

Executive Summary

This visitor study report profiles a systematic random sample of Rocky Mountain National Park (NP) visitors during July 18 – July 24, 2010. A total of 1,099 questionnaires were distributed to visitor groups. Of those, 755 questionnaires were returned resulting in a 69% response rate.

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| Group type and size | Forty-one percent of visitor groups were in groups of two and 22% were in groups of five or more. The average group size was 3.6 people. Seventy-six percent of visitor groups were in family groups. |
| State or country of residence | United States visitors comprised 96% of total visitation during the survey period, with 24% from Colorado and smaller proportions from 45 other states. International visitors comprised 4% of total visitation during the survey period, with 15% from Germany, 9% from Denmark, and smaller proportions from 15 other countries. |
| Frequency of visits | Thirty-nine percent of visitors were visiting the park for the first time in their lifetime and 75% visited once in the past 12 months. |
| Age, gender, ethnicity, race, education level | Forty-four percent of visitors were ages 41-65 years, 20% were ages 15 years or younger, and 13% were ages 66 or older. Fifty-six percent of respondents were female and 44% were male. Two percent were Hispanic or Latino. Ninety-five percent of visitors were White, and 2% were Asian. Thirty-seven percent had completed a graduate degree. |
| Physical conditions | Ten percent of visitor groups had members with physical conditions. Hiking and walking were the services/activities most commonly listed as difficult to access or participate in. |
| Information sources | Most visitor groups (85%) obtained information about the park prior to their visit. Prior to this visit, visitor groups most often obtained information about the park through previous visits (57%), and most (95%) received the information they needed. To obtain information for a future visit, 74% of visitor groups would use the park website. |
| Primary reason for visiting park area | For 74% of non-resident visitor groups, the primary reason for visiting the area (within 20 miles) of Rocky Mountain NP was to visit the park. |
| Overnight stays | Sixty-four percent of visitor groups stayed overnight in the area within 20 miles of the park, of which 41% percent stayed four or more nights inside the park and 33% stayed five or more nights outside the park within 20 miles. |
| Accommodations | Of those visitor groups that stayed inside the park, 70% camped in developed campgrounds inside the park and 14% camped in a backcountry campsite. Of those visitor groups that stayed outside the park (within 20 miles), 79% stayed in a lodge, hotel, motel, rented condo/home, or bed and breakfast. |
| Length of stay | The average length of stay within 20 miles of the park was 3.6 days, and the average length of stay in the park was 1.6 days. |
| Sites visited in the park | The most commonly visited site in the park was the Trail Ridge Road (71%) followed by the Alpine Visitor Center (60%), Bear Lake (47%), and Old Fall River Road (36%). |

Executive Summary (continued)

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| Activities | The most common activity on this visit was viewing scenery (93%), followed by driving Trail Ridge Road (75%), wildlife viewing/bird watching (73%) and day hiking (57%). Viewing scenery was the most important activity for 35% of visitor groups. On a future visit, 84% of visitor groups would like to view scenery, 72% would like to day hike, and 72% would like to view wildlife/bird watch. |
| Ranger-led programs/activities | Sixty-five percent of visitor groups did not participate in a ranger-led program/activity because they did not have time. Twenty-three percent were not interested. However, 50% of visitor groups were interested in attending ranger-led programs on a future visit to the park, of which 63% preferred a program length of 1/2 - 1 hour. The most commonly preferred topic to learn about was wildlife (83%). |
| Information services and facilities | The information service/facility most commonly used by visitor groups was the park brochure/map (80%), followed by the visitor center (69%), trailhead signs (63%), and assistance from park staff (57%). |
| Visitor services and facilities | The facility most commonly used by visitor groups was the park roads (92%), followed by restrooms/toilets (86%) and parking areas (82%). |
| Protecting park attributes, resources, and experiences | The highest combined proportions of “extremely important” and “very important” ratings of protecting park attributes, resources, and experiences included native wildlife (96%), natural scenery/undeveloped vistas (95%), clean water (95%), and clean air (92%). |
| Elements affecting experience | For 46% of visitor groups, crowding detracted from their experience. Eighty-five percent of visitor groups felt fencing of fragile areas had no effect on their visit. Helicopters had no effect on their experience for 93% of visitor groups, and similarly, high elevation aircraft had no effect for 92% of visitor groups. Fifteen percent felt horse use on trails added to their experience, where 8% felt it distracted from their experience. Finally, 26% of visitor groups felt noise from vehicles/trucks/motorcycles detracted from their experience. |
| Expenditures | The average visitor group expenditure (inside and outside the park within 20 miles) was \$753. The median group expenditure (50% of groups spent more and 50% of groups spent less) was \$325, and the average total expenditure per person (per capita) was \$233. |
| Methods of learn about the park | Among those visitor groups that were interested in interpretive activities/programs on future visits (91%), the most commonly preferred methods to learn were printed materials (61%), roadside exhibits (58%), and trailside exhibits (58%). |
| Overall quality | Most visitor groups (95%) rated the overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities at Rocky Mountain NP as “very good” or “good.” Less than 1% of groups rated the overall quality as “very poor” or “poor.” |

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| For more information about the Visitor Services Project, please contact the Park Studies Unit at the University of Idaho at (208) 885-7863 or the following website http://www.psu.uidaho.edu . |
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