



Social Science Program

Background

Understanding the relationship between people and parks is critical for protecting resources unimpaired and providing for public enjoyment. The objectives of the Social Science Program (SSP) are to conduct and promote state-of-the-art social science related to the mission of the National Park Service (NPS) and to deliver usable knowledge to park managers and the public. This includes several major activities.

Socioeconomic Technical Support

- Offers parks and regions guidance concerning requests for technical assistance and identifying social science needs.
- Provides economic support for damage assessments, rulemakings, environmental compliance, and special projects.

Visitor Services Project

- Implements survey research in park units to understand visitor demographics, trip characteristics, opinions about park services and facilities, etc.
- Conducts numerous visitor use studies in park units annually to provide park managers with scientific information about visitors that have been used to improve services, protect resources, and manage parks more effectively.

Visitor Spending Effects

- Estimates the impacts park visitors have on local, regional and national economies in terms of their contribution to sales, income, and jobs.
- Applies Visitor Services Project and Public Use Statistics Office data to economic multipliers to provide usable estimates for NEPA compliance documents and other applications for socioeconomic data.

Information Collections Review

- Manages the Information Collection Review Process and NPS Programmatic Review and Approval for social science surveys for NPS.
- Assists parks and regions with requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act as necessary for all social science surveys and information collection request submitted to the Office Management and Budget (OMB) for approval.

- Provides training and technical assistance to agency personnel in the development and clearance of social science survey submissions and all aspects of the PRA submission process.

Public Use Statistics Office

- Collects, analyzes, and publishes official visitation statistics for NPS.
- Hosts a dynamic website providing historic and current visitor use statistics for 374 of the nearly 400 units included in the National Park System.
- Projects recreation visits for park units by extending trend lines of actual visitation data from the previous five years.

Visitor Survey Card

- Conducts customer satisfaction surveys system-wide regarding facilities and services.
- Reports results for 13 indicators (including park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities) for performance reporting.



Visitors being surveyed at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

More Information

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Katmai National Park visitors watching brown bears catch fish from viewing platforms near Brooks Camp.

Current Projects and Accomplishments

Socioeconomic Monitoring Program Implementation

The SSP is in the process of establishing a socioeconomic monitoring program (SEM). This effort will allow for a variety of indicator variables to be understood and tracked over time across the NPS. These results will be reported at park, regional and national levels and provide visitor information currently not available. This effort requires an establishment of a system of indicator parks for the service in addition to statistical power analysis before proceeding. These developments are expected by 2015.

Database Migration to Integrated Resources Management Application (IRMA)

Currently, two programs managed by the SSP have been established within IRMA, a web-based "one-stop" for data and information related to National Park Service natural and cultural resources (<https://irma.nps.gov>). NPS Stats for the Public Use Statistics Office and Survey Request Tracking System (SRTS) for Information Collections Review are now live and available for use. However, the program is always looking for ways to improve end-user interface and welcome suggestions for improvement.

Technical Assistance and Online Social Science Research and Visitor Use Management Tool Development

The SSP is in the process of reviewing their approach to providing technical assistance to park units in the future. Two identified needs include 1) the provision of online tools to increase social science understanding and integration into park-level planning and management, and 2) more direct and diverse staff involvement in the development, implementation, and review of social science research efforts. These efforts seek to assist park units in initiating both comprehensive and plan-specific visitor use and social science research needs assessments.