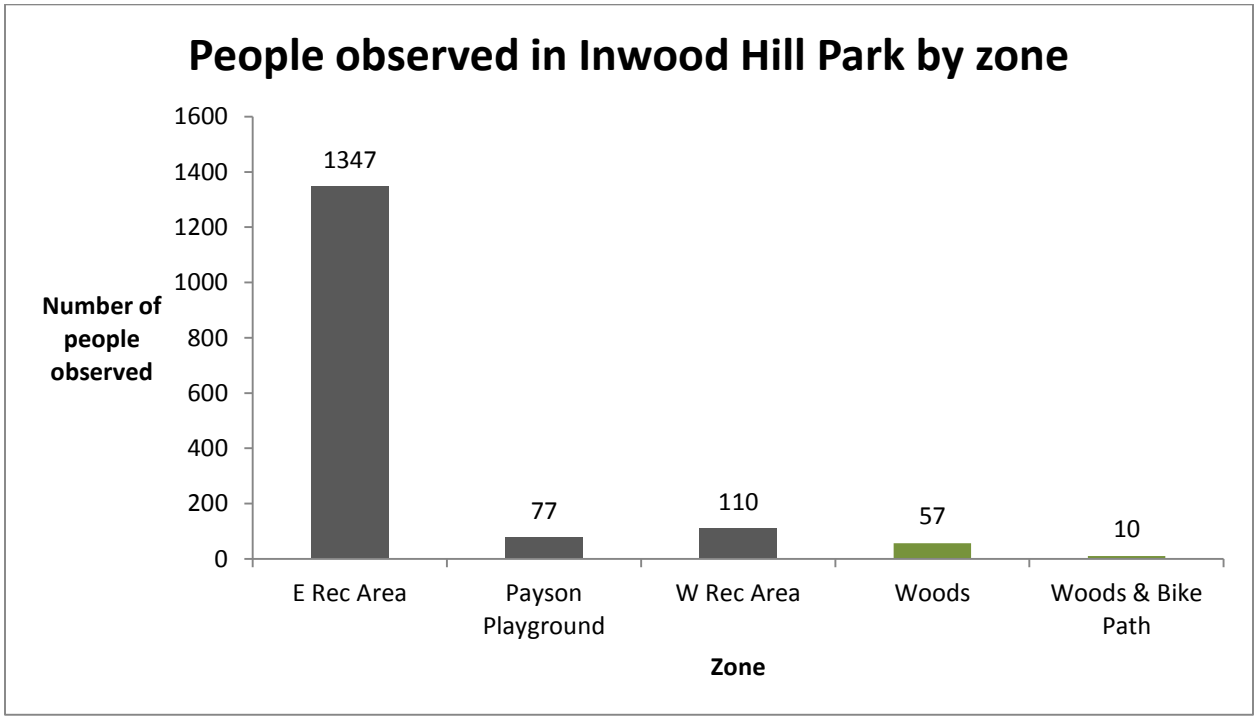
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone					
	E Rec Area	Payson Playground	W Rec Area	Woods	Woods & Bike Path	Total
Bicycling	16		8	1	2	**27**
Jogging / Running	34		3	8	6	**51**
Walking / Dog Walking	231		14	29		**274**
Sports & Recreation	427	37	27			**491**
Socializing in Place	489	36	46	14	2	**587**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch	95	4	8			**107**
Educational Group / Tour	17					**17**
Nature Recreation	14		2			**16**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering						**0**
Stewardship						**0**
Working	5		2	5		**12**
Other Activity	19					**19**
Total	**1347**	**77**	**110**	**57**	**10**	**1601**

Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by time of visit and age group.

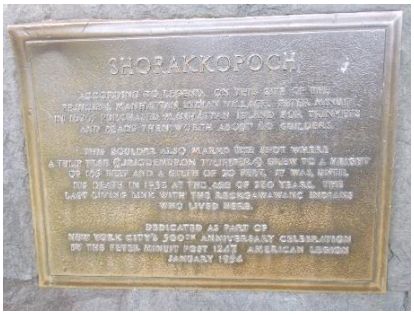
Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	4	14	9	**27**	15	11	1	**27**
Jogging / Running	9	8	34	**51**	7	43	1	**51**
Walking / Dog Walking	50	37	187	**274**	69	171	34	**274**
Sports & Recreation	117	178	196	**491**	401	78	12	**491**
Socializing in Place	107	358	122	**587**	155	366	66	**587**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch	33	39	35	**107**	9	78	20	**107**
Educational Group / Tour			17	**17**	2	9	6	**17**
Nature Recreation	2	11	3	**16**	8	7	1	**16**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering				**0**				**0**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**
Working	2	8	2	**12**		11	1	**12**
Other Activity		19		**19**		3	16	**19**
Total	**324**	**672**	**605**	**1601**	**666**	**777**	**158**	**1601**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document counter-narratives in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

Sign	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)				
	E Rec Area	**W Rec Area**	**Woods**	**Woods & Bike Path**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat box					**0**
Damaged / Vandalized Property					**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area			1		**1**
Fire pit					**0**
Garden in Park					**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals		1	5	4	**10**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places			1		**1**
Informal Trails	5		22	3	**30**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol					**0**
Other Sign			8	2	**10**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers	2		1		**3**
Substantial Dumping or Debris			1		**1**
Total	**7**	**1**	**39**	**9**	**56**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Inwood Hill Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of the Shorakkopoch monument where the Dutch West Indian Company 'purchased' Manhattan from Native Americans, a structure made of tree branches, and an improvised sitting area.



Sociability Observed by Zone

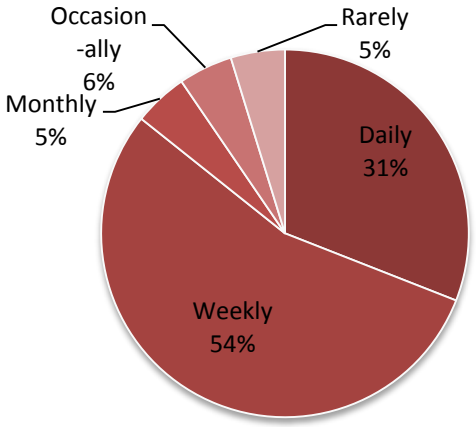
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
E Rec Area	48	85	59	14	**206**
Payson Playground		5	7		**12**
W Rec Area		7	7	3	**17**
Woods	11	7	5		**23**
Woods & Bike Path		2			**2**
Total	**59**	**106**	**78**	**17**	**260**

III. Interviews with Park Users

Forty-two park users were interviewed at Inwood Hill Park, of which 45% were female and 55% were male. Eighty-eight percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 12% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 72%.

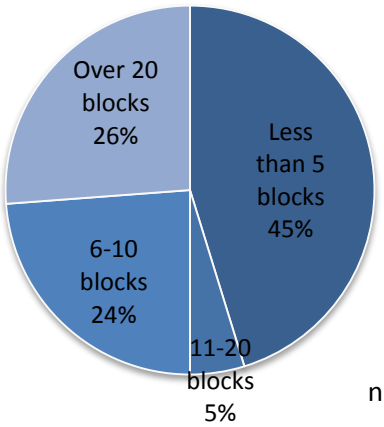
The park plays a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 85% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park appears to be largely a neighborhood park: 50% of users travel less than 10 blocks away while only 26% travel over 20 blocks to reach the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 42

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 42

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Kids	13	31%
Walking	6	14%
Dog	6	14%
Nature-outdoors	6	14%
Sports & recreation	5	12%
Socializing	5	12%
Relaxing	4	10%
Arts and culture	3	7%
Working	2	5%
Exercise	2	5%
Biking	1	2%
Spiritual	1	2%
Total Respondents	**42**	

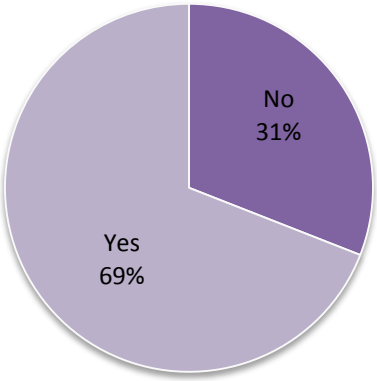
Inwood Hill Park appears to be an important social space. Many were in the park with *kids* (31%) or *socializing* (12%) at barbecues, at family reunions or with friends. A large number of respondents were also participating in some form of physical activity: *walking* (14%), *dog walking* (14%), *sports and recreation* (12%), *exercising* (5%), or *biking* (1%). Some respondents were in the park experiencing *nature and the outdoors* (14%); others were *relaxing* (10%). A few were engaging in *art and cultural* activities (7%) like reading or filming. We also encountered people *working* in the park (5%): one worked for NYC Parks and another was a babysitter. Finally, one respondent came to the park to meditate (*spiritual*, 2%)

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	20	48%
Nature-outdoors	10	24%
Amenities	8	19%
Refuge	6	14%
Enjoyment	6	14%
Sociability	4	10%
Access	3	7%
Place attachment	2	5%
Explore	2	5%
Quality	2	5%
Activity	2	5%
Social ties	1	2%
Total Respondents	**42**	

Inwood Hill Park is a valuable *local* resource, and most parks users chose to visit because it is close to home (48%). Many came to enjoy *nature and the outdoors* (24%). Many respondents visited the park because of its characteristics: they like the types of *amenities* (19%), like the playground and the shade; the *quality* of the park (5%), like its lack of crowds; and the *activities* they could participate in (5%), like sports. Some saw the park as a *refuge* (14%) while others simply *enjoyed* (14%) being in the park because it was "beautiful" and "nice." *Sociability* (10%) was also a factor for many respondents: they found it a fun place to "people watch" and that people here were "more social" than in other parks. A few respondents found the park to be easier to *access* (7%) compared to other parks, and there were those who had strong *place attachment* (5%) to the park—one respondent had been visiting the park for 50 years. At the same time, there were respondents *exploring* (5%) the park for the first time. Finally, one respondent was in the park because of *social ties* (2%) and was visiting her daughter who lived nearby.

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 42

Inwood Hill Park includes some wooded, wetland, and trail areas, so we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. The majority of respondents interviewed said yes (69%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas.

Out of the respondents who said yes, the majority of respondents participate in physical activity in natural areas: *walking* (55%), *exercising* (28%), and *biking* (3%) were common activities. Respondents also spent time *enjoying nature and the outdoors* (14%) or *engaging in nature recreation* (14%), like hiking. Some respondents saw natural areas as a place to *relax* (10%) while others expressed *concern* (7%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about safety. Finally, one respondent was filming (*arts & culture*, 3%) in the natural area, and another mentioned that she would go to natural areas with her *kid* (3%).

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	16	55%
Exercise	8	28%
Nature-Outdoors	4	14%
Nature recreation	4	14%
Relaxing	3	10%
Concern	2	7%
Biking	1	3%
Arts & culture	1	3%
Kids	1	3%
"Yes" Respondents	**29**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Fear-concern	6	46%
Preference	4	31%
Potential	2	15%
Access	1	8%
Life course	1	8%
"No" Respondents	**13**	

Thirteen (31%) respondents said that they do not go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, the majority expressed *fear or concern* (46%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about safety – many alluded to the jogger who had been murdered in the park in 2004. Some *preferred to go to other parts of the park* (31%). We classified some respondents as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (15%) because they were previously unaware that these areas existed or did not have a specific reason for not visiting those areas. One respondent felt that the natural areas were difficult to *access* (8%) because they were "too bushy." Finally, one was at a stage in the *life course* (8%) – "the kids are too young" – which made him reluctant to go to natural areas.

Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

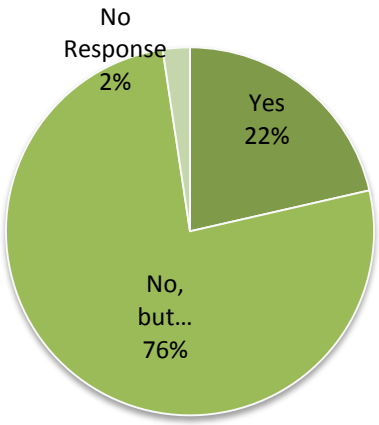
In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	27	64%
Beach-waterfront	9	21%
Out of town	8	19%
Nowhere else	6	14%
Botanical garden	5	12%
Playground	2	5%
Streets	1	2%
Greenway	1	2%
Zoo / Aquarium	1	2%
Nature preserve	1	2%
Total Respondents	**42**	

The most commonly visited site types for Inwood Hill Park users were other *named NYC parks* (64%), like Central Park and Fort Tryon Park. *Beach and waterfront areas* (21%) were also popular. Many respondents went *out of town* (19%) to places in upstate New York, Long Island, and Pennsylvania. Some respondents said they *don't go anywhere else outdoors* (14%), indicating the importance of Inwood Hill Park in their everyday lives. See table at top right for the full list of responses in rank order.

> "Four older men were sitting at a table… on a bustling Saturday afternoon at the park. They met almost daily to walk through the wooded areas of the park, and they walked almost four miles every day. One man talked about how he had come to the park as a child to play baseball and then brought his own son here to play. The man's grandson was in the park that day, he had a soccer game. 'Three generations in one park!' he said with a grin."
>
> **Vignette from field researcher's notes on Inwood Hill Park**

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 42

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and 22% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Some who said yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type(s) of group in which they participate (listed below). Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

At one end of the spectrum, some respondents participate in *self-led stewardship* (n = 3) outside the

context of a group, like cleaning up the park. One held *pro-environment beliefs* like not littering while another respondent was involved in *other forms of civic engagement*.

Many respondents had *no specific reason* (n = 9) for not participating in environmental stewardship or lacked *awareness* (n = 5) of groups they could join. One respondent had *social ties* to a sibling who was involved in environmental stewardship. Another respondent was *involved with an environmental stewardship group in the past*. We classified one as having the *potential* to be a steward because he "had an interest." Finally, some respondents said that they had *no time* (n = 9) and/or cited *other barriers* (n = 3) such as lack of money.

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Environment	3	75%
Sports & recreation	1	25%
Total	**4**	

Named Stewardship Groups

- National Geographic
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- Sierra Club
- The Wilderness Society
- Wildlife Conservancy Society
- YMCA

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

MANHATTAN: Sherman Creek Park Profile

Zone Names
Children's Garden
Natural Area

I. Park Narrative

Sherman Creek Park is a small, 7-acre[1], newly-remodeled park in upper Manhattan. We observed signs indicating that the park is undergoing some renovations, so there may be some upcoming changes to it, particularly in the Natural Area zone. The park is in a mixed-income, primarily Latino community. It is bordered by a large housing project, a few auto body shops, and the new ConEdison power plant. This ConEdison building seems to have made parts of the park inaccessible. There is also an elementary school, Public School 5, directly next to the park. The entrance to the park is somewhat difficult to find as it is small and on a side street.

The park features a well-marked and wide path that travels through a small wooded area and then parallels the water. The path also features a metal bridge that goes over the water and a seating area. It only takes about five minutes to walk this path, which ends at a man-made water feature that is made to look like water flowing over a few rocks into a small pool. We had the impression that the main purpose of this path is for children or school groups. The park also contains a garden area with about 14 small raised beds. A different school or community group plants in each bed—adding to the educational nature of the park. The park also has a seating area with picnic tables and umbrellas.

Moving through the park feels like being in a refuge. It is particularly quiet because it is removed from the street and bordered by water and a greenway. It is apparent that a great deal of planning went into the park; the trail is easy to follow and provides visitors the opportunity to see a few different kinds of ecosystems in one short path. During our visits to the park we observed few to no users. We spoke with one woman who had just finished teaching a class in the park. She was working with developmentally disabled adults in the garden area and noted how students enjoyed the opportunity to plant in the garden while being outside.

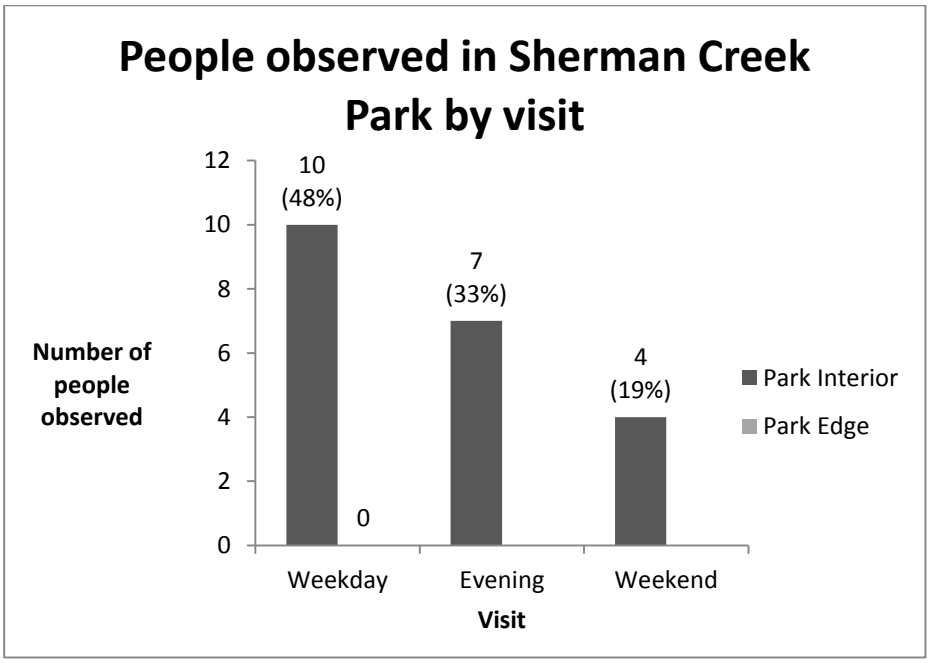
This park is a pleasant and calm natural area in an otherwise busy neighborhood. The walking path and garden plots also showcase the variety of plants that can grow in the area. Once construction is complete, there may be more visitors to the park, its gardens, shady path, and water access. For the time being it is somewhat of a hidden treasure in the neighborhood. Sherman Creek seems like a great place for environmental education and for visitors who want a quiet place to sit by the water.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

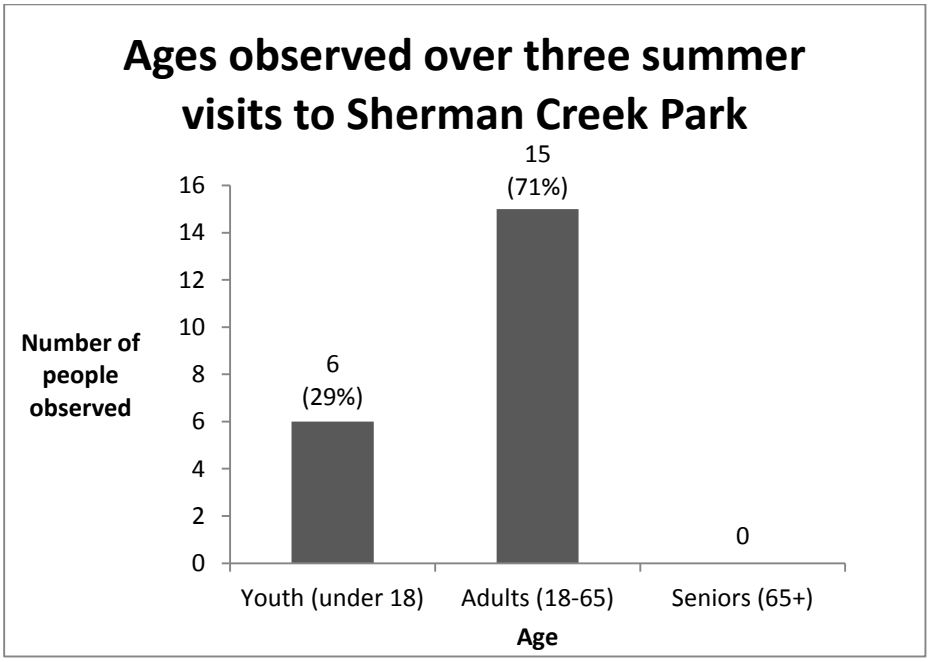
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

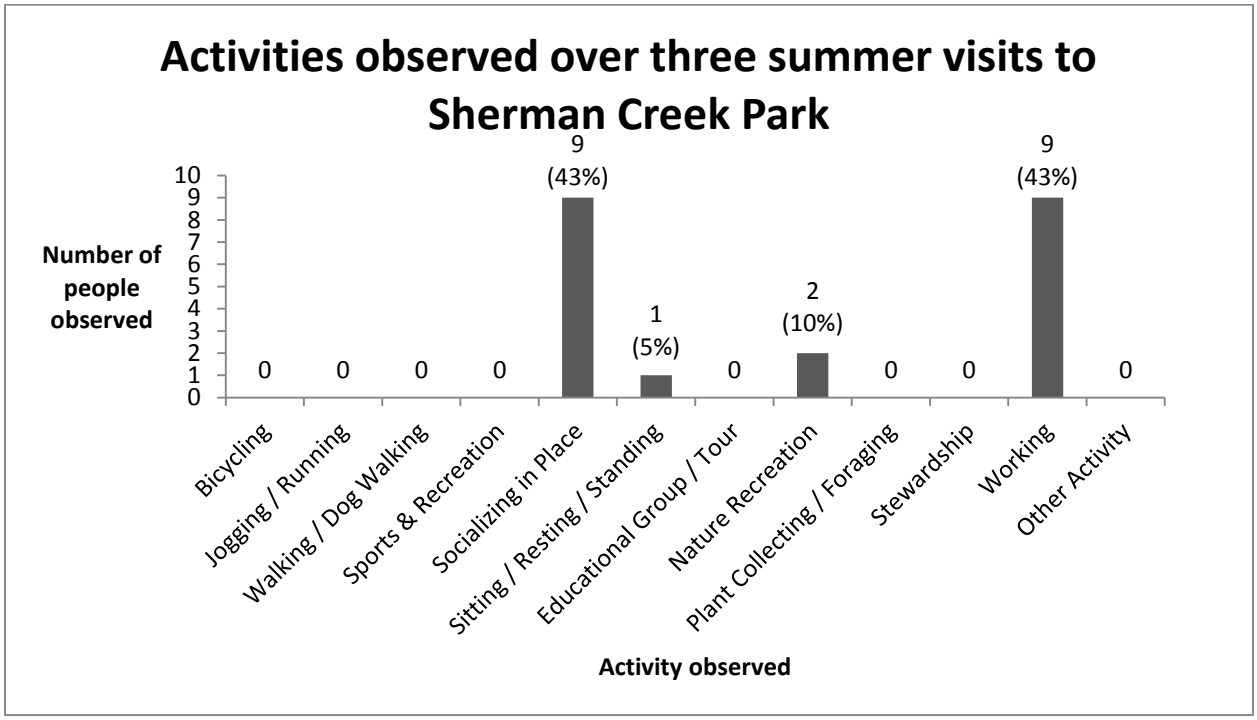


Who are they?



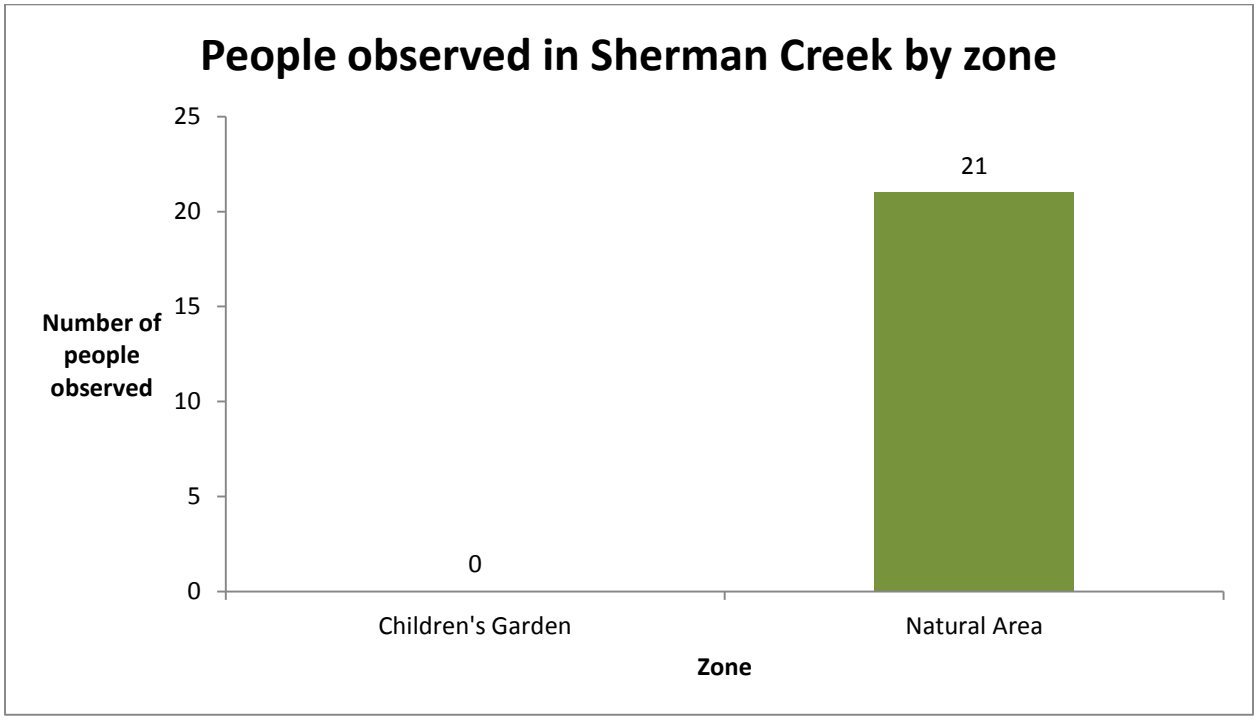
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone, time of visit, and age group. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

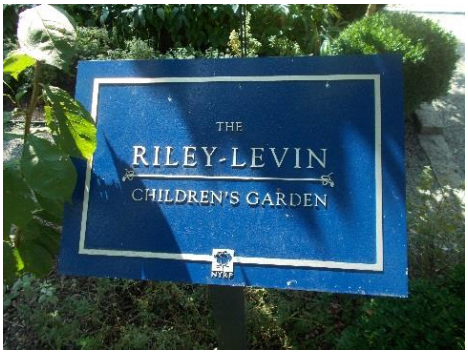
Activity Observed	Zones			Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Children's Garden	Natural Area	Total	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling			**0**				**0**				**0**
Jogging / Running			**0**				**0**				**0**
Walking / Dog Walking			**0**				**0**				**0**
Sports & Recreation			**0**				**0**				**0**
Socializing in Place		9	**9**	5	4		**9**	6	3		**9**
Sitting / Resting / Standing		1	**1**	1			**1**		1		**1**
Educational Group / Tour			**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation		2	**2**	2			**2**		2		**2**
Plant Collecting / Foraging			**0**				**0**				**0**
Stewardship			**0**				**0**				**0**
Working		9	**9**	2	3	4	**9**		9		**9**
Other Activity			**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**0**	**21**	**21**	**10**	**7**	**4**	**21**	**6**	**15**	**0**	**21**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)		
Sign	**Children's Garden**	**Natural Area**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat box		1	**1**
Damaged / Vandalized Property			**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area			**0**
Fire pit			**0**
Garden in Park			**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals			**0**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places			**0**
Informal Trails		2	**2**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol			**0**
Other Sign			**0**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers	1	3	**4**
Substantial Dumping or Debris			**0**
Total	**1**	**6**	**7**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Sherman Creek Park, other signs noted included, for example, images of the Riley-Levin Children's Garden.



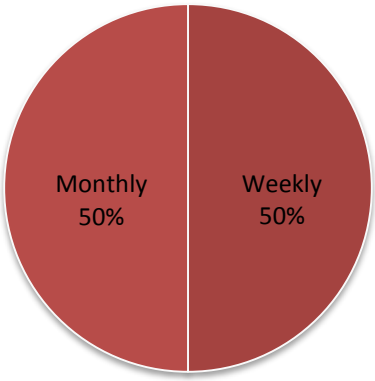
Sociability Observed by Zone

Zone	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Natural Area	2	3		**5**
Total	**2**	**3**	**0**	**5**

III. Interviews with Park Users

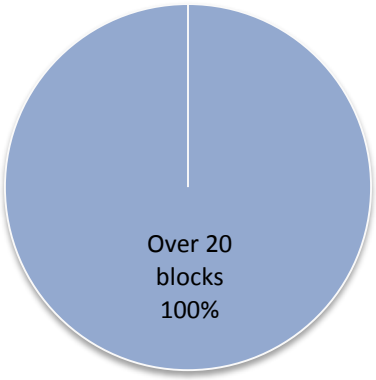
Two park users were interviewed in Sherman Creek Park: one was male and one was female. Both were between the ages of 18-65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 100%. One respondent visited weekly while the other visited monthly. Both traveled over 20 blocks to reach the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 2

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 2

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Working	1	50%
Socializing	1	50%
Total Respondents	**2**	

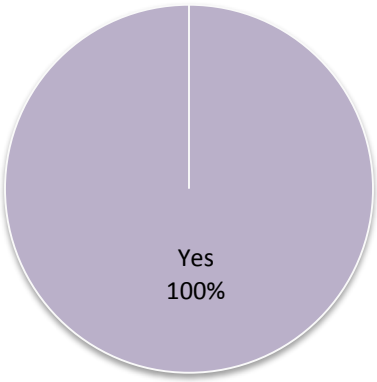
One respondent was in the park leading a class (*working*, 50%) while the other respondent was *socializing* (50%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Amenities	1	50%
Local	1	50%
Nature-outdoors	1	50%
Total Respondents	**2**	

One respondent visited the park because of the *amenities* (50%) offered and the ability to see "multiple modes of habitats" (*nature-outdoors*, 50%). The other respondent was in the park because it was local (50%) and near his work.

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 2

Sherman Creek Park includes a number of wooded and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. Both respondents said yes (100%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas. One respondent was *working* (50%) in natural areas and the other was engaging in *nature recreation* (50%).

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature recreation	1	50%
Working	1	50%
"Yes" Respondents	**2**	

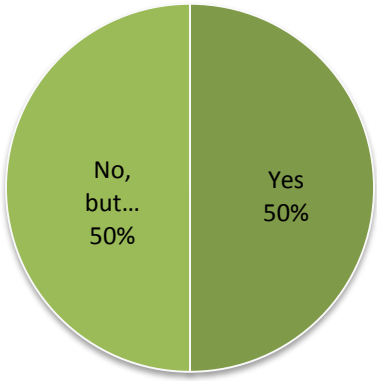
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	2	100%
Botanical garden	1	50%
Total Respondents	**2**	

The most commonly visited site types were other *named NYC parks* (100%), such as Bryant Park and Central Park. The Queens Botanical Garden (*botanical garden*, 50%) was also mentioned.

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 2

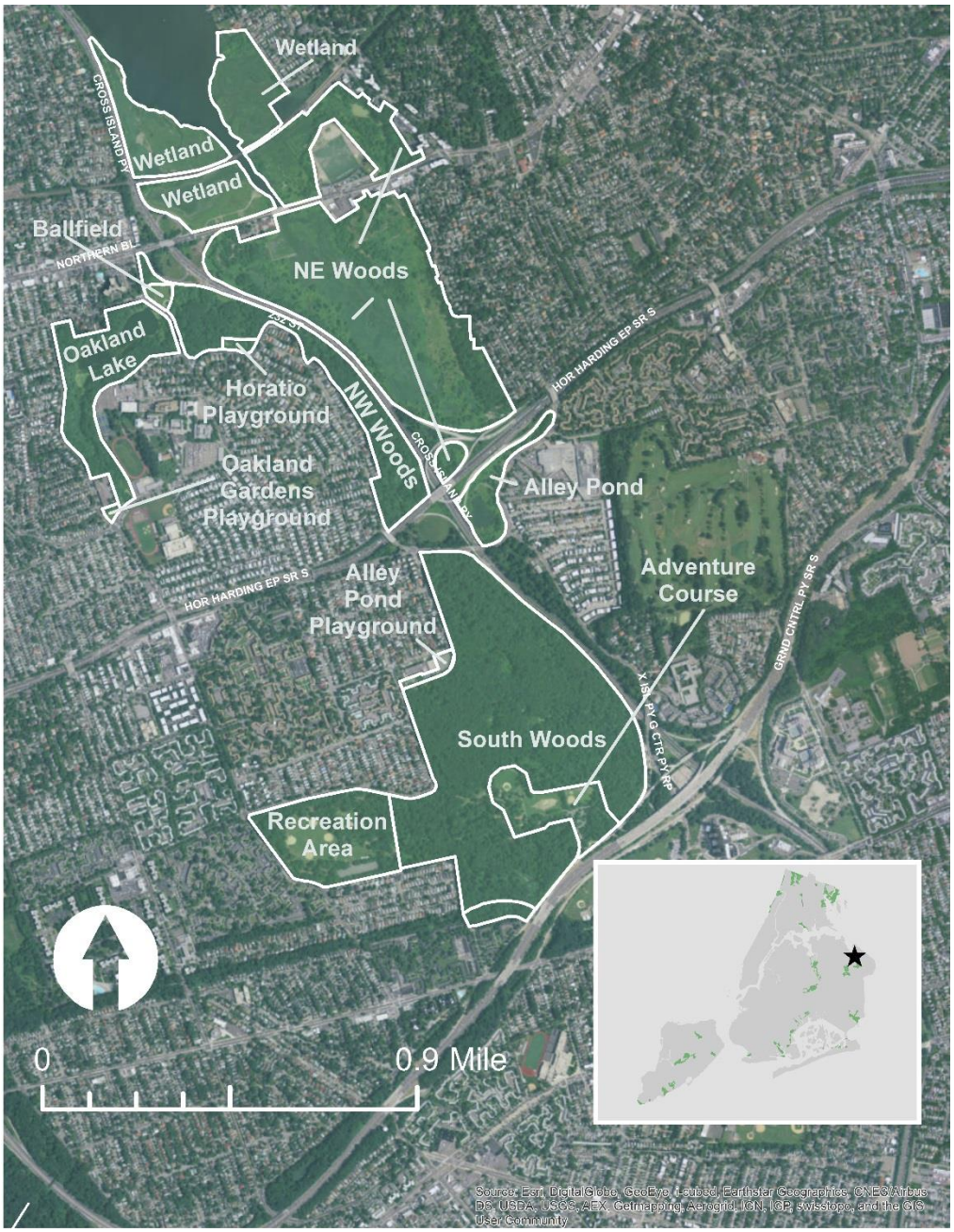
Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and only one of the respondents (50%) directly identified as doing so. Although the other respondent was not involved in stewardship, he expressed a *pro-environmental ethic*: he donates to an environmental group and avoids using plastic.

"Each time we walked into the park I instantly felt myself relax and move a little more slowly. Something about the natural landscape, tall grasses, and trickling water makes even the most harried New Yorker stop and take a breath."

Vignette from field researcher's notes on Sherman Creek Park

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

QUEENS: Alley Pond Park Profile



Zone Names			
Adventure Course	Ballfield	NW Woods	Recreation Area
Alley Pond	Horatio Playground	Oakland Gardens Playground	South Woods
Alley Pond Playground	NE Woods	Oakland Lake	Wetlands

I. Park Narrative

Alley Pond Park is a large, 494-acre[1], multi-use park in eastern Queens. From the water's edge at Long Island Sound, the park stretches into the interior of Queens. The park has a number of different areas for various activities and caters to many different age, ethnic, and income groups. Overall impressions of the park, supported by interviews and evidence from the park users, were positive.

The park is mostly wooded but has wetlands and various mowed areas with recreational fields. The wetland at the northern section of the park is largely inaccessible; however, there are small spots for waterfront access. These small areas enable oyster collection, fishing, and other water-based nature recreation. Generally, the wooded areas facilitate recreation and nature-engagement as well. Tulip poplars, in addition to other trees, provide a very tall canopy throughout much of the wooded areas. The South Woods zone is actively used for running, walking, and exercising with many well-worn paths and trails. Nevertheless, some wooded areas of the park are inaccessible and seem to be largely unused. Due to the sprawling shape of the park, we found that many park users did not know they were in Alley Pond Park or did not consider the areas of the park they were in to be Alley Pond Park—it seemed that some parts of the park felt disconnected from others.

The park users are as varied as the park itself. The surrounding neighborhoods have great income variation judging from the homes. The northern section is surrounded by large, single-family houses, and the southern section has smaller townhouses and some apartment co-op complexes. We saw a mix of Asian, white, black, and Latino communities doing various activities in the park. In addition to nature recreation and exercise, picnicking, barbequing, sports, and educational activities are all ongoing and simultaneous uses. The park also has some unique features. At the southern end of the park, the Adventure Course provides opportunities for team-building activities. We also observed a distinctive feature, which was created by boy scouts according to the park administrator, in the South Woods: a large wooden structure made of branches with three rooms, interior walls, almost fully covered, and fully upright. From the programming side, the Alley Pond Environmental Center serves as a resource for groups and individuals. On the community side, there are many active nature enthusiasts as well as groups such as the Alley Pond Pet Lovers, who actively look out for the wellbeing of the park. Based on our observations and interviews with park users, the park is well-maintained, clean, and very accessible.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

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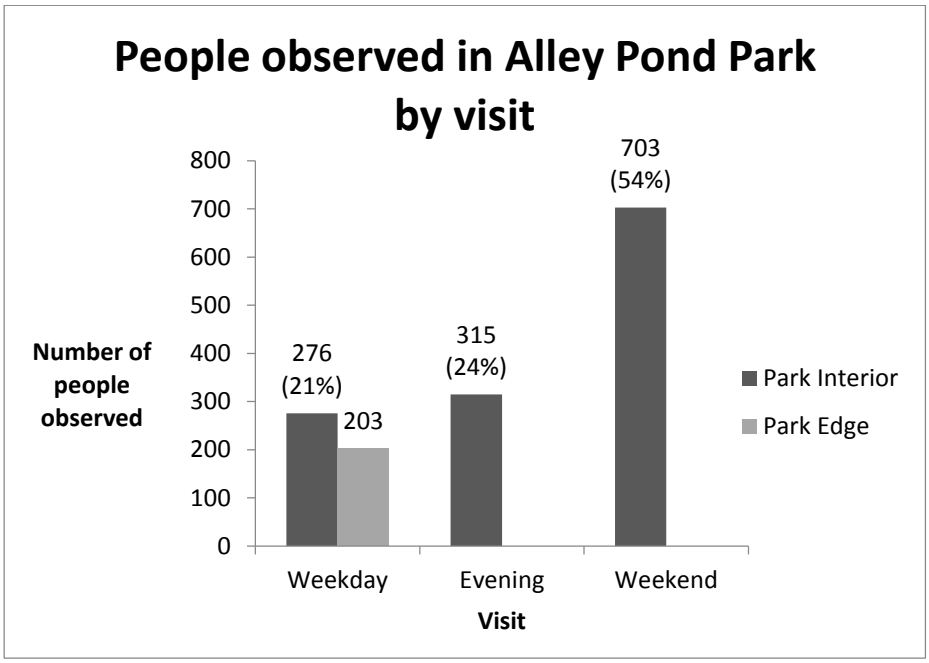
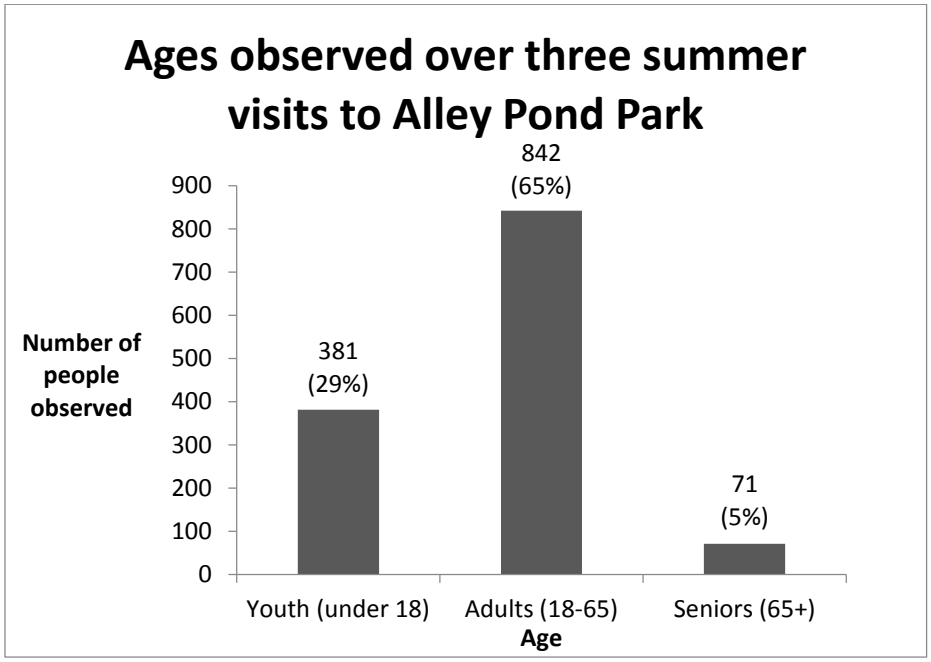


Who are they?



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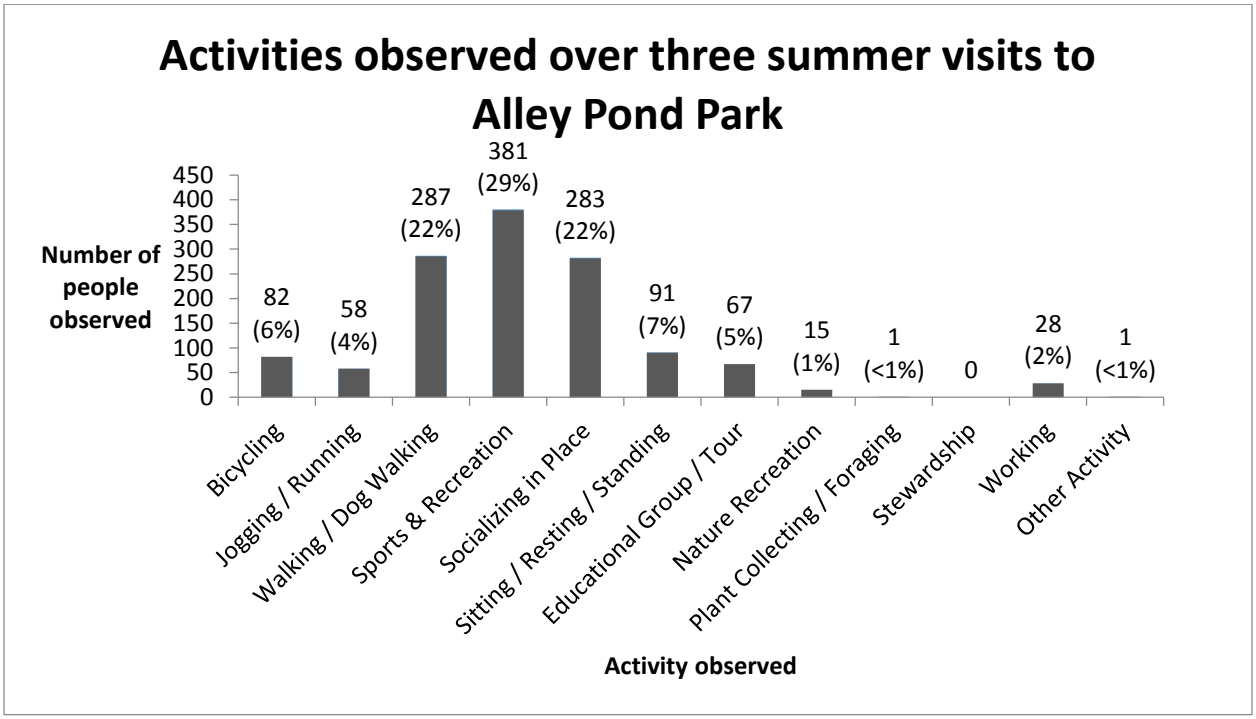

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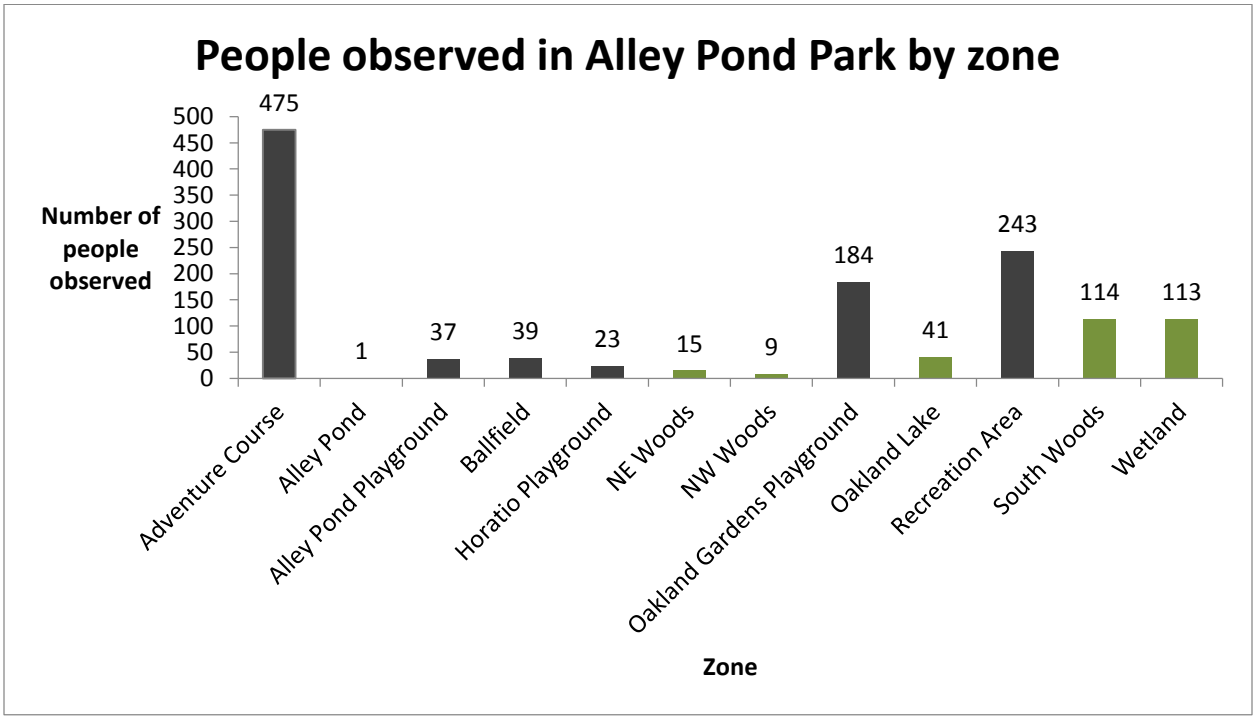


Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone												
	Adventure Course	Alley Pond	Alley Pond Playground	Ballfield	Horatio Playground	**NE Woods**	NW Woods	Oakland Gardens Playground	Oakland Lake	Recreation Area	South Woods	Wetland	**Total**
Bicycling	5		1						1	10	12	53	**82**
Jogging / Running	4								2	8	24	20	**58**
Walking / Dog Walking	91		3			1	5		20	70	71	26	**287**
Sports & Recreation	114		24	39	19			152	1	29	2	1	**381**
Socializing in Place	180		2			4	2	6	3	83		3	**283**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	8	1	5		4	1	1	26	5	36	4		**91**
Educational Group / Tour	62											5	**67**
Nature Recreation						2			9			4	**15**
Plant Collecting / Foraging											1		**1**
Stewardship													**0**
Working	10		2			7	1			7		1	**28**
Other Activity	1												**1**
Total	**475**	**1**	**37**	**39**	**23**	**15**	**9**	**184**	**41**	**243**	**114**	**113**	**1294**

Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by time of visit and age group.

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	3	45	34	**82**	8	73	1	**82**
Jogging / Running	10	23	25	**58**	2	55	1	**58**
Walking / Dog Walking	52	89	146	**287**	39	220	28	**287**
Sports & Recreation	82	84	215	**381**	175	199	7	**381**
Socializing in Place	32	21	230	**283**	89	173	21	**283**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch	19	44	28	**91**	11	67	13	**91**
Educational Group / Tour	62	5		**67**	57	10		**67**
Nature Recreation	2	3	10	**15**		15		**15**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering	1			**1**		1		**1**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**
Working	12	1	15	**28**		28		**28**
Other Activity	1			**1**		1		**1**
Total	**276**	**315**	**703**	**1294**	**381**	**842**	**71**	**1294**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)									
Sign	Adventure Course	Alley Pond	Alley Pond Playground	NE Woods	NW Woods	Oakland Lake	Recreation Area	South Woods	Wetland	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box				2						**2**
Damaged / Vandalized Property										**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area									1	**1**
Fire pit				2				1	1	**4**
Garden in Park										**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals		4		10	3		1	9	2	**29**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places				1				3	1	**5**
Informal Trails	2			13	15	11	2	43	9	**95**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol	1			1				2		**4**
Other Sign	1			8	2	5	2	5	2	**25**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers	1			3			1	1	2	**8**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	1			1					1	**3**
Total	**6**	**4**	**2**	**41**	**20**	**16**	**6**	**64**	**19**	**176**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Alley Pond Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of bird boxes, a structure made of branches, and an informal memorial.

Sociability Observed by Zone

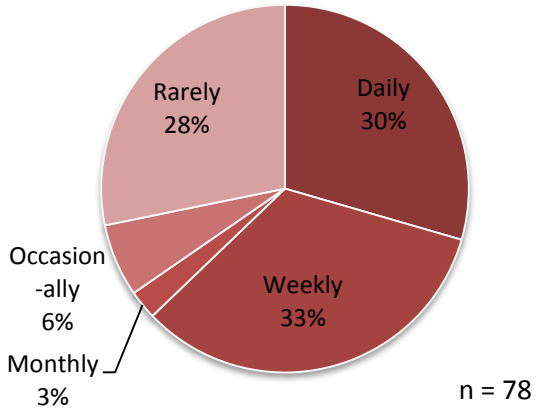
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Adventure Course	16	17	18	10	**61**
Alley Pond Playground		2			**2**
Ballfield				1	**1**
Horatio Playground			2		**2**
NE Woods		1	1		**2**
NW Woods		1			**1**
Oakland Gardens Playground		17	10		**27**
Oakland Lake	2				**2**
Recreation Area	10	28	17		**55**
South Woods	13	21	3		**37**
Wetland	3	11	4		**18**
Total	**44**	**98**	**55**	**11**	**208**

III. Interviews with Park Users

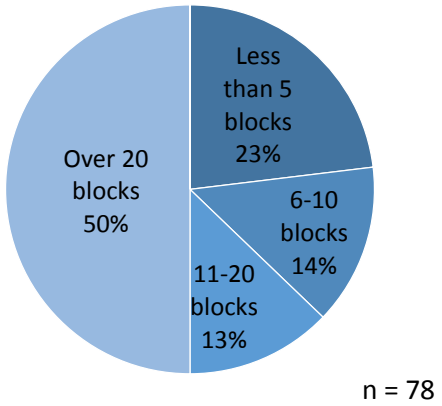
Seventy-eight park users were interviewed in Alley Pond Park, of which 50% were male and 50% were female. Eighty-seven percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 13% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 73%.

The park plays a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 63% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park also appears to be a destination park: 50% of users travel over 20 blocks to reach the park while only 37% of users travel less than 10 blocks away.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	23	29%
Kids	20	26%
Socializing	13	17%
Exercise	8	10%
Sports & recreation	8	10%
Dog	8	10%
Relaxing	4	5%
Nature recreation	4	5%
Nature-outdoors	3	4%
Arts and culture	2	3%
First time	1	1%
Working	1	1%
Biking	1	1%
Total Respondents	**78**	

The park is being used for a range of physical activities: the most common activity that respondents were engaging in at Alley Pond Park was *walking* (29%) and some were also *exercising* (10%), participating in *sports and recreation* (8%), and *biking* (1%). Alley Pond Park is also a social space. Many respondents were at the park with *kids* (26%) and/or *socializing* (17%) at barbecues, birthday parties, church events, picnics, and other events. For example, we observed a sign in Korean for the New York Nurses Association picnic (see below).

We observed large numbers of park users in the Forever Wild areas, so perhaps it is not surprising that many of the respondents we interviewed were interacting with nature. Respondents were *relaxing* (5%), participating in *nature recreation* (5%) by clamming or fishing, enjoying *nature and the outdoors* (4%), and doing *art and cultural* activities (3%) such as photography. Finally, a few park users were at the park for the *first time* (1%) or *working* (1%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

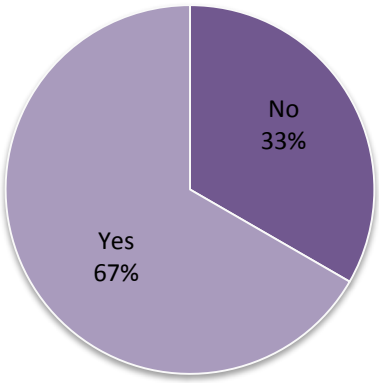
Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	34	44%
Amenities	15	19%
Activity	11	14%
Place attachment	9	12%
Nature-outdoors	9	12%
Social ties	8	10%
Enjoyment	7	9%
Refuge	7	9%
Access	7	9%
Quality	7	9%
Sociability	4	5%
Explore	4	5%
No response	1	1%
Total Respondents	**78**	

Alley Pond Park is a valuable *local* resource for respondents (44%), and many are attracted to its *amenities* (19%), such as the Alley Pond Adventure Course, playgrounds, and trails. Respondents also visited because of different *activities* they could do at the park (14%) and because of their deep history of *place attachment* with the park (12%). Others were drawn to aspects of *being outdoors in nature* (12%), such as the ability to watch wildlife, the fresh air and greenery, and the ability to be near water and the marsh. Some of the people interviewed had *social ties* to the park through family and friends living close by (10%) or were in the park for a *social gathering / sociability* (5%) while others simply identified *enjoyment* of the site (9%) or sought out the site as a *refuge* (9%). Convenience and ease of *access* was another reason why respondents visited (9%) along with the *quality of the amenities* (9%). Alley Pond Park also attracted users from far away, and some respondents were *exploring* the park for the first time (5%), such as a visitor from Taiwan.

"Further north in the same zone, we met an elderly East Asian woman… She said that this clearing or intersection was her "office". She picks up trash in the area and makes sure it is clean and maintained. Beside her exercise / stretching spot, we saw a small portable clock and other equipment that she had placed there (presumably temporarily) while she stretches. She was extremely enthusiastic about the park, about her engagement with, and guiding us or advising us through it. There was a real sense of ownership through her daily interaction with the space."

Vignette from field researcher's notes on Alley Pond Park

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area? If yes, what do you do? If no, why not?



n = 78

Alley Pond Park includes a number of wooded, wetland and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. The majority of respondents interviewed said yes (67%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas.

Out of the respondents who said yes, the most common answer was *walking* (63%), which matches with most respondents' responses to the question about what they were doing in the park in general. Many of the respondents were also *enjoying nature and the outdoors* (11%) or participating in *nature recreation* (7%). Other physical activities such as *exercise* (13%), *sports & recreation* (4%), and *biking* (1%) were also reported. Natural areas are social spaces – visitors reported coming to natural areas with their *kids* (13%) and/or to *socialize* (8%) – and places to *relax* (10%) as well. A small number of respondents expressed *concern* (6%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about getting lost or "get[ting] bit by mosquitoes." We also interviewed a *worker* (2%) whose job involves surveying natural areas, a person taking photographs (*arts and culture*: 2%), a person who participates in *stewardship* (2%), and a person who used to go to natural areas in the past (*prior engagement*: 2%).

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	33	63%
Nature-Outdoors	11	21%
Nature recreation	7	13%
Exercise	7	13%
Kids	7	13%
Relaxing	5	10%
Socializing	4	8%
Concern	3	6%
Sports & recreation	2	4%
Working	1	2%
Biking	1	2%
Arts and culture	1	2%
Stewardship	1	2%
No response	1	2%
Prior engagement	1	2%
"Yes" Respondents	**52**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Preference	15	58%
Potential	5	19%
Fear-Concern	3	12%
No response	3	12%
"No" Respondents	**26**	

Twenty-six respondents (33%) said that they never go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, the majority of them *preferred to go to other parts of the park* (58%). We classified some respondents as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (19%) because they were previously unaware that these areas existed or did not have a specific reason for not visiting those areas. Some respondents expressed *fear or concern* (12%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about safety, getting lost or wildlife. Out of the 33% of respondents who said they did not go into natural areas, 7 of them were actually interviewed in what is officially designated as a natural area but did not realize it. Perhaps this illustrates that park users hold multiple perspectives of what nature and parklands look like. Many of these users were simply passing through the natural area: for example, a biker who was passing through or a person who was walking around looking for a place to sit and eat.

Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

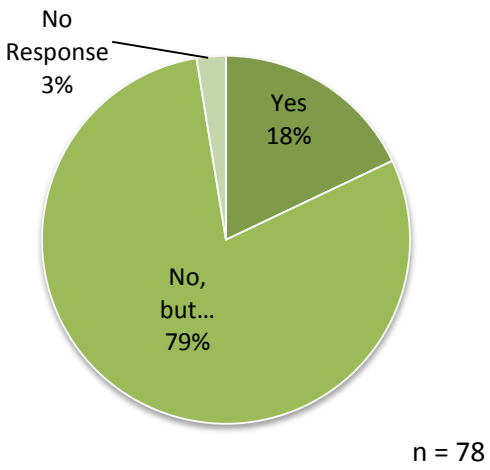
In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

The most commonly visited site types for Alley Pond Park users were other *named NYC parks* (37%) such as Cunningham Park. *Beach and waterfront areas* (26%) such as Jones Beach State Park were also popular. Many respondents said they *do not go anywhere else outdoors* (26%), indicating the importance of Alley Pond Park in their everyday lives. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	29	37%
Nowhere else	20	26%
Beach-waterfront	19	24%
Out of town	18	23%
Schoolyard	3	4%
Sports	3	4%
Barbecue	2	3%
No response	2	3%
Campground	2	3%
Local	2	3%
Woods	1	1%
Community facility	1	1%
Dog park	1	1%
Greenway	1	1%
Total Respondents	**78**	

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and only 18% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Some of those who said “yes” also specifically named groups and/or offered the general type(s) of group in which they participate (listed below). Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.



At one end of the spectrum, a number of respondents participated in *other civic engagement* (n = 4), such as art and cultural activities or articulated a *pro-environmental ethic* (n = 5), such as the importance of recycling or not littering. One participated in *self-led stewardship* outside the context of a group.

Some respondents expressed a *desire to engage* in stewardship (n = 18) even though they were not at present. Others *lacked awareness* (n = 5) of groups or opportunities to participate in stewardship, and some were *self-critical* (n = 5) and felt embarrassed or apologetic about not engaging in stewardship. Two respondents cited that they were at stages in their *life courses* that prevented them from participating like recently becoming a parent or retirement. One respondent had *social ties* to family members who participated in stewardship. Finally, some respondents said that they had *no time* (n = 9), *no interest* (n = 5), and/or cited *other barriers* (n = 4) such as illness or age.

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Animal	3	43%
Environment	3	43%
Friends of Park	1	14%
Total	**7**	

Named Stewardship Groups:

- Alley Pond Pet Lovers
- Alley Pond Striders
- Greenpeace
- MillionTreesNYC
- North Shore Animal League
- Sierra Club
- The Nature Conservancy

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

QUEENS: Bayswater Park Profile

Zone Names	
Recreation Courts	North Natural Area
Recreation Ballfields	South Natural Area

I. Park Narrative

Bayswater Park is a 25-acre park[1] located on the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens, adjacent to Jamaica Bay. Overwhelmingly, the primary reason people choose to visit Bayswater Park is that it is a form of nearby nature and open space. Many interviewees discussed the site as a "local park" that serves primarily people in the nearby community—which can be juxtaposed with the beaches of Rockaway that serve both local residents and visitors from outside the neighborhood. Some interviewees commented on the absence of other local parks nearby, with this park serving as a critical local resource. Users are primarily African American and Hispanic.

The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 67% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It is also a crucial local resource, with 76% of users traveling from less than 10 blocks away – and the most common thematic response to why people choose to come to this park is that it is local or proximate (57%).

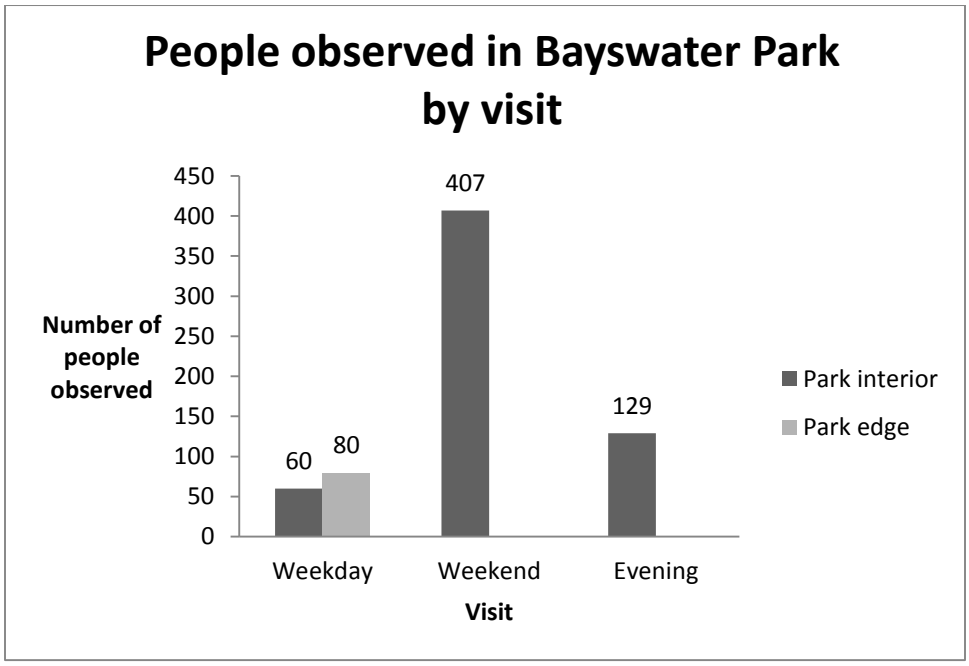
The most commonly observed human activity was socializing in place (51%), which was even more abundant than sports and other physical activities; this is a highly social park. There are zones of high human activity clustered along Beach Channel Drive. People were clearly using the tennis and basketball courts, the play area, and the sitting area. Fewer park users were directly observed in the park's large natural areas. In particular, very few people were observed in the northern natural area, which also contained some dumping of debris, likely a result of Hurricane Sandy. However, well-worn informal trails and sitting places reveal years of community use in that section of the park. The entire Rockaway Peninsula was affected by Hurricane Sandy and crews observed signs of construction and rebuilding occurring near the park.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp , clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

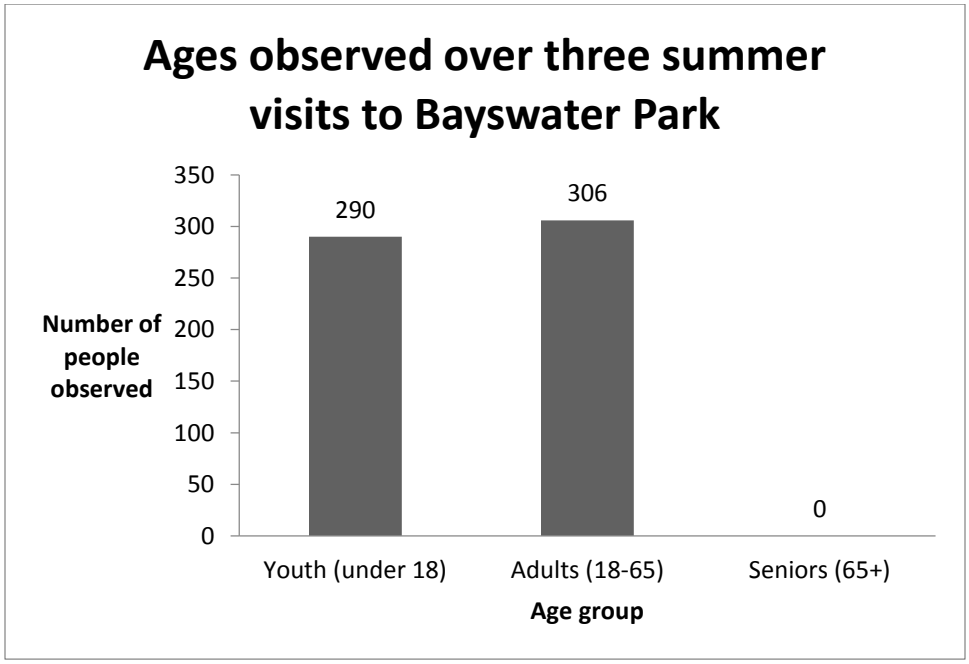
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

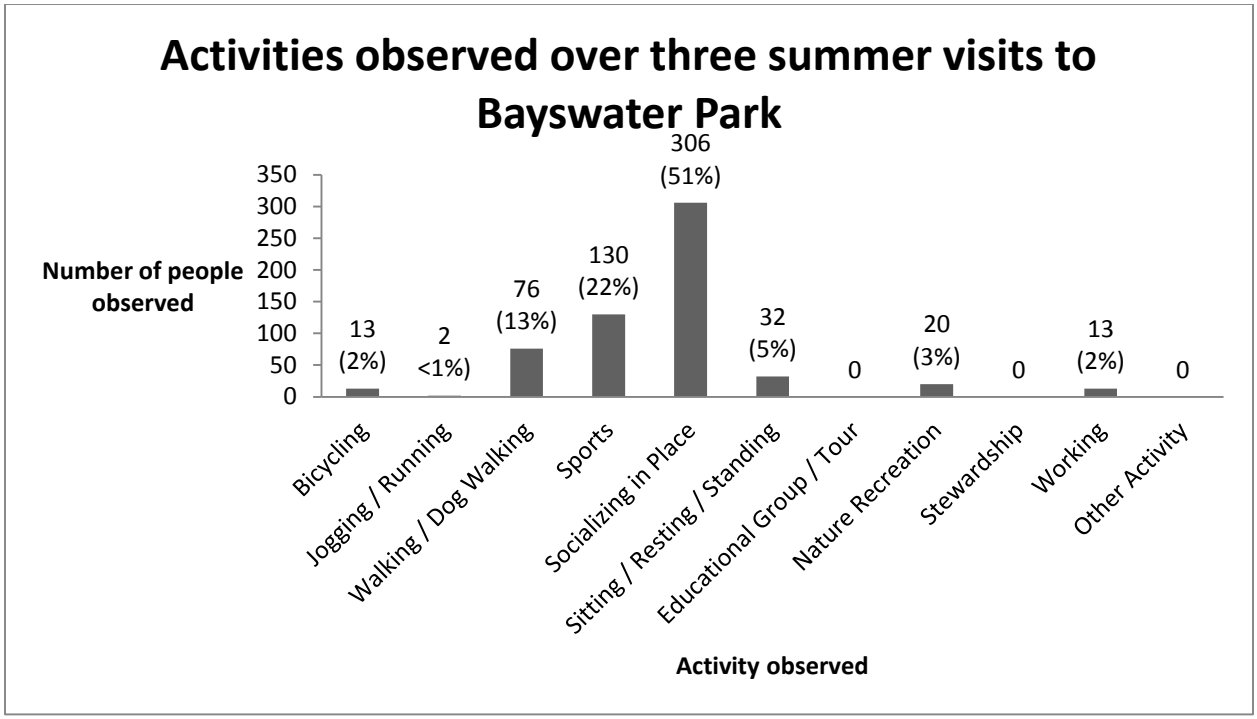


Who are they?



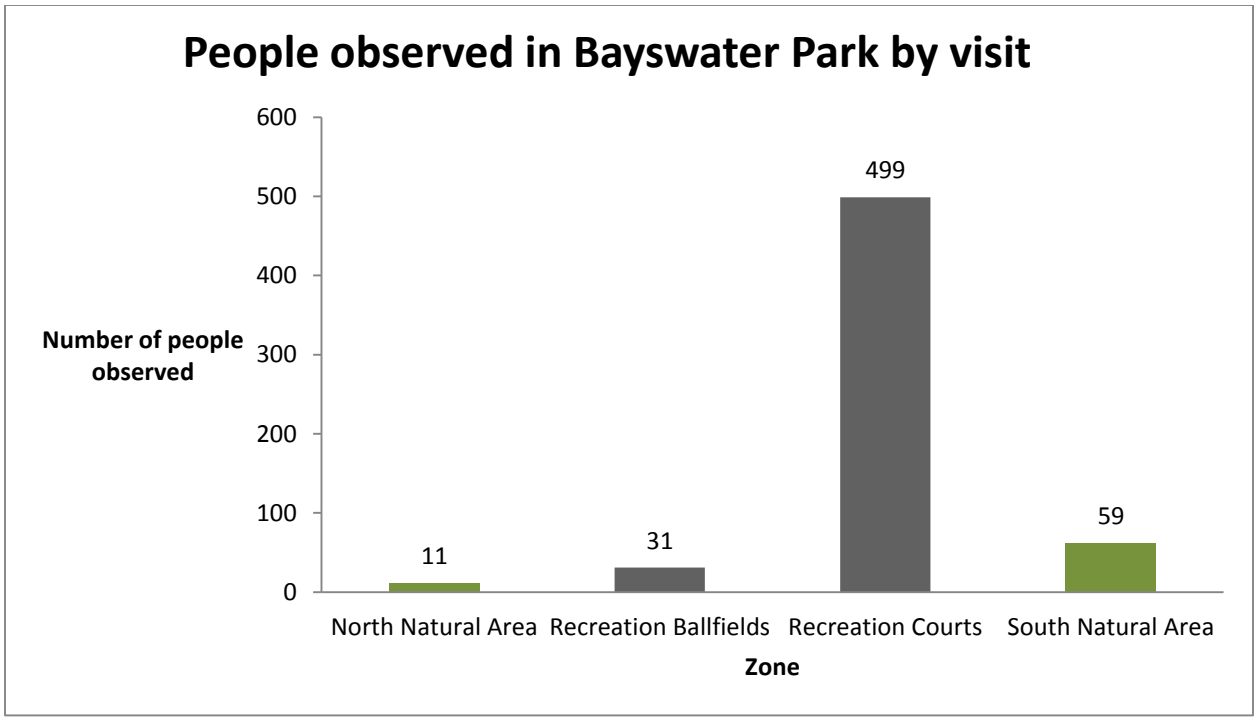
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Human Activities Observed by Zone, Visit, and Age in Bayswater Park. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone					Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Recreation Courts	Recreation Ballfields	North Natural Area	South Natural Area	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	7	4		2	**13**		3	10	**13**	11	2		**13**
Jogging / Running	2				**2**	2			**2**		2		**2**
Walking / Dog Walking	42	11	1	22	**76**	11	11	54	**76**	37	39		**76**
Sports	113	7		10	**130**	20	86	24	**130**	111	19		**130**
Educational Group / Tour					**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation			8	16	**24**	2	8	10	**24**	8	16		**24**
Stewardship					**0**				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	30	2			**32**	23	1	8	**32**	11	21		**32**
Socializing in Place	292	5		9	**306**		288	18	**306**	112	194		**306**
Working	9	2	2		**13**	2	10	1	**13**		13		**13**
Other Activity					**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**495**	**31**	**11**	**59**	**596**	**60**	**407**	**129**	**596**	**290**	**306**	**0**	**596**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)				
Sign	**North Natural Area**	**Recreation Ballfields**	**Recreation Courts**	**South Natural Area**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bird Box / Pond				1	**1**
Damaged / Vandalized Building		1	3		**4**
Graffiti, Art, Murals			1		**1**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	2	2		1	**5**
Other (Note)*	1	1	2		**4**
Other Signs, Flyers & Stickers	2	3			**5**
Sitting Places & Dining	2	1			**3**
Trails	6	5	1	2	**14**
Total	**13**	**13**	**7**	**4**	**37**

*Crews were instructed to take note of any other noteworthy or unique observations that stood out to them in each park. For Bayswater Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of a construction site.

Sociability Observed by Zone

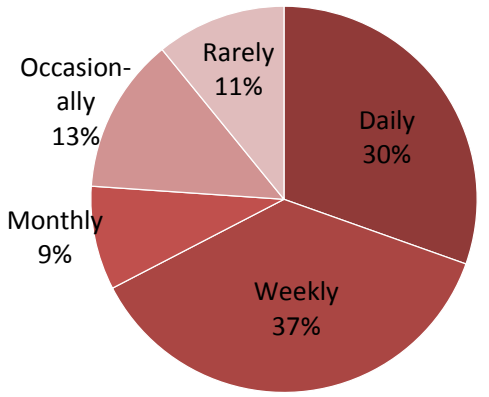
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Recreation Court	2	56	22	3	83
Recreation Ballfields		5	3		8
North Natural Area		1	1		2
South Natural Area	3	5	4		12
Total	**5**	**67**	**30**	**3**	**105**

III. Interviews with Park Users

Forty-six park users were interviewed in Bayswater Park, of which 48% were male and 50% female (2% unidentified). Eight-three percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 15% were estimated to be over the age of 65 (2% unidentified). We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 90%.

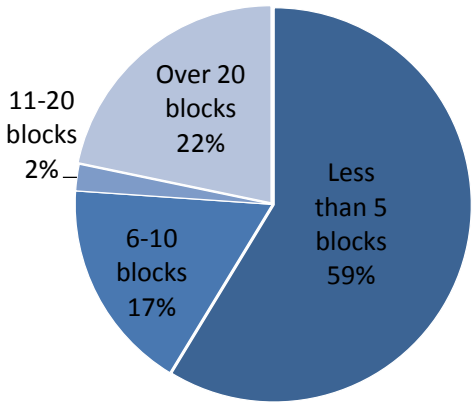
The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 67% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It is also a crucial local resource, with 76% of users traveling from less than 10 blocks away. At the same time, the park is drawing people from a distance, with 22% of users traveling over 20 blocks to reach the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 46

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 46

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Kids	13	28%
Sports-Recreation	9	20%
Nature Recreation	8	17%
Relaxing	8	17%
Socializing	8	17%
Nature-Outdoors	6	13%
Working	2	4%
Mobile Health Center	1	2%
Dog	1	2%
Spiritual	1	2%
Sustenance	1	2%
Total Respondents	**46**	

In the observations of human activities, 49% of users were youth. In the interviews of adult park users, 28% said that they were using the park because it had amenities and spaces for *kids*. This included not only children, grandchildren, cousins, nieces and nephews, but also children under the care of babysitters. The park is an attractor for use by children during the summer season when kids are out of school. (Comparing these trends with data from throughout the school-year would require additional research.)

The park is used for multiple forms of recreation, including active *sports and recreation* (20%) at the courts and fields and *nature recreation* (17%). Fishing and crabbing are common activities on the waterfront.

Other people are using the park for *relaxation* (17%) or engaging with *outdoors* (13%), including the sun, shade, and the waterfront. Users also spend time *socializing* (17%) –including casual gatherings as well as barbecues, picnics and social events. Triangulating these data with the counts of human activities, we can see that the most commonly observed activity was socializing in place (51%).

Less common activities included *working* (4%), going to a *mobile health center* (2%), walking the *dog* (2%). Two responses related to a church barbecue that was occurring – with one respondent ministering and serving food (*spiritual*, 2%) and one getting food and *sustenance* (2%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	30	65%
Amenities	9	20%
Refuge	4	9%
Sociability	4	9%
Enjoyment	3	7%
Nature-outdoors	3	7%
Total Respondents	**46**	

Overwhelmingly, the primary reason people choose to visit Bayswater Park is that it is a form of nearby nature and open space (*local*, 65%). Interviewees discussed the site as a "local park" that serves many people in the nearby community—which can be juxtaposed with the beaches of Rockaway that serve both local residents and visitors from outside the neighborhood. Other interviewees commented on the absence of other local parks nearby, with this park serving as a critical local resource.

Users are attracted to the *amenities* (20%), which include not only the physical features and park infrastructure, but also the quality of the amenities and the way in which they are maintained.

Less frequent responses included seeking out the sense of *refuge* (9%) that comes from being outside, using language like calm, health, peace, tranquility, solitude, and serenity. On the other hand, some respondents reflected on the park as a space for *sociability* and social gatherings (9%). Others simply identified *enjoyment* of the site (7%), using language like "I like it", "I love it", or noting the beauty or pleasantness of the site. Respondents also identified specific material attributes of being *outdoors in nature* (7%), including breeze, shade, sun, and water.

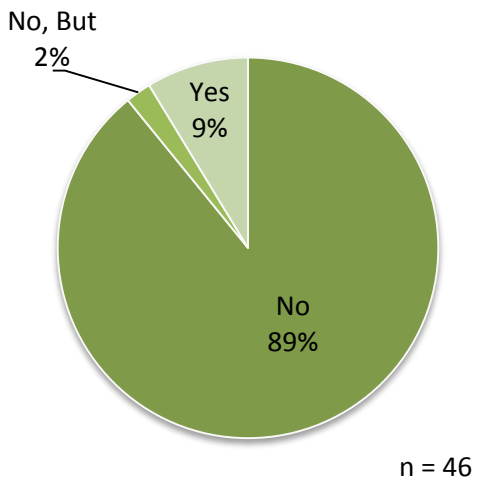
Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park(s)	16	35%
Beach-Waterfront	15	33%
Nowhere Else	10	22%
Playground	5	11%
Botanical Garden	1	2%
Sports	1	2%
Zoo or Aquarium	1	2%
Total Respondents	**46**	

The most commonly visited site types for Bayswater Park users were other *named NYC parks* (35%) and *beach and waterfront areas* (33%). In addition, 22% of respondents said that they *don't really like to go anywhere else outdoors,* indicating the importance of Bayswater Park in their everyday lives. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, so it is not surprising that just 9% of respondents directly identified as doing so.

For those that did say they participate in stewardship, two specific groups were named below. Three other respondents did not give specific names of groups, but identified types of groups in which they participate: civic (n = 2) and environmental (n = 1).

One notable stewardship group in this zone are the Bay Rats, who fish and grill at the dead end street on the edge of the bay at Beach 38th Street. This informal group of friends has been using the area to socialize and recreate for years. They hold block parties and celebrations for Fathers' Day and Memorial Day, where they catch, prepare, and share fish with residents of the nearby NYCHA apartment buildings. These stewards observed the damage caused by Sandy to their gathering space and other nearby greenspaces. While they generally maintain the area near their fishing spot, they reported that rebuilding their own homes after Sandy required a great deal of effort, such that they had less time to engage in rebuilding at the waterfront.

No, but…

In addition to outright replies of 'yes' and 'no' one respondent answered that they take part in *self-led stewardship* outside the context of a group.

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Civic	2	**67%**
Environment	1	**33%**
Total	**3**	

Named Stewardship Groups

- Bay Rats
- NYC Parks

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
QUEENS: Beach Channel Park Profile

Zone Names
East
Middle
West

I. Park Narrative

Beach Channel Park is a 1-acre, long, linear waterfront site[1] along the Jamaica Bay waterfront in Rockaway, Queens (with zero acres of natural area). It is bounded by Beach 116th St and Beach 124th St along Beach Channel Drive. It is primarily used as a fishing spot, with striking views of the Manhattan skyline. The site is generally sun-exposed lawn, with very few trees. The low number of youth and seniors reflect the fact that the site is not a place to stop and rest or to play but is primarily used by adults for fishing or to pass through. The site is adjacent to Tribute Park, a site that was created by the Rockaway community to memorialize September 11, 2001, and that is an active space of community stewardship and engagement. Most interviewees traveled to visit this park, with 75% indicating they traveled more than 20 blocks.

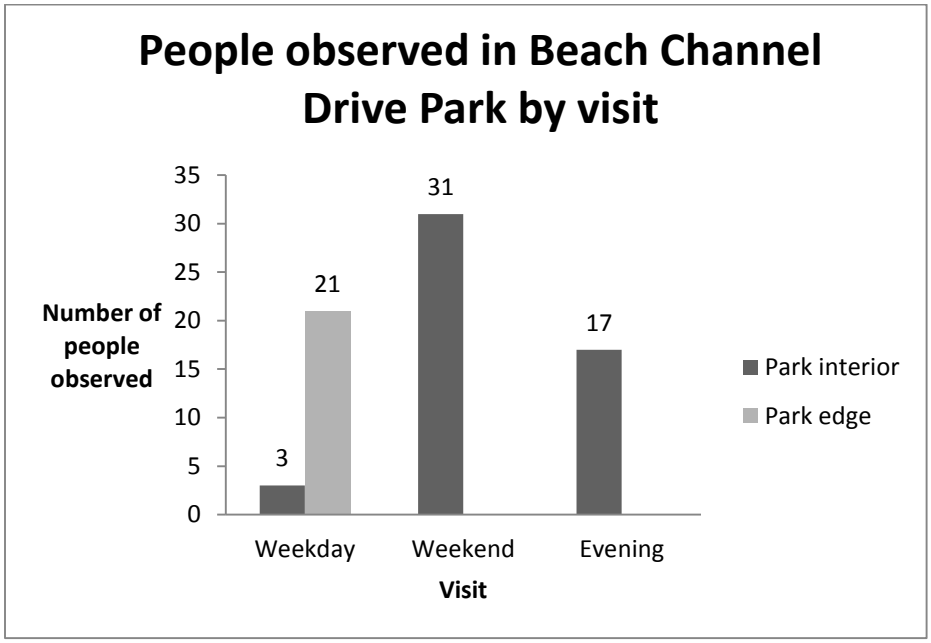
Crews observed post-Sandy damage as well as tripping hazards in the sidewalk. The area had only light litter and a bit of graffiti. On the neighborhood side, the site faces a residential area that sustained damage during Hurricane Sandy. The crew observed signs of rebuilding as well as numerous US flags displayed on homes.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp files, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

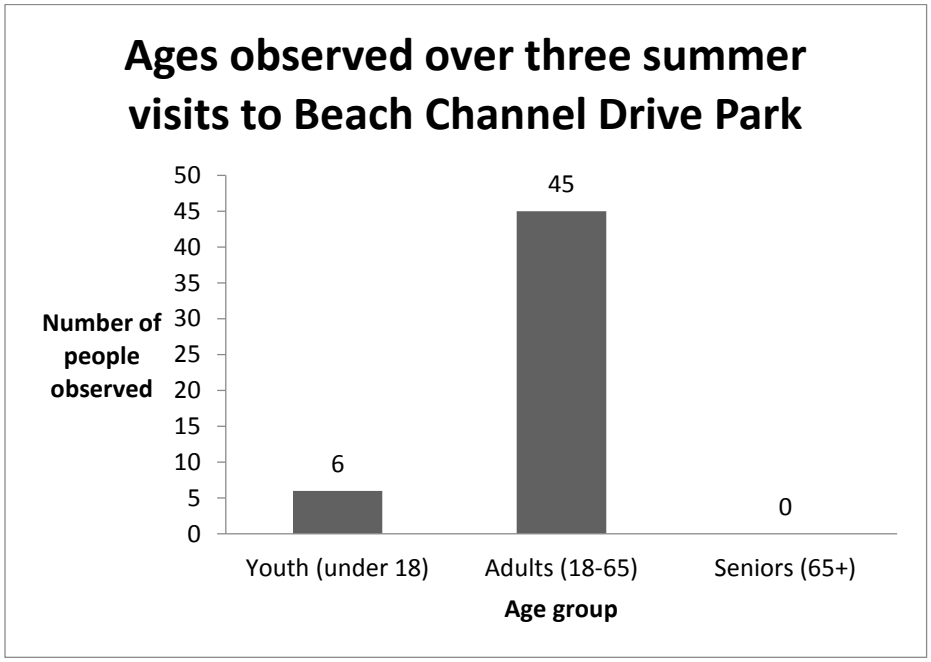
II. Field Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources. Because the site is essentially a long, linear strip along the roadway with few physical amenities, it is not surprising that more people were often observed on the edge than in the park itself.

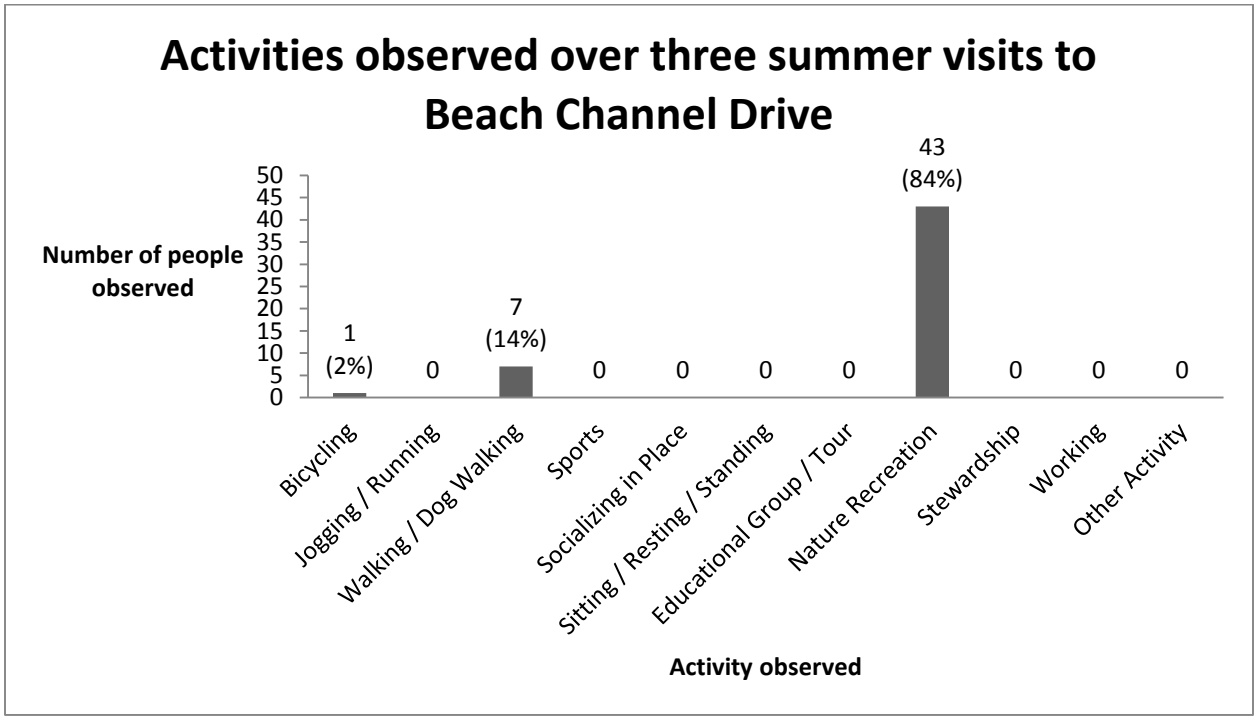


Who are they?

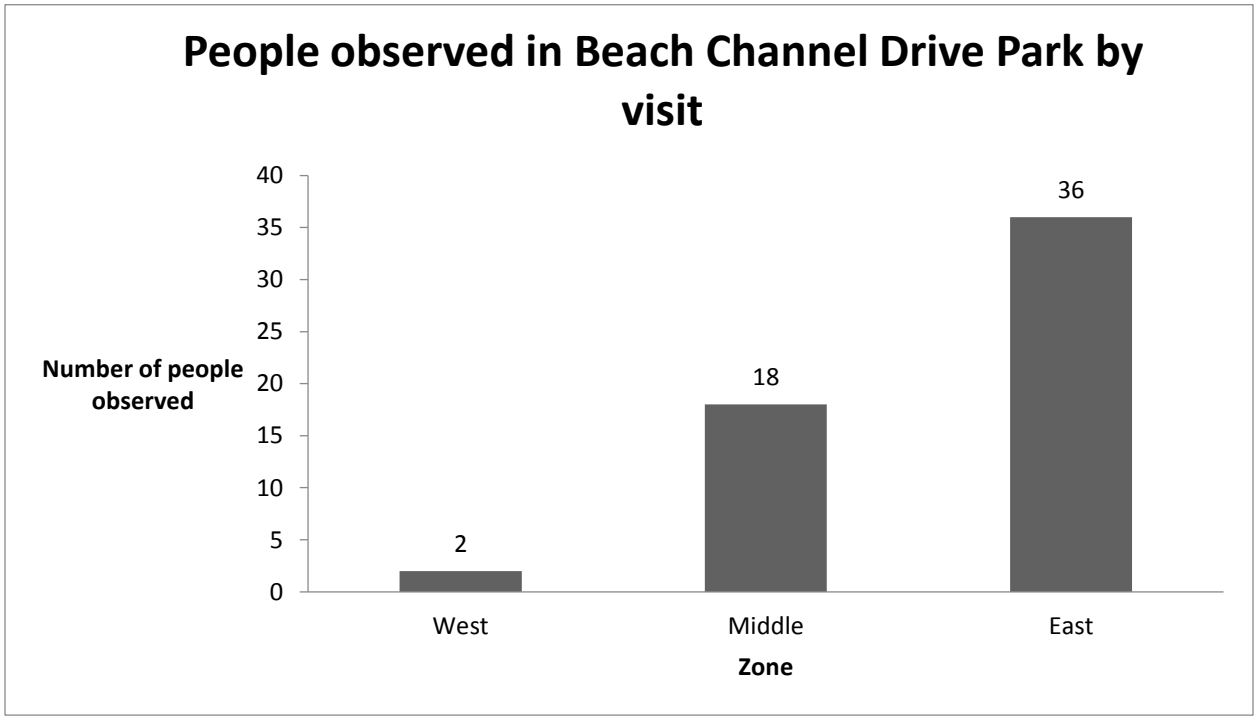


What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?



Detailed Counts

Human Activities Observed by Zone, Visit, and Age along Beach Channel Drive

Activity Observed	Park Zone				Time of Visit				Age Group			
	West	Middle	East	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling			1	**1**	1			**1**		1		**1**
Jogging / Running				**0**				**0**				**0**
Walking / Dog Walking		3	4	**7**	2	2	3	**7**		7		**7**
Sports				**0**				**0**				**0**
Educational Group / Tour				**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation	2	14	27	**43**		29	14	**43**	6	37		**43**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting				**0**				**0**				**0**
Socializing in Place				**0**				**0**				**0**
Working				**0**				**0**				**0**
Other Activity				**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**2**	**17**	**32**	**51**	**3**	**31**	**17**	**51**	**6**	**45**	**0**	**51**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Zone			
Sign	**East**	**Middle**	**West**	**Total**
Buildings / Lots with Signs of Repair / Construction			1	**1**
Buildings and Gardens with Decorations			5	**5**
Damaged Property			2	**2**
Graffiti, Art, Murals		6	2	**8**
House with Garden Actively Stewarded			9	**9**
House with Garden Minimally Managed			1	**1**
House with Lawn Actively Stewarded			9	**9**
Keep Out Signs			1	**1**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol			2	**2**
National Flags			6	**6**
Other (Note)*	1	2	1	**4**
Other Garden			1	**1**
Other Signs, Flyers & Stickers			6	**6**
Sitting Places & Dining			4	**4**
Sporting / Play Equipment			3	**3**
Vacant Lot (NOT a garden)			1	**1**
Total	**1**	**8**	**54**	**63**

*Crews were instructed to take note of any other noteworthy or unique observations that stood out to them in each park.

Sociability Observed by Zone

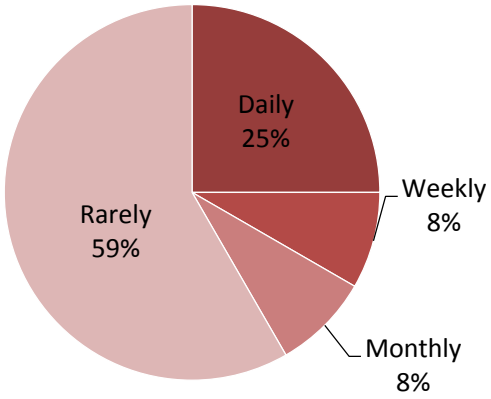
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
East		3	6		**9**
Middle	1		3		**4**
West					**0**
Total	**1**	**3**	**9**	**0**	**13**

III. Interviews with Park Users

Twelve park users were interviewed in Beach Channel Park, of which 92% were male and 8% female. Eighty-three percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 17% were estimated to be over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 92%.

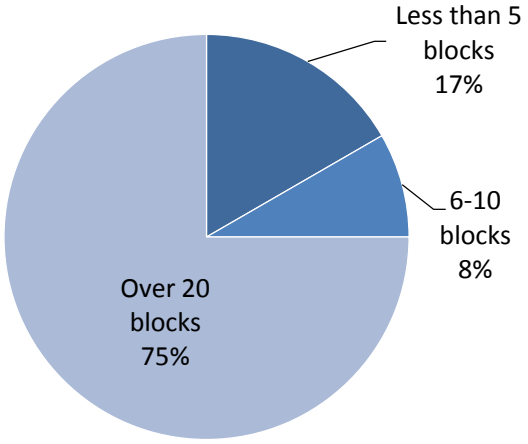
Compared to neighborhood parks that users visit daily and weekly, Beach Channel Park is visited less frequently, with 59% of respondents saying that they visit "rarely". It is also drawing users from a wider geographic area, with 75% of respondents saying that they travel more than 20 blocks to reach the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 12

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 12

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature-Recreation	11	92%
Dog	1	8%
Kids	1	8%
Nature-Outdoors	1	8%
Relaxing	1	8%
Sustenance	1	8%
Total Respondents	**12**	

Beach Channel Park interviewees were primarily engaged in *nature recreation* (92%), particularly fishing. Other less common activities were identified by just one respondent each, including: walking the *dog*, playing with *kids*, interacting with *nature and the outdoors*, and *relaxing*. Gaining *sustenance* was specifically noted when an interviewee offered details about fishing in order to feed himself.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Activity	5	42%
Social Ties	5	42%
Nature-Outdoors	4	33%
Local	3	25%
Amenities	2	17%
Place Attachment	1	8%
Total Respondents	**12**	

People chose to visit Beach Channel Park specifically to engage in a specific *activity*, fishing (42%) – it is a known fishing spot. As well, some respondents reflected on having *social ties* (42%) to the site through having friends that knew about the fishing spot and recommended it.

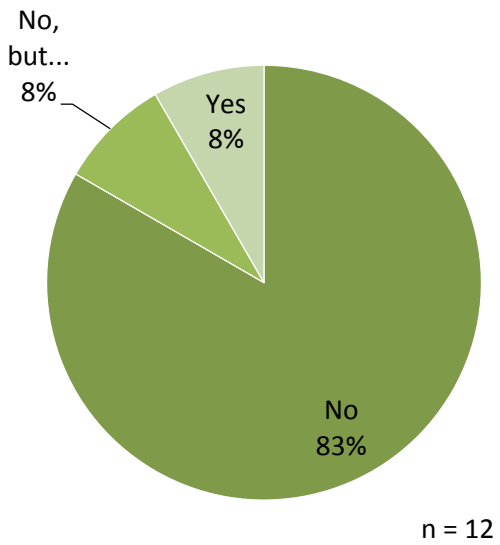
Respondents also identified specific material attributes of being *outdoors in nature* (33%), including breeze, views, sun, and water. Beach Channel Park is a form of nearby nature and open space (*local*, 25%) for some park users. For a few respondents, they are attracted to the *amenities* (17%), which include the physical features and park infrastructure. Finally, one respondent gave detail about his history of *place attachment* with the park from having family live nearby (8%).

Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as *social connectors* between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Beach-Waterfront	9	75%
Memorial	1	8%
Nowhere Else	1	8%
Out of Town	1	8%
Sports	1	8%
Total Respondents	**12**	

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and for this particular site, one respondent (8% of interviewees) identified participating in a stewardship group, but did not provide a group name or type.

In addition, one respondent (8% of interviewees) said that he engaged in *self-led stewardship* of the site, by cleaning up after himself when he is there fishing.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
QUEENS: Brant Point Wildlife Sanctuary Profile

[Brant Point is a small park, which was not subdivided into zones for the purposes of this research. All observations are, therefore, presented together.]

I. Park Narrative

Brant Point Wildlife Sanctuary is a 9-acre[1] park (including four acres of Forever Wild natural area) on the Rockaway Peninsula, directly adjacent to Jamaica Bay at Beach 72nd Street. It was established as a protected area under the Buffer the Bay program, a joint effort by the Trust for Public Land and the New York City Audubon Society, in the 1980s.

The site is largely unused by humans and is primarily a wetland site. Indeed, the field research crews had an encounter with a resident who said "that is not a park, it is a garbage dump". Notably, of the 28 human observations made at this site, five of them were positive encounters with residents who were interested in the work of the social assessment crew and willing to discuss the site and their neighborhood. Other noteworthy observations included signs of personal property maintenance, as residents were outside working to rebuild their homes post-Sandy. The park is a crucial local resource, with 100% of users interviewed traveling from less than 10 blocks away, and 75% of users said they choose to visit Brant Point because it was close by.

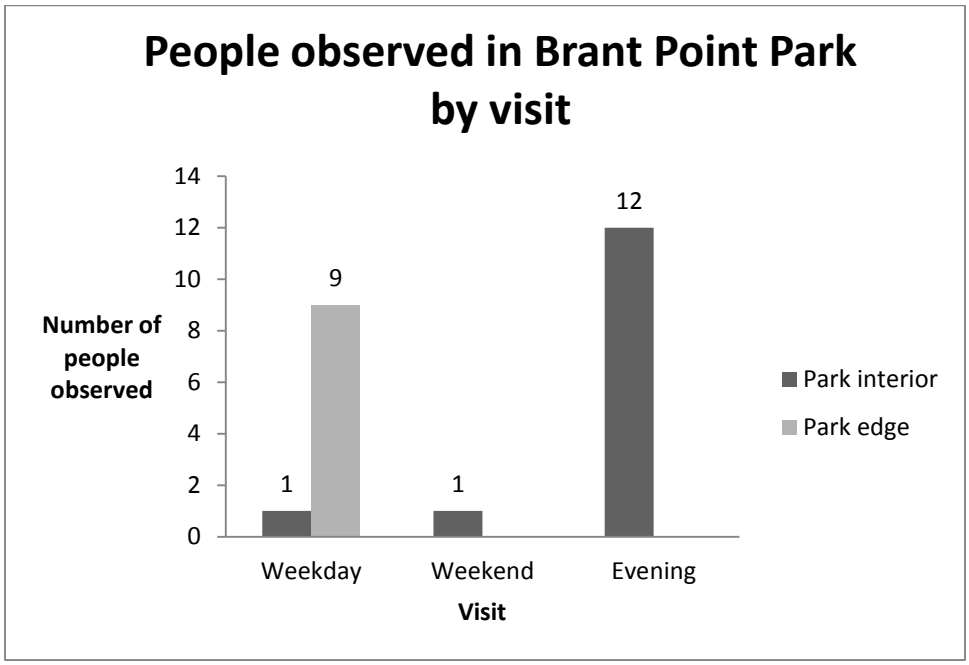
Through the interviews, we learned about concerns over mosquitoes in the park, the desire for more trees, and the extreme devastation that Sandy brought to the area, including both to residential homes and to the park itself. The few people who were inside the park and not on the edge were there to engage in fishing and to investigate post-Sandy damage. Field researchers observed concrete dumping, damaged barriers, marine debris, and Sandy debris on the site. There were signs that some people used the site, as we observed that people had left wooden planks to enable access during higher tides. The surrounding neighborhood is primarily single-family home residential, and most residents encountered were African American and West Indian.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp files, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

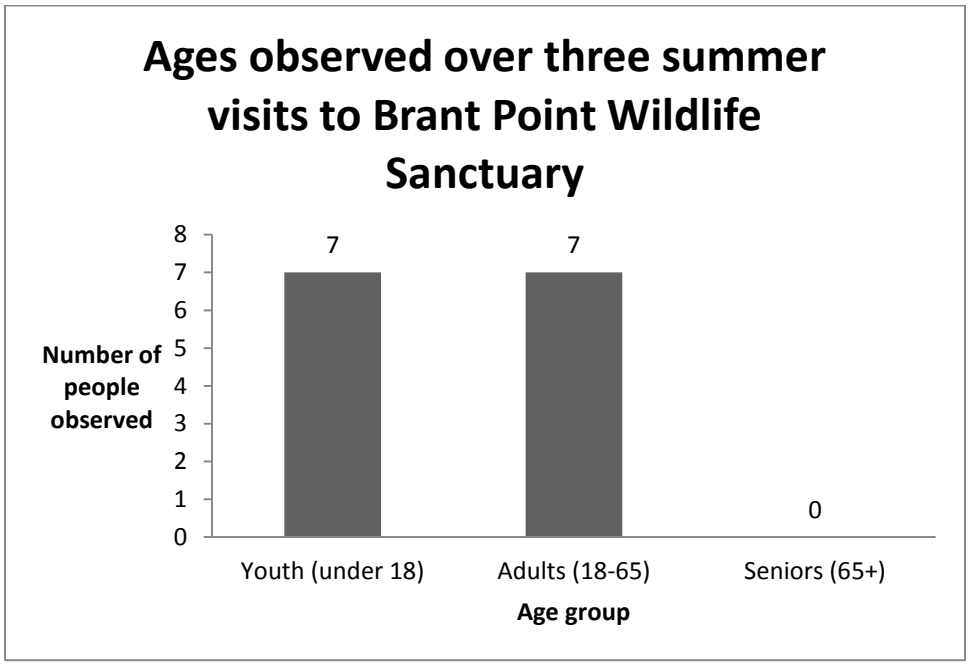
II. Field Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

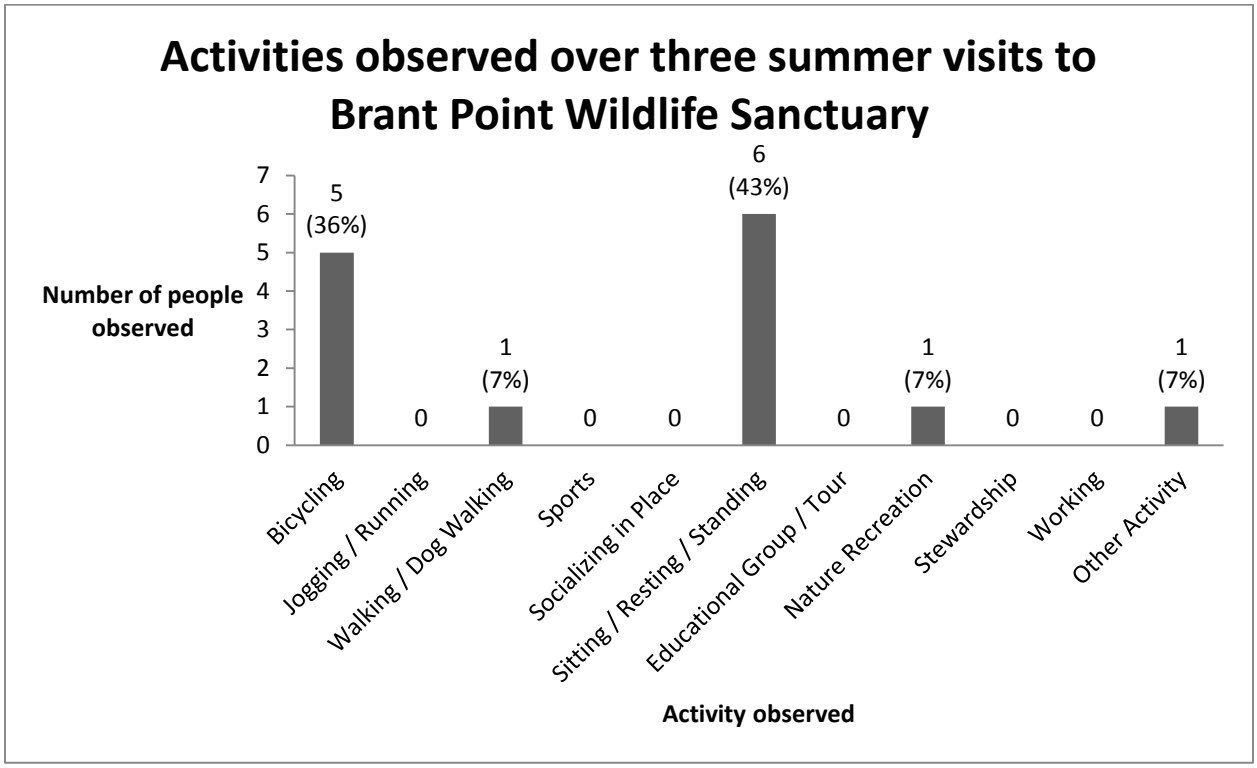


Who are they?



What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Detailed Counts

Human Activities Observed by Time of Visit and Age Group in Brant Point Wildlife Sanctuary

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling			5	**5**	3	2		**5**
Jogging / Running				**0**				**0**
Walking / Dog Walking	1			**1**		1		**1**
Sports				**0**				**0**
Educational Group / Tour				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation			1	**1**		1		**1**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting			6	**6**	4	2		**6**
Socializing in Place				**0**				**0**
Working				**0**				**0**
Other Activity		1		**1**		1		**1**
Total	**1**	**1**	**12**	**14**	**7**	**7**	0	**14**

Signs of Activity Observed

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

Sign	**Total**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	**1**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	**3**
Trails	**5**
Total	**9**

Sociability Observed by Zone

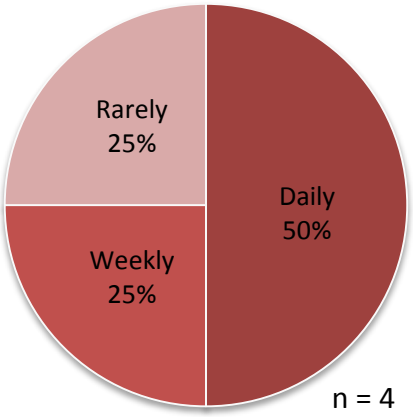
Zone	**Dogs**	**Pair (2)**	**Small Group (3-10)**	**Large Group (10+)**	**Total**
Entire Park			3	0	**3**
Total	**0**	**0**	**3**	**0**	**3**

III. Interviews with Park Users

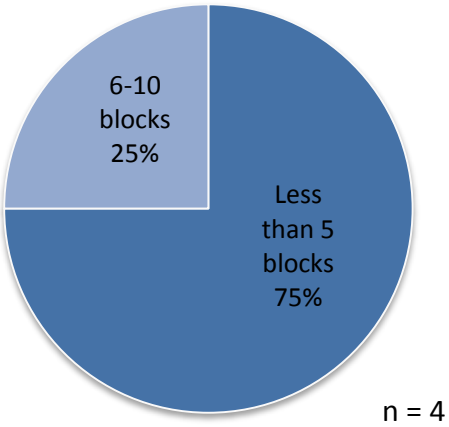
Four park users were interviewed in Brant Point Wildlife Sanctuary, of which 25% were male and 50% female (25% unidentified). All interviewees (100%) were between the ages of 18-65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 80%.

The interviewees were all local residents who live within 10 blocks of the site. It is important to note that due to the lack of people in the park, interviews were conducted on the edge of the site as well. Two of the respondents were local residents living directly adjacent to the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature-Recreation	2	50%
Relaxing	1	25%
Stewardship	1	25%
Total Respondents	**4**	

Brant Point Wildlife Sanctuary interviewees were primarily engaged in *nature recreation* (50%), particularly fishing.

One respondent said that they were *relaxing* and one was engaging in *stewardship* of their private garden on the park edge.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

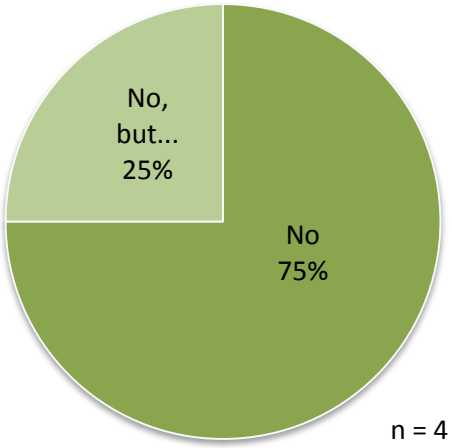
Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	3	75%
Refuge	1	25%
Total Respondents	**4**	

People chose to visit Brant Point specifically because it is a form of nearby nature that is "local", "close-by", and "convenient" (*local*, 75%). In addition, one respondent said that the site is relaxing (*refuge*, 25%) to him.

Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as *social connectors* between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. All four of the respondents said that they go to the beach or waterfront.

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and for this particular site, no respondents identified participating in stewardship groups. However, one respondent said that she *used to do so in the past*, when her son was younger.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

QUEENS: Broad Channel American Park Profile

Zone Names
Ballfields
Beach
North Meadow

I. Park Narrative

Broad Channel American Park is a 17-acre park[1], including 6 acres of Forever Wild natural areas that were assessed and 38 acres of wetlands inaccessible by foot and therefore were not assessed. The park is located on the island of Broad Channel in the middle of Jamaica Bay.

Compared to other sites that figure in the daily lives of users, this park is visited primarily on a weekly basis (53%) and less frequently than that (40%). As well, this is not a local, neighborhood park for most users, as 93% of respondents traveled more than 20 blocks to reach the site. The park consists of an interior sports and recreation area with baseball diamond, fields, and courts, surrounded by a beach and wetland. The baseball field is more actively used than the basketball court; and several interviewees were met while watching a Little League game. One user was seen on multiple visits re-appropriating the open field as a golf driving range.

Uniquely, many of the park users interviewed are seeking out this spot as a site for *nature recreation*—particularly fishing—and as a place of *refuge* and *spiritual practice*. One respondent in particular gave rich detail about his history of place attachment with the park, including 30 to 40 years of coming to the site to fish—both alone and with friends. A teenager who visited the site to fish returned with friends for a more secluded outdoor hangout spot. Another adult male said that he has been coming to the park daily for 3 to 4 years to photograph the sunset every evening. Sport boats and canoes and kayaks were visible in the water. Also present were substantial signs of Hindu ritual offerings (including fruit, flowers, coconuts, and flags along the beach). A few families were observed making offerings and bathing in the water, and one man agreed to be interviewed. He shared the origin and timing of these rituals that worship the water and told us that he always cleans up the non-biodegradable parts of the offerings. He is originally from Guyana and noted that many people of Hindu faith in the Jamaica Bay area are Guyanese.

The surrounding neighborhood edge showed substantial signs of Sandy damage and rebuilding, including entirely new homes—which is not surprising given the flooding that occurred throughout Broad Channel. Telephone poles along the edge were marked with "Stars of Hope" – a symbol of rebuilding post-Sandy. The crew had an encounter with a neighborhood resident who had a strong sense of 'ownership' of the park, and gave insight about its changing uses over the years and the impact of the recent influx of Rockaway Beach users.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

II. Field Observations

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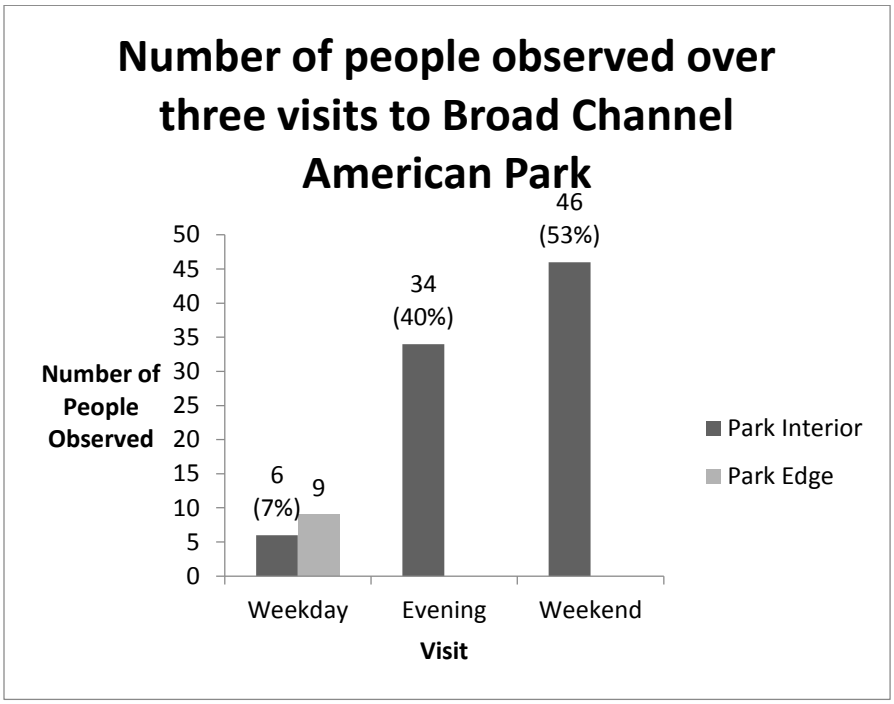
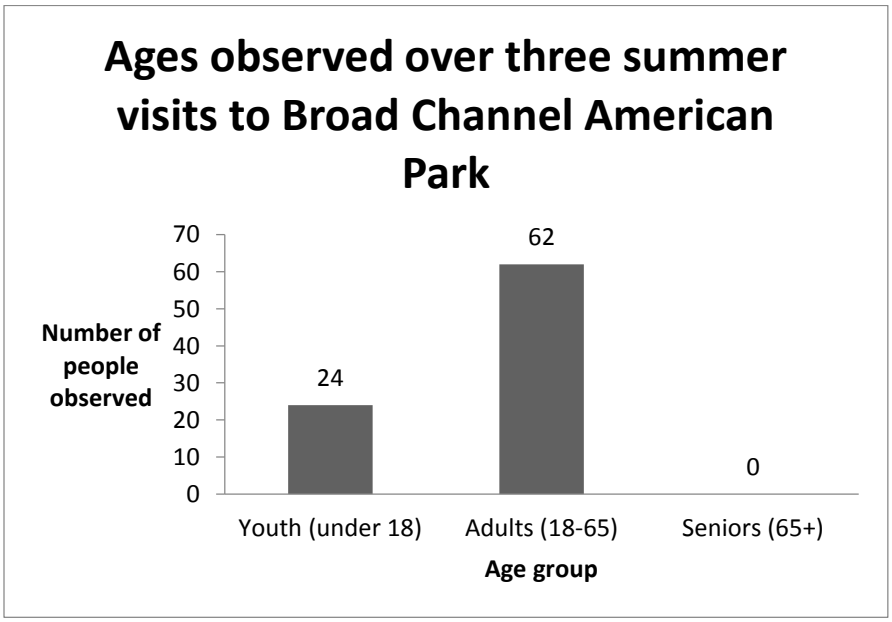
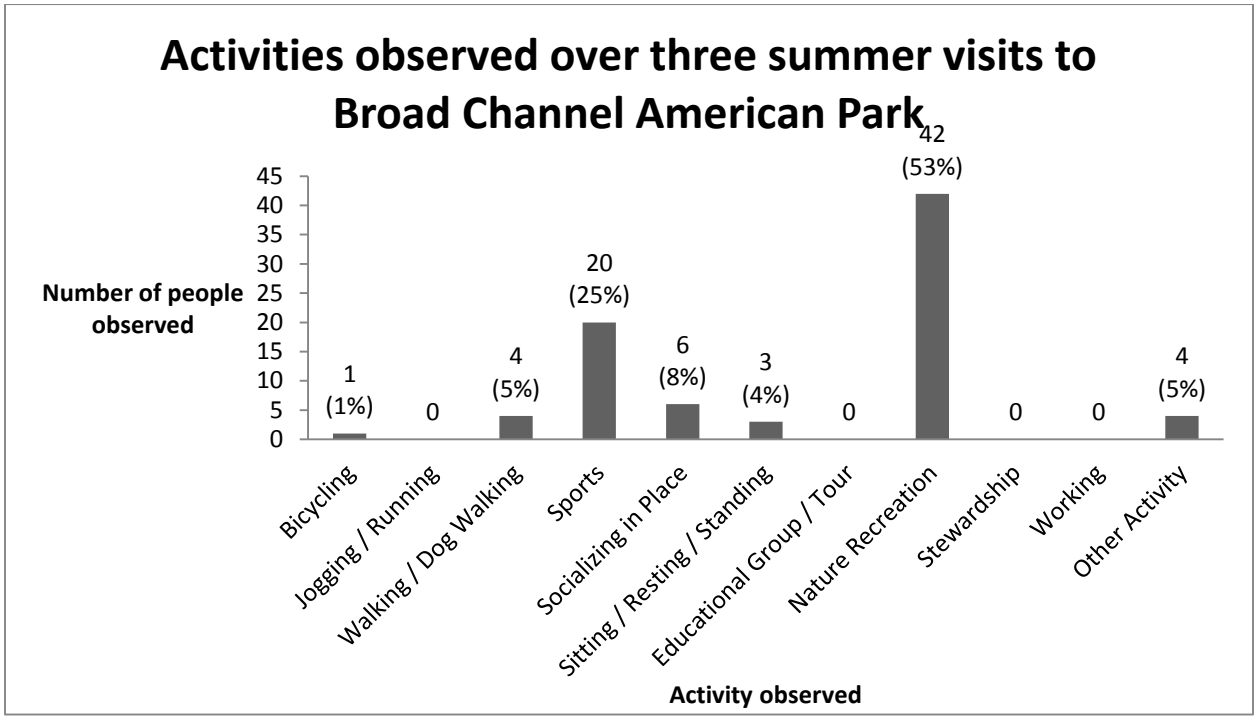


Who are they?



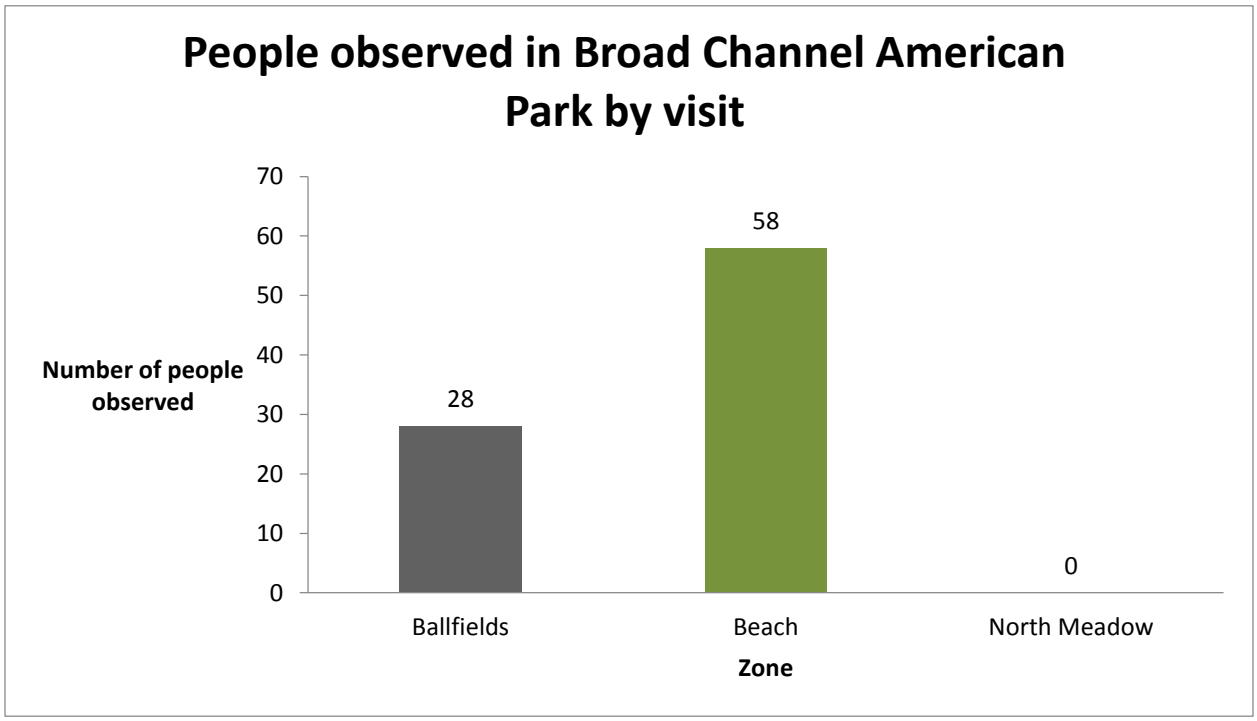
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior

Human Activities Observed by Zone, Time of Visit, and Age Group in Broad Channel American Park. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone				Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Ballfields	Beach	North Meadow	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling		1		**1**			1	**1**	1			**1**
Jogging / Running				**0**				**0**				**0**
Walking / Dog Walking	3	1		**4**		3	1	**4**	1	3		**4**
Sports	20			**20**		20		**20**	10	10		**20**
Educational Group / Tour				**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation	1	47		**48**	6	15	27	**48**	7	41		**48**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing		3		**3**			3	**3**	3			**3**
Socializing in Place	4	2		**0**		4	2	**0**		6		**0**
Working				**6**				**6**				**6**
Other Activity				**4**		4	2	**4**	2	2		**4**
Total	**28**	**58**	**0**	**86**	**6**	**46**	**34**	**86**	**24**	**62**	**0**	**86**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)			
Sign	**Ballfields**	**Beach**	**North Meadow**	**Total**
Fire Pit		1	1	**2**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	14			**14**
Substantial Dumping or Debris		7		**7**
Other (Note)*	2	9		**11**
Other Signs, Flyers & Stickers	1			**1**
Sitting Places & Dining		3		**3**
Sporting / Play Equipment	1	3		**4**
Trails		9		**9**
Total	**18**	**32**	**1**	**51**

*Crews were instructed to take note of any other noteworthy or unique observations that stood out to them in each park. For Broad Channel American, other signs of activity included Sandy debris, religious ritual debris, and tags marking restoration plots in the wetland area.

Sociability Observed by Zone

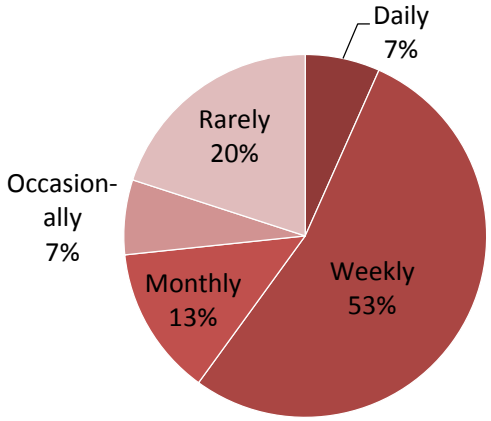
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Ballfields	1	1	2	1	**5**
Beach		7	8		**15**
North Meadow					**0**
Total	**1**	**8**	**10**	**1**	**20**

III. Interviews with Park Users

Fifteen park users were interviewed in Broad Channel American Park, of which 67% were male and 33% female. Ninety-three percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and none (0%) were estimated to be over the age of 65 (7% unidentified). We did not interview park users under the age of 18. Interview response rate was 88%.

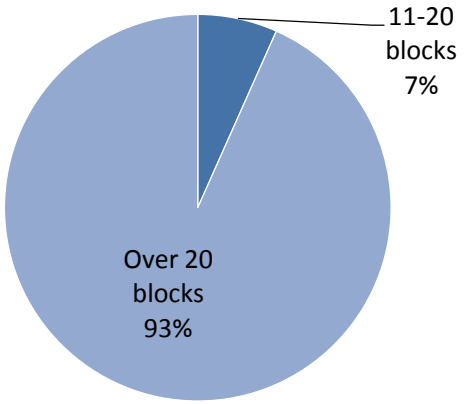
Compared to other sites that figure in the daily lives of users, this park is visited primarily on a weekly basis (53%) and less frequently than that (40%). As well, this is not a local, neighborhood park for most users, as 93% of respondents traveled more than 20 blocks to reach the site.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 15

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 15

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activity		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature-Recreation	6	40%
Socializing	5	33%
Sports-Recreation	2	13%
Arts and Culture	1	7%
Kids	1	7%
Nature-Outdoors	1	7%
Spiritual	1	7%
Total Respondents	**15**	

The most common activity that respondents were engaging in at Broad Channel American Park was *nature recreation* (40%), particularly fishing and bathing. *Socializing* – including talking with friends (while fishing or watching baseball) was mentioned by 33% of respondents. Participating in or spectating *sports* was mentioned by 13% of interviewees. Although the research crews did not observe a cricket being played in this park, one person mentioned large weekend crowds often attend cricket matches.

Other less common activities were identified by just one respondent each, including: photography (*arts-culture*), playing with *kids*, interacting with *nature and the outdoors*, and participating in Hindu *spiritual* practices.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature-Outdoors	7	47%
Refuge	7	47%
Amenities	4	27%
Local	4	27%
Social ties	4	27%
Enjoyment	1	7%
Place Attachment	1	7%
Total Respondents	**15**	

The most common reason people choose to visit Broad Channel American Park is because of specific material attributes of being *outdoors in nature* (47%), including breeze, sun, and water. Others seek out the sense of *refuge* (47%) that comes from being outside, using language like calm, health, peace, tranquility, solitude, and serenity. It is clear that for the fishers and bathers on the beach, they are seeking out this park as a nature recreation spot.

Users are attracted to the *amenities* (27%), which include the physical features and park infrastructure. Others note that it is an important *local* park and form of nearby nature (27%). Some reflected on the park as a space to which they have *social ties* (27%) through family and friends (e.g. living nearby).

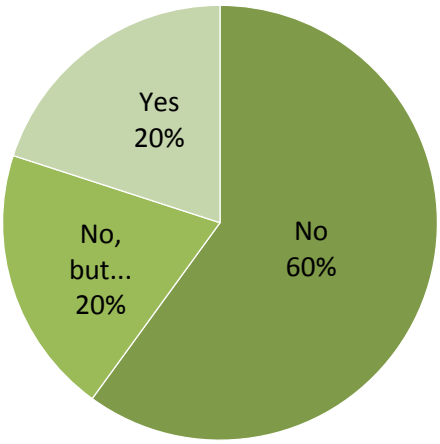
Finally, one respondent simply identified *enjoyment* of the site, using language like "it's beautiful". And one gave rich detail about his history of *place attachment* with the park, including 30-40 years of coming to the site to fish.

Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit. The most commonly visited sites for Broad Channel American Park users were beach-waterfront areas (60%); the full list of responses is shown at right.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Beach-Waterfront	9	60%
Out of Town	3	20%
Nowhere Else	2	13%
No Response	1	7%
Playground	1	7%
Sports	1	7%
Total Respondents	**15**	

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 15

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement. In Broad Channel American, three respondents (20%) directly identified as doing so. For those that did say they participate in stewardship, two specific groups were named below, and both are international membership organizations to which people donate money. One other respondent did not give a specific name of a group, but identified the type of group in which she participates as a parks clean-up group through her school.

No, but…

Finally, in addition to outright replies of 'yes' and 'no' three respondents answered that they take part in *self-led stewardship* outside the context of a group, by helping to clean up after themselves in the park.

Named Stewardship Groups

- Wildlife Conservation Society
- World Wildlife Fund

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
QUEENS: Brookville Park Profile

Zone Names	
Ballfield	Lawn & Recreation
Courts & Play Area	Natural Area
Lake & Lawn	

I. Park Narrative

Brookville Park is a 64-acre site[1], including two acres of Forever Wild natural area located on South Conduit Avenue in Queens. It is bordered by Idlewild Park to the South and the Belt Parkway to the North.

The site is programmed for a range of uses, and includes natural area forest and wetlands as well as sports and recreation courts and fields. It is a highly used park, though almost all park users were observed in the northern section of the park, across landscaped lawn and recreation areas. The southern end of the park contains a ball field and natural area; very few people were observed using these areas.

Many of the park users were engaged in physical activity, including sports and other exercise. Notably, the baseball and football fields were well-maintained and appeared to be cared for by local community groups, including the Rosedale Jets football team. In addition, a baseball field was locked and seemed not to be open for public use. Brookville Park also contains a large lake, where we observed users engaged in crabbing near the bridge. While we observed the lake to be murky, park users noted that it was much more polluted in the past 15 years, and has shown improvement. Overall, users expressed high enjoyment of the park, but many offered that it could still be renovated and better maintained. There was a high degree of interest in the social assessment crews, with 29 unsolicited, positive greetings coming from park users. The field research crews also enjoyed the experience of being in this well-used and shade-filled park.

The surrounding neighborhood showed signs of stewardship, including maintained lawns and private gardens, stewarded street trees, and an active, tended community garden on parks property with vegetables growing. Crew members and park users alike expressed concerned about the busy traffic on Brookville Boulevard, particularly given the many youth living in the area and using the park. The edge of the natural area showed signs of illegal construction dumping and post-Sandy repair. While this edge is mostly wooded and fenced, the crew did find a small trail into the interior salt marsh.

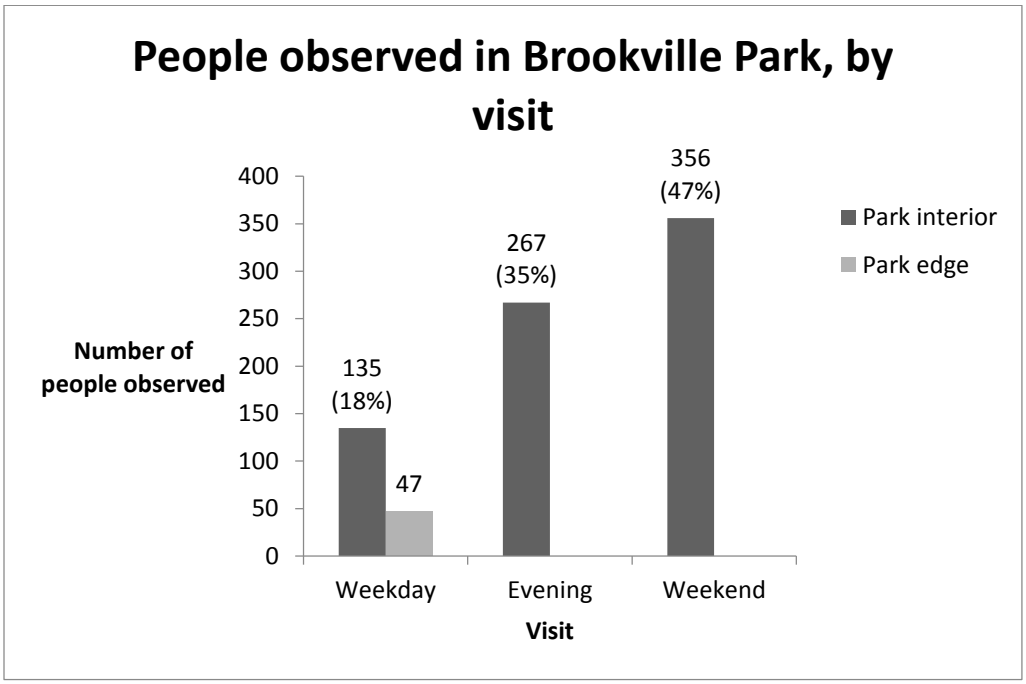
Most of the users encountered in the park were African American, Caribbean, Guyanese, Indian, and South Asian. The park reveals the legacy of prior users that have moved on, as there are overgrown and abandoned bocce courts that once served an Italian American population. The park plays a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 81% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It also serves as a local resource, with 42% of users traveling from less than 10 blocks away, and 39% of users said they choose to visit Brookville Park because it is serves as their local park. At the same time, the park is drawing people from a distance, with 43% of users traveling over 20 blocks to reach the park.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

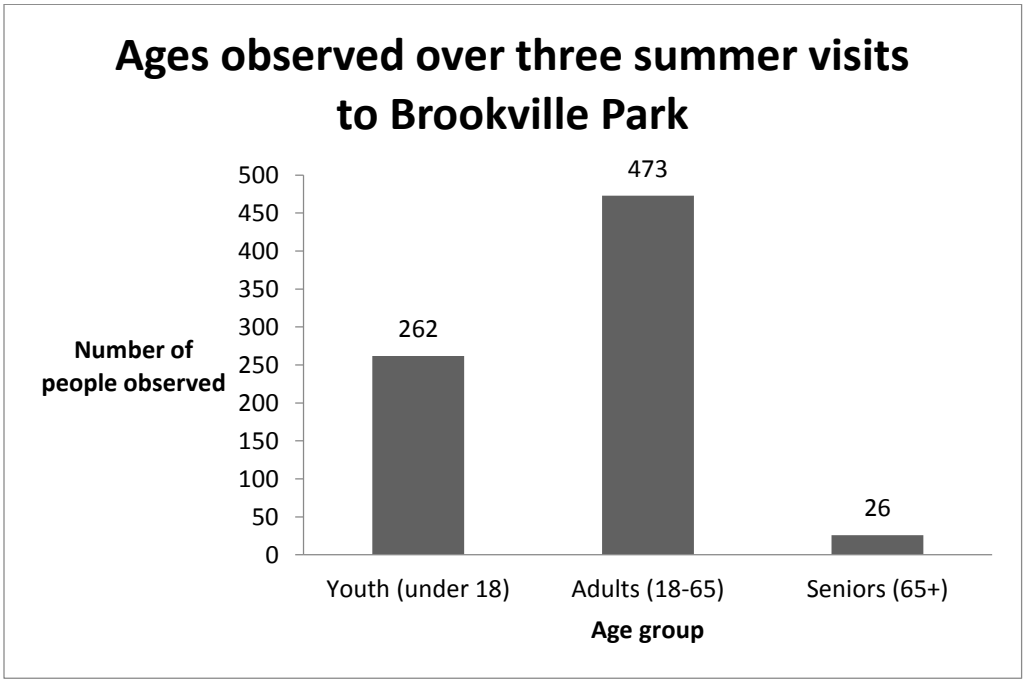
II. Field Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

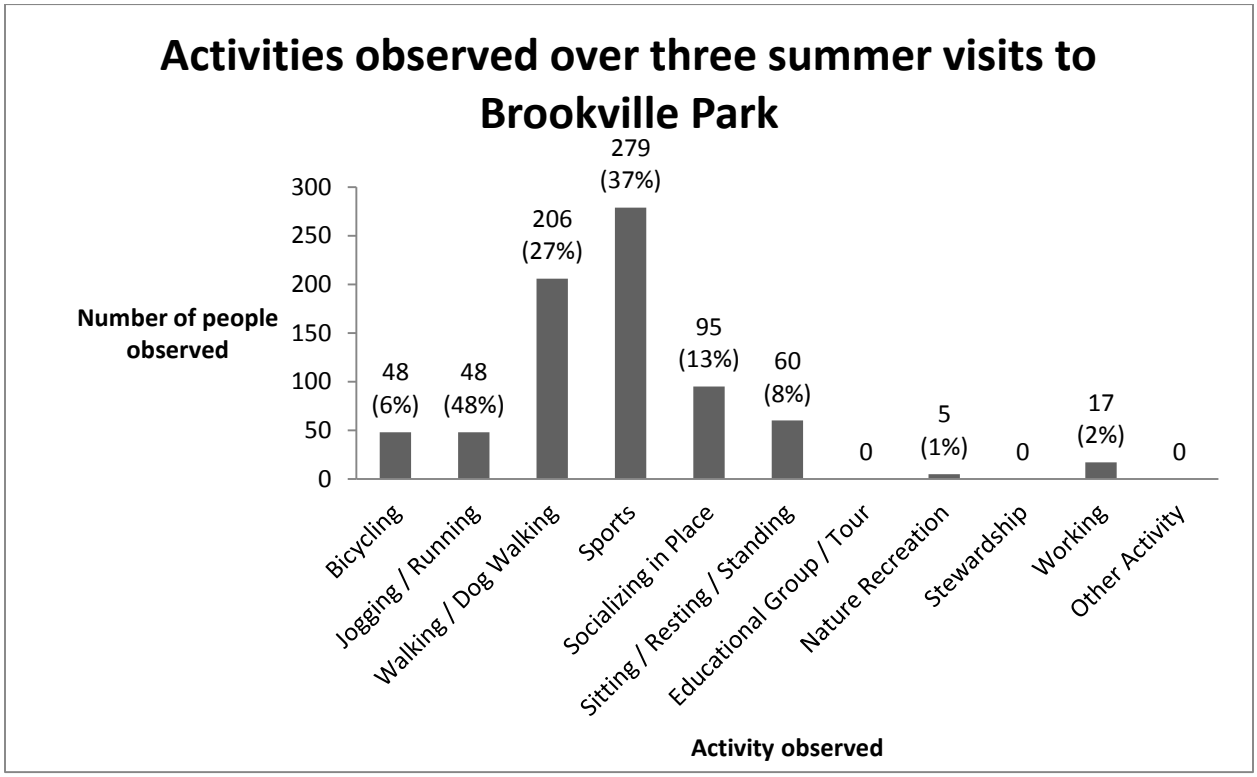


Who are they?



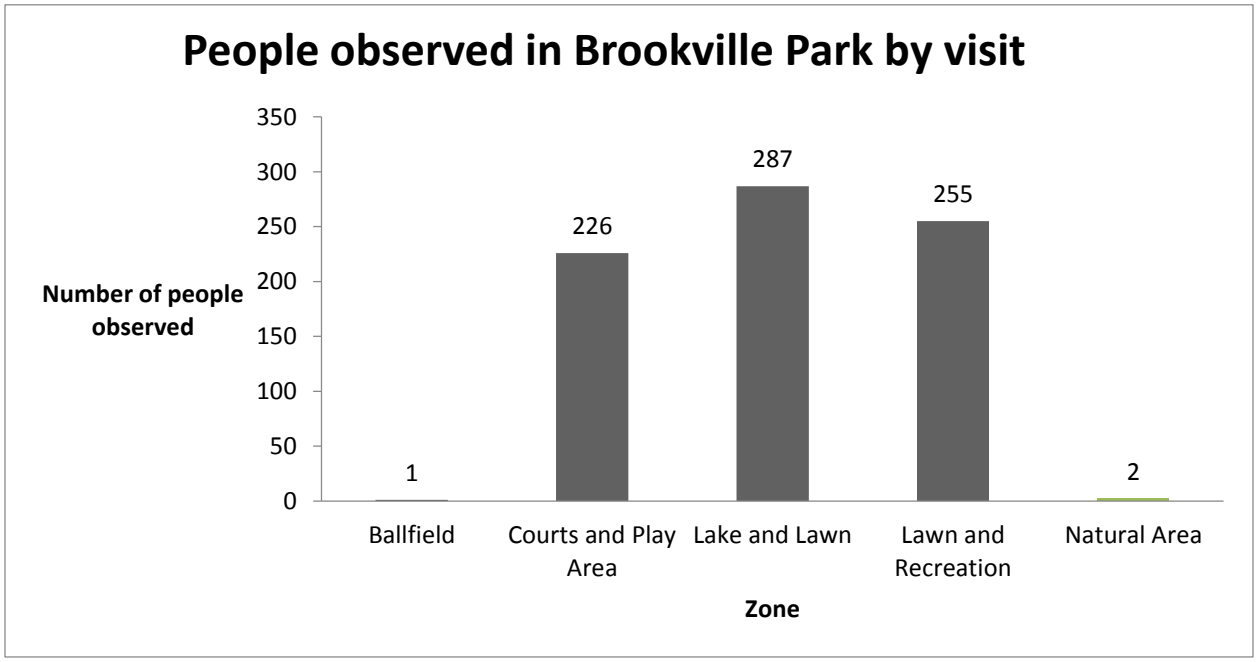
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Human Activities Observed by Zone, Time of Visit, and Age Group in Brookville Park. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone						Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Ballfield	Courts & Play Area	Lake & Lawn	Lawn & Recreation	Natural Area	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling		7	37	4		**48**	7	23	18	**48**	10	37	1	**48**
Jogging / Running		4	42	2		**48**	12	26	10	**48**	1	45	2	**48**
Walking / Dog Walking		13	149	44		**206**	49	98	59	**206**	42	155	9	**206**
Sports		130	12	137		**279**	54	116	109	**279**	194	81	4	**279**
Educational Group / Tour						**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation			5			**5**		2	3	**5**		5		**5**
Stewardship						**0**				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing		21	12	27	1	**61**	11	28	22	**61**	6	49	6	**61**
Socializing in Place		45	28	22		**95**	2	48	45	**95**	9	82	4	**95**
Working	1	6	2	9	1	**19**	2	15	2	**19**		19		**19**
Other Activity						**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**1**	**226**	**287**	**245**	**2**	**761**	**137**	**356**	**268**	**761**	**262**	**473**	**26**	**761**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)					
Sign	**Ballfield**	**Courts & Play Area**	**Lake & Lawn**	**Lawn & Recreation**	**Natural Area**	**Total**
Damaged / Vandalized Building					2	**2**
Garden in Park			1		2	**3**
Graffiti, Art, Murals		2		5		**7**
Substantial Dumping or Debris			2		7	**9**
Other (Note)*	2	1	4	2	5	**14**
Other Signs, Flyers & Stickers	6	1		3		**10**
Sporting / Play Equipment					2	**2**
Trails		1	2	6	10	**19**
Total	**8**	**5**	**9**	**16**	**28**	**66**

*Crews were instructed to take note of any other noteworthy or unique observations that stood out to them in each park. For Brookville Park, other signs of activity included carvings on trees, Sandy debris, and locked gates at the baseball field.

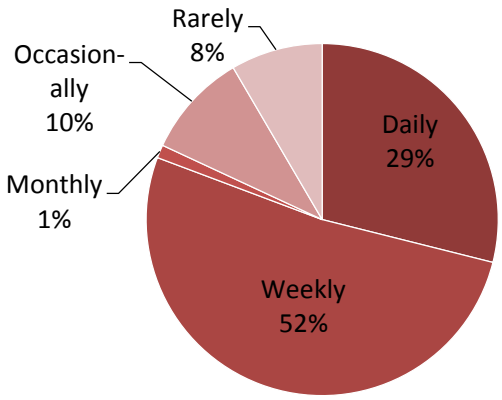
Sociability Observed by Zone

Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Ballfield					**0**
Lawn and Recreation	2	15	13	2	**32**
Lake and Lawn	9	36	8		**53**
Courts and Play Area	1	6	12	1	**20**
Natural Area					**0**
Total	**12**	**57**	**33**	**3**	**105**

III. Interviews with Park Users

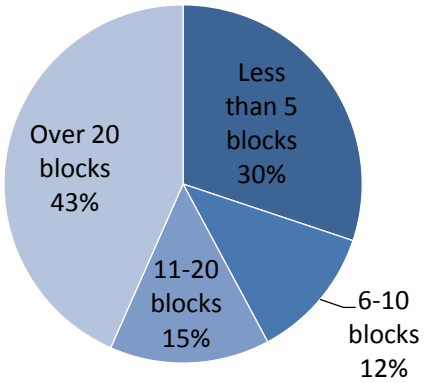
Eighty-three park users were interviewed in Brookville Park, of which 56% were male and 42% female (2% unidentified). Eighty-two percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 17% were estimated to be over the age of 65 (1% unidentified). We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The majority of users visit regularly, with 81% visiting daily or weekly. Users are fairly evenly split between those coming from less than 10 blocks away (42%) and those traveling more than 20 blocks (43%). The response rate for interviews was 90%.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 83

Q.2 How how far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 83

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Sports-Recreation	29	35%
Kids	26	31%
Exercise	14	17%
Walking	12	14%
Relaxing	6	7%
Nature-Recreation	5	6%
Nature-Outdoors	5	6%
Spiritual	4	5%
Dog	3	4%
Socializing	3	4%
Arts and Culture	1	1%
Biking	1	1%
Total Respondents	**83**	

The park is being used for a range of physical activities, including *sports and recreation* (35%), *exercise* (17%), *walking* (14%), and *biking* (1%). Park users mentioned a wide assortment of sports including basketball, football, tennis, and racquetball.

It is also a place for social interaction of many forms: for *kids* to play (31%), to walk *dogs* (4%), and for *socializing*, through barbecues and picnics (4%). Youth users are prominent and include not only children, grandchildren, cousins, nieces and nephews, but also children under the care of babysitters. Clearly, the park is an attractor for use by children during the summer season when kids are out of school. (Comparing these trends with data from throughout the school-year would require additional research.)

While less common, some users engage with the park in a very different way than the sports and recreation and socializing practices described above. These users engage in *nature recreation* (6%)—particularly catching crabs and eels at the lake; this was a known crabbing spot. They also interact with the *outdoors* (6%), engage in *spiritual* practices—including ministry and meditation (5%), and participate in *arts and culture* activities—such as photography (1%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	45	39%
Amenities	23	20%
Nature-Outdoors	12	11%
Sociability	9	8%
Activity	7	6%
Refuge	6	5%
Enjoyment	5	4%
Place Attachment	4	4%
Social Ties	3	3%
Total Respondents	**83**	

The primary reason people choose to visit Brookville Park is that it is a form of nearby nature and open space (*local*, 39%). They are attracted to the *amenities* (20%), which include not only the physical features and park infrastructure, but also the quality of the amenities, the way in which they are maintained, and the size of the park. Respondents also identified specific material attributes of being *outdoors in nature* (11%), including breeze, shade, sun, and water.

Less common responses included: that the park is a space for *sociability* and social gatherings (8%) and to which they have *social ties* (3%) through family and friends and *place attachment* over time (4%) -- e.g. because of growing up nearby. Others mentioned again the unique *activities* that they could do in this site (6%)—referring back to the prior question. Others sought out the sense of *refuge* (5%) that comes from being outside, using language like calm, health, peace, tranquility, solitude, and serenity. Finally, some simply identified *enjoyment* of the site (4%), using languages like "I like it", "I love it", or noting the beauty of the site.

Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

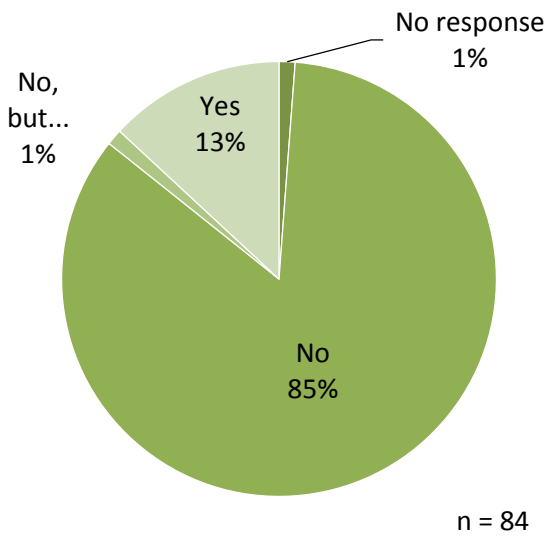
In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit.

The most commonly visited sites for Brookville Park users were *other named NYC parks* (40%). Uniquely, 29% of respondents said that they *don't really like to go anywhere else outdoors*, indicating the importance of Brookville Park in their

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park(s)	34	40%
Nowhere Else	24	29%
Beach-Waterfront	13	15%
No Answer	5	6%
Out of Town	4	5%
Amusements	2	2%
Sports	2	2%
Streets	2	2%
Amphitheater	1	1%
Greenway	1	1%
Local	1	1%
Playground	1	1%
Zoo or Aquarium	1	1%
Total Respondents	**83**	

everyday lives. Brookville Park users also commonly visit *beach and waterfront* sites (15%). See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, so it is not surprising that just 13% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Those that did say yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type of group in which they participate, both of which are listed below.

No, but…

In addition to outright replies of 'yes' and 'no' one respondent answered that they took part in stewardship through their *work*—this respondent was a retired employee of the NYC Parks Department who had a long history with the site.

Stewardship of the edge

In addition to these interviews in the interior with park users, crews encountered a number of active stewards of the park edge. Residents showed examples of proactive creation of gardens and fencing along the park edge.

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Culture	3	21%
Youth	3	21%
Civic	2	14%
Environment	2	14%
Religious	2	14%
Sports-Recreation	2	14%
Total	**14**	

Named Stewardship Groups

- Act Now Vote
- Brookville Tennis Club
- Queens Hall of Science
- Rosedale Center
- WPET Radio Station
- Youth Basketball Empowerment

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
QUEENS: Cunningham Park Profile

Zone Names	
NE Rec Area	SE Woods
NE Woods	SW Woods
NW Ballfields	SW Rec Area

I. Park Narrative

Cunningham Park in eastern Queens is a mix of Forever Wild designated areas and recreational areas. It spans 374 acres[1] and has a range of uses. The surrounding neighborhood is mostly made up of single-family homes. The park is both a neighborhood park with users coming from nearby and a destination park for mountain bikers who from all over the city for the trails.

The mountain biking trails in the NW Woods and NE Woods are well-loved by users. Bikers come from all over the city for these trails; several described them as the best in the city. Trails are well-marked and have varying levels of difficulty. Many bikers act as stewards for these trails, either picking up trash or helping to shape jumps or other features. The trails are also used for organized races, as we observed one Saturday morning. This area seems to be an asset to bikers of New York and is a center of community engagement with many bikers stopping to chat with each other and encouraging others to try new features.

Portions of Forever Wild areas that are not used for mountain biking appear to have lower usage. During all visits, we saw almost no people in these areas but did notice large amounts of litter and several homeless encampments. The trails are mostly overgrown with blazes seemingly leading to nowhere. Users who did go into these wooded areas were mountain bikers or people on paved paths.

The recreation areas of this park were bustling with sporting events on our weekend visit. During our weekday and evening visit, most ball fields were empty and unused. On Saturday, we saw many youth softball games, cricket matches, and a tennis tournament in the SW Rec Area. Most weekend park users we observed were participating in or observing sports. Many sporting events were formal with coaches and matching team uniforms. There were a few barbeques also being set up. There was a fair amount of ethnic and racial diversity among park users in the recreation areas, and we encountered people speaking Russian, Spanish, Chinese, and Tagalog.

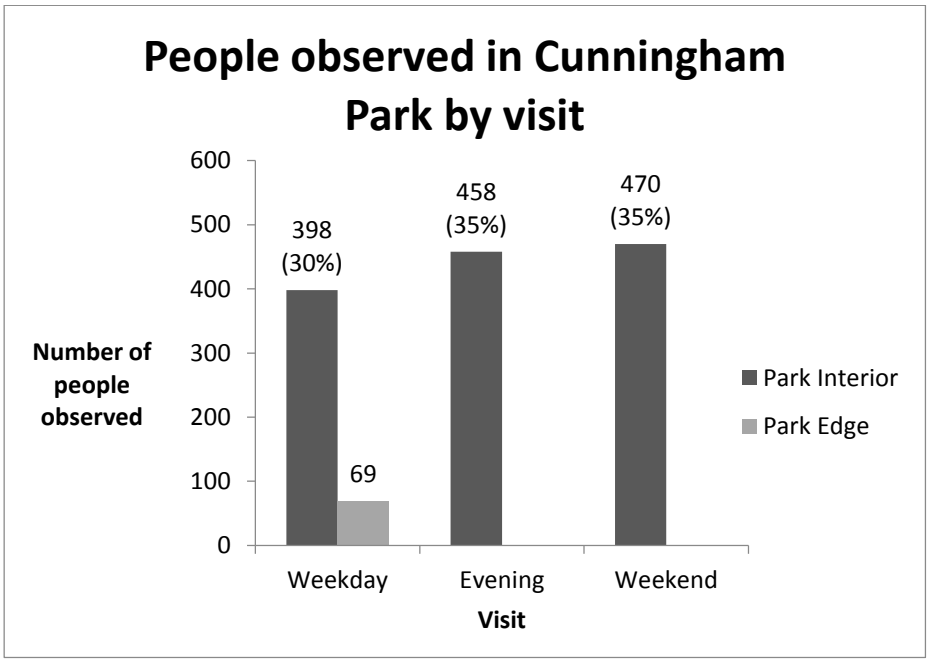
Cunningham Park acts as a place of social interaction. This can be seen in the sports being played on Saturday morning by neighborhood members and by the large mountain biking community that comes together in the park. We saw few users visiting the park alone. The wilderness areas of Cunningham have the potential to serve as resources to the community, but at the present time, are not all easily accessible to visitors.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

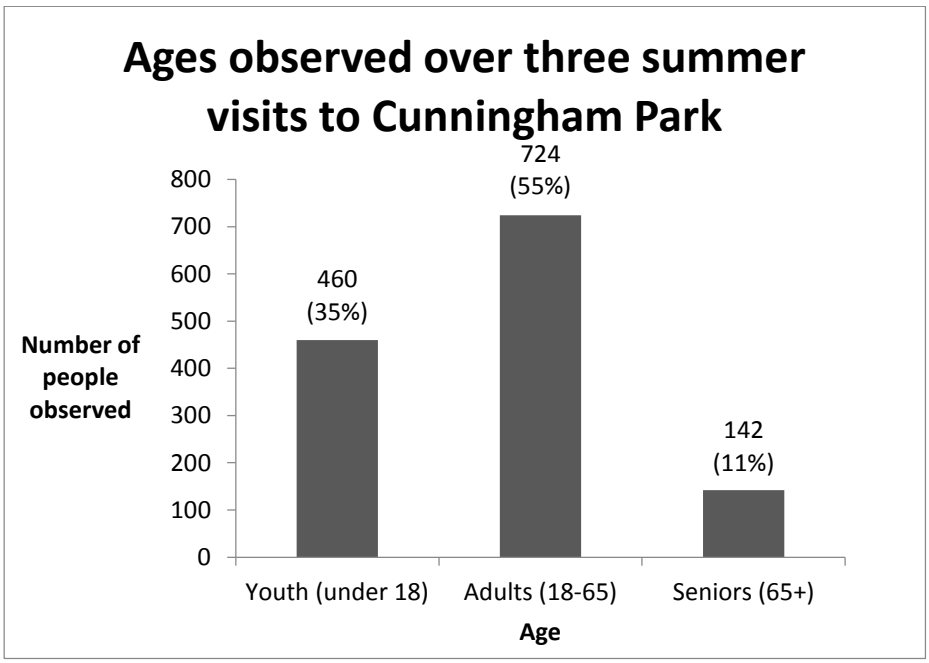
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

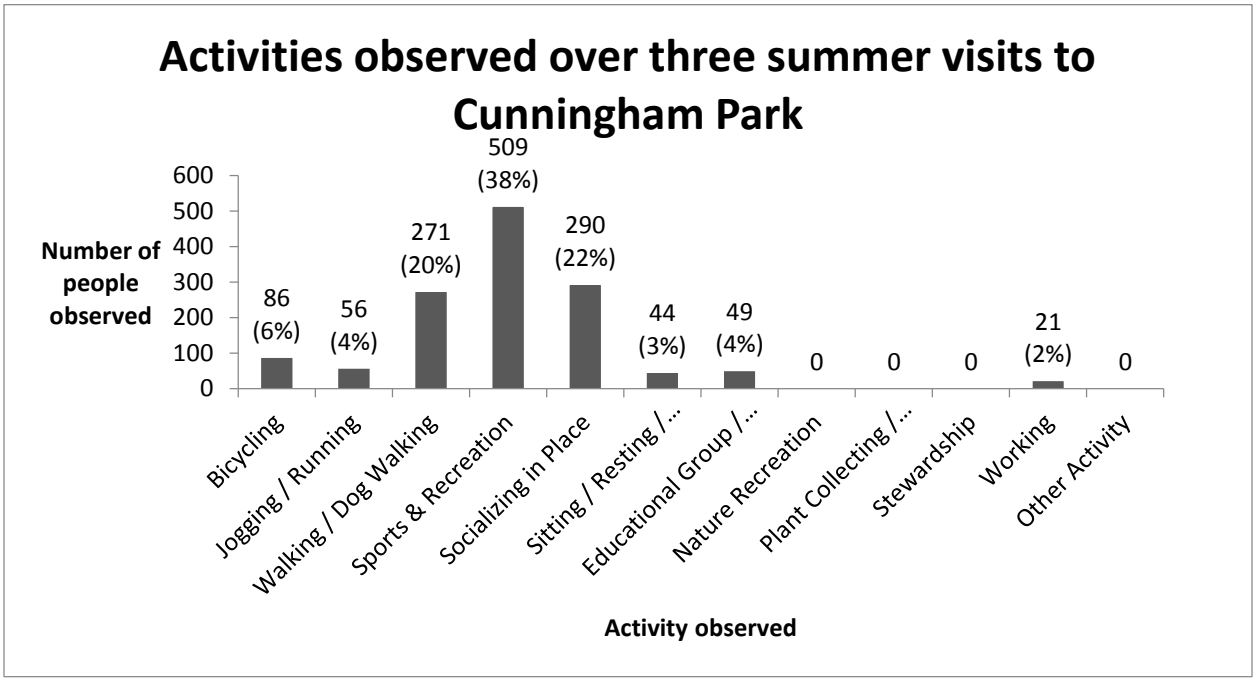


Who are they?



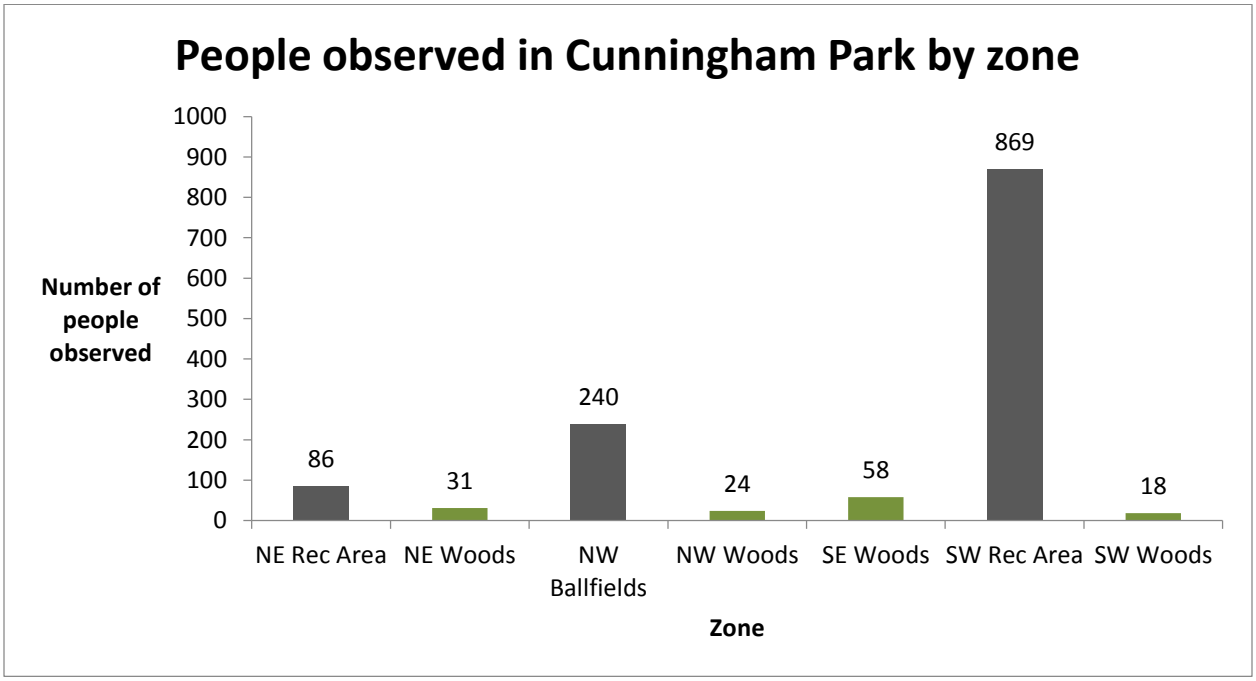
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone							
	NE Rec Area	NE Woods	NW Ballfields	NW Woods	SE Woods	SW Rec Area	SW Woods	**Total**
Bicycling	1	26	4	21	13	18	3	**86**
Jogging / Running	1				12	40	3	**56**
Walking / Dog Walking	8	5	12		33	203	10	**271**
Sports & Recreation	41		185			283		**509**
Socializing in Place	21		33	3		231	2	**290**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch	8		2			34		**44**
Educational Group / Tour						49		**49**
Nature Recreation								**0**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering								**0**
Stewardship								**0**
Working	6		4			11		**21**
Other Activity								**0**
Total	**86**	**31**	**240**	**24**	**58**	**869**	**18**	**1326**

Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by time of visit and age group

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	22	35	29	**86**	15	68	3	**86**
Jogging / Running	13	29	14	**56**	22	32	2	**56**
Walking / Dog Walking	105	90	76	**271**	56	174	41	**271**
Sports & Recreation	111	138	260	**509**	243	207	59	**509**
Socializing in Place	77	141	72	**290**	88	176	26	**290**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch	17	17	10	**44**	1	32	11	**44**
Educational Group / Tour	42	7		**49**	33	16		**49**
Nature Recreation				**0**				**0**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering				**0**				**0**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**
Working	11	1	9	**21**	2	19		**21**
Other Activity				**0**				**0**
Total	**398**	**458**	**470**	**1326**	**460**	**724**	**142**	**1326**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zones (in alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)							
Sign	NE Rec Area	NE Woods	NW Ballfields	NW Woods	SE Woods	SW Rec Area	SW Woods	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box								**0**
Damaged / Vandalized Property								**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area		1					2	**3**
Fire pit				3		7	3	**13**
Garden in Park						1		**1**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	1	2		2			1	**6**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places	2	4			1	10	7	**24**
Informal Trails		9	1	7	6	7	18	**48**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol								**0**
Other Sign		1		2			12	**15**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers		3		3	2	10	6	**24**
Substantial Dumping or Debris					3		4	**7**
Total	**3**	**20**	**1**	**17**	**12**	**35**	**53**	**141**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Cunningham Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of a mountain bike obstacle course and a 'hangout'.

Sociability Observed by Zone

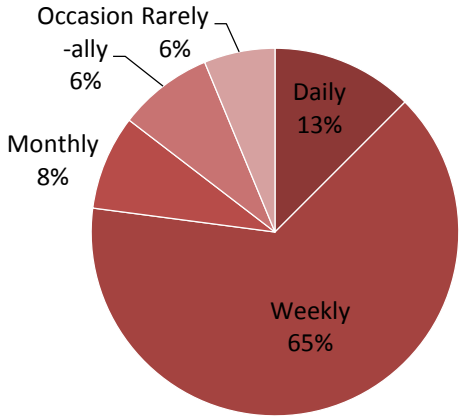
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
NE Rec Area		7	5	1	**13**
NE Woods		3	3		**6**
NW Ballfields	2	4	2	8	**16**
NW Woods		2	3		**5**
SE Woods	1	1			**2**
SW Rec Area	26	82	60	8	**176**
SW Woods	1	1	1		**3**
Total	**30**	**100**	**74**	**17**	**221**

III. Interviews with Park Users

Forty-eight park users were interviewed in Cunningham Park, of which 69% were male and 31% female. Seventy-seven percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 23% were estimated to be over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 70%.

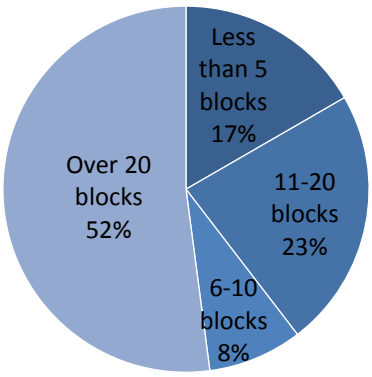
The park plays a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 78% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It serves as a local resource, with 40% of users traveling less than 10 blocks away, and draws people from a distance, with 52% of users traveling over 20 blocks to reach the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 48

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 48

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Kids	10	21%
Relaxing	9	19%
Walking	8	17%
Socializing	8	17%
Dog	6	13%
Exercise	4	8%
Arts & culture	4	8%
Sports & recreation	3	6%
Biking	3	6%
Working	2	4%
Nature recreation	1	2%
Community program	1	2%
Nature-outdoors	1	2%
Total Respondents	**48**	

Cunningham Park is an important social space for many respondents: many were in the park with *kids* (21%) or *socializing* (17%) at barbecues, birthday parties or picnics. At the same time, many respondents found the park to be a good place to *relax* (19%), often alone. Many park users were doing some form of physical activity: *walking* (17%), *dog walking* (17%) *exercising* (8%), *sports and recreation* (6%), or *biking* (6%). Some were participating in *art or cultural* activities (8%) such as singing or reading. Others were *working* (4%): one respondent was coaching, and one was babysitting. One respondent was involved in *nature recreation* (2%) and was hiking while another was in the park for a *community program* (2%), specifically a concert. Finally, one respondent was *enjoying* the outdoors (2%) and "getting sun."

"The mountain bikers with whom we spoke talked about how these were the best trails in New York City and several of them have traveled from Long Island and Brooklyn. They all care deeply about this place, and two men with whom we spoke talked about how they always pick up after themselves and try to take care of the space."

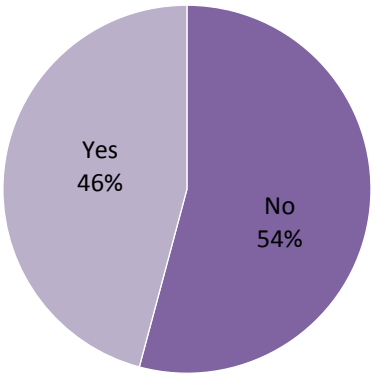
Vignette from field researcher's notes on Cunningham Park

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	24	50%
Activity	8	17%
Place attachment	7	15%
Enjoyment	6	13%
Quality	5	10%
Amenities	5	10%
Access	5	10%
Refuge	4	8%
Nature-outdoors	3	6%
Social ties	2	4%
No response	1	2%
Explore	1	2%
Total Respondents	**48**	

Cunningham Park is an important *local* resource: 50% of respondents were in the park because it was nearby, and many respondents also had a history of *place attachment* (15%) with the park because they had grown up or are living in the neighborhood. Many respondents also came because of a range of *activities* (17%) offered in the park such as a tennis tournament, a ballgame, a concert, exercising, and many more. Some respondents simply *enjoyed* the park (13%) and/or remarked on the *quality* of the park (10%), citing that it was "huge" and "clean." *Amenities* were also a draw (10%), and users liked the bike trails, the open field, and the bathrooms. Respondents also mentioned *accessibility* (10%) and convenience as a reason for come to the park. Cunningham Park is also seen as a *refuge* (8%) for some respondents who described it as "quiet," "safe," a place that "keeps me physically and mentally active." A few respondents came to the park to *enjoy the outdoors* (6%) or because they had *social ties* to family or friends who lived nearby (4%). Finally, one respondent had come to *explore* the park because he had heard about it online (2%).

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 48

Cunningham Park includes a number of wooded, wetland and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. Nearly half of respondents interviewed said yes (46%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas.

Out of the respondents of who said yes, the majority of respondents participate in physical activity in natural areas: *walking* (64%), *biking* (27%), and *exercising* (14%) were common activities. Respondents also spent time *engaging in nature recreation* (23%), such as watching the scenery. One respondent noted *prior engagement* (5%) with natural areas in the past. Another respondent was *concerned* (5%) about "weird stuff" occurring in natural areas. Finally, one respondent liked to look for mushrooms with her *kids* (5%).

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	14	64%
Biking	6	27%
Nature recreation	5	23%
Exercise	3	14%
Prior engagement	1	5%
Concern	1	5%
Kids	1	5%
"Yes" Respondents	**22**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Preference	15	58%
Potential	8	31%
Fear-Concern	3	12%
"No" Respondents	**26**	

Twenty-six respondents (54%) did not go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, most *preferred to go to other parts of the park* (58%). We classified some respondents as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (31%) because they were previously unaware that these areas existed or did not have a specific reason for not visiting those areas. A few expressed *concern* (12%) about being in natural areas because of ticks, mosquitoes, or their children's safety.

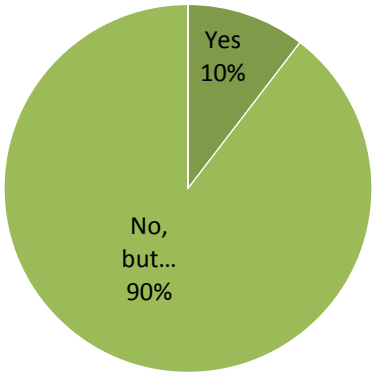
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	22	46%
Beach-waterfront	17	35%
Out of town	13	27%
Nowhere else	8	17%
Sports	1	2%
Urban farm	1	2%
Dog park	1	2%
Community facility	1	2%
Nature preserve	1	2%
Total Respondents	**48**	

The most commonly visited site types for Cunningham Park users were other *named NYC parks* (46%), such Fort Totten Park. *Beach and waterfront areas* (35%), such as Jones Beach State Park, were also popular. Many respondents also traveled *out of town* (27%) to places on Long Island. Some respondents *don't go anywhere else outdoors* (17%), indicating the importance of Cunningham Park in their everyday lives. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 48

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and only 10% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Some of those who said "yes" also specifically named groups and/or offered the general type(s) of group in which they participate (listed below). Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

At one end of the spectrum, a number of respondents articulated *pro-environmental beliefs* (n = 3), such as donating to environmental groups, or participating in *self-led stewardship* (n = 2) outside the context of a group like helping to clean up the park. One respondent participated in *other forms of civic engagement* and was involved with his church.

Most respondents had *no specific reason* for not participating in stewardship (n = 19). Others *lacked awareness* (n = 2) of groups or opportunities to participate in stewardship, and some were *self-critical* (n = 4) and felt embarrassed or apologetic about not engaging in stewardship. Two respondents cited that they were at stages in their *life course* – retirement – that prevented them from participating. One respondent had *social ties* to family members who participated in stewardship, and another had participated in stewardship in the past. Finally, some respondents said that they had *no time* (n = 11) or had "never thought of [stewardship]" (n = 1).

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Civic	1	50%
Religious	1	50%
Total	**2**	**100%**

Named Stewardship Groups

- Sudanese American Community

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
QUEENS: Dubos Point Wildlife Sanctuary Profile

[Dubos Point Wildlife Sanctuary is a small park of continuous character, which was not subdivided into zones for the purposes of this research. All observations are, therefore, presented together.]

I. Park Narrative

Dubos Point Wildlife Sanctuary is an approximately 32-acre park[1] on the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens that is designated entirely as a natural area. The site is largely unused by humans and is primarily a wetland site with vegetation that reaches up to 10 feet high at times. When the tide comes in, the interior of the park is essentially inaccessible. When tide is out, there is a well-worn informal trail through the marsh grasses. The edge of the park appears like a street end parking/access point.

While it is not heavily used in terms of the number of people on site, the engagement that is occurring is uniquely focused on nature recreation – including fishing and simply viewing the water. Pleasure boats and waterfowl can easily be seen from the site. On the weekend visit, a family was observed releasing a turtle into the water, while a pair of bicyclists stopped to observe the release and examine the site. Interviews conducted on-site indicate that users seek out the site as a place to relax in nature and interact with the water. We found an example of deep place attachment and local ecological knowledge. One user works in Far Rockaway and drives to the site – visiting every day before his shift for over 20 years. He comes to the site to fish, knows when other people will be on the site, is familiar with the tides, and brings his kids to the park. All of the people interviewed were Guyanese or West Indian—two of the women were observed wearing scrubs and the crew presumed them to be health care workers on a break. Half of interviewees mentioned using the park on a daily or weekly basis, and 75% of users traveled less than 10 blocks to arrive at the sanctuary.

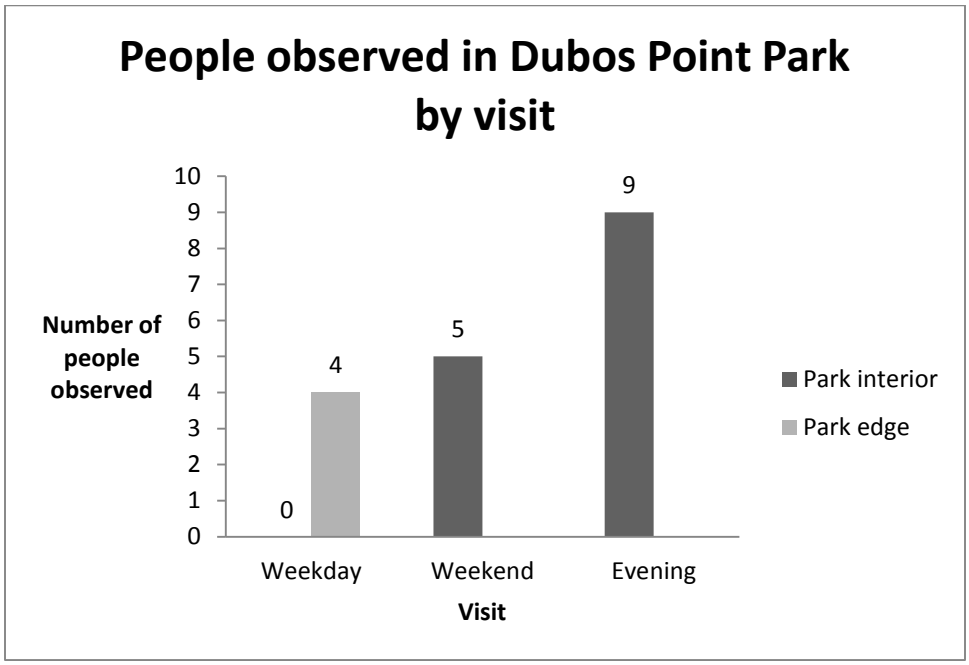
In terms of the condition of the site, crews observed dumping, damaged barriers, marine debris, and Sandy debris on the site. The adjacent residential homes also showed substantial signs of Sandy damage and repair.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp files, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

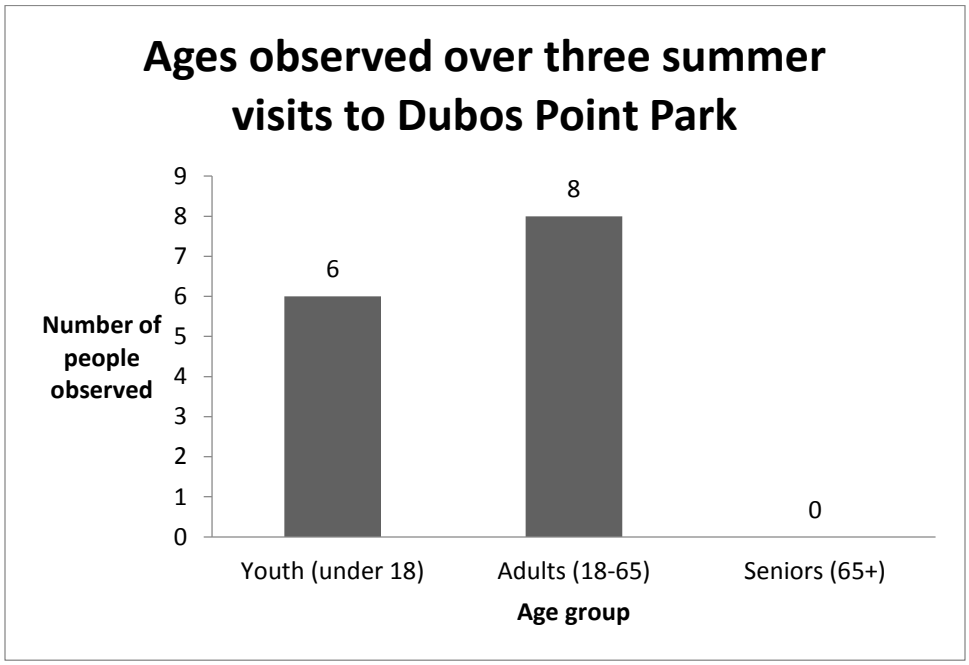
II. Field Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

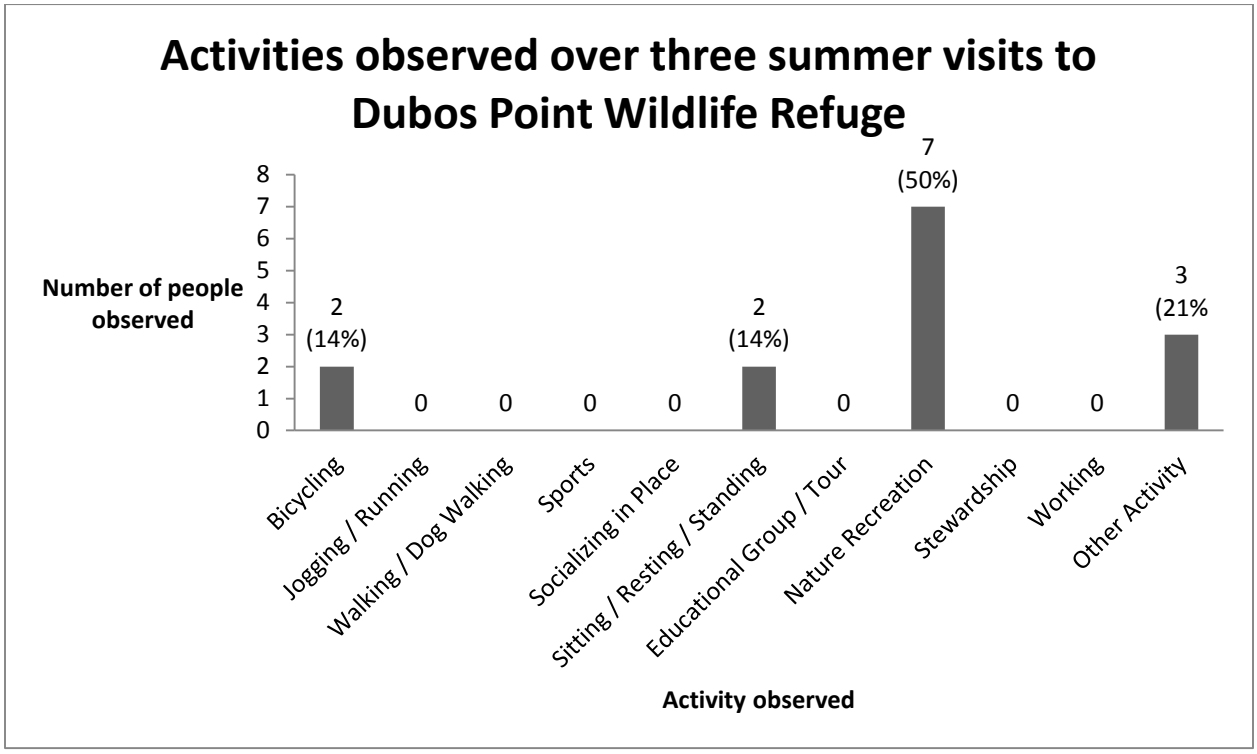


Who are they?



What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Detailed Counts

Human Activities Observed by Time of Visit and Age in Dubos Point Wildlife Sanctuary

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age			
	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling		2		**2**		2		**2**
Jogging / Running				**0**				**0**
Walking / Dog Walking				**0**				**0**
Sports				**0**				**0**
Educational Group / Tour				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation			7	**7**	5	2		**7**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting			2	**2**		2		**2**
Socializing in Place				**0**				**0**
Working				**0**				**0**
Other Activity		3		**3**	1	2		**3**
Total	**0**	**5**	**9**	**14**	**6**	**8**	**0**	**14**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

For Dubos Point, there were no observed signs of human use in the interior of the park.

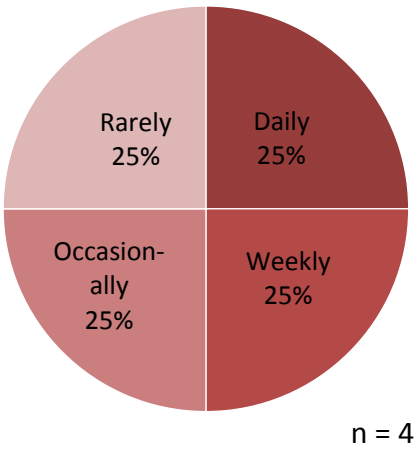
Sociability Observed by Zone

Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Entire Park			1	1	**2**
Total	**0**	**0**	**1**	**1**	**2**

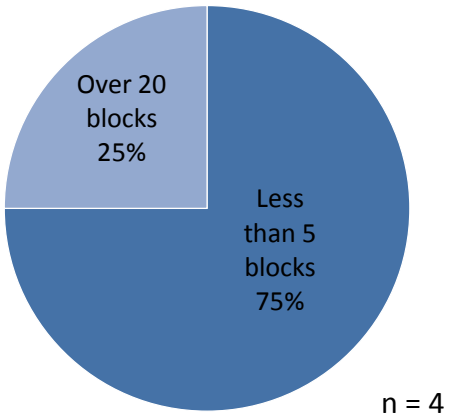
III. Interviews with Park Users

Four park users were interviewed in Dubos Point Wildlife Sanctuary, of which 50% were male and 50% female. Seventy-five percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 25% were estimated to be over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18, and the response rate for interviews was 100%. The small number of interviewees was evenly split in terms of how often they visit the park: daily, weekly, occasionally, and rarely. In terms of how far they traveled to reach the park, 75% lived less than 5 blocks away, while one user lived more than 20 blocks away.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature-Recreation	2	50%
Nature-Outdoors	2	50%
Kids	1	25%
Relaxing	1	25%
Total Respondents	**4**	

Respondents were in Dubos Point to engage in *nature recreation*—particularly fishing (50%). They were also engaging with *nature and outdoors* by viewing the water and experiencing the breeze (50%). One user specifically mentioned exposing his children to nature (*kids*, 25%) while another mentioned "*relaxing*" in the park instead of being at home (25%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	3	75%
Nature-Outdoors	1	25%
Refuge	1	25%
Total Respondents	**4**	

People chose to visit Dubos Point specifically because it is a form of nearby nature that is *local*, close-by, and convenient (75%). In addition, one respondent (25%) said that the site is a way to connect with the beauty of *nature and the outdoors*, saying: "The place is beautiful even though Sandy destroyed a lot of it. We've gotta' live with nature". Another (25%) said that she finds *refuge* in the site, saying: "I went to work, came home tired and wanted to take a little walk near home".

Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Beach-Waterfront	4	100%
Out of Town	1	25%
Total Respondents	**4**	

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit. Other site types visited by Dubos Point users were *beach-waterfronts* (100%), and *out of town* locations (25%).

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?

n = 4

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement. For Dubos Point, unlike other parks, none of the users engaged in stewardship or gave any other insights about other forms of stewardship engagement.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
QUEENS: Flushing Meadows Corona Park Profile

Zone Names		
Buzz Vollmer Playground	Promenade	W Lawn
Carousel	Rec Area	W Playground
Cloverleaf & Lawn	Soccer Fields	Walkway
Meadow Lake Rec Area	SW Cloverleaf & Lawn	World's Fair Monument
Natural Area	Tennis Courts & Lawn	World's Fair Playground
NE Playground	Unisphere & Lawn	

I. Park Narrative

Flushing Meadows Park is a large, 693-acre[1] park in central Queens. Highly programmed with dozens of features and adjacent to the U.S. Tennis Center and Citi Field, the park attracts crowds and lone users from near and far. The majority of the park is landscaped, and it functions well as a site for social engagement. Flushing Meadows can be easily and broadly characterized by high-density and frequent usage.

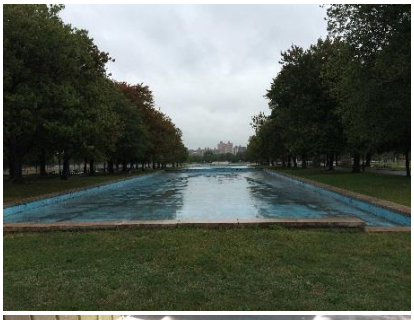
Flushing Meadows Park is surrounded by major highways on all sides: the Grand Central Expressway, the Van Wyck Expressway (I-678), and the Long Island Expressway (I-495). All of these highways provide the main access points for the park. There are very few local street routes. Nevertheless, the 7 train station and a number of buses come close to the park. In addition, the surrounding neighborhoods – Corona, Forest Hills, and Flushing – are all high-density neighborhoods whose residents frequently use the park.

The central feature of this park are the buildings and remnants of the 1964 World's Fair that left tall tree-lined walkways and the Unisphere, a spherical stainless steel globe, which stands at the end of a long water feature and in front of the Queens Museum of Art. Much of the area is mowed lawns with soccer fields, tennis courts, playgrounds, a peace / meditation garden, and a skating ramp around it. The northern ends of the park are waterfront boardwalks and strips of greenspace by the highways. Western zones of the park are playgrounds and recreation areas that are not as frequented by park users compared to the central zones. The Southern areas feature two large lakes – Meadow Lake and Willow Lake – which are quieter. While Meadow Lake enjoys high usage, especially on the weekends, with barbeques, reunions, and other large social functions, Willow Lake, the Forever Wild designated part of the park, is less frequently accessed.

Park users come from all over New York City and even further. For example, special events such as soccer tournaments or skating memorials draw attendees from the larger tristate area. Barbeques and family functions draw park users from different states around the country. Many racial and ethnic groups are represented, and we frequently observed multi-ethnic and multi-racial groups (i.e. they were not solely socializing with people of the same race). Around the soccer fields, however, most users were Latinos with many ethnicities of Latinos represented. These soccer games were held for young children, youth, and adults. Many of the interviews conducted in this area were in Spanish. In addition to Spanish, there were many Mandarin speakers in the park as well. Oftentimes, any data collection in the park required language capabilities other than English.

Flushing Meadows is a large park that serves a multitude of purposes. Because the park is highly programmed and much of the park is landscaped, there is less extensive tree canopy cover and fewer distinguishing ecological features compared to less landscaped parks. However, the social dynamics and user population are rich areas of study for user-park interactions.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.



II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

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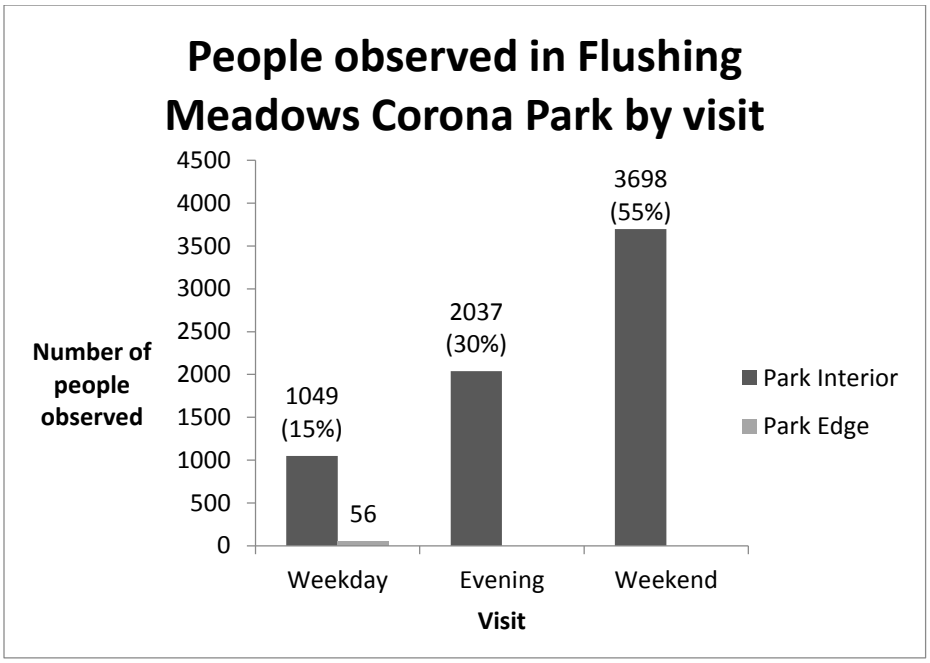
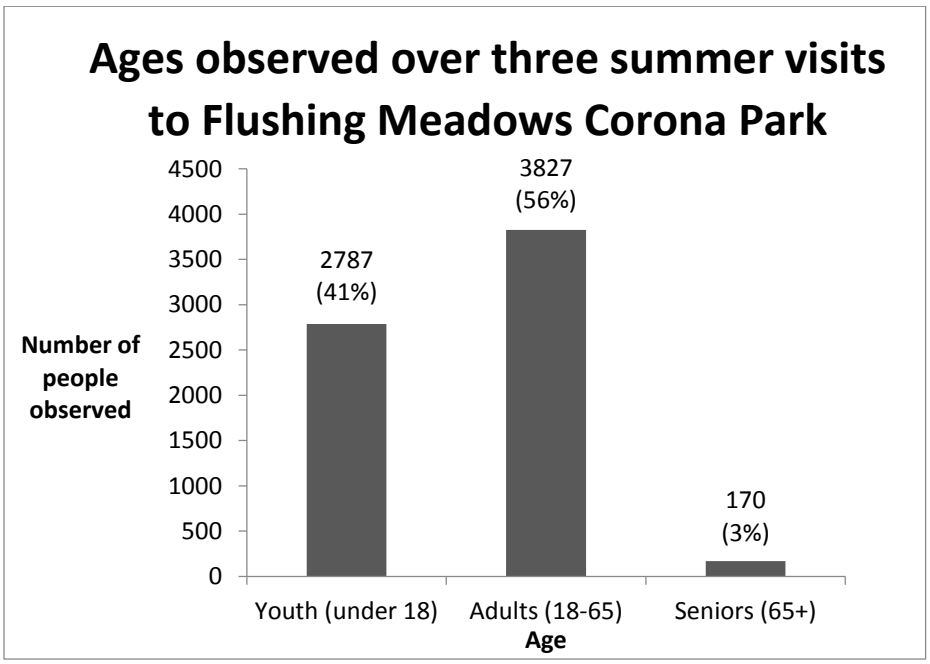
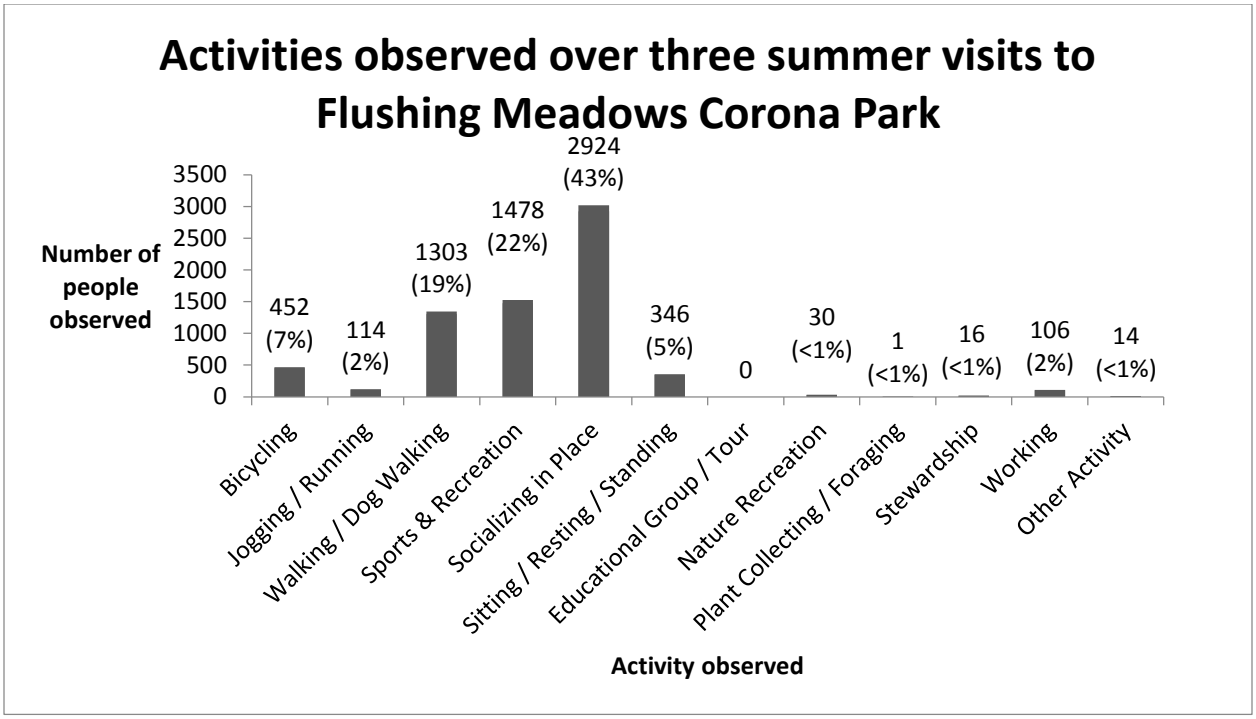


Who are they?



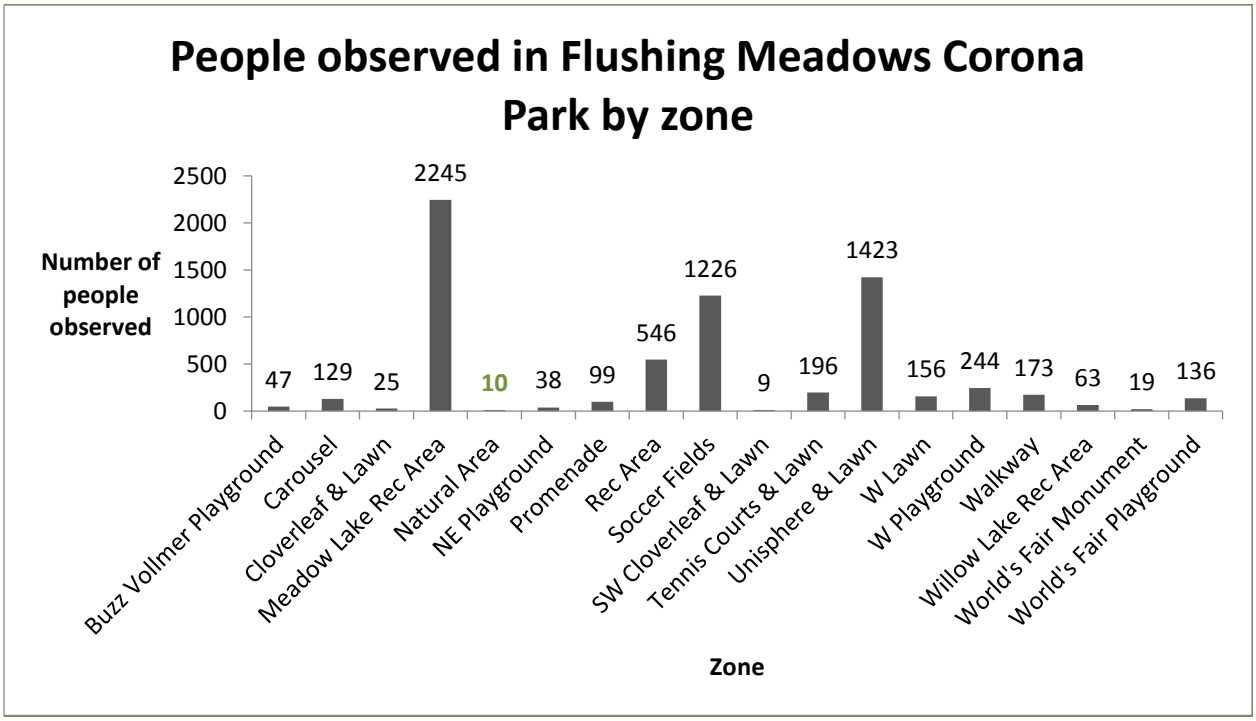
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone																		
	Buzz Vollmer Playground	Carousel	Cloverleaf & Lawn	Meadow Lake Rec Area	Natural Area	NE Playground	Promenade	Rec Area	Soccer Fields	SW Cloverleaf & Lawn	Tennis Courts & Lawn	Unisphere & Lawn	W Lawn	W Playground	Walkway	Willow Lake Rec Area	World's Fair Monument	World's Fair Playground	Total
Bicycling			3	192			18	22	29	5	8	143	21		3		5	3	**452**
Jogging / Running				50			1	5	7		1	38	7		2		2	1	**114**
Walking / Dog Walking	1	22	20	220	10	6	26	185	71	4	49	428	78	21	138	4	9	11	**1303**
Sports & Recreation	7	68		193		12	14	126	631		75	150	2	103	2	25		70	**1478**
Socializing in Place	29	13		1491		18	17	170	377		49	571	35	83	12	27		32	**2924**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	10	7	1	50		2	9	30	93		11	55	12	33	8	7		18	**346**
Educational Group / Tour																			**0**
Nature Recreation				18			10					2							**30**
Plant Collecting / Foraging				1															**1**
Stewardship									6			10							**16**
Working		19	1	26			3	7	10		3	20	1	4	8		3	1	**106**
Other Activity				4			1	1	2			6							**14**
Total	**47**	**129**	**25**	**2245**	**10**	**38**	**99**	**546**	**1226**	**9**	**196**	**1423**	**156**	**244**	**173**	**63**	**19**	**136**	**6784**

Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by time of visit and age group.

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	101	127	224	**452**	124	315	13	**452**
Jogging / Running	31	37	46	**114**	12	99	3	**114**
Walking / Dog Walking	275	405	623	**1303**	457	810	36	**1303**
Sports & Recreation	265	632	581	**1478**	1005	469	4	**1478**
Socializing in Place	251	607	2066	**2924**	1115	1716	93	**2924**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	63	190	93	**346**	49	277	20	**346**
Educational Group / Tour								
Nature Recreation	4	13	13	**30**	13	16	1	**30**
Plant Collecting / Foraging		1		**1**		1		**1**
Stewardship	16			**16**	8	8		**16**
Working	38	18	50	**106**	3	103		**106**
Other Activity	5	7	2	**14**	1	13		**14**
Total	**1049**	**2037**	**3698**	**6784**	**2787**	**3827**	**170**	**6784**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)									
Sign	**Cloverleaf & Lawn**	**Meadow Lake Rec Area**	**Natural Area**	**Playground**	**Promenade**	**Rec Area**	**Unisphere & Lawn**	**Woods**	**World's Fair Playground**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box										**0**
Damaged / Vandalized Property										**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area	2									**2**
Fire pit		10								**10**
Garden in Park										**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals		4	1	3	4	4				**16**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places			1			1				**2**
Informal Trails	3	6	3			2	2			**16**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol		1					1			**2**
Other Sign		3	1			2	2	1		**9**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers	1	3	2				2		2	**10**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	2					2		1		**5**
Total	**8**	**27**	**8**	**3**	**4**	**11**	**7**	**2**	**2**	**72**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Flushing Meadows Corona Park, signs of activity noted included, for example, images of a wildlife viewing area, party decorations, and improvised play equipment.

Sociability Observed by Zone

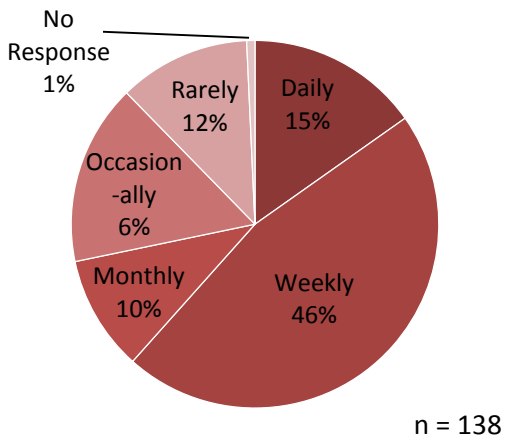
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Buzz Vollmer Playground	1	4	5		**10**
Carousel		12	6		**18**
Cloverleaf & Lawn	1	3	1		**5**
Meadow Lake Rec Area	15	88	110	61	**274**
NE Playground		3	5		**8**
Promenade		10	6	1	**17**
Rec Area	8	40	41	1	**90**
Soccer Fields	4	31	38	20	**93**
SW Cloverleaf & Lawn		1			**1**
Tennis Courts & Lawn		16	19	2	**37**
Unisphere & Lawn	12	117	144	15	**288**
W Lawn	9	23	14		**46**
W Playground		18	15	1	**34**
Walkway		20	18		**38**
World's Fair Monument	1	1	1		**3**
World's Fair Playground		10	11	1	**22**
Total	**51**	**397**	**434**	**102**	**984**

III. Interviews with Park Users

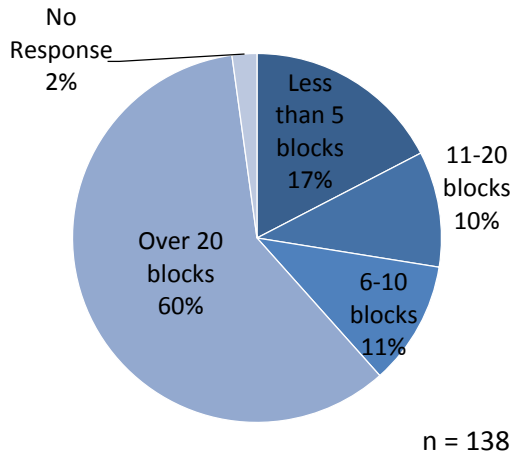
One hundred thirty-eight park users were interviewed in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, of which 60% were male and 40% were female. Ninety-one percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 9% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 72%.

The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 61% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park also appears to draw users from near and far: 60% of users travel over 20 blocks to reach the park while 27% of users travel less than 10 blocks away.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Kids	35	25%
Sports & recreation	28	20%
Socializing	27	20%
Relaxing	26	19%
Walking	17	12%
Exercise	11	8%
Nature recreation	6	4%
Nature-outdoors	6	4%
Biking	5	4%
Working	4	3%
Arts and culture	2	1%
Explore	2	1%
Community program	1	1%
Dog	1	1%
Total Respondents	**138**	

Flushing Meadows Corona Park appears to be an important social space. Many were in the park with *kids* (25%) or *socializing* (20%) in barbecues, family reunions, picnics, and parties. A large number of respondents were also participating in some form of physical activity: *sports and recreation* (20%), *walking* (12%), *exercising* (8%), *biking* (4%), or *dog walking* (1%). The respondent participating in the *community program* (1%) was part of a zumba class. The park is also a place to *relax*, and some respondents (19%) were in the park "resting," "sitting," and "to become distracted from everything." We found some respondents participating in *nature recreation* (4%), specifically fishing and feeding birds, and just *enjoying the outdoors* (4%). Some respondents were *working* (3%) and collecting bottles, selling food and drinks, or studying. A few

respondents were doing *art and cultural* activities (1%), such as photography and reading. Finally, there were some users who were *exploring* the park for the first time (1%) fishing or visiting the Queens Zoo.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

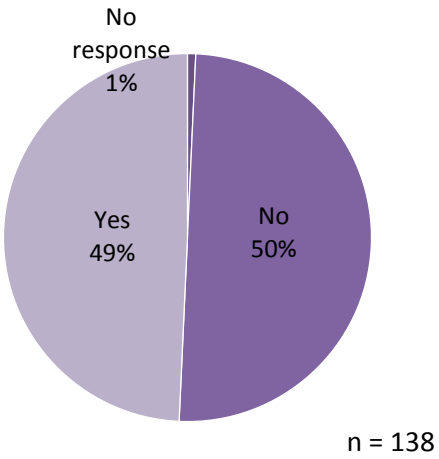
Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	44	32%
Activity	26	19%
Refuge	25	18%
Quality	20	14%
Nature-outdoors	18	13%
Amenities	15	11%
Access	15	11%
Sociability	13	9%
Enjoyment	10	7%
Place attachment	8	6%
Social ties	5	4%
Explore	3	2%
No response	1	1%
Ambivalence	1	1%
Total Respondents	**138**	

Many respondents thought of Flushing Meadows Corona Park as their *local* park (32%) even though some of them traveled from over 20 blocks away. The park also attracted many respondents because of the *activities* offered (19%), such as exercise opportunities, sports, and a fundraiser for city parks. Many saw the park as a *refuge* (18%), and they described it as "calm," "peaceful," "tranquil," and "safe." Similarly, many respondents commented on the *quality* of the park (14%) and liked that it was "clean," "big," "not too crowded." Some respondents liked the feeling of *being outdoors* in the park (13%) to "see the view" or enjoy its "nice landscape" while others chose the park based on specific *amenities* (11%), such as the zoo, the "dinosaur park [in reference to Triassic Playground]," and "nice areas to grill." The park's accessibility also drew many users because it was close to the train (*access*, 11%), and many chose the park for its *sociability* (9%) and being able to spend time with family and friends at the park. Some respondents chose the park simply because of *enjoyment* (7%) and "liking the feel of it." A number of respondents had a history of *place attachment* with the park (6%) and have been living in the area for decades. Finally, some respondents had *social ties* (4%) to the park so they visited because they had family or friends living close by, and some respondents were *exploring* the park (2%) after hearing about it through a flyer or website.

"This park is highly programmed. Every single area has a specific purpose. There are particular activities going on in each place. During Saturday, there are a lot of events going on - birthday parties, family reunions, baby showers, memorial picnics, tennis tournaments, skating memorials, boat races, etc. It was crowded but crowded with a purpose. This was the most multi-use park we've seen thus far."

From debrief notes on Flushing Meadows Corona Park

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



Flushing Meadows Corona Park includes some wooded, wetland and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. Nearly half of respondents interviewed said yes (49%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas.

Out of the respondents who said yes, the majority participate in physical activity in natural areas: *walking* (44%), *exercising* (13%), and *biking* (10%) were common activities. Many respondents spent time *enjoying nature and the outdoors* (41%) or *engaging in nature recreation* (26%) by fishing or boating for example. Respondents also saw natural areas as a place to *socialize* (15%) and/or *relax* (9%). Some respondents may have not perceived firm boundaries between the natural areas and the rest of the park when they said that they went to natural areas to play baseball or soccer (*sports & recreation*, 9%). Others were in natural areas with their *kids* (6%) or for *art and cultural* activities (6%), such as photography or reading. One respondent was *concerned* (1%) about getting lost. Another saw natural areas as a *free space* (1%) to do any activity even if unsanctioned like visit at night and drink alcohol. Finally, one noted *prior engagement* (5%) with natural areas in the past.

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	30	44%
Nature-Outdoors	28	41%
Nature recreation	18	26%
Socializing	10	15%
Exercise	9	13%
Biking	7	10%
Relaxing	6	9%
Sports & recreation	6	9%
Kids	4	6%
Arts & culture	4	6%
Concern	1	1%
Free space	1	1%
Prior engagement	1	1%
No response	1	1%
"Yes" Respondents	**68**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Preference	29	42%
Potential	26	38%
No response	8	12%
Access	8	12%
Fear-concern	5	7%
Life course	5	7%
"No" Respondents	**69**	

Sixty-nine respondents (50%) did not go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, the majority *preferred to go to other parts of the park* (42%). We classified some respondents as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (38%) because they were previously unaware that these areas existed or did not have a specific reason for not visiting those areas. Some noted that the natural area was difficult or inconvenient to *access* (12%). A few also expressed *fear or concern* (7%) or that they were at a stage in their *life course* (7%), like having to care for small children or grandchildren, which made them reluctant to visit natural areas.

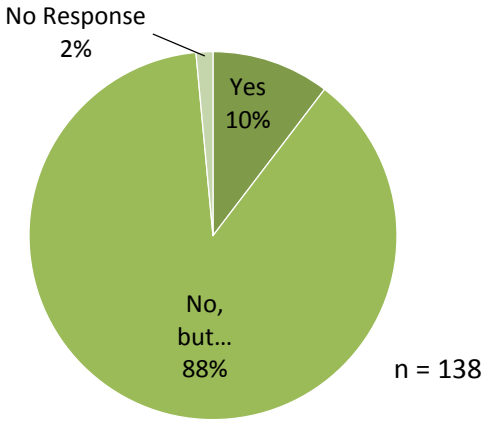
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

The most commonly visited site types for Flushing Meadows Corona Park users were other *named NYC parks* (37%), such as Prospect Park or Kissena Park. *Beach or waterfront* parks (27%), such as Jones Beach and Rockaway Beach, were also popular. Many respondents said they *don't go anywhere else outdoors* (24%), indicating the importance of Flushing Meadows Corona Park in their everyday lives. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	62	45%
Beach-waterfront	37	27%
Nowhere else	33	24%
Out of town	26	19%
Zoo / Aquarium	9	7%
No response	5	4%
Sports	4	3%
Nature preserve	3	2%
Pool	3	2%
Greenway	1	1%
Streets	1	1%
Botanical garden	1	1%
Dog park	1	1%
Playground	1	1%
Total Respondents	**138**	

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and only 10% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Some of those who said "yes" also specifically named groups and/or offered the general type(s) of group in which they participate (listed below). Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

At one end of the spectrum, a number of respondents were involved in *other civic engagements* (n = 7), such as helping out special needs children, working with the Wounded Warrior Project, or helping out with their church. Others articulated a *pro-environmental*

ethic (n = 10), such as the importance of recycling or donating to environmental groups. Some participated in *self-led stewardship* outside the context of a group (n = 7), and some *worked* (n =2) for stewardship groups.

Many respondents had *no specific reason* (n = 23) for not participating in stewardship. Some respondents had the *potential to become stewards* (n = 7), because they had given no thought to participating in stewardship or they actively wanted to but were not at present. Others *lacked awareness* (n = 17) of groups or opportunities to participate in stewardship, and one was *self-critical* and felt that she "should [participate in stewardship] for [her] son." One respondents cited that she was at a point in her *life course* that prevented her from participating like having young children. One respondent had *social ties* to a family member who participated in stewardship. Another respondent had *participated in the past* but was not at present. Finally, some respondents said that they had *no time* (n = 26), *no interest* (n = 11), and/or cited *other barriers* (n = 4) such as language, geography, or homelessness.

Stewardship Group Types

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Environment	5	56%
Religious	2	22%
Community garden	1	11%
Friends of park	1	11%
Total	**9**	

Named Stewardship Groups

- Brooklyn Botanical Garden
- Central Park Conservancy
- Earthwatch
- MillionTreesNYC
- Queens Botanical Garden
- Wildlife Conservation Society

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

QUEENS: Forest Park Profile

Zone Names			
Bandshell	Giovannelli Playground	Model Airplane Field	Rec Area
Carousel	Greenhouse Playground	NE Woods	Sobelsohn Playground
Devoy Playground	Jackson Pond Playground	Onramp Woods	Tennis Courts
Dog Park	Mary Whalen Playground	Playground & Courts	W Woods

I. Park Narrative

Forest Park is a heavily wooded, 496-acre[1] park near the Queens-Brooklyn border. It is a mix of Forever Wild and non-Forever Wild designated wooded areas with recreational areas in between. The park has a number of unique geological and ecological features. According to informational signs, the park has a hilly "knob and kettle" terrain created by the retreat of the Wisconsin glacier during the last ice age. There are kettle ponds in the forest that provide habitat for wildlife and also a pine grove in the NE Woods zone that was planted during the park's centennial celebration in 1995. We deduced from the signs of human use in the wooded areas that the park gets moderate use there and heavy use in the recreational areas. Surrounded by highly residential, walkable neighborhoods on all sides, the park functions in many ways like a neighborhood park. There were mixed positive and negative perceptions of the park from the park users.

Forest Park is roughly divided into two different parts by Woodhaven Boulevard. The part west of Woodhaven Boulevard is mostly not Forever Wild, and the woods get less usage and have fewer informal trails. There are unique features within the park, including a carousel for children and a band shell for performances. Both of these are close to the parking lot and are highly used. The western half also contains a dog park with a unique community of stewards who have constructed small garden boxes named after their dogs. The main feature on this side, however, is the golf course, which is largely inaccessible from the rest of the park.

On the eastern side, the park is densely packed Forever Wild forest. This side has many formal and informal trails that take users deep into the woods. Bicyclists and joggers are the most common sights, although there are occasional horse riding tours that go by on the formal paths. In addition to the formal paths, this side has a lot of informal paths, 'hang-out' spots, and remnant industrial infrastructure. The northern section has an area with a decorated sitting place, a rope swing made from vines, and neatly arranged garbage piles, indicating signs of maintenance on the part of park users. In another direction, parallel to the Long Island Railroad tracks, there are old, rusting train tracks from years past. Like the tracks on the High Line Park before they were renovated, these train tracks are being uprooted and engulfed by young trees and other understory flora.

There are a few areas in Forest Park that have huge concentrations of people. Unsurprisingly, these are playgrounds and recreational areas, which are often densely packed and highly used. All the five playgrounds, especially the eastern-most one just by the Kew Gardens neighborhood, are well used by young families and children. All these areas have a high racial diversity of people. Nevertheless, interviews brought out some of the tensions between people of different races. Another tension is related to community concerns over past sexual assaults that occurred in the wooded areas east of Woodhaven Boulevard. Park users, particularly women, are hesitant to engage with the park, especially the woods, due to concerns about their own safety.

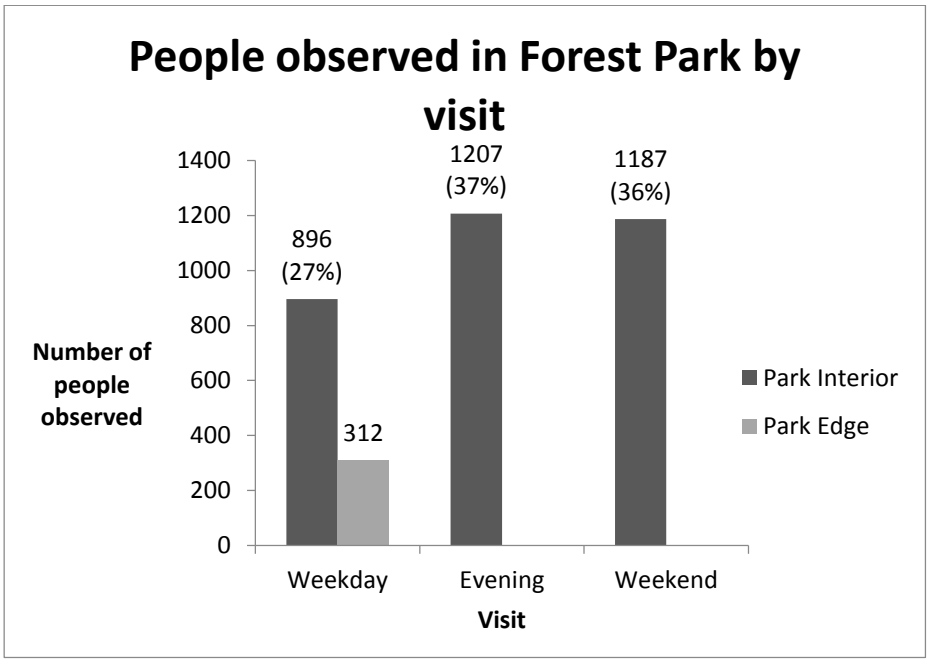
[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

Forest Park is a well-used, fascinating park with hidden secrets and a lot to offer. Despite some negative associations with certain aspects of the park, it continues to be in high use and provide a vital green space to surrounding neighborhoods.

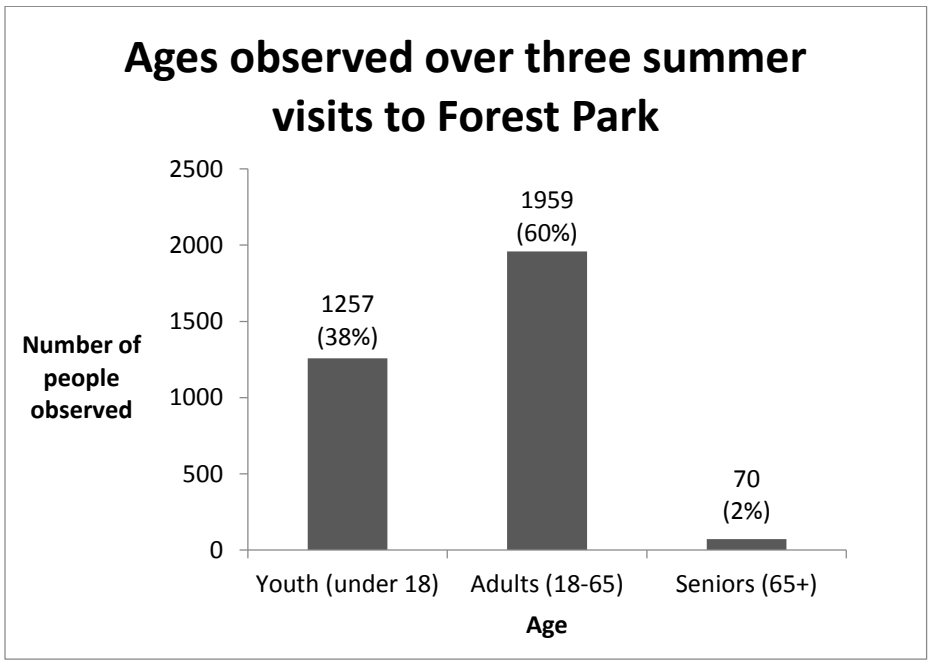
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

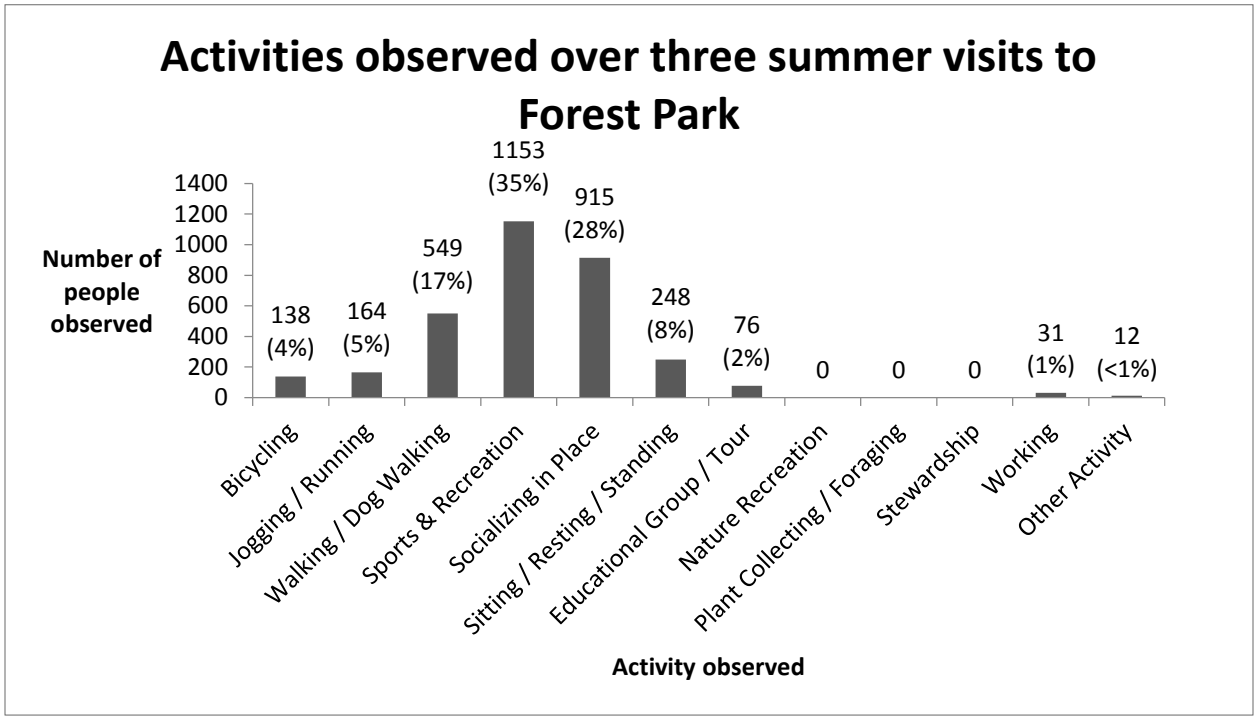


Who are they?



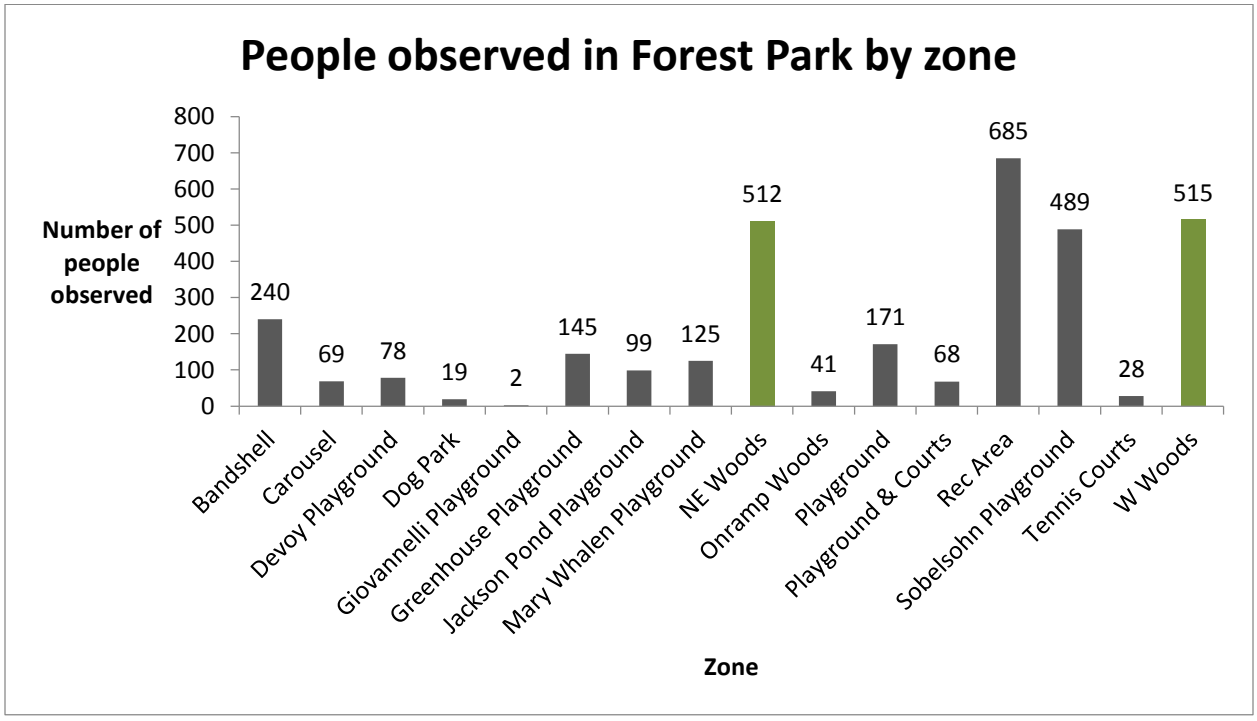
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone																
	Bandshell	Carousel	Devoy Playground	Dog Park	Giovannelli Playground	Greenhouse Playground	Jackson Pond Playground	Mary Whalen Playground	NE Woods	Onramp Woods	Playground	Playground & Courts	Rec Area	Sobelsohn Playground	Tennis Courts	W Woods	Total
Bicycling	2					4			89	7		5	9	5	1	16	**138**
Jogging / Running						1			133	4			6	5	2	13	**164**
Walking / Dog Walking	16	1	1	16		22	9	17	225	22	12	2	16	82	8	100	**549**
Sports & Recreation	2	19	24		2	87	56	74	2		111	43	522	198	11	2	**1153**
Socializing in Place	211	35	47			12	7	14	27	2	27	13	117	114		289	**915**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	2		6	3		18	26	18	20	6	20	5	12	84	4	24	**248**
Educational Group / Tour		12														64	**76**
Nature Recreation																	**0**
Plant Collecting / Foraging																	**0**
Stewardship																	**0**
Working	7	2				1	1		7		1		3	1	2	6	**31**
Other Activity								2	9							1	**12**
Total	**240**	**69**	**78**	**19**	**2**	**145**	**99**	**125**	**512**	**41**	**171**	**68**	**685**	**489**	**28**	**515**	**3286**

Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by time of visit and age group.

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	39	55	44	**138**	35	102	1	**138**
Jogging / Running	49	31	84	**164**	11	151	2	**164**
Walking / Dog Walking	235	177	137	**549**	124	397	28	**549**
Sports & Recreation	388	517	248	**1153**	715	438		**1153**
Socializing in Place	27	291	597	**915**	279	614	22	**915**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	70	120	58	**248**	37	194	17	**248**
Educational Group / Tour	76			**76**	56	20		**76**
Nature Recreation								
Plant Collecting / Foraging								
Stewardship								
Working	10	11	10	**31**		31		**31**
Other Activity	2	1	9	**12**		12		**12**
Total	**896**	**1203**	**1187**	**3286**	**1257**	**1959**	**70**	**3286**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)														
Sign	**Bandshell**	**Devoy Playground**	**Dog Park**	**Greenhouse Playground**	**Jackson Pond Playground**	**Model Airplane Field**	**NE Woods**	**Onramp Woods**	**Playground**	**Playground & Courts**	**Rec Area**	**Sobelsohn Playground**	**Tennis Courts**	**W Woods**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat box			3				1							2	**6**
Damaged / Vandalized Property						1	9			1				2	**13**
Encampment / Sleeping Area							6							2	**8**
Fire pit														2	**2**
Garden in Park			2											1	**3**
Graffiti, Art, Murals			1	2			21	3			1			13	**41**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places			6				7							1	**14**
Informal Trails		2	1				92	4						44	**143**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol	1						3		1	1				2	**8**
Other Sign							25	9					1	27	**62**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers	1		2		1		2	3			3	4		1	**17**
Substantial Dumping or Debris							8	2						8	**18**
Total	**2**	**2**	**15**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**174**	**21**	**1**	**2**	**4**	**4**	**1**	**105**	**335**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Forest Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, an image of a peace sign, a memorial to a horse, and firefighters practicing drills in a parking lot.

Sociability Observed by Zone

Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Bandshell	3	20	16		**39**
Carousel			1	1	**2**
Devoy Playground		5	3	1	**9**
Dog Park	3	2	1		**6**
Greenhouse Playground		3	7	1	**11**
Jackson Pond Playground		3			**3**
Mary Whalen Playground	3	2	7		**12**
NE Woods	27	25	13		**65**
Onramp Woods	4	3	3		**10**
Playground	3	12	5	1	**21**
Playground & Courts		1	2		**3**
Rec Area		19	8	11	**38**
Sobelsohn Playground	17	31	26	4	**78**
Tennis Courts	2	2			**4**
W Woods	12	18	10	11	**51**
Total	**74**	**146**	**102**	**30**	**352**

"There was a small community garden created by regular visitors to the dog park, and there were planter boxes named after each of the dogs. The dog owners took pride in taking care of the dog park by keeping it clean, installing bird houses, and also laying down rules for which type of dogs would be allowed in the dog park. It was clear that they had a strong sense of ownership of the dog park and the park in general."

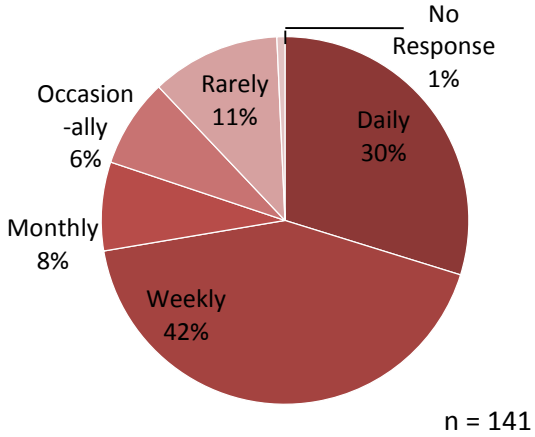
Vignette from field researcher's notes on Forest Park

III. Interviews with Park Users

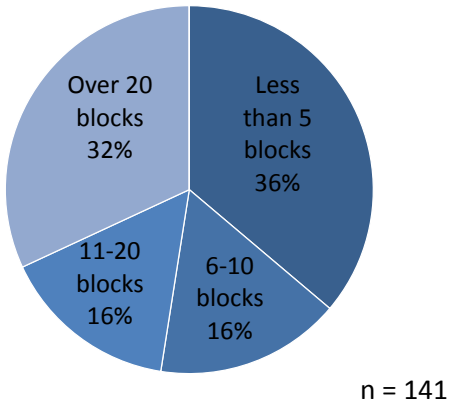
One hundred forty-one park users were interviewed in Forest Park, of which 55% were male and 45% were female. Eighty-four percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 16% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 73%.

The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 72% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park also appears to draw users from near and far: 32% of users travel over 20 blocks to reach the park while 52% of users travel less than 10 blocks away.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Kids	48	34%
Walking	38	27%
Socializing	18	13%
Relaxing	17	12%
Dog	17	12%
Exercise	12	9%
Sports & recreation	10	7%
Nature-outdoors	8	6%
Biking	6	4%
Arts and culture	5	4%
Community program	2	1%
Nature recreation	1	1%
Stewardship	1	1%
Total Respondents		

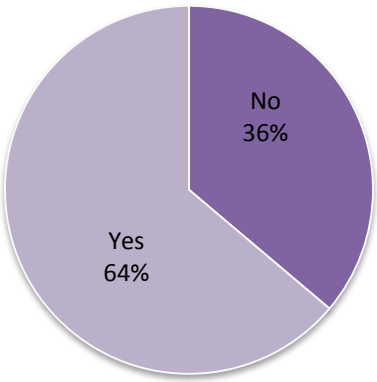
For many, Forest Park is an important social space; they were in the park with kids (34%) or socializing (13%) in barbecues, birthday parties, family reunions, or picnics. A fair number of respondents were participating in some form of physical activity: walking (27%), dog walking (12%), exercising (9%), sports and recreation (7%), or biking (4%). Many were also relaxing in the park (12%) or enjoying the outdoors (6%). Some were in the park for art and cultural activities (4%), such as listening to music or reading. Two respondents were in the park for a specific community program hosted by the park (1%), namely a concert at the Forest Park Bandshell. Finally, one respondent was participating in nature recreation (1%) and another was participating in stewardship (1%) as a volunteer for the greenhouses.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	69	49%
Amenities	25	18%
Activity	18	13%
Enjoyment	16	11%
Refuge	15	11%
Place attachment	12	9%
Sociability	11	8%
Quality	11	8%
Nature-outdoors	11	8%
Social ties	5	4%
Access	4	3%
Explore	3	2%
Ambivalence	3	2%
No response	1	1%
Total Respondents		**100%**

Forest Park is a *local* park for nearly half of respondents (49%). Many also chose the park for its *amenities* (18%) and the types of *activities* that are offered (13%) such as the outdoor concerts, puppet shows, and various sports and recreation opportunities. Many simply *enjoyed* the park (11%) and described it as "beautiful" and "nice." Respondents also saw the park as a *refuge* (11%) or a place that was "peaceful," "safe," and "quiet." Some respondents had a history of strong *place attachment* (9%) and had been coming to the park for decades or grew up around the park. The park is also a social space: respondents were at the park for its *sociability* (8%) or had *social ties* (4%) to friends or family who lived near the park. The *quality of the park* (8%) also drew some respondents, and they liked that the park was "clean," "well taken care of," and "big." Other respondents were at the park to *enjoy the outdoors* (8%), like the "fresh air," or *explore* (2%) the park for the first time. A few respondents came to the park because it was easy to *access* (3%). Finally, some respondents were *ambivalent* (2%) and were passing through the park to get to another location.

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 141

Forest Park includes a number of wooded and trail areas, so we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. Over half of respondents interviewed said yes (64%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas.

Out of the respondents who said yes, the majority of respondents participate in physical activity in natural areas: *walking* (54%), *exercising* (16%), and *biking* (12%) were common activities. Respondents also spent time *engaging in nature recreation* (24%), like horseback riding or wildlife watching, or *enjoying nature and the outdoors* (6%). Some respondents noted *prior engagement* (11%) with natural areas in the past while others expressed *concern* (11%) about their safety in natural areas. A number of respondents came to natural areas to *relax* (9%) or

engage in *art and cultural activities* (2%) such as reading. One respondent saw natural areas as a *free space* (7%) to do any activity, even if unsanctioned, like urinate. One respondent said that he would use the recreational areas (*sports & recreation*, 1%); as some natural areas in Forest Park are adjacent to the recreational areas, it is possible that the respondent did perceive these spaces as distinct areas. Another respondent was exploring the natural area with her *kids* (1%) and another was *socializing* (1%) with a group.

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	49	54%
Nature recreation	22	24%
Exercise	14	16%
Biking	11	12%
Prior engagement	10	11%
Concern	10	11%
Relaxing	8	9%
Nature-Outdoors	5	6%
No response	4	4%
Arts & culture	2	2%
Free space	1	1%
Sports & recreation	1	1%
Kids	1	1%
Socializing	1	1%
"Yes" Respondents	**90**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Potential	25	49%
Fear-concern	15	29%
Preference	11	22%
Life course	2	4%
Access	1	2%
"No" Respondents	**51**	

Fifty-one respondents (36%) said that they did no go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, we classified most respondents as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (49%) because they were previously unaware that these areas existed, did not have a specific reason for not visiting those areas, or expressed interest in going in the future. Some respondents expressed *fear or concern* (29%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about safety or getting lost or they simply *preferred to go to other parts of the park* (22%). A few respondents were also at a stage in their *life course* (4%) – they have young children – which made them reluctant to go to natural areas. Finally, one respondent noted that the natural areas were difficult to *access* (2%) because they were far away. Out of the 36% of respondents who said they did not go to natural areas, six were interviewed in a natural area but did not realize it. Many of them were walkers or joggers who were passing through.

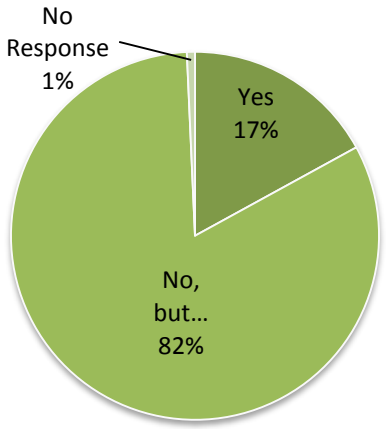
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

The most commonly visited site types for Forest Park users were other *named NYC parks* (42%), such as Central Park or Flushing Meadows Corona Park. *Beach and waterfront areas* (22%), such as Rockaway Beach and Jones Beach, were also popular. Many respondents also went *out of town* (25%) to places on Long Island for example. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	57	40%
Beach-waterfront	49	35%
Out of town	35	25%
Nowhere else	20	14%
No response	8	6%
Nature preserve	7	5%
Zoo / Aquarium	6	4%
Sports	4	3%
Botanical garden	3	2%
Playground	2	1%
Streets	1	1%
Pool	1	1%
Amphitheater	1	1%
Schoolyard	1	1%
Local	1	1%
Total Respondents	**141**	

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 141

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and 17% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Some who said yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type(s) of group in which they participate (listed below). Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

At one end of the spectrum, a number of respondents were involved in *other civic engagements* (n = 12), such as volunteering for the Special Olympics, an animal shelter, or their church. Some participated in *self-led stewardship* outside the context of a group (n = 6) by cleaning up beaches or gardening for example. Others articulated a *pro-environmental ethic* (n = 6), such as the importance of recycling and using reusable bags, or *worked* (n = 3) for stewardship groups.

Many respondents had *no specific reason* (n = 37) for not participating in stewardship. Others *lacked awareness* (n = 15) of groups or opportunities to participate in stewardship. Some respondents had the *potential to become stewards* (n = 9), because they had given no thought to participating in stewardship or they actively wanted to but were not at present. A few respondents were *self-critical* (n = 3) and were apologetic that they were not involved in environmental stewardship, or noted that they had *participated in the past* (n = 2). Finally, some respondents had no time (n = 27), no interest (n = 5), and/or cited *other barriers* (n = 1) like having to split his time in two geographic locations.

Stewardship Group Types

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Environment	7	44%
Civic	5	31%
Sports & recreation	2	13%
Friends of park	1	6%
Animal	1	6%
Total	**16**	

Named Stewardship Groups

- Adirondack Mountain Club
- Appalachian Mountain Club
- Boy Scouts
- Friends of Sands Point Preserve
- Girl Scouts
- National Park Service
- National Wildlife Federation
- Sierra Club
- Special Olympics
- Wildlife Conservation Society

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
QUEENS: Idlewild Park Profile

Zone Names
Natural Area
Soccer Field
Cricket Field

I. Park Narrative

Idlewild Park is a 120-acre site[1] with 96 acres of natural area (Forever Wild wetlands). The park is bordered by John F. Kennedy International Airport to the south and Brookville Park to the north, as well as the residential neighborhoods of Brookville and Rosedale, which are comprised largely of single-family homes. Most of the park is comprised of natural areas, but there is a cricket field in the northwest corner of the park and a soccer field in the north central park of the park. Both of these recreational fields appear to be well used and maintained.

Most park users observed were adults visiting the park on the weekend. An educational group was observed in the natural area, but all other park users were observed on the recreational fields. Many of them were either participating in sports or socializing in place near the sporting events. Both the cricket field and natural area zones had a large number of signs of activity, showing that the park is well used. The community has left a physical mark on the park with a garden, shrine, trails, signs, play equipment, and some debris.

The field research crews observed a great deal of construction at Idlewild Park, seemingly to address stormwater issues. Airplanes fly overhead frequently, since the park is in the flight path of JFK International Airport, making some areas quite noisy. Some parts of the natural area contain well-maintained trails and signs of stewardship, and the crews were told that the Eastern Queens Alliance maintains a trailer in the park and is working towards establishing a new nature center there. Other parts of the natural area appeared to be inaccessible. The natural area zone was observed to have lots of insects and birds.

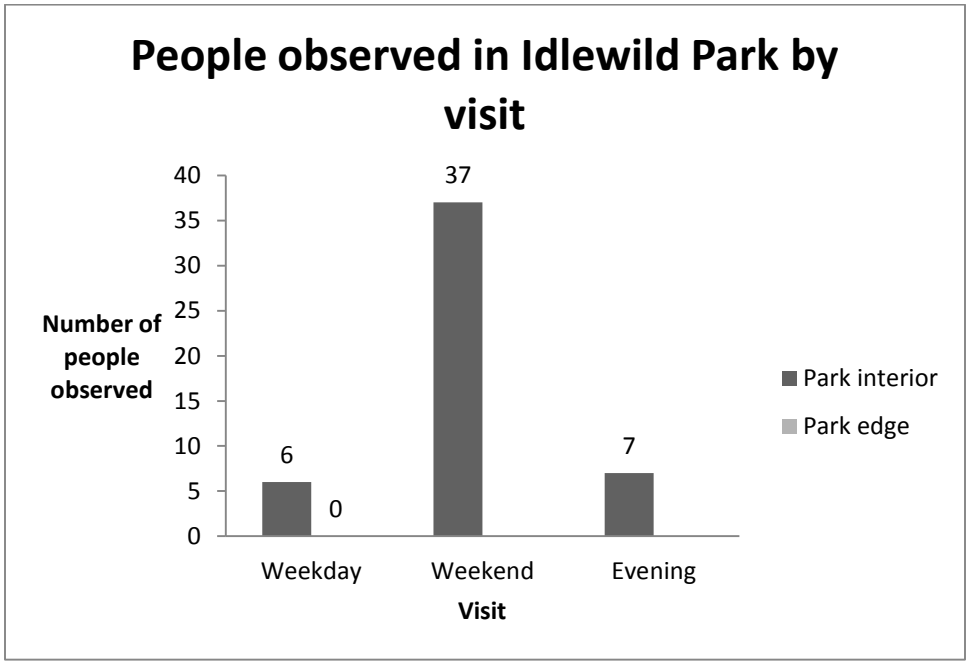
Idlewild Park's cricket field is in excellent condition and contained chairs and a grill left by park users, which appeared to be mostly West Indian in this zone. The field was found to be locked on a weekday but was open on the weekend with a game in progress. The synthetic soccer field was isolated and difficult to access from the park, but appeared well used. Numerous informal trails lead from these recreational fields or from nearby homes out into the surrounding natural areas. The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 100% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It is also a crucial local resource, with 50% of users traveling from less than 10 blocks away.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp files, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

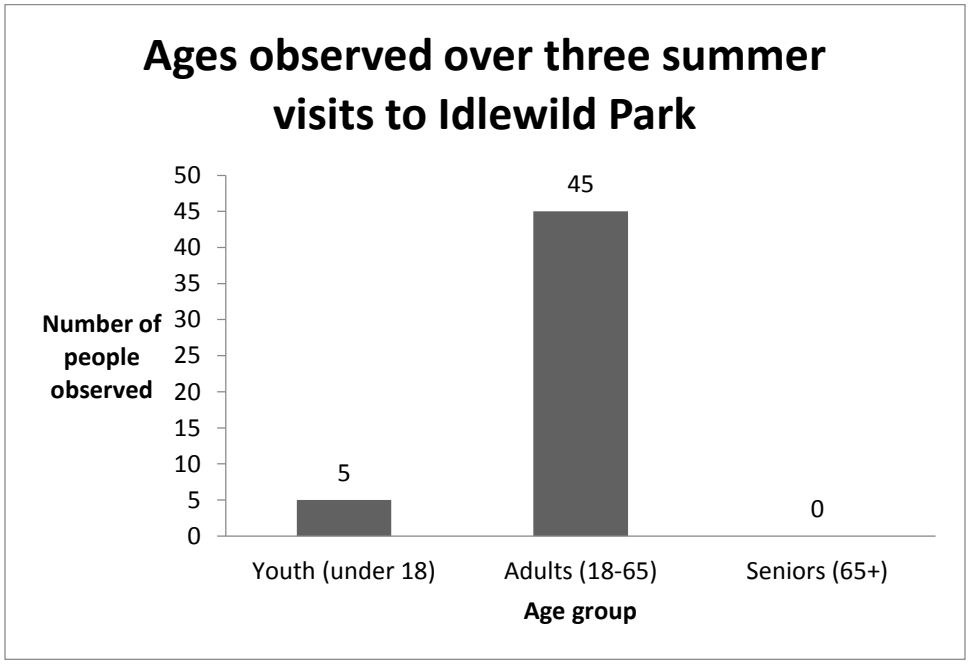
II. Field Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources. In this case, no people were observed on the edge of Idlewild Park.

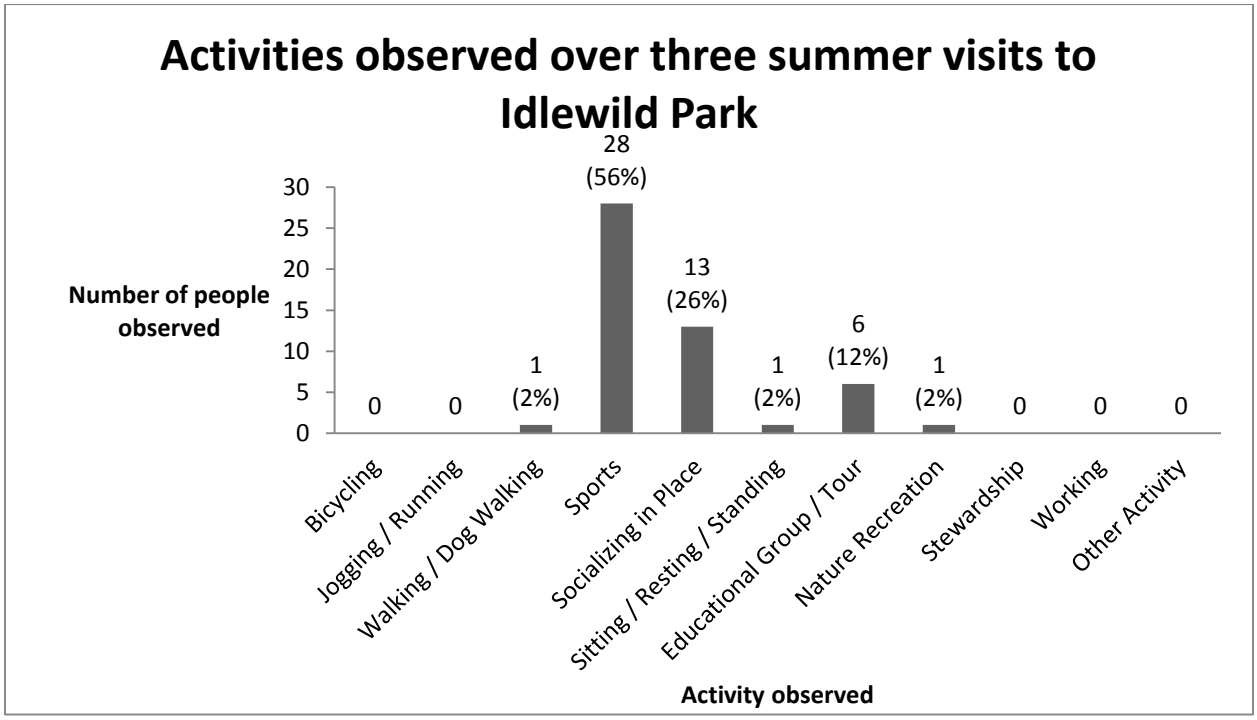


Who are they?



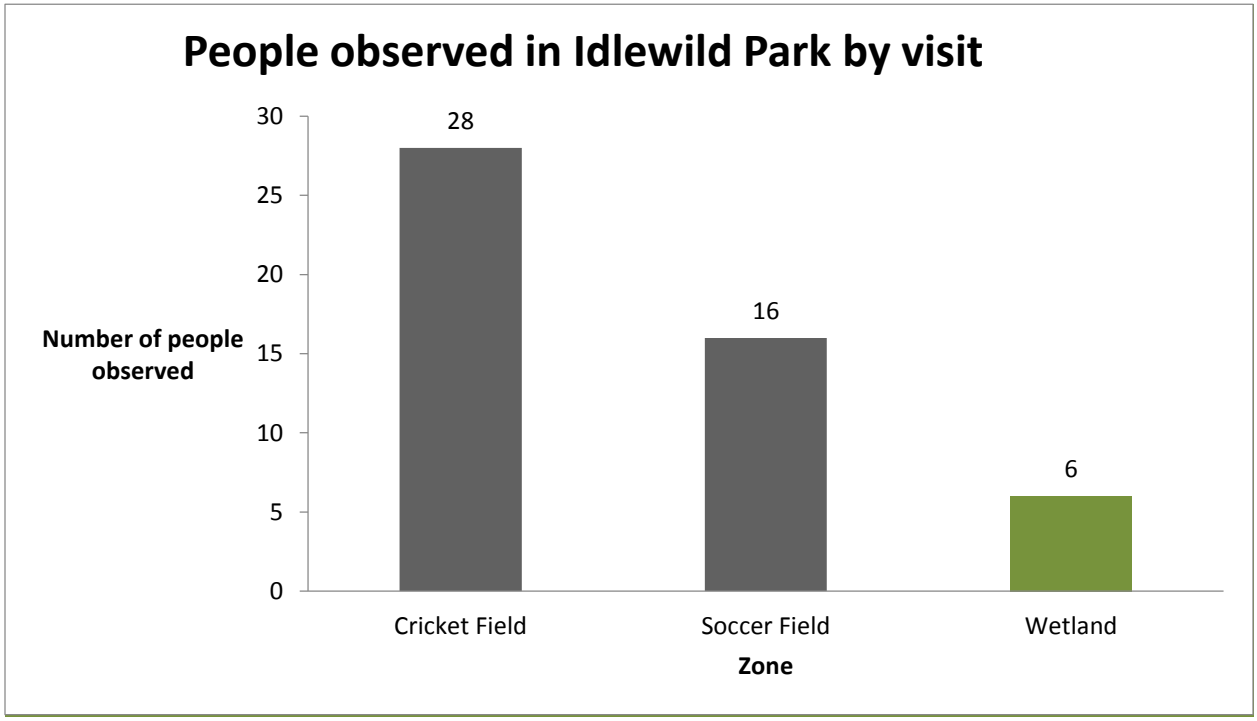
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior

Human Activities Observed by Zone, Time of Visit, and Age in Idlewild. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone				Time of Visit				Age			
	Cricket Field	Soccer Field	Wetland	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling				**0**				**0**				**0**
Jogging / Running				**0**				**0**				**0**
Walking / Dog Walking	1			**1**			1	**1**		1		**1**
Sports	14	14		**28**		28		**28**	1	27		**28**
Educational Group / Tour			6	**6**	6			**6**	4	2		**6**
Nature Recreation	1			**1**		1		**1**		1		**1**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	1			**1**			1	**1**		1		**1**
Socializing in Place	11	2		**13**		8	5	**13**		13		**13**
Working				**0**				**0**				**0**
Other Activity				**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**28**	**16**	**6**	**50**	**6**	**37**	**7**	**50**	**5**	**45**	**0**	**50**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)		
Sign	**Cricket Field**	**Wetland**	**Total**
Garden in Park	1		**1**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	1	5	**6**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol		1	**1**
Other (Note)	3	16	**19**
Other Signs, Flyers & Stickers	3	1	**4**
Sitting Places & Dining		4	**4**
Sporting / Play Equipment	4		**4**
Trails		10	**10**
Total	**12**	**37**	**49**

*Crews were instructed to take note of any other noteworthy or unique observations that stood out to them in each park. For Idlewild Park, other signs of activity included trail markers, storage areas, and signs of tree stewardship.

Sociability Observed by Zone

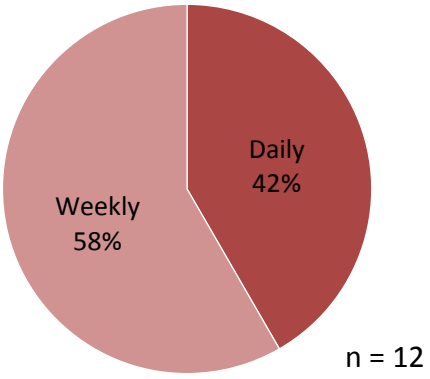
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Soccer Field		1		1	**2**
Cricket Field			1		**1**
Wetland			1		**0**
Total	**0**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**3**

III. Interviews with Park Users

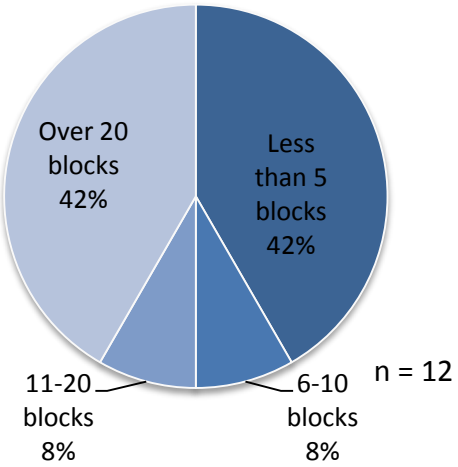
Twelve park users were interviewed in Idlewild Park, of which 92% were male and 8% female. Ninety-two percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 8% were estimated to be over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18.

All park users interviewed visit Idlewild Park daily (42%) or weekly (58%), revealing that this is site is important in their everyday lives. Interestingly, almost all park users came from either very near (42% traveled less than 5 blocks) or relatively far (42% traveled over 20 blocks). This split shows that the park is serving multiple distinct user groups.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Sports-Recreation	6	50%
Walking	3	25%
Exercise	2	17%
Nature-Outdoors	2	17%
Arts and Culture	1	8%
Nature-Recreation	1	8%
Total Respondents	**12**	

Idlewild Park users interviewed were primarily engaged in *sports and recreation* (50%), *walking* (25%), or other *exercise* (17%). Cricket, soccer, jogging, and yoga were some of the specific active uses mentioned. Bird watching and "enjoying fresh air" were uses more related to the natural characteristics of the park.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Many of those interviewed cited the convenience of a *local* park as their reason for visiting Idlewild (25%). The cricket fields were also listed as a primary reason (*amenities*, 25%) as well as the natural qualities of the park, such as wildlife and breeze (*nature-outdoors*, 25%).

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	3	25%
Amenities	3	25%
Nature-Outdoors	3	25%
Activity	1	8%
Place Attachment	1	8%
Total Respondents	**12**	

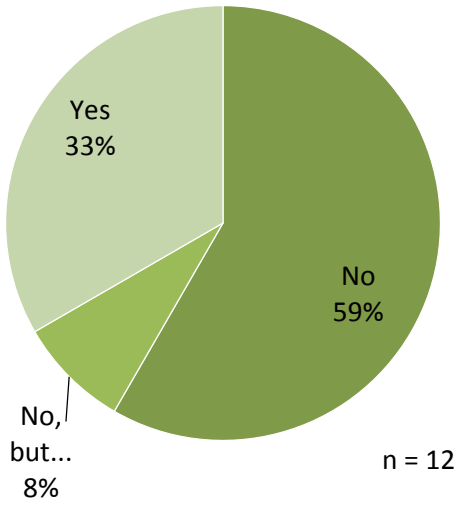
Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park(s)	7	58%
Nowhere Else	2	17%
Beach-Waterfront	1	8%
Local	1	8%
Wildlife Refuge	1	8%
Total Respondents	**12**	

Idlewild Park users most commonly reported visiting *other NYC parks* (58%), although a few reported *not visiting anywhere else in the outdoors* (17%) or other types of outdoor spaces. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and 33% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Those that did say yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type of group in which they participate, both of which are listed below.

No, but…

In addition to outright replies of 'yes' and 'no,' one respondent indicated interest in finding an opportunity to participate in environmental stewardship.

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Civic	2	40%
Environment	2	40%
Sports-Recreation	1	20%
Total	**5**	

Named Stewardship Groups

- Eastern Queens Alliance
- Environment Science Learning Center / Eastern Queens Alliance
- Idlewild Environmental Education Center
- Suburbia Cricket Club

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
QUEENS: Jamaica Bay Park Profile

Zone Names
East Wetland
West Wetland

I. Park Narrative

Jamaica Bay Park is a linear, waterfront park that is 64 acres[1] (including 11 acres of "Forever Wild" natural area) along Jamaica Bay. The site is accessed via a number of different dead end streets and is therefore rather fragmented and does not necessarily 'read' as a single, continuous site. Indeed, one interview was using the site as a cut-through and did not know that he was in a park. Overgrown vegetation (often mugwort) covers most of the site. The site varies in size and accessibility depending on whether the tide is in or out—when tide is in, much of the parkland is not reachable on foot. Views from the park include a partially submerged barge and a cement factory across the water. Sounds of plane flight overhead occur around every two minutes because of the proximity to JFK airport. The site also contained a number of mosquitoes and a feral cat colony.

Overall, more people were observed on the edge than in the interior of the park, as the interior is not very accessible, but the edge is directly adjacent to people's homes. Particularly in the east wetland, the park is almost an extension of people's side yards and driveways. The adjacent neighborhood was comprised primarily of detached, single family homes, which were occupied by a diverse mix of people, including African Americans, Hispanics, and Hasidic Jews. A number of the homes had signs of construction and repair, which we attributed to Sandy damage, particularly in the western portion of the site.

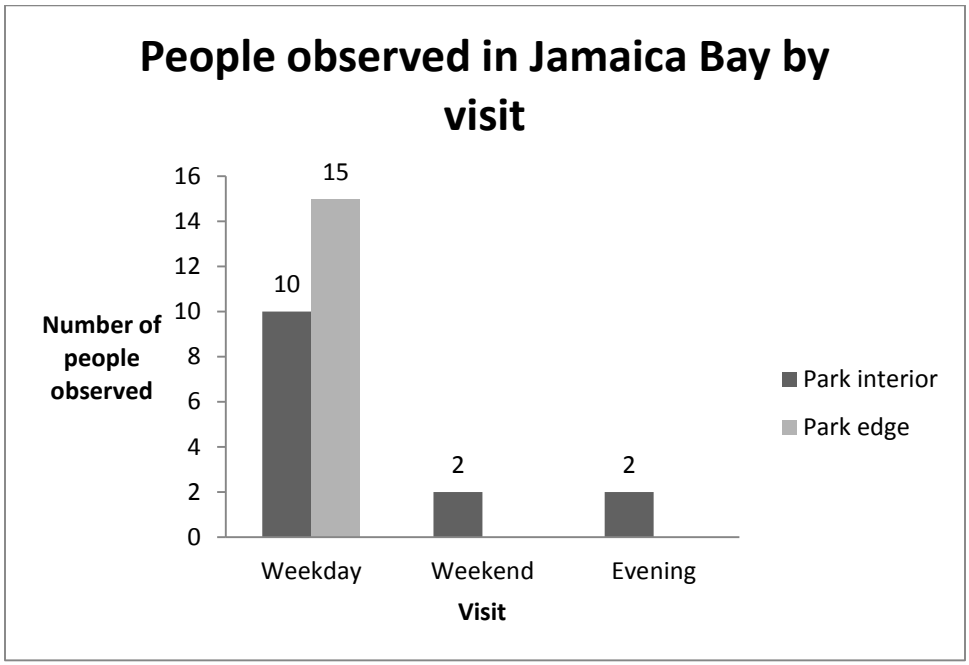
The people who are in the park are largely engaged in nature recreation, such as swimming, kayaking and fishing. One interviewee had been coming to the site for over 10 years and noted an improvement in the water quality and clarity, as well as the return of egrets to the area. Several mentioned the site as a good fishing spot. One homeless encampment was observed in the site. The eastern edge of the park included an informal staircase that was constructed to enable easier access to the water.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp files, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

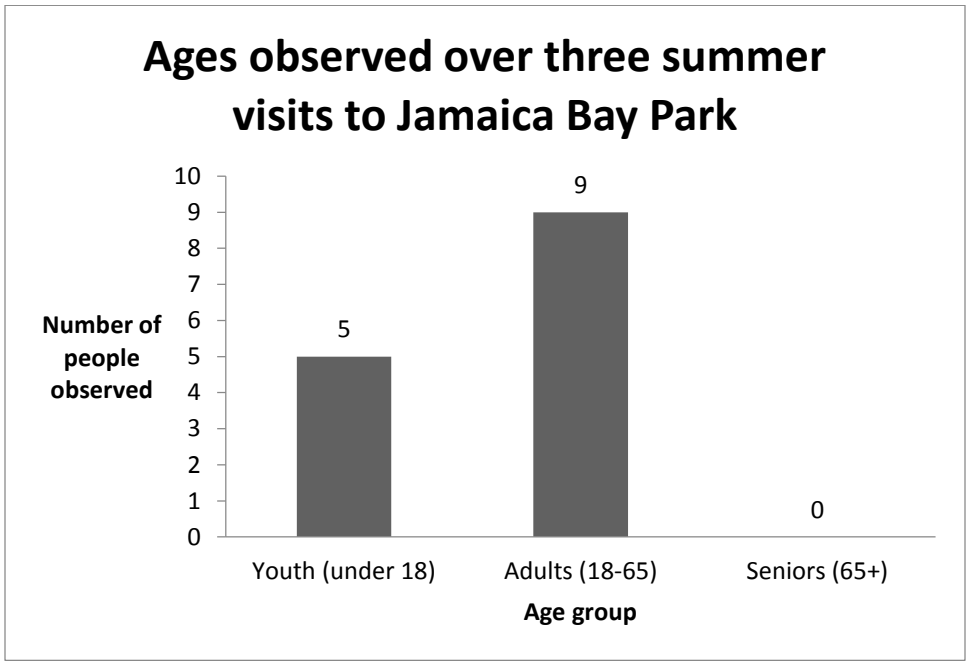
II. Field Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

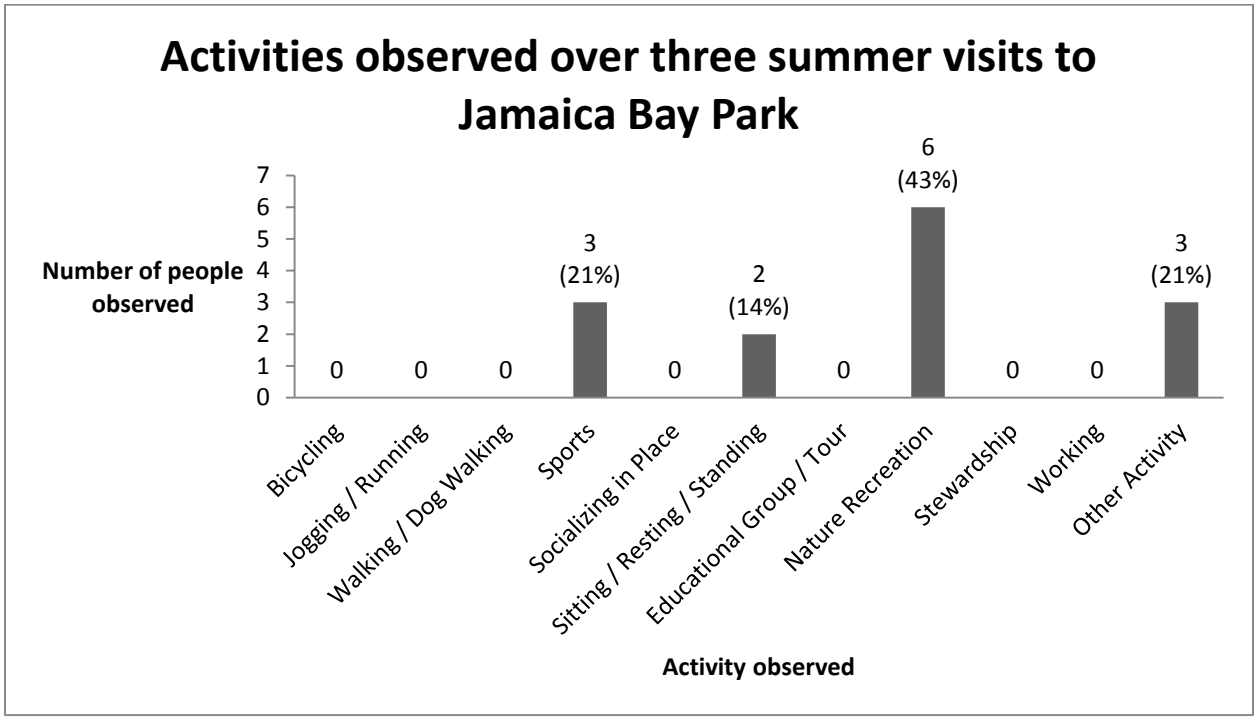


Who are they?



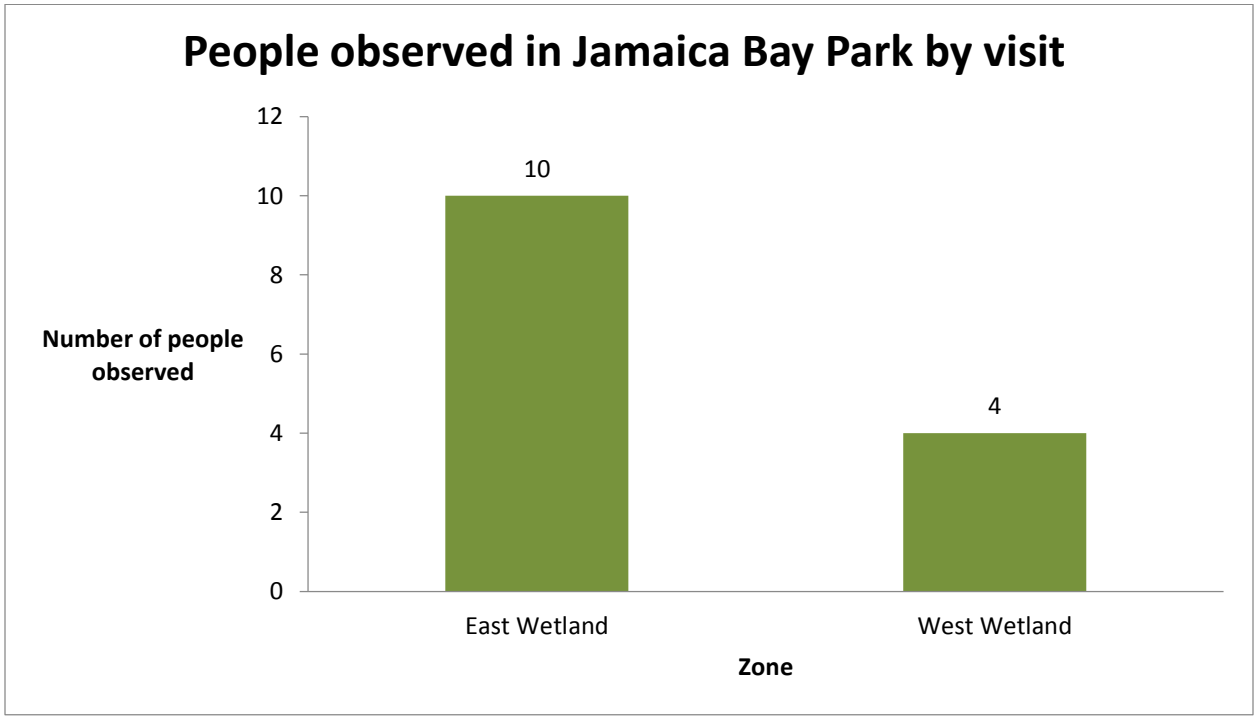
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior

Human Activities Observed by Zone, Time of Visit, and Age in Jamaica Bay Park. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone			Time of Visit				Age			
	West Wetland	East Wetland	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling			**0**				**0**				**0**
Jogging / Running			**0**				**0**				**0**
Walking / Dog Walking			**0**				**0**				**0**
Sports	1	2	**3**	3			**3**	1	2		**3**
Educational Group / Tour			**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation		6	**6**	5	1		**6**	3	3		**6**
Stewardship			**0**				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	1	1	**2**	2			**2**	1	1		**2**
Socializing in Place			**0**				**0**				**0**
Working			**0**				**0**				**0**
Other Activity			**0**		1	2	**0**		3		**0**
Total	**2**	**9**	**11**	**10**	**2**	**2**	**11**	**5**	**9**	**0**	**11**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)		
Sign	**East Wetland**	**West Wetland**	**Total**
Encampment / Sleeping Area		2	**2**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	2	1	**3**
Sitting Places & Dining		1	**1**
Sporting / Play Equipment	2	1	**3**
Trails		3	**3**
Total	**4**	**8**	**12**

Sociability Observed by Zone

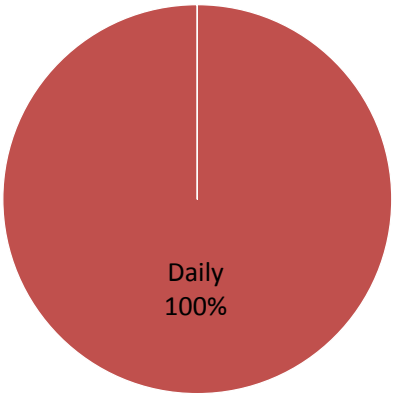
Zone	**Dogs**	**Pair (2)**	**Small Group (3-10)**	**Large Group (10+)**	**Total**
East Wetland		1	1		**2**
Total	**0**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**2**

III. Interviews with Park Users

Four park users were interviewed in Jamaica Bay Park (n = 4), of which 100% were male and 0% female. Fifty percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 25% were estimated to be over the age of 65 (25% unidentified). We did not interview park users under the age of 18, and the response rate for interviews was 100%.

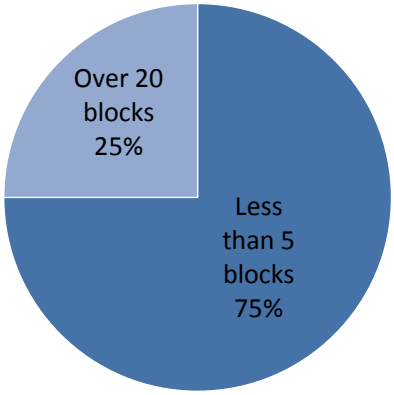
All of the respondents identified as visiting the park on a daily basis; and 75% lived within five blocks of the site, so the site is serving a local population of everyday users.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 4

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 4

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature-Recreation	2	50%
Walking	2	50%
Kids	1	25%
Total Respondents	**4**	

Interviewees said that they were in the park in order to engage in *nature recreation* (50%), most commonly fishing and crabbing. Others said that they were *walking* through the site (50%), including as a cut-through. Finally, one respondent (25%) said that they were taking their *kids* to the park to enjoy the water.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

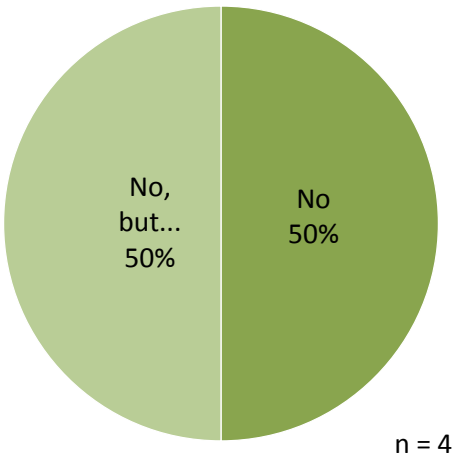
Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature-Outdoors	2	50%
Refuge	2	50%
Activity	1	25%
Local	1	25%
Total Respondents	**4**	

The primary reasons that people visit Jamaica Bay Park are to interact with *nature and the outdoors* (50%) and for the sense of *refuge* (50%) that the site provides. Respondents mentioned the quiet and isolation of the site as well as the views of the water. Another specifically mentioned the *activities* that they can engage in on site (25%), such as fishing, kayaking, and swimming. And one respondent mentioned that the park is *local* (25%) and a nice route for a walk.

Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit, shown here. The most commonly visited site types for Jamaica Bay Park users were *beach and waterfront* areas (75%) and *local* open spaces around the neighborhood (25%).

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Beach-Waterfront	3	75%
Local	1	25%
Total Respondents	**4**	



n = 4

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement. For Jamaica Bay Park, unlike other parks, *none* of the users engaged in stewardship.

However, two respondents said that they engage in *self-led stewardship* outside the context of a group –picking up their own trash in the park.

The Jamaica Bay Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users

QUEENS: Rockaway Community Park Profile

Zone Names	
Lawn	North Natural Area
Courts & Ballfields	East Natural Area
West Natural Area	

I. Park Narrative

Rockaway Community Park is a 193-acre park[1] on the Jamaica Bay waterfront of the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens. The park contains no designated natural areas. It sits directly across from a New York City Housing Authority public housing development, the Ocean Bay Apartments, and is adjacent to a large Department of Sanitation facility. The site includes recreational fields and courts, a large natural area, and a waterfront pier. The "West Natural Area" zone is essentially a corner vacant lot that is functioning as a neighborhood cut through / desire line as people walk to other sites along Beach Channel Drive. The high numbers of people observed there are *not* seeking out the park as a recreation site. The low number of seniors observed also reflects that most park users were just cutting through the site and not stopping to rest or use the space itself.

Overall, the site was very scarcely used. The tennis courts were missing nets and had weeds growing through the cracks; the basketball court surfaces were uneven; however, the cricket field was mown and maintained. Users interviewed consistently reported concerns about mosquitoes in the park that prevented them from comfortably using the site and called for extra maintenance and control measures to address the insect issue. The edge of the park lacks a sidewalk and many users end up walking in the street in order to avoid the insects and poison ivy. Along the bay side of the park, the crew observed signs of dumping, marine debris, driftwood, and abandoned boats. The proximity to JFK airport is noticeable, with low flying aircraft constantly passing overhead.

A number of people do use the park to recreate on the waterfront, however. One family was interviewed while using the waterfront pier and reported visiting the site close to daily to fish, crab, and enjoy the waterfront views. They live in the adjacent NYCHA houses and displayed a deep local ecological knowledge about the site, the tides, and the species they encounter there. They mentioned always cleaning up after themselves and others – and expressed interest in and willingness to pay fishing permit fees if the funds were used to help better maintain the park.

The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 73% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It is also a crucial local resource, with 87% of users traveling from less than 10 blocks away. Of those interviewed, 73% of users said they choose to visit Rockaway Community Park because it is serves as their local park.

On one daytime visit, because there were so few users in the park, the crew had to interview people along the park edge and to inquire about whether they used the park. Many of these interviews reiterated the concerns about the mosquitoes in the park. The crew observed that many of the street trees on the NYCHA side of the street were stewarded, but they appeared to be stressed – possibly due to saltwater inundation from Sandy. As well, the crew observed substantial construction projects occurring on the NYCHA grounds and speculated as to whether this was a result of post-Sandy rebuilding. There was high sociability along the NYCHA housing edge, as neighbors greeted each other

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

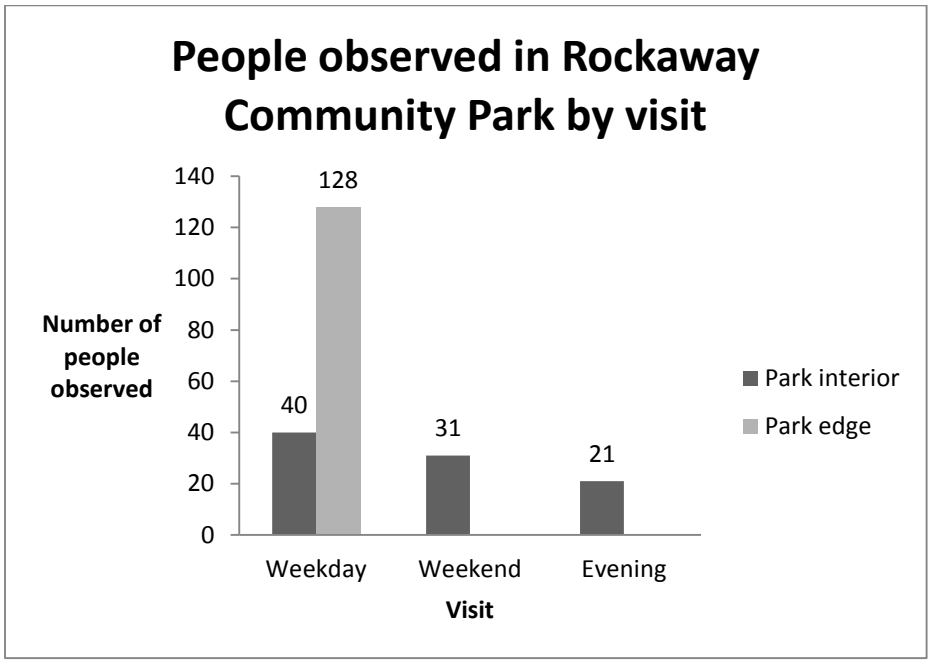
and had friendly encounters with the crew. Finally, there was construction in the adjacent streets, and conversations with construction workers revealed that they were updating the sewer system in anticipation of potential future new development in the area.

In fall 2013, after the park was assessed, it was the site of a large-scale MillionTreesNYC reforestation planting, where 20,000 trees were planted in a single day throughout the natural area. This was the best-attended planting of the entire campaign and was a highly visible public event, with opportunities for bird watching on the pier and a BBQ in the park after the planting was complete.

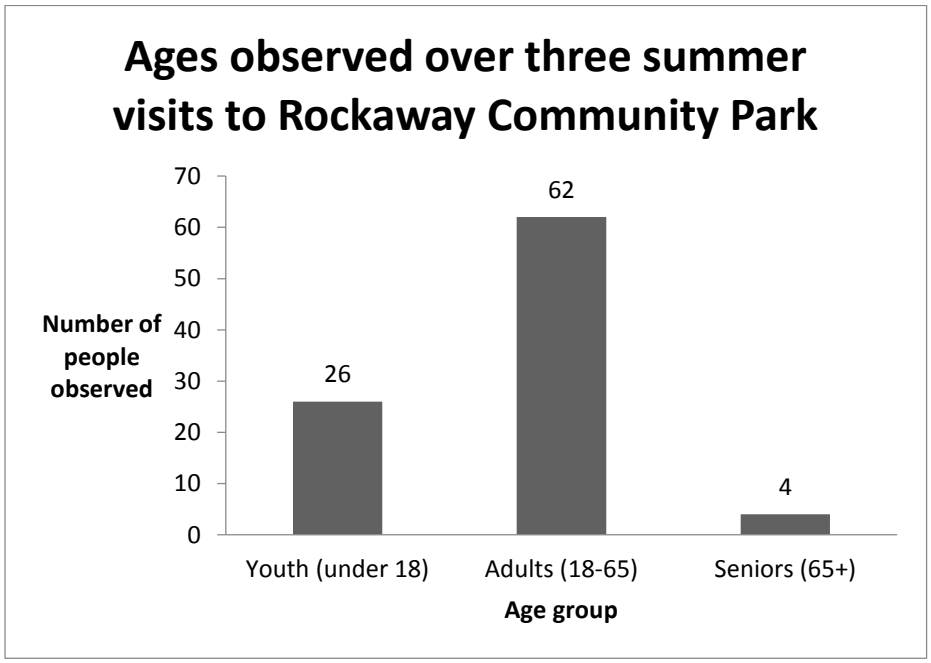
II. Field Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

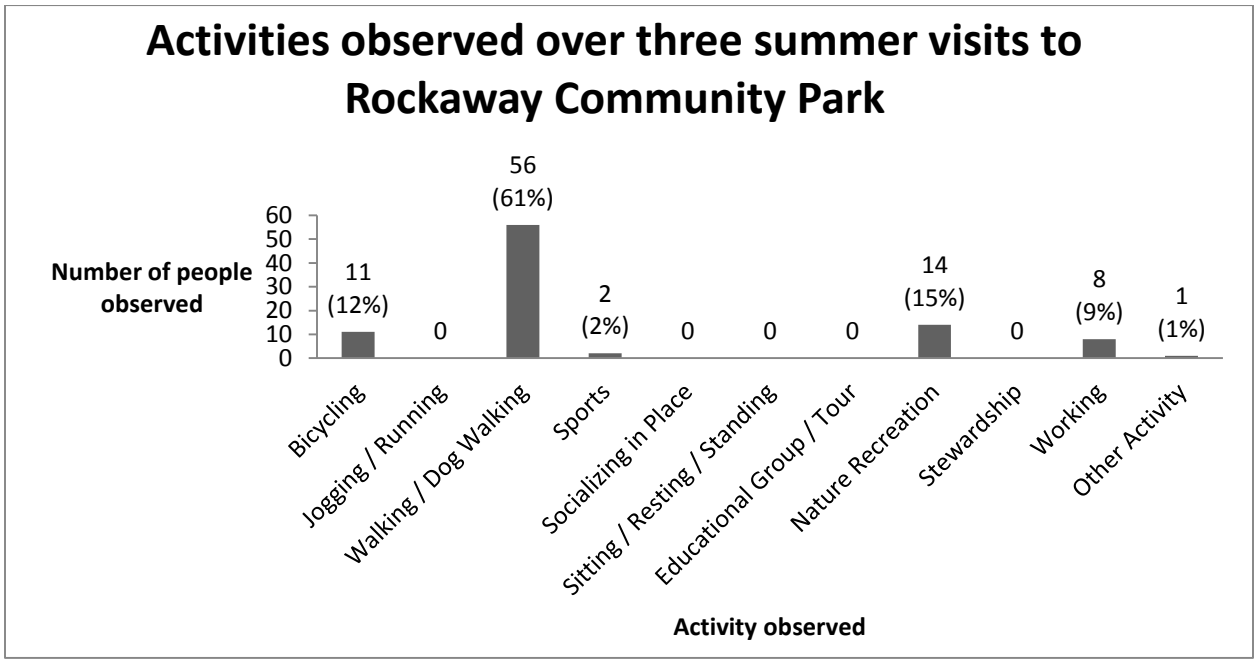


Who are they?



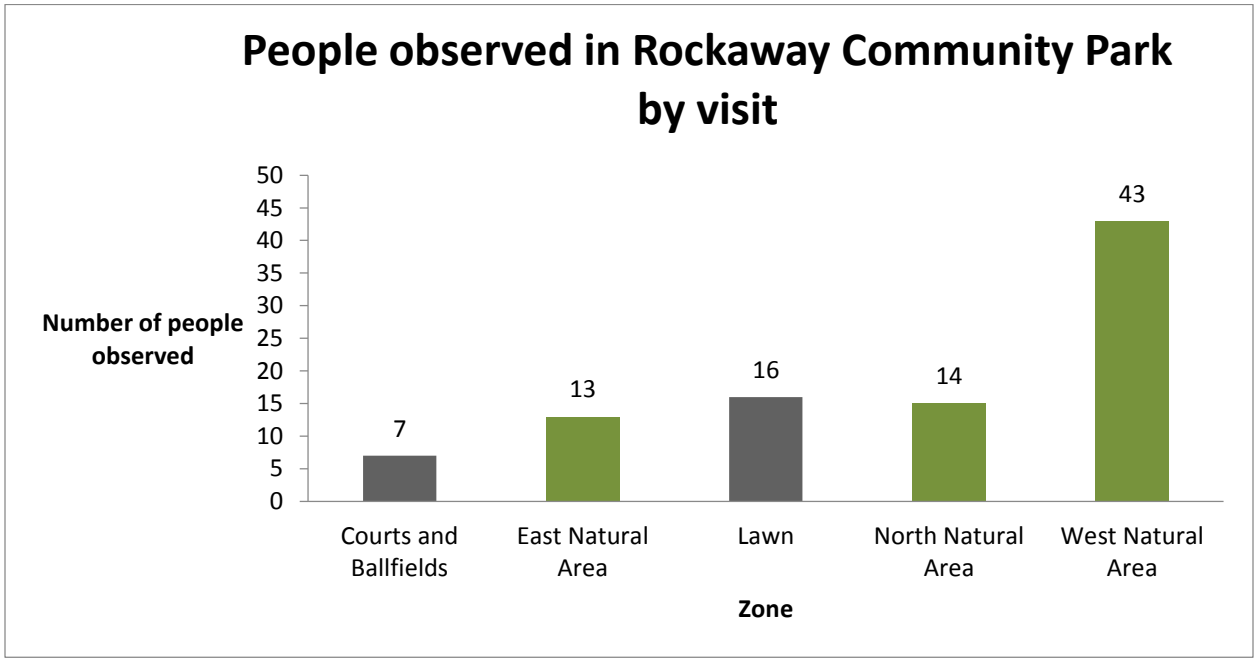
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Note that most park users are observed in the "West Natural Area" zone, which is essentially a corner vacant lot that is functioning as a neighborhood cut through / desire line as people walk to other sites along Beach Channel Drive. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Human Activities Observed by Zone, Time of Visit, and Age Group in Rockaway Community Park. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone						Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Lawn	Courts & Ballfields	West Natural Area	North Natural Area	East Natural Area	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	6		2		3	**11**	5		6	**11**		10	1	**11**
Jogging / Running						**0**				**0**				**0**
Walking / Dog Walking	9	5	41		1	**56**	25	25	6	**56**	20	35	1	**56**
Sports		1			1	**2**	1	1		**2**	1	1		**2**
Educational Group / Tour						**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation				14		**14**		5	9	**14**	5	7	2	**14**
Stewardship						**0**				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing						**0**				**0**				**0**
Socializing in Place						**0**				**0**				**0**
Working					8	**8**	8			**8**		8		**8**
Other Activity		1				**1**	1			**1**		1		**1**
Total	**15**	**7**	**43**	**14**	**13**	**92**	**40**	**31**	**21**	**92**	**26**	**62**	**4**	**92**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)					
Sign	**Courts & Ballfields**	**East Natural Area**	**Lawn**	**North Natural Area**	**West Natural Area**	**Total**
Damaged / Vandalized Building	6		2			**8**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	9	1		1		**11**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	6	3		2	2	**13**
Other (Note)	5	3	1	1	1	**11**
Other Signs, Flyers & Stickers			1			**1**
Sitting Places & Dining		2		4		**6**
Trails	4	1		5	2	**12**
Total	**30**	**10**	**4**	**13**	**5**	**62**

*Crews were instructed to take note of any other noteworthy or unique observations that stood out to them in each park. For Rockaway Community Park, other signs of activity noted included: remodeling of the boardwalk, a pesticide application sign, and two young trees that were uprooted.

Sociability Observed by Zone

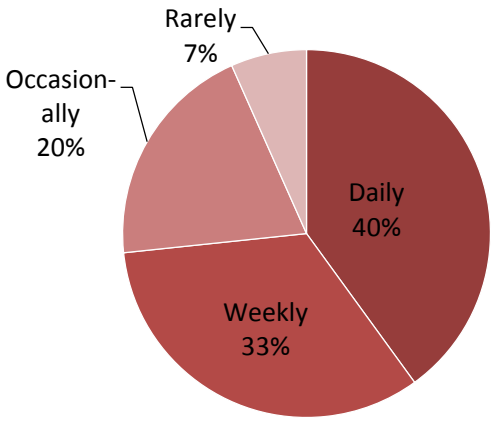
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Courts and Ballfields					**0**
East Natural Area					
Lawn	1	2	1		**4**
West Natural Area		2	2		**4**
North Natural Area		2	1		**3**
Total	**1**	**6**	**4**	**0**	**11**

III. Interviews with Park Users

Fifteen park users were interviewed in Rockaway Community Park, of which 53% were male and 40% female (7% unidentified). Ninety-three percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 7% were estimated to be over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 83%.

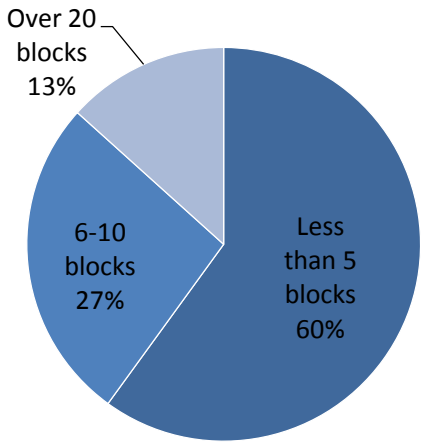
Overall, 73% of interviewees indicated that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It is serving a local population, with 60% of users traveling from less than 5 blocks away, and another 27% coming from within 10 blocks.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 15

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 15

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature Recreation	5	33%
Walking	4	27%
Nature-Outdoors	3	20%
Socializing	3	20%
Biking	2	13%
Dog	1	7%
Relaxing	1	7%
Sports-Recreation	1	7%
Total Respondents	**15**	

People interviewed at Rockaway Community Park were most commonly engaged in fishing or crabbing (*nature recreation*, 33%) along the waterfront. Others were *walking* in the park (27%) – either as a cut-through or specifically as a place to walk the *dog* (7%). Interviewees mentioned the experience of being *outdoors in nature* – enjoying the views, the breeze and the water (20%). Others mentioned the park as a site for *socializing* (20%), while fishing, playing sports, or going to a barbecue with friends and family. Finally, interviewees mentioned physical activities such as *biking* (13%) and playing *sports* (7%) as well as simply *relaxing* (7%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	11	73%
Refuge	3	20%
Activity	1	7%
Enjoyment	1	7%
Total Respondents	**15**	

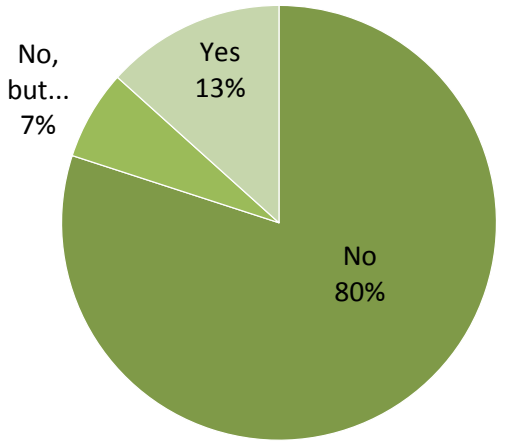
The primary reason people choose Rockaway Community Park to visit is that it is nearby to where they live (*local*, 73%) – this is particularly important to note for the people who are using the western edge of the site as a cut-through to get to other places they need to go in the neighborhood. A few respondents mentioned that the site is a peaceful and serves as a *refuge* where they can get away from everyday hustle and bustle and problems (20%). Just one respondent mentioned the specific *activity* that they can engage in in the park—fishing—as the reason to visit (7%) and the *enjoyment* that they experience being in the park (7%).

Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit, shown here. The most commonly visited site types for Rockaway Community Park users were *other named NYC parks* (33%) and *beach and waterfront* areas (27%). See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park(s)	5	33%
Beach-Waterfront	4	27%
No Response	3	20%
Nowhere Else	2	13%
Out of Town	1	7%
Sports	1	7%
Total Respondents	**15**	

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 15

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, so it is not surprising that just 13% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Those that did say yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type of group in which they participate, both of which are listed below.

No, but…

In addition to outright replies of 'yes' and 'no' one respondent said that they engage in stewardship practices through their *work*.

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Community Garden	1	33%
Environment	1	33%
Nature-Recreation	1	33%
Total	**3**	

Named Stewardship Groups

- Long Island Bass Masters Association
- NYC Parks Department

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

QUEENS: Spring Creek Park Profile

Zone Names
Lawn
Wetland
Natural Area

I. Park Narrative

Spring Creek Park is an approximately 119-acre park[1], including 31 acres of natural area. It is located just north of the Belt Parkway and includes both a substantial area of wetlands in the eastern portion of the park as well as a manicured area of lawn, trails, and a cricket pitch in the eastern portions of the park. The lawn area is across the street from a large, highly-visited shopping center/mall, which explains why so many people were observed on the edge of the park. As well, many of the interviewees reported that they were using the park as a cut-through or a walking path on their way to or from the mall. Others were using the path to walk, bike, or rollerblade. Most of the park users observed were African American adults. This area of the park is clearly being maintained, as the lawn was mowed, parks workers were observed pruning trees, and the cricket pitch was litter-free. Some gang graffiti was observed, however, on the walking path. In the trails leading into the woods, some signs of litter, beer bottles, and informal sitting places were observed. These areas include wildflowers, mature trees, and sounds of birdsong were heard.

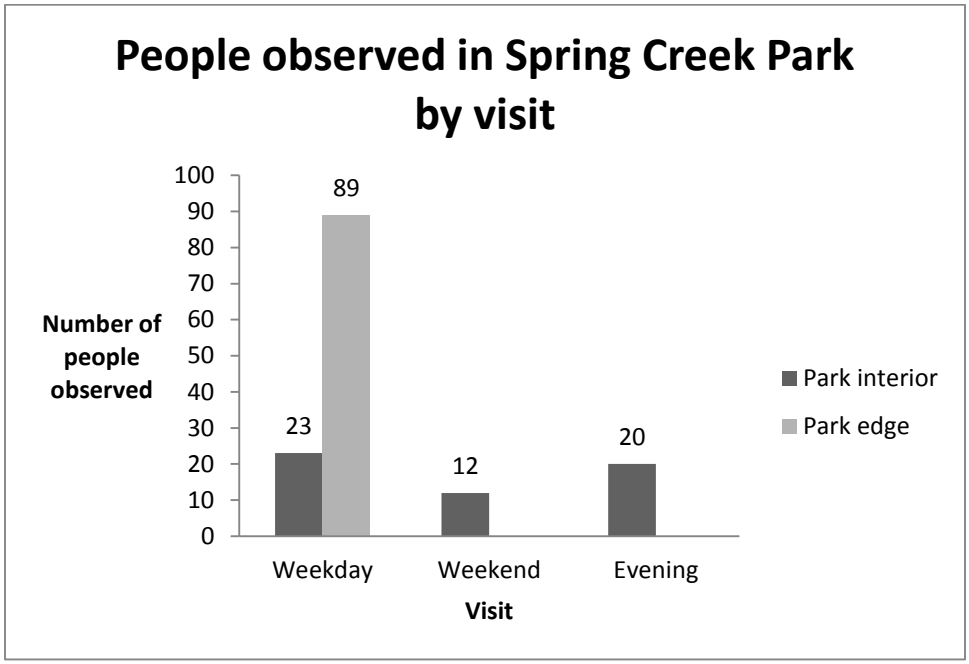
The wetlands are largely inaccessible, except for a few openings in the fence with informal trails leading toward the water. This zone includes tall weeds, such as mugwort and Queen Anne's lace. One gate that had been opened during the scouting phase was padlocked and closed. During scouting, we had observed signs of fishing and encampments in the wetland area. A posted sign notes that pregnant and nursing women should not eat fish or eel from waters, which indicates that this had historically been a fishing spot. During the assessment, no people were observed in either the wetlands or the natural area on any of the visits. This area of the park is bordered by Flatlands Ave and a number of large institutional spaces, including the US Postal Service, an MTA bus depot, and a DEP water treatment plant. There were few pedestrians in this more industrial area. However, the crew observed that the street trees surrounding this zone were mulched and staked. Throughout all of the zones, the crews observed a strong stench of sewage. There was also a major construction project adjacent to the existing mall, which made the site quite loud with construction sounds.

The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 51% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It is also a crucial local resource, with 58% of users traveling from less than 10 blocks away. Also, 50% of users said they choose to visit Spring Creek Park because it is serves as their local park. At the same time, the park does draw from a distance, with 34% of users traveling over 20 blocks to reach the park.

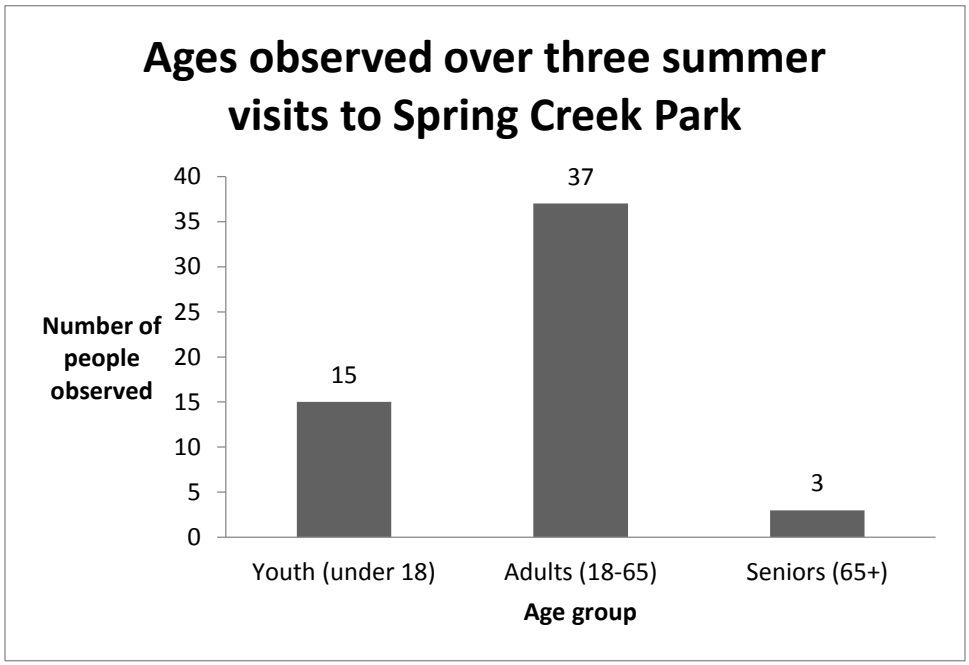
[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp files, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

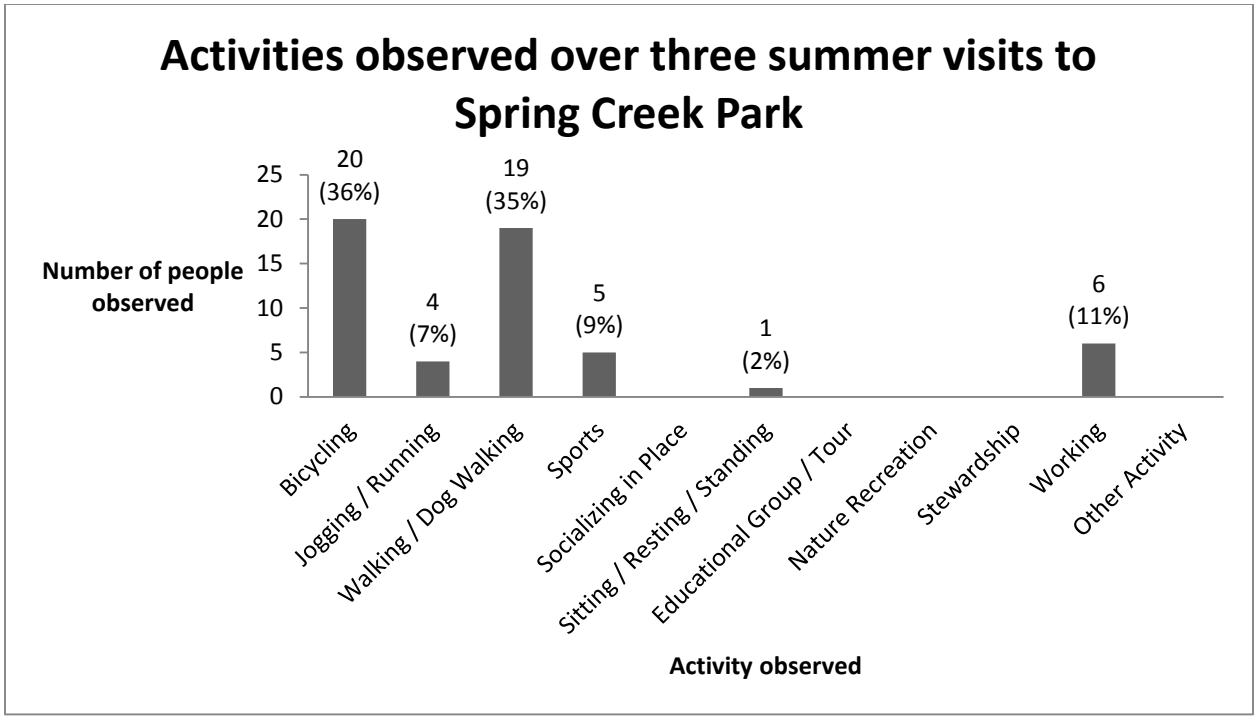


Who are they?

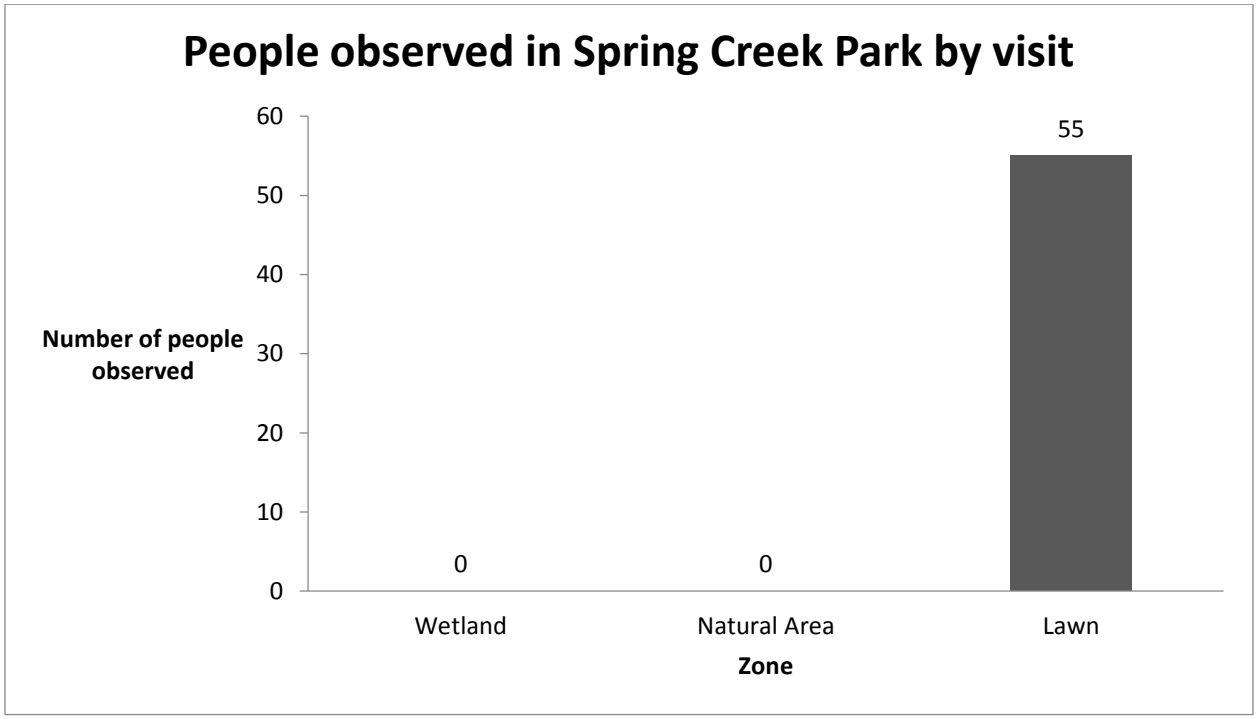


What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?



Detailed Counts

Human Activities Observed by Zone, Time of Visit, and Age Group in Spring Creek Park. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone				Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Lawn	Wetland	Natural Area	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	20			**20**	12	5	3	**20**	8	11	1	**20**
Jogging / Running	4			**4**	4			**4**		4		**4**
Walking / Dog Walking	19			**19**		6	13	**19**	3	15	1	**19**
Sports	5			**5**	2		3	**5**	4		1	**5**
Educational Group / Tour				**0**				0				**0**
Nature Recreation				**0**				0				**0**
Stewardship				**0**				0				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing				**0**			1	**1**		1		**1**
Socializing in Place				**0**				0				**0**
Working	6			**6**	5	1		**6**		6		**6**
Other Activity				**0**				0				**0**
Grand Total	**55**	**0**	**0**	**55**	**23**	**12**	**20**	**55**	**15**	**37**	**3**	**55**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

Sign	**Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)**			
	Lawn	**Wetland**	**Natural Area**	**Total**
Garden in Park		1		**1**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	9			**9**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	5	2		**7**
Other Signs, Flyers & Stickers	12			**12**
Sitting Places & Dining	3			**3**
Sporting / Play Equipment	1			**1**
Trails	1			**1**
Total	**31**	**3**	**0**	**34**

Sociability Observed by Zone

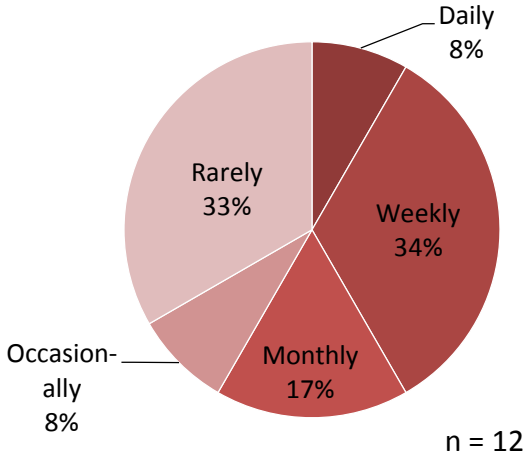
Zone	**Dogs**	**Pair (2)**	**Small Group (3-10)**	**Large Group (10+)**	**Total**
Lawn	1	8	2		**11**
Wetland					**0**
Natural Area					**0**
Total	**1**	**8**	**2**	**0**	**11**

III. Interviews with Park Users

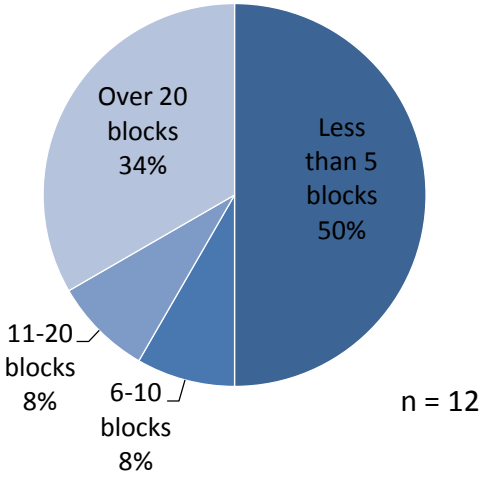
Twelve park users were interviewed in Spring Creek Park, of which 58% were male and 42% female. Ninety-two percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 8% were estimated to be over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 86% in Spring Creek Park.

Compared to most other parks assessed in the Jamaica Bay area, Spring Creek is used less frequently, with 33% of users saying that they visit "rarely" and another 8% occasionally. On the other hand, still, 42% of users visit the site daily or weekly. Half of the users come from the within 5 blocks of the site, while 34% of users travel from a distance of more than 20 blocks to reach the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	5	42%
Relaxing	3	25%
Biking	2	17%
Dog	2	17%
Socializing	2	17%
Exercise	1	8%
Kids	1	8%
Total Respondents	**12**	

The primary activity that most interviewees say they are engaging in is *walking* (42%) either for leisure, to *walk the dog* (17%), or as a pleasant way to get to/from the mall.

Another 25% say that they are simply *relaxing* or "killing time" in the park. Others use the park as a space for *socialization*—simply sitting and talking with friends (17%). Others seek out active recreation, including *biking* (17%) and *exercise* (8%) along the pathway. One respondent mentioned using the site with *kids* (8%), while several mentioned that the park should have more facilities and amenities for kids, which would be an attractor for greater use.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	6	50%
Amenities	3	25%
Nature-Outdoors	2	17%
Refuge	2	17%
Social Ties	2	17%
Sociability	1	8%
Total Respondents	**12**	

The main reason that people visit Spring Creek park is that is *local* (50%)—meaning it is "convenient", or "nearby". Some respondents mentioned that it is simply a cut-through, a way to get to the mall, but others mentioned that it is an important outdoor space when there are no other parks nearby. Three respondents (25%) mentioned the *amenity* of the bike path being important for long bike rides and walking the dog. Others mentioned features of *nature and the outdoors* (17%), including shade and birds. Others considered the site a *refuge* (17%) – mentioning the safety and seclusion that they feel there. Finally, some respondents considered the site a place for *sociability* (8%) or to which they have *social ties* (17%).

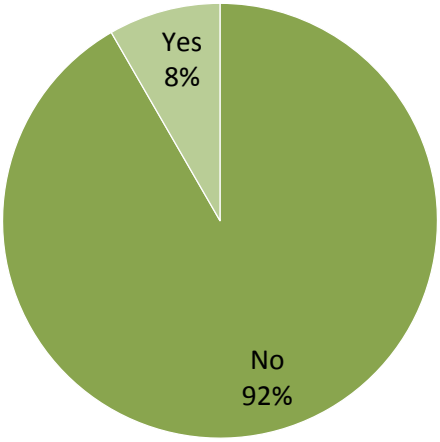
Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as *social connectors* between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit, shown here. For many respondents (42%) they visit *nowhere else* in the outdoors, indicating the importance of Spring Creek as a

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nowhere Else	5	42%
Out of Town	5	42%
Playground	2	17%
Named NYC Park(s)	2	17%
No Response	1	8%
Sports	1	8%
Total Respondents	**12**	

local source of nature. Others mentioned going out of town (42%) to interact with the outdoors. The complete list of sites visited is at right.

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 12

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental or civic engagement, so it is not surprising that just one respondent (8% of interviewees) directly identified as doing so.

This respondent did not identify the group by name, but indicated that they are a member of a hunting society, which we categorized as a 'nature-recreation' group.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

QUEENS: Springfield Park Profile

Zone Names
Courts and Ballfields
Lake and Lawn

I. Park Narrative

Springfield Park is a 22-acre site[1] with zero acres of natural area. It is located between the Queens neighborhoods of Springfield Gardens and Brookville, just northwest of Idlewild Park.

The park contains baseball fields, basketball and tennis courts, and play equipment, as well as a large lake surrounded by a landscaped lawn area dotted with mature trees. All areas of the park were well-used by adults and children. The lake and lawn area was most frequently used for walking and socializing in place, while the recreational areas were used primarily for playing or watching organized sports activities.

Springfield Park attracts people from both nearby and far away, with 52% coming from within 5 blocks away and 30% traveling over 20 blocks to reach the park. Two-thirds of park users interviewed reported visiting the park daily or weekly. Two large family/neighborhood reunions and a youth basketball tournament were observed on the weekend visit. This park clearly serves as a location for large community gatherings and events. The majority of park users observed were African American or Latino.

The lake and lawn area of the park contained many signs of stewardship, including mulched areas, dog waste bag dispensers, and several gardens that appeared to be created by community members. Informal trails and signage also reveal the community use of this area of the park for walking and socializing or communicating. While it was well used, the lake and lawn area did not appear to be recently mown and was full of mugwort and other weeds.

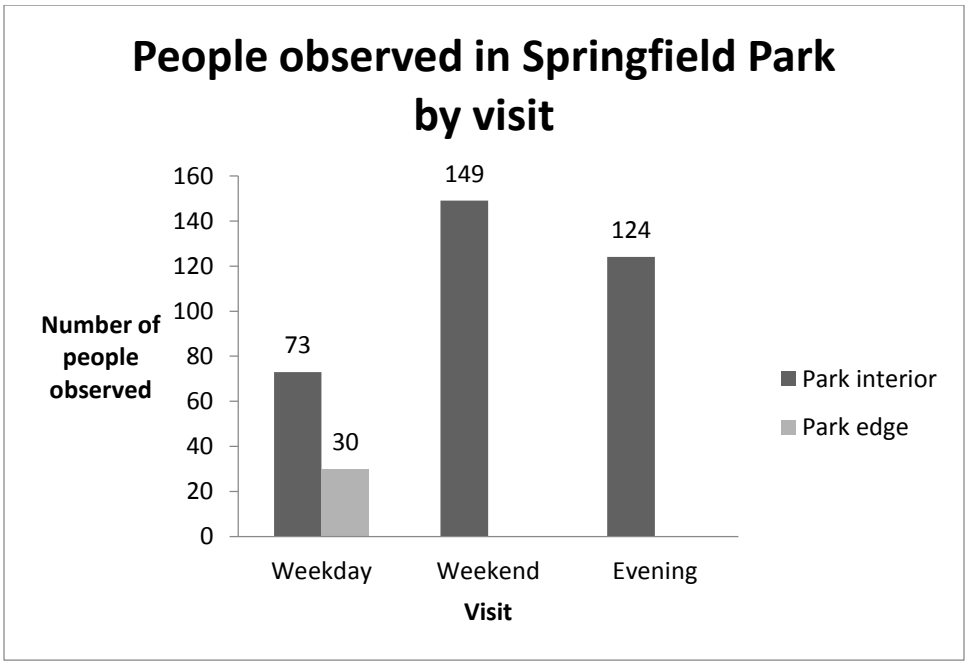
A boat was observed dredging the lake in Springfield Park, a project which some residents were eager to see finished. It was apparent that this park is well used by dogs. The dog waste bags were being replaced by a volunteer from Friends of Springfield Park while the field researchers were in the park, and one park user expressed the community's desire for a dog run. Park users also expressed interest in more exercise equipment.

[1] Park acreage was calculated by using the NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Natural areas acreage was calculated by using the Natural_Areas.shp and Preserves.shp files, clipped to park_property.shp and with water bodies removed from acreage.

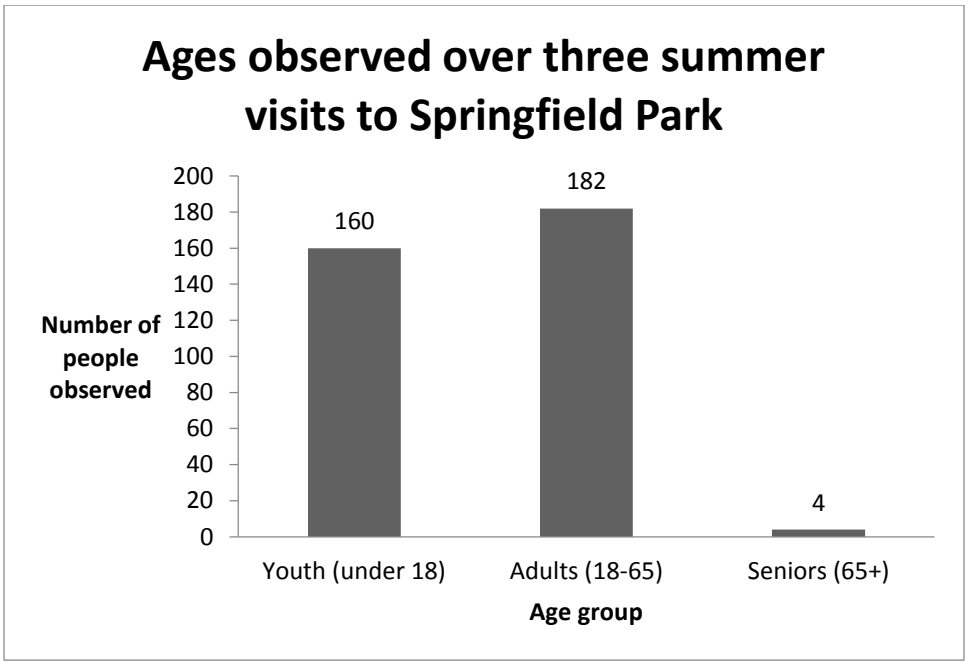
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

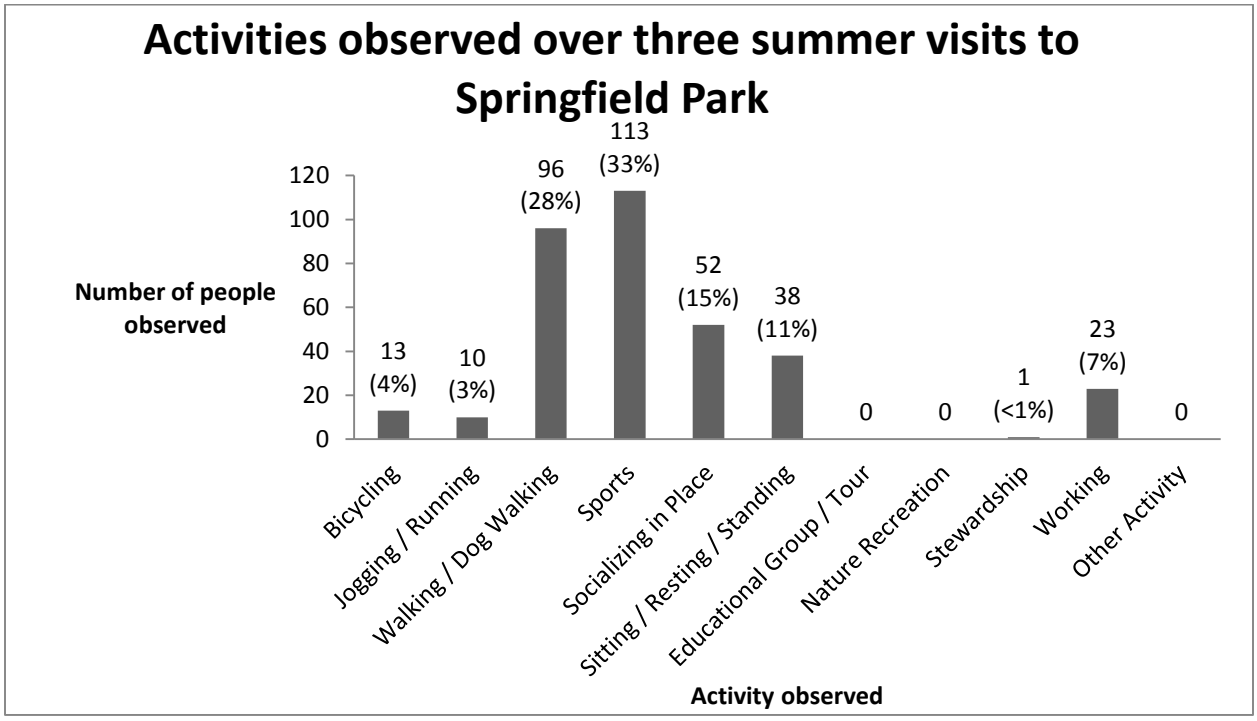


Who are they?

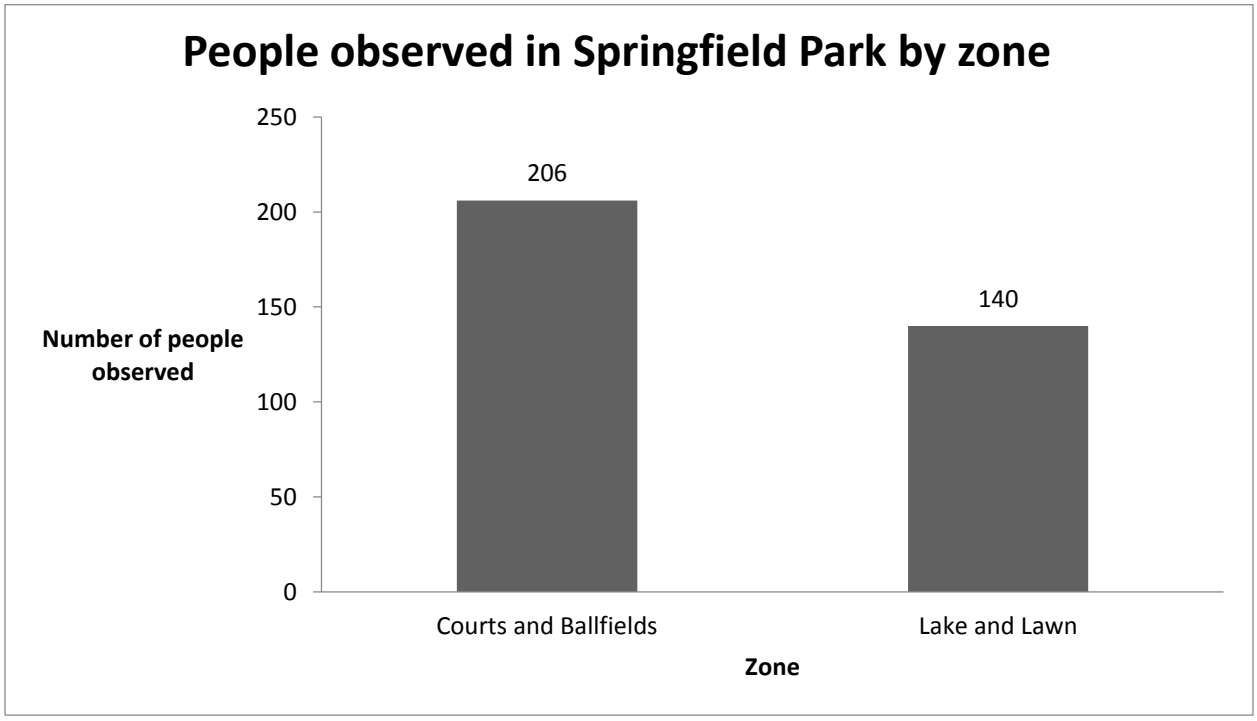


What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?



Detailed Counts

Human Activities Observed by Zone, Time of Visit, and Age Group Springfield Park

Activity Observed	Park Zone			Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Courts & Ballfields	Lake & Lawn	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	8	5	**13**	5	5	3	**13**	6	6	1	**13**
Jogging / Running	2	8	**10**	6	2	2	**10**	1	9		**10**
Walking / Dog Walking	41	55	**96**	34	24	38	**96**	23	71	2	**96**
Sports	109	4	**113**	9	59	45	**113**	112	1		**113**
Stewardship	1		**1**	1			**1**		1		**1**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	30	8	**38**	3	6	29	**38**	18	19	1	**38**
Socializing in Place		52	**52**		45	7	**52**		52		**52**
Working	15	8	**23**	15	8		**23**		23		**23**
Total	**206**	**140**	**346**	**73**	**149**	**124**	**346**	**160**	**182**	**4**	**346**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

Sign	Courts & Ballfields	Lake & Lawn	Total
Garden in Park	2	7	**9**
Substantial Dumping or Debris		2	**2**
Other (Note)*		5	**5**
Other Signs, Flyers & Stickers	2	8	**10**
Trails		3	**3**
Total	**4**	**25**	**29**

*Crews were instructed to take note of any other noteworthy or unique observations that stood out to them in each park. For Springfield Park, other signs of activity included dog waste bag dispensers, mulched areas, and construction materials.

Sociability Observed by Zone

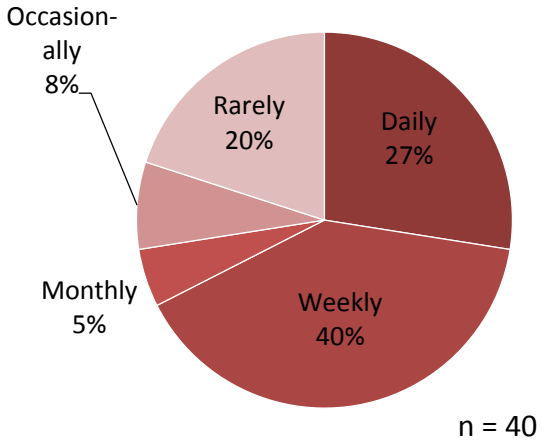
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Lake and Lawn	6	7	10	1	24
Courts and Ballfields	6	11	10	1	28
Total	**12**	**18**	**20**	**2**	**52**

III. Interviews with Park Users

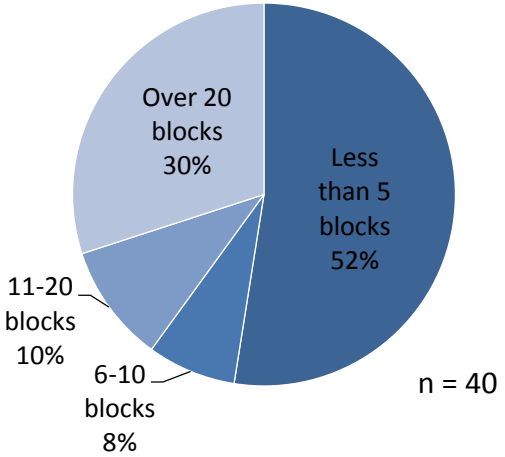
Forty park users were interviewed in Springfield Park, of which 60% were male and 38% female (2% unidentified). Eighty-five percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 13% were estimated to be over the age of 65 (2% unidentified). We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 98% in Springfield Park.

About two-thirds (67%) of park users visit daily or weekly, but 20% say they visit the park rarely, possibly due to the reunions taking place. While 52% of those interviewed live less than 5 blocks away, another 30% travelled more than 20 blocks to reach the park. Overall, the park appears to be serving a diverse audience.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Sports-Recreation	10	25%
Socializing	8	20%
Kids	7	18%
Exercise	5	13%
Walking	5	13%
Relaxing	3	8%
Stewardship	3	8%
Fundraising	2	5%
Arts and Culture	1	3%
Biking	1	3%
Dog	1	3%
Blank	1	3%
Working	1	3%
Total Respondents	**40**	

Many Springfield Park interviewees were engaging in physical activity, including *sports and recreation* (25%), *exercise* (13%) and *walking* (13%). Twenty percent (20%) of those interviewed were *socializing* and another 18% were there with *kids*. Many of those socializing or with children were involved in one of the large events taking place in the park: a family reunion, a neighborhood reunion, a youth basketball tournament, and a food shelter fundraising event. Some users were in Springfield Park to *relax* (8%) and one person was there for *artistic inspiration* (3%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

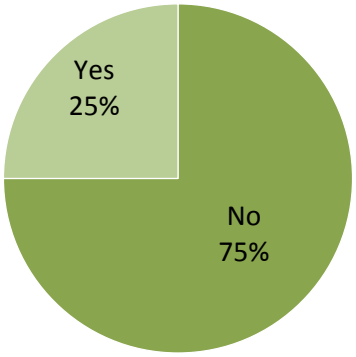
The primary reason people choose to visit Springfield Park is that it is close to home (*local*, 70%). Many park users also visit because of the *amenities* (20%), particularly the basketball courts. A few people mentioned visiting for natural qualities such as shade or wildlife (*nature-outdoors*, 5%), or to find a place of *refuge* that is "tranquil," "quiet," and "peaceful" (8%). Some park users also revealed *place attachment* (8%) with comments like, "I grew up in this park."

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	28	70%
Amenities	8	20%
Place Attachment	3	8%
Refuge	3	8%
Sociability	3	8%
Nature-Outdoors	2	5%
Enjoyment	1	3%
Total Respondents	**40**	

Q.5 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parkland as ecological corridors, we can think of human park users as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about their recreation patterns and where else they like to go in the outdoors. This led to responses that include both specifically named sites as well as a list of site types that they visit. The most commonly visited sites for Springfield Park users were *other named NYC Parks* (43%). Nineteen percent (20%) of park users said that they *don't really like to go anywhere else outdoors*, indicating the importance of Springfield Park in their everyday lives. Springfield Park users also commonly visit *beach and waterfront* sites (13%), *sports venues* (10%), or *out of town* locations (10%). See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park(s)	17	43%
Nowhere Else	8	20%
Beach-Waterfront	5	13%
Out of Town	4	10%
Sports	4	10%
Amusements	1	3%
No Response	1	3%
Streets	1	3%
Zoo or Aquarium	1	3%
Total Respondents	**40**	



n = 40

Q.6 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and 25% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Those that did say yes either gave specifically named groups and/or offered the general type of group in which they participate, both of which are listed below. Notably, the park appears to have its own stewardship group, Friends of Springfield Park.

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Environment	4	40%
Civic	2	20%
Community Garden	1	10%
Friends of Park	1	10%
Professional	1	10%
Sports-Recreation	1	10%
Total	**10**	**100%**

Named Stewardship Groups

- Eastern Queens Alliance
- Friends of Springfield Park
- Idlewild Environmental Education Center
- MillionTreesNYC
- National Black NBA
- Police Athletic League

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
STATEN ISLAND: Blue Heron Park Profile

Zone Names	
Central Natural Area	South Natural Area
East Natural Area	West Natural Area
Nature Center	

I. Park Narrative

Blue Heron Park is a large, 204-acre[1] nature preserve located in southern Staten Island. It is a mostly wooded, serene park with many ecological features and trails, and the majority of the park is designated as Forever Wild. There is a large nature center for the park that runs various public programs, such as nature hikes and wildlife education programs.

The park is surrounded by an affluent, suburban-style neighborhood. According to the NYC Parks website, the City purchased the parkland in multiple segments, which may explain why many houses appear to be almost within the park itself. Small parts of the park are separated from other parts because of this unique configuration. There are a number of American flags and objects of Americana adorning the local houses nearby. The streets are quiet and clean with very few people observed either inside or outside the houses.

The park can be divided into four sections because of major roads dividing the park. The sections are very similar in terms of their ecological characteristics. Three of them have marked trails and official paths going through them, while the last area south of Hylan Blvd does not; it only has one informal trail and a small 'hang-out' spot. All the areas have tall forest canopies, thick foliage, and little understory. When we assessed the park in summer 2014, there were many fallen trees that were not cleared. An attractive feature of the central area of the park is a large pond that, although covered in algae, has beautiful flowers and foliage around it. The pond has an informal path around it.

We observed very few people when we assessed the park. There are few signs of human use as well. By and large, this park appears to have little use aside from public programs organized by the nature center or other outside groups. While we saw signs advertising school group activities and volunteer opportunities in the park, we did not assess the park during those times, so we could not record all the park users who come to this park.

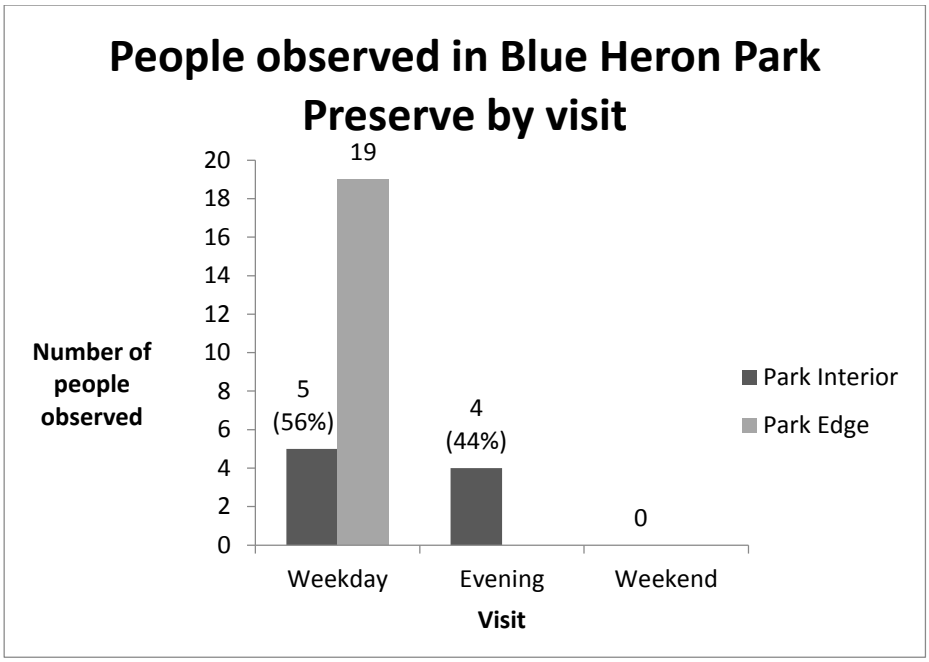
Blue Heron Park is a beautiful park preserve in Staten Island. Integrated into its local neighborhood, the park provides a sense of peace and quiet throughout the area. It has great potential as an environmental teaching space and for individual moments of natural immersion.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

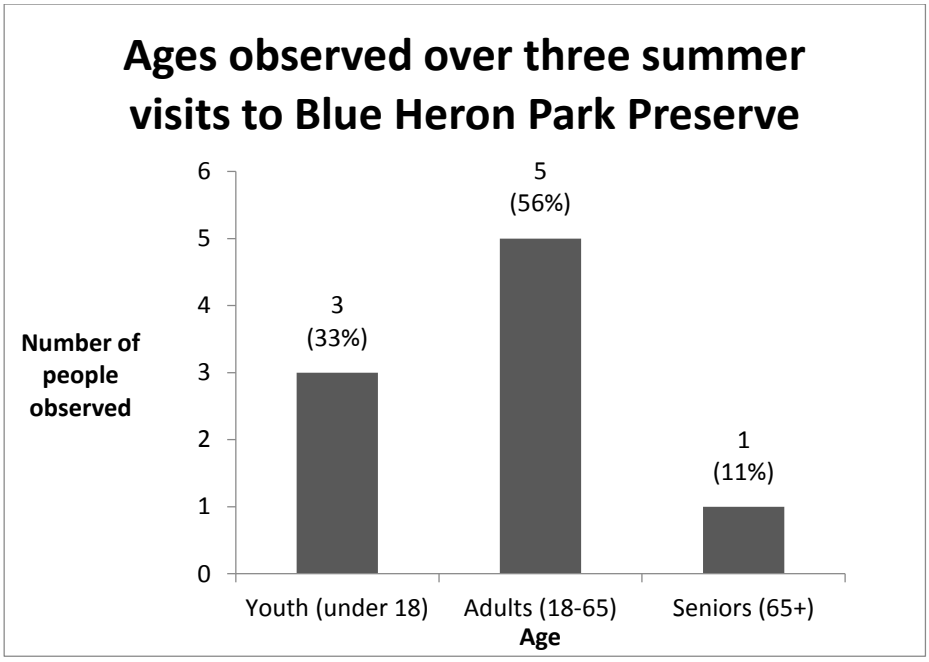
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

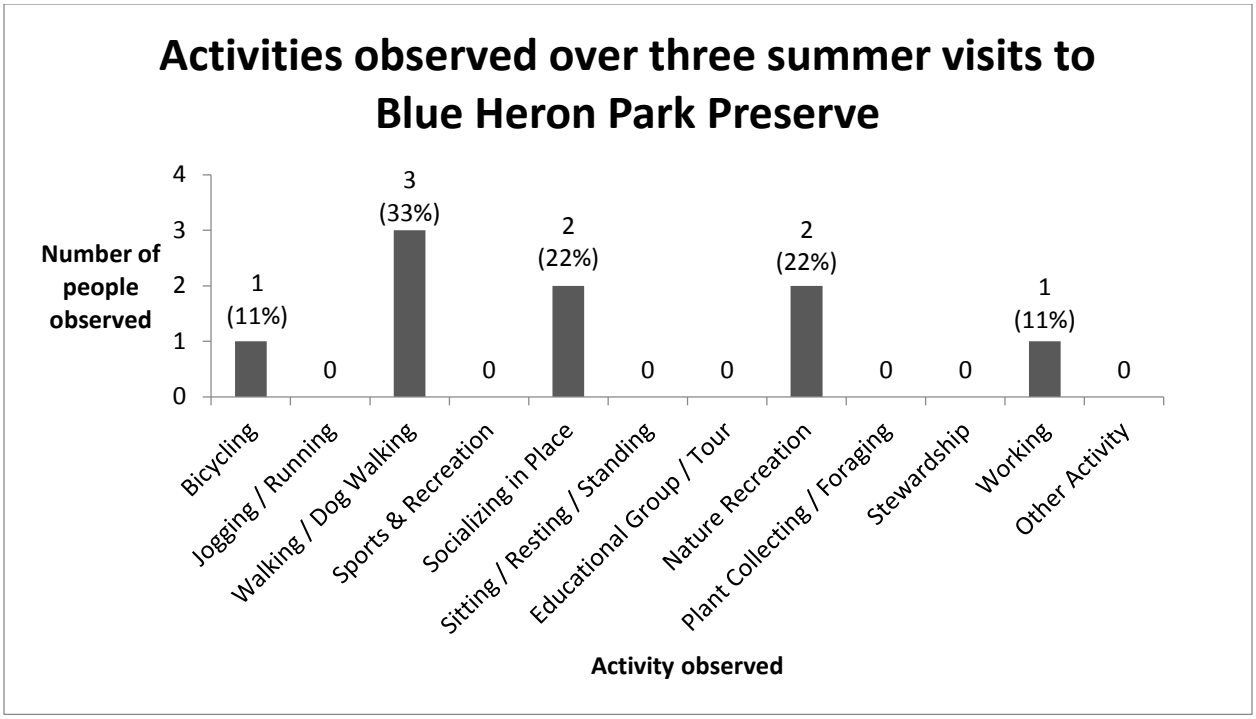


Who are they?



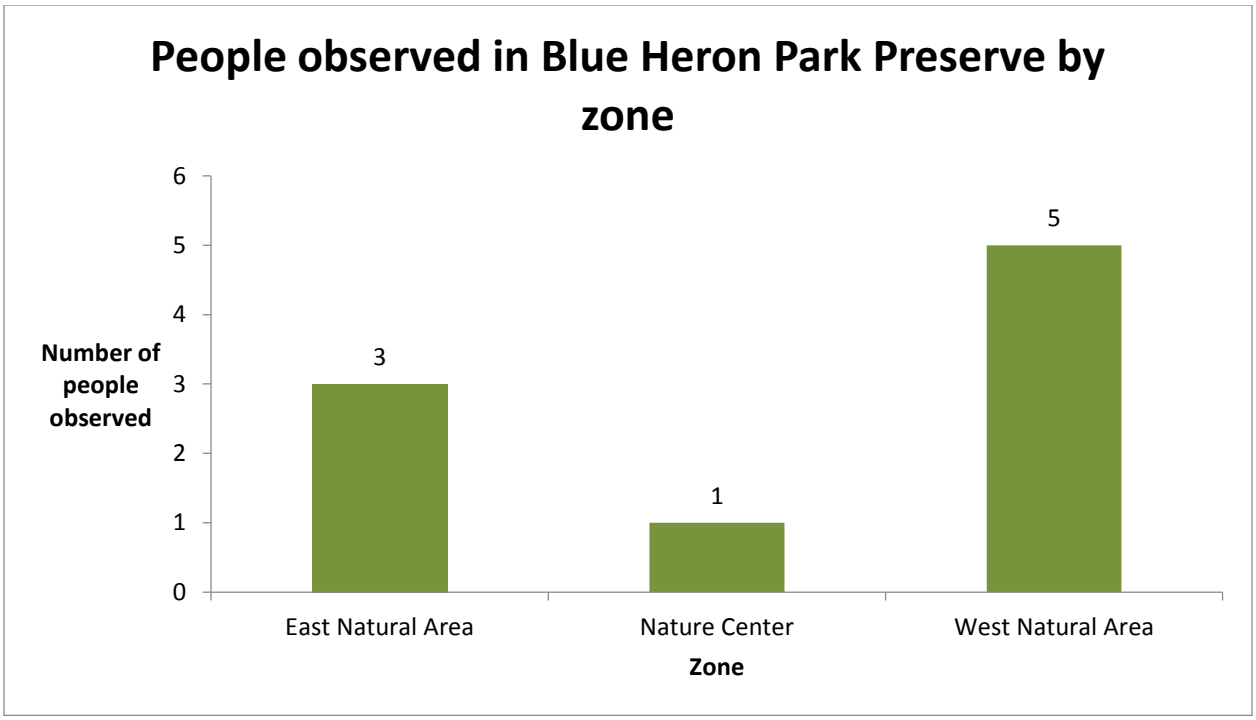
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone, by time of visit and age group. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone				Time of Visit				Age Group			
	E Natural Area	Nature Center	W Natural Area	Total	Weekday	Weekend	Evening	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling			1	**1**	1			**1**		1		**1**
Jogging / Running				**0**				**0**				**0**
Walking / Dog Walking	3			**3**	3			**3**		2	1	**3**
Sports & Recreation				**0**				**0**				**0**
Socializing in Place			2	**2**			2	**2**	2			**2**
Sitting / Resting / Standing				**0**				**0**				**0**
Educational Group / Tour				**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation			2	**2**			2	**2**	1	1		**2**
Plant Collecting / Foraging				**0**				**0**				**0**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**				**0**
Working		1		**1**	1			**1**		1		**1**
Other Activity				**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**3**	**1**	**5**	**9**	**5**	**0**	**4**	**9**	**3**	**5**	**1**	**9**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)				
Sign	Central Natural Area	East Natural Area	South Natural Area	West Natural Area	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box	1			2	**3**
Damaged / Vandalized Property					**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area					**0**
Fire pit					**0**
Garden in Park					**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals		2			**2**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places			1		**1**
Informal Trails	3	5	1	3	**12**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol	1				**1**
Other Sign	2	4	1		**7**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers				5	**5**
Substantial Dumping or Debris	1	4		1	**6**
Total	**8**	**15**	**3**	**11**	**37**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Blue Heron Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of wooden pallets in the woods and old nature signs along the trails.

"During our visits, we saw almost no other users and mostly took it as an opportunity to enjoy nature walks through the park. There are several color-coded trails that all begin at the Nature Center and playground. A well-marked map lets visitors know the length and route of each trail. When we first started out on the yellow trail it seemed like it would be easy to follow. It was well-marked and there was interpretation signage that taught us about common flora and fauna in the park. It then became obvious that we had come to a part of the trail that was less frequently traveled. There were many downed trees, and it was no longer clear where the path went… After walking for a few more minutes we were able to reorient towards the trail, but for those moments of 'lostness' the woods of Blue Heron Park felt enormous; in both a good and bad sense."

Vignette from field researcher's notes on Blue Heron Park

Sociability Observed by Zone

Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
East Natural Area			1		**1**
West Natural Area		2			**2**
Total	**0**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**3**

III. Interview with Park User

Due to the small number of park users present, only 1 park user was interviewed in Blue Heron Park. The respondent was male and over the age of 65. He rarely visited, traveled less than 5 blocks, and was walking in the park. He visited because the park was nearby. When asked whether he participated in any groups that take care of the environment, he said that he used to donate to Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, a local Staten Island organization. When asked if he ever went to the woods, wetland or trail areas, he answered yes and said that he typically goes walking in those areas. Finally, when asked where else he liked to go in the outdoors, he listed a named NYC park, specifically Wolfe's Pond Park.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

STATEN ISLAND: Clove Lakes Park Profile

Zone Names			
Ballfield	NE Woods & Lawn	Playground	Skating Rink
Natural Area	NW Woods & Lawn	Rec Area	SW Woods & Lawn

I. Park Narrative

Clove Lakes Park is a mid-sized, 174-acre[1] park in northern Staten Island. It is a multi-feature park that attracts a diverse array of users. The surrounding area is a middle-class neighborhood with single-family homes. Clove Lakes Park gives the impression that it is in a quiet area of Staten Island; in reality, it is very close to a number of major local roads and is just a few blocks away from the Staten Island Expressway (I-278). Many single-family homes have been converted to medical offices. Walking along the park edge, especially along the southern edge, one can see many fields of medicine and allied practitioners side-by-side.

The interface between the Forever Wild areas and other areas makes it easy to access both types of spaces. The lake serves as a buffer between the mowed, recreational, and playground areas. The path between the lake and the Forever Wild woods are welcoming and accessible to many users who may have only come for the scheduled activities or playground. The woods in Clove Lakes Park have many formal trails that are well-maintained and never lead too far from the periphery of the woods. The interior of the Forever Wild area also contains a picnic area equipped with several picnic tables and two water fountains. Because of routine maintenance and programming, the Forever Wild parts of the park does not have many signs of prior human use. There are a few informal trails, but other signs are largely absent.

Many of the park users we interviewed, both local users and people from outside the state or borough, have long histories with the park and have grown up around it. Others who are newer to the area also enjoy the park and find it accessible by car and bus. We observed many seniors using and enjoying the park; they were engaged in many activities such as jogging / running and nature recreation. Based on our interviews, the trails are well-liked by runners and joggers; some especially like the uphill slope where they can practice endurance running. During one of our interviews, we learned that Clove Lakes Park also serves as a training ground for a high school cross-country team.

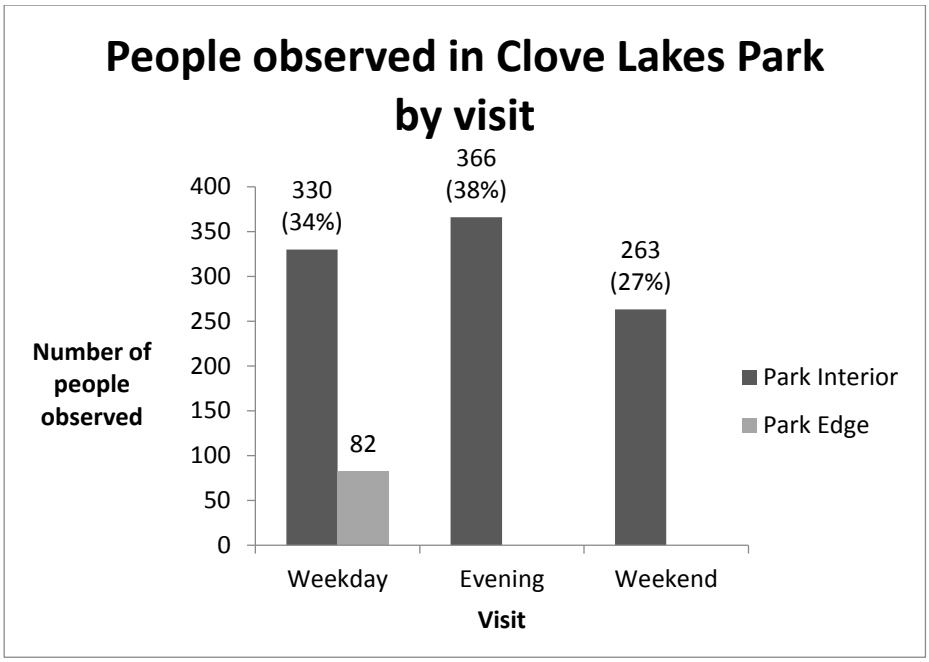
Clove Lakes Park is a neighborhood- and community-oriented park that attracts a wide range of users. The Forever Wild part of the park is also valued, well-used, and well-integrated with other parks of the park.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

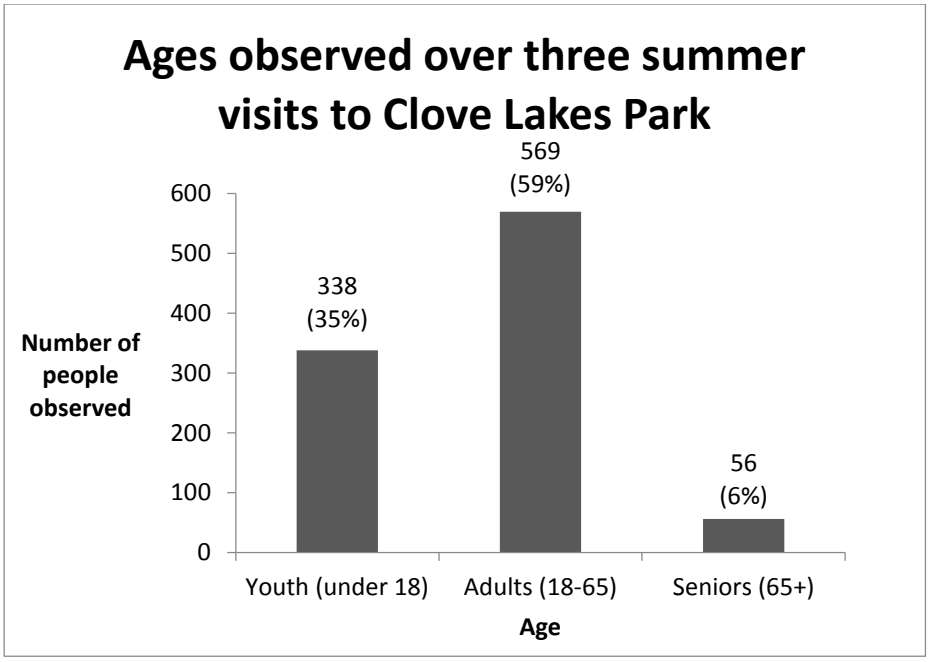
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

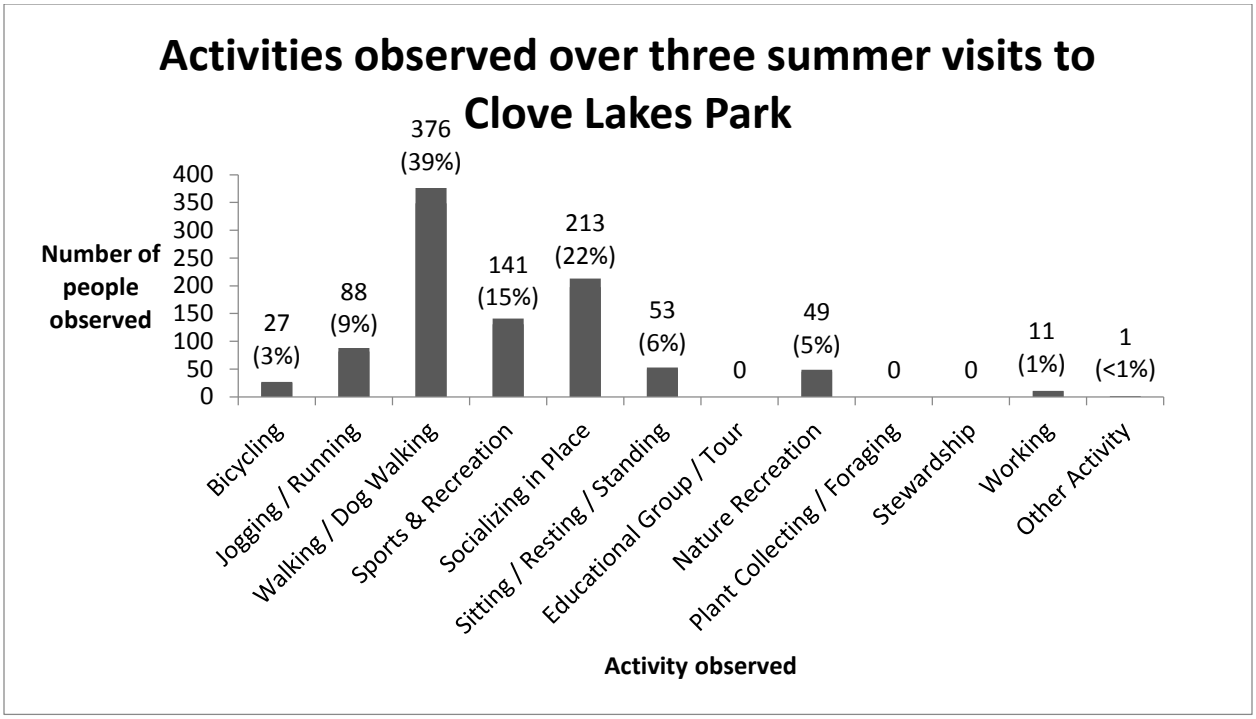


Who are they?



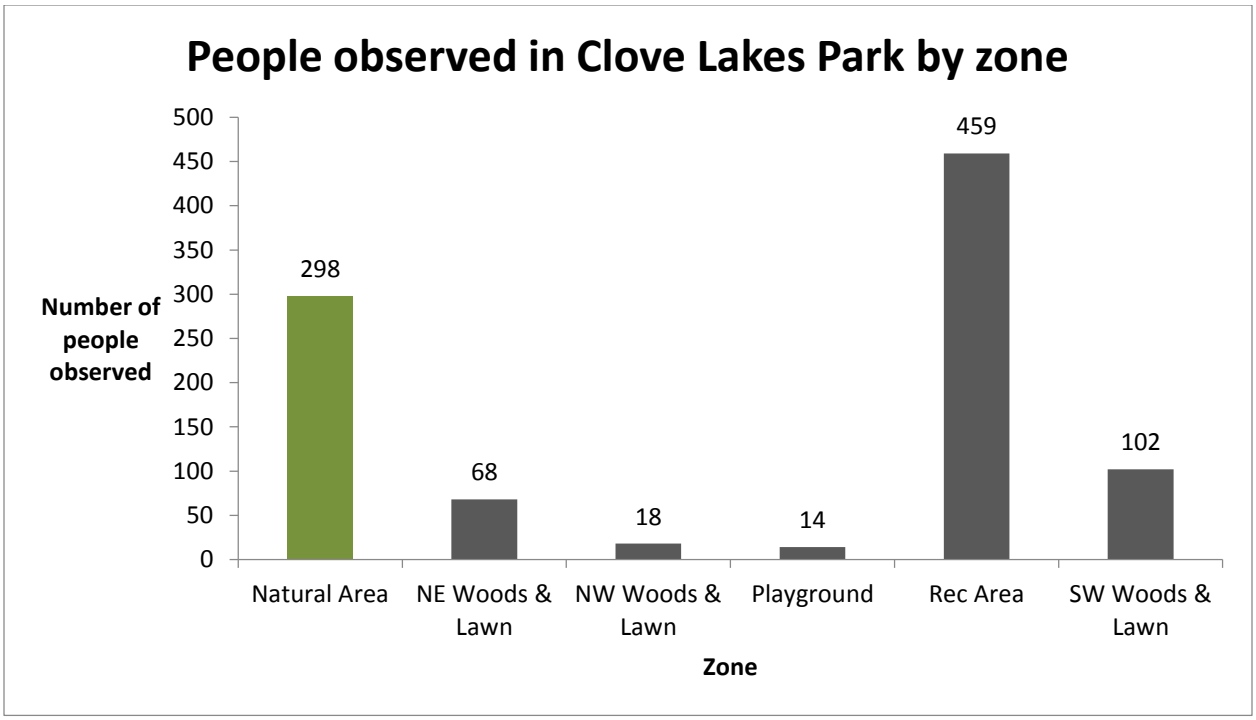
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone						
	Natural Area	NE Woods & Lawn	NW Woods & Lawn	Playground	Rec Area	SW Woods & Lawn	**Total**
Bicycling	11	8	5		3		**27**
Jogging / Running	57	7	2		10	12	**88**
Walking / Dog Walking	144	31	11		150	40	**376**
Sports & Recreation	1	2		5	120	13	**141**
Socializing in Place	30	17		6	129	31	**213**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	4	3		3	40	3	**53**
Educational Group / Tour							**0**
Nature Recreation	46				3		**49**
Plant Collecting / Foraging							**0**
Stewardship							**0**
Working	4				4	3	**11**
Other Activity	1						**1**
Total	**298**	**68**	**18**	**14**	**459**	**102**	**959**

Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by time of visit and age group.

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	11	7	9	**27**	13	14		**27**
Jogging / Running	36	33	19	**88**	20	64	4	**88**
Walking / Dog Walking	177	115	84	**376**	89	248	39	**376**
Sports & Recreation	6	95	40	**141**	86	54	1	**141**
Socializing in Place	56	88	69	**213**	93	112	8	**213**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch	16	28	9	**53**	7	45	1	**53**
Educational Group / Tour				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation	17		32	**49**	30	16	3	**49**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering				**0**				**0**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**
Working	10		1	**11**		11		**11**
Other Activity	1			**1**		1		**1**
Total	**330**	**366**	**263**	**959**	**338**	**565**	**56**	**959**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zones (in alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)						
Sign	Natural Area	NE Woods & Lawn	NW Woods & Lawn	Playground	Rec Area	SW Woods & Lawn	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box							**0**
Damaged / Vandalized Property	1						**1**
Encampment / Sleeping Area							**0**
Fire pit	1						**1**
Garden in Park							**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	2						**2**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places	1						**1**
Informal Trails	46	3	1	1		3	**54**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol	2	1	1		2		**6**
Other Sign	8	3	1			1	**13**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers				6		1	**7**
Substantial Dumping or Debris							**0**
Total	**61**	**7**	**3**	**7**	**2**	**5**	**85**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Clove Lakes Park, signs of activity noted included, for example, images of a sign of pesticide application, a lunch table with artwork by NYC public school students, and an informal memorial.

Sociability Observed by Zone

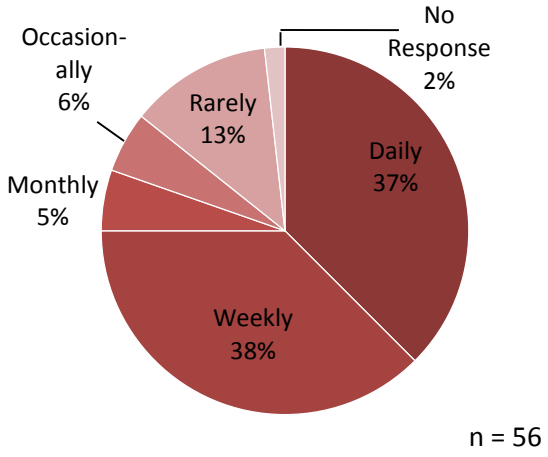
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Natural Area	24	39	29		**92**
NE Woods & Lawn	14	9	7	2	**32**
NW Woods & Lawn	3		1		**4**
Playground		4			**4**
Rec Area	7	54	40	3	**104**
SW Woods & Lawn	11	9	6	2	**28**
Total	**59**	**115**	**83**	**7**	**264**

III. Interviews with Park Users

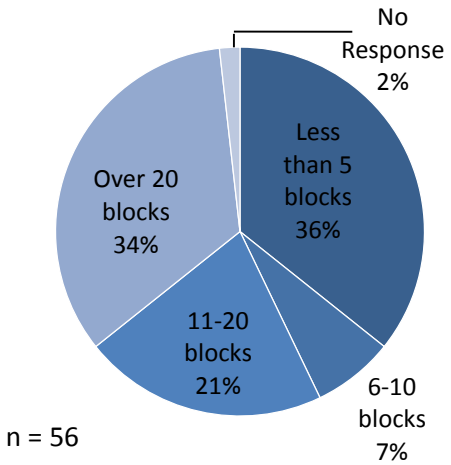
Fifty-six park users were interviewed in Clove Lakes Park, of which 54% were male and 46% female. Eighty-two percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 18% were estimated to be over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 84%.

The park plays a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 75% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. It is also a crucial local resource, with 43% of users traveling from less than 10 blocks away. At the same time, the park draws people from a distance, with 34% of users traveling over 20 blocks to reach the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	28	50%
Kids	14	25%
Dog	9	16%
Relaxing	8	14%
Exercise	6	11%
Socializing	5	9%
Nature-outdoors	5	9%
Sports & recreation	2	4%
Nature recreation	1	2%
Biking	1	2%
Total Respondents	**56**	**100%**

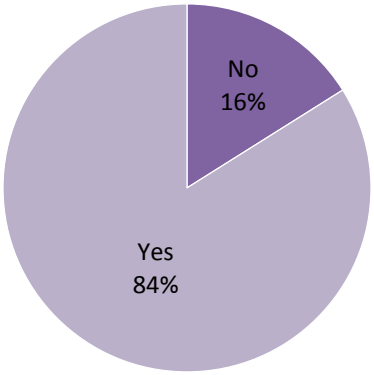
The vast majority of respondents were in the park engaging in some form of physical activity: *walking* (50%), *dog walking* (16%), *exercising* (11%), *sports and recreation* (4%), and *biking* (2%). Clove Lakes Park is also an important social space: many respondents were at the park with *kids* (25%) or *socializing* (9%) at a barbecue or picnic. Respondents also came to the park to *experience the outdoors* (9%) by observing wildlife and enjoying the weather. Finally, one respondent was participating in *nature recreation* (2%), or fishing specifically.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	24	43%
Place attachment	13	23%
Enjoyment	13	23%
Nature-outdoors	11	20%
Amenities	7	13%
Social ties	7	13%
Activity	5	9%
Refuge	4	7%
Quality	4	7%
Explore	1	2%
Access	1	2%
Total Respondents	**56**	**100%**

Clove Lakes Park is a valuable *local* resource, and most parks users chose to visit the park because it is close to home (43%). We spoke with many park users who had a strong sense of *place attachment* (23%) to Clove Lakes Park; they described it as their "childhood park," and many had grown up around the area. Respondents also spoke about their general *enjoyment* of the park (23%) and described it as "Staten Island's best kept secret" and the "best kept" park. The park *amenities* (13%) were also a draw, and respondents chose to come to park for its trails, playground, and sports fields. Similarly, respondents visited the park to participate in specific *activities* (9%) such as dog walking and sports. Many respondents also had *social ties* (13%) to the park because family members lived close by or their children had sports events at the park. Some respondents saw the park as a *refuge* (7%) and felt "safe" in the park. Others commented on the *quality* of the park (7%), especially its size and its lack of crowds. Finally, we interviewed one user who was *exploring* the park for the first time (2%), and one user who was here because its convenience and *access* (2%).

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 56

Clove Lakes Park includes a number of wooded, wetland and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. The vast majority of respondents interviewed said yes (84%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas.

Out of the respondents of who said yes, the majority of respondents participate in physical activity in natural areas: *walking* (66%), *exercising* (13%), and *biking* (9%) were common activities. Respondents also spent time *engaging in nature recreation* (23%) by hiking or viewing wildlife or *enjoying nature and the outdoors* (13%). Some respondents *socialized* (9%) in natural areas while others described playing baseball or going to the playground (*sports & recreation*, 6%), perhaps indicating these are perceived as part of the wooded, wetland and trail areas. A few respondents expressed *concern* (4%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about safety and getting lost or they noted *prior engagement* (4%) with natural areas in the past when they or their children were younger. One respondent took photos of natural areas (*arts & culture*, 2%), and one respondent went to natural areas with her *kid* (2%).

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	31	66%
Nature recreation	11	23%
Exercise	6	13%
Nature-Outdoors	6	13%
Socializing	4	9%
Biking	4	9%
Sports & recreation	3	6%
Concern	2	4%
Prior engagement	2	4%
Arts & culture	1	2%
Kids	1	2%
"Yes" Respondents	**47**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Preference	3	33%
Fear-Concern	2	22%
No response	2	22%
Life course	1	11%
Potential	1	11%
"No" Respondents	**9**	

Nine respondents (16%) said that they do not go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, the majority of them *preferred to go to other parts of the park* (33%). Some respondents expressed *fear or concern* (22%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about ticks or mosquitoes. One respondent was at a stage in her *life course* (2%) – "I'm too old" – which made her reluctant to go to natural areas. We classified one respondent as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (11%) because she was previously unaware that these areas existed. Out of the 16% of

respondents who said that they did not go into natural areas, one was actually interviewed in a natural area but did not realize it – although we did not specifically refer to Forever Wild, the respondent appeared to have the perception that "'Forever Wild' meant they don't take care of it." He also saw wooded areas as places where he would "get bitten by mosquitoes" and because he happened to be interviewed along one of the paved paths in the Forever Wild section, perhaps he did not perceive himself to be in the woods.

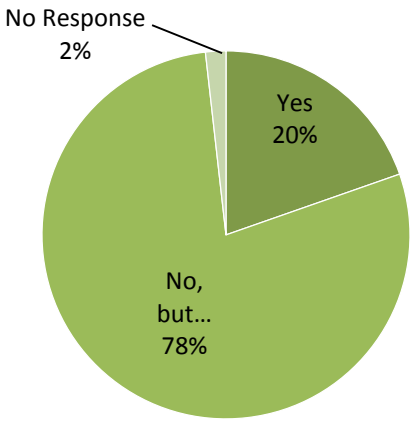
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

The most commonly visited site types for Clove Lakes Park users were *beach and waterfront areas* (48%), such as South Beach, and other *named NYC parks* (41%), such as Silver Lake Park. Many respondents also liked to go *out of town* (20%) to parks upstate or in New Jersey. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Beach-waterfront	27	48%
Named NYC Park	23	41%
Out of town	11	20%
No response	5	9%
Sports	2	4%
Greenway	2	4%
Playground	1	2%
Schoolyard	1	2%
Streets	1	2%
Botanical garden	1	2%
Nowhere Else	1	2%
Total Respondents	**56**	

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 56

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and only 20% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Some of those who said "yes" also specifically named groups and/or offered the general type(s) of group in which they participate (listed below). Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

At one end of the spectrum, one respondent was involved in *other forms of civic engagement*. Some answered that they take part in *self-led stewardship* (n = 2) outside the context of a group, such as cleaning up after themselves and picking up litter around the park. Others had *pro-environmental beliefs* (n = 4) and participate in nature walks and recycling.

Some respondents had the *potential to become stewards* (n = 16), because they had no specific reason for not participating in stewardship or they actively wanted to but were not at present. A number of respondents *lacked awareness* (n = 5) of groups they could join. Finally, some respondents said that they had *no time* (n = 7) or *no interest* (n = 2).

Stewardship Group Type

THEME	COUNT	% OF TOTAL
Environment	3	38%
Animal	2	25%
Culture	1	13%
Unknown	1	13%
Sports & Recreation	1	13%
Total	**8**	

Named Stewardship Groups

- Appalachian Mountain Club
- Blue Thong Society
- Protectors of Pine Oak Woods
- Protectors of Pinewood Forest
- Staten Island Athletic Club
- Staten Island Council for Animal Welfare
- Staten Island Museum
- Staten Island Zoo

"Our very last interview at Clove Lakes Park was a special one. I approached an older man who was standing at the edge of the stream through the middle of Clove Lakes Park. As I interviewed him – and he was generally happy with the park, an avid user for many years – I learned that his daughter and grandchildren were a few feet away actually walking around in the stream searching for little water creatures. They found snail shells and were looking around for other small creatures."

Vignette from field researcher's notes on Clove Lakes Park

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

STATEN ISLAND: Conference House Park Profile

Zone Names	
Beach	Lawn
Conference House	Western Natural Area
Eastern Natural Area	

I. Park Narrative

Conference House Park is a small, 141-acre[1] Staten Island park with historic buildings, manicured lawns, beaches and paved paths through the woods. It also contains a constructed wetland that is part of the Staten Island Bluebelt program aimed at managing stormwater. The park is located in an upper-middle class residential area, and in some sections, the barriers between the neighborhood and the park are somewhat blurred.

The park is well-cared for and evokes a sense of being near the beach. On our visits, ocean breezes cooled most of the areas, and many paths had views of the ocean through tall wild grasses. The park was fairly quiet on all three visits, and the trails are well-marked and easily accessible. Visitors can hear local birds in the trees. Based on our observations and conversations with the park director, Superstorm Sandy had a large impact on this park, and there is still some debris on the beach from the storm. Signage indicated that many areas are still undergoing restoration and improvements after Sandy and a playground near the West Natural Area has been closed since the storm.

This park, in addition to being naturally beautiful, also has a great deal of historical significance. The Conference House, for which the park is named, is a huge stone building constructed in the 17th century. This impressive building played an important role in the Revolutionary War, and it was where a conference between colonialists and the British king's representative was held in 1776. The park also contains New York State's southernmost point.

During our three visits, we observed mostly pairs or people walking alone and very few large groups. Most people were observed along paved paths that radiate from the parking lot at the visitor's center and run through the wooded areas. Based on interviews, many people who visit the park are neighborhood residents who are there to exercise or walk their dogs. On the Saturday when we visited, City Parks Foundation was sponsoring an adventure race for kids, which attracted families from the area.

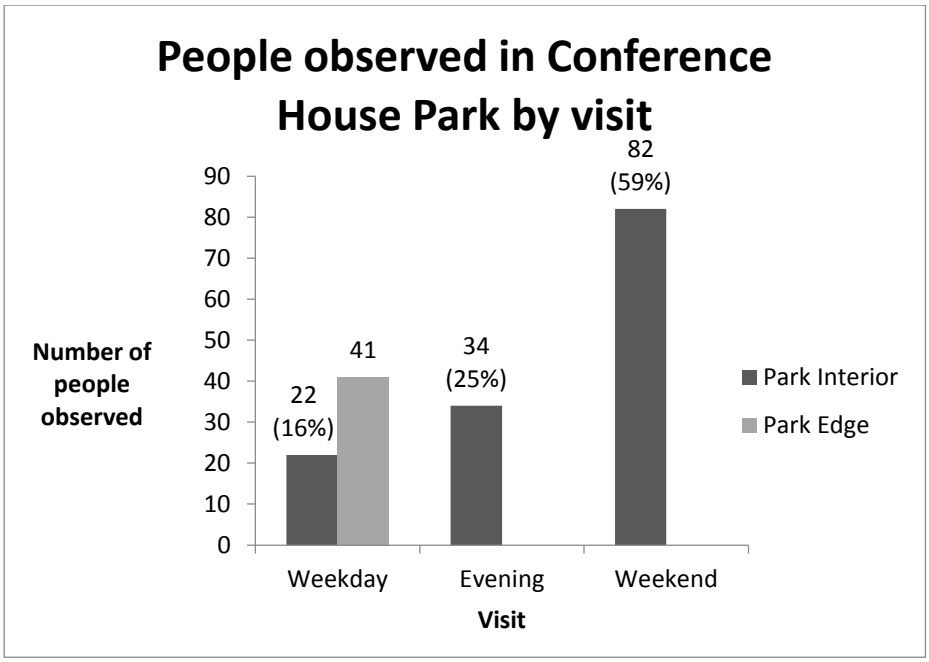
Conference House Park is a small, well-maintained park with many different uses and distinct areas. It can be attractive for those looking to exercise, birders, beach-goers, and history buffs.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

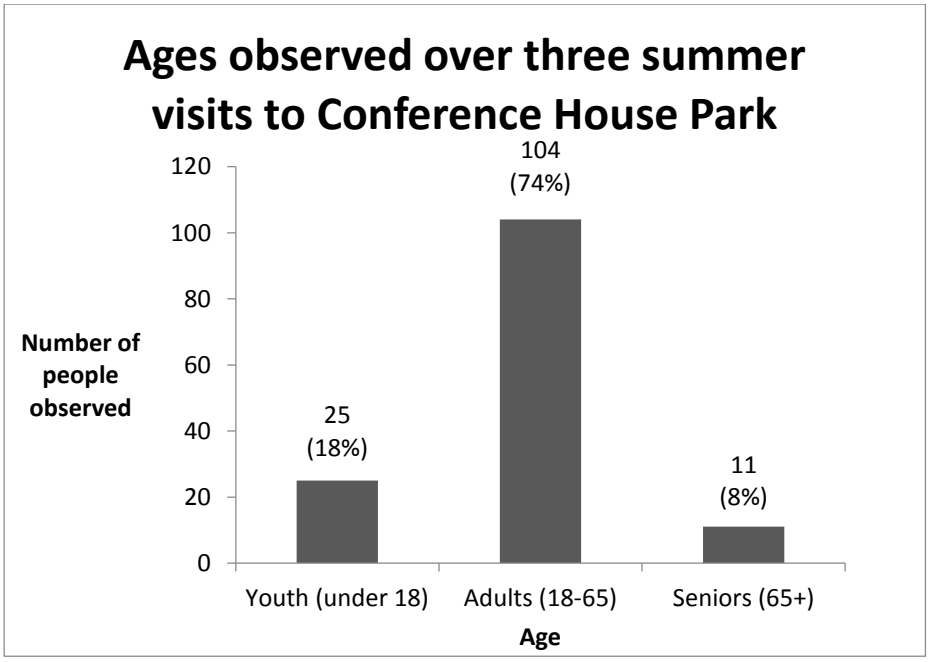
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

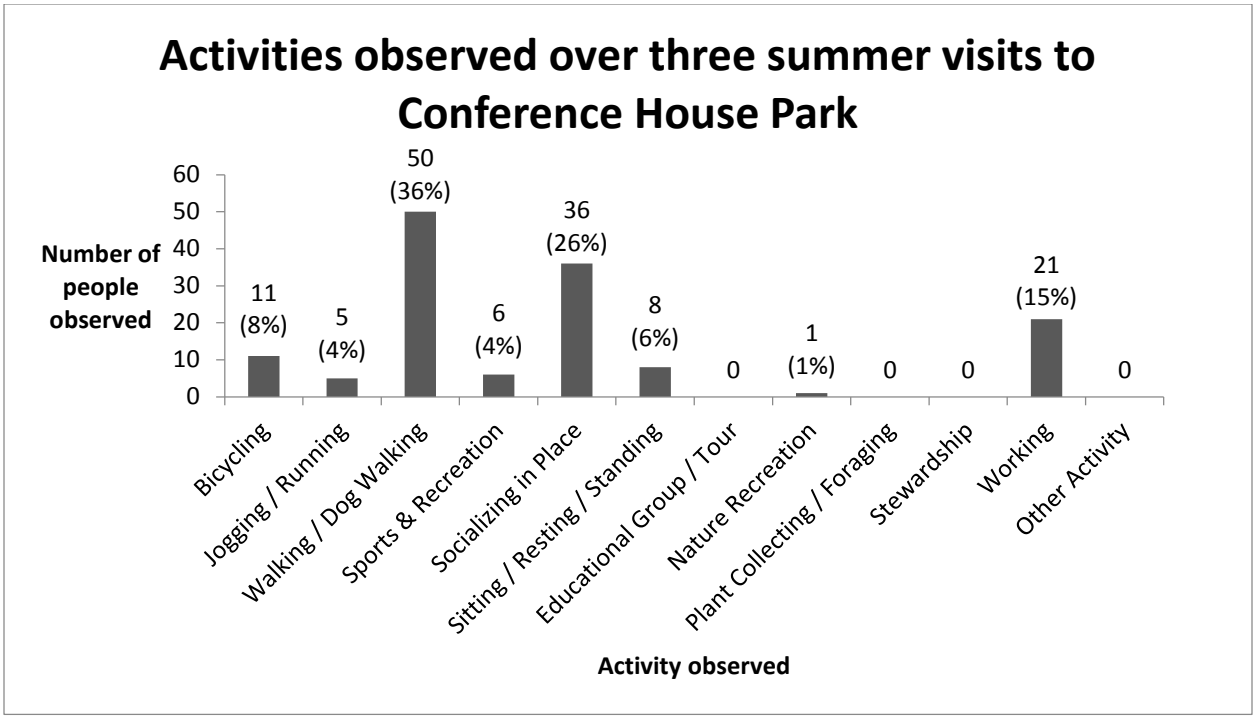


Who are they?



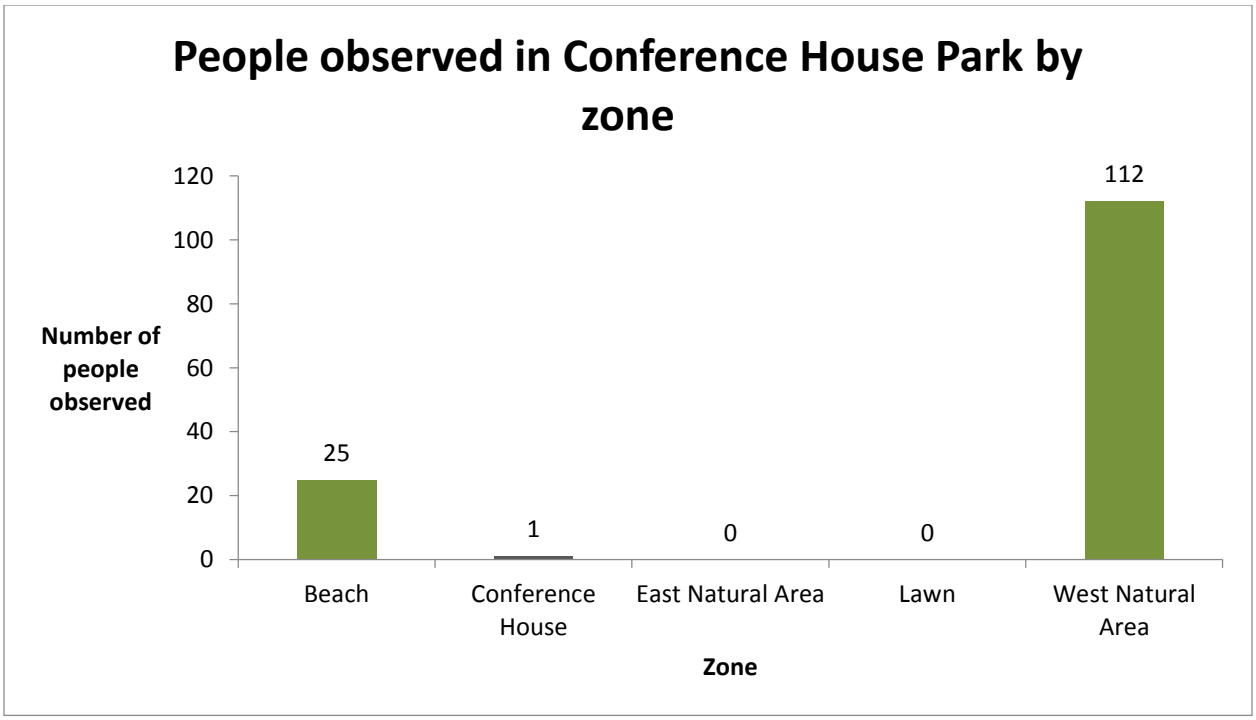
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone, by time of visit and age group. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Park Zone						Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Beach	Conference House	Eastern Natural Area	Lawn	Western Natural Area	**Total**	**Weekday**	**Weekend**	**Evening**	**Total**	**Youth**	**Adults**	**Seniors**	**Total**
Bicycling					11	**11**	5	1	5	**11**	1	10		**11**
Jogging / Running					5	**5**	3	1	1	**5**		5		**5**
Walking / Dog Walking	13	1			36	**50**	9	20	21	**50**	6	38	6	**50**
Sports & Recreation	2				4	**6**		4	2	**6**	4	2		**6**
Socializing in Place	3				33	**36**	3	4	29	**36**	12	24		**36**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	4				4	**8**	1	4	3	**8**		4	4	**8**
Educational Group / Tour						**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation					1	**1**			1	**1**			1	**1**
Plant Collecting / Foraging						**0**				**0**				**0**
Stewardship						**0**				**0**				**0**
Working	3				18	**21**	1		20	**21**	2	19		**21**
Other Activity						**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**25**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**112**	**138**	**22**	**34**	**82**	**138**	**25**	**102**	**11**	**138**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zones (in alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)					
Sign	Beach	Conference House	Eastern Natural Area	Lawn	Western Natural Area	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box						**0**
Damaged / Vandalized Property					1	**1**
Encampment / Sleeping Area						**0**
Fire pit	5				2	**7**
Garden in Park						**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	2				1	**3**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places	4		1			**5**
Informal Trails	4		1		21	**26**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol						**0**
Other Sign	9		1		13	**23**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers	1				1	**2**
Substantial Dumping or Debris					1	**1**
Total	**25**	**0**	**3**	**0**	**40**	**68**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Conference House Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of beach art and dune restoration.

Sociability Observed by Zone

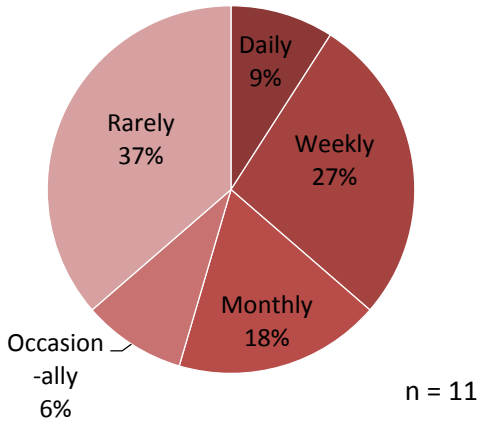
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Beach	1	4	2		**7**
Conference House					**0**
Eastern Natural Area					**0**
Lawn					**0**
Western Natural Area	10	14	8		**32**
Total	**11**	**18**	**10**	**0**	**39**

III. Interviews with Park Users

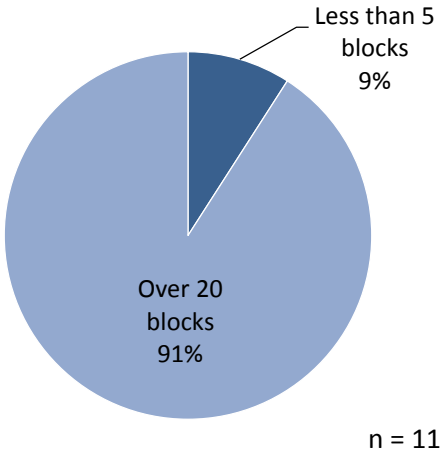
Eleven park users were interviewed in Conference House Park, of which 64% were male and 36% female. Seventy-three percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, and 27% were estimated to be over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 85%.

The park plays a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 38% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. The park tends to draw more people from a distance, with 91% of users traveling over 20 blocks to reach the park.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	6	55%
Dog	4	36%
Sports & recreation	2	18%
Kids	2	18%
Nature recreation	1	9%
Nature-outdoors	1	9%
Relaxing	1	9%
Total Respondents	**11**	

The vast majority of respondents were doing some form of physical activity: *walking* (55%), *dog walking* (36%), and/or participating in *sports and recreation* (18%). A few were with *kids* (2%). One respondent was participating in *nature recreation* (9%) and was fishing and digging for clams. Another respondent was *enjoying the outdoors* (9%) and said that he was looking at the ocean. Finally, one respondent was *relaxing* (9%).

"On this Saturday morning there was an event going on sponsored by City Parks Foundation. The event was an adventure course for kids that included a fun run with several obstacles such as a putting green, mini-hurdles, and a basketball dunking contest. There were not many kids competing in the race, maybe because of a light rain during the event."

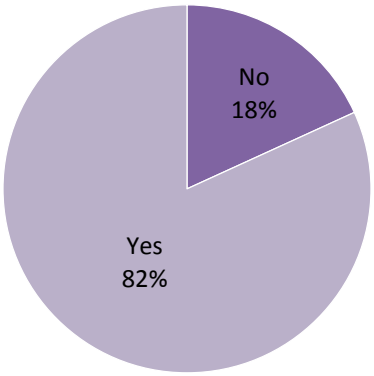
From debrief notes on Conference House Park

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	4	36%
Explore	2	18%
Nature-outdoors	2	18%
Activity	2	18%
Place attachment	1	9%
Refuge	1	9%
Quality	1	9%
Social ties	1	9%
Amenities	1	9%
Enjoyment	1	9%
Access	1	9%
Total Respondents	**11**	

Conference House is an important *local* resource, and many respondents said that they came to the park because it was nearby (36%). At the same time, some non-local visitors were *exploring* the park (18%) because it was "something different" and "far from home." Some respondents were in the park to *enjoy the outdoors* (18%), specifically the "sun," "sea breeze," and "water." Others were in the park for a specific *activity* (18%), namely an adventure race for kids. One user cited his history of *place attachment* with the park (9%) and that he "always knew about it." Another user viewed the park both as a *refuge* (9%) and a place that was easy to *access* (9%) – he described the park as being "peaceful" and "easily accessible." For one user, he liked the *amenities* offered for his granddaughter (9%) and the *quality* of the park (9%) because it was not crowded. *Social ties* (9%) also brought one respondent to the park because her grandson was participating in the aforementioned adventure race. Finally, one park user simply *enjoys* the park (9%) and "like[s] it here."

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 11

Conference House Park includes a number of wooded, wetland and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. The vast majority of respondents interviewed said yes (82%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas.

Out of the respondents of who said yes, the majority of respondents engaged in *nature recreation* (56%), such as looking at flowers and birds or collecting seashells. Some would go to natural areas to *walk* (44%) or simply *enjoy nature and the outdoors* (22%). One respondent was *concerned* (11%) about deer and ticks. Finally, one respondent came to natural areas to *bike* (11%) and do other *exercise* (11%) such as running.

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Nature recreation	5	56%
Walking	4	44%
Nature-Outdoors	2	22%
Concern	1	11%
Biking	1	11%
Exercise	1	11%
"Yes" Respondents	**9**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Fear-Concern	1	50%
Potential	1	50%
"No" Respondents	**2**	

Two respondents (18%) did not go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, one was concerned (50%) about ticks and mosquitoes, and the other had the *potential to go to natural areas* (50%) because she asked for more information about the hiking and biking trails in the park. Both respondents were interviewed in a natural area zone but did not realize it.

Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

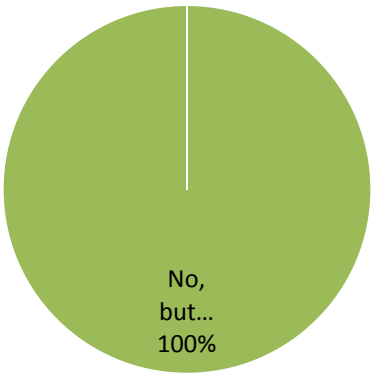
In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	5	45%
Out of town	4	36%
Beach-waterfront	3	27%
Greenway	1	9%
Total Respondents	**11**	

The most commonly visited site types for Conference House Park users were other *named NYC parks* (45%), such as Clove Lakes Park and Wolfe's Pond Park. Many respondents also liked to go *out of town* (36%) to parks upstate or in New Jersey.

Beach and waterfront areas (27%) were also popular. See table at top right for the full list of responses in rank order.

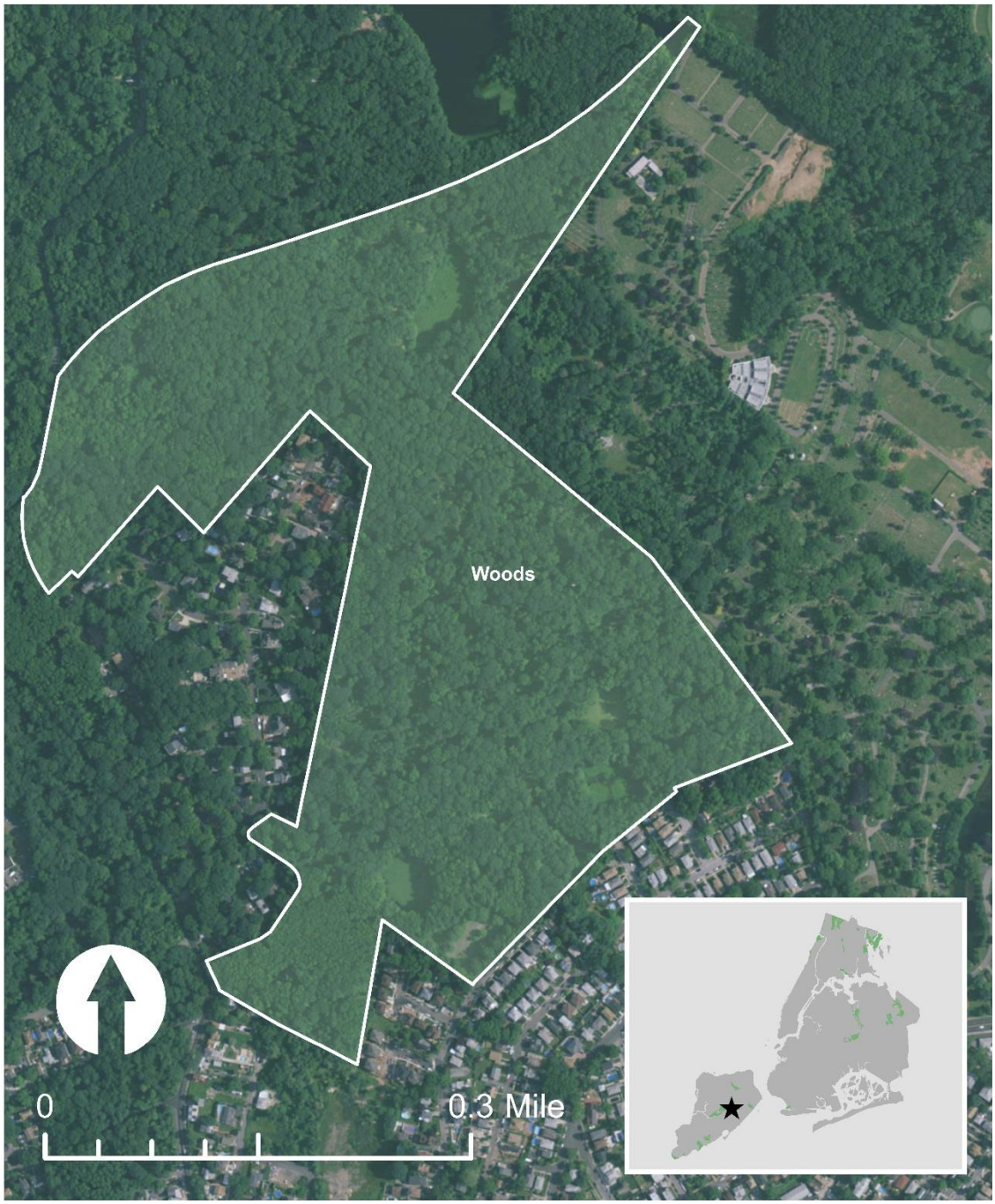
Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 11

Although no interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none. One respondent takes part in *self-led stewardship* outside the context of a group and has a vegetable garden. Another had *pro-environmental beliefs* (n = 1) and contributed to environmental organizations. Most respondents had *no specific reason* for not participating in stewardship (n = 3). A few *lacked awareness* (n = 2) of groups they could join. One respondent had *no time* (n = 1) because she was still trying to finish repairs on their house from Sandy. Finally, some respondents said that they had *no interest* (n = 2) or had *other barriers* (n = 1) such as health and mobility issues.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
STATEN ISLAND: High Rock Park Profile



Zone Names
Woods

I. Park Narrative

High Rock Park does not feel like a conventional landscaped city park, but rather an oasis of wilderness. Nestled in Staten Island's Greenbelt, the park is 89 acres[1] of woods, ponds, and wetlands. High Rock's varied terrain and dense woods give the park the feeling of someplace upstate or remote. High Rock is a haven for city dwellers as a place to get away from concrete densely packed streets. In addition to mature forests that provide bird habitat, the park also has several ponds and large swaths of wetlands, which are homes to frogs and turtles. The park provides users with the opportunity to interact with nature and observe animals in their natural habitats.

Traveling through the park is fairly easy. The paths are well-marked and cared for, and they connect in the interior of the park, so visitors can get the feeling of traveling a long distance without leaving the park. Due to the wetlands, we did observe a large mosquito population. The park is not accessible via public transportation, which is prohibitive to many users. For visitors who drive to the park, there are several easily accessible parking lots.

Observed users of High Rock Park were few and far between. The people we did see were exercisers and nature walkers. The park also attracts educational groups. There is a Boy Scout's summer camp within the park and the High Rock Nature Center or Greenbelt Headquarters. We also observed signs advertising educational events. The park seems to be an important resource for environmental education within the city. High Rock gives city kids the opportunity to experience wilderness and nature without traveling too far.

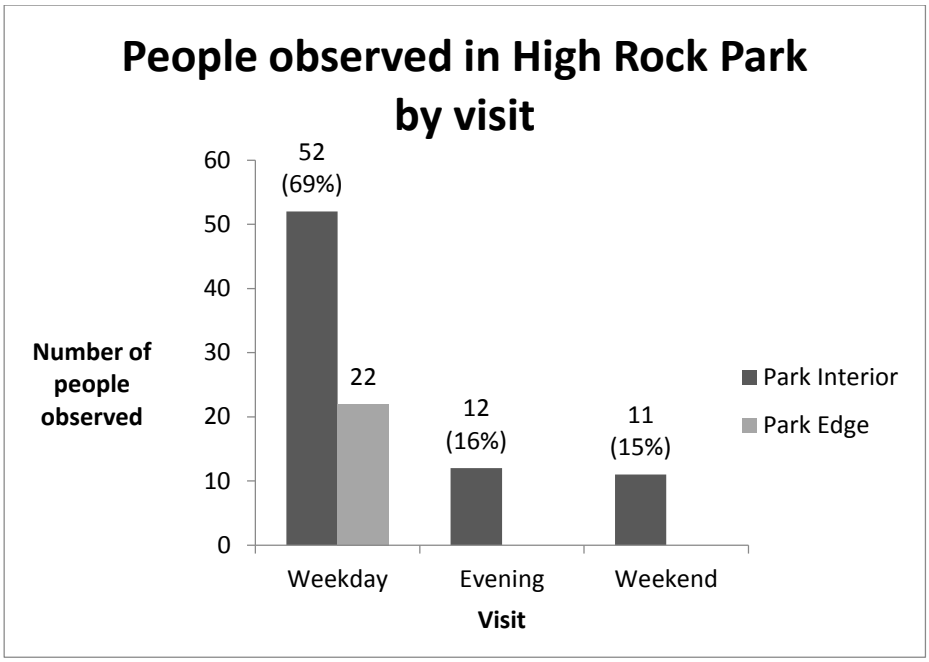
High Rock Park is extremely well-maintained with few informal trails and little trash or debris. At the same time, the park had much lower usage than other parks we visited, thus adding to its feeling of remoteness. This wilderness feeling is what makes High Rock special. Walking through the park gives visitors a taste of the biodiversity of New York City, with changes in landscape, many kinds of trees, different species of birds, and various understory plants. The park seems largely untouched by time, and visitors can imagine that at one time, hundreds of years ago, this is what all of New York City looked like.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

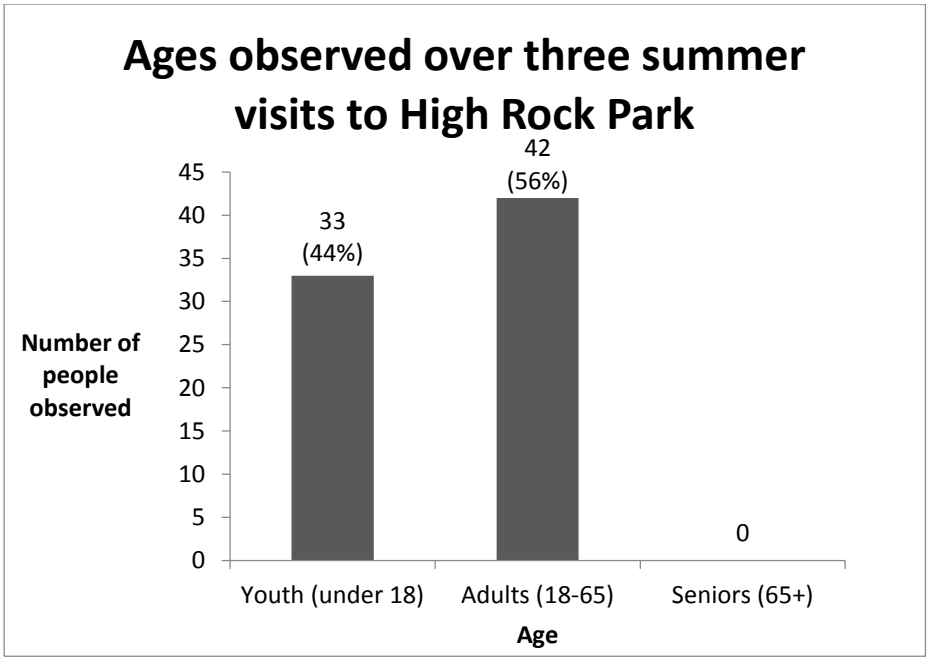
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

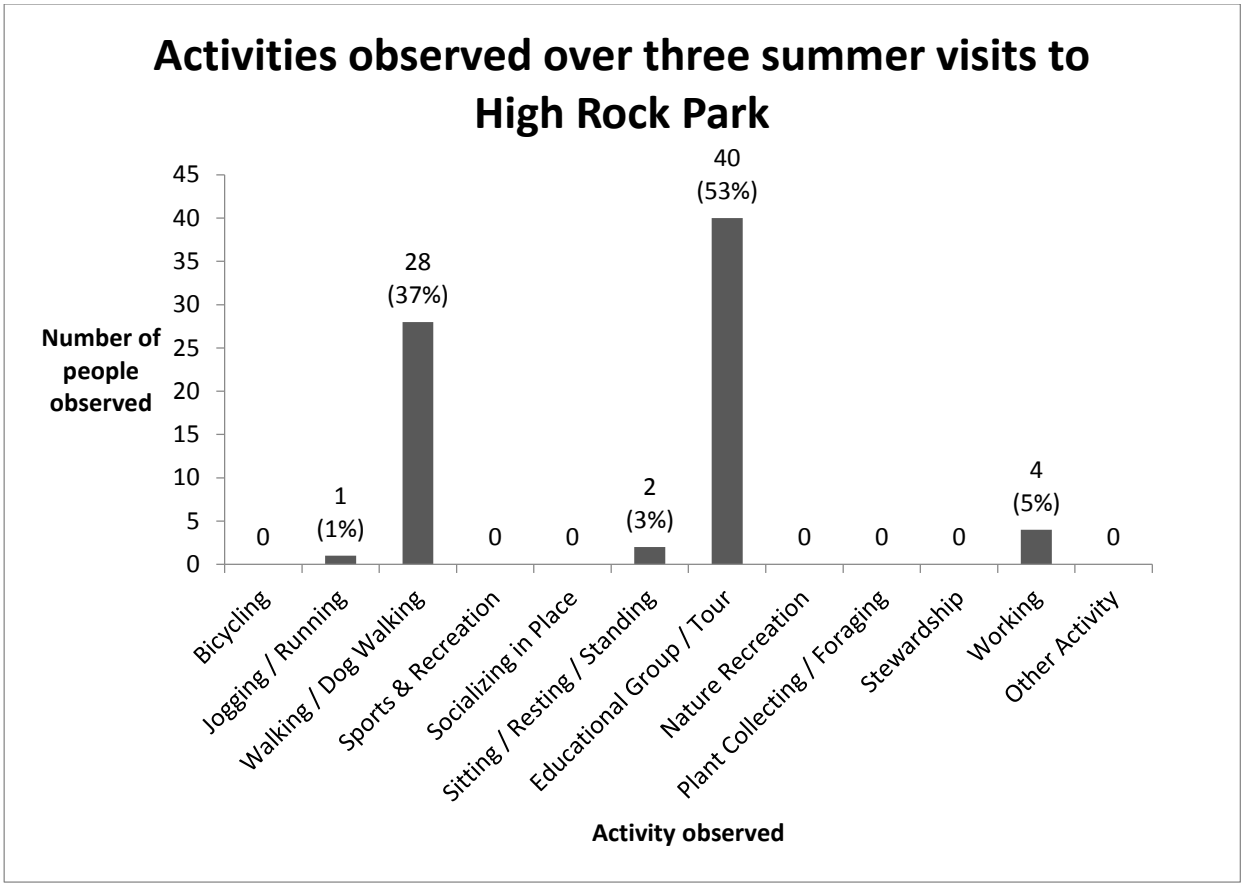


Who are they?



What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by time of visit and age group.

Activity Observed	Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling				**0**				**0**
Jogging / Running	1			**1**		1		**1**
Walking / Dog Walking	7	11	10	**28**	8	20		**28**
Sports & Recreation				**0**				**0**
Socializing in Place				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing / Waiting / Keeping Watch		1	1	**2**		2		**2**
Educational Group / Tour	40			**40**	25	15		**40**
Nature Recreation				**0**				**0**
Plant Collecting / Foraging / Gathering				**0**				**0**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**
Working	4			**4**		4		**4**
Other Activity				**0**				**0**
Total	**52**	**12**	**11**	**75**	**33**	**42**	**0**	**75**

Signs of Activity Observed

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

Sign	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat box	
Damaged / Vandalized Property	1
Encampment / Sleeping Area	
Fire pit	2
Garden in Park	
Graffiti, Art, Murals	6
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places	
Informal Trails	3
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol	2
Other Sign	
Signage, Flyers & Stickers	4
Substantial Dumping or Debris	
Total	**18**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For High Rock Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of a trail maintenance sign, an informal hand-painted sign, and a sitting area.

Sociability Observed

	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
High Rock Park	6	5	2	0	**13**

"[High Rock Park] is mostly empty save for a summer camp and nature tour / educational group. Non-group users were few and far in between. We saw some exercisers and nature walkers; that's it. We ran into two interns from the City Planning department guided by two nature enthusiasts from Staten Island. The interns were trying to get new programming or planning to improve High Rock Park."

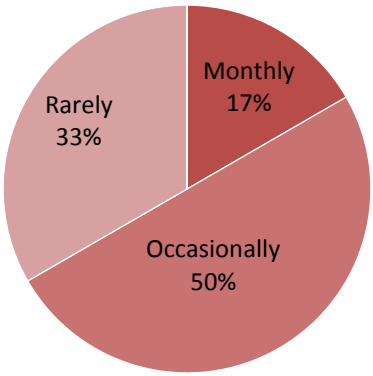
From debrief notes on High Rock Park

III. Interviews with Park Users

Six park users were interviewed in Alley Pond Park, of which 50% were male and 50% were female. All interviewees were between the ages of 18-65; none were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 75%.

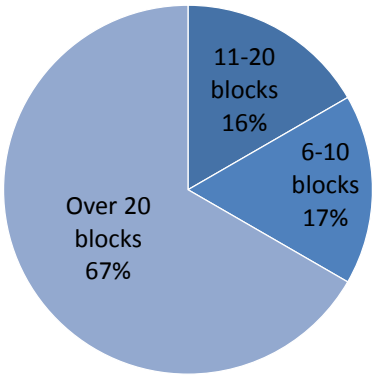
The park attracts occasional users from far away: 50% of users visit occasionally and 67% of users travel from over 20 blocks away.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 6

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 6

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Relaxing	3	50%
Walking	2	33%
Arts and culture	1	17%
Nature recreation	1	17%
Total Respondents	**6**	

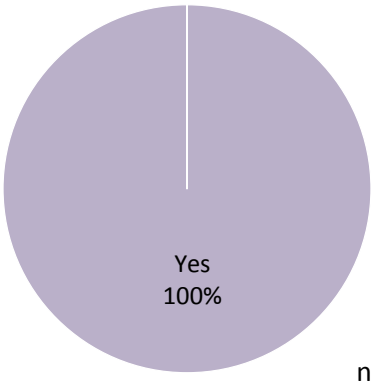
Most respondents were in the park *relaxing* (50%) or *walking* (33%). One respondent was reading (*arts and culture*, 17%), and another was engaged in *nature recreation* (17%) and hiking in the woods.

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	2	33%
Nature-outdoors	2	33%
Refuge	1	17%
Quality	1	17%
Social ties	1	17%
Access	1	17%
Place attachment	1	17%
Total Respondents	**6**	

High Rock Park is a valuable *local* resource, and most parks users chose to visit because it is close to home (33%). Respondents were also at the park to *experience the outdoors* (33%), and they mentioned the trees and the woods being a draw. One respondent saw the park as a refuge (17%) and liked that it was "peaceful, quiet." Another noted the size of the park (*quality*, 17%) and that it was easy to *access* (17%). *Social ties* (17%) brought one respondent who was visiting a friend who lived near the park. Finally, one respondent had a history of *place attachment* (17%) to the park and used to visit as a child on class trips.

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 6

High Rock Park includes a number of wooded, wetland, and trail areas, so we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. All respondents interviewed answered yes (100%). Most of the respondents were engaging in *nature recreation* (50%), like spotting wildlife and bugs, or *walking* (50%). One respondent also liked to read (*arts & culture*, 17%) and *relax* (17%) in natural areas. Finally, one liked to *exercise* (17%) and go running.

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	3	50%
Nature recreation	3	50%
Arts & culture	1	17%
Exercise	1	17%
Relaxing	1	17%
"Yes" Respondents	**6**	

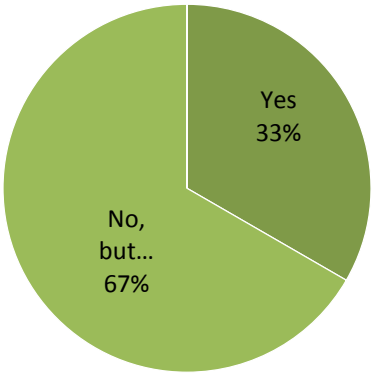
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	3	50%
Nature preserve	2	33%
Out of town	2	33%
Streets	1	17%
Total Respondents	**6**	

The most commonly visited site types for High Rock Park users were other *named NYC parks* (42%), such as Central Park, Clove Lakes Park, Silver Lake Park, and others. Some liked to go to *nature preserves* (33%) in state parks; some like to go *out of town* (33%) to places such as Vermont. Finally, one respondent liked to walk around *streets* in other neighborhoods (17%), such as Bay Street.

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 6

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and 33% of respondents directly identified as doing so. One of the respondents who said yes specifically mentioned his affiliation with the Appalachian Mountain Club and Hitchcock Center for the Environment, which are both environmental groups. Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

Most respondents had *no specific reason* (n = 2) for not participating in environmental stewardship. One respondent was *self-critical* and expressed embarrassment that she was not involved in stewardship while another respondent had *no time*.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

STATEN ISLAND: La Tourette Park Profile

Zone Names
Ballfield
Woods

I. Park Narrative

La Tourette Park's large golf course and historic clubhouse appear to be major draws to this park, but there is much more to the park than just the golf course. Located in the Staten Island Greenbelt, this 714-acre[1] park also has a nature center, a model airplane field, and expanses of Forever Wild areas. The surrounding neighborhood feels suburban with large single-family homes and yards. The streets have many street trees and are wide, well kept, and shady. There is ample parking for the park, and this appears to be the primary method for visitor access.

The model airplane field, located in the Ballfield zone, had one of the most active groups of stewards we observed. The field users, all older or middle-aged men, were protective of the space and had clearly put a great deal of time and care in it with planted flowers. They also appeared distrustful of outsiders and questioned our presence at the field. For regular users of the field, this is a place of community and regular connection among people with similar interests.

The natural areas of La Tourette Park, or the Woods zone, vary in quality and numbers of visitors. The middle section was difficult to access and appeared unused, aside from trash from the golf course and a place to store wood chips. The walkable trails of the woods begin on the eastern edge of the golf course. The trail parallels the golf course at this area, and it does not give users the feeling of being in the wilderness because the golf course is visible and audible. The northern section of the woods has a very natural and wild feeling, while also having accessible and well-marked trails. The large old trees make this area calm and quiet. On our visit, we observed a group of Hassidic schoolboys walking and playing through the park. In that same zone, we observed a couple of women volunteering with NYC Parks. One of the women discussed feeling rejuvenated from the city in this area.

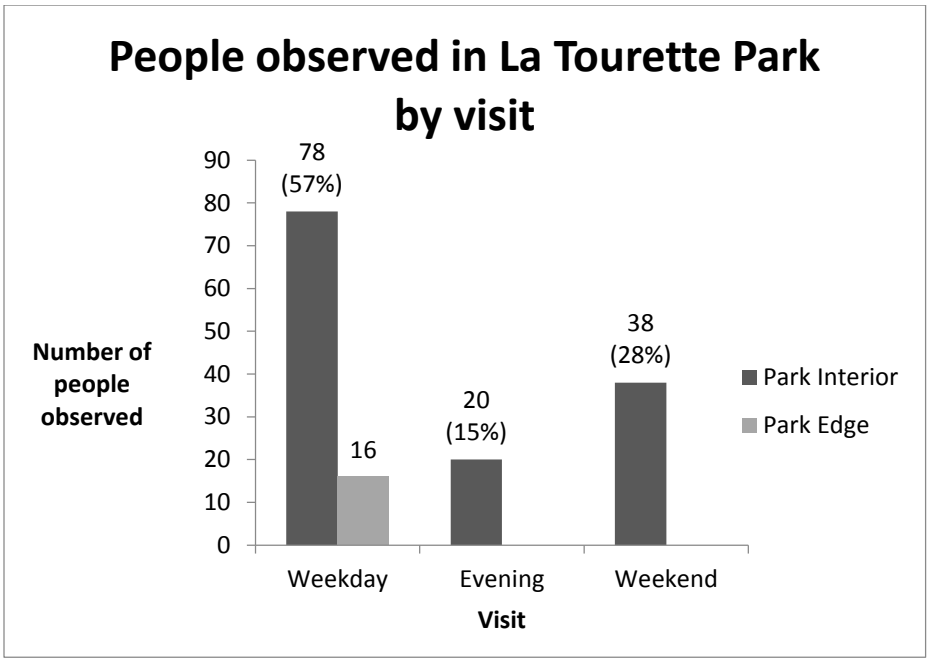
Towards Forest Hill Road on the west, the woods have specular views and less-well marked trails. We observed no visitors in this part of the woods but did observe many signs of prior human use, most notably an established 'hangout' with considerable amounts of trash. After conversations with park neighbors, we learned that this is a well-known and established hook-up location in the park. This may be one reason why we saw no users during the day. The eastern section of the woods is wooded and buggy with some overgrown trails and includes a restoration area. We saw some people hiking and learned from interviews that it is a popular spot for mountain bikers, though we only saw one biker. Overall, La Tourette Park is beautiful and offers a natural refuge for city residents.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

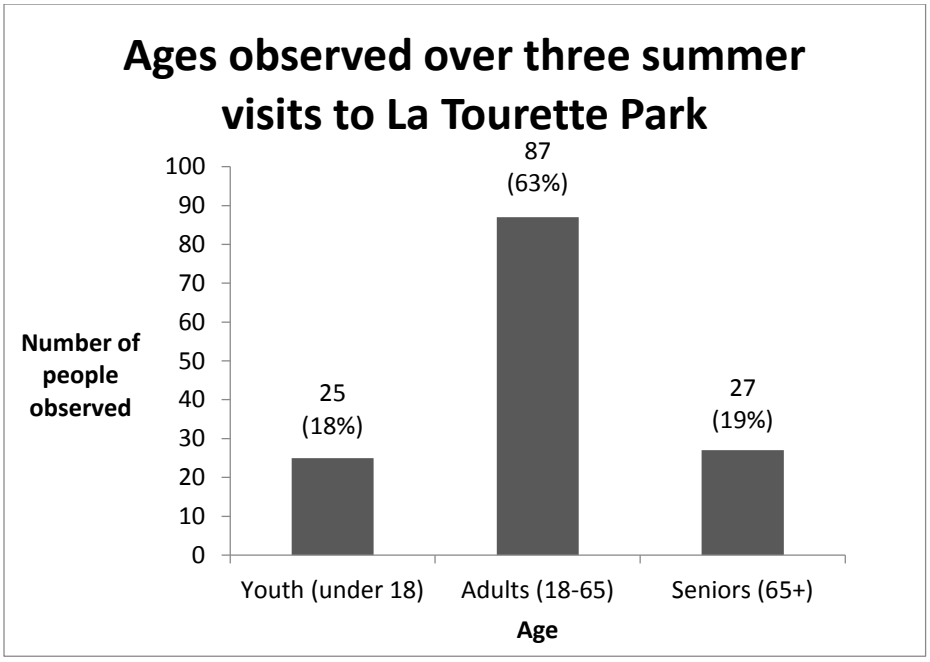
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

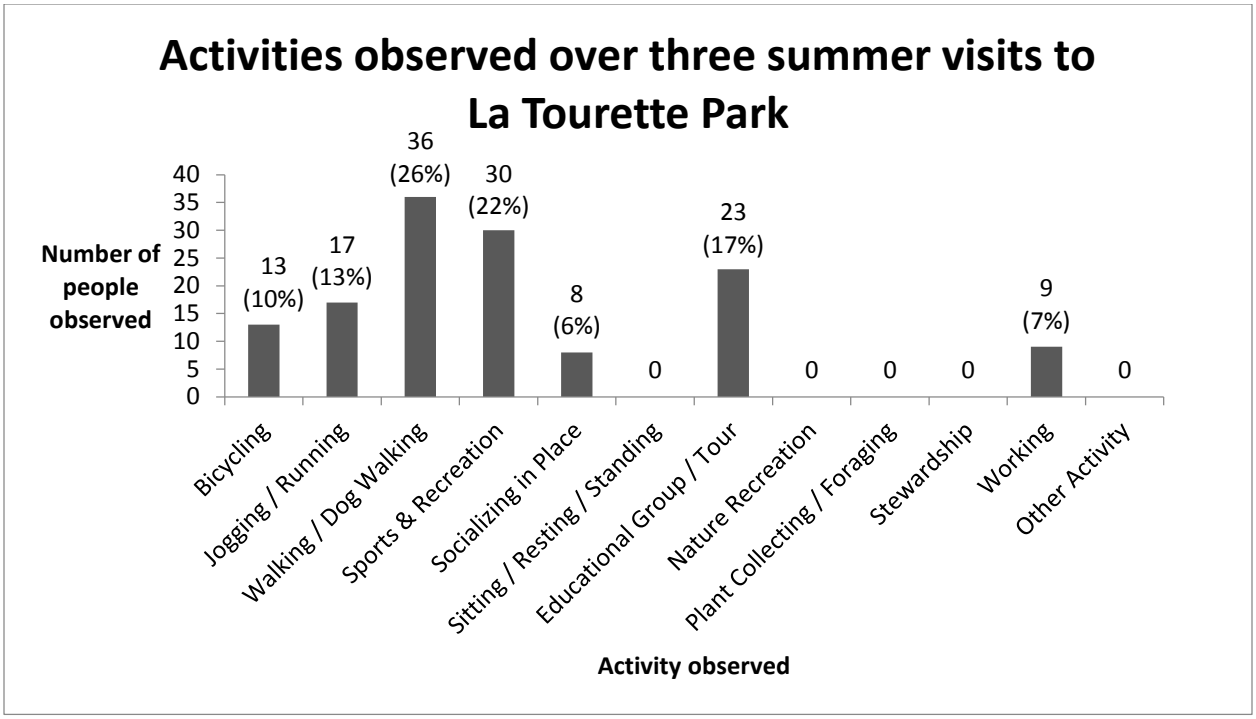


Who are they?



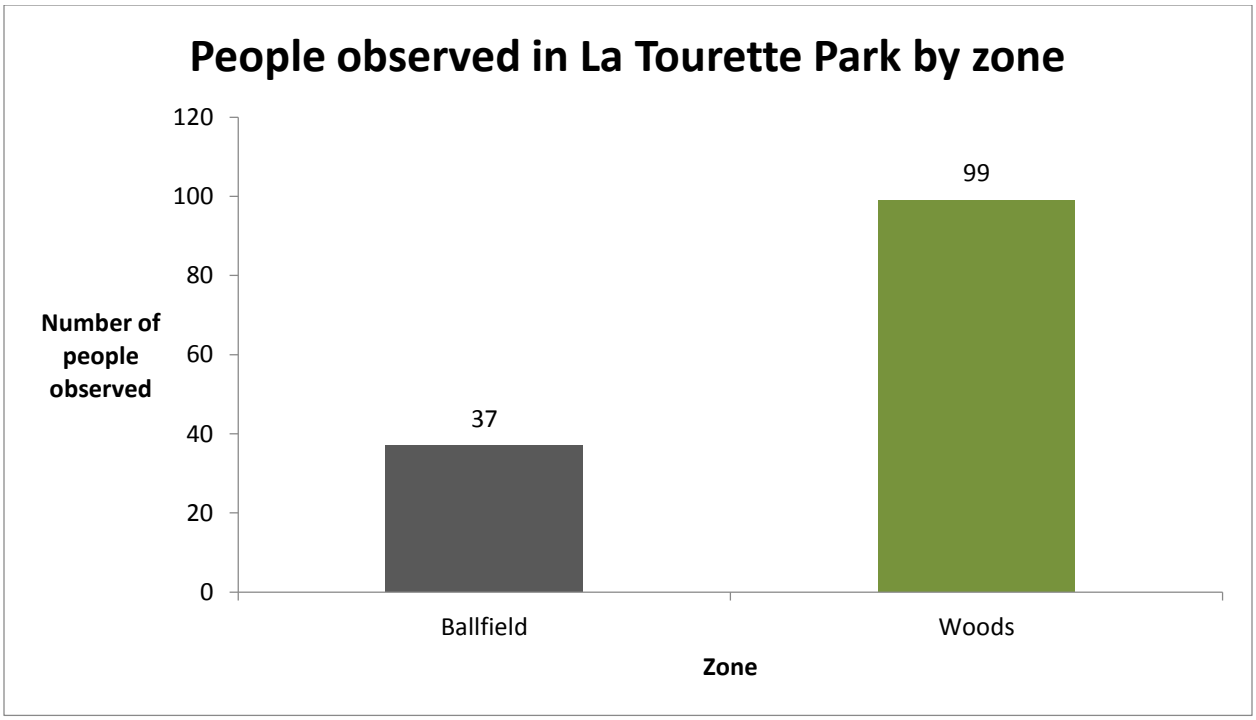
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone, time of visit, and age group. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Zones			Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Ballfield	Woods	Total	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling	8	5	**13**	13			**13**	2	7	4	**13**
Jogging / Running	5	12	**17**	14	2	1	**17**	2	14	1	**17**
Walking / Dog Walking	5	31	**36**	11	9	16	**36**	3	26	7	**36**
Sports & Recreation	9	21	**30**	3	6	21	**30**		22	8	**30**
Socializing in Place	8		**8**	8			**8**		1	7	**8**
Sitting / Resting / Standing			**0**				**0**				**0**
Educational Group / Tour		23	**23**	23			**23**	18	5		**23**
Nature Recreation			**0**				**0**				**0**
Plant Collecting / Foraging			**0**				**0**				**0**
Stewardship			**0**				**0**				**0**
Working	2	7	**9**	6	3		**9**		9		**9**
Other Activity			**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**37**	**99**	**136**	**78**	**20**	**38**	**136**	**25**	**84**	**27**	**136**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)		
Sign	**Ballfield**	**Woods**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat box			**0**
Damaged / Vandalized Property			**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area		1	**1**
Fire pit		2	**2**
Garden in Park	1		**1**
Graffiti, Art, Murals		2	**2**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places		3	**3**
Informal Trails	1	7	**8**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol			**0**
Other Sign		7	**7**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers	7	4	**11**
Substantial Dumping or Debris		2	**2**
Total	**9**	**28**	**37**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For La Tourette Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of benches from a Boy Scout camp, fenced off trees, and a sign indicating active forest restoration.

Sociability Observed by Zone

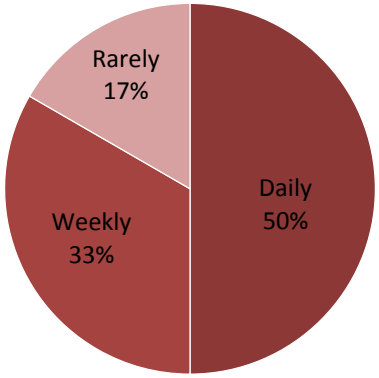
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Ballfield		1	2		**3**
Woods	2	4	2		**8**
Total	**2**	**5**	**4**	**0**	**11**

III. Interviews with Park Users

Six park users were interviewed at La Tourette Park, of which 50% were male and 50% were female. Sixty-seven percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 33% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 67%.

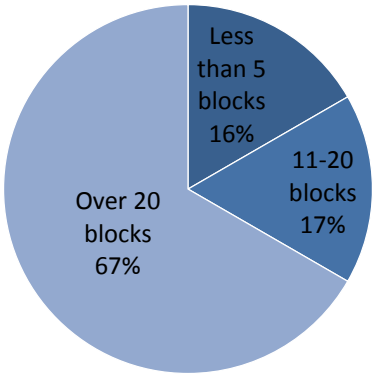
The park plays a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 83% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. La Tourette Park appears to attract users mostly from far away: 67% of users travel over 20 blocks to reach the park while only 16% of users travel less than 10 blocks away.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



n = 6

Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



n = 6

The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	3	50%
Nature rec	2	33%
Sports & recreation	1	17%
Relaxing	1	17%
Spiritual	1	17%
Total Respondents	**6**	

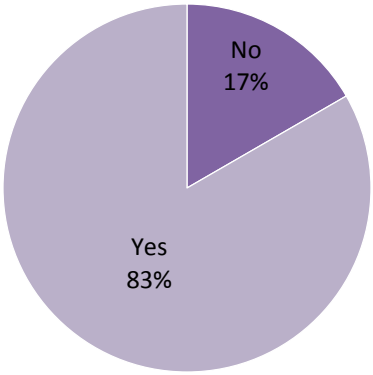
The majority of respondents were *walking* (50%) and/or engaging in *nature recreation* (33%) by birding or hiking, for example. One respondent was flying model airplanes (*sports & recreation*, 17%). Another was *relaxing* (17%). Finally, one was *meditating* (spiritual, 17%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Local	3	50%
Nature-outdoors	2	33%
Activity	2	33%
Access	1	17%
Enjoyment	1	17%
Total Respondents	**6**	

La Tourette Park is a valuable *local* resource, and most parks users chose to visit because it is close by (50%). Many also like the ability to experience *nature and the outdoors* (33%), especially one respondent who liked the park's "natural wooded area" and "[doesn't] like paved or manicured parks." Some respondents were in the park for a specific *activity* (33%), for example, flying model airplanes or walking. For one respondent, the ease of *access* (17%) was important. Finally, one respondent simply *enjoyed* the park (17%) and said that it was a "nice place to be."

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 6

La Tourette Park includes a number of wooded and trail areas, so we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. The vast majority of respondents interviewed said yes (83%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas. Out of the respondents who said "yes," the majority of respondents participate in physical activity in natural areas: *walking* (40%) and *exercising* (20%) were common activities. One respondent said that he only went to the natural areas to pick up model planes that had fallen (*sports & recreation*, 20%). Finally, respondents also went to natural areas to engage in *nature recreation* (20%) or enjoy *nature and the outdoors* (20%).

Only one respondent (17%) did not go to natural areas, and we classified her as having the *potential to visit natural areas* because she did not have a specific reason for not visiting those areas.

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	2	40%
Exercise	1	20%
Sports & recreation	1	20%
Nature recreation	1	20%
Nature-outdoors	1	20%
"Yes" Respondents	**5**	

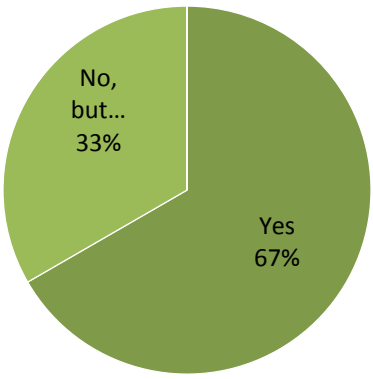
Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Potential	1	100%
"No" Respondents	**1**	

Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	2	33%
Beach-waterfront	1	17%
Nowhere else	1	17%
Out of town	1	17%
Playground	1	17%
Total Respondents	**6**	

The most commonly visited site types for La Tourette Park users were other *named NYC parks* (33%), such as Blue Heron Park or Clove Lakes Park. Other site types that were mentioned are listed in the table at the top right in rank order.



n = 6

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and 67% of respondents directly identified as doing so. One respondent who did say yes named the specific group she was involved with, NYC Parks. Two respondents (33%) were not involved in stewardship. One had *no specific reason*, and one cited age as a *barrier*.

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview

STATEN ISLAND: Ocean Breeze Park Profile

Zone Names
Construction Zone
Woods

I. Park Narrative

Ocean Breeze Park is a large, 124-acre[1] natural area by the southern coast of Staten Island. It is primarily a Forever Wild area that is largely unused. It is a quiet park that is currently undergoing construction in its southern part. There is one main trail that loops around the park, and the rest is inaccessible.

Ocean Breeze Park is located in a residential, single-family house neighborhood. It is close to the beach and adjacent to a large psychiatric facility. The neighborhood is a quiet area with little traffic in the local streets. Just a few blocks north is Hylan Boulevard, a major artery of Staten Island. The park is mostly inaccessible from the edge except for a select few entrances.

The park has the feel of a beachfront environment with sand, lots of phragmites, little to no tree cover. There are pockets of the park that have some tree cover, but these are around the edges and small in size. There are parts of the one formal trail that are paved over with asphalt, but much of it is sandy, narrow, and overgrown. A notable feature of this park is the presence of turkey. Each time we went, we observed increased numbers of turkeys – generally mothers with their chicks. During the final assessment on the weekend, we observed three flocks, along with sounds of another coming from within the thicket. We also observed a number of turkey feathers along the trail.

During our assessment visits, we observed few people in the park and did not conduct any interviews. We observed one person eating under the shade of the trees, perhaps looking for privacy. We deduced that he may be homeless and left him alone. We observed him twice during our visits and left him alone both times. We observed one bicyclist making his way through the narrow trails but did not interview him, as he was on his bike. Lastly, we observed a few teenagers hanging out just inside the entrance of the park during one visit. The only signs of human use are at the entrance to the trail, where the teenagers were hanging out. There were beer cans, cigarette butts, and broken glass. Residents outside of the park complained about dumping to us, but we did not observe substantial dumping within the park itself.

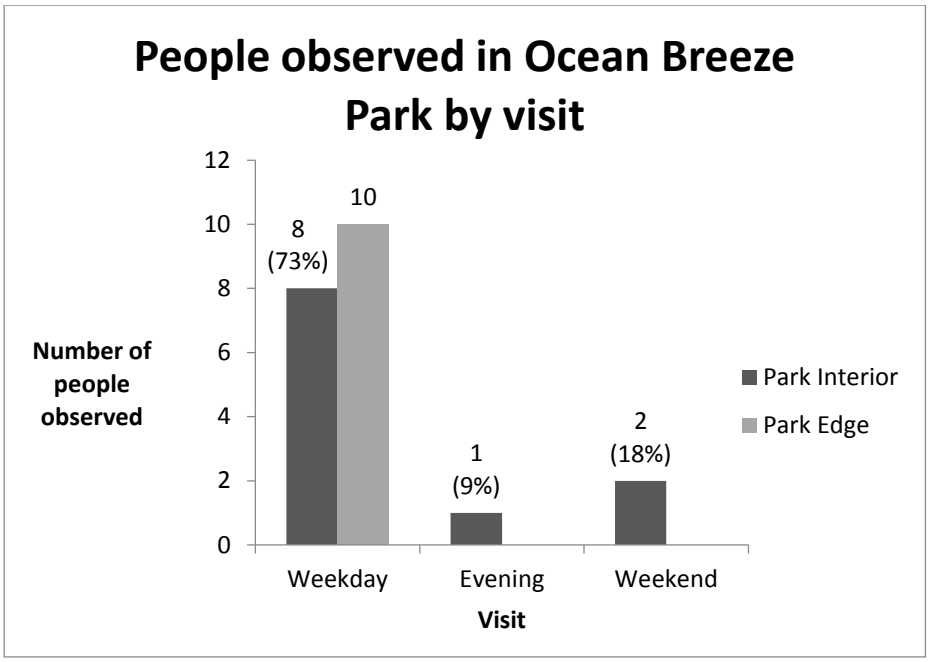
Ocean Breeze Park is largely pleasant and quiet. Because of its dense interior vegetation and construction on the southeastern end, it is mostly empty.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

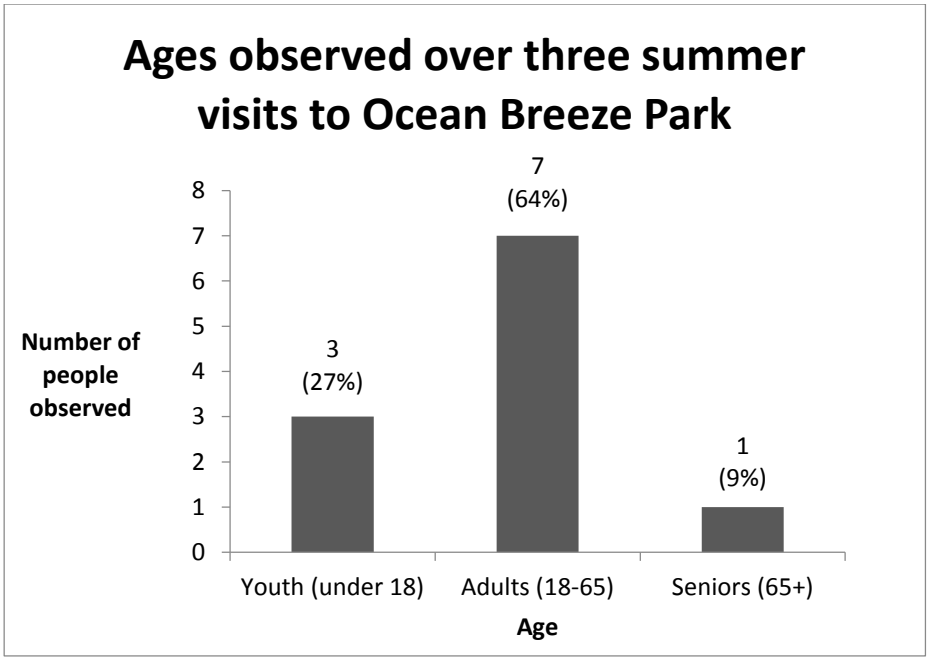
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

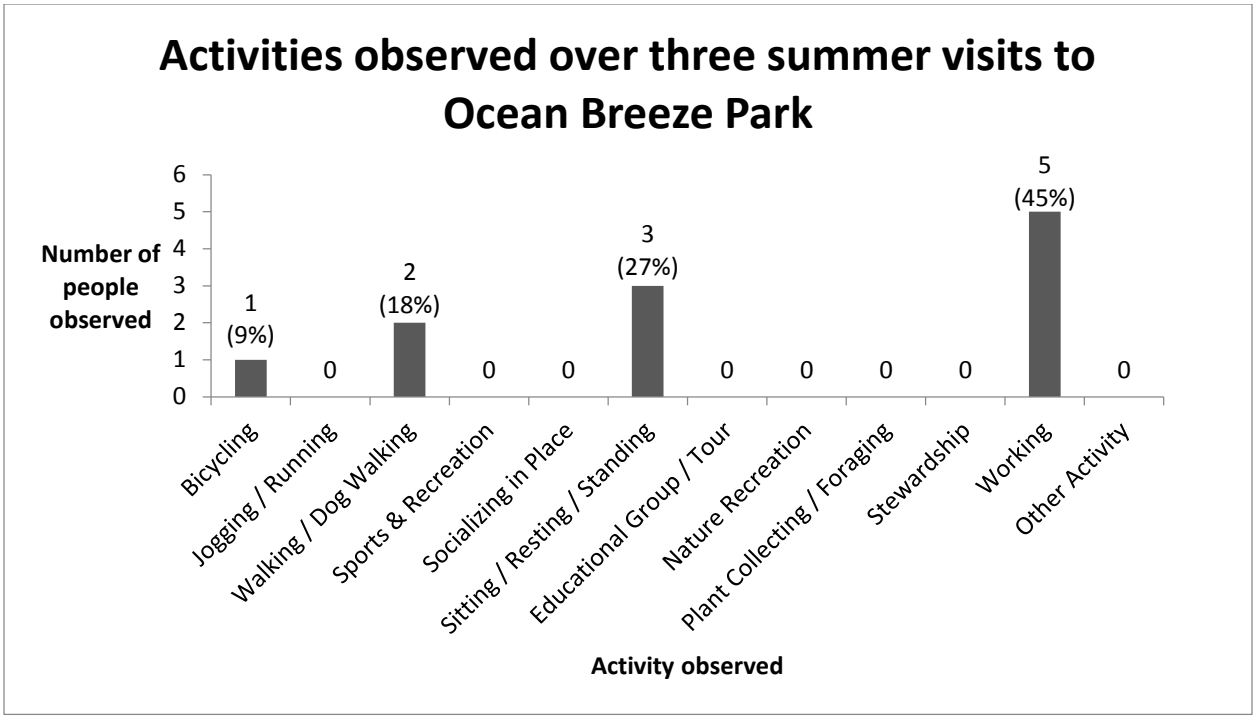


Who are they?



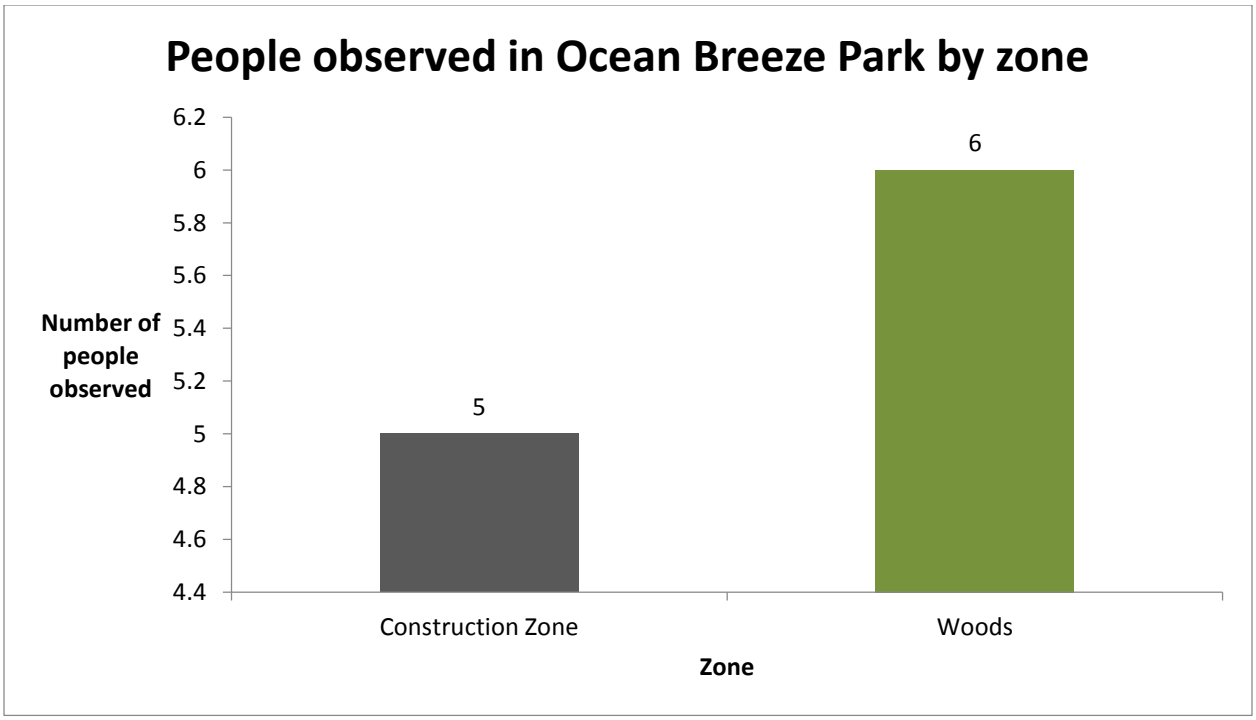
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones are in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone, time of visit, and age group. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Zones			Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Construction Zone	Woods	Total	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling		1	**1**			1	**1**		1		**1**
Jogging / Running			**0**				**0**				**0**
Walking / Dog Walking		2	**2**	2			**2**	2			**2**
Sports & Recreation			**0**				**0**				**0**
Socializing in Place			**0**				**0**				**0**
Sitting / Resting / Standing		3	**3**	1	1	1	**3**	1	1	1	**3**
Educational Group / Tour			**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation			**0**				**0**				**0**
Plant Collecting / Foraging			**0**				**0**				**0**
Stewardship			**0**				**0**				**0**
Working	5		**5**	5			**5**		5		**5**
Other Activity			**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**5**	**6**	**11**	**8**	**1**	**2**	**11**	**3**	**7**	**1**	**11**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)		
Sign	**Construction Zone**	**Woods**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box		1	**1**
Damaged / Vandalized Property			**0**
Encampment / Sleeping Area			**0**
Fire Pit			**0**
Garden in Park			**0**
Graffiti, Art, Murals			**0**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places			**0**
Informal Trails			**0**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol			**0**
Other Sign		2	**2**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers	2		**2**
Substantial Dumping or Debris		1	**1**
Total	**2**	**4**	**6**

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Ocean Breeze Park, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of the construction site.

Sociability Observed by Zone

There were no signs of sociability at Ocean Breeze Park.

III. Interviews with Park Users

No Interviews were conducted at Ocean Breeze Park.

> "The most striking feature of the park… in particular is the presence of turkeys. There were a number of turkeys present when we first visited – it looked like a mother with her many children. They fled as we got closer, but they were not disturbed by our sight when we were further away. On the weekend, I saw even more flocks of turkeys. I saw two mother-children flocks and heard the cry of another turkey. Like the turkeys from the first visit, they did not move until I got very close to them – and I had to because they were on the path. I think they were used to humans around them, but still feared them in close range (close enough to shoot and kill them). The trails have many turkey feathers lying about."
>
> **Vignette from field researcher's notes on Ocean Breeze Park**

The NYC Social Assessment: Understanding Park Users through Observation & Interview
STATEN ISLAND: Wolfe's Pond Park Profile

Zone Names	
Beach	Rec Area
Natural Area	

I. Park Narrative

Wolfe's Pond Park is a well-maintained neighborhood park with several distinct areas. The park is located in a residential area of Staten Island. It is 213 acres[1], though much of this is lightly or untraveled wildlife preserves. Wolfe's Pond Park features views of the ocean, pristine beaches, and scenic natural areas. From our interviews, we found that Wolfe's Pond Park attracts visitors for its beaches, dog parks, playgrounds, and nature walks. The large acreage combined with the small number of visitors gives the park a spacious and uncrowded feel.

The different zones of Wolfe's Pond Park we assessed are the Natural Area, Beach, and Recreation Area. Despite their potential, the Natural Area zone has few to no visitors. This may be because the trails are overgrown and not well-marked. In fact, several people we spoke with did not know that the woods were even accessible, and one user marked that she didn't know "they even existed". Park visitors also commented that the paths had been "trashed by [Superstorm] Sandy."

There is a high amount of variance along different sections of the beach. Some sections have a "fishy" smell and are littered with debris; both human litter and marine debris from the polluted waterways, such as dead fish and seaweed, were found. Other sections are fairly pristine and attract many visitors. We never observed anyone swimming in the ocean, though the visitors we interviewed enjoyed walking along it and searching for shells.

In the Recreation Area, there were a few open fields that visitors use for barbeques and family gatherings. These open areas were some of the cleanest and most well maintained that we saw in the city. On one of our visits we saw a family reunion in this area with dozens of people wearing matching t-shirts. They had traveled from all over the region to take part in the reunion. The park was chosen because the matriarch and patriarch had spent time in the park as kids. Several people with whom we spoke visited the park because of their strong familial connection with it over several generations.

Wolfe's Pond Park's dog park is one of its most unique features in the Recreation Area. The dog park is well-kept and features ocean views and a dense tree canopy to keep visitors cool. We interviewed some members of a passionate and dedicated group of volunteers who maintain the dog park. They fundraise and sponsor volunteer days, which have led to new double gates being put in, the construction of shelters structures, new mulch installed, and the dog park being kept incredibly clean. This specialized stewardship group, Wolfe's Pond Pooches, has also cultivated a sense of community among each other. On one Saturday afternoon when we visited there were about a dozen people gathered around a picnic table in the dog park catching up. They mostly chatted about their dogs, and it was obvious that this park was a point of community for them.

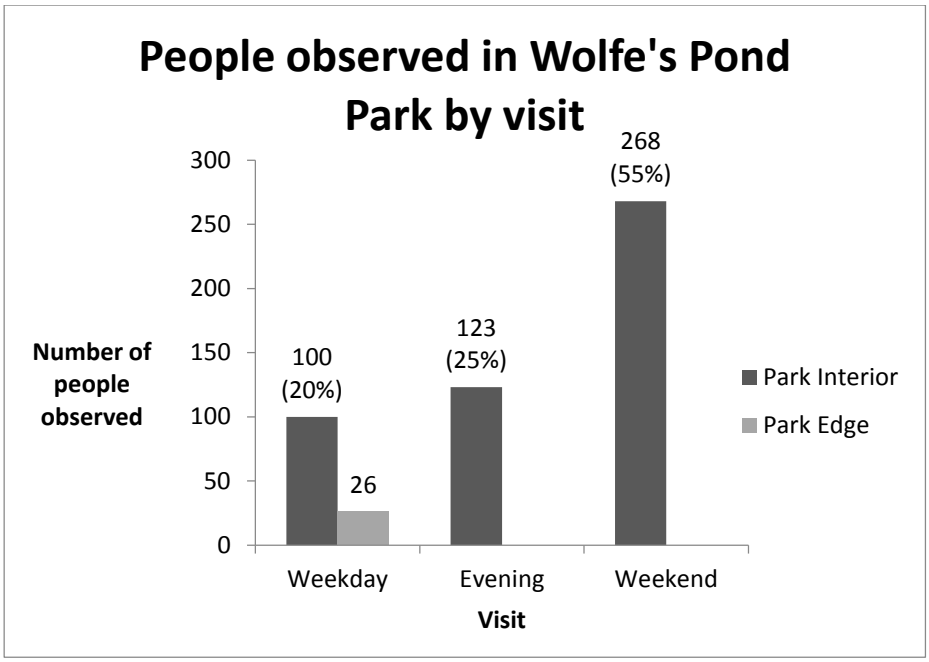
Wolfe's Pond Park attracts visitors from around Staten Island for its natural beauty and calming landscape. Visitors from across the region come to the park because of family and generational connections. The park is a place of community connection through family events and volunteering with the dog park.

[1] Total acreage was calculated using NYC Parks park_property.shp, with water bodies removed from acreage using the city_DPR_Hydro_Region_2001 feature class. Removing water bodies through this process resulted in land acreage estimates smaller than official park acreage estimates.

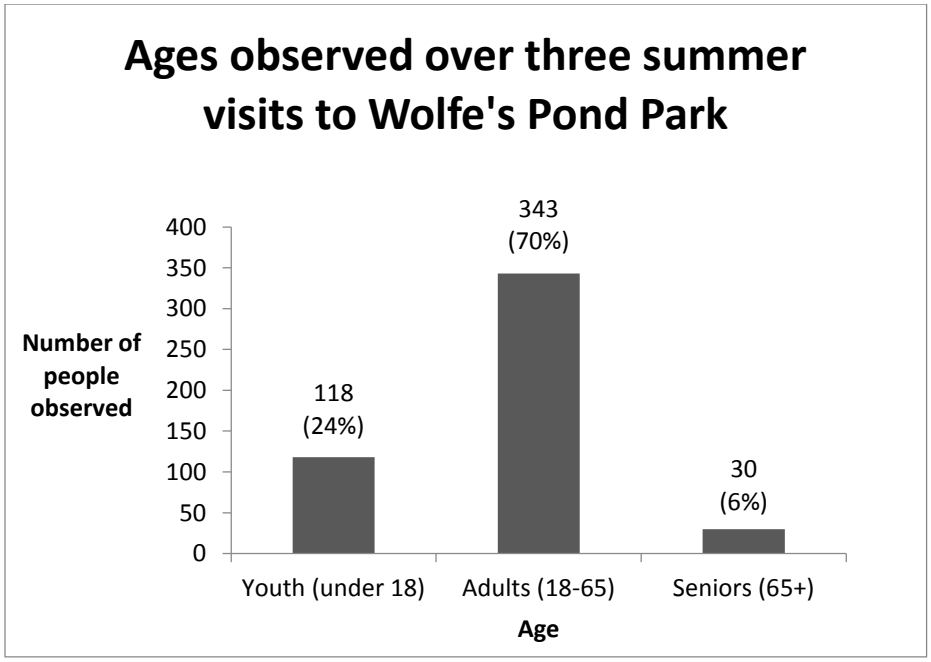
II. Park Observations

When did we see people in the park?

People were counted on the edge only during weekday visits. Humans were observed along the edge of parks, as this is a crucial zone of interface between the neighborhood and the resources.

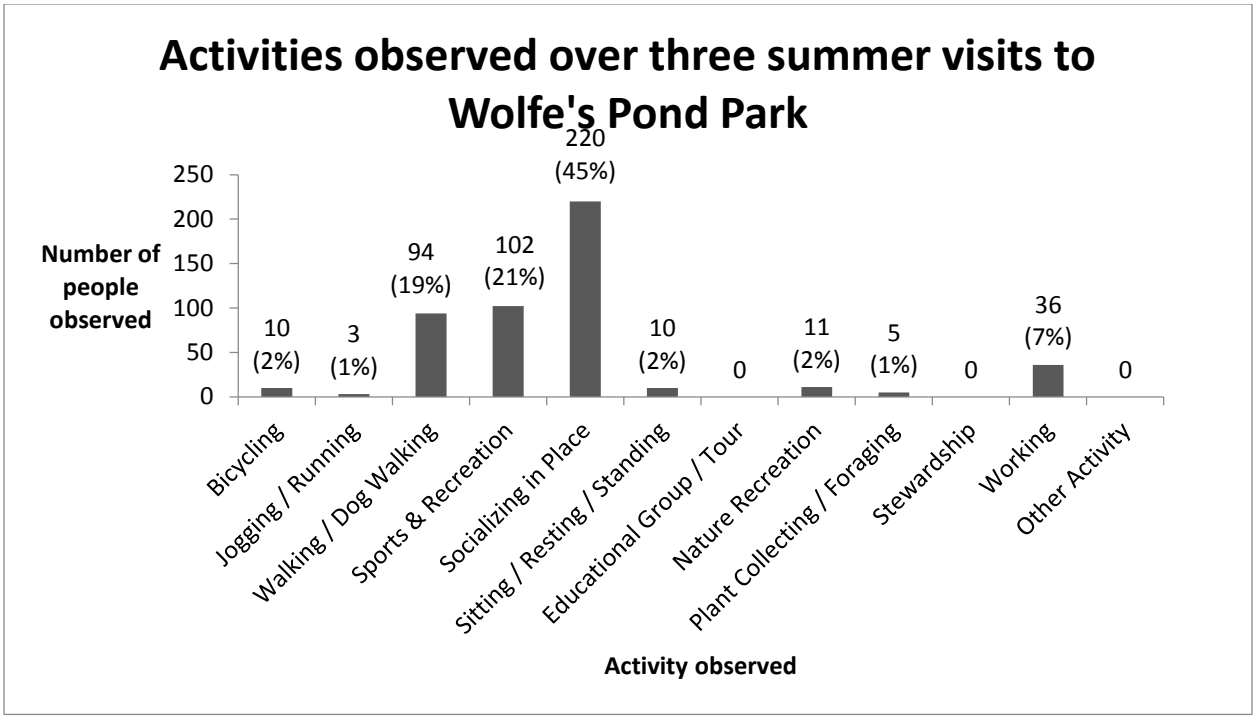


Who are they?



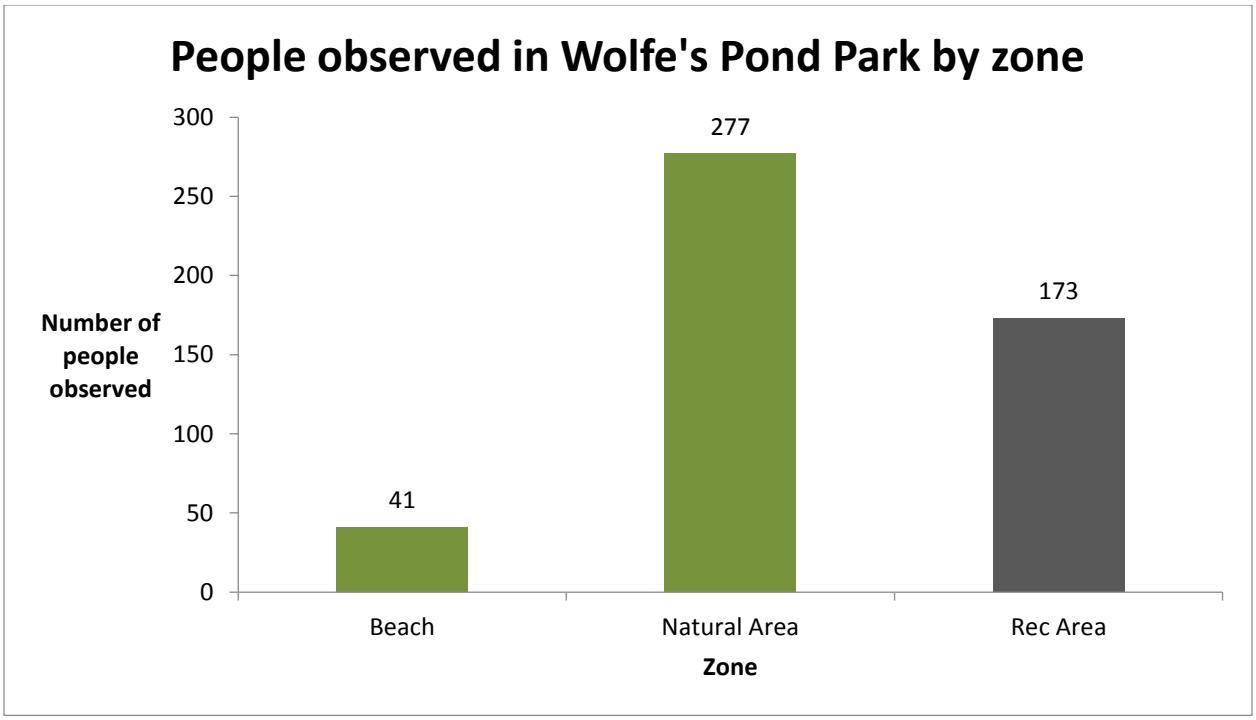
What are they doing?

Activities are clustered by: physical activity, passive use, nature-based activity, and other activity.



Where did we observe them?

Zones in alphabetical order; areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.



Detailed Counts

Activity: Counts of people observed in the park interior by zone, time of visit and age group. Areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green.

Activity Observed	Zones				Time of Visit				Age Group			
	Beach	Natural Area	Rec Area	Total	Weekday	Evening	Weekend	Total	Youth	Adults	Seniors	Total
Bicycling		2	8	**10**	1	7	2	**10**	5	5		**10**
Jogging / Running		3		**3**		1	2	**3**	1	2		**3**
Walking / Dog Walking	8	49	37	**94**	27	39	28	**94**	19	65	1	**94**
Sports & Recreation		22	8	**102**	14	39	49	**102**	5	52		**102**
Socializing in Place	8	178	34	**220**	38	33	149	**220**	41	162	17	**220**
Sitting / Resting / Standing	1	6	3	**10**	1	2	7	**10**		7	3	**10**
Educational Group / Tour				**0**				**0**				**0**
Nature Recreation	11			**11**			11	**11**	1	1		**11**
Plant Collecting / Foraging	5			**5**		2	3	**5**	1	4		**5**
Stewardship				**0**				**0**				**0**
Working	8	17	11	**36**	19		17	**36**		36		**36**
Other Activity				**0**				**0**				**0**
Total	**41**	**277**	**173**	**491**	**100**	**123**	**268**	**491**	**118**	**343**	**30**	**491**

Signs of Activity Observed by Zone

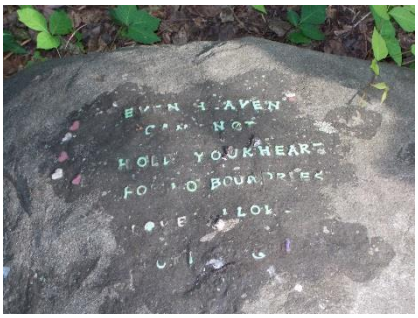
Because we could not always see people "in the act" of interacting with the site, the assessment team documented signs of human use to capture traces of activities and practices that occur across different timeframes and over longer time horizons. We will miss the birders at dawn, or the slow erosion of grass under feet. So we look for traces, signs of human use, the imprint that park users leave on the landscape. We note desire lines and well-worn trails. We document expressions of social dissent and/or disruption in the form of graffiti, hand-made signs, dumping, and vandalism. We note murals, gardens, impromptu seating, and temporary shelters. All of these signs are evidence that humans are ecosystem engineers, that our parks are co-created, by NYC Parks, of course, but also by the broader public.

	Park Zone (alphabetical order, areas designated as "Forever Wild" are in green)			
Sign	**Beach**	**Natural Area**	**Rec Area**	**Total**
Bird Feeder / Birdbath / Bat Box		2	8	**10**
Damaged / Vandalized Property		3		**3**
Encampment / Sleeping Area	8	49	37	**94**
Fire Pit		22	80	**102**
Garden in Park	8	178	34	**220**
Graffiti, Art, Murals	1	6	3	**10**
Informal / Improvised Sitting Places				**0**
Informal Trails	11			**11**
Memorial / Shrine / Sacred Symbol	5			**5**
Other Sign				**0**
Signage, Flyers & Stickers	8	17	11	**36**
Substantial Dumping or Debris				**0**
Total	**41**	**277**	**173**	**491**

"In [the natural area], we came upon a huge dirt bike area. There were multiple slopes and a large clearing. It was just a few meters away from the fence that divided the park and the Staten Island Railroad. There was no understory or mid-story in the entire area, but the trees were in place. The dirt was smooth and plain save for some litter here and there. There was clear evidence that teenagers (Tottenville High School was just across the street from the park) hung out in the area – there were bottles, soda cans, little baggies, and more general litter… [D]uring the weekend assessment… we saw a white male teenager (maybe around 18) ride into the woods on his motorized dirt bike."

Vignette from field researcher's notes on Wolfe's Pond Park

Crews took note of and photographed noteworthy features that stood out to them in each park. For Wolfe's Pond Park Preserve, other signs of activity noted included, for example, images of a National Geographic crew filming, a circle of sticks, and an informal memorial.



Sociability Observed by Zone

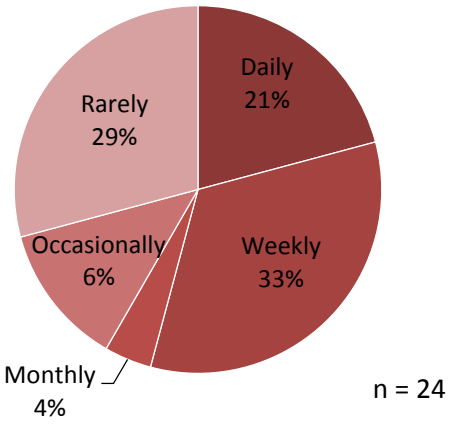
Zone	Dogs	Pair (2)	Small Group (3-10)	Large Group (10+)	Total
Beach		1	6		**7**
Natural Area	51	10	11	8	**80**
Rec Area	17	17	13		**47**
Total	**68**	**28**	**30**	**8**	**134**

III. Interviews with Park Users

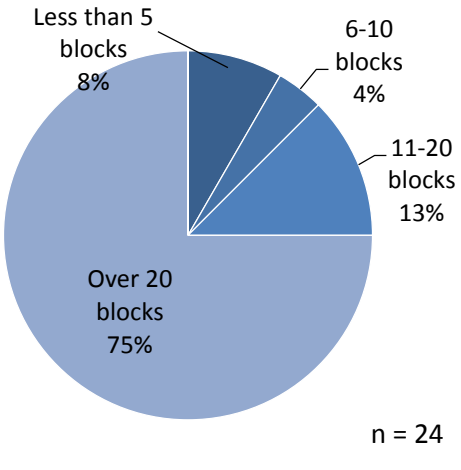
Twenty-four park users were interviewed in Wolfe's Pond Park, of which 58% were male and 42% were female. Eighty-three percent of interviewees were between the ages of 18-65, 17% were over the age of 65. We did not interview park users under the age of 18. The response rate for interviews was 71%.

The park is playing a role in the everyday lives of residents, with 54% of interviewees indicating that they use the park on a daily or weekly basis. Most visitors to the park tend to travel from far away: 75% of users travel over 20 blocks to reach the park while 12% of users travel less than 10 blocks away.

Q.1 How often do you visit the park we are in today?



Q.2 How far did you travel to get to this park?



The next section presents the results of open-ended interview questions with park users. Respondents could answer in any way that they chose and these responses were later coded for emergent themes by researchers. The tables present a summary of the rank-order of the occurrence of these themes among all the interviewees in the park, which are then explained in the text. The percentages may total to more than 100% because respondents often identified multiple themes.

Q.3 What are you doing in the park today?

Park Activities		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Dog	10	42%
Kids	5	21%
Walking	4	17%
Socializing	4	17%
Relaxing	2	8%
Nature recreation	2	8%
Sports & recreation	1	4%
Arts & culture	1	4%
Nature-outdoors	1	4%
Total Respondents	**24**	

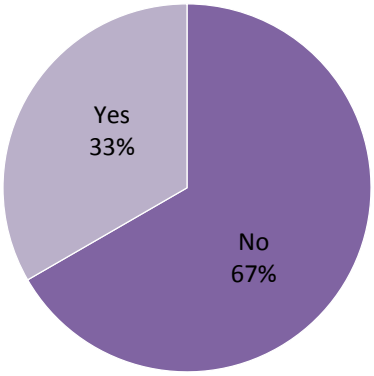
The majority of respondents were at the park *dog walking* (42%) or spending time with their *kids* (21%). Many were also engaging in physical activity, such as *walking* (17%) or *sports and recreation* (4%). Some were at the park to *socialize* (17%) at a family reunion, barbecue, or picnic. Others were *relaxing* (8%) or engaging in *nature recreation* (8%) – for example, looking for sea glass. One respondent came to watch the National Geographic crew filming (*arts & culture*, 4%) and another came to "enjoy the weather" (*nature-outdoors*, 4%).

Q.4 Why do you choose to come here?

Reasons for Visiting Park		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Enjoyment	8	33%
Amenities	4	17%
Quality	4	17%
Place attachment	3	13%
Activity	3	13%
Local	3	13%
Explore	2	8%
Nature-outdoors	2	8%
Refuge	2	8%
Social ties	1	4%
Sociability	1	4%
Total Respondents	**24**	

Most respondents visited because they *enjoyed* (33%) Wolfe's Pond Park and thought that it was "beautiful" and "one of the nicest parks on Staten Island." The *amenities* (17%) also attracted a number of respondents: one noted that the park had the "best dog park" and another was in the park because of the beach and the view. Many respondents visited because of the *quality* (17%) of the park or they had strong *place attachment* (13%) and had been coming to the park for years or since they were young. Some were at the park for specific *activities* (13%), such as sports or to watch the National Geographic crew filming, others were there because the park was *local* (13%) and close to home. At the same time, some respondents came from far away in order to *explore* (8%) the park. Others came to enjoy *nature and the outdoors* (8%), and a few respondents saw the park as a *refuge* (8%) and liked that it was "quiet" and "safe." One respondent was visiting her aunt who lived nearby (*social ties*, 4%) and another was in the park to spend time at his family reunion (*sociability*, 4%)

Q5. In this park, do you ever go to the woods / wetland / trail area?



n = 24

Wolfe's Pond Park includes a number of wooded, wetland and trail areas, and we asked all respondents whether they ever go to those areas. A few respondents said yes (33%), and we followed up to ask what they typically do in natural areas. Out of the respondents who said yes, the most common answer was *walking* (75%). Some respondents would engage in *nature recreation* (25%), such as hiking the trails or viewing the scenery. One respondent would read (*arts & culture*, 13%) or *exercise* (13%) in natural areas. Another liked to engage with *nature and the outdoors* (13%).

What Users Do In Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Walking	6	75%
Nature recreation	2	25%
Arts & culture	1	13%
Exercise	1	13%
Nature-Outdoors	1	13%
"Yes" Respondents	**8**	

Reasons for Not Visiting Natural Areas		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Preference	6	38%
Potential	5	31%
Access	3	19%
Fear-concern	2	13%
Life course	2	13%
"No" Respondents	**16**	

Most respondents (67%) said that they never go to natural areas. Out of the respondents of who said no, the majority of them *preferred to go to other parts of the park* (38%). We classified some respondents as having the *potential to go to natural areas* (31%) because they were previously unaware that these areas existed or expressed a desire to go in the future. Some felt that the natural areas were difficult to *access* (19%) because of Sandy damage or they had physical disabilities. Some respondents also expressed *fear or concern* (13%) about being in natural areas because they were worried about lyme disease or insects in general. Two respondents were at *life courses* (13%) – they had small children -- which made them reluctant to go into natural areas. Out of the 67% of respondents who said they did not go to natural areas, 9 of them were actually interviewed in natural areas but did not realize it. Many of these users were simply passing through the natural area: for example, they were on their way to the dog park or the barbecue area.

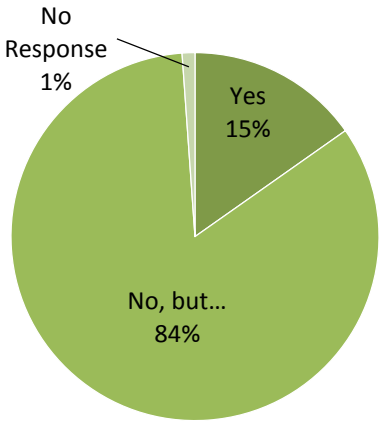
Q.6 Where else do you like to go in the outdoors?

In addition to studying parks as ecological corridors, we are interested in how human park users act as social connectors between outdoor sites. We asked park users to tell us about where else they like to go outdoors. This led to responses that include specifically named sites and different site types, shown here.

The most commonly visited site types for Wolfe's Pond Park users were other *named NYC parks* (37%), such as Bloomingdale Park or Great Kills Park. Some respondents also liked to go *out of town* (13%) to places in New Jersey, such as Allaire State Park, or in Connecticut. For some respondents, they *do not go anywhere else outdoors* (26%), indicating the importance of Wolfe's Pond Park in their everyday lives. See table at right for the full list of responses in rank order.

Other Site Types Visited		
THEME	**COUNT**	**% OF RESPONDENTS**
Named NYC Park	12	50%
Out of town	3	13%
Nowhere else	3	13%
Beach-waterfront	3	13%
Nature preserve	2	8%
Sports	1	4%
Total Respondents	**24**	

Q.7 Are you involved in any stewardship groups that take care of the environment?



n = 24

Participating in a local stewardship group indicates a high level of environmental and civic engagement, and 15% of respondents directly identified as doing so. Three of the respondents who said yes specifically named Wolfe's Pond Pooches as their affiliation. Although most interviewees were not involved in stewardship, many were involved in other forms of engagement or their interest in stewardship fell along a spectrum from some to none.

At one end of the spectrum, some respondents expressed a *pro-environmental ethic* (n = 2), such as having solar panels on their house or believing in the importance of recycling, while one participated in *other civic engagement*, such as working on women's issues. Many respondents had *no specific reason* (n = 7) for not engaging in stewardship or lacked *awareness* (n =2) of groups or opportunities to participate in stewardship. We classified one respondent as having the *potential* to participate because he had not really thought much about stewardship. Finally, some respondents had *no time* (n = 5) or *no interest* (n = 1).