



Expedited Approval for NPS-Sponsored Public Surveys

1 **Project Title |** Blue Ridge Parkway: Rocky Knob Area Visitor Survey 04/24/2008
 Submission Date:

2 **Abstract:** The National Park Service is seeking to conceptualize a sustainable tourism strategy for the Rocky Knob area of the Blue Ridge Parkway (Floyd and Patrick Counties, Southwestern Virginia). A multi-disciplinary team of researchers and extension specialists from Clemson University and Virginia Tech will collaborate with the NPS to help meet this goal. This research will (1) identify and inventory existing tourism assets, (2) determine tourism asset gaps/needs, and (3) develop specific recommendations/ alternatives for tourism marketing and sustainable economic development that enhance and respect the quality of life in the region. Research to support creation of a sustainable tourism strategy will be accomplished in two phases and actively involve key community stakeholders. This expedited approval request is for the first of two phases of research. As part of this phase of research an on-site survey will be conducted with approximately 400 visitors to Floyd and Patrick Counties adjacent to the Rocky Knob area of the Blue Ridge Parkway.
(not to exceed 150 words)

3 **Principal Investigator Contact Information**

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4 **Park or Program Liaison Contact Information**

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Project Information

5. **Park(s) Where Research is to be Conducted:**

6. **Survey Dates:** (mm/dd/yyyy) to (mm/dd/yyyy)

7. **Type of Information Collection Instrument (Check ALL that Apply)**

- Mail-Back Questionnaire **On-Site Questionnaire** Face-to-Face Interview Telephone Survey Focus Groups

Other (explain)

8. **Survey Justification:**
(Use as much space as needed; if necessary include additional explanation on a separate page.)

Legal Justification: The National Park Service Act of 1916, 38 Stat 535, 16 USC 1, et seq., requires that the National Park Service (NPS) preserve the national parks for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. At the field level, this means resource preservation, public education, facility maintenance and operation, and physical developments that are necessary for public use, health, and safety. This includes development of facilities that may enhance the enjoyment of visitors' experiences to parks and surrounding communities. Other federal rules (National Environmental Policy Act, 1969 and NPS guidelines) require visitor use data in impact assessment of development on users and resources as part of each park's general management plan.

Management Justification: The Blue Ridge Parkway connects Shenandoah National Park in Virginia with Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina/Tennessee. It is the most visited unit in the National Park System. Traversing 29 counties in two states, the Parkway is a scenic corridor that serves as a "window" on the region, providing access to scores of communities with cultural and natural resources that define this part of the country. An important component of the Parkway experience is stopping to visit local towns and communities along the route to enjoy the people, the natural and historic sites, and the local flavor that is an integral part of a visit to the area. To this end, the Parkway cooperates with the North Carolina and Virginia tourism commissions, as well as with adjacent counties, to promote an integrated tourism experience. The Parkway and its partners have identified the Rocky Knob Area and adjacent counties in southern Virginia as a high-priority area for cooperative tourism planning. The study described here will be used to inform the planning and development of a unique tourism centerpiece for the Rocky Knob Area and adjacent counties. This tourism centerpiece is intended to better serve park visitors by highlighting unique aspects of the Rocky Knob Area. In addition, the study is intended to provide information to the NPS regarding ways to encourage individuals visiting the surrounding area to visit the Parkway as well. Providing for visitor use and enjoyment is a component of National Park Service's statutory mission.

More specifically, information gathered from this survey will be used to (1) identify and inventory existing tourism assets, (2) determine tourism asset gaps/needs, and (3) develop specific recommendations/ alternatives for tourism marketing and sustainable economic development that enhance and respect the quality of life in the Rocky Knob area of the Blue Ridge Parkway. This information was requested by the NPS Blue Ridge Parkway

management staff to help assist with the development of a sustainable tourism/destination centerpiece strategy for the Rocky Knob Area of the Blue Ridge Parkway. The information obtained from this project will be incorporated into the park's planning process for a future tourism/destination centerpiece.

Literature Review: Previous studies conducted on use and tourism on the Blue Ridge Parkway include:

- (1) Blue Ridge Parkway Scenic Experience Project (S. Kask, L. Mathews, S. Stewart, L. Rotegard)
- (2) Factors of satisfaction: A case study of Explore Park (M. Uysal)
- (3) Tourists' perceptions, behaviors and motivations toward the Blue Ridge Parkway (R. Chen, G. Brothers, and L. Gustke)
- (4) A comprehensive travel and tourism study of the Blue Ridge Parkway (R. Chen, G. Brothers, and L. Gustke)
- (5) Visitor and vehicle carrying capacity of Blue Ridge Parkway. (R. Manning)
- (6) Blue Ridge National Heritage Area – Surry County Heritage Tourism Plan (NPS)
- (7) Gravity model formulation for an extensive National Parkway Site (G. Buhyoff, S. Williams, and D. Klemperer)
- (8) Measurement of the economic vitality of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (M. Evans, D. Davé, J. Stoddard, and I. Ha)
- (9) An economic analysis of forest products and nature-based tourism sectors in North Carolina (A. Murthy and F. Cabbage)
- (10) Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Study (VSP). (Littlejohn, Margaret) Fall 2007 & Summer 2008.

These studies were not intended or designed to collect information on tourism or tourism development in the Rocky Knob area of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Specifically, no information currently exists about existing tourism assets, their use, or tourism asset needs in the Rocky Knob area. The most recent VSP studies that were conducted last fall and this summer are being used to provide management information about visitor use, expectations, and opinions along the entire Parkway. The current study will examine these information gaps left by previous studies by specifically addressing tourism (via question content and study design) in the Rocky Knob area.

9. **Survey Methodology:**
(Use as much space as needed; if necessary include additional explanation on a separate page.)

(a) Respondent universe:

The sample universe will be all visitors (those people who live outside of Floyd and Patrick counties), 18 years and older, to the Rocky Knob area of the Blue Ridge Parkway, including Floyd and Patrick counties, Virginia, between July 1, 2008 and August 30, 2009.

(b) Sampling plan/procedures:

The surveys will be distributed on-site with visitors to Floyd and Patrick counties, VA, including the Rocky Knob area of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Survey participants will be recruited in person by having a trained interviewer ask visitors if they would complete a survey. Survey participants will be intercepted while stopped at Mabry Mill parking lot on the Blue Ridge Parkway, Devil's Backbone Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway, and along the main street in the business districts of Floyd and Stuart, VA. Participants will be instructed to complete the survey after they leave the Rocky Knob area and to return it using a self-addressed stamped envelope provided to them by the survey administrator.

All surveys will be self-administered. However, a trained surveyor will randomly select respondents and will be available to assist respondents if

needed. The surveyor will distribute the surveys at the intercept locations noted above. A systematic sampling protocol of asking every 5th visitor group to participate, then choosing the person from this group with the most recent birthday will be used to select survey respondents. Each respondent will be asked a screening question to prevent multiple responses from the same visitor. A surveyor will station him/herself at one of the intercept locations at normal times for visitor use. The surveyor will contact a total of 570 visitors to ask them to participate in the study, and 400 are expected to agree to participate.

Research shows that there is a systematic tendency for the last categories in questions with long lists to have higher item non-response because they are near the end of the list. A standard way to deal with this is to have two versions of the survey that reverses the order of items in the list. This approach will be used here. Two versions of the survey will be used. These versions will be the same in every respect other than the order of items listed in Questions 9, 10, 12, and 15. The order of items appearing in these questions will be reversed. The version of the survey distributed will be alternated so that equal number of respondents will receive each version.

(c) Instrument administration:

The survey administration for this study is based upon Dillman's Tailored Design Method (TDM). The TDM has been shown to increase response rates, improve accuracy, and reduce cost and burden hours. The TDM has been successfully used in over 180 previous NPS studies.

The initial contact with visitors to explain the study and determine if visitors are interested in participating (see script below) takes approximately 1 minute. The number of visitor groups who refuse are recorded and used in calculating response rates. Visitors who voluntarily agree to participate in the study are verbally given a short front-end interview (1 additional minute) to collect information used in a non-response bias check. They are also asked to record their name, address and phone number/email address. If a group agrees to participate, the researcher will give the survey to the individual within the group who has the next birthday. Participants will be given a stamped, addressed questionnaire to complete and return. Participants will be mailed a thank you/reminder post card 11 working days after the initial contact. If the thank you/reminder post card proves unsuccessful, a reminder letter with a stamped, addressed replacement questionnaire will be sent 21 working days after the initial contact. A second reminder letter will be mailed after 35 working days with a stamped, addressed questionnaire. Visitors to Floyd and Patrick Counties, Virginia will be approached by a surveyor and asked to participate in the study. The surveyor will use the following script to guide this introduction:

Surveyor Script (italicized text):

Hi, my name is _____. I'm from Clemson University. We're conducting a study for the National Park Service and the Blue Ridge Parkway to gather information about tourism in Floyd and Patrick Counties of Virginia. If you take a mail-back questionnaire, we will want you to send it back to us completed. It takes about 15 minutes to complete after your visit. Would you be willing to fill out a questionnaire after you leave today and mail it back? Participation is voluntary and your responses will be anonymous.

If No: OK. Thank you for your time so far. Have a good day.

If Yes: Thank you. Do you live outside of Floyd or Patrick counties?

If Yes: OK. Here's the survey for you to complete. So the we can thank you (and remind you to mail back the questionnaire), please provide your name, address and phone number. Thank you. Be sure to mail the questionnaire—your opinions are important!

If No: OK. Thank you for agreeing to participate, but we're only surveying visitors who live outside of these counties. Thank you for your time so far.

(d) Expected response rate/confidence levels:

Based on the park's visitation data and the number of days of surveying, approximately 570 groups will be contacted over the sampling period, and it is expected that approximately 513 of these will accept the questionnaires, and 400 will return them. This produces an overall response rate of 74%. This expected response rate is based upon similar study response rates (Cuyahoga Valley NP 2005, 76% and Zion NP 2006, 74%, Blue Ridge Parkway 2007 74%).

Study findings are estimated to be accurate within 5 percentage points, based on a sample size of approximately 400 surveys and using a 95% confidence level.

(e) Strategies for dealing with potential non-response bias:

The number, date and time of refusals will be recorded and reported on a survey log. Non-response bias will be examined by comparing selected observable characteristics of the sample population with characteristics observed and recorded in every group contacted (e.g., gender, group size, presence or absence of children). If given, the reasons for refusals (e.g., lack of time, not interested, language, etc.) will also be noted. The results of the check for non-response bias will be reported, and implications for interpretation of the results (if any) will be discussed.

(f) Description of any pre-testing and peer review of the methods and/or instrument (recommended):

The questions included in these surveys have been designed and reviewed by the Principal Investigator, research staff and graduate students, and park and regional staff, and are similar to questions used in several other park or tourism surveys. Findings from these types of questions have been used by park and tourism managers and have been published in the peer-reviewed scientific literature.

10. **Total Number of Expected Respondents:** 11 **Estimated Time to Complete Instrument (mins.):** 12 **Total Burden Hours:**

13. **Reporting Plan:** The results of this information collection activity will be presented in an internal agency report and will be available upon request. The key estimates that will be derived from the data collected will be descriptive in nature, primarily measures of central tendency (mean and median), dispersion (standard deviation), and frequency distributions. A copy of the technical study report will be archived with the Social Science Program of the National Park Service.