



# Fall 2015 Visitor Use Study

## UNDERSTANDING OUR VISITORS TO IMPROVE OUR SERVICES

A Visitor Use Study was conducted to help Marin County Parks broadly understand visitors and improve visitor services. Experts at San Francisco State University designed and helped implement the study. The results provide a snapshot in time of visitor demographics and preferences as well as visitation barriers that exist for underrepresented groups. Key Takeaways include:

**90,470**  
**ESTIMATED TOTAL VISITS TO 17 STUDY LOCATIONS BETWEEN 9/1/15 -11/4/15**



### PORTRAIT OF AN AVERAGE VISITOR.

About two thirds visited with family or friends. The average respondent was 50.1 years old, with slightly over half between the age of 45-64 years. There were nearly equal numbers of females and males. Over three quarters had a bachelor degree or higher level of formal education. 40% reported a 2014 annual household income over \$125,000 while 13% indicated less than \$50,000. 90% were white and 9% were Hispanic or Latino. About two thirds drove while one quarter walked. Approximately 4% of respondents had a person with a disability in their visitor group.



### MOST VISITORS ARE LOCALS.

Most of our visitors are local Marin County residents who visit our parks and preserves regularly. Over three quarters of visitors were residents of Marin County, and over half lived within one mile of the park, preserve, or path where surveyed. Only 3% were from outside California.



### MOST VISITORS HAVE A GOOD EXPERIENCE.

97% of respondents agreed that the quality of their overall experience in that park unit on the survey day was good or very good. 90% were satisfied or very satisfied with their interactions with other visitors. 98% felt safe. 95% said they would visit the same park, path, or preserve within the next year. 60% liked the site they visited just the way it is, while 40% wanted to see some future improvement.

### Visitor Intercepts and Visitor Counts

The study includes quantitative data from visitor intercepts and visitor counts at 9 parks, 6 preserves, and 2 bike/walking paths between September and early November 2015 over varying times of day and days of the week. Almost 7,000 visitors were counted at 17 sites and there were a total of 1,168 completed intercept surveys. 157 people voluntarily completed a more in-depth follow-up online survey via email.

### Focus Group Interviews

To identify key barriers to visitation and engage in more in depth conversations with Marin County residents, two facilitated focus group interviews were held in San Rafael during January and February 2016. The groups were comprised of two distinct communities: the Aging in Place/Senior community and the Hispanic/Latino community in the Canal neighborhood.

### Next Steps

Marin County Parks will complete another 3 seasons of data collection in 2017 to gather more robust data and understand visitor demographics throughout the year. Ideally this study will be performed at the same locations every five years to evaluate changes over time.

This visitor study is one of many tools the department uses to gather information to serve its visitors. The information will be used to guide department planning, communications, and visitor services. The complete Visitors Study Report is available at [www.marincountyparks.org](http://www.marincountyparks.org).

[marincountyparks.org](http://marincountyparks.org)

Alternative formats are available upon request.



## MOST POPULAR LAND-BASED ACTIVITIES.

The most popular land-based activities that were undertaken that day were: walk/hike, bike, walk dog, run/jog, and use kid's playground. The primary reasons for visiting the site that day, in order of popularity, were hiking/walking, nature/land/views, biking, walk dog, and exercise.



## MOST POPULAR WATER-BASED ACTIVITIES.

The most popular water-based activities were: relax on beach, beach activities, fishing, tide pooling, and kayaking or stand up paddleboarding.



## BARRIERS TO VISITATION

Groups that were underrepresented in visitor intercepts and visitor counts as a proportion of Marin County's overall population included: those 75 years and older, Hispanics/Latinos, younger adults aged 15-44, African Americans, and those with lower income or lower formal education levels.

**Focus Groups** | While differences exist, focus group discussions with both the senior and Latino communities indicated that they rely heavily on public transportation during their daily lives. One of the key barriers to park visitation is a lack of public transportation to park sites. Both groups would also like to see better enforcement of the rules. Despite their differences, the senior community and the Latino community both share the same love and appreciation for their county parks.

**Seniors:** Seniors participating in focus group discussions indicated that they are very concerned about their health. While they value parks, there are times when they do not have enough energy to frequent the parks as often as they used to, or cannot participate in the same activities as they did in the past. Fees and a lack of accessibility information were also factors for some. There were some instances where participants had experiences with other park users that prevented them from visiting certain parks more often. For example, due to some of the participant's hearing ailments, they noted having difficulty hearing a bike approaching them, which made them feel unsafe.

**Canal Neighborhood/Latino Group:** Findings show safety was highly valued among this group of Latinos. While visiting Marin County parks, it made them feel safer to see rangers enforcing regulations, especially when it came to keeping the park clean. The lack of signage and county park information in Spanish has also been a significant barrier for this community. Another barrier expressed by this group was the cost to visit these parks. Due to the lack of Marin County Parks in the Canal neighborhoods, partnering with local parks and partners is an additional recommendation of the report.

## WHERE DID WE SURVEY?

### North Region

Stafford Lake Park  
Pt. Reyes Park  
Indian Valley Preserve  
Mt. Burdell Preserve

### Central Region

McNears Beach  
McInnis Park  
Lagoon Park  
Pueblo Park  
Cascade Canyon Preserve  
Gary Giacomini Preserve

### South Region

Paradise Beach Park  
Corte Madera Creek Multiuse Pathway  
Crescent Park  
Mill Valley/Sausalito Multiuse Pathway  
Agate Beach  
Blithedale Summit Preserve  
Ring Mountain Preserve

## AREAS WHERE WE CAN IMPROVE

### Visitor Intercept Surveys

When asked what could be done to improve the quality of their park experience, the most common responses were improve trail/path, better enforcement of rules and policies, better maintenance, and better management of dog use.

### Follow Up Email Survey

Of 157 follow up emailed surveys, 10% of respondents were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the facilities which they used. The primary reasons for dissatisfaction were availability of restrooms, cleanliness of restrooms, condition of natural resources, lack of bike trails, and condition of trails. Signs, maps, trail markers, directional signage, information about activities and events at site, and interpretive messaging could also use improvement.

About 1 in 4 respondents indicated they had no serious concerns or needed improvements, but the most frequent issues were dogs off-leash, dog waste, speeding bikes on trails, lack of information on site's fragile plant and animal habitats, trail conflicts with other users, and horses and horse waste on trails.

40% also want more outdoor evening programs, history tours, special events, festivals, concerts, sport/fitness clinics, and races and competitions.