

# 2011 Minnesota State Parks and Trails Programs Study Report



**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Parks and Trails  
Division of Operations Services**

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## Introduction

Minnesota is not escaping a broad trend—evident since the 1990s—of declining per-capita participation in nature-based outdoor recreation in the United States. This is a national trend that impacts national parks, state parks, state trails and other outdoor recreational facilities. It includes activities such as park visitation, fishing, boating, wildlife watching, and wilderness use (Kelly, 2008). Although the decline in these activities in Minnesota is not as large as the national decline, it is still present. The primary driving factor behind this trend is a decline in involvement among young adults (ages 20–45) and their children. Today's young adults and youth are not as engaged in traditional nature-based activities as older generations.

Reversing this decline in outdoor recreation participation is one of the primary objectives of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR). Plans to increase outdoor recreation participation and connect people to the outdoors are presented in several comprehensive and strategic plans including *A Strategic Conservation Agenda 2009-2013*, *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*: and *Connecting People to Minnesota's Great Outdoors: Ten-Year Strategic State Park and Trails Plan, 2011-2020*. One of the common methods of increasing participation in these plans (and throughout parks and trails planning) is through programming and special events. A wide-range of anecdotal evidence has demonstrated that programming and special events are successful in attracting new users to parks and trails; however, there is limited evidence-based research to prove that programming and special events attract new users above and beyond the level that would happen naturally without intervention.

The Parks and Trails Division (PAT) of the MN DNR has committed substantial resources to programming and special events in an effort to attract new users, specifically in their key target market, families with children. In 2007, a series of market research efforts were conducted on behalf of PAT to assess Minnesota State Parks and Trails visitors' motivations, constraints and strategies for park visitorship. Based on this research, PAT designed a series of programs designed to attract new users, specifically families with children. Since it was found that other demographic groups have similar motivations and constraints, it was decided that targeting families with children was an effective means to reach a variety of demographic groups in addition to families with children, including ethnic and racial minority groups. In 2010 and 2011, PAT in conjunction with the Division of Operations Services conducted a study to assess the satisfaction of visitors who participate in a variety of PAT programs and special events as well as the success of these programs and special events at attracting new users above and beyond the typical level that visit parks and trails without programs and special events. The 2010 pilot study goals were twofold: 1) to evaluate the research methods of the study and determine if a full-scale assessment would be possible and 2) to gain preliminary information regarding special event and program success. Both of the pilot study goals were met and a summary of the research findings was produced (Appendix A). In 2011, a full-scale study was completed and the study methods and results are presented below.

## Methods

### *Study Setting*

2011 Programs research was conducted at 36 Minnesota State Parks, State Recreation Areas (SRAs) and State Water Trails (Table 1). Minnesota State Parks are managed by the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Trails. There are 67 state parks, which encompass 225,000 acres of public land and about 25,000 acres of private in-holdings. The most recent park, Lake Vermilion, was added in 2010. State recreation areas provide a broad selection of outdoor recreation opportunities in a natural setting that may be used by large numbers of people. There are nine state recreation areas including the most recently added La Salle Lake SRA. The DNR manages 4,397 miles of water trails for canoeing, kayaking, boating, and camping on the North Shore of Lake Superior and on 31 rivers statewide.

**Table 1. Minnesota State Parks, State Recreation Areas (SRA) and State Water Trails (WT) in which Programs Research was conducted, 2011**

	Number of surveys returned	Percent of total surveys		Number of surveys returned	Percent of total surveys
Afton	4	0.9	Maplewood	9	2.0
Banning	2	0.5	Mille Lacs Kathio	49	11.0
Bear Head Lake	30	6.8	Minneopa	7	1.6
Blue Mounds	8	1.8	MN River State WT	3	0.7
Buffalo River	3	0.7	MN Valley SRA	6	1.4
Father Hennepin	18	4.1	Moose Lake	4	0.9
Flandrau	5	1.1	Myre – Big Island	3	0.7
Fort Snelling	32	7.2	Nerstrand Big Woods	7	1.6
Frontenac	7	1.6	Red River SRA	1	0.2
Glacial Lakes	2	0.5	Rum River State WT	2	0.5
Glendalough	1	0.2	Sakatah Lake	4	0.9
Great River Bluffs	5	1.1	Savanna Portage	10	2.3
Interstate	38	8.6	Sibley	23	5.2
Jay Cooke	4	0.9	Temperance River	8	1.8
Lake Bemidji	10	2.3	Tettegouche	21	4.7
Lake Carlos	10	2.3	Whitewater	40	9.0
Lake Louise	4	0.9	Wild River	9	2.0
Lake Maria	5	1.1	William O'Brien	50	11.3

*\*All locations are at State Parks unless noted: SRA – State Recreation Area or WT – Water Trail*

### *Approach*

Seven programs were selected for evaluation: Archery (Archery in the Parks), Geocaching (Geocaching 101 or Geocaching for Beginners), I Can Camp, I Can Climb, I Can Fish, I Can Paddle and Outdoors Extra. For the larger and/or more regularly presented programs (Archery, Geocaching, I Can Climb, I Can Fish and Outdoors Extra), the research team aimed to approach at least 200 participant groups per program. For the smaller and less regularly presented programs (I Can Camp and I Can Paddle) the research team aimed to approach 100 percent of participant groups per program.

Surveys were distributed to parks and trails locations and programs throughout Minnesota. I Can Camp and Archery programs require equipment that is stored in a trailer and transferred from park to park, thus the targeted number of surveys for these programs were also placed in the trailer. The few I Can Paddle program dates that were based at trails were sent directly to the instructor for distribution. The remaining programs are park based and thus the surveys were sent to a pre-determined list of parks. Parks were chosen based on the quantity of programs offered (parks with more programs were given preference so as to reach a greater number of participants). Each survey packet contained a letter with instructions on

survey distribution and a list of the programs to distribute surveys at. The instructors for the programs were requested to distribute one survey per group at the end of the program.

The designated sampling period was scheduled for Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend (May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011 through September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011; Table 2). Unfortunately, surveys were not collected from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 through July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011 due to the state service interruption. The program team agreed that July visitors were not substantially different from June or August visitors and so it was decided that the gap in survey collection would not significantly alter the results of the research. However, since several of the programs were not held during the state service interruption, valuable sampling opportunities were lost. For example, one-third of I Can Climb, nearly one-third of I Can Paddle and 20 percent of I Can Camp programs were not held. As such, the overall number of surveys returned was lower than initial targets. In order to collect a large enough sample size additional locations were added in August which resulted in greater geographic diversity of the sample. A small number of surveys were collected in October though they were not originally part of the sample plan.

**Table 2. Percentage of respondents surveyed by month for Programs Research, 2011**

Month	Frequency	Percent
May	2	0.5
June	165	37.2
July	41	9.2
August	214	48.2
September	19	4.3
October	3	0.7

### ***Questionnaire***

Two paper surveys were designed based on previous Minnesota State Parks and Trails research and with the assistance of Parks and Trails planning, programming and marketing staff (Appendix B). The first survey [Programs survey] was used to assess Archery, Geocaching, I Can Camp, I Can Climb, I Can Fish and I Can Paddle. The second survey [Outdoors Extra survey] was used to evaluate Outdoors Extra and is identical to the Programs survey except that the first question was replaced with a write-in option and question three (in the Programs survey) was removed as it was not considered necessary information for Outdoors Extra.

### ***Response Rate***

Of the 1275 Programs surveys distributed to Parks, 331 were returned by Program instructors and thus 944 were distributed to Program participant groups. A total of 367 Programs surveys were returned for a response rate of 39 percent (Table 3). Of the 200 Outdoors Extra surveys distributed to Parks, 25 were returned by Outdoors Extra instructors and thus 175 were distributed to Outdoors Extra participant groups. A total of 77 Outdoors Extra surveys were returned for a response rate of 44 percent. In total, 444 surveys were returned out of 1119 distributed for a response rate of 40 percent. Surveys returned were relatively evenly distributed amongst the seven programs; however, the number of surveys for Geocaching and I Can Paddle returned was low (Table 4). Results for these two programs are still presented but conclusions and resultant actions based on the findings from these two programs should be made with caution.

**Table 3. Response rate for Programs Research, 2011**

	Programs	Outdoors Extra	Combined
Surveys Distributed	944	175	1119
Surveys Received	367	77	444
Response Rate	39%	44%	40%

**Table 4. Distribution of returned surveys by program for Programs Research, 2011**

	Frequency	Percent
Archery	80	18.0
Geocaching	28	6.3
I Can Camp	73	16.4
I Can Climb	49	11.0
I Can Fish	123	27.7
I Can Paddle	14	3.2
Outdoors Extra	77	17.3

***Analysis***

Completed questionnaires were entered, cleaned and checked in SPSS version 19.0. Descriptive analysis was utilized to provide means, percentages and frequencies to describe the sample and provide information on variables of interest.

## Question by Question Results

### *Comparison of Program Participants to Typical State Park Visitors*

#### Party Composition

Programs and special events successfully attract families. While less than half of typical state park visitor groups include teens or children, 70 percent of Geocaching, 80 percent of Get Outdoors Day and over 90 percent of Archery, I Can Camp and I Can Fish groups contain a teen or child (Kelly, 2008; table 5).

**Table 5. Party composition among respondents to Programs Research Questionnaire, 2011 (%)**

	2007 visitor survey	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
<b>Party Composition</b>									
Party contains teens and/or children	41	79	80	79	94	62	91	92	51
Adult only parties	59	21	20	21	6	38	9	8	49
<b>Age Group</b>									
Children 12 or under	20	41	39	45	46	37	47	36	26
Teens 13 to 18	10	6	11	1	6	7	4	8	7
Adults 19 to 24	3	2	1	5	1	5	1	6	3
Adults 25 to 30	6	7	7	4	4	8	5	8	14
Adults 31 to 40	11	17	13	21	23	15	18	17	14
Adults 41 to 50	21	16	18	12	17	20	15	26	10
Adults 51 to 60	18	7	5	10	2	8	6	0	14
Adults 61+	11	4	4	2	1	1	4	0	11
<b>Party size (mean)</b>	3.1	4.1	4.2	4.3	3.8	4.1	4.2	4.1	3.7

#### Demographics

Visitation at Minnesota State Parks is largely white, Non-Hispanic (98%; Kelly, 2008). Overall, 9 out of 10 (91%, table 6) 2011 Parks and Trails programs respondents are white, non-Hispanic indicating that programs are attended by a slightly more diverse audience than State Parks. I Can Camp had the most diverse attendance as nearly one-quarter (23%) of respondents were non-white and/or Hispanic. I Can Climb respondents were even less diverse than general park attendees (100% vs. 98%). With varying degrees, I Can Paddle, Geocaching, Archery, I Can Fish and Outdoors Extra had more diverse attendance than typical state visitors (86%, 89%, 91%, 94% and 97% respectively).

Minnesota State Park visitors are traditionally a very well-educated group. Nearly two-thirds (59%) of visitors hold bachelor's degrees or higher while about one-third of Minnesota's residents hold bachelor's degrees or higher (US Census Bureau, 2010a). Program respondents are even more likely to hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Overall, three-quarters (74%) of program respondents hold a bachelor's degree or higher and respondents with bachelor's degrees ranged from 68 to 78 percent for individual programs.

Minnesota State Park visitors are also an affluent group with nearly one-quarter of respondents reporting a household income over \$100,000 (Kelly, 2008). Program respondents are an equally or more affluent group with one-quarter to one-half of respondents (depending on program) reporting household incomes over \$100,000.

**Table 6. Demographics among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (%)**

	2007 visitor survey	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
<b>Race and ethnicity</b>									
White, Non-Hispanic	98	91	91	89	77	100	94	86	97
Non-white and/or Hispanic	2	9	9	11	23	0	6	14	3
<b>Education level</b>									
Bachelor's degree or higher	59	74	78	71	81	68	69	77	74
<b>Income</b>									
Under \$30,000	11	6	3	4	6	3	11	8	5
\$30,000 to \$39,999	7	7	7	0	5	5	10	17	5
\$40,000 to \$49,999	12	6	4	8	3	5	3	8	14
\$50,000 to \$59,999	13	12	12	12	16	11	10	8	10
\$60,000 to \$74,999	18	19	12	24	22	22	17	17	24
\$75,000 to \$99,999	17	19	28	20	11	22	21	17	12
Over \$100,000	22	31	34	32	38	32	25	25	31

Experience with State Parks

About one-third (32%) of typical state park visitors are new visitors to the park they are visiting (Kelly, 2008; table 7). However, nearly half (47%) of programs visitors are new to the park. About three-quarters of I Can Camp (76%) and I Can Paddle (71%) respondents indicated that they are new to the park. Outdoors Extra did not appear to attract new visitors to the park above the level that would typically be seen at a state park.

About one-fifth (17%) of state park visitors report one visit per year while the remainder report 2 or more visits. Slightly more program respondents, one-fourth (25%), report one visit per year with the remainder reporting 2 or more visits. A higher percentage of I Can Camp! (47%) respondents reported one visit within the last year, indicating that this event is bringing new users to the park.

Just five percent of state park visitors have been visiting parks for one year or less while 11 percent of program visitors have been visiting the state parks for one year or less. Thirty percent of I Can Camp and 21 percent of I Can Paddle respondents reported that they have been visiting state parks for one year or less indicating that these events attract a considerable number of new users to state parks. Typical state park visitors have been visiting Minnesota State Parks for a median of 23 years while Programs respondents have been visiting Minnesota State Parks for a median of 15 years indicating that Programs attendees are generally newer visitors to State Parks than typical State Park visitors.

**Table 7. Park experience among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (%)**

	2007 visitor survey	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
Visited this state park									
Yes	67	53	63	44	22	55	59	29	69
No	32	47	37	56	76	45	40	71	31
Number of MN State Parks Visited in last 12 months									
1	17	25	22	22	47	23	23	7	17
2 to 5	62	59	61	70	44	53	64	64	62
6 to 10	15	12	12	7	6	23	13	14	14
11 or more	6	4	5	0	3	3	1	14	8
<b>Median</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
Number of years visiting MN State Parks									
1 or less	5	11	5	4	30	8	9	21	6
2 to 5	9	21	17	19	27	29	18	36	15
6 to 10	13	14	14	8	6	13	18	36	14
11 to 20	22	21	26	31	17	32	22	7	12
21 +	51	33	38	38	20	18	33	0	52
<b>Median</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>24</b>

### Visitation Patterns

Just under half (44%) of State Park visitors report that their visit is part of an overnight trip away from their primary residence (Kelly, 2008, table 8). Program visitors are more likely to be on a trip away from home than typical state park visitors as two-thirds (67%) of them report that their visit is part of an overnight trip. The percentage of respondents indicating their visit was part of an overnight trip varied by program with 91% of I Can Camp, 77% of Geocaching, 75% of Archery, 63% of I Can Fish, 52% of Outdoors Extra, 51% of I Can Climb and 43% of I Can Paddle respondents indicating their trip was part of an overnight stay away from home.

**Table 8. Overnight trip status among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (%)**

	2007 visitor survey	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
Yes	44	67	75	77	91	51	63	43	52
No	56	33	25	23	9	49	37	57	48

Typical State Park visitors travel a median of 70 miles from their home to visit a state park (Kelly, 2008, table 9). Programs respondents overall also reported a median of 70 miles traveled; however, that distance varied from program to program. Archery (120 median miles) and Geocaching (100 median miles) reported more miles traveled than typical state park visitors while I Can Climb visitors reported 65 median miles traveled and I Can Fish, I Can Paddle, I Can Camp and Outdoors Extra respondents all reported 60 median miles traveled.

**Table 9. Miles State Park is from permanent home among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (%)**

	2007 visitor survey	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
25 miles or less	31	22	9	17	14	23	30	23	32
25.1 to 50	13	16	4	9	30	15	18	15	16
50.1 to 100	16	28	30	26	33	31	27	31	24
100.1 to 200	23	21	25	43	16	18	23	31	11
200.1 or more miles	17	13	32	4	8	13	2	0	17
<b>Median</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>

The type of entrance permit used to enter the park can help identify if the respondent visits or intends to visit State Parks multiple times per year (annual permit) or visits or intends to visit State Parks once or very few times per year (daily permit). About two-thirds (65%) of typical State Park visitors enter the park using an annual pass and the other one-third (30%) use a daily pass (Kelly, 2008; table 10). A small percentage (5%) of typical State Park visitors enter using some ‘other’ option which likely is walking/biking, alternative transportation or coming on a designated free day. Similar to typical State Park visitors, about two-thirds (69%) of Programs respondents have an annual pass. Overall, slightly less Programs respondents (23%) use a daily pass while 8 percent of Programs respondents reported that no permit was required, likely because it was included in the program (I Can Camp) or they came on a designated free day. I Can Paddle (86%), I Can Fish (85%), Outdoors Extra (82%), Archery (78%) and Geocaching (74%) respondents are more likely to enter the park using an annual pass than typical State Park visitors. I Can Camp (53%) and I Can Climb (35%) were more likely to come on a daily permit or come when no permit was required. This is not surprising for I Can Camp as the program included a daily pass in the program fee.

**Table 10. Type of entrance permit used among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (%)**

	2007 visitor survey	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
Daily	30	23	15	26	53	35	13	0	12
Annual	65	69	78	74	25	53	85	86	82
No permit required	in ‘other’	8	6	0	22	8	2	14	6
Other	5	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0

### Satisfaction of Park Visit

Programs respondents are very satisfied with their park visit, even more so than typical park visitors (Kelly, 2008; table 11). One-third to one-half (depending on program) reported that the visit exceeded their expectations compared to one-quarter of 2007 park visitors who reported that the visit exceeded their expectations.

**Table 11. Satisfaction of park visit among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (%)**

	2007 visitor survey	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
Exceeded expectations	26	41	38	44	58	55	31	43	33
Completely satisfied	56	46	50	37	27	34	51	43	50
Mostly satisfied	13	12	12	19	12	11	10	7	17
OK – could have been better	3	1	0	0	3	0	1	0	0
Dissatisfied (to any extent)	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0

### *Variables of Interest to Assess Program Visitor Characteristics*

#### Previous Participation in Program

About 1 in 10 (91.7%, table 12) respondents were repeat program participants. The percentage of repeat participants varied from program to program with just over ten percent of Geocaching (14.3%), I Can Paddle (13.9%), Archery (13.9%), and I Can Climb (10.4%) respondents indicating they were repeat participants and just 2.5 percent of I Can Fish respondents indicating they were repeat participants. I Can Camp did not have any respondents who indicated they were repeat participants.

**Table 12. Previous program participation among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (%), n=362)**

	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle
Yes	6.9	13.9	14.8	0.0	10.4	2.5	14.3
No	91.7	84.8	77.8	100.0	89.6	95.9	85.7
Don't Know	1.4	1.3	7.4	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0

*Question was not asked of Outdoors Extra Participants*

### Information Sources on Programs

Commonly identified information sources include the MN DNR website, family and friends, an event flyer, and info at one or more State Parks (table 13). However, Archery, Geocaching I Can Fish and Outdoors Extra respondents were most likely to have indicated that they found out about the event after arrival. In addition to the commonly identified information sources, I Can Camp respondents identified the radio as a common information source. I Can Paddle respondents also identified the MN Special Events Catalog, websites and Facebook as common information sources.

**Table 13. Information sources among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (%), n=442)**

	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
Found out about event after arrival	40.3	68.8	60.7	0.0	28.6	43.4	14.3	48.7
MN DNR website	35.3	22.5	35.7	54.8	36.7	32.0	78.6	26.3
Family & friends	13.1	8.8	10.7	19.2	24.5	9.0	21.4	10.5
Program/special event flyer	12.2	8.8	25.0	4.1	14.3	13.9	7.1	15.8
Info at 1 or more MN State Parks	10.2	6.3	35.7	5.5	14.3	10.7	0.0	7.9
MN State Park & Trail Program & Special Events Catalog	6.3	3.8	3.6	8.2	6.1	9.8	14.3	1.3
Newspapers/magazines	5.7	3.8	3.6	5.5	6.1	5.7	0.0	9.2
Radio	5.7	0.0	0.0	31.5	2.0	0.0	0.0	1.3
Websites	5.7	3.8	7.1	9.6	8.2	4.9	14.3	1.3
Explore MN Tourism website	3.6	5.0	0.0	6.8	0.0	4.1	7.1	1.3
TV	2.3	1.3	0.0	9.6	2.0	0.8	0.0	0.0
Facebook	2.0	1.3	3.6	0.0	8.2	0.8	14.3	0.0
<i>Minnesota Explorer</i> newspaper	1.6	1.3	3.6	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.0	1.3
Outdoor equipment stores	1.6	0.0	0.0	8.2	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Places I stay	1.6	3.8	3.6	0.0	2.0	0.8	0.0	1.3
Clubs/associations	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	2.6
Boating/camping/sports shows	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3
Chambers of commerce/CVBs	0.2	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Highway information centers	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3
MN DNR electronic information kiosk	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0

*Gray shading indicates information sources identified by 10 percent or more respondents*

### Equipment for Program

Participants were queried regarding whether they rented or used free equipment provided for the program at the park or brought equipment with them or both (brought some equipment with them and used some equipment provided for the program). Nearly all respondents indicated that they rented/used free equipment or both rented/used free equipment and brought some of their own (table 14).

**Table 14. Equipment use among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (% , n=418)**

	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle
Brought equipment with me	3.8	0.0	3.7	1.4	6.3	7.3	0.0
Rented/used free equipment	77.0	98.8	85.2	47.9	77.1	78.9	71.4
Both	19.2	1.3	11.1	50.7	16.7	13.8	28.6

*Outdoors Extra is not included because several Outdoors Extra programs did not require equipment*

### Importance of Program to Park Visit

Just over one-third (36.3%) of respondents indicated that the program they participated in was very important to their park visit (table 15). Another one-third (30.3%) of respondents reported the opposite and indicated that the program they participated in was not important at all to their park visit. The remaining respondents indicated that the program was slightly important (13.9%) or moderately important (19.4%) to their park visit. Not surprisingly the programs where the highest percentage of respondents found out about the event after arrival (Archery, Geocaching, I Can Fish and Outdoors Extra) were also the programs where the highest percentage of respondents indicated that the event was not important to their park visit (albeit I Can Fish). Conversely, zero percent of I Can Camp respondents found out about the event after arrival and three-quarters (74%) of respondents indicated the program was very important to their park visit.

**Table 15. Importance of program to park visit among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (% , n=433)**

	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
Not important at all	30.5	47.4	40.7	5.5	25.5	30.3	7.1	41.3
Slightly important	13.9	20.5	25.9	9.6	4.3	15.1	14.3	10.7
Moderately important	19.4	15.4	18.5	11.0	21.3	21.0	28.6	26.7
Very important	36.3	16.7	14.8	74.0	48.9	33.6	50.0	21.3

*Gray shading indicates most popular choice per category*

### Satisfaction of Program

Program participants are highly satisfied with their program experience (table 17). Overall, 83.4 percent of respondents indicated they were very satisfied and 16.4 percent of respondents indicated they were satisfied. On a program basis, respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they were very satisfied with the program (75% and higher) and the remaining respondents were satisfied, except I Can Fish. A nominal percent (0.8%) of I Can Fish respondents indicated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and open-ended respondents indicate this is likely to do to overcrowding of the program at some sites.

**Table 16. Event satisfaction among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (% , n=439)**

	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
Very satisfied	83.4	92.5	75.0	86.3	85.4	77.5	92.9	80.3
Satisfied	16.4	7.5	25.0	13.7	14.6	21.7	7.1	19.7
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0

*0.0 percent of respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied*

### Motivations

Respondents were motivated to participate in State Park programs for a variety of reasons. The most popular motivations were ‘have fun’ (84.7%, table 16), ‘program was free/inexpensive’ (70.9%), ‘spend time with family’ (62.6%) and ‘try new things’ (58.8%). Additionally, ‘program included free equipment use’ was an important motivation for I Can Camp respondents, ‘help family, friends or others develop

outdoor skills‘ was an important motivation for I Can Paddle respondents, and \_enjoy natural scenery was an important motivation for Outdoors Extra respondents.

**Table 17. Motivations for program participation among respondents to Programs Research Questionnaire (% , n=439)**

	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
Have fun	85.6	90.0	96.4	79.5	85.4	85.0	100.0	81.6
Program was free/inexpensive	71.8	75.0	71.4	64.4	81.3	72.5	64.3	69.7
Spend time with family	63.3	46.3	75.0	76.7	47.9	77.5	78.6	48.7
Try new things	58.8	71.3	78.6	71.2	70.8	45.8	50.0	40.8
Program included free equipment use	56.7	62.5	57.1	72.6	66.7	60.8	50.0	23.7
Enjoy natural scenery	46.2	21.3	60.7	64.4	43.8	44.2	64.3	51.3
Kids wanted to try the activity	46.2	56.3	42.9	39.7	35.4	64.2	50.0	21.1
Help family, friends or others develop outdoor skills	31.7	28.8	17.9	37.0	35.4	41.7	78.6	7.9
Program provided safe learning environment	30.5	22.5	28.6	37.0	47.9	27.5	64.3	21.1
Introduces children to the outdoors	28.9	10.0	28.6	56.2	16.7	31.7	42.9	23.7
Learn more about nature	23.2	3.8	28.6	30.1	8.3	28.3	7.1	39.5
Activity was close to home	19.8	8.8	10.7	34.2	20.8	20.0	28.6	18.4
Feel more self-confident	16.6	16.3	14.3	21.9	35.4	12.5	28.6	5.3
Other motivation	7.1	3.8	10.7	12.3	8.3	4.2	7.1	7.9

*Gray shading indicates three most popular motivations per program*

### Recommend Program to a Friend

The vast majority (98.2%) of respondents would recommend the program they participated in to a friend (table 18). 100 percent of I Can Camp, I Can Climb and I Can Paddle participants would recommend the program to a friend. Some Archery (1.3%), I Can Fish! (2.5%) and Outdoors Extra (3.9%) participants selected \_don’t know‘ but none selected \_no‘. Just Geocaching had a few (3.6%) participants who would not recommend the program to a friend.

**Table 18. Recommend program to a friend among respondents to Programs Research, 2011 (% , n=439)**

	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
Yes	98.2	98.8	96.4	100.0	100.0	97.5	100.0	96.1
No	0.2	0.0	3.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Don’t know	1.6	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5	0.0	3.9

### Quality of Program

Almost all program respondents found the quality of instruction to be excellent (79.8%, table 19) or good (18.0%). Some Archery (3.8% fair), I Can Climb (2.1% fair, 2.1%, poor) and I Can Fish (0.8% fair, 0.8% poor) respondents found the quality of instruction to be fair or poor.

Almost all program respondents indicated that the quality of facility/location was excellent (74.4%) or good (23.5%). Some Archery (1.3% fair, 1.3% poor), I Can Camp (2.7% fair, 1.4% poor), I Can Fish (2.5% fair) and I Can Paddle (7.1% poor) respondents found the quality of facility/location to be fair or poor.

The time of day was reported as excellent (74.5%) or good (24.4%) by the vast majority of respondents. Some Archery (1.3%), Geocaching (3.6%) and I Can Fish (2.5%) respondents found the time of day to be fair. There were no respondents who thought the time of day was poor.

The day of week was reported as excellent (78.9%) or good (19.7%) by the vast majority of respondents. Some Geocaching (3.6%), I Can Climb (2.1%), I Can Fish (2.5%) and Outdoors Extra (1.3%) respondents found the day of week to be fair. There were no respondents who thought the day of week was poor.

Respondents thought the length of program was about right (91.5%). Some respondents (7.8%) thought the program was too short but very few respondents (0.7%) thought the program was too long. A higher number of I Can Climb respondents thought the program was too short (17.0%) and open-ended comments reveal that this was mainly due to the long wait time and short climbing time. A higher number of I Can Camp respondents also thought the program was too short (11.1%); however, open-ended comments reveal that this did not necessarily result in a negative experience as some of those respondents commented that they knew a 2-night option was available.

Respondents thought the number of participants was about right (87.1%). Some respondents (11.7%) thought there were too many participants but very few respondents (1.2%) thought there were too few participants. Over one-quarter (27.3%) of I Can Climb respondents thought there were too many participants and open-ended comments reveal that some of the 4.5 percent that indicated that there were too few participants were likely referring to the number of staff available and not the number of participants. A relatively high number (17.8%) of I Can Fish respondents also indicated that there were too many participants. Open-ended comments reveal that many felt the space for the program was not big enough to accommodate the number of people.

**Table 19. Quality of program among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (%)**

	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
<b>Quality of instruction (n=431)</b>								
Excellent	79.8	82.5	77.8	79.5	81.3	78.3	100.0	75.4
Good	18.0	13.8	22.2	20.5	14.6	20.0	0.0	24.6
Fair	1.1	3.8	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.8	0.0	0.0
Poor	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.8	0.0	0.0
<b>Quality of facility/location (n=438)</b>								
Excellent	74.4	76.3	85.7	64.4	95.8	73.1	78.6	65.8
Good	23.5	21.3	14.3	31.5	4.2	24.4	14.3	34.2
Fair	1.4	1.3	0.0	2.7	0.0	2.5	0.0	0.0
Poor	0.7	1.3	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.0	7.1	0.0
<b>Time of day (n=439)</b>								
Excellent	74.5	73.8	78.6	78.1	85.4	73.3	85.7	63.2
Good	24.4	25.0	17.9	21.9	14.6	24.2	14.3	36.8
Fair	1.1	1.3	3.6	0.0	0.0	2.5	0.0	0.0
Poor	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Day of week (n=436)</b>								
Excellent	78.9	78.5	82.1	80.6	89.6	75.6	85.7	73.7
Good	19.7	21.5	14.3	19.4	8.3	21.8	14.3	25.0
Fair	1.4	0.0	3.6	0.0	2.1	2.5	0.0	1.3
Poor	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Length of program (n=434)</b>								
About right	91.5	91.1	89.3	87.5	83.0	95.0	100.0	94.7
Too short	7.8	7.6	7.1	11.1	17.0	5.0	0.0	5.3
Too long	0.7	1.3	3.6	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Number of participants (n=428)</b>								
Too many	11.7	7.6	3.6	6.9	27.3	17.8	7.1	5.5
About right	87.1	92.4	96.4	93.1	68.2	81.4	92.9	91.8
Too few	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.5	0.8	0.0	2.7

### Suggested Changes to Programs

Suggested changes were generally similar across all programs (Appendix C). Respondents often noted that either there were too many participants, not enough instructors or that the space was too small or crowded. Some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the promotion of the program and informational materials. Some comments noted that more promotion in general should be done while others specified that the park should do more to make visitors aware of programs currently available. Respondents who received informational material in advance want that information to be more accurate. For example: 1.) several respondents mentioned that the I Can Camp packing listed the wrong size sheets to bring; 2.) I Can Climb respondents had not anticipated that registration would close prior to the program ending and arrived late. Another common comment from respondents was related to mosquitoes and horse flies. Many respondents requested the program seek ways to minimize the interference or include information on ways to prepare for the interference in informational material (e.g. spray for mosquitoes, pack bug spray and long sleeves, etc...).

Respondents provided a variety of suggestions for improving the park programs; however, they also used this space to praise their program instructors, often mentioning them by name, indicating that program instructors are exceeding the expectations of participants and leaving a lasting impression. Respondents also frequently used this space to praise the program in general and comment that no changes were necessary.

### Hours At Park

Hours spent at State Parks vary from 3 hours or less to 5 or more days. The majority of Programs respondents report staying at the park about two days (25-48 hours, 28.2%, table 20) or 3 hours or less (24.9%) indicating that program participants generally come for short day visits or a short overnight trip. This was true for Archery, I Can Camp and Outdoors Extra respondents. I Can Paddle respondents were similar but some short day visits were also in the 4 to 6 hour range. Quite a few Geocaching respondents reported short stays of 3 hours or less but also had more 3-night stays (49-72 hours, 28.6%). I Can Climb respondents were most likely to report short day visits of 4 to 6 hours (31.5%) or 3 hours or less (37.5%). Finally, since I Can Camp was either a 1 or 2 night experience, it is not surprising that almost all respondents reported stays in the 1 and 2 night range.

**Table 20. Hours spent at the park among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (% , n=429)**

	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
3 or less	24.9	18.4	22.2	0.0	37.5	32.5	28.6	36.0
4 – 6	11.0	11.8	7.4	1.4	31.5	8.5	28.6	8.0
7 – 11	1.9	3.9	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.9	0.0	4.0
12 – 24	13.3	2.6	3.6	61.1	6.3	4.3	0.0	2.7
25 – 48	28.2	38.2	32.1	37.5	12.5	28.2	7.1	21.3
49 – 72	13.1	13.2	28.6	0.0	4.2	15.4	35.7	17.3
73 – 96	5.1	6.6	3.6	0.0	4.2	6.8	0.0	8.0
97 or more	2.6	5.3	0.0	0.0	2.1	3.4	0.0	2.7

*Gray shading indicates two most common time categories*

### Activities

Overall, the three most popular activities participated in while at the park among Program respondents were hiking/walking (79.5%; table 21), camping (64.5%) and observing/photographing nature (39.2%).

**Table 21. Activities participated in while at the park among Program Respondents (% , n=424)**

	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
Hiking/walking	79.5	80.8	92.9	90.4	85.7	75.2	61.5	67.1
Camping	64.6	66.7	71.4	98.6	34.7	60.2	46.2	55.7
Observing/photographing nature	39.2	48.7	17.9	34.2	40.8	41.6	30.8	38.6
Taking a self-guided nature walk	37.0	34.6	46.4	41.1	40.8	39.8	23.1	27.1
Looking at kiosks or visitor center exhibits	36.8	35.9	42.9	38.4	34.7	44.2	15.4	27.1
Picnicking	36.1	39.7	39.3	42.5	38.8	29.2	53.8	30.0
Sightseeing	35.1	46.2	35.7	34.2	34.7	34.5	38.5	24.3
Swimming	34.7	24.4	35.7	47.9	14.3	41.6	30.8	35.7
Other recreation activity	29.0	21.8	17.9	37.0	28.6	25.7	61.5	32.9
Bird watching	17.5	16.7	17.9	16.4	12.2	18.6	15.4	21.4
Visiting historic sites	13.4	19.2	17.9	1.4	18.4	15.0	23.1	10.0

*Gray shading indicates three most popular activities per program*

Overall, respondents identified that their three favorite activities are hiking/walking (85.4%; table 22), camping (74.4%) and swimming (65.4%). Additional favorite activities for individual programs were: Archery, relaxing outdoors (67.1%), Geocaching and I Can Climb, bicycling (75,0% & 54.2%, respectively), I Can Camp, picnicking (64.8%), and I Can Paddle, canoeing/kayaking (78.6%).

**Table 22. Favorite outdoor recreation activities among respondents to Programs Research questionnaire, 2011 (%  
n=437)**

	Combined	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp	I Can Climb	I Can Fish	I Can Paddle	Outdoors Extra
Hiking/walking	85.4	81.0	92.9	76.1	89.6	88.5	85.7	88.0
Camping	74.4	88.6	82.1	43.7	72.9	76.2	78.6	82.7
Swimming	65.4	60.8	67.9	71.8	50.0	77.0	78.6	52.0
Relaxing outdoors	60.9	67.1	64.3	56.3	45.8	63.9	64.3	61.3
Bicycling	60.4	59.5	75.0	63.4	54.2	59.8	50.0	60.0
Picnicking	52.2	40.5	57.1	64.8	43.8	56.6	64.3	46.7
Canoeing/kayaking	48.7	55.7	42.9	42.3	45.8	42.6	78.6	56.0
Sightseeing	47.6	46.8	50.0	36.6	45.8	53.3	42.9	50.7
Fishing	45.3	51.9	60.7	26.8	35.4	53.3	42.9	44.0
Visiting nature centers	41.4	40.5	39.3	42.3	31.3	45.9	0.0	49.3
Visiting historic sites	41.0	49.4	46.4	26.8	29.2	44.3	14.3	50.7
Outdoor learning activities	35.0	27.8	46.4	29.6	39.6	33.6	57.1	38.7
Visiting zoos	33.6	29.1	35.7	36.6	20.8	39.3	35.7	33.3
Sledding/snow tubing	33.2	36.7	28.6	38.0	33.3	34.4	28.6	25.3
Viewing wildlife	32.7	31.6	42.9	21.1	27.1	32.8	14.3	48.0
Driving for pleasure	30.2	29.1	25.0	23.9	22.9	31.1	35.7	41.3
Dog walking	25.4	25.3	35.7	19.7	20.8	23.0	28.6	33.3
Outdoor sports	23.6	36.7	32.1	21.1	18.8	23.0	7.1	16.0
Geocaching	23.1	24.1	42.9	23.9	20.8	21.3	35.7	16.0
Cross-country skiing	22.0	26.6	28.6	15.5	35.4	19.7	0.0	20.0
Jogging/running	20.6	24.1	17.9	21.1	27.1	18.0	28.6	16.0
Downhill skiing/snowboarding	19.0	29.1	17.9	16.9	33.3	13.9	21.4	9.3
Sunbathing	17.6	22.8	7.1	15.5	12.5	16.4	7.1	25.3
Motorboating	17.2	21.5	10.7	11.3	20.8	13.1	35.7	21.3
Hunting	15.3	22.8	17.9	5.6	8.3	13.9	14.3	22.7
Golfing	15.1	15.2	17.9	8.5	20.8	13.1	14.3	20.0
Ice skating outdoors	12.8	15.2	7.1	15.5	8.3	15.6	0.0	10.7
Horseback riding	12.4	16.5	3.6	12.7	12.5	11.5	21.4	10.7
Gathering mushrooms, berries, etc...	12.1	17.7	7.1	7.0	10.4	13.1	0.0	14.7
In-line skating	9.6	6.3	7.1	11.3	16.7	11.5	0.0	6.7
Snowmobiling	8.9	15.2	7.1	4.2	8.3	9.0	7.1	8.0
Other	7.6	7.6	7.1	4.2	20.8	5.7	7.1	5.3
ATV riding	5.9	10.1	3.6	0.0	4.2	8.2	14.3	4.0
Sailing/sailboarding	2.7	2.5	0.0	5.6	4.2	0.0	7.1	4.0

*Gray shading indicates three most popular activities per program*

## Discussion of Results

### *Discussion of Comparison of Program Participants to Typical State Park Users*

Parks and Trails has designed and marketed many of their programs to reach families with children. The 2011 Programs research suggests that these Programs did successfully attract families with children. About 40 percent of typical State Park visitors are families with children but over 90 percent of I Can Camp, I Can Paddle and I Can Fish parties were families with children. Geocaching, Archery and Outdoors Extra had slightly less families with children, but still more than typical State Park visitors.

Ensuring that the DNR develops and promotes outdoor recreational opportunities for members of racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds is also an important focus for the DNR. Just 3 percent of typical State Park visitors are non-white and/or Hispanic/Latino while 17% of the Minnesota population is non-white and/or Hispanic (Kelly, 2008; US Census Bureau, 2010b). The 2011 Programs research suggests that programs are a promising way to reach this audience segment. I Can Camp, I Can Paddle and Geocaching respondents were similar in race and ethnicity to the Minnesota population. Archery, I Can Fish and Outdoors Extra were slightly more representative of the Minnesota population than typical State Park visitors. One contributing factor for why programs may have a more racially and ethnically diverse makeup is that young families with children tend to be more racially and ethnically diverse than older adults and thus marketing to families with children is believed to also attract a more racially and ethnically diverse clientele (Table 23).

**Table 23. Minnesota population by race, ethnicity and age, 2010**

	Non-white and/or Hispanic	White, non-Hispanic
0 to 9	29%	71%
10 to 19	23%	77%
20 to 29	22%	78%
30 to 39	21%	79%
40 to 49	14%	86%
50 to 59	9%	91%
60 to 69	7%	93%
70 and over	4%	96%
<b>Overall (all ages)</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>83%</b>

State Parks have long had a high-income and well-educated visitorship makeup. Programs respondents are even more well-educated and affluent than typical State Park visitors. This suggests that Programs are not drawing new users outside of this typical demographic subset.

It appears that Parks and Trails programs are attracting newer visitors to Minnesota State Parks. I Can Camp and to a lesser extent I Can Paddle seem to be attracting the most new visitors. I Can Camp has the greatest percentage of respondents who 1.) report never having visited the State Park they were at when surveyed, 2.) have only visited 1 State Park in 12 months, and 4.) have been visiting State Parks for 1 year or less. I Can Paddle has the second greatest percentage of respondents who 1.) report never having visited the State Park they were at when surveyed and 2.) have been visiting State Parks for 1 year or less. Aside from Outdoors Extra, the remaining programs, I Can Fish, Geocaching, I Can Climb and Archery seem to be bringing in visitors with less experience than typical State Park visitors. Considering the nature of the Parks and Trails target market – families with children – it may be that programs participants are simply not old enough to report the same number of years of visitorship as typical State Park visitors who are older (42% of State Park visitors are 45 or older; Kelly, 2008).

Overall, about the same percentage of Programs respondents use an annual pass as typical State Park visitors. Since a parks visitor must visit a State Park 6 times or more (annual permit is \$25, daily permit is

\$5) for an annual permit to be cost-effective, it stands to reason that annual permit holders are repeat, frequent State Park visitors. Additionally, program participants have visited about the same number of State Parks as typical visitors over the last 12 months. As such, while programs appear to be attracting visitors from their target market, they may be a subset of typical State Park visitors who are already visiting the parks. The exception to this may be I Can Camp and I Can Climb who have a larger percentage of respondents who used daily permits.

### ***Discussion of Variables of Interest to Assess Program Visitor Characteristics***

There are several features of Programs that may be responsible for successfully attracting new visitors to Parks and Trails. Advertising is one key component of success. Programs that were advertised, specifically I Can Camp, were participated in by more new park visitors, families with children and non-white/Latinos than events that were not as well advertised, namely Archery and Outdoors Extra. Additionally, respondents of advertised programs were most likely to state a key information source while respondents of non-advertised programs were most likely to state that they found out about the program after they arrived at the park indicating that non-advertised programs tended to attract more typical State Park visitors who happened to be present at the parks anyway. MN DNR PAT advertising directs potential parks and trails users to the MN DNR website where they can find more information. Since the MN DNR website is the most popular information source, it would appear that this marketing strategy is successful. Programs participated in by attendants who find out about programs after they arrive at the park no doubt increase satisfaction, likelihood to return and likelihood to tell others about the park, but do not directly reach people who are not already visiting the park.

Marketing in general proved to successfully attract families with children. This is especially evident with I Can Camp which is a program designed for all new campers but was staged and advertised to attract families with children. As a result 94 percent of groups were families with children. Over 90 percent of I Can Paddle and I Can Fish participant groups were also families with children. Targeting families with children – particularly through decreasing obstacles of participation such as a lack of time, money and skills – may have also contributed to greater representation by racially and ethnically diverse groups as they report similar obstacles to participation.

Providing the equipment necessary for a program is also critical. Nearly all of the respondents reported that they used the equipment provided. In addition, many respondents indicated in open-ended responses that they participated in the program because equipment was provided and they wanted to try the activity before investing in the equipment.

Respondents were very satisfied – even more so than typical park visitors – with their program offerings as well as their park visit in general. This is not surprising as personal interactions, as obtained by program and event staff, have been found to increase visitor satisfaction. High visitor satisfaction is a key characteristic of high and increasing visitorship levels as it increases the likelihood to return as well as the likelihood to tell friends and family about the park or program.

Understanding motivations for Program participation will help Parks and Trails continue to meet the anticipated needs of new visitors. While similar, Programs respondents' motivations for program participation vary from typical State Park visitors motivations for park attendance. The most common motivations for typical State Park visitors are have fun, enjoy nature, escape personal, social and physical pressures and spend time with family and friends (Kelly, 2008). Programs participants also want to have fun and spend time with family and friends but they are also motivated by the free/inexpensive program and want to try new things. Perhaps, these motivations tie into the family dynamic since family outings can be quite expensive and opportunities to do so for free or inexpensively are rare.

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## **Appendix A – 2010 Report**

### **2010 DNR Parks and Trails Special Events and Programs Study Highlights**

Prepared by Andrea Date and Tim Kelly, MN DNR, OMBS

January, 2011

#### INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the Division of Parks and Trails in collaboration with the Office of Management and Budget Services set out to conduct a pilot study designed to assess the effectiveness of special events and programs at attracting new users, particularly in parks and trails key target market – families with children. The pilot study goals were twofold: 1) to evaluate the research methods of the study and determine if a full-scale assessment would be possible and 2) to gain preliminary information regarding special event and program success. The five programs and special events studied over the summer of 2010 were: National Get Outdoors Day at Fort Snelling State Park on June 12<sup>th</sup>, Archery and I Can Camp! at various state parks and on various dates throughout the summer and I Can Fish! and Geocaching at Fort Snelling, Mille Lacs Kathio and William O'Brien State Parks on various dates throughout the summer.

Research findings were analyzed alone and in comparison with a recent 2007 study of State Park visitors, which identified the characteristics of typical park visitors. The comparison with 2007 provides an indication of whether the programs are drawing a different or typical type of visitor into the parks.

#### EVALUATION OF RESEARCH METHODS

The pilot study methods worked well, and a full-scale assessment using these methods can proceed.

The basic method used in the study is: at the conclusion of the program or special event, participants were given a survey and asked to fill it out and mail back the stamped envelope provided with the survey. There were no follow ups to non-respondents.

From previous work, it was expected that the survey response rate would be near 50 percent, and this was achieved by some of the surveys (table 1). For the full-scale assessment, it is suggested that the survey distributors strongly encourage program participants to return the survey by telling them the high importance of their response. This should help boost response rates.

#### TABULATION OF SURVEY RESULTS

The 2010 Special Events and Program Research was a pilot study with a limited sample size, but it does provide useful preliminary results.

#### **Information Sources on Programs**

Commonly identified information sources were the MN DNR website, information at a state park, an event flyer, family and friends, newspapers/magazines and TV/radio (table 2). Respondents also frequently noted that they found out about the event after arriving at the park. Found out about the event after arrival was identified by the greatest percentage of respondents from Archery and I Can Fish!, the MN DNR website was identified by the greatest percentage of respondents from Geocaching and I Can Camp! while family and friends was identified by the greatest number of respondents from National Get Outdoors Day.

## **Importance of Program to Park Visit**

The importance level of a program for visiting parks varied (table 3). Respondents for Archery and I Can Fish! most frequently stated that the program was not important at all in encouraging them to visit the park. This is not surprising, since many of these respondents found out about the program after arrival at the park. On the other hand, respondents for Geocaching, I Can Camp! and Get Outdoors Day most frequently stated the program was very important in encouraging their visits.

## **Experience with State Parks**

About one-third of 2007 state park visitors are new visitors to the park they are visiting (table 4). Similarly, about one-third of visitors to programs and special events are new to the park. However, two-thirds of I Can Camp! and nearly half of Geocaching respondents indicated that they are new visitors to the park.

About one-fifth (17%) of state park visitors report one visit per year with the remainder (83%) reporting 2 or more visits. A much higher percentage of I Can Camp! (43%) and Get Outdoors Day (32%) respondents reported one visit within the last year, indicating that these events are bringing new users to the park.

## **Equipment for Program**

Participants of Geocaching, I Can Camp! and I Can Fish! were queried regarding whether they used equipment provided for the program at the park or brought equipment with them. Nearly all respondents indicated that they used the equipment that was provided at the park (table 5).

## **Satisfaction of Park Visit**

Programs and Special event respondents are very satisfied with their park visit, even more so than typical 2007 park visitors (table 6). One-third to one-half (depending on program) reported that the visit exceeded their expectations compared to one-quarter of 2007 park visitors who reported that the visit exceeded their expectations.

## **Party Composition**

Programs and special events successfully attract families. While less than half of typical state park visitor groups in 2007 include teens or children, 70 percent of Geocaching, 80 percent of Get Outdoors Day and over 90 percent of Archery, I Can Camp! and I Can Fish! groups contain a teen or child (table 7).

## **Demographics**

Minnesota's population is currently about 84 percent white and 16 percent non-white or Hispanic yet 2007 visitation at Minnesota state parks is largely white (98%). Special events and programs are one way to increase diversity at state parks. Archery and Geocaching were similar to typical state parks visitors in that they were mostly attended by white, non-Hispanic participants (table 8). I Can Fish! was somewhat successful at increasing attendance by non-white or Hispanic participants (8%). I Can Camp! and Get Outdoors Day attendance was about 87 percent white and 13 percent non-white or Hispanic – more closely resembling Minnesota's population.

Minnesota State Park visitors are traditionally a very well-educated group. Nearly two-thirds of visitors hold bachelor's degrees or higher while about one-third of Minnesota's residents hold bachelor's degrees

or higher. Special events and program respondents are even more likely to hold a bachelor's degree or higher – eight of ten respondents in some cases.

Minnesota State Park visitors in 2007 are also an affluent group with nearly one-quarter of respondents reporting a household income of over \$100,000. Special events and program respondents are an equally or more affluent group with one-quarter to one-half of respondents (depending on program) reporting household incomes over \$100,000.

## DISCUSSION OF SURVEY RESULTS

While the 2010 Special Events and Program Research was a pilot study with a limited sample size, it does provide useful preliminary results. Importantly, it appears that special events and programs are attracting new visitors, and importantly, in our key target market – families with children. I Can Camp!, Geocaching and to a lesser extent I Can Fish! were most successful at attracting new users. In 2007 research, Minnesotans told the DNR that targeted programs and special events were key to their use of state parks.

Advertising is a key component of success. Events that were heavily advertized, I Can Camp! and Get Outdoors Day, were participated in by more new park visitors, families with children and non-white/Latinos than events that were not as well advertized, namely Geocaching and I Can Fish!. Additionally, respondents of advertised programs were most likely to state a key information source while respondents of non-advertized programs were most likely to state that they found out about the program after they arrived at the park. Events and programs participated in by attendants who find out about programs after they arrive at the park no doubt increase satisfaction, likelihood to return and likelihood to tell others about the park, but do not directly reach people who are not already visiting the park.

Marketing in general proved to successfully attract our target market. This is especially evident with I Can Camp! which is a program designed for all new campers but was staged and advertised to attract families with children. As a result 97 percent of groups were families with children. Over 90 percent of I Can Fish! and Archery participant groups were also families with children. By targeting families with children – particularly through decreasing obstacles of participation such as a lack of time, money and skills – these special events and programs also attracted a greater percentage of Non-white/Latino participants who have similar constraints.

Providing the equipment necessary for a program is also critical. Nearly all of the respondents for the programs that inquired about equipment reported that they used the equipment provided. In addition, many respondents indicated in open-ended responses that they participated in the program (especially I Can Camp!) because equipment was provided and they wanted to try the activity before investing in the equipment.

Respondents were very satisfied – even more so than typical park visitors – with their program and special event offerings as well as their park visit in general. This is not surprising as personal interactions, as obtained by program and event staff, have been found to increase visitor satisfaction. High visitor satisfaction is a key characteristic of high and increasing visitorship levels as it increases the likelihood to return as well as the likelihood to tell friends and family about the park or program.

Program and special event attendees are well-educated and affluent. Younger families have not had as many years to establish careers as older families; so while there is an increase in attendance by families at programs and special events, they may be of a more limited demographic subset and not necessarily characteristic of the general Minnesota population. Additionally, the fact that so many programs and special event participants are highly educated, while the general Minnesota population has a lower

percentage of people with bachelor's degrees indicates that these programs and special events are attracting a specific socioeconomic group while possibly not meeting the needs of the rest of Minnesota's population. It may be difficult to continue to attract more families with children if programs and special events are only drawing participants from a minor subset of the whole population.

## TABLES

Table A1. Response rates among respondents to the DNR Special Event and Program Pilot Research Study, 2010

	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp!	I Can Fish!	Outdoors Day
Surveys Distributed	158	115	125	109	64
Surveys Received	61	53	64	45	32
Response Rate	38.6%	46.1%	51.2%	41.3%	50.0%

Table A2. Information sources among respondents to the DNR Special Event and Program Pilot Research Study, 2010

	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp!	I Can Fish!	Outdoors Day
Chamber of commerce/CVBs		1.9%	1.6%		
Clubs/associations		1.9%			3.1%
Event flyer	3.3%	13.2%	6.3%	4.5%	18.8%
Explore MN website	1.6%	1.9%		2.3%	3.1%
Family & friends	3.3%	5.7%	7.9%	11.4%	21.9%
Found out about the event arrival	59.0%	15.1%		40.9%	
Info at one or more State Parks	8.2%	3.8%	4.8%	13.6%	
MN DNR website	18.0%	28.3%	28.6%	9.1%	9.4%
MN explorer newspaper		1.9%			
MN Special events catalog		5.7%		6.8%	9.4%
Newspapers/magazines	3.3%	11.3%	20.6%	11.4%	6.3%
Outdoor equipment stores			4.8%		12.5%
Places I stay		1.9%			
Social media		1.9%	1.6%		3.1%
TV/radio	1.6%	1.9%	22.2%		12.5%
Websites	1.6%	3.8%	1.6%		

*Grey shading represents information source by program with highest percentage of responses.*

Table A3. Importance of program to park visit among respondents to the DNR Special Event and Program Pilot Research Study, 2010

	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp!	I Can Fish!	Outdoors Day
Not important at all	57.6%	22.6%	6.3%	33.3%	3.1%
Slightly important	10.2%	15.1%	4.7%	11.1%	12.5%
Moderately important	23.7%	20.8%	20.3%	26.7%	25.0%
Very important	8.5%	41.5%	68.8%	28.9%	59.4%

*Grey shading represents importance level by program with highest percentage of responses.*

Table A4. Park experience among respondents to the DNR Special Event and Program Pilot Research Study, 2010

	2007 visitor survey	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp!	I Can Fish!	Outdoors Day
Visited this state park						
Yes	67%	71%	56%	34%	68%	62%
No	32%	29%	44%	66%	32%	38%
Number of MN State Parks Visited in last 12 months						
1	17%	7%	15%	43%	24%	32%
2 to 5	62%	59%	77%	53%	59%	57%
6 to 10	15%	23%	8%	3%	12%	7%
11 or more	6%	11%	0%	0%	5%	4%

Table A5. Equipment use among respondents to the DNR Special Event and Program Pilot Research Study, 2010

	Geocaching	I Can Camp!	I Can Fish!
Brought equipment with me	7.5%	4.7%	13.3%
I rented/used free equipment at the park	92.5%	95.3%	86.7%

Table A6. Satisfaction of park visit among respondents to the DNR Special Event and Program Pilot Research Study, 2010

	2007 visitor survey	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp!	I Can Fish!	Outdoors Day
Exceeded expectations	26%	41%	31%	38%	49%	38%
Completely satisfied	56%	52%	56%	33%	42%	31%
Mostly satisfied	13%	7%	12%	25%	7%	24%
OK – could have been better	3%	0%	2%	2%	2%	7%
Dissatisfied (to any extent)	2%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%

Table A7. Party composition of respondents to the DNR Special Event and Program Pilot Research Study, 2010

	2007 visitor survey	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp!	I Can Fish!	Outdoors Day
Parties with teens / children	41%	92%	70%	97%	92%	79%
Adult only parties	59%	8%	30%	3%	8%	21%

Table A8. Demographics of respondents to the DNR Special Event and Program Pilot Research Study, 2010

	2007 visitor survey	Archery	Geocaching	I Can Camp!	I Can Fish!	Outdoors Day
<b>Race &amp; ethnicity</b>						
White, Non-Hispanic	98%	98%	96%	87%	93%	87%
Non-white and Hispanic	2%	2%	4%	13%	8%	13%
<b>Education</b>						
Bachelor's degree or higher	59%	64%	80%	85%	70%	81%
<b>Income</b>						
Under \$30,000	11%	4%	14%	7%	10%	17%
\$30,000 to \$39,999	7%	8%	14%	4%	7%	7%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	12%	10%	0%	7%	7%	3%
\$50,000 to \$59,999	13%	6%	10%	4%	15%	14%
\$60,000 to \$74,999	18%	12%	14%	18%	15%	17%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	17%	26%	20%	13%	22%	21%
Over \$100,000	22%	35%	27%	48%	24%	21%

## Appendix B – Questionnaire

# Survey on Minnesota State Park and Trail Programs

**SECTION ONE — This section asks questions about the Program at which you received this survey.**

1. What Program did you (or a member of your party) participate in when you received this survey?  
(Check one)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I Can Fish! (also referred to as <del>“MinnAqua”</del> )                       | <input type="checkbox"/> I Can Camp!          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I Can Paddle!  | <input type="checkbox"/> I Can Climb!         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Geocaching for Beginners<br>(also referred to as <del>“Geocaching 101”</del> ) | <input type="checkbox"/> Archery in the Parks |

2. At what park or trail, and on what date and time did you—or a member of your party—participate in this Program?

Park or Trail name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: *from* \_\_\_\_\_ (AM or PM) *to* \_\_\_\_\_ (AM or PM)

3. Did you—or a member of your party—participate in this Program earlier this year? (Check one)

- Yes     No     Don't know

4. Including you, how many adults, teens, and children participated in this Program?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Number of children 12 or under | <input type="checkbox"/> Number of adults 31-40   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Number of teens 13-18          | <input type="checkbox"/> Number of adults 41-50   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Number of adults 19-24         | <input type="checkbox"/> Number of adults 51-60   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Number of adults 25-30         | <input type="checkbox"/> Number of adults over 60 |

5. How did you find out about this Program? (Check **all** your main sources of information)

### MN DNR sources

- Found out about the event after I arrived at the park  
 The MN DNR website  
 Information at one or more Minnesota State Parks  
 MN DNR electronic information kiosk  
 Minnesota State Park & Trail Program and Special Events Catalog (where obtained Catalog?  
\_\_\_\_\_ )  
 Program or special event flyer (where obtained flyer?  
\_\_\_\_\_ )

### Explore Minnesota Tourism sources

- Explore Minnesota Tourism website  
 Highway information centers  
 *Minnesota Explorer* newspaper

### General sources

- Family and friends  
 Facebook  
 Twitter  
 Boating/camping/sports shows  
 Places I stay (e.g., resorts, campgrounds)  
 Clubs or associations  
 Newspapers or magazines  
 TV  
 Radio  
 Websites  
 Outdoor equipment stores  
 Chambers of commerce/convention and visitors bureaus

6. The Programs use special equipment. Did you bring this equipment with you, or did you rent or use equipment available at the park or trail? (Check one)

- Brought equipment with me  
 I rented or used free equipment available at the park  
 Both—brought some with me , rented/used other available at the park

7. How important was participation in this Program in getting you to visit this park or trail? (Check one)

Not important at all       Slightly important       Moderately important       Very important

8. What were your **most** important motivations for participation in this Program? (Check all that apply)

- Have fun
- Enjoy natural scenery
- Spend time with family
- Try new things
- Learn more about nature
- Feel more self-confident
- Help family, friends or others develop their outdoor skills
- Other (please describe \_\_\_\_\_)
- Program was free/inexpensive
- Program included free equipment use
- Kids wanted to try the activity
- Activity was close to home
- Program provided safe learning environment
- Introduce children to the outdoors

9. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with this Program? (Check one)

Very satisfied       Dissatisfied  
 Satisfied       Very dissatisfied  
 Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied       Don't know

10. Would you recommend this Program to a friend? (Check one)

Yes     No       Don't know

11. How do you rate the quality of each item for this Program? (Circle one response for each item)

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know	Not applicable
a. Quality of instruction in this Program	E	G	F	P	DK	NA
b. Quality of facility/location where Program took place	E	G	F	P	DK	NA
c. Time of day this Program took place	E	G	F	P	DK	NA
d. Day of week this Program took place	E	G	F	P	DK	NA

e. Was this Program too long, too short, or about right? (Check one)

Too long     About right     Too short     Don't know

f. Were the number of people in this Program too many, too few, or about right? (Check one)

Too many     About right     Too few     Don't know

12. Please tell us about any changes you would make to this Program to make it better for you:

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**SECTION TWO — This section asks general questions about your visit to this state park.**

13. Which of the following activities did you participate in while visiting this park on this trip?

(Check all that apply)

- Camping       Picnicking       Observing/photographing nature  
 Hiking/walking       Swimming       Looking at kiosks or visitor center exhibits  
 Bird watching       Sightseeing       Taking a self-guided nature walk  
 Visiting historic site       Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

14. Including you, how many people by age class were in your party on this visit to the park?

- Number of children 12 or under       Number of adults 31-40  
 Number of teens 13-18       Number of adults 41-50  
 Number of adults 19-24       Number of adults 51-60  
 Number of adults 25-30       Number of adults over 60

15. How many hours did you spend in the park on this visit? \_\_\_\_\_ Hours

16. About how many miles is this state park from your permanent home? \_\_\_\_\_ Miles

17. Is this park visit part of an overnight trip away from home? (Check one)

- Yes       No

18. Which statement most closely reflects your feelings about this visit? (Check one)

- Exceeded expectations; it was a great experience  
 Completely satisfied  
 Mostly satisfied  
 OK - Could have been better  
 Somewhat dissatisfied  
 Very dissatisfied  
 Most dissatisfied; it was a miserable experience

19. What type of entrance permit did you use to get into this state park? (Check one)

- Daily vehicle permit (may have been included in Program fee)  
 Annual vehicle permit  
 No permit required when I visited or for the program/event I attended  
 Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

20. Have you ever visited this state park before? (Check one)       Yes       No       Don't know

21. Including this park, how many Minnesota State Parks have you visited in the last 12 months?

\_\_\_\_\_ Parks

22. For how many years have you been visiting Minnesota State Parks? \_\_\_\_\_ Years

(Please check here  if this is the first time you have *ever* visited a Minnesota State Park)

**SECTION THREE — This section asks questions about you so we can better understand park visitors.**

23. How important a part of your life is outdoor recreation? (Check one)

- Not important at all       Slightly important       Moderately important       Very important

24. When you recreate outdoors, what are your **most** favorite activities?

(Check all of your most favorite activities)

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camping  | <input type="checkbox"/> Picnicking   | <input type="checkbox"/> Visiting historic or archaeological sites           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hiking/walking   | <input type="checkbox"/> Dog walking  | <input type="checkbox"/> Visiting nature centers                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Motorboating   | <input type="checkbox"/> Canoeing/kayaking  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sailing/sailboarding                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sightseeing  | <input type="checkbox"/> In-line skating/roller-blading                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bicycling  | <input type="checkbox"/> Horseback riding   | <input type="checkbox"/> Downhill skiing/snowboarding                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Golfing  | <input type="checkbox"/> Geocaching   | <input type="checkbox"/> Sledding or snow tubing                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visiting zoos  | <input type="checkbox"/> Jogging/running  | <input type="checkbox"/> Driving for pleasure on scenic roads or in a park   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hunting  | <input type="checkbox"/> Ice skating outdoors                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Gathering mushrooms, berries, or other wild foods   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Off-road ATV riding  | <input type="checkbox"/> Cross-country skiing                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Snowmobiling  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxing outdoors  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sunbathing   | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor sports (e.g., soccer, ice hockey, softball) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Swimming   | <input type="checkbox"/> Viewing, identifying, or photographing nature and wildlife |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Participating in outdoor learning activities on your own or in a group |   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe) _____  |   |  |

25. What is the zip code of your permanent home? \_\_\_\_\_

26. Are you ( ) Male or ( ) Female

27. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ Years

28. Which of the following best describes your race? (Check all that apply)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> African American/black           | <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian/white  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaska Native | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian                            |   |

29. Do you consider yourself Hispanic/Latino/Spanish? (Check one) \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

30. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Check one)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some high school                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Some college            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Graduated from high school or GED             | <input type="checkbox"/> Graduated from college  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some vocational or technical school           | <input type="checkbox"/> Some postgraduate study |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Graduated from vocational or technical school | <input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate degree(s)  |

31. Please indicate below your total household income before taxes last year. (Check one)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under \$19,999       | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 to \$59,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$20,000 to \$29,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$60,000 to \$74,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$30,000 to \$39,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75,000 to \$99,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$40,000 to \$49,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> Over \$100,000       |

## Appendix C – Open-ended Responses

### Open-Ended Responses – Changes to Program

<b>I Can Fish</b>
A lot of people for a small area with lots of kids. Smaller groups, maybe a few sessions. Kyle did a nice job!
A smaller amount of people, it got too crowded
beautiful time of day - but night at dinner time (6-7) made it a little hard to plan around
Better promotion of program.
Closer to home. Longer time. My kids were having fun and didn't want to stop. Thank you!
Create a second dock near the current one for space. Better advertisement.
Don't have it on Sunday morning because it's difficult to get there on time after church.
Fish were not biting - what do you do? No changes.
They had left over worms from a previous day - so that was good cause we didn't bring worms, didn't know free fishing w/pole when going - just a great add for the day.
Fly fishing demonstration guy was too long for the kids & needs to talk more at their level.
Guide was very helpful & patient w/ beginners!
Hard when a lot of people were on dock. We loved the I can fish activity. Park people were incredibly patient & helpful w/ our 5 yr old. Wonderful program!
I would have more volunteers because my girls don't like worms.
if we caught fish it would have been more fun
It was fun & informational.
It was great - I can't think of any changes to make.
Kids all like to group by each other. This does not work well for fishing. Not really a way to fix that. Lots of tangled lines. All had fun!
Kyle was very informative.
Learning to fly-fish would make more sense with a trout stream instead of rod & reel fishing. It was still a fun time fishing though.
less rain, more fish - but I don't think the DNR can control that!
Let's fish is a wonderful intro to fishing. The instructors were wonderful, enthusiastic & patient. Ditto for the paddling/canoe intro. Park, scenery, classes - everything is great. Our only complaint is the campground - way too close to each other. yuk.
Limit participants due to limited shoreline and safety of kids when casting.
Maybe have Horses you can rent, would be nice. But everything was very fun & exciting. Thank you.
<b>MORE FISH CAUGHT</b>
More information on the fish we would be catching so we could identify them.
My son said he would recommend letting people know they need to be quieter while fishing. We didn't catch any fish but it was fun.
No changes need to be made, the program was perfect.
No changes recommended. But I just want to share that Kyle did a great job with the kids.
No changes to the program as it was presented.
none (n=3)
None - I liked the fact you had bait - and rods/reels
nothing - they were perfect!
nothing, it was great
Nothing. Loved Robin & Hannah! Very knowledgeable & great helpers.
Offer a few times (doesn't need to be every weekend) in the fall.
perfect
Stock the lake with more fish
Teach one or two more knots. We enjoyed learning the improved clinch knot.
The # of participants was few due to park just re-opening, which made it nice, but if there were more people, it would have been tough. Maybe need to offer it more than just once during the weekend.
The deck was a little bit too small for the number of people attending the event.
The instructor was very nice & helped one-on-one but could use training in how to manage/teach a group. The instruction part was not at all useful. The first ID poster handed out was very nice.
The location we fished at by the damn @ Kathio was a little crowded because there were also people who weren't part of the program fishing there. And when you get little kids casting hooks more room is needed for safety reasons.
These state employees are vital! Please keep these employees! They serve a tremendous purpose!
Thought everything was great. Don't change it. Melissa was a great teacher for fishing & Al too (camp host).
Thought instructor might teach kids a little more upfront about the lures & baits we were using and the type of fish that could be caught in the area we were fishing.

Too many people due to small fishing area, but there's no reason to limit it to less than 15-20. We made it work.
Too many people at the single site (offer a couple of spots) but plenty of equipment.
Too many people trying to fish in a small area. Lines became tangled.
Too many trying to fish in same area
Was good learning - only caught 1 fish among 4 children. Some were disappointed.
We loved Melissa. She was firm w/ the kids making them say please & thank you, yet encouraging & sweet. We had a great time fishing. The perfect activity for my nephew who loves to fish since I don't have any equipment.
Wheelchair difficulty, couldn't get to site.
Where we were fishing there was limited room. We expected more information/presentation.
Wonderful program!
Would be hard to limit # of people, but fishing space was limited.
Wouldn't change a thing. Melissa was spectacular!! She really knew her stuff. Her helpers Al & Issac were a big help too. Thank you so much for offering this fishing program.
<b>I Can Paddle</b>
1.) Clarity on where to meet. We were told to go to the visitor's center where we waited 'ended up being' late. 2.) We received 'what to bring' list after we arrived - online would have been helpful.
Absolutely nothing. We had a blast. Bob & Mike are Awesome! Thank you!
It was great.
More instructors out in canoes to help people w/skills & to help people get in & out of canoes.
No changes - Instructors Bob Dunker & Mike Sturlie were Awesome - very knowledgeable & helpful not to mention extremely patient w/ kids. Great job Bob & Mike
Offer age group levels of participation - Have more trips - promote family classes more
Offer more days and variations including kayak.
The deerflies were too much. This made the experience miserable.
The kids in our group got a bit tired and felt trip was too long. I like longer trips but would want to see a "kids" timed canoe trip. Also would like more advanced classes. More Classes! Eric P. and Eric W. ARE AWESOME!!
While canoeing could sing a simple song together to enhance group canoeing atmosphere. Could notify participants in advance about the bugs (deerflies) and suggest to wear masks or something else to protect.
Would like to combine an I can paddle with I can camp.
<b>Geocaching</b>
Add more levels, intermediate and advanced
Change the time to before or after mealtime. Change the day to Saturday.
great job
Hard to find the info about the class earlier in the day when exploring the park. Naturalist/park person told us about it so we returned that evening.
Have cool stuff in the caches like they have in the Jay Cooke State Park in rural Duluth.
Have the program earlier in the day so there is more time to try to find the others in the park.
I would have more than 2 locations to go to or less people involved b/c I could see exactly where everyone was going.
Make it a little harder, more caches and when we were going to second place people were still there, but it still worked.
Make the practice geocaches a little farther away so participants have more of a challenge.
More of the staff could have been more informative about the geocaching other than Alex, therefore it could have been a better experience. It was a great program but we weren't even told about all the courses on the property.
none (n=2)
None! Staff were helpful & courteous.
Thank you so much!
<b>I Can Camp!</b>
1.) More detailed list of what equipment would be available for use, e.g., I would have brought coffee grounds if known percolator would be available. 2.) Instructors could have done a better job of enforcing quiet time after 10pm. One group of families was very noisy.
A common area for all to go to, to socialize & hang around a working fire! : )
Abbie and Shawn were our coaches/guides and they were just wonderful. They made this experience so enjoyable and taught us a lot about camping! Thank you both for such a great experience! You two rock!!!
Change route to Hwy 52 vs Hwy 61 or at least give options
Combine programs, fish, paddle, Geocache & climb while camping.
Demonstration on cooking on campfire/cookstove
For our situation, being able to have the staff (myself) be able to comm. with the camp staff prior to the event. We had a group of kids with their own program. Getting better synergy with camp staff prior to event would have been beneficial.

Front desk did not tell us where to meet the group. We got lost and were late. Guides were awesome!
good - fun!
Group campsite was a long hike from the parking lot. Drive in spots are easier w/kids.
Have a picture or in a plastic bag of what poison ivy looks like for all to know.
Have quiet social & family time from 9pm until 6am, no screaming and running around
I enjoyed the program and have no suggestions.
I think the # of families that participated was fine but it would have been nice to have the tent "footprints" already laid out to map out where families should set up. Everyone just set up willie-nilly & our family ended up having to set up away from group & right next to a busy trail. We have visited state parks over the years, but infrequently & only for a few hours @ a time. This was our first overnight stay @ a state park. We've probably visited 5 or 6 over the last 15 years for day excursions.
I would want to cut down all the lectures.
Instruction on packing light for camping. A class on camping in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area or A Trip to the BWCA.
It can be challenging to get to the location by 10am but the leaders of our camp were very accommodating. Note - this program was made excellent because of Kip and Abby - the counselors - they were super friendly, engaging and fun. Glad there are 2-day options too.
It was a little crowded
It was fantastic. Abby and Nick were amazing and so positive and helpful.
It's perfect.
Just a bit more space between tents.
Just not to feel so rushed in the morning to pack up tent etc...
Literature said to bring twin sheets, but air mattresses were queen size. Jessie and Sean were great facilitators - very patient and kind!
Loved this program. Would not have taken my 5 year old camping if not for this program, "the best camp ever!" - Thank you.
More activities for kids. Kids were sad because we could not swim in the lake; therefore you need backup activities in these cases. Warning about mosquitoes, it was very bad.
more cooking suggestions besides hot dogs
More options for parks & dates
More organized activities
More privacy in individual/family camping areas; would have liked be in the actual campground area
More teaching for the kids. For example, fire safety, safety with animals.
none
None! It rained and was still great!
None! It was well organized & thoughtful. We enjoyed every aspect of it.
None, we had lots of fun.
Only for the cooking kits to contain tongs. Also, the literature says twin sheets when the mattresses were queen size.
Only two complaints: 1.) too many mosquitoes (but I don't think anyone can change that); 2.) no swimming in this particular park. But the staff were great, especially Sean!
Provide "carts" to transport belongings/gear from vehicle to group campsite - I'm 58 & brought 2 young children, so it was a lot of work to carry stuff, tote water, etc. The group site could use more latrines! How about a "grandparents" camp weekend? Camp leaders were fabulous!
Select a facility not that close to the airport - it was overly noisy & too much light for the night walk. Do not rush clean up on Sunday morning, we felt very rushed while we only started to get used to what we were doing.
So many mosquitoes! More kids activities.
The only thing I would add is to stress quiet hours in a campground.
This program really got the kids involved on the work. Nick & Jess were great! Nick taught the kids how to fish!
Try making a 3-day program or putting 2 programs together (e.g. I Can Paddle & I Can Camp).
We are disappointed to not be able to share the experience due to closures. This was the year to get our kids (Age 4, 6, 8) going with camping.
We enjoyed everything about this program - good equipment, having everything supplied, friendly staff, many activities, etc.
We had an absolute ball! All the conservationist leaders were great - especially they were great @ engaging our kids!
We had queen sized mattresses provided to us - but the packing list on the website said to bring TWIN fitted sheets for the air mattresses! Please fix that error! Also, maybe spray for mosquitoes. They were very bad, even w/ bug spray (lots!!), spray just to cut down on them, not get rid of them. Also, we are used to air conditioning & not being all sweaty - maybe a list of suggestions to help us stay more comfortable while camping . . . hydrate (so less sweating), eat garlic (so less mosquitoes) and remind us that EVERYTHING is going to get covered in dew outside. :) etc...
We were tight in our campsite, wouldn't use fire ring because tents were too close to it. Decrease # of people @ one time. We were within 10 feet of each other. Thanks Kip & Abby.
We wish we'd have chosen the 2-night program!
<b>I Can Climb!</b>

A 4th belayer would have moved the waiting to climb line along a little faster. Would have liked to climb all the routes. Only climbed one due to waiting line length. Great job! Thanks for making this available.
Group running program was disorganized and unprepared. Also seemed under staffed. Was late getting started by 40 minutes.
Had approx two hour wait, this could be better if they had more climbing instructors/points
Have a belayer for each rope site - 4 in the case of 08/21/11
Have it go longer in time, tell if you have to be registered by a certain time to be able to do the climb.
I would choose a place where small children could find a foothold and have a little more assistance for them, maybe 2 people instead of 1 so they could feel that they accomplished something.
Include more lines to climb, more belayers for more opportunities to climb (they also never took breaks - more staff would be helpful).
It would have been good to have one more VE person so all routes could be continually used. Also "gear to use" should not have been in the path of the line of people ready to climb next.
More belayers for more climbing
More belayers so more people can climb @ a time
More frequent
none
none - it was great!
none - loved every minute! Even waiting in line was fun to watch. Thanks for the great Father's Day experience! We will definitely look for more MN State Park Programs! our family now adores rock climbing.
Perfect. Just longer!
Program staff had to manage/belay the climber and the waiting climbers and the general public. From a safety standpoint that could cause problems. Suggest more staff at climbing sites to alleviate potential problems.
So many people! Great turnout - but maybe have more ropes set up so more can climb at one time?
Start earlier, at 9am instead of 10am (due to warm temp and sun-facing climbing area)
The number of participants was too large for the space and number of ropes used to climb. We waited about 1 1/2 hours to climb and we were only able to climb one time due to the length of wait and number of people. I would recommend a pre-registration or offering more sessions during the year.
The only change would be to better arrange the participation lines early in the program. Initially it was unclear how we should line up to participate in the rock climb.
The program was fantastic. My only suggestion would be to allow time for those who have signed up to do the climb of their choice. We waited in line for over 30 minutes so my girls could do the "easy" climb (they are 4 & 6 yrs old), but because it was past 2:00 they were asked to switch to a harder climb which was too hard for them & they couldn't make it up very far. The folks from Vertical Endeavors were fantastic! They made the rock-climbing a wonderful experience for my family. Thanks to all of you for offering this free program - it completely exceeded our expectations (except for the suggestion noted previously). We very much appreciate being able to participate. Thank you!!!
The wait time for the climb was 1.5 hours and the climb only took 10 min. Separate children w/ no experience from those w/ better skills.
There were 4 climbs roped up and needed another belay person to keep the line moving (only 3 belayers were available). The 3 belayers were excellent.
Too many people waiting to participate - offer more often.
Took a very long time of waiting in line before we could do the rock climb. The time could have been used by instructors to give us some instruction/info about rock climbing. Or find ways to reduce wait time.
We LOVE staff at both "I Can Climb" events we attended! The actual climb site at Tettagouche seemed VERY DIFFICULT for beginners but the experience & view was worth not being able to actually climb back up (without lots of assist)!
Website didn't indicate a registration deadline...they stopped accepting @ 1:00 whereas program advertised until 3:00, we made it there just in time but others were turned away.
Would have loved to go all the way down to the lake while repelling.
Would like one w/ adults only. Maybe have a week camp session w/ learning camp - canoe - rock climbing.
<b>Archery</b>
A few too many people / not enough targets.
able to shoot more arrows every time
Better location. Mosquitoes were BAD, really BAD.
Better queuing system
GREAT
Great park, but HOT weather, not too motivated camping buddies : )
have more targets to shoot at.
I think the program was well run and was really fun. We had a couple near us with dogs out of control and they were very brutal in disciplining their dogs. Park personnel did stop and warn them. We left early because of them.
I thought it was great!

I wish there were different targets to shoot at. I think last year there was at least a dinosaur and some rodents. Why weren't those here?
Instructor did a great job at helping those who needed help. My 7 yr old son enjoyed his time thoroughly.
It was a long time for each group to finish the archery lesson and shoot. The next group could be receiving the lesson while the first group shoots. The bathrooms were not very clean or kept up. Toilets backed up or plugged up often.
It was excellent - wouldn't change a thing
It was great. Could may be advertise more.
Last year there were more fun targets to shoot at. Where did they go?
longer archery range
Make different distances of targets.
Maybe a beginner lesson station and then a station for those that have already gone thru the beginning lesson. Lots of kids wanted to shoot again but the line was long and the same content explained.
Maybe speak more about safety and respect for others participating in the activity.
More arrows. The staff was friendly & helpful! It was great!
More signage. Posting signs on the bathroom door at the campground. We just happened to see the sign on Hwy 61.
More structure, more variety of targets to try.
More targets
Move the time to later in the afternoon or earlier in the morning and run it for another hour or two.
No changes! Very fun! Bearhead staff are GREAT! We've been coming here for years & LOVE it!
no changes. It was well organized and with good equipment.
None - great staff - did a good job teaching our girls. Gave lots of pos. feedback. Very personable.
None - It was great. Instructor was excellent, others involved were nice and accommodating.
none - thanks! Our son loved it! We came to see the falls, the archery was a bonus : )
nothing
Nothing, the instructor was great!
offer different distances to shoot
Pre-registration if possible
Program announcement at check-in. Cooler time of the day.
Program was great.
Sign-up times so each archer could get more contiguous play or shooting 10 instead of 5 arrows might help. Excellent program though.
Smaller bows for little kids.
Sorry! I have no suggestions or comments at this time.
Sun too hot, no shade
This was such a wonderful experience! The only thing we could have asked for was more targets/quivers so more than 1 family could shoot at a time. The rangers were FABULOUS!!! Especially with my 8 yr-old daughter: encouraging, patient, great role models. Thank you!
Tons of fun, would have been great to do it longer or on Sunday
When we arrived, they had cancelled the event due to rain. Initially it was a disappointment as we had traveled a distance to take part. Due to the weather clearing & the interest of other families as well as ours, they went ahead with the event but it started late. Once going, it was a great time & I appreciate the attention to safety measures taken.
<b>Outdoors Extra</b>
Do more of them! Get more canoes for use - limited group size, but that was ok too.
Don't change a thing!
Fort Snelling is a unique park in that planes fly overhead - while I still had a fabulous time - the planes did prevent me from hearing all the instruction. Linda did a great job with the canoeing portion. Kathy was a great yoga instructor esp. seeing it was our first yoga experience.
Good the way it is.
Have a program area w/ seats
Have more presenters
I did not see the events when I visited the website for the State Park or told when I registered. Should be more advertisement!!
I know there was a scheduling issue - and I am certainly glad that they still held the event - even though there was a very bright full moon, which interferes with star gazing. However, it was a wonderful experience being by the Old Seppman Mill under the full moon. Our family enjoyed it. Would do it again!
I love State Parks, I always enjoy the programs. I wish there were more programs.
I would like more time. And more telescopes.
I would like to get special information on the different park programs. An email notification would be very much welcomed and it may increase my chances to visit the parks.
Jim talked really fast & was hard to hear sometimes.

Kids like to touch/feel/hold stuff, so maybe pass around more of the props/displays.
Larger place and a microphone would have been good. Could have it outside when weather is good.
Make 2-3 spinners if time/able, even if it was for small cost, to know you would walk away w/ several new pieces of tackle would be so cool.
Make more than one spinner.
More light would be nice.
More publicity in newspapers in surrounding towns
morning schedule works well, pm often runs into supper
none (n=5)
None. I loved how honest and funny he was. It was great!
None. Keep the wonderful system going! Please continue the interpretive programs!! Where is the singer Charlie Maguire - He has sang many songs about Minnesota State Parks!! Nick Barthels did a wonderful job at Buffalo River State Park!
Pamphlets about the archeology & history of the area.
Program was perfect
Shorter introduction because the little kids started to get antsy before the reptiles came out. We were very unhappy to see the parks closed when the state shut down, especially when they bring \$ into our state.
Start earlier
This is just my opinion because I love animals but maybe to get to hold the animals.
This program was great.
Very happy to have programs in the park.
We arrived late. Had intended to go the beach and saw the program and spontaneously joined in with two grandsons. They enjoyed it immensely. Axe throwing, fire starting...what 10 year old boy wouldn't love that? : )
We enjoyed it. Thanks! Our kids are only 3 1/2 and 1 1/2... we hope do some more adventurous things with them in the future!
We felt for the quality of the program being offered it was not sufficiently promoted by the park. We could have been notified at check-in, but were not told. Also, we had no clue what kind of program it would be until we got there. The flier just said Dancing Light but did not say it was a music show. Many people missed a very good show.
Would have enjoyed trying kayaking as well as canoeing