

Park Use and Users of San Mateo County Units of Golden Gate National Recreation Area

Introduction

A number of units of Golden Gate National Recreation Area have been added in San Mateo County in recent years. However, little is known about the use of these areas, including the amount of use, type of use, characteristics of park visitors, and evaluation of these park units by visitors. Therefore, a study was undertaken in the summer of 2006. The purpose of this study was to 1) conduct counts of use at selected park units and 2) administer a survey to park visitors. Park units included in the study were Milagra Ridge, Mori Point, Sweeny Ridge, and the Phleger Estate.

Study Methods

The visitor counts and survey were administered by stationing an employee at each of four study park units: College Avenue for Milagra Ridge, Moose Lodge and “North Trailhead” for Mori Point, Sneath Lane for Sweeny Ridge, and Miramontes Trail access area for the Phleger Estate. The employee was stationed at these sites on randomly selected days (stratified by weekend and week days) in the summer of 2006. Visitor counts and surveys were conducted at Milagra Ridge on seven days, at Mori Point on nine days, at Sweeny Ridge on nine days, and at Phleger Estate on ten days. The visitor counts and surveys were conducted from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm on half of the sample days and from 12:00 noon to 8:00 pm on half of the sample days. The employee recorded the number of people and groups entering the park throughout the sampling

period and approached as many groups leaving the park as possible, asking them to participate in the survey. The response rate for the survey was 44.3% for Milagra Ridge, 48.0% for Mori Point, 52.4% for Sweeny Ridge, and 44.4% for the Phleger Estate. This yielded 35 completed questionnaires for Milagra Ridge, 72 completed questionnaires for Mori Point, 86 completed questionnaires for Sweeny Ridge, and 16 completed questionnaires for the Phleger Estate.

Visitor Counts

Visitor counts for each of the four study park units were averaged for each half-hour period and are shown in Tables 1 through 4. At the bottom of these tables, the average daily number of people and groups entering each park unit is shown. For Milagra Ridge, an average of 41 people in 27 groups entered the park each day. For Mori Point, an average of 78 people in 48 groups entered the park each day. For Sweeny Ridge, an average of 53 people in 34 groups entered the park each day. And for the Phleger Estate, an average of 12 people in 7 groups entered the park each day.

Visitor Survey

The survey questionnaire included twenty-four questions addressing a variety of issues. For the purposes of this report, these issues are grouped into four categories: 1) park use patterns, 2) indicators of quality, 3) characteristics of park users, and 4) Rancho Corral de Tierra. Frequency distributions of resulting data for all questions for each of the four study park units are included in the appendix to this report. A summary of principal survey findings are summarized in the remainder of this report.

Park Use Patterns

Several survey questions addressed characteristics of park use, including previous use, length of stay, group size, means of travel to the park, and activities in which visitors participated. The first question asked if visitors had been to the park previously. A large majority of respondents at all four parks had visited the park before, suggesting that these parks may serve as “neighborhood parks” for many visitors. This was corroborated by findings from the second question which asked visitors approximately how many times they had visited the park in the last 12 months. Since some respondents had visited the park many times (nearly every day of the year), the median number of visits is the most appropriate measure of previous visits. The median number of visits ranged from a low of 10 at Mori Point to a high of 51 at the Phleger Estate. Clearly, most visitors are using these parks on a regular basis. Length of stay was relatively short, and again this is generally in keeping with use of “neighborhood parks.” Median length of stay ranged from one-to-two hours. Group size was small at all four parks, generally one or two people.

Residential location of visitors varied by park. The vast majority of visitors to both Milagra Ridge and Mori Point live within two miles of these parks. A near majority of visitors (46.9%) to Sweeny Ridge also live within two miles of the park. However, a relatively large percentage of visitors (75%) to the Phleger Estate live more than two miles from the park, probably because there are no large residential neighborhoods close to this park. Despite the fact that relatively large percentages of visitors live close to these parks, the majority of visitors (ranging from 60.3% at Mori Point to 85.7% at the

Phleger Estate) reported that they had driven to the park on the day they were contacted for this survey.

Three questions in this section asked visitors about the activities in which they participated on the day they were contacted and related issues. Twelve activities were listed in the questionnaire and respondents were asked to indicate 1) which activities they had participated in and 2) which activity was most important to them. Activities participated in were relatively similar across the four parks. The most popular activities were hiking/walking and observing the scenery/views. A second tier of important activities included bird watching, wildlife viewing, and dog walking, though no respondents reporting dog walking at the Phleger Estate. The most important recreation activities were generally the same activities in which visitors participated. However, no respondents reported that dog walking was important at the Phleger Estate. Finally, respondents were asked what new recreation opportunities they would like to see provided. Overwhelmingly, the most common response to this question was that visitors would like the park to remain the same and not change by adding different types of recreation activities.

Two final questions dealt with the familiarity of respondents with Golden Gate National Recreation Area as the manager of the study parks. Respondents were first asked if they knew that name of the agency that manages the park they were visiting. Most visitors to Milagra Ridge, Mori Point and Phleger Estate reported that they knew the name of the management agency. Only 42.2% of visitors to Sweeny Ridge reported that they knew the name of the management agency. Respondents who reported they knew the name of the management agency were then asked to record the name.

Responses were highly variable, but most included some language referencing Golden Gate, the National Park Service, GGNRA, or similar wording.

Indicators of Quality

Several batteries of questions explored the qualities of the parks that visitors think are most important. For example, respondents were asked to report in an open-ended manner what they enjoyed most and least about their visit on the day they were contacted for the survey. Responses were recorded verbatim and then categorized. The largest plurality of respondents – by far – for all four parks reported that “beauty/scenery/views” was the quality most enjoyed. A second tier of items included 1) “being outside/in nature/natural setting/fresh air”, 2) “wildlife/birds/plants”, 3) “trails/number of trails/maintenance of trails”, 4) “weather”, and 5) “quiet/peaceful/serene”. For the question about what was least enjoyed, the largest plurality of respondents – by far – for all four parks reported that nothing detracted from their visit. A second tier of items least enjoyed included 1) “litter/garbage” and 2) “dog waste/dogs off leash”.

Related open-ended questions asked what makes the park “special” and what respondents would ask park managers to do to improve the park. The most common “special” characteristic of the parks was their “accessibility/closeness to home”. Other commonly reported characteristics included 1) “beauty/great views” and 2) “being in nature/near the beach/near the ocean”. In keeping the open-ended question described above, a plurality of respondents reported that they would not ask park managers to do anything to improve the park – they like the parks as they are.

Two batteries of closed-ended questions were also designed to explore important qualities of study parks. Respondents were asked to rate the degree to which 15 items are “problems” in the study parks. “Lack of parking” was reported as a relatively important problem at all four parks, but especially at Milagra Ridge. Other problems reported as relatively important included 1) “spread of exotic/invasive plant species”, 2) “off-trail impacts of bikes”, and 3) “dogs off leash” (especially at the Phleger Estate).

The second battery of closed-ended questions asked respondents to 1) rate the importance of 17 park characteristics related to facilities/services, physical characteristics, and social characteristics, and 2) rate the quality of these same 17 park characteristics. Resulting data were used to create “importance-performance” graphs for each park which illustrate the relationship between importance and perceived quality. These graphs for each park are included in the tables in the appendix to this report. For most parks, most of the 17 items included in the question are found in the upper right-hand quadrant of the resulting graphs, meaning that items that were rated by respondents as important were also rated as high in quality. Only a few items were rated as relatively important, but relatively low in quality and therefore are found in the lower right-hand quadrant of the graph. These items varied by park. For Milagra Ridge, only one item – parking – was in the lower right-hand quadrant. For Mori Point, only one item – accessibility for people with disabilities – was found in the lower right-hand quadrant. For Sweeny Ridge, three items – restrooms, information about the park, and accessibility for people with disabilities – were found in the lower right-hand quadrant. For the Phleger Estate, no items were found in the lower right-hand quadrant.

A final question asked respondents to report the degree to which they felt crowded in the park. Nearly all respondents at all four parks reported that they were “not at all crowded.”

Characteristics of Park Users

Several questions asked about the personal characteristics of visitors. The gender of respondents was relatively evenly split except at the Phleger Estate where a large majority of visitors (76.9%) were male. The vast majority of visitors at all study parks are highly educated with at least a four-year college degree. Correspondingly, income levels were relatively high; the plurality of visitors at all four parks reported an annual household income of \$100,000 to \$200,000. The vast majority of visitors are also currently employed. Respondents represented a range of ages with most in their forties or fifties; average age ranged from 41 at Sweeny Ridge to 55 at the Phleger Estate. Most visitors (over 90% at all four parks) identified themselves as non-Hispanic/Latino/Latina. The vast majority of visitors (over 85%) at Milagra Ridge, Mori Point, and the Phleger Estate reported their racial identity as White. Most visitors (58.1%) at Sweeny Ridge also reported their race as White, but 20.9% reported themselves as Asian.

Rancho Corral de Tierra

Three questions were included at the end of the questionnaire addressing Rancho Corral de Tierra, an area that is now being acquired by Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The first question asked respondents if they were familiar with this area. Most respondents at all study parks were not familiar with this area. Respondents who were

familiar with the area were asked 1) what important qualities of this area should be protected and 2) what types of recreation opportunities should be provided at this area.

The most important qualities of this area that should be protected were 1) “natural setting/openness/no development” and 2) “flora and fauna”. The most important recreation activity that should be provided was hiking.

Table 1. Milagra Ridge – Average of 7 counting days

Time Period	Number of People	Number of Groups
7:00 to 7:30	1.5	1.0
7:30 to 8:00	0.5	0.5
8:00 to 8:30	1.0	1.0
8:30 to 9:00	1.8	1.8
9:00 to 9:30	3.0	1.5
9:30 to 10:00	2.0	1.3
10:00 to 10:30	4.0	1.3
10:30 to 11:00	2.0	1.8
11:00 to 11:30	1.7	1.0
11:30 to 12:00	1.3	1.0
12:00 to 12:30	1.4	0.6
12:30 to 1:00	2.1	0.9
1:00 to 1:30	1.3	0.9
1:30 to 2:00	0.6	0.4
2:00 to 2:30	0.6	0.6
2:30 to 3:00	2.7	1.3
3:00 to 3:30	2.7	1.3
3:30 to 4:00	1.3	1.3
4:00 to 4:30	1.0	1.0
4:30 to 5:00	2.5	1.5
5:00 to 5:30	1.0	1.0
5:30 to 6:00	1.0	0.7
6:00 to 6:30	1.7	1.0
6:30 to 7:00	1.3	1.3
7:00 to 7:30	1.0	1.0
7:30 to 8:00	0.5	0.5
Total	41.3	27.3

Table 2. Mori Point – Average of 9 counting days

Time Period	Number of People	Number of Groups
7:00 to 7:30	1.0	1.0
7:30 to 8:00	0.8	0.6
8:00 to 8:30	3.0	2.4
8:30 to 9:00	1.8	1.2
9:00 to 9:30	3.4	2.0
9:30 to 10:00	3.6	2.6
10:00 to 10:30	2.2	1.4
10:30 to 11:00	2.0	1.4
11:00 to 11:30	1.4	1.0
11:30 to 12:00	1.7	1.3
12:00 to 12:30	2.5	1.9
12:30 to 1:00	3.4	2.4
1:00 to 1:30	2.2	1.1
1:30 to 2:00	3.1	1.8
2:00 to 2:30	2.3	1.2
2:30 to 3:00	1.2	0.7
3:00 to 3:30	4.7	2.7
3:30 to 4:00	8.5	4.0
4:00 to 4:30	8.3	4.0
4:30 to 5:00	5.5	3.5
5:00 to 5:30	2.3	1.5
5:30 to 6:00	5.5	3.3
6:00 to 6:30	2.3	1.5
6:30 to 7:00	1.8	1.8
7:00 to 7:30	2.5	1.8
7:30 to 8:00	0.7	0.3
Total	77.6	48.3

Table 3. Sweeney Ridge – Average of 9 counting days

Time Period	Number of People	Number of Groups
7:00 to 7:30	0.0	0.0
7:30 to 8:00	1.7	1.3
8:00 to 8:30	1.3	1.0
8:30 to 9:00	2.7	1.3
9:00 to 9:30	2.3	1.7
9:30 to 10:00	1.0	1.0
10:00 to 10:30	3.0	2.7
10:30 to 11:00	2.7	1.7
11:00 to 11:30	5.0	2.0
11:30 to 12:00	3.7	1.7
12:00 to 12:30	2.3	1.7
12:30 to 1:00	2.8	1.4
1:00 to 1:30	2.9	1.9
1:30 to 2:00	2.3	1.6
2:00 to 2:30	2.4	1.4
2:30 to 3:00	1.3	0.9
3:00 to 3:30	3.0	2.2
3:30 to 4:00	2.2	1.7
4:00 to 4:30	1.8	1.0
4:30 to 5:00	2.2	1.5
5:00 to 5:30	1.8	1.2
5:30 to 6:00	2.2	1.2
6:00 to 6:30	0.5	0.5
6:30 to 7:00	1.0	1.0
7:00 to 7:30	1.0	0.6
7:30 to 8:00	0.2	0.2
Total	53.3	34.2

Table 4. Phleger Estate – Average of 10 counting days

Time Period	Number of People	Number of Groups
7:00 to 7:30	0.0	0.0
7:30 to 8:00	0.0	0.0
8:00 to 8:30	0.2	0.2
8:30 to 9:00	0.5	0.5
9:00 to 9:30	0.7	0.7
9:30 to 10:00	1.2	0.8
10:00 to 10:30	1.2	0.7
10:30 to 11:00	2.5	1.3
11:00 to 11:30	3.2	0.7
11:30 to 12:00	0.2	0.2
12:00 to 12:30	0.1	0.1
12:30 to 1:00	0.0	0.0
1:00 to 1:30	0.5	0.4
1:30 to 2:00	0.3	0.2
2:00 to 2:30	0.0	0.0
2:30 to 3:00	0.3	0.1
3:00 to 3:30	0.1	0.1
3:30 to 4:00	0.6	0.2
4:00 to 4:30	0.3	0.2
4:30 to 5:00	0.3	0.3
5:00 to 5:30	0.3	0.3
5:30 to 6:00	0.0	0.0
6:00 to 6:30	0.0	0.0
6:30 to 7:00	0.0	0.0
7:00 to 7:30	0.0	0.0
7:30 to 8:00	0.0	0.0
Total	12.3	6.9