



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE VISITOR SURVEY

*2018 Results for
Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge*



**THE OHIO STATE
UNIVERSITY**



Acknowledgments

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Front cover: Entering a wilderness area in the swamp at Okefenokee NWR. October 2018. Photo credit: Kylie Campbell.

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Understanding Wildlife Refuge Visitors & Their Experiences

A hundred years in the making, the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) is a vast network of habitats that supports over 2,000 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish across the United States on national wildlife refuges (wildlife refuges). Wildlife refuges also provide unparalleled outdoor recreation experiences and health benefits to people by offering a chance to unplug from the stresses of modern life and reconnect with their natural surroundings. The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 specifically identified six priority recreational uses: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and interpretation (Fig. 1). These recreational activities are prioritized on every refuge where compatible with the refuge's stated purposes. Visitors may also engage in many other activities (for example, hiking, paddling, boating, and auto tour routes) where compatible.

At least one wildlife refuge exists within an hour's drive of most major metropolitan areas. With over 55 million visits per year, the Refuge System is committed to maintaining customer satisfaction and public engagement while helping people and wildlife to thrive. Increased

visitation is not limited to the Refuge System—over the past few years, there has been a rise in the number of people traveling to public lands and waters for recreation (Outdoor Foundation, 2018). This nationwide trend demands effective management of visitor access and use to ensure benefits for present and future generations.

The need to understand visitors and their experiences, as well as preferences for future opportunities, is further underscored by widespread societal changes that are shaping how people engage with nature and wildlife (Kellert et al., 2017; Manfredo et al., 2018). Researchers and land management professionals alike recognize the need to connect the next generation to nature and wildlife to enhance mental and physical well-being and build a broader conservation constituency (Charles & Louv, 2009; Larson, Green, & Cordell, 2011).

The National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey is a Refuge System-wide effort to monitor visitor characteristics, experience, and satisfaction with refuge experiences, as well as visitor economic contributions to local communities. The survey is conducted every five years on a rotating basis on wildlife refuges that have at least 50,000 visits per year. This effort provides refuge professionals with reliable baseline information and trend data that can be used to plan, design, and deliver quality visitor experiences, communicate the value of wildlife refuges to different audiences, and set future priorities. The National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey is a collaboration between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service), The Ohio State University (OSU), and American Conservation Experience (ACE).

This report summarizes visitors and their experiences at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, referred to as “this wildlife refuge” or “refuge” throughout this report. Percentages noted throughout the report were rounded



Fig. 1: Priority recreational uses of National Wildlife Refuges.

to the nearest whole number and, when summarized per survey question, may not equal 100%. Additionally, most figures do not display a percentage for any category containing less than 5% of visitors. See Appendix A for the

survey methodology and limitations of findings. See Appendix B and C for visitor responses to specific survey questions for this wildlife refuge.



2018 National Visitor Survey interns in action at wildlife refuges across the United States. Photo credit: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Surveying Visitors at This Wildlife Refuge

REFUGE DESCRIPTION

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is located in southeast Georgia. The refuge was established by executive order in 1936 to provide habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. This wildlife refuge is the largest in the eastern United States at 402,000 acres and covers almost all of the Okefenokee Swamp, a 7,000-year-old rain fed wetland. Nearly 353,981 acres of the refuge are designated as a National Wilderness Area. The name Okefenokee means “Land of the Trembling Earth” in Choctaw and is descriptive of the vast peat deposits that make up the swamp. Though this wildlife refuge has changed dramatically throughout human history, largely through logging, it remains one of the largest intact freshwater ecosystems in the world. It is home to many charismatic species including alligators, black bears, gopher tortoises, and sandhill cranes. The pine forest surrounding the swamp provides habitat for the endangered red cockaded woodpecker.

Okefenokee NWR attracts over 646,000 visitors annually (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2018, written comm.). Boating is one of the most popular ways for visitors to experience the refuge. Guided boat tours take visitors out into



Visitors observe alligators from a boat in Okefenokee NWR. August 2018. Photo credit: Nicole Stagg.

the swamp and provide interpretive information about the ecosystem and its wildlife. Visitors can also explore the refuge in their own canoes via miles of water trails and backcountry floating camping platforms. A unique partnership with Georgia State Parks allows visitors to have access to a full campground as well as cabins within the refuge. Hiking trails and an auto tour route provide additional opportunities for wildlife observation and photography. The restored Chesser Island Homestead provides visitors with a glimpse into the human history of the refuge.

SAMPLING

Refuge professionals at this wildlife refuge identified two separate 14-day sampling periods and one or more sampling locations that best reflected the primary uses of the refuge as well as the diversity of activities that occur (Fig. 2). For more details on methodology for the National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey, see Appendix A.

- During the two sampling periods, a total of 380 visitors agreed to participate in the survey by providing their names and addresses.
- In all, 195 visitors completed the survey online (35%) or by mail (65%) after their refuge visit, resulting in a 54% response rate.
- Results for this wildlife refuge have a $\pm 7\%$ margin of error at the 95% confidence level. For more details on limitations of results and survey methodology, see Appendix A.

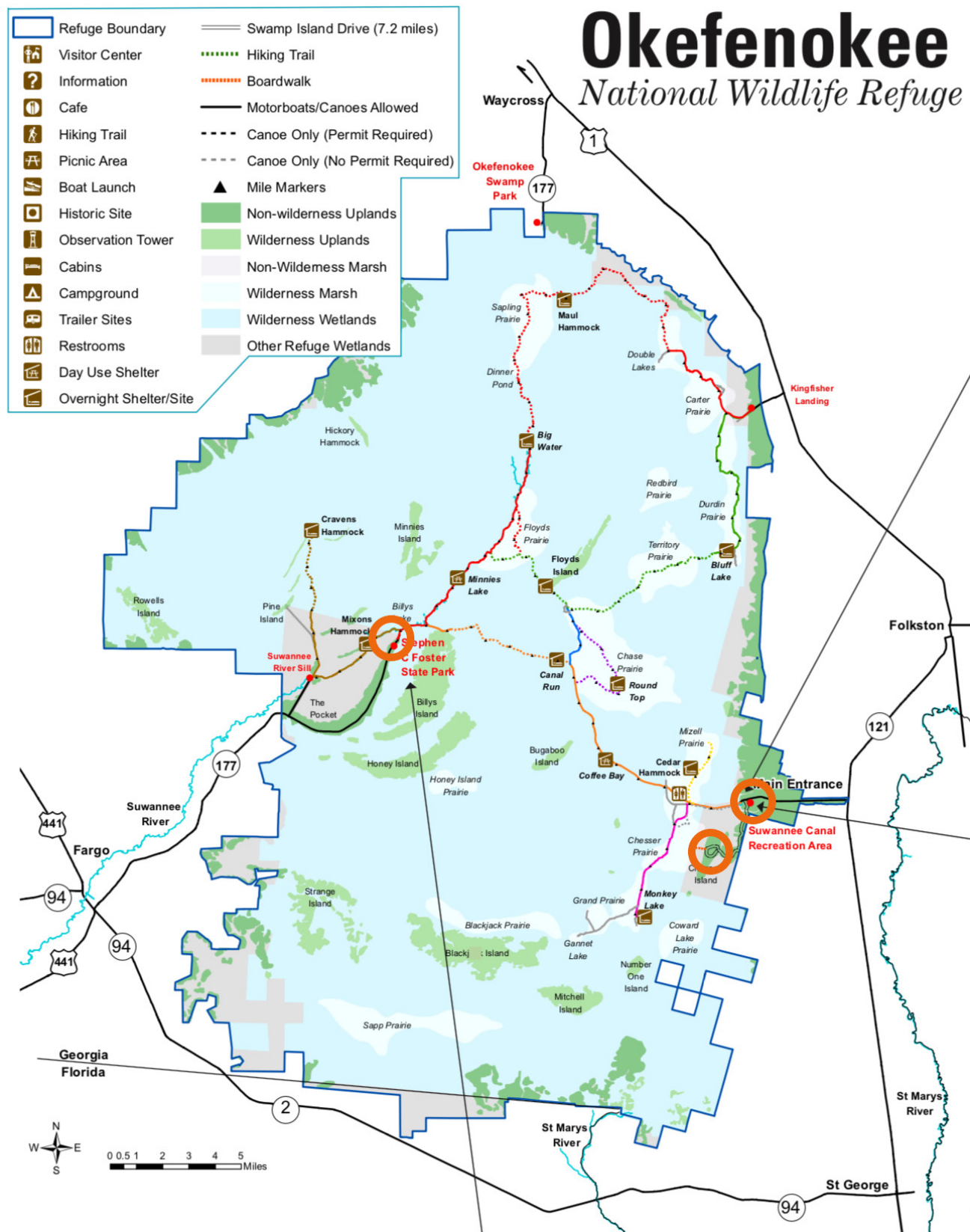


Fig. 2: A map of Okefenokee NWR. Visitors were contacted at the circled locations from 4/5/2018-4/14/2018 and 10/19/2018-10/27/2018.

Visitor Characteristics

An important first step in managing visitor experiences is to understand the characteristics of those who currently visit wildlife refuges. Refuge professionals can compare visitor demographics to the demographic composition of nearby communities or the nation to inform engagement efforts with new audiences. Useful tools for these comparisons include Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System and their Populations at Risk (<https://headwaterseconomics.org>) or U.S. Census Bureau products (www.census.gov; www.socialexplorer.com).

AGE & GENDER

- 46% of visitors were female with an average age of 59 years (Fig. 3).
- 54% were male with an average age of 60 years.

EDUCATION

- 10% of visitors had a high school degree or less.
- 50% had at least some college.
- 40% had an advanced degree.

RACE & ETHNICITY

Most prevalent race or ethnicity (Fig. 4):

- White (95%).
- Some other race (3%).
- Hispanic (2%).

INCOME

- Visitors had a mean income range of \$75,000-\$99,999 (Fig. 5).

OTHER TRIP CHARACTERISTICS

- Average group size of 4 people.
- 12% visited the refuge alone.
- 66% visited with at least one other adult.
- 22% visited with a combination of at least 1 adult and 1 child.

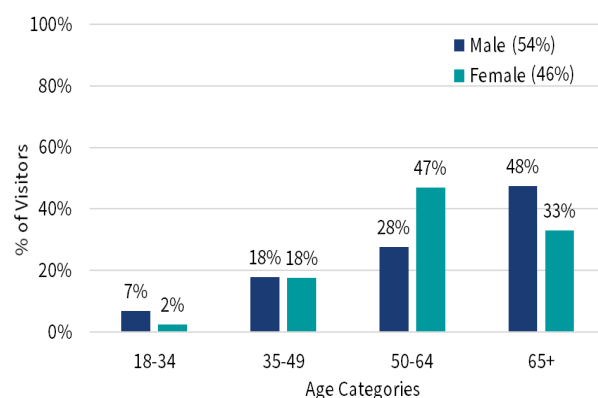


Fig. 3: Distribution of visitors to this refuge by gender and age group.

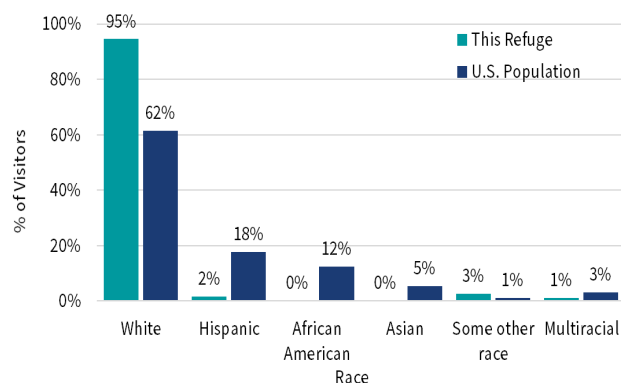


Fig. 4: Race and ethnicity of visitors to this refuge compared to the national average.

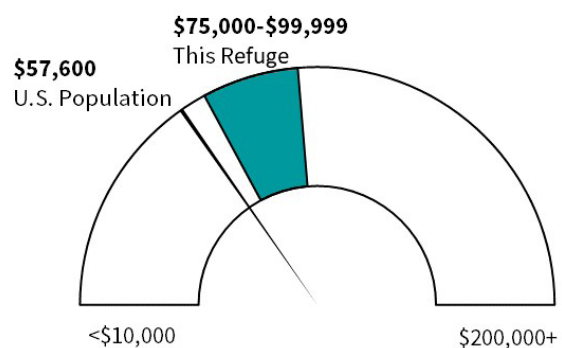


Fig. 5: Mean income range of visitors to this refuge compared to the national median income.

Trip Characteristics

Understanding the travel patterns of visitors and why they choose to visit wildlife refuges is important for effective visitor use management. Comparisons of responses from local visitors (those living ≤ 50 miles from the refuge) and nonlocal visitors (those living > 50 miles from the refuge) can inform communication efforts with current visitors and those who have yet to visit. Understanding seasonality helps refuge professionals better understand visitor use patterns and gauge supply and demand.

LOCAL VISITORS

Highlights of trip characteristics for local visitors to this wildlife refuge include:

- Visiting this refuge was the primary reason for their trip (84%) (Fig. 6).
- 23% of visitors lived within 50 miles of the refuge (Fig. 7).

- Local visitors traveled an average of 32 minutes to arrive at this refuge.

NONLOCAL VISITORS

Highlights of trip characteristics for nonlocal visitors to this wildlife refuge include:

- Visiting this refuge was the primary reason for their trip (54%) (Fig. 6).
- 77% of visitors lived outside the local 50 mile area (Fig. 8).
- Nonlocal visitors traveled an average of 7 hours to arrive at this refuge.
- Of the 95% of visitors who lived in the U.S., nonlocal visitors were most often from Georgia (41%) and Florida (28%).
- 5% of respondents were international visitors.

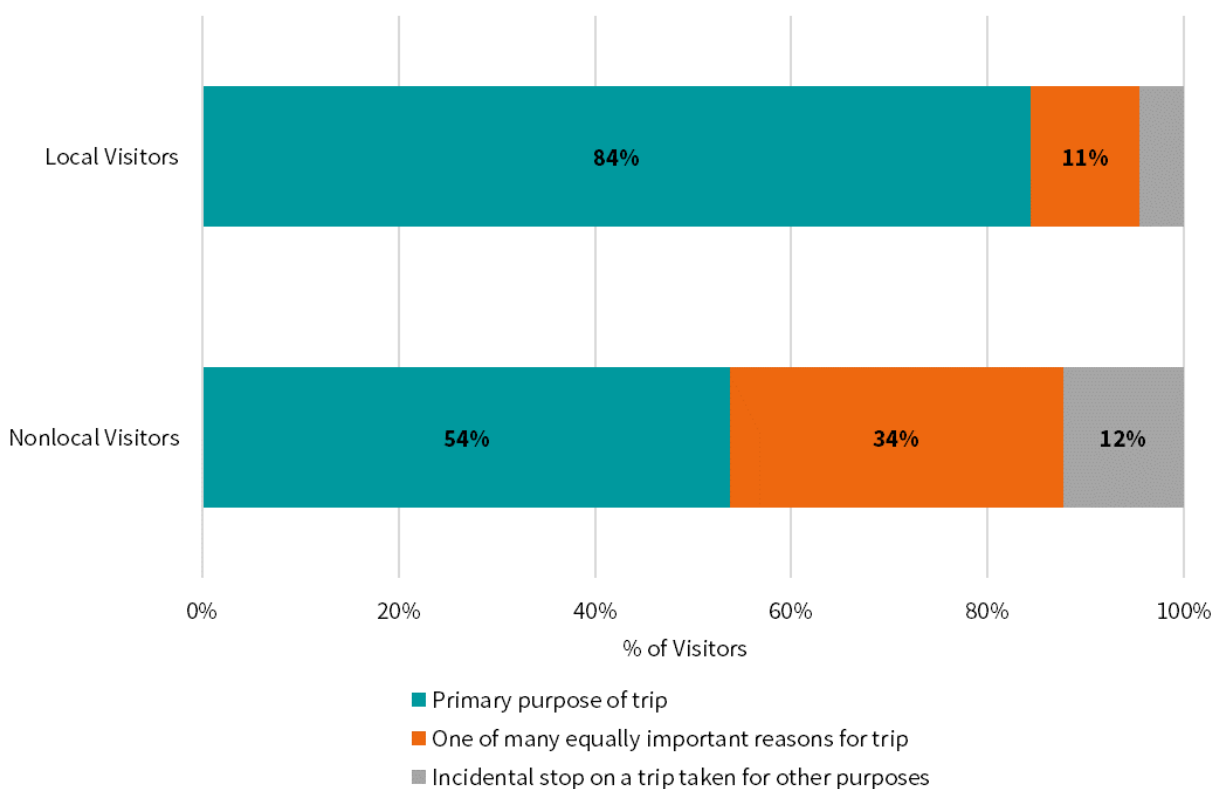


Fig. 6: Purpose of most recent refuge visit for local (living ≤ 50 miles from the refuge) and nonlocal (living > 50 miles from the refuge) visitors.

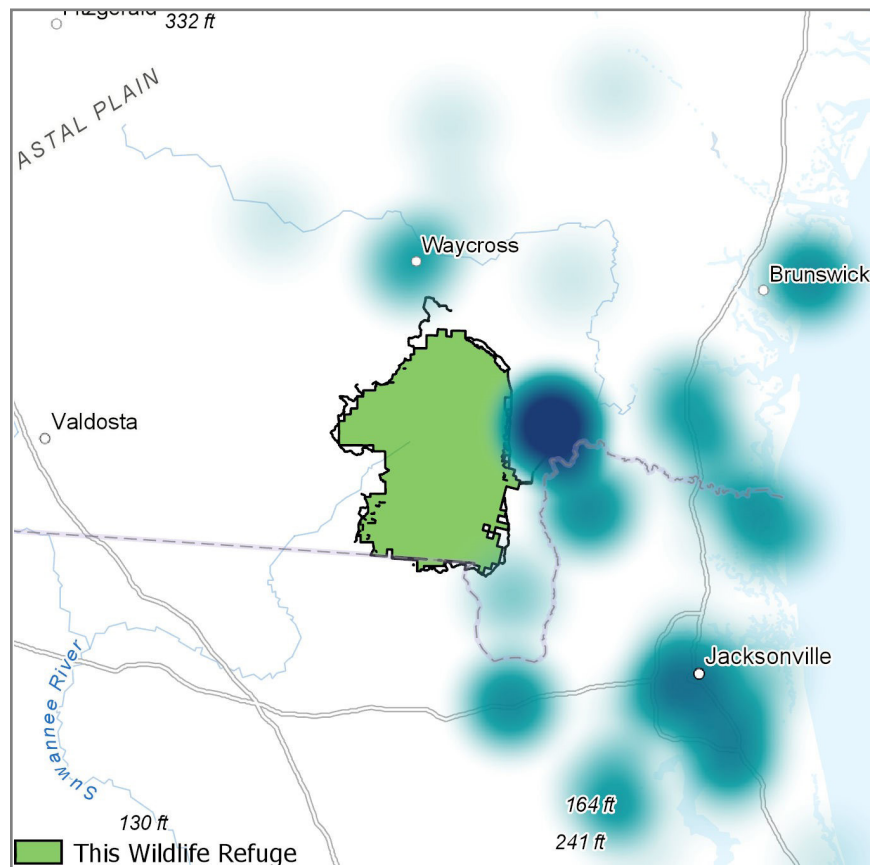


Fig. 7: Map showing residence of local visitors to this refuge. Darker shading represents relatively higher visitation from that area.

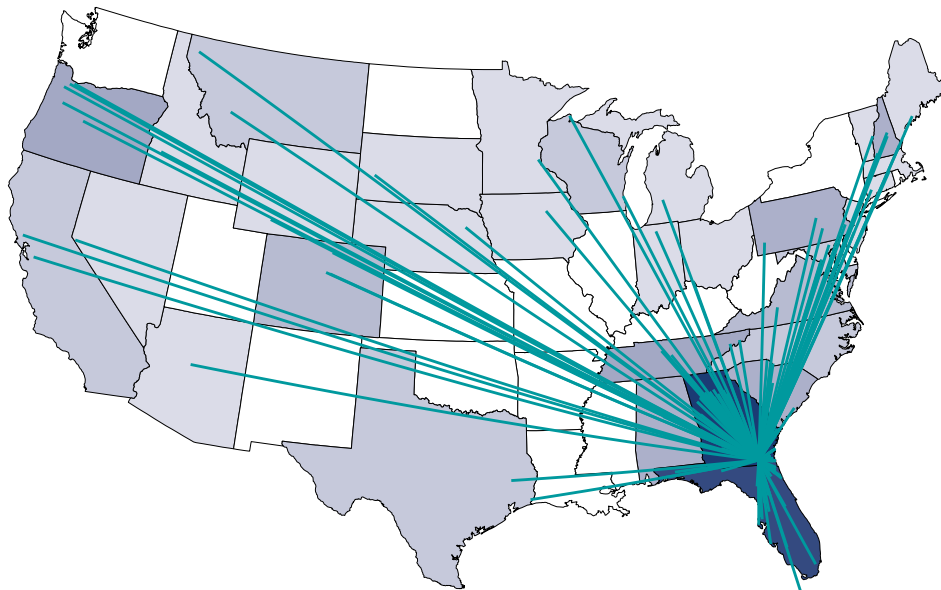


Fig. 8: Map showing residence of visitors to this refuge by zip code, with each line representing visitation from a different zip code. The convergence point of the lines is the geographical center of the refuge. Darker shading of the states represents higher visitation from that state.

OTHER TRIP CHARACTERISTICS

Other trip characteristics include:

- To get to this wildlife refuge, visitors primarily traveled by private vehicle without a trailer (75%) and by private vehicle with a trailer (15%) (Fig. 9).
- Once on the refuge, visitors primarily traveled by private vehicle without a trailer (58%) and by foot (53%) (Fig. 9).
- Visits occurred during winter (15%), spring (64%), summer (12%), and fall (51%).
- 62% of visitors made a single-day trip to this refuge, spending an average of 5 hours, while 38% of visitors were on a multi-day trip to this wildlife refuge that averaged 3 days.

During the 12 months prior to completing the survey, visitors also made multiple trips to this wildlife refuge, other wildlife refuges, and other public lands:

- 33% were repeat visitors to this wildlife refuge, visiting an average of 12 times.
- 53% visited other national wildlife refuges, averaging 3 visits.
- 78% visited other public lands, averaging 7 visits.

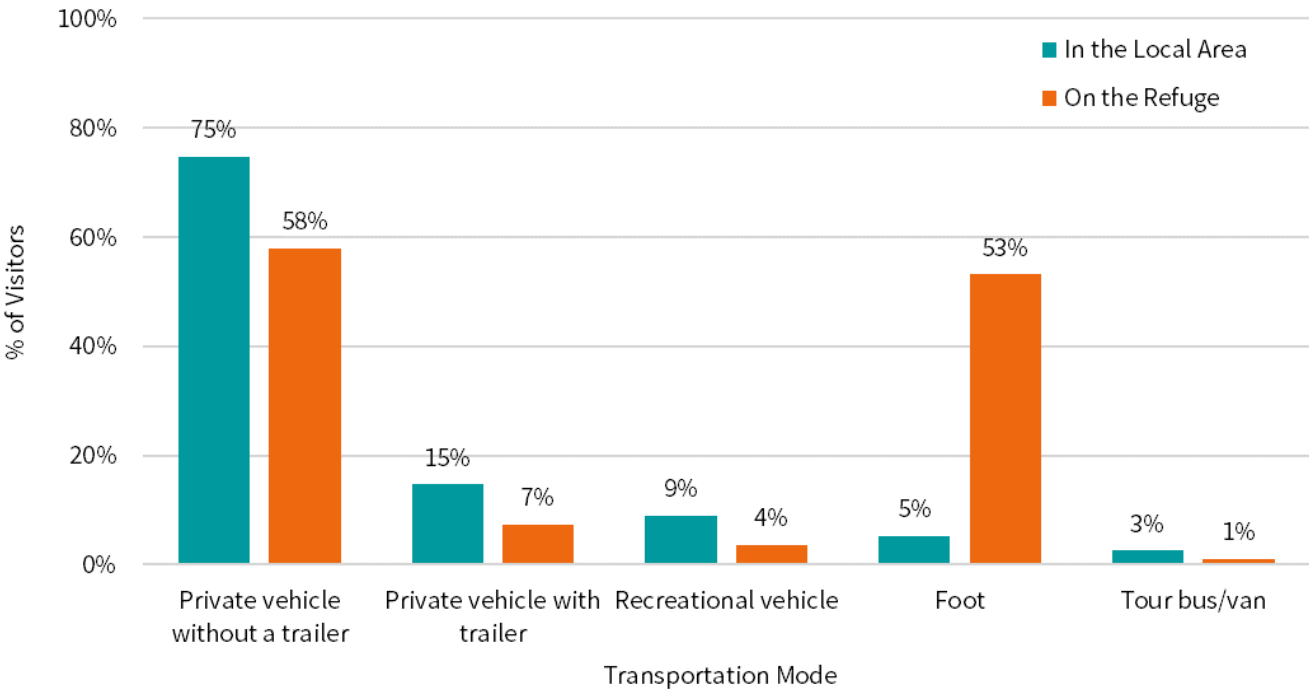


Fig. 9: Modes of transportation used by visitors to get from the local area to this refuge and within the boundaries of this refuge.

Information Sources Used for Trip Planning

Knowing more about which information sources visitors use (or do not use) to plan their trips can improve communication strategies and facilitate positive experiences on refuges. The Refuge System's success in reaching new and diverse audiences as well as current visitors also depends on its ability to keep pace with communication trends (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2016a).

Visitors to this wildlife refuge found a variety of in-person, print/internet, and refuge-specific information sources helpful when planning their trips. Details for information sources identified as very or extremely helpful include:

- In-person sources that were most helpful to visitors regardless of age included tourist information/welcome center and word of mouth.
- Print and internet sources that were most helpful to visitors regardless of age included web-based map and printed map/atlas.
- Refuge-specific sources that were most helpful to visitors regardless of age included refuge employees/volunteers and refuge website.
- Use of information sources varied by age groups (see Figs. 10-12 for details).

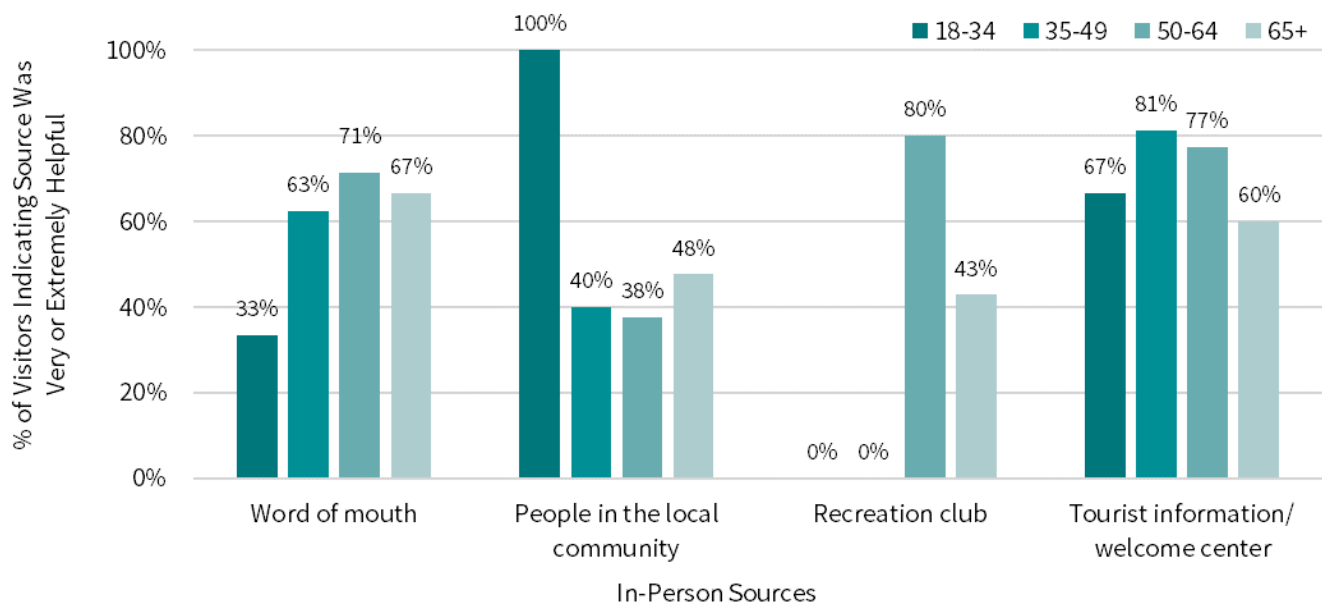


Fig. 10: Percent of visitors by age group who found in-person information sources very or extremely helpful in planning their trip.

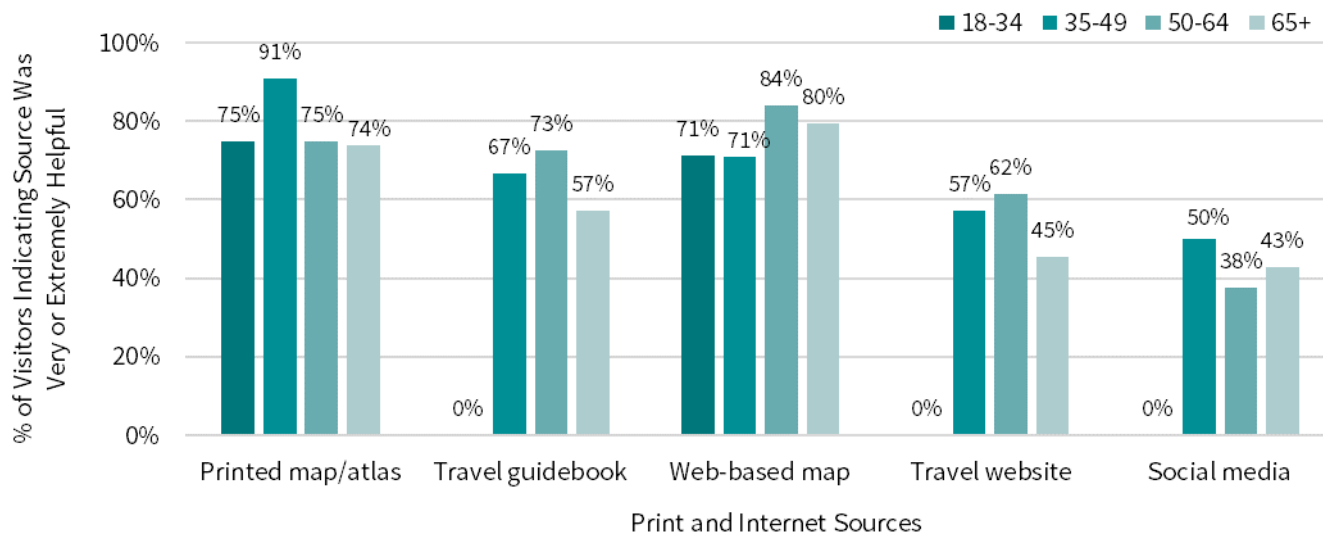


Fig. 11: Percent of visitors by age group who found print and internet information sources very or extremely helpful in planning their trip.

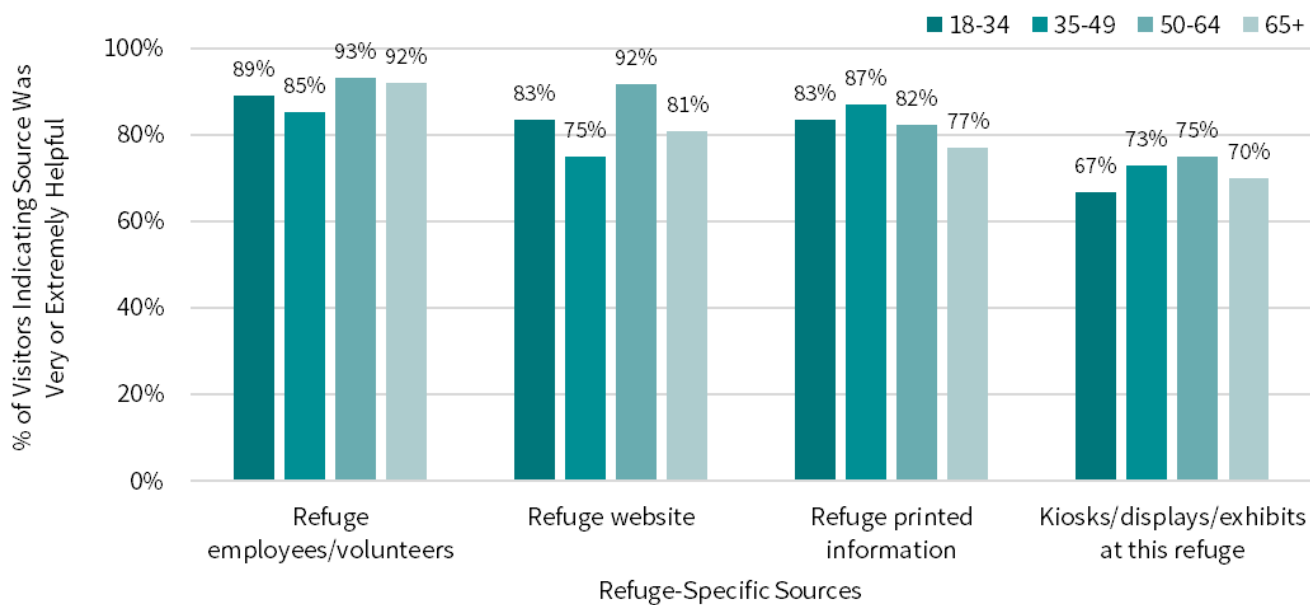


Fig. 12: Percent of visitors by age group who found refuge-specific information sources very or extremely helpful in planning their trip.

Use of Social Media

Around 70% of Americans use social media to connect with one another, engage with news content, share information, and entertain themselves (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Social media posts can act as a virtual “word of mouth” method for increasing awareness about the refuge to the visitor’s network and beyond. A social media presence can further generate awareness of the refuge and its resources among audiences that do not use or did not otherwise learn about the refuge through traditional advertising outlets.

Social media was used by 52% of visitors to share their experience on this refuge with others. Use of specific social media platforms varied by age group (Fig. 13):

- Visitors 18-34 years old preferred to use Facebook (63%) and Instagram (50%).
- Visitors 35-49 years old preferred to use Facebook (58%) and Instagram (23%).
- Visitors 50-64 years old preferred to use Facebook (50%).
- Visitors 65 or older preferred to use Facebook (37%).

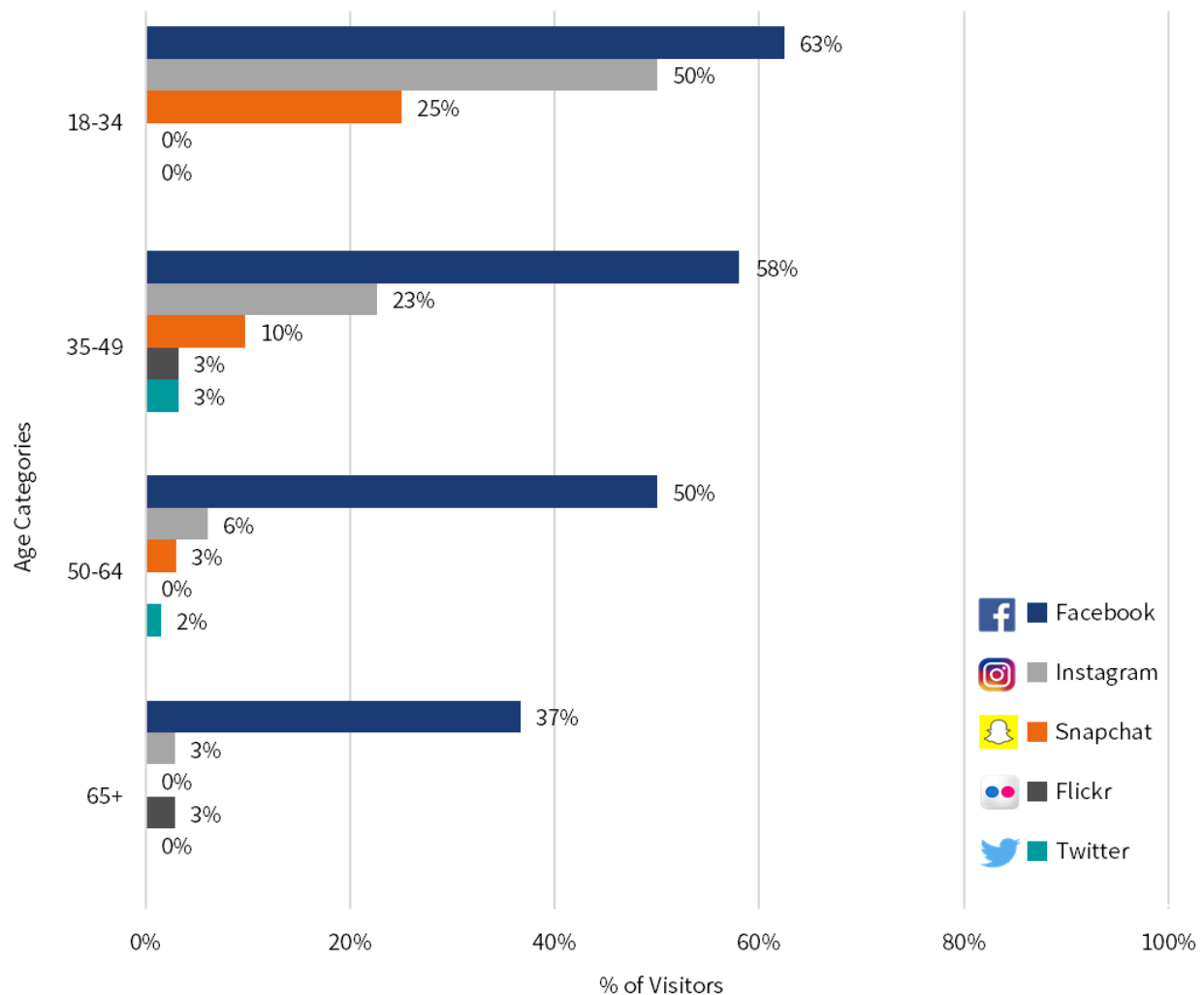


Fig. 13: Percent of visitors by age group who used various social media platforms to share their experience on this refuge with others.

Participation in Recreational Activities

Some research shows that rates of participation in outdoor recreation activities have increased (Outdoor Foundation, 2018), while other studies have indicated declines in participation in heritage activities such as hunting (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2016a). In light of these trends it is important to understand recreation participation on refuges to create quality visitor experiences and foster personal and emotional connections to the refuge and its resources (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2011). Understanding what people do while visiting refuges can also aid in developing programs that facilitate meaningful interactions between visitors and refuge professionals. Finally, such information can help to ensure impacts to resources and conflicts among visitor groups are minimized.

Participation in recreational activities at this wildlife refuge can be characterized as follows:

- The top three activities in which visitors participated during the past 12 months were wildlife observation (90%), hiking (69%), and bird watching (57%) (Fig. 14).
- The top three activities noted as their primary activity on the day visitors were contacted to participate in the survey were wildlife observation (29%), nonmotorized boating (15%), and hiking (9%) (Fig. 14).
- Of those who went to the visitor center (86%), most used the facilities (82%), visited the gift shop or bookstore (78%), and asked for information (70%) (Fig. 15).



Photo credit: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

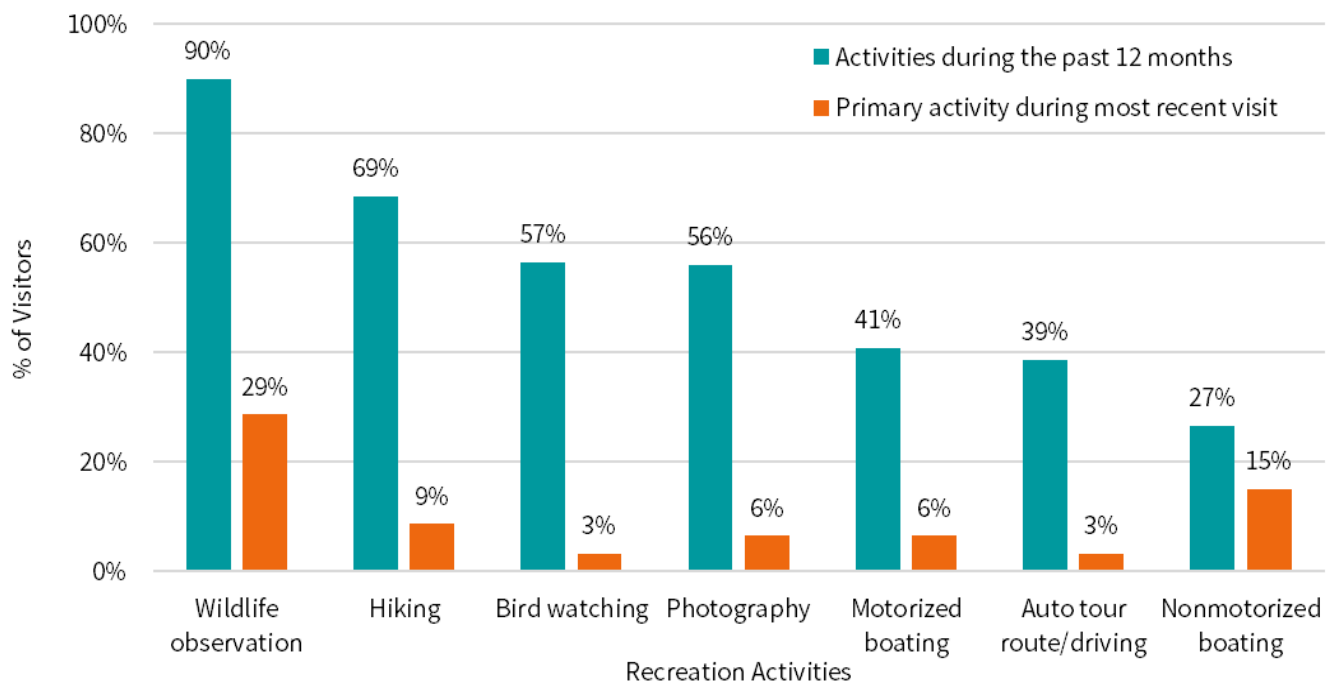


Fig. 14: Recreational activities visitors participated in during the past 12 months and their primary activity during their most recent visit to this refuge.

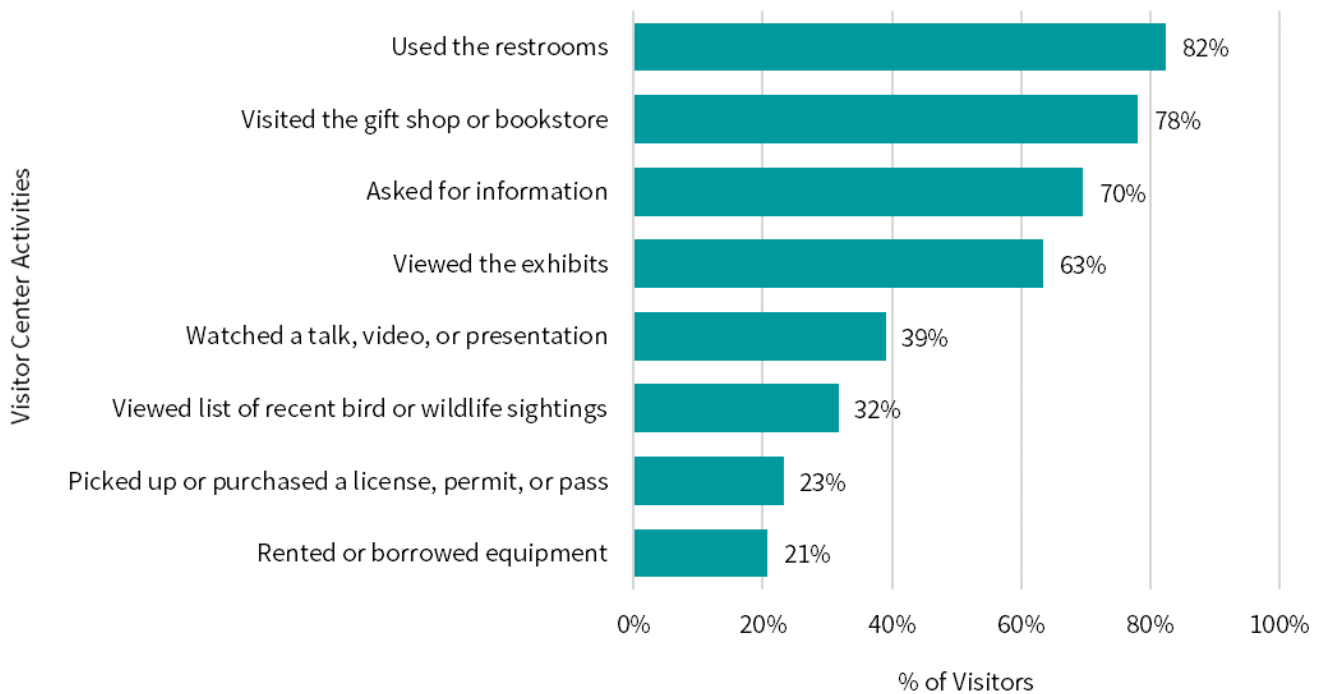


Fig. 15: Reasons visitors used the visitor center during their most recent visit to this refuge.

Comfort in Nature/Feeling Safe & Welcome

While many people are repeat visitors to refuges, each year thousands of people experience these lands and waters for the first time. One barrier for some visitors, particularly those living in urban areas or with little past exposure to nature-based recreation, is the perception that being in nature is dangerous or unsafe (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2014). There may also be negative stigmas associated with outdoor spaces that arise from social contexts (for example, people associating being outdoors with poverty or ‘dirty’ contexts) and historical contexts in which being ‘in the woods’ was dangerous and unsafe (Sexton, Ross-Winslow, Pradines, & Dietsch, 2015).

While ensuring that visitors feel safe and welcome is a foundational standard of the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program (<https://www.fws.gov/urban>), these basic needs apply across the Refuge System.

Before visitors can appreciate the wonders of nature, their basic need for safety and belonging must be met. Thus, an understanding of how visitors perceive safety, belonging, accessibility, and comfort in nature is critical to ensure real threats to safety are minimized, and that individuals from all demographic groups feel as welcome and comfortable in nature as possible.

Visitors to this wildlife refuge shared the following about safety, belonging, and their comfort while being in nature:

- 95% of visitors felt welcome during their refuge visit (Fig. 16).
- 99% of visitors felt safe during their refuge visit (Fig. 16).
- 99% of visitors felt comfortable in nature, but 6% did not like being in nature alone (Fig. 17).

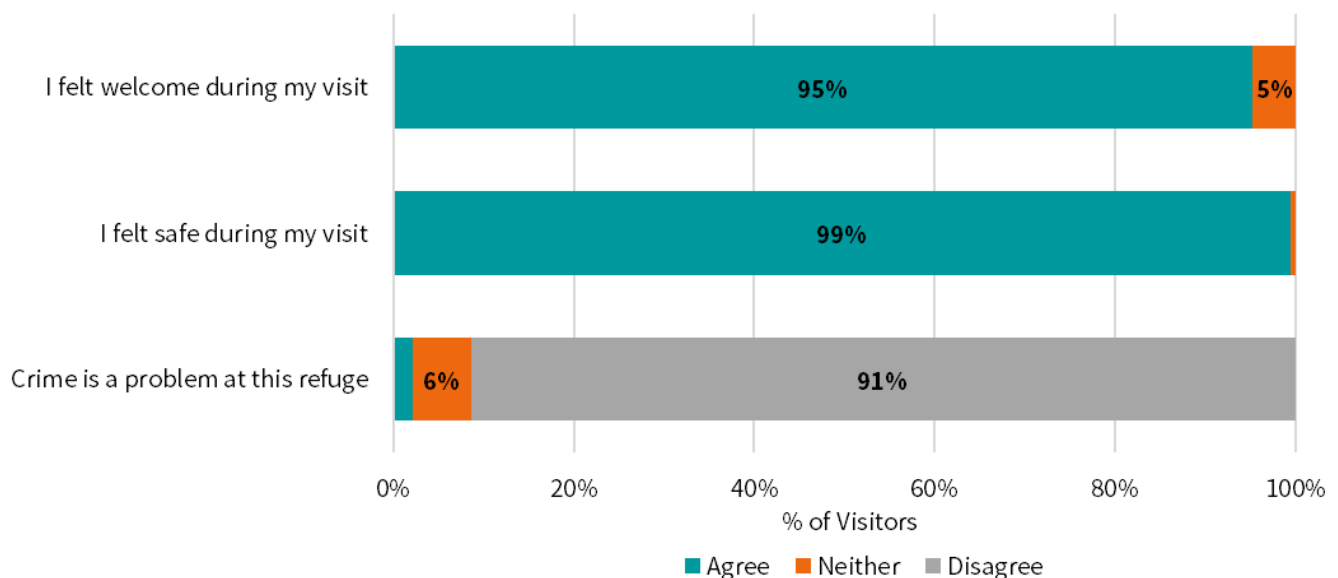


Fig. 16: Visitors' perceptions of safety and feeling welcome at this refuge during their visit.

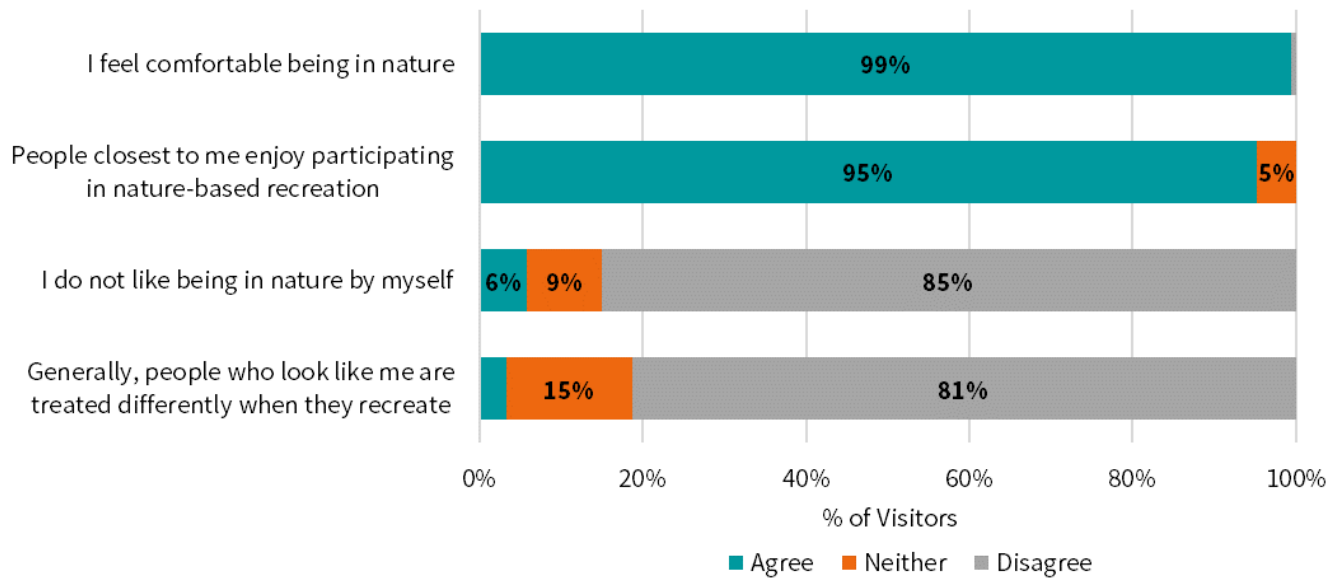


Fig. 17: Visitors' comfort with being in nature.



Photo credit: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Satisfaction with Refuge Experiences

OVERALL SATISFACTION

Refuge professionals strive to maintain a high level of customer satisfaction by operating visitor centers; designing, installing, and maintaining accessible trails; constructing viewing blinds; and much more to facilitate quality recreational experiences. A solid understanding of visitors' perceptions of their experiences provides a framework for monitoring and responding to trends across time. Overall satisfaction with this wildlife refuge is summarized as follows:

- 96% of visitors were very or extremely satisfied with the overall experience at this wildlife refuge (Fig. 18).
- 93% of visitors were very or extremely satisfied with this wildlife refuge's job of conserving fish, wildlife, and their habitats (Fig. 18).

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Refuge professionals regularly interact with visitors and maintain facilities to ensure high quality experiences. From greeting visitors, to keeping bathrooms clean, to clearly stating regulations, providing quality customer service is important to ensuring overall satisfaction.

Satisfaction with customer service was highest among visitors for the following (Fig. 19):

- courteous and welcoming employees/volunteers (91%),
- restrooms (88%), and
- refuge hours/days of operation (87%).

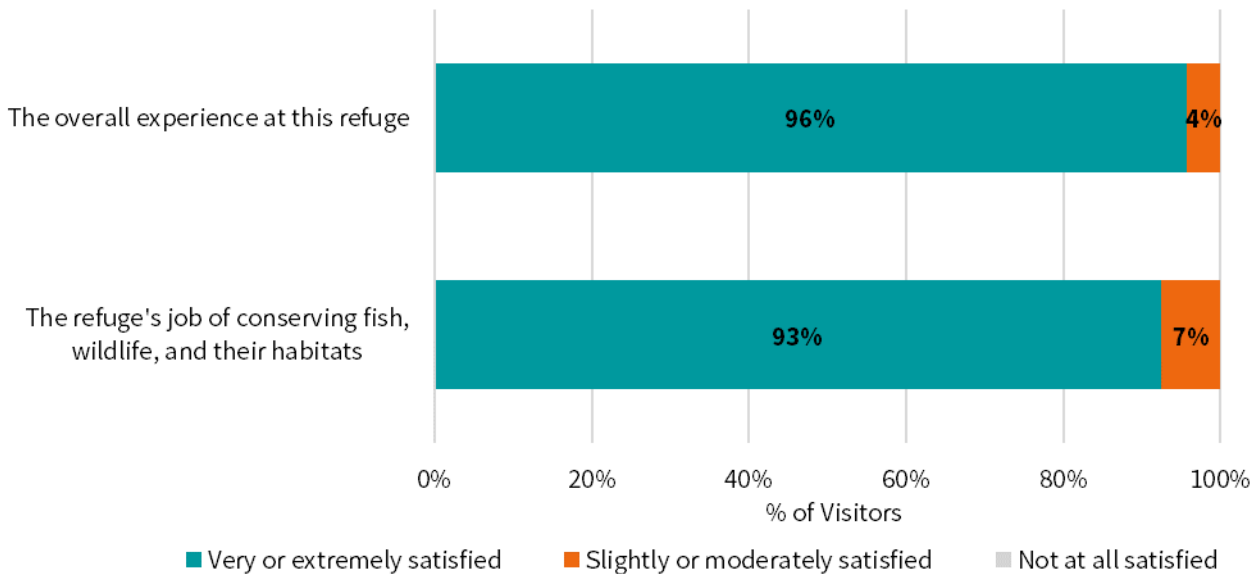


Fig. 18: Visitors' satisfaction with their experience at this refuge and with this refuge's job of conserving fish, wildlife, and habitats.

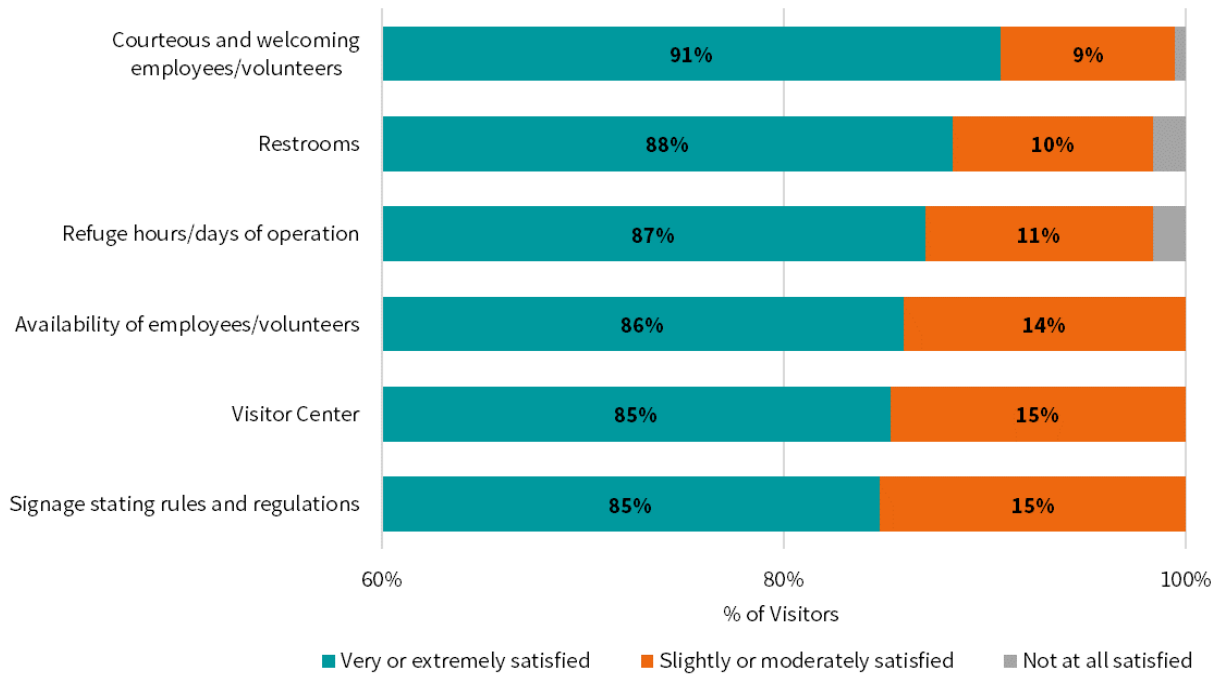


Fig. 19: Visitors' satisfaction with customer service and amenities at this refuge.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Outdoor recreation on wildlife refuges is a fundamental part of a visit. As American's values toward wildlife and their relationship with nature continue to shift (Kellert et al., 2017; Manfredo et al., 2018) desires for recreational experiences on public lands may also shift as researchers and land management professionals recognize the need to connect the next generation to nature and wildlife (Charles & Louv, 2009; Larson et al., 2011). A solid understanding of visitors' perceptions of their experiences provides a framework for

monitoring and responding to these recreation trends across time.

Satisfaction with recreation opportunities among visitors who had participated in the activity during the last 12 months was highest for the following (Fig. 20):

- canoeing/kayaking (91%),
- photography (90%),
- wildlife observation (90%), and
- bird watching (90%).

"We were very pleased with the refuge because it is so beautiful, tranquil, and welcoming. It is our special place and [we] are grateful for its presence so close to us. We can't wait to come back for a visit again." – Visitor to Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge

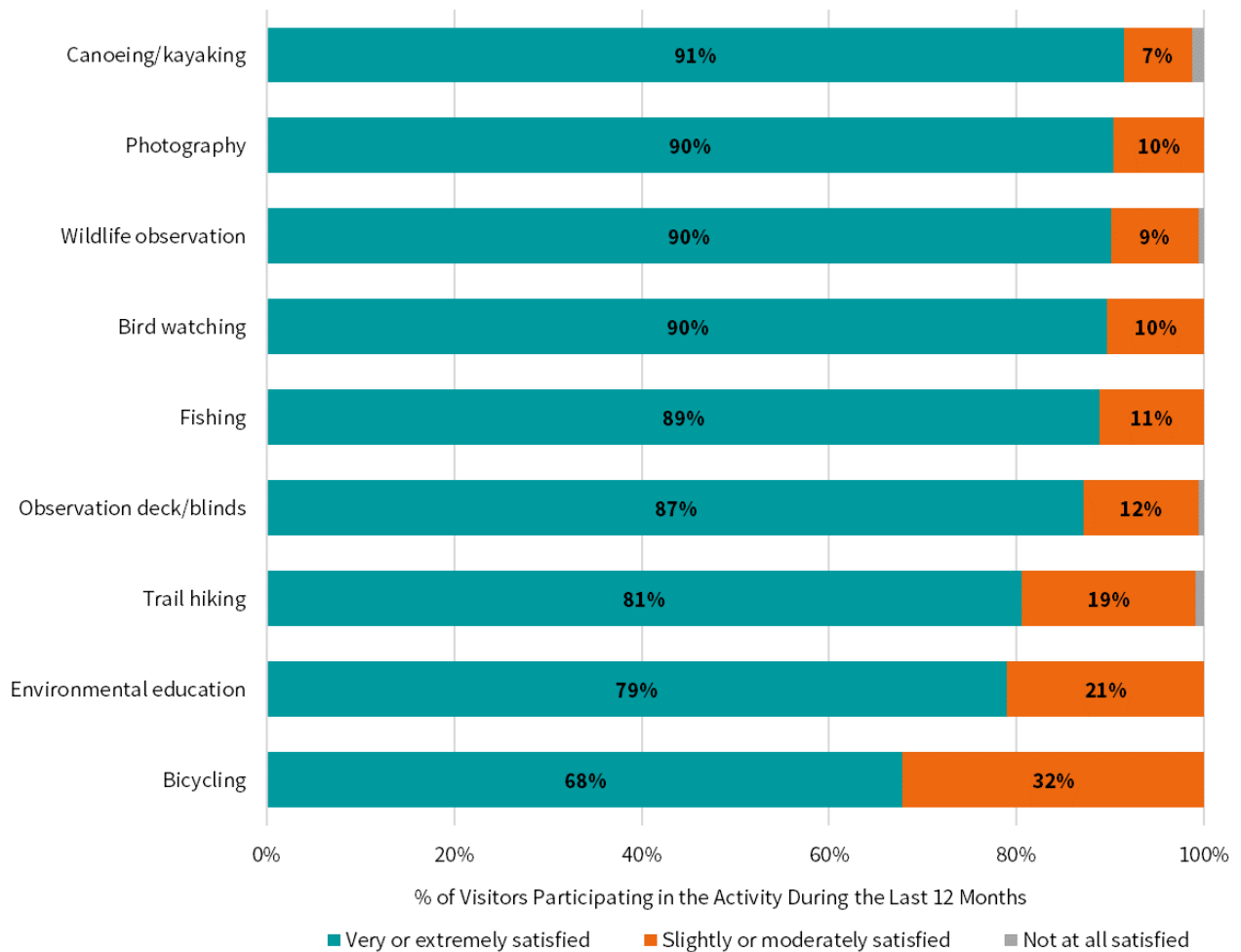


Fig. 20: Visitors' satisfaction with recreational opportunities at this refuge. Only visitors (10 or more) who participated in activities related to each opportunity at this refuge during the last 12 months were included.

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY & ACCESS

Transportation networks connect local communities to refuges and are critical to visitors' experiences there. Visitors access refuges by plane, car, train, boat, bike, and foot. The Service works to ensure that the roads, trails, and parking areas are welcoming and safe for visitors of all abilities. A goal of the Service's National Long-Range Transportation Plan is to enhance experiences on wildlife refuges and fish hatcheries through improvement to the transportation network (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2016b). How visitors perceive different transportation features can be used to prioritize access and transportation improvements.

Visitors were satisfied with transportation safety and access at this wildlife refuge as follows (Fig. 21):

- Getting to this wildlife refuge, visitors were most satisfied with safety of refuge road entrances and exits (96%).
- Getting around this wildlife refuge, visitors were most satisfied with safety of driving conditions on refuge roads (97%), number of parking places (96%), condition of parking areas (94%), and condition of refuge roads (94%).
- Accessing recreation on this wildlife refuge, visitors were most satisfied with safety of roads or trails for nonmotorized users (91%), condition of boat launches (90%), and condition of trails and boardwalks (88%).

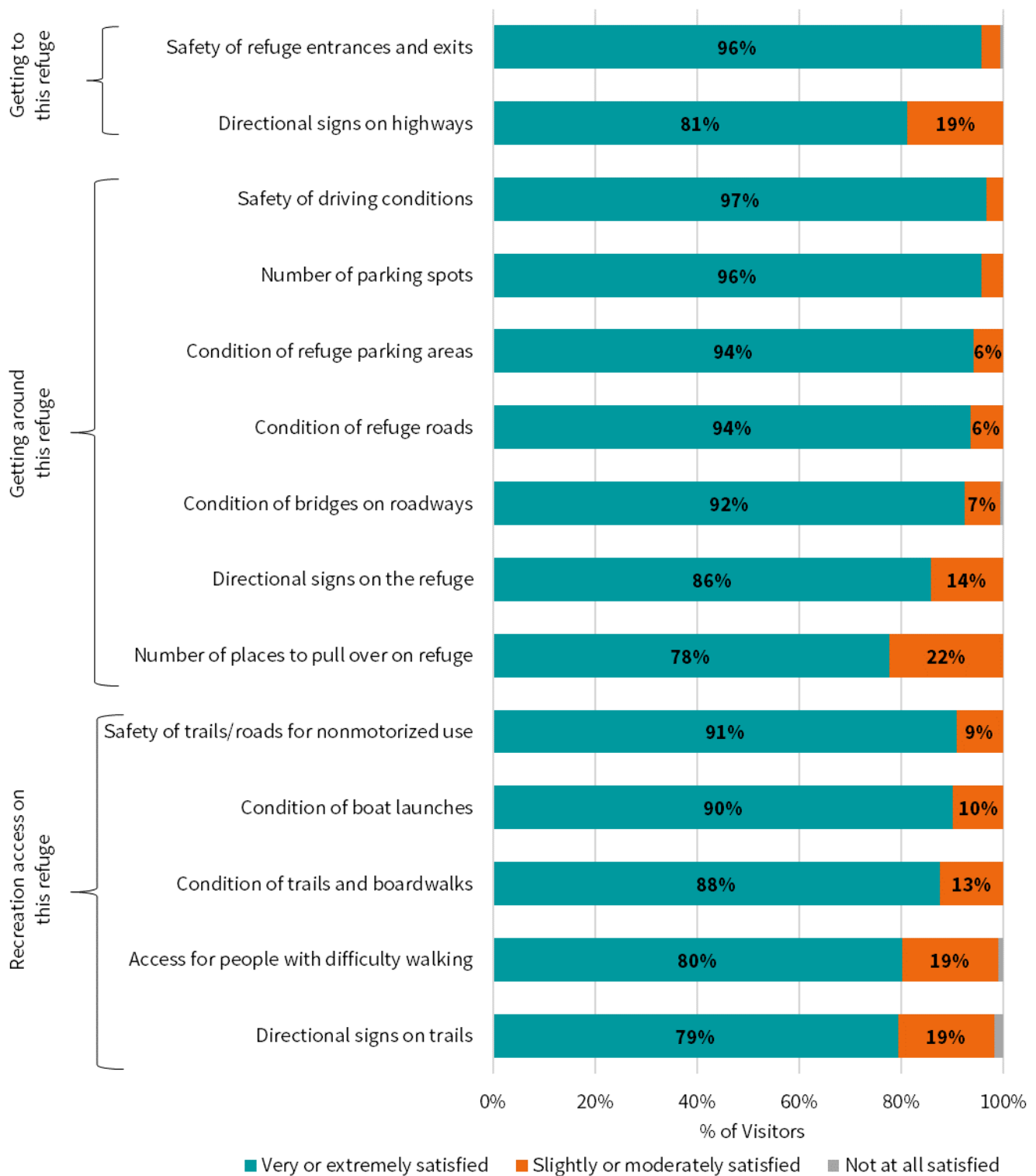


Fig. 21: Visitors' satisfaction with how the refuge is managing transportation-related features.

Economic Benefits to Local Communities & Visitors

The value of any commodity is comprised of two elements: 1) the amount paid and 2) the additional benefit derived above and beyond what is paid. The first element equates to direct expenditures. Visitors to wildlife refuges pay for a variety of things, including nearby lodging, gas, food, and other purchases from local businesses. This spending has a significant positive contribution to local economies. The *Banking on Nature* report (Caudill & Carver, 2017) highlights how nearly 54 million visits to wildlife refuges during 2017 generated \$3.2 billion of economic output in local communities and supported over 41,000 jobs. The report further indicates that recreational spending on wildlife refuges generated \$229 million in tax revenue at the local, county, and state levels.

Determining benefits derived above and beyond what is paid is commonly estimated by “willingness to pay” for an experience. Studies show people are often willing to pay more for a recreational experience than what they actually spent (Neher, Duffield, & Patterson, 2011; Rosenberger & Loomis, 2001). For example, a visitor may have spent \$500 on lodging, food, and gasoline to make the trip possible, while also indicating that they would be willing to pay an additional \$50 to visit this wildlife refuge if total trip costs were to increase.

Results for local visitors (those living ≤ 50 miles from this wildlife refuge; 23%) are as follows:

- On average, local visitors accounted for 5% of expenditures.
- Top trip expenditures by locals were for food/drink and retail (Fig. 22).
- The average amount paid by locals to visit this wildlife refuge was \$78 per person per day (Fig. 22).
- Local visitors were personally willing to pay an additional \$74 per day on average to visit this wildlife refuge (Fig. 23).

Results for nonlocal visitors (those living >50 miles from this wildlife refuge; 77%) are as follows:

- On average, nonlocals accounted for 95% of expenditures.
- Top trip expenditures by nonlocals were for lodging and food/drink (Fig. 22).
- The average amount paid by nonlocals to visit this wildlife refuge was \$68 per person per day (Fig. 22).
- Nonlocal visitors were personally willing to pay an additional \$93 per day on average to visit this wildlife refuge (Fig. 23).
- Nonlocal visitors spent an average of 3 days in the local community during this visit.





Fig. 22: Individual daily expenditures in the local community for local, nonlocal, and all visitors. Expenditures were reported by respondents on a per group basis; the total expenditures were divided by the number of people in the group who shared trip expenditures and the number of days spent in the local community. The number of people sharing trip expenditures was often smaller than the total group size.

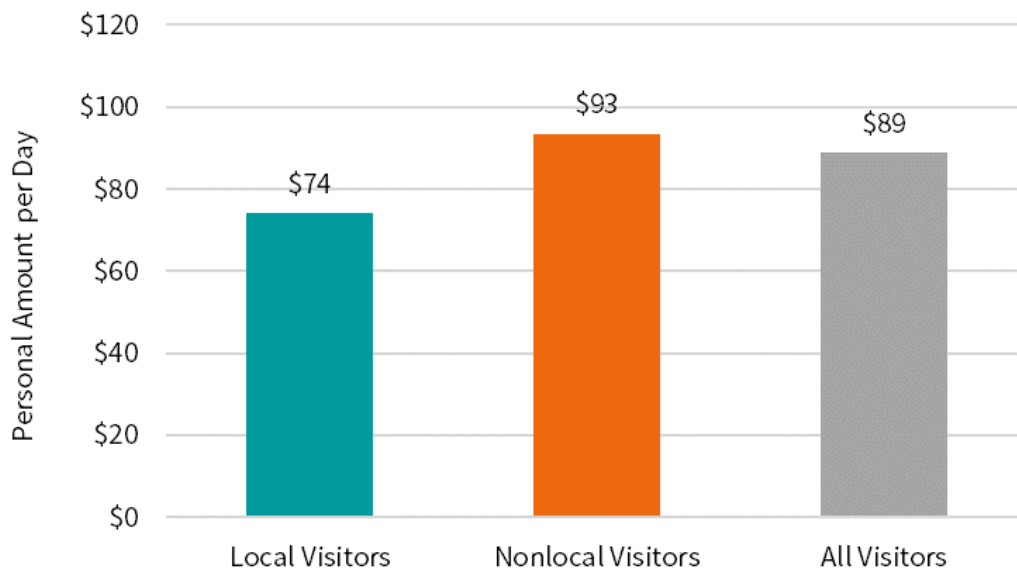


Fig. 23: Total personal willingness to pay per day above and beyond most recent trip expenses if costs were to increase for local, nonlocal, and all visitors. Due to the question format (i.e., fixed-response option), estimates of willingness to pay may underestimate the amount visitors would actually pay. Responses were divided by the number of days spent at the refuge.

Encouraging Return Visits & Future Recreation Participation

Public land managers strive to maximize benefits for visitors while achieving and maintaining desired resource conditions. This complex task requires that managers accurately estimate visitor numbers, as well as where visitors go, what they do, their impacts on resources, how they perceive their experiences, and their desires for future visits. Gaining a sense of what would encourage visitors to return and how management activities affect their likelihood of returning can lead to improved visitor use and resource management (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2014).

PROGRAMS AND OTHER OFFERINGS

Programming and other offerings that are compatible with the purpose of a refuge and the Refuge System mission can encourage people to continue visiting the refuge. Additionally, changes to regulations and access for improving resource availability may increase or decrease future participation, or have little effect at all.

In the future, changes in programming, offerings, or regulations would have an effect on visitation to this wildlife refuge as follows:

- Programs most likely to encourage visitors to return to this wildlife refuge included those focused on highlighting unique local culture (65%), teaching skills (47%), and engaging families and multiple generations (43%) (Fig. 24).
- The top two factors likely to increase visitors' future participation in their primary recreation activity were more infrastructure (24%) and recreation equipment available for rent (13%) (Fig. 25).
- The top two factors likely to decrease visitors' future participation in their primary recreation activity were less regulations on hunting (28%) and more people participating in their primary activity (21%) (Fig. 25).

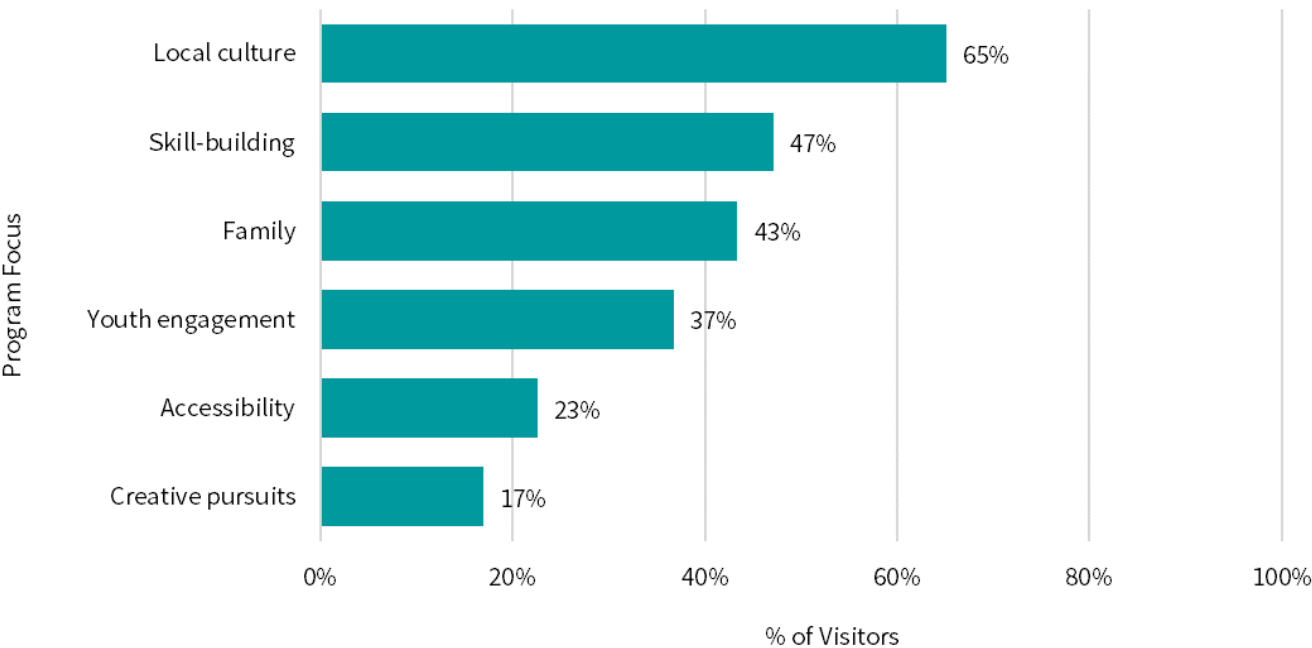


Fig. 24: Types of programs that would encourage visitors to return to this refuge.

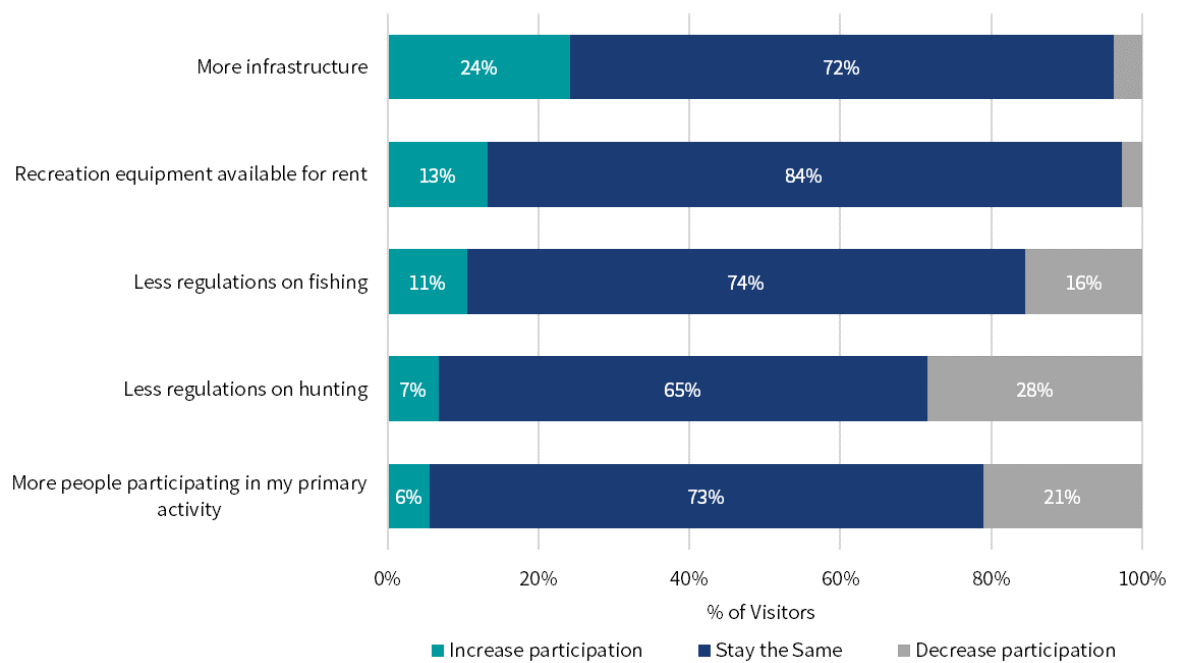


Fig. 25: Changes in visitors' participation in their primary activity if the listed recreation factors were to change.

ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

Understanding visitor demand for alternative transportation options is a goal of the Service's National Long-Range Transportation Plan (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2016b). Alternative transportation options can be valuable in realizing refuge goals to conserve natural resources, reduce visitors' carbon footprint (Volpe Center, 2010), and improve visitor experiences. Even though demand may be relatively small, any use of alternative transportation that is feasible at a wildlife refuge can help to meet goals.

The top future alternative transportation options supported by visitors at this wildlife refuge included:

- bus/tram that provides a guided tour (28%),
- a bike-share program (23%), and
- bus/tram that takes passengers to different points on the refuge (16%) (Fig. 26).

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Natural processes associated with wildlife refuges can provide benefits to people, including provisioning services such as food and water; regulating services such as flood

and disease control; cultural services such as spiritual, recreational, and educational benefits; and supporting services such as nutrient cycling (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). Understanding how changes in natural resources and related processes may impact future visitation and participation in certain recreation activities can improve resource and visitor management, as well as inform communication efforts with stakeholders and policy-makers (Patton, Bergstrom, Covich, & Moore, 2012).

In the future, changes to resources would affect visitation to this wildlife refuge as follows (Fig. 27):

- The top two resource changes likely to increase visitors' future participation in their primary recreation activity were a greater diversity of species (51%) and an improvement in the quality of wetlands (51%).
- The top two resource changes likely to decrease visitors' future participation in their primary recreation activity were less water available for recreation (50%) and more acreage open to hunting and fishing (30%).

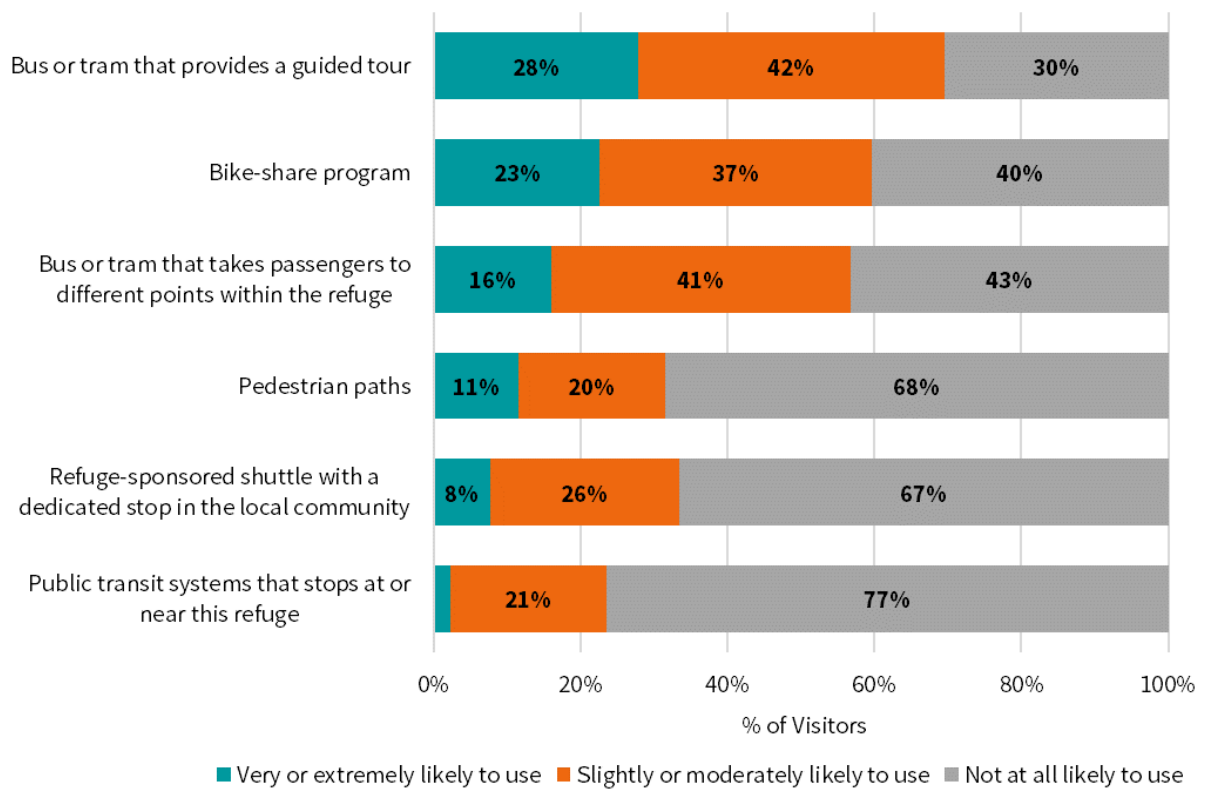


Fig. 26: Visitors' likelihood of using alternative transportation options if offered at this refuge.

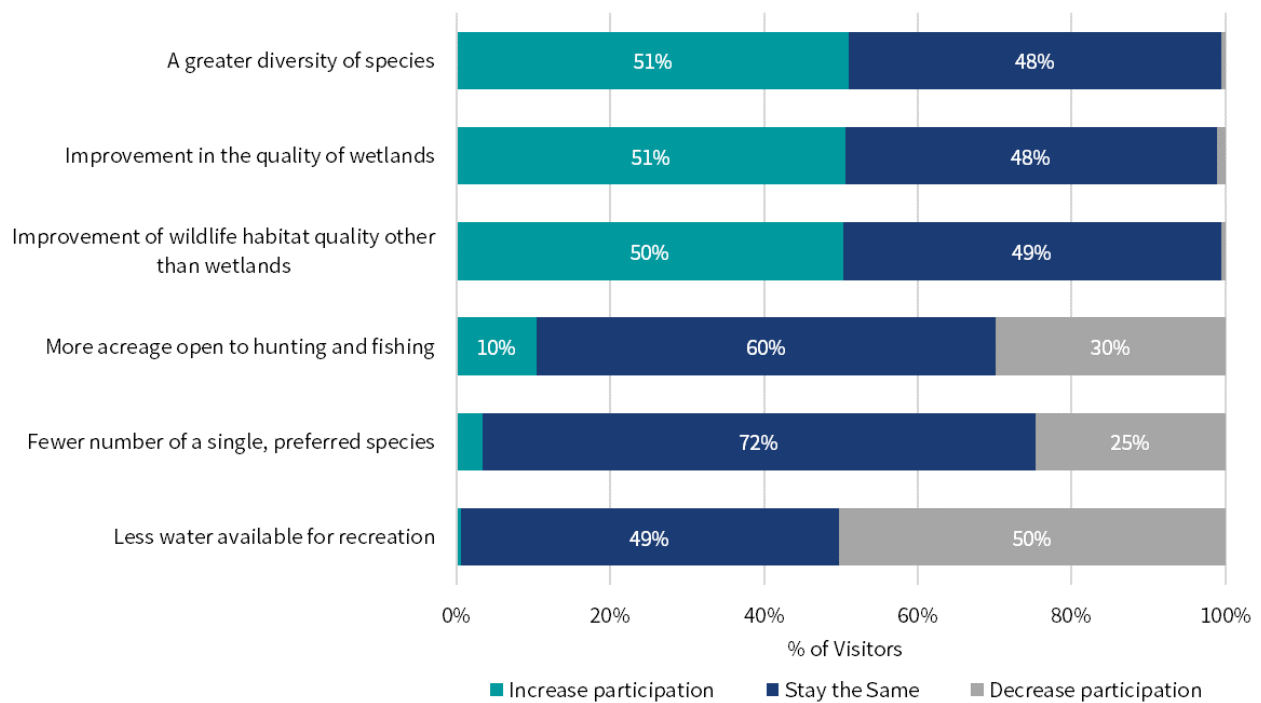


Fig. 27: Changes in visitors' participation in their primary activity if the listed resources were to change.

Conclusion

These individual refuge results provide a summary of trip characteristics and experiences of a sample of visitors to Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge during 2018. They are intended to inform refuge planning, including the management of natural resources, recreation, and the design and delivery of programs for visitors. These results offer a baseline that can be used to monitor and evaluate efforts over time. Refuge professionals who understand

visitor demographics, trip characteristics, and desires for future conditions can make informed decisions for proactive visitor management and resource protection. Integrating this social science with biophysical science ensures that management decisions are consistent with the Refuge System mission while fostering a continued public interest in and connection with these special places we call national wildlife refuges.



Photo credit: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

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Appendix A: Survey Methodology

The National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey (NVS) team consisted of staff from The Ohio State University (OSU), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service), and American Conservation Experience (ACE) who collectively developed the following NVS methodology. Staff from OSU and the Service designed the survey instrument with multiple reviewers within the Refuge System providing feedback about content and wording. The logistical coordinator and interns from ACE conducted sampling on refuges. OSU staff coordinated survey mailings, analyzed data, and in cooperation with Service staff, designed the report template and created each refuge report.

SAMPLING SCHEDULE

Interns (survey recruiters) sampled on each participating refuge for two 14-day sampling periods between March 2018 and February 2019. Refuge staff identified the sampling periods and locations that best reflected the diversity of use and visitation patterns of the refuge.

The national visitor survey team developed a sampling schedule for each refuge that included eight randomly selected sampling shifts during each 14-day sampling period. Shifts were four-hour time bands stratified across mornings and afternoons/evenings. The NVS team customized the schedule as needed to accommodate the individual refuge sampling locations and specific spatial and temporal patterns of visitation. The target number of contacts was 25 adult visitors (18 years of age or older) per shift for a total of 375 participants contacted per refuge. Shifts were moved, added, or extended to address logistical limitations (for example, bad weather or low visitation).

CONTACTING VISITORS ONSITE

ACE interns received a multi-day training that included role-play exercises on a refuge to

simulate engagement of visitors. Once onsite, the interns contacted visitors following a protocol developed by OSU and Service staff. Interns surveyed across the entire sampling shift and only one visitor per group was asked to participate. If a visitor declined to participate, interns recorded a direct refusal. Visitors willing to participate provided their name, mailing address, language preference (English or Spanish), and answered a few initial questions about their experience that could be used for nonresponse comparisons. Willing visitors were also given a small token incentive (for example, sticker) as a thank you and reminder of their participation.

COMPLETING A SURVEY AT HOME

All visitors that agreed onsite to participate in the survey received a postcard mailed to their address within 10 days. The postcard thanked visitors for agreeing to participate, provided a weblink and unique password, and invited the visitor to complete the survey online. All participants then received the following sequence of correspondence by mail from OSU until a survey was returned and the address removed from the mailing list (as suggested by Dillman et al., 2014):

- 1) A packet consisting of a cover letter, survey, and postage-paid return envelope approximately seven days after the first postcard was mailed.
- 2) A reminder postcard mailed 14 days after the first packet was mailed.
- 3) A final packet consisting of a cover letter, survey, and postage-paid return envelope mailed seven days after the reminder postcard.

All printed correspondence and online material were provided in the language chosen by visitors onsite; however, visitors who went online to complete the survey were able to switch between English and Spanish. The

survey was designed to take no more than 25 minutes to complete, and the average completion time recorded by the online survey software was approximately 20 minutes.

DATA ENTRY & ANALYSIS

The NVS team used Qualtrics survey software to collect survey data online. OSU staff then exported the data for cleaning (for example, treatment of missing data) and analyses. The team entered data from the paper surveys into Microsoft Excel using a standardized survey codebook and data entry procedures. All data from the two sources (paper and online) were merged and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, v.25) software.

LIMITATIONS OF RESULTS

The degree to which these results represent overall visitation at a wildlife refuge depends on the number of visitors who completed the survey (sample size), and how well the sample reflects the degree of use at the refuge (Scheaffer et al., 2011). Many respondents completing the survey will produce a smaller margin of error, leading to greater confidence in results, but only to a point. For example, a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$ at a 95% confidence level signifies that if a reported percentage is 55%, then 95 out of 100 times that sample estimate would fall between 50% and 60% (if the same question was asked in the same way of the same sample). The margin of error for this survey was calculated with an 80/20

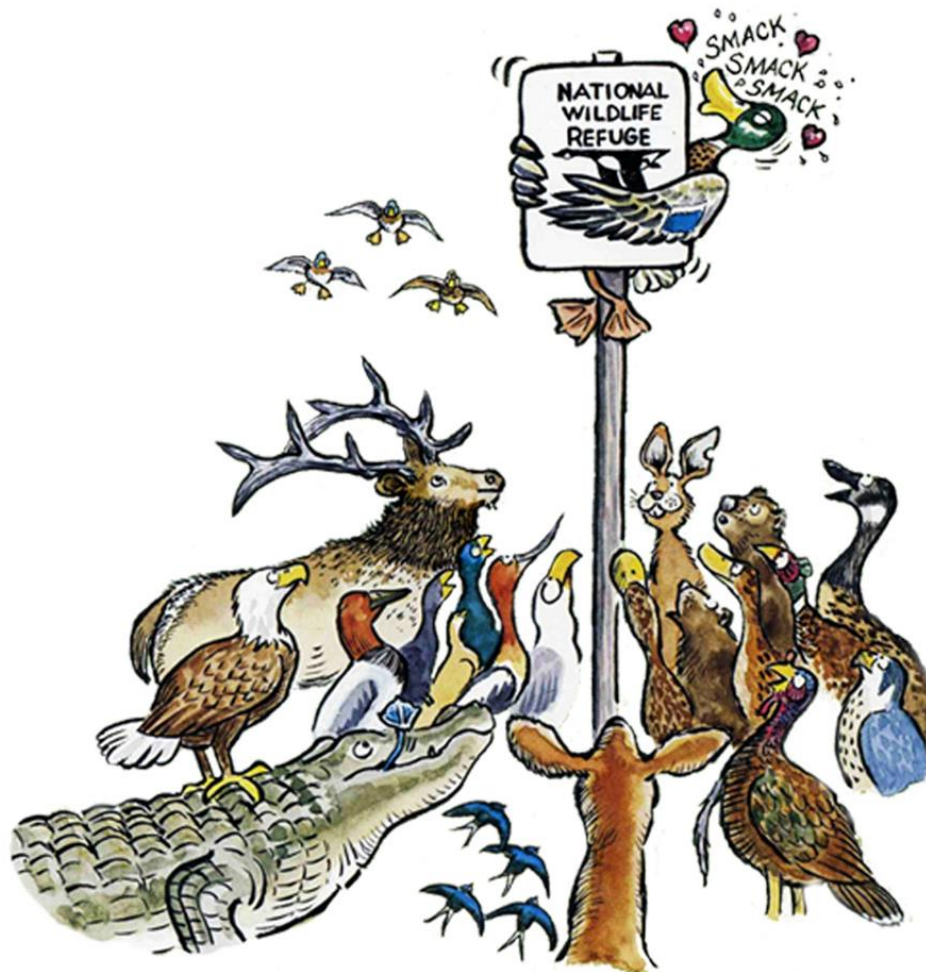
response distribution, meaning if respondents were given a dichotomous choice question, approximately 80% of respondents would select one choice and 20% would select the other (Salant & Dillman, 1994).

While OSU designed the standardized sampling protocol to account for spatial and temporal visitation patterns, the geography and infrastructure of wildlife refuges vary widely. This variation can affect who is ‘captured’ as part of the survey. For example, contacting visitors is much easier if everyone must pass through a single-entry point and much more difficult if a refuge has multiple access points over a large area. Additionally, the two 14-day sampling periods may not have effectively captured all visitor activities throughout the year on some wildlife refuges (for example, visitors who solely engage in ice fishing). As such, results presented in any one of these reports are aimed at representing overall visitation at a wildlife refuge while recognizing that particular visitor groups may vary in their beliefs and activities.

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National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey



Front cover of the 2018 National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey instrument. Artwork credit: Kent Olson.

PLEASE READ THIS FIRST:

Thank you for visiting a national wildlife refuge and agreeing to participate in this study! We hope that you had an enjoyable experience. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and The Ohio State University are conducting this survey to learn more about refuge visitors and their experiences in order to improve management and enhance visitor opportunities.

Please respond regarding the refuge and the visit for which you were asked to participate in this survey. The cover letter indicates the refuge you visited.

SECTION 1. Your visit to this refuge

1. Including your most recent visit, which activities did you participate in during the past 12 months at this refuge? (Mark all that apply.)

<input type="checkbox"/> 90% Wildlife observation	<input type="checkbox"/> 69% Hiking/Walking	<input type="checkbox"/> 3% Volunteering
<input type="checkbox"/> 57% Bird watching	<input type="checkbox"/> 3% Jogging/Running/Exercising	<input type="checkbox"/> 7% Environmental education program (classroom visits, labs)
<input type="checkbox"/> 56% Photography	<input type="checkbox"/> 16% Bicycling	
<input type="checkbox"/> 2% Big game hunting	<input type="checkbox"/> 39% Auto tour route/Driving	<input type="checkbox"/> 21% Interpretative program (bird walks, staff/volunteer-led talks)
<input type="checkbox"/> 1% Upland/Small game hunting	<input type="checkbox"/> 41% Motorized boating	
<input type="checkbox"/> 0% Waterfowl/Migratory bird hunting	<input type="checkbox"/> 27% Nonmotorized boating (canoeing, kayaking)	<input type="checkbox"/> 7% Refuge special event (<i>specify</i>) _____ See Appendix C
<input type="checkbox"/> 16% Freshwater fishing	<input type="checkbox"/> 1% Foraging (berries, nuts, other)	<input type="checkbox"/> 12% Other (<i>specify</i>) _____ See Appendix C
<input type="checkbox"/> 1% Saltwater fishing	<input type="checkbox"/> 20% Picnicking	

2. Which of the activities above was the primary purpose of your most recent visit to this refuge?

(Please write **only one activity** here.) _____ See Appendix C

3. Which of the following best describes your most recent visit to this Refuge? (Mark only one.)

☐ 61% It was the primary purpose or sole destination of my trip.

☐ 29% It was one of many equally important reasons or destinations for my trip.

☐ 10% It was just an incidental or spur-of-the-moment stop on a trip taken for other purposes or to other destinations.

4. How many people were in your personal group, including yourself, on your most recent visit to this refuge? (Please answer each category.)

____ 4 ____ number of people 18 years and older ____ 1 ____ number of people under 18 years

5. Did you go to a visitor center at this refuge during your most recent visit?

☐ 14% No / Not Applicable

☐ 86% Yes → If yes, what did you do there? (*Mark all that apply.*)

☐ 70% Asked information of employees/volunteers

☐ 32% Looked at list of recent bird/wildlife sightings

☐ 39% Attended a talk/video/presentation

☐ 82% Stopped to use the facilities (for example, got water, used restroom)

☐ 63% Viewed the exhibits

☐ 23% Picked up/purchased a license, permit, or pass

☐ 21% Rented/borrowed equipment (for example, binoculars, fishing rod, snowshoes)

☐ 78% Visited the gift shop or bookstore

☐ 7% Other (*specify*) See Appendix C

6. How much time did you spend **at this refuge** during your most recent visit?

If you spent less than one day at this refuge, enter the number of hours: 5 hour(s)

If you spent one day or more at this refuge, enter the number of days: 3 day(s)

7. Do you live in the local area (within 50 miles of this refuge)?

☐ 23% Yes

☐ 77% No → How much time did you spend in **the local area** on this trip?

If you spent less than one day in the local area, enter the number of hours: 6 hour(s)

If you spent one day or more in the local area, enter the number of days: 3 day(s)

8. Approximately how many hours/minutes (one-way) did you travel from your home to this refuge?

If you travelled less than one hour, enter the number of minutes: 33 minutes

If you travelled more than one hour, round to the nearest hour: 7 hours

9. Including this visit, during which seasons did you visit this refuge in the last 12 months? (*Mark all that apply.*)

☐ 64% Spring
(March-May)

☐ 12% Summer
(June-August)

☐ 51% Fall
(September-November)

☐ 15% Winter
(December-February)

10. In the last 12 months, how many times have you visited...

...this refuge (including this visit?) 5 number of visits

...other national wildlife refuges? 3 number of visits

...other public lands (for example, national or state parks) to participate in the same primary activity as this visit? 7 number of visits

11. Which, if any, of the following social media outlets did you use to share your refuge experience with other people? (*Mark all that apply.*)

<input type="checkbox"/> 46%	Facebook	<input type="checkbox"/> 4%	Snapchat	<input type="checkbox"/> 2%	Personal blog (for example, Tumblr, Wordpress)
<input type="checkbox"/> 2%	Flickr	<input type="checkbox"/> 1%	Twitter	<input type="checkbox"/> 4%	Travel-related website (for example, Trip Advisor)
<input type="checkbox"/> 9%	Instagram	<input type="checkbox"/> 0%	Vimeo	<input type="checkbox"/> 1%	Other (<i>specify</i>) <u>See Appendix C</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> 1%	Pinterest	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	YouTube	<input type="checkbox"/> 46%	I do not use social media

SECTION 2. Information about this refuge and its resources

1. How helpful was each of the following sources to get information about this refuge and its resources? (*Circle one number for each source, or mark the box if you did **not** use a source.*)

Information source	For those who used a source, the % who found it to be...					Did not use
	Not at all helpful	Slightly helpful	Moderately helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful	
Personal knowledge from previous visit(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> 5%	<input type="checkbox"/> 4%	<input type="checkbox"/> 13%	<input type="checkbox"/> 25%	<input type="checkbox"/> 53%	<input type="checkbox"/> 41%
Word of mouth (for example, a friend or relative)	<input type="checkbox"/> 5%	<input type="checkbox"/> 13%	<input type="checkbox"/> 17%	<input type="checkbox"/> 36%	<input type="checkbox"/> 30%	<input type="checkbox"/> 54%
People in the local community near the refuge	<input type="checkbox"/> 19%	<input type="checkbox"/> 17%	<input type="checkbox"/> 15%	<input type="checkbox"/> 33%	<input type="checkbox"/> 15%	<input type="checkbox"/> 73%
Refuge employees or volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/> 0%	<input type="checkbox"/> 1%	<input type="checkbox"/> 8%	<input type="checkbox"/> 41%	<input type="checkbox"/> 50%	<input type="checkbox"/> 15%
Printed map or atlas	<input type="checkbox"/> 2%	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	<input type="checkbox"/> 18%	<input type="checkbox"/> 50%	<input type="checkbox"/> 29%	<input type="checkbox"/> 38%
Web-based map (for example, Google Maps, Waze)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2%	<input type="checkbox"/> 2%	<input type="checkbox"/> 16%	<input type="checkbox"/> 36%	<input type="checkbox"/> 44%	<input type="checkbox"/> 33%
Refuge website	<input type="checkbox"/> 1%	<input type="checkbox"/> 5%	<input type="checkbox"/> 11%	<input type="checkbox"/> 45%	<input type="checkbox"/> 39%	<input type="checkbox"/> 30%
Travel website (for example, TripAdvisor)	<input type="checkbox"/> 18%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 24%	<input type="checkbox"/> 35%	<input type="checkbox"/> 18%	<input type="checkbox"/> 82%
Other website (<i>specify</i>) <u>See Appendix C</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> 14%	<input type="checkbox"/> 7%	<input type="checkbox"/> 14%	<input type="checkbox"/> 29%	<input type="checkbox"/> 36%	<input type="checkbox"/> 90%
Social media (for example, Facebook, Instagram)	<input type="checkbox"/> 20%	<input type="checkbox"/> 16%	<input type="checkbox"/> 20%	<input type="checkbox"/> 32%	<input type="checkbox"/> 12%	<input type="checkbox"/> 87%
Recreation club or organization	<input type="checkbox"/> 25%	<input type="checkbox"/> 19%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 31%	<input type="checkbox"/> 19%	<input type="checkbox"/> 91%
Refuge printed information (for example, brochure)	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	<input type="checkbox"/> 13%	<input type="checkbox"/> 43%	<input type="checkbox"/> 37%	<input type="checkbox"/> 32%
Kiosks/displays/exhibits at the refuge	<input type="checkbox"/> 2%	<input type="checkbox"/> 5%	<input type="checkbox"/> 22%	<input type="checkbox"/> 38%	<input type="checkbox"/> 34%	<input type="checkbox"/> 32%
Travel guidebook or other book	<input type="checkbox"/> 18%	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	<input type="checkbox"/> 15%	<input type="checkbox"/> 59%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 82%
Tourist information or welcome center	<input type="checkbox"/> 7%	<input type="checkbox"/> 4%	<input type="checkbox"/> 17%	<input type="checkbox"/> 39%	<input type="checkbox"/> 32%	<input type="checkbox"/> 64%
Other source (<i>specify</i>) <u>See Appendix C</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> 29%	<input type="checkbox"/> 0%	<input type="checkbox"/> 14%	<input type="checkbox"/> 29%	<input type="checkbox"/> 29%	<input type="checkbox"/> 94%

SECTION 3. Transportation and access at this refuge

1. First rate how important each of the following transportation-related features is to you when visiting this refuge; then rate how satisfied you are with the way this refuge is managing each feature. *If this refuge does not have a specific feature or you did not experience it during this visit, please rate how important it is to you and then circle NA “Not Applicable” under the satisfaction column.*

Importance <i>Circle one for each item.</i>					Transportation-Related Features	Satisfaction <i>Circle one for each item.</i>					
Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Moderately important	Very Important	Extremely Important		Not at all Satisfied	Slightly Satisfied	Moderately Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	Not Applicable
4%	10%	42%	27%	17%	Surface conditions of refuge roads	0%	1%	6%	49%	44%	NA
6%	13%	40%	25%	15%	Surface conditions of parking areas	0%	0%	6%	43%	51%	NA
2%	8%	38%	32%	19%	Condition of bridges on roadways	1%	0%	7%	48%	45%	NA
0%	6%	17%	46%	31%	Condition of trails and boardwalks	0%	1%	12%	34%	53%	NA
13%	11%	18%	36%	23%	Condition of boat launches	0%	2%	8%	46%	44%	NA
2%	5%	33%	42%	19%	Number of places for parking	0%	1%	4%	40%	56%	NA
6%	11%	24%	45%	15%	Number of places to pull over on refuge roads	0%	3%	19%	43%	35%	NA
1%	7%	18%	46%	28%	Safety of driving conditions on refuge roads	0%	0%	3%	45%	51%	NA
1%	9%	18%	43%	30%	Safety of refuge road entrances/exits	1%	0%	4%	47%	49%	NA
5%	3%	19%	41%	32%	Safety of roads/trails for nonmotorized users (for example, bicyclists and hikers)	0%	1%	8%	46%	44%	NA
1%	6%	20%	40%	33%	Signs on highways directing you to this refuge	0%	3%	15%	47%	34%	NA
1%	3%	24%	44%	29%	Signs directing you around refuge roads	0%	1%	14%	51%	35%	NA
2%	4%	16%	42%	36%	Signs directing you on trails	2%	3%	16%	44%	35%	NA
16%	12%	21%	22%	29%	Access for people with physical disabilities or who have difficulty walking	1%	3%	16%	48%	32%	NA

2. If you have any comments about transportation-related features at this refuge, please write them here.

See Appendix C

3. What modes of transportation did you use to travel from the local area to this refuge and within this refuge during your most recent trip? (*Mark all that apply.*)

Transportation modes used to travel...	...from the local area to this refuge	...within the boundaries of this refuge
Private/rental vehicle without a trailer	75%	58%
Private/rental vehicle with a trailer (for boat, camper, or other)	15%	7%
Recreational vehicle (RV)	9%	4%
Refuge shuttle bus/tram	0%	1%
Tour bus/van	3%	1%
Public transportation	1%	1%
Motorcycle	0%	0%
Bicycle	1%	14%
Foot (for example, walking/hiking)	5%	53%
Boat	3%	47%
Other (<i>specify</i>): <u>See Appendix C</u>	2%	6%
Other (<i>specify</i>): <u>See Appendix C</u>	1%	0%

4. Please tell us how likely you would be to use each transportation option **at this refuge** if it were available in the future. Not all options are currently available at every refuge. (*Circle one number for each option.*)

Transportation options	Not at all Likely	Slightly Likely	Moderately Likely	Very Likely	Extremely Likely
Bus or tram that takes passengers to different points within refuge boundaries (such as the Visitor Center)	43%	21%	20%	12%	4%
Bus or tram that provides a guided tour of the refuge with information about this refuge and its resources	30%	19%	23%	18%	10%
Refuge-sponsored shuttle with a dedicated stop in the local community for picking up people at set times	67%	14%	11%	6%	2%
Public transit system that stops at or near this refuge	77%	13%	9%	1%	2%
Bike-share program that offers bicycles for rent on or near this refuge	40%	16%	21%	15%	8%
Pedestrian paths for access to this refuge from the local community	68%	8%	12%	7%	5%

SECTION 4. Your expenses related to your refuge visit

1. Record the amount of money that you and other members of your group spent in the local 50-mile area during your most recent visit to this refuge. Your group would include you and those with whom you shared expenses (for example, family members, traveling companions). *Enter the amount spent or enter 0 (zero) if you did not spend any money in a particular category.*

Categories	Amount spent in the local area/communities & at this refuge (within 50 miles of this refuge)
Hotel, bed & breakfast, cabin, etc.	
Camping fees (for example, tent, RV)	
Restaurants and bars	
Groceries	
Gasoline and oil (for private vehicles, boats, RVs, or other motors)	
Local transportation (for example, public transit, rental car)	See report for summary of visitor expenditures
Guides and tour fees	
Equipment rental (for example, bicycle, canoe, kayak)	
Sporting goods (for example, bait, binoculars)	
Souvenirs/clothing and other retail	
Other (specify) <u>See Appendix C</u>	

2. Including yourself, how many people in your group shared these trip expenses?

3 number of people sharing expenses

3. As you know, costs of travel such as gasoline, hotels, and public transportation often increase. If your total trip costs were to increase, what is the maximum extra amount you would pay and still visit this refuge? (*Mark the dollar amount that represents your response.*)

<input type="checkbox"/> 3% \$0	<input type="checkbox"/> 9% \$30	<input type="checkbox"/> 24% \$100	<input type="checkbox"/> 5% \$250
<input type="checkbox"/> 4% \$5	<input type="checkbox"/> 9% \$45	<input type="checkbox"/> 2% \$125	<input type="checkbox"/> 7% \$350
<input type="checkbox"/> 3% \$10	<input type="checkbox"/> 9% \$60	<input type="checkbox"/> 2% \$150	<input type="checkbox"/> 7% \$500
<input type="checkbox"/> 10% \$20	<input type="checkbox"/> 2% \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> 3% \$200	<input type="checkbox"/> 1% \$750

SECTION 5. Your experience at this refuge

1. First rate how important each of the following services, facilities, and opportunities is to you when visiting this refuge; then rate how satisfied you are with the way this refuge is managing each item. *If this refuge does not offer a specific item or you did not experience it on this visit, please rate how important it is to you and then circle NA "Not Applicable" under the satisfaction column.*

Importance <i>Circle one for each item.</i>					Refuge Services, Facilities, and Opportunities	Satisfaction <i>Circle one for each item.</i>					Not Applicable
Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Moderately important	Very Important	Extremely Important		Not at all Satisfied	Slightly Satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Very Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	
1%	1%	13%	46%	41%	Convenient hours/days of operation for this refuge	2%	2%	10%	38%	49%	NA
1%	3%	26%	44%	26%	Availability of employees or volunteers	0%	2%	12%	40%	46%	NA
1%	5%	15%	39%	40%	Courteous and welcoming employees or volunteers	1%	3%	5%	34%	57%	NA
1%	4%	26%	41%	28%	Signs with rules/regulations for this refuge	0%	2%	14%	42%	42%	NA
1%	3%	17%	43%	36%	Visitor center	0%	2%	12%	34%	52%	NA
1%	2%	11%	39%	47%	Well-maintained restrooms	2%	2%	8%	37%	51%	NA
1%	4%	21%	43%	31%	Recreational structures (decks, blinds, platforms)	1%	1%	12%	42%	45%	NA
8%	9%	26%	31%	26%	Bird-watching opportunities	0%	2%	11%	41%	46%	NA
3%	1%	14%	41%	41%	Opportunities to observe wildlife other than birds	1%	2%	7%	45%	46%	NA
2%	5%	15%	33%	46%	Opportunities to photograph wildlife and scenery	0%	2%	9%	37%	52%	NA
4%	14%	28%	33%	22%	Environmental education opportunities	0%	5%	18%	46%	31%	NA
71%	6%	9%	8%	6%	Hunting opportunities	19%	19%	24%	27%	11%	NA
43%	12%	17%	16%	12%	Fishing opportunities	6%	8%	12%	44%	30%	NA
3%	3%	19%	38%	37%	Trail hiking opportunities	1%	3%	16%	46%	34%	NA
17%	16%	20%	28%	18%	Bicycling opportunities	4%	7%	21%	47%	21%	NA
9%	7%	16%	31%	37%	Water trail opportunities for canoeing or kayaking	1%	3%	6%	32%	58%	NA
42%	15%	17%	17%	8%	Volunteer opportunities	2%	16%	20%	39%	24%	NA
6%	6%	22%	26%	40%	Wilderness experience opportunities	0%	4%	7%	37%	52%	NA

2. If you have comments about the services, facilities, and opportunities at this refuge, please write them here.

See Appendix C

3. How much do you disagree or agree with each statement below? (*Circle one number for each statement.*)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
I felt welcome during my visit to this refuge.	0%	0%	5%	33%	62%
I felt safe during my visit to this refuge.	0%	0%	1%	30%	69%
Crime <u>is</u> a problem at this refuge.	74%	17%	6%	1%	1%
I feel comfortable being in nature.	0%	1%	0%	26%	73%
I do <u>not</u> like being in nature by myself.	65%	20%	9%	5%	1%
People closest to me enjoy participating in nature-based recreation.	0%	0%	5%	36%	59%
Generally, people who look like me are treated differently when they participate in nature-based recreation.	63%	18%	15%	3%	1%

4. How satisfied are you with the following? (*Circle one number for each statement.*)

	Not at all Satisfied	Slightly Satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Very Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied
The job this refuge is doing of conserving fish, wildlife, and their habitats.	0%	1%	7%	47%	46%
The quality of the overall experience when visiting this refuge.	0%	1%	4%	38%	58%

SECTION 6. Future visits to this refuge

1. Considering **the primary activity** you participated in during your most recent visit to this refuge, please tell us how the following factors, if they occurred, could affect your future participation in that activity at this refuge. (*Circle one number for each factor.*)

If there was...	My participation in my primary activity would...		
	Decrease	Stay the same	Increase
Less water in lakes, rivers, or streams available for recreation	50%	49%	1%
More acreage open to hunting and fishing	30%	60%	10%
More infrastructure (for example, bathrooms, observation decks)	4%	72%	24%
Recreation equipment available for rent (for example, fishing rods, binoculars, snowshoes)	3%	84%	13%
Less regulations on fishing	16%	74%	11%
Less regulations on hunting	28%	65%	7%
A greater diversity of species	1%	48%	51%
Fewer numbers of a single, preferred species	25%	72%	3%
More people participating in my primary activity	21%	73%	6%
An improvement in the quality of wetlands	1%	48%	51%
An improvement in the quality of wildlife habitat other than wetlands	1%	49%	50%

2. Do you plan to return to this refuge in the next 12 months?

39% Yes 31% No 29% Not sure

3. Which of the following types of programs, if offered, would encourage you to return to this refuge in the future? (*Mark all that apply.*)

40% I do not typically participate in refuge programs

For those that do participate in refuge programs, the % that would be encouraged to return if the following programs were offered:

37% Programs that engage youth	17% Programs that focus on creative pursuits (for example, art, writing, meditation)
43% Programs that focus on family/multiple-generations	23% Programs that support people with accessibility concerns (for example, difficulty walking, in a wheelchair)
47% Programs that teach skills to visitors	9% Other (<i>specify</i>) <u>See Appendix C</u>
65% Programs that highlight unique local culture	

SECTION 7. A little about you

**** Please tell us a little bit about yourself. Your answers to these questions will help us to know more about who visits national wildlife refuges. Answers will not be linked to any individual taking this survey. ****

1. Are you? ☐ 54% Male ☐ 46% Female

2. In what year were you born? 1959 (YYYY)

3. How many years of formal schooling have you had? (Circle one number.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20+
(elementary)					(junior high or middle school)			(high school)				(college or technical school)				(graduate or professional school)			
					<input type="checkbox"/> 0%			<input type="checkbox"/> 10%				<input type="checkbox"/> 50%				<input type="checkbox"/> 40%			

4. What race or ethnicity do you consider yourself? (Mark all that apply.)

<input type="checkbox"/> 96% White	<input type="checkbox"/> 2% American Indian or Alaska Native
<input type="checkbox"/> 2% Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/> 0% Middle Eastern or North African
<input type="checkbox"/> 0% Black or African American	<input type="checkbox"/> 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
<input type="checkbox"/> 0% Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> 2% Some other race or ethnicity

5. How many people (including yourself) live in your household? 2 persons

6. What was your approximate household income from all sources (before taxes) last year? (Mark only one.)

<input type="checkbox"/> 1% Less than \$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 10% \$35,000 - \$49,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 28% \$100,000 - \$149,999
<input type="checkbox"/> 6% \$10,000 - \$24,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 15% \$50,000 - \$74,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 10% \$150,000 - \$199,999
<input type="checkbox"/> 2% \$25,000 - \$34,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 17% \$75,000 - \$99,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 10% \$200,000 or more

7. Which of the following best describes your current employment situation? (Mark only one.)

<input type="checkbox"/> 33% Employed full-time	<input type="checkbox"/> 2% Unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/> 47% Retired
<input type="checkbox"/> 5% Employed part-time	<input type="checkbox"/> 3% Homemaker/caregiver	<input type="checkbox"/> 2% Disabled/unable to work
<input type="checkbox"/> 8% Self-employed	<input type="checkbox"/> 1% Student	<input type="checkbox"/> 0% Other (specify): <u>See Appendix C</u>

Thank you for completing the survey.

There is space on the next page for any additional comments you may have regarding your visit to this refuge.

Comments?

See Appendix C

PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT STATEMENT: The Paperwork Reduction Act requires us to tell you why we are collecting this information, how we will use it, and whether or not you have to respond. The information that we collect in this survey will help us understand visitor satisfaction with and use of national wildlife refuges and to inform management and policy decisions. Your response is voluntary. An agency may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB Control Number. We estimate it will take an average of 25 minutes to complete this survey. You may send comments concerning the burden estimate or any aspect of the survey to the Information Collection Clearance Officer, Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, MS 222-ARLSQ, Arlington, VA 22203. OMB CONTROL # 0596-0236 EXPIRATION DATE 11/30/2020

Appendix C: Open-Ended Survey Responses by Question

Survey Section 1

Question 1: “Including your most recent visit, which activities did you participate in during the past 12 months at this refuge?”

Special Event	Frequency
Archery for kids	1
Astronomy	1
Boat tour	1
Boat trip by refuge	1
Dark sky	1
Guided boat tour of swamp	1
Living history event	1
Newcomers dinner & boat ride full moon	1
Pioneer day; Earth Day	1
Quota hunt	1
Star gazing	1
Sunset boat ride	1
Swamp boat tour	1

Other Activity	Frequency
Boat tour	1
Camping	13
Camping and constellation cruise	1
Experiencing the swamp	1
I like swamps	1
Lunch in cafe-delicious	1
Okefenokee adventure boat tour	1
Star gazing	1
Swamp boat tour	1
Took the boat tour with Okefenokee adventures	1

Question 2: “Which of the activities above was the primary purpose of your most recent visit to this refuge?”

Primary Activity	Frequency
Auto tour route/driving	6
Bicycling	4
Bird watching	6
Camping	14
Environmental education	3
Fishing	8
Hiking	16
Hunting	3
Interpretation	8
Motorized boating	12
Nature observation	2
Nonmotorized boating	28
Other	3
Photography	12
Picnicking	1
Sightseeing	2
Special event	2
Volunteering	2
Wildlife observation	53

Question 3: “Did you go to a visitor center at this refuge during your most recent visit?”; If Yes, “What did you do there?”

Other Visitor Center Activity	Frequency
Boat ride	1
Boat trip to the meadow	1
Bought firewood	1
Camping check in/boat tour	1
Canoes	1
Constellation cruise meeting place	1
Got refuge visitor book stamped	1
Guided boat tour	3
Purchased ice	1
Sign up for guided trip	1

Question 11: “Which, if any, of the following social media outlets did you use to share your refuge experience with other people?”

Other Social Media Outlets	Frequency
Google Photos	1
WhatsApp	1

Survey Section 2

Question 1. “How helpful was each of the following sources to get information about this refuge and its resources?”

Other Websites	Frequency
Darksky.org	1
Ga state park website	1
Google	1
NOAA water tables	1
Okefenokee tours	1
State travel website	1
Websites from travelers	1
YouTube	1

Other Information Sources	Frequency
Georgia hunting registrations book	1
Georgia nature photo association	1
National Geographic kids movie series from the late 90's early 00's	1
Refuge books	1

Survey Section 4

Question 1: “Record the amount of money that you and other members of your group spent in the local 50-mile area during your most recent visit to this refuge. Your group would include you and those with whom you shared expenses (for example, family members, traveling companions).”

Other Expenses	Frequency
Church	1
Entrance fee	1
Firewood/bait	1
Refuge entrance fee	1

Survey Section 6

Question 3: “Which of the following types of programs, if offered, would encourage you to return to this refuge in the future?”

Other Programs	Frequency
Bird-related programs	2
Citizen science	1
General environmental education	1
Hunting-related activities	1
Local history programs	1
Nature-related programs	1
Other	1
Photography-related programs	1

Survey Section 3

Question 2: "If you have any comments about transportation-related features at this refuge, please write them here."

Comments on Transportation-related features at this refuge (n=30)

All good.

Boardwalks looked to be new very well maintained, nice and wide.

Canoe trails were clogged and limited access.

Cars drive too fast on swamp drive, probably more than 20 mph.

Did encounter a few speeders on the nature auto loop drive.

I absolutely had a great time. The boat ride was the best part. :)

I also rode my bicycle on one trip within the site.

I brought a bus and a van with a total of 36 seniors and 2 drivers. We had no problem getting around on the loop or walking the boardwalk.

I found everything that pertained to my trip to be as good or better than most places I fish throughout the year.

I have difficulty walking. More benches along hiking trails, please!

I think it would be nice if they had a golf cart rental for people with mobility issues.

I think the signs leading the camping islands could be improved. We arrived at Floyd's island our first night and there was no sign, we only knew we were in the right place by the cabin. We never found Mixom's hammock for our second night camping.

I would like to see another long drive to a different area in the park!

It was somewhat confusing figuring out where to enter the refuge, the two entrances were called different things, e.g. west gate vs the state park and wasn't sure where we were supposed to go

It would be nice to have more shade in the parking lot. The roadways don't have much pull of space - not much room for bikes, etc.

It's easy to get lost on the canal digger trail. It needs a better surface and marking.

Much better than Germany.

My husband is disabled so we really enjoyed and appreciated the ability for us to have access to the drivable nature trail in the south side of the refuge.

Need better boat docking platform with access to enter and exit boats such as step closer to water level.

Okefenokee in Folkston and Waycross are wonderful.

Several signs on the kayak/canoe trails were missing. This would have been a real problem if I had not had my GPS. I kayaked the trail #7.

Signs from main visitor center to homestead not visible when leaving main visitor center.

The guided boat tour was very informative and well done. It gave visitors close up encounters with the magical beauty of the wildlife, plants and natural features of the refuge.

The road we use is quite nice. It winds through the forest and we have a good opportunity to see many birds. I feel safe stopping along the road to rest or watch wildlife. We go the forest on an average of six time a week.

The roads inside the refuge are great. But the 4 mile access road into the refuge once you turn off of the main road is terrible. The cycling club from St. Mary's that I belong to ride up here where I live in Folkston to ride. The Okefenokee swamp used to be a regular part of our ride. But because the access road into the swamp is so rough and has potholes. The swamp has been removed from our route. The road is made of some type of rough small stone chip seal, it is not bicycle friendly. Road bikes have no shocks and 1/2 inch wide wheels. We have experienced a few flats just riding into the swamp on the access road. And it vibrates and shakes our bikes so bad. That we have removed the Okefenokee from our ride. We ride from the court house in Folkston and have usually rode on average 15 to 20 miles before riding the 10 miles to the wildlife entrance. So the last thing we want at that stage is to have us and our bikes shook so badly. Once into the swamp parking area from there on out, the roads are well maintained and smooth. If they can provide that type of road within the swamp, then why not on the access road that starts at the national wildlife sign. I've talked to other cyclist in the area and they have also scratched the refuge off of their rides in the area. I ride a recumbent trike, low to the ground with two wheels in the front and one in the back with wide soft riding tires so it's not as bad for me. But that road has caused many cyclist to avoid the refuge and all that it offers.

Very enjoyable. I would recommend the visit.

Water trails are narrow and get overgrown easily. Hard to navigate at times.

We had problems with one of the motorboats. Kept dying and had to restart often, gas leak at gas line. One employee at the boat rental site was very rude when we returned the boat. Okefenokee park.

We were unable to hike entire trail since part of it was closed due to boardwalk being unstable.

Survey Section 5

Question 2: "If you have comments about these services, facilities, and opportunities at this refuge, please write them here."

Comments on Services, Facilities, and Opportunities at this refuge (n=57)

All the seniors in my group were extremely pleased with everything to the point that we are already planning another one for next year.

Best kayaking in the area.

Better than I expected. Clean bathrooms. Interesting interpreted boat ride through swamplands.

Brush along the water canals on swamp drive need cutting down so can see into waterways canals etc. Sometimes trees fall in road and are left there.

Everyone was friendly and nice.

Everyone was very helpful and knowledgeable.

Expand opportunities and areas to hunt small game such as grey and fox squirrels, rabbits, quail, and doves.

Extremely friendly staff.

Fishing areas blocked by fallen trees.

For my purposes on this trip everything suited me fine.

Friendly people and interaction with children. Welcome/nature center closed Mondays & rules out trips on long weekends or holiday Mondays.

Hours of operation, handling of reservations, and cost were really problematic. The refuge itself and the educational visitor center was great. Cost for one night was well over \$150 which is outrageous for a family.

I didn't find out about the rest of the area until after I left. I was reading the book I bought and found out the rest of the area. I made a short stop there on my way to Florida, a Saturday afternoon/ Sunday morning tour of the area. The only results from my internet search was the refuge and park. I could have brought my boat and spent several days there.

It is unfortunate that the visitor center is not open, and funds are not available for the safety/ upgrading of the present structure so that it can be used for the programs which used to be held there.

It was great! Workers were friendly and helpful.

Just a great place for viewing vegetation, birds, alligators, beautiful water.

My intention was to do an overnight kayak trip solo but after taking a boat excursion and speaking with employees decided to put it off until spring when I have an InReach Garmin GPS (emergency beacon). Impressed with the wilderness experience.

Need to separate tent campers and RV campers I go to the woods for peace and quiet. Do not like to hear tv's radios and RV AC units running.

Needs more boardwalks out into the swamp.

Nicely maintained, employees and volunteers very nice.

Okefenokee is a wonderful place to watch the seasons changing. Different wildflowers throughout the year are seen along the road, as well as snakes, alligators and birds.

One employee at the boat rental facility was very rude. Okefenokee Nat Park.

Overall, I was extremely happy with this refuge, largely because of the opportunity to so immerse myself in nature.

Park exit gate is locked until 7:00 am. Why not install an automatic exit gate for safety and convenience?

Park gate should be open daylight - sundown 7 days/week. Use of any size boat motor set to "idle only".

Please bring back (replace) the wildlife museum.

Plenty of canoes outside of the visitor center, but our rental time is restricted by some small minutes by one of the staff members. Strange.

Restroom wasn't working at visitor center. We rented boat, motor fell off boat almost went in swamp.

Some of the kayak trails are blocked or nearly blocked with downed trees or submerged logs.

Staff is always great.

Staff was great. Maintenance staff on boardwalk showed us where a snake was that they had just found and explained about the fire and what it did.

Super staff, great facility.

The bathrooms in the comfort stations need to get redone.

The boat guides were great, taught us a lot, pointed out birds, wildlife, plants. We wanted to see gators up close and did on the drive loop.

The film at visitor's center was not detailed enough and could have gone into a lot more detail about ecology, environment and wildlife as well as history of the swamp. It was overly simple.

The information for the boat tours was hidden almost didn't see it.

The limited hours for reserving camp platforms made planning difficult.

The Okefenokee adventures staff is extremely professional and helpful.

The park could use some updated restroom facilities! Especially on the outside of the check-in center by the boat dock. That bathroom is so small and the toilet is really low and difficult to use, not to mention, there is only 1! And even the restrooms close by in the picnic area could use an update inside. The building is ok, but the inside, while usable, is just not as convenient or comfortable as the newer, modern facilities that are being put in the state parks.

The refuge offers a variety of opportunities hiking, biking, boating, camping at a variety of times daytime, nighttime and seasons. The park is well run and a magical place to visit. One of a kind.

The restrooms were not up and running.

The staff was excellent. The restrooms were always very clean. Love camping here. The kayaking is superior....

The very best experience was the wonderful guide that lead our boat tour. He was knowledgeable, interesting and observant. We saw many things that we probably would have missed if he had not pointed them out! My only negative comment would be that the sign from the cabin to the boardwalk made no mention of the fact that it was much shorter to drive, which we discovered much too late. Several other older visitors were out of breath on the return trip and would have appreciated driving.

The wildlife staff (rangers) were very helpful and informative. The visitors office for cabin check in closed at 5 which is unreasonable. The visitor office staff (cashier) was not friendly or helpful.

This is a dark park for night sky observation. We had perfect conditions for viewing. In May we used the Suwanee river for a trip in north Florida. Nice to see the park we are visiting connected to other WMA's.

This was an unexpected gem. The amount of staff, services and conveniences offered were appropriate. The national wildlife refuge brand was well represented.

Unfortunately I did not have a lot of time to spend at the refuge otherwise I would have taken advantage of other services such as tours and boating and done more hiking. I have on my list to return when I have more time.

Very impressed by the whole operation.

Visitor center closed too early. Handicap parking was way too far from visitor center and shop.

Volunteer at visitor center helpful, she knew recent species of birds sighted.

Water and rail system is amazing; refuge should stay open later - give people a chance to see sunsets.

We enjoy Okefenokee because it is still a bit removed from "civilization". We spend a considerable amount of money (approx. \$2500) within a 65 mile radius of Folkstone, as we always include Okefenokee as part of a barrier island ocean experience. We have brought scouts (and recommended to others) from Virginia to specifically enjoy the back country canoe/kayak camping experience.

We enjoyed our visit. Had not been at this location for 42 years.

We were passing through on our way from Orlando to Chattanooga. Two of us had visited the Okefenokee in the early 1970's during the spring from Folkston. It was terrific. Lots of reptiles big and small, lots of water, and we rented a boat and took a lunch and we were gone for the day. Not so good entering from Fargo. Low water and not much wildlife. We walked the boardwalks and saw very little.

We were very pleased with the refuge because it is so beautiful, tranquil and welcoming. It is our special place and are grateful for its presence so close to use. We can't wait to come back for a visit again.

Well-marked water trails and a nice map are helpful. The staff is very knowledgeable and helpful. Beauty is everywhere in the swamp.

Would like to see new items in gift shops, with a lot more to look at.

Comments

General Comments (n=37)

Although I live in Athens, Georgia, my family owns a house in St. Mary's for vacation. Thus, we visit Okefenokee each time we are in St. Mary's.

As once stated, sure would like to be able to rent a motorized boat again; as was once available. The combination of private vendor food and services available at Okefenokee is ideal in my estimation. Just the right amount of commercial venture for a refuge. The trails and roadways are well maintained and the availability of literature, both print and digital, is sufficient for planning and background information. I found the method in which this survey was conducted to be low pressure and made me feel like I could be of service to those who provide us such excellent service.

Awesome experience! Will definitely recommend this refuge to friends and family. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in your survey.

Food plots to help keep the deer on the refuge.

Good luck with your research!

I am not a Georgia resident but I am a war disabled veteran who enjoys fishing. Too bad that veterans are not, Georgia resident or not, extended the honor of being allowed to fish within the park. The fact is that a disabled US veteran is a disabled US veteran regardless of his/her state of residence.

I could not recall the exact amount I spent in the refuge and area, so those are estimates. I also was not clear about the question asking how much more money would I spend - was that total or per person, or group? So I put down a figure that I would pay to visit the refuge. I really like the Okefenokee refuge and bring all my visitors to it.

I have been visiting SCFSP since 1962. My family has been visiting for at least 30 years before. I have passed my love for this place on to my children and grandchildren. I am hopeful that in the coming years efforts will be made not to develop any further. Just maintain what we have!

I live in Millsboro, so I brought my grandchildren here one day in the summer. They are ages 11 and 9. After the refuge, we visited the Dupont Center near Slaughter Beach and they liked it much better because it had more hands-on exhibits.

I love the refuge.

I really do not recall seeing road access to other parts of the refuge other than to the boat dock and the visitor center. If they are missing, it might be an asset to build a road with observation points along the way. I learned nothing about the large areas of brush and palmetto and how the environment seems to be so stable. I will do some reading on the Okefenokee.

Keep it wild!

Leave no trace.

Loved the astronomy session.

Loved the staff they were friendly, engaging and busy.

My family has enjoyed this park for years. Hiking, biking, canoeing for the most part. Love the observation tower. Guided boat tours were enjoyable, as well.

Okefenokee is awesome! Protect it!

On behalf of my family and I, thank you for creating a wonderful environment through your staff and recreational areas of the park and thank you for keeping the Okefenokee swamp clean, beautiful and safe for the indigenous species of animals there. God bless you.

One of the best places I have camped and kayaked.

Open up small game hunting areas near the east side access of refuge.

Our sons grew up in Camden County nearby. Unlike their peers, they preferred the swamp over the beach. Now we take our grandkids and other relatives when they visit and keep an annual parking pass because we still enjoy going even when it is just my husband and I enjoying a quiet hike and picnic. The Okefenokee is a beautiful, magical and primitive place that calls you back!

Short but enjoyable visit.

Thanks for your work and the nice young people at the refuge.

The boat guide was extremely interesting, and we enjoyed learning about the refuge, the nature of the swamp and the history. Very knowledgeable!

The Okefenokee National Wildlife Reserve is the highlight on my list of places to take visitors to. First visited the swamp before the fire in 2011-12. I was glad to see the homestead had been preserved and the pictures of the equipment/coverings kept on stand by for the purpose. The boat trip to the prairie is outstanding, seeing all the gators, the shaking earth, something you have to see to really understand. I did take a wrong turn coming out of the refuge on my first visit. The signs could be better.

The refuge is basically our rain forest in the USA. It is important to preserve this area for future generations to see and for the health of planet earth. The refuge needs to keep strict rules in place to continue to protect this environment and the animals that call this place home.

The refuge perfectly straddled the line of making us feel welcome but protecting the natural world. We were visitors in another world and the creatures and water/plants/etc. in that world were more important than us. As it should be. Initially we were afraid of the gators, but mutual respect made the observation of gators safe and easy. Bird watching was awesome. More sunrise/sunset opportunities would be great. We were amazed that our misperceptions were dispelled. We expected heat, humidity, bugs, smell. Instead, fresh air, fresh smell, almost no bugs. If you want more "off season" visitors, advertise that. I don't think you should grow your visitors base too much. If you start getting more drunk boaters/fishers or rowdy people who don't respect the wildlife, the refuge could be endangered.

The refuge seems to be heavily impacted in terms of their ability to open and maintain canoeing trails within the refuge. I feel more dollars should be allocated for this purpose. I feel it is extremely important for the refuge to provide this level of opportunity to the public.

The tour guide at the homestead was very helpful and informative.

People go by the sign that says keep out they walk into danger. Like at the big pond it says no people beyond this point. They go anyways.

We come upon the swamp when looking for RV camping for the night. We were unexpectedly surprised w/the park. Great nature, great historical exhibits, great nature center actually saw alligators :), great boat tour. We learned so much about swamps and the people that lived there. Very educational. Thanks for running such a great experience.

We just attended pioneer day and enjoyed talking to the talented people who participated. My husband and I talked with a volunteer from almost every booth. We know the hardships people faced and admire their tenacity. We usually ride our bikes each day for exercise and bird watching. I am pleased that we have the park close enough to visit often.

We really enjoyed visiting the Okefenokee NWR. The boat tour was especially rewarding. We would return more often, but we live in Alaska.

We speak German and French in our couple.

We thoroughly enjoyed visiting Okefenokee and would highly recommend any friends and family to visit.

We visited Okefenokee swamp on a road trip to Florida to Disney world. It was an enjoyable day.

We were pleasantly surprised at the attitude of the employees. They were great people and the facilities neat and clean. Keep up the good work.