



National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey 2010/2011: Individual Refuge Results for Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge

By Natalie R. Sexton, Alia M. Dietsch, Andrew W. Don Carlos, Lynne Koontz, Adam N. Solomon and Holly M. Miller

Rice Lake NWR offers a lot of opportunities to experience wildlife up close. We had a doe and fawn walk right past our car as we sat and watched. We could have reached out and touched them—my kids still talk about it.—Survey comment from visitor to Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge.



Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Photo credit:
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Contents

acknowledgments	iv
Introduction	1
Organization of Results	1
Methods	2
Selecting Participating Refuges.....	2
Developing the Survey Instrument	2
Contacting Visitors	2
Interpreting the Results	4
Refuge Description.....	5
Sampling at This Refuge	7
Selected Survey Results	7
Visitor and Trip Characteristics.....	7
Visitor Spending in Local Communities	14
Visitor Opinions about This Refuge	15
Visitor Opinions about National Wildlife Refuge System Topics.....	20
Conclusion	24
References	24
Appendix A: Survey Frequencies for This Refuge.....	A-1
Appendix B: Visitor Comments for This Refuge	B-1

Figures

1.	Map of this refuge.....	6
2.	How visitors first learned or heard about this refuge.....	8
3.	Resources used by visitors to find their way to this refuge during this visit.....	9
4.	Number of visitors travelling to this refuge by residence.....	10
5.	Modes of transportation used by visitors to this refuge during this visit.	11
6.	Activities in which visitors participated during the past 12 months at this refuge.	12
7.	The primary activity in which visitors participated during this visit.....	13
8.	Use of the visitor center at this refuge..	13
9.	Overall satisfaction with this refuge during this visit.....	15
10.	Importance-satisfaction ratings of services and facilities provided at this refuge.....	17
11.	Importance-satisfaction ratings of recreational opportunities provided at this refuge.....	18
12.	Importance-satisfaction ratings of transportation-related features at this refuge.....	19
13.	Visitors' likelihood of using alternative transportation options at national wildlife refuges in the future.....	21
14.	Visitors' personal involvement with climate change related to fish, wildlife and their habitats.....	22
15.	Visitors' beliefs about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.....	23

Tables

1.	Participating refuges in the 2010/2011 national wildlife refuge visitor survey.	3
2.	Sampling and response rate summary for this refuge.	7
3.	Influence of this refuge on visitors' decision to take this trip.	9
4.	Type and size of groups visiting this refuge.....	11
5.	Total visitor expenditures in local communities and at this refuge expressed in dollars per person per day.....	14

Acknowledgments

This study was commissioned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Visitor Services and Communications Headquarters Office, Arlington, Virginia. The study design and survey instrument were developed collaboratively with representatives from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and researchers from the PASA Branch, U.S. Geological Survey. For their support and input to the study, we would like to thank Kevin Kilcullen, Chief of Visitor Services; Steve Suder, National Transportation Coordinator; Regional Office Visitor Services Chiefs and Transportation Coordinators; and the staff and any volunteers at Rice Lake NWR who assisted with the implementation of this surveying effort. The success of this effort is largely a result of their dedication to the refuge and its resources as well as to the people who come to explore these unique lands. We also would like to thank the following PASA team members for their hard work throughout the surveying effort, which has included (among *many* things) the arduous tasks of stuffing more than 20,000 envelopes, managing multiple databases, and preparing numerous reports: Shannon Conk, Halle Musfeldt, Phadrea Ponds, Gale Rastall, Margaret Swann, Emily Walenza, and Katie Walters.

Introduction

The National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), established in 1903 and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), is the leading network of protected lands and waters in the world dedicated to the conservation of fish, wildlife and their habitats. There are 556 national wildlife refuges (NWRs) and 38 wetland management districts nationwide, including possessions and territories in the Pacific and Caribbean, encompassing more than 150 million acres. The mission of the Refuge System is to “administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.” Part of achieving this mission is the goal “to foster understanding and instill appreciation of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their conservation, by providing the public with safe, high-quality, and compatible wildlife-dependent public use” (Clark, 2001). The Refuge System attracts more than 45 million visitors annually, including 25 million people per year to observe and photograph wildlife, over 9 million to hunt and fish, and more than 10 million to participate in educational and interpretation programs (Uniack, 1999; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2007). Understanding visitors and characterizing their experiences on national wildlife refuges are critical elements of managing these lands and meeting the goals of the Refuge System.

The Service contracted with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to conduct a national survey of visitors regarding their experiences on national wildlife refuges. The survey was conducted to better understand visitor needs and experiences and to design programs and facilities that respond to those needs. The survey results will inform Service performance planning, budget, and communications goals. Results will also inform Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCPs), Visitor Services, and Transportation Planning processes.

Organization of Results

These results are for Rice Lake NWR (this refuge) and are part of USGS Data Series 643 (Sexton and others, 2011). All refuges participating in the 2010/2011 surveying effort will receive individual refuge results specific to the visitors to that refuge. Each set of results is organized by the following categories:

- **Introduction:** An overview of the Refuge System and the goals of the national surveying effort.
- **Methods:** The procedures for the national surveying effort, including selecting refuges, developing the survey instrument, contacting visitors, and guidance for interpreting the results.
- **Refuge Description:** A brief description of the refuge location, acreage, purpose, recreational activities, and visitation statistics, including a map (where available) and refuge website link.
- **Sampling at This Refuge:** The sampling periods, locations, and response rate for this refuge.
- **Selected Survey Results:** Key findings for this refuge, including:
 - Visitor and Trip Characteristics
 - Visitor Spending in the Local Communities
 - Visitors Opinions about This Refuge
 - Visitor Opinions about National Wildlife Refuge System Topics
- **Conclusion**
- **References**
- **Survey Frequencies (Appendix A):** The survey instrument with the frequency results for this refuge.
- **Visitor Comments (Appendix B):** The verbatim responses to the open-ended survey questions for this refuge.

Methods

Selecting Participating Refuges

The national visitor survey was conducted from July 2010 – November 2011 on 53 refuges across the Refuge System (table 1). Based on the Refuge System’s 2008 Refuge Annual Performance Plan (RAPP; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2011, written comm.), 192 refuges with a minimum visitation of 25,000 were considered. This criterion was the median visitation across the Refuge System and the minimum visitation necessary to ensure that the surveying would be logistically feasible onsite. Visitors were sampled on 35 randomly selected refuges and 18 other refuges that were selected by Service Regional Offices to respond to priority refuge planning processes.

Developing the Survey Instrument

USGS researchers developed the survey in consultation with the Service Headquarters Office, managers, planners, and visitor services professionals. The survey was peer-reviewed by academic and government researchers and was further pre-tested with eight Refuge System Friends Group representatives from each region to ensure readability and overall clarity. The survey and associated methodology were approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB control #: 1018-0145; expiration date: 6/30/2013).

Contacting Visitors

Refuge staff identified two separate 15-day sampling periods and one or more locations that best reflected the diversity of use and specific visitation patterns of each participating refuge. Sampling periods and locations were identified by refuge staff and submitted to USGS via an internal website that included a customized mapping tool. A standardized sampling schedule was created for all refuges that included eight randomly selected sampling shifts during each of the two sampling periods. Sampling shifts were three- to five-hour randomly selected time bands that were stratified across AM and PM, as well as weekend and weekdays. Any necessary customizations were made, in coordination with refuge staff, to the standardized schedule to accommodate the identified sampling locations and to address specific spatial and temporal patterns of visitation.

Twenty visitors (18 years or older) per sampling shift were systematically selected, for a total of 320 willing participants per refuge—160 per sampling period—to ensure an adequate sample of completed surveys. When necessary, shifts were moved, added, or extended to alleviate logistical limitations (for example, weather or low visitation at a particular site) in an effort to reach target numbers.

Table 1. Participating refuges in the 2010/2011 national wildlife refuge visitor survey.

Pacific Region (R1)	
Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge (HI)	William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge (OR)
Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge (ID)	McNary National Wildlife Refuge (WA)
Cape Meares National Wildlife Refuge (OR)	Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge (WA)
Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (OR)	
Southwest Region (R2)	
Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NM)	Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (TX)
Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (NM)	San Bernard/ Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge (TX)
Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge (OK)	
Great Lakes-Big Rivers Region (R3)	
DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge (IA)	McGregor District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge – (IA/WI)
Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge (IA)	
Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge (IN)	Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge (MO)
Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge (MN)	Horicon National Wildlife Refuge (WI)
Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge (MN)	Necedah National Wildlife Refuge (WI)
Southeast Region (R4)	
Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (AL)	Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge (GA)
Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge (AR)	Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge (MS)
Pond Creek National Wildlife Refuge (AR)	Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge (Puerto Rico)
Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (FL)	Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge (NC)
St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge (FL)	Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge (SC)
Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge (FL)	Reelfoot National Wildlife Refuge (TN)
Northeast Region (R5)	
Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge (CT)	Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge (ME)
Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge (DE)	Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (NJ)
Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge (MA)	Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge (NY)
Parker River National Wildlife Refuge (MA)	Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge (NY)
Patuxent Research Refuge (MD)	Occoquan Bay/ Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge (VA)
Mountain-Prairie Region (R6)	
Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge (CO)	Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge (SD)
Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (KS)	National Elk Refuge (WY)
Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (MT)	
Alaska Region (R7)	
Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (AK)	Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (AK)
California and Nevada Region (R8)	
Lower Klamath/Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge (CA)	Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NV)
Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge (CA)	

Refuge staff and/or volunteers (survey recruiters) contacted visitors on-site following a protocol provided by USGS to ensure a diverse sample. Instructions included contacting visitors across the entire sampling shift (for example, every n^{th} visitor for dense visitation, as often as possible for sparse visitation), and only one person per group. Visitors were informed of the survey effort, given a token incentive (for example, a small magnet, temporary tattoo), and asked to participate. Willing participants provided their name, mailing address, and preference for language (English or Spanish) and survey mode (mail or online). Survey recruiters also were instructed to record any refusals and then proceed with the sampling protocol.

Visitors were mailed a postcard within 10 days of the initial on-site contact thanking them for agreeing to participate in the survey and inviting them to complete the survey online. Those visitors choosing not to complete the survey online were sent a paper copy a week later. Two additional contacts were made by mail during the next seven weeks following a modified Tailored Design Method (Dillman, 2007): 1) a reminder postcard one week after the first survey, and 2) a second paper survey two weeks after the reminder postcard. Each mailing included instructions for completing the survey online and a postage paid envelope for returning the paper version of the survey. Those visitors indicating a preference for Spanish were sent Spanish versions of all correspondence (including the survey). Finally, a short survey of six questions was sent to nonrespondents four weeks after the second survey mailing to determine any differences between respondents and nonrespondents at the national level. Online survey data were exported and paper survey data were entered using a standardized survey codebook and data entry procedure. All survey data were analyzed by using SPSS v.18 statistical analysis software.

Interpreting the Results

The extent to which these results accurately represent the total population of visitors to this refuge is dependent on 1) an adequate sample size of those visitors and 2) the representativeness of that sample. The adequacy of the sample size for this refuge is quantified as the margin of error. The composition of the sample is dependent on the ability of the standardized sampling protocol for this study to account for the spatial and temporal patterns of visitor use specific to each refuge. Spatially, the geographical layout and public use infrastructure varies widely across refuges. Some refuges only can be accessed through a single entrance, while others have multiple unmonitored access points across large expanses of land and water. As a result, the degree to which sampling locations effectively captured spatial patterns of visitor use will likely vary from refuge to refuge. Temporally, the two 15-day sampling periods may not have effectively captured all of the predominant visitor uses/activities on some refuges during the course of a year. Therefore, certain survey measures such as visitors' self-reported "primary activity during their visit" may reflect a seasonality bias.

Herein, the sample of visitors who responded to the survey are referred to simply as "visitors." However, when interpreting the results for Rice Lake NWR, any potential spatial and temporal sampling limitations specific to this refuge need to be considered when generalizing the results to the total population of visitors. For example, a refuge that sampled during a special event (for example, birding festival) held during the spring may have contacted a higher percentage of visitors who traveled greater than 50 miles to get to the refuge than the actual number of these people who would have visited throughout the calendar year (that is, oversampling of nonlocals). In contrast, another refuge may not have enough nonlocal visitors in the sample to adequately represent the beliefs and opinions of that group type. If the sample for a specific group type (for example, nonlocals, hunters, those visitors who paid a fee) is too low ($n < 30$), a warning is included. Additionally, the term "*this* visit" is used to reference the visit on which people were contacted to participate in the survey, which may or may not have been their most recent refuge visit.

Refuge Description for Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Rice Lake NWR was established in 1935 and covers 18,208 acres of scenic forest and bog area in northern Minnesota. Visitors can enjoy a range of habitats, including lake, river, bog and hardwood forest. The refuge was created to preserve valuable habitat for waterfowl.

Rice Lake NWR's history centers around the 4,500-acre Rice Lake which, for thousands of years, has supplied an abundant wild rice crop. Each fall, the bountiful rice attracts hundreds of thousands of waterfowl, as well as native peoples who harvest it using traditional methods. Rice Lake NWR is known for its tremendous number of ring-necked ducks. Because of the high concentrations of migratory birds, the refuge has been designated as a Globally Important Bird Area by the American Birding Association.

The 2,045-acre Sandstone Unit of Rice Lake NWR was acquired in 1970 through a land exchange with the U.S. Department of Justice. The Sandstone Unit is located in central Minnesota, in an area once known for expanses of towering white pine forests. Today, visitors enjoy a rustic and natural setting that includes a portion of the Wild and Scenic Kettle River. Birders will find plentiful neo-tropical migrants in the spring and fall. The Sandstone Unit's wildlife includes black bear, sandhill cranes, white-tailed deer and songbirds.

Rice Lake NWR attracts over 29,000 visitors annually (based on 2008 RAPP database; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2011, written comm.). Visitors enjoy participating in environmental education and interpretive programs, fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, photography, and harvesting wild rice. Rice Lake NWR offers a 9.5-mile self-guided auto tour route as well. Figure 1 displays a map of Rice Lake NWR. For more information, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/ricelake/index.htm>.

Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge



- Roads**
- Open to Vehicles
 - Closed to Vehicles
 - Hiking Trails
 - Highway 65
 - Refuge Boundary
- Major Habitat Types**
- Grass or Cattail
 - Brush or Bog
 - Forest
 - Water or Marsh

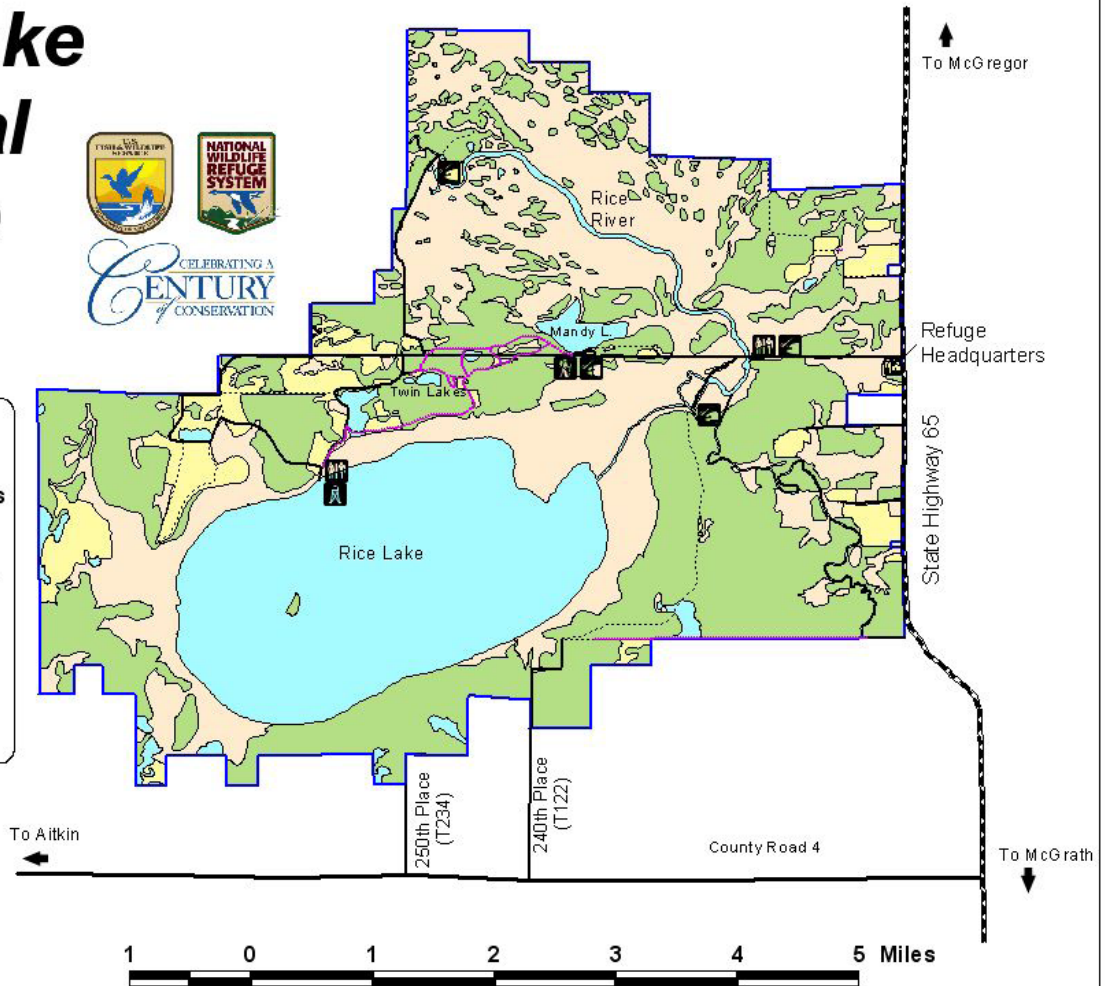


Figure 1. Map of Rice Lake NWR, courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Sampling at Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge

A total of 230 visitors agreed to participate in the survey during the two sampling periods at the identified locations at Rice Lake NWR (table 2). In all, 189 visitors completed the survey for an 82% response rate and $\pm 6\%$ margin of error at the 95% confidence level.¹

Table 2. Sampling and response rate summary for Rice Lake NWR.

Sampling period	Dates	Locations	Total contacts	Undeliverable addresses	Completed surveys	Response rate
1	8/26/2010 to 9/11/2010	Refuge Headquarters	148	0	125	84%
		Rice Lake Water Control Structure				
		Mandy Lake Area				
		River Control Structure				
		Twin Lakes Area				
Rice Lake Overlook						
2	6/4/2011 to 6/18/2011	Refuge Headquarters	82	0	64	78%
		Rice Lake Water Control Structure				
		Mandy Lake Area				
		River Control Structure				
		Twin Lakes Area				
Rice Lake Overlook						
Total			230	0	189	82%

Selected Survey Results

Visitor and Trip Characteristics

A solid understanding of refuge visitors and details about their trips to refuges can inform communication outreach efforts, inform visitor services and transportation planning, forecast use, and gauge demand for services and facilities.

Familiarity with the Refuge System

While we did not ask visitors to identify the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, visitors to Rice Lake NWR reported that before participating in the survey, they were aware of the role of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in managing national wildlife refuges

¹ The margin of error (or confidence interval) is the error associated with the results related to the sample and population size. A margin of error of $\pm 5\%$, for example, means if 55% of the sample answered a survey question in a certain way, then 50–60% of the entire population would have answered that way. The margin of error is calculated with an 80/20 response distribution, assuming that for any given dichotomous choice question, approximately 80% of respondents selected one choice and 20% selected the other (Salant and Dillman, 1994).

(93%) and that the Refuge System has the mission of conserving, managing, and restoring fish, wildlife, plants and their habitat (96%). Positive responses to these questions concerning the management and mission of the Refuge System do not indicate the degree to which these visitors understand the day-to-day management practices of individual refuges, only that visitors feel they have a basic knowledge of who manages refuges and why. Compared to other public lands, many visitors feel that refuges provide a unique recreation experience (92%; see Appendix B for visitor comments on “What Makes National Wildlife Refuges Unique?”); however, reasons for why visitors find refuges unique are varied and may not directly correspond to their understanding of the mission of the Refuge System. More than half of visitors to Rice Lake NWR had been to at least one other National Wildlife Refuge in the past year (53%), with an average of 6 visits to other refuges during the past 12 months.

Visiting This Refuge

Some surveyed visitors (42%) had only been to Rice Lake NWR once in the past 12 months, while most had been multiple times (58%). These repeat visitors went to the refuge an average of 10 times during that same 12-month period. Visitors used the refuge during only one season (54%), during multiple seasons (37%), and year-round (9%).

Most visitors first learned about the refuge from friends/relatives (42%), signs on the highway (41%), or people in the local community (21%; fig. 2). Key information sources used by visitors to find their way to this refuge include previous knowledge (59%), signs on highways (54%), or a road atlas/highway map (19%; fig. 3).

More than half of visitors (54%) lived in the local area (within 50 miles of the refuge), whereas a little under half (46%) were nonlocal visitors. For most local visitors, Rice Lake NWR was the primary purpose or sole destination of their trip (83%; table 3). For most nonlocal visitors, the refuge was also the primary purpose or sole destination of their trip (48%). Local visitors reported that they traveled an average of 20 miles to get to the refuge, while nonlocal visitors traveled an average of 180 miles. Figure 4 shows the residence of visitors travelling to the refuge. About 90% of visitors travelling to Rice Lake NWR were from Minnesota.

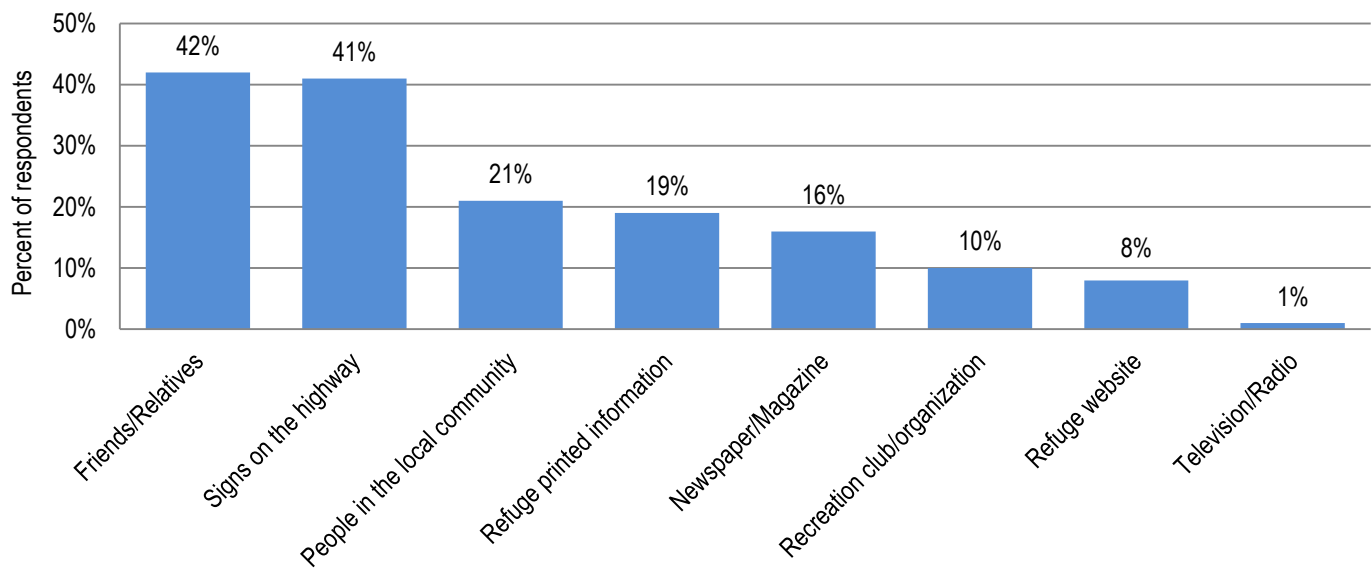


Figure 2. How visitors first learned or heard about Rice Lake NWR (n = 172).

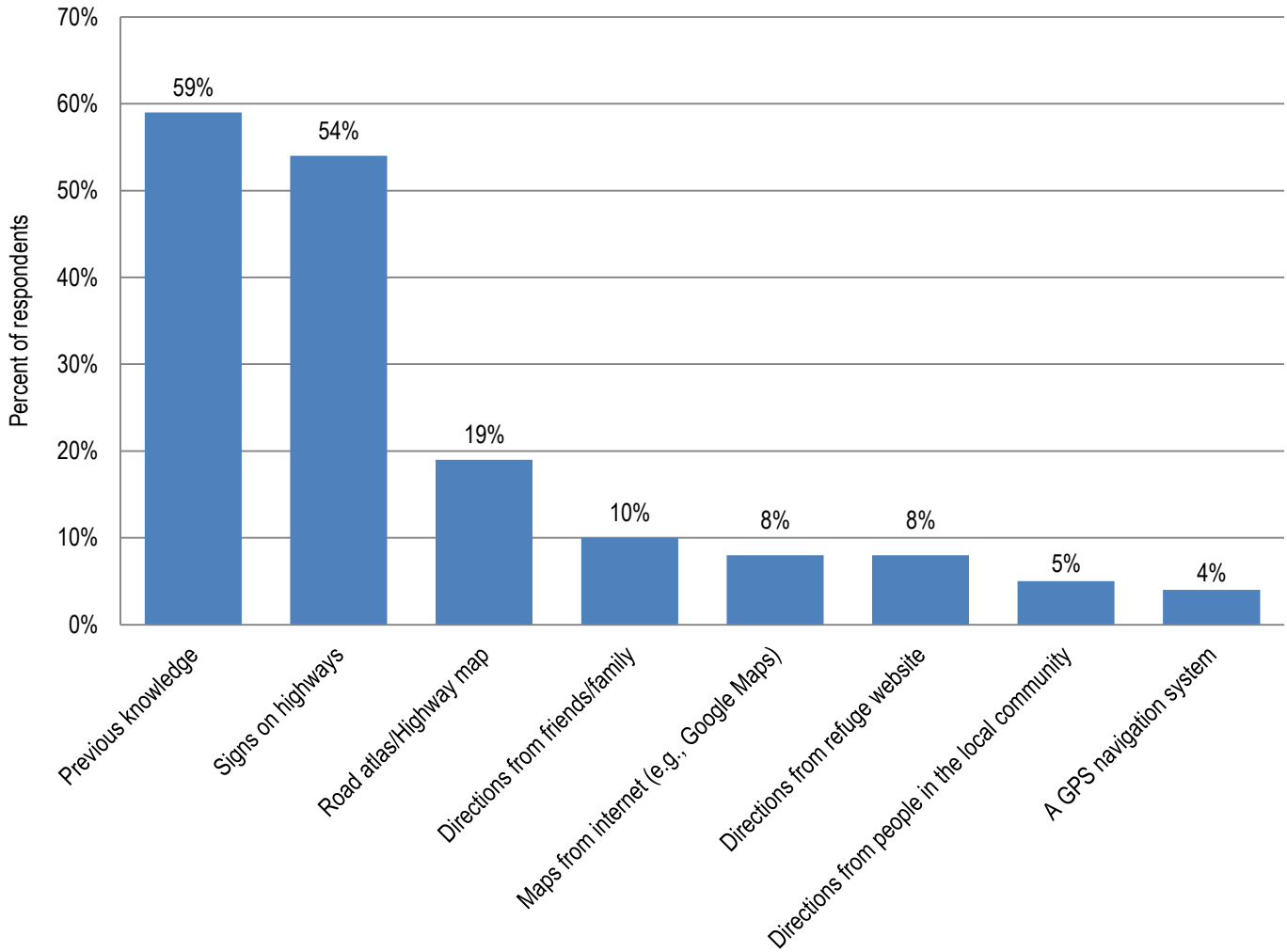


Figure 3. Resources used by visitors to find their way to Rice Lake NWR during *this* visit (n = 178).

Table 3. Influence of Rice Lake NWR on visitors' decision to take *this* trip.

Visitors	Visiting this refuge was...		
	the primary reason for trip	one of many equally important reasons for trip	an incidental stop
Nonlocal	48%	35%	17%
Local	82%	9%	9%
Total	67%	21%	12%

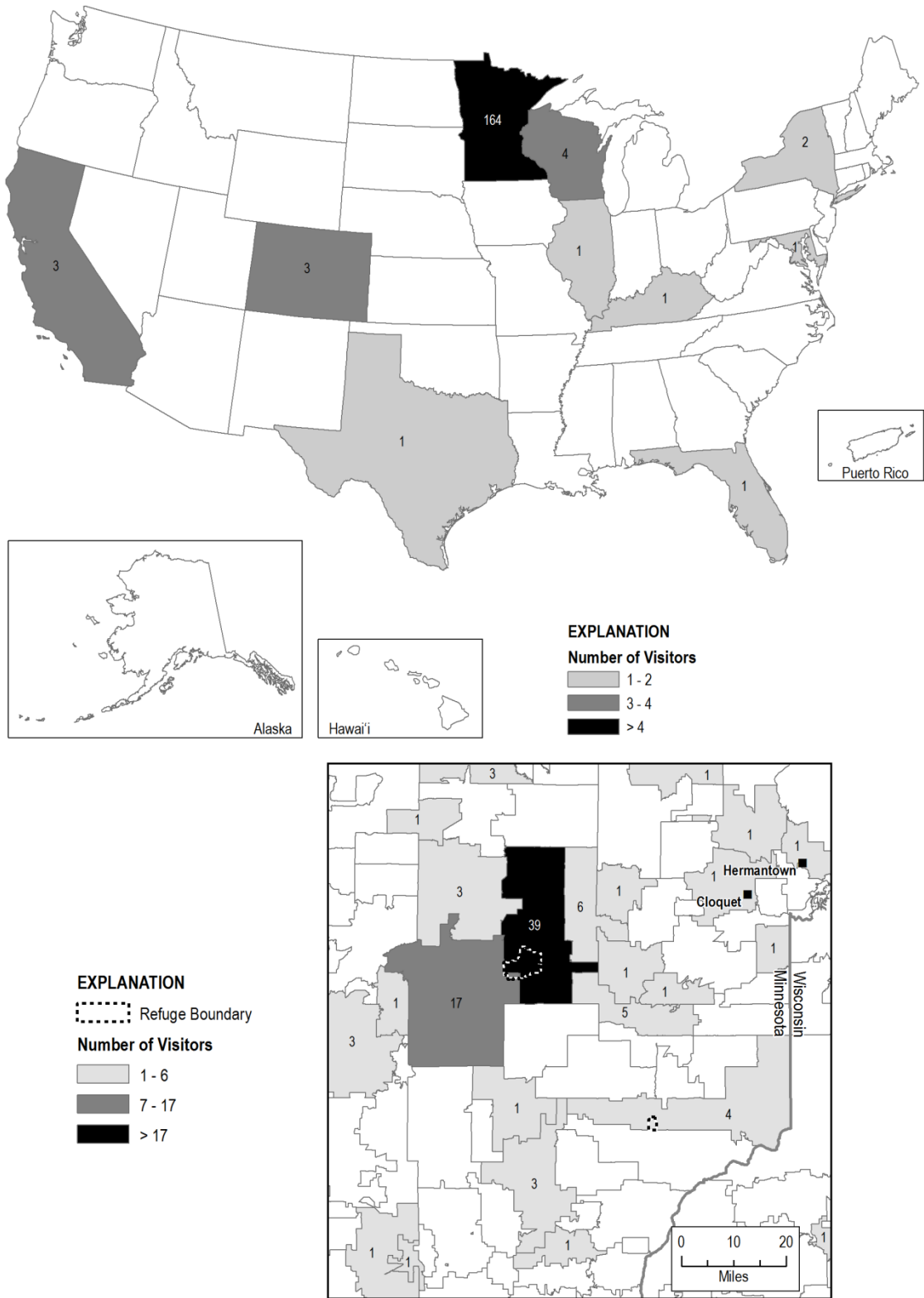


Figure 4. Number of visitors travelling to Rice Lake NWR by residence. Top map shows residence by state and bottom map shows residence by zip codes near the refuge (n = 181).

Surveyed visitors reported that they spent an average of 4 hours at Rice Lake NWR during one day there (a day visit is assumed to be 8 hours). However, the most frequently reported length of visit during one day was actually 8 hours (27%). The key modes of transportation used by visitors to travel around the refuge were private vehicle (93%) and walking/hiking (19%; fig. 5). Most visitors indicated they were part of a group on their visit to this refuge (69%), travelling primarily with family and friends (table 4).

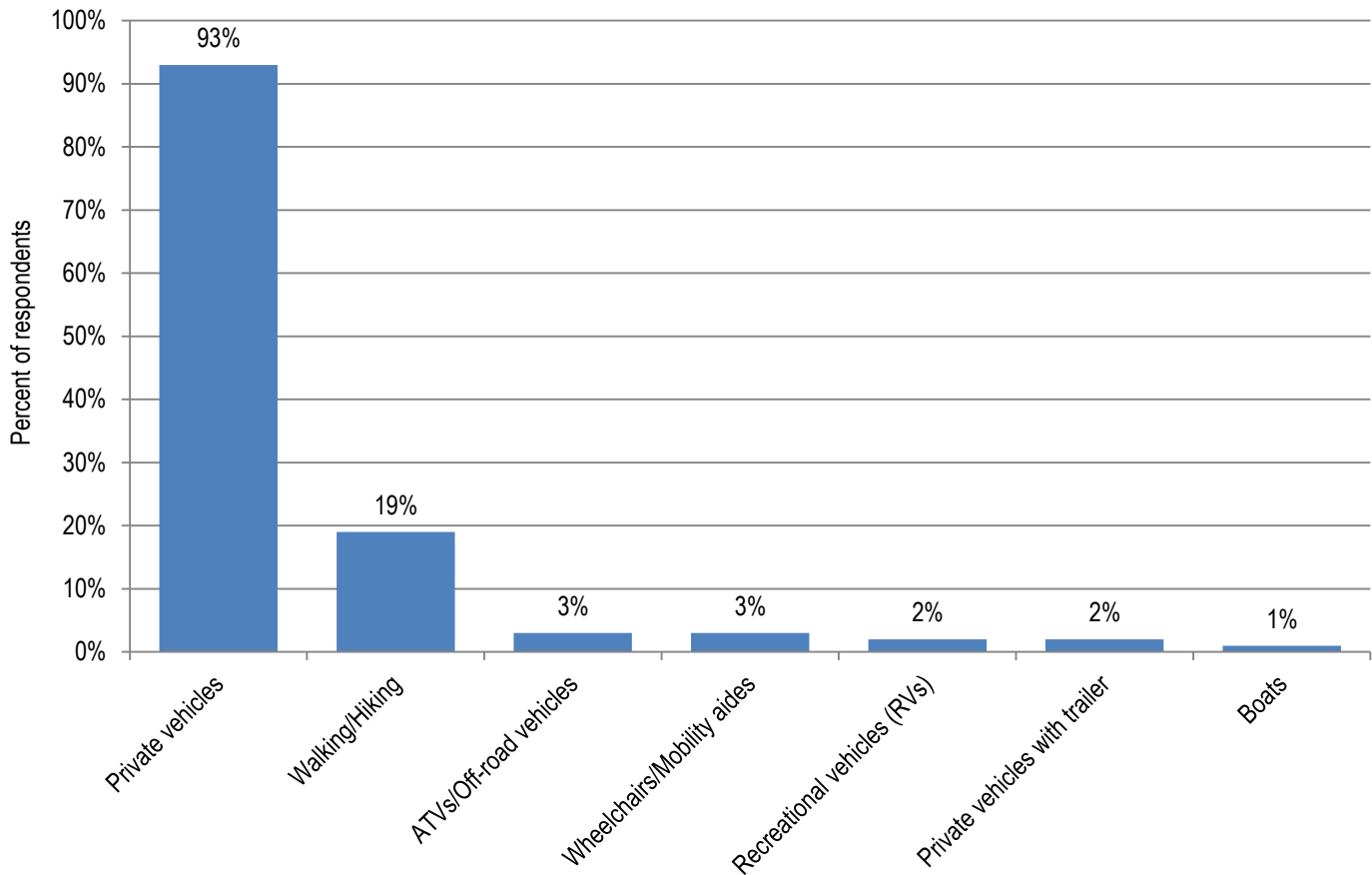


Figure 5. Modes of transportation used by visitors to Rice Lake NWR during *this* visit (n = 177).

Table 4. Type and size of groups visiting Rice Lake NWR (for those who indicated they were part of a group, n = 122).

Group type	Percent (of those traveling in a group)	Average group size		
		Number of adults	Number of children	Total group size
Family/Friends	71%	3	1	4
Commercial tour group	4%	5	1	6
Organized club/School group	12%	12	3	15
Other group type	13%	12	0	12

Surveyed visitors participated in a variety of refuge activities during the past 12 months (fig. 6); the top three activities reported were wildlife observation (60%), auto tour route/driving (53%), and bird watching (50%). The primary reasons for their most recent visit included special event (25%), bird watching (20%), and hunting (13%; fig. 7). The visitor center was used by 70% of visitors, mostly to view the exhibits (77%), ask information of staff/volunteers (73%), and visit the gift shop/bookstore (66%; fig. 8).

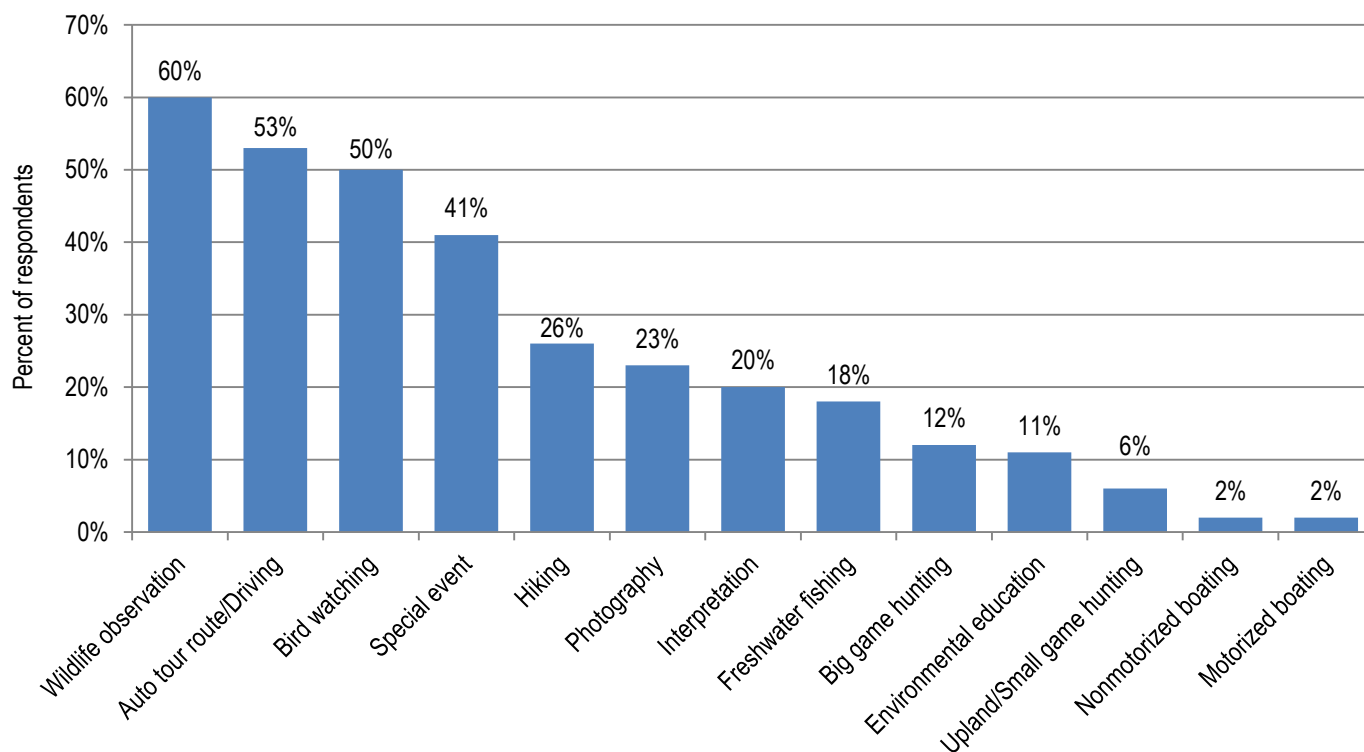


Figure 6. Activities in which visitors participated during the past 12 months at Rice Lake NWR (n = 177). See Appendix B for a listing of “other” activities.

Visitor Characteristics

All (100%) surveyed visitors to Rice Lake NWR indicated that they were citizens or permanent residents of the United States. Only those visitors 18 years or older were sampled. Visitors were a mix of 61% male with an average age of 56 years and 39% female with an average age of 56 years. Visitors, on average, reported they had 15 years of formal education (college or technical school). The median level of income was \$50,000–\$74,999. See Appendix A for more demographic information. In comparison, the 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation found that participants in wildlife watching and hunting on public land were 55% male and 45% female with an average age of 46 years, an average level of education of 14 years (associate degree or two years of college), and a median income of \$50,000–\$74,999 (Harris, 2011, personal communication). Compared to the U.S. population, these 2006 survey participants are more likely to be male, older, and have higher education and income levels (U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Commerce, 2007).

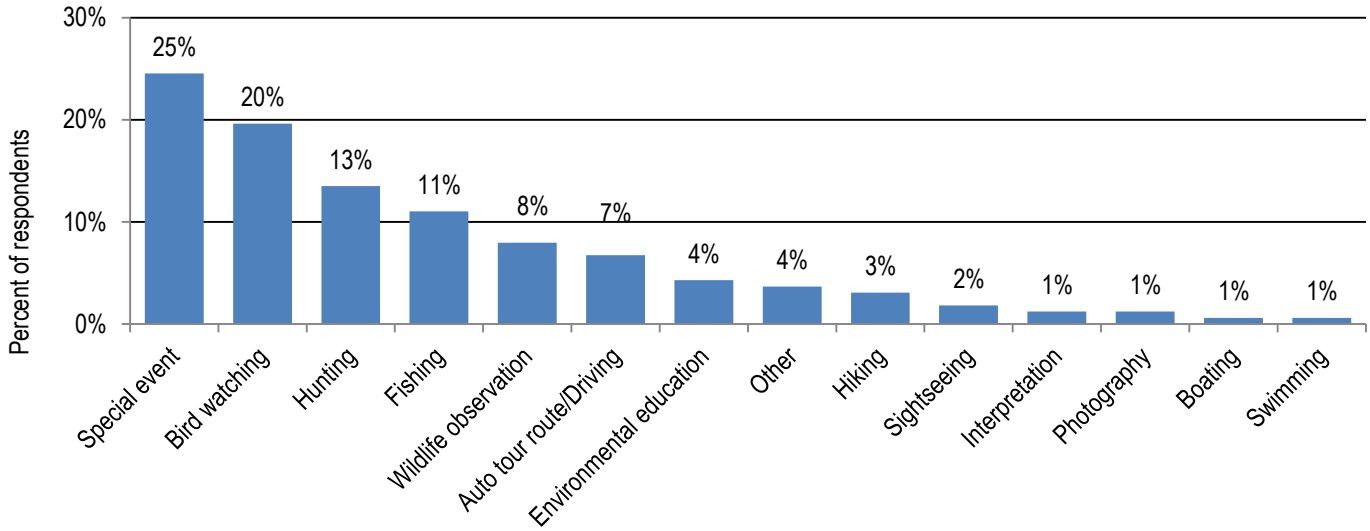


Figure 7. The primary activity in which visitors participated during *this* visit to Rice Lake NWR (n = 163). See Appendix B for a listing of “other” activities.

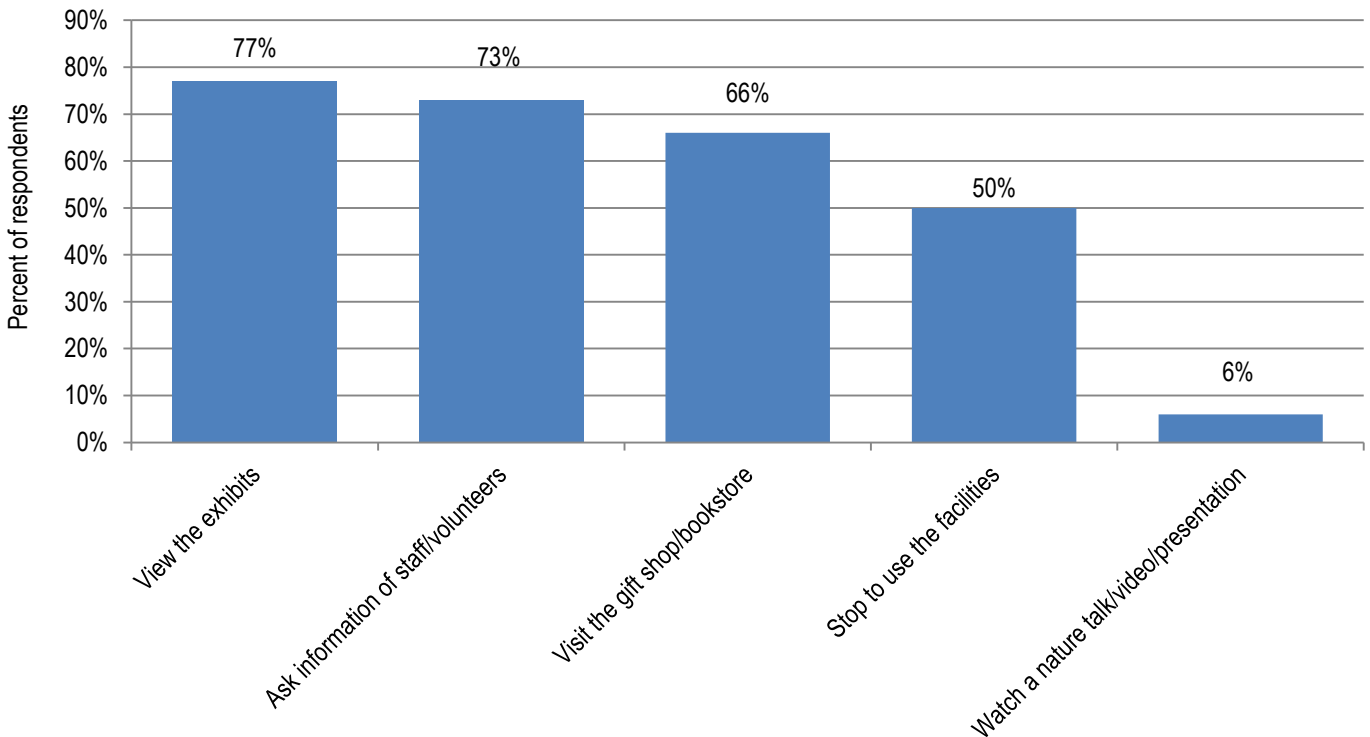


Figure 8. Use of the visitor center at Rice Lake NWR (for those visitors who indicated they used the visitor center, n = 124).

Visitor Spending in Local Communities

Tourists usually buy a wide range of goods and services while visiting an area. Major expenditure categories include lodging, food, supplies, and gasoline. Spending associated with refuge visitation can generate considerable economic benefits for the local communities near a refuge. For example, more than 34.8 million visits were made to national wildlife refuges in fiscal year 2006; these visits generated \$1.7 billion in sales, almost 27,000 jobs, and \$542.8 million in employment income in regional economies (Carver and Caudill, 2007). Information on the amount and types of visitor expenditures can illustrate the economic importance of refuge visitor activities to local communities. Visitor expenditure information also can be used to analyze the economic impact of proposed refuge management alternatives.

A region (and its economy) is typically defined as all counties within 50 miles of a travel destination (Stynes, 2008). Visitors that live within the local 50-mile area of a refuge typically have different spending patterns than those that travel from longer distances. During the two sampling periods, 54% of visitors to Rice Lake NWR indicated that they live within the local area. Nonlocal visitors (46%) stayed in the local area, on average, for 2 days. Table 5 shows summary statistics for local and nonlocal visitor expenditures in the local communities and at the refuge, with expenditures reported on a per person per day basis. During the two sampling periods, nonlocal visitors spent an average of \$45 per person per day and local visitors spent an average of \$26 per person per day in the local area. Several factors should be considered when estimating the economic importance of refuge visitor spending in the local communities. These include the amount of time spent at the refuge, influence of refuge on decision to take this trip, and the representativeness of primary activities of the sample of surveyed visitors compared to the general population. Controlling for these factors is beyond the scope of the summary statistics presented in this report. Detailed refuge-level visitor spending profiles which do consider these factors will be developed during the next phase of analysis.

Table 5. Total visitor expenditures in local communities and at Rice Lake NWR expressed in dollars per person per day.

Visitors	n ¹	Median	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Nonlocal	67	\$33	\$45	\$48	\$0	\$300
Local	65	\$15	\$26	\$32	\$0	\$188

¹n = number of visitors who answered both locality *and* expenditure questions.

Note: For each respondent, reported expenditures were divided by the number of persons in their group that shared expenses in order to determine the spending per person per trip. This was then divided by the number of days spent in the local area to determine the spending per person per day for each respondent. For respondents who reported spending less than one full day, trip length was set equal to one day. These visitor spending estimates are appropriate for the sampling periods selected by refuge staff (see table 2 for sampling period dates and figure 7 for the primary visitor activities). They may not be representative of the total population of visitors to this refuge.

Visitor Opinions about This Refuge

National wildlife refuges provide visitors with a variety of services, facilities, and wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities. Understanding visitors' perceptions of their refuge experience is a key component of the Refuge System mission as it pertains to providing high-quality wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities. Having a baseline understanding of visitor experience can inform management decisions to better balance visitors' expectations with the Refuge System mission. Recent studies in outdoor recreation have included an emphasis on declining participation in traditional activities such as hunting and an increasing need to connect the next generation to nature and wildlife. These factors highlight the importance of current refuge visitors as a key constituency in wildlife conservation. A better understanding is increasingly needed to better manage the visitor experience and to address the challenges of the future.

Surveyed visitors' overall satisfaction with the services, facilities, and recreational opportunities provided at Rice Lake NWR were as follows (fig. 9):

- 94% were satisfied with the recreational activities and opportunities,
- 91% were satisfied with the information and education about the refuge and its resources,
- 95% were satisfied with the services provided by employees or volunteers, and
- 93% were satisfied with the refuge's job of conserving fish, wildlife and their habitats.

While 10%, (n = 17) of surveyed visitors indicated they paid a fee to enter Rice Lake NWR, the refuge does not charge an entrance fee. It is not known why this small percentage of visitors thought they paid a fee.

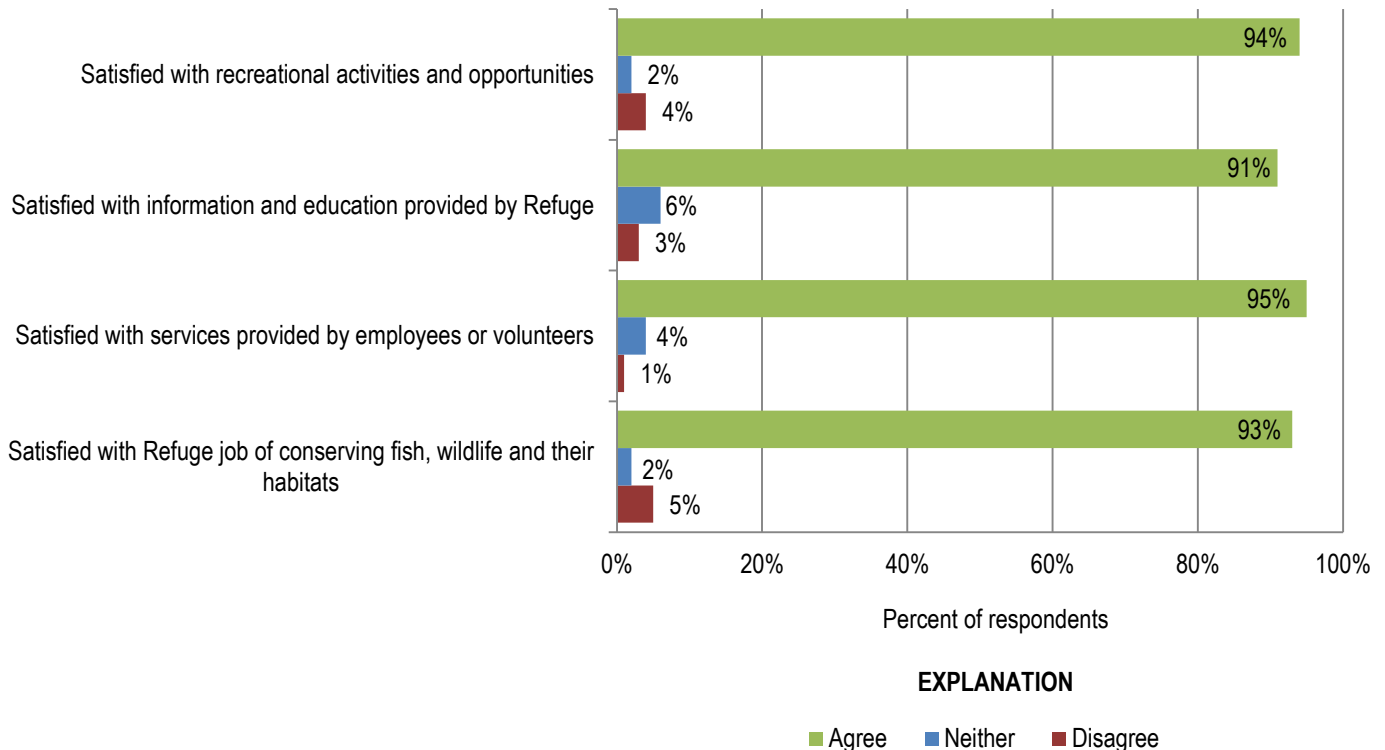


Figure 9. Overall satisfaction with Rice Lake NWR during *this* visit (n ≥ 171).

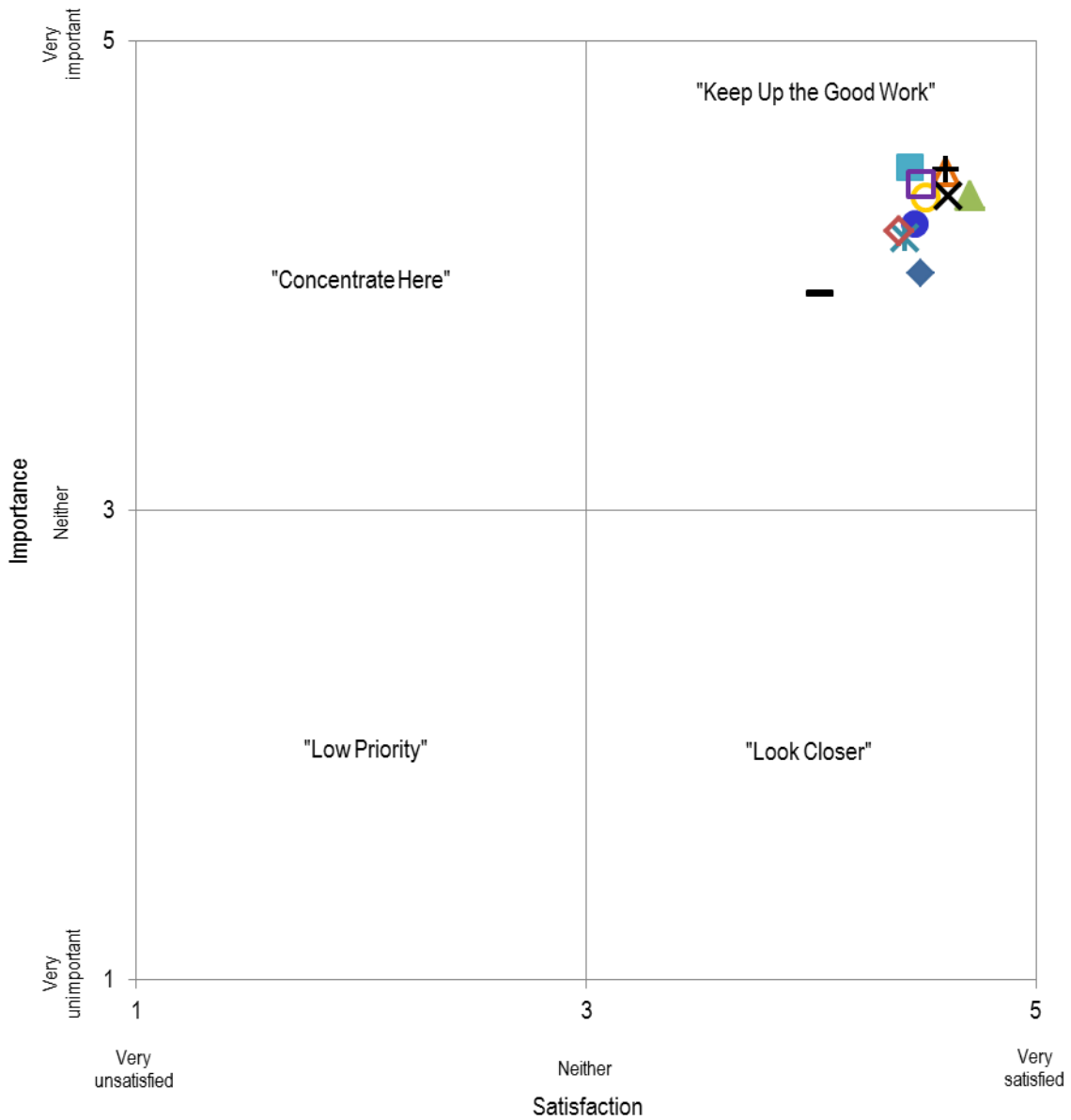
Importance/Satisfaction Ratings

Comparing the importance and satisfaction ratings for visitor services provided by refuges can help to identify how well the services are meeting visitor expectations. The importance-performance framework presented in this section is a tool that includes the importance of an attribute to visitors in relation to their satisfaction with that attribute. Drawn from marketing research, this tool has been applied to outdoor recreation and visitation settings (Martilla and James, 1977; Tarrant and Smith, 2002). Results for the attributes of interest are segmented into one of four quadrants (modified for this national study):

- Keep Up the Good Work = high importance/high satisfaction;
- Concentrate Here = high importance/low satisfaction;
- Low Priority = low importance/low satisfaction; and
- Look Closer = low importance/high satisfaction.

Graphically plotting visitors' importance and satisfaction ratings for different services, facilities, and recreational opportunities provides a simple and intuitive visualization of these survey measures. However, this tool is not without its drawbacks. One is the potential for variation among visitors regarding their expectations and levels of importance (Vaske et al., 1996; Bruyere et al., 2002; Wade and Eagles, 2003), and certain services or recreational opportunities may be more or less important for different segments of the visitor population. For example, hunters may place more importance on hunting opportunities and amenities such as blinds, while school group leaders may place more importance on educational/informational displays than would other visitors. This potential for highly varied importance ratings needs to be considered when viewing the average results of this analysis of visitors to Rice Lake NWR. This consideration is especially important when reviewing the attributes that fall into the "Look Closer" quadrant. In some cases, these attributes may represent specialized recreational activities in which a small subset of visitors participate (for example, hunting, kayaking) or facilities and services that only some visitors experience (for example, exhibits about the refuge). For these visitors, the average importance of (and potentially the satisfaction with) the attribute may be much higher than it would be for the overall population of visitors.

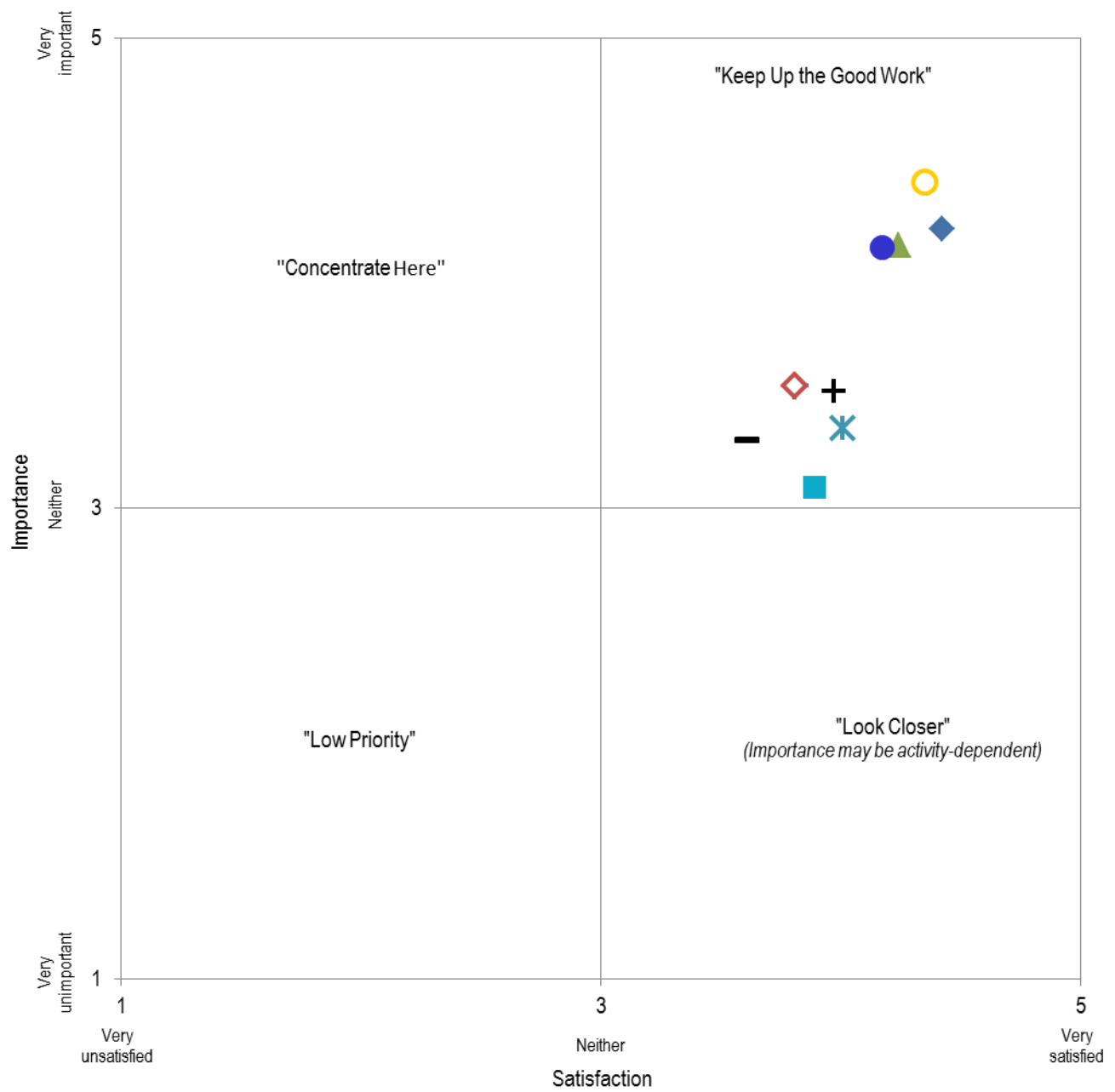
Figures 10-12 depict surveyed visitors' importance-satisfaction results for refuge services and facilities, recreational opportunities, and transportation-related features at Rice Lake NWR, respectively. All refuge services and facilities fell in the "Keep Up the Good Work" quadrant (fig. 10). All refuge recreational opportunities fell in the "Keep Up the Good Work" quadrant (fig. 11). All transportation-related features fell in the "Keep Up the Good Work" quadrant (fig. 12).



EXPLANATION

- ◆ Availability of employees/volunteers
- ▲ Courteous/welcoming employees/volunteers
- ▲ Well-maintained restrooms
- ✚ Knowledgeable employees/volunteers
- Signs with rules/regulations
- ✕ Informational kiosks/displays about this Refuge
- ◇ Exhibits about this Refuge
- Environmental education programs/activities
- Visitor Center
- Convenient hours/days of operation
- ✕ Printed information about this Refuge
- Wildlife observation structures

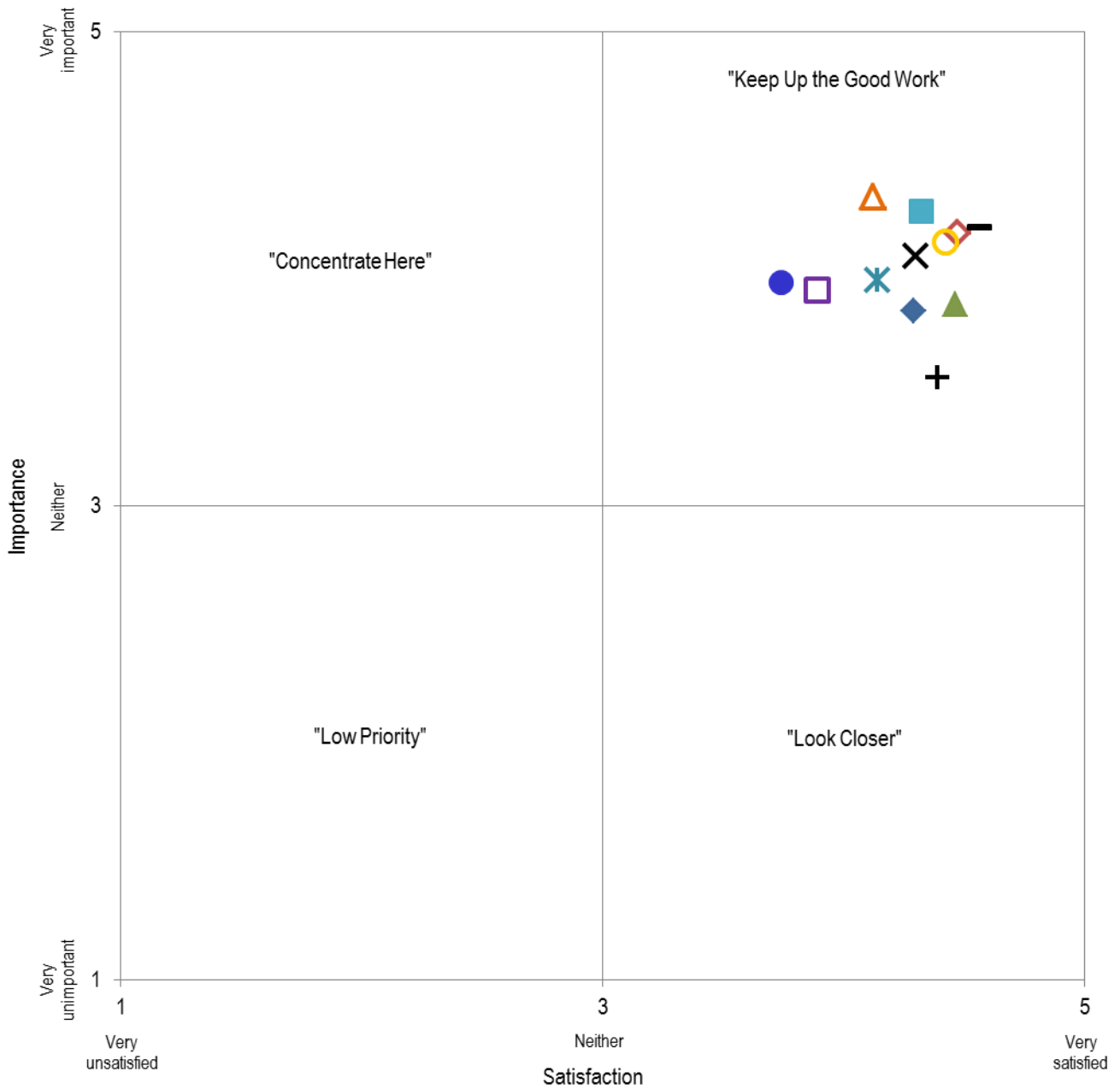
Figure 10. Importance-satisfaction ratings of services and facilities provided at Rice Lake NWR.



EXPLANATION

- ◆ Bird watching opportunities
- Wildlife viewing opportunities
- ▲ Photography opportunities
- Hunting opportunities
- ✖ Fishing opportunities
- Hiking opportunities
- ◇ Kayak/Canoe opportunities
- Bicycling opportunities
- ✚ Volunteer opportunities

Figure 11. Importance-satisfaction ratings of recreational opportunities provided at Rice Lake NWR.



EXPLANATION

- ◆ Condition of roads
- ⊕ Condition of parking areas
- ▲ Condition of bridges
- ✕ Condition of trails/boardwalks
- ⊗ Number of parking places
- Number of pullovers
- ◇ Safety of driving conditions
- Safety of Refuge entrances
- Directional signs on highways
- Directional signs on Refuge
- △ Directional signs on trails
- Disabled access

Figure 12. Importance-satisfaction ratings of transportation-related features at Rice Lake NWR.

Visitor Opinions about National Wildlife Refuge System Topics

One goal of this national visitor survey was to identify visitor trends across the Refuge System to more effectively manage refuges and provide visitor services. Two important issues to the Refuge System are transportation on refuges and communicating with visitors about climate change. The results to these questions will be most meaningful when they are evaluated in aggregate (data from all participating refuges together). However, basic results for Rice Lake NWR are reported here.

Alternative Transportation and the National Wildlife Refuge System

Visitors use a variety of transportation means to access and enjoy national wildlife refuges. While many visitors arrive at the refuge in a private vehicle, alternatives such as buses, trams, watercraft, and bicycles are increasingly becoming a part of the visitor experience. Previous research has identified a growing need for transportation alternatives within the Refuge System (Krechmer et al., 2001); however, less is known about how visitors perceive and use these new transportation options. An understanding of visitors' likelihood of using certain alternative transportation options can help in future planning efforts. Visitors were asked their likelihood of using alternative transportation options at national wildlife refuges in the future.

Of the six Refuge System-wide alternative transportation options listed on the survey, the majority of Rice Lake NWR visitors who were surveyed were likely to use the following options at national wildlife refuges in the future (fig. 13):

- a boat that goes to different points on Refuge waterways;
- an offsite parking lot that provides trail access;
- a bus/tram that runs during a special event; and
- a bus/tram that provides a guided tour.

The majority of visitors were *not* likely to use a bike share program, or a bus/tram that takes passengers to different points on national wildlife refuges in the future (fig. 13).

When asked about using alternative transportation at Rice Lake NWR specifically, 42% of visitors indicated they were unsure whether it would enhance their experience; however, some visitors thought alternative transportation would enhance their experience (25%) and others thought it would not (34%).

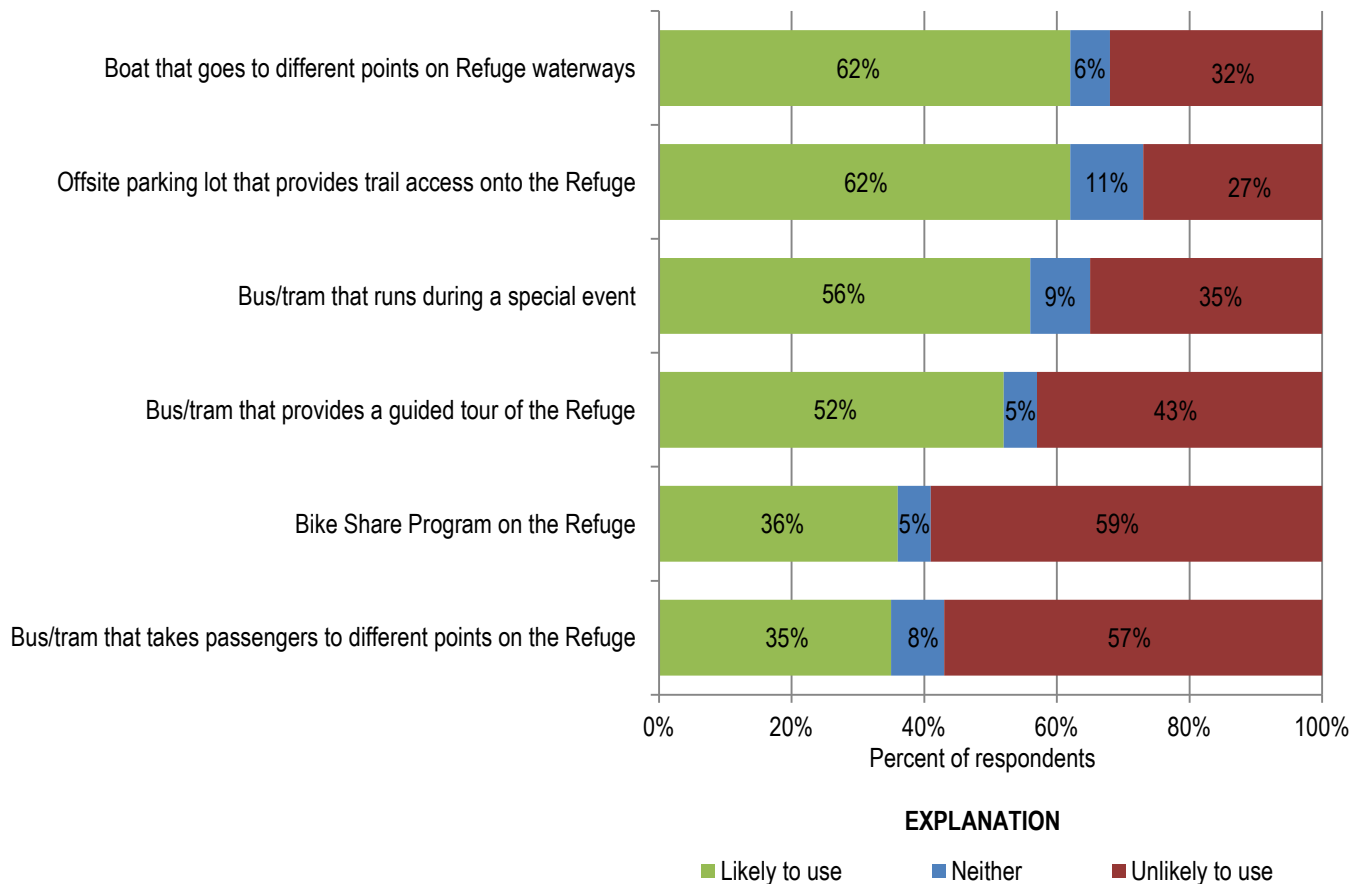


Figure 13. Visitors’ likelihood of using alternative transportation options at national wildlife refuges in the future (n ≥ 173).

Climate Change and the National Wildlife Refuge System

Climate change represents a growing concern for the management of national wildlife refuges. The Service’s climate change strategy, titled “Rising to the Urgent Challenge,” establishes a basic framework for the agency to work within a larger conservation community to help ensure wildlife, plant, and habitat sustainability (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2010). To support the guiding principles of the strategy, refuges will be exploring options for more effective engagement with visitors on this topic. The national visitor survey collected information about visitors’ level of personal involvement in climate change related to fish, wildlife and their habitats and visitors’ beliefs regarding this topic. Items draw from the “Six Americas” framework for understanding public sentiment toward climate change (Leiserowitz, Maibach, and Roser-Renouf, 2008) and from literature on climate change message frames (for example, Nisbet, 2009). Such information provides a baseline for understanding visitor perceptions of climate change in the context of fish and wildlife conservation that can further inform related communication and outreach strategies.

Factors that influence how individuals think about climate change include their basic beliefs, levels of involvement, policy preferences, and behaviors related to this topic. Results presented below provide baseline information on visitors’ levels of involvement with the topic of climate change related to fish,

wildlife and their habitats. The majority of surveyed visitors to Rice Lake NWR agreed with the following statements (fig. 14):

- “I am personally concerned about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and habitats;”
- “I take actions to alleviate the effects of climate change;” and
- “I stay well-informed about the effects of climate change.”

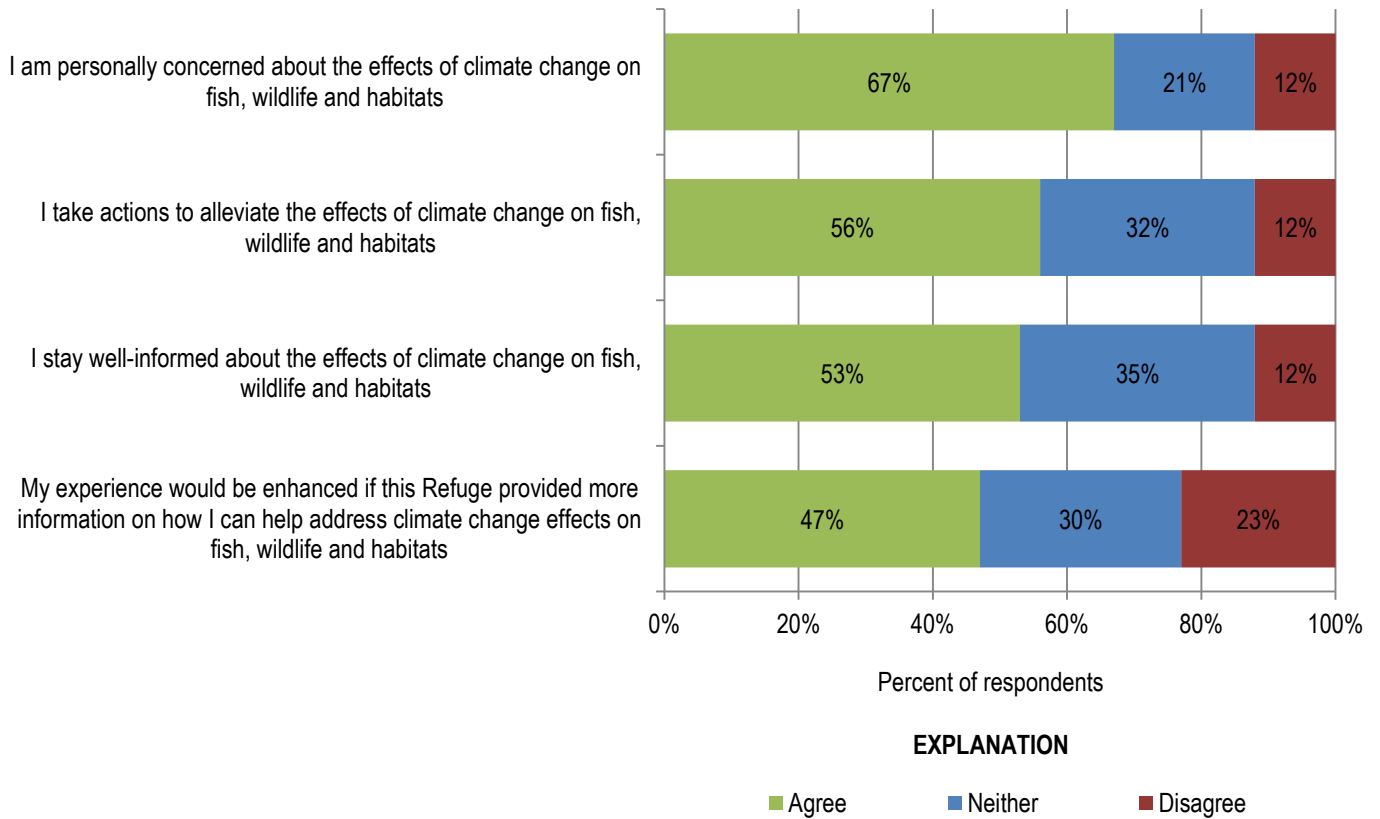


Figure 14. Visitors’ personal involvement with climate change related to fish, wildlife and their habitats (n ≥ 171).

These results are most useful when coupled with responses to belief statements about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats, because such beliefs may be used to develop message frames (or ways to communicate) about climate change with a broad coalition of visitors. Framing science-based findings will not alter the overall message, but rather place the issue in a context in which different audience groupings can relate. The need to mitigate impacts of climate change on Refuges could be framed as a quality-of-life issue (for example, preserving the ability to enjoy fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitat) or an economic issue (for example, maintaining tourist revenues, supporting economic growth through new jobs/technology).

For Rice Lake NWR, the majority of visitors believed the following regarding climate change related to fish, wildlife and their habitats (fig. 15):

- “Future generations will benefit if we address climate change effects;”
- “We can improve our quality of life if we address the effects of climate change;”
- “It is important to consider the economic costs and benefits to local communities when addressing climate change effects;” and
- “There is too much scientific uncertainty to adequately understand climate change effects.”

The majority of visitors did *not* believe:

- “There has been too much emphasis on the catastrophic effects of climate change.”

Such information suggests that certain beliefs resonate with a greater number of visitors than other beliefs do. This information is important to note because some visitors (47%) indicated that their experience would be enhanced if Rice Lake NWR provided information about how they could help address the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife, and their habitats (fig. 14), and framing the information in a way that resonates most with visitors may result in a more engaged public who support strategies aimed at alleviating climate change pressures. Data will be analyzed further at the aggregate, or national level, to inform the development of a comprehensive communication strategy about climate change.

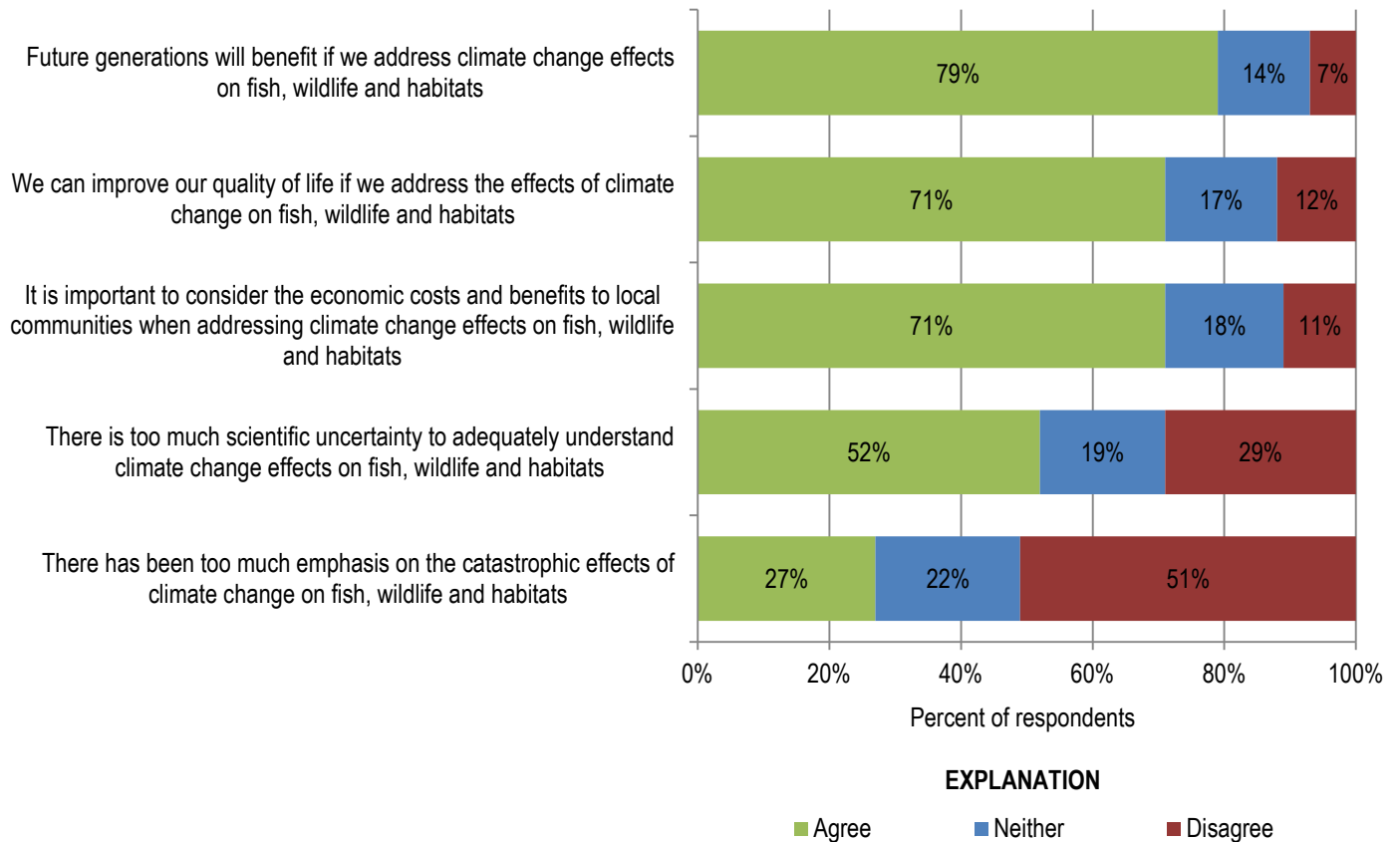


Figure 15. Visitors’ beliefs about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats (n ≥ 172).

Conclusion

These individual refuge results provide a summary of trip characteristics and experiences of a sample of visitors to Rice Lake NWR during 2010–2011. These data can be used to inform decision-making efforts related to the refuge, such as Comprehensive Conservation Plan implementation, visitor services management, and transportation planning and management. For example, when modifying (either minimizing or enhancing) visitor facilities, services, or recreational opportunities, a solid understanding of visitors' trip and activity characteristics, their satisfaction with existing offerings, and opinions regarding refuge fees is helpful. This information can help to gauge demand for refuge opportunities and inform both implementation and communication strategies. Similarly, an awareness of visitors' satisfaction ratings with refuge offerings can help determine if any potential areas of concern need to be investigated further. As another example of the utility of these results, community relations may be improved or bolstered through an understanding of the value of the refuge to visitors, whether that value is attributed to an appreciation of the refuge's uniqueness, enjoyment of its recreational opportunities, or spending contributions of nonlocal visitors to the local economy. Such data about visitors and their experiences, in conjunction with an understanding of biophysical data on the refuge, can ensure that management decisions are consistent with the Refuge System mission while fostering a continued public interest in these special places. Individual refuge results are available for downloading at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/ds/643/> as part of USGS Data Series 643 (Sexton and others, 2011). For additional information about this project, contact the USGS researchers at national_visitor_survey@usgs.gov or 970.226.9205.

References

- Bruyere, B.L., Rodriguez, D.A., and Vaske, J.J., 2002, Enhancing importance-performance analysis through segmentation: *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, v. 12, no. 1, p. 81-95.
- Carver, E., and Caudill, J., 2007, Banking on nature 2006: The economic benefits to local communities of National Wildlife Refuge visitation: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Economics, Washington, D.C., 372 p., accessed September 30, 2011, at http://www.fws.gov/refuges/about/msWord/BankingonNature_2006_11-23.doc.
- Clark, J.R., 2001, Mission and Goals (National Fish and Wildlife Service Director's Order #132–601 FW1), accessed November 18, 2011 at http://www.fws.gov/refuges/policiesandbudget/HR1420_missionGoals.html.
- Dillman, D.A., 2007, Mail and Internet surveys: The tailored design method. (2nd ed.): Hoboken, N.J., John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 523 p.
- Krechmer, D., Grimm, L., Hodge, D., Mendes, D., and Goetzke, F., 2001, Federal lands alternative transportation systems study – Volume 3 – Summary of national ATS needs: prepared for Federal Highway Administration, and Federal Transit Administration in association with National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 80 p. (Also available at http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/3039_study.pdf.)
- Leiserowitz, A, Maibach, E., and Roser-Renouf, C., 2008, Global warming's six Americas: An audience segmentation: New Haven, Conn., Yale University.
- Martilla, J.A., and James, J.C., 1977, Importance-performance analysis: *Journal of Marketing*, v. 41, p. 77–79.
- Nisbet, M.C., 2009, Communicating climate change: Why frames matter for public engagement: *Environment*, v. 51, p. 12-23.
- Salant, P., and Dillman, D.A., 1994, How to conduct your own study: New York, N.Y., John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

- Sexton, N.R., Dietsch, A.M., Don Carlos, A.W., Koontz, L., Solomon, A. and Miller, H., 2011, National wildlife refuge visitor survey 2010/2011: Individual refuge results: U.S. Geological Survey Data Series 643.
- Stynes, D.J., 2008, National Park visitor spending and payroll impacts, 2007: East Lansing, Mich., Michigan State University, Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies.
- Tarrant, M.A., and Smith, E.K., 2002, The use of a modified importance-performance framework to examine visitor satisfaction with attributes of outdoor recreation settings: *Managing Leisure*, v. 7, no. 2, p. 69–82.
- Uniack, T., 1999, The citizen's wildlife refuge planning handbook: Charting the future of conservation on the National Wildlife Refuge near you: Defenders of Wildlife, Washington, D.C., accessed April 2010 at http://www.defenders.org/resources/publications/programs_and_policy/habitat_conservation/federal_lands/citizen's_wildlife_refuge_planning_handbook.pdf.
- U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, 2007, 2006 National survey of fishing, hunting, and wildlife-associated recreation: U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C., 168 p.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2007, America's national wildlife refuges, Fact Sheet, last updated July 31, 2007.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2010, Rising to the urgent challenge: Strategic plan for responding to accelerating climate change: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Refuges, Washington, D.C., 32 p., accessed April 2011 at <http://www.fws.gov/home/climatechange/pdf/CCStrategicPlan.pdf>.
- Vaske, J.J., Beaman, J., Stanley R., and Grenier, M., 1996, Importance-performance and segmentation: Where do we go from here?: *in* Fesenmaier, D.R., O'Leary, J.T., and Uysal, M., eds., *Recent advances in tourism marketing research*: New York, The Haworth Press, Inc., p. 225-240.
- Wade, D.J. and Eagles, P.F.J., 2003, The use of importance-performance analysis and market segmentation for tourism management in parks and protected areas: An application to Tanzania's National Parks: *Journal of Ecotourism*, v. 2, no. 3, p. 196-212.

This page left intentionally blank.

National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey



PLEASE READ THIS FIRST:

Thank you for visiting a National Wildlife Refuge and for agreeing to participate in this study! We hope that you had an enjoyable experience. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey would like to learn more about National Wildlife Refuge visitors in order to improve the management of the area and enhance visitor opportunities.

If you have recently visited more than one National Wildlife Refuge or made more than one visit to the same Refuge, please respond regarding only the Refuge and the visit when you were asked to participate in this survey. Any question that uses the phrase “this Refuge” refers to the Refuge and visit when you were contacted.

SECTION 1. Your visit to this Refuge

1. Including your most recent visit, which activities have you participated in during the past 12 months at this Refuge?
(Please mark **all that apply.**)

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 12% Big game hunting | <input type="checkbox"/> 26% Hiking | <input type="checkbox"/> 11% Environmental education (for example, classrooms or labs, tours) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6% Upland/Small-game hunting | <input type="checkbox"/> 0% Bicycling | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0% Migratory bird/Waterfowl hunting | <input type="checkbox"/> 53% Auto tour route/Driving | <input type="checkbox"/> 41% Special event (<i>please specify</i>)
<u>See Appendix B</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 60% Wildlife observation | <input type="checkbox"/> 2% Motorized boating | <input type="checkbox"/> 3% Other (<i>please specify</i>)
<u>See Appendix B</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 50% Bird watching | <input type="checkbox"/> 2% Nonmotorized boating (including canoes/kayaks) | <input type="checkbox"/> 0% Other (<i>please specify</i>)
<u>See Appendix B</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18% Freshwater fishing | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0% Saltwater fishing | <input type="checkbox"/> 20% Interpretation (for example, exhibits, kiosks, videos) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 23% Photography | | |

2. Which of the activities above was the ***primary*** purpose of your visit to this Refuge?
(Please write **only one activity** on the line.) See report for categorized results; see Appendix B for miscellaneous responses

3. Did you go to a Visitor Center at this Refuge?

- 30% No
- 70% Yes → If yes, what did you do there? (Please mark **all that apply.**)
- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 66% Visit the gift shop or bookstore | <input type="checkbox"/> 6% Watch a nature talk/video/presentation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 77% View the exhibits | <input type="checkbox"/> 50% Stopped to use the facilities (for example, get water, use restroom) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 73% Ask information of staff/volunteers | <input type="checkbox"/> 11% Other (<i>please specify</i>) <u>See Appendix B</u> |

4. Which of the following best describes your visit to this Refuge? (*Please mark **only one.***)

Nonlocal	Local	Total	
48%	83%	67%	It was the primary purpose or sole destination of my trip.
35%	9%	21%	It was one of many equally important reasons or destinations for my trip.
17%	9%	13%	It was just an incidental or spur-of-the-moment stop on a trip taken for other purposes or to other destinations.

5. Approximately how many **miles** did you travel to get to this Refuge?

Nonlocal 180 number of miles

Local 20 number of miles

6. How much time did you spend at this Refuge on your visit?

See Report for Results

7. Were you part of a group on your visit to this Refuge?

31% No (*skip to question #9*)

69% Yes → What **type of group** were you with on your visit? (*Please mark **only one.***)

70% Family and/or friends

12% Organized club or school group

4% Commercial tour group

13% Other (*please specify*) See Appendix B

8. How many people were in your group, including yourself? (*Please answer each category.*)

5 number 18 years and over

1 number 17 years and under

9. How did you **first learn or hear about** this Refuge? (*Please mark **all that apply.***)

42% Friends or relatives

8% Refuge website

41% Signs on highway

2% Other website (*please specify*) See Appendix B

10% Recreation club or organization

1% Television or radio

21% People in the local community

16% Newspaper or magazine

19% Refuge printed information (brochure, map)

16% Other (*please specify*) See Appendix B

10. During which seasons have you visited this Refuge in the last 12 months? (*Please mark **all that apply.***)

42% Spring
(March-May)

64% Summer
(June-August)

69% Fall
(September-November)

10% Winter
(December-February)

11. How many times have you visited...

...this Refuge (including this visit) in the last 12 months? 6 number of visits

...other National Wildlife Refuges in the last 12 months? 3 number of visits

SECTION 2. Transportation and access at this Refuge

1. What **forms of transportation** did you use on your visit to this Refuge? (*Please mark **all that apply.***)

- | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 93% | Private vehicle without a trailer | <input type="checkbox"/> 0% | Refuge shuttle bus or tram | <input type="checkbox"/> 0% | Bicycle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2% | Private vehicle with a trailer
(for boat, camper or other) | <input type="checkbox"/> 0% | Motorcycle | <input type="checkbox"/> 19% | Walk/Hike |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0% | Commercial tour bus | <input type="checkbox"/> 3% | ATV or off-road vehicle | <input type="checkbox"/> 6% | Other (<i>please specify below</i>) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2% | Recreational vehicle (RV) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1% | Boat | <u>See Appendix B</u> | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> 3% | Wheelchair or other mobility aid | | |

2. Which of the following did you use to find your way to this Refuge? (*Please mark **all that apply.***)

- | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 54% | Signs on highways | <input type="checkbox"/> 8% | Directions from Refuge website |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4% | A GPS navigation system | <input type="checkbox"/> 5% | Directions from people in community near this Refuge |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 19% | A road atlas or highway map | <input type="checkbox"/> 10% | Directions from friends or family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8% | Maps from the Internet (for example,
MapQuest or Google Maps) | <input type="checkbox"/> 59% | Previous knowledge/I have been to this Refuge before |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> 1% | Other (<i>please specify</i>) <u>See Appendix B</u> |

3. Below are different alternative transportation options that could be offered at some National Wildlife Refuges in the future. Considering the different Refuges you may have visited, please tell us **how likely you would be to use each transportation option.** (*Please circle one number for each statement.*)

How likely would you be to use...	Very Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Neither	Somewhat Likely	Very Likely
...a bus or tram that takes passengers to different points on the Refuge (such as the Visitor Center)?	<input type="checkbox"/> 41%	<input type="checkbox"/> 16%	<input type="checkbox"/> 8%	<input type="checkbox"/> 25%	<input type="checkbox"/> 10%
...a bike that was offered through a Bike Share Program for use while on the Refuge?	<input type="checkbox"/> 43%	<input type="checkbox"/> 16%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 22%	<input type="checkbox"/> 13%
...a bus or tram that provides a guided tour of the Refuge with information about the Refuge and its resources?	<input type="checkbox"/> 27%	<input type="checkbox"/> 16%	<input type="checkbox"/> 5%	<input type="checkbox"/> 34%	<input type="checkbox"/> 18%
...a boat that goes to different points on Refuge waterways?	<input type="checkbox"/> 24%	<input type="checkbox"/> 8%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 34%	<input type="checkbox"/> 29%
...a bus or tram that runs during a special event (such as an evening tour of wildlife or weekend festival)?	<input type="checkbox"/> 27%	<input type="checkbox"/> 8%	<input type="checkbox"/> 10%	<input type="checkbox"/> 35%	<input type="checkbox"/> 20%
...an offsite parking lot that provides trail access for walking/hiking onto the Refuge?	<input type="checkbox"/> 17%	<input type="checkbox"/> 10%	<input type="checkbox"/> 11%	<input type="checkbox"/> 34%	<input type="checkbox"/> 27%
...some other alternative transportation option? (<i>please specify</i>) <u>See Appendix B</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> 0%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 22%	<input type="checkbox"/> 67%

4. If alternative transportation were offered at *this* Refuge, would it enhance your experience?

- 25% Yes 34% No 42% Not Sure

5. For each of the following transportation-related features, first, **rate how important** each feature is to you when visiting this Refuge; then **rate how satisfied** you are with the way this Refuge is managing each feature. *If this Refuge does not offer a specific transportation-related feature, please rate how important it is to you and then circle NA "Not Applicable" under the Satisfaction column.*

Importance					Satisfaction						
Circle one for each item.					Circle one for each item.						
Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Neither	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Very Unsatisfied	Somewhat Unsatisfied	Neither	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable	
5%	9%	8%	53%	25%	Surface conditions of roads	9%	2%	6%	20%	64%	NA
4%	19%	10%	54%	13%	Surface conditions of parking areas	7%	1%	5%	21%	67%	NA
7%	8%	13%	36%	36%	Condition of bridges	6%	0%	11%	9%	74%	NA
3%	7%	11%	39%	40%	Condition of trails and boardwalks	4%	3%	7%	29%	56%	NA
2%	8%	10%	52%	28%	Number of places for parking	6%	7%	8%	25%	53%	NA
5%	6%	10%	48%	31%	Number of places to pull over along Refuge roads	5%	17%	9%	35%	34%	NA
4%	5%	9%	36%	46%	Safety of driving conditions on Refuge roads	3%	1%	9%	20%	67%	NA
4%	4%	8%	36%	47%	Safety of Refuge road entrances/exits	3%	1%	5%	18%	73%	NA
3%	4%	12%	40%	40%	Signs on highways directing you to the Refuge	4%	2%	7%	22%	65%	NA
3%	4%	8%	37%	48%	Signs directing you around the Refuge roads	4%	2%	7%	28%	57%	NA
1%	4%	11%	32%	52%	Signs directing you on trails	3%	7%	12%	33%	46%	NA
6%	6%	20%	27%	41%	Access for people with physical disabilities or who have difficulty walking	2%	6%	27%	30%	35%	NA

6. If you have any comments about transportation-related items at this Refuge, please write them on the lines below.

See Appendix B

SECTION 3. Your expenses related to your Refuge visit

1. Do you live in the local area (within approximately 50 miles of this Refuge)?

54% Yes

46% No → How much time did you spend **in local communities** on this trip?
 2 number of hours OR 3 number of days

2. Please record the amount that **you and other members of your group** with whom you shared expenses (for example, other family members, traveling companions) spent in the local 50-mile area during **your most recent visit** to this Refuge. (Please enter the amount spent to the nearest dollar in each category below. Enter 0 (zero) if you did not spend any money in a particular category.)

Categories	Amount Spent in Local Communities & at this Refuge (within 50 miles of this Refuge)
Motel, bed & breakfast, cabin, etc.	
Camping	
Restaurants & bars	
Groceries	
Gasoline and oil	
Local transportation (bus, shuttle, rental car, etc.)	
Refuge entrance fee	
Recreation guide fees (hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, etc.)	
Equipment rental (canoe, bicycle, kayak, etc.)	
Sporting good purchases	
Souvenirs/clothing and other retail	
Other (please specify) _____	

See Report for Results

3. Including yourself, how many people in your group shared these trip expenses?

2 number of people sharing expenses

4. As you know, some of the costs of travel such as gasoline, hotels, and airline tickets often increase. If your total trip costs were to increase, what is the maximum extra amount you would pay and still visit this Refuge? *(Please circle the highest dollar amount.)*

\$0	\$10	\$20	\$35	\$50	\$75	\$100	\$125	\$150	\$200	\$250
9%	19%	21%	13%	21%	4%	6%	1%	3%	0%	4%

5. If you or a member of your group paid a fee or used a pass to enter this Refuge, how appropriate was the fee? *(Please mark **only one**.)*

12%	Far too low	0%	Too low	76%	About right	0%	Too high	12%	Far too high	90%	Did not pay a fee <i>(skip to Section 4)</i>
-----	-------------	----	---------	-----	-------------	----	----------	-----	--------------	-----	---

6. Please indicate whether you disagree or agree with the following statement. *(Please mark **only one**.)*

The value of the recreation opportunities and services I experienced at this Refuge was at least equal to the fee I paid.

0%	Strongly disagree	0%	Disagree	12%	Neither agree or disagree	41%	Agree	47%	Strongly agree
----	-------------------	----	----------	-----	---------------------------	-----	-------	-----	----------------

SECTION 4. Your experience at this Refuge

1. Considering your visit to this Refuge, please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with each statement. *(Please circle one number for each statement.)*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
Overall, I am satisfied with the recreational activities and opportunities provided by this Refuge.	3%	1%	2%	41%	53%	NA
Overall, I am satisfied with the information and education provided by this Refuge about its resources.	2%	1%	6%	34%	57%	NA
Overall, I am satisfied with the services provided by employees or volunteers at this Refuge.	1%	0%	3%	30%	66%	NA
This Refuge does a good job of conserving fish, wildlife and their habitats.	2%	2%	3%	27%	65%	NA

2. For each of the following services, facilities, and activities, first, **rate how important** each item is to you when visiting this Refuge; then, **rate how satisfied** you are with the way this Refuge is managing each item.
If this Refuge does not offer a specific service, facility, or activity, please rate how important it is to you and then circle NA “Not Applicable” under the Satisfaction column.

Importance					Refuge Services, Facilities, and Activities	Satisfaction					
Circle one for each item.						Circle one for each item.					
Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Neither	Somewhat Important	Very Important		Very Unsatisfied	Somewhat Unsatisfied	Neither	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
4%	9%	11%	37%	40%	Availability of employees or volunteers	1%	1%	11%	21%	66%	NA
4%	1%	9%	30%	56%	Courteous and welcoming employees or volunteers	1%	0%	6%	12%	81%	NA
3%	1%	4%	33%	59%	Knowledgeable employees or volunteers	2%	2%	4%	15%	76%	NA
2%	3%	6%	38%	51%	Printed information about this Refuge and its resources (for example, maps and brochures)	1%	1%	5%	23%	71%	NA
2%	4%	9%	46%	39%	Informational kiosks/displays about this Refuge and its resources	1%	2%	10%	28%	59%	NA
2%	3%	9%	42%	44%	Signs with rules/regulations for this Refuge	1%	2%	7%	33%	58%	NA
1%	3%	14%	43%	40%	Exhibits about this Refuge and its resources	1%	1%	11%	33%	54%	NA
3%	5%	24%	33%	35%	Environmental education programs or activities	1%	2%	30%	27%	40%	NA
1%	4%	10%	33%	53%	Visitor Center	1%	3%	9%	20%	68%	NA
1%	1%	8%	33%	58%	Convenient hours and days of operation	1%	2%	8%	28%	61%	NA
1%	3%	4%	34%	57%	Well-maintained restrooms	1%	3%	4%	18%	74%	NA
1%	1%	6%	41%	51%	Wildlife observation structures (decks, blinds)	1%	3%	7%	24%	65%	NA
4%	5%	10%	30%	51%	Bird-watching opportunities	2%	1%	13%	20%	64%	NA
3%	1%	5%	37%	54%	Opportunities to observe wildlife other than birds	1%	3%	10%	31%	55%	NA
2%	4%	15%	38%	40%	Opportunities to photograph wildlife and scenery	2%	2%	15%	31%	50%	NA
26%	8%	25%	14%	27%	Hunting opportunities	2%	3%	39%	18%	39%	NA
20%	8%	22%	19%	31%	Fishing opportunities	2%	1%	34%	22%	42%	NA
5%	1%	14%	40%	41%	Trail hiking opportunities	1%	3%	17%	34%	44%	NA
9%	5%	32%	35%	19%	Water trail opportunities for canoeing or kayaking	1%	3%	41%	26%	30%	NA
11%	10%	32%	32%	14%	Bicycling opportunities	0%	4%	51%	24%	21%	NA
7%	9%	35%	25%	24%	Volunteer opportunities	1%	0%	40%	18%	40%	NA

3. If you have any comments about the services, facilities, and activities at this Refuge, please write them on the lines below.

See Appendix B

SECTION 5. Your opinions regarding National Wildlife Refuges and the resources they conserve

1. Before you were contacted to participate in this survey, were you aware that National Wildlife Refuges...

...are managed by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

93% Yes

7% No

...have the primary mission of conserving, managing, and restoring fish, wildlife, plants and their habitat?

96% Yes

4% No

2. Compared to other public lands you have visited, do you think Refuges provide a unique recreation experience?

92% Yes

8% No

3. If you answered "Yes" to Question 2, please briefly describe what makes Refuges unique. _____

See Appendix B

4. There has been a lot of talk about climate change recently. We would like to know what you think about climate change as it relates to fish, wildlife and their habitats. To what extent do you disagree or agree with each statement below? (Please circle one number for each statement.)

Statements about climate change	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am personally concerned about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	6%	6%	21%	36%	31%
We can improve our quality of life if we address the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	6%	6%	18%	43%	28%
There is too much scientific uncertainty to adequately understand how climate change will impact fish, wildlife and their habitats.	10%	19%	19%	38%	14%
I stay well-informed about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	1%	12%	35%	44%	9%
It is important to consider the economic costs and benefits to local communities when addressing the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	2%	9%	18%	56%	14%
I take actions to alleviate the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	3%	9%	32%	41%	15%
There has been too much emphasis on the catastrophic effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	25%	27%	21%	20%	8%
Future generations will benefit if we address the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	3%	3%	15%	38%	40%
My experience at this Refuge would be enhanced if this Refuge provided more information about how I can help address the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	9%	15%	30%	39%	8%

SECTION 6. A Little about You

**** Please tell us a little bit about yourself. Your answers to these questions will help further characterize visitors to National Wildlife Refuges. Answers are not linked to any individual taking this survey. ****

1. Are you a citizen or permanent resident of the United States?

100% Yes 0% No → If not, what is your home country? See Figure 4 in Report

2. Are you? 61% Male 39% Female

3. In what year were you born? 1955 (YYYY)

4. What is your highest year of formal schooling? (Please circle one number.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20+
(elementary)					(junior high or middle school)			(high school)				(college or technical school)				(graduate or professional school)			
					1%			24%				53%				22%			

5. What ethnicity do you consider yourself? 1% Hispanic or Latino 99% Not Hispanic or Latino

6. From what racial origin(s) do you consider yourself? (Please mark ***all that apply.***)

- 3% American Indian or Alaska Native 1% Black or African American 98% White
 0% Asian 0% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

7. How many members of your household contribute to paying the household expenses? 2 persons

8. Including these members, what was your approximate household income from all sources (before taxes) last year?

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1% Less than \$10,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 16% \$35,000 - \$49,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> 10% \$100,000 - \$149,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10% \$10,000 - \$24,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> 22% \$50,000 - \$74,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4% \$150,000 - \$199,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15% \$25,000 - \$34,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> 20% \$75,000 - \$99,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1% \$200,000 or more |

9. How many outdoor recreation trips did you take in the last 12 months (for activities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, etc.)?

19 number of trips

Thank you for completing the survey.

There is space on the next page for any additional comments you may have regarding your visit to this Refuge.

See Appendix B for Comments

This page left intentionally blank.

Appendix B: Visitor Comments to Open-Ended Survey Questions for Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Survey Section 1

Question 1: "Including your most recent visit, which activities have you participated in during the past 12 months at this Refuge?"

Special Event	Frequency
75th Anniversary Celebration	38
75th Anniversary Celebration, Family Fun Day, Wild Rice Days float	1
75th Anniversary Celebration, Memorial Day weekend event	1
Assisted with Disabled Deer Hunt	1
Disabled Deer Hunt	10
Disabled Deer Hunt, Kid Fishing Day, 75th Anniversary Celebration	1
Family Fun Day	8
Family Fun Day, 75th Anniversary Celebration, Friends events	1
Family Fun Day, 75th Anniversary, Disabled Access Deer Hunt, Refuge Cleanup Day, Migratory Bird Day	1
Logging Demos	1
Open House	2
Plant trees	1
Rice Lake Event	1
Wild Rice Days	4
Total	71

Other Activity	Frequency
75th Anniversary	1
GWWA research project	1

Plant Trees	2
Ricing	1
Visit Headquarters	1
Total	6

Question 2: "Which of the activities above was the primary purpose of your visit to this Refuge?"
Primary activities are categorized in the main report; the table below lists the "other" miscellaneous primary activities listed by survey respondents.

Other Miscellaneous Primary Activities	Frequency
75th anniversary celebration	22
Birthday Celebration	2
Celebration	1
Family Fun Day	8
Friends of Rice Lake NWR	1
GWWA research project	1
Logging Demonstration	1
Looking at wildlife and relaxing	1
Lunch	1
McGregor Wild Rice days	1
Open House	1
Refuge Anniversary	1
Ricing	1
To get wildrice	1
Visit Headquarters	1

Visit Information Center	1
Watching deer	1
Wild Rice Information	1

Question 3: "Did you go to a Visitor Center at this Refuge?"; If Yes, "What did you do there?"

Other Visitor Center Activity	Frequency
75th Anniversary events	1
Auto tour	1
Auto tour and bird watching	1
Bought Hunting/Bird Conservation Stamp	1
Disabled deer hunt meetings	1
Grabbed maps and brochures	1
I judged a photography contest.	1
I talked to a biologist.	1
Joined a Friends Meeting	1
Maps	1
Meeting for Disabled Deer Hunt	1
Meeting with staff	1
Meetings	1
View Outside Events	1
Total	14

Question 7: "Were you part of a group on your visit to this Refuge?; If Yes, "What type of group were you with on your visit?"

Other Group Type	Frequency
Big Game Hunting	1
Disabled Deer Hunt	9
Disabled Deer Hunt workers	1
Farm workers	1
MOU Birding Trip	1
U of M research group	1
Volunteer for Family Fun Day	1
Total	15

Question 9: "How did you first learn or hear about this Refuge?"

Other Website	Frequency
eBird	1
Minnesota Birding on the Net	1
MN DNR Website	1
MN Hunting Booklet	1
Total	4

Other Ways Heard about This Refuge	Frequency
Aitkin County Fair booth	1
Audubon Guide to NWR Northern Midwest	1
Bird Guide for Minnesota	1
Center of Individual Living in northeast Minnesota	1

Commercial group had Rice Lake as a planned destination	1
Contacted by manager	1
Deer Regulations	1
Fun Things To Do in Aitkin County brochure	1
Hiking Guidebook	1
Hunting Register	1
I am a retired FWS employee.	1
I am retired USFWS (Region 3)	1
Information Booth at town event	1
Minnesota Ornithologists Union - Birding Trips	1
MN Hunting Booklet	1
National Wildlife Refuge directory	1
Organizers of this Hunt.	1
Part of tour	1
Rand McNally Road Atlas	1
Refuge Staff	2
State Map	3
The Birds of Minnesota	1
The Wings tour leader brought us to Rice Lake	1
Trip Leader	1
U of Minnesota	1
Total	28

Survey Section 2

Question 1: "What forms of transportation did you use on your visit to this Refuge?"

Other Forms of Transportation	Frequency
Commercial tour van	1
Horse-drawn wagon	4
School bus	1
Van rented by tour group	1
Volunteers' SUV	1
Wagon ride	2
Total	10

Question 2: "Which of the following did you use to find your way to this Refuge?"

Other Ways Found This Refuge	Frequency
Birds of Minnesota	1
Tour	1
Total	2

Question 5: "Below are different alternative transportation options that could be offered at some National Wildlife Refuges in the future...please tell us how likely you would be to use each transportation option."

Other Transportation Option Likely to Use	Frequency
Air boat	1
ATV	4
ATV trail	1
Dirt bikes or ATV rentals	1

Four wheel access for handicapped	1
Golf cart	1
Horse	2
Jetpack	1
My own vehicle	1
Segway	1
Skis, Snowmobiles, or ATVs	1
Snowmobiles	1
Wheel chair	2
Total	18

Question 6: "If you have any comments about transportation-related items at this Refuge, please write them on the lines below."

Comments on Transportation-related Items at This Refuge (n = 27)

An observation tower overlooking the woodlot/open field to watch deer coming out to feed would be nice.

Fine!

For many years, much of this refuge was closed to visitors, therefore transportation didn't matter.

I can't give a very good assessment of the Refuge (Rice Lake) because it was closed the day I was there due to hunting. I was only able to drive and visit the south part of the refuge.

I think there should be more signs miles before the entrance to the refuge telling people to visit. If a person does not know of the refuge, there is no "invitation" ahead of time.

I was there for hunting grouse, of which I saw 1 the whole time. Concentrate more on getting something for someone to shoot at when they are there instead of how to make some old women in a wheelchair happy; if there's nothing to hunt, then there's no sense in me even going there.

I would like to see a few pull off spots along the side of the roads. Also, parking lots a little bigger.

I would like to see more places to turn around.

If people are handicapped, then they should be allowed to use 4 wheel access.

More paved trails would be nice.

More roads and places of interest are needed.

Open all roads and gates to automobiles.

Signage could improve (number of miles on the loop back to the main road from one area to another). I had cars following me, and I knew where I was going, but met a car that turned around on a narrow road and went back to the starting point. I feel headlights should be on at all times in the refuge.

Some roads are very narrow with water on roads, and it is very difficult to pass oncoming vehicles.

Staff was great with suggestions for hiking and perhaps seeing wolves.

The 75th anniversary had poor parking at the event, which was several miles into the refuge. Staff had vehicles parking with no order, which was somewhat unsafe. Great event otherwise.

The number one important thing is accuracy. Signs directing us on trails. We are a family with young children and accuracy of signage is important to understand conditions and distance of trails.

The roads are always very well-maintained. Recently, the driveway to and around the picnic area and at Twin Lakes needs to be blacktopped, so it can be used by handicapped people.

The roads were all passible by auto. They were well maintained and were better than I expected for a backwoods road.

They are fine. I wish we could travel some of the minimum maintenance roads though.

They do a great job there. I would like to see a few more spots allowed to park and to walk other areas. They are too spread out and could never walk to some areas. I can't walk as far anymore and a few more pull off and parking spots would be nice; other than that, it's a true treat every time I visit this piece of heaven!!

They do a very good job at Rice Lake.

Trail signs are confusing. I assumed wrongly that north would be at the top of the map, but the good condition of trails made it clear where to go.

Trail surfacing, allowing use of a wheel chair, is a priority of ours. More is always better.

Transportation routes were excellent; they were well-maintained, yet still "country."

While some appreciate the wildlife description signs on wooden viewing platforms, often they tend to be overdone in size and quantity, sometimes to the point of being distracting and obstructive to the view.

Widen the roads a little bit more. Add more picnic tables and another porta-potty.

Survey Section 4

Question 6: "If you have any comments about services, facilities, and activities at this Refuge, please write them on the lines below."

Comments on Services, Facilities, and Activities at This Refuge (n = 53)

75th Anniversary gathering of the pioneer cooking and the drying of the wild rice plus the making of the birch bark canoe was great. Also, the team of horses pulling logs was a great idea. Overall, the event was great.

As a young child, we were always able to drive through the refuge and not have to turn around to get to Aitkin or Kimberly and it was a ride that was very enjoyable. The gate used to be open during daylight hours, and now it is always closed to the public. It makes it very inconvenient for cars coming from (Aitkin and Kimberly).

Bathrooms sometimes smell bad.

Employees were very welcoming.

Everything is very well maintained and clean. Everyone is pleasant and helpful.

Fish size has decreased.

Focus more on wild rice preservation.

Great to have this! I will be back.

Guides were very knowledgeable.

I am very impressed with the staff and volunteers.

I enjoyed the event.

I enjoyed the viewing platform facing the water.

I think it would be nice to have open Visitor Center hours on the weekends, especially in the summer.

I think that the refuge should start having the "local" farmers make hay and grow some crops in the natural clearing as they used to. There was more wildlife (easier to see) in the small fields. All wildlife benefited from this food, and this place to get a good breeze and get away from the "bugs." That's when you'd like to see them.

I thought it was an excellent trip!

I was extremely impressed with the quality of volunteers chosen for this event. As a home school parent, it was absolutely wonderful to see enthusiasm from volunteers. The volunteers showed excitement about being there and they were very knowledgeable. I have visited many historic sights/environmental programs, and even though the weather was horrible, each volunteer seemed genuinely happy to be there. I learned so much and my children enjoyed talking with the adults. The adults were patient and generously provided information to my curious children. Thank you for your patience.

I was very pleased with the staff and the work they did to make my visit special.

I went in June (tick season). I know it's part of being outdoors, but the hiking trails could have been mowed shorter during early summer. We went to pick off ticks for over an hour after 15 minutes of hiking.

I wish there could be a way for weekend visitors to post sightings on the bulletin board outside (maybe I'm the only computer illiterate one).

I would have appreciated a warning about the unbelievable numbers of ticks on the trails at one location. Removed 56 at the end of a hike.

I would like to see more hiking trails.

I would like to see the activities of early Native Americans documented and shown more. For example, the burial mounds: Who? When? Why here? Etc.

It is a very well run "small" refuge and fun to spend time at.

It is pleasant, fun and enjoyable. I enjoyed watching people ricing on Rice Lake.

It is very well kept.

More fishing opportunities would be nice. Also, more places to pull over and walk, etc.

My answers are based on visiting the refuge on a day that it was closed due to hunting.

My family and I enjoy all refuges very much and spend a lot of time enjoying them.

My family fun day and the disabled hunt.

Need more roads and places to stop.

Nice visit. I will return. People working there are very helpful.

Refuge maps are too vague. We were unsure where to hunt, and the trails are too vague.

The addition of a park ranger/public service person would be a great asset and is much needed.

The back gate should open for more automobile trails.

The park was very clean and well kept. After 50 years of passing the bay, we will be back again and we will tell our children and any friends who do not know about the refuge.

The refuge staff is terrific and is appreciative of the volunteer support given.

The refuge used to have a great place to have fun events (BBQ and relax). But due to funding cuts, it is not well maintained. I would really like to see the funding come back.

The refuge was excellent in all aspects. I will recommend this refuge to people I know. I visit these areas more for preservation; it would help people appreciate what they have.

The service folks at the Visitor Center were most friendly and helpful!

The staff at Rice Lake did a wonderful job of explaining the resource and the activities they were involved with.

The Visitor Center is small, but very nice and well-stocked with a nice store for t-shirts, etc. The naturalist on duty was great!!!

The wild rice event was amazing! Everyone was very knowledgeable and friendly. The rice making event was breathtaking and something my kids will always remember. Thanks to the Native Americans!

They were all great and wonderful.

This is one of the better National Wildlife Refuges I have visited. I am very proud we have access to this special place.

This year, the fishing has been way off. Typically, we catch a lot of sunfish/bluegills. And the trails should be sprayed or kept mowed due to the high tick infestation.

Visitor Center opened on weekends in the summer.

Walt Ford, the manager at the McGregor Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge, did a great job. He had everything planned so well.

We drove the gravel road and stopped at a few spots to watch and listen for birds. It was difficult to listen as the crunching from the gravel made it hard to hear.

We found this refuge to be excellent.

We met the Refuge Manager, who happened to be there with his son that day. Even though it was a Sunday, it was great to see the level of dedication that he has for the locale.

We went for the first time during the refuge's 75th Anniversary. It was very interesting and informative.

You need ATV trails.

You need more educational programs and learning displays at the Visitor Center.

Survey Section 5

Question 3: "If you answered "Yes" to Question 2, please briefly describe what makes Refuges unique."

Comments on What Makes Refuges Unique? (n = 134)

A combination of activities.

A vital, secluded fishing ground.

Animal protection makes it unique.

Being able to hunt big game makes it unique!

Being able to visit an area that you can't visit most of the time.

Clean, managed, and used, but not destroyed.

Conservation and education.

Conservation efforts.

Everyone from children through us old people can enjoy seeing birds, animals, wildflowers and plants. It is a pleasure to see waterfowl and birds when they migrate through here.

Everything: fishing lake, etc.

Excellent access to desired habitat/wildlife.

Fish and wildlife populations seem to be much more controlled at the refuge. Able to see wildlife close up, such as bears, swans, herons, eagles, etc.

Fishing opportunities, wildlife lookout, information provided about wildlife in the form of outdoor displays (posters, exhibits, eagle nest display, etc.) make it unique.

Gives people an opportunity to observe birds and animals in natural environments. Especially people living in metro areas.

Guided educational opportunities.

Hiking trails, fishing, and hunting make it unique.

I am a Rice Lake band member. This is my homeland. It is very important to me and my family. We visit at least 2 times a month.

I enjoyed seeing rice harvested.

I like that the habitat is managed to be natural, with native plants and animals.

I like the hunting; you have the chance to get a big deer.

I live 2-8 miles from Rice Lake. We get 4-6 pairs of swans by our river. The Rice River goes through our place. It helps to get the swans back.

I think refuges are unique because of the way they manage the wildlife and habitat.

I was impressed by the size of it. I kept driving, thinking the road would come to end. As I drove, there were places to stop and most had restrooms.

Important in preserving wildlife in different ways makes it unique.

In the Midwest where I live, the NWRs are about the best place to see migrating waterfowl in large numbers.

It is a clean place with a secure and friendly environment.

It is a lot quieter here, except there is no camping, which I do enjoy.

It is a protected place where wildlife can be observed in their natural habitat.

It is close to our home and we personally know the refuge manager.

It is located next to our cabin. I have brought visitors to see exhibits, see photography contests, and visit the gift shop.

It is nice to be on a lake with no motorboats. The water was beautiful and quiet.

It is very peaceful to be there with your family. There is a lot of land and a lot of animals to see.

It makes you think about the animals we share our land with and you can enjoy the beauty of it.

It offers a lot of opportunities to experience wildlife up close. We had a doe and fawn walk right past our car as we sat and watched. We could have reached out and touched them - my kids still talk about it.

It preserves the history of the area and protects the mounds (Indian burial grounds), which are very important to our neighbors. Long Lake Conservation Learning Center is a good mix.

It provides safe opportunities to experience nature at its best. Many outdoor activities are available, and knowledgeable staff manages land for maximum benefit.

It would be much more unique if the park and BBQ pits were better maintained.

It's comparatively close to towns (readily accessible). It is so diverse in habitat.

It's fun to look for animals.

Leaving the land or managing it for a variety of birds and other wildlife.

Less people, more animals, more trees and fewer buildings make it unique.

Lots of variety when you visit refuges all over the country.

Management of waterfowl and habitat.

Many types of activities available, lots of wildlife, and diverse habitats.

Nice location and good fishing opportunities.

No camping and a more primitive feel due to lack of structures and amenities makes it unique.

No people living in the area.

Not commercial, relatively very wild/natural; usually have few cars and people.

Not crowded with people.

Observing wildlife in a natural condition - the opportunity to see things and hear things in a natural setting makes it unique.

Open to all who seek and appreciate natural resources.

Opportunities for bird watching, hiking trails, unique history, and involvement with Native Americans.

Opportunities to roam and be with nature in a beautiful setting/managed setting makes it unique. We love them.

Over 150 different ducks, geese, cranes and a chance to fish and hunt deer makes it unique. In 2008, I had a cougar for company on the 3rd day of the hunt in a large wooded area near my ground blind. I could hear him all afternoon.

People have respect for the land and water resources. On other public lands, many people don't.

Preserve habitat and gives the public opportunities to visit open spaces and view wildlife that they may not see in daily life.

Preserves, restores, and enhances native wildlife and plants. Educates visitors about wildlife conservation. Provides a safe environment for people to enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation. Preserves cultural values and historical and archaeological sites.

Proactive volunteers and excellent viewing opportunities make it unique.

Protection and management of habitats make it unique.

Providing an area where anyone can stop and view nature for free is a good thing.

Refuges are focused on birds and other wildlife, with other uses being secondary. BLM exists, it seems, to extract minerals. National Parks are for hotel construction and development. NWRs are some of the few places that are left natural. They are among our country's best assets and should be better funded.

Refuges are unique to me, because people are not allowed to use loud gas motors on boats and a lot of motorized vehicles are not permitted to be used in the refuges. This makes for a peaceful and enjoyable time without the noise from loud motors.

Refuges are unique, because they are not as commercialized as some National Parks are. Refuges offer safe havens for native species where people are not allowed to trample all over the refuge, as they can in some National Parks. Refuges offer people a window with a smaller area of access. National Wildlife Refuges are saviors of native biology.

Refuges have a primary mission of conservation. I live in the west where the National Forests are known as the land of many animals.

Refuges mean undisturbed wildlife. One can get close to the wildlife without them running away. I do not get out of the truck, but it is nice to see deer up-close.

Refuges provide a more natural habitat for all birds and wildlife so that we can see them living their normal lifestyle, although there is no guarantee you will see any of them each time you go there.

Rice Lake itself and the numerous birds that call it home or use it on migration trips.

Rice Lake: the rivers, waterways, small lakes, and diversity of forests and farmlands.

Seems that you are always able to see more wildlife in a refuge.

Structures specific to wildlife viewing make it unique.

That there are not 4 wheelers or motor vehicles everywhere makes it unique.

The ability to access information about refuges seems easier. The public events at refuges help introduce people to resources available to them. It has been the best way for our family to be introduced to refuges. Other public lands seem to be hard to locate, find information about recreational opportunities, and are difficult for non-hunters to feel like they have the same access as hunters.

The ability to drive into areas of wetlands that would not be accessible to us otherwise and thus the ability to see waterfowl and wildlife.

The ability to use it all year long.

The ability to view nature, but also hunt and fish.

The amount of migratory birds that travel through this Refuge is unique and amazing!

The different trails for hiking and driving make it unique.

The dirt road "wildlife loops" for photography from cars make it unique.

The duck populations during migration make it unique.

The employees and it's close by.

The focus on protecting wildlife (fish, animals, plants) and their habitats, instead of putting human wants/needs for recreation first makes the type of recreation available unique. Keep it that way!

The friendliness of everyone working there makes it unique.

The habitats are unique in the concentrations of wildlife and birds and other life forms because of the critical flyways, waterways, or food resources.

The information sources are equal to National Parks.

The land and water is left in a natural state.

The land is managed in its natural state, and is not manipulated to cater to people. Means are established so people can navigate through the refuges, but we are visitors there, not the dominators.

The location and land use give it a big advantage over private lands.

The one I visit is free and close to home. Since I don't travel much, this is important to me. Being on social security disability, free makes a difference for me too. This makes it available to me.

The primary focus is on wildlife habitat and the public information given.

The refuge is different every time I visit. You never know what you are going to see as far as wildlife or plants. It often feels that I am alone there, even though it gets many visitors.

The serenity of the visit makes it unique, partly because of the absence of commercialization and how it reflects the nature of the area. My husband and I love what has been done to the area. It is one of our favorite places to visit!

The staff and habitat of wildlife make it unique.

The trails out to the stands make it unique.

The Visitor Center, staff, signs, and observation decks make it unique.

The wildlife viewing opportunities make it unique.

The wildlife, hiking, and fishing (especially fishing) make it unique.

Their mission to preserve the land, its history and wildlife, are very important to the present and, most important, to future generations.

The birds and other wildlife are more easily seen on refuges than elsewhere. Many are unique. Many (Aransas, Laguna, Atascosa) provide a safe haven for endangered species.

There is more wildlife to view, they are very secluded, and it almost seems like a piece heaven every time I drive or walk in this refuge - very well managed.

There is a large area in which you can do many things - hike, fish, watch, etc. Such a wonderful asset to this small community!

There is a place to sit down and eat at tables. I like it when you have a picnic table at places, and places for kids to play in the mowed grass and it is very clean.

There is less traffic and it is slower moving so you can see things. There is also an observation deck and a handicapped deck.

They are centered on conserving nature, not using it for recreation, which allows an opportunity to witness true wilderness and wildlife.

They are generally wilder and less commercial than National Parks, for example. There are also more of them and they are usually accessible.

They are national in focus and create a great balance on what is offered in our 50 states. I've always had a great experience in every NWR I've visited.

They are not quite as public as a State Park or National Park. I like the fact that we aren't allowing camping sites per se, etc. I like that they aren't as commercially focused. I feel like I am visiting a place that really is focused on conserving.

They are set up specifically for wildlife, most often birds, and typically have great opportunities for viewing wildlife.

They have a handicap deer hunt for those who love the sport and have special needs. The experience is truly special.

They make it possible for all people to use them; all ages and abilities.

They offer a place for people to visit and see all nature has to offer.

They offer opportunities for handicapped hunters and treat us as equals.

They offer things and services to the area which are unique and make young people in the area more aware of wildlife and the importance of habitat and how to protect it in the future.

They preserve the unique habitat and living creatures in that geographical area for all to observe.

They remain undeveloped and leave nature as is so that all can enjoy the natural habitat.

This refuge is a large wild rice lake that is very important to the migrating waterfowl.

To be able to take our time and stop whenever we want and not be rushed.

Unbelievable numbers of waterfowl with the accompanying sounds.

Undisturbed nature makes it unique.

Very "kid friendly" for educational programs and fishing opportunities.

Very nice land, lots of opportunities to see wildlife, and extra knowledgeable.

Very sizeable; the opportunity to see wildlife.

Walk-in only small game hunting, well maintained roads for bikes, and archery deer opportunity makes it unique.

We are in need of open spaces with controlled access based on the needs of the resident wildlife and flora.

We need these public lands to enjoy and have them maintained to enjoy; it's our tax dollars put to good use.

Welcomes an opportunity for public to visit, bird watch, enjoy nature, hunt and fish.

Well maintained and beautiful refuge.

Wetlands are fewer and fewer each year. I live in southwest MN and we have wetlands, but they are not managed very well, with limited hunting and little fishing. Keep up the good work.

When we visit various refuges, there is no pressure to hurry up. We can take our time, stop, look around, and even take a nap, if the fish aren't biting. Thank you for being there.

When we were there, they had booths set up demonstrating "old time" activities, which my family enjoyed immensely.

When you spend time on a number of refuges, you see an approximation of a natural ecosystem, and more importantly to us, you see birds and wildlife in numbers and variety that you cannot generally see elsewhere. We love them!

You are able to drive or walk and see undisturbed nature: trees, animals, birds, and fish.

You can drive around and enjoy the scenery and wildlife and bring friends there.

You get to see more wildlife.

You know every time you drive down the roads that you will see something wild and you can stop and look at turtles and birds in the peace and quiet.

Additional Comments (n = 20)

As primary administrator of the LLCC for 8 years from 1962 to about 1971, I knew Wes Dundus and Bob Burreth - I am disappointed that the LLCC no longer uses professional resource people to teach the summer program. I often accompanied Wes when we toured the refuge. The LLCC is no longer supervised by local resource personnel and is replaced by so called naturalists. I thought camping facilities were provided at refuges. How about cross country skiing?

I am passionate about wildlife refuges and will detour to visit one. Favorites: Bosque del Apache, NM; National Bison Range, MT; Rice Lake,

MN; Long Lake, ND; Ding Darling, FL; Santa Ana, Laguna Atascosa, Aransas, TX; Wichita Mountains, OK.

I especially liked the hike where the information was placed on the pathway so that you could walk and read about the history, geology, animals, etc. of this refuge.

I find it to be very relaxing and an enjoyable time each time we go there.

I think it is very important to have refuges for our wildlife, especially when so much other land is disappearing to housing or commercial development. I hope any hunting or fishing will take into account the abundance or not of each species. Some are getting scarce - need to limits these! I realize as a non-hunter (nor my family) that I am biased - but as a birder, it is disheartening to see many species dropping in numbers. Essential we plant and otherwise enhance places for birds to nest.

I visit often in the fall and it is very well run. The staff is always friendly and they seem to strive to keep it a real diamond in the rough. Everything seems to be kept up to the T. The trails mowed, picnic areas, parking spots are mowed, etc. Would like to see more areas open for bow hunting and a few more places to park so you can walk to new areas. They are too spread out and there are not that many anyway. Otherwise, it's a real treat to take photos and walk through this great refuge.

It is a great place. I hope to return.

It is a well-maintained refuge and provides educational activities for everyone.

Keep up the good work for preservation and protection! Thanks for providing hiking trails!

My wife and I both enjoyed our day trip to Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge during our camping trip to the MN North Shore. Will return again in the future!

Refuge staff and people manning displays did real good jobs at the Rice Lake NWR 75th Anniversary Day. Thanks to all.

Rice Lake NWR is great. It has and is maintaining the wildness quality about it with little human impact. Trails could be mowed a little more often. New programs being offered there is a real plus and their work on the Purple Martin is commendable.

The 75th was great; maybe an event every year would create more interest with McGregor having rice days.

The day I visited Rice Lake NWR, it was closed due to hunting. I have found many of my visits to NWRs are impacted by a closure of one form or another due to hunting. To me, it seems that the NWR system spends a lot of resources on two select groups: hunters and people who fish. I don't understand why the whole refuge should be closed to a select group of visitors. Could I get a group of birders together to have the whole refuge to ourselves? I have to travel a long distance to get to a NWR and when I visit I would like to use it. I am finding my experiences at NWRs to be very inconsistent. I guess I'm used to how the NPS operates.

There should be more questions on why we should have these places and why they are important to have and to keep.

Very nice facility. I am planning on using it on a regular basis.

We love to drive through and walk some of the trails, because it gives us such a peaceful feeling. We both love wildlife and exploring. (Signed)

We visited this refuge on a Wings Birding Tour. We stayed one night in McGregor. I saw my first Barred Owl in the refuge!

Wonderful way to spend a Sunday afternoon!

You have a top rate crew at Rice Lake. Be proud of them. I have passed it a thousand times (not an exaggeration). Unfortunately, it is too close to or from our destination, but we will stop again. The place is well worth taking the time.
