



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

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This refuge offers a quiet, peaceful, and natural setting. It allows so many different ways to enjoy the natural habitat in and around the area. I found it to be an exquisite experience despite the heat and muggy climate. I enjoyed the aquatic life and feeling as though we were all alone. The staff was especially helpful and friendly.—Survey comment from visitor to Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge.



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

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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 Banks 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)	Upper Mississippi River National Fish and Wildlife Refuge - McGregor District (MN)
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.

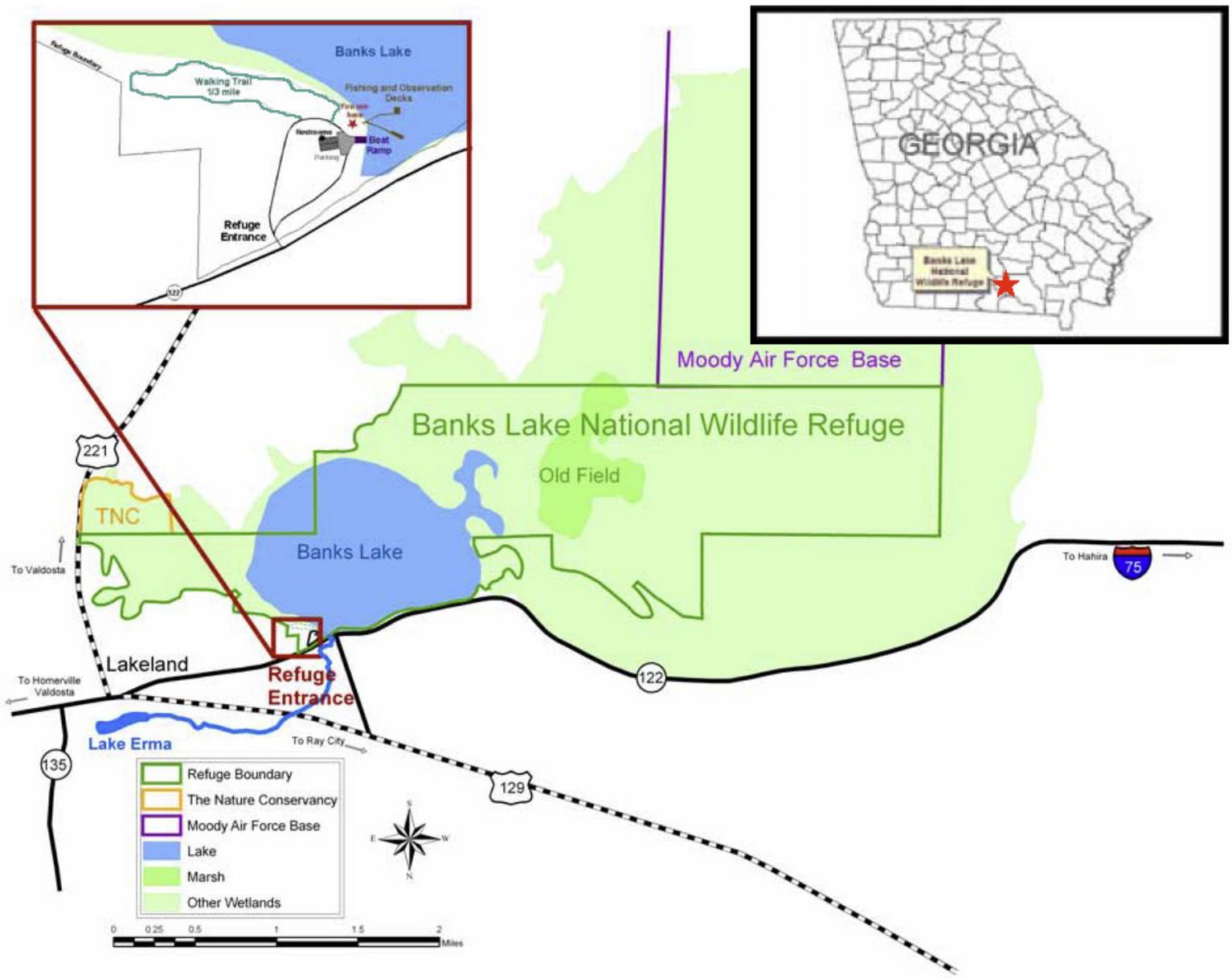
Herein, the sample of visitors who responded to the survey are referred to simply as "visitors." However, when interpreting the results for Banks Lake NWR, any potential spatial and temporal sampling limitations specific to this refuge need to be considered when generalizing the results to the total 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 Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Banks Lake NWR is located near Lakeland, Georgia in Lanier County as part of a much larger blackwater system in southern Georgia. Banks Lake NWR sits atop a natural pocosin, or sink, of ancient geologic origin. The 4,000-acre refuge is comprised of 1,500 acres of marsh, 1,500 acres of cypress swamp, and 1,000 acres of open water.

Banks Lake NWR was officially established in 1985 when the land was purchased from The Nature Conservancy. The refuge was established to provide optimum habitat for the diverse flora and fauna including threatened and endangered species, as well as providing environmental education and interpretive programs.

Banks Lake NWR attracts over 83,000 visitors annually (based on 2008 RAPP database; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2011, written comm.). Visitors enjoy environmental education and interpretive programs, fishing, wildlife observation and photography. It is common for visitors to see wood storks, red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks, osprey, black and turkey vultures, American kestrels, barred owls, white ibis and wood ducks. Migrating sandhill cranes also call Banks Lake NWR home during the winter months. Banks Lake Outpost also offers canoe and kayak rentals and a gift shop. Figure 1 displays a map of Banks Lake NWR. For more information, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/bankslake/>.



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

Sampling at Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge

A total of 248 visitors agreed to participate in the survey during the two sampling periods at the identified locations at Banks Lake NWR (table 2). In all, 97 visitors completed the survey for a 41% response rate and $\pm 6\%$ margin of error at the 95% confidence level.¹

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

Sampling period	Dates	Locations	Total contacts	Undeliverable addresses	Completed surveys	Response rate
1	3/26/2011 to 4/9/2011	Banks Lake Outpost	61	2	13	22%
2	5/28/2011 to 6/11/2011	Banks Lake Outpost	187	9	84	47%
Total			248	11	97	41%

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 Banks 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 (96%) and that the Refuge System has the mission of conserving, managing, and restoring fish, wildlife, plants and their habitat (94%). 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 (84%; 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

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).

correspond to their understanding of the mission of the Refuge System. Most visitors to Banks Lake NWR had been to at least one other National Wildlife Refuge in the past year (70%), with an average of 7 visits to other refuges during the past 12 months.

Visiting This Refuge

Some surveyed visitors (25%) had only been to Banks Lake NWR once in the past 12 months, while most had been multiple times (75%). These repeat visitors went to the refuge an average of 16 times during that same 12-month period. Visitors used the refuge during only one season (36%), during multiple seasons (34%), and year-round (30%).

Most visitors first learned about the refuge from friends/relatives (60%), people in the local community (33%), or signs on the highway (31%; fig. 2). Key information sources used by visitors to find their way to this refuge include previous knowledge (55%), signs on highways (24%), or directions from friends/family (22%; fig. 3).

Most visitors (76%) lived in the local area (within 50 miles of the refuge), whereas 24% were nonlocal visitors. For most local visitors, Banks Lake NWR was the primary purpose or sole destination of trip (85%; table 3). For most nonlocal visitors, the refuge was an incidental or spur-of-the-moment stop on a trip taken for other purposes (50%). Local visitors (n = 71) reported that they traveled an average of 15 miles to get to the refuge, while nonlocal visitors (n = 22) traveled an average of 199 miles. ***It is important to note that summary statistics based on a small sample size (n < 30) may not provide a reliable representation of the population.*** Figure 4 shows the residence of visitors travelling to the refuge. About 90% of visitors travelling to Banks Lake NWR were from Georgia.

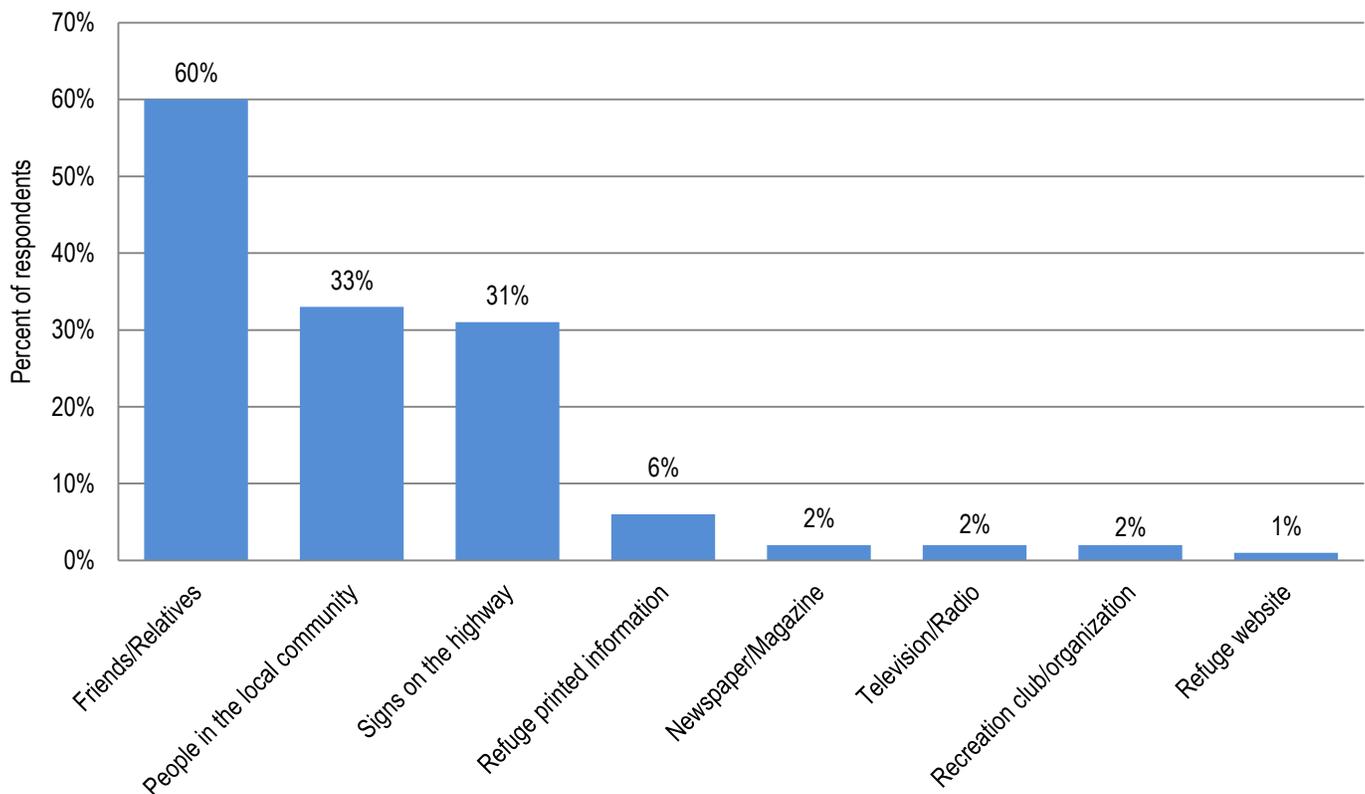


Figure 2. How visitors first learned or heard about Banks Lake NWR (n = 89).

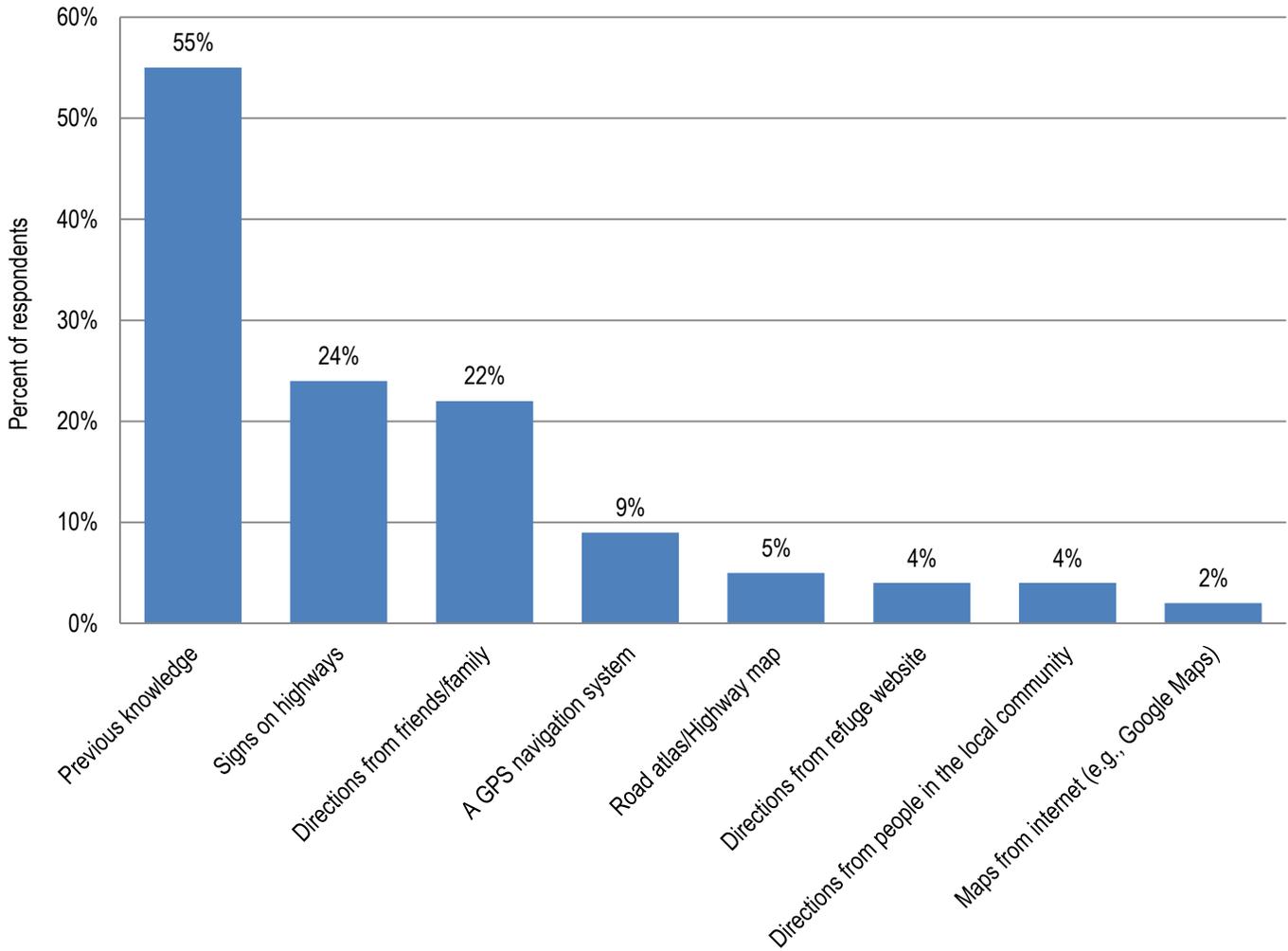


Figure 3. Resources used by visitors to find their way to Banks Lake NWR during *this* visit (n = 93).

Table 3. Influence of Banks 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	25%	25%	50%
Local	85%	9%	6%
Total	72%	12%	16%

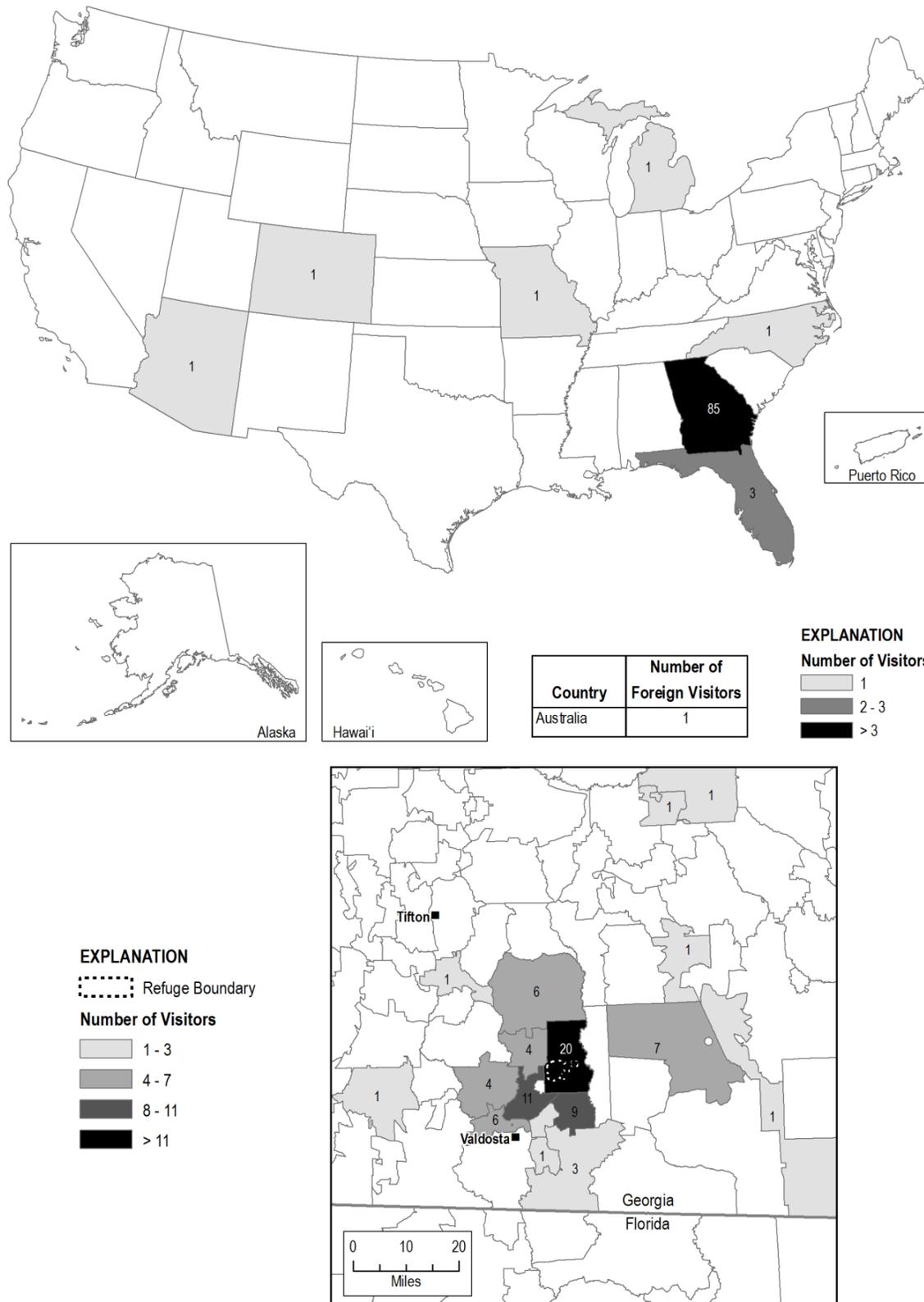


Figure 4. Number of visitors travelling to Banks Lake NWR by residence. Top map shows residence by state and bottom map shows residence by zip codes near the refuge (n = 94).

Surveyed visitors reported that they spent an average of 4 hours at Banks 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 (21%). The key modes of transportation used by visitors to travel around the refuge were private vehicle (61%), private vehicle with trailer (37%), and boat (17%; fig. 5). Some visitors indicated they were part of a group on their visit to this refuge (44%), travelling primarily with family and friends (table 4).

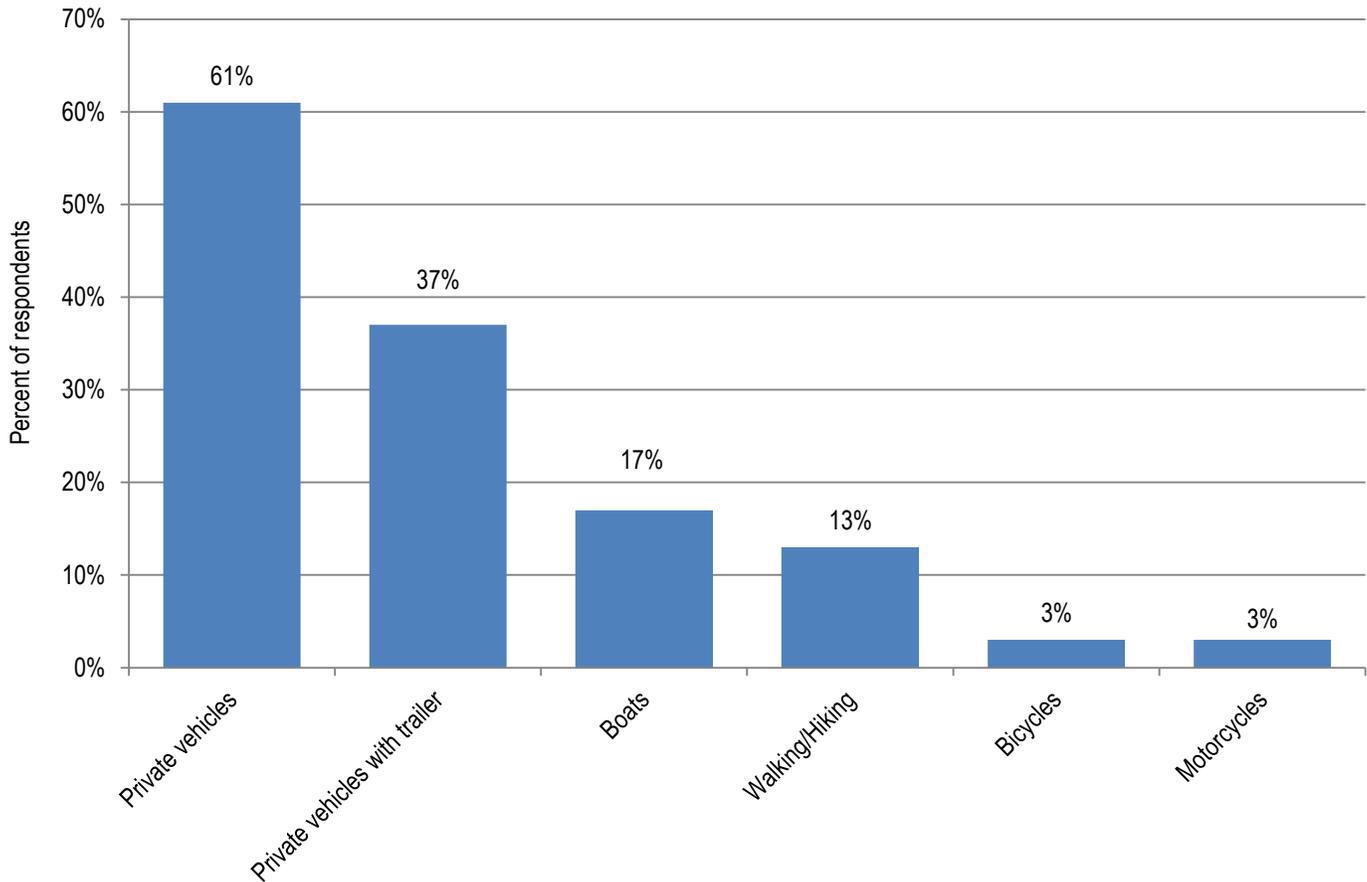


Figure 5. Modes of transportation used by visitors to Banks Lake NWR during *this* visit (n = 93).

Table 4. Type and size of groups visiting Banks Lake NWR (for those who indicated they were part of a group, n = 40).

Group type	Percent (of those traveling in a group)	Average group size		
		Number of adults	Number of children	Total group size
Family/Friends	98%	3	1	4
Commercial tour group	0%	0	0	0
Organized club/School group	2%	14	0	14
Other group type	0%	0	0	0

Surveyed visitors participated in a variety of refuge activities during the past 12 months (fig. 6); the top three activities reported were freshwater fishing (66%), wildlife observation (44%), and photography (30%). The primary reasons for their most recent visit included fishing (55%), boating (13%), and wildlife observation (9%; fig. 7). The visitor center was used by 77% of visitors, mostly to visit the gift shop/bookstore (74%), stop to use the facilities (for example, get water, use restroom) (65%), and ask information of staff/volunteers (43%; fig. 8).

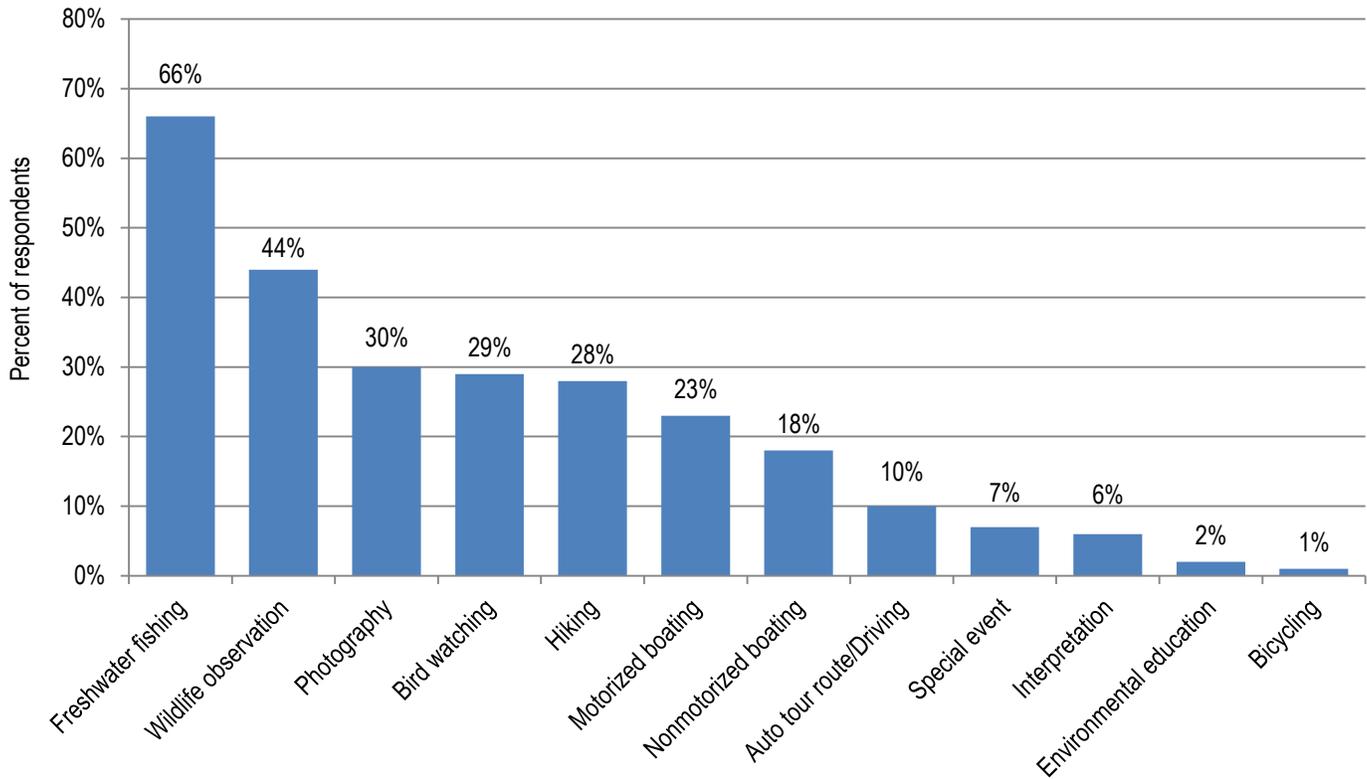


Figure 6. Activities in which visitors participated during the past 12 months at Banks Lake NWR (n = 90). See Appendix B for a listing of “other” activities.

Visitor Characteristics

Nearly all (99%) surveyed visitors to Banks 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 75% male with an average age of 48 years and 25% female with an average age of 50 years. Visitors, on average, reported they had 14 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).

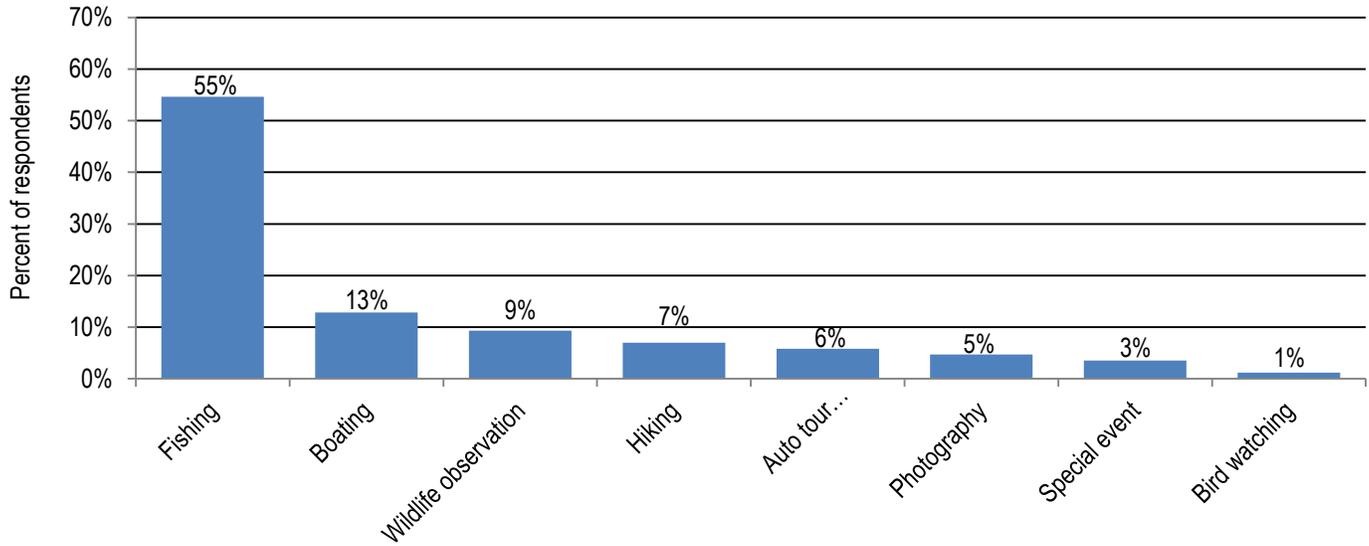


Figure 7. The primary activity in which visitors participated during *this* visit to Banks Lake NWR (n = 86). See Appendix B for a listing of “other” activities.

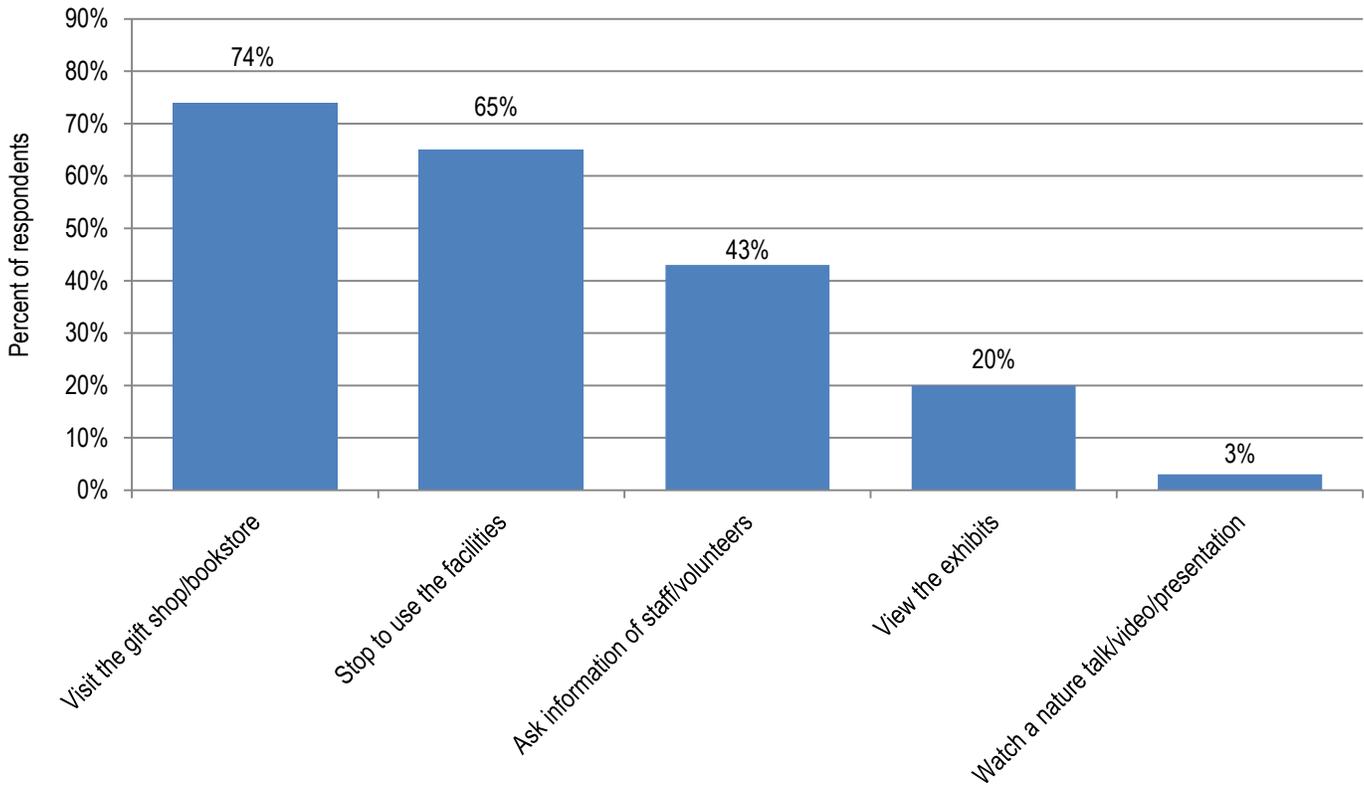


Figure 8. Use of the visitor center at Banks Lake NWR (for those visitors who indicated they used the visitor center, n = 69).

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, 76% of surveyed visitors to Banks Lake NWR indicated that they live within the local area. Nonlocal visitors (24%) stayed in the local area, on average, for 3 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. ***It is important to note that summary statistics based on a small sample size ($n < 30$) may not provide a reliable representation of that population.*** During the two sampling periods, nonlocal visitors spent an average of \$48 per person per day and local visitors spent an average of \$37 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 Banks Lake NWR expressed in dollars per person per day.

Visitors	n ¹	Median	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Nonlocal	16	\$60	\$48	\$32	\$0	\$100
Local	61	\$25	\$37	\$44	\$0	\$195

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 Banks Lake NWR were as follows (fig. 9):

- 84% were satisfied with the recreational activities and opportunities,
- 84% were satisfied with the information and education about the refuge and its resources,
- 88% were satisfied with the services provided by employees or volunteers, and
- 83% were satisfied with the refuge's job of conserving fish, wildlife and their habitats.

Although 14% (n = 12) of visitors indicated they paid a fee to enter Banks Lake NWR, the refuge does not have an entrance fee. The refuge does have a fee for a special use permit for fishing tournaments; it may be some of these visitors were referencing this fee when they answered this question.

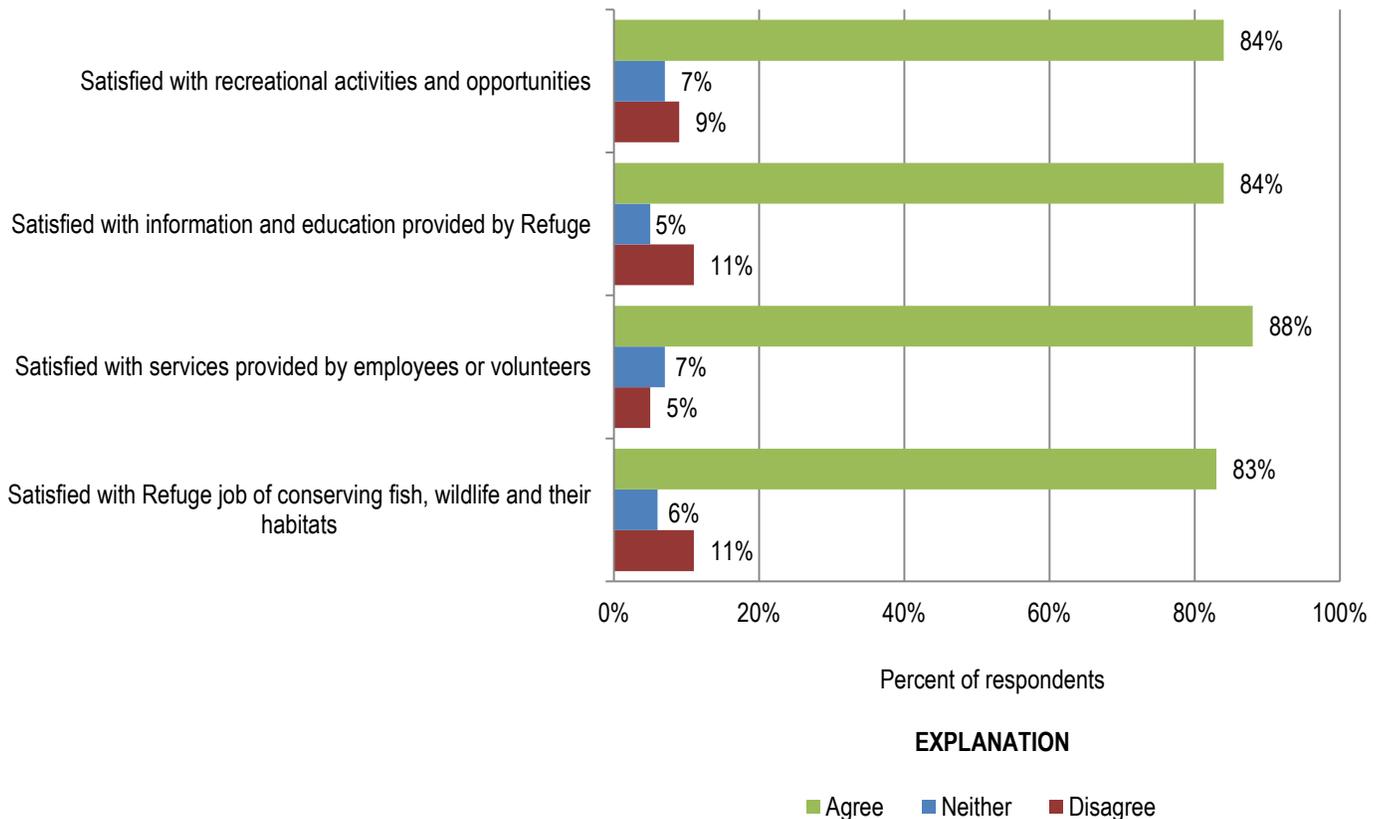


Figure 9. Overall satisfaction with Banks Lake NWR during *this* visit (n ≥ 88).

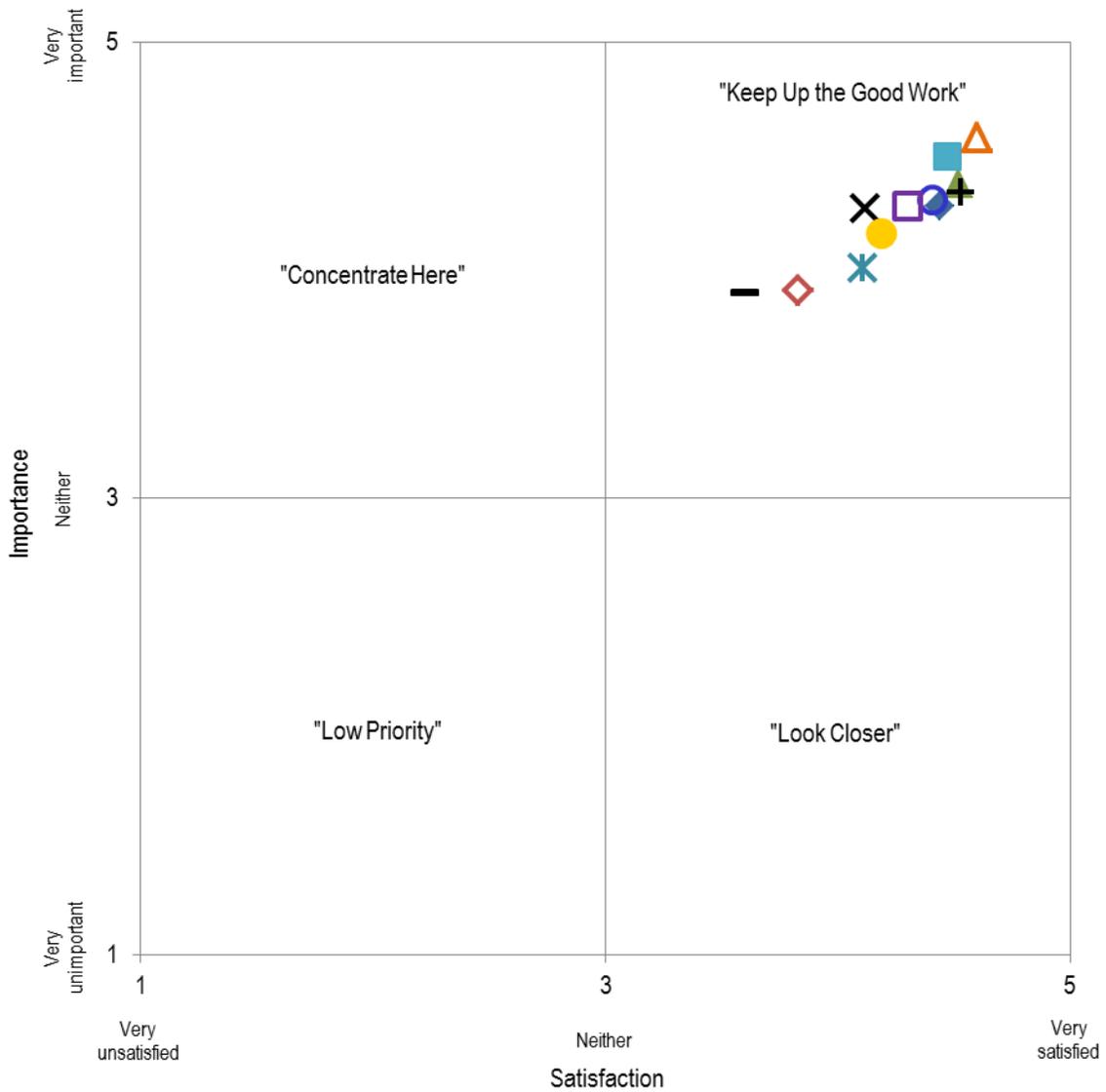
Importance/Satisfaction Ratings

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 Banks 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.

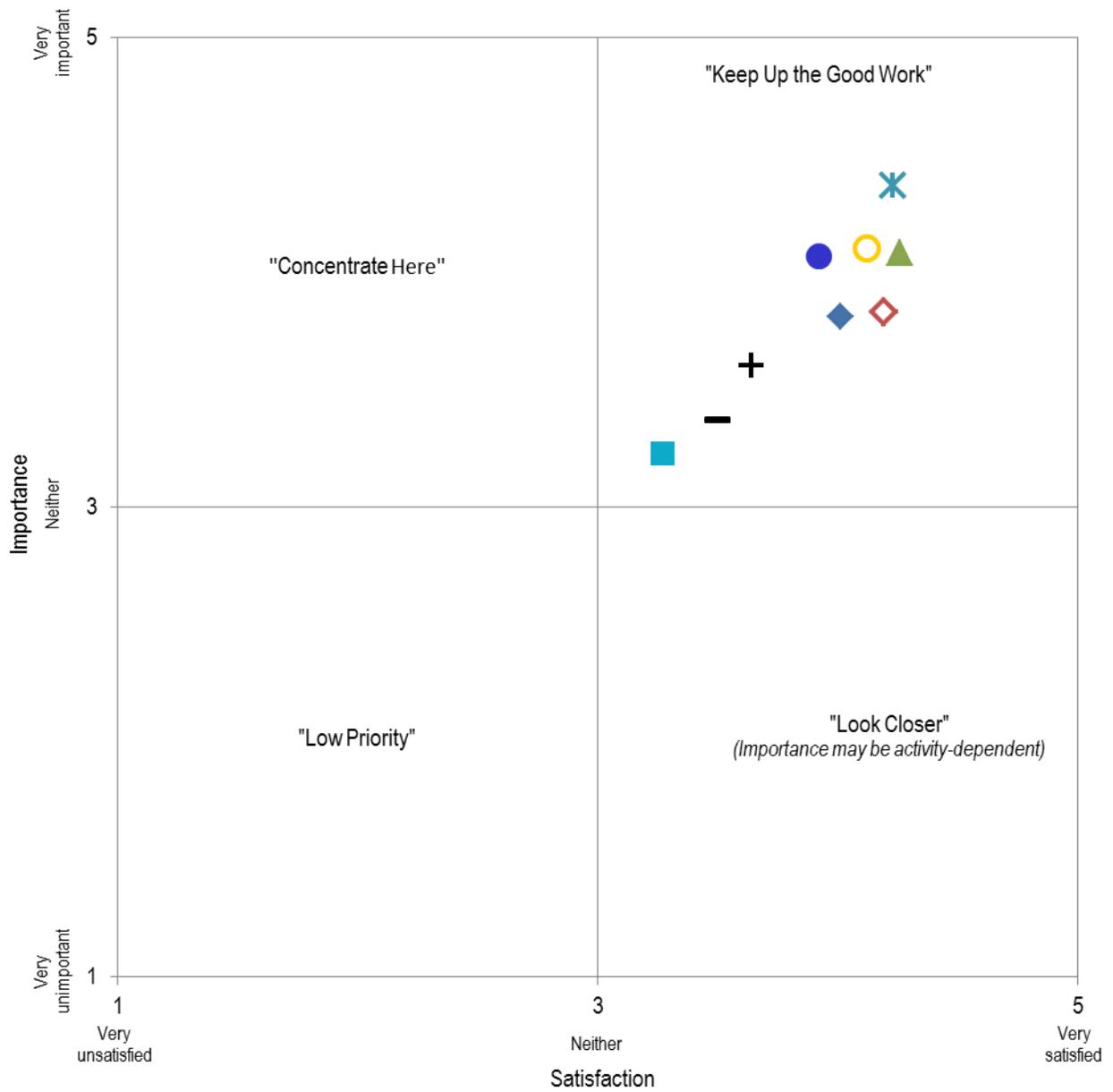
Figures 10-12 depict surveyed visitors' importance-satisfaction results for refuge services and facilities, recreational opportunities, and transportation-related features at Banks Lake NWR, respectively. All refuge services and facilities fell in the "Keep Up the Good Work" quadrant (fig. 10). All refuge 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
- ▲ Knowledgeable employees/volunteers
- ✚ Courteous/welcoming employees/volunteers
- ✕ Printed information about this Refuge
- ✱ Informational kiosks/displays about this Refuge
- Signs with rules/regulations
- ◇ Exhibits about this Refuge
- Environmental education programs/activities
- Visitor Center
- Convenient hours/days of operation
- ▲ Well-maintained restrooms
- Wildlife observation structures

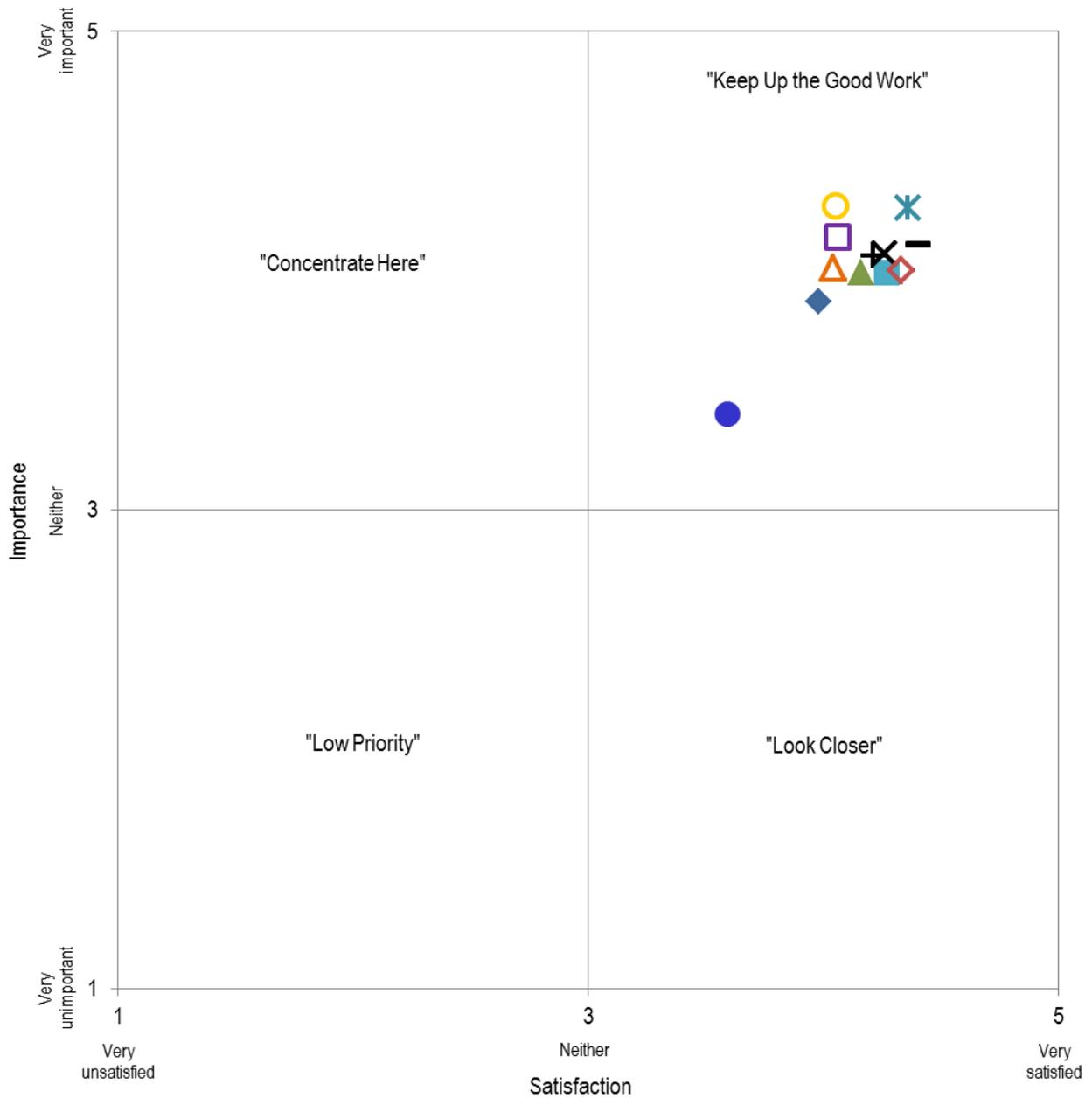
Figure 10. Importance-satisfaction ratings of services and facilities provided at Banks Lake NWR.



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 Banks Lake NWR.



EXPLANATION

- ◆ Condition of roads
- ✦ Condition of parking areas
- Directional signs on Refuge
- ▲ 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 trails
- Disabled access

Figure 12. Importance-satisfaction ratings of transportation-related features at Banks 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 Banks 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 Banks 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; and
- an offsite parking lot that provides trail access.

The majority of visitors were *not* likely to use:

- a bus/tram that takes passengers to different points;
- a bike share program;
- a bus/tram that provides a guided tour, and
- a bus/tram that runs during a special event on national wildlife refuges in the future (fig. 13).

When asked about using alternative transportation at Banks Lake NWR specifically, 33% of visitors indicated they were unsure whether it would enhance their experience; however, some visitors thought alternative transportation would enhance their experience (27%) and others thought it would not (40%).

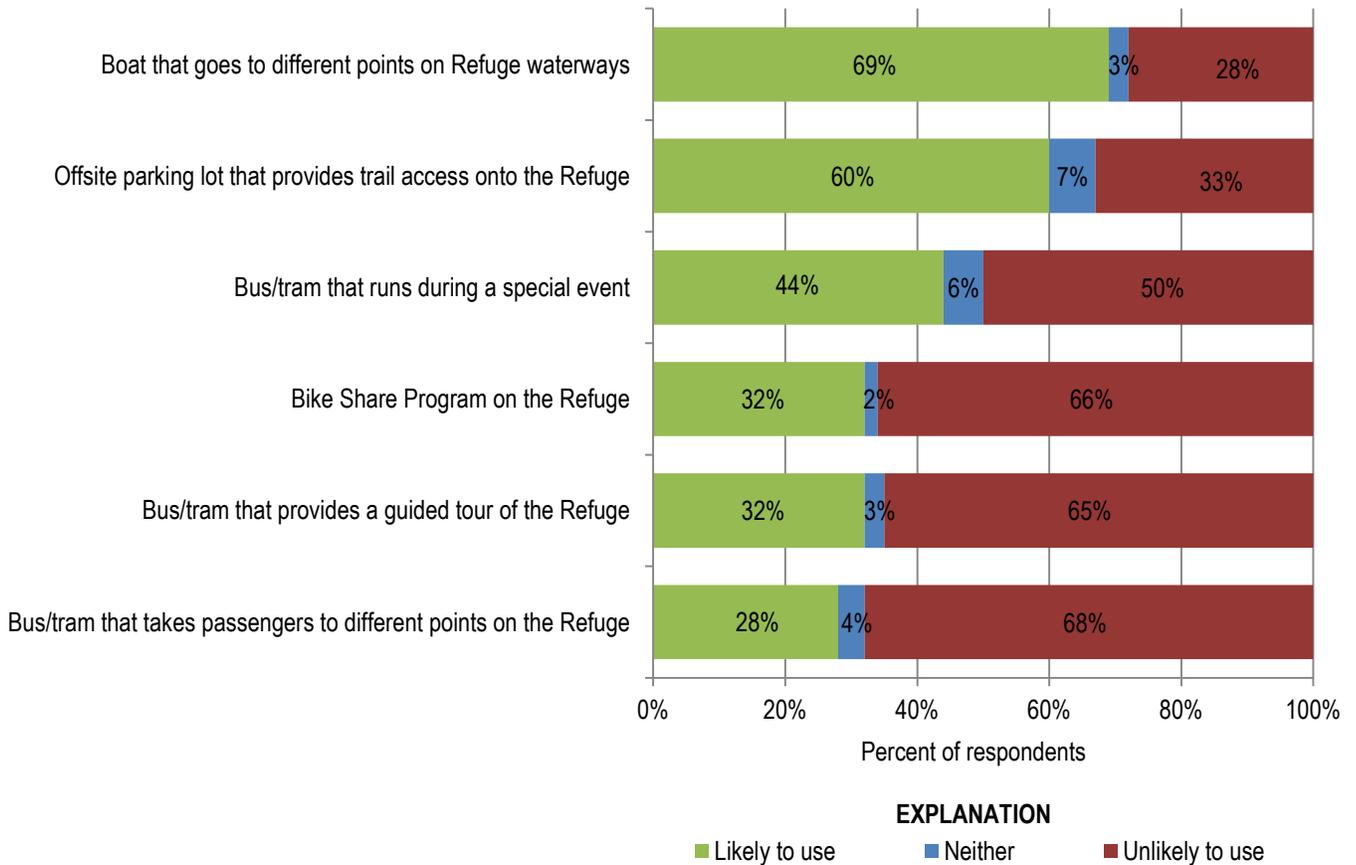


Figure 13. Visitors’ likelihood of using alternative transportation options at national wildlife refuges in the future (n ≥ 89).

Climate Change and the National Wildlife Refuge System

Climate change represents a growing concern for the management of national wildlife refuges. Service’ 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 Banks Lake NWR agreed with the following statements (fig. 14):

- “I am personally concerned about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and habitats;” and
- “My experience would be enhanced if the Refuge provides information about how I can help address climate change effects.”

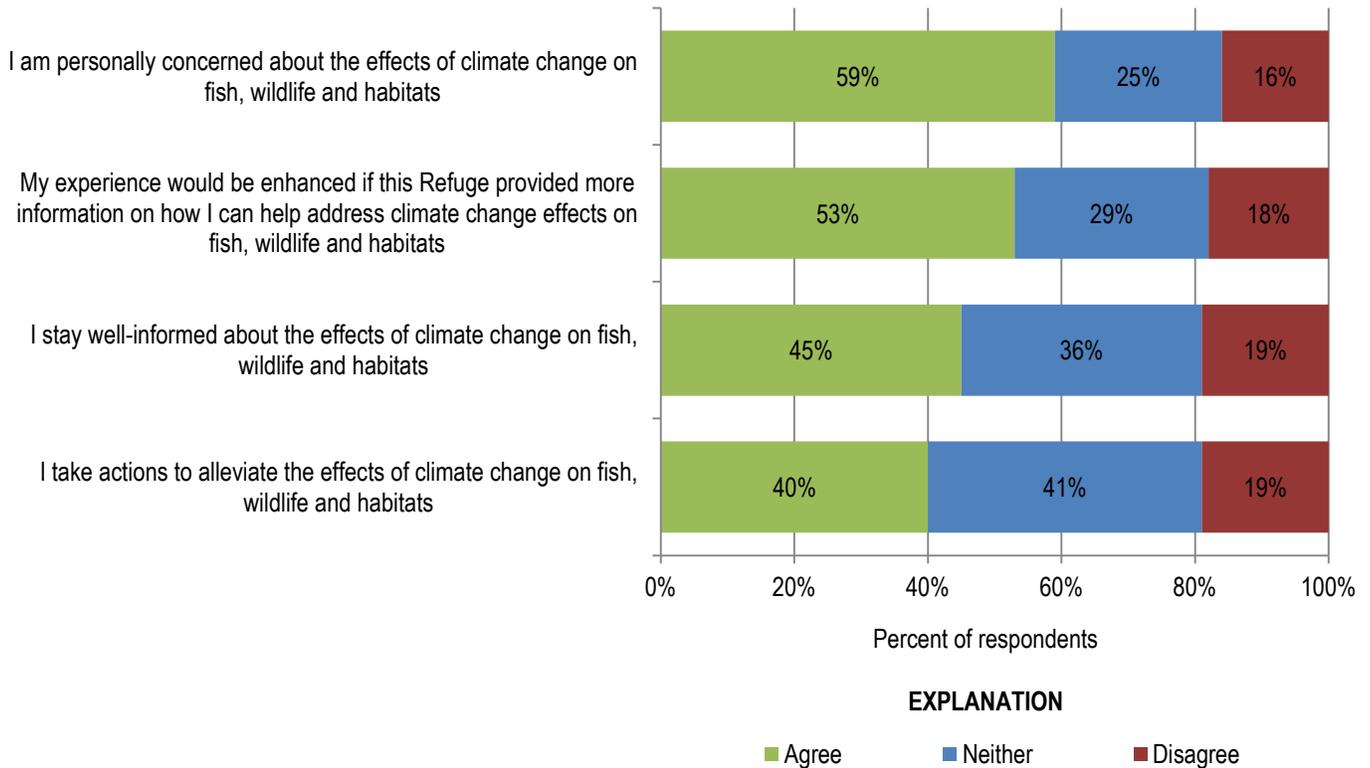


Figure 14. Visitors’ personal involvement with climate change related to fish, wildlife and their habitats (n ≥ 85).

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

- “It is important to consider the economic costs and benefits to local communities when addressing climate change effects;”
- “Future generations will benefit if we address climate change effects;” and
- “We can improve our quality of life if we address the 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 the majority of visitors (53%) indicated that their experience would be enhanced if Banks Lake NWR provided information about how they could help address the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife, and their habitats (fig. 15), 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.

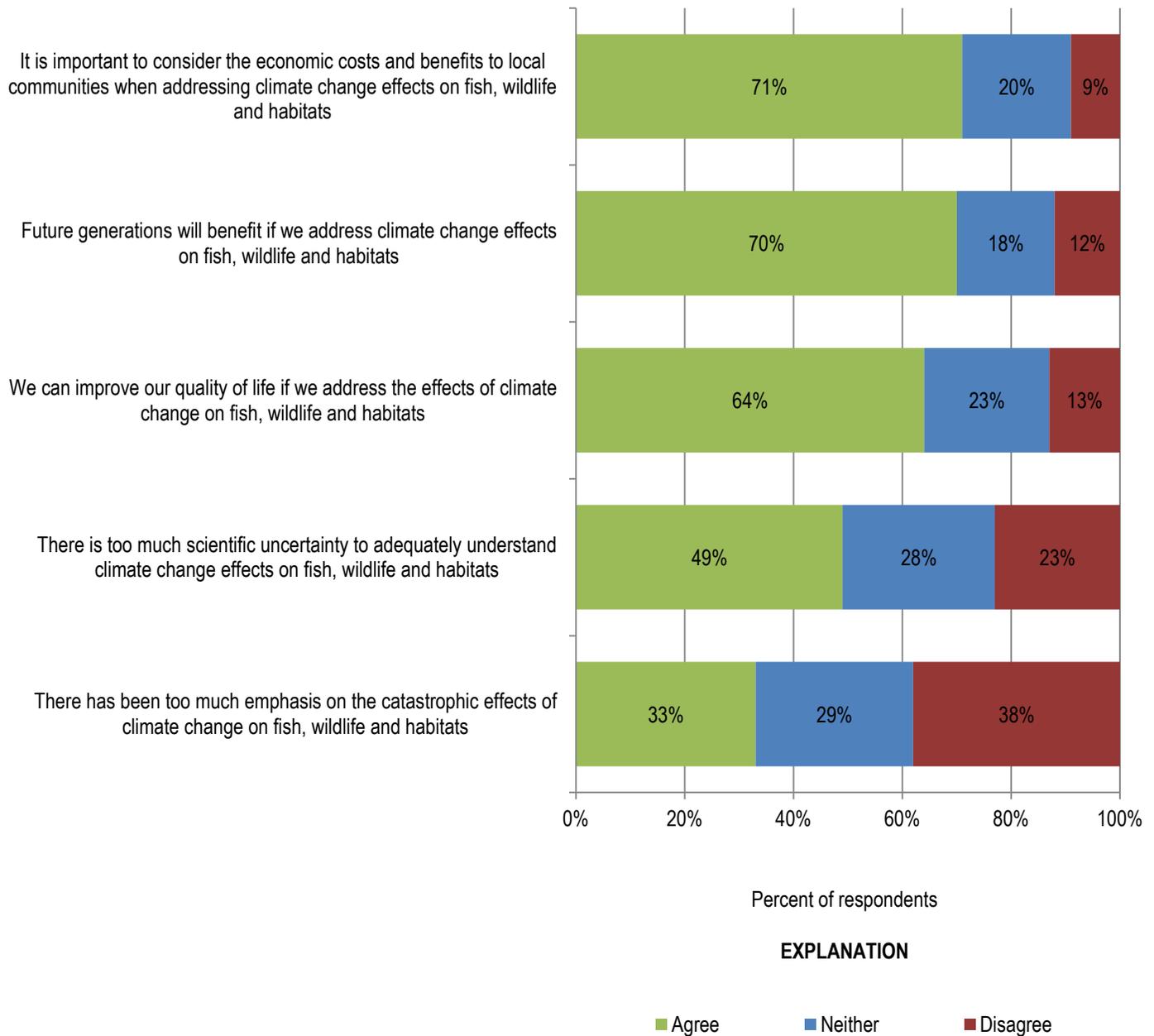


Figure 15. Visitors' beliefs about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats (n ≥ 84).

Conclusion

These individual refuge results provide a summary of trip characteristics and experiences of a sample of visitors to Banks 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.

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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"/> 0% Big game hunting | <input type="checkbox"/> 28% Hiking | <input type="checkbox"/> 2% Environmental education (for example, classrooms or labs, tours) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0% Upland/Small-game hunting | <input type="checkbox"/> 1% Bicycling | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0% Migratory bird/Waterfowl hunting | <input type="checkbox"/> 10% Auto tour route/Driving | <input type="checkbox"/> 7% Special event (<i>please specify</i>)
<u>See Appendix B</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 44% Wildlife observation | <input type="checkbox"/> 23% Motorized boating | <input type="checkbox"/> 4% Other (<i>please specify</i>)
<u>See Appendix B</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 29% Bird watching | <input type="checkbox"/> 18% Nonmotorized boating (including canoes/kayaks) | <input type="checkbox"/> 0% Other (<i>please specify</i>)
<u>See Appendix B</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 66% Freshwater fishing | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0% Saltwater fishing | <input type="checkbox"/> 6% Interpretation (for example, exhibits, kiosks, videos) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30% 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?

- 23% No
- 77% Yes → If yes, what did you do there? (Please mark **all that apply.**)
- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 74% Visit the gift shop or bookstore | <input type="checkbox"/> 3% Watch a nature talk/video/presentation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 20% View the exhibits | <input type="checkbox"/> 65% Stopped to use the facilities (for example, get water, use restroom) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 43% Ask information of staff/volunteers | <input type="checkbox"/> 23% 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	
25%	85%	72%	It was the primary purpose or sole destination of my trip.
25%	9%	13%	It was one of many equally important reasons or destinations for my trip.
50%	6%	16%	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 199 number of miles
Local 15 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?

56% No (*skip to question #9*)

44% Yes → What **type of group** were you with on your visit? (*Please mark **only one.***)

98% Family and/or friends

2% Organized club or school group

0% Commercial tour group

0% Other (*please specify*) See Appendix B

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

3 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.***)

60% Friends or relatives

1% Refuge website

31% Signs on highway

1% Other website (*please specify*) See Appendix B

2% Recreation club or organization

2% Television or radio

33% People in the local community

2% Newspaper or magazine

6% Refuge printed information (brochure, map)

1% 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.***)

81% Spring
(March-May)

75% Summer
(June-August)

42% Fall
(September-November)

37% Winter
(December-February)

11. How many times have you visited...

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

...other National Wildlife Refuges in the last 12 months? 5 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"/> 61% | Private vehicle without a trailer | <input type="checkbox"/> 0% | Refuge shuttle bus or tram | <input type="checkbox"/> 3% | Bicycle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 37% | Private vehicle with a trailer
(for boat, camper or other) | <input type="checkbox"/> 3% | Motorcycle | <input type="checkbox"/> 13% | Walk/Hike |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0% | Commercial tour bus | <input type="checkbox"/> 0% | ATV or off-road vehicle | <input type="checkbox"/> 0% | Other (<i>please specify below</i>) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0% | Recreational vehicle (RV) | <input type="checkbox"/> 17% | Boat | <u>See Appendix B</u> | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> 0% | 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"/> 24% | Signs on highways | <input type="checkbox"/> 4% | Directions from Refuge website |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 9% | A GPS navigation system | <input type="checkbox"/> 4% | Directions from people in community near this Refuge |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5% | A road atlas or highway map | <input type="checkbox"/> 22% | Directions from friends or family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2% | Maps from the Internet (for example,
MapQuest or Google Maps) | <input type="checkbox"/> 55% | Previous knowledge/I have been to this Refuge before |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> 0% | 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"/> 59%	<input type="checkbox"/> 9%	<input type="checkbox"/> 4%	<input type="checkbox"/> 19%	<input type="checkbox"/> 9%
...a bike that was offered through a Bike Share Program for use while on the Refuge?	<input type="checkbox"/> 57%	<input type="checkbox"/> 9%	<input type="checkbox"/> 2%	<input type="checkbox"/> 15%	<input type="checkbox"/> 16%
...a bus or tram that provides a guided tour of the Refuge with information about the Refuge and its resources?	<input type="checkbox"/> 52%	<input type="checkbox"/> 13%	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	<input type="checkbox"/> 12%	<input type="checkbox"/> 20%
...a boat that goes to different points on Refuge waterways?	<input type="checkbox"/> 20%	<input type="checkbox"/> 8%	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	<input type="checkbox"/> 28%	<input type="checkbox"/> 40%
...a bus or tram that runs during a special event (such as an evening tour of wildlife or weekend festival)?	<input type="checkbox"/> 40%	<input type="checkbox"/> 10%	<input type="checkbox"/> 7%	<input type="checkbox"/> 21%	<input type="checkbox"/> 23%
...an offsite parking lot that provides trail access for walking/hiking onto the Refuge?	<input type="checkbox"/> 27%	<input type="checkbox"/> 5%	<input type="checkbox"/> 7%	<input type="checkbox"/> 32%	<input type="checkbox"/> 29%
...some other alternative transportation option? (<i>please specify</i>) <u>See Appendix B</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> 0%	<input type="checkbox"/> 0%	<input type="checkbox"/> 17%	<input type="checkbox"/> 8%	<input type="checkbox"/> 75%

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

- 27% Yes 40% No 33% 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
10%	6%	12%	32%	40%	Surface conditions of roads	4%	16%	6%	27%	47%	NA
4%	3%	13%	39%	39%	Surface conditions of parking areas	7%	4%	6%	28%	55%	NA
11%	3%	17%	17%	53%	Condition of bridges	2%	2%	24%	20%	51%	NA
6%	6%	10%	33%	45%	Condition of trails and boardwalks	8%	1%	7%	25%	59%	NA
4%	4%	8%	28%	56%	Number of places for parking	2%	4%	6%	32%	56%	NA
11%	10%	27%	35%	18%	Number of places to pull over along Refuge roads	9%	9%	28%	24%	30%	NA
11%	3%	13%	18%	54%	Safety of driving conditions on Refuge roads	1%	4%	7%	33%	54%	NA
10%	2%	9%	23%	56%	Safety of Refuge road entrances/exits	4%	1%	6%	29%	60%	NA
8%	1%	7%	26%	59%	Signs on highways directing you to the Refuge	6%	12%	6%	24%	52%	NA
10%	1%	12%	33%	44%	Signs directing you around the Refuge roads	2%	0%	19%	27%	52%	NA
10%	3%	8%	32%	47%	Signs directing you on trails	7%	1%	16%	30%	45%	NA
6%	5%	13%	24%	53%	Access for people with physical disabilities or who have difficulty walking	4%	3%	15%	37%	40%	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)?

76% Yes

24% No → How much time did you spend **in local communities** on this trip?

 2 number of hours OR 5 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 <i>(within 50 miles of this Refuge)</i>
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 <i>(please specify)</i> _____	

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
22%	20%	18%	8%	12%	2%	10%	1%	1%	4%	0%

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.***)

0%	Far too low	0%	Too low	100%	About right	0%	Too high	0%	Far too high	86%	Did not pay a fee (skip to Section 4)
----	-------------	----	---------	------	-------------	----	----------	----	--------------	-----	--

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.

17%	Strongly disagree	0%	Disagree	8%	Neither agree or disagree	50%	Agree	25%	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.	6%	3%	7%	42%	42%	NA
Overall, I am satisfied with the information and education provided by this Refuge about its resources.	6%	6%	5%	44%	40%	NA
Overall, I am satisfied with the services provided by employees or volunteers at this Refuge.	2%	2%	8%	37%	51%	NA
This Refuge does a good job of conserving fish, wildlife and their habitats.	6%	6%	6%	37%	47%	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
3%	2%	5%	43%	47%	Availability of employees or volunteers	1%	2%	9%	26%	62%	NA
2%	5%	7%	29%	57%	Courteous and welcoming employees or volunteers	1%	2%	9%	16%	71%	NA
2%	2%	8%	30%	57%	Knowledgeable employees or volunteers	0%	4%	7%	23%	67%	NA
6%	0%	7%	36%	51%	Printed information about this Refuge and its resources (for example, maps and brochures)	2%	6%	15%	31%	45%	NA
2%	7%	14%	39%	37%	Informational kiosks/displays about this Refuge and its resources	3%	4%	18%	30%	45%	NA
5%	5%	5%	27%	59%	Signs with rules/regulations for this Refuge	0%	5%	8%	29%	58%	NA
2%	7%	22%	34%	34%	Exhibits about this Refuge and its resources	4%	8%	23%	31%	34%	NA
4%	7%	24%	24%	40%	Environmental education programs or activities	10%	9%	27%	18%	36%	NA
5%	4%	8%	38%	46%	Visitor Center	4%	4%	12%	29%	51%	NA
5%	0%	5%	22%	69%	Convenient hours and days of operation	1%	3%	6%	26%	63%	NA
3%	1%	3%	17%	74%	Well-maintained restrooms	1%	2%	5%	18%	73%	NA
5%	3%	7%	29%	56%	Wildlife observation structures (decks, blinds)	1%	11%	5%	24%	60%	NA
11%	4%	20%	26%	40%	Bird-watching opportunities	5%	5%	19%	25%	46%	NA
7%	3%	12%	28%	50%	Opportunities to observe wildlife other than birds	1%	7%	15%	31%	46%	NA
8%	2%	12%	28%	49%	Opportunities to photograph wildlife and scenery	1%	5%	16%	23%	55%	NA
22%	4%	32%	16%	27%	Hunting opportunities	13%	4%	48%	15%	21%	NA
7%	0%	12%	12%	70%	Fishing opportunities	3%	9%	10%	20%	58%	NA
4%	6%	15%	30%	45%	Trail hiking opportunities	3%	10%	16%	35%	36%	NA
10%	4%	20%	28%	39%	Water trail opportunities for canoeing or kayaking	4%	3%	19%	18%	56%	NA
13%	8%	35%	20%	25%	Bicycling opportunities	9%	2%	48%	14%	28%	NA
6%	4%	39%	26%	25%	Volunteer opportunities	2%	3%	49%	20%	25%	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?

96% Yes

4% No

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

94% Yes

6% No

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

84% Yes

16% 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.	8%	8%	24%	33%	27%
We can improve our quality of life if we address the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	8%	5%	23%	38%	26%
There is too much scientific uncertainty to adequately understand how climate change will impact fish, wildlife and their habitats.	13%	10%	28%	37%	12%
I stay well-informed about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	5%	14%	36%	36%	8%
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.	3%	6%	20%	48%	23%
I take actions to alleviate the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	7%	12%	41%	32%	8%
There has been too much emphasis on the catastrophic effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	17%	21%	29%	21%	12%
Future generations will benefit if we address the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	6%	6%	18%	31%	39%
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.	12%	6%	29%	29%	24%

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?

99% Yes 1% No → *If not, what is your home country?* See Figure 4 in Report

2. Are you? 75% Male 25% Female

3. In what year were you born? 1962 (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)			
					5%			32%				43%				21%			

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.***)

2% American Indian or Alaska Native 7% Black or African American 93% White
 1% 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"/> 8% Less than \$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 15% \$35,000 - \$49,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 12% \$100,000 - \$149,999
<input type="checkbox"/> 12% \$10,000 - \$24,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 24% \$50,000 - \$74,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 1% \$150,000 - \$199,999
<input type="checkbox"/> 13% \$25,000 - \$34,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 13% \$75,000 - \$99,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 3% \$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

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Appendix B: Visitor Comments to Open-Ended Survey Questions for Banks 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
Fishing Derby	1
Fishing Rodeo	1
Fishing Tournament	1
Kids Fishing Day	1
Kids Fishing Derby Activities	1
Kids Fishing Rodeo	1
Total	6

Other Activity	Frequency
Eating lunch, just sitting and thinking	1
Take lunch break	1
Teach my children about nature	1
Water lilies	1
Total	4

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
To purchase bait	1
Tournament	1
Total	2

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

Other Visitor Center Activity	Frequency
Bought fishing supplies	1
Buy bait and tackle	1
Eat lunch	1
First aid	1
Purchase bait	4
Purchase bait and fishing gear	1
Purchase bait/snacks	2
Purchase fishing license	4
Walked the boardwalk for wildlife observation	1
Total	16

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

Other Website	Frequency
GA State Parks website	1
Total	1

Other Ways Heard about This Refuge	Frequency
State Park	1
Total	1

Survey Section 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
Bike trails	1
Boat rentals with motors	1
Canoe rental	1
Car	1
Golf cart	1
Helicopter ride	1
Motor boat, canoe, kayak	1
Motorized boat	1
Personal vehicle	2
Ride share	1
Shuttle	1

Walking/hiking	1
Total	13

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 = 11)

Banks Lake doesn't allow recreational vehicles. Golf carts and similar vehicles are allowed on public streets by local ordinance and this privilege should be extended to Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge. We have several elderly citizens that use golf carts in Lakeland, GA.

Banks Lake needs to allow people to use golf carts or motorized carts to access this refuge. The city of Lakeland allows people to purchase a permit to use these carts in the city.

Entrance is on a 55 mph highway and doesn't have a deceleration lane in which one can slow down and make a right hand turn. Also, doesn't have signage before the curve to warn you to slow down for the upcoming entrance. Also, the gravel road could use more frequent leveling (pot holes).

I bring my family who is spreadout all over the USA. They want to see alligators and other wildlife. In the past few years, it seems as though number of these living dinosaurs has decreased. Five years ago, I could walk out on the dock and see at least one swim by and, at dusk, see many of them coming from the back and spreading out. Last year and this year, we have seen very few. I went out in a canoe with two of my nieces and we saw one alligator. We know they are being found dead on the side of the road from gunshot wounds (the gator man Robert Browning has told us) and some that live on the lake are saying they are hearing gunshots at night in the lake. Allowing weapons on the refuges was a very big mistake. All anyone has to say is the gator, bear, or any other animal was threatening them. This law needs to be changed.

I think that the refuge could use an upgrade in parking and paving.

If you don't have your own transportation, you can forget it. This refuge is almost totally undeveloped. The lake is huge and beautiful and has piers out to the water and some boardwalks, but nothing else. The people who live here are very backwards and do not want anything changed. Years ago, there was a sign on the gateway that said, "Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge," which was false and the law finally made them remove it and put up the "Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge" sign. I hope you can help this place. This is where they made the movie "Gator" with Burt Reynolds.

My wife and I went with our son and a family friend to walk the nature trails, but there are hardly any - it took all of 5 minutes.

The parking area was small.

This is a difficult consideration - especially politically, but every intrusion into a wilderness area degrades it, and I most definitely do not think that wilderness areas should be unnecessarily degraded by making them easily accessible to every lard-a** in this country. In fact, many wilderness areas should have no one in them - handicapped or not. (And yes, the invariable use of euphemism itself is an "impairment" to our national condition).

This refuge has gravel roads with potholes which makes it somewhat bumpy. I would like to see it asphalted.

You need entrance and exit signs as well as a one-way sign.

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 = 37)

Banks Lake has the cleanest bathrooms I have ever seen at a refuge or park.

Banks Lake is a beautiful cypress lake and we enjoy kayaking there. We hope to have many more trips over there in the future.

Banks Lake NWR needs to have something done about the monkey tail moss.

Banks Lake seems to have been somewhat neglected in past years.

Banks Lake should offer migratory duck hunting opportunities since there is a large abundance of ducks on this property.

Beautiful place, nice people, and peaceful. Thanks.

Could the outpost (Visitor Center) offer educational programs? It could use more towers or decks or boardwalks to view nature, bird, alligators, etc. There are limited walkways and piers. Love seeing alligators!!

Facilities need a dock for boats; it would help a lot.

Get rid of Lydrilla grass/coontail moss. Too much makes it difficult to use certain lures.

I haven't had the opportunity to experience some of the activities available, but hopefully I will in the near future. I am happy to know that the amenities/activities are there for my use.

I just went to photograph the area. I always thought it was a beautiful place. I would like to go kayaking in hopes of seeing more alligators, birds and hopefully deer.

I recently moved to this area from FL. This is the only place near to take my grandkids fishing in a lake. The staff was courteous and the place is nice. Thanks!

I would like to go back to Bank Lake and help with the upkeep. Yes, I do have a full-time job. I was on stay there and keep it up, until two other volunteers came and ran me away. You can call and I will specify. (Name Signed and Telephone Number)

I would like to see a RV campground and boat docking stations. And please do something with the grass in the lake. It has got to the point where you can't fish without fighting the grass the whole time.

In reference to the fishing opportunities, I am an avid fisherman and do believe that those without boats should be able to enjoy a day of fishing (while still catching fish) is important. The issue doesn't really come in with the lily pads, but more over on the moss like grass that is everywhere at Banks Lake - you can't really do much fishing with all the grass around, which makes it really tough to enjoy your day of fishing while cleaning your line off from all the grass that tangles your baits. I'm not saying to destroy all the grass, but at least around the bank where people who don't have boats can sit out and fish without catching a ton of grass every time they throw out. I am sure there are chemicals that are available to use that will minimize the growth as well as cut back on the amount of grass at Banks Lake, which will more than likely improve the fishing session of those who look to do fishing from shore activities while at Banks Lake!

It needs a lot of improvement. There could be a swimming place. Of course, there are alligators in it, but that is what's in south Georgia. There are a lot of Cyprus trees, so it may not be good for speed boats.

It was a fishing tournament and it rained and stormed, so we had to leave early.

It's a good place to go fishing with my friends and family.

It's a small refuge and one, I imagine, which get little attention. Still, it's quite beautiful.

Make the fishing more enjoyable by killing the coon tail moss. It's over run with vegetation.

Need more tables and seats.

Need more watercraft and information about fishing. Also, information about history, local wildlife (numbers, conservation statistics), and maps of refuge - prefer details.

Needs vegetation control in the water.

Overall, it was very satisfactory.

Recruiting volunteers and letting the public know of opportunities and activities going on would be helpful.

Service is very good on the refuge; very clean.

Services and facilities are fine. The fishing has been all but destroyed due to the coon tail moss that has been allowed to overtake this beautiful lake.

The canoeing at this refuge is amazing and one of the best I have experienced. It is a quiet gem in southern GA. Our family enjoys it very much.

The employees are very friendly.

The facility was extremely well-maintained and beautiful. We will visit again when in the area - prepared to enjoy all the facility has to offer.

The hiking trail is way too short through the woods and you don't get to see any wildlife.

The Lake needs to be drained down for 2 years, burned, and replace the spillway with an overflow spillway. Allow invasive species of floating vegetation to flow out. This will increase the size of the lake and opportunities (ex. camping, platform tours) of inaccessible parts of the lake.

The staff was great.

This facility needs an upgrade. It could be a better place if it had more walkways and more dock areas.

This refuge has provided great outdoor experiences. The staff is very polite and knowledgeable about the refuge.

Well pleased with the staff at the store. Nice place to visit. I did a lot of the photographing. It would be nice to have more things to do, but I can relate to that considering the way things are.

What happened to the alligators I used to watch? They are no longer here.

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 = 60)

A better chance to learn about wildlife first hand and get closed to nature.

Although small compared to other refuges, it offers a unique opportunity to educate regarding wetland areas. It also offers a surprisingly pleasant way to "get back to nature."

Banks Lake is a wonderful place. Nice boat ramps, etc. The view is awesome.

Banks Lake is and has been a popular place for fishermen for many years. I remember my dad fishing there many times in his lifetime. It was one of his favorite places. Now my husband and I enjoy kayaking with friends there. It is a beautiful place. There are always many fishermen there when we go. We were also impressed with the activities provided by the FWS for the children. The children and their families were enjoying the day. We also enjoyed looking through the arts and crafts, and the educational displays and games. I think everyone was enjoying the day. Plus the hotdogs and drinks were just great after several hours on the lake. Thanks for providing the kids fishing rodeo - that is a great service for our future: the children.

Because it is one of the largest Carolina Basins in Georgia proper, maintenance of vegetation will allow for more opportunities and revenue.

Better maintained, overall cleaner, and more pleased with experience.

Carolina Bay habitat is quite amazing to visit in canoes/kayaks, especially early in the morning.

Close to the house, with a beautiful lake. Awesome bass fishing opportunities; lots of local bass tournaments held there.

Deer and other wildlife are strictly protected (Fargo, Georgia's Stephan Foster Park is one of my favorite).

Easy access, convenient, and a great place to fish.

Fishing, the nature trail, and the boat trail.

For the most part, they are left in their natural state, unlike state parks. Refuges are mainly for the conservation of the natural resources and protection of the lands for our natural habitat.

Gives you the opportunity to do things (fishing, boating) in a public area, which you can't do at private lands.

Great fishing and wonderful scenery make it unique!

I believe that, in a refuge, the animals are more relaxed (hopefully) to act as they would without man around and therefore one can/could observe them in a more natural environment. I love taking photographs and enjoy watching content animals/wildlife. I don't approve of hunting in a refuge because to me hunting on a refuge is a contradiction of terms.

I really enjoy being out in nature. Being able to visit a place (like the refuge) where the human race hasn't corrupted or destroyed it is very relaxing. Places like these are and will always be number one for me. Good luck.

It gives my children a way to observe the animals and at the same time teaches them responsibility and how to conserve wildlife.

It gives some people the chance to enjoy nature.

It has a more natural feel.

It has good fishing for younger outdoorsmen.

It is a great lake.

It is a great place to visit.

It is beautiful.

It is somewhere to enjoy and relax.

It shows people what natural plants and wildlife really look like in their natural habitat and why it should be protected instead of being destroyed by people for homes. It shows people that it should be protected for our children to enjoy.

It changes day to day and is very quiet.

It's very pretty.

Keeping the beauty, wilderness, and uniqueness of the area intact, makes it special. Preserving the area for future generations - what more could you ask for?

Location, and type of geography.

Lots of opportunities to hunt and fish on large areas of land.

Minimal man-made structures are vital to keeping the beauty of the surrounding area.

Nature with minimum obstruction makes it unique.

Opportunity to fish and see nature at its best.

Protection of wildlife makes it unique.

Public access is very important. You need to organize activities to get children involved and interested in nature.

Refuges are a non-commercial experience of the natural habitat in the area. It's important to know and be able to experience the environment/area in its natural state with local wildlife that is not disturbed by outside influences.

Refuges are a way to experience this country in its natural and mostly undeveloped setting.

The fact that it's nature preserved, natural beauty, and what God has created for us all to enjoy.

The fishing and the wildlife time I spend with my family there makes it unique.

The history and the movie "Gator" make it unique.

The knowledge and history of the land and animals in and around it.

The lake is a one of a kind place. I have fished all over the state of Georgia and north Florida and Banks Lake is the most unique place of them all.

The lake is beautiful.

The natural beauty makes it unique.

The natural look of the land when you are in a boat on the water; you can see the real wildlife in this park. The alligators and all the cypress trees are unique.

The opportunities and space made it unique.

The people who visit them and the people that manage them are special kind of people. A quiet, serene sort of personality with a respect for nature. When you meet someone, there's always a friendly face eager to talk about the "gator over there" or the "Blue Herons nest".

The scenery was unlike anywhere I've been before. The trees growing in the water were absolutely beautiful.

The services and facilities make it unique.

There are trails to see wildlife, and water to have fun on.

They allow animals and plants to be protected, so the public that normally wouldn't be able to see the things can see wildlife up close.

They are all unique in their own way, and I just enjoy the great outdoors!

They are by their nature unique. Of course, they are ultimately governed by political inanity, but, be-that-as-it-may, they are somewhat removed from monetary greed and its willful destruction of everything. Bless you!

They present the natural habitat in a somewhat more undisturbed manner.

They provide things that most people don't get to see such as birds, alligators, and beautiful sunsets.

This refuge offers a quiet, peaceful, and natural setting. It allows so many different ways to enjoy the natural habitat in and around the area. I found it to be an exquisite experience despite the heat and muggy climate. I enjoyed the aquatic life and feeling as though we were all alone. The staff was especially helpful and friendly.

To be able to explore nature in its natural habitat without it being ruined.

To be able to see wildlife without nature being disturbed by man making changes to the habitat.

Very good scenery, wildlife, and fishing. Very peaceful and relaxing. I would go again.

We find it a peaceful, tranquil place to experience nature. We find it a great place to unwind and de-stress from daily life.

Additional Comments (n = 22)

Banks Lake is a beautiful wildlife refuge. However, the refuge would benefit greatly with the additions or improvements of the following list: 1. More law enforcement. 2. More protection/education regarding alligators. 3. Observation towers/platforms for wildlife viewing. 4. An Education Center.

Banks Lake is a very beautiful and natural lake in my hometown. I was raised in and around the lake and all my life, I've enjoyed going there to visit and fish. (Name Signed)

Get rid of the Lydrilla grass and maybe a few stumps.

I am very disappointed in the DNR for the way they have managed this lake.

I appreciate and enjoy the natural resources in every state I visit. I am a very strong supporter of conservation of our natural resources. My only goal when I retire is to travel and visit every state park and refuge in the United States. Our country is a beautiful natural environment, but many choose not to experience or respect the lands that so many before us have fought to protect. I don't seek out roadside attractions when I travel or theme parks. I always seek out the natural resources available. They are far more affordable and without a doubt much more enjoyable. I come from a long line of tree huggers and will always defend and respect our natural resources. Many thanks and with great gratitude to all those that take care of the many fabulous places that there are to visit.

I did not have a car last year, but now I do and will resume being a regular visitor at Banks Lake. I would like to see an observation tower for photographing wildlife and an Education Center for informing the general public of their responsibilities in contributing to this refuge and teaching them that it is not for them to take, take, take, but to preserve and protect the environment and wildlife before it's too late. If you have to charge admission, so be it. People can afford to pay a couple of dollars to get in. People generally do not appreciate anything that is given to them for free.

I took my son for a day on the lake. We both really enjoyed it. (Name Signed)

I was in the military and traveled many places. Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge is one of the most beautiful places I have seen. It is peaceful and enjoyable. I love this refuge. I just wish we could see more alligators. I enjoy watching them.

I would like to come more to fish, but life is too busy for me right now. Thanks.

I would like to see a community-wide meeting before any final decisions are made.

If the invasive plant species and natural overgrowth of the lake is not controlled, the lake is in danger of becoming dry land. I have been fishing Banks Lake since I was a child. My family owns part of the lake called Milltown Bay and Lightsey's Hammock. I have seen first-hand the natural effect of a lake becoming land due to not doing anything about the problem. I am a member of the Nature Conservancy, and even this environment organization realizes the value of fire in controlling vegetation. The fires in the Okefenokee Swamp are a good thing for wildlife and for future recreation. Let's bring Banks Lake back to its former beauty. Thank you. (Name Signed)

My husband and I have a 5th wheel camper and love to go camping and enjoy the outdoors. We usually don't travel too far so we love Georgia State Parks.

Thank you for all that you do. Keep fishing and hunting in the hearts of our youth.

Thank you, for all that you do, to preserve nature and its inhabitants. God bless.

Thank you.

The alligators are over protected and have ruined fishing and scare people out of and near the water. The alligators have also eaten all

the wood-ducks and other wildlife that I enjoy watching when at the refuge. Please help to keep alligators at a productive level for everything and everyone.

The lake has a lot of grass that needs to be cleaned up for easy travel around the lake.

The moss-like grass surrounding the banks at Banks Lake is outrageously out of control. One can hardly fish from the banks, which makes it impossible for those without a boat to have a good time while trying to recreationally fish from the shore and/or influence the younger generation about fishing while attending Banks Lake!

The place is a wonderful place to go and look, but fishing was hard.

The visit to this refuge was a side trip to another destination (Okefenokee Swamp). It was my second trip to this refuge in eight years. My visit here was much too short and I would like to make it my main destination on some future trip. Information on this refuge concerning places to stay and list of things to do may have been available, but I did not readily see them. The main reason for a second visit was the beautiful scenery, which I think rivals the nearby Okefenokee.

We really enjoy having the federal lands to visit. We live near Banks Lake, but we also enjoy hunting in Piedmont every year.

We try and go fishing every weekend and really enjoy Banks Lake. The weeds in the water are getting thick, but we still go.
