



Metropolitan Council: Regional Parks System Visitor Study Report November, 2016

Background

Metropolitan Council contracted Information Specialists Group, Inc. (ISG) to fulfill sample planning, fielding, analysis and reporting for the 2016 Regional Parks and Trails Visitor Survey for the Metropolitan Council.

Learning Objectives

- Provide benchmark measurement of regional park and trail visitor experiences in terms of:
 - Reasons for visiting and activity participation
 - Frequency and length of visits
 - Travel distances and modes of transportation
 - Group sizes
 - Quality of facilities, services and recreation opportunities and sense of safety
 - Information behavior

Fielding Methodology

Metropolitan Council provided a survey instrument of approximately five to 10 minutes in length, that was fielded at all regional park and trail units within the 10 regional park implementing agencies between May 30 and September 5, 2016. A total of 65 parks and 52 trails are included in the sample. The survey was conducted by professional interviewers employing a live intercept method. Strategic intercept scheduling ensured that all agencies received appropriate coverage across the season, days of week and times of day.

For analysis purposes, the number of completed surveys for each agency is weighted so that each agency is statistically representative of their respective proportion of summer visits within the overall system, as reported in 2015 Annual Use Estimate of the Regional Parks System:

<https://metro council.org/Parks/Publications-And-Resources/PARK-USE-REPORTS/2015-Annual-Use-Estimate-of-the-Regional-Parks.aspx>. **Additional details on methodology, statistical testing methods, weighting and agency level weight tables can be found in the Appendix of the full report.**

Number of Survey Completes in Parks and Trails by Agency

	Parks	Trails	Total
Anoka County	407	251	658
City of Bloomington	385	NA	385
Carver County	126	268	394
Dakota County	273	116	389
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	376	310	686
Ramsey County	286	201	487
City of Saint Paul	320	71	391
Scott County	253	132	385
Three Rivers Park District	689	606	1295
Washington County	312	77	389
Totals	4009	1450	5459

Demographics

- **Gender:**
 - Male: 50%
 - Female: 49%
 - Prefer not to say: 1%
- **Age:**
 - 18-36: 32%
 - 37-56: 32%
 - 57 or over: 18%
 - Prefer not to say: 19%
- **Ethnicity:**
 - Caucasian: 80%
 - Black/African American: 8%
 - Asian: 5%
 - Other: 5%
 - Prefer not to say: 2%
- **Annual Household Income:**
 - Less than \$60,000: 22%
 - \$60,000 -- \$100,000: 26%
 - More than \$100,000: 19%

Key Findings

- **Hiking, walking and biking are the most popular activities.** They are also the most commonly mentioned **primary reason** for visiting a regional park or trail.
 - Dakota County agency has the most breadth of activity participation, with significantly higher participation in eight of 13 activities measured.
 - Ramsey County, Scott County, Three Rivers Park District and Washington County agencies have the narrowest participation, with significantly lower participation in six or more of the 13 activities measured.

- **Visitors are either very loyal to their park or trail, or simply prefer familiar surroundings.** Most respondents (89%) had visited the park or trail where they were surveyed before and visit it fairly regularly, as demonstrated by:
 - **Frequency:** Visitors average 56 visits per year (52 parks and 68 trails) and 19 visits in summer (17 for parks and 22 for trails).
 - At the agency level, Scott County stands out for significantly higher visits across three seasons, while Anoka County, City of Bloomington and Washington County exhibit significantly fewer visits in at least three seasons.
 - **Frequency satisfaction:** Four-fifths say they spend about the right amount of time visiting the park. Two-thirds (67%) of those who would like to spend more time say that not having enough time is the primary barrier.
 - **Length:** Visit length averages 1.74 hours, and visitors spend significantly more time in parks (1.84) than on trails (1.47).
 - Visitors spent more time when their primary reason for visiting was swimming, a special event, picnicking or fishing. They spent significantly less time when they came to hike, walk, jog or run.
- **Few gathered outside information about their destination prior to visiting.** More than four-fifths (86%) did not obtain any outside information prior to visiting. The most frequently used information resource is previous personal knowledge, which may serve as further evidence of loyalty to the most familiar parks or trails. The most popular outside information sources are family and friends (36%), park or trail websites (16%) and other internet sources (13%).
- **Overall, visitors are satisfied with facilities and feel safe.** Nearly all (95%) gave the regional park or trail they visited a rating of good or very good in terms of facility quality, services and recreation opportunities.
 - Those who were primarily there for socializing or a playground were significantly more likely to give this rating, while those visiting to bicycle or fish were significantly less likely to rate the location as good or very good.
 - Most (91%) said that they felt very safe during their visit.
- **Age, ethnicity and income have the most noteworthy impacts on usage and experiences.** Key distinctions include:
 - **Age:** Frequency of visiting increases directionally and significantly with age. Those under age 35 are significantly more likely to use family and friends, Google Maps or Facebook for information prior to visiting, and to use the park or trail for commuting purposes. Respondents age 35-54 are significantly more likely to use park websites. Visitors over age 55 visit significantly more often than other ages and are significantly more likely to rate facilities, services and recreational opportunities as good to very good.
 - **Race/ethnicity:** Caucasians visit significantly more often than non-Caucasians (60 vs. 36 times per year). They are also significantly more likely to rate facilities quality, services and recreation opportunities as very good and to say that they had no safety concerns during their visit. Caucasians are significantly more likely to walk, run or use inline skates to get to parks or trails and to use prior knowledge rather than outside information sources, while non-Caucasians are more likely to rely on family and friends for information. Non-Caucasians are also significantly more likely to participate in fishing, special events and picnicking activities than Caucasians.
 - **Household income:** Those with household incomes exceeding \$100,000 visited significantly more frequently than the lower income segments and had fewer safety concerns. They were also significantly more likely than those earning less than \$60,000

to use park or trail websites and to rate facility quality and recreation opportunities as very good. Those earning less than \$60,000 are significantly more likely to arrive using public transportation and to use parks or trails for commuting purposes.

- **Parks differ from trails in terms of usage and visitor demographics.** Key distinctions include:
 - **Parks:** The parks visitors indicated more socializing and larger groups of visitors of broader age ranges. Visitors travelled farther from home to get to parks (18 miles vs. 8 miles for trails), were more likely to look for information prior to visiting and indicated a wider variety of activity participation.
 - **Trails:** Visits to trails were significantly more solitary (63% go alone vs. 45% for parks). Trails had a higher frequency of visits across seasons and significantly higher summer visits than parks, but less time spent per visit.
- **Very few were limited by a physical or mental condition.** Just 3% said that a member of their group had a physical or mental condition that could impact their participation in activities. Of those impacted, 97% cited a mobility issue.