



PROGRAMMATIC REVIEW AND CLEARANCE PROCESS FOR NPS-SPONSORED PUBLIC SURVEYS



The scope of the Programmatic Review and Clearance Process for NPS-Sponsored Public Surveys is limited and will only include individual surveys of park visitors, potential park visitors, and residents of communities near parks. Use of the programmatic review will be limited to non-controversial surveys of park visitors, potential park visitors, and/or residents of communities near parks that are not likely to include topics of significant interest in the review process. Additionally, this process is limited to non-controversial information collections that do not attract attention to significant, sensitive, or political issues. Examples of significant, sensitive, or political issues include: seeking opinions regarding political figures; obtaining citizen feedback related to high-visibility or high-impact issues like the reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone National Park, the delisting of specific Endangered Species, or drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

SUBMISSION DATE:6-14-2017

PROJECT TITLE: Wrangell-St. Elias Backcountry Monitoring Study

ABSTRACT: (not to exceed 150 words)

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve (WRST) is developing a Backcountry and Wilderness Stewardship Plan (BWSP) to guide management of its backcountry, wilderness character, and related resources. The BWSP will identify management objectives related to visitor experiences and will include indicators, standards, and management actions designed to protect high-quality experiences and prevent degradation of resource conditions. A mail-back questionnaire will be used to collect information.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR CONTACT INFORMATION:

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PROJECT INFORMATION:

Where will the collection take place? Wrangell-St. Elias National Park

Sampling Period Start Date: July 1, 2017 Sampling Period End Date: October , 2018

Type of Information Collection Instrument: (Check ALL that Apply)

- Mail-Back Questionnaire Face-to-Face Interview Focus Groups
 On-Site Questionnaire Telephone Survey
 Other (List)

Will an electronic device be used to collect information? No Yes - Type of Device:

SURVEY JUSTIFICATION:

Social science research in support of park planning and management is mandated in the NPS Management Policies 2006 (Section 8.11.1, "Social Science Studies"). The NPS pursues a policy that facilitates social science studies in support of the NPS mission to protect resources and enhance the enjoyment of present and future generations (National Park Service Act of 1916, 38 Stat 535, 16 USC 1, et seq.). NPS policy mandates that social science research will be used to provide an understanding of park visitors, the non-visiting public, gateway communities and regions, and human interactions with park resources. Such studies are needed to provide a scientific basis for park planning and development.

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve (WRST) has experienced increased backcountry visitation over the past decade. In other areas similar to this location, studies have shown that higher use is often correlated with a degraded quality of visitor experiences and increased biophysical and cultural resource impacts. The need to monitor experiential and resource issues has become a major focus of backcountry stewardship management and planning. Backcountry and Wilderness Stewardship Planning (BWSP) process began in spring 2015 and is expected to be complete in 2018. The BWSP will amend the WRST 1986 General Management Plan. It will help park staff guide programs and set priorities for resources stewardship and science, visitor use, facilities and operations for specific areas of the WRST backcountry and wilderness for the next 20 years. The WRST Backcountry and Wilderness Stewardship Plan (BWSP) will be used to:

- 1) guide management of its backcountry
- 2) identify desired future conditions;
- 3) provide comprehensive management prescriptions;
- 4) develop specific management indicators and standards to protect wilderness character and protect opportunities for high quality visitor experiences; and
- 5) identify management tools to address recreational and commercial uses and provide for customary and traditional subsistence activities.

This proposed information collection will address complex issues related to visitor use patterns and attitudes that can be used to address visitor impact problems. Because WRST does not currently require backcountry use permits, managers and planners have relied on visitor use information provided by commercial air taxi operators and backcountry lodges as part of their Commercial Use Authorizations (CUAs). There is limited information about visitor use levels, destinations,

and activities. The results of this collection will attempt to systematically provide information that will be directly applicable to management decisions.

Park managers and planners have requested this study to learn more about visitors' experiences and expectation during their backcountry trips in WRST. The topics will include:

- Perceived crowding
- Reported levels of social or natural resource impacts.
- Tolerance levels towards social or natural resource impacts.

An on-site survey will be used to collect information from visitors between May and October 2017.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY:

(A) Respondent Universe:

The respondent universe for this collection will consist of two respondent categories that will include all adult groups (ages 18 and older) engaged in WRST backcountry trips during the study period (April through October 2017). The study will survey **one visitor from each group** taking a trip.

- **Category 1:** Groups using commercial services to access the backcountry (e.g., air taxis, guides, or backcountry lodges).
- **Category 2:** Groups contacting NPS at the park visitor center or ranger stations to plan their trips (and do not plan to use commercial services to access the backcountry).

(B) Sampling Plan / Procedures:

The park has limited information about the number of backcountry trips into WRST; currently available information is unsystematically collected from commercial air taxi reports and visitor center contacts. Based on this information, NPS estimates that there are about 500 groups who take trips over the course of a year, and of this about 450 (90%) stay in commercial backcountry lodges or use commercial air taxi services to access the backcountry.

An estimated 50 groups (10%) do not use these commercial services during their backcountry trips. Of these, an estimated 30 may contact NPS at the visitor center or ranger station while planning trips.

The study will attempt to invite participation from all backcountry groups accessing WRST during the study period (April 2017 through March 2018). Potential respondents in the two categories identified above, will be invited to participate by two different methods that are described below.

Respondent category	Method for inviting	Estimated
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	participation in the survey	Number of Groups
Category 1: Commercial air taxi services or backcountry lodges	In-person contact with commercial air taxi services or backcountry lodges	450
Category 2: Visitor Center and NPS staff Contacts	In-person contact with NPS staff at the Copper Center or Kennecott Visitor Centers, or the Slana Ranger Station	30
	Total	480

Category 1:

Twelve air taxi operators and seven backcountry lodges have commercial use authorizations to operate in WRST. These operators are estimated to provide access to 90% (n= 450) of all WRST backcountry groups. These operators will invite every backcountry group they bring into WRST to participate in the study throughout the study period. The operators will be trained in survey protocol and distribution. Each operator will have a supply of survey packets in a Ziploc bag that will include: a survey, instructions, a self-addressed and return envelope (SASE), and a pencil. A packet will be given to one person in each group aboard the vessel. The passengers will be instructed to complete the questionnaire on the last night of their trip and will be reminded return in on the boat ride back to the mainland. It is our experience that backcountry groups tend to have the greatest amount of time to complete surveys when they are in camp on the last night of their trip, or while waiting for the air taxi to take them back to the mainland. All air taxis will have additional questionnaires on-board to replace any lost instruments to be completed as needed.

The operators will keep a log of all groups contacted throughout the study period; this will include basic information from those accepting a survey packet as well as those who refuse. This log will be used to record group size, backcountry destination(s), dates of trip, and planned activities (e.g., hunting, rafting, backpacking, etc.) to compare to those who decide to participate vs. those who refuse. The survey will be coded to track the source of the survey (the name of the commercial service provider).

Category 2:

All Backpackers, pack rafters, or river runners that stop at the Copper Center Visitor Center, Kennecott Visitor Center, and Slana Ranger Station requesting help planning their backcountry trips will be asked to participate in the study. It is expected that at least 30 groups will ask NPS staff for help planning their backcountry trip during the sampling period. The non-response check questions will be used to determine anticipated start and end dates. If the start date is outside the sample period the visitor will not be given a survey. All visitors receiving a survey packet will be asked at least two salient questions from the survey to attempt to assess any bias. Any visitors only “planning” but will not complete a trip during the study period will be asked the non-response check questions as well.

The staff member will keep a log of all contacted groups throughout the study period; this will include basic information from those accepting a packet, those who refuse and those who are deemed ineligible. This log will include group size, backcountry destination(s), and primary activity (e.g., hunting, rafting, backpacking, etc.) and responses to the non-response bias check questions. Surveys will be coded to track the source of the survey (the two visitor centers vs. the ranger station).

Table 1: Estimated Number of Visitor Contacts during Sampling Period

Visitor Contacts	Number during Sampling Period					
	June	July	August	September	October	TOTAL
Category 1	30	150	150	100	20	450
Category 2	5	10	10	5	0	30
Total	35	160	160	105	20	480

(C) Instrument Administration:

Category 1:

The following script will be used by the lodge and air taxi operators during the initial contact with all visitors:

“We’re helping the National Park Service conduct a study for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park to better understand visitor experience during their backcountry trips their perceptions of conditions, and opinions toward management actions to address impacts. Your participation is voluntary and all responses are anonymous. Would you be willing to take about 7 minutes to complete a survey on the last day of your backcountry trip?”

⇒If YES:

“Thank you. Here is the survey and instructions on how to complete the survey and mail it back to NPS at the end of your trip when you leave the backcountry. As discussed in the instructions on the first page, we only need one member of your group to complete the survey. In order to ensure a random sample, please identify the person in your group who most recently celebrated a birthday (and is at least 18 years old). They will be the person designated to complete the survey.”

“All instructions for completing the questionnaire are self-explanatory. The survey is about two pages long.”

⇒If NO:

“Thank you. I have three quick questions to ask you.”

For all groups contacted, the air taxi operator or lodge staff will then ask and record:

1. How many people are in your group?
2. What is your backcountry destination and pick-up location?
3. What day will you enter and exit the backcountry?
4. What is the primary activity you will do in the backcountry?

Category 2:

The following script will be used by the NPS staff at the visitor centers and ranger station during the initial contact with all visitors:

“The National Park Service is conducting a study for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park to better understand visitor experience during their backcountry trips their perceptions of conditions, and opinions toward management actions to address impacts. Your Participation is voluntary and all responses are anonymous. Would you be willing to take about 7 minutes to complete a survey on the last day of your backcountry trip?”

⇒If YES:

“Thank you. Here is the survey and instructions on how to complete the survey and mail it back to NPS at the end of your trip when you leave the backcountry. As discussed in the instructions on the first page, we only need one member of your group to complete the survey. In order to ensure a random sample, please identify the person in your group who most recently celebrated a birthday (and is at least 18 years old). They will be the person designated to complete the survey.”

“All instructions for completing the questionnaire are self-explanatory. The survey is about two pages long.”

⇒If NO:

“Thank you. I have three quick questions to ask you.”

For all groups contacted, NPS staff will then ask and record the responses to the following questions:

1. *How many people are in your group?*
2. *What is your backcountry destination and pick-up location?*
3. *What day will you enter and exit the backcountry?*
4. *What is the primary activity you will do in the backcountry?*

(D) Expected Response Rate / Confidence Level:

We anticipate that a total of 480 groups will be asked to participate in the survey. Of these, we estimate that about 90% (n=432) in Category 1 will be contacted by air taxi operators and lodges and the remaining 10% (n=48) in Category 2 will be contacted by NPS staff. Based on previous surveys of Alaskan backcountry users, we estimate 80% of groups in both Category 1 (n=346) and Category 2 (n=38) will agree to participate by accepting the survey packet during the initial contact (see table below).

We anticipate that approximately 55% (n= 211)of all visitor accepting the invitation will return a completed questionnaire Category 1 (n=190) and Category 2 (n=21), therefore we expect a return rate of about 211 completed surveys.

Intercept Location	On-site and On-line Contacts				
	Initial Contacts	Acceptance 80%	Non-respondents (20%)	Non-response survey 80%	Hard Refusals 20%
Category 1	432	346	86	69	14
Category 2	48	38	10	8	2
	480	0	96	0	0

	Mail Back Survey		
	Accepted invitation	Returned Questionnaires 55%	Non-respondents ¹ 45%
Category 1	346	190	156
Category 2	38	21	17
	0	0	0

Confidence intervals provide a method for estimating population values from sample statistics. Based on the survey sample sizes, there will be 95 percent confidence that the survey findings will be accurate to within 5 percentage points. The proposed sample size will be adequate for bivariate comparisons and more sophisticated multivariate analysis. For dichotomous response variables, estimates will be accurate within the margins of error and confidence intervals will be somewhat larger for questions with more than two response categories.

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

Categories 1 and 2: NPS staff and commercial service providers will collect information from all visitors contacted through several verbal questions, regardless of whether they agree to participate. The visitors are contracting with air taxi operators to take trips into the park, and thus must communicate their primary activity (e.g., hunting, backpacking, rafting), group size, entry destination, exit location, and dates of travel. Likewise, visitors who are enquiring about trips into the backcountry at NPS visitor centers and ranger stations will be providing that information in asking for NPS with advice about the trip they are planning. The air taxi operators and NPS staff will simply keep track of that information in a log of all trips that will include:

- Group size
- Entry destination (trailhead, launch, or airstrip)
- Exit location (trailhead, launch, or airstrip)
- Entry and exit dates
- Primary activity

These comparisons can help estimate non-response bias for the shared variables, and offer opportunities to weight data by those variables if differences between respondents and non-respondents are statistically significant.

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

¹ The non-response check during the initial contact will be used to make an overall comparison between the respondents to the non-respondents.
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The survey uses well-known and commonly-used questions in backcountry visitor surveys (Vaske, 2008); most are slightly adapted from questions in NPS's Pool of Known Questions for OMB. The order of questions follows from strategies that have been used on dozens of backcountry surveys conducted by the study researchers since 1976. Peer review and pre-testing was limited to NPS-staff, consultants, a small sample (n=5) of Alaskan backcountry users and four additional NPS staff at other Alaskan parks in April 2017 to inform the response burden estimates below. Based on an informal pre-test and NPS peer-review, the users required as few as 5 minutes and as many as 11 to complete the questionnaire, therefore we have estimated that it will take an average of seven minutes per respondent to complete the questionnaire.

BURDEN ESTIMATES:

The combined total burden for this collection is estimated to be 52 hours. We plan to contact a total of 480 potential participants for this collection. We anticipate that of all the visitors invited to participate 80% (n=384) will agree and accept a survey packet. During the initial contact, in addition to being asked to participate in the study, all visitors will be asked to respond to the non-response bias check questions (listed above). The initial contact to explain the study and to administer the non-response bias check is anticipated to take at least three minutes (384 x 3 minutes = 19 hours). We expect of the ~20% (n=96) refusing to participate in the study only 77 (80%) will answer the non-response bias check questions (77 x 3 minutes = 4 hours). For those individuals, we will only record their reason for refusal and ask them to answer the non-response check question. For both survey efforts, we have estimated respondent burdens as follows:

- ❖ **19 hours** - Three minutes will be used to complete the initial contact with all visitors (n=461) to explain the study and to administer the non-response survey (this includes the visitors refusing to take a survey packet but agree to and respond to the non-response check questions)

The time to complete and return the survey instrument is estimated to be at least seven minutes. We are expecting to receive 215 completed surveys from both groups (211 x 7 minutes = 25 hours). We have estimated that 173 of the visitors accepting a survey during the initial on-site contact will not return the survey by the end of the collection.

- ❖ **25 Hours** - Seven minutes will be used to complete and return the mail back questionnaire

Combined: Categories 1 and 2	Responses	Completion Time * (minutes)	Estimated Burden Hours
Initial contact and non-response check for all visitors contacted	461	3	19
Returned and completed questionnaire	211	7	25
Total burden requested under this ICR:	0	-	0

REPORTING PLAN:

The study results will be presented in an internal report for park managers. Results of statistical analyses and summary statistics will be compiled (e.g. response frequencies, measures of central tendency, correlations, Chi-square, analysis of variance, factor analysis, and scale reliability analysis, as appropriate). Final reporting will be delivered to park managers in hard copy and electronic formats, and posted as a Natural Resource Data Series in the NPS Data Store (<https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/>) as required by the NPS Programmatic Review Process.

NOTICES

Privacy Act Statement

General: This information is provided pursuant to Public Law 93-579 (Privacy Act of 1974), December 21, 1984, for individuals completing this form.

Authority: National Park Service Research mandate (54 USC 100702)

Purpose and Uses: This information will be used by The NPS Information Collections Coordinator to ensure appropriate documentation of information collections conducted in areas managed by or that are sponsored by the National Park Service.

Effects of Nondisclosure: Providing information is mandatory to submit Information Collection Requests to Programmatic Review Process.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement

We are collecting this information subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. 3501) and is authorized by the National Park Service Research mandate (54 USC 100702). This information will be used by The NPS Information Collections Coordinator to ensure appropriate documentation of information collections conducted in areas managed by or that are sponsored by the National Park Service. All parts of the form must be completed in order for your request to be considered. We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to, this or any other Federal agency-sponsored information collection unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. OMB has reviewed and approved The National Park Service Programmatic Review Process and assigned OMB Control Number 1024-0224.

Estimated Burden Statement

Public Reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 60 minutes per collection, including the time it takes for reviewing instructions, gathering information and completing and reviewing the form. This time does not include the editorial time required to finalize the submission. Comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form should be sent to the Information Collection Clearance Coordinator, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Dr., Fort Collins, CO 80525.