



Social Science Program

Background

Understanding relationships 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 scientific information to park managers and the public. This includes several major activities.

Socioeconomic Technical Support

- Offers parks and programs guidance concerning requests for technical assistance, identifying and prioritizing social science needs.
- Provides socioeconomic support on required economic analyses, visitor studies, peer review processes, and other types of discipline-specific projects.

Socioeconomic Project Management

- Acquires and implements various data collection efforts (e.g. surveys) for parks and programs to understand visitor demographics, trip characteristics, opinions about park services and facilities, etc.
- Outlines a variety of choices for customers (park and program managers) to acquire research through external subject matter experts (e.g. cooperators and contractors).

Economic Analyses

- Estimates the economic contribution of NPS visitor spending as it cycles through park-level, state, and national level economies (Visitor Spending Effects).
- Quantifies economic value received from a variety of ecosystem services managed by the NPS.
- Conducts and ensures Service-wide consistency for required economic analyses associated with regulatory rulemaking, environmental compliance, and damage assessments.

Information Collections Review

- Manages information collection process by assisting parks and programs with Paperwork Reduction Act requirements for all social science surveys and information collection requests submitted to the Office of 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.

Park Visitor Use Statistics

- Collects, analyzes, and publishes official visitation statistics for NPS.
- Hosts a dynamic website providing historic and current visitor use statistics for 378 of the 409 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 (GPRA and NPS Scorecard).



Visitors listening to the cellhouse audio tour at Alcatraz Island.

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 Development

SSP is in the process of establishing feasible approaches for implementing a socioeconomic monitoring program (SEM) to better understand in-park visitors. This effort will yield a variety of visitor-related information through understanding some of the most challenging park contexts to conduct survey research (~15 pilot parks). Additionally, two recommended approaches for bureau-wide visitor monitoring will be communicated to senior leadership for further consideration. Results of the pilot studies and monitoring approaches will be finalized in early 2017.

Centennial National Household Survey

Development of a Centennial year national household survey is currently underway for collection later in 2016. Similar to previous national household surveys, this study will collect data via phone surveys from nearly 4,000 U.S. households. Similar to previous studies of this kind, questions will be asked that seek to understand visitation to national parks and other leisure pursuits. Additional questions that explore societal relevancy of parks, youth engagement and NPS program efforts will be added to this study to more comprehensively understand public attitudes and beliefs regarding NPS opportunities and engagement.

Technical Assistance Capacity Increases

SSP has expanded efforts to provide greater technical assistance to parks and programs. This enables program staff to assist more parks and programs per year to acquire high-quality and priority information needs through socioeconomic research and analysis cooperators/contractors. SSP technical assistance includes developing social science needs assessments, cost estimating socioeconomic studies, conducting and acquiring analytic services, and peer review management of scientific products.

Social Science Subject Site

Establishing a user-friendly platform to centralize and communicate NPS social science products increases awareness of benefits this information can provide for park planners and managers. This developing subject site will allow for a seamless communication tool for study materials and results to further demonstrate how usable results can be generated and communicated. This effort seeks to assist managers through providing a consolidated body of social science knowledge and discrete study examples that can support information needs of managers across the NPS.