

A Visitor Assessment of Florida National Scenic Trail Visitors on State Park Lands in Florida



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, Florida Greenways, 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 the visitor counts for all of the State Parks where the study was conducted. Hopefully, this report will help the State Parks personnel better understand the recreation habits of visitors to their lands.



Suwannee River State Park

2004-2005 Use

- Counter Type
 - A pressure pad was installed in the Big Oak Trail at Suwannee River State Park in early June.

Trail Use Estimates

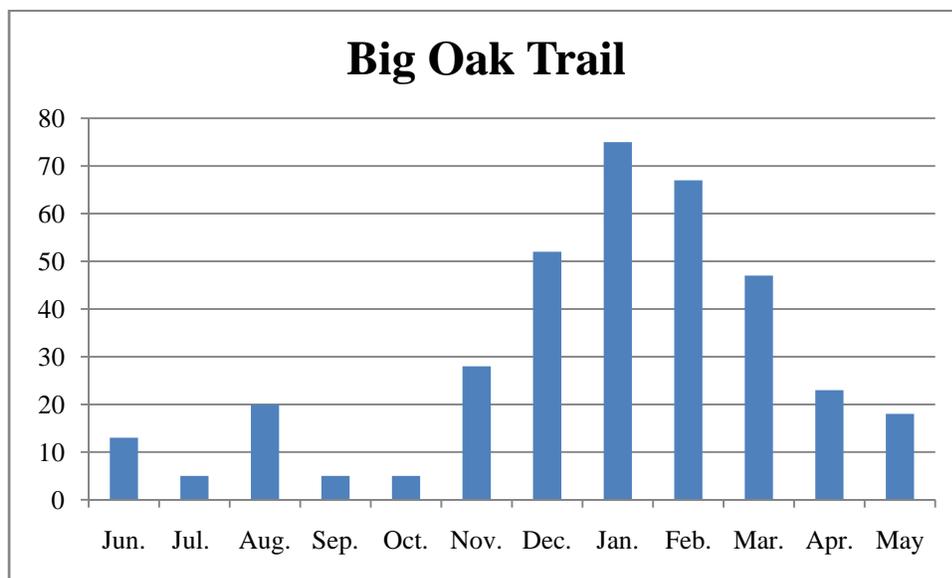
Preliminary research performed from 2001-2002 indicated that the Suwannee River FNST segment was a high use segment, receiving 1500 visits or more annually. This segment of trail

faced several setbacks throughout the study year due to flooding and hurricane damage. During the hurricane season the Suwannee River reached a flood stage of approximately 84 feet, one of the highest in recorded history. As a result the FNST was closed from the beginning of September through November 15, 2004. After experiencing a few drier months in winter and early spring, the river crested once again in the spring and the trail was closed once again from April 4–20, 2005. The use estimates are in the table below.

Table 1. Monthly Florida Trail use in Suwannee River State Park during 2004-2005

Access Pt.	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	Apr.	May	Total
B.O.T.	13	5	20	5	5	28	52	75	67	47	23	18	385

Figure 1. Monthly Florida Trail use in Suwannee River State Park during 2004-2005



Tosohatchee State Preserve

2005-2006 Use

- Counter Type
 - A Diamond Traffic was installed at Nicolas Rd.
- Counter-related problems and solution
 - The counter worked well throughout the year.
- Trail condition throughout the year
 - The trail was in good condition except in November it was flooded.

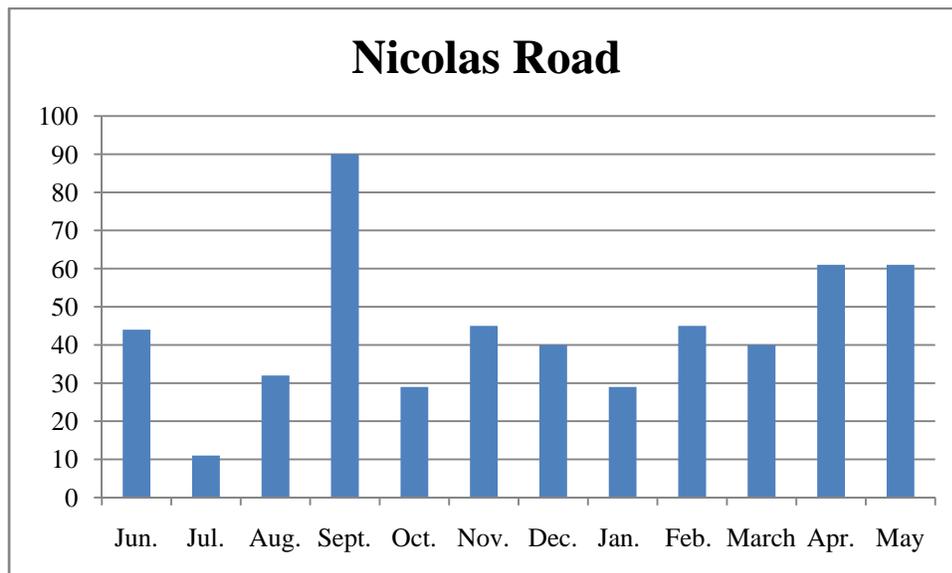
Trail Use Estimates

Preliminary research conducted in 2001-2002 estimated that Tosohatchee was a high use site, receiving over 1000 visitors/ year. The research conducted in 2005-2006 indicates that Tosohatchee is a medium use site, having between 366 and 999 trail visits/ year. The total recorded FNST visits for Tosohatchee was 527. The highest use month was September with 90 visits. The lowest use month was July with 11 visits.

Table 2: Use of the Florida Trail at Tosohatchee State Reserve June 2005- May 2006

Access Pt.	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	Apr.	May	Total
Nicolas Road	44	11	32	90	29	45	40	29	45	40	61	61	291

Figure 2. Use of the Florida Trail at Tosohatchee State Reserve June 2005-May 2006



Questionnaire Results

(n=8)

Participant Use History & Knowledge

- 67% of participants did not know they were on the FNST
- 63% of participants had visited this segment of FNST before
- 50% of returning visitors have visited the trail at least 12 times or more in the past

Participant Trip Characteristics

- 88% of participants entered and exited the trail from the same trailhead
- 38% of participants alone
- 63% of participants traveled in groups of 2 or 3 people, typically with friends or family
- 88% of participants spent a few hours on the FNST the day of their visit
- Participants visited the FNST to hike, view scenery, photography, and study nature

Participant Trip Experience

- 100% 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
 - Roads accessing trails where dry and sandy making them difficult to drive
 - Not preferred scenery
- Suggested improvements for the FNST in this area included:
 - Better maintenance and blazes
 - More information (maps)
 - More facilities (water fountains, picnic areas, restrooms, and benches)

Participant Demographics

- Age
 - 13% were between the ages of 70-79
 - 25% were between the ages of 50-59
 - 38% were between the ages of 40-49
 - 13% were between the ages of 30-39
 - 13% were between the ages of 18-29
- Gender
 - 88% of respondents were male
 - 12% of respondents were female

Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park

2007-2008 Use

- Counter type
 - Diamond Traffic Eye
- Counter related problems and solutions
 - The counter performed excellent throughout the study year without any problem.
- Trail conditions throughout the year
 - Very good except in October, November 2007 and July 2008 there were fallen trees on the trail requiring some efforts to traverse the trail.

Table 3. Use of the Florida Trail at SFFCC State Park June 2007-May 2008

Access Pt.	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	TOTAL
Gazebo	27	23	48	10	18	141.5	70.5	52	85	392	127.5	140.5	1,134

Figure 3. FNST visitation at SFFCC State Park 2007-2008

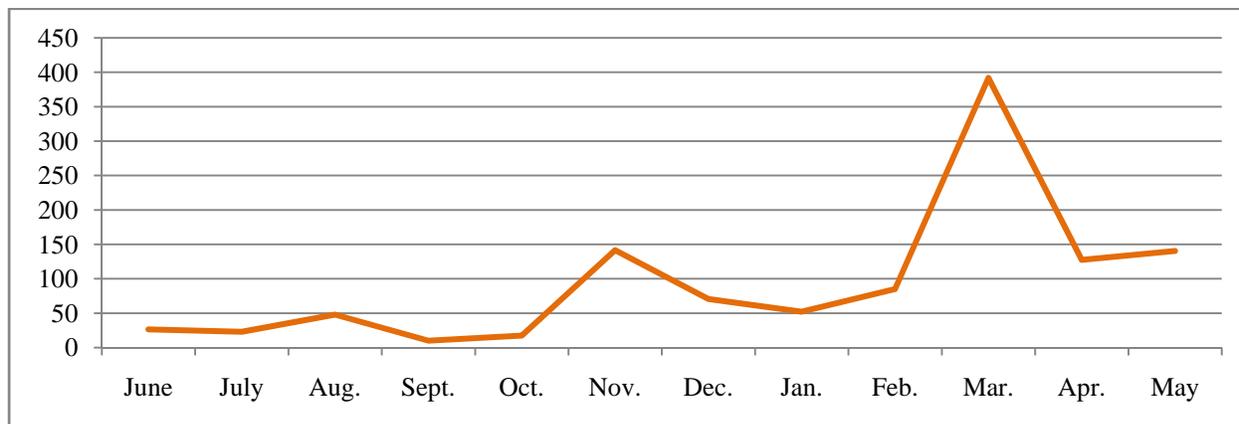
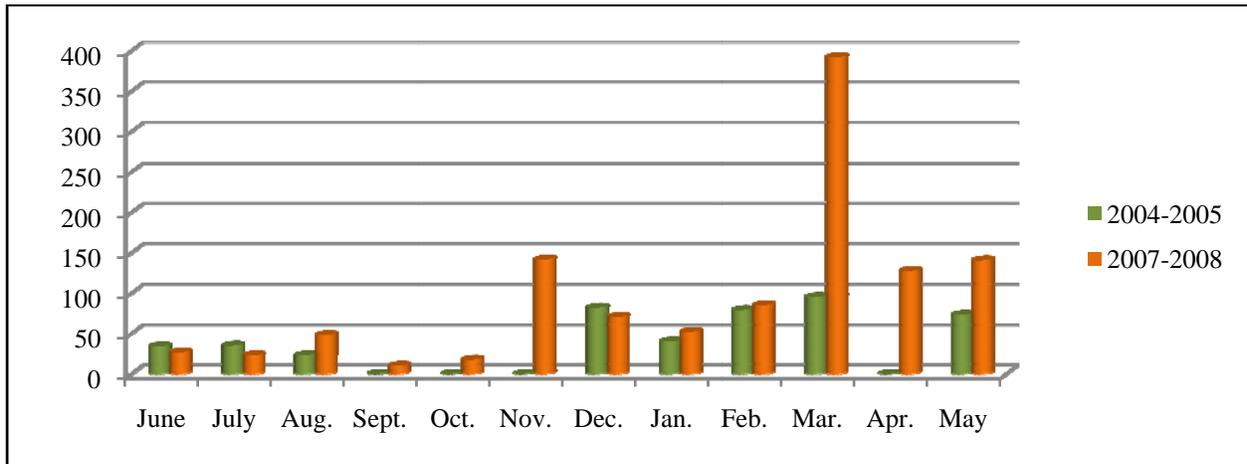


Table 4. Comparison of FNST use for 04/05 and 07/08 hiking seasons at SFCC State Park.

Year	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	TOTAL
2004-2005	34	35	23	0	0	0	82	40	79	95	0	73	461
2007-2008	27	23	48	10	18	141.5	70.5	52	85	392	127.5	140.5	1,134

Figure 4. Comparison of FNST visitation at SFFCC State Park for 04-05 and 07-08



Goldhead Branch State Park

2007-2008 Use

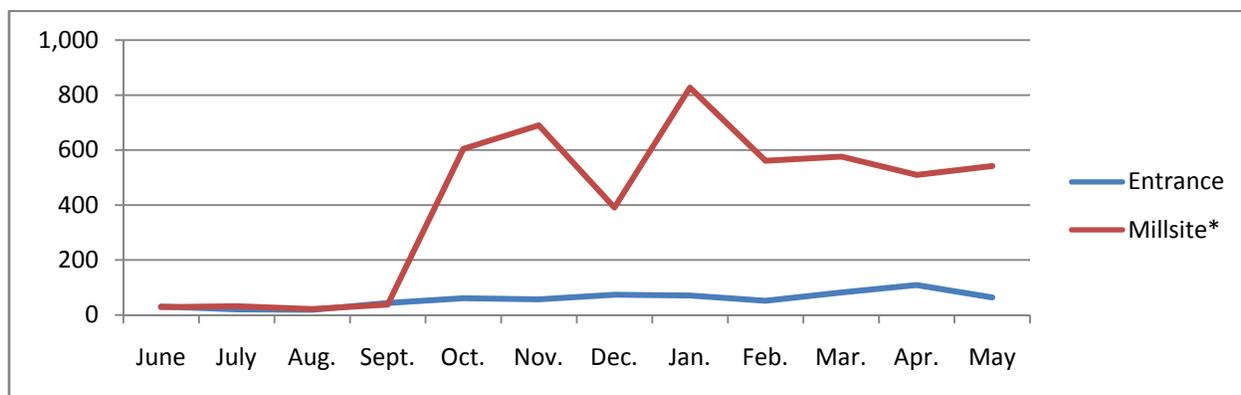
- Counter type
 - Entrance: Diamond Traffics Eye
- Counter related problems and solutions
 - The prescribed burn in August 2008 along the trail caused the distortion of reflector and further caused some irregularity of the data, which later was corrected through analysis.
- Trail conditions throughout the year
 - Trail condition was excellent throughout the entire year except the prescribed burn in the last study month which may affect the use of the trail.

Table 5. FNST visitation at Goldhead Branch State Park 2007-2008

Access Pt.	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	TOTAL
Entrance	31	21	19	44	61	57	74	71	52	82	109	64	685
Millsite^a	28	32	21	37	605	690	391	828	561	576	510	542	4,820
Monthly Total	59	53	40	81	666	747	465	899	613	658	619	606	5,506

^aData collected during the 2003-2004 study year

Figure 5. FNST visitation at Goldhead Branch State Park 2007-2008



*Data collected during the 2003-2004 study season

Questionnaire Results

(n = 42)

Access Points Surveyed

- Millsite trailhead

Socio-Demographics

- 53% of respondents were male
- 41% of respondents has a college degree or beyond
- 83% of respondents are employed outside the home
- 43% of respondents were between the ages of 18-29 years old
- 95% of respondents were white
- Household income was variable. The two largest percentages represented were \$100,000 or more (15.4%) and \$70,000-\$79,999 annually (15.4%).

Trip Characteristics

- 52% of visitors had never been to Goldhead Branch St. Park before
- 68% of visitors that had been to the park before, had visited 2-6 times in the past year
- 68% of visitors spent an hour or less on the trail
- 45% of visitors hiked/walked 1-2 miles during their visit
- 29% of visitors rated their experience a 10 out of 10
- 64% of visitors stated that hiking/walking was their primary reason for visiting the trail

- 31% of visitors stated that viewing scenery was the secondary reason for visiting the trail
- 45% of visitors were traveling with family
- 21% of visitors said they knew about the trail because they lived near by
- 48% of visitors lived within 30 miles of the park

Motivations

- Enjoy nature mean = 2.91
- Reduce Stress mean = 2.86
- Escape mean = 2.86

Destination Attractors & Settings

- A chance to see wildlife/birds mean = 2.80
- A chance to see natural water features mean = 2.88
- Wilderness and undisturbed nature mean = 2.88
- Travel along dirt or grass trails mean = 2.80
- Travel along loop trails mean = 2.52
- Encounter few than 6 groups per day mean = 2.36
- Travel in areas untouched by humans mean = 2.75

Acknowledgements

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