

# **Project Summary**

## **Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit**

**Project Title:** Economic Values of National Park System Visitation: Meta Analysis, System-wide Application, and Reference Methodology Analysis

**Discipline:** Social science  
**Type of Project:** Research  
**Funding Agency:** National Park Service  
**Other Partners/Cooperators:** University of Montana  
**Effective Dates:** 8/10/2010 - 12/31/2011  
**Funding Amount:** \$150,000

**Investigators and Agency Representative:**

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**Project Abstract:** The National Park Service (NPS) requires an evaluation of the economic values of National Park System resources throughout the NPS system. These resources contribute substantial benefits to local economies in the form of business output, jobs, and tax revenues resulting from recreational visitation. Additionally, these resources also provide other significant values including the consumer surplus individuals derive from visitation. While significant effort and funding has been provided by the NPS for quantifying the contribution of NPS-related visitation to local economic activity through the MGM2 project, no similar system-wide analysis of visitor consumer surplus values has been undertaken to date. This Statement of Work describes a project that will estimate the direct use economic values of National Park System visitation for a wide spectrum of NPS units nationwide.

For many years, the NPS has sponsored the NPS Visitor Services Project through the University of Idaho. The Visitor Services Project (VSP) has surveyed many of the NPS units and all VSP park reports are available on the VSP website. The VSP surveys an average of 10-12 park units per year, and since its inception has conducted 195 in-depth visitor surveys covering 155 NPS units. Sample sizes for the VSP surveys tend to range from 500 to 1000 completed surveys, with the exception being for some smaller sites where samples may be in the 250-500 range. Currently, the VSP personnel are finalizing the incorporation of the entire collection of VSP survey data into one unified database. While information gathered for each park varies, some data is collected for all park units.

Heberling and Templeton (2009) demonstrated the use of VSP data for a single park unit in order to estimate an individual observation travel cost model of visitor net willingness to pay for park visitation. Bowker et al. (2009) utilized this methodology and national forest visitation survey data to estimate a broad range of system-wide NEVs. Duffield, Neher, and Patterson (2010) applied these methods to the available VSP database and estimated NEV per trip estimates for 65 new park-specific survey datasets. The Duffield, Neher and Patterson study extended the Heberling and Templeton (2009) analysis in two major respects: 1) increasing the number of parks for which TC NEV estimates of visitation are available, and 2) refining the travel distance variable in the travel cost models by utilizing route mapping software.

The current study is an extension of this previous analysis of VSP data within a count-data travel cost modeling framework.

**Outcomes with Completion Dates: December 31, 2011**

**Keywords:** economic value, Visitor Services Project, park resources, National Park System, University of Montana