

Recreationists in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area: A Survey of User Characteristics, Behaviors, and Attitudes

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River(s): Columbia River
Research Topic(s): User satisfaction, User characteristics, Recreation experience, Economic value of recreation
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1. Study Purpose

“To examine recreational use patterns, satisfaction levels, economic expenditures, and visitors' perceptions of place attachment, motivations to visit, and management references for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.” (p. 138)

2. Findings

Response rate 95%.

2.1. Visitor Demographics and Trip Characteristics

- Primarily married, male, average age of 43, income between \$40-70,000
- Highly educated (nearly 1/3 degree beyond bachelors)
- CRGNSA was the primary destination for most respondents
- Users were primarily part of family and/or friends groups

2.1.1. Season of use

- Fall visitors were primarily male, worked outside of the home, and less interested in participating in the survey
- Winter visitors were generally smaller group sizes
- Summer visitors were more likely to have children under 16 and have graduate degrees
- Females and retired persons were more likely in winter and spring

2.1.2. State

- Oregon visitors were more likely married and slightly older than Washington visitors
- Oregon visitors had more persons per car

- Washington visitors were more commonly white and single with graduate degrees

2.1.3.Site type

Developed area users were generally younger and more ethnically diverse than general forest users, a higher number of females and in the middle income bracket

2.1.4.Survey period (morning/afternoon)

Afternoon visitors tended to be older and employed outside the home

2.1.5.Use levels

High use site visitors tended to be in larger groups and more ethnically diverse

2.2. Recreation experience

2.2.1.Place attachment

- Oregon visitors chose the place “because it is the Columbia River Gorge” (p. 140)
- Washington visitors were more particular about the place within the Gorge they visited
- Low use site visitors identified more with the site-specific factors, whereas high use visitors felt the Gorge itself was the reason for visiting
- Winter users commonly felt that “this place means a lot to me” (p. 140)

2.2.2.Motivations

- Visitors at medium use sites identified “challenge and physical effort” (p. 141) as important reasons for visiting
- High use site visitors were least interested in physical effort and skill development
- Family was important to Oregon visitors, while Washington visitors emphasized challenge/physical effort
- Friends were most important to winter visitors, while family was important for spring users
- Spring users were less interested in challenge and skill development than other season users

2.2.3.Management preferences

- All seasons users felt a need for better signs and more ranger presence for directing visitors, but especially winter users
- Winter users generally agreed that more parking and more interpretive rangers were needed, more so than other season visitors
- Morning visitors and Oregon visitors also supported more interpretive rangers

2.3. Visitor Satisfaction

- Oregon visitors were more satisfied than Washington visitors with regard to scenery, signs, and attractiveness of forest landscape, but overall satisfaction for both groups was the same
- Oregon visitors felt sites were more crowded than Washington visitors
- Low use site users felt the natural environment and facilities were in poorer condition than other users felt
- Crowding was perceived higher at high use sites
- Winter users had the lowest overall satisfaction levels, whereas summer users reported the highest level of satisfaction

2.4. Economics

- Site type “showed significant differences for purchases of fuel and other transportation costs” (p. 142)
- Dispersed users spent more on fuel than developed sites users
- Spring and summer users spent less on lodging, while fall users spent money on other transportation costs

3. Key Discussion Points

- Most differences were notable across the four use seasons
- “Few differences were noted across the economic expenditure variables” (p. 142), including between Oregon and Washington users
- There were significant differences in satisfaction levels across the four seasons.
- Oregon satisfaction levels were always higher than Washington. Oregon side has more high use sites, which may receive more upkeep resulting in greater user satisfaction.
- Oregon users felt more crowded than Washington users, which may be due to the more “social-oriented opportunities” (p. 143) on the Oregon side.
- “Oregon and Washington visitors are clearly different in their feelings of place attachment toward the CRGNSA” (p. 143). Washington users are more activity focused, while Oregon users place importance on the special designation of the area.
- There were very little differences in motivations between users in the general forest area and those at developed sites.

4. Management Recommendations

Experience variables appear to play a larger role in differentiation among the user categories. “Recreation managers may wish to focus on the experience variables outlined in this paper in order to better meet visitor’s needs” (p. 143).

5. Research Design

Survey research, random sample, stratified by survey period (morning/evening), state (OR/WA), use level (high, medium, low), season (four seasons), and site type (general forest/developed area)

5.1. Study Area

Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area

5.2. Data Collection Instruments

On-site interviews were given using three versions of a questionnaire, which were designed for the National Visitor Use Monitoring study: basic + experience, basic + satisfaction, and basic + economics. Experience questions were added to the basic question and asked questions relevant to the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area.

5.3. Study Population

Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area visitors from January 1 to December 31, 2000

5.4. Sample Size

200 days sampled, 1282 boaters surveyed

5.5. List of Variables and Operational Definitions

5.5.1. Visitor demographics and trip characteristics

Questions addressed age, income level, group size, marital status, education, race and employment

5.5.2. Satisfaction level

- 14 factors were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale
- An overall satisfaction level was measure using a 10-point scale
- Degree of crowding was measured using a 10-point scale

5.5.3. Economic expenditures

Questions addressed how much money visitors spent on items and services

5.5.4. Experience perceptions

Questions addressed place attachment, motivations, and management preferences

6. Theories Used in Study

N/A