

Focus Group Discussion Guide

At the start of the focus group session, each participant receives a survey packet, pencil and digital audio device with headphones

Moderator Introduction:

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in our focus group discussion this afternoon. My name is Mike Welsh and I’m working with a team of researchers on a study for the National Park Service on noise in national parks. We are currently in the process of designing a survey that will help park managers understand visitor perceptions of sounds in parks. We will be conducting a series of eight focus groups to help us to refine the questions that we will use in the survey. Today we are going to ask you to answer a series of questions and after each question we will have short discussions about your impressions. You will be asked to use the headphones to listen to audio recordings that will coincide with a series of questions. We anticipate that this session will not take more than 2 hours today. Your responses and feedback will help us make sure the survey questions are clear and can be easily answered by other park visitors. I would like you to know that your participation is voluntary and all of your responses will be anonymous and will only be used to develop the questions for the final version of an NPS Sound Survey. Are there any questions before we begin?”

PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT STATEMENT: The National Park Service is authorized by 54 U.S.C. 100070 to collect this information. This collection involves 8 focus group sessions. Information from the groups will be used to design a survey that will help park managers to understand visitor perceptions of sound in [park name]. Response to this request is voluntary. No action may be taken against you for refusing to supply the information requested. The permanent data connected with this collection will be anonymous. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

BURDEN ESTIMATE: The public reporting for this collection is estimated to be 2 hours per focus group participant. Direct comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of this form to: Frank Turina, Night Skies and Natural Sounds Division, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive, Fort Collins, CO 80525, frank_turina@nps.gov (email).

Note to Reviewer: This survey will be self-guided. The respondent will independently read and answer each survey question and follow the instructions of the moderator. The text in the shaded boxes is for the purpose of the review and will not appear on the final version of the survey.

Moderator:

"Please turn to the first page of the packet, read the information provided and answer the question on first page. Feel free to make notes about any questions or comments you have about the information on the page as well. Please do not go to the next page when you are finished because we would like to discuss your reactions and responses to this question."

The purpose of the first section is to establish a common definition for natural sounds and soundscapes. Question 1 encourages respondents to reflect on the definition and examples and relate them to their own visit/experience.

Section 1 - Introduction

In this survey we will be discussing **soundscapes** in National Parks. A soundscape is all of the sounds in an environment that can be perceived by humans. These include **natural sounds**, such as:

- Leaves rustling in the wind
- Moving water
- Birds and other wildlife

- 1) What types of natural sounds did you experience during your current visit to [Park Name]? Please list in the space provided

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Moderator:

"We would like to take a few minutes to go around the room and discuss your responses."

Moderator Questions:

1. Is there anything about the definition of soundscapes that is unclear or confusing?
2. What about the examples of natural sounds?
3. What types of natural sounds did people write down for question 1?

"Please turn to the next page of the packet, read the information provided and answer the question. Please pause when you are finished so we can discuss your reactions and responses."

The purpose of this section is to establish a common definition for noise. The impact of noise on natural soundscapes is fundamental to the survey. Question 2 encourages respondents to reflect on the definition and examples and relate them to their own visit/experience.

Section 2 - Noise

Park soundscapes can also include man-made sounds, or **noise**.
Common sources of noise in National Parks include:

- Aircraft
- Cars, motorcycles and other vehicles
- Maintenance and construction equipment
- Visitor voices and activities are also a source of noise.

2. What types of noise did you experience during your current visit to [Park Name]?

Moderator:

"We would like to take a few minutes to go around the room and discuss your responses."

Moderator Questions:

1. *Is there anything unclear or confusing about the text and examples provided?*
2. *What types of noise types did people write down for question 2?*

*"Next we are going to ask you to use your headphones and audio devices to listen to a 60 second audio clip of sounds in the park. After 60 seconds you will hear a chime, please press **STOP** to end the recording, read the instructions provided and answer question 3. Please pause when you are finished so we can discuss your reactions and responses."*

In this section respondents are introduced and oriented to the audio recording format that will form the basis of the valuation choice questions. First, Question 3 asks respondents to report reactions to the clips in an open-ended manner.

3. What are the sounds you heard? Please describe in the space provided.

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Moderator:

"We would like to take a few minutes to go around the room and discuss your responses."

Moderator Questions:

1. *What natural sounds did people identify in the recording?*
2. *What noises did people identify in the recording?*
3. *How did this recording compare to what you experienced in the park today?*

"Please turn to the next page of the packet, read the information provided and answer the question. Please pause when you are finished so we can discuss your reactions and responses."

At this point the definitions are provided for relevant noise characteristics that may be experimentally varied in the valuation choice questions. Question 4 is intended to help us understand how the respondent translates the noises that were featured in the audio recording into these attributes through a series of rating scales. The recording will have three prominent noises characteristics (listed below) that obscure natural sounds.

Section 2: Noise (cont.)

Noises are often described in terms of three characteristics:

- **Volume:** how loud is the noise?
- **Frequency:** is the pitch or tone low or high?
- **Duration:** how long does the noise last?

4) Please choose three noises you heard in the recording and rate each in terms of the following the characteristics – Volume, Frequency, and Duration. (Write the name of the noises in the first column in each table, then circle one number in each row to describe the noise)

| | | NOISE | VERY LOW | LOW | MEDIUM | HIGH | VERY HIGH |
|----------------------|---|-------|----------|-----|--------|------|-----------|
| <u>Volume</u> | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | 2 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | 3 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | NOISE | VERY LOW | LOW | MEDIUM | HIGH | VERY HIGH |
|-------------------------|---|-------|----------|-----|--------|------|-----------|
| <u>Frequency</u> | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | 2 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | 3 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | NOISE | VERY SHORT | SHORT | MEDIUM | LONG | VERY LONG |
|------------------------|---|-------|------------|-------|--------|------|-----------|
| <u>Duration</u> | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | 2 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | 3 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

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Moderator:

"We would like to take a few minutes to go around the room and discuss your responses."

Moderator Questions:

1. *Is there anything unclear about the information describing Volume? Frequency? Duration?"*
2. *Are there other noise characteristics, not mentioned, that are important?"*
3. *Let's go around the room - start with the first noise you listed, how did you rate: volume, frequency and duration, and why?*

"Please turn to the next page of the packet, read the information provided and answer the question."

Please pause when you are finished so we can discuss your reactions and responses.”

In this section the respondents are introduced to potential adverse impacts of noise in a general way. Question 5 asks respondents to reflect on whether any such impacts were experienced during their visit.

SECTION 3: Noise Impacts

- Noise can affect park visitors’ ability to appreciate natural sounds and enjoy scenery.
 - It has been determined that that some noises can be disruptive to wildlife in terms of finding habitat, mating and hunting for food.
- 5) Thinking about the natural sounds that you heard during your current visit to [Park Name] from Question 1 and the noises that you heard from Question 2, did noise affect your visit in any way?

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Moderator:

“We would like to take a few minutes to go around the room and discuss your responses.”

Moderator Questions:

1. *Are there other noise impacts that are not listed here?*
2. *How many people indicated that noise did affect their visit today?*
3. *Let’s go around- how specifically did it affect your visit?*

“Please turn to the next page of the packet, read the information provided and answer the question. Please pause when you are finished so we can discuss your reactions and responses.”

In this section a program to reduce noise impacts is introduced and explained. This is the mechanism for the change respondents will be asked to evaluate in the choice questions. Questions 6 and 7 are designed to engage the respondent on two critical aspects of the valuation scenario (1) program framing and (2) payment vehicle.

SECTION 4: Reducing Noise Impacts

The National Park Service is considering a program to reduce noise impacts in [Park Name]. This would be accomplished through a series of actions, including:

- Retrofitting noisy machinery
- Purchasing new equipment and vehicles
- Limiting overflights for park management purposes
- Scheduling noisy activities to avoid conflicts with visitors

6) How effective do you think a program like this would be in reducing noise impacts?
(CIRCLE ONE NUMBER)

- 1 NOT EFFECTIVE
- 2 SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE
- 3 VERY EFFECTIVE

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Moderator:

"We would like to take a few minutes to go around the room and discuss your responses."

Moderator Questions:

- 1. In general, does implementing a program to reduce noise seem like an important thing to do? Why or why not?*
- 2. How did people respond to question 6 about the effectiveness of the program? Why?*

"Please turn to the next page of the packet, read the information provided and answer the question. Please pause when you are finished so we can discuss your reactions and responses."

Note to Reviewer: This is the hypothetical scenario that will be used to elicit respondent values for reducing noise impacts. While the features are based in part on the NPS 'Quiet Parks Program' it does not necessarily reflect specific actions that any one park may implement, or how those measures would be paid for.

SECTION 4: Reducing Noise Impacts (cont.)

Purchasing new equipment and changing park management practices and schedules to reduce noise impacts would be costly. To pay for the program, [Park Name] would establish a "special program fee". The fee would be collected upon entrance to the park and apply to all adult visitors, including annual pass holders.

The exact fee amount would depend on what noise impacts are targeted by the program, but would range between **\$2 and \$15 per visitor**.

7) How important do you think the cost of a noise reduction program to visitors is when deciding what noise impacts to target? (CIRCLE ONE NUMBER)

- 1 NOT IMPORTANT
- 2 SOMEWHAT IMPORTANY
- 3 VERY IMPORTANT

STOP. PLEASE DO NOT TURN PAGE UNTIL INSTRUCTED TO DO SO.

Moderator:

"We would like to take a few minutes to go around the room and discuss your responses."

Moderator Questions:

1. *What are people's reactions to this proposal for how a noise reduction program might be paid for?*
2. *"In your opinion, are there alternative ways the program could be funded?"*
3. *How did people respond to question 7? Why?*

"Please turn to the next page of the packet, read the information provided and answer the question. Please pause when you are finished so we can discuss your reactions and responses."

This final section orients respondents to the choice question scenario and then presents three different questions (8, 9 and 10). The audio clips and fee amounts will be varied to gauge respondent evaluation of noises and sensitivity to program price.

SECTION 5: Noise Reduction Program

In the following series of questions we are going to ask you your opinions about different ways that a noise reduction program at [Park Name] might be designed.

First, you will listen to a recording of sounds from [Location] at [Park Name] that includes different noises. This clip represents what a visitor may experience once each hour during normal daytime hours.

Then, you will listen to another recording from [Location] that reduces noises addressed by a noise reduction program.

You will be asked whether you would vote to implement a program that would reduce the noises, and establish a special visitor fee to fund the program.

The answers to your questions will be used to determine whether a noise reduction program should be implemented, and what noises the program should target.

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Moderator:

"Before we go on..."

Moderator Questions:

1. *Is there anything about these instructions that is unclear or confusing?*

"Please turn to the next page of the packet, read the information provided and answer the question. Please pause when you are finished so we can discuss your reactions and responses."

Program 1

During this exercise you will hear two separate audio clips:

Clip A: Current Sounds:

These are sounds that a visitor may experience once each hour during day time hours in [Park Name]. The clip is 60 seconds long and will end with a chime

There will then be a 10 second pause

Clip B: Noise Reduction Program

These are the same sounds from Clip A if a noise reduction program were implemented. The clip is 60 seconds long and will end with a chime. Press Stop when clip is over

8) Now, please consider the choice below. If you had to vote between implementing a noise reduction program for the special fee listed **or** maintaining the current conditions with no special visitor fee, how would you vote? (CHECK ONE BOX)

| Sound Conditions | Current Conditions <i>Clip A</i> | Noise Reduction Program <i>Clip B</i> |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Special Visitor Fee | \$0 | \$15 |
| I would vote for.... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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Moderator:

"We would like to take a few minutes to go around the room and discuss your responses."

Moderator Questions:

- 1. How many people chose to keep the current conditions? Implement the program?*
- 2. Let's go around and hear why you voted the way you did...*

"Please turn to the next page of the packet. You will be asked to listen to two different recordings and answer another program choice question. Please pause when you are finished so we can discuss your reactions and responses."

Program 2

You will now hear two different audio clips:

Clip A: Current Sounds:

These are sounds that a visitor may experience once each hour during day time hours in [Park Name]. The clip is 60 seconds long and will end with a chime

There will then be a **10 second pause**

Clip B: Noise Reduction Program

These are the same sounds from Clip A if a noise reduction program were implemented. The clip is 60 seconds long and will end with a chime. Press Stop when clip is over

8) Now, please consider the choice below. If you had to vote between implementing a noise reduction program for the special fee listed **or** maintaining the current conditions with no special visitor fee, how would you vote? ? (CHECK ONE BOX)

| Sound Conditions | Current Conditions <i>Clip A</i> | Noise Reduction Program <i>Clip B</i> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Special Visitor Fee | \$0 | \$2 |
| I would vote for.... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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Moderator:

"We would like to take a few minutes to go around the room and discuss your responses."

Moderator Questions:

1. *How many people chose to keep the current conditions? Implement the program?*
2. *Let's go around and hear why you voted the way you did...*

"Please turn to the next page of the packet. You will be asked to listen to a final set of recordings and answer another program choice question. Please pause when you are finished so we can discuss your reactions and responses."

Program 3

You will now hear two different audio clips:

Clip A: Current Sounds:

These are sounds that a visitor may experience once each hour during day time hours in [Park Name]. The clip is 60 seconds long and will end with a chime

There will then be a 10 second pause

Clip B: Noise Reduction Program

These are the same sounds from Clip A if a noise reduction program were implemented. The clip is 60 seconds long and will end with a chime. Press Stop when clip is over

8) Now, please consider the choice below. If you had to vote between implementing a noise reduction program for the special fee listed **or** maintaining the current conditions with no special visitor fee, how would you vote? ? (CHECK ONE BOX)

| Sound Conditions | Current Conditions <i>Clip A</i> | Noise Reduction Program <i>Clip B</i> |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Special Visitor Fee | \$0 | \$5 |
| I would vote for.... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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Moderator:

"We would like to take a few minutes to go around the room and discuss your responses."

Moderator Questions:

- 1. How many people chose to keep the current conditions? Implement the program?*
- 2. Let's go around and hear why you voted the way you did...*

"That concludes our focus group discussion. We appreciate your time and feedback. Please note that the exercises we completed are hypothetical and are used as examples that will help us with survey design. They do not reflect any specific programs that [Park Name] is considering implementing. Thank you."
