

Executive Summary

This visitor study report profiles a systematic random sample of Congaree National Park (NP) visitors during January 27- March 7, 2012. A total of 446 questionnaires were distributed to visitor groups. Of those, 341 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 76.5% response rate.

Group size and type	Fifty-five percent of visitor groups consisted of two people. Fifty-eight percent of visitor groups consisted of family groups.
State or country of residence	United States visitors were from 34 states and comprised 98% of total visitation during the survey period, with 52% from South Carolina. International visitors were from 7 countries.
Frequency of visits	Seventy-eight percent of visitors visited the park once in the past 12 months and 63% were visiting the park for the first time in their lives. Nineteen percent had visited four or more times in their lifetime.
Age, ethnicity, race, and educational level	Forty-seven percent of visitors were ages 51-70 years, 22% were 21-40 years old, 12% were ages 15 years or younger. One percent were Hispanic or Latino. Most visitors (94%) were White, 3% were Asian and 2% were African American. Thirty-nine percent of respondents had a graduate degree and 38% had completed a bachelor's degree.
Physical conditions	Six percent of visitor groups had members with physical conditions affecting their ability to access or participate in activities and services.
Awareness of park programs	Sixty-five percent of visitor groups were aware, prior to their visit, of the various programs offered at the park.
Knowledge of wilderness	Fifty-nine percent of respondents indicated they were aware of what congressionally designated wilderness is before their visit to the park. Forty-three percent of visitor groups said they learned about wilderness while at the park.
Non-native species management	Fifty percent of respondents were aware of the policy regarding removal of non-native species. Most visitor groups (86%) were in support of removal of non-native plants and 77% were supportive of removal of non-native animals.
Scientific research and education in the park	Forty-seven percent of visitor groups noticed scientists working or scientific markers or equipment being used in the park. Through programs or products, 26% of the visitors learned about the results of scientific studies conducted at the park.
Information sources	Most visitors (94%) obtained information about the park prior to their visit. Of those visitors, 56% used the park website and 30% obtained their information from friends/relatives/word of mouth.
Park as destination	Seventy-five percent of visitor groups said the park was their primary destination and 21% said it was one of several destinations.
Primary reason for visiting the area	Twenty-eight 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 (65%).

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 a 1-hour drive), 49% stayed one night and 23% stayed two nights.
Accommodations	Of those visitor groups that stayed outside the park (within 1-hour drive), 82% stayed in a lodge, hotel, motel, cabin, rented condo/home, or B&B.
Time spent at park and in the area	The average length of stay in the park was 8.8 hours or 0.4 days. The average length of stay in the area was 31.4 hours, or 1.3 days.
Activities	The most common visitor activities within the park were walking/hiking (85%), visiting the visitor center (71%), and birdwatching (25%).
Use of park trails	The Elevated Boardwalk Trail was used by 79% of visitor groups and the Low Boardwalk Trail was used by 70%.
Information services and facilities	The information services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were park brochure/map (90%), assistance from park staff (83%), and visitor center exhibits (75%).
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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 air (94%), natural quiet/sounds of nature (94%), and clean water (93%).
Elements affecting park experience	Thirty-nine percent of visitor groups reported that encountering small numbers of visitors on the trails added to their trip experiences. Airplane noise detracted from 42% of the visitor groups’ experiences.
Expenditures	The average visitor group expenditure (inside and outside the park within a 1-hour drive) was \$153. The median group expenditure (50% of groups spent more and 50% of groups spent less) was \$55. The average total expenditure per capita was \$74.
Future visit	Sixty-eight percent of visitor groups were interested in canoeing/kayaking on future visits and 57% were interested in either owl prowls or night walk/night sky programs. Seventy-four percent of visitor groups were interested in learning more about plants and animals on future visits and 61% were interested in learning more about either champion trees or old growth floodplain forest.
Overall quality	Most visitor groups (97%) 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>.