



Great Falls Park, Virginia

Visitor Study **Spring 1996**

Report 87
Visitor Services Project
Cooperative Park Studies Unit



University of Idaho



Great Falls Park, Virginia Visitor Study

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Margaret Littlejohn

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Margaret Littlejohn is VSP Coordinator, National Park Service, based at the Cooperative Park Studies Unit, University of Idaho. I thank the staff of Great Falls Park, Virginia and George Washington Memorial Parkway for their assistance with this study. The VSP acknowledges the Public Opinion Lab of the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center, Washington State University, for its technical assistance.

Visitor Services Project Great Falls Park, Virginia Report Summary

- This report describes part of the results of a visitor study at Great Falls Park, Virginia during April 28 - May 4, 1996. A total of 585 questionnaires were distributed. Visitors returned 443 questionnaires for a 76% response rate.
- This report profiles Great Falls Park, Virginia visitors. A separate appendix has visitors' comments about their visit; this report and the appendix contain a comment summary.
- Thirty-four percent of the visitors were in groups with friends; 31% were with families. Thirty-eight percent of Great Falls Park, Virginia visitors were in groups of two. Over half of the visitors (51%) were aged 21-40 and 11% were aged 15 years or younger.
- Among Great Falls Park, Virginia visitors, 6% were international visitors. Over one-third of those visitors (38%) were from England and 16% were from Germany. United States visitors were from Virginia (60%), Maryland (12%), Washington, D.C. (10%) and 33 other states.
- On this visit, visitors' most common activities viewing the falls (73%), walking/hiking (56%) and viewing wildlife (41%). On past visits, visitors' most common activities were viewing the falls (88%), walking/hiking (75%), visiting Patowmack Canal (56%) and viewing wildlife (50%).
- About one-third of the visitors were visiting Great Falls Park, Virginia for the first time (34%). Another one-third of the visitors (33%) had visited ten or more times. Seventy-four percent of visitors stayed for two to four hours in the park on this visit.
- The primary reason which brought visitors to the park was to view the falls (29%). Other visitors identified walking/hiking (20%), bicycling (12%) and white water boating (8%) as their primary reason for visiting.
- When asked what information sources they used to learn about river safety hazards, 96% of the visitors said park signs. Fifty-one percent of visitors said they used park bulletin boards. The least used source to learn about river safety was radio (19%). The information sources which received the highest "very effective" to "extremely effective" ratings were park signs, park bulletin boards, park personnel and park brochures.
- The most used visitor services were the park brochure/map (64%), trail map (52%) and visitor center exhibits (42%). According to visitors, the most important services were the trail map (73%), park brochure/map (67%) and park staff assistance (61%). The best quality services were park staff assistance (87%), visitor center information desk (87%), park brochure/map (86%) and visitor center exhibits (85%). The services with the highest "very poor" quality rating was the trail map (2%)
- The most used visitor facilities were parking (79%), trails (69%), overlooks (66%) and restrooms (65%). According to visitors, the most important services were parking (96%), trails (93%) and restrooms (90%). The service receiving the highest proportion of "not important" ratings was the snack bar (8%). The best quality services were parking (87%), trails (82%) and picnic area (80%). The services with the highest "very poor" quality rating was the snack bar (6%)
- Most visitors (93%) rated the overall quality of services in Great Falls Park, Virginia as "good" or "very good." Visitors made many additional comments.

<p>For more information about the Visitor Services Project, please contact: Dr. Gary E. Machlis, Sociology Project Leader, University of Idaho Cooperative Park Studies Unit, College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences, Moscow, Idaho 83844-1133 or call (208) 885-7129.</p>
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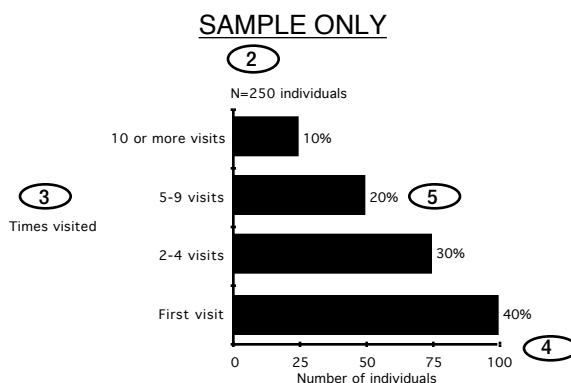
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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of a study of visitors to Great Falls Park, Virginia (referred to as "Great Falls Park, Virginia"). This visitor study was conducted April 28 - May 4, 1996 by the National Park Service (NPS) Visitor Services Project (VSP), part of the Cooperative Park Studies Unit at the University of Idaho.

A **Methods** section discusses the procedures and limitations of the study. A **Results** section follows, including a summary of visitor comments. Next, an **Additional Analysis** page helps managers request additional analyses. The final section has a copy of the **Questionnaire**. The separate appendix includes comment summaries and visitors' unedited comments.

Many of this report's graphs resemble the example below. The large numbers refer to explanations following the graph.



1 Figure 4: Number of visits

- 1: The figure title describes the graph's information.
- 2: Listed above the graph, the 'N' shows the number of visitors responding and a description of the chart's information. Interpret data with an 'N' of less than 30 with **CAUTION!** as the results may be unreliable.
- 3: Vertical information describes categories.
- 4: Horizontal information shows the number or proportions in each category.
- 5: In most graphs, percentages provide additional information.

METHODS

Questionnaire design and administration

The questionnaire design used the standard format of previous Visitor Services Project studies. See the end of this report for a copy of the questionnaire.

Interviews were conducted and questionnaires distributed to a sample of selected visitors visiting Great Falls Park, Virginia during April 28 - May 4, 1996. Visitors completed the questionnaire after their visit and then returned it by mail.

At Great Falls Park, Virginia, visitors were sampled as they entered the park at the main gate, at Difficult Run Trail parking area and at River Bend Trail, as follows.

<u>Location</u>	<u># of Q. distributed</u>
Main gate	427 (73%)
Difficult Run Trail parking area	102 (17%)
River Bend Trail	56 (10%)
Grand Total	585

Visitor groups were greeted, briefly introduced to the purpose of the study and asked to participate. If visitors agreed, the interview took approximately two minutes. These interviews included determining group size, group type and the age of the adult who would complete the questionnaire. This individual was asked his or her name, address and telephone number for the later mailing of a reminder-thank you postcard.

Two weeks following the survey, a reminder-thank you postcard was mailed to all participants. Replacement questionnaires were mailed to participants who had not returned their questionnaires four weeks after the survey. Eight weeks after the survey, a second replacement questionnaire was sent to a random sample of visitors who had not returned their questionnaires.

Data analysis

Returned questionnaires were coded and the information entered into a computer. Frequency distributions and cross-tabulations were calculated using a standard statistical software package. Respondents' comments were summarized.

This study collected information on both visitor groups and individual group members. Thus, the sample size ("N"), varies from figure to figure. For example, while Figure 1 shows information for 435 groups, Figure 4 presents data for 1,077 individuals. A note above each figure's graph specifies the information illustrated.

**Sample size,
missing data
and
reporting
errors**

Occasionally, a respondent may not have answered all of the questions, or may have answered some incorrectly. Unanswered questions create missing data and cause the number in the sample to vary from figure to figure. For example, although 443 questionnaires were returned by visitors, Figure 1 shows data for only 435 respondents.

Questions answered incorrectly due to carelessness, misunderstanding directions and so forth, turn up in the data as reporting errors. These create small data inconsistencies.

Like all surveys, this study has limitations which should be considered when interpreting the results. **Limitations**

1. It is not possible to know whether visitor responses reflect actual behavior. This disadvantage applies to all such studies and is reduced by having visitors fill out the questionnaire soon after they visit the park.
2. The data reflect visitor use patterns of visitors to the selected sites during the study period of April 28 - May 4, 1996. The results do not necessarily apply to visitors during other times of the year.
3. Caution is advised when interpreting any data with a sample size of less than 30, as the results may be unreliable. If the sample size is less than 30, the word "**CAUTION!**" is included in the graph, figure or table.

During the study week, weather conditions at Great Falls Park, Virginia were fairly typical of this area in the spring, including some rainy days and some sunny days.

**Special
Conditions**

GREAT FALLS PARK, VIRGINIA RESULTS

Visitors contacted

At Great Falls Park, Virginia, 661 visitor groups were contacted; 89% (585 groups) accepted questionnaires. A total of 443 visitor groups completed and returned their questionnaires, a 76% response rate.

Table 1 compares information collected from the total sample of visitors contacted and the actual respondents who returned questionnaires. The non-response bias was insignificant, however the respondents were slightly older than visitors who accepted questionnaires.

Table 1: Comparison of total sample and actual respondents

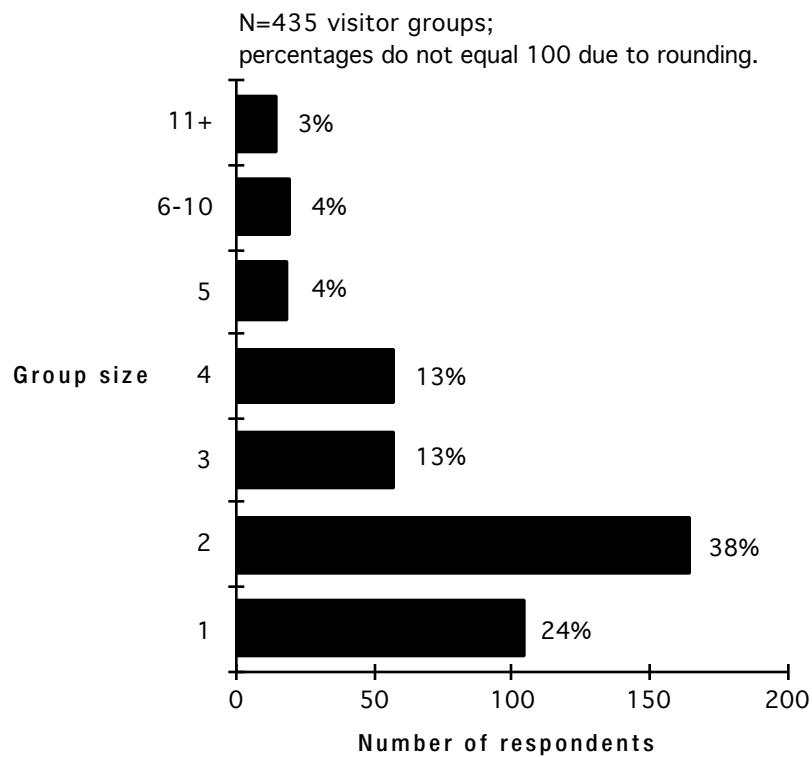
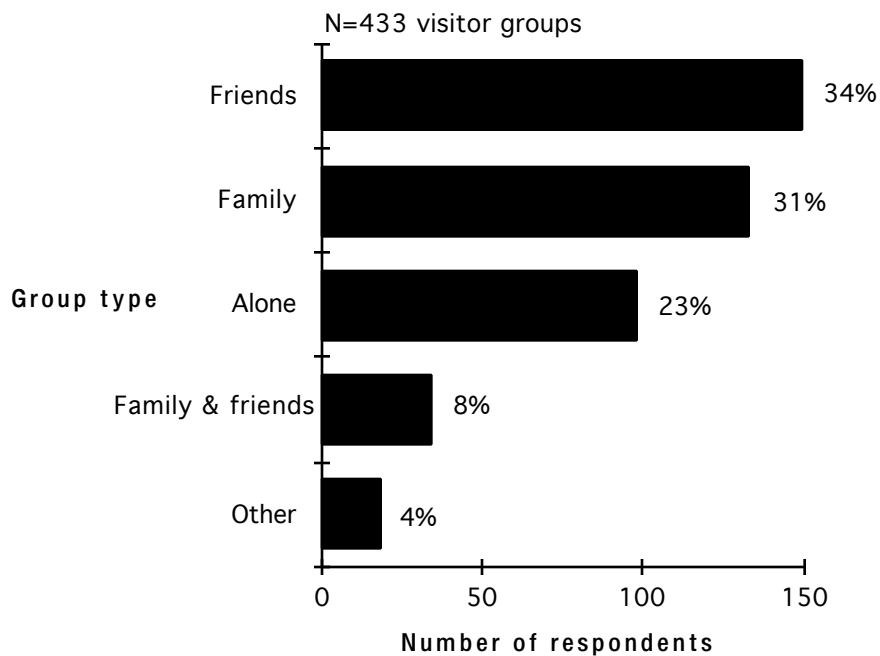
Variable	Total sample		Actual respondents	
	N	Avg.	N	Avg.
Age of respondent (years)	585	35.9	429	37.6
Group size	568	3.1	435	3.5

Demographics

Figure 1 shows group sizes, which varied from one person to 70 people. Thirty-eight percent of visitors came in groups of two; 26% came in groups of three or four and 24% were alone. Thirty-four percent of the visitors were in groups with friends and 31% were with family (see Figure 2). "Other" groups included company picnic, girlfriend/boyfriend or class field trip. Two percent of the visitors were traveling with a guided tour group or educational group (see Figure 3).

The most common visitor ages were 21-40 years (51%), as shown in Figure 4. Eleven percent of visitors were aged 15 years or younger. When asked about the number of visits to Great Falls Park, Virginia, about one-third of the visitors (34%) said they were first-time visitors and another one-third (33%) had visited 10 times or more (see Figure 5).

International visitors comprised 6% of Great Falls Park, Virginia visitors. They were from England (38%), Germany (10%) and 16 other countries, as shown in Map 1 and Table 2. United States visitors were from Virginia (60%), Maryland (12%), Washington, D.C. (10%), and 33 other states, as shown in Map 2 and Table 3.

**Figure 1: Visitor group sizes****Figure 2: Visitor group types**

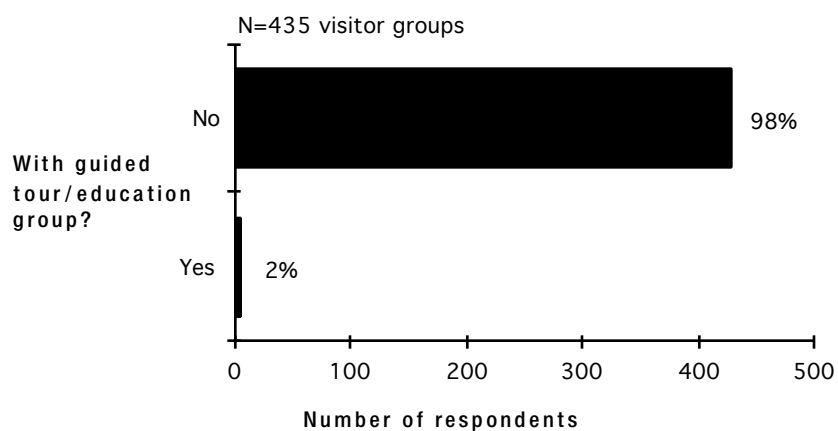


Figure 3: Traveling with guided tour/educational group?

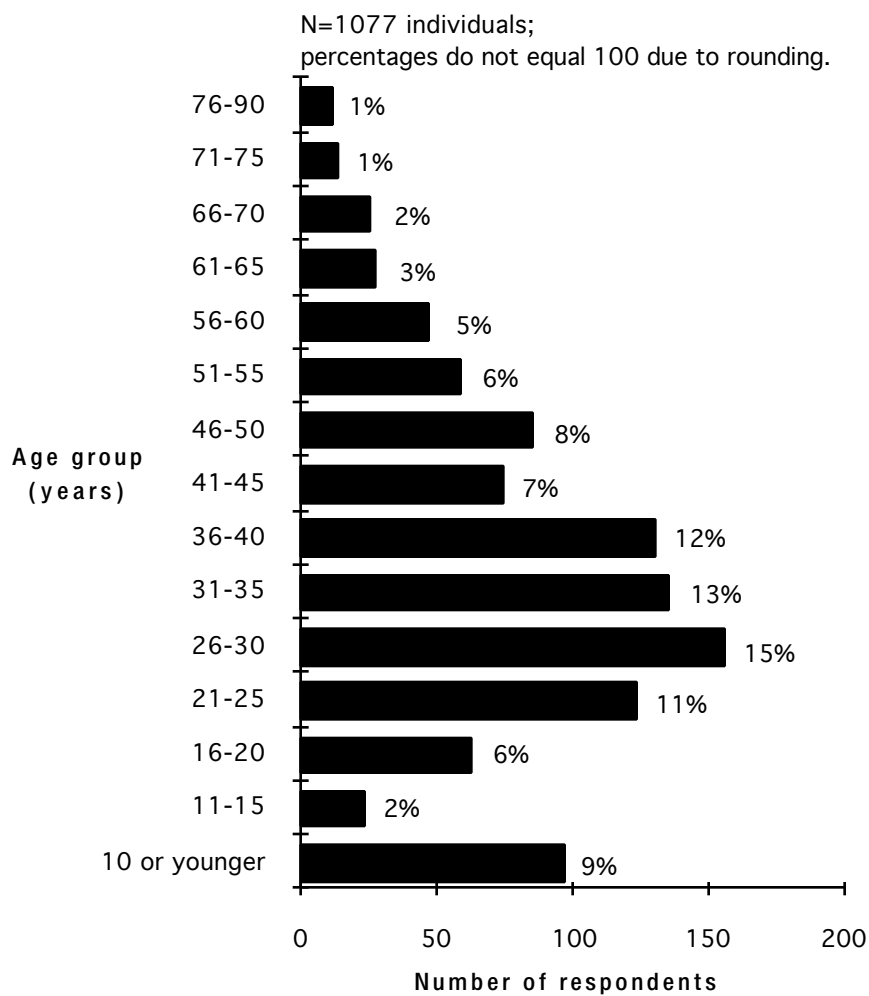


Figure 4: Visitor ages

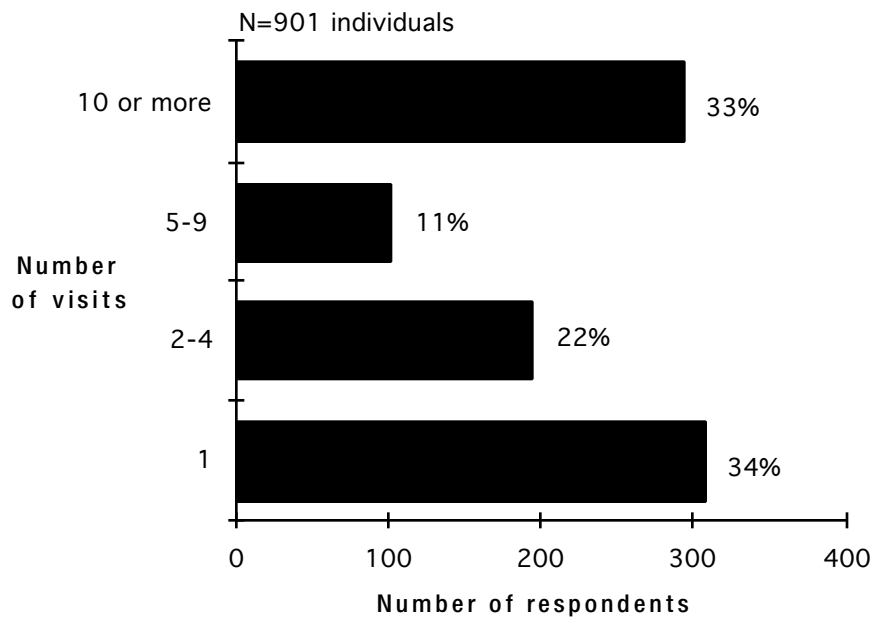
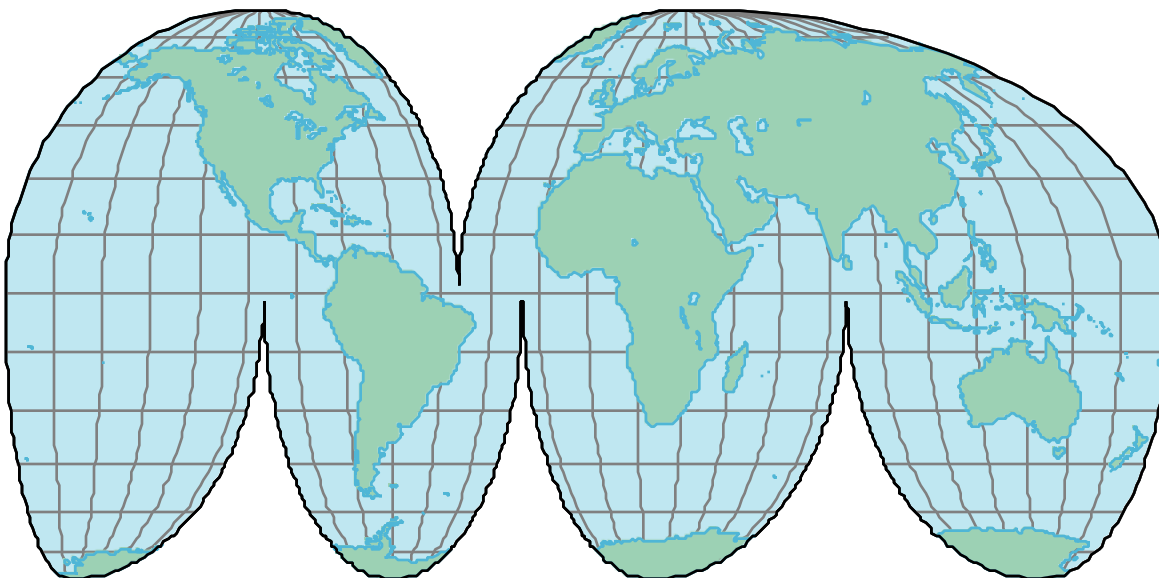
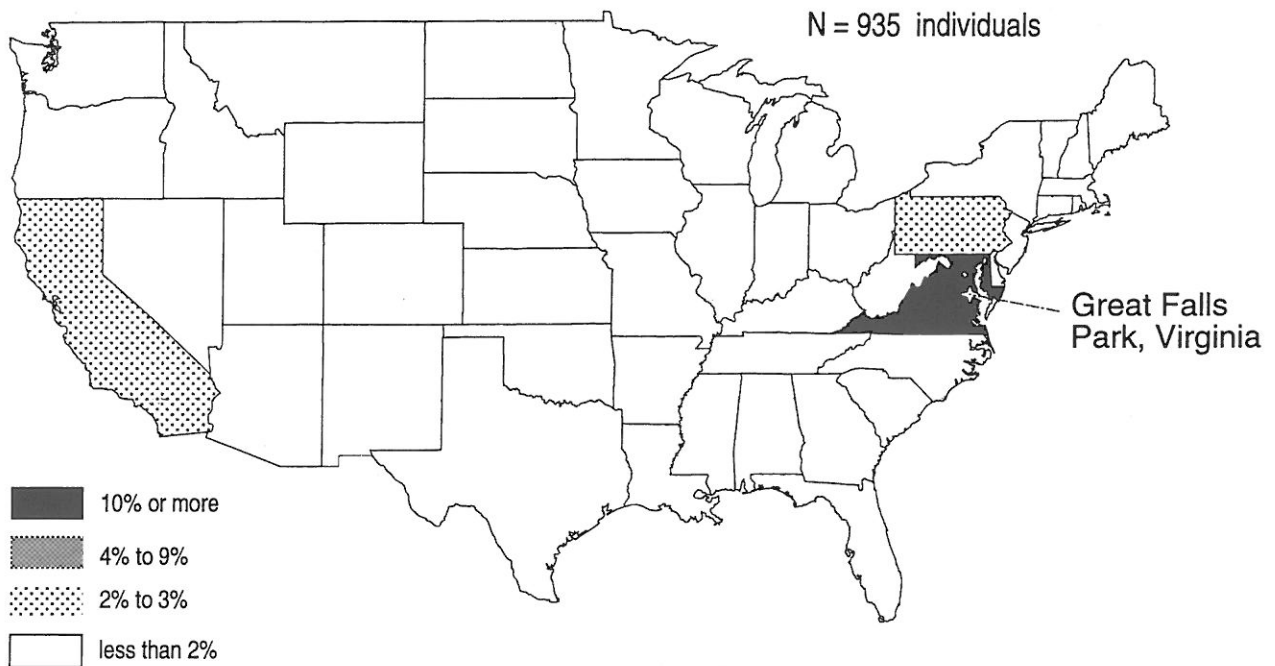


Figure 5: Number of visits to Great Falls Park, Virginia

**Map 1: The world****Table 2: Proportion of visitors from each foreign country**

N=61 individuals;
percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

Country	Number of individuals	% of internat'l visitors	% of total visitors
England	23	38	2
Germany	10	16	1
Brazil	3	5	
Czechoslovakia	3	5	All others
Finland	3	5	less than 1%
France	3	5	[
Korea	3	5	
Holland	2	3	
Sweden	2	3	
China	1	2	
Colombia	1	2	
Malaysia	1	2	
New Zealand	1	2	
Philippines	1	2	
Romania	1	2	
Russia	1	2	
Thailand	1	2	
Vietnam	1	2	



Map 2: Proportion of United States visitors from each state

Table 3: Proportion of United States visitors from each state

N=935 individuals;
percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

State	Number of individuals	% of U.S. visitors	% of total visitors
Virginia	560	60	56
Maryland	110	12	11
Washington, D.C.	96	10	10
California	19	2	2
Pennsylvania	18	2	2
New York	13	1	1
Massachusetts	12	1	1
Florida	11	1	1
North Carolina	6	1	1
New Hampshire	6	1	1
Arkansas	5	1	1
Ohio	5	1	1
Texas	5	1	1
West Virginia	5	1	1
Arizona	4	<1	all others less than 1% ↓
Louisiana	4	<1	
Minnesota	4	<1	
Rhode Island	4	<1	
Other states (18)	48	5	

**Length of
stay**

Over half (52%) of Great Falls Park, Virginia visitors stayed two hours or less (see Figure 6) on this visit. Another 42% of visitors stayed three to four hours.

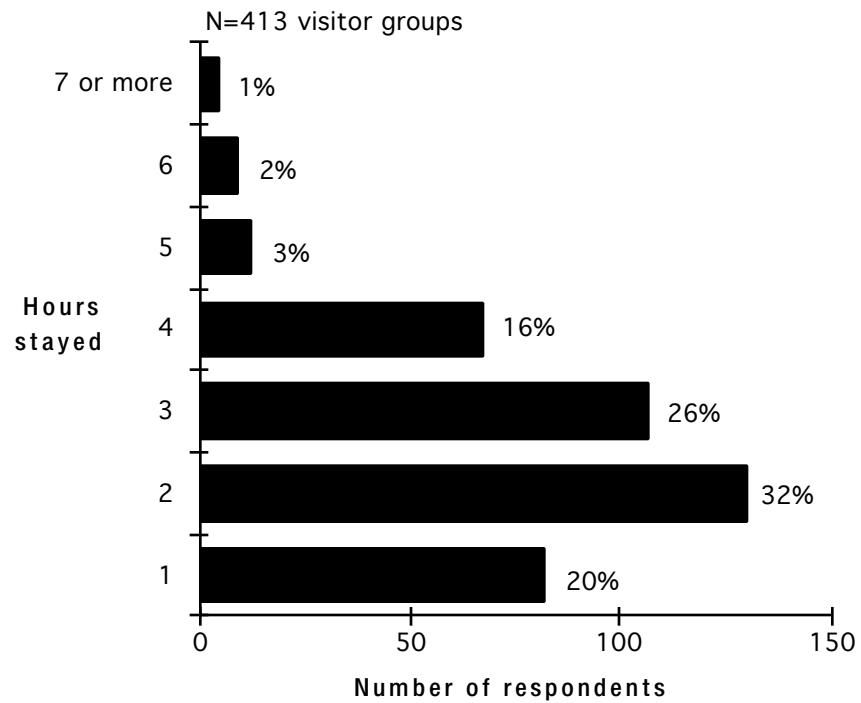


Figure 6: Length of stay (hours)

On this visit, common visitor activities were viewing the falls (73%), walking/hiking (56%), viewing wildlife (41%) and visiting the Patowmack Canal (31%), as shown in Figure 7. The least common activity was horseback riding (1%). Other activities visitors did on this visit included taking photographs, playing sports, relaxing, visiting the visitor center, birding and being outdoors.

Past and present activities

On past visits, visitor most often did the same four activities: viewing the falls (88%), hiking/walking (75%), visiting the Patowmack Canal (56%) and viewing wildlife (50%), as shown in Figure 8. The least common activity was horseback riding (3%).

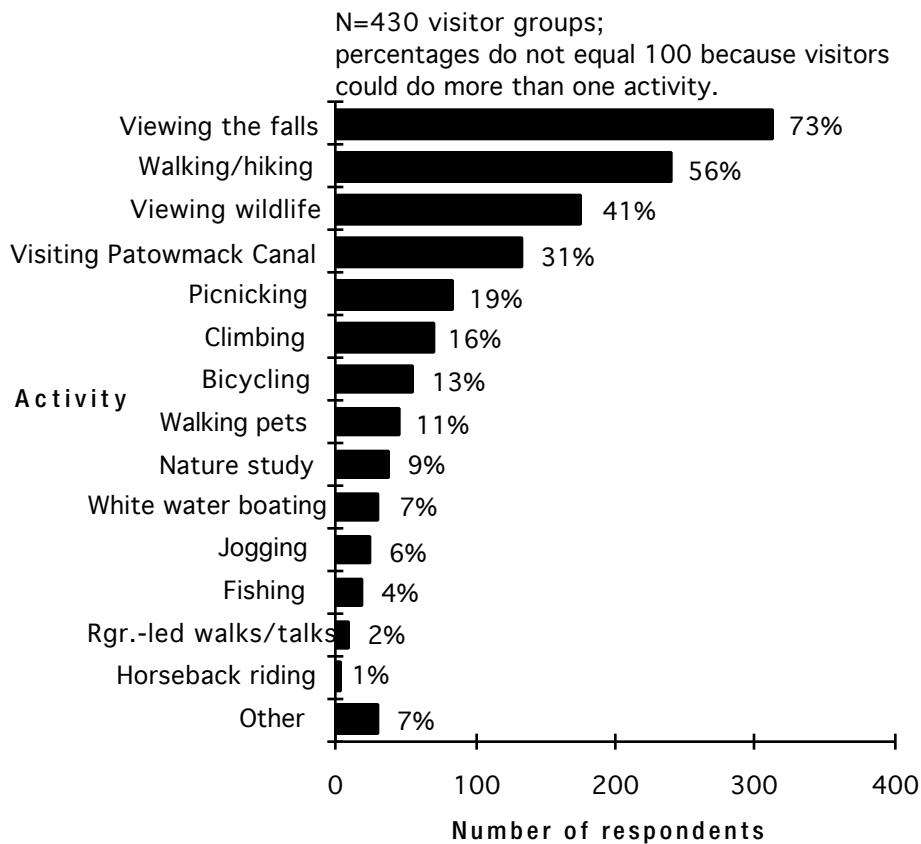
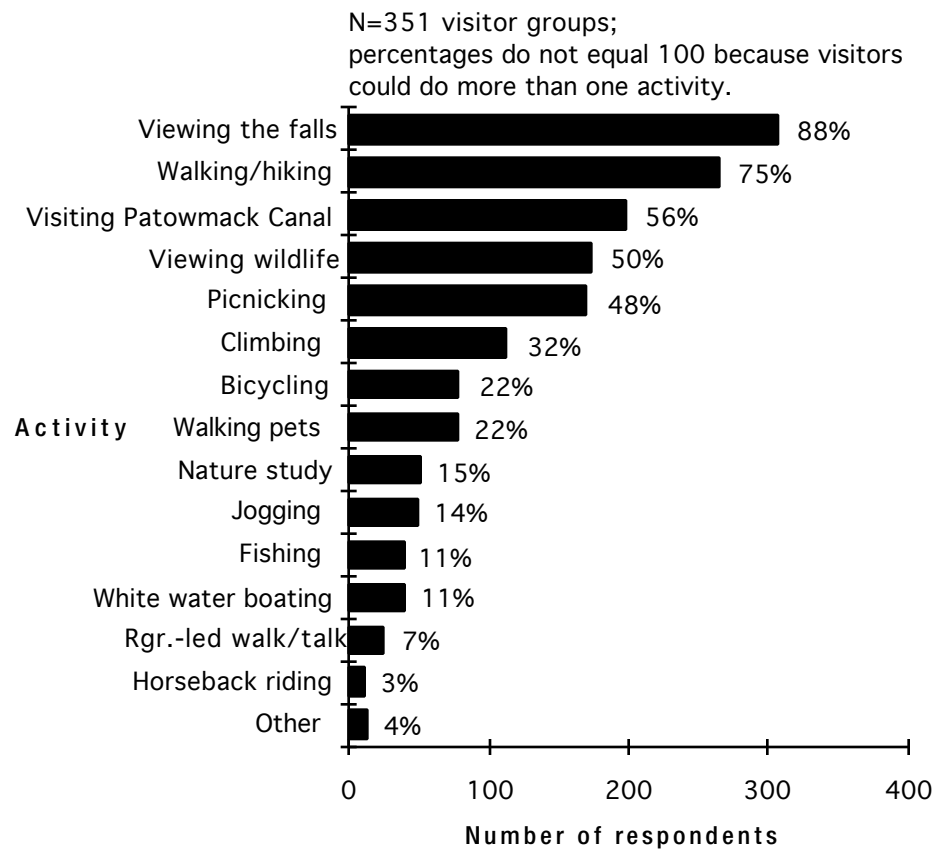


Figure 7: Visitor activities, this visit

**Figure 8: Visitor activities, past visits**

Visitors were asked their reasons for visiting Great Falls Park, Virginia on this visit. Twenty-nine percent of the visitors came to view the falls, 20% came to walk or hike and 12% came to bicycle (see Figure 9). No visitor groups said they came to visit the Patowmack Canal or to attend ranger-led walks or talks. "Other" reasons which brought visitors to the park included attending a barbecue, photography, showing the park to friends/relatives, birdwatching, and enjoying the outdoors.

Reasons for visit

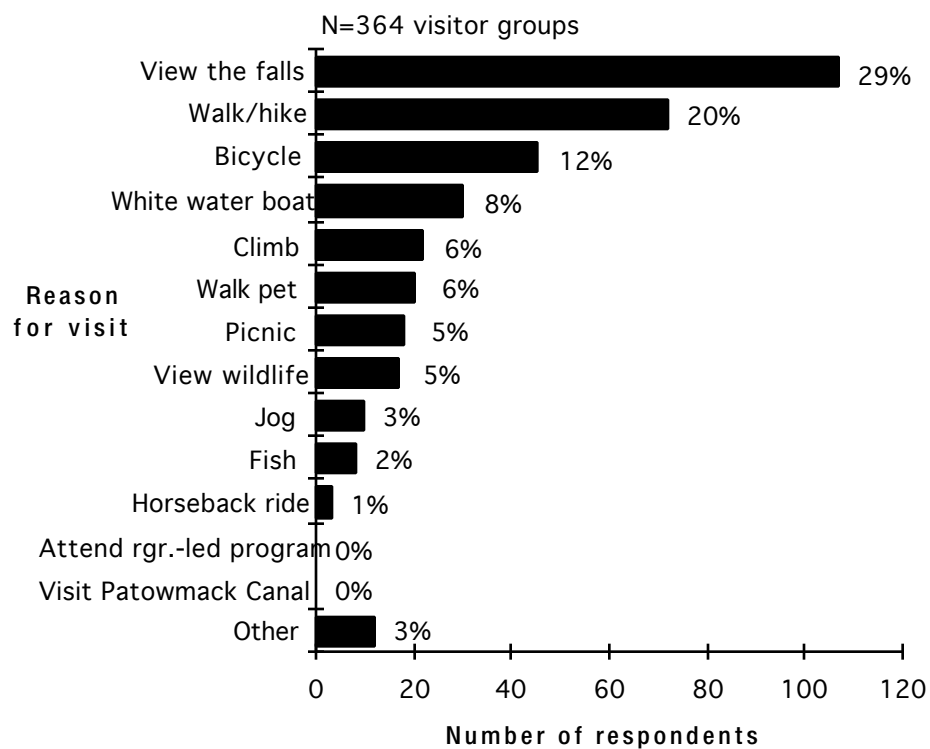


Figure 9: Reasons for visit

Use and effectiveness of safety information

Visitors were asked what information sources they used to learn about river safety hazards of the Potomac River at Great Falls Park, Virginia. The most often used safety information sources were park signs (96%), park bulletin boards (51%) and park brochures (44%), as shown in Figure 10. The least used information source was radio (19%).

Visitors were then asked to rate the effectiveness of these same safety information sources (see Figures 11-17). The highest "very effective" to "extremely effective" ratings for ways of warning visitors about river safety hazards were for park signs (83%), park bulletin boards (71%), park personnel (66%) and park brochures (66%). The highest "not effective" rating was for radio (32%).

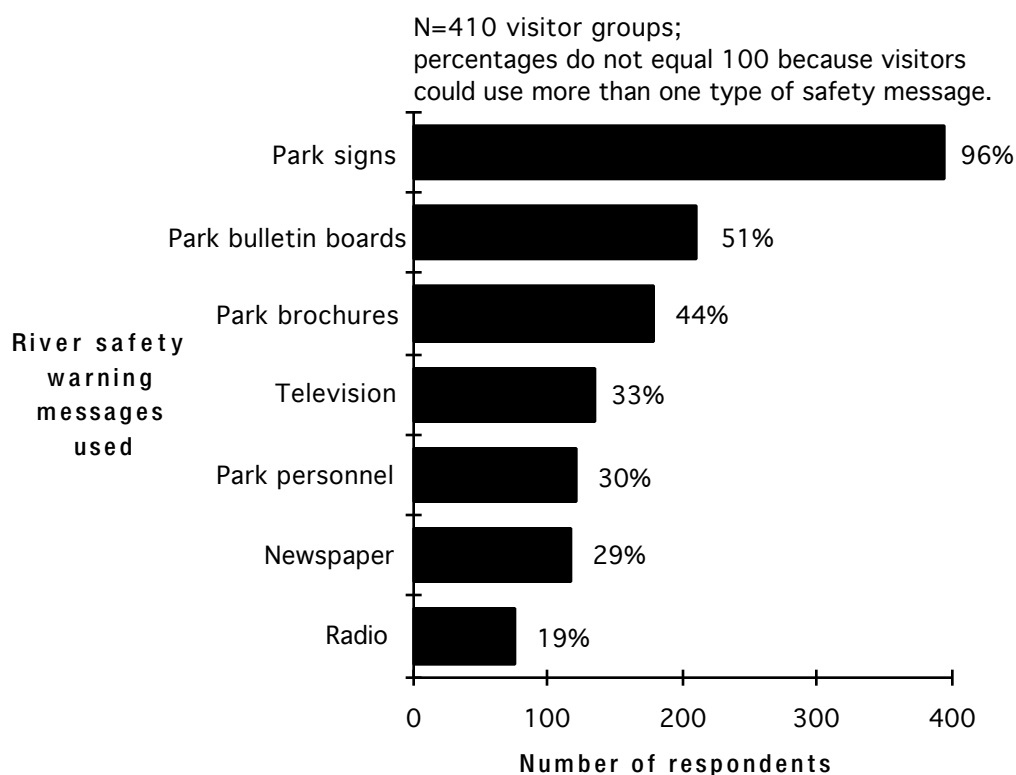
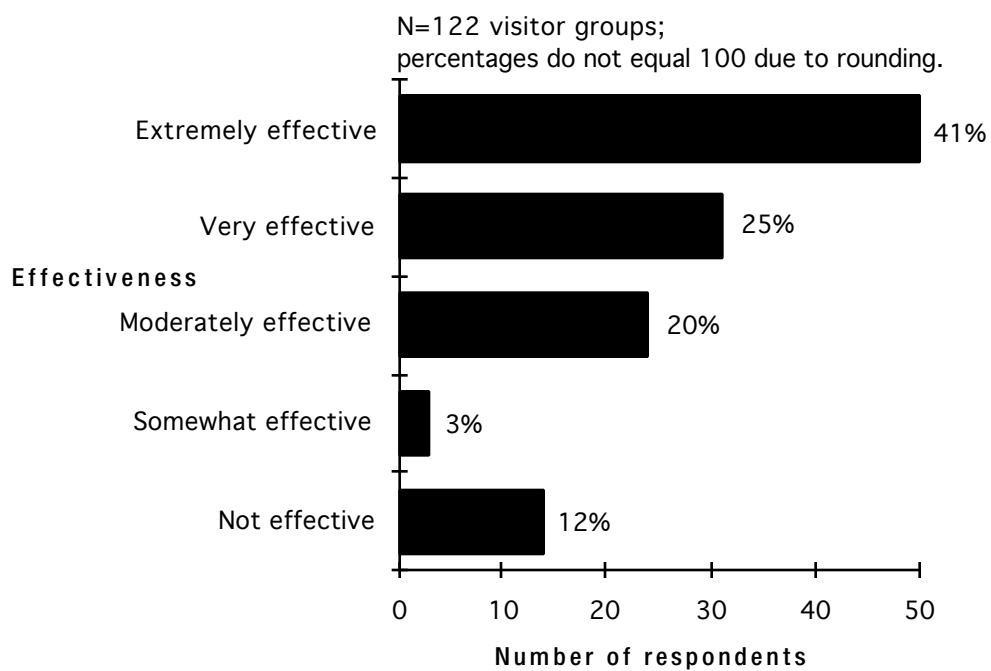
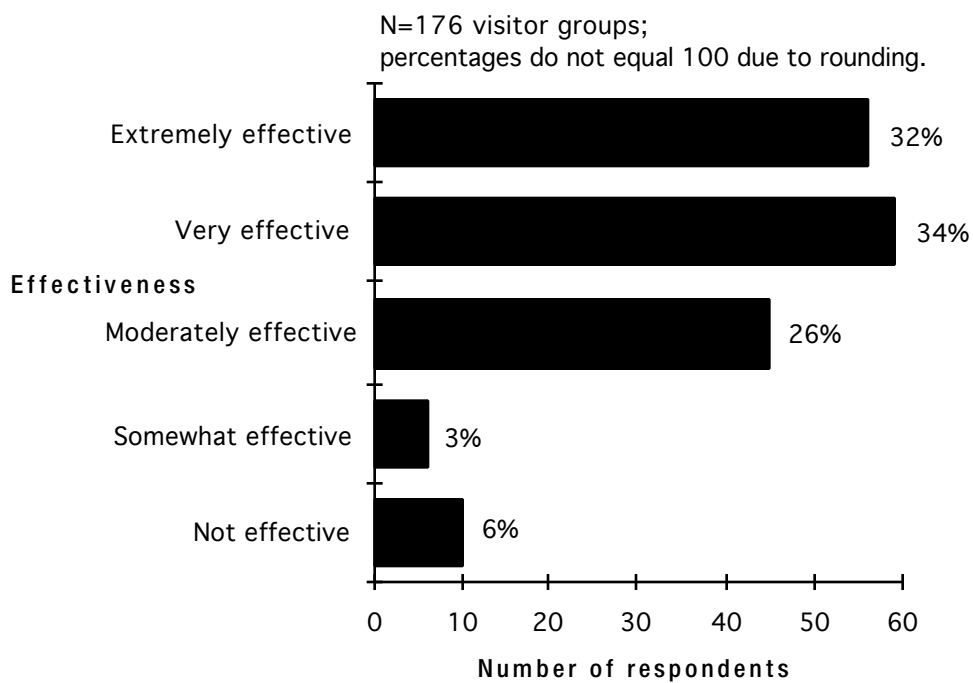
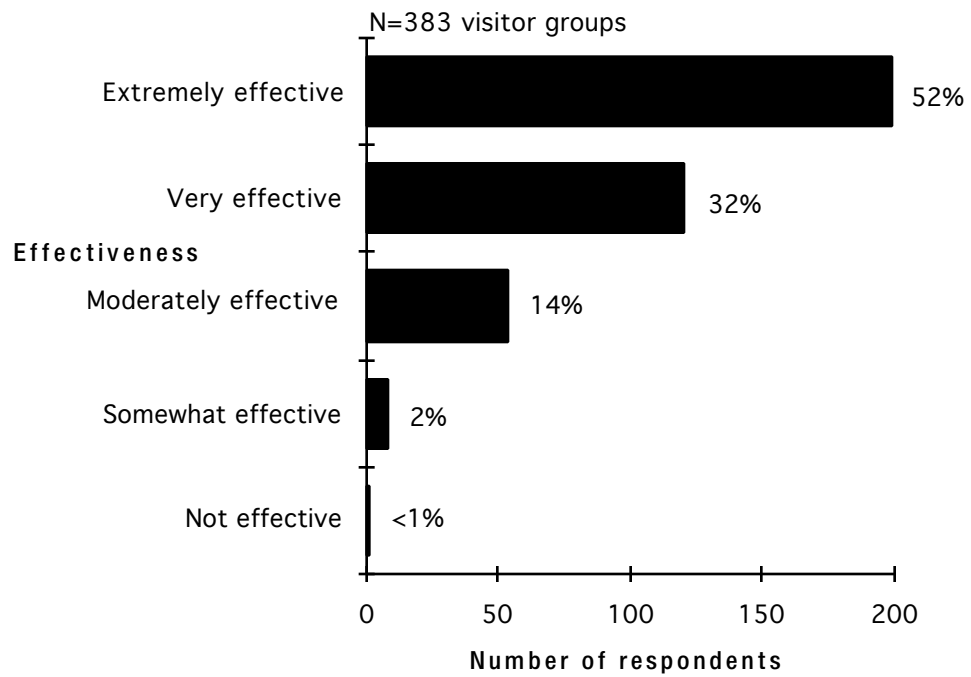
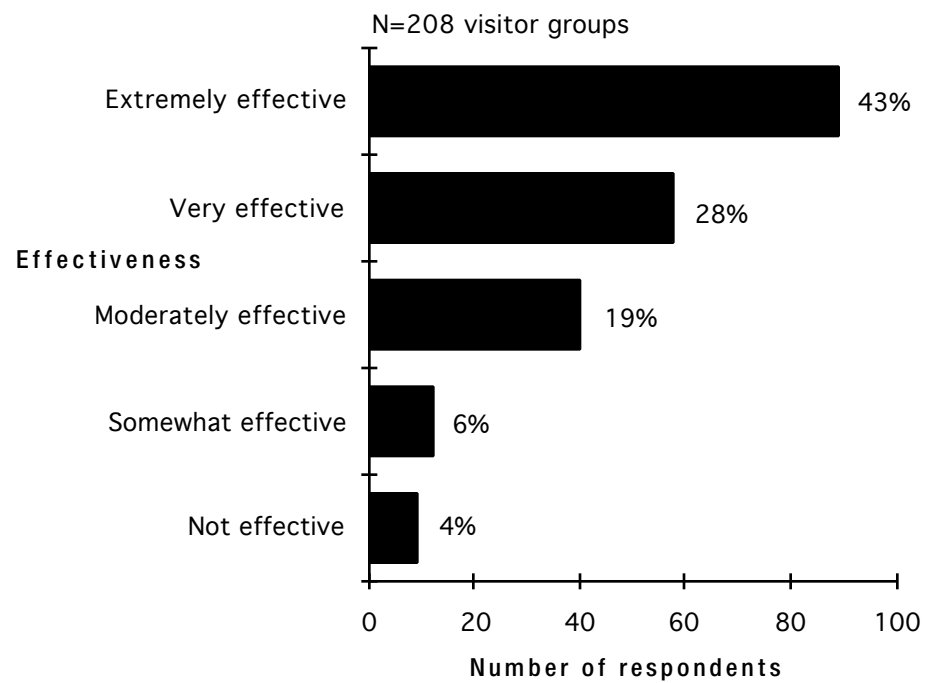
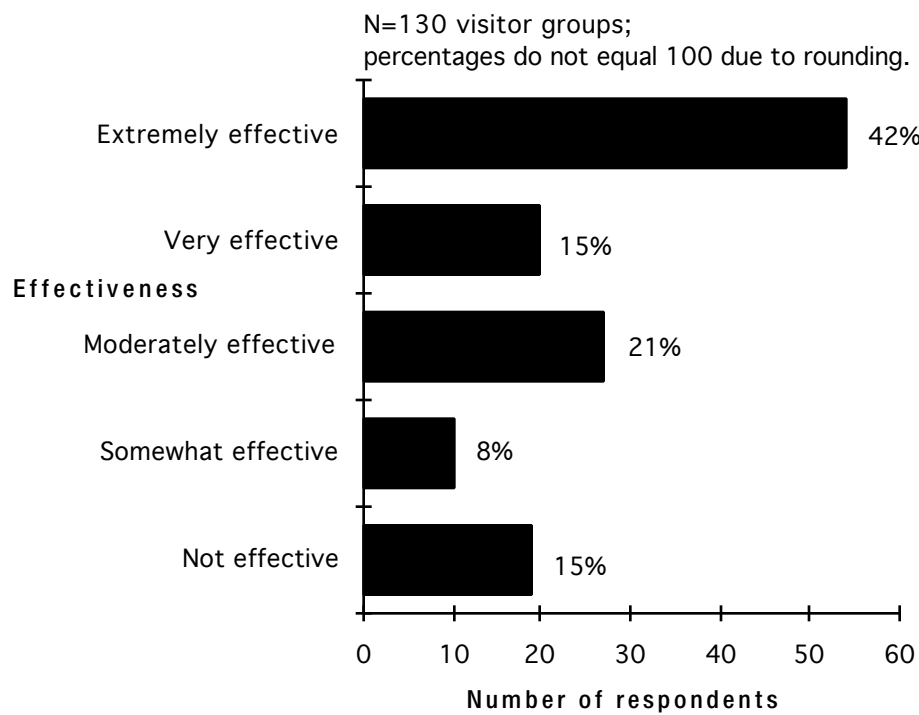
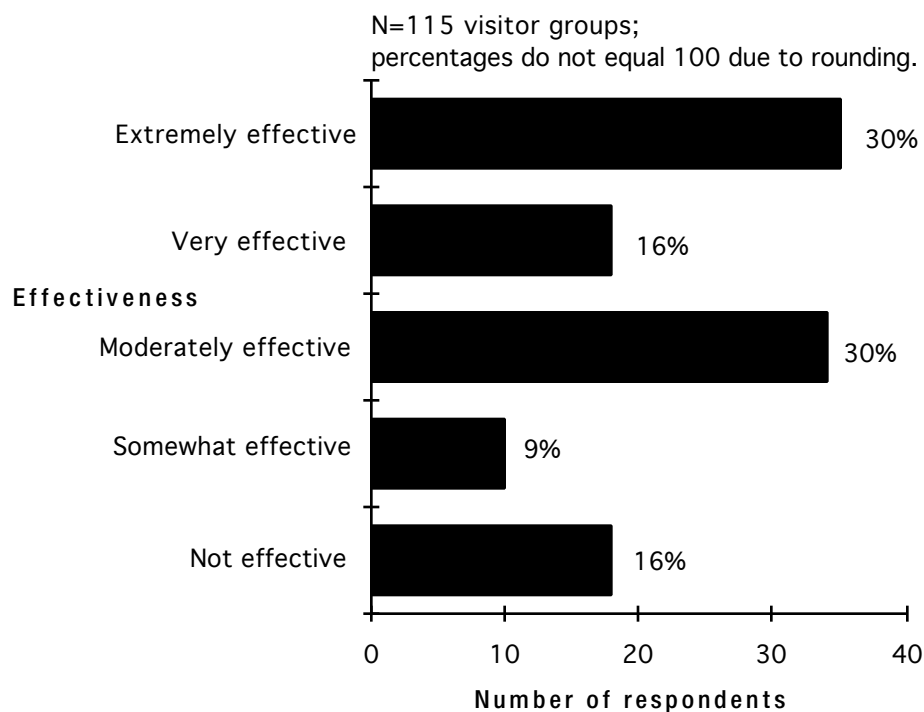
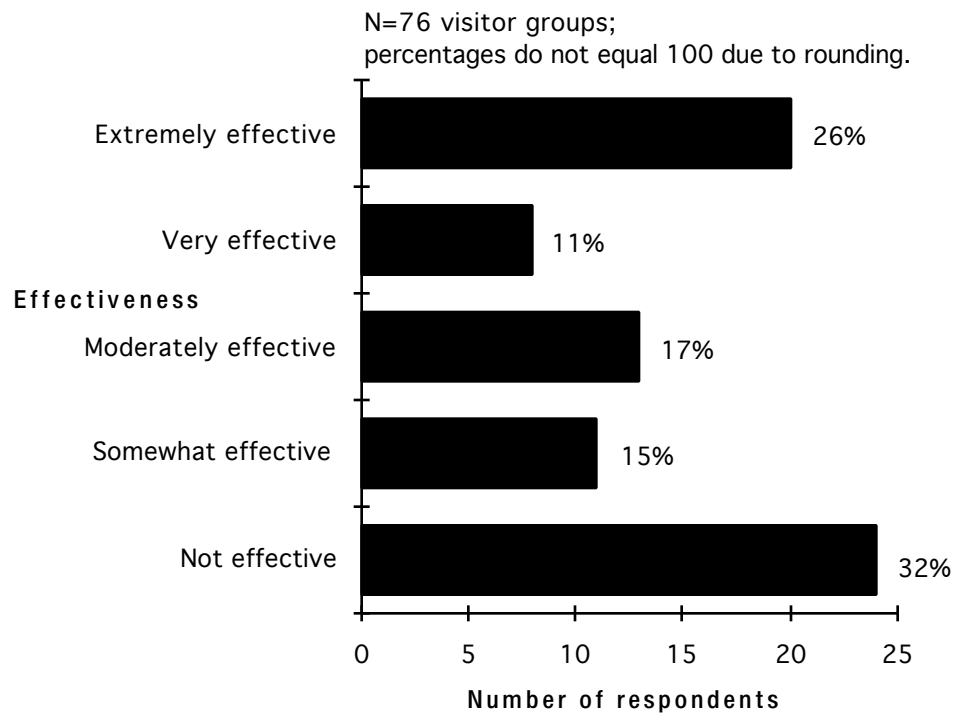


Figure 10: Use of river safety information

**Figure 11: Park personnel effectiveness****Figure 12: Park brochures' effectiveness**

**Figure 13: Park signs' effectiveness****Figure 14: Park bulletin boards' effectiveness**

**Figure 15: Television's effectiveness****Figure 16: Newspapers' effectiveness**

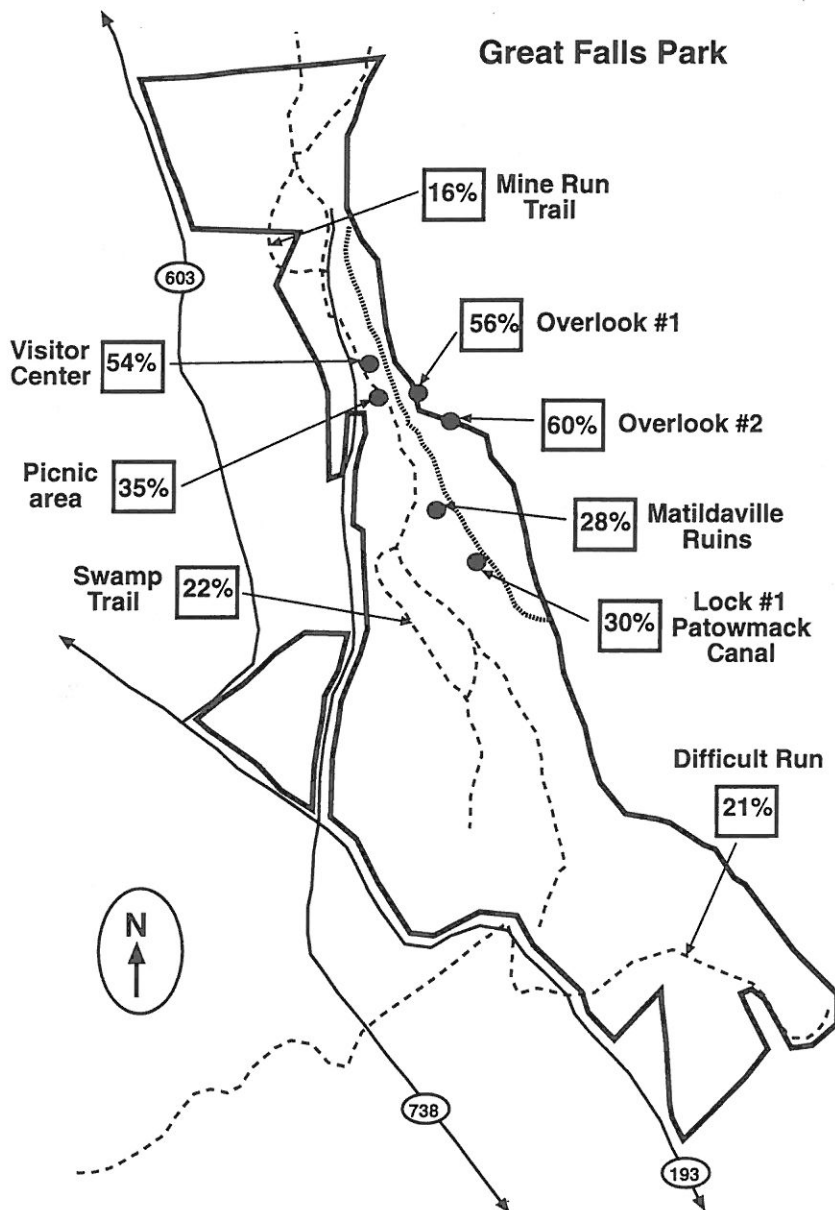
**Figure 17: Radio's effectiveness**

The most visited sites at Great Falls Park, Virginia were Overlook #2 (60%), Overlook #1 (56%) and the Visitor Center (54%), as shown in Map 3. The least visited site was Mine Run Trail (16%).

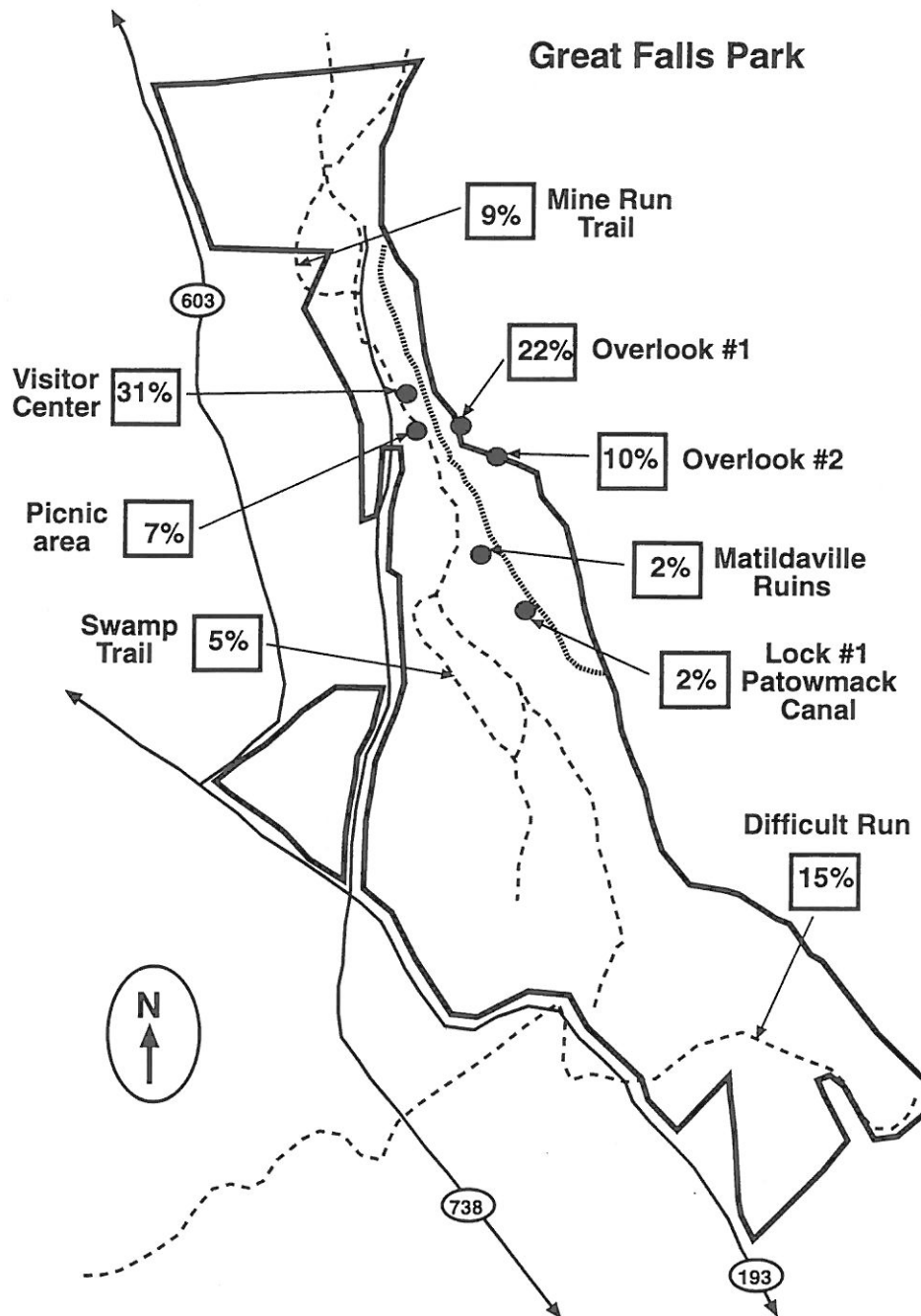
The sites which were most often visited first were the Visitor Center (31%), Overlook #1 (22%) and Difficult Run (15%), as shown in Map 4.

N=441 visitor groups;
percentages do not equal 100 because visitors could visit more than one site.

Sites visited



N=380 visitor groups;
percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.



Visitors were asked "During this visit, did other visitors and their activities interfere with your visit to Great Falls Park, Virginia?" Most visitor groups (93%) responded that other visitors and their activities did not interfere with their visit (see Figure 18). Seven percent of groups said other visitors interfered with their visit. The ways that visitors interfered with other visitors are itemized in Table 4. Crowding, with the resulting lack of parking, was the most often listed way that visitors interfered with others.

**Visitor
activities
which
interfered
with visit**

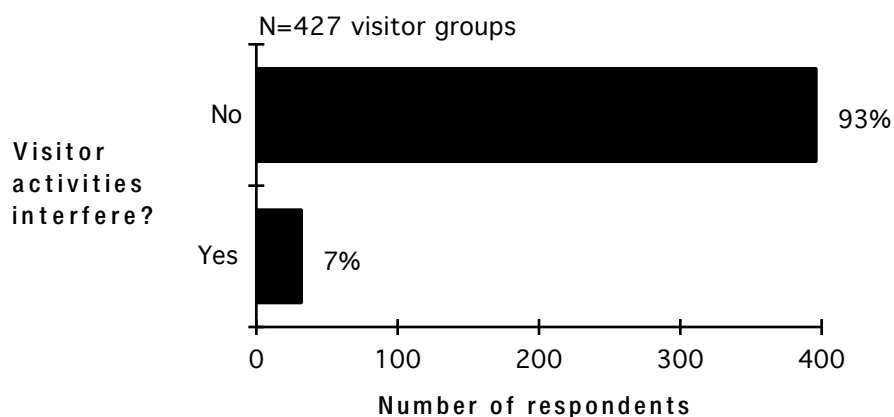


Figure 18: Did visitor activities interfere with visit?

Table 4: Ways other visitors/activities interfered

N=35 comments

How interfered	Number of comments
Crowding/lack of parking	8
Litter from fisherman	5
Bicycles on trails, speeding	4
Dogs off leash	4
Loud music/children	4
Litter	2
Other comments	8

**Visitor
services:
use,
importance
and quality**

The most commonly used visitor services at Great Falls Park, Virginia were the park brochure/map (64%), the trail map (52%), visitor center exhibits (42%) and park staff assistance (30%), as shown in Figure 19. The least used services were ranger-led programs and commercial outfitters (each 1%).

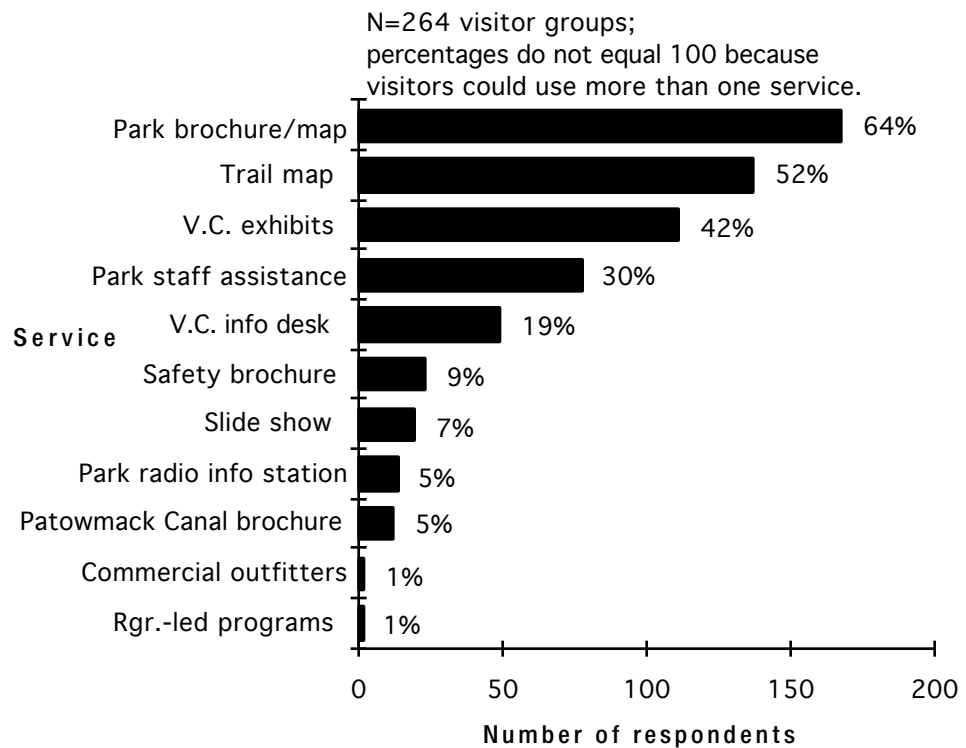


Figure 19: Use of visitor services

Visitors rated the importance and quality of each of the visitor services they used. They used a five point scale (see boxes below).

IMPORTANCE	QUALITY
1=extremely important	1=very good
2=very important	2=good
3=moderately important	3=average
4=somewhat important	4=poor
5=not important	5=very poor

Figure 20 shows the average importance and quality ratings for each service. An average score was determined for each service based on ratings by visitors who used that service. This was done for both importance and quality. The results were plotted on the grid shown in Figure 20. All services were rated above average in importance and quality. A number of services were not rated by enough visitors to provide reliable information.

Figures 21-31 show that several services received the highest "very important" to "extremely important" ratings: trail map (73%), park brochure/map (67%) and park staff assistance (61%).

Figures 32-42 show that several services were given high "good" to "very good" quality ratings: park staff assistance (87%), visitor center information desk (87%), park brochure/map (86%) and visitor center exhibits (85%). The service which received the highest "very poor" quality rating was the trail map (2%).

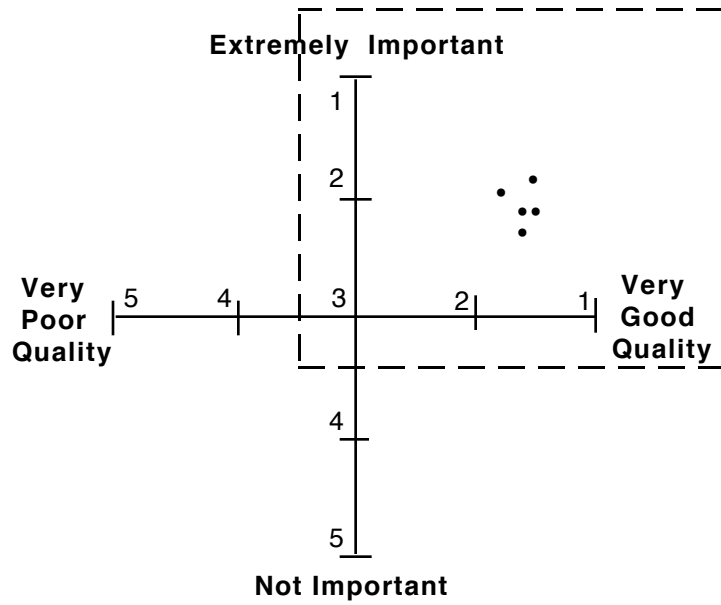


Figure 20: Average ratings of visitor service importance and quality

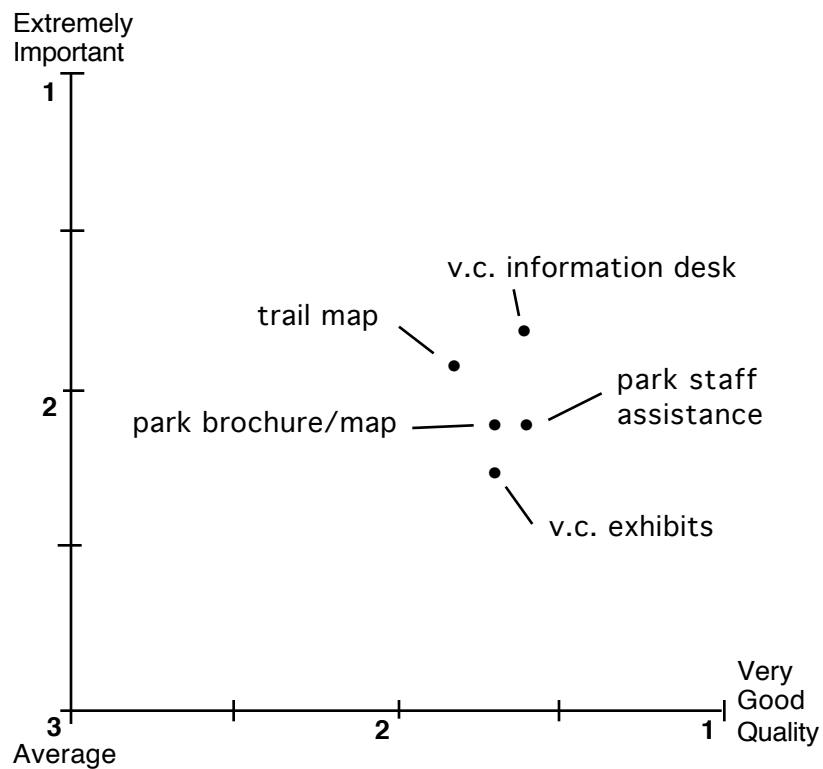


Figure 20: Detail

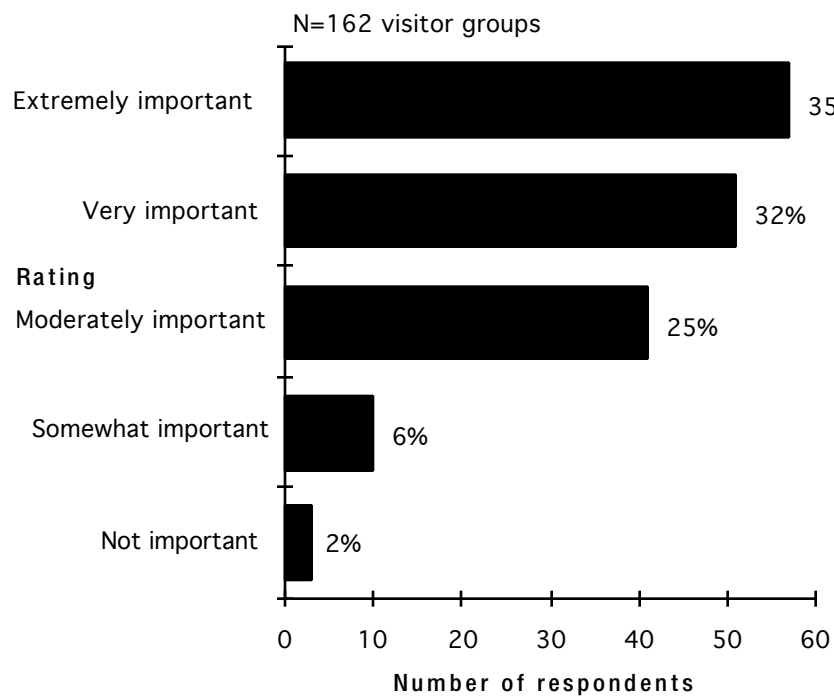


Figure 21: Importance of park brochure/map

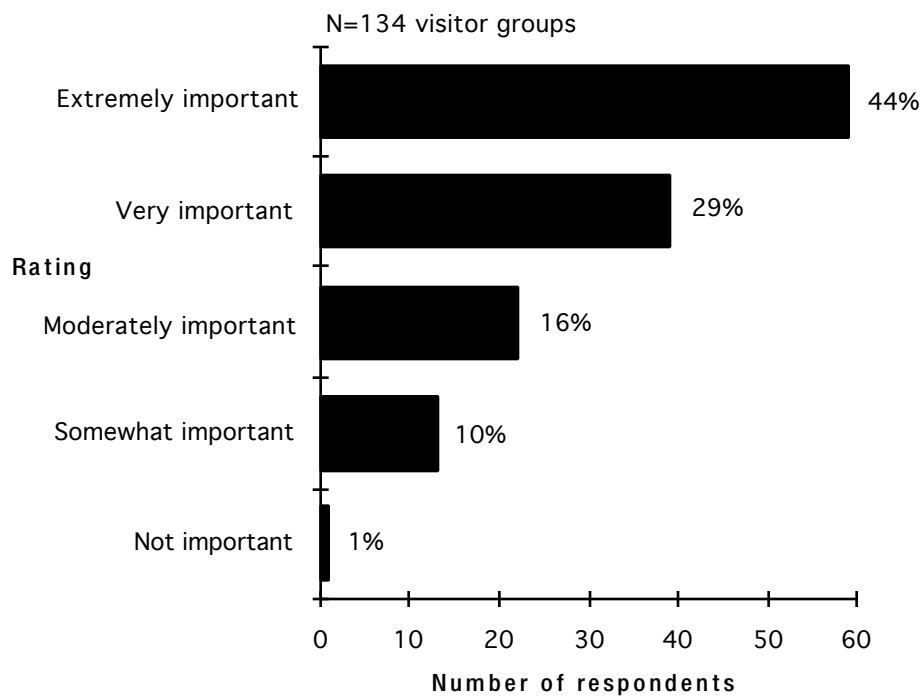
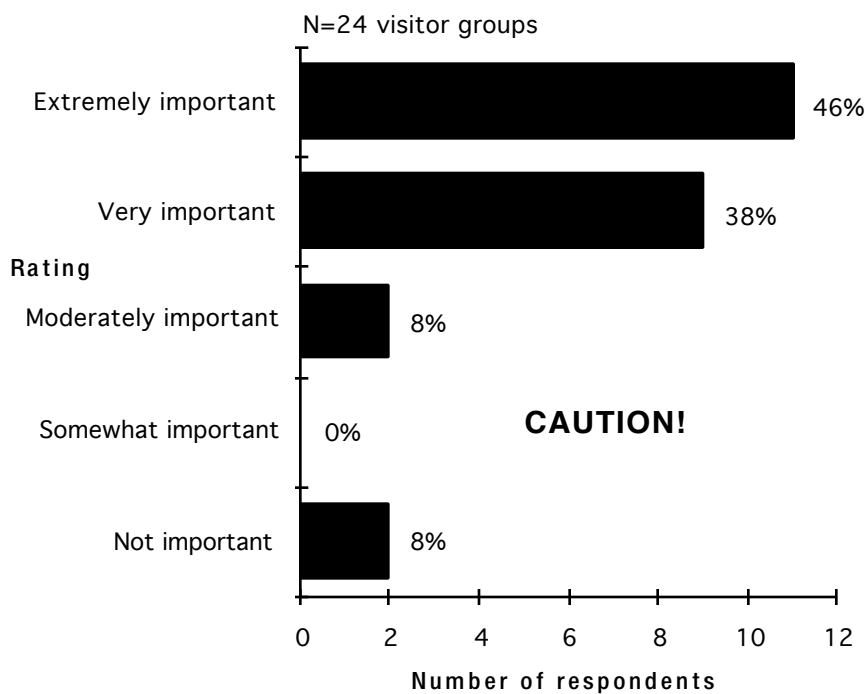
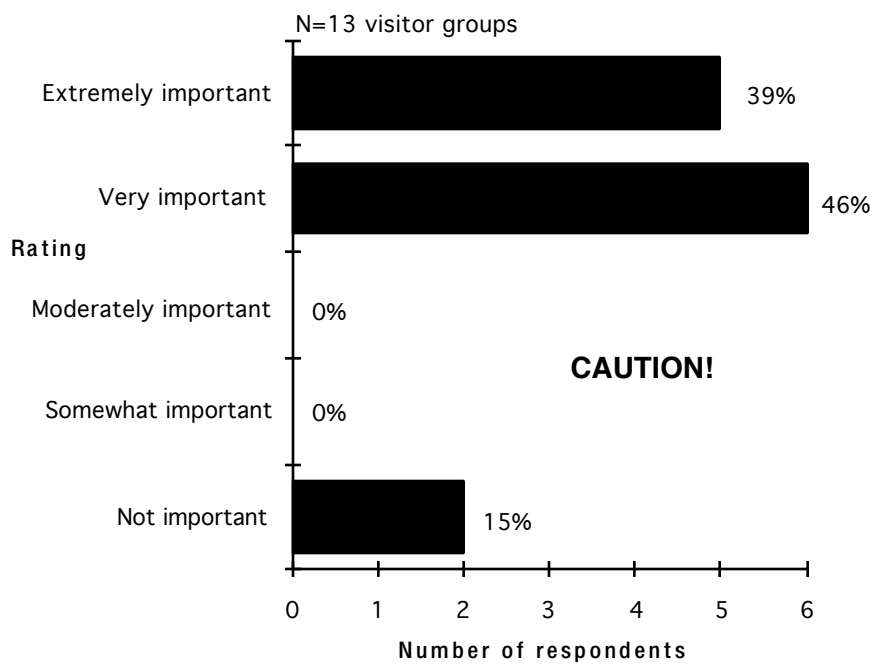


Figure 22: Importance of trail map

**Figure 23: Importance of safety brochure****Figure 24: Importance of Patowmack Canal brochure**

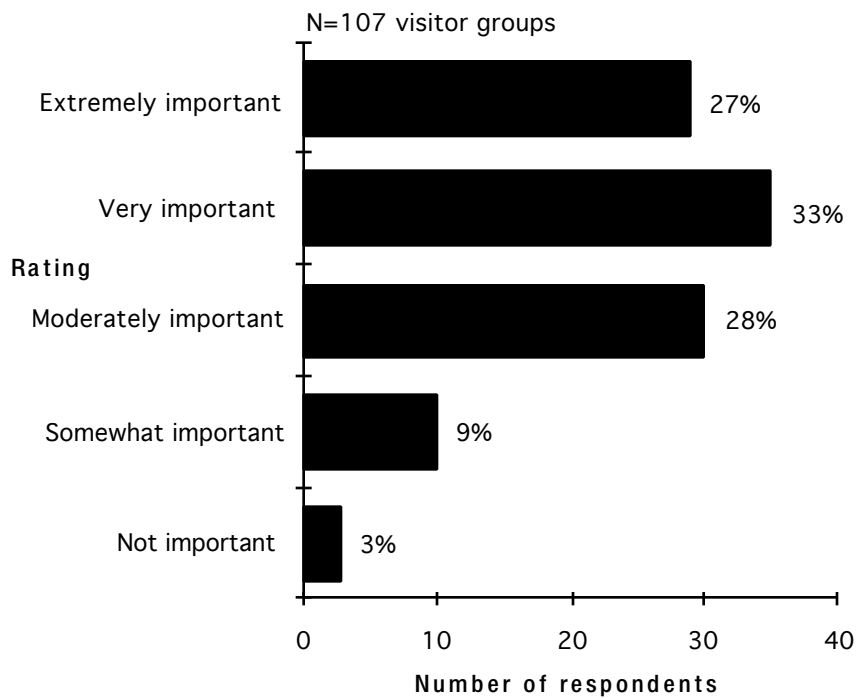


Figure 25: Importance of visitor center exhibits

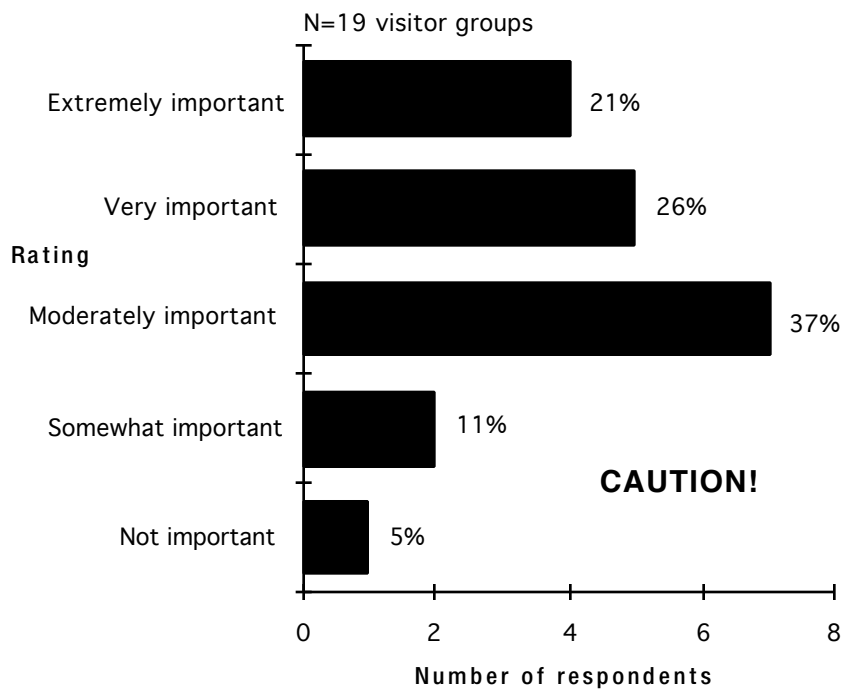
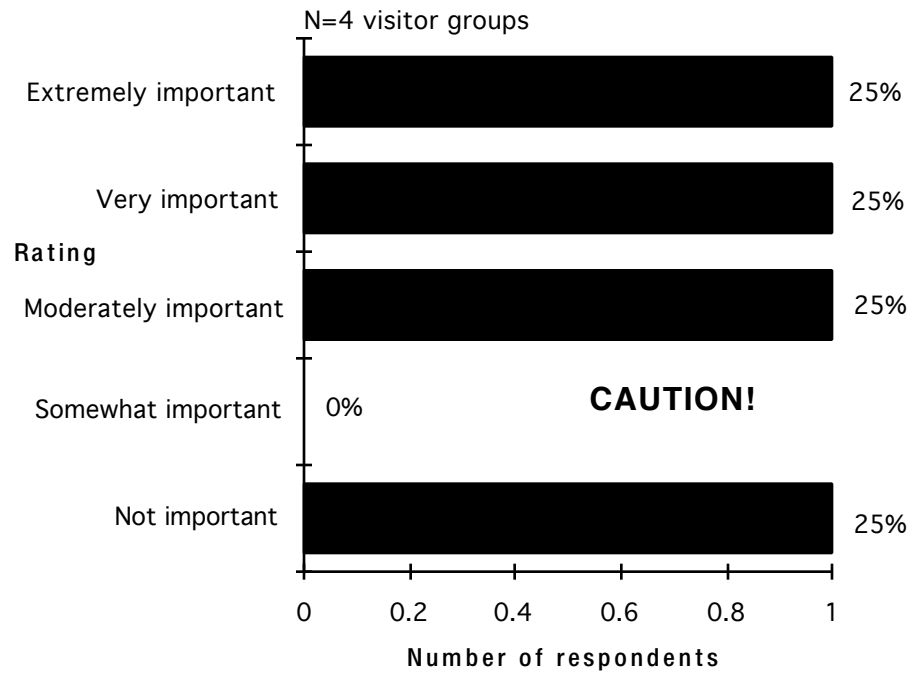
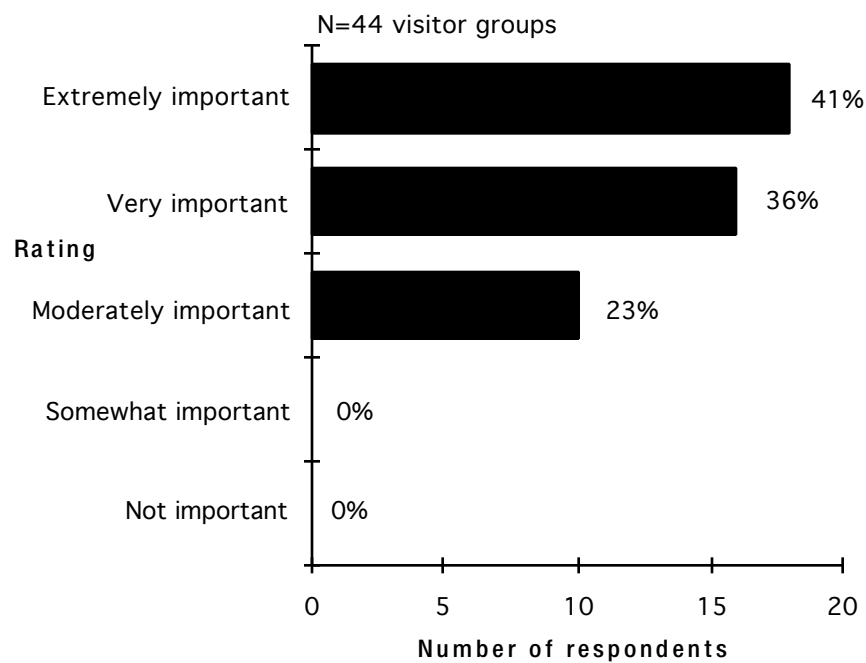


Figure 26: Importance of slide show

**Figure 27: Importance of ranger-led programs****Figure 28: Importance of visitor center information desk**

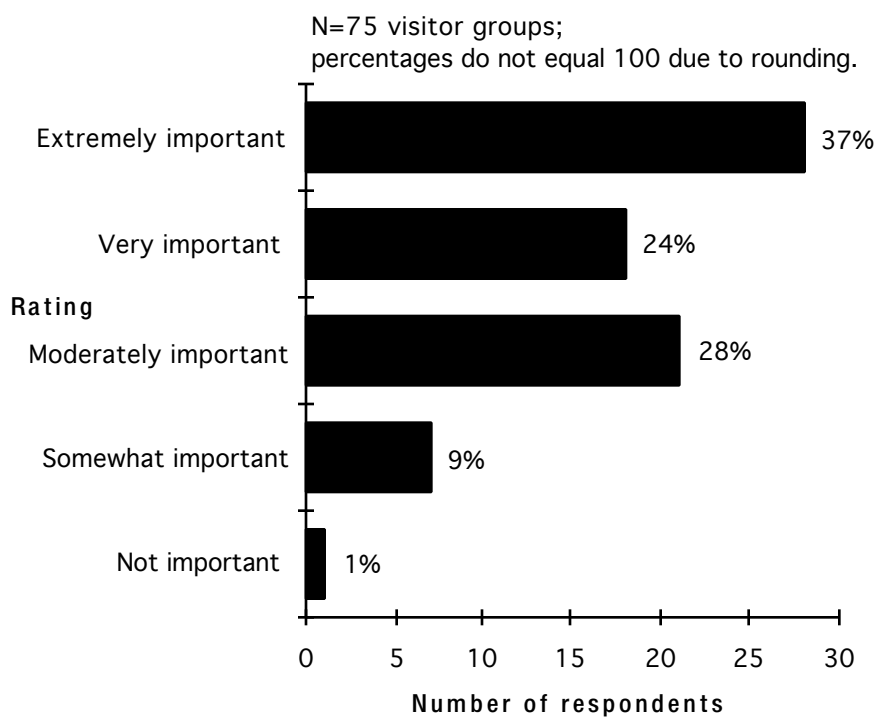


Figure 29: Importance of assistance from park staff

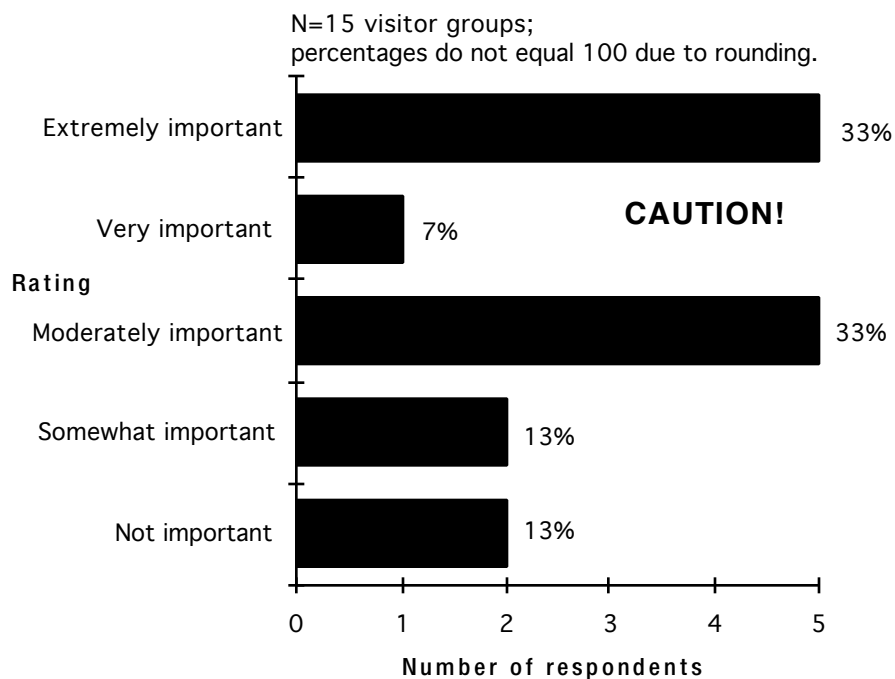
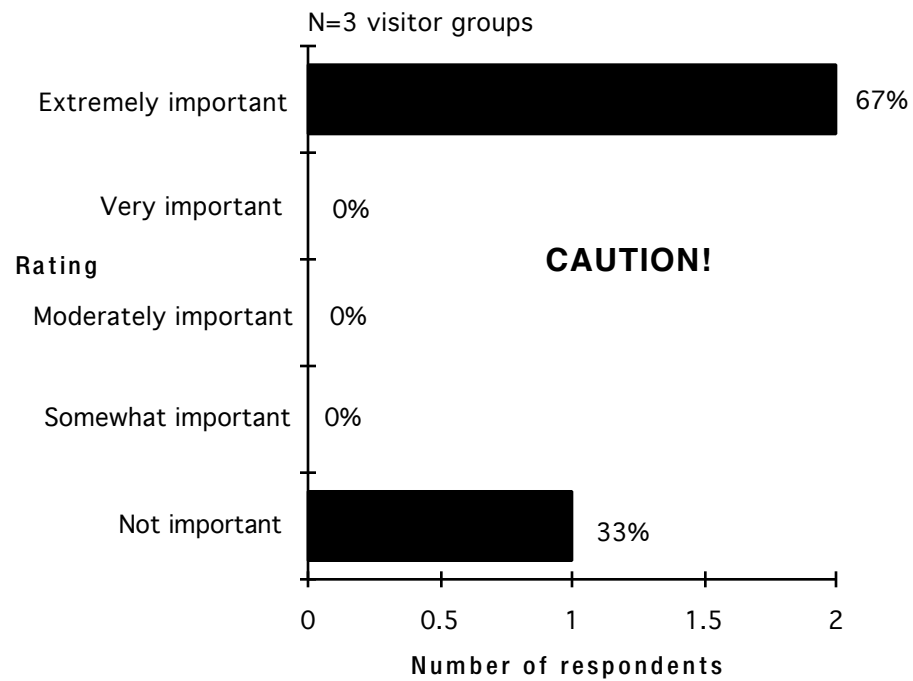
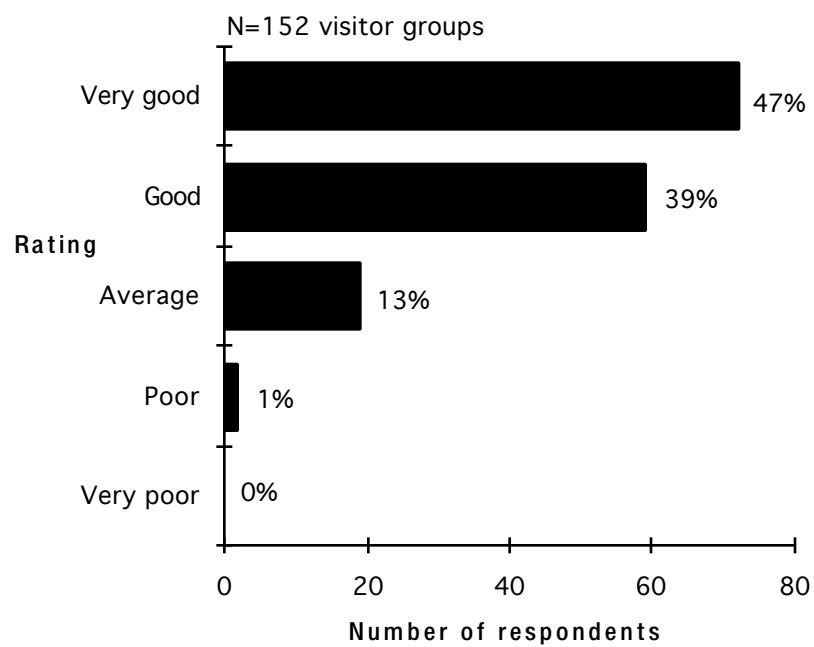
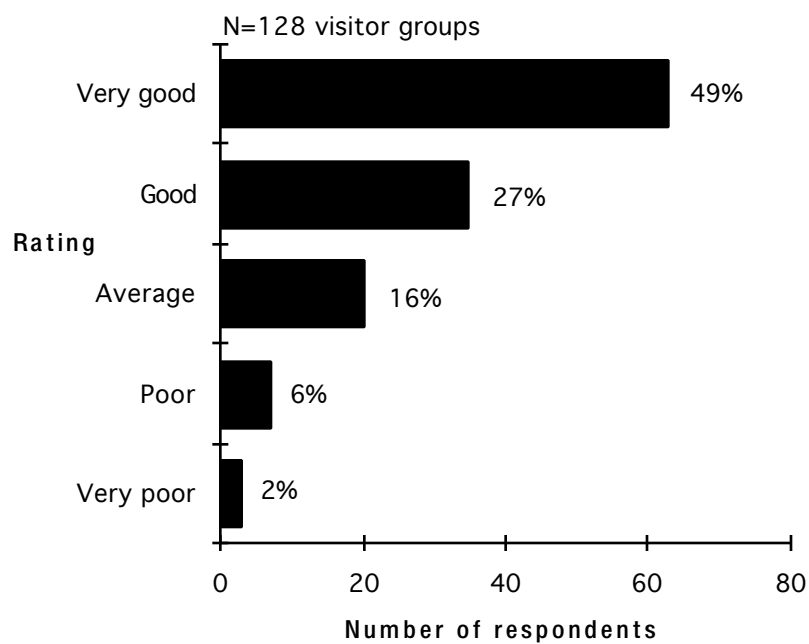
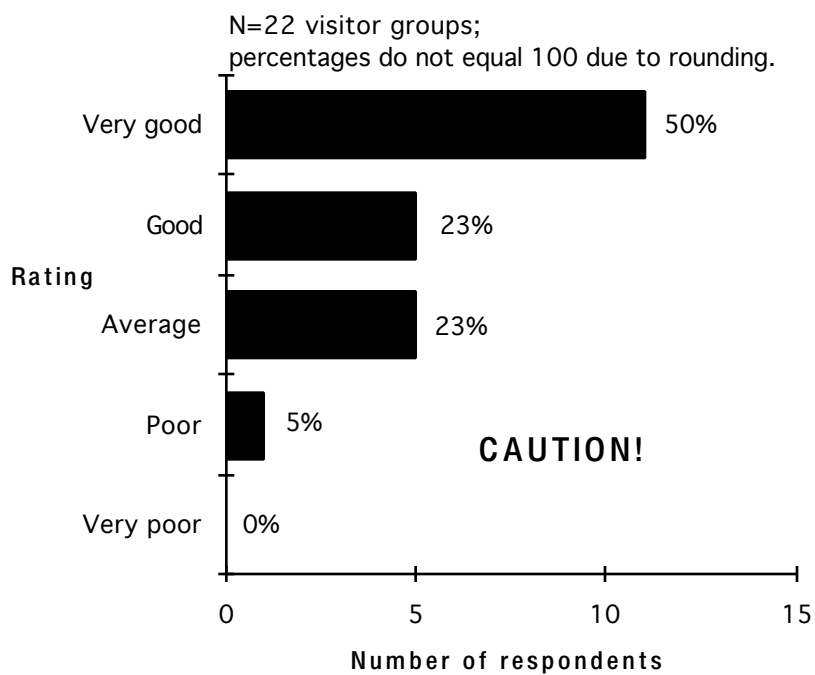


Figure 30: Importance of park radio information station

**Figure 31: Importance of commercial outfitters****Figure 32: Quality of park brochure/map**

**Figure 33: Quality of trail map****Figure 34: Quality of safety brochure**

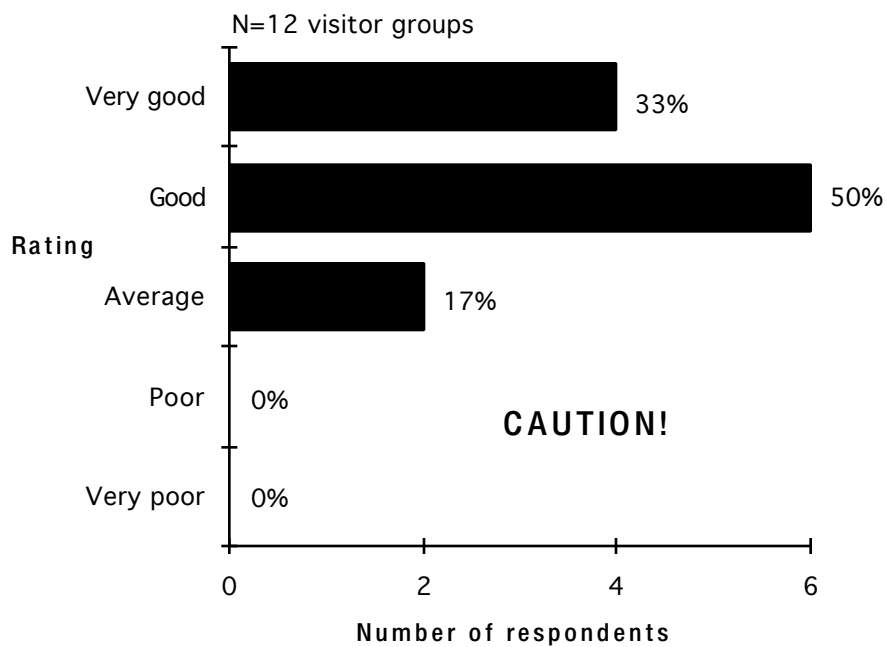


Figure 35: Quality of Patowmack Canal brochure

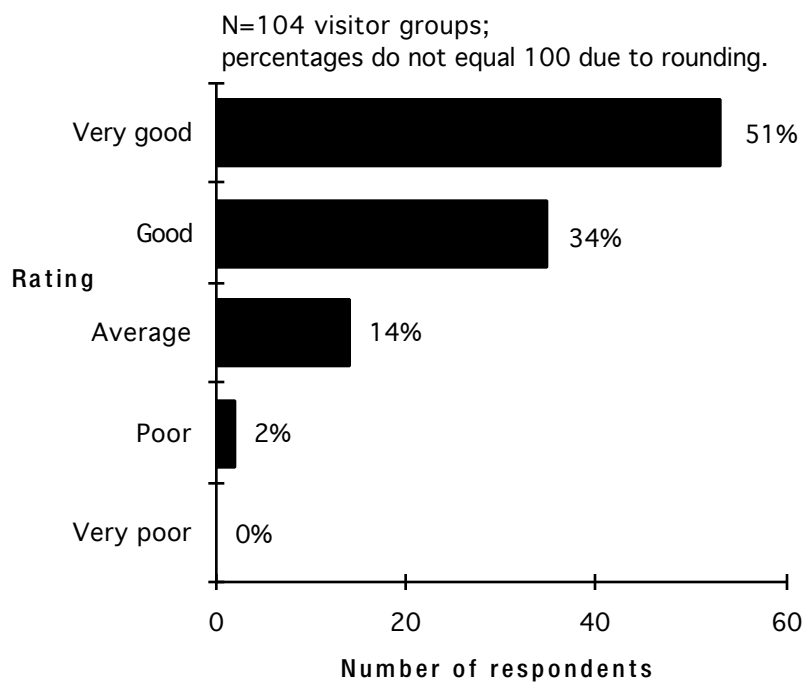


Figure 36: Quality of visitor center exhibits

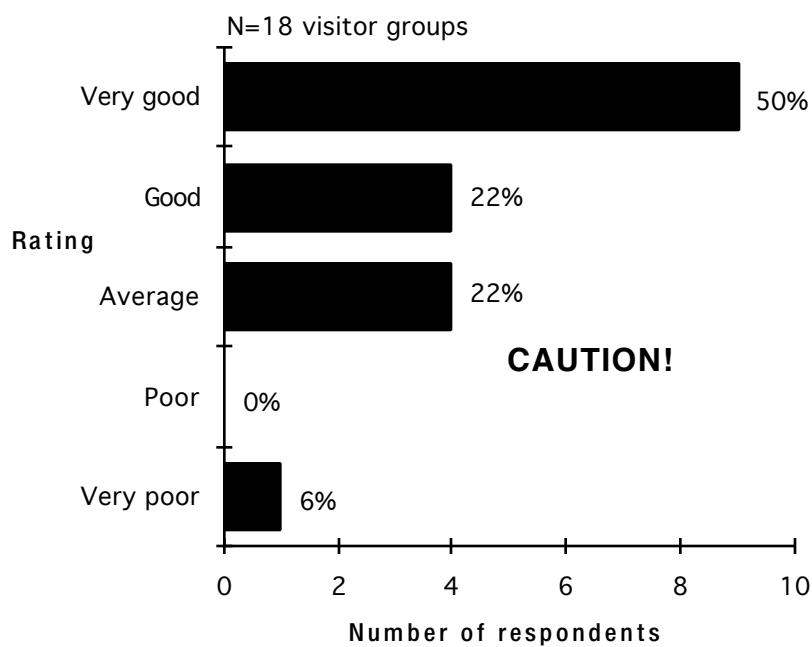


Figure 37: Quality of slide show

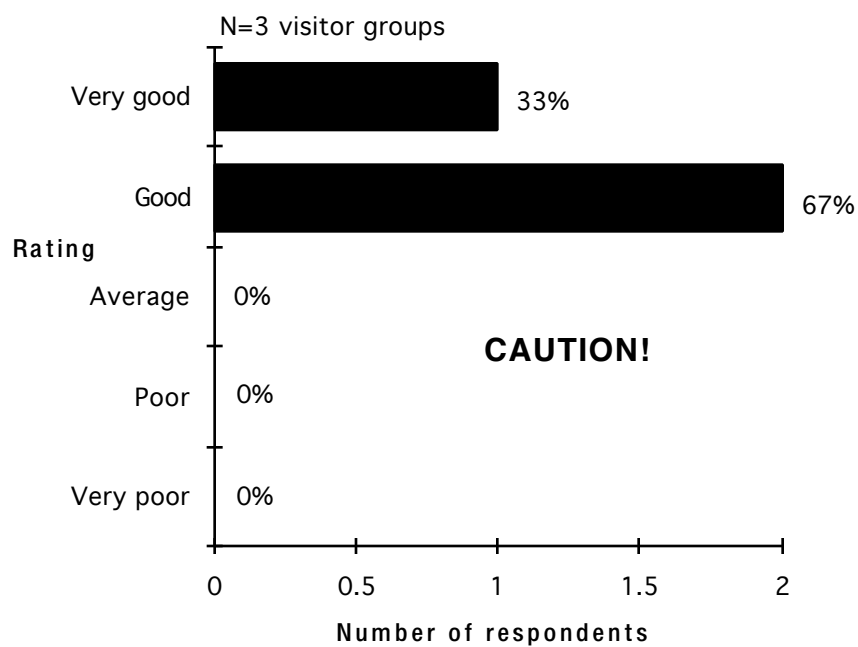
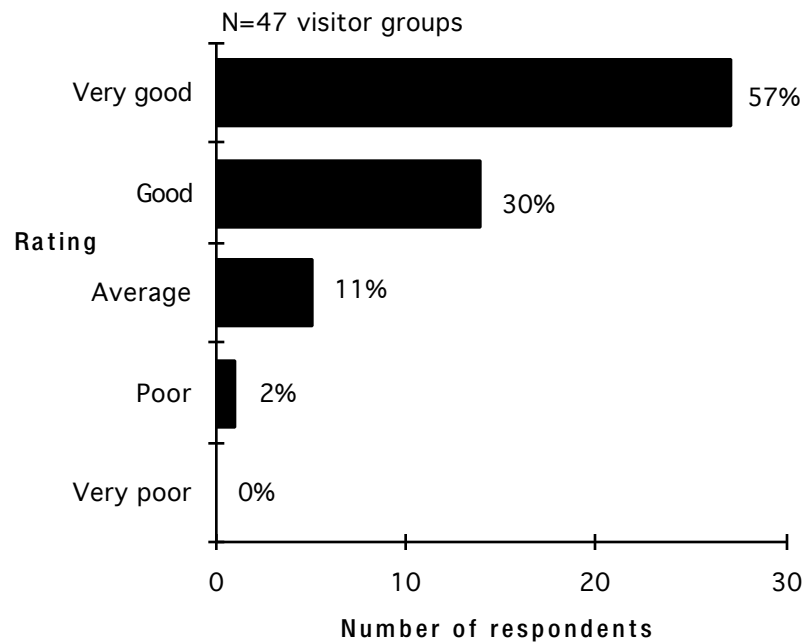
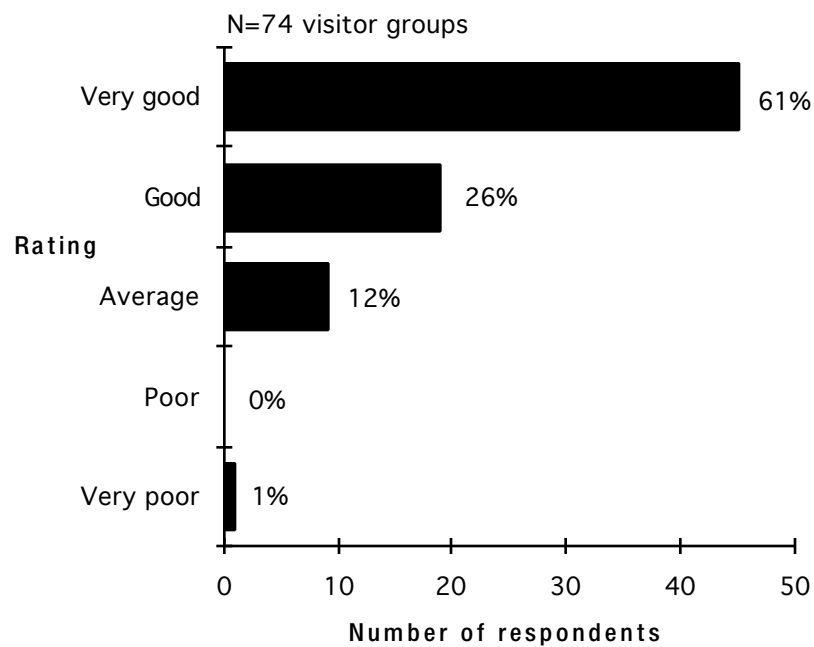


Figure 38: Quality of ranger-led programs

**Figure 39: Quality of visitor center information desk****Figure 40: Quality of assistance from park staff**

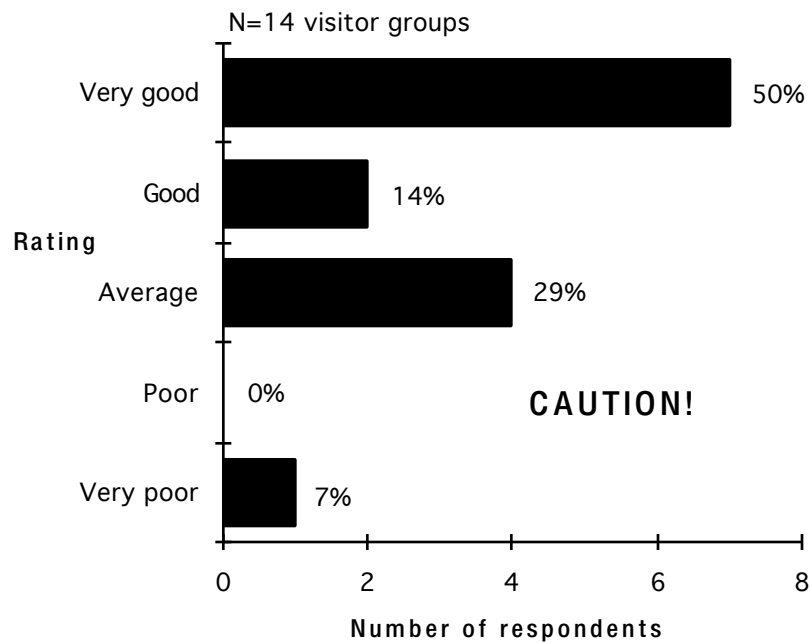


Figure 41: Quality of park radio information station

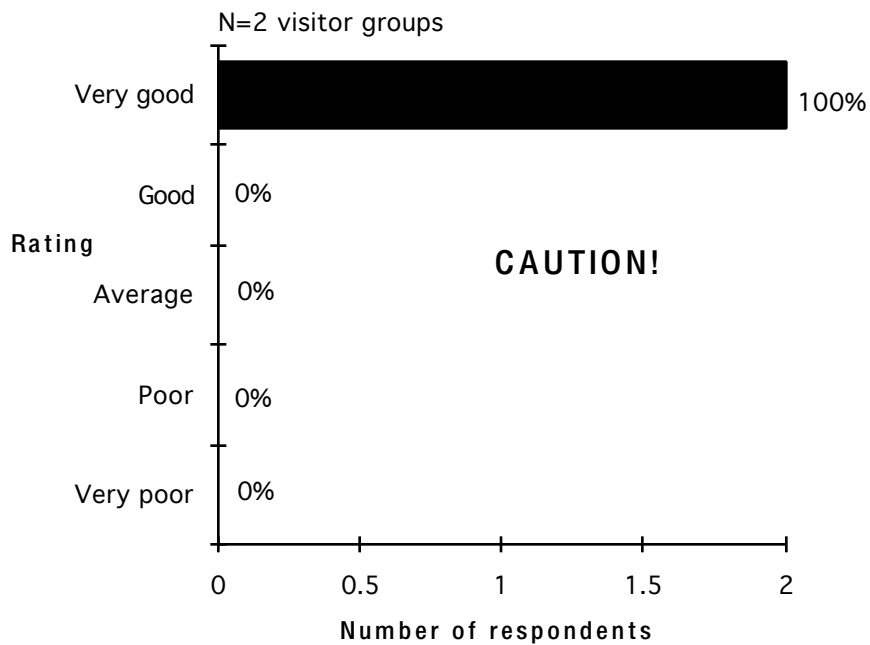


Figure 42: Quality of commercial outfitters

**Visitor facilities:
use,
importance
and quality**

The most commonly used visitor facilities at Great Falls Park, Virginia were parking (79%), trails (69%), overlooks (66%) and restrooms (65%), as shown in Figure 43. The least used service was the climber sign-in box (3%).

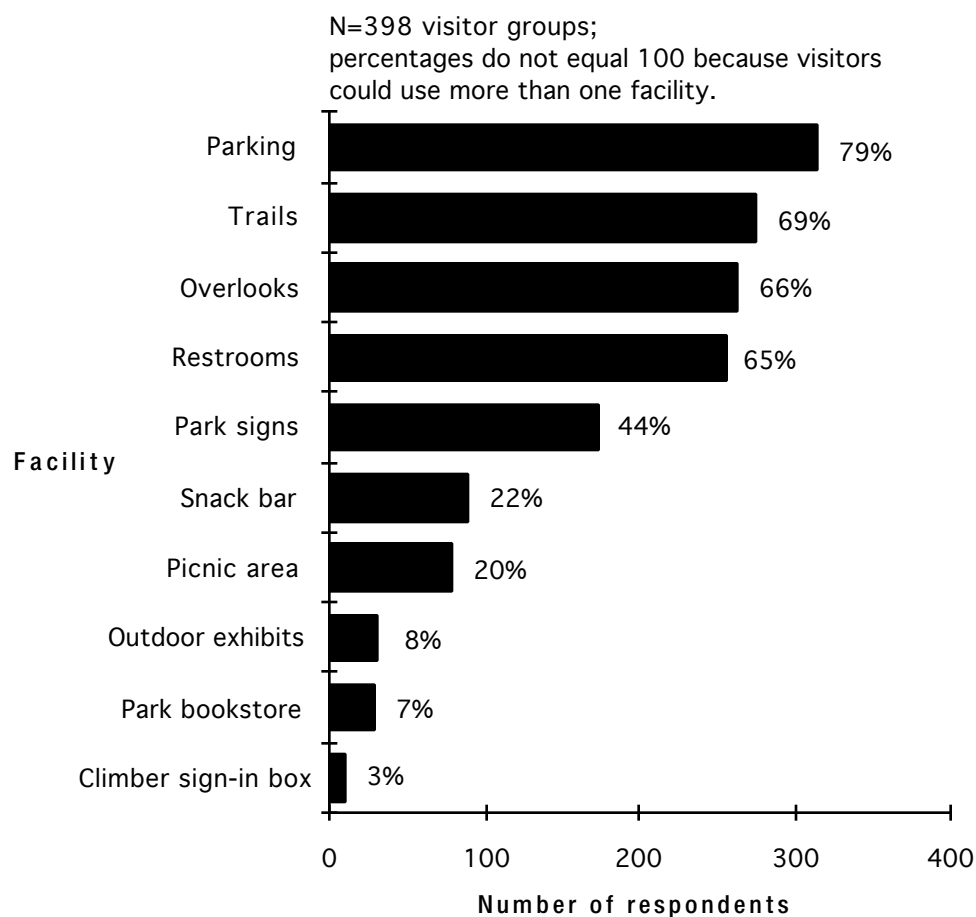


Figure 43: Use of visitor facilities

Visitors rated the importance and quality of each of the visitor facilities they used. They used a five point scale (see boxes below).

IMPORTANCE	QUALITY
1=extremely important	1=very good
2=very important	2=good
3=moderately important	3=average
4=somewhat important	4=poor
5=not important	5=very poor

Figure 44 shows the average importance and quality ratings for each service. An average score was determined for each service based on ratings by visitors who used that service. This was done for both importance and quality. The results were plotted on the grid shown in Figure 44. All services were rated above average in importance and quality. The park bookstore, climber sign-in box and outdoor exhibits were not rated by enough groups to provide reliable information.

Figures 45-54 show that several services received the highest "very important" to "extremely important" ratings: parking (96%), trails (93%), restrooms (90%) and overlooks (87%). The highest "not important" rating was for the snack bar (8%).

Figures 55-64 show that several services were given high "good" to "very good" quality ratings: parking (87%), trails (82%), and picnic area (80%). The service which received the highest "very poor" quality rating was the snack bar (6%).

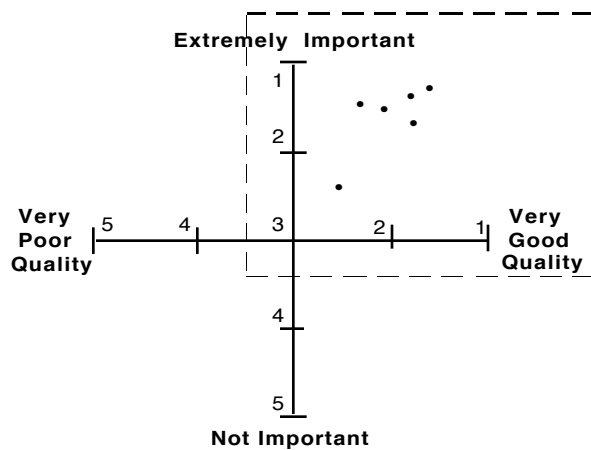


Figure 44: Average ratings of visitor facility importance and quality

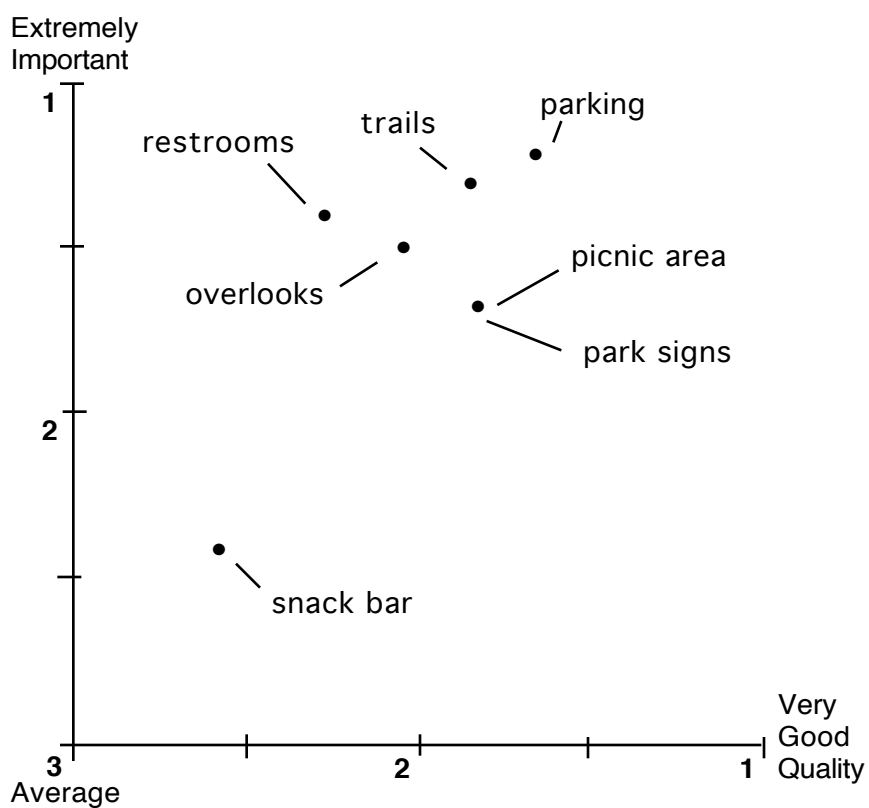
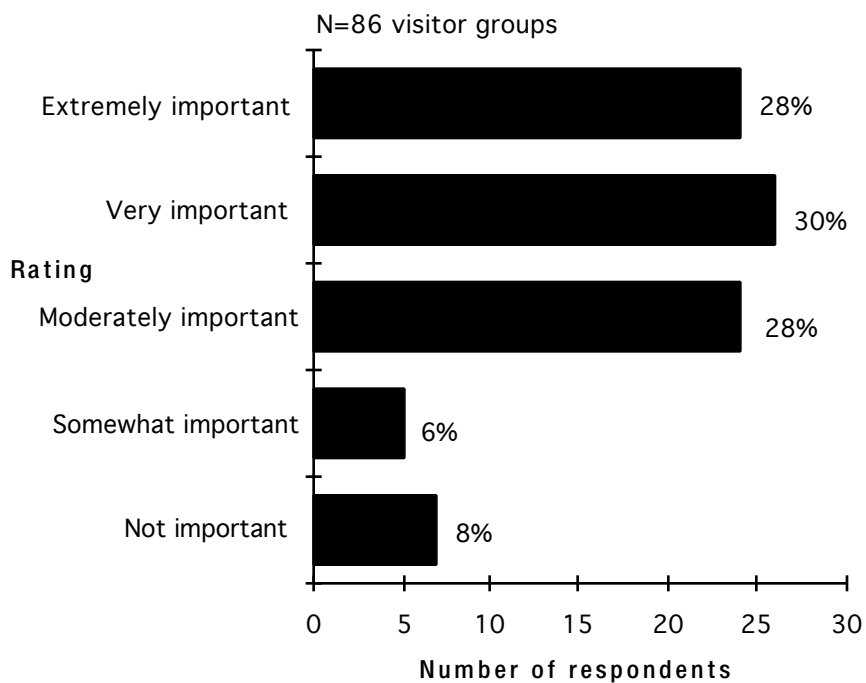
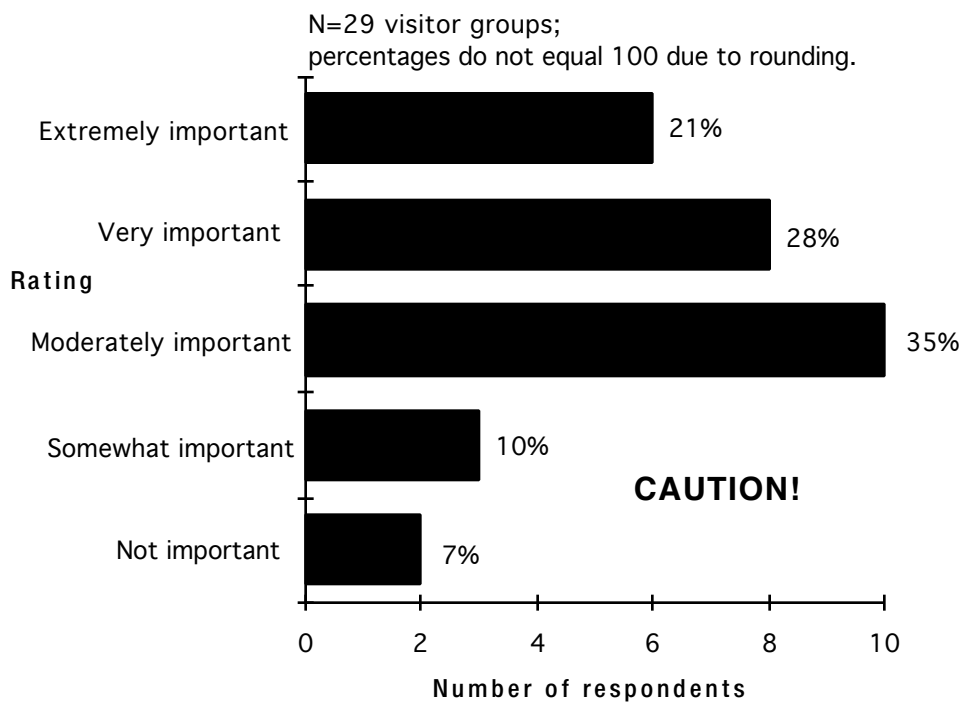


Figure 44: Detail

**Figure 45: Importance of snack bar****Figure 46: Importance of park bookstore**

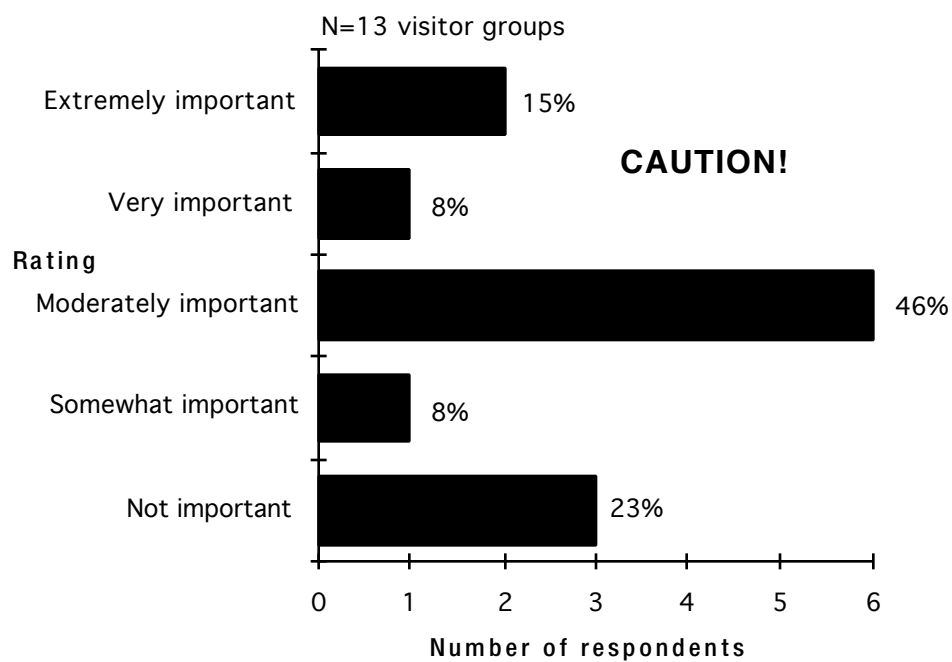


Figure 47: Importance of climber sign-in book

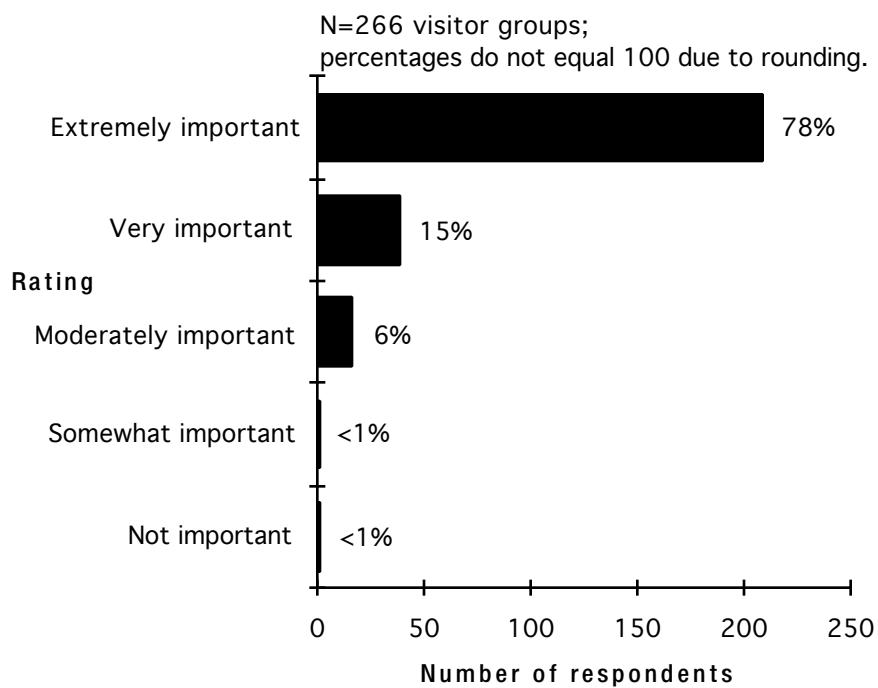
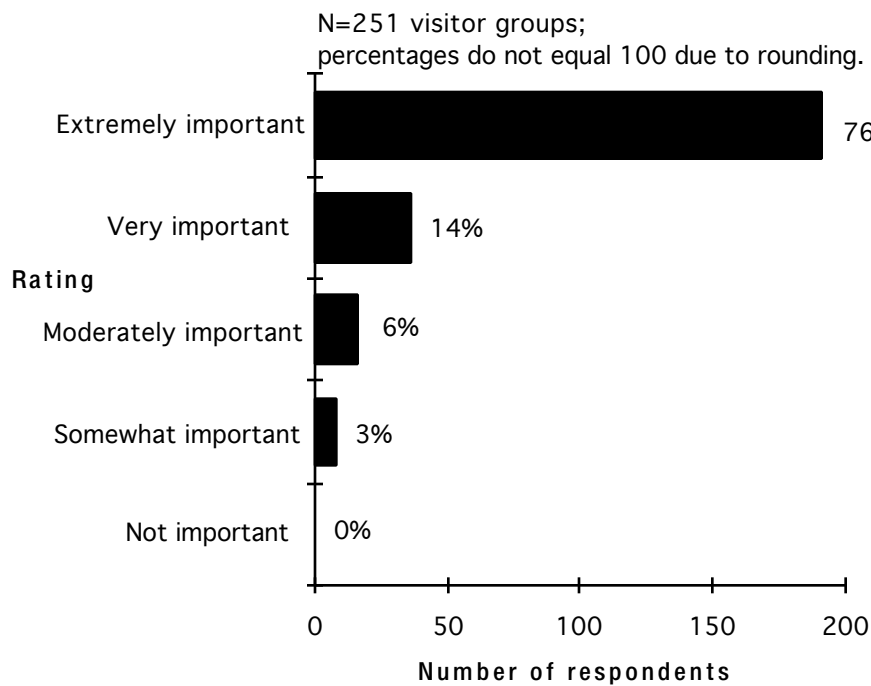
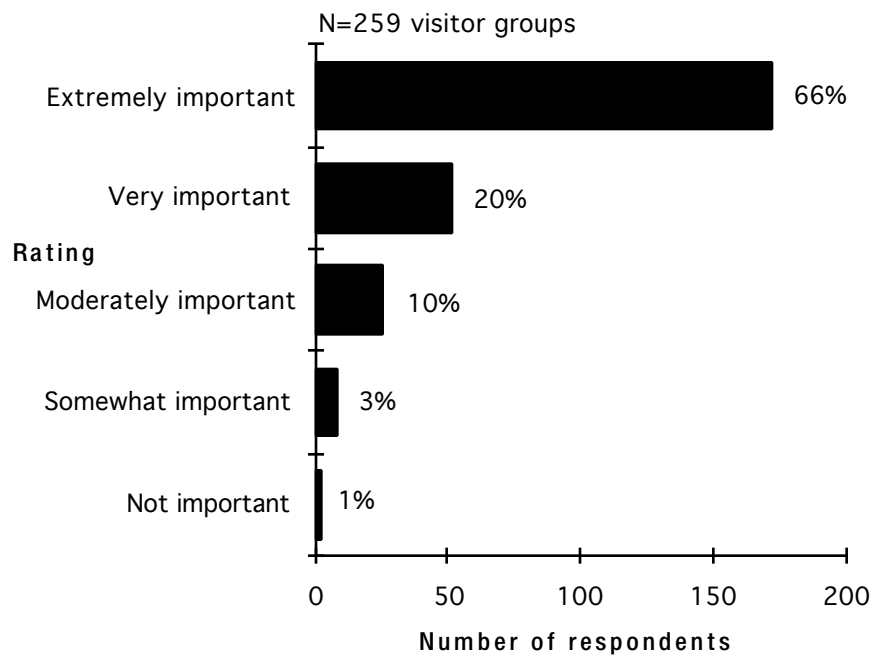
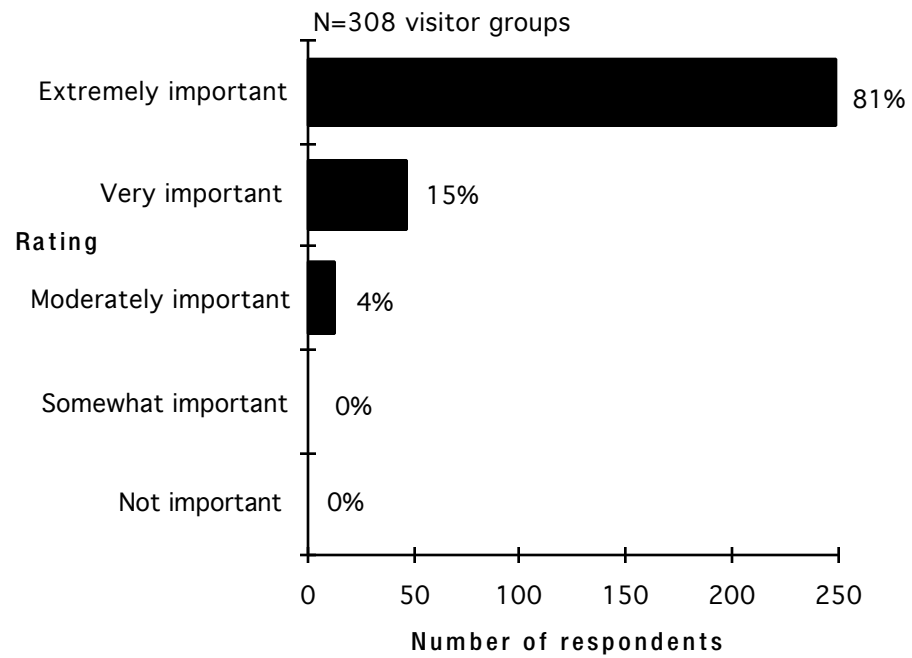
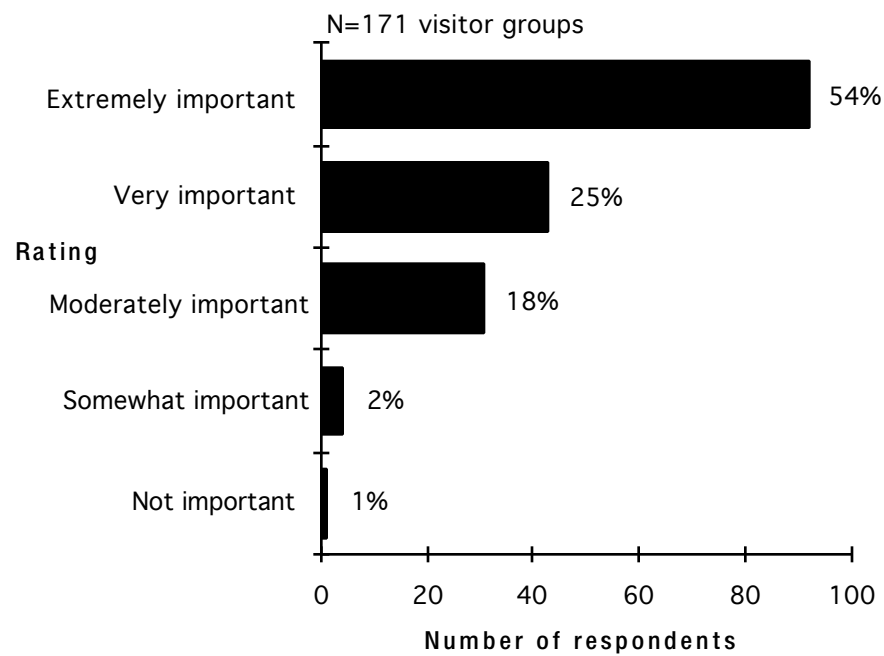
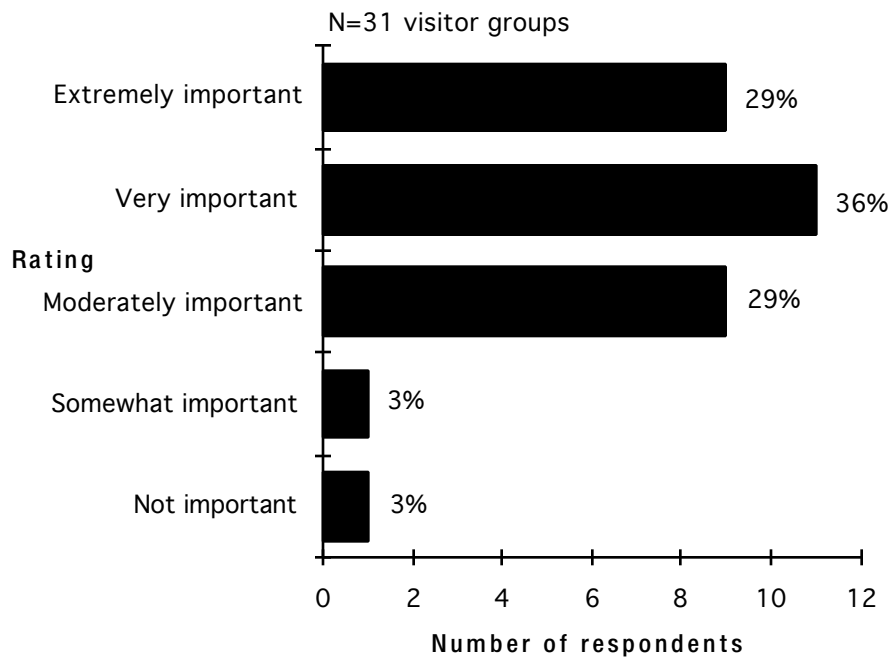
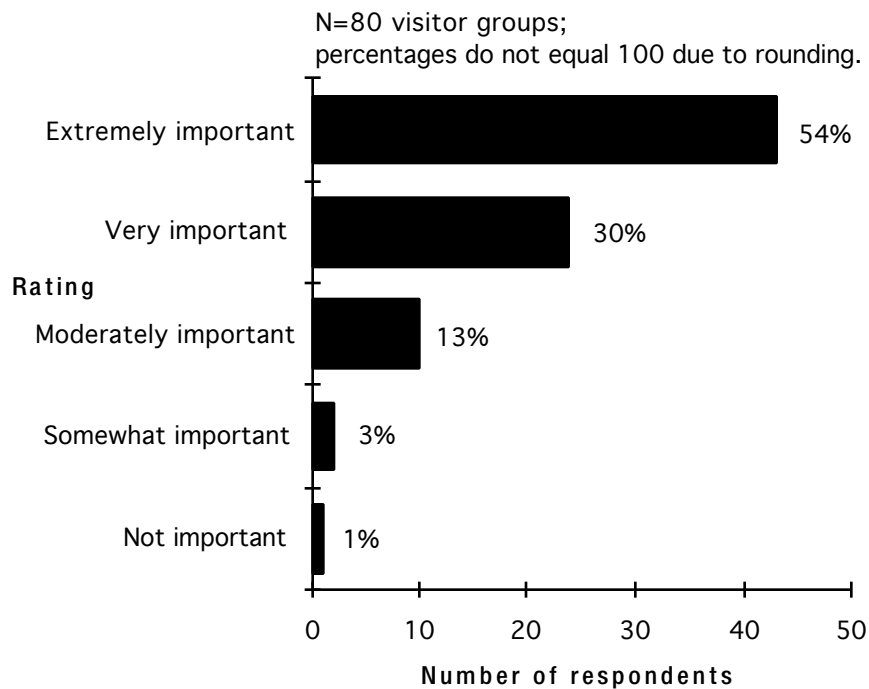
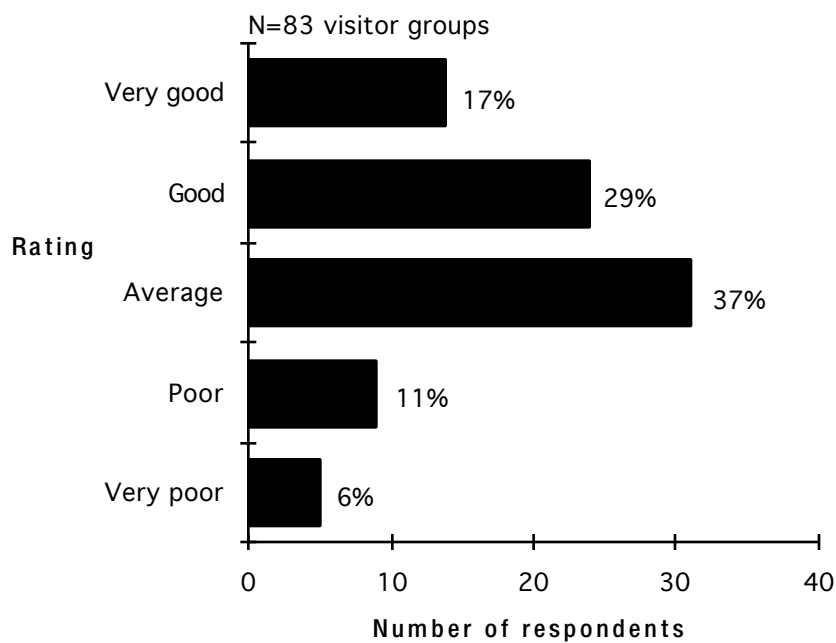
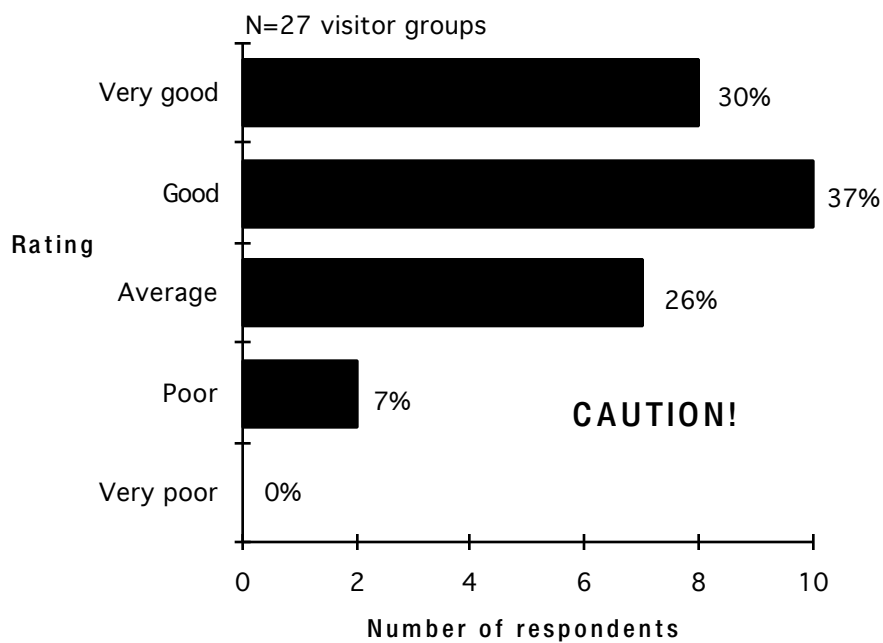


Figure 48: Importance of trails

**Figure 49: Importance of restrooms****Figure 50: Importance of overlooks**

**Figure 51: Importance of parking****Figure 52: Importance of park signs**

**Figure 53: Importance of outdoor exhibits****Figure 54: Importance of picnic area**

**Figure 55: Quality of snack bar****Figure 56: Quality of park bookstore**

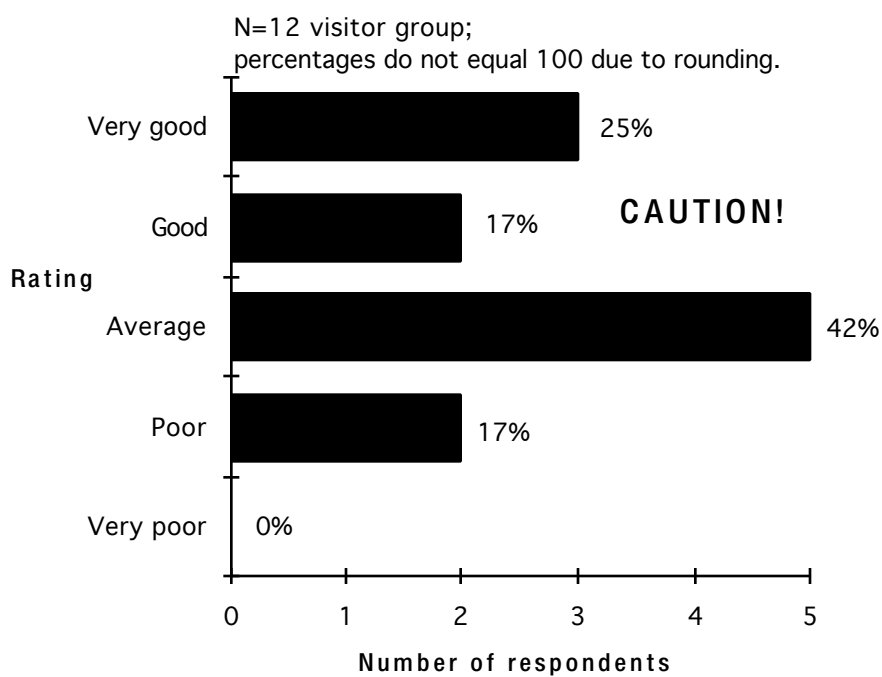


Figure 57: Quality of climber sign-in book

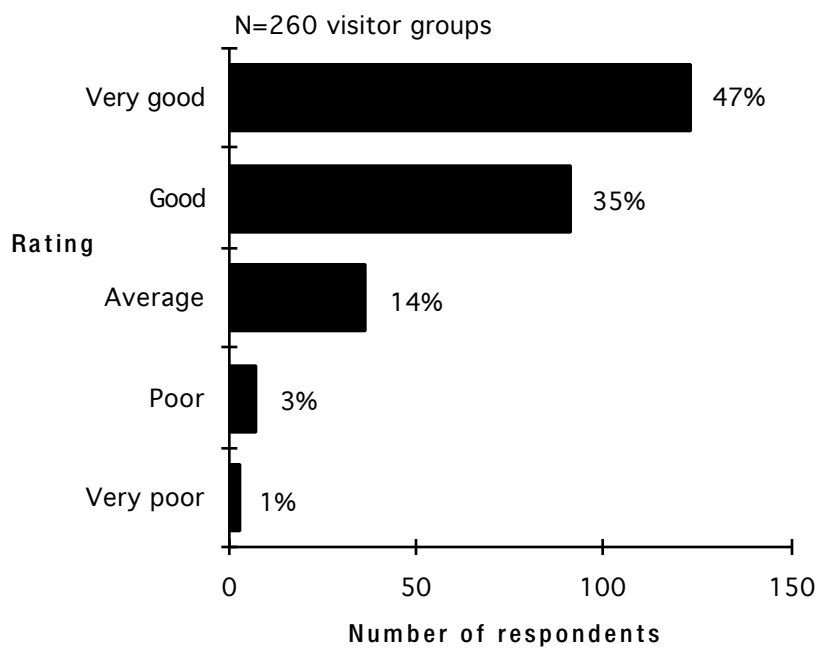
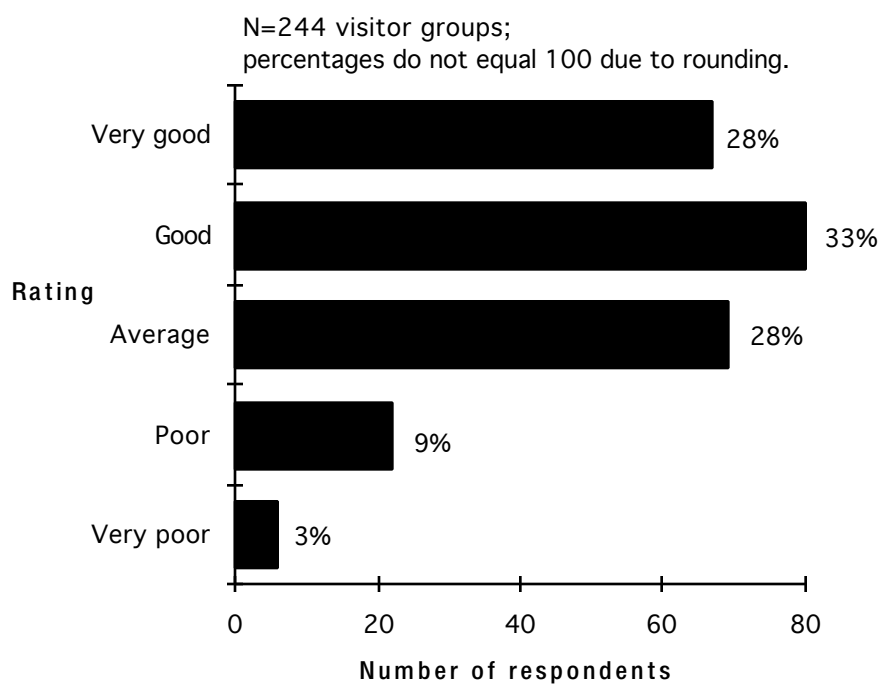
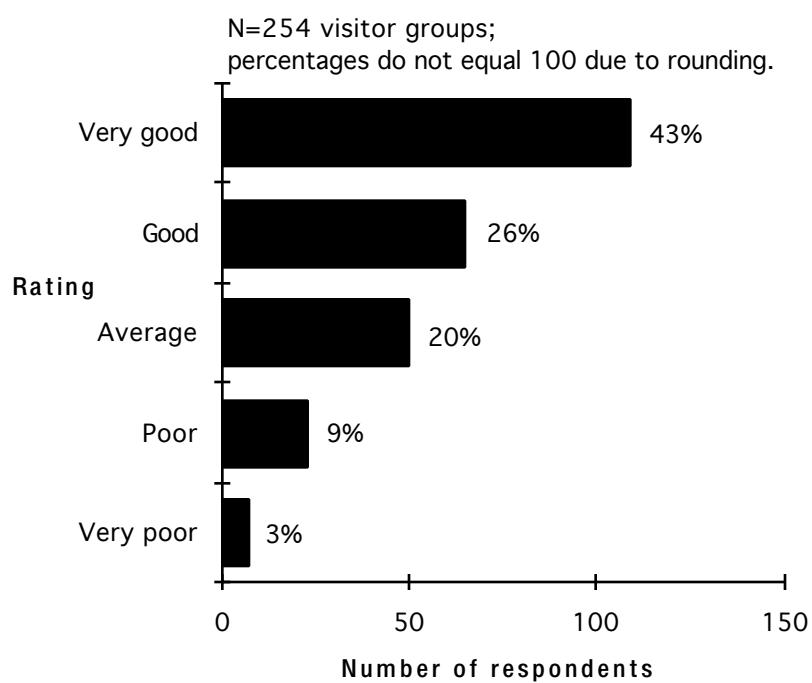
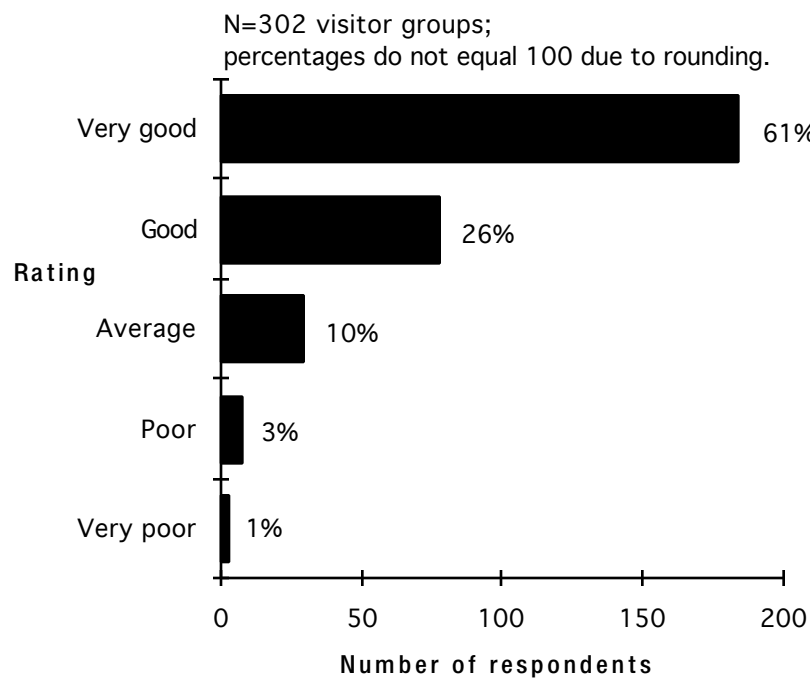
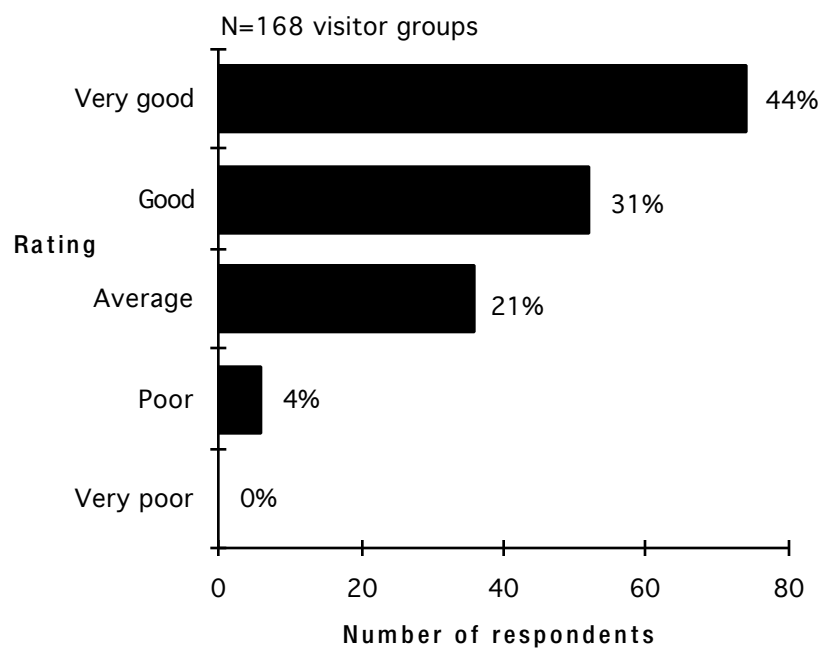
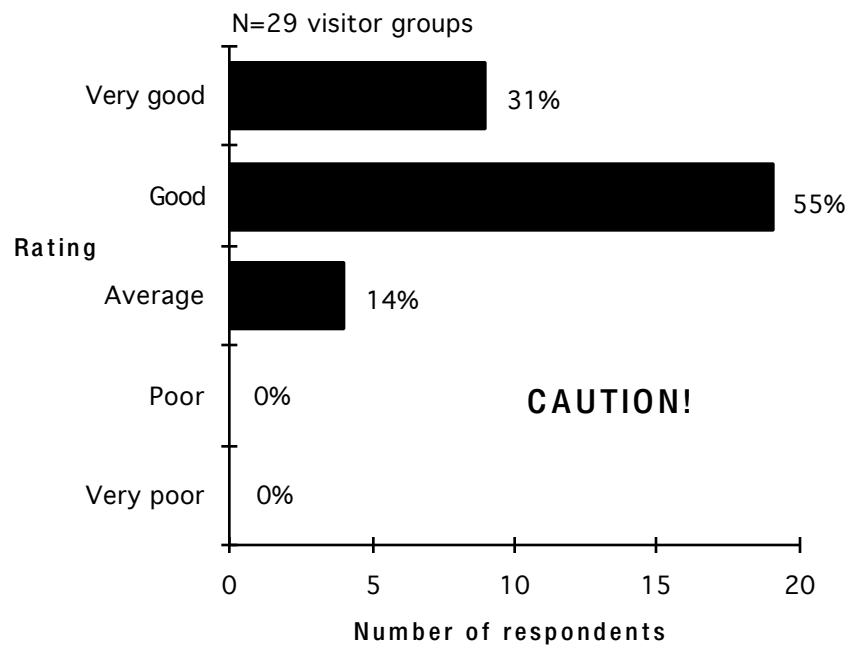
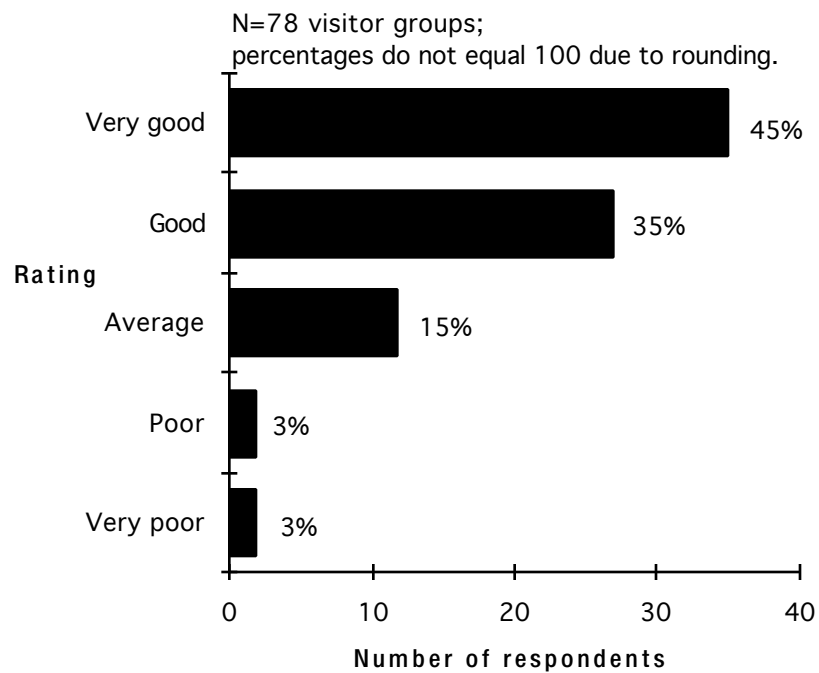


Figure 58: Quality of trails

**Figure 59: Quality of restrooms****Figure 60: Quality of overlooks**

**Figure 61: Quality of parking****Figure 62: Quality of park signs**

**Figure 63: Quality of outdoor exhibits****Figure 64: Quality of picnic area**

Visitors were asked to rate the overall quality of the visitor services provided at Great Falls Park, Virginia during this visit. Most visitors (93%) rated the services as "good" or "very good," as shown in Figure 65. No visitors said the overall quality of services was "very poor."

Overall rating of service quality

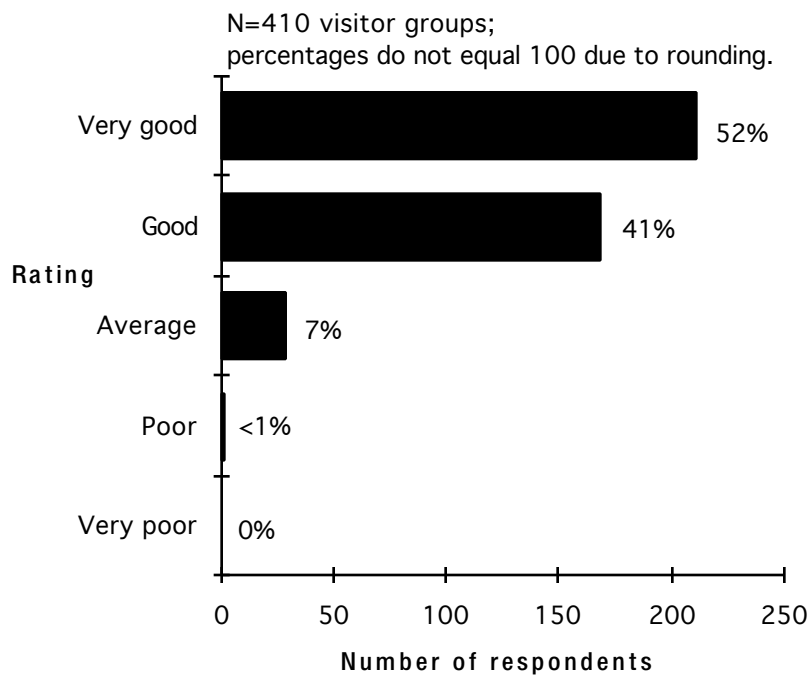


Figure 65: Overall quality rating of services

What visitors liked most Visitors were asked, "What did you and your group like most about your visit to Great Falls Park, Virginia?" A summary of their comments appears below and in the appendix.

Visitor likes

N=669 comments;
many visitors made more than one comment.

Comment	Number of times mentioned
PERSONNEL	
Friendly rangers and staff	8
Helpful/knowledgeable rangers and staff	8
Courteous personnel	2
Other comments	3
INTERPRETIVE SERVICES	
Historic information	6
Other comments	1
FACILITIES AND MAINTENANCE	
Trails	47
Overlooks	26
Cleanliness of park	25
Biking trails	19
Hiking trails	13
Easy access to river	7
Picnic area/picnicking	7
Well maintained	5
Well maintained trails	3
Horse trails	2
Restrooms	2
Well maintained bike trails	2
Well laid out	2
Very accessible	2
Other comments	10
POLICIES	
Safety of park	4
Able to bring and walk pets	3
Other comments	2
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	
Natural setting	37
Rock-climbing	16
Abundant wildlife	14
Birds/birdwatching	9

Park isn't crowded	9
Uncrowded trails	6
Natural setting near urban area	5
Open space	3
Wildflowers	3
Forest and trees	2
Other comments	6

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

View/beauty/scenery	119
Watching the falls	72
Peace and quiet	29
Tranquillity and/or solitude	17
The river	16
Contact with nature	11
Close to home	11
White water rapids	8
Being outside/fresh air	7
Enjoyed the park	6
Beautiful weather	6
Scrambling and walking over rocks	4
Fishing	3
Jogging/running	2
Isolation	2
Wonderful area	2
Other comments	35

**What visitors
liked least**

Visitors were asked, "What did you like least about your visit to Great Falls Park, Virginia?" A summary of their comments appears below and in the appendix.

Visitor dislikes

N=400 comments;
many visitors made more than one comment.

Comment	Number of times mentioned
PERSONNEL	
Attitude of park police	2
Other comments	3
INTERPRETIVE SERVICES	
Lack of accurate trail map	4
Other comments	1
FACILITIES AND MAINTENANCE	
Litter	25
Parking situation	15
Poorly marked trails	12
Restrooms	12
Orange safety fence unsightly	6
Puddles or mud on trails	6
Smell of sewage	5
Lack of bike trails	4
Lack of enough grills	3
Lack of trash cans along the trail	3
No playground for kids	3
Horse manure on trails	3
Stroller access to overlooks and trails	3
Some trails are too narrow	2
Lack of drinking water	2
Trails could be improved	2
Other comments	25
POLICIES	
Traffic line entering the park	19
Entrance fee	9
Trails closed to bikes	7
Bikes on trails or speeding bicycles	6
Loud music or people	6
Unleashed dogs	4
Pets and pet droppings	3
Too many horses	2
Other comments	14

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Flood damage and closed areas	50
Crowded	32
Insects and bugs	13
Limited access to river	4
Lack of wildlife	3
Other comments	5

CONCESSIONS

Snack bar needs more variety	3
Snack bar was slow	3
Food expensive	3
Snack bar	2
Other comments	3

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

Nothing to dislike	38
Bad weather	13
Leaving	3
Small size of park	2
Other comments	12

Planning for the future

Visitors were asked "If you were planning for the future of Great Falls Park, Virginia, what would you propose? Please be specific." A summary of their responses is listed below and in the appendix.

Planning for the future

N=622 comments;
many visitors made more than one comment.

Comment	Number of times mentioned
PERSONNEL	
Have more rangers on duty	4
More rangers manning booth	4
INTERPRETIVE SERVICES	
Improve trail map	8
Provide exhibits showing plants, trees, shrubs	6
Improve visitor center information and exhibits	5
Provide better interpretation of history	3
Emphasize safety information	2
Provide exhibits about wildlife and habitats	2
Other comments	13
FACILITIES AND MAINTENANCE	
Provide better/additional parking	36
Traffic and parking are problem	23
Provide better trail signs	15
Provide additional entrance lanes	11
More trash barrels and trash removal	11
Do not increase parking capacity	10
Improve traffic flow into park	9
Construct more trails	8
Parking and traffic OK on our visit	8
Improve park access from highway	8
Upgrade overlooks	8
Parking and traffic OK on weekdays and mornings	8
More bike trails	7
Hold volunteer clean-up/maintenance days	7
Provide more picnic areas	6
Better directions and signs to park from highways	6
Provide more restrooms	5
More parking at Difficult Run	5
Improve path to river	4
Provide more restrooms in the remote areas	4
Upgrade bathrooms	4
Use more natural looking barricades	4
Build a children's playground	4
Provide additional viewpoints	4
Build a campground	3
Improve picnic area	3

Provide better handicapped access	3
Open bathrooms earlier for early morning users	3
Overlooks not easily accessible for handicapped or strollers	2
Visitor center looks outdated	2
Provide more benches	2
Expand picnic area	2
Provide erosion control measures for footpaths	2
Provide exclusive walking trails	2
Restore historical buildings	2
Maintain trails	2
No more paved surfaces	2
Reopen closed sections	2
Other comments	72

POLICIES

Have express lane for pass holders at entrance	11
Limit number of visitors	10
Enforce rules against littering	7
Regulate bikes on trails	6
Maintain access	4
Allow paddlers to put in above Great Falls	4
Allow swimming	3
Open more trails to bikes	3
Post when parking is full at entrance	3
Walk car-to-car to collect entrance fee instead of requiring wait	3
Charge higher fee during busy periods	3
No fees for locals or U.S. residents	3
Require fishermen to clean their mess	3
Should not have to pay to be with nature	2
Enforce noise codes	2
Develop a high-water access policy	2
Train park personnel in river rescue	2
Limit helicopter flyovers	2
Restrict dogs in park	2
Maintain easy river access	2
Keep entrance fee low	2
Other comments	57

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Limit development in and around park	16
Expand the park	8
Management of park is good	6
Crowded on weekends	4
Repair flood damage quickly	4
Maintain current usage levels	2
Plant more trees	2
Restore the canal	2
Horses cause trail damage	2
Additional parking will harm resource	2
Other comments	8

CONCESSIONS

Better snack bar selections	3
Provide boat rentals	2
Expand snack bar hours	2
Other comments	7

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

Keep it as it is	18
Great Falls is unique	2
Always have positive experience	2
Other comments	28

Many visitors wrote additional comments, which are included in the separate appendix of this report. Their comments about Great Falls Park, Virginia are summarized below and in the appendix. Some comments offer specific suggestions on how to improve the park; others describe what visitors enjoyed or did not enjoy about their visit.

Comment Summary

Visitor Comment Summary

N=431 comments;
many visitors made more than one comment.

Comment	Number of times mentioned
PERSONNEL	
Rangers and staff friendly	13
Rangers and staff informative or knowledgeable	22
Rangers and staff great	6
Rangers courteous	3
Park staff have been overheard complaining about boaters	2
Other comments	4
INTERPRETIVE SERVICES	
More description of historical importance	2
More signs describing park plant and animal life	2
Need more information/guide signs	2
Other comments	6
FACILITIES AND MAINTENANCE	
Park well maintained	13
Good job cleaning up after flood	4
Repair flood damage quickly	4
Trails well maintained	3
Provide more trash cans	3
Lots of flood damage	2
Improve overlooks	2
Add more bike trails	2
Reopen Billy Goat Trail	2
Enjoy the rugged winding trails	2
Didn't like orange safety fences	2
Parts of trail system poorly marked	2
Need handicapped/children's water fountain	2
Other comments	27
POLICIES	
Provide more access for bikers	4
Allow access during flood periods	2
Organize volunteers to help maintain park	2
Keep access open to climbers	2
Appreciate low cost park pass	2
Other comments	20

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Park well run	5
Maintain natural setting	4
Horses cause trail erosion	2
Recognize challenge of managing for the variety of uses	2
Fishing regulations not always followed	2
Park not crowded	2
Crowded on weekends and holidays	2
Not crowded during the week	2
Other comments	7

CONCESSIONS

Comments	4
----------	---

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

Enjoyed park	98
Beautiful park	19
Keep up good work	14
Thank you	10
Good job	9
Relaxing oasis from city life	4
Visit park often	4
Keep it as it is	4
Nice to have natural beauty close to urban area	3
Park convenient	3
Park good multiple-use area	3
Great for bringing visitors to area	3
Peaceful	3
Trip worthwhile	3
Great Falls a national resource/treasure	2
Park doing well with limited and dwindling resources	2
Private	2
Plan to return	2
Good services	2
Other comments	45

Great Falls Park, Virginia Additional Analysis

The Visitor Services Project (VSP) staff offer the opportunity to learn more from VSP visitor study data.

Additional Analysis:

Additional analysis can be done using the park's VSP visitor study data that was collected and entered into the computer. Two-way and three-way cross tabulations can be made of any of the characteristics listed below. Be as specific as possible--you may select a single program/ service/ facility instead of all that were listed in the questionnaire. Include your name, address and phone number in the request.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Activities this visit | • Country of residence |
| • Activities past visits | • State of residence |
| • Length of stay | • Number of visits |
| • Primary reason for visit | • Did other visitors interfere? |
| • Safety source used | • Visitor services used |
| • Effectiveness of safety message | • Visitor service importance |
| * Sites visited | • Visitor service quality |
| • Group size | • Facilities used |
| • Guided tour/educational group | • Facilities importance |
| • Group type | • Facilities quality |
| • Age | • Overall service quality rating |

Database

A database, which became operational in April 1996, contains all the VSP visitor studies results from 1988 through the present. To use the database it is necessary to have a database catalog, which lists the information contained in the database. Queries to the database will be accepted by phone, mail, cc:Mail, e:mail or fax and the same forms of media can be used to return the answer to you. Through the database, you can learn how the results of this VSP visitor study compare with those across the nation, or within a specific region, with other natural areas, or sorted in many other ways.

Phone/ send requests to:

**Visitor Services Project, CPSU
College of Forestry, Wildlife, and Range Sciences
University of Idaho
Moscow, Idaho 83844-1133**

**Phone: 208-885-2819
FAX: 208-885-4261
cc:Mail: VSP Database
e:mail: vspdatabase@uidaho.edu**

QUESTIONNAIRE

Great Falls Park, Virginia

Visitor Study

Appendix

Visitor Services Project Report 87
Cooperative Park Studies Unit

Great Falls Park, Virginia

Visitor Study

Appendix

Margaret Littlejohn

Report 87

October 1996

This volume contains summaries of festival and general visitors' comments for Questions 14, 15 and 16. Each summary is followed by their unedited comments.

Margaret Littlejohn is VSP Coordinator, National Park Service based at the Cooperative Park Studies Unit, University of Idaho. I thank the staff of Great Falls Park, Virginia for their assistance with this study. The VSP acknowledges the Public Opinion Lab of the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center, Washington State University, for its technical assistance.
