

A Visitor Assessment of Florida National Scenic Trail Visitors on Osceola 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 all Osceola National Forest recreation areas where the study was conducted. It should be noted that the survey sample size was sometimes small in the lower use areas. The sample size for the questionnaire results is noted above the results summary. Hopefully, this report will help the Osceola National Forest personnel better understand the recreation habits of visitors to their lands.



Osceola National Forest

Visitor Counter Data

Counter type:

- Battlefield: Trail Master
- Turkey Run: Trail Master

Counter related problems and solutions:

- Both counters performed very well without any problem.

Trail conditions throughout the year:

- One time prescribed burn in late March 2008 at Battlefield may have affected the trail use.

Table 1. FNST visitation at Osceola National Forest: 2007-2008

Access Pt.	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	TOTAL
Battlefield	12	7	3	9	18	14	8	8	39	26	12	17	173
Turkey Run	12	12	5	23	32	36	23	29	43	35	21	8	279
Deep Creek*	12	7	11	5	10	13	8	16	9	15	11	5	119
TOTAL	36	26	19	37	60	63	39	53	91	76	44	30	571

* Estimation calculated using access point averages

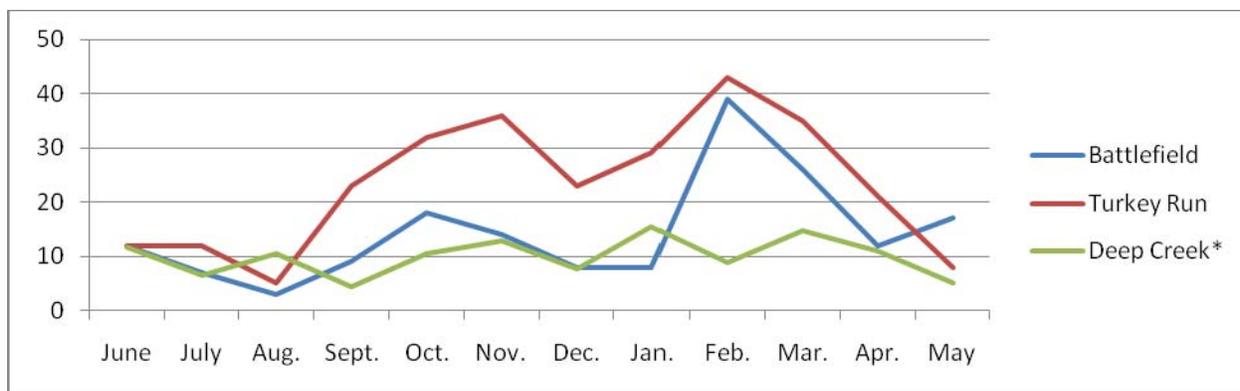


Figure 1. FNST visitation at Osceola National Forest: 2007-2008

* Estimation calculated using access point averages

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

Study Year	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	TOTAL
2003-2004	*	*	*	*	48	30	18	55	116	71	41	35	414
2004-2005	45	18	24	0	21	212	282	241	277	254	147	88	1609
2005-2006	33	39	68	52	89	200	211	195	176	269	142	30	1504
2006-2007	39	25	26	26	57	26	124	87	190	79	75	24	692
2007-2008	36	26	19	37	60	63	39	53	91	76	44	30	571

*Counter were not installed until October of 2003

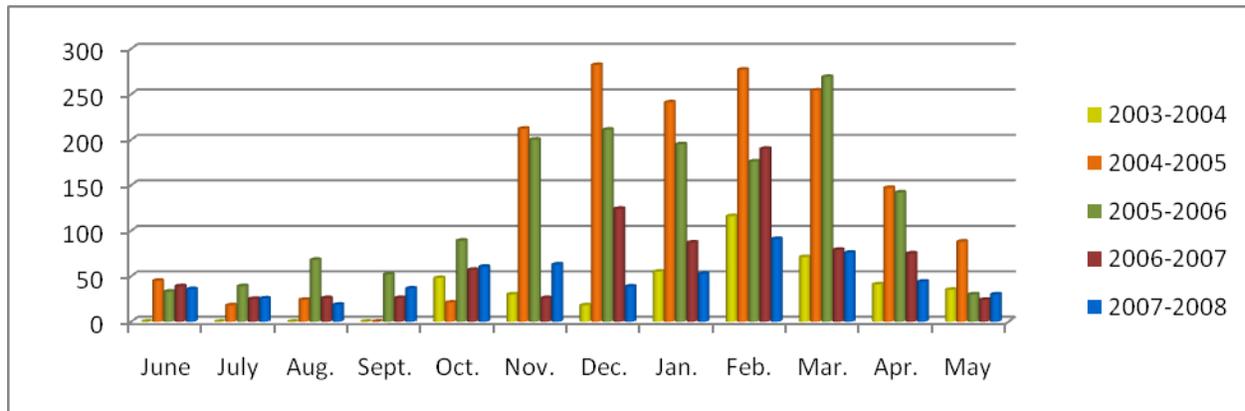


Figure 2. Comparison of FNST visitation at Osceola National Forest: 2003-2008

Questionnaire Results

(n=7)

Participant Use History & Knowledge

- 100% of participants did not know they were on the FNST
- 57% of participants had not visited this segment of FNST before
- 29% of returning visitors have visited the trail 2-6 times in the past 12 months

Participant Trip Characteristics

- 71% of participants entered and exited the trail from the same trailhead
- 57% of participants traveled in an organized group (FTA)
- 57% of participants spent a few hours or less on the FNST the day of their visit
- Participants visited the FNST to hike, view scenery and cultural resources

Participant Trip Experience

- 100% rated their experience as a 8 or higher with a 10 being a perfect experiences
- Reasons why the participants experience was not a ten included:
 - Weather (wet)
 - Not preferred scenery
- Suggested improvements for the FNST in this area included:
 - Provide improved facilities in the way of improved boardwalks and benches along the trail
 - Widen the trail

Participant Demographics

- Age
 - 100% of participants were between the ages of 50-59 years old
- Gender
 - 50% of participants were male
 - 50% of participants were female

Acknowledgements

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