

Chapter 3

Best Practice: Visitor Analysis and Market Analysis



for Alberta Parks Properties
in the David Thompson Corridor

EcoLeaders Prepared by
Interpretation and Environmental Education
Box D82, Bowen Island, BC V0N 1G0
email: info@ecoleaders.ca phone: (604) 947-0483
www.ecoleaders.ca



SAMPLE PAGES

Contents

Introduction	3.1
Best Practice in Analysis of Visitors (Audiences, Participants and Learners)	3.3
External Audiences, Participants and Learners	3.3
Visitor Information and Analysis	3.3
Park User Statistics	3.3
Park User Profiles	3.4
What Information is Needed?	3.4
Internal Audiences	3.6
Best Practice in Assessing the Local Market	
Market Information and Analysis	3.7
Best Practice in Assessing the Local Market	3.7
Best Practice in Assessing the Tourism Market	3.8
Best Practice in Assessing the School Market	3.9

SAMPLE PAGES

Introduction

This chapter is designed to provide a best practice model for Visitor Services participant analysis and general recommendations for action, when applicable.

The Importance of Knowing Your Audience/Participants/Learners

The more that Visitor Services staff know about the current site users' knowledge, interest, attitudes and activities, the better they can design, develop and deliver programs that meet visitor needs and the goals and mandates of the David Thompson Corridor District and individual parks and protected areas in the district.

Audience or Participants or Learners?

How is it best to consider the people who will be taking part in Visitor Services programs? Various organizations use different terms. These names can reflect the approach that the organization has toward the people that they serve.

Audience implies delivering messages to a group that is passively watching what is going on. Typically, audiences may be very interested in what is going on but there is little or no expectation of interaction, contribution or action. Organizations who view themselves as broadcasters of information often use this term.

Participant suggests a group of people that are actively involved. They often expect to take part in active learning and/or stewardship actions that support the park's sustainability (e.g., Learning Enrichment and Education Travel Tourism). They often expect to be able to communicate their knowledge, discoveries and feelings about the park to park staff. Organizations who have a focus on community involvement and capacity building, stewardship and discovery learning often use this term.

Learner implies people with an education focus. This may involve formal curriculum-based teaching aimed at primary, secondary or post-secondary students or life-long or informal learning aimed at adults and families. In learning-focused agencies, programming is based on understanding of best practice and learning theory. Organizations with connections to formal education often use this term. However, some organizations who focus on informal education and community capacity building do as well.

Alberta's Plan for Parks (2009) mandates Alberta Parks in the David Thompson Corridor to focus on conservation, discovery, and appropriate nature-based recreation and tourism. The *Plan for Parks* also requires a focus on maintaining ecological integrity, land and water stewardship, habitat restoration and enabling and encouraging proper visitor use.

Alberta Parks' Visitor Services program will involve services that fit all three classifications:

Audience Focus

- information and orientation aimed at raising the profile of the Alberta Parks property, the David Thompson Corridor and the Alberta Parks Agency in the eyes of visitors and local citizens
- maintaining the David Thompson Corridor Parks District on the radar of decision makers in:
 - Alberta Parks head office, the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, and the Government of Alberta
 - partner groups, funders and collaborators

Participant Focus

- providing park users and off-site outreach target groups with discovery and experiential learning opportunities
- building capacity and involving citizens in park stewardship and restoration activities
- encouraging and enabling partners and visitors to participate in appropriate outdoor recreation activities in the parks, protected areas and on adjacent public lands within the David Thompson Corridor

Learner Focus

- providing formal education services that are compatible with Alberta Parks and the David Thompson Corridor Parks District's goals and objectives
- providing life-long learning opportunities to park users and park neighbours

Internal and External Audiences/Participants/Learners

There are two categories of people that Visitor Services must target.

External

This group is by far the largest. It includes all traditional targets including:

- local people who could or do regularly visit parks and protected areas in the David Thompson Corridor
- people who do not visit the parks and protected areas in the David Thompson Corridor
- community groups and organizations using the parks
- tourists
- park neighbours

This is the category that almost all Visitor Services staff time and effort is allocated to.

Internal

This group is made up of stakeholders that are very close to the park. It is made up of:

- park staff in the David Thompson Corridor
- Alberta Parks regional and head office management
- David Thompson Corridor Parks partners
 - groups, organizations and individuals who fund VS programs
 - groups that deliver some approved interpretation and education services in district parks and protected areas
 - groups that work with the parks in David Thompson District to:
 - manage and support stewardship and research into the park's natural and cultural features
 - learn more about park users and VS program participants

With internal audiences, the goals of the Visitor Services program are to:

- keep them informed of initiatives and successes
- show how their support is making a difference
- illustrate how Visitor Services are supporting their initiatives and mandates, especially the *Plan for Parks*
- show that they are getting value for the funding and support that they are contributing

Internal audiences are often overlooked in this type of plan, but they are especially important within the David Thompson Corridor where partnerships are important.

Best Practice in Analysis of Visitors (Audiences, Participants and Learners)

External Audiences, Participants and Learners

This category includes current and potential park users, supporters and park neighbours.

Visitor Information and Analysis

Park visitation statistics and user profiles are important data for park management and for the development, delivery and support of effective Visitor Services.

Park User Statistics

These are the counts of visitors for the whole park and for various key places within the park. They can show levels of use over several years, seasons, months, weeks, days of the week, and times of day.

Statistics Are Important

For Park Management

Statistics are key tools that help managers and Visitor Services staff:

- identify areas of high visitor pressure
- decide where to allocate funding for maintenance and enforcement
 - higher visitor use may suggest allocation of larger portion of limited staffing and budgets

Visitor Services can assist management through placing more effort into providing the education portion of the 3-E management model (Education, Engineering, Enforcement) for dealing with specific visitor management issues.

For Visitors Service Planning and Delivery

Statistics tell Visitor Services staff where people gather plus when they are there and, in some cases, what they are doing. This information is used to identify:

- key locations to provide Visitor Services programs
 - deliver programs where the people are
- optimum time of year, month and week to provide activities and services
 - deliver programs when the people are in the park

Finer-focus daily and weekly camping and dayuse and

dayuser statistics and duration of camper's stay can provide Visitor Services staff valuable information. Visitation statistics about highs and lows of camper use assist Visitor Services staff in timing programs (time of day, day of the week, etc. for optimal exposure and in efficiently distributing limited staffing and program funding optimally across the district by moving staff from site to site to deliver programming where visitation is highest.

A clear understanding of the average and range of duration of camper and day user stays along with other factors such as visitor profiles and budget help Visitor Services staff determine the range of programming needed.* For example, sites that have a high proportion of campers staying for a week or more will need a broader range of personal and non-personal programs than sites where campers stay only for an average of two nights.

Gathering Visitor Statistics is Difficult

Accurate visitor counts and studies are difficult in large parks that have large numbers of official and unofficial entrances. It is very difficult to keep track of people entering and leaving the park.

Gathering Park User Statistics Can Be Done

Alberta Parks and other park systems collect meaningful park user statistics. David Thompson Corridor parks can too—see the planning section of Chapter 17 Crimson Lake Provincial Park Program Statements and Implementation.

* In general, with limited staff and budgets, park staff must understand current park users (see this chapter) and future potential real and virtual park visitors in order to effectively:

- choose locations for interpretive signs and trails where significant numbers of people gather or pass by (to be cost effective)
 - note for site with low visitation, park staff must choose media and methods that are low cost but effective (see Chapter 6 Presentation Options)
- choose media and methods that are attractive, and accessible to target audiences

Park User Profiles

User profiling includes the development of accurate information about the activities and motivations of visitors, plus their prior knowledge of and interest in park-related issues and potential Visitor Services themes and activities. Because of the increasingly large percentage of new Canadians in Alberta's population, ethnic background and user group activities are often important factors that give park managers and Visitor Services program developers insight into visitor motivations and interests.

This type of data is gathered through a number of direct and indirect methods described below.

What Information is Needed?

Best practice in Visitor Services programming includes developing detailed profiles on park users. The kinds of questions that this information should answer include:

- Who visits the park?
 - multi-generational Albertans and Canadians
 - first, second generation Canadians
 - new Canadians
- What portion are return visitors/new visitors?
- How often do return visitors come to the property?
- When do they come (season, day of the week, time of day)?
- How long do they stay?
- Where do they come from?
- Why do they come?
- What do they do when they visit the park?
- What kinds of groups do they come in, e.g., traditional family (two parents with children)?
- What ages are they?
- What is their cultural background?
 - This can give insight into their
 - attitudes toward nature and local culture
 - needs with respect to location and timing of Visitor Services
- Who does not visit the parks?
 - Are there parts of the local population that do not come to the park?
 - Why?
- What are visitors interested in?
- What do they already know about the park's Visitor Services topics?
- What are their current attitudes about park-related issues?
- What appropriate and inappropriate behaviours do they display?

SAMPLE PAGES

Chapter 3: Best Practice in Visitor and Market Analysis

How is Visitor Profile Information Used?

The data are then analyzed from the point of view of providing Visitor Services programming to identified audience groups. Lines of analysis for each group include:

- What topics and themes fit the needs and interests of each particular audience group?
- What times and locations are best for presenting Visitor Services and products to identified audiences?
- Where are the good locations for Visitor Services? It is good practice to provide Visitor Services where the people are.

Methods for Gathering Visitor Profile Information

The following are techniques that must be employed throughout the period of this Visitor Services Plan. New data must be acquired and analyzed each year.

Direct Methods

These include:

- interviews conducted at points of park user activity including:
 - at trailheads and along trails
 - at parking lots and other locations where park users congregate
 - as part of special events
- questionnaires:
 - printed copies distributed at the same types of locations identified for interviews
 - digital copies available through the park website or Facebook page
- direct observation
 - here trained staff or contractors regularly observe visitors using specific trails and other park facilities

Direct methods are costly and time consuming. In most cases they can only be conducted at wide intervals (e.g., at 5 and 10 years).

Indirect Methods

These are methods that do not include direct sampling of the visitor population. This includes gathering anecdotal information from long-time park staff (operations, Visitor Services, and enforcement—if they exist) and with long-time regular park users. Here, information is usually obtained through informal conversations, but formal interviews following a set script can also be used.

There have been no formal all-inclusive studies of park users in David Thompson Corridor. The time and budget available for this plan did not allow for a formal visitor study. Instead, we have gathered anecdotal information from park staff, park partners and from some of the groups that are delivering their own environmental education programs.

How to Pole People Who Do not Use the Parks and Protected Areas in the David Thompson Corridor?

This process involves first identifying groups who do not visit the properties in the David Thompson Corridor (some of these groups have been identified and discussed later in this chapter). Generally, Visitor Services staff will need to look at current visitor profiles and compare them with data from Statistics Canada that identify the whole spectrum of Albertan demographics and compare the two data sets. Any groups from the provincial spectrum that are not visiting Alberta Parks will be the target of directed polling.

Methods used to poll individuals in these groups are identical to those used when dealing with visitors:

- interviews at locations where they gather
- questionnaires distributed to clubs and organizations to which non-visitor belong (e.g., Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre)
- direct observation by park staff and contractors