

A Visitor Assessment of Florida National Scenic Trail Visitors on Apalachicola National Forest Lands



Compiled at
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Introduction to the Project

From the summer of 2003 through the summer of 2008, researchers from the University of Florida studied visitors on the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST). The Trail traverses almost the whole state from Pensacola to Big Cypress National Preserve. Researchers studied visitors to the Trail on public lands throughout the state with the cooperation of every type of public land agency. This includes the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Defense, Florida Division of Forestry, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida State Parks, and Florida's water management districts (Northwest Florida, Suwannee River, St. Johns River, Southwest Florida, and South Florida).

The project consisted of two main parts: to count visitors and to understand who they are and why they use the Trail. In order to count visitors, mechanical counters (either infrared or pressure sensitive pads) were placed along the FNST near trailheads. This gave researchers 24 hour monitoring capabilities. Each site had a counter installed for one or more years, so seasonal fluctuations could be studied. The data were analyzed monthly and cleaned to correct for counts triggered by wildlife or meteorological events.

This produced fairly reliable counts for each section of the Trail that was monitored. In some instances, counters were not installed. Instead, different sampling strategies were used that included visual monitoring, permits, and other strategies.

A questionnaire was also administered to better understand the recreation habits and motivations of visitors to the FNST. Trained surveyors questioned visitors about their demographics, desired experiences, satisfaction, and other recreation activities involved in while on the Trail. This portion of the study was also completed in areas all over the State and on lands representing all the different types of land management agencies in Florida.

The following report is a summary of the results of both portions of the study for the Apalachicola National Forest (ANF) where the study was conducted. Some areas only had visitor counting done and no questionnaires administered. Also, it should be noted that the survey sample size was sometimes small in the lower use areas. The sample size is noted above the results summary. Hopefully, this report will help the ANF personnel better understand the recreation habits of visitors to their lands.



Apalachicola National Forest

Visitor Counter Data

Counter type:

- Sopchoppy: Diamond traffics Eye
- Camel Lake: Trail Master Eye

Counter related problems and solutions:

- Both counter performed well except one time battery found dead at Camel Lake. Batteries were replaced.

- Alignment was sometimes not 100% at Sopchoppy. Corrections were made.

Trail conditions throughout the year:

- In both locations, the trail condition was good. A sign of trail closure due to fire was posted at Sopchoppy for 9 months.

Table 1. Use of the Florida National Scenic Trail for Apalachicola National Forest: June 2007-May 2008

Access Pt.	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	TOTAL
Camel Lake	4	2	8	1	3	4	1	10	29	11	8	3	84
Sopchoppy	21	17	6	15	30	39	49	25	56	18	37	14	327
FR 150*	12	7	11	5	23	30	30	38	42	41	29	21	287
Bradwell Bay Wilderness*	12	7	11	5	23	30	30	38	42	41	29	21	287
Porter Lake*	12	7	11	5	23	30	30	38	42	41	29	21	287
Monthly Total	60	39	46	30	102	132	140	149	210	151	132	81	1,271

*Estimation calculated by access point averages

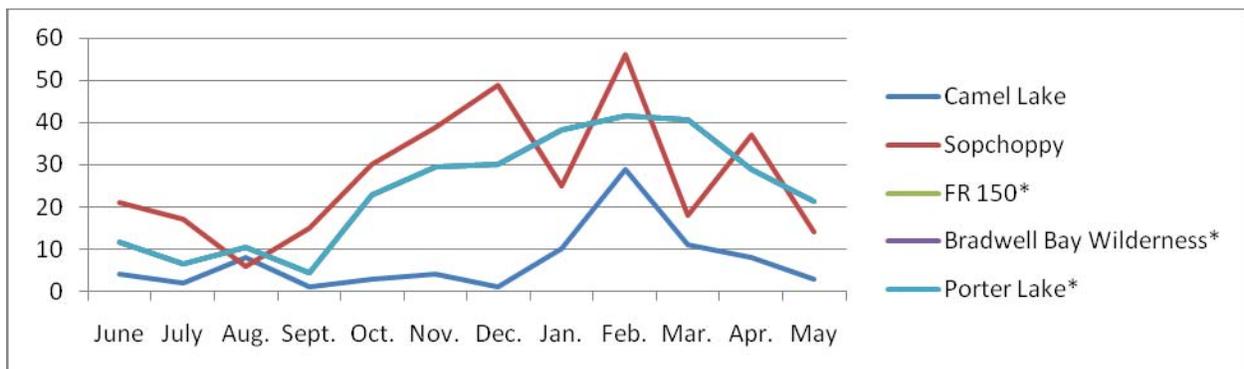


Figure 1. Use of the Florida National Scenic Trail for Apalachicola National Forest: June 2007-May 2008

Table 2. Comparison of FNST visitation at Apalachicola National Forest: 2003-2008

Study Year	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	TOTAL
2003-2004	*	*	*	*	150	107	63	156	154	273	334	158	1,933
2004-2005	115	61	65	33	79	106	79	118	122	171	80	72	1,099
2005-2006	127	129	115	136	137	255	184	231	291	270	214	368	2,457
2006-2007	149	138	123	138	88	134	94	159	188	238	106	85	1,640
2007-2008	60	39	46	30	102	132	140	149	210	151	132	81	1,271

* Mechanical Counter not installed until October of 2003

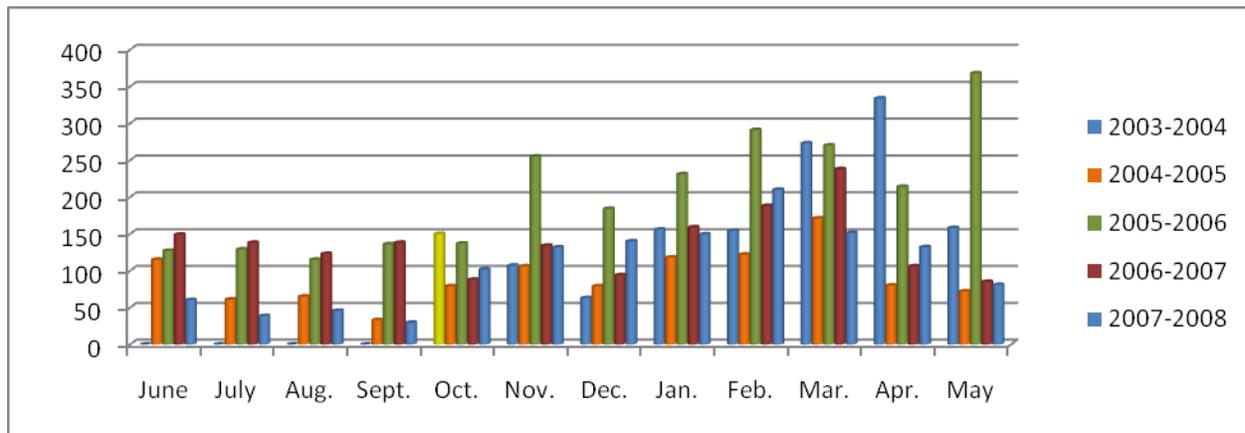


Figure 2. Comparison of FNST visitation at Apalachicola National Forest: 2003-2008

Questionnaire Results

(n= 5); Questionnaire was administered in 2006.

Participant Use History & Knowledge

- 100% of participants did not know they were on the FNST
- 80% of participants had visited this segment of FNST before
- 60 % of returning visitors have visited the trail at 2-6 times in the past 12 months

Participant Trip Characteristics

- 60% of participants entered and exited the trail from the same trailhead
- 60% of participants traveled alone
- 40% of those traveling with a group traveled with a significant other
- 40% of participants spent an hour or less on the FNST the day of their visit

- Participants visited the FNST to hike, view scenery and cultural resources, and photography

Participant Trip Experience

- 60% rated their experience as a 7 or higher with a 10 being a perfect experiences
- Reasons why the participants experience was not a ten included:
 - The trail was overgrown
- Suggested improvements for the FNST in this area included:
 - Clean up the trail

Participant Demographics

- Age
 - 80% of participants were between the ages of 40-69 years old
- Gender
 - 80% of participants were male
 - 20% of participants were female

Acknowledgements

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