

Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a qualitative study about recreational behaviors, preferences and opinions of African Americans in the Columbia, SC area and the potential barriers to visiting Congaree National Park. Following a single case study methodological approach, the focus group method was applied as an appropriate data collection method. Ten focus groups of six to twelve participants each at five different locations in the Columbia, SC area were scheduled between November 11 and November 16, 2011. Focus group discussions were audiotaped and transcribed. Thematic coding using a grounded theory approach was applied to analyze the qualitative data. The emerging themes indicating potential barriers to park visitation included lack of information, concerns for safety, detachment from nature, and perceived discrimination. The recreational behaviors, interests and preferences discussed by focus group participants can serve as opportunities to help guide park managers as they seek to increase the number of African American visitors to Congaree National Park. Facilities such as group picnic areas, structures for special events (such as meetings, weddings, and reunions), and outdoor play and sports facilities may help enhance the visitor experience. Focus group participants suggested that more community outreach, education, and marketing could help the park make meaningful connections with its local communities.

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>.