



# National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey 2012: Individual Refuge Results for La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

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

Refuges are not designed as tourist attractions, as their prime reason for existence is to maintain and/or enhance the wildlife. Their uniqueness comes in the fact that we are invited and educated as guests to observe and somewhat participate in the programs set up, in such a manner that the plan will let others in the future accomplish the same activities.

*— Survey comment from a visitor to La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge*



La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

Photo credit: Bob Hurt.

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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 La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (NWFR) (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.

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

<b>Pacific Region (R1)</b>
Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge (WA)
<b>Southwest Region (R2)</b>
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)
<b>Great Lakes-Big Rivers Region (R3)</b>
La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (WI)
Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (MN)
<b>Southeast Region (R4)</b>
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)
<b>Northeast Region (R5)</b>
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)
<b>Mountain-Prairie Region (R6)</b>
Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge (UT)
Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge (MT)
Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge (CO)
National Bison Range (MT)
<b>California and Nevada Region (R8)</b>
Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge (CA)
San Luis National Wildlife Refuge (CA)

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  $n^{\text{th}}$  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.

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) software<sup>1</sup>.

## 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

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

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 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 La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR, 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 La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge**

Upper Mississippi NWFR winds through 260 miles of beautiful bluff country. Its marshes, wooded islands, bottomland forests and upland prairies provide the diverse habitats necessary for countless numbers of fish and wildlife. Established on June 7, 1924, this refuge begins at the Chippewa River near Wabasha, Minnesota, and ends near Rock Island, Illinois. The refuge lies within four states: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois. The river was free-flowing until a series of locks and dams were constructed in the 1930s by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). Over half of the lands managed by the refuge are owned by the Corps. Today, nearly 240,000 acres of wooded islands, marshes, and backwaters comprise the Upper Mississippi River NWFR. The refuge is divided into four management districts: Winona, La Crosse, McGregor, and Savanna. The La Crosse District encompasses Pools 7 and 8, and includes a Visitor Center in Onalaska, WI.

This refuge was established as a breeding place for migratory birds, game animals, fur-bearing animals, fish and other aquatic mammals, as well as for the conservation of wild flowers and aquatic plants. The refuge provides resting and feeding areas for a large number of migratory birds including Tundra Swans

and canvasback ducks. Additionally, Upper Mississippi River NWFR provides the public with opportunities for outdoor recreation and environmental education programs. Upper Mississippi River NWFR has roughly 1.5 million visitors annually, with 475,000 visitors specifically to the La Crosse District (2011 Refuge Annual Performance Plan measures; Rob Miller, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2012, written commun.). A variety of activities and opportunities are available to visitors at the La Crosse District, including use of the Visitor Center, waterfowl hunting, migratory bird hunting, upland game hunting, big game hunting, trapping, fishing, hiking, biking, motorized and nonmotorized boating, wildlife observation, birdwatching, photography, environmental education programs, and interpretation. Figure 1 depicts a map of the Upper Mississippi River NWFR. For more information, visit [http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Upper\\_Mississippi\\_River/LaCrosse\\_District.html/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Upper_Mississippi_River/LaCrosse_District.html/).



**Figure 1.** Map of Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## Sampling at La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

A total of 308 visitors agreed to participate in the survey during the two sampling periods at the identified locations at La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR (table 2). In all, 229 visitors completed the survey for a 75% response rate, and  $\pm 5.2\%$  margin of error at the 95% confidence level.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 2.** Sampling and response rate summary for La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

Sampling period	Dates	Locations	Total contacts	Undeliverable addresses	Completed surveys	Response rate
1	7/14/2012 to 7/28/2012	Goose Island				
		Nelson Park				
		Great River State Trail				
		Wildcat Landing				
		SP1 Totals				
2	10/27/2012 to 11/10/2012	Brownsville Overlook				
		Nelson Landing				
		Goose Island				
		Visitor Center				
		SP2 Totals				
Combined Totals			<b>308</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>75%</b>

<sup>2</sup> 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

Most visitors to La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR reported that before participating in the survey, they were aware of the role of the Service in managing refuges (90%) 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.

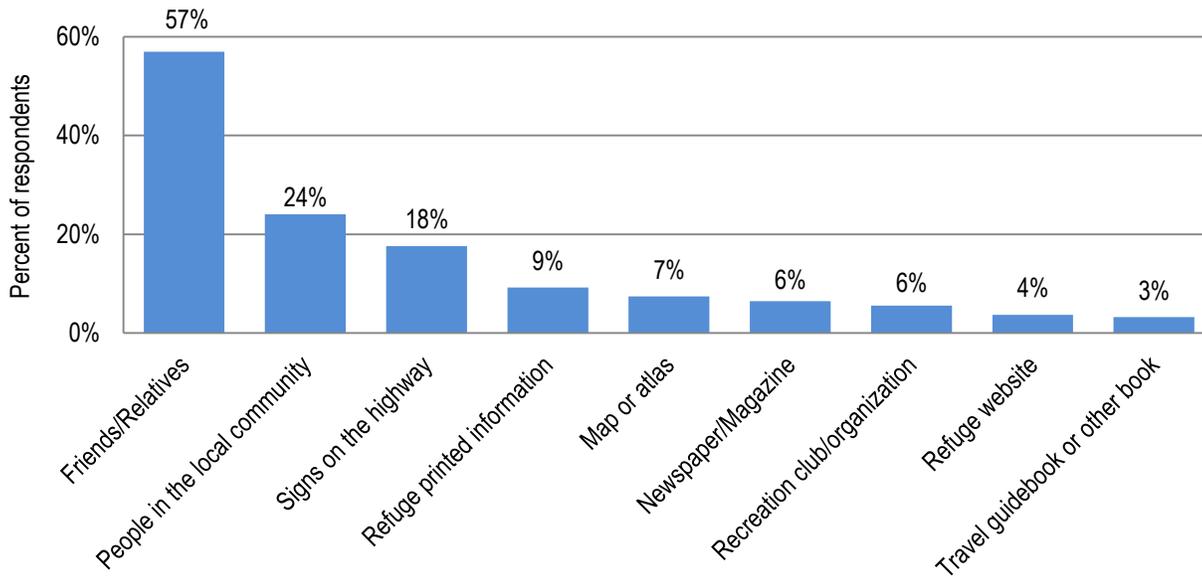
Many visitors (84%) feel that refuges, compared to other public lands, provide a unique recreation experience (see Appendix B for visitor comments on “What Makes National Wildlife Refuges Unique?”); however, reasons for why visitors find refuges unique are varied and may not directly correspond to their understanding of the mission of the Refuge System.

Half of visitors to La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR (50%) had been to at least one other national wildlife refuge in the past year, with an average of 12 visits to *other* refuges during the past 12 months.

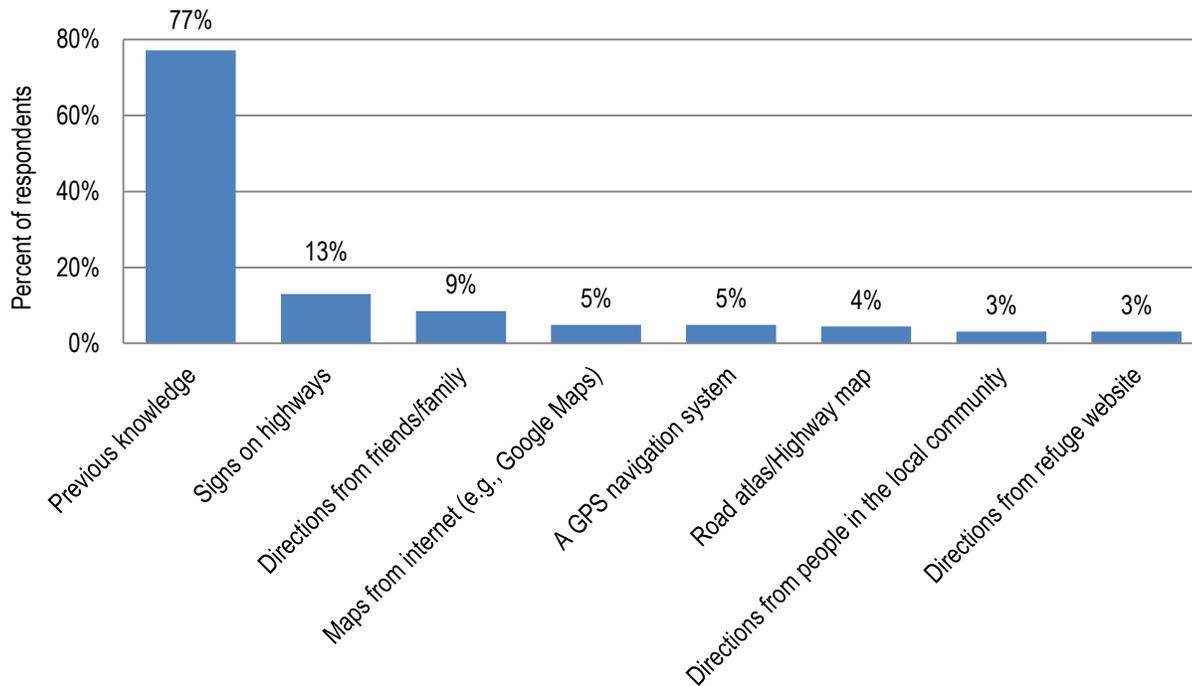
#### Visiting This Refuge

Some surveyed visitors (24%) had only been to La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR once in the past 12 months, while many had been multiple times (76%). These repeat visitors went to the refuge an average of 30 times during that same 12-month period. Visitors used the refuge during only one season (35%), during multiple seasons (31%), and year-round (33%).

Most visitors first learned about the refuge from friends/relatives (57%), people in the local community (24%), or signs on the highway (18%; fig. 2). Key information sources used by visitors to find their way to this refuge include previous knowledge (77%), signs on highways (13%), or directions from friends/family (9%; fig. 3).



**Figure 2.** How visitors first learned or heard about La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (n = 216).



**Figure 3.** Resources used by visitors to find their way to La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge during this visit (n = 223).

Most visitors (79%) lived in the local area (within 50 mi of the refuge), whereas 21% were nonlocal visitors. For most local visitors, La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR was the primary purpose or sole destination of their trips (79%; table 3). For most nonlocal visitors, the refuge was the primary purpose or sole destination of their trips (64%).

Local visitors reported that they traveled an average of 12 mi to get to the refuge, while nonlocal visitors traveled an average of 258 mi. The average distance traveled for all visitors to this refuge was 59 mi, while the median was 12 mi. Figure 4 shows the residences of visitors traveling to this refuge. About 75% of visitors traveling to La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR were from Wisconsin.

**Table 3.** Influence of La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge 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	64%	21%	15%
Local	79%	12%	9%
All visitors	76%	14%	10%

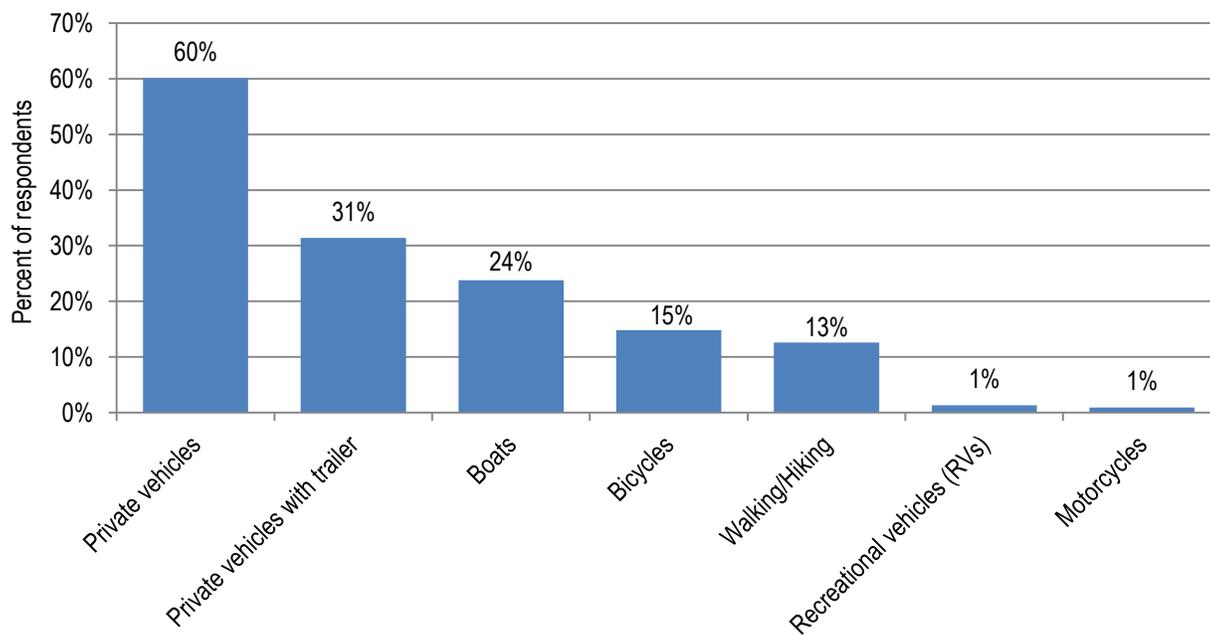


Surveyed visitors reported that they spent an average of 4 hr at the refuge during one day there, while the most frequently reported length of a day visit (the modal response) was 8 hr (28%). Most visitors indicated they were part of a group on their visit to this refuge (76%). Of those people who indicated they traveled with a group, visitors primarily traveled with family/friends (table 4).

**Table 4.** Type and size of groups visiting La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (for those who indicated they were part of a group, n = 224).

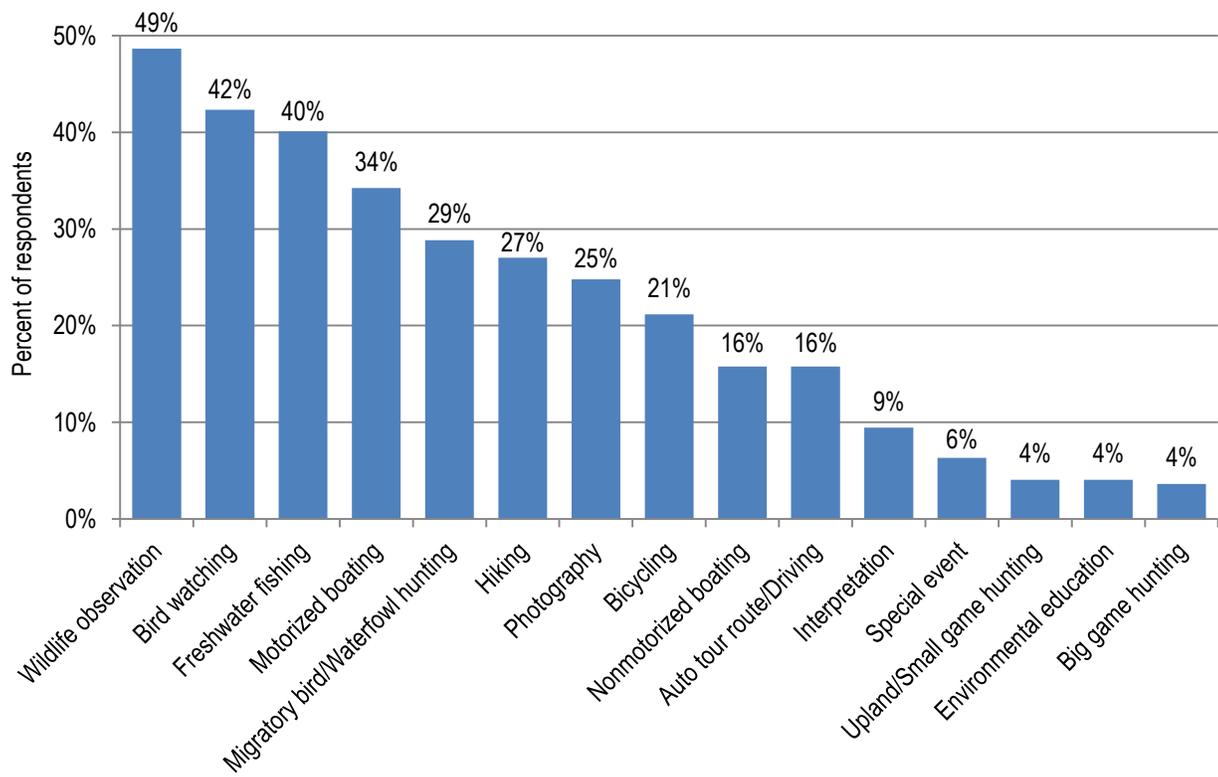
Group type	Percent (of those traveling in a group)	Average group size		
		Number of adults	Number of children	Total group size
Family/Friends	92%	3	1	4
Commercial tour group	0%	0	0	0
Organized club/School group	2%	3	13	16
Other group type	6%	8	0	8

The key modes of transportation used by visitors to travel around the refuge were private vehicles (60%) and private vehicles with trailers (31%; fig. 5).

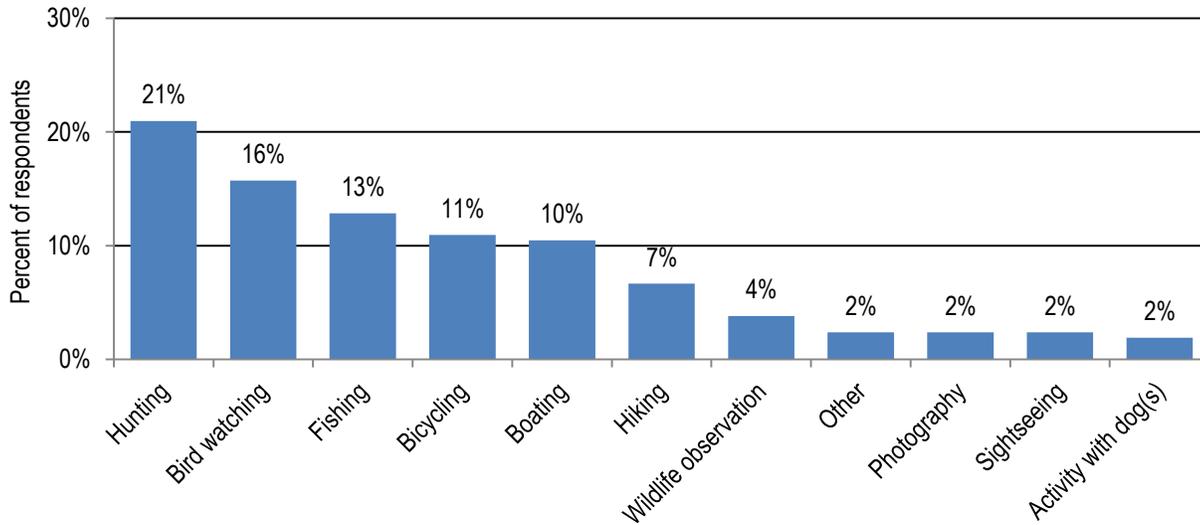


**Figure 5.** Modes of transportation used by visitors to La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge during this visit (n = 223).

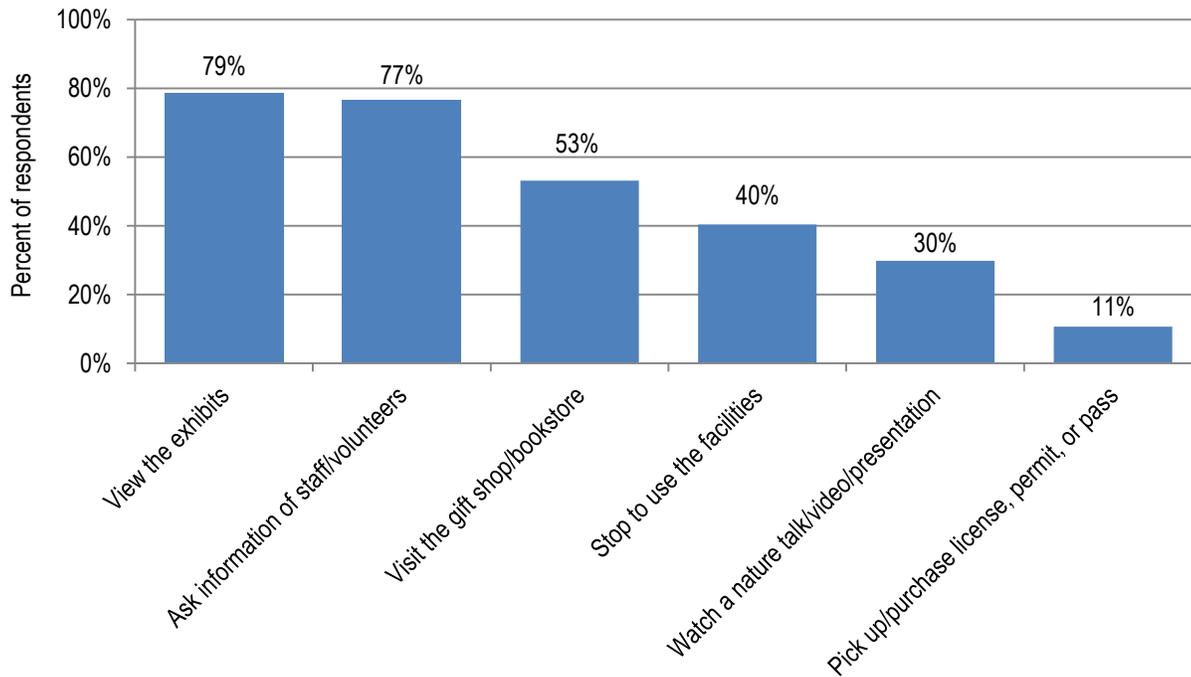
Surveyed visitors participated in a variety of refuge activities during the 12 months prior to completing the survey (fig. 6); the top three activities in which people reported participating were wildlife observation (49%), bird watching (42%), and freshwater fishing (40%). The primary reasons for visitors' most recent visits included hunting (21%), bird watching (16%), and fishing (13%; fig. 7). Some visitors also used the Visitor Center during their trips (21%), mostly to view the exhibits (79%), ask information of staff or volunteers (77%), and visit the gift shop/bookstore (53%; fig. 8).



**Figure 6.** Activities in which visitors participated during the past 12 months at La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (n = 222). See Appendix B for a listing of “other” activities.



**Figure 7.** The **primary** activity in which visitors participated during this visit to La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (n = 210). See Appendix B for a listing of “other” activities.



**Figure 8.** Visitor Center activities in which visitors participated at La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (n = 47).

## Visitor Characteristics

All visitors who participated in the survey at La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR indicated that they were citizens or permanent residents of the United States. These visitors were a mix of 70% male (with an average age of 54 years) and 30% 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 \$50,000-\$74,999. 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, 79% of surveyed visitors to La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR indicated that they live within the local 50-mi area while nonlocal visitors (21%) stayed in the local area, on average, for 5 days. Table 5 shows summary statistics for local and nonlocal visitor expenditures in the local communities and at the refuge, with expenditures reported on a per person per day basis. During the two sampling periods, nonlocal visitors spent an average of \$61 per person per day and local visitors spent an average of \$22 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 La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge expressed in dollars per person per day.

Visitors	n <sup>1</sup>	Median	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Nonlocal	41	\$54	\$61	\$49	\$0	\$206
Local	112	\$13	\$22	\$27	\$0	\$152

<sup>1</sup>n = number of visitors who answered both locality *and* expenditure questions.

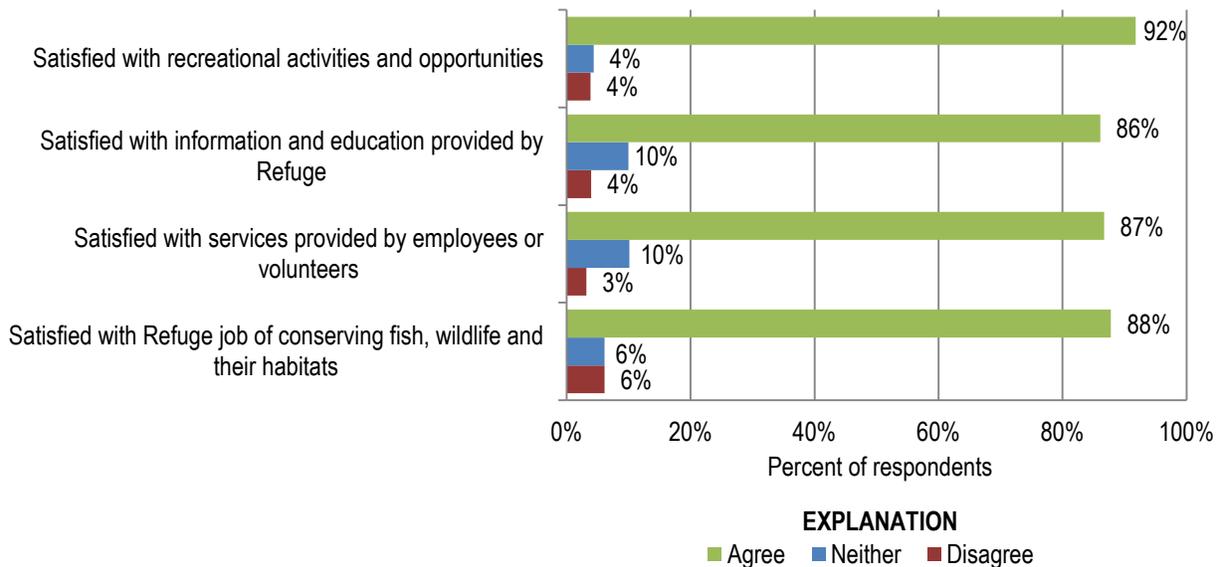
Note: For each respondent, reported expenditures were divided by the number of persons in their group that shared expenses in order to determine the spending per person per trip. This number was then divided by the number of days spent in the local area to determine the spending per person per day for 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR were as follows (fig. 9):

- 92% of visitors were satisfied with the recreational activities and opportunities,
- 86% of visitors were satisfied with the information and education about the refuge and its resources,
- 87% of visitors were satisfied with the services provided by employees or volunteers, and
- 88% of visitors were satisfied with the refuge's job of conserving fish, wildlife and their habitats.



**Figure 9.** Overall satisfaction with La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge during this visit (n ≥ 188).

## Importance/Satisfaction Ratings

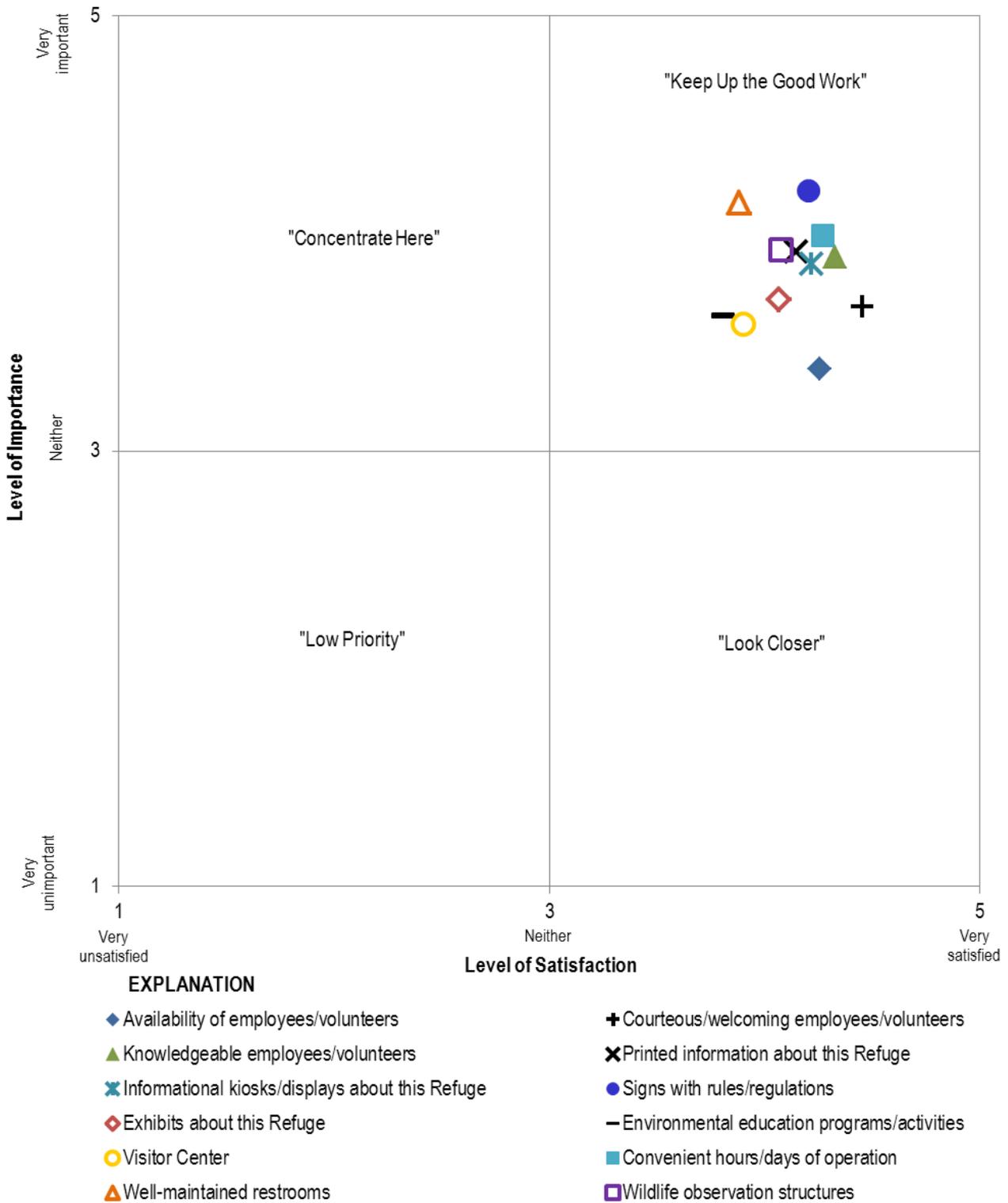
*Comparing the importance and satisfaction ratings for visitor services provided by refuges can help to identify how well the services are meeting visitor expectations. The importance-performance framework presented in this section is a tool that examines the importance of an attribute to visitors in 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.

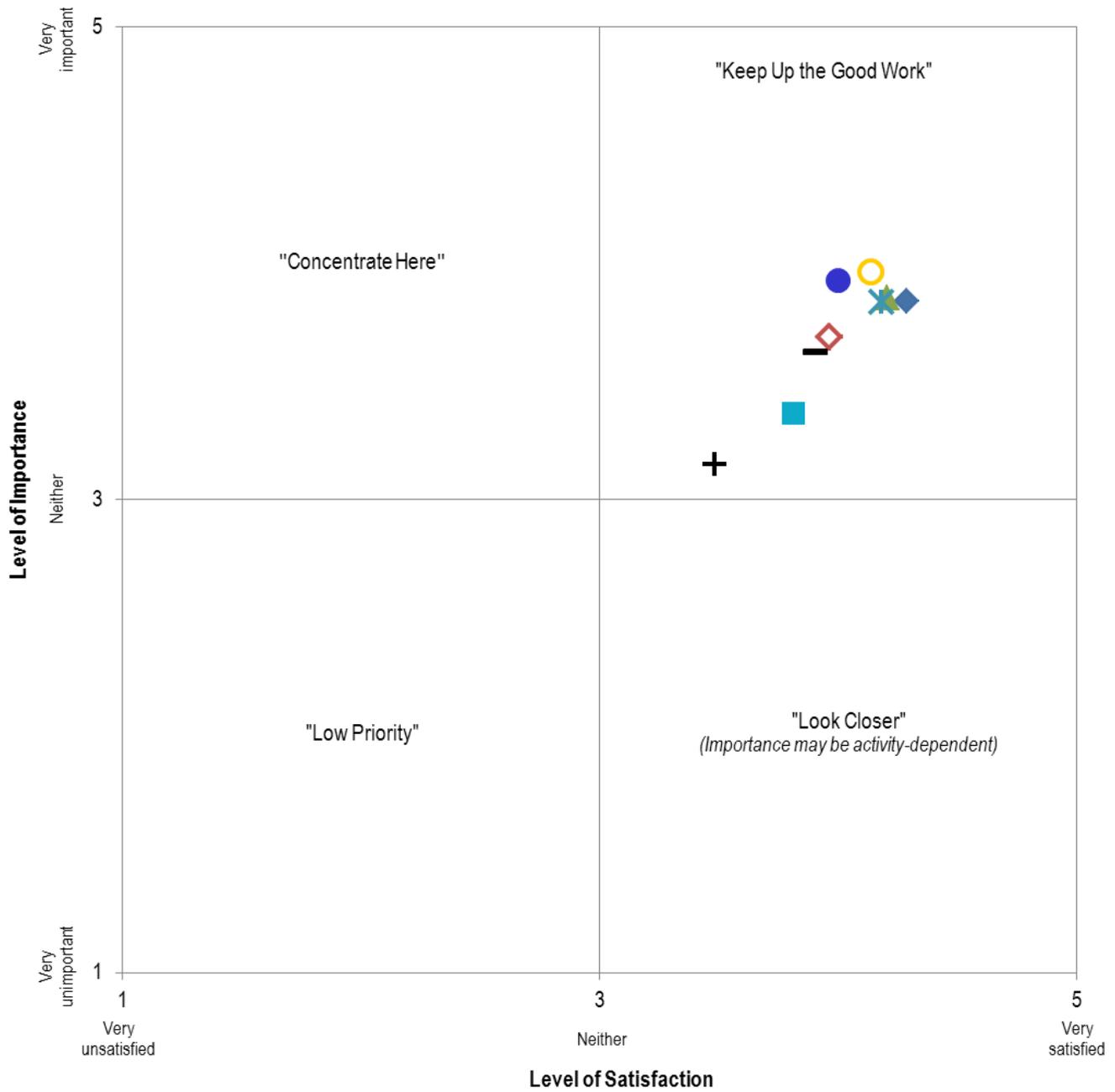
*Graphically plotting visitors' importance and satisfaction ratings for different services, facilities, and recreational opportunities provides a simple and intuitive visualization of these survey measures. However, this tool is not without its drawbacks. One is the potential for variation among different 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 La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR. 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 (fig. 11).
- All *transportation-related features* fell in the "Keep Up the Good Work" quadrant (fig. 12).



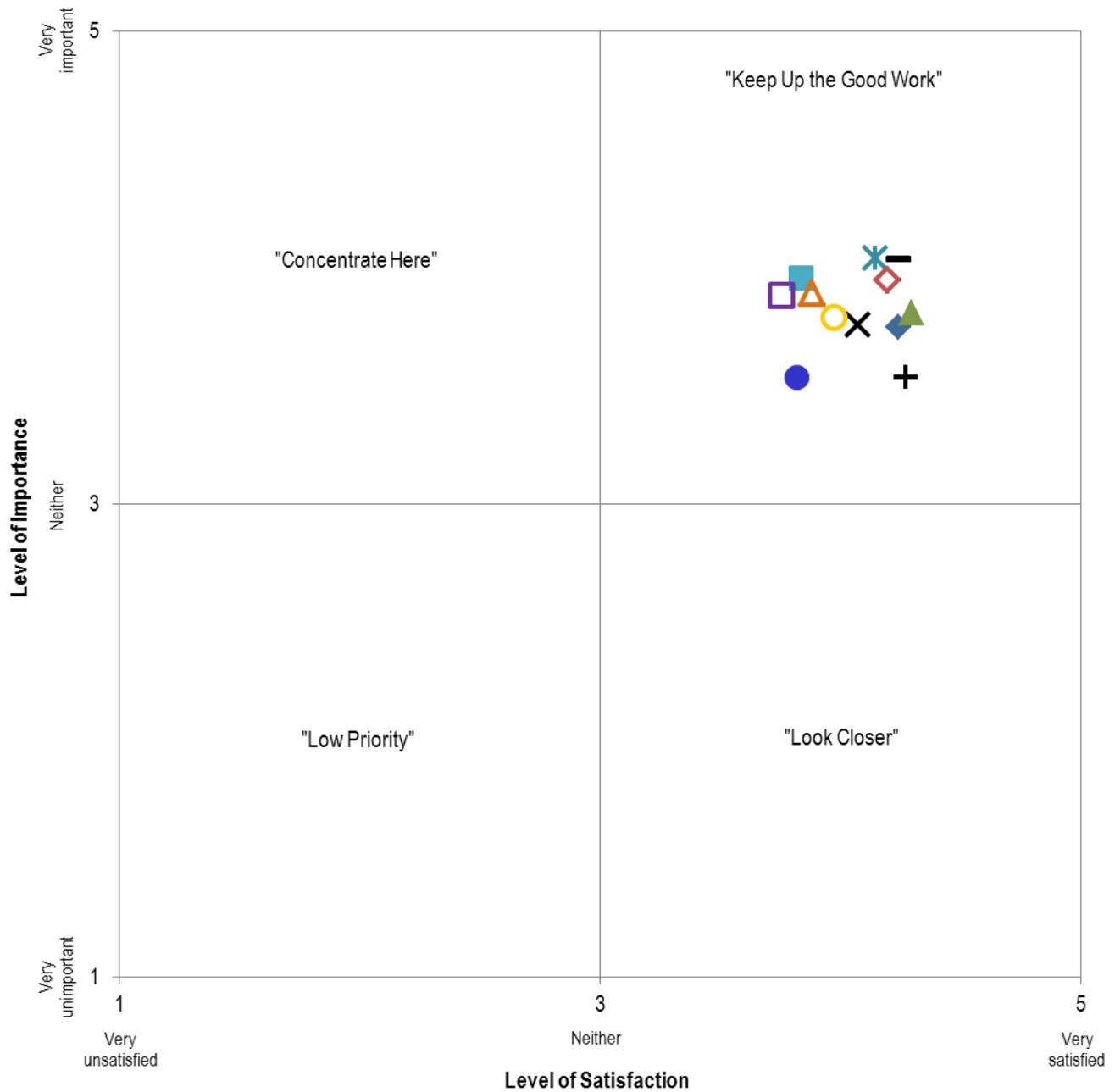
**Figure 10.** Importance-satisfaction ratings of services and facilities provided at La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.



**EXPLANATION**

- ◆ Bird watching opportunities
- Hunting opportunities
- ◊ Kayak/Canoe opportunities
- Wildlife viewing opportunities
- ⊗ Fishing opportunities
- Bicycling opportunities
- ▲ Photography opportunities
- Hiking opportunities
- + Volunteer opportunities

**Figure 11.** Importance-satisfaction ratings of recreational opportunities provided at La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.



**EXPLANATION**

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

**Figure 12.** Importance-satisfaction ratings of transportation-related features at La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

## Visitor Opinions about National Wildlife Refuge System Topics

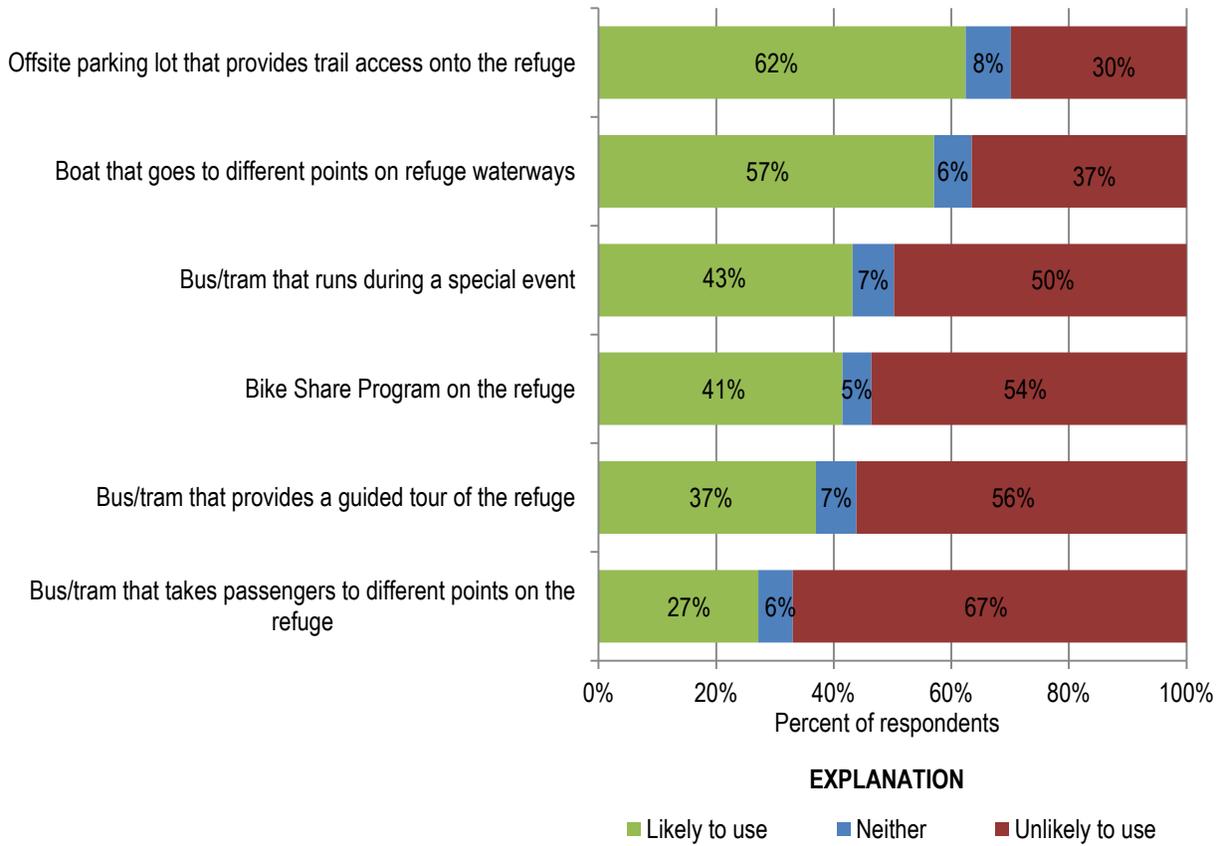
*One goal of this national visitor survey was to identify visitor trends across the Refuge System to more effectively manage refuges and provide visitor services. Two important issues to the Refuge System are transportation on refuges and communicating with visitors about climate change. The results of these questions will be evaluated in aggregate form (data from all participating refuges together) to better address national-level goals. Basic results for La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR 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 La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR visitors were likely to use an offsite parking lot that provides trail access and a boat that goes to different points on refuge waterways at refuges in the future (fig. 13). A majority of visitors indicated they were *not* likely to use the following at refuges in the future: a bus/tram that takes passengers to different points on the refuge, a bus/tram that provides a guided tour, a bike share program, or a bus/tram that runs during a special event.

When asked specifically about using alternative transportation at La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR, some visitors thought alternative transportation would enhance their experience (16%) while others thought it would not (53%). An additional 30% 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 ≥ 213).

## 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.*

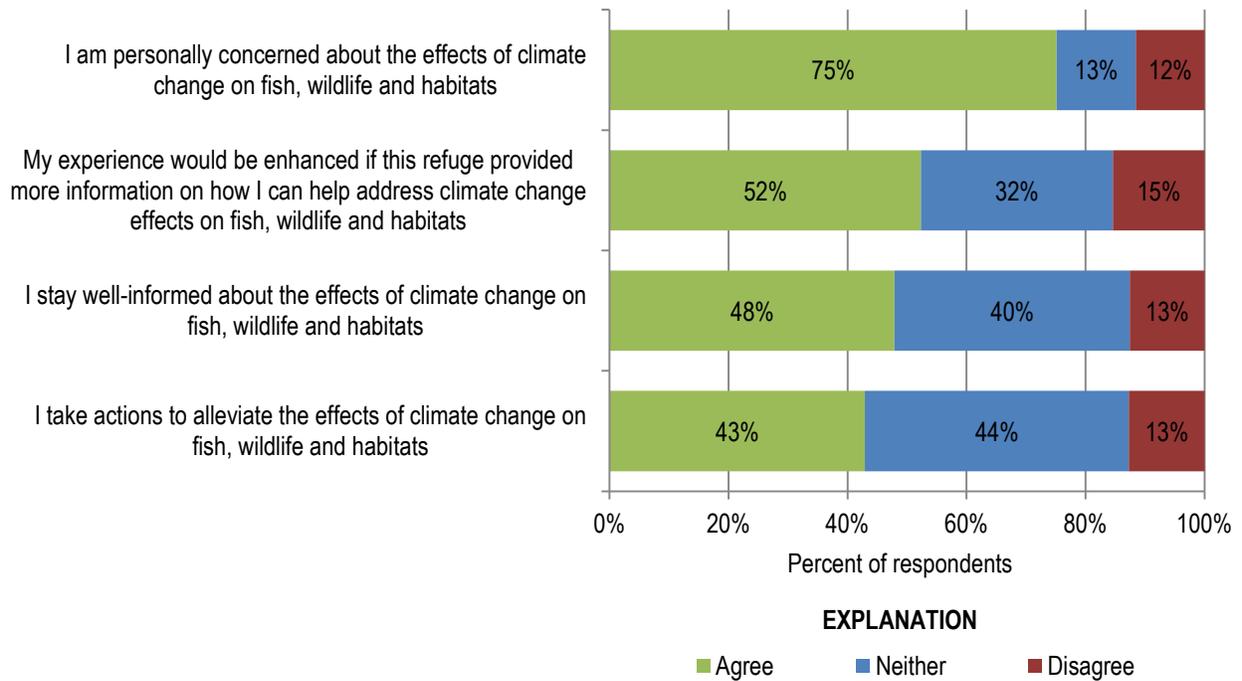
The majority of visitors to La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River NWR agreed with the following statements related to their own personal involvement with the topic of climate change as it relates to fish, wildlife, and habitats (fig. 14):

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

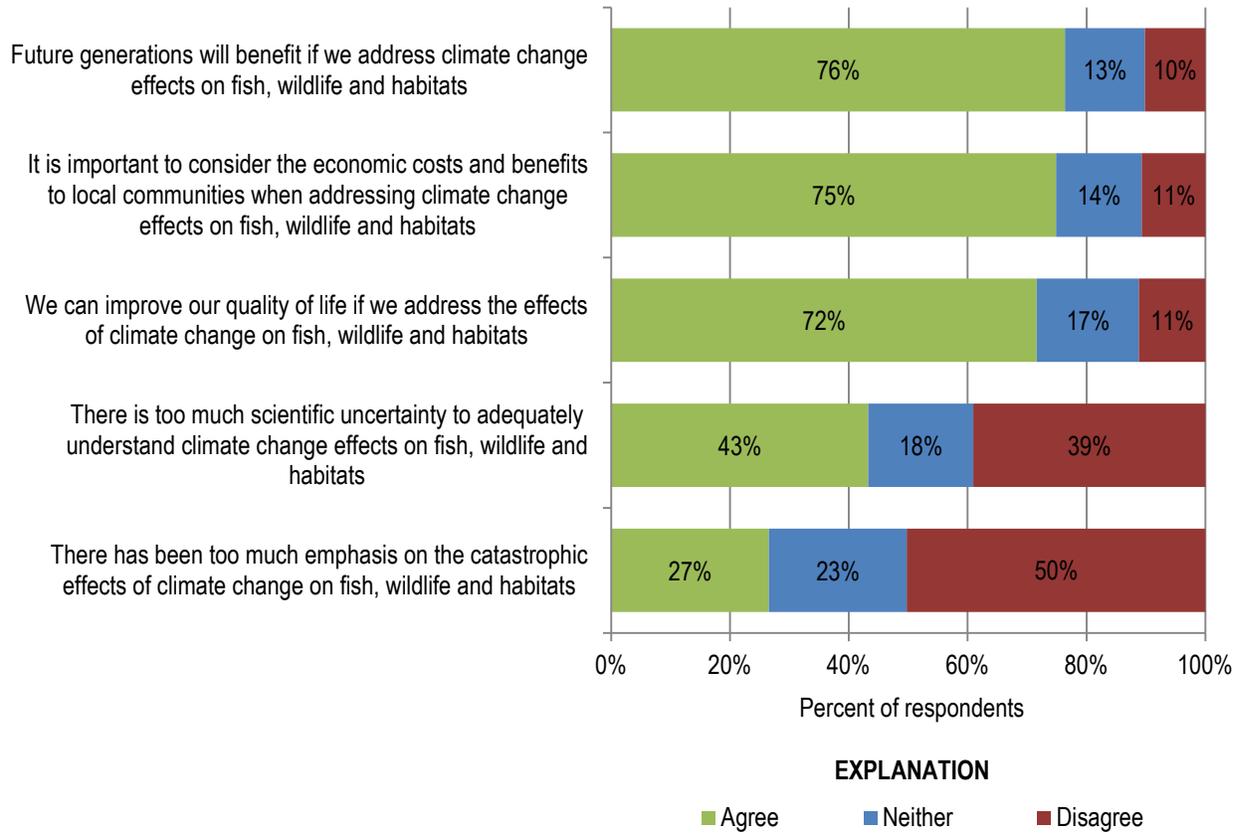
The majority of visitors also agreed with the following *belief statements* regarding climate change effects on fish, wildlife and their habitats (fig. 15):

- Future generations will benefit if we address climate change effects;
- It is important to consider the economic costs and benefits to local communities when addressing 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 more than half of visitors (52%) indicated their experiences would be enhanced if La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River 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 ≥ 212).



**Figure 15.** Visitors' beliefs about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats (n ≥ 215).

## Conclusion

These individual refuge results provide a summary of trip characteristics and experiences of a sample of visitors to La Crosse District, Upper Mississippi River 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](mailto: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"/> 4% Big game hunting                  | <input type="checkbox"/> 27% Hiking   | <input type="checkbox"/> 4% Environmental education (for example, classrooms or labs)               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4% Upland/Small game hunting         | <input type="checkbox"/> 21% Bicycling                                      |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 29% Migratory bird/Waterfowl hunting | <input type="checkbox"/> 16% Auto tour route/Driving                        | <input type="checkbox"/> 9% Interpretation (for example, exhibits, kiosks, videos)                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 49% Wildlife observation             | <input type="checkbox"/> 34% Motorized boating                              |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 42% Bird watching                    | <input type="checkbox"/> 16% Nonmotorized boating (including canoes/kayaks) | <input type="checkbox"/> 6% Refuge special event ( <i>please specify</i> )<br><u>See Appendix B</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 12% Freshwater fishing               |   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0% Saltwater fishing                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4% Volunteering                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> 9% Other ( <i>please specify</i> )<br><u>See Appendix B</u>                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25% 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?

- 79% No
- 21% Yes → If yes, what did you do there? (Please mark **all that apply.**)
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 53% Visit the gift shop or bookstore       | <input type="checkbox"/> 11% Pick up/purchase a license, permit, or pass                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 79% View the exhibits                      | <input type="checkbox"/> 40% Stop to use the facilities (for example, get water, use restroom) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 77% Ask information of staff/volunteers    |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30% Watch a nature talk/video/presentation | <input type="checkbox"/> 6% 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.**)

<b>Nonlocal</b>	<b>Local</b>	<b>All visitors</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> 64%	<input type="checkbox"/> 79%	<input type="checkbox"/> 76%	It was the primary purpose or sole destination of my trip.
<input type="checkbox"/> 21%	<input type="checkbox"/> 12%	<input type="checkbox"/> 14%	It was one of many equally important reasons or destinations for my trip.
<input type="checkbox"/> 15%	<input type="checkbox"/> 9%	<input type="checkbox"/> 10%	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?

<b>Nonlocal</b>	<u>  3  </u> Hours	<u>  33  </u> Minutes	<i>and</i>	<u> 258 </u> Miles
<b>Local</b>	<u>  0  </u> Hours	<u>  27  </u> Minutes	<i>and</i>	<u>  12 </u> Miles
<b>All visitors</b>	<u>  1  </u> Hours	<u>  2  </u> Minutes	<i>and</i>	<u>  59 </u> Miles

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

24% None, I visited this Refuge alone

*(of those visiting with a group)*

92% Family and/or friends

2% Organized club or school group (for example, Boy/Girl Scouts, hiking club, bird watching group)

0% Commerical tour group

6% 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.*)

57% Family and/or friends

4% Refuge website

18% Signs on highway

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

6% Recreation club or organization

3% Television or radio

24% People in the local community

6% Newspaper or magazine

9% Refuge printed information (brochure, map)

3% Travel guidebook or other book

7% 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.*)

54% Spring  
(March-May)

78% Summer  
(June-August)

83% Fall  
(September-November)

35% Winter  
(December-February)

10. How many times have you visited...

...this Refuge (including this visit) in the last 12 months?   23   number of visits

...other National Wildlife Refuges in the last 12 months?   6   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"/> 60% | Private vehicle without a trailer                             | <input type="checkbox"/> 0%  | Refuge shuttle bus or tram       | <input type="checkbox"/> 15% | Bicycle                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 31% | Private vehicle with a trailer<br>(for boat, camper or other) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1%  | Motorcycle                       | <input type="checkbox"/> 13% | Walk/Hike                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0%  | Commercial tour bus   | <input type="checkbox"/> 0%  | ATV or off-road vehicle          | <input type="checkbox"/> 0%  | Other ( <i>please specify below</i> ) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1%  | Recreational vehicle (RV)                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> 24% | Boat                             | <u>See Appendix B</u>        |                                       |
|                              |   | <input type="checkbox"/> 0%  | 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"/> 77% | Previous knowledge/I have been to this Refuge before | <input type="checkbox"/> 5% | Maps from the Internet (for example, MapQuest or Google Maps) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 13% | Signs on highways                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> 3% | Directions from Refuge website                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5%  | A GPS navigation system                              | <input type="checkbox"/> 3% | Directions from people in community near this Refuge          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4%  | A road atlas or highway map                          | <input type="checkbox"/> 9% | Directions from friends or family                             |
|                              |  | <input type="checkbox"/> 1% | 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"/> 55%	<input type="checkbox"/> 12%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 15%	<input type="checkbox"/> 12%
...a bike that was offered through a Bike Share Program for use while on the Refuge?	<input type="checkbox"/> 44%	<input type="checkbox"/> 9%	<input type="checkbox"/> 5%	<input type="checkbox"/> 27%	<input type="checkbox"/> 14%
...a bus or tram that provides a guided tour of the Refuge with information about the Refuge and its resources?	<input type="checkbox"/> 46%	<input type="checkbox"/> 11%	<input type="checkbox"/> 7%	<input type="checkbox"/> 23%	<input type="checkbox"/> 14%
...a boat that goes to different points on Refuge waterways?	<input type="checkbox"/> 26%	<input type="checkbox"/> 11%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 36%	<input type="checkbox"/> 21%
...a bus or tram that runs during a special event (such as an evening tour of wildlife or weekend festival)?	<input type="checkbox"/> 39%	<input type="checkbox"/> 10%	<input type="checkbox"/> 7%	<input type="checkbox"/> 31%	<input type="checkbox"/> 13%
...an offsite parking lot that provides trail access for walking/hiking onto the Refuge?	<input type="checkbox"/> 21%	<input type="checkbox"/> 9%	<input type="checkbox"/> 8%	<input type="checkbox"/> 30%	<input type="checkbox"/> 33%
...some other alternative transportation option? ( <i>please specify</i> ) <u>See Appendix B</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> 8%	<input type="checkbox"/> 0%	<input type="checkbox"/> 8%	<input type="checkbox"/> 38%	<input type="checkbox"/> 46%

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

- 16% Yes       53% No       30% 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%	12%	11%	49%	24%	Surface conditions of roads	4%	5%	6%	33%	52%	NA
8%	13%	15%	46%	18%	Surface conditions of parking areas	3%	6%	9%	27%	56%	NA
8%	5%	19%	33%	34%	Condition of bridges	2%	4%	13%	27%	55%	NA
9%	6%	15%	41%	29%	Condition of trails and boardwalks	3%	5%	19%	30%	44%	NA
6%	3%	11%	41%	39%	Number of places for parking	2%	8%	9%	35%	46%	NA
9%	7%	25%	39%	20%	Number of places to pull over along Refuge roads	1%	8%	25%	38%	27%	NA
7%	4%	17%	34%	39%	Safety of driving conditions on Refuge roads	3%	2%	18%	28%	50%	NA
7%	3%	14%	33%	44%	Safety of Refuge road entrances/exits	1%	3%	16%	30%	49%	NA
8%	7%	17%	33%	35%	Signs on highways directing you to the Refuge	1%	6%	22%	37%	34%	NA
7%	3%	18%	34%	39%	Signs directing you around the Refuge roads	1%	8%	26%	33%	31%	NA
8%	2%	23%	28%	40%	Signs directing you on trails	3%	4%	25%	37%	31%	NA
7%	3%	23%	30%	37%	Access for people with physical disabilities or who have difficulty walking	3%	6%	33%	29%	29%	NA

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

See Appendix B

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**SECTION 3. Your expenses related to your Refuge visit**

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

79% Yes

21% 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: 7 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: 6 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	<b>Amount Spent in Local Communities &amp; at this Refuge</b> <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
13%	25%	20%	8%	13%	3%	7%	1%	2%	2%	7%

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*)

*The La Crosse District does not charge a refuge 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.**

*The La Crosse District does not charge a refuge entrance fee. This question does not apply.*

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#### SECTION 4. Your experience at this Refuge

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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"/> 2%	<input type="checkbox"/> 4%	<input type="checkbox"/> 43%	<input type="checkbox"/> 49%	NA
Overall, I am satisfied with the information and education provided by this Refuge about its resources.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0%	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	<input type="checkbox"/> 10%	<input type="checkbox"/> 45%	<input type="checkbox"/> 41%	NA
Overall, I am satisfied with the services provided by employees or volunteers at this Refuge.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1%	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	<input type="checkbox"/> 10%	<input type="checkbox"/> 35%	<input type="checkbox"/> 52%	NA
This Refuge does a good job of conserving fish, wildlife and their habitats.	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	<input type="checkbox"/> 3%	<input type="checkbox"/> 6%	<input type="checkbox"/> 40%	<input type="checkbox"/> 47%	NA

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

Importance					Refuge Services, Facilities, and Activities	Satisfaction					
Circle one for each item.						Circle one for each item.					
Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Neither	Somewhat Important	Very Important		Very Unsatisfied	Somewhat Unsatisfied	Neither	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
10%	14%	20%	39%	17%	Availability of employees or volunteers	2%	1%	22%	20%	55%	NA
10%	8%	19%	34%	30%	Courteous and welcoming employees or volunteers	1%	0%	19%	14%	66%	NA
8%	4%	17%	32%	39%	Knowledgeable employees or volunteers	1%	2%	21%	16%	60%	NA
5%	5%	15%	43%	32%	Printed information about this Refuge and its resources (for example, maps and brochures)	1%	6%	21%	22%	50%	NA
4%	5%	19%	43%	28%	Informational kiosks/displays about this Refuge and its resources	1%	3%	22%	20%	53%	NA
3%	3%	11%	39%	45%	Signs with rules/regulations for this Refuge	1%	6%	17%	25%	51%	NA
5%	7%	26%	37%	25%	Exhibits about this Refuge and its resources	1%	3%	28%	23%	45%	NA
4%	8%	31%	36%	21%	Environmental education programs or activities	0%	6%	41%	19%	34%	NA
7%	7%	29%	35%	22%	Visitor Center	3%	3%	40%	11%	44%	NA
5%	2%	19%	36%	37%	Convenient hours and days of operation	1%	1%	21%	21%	55%	NA
3%	3%	16%	35%	43%	Well-maintained restrooms	3%	10%	23%	27%	38%	NA
5%	4%	18%	37%	35%	Wildlife observation structures (decks, blinds)	2%	3%	27%	23%	46%	NA
5%	5%	23%	35%	32%	Bird-watching opportunities	0%	1%	25%	18%	56%	NA
3%	4%	17%	46%	30%	Opportunities to observe wildlife other than birds	0%	2%	27%	27%	44%	NA
5%	6%	23%	30%	35%	Opportunities to photograph wildlife and scenery	1%	1%	29%	16%	53%	NA
24%	2%	25%	12%	37%	Hunting opportunities	5%	3%	35%	19%	38%	NA
14%	6%	12%	20%	49%	Fishing opportunities	4%	1%	20%	25%	51%	NA
5%	7%	17%	34%	38%	Trail hiking opportunities	1%	3%	27%	32%	37%	NA
7%	6%	25%	35%	27%	Water trail opportunities for canoeing or kayaking	1%	2%	36%	25%	37%	NA
9%	5%	27%	32%	26%	Bicycling opportunities	1%	1%	39%	27%	33%	NA
12%	7%	46%	25%	10%	Volunteer opportunities	0%	4%	61%	18%	17%	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

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

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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?

90% Yes

10% 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?

84% Yes

16% No

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

See Appendix B

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

Statements about climate change	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am personally concerned about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	6%	5%	13%	38%	37%
We can improve our quality of life if we address the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	7%	4%	17%	42%	30%
There is too much scientific uncertainty to adequately understand how climate change will impact fish, wildlife and their habitats.	16%	23%	18%	29%	14%
I stay well-informed about the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	0%	12%	40%	40%	8%
It is important to consider the economic costs and benefits to local communities when addressing the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	4%	7%	14%	59%	16%
I take actions to alleviate the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	4%	9%	44%	33%	10%
There has been too much emphasis on the catastrophic effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	25%	25%	23%	15%	11%
Future generations will benefit if we address the effects of climate change on fish, wildlife and their habitats.	6%	5%	13%	40%	37%
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.	7%	9%	32%	41%	11%

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## SECTION 6. A Little about You

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

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

100% Yes  0% No → *If not, what is your home country?* See Figure 2 in Report

2. Are you?  70% Male  30% Female

3. In what year were you born? 1956 (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)			
					<input type="checkbox"/> 0%			<input type="checkbox"/> 13%				<input type="checkbox"/> 56%				<input type="checkbox"/> 31%			

5. What ethnicity do you consider yourself?  0% Hispanic or Latino  100% Not Hispanic or Latino

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

<input type="checkbox"/> 2% American Indian or Alaska Native	<input type="checkbox"/> 0% Black or African American	<input type="checkbox"/> 99% White
<input type="checkbox"/> 1% Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> 0% 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"/> 1% Less than \$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 14% \$35,000 - \$49,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 17% \$100,000 - \$149,999
<input type="checkbox"/> 4% \$10,000 - \$24,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 22% \$50,000 - \$74,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 4% \$150,000 - \$199,999
<input type="checkbox"/> 9% \$25,000 - \$34,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 23% \$75,000 - \$99,999	<input type="checkbox"/> 4% \$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.)?

30 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?

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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 Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, La Crosse District

### 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
Boat tour of refuge island reconstruction	1
Grand opening	1
International Migratory Bird Day	1
Night hike	1
Ranger Dan night hike	2
River Days - Pool 9	1
Summer of Paddling Event at Goose Island	2
Swan watch in November	1
Visitor Center opening	3
Waterfowl Observation Day, Brownsville, Man. lookout	1

Other Activity	Frequency
Camping	4
Camping, swimming, tubing, skiing (snow and water)	1
Dog training	1
Fishing meet	1
Have lunch break there.	1
Let dogs play.	1
On hot summer days when it's too hot to walk the dog, I take him to the park and throw his ball in the river so that he can play fetch in the water.	1
Picnic	1
Recent visit only to get acquainted.	1
River clean up, island planting, and Youth Outdoor Fest	1
Scenery	1
See new Visitor Center.	1
Swimming	1
Trapping	1
Walking around the area.	1
Weekend primitive leave no trace camping.	1

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
Lunch break	1
Other	1
Pleasure	1
Swinging and slides with granddaughter.	1
Visiting	1

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

Other Visitor Center Activity	Frequency
Chat with friends	1
Not an actual building. Tents and tables were set up.	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
Co-workers	1
Dogs	1
Fish and Wildlife Service Group	1
FLW Everstart Fishing Tournament	3
Me and my dog	1
Natural Resources Foundation of WI	1
Photo group from Necedah Wildlife Refuge	1
Summer of Paddling outing	1

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

Other Website	Frequency
explorelacrosse.com	1
facebook.com	1
iPhone map	1

Other Ways Heard about This Refuge	Frequency
Annual event	1
DNR onsite	1
From bike riding on Wisconsin trails.	2
Natural areas field trip	1
One of many road trips along rivers.	1
Presentation by the refuge staff at the Trempealeau Community Heritage Society	1
Rails to trails	1
Summer of Paddling 2012	1
USGS open house	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
Directions given by refuge staff over the phone.	1
Maps supplied at refuge boat launch.	1
We traveled to Onalaska for a doctor appointment.	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 to local trail system	1
Carpool to events	1
Guided hiking tour	1
Guided walking tours	1
Horseback	1
Jeep, golf cart, ATV	1
Motorcycle	1
My own boat	1
My own vehicle	1
Personal bike	1
Rubber raft	1
Snowmobile	1
Some form of alternate fuel	1

## Survey Section 2

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

### Sampling Location: Brownsville Overlook

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Comments on Transportation-related Items at This Refuge (n = 5)

This is a beautiful refuge. It should be marked back at highway 16 so more people are aware of it and use it.

This is a very nice site!!

Very busy area a few days a year when Tundra Swans migrate.

We only knew of the birdwatching areas on highway. We would be interested in touring the refuge.

---

### Sampling Location: Goose Island

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Comments on Transportation-related Items at This Refuge (n = 6)

Access to the refuge is from a fairly busy highway (35) with a Burlington Northern railroad crossing on the access road (County GI). It can be a little tense sometimes with backed up traffic because of trains and boats and trailers coming and going. Fortunately, I have not witnessed any accidents. Drivers are careful in this area.

Boat ramps could be better maintained. Navigation channels should be marked.

It is a nice refuge. Thank you for your hard work.

Safety of refuge road entrances/exits: there is a railroad crossing at the entrance/exit, sometimes traffic gets backed up on the lane used to enter the park. This lane is part of a busy highway. It's not the best set-up, but there isn't really anything that can be done except to build an overpass-which I don't think is warranted considering the cost involved.

Very nice park for camping. Road too old. Boat landings could use some smoothing out.

We were told to meet at the boat landing. However we weren't told which one and there were at least 3 we found before we got to the right place. We traveled to the opposite end of the park before we got to the right place.

---

### Sampling Location: Great River State Trail

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Comments on Transportation-related Items at This Refuge (n = 5)

A refuge near my home is paving way too much for my taste. I want to experience a refuge, not a park. I want it to feel undeveloped.

Clarify uniform parking at parking areas. Sometimes it is clustered with cars facing different ways.

From what I recall, the gravel bike trails had vegetation growing in the middle. An occasional (annual or semi-annual) grading would improve the biking experience. But, overall, the trail was fine for my narrow-tired road racing bicycle.

It would be wonderful if the bike trails were black topped.

This refuge does not have any roads. I used the bicycle trail to get around the refuge. The trail is in fair condition. Sometimes I stop at the observation sites along the trail.

---

## Sampling Location: La Crosse Visitor Center

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Comments on Transportation-related Items at This Refuge (n = 1)

Roads to the 200 + miles of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge are operated and maintained with local, county, state or federal highway systems, although access is critical for visits.

## Sampling Location: Neslon Park Landing

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Comments on Transportation-related Items at This Refuge (n = 6)

There should be no public use of motorized vehicles on refuge trails.

Boat landings have deep ruts just off the end of the sloping concrete from boats power loading. Onalaska town of Campbell ramp very slippery.

Boat ramps need deeper extensions in low water- concrete ties work well in this modification.

I used a pick-up truck towing a fishing boat. At times I notice not enough parking space for boat trailers.

The dirt roads on the south end of the refuge are deeply rutted in some places.

Transportation was not an issue.

## Sampling Location: Upper Brice Prairie Landing

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Comments on Transportation-related Items at This Refuge (n = 3)

I would like to see more boat landings. The ones available are good but very crowded.

More maintenance on boat landings would be great and it is very important to me.

Viewing areas like Shady Maple are important for refuge visitors. Access parking at hiking trails must be large enough to handle demand.

## Sampling Location: Wildcat Landing

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Comments on Transportation-related Items at This Refuge (n = 2)

For the most part I was satisfied with everything, no complaints. I have been to this refuge every year 2 or 3 times per year for 7 years. Since 2005, I keep coming back and I really enjoy it!

Some of the boat landings are not very well maintained.

## 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."

### Sampling Location: Brownsville Overlook

---

Comments on Services, Facilities, and Activities at This Refuge (n = 8)

Courteous and helpful wildlife refuge personnel.

I like being able to talk with staff about things happening on that specific day. They are always happy to answer questions or point out things.

I took two family members to visit this refuge specifically to view the migrating Tundra Swans. A representative of the National Wildlife Refuge was very friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable.

It's neat when the rangers have the extra binoculars and telescopes available!!

Recent closing of previous hunting areas. Less and less areas to hunt. You don't care about waterfowl hunters, just birdwatchers; they don't buy duck stamps!

The two officers at this roadside observation point were excellent and very willing with information. The spotting scopes were excellent. Don't remember if there were outhouse facilities.

We felt there needs to be more places to stop along the river to observe wildlife.

We were told by phone from staff person along the Mississippi River Road that the Tundra Swans came through Brownsville. So we came to Brownsville thinking that the Visitor Center would be an actual place but instead found a small viewing area along the road with a porta potty. We saw no swans.

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### Sampling Location: Goose Island

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Comments on Services, Facilities, and Activities at This Refuge (n = 7)

More handicapped accessible restrooms.

Restrooms were very rustic.

The family that runs the refuge are great and very helpful. They run a class act operation.

This is close to home but I don't hear much about it. It is on the far side of town from where I live and I just don't think of it as a destination because I forget about it.

This refuge is very limited. Basically a wayside and deck with scopes for viewing.

To me personally, less is more.

Would like to see more vehicle and trailer parking space at Goose Island, hunter's point "West" landing.

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### Sampling Location: Great River State Trail

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Comments on Services, Facilities, and Activities at This Refuge (n = 8)

I am a cyclist- the bridges are deteriorating. Exposed nail heads, boards jutting up. Otherwise, well maintained.

I use this refuge primarily for hiking and biking- trails have some rough spots, littered with larger stones. Would like to hunt in this refuge. I find that boundaries do not seem to be well defined. Tough to determine where certain activities are allowed.

Please know I only used the bike trail portion on my visit.

---

Rails to trail went through this facility. It was a terrific site. The State Park is also a terrific park.

The weeds should be cut more often along the bicycle and other trails. Sometimes there are stinging nettles and other noxious weeds that we contact when biking or walking along the trails.

This refuge is pretty much just a bike trail with the refuge along that...therefore it does not have, nor would I expect to have many of the services as listed above.

We were just taking a bike ride on the Lacrosse bike trail going north. Didn't even know we were in a refuge.

When approaching bridges the gravel needs to be built up.

---

## Sampling Location: La Crosse Visitor Center

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### Comments on Services, Facilities, and Activities at This Refuge (n = 11)

I am not aware of facilities for grilling or picnicking, which I greatly enjoy and would lengthen my visit time to refuges.

Love the hiking, running, walking, and biking trails, just need more.

Love the LEED standard, THANK YOU. Paved path is great with small kids

The employees at this facility were wonderful! They were so welcoming. I cannot wait to take my 9 grandkids there. Thank you.

The refuge I visited recently opened and the outdoor hiking etc. is not yet completed. There is also no water on this refuge.

The staff at the Visitor Center were outstanding. They provided information on the refuge, maps, information on other areas, recommendations on learning about the area, and books. (New to the area and wanted to learn about wildlife and geology).

The staff was excellent. She made our visit a superb experience. The facilities are great.

Visitor Center and grounds look like they have just been built, so I understand that it is a new facility. Visitor Center stands alone in wide open space, not much to look at. Needs trees, at least near building. In summer I would not walk in sun to see anything beyond the Visitor Center. In winter the area is too windswept to bother trying. Exhibits at the Visitor Center are very well done but the computer interactive part was not working.

Was awesome!

We were there for a short time so I really am not aware of all the opportunities and availability there, at this time.

With its vast area within three districts, it is difficult to optimize a brochure for the refuge. The USFWS becomes an invaluable resource for self planned individual experiences. With rules, they allow freedom to experience the refuge as desired.

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## Sampling Location: Neslon Park Landing

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### Comments on Services, Facilities, and Activities at This Refuge (n = 11)

As I understand it, this refuge has in its charter a requirement to provide recreational access on the refuge along with the normal mission of providing for fish and wildlife. The recreational mission is not being adequately supported.

Big power and fishing boats blow out holes at the end of the concrete ramps. Add concrete ties or planks to extend ramps.

It is public! Doesn't just belong to you.

More information whole is available.

My main purpose in visiting this refuge is freshwater fishing. The vegetation in Lake Onalaska is extreme and as a result it is very difficult to use a fishing boat weeds were constantly caught in the propeller.

Not a lot of information is available at the boat landing.

Porta potty is gross. Nice they have water fountains. Never seen a worker/volunteer.

Restrooms.

There are two portable toilets, one at each end. A permanent structure would be good, at least one on one end.

West Lake Onalaska has been slowly filling in. Using dredged sand for offsite projects could be useful.

What is important to me is what is not on this list which are boating opportunities. The overall refuge has many areas for a variety of conservation efforts (and I feel conservation efforts are important), however Pool 7 is the only pool in the local area that is available for certain activities such as sailing and other boating. I feel the USFWS and other agencies have too narrow of a perspective on maintaining this area that not only prevents cooperation in ensuring the boating (and sailing in particular) can take place but puts them at odds with the citizens in the surrounding communities who are part of the population that this governmental organization is meant to serve.

## Sampling Location: Upper Brice Prairie Landing

Comments on Services, Facilities, and Activities at This Refuge (n = 8)

Boat ramp is in bad condition, needs to be repaired before someone ruins their tire.

Good place!

Great facility! Must be kept open for future generations to enjoy.

I want to thank the refuge managers for what an outstanding job they do for managing the refuge for hunting waterfowl.

Parasites killing waterfowl should be eliminated.

Signs need to be better maintained and trails better marked.

There is a need for more public relations work in refuge districts, other than La Crosse. Example: Refuge news releases do not mention number of swans and canvasbacks in pool 9 or eagles in pool 10.

Very inadequate parking at boat landings.

## Sampling Location: Wildcat Landing

Comments on Services, Facilities, and Activities at This Refuge (n = 6)

Boaters and fisherman spend way more that bird watchers however you slam hunters/fisherman that supply the revenue for you to be employed. The new islands are wrecking the raft channel, you cut off the flow. Worry less about the birds they have plenty of water to land on. Take care of who paid your way.

I would like to have the refuge open to hunting on two different weeks during the hunting season, instead of letting all the ducks go to Mexico and let them all be shot down there.

The facilities are very good. I was satisfied with everything and the employees were professional. Very good job.

The old guy that runs the place was crabby.

The refuge is becoming un-navigable due to shallow water silting in, and low water levels maintained.

We would love to see Lawrence Lake cleaned and dredged out to provide better fishing. Beautiful lake at one time and would enjoy to be able to take grandchildren there fishing. Would also be nice for better bathrooms and showers at Wildcat Landing.

## Survey Section 5

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

### Sampling Location: Brownsville Overlook

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Comments on What Makes Refuges Unique? (n = 24)

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A safe and comfortable area providing bird watching experiences I would otherwise not be able to see.

Belongs to all. A national treasure to preserve.

Birdwatching and natural beauty.

Displays the natural world for all the people. Very important!

I am a waterfowl hunter. I love to hunt the birds and watch them, but you have closed traditional hunting areas. You guys do exactly what you want, hunter's input means nothing. Eventually you will have the whole flyway closed down! -Signed

I would hate to think what it would be like if there wasn't a refuge.

It is very important to me that there are large areas set aside for wildlife. I know of many areas where wildlife thrive on private property, but you can never be sure of how permanent they are.

It seems to have a different mission, not catering to campers and thus a better preservation of the area.

Its enormous size! Plus, its mission to preserve wildlife of all kinds. It's a stated goal to provide outdoor education for young people - fishing, hunting, trapping, etc., so that future generations will value these places. Good job!

Protected area, good signage, great volunteers and knowing that some group is making this happen.

Set aside to provide wildlife habitat, which is increasingly valuable and important.

The hunting and boating opportunities in the refuge are unique and very important to the local population and visitors.

The Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge is very available on trips to and from La Crosse and farther up the river. Scenery is beautiful - changes throughout the year are wonderful. I like the water and the trains and towboats as well as the fish and wildlife - also the old river towns, etc. The refuge is a part of the special experience of this area. Birds are wonderful too. Our experiences with personnel at the Brownsville overlook in the last few years has been very good. We enjoy the Reno Bottoms walkway very much too.

The property is publicly accessible to most people and offers a variety of wildlife and nature experiences.

The types of waterfowl and just how the river is at that point.

The variety of activities.

Their size, efforts at habitat restoration, and preservation.

They have rebuilt the islands that used to be there before the dams were built.

They preserve and promote all wildlife and opportunities to just observe, learn, hunt, fish, and enjoy in many different ways.

They provide a unique experience and more undisturbed natural environment than many public facilities.

To see wildlife.

We get to see what's actually around as far as birds or wildlife in their own environment. The information offered from staff makes it more educational and interesting.

We love the work they have done to this refuge in building the islands up for the migratory birds and making it so available to the public

When we were children many of the birds and animals we now see were rare. Eagles, turkeys, cranes, pelicans, and swans seldom were seen.

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## Sampling Location: Goose Island

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### Comments on What Makes Refuges Unique? (n = xx)

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Any time of year I can go there and not worry about being accidentally shot by a drunk hunter.

Diversity.

Especially at Goose Island there is ample room for camping, grilling, exploring and my whole family loves it.

Free programs, staff are very dedicated and enthusiastic.

Great trapping, hunting, and fishing.

I appreciate the fact that our government is preserving land, flora, and fauna for all to enjoy.

I feel most people respect the refuges more than a county campground or county boat landings.

I grew up in the country. However many/most people do not. I believe National Wildlife Refuges provide city folks a location to enjoy the outdoors.

I like to boat.

I was able to see things I wouldn't have normally seen or noticed. The guides provided good educational information.

It gives ducks a safe haven. It gives hunters a place to hunt.

It has a nice camping area. Nice shelters. Many nice areas for picnics.

It offers a place of natural surroundings not found within urban areas, a place of peace and serenity, an escape from the craziness of the world.

It was unique as I had never seen or realized white pelicans existed! Lovely setting to see them in, big expanse of water with no buildings in sight! Did not know so many birds migrate through the refuge and in such numbers.

It's unique in that we are allowed to use it without too much regulation and somehow the users seem to coexist rather peacefully.

Just simple easy access to recreation and picnic areas that offer great places to do both.

Left wild. Less touristy, the better.

Mississippi River.

More opportunities to experience trails and wildlife.

Most of my refuge experiences are on the Mississippi River. The river is a fantastic resource.

Refuges let people see wildlife in their own habitat.

The backwaters/sloughs of the Mississippi River.

The refuge is more "low-key" than a National or State Park. No permit is needed which is nice. Access is easy and it's less crowded. People tend to police their own activities and I don't see littering or vandalism problems. This refuge is unique in that it has a high migratory bird population in season.

The refuges are some of the best properties in the area.

The river.

The volunteers and workers were very accommodating to us, and pointed out many things on canoe trip.

These areas don't have high volumes of traffic, which make observing wildlife possible. Perhaps the people who frequent refuges are there for the same purpose and respect others wishes for a peaceful visit.

This refuge is unique in the fact that it allows for multiple activities. You can hunt, fish, hike, play on the playground, boat, canoe, or even camp. It had also allowed for a handicap deer hunt also.

Vast area of waterfowl hunting. Large amount of ducks use refuge.

Well maintained trails and grounds.

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## Sampling Location: Great River State Trail

Comments on What Makes Refuges Unique? (n = 19)

Bicycling opportunities.

I have found National Wildlife Refuges to be not the most scenic of federal lands, but they provide excellent habitat for the lives and viewing of wildlife and birds combined with recreational opportunities.

I like the cement patio at water's edge. I would like to see a dock built out over the water.

I liked it because it was very quiet. Not as frequented as the state parks are. More primitive.

I visit this refuge about 3 times a week in the summer. I access at different points along the trail. The trails are well maintained. They are cleared shortly after a major storm. The observation areas are clean.

It is not commercialized.

Natural state.

On certain days the waterfowl hunting can be very good.

Opportunity to be part of "unspoiled", unincorporated areas that give nature a place to remain...nature.

The area has unique plants and animals that can be observed from the trails such as eagles, turtles and beavers.

The area where it is located.

The care taken of the properties.

The opportunity to enjoy the beautiful river and bluffs during all seasons. Also you have the fishing and hunting to enjoy. A quiet place to relax.

The refuges are unique because they offer access to many natural environments where the public can learn, enjoy, and share with others.

The refuges I have visited in my area are usually not crowded and provide a more intimate natural interaction.

The vista along the Upper Mississippi. Wildlife refuges are beautiful. Wild areas close to home.

The workers were working on killing off an invasive species or two. It was a beautiful land. Peaceful place. Thank you!

They offer uninhibited access to natural areas without any cost and with little improvements. They try to keep natural beauty. There are many areas for birds and animals to live in a natural environment.

Variety of birds. Biking and hiking trails.

## Sampling Location: La Crosse Visitor Center

Comments on What Makes Refuges Unique? (n = 21)

Allow wildlife to remain in a protected area in their natural environment, while teaching visitors about it and allowing them opportunities to observe wildlife.

Availability of Visitor Center, knowledgeable staff, and educational programs enhances your experience at the refuge.

Beauty close by.

Ducks! Swans!

Exhibits. Offer educational programs and activities. Instrumental in restoring whooping cranes! The employees and volunteers.

First time visit was great opportunity to see and experience the Visitor Center and participate in a night hike. I hope for more events to visit the NWR and Visitor Center.

I think that State Parks are also great and they have the opportunity to combine a picnic along with hiking and cross country skiing.

It is an opportunity to see an undisturbed/restored environment.

Less crowded and nature less trampled on, plus more settings for wildlife. Each has a specialty to learn about!

People who want recreational facilities can use this refuge and be confident the facility is clean, safe and well organized. Congratulations!

Provides the public with opportunity to view wildlife where it should be viewed...in the wild.

Refuges are not designed as tourist attractions, as their prime reason for existence is to maintain and/or enhance the wildlife. Their uniqueness comes in the fact that we are invited and educated as guests to observe and somewhat participate in the programs set up, in such a manner that the plan will let others in the future accomplish the same activities.

Restoring outside areas to their natural state.

The amount of land is amazing along the rivers here, unique because it can cross state lines.

The many opportunities available for any person that enjoys the outdoors and outdoor activities that are right there on the refuge.

They provide opportunities in nature that are otherwise unavailable.

Those of us that enjoy them have the same passions as those that start it and run it.

To me, it is the Visitor Center with its unique displays along with the "outdoor experience".

Trails and bird watching.

Water and land together and how they change year to year.

Well managed land that is attractive to wildlife and open to all.

## Sampling Location: Neslon Park Landing

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### Comments on What Makes Refuges Unique? (n = 19)

A great place to be in nature, be educated about the natural area and to see wildlife and plants.

Beauty of the river.

Diversity of outdoor and wildlife experiences.

Great service.

I live in California and have visited the Lacrosse, WI area 5 summers in a row. Very impressed with the care and interest in your wildlife refuges. California does not maintain parks and refuges nearly as well as WI. We were very impressed and enjoyed our visit so much.

Information pamphlets provided.

It is a good place to observe and hunt birds and animals for the public.

Open to public.

Peace and quiet areas.

Plenty of information posted about animals, plants, etc. Well maintained.

Still maintains 'wild' opportunities.

The Upper Mississippi Refuge, in particular, is heavily used and complicated to manage because of the diversity of use, the amount of river/wetland, and the presence of FWS, State DNRs, Corps. of Engineers, National Fish Hatcheries, privately owned boathouses, Railroad, DOT, etc.

They are not private property and are open to all who wish to enter.

They tend to be more educational.

Unique in that they are specifically set-up for the purpose of preserving wildlife for people to view in their natural habitat.

Very open, easy access.

We have great water ways and great populations of fish, birds, and big game. We do need to keep a good level of weed control on Lake Onalaska.

We have one only 10 minutes from our driveway, whereas the closest National Park to us is about 425 road miles away.

You can see small critters, ducks, and geese on the water, take your dog for a walk where allowed, walk under big shaded trees, and go ice fishing on the lake.

## Sampling Location: Upper Brice Prairie Landing

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Comments on What Makes Refuges Unique? (n = 15)

Access.

Because of the different habitats it manages.

Free public access to vast acreage of wetlands that is fairly unrestricted.

Gives the public a well maintained recreational area to use at no cost to the public.

Great job of maintaining good water levels in a very dry year.

Offer a variety of public uses while protecting the habitat and populations of plants and animals present in unique or threatened locations.

Open to all outdoor activities.

Provides access to wild and unique areas that may not otherwise be accessible, i.e. might be private or posted.

The diverse wildlife.

The refuge is very important to the waterfowl. The nesting grounds were very impressive and we were very happy with how well kept the refuge was.

The wild rice is coming back which brings duck and geese. Just nice to be out in fresh air and sunshine.

There is a wide variety of activities possible to participate in at Ridgefield.

They cover such a vast area, with so many varied opportunities.

They give birds and fish and other wildlife a safe place to live. It also gives people a place to hunt and fish on public lands.

They must be kept open, so we do not lose our children to politics and computers.

## Sampling Location: Wildcat Landing

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Comments on What Makes Refuges Unique? (n = 10)

Being able to get into nature and see firsthand what is happening.

Easy access to river and there are no docking fees.

Great beaches.

Migratory bird management.

Open opportunities for all users.

Right on the Mississippi. Wildlife all around.

The ability to walk in and start hunting and/or fishing without getting permission.

The beauty.

The Mississippi River and the bluffs.

The river- fishing is good, turtles, eagles, deer, cranes. You see it all. Just the Mississippi River is a wonderful sight of its own. The sand bars and nature just being nature. It is beautiful and definitely God's country!

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## Additional Comments:

### Sampling Location: Brownsville Overlook

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Additional Comments (n = 9)

I'd like more information on tours or guided walks in the refuges in general.

I am very disappointed in all of the taxpayer and hunting dollars spent on closed-to-hunting areas of the refuge. In particular the Reno closed area. I think the closed area should be opened to lottery hunts or possibly swapped with other areas every few years. I think the focus of the fish and wildlife service should be primarily on hunting opportunities and secondary on other recreational activities.

I am basically undecided whether the current climate change is due to manmade activity or a temporary natural swing of climate. Therefore my answers to the climate questions are not meant to be a part of a mandate to be tough on American industry until it is conclusively proven to be the case. Thank you.

The two young ladies that greeted us on our visit did an amazing job! Good job girls.

Too much money spent on the refuge and has hurt hunting in the area.

We are also frustrated by not being able to access any online information or phone information where the Tundra Swans were. Turns out they flew through 3 weeks late but may have actually been at other locations along the Great River Road drive but no way to find out. The description of the Brownsville Visitor Center was misleading- a boardwalk pier for viewing- no building and limited information by staff there.

We are new to the La Crosse, WI area and found that having this local resource is a nice amenity for the area.

We live in a rural area. We own several hundred acres half of which are trees and creeks and grass, so we are directly supporting wildlife and some little fishes ourselves. We enjoy the refuge on trips to and from La Crosse several times a month. Maybe we should save the gas and stay home but we have not come to that decision yet. Thanks so much.

You did a poor job with the Brownsville area. You scared away all to the ducks and geese with your poorly designed islands.

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### Sampling Location: Goose Island

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Additional Comments (n = 8)

I have enjoyed this refuge and see a fair amount of wildlife there.

I've enjoyed hunting and fishing in this refuge for the last 43 years.

It would be great if there were bicycle trails connecting the area to the city.

It would be nice to have a naturalist on site to answer questions.

Love to camp, hunt, fish, bird watch. Goose Island is a very nice park for these activities, especially if you have younger children.

Mississippi Pool 8 is a beautiful place with a lot of wildlife and opportunities for those looking to take advantage of the outdoors. Restricting the size of boats for pleasure boaters needs to be addressed. As I saw multiple smaller craft get nearly swamped by big yachts that have no place to be on a body of water of the lake.

Outlaw motorized duck decoys.

Recent citizen, originally from London.

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## Sampling Location: Great River State Trail

Additional Comments (n = 6)

Bike trail pass was 25 dollars.

Great refuge!

I pass through the refuge on my bicycle. But I do go to the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge on occasion. It is wonderful that we have National Wildlife Refuges. They enhance my life. The number of visitors should not determine what is done in a refuge to keep it natural and simple.

I take my 2 dogs on walks every week on this refuge. It is nice to see the changes throughout the year as the weather changes.

The woman who asked me to participate in the survey was very friendly. This impressed me, as she was the only employee that I observed during my bike ride through the length of the refuge.

We'll be back! Thank you.

## Sampling Location: La Crosse Visitor Center

Additional Comments (n = 4)

As a personal choice, I live and interact with a portion of this refuge, and enjoy every day I can observe or participate.

Beautiful facility. Love the off the grid concept.

My family and I have fished, boated, hunted, and trapped, on the Mississippi Refuge for years. I commercial fished for 30 years. We have seen a lot of change in the river, good and bad but mother nature is the boss.

No fish!

## Sampling Location: Neslon Park Landing

Additional Comments (n = 7)

I wish that the no hunting zones of the refuge were changed every couple of years to allow a better hunting experience. The ducks and geese that migrate down the Mississippi River seem to know exactly where they are. It would be nice to change them every once in awhile to give the hunter a fighting chance at them. It would only take the birds a short time to figure out the new no hunting zones.

I'm a 90 year old veteran (WWII) who loves to fish the river and brook waters, but I don't get around much anymore.

Let us remember cost to taxpayers.

Need more trash cans or have them emptied more often.

Safe sailing in a refuge should be complimentary. Let's not leave people out of the primary mission. Thank you!

This refuge is a busy place, with a lot of people fishing, boating, sailing, ice fishing, snowmobiling on the lake. The police drive through regularly, which is great. Quite a few people walk through it during every season but winter. There are baseball games, and people having small picnics in the park.

Although I am concerned about climate change and feel it is important, that does not mean that attention to it in publicly held lands must come at the cost of cooperation with residents near and in the refuge and those who make use of the land in the refuge. It cannot be used as an excuse for lack of attention to how the local residents and others wish the local public lands to be used and managed. I do not personally agree with some suggestions offered by local community members for how the area could be managed differently. Nevertheless, when members of USFWS have been approached on both a formal and an informal basis, they have come across as territorial, uncooperative and completely unconcerned with anything other than a narrow interpretation of their mandate that precludes consideration of any other suggestions for usage/management of the area.

## Sampling Location: Upper Brice Prairie Landing

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### Additional Comments (n = 3)

Consider more areas to hunt or open some of the closed areas to hunting.

I would like to see more opportunities for the public to get involved with property management and future plans for uses on refuges. I also would like to be able to get more involved with bird banding opportunities and overall waterfowl management.

There are parasites living in snails that should be eliminated. The loss of waterfowl is terrible. Waterfowl carry these parasites when migrating.

## Sampling Location: Wildcat Landing

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### Additional Comments (n = 2)

I live about 20 minutes away from the Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge and love to hunt and fish, but with my girls getting into college age and sports it is harder and harder to get down there. I would love to get a job where I could work for the USFWS as a keeper of records or information gatherer or giver. I love being out down at the Reno bottoms and not just hunting or fishing but also observing all that there is.

Someone thinks they can alter nature. Humans cannot effect climate to the extent you would like to preach. Why did the dinosaurs die off, what caused the ice age to end? Was it the SUV? We can't even predict the weekend weather accurately!