

WASO SOCIAL SCIENCE PROGRAM

8/14/91 #47

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF PARKS

The emergence of the 'green tourist'

The federal role in outdoor recreation

Recreation trends and public lands tourism

Recreation vs. conservation
Judge refuses to ban snowmobiling in Voyageurs

A glimpse of the '90s

VOICES/Do you like the way the national parks are run?

Rhetoric Easier Than Action on Environment

The Changing Climate of Environmental Opinion

Crowds threaten U.S. park system

Traffic, pollution problems grow



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
P.O. BOX 37127
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20013-7127



AUG 23 1991

August 14, 1991

Memorandum

To: Park Superintendents

From: Assistant to the Director for Science and Technology

Subject: **PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE NATIONAL PARKS**

Research and Forecasts, Inc., a New York public opinion polling firm under contract to the Citibank Corporation, recently completed a nationwide survey concerning public perceptions about the national parks. A random sample of 1006 persons, 18 years or older, was interviewed via telephone over a four-day period. The response data were weighted according to age, gender, geographic region and race to ensure statistical representation for the total U. S. adult population. Statistically, the results are projected to be accurate to $\pm 3\%$.

This project was carried out in cooperation with the National Parks Foundation. The Service's direct role was twofold: First, my Office reviewed and commented on the survey questionnaire; and second, the Director participated in the June 19th press conference releasing the results of the survey.

When the NPS conducts surveys, these surveys almost always are directed exclusively to current park visitors, and they usually are carried out in response to some management problem or concern. In contrast, the Citibank survey deals with Park Service issues of broad public interest, rather than with park-specific issues. There are two aspects of the Citibank survey that make it particularly interesting. The first is that the respondents were chosen from the public at large, both visitors and non-visitors. The survey, therefore, provides insight not only about today's visitors, but also about potential future visitors. The second very important feature of the Citibank survey is that it, like our own General User Survey, provides substantive information about what the public perceives with respect to such relevant questions as: what is the proper role and mission of the parks; what should be our priorities and our responsibilities regarding education, environmental protection, resources preservation, and providing recreational opportunities; what are appropriate public, private and corporate roles in financing the national parks; to what extent should the parks be protected from external threats and outside encroachment; what are the basic reasons why people visit the national parks, and what are their expectations; what responsibilities do concessioners have in addition to providing services to visitors; should additional commercialization of the parks be permitted; within the spectrum of recreational opportunities offered by the national parks, should more emphasis be given to competitive sporting activities and games such as softball, tennis, and golf, or should emphasis be placed more on contemplative individual activities such as hiking, backpacking, and nature walks; and is overcrowding a problem today or likely in the future, and should the Service be prepared to limit attendance in order to deal with this situation.

The results of the Citibank survey have been published as a 42 page set of charts and tables. In addition, some brief descriptive materials have been issued in the form of press releases. I have summarized below the information released by Citibank. We also have received copies of the basic survey questionnaire data files and will complete more detailed analyses of them over the next few months, looking particularly for information that will help us predict future visitation trends and recreational use patterns.

CITIBANK SURVEY RESULTS

PUBLIC IMAGES OF THE NATIONAL PARKS. When asked how Americans perceived of the National Parks, 68% identified the parks with "environmental qualities" . . . e.g., wildlife, scenic beauty, lakes and rivers, etc.; and 50% identified the parks with "recreational activities" . . . e.g., camping, fun and enjoyment, picnics, etc. Surprisingly, these characterizations were roughly the same for people across the country and additionally were representative for those who had never visited a park as well as for past visitors.

USE RATES. The majority of the American public uses the National Park System: 68% of the respondents were current or past visitors and 82% plan to visit national parks in the near future. Note: This suggests that the increased visitation trends we experienced in the decades of 70's (+30%) and the 80's (+35%) can be expected to continue.

VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS. A majority of survey respondents in each demographic category had visited a national park, except for black adults; for example:

- . . males, 73%
- . . 55 or older, 72%
- . . living in the west, 86%
- . . college grads, 76%
- . . incomes greater than \$50,000, 76%
- . . white, 71%
- . . black, 42%

MOST VISITED. In the "most popular" park category, the survey results indicate that almost 48 million adult Americans (25%) have visited Yellowstone NP at least once in their lifetime, followed by Yosemite (16%) and the Grand Canyon (12%). (Comment . . . think of the opportunities this affords the NPS over a period of time to present natural resource, conservation, environmental stewardship, and educational information to a major segment of the American public.)

IDENTITY CRISIS. Some 31% of the survey respondents did not know that the White House was part of the National Park System, 19% for the Statue of Liberty, 13% for Independence Hall, and 1% for Yellowstone.

PARK RANGERS. Some 54% of the respondents reported having met a park ranger; of these persons, 35% thought that educating visitors constituted the best part of a ranger's job, managing wildlife 23%, and helping preserve the parks, 19%.

VALUES OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM. The survey respondents reported that National Parks serve multiple valuable purposes for the public . . . e.g., providing preservation benefits, 74%; conserving wildlife, 72%; preserving monuments and memorials that remind Americans of national ideals and earlier sacrifices, 61%; morale building and intellectual health, 55%; and capturing the spirit of early America, 53%.

REASONS FOR VISITING A NATIONAL PARK. Some of the most frequently cited motivating reasons for visiting a park were: to experience nature, 86%; to see someplace new, 76%; to see history, 69%; and to get away from civilization, 65%.

NPS ROLE. Public perceptions about the role of the National Park Service showed very strong emphasis and support for preservation and protection initiatives. For example: protecting America's natural beauty, 86% strongly agreed; educating the public about recycling and protecting the environment, 69%; preserving historic sites, 68%; and scientific research/ecosystem protection, 64%.

ACTIVITIES SUPPORT. Public support for individual outdoor activities such as hiking and nature walks was twice as great as was public support for group sport activities such as softball and golf.

ISSUES FACED BY THE PARK SERVICE. Preservation/conservation issues were perceived by the public to be significantly more important than were issues related to work force staffing or to services provided. . . 91% of the respondents cited preserving wildlife as a major issue, while only 57% cited providing quality facilities and services to visitors as a major issue.

COMMERCIALIZATION. The public believes that over-commercialization and overcrowding pose significant threats to the parks. An area of major concern relates to the role of concessions and concessionaires, with fears that excess development and overuse will degrade the basic environmental experiential qualities of the parks.

FEDERAL SUPPORT. The public at large, both those who have visited a national park and those who have not, support increased Federal funding and lands for the National Park System: 67% endorsed more monies for the National Parks, 4% recommended less funding; 68% endorsed more land, 3% recommended less land.

FINAL COMMENTS. While I do not want to overgeneralize the results of the Citibank survey, after reviewing the responses carefully one cannot help but sense the deep feeling of pride that the American public has for the national parks. More than this, there is a very strong recognition of the fundamental need in people's lives for the unique qualities that the parks exhibit and for the experiential opportunities that they provide. But something else also comes through with clarity, namely that the public feels that we, the National Park Service, have a singularly important leadership role to play in actively supporting preservation and conservation initiatives and in using our unique historic and natural areas to educate, to teach, to make people aware, and to challenge. The public recognizes the values of concessioner services and the need for appropriate development activities in the parks, but at the same time the public is strongly opposed to overcommercialization, and they are growing increasingly concerned about overcrowding and overuse. Environmental issues, for example, far outweigh other factors such as recreation in Americans' perceptions about the value, purpose and future of the National Park System.

Taken together, what this all says to me is the following: first, the public, both those who use the parks and those who don't, have clear priorities and perceptions about the parks; I think that those priorities and perceptions in large measure mirror our own. Secondly, the public would have us as an organization accept a broader preservation/conservation role and become more activist in some of our education and outreach activities, particularly as relates to protection of environmental values in natural areas. Third, the public is aware of many of the important issues faced by the parks . . . funding, staffing, development pressures, etc., . . . but they probably can't relate these issues to the delivery of services. And finally, the public really enjoys the national parks and benefits from their use in many diverse and important ways, and this is reflected by enormous public good will and support for the parks and for the National Park Service.

ATTACHMENTS. I have enclosed copies of charts showing some of the results from the Citibank survey. Those Superintendents who wish to review the full package of data from the Citibank study may request copies from the Public Affairs Division, Citibank N. A. 399 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10043.

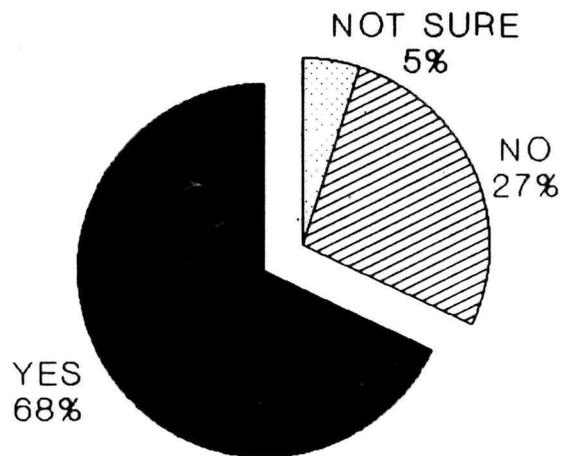


Richard H. Briceland

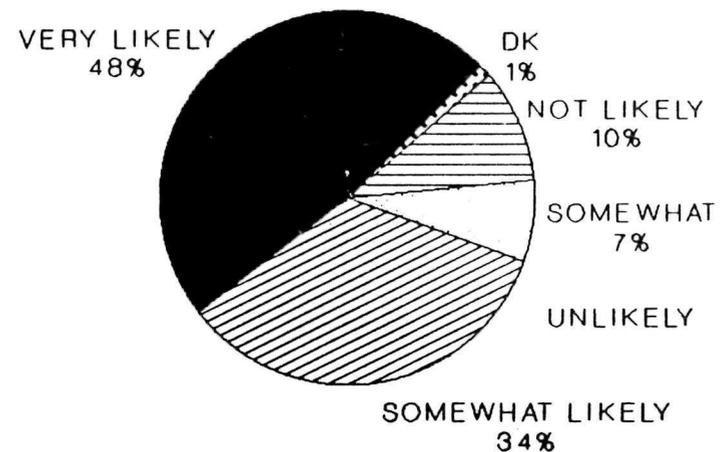
Attachments

PAST AND FUTURE VISITS TO U.S. NATIONAL PARKS

VISITED IN PAST

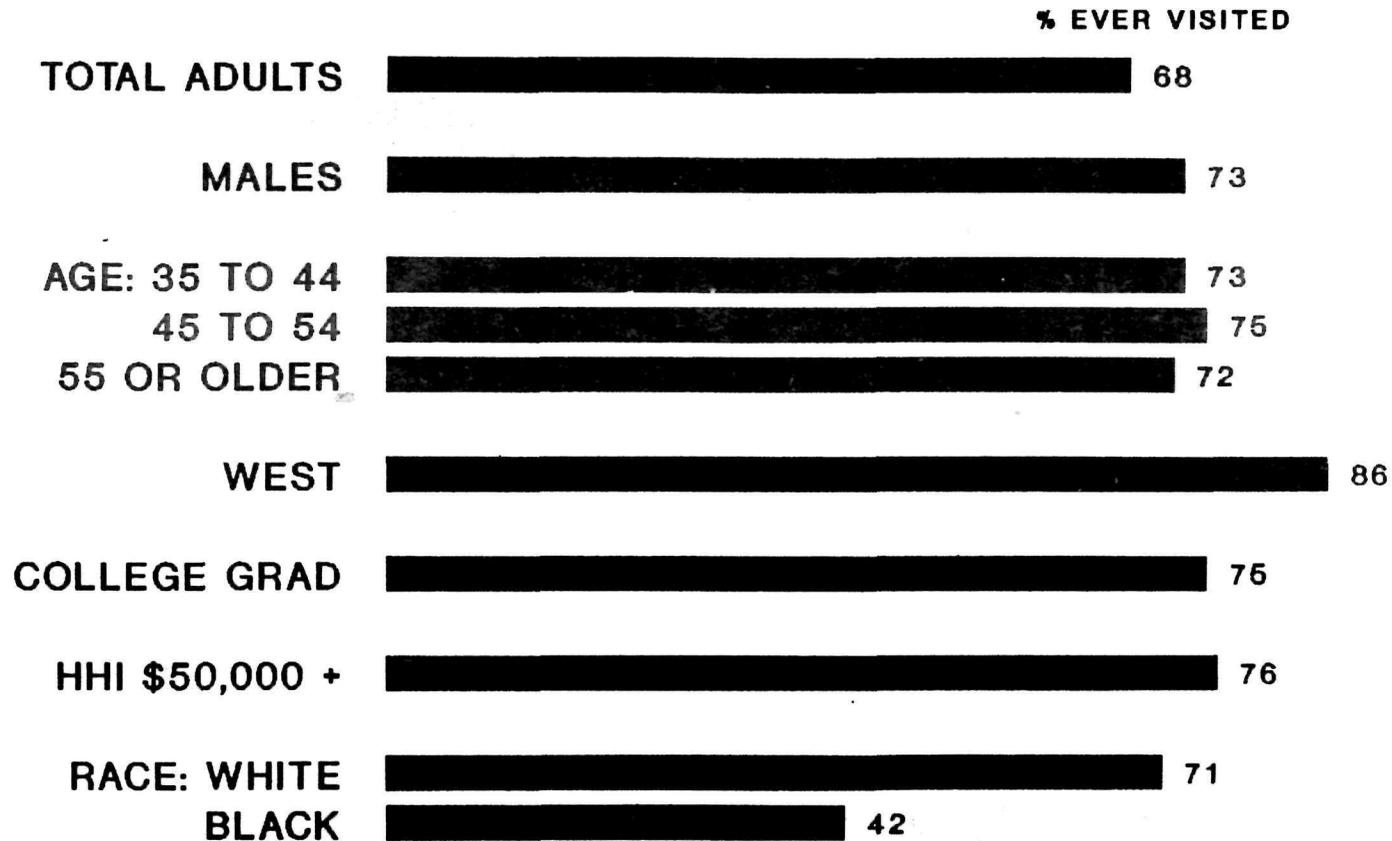


PLAN TO VISIT IN NEXT FEW YEARS

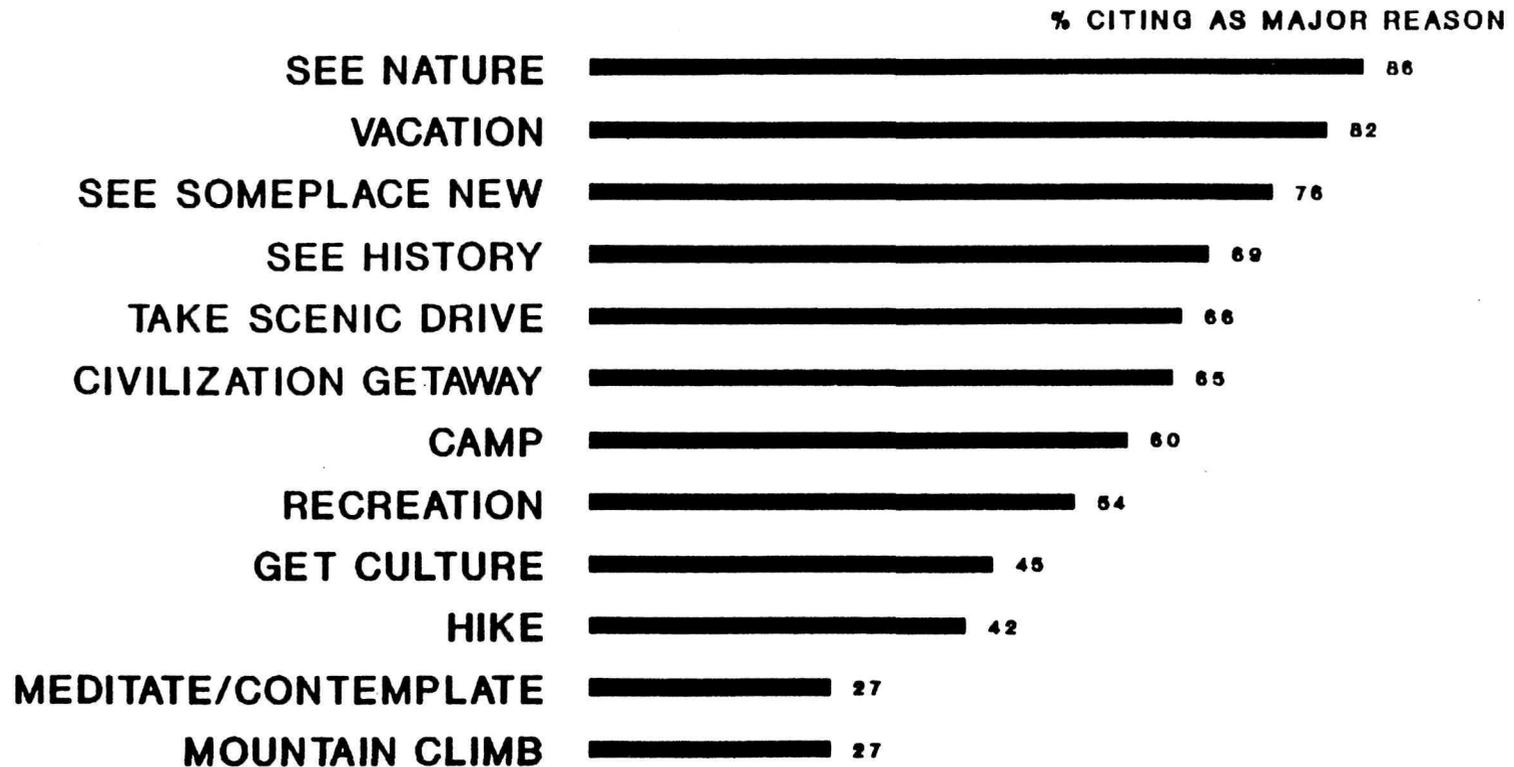


LIKELY - 82% IN TOTAL

HAVE VISITED A NATIONAL PARK

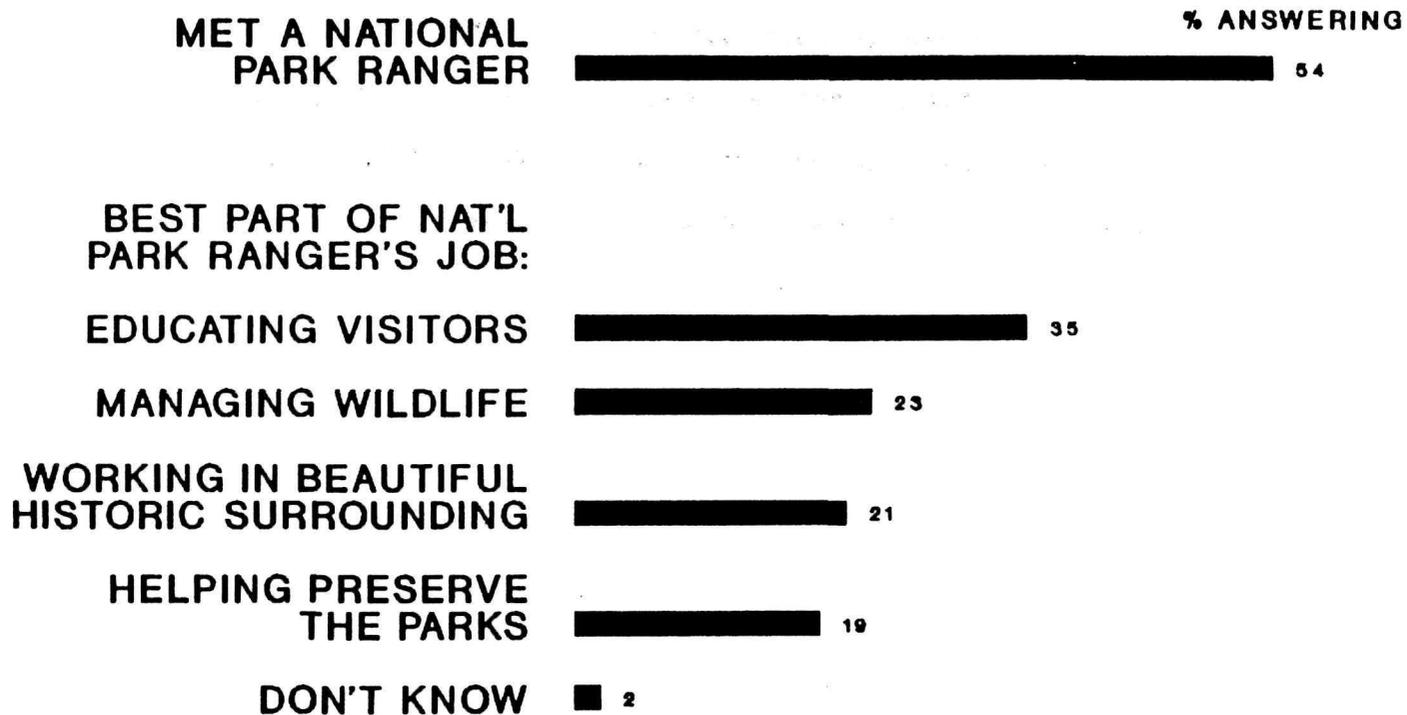


MAJOR REASONS TO VISIT A NATIONAL PARK

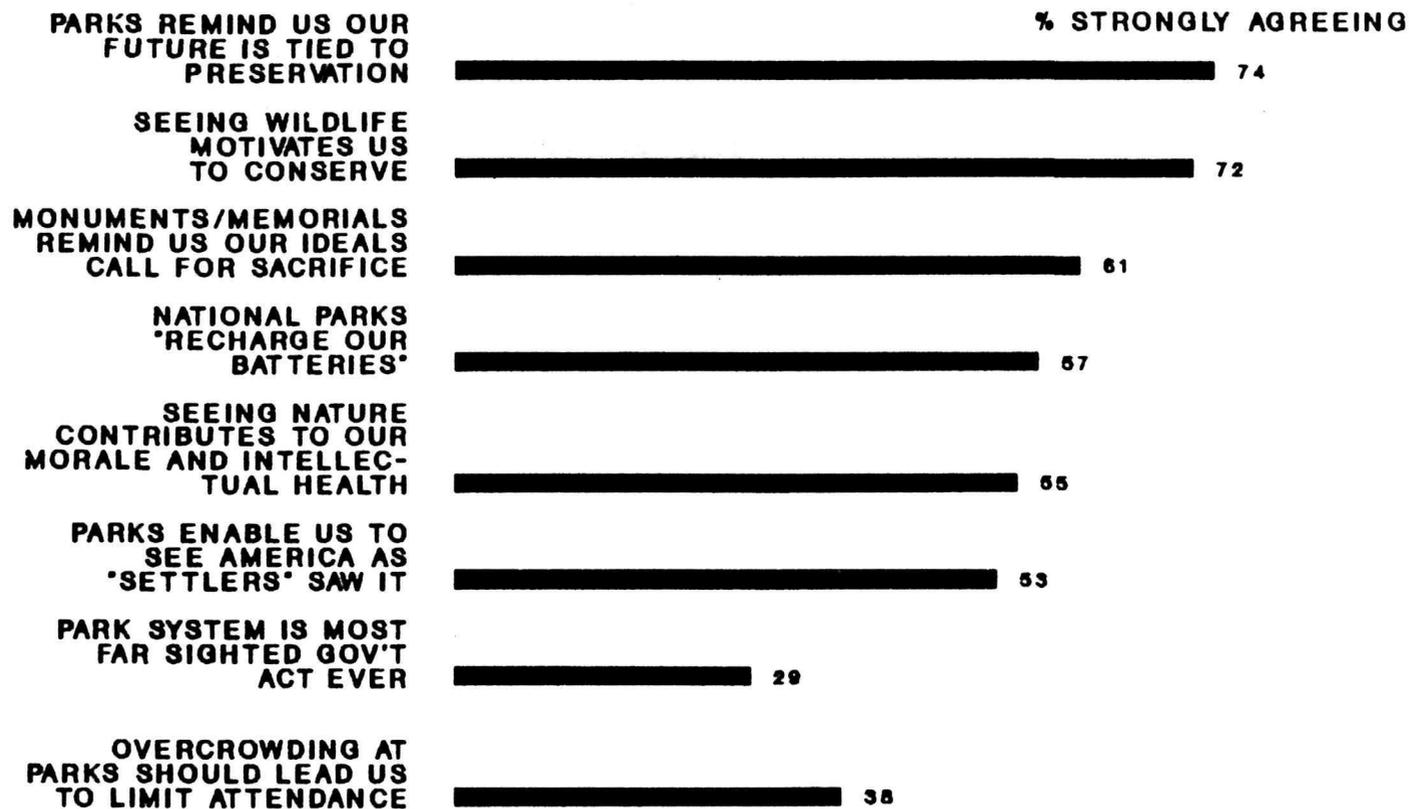


1991 CITIBANK VISA AND MASTERCARD
REPORT ON OUR NATIONAL PARKS:
PRESERVING A PRICELESS HERITAGE (Q5)

"THE NATIONAL PARK RANGER" PERSONAL PERCEPTIONS

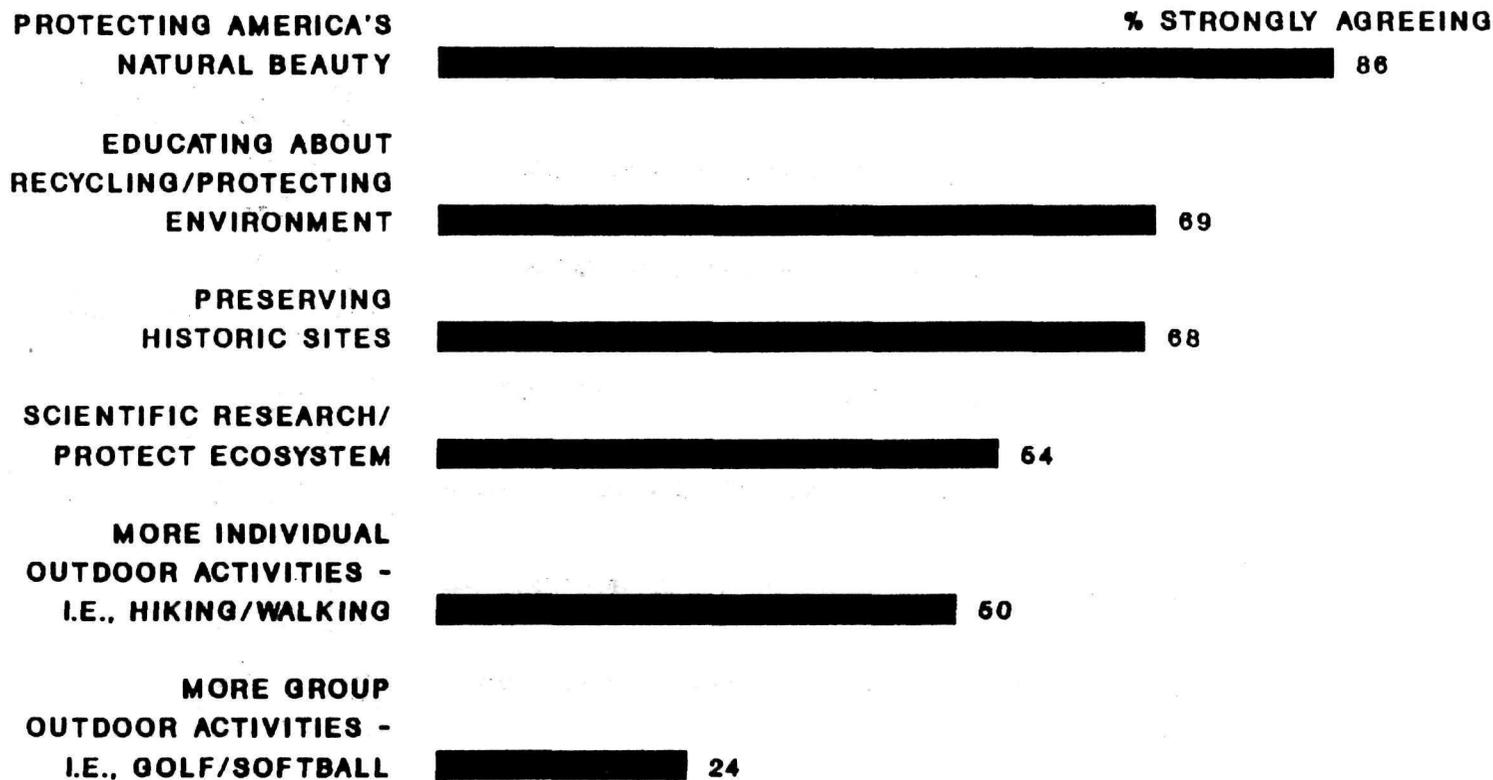


RECOGNITION OF THE VALUE OF OUR NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

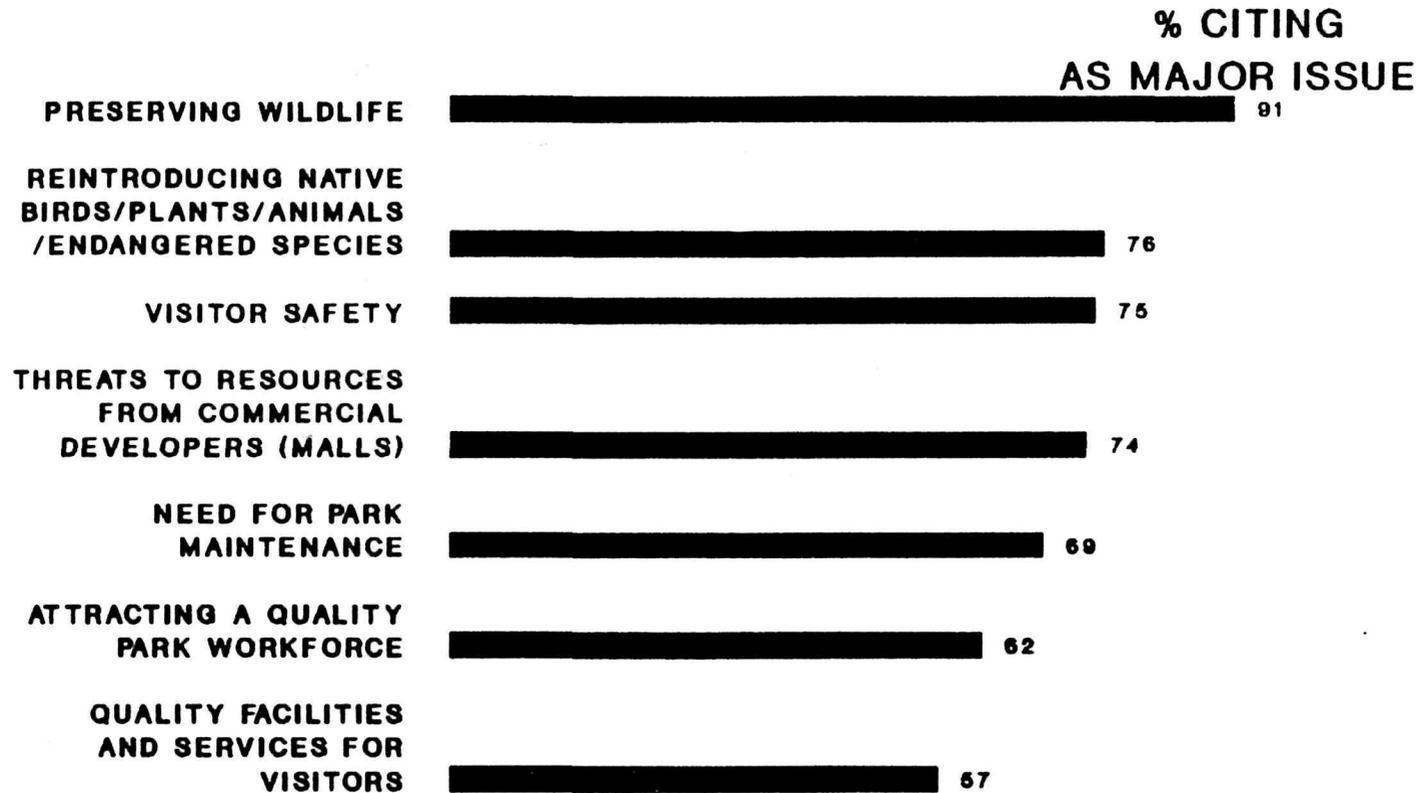


1991 CITIBANK VISA AND MASTERCARD
REPORT ON OUR NATIONAL PARKS:
PRESERVING A PRICELESS HERITAGE (Q17)

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE'S FUTURE PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES

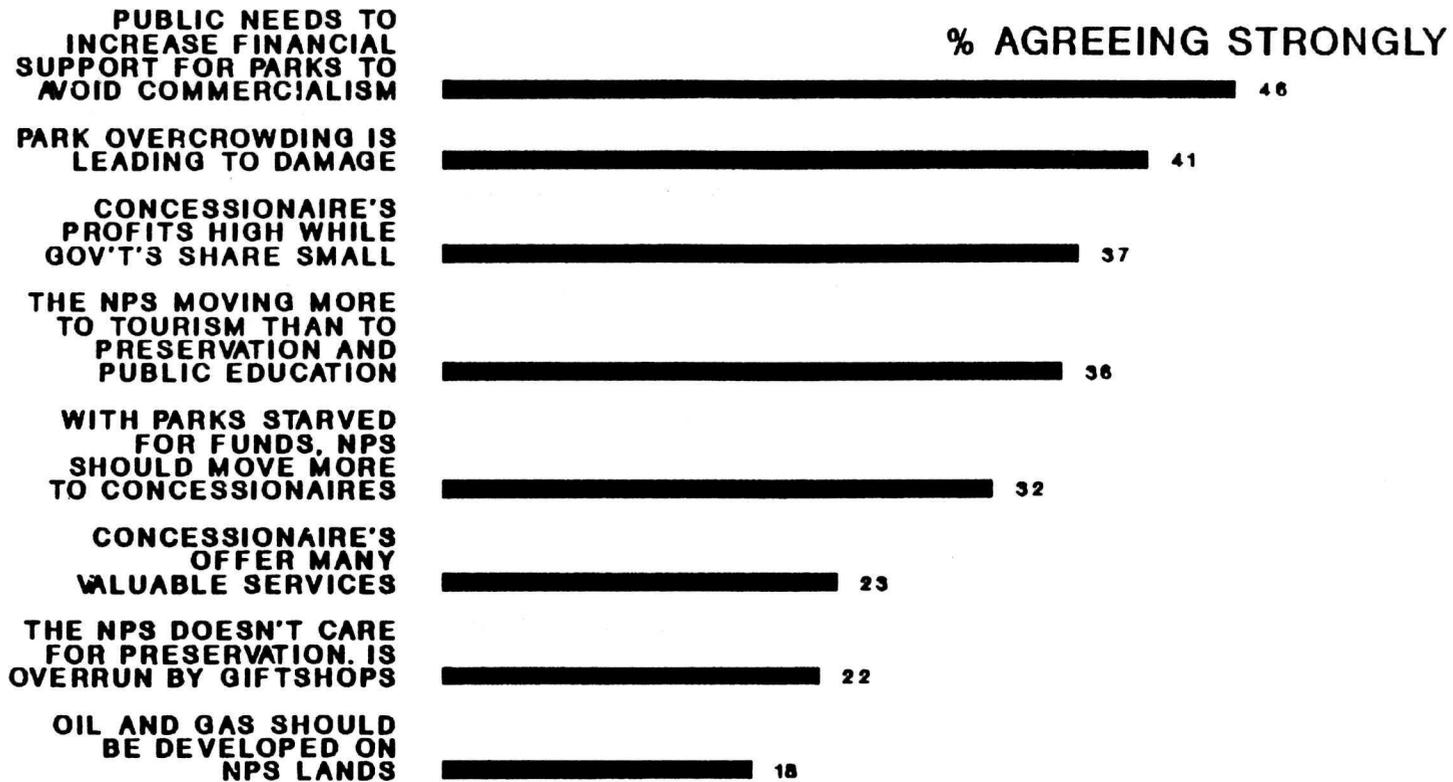


MAJOR ISSUES FACING THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



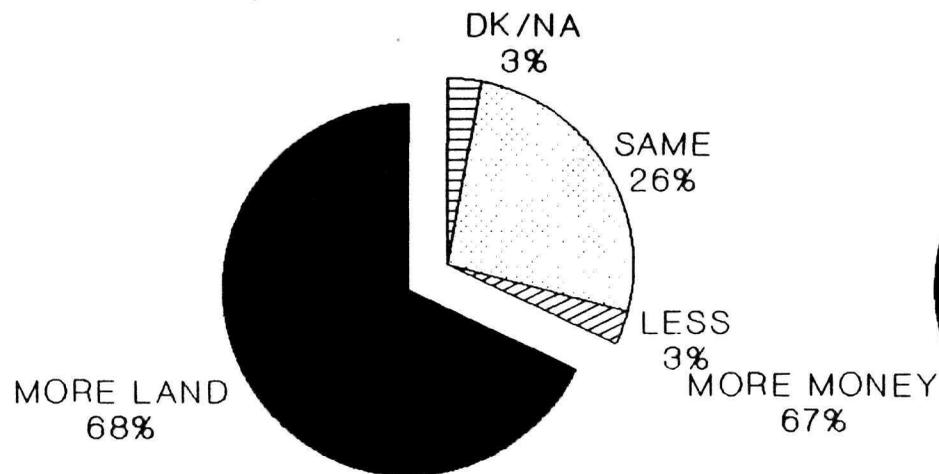
1991 CITIBANK MASTERCARD AND VISA
REPORT ON OUR NATIONAL PARKS:
PRESERVING A PRICELESS HERITAGE (Q13)

ISSUES FACING THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE WITH REGARD TO CONCESSIONAIRES



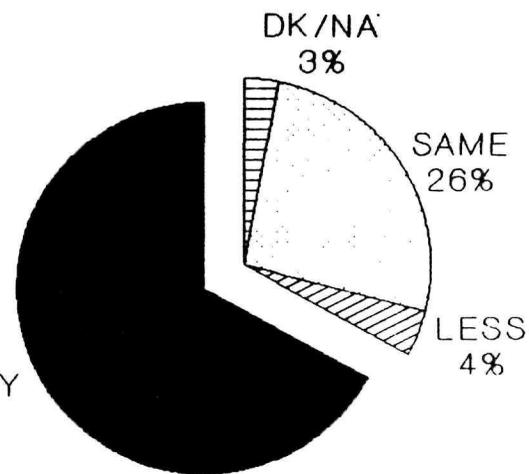
THE PUBLIC'S HOPES FOR THE NATIONAL PARKS

LAND PUT ASIDE



22 TO 1 RATIO

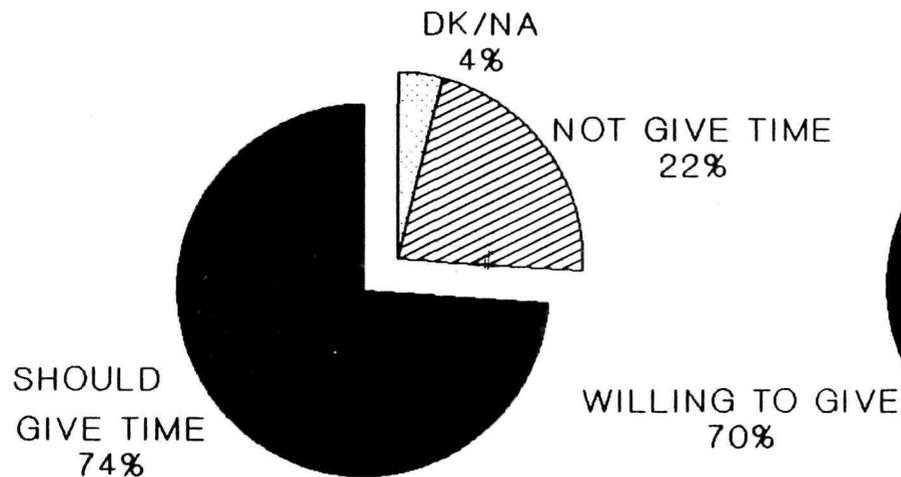
MONEY TO PRESERVE/
MAINTAIN



17 TO 1 RATIO

VOLUNTEERING TIME AND MONEY FOR THE NATIONAL PARKS

PARK USERS
GIVING TIME



DESIGNATING \$5.00 FED. TAX
PER YEAR FOR PARKS

