

Recreational Use of Viewpoints on the Going-to-the-Sun Road, Glacier National Park

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Introduction

This study is part of a five year assessment of visitor use of the Going the Sun Road and the park shuttle system. This portion of the study had three primary goals:

- Assessing if the shuttle is increasing the number of people taking one way hikes on more backcountry trails and understanding how hikers use the shuttle to facilitate their hiking experiences.
- Assessing how shuttle riders and non-shuttle riders use roadside pullouts and if the shuttle influences roadside pullout use.
- Assessing how visitors use park-provided shuttle information sources, how useful these information sources are, and possibilities for making them more useful.

Methods

Data was collected using three different surveys and were implemented at Logan Pass and the Loop, which are busy roadside pullouts on the Going to the Sun Road and provide access to the Highline Trail.

Results and Conclusions

The study provided interesting and useful results. For example, a large majority of hikers on the Highline Trail used the shuttle to facilitate a one-way hike.



Furthermore, the ability to use the shuttle seems to be a key factor in people's decisions to hike the Highline Trail: a large majority of hikers surveyed decided to take this hike based on knowledge of the shuttle. However, it appears that hikers are still driving the road and parking in congested areas to reach one of the Highline trailheads – 70% of hikers surveyed parked at either Logan Pass or the Loop. Though the shuttle may be increasing the number of people hiking the Highline Trail, people's hiking experiences do not seem to be highly affected by an increase in hikers. A majority of hikers said that solitude, pristine natural beauty, and wildlife sightings had a positive impact on their hike. However, between 30 and 40% of hikers did feel that overcrowding, non-natural sounds and overflights had a negative impact on their hike.



In addition, the study results suggest that riding the shuttle does not significantly impact how many roadside pullouts people stop at or what they do at roadside pullouts, other than increasing the number of people who choose to hike the Highline Trail. Beyond this difference in hiking behavior, shuttle riders and non-shuttle riders engage in similar activities at the Loop and Logan Pass. This study also found that shuttle related information is considered very helpful by people who look at it. Approximately 50% of shuttle riders used some shuttle related information while between 20 and 40% of non-shuttle riders looked at some shuttle related information. Most shuttle information sources were considered helpful by over 80% of visitors who used them.

This study has some important management implications. For example, it suggests that shuttle related information and park employees should stress the benefits of parking at the transit centers to access major trailheads rather than driving to and parking at trailheads. In addition, the results suggest that shuttle related information could be placed more prominently in the park newspaper and website to encourage more people to use it.