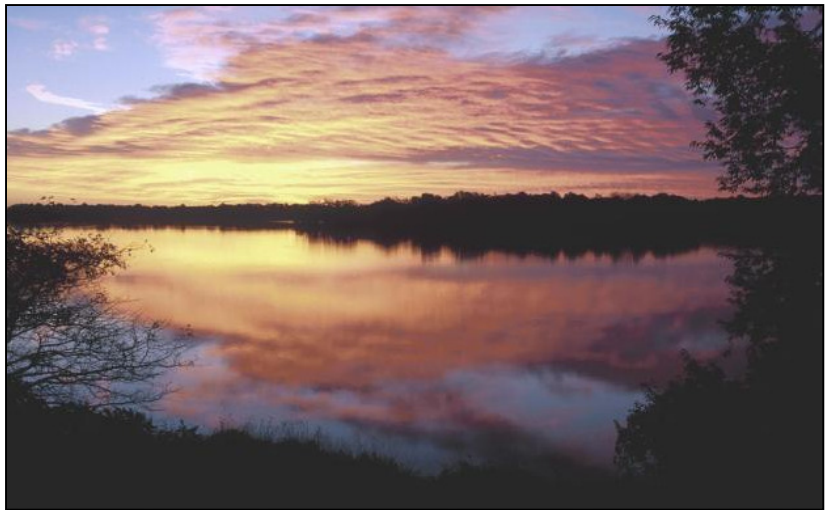
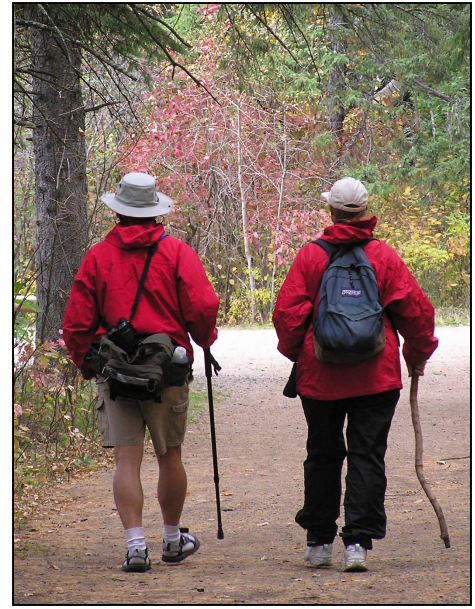


2007 Minnesota State Parks Research Report

Focus Group Study, Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey, and Household Survey of Minnesota Nature-based and State Park Recreation



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Recreation
Office of Management and Budget Services

University of Minnesota – Twin Cities
Department of Forest Resources

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Executive Summary

Objective

The main objective of this report is to gain a better understanding of the factors that underlie declining involvement in nature-based recreation by Minnesota residents, particularly those under the age of 45. Made up of young families with children, members of Generation X and Y, and Millennials, this group has been termed the “Next Generation” of park visitors by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Outcomes

The findings from this report will be used to:

- Plan for the Next Generation of park visitors.
- Inform DNR management and development decisions.
- Develop a marketing plan that includes recruitment and retention strategies of park visitors.
- Outline future research conducted by the DNR.

2007 Research Efforts

This report details the findings of three research efforts:

1. Focus Group Study
2. Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey
3. Household Survey of Minnesota Nature-based and State Park Recreation

Focus Group Study

The DNR identified three target markets to be included in the focus group study. These target markets formed the basis for five groups that were analyzed for their interests in the outdoors. Each group focused on the Next Generation of park visitors who live in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The groups provided consumer insights that inform the DNR of the reasons why and how Minnesota residents use or do not use nature-based parks, specifically the Minnesota State Park system. These insights will be used to further investigate the motivations and barriers of Minnesota residents to nature-based park visits, as well as possible changes for Minnesota State Parks.

Minnesota State Park Visitor Survey

The goal of the visitor survey was to gain a current understanding of the characteristics of state park visitors in particular, what this group desires within state parks, and how well they believe Minnesota State Parks are meeting their needs. Motivations for a visit and possible in-park changes were also examined. The 2007 survey is the most recent in a series of efforts dating back to 1987. The survey was a cooperative project between the DNR and the University of Minnesota.

Household Survey of Minnesota Nature-based and State Park Recreation

The household study was conducted to gain a better understanding of the recreational preferences of the Minnesota population, including those who are visitors and non-visitors of state parks. Like the other surveys, the Household Survey looked at motivations and barriers to outdoor recreation, and gauged interest in possible changes at state parks. Due to the list bias going into the study – the sample was drawn from the White Pages where only 62% of Minnesota households appear – responses can only be compared between groups. Therefore, projections for the entire Minnesota population cannot be made. As with the Visitor Survey, the Household Survey was a cooperative effort between the DNR and the University of Minnesota.








Age Class Groupings: The Visitor and Household Surveys

Like the Focus Group Study, the Visitor and Household Surveys separated respondents into different groups for analytical purposes. While the Focus Group Study split out groups primarily by when or if they had visited a Minnesota State Park within the past two years (e.g., visitors vs. non-visitors), the Visitor and Household Surveys generally separated groups by age. Those groups included the Next Generation (Gen X & Y¹ group), Baby Boomers², and Pre-Boomers³.

Summary of Key Findings

This report outlines the key findings of three research efforts undertaken by the DNR in 2007. These efforts focused primarily on gaining a better understanding of the factors that underlie declining involvement in nature-based recreation by Minnesota residents. The DNR also sought to learn more about visitors and non-visitors of Minnesota State Parks in general. The motivations and barriers of a state park visit, and possible in-park changes were important aspects of the research. Particular attention was paid to the Next Generation of park visitors, a group who is somewhat less satisfied with Minnesota State Parks. In general, there was a great deal of agreement among the three parts of the 2007 Minnesota State Parks research findings. These efforts will be outlined in more detail below and in the body of this report.

The key findings of the three research efforts in 2007 are:

-  Satisfaction ratings of Minnesota State Parks visitor experiences are at an all-time high (p. 8).
-  Young adults and families with children have become a smaller portion of park visitation, while people from older generations have become a larger portion. These age-based visitation trends are steeper than their respective trends in the Minnesota population. (p. 9).
-  When planning a visit, Minnesota State Parks visitors are shifting strongly from hard-copy publications to the DNR website (p. 11).
-  The primary motivations and barriers to visiting Minnesota State Parks were similar for frequent and infrequent visitors of the state park system (p.15).
-  Childhood nature-based activities are strongly associated with nature-based activities as an adult (p.17).
-  Minnesota State Park visitors successfully use negotiation strategies to overcome barriers like lack of time, crowding in the parks, and lack of money. An example of a successful negotiation strategy for overcoming the lack of time barrier is trip planning (p.19).
-  “High service” items like park programs that cater to children, and the opportunity to rent equipment and attend special events are the items of greatest interest to respondents of the Household Survey. The opportunity to take virtual tours of the park and attend programs to develop outdoor skills are also of great interest. (p. 23).

¹ Gen X & Y comprise a group that is between 19-42 years old; this group is equivalent to the Next Generation.

² The Baby Boomers comprise a group that is between 43-62 years old.

³ The Pre-boomers make up a group that is over 63 years old.

Focus Group Study

The DNR was interested in collecting qualitative data about how and why Minnesota residents do or do not use nature-based parks. The Department identified three target markets to be included in the study. These target markets formed the basis for the five groups that were included in the study. Each group consisted of adults from 20- to 40-years old – the Next Generation – who live in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Further definitions of the groups are:

- Group 1: Males/females who have low to moderate involvement in outdoor recreation and have not visited a nature-based park in the last two years.
- Group 2: Males/females who have moderate to high involvement in outdoor recreation and have not visited a nature-based park in the last two years.
- Group 3: Females with children in the household who have moderate to high involvement in outdoor recreation, and have not visited a nature-based park in the last two years.
- Group 4: Males/females who are moderate to high users of Minnesota state parks.
- Group 5: Males/females who are moderate to high users of Minnesota state parks.

Motivations

The question, “What motivates (or causes) you to participate in outdoor activities?” was asked of each group aside from some subtle differences in response, most groups answered with a similar array of motivations.

Enjoying and connecting with nature, feeling a sense of freedom and/or peace, and getting away from life’s usual demands were the motivations mentioned most often by all groups.

An individual from Group 3 mentioned how children can be a motivating force to get parents outside. Other motivations mentioned included having fun, taking advantage of nice weather, and feeling refreshed or energized.

Barriers

During focus group discussions, participants were encouraged to talk about their personal or perceived barriers to participating in outdoor activities. Specifically, facilitators said, “ Let’s talk about some of the things that make you participate less than you would like to.”

A lack of information about the parks was a barrier for all groups. Some respondents were unclear about which parks were Minnesota State Parks, where the parks are located, and what opportunities are available there. Other barriers that were consistently mentioned were time, planning, and money.

Groups 1 and 2 both mentioned inclement weather as a barrier, as well as the perception that there is little to do or there would not be activities that were age-appropriate for all members of the family. A lack of skills and having access to the appropriate equipment were also regularly mentioned as barriers.

Two of the primary concerns of Group 3 were safety and the availability and cleanliness of facilities like restrooms. Other barriers that this group mentioned were feeling overwhelmed by planning a park visit for their family, a lack of knowledge about what to bring, and a lack of playground facilities.

Other barriers mentioned included work, travel distance, fees, not having anyone to do things with, and the age of children.

Possible Changes

Given a rating sheet, focus group participants were asked to rate, “How likely (they) would be to visit (a nature-based park) based upon each of the things listed, using the scale of 1-5”, with 1 = not likely and 5 = very likely.

The items listed on the rating sheet included: more information about the parks, Internet access at the park, self-guided audio tours about the park, virtual tours of the park on the Web, option to rent camping equipment, option to attend outdoor skills courses at the park, geocaching offered at the park, community gathering spots (e.g., providing coffee shops), or opportunity to attend special events.

More information about Minnesota State Parks, virtual tours of individual parks on the Web, options to rent camping equipment, and opportunities to attend special events were the items that were mentioned most often by all groups.

Group 1 in particular mentioned an interest in the opportunity to attend outdoor skills courses.



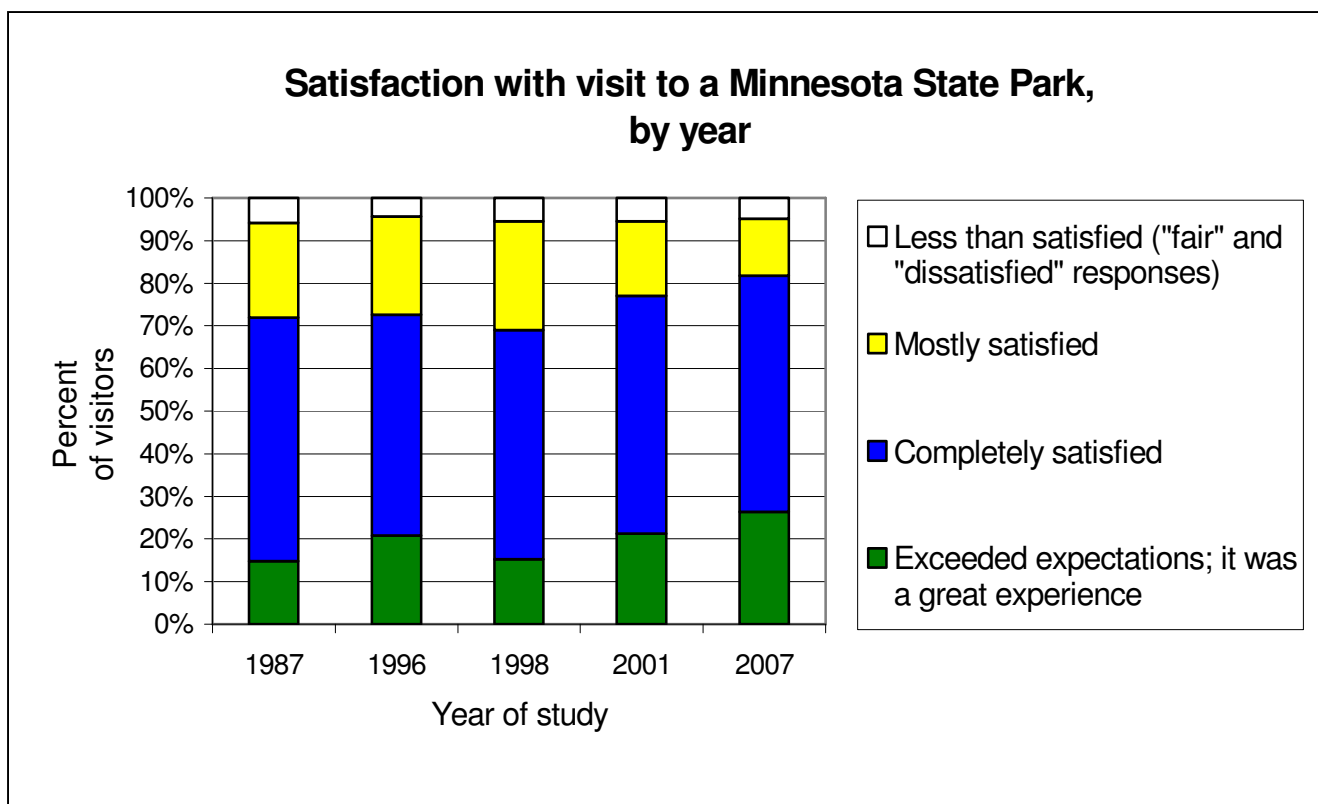
Overall Satisfaction

Visitor Survey



Satisfaction ratings of Minnesota State Parks visitor experiences are at an all-time high.

- The proportion of all visitors who thought their expectations were exceeded is the highest in the records – since 1987 – and exceeds the ten year average by 6%.



- The longer a visitor has been going to Minnesota State Parks, the better they feel about them. 65% of visitors who have been traveling to state parks for more than 11 years said their experience was either “greatly improved” or “improved.”
 - Such satisfaction levels are uncommon. A recent Minnesota fisheries survey showed 42% on the “decline” side and 10% on the “improve” side. In addition, a recent Minnesota forest recreation survey showed 37% on the “decline” side and 19% on the “improve” side.

The Next Generation is generally less than satisfied. When asked, “Which statement closely reflects your feeling about this visit,” the Next Generation selected, “OK – could have done better” more often than the average of all visitors.

- The Next Generation placed greater importance on self-service items like self-registration and gathering their own information, and water-recreation opportunities. Pre-Boomers placed greater importance on staff-provided items like structured programs, someone to greet them when they arrive, and learning and informational items.

Please see pg. 1 of the Appendix for more information on Overall Satisfaction and Trend of Experience.

Visitor Demographics

Visitor Survey


Overall, compared with the population of the state, Minnesota State Park visitors are:

- More educated
- Older
- Less racially and ethnically diverse
- Have a slightly higher income

Education

- 99% of Minnesota State Parks visitors are high school graduates or higher, and 59% of Minnesota State Parks visitors have a Bachelor’s degree or higher. This compares to the state’s population where 93% are high school graduates or higher, and 34% has a Bachelor’s degree or higher.

Age



Young adults and families with children have become a smaller portion of park visitation since 2001, while people from older generations have become a larger portion. These age-based visitation trends are steeper than their respective trends in the Minnesota population.

- Between 2001 and 2007, the median age of all Minnesota State Parks visitors increased from 36.7 to 41.3 (+4.6 yrs), while the overall Minnesota population only increased from 35.7 to 37.1 (+1.4 yrs).
- The proportion of people making up the over 45 group increased by 3% and their Minnesota State Park visitation has increased by 10%.
- Between 2001 and 2007, the proportion of people making up the Next Generation (under 45) in Minnesota decreased by 3%, but visitation to Minnesota State Parks by the Next Generation decreased by 10%. In particular, young families with children are visiting less often.
- Since the Next Generation makes up 58% of state park visitors, their decline in visitation is a concern that needs to be addressed. This is important for both the future of Minnesota State Parks, and the conservation and preservation of natural and cultural resources more broadly.

Age Class Groupings	Visitation		Change: 2007-01
	2001	2007	
Under 45	68%	58%	-10%
45 and older	32%	42%	10%
MN Population			
	Population		
Under 45	65%	62%	-3%
45 and older	35%	38%	3%

Diversity

- Minnesota State Parks visitors are overwhelmingly white and non-Hispanic/Latino; 97% of survey respondents classified themselves in this way. The Minnesota population, on the other hand, is 86% white and non-Hispanic/Latino. That is, the Hispanic and/or non-white population is not being proportionally represented in Minnesota State Park visitation.

	Park Visitors 2007	MN Population 2006
Race		
African American/black alone	0.8%	4.4%
American Indian or Alaska native alone	0.8%	1.2%
Asian alone	0.5%	3.4%
Caucasian/white alone	97.7%	89.5%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone	0.2%	0.1%
Two or more races	0.0%	1.5%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	0.5%	3.8%
Non-Hispanic/Latino	99.5%	96.2%
Race & Ethnicity		
White, Non-Hispanic/Latino	97.2%	85.9%
Non-white and/or Hispanic/Latino	2.8%	14.1%

According to Wilkinson (1993), race is “a category of persons who are related by a common heredity or ancestry and who are perceived and responded to in terms of external features or traits,” whereas ethnicity often refers to “a shared culture and lifestyle.”⁴ So, an individual may belong to a particular race without sharing ethnic identity with others of that race. For example, two Hispanic individuals may share a common heredity or ancestry but that does not necessarily mean that they also share the same ethnic identity. That is, their cultures, values, lifestyles, beliefs, and norms may be very different.

Economic Status

- The proportion of visitors with income less than \$40,000 was about 17% in 2007 as compared to 27% in 2001. The proportion of visitors with income >\$100,000 increased by 9% from 2001.



⁴ From Assessing and Treating Culturally Diverse Clients: Race Versus Ethnicity. http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/4966_Paniagua_I_Proof_Chapter_1.pdf

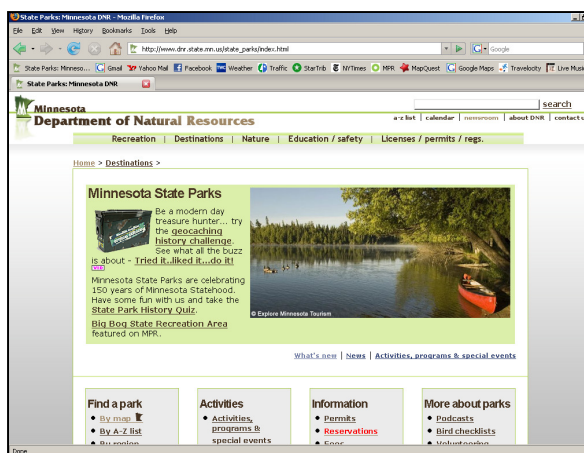
Trip Planning

Visitor Survey



When planning a visit, Minnesota State Parks visitors are shifting strongly from hard-copy publications to the DNR website.

- For the first time in Minnesota State Parks Visitor Survey history, a greater number of Next Generation visitors and Campers use the Minnesota DNR website to gather information and plan trips to state parks than any other method.
- **All Visitors** get their information most often from:
 1. Family and friends (56.3%)
 2. Minnesota DNR website (54.0%)
 3. Minnesota State Parks guide (46.6%)
 4. Minnesota state highway map (40.0%)
- The **Next Generation** of visitors get their information most often from:
 1. Minnesota DNR website (66.2%)
 2. Family and friends (66.1%)
 3. Minnesota State Parks guide (40.7%)
- **Campers** get their information most often from:
 1. Minnesota DNR website (68.0%)
 2. Family and friends (54.3%)
 3. Minnesota State Parks guide (51.9%)



- Relative to 2001, the proportion of All Visitors indicating the following as one of their most important source of information increased by the percentage points in parentheses:

1. Minnesota DNR website (+20.0%)
2. Explore Minnesota tourism website (+12.5%)
3. Other websites (+9.2%)

2001	2007
34%	54%
11%	23.5%
21%	30.2%

- Relative to 2001, the proportion of visitors indicating the following as one of their most important source of information decreased by the percentages in parentheses:

1. Travel guides/agents (-13.6%)
2. Minnesota State Parks guide (-8.4%)
3. Minnesota Explorer newspaper (-5.6%)
4. Information at one or more state parks (-4.7%)

2001	2007
20%	6.4%
55%	46.6%
32%	26.4%
41%	36.3%

Please see pgs. 2-3 in the Appendix for more information on Trip Planning.

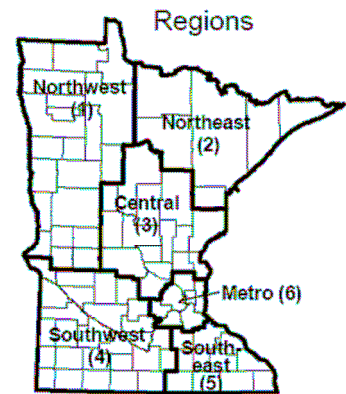
Trip Characteristics

Visitor Survey

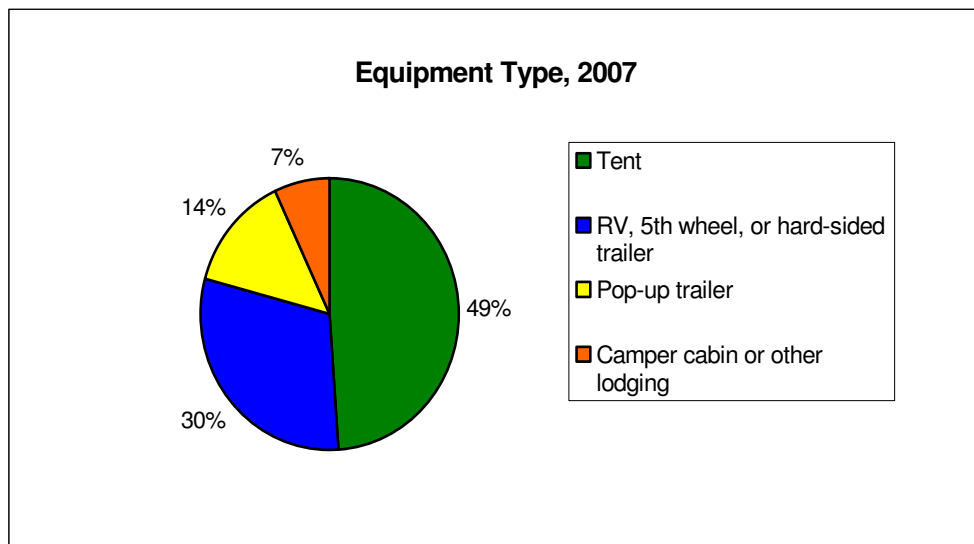
Almost 50% of Minnesota State Parks visitors are on an overnight trip away from home. Of those on an overnight trip away from home, 47% stayed at a private resort/hotel or inn, 31% stayed in a Minnesota State Park at least one night, and 20% stayed in a campground outside of the park.

- The greatest percentage of park users comes from the Twin Cities metro area (45%), southwest Minnesota (16%), southeast Minnesota (12%), and northwest Minnesota (12%). Over 16% of visitors came from out of state.
- As a proportion of the state’s population, the Metro region is the most under-represented (9%).

Region of origin	2007 Park Visitors	2006 MN Population
Northwest	12%	7%
Northeast	5%	6%
Central	11%	14%
Southwest	16%	10%
Southeast	12%	9%
Metro	45%	54%



- The most popular equipment for campers was tents (49%), followed by recreational vehicles, 5th wheel or hard-sided trailers (30%). The proportion of those who stayed in camper cabins or other types of lodging increased when compared with 2001 survey results.⁵



⁵ There were 28 camper cabins in the Minnesota State Parks system in 2001 and 36 in 2007.

- As age increases, tent use decreases and the use of hard-sided equipment increases. Since the Baby Boomers are aging and more likely to be in a hard-sided equipment – like the Pre-boomers - it becomes important to service their needs while keeping them spatially separate from the “tenters”. (See *Reaction to Possible Changes: In-park Items, Camping Only* on pgs. 21-22).

Age Group	Gear Type			
	Tent	Pop-up	RV, 5th-wheel, etc.	Cabin & Other
Next Generation	63.3%	13.9%	15.2%	7.6%
Baby Boomers	39.6%	11.3%	29.2%	19.8%
Pre-boomers	9.5%	9.5%	47.6%	33.3%

- People are traveling roughly the same distance to Minnesota State Parks in 2007 as they did in 2001.
- In 2007, Minnesota State Park visitors displayed the following trip characteristics:
 - Approximately 78% of campers traveled more than 50 miles to a park.
 - Approximately 55% traveled more than 100 miles.
 - The greatest proportion of day users comes from 25 miles or less from the park; the same is true for all visitors.
- The 2007 Minnesota State Parks Visitor Survey does not account for the relatively recent increase in gasoline prices⁶.

Miles from Home	2007		
	Camper	Day user	All visitors
25 or less	10.9%	29.9%	27.3%
26-50	10.9%	11.9%	11.8%
51-100	22.6%	14.0%	15.2%
101-200	30.7%	19.3%	20.9%
over 200	24.8%	24.9%	24.8%
Mean miles	187.6	200.6	196.9
Median miles	124.9	85.0	96.5

- A greater percentage of Minnesota State Parks visitor households have fishing and hunting licenses, and registered watercraft than Minnesota households in general.

Type of license or registration	Percent of households have the license or registration:		Percent park visitor households over general
	Minnesota state-park visitor households	Minnesota house-holds in general	
Current Minnesota fishing license	57%	47%	21%
Current Minnesota hunting license	30%	24%	22%
Boat currently registered in Minnesota	46%	26%	77%
Snowmobile currently registered in Minnesota	14%	9%	58%
ATV currently registered in Minnesota	17%	10%	59%

⁶ Gasoline prices averaged \$2.94 per gallon in 6/2007. The cost of gasoline averaged almost a dollar more per gallon one year later (\$3.93 per gallon, 6/2008). http://www.eia.doe.gov/oil_gas/petroleum/data_publications/wrgp/mogas_home_page.html

Activity Participation

Visitor Survey

The top five activities for **All Visitors** are:

1. Hiking/walking (69.9%)
2. Observing/photographing nature (36.4%)
3. Sightseeing (35.4%)
4. Picnicking (28.4%)
5. Shopping in the parks' nature store (25%)

The top five activities for the **Next Generation** are:

1. Hiking/walking (69.9%)
2. Observing/photographing nature (37%)
3. Sightseeing (32.5%)
4. Picnicking (32%)
5. Taking a self-guided nature walk (26.8%)

The activities that the Next Generation participated in most often mirrored that of All Visitors with a few notable exceptions:

- They shop in the parks' nature store less often
- They look at kiosks or visitor center exhibits less often
- They visit historic sites less often
- They bird watch less often

On the other hand, the Next Generation participates in the following activities more often than the other groups:

- Picnicking
- Taking a self-guided nature walk
- Swimming
- Canoeing/kayaking
- Fishing

It is not known, however, if these differences are due to the Next Generation being unique as a group, or if they are at an age where they simply do not participate in the same activities that the older generations do. Additional research on how the Next Generation is unique as a group is needed.

Please see pgs. 4-7 of the Appendix for more information on Activity Participation.

Value for Fees

Visitor Survey

Relative to 2001, the percentage of Minnesota State Park visitors who think that the annual vehicle permit is a good value remains high (just under 80%). Almost 74% of respondents think that the daily vehicle permit is a good value while over 65% think that the camping fees that they pay are a good value.

- The proportion of visitors with daily vehicle permits who reported having good value for their money increased by 2%, while visitors with annual vehicle permits who report having a good value for their money decreased by 2%.⁷
- Relative to 2001, the proportion of campers who report having good value for their camping fees decreased by >8% points.

⁷ In 2001, an annual permit was \$20 and a daily permit was \$4. In 2007, an annual permit was \$25 and a daily permit was \$5.

The DNR further examined the relationship between the perceived value for camping fees and satisfaction with the campground, and found that there is a strong relationship between the two. That is, nearly 80% of campers that said they were "very satisfied" with the quality of the campground said the camping fees were a "good" value. As satisfaction with the campground diminished, so did the perceived value of the fees.

The same pattern holds true for the annual vehicle permit. Over 90% of annual permit holders that said their park visit “exceeded expectations” said the camping fees were a “good value.” Again, as overall satisfaction with the park visit diminished, so did the perceived value of the annual vehicle permit.

Please see pgs. 8-9 of the Appendix for more information on the Value for Fees.

Motivations



The primary motivations and barriers to visiting Minnesota State Parks were similar for frequent and infrequent visitors of the state park system.

Visitor Survey

In an attempt to better understand the motivations or types of experiences that Minnesota State Parks visitors are seeking, the Visitor Survey asked the following question: “ Below is a list of experiences you might have during your visit to this state park. For each experience, please tell us two things: (1) the importance of the experience to you on your visit; and (2) the extent to which you were able to attain the experience on your visit.”

Examining the responses to the first question above – the importance of the experience to the visitor – the five most important experiences or motivations for the group in **bold** (followed by the percentage of visitors who responded in that fashion) are:

All Visitors

1. To have fun (85%)
2. Enjoy natural scenery (80%)
3. Get away from life's usual demands (74.5%)
4. Enjoy smells and sounds of nature (70.6%)
5. Spend time with family (70.3%)

Next Generation

1. To have fun (90.2%)
2. Enjoy natural scenery (79.6%)
3. Spend time with family (78.4%)
4. Get away from life’s usual demands (76.5%)
5. Enjoy smells and sounds of nature (69.3%)



Parents with Children, some of whom fit into the Next Generation category, chose the same top four motivations as the Next Generation. The only difference is that Parents with Children think that “introducing children to the outdoors” is the 5th most important motivation, while “enjoy(ing) smells and sounds of nature” rounds out the top five for the Next Generation.

Please see pg. 10 of the Appendix for more information on Motivations (Visitor Survey).

Household Survey

With regard to the motivations that drive a visit to a state park and the experiences that visitors seek, the Household Survey asked: “The following is a list of possible experiences you can have in Minnesota State Parks. Please tell us how important each experience is or would be to you when visiting a Minnesota State Park.”

All groups – including low⁸, moderate⁹, high¹⁰, and very high¹¹ users – agree that “enjoying natural scenery” is the primary motivation for a visit.

Overall, the four groups are more similar in their motivations to visit a Minnesota State Park than they are different. The only major difference is that the very high user group tends to be more motivated to recreate in state parks than the other user groups.

When the results of the Household Survey are compared with the Visitor Survey and the Focus Group Study, the motivations that encourage Minnesota State Park visitation are very similar to one another. Across the board, survey respondents chose having fun, enjoying natural scenery, enjoying smells and sounds of nature, and getting away from life’s usual demands as one of their top five motivating forces.

Please see pg. 11 of the Appendix for more information on Motivations (Household Survey).



⁸ Have not visited since 2002, if ever.

⁹ Have visited since 2003, but not within the last year.

¹⁰ Have visited 1-4 times within the last year.

¹¹ Have visited 5 or more times within the last year.

Childhood Activities



Childhood nature-based activities are strongly associated with nature-based activities as an adult.

The Household Survey asked survey respondents the following question, “Which of the following outdoor activities did you participate in as a child (16 or younger)?”

Results of the survey show different levels of association with users of Minnesota State Parks today and their childhood activities. If an activity was categorized as ‘high association,’ the individuals who participated in them as children were the most likely to be a Minnesota State Park visitor as an adult. Listed by association, the childhood activities that have a tendency to result in Minnesota State Park visitors as adults are as follows:

High Association

- Visiting state or national parks
- Hiking/ backpacking
- Camping
- Canoeing/ kayaking

Low Association

- Motor boating
- Horse back riding
- Snowmobiling
- Fishing
- Hunting

Moderate Association

- Snow skiing and snowboarding
- Visiting nature centers
- Gathering mushrooms, berries, or other wild foods
- Swimming in a lake or river

Please see pgs. 12-13 of the Appendix for more information on Childhood Activities.



Barriers

Household Survey

Regarding the constraints or barriers that keep individuals from recreating in the outdoor, nature-based parks, visitors and non-visitors were looked at together in the Household Survey. There was not a separate question addressing this particular item in the Visitor Survey.

Almost all survey respondents agree that they would like to spend more time outdoors, but acknowledged that there are barriers to doing so. The Household Survey asked respondents, “Please tell to what extent each of the following possible obstacles keep you from visiting Minnesota State Parks at all or as often as you would like.”

Results of the survey show variation in the extent of barriers to visitation. If a barrier was ranked as having a “high extent,” it represented something that was a barrier to visitation. If it was ranked as having a “low extent,” it meant that the item was not a major barrier to visitation.

Across all groups, the number one barrier to visiting Minnesota State Parks is a perceived “lack of time.” There is also general agreement that “competing leisure activities” pose a substantial barrier to recreating in an outdoor, nature-based park.

High (or primarily high) Extent

- Lack of time
- Competing leisure activities

Moderate Extent

- Crowding in the parks
- Lack of money
- Lack of information
- Concerns about the biophysical setting

Low (or primarily low) Extent

- Lack of skills
- Park offerings
- Fears and personal discomfort
- Health problems

Although “lack of information” is only a barrier of moderate extent, providing more information would likely help to overcome a number of barriers, including both “lack of time” and “competing leisure activities.”

Please see pgs. 14-15 of the Appendix for more information on Barriers.

Negotiation (Coping/Adaptive) Strategies



Minnesota State Park visitors successfully use negotiation strategies to overcome barriers like lack of time, crowding in the parks, and lack of money. An example of a successful negotiation strategy for overcoming the lack of time barrier is trip planning.

Household Survey

A variety of strategies may be used to overcome the most common barriers that keep people from visiting Minnesota State Parks. Grouped by barrier, the strategies that are used most often to overcome those barriers include (followed by mean frequency):¹²

Lack of time

- Try to make outdoor recreation a priority (3.4)
- Try to plan ahead for the park visits (3.2)
- Take more short trips to the parks (3.1)
- Push myself harder to get out and do something (2.9)

Competing leisure activities

- Choose activities that all of us can participate in as a family (3.3)
- Try to find people with similar interests (2.8)
- Try to find people to recreate with (2.8)

Crowding in parks

- Recreate at times when parks are less busy (3.4)
- Go to different places within a park (3.4)

Lack of money

- Participate in activities that are inexpensive or free (3.5)
- Improvise with equipment that I have (3.1)

Concerns about the biophysical setting

- Wear appropriate clothing (4.2)
- Use bug spray (3.9)
- Use sun screen (3.7)

Fears and Personal Discomfort

- Take steps to be safe (e.g. camp near others, take dog, carry pepper spray) (2.9)
- Use orientation devices (2.8)



Please see pgs. 16-18 of the Appendix for more information on Negotiation Strategies.

¹² Strategies with a mean frequency close to or greater than 3 were included. In the Household Survey, a 3 represented a strategy that was “sometimes” used to overcome obstacles, a 4 represented a strategy was used “regularly,” and a 5 represented a strategy was used “very often.” Only the responses of high and very high users were included here, as these groups employed negotiation strategies most often.

Reaction to Possible Changes

Visitor Survey

Given a list of several statements that describe possible changes for Minnesota State Parks and related services, visitors were asked to indicate how much they support or oppose each possible change on a scale of 1 (strongly oppose) to 5 (strongly support).

There was general consensus for possible changes among all groups of respondents for more spacing between campsites, more hiking opportunities, and more self-guided learning opportunities and exhibits.

All campers, regardless of equipment type, showed strong support for more spacing between campsites. As might be expected, camping groups differed from day users in that they showed more interest in items related to their camping experience including more electrical hookups, and more walk-in or cart-in campsites.

In-Park Items, Excluding Camping Items

Visitors

Visitors show **support** for:

1. More hiking opportunities (4.09)
2. More self-guided learning opportunities and exhibits (3.93)
3. The opportunity to take virtual tours of the parks on the state parks website (3.82)
4. Not expanding the amount of development so as to protect resources (3.69)
5. More events for children (3.67)
6. More staff-led learning opportunities (3.63)
7. More accommodations for visitors with mobility impairments (3.63)
8. The opportunity to sign up for emails on park happenings (3.57)

Visitors oppose:

1. Providing more opportunities for off-highway vehicles (2.06)
2. Eliminating park entrance fees (2.36)
3. Providing more hunting opportunities (2.45)

MN state park visitors oppose providing more hunting opportunities in the parks. Visitors who come from hunting households are less opposed than visitors as a whole, but overall are ambivalent about providing more hunting in the parks.

The Next Generation

The Next Generation shows **support** for:

1. More hiking opportunities (4.01)
2. More self-guided learning opportunities and exhibits (3.89)
3. More events for children in Minnesota State Parks (3.68)
4. More opportunities to sign up for emails on park happenings (3.63)

The Next Generation opposes:

1. More opportunities to drive off-highway vehicles (2.46)

In-Park Items, Excluding Camping *continued*

Parents with Children

Parents with Children show **support** for:

1. More self-guided learning opportunities and exhibits (4.03)
2. More hiking opportunities (3.99)
3. The opportunity to take virtual tours of the parks on the Minnesota State Parks website (3.93)
4. More events for children in Minnesota State Parks (3.94)
5. The opportunity to sign up for emails on Minnesota State Parks happenings (3.68)
6. Not expanding the amount of development so as to protect resources (3.60)
7. More accommodations for visitors with mobility impairments (3.51)

Parents with Children oppose:

1. More opportunities to drive off-highway vehicles (2.19)
2. More hunting opportunities (2.35)
3. Elimination of park entrance fees (2.37)

In-Park Items, Camping Only

Campers

Campers show **support** for:

1. More spacing between campsites (4.28)
2. More electrical hookups for campers (3.52)
3. More walk-in/cart-in campsites (3.51)
4. Additional rustic camper cabins (3.49)
5. Separate campgrounds for tent and vehicle campers (3.49)

Campers oppose:

1. Eliminating non-reservable campsites and make all sites reservable (2.27)

The Next Generation

With regard to camping items, the Next Generation shows **support** for:

1. More spacing between campsites (4.12)
2. More walk-in/cart-in campsites (3.75)
3. Separate campgrounds for tent and vehicle campers (3.63)

With regard to camping items, the Next Generation opposes:

1. More campsites for motor homes and other similar large rigs



In-Park Items, Camping Only *continued*

Parents with Children

With regard to camping items, Parents with Children show **support** for:

1. More spacing between campsites (4.21)
2. More walk-in/cart-in campsites (3.64)
3. Separate campgrounds for tent and vehicle campers (3.55)

Parents with Children do not show strong opposition to any of the potential camping related changes.

Tent Campers

Tent campers show the greatest **support** for:

1. More spacing between campsites (4.31)
2. More walk-in/cart-in campsites (3.69)
3. Separate campgrounds for tent and vehicle campers (3.68)
4. Additional rustic camper cabins (3.58)

Tent campers oppose:

1. Eliminating non-reservable campsites and make all sites reservable (2.28)
2. More campsites for motor homes and other similar large rigs (2.35)

Hard Gear Campers

Hard gear campers show the greatest **support** for:

1. More electrical hookups for campers (4.24)
2. More spacing between campsites (4.21)
3. Cell phone coverage near park visitor centers and campground (3.49)
4. More campsites for motor homes and other similar large rigs (3.49)

Hard gear campers oppose:

1. Eliminating non-reservable campsites and make all sites reservable (2.31)



Household Survey



“High service” items like park programs that cater to children, and the opportunity to rent equipment and attend special events are the items of greatest interest to respondents of the Household Survey. The opportunity to take virtual tours of the park and attend programs to develop outdoor skills are also of great interest.

Survey respondents were asked the question, “Do you have any interest in visiting Minnesota State Parks at all or visiting them more often?” Over 90 percent of people who visited a state park in the last year have an interest in visiting again or more often. Interest is significantly lower for those who haven’t visited a state park recently.

The Low User group responded differently than the rest of the user groups. Almost 23 percent of the Low Users said “No,” they do not have an interest in visiting Minnesota State Parks or visiting them more often. Interestingly, the Low User group responded, “Don’t know” almost 39 percent of the time, meaning that with more information – or some other form of impetus – they might visit more often.

Do you have any interest in visiting Minnesota State Parks at all or visiting them more often?		Visitor Group			
		Low Users (have not visited since 2002, if ever)	Moderate Users (have visited since 2003, but not in last 12 months)	High Users (visited 1 to 4 times in last 12 months)	Very High Users (visited 5 or more times in last 12 months)
	Yes	38.4%	71.0%	86.1%	96.4%
	No	22.7%	7.4%	2.3%	--
	Don't know	38.9%	21.6%	11.6%	3.6%

Retention of visitors is key to people regularly spending time in state parks. A similar trend has been seen in the purchase of hunting and fishing licenses. If a former license holder does not get a license one year, the likelihood that they will get one again never goes above 25 percent. This figure is well below the year-to-year re-license rate of 70 to 85 percent.

Given a different list of statements that could make visiting a Minnesota State Park more attractive (e.g. I might visit Minnesota State Parks, or would visit them more often, if...), household survey respondents were asked to indicate how much they agree or disagree with the statements on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Across all groups, respondents agreed that they would visit at all or more often if:

1. They could find park programs for their child/children.
2. The park had equipment they could use or rent.
3. They could attend special events in the park.
4. They had the opportunity to take virtual tours of the park on a website.
5. They could attend programs to develop outdoor skills.

Please see pg. 19-23 of the Appendix for more information on the Reaction to Possible Changes.

Conclusions

The primary objective of this report was to gain a better understanding of the factors that underlie declining involvement in nature-based recreation by Minnesota residents, particularly those under the age of 45. Made up of young families with children, members of Generation X and Y, and others, this group has been termed the “Next Generation” of park visitors by the state’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The findings from this report will be used to:

- Plan for the Next Generation of park visitors.
- Inform DNR management and development decisions.
- Develop a marketing plan that includes recruitment and retention strategies of park visitors.
- Outline future research conducted by the DNR.

Summary of Key Findings

This report outlined the key findings of three research efforts undertaken by the DNR in 2007. These efforts focused primarily on gaining a better understanding of the factors that underlie declining involvement in nature-based recreation by Minnesota residents. The DNR also sought to learn more about visitors and non-visitors of Minnesota State Parks, in general. The motivations and constraints of a state park visit, and possible in-park changes, were important aspects of the research. Particular attention was paid to the Next Generation of park visitors, a group of people who are somewhat less satisfied with Minnesota State Parks. In general, there was a great deal of agreement among the three parts of the 2007 Minnesota State Parks research findings.

The key findings of the three research efforts in 2007 are:

- 1 Satisfaction ratings of Minnesota State Parks visitor experiences are at an all-time high (p. 8).
- 2 Young adults and families with children have become a smaller portion of park visitation, while people from older generations have become a larger portion. These age-based visitation trends are steeper than their respective trends in the Minnesota population. (p. 9).
- 3 When planning a visit, Minnesota State Parks visitors are shifting strongly from hard-copy publications to the DNR website (p. 11).
- 4 The primary motivations and barriers to visiting Minnesota State Parks were similar for frequent and infrequent visitors of the state park system (p.15).
- 5 Childhood nature-based activities are strongly associated with nature-based activities as an adult (p.17).
- 6 Minnesota State Park visitors successfully use negotiation strategies to overcome barriers like lack of time, crowding in the parks, and lack of money. An example of a successful negotiation strategy for overcoming the lack of time barrier is trip planning (p.19).
- 7 “High service” items like park programs that cater to children, and the opportunity to rent equipment and attend special events are the items of greatest interest to respondents of the Household Survey. The opportunity to take virtual tours of the park and attend programs to develop outdoor skills are also of great interest. (p. 23).