



COLORADO STATE PARKS

VISITOR AND NON-VISITOR OPINIONS AND
PERCEPTIONS

Final Report of Focus Group Findings

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Corona Research is pleased to present this final report of research findings to the State of Colorado Department of Natural Resources for focus groups conducted with both visitors and non-visitors of Colorado State Parks. The following report includes a description of the project design, methodology, and implementation of focus groups, along with a summary of key focus group findings and detailed findings.

BACKGROUND

The State of Colorado Department of Natural Resources retained Corona Research in October, 2007, to learn more about perceptions and attitudes about Colorado State Parks from both State Park visitors and non-visitors. Together, the State of Colorado Department of Natural Resources and Corona Research agreed upon the work scope by defining both the number and location of focus groups. This report summarizes the detailed findings from focus groups conducted in all five geographic regions of the State selected, including Greeley, Colorado Springs, Denver, Grand Junction and Durango. Focus groups took place in late June and early July 2008.

Findings included in this final report will assist the State of Colorado Department of Natural Resources in upcoming programming and messaging efforts.

PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In total, Corona Research conducted ten focus groups, five of which were with State Park visitors and five with non-visitors. One focus group was conducted with each segment in each geographic location.

Recruitment. Corona Research assumed responsibility for recruiting focus group participants for all group sessions. Recruiting for all groups, including both segments, was conducted via a mailing to a listed sample of Colorado residents that was purchased from a commercial list firm.

The letters announced the upcoming focus groups and encouraged interested respondents to call a toll-free number to speak with a Corona Research representative so that they could be registered for a particular group for which they qualified. Once respondents indicated an initial interest in participating, a member of the Corona recruiting team proceeded through a screener to determine eligibility.

- 1) To be eligible for Park visitor/user groups, participants had to meet all of the following criteria:
 - a. Must have visited a Colorado State Park in the last 12 months
 - i. (Must be able to identify by name at least one Colorado State Park they have visited in this timeframe, or with recruiter assistance based on location.)

- b. Must have been a Colorado state resident for at least one year
- 2) To be eligible for non-Park visitor/user groups, participants had to meet all of the following criteria:
- a. Must not have visited a Colorado State Park during the last 12 months, (but could have visited another park (such as National Park, etc.) in the last 12 months).
 - b. Must have been a Colorado state resident for at least one year
- 3) In order to obtain a diverse mix of participants across both visitor and non-visitor groups, the recruiting team set goals including:
- a. At least three people in each group had to have children living in the home
 - b. A mix of activity level (active versus passive activities)¹
 - i. No more than two “very passive”
 - ii. No more than four “very active”

For the non-visitor groups, there were also no more than two (2) signed up in each group who expressed that Colorado Parks are of “very little” value to the State of Colorado

- 4) Participants across both group segments were further screened to ensure that they represented a general mix of the following:
- a. Gender
 - b. Age (must be at least 18)
 - c. Marital Status
 - d. Household Income
- 5) Once eligibility was determined and participants were assigned to an appropriate group, they were informed as to the time and location where the focus group would take place. Participants’ names, addresses, e-mail addresses and phone numbers were recorded at this time.
- 6) Corona Research mailed reminder letters to all participants announcing the date and the time of the discussion group to which they were assigned. These letters were mailed so that those who registered received them approximately two days before the group was to take place. When possible, email reminders were sent, instead. Letters prompted participants to contact the research team if they had questions.

¹ Active activities included those such as biking, hiking, climbing, etc. and passive activities included those similar to walking, photography, sightseeing, etc.

- 7) A final, follow-up reminder telephone call was placed to all respondents, usually the day or night before the group session was to take place. This call was to confirm attendance so that the research team could be reasonably confident of adequate attendance.
- 8) Recruiting was performed with a goal of seating 8 to 12 participants in each group session. Because “no show” rates can be high for focus groups, between 10 and 12 people were registered for each group. The number of participants for all groups met expectations as indicated in the table below.

Planning and Logistics. The Corona Research team handled all planning associated with conducting the focus group sessions, including set-up and logistics, in order to effectively capture participants’ feedback during group sessions.

Snacks and Incentives. Participants were provided with a light dinner, snacks and drinks. In addition, all group attendees received a cash honorarium (\$80) at the end of the focus group.

Time and Location: The focus groups were held in different locations since they were conducted in five regions of the state. The following table outlines the specific locations, dates, times for all groups. All groups (except those in metro Denver) were conducted at less formal, non-traditional locations.

FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

	LOCATION	DATE	SEGMENT/TIME	# OF PARTICIPANTS
GREELEY	The University of Northern Colorado – Student Center	Tuesday, June 24th	Park visitor group (6:00 – 8:00 pm)	11
			Non-visitor group (8:00 – 10:00 pm)	10
COLORADO SPRINGS	Academy Best Western Hotel	Wednesday, June 25th	Park visitor group (6:00 – 8:00 pm)	9
			Non-visitor group (8:00 – 10:00 pm)	9
DENVER	Corona Research	Thursday, June 26 th	Park visitor group (6:00 – 8:00 pm)	12
			Non-visitor group (8:00 – 10:00 pm)	8
GRAND JUNCTION	The Courtyard by Marriott	Tuesday, July 8th	Park visitor group (6:00 – 8:00 pm)	8
			Non-visitor group (8:00 – 10:00 pm)	10
DURANGO	La Plata County Fairgrounds	Wednesday, July 9th	Park visitor group (6:00 – 8:00 pm)	11
			Non-visitor group (8:00 – 10:00 pm)	7

Moderators for Focus Groups: Leo Lewis and Meghan Kelly served as the moderators for the ten focus groups in the project. Leo conducted groups with Park visitors (and non-visitors in Grand Junction and Durango), and Meghan conducted group with non-visitors. Both Leo and Meghan have prior experience as focus group moderators on a variety of topics.

Focus Group Moderator Guide and Other Materials: The focus group moderator’s guides are presented in Appendix A and B. The content varied slightly between visitors and non-visitors, but it was the same for all groups within each segment. The guides incorporated feedback from the client, and was used by the moderator as a flexible guideline for group discussion, in that the moderator had the option to diverge from the guide if appropriate.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

<u>Group</u>	<u>Total Participants</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Family background with the outdoors</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Greeley Group 1 – Park Visitors	11	6 women 5 men	Single (3) Married (8)	All participants grew up in a family that was very active with the outdoors.	One man had previously done wildlife rescue.
Greeley Group 2 – Non-Visitors	10	4 women 6 men	Single (2) Married (8)	All but <i>two</i> participants grew up doing outdoor activities.	Two participants were retired.
Colorado Springs Group 3 – Park Visitors	9	2 women 7 men	Single (4) Married (5)	All but <i>two</i> participants grew up doing outdoor activities.	One participant teaches rock climbing.
Colorado Springs Group 4 – Non-Visitors	9	4 women 5 men	Single (3) Married (6)	All but <i>one</i> participant grew up doing outdoor activities.	A majority of participants were originally from out-of-state and some came to Colorado for the outdoors.
Denver Group 5 – Park Visitors	12	5 women 7 men	Single (2) Married (10)	All but <i>two</i> participants grew up doing outdoor activities. (The other two picked it up in their married life).	Three participants were Denver natives; the rest grew up in Utah, California, Minnesota and others.

Denver Group 6 – Non-Visitors	8	4 women 4 men	Single (2) Married (10)	All but <i>one</i> participant grew up doing outdoor activities.	(Nothing remarkable)
Grand Junction Group 7 – Park Visitors	8	3 women 5 men	Single (1) Married (7)	All but <i>one</i> participant grew up doing outdoor activities.	Two participants were retired.
Grand Junction Group 8 – Non-Visitors	11	3 women 5 men	Single (2) Married (9)	All but <i>one</i> participant grew up doing outdoor activities.	Two participants were retired.
Durango Group 9 – Park Visitors	11	7 women 4 men	Single (3) Married (8)	Respondents were somewhat split as to whether they spent time outdoors when growing up.	Two participants were Colorado natives; the majority grew up in the mid-west or on the east coast.
Durango Group 10 – Non-Visitors	7	2 women 5 men	Single (4) Married (3)	<i>Three</i> of the participants did not grow up doing outdoor activities.	Of all groups, this group had the greatest proportion who did not grow up spending time outdoors.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following includes a top-level report of findings from the ten focus groups conducted for Colorado State Park visitors and non-visitors. Findings are reported by each major topic area addressed in discussion. Following the summary of findings is a section titled ‘Market Segment Highlights,’ which includes findings that were unique to each market segment.

LEISURE AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES

- 1) **State Park visitors and non-visitors differ in their preferences to spend free-time outdoors.** While it was clear that State Park visitors prefer to spend most of their free-time outdoors, non-visitors reported spending only a moderate amount of time outdoors. Nearly all non-visitors indicated that they enjoy the Colorado landscape, but prefer to do a mix of indoor and outdoor activities. On the other hand, park visitors heavily favored outdoor activities. Durango residents, in particular, indicated that outdoor activities are the primary reason they chose to live in the area.
- 2) **For future vacations, both State Park visitors and non-visitors are choosing to stay local or travel less.** Both segments stated that they are choosing to stay local for their next trips because they feel there are plenty of travel options within the state and also because of the rising cost of transportation. Staying local was not necessarily all participants’ first choice, but it is not a significant drawback either due to the number of attractive options within the State.
 - **Several local options:** A park visitor from Durango said the following about Colorado to illustrate the variety of local options for travel: “It’s always like a vacation when you live out here.” Another Colorado Springs man said, “Colorado’s awesome...I could live here my whole life and not see everything.” Regardless of time spent outdoors, non-visitors also agreed that there are many options within Colorado, which makes the decision to stay local easier.
 - **Rising cost of transportation:** The rising cost of transportation, and particularly the cost of gasoline, was another reason (if not the primary reason) most visitors and non-visitors are choosing to stay local for future trips, and the added expense was causing several participants to stop traveling altogether. The following quotes further describe participants’ sentiments on the topic of gas prices.
 - “Gas prices and airline prices are crazy. I’m not going anywhere.”
 - “With gas being the way it is, you don’t know how long it will take to get somewhere. (So I’m staying close to home.)”
 - “I have tried to focus on staying closer (to home) because I can’t afford to go anywhere else.”

Additionally, the difficulty of traveling long distances with small children and/or finding the time off of work made traveling outside of Colorado difficult. Both of these factors were mentioned across locations with both park visitors and non-visitors.

Implications of this finding demonstrate that Coloradoans will increasingly be looking for in-state opportunities for travel and recreation.

- 3) **Coloradoans generally agree that there is a lot to see and do within 50 miles of where they live.** Focus group participants across all locations felt strongly that there were attractive options for short trips within 50 miles of their homes, although some people said they preferred to go beyond 50 miles in order to find solitude. The options available within 50 miles of each location varied. Greeley residents discussed Rocky Mountain National Park; Colorado Springs residents mentioned the nearby National Forests and landmarks like the Garden of the Gods; Denver residents discussed State Parks within the metro area such as Chatfield and Cherry Creek, and Western Slope residents (Grand Junction and Durango) discussed numerous parks and open areas. The following quotes highlight visitors' and non-visitors' perceptions of nearby areas within Colorado.

- Greeley - "For me, being near Rocky Mountain National Park, there's a lot to do...biking along the Poudre is something I'd do."
- Colorado Springs - "We've been to Garden of the Gods several times. We love it. I like more what the park has to offer than what I can figure out what to do on my own."
- Denver - "Golden Gate is a great place to go for solitude, if you go during the week. On the weekend, I don't think it matters where you go."
- Grand Junction: "We actually call it the outdoor capital of the United States at Mesa (State College). Within 90 miles, there's everything to do except surfing."
- Durango: "I could spend the rest of my life exploring around here and not see it all."

- 4) **Park visitors and non-visitors generally choose destinations that they are already familiar with.** Park visitors across all five geographies said they are choosing to visit State Parks that they have already been to, primarily because of familiarity. "There are some places you go back to because you are comfortable with it, and with any repeat vacation spot, it's nice to not have to reinvent the wheel but to choose to explore (instead)," one visitor said. Non-visitors, although not visiting State Parks, agreed that they are "creatures of habit" and tend to visit destinations they are already familiar with. Numerous non-visitors said they oftentimes visit the same camping destinations they did as children in fact, because they were familiar and comfortable with them.

The increasing cost of traveling also played a part in visitors' and non-visitors' decision making because they wanted to be assured they knew what they would be getting for the cost of a trip. A man in Greeley said, "...We had such a good experience last time, it's hard to think of some new place to go with gas prices. You don't want to drive all the way out somewhere and be disappointed..."

IMPRESSIONS, KNOWLEDGE AND INITIAL PERCEPTIONS OF STATE PARKS

- 5) **The majority of all participants perceive that State Parks are crowded.** For park visitors who had more experiences at State Parks, nearly everyone agreed that State Parks are more crowded than they were in the past. This was the primary drawback to

State Parks that visitors discussed. A Denver park visitor remarked, “It’s not a perception; it’s a reality (that parks are overcrowded.) When you have to wait to get in, there are not enough parks for the number of Coloradans who want to use State Parks.”

More than one-half of all non-visitors indicated that they have observed that Colorado State Parks are crowded. While these respondents had less experiences with parks than visitors, they had a somewhat strong perception of crowding due to their own observation or from word-of-mouth. One gentleman remarked, “I stay away from them because they are so crowded with a lot of people coming in.” Others in the group agreed.

- 6) **Both visitors and non-visitors are surprised at the total number of State Parks.** Regardless of a participant’s prior experience at a State Park, both visitors and non-visitors were surprised to hear of the total number of parks in Colorado. Park visitors guessed that there were between 20 and 150 parks and non-visitors guessed between 6 and 200, both illustrating the public’s general lack of knowledge about the State Parks system. Many participants were surprised to hear there are 43 State Parks.
- 7) **Both visitors and non-visitors perceive State Parks being located near metropolitan areas.** Again, regardless of prior knowledge or experience at a State Park, the majority of both visitors and non-visitors guessed that State Parks are near larger populations of people, and thus, near metropolitan areas. A Greeley park visitor said, “They are close to populations,” and a Durango non-visitor surmised that parks are “near Denver.”
- 8) **Colorado residents primarily associate State Parks with the water, mountains and camping.** Across the state, with both segments of visitors, unaided remarks show that Coloradans strongly associate State Parks with the mountains, water (including lakes, streams, rivers and ponds), and camping.
- 9) **By far, Colorado residents associate water with State Parks more than anything else.** After analyzing both visitors’ and non-visitors’ drawings of what they considered “a typical Colorado State Park,” it was clear that a majority of Colorado residents associate water (including lakes, ponds, streams, rivers and waterfalls) with Colorado State Parks more than anything else, even the mountains. Although mountains were relatively popular, less than one-half of all participants included them in their drawings of a typical Colorado State Park.
- 10) **Feelings are mixed for all Colorado residents as to whether solitude is possible at a Colorado State Park.** Both visitors and non-visitors had mixed reactions when discussing the possibility of finding solitude at a State Park. One Denver visitor said, “It depends on where you go and when you go.” Non-visitors obviously had less experience at State Parks, but they still shared perceptions that some parks were more crowded than others. Many expressed similar sentiments to a Colorado Springs non-visitor, who remarked, “It (a State Park) doesn’t strike me as a good place to go for solitude.”

Perceptions of what solitude actually means generally varied among respondents. Views on solitude among both visitors and non-visitors ranged from being around virtually no one else to being outdoors and getting away from a metro area.

- 11) **Visitors and non-visitors associate three primary groups of people with a typical State Park visitor: experienced outdoors-people, families, and tourists.** Visitors and non-visitors both associated these three groups of people with a “typical State Park visitor.” These three groups generally emerged through unaided discussions and an analysis of drawings that respondents created.

Park visitors added that they mostly associate the summer season with State Parks. In their drawings of a typical State Park visitor, close to one-half of all visitors drew something to indicate protection from the sun, including hats, sunglasses or people wearing summertime clothes such as shorts.

- 12) **Park visitors and non-visitors overwhelmingly agree that State Parks are an asset to the state.** The overall consensus between park visitors and non-visitors was that State Parks are a great asset for Colorado residents, mostly because the parks offer a place for people to go and enjoy the outdoors. A male park visitor said, “It provides and affords and opportunity for families to spend some quality time.” Another visitor remarked, “It’s a quality of life issue...It’s a way to just get away.” The following quote is from a woman in Denver describing what impact State Parks have had on her family:

“I think that going out in the wilderness has really strengthened our family values because it’s very hard with the hustle and bustle of life. With computers and TV and everything around you, it’s hard to connect with your family, but when you go out and you take all of that away, you really get back to the basics.”

Non-visitors also agreed that State Parks are an asset for the State, and in addition to the factors listed above, non-visitors added that they felt State Parks were good for the State because of the social aspects at a park and because of the economic benefits for the State from tourism.

- 13) **Both segments agree that there are some obvious differences between State Parks and other types of public land/parks.** The greatest differences mentioned included the relative amount of on-site development, the proximity/accessibility, and the entry cost. The following quotes from both visitors and non-visitors describe how participants compared State Parks to other types of parks and public land.

- “BLM and National Forest are a little more primitive.”
- “There’s more solitude (on BLM land), and I’d feel more safe.”
- “It costs more to go to a State Park.”
- “(The entry fees at a National Park are more expensive) but the entry fees are good for a week.”
- “(Other (local) parks) are just quicker, easier, and less expensive.”
- “(Other types of parks) are free, but they don’t have the amenities (that State Parks do).”

- "...I like to camp around others, so I can't be in the middle of nowhere (like on BLM land or at a National Forest.)"
- "I think of the word "raw" for those places (land other than State Parks.) I think of less people too."

14) Visitors and non-visitors alike consider National Parks to be more of a destination than State Parks. A State Park visitor said the following comparing State Parks to National Parks: "It (a National Park) is more of a destination," another visitor agreed and said, "...There seems to be something a little grander about it...Here's a place where you go and see something that's unbelievable enough to the point where it's become a National Park."

Non-visitors also agreed since more than half said they prefer to visit a National Park over a State Park. A Denver non-visitor said, "I don't associate it (a State Park) with a destination. If I were to go somewhere next week and have a destination to go to, I think a State Park would be at the bottom of the list..." Many others agreed and part of this was due to the fact that non-visitors were less informed about State Parks compared to National Parks.

15) Park visitors feel safe at State Parks and non-visitors perceive State Parks as safe.

Nearly all non-visitors in all locations shared that they perceive State Parks to be very safe, and the fact that rangers are around and visible also make people feel safe. Park visitors, having more direct experience at State Parks, also said they feel very safe when visiting. Some of the different reasons that they felt this way included the types of people who visit a State Park, the number of people, and familiarity. The following quotes explain this further:

- "Maybe I'm silly but I tend to think that if you pay to get into a place, you have more people that want to be there for recreation than people who are just out for no good."
- "There's more people (at a State Park than another kind of park) and they're usually of like minds to be there."
- "Familiarity more than anything makes people feel safe...and proximity to a metro area."

16) Colorado residents differ in their opinion on the role of a ranger, but the majority agree that one role is to inform park visitors. Park visitors and non-visitors agree that the role of a ranger is to inform and educate park visitors, either on the rules of the park or on issues to be aware of. Visitors and non-visitors also agreed that they saw rangers as "caretakers," or those designated to serve the public.

Visitors and non-visitors differed somewhat on the preferred role of a ranger related to enforcement. Non-visitors felt the enforcement of the rules came secondary to informing, whereas the majority of park visitors agreed that informing and enforcing were equal duties of a ranger. Overall, regardless of how participants felt about enforcing the rules, both groups agreed that there needed to be someone available when trouble arises, and they all viewed this job as the ranger's.

DECISIONS ABOUT VISITING STATE PARKS AND PREFERRED ACTIVITIES

- 17) **Many park visitors make last minute decisions to visit a State Park where non-visitors want more details before they decide to go.** Park visitors shared that during their most recent visits to a Colorado State Park, most did a combination of active and passive activities, and this was their prime motivation for going. Participants in three of the five visitor groups said their decision to visit was last-minute. A big difference between visitors and non-visitors in this instance is that the park visitors were informed about the parks, so they knew where to go when they decided last minute that they wanted to have an outdoors experience.

On the other hand, close to all non-visitors said they would consider visiting a State Park if they had specific information, such as where the parks were located, what they could do once they got to a park, and what the rules of each park were (e.g. if dogs were allowed or not).

As discussed in more detail below, the biggest barrier for visiting a State Park for non-visitors is lack of knowledge. Coupled with the fact that most non-visitors were aware that there were fees to get in, many said they were unwilling to pay for something they knew nothing about, especially when they also see numerous alternatives that are free.

- 18) **The majority of respondents, visitors and non-visitors, agree that entry fees at State Parks are reasonable.** Despite the fact that many park visitors and non-visitors said they would visit more often if it was free, the consensus was that the entry fees for State Parks are reasonable. Participants guessed the entry fees were between \$3 and \$10, and non-visitors shared that they felt \$10 was a “little steep.” Participants in both segments agreed that they would prefer not to pay if they had the choice, but many also said they understand there is a cost to maintaining a park.

For participants who felt different, the cost of the entry fee appeared to be weighted in comparison to the free alternatives that may also be more convenient. One visitor said, “There’s just too many areas where you can go for free.”

- 19) **Park visitors and non-visitors believe that there should be some adjustments to the park passes available through the State.** In discussing the day and annual passes available through the State Parks system, both visitors and non-visitors agreed that there should be some adjustments made, or incentives given to Colorado residents. In nearly every group with park visitors, at least one person suggested offering a multi-car or multi-park pass. Several visitors agreed with one man who said, “It wasn’t cost effective to have both a county and a State Park pass.” Many appear to purchase what they feel they would use most often, which may not be a State Park pass in all cases. A Colorado Springs non-visitor said he thought the price for an annual pass to a State Park was reasonable but “I’d still rather do a day pass because I don’t see myself going (to a State Park) that often. I’d buy a National Park pass before a State Park pass,” he said.

Another, similar suggestion, that was mentioned more than once was having an interchangeable sticker where visitors were not limited to using just one car. Non-visitors also suggested offering more of an incentive for Colorado residents to visit State Parks, such as a discount when compared with what a non-Colorado resident would pay.

- 20) **The most preferred activities to do at a State Park according to visitors and non-visitors are hiking, getting together with family or friends, and looking at scenery.** When asked about the preferred activities in which they participate, park visitors most preferred camping, hiking, getting together with family and friends, and looking at scenery. Non-visitor preferences, other than hiking, were more passive in nature and included nature/wildlife observation, looking at scenery, and getting together with family and friends. Thus, camping appeared to be much more of a preferred activity for visitors versus non-visitors.
- 21) **Non-visitors and visitors agree that riding motorcycles and ATVs is better suited for parks/land(s) other than State Parks.** From the list of activities at State Parks that was evaluated by respondents, both segments of respondents agreed that riding motorcycles and ATVs was inappropriate for a State Park. One non-visitor said, “I personally wouldn’t want to have to deal with motorcycles, dirt bikes, and ATV’s, or four wheeling.” A park visitor remarked, “It (a State Park) doesn’t seem like a place a place where motorcycles or ATVs belong.”
- 22) **Colorado residents feel that amenities and features relating to camping are most important for a State Park.** Non-visitors indicated that they expect some amenities at a State Park, including clean bathrooms/toilets, showers for camping, picnic tables, paved parking lots and paved roads. More than one-half of all non-visitors said they would expect showers at a State Park that had camping sites. State Park visitors agreed that any amenities and features relating to camping were the most important, including clean bathrooms/toilets, showers, fire pits, developed and primitive campsites, and dumpsites for RV’s.
- 23) **Visitors and non-visitors agree that preserving natural landscapes are more important than building amenities and features at a State Park.** Both segments of respondents believed that there are tradeoffs between preserving the natural landscape and developing amenities/features at a State Park, and nearly everyone agreed that both could be done harmoniously. Most agreed that they should both be done to accommodate all types of people. One non-visitor said, “I don’t see it being an either or, because today they can integrate facilities and make it blend in architecturally,” and another non-visitor said, “I would expect both at a State Park.” A State Park visitor said, “Well-balanced amenities with nature all around (is what I want.)”

When choosing between the two options, however, visitors and non-visitors were more likely to believe that the greater focus should be on preserving the natural landscape. A Colorado Springs visitor summarized, “If I could have more with less development, then I’d like that more than having more with more development.”

- 24) **Primitive campsites are preferred to developed ones.** Between two types of campsites, a developed site with facilities and amenities and a more primitive camping area with more natural features, the majority of both visitors and non-visitors preferred primitive camping sites to developed ones.

Although the majority preferred primitive camping, they also shared that they saw the need for both types of camping in order to accommodate all people. As discussed with amenities and features, a balance between the two types of camping was most preferred.

COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT STATE PARKS

- 25) **Colorado residents desire more information about State Parks.** Both visitors and non-visitors shared that they would like more general information about State Parks, such as where they are (all) located and what activities are available at each park to name a few. Park visitors added that they would like to find an easier way to access the information as well. As previously mentioned, one of the greatest barriers, if not the greatest reason why non-visitors are choosing not visit State Parks, is because of the lack of general knowledge.

In discussions about information desired, it was apparent that many residents had not accessed the State Parks website recently.

- 26) **Respondents feel that the State Parks should advertise more.** Non-visitors were very vocal that they thought there should be more advertising for State Parks, since many had never seen any or had only heard of it when they saw a lottery commercial. Park visitors and non-visitors both agreed that a way to overcome the objection of not being informed enough about the different State Parks was to advertise. Both groups also mentioned the State Parks website. Participants felt strongly that a very informative website would be extremely helpful. (Again, it was apparent that many had not visited the State Parks website recently).

- 27) **Visitors and non-visitors alike rely on getting information from either word-of-mouth, the Internet, or a combination of the two.** Both segments said they rely primarily on word-of-mouth and the Internet for gathering information, and specifically information related to traveling. Most participants agreed that any information they have received about State Parks has been online and that the web is the best way to reach people. One park visitor said, “I wouldn’t know where to go otherwise to pursue information.”

- 28) **Both segments are limited in their knowledge about the State Parks website.** Half of all park visitors were generally familiar with the existence of the State Parks website, but even so, most agreed that they wanted to see more of the following on the website: photos, trail descriptions, maps, distances from major metropolitan areas, restrictions, activities by park, the number of visitors expected each day, campsite information and a list of upcoming events.

Very few non-visitors had ever visited the State Park’s website, but most said they assumed there was one. The kind of information they would want to gain from a website included the locations of all the parks with a map, the proximity from their homes, the activities available at each park, and information about rare plants and animals at each State Park.

- 29) **Two marketing messages are recommended by Colorado residents: marketing to families and communicating the convenience and accessibility of State Parks.** State Park visitors strongly agreed that targeting families would be an ideal way to boost attendance at State Parks. A Denver park visitor said, “I think the marketing could be really well done if they marketed to families with children under 18, because the whole screening thing is such a big issue and it’s only getting worse.”

A second marketing approach that was suggested by both visitors and non-visitors was by emphasizing the convenience and accessibility of State Parks in messages. A

Durango man said, "...make it well-known how accessible it (visiting a State Park) is..." Non-visitors added that they particularly thought it would be best to market to locals, since they perceived out-of-town tourists are already attending State Parks regularly.

FINDINGS BY SEGMENT

The following findings represent areas of interest that were unique to each market segment included in this research project, State Park visitors and non-visitors.

STATE PARK VISITORS

- 30) **Park visitors describe the purpose of State Parks as primarily for “preservation” and “recreation.”** Park visitors across all five geographic locations agreed that the purpose of a State Park is mostly preservation, “to preserve green space,” for example, and for recreation, such as “(to provide) opportunities for people to enjoy the State.” All groups of visitors agreed that State Parks offers opportunities for recreation, especially for people who are not used to the outdoors but are looking for new ways to experience it.
- 31) **State Park visitors relate a really “cool” State Park to the number of people visiting, the scenery, the park activities and park features.** Regarding the number of people visiting, at least a third of all park visitors agreed that a good experience at a park is one where you “don’t have wall-to-wall people.” Special or unique scenery was also important to park visitors, especially in Durango where there were so many competing options available. Unique park features such as a special natural attraction also defined a “cool” park from an average park.
- 32) **Some proportion of park visitors considers State Parks to be more for day-use than overnight use.** Approximately one-third of all park visitors agreed with an opinion that was addressed by a Colorado Springs resident who said, “I didn’t put a campground (in my drawing) because so many parks are near urban settings. If it’s so close to an urban setting, they why would you want to camp there?” For this reason, most park visitors perceive that some State Parks are better for day-use only.
- 33) **All park visitors plan to visit a State Park again in the future.** Overall, park visitors had a very positive outlook on State Parks, and nearly all visitors said they plan to visit a State Park again in the future where they will do a combination of both active and passive activities. The greatest reasons why participants said they would visit a State Park again included proximity, familiarity, and convenience. Parks that are convenient and accessible are the ones that visitors are most likely to visit on another occasion.
- 34) **Park visitors agree that there are three primary factors that would encourage them to visit State Parks more often.** The three factors that would encourage State Parks visitors to visit more often included: if the parks were free, if they were less-crowded and if more general information about them was known. The kinds of information that park visitors wanted to learn included the cost for different parks, the distances from metro areas, and the locations of the all the parks. This was virtually identical to separate discussions with non-visitors.

- 35) **Visitors choose State Parks for a variety of reasons.** In discussing why a visitor chooses a State Park over another kind of park, visitors shared that they prefer State Parks for the proximity, the activities, the amenities, the facilities, the convenience for out-of-town guests and social gatherings, camping, and the structure/organization that is provided for people who are less equipped to rough it in the wilderness. At least one-half of all visitors said they use State Parks for camping and multiple others said they consider State Parks when out-of-town guests are visiting.

NON-PARK VISITORS

- 36) **Non-park visitors are more willing to try something new if it comes as a recommendation.** The strong majority of non-visitors said they felt more comfortable trying something new if someone recommended it. A Colorado Springs woman summarized, “My level of daringness has a lot more to do with being with someone that I trust, particularly if it means trying something new at a different place that I’ve never been to. If I’m with someone and they like it...then okay, but otherwise, I don’t like to try new things.” In discussing the outdoors, only about one-third of all non-visitors indicated that they had recently tried something new that involved the outdoors.

For similar reasons, non-visitors also indicated that they prefer to do new activities in their local community; they were simply more comfortable with it. This finding is also attributed to the fact that numerous non-visitors shared that they were relatively new to Colorado.

- 37) **Non-visitors do not relate to a typical State Park visitor.** As discussed above, like park visitors, non-visitors associated families, tourists and experienced outdoors-people with a typical State Park visitor. When asked if they related to the people in their drawings, participants in four of the five groups generally did not identify with the people they drew. Nearly everyone indicated that they could be friends with the type of person they drew, however.

- 38) **Non-visitors struggle with identifying a State Park from another kind of park.** In each group across the state with non-visitors, at least one person said something similar to: “I don’t have a sense for a State Park versus a National Park (or any other kind of park)... when I think of a State Park, I don’t have a sense of that.” Multiple others agreed with the following mindset given by one respondent, “I never differentiate one park from another. I just think I’ll go to the park, and I’ll go.”

- 39) **The majority of non-visitors across the State were aware that there are fees to get into a Colorado State Park.** When non-visitors were asked what they had heard about State Parks, many top-of-mind remarks had to do with fees, including the following statement from a male participant: “That you have to pay to get in.” As stated earlier, most non-visitors felt the fees were fairly reasonable for State Parks, but because of a lack of knowledge, many also said they were unwilling to pay for something they knew very little or nothing about.

- 40) **Non-visitors perceive State Parks to be a combination of “nature with facilities” or the “outdoors with amenities.”** Non-visitors in all five locations generally agreed with the following statement made by a Denver area resident: “I think of nature with facilities (when I think of a State Park.)” Another man agreed and said, “State Parks are

campgrounds with some basic facilities.” The strong majority of non-visitors associated camping with State Parks.

- 41) **Non-visitors believe there are many reasons to visit a State Park, but primarily to get away and relax and/or for the activities available.** During discussion, non-visitors said they believe there are many reasons to visit a State Park including an accessible and easy way to experience nature, or a good way to spend quality time with family and friends. There were two primary reasons non-visitors perceived people visiting State Parks: because State Parks provide a way to get away and relax and because of the activities that are available at State Parks, many of which are only available at State Parks.
- 42) **A State Park is not a preferred choice of destination for non-visitors.** When discussing where non-visitors might go for their next trip, only a quarter of all participants said they might consider a State Park. Durango and Grand Junction non-visitors differed in their response as many in these locations said they would choose a State Park over another kind of park if they were looking for amenities or were going for a specific activity.
- 43) **The greatest barrier for non-visitors to visiting a State Park is a lack of knowledge about the park(s) and not perceiving it as a convenient thing to do.** Close to one half of all non-visitors said they did not feel that they are familiar enough with a Colorado State Park to know what to do when they get there, and that they do not perceive a State Park as being a convenient thing to do, primarily because of crowds. More than one half of all non-visitors shared that they have the perception that State Parks are overcrowded. One non-visitor said, “Crowds would stop me from going.”

Additional barriers that were discussed were the cost (primarily for metro Denver non-visitors), being creatures of habit, (i.e. not trying new things), limited knowledge and experience with the State Parks website, and not viewing visiting a State Park as a “cool” thing to do.

DETAILED FINDINGS

The following includes the detailed findings from the ten focus groups conducted in this study. Findings are reported separately for each segment (park visitors and non-visitors) and are reported by each major topic area that was addressed in discussion.

LEISURE AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES

In the first section of discussion, State Park visitors discussed their leisure and recreational activities, including indoor and outdoor activities. They also discussed their current opinions on traveling and why they decide to go where they do.

STATE PARK VISITORS

State Park visitors prefer to spend most of their free-time outdoors. When asked how they spend their free time, most visitors of State Parks described activities outdoors, and compared to non-visitors, they appeared to spend much more time outside. A man in Greeley said, “We (my wife and I) are on a quest to hike at every National Park in the country.” Another man said, “(I take advantage of) any opportunity we get to hike and to do it in the mountains is even better.” Hiking was perhaps the most preferred activity outdoors among State Park visitors, although preferred recreational activities varied from location to location.

Participants in both Grand Junction and Durango, particularly, strongly agreed that they take full advantage of the recreational opportunities in their local areas, and residents of these two locations were specifically excited about the variety of outdoor options close to home. Especially in Durango, multiple participants indicated that they are living in the area primarily for the outdoor lifestyle. One man said, “There’s so much to do here,” and another said, “In this town, it’s easy to say that we are active all year around (with outdoor activities.)” Similarly, a Grand Junction resident remarked, “Here, it’s pretty much all four seasons.” Grand Junction residents also mentioned the desert/arid climate that makes year-round activities possible, although at least one-half of all Grand Junction park users commented on the summer heat, which may limit some of their time spent outdoors.

Close to all visitors are planning to stay within Colorado for their next trip. Close to all park visitors shared a variety of destinations within Colorado for their next trips including the Royal Gorge, the Gunnison Canyon, Aspen, Ouray, Kremling, Steamboat Springs, the Grand Mesa, and Estes Park. It was clear through discussion that park visitors enjoyed and appreciated Colorado, and the strong majority agreed that there is enough to do in the state, and thus, saw little reason to leave (for a vacation). A Colorado Springs resident said, “Colorado’s awesome. You don’t get tired of it. I could live here my whole life and not see everything...You don’t have to go anywhere else.” Another man agreed, and said, “You are barely scratching the surface with any area that you go.” Durango residents were particularly pleased about staying within Colorado for vacations. A female resident in Durango said, “It’s always like a vacation when you live out here,” and another woman mentioned how she knows several people in the area who took a pay cut “by choice,” to live in Durango. This participant remarked, “I’m a teacher and we knew that by going to Durango, we’d be receiving much less, but we did it because we love Durango.”

Financial reasons also played a part as to why some residents are choosing to stay close to home for their next trip. A male participant said, “It’s financial for me, because I’m a student and don’t have much disposable income at all. I’m extremely limited.” Gas prices were also mentioned as a

factor for staying close to home, although this was more commonly heard in focus groups along the front range.

The level of planning involved in visiting s State Park varies. Across all geographic areas, nearly all participants indicated that they plan to travel with other people for their next trip, and results were mixed if park visitors plan their trips or decide last minute. In locations such as Durango and Grand Junction where a greater variety of outdoor recreation is available at a closer distance, several said most of their short (weekend) trips are spontaneous. Along the front range, about one-half of all participants said they prefer to plan their vacations, even short trips, primarily because of crowds and secondly because of the travel time. “For instance, if you’re a boater and you go to Cherry Creek or Chatfield and you’re not on the water by 9 o’clock, you’re not going to get in and nor do you want to,” said one woman in Denver. Others shared that they have to reserve camp sites months in advance for places such as Cherry Creek and Chatfield.

All participants strongly agreed that there is a lot to do within a short distance from their homes. When asked if participants felt there was a lot to do within 50 miles of their homes, a male in Grand Junction said, “We actually call it the outdoor capital of the United States at Mesa (State College). Within 90 miles, there’s everything to do except surfing.” A woman in Durango remarked, “(Close proximity to the outdoors) is really why people live here. I haven’t met anybody who lives in Durango who isn’t here to take advantage of the outdoor activities.” Colorado residents on the front range also agreed that there is a lot to do in a relatively short distance, even living in larger metropolitan areas. Some added that they did feel, however, that going beyond 50 miles was necessary in order to find solitude. The following are additional quotes from park visitors regarding the array of outdoor activities available to them near their homes.

- “I traveled around the U.S. in a motor home for eight years, and I came here (Grand Junction), and I’ve never seen such a place. You can go out to the airport or the sand dunes. There’s the Grand Mesa and be up in the trees; you can go to the Colorado Monument and be up in the mountains, kind of...You can (be on the) river; you can motorcycle; you can pedal bike; you can hike. Everything’s here, and it’s not 115 degrees, and it’s not 20 below zero.”
- “I love that you can leave your front door and take a 30 to 50 minute bike ride and be back that same day.”
- “(In deciding where to go) I think you say ‘what do you want to see this weekend?’”
- “That’s one reason I love Durango...there’s always something new to discover all the time.”
- “I could spend the rest of my life exploring around here and not see it all.”

“You can go to any place in Colorado, and you aren’t going to be disappointed. There’s no way you can be disappointed.”

Most visit destinations where they have already been. As stated above, participants thoroughly enjoy Colorado and the kinds of recreational activities that are available. For this reason, and the fact that many were experienced Colorado travelers and had found favorite destinations,

most said they were planning to visit a place where they had already been for their next trip. One man remarked, “Most of the time, I go back to the same place because I know it well, and I tend to have a desire to do the same kinds of things that I’m familiar with.” Another added, “With Red Feathers (Redfeather Lakes), we had such a good experience last time it’s hard to think of some new place to go with gas prices. You don’t want to drive all the way out somewhere and be disappointed and not know how it’s going to go. So, it’s based on past experiences.” Multiple others agreed, both about preference for familiarity and not wanting to be disappointed in their choice of destination.

Across all regions of the state, State Park visitors agreed that familiarity is the greatest reason they choose to revisit destinations. “When you’re familiar with it, it makes it so much better because then there’s areas you know to revisit,” one man shared. A second participant agreed, “Usually, when you are taking family members, it’s better to take them somewhere where you know. I find that’s the reason we normally go back to camping spots or lakes.” Another remarked, “There are some places you go back to because you are comfortable with it and with any repeat vacation spot, it’s nice to not have to reinvent the wheel, but to choose to explore (instead).” An additional reason why some participants said they visit the same destination is because they have ties to it. For example, one man said his sister has a condo in the mountains, so the family regularly visits the area.

There was a small group of State Park visitors who said they prefer to visit new sites. One woman said, “We don’t normally go to the same place twice. There’s so much to see. You want to cover it all and then go back.” Another woman said, “We’re constantly exploring since we’re still fairly new here. We are constantly driving around to find new places for the kids to go. We just love to burn energy...I love to get out and see the mountains and the foothills.” Because many participants were like this resident and were fairly new to Colorado, they had not yet found their destination-of-choice, so at this point they still preferred to explore the state.

The following list consolidates reasons why participants indicate that they choose to visit certain Colorado destinations.

- Landscape/Scenery
- Accessibility/Distance
- Spontaneity
- Exploration
- Word-of-Mouth/recommendation
- Availability
- (For) specific activities
- Weather
- Dogs allowed
- Water (activities)

Rising gas and transportation costs have affected travel decisions. As previously mentioned, gas prices have impacted Colorado residents’ choices about travel in all geographies, although in some locations more than others. One participant said, “With gas being the way it is,

you don't know how long it's going to take to get somewhere." Roughly a third of all park visitors shared that the price of transportation is affecting their decisions to travel, so therefore, many are choosing "staycations" rather than vacations. A Colorado Springs resident said, "Staycation means you stay close. You're not going to spend a lot of money getting there." Similarly, a Denver resident stated, "Gas prices and airline prices are crazy. I'm not going anywhere."

It is true that most residents highly pleased about living in Colorado because they enjoy the surroundings, so for many, choosing to stay within the state for a vacation did not appear to be a sacrifice. It is also true, however, that many are choosing to stay within Colorado (or closer to home) rather than traveling outside of it (or a further distance within the State) because of gas prices. Multiple people across all groups said that they are consciously making the decision to stay close for this reason. The following quotes illustrate how a few participants travel choices have been impacted by the increase in transportation costs.

- "I have a motor home, and I don't get to use it as much as I use to. Can you guess why?"
- "I'm heading up to Deadwood and Mt. Rushmore (for my next trip). Normally (I would choose) Mexico or Hawaii."
- "I'm not going to go near as far for a day hike as I used to."

Park visitors rely mostly on word-of-mouth and the Internet for gathering information.

Respondents shared that the most common sources for information relating to travel come from Internet and word-of-mouth. A female participant said, "We utilize friends and people that we know, especially our next-door-neighbor. They are always gone so they can tell us where they've been or where they're going." Others said they rely on researching various websites and utilizing the Internet. A male participant said, "We use the Internet to search and find all the information available on parks and reserving campsites." The following is a short list of websites that participants said they regularly use for travel needs.

- www.reserveamerica.com
- www.larimercamping.com
- www.14ers.com
- www.fs.fed.us

In addition to word-of-mouth, park visitors shared that they use a variety of other sources to gather information about traveling, such as information from the U.S. Forest Service, State Visitor's Bureau, the local Fish and Wildlife Offices, the AAA publication "Encompass," from park rangers, the travel section in newspapers, and from maps or atlases, such as BLM maps. A man in Greeley mentioned that he'll call a park in advance and ask to speak with a ranger. He said, "What I've seen is that on websites, they'll lead you to real popular trails, and if you talk to a ranger and tell them, 'I'm an experienced hiker and this is what I'm looking for, then they'll help you find it.'"

NON- PARK VISITORS

The following summary is also regarding leisure and recreational activities, but it is from feedback with non-visitors.

Non-park visitors spend a moderate amount of time outdoors. Non-visitors of Colorado State Parks reported spending a moderate amount of time outdoors, although perhaps comparatively less than visitors. Participants in the metro Denver area indicated that they try to go outdoors between two and three times a week, which generally represented the other geographies as well. Multiple respondents in Grand Junction, in particular, reported to have a lot of leisure time because they were retired. One commonality across all geographies was that many participants are involved in volunteer activities, including activities through churches, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, healthcare organizations, and organizations that work with seniors.

Participants are many times more willing to try something new if it comes as a recommendation. Most non-visitors in all focus groups said they were more likely to try something new if it came as a recommendation from someone they knew and trusted. Opinions were mixed about trying new things, but more non-visitors were interested in trying new activities than the contrary. Some shared that they were comfortable trying new things on their own, and many individuals, particularly in Colorado Springs, were new to Colorado and were looking for new things to do to get familiar with their surroundings. Multiple participants also reported that they preferred to do something new with someone else present. A Colorado Springs resident remarked: “My level of daringness has a lot more to do with being with someone that I trust, particularly if it means trying something new at a different place that I’ve never been to. If I’m with someone and they like it, or if it’s a new food and they try it first and like it, then okay, but otherwise, I don’t like to try new things.” Another woman remarked, “I think I have an attitude that I like to do new things, but I oftentimes rely on a friend to grab me, and then I like to do new things. I somehow don’t seek them out enough (on my own.)”

Examples of new activities that people recently tried included taking classes on writing or dancing, taking an alternative route home, trying a new children’s activity, attending an event, such as a large-scale conference, or running in the Bolder Boulder. More than one-third of respondents reported doing something new recently that had to do with the outdoors. “There’s so many branches off the trails that you could do a new one each day,” one woman said. Another described her and her husband’s experiences trying new outdoor activities: “My husband and I recreate each day and we’ve said that there is still so much that we haven’t done because we tend to go to our areas. We want to set aside time to do things that we haven’t done yet.” Overall, respondents in all groups reported doing new activities that were both indoor and outdoor; however, most participants in Durango especially reported trying new outdoor activities. The group agreed that a resident in Durango would be very limited in trying new things if the outdoors was not their primary interest.

The majority of non-visitors said they prefer to try new activities within their local community. Most non-visitors said they prefer to stay in their own local area when trying something new, although some had mixed reactions. A man in Denver said, “It depends on how big of a fool I’m going to make of myself.” Numerous participants stated that they were not originally from Colorado, or were fairly new to the area, so many said they have tried a lot of local activities simply to get familiar with their surroundings. This was especially the case for Colorado Springs and Durango non-visitors. Participants across all groups agreed that there are a lot of different activities to do within close proximity, which also factors in to why many choose to stay local. In speaking about the variety of the activities, a Grand Junction man said the following: “You can hit sub-alpine forest on to pretty low lying desert and do the sand dunes within a tank of gas, so I don’t see the need to spend two tanks of gas when I can see all the bushes and trees I want within one tank.” A woman in Colorado Springs said she prefers to stay in her local community because she is single. “I think it’s partially because I’m alone. So now, if I’m going to do something new, either I’m going to do something that I know is going to be safe or I’m going to find somebody else to go with me,” she said.

Non-park visitors express that there is generally a lot to do within 50 miles of their hometowns. For the most part, non-park visitors agreed that there is a lot to do within 50 miles of their home towns, relatively. A Grand Junction man said, “Fifty miles is kind of limited but I definitely stay on the Western Slope.” A Durango man said, “The sky’s the limit on the outdoor stuff (here). I’m trying to think of an outdoor venue that isn’t available, but you do have to want to do and make a step towards it.” In Colorado Springs, several participants discussed the nearby National Forests and landmark sites like the Garden of the Gods and Pikes Peak, and metro Denver residents discussed nearby local or city parks mostly, because they commonly agreed that one would need to get a little beyond 50 miles to find any solitude.

In Durango, a female participant shared her concern that there is not much to do for teenagers in the area, but nearly everyone else in the group disagreed. They agreed, however, that most activities available are related to the outdoors in this region of the State. The aforementioned lady remarked, “I feel satisfied (with enough to do) but I’ve seen a lot of people leave over the years. Like they (other participants) said, it has a lot of recreational activities, but if you’re the artsy, theatre or music type, (then) it’s limited.” One other limitation that was discussed is the cost of some of the outdoor activities. One Durango resident commented, “I think ultimately it comes down to the buy in. It’s expensive, and with so many of these sports, you can’t do them without a \$3,000 piece of equipment, whether it’s skating or snowboarding or rafting or kayaking, or climbing.”

Gas prices are forcing people to stay local. Rising gas prices played a tremendous role in why non-visitors are choosing to try new activities in their local areas and why nearly all participants (in all five locations) are planning to stay within their local communities for future vacations, or “staycations.” The vast majority of participants in each location shared that gas prices are preventing them from traveling as often as they would like. The following are a few quotes to further support this finding:

- “I have tried to focus on staying closer because I can’t afford to go anywhere else.”
- “Realistically that (staying local) is all I can do. With having a young child, you’re limited in a number of ways. It’s difficult traveling, let alone (with) the increased expense of traveling. In the last couple of years, I’ve spent a significant amount of time trying to explore areas around here.”
- “With having a young child, you’re limited (in traveling) in a number of ways. It’s difficult traveling let alone with the increased expense of traveling.”

When asked, the strong majority of non-visitors said they are planning to stay within Colorado for their next vacation. Again, this was not necessarily the first choice for many participants, but they appear to be choosing to do so for financial reasons. Most participants were happy staying within Colorado, however, because of the variety of available destinations. As previously mentioned, many were still somewhat new to the state, so they enjoyed any opportunity to travel and learn more about their *new* home. One female participant remarked, “I’d like to see places within Colorado, (but) I just don’t know where they are yet.”

Other reasons that people are choosing to travel less or to stay within their local home was because of the difficulty of traveling with small children, the lack of time off of work, the time it takes to travel, or not knowing enough about Colorado to know where to go. A Denver resident said, “When weekends come, I just want to be someplace close.” Another man said, “There’s so much to do here, you don’t really have to go that far.”

Non-visitors get most of their travel information from the Internet or through word-of-mouth. Probably the most common source for finding information relating to travel was through word-of-mouth. “I get (my) info from family and friends,” one woman said and several others agreed. Using the Internet was common among group members as well, although a few barriers were discussed to this approach. One Denver resident said, “The Internet is hard because there’s so much information, so you have to find what’s local,” where a Grand Junction resident said the following: “Some of us don’t have access to the Internet, and it’s hard for us to find information.”

Another very common approach to finding information, and especially travel-related information, appears to be using the local newspapers’ travel or entertainment sections. In nearly all of the five locations, participants discussed their local papers as being an excellent resource. Other common sources for finding such information included the following: the State Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, flyers and newsletters such as “Tidbits,” the AAA publication “Encompass,” the Yellow Pages (one person in all five groups), and information from the Department of Wildlife.

Traveling far enough away to stay overnight is not a common occurrence with non-visitors. When asked how often group members traveled far enough away to where they would need to stay the night, less than half of all participants reported to do this more than twice a year. Grand Junction residents appeared to travel like this more than any other group, because several participants were retired and had the time to do so. A young Denver resident without children said that she and her husband do such a thing at least once a month because they will visit friends in places like Castle Rock where she lives in Broomfield. To her, this was far enough away to warrant an overnight stay. Otherwise, traveling and staying overnight was not very common to group members. Reasons included lack of time and money, the difficulty of doing so with children, or preferring day trips since they are just as easy in Colorado. One woman said, “There’s so much to do here, you don’t really have to go that far.”

IMPRESSIONS OF STATE PARKS

The second major theme discussed was impressions of Colorado State Parks. During discussion participants shared what they felt the general purpose of State Parks was, and they also shared any previous knowledge they have about the parks system in Colorado.

STATE PARK VISITORS

Park visitors describe the purpose of State Parks as primarily “preservation” and “recreation.” Participants across all five regions agreed that the purpose of a State Park is mostly preservation: to “preserve green space,” “preserve historical sites,” “set aside land for future generations,” and “a place for the animals.” A female in Grand Junction said she felt the chief purpose of parks was “to protect the wildlife and the integrity of Colorado’s great living areas.” A second participant added the following comment:

“It’s about keeping it so it stays similar (to what it is now) so there’s integrity for future generations, and so they know what to do with it.”

All groups also felt strongly that State Parks offers opportunities for recreation, particularly for people who are not used to the outdoors, but are looking for ways to experience it. Park visitors felt that State Parks served the purpose of “providing an opportunity for people to enjoy the state,” and to provide “access to areas you might not be able to access if it weren’t a State Park.” A Grand Junction woman said, “I think (it is for) being at a place that’s cared for and safer than being in the middle of nowhere.” Multiple people discussed how State Parks give people the opportunity to camp. One man remarked, “It makes camping more accessible, perhaps to all sorts of people who aren’t as adventurous, because there’s campsites, bathroom facilities, water and a structured area for people to enjoy the outdoors who may not do it all the time.” Another man commented, “There’s a lot of people who don’t like to just go out and camp. They like to have the bathrooms and the showers right there.” In Greeley, a resident described State Parks as having “recreation that is controlled,” such as controlling the number of fish in a lake or the number allowed to be caught by visitors. The following quote is from a Durango woman who described why she appreciates State Parks.

“It provides structure for someone like us. We don’t have any gear. We need a structured vehicle to do it until we get the gear, and even then, we won’t know what we’re doing anyway, so it’s nice to have something set up to make it easy and so we can learn.”

Nearly all park visitors agreed that preservation and recreation can coexist at State Parks. A Denver woman expressed, “I think it’s the only way that things could be preserved in today’s world. The greater part of the population wants to make use of whatever land there is.” A man then commented, “Plus it’s regulated in a State Parks system. They have certain rules, so it’s not like you can do whatever you want. That does help with preservation,” he said.

Another purpose for State Parks that was discussed in all geographic locations included education. More participants than not agreed that State Parks serve as tools to “educate people about wildlife and green space,” as a Greeley resident stated. A young man in Durango said, “I think it’s a pretty controlled setting for people to be introduced into the wilderness in a controlled way, and

the parks teach a lot.” A second man added that, “You receive a lot of information and there are a lot of set boundaries on what you can do and what you are expected to do...the stringent boundaries (teach you) how you are supposed to treat the land...” A Denver resident shared the following: “You can go on hikes and they have signs to tell you what kind of trees there are, what kinds of animals are around, and what the topography is like.”

One man out of the five groups with parks visitors disagreed, because, in his experience, the Colorado State Parks were not interested in educating school-age kids. He felt that children naturally had less interest in such a thing, so “If they (Colorado State Parks) want kids to go there, they would have more of an incentive for that. The State is not educational on their part,” he said. By contrast, a Grand Junction man said the following regarding education at State Parks.

“I think they (State Parks) are good because they are good for educational opportunities for kids. I’ve been to Idaho and there was a presentation for the kids and the ranger came out... I like doing things with my kids, and if it’s educational, it’s even better.”

Participants in several locations discussed an additional purpose: State Parks grant families the chance to spend quality time together. A small group of people also added that State Parks serve as a revenue-generator for the State. “I would guess that it was intended to be a money generating thing for the State,” one Greeley man said. This was a perception that some participants shared, although others disagreed. “It’s a revenue source for the park, because the State has said the parks need to fund themselves,” one Colorado Springs resident said.

Everyone agreed that the State Parks are a good thing for Colorado. The overall consensus was that State Parks are great for the state and for Colorado residents, mostly because the parks provide a place for people to go and enjoy the outdoors. A male participant said, “It provides and affords an opportunity for families to spend some quality time.” Similarly, another man said, “It’s an affordable thing to do, to spend time outdoors with your family...where else can you have a campfire?” A few residents who were fairly new to Colorado spoke about their experiences in other states where natural areas and open space was limited. “After living in New York, we’re really happy that there’s places to actually go and not get in trouble for it,” one woman said. Another participant said that growing up in Iowa much of the land was private. “We’re so lucky here that we have access to as many places freely.” The following are additional quotes as to why participants believed State Parks are an asset:

- “They take pressure off of the National Parks, to a certain extent.”
- “I think if there weren’t State Parks, you’d be limited in your choices on where to go.”
- “It’s good for the state because it’s an attraction for the tourists. People move here for these specific reasons too.”
- “One of the best things about coming here (from California) is just how accessible everything is. I love it.”
- “I really appreciate that Colorado has put aside some of this land for us to enjoy. It’s what a lot of people do, especially at Cherry Creek and Chatfield.”

- “It’s a quality of life issue...It’s a way to just get away.”
- “I think it’s a valuable thing, that you get to go to a place that you know is going to be pretty.”
- “People are choosing to be active instead of just sedentary, which is a good thing.”
- “It provides residents a way to get into something that’s real, and permanent and of value.”
- “There’s a lot of people who wouldn’t have any opportunity to go anywhere else, other than Cherry Creek and Chatfield. That might be their only outdoors option they will ever get.”

“I think that going out in the wilderness has really strengthened our family values because it’s very hard with the hustle and bustle of life. With computers and TV and everything around you, it’s hard to connect with your family, but when you go out and you take all of that away, you really get back to the basics.”

Nearly everyone agrees that State Parks are more crowded than they use to be. The primary downside to State Parks that was discussed was the perceived overcrowding. The greatest concern about State Parks was the number of people visiting them, and nearly everyone agreed that the parks are more crowded than they use to be. A Colorado Springs man said, “I think you can probably say that (places are more crowded than they used to be) for almost anything in Colorado, including the backcountry...The reason I head out east now is because there’s no as many people going to those places.” Another Colorado Springs resident said, “Sometimes there can be too much activity (at a State Park), so it can be crowded.” More than one-half of all participants had the perception that State Parks were crowded, and they developed this perception based on past experiences.

The following are quotes from participants regarding the issue of overcrowding:

- “It’s not a perception, it’s a reality. When you have to wait to get in, there are not enough parks for the number of Coloradans who want to use State Parks.”
- “Especially on the weekends, and sometimes you have to wait in long car lines just to get in, and I think somebody mentioned that if you don’t get there early, you might as well forget it. Sometimes it’s really difficult just to get in, even if you just want to take a walk by the water or something.”
- “At Eldorado State Park, most of the time there’s never anywhere to park, so they just don’t let anyone else in.”
- “Camping is the same as boating. I bet if you want to get a camp spot, there’s no chance without a reservation.”
- “I think, especially with Denver growing as it is, you have more people sharing the same resources and typically people only have the weekend to access that, so

I think that has a lot to do with the long lines getting into parks and the overcrowding.”

“I don’t think solitude when I think of a State Park. You can find solitude when you get there, but I’m thinking of the past when I went to Mueller (State Park) and there were maybe 2 or 3 people with me. That’s solitude.”

Although nearly all participants agreed that State Parks are more crowded than they used to be, the topic of crowds was not as top-of-mind in Grand Junction and Durango it was with participants on the Front Range. Most Durango and Grand Junction residents did not feel that State Parks were too crowded, in contrast to Front Range visitors. A Grand Junction resident said, “I think in years gone by, parks weren’t full like they are now. You often had space around you because it just wasn’t packed. Now, you even have to make reservations if you want to go down to one of the popular places, and they are usually full where it feels more like a neighborhood than it does a State Park.” Multiple others agreed, but they also agreed with another man who said, “Regarding camping, you can actually go and know you’re going to get a camping spot...If it’s not a holiday weekend, it’s usually pretty secure...Where with the National Parks, you don’t always know if you’re going to get one.”

The majority of park visitors agreed that camping is usually “close” and “tight” at State Parks. A Durango respondent said, “I like State Parks, but it’s close camping, and a lot of people on the trails.” Another man agreed and said, “It’s fighting for the bathrooms. If it’s first thing in the morning, you’ve got to really try and get in there early before it gets crowded.” Grand Junction residents discussed State Park campsites relative to KOA campsites and nearly everyone agreed that despite the close quarters at times, State Park sites were better than KOA campsites. “You’re even closer and it’s really regimented (at KOA sites),” one woman said. Another participant agreed that KOA sites were close and added that, “It’s within reaching distance (of another camper.)”

Park visitors guess that there are between 20 and 150 State Parks. Although State Park visitors were more informed about the parks than non-visitors, like non-visitors they were surprised to hear there were 43 parks throughout the State. One man said, “I was shocked when you (the moderator) said how many there were. I would like information about all of them sometime.” Many participants also shared that they commonly find it difficult to distinguish the difference between State Parks and other kinds of parks, including National Parks. The following table highlights the State Parks that were top-of-mind for park visitors in each geographic region.

Table 1: Top-of-Mind State Parks by Region (All responses)

<u>Greeley</u>	<u>Colorado Springs</u>	<u>Denver</u>	<u>Grand Junction</u>	<u>Durango</u>
Boyd	Barr Lake	Barley*	Bear Creek*	Atlas*
Chatfield	Bonny Lake	Barr Lake	Chatfield	Cheyenne Mountain
Cherry Creek	Carter Lake*	Boyd Lake	Cherry Creek	Longmont*
Lory	Castlewood Canyon	Castlewood Canyon	Connected Lakes* (<i>now</i>	Mancos
Navajo	Cherry Creek	Chatfield	<i>James M. Robb</i>)	Navajo Lakes
Red Rocks*	Cheyenne Mountain	Cherry Creek	Corn Lake*	North Park*
Rocky Mountain*	Chatfield	Eldorado Canyon	Dinosaur Nat'l Mon.*	Ridgway
San Luis	Cottonwood*	Golden Gate	Highline Lake	San Luis Valley
St. Vrain	Eleven Mile	Horsetooth*	James M. Robb	San Luis Wilderness*
Stagecoach	Gunnison*	Piñon (Canyon)*	Ridgway	Sand Dunes*
Steamboat Lake	Mueller	Pleasant Valley*	Rifle Gap	The Grand Mesa*
	Pueblo Reservoir	Roxborough	Riverside*	
	San Luis Lakes		Sweitzer Lake	
	Steamboat Lake		Vega	

*Participant responses that are not State Parks.

Park visitors perceive State Parks being near metropolitan areas. Many park visitors stated that they assumed the State Parks are located near metropolitan areas. A Durango man said, “My suspicion is that there are more on the eastern slope since that’s where the population is,” and a Colorado Springs resident said, “There’s a lot near Denver in the city,” and Greeley man said, “They are close to populations. They tend to be in places that people can take advantage of with a staycation issue.” Although a few people in each group agreed with the previous comments, Durango residents, in particular, felt this was the case. More than half of all Durango residents assumed that State Parks were located near metropolitan areas, like Denver or Colorado Springs. One Durango resident said, “It’s heavy on the Front Range,” and another added, “It’s in metropolitan areas.”

One Denver resident shared a different perspective. She guessed that many State Parks were located near colleges or universities: “They are located near the metro areas, near larger cities...especially since there’s 43 of them; they must be near larger cities or colleges. (The) big universities are probably where they are at,” she said.

Park visitors believe that State Parks are different based on topography and activities. Nearly all State Park visitors agreed that individual State Parks are different across the State, primarily because of varying landscapes and activities available. “Environmentally, they are very different,” said a Grand Junction resident. Durango residents agreed that most parks were the same as far as layout goes, but they agreed that the landscapes made them different, especially after learning where the parks were located throughout the State. “There has to be a difference based on the topography of the area,” one woman said.

Participants across all five groups acknowledged that amenities are different at different parks, such as Chatfield where you can swim and Barbour Ponds (or St. Vrain) in Longmont where “you can’t swim and wouldn’t want to,” one man said. A Grand Junction resident commented, “I think some (parks) are geared toward this kind of activity and some are geared toward another. Like at Highline, the highlight is the lake and swimming and at Connected Lakes, it’s fishing but not

necessarily boating. It's also walking and hiking. They (parks) all seem like they are dedicated to different things."

A Greeley resident said the following about State Parks to describe their differences: "Some are larger. Some have better energy, and they just look better and feel better. Whether they are wide open or have nice terrain, there are geographic and topographic differences... There are some that are just day-use only." Finally, a female participant summarized and said, "I think (at a State Park) you can always camp, always bike, always hike, always run; it's across the board." Commonalities that park visitors tended to associate with all State Parks included: trails, picnic tables, bathrooms, running water, tent pads (places to camp), fire pits and some RV hook-ups. The following quote from a Colorado Springs resident further supports this finding:

"I think you can get the impression that many parks are the same because of the campsites and the visitor's centers and things like that, but I believe geographically they are significantly different."

Most visitors revisit the same parks rather than trying new ones. Although there were participants who enjoyed visiting new parks, like one who said, "I try to go to a new one each year," most park visitors said they typically visit the same parks because of convenience and expectation. "I keep going back to the same park but that's because of convenience and money. We go camping down at Navajo Lakes a lot," one Durango man said. Another man agreed and said, "We do the same. We don't have a lot of choices (among State Parks) down here." "(It's the) proximity to Lory. It's close. It's the driving factor," said a Greeley woman, and multiple others agreed that, for short trips, or day trips, they would prefer to go to the same place because it's familiar and they want to make the most of their time once they are there.

Expectations were also described as important regarding choices on where to go. Participants in all locations agreed that it is more comfortable to visit a State Park they have already been to because they know what to expect. A Durango man said, "It's good to know what to expect, because the scenery will be different. It's good to have commonalities." A male participant in Greeley said he goes to the same parks because, "We know all of the rules. We know if we can have a campfire; we know if they have a grill; we know what times the motor homes have to shut off the A/C so we can sleep; and we know if we can swim. That's important – to show up and to know what you can and can't do." Another gentleman agreed and remarked, "It's good to know what to expect. It's like McDonald's, as crappy as the food is, you know what to expect." The following quote is from a woman in Grand Junction regarding expectations:

"You can count on them (State Parks) being clean and ready for you. I think they're in good condition. I'm impressed with that every time."

A few participants also indicated that they revisit the same park because it's a park that they know allows dogs. That was important for a number of participants. The following quotes are from two Grand Junction residents speaking on this topic: "(I revisit) Connected Lakes because I walk my dog," and "(I revisit the same parks because) you are familiar with it. You know that you like it, and it's comfortable for you and your dog."

Grand Junction residents, like participants on the Front Range, felt they had more choices than Durango residents, and many reported to make their decisions more so on the activities available at

each State Park. A man in Grand Junction said, “There are only two or three places in this valley where you can get in and do a float. Corn Lake is one of them, probably the best one actually...it’s (also) good for my canoe.” A Colorado Springs man said, “I probably go to Eleven Mile more than anywhere else for fishing.”

Of the individuals who prefer visiting new parks, many said this was the case because they wanted to see more of the State. “There’s always fun places to discover,” said one woman and another said, “We just moved here, and we want to test the waters and find where our favorite places are. Our intentions are that we will find our favorite places and then go there all the time.” One man in Grand Junction said he routinely visits the same parks. “We don’t go back because you have to put one sticker on one vehicle. If you have more than one vehicle, you have to take that one to get in there.”

The primary factors that make a State Park “really cool” are related to the number of people visiting, the scenery, and the park activities and features. Regarding the number of people visiting, at least a third of all park visitors agreed that a good experience at a park is one where you “don’t have wall-to-wall people,” as one woman said. She also said, “The idea is to commune with nature (instead).” Another man expressed that he has had trips ruined in the past because of being near a “jerk,” who was inconsiderate and played “obnoxious music” all night. Another man remarked, “I don’t camp at State Parks because there’s too many people.” Multiple people said they prefer to feel isolated or alone in a park, such as one male participant who described what he thinks makes a “really cool park.” That is, “The feeling that you’re secluded. To feel like you’ve gotten away.”

The scenery of a park also makes a tremendous difference according to numerous participants. A Denver resident shared, “I think the variety of amenities and geography, like if you have a river, lake, and mountains versus on the plains, where it’s going to be pretty plain.” Grand Junction residents were in agreement regarding the scenery aspect as well. One man said, “There’s a State Park on the south side of Chatfield on the Denver side, and it’s just beautiful hiking. It’s in the Red Rocks area and there are nice trails through there.”

Other factors that differentiate a “cool” park included amenities such as paved bike paths, a well-maintained park, a visitor’s center, and the presence of water, which was especially important to several Grand Junction residents. One woman said, “It’s nice to have that sound (water) when you’re sitting at the park,” and another resident said, “Also, if it’s hot, you can stick your feet in the water or watch the fish.” A third resident added, “There’s (also) more wildlife when there’s water.” A Greeley resident said, “(A State Park is cool) If it has a visitor’s center or information center. It gives you an idea, not just what there is to do, but where to do it. It also tells you about rules on campfires, for example.”

Process Note: The following finding originates from an exercise (*see Appendix A, Question #3*) that was conducted with State Park visitors. Using a plain piece of paper, participants were asked to draw a top-of-mind sketch or map of a “typical Colorado State Park.” Participants were encouraged to label any attributes of their drawings that would be hard to understand, and it was expected that many would draw based on their experiences of State Parks.

Park visitors primarily associate State Parks with water (lakes or rivers), the mountains, and camping. Across all five geographies visitors discussed their drawings of a “typical Colorado State Park,” and in their verbal descriptions, most included water, mountains and camping. More participants on the western slope, including both Grand Junction and Durango, discussed mountains when they explained their drawings in comparison to participants on the Front Range who

commonly discussed water features, such as lakes, ponds and rivers. The following quotes are from various participants across all five regions describing their drawings and interpretations of a typical Colorado State Park.

- “It’s a typical park with the lake or the reservoir being the centerpiece. There are some campgrounds and this is supposed to be a wooded area and here’s a dock and some roads.”
- “The centerpiece is campgrounds, and it’s all regimented. I think of mountainous places and sometimes with water involved.”
- “I put my mountains first and then the lake and then the stream and then the camping and the facilities to go with that. I also have a sun.”
- “I think of a place where I can do variety, where I can pack the bike, the kayak and the hike if I want to.”
- “Lots of water, a beach, picnic tables and overhangs and covered picnic tables, roads hiking trails.”
- “If it’s a State Park, there’s a fee area...I also had a sign that said, ‘All Reserved. Full.’”
- “I have the river and the mountains, and after drawing it, I realized those are the things that I like the most. You’ve got the river, and the lake and the beach and the trails, the mountains, and trees.”
- “I did actually have a parking lot and camping. My comment with the camping is that they are usually very close together. The proximity is that you are right next door to people when you are camping, which I don’t always find a positive thing.”
- “There’s a main entrance, you go through the gate; there’s a pay here station; there’s usually a parking area and then usually a loop with campsites and people’s cars and fires, some sort of body of water, and then trails coming off of the back.”
- “I had some RV’s because I thought it’s easier for people with large vehicles to camp this way.”
- “I have a picnic site in mine. I drew a place I’ve been to, and it had a large picnic area. What’s good about that is the park service let us (cub scouts) camp there as a group.”
- “I had usual primitive sites and RV sites, and I’d like to see that continue to be offered.”
- “It’s a State Park. There’s a fee area.”

Water is, by far, the feature that most visitors associate with Colorado State Parks. After analyzing the drawings of typical Colorado State Parks by State Park visitors, it was clear that the

majority associated water of some kind with State Parks, including lakes, rivers, streams, ponds and waterfalls. Close to all State Park visitors drew some form of water in their drawings. Half of all visitors included hiking or biking trails; a main roadway or pathway throughout the park; camping (or campsites); and trees in their drawings. Slightly less than half included mountains in their illustrations. Thus, associating mountains with Colorado State Parks occurred significantly less than water. Slightly less than half of all visitors also thought of parking lots, or some kind of development for parking. The following table further quantifies top-of-mind aspects of Colorado State Parks from the perspective of a State Park visitor.

Table 2: Perspectives of a “Typical Colorado State Park” (# of times each feature was indicated in participant drawings across groups)

State Park features	Greeley	Colorado Springs	Denver	Grand Junction	Durango	TOTAL
Water (lake, pond, river, streams etc.)	11	7	10	7	9	44
Hiking/Biking trails	7	6	5	4	6	28
Main road/Main pathway	9	3	4	3	7	26
Camping/Campsite(s)	5	4	5	4	7	25
Trees	4	6	4	5	6	25
Mountains	4	8	3	2	4	21
Parking (lot)	5	1	2	5	3	16
Entrance gate/building/kiosk	3	2	2	4	3	14
Restrooms/Facilities	1	1	3	4	4	13
Pay booth	2		5	1	4	12
Tent(s)	3	2	1	2	3	11
Picnic area(s) (tables, grills, shelters etc.)	4	1	2	3	1	11
Boat Ramp/Dock	2	1	3	1	3	10
Sun/Sunshine	2	2	4		1	9
Wildlife (birds, coyotes, bears, insects etc.)		3	1	1	3	8
Boat(s)		3	4			7
RV's/RV hook-ups	1		1		4	6
Visitor's Center / Museum	1	2	1	1	1	6
Campfire/Fire pits	1	3		1		5
Signs	1	1	1		2	5
Fishing / Fishermen	1	1	2			4
Swimming/Swim beach			2	1	1	4
Nearby highways / Busy roads	3			1		4
Scenery / Special feature (waterfall, overlook etc.)	1	1		2		4
Bridge(s)			2	1		3
Fish (in the river) (1 said “dead fish”)	1		2			3
Campers			1		1	2
Primitive/Remote campsites	1				1	2
Clouds/Rain clouds			1		1	2
Flowers				1	1	2
Crowds / A lot of people			1		1	2

Garbage /Dump station	1		1		2
Playground		1	1		2
Cabins		1		1	2

Other features that were mentioned by one person as something they associate with a State Park include: a rainbow, canyon lands, horse trails, rangers, houses (i.e. urban areas) nearby, dogs, a food and beverage station, railroad, a place to rent equipment, a pool, and hunting.

Some proportion of visitors consider State Parks to be more for day-use than overnight use. When visitors were asked to draw a typical State Park, at least a third agreed with a Colorado Springs resident who said the following: “I didn’t put a campground because so many parks are near urban settings. If it’s so close to an urban setting, then why would you want to camp there? If you want camping, go to a National Forest because it is way more isolated. To me, a State Park is more of a day-use, rather than a camping ground.” A Colorado native said the following: “I grew up in Colorado, so when I think of a State Park, I think of weekend recreation and if you want to go out and camp, you need to go to a National Forest.” Another man agreed, but explained that he liked to camp at State Parks that were further from metropolitan areas. “To me, the close State Parks like Mueller and Cheyenne are the ones that I don’t think of camping, where I think of camping with Steamboat Lake or something. Because here you just go for the day and there you pay for more of a campsite.” Several others agreed that they preferred camping at State Parks outside of the metropolitan areas. A Denver park visitor said the following:

“I would think that, for a State Park, to me if it reminds me of a weekend visit. I’m not going to spend a week at Cherry Creek. It’s a quick weekend where you’re in and you’re out.”

Feelings are mixed on whether solitude is possible at a State Park. As previously discussed, nearly everyone across all five locations agreed that State Parks are more crowded than they used to be. Knowing this, participants were fairly split on whether solitude was possible to find at a State Park or not. Some agreed with a Durango resident who said, “Oh, it’s very possible,” and others agreed with a Grand Junction man who said, “You don’t get one bit of solitude.” Participants in metro Denver felt that finding solitude was possible, but they agreed that it depended on when and where they went. One man said, “It depends on where you go and when you go. We go to Golden Gate and they have some great campsites, but if you go on a weekend, you won’t have any peace.” Multiple others agreed that, although finding solitude can be difficult, especially on a weekend, most still considered visiting a State Park as “getting away.” A female participant said, “Even if you don’t have solitude, it’s just nice to get out of the city and out of town.” Despite the fact that State Parks may offer less solitude than a National Forest, for example, multiple respondents agreed that State Parks are assets and have attractive features.

The following are additional quotes from across groups regarding solitude at State Parks.

- “It’s not solitude, (but) if you really want solitude, I’d go to a National Forest or something like that where you can literally get away and maybe see someone in the distance.”
- “Golden Gate (State Park) is a great place to go for solitude, if you go during the week. On the weekend, I don’t think it matters where you go (because it’s all busy.)”

- “If your children are trying to experience the wilderness, they’re not going to get that if they’re in a busy campground.”
- “Daytime is fine. People are off doing their own thing, but sometimes mornings and evenings can feel more like a neighborhood than it can a State Park.”

Process Note: The following finding originates from an exercise (*see Appendix A, Question #7*) where park visitors were asked to draw a top-of-mind sketch of a “typical Colorado State Park visitor.”

Park visitors consider a few profiles when thinking of a typical State Park visitor: families, people who are “prepared” and experienced with the outdoors, and (out-of-state) tourists. Along the Front Range, a strong majority of participants drew families when they were asked to draw a typical State Park visitor. They described different members of the family doing their own activities, but all being together.

They also discussed people who were experienced with the outdoors and tourists (both out-of-state and from other parts of Colorado), which were both commonly mentioned in Durango and Grand Junction groups. In Durango, particularly, the group had a variety of perceptions, ranging from one-half out-of-town visitors (even from Denver) and one-half locals, to 20 percent locals and 80 percent tourists. One man said, “We get a lot of Denver and Pueblo people coming to use Navajo Lake because it has been such a great lake and there’s not a lot of people (at it.)” Although participants’ perceptions of how many tourists (from Colorado and out-of-state) versus locals varied, they agreed that there are plenty of tourists visiting the State Parks near them, especially in the summertime. During the winter months, the consensus was that visitors were more likely from the local area. The following quote is from a Durango resident:

“We’re a tourism state, and we’re all talking about State Parks as if they are only for us, but the fact is, people are coming from other states that surround us and from all over the country to Colorado, and since we’ve got State Parks, that certainly helps and satisfies the attraction.”

Meanwhile, the quotes below are a compilation of visitors’ perceptions on who visits State Parks:

- “It’s a family and a dog. It’s a day use.”
- “I drew a guy going fishing with his dog on a lease and a bike and the kids are asleep in the tent.”
- “I had overnight camping with the kids and with the fire going and the grill with the steaks.”
- “It’s a person with a camera and a walking stick, and a youngster following around behind.”
- “I had a dad with his fishing pole and a mom with her basket and a girl with her doll and a little boy with his paint ball gun.”

- “It’s a dad and a couple kids... I went more generic. To get to a park, you’ve got to get in your car.”
- “I went more generic. To get to a park, you’ve got to get in your car. (He drew a car with equipment attached to it.)”
- “We have the sun hat, the big smile, the arms expressing that he wants to be there, a big backpack full of gear, outdoor footwear, a cooler, beer, and a chair.”
- “I have glasses, a backpack, hiking shoes, and shorts with lots of pockets.”
- “I didn’t draw a person. I just focused on the gear (they would bring).”

Park visitors think primarily of summer for visiting. Based on the drawings of a typical State Park visitor (drawn by park visitors), it appears that people associate visitors more with the summer than the winter. Close to half of all visitors drew something to indicate protection from the sun, including hats or sunglasses, and slightly less than half also drew people in shorts, indicating warm weather. Although participants were instructed to draw a typical visitor, the split between a single visitor and a family was fairly even. Some participants may have interpreted the instructions differently, but based on verbal discussion about the drawings, more participants associated families with State Parks than people visiting alone. In the metro Denver group, nearly all participants drew a family. Participants also indicated active visitors in their drawings, such as people who were visiting to do specific activities including fishing, hiking or camping. The following table further summarizes top-of-mind aspects of a typical Colorado State Park visitor from the perspective of a State Park visitor.

Table 3: Perspectives of a “Typical Colorado State Park Visitor”* (# of times each feature was indicated in participant drawings across groups)

State Park features	Greeley	Colorado Springs	Denver	Durango	TOTAL
Hat(s) (sun hat, baseball cap etc.)	7	5	2	9	23
Family (with kid(s))	4	4	9	5	22
Single man/person	6	5	2	5	18
Shorts	6	4	1	6	17
Fishing equipment (pole(s), fishing vest etc.)	6	4	1	3	14
Hiking boots/Hiker	3	3	1	5	12
Campers	1	1	3	5	12
Backpack(s)	4	3		4	11
Sunglasses	3	4		3	10
A “prepared” visitor (with equipment and gear, etc.)	1	2		6	9
Dog	2	2	2	2	8
Water / bottle	5	1	1	1	8
Hiking shorts/Cargo pants and or shorts/Pants with plenty of pockets	3			4	7
Camera	2	3	1		6

Truck		1	1	3	5
Bicyclist(s)	1	3	1		5
Uneducated/Inexperienced visitors	1	3	1		5
Tent	2		1	1	4
Sunshine/Sun	1	2		1	4
Walking Stick	3	1			4
Tourist (obvious tourist)	1	3			4
Fisherman/men				3	3
Cooler	1			2	3
RV			1	2	3
T-shirt	1	1		1	3
Rock climber		2			2
Campfire	2				2

*This exercise was not conducted in the Grand Junction group

Other items that were mentioned by one person as something they associate with a State Park visitor: a whistle, clean sites to stay, grill/BBQ equipment, “Life is Good” apparel, swim suites, wool socks (for hiking), snacks, boat, iPod, sunburn, sneaker/tennis shoes (to show an inexperienced hiker), white socks (again to show an inexperienced hiker), a lot of rules to obey, a stroller, bike helmet, mountain biking gloves, kids toys (for children’s entertainment), a compass, beer, flip flops (shoes), and suspenders.

NON-PARK VISITORS

The following summary is for non-visitors and their initial perceptions of Colorado State Parks, especially in terms of a “typical park” as well as a “typical park visitor.”

Non-visitors associate State Parks with the mountains, water, and camping. Perceptions of State Parks varied from location to location, but mostly because participants’ knowledge of State Parks varied greatly between geographies. Non-visitors in Greeley, for example, were fairly informed about Colorado State Parks, many having had prior experiences at one or many, whereas metro Denver participants appeared to be less informed. Grand Junction and Durango participants had some experience to discuss, and Colorado Springs non-visitors were the least informed of the five groups.

Process Note: An exercise was conducted (*see Appendix B, Question #7*) during the group in which participants were asked to draw a top-of-mind sketch or map of a “typical Colorado State Park.”

As a result of the discussion in this exercise, in groups along the Front Range, most participants associated the mountains with State Parks. Along the western slope, non-visitors mostly associated State Parks more with water than the mountains. Other common attributes across geographies that non-visitors associated with State Parks included trees, camping, picnic areas, wildlife, hiking trails, and water (in some form such as a lake or river). Based on discussion of their sketches, close to three out of every four non-visitors associated some form of water with Colorado State Parks.

The following quotes are from various participants in all five locations describing their drawing and perceptions of Colorado State Parks. The quotes demonstrate a variety of perceptions about Colorado State Parks:

- “To me Colorado has such diverse areas. I picture State Parks having mountains, trees and lakes, but I also picture buttes and grass. It’s pretty dry.”
- “I always picture rivers, and Big Horn Sheep and lots of Aspen and Evergreen trees. I have a lot of trees in my drawing.”
- “I miss water, and I don’t see a lot of water in Colorado, so my State Park (drawing) has high cliffs that you can climb up and around. There’s rough terrain with trees and trails. There are horses, places to camp, and water with a little canoe...I realized I missed water. It’s pretty dry here.”
- “Mine is more of a campground, and it has a big lake. There are hiking trails all around.”
- “Here’s the little place where you need to pay, a trailhead, lake, trails, mountains and lots of birds.”
- “Mine is very vague because I’ve only been to one State Park, but I think of Colorado as a state with mountains, so when I think of a State Park, I think of away from the city. So here’s the road, and the road gets smaller and smaller as it gets to the wilderness and that’s where the park is and the rivers and there’s sunshine.”
- “There’s a trail and a bathroom, and then I had a loop for camping, and I would have gotten around to drawing some RV’s if I would have had time.”
- “I’ve got boat docks, and restrooms and camping. Basically what they have at Highline Lake.”
- “A common feature with mine is that there is usually a water feature and a large number of camping spots, a bathroom and a boat ramp.”
- “They usually seem the same to me. They have some kind of water and bathrooms.”
- “You have your parking lot and visitor center and a very well-defined hiking trail, and a feature – I see it as being the park centered around the feature, the lake, interpretive signs, a little bit of control. It’s not so wild as a National Forest.”
- “I’ve got them taking money, an information board, an outhouse, a lot of parking and some camping areas off of a paved road.”
- “I had the space where you go in and pay and then you go over here and there are trees and some mountains and a waterfall. Then there’s animals, (some) birds.”

Non-visitors mostly associate State Parks with some form of water. Like discussion indicated, and after analyzing non-visitors’ drawings of a typical Colorado State Park, three out of every four people associated water with a State Park, including lakes, rivers, streams and ponds. Close to that same proportion also associated trees and forest land with State Parks. There was only

one man in all five groups that thought of the desert when he thought of a State Park, and he was not a Grand Junction resident. Half of all participants associated camping with State Parks and slightly less than that thought of the mountains when they thought of a typical Colorado State Park. The second most common activity (after camping) that non-visitors associated with a State Park was hiking.

Table 4: Perspectives of a “Typical Colorado State Park” (# of times each feature was indicated in participant drawings across groups)

State Park features	Greeley	Colorado Springs	Denver	Grand Junction	Durango	TOTAL
Water (lake, pond, river, streams etc.)	8	7	5	9	4	33
Trees	9	4	8	6	3	30
Main road/Main pathway	3	5	4	6	3	21
Camping/Campsite(s)	6	3	2	8	2	21
Mountains/Bluffs	6	5	5	1	1	18
Hiking/Biking trails	2	4	2	5	2	15
Restrooms/Facilities		2	2	6	1	11
Picnic area(s) (tables, grills, shelters etc.)	2	2	1	5	1	11
Wildlife (birds, coyotes, bears, insects etc.)	2	3	2	1	2	9
Visitor’s Center / Museum	2	2	1	1	3	9
Tent(s)	1	2	1	3	1	8
Parking (lot)			2	2	3	7
Boat Ramp/Dock	2	2	2	3	1	7
Boat(s)	2	4	1			7
Nearby highways / Busy roads	1	1	2	3		7
Sun/Sunshine	1	1	1	2	1	6
Pay booth		1	1	2	1	5
Entrance gate/building/kiosk		1	2			3
Fishing / Fishermen	1			1	1	3
Swimming/Swim beach	2	1				3
Fish (in the river)		2				2
Clouds/Rain clouds		1		1		2
Playground		1		1		2
Carousel/Amusement park rides	1	1				2
Place to rent equipment (boats,		2				2

Other items that were mentioned by one person as something they associate with a State Park include: campfire, signs, primitive/remote campsites, buttes, sage/grass/brush, bicyclists, swimming pool, running track and wildflowers.

Process Note: Similar to the exercise above, participants were asked to draw a sketch of the “typical visitor” to a Colorado State Park- (see Appendix B, Question #8).

Opinions are mixed on who visits Colorado State Parks. Perceptions on Colorado State Park visitors varied from location to location, but overall, non-visitors primarily thought of three

kinds of people, consistent with earlier findings: tourists, families, and experienced outdoors-people. Many Greeley respondents felt strongly that a State Park visitor was “prepared” with the right gear. A woman in Greeley said, “I think people are getting smarter if something should happen. They are prepared with goggles, and their hats. I see this all the time at the camping stores,” she said. Compared with other groups, Greeley participants associated tourists less with State Parks.

On the other hand, Colorado Springs and Durango residents thought mostly of tourists. A woman in Colorado Springs described her drawing of a typical State Park visitor as “an overweight, while male tourist with kids running him all over the place. He’s got his camera, and his shorts, and I couldn’t figure out how to make his legs stark white.” Durango residents agreed that park visitors were like a typical American tourist: “Slightly overweight, wearing flip flops, sun glasses and not thinking about walking very far,” one man said. Another woman agreed and shared that her drawing was somewhat similar. She said, “I had a foreign couple with their guide book of State Parks and binoculars. They have their hiking boots and are going to walk a little ways. They’re somewhat prepared to snap pictures.”

Others in Colorado Springs were split between the tourist and the experienced outdoorsman, as were participants in metro Denver. Close to one-half in metro Denver participants thought of visitors who had money, or tourists. A woman in the group described her drawing by saying, “It represents the people who can afford to go and who have time because they might not work, or they may have a different kind of job.” A few Grand Junction residents agreed, but the majority tended to think about the young family visitor more than a tourist. One man said, “I drew fishing. My idea is family, so it’s a family fishing in the river.”

A few participants said their first thoughts were people who were “clueless” about nature, but one Durango man said he changed his mind after he thought more about it. He said that, if he were visiting another state, he would be more likely to visit a State Park because there are less unknowns. He eventually said he thought that the typical people visiting were probably not much different than him. They probably enjoyed the outdoors and were just looking to get away.

Other descriptions of a “typical Colorado State Park visitor” by non-visitors are below:

- “I think of families and a lot of foreign tourists when I think of State Parks.”
- “I included a prepared guest with stuff for protection. Protection from the sun, with sunglasses, chapstick and sunscreen. A camera, shorts and a vest is usually what I think of...somebody who is watching wildlife for photography.”
- “I think people visiting a State Park are pretty serious about them. They’re serious about going there, because the others (non-visitors) are just going to drive into the mountains.”
- “This is an older person with a purse and a camera, who does a quarter mile out of the car to take a picture and comes back, and his is a naturist with a camera, sack lunch and his walking stick, and then this (the third person) is the RV person.”
- “Mine is just plain and simple - a family going out and shopping all over the place... When I go in the mountains, I don’t see a lot of visitors there. I don’t see a lot of people at State Parks because this (shopping) is what they’re doing instead.”

- “I think of the people like the quintessential Boulder-ite: the rich hippy. You run into them and they’re wearing Birkenstocks and they look like they’ve been out there for a week and then they get in an SUV when they leave.”
- “I always see people from out-of-state. You can’t go without seeing someone from Texas, or somebody from out-of-state. When you see out-of-state people, this is where I see them.”
- “It’s a hiker with a water bottle, a shirt that says ‘Life is Good.’”
- “I had a family (that’s) social, wants amenities, and I think people that go to cities are more apt to go to State Parks. People near cities tend to go to State Parks because they’re close. They go where there’s easy access.”
- “I think a lot of it is that people don’t know where to go. A lot of people don’t realize the freedoms you have so they think ‘oh, we want to go camping. We’ve got to find a campground, so we’ll go to a State Park. If we want to go fishing, we’ll go somewhere where we’re allowed to fish.’ That’s what I envision in a State Park—people who are less familiar with things in their area.”
- “I’ve got two groups. One is older people and with RVs and a generator, and the other is young families. These people are tourists and these people are locals. I think State Parks are for people who are looking for amenities, like bathrooms, people who are not physically fit or who have a multitude of people.”

“I think people who are choosing to go to a State Park are more outdoorsy than the average traveler or than another type of traveler that wants to ride the train and go to Mesa Verde. I think it’s people who have a general interest in nature. My parents, for example, they go to State Parks and they have a guidebook; it’s all laid out and they know they’re going to the lake and coming back. There are no unknowns, but they do love the outdoors.”

Most participants did not relate personally to their drawings of perceived visitors. When asked, participants in four of the five groups generally did not identify with the people they drew as their State Park visitors. A woman in Denver said that her perception was that people who go to State Parks have money. She said, “Otherwise we just go somewhere else. We just go to the free places. Why would you go and pay when you can go somewhere for free?” As previously stated, Colorado Springs participants thought of people who were visiting from out-of-state or out-of-the-country. A Durango man said, “It’s a different person altogether.”

A small portion said they could relate, however, and most Greeley residents said they also related to their drawings. Close to all Greeley residents shared that they felt they were fairly experienced with the outdoors, so they related to visitors that they drew. Another man remarked, “I identify with the young family. I could take my daughter. I just haven’t. It’s close and it’s handy and if she has a good time, then great!”

Although the strong majority of non-visitors shared that they did not relate to their drawings of a typical visitor, most felt that they would be friends or could relate with the person they drew, however.

Analysis of drawings matches discussion about “typical State Park visitors.” Drawings of “typical State Park visitors” from the perspective of a non-visitor were analyzed by the research team. Again, non-visitors associated park visitors with both single people and families with children. Top-of-mind thoughts were that visitors were “prepared” with plenty of equipment, including (sun) hats, sunglasses, hiking boots, walking sticks, and fishing equipment. A tourist was also fairly high on the list, although this was discussed more than the actual pictures portrayed.

As mentioned in the earlier analysis of park visitor feedback, some participants may have interpreted the drawing instructions differently and could have therefore only drawn one person, when they were actually thinking of more than one. For this reason, it is important to consider the verbal feedback that was given when participants discussed their drawings along with the analysis below when comparing single to family visitors.

Table 5: Perspectives of a “Typical Colorado State Park Visitor” (# of times each feature was indicated in participant drawings across groups)

State Park features	Greeley	Colorado Springs	Denver	Grand Junction	Durango	TOTAL
Hat(s) (sun hat, baseball cap etc.)	7	3	6	6	3	25
Single man/person	6	4	5	5	2	22
Family (with kid(s))	3	5	3	6	3	20
A “prepared” visitor (with plenty of equipment etc.)	4	2	2	3	2	13
Fishing equipment (pole(s), fishing vest etc.)	3	1	3	3	2	12
Hiking boots/Hiker	6	3	1	1	1	12
Camera	3	1	1	1	2	8
Tourist (obvious tourist)	1	1	2	2	2	8
Shorts	2	3		1	1	7
Campers	2	1		2	2	7
Fisherman/men	2			4	1	7
Backpack(s)	4	1		1		6
Sunglasses	2	1		2	1	6
Bicyclist(s)	2	1	1		1	5
Tent	1	1		1	2	5
Walking Stick	1	2	2			5
Dog		1		3		4
RV			1	1	2	4
Uneducated/Inexperienced visitors						3
Sunshine/Sun				2	1	3
Water / bottle		1	1			2
Grill/BBQ equipment				1	1	2
Skier/Skiing equipment				2		2
Sandals/Flip-flops (shoes)			1		1	2
Local visitor			2			2
Retired visitors	1	1				2

Other items that were mentioned by one person as something they associate with a State Park visitor include: hiking shorts/cargo shorts with plenty of pockets, “Life is Good” apparel, a visitor who is looking for relaxation time (only one drawing indicated this), a visitor who is interested in sightseeing, someone who wants easy access, someone who wants amenities, guidebook, stroller, suspenders, SUV, and bug spray/sunscreen.

DECISIONS ABOUT STATE PARKS

The third major topic of discussion focused on decisions about visiting, or not visiting, Colorado State Parks. It was during this section of the discussion where participants talked about the differences between State Parks and other types of parks and public land as well.

Process Note: This topic area was discussed with park visitors only.

PARK VISITORS

Everyone plans to visit a State Park again in the future. Nearly everyone in all groups agreed that they plan to visit a State Park again in the future, and the greatest reasons why participants said so was because of proximity, familiarity, and convenience. One man said, “For a day trip primarily,” and another man said he would revisit because, “I haven’t seen more of them, so I want to visit and find out which ones I want to return to.” Others mentioned a desire to view nature, the wild flowers, to hike, to take pictures, to look at wildlife, to fish, or to go with friends.

Several park visitors consider State Parks a place that allows them “to get away from the hustles and bustles of the city and being able to get back.” A Greeley resident said, “If you have the time to spend looking over new places, that’s great, but if you don’t, you’ve got to do it where you’re most familiar.” More than one-half of all visitors also said they plan to visit again because they consider State Parks a great place for taking out-of-town guests. A female in Denver said, “Also, if you have people visiting, you want to take them somewhere that’s not too remote and too challenging.”

Overall, participants had a positive outlook on State Parks. Many said they would visit again because they have had positive experiences to date. “The facilities are always nice and well kept, and you know what you can expect in going there,” one Durango resident said. Another woman agreed and said, “I think knowing what to expect is part of what makes me go back.” A few participants said that they would visit a State Park again and would consider it their “home base” while they would travel around to other areas during the day. The following selected quotes include other reasons why participants plan to visit a State Park again in the future:

- “I don’t think I would just go and sit. I would camp, and if I was camping, I’d want to certainly hike. I’d want to see what’s there.”
- “For the geology. I like to go hike and look at the rocks where there’s no trees. It’s rocks and desert, and I like to go hiking in that kind of area.”
- “It’s also social. I love getting up in the morning and having coffee with a bunch of people, or during cocktail time at 5:00. It’s when everyone gets together and talks about what they did that day.”
- “I find it easy to teach my grandkids new things that they’ve never experienced before in the State Parks.”

- “For Mancos State Park, I just use it to go for a run because the setting is perfect for that, and it’s easy and accessible, and I know what I’m getting and how full the trails are. It’s a beautiful place for fun and there’s not heavy traffic. It’s not like I’m running on the road. The terrain is why (I go), and it’s a beautiful setting.”
- “You go there because it’s social. Somehow it’s social. Like I said, the Telluride events, it’s probably for those people that prefer that kind of structure, like families. I’m sure as not going to go to the wilderness with my folks.”
- “You can just drive up and unload your stuff instead of backpacking in it, and with kids or elderly, that’s hard.”
- “If I’m with friends...I am more likely to end up at a State Park if there’s a group.”

Park visitors will revisit State Parks that are convenient and accessible. As the previous finding showed, nearly all State Park visitors said they plan to visit another State Park at some point. When asked if it mattered which one, more than half of all visitors said it did matter in fact because they preferred to go somewhere that was both convenient and familiar. A Greeley man said, “I’d probably go over to Boyd Lake again, because it’s 45 minutes, (and) jump in the water with the boat.” Another woman in this same group agreed and said, “I’ll go to Lory (State Park) again and go hiking. It would be going to the same one I’ve been to (because I’m familiar and it’s convenient.)” A Denver resident said he plans to go to Chatfield again because it’s a good place to hang out with friends and “it’s basically the same things as Navajo (Lake), but it doesn’t take as long to get there.”

Another reason a specific park mattered to visitors was because according to participants, each park can offer a different experience, either based on the scenery or the activities. As an example, a Colorado Springs man discussed how visiting different parks during different times of the year was part of the experience: “At different times of the year, it smells different.”

Participants share that they will do a combination of active and passive activities during their next visit to a State Park. Although some participants said they prefer to go and relax with friends, many said they plan to go again to hike, fish or camp. The one thing that was common among nearly all participants was that they planned to do a combination of activities during their next visit to a State Park, and the fact that most State Parks have amenities was another common reason why people said they plan to go back. Many participants said they greatly appreciate the amenities, including bathrooms and picnic areas that are part of State Parks. More than one-half also agreed that the amenities are better at State Parks than at other types of parks.

Information pertaining to restrictions at a State Park is a factor in encouraging participants to visit. State Park visitors were asked what kind of information would help them in their decision to go to a State Park, and the most common response was any information related to restrictions at the different parks. Participants reported that they would be interested in knowing about any closures, even to certain parts of a park, if dogs are allowed, if campfires are restricted, if motorized vehicles are allowed and if overnight camping is available or not, to name a few. One woman said she would want to know whether she could bring her dog, and she felt that either answer was ok, “as long as I know beforehand.” In discussing campfires, a Greeley man said, “We’ve had quite a few drought years, and a lot of times they won’t allow campfires. A lot of times in the mountains, they restrict fire.”

Participants also shared that they would want any information pertaining to outbreaks affecting the landscape or wildlife at State Parks. “It might be out there but just knowing the areas that are getting excessively hit by pine beetle would be helpful to know.” Several others agreed and shared that they perceive pine beetle to be damaging a lot of State Parks. The participants who discussed this topic also agreed that there was little that the State Parks system could do, but they as visitors wanted to be informed so that they aren’t surprised when they visited a park. A woman added, “Another thing I’d like to know is about nesting since that seems to happen a lot around this time of year.”

Other information that was mentioned as something park visitors desired in advance of a trip included if there are any water shortages where water is shut down at restrooms, if reservations are necessary for camping and/or if camping spots are available, and what the geologic interests are in a particular area. “The geologic interests (is what I’d want to know). (For example) what forest am I in? I’m interested in knowing about the topography,” said one Durango resident.

Decisions are shared about visiting State Parks. Although some participants said that they were the primary decision makers when it comes time to visit a State Park, the majority of park visitors said that the decisions were usually shared among their families and friends. “It’s an open democracy in our home. We mull it around until we reach a consensus,” one Colorado Springs man said. A Durango woman agreed and said “I feel like it’s a pretty democratic decision with my family.” The weather was a primary factor that several participants described as making the decision for them oftentimes. A Denver woman said, “For me it’s also about the weather. If I’m going to make a reservation, I’ll wait mid-week so I can have a shot at something. If I’m only going for the night, if I get washed out it’s not a good thing and I can run the risk of not getting a space.”

Participants share a variety of things that would encourage them to visit a State Park more often, including if they were free, less crowded or if they were provided with more information upfront. For groups along the Front Range, participants said they would visit State Parks more often if they had more information, or if there were no fees to get in. Overall, participants had questions about the different parks, such as the hours of operation, the fees to get in, the distances from metro areas and the location of some of the parks. Front Range residents agreed that if they had more general information, they would have more reason to visit new parks or to visit more often. One participant suggested, “Have commercials showing the different types of diversity in the State.” Another common response, when asked how they would be encouraged to visit a State Park more often was, “If gas prices went back down,” or, “If it was free.” Another common response heard included, “If it was less crowded.”

Participants in Durango and Grand Junction agreed that more information would be helpful, and one remarked, “I think having a place where there’s information or advertising (would help encourage people to visit). I’m not typically going to go look for it, but if it’s there and I see it, I’ll be much more likely to read it.” Western slope residents, however, primarily wanted more guarantee that there would be remote private camping sites. Some wishes mentioned more than once included: “Less people”; “Less RV’s”; or “If there was a happy medium between the right on the road camping and some campsite that gives you a little more privacy.” The gentleman who preferred the mix of camping options added, “I’d go more to a State Park if I knew I had the convenience of camping but without so much stuff around.” Another man added, “With the needs of my family, the bathroom and shower - are important. (But) for me, if you could do the bathroom and shower thing, and yet still feel like you are out there, that would be a big attraction for me.”

Other suggestions given by visitors that would encourage them to visit more often included allowing dogs in certain parks, adding camping sites are so that visitors can get in with or without

reserving a spot in advance, and increasing interest for kids. A Denver resident said, “They should get the kids out there. They’ll get their parents out there if they like it.”

Having a multi-car pass or multi-park pass is very appealing to State Park visitors.

Across nearly all locations at least one park visitor suggested offering a multi-car or multi-park (i.e. State Parks and other types of parks) pass. Several participants agreed with one man who said, “It wasn’t cost effective to have both a county and a State Park pass,” so many reported buying only the one pass that they would use more often, which was not always a State Park pass. Another man remarked, “They should have a multi-car pass,” and a few others agreed. One said, “I wonder if you bought more than one park pass if you got a discount on both? You could maybe use more parks and then maybe you’d go to State Parks more.” Another suggestion mentioned in more than one group was having an “interchangeable sticker,” to use different cars at different times, and numerous people liked this idea. One gentleman remarked, “We had a pass one year and if we wanted to take the other vehicle, then we were just out of luck.” Overall, park visitors agreed that multi-car or multi-park passes would encourage them to visit State Parks more often.

The topic of a discounted pass was also discussed among several park visitors in unaided comments. A Colorado Springs man suggested the following: “(What about) for Colorado residents you have a basic fee somewhere in there, maybe \$35 that allows you to go to any other parks? (For example) we pay \$35 for a fishing license, and we can fish anywhere.”

Other factors that would encourage people to visit State Parks more often include the following :

- “Maybe the thought if there were more of them (more parks.) You said there were two more that were being built, so take more advantage of the land that we have around us.”
- “Expand the current State Parks. Take the existing parks and increase the space.”
- “If I knew they were being threatened, I’d be there all the time. If I knew the State Parks were being threatened in some way, I’d be going all the time.”
- “If there was a specific habitat they were preserving so I could go see the animals or the trees. If that was a major factor in visiting that would really appeal to me.”
- “If something was celebrated at that specific State Park.”
- “If there was more general information. A lot of us didn’t know where the majority of the parks were. I’m sure there’s a lot of places that none of us know about and maybe we’d like to go...If the information was more available. I know you can go online, but maybe in outdoors stores or information centers.”

The greatest differences between State Parks and other parks or types of public land include the relative amount of on-site development (having to do with isolation), proximity, and the cost differences. Several people agreed that the greatest difference between State Parks and other types of public land had to do with the amount of development on-site. A Grand Junction man said, “BLM and the National Forest are a little more primitive.” Another man agreed and said he considers National Forest and BLM land to be more “private” and to be “more wilderness.” A Colorado Springs man contrasted with a State Park by saying, “On the BLM, you are really on your own. There’s no one there and the trails aren’t marked. You go there on your own, which is fine.”

Being alone and “on your own” was not preferred by other participants, but the groups recognized the fact that BLM land, like National Forests, were less developed and provided more of an opportunity for isolation for those who seek this. One man said, “There’s more solitude (on BLM land), and I’d feel more safe.” By contrast, a woman in Denver said she prefers to camp at State Parks because of the interaction with other people, and she felt safer being around other people for her children’s sake.

The cost factor was mentioned in all five groups, although responses to it varied. Nearly all visitors were aware that there was a charge to get into a State Park, and one man said, “It costs more to go to a State Park.” A Denver resident said, “(Other parks or type of land are) Free, but they don’t have the amenities. They don’t have showers for example.” This point was recognized across participants in all groups. Multiple others agreed, again with varying responses to the entry fees, but a small group shared that they thought the entry fees at National Parks were more expensive. A Greeley man defended that and said “but the entry fees are good for a week.” Overall, the fact that there was an entry fee of any kind made State Parks unique among other types of parks and public land.

Distance appeared to be another large factor differentiating State Parks from other types of land. A Greeley man described other parks as, “just a quicker, easier and less expensive trip.” The following quotes further highlight other comparisons between State Parks and other kinds of parks, especially National Parks.

- “If you want isolation, go to the National Forest because it is more isolated. It’s more an outing and you know that you’ll have well-marked trails and things.”
- “National Parks can be better maintained and they have the prettiest things too. Rocky Mountain National Park on the top of Trail Ridge, you can see I don’t know how many fourteeners, and you can’t do that anywhere else.”
- “Seems like the majority of lakes are in State Parks (compared to other parks).”
- “I think, to some extent, there’s a spectrum of facilities. At National Parks, you’re talking about the same kind of facilities and visitor’s centers (at State Parks). With BLM, there’s basically nothing there. You’ve got the full spectrum, and I think the State Parks are really in the middle of that spectrum in terms of the manpower that they have and the facilities that they have.”
- “(Some parks) are fee, but they don’t have the toilets and showers.”
- “You can find solitude in a National Park.”
- “I have small kids and I like to camp around others, so I can’t be in the middle of nowhere.”
- “Cleanliness is a big one...(in some places) the locals use them as party areas and they trash them, and then the BLM has to come in and eventually clean it up where State Parks are going to have it cleaned up the next day, have them kicked out and it’s a lot safer environment in that respect.”
- “I think there has to be a specific attraction (like at a National Park) for me to consider going to a State Park.”

- *“The State Parks are the hotels of the parks system.”*

- *“I’d say the freedoms (is the greatest difference). You go out to a National Forest and you really have freedom to do a lot and do what you want to do. You don’t have a lot of restrictions that you do at other places. State Parks tend to have a lot of restrictions than the National Forests, which is something I definitely appreciate about going out there.”*

National Parks are more viewed as “destinations” than State Parks. Adding to the previous finding, and further differentiating State Parks and National Parks, a Denver man said, “It (a National Park) is more of a destination,” and multiple others agreed. One remarked, “National Parks, in my experience, tend to surround a monument or a natural wonder. There seems to be a something a little grander about it. It’s not a place where you park your vehicle and have a campfire. Here’s a place where you go and see something that’s unbelievable enough to the point where it’s become a National Park.” One female participant said the biggest difference she saw between State Parks and National Parks was the duration of the visit. “I would think that, for a State Park, to me it reminds me of a weekend visit. I’m not going to spend a week at Cherry Creek. It’s a quick weekend where you’re in and you’re out.”

Many others agreed that they would spend more time at a National Park than a State Park, and feelings were mixed regarding the number of people at National Parks compared to State Parks. One man said, “You have more out-of-towners (at National Parks), and it really seems a lot more clustered.” Another man said, “National Parks are huge. There’s nobody in them compared to State Parks.” Finally, a Greeley man said the following to compare State Parks to National Parks: “National parks can be better maintained and they have the prettiest things too. Rocky Mountain National Park on the top of Trail Ridge, you can see I don’t know how many fourteens and you can’t do that anywhere else.”

Park visitors choose State Parks for a variety of reasons. In discussing why one might choose a State Park over another kind of park, visitors had a variety of answers including the proximity, activities, amenities and facilities, convenience for out-of-town guests, camping, and the structure or organization that is provided. Multiple people shared that they consider State Parks when out-of-town guests come to town, and at least one-half of all visitors indicated that they use the parks for camping.

Group participants were made up of a mix of people who preferred “camping in the rough” and families who preferred State Parks due to the amenities. A male in Colorado Springs shared that he has also grown to prefer State Parks for the amenities and facilities available. He said, “Because of my injuries (disability), I’d be more likely to go to a State Park.” A woman in Grand Junction had a similar situation and felt the same way. She shared that, if not for State Parks, she would be very limited in where she could go (outdoors).

“Convenience and day-use,” was a common reason for choosing a State Park, relating to the organization and structure of the parks. A Colorado Springs resident said, “I go to a State Park, especially in the winter time, because the trail maps are easy to follow and pick out new trails.” Multiple people agreed that State Parks were more structured, and many said they felt less “out in the open wilderness,” which is what they preferred.

Park visitors decide where they want to go primarily based on what they want to do. The general consensus among group members across all five locations was that they decide what kind of

park to visit based on what they are planning to do. “I don’t think I’ve ever sat down and said, ‘I’m going to go to the mountains today, do I go to a State Park or a National Park?’ I don’t think I’ve ever made a decision like that. It’s more about where you want to go and when you get here, you pay the fee to get in.” Another man agreed and said, “I don’t know that it’s a matter of picking one over the other, but it’s about where do you want to go? Part of it is just what you feel like doing.” Several others across all locations agreed.

AWARENESS, PERCEPTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT STATE PARKS

The following topic of discussion focused on awareness, perceptions and knowledge about Colorado State Parks from the non-visitor standpoint. Along with awareness, perceptions and knowledge of State Parks, non-visitors compared State Parks to other types of public land and also discussed what they see the role of a ranger being at a Colorado State Park.

Process Note: This topic was discussed with non-visitors only.

NON-PARK VISITORS

Non-visitors are surprised to hear there are 43 Colorado State Parks. Three out of every four focus group participants indicated that they had some awareness and knowledge of State Parks prior to being invited to the focus group, however, most of their knowledge was very limited. When asked how many State Parks exist in Colorado, non-visitors guessed between 6 and 200. Greeley residents had the most prior knowledge of the State Park system, but close to all participants were surprised to hear that there were 43 parks statewide.

At least a quarter of all non-visitors perceive that State Parks are located mostly near populated areas. Several non-visitors guessed that Colorado State Parks were “near Denver,” or on the “Front Range.” A Durango man also said, “I think people in areas of higher populations tend to go there because they’re comfortable in a social environment. It’s going to a campground where there are a lot of people. There’s comfort in that versus going to some place where there’s no one around.” A few others agreed that they see social aspects being part of a State Park experience. One man said, “I don’t know that it’s social or the fear of the wild component, which is for a lot of people, a lot of times scary...they think they’re safer in masses of people and with campfires.”

Because participants’ knowledge was limited regarding State Parks, in addition to guessing that parks are near metropolitan areas, participants made many other assumptions as to State Park locations, including the following:

- “I think no matter where you go, like a pass or something, I think of a State Park being a little turn-off where they have the sign.”
- “I think of rest stops.”
- “I’d say all over and not as many in the mountains.”
- “They’re near major roads.”
- “There are less of them on the eastern plains.”
- “There’s a lot in this area (western slope).”
- “There’s a lot in eastern Colorado and some close to Denver.”

- “I would guess they (are located) along the Rockies, along the mountains. “
- “Colorado Springs up to Denver...I would say it’s largely dependent upon front range water supply.”

The following table comprises the top-of-mind park names that non-visitors thought of when asked to name State Parks they were familiar with. In each group, non-State Parks were also mentioned. All park names mentioned are included in the table below for each group by geographic area, including parks mentioned that are not State Parks.

Table 6: Top-of-Mind State Parks by Region (All Responses)

<u>Greeley</u>	<u>Colorado Springs</u>	<u>Denver</u>	<u>Grand Junction</u>	<u>Durango</u>
Barbour Ponds (now St. Vrain) Barr Lake Bonny Reservoir (3) Boyd Lake (2) North Sterling Jackson Lake St. Vrain (2)	Cherry Creek Cheyenne Mountain Estes Park* Golden Gate Lake Pueblo Mueller Nathrop* Ridgway	Aurora Reservoir * Bear Creek* Chatfield Reservoir Cherry Creek Eleven Mile Canyon Estes Park* Horsetooth Reservoir* Pingree Park* Red Rocks* Rocky Mountain* St. Vrain Yellowstone*	Connected Lakes (now James. M Robb) Corn Lake* Estes Park* Highline Lake Island Acres* Rubent* Yampa	Blue Mesa* Horsetooth Reservoir* Jackson Lake Joe Wright Reservoir* Mancos Navajo Reservoir Pikes Peak* Red Rocks* Sand Dunes*

**Participant responses that are not State Parks.*

Most non-visitors have some knowledge of State Parks, although nearly everyone agreed that their knowledge is extremely limited. Excluding Durango where very few participants had any knowledge of Colorado State Parks, most non-visitors agreed that they knew something but most agreed with a woman who said, “I don’t know much.” Another man said, “I don’t know very much. I couldn’t tell you what fees are or if they’re different from each other and I don’t know how much a yearly pass is.” A second man said, “I probably know more about the funding and the management and those things than I do about geographic locations and mission statements or anything along those lines.”

Multiple participants cannot distinguish between a State Park and another kind of park. In each group across the State, at least one non-visitor said something like the following from a Colorado Springs resident: “I don’t have a sense for a State Park versus a National Park...when I think of a State Park, I don’t have a sense of that.” She later remarked, “I don’t think I have a real concept of State Parks. What I know of State Parks is primarily from Minnesota and California.” A Durango man said something similar: “To me, I don’t know if it’s a State Park, or a rec center or a city park. It’s hard for me to come up with State Parks here (in Colorado).” A Denver resident said, “I don’t differentiate one (park) from another, so when you talk about parks and where things are, you use the name, but I don’t know that I would know if it was a State Park, or City Park or a local park.” Another participant agreed and said, “I never differentiate one park from another. I just think I’ll go to the park, and I’ll go.” The table earlier in this section indicates the confusion that some participants had distinguishing between State, National, City, and even County Parks.

In unaided comments, non-visitors discuss their awareness of fees, crowding and camping at State Parks. A summary of discussion in these areas is presented below.

- **Fees.** Participants in every group were aware that there are fees at Colorado State Parks. When asked what they had heard about State Parks, a male participant remarked, “That you have to pay to get in.” Additionally, many participants’ were aware that State Parks are funded with “lottery money.” A second male participant said, “It’s all done through the State Legislature,” and a third man said, “It comes out of your pocket when you come in.” Others also observed that visitor fees, both annual and daily passes, pay for much of park operations.
- **Crowds.** More than one-half of all non-visitor participants had observed that Colorado State Parks are crowded. A Colorado Springs resident who prefers other kinds of parks observed that parking lots are full at State Parks, and commented further, “Personally I stay away from them because they are crowded with a lot of people coming in. I try to stay out of them because they do get congested. I figure that if I’m in the city most of the week and I want to get away, then I don’t want to be around a lot of people. So I don’t have a lot of experience with State Parks because I don’t like to visit them with the amount of people that are involved.” A Durango man said, “It’s getting more crowded,” and more than half of all non-visitors also agreed with this comment.

Grand Junction residents had a slightly different perception compared to the other groups. They perceived some crowding but did not feel it was bad enough to where they could never get in or to where the experience would be a poor one because of the amount of people. They, like Colorado Springs residents, felt that the busiest times were during holiday weekends.

Both Durango and Grand Junction locations have colleges in them, which may contribute to crowds. A Durango man remarked, “I think it would be different (less crowded) without the college. I think it offers a lot of amenities that would be appropriate for a town its size without the college.”

- **Camping.** Participants in all groups shared that they were aware that there were some activities at State Parks; however, the most frequently cited top-of-mind activity was camping. A Denver resident said, “I think of campgrounds mostly (when I think of a Colorado State Park.)” The next finding discusses camping in more detail.

The following is a comment from a man describing his first impression of a Colorado State Park.

“My first impression of a State Park wasn’t positive. I was used to the beaches of Lake Michigan, and since I missed the water, someone told me to go to Cherry Creek State Park because they have ‘beautiful beaches.’ So I went, and it appeared as a duck pond to me. That was my first impression of a Colorado State Park, but I was comparing.”

Non-visitors perceive Colorado State Parks to be a combination of “nature with facilities” or the “outdoors with amenities.” Participants in all five locations generally agreed

with the following point made by a Denver area resident: “I think of nature with facilities (when I think of a State Park.)” Another man agreed and said, “State Parks are campgrounds with some basic facilities. I think that really defines a State Park. There are many different types and activities, certainly, but the typical State park is camping with facilities. The pros and cons are if you want to go someplace where that’s your destination, then it’s perfect. The negatives are the distance to travel to them and then also that it’s camping.”

Most non-visitors also viewed State Parks as having some sort of development on-site, such as picnic areas, restrooms and a boat dock. Like many participants who were aware and had visited a State Park at some point, the participants who had never visited a State Park shared their perceptions that parks contain camping, crowding, fees, and rules. Participants appeared to be well-aware that there were activities at State Parks, especially camping. One Grand Junction man described the State Park camping experience with the following: “It’s reliable camping. You are pretty much guaranteed a 12’ x 14’ spot with a bib and a picnic table. It’s reliable on what you’re going to get, I mean.”

The group agreed but preferred to use the word “predictable” because they were aware of what they could expect, but many said they were also aware that reservations were necessary at many State Parks. More than one-half of all non-visitors agreed that calling ahead to reserve a camping site was necessary, and Denver non-visitors were adamant about needing to call in advance. Several participants also viewed State Parks as having a variety of options, including when it comes to camping. One man said, “There’s wilderness camping in addition to a variety of kinds of camping. You can do camping with no amenities at all or you can do tent camping.”

The following statements are a collection of quotes from participants when asked about their perceptions of Colorado State Parks. Many have to do with the perception that State Parks offers a variety of amenities.

- “I think there’s a large variety of amenities that they offer.”
- “Lots of rules.”
- “I’m looking at a State Park to hunt at, and I look at it that there are fewer hunters because of the rules and the cost.”
- “Lots of out-of-state people that come to Colorado.”
- “My perception is that there’s usually a developed picnic or camping site, and there’s a boat ramp.”
- “I don’t think they’re unstaffed. I expect somebody to be there for me and others like me who are just going for a short item and don’t know that place.”
- “I think they are designed to be self sustaining, so there has to be an attraction for campers, and that’s not the kind of place that I’d want to go to. I prefer camping in the rough.”
- “When I think of a State Park, I think of camping. If I went to a park, that’s what I’d go for.”
- “I think of a place that intends to keep nature as it is.”

- “I also think of crowds and traffic. Like for instance, Chatfield Reservoir, I was there a few times a few years ago and everybody goes out there with their boats and makes all this noise and there’s bicyclers, and you’re walking around and people are trying to run over you. It was miserable.”
- “There’s always going to be a bathroom.”
- “We know about the terrain, the wildlife, about the trees, and there might be a little nature place where you can go in and see some examples of what’s there.”
- “(They) create an opportunity for people to experience and enjoy God’s creation with some additional amenities to ease that and make them easy for use.”
- “That’s what separates them (State Parks) out from other places, that you don’t have to pay for, parking and bathrooms.”
- “I think there’s a large variety of amenities that they offer...there’s a real variety (of activities).”

Non-visitors view State Parks as an asset for the State. Visitors in all five locations viewed State Parks being an asset for a number of reasons, including social aspects, offering the opportunity to get out of the city and enjoy nature, offering a place for families to go and spend time together, as well as being a place for tourists to go, even if they are from Denver. (Durango residents viewed Denver residents as tourists). A Colorado Springs woman said the following about parks in general, not just State Parks: “I think any park is a good thing. I think we should turn some of our cities into parks. That’s just my appreciation for nature.”

The following participant quotes explain a little further how non-visitors view State Parks as an asset for the State of Colorado across different attributes.

- **Social aspects**
 - “I think it’s a good way to create community land use and to protect habitats. A State Park gives you the ability to create some sort of community control centered on one special interest.”
 - “They’re good for the community through use and also rest.” (Giving opportunities to rest).
 - “If I go to a State Park, it might be with a group of friends, but I ain’t camping there.”
- **Opportunities to get-away and enjoy nature**
 - “It gives people an opportunity to recreate in a certain area.”
 - “It seems like everywhere you turn, there’s some kind of construction and somebody’s building something. Parks seem to be the only place you can go to get away from it and to get into the natural.”
 - “To the extent that it happens to get people out of the city and more into touch with the natural environment is a good thing. Having places

where people can get out and sit under a tree, even if it's not wilderness, is important.”

- “People go to State Parks, much more than someone living in Durango or Jackson Wyoming (where the outdoors is part of the lifestyle).”
- “It (visiting State Parks) expands what you can do by being out in nature and away from the city. It gives you more opportunities.”
- “It’s a way to get away and have options. There is just so much to do here, outdoors-wise, and if those (State Parks) weren’t here, it would be just terrible.”
- “Creates an opportunity for people to experience and enjoy God’s creation with some additional amenities to ease that and make it easy for them.”

- **Family**

- “To me, it is the place I’d go to take my family.”
- “It’s a relatively easy way if you want to take the family...it’s accessible.”
- “Everyone’s going in so many directions that it’s a good way to get your family together because they have to stay with you. It’s good family time.”

- **Economic benefits of tourism**

- “(State Parks are) an economic value to draw tourists.”
- “Tourism is bound to help the economy.”

- **For tourists and/or people unfamiliar with the outdoors**

- “People that don’t know the difference between National Forest and other types of land might go to a State Park because it’s more defined.”
- “I think real camping is backpacking and hiking into the wilderness and not driving into a parking space and taking a tent out of your car and setting it up...but some people view setting up a tent as camping.”
- “It’s like a gateway campground area. If you aren’t from here, you can go there and there are maps that can direct you in other directions to the right place.”

Non-visitors believe there are many reasons to visit a State Park, but primarily to get away and relax and/or for the activities available. Non-visitors believe there are many reasons to visit a State Park including an accessible and easy way to experience nature or a good way to spend quality time with friends or family, but there were two primary reasons non-visitors perceived people visit State Parks: because State Parks provide a convenient way to get away and relax; and for the

activities available. Most non-visitors agreed that these two reasons went hand-in hand. Numerous participants, especially along the Front Range, agreed with one woman who said, “I think they go to get away and the activities are something to do while you’re there. It (the activities) is not so much secondary, but I think it’s more about getting away from the daily grind. That’s what they go up there for.” In comparing passive activities, like relaxing or spending time with family, to more active activities, such as fishing, hiking or camping, non-visitor participants felt that State Park visitors were going mostly to “get out of town,” “to sit around,” or “to spend time with friends and family.” Thus, the majority perceived that visitors are primarily drawn by passive activities, but that more outdoor recreational activities are typically also a benefit of a trip to a State Park.

Regarding the activity level, Grand Junction and Durango residents tended to think that this was more of the focus for visiting a State Park, because both Durango and Grand Junction residents have more natural areas in close proximity to their homes. One Grand Junction woman said, “I was thinking (people go) to access the rivers and lakes. You can stop by, pay \$10 and camp by the lake, which is hard to find in Colorado. Like the Colorado River, it’s hard to find access to that river.” Another female participant said, “If I was going to have a picnic, I wouldn’t pay the fee to go to a State Park. I’d go to another park. If I’m going to spend money to go there, it’s going to be for some reason.” A third participant agreed and similarly stated, “For me, it (visiting a State Park) is going to be for a purpose, like a class reunion or a family reunion.” A fairly large number of participants agreed that there were certain parks where people were going primarily for the activities, such as Cherry Creek and Chatfield. A Denver resident said, “I don’t consider Cherry Creek or Chatfield getting away from anything...they go to do the activities that they do there. There’s not much to do there except boating.”

Participants also felt that visitors’ motivations for visiting a State Park had to do with the fact that State Parks are able to accommodate large groups of people, or because State Parks could serve as a stop along the way to a final destination. If I’m on a trip, I’ll plan if I go to a State Park because that’s where I sleep, and they’re usually really nice. Some of them even have showers.” A few others agreed, and one woman said, “(It) gets you to your destination. You can camp all the way to your destination.”

There are many perceived differences between a State Park and other types of public land. Participants tended to view State Parks as being in the middle of the spectrum, as far as offerings go, when compared with National Parks, city (local) parks, private land, National Forest and BLM land. In comparing State Parks to the parks/types of land listed above, excluding National Parks, the greatest differences participants mentioned were that other types of land are both cheaper and/or free; many are closer and more convenient; and they are more private and less crowded. A Denver participant compared city or local parks to State Parks and said, “They are just more accessible from my front door. I don’t have to pack up and drive for two hours to get there. Accessibility is really it for us.” A Grand Junction woman, on the contrary, remarked, “They (State Parks) are more accessible.”

In comparing National Forests and BLM land to State Parks, another woman said, “I think of the word ‘raw’ for those other places. I think of less people too.” Another man said, “If you camp out there (on BLM land), you camp out for free,” and another man agreed and said, “National Forests don’t have any amenities. You have to look for a place to a camp there.” The fact that these types of land were perceived to be less crowded was very appealing to the majority of participants. A man in Greeley described BLM land remarking, “I think when someone chooses BLM land; they want to get away from it all. They don’t want anyone around them, and they want to be by themselves, and when you go to a State Park, you camp with neighbors and get to know them and have fun with them. It’s just what you want. A State Park’s just more civilized than going out on

BLM land where you have to take your water and you have to have everything. So it just depends on what you want.”

Some other factors that differentiated State Parks from these other types of land included that State Parks are more developed, with facilities and amenities. One gentleman remarked, “They are more manicured. The trails are more controlled.” Another said, “They are more developed than most of the areas I go to. They have more amenities.” Because of this, and coupled with the fact that more than half of all non-visitors agreed that State Parks are more crowded than they use to be, numerous participants agreed with a woman who said the following:

“My perception is that State Parks are more day-use. They have more access to a specific thing, like boat ramps and campgrounds. National Parks seem bigger.”

Feelings are mixed as to whether State Parks offer solitude. As indicated above, a large number of non-visitors shared that State Parks are more crowded than they use to be. More than one-half of all non-visitors agreed with comments such as, “It doesn’t strike me as a good place to go for solitude,” or, “I’d rather have solitude (so I wouldn’t go to a State Park.)” Particularly in Durango, most participants were experienced with the outdoors, and many were choosing to go somewhere other than a State Park because it did not offer enough solitude for them, or did not offer them a chance to experience nature to the fullest. One man said, “I’d be more likely to go to the high country where there’s either people or no people, some place like Yankee Basin, where I could be five miles away from the nearest road and completely surrounded by wildflowers and no one else there, maybe one or two people.” Several non-visitors agreed with one man who remarked, “You get more privacy and have more chances to be alone at a National Park.”

National Parks may be viewed as more of a “destination” than State Parks. Particularly in Greeley, due to the close proximity to Rocky Mountain National Park, more than one-half of all participants strongly said they prefer going to a National Park, such as Rocky Mountain National Park, over a State Park. Much of this was because people are more informed of National Parks, and many view National Parks as having better facilities and amenities, better educational programs, more hiking opportunities and perhaps more to do overall. A Denver resident said the following about State Parks compared to National Parks: “I don’t associate it (State Parks) with a ‘destination.’ If we were to do something next week and have a destination to go to, I think a State Park would be at the bottom of the list...when the opportunities come, we pick places that have a wider variety of opportunities...National Parks are always preferable. My experience is that there’s more to see, more to do and more variety. It’s not all about camping.” Multiple people agreed that there is “something that makes it (a National Park) special.”

The following quotes summarize selected thoughts and opinions of non-visitors from across all locations presented when asked to compare and contrast National Parks and State Parks:

- “It (National Parks) is the best of the best in the country as far as parks go.”
- “National Parks are one of a kind.”
- “If I was really going to do it, I probably would go to a National Park...because every National Park I’ve been to has been so cool.”
- “National Parks are more scenic.”

- “National Parks are more seasonal.”
- “A lot of the management at State Parks is for recreational purposes, whereas National Parks, the mission is to preserve for whatever reason the park is there— for cultural or natural reasons.”
- “State Parks are small and developed with developed trails and things like that versus National Parks that are larger and have less formal development.”
- “I don’t see restaurants in State Parks as I do in National Parks. There’s a form of lodging in National Parks, which you wouldn’t have in a State Park. (In National Parks) you have shuttles that drive you around; you have extensive visitor centers; you have employee housing because of the size and there are probably interpretive programs. When I was at a National Park, they have one every night. I don’t think you’d see those things in a State Park.”
- “I would always choose a national campground over a state campground because there’s more trees, and they’re more secluded. State Parks are like KOA’s in my mind. They’re cheaper.
- “On my way up to Rocky Mountain National Forest, there’s tons of trailheads off the road where you can go and don’t have to necessarily pay.”

Some drawbacks to National Parks were cited. One resident remarked, “State Parks are smaller and less crowded.” Other drawbacks to some National Parks that were discussed included; it is very difficult to go camping without making reservations; they are sometimes more expensive than State Parks, and that State Parks are more sensitive to wheelchair accessibility. A Greeley man said the following about camping at a State Park versus a National Park: “I think it’s easier to find camping spaces in a State Park than in a National Park, at least in the summer time. In my experience, Rocky Mountain (National Park) tended to be really busy without a reservation.” Additionally, a Grand Junction woman remarked, “State Parks have more wheelchair accessibility than National Parks have.”

One female participant shared that she did not feel that one type of park is better than another, but that it depends on what a person wants to do and making choices based on how much a person wants to spend. Multiple others agreed when this resident remarked, “I don’t think that National Parks are any better than State Parks. I think they’re the same, but for us, you’ve got to buy so many different passes. For us, we bought a pass to Rocky Mountain National park because we like to hike. In a State Park, you can’t hike much. You can hike up a hill or around a lake, but we want to go hike up the mountain, so, we don’t buy a pass for everything. We just buy for Rocky Mountain National Park, which is \$50. If we want to do the State (Park), it would be \$50 plus \$60, and we don’t want to spend that much.”

State Parks may not be a preferred choice for future trips. When asked where they will go for their next trip to a park, participants across all locations indicated that city/local, national or types of land other than State Park were their preference. About one quarter of all non-visitor participants said they might consider a State Park, but that it “depends on the situation.” One man said the last time he went to a State Park was when he had out-of-town visitors and it was enough to show them snow with amenities.

Preferences included city/local parks, primarily because of proximity, and overall, National Forests were preferred in Colorado Springs for the same reason. BLM land was preferred by some, primarily for the reason given by one gentleman: “I’d prefer the raw land because it’s untouched, and I can hike and not have to pay for example.” Others appeared to prefer National Parks, and participants generally agreed with one participant who remarked, “If I have time, National Parks are my choice just because of the amenities and activities. I’d want to go some place that’s spectacular, and that’s what I think National Parks are.” A Colorado Springs woman added that “it never occurred to me that a State Park could be unique.”

Durango and Grand Junction residents said they would visit a State Park over another kind of park if they were looking for amenities or were going for a specific activity. One Durango man said he would choose a State Park over another kind of park, “(if I was) older, or if I had small kids, or if I was unfamiliar with the area.” Another man said he would choose a State Park because of the water. “A lot of them have water. That would be a big one (reason), or if they had a unique feature.” Other reasons mentioned included if there was a need to accommodate a large group of people, or if a tourist or someone unfamiliar with the area was looking for a place to go.

Non-visitors perceive State Parks to be safe. Nearly all non-visitors in all locations shared that they perceive State Parks to be very safe. A Grand Junction woman said, “I think they’re more patrolled than nationals, which is what I depend on.” Others agreed and one man said, “Yeah, there’s (always) somebody keeping an eye on it.” A male participant said that he considered State Parks to be safe but “I think that the closer it was to a big city, then the more reserved and conservative I’d be. I’d feel safer being ten miles into the National Forest.” A few others agreed, and one man expressed that, “...if it wasn’t remote, it might attract people breaking into cars and things.”

The fact that rangers are around and visible also made people feel safe, although this was not as top-of-mind for non-visitors in Durango and Grand Junction as it was for non-visitors on the front range. A man in Durango said, “I don’t know if this is the case at a State Park, but rangers might be able to carry firearms. National rangers are very visible when this is allowed...It’s an indication of a higher level of threat. National Parks have jails in them where they impound people. Grand Teton doesn’t have one but Yellowstone does.” Few others had the same knowledge or experiences at a National Park, but they agreed that the presence of a ranger, or knowing that one is there, helps people to feel safe.

Participants across groups differed in their opinion on the role of a ranger, but many agreed that rangers should focus primarily on informing rather than enforcing. Most non-visitors agreed that rangers are there to “serve and protect” and that enforcing comes as part of the job but that it should not be the primary focus of a ranger. Many saw enforcing as secondary to informing and educating park visitors. A woman in Colorado Springs summarized how the majority of non-visitors felt about park rangers with the following statement: “My image of a ranger would be a naturalist who happens to also be out there enforcing the rules, so that rather than going up to someone and saying ‘take the clothes off the tree,’ they would have an option for drying those clothes. It’s so that the education would come about while enforcing the rules. I’ve seen more of those than park rangers that were cops.”

Roughly one-half felt that the word “enforce” or the position as a “cop” was a little strong and that, “There are points in time where you need someone to enforce, but they need to use a little common sense and a little judgment,” as one man said. On the other hand, a significant proportion of participants assumed that park rangers exist to enforce and be the “policeman of the area.” It appeared that everyone generally agreed that there needs to be someone there supervising the park and monitoring people’s behavior. A Greeley man said, “Being by the wrong people can ruin a trip.”

Overall, non-visitors wanted to be able to look to somebody if there was a problem while staying at a State Park, but they wanted to be able to have their freedom to relax at the same time and not be overly monitored without reason. More than half of all non-visitors agreed that guests to State Parks were generally paying for the experience, so they felt there was less need for “cops.” The following quote is from a man who shared an experience he had with rangers at a State Park near Colorado Springs.

“Obviously they have to be to a point a police officer; they have to keep things under control, but I think there can be some reasonableness with it too. A clothesline on a tree isn’t going to hurt it, (but) shooting wildlife in a park yes. Absolutely, draw the line... I don’t want to damage trees. I just felt like I was being babysat...It just felt very rigid to me.”

EXPERIENCES WITH STATE PARKS AND PREFERRED ACTIVITIES

The following information summarizes findings about participants’ experiences, both past and present, with Colorado State Parks. Group members shared their preferred activities at parks as well as what kind of campgrounds they most prefer, developed versus primitive.

Process Note: This topic was discussed with park visitors only.

PARK VISITORS

Many park visitors recently made last-minute decisions to visit a State Park. State Park visitors were asked about their most recent trip to a Colorado State Park and reasons for visiting varied from participating in active to passive activities, or both, and participants in three of the five groups shared that their decision to visit a State Park was spontaneous. A Denver woman said, “I went by myself during the week and went for a nice long walk. I had solitude and it was pretty nice there. It was spur-of-the-moment. It’s really close to me.” A Colorado Springs man agreed that his decision to visit Cheyenne Mountain State Park was “on an accidental whim.” He remarked, “I went to Cheyenne Mountain State Park kind of on an accidental whim because we were planning to mountain bike somewhere else. We drove by and decided to go there. It was easier to get to.” A third man said he “just pulled off (at a State Park) on my way home the other day and went hiking to cool down.”

Most visitors feel that fees for State Parks are reasonable. Despite the fact that some State Park visitors said they would visit a State Park more often if it was free, the majority of park visitors agreed that the fees were reasonable, and after visiting, nearly everyone agreed that the visit was worth the cost. Group members estimated park fees to be between \$3 and \$8, and most felt this cost is reasonable. Some used the word “typical” to describe this estimate and some called it “reasonable.” A few others agreed with a man who cited the available competition for leisure and said, “There’s too many areas where you can go for free.” Another man later said, “If they raise it (the cost) to \$30 a car, then it wouldn’t be crowded.” Few participants appeared to favor this idea. A Denver resident said, “If you raised the price, it wouldn’t deter our family. We would still go,” and another woman said, “If you raise the fees too much, it’s going to take the opportunity away from some families because they don’t have the money.” The following quote is from a Durango man regarding the cost of entry for a Colorado State Park, which several people agreed with:

“They are doing a good job of trying to keep the prices low. They’re trying to keep an area clean and they don’t have garbage everywhere. They do a good job of keeping prices down.”

Although park visitors agreed that the fees for State Parks were reasonable, the bottom line was that most would prefer not to pay if they had the choice, especially if they were staying for only a short while. One Durango woman said, “Even though we realize they (State Parks) need money to maintain it, when it comes down to it, you really don’t want to have to pay.” The following are a few additional quotes about park visitors’ reservations about paying to get into a State Park.

- “The only thing that enters in is if you know you’re going to go, but you don’t know if you want to hike across the street for free or pay?”
- “If you’re only going to be there for an hour, maybe it’s not worth it then.”
- “I had mixed feelings on how much it would be worth going in for an hour or a couple of hours.”

Park visitors generally know some of the details of a State Park annual pass. Along the front range, several participants had a season pass to the Colorado State Parks, so therefore, they were fairly educated on the cost of a pass. Grand Junction and Durango residents were less informed, however, and guessed that the cost of an annual pass was between \$27 (for a senior) and \$64. When told the actual cost, most people believed that it is reasonable, although many agreed with one participant who remarked, “It depends on how much you’re going to use it.” The need for an annual pass was debatable, as some park visitors felt it is unnecessary because there is so much to do in close proximity that is otherwise free.

Nearly half of all park visitors were also already informed that an annual pass is for a full calendar year and that it is good for all parks in the State. This was not the case in Durango, however, where none of the park visitors were aware that a pass was good for a full year, regardless of purchase date. Most assumed that the pass runs from the purchase date until December 31st.

Note: In this section of discussion, participants chose their favorites from a list of activities, and then the moderator tabulated choices during the group so that the most preferred activities could be discussed further. Participants chose activities that were their favorites, regardless of the venue. See full results in Appendix C.

The most preferred activities among State Park visitors are camping and hiking. Results in the table in Appendix C indicate that 36 park visitors across five groups chose camping as a preferred activity. Another 34 chose hiking. These were the top two preferred activities. Getting together with family and friends and looking at scenery were also preferred activities.

The table below includes quotes that indicate both the benefits and drawbacks of camping or hiking at a State Park versus another venue. Across the five Colorado regions, camping or hiking were the most preferred activities to do at a State Park. A few comments about looking at scenery are also included.

Table 7: Park Visitor Preferred Activities

Activity	Benefits (at a State Park)	Drawbacks (at a State Park)
<p>Camping</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There’s a trust factor. You know if you go camping at a State Park, it will be nice. You know what to expect as opposed to some campground where you could find people living there and things.” • “Usually the camping spots are well-maintained, compared to all the other places that you can go. If there are trees, they’re taken care of.” • “Bathrooms are one of the hugest things. For me, well-maintained bathrooms and sometimes even with showers (are very important).” • “There’s always water at a State Park...Water is so important because carrying all that water is just not fun. When you know you can go get water and wash with it, then it’s really big.” • “A lot of people are going but they are not all choosing to camp. It’s usually fine to go if you avoid holidays.” • “Bathrooms and showers.” • “Your tent site is already level, and there’s a BBQ grill.” • “You can park and leave everything in your car.” • “(It’s) convenient” • “If you make reservations, you know you are getting in.” • “They are usually at scenic places where there’s a lake and things, where you know you have things to do.” • “They have facilities. The sites are more or less level.” • “Nice fire rings.” • “There’s other places that offer the same thing, but for us, it’s a matter of knowing there’s a park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Crowds” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’d rather go elsewhere to camp just because of the amount of people.” • “I think years ago the parks were not as crowded as they are now.” • Less solitude. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Less privacy” • Not as private as some might want. • “Fees” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’d rather not camp where I have to pay to camp...” • Rowdy people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It can ruin a trip if you’re next to a jerk.” • “Neighbors when camping” • Not as spread out <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Not as much room.” • “Making reservations”

	<p>ranger and fast access to get home or get to a city is necessary.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’ve stayed a KOA campsite and I’ve noticed that people are right on top of each other where they’re spread out a lot nicer in a campground at a State Park.” • “At a State park, you have the presence of a ranger and at KOA sites you have kids having keggers and being loud. It’s more family-oriented at a State Park.” • “It’s more wilderness at a State Park. There’s nice campsites too. They are well maintained and some have electricity.” • “I think it’s safety in numbers.” 	
<p>Hiking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Good trails” • “Usually, there’s information or a board of some sort that says ‘this is what’s going on.’” • Facilities • “They’re usually areas that are interesting to see, like Rifle Gap State Park.” • Most participants agreed that a benefit was seeing the scenery at the same time of doing an activity. • “You can go with your family or a group of people.” • “It’s social again.” • Better for the physically challenged or handicapped. • “It’s in a natural setting.” • “They’re different, variety.” • “I would probably choose a State Park to go hiking over a National Park just because of the crowds. Hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park is like walking on I-25. It’s just crowded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crowds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There’s a number of people.” • “It’s not as isolated.” • “I like to go off where there’s not a lot of people.” • “A little more crowded than a National Forest.” • Restriction for dogs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “With my dog it’s easier to go on a trail that isn’t a State Park.” • Sometimes dogs aren’t allowed at State Parks and a quarter agreed that it’s easier to take their dogs elsewhere. • “(You) can’t take your dog.” • Not as good as hiking in a National Park or Forest. • “It’s the same thing, but you get different things out of being remote.”

	<p>and you have to wait for people.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The well laid-out trails.” • “Good maps” • “You don’t get lost.” • “Known distances.” • “You know what you’re getting into.” • “It’s very easy to find a guide...Somewhat maintained.” 	
Looking at scenery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I like to see what is unique to a particular area.” • “This was just a given and it rolled into many of the others (on the list).” • “It’s part of the experience.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not as beautiful as National Parks

Other activities that were popular among State Park visitors included boating, nature and wildlife observation, hanging out and relaxing, and getting together with friends and family.

Park visitors feel that riding motorcycles and ATVs is better-suited for areas other than State Parks. When asked if there were certain activities from the list considered in the exercise summarized above (in table 7) that park visitors strongly agreed were better-suited for parks other than State Parks, respondents cited riding motorcycles and ATV’s. One man in Colorado Springs said, “With riding motorcycles/dirt bikes and ATV’s, there are better areas of the state that are much more scenic (to do so).” Another woman agreed and said, “It doesn’t seem like the place where motorcycles and ATVs belong.” A Durango resident also agreed and said, “I think a State Park is a social setting, and I don’t think that motorcycles and dirt bikes go well because of the noise.”

Other activities that visitors did not feel were suited for a State Park, or activities that they did not perceive were available at State Parks included rafting, riding horses, snowmobiling, off-road four wheeling, rollerblading, and running. A female participant said, “It (rollerblading) seems like such an urban thing to do,” while a few others agreed. Another woman said, “I put running because I don’t want to pay a fee when I can go run outside my backyard for free.”

Park visitors are most familiar with volunteer programs, although no participants have participated in them. When asked what Parks activities or programs visitors were familiar with, at least one participant in each group across all five regions was aware that there are volunteer opportunities through the Colorado State Parks. Very few participants knew much about them or had ever personally volunteered at a State Park, however. Overall, participants’ knowledge about activities and programs through Colorado State Parks was very limited. Other programs and activities that visitors were generally aware of, but not necessarily knowledgeable of, included educational classes and naturalist-led programs.

The following list is a compilation of the activities and programs that park visitors were familiar with:

- “Volunteer programs to go work in a State Park or be a campground host.”
- “When I was doing rehab and rescue, there are groups that would put up lines for nesting areas. They also trained people to do nature tours.”
- “At Lory, the first time I went up there it was with a naturalist and it was all about what we might find there.”
- “They have interpretive types of things for watching. It’s a naturalist type program.”
- “Boat safety”
- “At Mueller I was one of the leaders of the 4H club several years ago. There was a class on black power and shooting.”
- “Cheyenne Mountain has a survey of the animals that they’ve seen, and they do that on a continuing basis.”
- “I did volunteer at Red Rock Canyon.”
- “Naturalist activities at Barr Lake. It’s really good for that, one of the best.”
- “There are summer events and classes for kids.”

The quotes above are primarily from focus group participants along the Front Range. Durango and Grand Junction residents overall had little to no knowledge about programs or activities at State Parks.

Park visitors feel that amenities and features relating to camping are extremely important. “If you’re going to spend any time there, it’d be nice to have shower facilities,” one Colorado Springs man said. When asked what amenities and features they felt were most important or that they most prefer to see when visiting a State Park, amenities and features relating to camping, including clean bathrooms, showers, fire pits, developed and primitive camping sites, and dumpsites for RV’s were top-of-mind to State Park visitors.

Some other important things mentioned included trails and trail maps, naturalist led programs, playgrounds for kids, cabins (to give various options for camping), and picnic areas, which were extremely important to more than half of all park visitors. Amenities and features that were less important included snack bars, park offices and conference rooms.

One woman discussed reservation sites for campgrounds. She thought these could be improved. “(They need) better reservation sites for campgrounds...not only that they charge you per night, but it’s outrageous. It’s completely gotten rid of spontaneity. There’s no way you could say, ‘I want to go camping this weekend.’ They open it 30 days in advance, and you have to be there like that.”

State Park visitors, like non-visitors, are more concerned with preserving the natural landscape than building amenities and features at State Parks. Like non-visitors, visitors of Colorado State Parks felt there was a tradeoff between developing natural spaces and maintaining

primitive sites and most generally agreed that they wanted a balance between man-made amenities and natural features. The strong majority of State Park visitors agreed with two participants who said, “I think there’s a balance,” and, “Well-balanced amenities with nature all around (is what I want).” Between the two choices, the majority of participants were more concerned with maintaining primitive and natural sites, however. A Colorado Springs man said, “If I could have more with less development, then I’d like that more than having more with more development.”

Also, like non-visitors, park visitors felt that both could be done in a harmonious way, and many felt that the parks are currently doing a good job at this. One man said, “I don’t think the State Parks are creating unbalance (currently),” and a man in Greeley said, “I think you could do both. The Oregon State Parks, for example, are terrific for that. They (amenities and facilities) blend in.” Participants in the groups across all locations generally felt that State Parks currently does a nice job of balancing development and preservation of nature.

Process Note: In this part of discussion, the moderator gave the following instructions to respondents and then followed up. I’d like you to envision two state parks that are the same size, the same distance from you, and have generally the same environment and scenery. Park A has a paved parking lot, a visitor center, picnic tables, campgrounds with showers, RV hookups, guided hikes with park rangers, and a lot of trails for people to hike. Park B has a gravel parking lot, a few trails with pit toilets near the trailheads, and a few primitive campsites along the trails. Which one would you prefer to visit, and why?

Primitive campsites are preferred over developed sites. In comparing two scenarios – a developed campsite with amenities and facilities (Park A) to a primitive site with more natural settings (Park B), park visitors along the front range highly favored primitive sites, whereas participants along the Western slope slightly preferred primitive sites. Overall, all State Park visitors preferred primitive camping to sites with amenities, although multiple people said they saw value in both kinds of parks. The following quotes describe why Park B was preferred:

- “If I’m going to go camping, it just seems like it would be more of an experience (at Park B), more of a camping experience. It’s more wilderness than the other place.”
- “I think for society it’s better to have both types, but I prefer Park B.”
- “There would be fewer people at B than A.”
- “It’s more of an outdoors environment too.”
- “It’s about communing with nature.”
- “Scenario A gave me more of a feel of a 4-day trip with the family and just enjoying. Scenario B was like ‘I’m going out just for the weekend to get away.’”
- “I think there will be less of a crowd (at Park B).”
- “I’ve got a grown child and no grandchildren yet, so I’m almost always going with adults and I don’t have to have those things (amenities). If I had kids, then I’d pick Park A, but at this point in my life, I’d probably go with Park B.”

For park visitors who preferred Park A, many agreed with one man who said, “If I’m going to pay for my camping, it’s going to be in a campsite that’s developed. If I want to be in the wilderness by myself, I’m not going to be at a State Park.” Another man said that the thought Park A “sounds like a nicer park.” Others agreed that Park A was easier with children. One woman said, “The upside is for friends who are handicapped. They wouldn’t get out at all if it weren’t for parks like Park A.”

Nearly all State Park visitors reported that they feel safe at State Parks for many reasons, particularly because of the types of people visiting and the quantity of people. Visitors reported to feel safe for several reasons including the number and kind of people who typically visit State Parks. A Denver resident sarcastically said he feels safe at State Parks because there are “10,000 people there,” and a Colorado Springs man said, “Familiarity more than anything makes people feel safe...and proximity to a metro area.” A Grand Junction woman said, “There’s more people, and they’re usually of like minds to be there.” Similarly, a Durango man said, “I’d say I feel safe because of the type of people that are there. Things along those lines. Not just for State Parks, but for any outdoor activities. As far as wildlife goes, it seems like they (wildlife) are more used to people and if there is a bear and there’s a problem, the rangers tend to pay attention.” Additionally, one man said his wife would feel better knowing that there was cell phone coverage.

The following quotes are from two Colorado residents who offered different opinions of what they consider safe.

“Maybe I’m silly, but I tend to think that if you pay to get into a place, you have more people that want to be there for recreation than people who are just out for no good.”

“I have to say that I feel less safe at a State Park for the camping than I do in solitude. When I’m in a National Forest, there’s no one around me. At Boyd Lake, I was scared to death. I never feel this way camping at a National Forest...the closer you are to a metro area, the less safe you are in my opinion.”

The fact that rangers were visible was another reason people reported to feel safe at State Parks, although visitors were split on the topic of visibility, which will be further discussed below. A female State Park visitor remarked, “There’s usually a ranger around too. When you come in, there’s usually a gate or something where you pay, and there’s a person there. You see them around.” Most people agreed with one man when he said, “They come and check you out at the campsite.”

Opinions are mixed on how visible rangers are at State Parks. One man said, “Other than the guys at the front taking your money, they’re not visible.” Another man agreed and said the following: “The irony to the State Parks system is that the rangers are becoming almost an endangered species. They are basically the supervisors of the things that are going on there. They supervise the contractors that come in to pick up the trash, and they supervise the volunteers. You might have one or two rangers for an entire park, and they have a multitude of things they need to do.” Several participants, on the other hand, felt that rangers are very visible. “Rangers are everywhere,” one Denver resident said.

Park visitors describe a ranger’s role as enforcing, informing, and serving. When asked what they thought the role of a ranger should be, most visitors agreed that it should have to do with “enforcement of the rules” and “information.” A Colorado Springs resident said, “They (rangers) are caretakers,” and a Denver resident said, “They give information.” A Grand Junction man added that, “They’re there to help take care of the surroundings,” and another man said he appreciated that

“you have access to people who have knowledge on how to deal with those types of situations if a problem does come across that’s related to the wilderness.” A State Park “has people there to assist you,” he said.

Nearly everyone agreed with one man who said, “There definitely needs to be somebody there (at a park) that has some type of authority.” Denver residents shared that they generally did not think there needed to be a lot of enforcement at State Parks. A man in the group said, “I think the people that use those facilities are out here to enjoy it like you are. There’s always a bad apple in a group.” Participants in other locations also agreed with this perception. They felt there needed to be enforcement and protection, but mostly for enforcing rules and knowing who to call if a need arose.

As part of the information sharing piece mentioned above, close to a third of all group members felt strongly that another role of a ranger was to educate; one man said he thought the role of a ranger was “ideally education.” Many agreed that rangers share knowledge about parks and resources in the area in addition to protecting, and a Durango woman said, “Some of us think that the (protection of natural resources) ties in directly with education.” Grand Junction participants agreed that rangers were very “approachable.” One woman said, “Yes, the ones I’ve talked to, they take the time to talk to you. It’s not like they are in a big hurry to go on...you can ask the questions and they respond, instead of acting like ‘you’re bothering me. Let’s go.’” A second woman said, “I always think they’re so happy to be there versus somewhere else.”

As previously mentioned, most participants shared that they felt very safe at State Parks, and many attributed this to the fact that there are rangers, but a few shared experiences where they encountered difficult people, and because of that, they just wanted to know that there is someone available to call, if necessary. One male participant described an experience at Pueblo Reservoir with inconsiderate people on the lake. He said, “I thought it was offensive and there was no one to call.” He later said that he wanted to know who and how to call a ranger, if necessary.

A Durango man shared a story about rangers who he thought were “extremely strict.” He remarked, “At John Martin Reservoir, I’ve had experiences with them where they have been extremely strict with little things that don’t make a lot of sense. The State Park rangers down there are really strict. It’s just politics and they try to make your life uneasy due to circumstances. It’s kind of sad...It’s definitely a politics thing. It’s something with politics that’s going on with current owners and State Park officials, and it’s kind of childish almost and frustrating.” He shared that the wildlife is not much of an issue in recent years but the rangers will follow you and monitor your tracks as a way of protecting the wildlife. A few others in the group appeared to believe that his story “had to do with politics” of some kind.

Most participants shared positive experiences with rangers, including one man who “flagged down the ranger and he actually found us a campsite at 11 o’clock at night. They’re there. They’re present and they’re helpful.” Another male participant said, “They (rangers) have made it family-friendly, so you don’t find people drunk there. They’ve spent a lot of money on the environment.”

The following list of quotes demonstrates how other participants saw the role a ranger:

- “They make sure you’re not littering.”
- “They collect the toll.”
- “They tell you where you can’t go.”
- “They pick up garbage.”

- “To give information.”
- “I’ve had a lot of experiences where they’ve come up and done educational courses with the kids. They’re helpful.”

BARRIERS TO VISITING STATE PARKS

The following discussion topic focuses on the barriers to visiting State Parks for non-visitors. Non-visitors also shared the top reasons they do not visit State Parks during this part of the discussion.

NON-PARK VISITORS

Process Note: In this section, the moderator conducted an exercise with participants. (See Question # 15 on the moderator’s guide and the handout that was distributed in Appendix D. The purpose of the exercise was to identify the most common barriers that non-visitors may face in considering visiting State Parks.

The greatest barriers for visiting a Colorado State Park are not knowing what to do at the park and not perceiving it as a convenient thing to do, primarily because of crowds. Close to one-half of all non-visitors said they did not feel that they were familiar enough with a Colorado State Park to know what to do when they get there. The following includes representative statements on this topic from participants in all locations:

- “I know that there are State Parks, but I’m just not familiar with what each of them has to offer. I don’t know what’s different from one to the next.”
- “I don’t look at it as a barrier, but I’ve never been to one, so how would I know what to do when I get there?”
- “The National Forests and Parks are so popular that people tend to know what to expect...more than what they might know of a State Park and what the rules are. So that familiarity with the National stuff maybe makes a difference...They have rangers, shows that they put on and hikes. You know that’s going on, and it’s free once you get in.”
- “If you don’t know where they are and what’s there, you aren’t going to go there.”
- “Especially with the cost, with the gas prices now, if you’re going to go, what’s going to be there when you get there? If you feel like it’s going to be worth your money, then you’ll go.”
- “My first thought would be ‘it would be a waste of money, so we’re here, now what?’ If you don’t know (where it is or what’s there), it’s almost like driving blindfolded. I need to know that I spend my money to get here to do something, that’s all.”

- “I think the thing about knowing what to do there as opposed to the abstract of just going, like doing certain activities like hiking, or something specific, would draw you there.”
- “I simply don’t know where the parks are...I don’t even know where to go for a State Park.”
- “You might not know what you can and can’t do. For me, the idea of a State Park is that there is quite a bit of restrictions compared to other places. That’s the mindset I have.”

Participants felt the greatest way to overcome the barrier to lack of knowledge was if the Colorado State Parks advertises more. Participants agreed that the State Parks system can advertise more and better inform the public of what they have to offer at each park. The kind of information they were looking for included the types of activities at each park, the cost and hours of operation, and the rules of each park. A Greeley resident said, “I think a really good website with a lot of photography would be helpful,” and numerous participants agreed. A Colorado Springs woman said, “In my mind, State Parks all look the same. But in the State of Colorado, they must be different. I hadn’t even thought of it until now.” A man in the group suggested the following as a way to overcome these perceptions. He remarked, “I think a live webcam, like at Pikes Peak. They used to have a live webcam, so if you want to go there, you could see what it looks like.”

Close to one-half of all participants also said they did not feel that visiting a Colorado State Park would be a convenient and easy thing to do (ie. not too crowded.) In fact, more than one-half of all participants had the perception that State Parks were crowded. The following represents participants’ rationale as to why they did not feel State Parks were a convenient and easy activity to do.

- “Crowds would stop me from going.”
- “It’s not that convenient, distance-wise. I’m thinking of the State Parks in the mountains, but the drive and the time it would take to get there...it’s the travel time.”
- “I might have the time and I might have a day but I tend to stick with what’s easy and what I know, and open space is right outside my door.”
- “What’s unique about Colorado is that there are so many of these different types of opportunities that are more convenient and I think that has a factor to play in the fact that State Parks aren’t as much of a destination as they are perhaps in other states. Colorado’s full of open space and convenient places to go for a spur of the moment afternoon.”
- “If I’m just going to go a half hour from where I am, I’m in National Forest. I wouldn’t even know where to go for a State Park.”
- “I think it would be quick and convenient if that was the question, but the too crowded (thing) makes it less desirable.”
- “Crowded means you can’t find a parking space.”

- “No, because there would be Winnebago’s and tons of people...that’s not convenient.”
- “For me, it’s just out of my routine and out of what I’m aware of, whereas I’m aware of a lot of natural areas that are familiar and easy to get to. I have two kids, and I’m not really into car trips with them at this point, and like someone else said, it comes down to priorities, and it’s not a priority for me.”
- “I think it’s also the perception of everyone having either a pop-up camper or a RV experience to having bathrooms there, and it’s just the clientele, if you will. It doesn’t fit in my general mentality of where I want to go when I go outdoors.”
- “If I’m going to go outdoors, then I want to be pretty much far away from civilization.”
- “If you’re going to plan to go someplace, I think the hard thing is that this is an in-between. You could take a few hours and that might feel like too much but you might not want to do it for a weekend, so it falls to the wayside.”

Recommendations for overcoming this objection included a number of different things, including allowing a free one-hour pass for visitors to drive around and find a campsite or to look around and decide if they wanted to stay. One participant remarked, “One thing that kept me out of a park was that I couldn’t go look at it without paying the fee. I couldn’t just drive in without risking a ticket. I just wanted to drive around and look at it. I came in off-hours and they wouldn’t let me, so I just went on.” Another woman agreed that she has had the same experience. She said, “You have to pay even if you just want to look around and aren’t going to stay.” For this reason, close to half of all participants strongly liked the idea of offering a short-term/one hour pass to visitors.

Offering events was also recommended. A man in Greeley said, “If there’s nothing to draw you there, then why go? At Mesa Verde, you go to see the Indian dwellings. At a State Park, you’ll have water and a place to put your tent. That doesn’t thrill a lot of people, so I think they’re going to have to do something to get some people there.”

Another common barrier according to a quarter of all non-visitors is that going to a State Park is not considered a “cool” thing to do. One out of every four non-visitors said they did not feel that visiting a Colorado State Park would be a “cool” thing to do. Many got hung up on the word “cool,” but one woman in Grand Junction said, “Cool to me means hip or cutting edge, or something that’s exotic. It (going to a State Park) is definitely not the ‘in thing to do.’” Another man said, “State Parks are not as cool as National Parks or the wilderness. Those are cool.”

The following quotes are from non-visitors related to why State Parks may not be viewed as “cool.”

- “I just don’t associate the word ‘cool’ with State Parks.”
- “To me, a cool thing to do is hike a fourteener or something kind of monumental, run a class-5 ramp, but just to visit a park...what’s cool about that?”
- “Is fitting in with the cool crowd? Is it the in thing to do?”

- “It depends on what you’re doing.”

One of Denver residents’ greatest barriers is the cost to visit a State Park. Most Denver residents said they would prefer to visit other parks because some are more convenient, but mostly because they would not have to pay to get in. The group also shared some mistrust about where the lottery money is being spent as well. They wanted to be better informed and felt that, if they were, they would be more willing and understanding about park entrance fees. One woman said, “I think it’s showing people what they spend the money on. I think people are thinking ‘well I spend \$6 and then this road has pot holes in it. I don’t see a ranger and the bathroom has a hole in the ground, so what are they spending the money on?’”

After more discussion, all participants in Denver agreed that they may have a misunderstanding on what it takes and how much it costs to maintain a park. For this reason, they desired to be better informed. One man said, “There’s a misunderstanding for how much of our tax dollars, if any, pay for that stuff already. I think people are thinking, ‘I pay Colorado State taxes. Doesn’t any of that go to the parks?’ I want to know, are they getting 10 percent of their money from taxes or zero? What does a ranger make? I think if people knew these things, they’d be more willing to pay. I know I would.” Another man agreed and said, “If you don’t know, you tend to make a negative assumption...or you make assumptions that there isn’t any money.”

People are creatures of habit. Another barrier that was discussed among participants in all locations was the fact that people are “creatures of habit,” as one man said. “I think a lot of us get into routines. As a kid, we went to Rocky Mountain National Park, so I learned how to do that (and I had fun doing that, so as an adult, I do that. We do the same thing every summer. We go to the same towns; we’re doing the same hike; we’re doing the same thing because we’ve done it and we know how it works.” Many participants across groups agreed with this statement and many said that they, too, do many of the same activities that they did as a kid, many of which did not include visiting State Parks.

Colorado Springs and Durango residents had a slightly different take on this, because so many of them were new to the State. Multiple Durango residents shared that they moved to Durango to enjoy the outdoors, so it was new to many of them, as was the case with the majority of Colorado Springs residents.

Lack of knowledge and experience with the website is a barrier to visiting a State Park. Half of all visitors had visited the Colorado State Parks website at some point. For most who had not visited it, they assumed there was one, but they did not have a reason to visit. Most felt that if (they knew that) the State of Colorado Department of Natural Resources had a well-developed website with information about each State Park, such as amenities and activities at each, they would be more willing to perhaps visit. Lack of information was a big challenge with most non-visitors. Participants did not know much about State Parks other than the big and most common parks such as Cherry Creek and Chatfield, which in fact turned some people away, or the parks nearby to their particular location, such as Boyd Lake in Greeley, Navajo near Durango and Connected Lakes or Highline Lake in Grand Junction.

At least one quarter of all non-visitors said they were familiar with websites for National Parks. A man in Greeley said that he checked out the website for Mesa Verde because “I knew I was going there, and I needed the hours of operation and the cost. I’m not that aware of Colorado State Parks, so I really had no reason to go to the website.”

COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT STATE PARKS

The final topic of discussion revolved around communication and marketing materials for the Colorado State Parks system. Participants were asked to share their marketing ideas and ideas for marketing messages.

Process Note: This topic area was discussed with park visitors only.

STATE PARKS VISITORS

Park visitors desire more information about the different State Parks in Colorado, including amenities and activities at each. When asked what additional information they would like to have about the different State Parks in Colorado, participants across all groups agreed that they would like more information, both general information and specific details, such as the activities by State Park and where all of the parks are located. One man stated, “I’d like to be able to pick up a brochure to see where they (State Parks) all are.”

Park visitors desired more information and an easier way to access it. A Colorado Springs woman said, “They’ve got maps and things that aren’t very good as far as telling you what’s available at different State Parks. They are trying, but so far it isn’t helping much. They need to do more that way and say, ‘over here, I can take my dog; there’s fishing here, and there’s camping.’” Multiple people agreed, and another man said, “I’d like to see the activities of the State Parks. In other words, what naturalist programs are being presented so that I could understand where I might go to see those types of activities?”

Park visitors also said they would like more information on the annual pass, reservations for camping, ability to purchase fishing/hunting licenses, programs for kids or volunteer activities, information on prime seasons/times to see certain wildlife and plants, and any information related to a “free day.” A man in Grand Junction suggested a free day once a year, and the rest of the group (half of all participants) strongly approved of the idea.

People prefer to get information online. Of all the information sources available, the strong majority shared that they get their information from the Internet, so this was their preferred source for receiving information on any given topic. Most people agreed that any information they have found about State Parks has been online and that the web is the best way to reach people. Participants in each location made remarks similar to the following: “I wouldn’t know where to go otherwise to pursue information,” and “The website is where I’ve gone. Otherwise, I don’t know where I’d go.” A man in Colorado Springs said he wanted “better information on the website, so he didn’t have to go to multiple sites looking for everything.” An electronic newsletter was recommended as well for people who buy annual passes or maybe even for day pass-users. “My suggestion would be for anyone who buys a day pass, get an email address and send a letter thanking them for visiting and then include language like, ‘Oh, by the way, here’s the State Parks website.’”

Email was suggested by a few participants as well, one even saying that “email definitely” is her most preferred way to receive information. Many people agreed that they’d like to receive emails from the Colorado State Parks “as long as you can unsubscribe, and it’s easy and obvious how to subscribe. As long as it’s not annoying and it’s still useful for you, I think it’s a great way to do it.” Another man in a different group discussed knowing about naturalist led activities at State Parks and he said, “I don’t know if they’re not in the papers...Usually when I go to a park, we see a sign or something and that’s how I find out about them. It would be nice to know about these things in advance, so you could plan.” Signing up on the Colorado State Parks website was recommended as the most obvious way to do this. A Colorado Springs man believed, “The problem on the website is

there's nowhere for yourself to register to get these things (updates and notices etc.) as a member where they have a database where they could start collecting names.”

Other recommendations for providing information included targeting locations such as REI, Sportsman's Warehouse, bike shops, or even Wal-Mart. Participants agreed that specific information should be provided where people go most often. Other ideas included sending information to people who purchase either hunting or fishing licenses each year, and providing flyers and/or brochures at State Visitors Bureaus, the Stock Show, or at RV shows.

The following were suggested as ways to draw traffic to the State Parks website:

- “Fifteen second radio blurbs telling us about the website.”
- “I'd like to see the website just right under the park name when you drive up, and after you see it enough, you memorize it and you don't have to go to Google to find it. People are just doing that more and more with websites, and I think it's a good thing.”
- “I read magazines that advertise other aspects of tourism. You see a lot of stuff that speaks to Colorado, in general, but maybe targeting publications that people who like the outdoors would enjoy would be a good idea.”
- “When someone buys a fishing license, they've got you and they have your name.”

Half of all park visitors are familiar with the State Parks website. Across all locations, about one-half of each group said they had visited the State Parks website at some point. A woman in Colorado Springs said the following about the website: “It's not very informative. Also with the website, it says click on an area of the State and then it lists the parks. What I want is a map of Colorado that lists the parks and where they're located in the State.” Others in the group agreed and added, “Then you can find out what to do at that park.” Park visitors shared that they wanted to see more of the following on the website: photos, trail descriptions, maps, distances from major metropolitan areas (to the park), restrictions, activities by park, number of visitors expected each day, campsite information, and a list of upcoming events by park, to name a few. As previously mentioned, a Colorado Springs resident also recommended having a live webcam at each park to show people what the park looks like.

After describing their desires for information on the State Parks website, it was apparent that many had not been to the site recently or had not seen all of the information that is currently available.

Park visitors suggest two approaches for marketing the Colorado State Parks system: marketing to families and communicating the convenience and accessibility of State Parks. In discussing preferred marketing messages, many park visitors believed that marketing to families and children would be an ideal way to boost attendance at parks. A Denver resident said, “I think the marketing could be really well done if they marketed to families with children under 18, because the whole screen time thing is such a big issue and is only getting worse. If they tried to market to kids under 18 to use what Colorado has to offer, then that would be wonderful.”

Others agreed that marketing the idea of “reconnecting” families with quality time at a State Park would be appealing. Some liked the idea of marketing to schools. They felt that if kids become interested, then they would get their parents involved. One man recommended outreach programs

where rangers come and talk with students at schools, and a woman recommended having information available at parent/teacher conferences.

The second suggested marketing approach was to communicate the convenience factor and ease of use, or accessibility, of Colorado State Parks. A Durango man said, “Within the Denver area, make it well-known how accessible it (visiting a State Park) is, and then if it’s outside of the State, something along the lines of ‘try Colorado’s outdoors.’”

The following lists suggested marketing messages to communicate as a way of increasing use of Colorado State Parks:

- “Visiting the State Parks makes experiencing the outdoors accessible.”
- “Take advantage of Colorado. The State has a lot to offer for a lot less money than going to Elitches.”
- “Kids come back happier after visiting a State Park.”
- “Get back to nature.”
- “Reconnect with your families.”
- “Rediscover Colorado.”
- “Rediscover each other and Colorado.”
- “Rediscover wildlife.”
- “Get out of the urban hustle and bustle and come and relax and enjoy the Colorado.”
- “All the diversity at the parks is impressive to me, so I think a message about the diversity would be appealing.”
- “Gateway to the wilderness.”
- “Family fun”

One other marketing suggestion was to promote the diversity of the State Parks. A Durango resident said, “All of the diversity at the parks is impressive to me, so I think a message about the diversity would be appealing.”

Participants suggested marketing such messages on television. One man remarked, “Everybody loves TV.” Another woman said, “I see a video of someone rollerblading and another person fishing. And the question is ‘where is all of this happening? At Colorado State Parks!’” Other suggestions for advertising sources included outdoor magazines, or camping magazines. “The nightly news would be a great place to advertise,” said one woman, and another said, “At all the festivals which the locals go to and have some sort of presence.” A similar idea was conveyed during the Colorado Springs group: “If you’re at the State Fair, they have an exhibit and you can pick up brochures for each park and talk to the rangers. This is once a year, so it’s not very convenient.”

DECISIONS ABOUT VISITING STATE PARKS, PREFERENCES AND PRICING

The final topic of discussion with non-visitors was regarding decisions about visiting State Parks, preferences and pricing. During this part of the discussion, participants talked through the activities they would most prefer to do at a State Park and why they have chosen not to visit a State Park in the last year.

Process Note: This topic area was discussed with non-park visitors only.

STATE PARKS NON-VISITORS

Participants want specific details in order to agree to go to a State Park. Close to all participants across all five groups said they would consider going to a Colorado State Park in the future, but nearly everyone wanted specific details in order to decide if they would go or not.

More than one-half of all non-visitors said, that if a friend invited them, they would want to know about the specific activity they would do at the park, regardless if it was active or passive. In discussing visiting a lake, for example, most Grand Junction residents said they would go because they “understand what activities they do at Highline Lake.” Durango residents, on the other hand, were more reluctant to go. One Durango man said he would go if “it had a great mountain bike trail...if it was an epic ride.” He, like many other non-visitors, said he would ask his friends why they wanted to go to a State Park. Multiple respondents agreed that they would want more information if they were unfamiliar with the park and the activity already. Only a few agreed with one woman who said, “I’d just go for the hell of it.”

The greatest reasons non-visitors have not visited a State Park are because they lack knowledge on why they would visit. Coupled with a lack of general knowledge about Colorado State Parks and the fact that nearly all non-visitors knew there was a cost associated with visiting a State Park, several non-visitors said they were unwilling to pay for something they knew nothing about. One female non-visitor said, “One of the big reasons (that I haven’t visited a State Park) is that I don’t know where they are, and the other factor is the money, but I think the parks are a good value out here.” Most people generally agreed that the cost of the parks was not unreasonable, but when they had so many other options that were free, paying may not make sense. Several others said that, because they also did not see a State Park being any different than any other kind of park, they obviously chose the free option. “You get nickel-and-dimed to death, so when I go outdoors, I just head east or drive until I turn around. To me, that’s like being out in a State Park. I’m out in Colorado,” said one Colorado Springs resident.

Nearly all non-visitors say they would be willing to go to a Colorado State Park, given some conditions. Nearly everyone across all five geographies agreed that they would be willing to go to a Colorado State Park with some conditions, and the greatest condition was if they understood why they would be going and what they could do when they get there. A Grand Junction man said, “For me it boils down to why. I don’t have a compelling reason to go.” Non-visitors’ greatest handicap for visiting a Colorado State Park was that they were not informed about the parks. Several did not know where the different parks were located, so therefore they did not understand the differences from place to place.” I don’t know anything about them,” said one Denver resident and another said, “I don’t know where they are located in order to go.” Several non-visitors said the discussion about State Parks had piqued their interest, so they were now more interested in going. A Greeley resident said, “I’d go to try something different. After tonight, it’s kind of piqued my interest because there’s so many that I didn’t even know about...I was just assuming that every State Park was alike...It’s kind of like a step child in our minds that we don’t think about.” The following quotes highlight other conditions that participants stated in order to consider visiting a State Park.

The conditions included knowing the rules of the parks (e.g. if one could bring a dog) or the specific activities are available at each park. The consensus was that, with more knowledge, non-visitors would have more reason to visit a State Park.

- “If it had a great mountain bike trail, then it would draw me in. (I’d be more interested if there was) an epic ride or something while I’m there.”
- “I just like being out there relaxing.”
- “If I was driving to Denver or something and we needed a stopover place and it was right there off of the road, then I would consider going to get out and also sleep. It would be for an hour or so (though), a quick stop.”
- “I would use it in lieu of a motel or something if it was more on my route.”
- “The older I get, the more I realize just what I don’t know. So there might be something there that I’d really enjoy. I just don’t know if there’s something that I really want to experience or not.”
- “I’d go to take my dog swimming or to take my family out perhaps.”
- “If a park existed that offered access somewhere else I might camp and then work my way back through.”
- “If there was a high profile amenity or feature there, I’d consider going.”
- “If there was something I’d want to see there, like is there a mountain or something to see? If it is really scenic, because if there’s just picnic tables and a pond, forget it.”
- “It’s a priority thing. During the school year, there’s not the chunk of time to drive up somewhere.”

Process Note: In this section of discussion, participants chose their favorites from a list of activities, and then the moderator tabulated choices during the group so that the most preferred activities could be discussed further. Participants chose activities that were their favorites, regardless of the venue. See full results in Appendix E.

The most preferred activities among non-visitors are nature/wildlife observation and hiking. In this section of discussion, participants chose their favorites from a list of activities, and then the moderator tabulated choices during the group so that the most preferred activities could be discussed further. Across all six groups with non-park visitors, 34 respondents chose nature/wildlife observation as a preferred activity and 31 chose hiking. These were the first and second most common choices, respectively. In addition to the top activities above, looking at scenery and getting together with friends and family were also preferred. Overall, except for hiking, top choices by non-visitors were more passive activities.

Meanwhile, the table below includes participant statements that indicate both the benefits and drawbacks of doing these most preferred activities at a State Park relative to another kind of park/land.

Table 8: Non-Visitor Preferred Activities

Activity	Benefits (at a State Park)	Drawbacks (at a State Park)
<p>Nature/ wildlife observation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It’s nice to see the animals in their natural habitat rather than in a cage or something.” • “Animals are protected there, so the possibility of seeing one is probably greater.” • “You might see different animals you’ve not seen before.” • “If you run into a ranger, they can tell you what some things are and where to look for things and signs.” • “There’s more naturalist and wildlife observation at a State Park than there is at a city park.” (Most everyone agreed that they expected to be able to do more of this at a State Park compared to another kind of park.) • “If you’re there, you should be looking at nature and wildlife. You shouldn’t be able to help it.” (Some people in the group said they would more likely do this at a National Forest than a State Park.) • “I like looking at scenery. I think that State Parks are usually in pretty places.” • “I perceive a State Park as being more developed and with more people, so I’d expect to see chipmunks and squirrels much more than I would bears.” • “There might be a herd that knows that’s a protected area, so we’d get to see them.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of animals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Just maybe if it was really crowded than a lot of animals might not be around.” • “Scaring the animals” • Lack of variety of wildlife • Crowds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The only State Park I’ve been to is Chatfield, and it’s so commercial. It’s so crowded.” • “Again the people and too many would deter people from coming.” • “If someone wants to hunt, and the danger of animals like bears.” • “If it’s been really adapted, then things might have changed.” • “I wouldn’t pay the fee to just go look at scenery.” • “(The) \$10 fee at the entrance.” • “It’s not as wilderness as National Forest.”
<p>Hiking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I have the perception that hiking would be less crowded at a State Park than at a National Park.” • “The hiking probably wouldn’t be as strenuous (because) most of the State Parks that I know seem to be on a flat level, so when you’re hiking, it’s more like a nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think the scenery can be a little plain sometimes, like around the plains.” • “The popular trails at Rocky Mountain National Park are monitored by rangers...I’m not sure what would happen to someone if they were on a trail in a State Park in the middle of the week when there

	<p>walk than a hike.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Staying on a trail and it would be more organized (safe).” • “A lot of times at parks, there are places that are specifically there to hike. There’s a park there and they develop the trails, so you can drag kids along. They’re planned and they’re in the right location to see something interesting, and it’s more accessible.” • “It tells you how far it is and whether it’s a loop or whatever.” • “There might be signs on trees telling you the names of the trees. • “Checking out some specific special feature would be appealing.” • “Access at this point with either a stroller or a backpack with a small stroller and also if it was wheelchair accessible. I have a few handicap members of my family.” • “A state park is going to have a trash receptacle too, so you assume people will use it.” • “I think it’s regulated to an extent. They have the resident RV person that stays there all summer and they have someone there if something happens.” 	<p>aren’t a lot of people around. What if they get hurt? They tend to be pretty secluded some of them...the one I’m thinking of, State Forest, is a long ways from any medical care, so I don’t know if the monitoring is that strong...for someone needed medical attention, I would be concerned about that.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think it’s more of a controlled thing at a State Park than at a National. They tell you, ‘this is where you’re going to go, and you’re going to see this and that. Stay on the trail.’ But when you go to a National Forest, you’re out and you’re going to see a lot more.” • “If dogs weren’t allowed on the trails.” • “Too many people.” • “All the fun and interesting people that you meet. They may be fine and interesting people, but if you’re looking for no one, it’s awfully disappointing.” • “If there were too many people.” • “Some litter and you could see that more in State Parks compared to other places.” • “Visitors have a tendency not to have ownership. Locally we might see less of that (littering) because they are our trails and our ground and we have that ownership.” • “I envision that State Parks would have the (only) twelve miles of trails.”
<p>Looking at scenery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The variety (is a benefit). You’d get to see different things than you would at Rocky Mountain National.” • “You can’t look out your backyard and see the same things.” • “Better quality air than in the city.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It can be a little plain.” • “Sometimes you have to drive to get there and depending on where it is, sometimes it’s not worth it.”

Finally, in this section of discussion, participants were asked about any of the activities that they would prefer to do at a venue other than a State Park. The activities that people would prefer to do at another location include off-road four wheeling, motorcycle/ATV/dirt bike racing, rollerblading, skiing, and hunting. One participant said the following about hunting at a State Park: “(It) doesn’t seem right and could be dangerous.” Regarding riding motorcycles or ATV’s, one man said, “The reason I don’t like State Parks, like with motorcycle, dirt bike or ATV riding, there’s gasoline fumes and noise.” Another man said, “I personally wouldn’t want to have to deal with motorcycles, dirt bikes and ATVs, or four wheeling. Again, back to my perception of State Parks, there are places for that but not in a 500 acre chunk of land. It’s the noise and the dirt...” The majority of all non-visitors agreed with this comment. Rollerblading was also mentioned as an activity that participants did not associate with State Parks. “It seems so urban to me,” one Durango man said.

Another male participant said the following about naturalist-led programs: “I think (with) the naturalist-led programs, (it) would be hard to beat the National Parks system, but my perception is that State Parks aren’t that well staffed. I’m thinking about Rocky Mountain National Park where they have slideshows and an amphitheatre. I don’t know that that happens in a State Park. It may, in some cases, but I don’t think they are nearly as well situated to do that.”

Non-visitors expect some amenities at a State Park, including clean bathrooms/toilets, showers for camping, picnic tables, paved parking lots, and paved roads. In open-ended responses, participants in each location listed an assortment of amenities that they would expect to see at a State Park, and among those, clean bathrooms with flushing toilets, picnic areas or tables, showers (mostly if there’s camping at the park), paved parking lots, paved roads and in some cases a visitor’s center were most frequently mentioned. More than one-half of all non-visitors said they would expect showers at a State Park that had camping sites. For parks without camping, most people did not see any reason for showers. Roughly one quarter of all participants said they would expect a visitor’s center, and many more said they would like such a feature at a State Park. A Greeley resident said, “It’s frustrating because you get there and there’s no one to talk to, or you can’t find anyone. If there was a visitor’s center, you’d have to have somebody there.” Another man commented and said he would expect a visitor’s center because he has always seen that at State Parks. Others said they did not see the need. One Grand Junction man said, “The visitor’s center over at Highline Lake is a total waste of money.”

When asked, most participants said they would not expect to see snack bars at a State Park, and many said they would not want to. Most people also said they would not expect to see cabins, although they could envision these at a State Park and were less apprehensive about these compared with snack bars. Regarding cabins, one man said, “If there was some feature, it might be good, but cabins at Highline Lake wouldn’t make sense.” Another man said, “Some of the State Parks down south, like in Alabama and on Gulf Shores, they have lodging right there on the beach, and it’s really affordable.” After hearing that, many others agreed this is a good idea.

Lastly, participants appeared indifferent about conference or meeting room space. One woman said, “It might be used a lot and could help pay for some of the fees for state parks,” but another man said, “If I knew they were doing conferences at the State Parks, I probably wouldn’t go because of all the people with their Blackberries.”

Non-visitors feel tradeoffs between natural spaces and more developed sites are necessary in order to accommodate all walks of life. When asked if non-visitors felt there was a tradeoff between having primitive areas versus more developed spaces, nearly everyone agreed that there is, but that it generally is necessary in order to accommodate all kinds of visitors. A Grand Junction woman offered an example, and remarked, “I’d love to see things more natural, but like I

said (due to health disability), I've got to depend on amenities, because otherwise, I can't go. I'd love to see things more natural, but I have to settle for development." Between building amenities and facilities and preserving the natural landscape, participants in some groups were split between which was more important to them, but in general, non-visitors felt that preserving the natural landscape was more important than building up a State Park to be more convenient for visitors. The overall consensus was that the State Parks system can accomplish both. One man remarked, "I think you can do that (have amenities and facilities) well without harming the natural landscape...You should be able to do both." Another man remarked, "In a State Park, I would expect both."

The following are additional quotes along these same lines from other non-visitors across all regions:

- "I think they should be separate. You can put all the development in one area and then leave the rest for more natural."
- "I think you should be able to have both, but I know there's been a lot of debate on how far the National Parks can go because they have some demands in the National Parks that are exceeding the facilities capabilities, so do they just keep building more and more?"
- "I think they can coexist. I think a separation of more primitive camping and more developed camping can just be separated."
- "I don't see it being an either or, because today they can integrate facilities and make it blend in architecturally."
- "I can see a continuum that fits a specific niche (at a State Park), and it does a good job of that. It's just not the particular niche that I fall into."
- "I think parks have done that really well to serve that niche (disabled people.) It (visiting a State Park) is not what I would want to do, but I think it's served a lot of people."
- "There's a little bit of development and the tradeoff is it gets protected from really bad development, so even though there's some bathrooms, and showers and amenities, it means that no one can privately buy that and then there's no shopping centers or malls on it."
- "If you have the typical park environment, I think it protects the environment by having trash cans, so people don't just throw their trash here."
- "It's a very direct (tradeoff) I'd say. The more people go, the more it's developed and the more people go and the less solitude you have."

A man in Durango referred positively to his experience in Grand Teton National Park with the following remark: "There's areas where there is no light and only tents are allowed and then there are other areas where RVs can go and hook up. It's first come, first serve...It's a cross section of society and State Parks have to service a wide range." He spoke very highly of this arrangement and others agreed.

Some arguments for why building amenities and facilities would be preferred included the fact that this is what people are paying for when they visit a State Park and that amenities are accommodating for families with children. The following quotes are from participants who preferred amenities and facilities to primitive areas.

- “I think more women would want that (amenities and facilities) than men. They’d want water and a toilet.”
- “I have a sister with two little kids, and I know without the amenities, they wouldn’t consider going to a State Park without them.”
- “In a primitive setting, people have to be trained how to clean up after themselves and how not to destroy that primitive setting. In a State Park, you’re going to have to have the amenities because people are not trained to be outdoors.”
- “If I go to a park and they don’t have a bathroom, that’s fine, but in my mind, that’s what I’m paying for. I’m paying for the bathrooms and the paved parking lot. I’m paying for them to have a campground person there in the summer. But I go to more parks that have a little trail map, and we just go and there’s no bathroom (or fee).”

The greatest argument for why preserving the natural landscape was preferred was the fact that this was the overall intent of a State Park and the reason that someone visits. A male participant said, “(The) main reason I’m going to a State Park is to be in a natural area,” and several other participants agreed with him. Denver residents also agreed with this, although most appeared less likely to visit a State Park than participants in other geographic areas. Although one Denver man shared that he was unlikely to visit a State Park he said, “I take pleasure in the fact that I know it (the natural setting) is there.” Other Denver residents laughed in agreement.

Process Note: In this part of discussion, the moderator gave the following instructions to respondents and then followed up. I’d like you to envision two state parks that are the same size, the same distance from you, and have generally the same environment and scenery. Park A has a paved parking lot, a visitor center, picnic tables, campgrounds with showers, RV hookups, guided hikes with park rangers, and a lot of trails for people to hike. Park B has a gravel parking lot, a few trails with pit toilets near the trailheads, and a few primitive campsites along the trails. Which one would you prefer to visit, and why?

Between Park A (one that is developed with facilities and amenities) and Park B (one that focuses more on primitive areas), non-visitors prefer Park B. Like the previous finding indicates, non-visitors, overall, prefer the preservation of Colorado’s natural setting to developing features and amenities. Many people agreed with a Greeley resident who explained why he chose Park B over A: “I would visit (the) more natural (one) than A because I think that’s the beauty and that’s why you are going,” and many also agreed with a Grand Junction resident who explained why he chose preferred Park B: “The wilder the better.” A Denver woman, who also preferred Park B, brought indicated that she might choose Park A depending on who was visiting from out-of-town. She said, “The only time I would prefer Park A is if I had my mom with me, or someone who couldn’t get around as easily. And if you had a lot of kids or someone who was older and might need (more).” Another woman agreed and said, “I think it depends on who is coming. If it were friends (someone like her), then Park B, but if it were my parents, then Park A.”

Participants who preferred Park A to B felt that it was more convenient, and a few said they chose it considering their wives and small children. One man said, “I picked this one because I’d be taking my wife, and she does not like outhouses,” and a woman said, “I didn’t pick B because of the pit toilets. That’s a killer for me.” A second woman said, “I have a four year old and a two year old. That would be my reason for going, to have nature explained to them. That would be a benefit of that.” Another female participant, who several non-visitors agreed with, remarked, “If I’m going to a State Park, I’m going for the amenities.”

The majority of non-visitors feel the entry fees to State Parks are reasonable. Non-visitors were all aware that there were fees to get in to a State Park. They estimated these fees to be between \$5 and \$10. Two thirds of all participants felt \$5 was reasonable, but most agreed with one man who said \$10 is a “little steep.” Overall, most non-visitors, felt the costs for a day pass were reasonable. Denver residents, on the other hand and a few in each location outside of Denver strongly felt the opposite. As previously discussed, Denver residents wanted to know more about how the lottery money was being spent because they wanted to better understand what they were paying for at a State Park. Many felt that paying \$5 to \$10 was too much to just have a picnic at a park, or they felt there were too many free alternatives in Colorado.

Most non-visitors are also aware of the annual pass for Colorado State Parks. The majority of non-visitors were also aware that the Colorado State Parks system offered an annual pass, although their knowledge of the pass was different from location to location. The few participants who were educated on the annual passes available through the Colorado State Parks found the information on the website. Grand Junction residents guessed the annual pass cost between \$25 and \$60. When told of the actual cost, feelings were mixed. One man said, “That makes sense because the idea of a State Park is to go there and have a little separation from the world, and you should pay for that because it’s getting more crowded,” where a woman in the group said, “I thought \$60 was too much, because then I have to get another one to go to the National Parks. I wish it could just be any park in Colorado with one pass.” Others agreed that the idea of one pass for any kind of park in Colorado was intriguing but most did not all agree that \$60 was too much. A male participant remarked, “That’s cheap (for an annual pass) for all (State) Parks.”

A few non-visitors had passes to National Parks, and close to a third shared that they preferred National Park’s to State Park’s passes. A man in Colorado Springs said that he thought the price of a State Park pass was reasonable, but “I’d still rather do a day pass (to a State Park) because I don’t see myself going that often. I’d buy a National (Park) pass before a State Park pass.” Durango residents generally agreed with a man who said, “I think if you live in Denver and you want to take your boat out at Chatfield, it’s probably worth the \$60, but I don’t think it’s worth it here whatsoever.” Most people agreed that they didn’t think it was worth it in the Durango area.

Non-visitors feel that there should be more incentive to visit a Colorado State Park for Colorado residents. In each location, a few participants discussed the fact that they felt Colorado residents should receive a discount or some sort of incentive for visiting a State Park. A Greeley resident said, “I think there should be a discount for Colorado residents,” and a Colorado Springs female said, “If we live in Colorado, we shouldn’t have to pay the same as someone that’s visiting because our taxes are already going toward that.”

The strong majority of non-visitors felt that Colorado State Parks needs to advertise more. Multiple participants were unaware that the State Parks had a website, although when asked, many said they guessed there would be one. Very few people had ever visited the site, and nearly everyone across all five regions strongly agreed that the State Parks needed to better advertise overall. A Greeley man said the following, which many people agreed with: “I don’t think the State Parks advertise. All of the National Parks advertise, but none of us know anything about the State Parks.

On the Internet, when you're looking in the newspaper, on Encore, you never see anything about a State Park. We're all pretty intelligent people; we all like doing things, (but) none of us know the cost to get in; no one knew there were 43 of them. If they don't tell us about them, then why are we going to go to one? They've got to generate some interest. The bigger federal parks advertise and they get us interested. They need to advertise. We don't know unless anyone tells us." A female participant said the only time she has heard anything about State Parks is "when they are advertising the lottery." Another man added that the only time he has ever heard anything is when "there's something new happening or some new development."

Suggested marketing messages include concepts such as nearby access and convenience of visiting Colorado State Parks. Although a variety of marketing messages were suggested, the most common theme revolved around the close proximity and easy access to State Parks. A woman said, "I would market to the locals, because it seems like they market more to people that don't live in the area. If it's accessible and easy to get to, why not try and get the locals to go out more?" A man commented, "Make it easy and more accessible to the large local groups who are likely to go on a Wednesday, as opposed to the weekends." The following list is a compilation of suggested marketing messages from non-visitors.

- "That it's convenient, accessible, and easy. That it's cheap."
- "It's nearby and it's fun."
- "Now that gas is an issue, they (State Parks) are right here, in your hometown. This is a great place to go camping for families."
- "You're paying for it. You might as well enjoy it."
- "It's outdoors and there's lots of things to do."
- "It's fun for your family."
- "It's a good life."

An additional suggestion for marketing had to do with the diversity of the different State Parks. "If the focus was (on) the diversity of the parks...I could see if I had a real awareness of what the uniqueness of the different parks that (visiting each) could be fun. To have a goal to visit each trying to see what the differences are (would be appealing)," one woman said.

Suggested ways of getting the messages out were by advertising on TV, radio, or in the local paper. Multiple people spoke about the travel sections of the local paper and how this would be an obvious place to advertise. A female participant in Grand Junction said, "It would be a good avenue every week or once a month or something to write about a park in the travel section of the paper and to tell all about it." Another woman said, "If they had a brochure that has routes and locations and a little sentence about what's going on."

Multiple others discussed benefitting from a website. In these discussions, it was apparent that many were not aware of current information on the State Parks website. One gentleman remarked, "I'd just show the website to show people where to go," and another added that, "If there was an organized website where you could look up what kind of park you want to go to or you could search hiking, all kinds of things (that would be helpful)." A suggestion for driving people to the website was using billboards—"something that's more visible," said one male non-visitor.

Non-visitors had little experience with the State Park’s website. Very few non-visitors said they had visited the Colorado State Parks website, but nearly everyone guessed that there was one. The kind of information they would want to gain from a website included the locations of all the parks with a map, the proximity from their homes, the activities available at each park, and information about rare plants or animal life at the different parks. Information about camping and reservations for this were also desired, and a few women agreed that they would find it helpful to know if there was cell phone coverage at a park or not. One of the two said, “I’d like to know if they have cell service because when you have kids, you just think that way. It’s not that I would be taking calls, but...” Another woman agreed and said, “I know plenty of people who would think that way. They’d want to know if they have an Internet connection.” A very small group of people said they would find having Internet access helpful at a State Park, one of which was an online professor. She said, “It’d be an interesting piece of information to have, if there was Internet access. Then I could show up and just chill out in the shade.” A second person agreed and said, “For people traveling, that would be a huge piece of information for them to have.” A male participant disagreed and said, “I think Internet capability is not necessary, but cell phone use is.”

APPENDIX A: PARK VISITORS MODERATOR'S GUIDE

Note: Items in pink are items to cover if we have time, with the expectation that we won't have time for them.

WELCOME AND BACKGROUND ON THE FOCUS GROUP (1 MINUTE)

Welcome. Thank you for making time to be here today. My name is _____ and I am with Corona Research, and our firm has been hired by Colorado State Parks to talk with residents like yourselves who have recently visited a State Park.

Before we get started tonight, I'll give you some background and an introduction about what we're going to talk about, and the reasons that we're doing it.

In this project, we are interested in hearing from Colorado residents like yourselves who have visited a Colorado State Park within the past year. We'd like to learn more about your preferences for leisure and recreation activities and we'll also discuss your interest in Colorado State Parks and talk about your experiences at the parks.

LOGISTICS (1 MINUTE)

So that's the big picture. Now let's talk about logistics. We'll be here for about two hours. Please help yourself to refreshments if you haven't done so already. If you want to get up to get more to eat or drink, or go to the bathroom, feel free to do so. Please note that we have observers here tonight and that we are also audio taping and videotaping the session for reporting purposes. Your comments will be summarized and reported anonymously, though, and we won't ever identify you personally as a participant. Finally, we promised to pay you \$80 for participating today, and you will be paid at the end of the session.

GROUND RULES (2 MINUTES)

How many of you have participated in a focus group before?

The rules are simple: I'll bring up a topic, and I want to get your thoughts and opinions. Sometimes I'll ask a question and we'll just go around the table and get everyone's thoughts, and other times I'll just wait for anyone to answer. Feel free to respond to something that someone else says, and feel free to disagree, but please show respect for others even if you disagree with their opinions. There are no wrong answers. At certain points during our discussion I may poll the group to determine how many of you agree or disagree about a certain issue. This will be done to summarize opinions for reporting back to the client.

Keep in mind that we want everyone to participate. If you're not talking, I'll eventually notice and ask you for your opinions. On the other hand, if you're the only one talking, please recognize that and give others a chance to participate.

Finally, I may politely interrupt if you're talking about something that strays off of our topics. No disrespect is intended if I do this, but we have a lot to accomplish tonight so we need to stay focused so we can make sure that we don't need to keep you beyond our scheduled two hours.

INTRODUCTIONS (10 MINUTES)

First, let's briefly introduce ourselves, using a "one minute biography." In one minute or less, tell us the important facts about yourself: your first name, the general area of town where you live, and your family status. Also, please tell us if you grew up in a family that did a lot of outdoor recreation growing up, or if you didn't.

LEISURE AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES (15 MINUTES)

In our first topic area tonight, we'd like to discuss your leisure and recreational activities.

1. What do you like to do in your free time?
 - [If not mentioned yet] Do you ever do outdoor recreational activities? What kinds?
2. Where will you go on your next trip or vacation? [Moderator: at this point, discuss only destinations *not* related to Colorado parks and mention that these will be discussed in much more detail later in conversation]
 - How did you decide where you will go? What factors go into this decision? [Moderator: listen for proximity to home, cost, activities, etc.]
 - What attracts you to this destination?
 - What will you do?
 - Is there any information that you will rely upon to assist in your decision making for activities and the planning of your trip?

IMPRESSIONS OF STATE PARKS (20 MINUTES)

Now, we'd like to discuss your general impressions about Colorado State Parks.

3. The first thing I'd like you to do is sketch me a picture or map of a typical Colorado state park. You have three minutes, so think fast, and have fun with it. Don't worry about the quality of the drawing. We just want the concepts.
 - Turn over your paper and we will discuss these in a few minutes.
4. What are state parks for? i.e....what is their general purpose?
 - Are state parks a good thing? Is there value to having state parks in Colorado? Please explain.

- What's the best thing about state parks in Colorado? Please explain.
 - Is there any downside to having state parks in Colorado? Please explain.
5. [Quick poll] How many state parks are there in Colorado?
- Are state parks different from each other or are they pretty much the same? Please explain.
 - Do you try to get around to different parks, or do you pretty much always go to the same park? Do you think it would be fun to visit other state parks in Colorado, or is that not why you go to state parks?
 - In your mind, what distinguishes a really cool state park from an average one?
6. Now let's discuss the picture or map that you drew earlier. Tell me about your drawing.
7. Now take three more minutes and draw me a picture of a typical visitor to a Colorado State Park.
- Tell me about your drawings. [Moderator: we don't need much detail here, just a description. We want more detail in the non-visitor study, and this is just for comparison.]

DECISIONS ABOUT STATE PARKS (25 MINUTES)

Now, we'd like for you to tell us more about your upcoming decisions related to visiting a state park.

8. [Quick poll] First, will you visit a state park again in the future?
- If no:
- Why not? [Moderator: Listen for barriers similar to those discussed in the non-visitors groups]
- If yes:
- What is the most likely reason that you will visit a state park again in the future? [Moderator: Probe for visiting for natural setting versus activities]
 - i. Will it matter which state park that you go to? Why (no)?
 - ii. What will you do when you get there?
 - iii. Will you use any information to help you in your decision? What kind of information will you use and where will you find it?
9. Whose idea is it to go a state park? Is it you, a friend, someone else in your household? Tell me who gets the ball rolling, and how it happens.

10. Is there anything that would encourage any of you to visit a state park(s) more often in the future? Please explain.
 - What can Colorado State Parks do to encourage additional visits among prior visitors like yourselves?
11. At this point we've talked about state parks. Now let's talk about other types of public land. If a person wanted to go out and hike or fish or picnic or watch nature or any other outdoor activity, what types of public lands could he or she visit? [Moderator: listen for terms such as national parks, forest service land, Bureau of Land Management land, local parks, private open space, etc.]
 - What's the difference between a Colorado State Park and these other types of public lands? Why would someone pick one of these over the other?
 - Which type would you prefer if you were going to go out? Why?

EXPERIENCES WITH STATE PARKS AND PREFERRED ACTIVITIES (30 MINUTES)

In this section, we'd like to discuss your experiences and preferred activities while at state parks.

12. Think about your last trip to a Colorado state park. Please walk us through your experience.
 - Tell us about what you did. [Moderator: Get examples from across the group]
 - How was your overall experience?
 - Was the visit worth the fees that you paid? Why (not)? [Moderator: Listen for perceptions of pricing]
 - Would you recommend the experience to a friend or family member? Why (not)?
13. Now let's discuss some activities that are available at Colorado State Parks and gather your preferences for these. [Moderator: Pass out handout of activities. Instruct group members to choose the top 6 activities of interest to them. After show of hands, discuss the top 4 selected among group members. Contrast active versus passive activities in discussion].
 - What do you think are the benefits of doing this activity at a Colorado State Park versus another venue?
 - Are there drawbacks to doing this at a Colorado State Park?
 - Are there any of these activities that – if you had to do them – you definitely would want to do it somewhere other than a Colorado State Park?
14. Are you familiar with any programs that are provided by Colorado State Parks? [Moderator: listen for Colorado State Trails program, Volunteer program, Boating program, etc.] If so,
 - Which one?

- What do you know about it?
 - Where did you hear about it?
15. We've just discussed some activities and programs that may be available to visitors to a Colorado State Park. Now, tell us what kinds of amenities and features that you prefer to see if you visit a Colorado State Park. [Moderator: Allow time for full responses, probe on certain amenities to stimulate discussion if needed, then proceed to the following questions for further discussion].
- Do you think there is a tradeoff between the development of amenities and facilities at Colorado State Parks and preserving the natural setting? What is more important- the development of facilities or the preservation of natural areas? Please explain.
 - I'd like you to envision two state parks that are the same size, the same distance from you, and have generally the same environment and scenery. Park A has a paved parking lot, a visitor center, picnic tables, campgrounds with showers, RV hookups, guided hikes with park rangers, and a lot of trails for people to hike. Park B has a gravel parking lot, a few trails with pit toilets near the trailheads, and a few primitive campsites along the trails. Which one would you prefer to visit, and why?

COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT STATE PARKS (10-15 MINUTES)

In our last section, we'd like to ask you about your preferred communications about state parks.

16. What additional information would you like to know about Colorado state parks?
- How would you like to receive this information?
17. What kind of message would you need to see or hear to make you decide to go to a Colorado state park for your next trip?
18. Have any of you accessed the Colorado State Parks website? If so,
- What kind of information were you looking at?
 - Was there anything that you hoped to find that wasn't there?

CONCLUSION

19. Any there any final comments about anything we have covered, or something else you feel is relevant to our discussion tonight?

Thank you for your time! This information will be useful to the Colorado State Parks as it continues to develop and improve its services for Colorado residents. Now, we've promised you a payment...

APPENDIX B: NON-VISITORS MODERATOR'S GUIDE

Note: Items in pink are items to cover if we have time, with the expectation that we won't have time for them.

WELCOME AND BACKGROUND ON THE FOCUS GROUP (1 MINUTE)

Welcome. Thank you for making time to be here today. My name is _____ and I am with Corona Research, and our firm has been hired by Colorado State Parks to talk with residents like yourselves who have not recently visited a State Park.

Before we get started tonight, I'll give you some background and an introduction about what we're going to talk about, and the reasons that we're doing it.

In this project, we are interested in hearing from Colorado residents like yourselves who have not visited a Colorado State Park in the past year. We'd like to learn more about your preferences for leisure and recreation activities, as well as for trips and vacations. We'll also discuss your awareness, knowledge and interest in Colorado State Parks, as well as any barriers may keep you from visiting Colorado State Parks.

LOGISTICS (1 MINUTE)

So that's the big picture. Now let's talk about logistics. We'll be here for about two hours. Please help yourself to refreshments if you haven't done so already. If you want to get up to get more to eat or drink, or go to the bathroom, feel free to do so. Please note that we have observers here tonight and that we are also audio taping and videotaping the session for reporting purposes. Your comments will be summarized and reported anonymously, though, and we won't ever identify you personally as a participant. Finally, we promised to pay you \$80 for participating today, and you will be paid at the end of the session.

GROUND RULES (2 MINUTES)

How many of you have participated in a focus group before?

The rules are simple: I'll bring up a topic, and I want to get your thoughts and opinions. Sometimes I'll ask a question and we'll just go around the table and get everyone's thoughts, and other times I'll just wait for anyone to answer. Feel free to respond to something that someone else says, and feel free to disagree, but please show respect for others even if you disagree with their opinions. There are no wrong answers. At certain points during our discussion I may poll the group to determine how many of you agree or disagree about a certain issue. This will be done to summarize opinions for reporting back to the client.

Keep in mind that we want everyone to participate. If you're not talking, I'll eventually notice and ask you for your opinions. On the other hand, if you're the only one talking, please recognize that and give others a chance to participate.

Finally, I may politely interrupt if you're talking about something that strays off of our topics. No disrespect is intended if I do this, but we have a lot to accomplish tonight so we need to stay focused so we can make sure that we don't need to keep you beyond our scheduled two hours.

INTRODUCTIONS (10 MINUTES)

First, let's briefly introduce ourselves, using a "one minute biography." In one minute or less, tell us the important facts about yourself: your first name, the general area of town where you live, and your family status. Also, please tell us if you grew up in a family that did a lot of outdoor recreation growing up, or if you didn't.

LEISURE AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES (15 MINUTES)

In our first topic area tonight, we'd like to discuss your leisure and recreational activities. We're talking about anything here, not just things that a person might do at a state park.

1. What do you like to do in your free time?
2. What kinds of activities do you participate in? Think about both organized and informal activities. Also think about your hobbies and interests. [Moderator: Allow time to draw these out]
 - Where do you go when you participate in these activities?
3. Do you try new things very often? [If yes, "give me an example."] When you do, how do you find new things to do? Do you rely on any particular information when you choose something to do?
 - What are your primary sources of information?
 - When you do try something different, is it typically something in your community, or do you look for something further away.
 - How often do you go far enough to stay overnight somewhere?
4. [For those who haven't mentioned it yet.] Do you ever do outdoor recreational activities? What kinds?

TRIPS AND VACATIONS (10 MINUTES)

In our next section, we'd like to discuss how you make decisions about trips and vacations.

5. First, tell me about the last overnight trip you took for fun.
 - When was it?
 - What did you do?

- How did you decide to do this?
- If no trips overnight:
- Why (not)?
 - Is there anything that prevents you from taking a trip or vacation?
6. Imagine that you are thinking about your next overnight trip or vacation. When answering the following questions, please be as realistic as possible, considering your current circumstances.
- Who would you go with?
 - Who would be the primary decision maker to determine where you go?
 - Where would you go? Why?
 - What would you do? Please explain.

INITIAL PERCEPTIONS OF STATE PARKS (20 MINUTES)

Now, we'd like to discuss your awareness and perceptions about Colorado State Parks.

7. The first thing I'd like you to do is sketch me a picture or map of a typical Colorado state park. You have three minutes, so think fast, and have fun with it. Don't worry about the quality of the drawing. We just want the concepts.
- Tell me about your drawings.
8. Now take three more minutes and draw me a picture of a typical visitor to a Colorado State Park.
- Tell me about your drawings. How is this person like you, and how are they different? Would you be friends with this person? [Or: if you were neighbors, how would you get along?]

AWARENESS, PERCEPTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT STATE PARKS (25 MINUTES)

9. Please answer truthfully. [Show of hands] How many of you were aware of Colorado State Parks prior to this project?
- If so, what have you heard about Colorado State Parks?
 - Where did you hear or see this information?
10. Again, please answer truthfully. [Show of hands] Who here feels like you do not know anything about Colorado State Parks? [Moderator: Allow time to answer this question, then proceed to additional questions below]

- [If don't know] What is your perception about Colorado State Parks?
 - i. What's in a Colorado State Park?
 - ii. Are state parks a good thing? Why (not)? Is there value to having state parks in Colorado? Please explain.
 - [If do know] What do you know? Please tell me everything you know.
 - i. What's in a Colorado State Park?
 - ii. Are state parks a good thing? Is there a value to having state parks in Colorado? Why (not)? Please explain.
11. Why do people go to state parks? What do you think their motivation is? [Moderator: if it isn't discussed, ask "Do you think they really go there for the activities, or is it just a place where they can get away from their normal life and stresses for a while?"]
12. What kinds of activities are available to visitors of Colorado State Parks (i.e. activities)? [Moderator: First, gather *perceptions* of those who indicated a lack of awareness or knowledge in questions 7 and 8 above. Next, ask for all activities that all others in the group are familiar with].
- Are there any Colorado State Parks programs that you are familiar with? What are these? [Colorado State Trails program, Volunteer program, etc.]
13. We've talked a little about state parks. Now let's talk about other types of public land? If a person wanted to go out and hike or fish or picnic or watch nature or any other outdoor activity, what types of public lands could he or she visit? [Moderator: listen for terms such as national parks, forest service land, Bureau of Land Management land, local parks, private open space, etc.]
- What's the difference between a Colorado State Park and these other types of public lands? Why would someone pick one of these over the other?
 - Which type would you prefer if you were going to go out? Why?

PERCEIVED BARRIERS – EXERCISE (20 MINUTES)

In this section, we'd like to further discuss factors that may affect your ability to make a decision about visiting a Colorado State Park.

14. [Moderator- Pass out handout for Exercise #1] Please answer "yes" or "no" to each of the statements on the handout. When you are done with this, please look at each of your "no" responses, and place a star next to the ONE that you think would be the most likely reason that you may not visit a Colorado State Park. In this exercise, don't worry about whether you have an interest in typical activities. We're really looking more at logistics here. [Moderator: By show of hands, record number of no's and stars for each statement]

- [Moderator: Discuss top 3 areas of no's first, one at a time]

- Why do you feel this might prevent you from visiting a state park? [Moderator: Gather perceptions as to why this is a barrier]
 - What would make you feel that this is less of an obstacle for visiting a state park?
- [Moderator: Discuss any remaining areas (out of top 2 with stars) that were not covered above, if necessary]

DECISIONS ABOUT VISITING STATE PARKS, PREFERENCES AND PRICING (25 MINUTES)

In our last section, we'd like to ask you about your interest in visiting Colorado State Parks, as well as your preferences for activities, services or amenities.

15. A friend of yours calls you, and says, "Hey, let's go over to [insert name of local state park]. What's your first reaction?
 - Would you go? [If no, "What would have to happen for you to say yes?"]
16. Would you consider visiting a Colorado State Park? Why (not)? [Moderator: Listen for interest in activities as well as passive versus active benefits. Probe. Allow time for group to answer and then proceed to questions below]. If so,
 - Is there a particular park that you would go to? Why?
 - What would you do at a Colorado State Park?
17. Now let's discuss some activities that people commonly do at Colorado State Parks and gather your preferences for these. [Moderator: Pass out handout of activities. Instruct group members to choose the top 6 activities of interest to them. After show of hands, discuss the top 4 selected among group members].
 - What do you think are the benefits of doing this activity at a Colorado State Park versus another venue?
 - Are there drawbacks to doing this at a Colorado State Park?
 - Are there any of these activities that – if you had to do them – you definitely would want to do it somewhere other than a Colorado State Park?
18. We've just discussed some activities that may be available for visitors to a Colorado State Park. Now, tell us what kinds of amenities and features you would expect to see if you visited a Colorado State Park. [Moderator: Allow time for full responses, then proceed to the following questions for further discussion].
 - Do you think there is a tradeoff between the development of amenities and facilities at Colorado State Parks and preserving the natural setting? What is more important- the development of facilities or the preservation of natural areas? Please explain.

- I'd like you to envision two state parks that are the same size, the same distance from you, and have generally the same environment and scenery. Park A has a paved parking lot, a visitor center, picnic tables, campgrounds with showers, RV hookups, guided hikes with park rangers, and a lot of trails for people to hike. Park B has a gravel parking lot, a few trails with pit toilets near the trailheads, and a few primitive campsites along the trails. Which one would you prefer to visit, and why?

19. Are there any fees to enter a Colorado State Park?

If yes:

- What would you estimate the entry fee is? [Moderator: Qualify as to whether they're speaking about a daily rate, weekly rate, etc.]
- Is this a reasonable amount given what you perceive to be offered?
- What are the methods by which a visitor can pay? [Listen for familiarity with pass]
- Does this entry fee cover all services and amenities?
 - i. Or, are there additional fees for camping, etc.?

CONCLUSION

Thank you for your time! This information will be useful to the Colorado State Parks as it continues to develop and improve its services for Colorado residents. Now, we've promised you a payment...

APPENDIX C. PREFERRED ACTIVITIES – PARK VISITORS

Exercise results from Question #13 on moderator’s guide.

PREFERRED ACTIVITIES BY REGION – PARK VISITORS

Activity	Location / Geographic Region					TOTAL
	Greeley	Colorado Springs	Denver	Grand Junction	Durango	
Camping	7	6	8	6	9	36
Hiking	7	7	6	5	9	34
Getting together with family/friends	6	4	9	3	6	28
Looking at scenery	7	5	8	4	3	27
Picnicking	8	2	8	4	3	25
Hanging out/relaxing	8	3	6	2	5	24
Nature/wildlife observation	7	3	5	4	4	23
Fishing	6	4	5	4	3	22
Bicycling	3	4	4	7	4	22
Scenic Driving	4	2	6	5	2	19
Boating	4	5	2	2	6	19
Dog walking	2	3	3	3	4	15
Photography	4	3	3	4	-	14
Skiing/Snowboarding/Sledding	2	3	3	-	5	13
Swimming	5	1	4	2	-	12
Rafting	1	3	3	2	3	12
Horseback Riding	1	-	3	2	2	8
Rock Climbing	-	2	2	-	4	8
Motorcycle/Dirt Bike/ATV Riding	2	1	1	1	2	7

Running	1	1	1	-	4	7
Naturalist-led programs to learn about nature	-	4	-	1	1	6
Hunting	-	1	2	1	1	5
Snowshoeing		4		-	-	4
Off-road 4-wheeling	1	-	-	1	2	4
Snowmobiling	-	-	1	1	-	2
Rollerblading	-	-	1	-	-	1

APPENDIX D. NON-VISITOR BARRIERS

Results of exercise in Question #14 on moderator's guide.

	Greeley	Colorado Springs	Denver	Grand Junction	Durango	TOTAL
I feel like I am familiar enough with a Colorado State Park to know what to do when I get there	3	9	1	4	2	19
I feel like visiting a Colorado State Park would be convenient and easy to do (i.e. not too crowded, etc.)	3	5	5	1	4	18
I feel like visiting a Colorado State Park would be a "cool" thing to do	-	-	2	6	3	11
I'm confident that I can navigate around in a Colorado State Park without getting lost	3	2	2	1	-	8
I feel like I have the time to visit a Colorado State Park	1	1	3	2	1	8
I feel like I can afford the cost to visit a Colorado State Park	1	2	3	1	1	8
Fun and interesting people go to Colorado State Parks	-	1	2	2	1	6
I am aware of a Colorado State Park	1	2	-	1	1	5
I feel like a Colorado State Park would have convenient hours of operation	2	-	1	1	-	4
I feel like I can get to a Colorado State Park if I want to	1	1	-	-	-	2
I feel like I would have what I need in order to visit a Colorado State Park	-	-	1	-	-	1

APPENDIX E. PREFERRED ACTIVITIES – NON-PARK VISITORS

Exercise results from Question #17 on moderator’s guide.

Activity	Location / Geographic Region					
	Greeley	Colorado Springs	Denver	Grant Junction	Durango	TOTAL
Nature/wildlife observation	6	7	6	8	7	34
Hiking	7	5	5	7	7	31
Looking at scenery	7	5	7	6	3	28
Getting together with family/friends	6	3	5	7	7	28
Bicycling	7	3	5	6	5	26
Hanging out/relaxing	4	5	6	4	3	22
Camping	4	3	5	4	6	22
Picnicking	6	3	5	6	1	21
Photography	4	5	3	5	1	18
Scenic Driving	6	4	3	4	-	17
Dog walking	4	2	5	3	3	17
Swimming	3	2	2	6	2	15
Rafting	2	5	-	5	2	14
Naturalist-led programs to learn about nature	5	3	1	1	2	12
Boating	4	3	1	3	1	12
Skiing/Snowboarding/Sledding	2	1	-	3	5	11
Fishing	5	1	-	-	3	9
Hunting	1	1	-	3	3	8
Horseback Riding	2	3	-	1	1	7

Off-road 4-wheeling	-	3	1	2	-	6
Motorcycle/Dirt Riding Bike/ATV	-	2	1	-	-	3
Rock Climbing	-	2	-	1	-	3
Running	-	-	2	-	1	3
Snowmobiling	-	1	-	1	1	3
Rollerblading	-	-	-	-	-	0