



## 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:

**PROJECT TITLE:** Visitor Use Research to Inform Visitor Use Management at Joshua Tree National Park

### ABSTRACT: (not to exceed 150 words)

Over 790,000 acres, Joshua Tree National Park (JOTR) offers diverse visitor experiences resulting in 3.2 million annual visits — 2.3 times more than ten years ago. This dramatic rise in visitation presents significant challenges for park managers charged with maintaining high-quality visitor experiences while preserving unique resources. Therefore, the goal of this study is to gather information from park visitors to help managers ensure sustainable and appropriate visitor experiences considering burgeoning visitation. This research is critical as it provides updated data on how increased visitation impacts visitor experiences, helping managers develop informed, sustainable strategies. By partially replicating a 2010 study, this research allows for a comparative analysis of visitor profiles and experiences over time, offering key insights into how increased visitation has altered use patterns and visitor needs. This knowledge is essential for ensuring that JOTR can continue to accommodate growing visitor numbers while maintaining its environmental integrity and recreational value.

### PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR CONTACT INFORMATION:

NAME: Dr. Matthew T.J. Brownlee

TITLE: Associate Professor

AFFILIATION: Clemson University

ADDRESS: 170 Sarrine Hall, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634

EMAIL: [mbrownl@clemson.edu](mailto:mbrownl@clemson.edu)

PHONE: 864-508-1212

### PARK OR PROGRAM LIASION CONTACT INFORMATION:

NAME: Jane Rodgers

TITLE: Chief Science and Resource Stewardship

AFFILIATION: National Park Service

ADDRESS: 74485 National Park Drive, Twentynine Palms, CA 92277

EMAIL: [jane\\_rodgers@nps.gov](mailto:jane_rodgers@nps.gov)

PHONE: 760-367-5560

## PROJECT INFORMATION:

**Where will the collection take place?** Joshua Tree National Park

**Sampling Period Start Date:**

Sampling Period End Date: 3/1/2025-5/30/2025

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

Mail-Back Questionnaire

Face-to-Face Interview

On-Site Questionnaire

Focus Groups

Telephone Survey

Other (List)

Will an electronic device be used to collect information?

No

Yes (tablet)

## 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.*

Joshua Tree National Park (JOTR) was established to protect the scenic and natural resources of a desert environment, while providing opportunities to experience wilderness and recreational-related values. JOTR has found it difficult in recent years to maintain these mandates due to a large rise in visitation (and relatively close proximity to major urban centers of Palm Springs and Los Angeles). In the past ten years, visitation has risen from 1,383,340 in 2013, to 3,270,404 in 2023, thus more than doubling the number of visits in this period. For further perspective on these numbers, it took the park 25 years to go from 1 million visits to 2 million visits, whereas it has taken only 8 years to go from 2 million to over 3 million visits (2015 to 2023). This rapid increase in visitation has left park managers questioning how this dramatic increase has impacted visitor experiences in the park. This study is critical and timely for two primary reasons:

1. The evaluation of visitor characteristics and preferences across multiple user groups (e.g., campers, day users, climbers, backpackers) that can be compared to a previous study conducted before the dramatic increase in visitation began (2010).
2. The identification of emergent recreation uses and opposition/support for related specific management actions that may need to be implemented because of the dramatic increase in visitation.

Through this study, park managers will understand how visitation demographics may have changed since the rise in visitation ten years ago and gain a clear understanding of visitor support for different hypothetical management options (or that they do not have any) specifically related changes in infrastructure, wilderness and various activities that will guide visitor use management at the park for the next 15-20 years.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

**(A) Respondent Universe:** The respondent universe for this collection will be a systematic sample of all adult recreation users (age 18 and older), at the 1) West Entrance of JOTR, 2) the East Entrance of JOTR, and the 3) Cottonwood Entrance of JOTR. Visitor sampling will occur at these locations for 8 consecutive days during the proposed study period (3/1/2025-5/30/2025). These three locations represent the primary ways of entry and exit to the park, thus making them ideal locations for intercepting visitors.

**(B) Sampling Plan / Procedures:**

This study will use a Qualtrics-based online survey, administered through Clemson University. As visitors exit the park, researchers from Clemson University will intercept them and ask them to participate in the study by completing a survey on a tablet computer furnished by the research team. Participants will be encouraged to complete the survey onsite using a tablet furnished by the research team at or near the intercept site on the day of their visit. However, if the visitor is seriously pressed for time but willing to participate, the visitor may provide an email address to receive a link to the survey, which will allow them to complete the survey on their personal device such as a computer or tablet within ten days of the onsite intercept at the park.

According to the NPS visitor use statistics, approximately 3,270,404 visits occurred at JOTR in 2023. Because the park offers exceptional opportunities for recreation during the spring season (peak visitation, March-May), we will sample during the spring. The tables below provide estimates for visitor contacts based on previous onsite survey efforts in other NPS units, areas of varying levels of use, and park manager input.

The ideal sampling period will occur for 8 days (Table 1), consisting of 5 consecutive weekdays and 3 weekend days between 3/1/2025-5/30/2025 (ideal dates are 3/15/2025-3/23/2025). During this time, two researchers (six total) will intercept visitors at three sampling locations (East, West, and Cottonwood Entrance/Exit Stations). Sampling will be evenly split between the East and West entrances and fewer contacts will be expected at the less frequently used Cottonwood entrance/exit, for a combined total of 1,600 visitor contacts at the end of the 8-day sampling period. Although the study will use two different surveys (a General Visitor Survey and a Management Survey), a single visitor will only complete one of the two surveys. The specific survey designated for the visitor to complete will be selected randomly with each survey receiving the same number of contacts and respondents (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Estimated number of contacts for the Visitor Surveys during the sampling period**

Location	Survey 1 (General) Spring Season (ideally March 15-22)			Survey 2 (Management) Spring Season (ideally March 15-22)			TOTAL	
	Weekday (5 days)	Weekend (3 days)	Subtotal	Weekday (5 days)	Weekend (3 days)	Subtotal		
East Entrance	160	160	320	160	160	320	640	A
West Entrance	160	160	320	160	160	320	640	random
Cottonwood Entrance	80	80	160	80	80	160	320	sample
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>1,600</b>	of every 3 <sup>rd</sup>

visitor will be approached and asked to participate in the study. Based upon the sampling approach, we anticipate contacting at least 1,280 visitors at the East and West entrances and 320 visitors at the Cottonwood entrance during the

8-day sampling period (Table 1). During weekdays (Monday-Friday) we expect to contact at least 160 visitors each day for a total of 800 contacts during weekdays. If this daily sample quota is not met on a given day, the balance will be evenly distributed across the remaining days. On the weekend (two Saturdays and one Sunday) when visitation rates are typically higher, we expect to contact approximately 267 people each day for a total of 800 weekend contacts. The expected acceptance rate to participate in the study is 50% resulting in 800 total visitors agreeing to participate in the study with 400 visitors completing the General Visitor Survey and 400 visitors completing the Management Survey.

**Table 2. Example of expected weekly sampling during study period**

	Estimated number of total visitor contacts	Expected number of visitors agreeing to participate (50% across both surveys)	Targeted number of visitors approached per day	Expected onsite acceptance rate per day (50%)
Mon - Fri (5 days)	800	400	160	80
Sat (2 days) & Sun (1 day)	800	400	267 (sat 1)	134 (sat 1)
			266 (sat 2)	133 (sat 2)
			267 (sun)	133 (sun)
Total	1,600	800	560	280

**(C) Instrument Administration:**

The surveys in this collection will follow the same sampling procedures across the three sampling locations. The initial contact with visitors will be used to explain the study and determine if visitors are interested in participating (see script below), taking approximately one minute. When a group is encountered (> 1 visitor), the researcher intercepting the group will ask the individual in the group with the closest birthday to the sampling date to serve as the respondent. At this point, visitors who agree to participate will be asked the non-response questions and the surveyor will record the responses before handing the visitor the tablet for them to complete the survey on their own. Visitors refusing to participate will be asked if they would be willing to take a minute to respond to nonresponse bias questions, which will be recorded by the researcher performing the intercept. The number of refusals will be recorded by the researchers and used to calculate the overall response rate for the collection. Visitors will complete one of two randomly selected surveys (General Visitor Survey or Management Survey). Participants will be encouraged to complete the survey onsite using a tablet furnished by the research team at or near the intercept site on the day of their visit. However, if the visitor is pressed for time but willing to participate, the visitor will be asked to provide an email address to receive a link to their assigned survey (general or management), which will allow them to complete the survey on their personal device such as a computer or tablet within ten days of the onsite intercept at the park.

In the rare instances where a visitor is pressed for time, but willing to participate, we will them an electronic version of the survey delivered to their email. After providing an email address, they will receive a link to the online survey, the researchers will follow the Tailor Design Method to follow up and encourage response. In following up with those visitors who provide email addresses, we will a) personalize the invitation, b) state a clear purpose for the survey with a reminder about the onsite intercept and visit to JOTR, c) contact the potential respondent three times via email allotting three days between each contact (example email text attached as supplemental document in ROCIS), d) discontinue contact and erase the email if the survey is not completed after three reminders and within 10 days from the time of the intercept, and e) provide clear directions for completion and directions for contacting the researchers with questions.

Visitors selected for participating in the survey will be read the following script by researchers.

*“Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am conducting a survey for the National Park Service in collaboration with Clemson University to better understand your opinions about your overall experience and management at the park. Your participation is voluntary, and all responses will be kept anonymous. Would you be willing to complete a 10-minute survey on one of our tablet computers?”*

<i>èIf YES – then ask, “has any member of your group been asked to participate in this survey before?”</i>
<i>If “YES” (already asked to participate) then, “Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Have a great day.”</i>
<i>If “NO” (have not been previously asked to participate) then, “Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Who in your group is at least 18 years old, has the next birthday, and willing to participate? The survey takes about 10 minutes to complete. Here is a tablet to complete the survey.</i>
<i>èIf YES; the visitor is willing but expresses that they are seriously pressed for time – Record their email address and inform them that they will receive a link to the online survey to complete in the next ten days. Before they depart, ask them to answer the nonresponse bias questions (listed below). Record responses in spaces provided on the tracking sheet.</i>
<i>èIf NO– (soft refusal) - ask them if they would be willing to answer the non-response bias questions (listed below) and then thank them for their time. Record responses in spaces provided on the tracking sheet.</i>
<i>èIf NO– (hard refusal) - end the contact and thank them for their time.</i>

**(D) Expected Response Rate / Confidence Level:**

The response rate for this collection is based on surveys at similar park sites. Based on the survey sample sizes, there will be 95% confidence that the survey findings will be accurate to within 3-5 percentage points. Assuming a 50% response rate, we will need to contact 1,600 visitors (1,280 at the East and West Entrance and 320 at the Cottonwood Entrance sampling location; see Table 3). The proposed sample sizes will be adequate for bivariate comparisons and will allow for comparisons between study sites. 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. The number of refusals at each location will be recorded and reported in a survey log and will be used in calculating the overall response rate.

**Table 3. Anticipated Response Rates**

Location	Initial Contacts	Completed surveys	Nonrespondents	Completed	Hard
----------	------------------	-------------------	----------------	-----------	------

		(i.e., acceptance) 50%	(i.e., soft refusals) 50%	nonresponse survey (30% of soft refusals)	refusals (70% of soft refusals)
East Entrance	640	320	320	96	224
West Entrance	640	320	320	96	224
Cottonwood Entrance	320	160	160	48	112
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,600	800	800	240	560

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

During the initial contact, the researcher will ask those who decline to participate in the full survey (or those pressed for time who elect to provide an email address) if they would be willing to answer three questions from the survey. The following questions will be the nonresponse bias check for this collection.

1) On this trip, how long did you and your personal group spend visiting Joshua Tree NP? Please list partial hours / days as ¼, ½, ¾.

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of hours, if fewer than 24 hours  
OR  
\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days, if 24 hours or more

2) Are you a permanent resident or citizen of the United States?

NO - What is your country of origin? \_\_\_\_\_  
 YES - What is your zip code and state of your primary residence?  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

3) What is your age \_\_\_\_\_

All responses will be recorded. Results of the nonresponse bias check will be described in a report and any implications for park planning and management will be discussed.

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

The questionnaire format and variations of many of the questions have been used in many survey instruments previously approved by OMB. The questions are from the currently approved list of questions in the NPS Pool of Known Questions (OMB 1024-0224; Current Expirations Date: 8-31-2026). Variations of the questions have been reviewed by JOTR managers and faculty from Clemson University. The questionnaire was tested on eight voluntary members of the general public for burden length and clarity of the questions.

**BURDEN ESTIMATES**

Overall, we plan to approach 1,600 individuals total during the sampling periods. We anticipate that 50% (n=800) of the individuals contacted will agree to participate. Half of the respondents (n= 400) will complete the Management Survey, resulting in a burden of 73 hours (400 respondents X 11 minutes = 73 hours, and the other half of the

respondents (n= 400) will complete the General Visitor Survey, resulting in a burden of 73 hours (400 respondents X 11 minutes = 73 hours).

We expect that 800 (50%) visitors will refuse to participate. We will ask all individual who refuse to complete the survey, if they would be willing to answer the three questions that will serve as the nonresponse bias check for this collection. We expect that 30% (n=240) of the onsite refusals will agree to answer the nonresponse bias questions. We anticipate that the time to complete the nonresponse bias questions will take about one minute, resulting in 4 hours of respondent burden for the non-response survey (240 respondents x 1 minute = 4 hours).

The remaining 560 visitors refusing to accept any part of the invitation to participate will not incur a respondent burden and for those individuals, we will only attempt to record their reason for refusal.

The overall burden for this collection is 150 hours. This includes the time it takes to complete the onsite questionnaire (including the initial contact) plus the nonresponse survey (Table 4).

**Table 4. Burden estimate**

	Responses	Completion Time * (minutes)	Burden Hours (rounded up)
Management survey*	400	11	73
General Visitor Survey*	400	11	73
Nonresponse survey	240	1	4
<b>Total burden requested under this ICR:</b>	<b>1,040</b>		<b>150</b>

\* Initial contact time of one minute is added to the time to complete the survey.

---

**REPORTING PLAN:**

The study results will be presented in internal agency reports for NPS managers at the park. Response frequencies will be tabulated, and measures of central tendency computed (e.g., mean, median, mode, as appropriate). The reports will be archived with the NPS Social Science Program for inclusion in the Social Science Studies Collection as required by the NSP Programmatic Approval Process. Paper copies will be available upon request.

---

---

## 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.

---