



Friendly Companions Enjoy the Backcountry Canoe Trail System at NLSRA.

## **VISITOR USE, PREFERENCES AND PROJECTIONS**

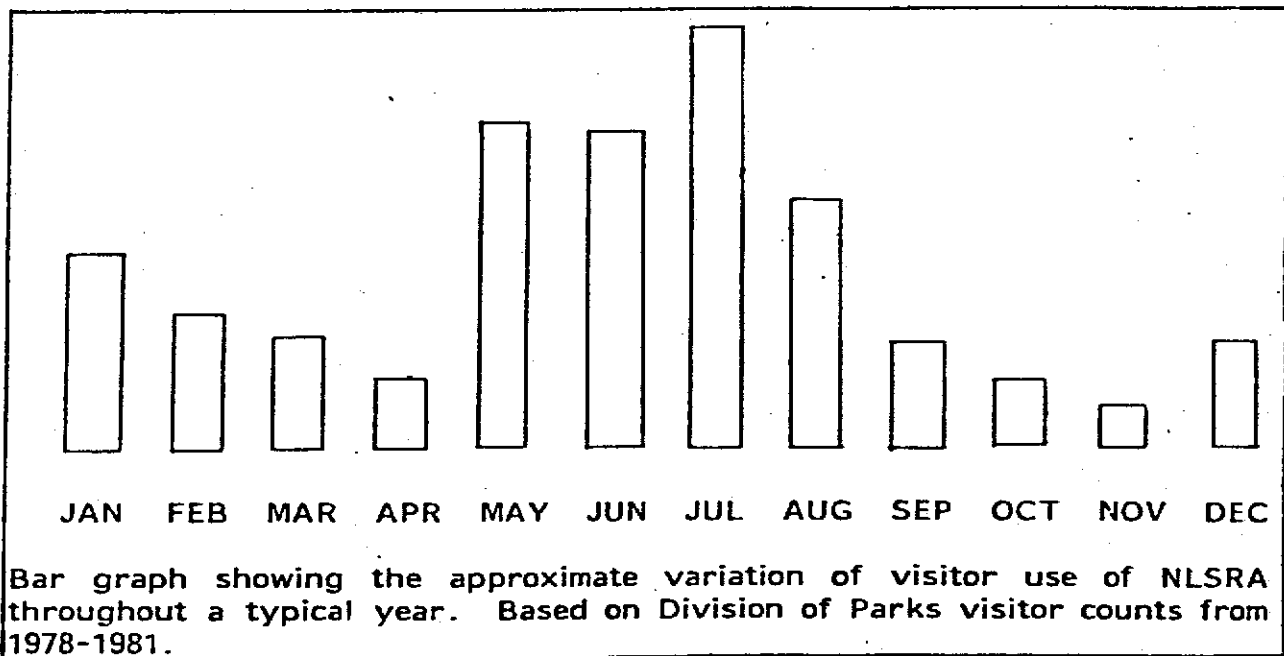
# VISITOR USE, PREFERENCES AND PROJECTIONS

## EXISTING RECREATIONAL USE

Since visitor count methodology is still undergoing refinement within the Division of Parks, data is not available of sufficient reliability to accurately compare current and past numbers of visitors. It can be estimated from available data, however, that for the years 1978 through 1981, there have been between 50,000 and 70,000 combined annual visitors to NLSRA and NLSRS, with NLSRA receiving approximately three times more visitors than NLSRS. The number of rainy and cool days during the peak of the summer camping season probably account for most of the fluctuations since facility construction and other visitor attractions have remained fairly static over this period.

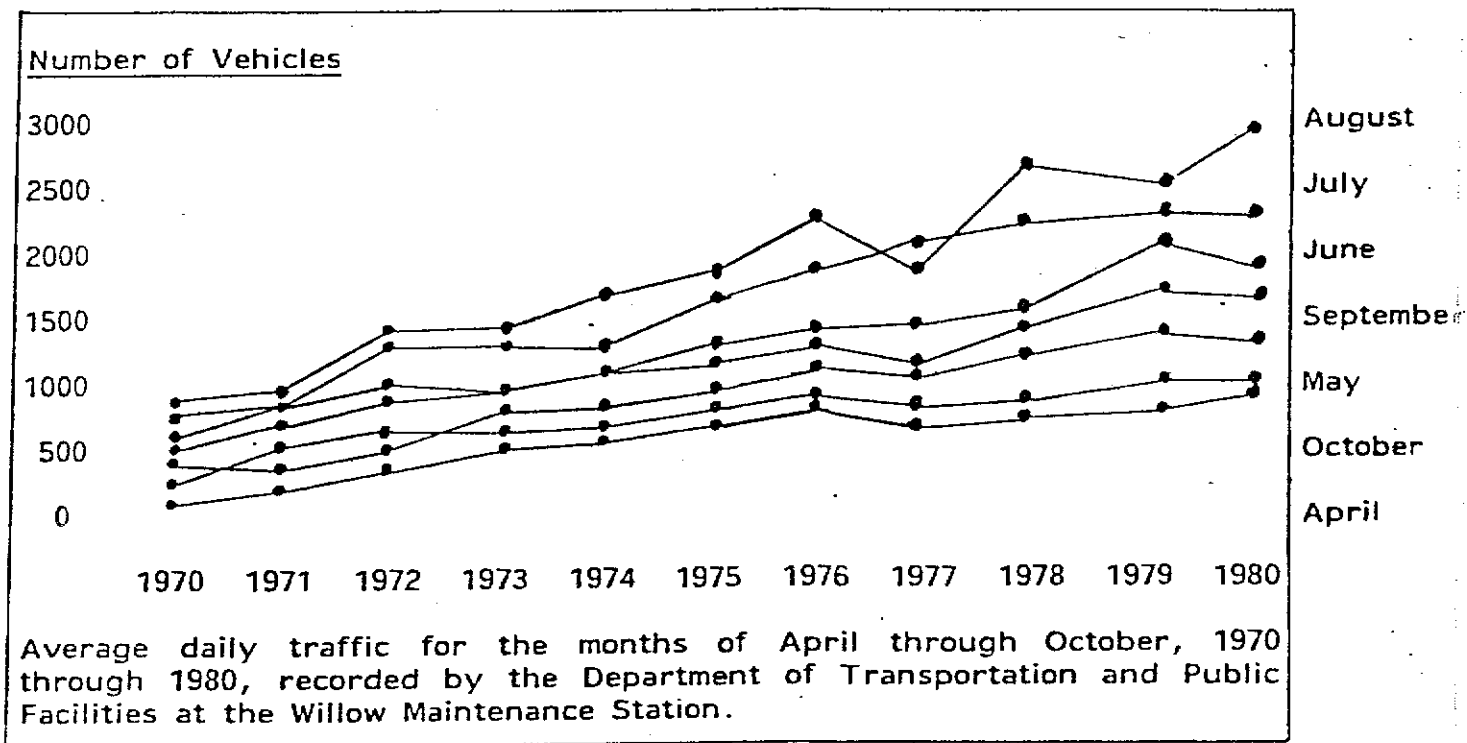
The existing campgrounds at NLSRA and NLSRS, and the canoe trail system in NLSRA are the attractions responsible for most of the current visitation. The months with heaviest visitation are May through August, with July being the busiest. With the coming of snow and the winter recreational season in November, visitation to the recreation area again increases through March. October, November, and April are the months with lowest visitation. Campground facilities have been traditionally closed and gated during November through March. This relationship of use to season is shown best by the bar graph in Figure 8.

**FIGURE 8: NLSRA VISITOR USE MONTHLY VARIATIONS**



The amount of average daily traffic (ADT) recorded at the Willow maintenance station near the NLSRA entrance, for the busiest months (May through September), between 1970 and 1980 are shown in Figure 9. This ebb and flow of vehicular traffic corresponds with NLSRA visitor use. The heaviest amount of vehicle traffic and campground visitation occur during July and August.

**FIGURE 9: AVERAGE DAILY TRAFFIC at the WILLOW MAINTENANCE STATION**



#### LOCAL RECREATION PREFERENCES

The attitudes of people who visit NLSRA and those affected by its presence, such as private landowners and local business owners, were sampled during July and August of 1981. The surveys determined what people liked best about NLSRA, what people would like to see more of, and what people disliked.

Approximately 350 questionnaires were distributed over several weeks to people recreating within NLSRA and mailed to nearby residents, businesses, inholders and interested individuals and organizations. See Appendix A for results. Four public meetings were held, two in July, 1981,

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and two in November, 1981, to exchange information and solicit the same type of information the questionnaires were designed to obtain. Approximately 190 people attended the meetings. Ninety-four questionnaires were returned.

The results of surveys revealed the following attitudes, preferences and other data that affect this master plan.

1. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the visitors to NLSRA who remained overnight stayed at South Rolly Campground. Just over half of those slept in a vehicle (59%) while the remainder (41%) slept in a tent. Seven percent (7%) slept at one of the 11 designated campsites along the canoe trails. Thirty percent (30%) slept in a private cabin within or adjacent to NLSRA.
2. The average (mean) party size is 2.7. The most frequent number in a party (mode) is 2.
3. The average party spent \$51.49 (includes transportation, but not major equipment) on their visit to NLSRA. That equates to \$19.07 per person.
4. Eighty-one percent (81%) of the visitors are from the Anchorage area, 8% are from the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 3% are from the Kenai Peninsula, 3% are from Southeast or Interior Alaska, and 5% are from out-of-state. A similar survey done by the Division of Parks in 1981 on Willow Creek, four miles north of NLSRA showed an even split between Anchorage and Matanuska-Susitna Borough residents visitation.
5. The most frequently given reason for coming to NLSRA was to enjoy the quiet natural setting. Convenience or nearness to home was second.
6. The five most frequently mentioned items visitors want more of in NLSRA were hiking trails; fishing; canoeing; campgrounds and associated facilities; and public cabins.
7. The five most frequently mentioned facilities or activities considered inappropriate for NLSRA were motor boats; commercial establishments; snowmobiles; more roads; and motorized vehicles.
8. The five most frequently mentioned existing qualities of NLSRA appreciated most were natural beauty, open space and quiet; campgrounds; easy access and convenience; canoe trails; and good maintenance.

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9. The five most frequently mentioned existing conditions liked least were overcrowding, overdevelopment and noise; poor fishing; motor boats and planes; lack of firewood; and poor maintenance.

Paralleling closely to the above responses are the results of a questionnaire distributed by the Division of Parks in 1977 and published in January, 1978, under the title Alaska State Park Visitors. It showed that the two most popular activities in NLSRA were camping and freshwater fishing, followed at a considerable distance by canoeing, picnicking, and hiking.

### REGIONAL RECREATION PREFERENCES

The following regional recreation preferences for Southcentral Alaska, were obtained from the Alaska Outdoor Recreation Plan, published in 1981 by the Alaska Division of Parks.

1. When people were asked to judge as "good", "fair", or "poor" the adequacy of outdoor recreation opportunities available to them in Southcentral Alaska, those under 60 (including children under 13) most frequently said "good". Adults 60 and older were evenly split between "good", "fair", and "poor". Those with physical or mental disabilities rated them as "poor".
2. Recreation opportunities were given by 87% of respondents as an "important" or "very important reason" for their coming to or staying in Alaska. Being self reliant was also mentioned by 87% of the respondents. Being close to a wilderness environment was cited by 84%. Economic opportunity was mentioned by 80% of the respondents.
3. Fifty-eight percent (58%) wanted more recreation areas within reach on a weekend. Although there wasn't much reluctance to traveling six (6) or more hours to get to a weekend recreation area, the traveling time preferred was to (2) hours.
4. Most desired features in out-of-town recreation areas were fishing, listed by 95% of the respondents; swimming or boating, 91%; picnic tables, campsites, drinking water and restrooms, 91%; and undisturbed natural areas, 88%. (See Figure 10.)
5. A question asking what new types of recreation opportunities the state should provide found "remote cabins" being the most frequently mentioned (mentioned by 58% of respondents), followed by "areas accessible by boat only" (49%), "community parks" (47%), and "areas accessible by plane only" (43%).

6. The three most preferred outdoor recreation activities were "fishing" (24% rated it their top preference), "trail related activities" (19%), and tent camping (9%). Hunting was next with 6%.
7. The following inland outdoor recreation activities were the highest vote getters for percent of population actually participating: Driving for pleasure (59%); walking or running (53%); freshwater fishing (42%); attending sports and entertainment (37%); tent camping (31%); motor boating (30%); and bicycling (29%).
8. Most people listed "fishing" (25% rated it first), "tent camping" (12%) and trail related activities (10%) as the activities they would like to do more often.

**FIGURE 10: DESIRED FEATURES in  
OUT-OF-TOWN RECREATION AREAS**

<u>Features</u>	<u>Southcentral</u>
1. Fishing areas	95%
2. Access to water for swimming or boating	91%
3. Areas for hunting	87%
4. Picnic tables, campsites, drinking water, restrooms	91%
5. Undisturbed natural areas	88%
6. Bicycle, walking, skiing, or horseback riding trails	84%
7. Motorcycle, snowmachine and other ORV trails	76%
8. Paved roads	69%
9. Unpaved roads	66%
10. Overnight lodging	66%
11. Electrical hook-ups, showers, general store	65%
12. Playfields	60%
13. Lawns and benches	49%

Percentage of Population  
in Favor of Features

Alaska Outdoor Recreation Plan, Division of Parks, 1981.

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9. The most frequently given reason for not participating more often in outdoor recreation activities was "weather". Close behind was "not enough free time".
  10. The number of visitors coming to Alaska for pleasure is growing at an annual rate of 13-15%. In 1977, the 1981 Alaska Outdoor Recreation Plan shows that number to be 389,000; estimates 600,000 for 1980; and 1,000,000 by 1985.
  11. Recreation equipment that is necessary for using NLSRA was owned by the following percent of households: fishing equipment 78%; camping tent 50%; cross-country skis 39%; boat 26%; camper, trailer, or motorhome 26%; and snowmachine 22%.

The recommendations for facility and operational development and changes within NLSRA will utilize these regional recreational preferences to try and create an area which will meet the needs of its users.

#### NATIONAL RECREATION PREFERENCES

The results of a nationwide outdoor recreation survey taken in 1977 and published in 1979 as part of The Third Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Plan, closely parallel those published in the 1981 Alaska Outdoor Recreation Plan for Southcentral Alaska, and the responses received from the NLSRA master plan questionnaires. The national survey cited the following examples.

1. "Convenience" was a major reason people visited a particular recreation area. "Sightseeing", "camping", "swimming/sunbathing", "nature walks", "fishing", "picnicking", "driving for pleasure", and "hiking", in that order, were the most popular activities. The most frequently mentioned deterrents to park use were "lack of time", "too crowded", "lack of money", and "lack of information on outdoor recreation areas".
2. Eight percent (80%) cited the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities as being "very important" in their lives.
3. Although satisfaction with recreation areas was generally very high nationally, the most frequent reasons for dissatisfaction were "inadequate facilities" and "unattractive appearance/maintenance".
4. Young people (12-34) were the most active participants in outdoor recreation activities.

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## TRENDS

Because Alaskans as a population are young, affluent, very outdoor recreationally oriented, and live close to outdoor recreation opportunities, their participation in these activities will likely continue at a greater rate than in the "lower 48". In states other than Alaska, the population is older, less affluent, and therefore more likely to be affected by current and forecasted economic hard times and the shortening of energy supplies.

Since preferences for certain activities and opportunities are so similar between NLSRA visitors, Alaskans in general, and the national population, it should be a relatively easy matter to plan for future developments within NLSRA and be confident that they will meet the public's expectations.

Population forecasts for Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough indicate a rapid and steady growth for the next 15 years. Since approximately 90 percent of NLSRA visitors reside in these two areas, visitation is expected to increase with the population. Only the limits of the natural resources, management practices and policies, and the rate and amount of facility development within NLSRA will limit the amount of visitation. The Matanuska-Susitna region is also attracting many people who have traditionally used the Kenai Peninsula region due to the ease of access, travel distance, increase in fisheries enhancement programs, tourism development and the availability of private landownership in the Mat-Su area. Possible development of the Knik Crossing will bring the region even closer to half of the State's population which resides in Anchorage.