



Alagnak

Aniakchak

Katmai

Kenai Fjords

Lake Clark

Visitor Use

New Reporting Tools in Development

The Southwest Alaska I&M network (SWAN) has been working with park managers and staff for the past year to revise and streamline the recorded visitor data submitted by Commercial Use Authorization (CUA) holders. These data are being reviewed and consolidated and will shortly be available to park managers and the public in a user-friendly format (Fall 2013). Types of information collected on annual CUA activity reports include number of visitors, locations visited, mode of transportation, and type of recreational activity.

The database shows visitor use information for Katmai, Lake Clark, Aniakchak, and Alagnak national park units. Summary reports will be publicly available on the SWAN website. Plans to expand this effort to include Kenai Fjords are scheduled for the near future.

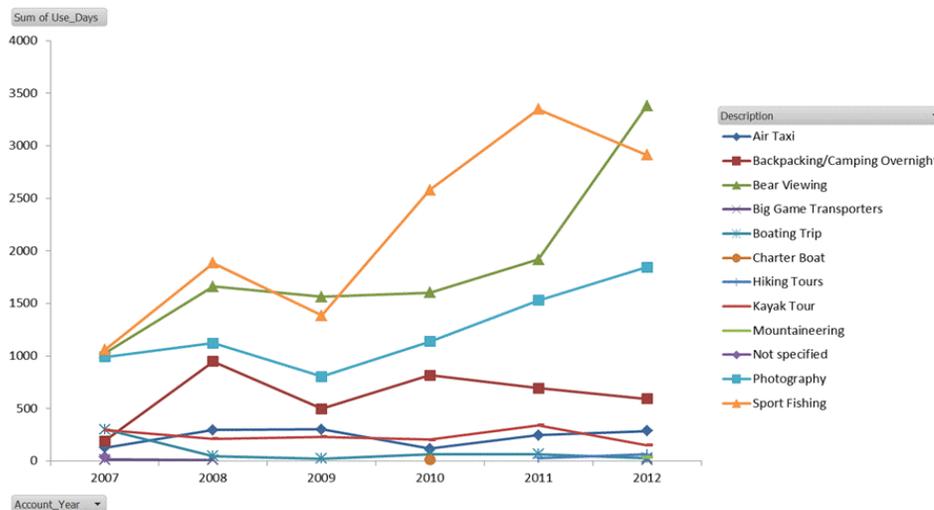


Figure 1. The graph above shows the number of visitors and the main activity for the visitors as reported by the commercial operators working in Lake Clark National Park and Preserve from 2007 through 2012.

Importance

Understanding visitor use patterns allows park managers to assess where park staff needs to be deployed and where impacts, such as trampling or increase in social trails, may need to be monitored or mitigated in the future. Visitor use patterns may also inform commercial operators by providing insights to the areas visited and the timing of visits—details which are helpful when planning guiding operations.

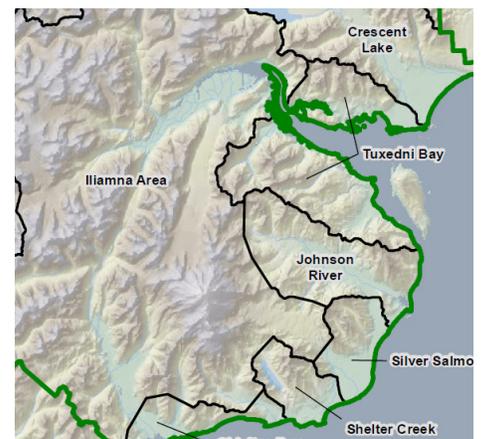
Because these remote Alaska park units do not have entrance stations, the data collected from commercial service providers are the only real means to quantify and understand visitation patterns and public uses in these vast backcountry areas.

User Days & Visitor Use Areas Defined

For these park units, managers are focused on the broad trends and overall patterns of use rather than specifics about activities and trips.

Some visitors may travel to more than one location in a given day—bear viewing on the coast in the morning and fishing in the interior of the park in the afternoon, for example. In these cases the number of reported “user days” may be slightly more than the number of actual visitors to the park. This definition of user day provides the park the best information of the potential impacts by location across the park.

Each park unit is divided into areas. When reporting, commercial operators choose the area of the visitors’ main activity. These areas roughly correspond to watersheds in each park unit. Areas with concentrated use have been sub-divided into smaller areas.



The map above shows a section of Lake Clark National Park and Preserve with visitor use areas outlined.

Visitor Use Trends in Lake Clark National Park and Preserve

Activities

The three main activities reported by the commercial operators are bear viewing, sport fishing and photography (Figure 1). The reported information suggests there has been a significant growth in the number of visitors coming to Lake Clark for these three main activities.

The number of visitor use days reporting bear viewing as their main activity has tripled from approximately 1,000 people in 2007 to over 3,100 in 2012. The number of reported user days focused on sport fishing and photography has likewise more than doubled in this same period of time. In contrast, the number of reported visitor use days for other activity categories have stayed relatively constant over the six years (Figure 1).

Visitation and Timing

Over the last six years the number of visitor use days reported by CUA operators has more than doubled from approximately 4,000 days to 8,400 visitor use days, most of the increase in visitation has been to the coast and most has occurred in July and August. The area of Crescent Lake has seen the most significant increase during the six years, going from 6% of the reported visitor use days in 2007 to approximately 36% in 2012 (Figure 3).

The time of year when visitors come to Lake Clark has remained consistent; almost all of the visitor use days reported occur between June through September. Two months—July and August—account for approximately 60-70% of the total visitation (Figure 2). Over the last six years most of the increase in visitor use has occurred in these two summer months (Figure 2).

Figure 3. Total User Days by Location (2007-2012) for the three most visited locations on the coast and the three locations in the interior of the park as reported by the commercial use operators.

Locations

CUA holders report usage on 24 of the 33 different locations within the park and preserve over the last six years. Thirteen of these locations were visited regularly. Silver Salmon Creek, Crescent Lake and Chinitna Bay are the most highly visited places in the park and preserve, and together account for over ¾ of the reported user days in Lake Clark. In contrast, the visitor use days for the three most popular interior locations for 2012 represent just over 11% of the visitor use days for the park (Figure 3).

Figure 2. The number of visitor use days for the four busiest months from 2007 through 2012. Data from the Lake Clark National Park & Preserve CUA database 12/21/12.

