Bureau of Forestry Visitor Use Monitoring Report Summary
for Rothrock and Gallitzin State Forests

Resource managers in the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry have utilized a Visitor Use Monitoring (VUM) process to better understand the recreational visitors who use state forest land. Knowing the patterns of use and the desires and expectations of forest recreators help staff make informed decisions about infrastructure design and investments and provide better services to people of the Commonwealth.

VUM is modeled after the National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) process used by the federal agency, the US Forest Service. It answers relevant questions about who state forest visitors are and what they're looking for. Economic surveys are also included to help understand the impact that outdoor recreation has on local communities.

This long-term, systematic study has been conducted in partnership with Penn State University (PSU). In total, 14 of the state's 20 state forests have been surveyed since 2008.

2023 Findings

In the latest VUM study in Rothrock and Gallitzin State Forests, researched discovered:

- Many visitors to both state forests (48% in Rothrock and 62% in Gallitzin) reported making their first visit to the forest before the year 2000
  - However, the second sampling period, i.e. post-COVID, included a notable number of respondents reporting their first visit to the state forest since the year 2020, perhaps indicating a trend towards increasing use of these forests by new recreation visitors
- Consumptive activities were less popular than expected on both Forests, with fewer than 10% of visitors citing either hunting or fishing as their primary activity
- Most respondents in both forests were clearly satisfied with their recreation experience and with the satisfaction attributes listed on the survey
- State forest visitors were most satisfied with the scenery and attractiveness of the forest landscape
- They also reported very high feelings of safety while in the forest and gave very favorable reviews of the helpfulness of employees
- There were some lower ratings in comparison to other attributes, such as availability of information
- Visitors expressed the greatest interest in availability of hiking trails and wildlife viewing areas or opportunities
- Users on both forests attached high importance to the availability of adequate parking
- Respondents also attached relatively high importance to signs directing them to recreation facilities and printed interpretive information
- A minority of visitors obtained information about the area they visited during their trip or in preparation for it
- Information was more likely sought by first-time users and in both forests, the vast majority (85 – 100%) of those who sought information found it helpful in planning trips

Recreation Use Estimates

Following the National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) protocols, recreation use of the state forests was estimated through a process of obtaining mechanical traffic counts, calibrated by observation and on-site interviewing, at the sample of recreation sites and days scheduled throughout the study year.

Data were extrapolated from the sampled site-day combinations to all site-days within each stratum and totaled for the entire forest. The results include two measures of recreational use per forest: 1) the total number of individual site visits, and 2) the total number of recreational forest visits. Since some trips to the state forests include visits to more than one different site during each visit, the total site visits are considerably higher than the number of forest visits.

Because state forests are large, dispersed, and have many entry and exit points it can be difficult to obtain continuous visitation counts so this type of study is particularly useful to the Bureau of Forestry.

- Rothrock State Forest received an estimated 380,771 recreational visits during the amalgamated study year including a total of 465,342 individual site visits.
- Gallitzin State Forest received an estimated 104,099 recreational forest visits and 143,421 individual forest site visits during the same period.

Future Management Actions and Decisions

Based on current and past findings, the Bureau of Forestry will strive to:

- Adapt to changing demographics, use levels, and recreation types
- Develop better materials for first time visitors
- Inventory facilities and trails for maintenance or upgrades
- Focus on assessing any areas of lower satisfaction to learn how to improve
- Understand visitor values across the landscape to inform long-term planning and zoning
- Understand access points and needs for optimization
- Continue to monitor these trends over time

Highlighted Statistics

More detailed information selected from the report is highlighted in the tables below or the full Visitor Use Monitoring Report (PDF) is available online.

Table 6. Activity Participation of State Forest Visitors (during this recreation visit)

	Rothrock		Gallitzin	
Consumptive Activities	**Activity Participation***	**Primary Activity[+]**	**Activity Participation***	**Primary Activity[+]**
Fishing—all types	8.2	6.0	11.0	3.2
Hunting—all types	7.8	6.8	11.8	9.5
Viewing, Learning about Nature & Culture				
Viewing natural features such as scenery, wildlife, birds, flowers, fish, etc.	27.3	5.7	48.0	11.9
Visiting historic and prehistoric sites/areas	2.1	0.0	4.7	0.0
Nature study	2.8	0.7	3.1	0.0
Visiting a nature center, nature trail, or visitor center	7.1	0.0	4.7	0.0
Nonmotorized Activities				
Hiking	47.5	34.2	36.2	19.0
Walking	24.8	12.1	31.5	13.5
Horseback riding	0.4	0.4	1.6	1.6
Bicycling, including mountain bikes	7.8	6.0	3.9	0.8
Nonmotorized water travel (canoeing, sailing, kayaking, rafting, etc.)	1.1	0.4	0.8	0.8
Downhill skiing or snowboarding	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0
Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing	1.8	1.4	2.4	2.4
Other nonmotorized activities (e.g. swimming, games & sports)	4.6	3.2	0.0	0.0
Motorized Activities				
Driving for pleasure on roads	16.3	6.8	19.7	9.5
Riding in designated off-road vehicle areas (non-snow)	1.1	0.7	9.4	7.1
Snowmobile travel	2.8	2.8	5.5	5.6
Motorized water travel (boats, etc.)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other motorized activities (enduro events, games, etc.)	0.4	0.4	0.8	0.0
Camping or Other Overnight Activities				
Camping in developed sites (family or group sites)	2.1	0.7	0.8	0.0
Primitive camping (motorized)	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0
Backpacking or camping in unroaded areas	0.7	0.4	0.8	0.0
Resorts, cabins, or other accommodations on State managed lands	2.1	0.7	3.1	1.6
Other Activities				
Gathering mushrooms, berries, firewood, or other natural products	1.1	0.4	3.1	1.6
Relaxing, hanging out, escaping heat, noise, etc.	13.8	1.1	18.1	1.6
Picnicking and family gatherings in developed sites (family or group sites)	2.1	1.4	2.4	0.8
Other	13.9	7.8	11.8	9.5

Table 7. Satisfaction Ratings for Customer Service Attributes in the State Forests (Percent)

Rothrock State Forest	Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Very Good	Mean[a]
Scenery	0.0	0.0	6.4	19.2	74.4	4.7
Attractiveness of the forest landscape	0.0	0.0	5.1	25.6	69.2	4.6
Feeling of safety	1.3	1.3	2.6	31.6	63.2	4.5
Condition of the natural environment	0.0	2.6	9.0	21.8	66.7	4.5
Helpfulness of employees	3.4	6.9	6.9	10.3	72.4	4.4
Condition of developed recreation facilities	0.0	7.3	7.3	43.9	41.5	4.2
Adequacy of signage	1.4	5.7	17.1	37.1	38.6	4.1
Cleanliness of restrooms	0.0	3.1	18.8	28.1	50.0	4.3
Parking lot condition	2.8	4.2	15.3	37.5	40.3	4.1
Condition of Forest roads	6.8	4.1	9.6	38.4	41.1	4.0
Condition of Forest trails	0.0	2.9	12.9	38.6	45.7	4.3
Availability of parking	2.7	4.1	9.5	25.7	58.1	4.3
Availability of information on recreation	1.9	7.4	13.0	25.9	51.9	4.2

Gallitzin State Forest	Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Very Good	Mean[a]
Scenery	0.0	0.0	2.4	19.5	78.0	4.8
Attractiveness of the forest landscape	0.0	0.0	7.3	22.0	70.7	4.6
Feeling of safety	0.0	5.0	7.5	20.0	67.5	4.5
Condition of the natural environment	0.0	0.0	7.3	24.4	68.3	4.6
Helpfulness of employees	0.0	0.0	5.6	27.8	66.7	4.6
Availability of parking	2.6	0.0	15.8	28.9	52.6	4.3
Adequacy of signage	5.4	8.1	10.8	37.8	37.8	4.0
Condition of developed recreation facilities	0.0	4.5	4.5	31.8	59.1	4.5
Parking lot condition	2.7	10.8	18.9	24.3	43.2	4.0
Condition of Forest roads	5.0	7.5	12.5	45.0	30.0	3.9
Condition of Forest trails	2.8	2.8	13.9	55.6	25.0	4.0
Cleanliness of restrooms	0.0	0.0	11.8	47.1	41.2	4.3
Availability of information on recreation	3.0	15.2	21.2	33.3	27.3	3.7

Table 8. Importance Ratings for Customer Service Attributes in the State Forests (Percent)

Rothrock State Forest	1	2	3	4	Mean[a]
Condition of the natural environment	5.3	0.0	15.8	78.9	3.7
Attractiveness of the forest landscape	5.9	0.0	23.5	70.6	3.6
Scenery	4.0	4.0	32.0	60.0	3.5
Feeling of safety	6.9	10.3	27.6	55.2	3.3
Condition of Forest roads	2.2	2.2	33.3	62.2	3.6
Adequacy of signage	11.5	11.5	25.0	51.9	3.2
Condition of Forest trails	13.3	0.0	40.0	46.7	3.2
Availability of information on recreation	17.2	12.1	27.6	43.1	3.0
Helpfulness of employees	23.2	12.5	37.5	26.8	2.7
Cleanliness of restrooms	25.4	15.3	27.1	32.2	2.7
Condition of developed recreation facilities	27.7	18.5	21.5	32.3	2.6
Availability of parking	16.0	10.0	32.0	42.0	3.0
Parking lot condition	19.0	17.2	27.6	36.2	2.8

Gallitzin State Forest	1	2	3	4	Mean[a]
Condition of the natural environment	8.3	0.0	8.3	83.3	3.7
Attractiveness of the forest landscape	0.0	0.0	7.7	92.3	3.9
Scenery	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	4.0
Feeling of safety	5.3	0.0	36.8	57.9	3.5
Condition of Forest roads	4.2	8.3	33.3	54.2	3.4
Adequacy of signage	0.0	4.2	29.2	66.7	3.6
Condition of Forest trails	9.5	4.8	14.3	71.4	3.5
Availability of information on recreation	13.0	8.7	21.7	56.5	3.2
Helpfulness of employees	4.0	12.0	20.0	64.0	3.4
Cleanliness of restrooms	15.0	20.0	35.0	30.0	2.8
Condition of developed recreation facilities	12.5	4.2	37.5	45.8	3.2
Availability of parking	25.0	5.0	10.0	60.0	3.0
Parking lot condition	25.0	3.6	32.1	39.3	2.9

Table 9. Visitor Satisfaction Ratings for Various Forest Attributes (Percent)

	Awful	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Mean[a]
Rothrock State Forest						
Natural environment	0.0	0.0	5.8	14.5	79.7	4.7
Safety and security	0.0	2.9	2.9	23.2	71.0	4.6
Responsiveness of staff	4.2	8.3	12.5	25.0	50.0	4.0
Sanitation and cleanliness	4.2	2.8	8.5	28.2	56.3	4.3
Condition of latrines	0.0	13.3	16.7	33.3	36.7	3.9
Condition of picnic pavilions & other facilities	2.9	0.0	5.9	41.2	50.0	4.4
Gallitzin State Forest						
Natural environment	0.0	0.0	15.8	7.9	76.3	4.6
Safety and security	0.0	5.1	26.3	15.8	52.6	4.2
Responsiveness of staff	0.0	5.9	29.4	17.6	47.1	4.1
Sanitation and cleanliness	0.0	0.0	18.4	18.4	63.2	4.5
Condition of latrines	0.0	5.3	26.3	15.8	52.6	4.2
Condition of picnic pavilions & other facilities	0.0	8.3	29.2	25.0	37.5	3.9

Table 15. Visitor Ratings of Access to the State Forests (Percent)

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Rothrock State Forest						
By roads	0.0	1.4	8.5	15.5	74.6	4.6
By trails	3.4	3.4	5.1	32.2	55.9	4.3
Gallitzin State Forest						
By roads	2.6	2.6	5.1	28.2	61.5	4.4
By trails	0.0	0.0	2.7	37.8	59.5	4.6

Table 17. Which of the following was the most important reason for this visit to the State Forest?

	Valid Percent	
	Rothrock	Gallitzin
I went there because I enjoy being in the forest	31.0	23.1
I went there because it's a good place to spend time with friends/family	14.1	20.5
I went there because it's a good place to:		
Hunt	7.0	15.4
Hike	26.8	5.1
Bike	5.6	2.6
Fish	5.6	0.0
Horseback ride	1.4	0.0
Other Reason	8.5	33.3