



Grand Teton National Park

Visitor Use Management

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Summer 2022: Key Insights and Findings

The National Park Service is dedicated to conserving unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. In recent years, we have embarked on the early stages of identifying potential issues and impacts of changing visitation. Grand Teton National Park, in collaboration with our research partners, conducted several studies to identify themes and insights and help paint a fuller picture of what visitor use management at the park looks like today.



Insight 1 (Increasing Visitation): The overall trend in recreational travel to Grand Teton National Park and the surrounding areas is increasing. Other observed trends related to this insight include a mismatch between the operational capacity of the park’s facilities and staff and the demands increased visitation puts on those facilities and staff. Related Findings:

- Grand Teton National Park hosted nearly 3.9 million recreational visits in 2021, the highest visitation in the park’s history. This record-breaking year is part of a larger long-term trend—visitation to the park has increased 50% in the last 15 years. Over the last six to eight years, this steady increase has become more noticeable.
- People are enjoying Grand Teton National Park at unprecedented levels and in new ways. We expect visitation to the park to continue to grow, and we intend to continue to welcome visitors to this place. The vast majority of vehicles that come through this area make at least one stop within the park (91%).
- Over the past 10 years, the park has strategically implemented infrastructure projects, where possible, to accommodate use; however, funding for permanent and seasonal staffing for most of these years has remained static or has declined. Over the same period, visitation and related demands have increased. VIP programs have met some of this need.
- As visitation has increased, park staff has observed and documented the following conditions within the park: longer queue lines at entrance stations on busy days; full parking lots for trailheads and frequently used scenic turnouts; increased trash and recycling to be handled; increased need to clean and service restrooms; increased incidences of out-of-bounds camping; increased law enforcement and emergency medical calls; and increased incidences of human-wildlife conflicts.



Insight 2 (Travel Volume and Patterns): Travel to and through Grand Teton National Park is highly dispersed and varied, with no dominant travel pattern. Transportation hot spots are most likely to occur in specific parking areas. Related Findings:

- Vehicle-based visitors travel through the park in an “auto touring” style, punctuated with numerous stops at pullouts, overlooks, trailheads, and other locations parkwide. These stops are highly varied.



- At the regional level, the largest proportion of visitors approach the park and surrounding towns from south of Hoback Junction (33%); another third approach from Teton Pass (30%); and the remainder come from Yellowstone (15%), east of Moran (12%), or the airport (11%).
- The vast majority of first stops (70%) are at a range of locations dispersed throughout the park. For example, of those vehicles that enter at the Moran entrance station, the greatest number of cars make their first stop at Colter Bay (10%), followed by Jackson Lake Lodge (8%), Snake River Overlook (4%), Oxbow Bend Turnout (4%), and Teton Point Overlook (3%) The remaining 71% of first stops from this entrance comprise many locations dispersed throughout the park.
- Monitoring parking lots directly shows that some lots are frequently overparked (e.g. , South Jenny Lake, Lupine) and others are rarely at fully parked (e.g., Colter Bay). Though some visitors report that parking availability at key destinations was problematic for them, these comments relate to experiences in specific key locations.



Insight 3 (Recreational/Experience Quality): The demand for recreational activities in the frontcountry, backcountry, and wilderness areas of the park is increasing, and this trend is expected to continue. As visitation to the park increases, there is an increasingly high density of visitor use along some trails and lakeshore areas in the park. A higher density of visitor use in these areas results in higher encounter rates between visitors and increased perceptions of crowding. Related Findings:

- Almost all visitors note that scenic beauty and natural quiet are key features that influence their decision to visit places in Grand Teton and contribute meaningfully to their experience.
- Having an opportunity to socialize with family and friends and having opportunities for relaxation, escape, and quiet also appear frequently as motivations for visiting and are key attributes of what visitors hope to achieve at Grand Teton.
- More than half of visitors experience some kind of crowding at key destinations (like Jenny Lake or String Lake) while visiting the park. Only a few visitors report that crowding is a big or extreme problem, but many visitors report that it is a slight-to-moderate issue.
- When asked what problems visitors encountered while visiting Colter Bay, more than half (55%) report that “too many other people” was a problem during their visit (though only a small portion [14% of total] state that this was a big problem for them).



Insight 4 (Resource Impacts): When natural resources are impacted, visitors’ experiences of those resources are impacted as well. On busy days, parking areas and scenic turnouts overflow with vehicles parking on road shoulders and roadside vegetation. These frontcountry areas are connection points between the park’s road network (how visitors get around) and its trail system, lakeshores, and scenic overlooks (primary visitor destinations). Related Findings:

- Across many studies over multiple years, the top motivation for visiting Grand Teton is to experience the scenery.
- Though crowding is the most-cited issue at key destinations, other problems that were reported by at least a third of visitors included visible erosion and vegetation loss, actions and behaviors of other visitors, and large groups recreating.
- As of 2018, String Lake had 2 miles of user-created trails and Leigh Lake had 0.8 miles of user-created trails (across 92 individual segments). Researchers also identified 8,180 feet of bare ground from user-created sites.