OUTLOOK ON FOREST SERVICE LANDS

White Paper By

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Introduction

In the world, and in the United States there is growing concern about the future of natural land and water, including forests. A part of this concern is to assure a continued source of opportunity for outdoor recreation and forest-based tourism. In 1994, 12 countries assembled to conceptualize a set of indicators for monitoring the conservation and sustainable management of temperate and boreal forests around the world. In 1995, through what is called the Santiago Declaration, the governments of these 12 countries endorsed a final set of indicators for use by their respective policymakers to assess forest sustainability at each of their own national levels. Three of these indicators describe forest recreation and tourism supply and demand conditions. The following paper is based in large measure on the recent report for one of these indicators, that is, use and trends in use of forests for outdoor recreation. Forest-based outdoor recreation has long been and increasingly is a major component of tourism in this country. (Further information about what is called the Montreal Process for monitoring the sustainable management of the Nation's forests can be found at www.fs.fed.us/land/sustain_dev/sd/sfmsd.htm. The United States report on forest sustainability is about to be published and is entitled the *2003 Nation's Report on Sustainable Forest Management in the United States*.)

Rising Demand for Forest-Based Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor recreation is a fast growing use of forests in the United States, continuing a trend of steady growth since well before the 1950s. The National Recreation Survey, 2000-02 NSRE, has indicated that 97% of Americans participated at some level in at least one outdoor recreation activity over the 12 months just prior to their being interviewed for that survey (Cordell et al 2002 or visit www. srs.fs.fed.us/trends/nsre). That percentage translates into approximately 206 million people over age 15 participating in one or more of the 77 outdoor activities listed in the NSRE survey nationwide. Walking is and has continued to be the single most popular of these activities (83.8% participation). Other activities in the list of the most popular include attending a gathering outdoors with family or friends (73.5%); visiting nature centers, nature trails, visitor centers and zoos (57.2%); picnicking (55.3%); and viewing or photographing natural scenery (54.0%).

Table 1 shows the 10 fastest growing outdoor activities for the year 2000 from among the 21 activities we have been tracking since the 1983 NSRE was done (Cordell et al 2002). It also shows the total number and percent of people aged 16 or older in 2000 that reported participating in at least one outdoor recreation activity in the last 12 months. Growth rates among these activities point to the rapid rise in popularity of trail, motorized, camping, and skiing activities. As part of the NSRE, respondents were asked about participation in forest recreation as well as about the number of days on which they participated in those recreation activities in forest settings.

Table 1--The 10 fastest growing activities in the United States by percentage change in number of participants aged 16 and over, 1983-2001.

Activity	Growth (percent)	No. of Participants (millions)	Percent of Population Participating
Bird watching	235.9	71.2	33.4
Hiking	195.9	73.1	34.3
Backpacking	165.9	23.4	10.9
Snowmobiling	107.5	66.9	31.4
Walking	91.2	179.0	83.9
Off-road driving	89.2	27.9	13.1
Primitive camping	81.9	32.2	15.1
Developed camping	76.0	52.8	24.8
Downhill skiing	66.9	17.7	8.3
Swimming in river, lake, or ocean	64.4	78.1	36.6

Note: All percentages and figures shown are based on NSRE data collected (n=22,847) up to the time this document was originally written.
Source: National Survey on Recreation and the Environment 2000-2001, Versions 1-11, July 1999 to November 2001 (USDA Forest Service, Athens, GA).

Table 2 lists estimates of recreation activity days (activity occasions on different days) in forest settings by region and by recreation activity, from highest activity days at top to lowest at bottom. Noteworthy are the activities that involve viewing and learning about nature. Except for walking, numbers of occasions in forest settings were generally greater in the North than in other regions. With greater numbers of residents in the North and substantial forest area available for recreation, significant activity occasions would be expected in that region. Next highest is the South for most activities, except, of course, for snow/ice-based activities. Third is the Pacific Coast region followed fourth by the Rocky Mountain/Great Plains region. The activity days reported can be of any duration from a few minutes to many hours and more than one activity can be engaged during one outing by the same person. For these reasons, the estimates provided in Table 2 should be treated as a non-additive index that, if measured consistently over time, will enable monitoring the flow of apparent recreation benefits from the forests of the Nation.

Table 2--Total number of recreation activity days that occur in forest settings in the United States by region, 2000-01.

Activity	U.S. Total	North	South	Rocky Mtns.	Pacific Coast
Walking for pleasure	6,420.1	1,384.8	2,446.5	543.2	1,226.7
View/photograph natural scenery	5,389.6	2,585.7	1,415.5	536.7	831.4
View/photograph birds	3,811.6	2,290.3	1,339.9	188.7	708.8
View/photograph flowers, etc.	3,238.0	2,282.6	597.7	344.2	751.7
View/photograph wildlife	2,347.1	922.4	976.0	275.1	141.3
Day hiking	1,903.6	743.3	874.4	123.9	422.8
Sightseeing	1,339.9	559.2	450.8	123.3	186.6
Driving for pleasure	1,116.6	407.3	660.3	70.6	65.2
Mountain biking	1,053.7	465.4	364.2	103.4	124.6
Visit a wilderness	858.4	313.8	268.6	64.5	223.6
Warmwater fishing	641.8	234.3	371.8	35.9	16.7
Family gathering	616.0	275.4	186.6	49.8	97.5
Drive off-road	609.6	238.9	228.7	78.8	36.1
Picnicking	587.3	296.5	131.4	47.8	106.8
Swimming	480.5	248.3	156.3	36.3	49.9
Visit nature center	459.2	196.9	155.2	37.7	72.4
Developed camping	369.6	126.2	122.1	47.3	48.9
Horseback riding	355.4	77.6	160.2	44.0	37.0
Gather mushrooms, berries, etc.	318.1	250.1	60.8	40.1	65.8
Coldwater fishing	277.0	118.3	54.8	38.2	51.8
Big game hunting	215.2	112.9	80.7	21.6	10.6
Backpacking	190.8	56.3	50.9	28.4	56.3
Primitive camping	180.8	39.0	46.0	28.9	66.1
Small game hunting	121.1	58.5	36.0	9.9	12.5
Canoeing	119.9	62.8	29.7	2.4	33.2

Activity (continued)	U.S. total	North	South	Rocky Mtns.	Pacific Coast
Downhill skiing	111.6	67.2	9.3	9.9	19.5
Snowmobiling	101.1	67.5	4.1	16.1	6.7
Mountain climbing	82.7	22.3	20.2	16.6	17.1
Snowboarding	71.8	14.2	.	14.7	17.6
Rafting	69.6	28.6	17.5	9.2	10.1
Kayaking	58.7	25.2	10.1	3.4	20.6
Cross country skiing	47.0	38.5	0.1	5.6	12.4
Anadromous fishing	41.6	19.6	7.0	2.5	24.9
Orienteering	41.1	19.7	10.2	1.7	--
Rock climbing	38.3	17.5	3.8	--	0.0
Visit prehistoric sites	25.5	3.5	1.1	12.0	9.1
Snowshoeing	20.0	14.7	--	1.6	2.1
Caving	14.6	5.2	4.1	0.8	5.8

Source: National Survey on Recreation and the Environment 2000-2001, Versions 1-11, July 1999 to November 2001 (USDA Forest Service, Athens, GA).

Use of the Country's National Forests

In Table 3, visits are reported to U.S. National Forests for the year 2000. The United States Forest Service has implemented a National Visitor Use Monitoring System (NVUM). It is intended to be on-going and to serve as a valid and consistent data source for the Montreal Process. One fourth of the National Forests are statistically sampled with regional stratification each year. National Forest use across the country is primarily in general (undeveloped) forest areas, and totals over 138 million estimated visits per year.

Table 3--Estimated Site Visits to National Forest Sites, calendar year 2000, millions of visits.

Region	Site Type			
	Day use developed	Overnight developed	Designated wilderness	General forest area
North	10.64	6.31	1.57	27.10
South	7.33	4.72	0.63	18.88
Rocky Mountain/ Great Plains	35.55	8.25	7.35	54.65
Pacific	31.43	3.70	6.75	37.45
U.S. Totals	84.95	22.98	16.3	138.08

Source: USDA-Forest Service, National Visitor Use Monitoring project.

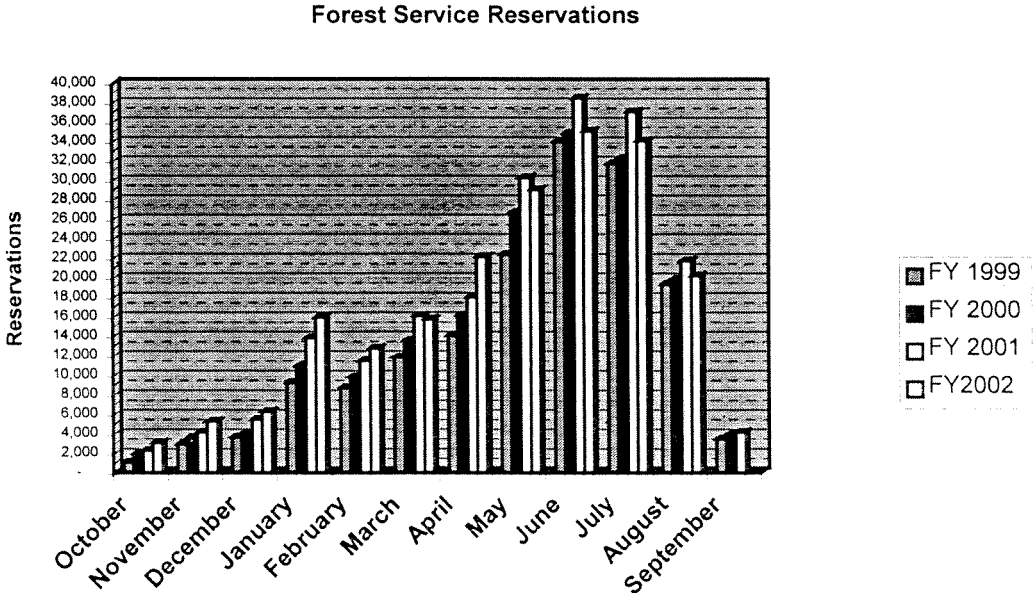
A visit is one occasion of any duration where one person enters into a national forest for recreation purposes. Because most of the land area in national forests is in the West, two-thirds of all general forest use is in this region. Likewise for developed site day use, over three-fourths of national use is in the western national forests. Forty-eight percent of overnight developed site use, on the other hand, occurs in eastern national forests. Only 13.5 percent of use of areas of national forest in the National Wilderness Preservation System is in eastern wilderness. Comparable use statistics for state forests are generally not available.

A Growing Population with More People Living Near a National Forest

Over time, as the population of the country grows, more people live within easy driving distance of a national forest. For the millions of people who live within 50 miles of a national forest, public lands such as national forests will increasingly become the destinations for people seeking forest recreation experiences. Around the more popular national forests, substantial tourism industry has been developing.

National Trends in the National Recreation Reservation Service

An additional source of data on recreation use trends is also available from the National Recreation Reservation Service (NRRS) that the USDA Forest Service operates in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The graph that follows shows trends in advance customer reservations over the last three years. The Forest Service has had a fairly consistent seasonal pattern of reservations from 1999 to 2002, with growth occurring in the late fall to early summer months and some decline from 2001 to 2002 in the summer to early fall months. Overall, reservations have increased across these four years. The tourism industry nationally experienced an unusual amount of growth in 2001, compared with growth in other years. Of note is the negligible impact the 9/11 event seems to have had on the camping patterns for Forest Service sites. Recent, localized wild-land fire closures, however, have had major impacts on tourism industry activity.



Discussion

Outdoor Recreation, and more specifically forest recreation, is an important source of demand for the tourism industry in this country. People travel millions of miles each year in all seasons to find and experience activities in forest settings. High levels of National Forest visitation and sustained demand for reservations testify to this demand. In many ways the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry is tied to the long-term sustainability of the public and private forests of the country. The recent fires in the West have brought the public closer to the issue of

forest health and sustainable management, than in many years.

Forests provide many benefits to people around the country. One of the primary benefits is forest-based outdoor recreation. We in the Forest Service are committed to doing all we can to assure a sustained forest resource and sustained access to it for recreation. But, access is not assured. Adjacent to many of our public forests, on adjoining private lands, a growing number of new houses and subdivisions have sprung up in the last 20 or so years. This housing growth is one of the outcomes of rising population, and wealth. It is also one of the outcomes of the rising popularity of outdoor recreation and the demand for access to public forests. However, access across these recently developed adjacent lands is usually closed to public access other than the property owner. Thus access to the public forests is becoming more limited. Access to private lands fares no better. Across the country in the last three or more decades, private land access to the general public has been declining.

Sustaining access and forest health are central to supplying quality forest recreation experiences in the future, on both public and private forests. As we monitor demand and use of forests for outdoor recreation in the coming years, we will be looking for signs that our efforts to keep public forests available and to help landowners with access issues are working, or not. We suspect that one key to sustaining the Nation's forests and their recreation potentials lies in the rising interest in nature-based viewing and learning activities. This interest links closely to forest health. Perhaps this also will be a key link to activating a public normally complacent about forest issues to become more active in forest recreation access issues.

Our Outlook for 2003

Overall, the USDA Forest Service is "bullish" on the prospects for the 2003 and more distant seasons. We see areas of the country where trends of growth are returning in domestic visitation to public lands. The following article from the Montana area tells one story:

TOURISM BOUNCES BACK

This year's tourism brings a range of numbers. While early visitor counts were generally down for businesses, a hot July and August brought them out of the doldrums. Glacier Park Inc. experienced a great August with occupancy rates of 99 percent. September is also looking good with park lodges and hotels already 74 percent booked. At Glacier Park International Airport, departures and arrivals are fluctuating slightly, but overall they are about even with last year. The drop in arrivals is likely due to the fact that the leisure travel to and from Montana is about at normal levels, while business travel is down because of the national economy. (Daily Interlake, Kalispell, September 11, 2002).

While unforeseen global or national events may suddenly change the prospects for tourism growth, and another severe fire season could wreak havoc in local areas, we remain confident that national forest and grassland visitation, as well as visitation to other public lands, will grow, as will their contribution to domestic and international tourism in 2003. International tourists have remained a small part of our visitation, though certain segments could see increases as overall "SeeAmerica" brand marketing campaigns target eco-tourists in Great Britain, Germany, and other global markets.

References

Cordell, H. Ken, Gary T. Green, and Carter J. Betz. 2002. Cultural dimensions, recreation, and the environment. Leisure Sciences, 24(1):13-41.