



2025 Socioeconomic Research of Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area

Report on 2025 Data Collection



Mountain biker rides down off rock on a trail in Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area.

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ON THE COVER

NPS

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Abstract

A strong mandate and need for socioeconomic monitoring have been expressed in the National Park Service (NPS) strategic goals for science, in statements by NPS leadership, and in various official reports. Since such monitoring began in 2022, the NPS has typically conducted visitor surveys at 24 parks per year across the United States and associated territories. However, the 2025/2026 SEM Visitor Survey study period was impacted by unexpected timing constraints that reduced the total sample from 24 to 21 parks. Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area (Big South Fork) was selected as one of these units for 2025 implementation. This socioeconomic monitoring at Big South Fork uses a two-step survey methodology to capture a representative sample of park visitors during the peak season of each respective park unit. This process includes (1) an on-site intercept survey conducted via tablet, and (2) a post-trip survey (completed either by mail-back or online) for more in-depth trip details. The types of data collected include visitor demographics, trip characteristics/planning, and experience evaluations. Results are organized by these two survey instruments and are aimed at assisting park managers in understanding current utilization and perception of park resources, assessing operations and potential issues, and facilitating communication and decision-making processes within the park and between the park and its local partners and stakeholders.

Introduction

Social science research has become increasingly recognized as a crucial component of park planning, amplifying its significance for the National Park Service (NPS). With the ever-changing landscape of visitation and a desire to provide transformative visitor experiences, understanding the needs and expectations of the visiting public has become more important than ever. The agency seeks to provide the highest quality visitor experience while also protecting the important natural and cultural resources that make these sites special.

A pilot visitor study was conducted in 2015/2016 across selected park units throughout the United States. Building upon the insights gleaned from the pilot study, the Socioeconomic Monitoring Program (SEM) Visitor Survey has been carried out each year starting in 2022 at 24 NPS units across the country per year. The total sample of parks surveyed in the 2025/2026 sampling period was reduced from 24 to 21 to accommodate unexpected time constraints. Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area (Big South Fork) was selected as one of the 21 units studied in the 2025 sampling period. The study aims to deepen understanding of visitor demographics and characteristics at Big South Fork.

This report contains the data and findings collected from the Big South Fork SEM Visitor Survey in fall 2025. The study gathers data at a comprehensive agency level, addressing the informational needs of park managers throughout the National Park System. The data collected during the 2025 SEM Visitor Survey sampling period are intended to provide park managers with data-supported insights into their visitors while enabling data analysis at the agency level and beyond for future applications.

This study collects information about visitor use, aids in finding effective management solutions, and offers insights into the visitors who experience NPS sites. The findings empower NPS managers to better comprehend visitor behaviors, inform park operations, and identify areas for enhancing the visitor experience. Moreover, these results are intended to facilitate communication and foster informed decision-making processes, both within the NPS unit and in collaboration with local partners and stakeholders. Unique to the 2025/2026 SEM Visitor Survey study period, 11 of NPS units were surveyed during their peak season, with another 10 NPS units surveyed during their off-peak season. Big South Fork was surveyed during its peak season, with results representing the visitors that were surveyed at that time.

This report does not include spending data, despite it being collected as part of the study. For detailed information regarding visitor spending at Big South Fork, please refer to the 2025 Visitor Spending Effects report.

The research was carried out by a team including Otak, Inc., RRC Associates, Inc., the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at the University of Montana, and GAIA Environmental Consulting.

Methods

The SEM Visitor Survey methodology is designed to capture a representative sample of visitor information, characteristics, and behavior at each sampled park unit through:

An onsite intercept survey conducted via tablet, and

A post-trip follow-up survey (mail-back or online) for full trip details.

This comprehensive approach provides the necessary information to make on-the-ground decisions in park units using the intercept survey to capture visitor responses on higher priority information, while also capturing key in-depth information on visitor spending and trip characteristics for long-term planning from the post-trip survey. Additionally, the intercept survey is designed to be brief so as not to fundamentally affect visitors' experiences. The methods also permit a larger sample to be collected on key questions of interest by asking these high priority questions during the intercept survey.

Study Area

The Big South Fork local area map is shown in Figure 1. The local area around Big South Fork consists of the following counties in the state of Tennessee: Fentress, Morgan, Pickett, Scott; and McCreary County and Wayne County in the state of Kentucky. Within Big South Fork, the study area was comprised of ten locations. Table 1 lists those sites and the number of onsite intercept surveys completed at each. The distribution of surveyor effort across sites was determined based on historical visitor volumes and spatial distribution across the park's key areas. Where available, Visitor Use Statistics estimates for monthly visitation at each site were used to assign surveyors proportionally to reflect visitor use patterns. Park staff were consulted prior to the study launch to confirm that these metrics accurately captured visitor flows, ensuring that sampling efforts were focused on the most popular and representative locations.

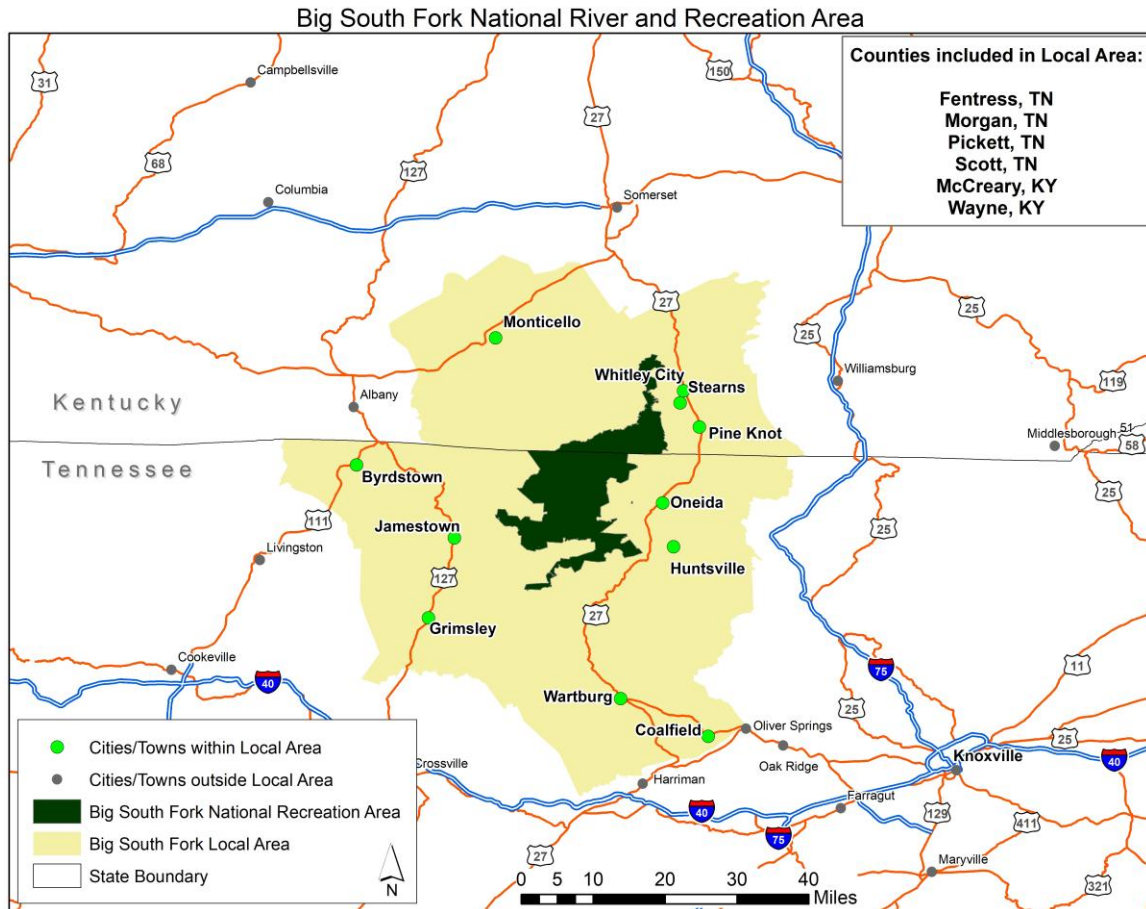


Figure 1. Big South Fork local area map.

Table 1. Intercept surveys conducted within Big South Fork.

Intercept Site	Completed Intercept Surveys	
	Number of Surveys	Percent of Surveys
Leatherwood East Entrance	218	39.1%
Blue Heron Coal Mine Town	98	17.6%
Bandy Creek Visitor Center	79	14.2%
Divide Road	70	12.6%
Yahoo Falls	23	4.1%
Rugby Historic District	23	4.1%
Station Camp	13	2.3%
Burnt Mill Bridge	13	2.3%
Alum Ford	10	1.8%
Leatherwood West Entrance	6	1.1%
Peters Bridge	4	0.7%

Sampling Period and Procedure

Intercept Survey

The on-site intercept survey is designed to rapidly collect visitor information as tablet-based responses, reaching the largest possible sample for the highest priority visitor information. The intercept sampling was conducted during the period of September 5 through 16, 2025. A sample of visitors were intercepted while visiting Big South Fork across the designated locations listed in Table 1, above. The majority of respondents were visitors on foot at these locations.

Surveyors approached potential respondent groups at the site to introduce the purpose of the study and ask them to participate in a short 5–7-minute survey about their experience in Big South Fork (NPS 2025). Within the group, the adult with the next upcoming birthday was asked to participate. If the visitor was eligible (at least 18 years of age, not a Big South Fork employee, and had not previously taken the survey) and agreed to participate in the study, the surveyor verbally administered the survey questions and recorded the responses on a handheld tablet device. If the visitor did not agree, surveyors asked if they would be willing to answer three non-response bias questions (see the Non-Response Bias Analysis section, below). Upon complete or partial refusal, the surveyor would thank the visitor for their time, log the non-response, and approach the next visitor group.

At the end of the intercept survey, respondents were invited to participate in a post-trip survey by mail-back or online response. Those who agreed to participate were given an envelope containing a printed copy of the post-trip survey with a postage-paid envelope for mailing it back, as well as a hyperlink and instructions for accessing it online. As part of the intercept protocol, surveyors logged a unique identifier (four-digit code) from the envelope into the tablet for future connection to the post-trip survey.

Therefore, four potential outcomes were possible when intercepting visitors (see Table 2):

1. Complete refusal, refused to answer any questions, including non-response bias questions;
2. Partial refusal, answered non-response bias questions but nothing further;
3. Completed intercept, but refused to take post-trip survey; or
4. Completed intercept and took post-trip survey.

During the sampling period, seven surveyors were stationed simultaneously at different sampling sites. Start times varied day-to-day and by location to capture a diverse sample of visitors across Big South Fork. Each surveyor worked 10 seven-hour days (approximately six hours of data collection and a one-hour lunch break) and rotated among several sites. Each surveyor had two days off during the 12-day sampling window.

Table 2. Response outcomes — Big South Fork intercept survey.

Outcome	Total
Eligible visitors contacted	657
Complete refusals	40
Partial refusals (non-response bias questions completed)	60
Intercept surveys completed	557
Post-trip surveys distributed	548
Intercept response rate	84.8%
Post-trip acceptance rate	98.4%

Post-trip Survey

The post-trip survey was distributed to participating respondents who completed the intercept survey and then agreed to take a follow-up survey after completing their trip to the NPS unit. This method extended data collection and asked participants to complete the survey after their visit, either through a provided postage-paid envelope, or online via a provided survey link. The post-trip survey covers visitor trip spending details, travel patterns, and perceptions of their recent visit (NPS 2025). Both the intercept survey and the post-trip survey were tagged with a unique identifier (four-digit code) for each respondent so their onsite intercept responses could be paired with their post-trip responses. Numbers were assigned at random to the individual. The use of this code allows the data to be joined, while keeping all surveys confidential and removing respondents' identifying information. Joining the two datasets provides a more complete picture of in-park experiences and post-visit perceptions.

At the end of the intercept survey, respondents were asked for their physical mailing address or email address. This allowed for a reminder postcard or email to be sent to all respondents who provided contact information about a week following the end of each onsite data collection period. This postcard or email thanked respondents for their original participation and encouraged them to complete the post-trip survey if they had not already done so.

Three weeks after postcard mailing, a second contact (with the same unique IDs) was delivered to all outstanding addresses/emails, noting that the individual's completed questionnaire had yet to be received. The mailed survey packets included replacement surveys and postage-paid, self-addressed return envelopes. A final contact was mailed/emailed to all remaining non-respondents four weeks after sending the second contact (i.e., first full replacement survey). Table 3 shows response rates for the post-trip survey.

Table 3. Response outcomes — Big South Fork post-trip survey.

Outcome	Total
Post-trip surveys distributed	548
Valid post-trip surveys completed	186
Response rate	33.9%

Non-Response Bias Analysis

To account for potential biases between respondents and non-respondents, three questions were asked of eligible visitors contacted who did not wish to participate in the survey. The responses to these three questions can then be compared to both the larger group of respondents who completed the intercept survey, and the smaller group who completed both the intercept and post-trip surveys.

The Office of Management and Budget recommends testing for non-response bias when a response rate is less than 80%. With an intercept survey response rate of 84.8%, concern over intercept non-response bias is muted. However, because the post-trip survey response rate (33.9%) did not meet the minimum threshold, bias testing was conducted to evaluate differences between those respondents who completed the full survey (both intercept and post-trip), and those who only completed the intercept portion.

A chi-square test for homogeneity was performed for each of the three questions to evaluate differences between the groups. The chi-square test for homogeneity is a statistical test used to determine whether there is a significant association between categorical variables. It compares observed data with expected frequencies to assess if any deviations are due to chance. A p-value of 0.05 is used as the indicated threshold of this significance; p-values of 0.05 or lower indicate significant difference between groups.

The distribution of responses among full survey respondents and intercept-only respondents differed significantly for one question: overnight visitation. Therefore, day visitors are not as well represented in the full survey sample (55.4%) as desired, when compared to their proportion among respondents that only completed the intercept survey (67.8%).

Results of the bias testing for the post-trip survey are shown in Table 4 through Table 6.

Table 4. Post-trip survey non-response bias question: "Are you a permanent or seasonal/second home resident of the local area around Big South Fork?". Note: p-value = 0.165.

Response	Full Survey Respondents		Intercept-Only Respondents	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	69	37.1%	160	43.2%
No	117	62.9%	210	56.8%

Table 5. Post-trip survey non-response bias question: "Do you currently live in the United States?". Note: p-value = 0.218.

Response	Full Survey Respondents		Intercept-Only Respondents	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	186	100.0%	367	99.2%
No	0	0.0%	3	0.8%

Table 6. Post-trip survey non-response bias question: “On this trip away from home, will you [and your personal group] stay overnight away from your permanent residence either in Big South Fork and/or within the local area?”. Note: p-value = 0.004.

Response	Full Survey Respondents		Intercept-Only Respondents	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	83	44.6%	119	32.2%
No	103	55.4%	250	67.8%

Results

Results are presented separately for both the intercept and post-trip surveys throughout the following section. To preserve the data for additional analyses, outliers for open-ended numeric questions (e.g., nights spent, days in local area, etc.) have not been removed. Given these outliers, medians are shown instead of means throughout the report, in order to better represent the central tendency. Some questions were omitted because they were not applicable to this report.

Intercept Survey Results

The following section provides results of the 557 visitor intercept surveys conducted in Big South Fork from September 5 through 16, 2025. All results are presented in this report, regardless of sample size, which varies by question. Caution is recommended in the interpretation of figures with sample size lower than n=30. Categories on some questions may not sum to 100% due to rounding differences and/or the opportunity to select more than one response option.

Question 1: Previous Visits to Big South Fork

First, respondents were asked if they were first time visitors to Big South Fork. Repeat visitors were then asked how many visits they have made to Big South Fork in the last 12 months and the last five years (Figure 2).

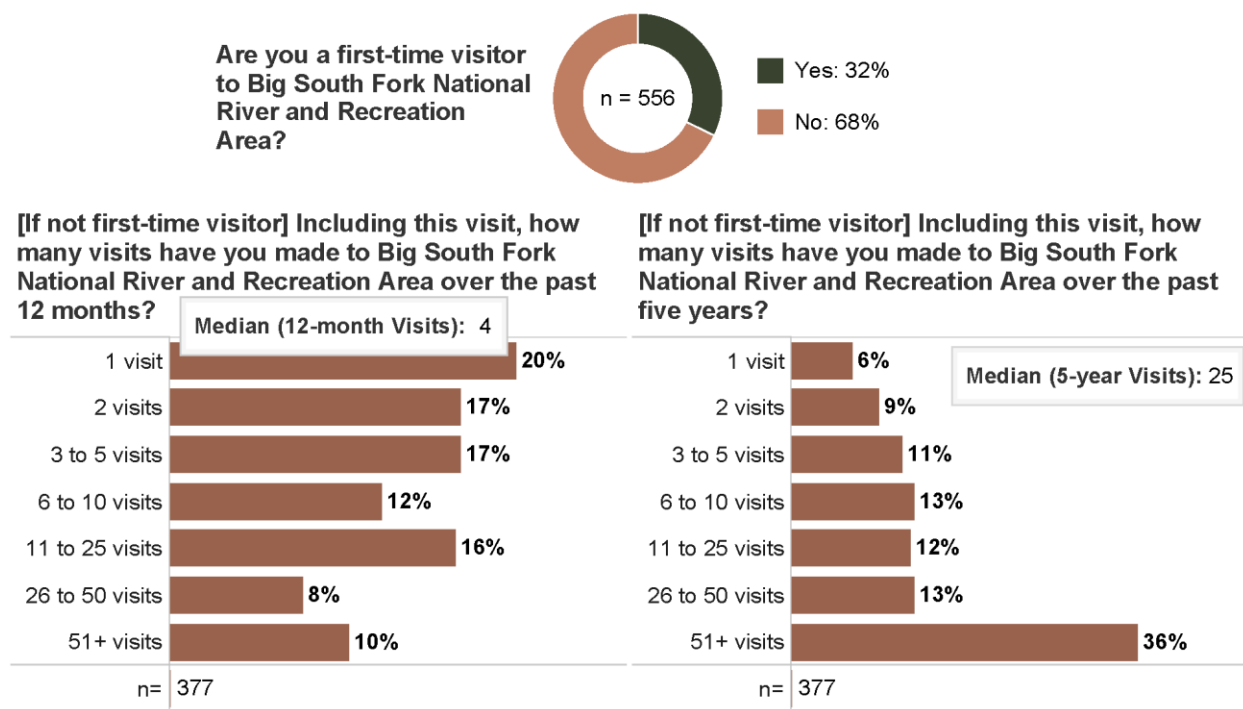


Figure 2. Previous visits to Big South Fork. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, Table 8.

- A third of respondents (32%) were on their first ever trip to Big South Fork.

- Among the 68% of respondents who were repeat visitors, a fifth (20%) were on their first visit in the past 12 months (i.e., had last visited more than a year ago).
- However, most repeat visitors (94%) visited at least one prior time in the past five years.
- The median number of visits made in the past five years was 25, including the current trip; 61% of repeat visitors had made more than 10 visits in the past five years.

Question 2: Previous Visits to Other NPS Units

Respondents were then asked how many visits they made to other NPS sites over the past 12 months (Figure 3).

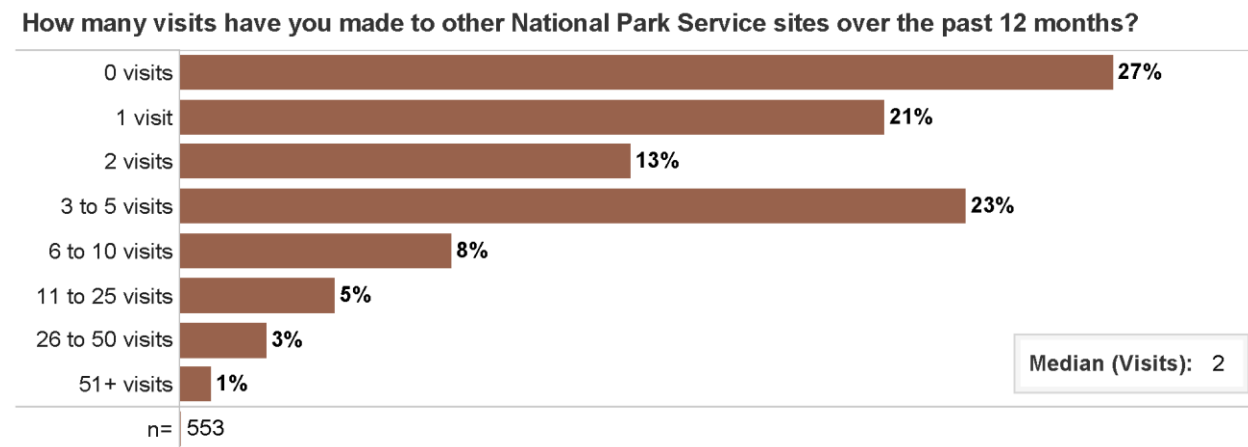


Figure 3. Visits made to other NPS sites within the past year. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, Table 9.

- The majority of respondents (73%) made at least one visit to one other NPS site(s) in the past year.
- The median number of visits made to other NPS site(s) in the past 12 months was 2, though a combined 40% had made three or more visits in the past year.

Questions 3-4: Visitor Residency

Respondents were asked to indicate if they were permanent or seasonal residents of the local area around Big South Fork. Permanent and seasonal residents were then asked for their ZIP code within the local area. Respondents who do not reside permanently or seasonally in the local area were asked if they currently live in the U.S., and if so, for their ZIP code. Figure 4 depicts responses to this group of questions.

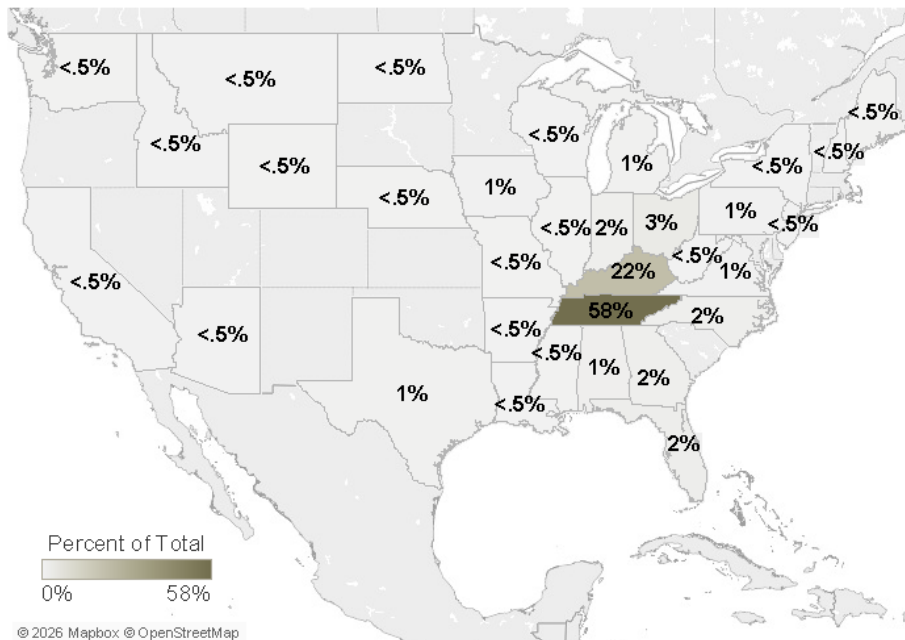
Are you a permanent or seasonal/second home resident of the local area around Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area?



Do you currently live in the United States?



Respondent States (Percentage of U.S. respondents only)



Top 10 States

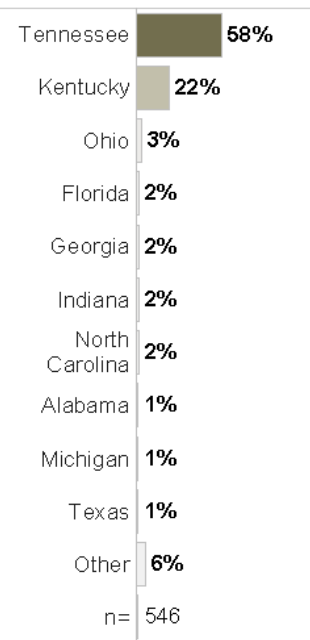


Figure 4. Respondent residency status and geographic origin of domestic visitors surveyed at Big South Fork.

- About two-fifths of respondents (a combined 41%) stated that they were either permanent or seasonal residents of the local area around Big South Fork.
- There was a large geographic concentration of respondents from Tennessee and Kentucky (where Big South Fork is located).
- Among the 99% of respondents who resided in the U.S., 58% resided in Tennessee, followed by Kentucky (22%), Ohio (3%), Florida (2%), Georgia (2%), Indiana (2%), and North Carolina (2%).

Question 5: Trip Purpose

Respondents who are not permanent or seasonal residents of the local area were asked about the purpose for their overall trip away from home, while permanent or seasonal residents of the local area were asked about the purpose of their trip away from home “today,” the day they were intercepted in the park. Figure 5 depicts responses to this group of questions.

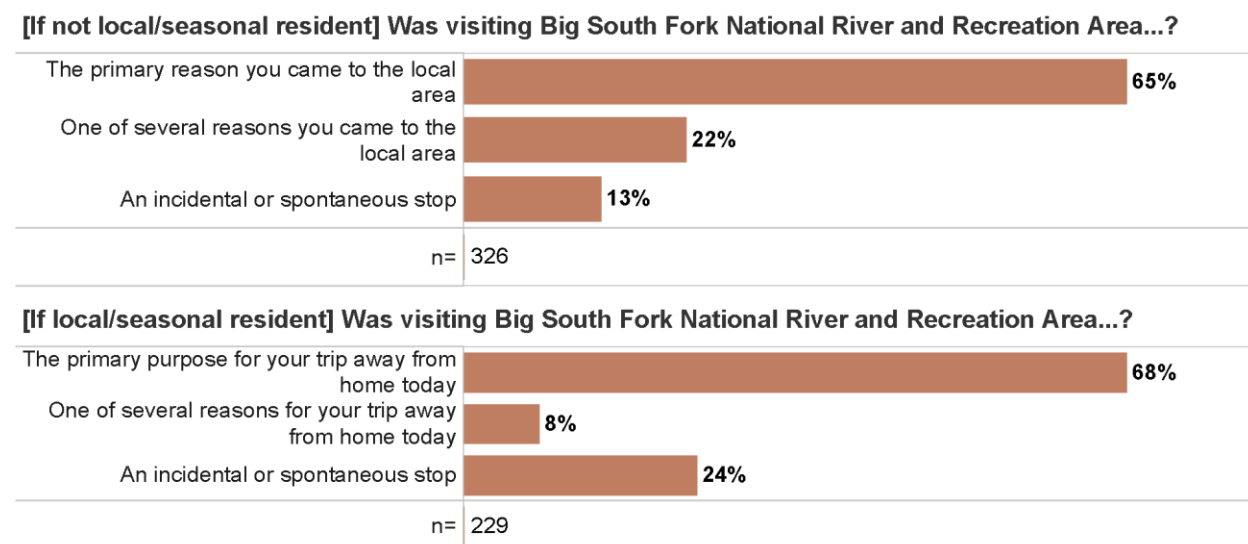


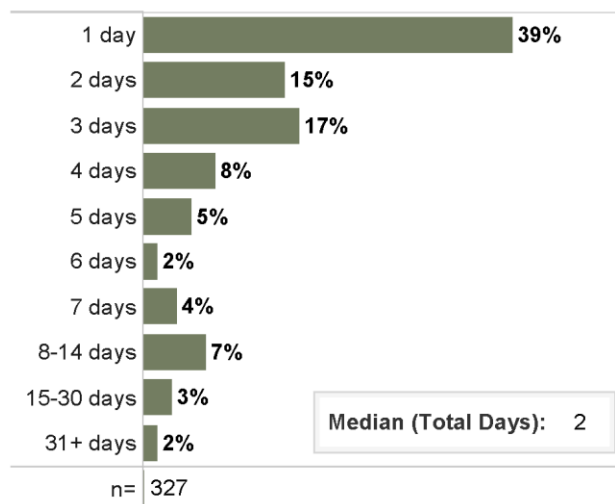
Figure 5. Role of Big South Fork in overall trip purpose.

- A majority of non-local respondents indicated visiting Big South Fork was either the primary reason for their visits (65%) or one of several reasons they came to the local area (22%).
- The remaining 13% of non-local respondents indicated their visit to Big South Fork was an incidental or spontaneous stop while they were already in the area.
- Among permanent or seasonal local resident respondents, for about two-thirds, their trip to Big South Fork was the primary reason for their trip away from home on the day they were contacted for the survey, while for 8% their visit was one of several reasons for their trip away from home that day, and for nearly a quarter (24%) it was an incidental or spontaneous stop.

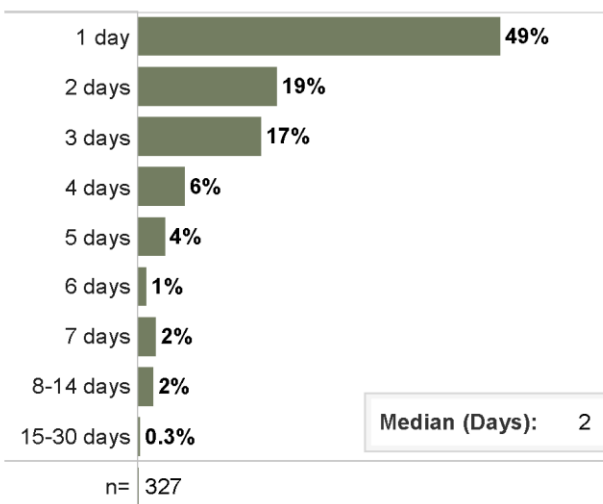
Question 6-8: Length of Stay

Respondents who are not permanent or seasonal residents of the local area around Big South Fork were also asked how many total days they would be spending away from their home on this trip, and then how many days they planned to spend within that local area, including days spent in the park. All respondents, regardless of residency, were asked whether they would be staying overnight away from their permanent residence within the local area. Responses to both of these questions are depicted in Figure 6.

[If not local/seasonal resident] How many total days will you spend away from home on your overall trip that includes your visit to Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area?



[If not local/seasonal resident] How many days will you spend in the local area (including the days you spend in Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area) on this trip away from home?



On your trip, will you stay overnight away from your permanent residence in Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and/or within the local area?

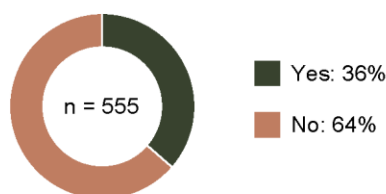


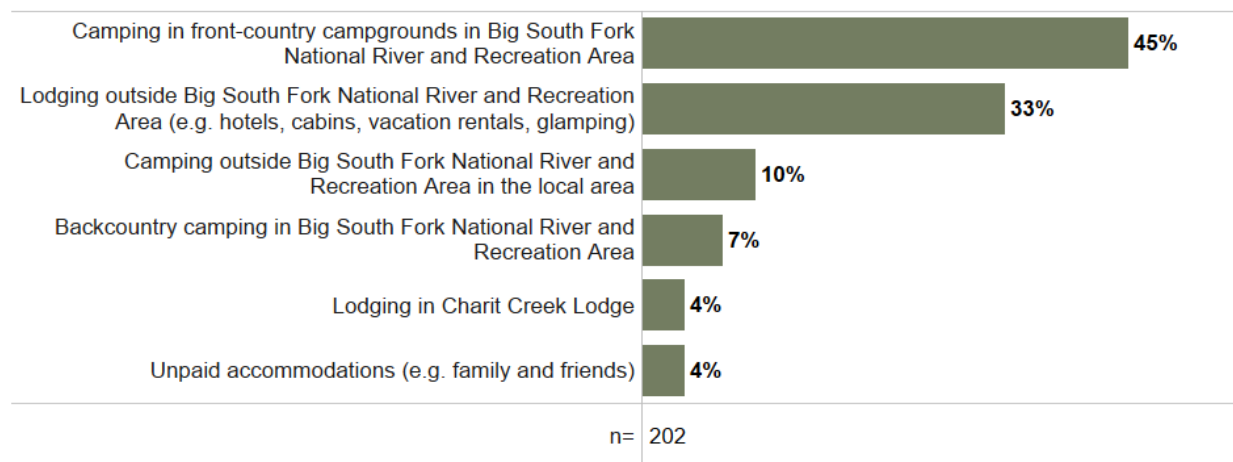
Figure 6. Time spent in the local area around Big South Fork.

- About two-fifths of non-local respondents (39%) spent one day overall on their trip away from home, while 15% spent two days, and 17% spent three days. The median number of days spent away from home was two days.
- About half of non-local respondents (49%) spent one day in the local area, while 19% spent two days, and 17% spent three days. The median length of stay in the local area was two days.
- Additionally, more than a third of all respondents (36%; including permanent/seasonal residents) stayed or planned to stay overnight away from their permanent residence in the park and/or in the local area.

Question 9: Overnight Visitors

If respondents indicated that they stayed overnight in the local area, they were asked about the type(s) of accommodation they used or planned to use while there (Figure 7).

[If staying overnight in local area] On this trip, what type of accommodations will you use while in the local area? Please mark all that apply



[If camping in or outside Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area] Did you stay in a tent or RV?

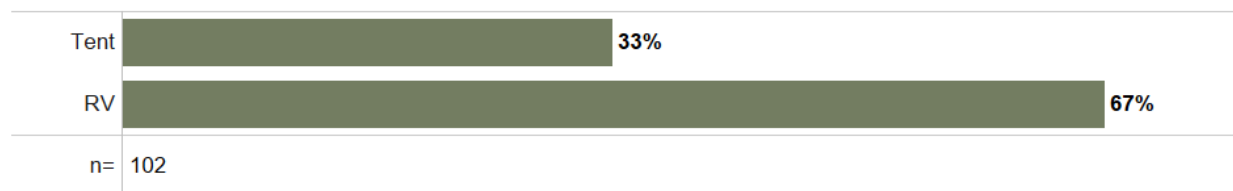


Figure 7. Accommodation types used by overnight visitors within Big South Fork and in the local area surrounding it.

- Nearly half of overnight respondents (45%) reported camping in front-country campgrounds in Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area.
- This was followed in prevalence by lodging outside Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area (hotels, cabins, vacation rentals, glamping) (33%), and backcountry camping in Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area (7%).
- Two-thirds of respondents (67%) who reported camping in or outside Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area utilized an RV with the remaining third (33%) utilizing a tent.

Respondents were then asked to indicate the number of nights they spent or would spend in each accommodation type (Figure 8).

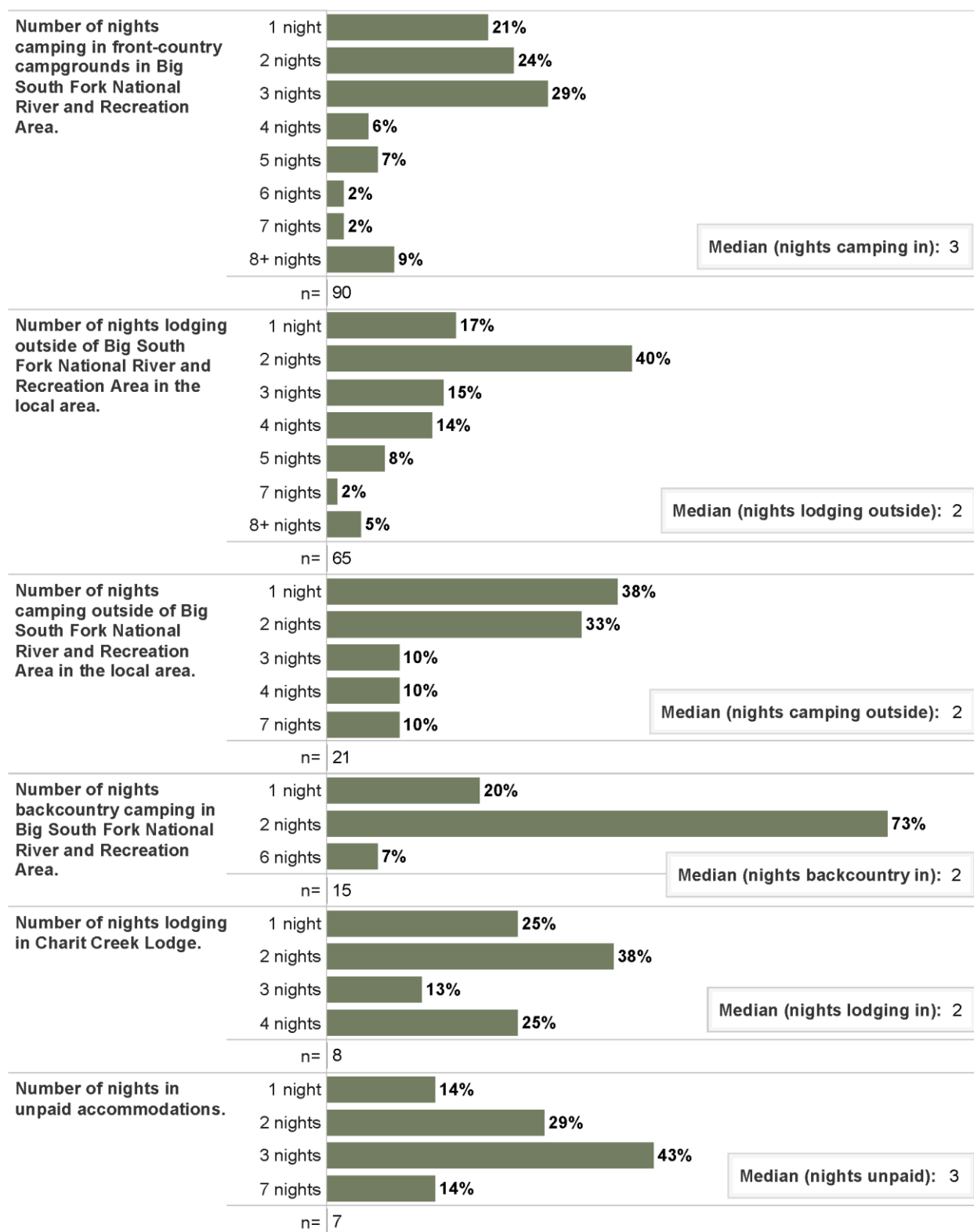


Figure 8. Number of nights spent within Big South Fork and in the local area surrounding it, by accommodation type. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, Table 10.

- Among the 45% of overnight respondents who camped in Big South Fork (per Figure 7), the median length of stay was three nights. Just under half (45%) of campers spent two nights or fewer camping in the park on this trip; 74% spent three nights or fewer.
- Among the 33% of overnight respondents who lodged outside of Big South Fork in the local area (per Figure 7), the median length of stay was two nights. Over half (57%) lodged two nights or fewer in the local area on this trip; 72% spent three nights or fewer.
- Among the 10% of overnight respondents who camped outside of Big South Fork (per Figure 7), the median length of stay was two nights, though almost two-fifths (38%) stayed just one night.
- Among the 7% of overnight respondents who camped in the backcountry in Big South Fork (per Figure 7), the median length of stay was two nights, with 20% staying for just one night, 73% staying for two nights, and 7% staying for six nights.
- Among the 4% of overnight respondents who stayed at Charit Creek Lodge in Big South Fork (per Figure 7), the median length of stay was two nights.
- Among the 4% of overnight respondents who stayed in unpaid accommodations in the local area (per Figure 7), the median length of stay was three nights.

Questions 12-14: Party Characteristics

Respondents were asked to indicate how many adults (18 or older) and children (under 18) were in their personal group during their visit to Big South Fork (Figure 9). A personal group was defined as the visitor and companions with whom they visited the park, such as a spouse, family, and/or friends, but respondents were informed not to account for the larger group with whom they may have traveled, such as a school, church, scout, or tour group.

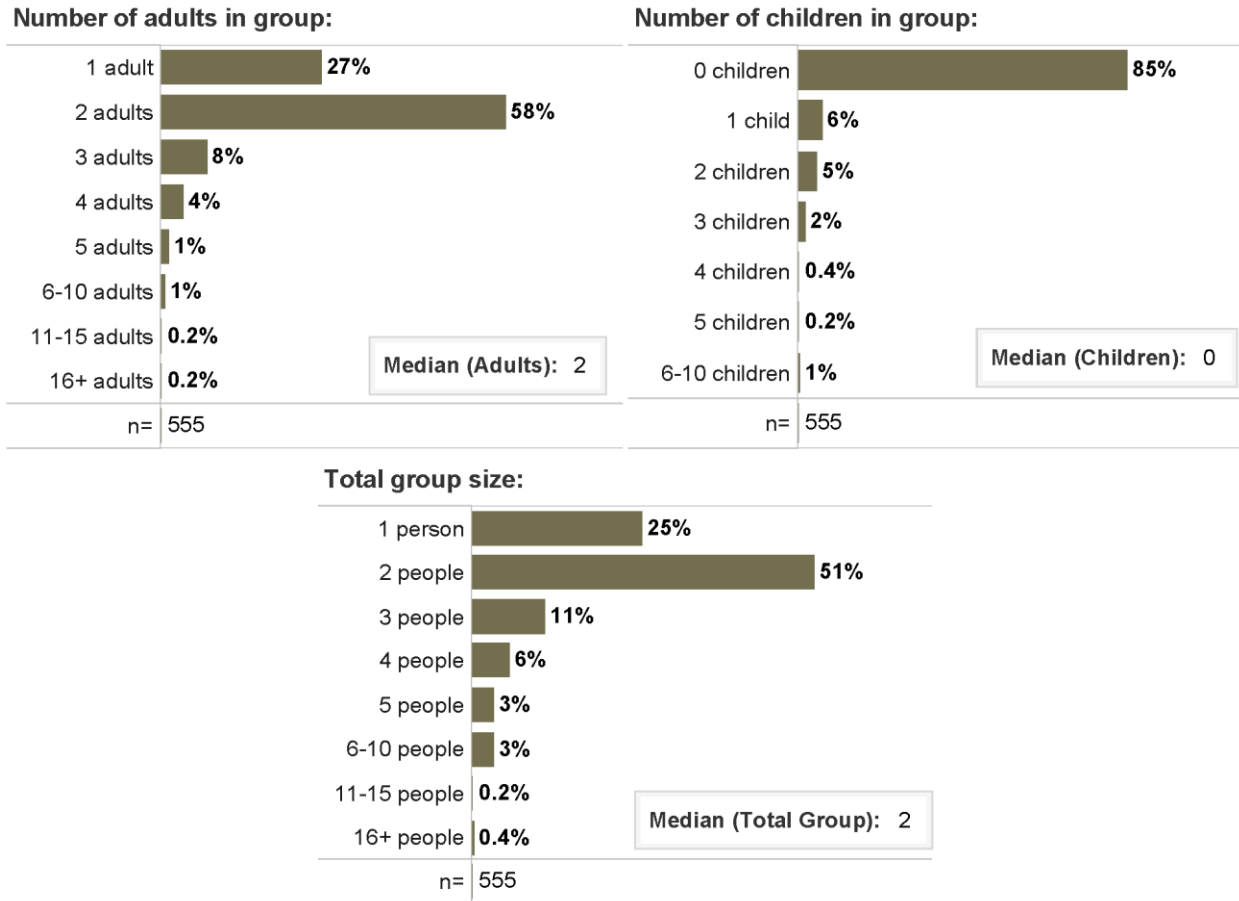


Figure 9. Number of adults and children in respondent's personal group, and total group size, while visiting Big South Fork. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, Table 11.

- The median number of adults per group was two.
- Most groups (85%) did not include any children.
- The median total number of people (adults and children) per group was two.

Respondents were then asked to provide the age of each member of their group (Figure 10). These data show the true age distribution of respondent groups sampled at Big South Fork.

What are the ages of each of the adults and children in your group?

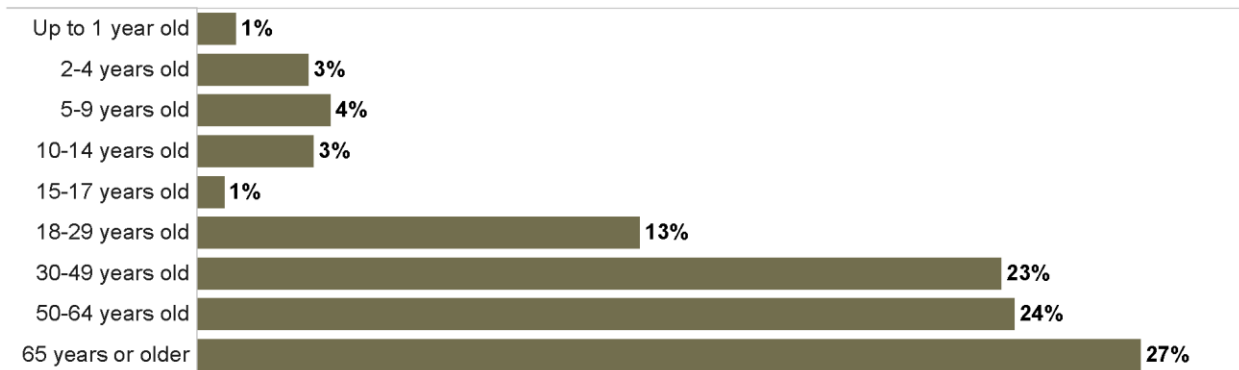


Figure 10. Age distribution of all members of respondent's personal group while visiting Big South Fork.

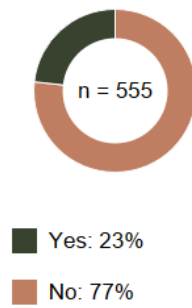
- The most common age of adults and children in a personal group was 65 years old or older (27%), followed by 50-64 years old (24%), and 30-49 years old (23%).
- Children (i.e., visitors under 18 years old) accounted for a combined total of 12% of group members.

Questions 17-21: Park Use Characteristics

Then, respondents were asked to indicate if they planned to visit Big South Fork for more than one day, and then a series of follow-up questions about the length of time they might spend in the park (Figure 11 and

Table 7).

On this trip, will you visit Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area for more than one day?



Will you spend one hour or more within Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area today?

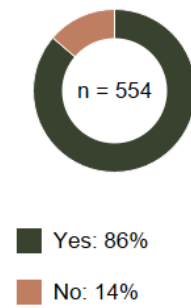


Figure 11. Length of time spent within Big South Fork on this trip.

Table 7. Length of time spent within Big South Fork on this trip.

Question	Sample Size (n)	Median
[If not planning to spend one hour or more] How many minutes do you plan to spend within Big South Fork today?	76	20
[If planning to spend one hour or more] How many hours do you plan to spend within Big South Fork today?	478	3
[If planning to visit more than one day] How many days do you plan to spend within Big South Fork on this trip?	129	3
[If planning to visit more than one day] On how many different days do you expect to enter the park?	129	2

- A majority of respondents (86%) planned to spend one hour or more in Big South Fork on the day they were surveyed. Among these visitors, the median length of time spent in the park “today” was three hours.
- Among 14% of respondents who planned to spend less than an hour within the park on the day they were surveyed, the median length of anticipated visit was 20 minutes.
- Additionally, three-quarters of respondents (77%) were planning to spend just a single day in Big South Fork on their trip. Among the 23% of respondents who planned to visit for more than one day, the median length of visit was three days.
- Those respondents who spent more than one day in the park were also asked on how many different days they expected to enter the park; the median answer was two days.

Next, respondents were asked to indicate the most recent entrance they used to enter Big South Fork (Figure 12).

Which was the most recent entrance you used to enter Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area?

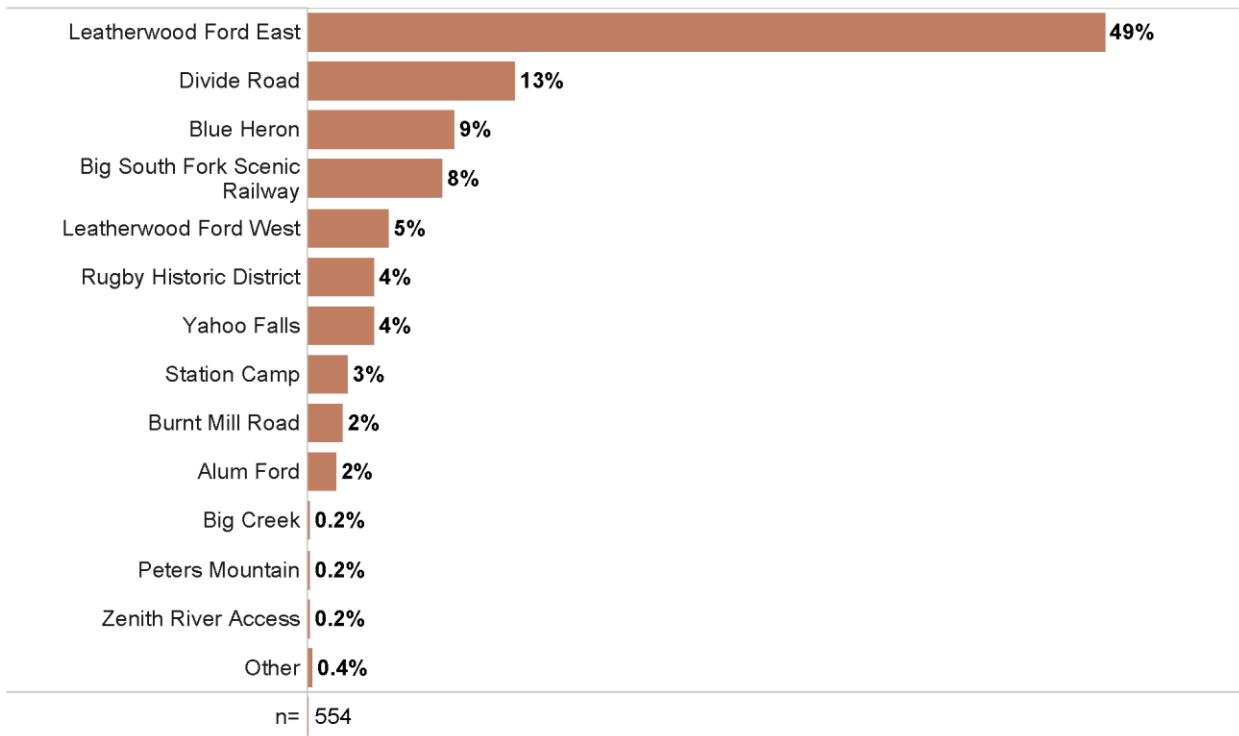


Figure 12. Most recent entrance used to enter Big South Fork.

- Among respondents, Leatherwood Ford Esat was the most commonly used entrance to Big South Fork (49%).
- This was followed in prevalence by Divide Road (13%), Blue Heron (9%), Big South Fork Scenic Railway (8%), and Leatherwood Ford West (5%).
- Due to park geography and proximity of intercept sites to entrances, the results for most recent entrance used were impacted by the volume of visitors intercepted at various sites.

Respondents were also presented with a list of locations within Big South Fork and asked to indicate if they had been to, or planned to visit them, that day (Figure 13).

Considering your visit today, will you visit any of the following locations within Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area? Please mark all that apply

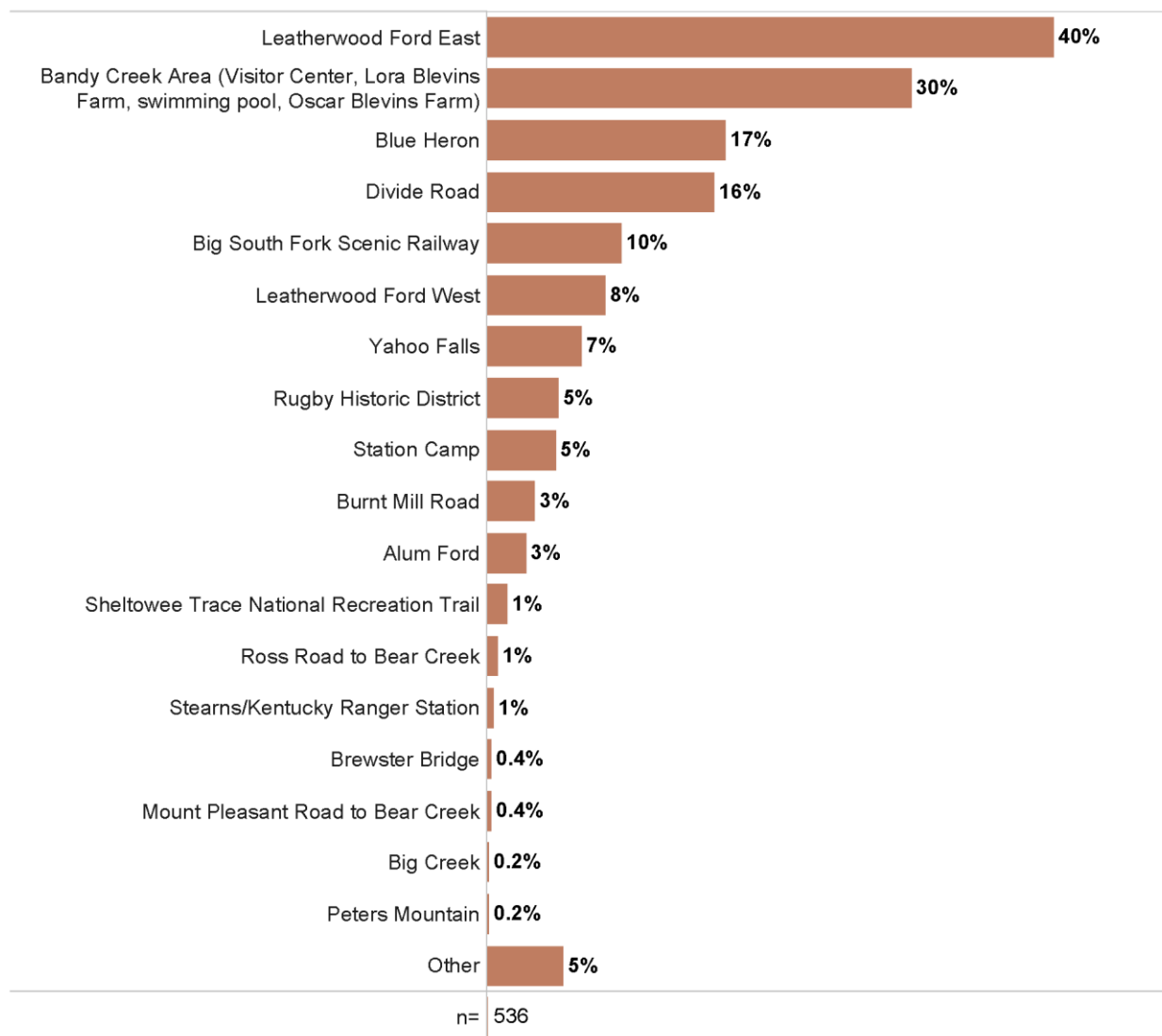


Figure 13. Park locations visited during the most recent trip to Big South Fork.

- The most commonly visited location in Big South Fork was Leatherwood Forest East (40% of respondents had either been there or planned to visit it on their trip), followed by Bandy Creek Area (30%), Blue Heron (17%), and Divide Road (16%).
- Peters Mountain and Big Creek were the least visited locations from the list provided, with 0.2% of respondents reporting having visited or planning to visit each location.

Question 22-23: Transportation

Respondents were first asked to indicate all the forms of transportation they personally used to travel from their home to Big South Fork on their trip (Figure 14).

From the list below, select all forms of transportation you personally used to travel from your home to Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area on this trip. Please mark all that apply.

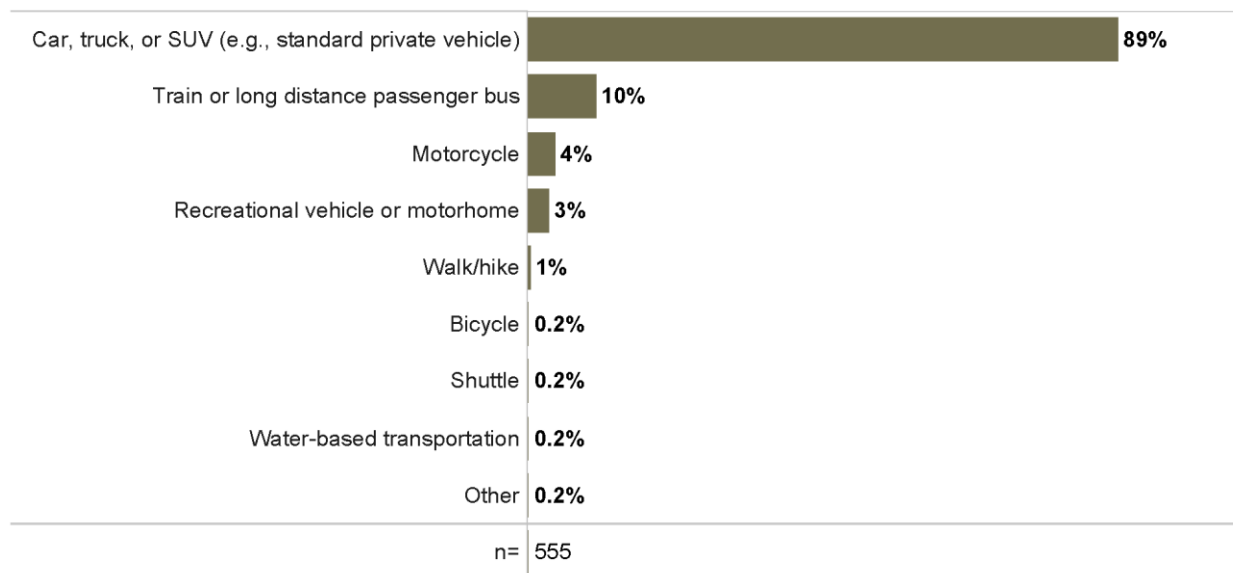


Figure 14. Forms of transportation used to travel from home to Big South Fork on the recent trip.

- Most respondents (89%) used a personal vehicle, such as a car, truck, or SUV, at some point during their trip from home to Big South Fork.
- The second most common mode of travel was a train or long-distance passenger bus (10%), followed by motorcycle (4%).

Respondents were then asked a follow-up question about the single form of transportation they used to enter Big South Fork on the day they were surveyed (Figure 15).

[If used at all during trip] Which form of transportation did you personally use to enter Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area today?

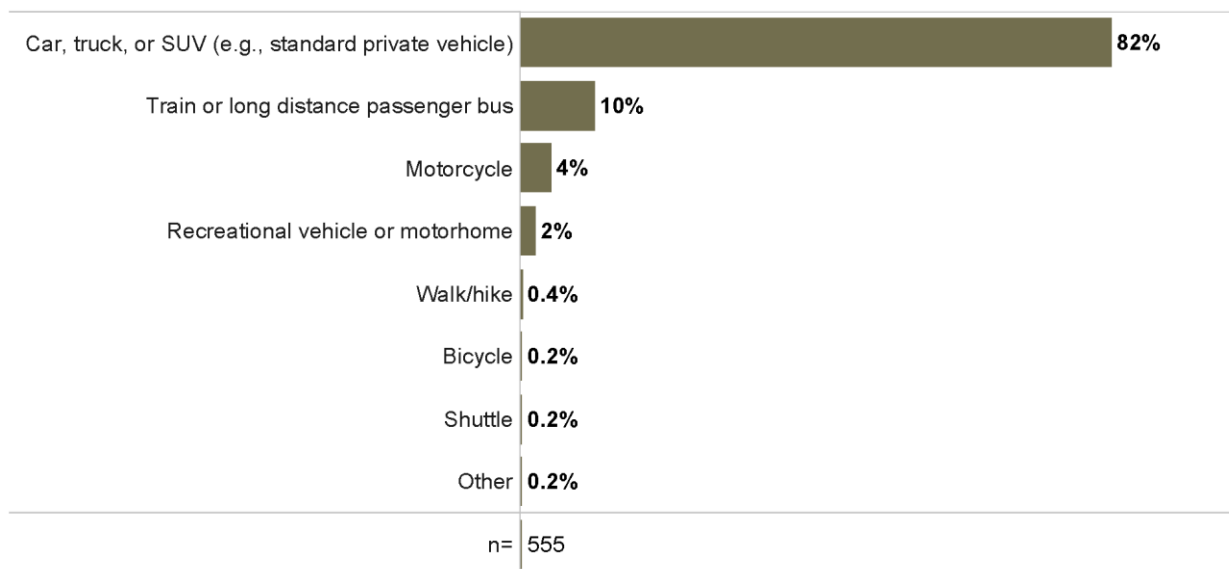


Figure 15. Form of transportation used to enter Big South Fork on the day of the survey.

- The majority of respondents (82%) reported that they used their car, truck, or SUV to enter Big South Fork on the day of the survey.
- This was followed distantly by use of a train or long-distance passenger bus (10%), and motorcycles (4%).



Kayaker in the O&W.

NPS

If respondents entered the park using a multi-passenger private vehicle (i.e., car, truck or SUV, recreational vehicle or motorhome, or motorcycle), they were asked to indicate how many people were traveling in or on that vehicle (Figure 16).

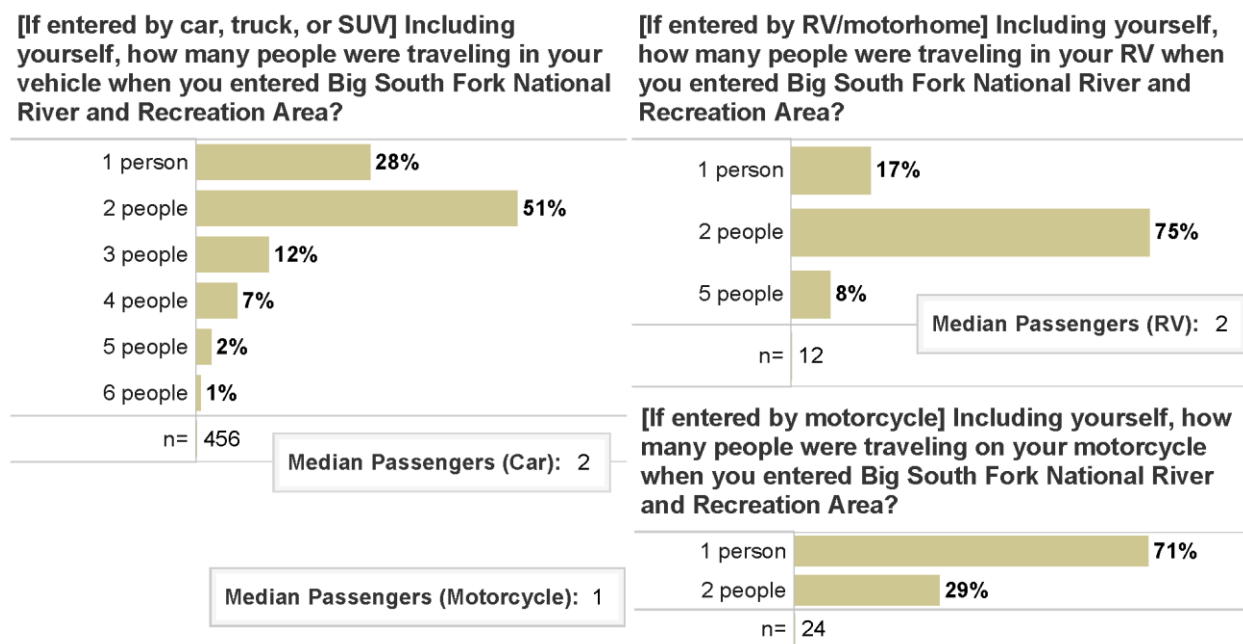


Figure 16. Number of people in or on respondent's vehicle when entering Big South Fork. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, Table 12.

- Half of respondents traveling by car (51%) reported two people. The next common group size was one person (28%), followed by three people (12%).
- Three-quarters of respondents entering Big South Fork by RV/motorhome reported traveling in a group of two people (75%), followed by one person (17%) and five people (8%).
- Most motorcyclists (71%) were traveling on their own.

Post-trip Survey Results

The following section provides results of the 186 post-trip visitor surveys received by mail-back or online following fieldwork conducted in Big South Fork in fall 2025. Again, caution is recommended in the interpretation of figures with sample size lower than n=30, and categories on some questions may not sum to 100% due to rounding differences and/or the opportunity to select more than one response option.

Questions 1–2: Information about Big South Fork

First, respondents were asked what sources they used to obtain information about Big South Fork prior to their trip, and whether they had the information they needed on their trip (Figure 17).

Prior to this trip, how did you obtain information about Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area? Please mark all that apply

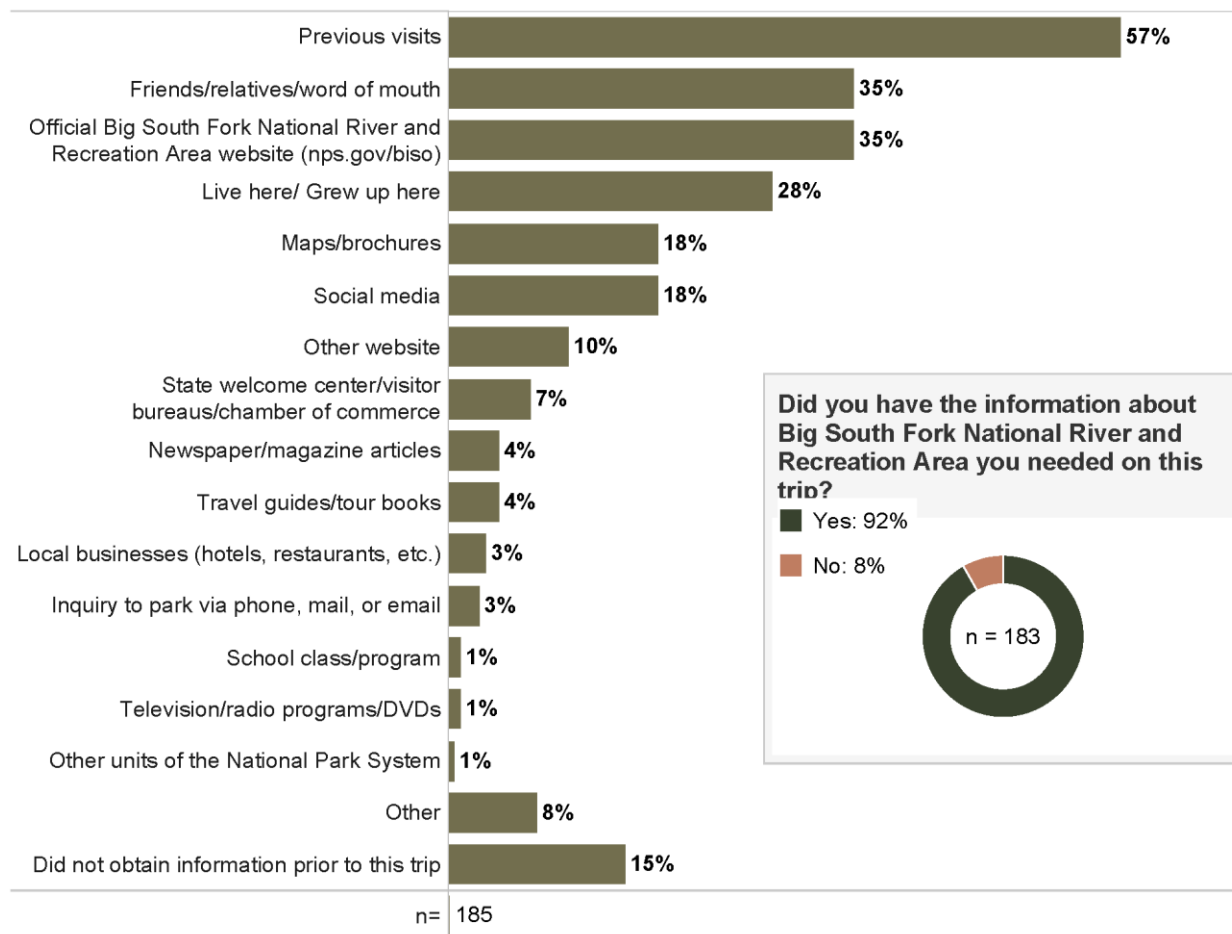


Figure 17. Sources used to obtain information about Big South Fork prior to the trip.

- The most used resource was information gained from previous visits, with 57% of respondents reportedly using it. The second most common source was friends, relatives, or word of mouth (35%), and the Official Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area website (35%), knowledge from living or growing up in the local area (28%), maps or brochures (18%), and social media (18%).
- In a follow-up question, 92% of respondents said that they had the information about Big South Fork that they needed on their trip, while 8% indicated that there was information that they needed but did not have.
- In an open-ended follow-up question, those who did not have the information they needed on this trip were asked to elaborate.

Questions 7-9: Trip Characteristics

Respondents were asked if they visited other National Park Service sites on their trip away from home (Figure 18).

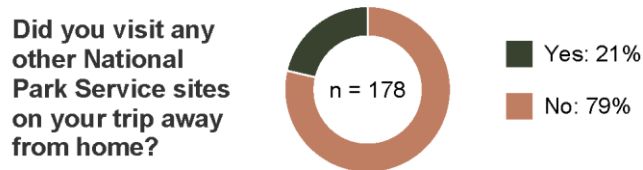


Figure 18. NPS sites visited on trip away from home.

- Just over one-fifth (21%) of all respondents had visited other NPS sites on their trip, while 79% identified Big South Fork as the only NPS site they visited while away from home.
- In an open-ended follow-up question, those who had visited other NPS sites on their trip were asked to list which one(s).

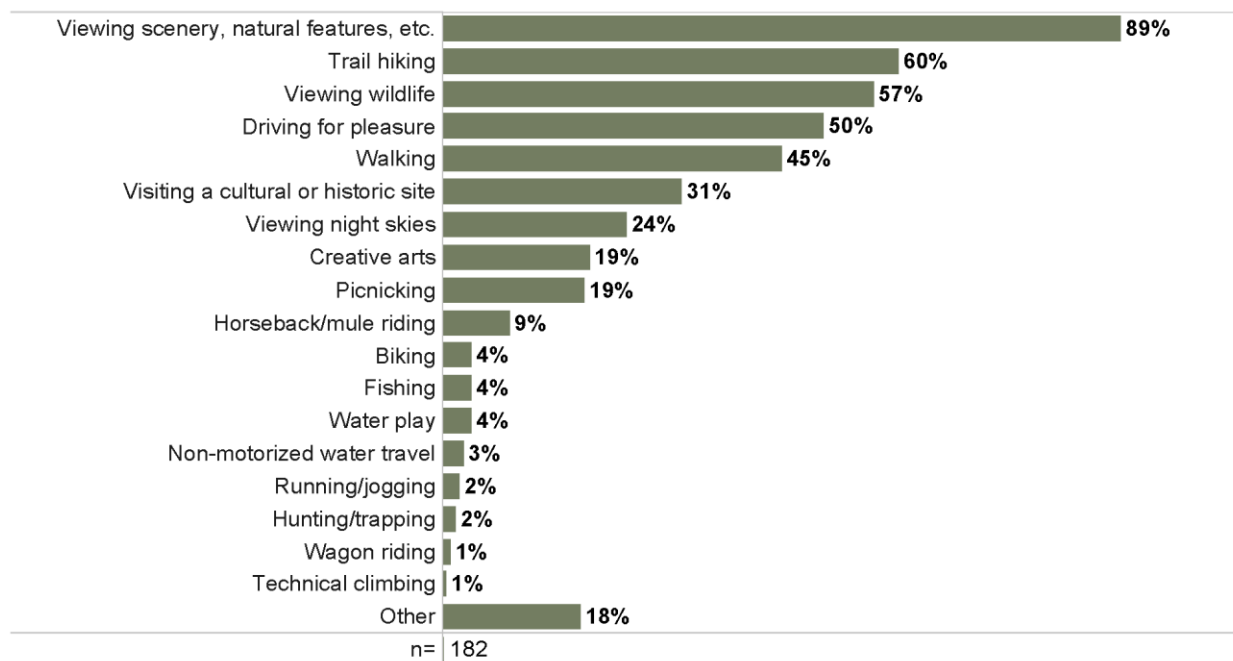


Mountain biker on a trail in Big South Fork.

NPS

Survey respondents were then asked to identify all activities that they participated in while visiting Big South Fork, and which of those was their primary activity (Figure 19).

On this trip, in which of the following activities did you personally participate within Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area? Please mark all that apply



And which was your primary activity within Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area during your visit (on the day you were contacted for this survey)?

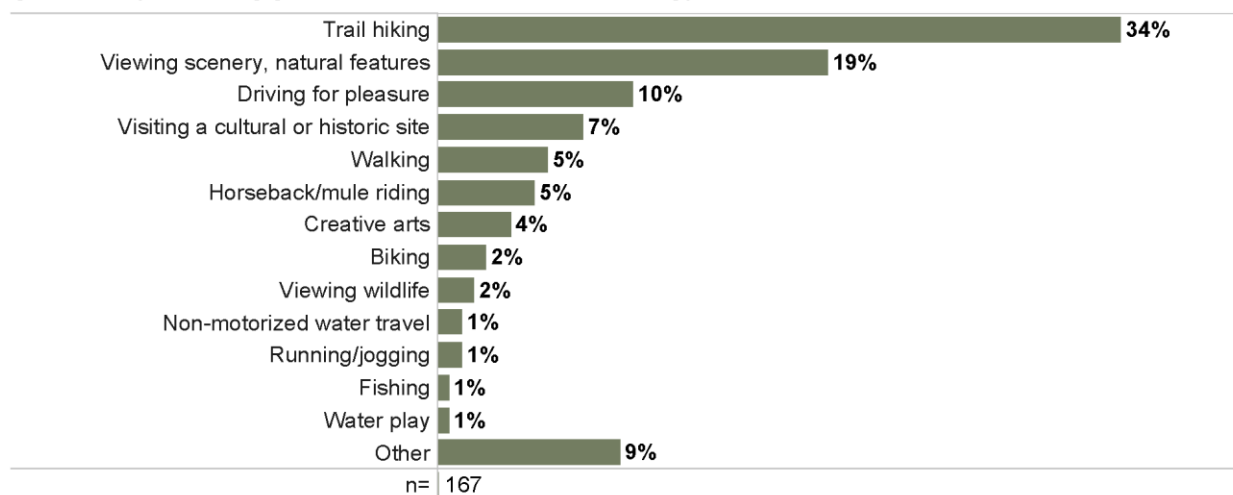


Figure 19. Participation in activities at Big South Fork.

- Almost all respondents reported viewing scenery and natural features (89%), while a majority of respondents reported trail hiking (60%), and viewing wildlife (57%).
- Non-motorized water travel, running or jogging, hunting, or trapping, wagon riding, and technical climbing were all uncommon activities (reported by 3% or fewer respondents).

- About one-third of respondents (34%) reported trail hiking as their primary activity, followed by viewing scenery or natural features (19%).

Questions 10-11: Reasons to Visit

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of various reasons to visit Big South Fork on their trip and were then asked which of those was the most important reason for them to visit Big South Fork (Figure 20).

How important to you were each of the following reasons or motivations for visiting Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area on this trip?

Rating Category	n=	Percent Responding				
		1 - Not at all important	2 - Slightly important	3 - Moderately important	4 - Very important	5 - Extremely important
To view wildlife or natural scenery	174	3%	2%	9%	34%	52%
To spend time with family/friends	169	8%	5%	9%	27%	50%
To relax	172	3%	3%	12%	32%	49%
To get physical exercise	171	9%	8%	19%	28%	36%
To hear the sounds of nature/quiet	172	7%	4%	13%	43%	33%
To experience solitude	175	14%	7%	19%	33%	26%
To learn more about nature	164	12%	12%	26%	34%	16%
To learn more about American history and culture	168	13%	14%	27%	32%	15%
To visit a National Park Service site	169	13%	12%	33%	28%	15%
Other (if specified)	34	12%		6%	26%	56%

And which was the most important reason for you to visit Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area on this trip?

To spend time with family/friends	25%
To view wildlife or natural scenery	18%
To get physical exercise	12%
To relax	10%
To experience solitude	7%
To visit a National Park Service site	6%
To hear sounds of nature/quiet	5%
To learn more about American history and culture	5%
To learn more about nature	1%
Other	12%
n=	171

Figure 20. Reasons or motivations to visit Big South Fork. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, Table 13.

- About half of respondents chose viewing wildlife or natural scenery (52%) and spending time with family or friends (50%) as extremely important reasons for their trip to Big South Fork.

- Other important reasons for visiting were relaxation and getting physical exercise (49% and 36% of respondents, respectively, rated them as extremely important).
- The least important reasons for visiting were visiting a National Park Service site and learning more about American history and culture (only 15% of respondents, reported either of them as extremely important, and 13% of respondents, rated either of them as not at all important).
- The most common response about the most important reason for visiting was spending time with family and friends (25%), followed by viewing wildlife or natural scenery (18%), and getting physical exercise (12%).

Questions 12-13: Programs, Services, and Learning

Respondents were asked to identify all programs and services in which they personally participated in Big South Fork during their trip (Figure 21).

On this trip, in which of the following programs and services did you personally participate within Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area? Please mark all that apply

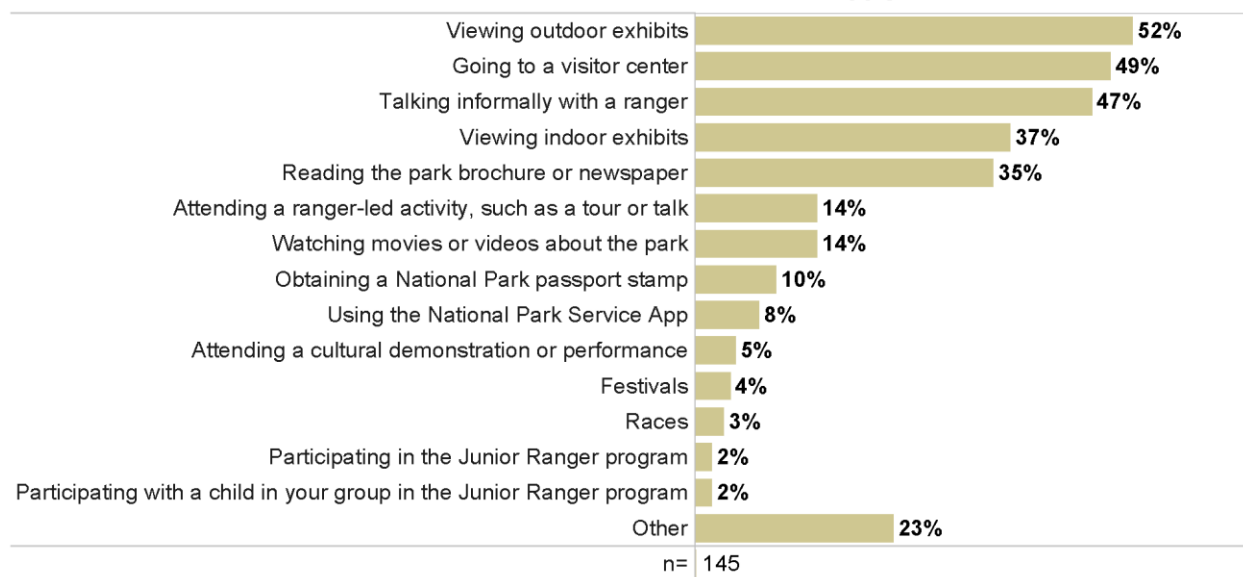


Figure 21. Participation in programs at Big South Fork.

- The three most-used programs were viewing outdoor exhibits, going to a Visitor Center, and talking informally with a ranger with about half of respondents (52%, 49%, and 47%, respectively) reporting participating in each of them.

A follow-up questions asked if respondents were to return to Big South Fork, were there specific subjects they would like to learn about in the future (Figure 22).

If you were to visit Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area in the future, are there specific subjects you would like to learn about?

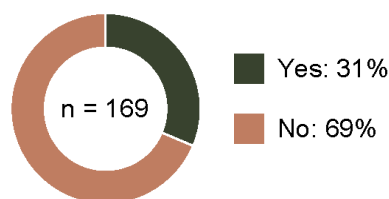


Figure 22. Learning outcomes while visiting Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area.

- About one-third of respondents (31%) reported that if they were to visit Big South Fork in the future, there are specific subjects they would like to learn about.
- Respondents who said yes to this question were asked to elaborate.

Questions 14-15: Use of Devices

Two survey questions were focused on the use of electronic devices, their importance, and the quality of service provided. First, respondents were asked which personal electronic devices they used while in Big South Fork (Figure 23).

Did you use a personal electronic device while in Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area to do any of the following actions?

	Yes	No	Don't know
GPS/Navigation n=166	60%	39%	1%
Send/receive a text message n=170	56%	42%	2%
Search the internet/email n=160	45%	51%	4%
Make/receive a cell phone call n=168	43%	54%	3%
Share pics/videos/audio via social media n=157	40%	58%	2%
Other (if specified) n=38	34%	63%	3%

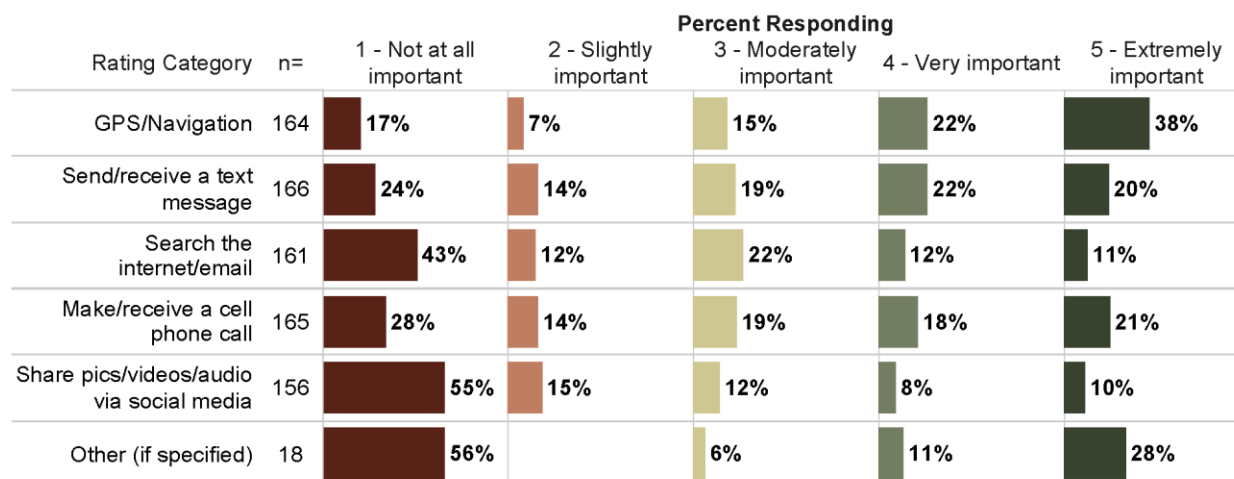
Labels <1% are not shown

Figure 23. Use of personal electronic devices while visiting Big South Fork. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, Table 14.

- The majority of respondents (60%) reported using GPS or navigation, while 56% reported sending or receiving text messages.
- Conversely, only 40% of respondents shared photos, videos, or audio via social media.

Then, respondents were asked to rate both the importance of each of these electronic device uses (Figure 24), and the quality of their service (Figure 25).

How important to you was it during your visit to Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area to use personal electronic devices to do each of the following?

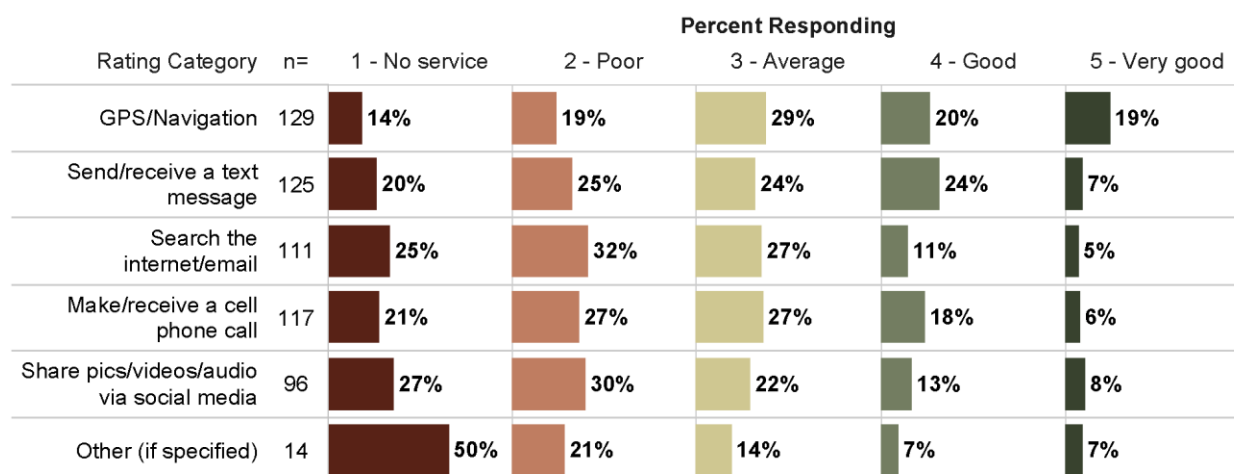


Categories sorted in descending order by percent answering "Yes" to "Did you use a personal electronic device while in the park to do any of the following actions?" (With "Other" anchored at bottom)

Figure 24. The importance of the use of personal electronic devices while visiting Big South Fork. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, Table 15.

- The most important device uses were GPS and navigation and making or receiving phone calls (38% and 21% of respondents, respectively, rated them as extremely important).
- Conversely, sharing photos, videos, or audio via social media was rated as extremely important only by 10% of respondents, and not at all important by 56% of respondents.

How would you rate the quality of service to do each of the following?



Categories sorted in descending order by percent answering "Yes" to "Did you use a personal electronic device while in the park to do any of the following actions?" (With "Other" anchored at bottom)

Figure 25. Quality of service for personal electronic devices while visiting Big South Fork. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, Table 16.

- GPS or navigation was rated as very good or good by 19% and 20% of respondents, respectively. However, 14% of respondents reported that they had no service for this.
- About a quarter of respondents (ranged from 20% to 27%, depending on the service) reported that they also had no service to make or receive phone calls, search the internet or email, share photos, videos, and audio via social media, and send or receive a text message.
- However, a small percentage of respondents (ranging from 5% to 8%, depending on the service) rated these services as very good.

Question 16: Physical Difficulties

Respondents were asked if anyone in their personal group had a physical condition that made it difficult to access or participate in park activities or services during their visit to Big South Fork. If such a condition was identified, respondents were asked to specify the type of difficulty (Figure 26).

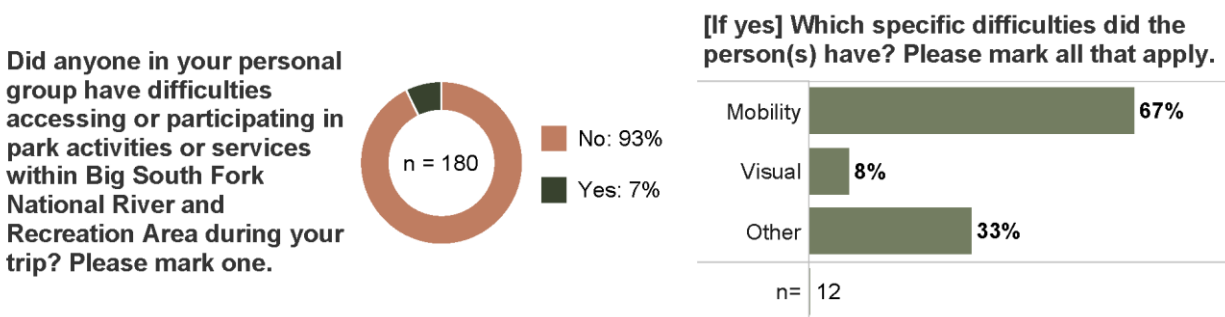


Figure 26. Physical difficulties while visiting Big South Fork.

- The majority of respondents (93%) reported that nobody in their personal group had a physical condition that made it difficult to access or participate in park activities or services during their visit to Big South Fork.
- Among the 7% of respondents who identified at least one difficulty, 67% reported mobility issues in their group, with a small portion (8%) also reporting visual difficulties. A total of 33% of respondents reported another difficulty that was not listed.

Questions 19-21: Visitor Experience

Respondents were then given several statements about Big South Fork and asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each given statement (Figure 27).

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

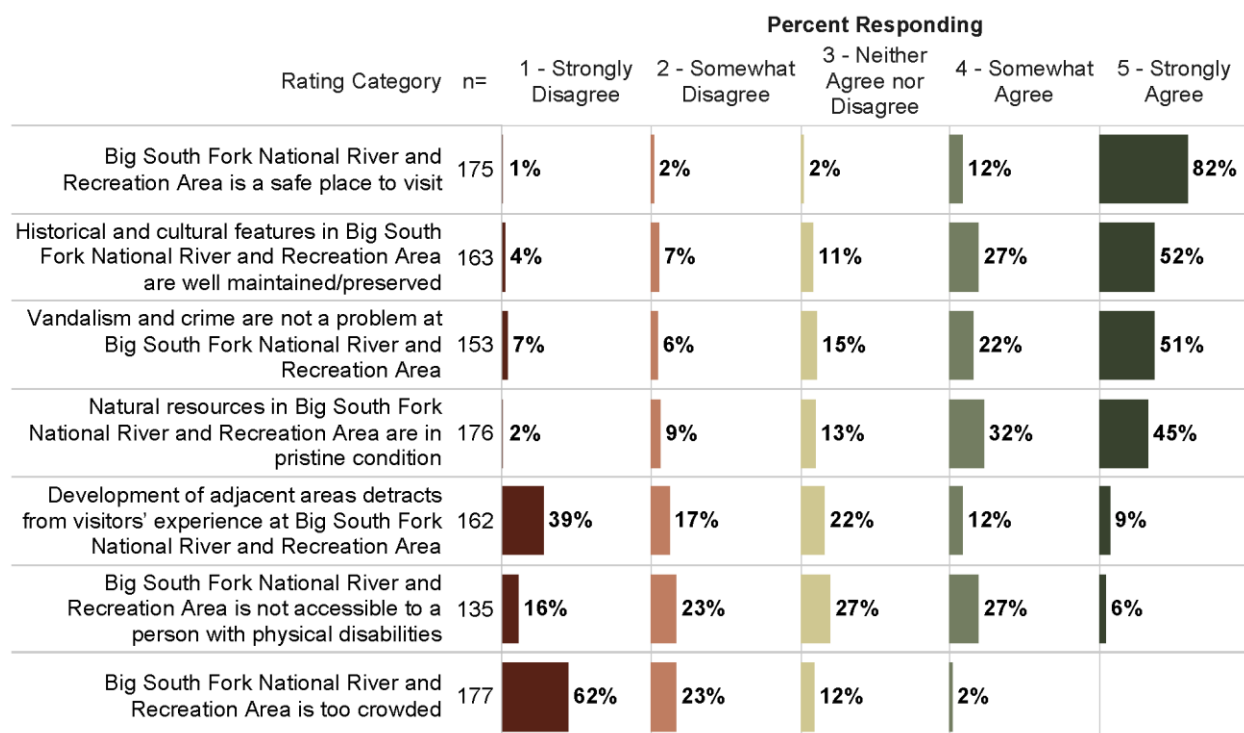


Figure 27. Rating Big South Fork experience. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, Table 17.

- From all the statements listed, “Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area is a safe place to visit” received the most consensus with a combined 94% of respondents saying they either strongly or somewhat agree with it. That was followed by “historical and cultural features in Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area are well maintained or preserved” and “vandalism and crime are not a problem at Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area” (79% and 73% of respondents, respectively, strongly or somewhat agreed with these statements).
- Conversely, “development of adjacent areas detracts from visitors’ experience at Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area” received the least support, with only 21% of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreeing with these statements, and 39% of respondents strongly disagreeing with the statement.

Next, respondents were asked to rate the quality of park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities in Big South Fork (Figure 28).

How would you rate the quality of the park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities in Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area?

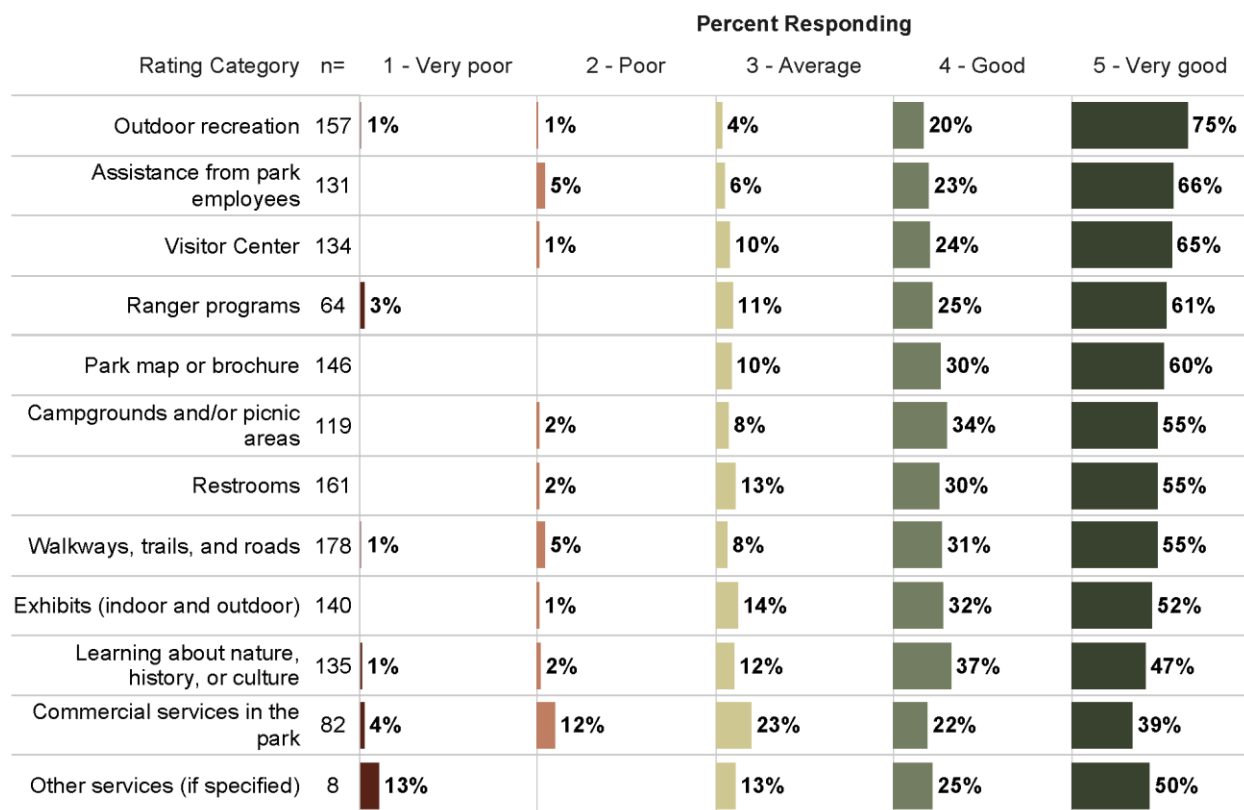


Figure 28. Rating the quality of specific Big South Fork facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, Table 18.

- Over half of respondents (ranging from 52% to 75%) rated exhibits (indoor and outdoor), walkways, trails and roads, restrooms, campgrounds and/or picnic areas, park maps or brochures, ranger programs, Visitor Center, assistance from park employees, and outdoor recreation as very good.
- Conversely, fewer than half of respondents rated learning about nature, history, or culture, and commercial services in the park as very good.

Finally, respondents were asked to rate overall quality of the park facilities, visitor services, and recreation opportunities (Figure 29).

Overall, how would you rate the quality of the park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities in Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area?

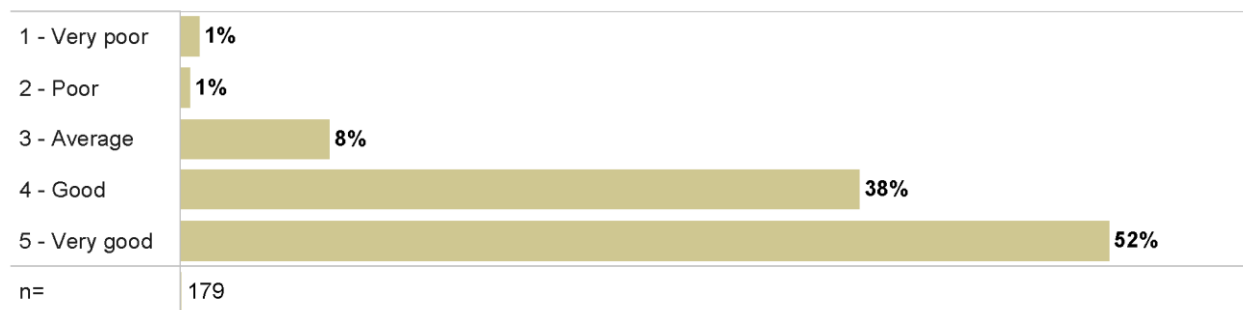


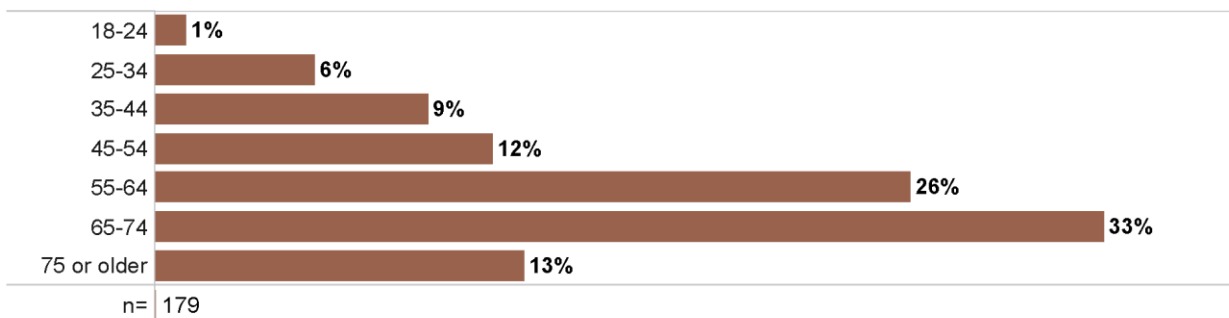
Figure 29. Rating overall quality of Big South Fork facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities.

- In general, about half of respondents (52%) rated the quality of the park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities in Big South Fork as very good, and another 38% rated them as good.
- Just about one in ten respondents rated the overall quality as average or below.

Questions 22-28: Background/Demographics

In the final section of the post-trip survey, respondents were asked various questions about their personal and household demographics. Figure 30 depicts descriptive statistics for respondent age and education.

What is your age?



What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

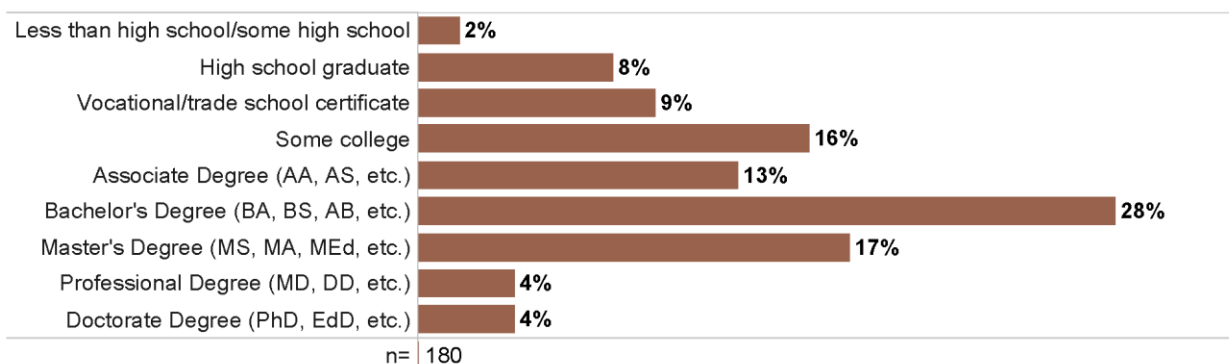


Figure 30. Respondent demographics: age and level of education.

- The most common age categories were 65 to 74 years old (33%), 55 to 64 years old (26%), and 75 or older (13%). The least represented age group were 18 to 24 years old (1% of the participants surveyed).
- Most survey respondents reported obtaining higher education, with a combined 81% having some college or a college degree, and a quarter (25%) holding a master's degree or higher.

Respondents were also asked to identify their race(s) and if they were of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin (Figure 31).

What is your race and/or ethnicity? Mark all that apply.

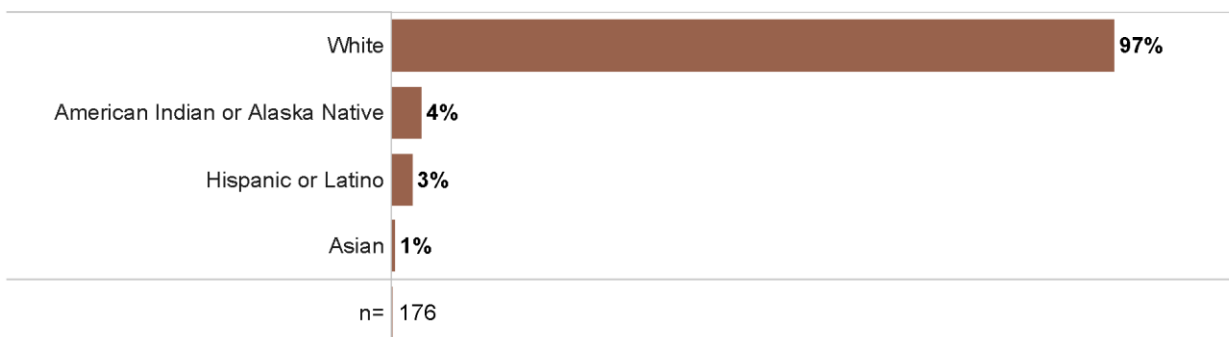


Figure 31. Respondent demographics: race and/or ethnicity.

- Nearly all respondents (97%) were White, while 4% were American Indian or Alaska Native.

Finally, at a household level, respondents were asked to report annual income and number of contributors, as well as how many people (adults and children) live in their household (Figure 32).

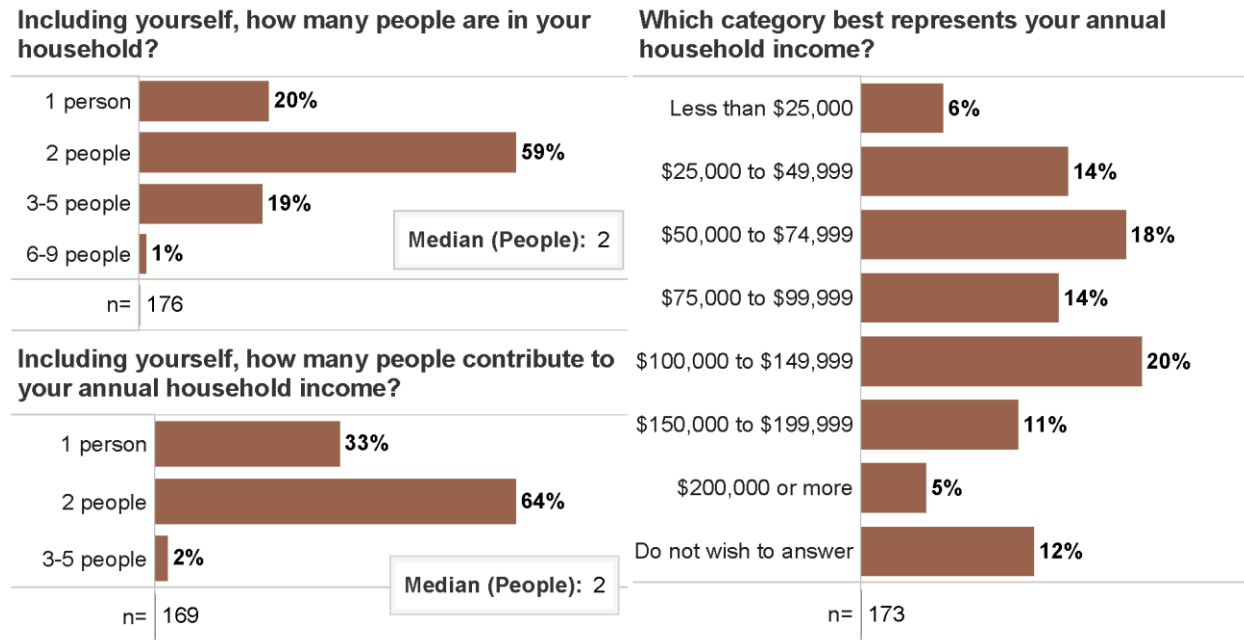


Figure 32. Household demographics: annual household income and household size. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in Appendix A, Table 19.

- The majority of respondents (59%) had two people in their household, followed by one person (another 20%).
- In addition to obtaining higher education, visitors surveyed at Big South Fork also reported relatively high-income levels. About one-third of respondents (31%) reported that their annual household income was between \$100,000 and \$199,999, and another 5% earned \$200,000 or more.
- Most respondents (64%) came from a dual-income household.

Literature Cited

National Park Service (NPS). 2025. 2025 Socioeconomic Monitoring of Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area: Visitor intercept and post-trip surveys.
<https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2317760>

Appendix A: Accessible Tables

Table 8 through Table 19 contain tabular data from figures found in the body of the report.

Table 8. Data from Figure 2. Previous visits to Big South Fork.

Question	Sample Size (n)	Median
[If not first-time visitor] Including this visit, how many visits have you made to Big South Fork over the past 12 months?	377	4
[If not first-time visitor] Including this visit, how many visits have you made to Big South Fork over the past five years?	377	25

Table 9. Data from Figure 3. Visits made to other NPS sites within the past year.

Question	Sample Size (n)	Median
How many visits have you made to other NPS sites over the past 12 months?	553	2

Table 10. Data from Figure 8. Number of nights spent in the local area around Big South Fork, by accommodation type.

Accommodation Type	Sample Size (n)	Median
[If backcountry camping in Big South Fork] Number of nights	15	2
[If camping in Big South Fork] Number of nights	90	3
[If camping outside of Big South Fork in the local area] Number of nights	21	2
[If lodging in Big South Fork] Number of nights	8	2
[If lodging outside Big South Fork in local area] Number of nights	65	2
[If staying in unpaid accommodations] Number of nights	7	3

Table 11. Data from Figure 9. Number of adults and children in respondent's personal group, and total group size, while visiting Big South Fork.

Group Composition	Sample Size (n)	Median
Adults	555	2
Children	555	0
Total group size	555	2

Table 12. Data from Figure 16. Number of people in respondent's vehicle when entering Big South Fork.

Question	Sample Size (n)	Median
[If entered by car, truck, or SUV] Including yourself, how many people were traveling in your vehicle when you entered Big South Fork?	456	2
[If entered by RV/motorhome] Including yourself, how many people were traveling in your RV when you entered Big South Fork?	12	2
[If entered by motorcycle] Including yourself, how many people were traveling on your motorcycle when you entered Big South Fork?	24	1

Table 13. Data from Figure 20. Reasons or motivations to visit Big South Fork.

Rating Category	Sample Size (n)
To visit a National Park Service site	169
To experience solitude	175
To hear the sounds of nature/quiet	172
To learn more about nature	164
To learn more about American history and culture	168
To spend time with family/friends	169
To get physical exercise	171
To view wildlife or natural scenery	174
To relax	172
Other (if specified)	34

Table 14. Data from Figure 23. Use of personal electronic devices while visiting Big South Fork.

Device Use	Sample Size (n)
Make/receive a cell phone call	168
Send/receive a text message	170
Search the internet/email	160
GPS/Navigation	166
Share pics/videos/audio via social media	157
Other (if specified)	38

Table 15. Data from Figure 24. The importance of the use of personal electronic devices while visiting Big South Fork.

Device Use	Sample Size (n)
Make/receive a cell phone call	165
Send/receive a text message	166
Search the internet/email	161
GPS/Navigation	164
Share pics/videos/audio via social media	156
Other (if specified)	18

Table 16. Data from Figure 25. Quality of service for personal electronic devices while visiting Big South Fork.

Device Use	Sample Size (n)
Make/receive a cell phone call	117
Send/receive a text message	125
Search the internet/email	111
GPS/Navigation	129
Share pics/videos/audio via social media	96
Other (if specified)	14

Table 17. Data from Figure 27. Rating Big South Fork experience.

Rating Category	Sample Size (n)
Big South Fork is a safe place to visit	175
Big South Fork is too crowded	177
Natural resources in Big South Fork are in pristine condition	176
Vandalism and crime are not a problem at Big South Fork	153
Big South Fork is not accessible to a person with physical disabilities	135
Historical and cultural features in Big South Fork are well maintained/preserved	163
Development of adjacent areas detracts from visitors' experience at Big South Fork	162

Table 18. Data from Figure 28. Rating the quality of Big South Fork facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities.

Rating Category	Sample Size (n)
Visitor Center	134
Exhibits (indoor and outdoor)	140
Restrooms	161
Walkways, trails, and roads	178
Campgrounds and/or picnic areas	119
Assistance from park employees	131
Park map or brochure	146
Ranger programs	64
Commercial services in the park (food, lodging, gifts, rental, etc.)	82
Other services (if specified)	8
Learning about nature, history, or culture	135
Outdoor recreation (sightseeing, camping, bicycling, boating, hiking, etc.)	157

Table 19. Data from Figure 32. Household demographics: annual household income and household size.

Question	Sample Size (n)	Median
Including yourself, how many people are in your household?	176	2
Including yourself, how many people contribute to your annual household income?	169	2