



# National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public

*2008–2009*

## Racial and Ethnic Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors

Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/SSD/NRR—2011/432



**ON THE COVER**

Petrified Forest National Park, Arizona

Photograph by the National Park Service Visitor Services Project

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## Executive Summary

In 2009 the National Park Service (NPS) completed its second Comprehensive Survey of the American Public, a nationwide telephone survey consisting of 15-minute interviews with 4,103 respondents across the United States. Both landline and cellular phone numbers were randomly sampled, and interviews were conducted in Spanish as well as in English.

As one of a series of technical reports from the survey, this paper compares major racial and ethnic groups on their visitation behavior and on related attitudes and opinions about the National Park System. Race is a social classification based on perceived differences in physical characteristics, whereas ethnic status is based on a shared cultural characteristic such as national origin. Thus “African American” and “white” are racial categories, but “Hispanic American” is an ethnic category reflecting ancestral ties to Spain.

The present report is part of an ongoing effort by the NPS to understand how different population groups relate to the National Park System. Highlights of the results include:

1. Those U.S. residents who could name a unit of the National Park System they had visited in the two years before the survey were disproportionately white and non-Hispanic.
2. Hispanic respondents (of any race) and African Americans each comprised a smaller share of recent visitors than their proportion of the total sample. Asian respondents and American Indians/Alaska Natives were represented among recent visitors in roughly the same proportions as their fractions of the sample as a whole.
3. Visitation differences by race/ethnic group seem not to have changed much since the previous iteration of the NPS Comprehensive Survey in 2000.
4. Among respondents who had not visited in the past two years, the reason for not visiting more often that was most widely endorsed was that they “just don’t know that much about National Park System units.” Hispanic, Asian, and African Americans were more likely to agree with this statement than were non-Hispanic whites, both among recent visitors and among non-visitors.
5. Very few non-Hispanic whites saw NPS units as unsafe, unpleasant, or providing poor service, whereas up to a quarter of those in other groups agreed with these reasons for not visiting. Hispanic non-visitors more often expressed such concerns than did members of any other group.
6. Reasons for not visiting were more widely endorsed by Hispanic respondents when the interview was conducted in Spanish than when they were interviewed in English. Such differences serve as a reminder that diversity exists within race/ethnic groups, as well as between them.
7. During their most recent visit, Hispanic Americans were less likely than non-Hispanic whites or African Americans to talk informally with a park ranger and to view indoor

exhibits, while Asian Americans were the most likely to view indoor exhibits and go to a visitor center. African American visitors were the most likely to view outdoor exhibits and to participate in cultural demonstrations and ranger-led tours.

The report concludes with recommendations for ways to increase awareness of NPS units among diverse groups, to translate awareness into increased visits, and to create a welcoming atmosphere throughout the National Park System. Providing accessible, relevant, and desirable experiences to underserved populations can help to sustain broad public support for national parks in an increasingly diverse America.



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WYSAC has a staff of 20 full-time employees and numerous part-time student workers, research aides, and interviewers. Together they conduct public opinion surveys, evaluation research, and software development for state and local governments and federal agencies. In particular, Bistra Anatchkova was Co-Principal Investigator of the NPS Comprehensive Survey, while Mike Dorssom and Brian Harnisch were active participants throughout the project.



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## Introduction

The issue of underserved populations is a critical one for the National Park Service (NPS) in an increasingly diverse twenty-first century America. This report uses data from a nationwide survey to compare major racial and ethnic groups on their visitation behavior and on related attitudes and opinions about the National Park System.

As part of its mission to protect and provide for America's national parks, national monuments, and the other natural, historical, and cultural sites it manages, the NPS obtains opinion data from the public in a variety of ways. These sources, used by the NPS in examining and developing its management policies, include customized surveys in particular parks (the Visitor Services Project), brief visitor satisfaction surveys (the Visitor Survey Card Project), and a nationally representative survey of U.S. adults (the Comprehensive Survey of the American Public). The distinguishing characteristic of the national survey is that non-visitors as well as visitors are interviewed.

The first NPS Comprehensive Survey of the American Public (hereafter, CSAP1) was conducted in 2000 by Northern Arizona University. It generated a series of reports archived on the NPS website at <http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/archive.cfm#CompSurvey>, including an analysis of differences by race and ethnicity (Solop *et al.*, 2003).

In 2008-09, a second iteration of the Comprehensive Survey (CSAP2) was conducted by the Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center (WYSAC) at the University of Wyoming. Like its predecessor, CSAP2 was administered through telephone interviews on a nationwide sample. It provided updated information on some of the questions covered in the 2000 survey, addressed additional topics not covered in 2000, and refined the survey methods. As in 2000, CSAP2 has generated a national report, seven regional reports, and several topical reports, all of which will be made available on the NPS website at <http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/>. The present topical report examines the CSAP2 data for differences across racial and ethnic groups.



## Diversity and the National Parks

When the NPS was created by the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916, the United States had completed its westward expansion and was securing those gains. Establishment of the first national parks and passage of the Organic Act were pieces of that consolidation. The Act sought to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (NPS Organic Act, 1916, 39 Stat. 535).

For many Americans, the national parks represent both a sense of place (what America was before European settlement) and a marker of identity (a rugged and untamed character) (Runte, 1987; Stokowski, 2002). However, because different groups of people arrived on the North American continent at various times and under different conditions, the lands set aside as units of the National Park System may not have the same subjective meaning for all racial and ethnic groups in America.

Some parks are tied to historical events that have different resonance for different groups of Americans (Linenthal, 1993). Indeed, for some the national parks may represent loss and expropriation (Hough, 1991; Spence, 1999; Jacoby, 2001) rather than exploration and wilderness. In addition, some park units reflect natural landscapes and their grandeur, others are embedded in urban areas, and still others commemorate historic people and events (Lee, 1972; Floyd and Gramann, 1993; Floyd *et al.*, 1993; Floyd, 1999; Grossman, 2010). To the extent that racial and ethnic groups differ in their geographic locations, their economics, and their histories, they may also differ in the cultural expression they find relevant in the parks. Hence they may have different patterns of park visitation and park activities.

In the U.S., most social science research relating recreational activities to race or ethnicity has focused on differences in rates of participation in outdoor recreation across social groups. Gramann and Allison (1999) summarize the history of this research and many of the issues it has raised. As they note, all modern societies are stratified, and one’s position in a stratification system affects one’s life chances. Along with differences in income, education, and gender, race and ethnicity have been primary dimensions of stratification in the U.S.

Historically, to be viewed as non-white in America has had large implications for access to society’s important institutions, including government (and national parks). Research comparing non-Hispanic whites with African Americans, Asian Americans, or Mexican Americans and other Hispanic groups has shown that racial and ethnic differences exist in outdoor recreation behavior (Cordell *et al.*, 2004; Outdoor Foundation, 2010; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). In particular, many people of color, especially African Americans, tend to participate less frequently than whites in visiting national parks (Solop *et al.*, 2003) and in a range of other outdoor recreational activities.

The NPS has supported research on the perspectives of different racial and ethnic groups concerning access constraints, preferred experiences, perceptions of being welcomed, and actual visitation to National Park System units (for reviews, see Gramann, 1996; Floyd, 1999). Of particular importance in this regard is the CSAP1 topical report on race/ethnic differences (Solop *et al.*, 2003). In addition, as part of the development of CSAP2, the NPS commissioned WYSAC

to conduct two focus groups in 2007, one with African Americans and the other with Hispanic Americans, to obtain culturally specific feedback on the content and wording of the questionnaire. NPS staff and management have also engaged in reflective self-assessments to better understand America's growing diversity and its impact on the park system.

All of these approaches are viewed as necessary for the NPS to incorporate diversity in park planning, programming, and interpretive narratives (Discovery, 2000; NPS Conservation Study Institute *et al.*, 2008; National Park Service, 1997; National Parks Second Century Commission, 2009a and 2009b). The present report is part of an ongoing effort by the NPS to understand how different population groups relate to the National Park System.



## Some Notes on Methods

Details on survey methodology are provided in the CSAP2 national report, which includes the full text of the interview script and tables of results for each item. A separate topical report, also available on the NPS website, focuses on methodological and substantive differences between CSAP1 and CSAP2. Here we summarize only those aspects of method most relevant to assessing racial and ethnic differences.

### Sampling

In both iterations of the national survey, data were obtained through telephone interviews with adults in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Interviewing was done by trained survey staff at Northern Arizona University (for CSAP1) and the University of Wyoming (CSAP2).

To improve coverage of racial and ethnic subgroups, refinements in the sampling approach were introduced in the second survey. CSAP1 had used a Random Digit Dialing sample of landline residential telephone numbers, and obtained 3,515 completed interviews conducted in English during the spring of 2000. CSAP2 randomly sampled both landline and cell phone numbers, with interviews conducted in either English or Spanish as needed. This second iteration of the survey obtained 4,103 completions in four seasonal waves from April 2008 to March 2009.

By adding a cell phone sample, CSAP2 sought better coverage of groups that tend to be under-represented in landline samples, such as younger adults and people of color (see Keeter *et al.*, 2007). And by providing for interviewing in Spanish as well as in English, CSAP2 could include Hispanic Americans regardless of which language they used.

### Defining Race and Ethnicity

As noted by Solop *et al.* (2003), race is a social classification based on perceived differences in physical characteristics. Ethnic status is based on national origin or a shared cultural characteristic. Thus “African American” and “white” are racial categories, but “Hispanic American” (or Latino) is an ethnic category reflecting ancestral ties to Spain. Hispanics can be of any race; for example, a person may self-identify as both Hispanic and African American or Hispanic and white.

Following a survey protocol required by the Office of Management and Budget, in both CSAP1 and CSAP2 respondents were asked first to identify their ethnicity (Hispanic or not Hispanic) and then to select one or more racial categories. In this report all respondents who self-identified on the first of those questions as “Hispanic or Latino/a,” are combined in a single category (“Hispanic, any race”). This categorization is independent of their racial self-identification in the follow-up question, and of the language used for their interview. The term “white, non-Hispanic” is used to describe respondents who self-identified as such. The remaining racial categories used in this report, also based on the second self-identification question, are “black or African American,” “Asian,” and “American Indian or Alaska Native.”

Under the OMB protocol, respondents could place themselves in more than one racial category, e.g., black *and* white, or American Indian *and* white. Because of the small number of individuals who chose more than one race, and the wide variety of multi-racial combinations they chose, results for this group are not analyzed in the present report. There were also too few Hawaiian/

Pacific Islanders to include that category in the analyses here. Respondents who declined to choose any race category are excluded as well, unless they had identified themselves as Hispanic (in which case they are included in the “Hispanic, any race” category).

### **Measuring Visitation**

Recent visitors were defined in both surveys as respondents who could name a valid unit of the National Park System they had visited in the previous two years. All others were classified as non-visitors (i.e., as not recent visitors, though many of them did report having visited at some earlier point in their lifetime). The surveys also asked about the number of visits in the past two years, but only the most recent of those visits was validated by checking the destination named against a list of all NPS units. For consistency with the approach used in CSAP1, the present analysis relies on the validated dichotomy of recent visitor/non-visitor.

The CSAP2 interviewing added to the visitation questions several features designed to assist interviewers in accurately recording the NPS units that respondents said they visited. For example, in CSAP2 the list of units used by the interviewers included not only official unit names (as in CSAP1), but also common alternative names. In part as a result of such refinements, visitation estimates derived from CSAP2 are higher than those obtained in CSAP1.

Another methodological factor could also produce an increase in estimated visitation. Willingness to participate in telephone surveys has been dropping over the past decade. This trend suggests that self-selection of survey respondents with an interest in national parks may have been greater for CSAP2 than for CSAP1. People who were regular visitors to the parks could have been more interested in the topic of the survey, and hence more likely to agree to participate.

By one measure of survey participation, both CSAP1 and CSAP2 achieved similar “completion rates,” around 90%. By another measure, however, the CSAP2 “response rate” was only 12.5%. No comparable response rate figure was reported for CSAP1, but it may have been higher. If so, then the visitation estimate from CSAP2 could be affected by more self-selection of recent visitors as survey participants.

### **Weighting the Sample**

To mitigate potential problems from non-response, in both CSAP1 and CSAP2 the survey results are weighted. Weighting is a statistical adjustment that brings selected demographic characteristics of the survey sample in line with independent measures of the same demographic characteristics, such as those reported by the Census Bureau. To the degree that demographic factors used in the weighting are correlated with other characteristics addressed in the survey, such as opinions and behaviors, weighting helps to reduce the adverse effects of non-response. However, some bias is unavoidable when missed people have opinions or behaviors different from those of interviewed people in the same demographic group.

In CSAP2 the weights were further adjusted to reduce the weighted sample size by about one-third. The exact deflation factor was calculated so as to compensate for the increase in statistical margins of error that is produced by weighting survey data (Dorofeev and Grant, 2006). Correcting the margin of error is useful when testing for statistically significant differences between groups. For descriptive statistics such as percentages, results are unaffected by deflating

the sample. CSAP1 did not explicitly provide significance tests in its reports, and did not deflate the sample size.

After deflation, the 4,103 respondents in CSAP2 yield an effective sample size of 2,706. Excluding those who could not be categorized in one of the five race/ethnic groups, the weighted sample size is 2,582. As shown in the CSAP2 national report, the number of cases available for analysis varies from question to question, due to the exclusion of respondents who declined to answer particular items. Item non-response appeared largely unrelated to race or ethnicity. Not surprisingly, non-visitors were more likely than recent visitors to decline an answer when asked about specific parks-related policies or activities. Presumably recent visitors felt more familiar with such issues, and more willing to express opinions.

### **Statistical Testing**

Significance tests comparing the two surveys are not reported here. Such tests would imply a degree of precision in the comparisons that is not warranted given the methodological differences summarized above. As a rough guideline, estimates based on either sample as a whole generally have a statistical margin of error of less than two percentage points (with 95% confidence). When analyzing only non-Hispanic whites in either sample, the margin of error is still less than three percentage points. For Hispanic Americans or African Americans, it is about six percentage points, while for Asian Americans and American Indians/Alaska Natives it is over 10 percentage points because the subsamples for these two groups are quite small.

When examining only the 2008-09 data, chi-square tests are used to assess the statistical significance of differences across race/ethnic groups. (For testing differences between two Hispanic subgroups in Table 5, Fisher's exact test is reported rather than the Pearson chi-square.) A small "p-value" (e.g.,  $p < .05$ ) indicates that the differences being tested can be generalized (with 95% confidence) from a sample of this size to the population as a whole. Larger p-values, on the other hand, suggest that the observed differences might well be due to chance variation in the survey sample.

The chi-square test can be unreliable when some of the subgroups being examined are very small. Therefore, the test results reported refer only to differences among the three largest race/ethnic groups in the CSAP2 sample (white, non-Hispanic; Hispanic, any race; and black or African American). A significant chi-square test implies a high level of statistical confidence that at least one of these three groups differs from one or both of the others in the population.

For descriptive purposes only, percentage differences are also shown for Asian Americans and American Indians/Alaska Natives. Even for this limited purpose, the results from these two small subsamples should be interpreted with caution.



## Results

### Who Visits?

Recent visitors were defined as people who had been to a unit of the National Park System within the past two years and who could identify that site with enough specificity for the interviewer to find it on a list of close to 400 named units managed by the NPS. As shown in the bottom row of Table 1, almost half of the weighted sample (47%) met this definition in 2008-09, compared to less than a third (32%) in 2000.

Table 1: Percent of Each Race/Ethnic Group Who Named a Valid NPS Unit Visited in the Past Two Years, by Survey Year

Race/Ethnicity	2000 Survey		2008-09 Survey	
	%	Wtd. N	%	Wtd. N
White, non-Hispanic	36%	2,452	53%	1,807
Hispanic, any race	27%	379	32%	348
Black or African American	13%	361	28%	307
Asian	32%	77	53%	80
American Indian or Alaska Native	37%	15	37%	39
Total	32%	3,284	47%	2,582

\*1

It seems unlikely that visitation to park units increased so markedly during the decade. As measured by entrance counts compiled at the parks, the total number of park visits did not change much between the CSAP1 survey in 2000 and 2009, when CSAP2 was completed. The entrance count totals (which include international visitors and repeat visits) stood at about 285 million visits in both years (NPS, 2010). Therefore, refinements in cross-referencing the list of unit names, along with other methodological factors, probably account for most or all of the apparent increase in visitation percentage for U.S. residents indicated in Table 1.

Consistent with this overall increase, the visitation percentages within race/ethnic groups were generally higher in CSAP2 than in CSAP1. Non-Hispanic whites tended to have high visitation, while African Americans and Hispanic Americans visited at the lowest rates in both survey years. Results for the American Indian/Alaska Native category and for Asian Americans are only approximate because of the small subsamples in these groups.

In Table 1, the percentages are calculated with the number of park visitors in each race/ethnic group as the numerator and the total number of respondents in each group as the denominator. This shows the percentage within each race/ethnic category who visited in the previous two years.

To view the data from another perspective, Table 2 reports the percentages calculated in the opposite direction. Here, the weighted number of respondents in each race/ethnic group is the numerator, and the denominator is either the total in all groups (for the two “All” columns) or the

total visitors (for the two “Visitor” columns). This approach helps to standardize for the methods-induced increase in apparent visitation as recorded in the surveys. It reveals which race/ethnic groups are over-represented or under-represented among recent visitors compared to their share of the total sample.

Table 2: Percent Distribution across Race/Ethnicity, All Respondents vs. Visitors, by Year

Race/Ethnicity	2000 All	2000 Visitors	Diff.	2008-09 All	2008-09 Visitors	Diff.
White, non-Hispanic	74%	83%	+9	70%	78%	+8
Hispanic, any race	12%	10%	-2	13%	9%	-4
African American	11%	4%	-7	12%	7%	-5
Asian	2%	2%	0	3%	3%	0
American Indian/Alaskan	<1%	<1%	0	2%	1%	-1
Weighted N	3,284	1,058	--	2,582	1,205	--

Non-Hispanic whites were “over-represented” among visitors by about the same degree in both survey years. That is, they constituted roughly eight or nine percentage points more of the visitors than their share of the sample as a whole. This is consistent with research reviewed above showing that non-Hispanic whites tend to participate more frequently than members of other race/ethnic groups in a range of outdoor activities, including visits to national parks.

African Americans were the most “under-represented” visitor group in both years, making up 11% and 12% of the sample in CSAP1 and CSAP2, but only four and seven percent of the visitors. The degree of under-representation (a seven percentage point difference in 2000 and five points in 2008-09) declined slightly between the two surveys. The change might reflect an increase in visitation by African Americans, but it is small enough that chance variation between the two samples cannot be ruled out. A third iteration of the national survey will be needed to establish a trend.

Hispanic Americans also were under-represented among visitors, by two percentage points in 2000 and four points in 2008-09. This apparent change may suggest that individuals who could only be interviewed in Spanish (included in CSAP2, but excluded from CSAP1) are less inclined to visit national park sites than are Hispanic Americans who could be interviewed in English. We explore that interpretation further in Table 5, below.

Finally, in both survey years, Asian Americans and American Indians/Alaska Natives are each represented among visitors in about the same proportion as their small fraction of the sample as a whole.

### Why Not Visit More Often?

Both CSAP1 and CSAP2 asked about reasons for not visiting national parks more often. Because of differences in question wording and response choices between the two surveys, the focus here is exclusively on race/ethnic comparisons at a single point in time, based solely on the CSAP2 data. (A separate topical report is available that compares the results over time.)

The interviewers asked all respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about perceived barriers to visitation. The statements were introduced identically to both visitors and non-visitors, with generic phrasing about “why people don’t visit National Park System units more often.” Five response choices were offered, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with “neither agree nor disagree” as the middle option. The statements were worded in the negative, as reasons for not visiting (e.g., hotel costs are “too high” or NPS units are “not safe”). Agreement with any of them therefore indicates some dissatisfaction or negative opinion about NPS units.

Table 3: Percent of Visitors Agreeing with Reasons for Not Visiting NPS Units More Often, by Race/Ethnicity (2008-09 Survey)

Reason	All	White	Hisp.	Afr-Am.	Asian	Am Ind.
The hotel and food costs at National Park System units are too high	36%	33%	47%	54%	40%	59%
Reservations at NPS units have to be made too far in advance	36%#	36%	41%	27%	39%	33%
It takes too long to get to any NPS unit from my home	35%	33%	37%	54%	43%	26%
I just don't know that much about NPS units	30%	26%	34%	56%	34%	61%
NPS units are too crowded	28%	28%	33%	14%	37%	18%
It is difficult to find a parking space within NPS units	24%	22%	32%	31%	44%	29%
Entrance fees are too high at NPS units	20%	18%	32%	25%	4%	37%
There isn't enough information about what to do once inside a unit	17%	13%	33%	36%	23%	6%
NPS units are not accessible to persons with physical disabilities	14%	11%	25%	28%	5%	21%
I prefer to spend my free time doing electronic activities	12%#	11%	17%	11%	25%	28%
NPS employees give poor service to visitors	4%	3%	8%	11%	11%	9%
NPS units are unpleasant places for me to be	3%	2%	9%	6%	0%	0%
NPS units are not safe places to visit	3%	2%	6%	5%	4%	0%

Chi-square tests comparing only white (non-Hispanic), Hispanic, and African American within each row: tests are significant ( $p < .05$  or beyond), except as noted (#,  $p > .10$ ).

Table 3 presents the percentage of recent visitors who agreed (either strongly or somewhat) with each statement. Although they were presented to respondents in random order, the statements are listed in the table based on the fraction of visitors who agreed, from highest to lowest. The first column shows the results for all responding visitors, while the remaining columns refer to visitors within each race/ethnic subsample.

As shown in the table, white non-Hispanic visitors tended to be more positive about their park experiences than visitors in other race/ethnic groups. Hispanic visitors had higher percentages of agreement, and therefore more negative opinions, than non-Hispanic whites on all 13 items. For African American and Asian visitors, the comparison is 10 of 13, while for American Indians it is seven of 13.

Relatively high levels of agreement with statements about a lack of park knowledge and park information suggest that for visitors other than whites, the park experience was not as familiar. In addition, both African American and Hispanic visitors were more likely than non-Hispanic whites to perceive the parks as unsafe or unpleasant and to believe that NPS personnel give poor service, although the percentage of visitors agreeing with any of those three viewpoints was small.

For all but two of the statements in Table 3, differences across the three largest race/ethnic categories easily surpassed the conventional criterion for statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ). Because of small cell sizes, the results for Asian Americans and American Indians/Alaska Natives are not considered in these tests.

Table 4 presents the agreement percentages for non-visitors on the same 13 statements, in the same order. Here the differences across the three largest groups are statistically significant on all of the items. The most widely endorsed statement for non-visitors, in every group except American Indians/Alaska Natives, was that they “just don’t know that much about National Park System units.”

Many of the “non-visitors” reported park experiences at some time in the past (although not in the previous two years), and even those who had never visited were generally willing to give their opinions about why people don’t visit more often. Whether based on direct personal experience or just overall perceptions, individuals who feel negatively about NPS units would be less likely to visit than those who have positive opinions. Conversely, a favorable visit could produce more positive attitudes toward parks. For example, those who visit a park for the first time might find that the costs are not as high as they had expected, or they might have their safety concerns allayed. Hence, not surprisingly, negative opinions were expressed more often by non-visitors than by visitors.

In general, race/ethnic differences were also greater among non-visitors than visitors. For the non-visitors in Table 4, as for the visitors in Table 3, Hispanic respondents had more negative opinions than non-Hispanic whites on all 13 items. For African American non-visitors, the comparison is 11 of 13, for Asian Americans it is ten of 13, and for American Indians/Alaska Natives it is eight of 13. Most of these differences, especially among Hispanic respondents, were larger for non-visitors than for recent visitors.



Only five percent of white non-Hispanics saw parks as unsafe, unpleasant, or providing poor service, even when they had not visited recently, whereas up to a quarter of non-visitors in other groups felt that way. Hispanic non-visitors tended to report the most adverse opinions of any group on these three items, and on most of the other statements as well.

Table 4: Percent of Non-visitors Agreeing with Reasons for Not Visiting NPS Units More Often, by Race/Ethnicity (2008-09 Survey)

Reason	All	White	Hisp.	Afr-Am.	Asian	Am Ind.
The hotel and food costs at NPS units are too high	46%	40%	59%	56%	43%	28%
Reservations at NPS units have to be made too far in advance	34%	32%	52%	25%	28%	35%
It takes too long to get to any NPS unit from my home	49%	47%	56%	48%	59%	50%
I just don't know that much about NPS units	60%	56%	65%	66%	75%	47%
NPS units are too crowded	29%	27%	46%	20%	26%	14%
It is difficult to find a parking space within NPS units	26%	19%	41%	35%	27%	26%
Entrance fees are too high at NPS units	28%	24%	40%	33%	28%	5%
There isn't enough information about what to do once inside	28%	23%	42%	28%	41%	49%
NPS units are not accessible to persons with physical disabilities	17%	14%	25%	18%	23%	10%
I prefer to spend my free time doing electronic activities	22%	17%	24%	31%	63%	35%
NPS employees give poor service to visitors	9%	5%	16%	14%	14%	16%
NPS units are unpleasant places for me to be	9%	5%	23%	9%	9%	25%
NPS units are not safe places to visit	10%	5%	24%	16%	5%	8%

Chi-square tests comparing only white (non-Hispanic), Hispanic, and African American within each row: all tests are significant ( $p < .05$  or beyond).

### Does Language Matter?

To examine the opinions of Hispanic Americans more closely, an analysis was performed comparing Hispanic respondents by language of interview (without regard to their visitor status). All self-identified Hispanic respondents who were interviewed in English comprised one subgroup (a weighted subsample size of 221), while those interviewed totally or mostly in Spanish comprised the other (weighted  $n=127$ ). Again, the questions of interest are the same as in the previous two tables, concerning why people do not visit NPS units more often. The results are presented in Table 5, along with the complete English and Spanish wordings of each item.

Table 5: Percent of Hispanic Respondents Agreeing with Various Reasons for Not Visiting NPS Units More Often, by Language of Interview (2008-09 Survey)

Reasons	English interview	Spanish interview
The hotel and food costs at National Park System [NPS] units are too high (El costo del hotel y las comidas son demasiado altos)	52%*	60%
Reservations at [NPS] units have to be made too far in advance (Las reservaciones para poder visitar los Parques Nacionales tienen que hacerse con mucha anticipación)	43%	58%
It takes too long to get to any [NPS] unit from my home (Me toma mucho tiempo llegar a cualquier propiedad del Sistema de Parques Nacionales desde mi casa)	43%	62%
I just don't know that much about [NPS] units (Simplemente no estoy muy familiarizado con el Sistema de Parques Nacionales)	52%*	60%
[NPS] units are too crowded (El Sistema de Parques Nacionales siempre está muy lleno de gente)	30%	62%
It is difficult to find a parking space within [NPS] units (Es difícil encontrar estacionamiento dentro del Sistema de Parques Nacionales)	33%	46%
Entrance fees are too high at [NPS] units (El costo de las entradas es demasiado alto)	29%	51%
There isn't enough information about what to do once inside a [NPS] unit (No hay suficiente información disponible acerca de que actividades se pueden hacer una vez dentro de los Parques Nacionales)	35%	46%
[NPS] units are not accessible to persons with physical disabilities (Las propiedades del Sistema de Parques Nacionales no son accesibles para personas con impedimentos físicos)	23%#	28%
I prefer to spend my free time doing electronic activities, like watching videos, enjoying computer games, or surfing the Internet (Prefiero gastar mi tiempo libre en actividades electrónicas, así como ver películas/vídeos, jugar juegos de computadora, o navegar en Internet)	21%#	22%
[NPS] employees give poor service to visitors (El servicio otorgado por los trabajadores de los Parques Nacionales es malo)	13%#	14%
[NPS] units are unpleasant places for me to be (El Sistema de Parques Nacionales son lugares en los que no me siento cómodo/a)	9%	35%
[NPS] units are not safe places to be (Los Parques Nacionales no son sitios seguros para ir de visita)	9%	31%

Fisher's exact tests comparing Hispanic respondents interviewed in English to those interviewed in Spanish, within each row: tests are significant ( $p < .05$  or beyond), except as noted (\*,  $p < .10$ ; #,  $p > .10$ ).

In each of the 13 comparisons, Hispanic respondents interviewed in Spanish had more negative opinions than did those interviewed in English, as shown by higher percentages of agreement with reasons for not visiting. For example, only nine percent of Hispanic respondents interviewed in English agreed that "National Park System units are unpleasant places for me to

be.” By contrast, there was a 35% agreement with the Spanish version of this statement (“*El Sistema de Parques Nacionales son lugares en los que no me siento cómodo*”).

Most of the differences are statistically significant, or nearly so, and they seem too large to attribute merely to nuances in meaning between the English and Spanish wordings of the items. Indeed, the survey development process devoted considerable attention to minimizing any such differences in meaning. After the questionnaire was translated into Spanish, it was back-translated into English by a different Hispanic American translator. As a further check, specific phrasing in the Spanish version was discussed in a focus group of bilingual Hispanic Americans, led by a Hispanic American member of the WYSAC research team. Adjustments in the final wording of the Spanish questionnaire were made as a result of both of those checks. While some differences in the subjective meaning of certain items may remain, it seems unlikely that they account for the main pattern of results in Table 5.

Rather, these results are most plausibly due to social, economic, and/or cultural variation between the two groups of Hispanic respondents. Those who speak only Spanish may include more recent immigrants with lower levels of acculturation and less awareness of the National Park System’s status in U.S. society. It also may be that less acculturated Hispanic Americans are less comfortable around uniformed government employees, including park rangers, as was conjectured in the focus group. Future research should examine such issues in more detail, with statistical controls for number of generations in the U.S. (not measured in CSAP2) and related socioeconomic variables. The differences shown in Table 5 serve as an important reminder that diversity exists within race/ethnic groups, as well as between them.

### **Do Activities Differ?**

To complement the preceding analyses about reasons for not visiting, Table 6 provides data from visitors about the kinds of activities they pursued during their most recent visit. Visitors were asked about activities and programs in which “you or any member of your personal group” participated.

Differences by race/ethnic group are less pronounced in Table 6 than in earlier tables. Several of the differences in participation rates are not statistically significant, and the rank-order of activities is generally similar across groups. Hispanic visitors were less likely than non-Hispanic whites or African Americans to talk informally with a ranger and to view indoor exhibits, while Asian Americans were the most likely to view indoor exhibits or go to a visitor center. African Americans were most likely to view outdoor exhibits and to participate in cultural demonstrations and ranger-led tours.

Table 6: Percent of Visitors Reporting Participation in Various Activities during the Most Recent Visit, by Race/Ethnicity (2008-09 Survey)

Activity	All	White	Hisp.	Afr-Am.	Asian	Am Ind.
Read the park brochure or newspaper	78%#	77%	78%	85%	87%	91%
View outdoor exhibits	78%	79%	67%	88%	62%	78%
Go to the visitor center	72%	71%	68%	83%	88%	80%
Viewing or photographing animals or plants	70%#	69%	76%	68%	81%	56%
View indoor exhibits	63%*	62%	55%	71%	82%	53%
Hiking or jogging for 30 continuous minutes	60%	62%	61%	41%	51%	59%
Talk informally with a ranger	51%	52%	41%	59%	35%	38%
Watch movies or videos about the park	39%#	40%	32%	42%	28%	29%
Attend a ranger-led activity such as a tour or talk	35%	34%	32%	55%	34%	41%
Attend a cultural demonstration or performance	21%	20%	19%	37%	21%	34%
Water activities, such as swimming or boating	20%#	19%	23%	26%	18%	18%
Snow sports, such as skiing, snowmobiling, or sledding	5%	5%	9%	1%	4%	0%
Have any involvement with the Junior Ranger Program	3%#	4%	2%	3%	4%	1%

Chi-square tests comparing only white (non-Hispanic), Hispanic, and African American within each row: tests are significant ( $p < .05$  or beyond), except as noted (\*,  $p < .10$ ; #,  $p > .10$ ).

## Conclusions

The issue of underserved populations is a critical one for the National Park Service in an increasingly diverse twenty-first century America. As others have pointed out (e.g., Gramann and Allison, 1999; National Parks Second Century Commission, 2009a), the day is fast approaching when the term “minority group” will lose much of its applicability as a social label in the U.S. By mid-century or sooner, non-Hispanic whites will no longer constitute a numerical majority in some areas, and in some states they may not even be the largest *minority*. One of the great challenges facing NPS will be its ability to accommodate these demographic changes in non-divisive and socially beneficial ways.

The purpose of the present report has been to inform this effort by investigating racial and ethnic differences in visitation and in perceptions of the National Park System. Of course, in the Internet age, physical visits are not the only measure of success in connecting with underserved populations. The role of virtual visits, including the volume and types of use received by NPS websites from different race/ethnic groups, needs to be studied further. Nevertheless, as pointed out by the National Parks Second Century Commission (2009a), demographic change will affect how parks are visited, and thus how the National Park System is valued, what kinds of development are appropriate, and who votes on behalf of parks. Therefore, the growth of population subgroups that have not traditionally included many park-goers requires the attention of the National Park Service.

As in the 2000 national survey, the 2008-09 NPS Comprehensive Survey of the American Public found that U.S. visitors to national parks, national monuments, and other units of the National Park System were disproportionately white and non-Hispanic. Asian Americans and American Indians/Alaska Natives appeared to be represented among visitors in roughly the same proportion as in the population as a whole. But Hispanic Americans and African Americans were under-represented among visitors to NPS units. Despite efforts by the National Park Service and its partners to engage underserved populations, these visitation differences by race/ethnic group seem not to have changed much over the past decade.

### Raising Awareness

Still, some of the reasons people reported for not visiting may be responsive to further outreach. The barrier to visitation that was expressed most widely by non-visitors, especially Hispanic, Asian, and African Americans, was that they “just don’t know that much about National Park System units.” There was also some concern expressed that “there isn’t enough information about what to do once inside” a park. The NPS might address these issues through a campaign of publicity and education using media serving different ethnic and racial communities.

However, increasing awareness of parks among non-visitors will not necessarily lead to increasing visits from these groups. Parks must still provide experiences that are relevant and desirable to those they are trying to attract. And these experiences must be accessible.

### Turning Awareness into Visits

One effort to translate increased awareness into greater use involves interpretive programming that relates NPS units to the cultural experiences and interests of specific race/ethnic populations. The challenge here is that, although the connection between a park and a racial or ethnic

community may be obvious in some cases, in other instances the history and significance of a park to people of color will have to be identified through appropriate research and communication involving underserved communities. For example, although it is relevant to interpret the significance of slavery at Civil War battlefield sites, it is equally relevant to interpret stories of African American success, in addition to African American enslavement.

Interpretive programming could be further augmented by special events celebrating the achievements of underserved groups. Many examples of this already exist in the National Park System, but there is potential for more, especially in NPS units that have not previously emphasized their connections to people of color. In addition—and in some parks this will be the most challenging strategy—opportunities could be provided to participate in the recreational activities preferred by large numbers of people within various underserved populations. A recent national survey of active outdoor recreation (Outdoor Foundation, 2010) found that only three percent of African Americans and eight percent of Hispanic Americans participated in hiking, an iconic national park pursuit. The outdoor activities favored by the largest percentage of these two groups were running/jogging/trail running (15% of African Americans and 19% of Hispanic Americans), followed by road biking/mountain biking/BMX, and fishing. Providing opportunities in national parks is a politically charged issue for some of these activities (e.g., mountain biking). Therefore, NPS managers must balance competing goals and mandates when considering how to respond to the preferences of underserved populations.

Providing desirable and relevant experiences is still not enough if underserved communities cannot access parks. In CSAP2, about a third of the visitors and half of non-visitors agreed that “it takes too long to get to any NPS unit from my home.” Although the question did not mention access issues other than time (distance, cost, transportation), these are all interrelated. Where access is a concern for some populations, many parks have partnered with environmental groups, school districts, community-based organizations, and local governments to provide transportation assistance for those who cannot reach parks on their own. Creating and sustaining these partnerships will be critical to attracting underserved populations.

### **Welcoming Visitors**

Besides increasing awareness and taking steps to turn awareness into a desire to visit, another critical issue faces the NPS. Although very few white non-Hispanic respondents saw NPS units as unsafe or unpleasant, up to a quarter of those in other groups felt that way.

The greatest concerns were expressed by Hispanic non-visitors, and especially by those Hispanic respondents who required or preferred a Spanish-language interview. The latter subgroup may include more recent immigrants with lower levels of cultural assimilation, greater economic challenges, and less awareness of the National Park System. Differences by language of interview serve as a reminder that diversity exists not only between major race/ethnic groups, but within groups as well. In addition to language use, internal diversity may be due to national ancestry (e.g., Puerto Rico vs. Mexico vs. Cuba), age, education, income, or rural/urban/suburban residence.

Not surprisingly, negative opinions about NPS units were expressed more often by those without a recent visit than by visitors. Notably, race/ethnic differences were also larger among non-visitors. This pattern suggests a further benefit of making visitors from underserved populations

feel welcome: it may be easier to encourage recent visitors to visit again, and often, than to attract new visits from among those who have not been to a national park recently if at all.

Among recent visitors, Hispanic visitors were less likely than either non-Hispanic whites or African Americans to talk informally with park rangers during their visit or to view indoor exhibits. This may be caused in part by language barriers, especially among those who have not adopted English as a first language. Some relatively simple measures could contribute to a more welcoming atmosphere, such as having both recorded responses and written materials available in Spanish as well as in English when potential visitors contact a park for information.

Asian American visitors were the least likely to view outdoor exhibits during their visit, but the most likely to use visitor centers and view indoor exhibits. African American visitors were the most likely to view outdoor exhibits or park movies and to participate in cultural demonstrations or ranger-led tours. These variations in activity patterns could provide clues about how best to target specific informational messages and special events to different visitor segments. Such efforts could assist in attracting some non-visitors with outreach programs emphasizing particular services and opportunities.

Among both visitors and non-visitors, only a small percentage of non-Hispanic whites said that NPS employees give poor service, whereas three times as many of those in every other race/ethnic group felt that way. Because many people do not draw fine distinctions between NPS personnel as such and park volunteers, cooperating association employees, or concessionaires who provide food and lodging, efforts to address concerns about poor service should extend quite widely. The National Park Service should intensify its on-going efforts to ensure the cultural sensitivity and service orientation of all those who provide services. This means more than language literacy, as reflected in multi-lingual interpretation and signage. It also means promoting cultural literacy by understanding the preferences of different groups for various facilities and programs, as well as their preferred leisure activities and group structures when visiting (e.g., nuclear families *vs.* extended families).

In short, to make units of the National Park System more welcoming to all Americans, the NPS must continue to seek connections with something meaningful in the experiences, cultural norms, and histories of diverse populations.

### **A Final Word on Policy**

In working to translate awareness into visits and to make parks more welcoming, the principle to keep in mind is that people not only seek out and visit parks; they also seek out and visit experiences. The experiences sought often reflect culturally based values and practices. In turn, the experiences gained can become lasting personal memories that are shared with others and influence future behaviors and opinions well beyond those of any particular visitor. Providing accessible, relevant, and desirable experiences to underserved populations is therefore a means of sustaining broad public support for national parks in an increasingly diverse America.





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