



Information on Campground Use and Visitor Characteristics

ABSTRACT: Registration data at campgrounds where fees are charged can provide information that will be useful in planning and design of facilities and in outdoor recreation research. Several available sources of information are described, and proposals for effective collection and use of registration data are suggested.

RICHARD L. BURY

Registration data from campgrounds where visitor fees are charged can provide a valuable incidental product: low cost information on campers and how they use the campgrounds. Public agencies are rapidly collecting a volume of registration

data as they place more and more campgrounds on a charge basis. For example, the California Region of the U. S. Forest Service now has 39 campgrounds that charge visitor fees, and by 1965 expects to have about 70 scattered throughout the State.

Data from registrations can be sampled and processed to provide such information as name and number of persons in the group, place of residence, time and length of visit, and type of vehicle and equipment for each visitor group. This information can help managers, planners, and researchers by helping them to follow trends of use and by providing objective measures of the amount and type of current use. Locations, designs, or natural features that are most desired by campers can also be determined by examining attributes of the most commonly used sites. Receipts might be used to compile panels of visitors to be interviewed later in full-scale surveys of recreation use. Information on the intensity and type of use can complement studies of the impact of recreation visitors on vegetation and soils.

SOME INFORMATION IS ALREADY AVAILABLE

Several recent 1-season or 1-year surveys of campground visitors and use are available for California campgrounds. For example, all major public recreation agencies in California turned over their registration information from 1958 to a special State planning committee. Information on length of visit, number of persons, and place of residence is available for each visitor

group. The data are also summarized for each campground, and attendance at each campground is tallied in several units of measurement.¹

A similar survey was based on registrations at nine U. S. Forest Service campgrounds operated by concessionaires during the summer of 1961.² These data show for each visitor group the length of visit, number of children, number of adults, dates and hours of arrival and departure, number and type of vehicles, and place of residence. Information is totaled for each campground and for all nine campgrounds together. Tables and frequency polygons are available for most basic distributions and many cross-classifications of the above characteristics. Results are reported separately for day-visitors and for campers. Daily attendance at each campground, expressed in several units of measurement, is also in table form.

Such information can describe the type and amount of use at particular sites, and can indicate how use differs between sites. Campground planners will find this kind of information helpful in designing facilities and sites to meet expected strains. For example, the 1961 survey showed that campgrounds near highways received a markedly different kind of use than campgrounds off the beaten path. Visitors at two campgrounds next to U. S. Highway 40 had fewer children, typically stayed only overnight, and traveled in smaller groups than people visiting campgrounds located away from a major highway. Less-accessible campgrounds were occupied mostly by 4-person families staying for either a weekend or an entire week.

Registration data can also be useful in comparing differences in use on an area during two or more time periods. For example, the 1958 and 1961 registrations contained comparable data for three campgrounds on the number of persons per group, place of residence, length of visit, day of arrival, and several measures of campground attendance. A preliminary analysis was made of differences and similarities in characteristics of visitors and attendance for these two years.³ Although trends cannot be reliably established with only two or three reference periods, some interesting items were noted. For example, two of the three campgrounds showed a greater number of out-of-state visitors during 1961; one showed a marked increase in number of visitors from a fast growing metropolitan county more

¹California Public Outdoor Recreation Plan Committee. California public outdoor recreation plan. v.II, pp. 198, 202. Sacramento. 1962.

²Bury, Richard L. A survey of visitors and use on U.S. Forest Service campgrounds in northern California, 1961. 1963. (Unpublished report on file at Pacific Southwest Forest & Range Expt. Sta., U.S. Forest Serv., Berkeley, Calif.)

³Bury, Richard L. A comparison of visitors and use at three campgrounds in northern California during 1958 and 1961. 1963. (Unpublished report on file at Pacific Southwest Forest & Range Expt. Sta., U.S. Forest Serv., Berkeley, Calif.)

than 150 miles away. Such differences could be watched closely to see if real trends develop over time.

NEW INFORMATION IS BECOMING AVAILABLE

Registration data routinely collected over several years can provide reliable trends in campground use and visitor characteristics. Although visitors are now registered by an attendant in most charge campgrounds, much of the recent and future registration data will be found on machine-vended tickets used at self-registration campgrounds.⁴

Given this development, let us look at machine-vended receipt tickets as a source of information about visitors and use. James W. Hall, formerly of this Station, made a preliminary analysis of tickets collected in the California Region during 1961.⁵ In the main, he found that visitors gave complete and legible information (92 percent or greater response to each item on tickets not left completely blank). However, a third of the tickets were not filled out at all. This omission presented a problem in analyzing length of stay and other items. Since managers think that these uncompleted tickets are probably attributable to visitors staying more than one night, the Region hopes to solve the problem temporarily by specially requesting the visitor to complete the entire form for each day of his stay. In the near future, it will design a new ticket format.

If tickets or receipts are to provide useful information, they must be handled in some simple but systematic way. In the California Region, for example, tickets from each campsite are collected each month by the campground attendant, squared off, secured with heavy staples, marked with the campsite number, boxed by campground, and then forwarded directly to this Station for analysis.

DEVELOPING AN OPERATIONAL METHOD

A 5-year pilot study for sampling fee receipts is being developed by this Station and the California Region. Its purposes are to determine the type of information desired, design instructional signs and registration forms to encourage maximum response, encourage suggestions from field personnel, devise a workable system for sampling tickets, and determine the most useful way of presenting results to managers, planners, and researchers.

⁴For a description and analysis of equipment and procedures used in charge campgrounds, see: U.S. Forest Service, California Region. Collecting user fees on National Forest recreation sites. Administrative study. 19 pp., illus. 1963. Also: Anon. To charge or not to charge: an analysis of methods of collection of recreation user fees. Parks and Recreation 45(6): 234-236. June 1962.

⁵Hall, James W. Response rates to a request for self-registration on machine vended receipts for campground fees. 1964. (Unpublished report on file at Pacific Southwest Forest & Range Expt. Sta., U.S. Forest Serv., Berkeley, Calif.)

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE
PACIFIC SOUTHWEST FOREST AND RANGE EXPERIMENT STATION
POST OFFICE BOX 245
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94701
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

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