

To Be Or Not To Be a Park: That Is The Question¹

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Abstract: The Applewhite Picnic Area of the San Bernardino National Forest is a site of change. This has been evidenced by the user groups who have visited the site, and the activities engaged in during the early 1990's. Because the picnic area is scheduled for renovation in fiscal year 1995, resource managers desired input from their user groups prior to renovation. A questionnaire was distributed to gather information from visitors about their preferences for the picnic site amenities and facilities. Overall, the respondents to this study specified preferences for developing the area.

*To be, or not to be a park, —that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler as a resource professional to
suffer the crowding and conflict by overdemand,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by redesigning end them?*

*-To survey, -to change, -Once more;
and by a change to say we end*

*The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That visitors fall heir to, -'tis an experience
Devoutly to be avoided.*

To survey, -to plan; -to change

*To change! Add flush toilets, grass and swingsets:
ay there's the rub;*

*For in those changes what other visitors may come
When we have shuffled off this wildland appearance
Must give us pause: there's the decision
That makes our job a challenge.*

(After Shakespeare's "Hamlet")

The Applewhite Picnic Area of the San Bernardino National Forest is a site of change. This has been evidenced by the user groups who have visited the site, and the activities they have engaged in on the site during the early 1990's. Statistics show that part of this change is because of the reshaping of the population in southern California as the Hispanic population increases. Applewhite has experienced a concurrent change in users because more Hispanics are recreating there than ever before, and they are recreating in

larger groups than previous user groups. These users are also engaging in "different" activities than prior users. For example, although picnicking remains the primary activity, the new user groups make meals from scratch that can take several preparation hours, in contrast to the methods of prior picnickers.

Another pending change in the area is the renovation of the picnic site. Currently, the site contain more that 100 parking spaces and about 30 picnic tables. And although the area was designed for about 250 people, actual visitation levels are commonly as high as 1,200 people (*fig. 1*).

This paper reports a study to gather information from visitors about their preferences for the picnic site amenities and facilities. This information will be used in the site development plan for renovation of the picnic area.

Our research objectives included obtaining information about:

- The socio-demographic background of site visitors, their patterns of visitation and the activities in which they engage;
- Visitors' favorite recreation areas within the picnic site, and their preferences for site features and facilities;
- Visitor opinions about potential changes in the picnic area; and
- New and repeat visitors' picnic site preferences.

Methods

The questionnaire used in this study to determine user preferences was based on a U.S. Office of Management and Budget approved document that addresses part of the day-use series emphasis of the Pacific Southwest Research Station's Wildland Recreation and Urban Culture Research Work Unit. The approval designates issues that are expressed in specific questionnaire items. The terminology of the items was determined in cooperation with resource managers of the Cajon Ranger District.

Data were collected on-site using a self-administered questionnaire format. A field team member approached a group, described the purpose of the study, and asked visitors who were 16 years of age or older to participate. Participation was voluntary.

Data were collected on weekends from July 3-18, 1993. During that period, 334 respondents completed an English or Spanish version of the questionnaire. Of the 761 adults approached, 44 percent participated and completed the questionnaire. This is a high percentage, despite that a Spanish version was not available at the beginning of the survey season.

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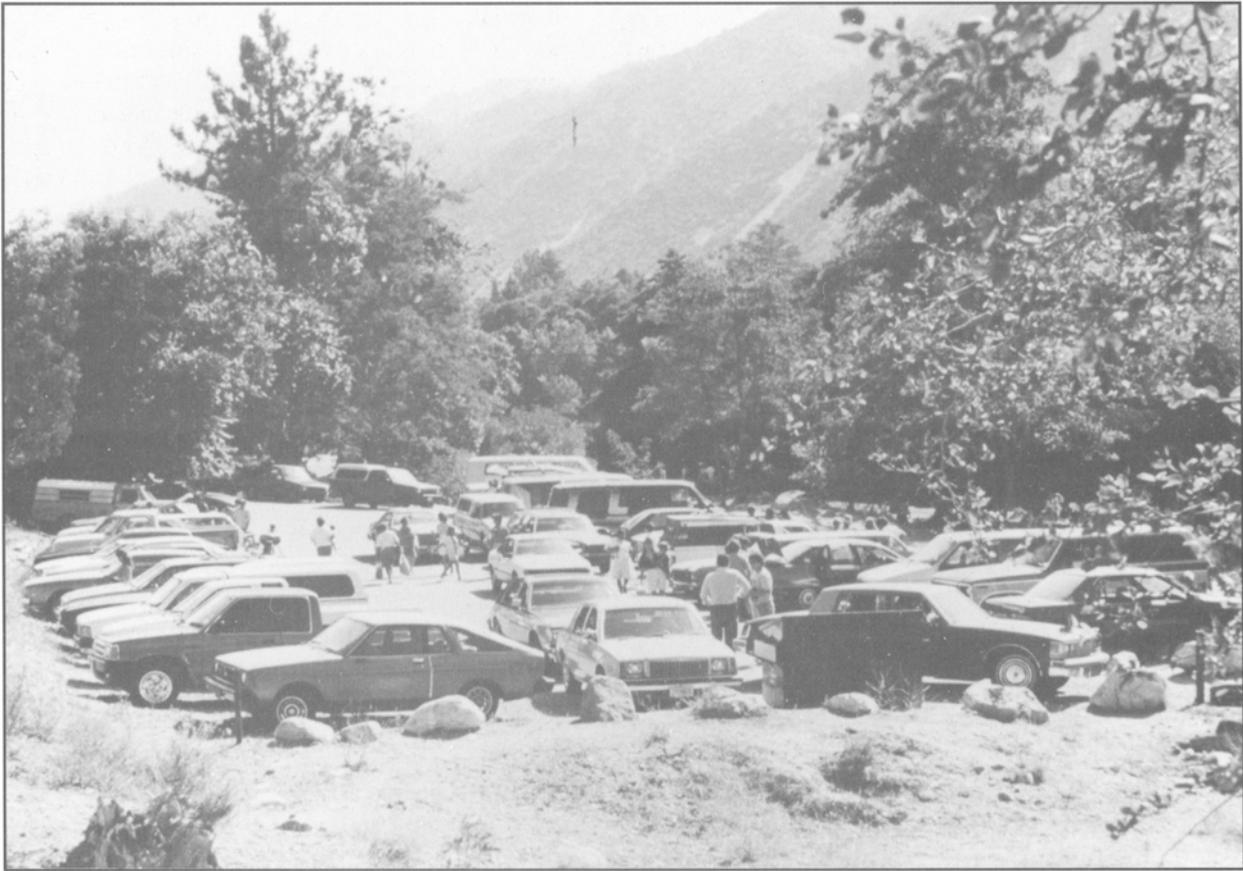


Figure 1—The San Bernardino National Forest’s Applewhite Picnic Area was designed to accommodate 250 visitors, but commonly it has held as many as 1,200. Forest Service, 4955 Canyon Crest Drive, Riverside, CA 92507.

Results

Socio-Demographic Profile

More than three-quarters (78 percent) of the visitors to the Applewhite Picnic Area were of Hispanic descent (40 percent were Hispanic American, 36 percent were Mexican American and 2 percent were Central American). Another 7 percent were Anglo-American. Less than half of the sample (43 percent) were born in the United States, with Mexico being the most common (50 percent) birthplace. Respondents had resided in the United States for an average of 22 years (with a standard deviation of 13).

More than half (54 percent) were female and the average age was 32 (with a standard deviation of 11). Respondents had an average of 11 years of education. More than 6 of 10 primarily speak and read English (3 of 10 speak and read English exclusively while another 3 of 10 speak and read English and Spanish; one-third read and speak Spanish only). Groups were comprised of an average of eight adults (standard deviation of 1) and seven children (standard deviation of 5).

Patterns of Visitation

Almost three-quarters of the visitors (72 percent) were repeat visitors to the Applewhite Picnic Area. Repeat visitors have been to the site an average of five occasions in the past (with a very large standard deviation of 9--which suggests that there were very wide ranges in responses), and they have been coming to the site for 6 years (with a standard deviation of 7).

Most respondents (71 percent) had plans to stay at the site the entire day. Another 16 percent had plans to stay for 2 to 4 hours. Only 2 percent had plans to stay for less than 2 hours. When asked about the level of crowding, on a scale of “not crowded” to “extremely crowded,” visitors perceived a “moderately crowded” condition.

Activities Engaged In

Respondents enjoyed a variety of activities at the Applewhite Picnic Area. The highest ranked activities were picnicking, relaxing, playing in the creek, wading, hiking and visiting with others; among these the most favorite

activities were picnicking (28 percent) or relaxing (26 percent). In addition, 8 of 10 respondents (79 percent) reported that their group had enough space for their activities. Those visitors reporting a need for more space wanted playgrounds, volleyball courts, a baseball field or other sports areas.

Favorite Recreation Areas and Preferred Features

Most respondents (70 percent) reported that they prefer to picnic in the shade while 9 percent preferred to picnic in the sun. Given the choices of picnicking near water, on or near the parking lot, on rocky areas or grassy areas, most respondents (76 percent) expressed a preference for picnicking near the water. Only 17 percent of the visitors said they were able to picnic at their favorite place all the time. A cross-tabulation of sun/shade preference and duration that people picnicked at their preferred area was not significant--78 percent of those preferring the sun recreated there some or most of the time, and 79 percent of those preferring the shade recreated there some or most of the time. The features most often desired by picnickers included creeks, trees, picnic tables, rocks/boulders, and easy access to the road.

Site Facility Preferences

Picnic Tables

Eight in ten respondents (81 percent) desired more picnic tables at Applewhite. About half the respondents (49 percent) thought that the picnic tables should be moved close to the water while about one-third (31 percent) thought the tables should not be moved.

Almost all the respondents (95 percent) preferred tables in a large group configuration (52 percent chose 10 foot tables that seat eight people and 43 percent chose side by side tables for large groups).

Trash Containers

Most of the respondents (90 percent) preferred trash cans near the picnic tables; and although more than half (63 percent) desired trash dumpsters in the parking area, another 31 percent did not prefer trash dumpsters in the parking area.

Other Amenities

About 8 of 10 respondents (79 percent) reported a lack of barbecue grills available at Applewhite. Although 30 percent reported a sufficient number of restroom facilities at Applewhite, 68 percent disagreed. And most respondents (88 percent) preferred flush toilets available at the picnic area.

Parking Preferences

A series of questions elicited information about parking preferences. More than one-third (36 percent) of the respondents reported that they prefer to pay nothing to park at the Applewhite picnic area. Another 4 in 10 (40 percent) reported they would pay \$3 per day.

About half (54 percent) reported that they would return to Applewhite if a fee was charged for parking, but 28 percent said they would not, and 18 percent said they were

uncertain. Most of the respondents (83 percent) said they would be willing to walk one-quarter mile or less from an overflow parking area to the picnic area (67 percent said less than one-quarter mile and 16 percent said one-quarter mile). Although 44 percent reported they would prefer to pay nothing, another 44 percent report they would be willing to pay \$3 or less to park some distance away from the picnic area.

Opinions About Change

Visitors were asked about their opinions regarding changes to the picnic area. Although about one-third (36 percent) stated that the changes was unnecessary, other respondents reported that changes should be made to the restrooms (26 percent), tables (12 percent), parking (7 percent), and the barbecues (2 percent). Respondents then indicated the improvements they desired at Applewhite. The most frequently listed improvements were adding more parking spaces and a playground.

When asked to choose the most important improvement, about one-fourth (26 percent) asked for the addition of parking spaces; others asked for lawn (16 percent), a playground (14 percent), shade trees (13 percent) and picnic area information on bulletin boards (6 percent).

Janna Larson, Recreation Planner for the Cajon Ranger District of the San Bernardino National Forest, provided renderings of three development options. The field team displayed the three choices, outlining the main features of change for each, and told respondents that choice number 4 was Applewhite in its current condition.

Choices 1, 2 and 3 displayed varying degrees of development. Choice 1 maintained the existing design capacity of 120 parking spaces, 33 picnic tables (all single, none clustered), no grassy lawn, and some additional shade trees. Choice 2 doubled the design capacity with 240 parking spaces, 60 picnic tables, lawn/gravel and rock in the main picnic area, and half clustered, half single tables. The greatest degree of development was depicted in choice 3: this choice tripled the existing design capacity with 480 parking spaces, 120 picnic tables (most clustered), lawn, shade trees, and playgrounds. Choice 3 was the most preferred (53%) when compared to the picnic area as it presently exists, and development options 1 and 2. A preference for more development was also demonstrated in visitors' second preference: Choice 2, the second greatest degree of development (30%) also received a high preference rating.

Another question relating to current and preferred management strategies queried visitors about management preferences for the picnic area. The highest percentage reported was for current management by the Forest Service (53 percent), but 10 percent preferred management by picnic area hosts and another 5 percent favored an outside group or concessionaire. Less than one-third (31 percent) reported no preference.

Another question asked visitors about their interest in hosting the picnic area, but only 1 percent replied affirmatively.

Socio-Demographics and Activities

No statistical differences were found between new and repeat visitors regarding socio-demographic characteristics.

Preferred Features and Favorite Recreation Areas

A statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) was discovered between new and repeat visitors regarding indications of their favorite place at Applewhite; new visitors showed a greater preference for places in the sun than did repeat visitors. No significant differences were found between new and repeat visitors regarding geographic preferences, e.g., grassy versus rocky areas.

A significant difference between new and repeat visitors was found regarding the perception of crowding (Chi-square, $p < .05$): a greater percentage of repeat visitors were likely to rate the picnic area as moderately or extremely crowded.

No other differences were found between new and repeat visitors about site features and indicated preferences. Only repeat visitors responded to the majority of these items, precluding any comparisons.

Opinions About Change

No significant differences were found between repeat and first time visitors regarding development options, willingness to pay for parking, or most preferred improvement.

Discussion and Management Implications

Socio-Demographic Profile

Average visitors to the Applewhite Picnic Area are of Hispanic descent—United States or Mexico born—and had resided in the United States for 22 years. These visitors on the average were 32 years old, had some high school education, and primarily spoke and read English. Average groups of visitors were comprised of eight adults and seven children.

Most respondents were repeat visitors to the Applewhite picnic area who had visited the site an average of five times in the past 6 years. On average, Applewhite visitors did not consider the site to be crowded. And although the highest visitation occurred after midday, most respondents reported plans to stay at the site all day.

Favorite activities at the Applewhite Picnic Area area included picnicking, relaxing, playing in the creek, wading, hiking and visiting with others. The favorite activity question revealed the two most popular activities—picnicking and relaxing.

Resource managers should be prepared to continue serving the Hispanic population at the Applewhite area and plan for large size groups. People have been using the area for the intended purposes-- picnicking and relaxing. Visitors have not been concerned about the numbers of other visitors at the site; this suggests that managers can redesign the area to match current use or possibly expand to include even more visitors. However, given that repeat visitors are more concerned about crowding, an optimal to design for

Applewhite would not include more space for many more visitors than are currently recreating at Applewhite.

Favorite Recreation Areas and Preferred Features

Visitors' favorite places to picnic at Applewhite are in the shade, near the water. The features respondents liked most at Applewhite were the creek, the trees, the picnic tables, the rocks/boulders and a picnic area that was close to the road.

Most respondents thought that there were not enough picnic tables at Applewhite. About half the respondents thought that picnic tables should be moved close. Most respondents wanted tables in a large group configuration, and they preferred more barbecue grills at Applewhite.

Although most of the respondents preferred trash cans near the picnic tables, they seemed to have no strong preferences about the location of trash dumpsters in the parking lot. More than half the respondents preferred more restroom facilities at Applewhite and most expressed a preference for flush toilets.

The responses to questions about parking lots also reveals a mixed preference. Many respondents did not want to pay to park at Lytle Creek although many others said they might pay up to \$3 per day to park there. About half reported that they would return to Applewhite if a fee was charged for parking, although many said they would not. Overflow parking responses suggested that visitors would walk one-quarter mile or less from an overflow parking area to the picnic area. Many respondents did not want to pay to park at an overflow area although many others said they might pay up to \$3 per day to park there.

Overall, the respondents to this study have preferences for developing the area. They prefer shade, more picnic tables (particularly in large group configurations), trash cans near those tables, more barbecue grills and more restrooms (especially flush toilets). All these items suggest that renovation of the site will be favorably considered by the current user groups. Their preferences also provide a guide to resource managers about the specific items that the visitors prefer at the site.

Because trees and bushes are favored by respondents, a site designed for a larger capacity of visitors should include these, which could serve as privacy regulators and perhaps give the impression of fewer, not more, visitors at the site.

Opinions About Change

Visitors' opinions about changes to the picnic area included about one-third who stated that change was not necessary, but other respondents reported that changes should be made to the restrooms, tables, parking, and the barbecues. Improvements they would like to see at Applewhite included adding more parking spaces and a playground. Parking spaces were considered the most important improvement needed at Applewhite. Several respondents also mentioned that they might like to have information available on bulletin boards.

Respondents who were shown sketches of potential site development preferred a high level of development.

Although many expressed no management preference for the site, about half preferred the current management by the Forest Service. Few supported the idea of a picnic area host and almost no one expressed an interest in hosting the picnic area.

Thus, more than two-thirds preferred development of the site, and parking lots and playgrounds were prioritized as the most important items in need of change. The respondents also expressed a desire to continue with Forest Service management of the area—even though this may not be feasible under a high development design.

Comparison Between New and Repeat Visitors

Few significant differences were found between new and repeat visitors to the Applewhite Picnic Area, although these groups did differ: new visitors showed a greater preference for places in the sun than did repeat visitors, and a greater percentage of repeat visitors were more likely than new visitors to rate the picnic area as moderately or extremely crowded.

But the overall lack of significant differences suggests that design planning of the picnic area does not need to focus on one particular user group--except that repeat users were more sensitive to crowding.

Management Plans

The final site development plan for the area has been developed. This design includes 100 picnic tables total--with 50 picnic tables in family clusters and longer tables and bigger grills. Trash cans will be placed near the picnic tables. Flush toilets will be installed in the picnic area. Two play areas are planned along with two creekettes (small, gravity-fed creek extensions) with boulders and shade. Half

the site will have lawn and additional shade trees will be provided. The area will be managed by a concessionaire who will oversee 200 parking spaces and charge a fee at the entrance to the parking area. There will be fencing around the perimeter of the picnic site and efforts will be made to provide use to a maximum capacity 800 people.

Conclusions

The goal of this research was to gather information from visitors about their preferences for amenities and facilities for the picnic site that would be incorporated into the site development plan for the renovation of the site.

Results from the self-administered questionnaire suggested that resource managers should be prepared to continue serving the Hispanic population at the Applewhite area and plan for large size groups. Although visitors did not seem concerned about the numbers of other visitors at the site, repeat visitors were more concerned about crowding, so it would not be optimal to design for many more visitors than are currently recreating at Applewhite.

Overall, respondents to this study have preferences for developing the area. They preferred shade, more picnic tables (particularly in large group configurations), trash cans near those tables, more barbecue grills and more restrooms (especially flush toilets). Respondents considered parking lots as the feature in most need of change. Each of these items suggested that renovation of the site would be favorably considered by the current user groups.

Finally, given that there were few differences between new and repeat visitors to the site, the design of the picnic area should not focus on one particular user group--with the caution that repeat users showed more sensitivity to crowding. Management plans for the area incorporated most of the preferences of the respondents as measured by the survey.