

Executive Summary

This visitor study report profiles a systematic random sample of Niobrara National Scenic River (NSR) visitors during July 30 - August 7, 2010. A total of 526 questionnaires was distributed to visitor groups. Of those, 317 questionnaires were returned resulting in a 60.3% response rate.

Group size and type	Thirty-seven percent of visitor groups were in groups of four to six, 22% were in groups of ten or more, and 22% were in groups of one to three. Fifty-six percent of visitor groups were in family groups.
State or country of residence	United States visitors comprised 99% of total visitation during the survey period, with 70% from Nebraska and smaller proportions from 29 other states. Too few international visitors responded to provide reliable data.
Frequency of visits	Forty-six percent of visitors were visiting the park for the first time in their lifetime, and 83% were visiting for the first time in the past 12 months.
Age, ethnicity, race, and education level	Twenty-nine percent of visitors were ages 36-50 years, 23% were ages 15 years or younger, and 7% were ages 61 or older. Two percent were Hispanic or Latino. Ninety-seven percent of visitors were White and 3% were American Indian or Alaska Native. Thirty-eight percent of respondents had completed a bachelor's degree.
Physical conditions	Four percent of visitor groups had members with physical conditions affecting their ability to access or participate in activities and services.
Household income and size	Twenty-four percent reported a household income of \$50,000-\$74,999 and 17% had an income of \$100,000-\$149,999. Thirty-three percent of respondents had two people in their household.
Awareness of park management	Thirty-five percent of visitor groups did not know who managed Niobrara NSR prior to their visit, and 32% thought it was managed by the National Park Service only.
Information sources	Most visitor groups (90%) obtained information about the park prior to their visit. Prior to this visit, visitor groups most often obtained information about the park through friends/relatives/word of mouth (72%), and most (95%) received the information they needed. To obtain information for a future visit, 64% of visitor groups would use the park website.
Park website	Thirty-four percent of visitor groups used the park website prior to or during their visit. Of those visitor groups that used the website, 47% rated it as "very helpful."
Reason for visiting park	For 68% of visitor groups, the park was a primary destination, and for 86%, the most common reason for visiting Niobrara NSR was to enjoy recreation in the park.
Length of stay	Of those visitor groups that stayed less than one day, 29% spent five to six hours visiting the park. Of those that spent more than one day, 50% spent two days visiting the park. The average length of stay was 41.5 hours or 1.7 days.

Executive summary (continued)

Locations visited in the park	The most common location visited was Smith Falls State Park (92%). The most common location that visitor groups visited first was Fort Niobrara NWR Launch Site (27%) and the most common location visited last was Brewer Bridge Landing (28%).
Expected activities	The most common activities visitor groups expected to participate in were canoeing/kayaking/rafting (64%) and tubing (60%). Fifteen percent of visitor groups expected, but were unable, to participate in an activity. The most common reason for not being able to participate was time constraints (47%).
Activities on this visit	The most common activities were tubing (58%) and enjoying natural quiet (58%), and the most important activity was tubing (50%).
Crowding at park locations	Nineteen percent of visitor groups felt more crowded than they expected on the river, and 17% felt more crowded than they expected, both in the campgrounds and on landings/boat launch areas.
Visitor services and facilities	The visitor service and facility most commonly used by visitor groups was the restrooms (87%), followed by the signs along the river (72%) and the park brochure/map (57%).
Commercial/outfitter services and facilities	The most commonly used commercial/outfitter services and facilities were the canoe/kayak/tube rental (85%) and restrooms (78%). Seventy-nine percent of visitor groups rented equipment from a commercial outfitter. Of the 74% of visitor groups that received the pre-trip safety and river orientation briefing, 92% felt it was adequate.
Protecting park attributes and resources	The highest combined proportions of “extremely important” and “very important” ratings of protecting park attributes and resources included clean water (90%) and scenic views (88%).
Elements affecting experience	For 62% of visitor groups, litter on the river detracted from their park experiences, and for 58%, visitors using poor river ethics detracted from their park experiences. For 75% of visitor groups, visitors using good river ethics added to their park experiences, and 67% found the signage along the river added to their park experiences.
Ranger-led programs/activities	Thirty-one percent of visitor groups were interested in attending ranger-led programs on a future visit to the park, of which 51% preferred a program length of 1/2 hour. The most commonly preferred topic to learn about was cliff and canyon rock formations, waterfalls and erosion effects (87%).
Overall quality	Most visitor groups (87%) rated the overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities at Niobrara NSR as “very good” or “good.” One percent of groups rated the overall quality as “very poor” or “poor.”

For more information about the Visitor Services Project, please contact the Park Studies Unit at the University of Idaho at (208) 885-7863 or the following website http://www.psu.uidaho.edu .
