

Park begins two-year visitor use study

SEP 14 1990

**Visitors soaking up
view from their cars**

Grand Canyon
Considering
Crowd Control

**Americans pummel parks
with conflicting goals**



Travelers Increasingly Favor
Weekend Trips, Survey Finds

**Visitor Surveys Aid Mount Rainier
In Handling Management Problems**

People travel
more often, but
take shorter,
cheaper trips.

Foreigners Increasing Travel to U.S.



United States Department of the Interior



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20013-7127

IN REPLY REFER TO:



SEP 14 1990

September 12, 1990

Memorandum

To: Park Superintendents

From: Assistant to the Director for Science and Technology

Subject: Visitor Survey Options

Over the last few months I have received numerous inquiries from Superintendents regarding the various options for conducting visitor surveys. Accordingly, perhaps it would be useful to identify some of the choices currently available. If you have interest in one or more of these options, you should contact your Regional Social Scientist for further information.

Note. At the end of this report, there is a very brief discussion under the heading "Concluding Remarks". I hope that each of you will read this section before deciding to commit your time and monies to a particular kind of visitor survey activity.

1. GENERAL USER SURVEY (GUS). This survey questionnaire was developed by the WASO Social Science Office. It is designed to provide comprehensive, in-depth information about visitor demographics, visitor interests, recreational preferences, visitor values, expectations, needs, activities participated in, satisfaction achieved, responses to park management actions, problems encountered (crowding, conflicts, etc), economic spending patterns, etc. The GUS questionnaire already has received conditional approval from the OMB. It can be administered either in mail back form or via face-to-face interviews. WASO field-tested this survey at eight parks this summer. WASO will begin implementing the GENERAL USER SURVEY at selected parks (indicator parks) during FY 91 to gather baseline data, at WASO expense. Sampling plans will be customized for each park so as to make the survey results as generally applicable as possible. A copy of the draft GUS instrument was distributed to Superintendents as issue paper #15 of this Memorandum Series. The final OMB-approved GENERAL USER SURVEY questionnaire will be available for general use

by parks early in FY 91.

2. VISITOR SERVICES PROJECT (VSP). The VSP is managed by the WASO Division of Interpretation (Mike Watson, FTS-268-5270) and administered at approximately ten parks each year (one per region) by staff at the University of Idaho. The survey questionnaire generally is quite concise; it typically contains 6-8 standardized questions concerning visitor demographics, visitor activities, services utilized, how time was spent in the park, etc, plus some 2-4 questions of specific interest to a given park. The questionnaire is administered over a 1-2 week period as a mail back instrument. Survey costs are borne by the benefitting parks and the Regional Offices.

3. DSC SURVEYS. DSC planning team personnel have worked cooperatively with parks in developing and carrying out visitor surveys, primarily to gather information needed for designing or completing various plans (transportation plans, GMP's, DCP's, etc). The survey questionnaires used for these purposes sometimes follow the Visitor Services Project format, or sometimes are tailored to support specific park planning or park management objectives. Survey costs are negotiated amongst the benefitting park, the region, and the DSC. The DSC point of contact for survey implementation is John Austin, FTS-327-2315.

4. REGIONAL SOCIAL SCIENTISTS. Superintendents frequently ask their Regional Social Scientists to design and conduct a visitor survey for them, often to support EIS's and planning/management actions, or sometimes to gather data needed for dealing with conflict situations or with matters of significant public interest. The survey questionnaire typically is tailored specifically to meet park objectives, but often will utilize standardized questions drawn from the OMB conditionally-approved Catalog of Questions developed by WASO.

5. INDEPENDENT UNIVERSITY SOCIOLOGISTS. Superintendents sometimes will work through a local University or through a Cooperative Parks Study Unit to carry out a visitor survey project. The situation here essentially is the same as discussed in #4 above i.e. usually consisting of a park-specific visitor survey questionnaire that is administered either by park staff or by university personnel.

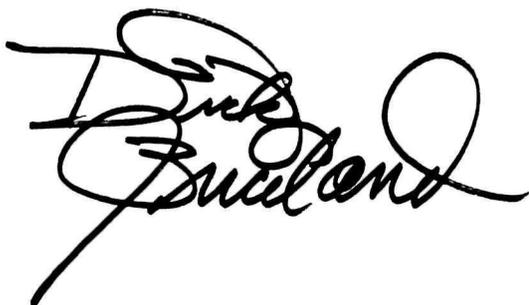
6. FOREST SERVICE SOCIOLOGISTS. On occasion, a park will find it convenient to work with a Forest Service sociologist, usually at one of their Forest Experiment Stations, in carrying out a visitor survey. As was noted in issue paper #21 of this Memorandum Series, the Forest Service recently implemented a new visitor survey initiative using a standardized questionnaire that they call the "CUSTOMER" survey. This questionnaire is administered by F.S. personnel via face-to-face interviews, usually over a 6-10 week period. We as yet do not have any experience in working with the CUSTOMER visitor survey instrument, but Forest Service sociologists typically are qualified and capable professionals. Superintendents

located near the nine Forest Service areas where CUSTOMER is being utilized this year might wish to talk with Forest Service personnel if interested in conducting a visitor survey.

7. PUBLIC USE REPORTING SURVEYS. Working with individual parks, the Denver Statistical Office conducts some 15-20 surveys each year to gather data needed for establishing park visitation statistics. The survey consists of a standardized one-page questionnaire that is administered in a face-to-face interview by park staff on a scheduled basis over an eleven month period. The questions deal with the purpose of the park visit, visitor residence, arrival and departure times, sites visited within the park, activities engaged in, and visitor expenditures.

Concluding Remarks. The different survey techniques or options discussed above all represent what we call "site surveys", as distinguished from "general population surveys", which, for example, might be used to gather information about selected populations such as international visitors. Population surveys are conducted each year at considerable expense by major market research organizations, the US Travel Data Center, the AAA, and many others; these surveys often contain a great deal of data about outdoor recreation activities, and who participate in these activities. I periodically try to keep Superintendents apprised of such information, or at least tell you of its existence.

FINALLY, IF YOU ARE CONSIDERING CONDUCTING A VISITOR SURVEY, YOU NEED TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE SCOPE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE, THE KINDS OF QUESTIONS ASKED, THE SAMPLING PLAN, THE POPULATION SURVEYED, AND THE PERIOD OF TIME OVER WHICH THE SURVEY IS ADMINISTERED ALL CAN GREATLY INFLUENCE THE QUALITY AND THE UTILITY OF THE RESULTS. IT IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT THAT THIS BE UNDERSTOOD AT THE OUTSET. In other words, the way in which a visitor survey is designed and carried out will determine whether the findings from that survey can be inferred to larger populations or to other time periods, and whether those results are useful for broader management and planning purposes. Conversely, when the survey questionnaire is narrowly focused, or when the survey period is too short or inappropriately chosen, the results will be valid only for the precise population and conditions existing at the time of the survey. In this case the survey still might serve its designed purpose but be of quite limited utility for dealing with important planning or management issues that may emerge in the future, and such surveys also may turn out to be extremely expensive when measured against the information content provided to the park. Please keep these important factors in mind when planning a visitor survey project.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dick Sullivan". The signature is stylized with large, sweeping loops and a long, trailing underline.