

Response to comment received from Jean Q Public, 12/12/12

0596-0110

This document summarizes the main points of the comment and responds to each

1. Author questions if 60,000 public contacts are needed

The 60,000 public contacts are needed to obtain reliable estimates of recreation use of National Forests and Grasslands. The total includes a portion that choose not to participate after finding out about the purpose of the survey, and a portion to whom only a few questions are addressed. The end result is a survey that reaches less than 1/10 of 1 percent of recreation visitors on the forests surveyed. A smaller sample size would be insufficient to adequately describe visit characteristics such as demographics, activity patterns, travel distances, and other data that are used in recreation and forest planning processes.

2. Author expresses concern that the data and results are shared freely with the public

The results of the NVUM survey are available to the general public at <http://apps.fs.usda.gov/nrm/nvum/results>. In addition to results, anyone can request a copy of the individual recreation responses through that application. The data in the application are updated as soon as new results and analyses are completed.

3. Author has concerns about efficiency of the methodology

Onsite interviewers are doing two things concurrently – calibrating traffic counters and interviewing exiting traffic. Both parts are needed to reach the two goals of the NVUM program: obtaining reliable visitation estimates, and unbiased representation of key characteristics of the visitation. To increase the overall efficiency of the programs funding in meeting its goals, the sampling rates for more popular areas are greater. The program also makes use of visitation-related information that the agency collects, including information on fee receipts, concessionaire reports, reservations for developed sites, and permanent traffic counters (where available). Stratification of the sample also increases the efficiency and effectiveness of the program.

4. Author expresses the opinion that a 5-, 10-, or 20-year cycle is a sufficient frequency for the survey

On any one National Forest, the NVUM survey is conducted once per 5 years. To minimize the overall costs of the process, the survey is staggered so that about 1/5 of the National Forests are completing the fieldwork each year. The 5-year cycle is consistent with forest planning cycles and with various biophysical monitoring activities. Less frequent sampling would hinder the agency in developing and adjusting forest plans to meet the needs of the American people.

5. Author questions the use of the data and results

Results from the NVUM program are used extensively in forest planning documents. As well, results are part of the process used in allocating funding across forest units, in deciding among various project alternatives, in working with private sector partners in providing and maintaining quality recreation opportunities, and in agency required reporting to Congress.

6. Author expresses opinion that complaint letters may suffice to guide management plans.

Complaint letters can be a valuable guide to management, particularly in identifying areas of poor service or weakness. However, they typically provide no information about the overall volume of recreation visitation, nor do they provide information about many of the aspects of visitation that drive planning and management decisions. Finally, they are not reliable indicators about what a provider is doing well.