

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.

Group size and type	Fifty percent of visitor groups consisted of two people. Sixty-two percent of visitor groups consisted of family groups.
State or country of residence	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.
Frequency of visits	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.
Age, ethnicity, race, and educational level	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.
Physical conditions	Seven percent of visitor groups had members with physical conditions affecting their ability to access or participate in park activities and services.
Awareness of park programs	Fifty-eight percent of visitor groups were aware, prior to their visit, of the various programs offered at the park.
Knowledge of congressional wilderness designation	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.
Non-native species management	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.
Scientific research and education in the park	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.
Information sources	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.
Park as destination	Many visitor groups (71%) said the park was their primary destination and 25% said it was one of several destinations.

Executive Summary (continued)

Primary reason for visiting the area	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%).
Overnight stays	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.
Accommodations	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.
Time spent at park and in the area	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.
Activities	The most common visitor activities within the park were walking/hiking (83%) and visiting the visitor center (73%).
Use of park trails	The Elevated Boardwalk Trail was used by 80% of visitor groups and the Low Boardwalk Trail was used by 64%.
Information services and facilities	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%).
Visitor services and facilities	The visitor services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were boardwalks (89%), restrooms (88%), and parking areas (86%).
Protecting park attributes, resources, and experiences	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%).
Elements affecting park experience	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.
Expenditures	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.
Future visit	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%).
Overall quality	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>.