

Executive Summary

This visitor study report profiles a systematic random sample of Congaree National Park (NP) visitors during July 27- August 19, 2011. A total of 448 questionnaires was distributed to visitor groups. Of those, 274 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 61.2% response rate.

Group size and type	Forty-one percent of visitor groups consisted of two people. Sixty-three percent of visitor groups consisted of family groups.
State or country of residence	United States visitors were from 36 states and Washington, DC and comprised 92% of total visitation during the survey period, with 44% from South Carolina. International visitors were from 13 countries and comprised 8% of total visitation during the survey period.
Frequency of visits	Eighty-three percent of visitors visited the park once in the past 12 months and 76% were visiting the park for the first time in their lives. Eleven percent had visited 4 or more times in their lifetime.
Age, ethnicity, race, and educational level	Thirty-four percent of visitors were ages 46-65 years, 21% were 21-35 years old, 12% were ages 10 years or younger, and 4% were 71 or older. Three percent were Hispanic or Latino. Most visitors (90%) were White and 5% were Asian. Forty-two percent of respondents had completed a graduate degree and 31% had a bachelor's degree.
Physical conditions	Seven percent of visitor groups had members with physical conditions affecting their ability to access or participate in activities and services.
Awareness of park programs	Forty-seven percent of visitor groups were aware, prior to their visit, of the various programs offered at the park.
Knowledge of wilderness	Forty-eight percent of the respondents said they were aware of congressionally designated wilderness before their visit to the park. Fifty-six percent of visitor groups said they learned about wilderness while at the park.
Non-native species management	Forty-five percent of the respondents were aware of the policy regarding removal of non-native species. Most visitor groups (88%) were in support of removal of non-native plants and 75% were supportive of removal of non-native animals.
Scientific research and education in the park	Thirty-nine percent of visitor groups noticed scientists working or scientific markers or equipment being used in the park. Through programs or products, 33% of the visitors learned about the results of scientific studies conducted at the park.
Information sources	Most visitors (95%) obtained information about the park prior to their visit. Of those visitors, 53% used the park website and 23% obtained their information from friends/relatives/word of mouth.
Park as destination	Fifty-nine percent of visitor groups said the park was their primary destination and 37% said it was one of several destinations.
Primary reason for visiting the area	Twenty-five percent of visitor groups were residents of the area (within 1-hour drive of the park). The most common primary reason for visiting the park area among nonresident visitor groups was to visit the park (48%).

Executive Summary (continued)

Overnight stays	Thirty-eight percent of visitor groups stayed overnight away from home either in the park or the area. Of those visitors that stayed outside the park (within 1-hour drive), 41% stayed 1 night and 23% stayed 4 or more nights.
Accommodations	Of those visitor groups that stayed outside the park (within 1-hour drive), 72% stayed in a lodge, hotel, motel, vacation rental, or B&B.
Time spent at park and in the area	The average length of stay in the park was 6.3 hours. The average length of stay in the area was 34.6 hours, or 1.4 days.
Activities	The most common visitor activities within the park were walking/hiking (82%), visiting the visitor center (79%), birdwatching (13%).
Use of park trails	The Elevated Boardwalk Trail was used by 80% of visitor groups and the Low Boardwalk Trail was used by 58%.
Information services and facilities	The information services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were assistance from park staff (91%), park brochure/map (85%), and visitor center exhibits (79%).
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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 clean water (95%), native wildlife (91%), clean air (91%), and natural quiet/sounds of nature (89%).
Elements affecting park experience	Twenty-seven percent of visitor groups reported that encountering small numbers of visitors on trails added to their park experience. Airplane noise detracted from 9% of the visitor groups’ experiences.
Expenditures	The average visitor group expenditure (inside and outside the park within a 1-hour drive) was \$221. The median group expenditure (50% of groups spent more and 50% of groups spent less) was \$50. The average total expenditure per capita was \$98.
Future visit	Sixty-eight percent of visitor groups were interested in canoeing/kayaking on future visits and 48% were interested in owl prowls. Seventy-seven percent of visitor groups were interested in learning more about plants and animals on future visits and 64% were interested in learning more about history.
Overall quality	Most visitor groups (95%) rated the overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities at Congaree NP as “very good” or “good.” No visitor groups rated the overall quality as “very poor.”

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>.