

Executive Summary

This visitor study report profiles a systematic random sample of Congaree National Park (NP) visitors during May 2–15, 2011. A total of 450 questionnaires was distributed to visitor groups. Of those, 313 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 69.6% response rate.

Group size and type	Fifty-four percent of visitor groups consisted of two people and 16% were visiting alone. Sixty-four percent of visitor groups consisted of family groups.
State or country of residence	United States visitors were from 40 states and Washington, DC and comprised 94% of total visitation during the survey period, with 54% from South Carolina. International visitors were from 9 countries and comprised 6% of total visitation.
Frequency of visits	Seventy-six percent of visitors visited the park once in the past 12 months and 62% were visiting the park for the first time in their lives. Twenty percent had visited 4 or more times in their lifetime.
Age, ethnicity, race, and educational level	Thirty-three percent of visitors were ages 56-70 years, 28% were 21-40 years old, 12% were ages 15 years or younger, and 5% were 71 or older. Four percent were Hispanic or Latino. Ninety-one percent of visitors were White and 4% were Black or African American. Forty-one percent of respondents had completed a graduate degree and 31% had a bachelor's degree.
Physical conditions	Eight percent of visitor groups had members with physical conditions affecting their ability to access or participate in activities and services.
Awareness of park programs	Fifty-nine percent of visitor groups were aware, prior to their visit, of the various programs offered at the park.
Knowledge of wilderness	Fifty-seven percent of the respondents said they were aware of congressionally designated wilderness before their visit to the park. Forty-six percent of visitor groups said they learned about wilderness while at the park.
Non-native species management	Fifty-two percent of the respondents were aware of the policy regarding removal of non-native species. Most visitor groups (83%) were in support of removal of non-native plants and 73% were supportive of removal of non-native animals.
Scientific research and education in the park	Forty percent of the visitor groups noticed scientists working or scientific markers or equipment being used in the park. Through programs or products, 25% of the visitors learned about the results of scientific studies conducted at the park.
Information sources	Most visitors (91%) obtained information about the park prior to their visit. Of those visitors, 50% used the park website and 30% obtained their information from friends/relatives/word of mouth.
Park as destination	Seventy-four percent of visitor groups said the park was their primary destination and 21% said it was one of several destinations.
Primary reason for visiting the area	Twenty-nine percent of visitor groups were residents of the area (within a 1-hour drive of the park). The most common primary reasons for visiting the park area among non-resident visitor groups were to visit the park (65%) and visit friends/relatives in the area (12%).

Executive Summary (continued)

Overnight stays	Forty percent of visitor groups stayed overnight away from home either in the park or the area. Of those visitors that stayed outside the park (within a 1-hour drive), 49% stayed 1 night and 21% stayed for 2 nights.
Accommodations	Of those visitor groups that stayed outside the park (within a 1-hour drive), 83% stayed in a lodge, hotel, motel, vacation rental, or B&B.
Time spent at park and in the area	Fifty percent of visitor groups spent 3 - 4 hours in the park, while 36% percent spent 1 - 2 hours. Thirty-nine percent of visitors stayed in the park area (within 1-hour drive) for 1 - 2 hours, while 36% spent 3 – 4 hours. The average length of stay in the park was 6.1 hours. The average length of stay in the area was 38.1 hours, or 1.6 days.
Activities	The most common activities were walking/hiking (82%), visiting the visitor center (71%), and birdwatching (24%).
Use of park trails	The Elevated Boardwalk Trail was used by 81% of the visitor groups and the Low Boardwalk Trail was used by 62%.
Information services and facilities	The information services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were the park brochure/map (86%), assistance from park staff (78%), and the visitor center exhibits (74%).
Visitor services and facilities	The visitor services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were the boardwalks (89%), restrooms (86%), and parking areas (83%).
Protecting park attributes, resources, and experiences	The highest combined proportions of “extremely important” and “very important” ratings of protecting park attributes, resources, and experiences included native wildlife (90%), natural quiet/sounds of nature (89%), clean water (88%), and clean air (87%).
Elements affecting park experience	Thirty-one percent of visitor groups reported that encountering small numbers of visitors on the trails added to their trip experience. Airplane noise detracted from 12% of the visitor groups’ experiences.
Expenditures	The average visitor group expenditure (inside and outside the park within a 1-hour drive) was \$199. The median group expenditure (50% of groups spent more and 50% of groups spent less) was \$55. The majority of expenses were for lodging (30%) and gas and oil (21%). The average total expenditure per capita was \$106.
Future visit	Fifty-nine percent of visitor groups were interested in canoeing/kayaking on future visits and 50% were interested in bird walks. Eighty-eight percent of visitor groups were interested in learning more about the park on future visits.
Overall quality	Most visitor groups (95%) rated the overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities at Congaree NP as “very good” or “good.” No visitor groups rated the overall quality as “very poor.” One percent of groups rated the overall quality as “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>.