

Adirondack Forest Preserve

Visitor Study Summary

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INTRODUCTION

A study of visitors to Adirondack Forest Preserve lands was conducted between December 1, 2008 and August 31, 2011 to develop a profile of current visitor characteristics, their use patterns, and the extent and type of visitor use and experiences. A 12-month study was conducted on Forest Preserve lands with a management unit classification of wild forest, primitive, and wilderness in each of four geographic areas of the Adirondack Park under the direction of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). This report is a summary of those four studies and more detail on the research methods and results are available in the original study reports (Dawson et al. 2011; Dawson, 2011; Dawson and Graefe 2011a and 2011b).

This summary report contains three subsections: (1) visitor characteristics and trip characteristics; (2) visitor experiences within the Adirondack Park; and (3) self-registration compliance by visitors at trailhead registers. The following briefly describes the research methods used to gather the data for each of the three aspects of the study reported herein:

1. Visitor characteristics and trip characteristics were measured using on-site interviews at public access points to Forest Preserve areas.
 - A trained interviewer requested visitors entering or leaving a Forest Preserve land area to provide information that was recorded using an on-site visitor questionnaire regarding the visitor’s trip to that area.
 - All public access locations (412 sites) for the 46 Management Unit areas of this study (over 1.8 million acres) on Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park were located and then field checked for feasibility as a site at which to interview users entering the lands for recreational activities.
 - Interviewers systematically sampled visitors at 389 of the 412 identified public access sites over a 12-month period. More than 1,890 interview sessions were held that lasted up to four hours if it was evident that visitors were present that day; interviewers sampled two different sites per day.
 - During the 1,890 interview sessions, a total of 15,310 visitors were seen, 11,403 were talked with briefly as they approached the interviewer’s location, and 6,503 were asked to participate in an interview. Of the 6,503 asked to participate, 5,955 (92%) agreed to provide their trip information and 8% refused to participate in the interview.
 - The interviewer asked those completing an on-site interview if they would be willing to also participate in a mail survey process that would be sent to the visitor’s home to gather information about their overall trip within the Adirondack Park.

2. Visitor experiences within the Adirondack Park were measured using mail surveys sent to those interviewed at public access points to Forest Preserve areas.
 - During the field interview portion of the study, 3,361 visitors agreed to participate in the mail survey and provided deliverable mailing addresses. A total of 2,177 completed mail surveys were returned for analysis, yielding a 65% response rate.
 - Information gathered included: sources of information, importance of and satisfaction with various features within the Management Unit visited, type of recreation participated in across the Adirondack Park, substitute destinations within or outside the Adirondack Park, future planned trips to the Adirondack Park, and overall trip satisfaction.
 - These mail surveys were sent as soon after the visitor’s trip as possible to support an accurate visitor recall about that specific trip. Up to two reminders were sent, if necessary, to achieve a relatively high mail survey response rate.
3. Self-registration compliance by visitors at trailhead registers.
 - Approximately 159 of the 412 public access sites have a trailhead register for self-registration by hikers and boaters.
 - Active infrared automated trail counters were installed and maintained at a sample of 37 trailheads with registers for four week or longer periods throughout the 12-month study period in a unit. The trail counters recorded the date and time that the users entered or exited the Management Unit.
 - Trail register sheets from the trailheads were compared to trail counter data for analysis.

VISITOR CHARACTERISTICS AND TRIP CHARACTERISTICS

On-site interviews were conducted over a 12-month period in each unit. Nearly half of all interviews were conducted in the summer season when visitor use is highest (Table 1).

Table 1. The percentage of the on-site visitor interviews completed on Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park by season.

Sampling Season	Percent
Winter -- December 1 to March 31	21
Spring -- April 1 to May 31	11
Summer -- June 1 to August 31	49
Fall -- September 1 to November 30	19
Total	100%

Eighty-one percent of the visitors completing an interview were on day trips within the Forest Preserve unit

while 19% were camping overnight within that unit. Sixty-seven percent of those staying overnight within the unit were doing so for 2 to 3 days (1 to 2 nights) and 33% were staying four or more days.

Thirty-three percent of the visitors completing an interview were on day trips within the Adirondack Park, while 67% were staying overnight within the Adirondack Park. Sixty-four percent of those staying overnight within the Adirondack Park were doing so for 2 to 3 days (1 to 2 nights); 27% were staying from four to seven days; and 9% were staying eight or more days.

Thirteen percent of the visitors completing an interview spent one or more additional nights away from home outside the Adirondack Park while on their trip to the Park.

A large percentage of visitors (35%) had traveled from their primary residence to their recreation destination (Table 2). The remaining visitors lodged for one or more nights in a variety of accommodations from camping on state land to second homes.

Table 2. The percentage of the on-site visitor interviews completed on Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park by type of lodging used on their trip.

Lodging Type	Percent of respondents ^a
Traveled from primary residence	35
Primitive campsite on state land	17
Rented home, condo, cabin, or lodge	10
Hotel or motel	9
Private home of friend or relative	9
Second home, cabin or condominium	9
New York State campground	7
Other	4

^a Lodging totals to more than 100% because some visitors used more than one type of lodging during their trip.

The primary residence area for most visitors (72.6%) interviewed was New York State. The other visitors were from the northeastern states of Vermont (2.1%), New Hampshire (0.4%), Massachusetts (1.8%), Connecticut (1.5%), Maine (0.3%), New Jersey (3.6%), and Pennsylvania (2.9%); other U.S. states (7.3%); the Province of Ontario (1.8%) or elsewhere in Canada (5.0%); and international visitors (0.7%).

Four activities were most participated in by more than half of visitors: viewing scenery, hiking or walking, viewing wildlife, and photography (Table 3).

Table 3. The percentage of visitors reporting participation in recreational activities on Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park.

Recreation Activities	Participated (%)
Viewing natural features such as scenery, flowers, etc.	90
Hiking or walking	78
Viewing wildlife, birds, fish, etc.	75
Photography	57
Nature study (identification of birds, plants, etc.)	27
Backpacking and camping in primitive campsites	15
Fishing – all types	11
Driving for pleasure on roads (paved, gravel, or dirt)	8
Camping along roads (tent, trailer, or recreational vehicle)	5
Hunting –all types	4
Horseback riding	1
Riding an all terrain vehicle or off-road vehicle	<1

Study participants were asked to indicate whether they typically visit the Adirondack Park for recreation during each of the four seasons. Each season was associated with a high visitation percentage. Seventy-nine percent of visitors reported that they participate in recreation in the Adirondack Park during the summer season, while 68% reported visitation during the fall season, 61% during the winter, and 58% during the spring. Only 7% of respondents reported that they were on their first recreation trip to the Adirondack Park.

The majority of respondents (94%) took their trip to the Adirondack Park primarily for recreation. Those who were primarily in the Adirondack Park for recreation were participating in the management area they were interviewed in, or that unit plus other units (Table 4).

Table 4. Percentage of respondents reporting on purpose of their trip to the Adirondack Park.

Reason for visit	Percentage
Primarily for recreation – this Management Unit is my main destination	57
Primarily for recreation – this Management Unit and other units in the Adirondack Park are my main destinations	37
Primarily to visit friends and relatives in the area – recreation in this Management Unit is secondary	3
Primarily for business in the area – visiting this Management Unit is secondary	1
Traveling through to another destination – visiting this Management Unit is secondary	1
Other reasons	<1
Total	100

Group size was most often 1 to 3 visitors (63%) or 4 to 6 visitors (25%); 9% of groups included 7 to 10 people and only 3% of groups included more than 10 people. Twenty-three percent of groups included one or more child under 18 years of age. The average total group size was 3.6 people (adults and children).

Visitor groups were most often made up of family (37%), friends (31%), or friends and family (13%); five percent of visitors reported traveling with an organizational group, and only 14% of respondents reporting participating alone.

Respondents were represented by all ages from 18 to more than 75 years of age (Table 5). Respondents were more often male (65%) than female (35%).

Table 5. Percent of respondents by age using Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park.

Age	Percentage
18 to 24	13
25 to 29	11
30 to 34	10
35 to 39	9
40 to 44	10
45 to 49	13
50 to 54	13
55 to 59	9
60 to 64	6
65 to 69	4
70 to 74	2
75 years and up	<u>1</u>
Total	100

Most respondents were employed (75%), 10% reported being retired from the work force, and 10% reported being students (Table 6).

Table 6. Percent of respondents by occupation using Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park.

Occupation	Percentage
Employed	75
Retired	10
Student	10
Unemployed	2
Homemaker / homecare provider	2
Military Service	1
I prefer not to answer this question	<u><1</u>
Total	100

Respondents are generally well educated with 64% reporting having earned a bachelor's degree or higher in college (Table 7).

Table 7. Percent of respondents by highest degree or level of school using Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park.

Education	Percentage
8 th grade or less	<1
9 th to 11 th grade	1
High school graduate or GED	12
Some college or technical/trade school, but have not yet graduated	14
Associate's or technical /trade school degree (AA or AS)	9
Bachelor's degree (BA or BS)	35
Master's, Professional, or Doctoral degree	29
I prefer not to answer this question	<u>0</u>
Total	100

The majority of respondents (95%) reported being of a Caucasian or white racial origin (non-Hispanic or Latino) and only 1% did not want to answer the question (Table 8).

Table 8. Percent of respondents by race or ethnic group using Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park.

Race or Ethnic Group	Percentage
White (Caucasian) origin	95
Hispanic or Latino origin	1
Asian	1
American Indian or Alaska Native	<1
Black or African American	<1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	<1
I prefer not to answer this question	<u>1</u>
Total	100

The majority of responding visitors, vacation home owners, or seasonal residents were highly experienced in traveling to the Adirondack Park and engaging in their primary form of recreation (Table 9). At least ninety-seven percent reported visiting the Adirondack Park and the specific Management Unit that they visited when interviewed at least one time per year.

Table 9. Percent of respondents who were visitors, vacation homeowners or seasonal residents and the typical number of times per year they visit Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park.

Annual visitation	Adirondack Park	FP unit interviewed in	Primary recreation activity when interviewed
1-2 times	39	71	20
3-5 times	19	13	19
6-10 times	15	8	16
11-20 times	14	5	19
More than 20 times	<u>13</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>26</u>
Total	100	100	100

The majority of responding full-time Adirondack Park residents was highly experienced in the Forest Preserve Management Unit in which they were interviewed in the Adirondack Park and were highly experienced in their primary form of recreation (Table 10).

Table 10. Percent of respondents who were full-time residents of the Adirondack Park and the typical number of times per year they visit Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park.

Annual visitation	FP unit interviewed in	Primary recreation activity when interviewed
1-2 times	26	8
3-5 times	17	10
6-10 times	15	11
11-20 times	14	19
More than 20 times	28	52
Total	100	100

All visitors interviewed were asked if they would be willing to participate in a more detailed mail survey about their overall trip experiences. Fifty-eight percent were willing to participate in the mail survey and provided their name and address to the interviewer.

VISITOR EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE ADIRONDACK PARK

Respondents relied heavily on their past experience, information from family and friends, and information from guidebooks and maps for information regarding the Forest Preserve unit they were visiting when interviewed in the Adirondack Park (Table 11). Many respondents reported using multiple sources of information and Table 11 sums to more than 100% for that reason.

Table 11. The percentage of mail survey respondents and their sources of information regarding Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park.

Source of Information	Used Source (%)
Previous personal experience there	60
Friend or family member	31
Commercially published guidebook/map	23
Internet or a Web site	15
NYS DEC staff or written materials	11
Chamber of commerce or visitor center	4
Other sources	2

Respondents reported they wanted a variety of information regarding the Forest Preserve unit they were visiting when interviewed in the Adirondack Park (Table 12). Respondents were particularly interested in obtaining detailed maps and information on current trail conditions. Many respondents reportedly wanted multiple sources of information and Table 12 sums to more than 100% for that reason.

Table 12. The percentage of mail survey respondents and the types of information they wanted more of regarding Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park.

Types of Information	Desired Information (%)
Map of the area, listing campsites, hiking trails, etc.	44
Trail conditions	34
Campsite availability	15
Local area attractions	12
Rules and regulations	11
Other information	1

Respondents were asked to indicate their perceived level of importance for 12 features of the Adirondack Park area during their trip. Importance was measured on a five-point range from very unimportant (-2) to neutral (0) to very important (2). The 12 features of the Adirondack Park experience were organized by percentage level of importance and there were six features of the management units that were reported as important or very important by 90% of visitors (Table 13).

Table 13. The percentage of mail survey respondents reporting important or very important ratings of certain features on Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park.

Area Features	Percent
Experience natural environment and scenic beauty.	96
Experience an environment free of litter and human waste and impacts.	93
Enjoy physical activity, challenge, and exercise.	92
Feeling a connection with nature and a natural environment.	90
Experience a remote area away from sight and sound of cities and people.	90
Experience recreation trails, sites, and environments that were <u>not</u> crowded.	90
Feel a connection with wilderness & wild forests as important places.	88
Get away from daily routines and have a chance to reflect on life.	87
Experience well managed recreation trails & facilities.	80
Experience solitude and being isolated from other groups and having a personal experience within my group.	76
Practice travel skills through a remote wild environment.	46
Obtain information on recreation opportunities, activities, and locations.	42

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with 12 features of the Adirondack Park area during their trip. Satisfaction was measured on a five-point range from very dissatisfied (-2) to neutral (0) to very satisfied (2). The 12 features of the Adirondack Park experience were organized by percentage level of satisfaction and there were five features of the management units that were reported as satisfying or very satisfying by at least 90% of respondents (Table 14).

Table 14. The percentage of mail survey respondents reporting they were satisfied or very satisfied with certain features on Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park.

Area Features	Percent
Experience natural environment and scenic beauty.	97
Feeling a connection with nature and a natural environment.	93
Enjoy physical activity, challenge, and exercise.	92
Get away from daily routines and have a chance to reflect on life.	90
Feel a connection with wilderness & wild forests as important places.	90
Experience a remote area away from sight and sound of cities and people.	86
Experience recreation trails, sites, and environments that were <u>not</u> crowded.	85
Experience an environment free of litter and human waste and impacts.	84
Experience well managed recreation trails & facilities.	82
Experience solitude and being isolated from other groups and having a personal experience within my group.	76
Practice travel skills through a remote wild environment.	55
Obtain information on recreation opportunities, activities, and locations.	42

Visitors rated most of the 12 features high to very high in importance and in satisfaction indicating strong trip satisfaction. Overall, respondents reported they were satisfied (22%) to very satisfied (72%) with their total trip experience in the Adirondack Park; 5% of respondents reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their trip in Adirondack Park and 1% were neutral.

Four types of recreational activities were participated in during recent trips to the Adirondack Park by more than 50% of respondents (Table 15) with the vast majority (94%) reporting participating in hiking or walking.

Four types of tourism-related activities were participated in during recent trips to the Adirondack Park by more than 50% of respondents (Table 16).

Table 15. The percentage of mail survey respondents reporting their participation during recent years in various recreational activities in the Adirondack Park.

Recreational Activities	Percentage
Hiking or walking	94
Viewing natural features such as scenery, flowers, etc.	85
Viewing wildlife, birds, fish, etc.	76
Non-Motorized water travel (canoe, kayak, sailing)	61
Backpacking and camping in primitive campsites	49
Cross-country skiing or snowshoeing	48
Camping in campgrounds	43
Fishing – all types	43
Bicycling and mountain biking	36
Motorized water travel (boat, jet ski, etc.)	30
Skiing at a downhill ski area	25
Nature study	21
Camping in roadside campsites on state land	19
Snowmobile travel	19
Hunting – all types	18
Riding in designated off-road vehicle areas (non-snow)	10
Backcountry alpine or downhill skiing or snowboarding	10
Horseback riding	6

Table 16. The percentage of mail survey respondents reporting their participation during recent years in various tourism activities in the Adirondack Park.

Tourism Activities	Percentage
Dining	66
Driving for pleasure on roads (paved, gravel or dirt)	61
Visiting museums or historical sites	55
Nature photography	54
Shopping (for non-essential items)	45
Visiting Environmental Education Centers	43
Attending festivals or cultural events	37
Visiting farms, gardens, or orchards	24
Attending art events or visiting galleries	21
Attending theater or music events	21
Participated in an Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA) or Empire State Game event or activity	9

Overall, 99% of respondents reported that the Adirondack Park was their first choice for the recreational trip. If for some reason they had not been able to go to the Adirondack Park, the majority would have: gone somewhere else outside the Adirondack Park for the same activities (38%) or come back to the Adirondack Park another time (37%). A minority would have stayed home (11%), gone somewhere else for a different activity (6%), or done taken other actions (8%).

Three questions asked respondents how they would modify their participation in the future based on their experiences on their trip in the Adirondack Park. Future intentions were considered long-term outcomes of their Adirondack Park experience at the time of the survey. The future intention questions were designed to identify behavioral modifications to how visitors use an area resulting from current on-site conditions and experiences. If the visitor is satisfied with current conditions and experiences there should not be a need to modify behavior. Conversely, if a visitor experienced less than satisfying situations on the current trip he/she is likely to proactively avoid the area again in the future. Future intentions was measured on a five-point range from very unlikely (-2) to neutral (0) to very likely (2).

The majority of visitors reported that were likely to very likely to return to the Adirondack Park and the same Management Unit on another trip, or return to the Adirondack Park and seek a different management area on another trip (94% and 75%, respectively) (Table 17).

Table 17. The percentage of mail survey respondents reporting their future intentions to go to the Adirondack Park.

As a result of my experience on this trip I am likely to:	Percentage				
	Very Unlikely (-2)	Unlikely (-1)	Neutral (0)	Likely (1)	Very Likely (2)
Return to the Adirondack Park to the same Management Unit	2	1	3	22	72
Return to the Adirondack Park but seek a different area	5	6	14	28	47
Go to a different recreation area outside of the Adirondack Park	14	19	31	21	15

SELF REGISTRATION COMPLIANCE BY VISITORS AT TRAILHEAD REGISTERS

Trail counters were used to estimate visitor use and to compare those estimates with the number of visitors who registered at a trailhead registration station. Overall, in the 37 trailhead studies, 34,610 visitors registered at the trailheads and the trail counters estimated 36,619 visitors for those same locations and time periods resulting in an estimated 95% compliance. There was wide variation in the percentage of registration compliance at any given trailhead, ranging from 61% to 118%. The estimates that reported more registered visitors at the trailhead registration station compared to the trail counters (i.e., more than 100% compliance) were likely due to three factors: (1) visitors were sometimes registering individually but recording their entire group total each time and, thereby, inflating the total numbered registered, although attempts were made to identify the obvious cases and remove them as the field data was entered into the computer; (2) visitors were exiting or entering the area in ways other than the main trail that had the counter installation; and (3) visitors were registering and going one way in or out on the trail, but not both directions.

Trail register data is essential to estimate visitor use both temporally and spatially for planning and management of Forest Preserve lands. Of the 159 trailheads with register stations, NYSDEC field staff recorded and published annual and monthly trailhead register data for 57 trailheads during the years of the study. Overall, trailhead visitor registrations at these 57 sites totaled over 230,000 visits with July and August reporting the heaviest visitor use during the typical summer recreation, vacation, and tourism season (Figure 1). September and October recorded the highest fall month visitor use due to visitors seeking cooler hiking weather and fall leaf foliage color changes.

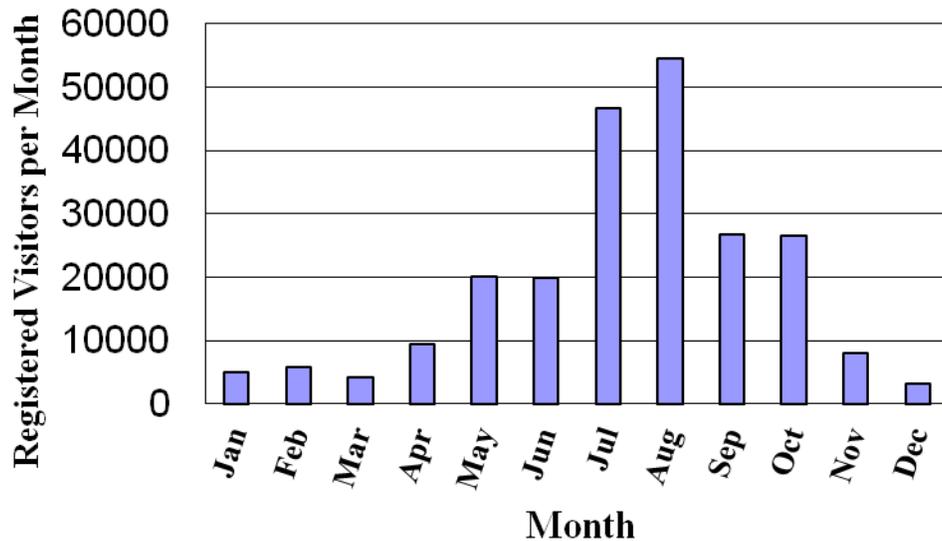


Figure 1. Trailhead visitor registrations by month (January to December) for 57 trailheads on Forest Preserve lands in the Adirondack Park.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The visitors to the 46 Forest Preserve unit areas in this study of the Adirondack Park were predominantly New York State residents (72.6%). The Forest Preserve lands within each area of the Adirondack Park tend to attract local residents for a variety of recreational activities with family and friends. What is surprising for this tourism region is the small percentage of visitors to the Forest Preserve who come to Adirondack Park to use the Forest Preserve lands from outside New York State. The possibilities for greater use by New York residents and people residing within a one-day drive (i.e., 350 miles) of the Adirondack Park are evident when you consider the population statistics and characteristics in the region.

The Adirondack Park Agency (APA 2010) estimated that the Adirondack resident population was 131,807 in 2000 and that there were 45,252 seasonal residents of the Adirondack Park in 2008; these are likely the heavy recreational users on Forest Preserve lands within the Adirondack Park. However, a large population base exists at a greater distance from the Adirondack Park and does not appear to use Forest Preserve lands in Adirondack Park to as large a degree as anticipated. New York State has a population of 19.4 million residents according to the 2008 U.S. Bureau of the Census (2010) reports and 87% are defined as living in urban areas and cities.

Another way to think about the potential user base for the Adirondack Park, including Forest Preserve lands, is to consider the population that lives within a one-day drive of the Adirondack Park. The APA (2010) estimated that there are 66 million US citizens (2005 population estimates) and 17.7

million Canadian citizens (2001 population estimates) who reside within 350 miles of the Adirondack Park boundary.

While it is evident that the Forest Preserve user base in the the Adirondack Park is localized and could be expanded geographically, it is also interesting to consider the age and ethnic/racial mixture of visitors compared to the general population. For example, while there were 34% of the adult visitors in the 18 to 34-year-old category, they represent 30% of the New York State adult population in 2008. Similarly, while there were 7% of the adult visitors in the 65 or older category, they represent 17% of the New York State adult population in 2008. An even more dramatic comparison is that 95% of those answering the visitor survey question on racial and ethnic origins reported being white or Caucasian in heritage and 1% as being Hispanic or Latino, while these same racial/ethnic groups make up 60% and 17%, respectively, in the New York State population in 2008.

The future of the Forest Preserve and the Adirondack Park itself rests on the support of the people of New York State. It is imperative that a wide diversity of New York State citizens learn to know and love the Adirondack Park and its Forest Preserve lands since we often protect only what we know and love. Not all the citizens of New York State need set foot on Forest Preserve lands to know and love and, thus, protect them. So, how else can this important heritage and landscape be maintained for future generations of New York State residents? One example may be information and education outreach programs to reach a highly urbanized population.

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