

## Executive Summary

This visitor study report compiles the profiles of four systematic random samples of Congaree National Park (NP) visitors during May 2-15, 2011, July 27-August 19, 2011, October 27- November 27, 2011, and January 27-March 7, 2012. These studies were conducted with a systematic, random sample of visitor groups that arrived at the park visitor center. The group respondent completed a mail-back questionnaire after their visit. A total of 1796 questionnaires were distributed to visitor groups. Of those, 1257 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 69.9% response rate.

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| <b>Group size and type</b>                               | Fifty percent of visitor groups consisted of two people. Sixty-two percent of visitor groups consisted of family groups.  |
| <b>State or country of residence</b>                     | United States visitors were from 49 states and Washington, DC and comprised 95% of total visitation during the survey period, with 50% from South Carolina. International visitors were from 18 countries.  |
| <b>Frequency of visits</b>                               | Seventy-eight percent of visitors visited the park once in the past 12 months and 66% were visiting the park for the first time in their lifetime. Fourteen percent had visited five or more times in their lifetime.   |
| <b>Age, ethnicity, race, and educational level</b>       | Thirty-nine percent of visitors were ages 51-70 years, 26% were 31-50 years old, 16% were ages 15 years or younger, and 5% were 71 years or older. Two percent of visitors were Hispanic or Latino. Most visitors (93%) were White, 3% were Asian, and 3% were Black or African American. Thirty-nine percent of respondents had completed a graduate degree and 36% had a bachelor's degree. |
| <b>Physical conditions</b>                               | Seven percent of visitor groups had members with physical conditions affecting their ability to access or participate in park activities and services.  |
| <b>Awareness of park programs</b>                        | Fifty-eight percent of visitor groups were aware, prior to their visit, of the various programs offered at the park.  |
| <b>Knowledge of congressional wilderness designation</b> | Fifty-six percent of respondents indicated they were aware of what congressionally designated wilderness was before visiting the park. Forty-eight percent of visitor groups said they learned about wilderness while at the park.  |
| <b>Non-native species management</b>                     | Forty-eight percent of respondents were aware of the policy regarding removal of non-native species. Most visitor groups (87%) were in support of removal of non-native plants and 76% were supportive of removal of non-native animals.  |
| <b>Scientific research and education in the park</b>     | Forty-four percent of visitor groups noticed scientists working or scientific markers or equipment being used in the park. Through programs or products, 28% of the visitors learned about the results of scientific studies conducted at the park.   |
| <b>Information sources</b>                               | Most visitors (93%) obtained information about the park prior to their visit. Of those visitor groups, 52% used the park website and 28% obtained information from friends/relatives/word of mouth.   |
| <b>Park as destination</b>                               | Many visitor groups (71%) said the park was their primary destination and 25% said it was one of several destinations.  |

**Executive Summary** (continued)

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| <b>Primary reason for visiting the area</b>                   | Twenty-eight percent of visitor groups were residents of the area (within a 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 (61%).   |
| <b>Overnight stays</b>  | Thirty-nine 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), 48% stayed one night and 21% stayed two nights.  |
| <b>Accommodations</b>   | Of those visitor groups that stayed outside the park (within 1-hour drive of the park), 74% stayed in a lodge, hotel, motel, cabin, rented condo/home, or B&B.   |
| <b>Time spent at park and in the area</b>                     | The average length of stay in the park was 7.7 hours. The average length of stay in the area was 38.7 hours, or 1.6 days.  |
| <b>Activities</b>   | The most common visitor activities within the park were walking/hiking (83%) and visiting the visitor center (73%).  |
| <b>Use of park trails</b>                                     | The Elevated Boardwalk Trail was used by 80% of visitor groups and the Low Boardwalk Trail was used by 64%.  |
| <b>Information services and facilities</b>                    | The information services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were park brochure/map (87%), assistance from park staff (84%), and visitor center exhibits (76%).  |
| <b>Visitor services and facilities</b>                        | The visitor services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were boardwalks (89%), restrooms (88%), and parking areas (86%).  |
| <b>Protecting park attributes, resources, and experiences</b> | The highest combined proportions of “extremely important” and “very important” ratings of protecting park resources and attributes included clean water (92%), clean air (91%), and natural quiet/sounds of nature (91%).  |
| <b>Elements affecting park experience</b>                     | Eighty-six percent of visitor groups experienced small numbers of visitors on trails, and of those, 37% felt this added to their park experience. Thirty-eight percent of visitor groups experienced airplane noise, and of those, 37% felt it detracted from their park experience. |
| <b>Expenditures</b>   | The average visitor group expenditure (inside and outside the park within a 1-hour drive of the park) was \$187. The median group expenditure (50% of groups spent more and 50% of groups spent less) was \$55. The average total expenditure per capita was \$88.                   |
| <b>Future visit</b>   | Regarding future organized activities/programs of interest, visitor groups preferred canoeing/kayaking (65%) and the night walk/night sky program (53%). The most often preferred topics to learn about on a future visit were plants and animals (74%) and champion trees (60%).    |
| <b>Overall quality</b>  | Most visitor groups (96%) 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) 885-2585 or the following website <http://www.psu.uidaho.edu>.