



National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey 2012: Individual Refuge Results for San Luis National Wildlife Refuge

By Alia M. Dietsch, Natalie R. Sexton, Lynne Koontz, and Shannon J. Conk

I appreciate the fact that the refuges are not overdeveloped and commercialized. They provide respect for nature and uncluttered closeness to the cradling web of life from which we all grow.

— *Survey comment from a visitor to San Luis National Wildlife Refuge*



San Luis 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 specifically dedicated to the conservation of fish, wildlife, and their habitats. There are 560 national wildlife refuges (refuges) and 38 wetland management districts nationwide, including possessions and territories in the Pacific and Caribbean, encompassing more than 150 million acres (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2013). As stated in the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, 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 the diversity and interconnectedness of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats” and the goal “to provide and enhance opportunities to participate in compatible wildlife-dependent recreation” (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2006, p. 2). The Refuge System attracts nearly 45 million visitors annually, including 34.8 million people who observe and photograph wildlife, 9.6 million who hunt and fish, and nearly 675,000 teachers and students who use refuges as “outdoor classrooms” (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2012). Understanding visitor perceptions of refuges and characterizing their experiences on 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 refuges. The purpose of the survey was to better understand visitor experiences and trip characteristics, to gauge visitors’ levels of satisfaction with existing recreational opportunities, and to garner feedback to inform the design of programs and facilities. The survey results will inform performance, planning, budget, and communications goals. Results will also inform Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs), visitor services, and transportation planning processes.

Organization of Results

These results are specific to visitors who were contacted at San Luis National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) (this refuge) during the specified sampling periods and are part of USGS Data Series 754. All refuges participating in the 2012 survey 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 survey effort.
- **Methods:** The procedures for the national survey 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 Refuge System topics
- **Conclusion**
- **References Cited**
- **Survey Frequencies (Appendix A):** The survey instrument with frequency results for this refuge.
- **Visitor Comments (Appendix B):** The verbatim responses to open-ended survey questions for this refuge.

Methods

Selecting Participating Refuges

The national visitor survey was conducted from January–December 2012 on 25 refuges across the Refuge System (table 1). Each refuge was selected for participation by the Refuge Transportation Program National Coordinator in conjunction with regional office Visitor Services Chiefs. Selection was based on the need to inform transportation planning processes at the national level and to address refuge planning and transportation needs at the individual refuge level.

Developing the Survey Instrument

Researchers at the USGS 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 (one 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 at which to sample, 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 the 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 3–5 hour (hr) time bands, stratified across AM and PM as well as weekend and weekdays. In coordination with refuge staff, any necessary customizations were made to the standardized schedule to accommodate the identified sampling locations and to address specific spatial and temporal patterns of visitation.

Twenty visitors (18 years of age or older) per sampling shift were systematically selected, for a total of 320 willing participants per refuge (or 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.

Refuge staff and/or volunteers (survey recruiters) contacted visitors onsite following a protocol provided by the USGS that was designed to obtain a representative 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 contacting only one person per group. Visitors were informed of the survey effort, given a token incentive (for example, a small magnet or 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 were also instructed to record any refusals and then proceed with the sampling protocol.

Table 1. Refuges participating in the 2012 national wildlife refuge visitor survey.

Pacific Region (R1)
Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge (WA)
Southwest Region (R2)
Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge (TX)
Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge (TX)
Kofa National Wildlife Refuge (AZ)
Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge (TX)
Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge (OK)
Great Lakes-Big Rivers Region (R3)
La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (WI)
Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (MN)
Southeast Region (R4)
Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge (FL)
Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge (AL)
Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge (AR)
Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge (LA)
National Key Deer Refuge (FL)
Savannah National Wildlife Refuge (GA/SC)
Northeast Region (R5)
Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge (MA)
Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge (VA)
Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (VA)
Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge (NJ)
Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge (ME)
Mountain-Prairie Region (R6)
Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge (UT)
Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge (MT)
Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge (CO)
National Bison Range (MT)
California and Nevada Region (R8)
Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge (CA)
San Luis National Wildlife Refuge (CA)

All visitors that agreed onsite to fill out a survey received the same sequence of correspondence regardless of their preference for survey mode. This approach allowed for an assessment of visitors' likelihood of completing the survey by their preferred survey mode (see Sexton and others, 2011). Researchers at the USGS sent the following materials to all visitors agreeing to participate who had not yet completed a survey at the time of each mailing (Dillman, 2007):

- A postcard mailed within 10 days of the initial onsite contact thanking visitors for agreeing to participate in the survey and inviting them to complete the survey online.
- A packet mailed 9 days later consisting of a cover letter, survey, and postage paid envelope for returning a completed paper survey.
- A reminder postcard mailed 7 days later.
- A second packet mailed 14 days later consisting of another cover letter, survey, and postage paid envelope for returning a completed paper survey.

Each mailing included instructions for completing the survey online, so visitors had an opportunity to complete an online survey with each mailing. 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 packet to determine any differences between respondents and nonrespondents at the aggregate level. Online survey data were exported and paper survey data were entered into Microsoft Excel using a standardized survey codebook and data entry procedure. All survey data were analyzed using *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS, v.20) software¹.

Interpreting the Results

The extent to which these results accurately represent the total population of visitors to this refuge is dependent on the number of visitors who completed the survey (sample size) and the ability of the variation resulting from that sample to reflect the beliefs and interests of different visitor user groups (Scheaffer and others, 1996). 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 unique to each refuge. Spatially, the geographical layout and public-use infrastructure varies widely across refuges. Some refuges can be accessed only 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 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, which may result in certain survey measures such as visitors' self-reported "primary activity

¹ Any use of trade, firm, or product names is for descriptive purposes only and does not imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

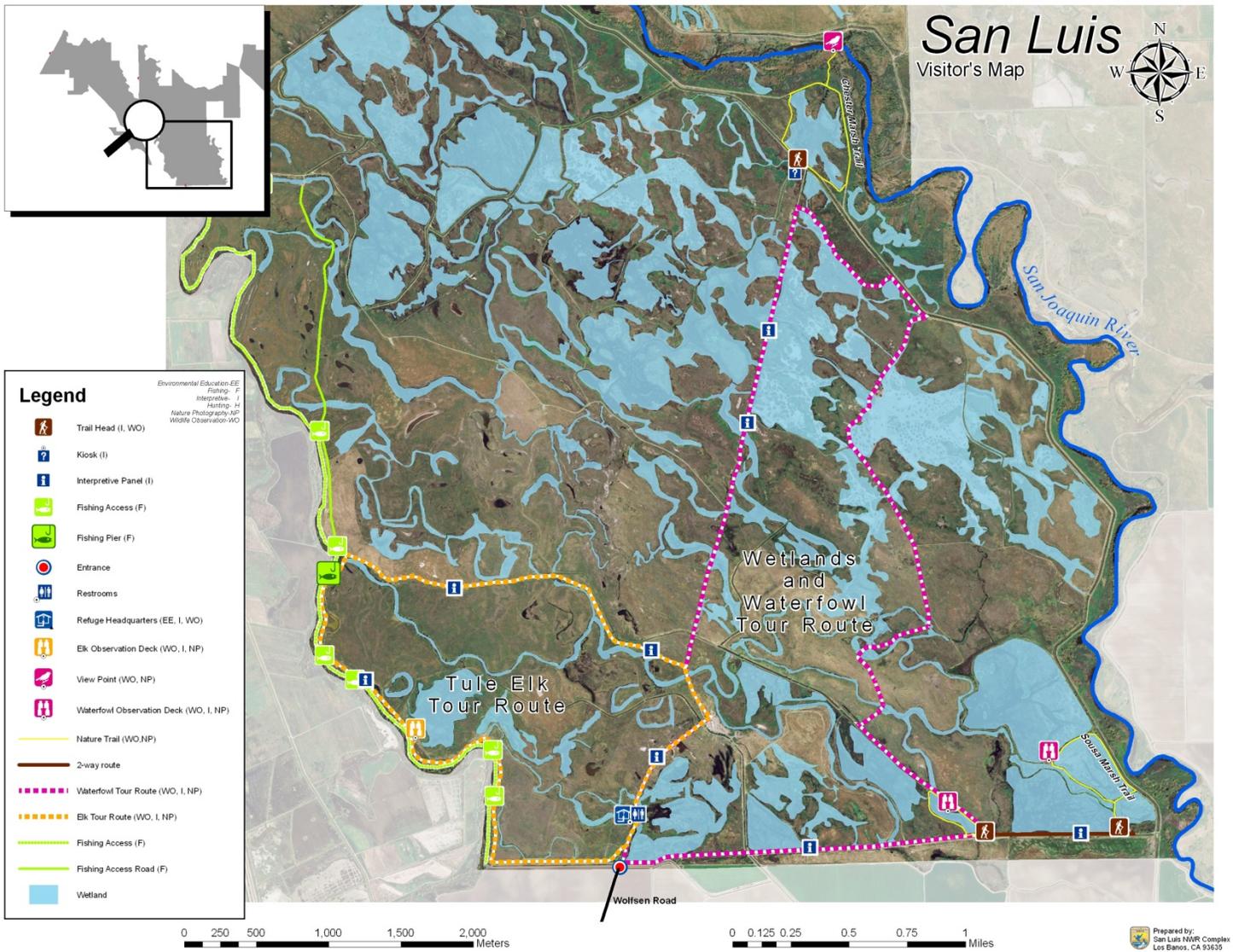
during their visit” reflecting a seasonality bias. Results contained within this report may not apply to visitors during all times of the year or to visitors who did not visit the survey locations.

In this report, visitors who responded to the survey are referred to simply as “visitors.” However, when interpreting the results for San Luis NWR, any potential spatial and temporal sampling limitation specific to this refuge needs 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 (mi) 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). 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) is too low ($n < 30$), a warning is included in the text. Finally, the term “this visit” is used to reference the visit during which people were contacted to participate in the survey.

Refuge Description for San Luis National Wildlife Refuge

San Luis NWR is located in central California approximately 115 miles southwest of San Francisco. The refuge consists of over 26,000 acres of wetlands, riparian forests, native grasslands, vernal pools, and open water on the San Joaquin River. Established in 1966, the refuge has consistently grown in size and is now comprised of six contiguous units: San Luis, East Bear Creek, West Bear Creek, Freitas, Blue Goose, and Kesterson. San Luis NWR is also part of the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which includes the Merced National Wildlife Refuge, the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge, and a Grasslands Wildlife Management Area.

The Refuge is host to significant assemblages of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, insects, and plants native to California’s San Joaquin Valley; some of which, such as the California tiger salamander, the long-horned fairy shrimp, and San Joaquin kit fox, are endangered species. The Refuge is a major wintering area and migratory stopover point for large concentrations of waterfowl, shorebirds, and other waterbirds, attracting thousands upon thousands of ducks, geese, cranes, and other birds. The Tule elk, a non-migratory elk species found only in California, has rebounded from an estimate of 10-20 individuals to over 4,000 in part due to the protection and management practices at the refuge. Each year, approximately 75,000 individuals visit the refuge and engage in a range of activities and opportunities (2011 Refuge Annual Performance Plan measures; Rob Miller, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2012, written commun.). Bird watching, wildlife observation, auto tour routes, fishing, waterfowl hunting, and use of the nature trails and observation decks are popular visitor activities. Visitors may also use the San Luis NWR Complex Visitor Center which is located on the San Luis NWR, and offers interpretation and environmental education opportunities for the entire complex. Figure 1 displays a map of the refuge. For more information, please visit http://www.fws.gov/sanluis/sanluis_info.htm.



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Figure 1. Map of San Luis NWR, courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Sampling at San Luis National Wildlife Refuge

A total of 320 visitors agreed to participate in the survey during the two sampling periods at the identified locations at San Luis NWR (table 2). In all, 217 visitors completed the survey for a 69% response rate, and $\pm 5.3\%$ margin of error at the 95% confidence level.²

Table 2. Sampling and response rate summary for San Luis NWR.

Sampling period	Dates	Locations	Total contacts	Undeliverable addresses	Completed surveys	Response rate
1	3/3/2012 to 3/17/2012	Auto Tour Routes San Luis Visitor Center W. Bear Creek Auto Tour				
SP1 Totals			160	3	114	73%
2	10/27/2012 to 11/10/2012	Auto Tour Routes Waterfowl Hunter Access San Luis Visitor Center				
SP2 Totals			160	3	103	66%
Combined Totals			320	6	217	69%

² A margin of error of $\pm 5\%$ at a 95% confidence level, for example, means that, if a reported percentage is 55%, then 95 out of 100 times, that sample estimate would fall between 50% and 60% if the same question was asked in the same way. The margin of error is calculated with an 80/20 response distribution, assuming that for a given dichotomous choice question, approximately 80% of respondents would select one choice and 20% would select the other choice (Salant and Dillman, 1994).

Selected Survey Results

Visitor and Trip Characteristics

A solid understanding of visitor characteristics and details about their trips to refuges can inform communication and outreach efforts, inform managers about desired types of visitor services and modes of transportation used on refuges, and help forecast use and gauge demand for services and facilities.

Familiarity with the Refuge System

Many visitors to San Luis NWR reported that before participating in the survey, they were aware of the role of the Service in managing refuges (89%) and that the Refuge System has the mission of conserving, managing, and restoring fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats (93%). It is important to note that we did not ask visitors to identify the mission of the Refuge System or the Service, and positive responses to these questions concerning the management and mission of the Refuge System do not necessarily indicate that these visitors fully 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.

Most visitors (88%) feel that refuges, compared to other public lands, provide a unique recreation experience (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.

A majority of visitors to San Luis NWR had been to at least one *other* national wildlife refuge in the past year (59%), with an average of 7 visits to *other* refuges during the past 12 months.

Visiting This Refuge

Some surveyed visitors (43%) had only been to San Luis NWR once in the past 12 months, while more than half had been multiple times (57%). These repeat visitors went to the refuge an average of 9 times during that same 12-month period. Visitors used the refuge during only one season (54%), during multiple seasons (35%), and year-round (12%).

Most visitors first learned about the refuge from friends/relatives (54%), while others learned from signs on the highway (22%) and the refuge website (16%; fig. 2). Key information sources used by visitors to find their way to this refuge include previous knowledge (55%) or signs on highways (30%; fig. 3).

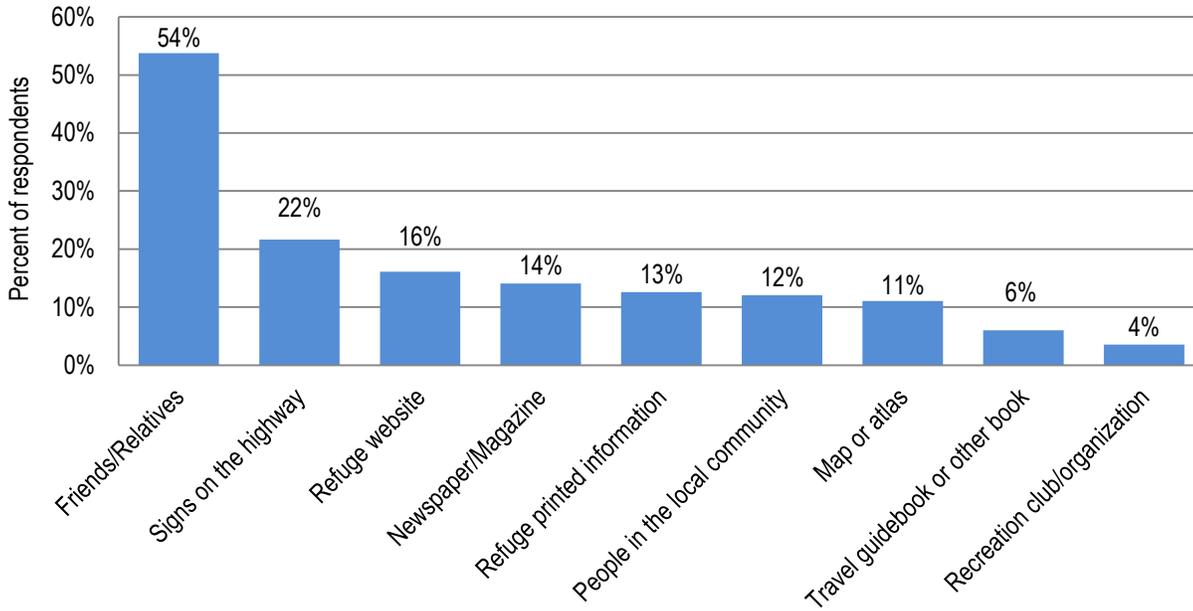


Figure 2. How visitors first learned or heard about San Luis NWR (n = 199).

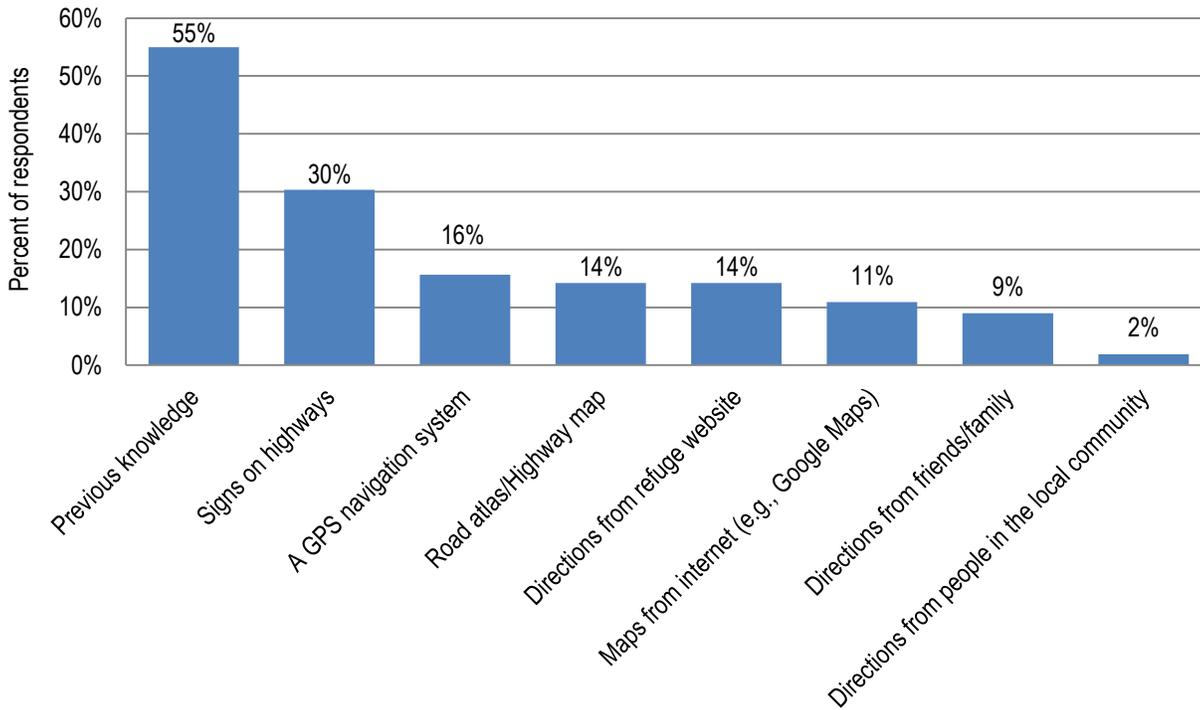


Figure 3. Resources used by visitors to find their way to San Luis NWR during this visit (n = 211).

A little over half of visitors (52%) lived in the local area (within 50 mi of the refuge), whereas 48% were nonlocal visitors. For most local visitors, San Luis NWR was the primary purpose or sole destination of their trips (88%; table 3). For most nonlocal visitors, the refuge was also the primary purpose or sole destination of their trips (55%).

Local visitors reported that they traveled an average of 28 mi to get to the refuge, while nonlocal visitors traveled an average of 300 mi. The average distance traveled for all visitors to this refuge was 151 mi, while the median was 50 mi. Figure 4 shows the residences of visitors traveling to this refuge. About 92% of visitors traveling to San Luis NWR were from California.

Table 3. Influence of San Luis NWR on visitors' decisions to take their trips.

Visitors	Visiting this refuge was...		
	the primary reason for trip	one of many equally important reasons for trip	an incidental stop
Nonlocal	55%	23%	22%
Local	88%	6%	6%
All visitors	72%	14%	14%

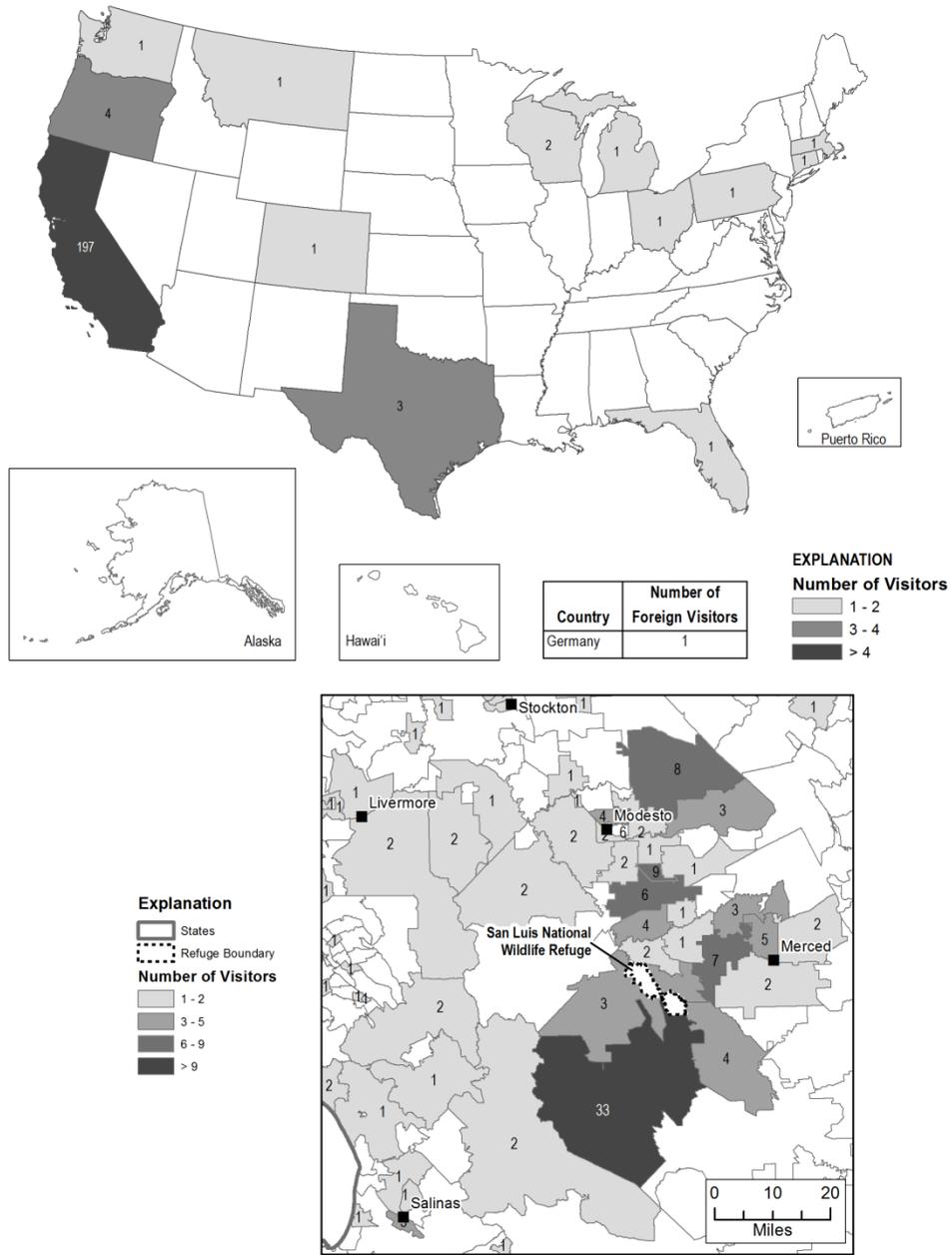


Figure 4. Number of visitors travelling to San Luis NWR by place of residence. The top map shows visitors residence by state and the bottom map shows residence by zip codes near the refuge (n = 216).

Surveyed visitors reported that they spent an average of 4 hr at the refuge during one day there, while the most frequently reported length of a day visit (the modal response) was 2 hr (25%). Most visitors indicated they were part of a group on their visit to this refuge (81%). Of those people who indicated they traveled with a group, visitors primarily traveled with family/friends (table 4).

Table 4. Type and size of groups visiting San Luis NWR (for those who indicated they were part of a group, n = 211).

Group type	Percent (of those traveling in a group)	Average group size		
		Number of adults	Number of children	Total group size
Family/Friends	98%	2	1	3
Commercial tour group	0%	0	0	0
Organized club/School group	1%	9	0	9
Other group type	1%	11	5	16

The key mode of transportation used by visitors to travel around the refuge was private vehicles (93%; fig. 5).

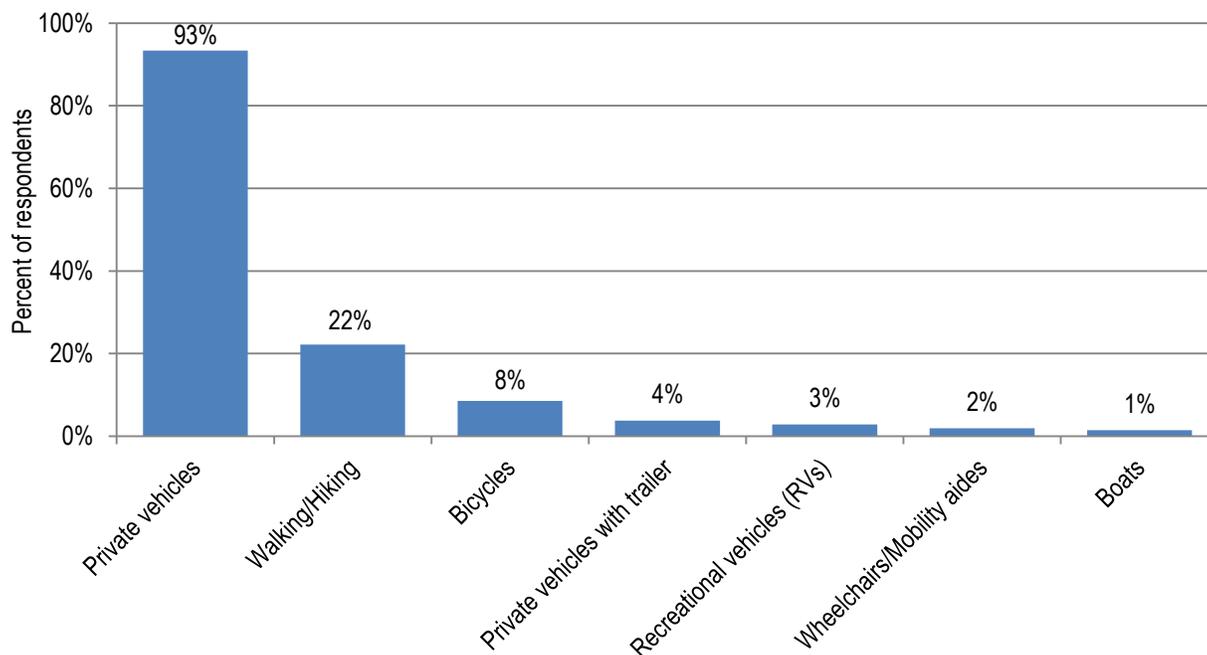


Figure 5. Modes of transportation used by visitors to San Luis NWR during this visit (n = 212).

Surveyed visitors participated in a variety of refuge activities during the 12 months prior to completing the survey (fig. 6); the top three activities in which people reported participating were wildlife observation (72%), auto tour route/driving (67%), and bird watching (61%). The primary reasons for visitors' most recent visits included wildlife observation (30%), hunting (20%), and bird watching (18%; fig. 7). Many visitors also used the Visitor Center during their trips (75%), mostly to view the exhibits (93%), ask information of staff or volunteers (67%), and stop to use the facilities (59%; fig. 8).

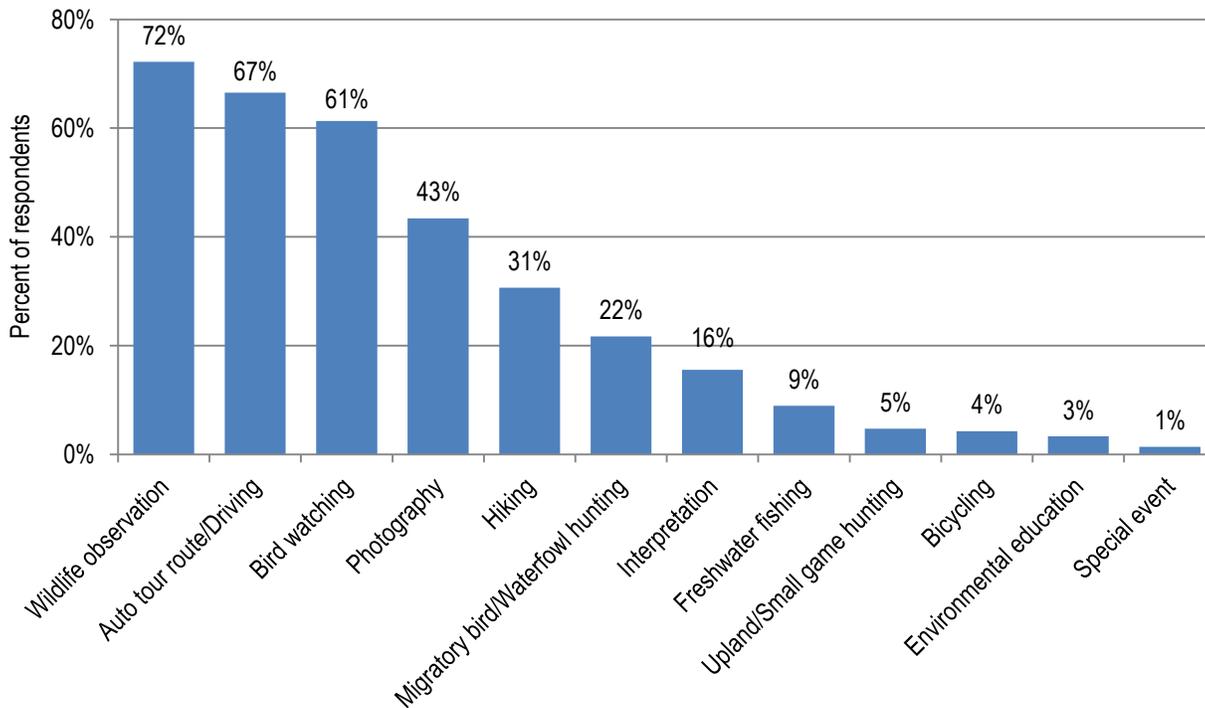


Figure 6. Activities in which visitors participated during the past 12 months at San Luis NWR (n = 212). See Appendix B for a listing of “other” activities.

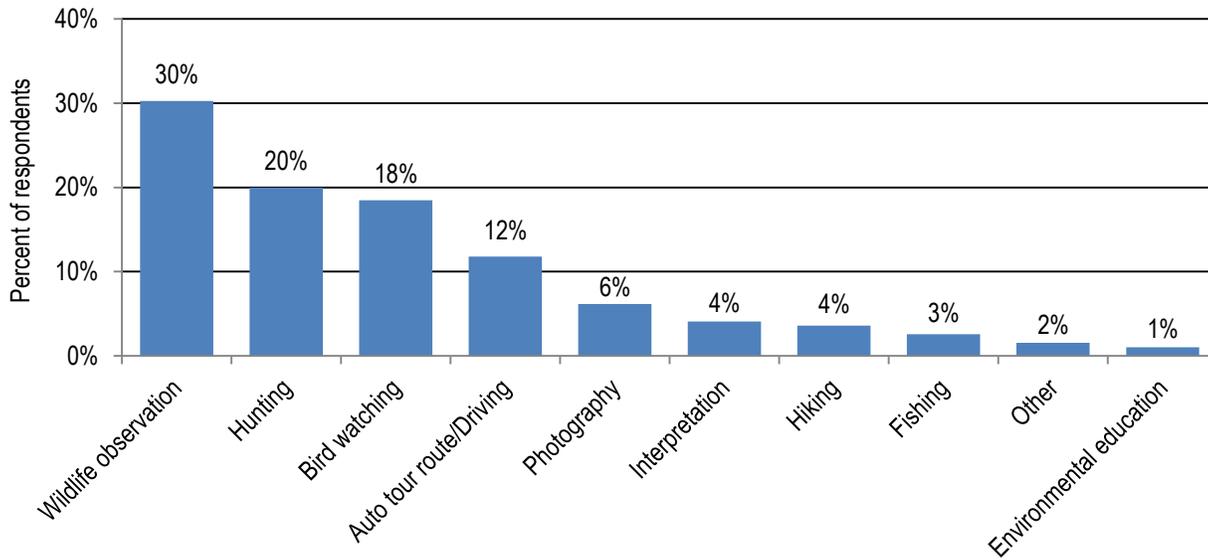


Figure 7. The **primary** activity in which visitors participated during this visit to San Luis NWR (n = 195). See Appendix B for a listing of “other” activities.

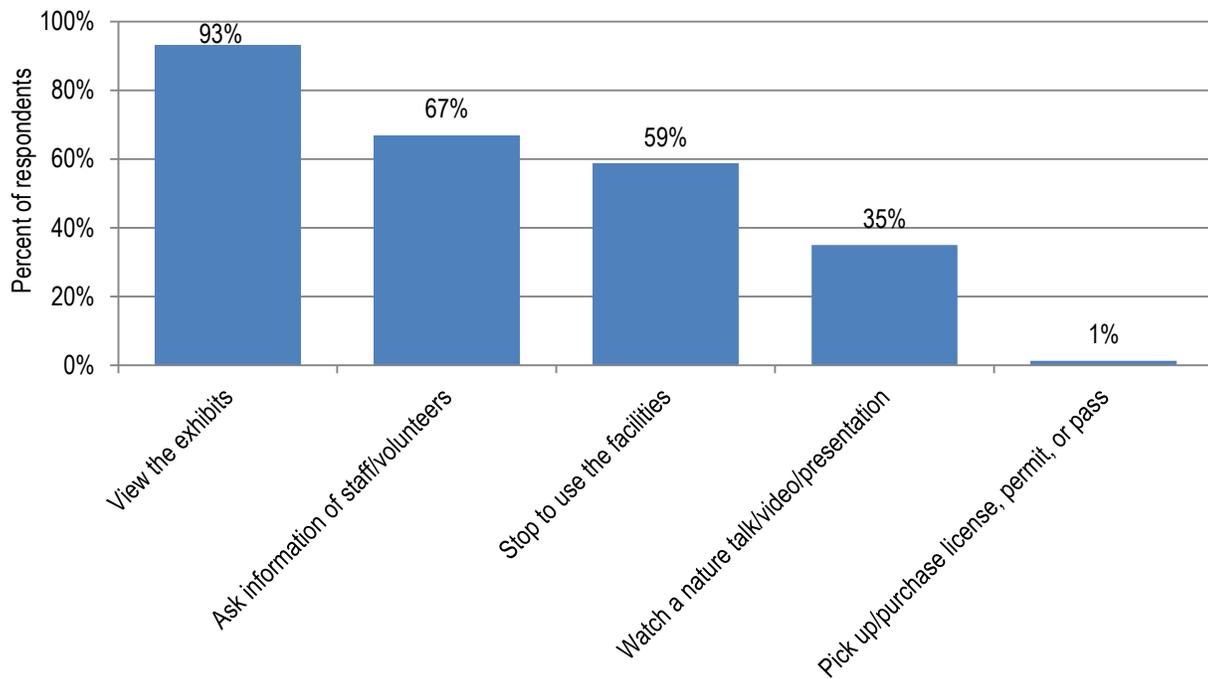


Figure 8. Visitor Center activities in which visitors participated at San Luis NWR (n = 160).

Visitor Characteristics

Nearly all (99%) visitors who participated in the survey at San Luis NWR indicated that they were citizens or permanent residents of the United States. These visitors were a mix of 63% male (with an average age of 52 years) and 37% female (with an average age of 55 years). Visitors, on average, reported they had 15 years of formal education (equivalent to three years of college or technical school). The median level of income was \$75,000-\$99,999. See Appendix A for more demographic information.

In comparison to these results, the 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2007) found that participants in wildlife watching and hunting on public lands were 55% male and 45% female with an average age of 46 years, an average level of education of 14 years (equivalent to an associate degree or two years of college), and a median income of \$50,000–74,999 (Anna Harris, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2011, written commun.). Compared to the U.S. population, participants in wildlife-related recreation are more likely to be male, and tend to be older with higher education and income levels (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

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 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 to local communities of visitor activities on refuges. Visitor expenditure information also can be used to analyze the economic impact of proposed refuge management alternatives.

Visitors that live within the local 50-mi area of a refuge typically have different spending patterns than those that travel from longer distances. During the two sampling periods, 52% of surveyed visitors to San Luis NWR indicated that they live within the local 50-mi area while nonlocal visitors (48%) stayed in the local area, on average, for 1 day. 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 \$42 per person per day and local visitors spent an average of \$31 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 factors include the amount of time spent at the refuge, influence of the refuge on the visitors' 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.

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

Visitors	n ¹	Median	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Nonlocal	83	\$33	\$42	\$41	\$0	\$170
Local	89	\$15	\$31	\$38	\$0	\$175

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 number 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 in the local community, 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 in which people participated), and may not be representative of the total population of visitors to this refuge.

Visitor Opinions about this Refuge

Refuges provide visitors with a variety of services, facilities, and wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities. Understanding visitors' perceptions of refuge offerings is a key component of the Refuge System's mission. In particular, a baseline understanding of visitor experiences provides a framework from which the Refuge System can monitor trends in visitor experiences overtime, which is increasingly useful in the face of changing demographics and wildlife-related interests. Some studies on wildlife-related recreation trends have indicated declines in participation over the latter part of the 20th century in traditional activities such as hunting (for example, U.S. Department of the Interior and others, 2007), while others highlight a need to connect the next generation of people to nature and wildlife (for example, Charles and Louv, 2009). These types of factors highlight a need to better understand visitors' opinions of their refuge experiences and to monitor trends in these opinions over time.

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

- 91% of visitors were satisfied with the recreational activities and opportunities,
- 90% of visitors were satisfied with the information and education about the refuge and its resources,
- 86% of visitors were satisfied with the services provided by employees or volunteers, and
- 90% of visitors were satisfied with the refuge's job of conserving fish, wildlife and their habitats.

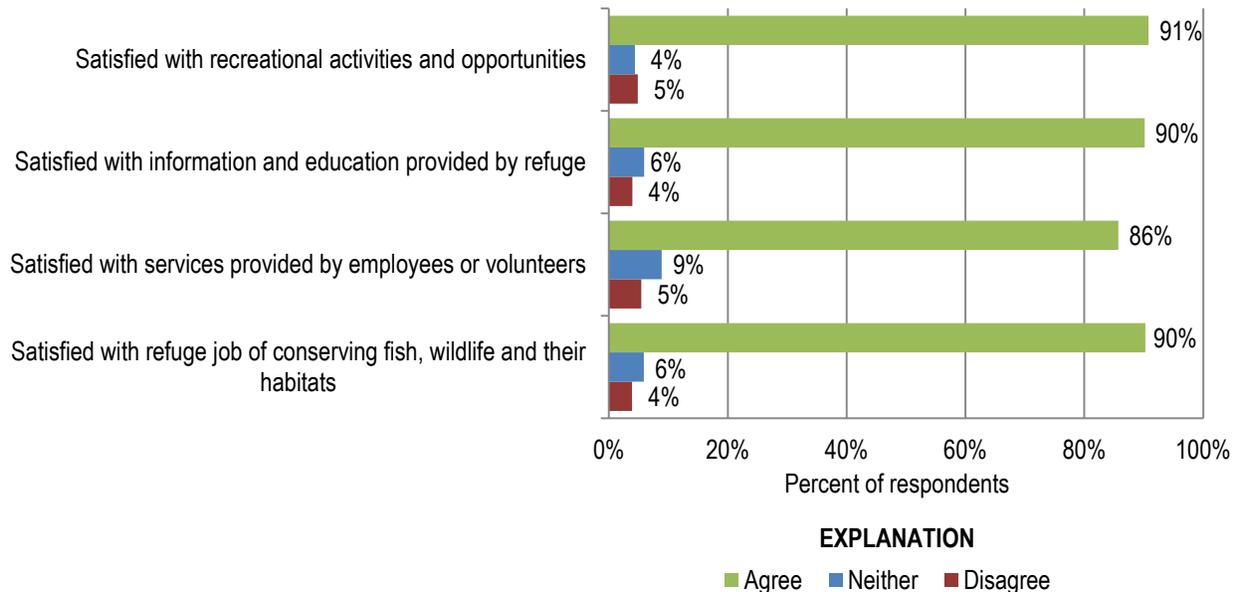


Figure 9. Overall satisfaction with San Luis NWR during this visit (n ≥ 203).

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 examines the importance of an attribute to visitors in relation to their satisfaction with that attribute (Martilla and James, 1977). Drawn from marketing research, this tool has been applied to outdoor recreation and visitation settings (for example, Tarrant and Smith, 2002). Results for the attributes of interest are segmented into one of four quadrants (modified slightly for this 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 different visitor groups regarding their expectations and levels of importance (Vaske and others, 1996; Bruyere and others, 2002; Wade and Eagles, 2003); 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. This consideration is especially important when reviewing any attribute that falls 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 or 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 their satisfaction with) the attribute may be much higher than the overall importance (and satisfaction) would be for the sample of visitors summarized in this report.

Figures 10–12 depict surveyed visitors' importance-satisfaction ratings for refuge services and facilities, recreational opportunities, and transportation-related features at San Luis NWR. Results are summarized as follows:

- 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 except hunting opportunities, which fell into the "Look Closer" quadrant (fig. 11). The average importance of this activity is likely higher among visitors to San Luis NWR who actually participated in the activity during the 12 months prior to taking the survey than the score reported here. For example, hunters, as part of the 2010–2011 national visitor survey, had an average importance score of 4.6 for this

recreational opportunity, while the average importance score of hunting activities across all visitors was lower.

- All *transportation-related features* fell in the “Keep Up the Good Work” quadrant (fig. 12).

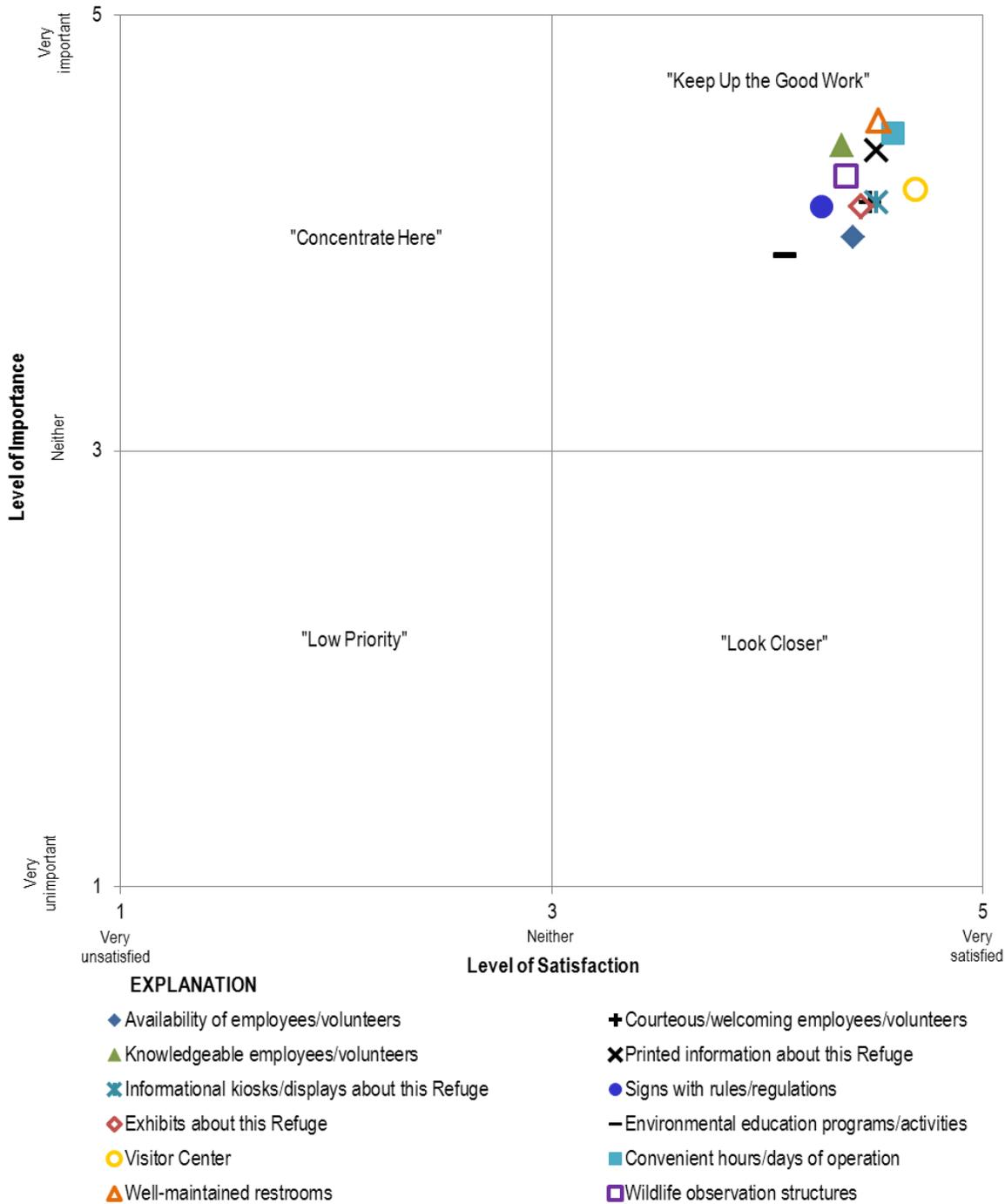
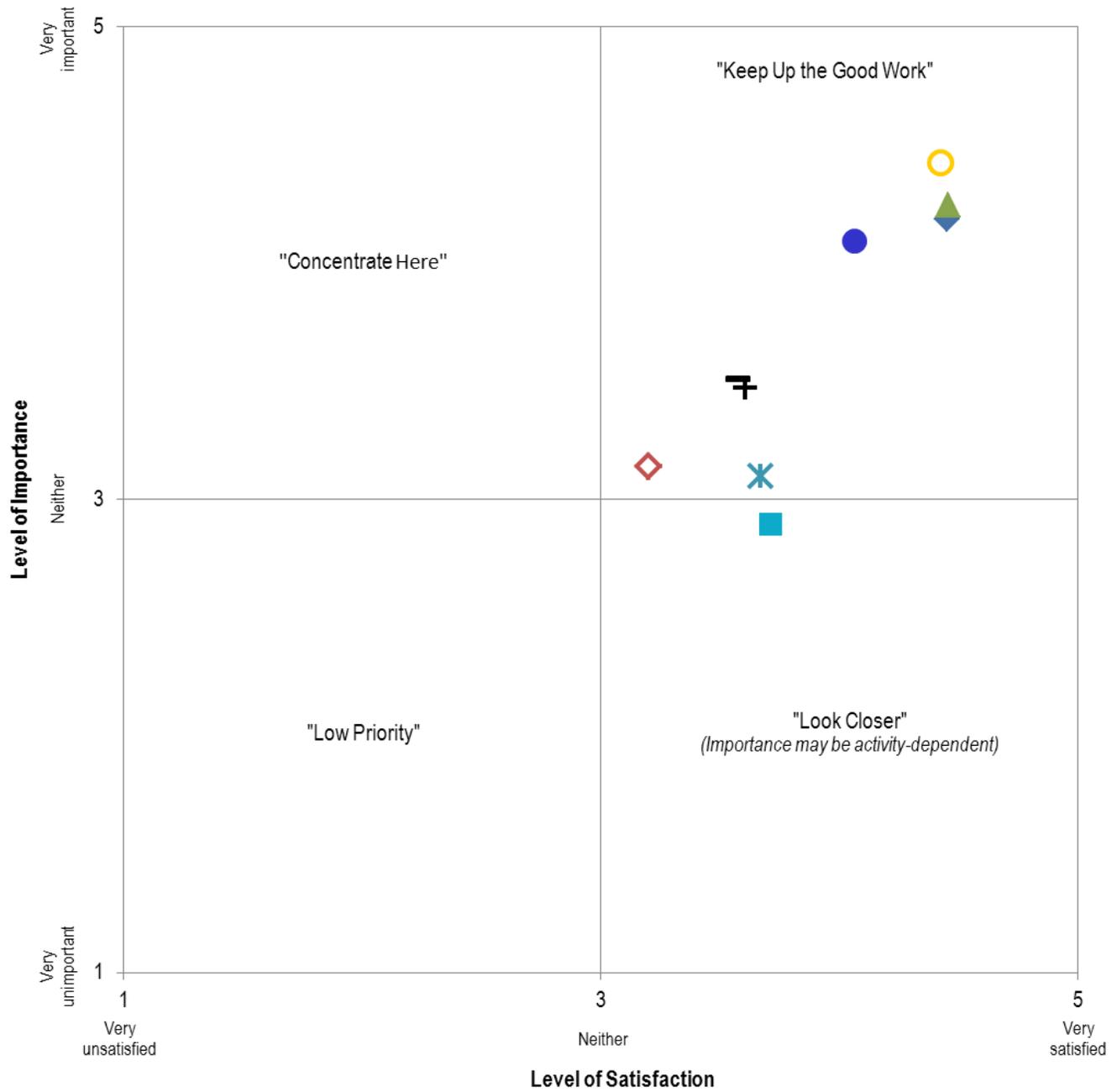


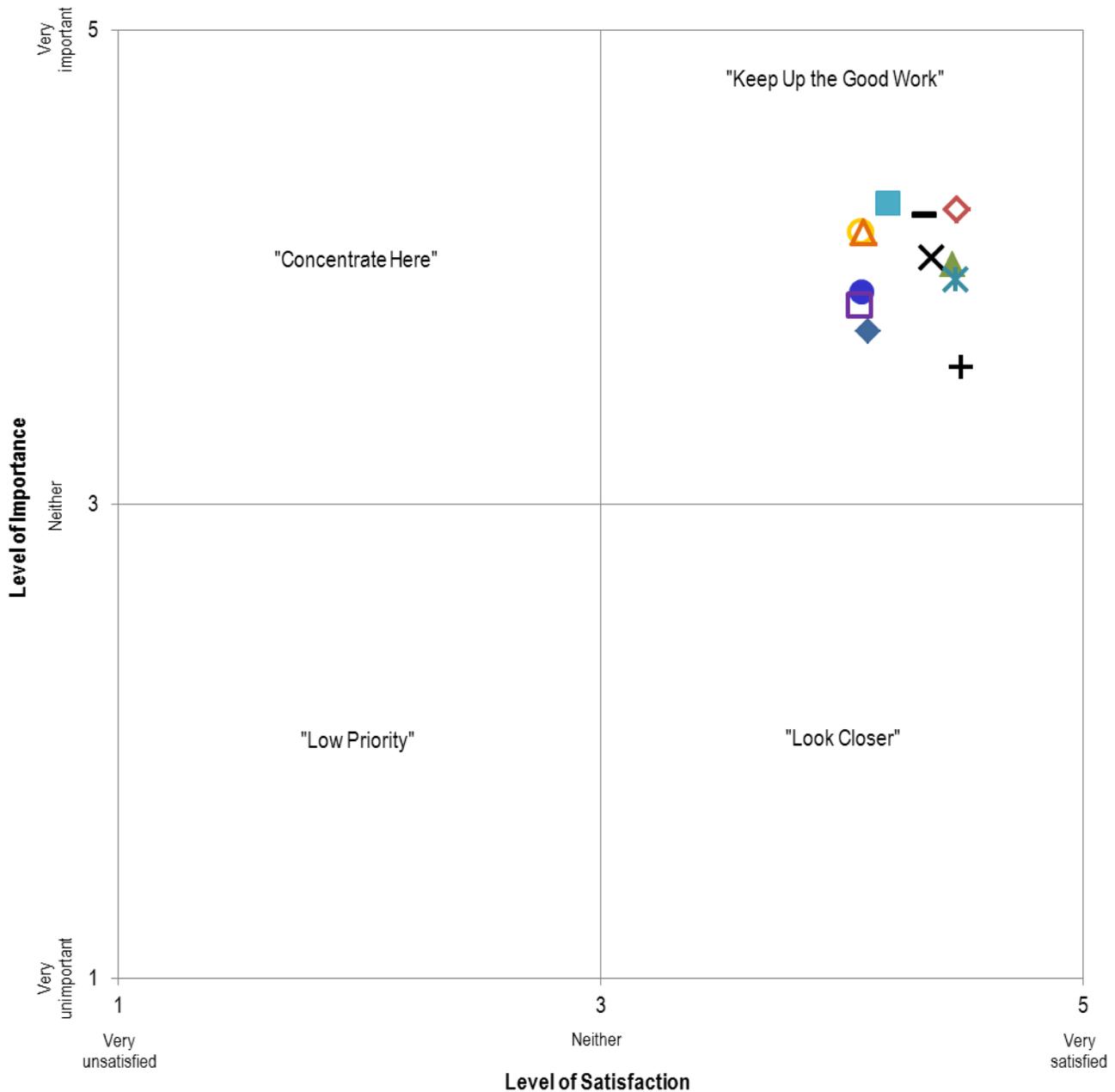
Figure 10. Importance-satisfaction ratings of services and facilities provided at San Luis NWR.



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 San Luis NWR.



EXPLANATION

- ◆ Condition of roads
- ▲ 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 San Luis 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 of these questions will be evaluated in aggregate form (data from all participating refuges together) to better address national-level goals. Basic results for San Luis NWR are reported here.

Alternative Transportation and the Refuge System

Visitors use various types of transportation to access and enjoy refuges. While many visitors arrive at the refuge in private vehicles, 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 and others, 2001), and recent efforts are beginning to characterize the use of transit and non-motorized transportation modes for visitor access to refuges (Volpe Center, 2010). However, less is known about how visitors perceive 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 refuges in the future.

Of six alternative transportation options listed on the survey, a majority of San Luis NWR visitors were likely to use the following at 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.

A majority of visitors indicated they were *not* likely to use a bus/tram that takes passengers to different points on the refuge or a Bike Share Program that was offered on the refuge.

When asked specifically about using alternative transportation at San Luis NWR, some visitors thought alternative transportation would enhance their experience (24%) while others thought it would not (34%). An additional 41% of surveyed visitors indicated they were unsure whether alternative transportation would enhance their experiences.

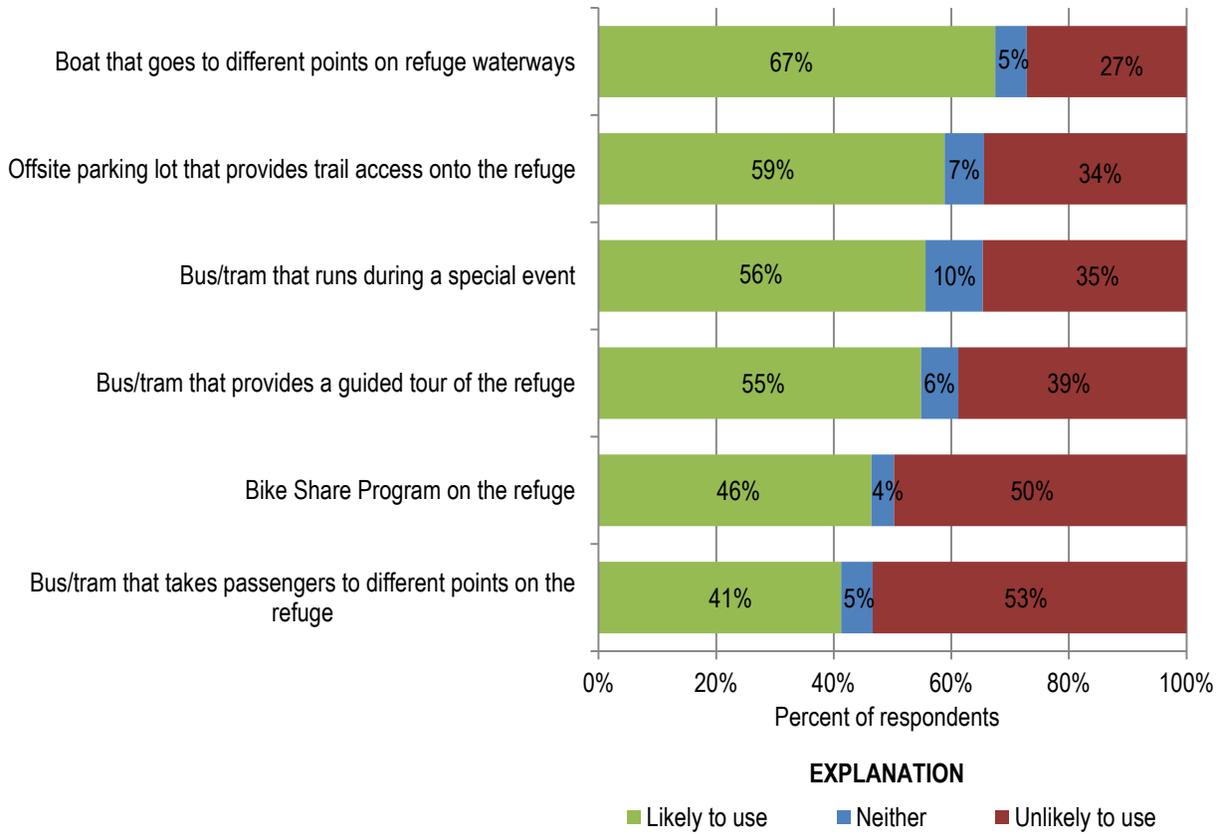


Figure 13. Visitors' likelihood of using alternative transportation options at refuges in the future (n ≥ 205).

Climate Change and the National Wildlife Refuge System

Climate change represents a growing concern for refuge management. The Service's climate-change strategy, titled "Rising to the Urgent Challenge," establishes a basic context for the agency to work within a larger conservation community to 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 the topic of climate change. Previous research suggests that human thought about climate change is influenced by individuals' levels of concern, levels of involvement, preferences for policies, and associated behaviors (Maibach and others, 2009). The results presented below provide baseline information on these factors in relation to the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife, and their habitats.

These results are most useful when coupled with responses to belief statements, 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 does not alter the overall message, but rather places the issue in a context in which different audience groupings can relate (Nisbet, 2009). 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 or supporting economic growth through new jobs/technology). Framing information in ways that resonate with visitors' beliefs may result in more engaged audiences who support strategies aimed at alleviating climate-change pressures. Data will be analyzed further at the national level to inform the development of a comprehensive climate change communication and engagement strategy.

The majority of visitors to San Luis NWR agreed with the following statements related to their own *personal involvement* with the topic of climate change as it relates to fish, wildlife, and habitats (fig. 14):

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

The majority of visitors also agreed with the following *belief statements* regarding climate change effects on 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.

Results regarding such beliefs are important to consider when communicating with visitors about this topic, since almost half of visitors (49%) indicated their experiences would be enhanced if San Luis NWR provided information about how visitors can help to address climate change impacts on fish, wildlife, and their habitats (fig. 14).

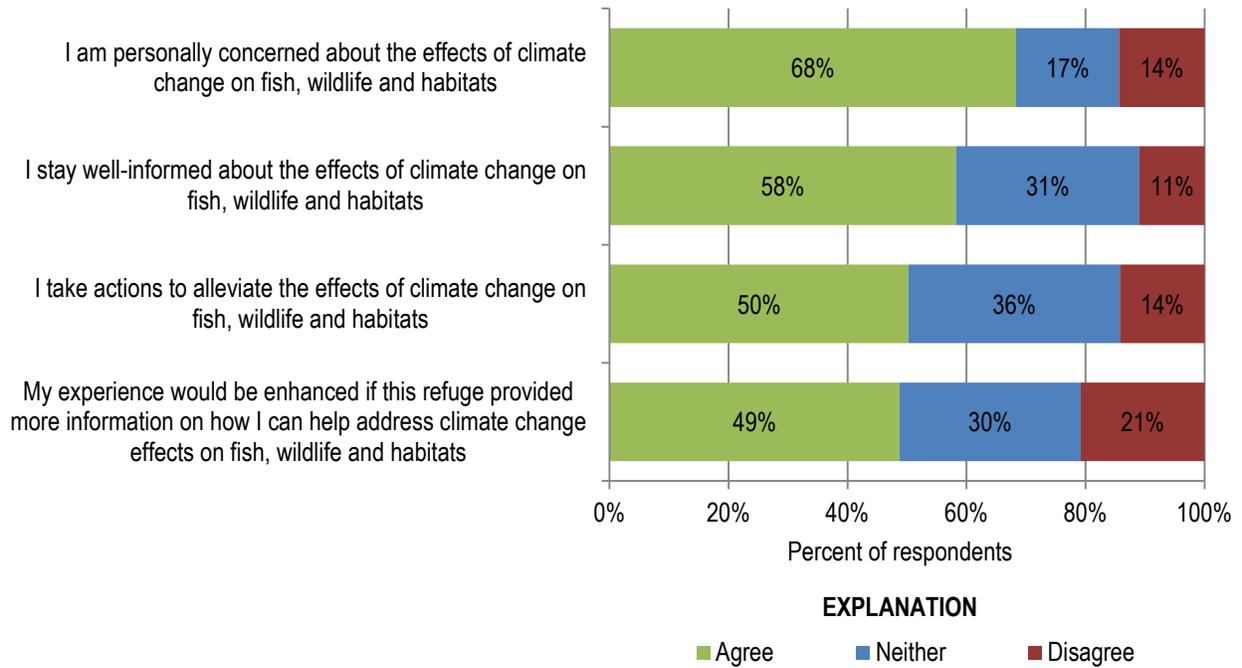


Figure 14. Visitors’ personal involvement with climate change related to fish, wildlife and their habitats (n ≥ 197).

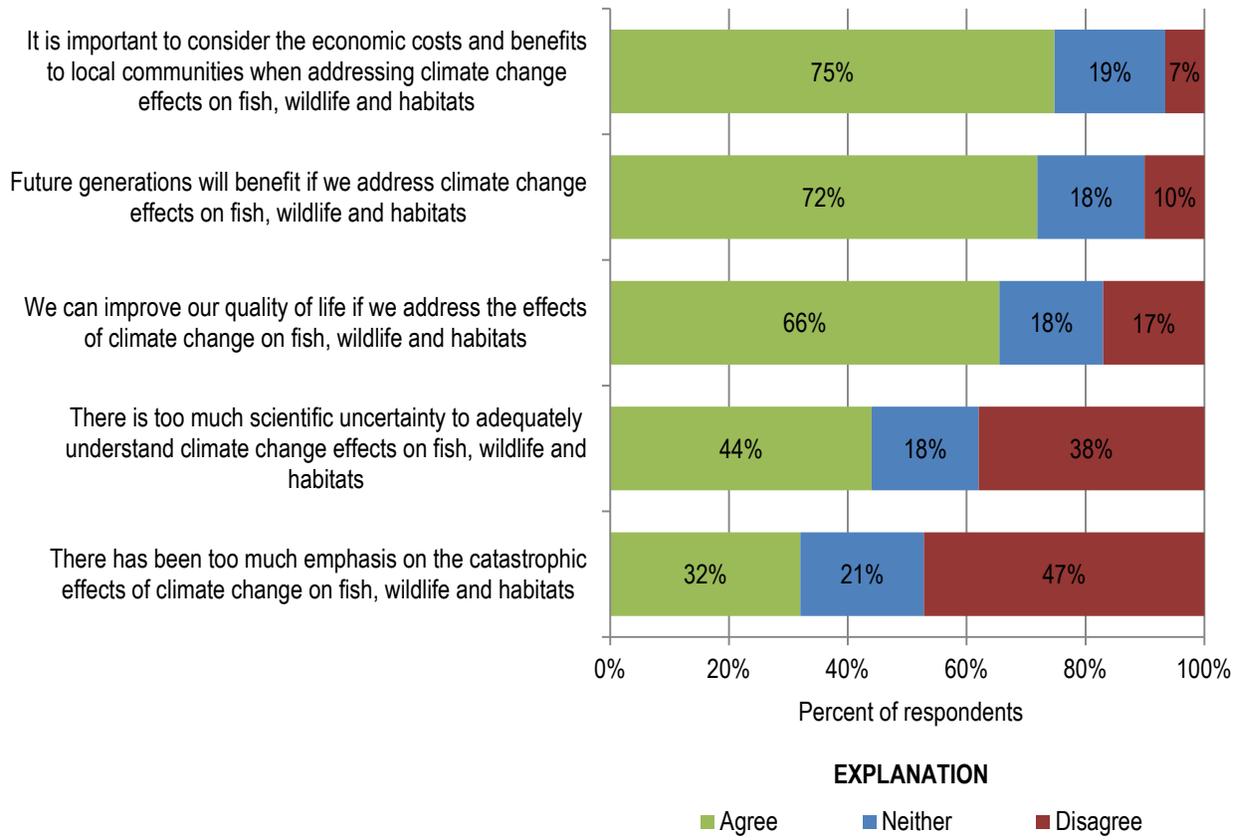


Figure 15. Visitors' beliefs about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats (n ≥ 197).

Conclusion

These individual refuge results provide a summary of trip characteristics and experiences of a sample of visitors to San Luis NWR during 2012 and are intended to inform decision-making efforts related to visitor services and transportation at the refuge. Additionally, the results from this survey can be used to inform planning efforts, such as a refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan. With an understanding of visitors' trip and activity characteristics, visitor-satisfaction ratings with existing offerings, and opinions regarding fees, refuge managers are able to make informed decisions about possible modifications (whether reducing or enhancing) to visitor facilities, services, or recreational opportunities. This information can help managers 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 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 and its resources, 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/754/>. 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.

Even 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 for any question that uses the phrase “this Refuge.” Please reference the cover letter included with this survey if you are unsure of which refuge you visited.

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"/> 31% Hiking	<input type="checkbox"/> 3% Environmental education (for example, classrooms or labs)
<input type="checkbox"/> 5% Upland/Small game hunting	<input type="checkbox"/> 4% Bicycling	
<input type="checkbox"/> 22% Migratory bird/Waterfowl hunting	<input type="checkbox"/> 67% Auto tour route/Driving	<input type="checkbox"/> 16% Interpretation (for example, exhibits, kiosks, videos)
<input type="checkbox"/> 72% Wildlife observation	<input type="checkbox"/> 0% Motorized boating	
<input type="checkbox"/> 61% Bird watching	<input type="checkbox"/> 0% Nonmotorized boating (including canoes/kayaks)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1% Refuge special event (<i>please specify</i>) <u>See Appendix B</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> 12% Freshwater fishing		
<input type="checkbox"/> 0% Saltwater fishing	<input type="checkbox"/> 0% Volunteering	<input type="checkbox"/> 3% Other (<i>please specify</i>) <u>See Appendix B</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> 43% 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?

<input type="checkbox"/> 25% No	
<input type="checkbox"/> 75% Yes → If yes, what did you do there? (Please mark <u>all that apply.</u>) (<i>*indicates the refuge does not offer this</i>)	
<input type="checkbox"/> * Visit the gift shop or bookstore	<input type="checkbox"/> 1% Pick up/purchase a license, permit, or pass
<input type="checkbox"/> 93% View the exhibits	<input type="checkbox"/> 59% Stop to use the facilities (for example, get water, use restroom)
<input type="checkbox"/> 67% Ask information of staff/volunteers	
<input type="checkbox"/> 35% Watch a nature talk/video/presentation	<input type="checkbox"/> 9% 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	All visitors	
<input type="checkbox"/> 55%	<input type="checkbox"/> 88%	<input type="checkbox"/> 72%	It was the primary purpose or sole destination of my trip.
<input type="checkbox"/> 23%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 14%	It was one of many equally important reasons or destinations for my trip.
<input type="checkbox"/> 22%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 14%	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 **hours/minutes and miles** (one-way) did you travel from your home to this Refuge?

Nonlocal	<u> 4 </u> Hours	<u> 3 </u> Minutes	and	<u> 300 </u> Miles
Local	<u> 0 </u> Hours	<u> 47 </u> Minutes	and	<u> 28 </u> Miles
All visitors	<u> 2 </u> Hours	<u> 16 </u> Minutes	and	<u> 151 </u> Miles

6. What type of group were you with on your visit to this Refuge?

19% None, I visited this Refuge alone

(of those visiting with a group)

98% Family and/or friends

1% Organized club or school group (for example, Boy/Girl Scouts, hiking club, bird watching group)

0% Commerical tour group

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

7. Including yourself, how many people were in your group? (*Please answer each category.*)

 3 number 18 years and over

 1 number 17 years and under

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

54% Family and/or friends

16% Refuge website

22% Signs on highway

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

4% Recreation club or organization

0% Television or radio

12% People in the local community

14% Newspaper or magazine

13% Refuge printed information (brochure, map)

6% Travel guidebook or other book

11% Map or atlas

5% Other (*please specify*) See Appendix B

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

56% Spring
(March-May)

20% Summer
(June-August)

60% Fall
(September-November)

45% Winter
(December-February)

10. 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? 4 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"/> 8% | Bicycle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4% | Private vehicle with a trailer
(for boat, camper or other) | <input type="checkbox"/> 0% | Motorcycle | <input type="checkbox"/> 22% | 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"/> 3% | Recreational vehicle (RV) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1% | Boat | <u>See Appendix B</u> | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> 2% | Wheelchair or other mobility aid | | |

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

- | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 55% | Previous knowledge/I have been to this Refuge before | <input type="checkbox"/> 11% | Maps from the Internet (for example, MapQuest or Google Maps) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30% | Signs on highways | <input type="checkbox"/> 14% | Directions from Refuge website |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16% | A GPS navigation system | <input type="checkbox"/> 2% | Directions from people in community near this Refuge |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 14% | A road atlas or highway map | <input type="checkbox"/> 9% | Directions from friends or family |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> 2% | Other (<i>please specify</i>) <u>See Appendix B</u> |

2. 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"/> 39%	<input type="checkbox"/> 15%	<input type="checkbox"/> 5%	<input type="checkbox"/> 29%	<input type="checkbox"/> 13%
...a bike that was offered through a Bike Share Program for use while on the Refuge?	<input type="checkbox"/> 36%	<input type="checkbox"/> 14%	<input type="checkbox"/> 4%	<input type="checkbox"/> 27%	<input type="checkbox"/> 19%
...a bus or tram that provides a guided tour of the Refuge with information about the Refuge and its resources?	<input type="checkbox"/> 28%	<input type="checkbox"/> 11%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 33%	<input type="checkbox"/> 21%
...a boat that goes to different points on Refuge waterways?	<input type="checkbox"/> 23%	<input type="checkbox"/> 4%	<input type="checkbox"/> 5%	<input type="checkbox"/> 39%	<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"/> 7%	<input type="checkbox"/> 10%	<input type="checkbox"/> 30%	<input type="checkbox"/> 26%
...an offsite parking lot that provides trail access for walking/hiking onto the Refuge?	<input type="checkbox"/> 24%	<input type="checkbox"/> 11%	<input type="checkbox"/> 7%	<input type="checkbox"/> 34%	<input type="checkbox"/> 25%
...some other alternative transportation option? (<i>please specify</i>) <u>See Appendix B</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 19%	<input type="checkbox"/> 38%	<input type="checkbox"/> 31%

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

- 24% Yes 34% No 41% Not Sure

4. 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%	13%	13%	40%	28%	Surface conditions of roads	4%	8%	8%	34%	46%	NA
5%	15%	18%	40%	22%	Surface conditions of parking areas	3%	1%	9%	21%	68%	NA
4%	5%	15%	38%	38%	Condition of bridges	1%	0%	17%	17%	65%	NA
5%	4%	13%	40%	38%	Condition of trails and boardwalks	2%	1%	12%	27%	58%	NA
1%	7%	13%	53%	26%	Number of places for parking	2%	2%	11%	21%	66%	NA
7%	5%	12%	44%	32%	Number of places to pull over along Refuge roads	1%	10%	11%	35%	43%	NA
3%	3%	7%	37%	49%	Safety of driving conditions on Refuge roads	2%	3%	6%	26%	64%	NA
2%	5%	7%	39%	46%	Safety of Refuge road entrances/exits	4%	4%	9%	24%	60%	NA
5%	4%	9%	33%	48%	Signs on highways directing you to the Refuge	2%	11%	11%	29%	47%	NA
4%	2%	7%	36%	50%	Signs directing you around the Refuge roads	2%	9%	10%	28%	52%	NA
6%	2%	13%	33%	47%	Signs directing you on trails	1%	6%	16%	36%	41%	NA
7%	5%	21%	32%	35%	Access for people with physical disabilities or who have difficulty walking	1%	4%	25%	26%	44%	NA

5. 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)?

52% Yes

48% No → How much time did you spend **in the local area** on this trip?

Nonlocals If you spent one day or more in the local area, enter the number of days: 2 day(s)

only If you spent less than one day in the local area, enter the number of hours: 4 hour(s)

2. How much time did you spend **at this Refuge** during your most recent visit?

If you spent one day or more at this Refuge, enter the number of days: 1 day(s)

If you spent less than one day at this Refuge, enter the number of hours: 3 hour(s)

3. 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

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

2 number of people sharing expenses

5. 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
10%	16%	23%	12%	16%	3%	9%	1%	1%	4%	3%

6. 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**.)*

100% Did not pay a fee (*skip to Section 4*)

San Luis National Wildlife Refuge does not charge an entrance fee. This question does not apply.

7. 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.

San Luis National Wildlife Refuge does not charge an entrance fee. This question does not apply.

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.	<input type="checkbox"/> 2%	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	<input type="checkbox"/> 4%	<input type="checkbox"/> 40%	<input type="checkbox"/> 51%	NA
Overall, I am satisfied with the information and education provided by this Refuge about its resources.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1%	<input type="checkbox"/> 2%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 29%	<input type="checkbox"/> 62%	NA
Overall, I am satisfied with the services provided by employees or volunteers at this Refuge.	<input type="checkbox"/> 2%	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	<input type="checkbox"/> 9%	<input type="checkbox"/> 27%	<input type="checkbox"/> 59%	NA
This Refuge does a good job of conserving fish, wildlife and their habitats.	<input type="checkbox"/> 2%	<input type="checkbox"/> 1%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 24%	<input type="checkbox"/> 66%	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%	10%	11%	38%	38%	Availability of employees or volunteers	2%	5%	11%	18%	65%	NA
2%	6%	12%	38%	42%	Courteous and welcoming employees or volunteers	2%	4%	8%	17%	69%	NA
2%	4%	4%	31%	59%	Knowledgeable employees or volunteers	4%	5%	7%	21%	63%	NA
3%	2%	4%	37%	54%	Printed information about this Refuge and its resources (for example, maps and brochures)	2%	3%	6%	23%	67%	NA
3%	5%	8%	41%	42%	Informational kiosks/displays about this Refuge and its resources	1%	1%	11%	23%	65%	NA
1%	6%	13%	38%	41%	Signs with rules/regulations for this Refuge	1%	2%	16%	32%	49%	NA
3%	7%	9%	36%	44%	Exhibits about this Refuge and its resources	1%	2%	13%	22%	63%	NA
5%	7%	20%	30%	38%	Environmental education programs or activities	1%	1%	30%	22%	45%	NA
2%	7%	9%	31%	51%	Visitor Center	1%	1%	8%	12%	79%	NA
1%	3%	8%	27%	62%	Convenient hours and days of operation	1%	2%	7%	18%	72%	NA
2%	3%	2%	30%	63%	Well-maintained restrooms	3%	5%	5%	11%	76%	NA
3%	4%	7%	37%	49%	Wildlife observation structures (decks, blinds)	1%	3%	11%	29%	56%	NA
5%	3%	12%	28%	52%	Bird-watching opportunities	1%	2%	9%	30%	59%	NA
3%	2%	5%	31%	60%	Opportunities to observe wildlife other than birds	1%	3%	8%	29%	59%	NA
3%	5%	9%	30%	53%	Opportunities to photograph wildlife and scenery	1%	3%	7%	29%	61%	NA
36%	8%	20%	4%	32%	Hunting opportunities	4%	6%	37%	19%	33%	NA
22%	12%	24%	18%	24%	Fishing opportunities	2%	7%	43%	16%	32%	NA
5%	3%	11%	38%	42%	Trail hiking opportunities	1%	4%	19%	39%	37%	NA
20%	8%	28%	29%	16%	Water trail opportunities for canoeing or kayaking	10%	7%	55%	12%	17%	NA
12%	9%	22%	32%	26%	Bicycling opportunities	3%	9%	41%	21%	26%	NA
10%	4%	36%	27%	22%	Volunteer opportunities	2%	4%	50%	20%	24%	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?

89% Yes

11% No

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

93% Yes

7% No

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

88% Yes

12% No

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

See Appendix B

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%	6%	17%	31%	37%
We can improve our quality of life if we address the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	10%	8%	18%	32%	34%
There is too much scientific uncertainty to adequately understand how climate change will impact fish, wildlife and their habitats.	16%	23%	18%	27%	18%
I stay well-informed about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	2%	8%	31%	43%	15%
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%	4%	19%	53%	22%
I take actions to alleviate the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	6%	9%	36%	35%	16%
There has been too much emphasis on the catastrophic effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	25%	22%	21%	17%	15%
Future generations will benefit if we address the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	5%	5%	18%	31%	41%
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.	13%	8%	30%	36%	13%

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 2 in Report

2. Are you? 63% Male 37% Female

3. In what year were you born? 1958 (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)			
					0%			12%				58%				31%			

5. What ethnicity do you consider yourself? 10% Hispanic or Latino 90% Not Hispanic or Latino

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

<input type="checkbox"/> 7%	American Indian or Alaska Native	<input type="checkbox"/> 1%	Black or African American	<input type="checkbox"/> 92%	White
<input type="checkbox"/> 4%	Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> 2%	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander		

7. How many members are in your household? 3 persons

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

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

<input type="checkbox"/> 0%	Less than \$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 12%	\$35,000 - \$49,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 21%	\$100,000 - \$149,999
<input type="checkbox"/> 7%	\$10,000 - \$24,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 18%	\$50,000 - \$74,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 10%	\$150,000 - \$199,999
<input type="checkbox"/> 8%	\$25,000 - \$34,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 18%	\$75,000 - \$99,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	\$200,000 or more

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

20 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.

Comments?

See Appendix B for Comments

PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT STATEMENT: The Paperwork Reduction Act requires us to tell you why we are collecting this information, how we will use it, and whether or not you have to respond. The information that we collect in this survey will help us understand visitor satisfaction with and use of National Wildlife Refuges and to make sound management and policy decisions. Your response is voluntary. An agency may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB Control Number. We estimate it will take an average of 25 minutes to complete this survey. You may send comments concerning the burden estimate or any aspect of the survey to the Information Collection Clearance Officer, Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, MS 222-ARLSQ, Arlington, VA 22203. OMB CONTROL #1018-0145 EXPIRATION DATE 6/30/2013

Appendix B: Visitor Comments to Open-Ended Survey Questions for San Luis 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
Open House by Invitation	1
Opening of new Visitor Center	2

Other Activity	Frequency
Drawing, painting	1
Reviewed the Visitor Center displays	1
Target and skeet shooting	1
Tribal meeting	1
Visit displays	2

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
Field trip	1
Opening of new center	1
Painting	1
To visit museum and see the map	1
Tribal meeting	1
Tule elk	7

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

Other Visitor Center Activity	Frequency
A new museum was being completed when we were there in March 2011.	1
Drive tour route	1
Looked up other hunting areas.	1
Teach my kids about wildlife.	1
To see what was available for future trip.	1
Tule elk	6
Used binoculars.	1
Walked around facility.	1
We got a list of what to see at this time of year.	1

Question 6: "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
Royal Rangers	1
Tribal Group	1

Question 8: "How did you first learn or hear about this Refuge?"

Other Website	Frequency
Google	1
Los Banos, CA	1
Stanislaus Audubon	1

Other Ways Heard about This Refuge	Frequency
Bio 6 Teacher: Cary	1
California Department of Fish and Game booklet	1
Discover Wildlife Brochure	1
Employees	1
Hunting	1
Los Banos Ranger	1
Other photographers	1
Sociology professor at Merced College	1
Tribal Chair	1

Survey Section 2

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

Other Ways Found This Refuge	Frequency
Bird viewing leader	1
Directions from teacher	1
Discover Wildlife - CA	1
Newspaper article	1
Refuge brochures from previous visit to sister refuge.	1

Question 3: "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
ATV	2
Bike access	1
For birdwatching, being in a vehicle is optimal.	1
Guided ATV tours	1
Helicopter (charge to allow people to go on the helicopter expeditions to capture elk which are deemed for transport, assuming the liability issues can be resolved beforehand)	1
Horseback riding (with a fee)	1
Kayak	3
Kayak rentals	1
Offsite parking with a tram which takes visitors to main entrance at which point the visitors can walk the refuge and of course, a ride back to the parking lot!	1
Onsite parking lots/walking trails	1
Plane	1
Public	1
Segway	1
Tramway	1
Walking group hikes	1

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 =46)

A bike trail would be great.

All of my choices are based off my experiences in the hunter access area: very poor and unsatisfactory road and trail conditions.

As a duck hunter I would hate to see miles of buses taking up the road going in and out. It's nice being in the country buses will make it like the city which will mean more litter.

Auto tour road so bumpy we couldn't use it. Car vibrated very badly even at 5 mph. Saw other people turning around also.

Balancing access with limited intrusion upon the natural habitats is of primary importance to me. Transportation is helpful in managing these competing needs while ensuring the integrity of the refuge as such.

Bigger and more signs on the highway would be very helpful.

Great place for the family; we love fishing.

I am not going to ride your bus or tram. I will just not go before I'll take that sort of option.

I believe it should be the way it was 20 years ago. No sign, no closed areas. We used to camp in the areas that are now closed. The only access is by canoe or kayak. Keep the tourist info in the front lot.

I like required speed limits, and would like some more pull-out areas to stop and observe.

I prefer plain/adequate to over-groomed. It is a natural area after all. One expects to rough it at least a bit.

I visited the refuge on a weekday. My mother, father and I were the only people there. We also took the vehicle tour of the waterfowl area. There were 2 other vehicles utilizing this area. I'm concerned that with additional methods of transportation and larger groups of people, that this refuge could be compromised. Along with progress of this kind, other issues are created.

In the past several years I was pleased to see wheelchair accessible viewing areas.

It is a long walk for people with difficulty walking.

It was very hard to find the entrance to the refuge. Actually we missed it and drove back, which took us more than 30 minutes.

It would be great to be able to ride your bike around the loop.

Liked the trail surface. It seemed natural, yet good footing.

More hiking trails of longer length. I would like to hike for 3-5 miles and ended up walking on the road which was okay since there were few cars.

Needs more access points for fly fishing, kayaking, cars, waterfowl watching, and tour buses.

Once on the refuge grounds, it was very difficult to figure out where to park and where vehicles were allowed to drive. Signs were sparse. Guests were asking each other since there were no employees to be found outside.

One way roads are a safety priority - good!

Open up more roads. More than half were closed when I went.

Roads and all trails were in good shape.

Roads are gravel, but good. There is very small signage from town. Handicap fishing is going up with tules and impossible to fish.

Signage along hwy 165 could be better to alert more people to the brand new facility and amazing opportunities to see the Tule elk and migratory birds.

Speed limits were not followed by all visitors and roads had very bad ripples and washboards.

The ability to use a bike is important.

The entrance to the refuge is littered with potholes, in addition the roads to the parking lots are not maintained well...they need gravel badly.

The handicapped accessible fishing platform at this refuge has been a wonderful place to take my wheelchair bound father for fishing and relaxing.

The hunting parking lots should be kept cleaner. Gravel would be a huge improvement.

The main road could be smoother. It was very rough.

The reeds at fishing access needs to be cleared from the front of the dock.

The refuge was very difficult to find from the major roads.

The road is kind of rough. Other vehicles speeding past on car tour knock up the large rocks.

The roads are not so well, especially on the rainy days.

There is a need to define whether a motorcycle is counted as a vehicle. The motorcycle can frighten birds into flight and other animals run on the vehicle tour road.

There is too much washboard on the roads.

Tour routes must be clearly marked at all times. I took a wrong turn one time and took a long beautiful drive into the next refuge area I had been to before. Kind of worried me at first but we got out okay.

We experienced some very deep 'washboard' type ruts along the auto tour route.

We had a jeep so no problem. I am thinking a Cadillac might have a rougher time, but really worth the bumps.

We had to stay in our car because the mosquitoes were so bad. Pool outside Visitor Center was covered in green muck.

You could get lost on the trails through the waterfowl area. It would be nice if there could be some signs marking the various routes.

You need larger and cleaner signs to the refuge (from the road), and mention it has a beautiful, new, and interactive Visitor Center, which is just wonderful.

You need more spaces to pull over and stop to look at animals and birds.

You need roadside reflectors for driving in the fog.

You should blade off the road chatter more often.

Survey Section 4

Question 3: "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 = 81)

All of the employees/volunteers that were on duty the day of our visit were very pleasant and helpful.

As I am not from the US I do not understand, why you offer hunting in a wildlife area. I was looking for wildlife and bird photography opportunities and I must say, the adjacent hunt that went on was very annoying...that was in both NWRs, San Luis and Merced.

Bicycles available would be very nice.

Both the men's and women's restrooms had no means to wash your hands. No paper towels, no running water and no hand sanitizer was available.

Bring more young people to visit this refuge (school).

Do not have clean up days for volunteers on work days.

Employees at the Visitor Center were very helpful.

Excellent facility and friendly staff.

Flush toilets please.

Generally well maintained restrooms. Was surprised this visit by a Black-Widow spider hiding in the toilet paper roll.

Gift shop would be a good addition for guide books, etc.

Grade or scrape the dirt roads so they are smoother to drive on.

Honestly I don't understand why hunting is allowed in a "refuge". I have read the displays at other refuges stating how hunting license money funds the refuge, but is this really the case in this federal refuge? Considering that humans have destroyed the habitat for these animals, its seems a real refuge should be a place of safety.

How much did you spend for this Visitor Center? I am about to go broke paying for Obama's follies and can't see how I needed to pay for this too. My taxes are unbearable as it is and I am one of those RICH GUYS making almost \$40,000 a year working my ass off.

Hunters supply a lot of funding for this refuge, but it seems they are last in considerations on conditions of hunting fields.

I am concerned the new Visitor Center will bring way more visitors, traffic etc. and pressure year round and effect the habitat and behavior of the critters.

I am very impressed with the Visitor Center.

I can't view areas that interest me, such as the hunting area. You need a tour route through the hunting area and should open the old tour route again; it's much better than the new one.

I drove a long way only to find that more than half the refuge was closed. A little upset!

I enjoy taking my grandchildren and educating them on the birds, Tule elk and other wildlife. They really like going.

I enjoy this location whenever I can. Very peaceful and beautiful. Nice to just go and relax. It is just a nice experience.

I go for fishing. There are sometimes when the plants are overgrown and getting to the fishing areas are a little harder.

I love this place. It is only a couple miles outside of town but it is so serene and beautiful. it s a great escape to a quiet place. a little noisier during hunting season but one of my favorite places to visit in the area.

I think there should be more hunter related activities outside of hunting. Like clean up days or workshops, tours, etc. which would help educate hunters more about what the service does on their end to manage the areas. This would help explain limitations, challenges, etc. which would provide more hunters with knowledge. Currently much of that information almost seems like a secret to hunters.

I was very impressed by the facilities at this refuge. The Visitor Center had excellent displays and walkways to view wildlife. The only thing that I would have liked were more trails for hiking.

I would have liked a much larger Visitor Center with more displays. Ninety percent or more of the new Visitor Center seems to be office space.

I would like to see more picnic areas, and more restroom facilities.

I would love to see the power lines underground so photos would not have power cables in them.

I'd like to visit after dark sometimes.

If San Luis does have fishing, hiking, and water trails, I would be interested. I have hunted the refuge for 7 years and have never seen any info on these activities.

If the government is trying bring in more people by offering transportation, bicycling, canoeing, kayaking, and hiking so they can get more money all they're going to do is fill the refuges full of people and trash, and it's going stress out the wild animals that live out there.

Information staff should be more informed to answer questions. When I asked about a new trail by the Visitor Center, she didn't have any idea how long. My last visit I had a question which wasn't answered. It would be possibly good to have a suggestions box for comments to get feedback. Information staff should be trained to guide people or at least guide them to a pamphlet or other person.

It is a job well done on all of the above.

It is a new facility and very beautiful. I think there was a lot of thought put into the building and the exhibits.

It is a very nice place to visit. It could use more trails to walk. We saw deer, ducks, geese, moose and coyote.

It is too over built! The Visitor Center is a joke. They built a pond in front of the building when you could walk across the road to a pond. The night lights look like an airport runway. I'm not sure what they were thinking spending money the government doesn't have.

It was a very enjoyable trip with our daughter, who is a Jr. High teacher, and our grandchildren. We enjoyed seeing the Tule elk. That was the highlight for us.

Maybe some picnic tables, a better deck for fishing, but we love the place.

Misquotes were very thick during our visit so we were not able to leave the car and view the new Visitor Center. That was one of our main reasons for visiting that day.

More focus should be spent on getting enough water to provide the full amount of habitat for waterfowl on the refuge. Many of the ponds were not flooded and couldn't be used for waterfowl in the hunting area and in the closed area.

Need a BIG sign in the parking lot warning to put on mosquito spray BEFORE opening car doors. I opened the door so I could get the spray out of the back and had a dozen mosquitoes in the car before I could even reach the spray. Because of the mosquito problem we could not walk the trail but had to just take the auto route.

Needs more portable restrooms around the trail. Would be very helpful.

Needs more waterfowl hunting and fishing areas.

New Visitor Center is very nice. Would like to be able to purchase books, post cards, etc.

New, very nice, and well thought out.

Outdoor women's restroom door didn't close properly or lock. Trail signs are hard to see. Wish there was more hiking available.

The brand new Visitor Center had nice displays, nice and clean restrooms, and a nice girl without much refuge knowledge. As a wildlife biologist and ecologist, I would have done much different displays, but some were extremely nice paintings of birds that we saw.

The employees we encountered were very friendly, we like friendly, they were most helpful. The young lady that spent the most time with us was very helpful and went out of her way (I felt) to answer all my questions and to walk over to the pamphlets and go over each one with me. I wish I could remember her name. She was sitting the closest to the front door of the Visitor Center when we arrived in the afternoon.

The environmental guide was very helpful and knowledgeable. The secretary/administrative assistant was the only person at the front desk when we arrived. Clearly she didn't think it was her job to be helpful.

The fees are out of control - it used to be \$6 to hunt per day, fewer people and more birds, I understand you can't control weather and bird movement, but this refuge should stay geared towards the hunters who are the ones buying passes, stamps, and everything else we need to kill a few birds. I do enjoy the Tule elk, but please keep the focus on benefits to the hunters.

The new Visitor Center is a great addition to the San Luis Complex and supplements the wonderful interpretive kiosks and panels along the refuge roads and trails.

The new Visitor Center is great, very informative, and it is a beautiful building.

The rangers and greeters were excellent and very helpful.

The refuge was easy to find and we were met by a staff person who gave us helpful information.

The staff was very helpful.

The very nice young lady at the desk was welcoming and friendly, but was not able to answer basic questions about the birds and wildlife we might expect to see.

The Visitor Center is very nicely done. It's nice the FWS service has its own facility, not an obscure shopping center site. It is great for bringing kids to see. But we loved it before too.

The Visitor Center was very informative. I wish it was larger.

There are locations, within the refuge, that are not flooded for waterfowl and should be. This is a federal refuge and should be fully flooded by the beginning of October in anticipation of the migration.

There are very few access point for canoes and kayaks. There are steep banks and water plants. It is difficult (safe) access.

There is a wonderful history of the area.

There is no gift shop here. We would like to be to purchase DVDs, photos, or books about the area.

There is too much funding being spent on non-hunting facilities and activities. The hunting areas and habitat seem the same or less tended to year after year, while a multimillion dollar Visitor Center, walking paths, etc. get improved for what I would guess serves non-hunters. I would guess that hunters provide way more funds than others.

This is a beautiful and very well designed facility. It was a pleasure to visit and learn about what this area has to offer in terms of wildlife observation and conservation. Staff was welcoming and knowledgeable.

This is a beautiful refuge and facility. The new Visitor Center is absolutely gorgeous. I have been visiting this refuge for over 30 years and it keeps getting better. I am glad to live so close.

This refuge layout and access is confusing to me. There is no map that shows the entire refuge... only maps that show sections. I was confused what section of the refuge I was in. But overall, I had a very positive experience at this refuge.

This Visitor Center is exceptional! I just think the sign needs to be larger on the road to it, so more people go by to see it. It needs more exposure in the paper, community, and schools so more people use it.

Thoroughly enjoyed the Visitor Center exhibits, media presentation and the bronze elk statue. We were able to see elk from viewing window! Appreciated the green design of building -- also the building seemed to fit in very well with landscape.

Very limited water area to fish due to water plants at fishing stations even at the handicap area.

Very nicely done.

Visitor Center was clean with different displays explaining what to look for on our drive tour and personnel very informative . Mosquitoes were the only downside!

Waterfowl hunting comments: Refuges need more assigned blinds, ponds, and areas instead of being free to roam.

We enjoyed time spent, and will bring family members when they visit us here in Los Banos.

We were there birdwatching and the staff provided us with information about birds at San Luis and Merced National Wildlife Refuges. Very helpful for out of town visitors.

We would like to explore the roads better on foot but feel intimidated by all the closed area signs even though you allow sheep to graze all over the refuge which includes fencing and shepherds in large vehicles with large noisy trailers.

When I told a (desk) staff person I had a question, she said to get a brochure! When I returned with the brochure, there was a second, more helpful staff person. But she made clear she wasn't familiar with current conditions. About the only thing that is critical in a Visitor Center is a staff person that is knowledgeable about the refuge. She did advise me to go to the Merced River NWR, which I did, and it was excellent - so ultimately, I was satisfied. But the bottom line is that courteous and knowledgeable staff are very important!

Wonderful, new and clean. Thank you.

Would be nice to have some sort of gift shop.

You need more water habitat (wetland). It needs more attention. Why can't we hunt doves?

You should have your own separate check station for hunters and so should your units at Bear Creek, South and North Freitas, and Blue Goose.

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 = 158)

1. Migratory birds. 2. Much fewer visitors than National Parks and thus more solitude. 3. Wildlife oriented rather than scenery oriented. So it is more of dynamic beauty than static beauty.

A lot of wildlife.

Access to wildlife and especially birds. Opportunity to hike and enjoy peace and quiet. Appreciate importance of nature for my well being.

All the different species of animals you can see at the refuge, they are not the same. If you go to San Luis refuge you can see the Tule elk, if you go to Merced you can see the migrating waterfowl. It's all very beautiful to see.

All the viewing platforms.

Animals can be seen that have a very big place to live in a fence.

As a visitor, I value the opportunity to see and hear wildlife first-hand. As a citizen and taxpayer I'm glad to know that we are managing our spectacular wildlife well. Even though I'm not a hunter myself, I still view well-regulated hunting as a part of our nation's history and culture.

At this National Wildlife Refuge you are able to see endangered elk.

Because the natural habitat is under restoration for species that need to have their habitat saved. There is a great need for this restoration. It is important that people see animals in their natural habitat.

Because there is duck hunting.

Being able to view Tule elk and other wildlife makes it unique.

Better maintained as well as better facilities and more information available.

Better organized than other places.

Birds, birds, birds, lovely wetlands, peace and quiet. When it's not hunting season.

Easily accessed and free.

Emphasis is to provide habitat for wildlife. In this case, it provided me with a glimpse into what the San Joaquin Valley must have been like before agriculture transformed it.

Endangered species: Tule elk, etc.

Everything was left natural.

For me, I like that the National Wildlife Refuges protect and conserve land, wildlife and their habitats. They perform an important service by educating visitors which instills in each visitor the importance of being environmentally aware and protective of our national wildlife habitat resources.

Great hunting opportunities for waterfowl.

Having the right to hunt on good accessible land with other hunters makes it unique.

Hunting and fishing

Hunting and off season hiking and exploring makes it unique.

Hunting, fishing and viewing all in one.

I am able to get closer to and see more of the wildlife - what is left of it before more of it is destroyed.

I am not a hunter but I don't knock on those who do. The effort to keep this area in a pristine condition i.e.: wetlands and the elk observers is a noble one. I hope it can remain as is forever.

I appreciate the emphasis on conserving habitat. Frequently, other federal lands cater far too much to off-road vehicles, shooting, and other destructive activities. NWRs would do well to emphasize conservation.

I appreciate the fact that the refuges are not overdeveloped and commercialized. They provide respect for nature and uncluttered closeness to the cradling web of life from which we all grow.

I feel like the employees love their jobs and take so much pride in the work that it shows. Kendal was so sweet and helpful.

I like it because it is in the middle of nowhere. I would see the signs passing through but never though there would be land set aside. Beautiful land, interesting animals, and the exhibits at the Visitor Center were fantastic!

I love the opportunity to see different birds at different times of the year!

I love to fish with my family. We love the deck you provide in the camp, but maybe more trash cans.

I loved the Visitor Center; it is great for kids and very attractive. It makes you want to go in.

In central California, the refuges offer the only opportunities to view wildlife and wetlands at this magnitude.

It gives public access to hunt.

It has easy access and is usually inexpensive.

It helps preserve areas and provides an insight to a past that should not be forgotten.

It helps preserve wildlife for future generations and recognizes wildlife in an area you might not realize was there.

It is a great place for hunting activity.

It is a great place to relax and enjoy the wildlife.

It is a peek at undisturbed natural habitats that are so essential for our native species.

It is a place to go and hunt.

It is a public place to not only view wildlife but to allow hunting for those who do not have access to private lands or clubs.

It is always good to walk around in an environment that is natural, and provides kids and adults alike to observe nature around them.

It is an opportunity for children to learn and see the Tule elk, different birds and enjoy our many resources.

It is an opportunity to observe and photograph wildlife in their natural setting.

It is hands on and you can see all the beauty.

It is land that the public is allowed to hunt; some of the refuges are well maintained and pleasant to visit, however others receive very little attention in maintenance.

It is maintained and unobstructed in a natural state.

It is not crowded and offers some of the best wildlife viewing and solitude in the state.

It is so natural for the area, the elk herd, and the birds are wonderful.

It is the only place to view elk in CA.

It is unique because I've never been around so many hunters when birdwatching/observing wildlife.

It is unique because the focus seems to be more about preserving the land for the sake of the wildlife and not for the sake of us people. Realizing that this land isn't just about people is what makes it so special.

It is unique because there are plenty of ways to spend your time at the refuge.

It is user friendly and dog friendly.

It is very educational, family friendly, and great service from staff.

It provides a place to see elk in California. This is unique to this area. It is great to bring children and even adults curious about wildlife.

It provides a refuge for animals, migrating birds, and an area for fish! I am so thankful for what the National Wildlife Refuges do!

It provides an above average area to hunt for citizens unable to obtain private hunting opportunities.

It provides an opportunity to view wildlife and maintain critical habitats.

It relays the importance we all share in protecting and maintaining unique wildlife habitats. We need to encourage/ direct children to be good stewards to ensure wildlife refuges continue.

It still looks all natural. If they start charging a fee to see this refuge, people will not come to visit.

It was a unique and beautiful way to observe wildlife and watch birds.

It was clean and well maintained.

It's close to where I live and is in the process of bringing the ancient environment back.

It's good to inform the public about the importance of wild animals and how they help control a healthy population.

It's nice to know that there is a place where animals can be supervised from people that don't care about taking care of them.

It's the only one I've been to.

Land that the common man would never be able to use or see if not made open to the public.

Location.

Location and elk.

Location and the preservation of natural habitat....

Management mandate and strict adherence to restoration of NWR. The fact that the refuges are accessible to the public is unique in itself.

More natural, original.

My partner has duck hunted and frog hunted for 25 years at this refuge. We also check out the elk.

NWR and state wildlife areas are very special places. It is fun to see the changes take place, as winter sets in it is always exciting to go back. I love seeing the ducks and geese flying in huge numbers (usually over the closed zone) it is something you don't see on other types of lands.

On any road trips that I have taken for over 30 years I will always look at maps and research availability for bird watching and wildlife viewing. I am not usually disappointed and have visited many NWRs in many states.

Opportunity to view wildlife in their natural habitat, usually in a relatively uncrowded, quiet setting.

Preserving the Tule elk populations.

Restoring elk to this region makes it unique.

Services, facilities, and activities are not available at other facilities.

Solitude.

Specifically managed for wildlife preservation as well as hunting in a controlled environment.

That funding to acquire the refuges was provided by hunting stamps and that the focus for providing hunting opportunities has been maintained. Also, that there are many benefits to non-game species while the land is managed for game species.

The ability to see wildlife in its natural setting.

The amount of wildlife and natural areas makes it unique.

The areas are usually more quiet and allow for better bird watching. Plus people usually stay in their cars.

The availability of wildlife and the availability to see and enjoy it. Plus it is free and that is becoming more and more important each year.

The birds make it unique.

The collaboration of the refuges with local farmers as well as hunters and visitors.

The combination of enjoying the outdoors, learning about it, and preserving it at the same time.

The conservation of endangered species and habitat is very important and this refuge is doing great work in both areas.

The control over mother nature vs. human interference is celebrated well in refuges. We have enjoyed them more than National Parks because it's more about the survival of the species.

The counts and variety of birds and wildlife makes it unique.

The diversity/variety of animals and birds - different than national parks!

The elk, the wonderful videos in the Visitor Center and not only is it great for kids, but the adults enjoy it too.

The enclosed herd with a view from the platform and binoculars makes it unique.

The experience of seeing new kinds of wildlife in a natural habitat made it unique.

The fact that most if not all NWRs are on the wildlife's natural migratory path.

The level of conservation and hunting opportunities.

The National Wildlife Refuges that I visit have a combine use venue. They have both sanctuary areas and hunting areas. I have seen a decline in the past ten years in the Sacramento area refuges' habitat management in the hunting areas. If you look at the water/habitat management of Sacramento, Delevan and Colusa NWR hunt area they have NO food sources in the hunt areas. No water grass, no smart weed, just muddy bottoms to the ponds. San Luis has a program that allows water and rehabilitation of units. Birds use the hunt area as feeding and protection habitat. Kudos to the wildlife managers in the grassland hunting areas.

The obvious attention to detail for the care and safety of the wildlife including migratory populations makes it unique.

The opportunity to watch animals in their native habitat makes it unique. My whole family enjoyed seeing all the wildlife, except for the mosquitoes.

The particular migratory route represented.

The preservation of wildlife habitat. I am a frequent visitor to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Excellent preservation of Whooping Crane habitat that needs to be expanded.

The San Luis NWR is very unique and most people have no idea there are grasslands in the Central Valley. I love seeing the Tule elk and the large variety of waterfowl.

The Tule elk makes it unique.

The Tule elk.

The Tule elk.

The Visitor Center and Tule elk.

The Visitor Center is so nice and full of information unlike most refuges I've drove through. The facility is very well-maintained and there were a lot of things to do and see.

The Visitor Center is very nice and clean with great hours on weekends.

The Visitor Center is very nice.

The whole purpose of the refuge is to not only educate but preserve our wildlife and natural resources. From our visit we decided that this refuge is doing an excellent job on both scores.

The wildlife and bird watching makes it unique.

The wildlife and the habitat seem less disturbed, more isolated... NWRs seem less developed than state and national parks - and that's good!

The wildlife focus.

The wildlife, especially the Tule elk, make it unique.

There are more chances of seeing wildlife at a refuge.

There are too many elk in CA. There is a lot of access for hunters but not much for fishing. It's becoming too commercial. Leave the wild area wild.

There is an emphasis on wildlife conservation, especially ducks and geese and in this case elk. They are excellent places for bird watchers.

There is less traffic than State or National Parks, and more rural and country like. Sounds like this one has a lot of hikes, boat rides, bikes riders, and fishing I was unaware of. Nice place.

These areas are premier lands set up for the protection of wildlife and offering recreational opportunities for people to use these areas. Nowhere can you find lands quite as unique as these to view large numbers of waterfowl, etc.

They are at a great location for migratory waterfowl; I would like to see more hunting opportunities for youth and disabled hunters. I would like to see our license and stamp money go towards land that is open to hunting. There are already a lot of closed zones and every time land is purchased near a refuge it becomes a closed area.

They are natural places for all to enjoy.

They are visited by few people, which means I get a better chance to quietly observe and carefully listen without the chatter of lots of folks who come for recreation.

They are well-maintained and easily accessible to all.

They generally offer excellent birding opportunities which is important to me, especially for water birds.

They have a wonderful new Visitor Center and short trails.

They have nicer facilities, are better staffed, and allow for a wider range of use.

They manage, protect, and teach about species/habitats that are endangered and/or threatened.

They occupy vital land/water, especially for migratory birds. They do not have unwanted development. They compliment with the National Parks.

They often offer concentrations of wildlife not easily accessible elsewhere. They help struggling animal populations survive.

They provide a place for a person to see birds and animals in their native habitat.

They provide habitat, breeding locations, and food sources for migrant species.

They provide the opportunity to view more wildlife.

They save and conserve for wildlife and animals which makes it unique.

This is the way the valley looked before it was developed. It is nice to see and learn about.

This refuge has elk which we love to come and see during different times of the year.

Tranquil generally pristine environment. Nature at its best. Just need to convince visitors that when they are there it is OK to shut their cell phones off.

Unique in that it is restored marshland in the California Central Valley and temporary home to a great number of migratory birds.

Unlike city parks, the refuge is a clean place with clean water and beautiful animals in a natural state. The more concrete and black top that is put on the ground is taking that all away. If city people don't like dirt stay in the city.

Up close to bird and elk in their natural habitat... most relaxing and a beautiful way to spend a day.... nothing more beautiful than white egrets leaning into the wind on one leg in wide open spaces....

Very quiet, non-commercial. I like it!

We don't see as many elk and birds as other parks.

We have elk there. We have hunting allowed.

We learned some different things we did not know prior.

We were able to see wildlife in its natural state of being.

Well maintained and friendly staff.

Well managed, pamphlets very informative, roads, trails are maintained - the new Visitor Center is wonderful for education, as are the displays along the auto route.

Well this location has very many activities and is very easy going. It's nice to be able to go somewhere that allows freedom to roam and choose for yourself.

Well-trained staff, well-maintained facilities.

With the growth of people, it is a rare day when we get to enjoy nature at its best. National Wildlife Refuges offer a way for us shut-ins to get out and see God at his greatest work.

You are able to see elk, coyotes, and rabbits - more visible than in National Forests.

You can go at your own pace. It is peaceful and not over crowded.

You get to see elk and different types of birds.

You should maximize viewing opportunities, not just by luck. Engage visitors in witnessing/preserving wildlife.

Additional Comments (n = 47)

After spending 3 hours hiking and birding it's very difficult to recall details such as the condition of parking lots, etc. in any refuge park, beach, etc. The day we were at San Luis, we also visited Merced - I would love to spend more time at both locations next year (at least one day each).

Any other place to visit like the one in Los Banos, CA, please advise (name given, address given, email given).

As I said before, the quality of the hunting area needs to be addressed. I see all the work of planting, burning, and bringing more waterfowl to the closed zones however there is nothing but a tractor and dike in the hunting zone.

Climate change is a natural occurrence. In the 70's we were told that North America would be covered in ice by now. Nothing that we do can change the climate enough to change the weather patterns. Climate change in my opinion is just another way for people to get grants and funding!!! I appreciate what you do to maintain the wildlife and natural areas, but limiting public areas, confiscating private lands and putting animals before people is all wrong.

Education is key to saving our resources.

Enjoyed visit except for the mosquitoes!

Great facility for viewing wildlife.

I am 75 years old, but I don't consider myself as handicapped. I do have a problem during waterfowl hunting on fields that were plowed for management purposes. It would be helpful if they would finish the area to preserve fowl. These areas do provide important recreation for watershed methods. I am also a member of CWA, AV, Andolten Waterfowl which also provides funding for the refuges. I was told by a refuge worker that they were managers for ducks and wildlife, not hunters. I don't approve.

I am concerned the refuge system has spent a bunch of money building fancy Visitor Centers and check stations which cost a lot of money but have made no effort to improve the land or manage predations from coyotes or damage from beavers.

I believe water management could improve. Flood up during the hunt area is often a few weeks late resulting in birds not utilizing the hunt area to optimal capacity. In addition, management needs to plan better during years the Mendota pool is shut off to avoid the refuge hunt area from drying up like many units did during 2011. Contingency planning should include better budget planning to pump more water, purchase water if needed from other sources, and other required conveyance improvements required to facilitate keeping the area flooded up. One particular area of concern is late flood up of Bear Creek. This unit should be flooded up much earlier than it does. Hunters like the mid November opening there but often water doesn't start coming until a couple of weeks before. Crane Flat in 2012 wasn't flooded until a few days before the season. These units should be fully flooded weeks before the season to allow sufficient imprinting and sanctuary for birds north of the San Luis Unit where the heaviest bird use traditionally occurs that time of year. More concerning is the mismanagement of Merced NWR. Alkali bulrush has taken over the hunt area due to improper management techniques. The area around the year 2000 looked great and has since gone steadily downhill. More emphasis should be placed on putting a manager in place at Merced that understands water management and understands how to maximize habitat potential. From a safety standpoint the Service should take a look at the old blinds at San Luis. Many of these are very dangerous now. Some of the pits have been stepped into by hunters and dogs and people have been injured. Either put new blinds in or remove the old damaged, broke down blinds altogether to prevent someone from getting hurt. Many of these are very well disguised like those on the NW corner of Dickenson 5 that are under the water in a bulrush patch. I almost stepped in those and they are an accident waiting to happen.

I enjoy going to the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge to get out of the sun. There is a lot of shade out there during the summer. My father-in-law is disabled and there is a handicap fishing ramp he really enjoys. Anytime I am in the area we stop by and enjoy fishing for catfish and bass. There is also crawfish during the hotter months.

I had a very enjoyable visit, keep up the good work.

I hope that there will always be funds to support the wonderful job that National Wildlife Refuges do. I feel that in the area of Furlock that I live, there is not a huge community support for wildlife refuges as there could be. We are surrounded by about 5 wildlife refuges, but I'm not sure how many people in this community visit them. Perhaps, there needs to be articles written about them. Schools need to draw attention about them, and perhaps parents also. I saw a special about Chico, CA and the wonderful snow geese festival that they have there. We need something like that here for more recognition of the importance of these refuges in our local area.

I look forward to going to the refuge every weekend from October thru January. The last thing I want to see is a bunch of littering city slickers roaming around. If it came to that I guess I would go some where else.

I really love SLNWR - it is always so beautiful and peaceful and I always see amazing wildlife! We saw Lesser Sandhill Cranes on this visit! Oh and a Peregrine Falcon!!!

I visit often. It's close to home and free.

I was very impressed with the Visitor Center as the exhibits were informative especially for children. Enjoyed the variety of birds we saw on the auto tour route. The highlight was a trio of coyotes frolicking in the fields. Enjoyed the nature walks and would like to see a few more picnic tables. It was a wonderful experience for us to visit this refuge.

I wish there were more hiking trails and the existing trails were better marked. I was told there are hiking trails at the entrance on 165, but I always thought those entrances were for hunters only. I thought the only trails were at the Wolfsen entrance. The person I asked at the desk didn't know. I'll have to go there sometime and check for myself. Probably after hunting season just in case.

I'll be back.

I've been coming to San Luis for about 20 years, the new auto tour is nice - look forward to doing it at Christmas next year (my favorite time to come).

I've seen modernization and improvement in the last ten years.

It was a beautiful experience all the way around: the Visitor Center, the drive/loop for the water fowl, the surrounding areas/habitats. Just beautiful.

Lovely spot, wonderful new building. We live in Stockton, we will come back.

My big concern at San Luis Wildlife Refuge area is that there you need to remove or fill old barrel blinds with no lids. I have seen people fall into them and get hurt not knowing where there at. Some people's dogs have fell into them as well. Big deal with people. I know for safety reasons. I've seen people fall into them that know where they are at "Dark 30" or foggy conditions. This is very dangerous for us, kids, and hunting dogs.

Nice place.

Please do not destroy the grit of the natural aspect of this preserve by becoming too improved.

Please focus your resources on conserving these places (and habitat/wildlife) first, then on educating the public. As part of the education, please do not shy down from the facts of climate change. We need bold leadership to get past the idiot denialists.

Question overheard at the Visitor Center - "Why do they need so much office space to manage this refuge?" Is there a poster map and history of what you all do? Most folks haven't a clue.

RE: Climate Change. I am not a scientist and do not trust most who are. Their finds are mostly for monetary gains through the political system. I hope the honest ones remain and the outcome is beneficial to us all. With that said, I really admire the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife.

San Luis NWR is a gem; keep it natural.

San Luis NWR has lost its way. The focus should be the wildlife, not the comfort of visitors. Any visitors like the hunters should have to pay to enter. The money for the Visitor Center could have been better spent on water or new land.

The day was beautiful, we saw a few birds, but the driving experience was like a Disneyland boat ride. Very comfortable and not too fast. We ate in Los Banos Wool Growers for the end of a perfect day.

The more trails the better as long as it doesn't disturb the wildlife.

The new Visitor Center at this refuge is great. When I first walked in I thought it was small, but it's packed with educational information and when I sat on the leather love seat over looking the Tule elk area I was sold!!!

The new Visitor Center looks very nice.

The refuge is excellent: a good balance for hunters and sightseers . I am very happy with the way it works and feel that it is the best balance for man and wildlife, and feel very lucky to enjoy it the way I have. Thanks for doing a good job of making it so useable and keeping it wild.

The refuge seemed to be set up well for bird watching. Unfortunately, we were there in the middle of the day, which is not the best time but we still saw many birds, including Great Horned Owls. As someone who has visited many NWRs, I appreciated the Visitor Center, the helpful staff, and the highway signs to the refuge. It is next to impossible to find some refuges and others don't even have kiosks or any information for new visitors when you do find the refuge. This one was great.

The Visitor Center and its environs are beautiful! Love the exhibits, the building, the statue out front, and the boardwalk.

This was my first visit to this refuge. It was very favorable. We will return. It gives the ability to see and leisurely watch wildlife in a quiet very pleasing environment. A job well done.

Very impressed with the new Visitor Center. Wonderful exhibits and the Tule elk viewing area from within the center was quite innovative. Also, the staff member behind the desk the morning of our visit was friendly, knowledgeable and professional.

We (my husband and I) went almost once a week since we heard about the wildlife refuge by Los Banos. I have some of the most beautiful photos of the elk in all seasons of the year. My favorite picture is one where my husband held our 2 year old granddaughter up by the fence and a female walked up to the fence and I got a picture of her petting it. We didn't get out much as my husband has a stroke, but he always wanted to go out there. It is so peaceful. He is gone now (16 years) but I still drive out there quite often. At age 92, I'm a little hesitant about going out there along so I take along anyone I can. I was surprised to know people didn't even know the place existed.

We loved our experience here. Can't wait to make a return trip.

We loved seeing the Tule elk and will come back to see them when they have their antlers! Thanks to all for all the hard work (physical and behind the scenes) maintaining the refuge!

We were too early in the year to see many birds, and were badly bitten by mosquitoes (October visit). Some of the ponds were not yet flooded.

Will continue to visit this refuge as long as it's open. We always enjoy our trips here.

Your focus on climate change misses the boat. The real problem is the untouchable third rail - 'excess human population'.
