

VISITOR USE SUMMARY DATA - 2015

RED ROCK RANGER DISTRICT, COCONINO NATIONAL FOREST

Prepared by Laura Koller, USFS Forestry Technician, January 2016

Key Findings:

2015 Statistics:

- **Total visitors: 2,840,610**
- Visitor center: 258,627
- Heritage sites: 63,872
- Oak Creek Vista: 95,720
- Fossil Creek Wild and Scenic River: 86,333
- Concessionaire campgrounds and day use sites: 300,525 (Day Use: 253,594, Camping: 46,931)
- Outfitter and Guide Special uses: 307,819
- Trail use: 1,727,714

Key Comparisons:

- Visitor use on the district has tripled in the last 10 years.
- Visitor Center use peaked in 2010, but the steady increase in visitors since 2013 is continuing through 2015.
- Visitation at the heritage sites is steadily increasing. However, Palatki visitation peaked in 2010 and has been steadily decreasing in the past 5 years.
- Trail use represents the majority of use and is steadily increasing.

Observations and recommendations:

- A road counter placed at Oak Creek Vista could provide more complete visitor usage data for that location.
- Recreation use of the dispersed areas of the District is not included in this analysis. There are no methods currently in place for collection of this data.
- Concessionaire (Recreation Resource Management) visitor use was affected by: Pine Flats closing for renovation in 2010, Banjo Bill, Encinosa, Halfway and Bootlegger sites removed from permit in 2010, and the Slide Fire in 2014. A portion of Pine Flats east remains closed due to rock fall hazard.
- Top 5 Most Used Trails: Bell Rock Pathway, Cathedral Rock, West Fork, Devil's Bridge, and Broken Arrow.
- An electronic trail counter placed on the Fossil Springs Trail would improve data collection for that important area.
- Outfitter and Guide visitor data collection is dependent on permittee self-reporting and is likely an undercount.

Methodology:

Visitor Center: An automatic counter is positioned at the entrance door of the visitor center and records a daily count. A formula is applied to deduct the cleaning crew and people exiting through the entrance door. 2006 data is not available.

Heritage Sites: Palatki, V bar V, and Honanki. Data for Palatki and V bar V is generated from Fee Site Monthly Reports. Honanki data is generated from the "self-guided individuals" monthly report tabulated by Pink Jeep Tours. Visitors are counted upon passing the trailhead booth. The Pink Jeep Tours are not included in the count, but are factored in under the Outfitter Guide counts.

Oak Creek Vista: A hand counter is used to tally the number of visitors entering the ANHA/Visitor Information building. The building is staffed 7 days/week high season (generally April – Sept); 2 days/week low season (Oct – March). Visitors who are counted at the building are estimated by local employees to be no more than ¼ of total use at the Vista site. No data is available for 2006-2007. Monthly counts were multiplied by 4 to arrive at a number that better reflects the real use of the site.

Fossil Creek Wild and Scenic Rivers: Visitor use data, including numbers of visitors and numbers of vehicles, was collected along FR502 and FR708 by recreation technicians on patrol. Data was taken from a separate report compiled by the District, *Fossil Creek Wild and Scenic River – 2015 Visitor Use Data Summary*.

Concessionaire (Recreation Resource Management) Sites: Recreation Resource Management provides USFS with monthly visitation reports based on fees collected. Since data from December 2015 is incomplete, December 2014 data was used as a proxy for the 2015 total. Sites include: Banjo Bill, Encinoso, Halfway and Bootlegger picnic sites (until 2010), Beaver Creek, Call of the Canyon, Cave Springs, Chavez Group, Clear Creek, Crescent moon, Grasshopper, Manzanita, Pine Flats, and Indian Gardens Visitor Center.

Outfitter and Guide Special Uses: Permittees submit quarterly visitor reports. Because these reports are not a requirement, timely submission has been an issue. 2014 data has been used for this report. In 2006-2010, some uses did not require permits.

Trails: Between 2006 and 2013, trail registers have been in place at 28 trailheads in order for visitors to voluntarily log in. This data was collected and analyzed into an annual report. In 2013, several trail registers were removed, and more were removed in 2014. In 2015, electronic counters were installed on 6 trails to gather direct data: Bell Rock Pathway, Broken Arrow, Cathedral Rock, Devil's Bridge, Fay Canyon, and West Fork. In order to complete a full analysis of all trails, both direct and proxy data was used. Each trail was designated as low, moderate or high use. Using trail register data collected from 2013 and 2014, an average was calculated for each usage level. Several representative trails were selected for each use level. Trails used for the low proxy: Dogie, Loy, Secret Canyon, Woods Canyon. Trails used for the moderate proxy: Aerie, Bear Mountain, Cockscomb, Bull Pen, Long Canyon, Sycamore Canyon, Vultee Arch, and Wilson Mountain. Trails used for the high proxy: Adobe Jack, Broken Arrow, Chuckwagon, Devil's Bridge, Doe Mountain, Fay Canyon, Fossil Creek, Little Horse, Mescal, and Soldiers Pass. The use for each of these trails was averaged to create a use figure for each use level. That average number was assigned to each trail for which there was no data. The Bell Rock Pathway, Boynton, Cathedral Rock, and West Fork trails were not used in the high usage proxy calculation since these trails have very unusually high usage.

Data Summary:

This report focuses on National Forest visitor use associated with: visitor centers, heritage sites, sites managed by Recreation Resource Management, Outfitter Guide Special Uses, and trails. Dispersed recreation use has not been included in this study.

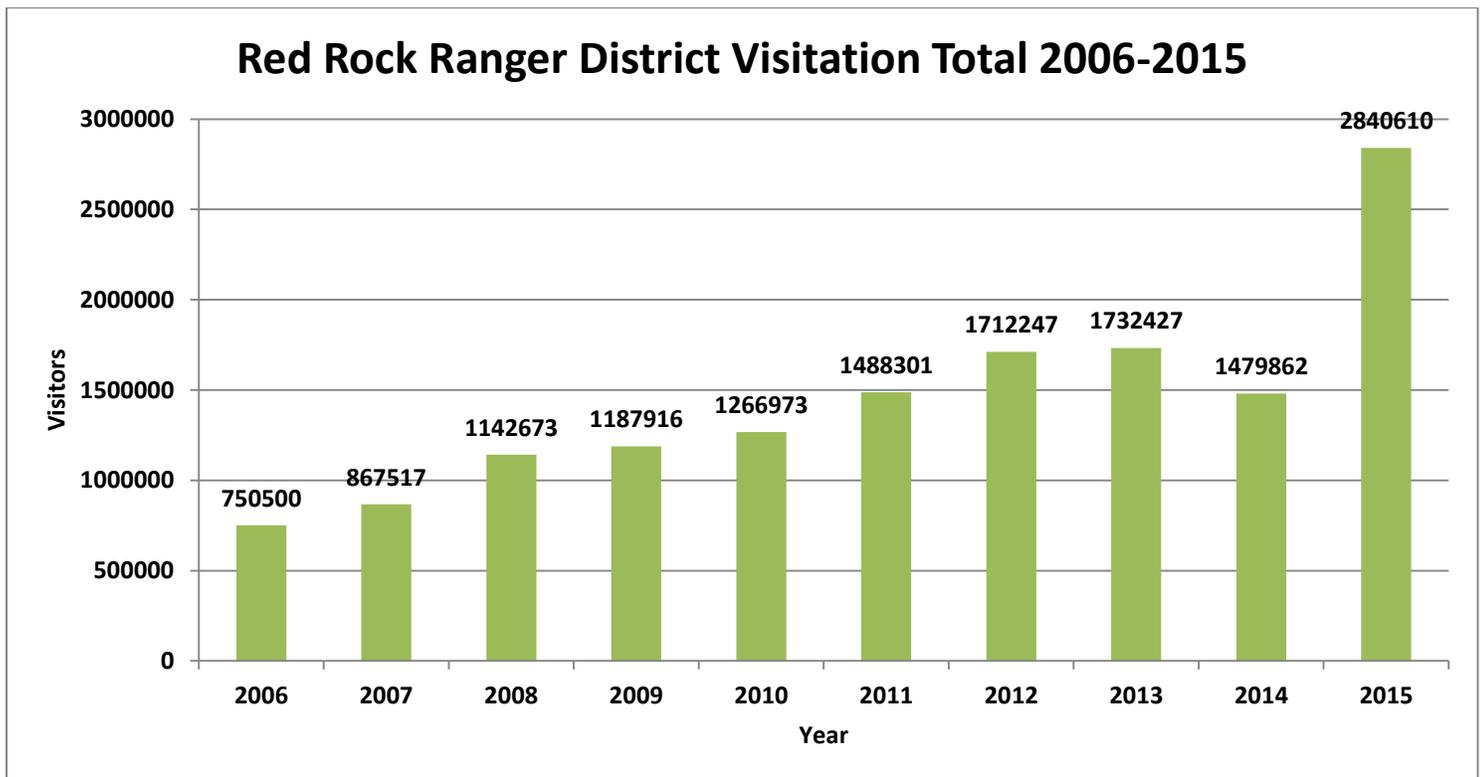
Overall, the district has seen the total number of visitors triple in the last ten years with a total of over 2.8 million visitors in 2015. The majority of usage is on the trail system which accommodates 61% of the visitation on the district.

Red Rock Ranger District - Annual Visitation Data 2006-2015										
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Visitor center		57572	103148	277582	300310	237100	246454	223865	249162	258627
Heritage sites	43376	49397	51364	55255	60161	58933	59489	56662	62273	63872
Oak Creek Vista			152576	146616	136756	117312	129848	137072	77732	95720
Fossil Creek Wild & Scenic Rivers										86333
RRM sites	305503	273956	320940	283957	302547	328050	358987	308710	260817	300525
Special Uses						224067	287524	291637	307819	307819
Trails	401621	486592	514645	424506	467199	522839	629945	714481	522059	1727714

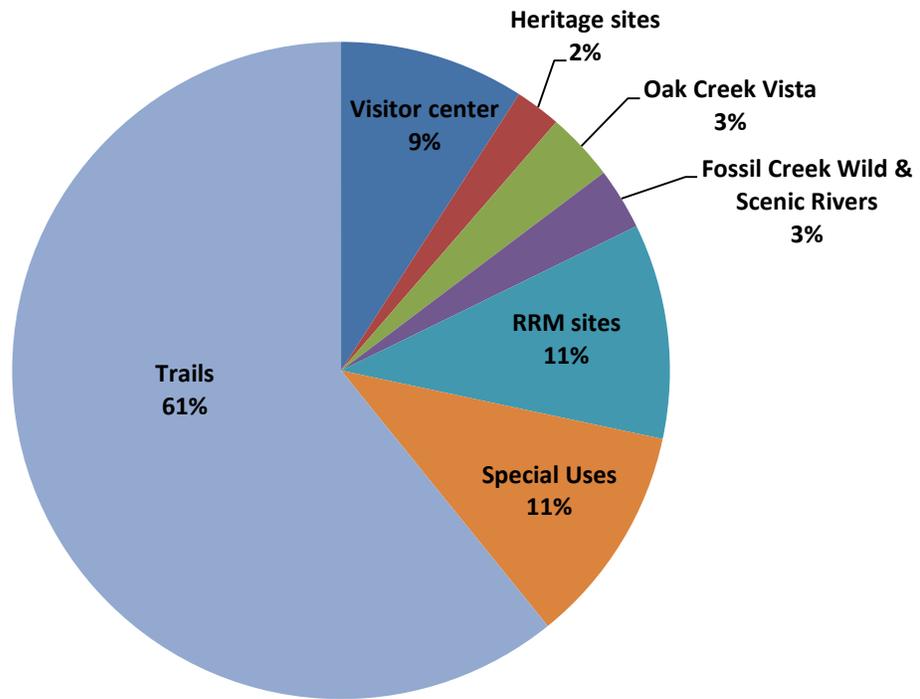
Total	750500	867517	1142673	1187916	1266973	1488301	1712247	1732427	1479862	2840610
--------------	---------------	---------------	----------------	----------------	----------------	----------------	----------------	----------------	----------------	----------------

2015 RRM: Day Use - 253594 Camping - 46931

* Data does not include dispersed recreation.

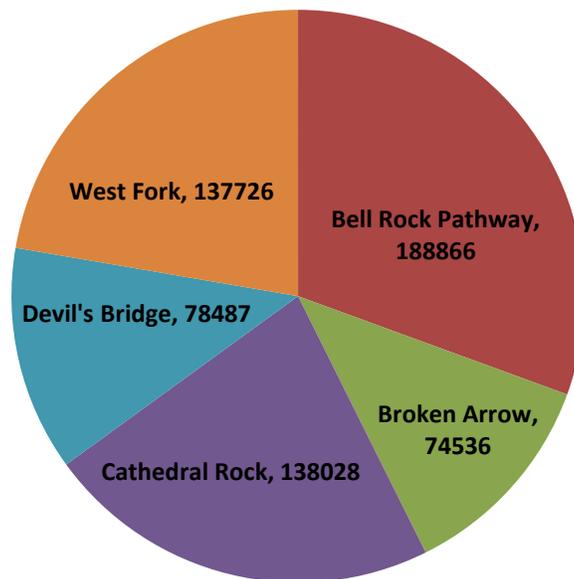


2015 Red Rock Ranger District Visitor Usage

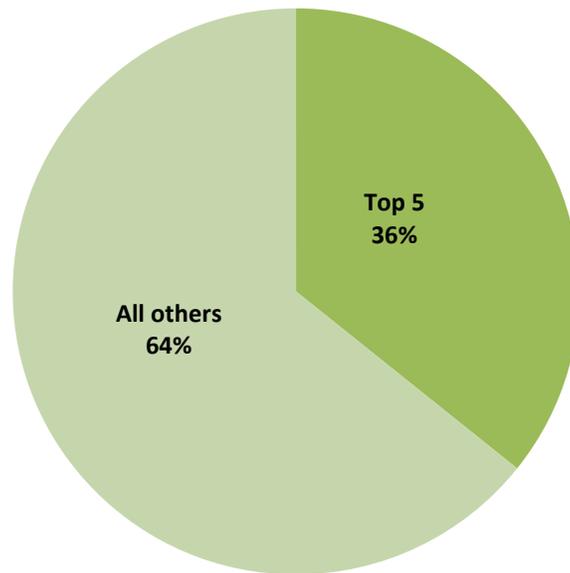


The five most used trails are: Bell Rock Pathway, Cathedral Rock, West Fork, Devil's Bridge, and Broken Arrow. These trails represent 36% of the total trail usage.

2015 Red Rock Ranger District Top 5 Trails

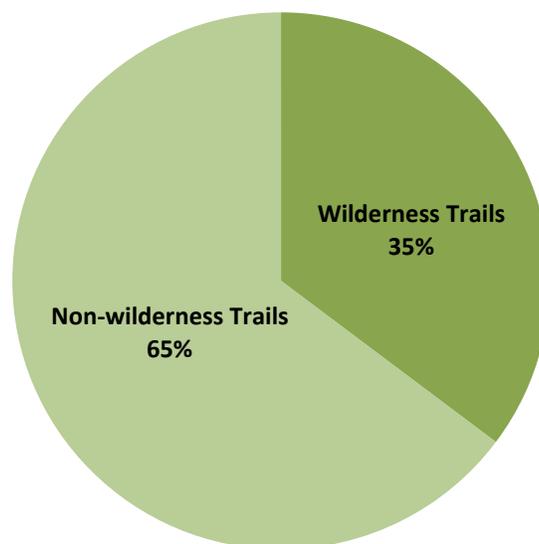


2015 Red Rock Ranger District Trail Usage

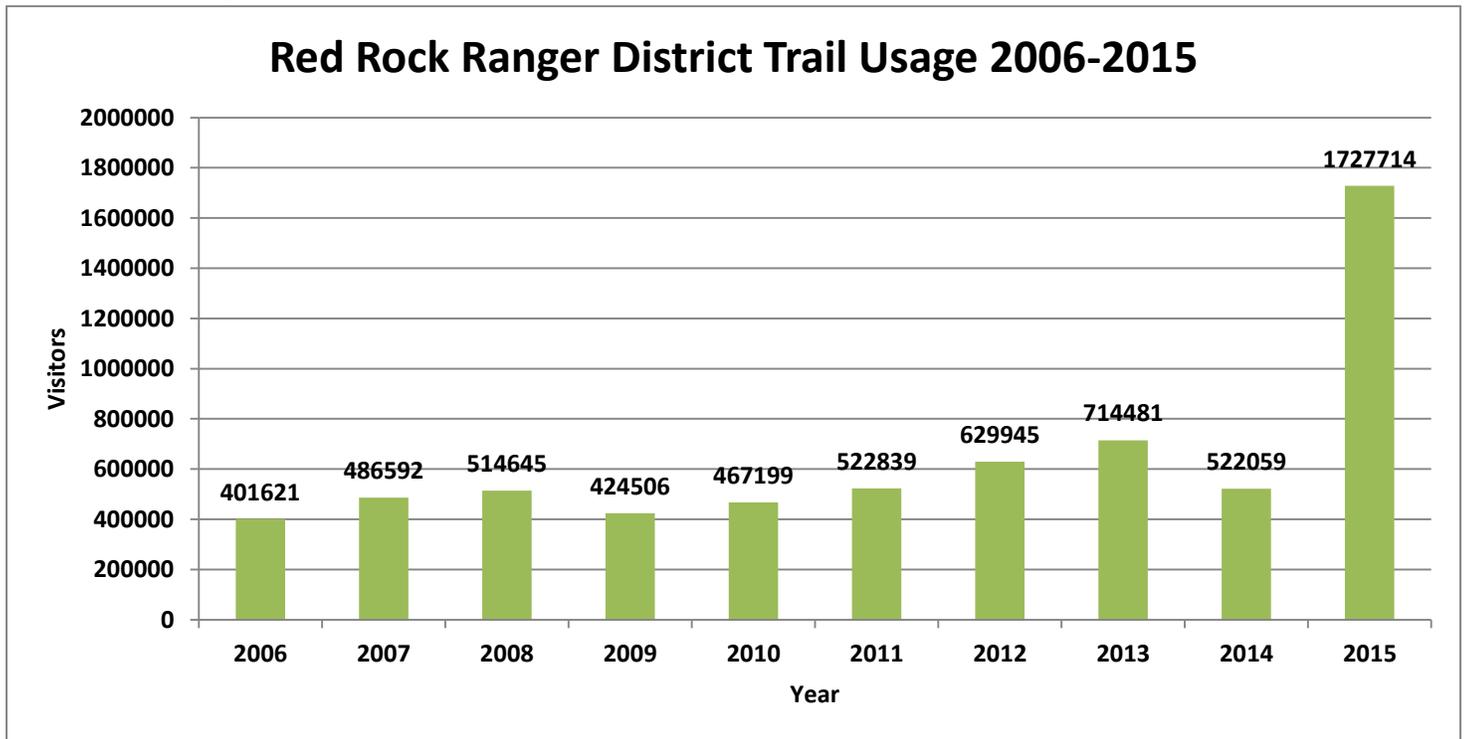


Non-wilderness trails were accessed by 1,118,728 users, while Wilderness trails saw 608,986 visitors.

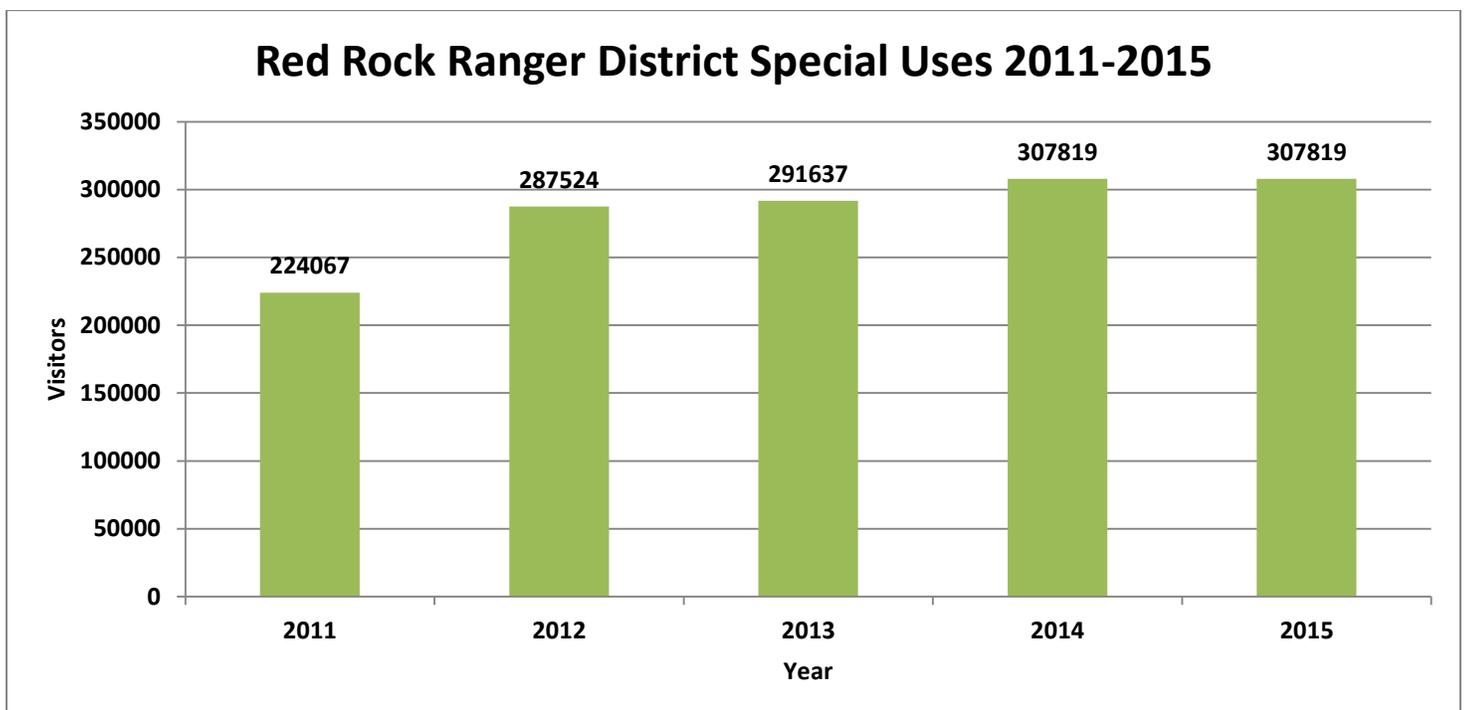
Red Rock Ranger District Wilderness vs. Non-wilderness Trail Usage 2015



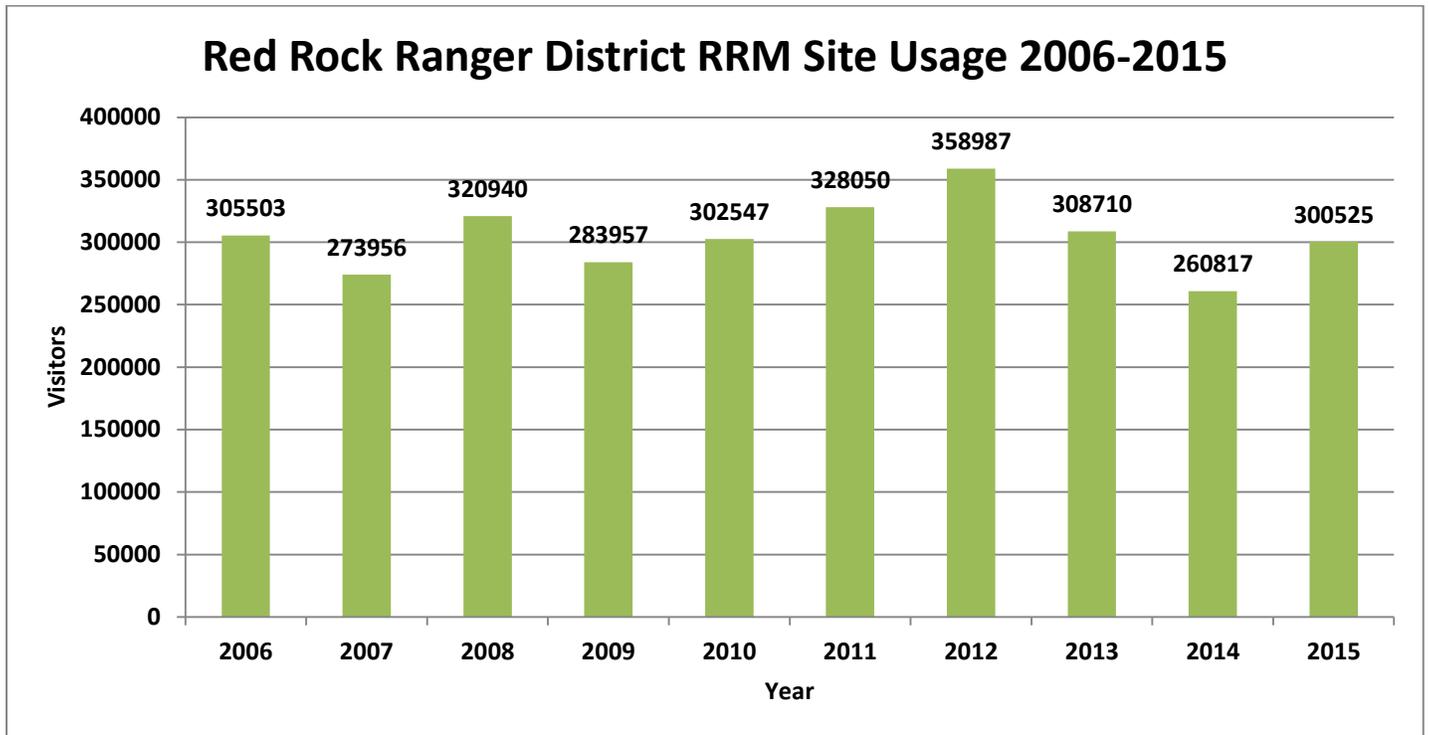
In 2006, 28 trail registers were in place across the district. In 2013 and continuing into 2014, many trail registers were removed. In 2015, 6 electronic trail counters were installed. The large increase seen in 2015 is due to a more complete analysis of all Sedona area trails using both direct counts and proxy data based on trailhead registration box data. A decrease in trail usage is seen in 2014 due to trail closures associated with the Slide Fire in Oak Creek Canyon and the removal of trail register boxes and no use of proxy data.



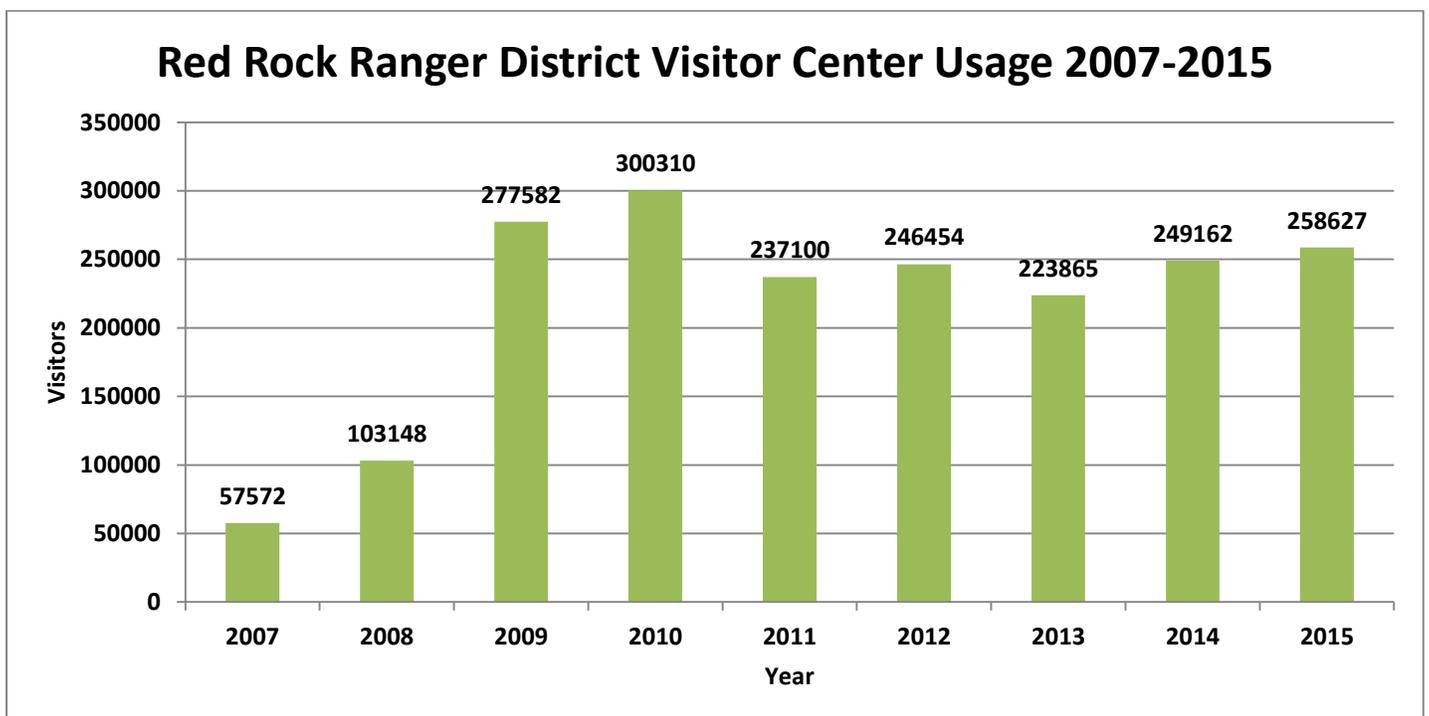
The Red Rock Outfitter Guide program issues special use permits for commercial and large groups. At the time of this study, the 2015 data was incomplete. Special Uses peaked in 2014 at 307,819 visitors, and it is speculated that the 2015 data will report approximately the same, if not more, usage.



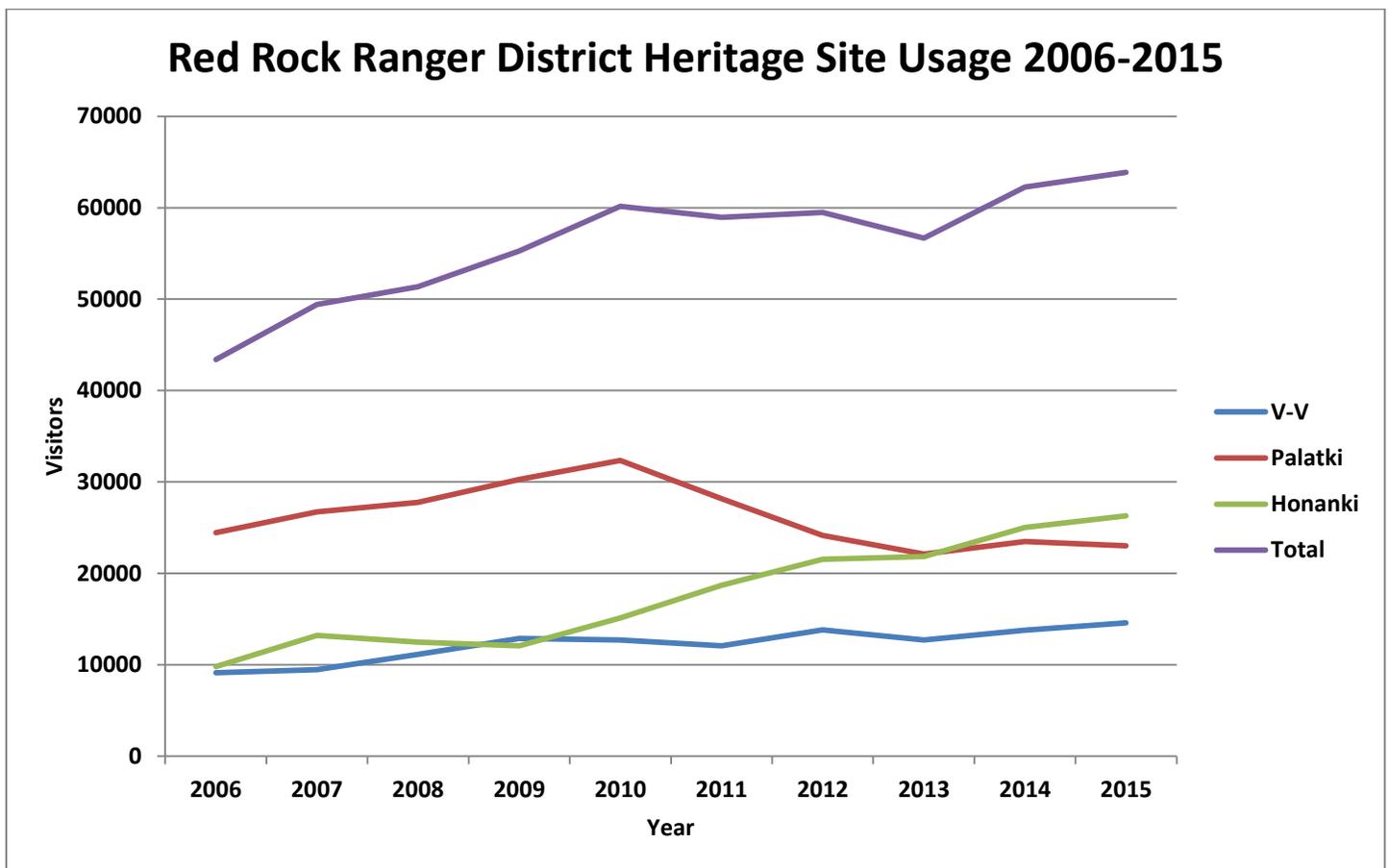
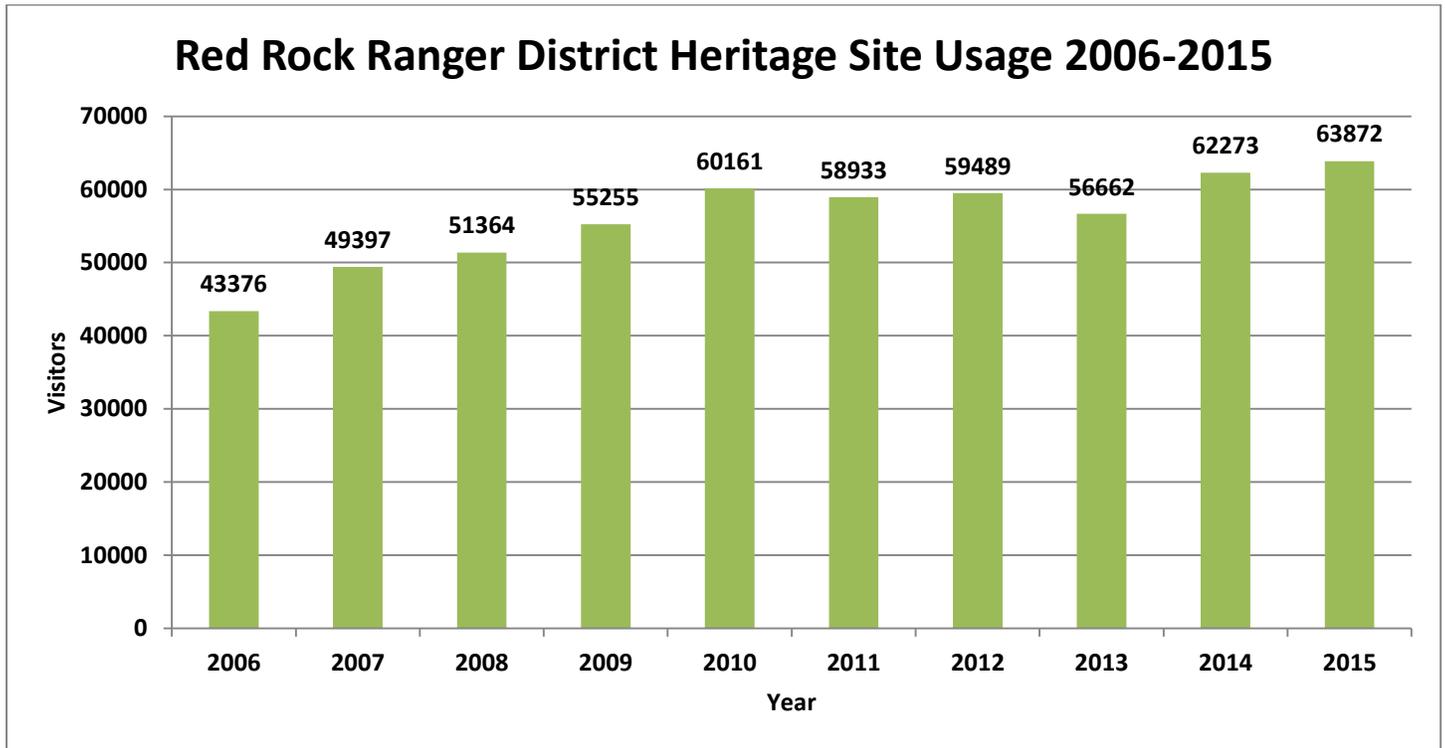
Recreation Resource Management (RRM) operates several sites on the district. RRM site usage peaked in 2012. In 2010 four fee sites were removed from the RRM permit area (Encinosa, Bootlegger, Banjo Bill and Halfway picnic sites) and added to the Red Rock Pass Fee Program. In 2010, Pine Flats was closed for construction. In 2014, many RRM sites in Oak Creek Canyon were closed due to the Slide Fire. In 2015, of the 300,525 users, 253,594 people were day use visitors, and 46,931 visitors were camping.



The Red Rock Ranger District visitor center provides vital visitor information and interpretative services for the public. Usage peaked in 2010 at 300,310 visitors.



Red Rock Country is rich in Native American culture and history. Numerous ruins and archaeology sites are protected on the district, including Palatki, V bar V, and Honanki. In 2015, visitation to these heritage sites peaked at 63,872 people. Although the overall usage at the heritage sites is increasing, Palatki has been showing a leveling of visitation since 2012. This may be partly due to the setting of a visitor capacity and reservation system.



The Oak Creek Vista provides visitors a place for information, a scenic view, and a Native American Marketplace. In 2008, usage peaked at 152,576. In 2014, the Slide Fire forced closure of 89A and deterred visitors to the area. Because only people entering the information center are currently counted, a road counter is recommended for this popular site.

