



Topics and trends for park professionals · California State Parks · Planning Division · May 2009

## The Survey Issue

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## State parks visitor survey data slated for summer release

by Eileen Hook, [ehook@parks.ca.gov](mailto:ehook@parks.ca.gov)

One Saturday morning last year the “Parker” family—mom and dad (both in their forties) and kids—packed a picnic lunch and headed off with a friend to nearby “Shady Glen” State Park. The family brought along a camera as well as their hiking boots, hoping to add to their family scrapbook of nature adventures at the park. The Parkers visit often; occasionally camping, but most times just relaxing outdoors for the day.

The fictional Parker family shares characteristics with many other California state park visitors, as documented by the California State Parks (CSP) State Park Visitor Survey (SPVS). The survey found:

- Sixty-two percent of state park visitors are with family, thirty-four percent with friends.

*Visitor survey, page 2.*

## Californians' outdoor recreation habits and opinions revealed

by Philomene Smith, [psmit@parks.ca.gov](mailto:psmit@parks.ca.gov)

Californians continue to enjoy walking more than any other outdoor recreation activity; it even tops the list of activities they'd like to do more often. Most would pay more for recreation activities requiring special equipment. And Californians are increasingly open to private businesses providing services such as renting equipment, operating concessions and performing general park maintenance at recreation areas.

Those are some of the findings in a new California State Parks (CSP) survey, the *Survey on Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation (SPOA)*. The survey,

*Public opinions, page 4.*



California State University Sacramento student surveyors and faculty at Auburn State Recreation Area

### Visitor survey, from page 1.

- Forty-six percent of state park visitors are 35-54 years of age.
- When asked, "How did you learn about this park?," 38 percent indicated they live nearby.
- Seventy-three percent of those surveyed were at the park for a day trip.
- The activities listed most frequently were 1) relaxing

in the outdoors (40 percent), 2) walking for pleasure (29 percent), 3) hiking (28 percent), 4) camping (22 percent) and 5) photography (20 percent) (see chart at bottom left).

### Survey results to aid decision making at CSP

The SPVS is the most comprehensive and statistically reliable survey of visitors to California's state parks ever conducted. (See *Methodology* sidebar on next page.) CSP staff will use results of this survey for administrative, operational and development decisions for years to come.

### Comparing SPVS and SPOA results

Some SPVS questions are similar to those in the recent *Survey of Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation in California* (SPOA), a study of over 4,000 Californians. In

addition to parks, the SPOA study covers other outdoor recreation areas. (See second article on page 1.)

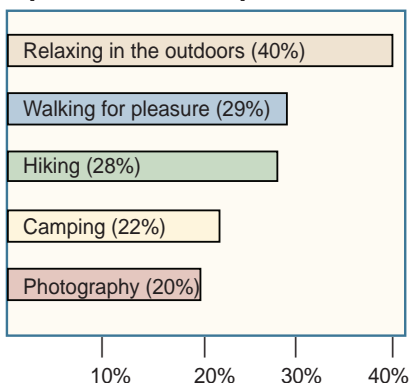
State park visitors surveyed are similar to other Californians in several ways:

- Both visit parks with family and friends. (Average group size for state park visitors is 4.5 persons; for those visiting California parks, 5.4.)
- The most popular activities for SPVS respondents (relaxing in the outdoors, hiking and walking for pleasure) are similar to those of SPOA respondents (walking, picnicking and sightseeing).
- Ninety percent of SPVS respondents are satisfied with CSP efforts to preserve natural or historic resources in the park they were visiting. SPOA respondents believe state and federal government outdoor recreation agencies should emphasize protecting natural and cultural resources.

Such similarities can help CSP staff identify facilities and activities for state parks. For example, based on the preferences of visiting parks in groups, CSP can plan group areas and amenities. Differences between results of the two surveys can also help CSP staff plan for the future.

Comparing other results of the two surveys reveals strengths of the California State Park system as well as areas that need continued attention.

#### Activities participated in most frequently at state parks, SPVS respondents





For example:

- Safety and security concerns results differ. While 96 percent of SPVS respondents are satisfied with safety and security at state parks, many SPOA respondents indicate that their activities at California parks are hindered by gang activity and drug use. (For the SPOA question, “California parks” refers to all parks, not just state parks).
- Most state park visitors and Californians surveyed are at least somewhat satisfied with the condition of facilities, with 92 percent of SPVS respondents “somewhat satisfied or very satisfied” with the condition of state park facilities and 96 percent of SPOA respondents “somewhat satisfied, satisfied, or very satisfied” with facilities and services at public outdoor recreation areas.

State park visitors generally think they are getting good value for the fees they pay. However, SPOA results on what fees respondents are willing to pay suggest that further fee increases at state parks may affect attendance:

- Seventy-two percent of SPVS respondents are satisfied with the value they receive from day-use fees at state parks, as were 88 percent who were camping. (Day-use fees are \$2-\$10; camping fees range from \$5 for primitive sites to \$45 for sites with hook-ups.)



CSU Sacramento surveyor Desiree Swift, with survey tool, at Auburn State Recreation Area

- Fifty-nine percent of SPOA respondents indicate that a fee of more than \$4 is too much to pay for their favorite day-use activities. For the 69 percent of SPOA respondents whose favorite activities include staying overnight in an outdoor recreation area, a fee of up to \$11 is acceptable; many are willing to pay \$20.

### For more information

The statistics in this article are a small part of the SPVS data now being analyzed. Final reports will be available in Summer 2009 on the Planning Division website, <http://www.parks.ca.gov/planning>, including overall survey results as well as results for each state park in the survey. ●

### Survey methodology

The SPVS team achieved an 86 percent response rate, with over 9,600 surveys submitted.

#### Design and development.

California State University (CSU) faculty and Planning Division staff designed the survey using earlier CSP surveys and surveys from other states; questions to assess trends and demographic information were added.

Most questions were multiple-choice; open-ended questions asked for suggestions on park facilities, activities and amenities.

Faculty at CSU Sacramento and San Diego State University trained and supervised surveyors. CSP District staff helped select locations at participating parks.

**Data collection.** Using hand-held computers (see photo this page) or paper forms, more than twenty student surveyors from three California State Universities (CSUs) conducted the five-minute, in-person interviews. Surveys were conducted across the state at twenty-six state parks and over four seasons, from October 2007 through February 2009.

**Public opinions, from page 1.**

conducted about every five years, is a key element of CSP's California Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP), which guides California's distribution of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund to public recreation providers.

The 2007 SPOA obtained responses from 2,780 adult Californians surveyed by telephone and 1,227 by mail-back survey, as well as 397 California youth surveyed by telephone. Answers reveal how often Californians engage in various outdoor activities, the types of outdoor recreation areas they visit and their satisfaction with outdoor recreation opportunities. SPOA also compares participation in various activities, use of support facilities and recreation participation patterns and preferences for

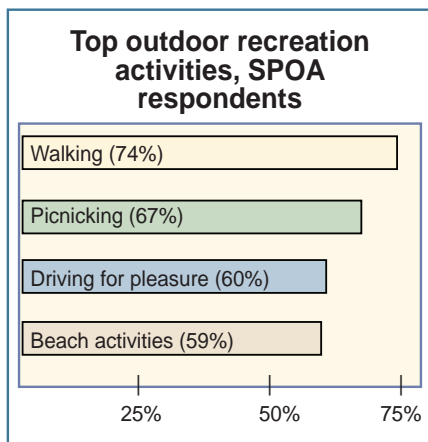
Hispanic and non-Hispanic Californians. (See sidebar on facing page.)

New for the 2007 survey are an analysis of results by region, survey questions about physical activity levels, a statistically reliable sample of youth and information on factors limiting Californians' physical activity outdoors.

**Recreation habits**

A majority of survey questions focus on Californians' outdoor recreation activities. Answers reveal that:

- Most adult Californians spend the same or more time participating in outdoor recreation compared to five years ago, and they generally find existing facilities satisfactory.
- Based on participation, Californians' top outdoor



activities are 1) walking (74 percent), 2) picnicking (67 percent), 3) driving for pleasure (60 percent) and 4) beach activities (59 percent).

- Adult Californians spend an average of thirty minutes driving to their most frequently used recreation destination or seventeen minutes walking there.
- Californians visit parks and other outdoor recreation areas primarily to have fun, relax and to be with family and friends. Ninety percent of visitors visit parks in groups averaging five; more than two thirds of these groups include at least one child.

**Opinions and attitudes**

In addition to asking Californians what they do outdoors, the survey asked for their opinions about outdoor recreation. Most Californians:

- Approve of private businesses providing rental equipment and food services, sponsoring events, operating facilities such as marinas and campgrounds and providing general park



Cyclists enjoy the scenic Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta.



maintenance. Most say only law enforcement and total management of areas should be off limits to private enterprise.

- Believe fees collected at a particular park should be spent at that park.
- Would pay more for activities requiring equipment, skill or fuel.
- Think park agencies should reduce their production of climate changing gases, prepare for the effects of climate change at parks and educate the public regarding climate change.
- Support more action to clean up pollution in the ocean, lakes, rivers and streams in parks and recreation areas.
- Rank importance of recreation facility types as follows: 1) play areas for young children, 2) wilderness areas, 3) areas and facilities for environmental and outdoor education programs, 4) multi-use turf areas and 5) picnic sites for large groups.

Californians would like to participate in these activities more often: 1) walking, 2) camping in developed sites, 3) bicycling on paved surfaces, 4) day hiking on trails and 5) picnicking in picnic areas.

#### For more information

See the *California Outdoor Recreation Plan* at <http://www.parks.ca.gov/planning>. The SPOA summary report and reference data will be available later in the year at [http://www.parks.ca.gov/planning\\_SPOA](http://www.parks.ca.gov/planning_SPOA). ●

### Hispanics' preferences bring opportunities, challenges for outdoor recreation providers

The Hispanic population of California, estimated at 13.2 million in 2007, continues to increase. For example, California's Department of Finance estimates 60 percent of the Central Valley's residents will be of Hispanic heritage by 2050.

Recreation planners and providers are taking note of the preferences and opinions of this important segment of the state's population. Although many Hispanic adults' opinions on outdoor recreation are similar to those of other ethnic groups, there are significant differences.

The 2007 SPOA found that compared to non-Hispanic adults, Hispanic adults:

- Visit developed parks slightly more frequently and natural areas slightly less frequently
- Are more likely to use picnic tables, open spaces to play, playgrounds, sports fields and skate parks
- Are much more likely to visit parks with family and much less likely to visit parks with friends
- Are much less likely to use wildlife viewing areas, water recreation areas or unpaved trails

The survey found that the most important services and facilities to Hispanic respondents are:

- Play areas, especially for young children
- Multi-use turf areas for field sports such as softball, baseball, soccer or football
- Areas and facilities for environmental and outdoor education programs



A large picnic at Caswell Memorial State Park, located on the Merced River in the Central Valley.

## Outdoor recreation research and survey information available online

by Eileen Hook, [ehook@parks.ca.gov](mailto:ehook@parks.ca.gov)

A number of websites offer research and survey information on the subject of recreation. Much information is free.



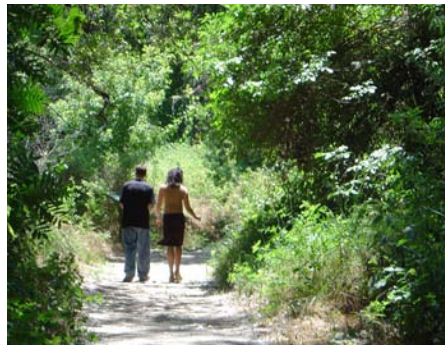
Sailing is a popular outdoor recreation activity in California.

**California State Parks** posts outdoor recreation research, including its Public Opinions and Attitudes Survey, visitor surveys, and more at <http://www.parks.ca.gov/planning>.

**The American Recreation Coalition** offers links to research reports and statistics on outdoor recreation. Go to <http://www.funoutdoors.com/arc/about> and click on 'Research & Statistics' on the left menu.

**The California Park and Recreation Society (CPRS)** offers its most recent monthly newsletter online. Go to <http://www.cprs.org/> and enter 'trendscan' in the Search box.

**The California Travel and Tourism Commission** produces annual economic and visitation studies on domestic and international travelers. Go to <http://www.tourism.visitcalifornia.com/B2B/> and click on 'Find Research.'



Hiking at Caswell Memorial SP

**The National Park Service** offers attendance information online. Go to <http://www.nature.nps.gov/stats/> and click on the U.S. map to narrow your search to California, or use the 'Select a Park' drop-down menu. To view visitor survey reports conducted at individual National Parks, click on 'VSP Reports' at the bottom of the homepage and enter a park name.

**The National Recreation and Park Association** offers some research online free of charge. Its various professional publications require subscriptions. Go to <http://www.nrpa.org/> and click on

'Publications & Research' on the left menu.

**The National Sporting Goods Association** has sales information on consumer purchases of sporting goods from specialty stores and online and big-box retailers. A free monthly e-newsletter is also available. Go to <http://www.nsga.org> and click on 'Information Center & Research.'



Kite flying at Carpinteria State Park

**The Outdoor Industry Association** offers a variety of research reports; some are free of charge, while others require membership. Go to <http://www.outdoorindustry.org> and click on 'Research & Resources' on the top menu.

**The U.S. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station**, has a series of ongoing projects on a variety of topics. An electronic newsletter is also available. <http://www.fs.fed.us/psw/topics/recreation/>

**The U.S. Travel Association** produces a variety of standard and special-interest publications. Subscribe to receive reports annually or purchase individual publications. <http://www.tia.org/researchpubs/index.html>. ●



## State grants for local and community parks fill recreation gaps

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As shown in the SPOA, Californians' incredibly diverse recreation interests cannot all be met inside the California State Park (CSP) system. That's one of many reasons that CSP's Office of Grants and Local Services (OGALS) funds projects that create or improve local and community parks and recreational facilities throughout California.

### Access to local parks is vital

In the last nine years, OGALS has administered some of the most significant park grant programs in U.S. history through two California bond acts:

- Proposition 12, the \$2.1-billion Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000
- Proposition 40, the \$2.6-billion 2002 Resources Bond, for natural resource conservation, parks and historical and cultural resources

While these two bond acts addressed a portion of the many unmet needs, a large number of Californians still lack access to recreation opportunities that they want, according to the SPOA (see second article on page 1). This report and other data

show that access to recreation facilities within communities is paramount. Reasons for the importance of local recreation opportunities include:

- Most SPOA respondents—both adults and youth—prefer recreation facilities close to home. A high percentage of Californians cannot travel to parks and open spaces outside their communities, due to a variety of financial and social circumstances.
- Residents of underserved communities lacking nearby park and recreation facilities for daily use are often most likely to suffer from health and social problems, such as obesity and the effects of a blighted environment.
- Without community parks, many families, seniors, youth and children would not have access to safe and affordable places to play and socialize.

### Statewide Park Program, a \$368M revitalization for community parks

In 2008 the Legislature passed AB 31 to create the Statewide Park Development and Community Revitalization Program of 2008 (SPP), which amends and renames the Urban Park Act of 2006. SPP



Golden Hills Park, City of Martinez provides \$368 million in grants for new parks and facilities in underserved communities. Cities, regional park districts, districts, joint powers authorities, counties and specified nonprofit organizations may apply for SPP local assistance program grants.

Because each community has unique needs, projects driven by grass-roots planning are most likely to respond to local communities' opinions and attitudes on outdoor recreation. For this reason, community residents will generate SPP project ideas, which OGALS staff then prioritizes. This bottom-up approach complements other priority-setting processes as well as surveys, studies, and other information.

### For more information

Stay up to date on OGALS' many activities to help local communities by going to the OGALS web page, [http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=1008](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=1008). ●

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The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

## Baby boomers have no plans to slow down

by Eileen Hook, [ehook@parks.ca.gov](mailto:ehook@parks.ca.gov)

While the calendar may show that baby boomers—Americans born between 1946 and 1964—are getting older, according to a 2005 travel report, “Baby boomers see themselves as younger than their age might imply, and a majority consider themselves adventurous. Many have participated in adventurous activities not only while traveling but also as a part of their ongoing leisure activities.”<sup>1</sup>

When planning vacations, boomers have specific requirements. These three top the list:

1. Beautiful, scenic place
2. Very relaxing
3. Good weather

One survey identifies these top three activities that boomers participated in during recent adventure trips: 1) hiking/backpacking/rock and mountain climbing, 2) escorted or guided tours and 3) snorkeling.<sup>2</sup>

Even after retirement, many boomers still seek active outdoor fun. One article states, “Trails for walking, hiking and biking are amenities favored by home buyers in retirement communities, and boomers are quickly adding in-line skating and rock climbing to their list of favorite outdoor activities. In 2002, a new Del Webb community in Arizona built a practice climbing wall for the younger retirees.”<sup>3</sup>

Baby boomers are redefining, on their own terms, what it means to grow older.

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