

Executive Summary

This report describes the results of two visitor studies at Shenandoah National Park (NP) during July 22-28, 2011 and October 15-21, 2011. Surveys were conducted using a systematic, random sample of visitor groups that arrived at four park sites during the two study periods. This was a self-administered survey. During the summer survey, a total of 898 questionnaires was distributed to visitor groups. Of those, 599 questionnaires were returned resulting in a 66.7% response rate. During the fall survey a total of 1398 questionnaires was distributed to visitor groups. Of those, 913 questionnaires were returned resulting in a 65.3% response rate.

Group size and type	Forty-nine percent of summer visitor groups and 65% of fall visitor groups consisted of two people. Twenty-seven percent of summer visitor groups and 19% of fall visitor groups were in groups of three or four. Seventy-two percent of summer visitor groups and 69% of fall visitor groups were in family groups.
State or country of residence	U.S. summer visitors were from 44 states and Washington, DC, and comprised 89% of total visitation during the survey period. During the fall survey, U.S. visitors were from 46 states and Washington, DC, and comprised 96% of total visitation during the survey period. The highest proportion of visitors was from Virginia (38% summer, 42% fall). International visitors during the summer survey were from 21 countries and comprised 11% of summer visitation, with the highest proportion from Canada (23%). During the fall survey, international visitors were from 15 countries and comprised 4% of fall visitation, also with a majority from Canada (32%).
Frequency of visits (past five years and lifetime)	For 54% of summer visitors and 45% of fall visitors, this was their first visit to the park during the past five years, while 15% of summer visitors and 14% of fall visitors had visited eight or more times. For 45% of summer visitors and 34% of fall visitors, this was their first visit to the park during their lifetime, while 23% of summer visitors and 28% of fall visitors had visited eight or more times in their lifetime.
Age, ethnicity, race, and educational level	Twenty-seven percent of summer visitors and 39% of fall visitors were ages 56-70 years. Thirty-one percent of summer and 28% fall visitors were 36-55 years old. Seventeen percent of summer visitors and 7% of fall visitors were 15 years or younger. Six percent of summer visitors and 12% of fall visitors were 71 years or older. Three percent of summer visitors and 2% of fall visitors were Hispanic or Latino. In both the summer and fall surveys, 92% of visitors were White, while 5% of summer visitors and 6% of fall visitors were Asian. Thirty-four percent of summer respondents and 30% of fall respondents had completed a graduate degree. In both the summer and fall surveys 30% of respondents had completed a bachelor's degree.
Physical conditions	Ten percent of summer visitor groups and 11% of fall visitor groups had members with physical conditions affecting their ability to access or participate in park activities or services.
Information sources used prior to visit	Most visitor groups (84% summer, 81% fall) obtained information about the park prior to their visit through previous visits (48% summer, 52% fall), park website (49% summer, 46% fall), friends/relatives/word of mouth (40% summer, 41% fall), and maps/brochures (42% summer, 39% fall). Most visitor groups (94% summer, 95% fall) received the information they needed. Seventy-six percent of summer visitor groups and 69% of fall visitor groups prefer to use the park website to obtain information for a future visit.

Executive Summary (continued)

Park as destination	For 56% of summer visitor groups and 70% of fall visitor groups, the park was the primary destination, and for 38% of summer visitor groups and 26% of fall visitor groups, the park was one of several destinations.
Timing of decision to visit park	Thirty-two percent of summer visitor groups and 27% of fall visitor groups made the decision to visit the park 2-7 days before their visit. Twenty-one percent of summer visitor groups and 25% of fall visitor groups made the decision to visit the park 8-30 days before their visit.
Primary reason for visiting the area	Twenty-one percent of visitor groups in the summer and 15% of visitor groups in the fall were residents of the area (within 50 miles any entrance point of the park). The most common primary reasons for visiting the park area among non-resident visitor groups were to visit the park (63% summer, 64% fall) and travel through to other destination (18% summer, 13% fall).
Transportation and distance traveled inside the park	Eighty-nine percent of visitor groups in the summer and 92% of visitor groups in the fall used a private vehicle to travel between sites inside the park. Most visitor groups (91% summer, 92% fall) used one vehicle to arrive at the park. Thirty-five percent of summer visitor groups and 33% of fall visitor groups traveled 26-50 miles within the park, while 18% of summer visitor groups and 14% of fall visitor groups traveled 1-25 miles.
Entries, entrances, and exits	Most visitor groups (71% summer, 71% fall) entered the park one time during their visit. Thirty-eight percent of visitor groups in the summer and 39% of visitor groups in the fall first entered the park through Front Royal North Station (Route 340), while 23% of summer visitor groups and 25% of fall visitor groups used the Thornton Gap (Route 211) entrance. Thirty percent of visitor groups in the summer and 27% of visitor groups in the fall last exited the park via Thornton Gap (Route 211), while 28% of summer visitor groups and 26% of fall visitor groups used the Swift Run Gap (Route 33) exit.
Overnight stays	Sixty percent of summer visitor groups and 57% of fall visitor groups stayed overnight away from their permanent residence within 50 miles of any entrance point of the park. The most common type of lodging used by visitor groups inside the park was lodge, hotel, cabin, rented condo/home, or B&B, (48% summer, 45% fall). The most common type of lodging used by visitor groups outside the park within 50 miles of any entrance point was lodge, hotel, cabin, rented condo/home, or B&B, (80% summer, 83% fall). Seventy percent of summer visitor groups and 72% of fall visitor groups stayed 1-2 nights inside the park. Fifty-eight percent of summer visitor groups and 57% of fall visitor groups stayed 1-2 nights outside the park.
Length of stay	Of the visitor groups that spent less than 24 hours visiting the park, 35% of summer visitor groups and 34% of fall visitor groups spent 3-4 hours. Of the visitor groups that spent more than 24 hours visiting the park, 35% of summer visitor groups and 41% of fall visitor groups spent two days. The average length of stay in the park was 1 day for summer visitor groups and .8 days for fall visitor groups.
Sites visited in the park	Sixty percent of summer visitor groups and 59% of fall groups visited the Big Meadows Area, while 50% of summer visitor groups and 48% of fall visitor groups visited the Skyland Area.

Executive Summary (continued)

Activities on this visit	The most common activities in the park were viewing wildlife/plants (summer 80%, fall 74%); enjoying sounds of nature (summer 76%, fall 69%); and enjoying solitude (summer 69%, fall 67%). The activity with the highest “extremely important” rating was viewing wildlife/plants (summer 53%, fall 51%).
Electronic devices used on this and future visits	Most visitor groups (83% summer, 85% fall) brought electronic devices on this visit. The most common use of electronic devices was to communicate with friends/relatives outside the park (76% summer, 76% fall). Most visitor groups (74% summer, 75% fall) were interested in using electronic devices to obtain park information on a future visit. The most common type of park information to obtain via electronic devices was current weather conditions (75% summer, 76% fall).
Information services and facilities	The information services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were directional signs inside the park (82% summer, 80% fall); park brochure/ map (74% summer, 74% fall); and exhibit panels at overlooks (61% summer, 59% fall).
Visitor services and facilities	The most commonly used visitor services and facilities included restrooms (79% summer, 86% fall) and trails (57% summer, 46% fall).
Concession services and facilities	The most commonly used concession services and facilities included Big Meadows Lodge gift shop (35% summer, 36% fall); Skyland gift shop (29% summer, 34% fall); Big Meadows Wayside campstore/gift shop (31% summer, 33% fall); and assistance from lodging, restaurant, or retail staff (34% summer, 27% fall).
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 (96% summer, 97% fall); clean air (95% summer, 96% fall); scenic vistas and overlooks (92% summer, 95% fall); and native animals (92% summer, 94% fall).
Elements affecting park experience	Sixty-two percent of visitor groups in the summer and 78% of visitor groups in the fall indicated that other sounds added to their park experience. Twenty-five percent of visitor groups in the summer and 23% of visitor groups in the fall indicated that sounds of motorcycles detracted from their park experience.
Learning about scientific research in the park	Fifty percent of visitor groups in the summer and 42% of visitor groups in the fall would like to learn about scientific research in the park. The most common sources of information to use to learn about scientific research included the park website (69% summer, 71% fall); exhibits (55% summer, 52% fall); and brochures (49% summer, 51% fall).
Preferred length and time of ranger-led programs	On a future visit, most visitor groups (53% summer, 55% fall) were interested attending a ranger-led program with a program length of 1/2 to 1 hour. Thirty-four percent of visitor groups in the summer and 40% of visitor groups in the fall would like to attend a ranger-led program from 10 am to noon.
Overall quality	Most visitor groups (95% summer, 94% fall) rated the overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities at Shenandoah NP as “very good” or “good.” Less than one percent of summer and fall visitor groups rated the overall quality as “very poor” or “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>.