



2008

Survey of Albertan's Priorities for Provincial Parks



Alberta

Priorities for Alberta's Parks

Final Report

Submitted to

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation

Prepared by

The Praxis Group

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Cover Photo: Crescent Falls Lookout

All photos courtesy of Praxis field team

Table of Contents

Summary	5
Key Findings	5
Top Priorities for Investment	5
Background	7
Priorities for Parks Programs, Facilities and Public Services.....	7
Objectives	7
Methods	8
Telephone Survey	8
Park User Survey	8
Survey of Albertans	10
Provincial Park Users and Non-Users.....	10
Parks Users (Telephone Survey)	14
Activities.....	14
Adequacy of Facilities	16
Change in Use	18
Investment in Provincial Parks.....	19
Public Consultation	22
Park User Survey	25
Visit Profile.....	26
Number of Previous Visits.....	26
Reasons for Visiting Selected Park.....	29
Rating of Services and Facilities	29
Park Users' Views on the System.....	36
Change in use of Provincial Parks	39
How Changes to Services and Facilities will Impact Provincial Park Use.....	41
Investment Priorities.....	43
Consulting with the Public on Changes to Provincial Parks.....	45

Priorities for Alberta's Parks, Programs, Facilities and Services	47
Non-visitors.....	47
Top Priorities for Investment.....	47
Set Aside Land in an Undisturbed State.....	47
Maintenance of Parks Facilities	47
Providing Showers.....	48
Increased Enforcement.....	48
More Electric Sites	48
A Centralized Reservation System	48
Improving Awareness of the System	48
Areas not considered a priority	49
Consulting with the Public	49
Appendix A – Parks Included in Field Research	50

Summary

Two complimentary research methods were used during the summer of 2008 to obtain the views of Albertans on the future priorities for provincial parks. A province-wide telephone survey was used to gather representative feedback from users and non-users of Alberta's parks. Additionally field teams were sent out to meet with visitors and invite their participation in an on-line survey (with the option of a mail back survey for those without Internet). The field teams visited a wide range of park types and sizes, from the small 10 to 20 site campgrounds along the David Thompson highway, to the largest and busiest parks in the province.

Key Findings

The telephone survey revealed that more than 40% of Albertans have visited a provincial park or provincial recreation area in the past three years.

Among those who have not visited Alberta's parks, 40% use other parks and recreation areas. A further 30% are simply not interested in parks (do not like the outdoors). Factors related to the lack of opportunity (access, cost, travel distance, crowdedness) accounted for only 8% of the reasons given for not using Alberta's parks.



Top Priorities for Investment

Albertans' feel the top priority for Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation should be to set aside more land and leaving it in an undisturbed state. Maintenance of existing facilities was the second highest overall priority. While campsites themselves received positive ratings, the recreational facilities at the campgrounds were not rated as highly. Picnic tables, trails, beaches and washrooms were the most noted facilities in need of maintenance.

Other priorities include providing showers, increased enforcement of rules and regulations (related to visitor disturbance and environmental protection) and more electrified sites.

An improved reservation system was identified as a priority, especially with the rising price of fuel as campers are reluctant to venture out not knowing if the campground will have an available site. A number of issues were raised pertaining to the current reservation system such as people reserving sites and not showing up, leaving sites vacant and unused on weekends, while campers without reservations are turned away.



Albertans clearly have their favourite parks that they frequent. The research showed high levels of repeat visitation and the majority of users indicating they visit only one park. Factors contributing to this pattern relate to proximity to home, enjoyment of their previous visit and lack of familiarity with alternatives. Encouraging use of multiple parks makes sense from the perspective of distributing demand, but also will enhance the public's appreciation of the system of parks and the variety of ecosystems within which they fall.

A number of areas were considered as low or non-priorities. The area of lowest priority is infrastructure and land to support off-highway vehicle use. Providing small scale roofed accommodation and environmental education programs were also not seen as priorities for investment. Equestrian trails were also noted as a low investment priority.

The report is structured in three sections; the first provides analysis of the province-wide telephone survey, the second section presents findings for the field research and on-line survey and the third section provides conclusions based on the two research methods used.



Background

Alberta's park system has been shaped by its 75 year history. Early parks were small recreation sites that provided Albertans with scenic spots to swim, picnic and camp. Today, there are over 500 provincial parks and protected areas across Alberta providing outdoor recreational opportunities and helping to protect wildlife, their habitats, and the environment.

The Government of Alberta issued a mandate to develop a plan to 'ensure Alberta's parks and recreation areas remain protected yet accessible to Alberta's growing population.' The drafting of this plan is now underway and will set the direction of the next ten years of park priorities.

Listening to Albertans is a priority for Tourism, Parks and Recreation and the Alberta Government. A number of methods are currently in place to obtain feedback from Albertans related to provincial parks and protected areas, such as camper satisfaction surveys, electronic comment forms and telephone surveys. The current report provides additional information in support of the ten year plan related to investment priorities.

Priorities for Parks Programs, Facilities and Public Services

During the summer of 2008, Tourism, Parks and Recreation commissioned The Praxis Group™ to conduct a study of Albertans to gain further insight into the priorities for parks programs, facilities and services. The research and consultation efforts focused on park visitors, as well as non-visitors (those who have not visited a provincial park in the last three years).

Objectives

- Gain statistically valid information on what park visitors (overnight and/or day-use) rank as priorities for provincial parks related to programs, facilities (new or improved) and public services.
- Determine from non-visitors (those who have not visited a provincial park in the last three years) why they have not visited a park and what kinds of improvements or changes would encourage them to visit a park.
- Gain statistically valid information on what Albertans see as future priorities for parks, and have recommendations to provide to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Methods

To meet the study objectives, two complimentary methods were used. A random sample telephone survey of the Alberta population was used to gather information from users and non-users of parks and protected areas. To compliment the telephone survey, field teams were employed to visit 50 parks and provincial recreation areas, many of which would not normally be covered in a telephone survey due to their relatively low use in relation to the total population.

Telephone Survey

The telephone survey was based on a stratified sample of the Alberta population according to population size. Three strata were used; metropolitan (Edmonton, Calgary), urban (cities over 50,000) and all other including rural. In each case a target sample of 400 was used to ensure statistically reliable representation for each stratum. Subsequently, data were weighted to the census population values within each stratum. The telephone survey was conducted in July, 2008. The response rate was 31% and the interview was an average of 13 minutes. The survey was designed to gather information about use of parks, as well as views from non-park users. In total, 1208 telephone surveys were completed. Results are reliable within +/- 2.83 %, 19 times out of 20 for population values.

Park User Survey

Previous telephone surveys conducted on behalf of Tourism, Parks and Recreation revealed that users of only a few of the most frequented parks get picked up in the sample (e.g. parks within Kananaskis Country, Aspen Beach, Cypress Hills). With a system of over 500 parks and protected areas, an alternative to telephone surveying was needed to ensure representation from the majority of parks.

Three field teams of university students (two per team) travelled the province and visited 50 provincial parks and provincial recreation areas. The sites were selected to provide a wide range in the activities, services and level of use. The complete list of locations is provided in Appendix A.

Field teams approached parks visitors in day use areas and campgrounds and asked them to participate in the study. Two alternatives were offered to the visitor. The interviewer could collect the visitor's email address for a subsequent emailing of an on-line survey, or they could provide the visitor with a mail-back paper survey. The intent was to minimize respondent burden while on vacation, and to also gather a reflective (post-visit) view of the park.

The survey was divided into three sections; the first in reference to the specific park where they obtained the survey, the second a broader set of questions related to the system of parks and the third gathered demographic information about the respondent.

The survey teams spent two to four days in each location, generally staying in park campgrounds. Parks were visited between June 30th and August 8th, 2008.

To broaden the input, posters and tear-off cards were left at each location enabling the park visitor to access the survey by going to a website to register for participation in the survey. Registration was used to ensure a degree of control over participation (to avoid the same person filling out the survey multiple times for the same park in an attempt to bias the outcome).

Almost 1800 park visitors were contacted by the field teams and 99% of those contacted agreed to participate in the survey. Email addresses were provided by 1466 people and 326 paper surveys were distributed. Twenty five survey participants self-registered from cards received from park staff or from poster.

The response rate for the email-based survey was 59% and the paper survey was 31%. However it should be noted that 348 email addresses were added following the August long weekend and with the cut off on August 15th, many of these potential survey participants would have not have had sufficient time to respond. The analysis included 983 surveys (864 email, 101 paper, 18 self-registered).

A more detailed discussion of methods is provided in a separate technical report.



Survey of Albertans

Provincial Park Users and Non-Users

More than 40% of the Alberta population has visited at least one Alberta provincial parks within the past three years. Slightly more than half have visited one provincial park. It is important to note this does not reflect the number of visits made, simply the percent of Albertans who have visited parks. Park use statistics show over 9 million visits are made to Alberta's parks.

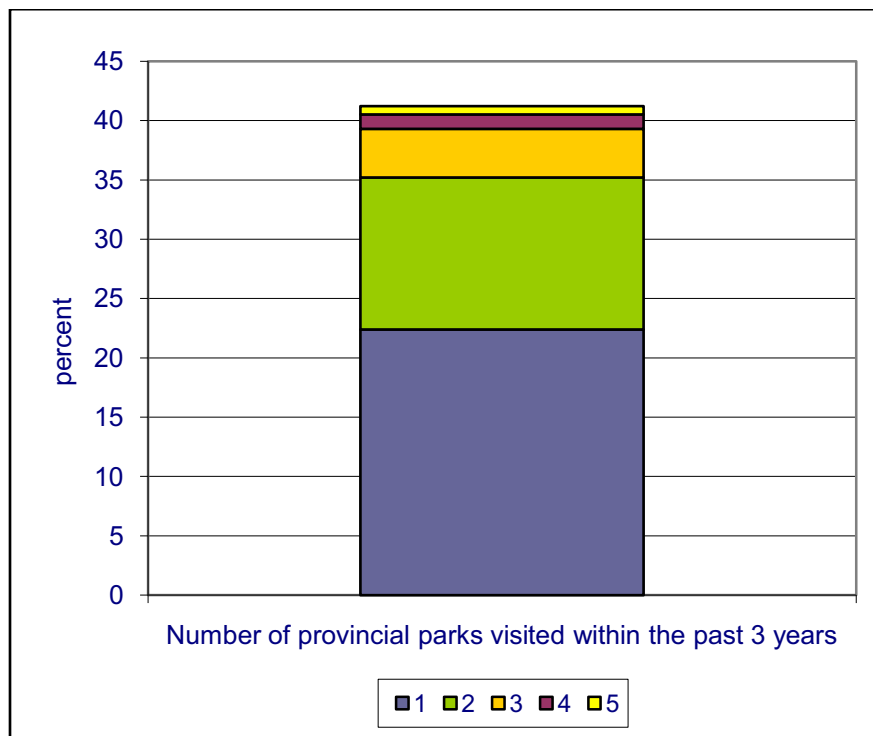


Figure 1 Percent of Albertans Who Have Used a Provincial Park in the Past 3 Years

One hundred twenty eight Alberta parks were identified by respondents. The most frequently identified parks are located within Kananaskis Country, accounting for 30% of total mentions. Other frequently mentioned parks are shown in Figure 2.

It is important to keep in mind Figure 2 reflects which parks have been visited within the past three years. It does not reflect the level of use for these parks. Repeat visitation and length of stay would need to be taken into account to arrive at levels of use.

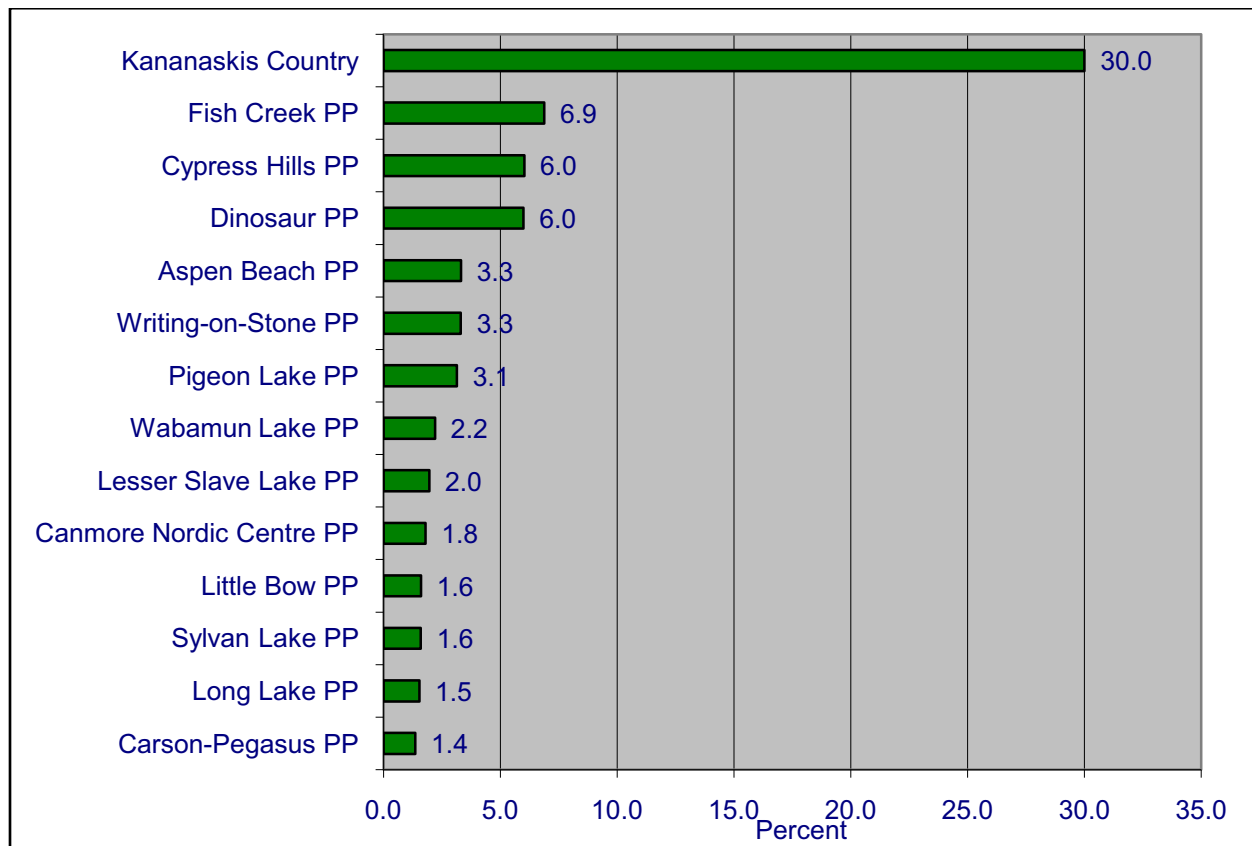


Figure 2 Parks Visited by Survey Respondents within the Past Three Years

People's recreation, leisure needs and preferences vary widely. Albertans are fortunate to have a system of over 500 parks and protected areas providing a vast array of opportunities, and in all areas of the province. However, for a variety of reasons Alberta's provincial parks are not within everyone's interest. Figure 3 illustrates the reasons Albertans do not visit provincial parks. Approximately 40% indicated they prefer locations in other provinces, national parks, city parks or their vacation property. From the wide range of other reasons, lack of interest, desire or time account for 30% of non-users, and some form of barrier accounts for 24%. Factors related to lack of opportunity (travel distance, crowded, access and mobility and cost) account for 8% of reasons Alberta's provincial parks are not visited.

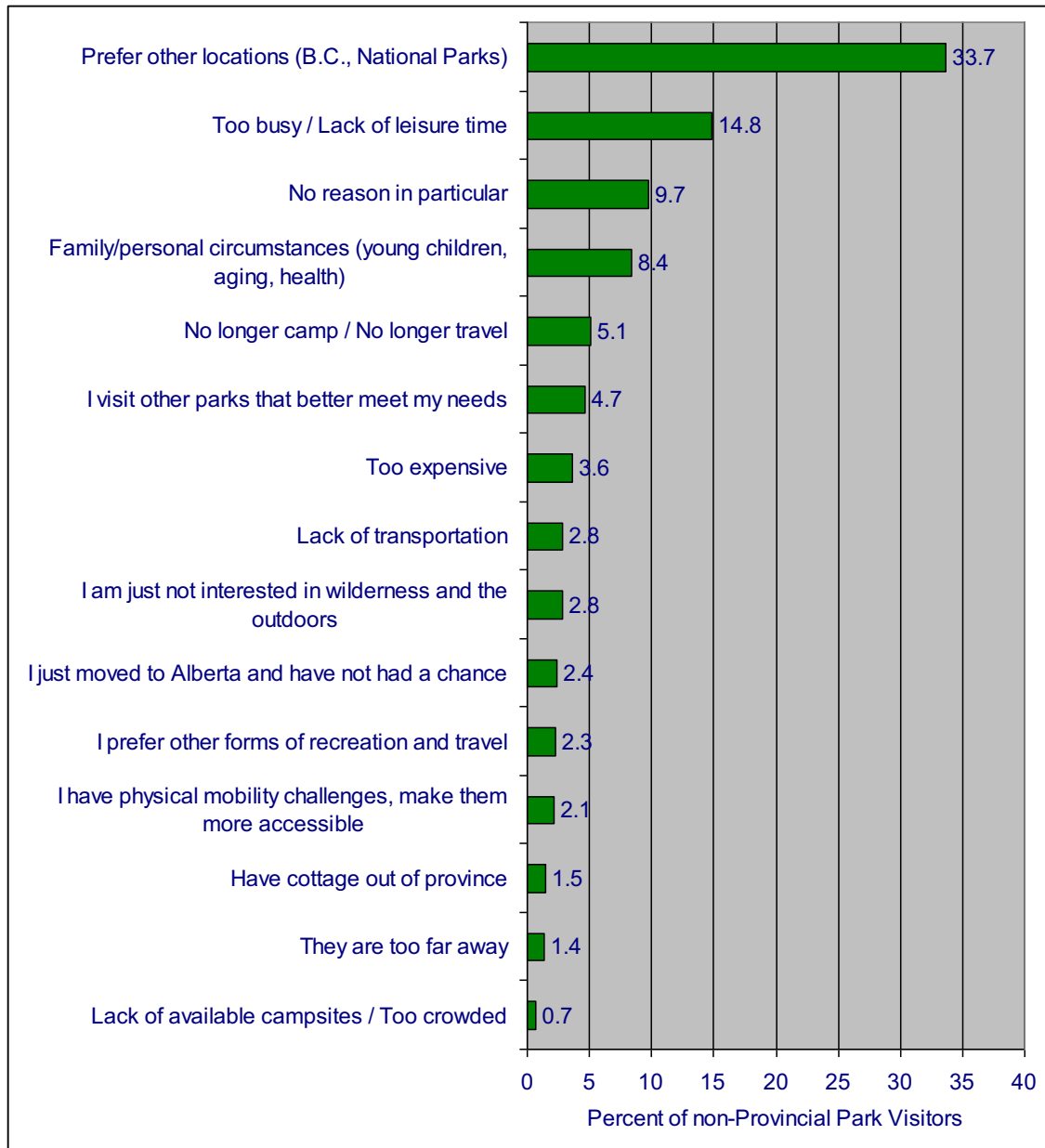


Figure 3 Reasons for Not Visiting Alberta's Provincial Parks

Respondents were asked if they considered themselves a person with a disability. Almost 10% of the population indicated they have a disability. Among those with a disability, 25% visit provincial parks and 63% do not visit any parks.

Provincial park use falls off substantially after age 75. Twenty percent of Albertans over age 75 visit provincial parks, compared with 37% of those age 65 to 75 and more than 40% in all younger age brackets. Twenty-two percent of those over age 75 indicated they have a disability.

Provincial park use is correlated with income and education (Figures 4 and 5). A significantly higher percentage of those with higher education and higher incomes use provincial parks.

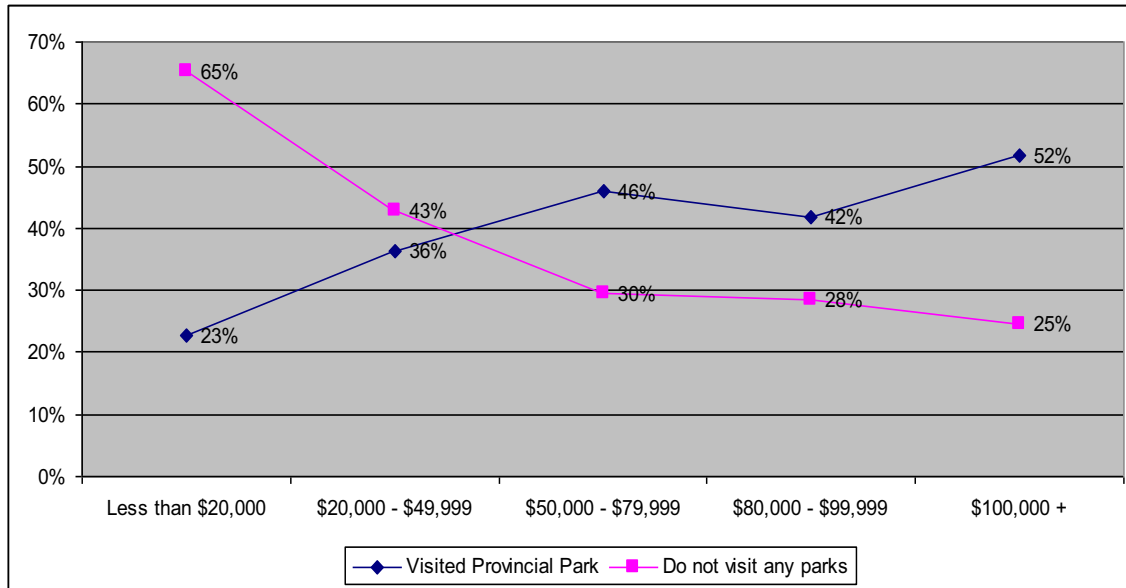


Figure 4 Relationship Between Income and Provincial Park Visitation

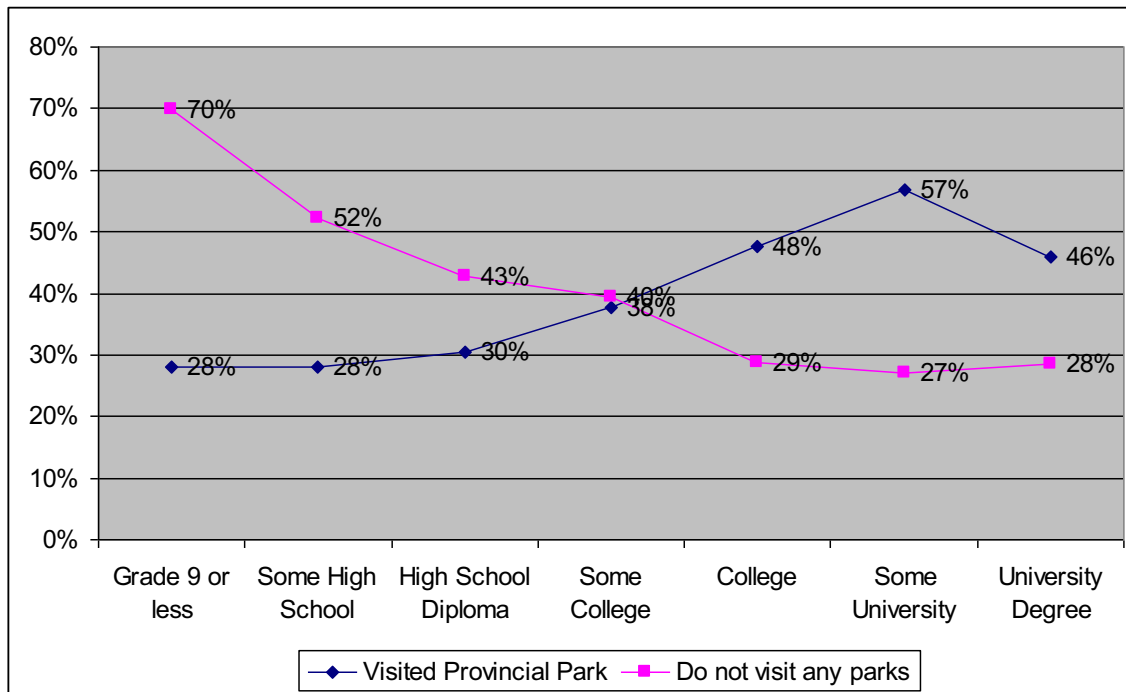


Figure 5 Relationship Between Education and Park Visitation

Parks Users (Telephone Survey)

From the telephone survey there were 520 respondents who visited at least one provincial park in the past three years. The following results relate specifically to these respondents. Non-users have been excluded.

Activities

Provincial parks visitors were asked to indicate the number of days they took part in certain recreational and leisure activities within provincial parks. The most frequent activity is photography, followed by wildlife viewing, picnicking and hiking on trails. Figure 6 provides an estimated number of days each activity is carried out in the course of a year within provincial parks.

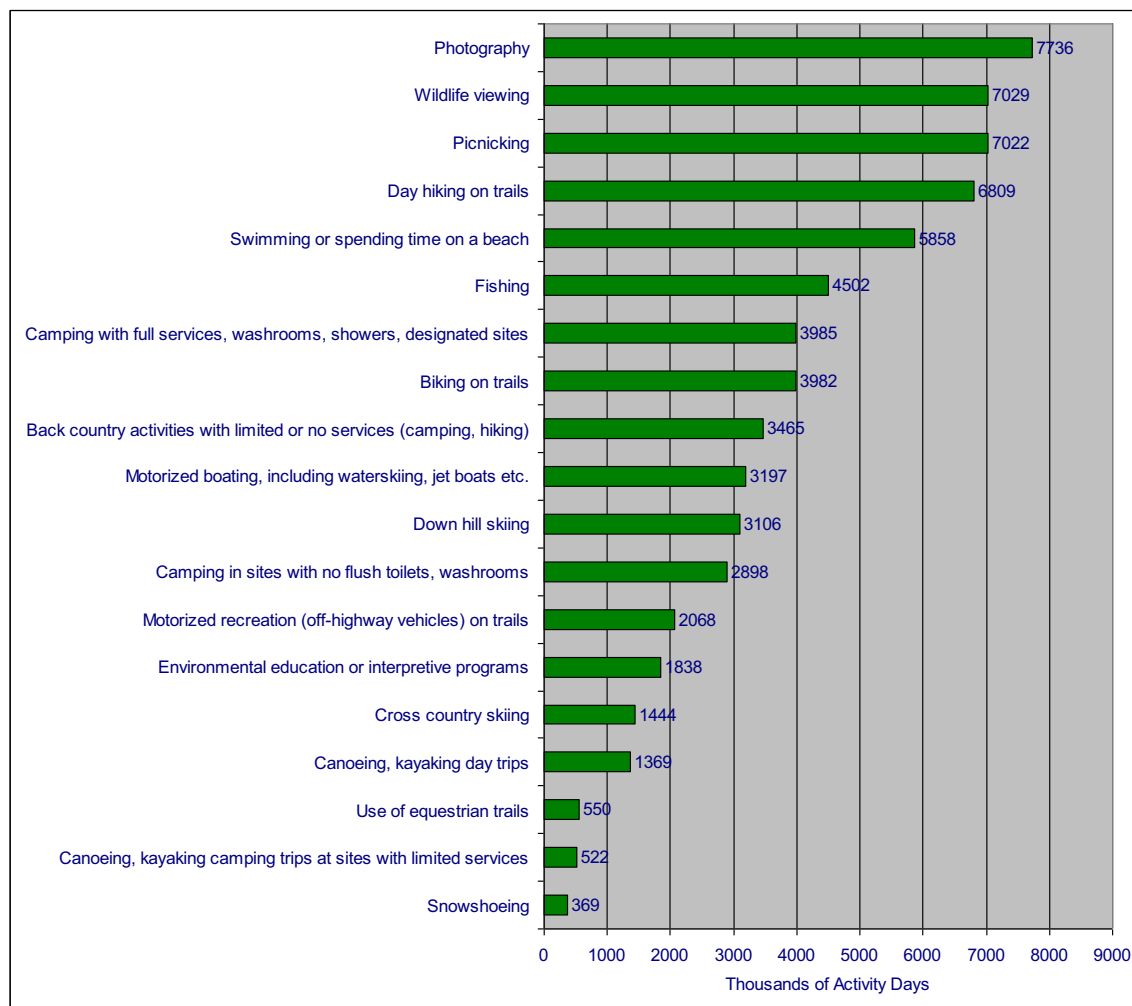


Figure 6 Activities within Provincial Parks

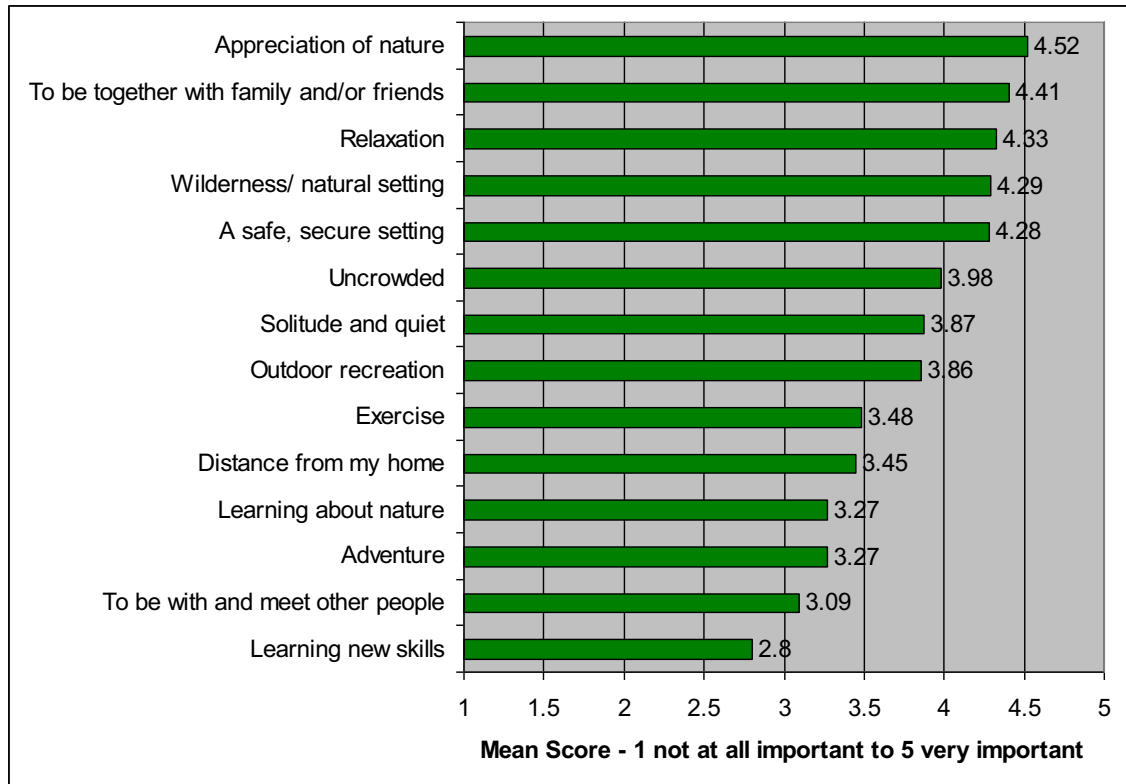


Figure 7 Most Important Aspects of Choosing a Provincial Park

When choosing a provincial park as a place to visit, the most important reasons are appreciation of nature, being with friends and family, relaxation, being in a wilderness setting and safety and security (all had mean scores above 4.0 on a 5 point Likert scale rating importance).

Of lower importance were learning new skills, meeting other people, adventure and learning about nature. It is interesting to note that “distance from my home” was fifth from the bottom in importance, indicating that for many visitors driving distance is less important than other factors in consideration of which park they choose. In fact, 48.4% of visitors rated distance from home important. By contrast 88.4% rated appreciation of nature important.



Adequacy of Facilities

Provincial park visitors were asked to assess the adequacy of services and facilities in meeting their current needs. If they did not use the service or facility (had no need for it) they were asked to not rate the item.

Two of the highest use activities, trails for day hiking and picnic sites, were rated as adequate to meeting their needs by approximately three quarters of park visitors. Facilities for visitor orientation and learning was the lowest rated item in terms of adequacy. Survey respondents' comments suggest there is a need for better orientation, especially around what there is to do.

When reading the table it is important to consider the N value as this is the number of people who rated the service or facility. For example, trails for horse back riding was second lowest in terms of adequacy, and was rated by 32 respondents.



Table 1. Adequacy of Facilities and Services

Facility or Service	Adequate	N
Trails for day hiking	74.4	320
Picnic sites	73.6	359
Opportunities for wildlife viewing	69.8	323
Fishing in a provincial park	63.8	233
Places for snowshoeing	61.3	32
Trails for cross country skiing	60.0	73
Camping with full services, washrooms, showers, designated sites	59.8	302
Trails for biking	58.4	187
Places for motorized boating, including waterskiing, jet boats etc.	56.7	156
Places for canoeing or kayaking camping trips with limited services	56.3	98
Places for swimming or spending time on a beach	56.0	300
The amount of enforcement (conservation officer patrols)	56.0	464
Environmental education or interpretive programs	55.6	192
Places for canoeing or kayaking day trips	53.6	98
Small scale roofed accommodation such as fixed wall tents, cabins	52.7	160
Places for motorized recreation (off-highway vehicles) on trails	51.5	156
Camping at more rustic, less developed site.	46.9	234
Back country camping or hiking activities with limited or no services	46.4	184
Trails for horse back riding	44.7	32
Facilities for visitor orientation and learning	41.8	438

Change in Use

One third of provincial park visitors indicated they have increased their level of use of parks over the past five years. Twenty percent indicated a decline in use and 46% indicated no change.

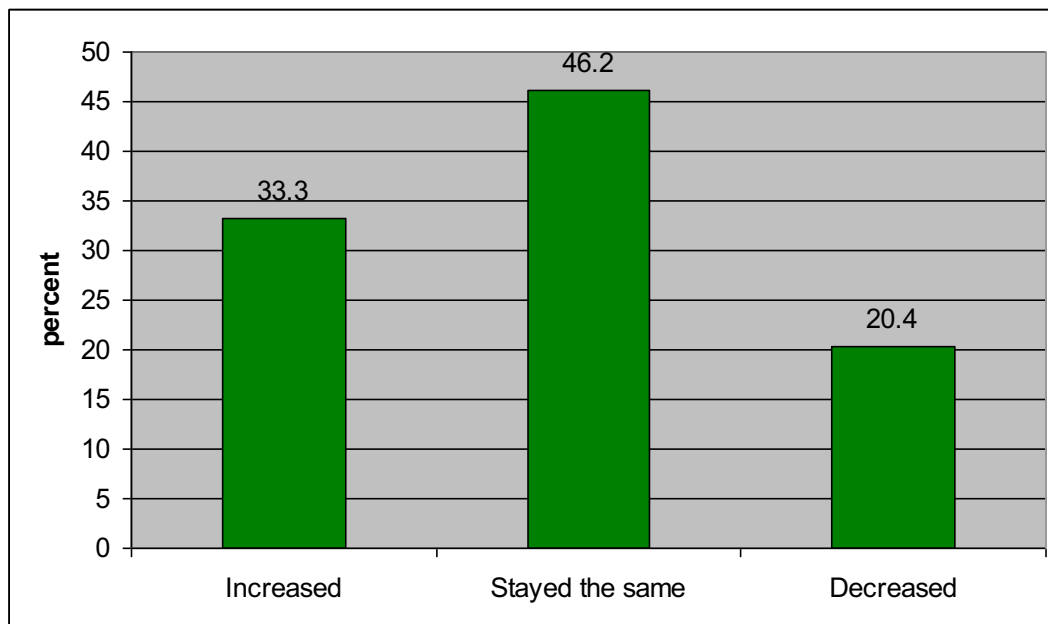


Figure 8 Change in Provincial Park Use

The main reasons for increased or decreased use are shown in Tables 2 and 3. The age of children has a significant bearing on increased or decreased use. Some families with very young children seem less inclined to visit parks, but as children get older this constitutes a main reason for increased use. Retirement is a major reason for increased use as it creates an opportunity for more leisure time.

Poor health and loss of mobility are significant reasons for decreased use.



Table 2 Reason for Increase in Provincial Park Use

INCREASE	Percent
Change in family circumstances e.g. children are older	37.3
More leisure time / More opportunity	24.2
Have or purchased RV/trailer	12.7
Participate in new outdoor recreational activities (e.g. skiing)	7.8
Want to be in natural environment / Get away from city	6.4
Retired / Older with more time	6.1
Other increased	5.4

Table 3 Reason for Decrease in Provincial Park Use

DECREASE	Percent
Change in family circumstances e.g. have young children	30.2
Change in personal circumstances (aging, health/mobility)	20.5
Too expensive / Increased costs (price of gas, campground fees)	12.7
Less leisure time / Too busy	12.5
Other decreased	10.3
Issues with campgrounds	8.7
Purchased recreational property	5.1

Investment in Provincial Parks

All Albertans included in the sample (n=1208) were asked their opinion on where the government should focus future investment in parks. Figure 9 shows the responses for 15 investment areas.

Over 70% of survey respondents indicated increased investment should be made in setting aside land to protect natural areas in an undisturbed state. This was followed by 65.9% indicating the need for more investment in enforcement of rules and regulations and 59.9% indicating the need for more investment in natural resources management.

Maintenance of existing park infrastructure, increased environmental education and interpretation programs and land devoted to non-motorized recreation were also seen as areas in need of increased investment by the majority of respondents.

The scale also included the opportunity to identify areas where the government should invest fewer resources. The majority of respondents indicated a decrease in investment in land and facilities for motorized recreational use such as off road vehicles (53.3%) and trails and infrastructure to support increased levels of off road vehicle use (54.6%).

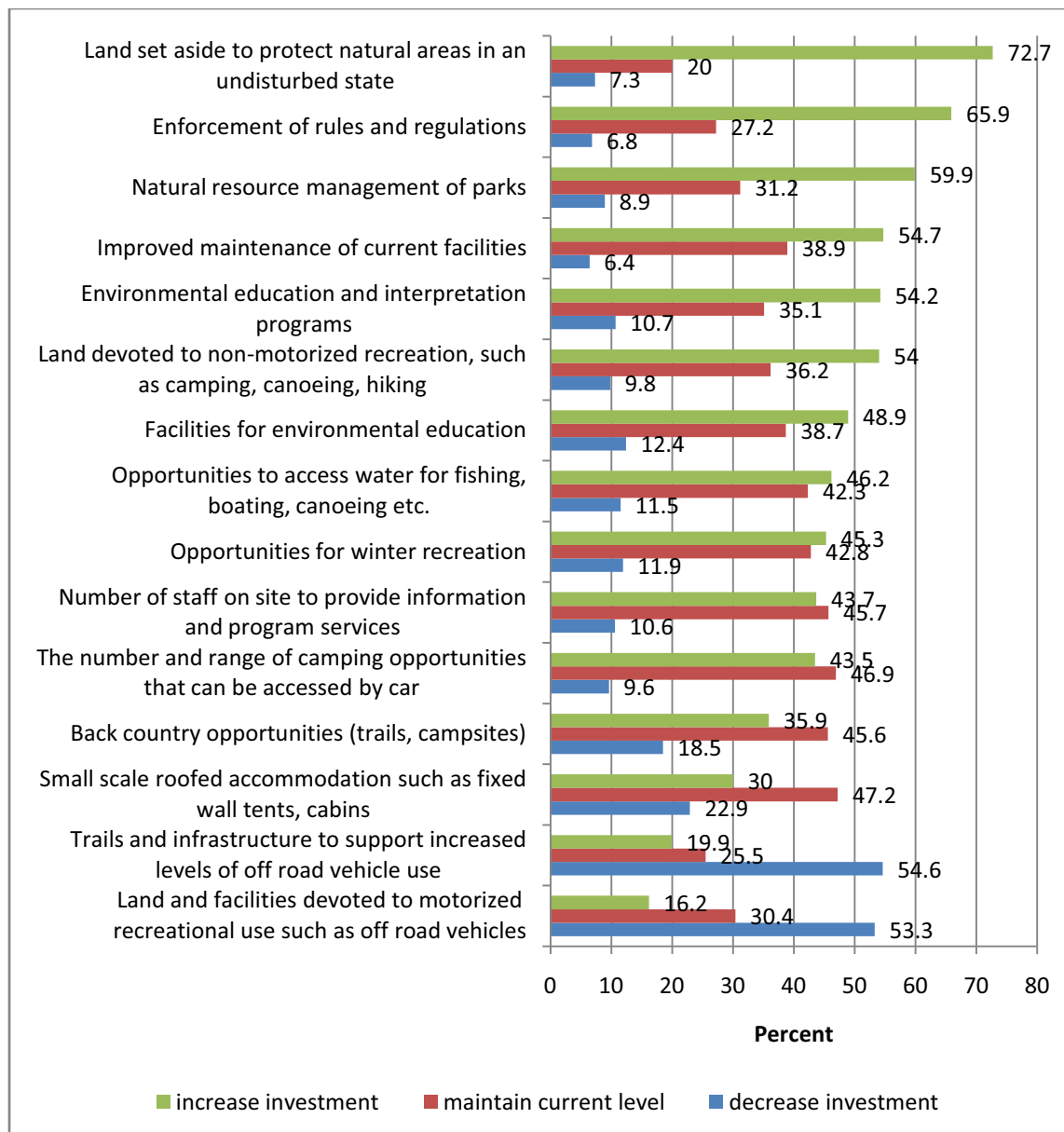


Figure 9 Areas for Increased, Maintained or Decreased Investment (note percentages refer to all Albertans)

Figure 9 shows the relative order of priority for investment when there are no limits in place. Respondents were asked to identify their “top priority” for future investment in provincial parks. This was an unaided question; therefore the categories differ slightly from the previous list.

Using this approach the number one priority is environmental protection and conservation (32.8%) followed by maintenance of existing infrastructure, facilities and services (14.6%), and increasing campground facilities, including showers and electrified sites (10.4%).

Although two-thirds of respondents indicated a need for increasing enforcement of rules (Figure 9), it was ranked as a top priority by only 7.3% of respondents when asked to identify a single priority (Figure 10.). Similarly, environmental education and interpretation programs were identified by the majority of respondents (54%) as an area in need of increased investment, but a top priority for only 3.7% of respondents.

Of the 13% who could not identify an overall priority, half were non-park users.

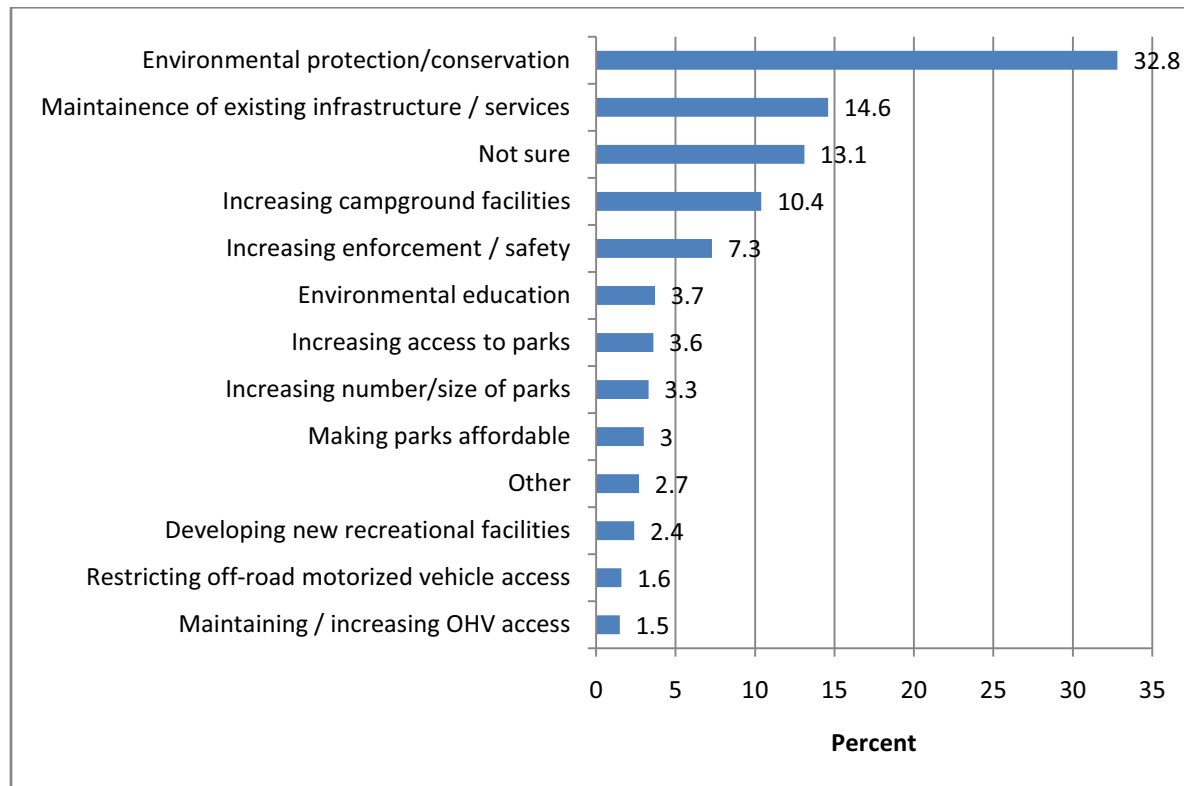


Figure 10 Number One Priority for Future Investment

When breaking down the investment focus by users of provincial parks, national parks, other parks and non-users, there were only a few notable differences in the priorities. National park visitors (who do not use provincial parks) had a higher emphasis on environmental preservation and conservation (44% compared to 33% for provincial park users). Another notable difference was in the priority for maintenance of existing facilities and services, where 16% of provincial park users rated this as their top priority, compared to 9% of national park visitors, 14% of non-park users and 24% of other park users.



Two of the investment attributes showed a relationship with level of education. The priority for environmental conservation increased with education, and the percent of respondents who were unsure on the investment priority decreased with education. All other investment attributes were similar when correlated with education.

Age tends to have less impact on the investment attributes than education.

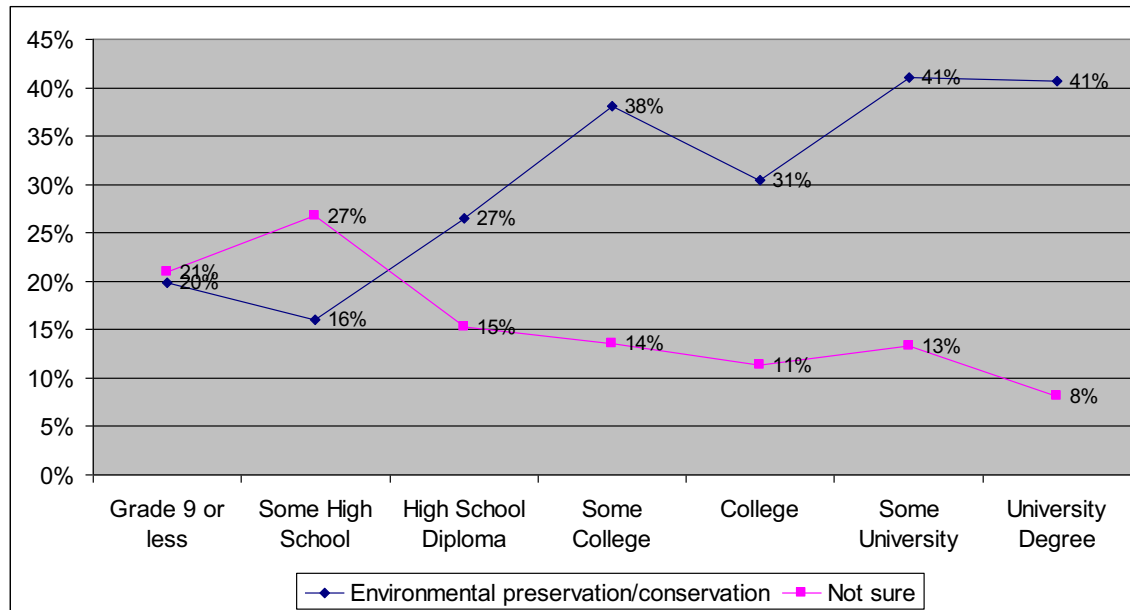


Figure 11 Relationship Between Investment Priorities and Education

Public Consultation

Respondents were asked which provincial parks issues or changes warranted consultation, how they should be notified of these changes and how they would like to be consulted.

Figure 12 shows the Alberta public would like to be consulted about specific changes to programs, policies and investments. The creation of new parks followed by removal of park lands topped the list, although all items received a majority interest.

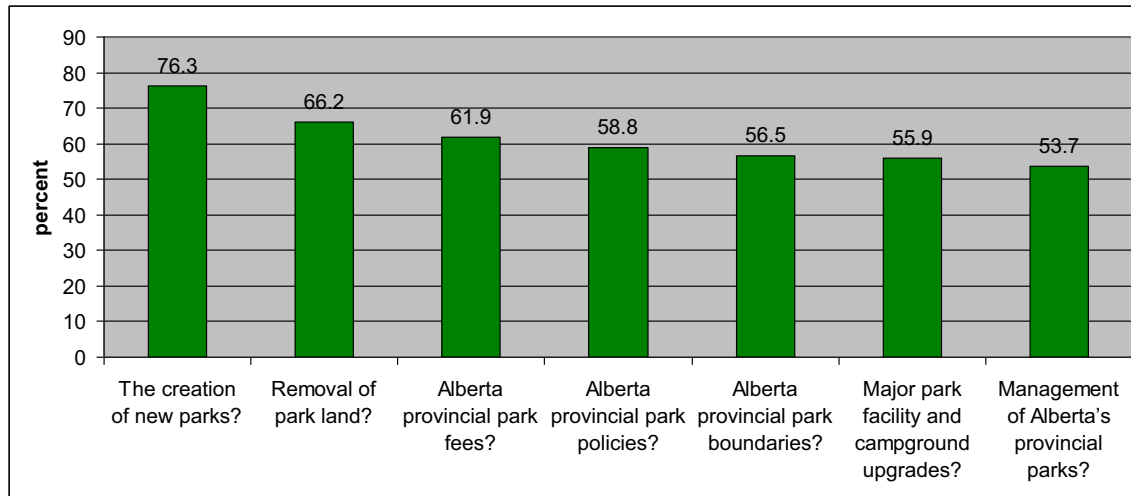


Figure 12 What Albertans Wish to Be Consulted About in Relation to Provincial Parks

The best way to notify the public about changes to parks is by mail followed by email and newspapers.

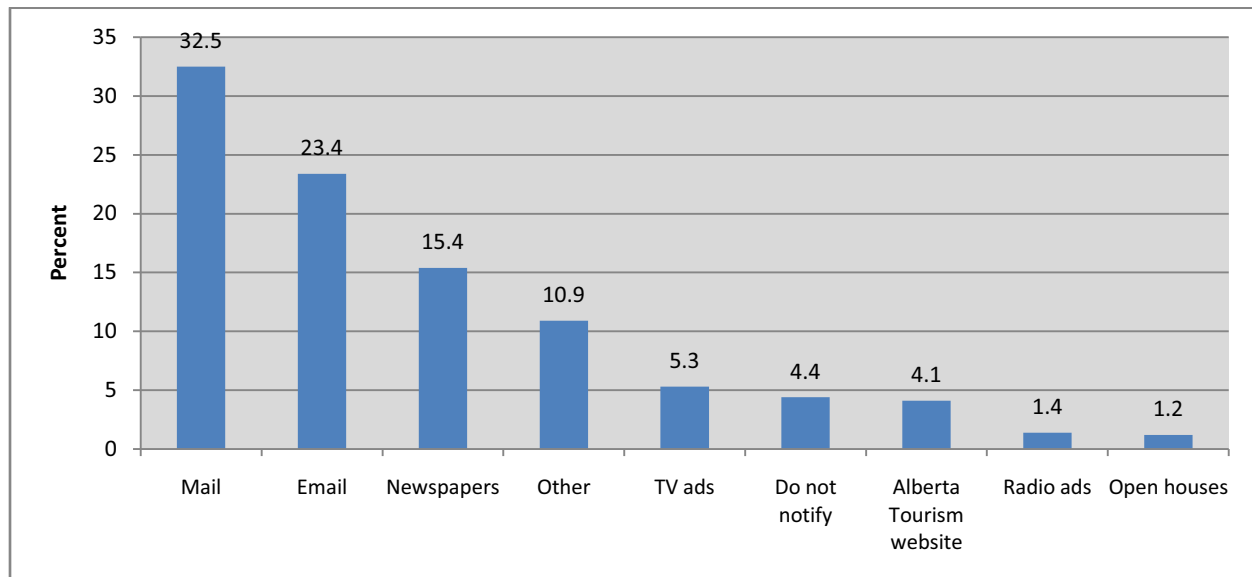


Figure 13 Best Methods of Notifying the Public of Changes to Provincial Parks

In terms of consultation methods email and telephone topped the list, followed by mail (Figure 14).

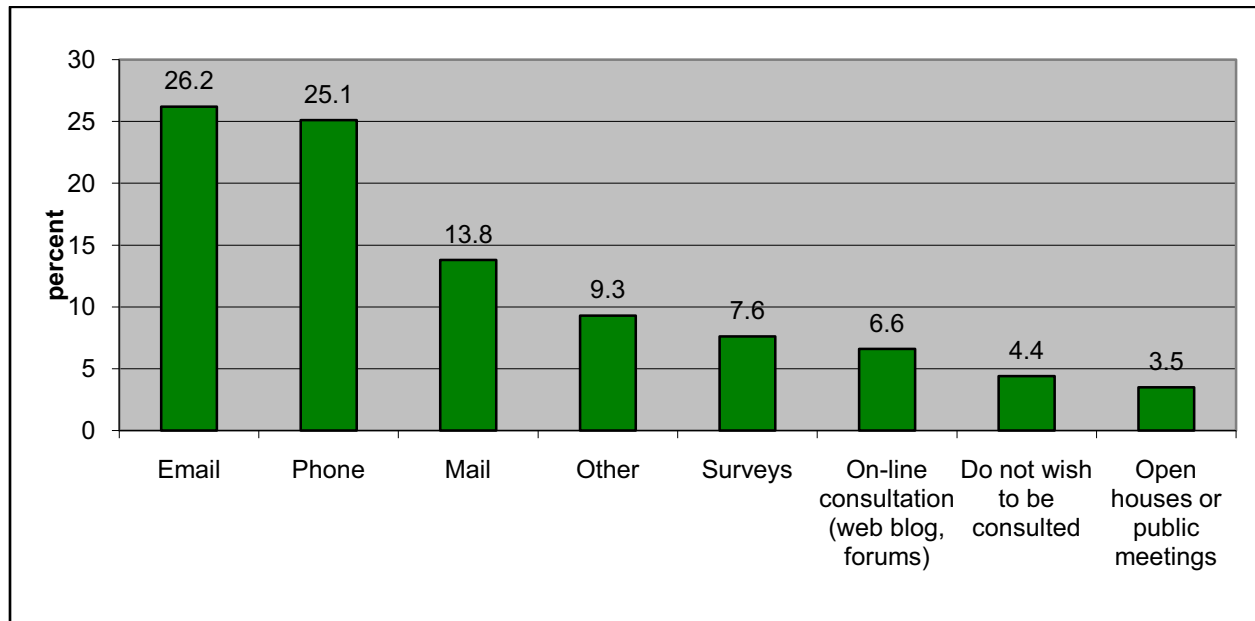


Figure 14 Best Methods of Consulting the Public Regarding Changes to Provincial Parks

Park User Survey

The primary intent of the park user survey was to gather input from a broad range of provincial park visitors related to their current visit, as well as their views on the system of parks. The survey teams visited parks and protected areas of various sizes and levels of use. Less frequented areas, like Crescent Falls, Sulphur Gates, Two O'clock Creek, Fish Lake and others would not get represented in a telephone survey unless a sample in the tens of thousands would be used. Therefore, the views of these visitors would otherwise be overlooked.

Table 4 Sample Distribution - Camping and Day Use

	Electricity Showers % of sample	Electricity only % of sample	Showers only % of sample	No services % of sample	Total
Camping permitted	63.5%	10.0%	7.6%	10.7%	91.8%
Day use only	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	5.9%	8.2%

Table 5 Sample Distribution - Camping Units

# of Camp Sites	Percent of Sample
1 to 50	4.1
51 to 100	23.1
101 to 150	17.1
151 to 200	13.0
201 to 250	13.2
More than 250	21.1
Random only	0.2
Day use only	8.2

Table 6 Sample Distribution - Designation

Designation	Percent of Sample
Provincial Park	77.3
Provincial Recreation Area	21.9
Other	0.8

The list of parks included and their response numbers are shown in Appendix A.

Visit Profile

Number of Previous Visits

One third of survey participants indicated this was their first visit to the particular park where they were surveyed. Respondents visiting day use parks tended to be heavier repeat users compared with visitors to locations offering camping. One third of visitors to the day use areas surveyed had visited these locations more than 10 times in the past three years.

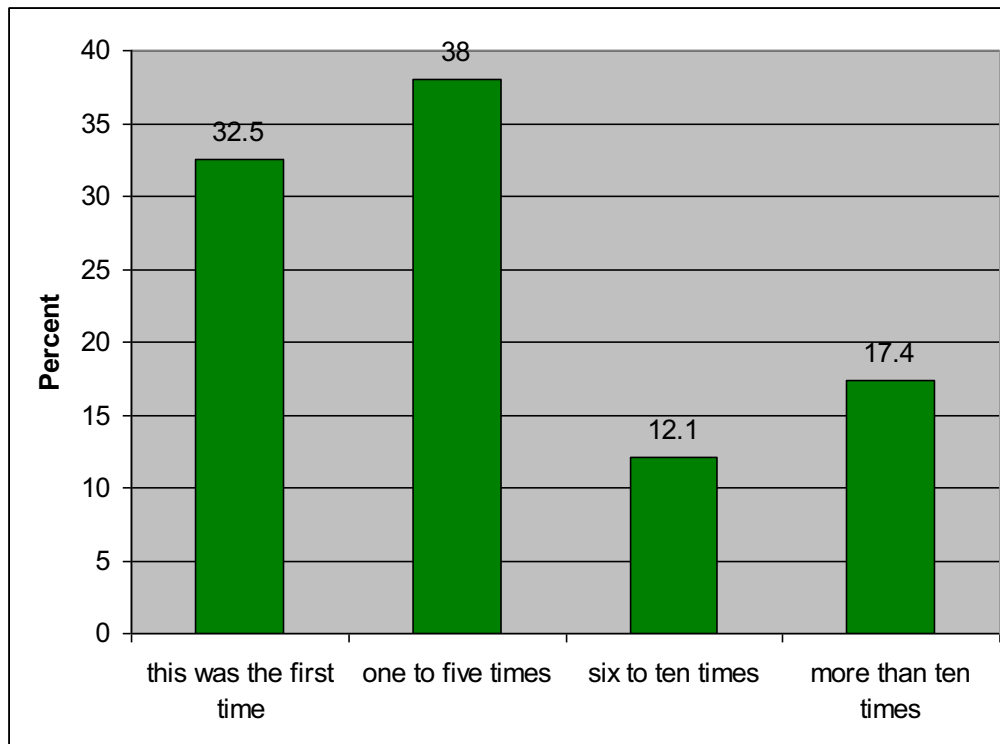


Figure 15 Frequency of Visitation

Almost 70% of respondents were travelling with their family, and just over 20% were travelling with friends. Almost 90% of visitors planned their visit ahead of time.

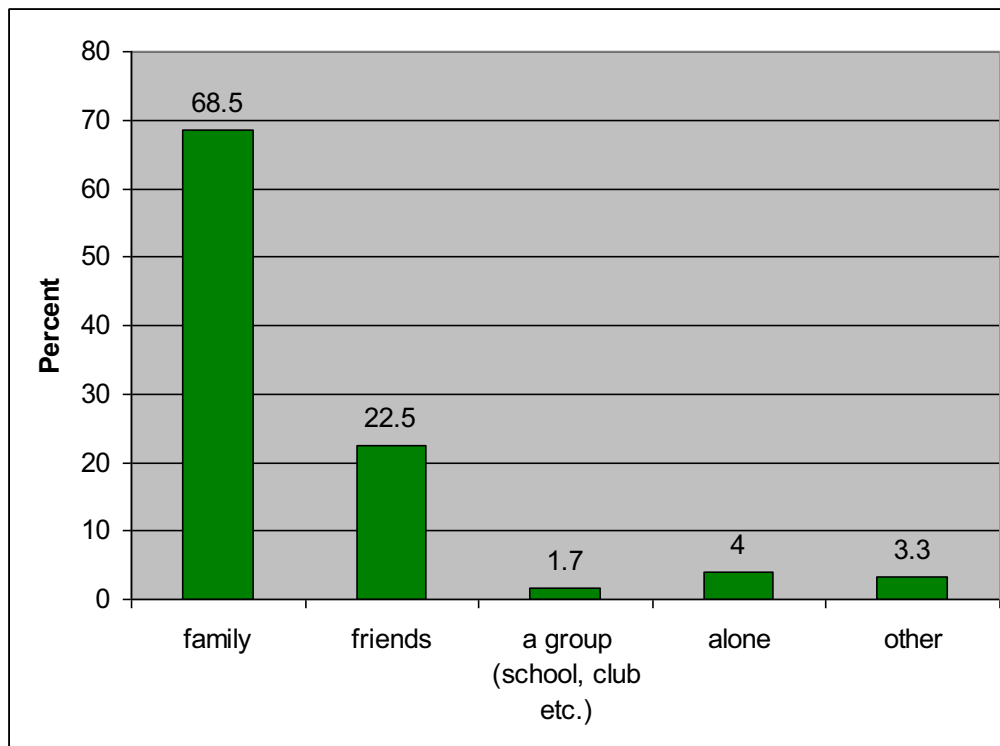


Figure 16 Travel Party Characteristics

The average length of stay for overnight visitors was 5 nights. The mode (most frequent number of nights) was 3 nights (24.1%). The average length of stay was not affected by the provision of services (based on Analysis of Variance at .05 level). However, there was a statistically significant difference in the length of stay according to the size of the campground. The smaller campgrounds tended to have a longer average length of stay.

Figure 17 shows the distribution of the number of nights spent in provincial parks. Figure 18 shows the number of nights according to the number of camping units available.



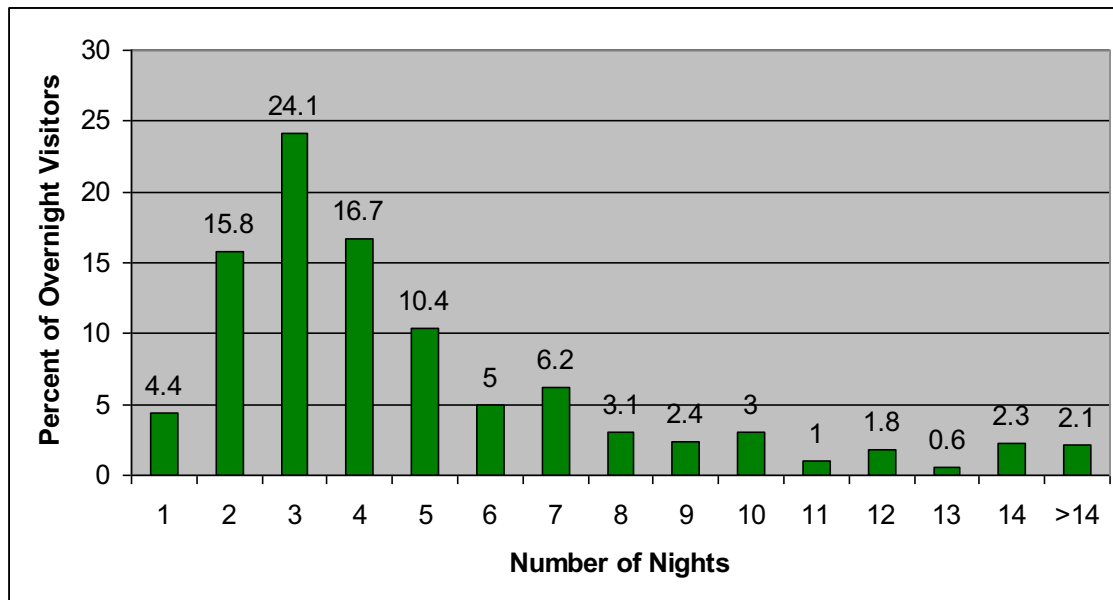


Figure 17 Number of Nights Spent at Park (Note: day users excluded)

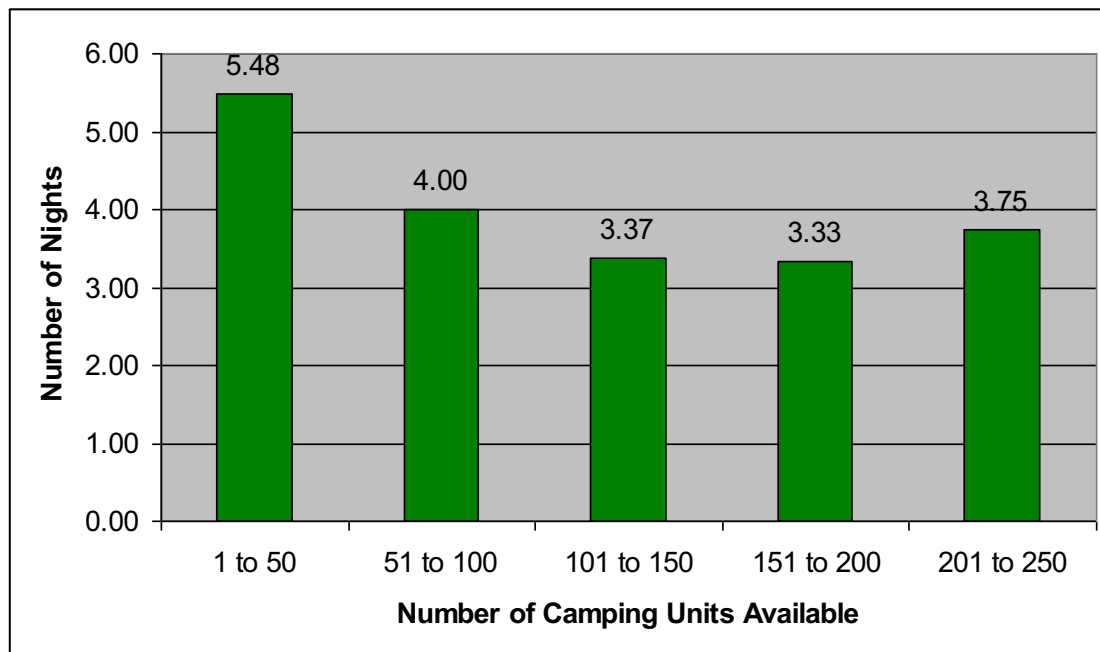


Figure 18 Number of Nights by Camping Units Available (Note: day users excluded)

Reasons for Visiting Selected Park

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a number of attributes in their decision to visit the park. After camping, the most important reasons for their visit were enjoyment of a previous visit and to enjoy nature and wildlife. Hiking, swimming and proximity to home were also important aspects of their choice.

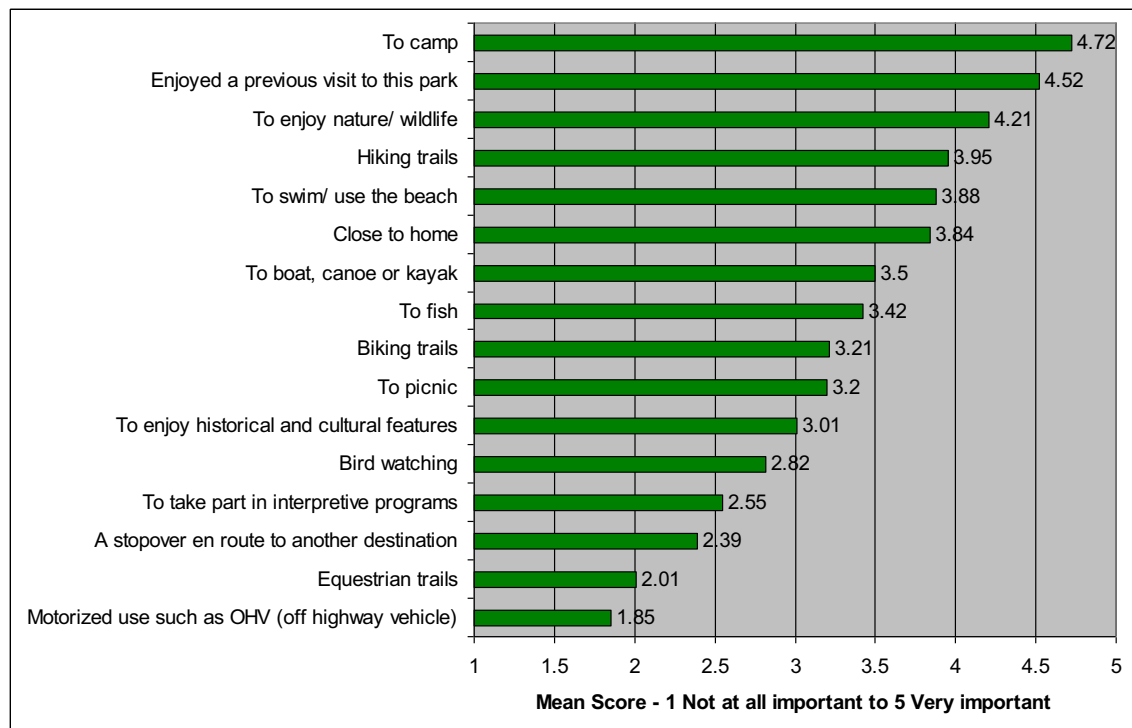


Figure 19 Importance Factors in Choosing Park

Analysis of Variance was used to determine if there were any notable statistically significant differences between importance factors and variables such as day use/overnight use, number of sites, services and designation. The most notable differences were between day users and overnight users, where day users attributed a higher importance to closeness to home (mean = 4.29) and hiking trails (mean = 4.11).

Rating of Services and Facilities

Ratings of services and facilities were provided using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent. Figure 20 shows the mean scores for the aggregate of provincial parks compared with the aggregate of provincial recreation areas. Condition of campsite, friendliness of staff and ease of check in had mean scores over 4 out of 5 for provincial parks. Provincial recreation areas had mean scores above

4.0 for condition of campsite, friendliness of staff, condition of hiking trails and sense of security. Some of the largest differences between provincial parks and provincial recreation areas are in interpretive signage and information, where provincial parks scored lower. Firewood quality had the lowest overall rating. Beach quality which was second from the bottom had highly variable results when viewed by park. Saskatoon Island had a beach quality rating of 1.8 out of 5, Lesser Slave Lake had a rating of 3.39, while Aspen Beach and Long Lake had ratings of 4.5 and 4.2.

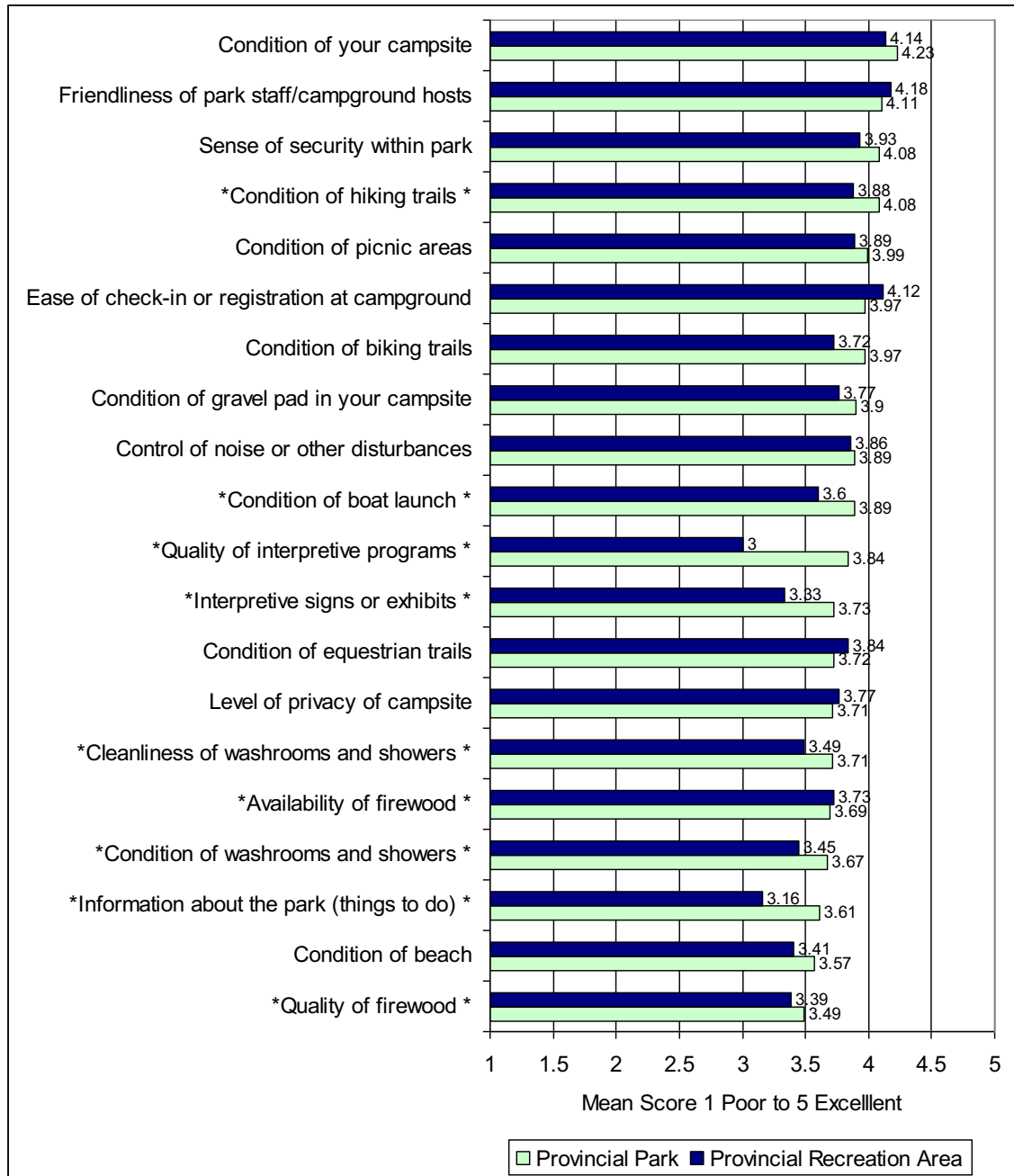


Figure 20 Rating of Facilities and Services Within Park Visited

* indicates statistically significant difference at .05 level *

Open-ended questions were used to assess the best features of the park visited and the area in greatest need of improvement. The open-ended responses were then recoded into the main categories, shown in the figures below.

The best things about the park visited are shown in Figure 21.

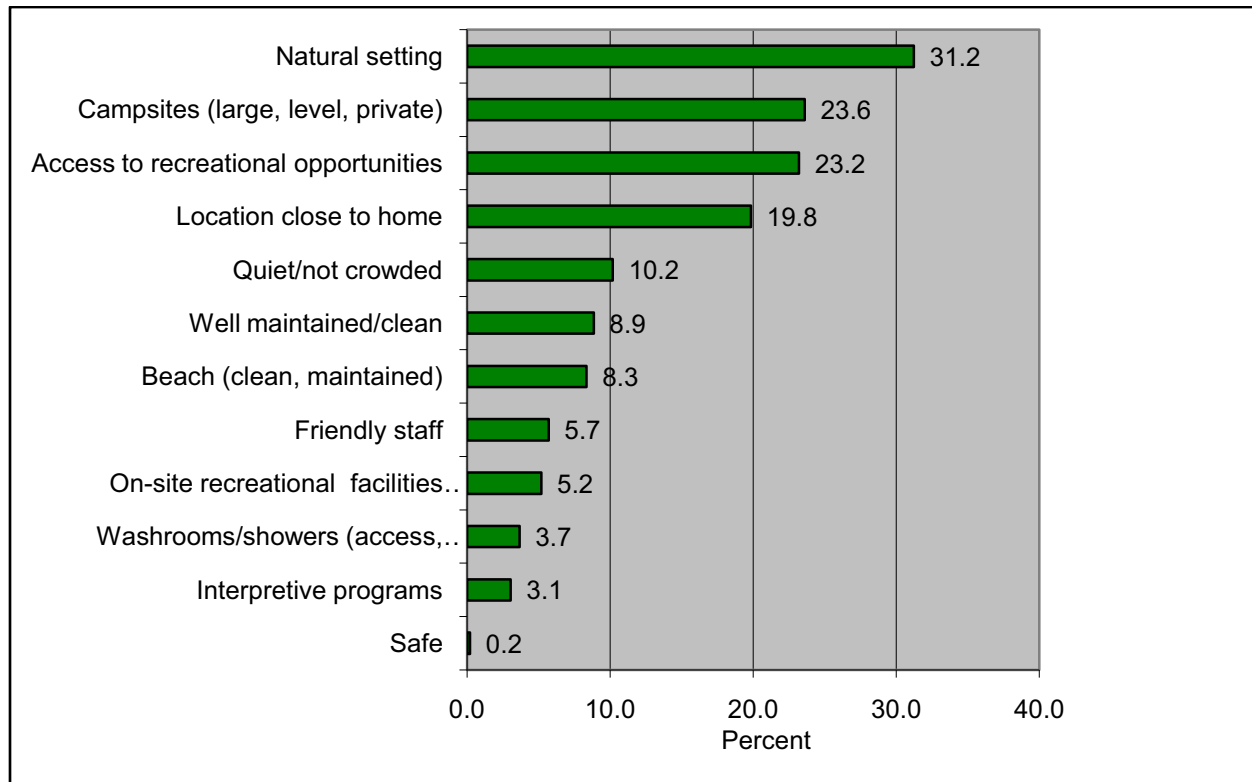


Figure 21 Best Things about the Provincial Park Visited

Most frequently, survey respondents indicated the natural setting—the opportunity to be in nature, proximity to wildlife, the beauty of the environment—was the most valued and appreciated aspect of the park they visited. Respondents identifying the quality of campsites as the best thing commented on the spaciousness of the sites, the level of privacy (space between sites, treed) and the availability of power hook-ups. Ready access to recreational opportunities such as hiking, fishing, boating and biking was the favourite aspect of the park for just under one quarter of survey participants. Almost 20% of respondents said the best feature of the park was that it is close to home. Others said that the lack of crowding, peacefulness and solitude of the park were



the things they valued most. Fewer than 10% of respondents identified the cleanliness and level of maintenance of the park infrastructure and facilities as the best feature of the park. For others, the beach and swimming areas were considered to be the best feature; a few specifically appreciated the cleanliness of the beach and water. Other facets of the parks survey participants valued included: friendly and helpful parks staff; on-site recreational facilities, particularly boat launches and playgrounds; access to and cleanliness of washroom and shower facilities; and interpretive programs.

Its natural beauty and wildlife.

*Can't really pick one thing but the forest would have to be the best thing about it.
Trees rule!*

Peaceful, spacious sites, lots of trees and grass, well secluded.

The privacy of the sites and all of the mature trees!

Variety of things to do, biking, walking in hills, rollerblading, beach, open park areas for sports and boating.

It is close to home and yet you still feel like you are camping and enjoying the outdoors.

Quiet and private atmosphere. Very enclosed campsites available. Campsites are spacious

*Everything is very clean, neat and tidy, well looked after and well taken care of.
The Fish Cleaning Station is very clean and functional.*

We love the swimming area. We have very young grandchildren and so we are attracted to the beach area and the water level.

*The staff made our visit so much more enjoyable than our first visit three years.
The girls in the office are very friendly and accommodating. The campground hosts are wonderful. It is great that reservations are now accepted for people traveling from long distances.*

The children's areas. They were wonderful and well used.

Clean shower facilities!

Great family interpretive programs. Loved the tours. Great hiking trails.

The same approach (an unaided question) was used to determine the most important improvement that could be made to the park visited.

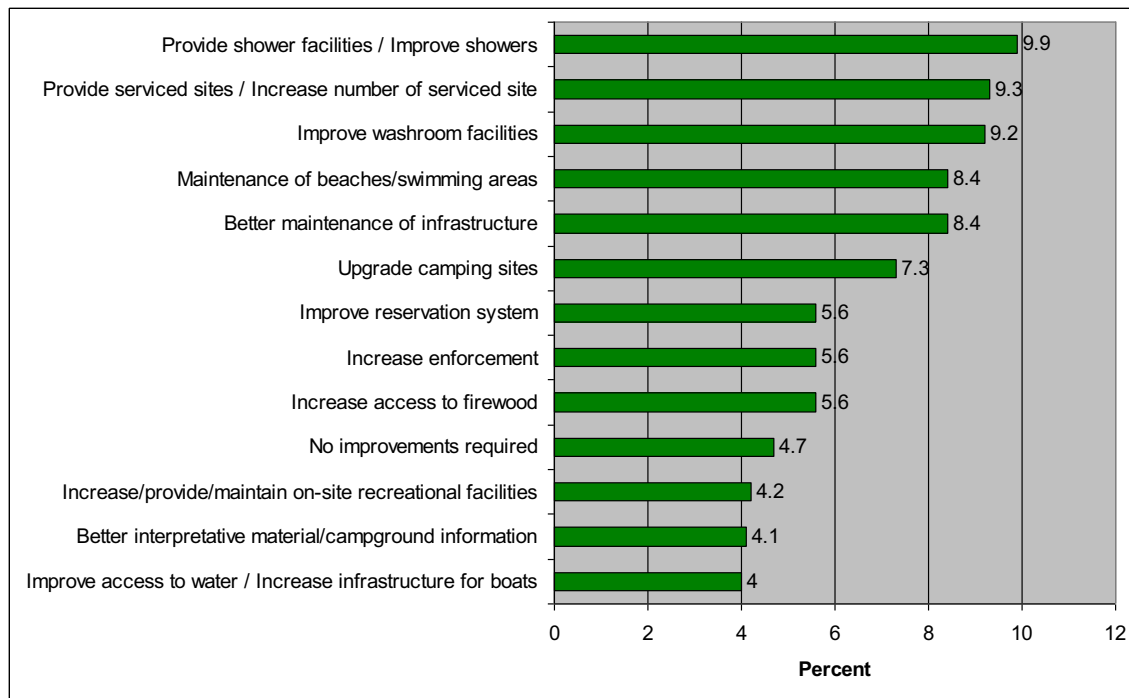


Figure 22 The Most Important Improvement that Should be Made

Most frequently, survey respondents said that providing shower facilities or improving existing shower facilities (cleaner, more hot water, lower cost) was the most important improvement. Adding more serviced sites, particularly power sites, was a necessary improvement noted by just over 9% of respondents. Enhancing existing washroom facilities was top-of-mind for some. These respondents indicated that washrooms should be cleaner and better maintained, the number of facilities should be increased and, in a few cases, that flush toilets should be installed.

Better maintenance of existing campground infrastructure was mentioned as an important

improvement; areas noted as requiring particular attention included roads, trails, picnic tables, road dust management, tree trimming, garbage facilities and fire pits.

Campground upgrades considered important included increasing the privacy of campsites (more trees, larger sites), providing level gravel pads and ensuring sites are appropriate to the range of camping units—grassy areas for tents, larger sites for RVs.



Comments regarding beaches and swimming areas typically centred on improving the cleanliness of the water and beach (removal of debris and weeds, raking sand). This was most evident in places where beach quality has changed considerably in recent years, such as Lesser Slave Lake, Saskatoon Island and Gooseberry.



Respondents who viewed campground firewood as a key issue most frequently mentioned the need for low or no cost firewood and extended hours of firewood accessibility as well as improved firewood quality. It was also noted that too many people are burning the plastic bags the wood is wrapped in, a practice that is not environmentally friendly.

Respondents indicating that improving the campground reservation system was most important indicated a need for more reserved sites, more phone lines for reservations, an online and/or centralized reservation system and prohibiting holding unattended sites. Holding unattended sites garnered very harsh opinions about the management of parks, especially as campgrounds posted 'full' signs over weekends when many sites were left vacant as campers were turned away.

Some respondents advocated more stringent enforcement of campground rules and regulations such as quiet time/noise, dogs and speeding. Areas requiring improvements mentioned less frequently included: campground information and interpretive materials (signage, printed maps); on-site recreational facilities (playgrounds, horseshoe pits, walking/biking trails); infrastructure for boating/water access (boat launches, docks, moorings); parks staff customer service (friendlier, helpfulness, politeness); facilities and programs for children; and restrictions on times of generator use.



Finally, a few suggested that the park they were visiting did not require any improvements.

This park would be much more enjoyable with showers, especially since there was a 'no swimming' notice up.

To have all the stalls as power stalls so everybody does not cram around the park and you don't have to [go] a week ahead just to get a stall...

The most important improvement would be making sure that the washrooms are cleaned daily with supplies always stocked. I had to tell the people twice about not having supplies in the washrooms. This is an easy fix if always checked when cleaning. Also there should be something that can deal with the smell of the washrooms. Even putting charcoal into the washrooms will deal with the smell.

Some trails are being overgrown by grasses and weeds some bush needs to be cut back. Camping pads are very unlevel, no gravel left, muddy spots. Handicap shower is unusable needs new showerhead.

Cleaner water. Too much seaweed and bird crap on the beaches. Heard so many people say that they wish the water and beach was cleaner!!! Please clean it!!! I want to swim so badly and we come here all the time!

Give more privacy for each site. Some are very close and very exposed.

Not having to pay for firewood. It is expensive enough to camp, but to have to pay for firewood when it used to be free.... If they are so worried that people will take the firewood home with them or to another campground then they should just have a system where the campers come to the front desk with their receipt and get one bundle per night that they are staying.

To have a better reservation system and more phone lines. We tried to call to change our reservation (after having a heck of a time making the reservation) and literally, hit redial at least 100 times and could not get through. This is my biggest pet peeve regarding Alberta Parks. When we camp in BC, it is easy to check availability and make reservations.

There needs to be more patrolling. [During] our last visit there were people yelling obscenities [and] our 11-year-old son wanted to move into the trailer. There was music playing till 2 a.m. from three campsites. We were there for three nights and saw the Conservation Officer patrolling the area once in the afternoon. Not once did they come around at 11:00 pm to ensure campers were obeying quite time. We were very, very disappointed.

Park Users' Views on the System

Park users were asked to rate their frequency of involvement in a range of activities on a 5-point scale from never to frequently. Figure 23 shows the activities that are 'frequently' participated in. Camping in serviced sites tops the list, followed by swimming, fishing, wildlife viewing and hiking.

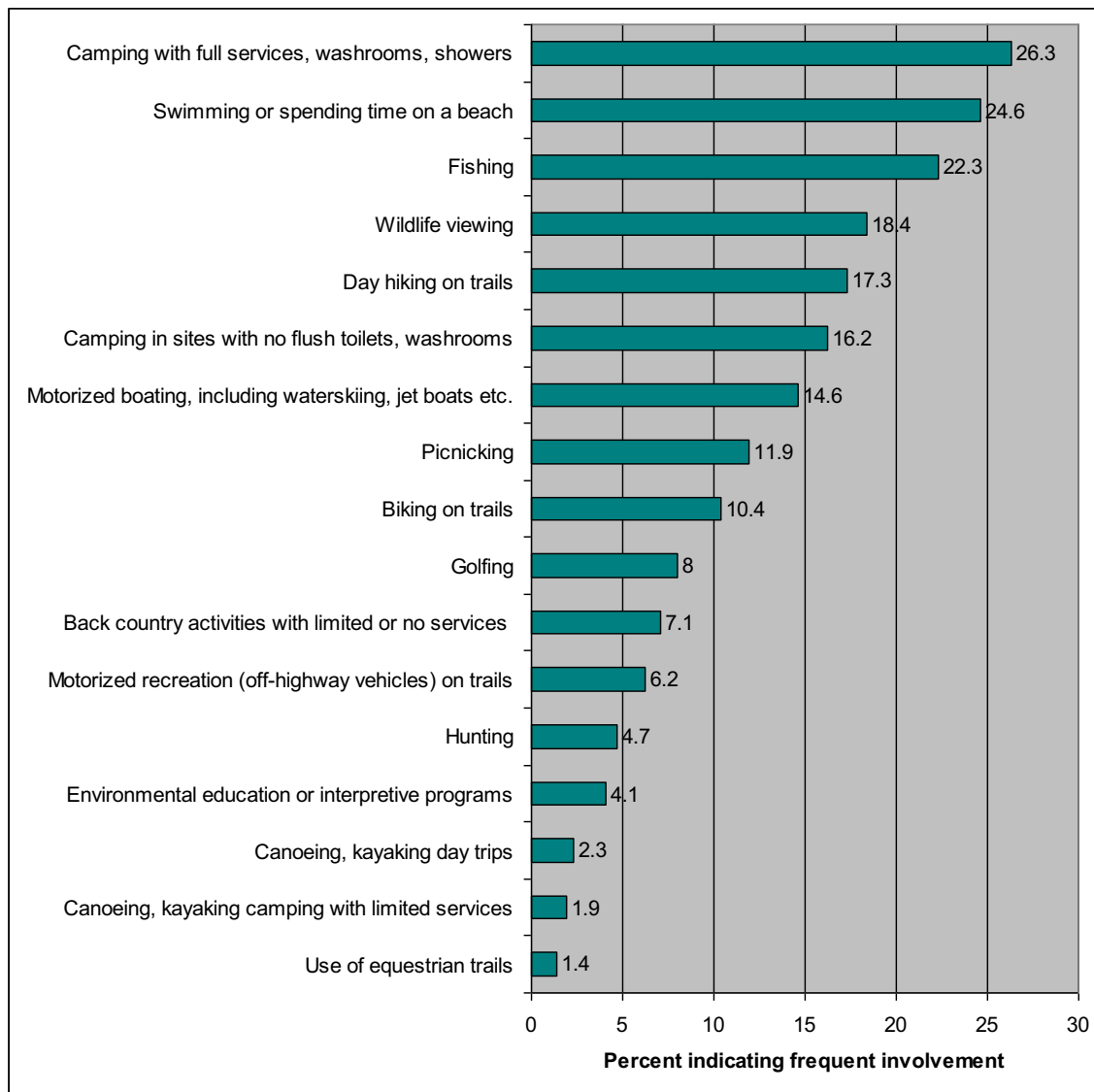


Figure 23 Frequency of Involvement in Park Activities

Survey respondents were then asked to assess the importance of attributes when choosing a provincial park or provincial recreation area. The highest overall mean score was associated with 'relaxation' (mean = 4.76). The results for this question for most attributes are very similar or even exactly the same as the telephone survey presented earlier. Learning new skills, meeting other people, learning about nature and adventure were at the bottom of both lists.

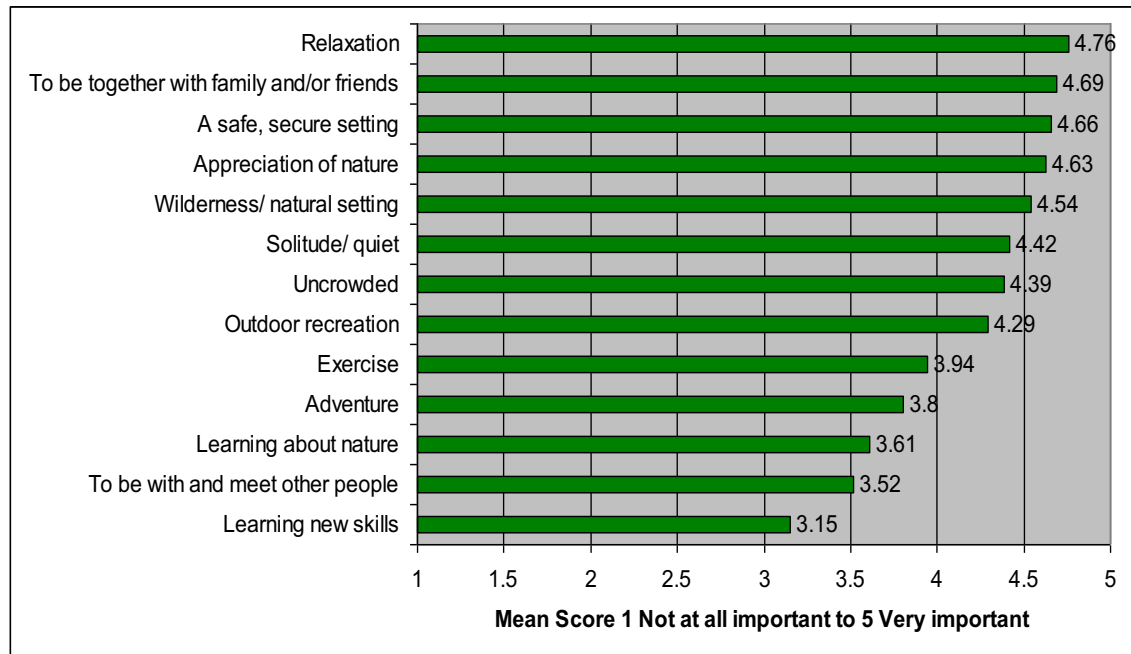


Figure 24 What is Important When Choosing a Park



Activities with the greatest involvement also have the most adequate supply. Activities with low involvement, such as hunting, equestrian trail use and OHV use have the lowest ratings in terms of adequacy of supply.

Table 7. Adequacy of Facilities and Services to Meet Needs

	Adequate	N
Day hiking on trails	80.4	791
Picnicking	78.0	803
Fishing in a provincial park	75.2	637
Camping with full services, washrooms, showers, designated sites	74.4	836
Wildlife viewing	72.3	787
Camping in sites with no flush toilets, washrooms	69.4	789
Biking on trails	69.1	667
Swimming or spending time on a beach	65.5	766
Motorized boating, including waterskiing, jet boats etc.	61.9	438
Back country activities with limited or no services (camping, hiking)	56.7	512
Canoeing, kayaking day trips	50.5	392
Golfing in a provincial park	48.4	440
Environmental education or interpretive programs	47.7	659
Canoeing, kayaking camping trips at sites with limited services	47.0	353
Equestrian trails	35.3	207
Motorized recreation (off-highway vehicles) on trails	33.0	297
Hunting in a provincial park	27.5	226

Change in use of Provincial Parks

Respondents were asked if their use of provincial parks has changed over the past five years. Almost half (49%) indicated their use has increased, while 42% indicated it has stayed the same. Only 8.6% indicated their use has decreased.

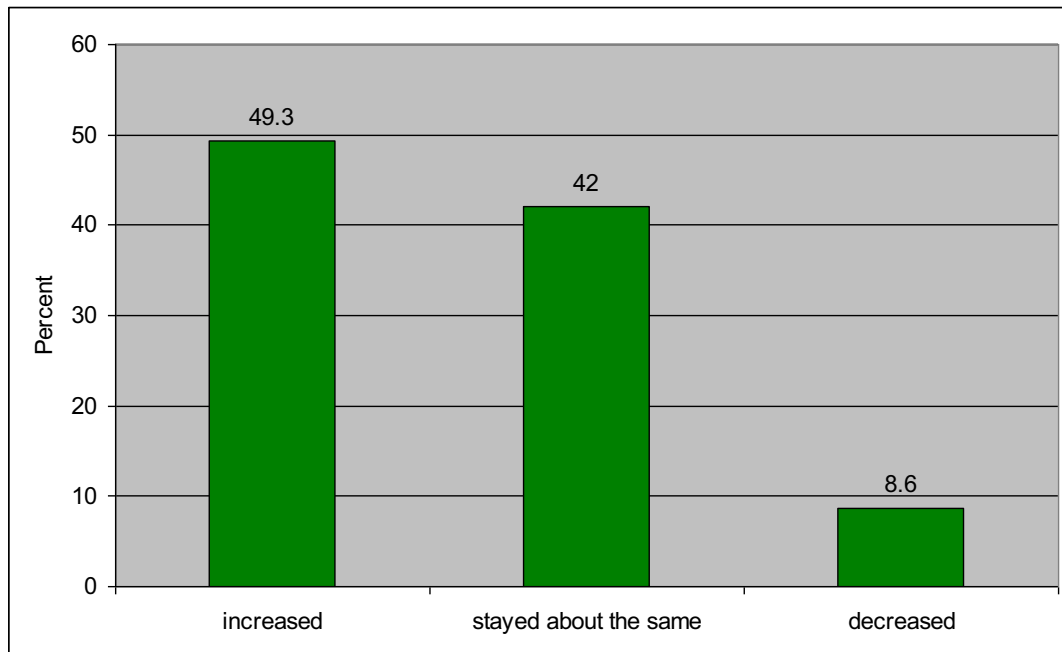


Figure 25 Change in Use of Provincial Parks

Although the percentage change is different from the telephone survey, the reasons for increases in park use are very similar.

Table 8. Reasons for Increased Use of Provincial Parks

	Increased
Change in family circumstance (e.g. children older)	31.6%
Purchased an RV	23.8%
Increased leisure time	13.4%
Getaway, solitude, nature	7.5%
Recreational facilities/activities	4.8%
Affordability of camping	2.9%
Camping facilities have improved	2.7%
Retired	2.4%

The ages of our children and purchase of an RV are the main reasons for the increased use by us.

We became parents in 2002 and increased our use of provincial parks to provide our son with a chance to get out of the city and experience nature.

My children are getting older and more independent, which means that we can take them to places where we can enjoy hiking/biking the trails, fishing, swimming, etc.

I have started taking annual vacations and I love to camp in the wilderness. I like to feel safe from bears, so enjoy camping around others. Your provincial park was a great place to stay and I would visit again.

Stress of our jobs...need to get back to nature for fresh air and a fresh perspective.

The reasons for a decrease in use are similar to the telephone survey results with the exception that the telephone survey did not capture the perspective of parks being too crowded or too difficult to access. Most of the concern around access related to difficulty in being able to reserve a campsite.

Table 9. Reasons for Decreased Use of Provincial Parks

	Decreased
Campgrounds are too crowded/ no access	31.6%
Change in family circumstance (aging, health, mobility)	28.9%
Too expensive, increased cost of travel (gas, fees etc.)	17.1%
Issues with campgrounds (noise, safety, no services)	6.6%
Purchased a recreational property	1.3%

Not being able to reserve a site has had us spending the weekend at home as we have had to turn around and come back home when we got some where and found it FULL!!

Decrease mainly because kids have grown up and moved away.

Work, gas and poverty. Price of living has skyrocketed in Alberta so a lot of people can't afford take time off to enjoy the parks. This survey is likely to be biased towards the wealthy who can afford time to fill it out after having taken a week or two off work.

The campgrounds we like to go to or the areas were often too difficult to get a spot. Limited our distance to drive over the last 5 years.

How Changes to Services and Facilities will Impact Provincial Park Use

Survey participants were asked to rate how certain changes would impact their level of use of provincial parks. Four areas of improvement would have the greatest impact; improving the condition of existing facilities, being able to reserve a campsite, more information about specific parks on the Internet and more power sites.



The one change that would create the most substantial increase would be ability to reserve a campsite. It should be noted that although there is a reservation system in place, many park users feel it is not efficient and is being abused by people who are “booking every weekend” and not showing up. This is likely a reflection of the low cost of the penalty for not showing up.

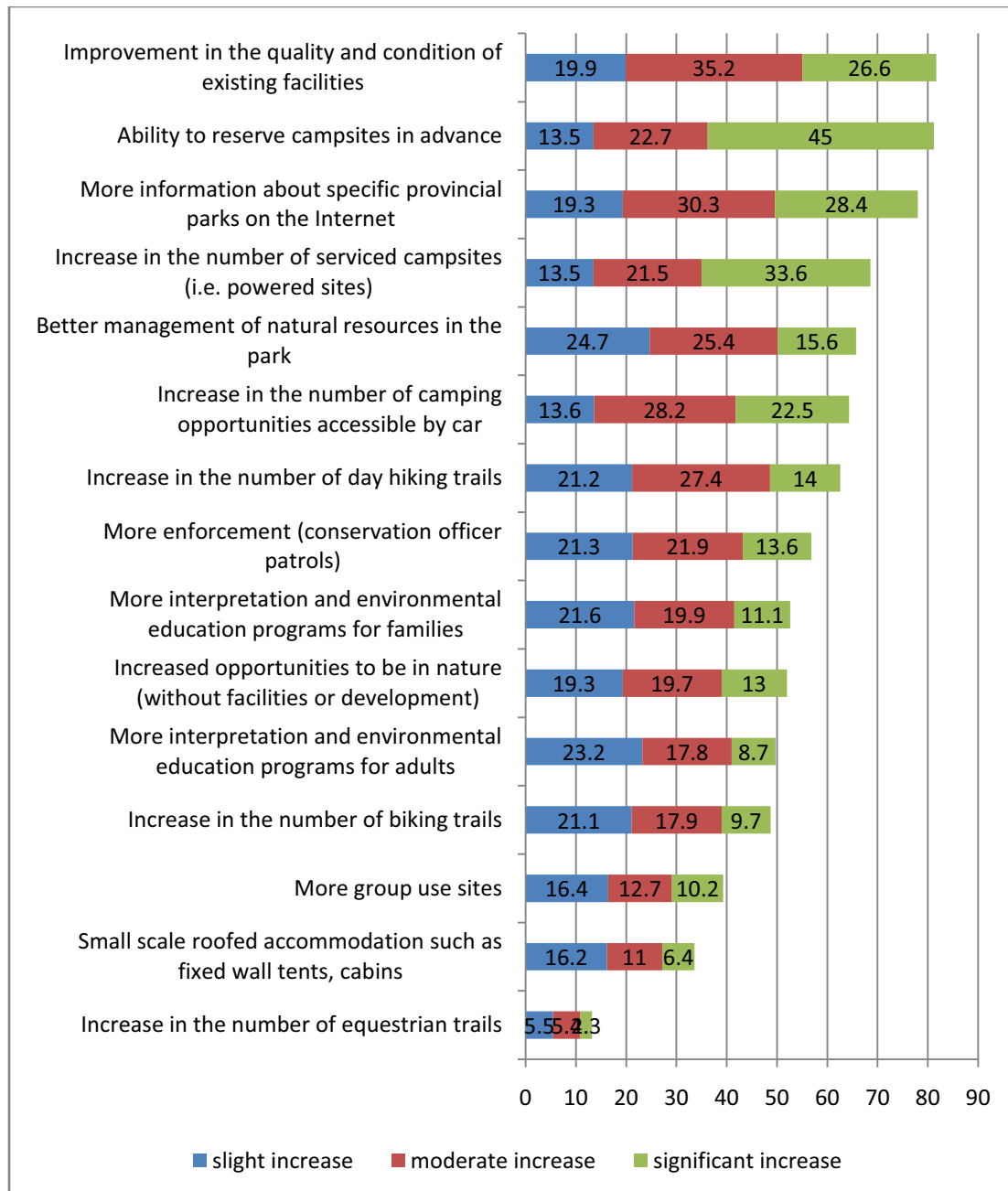


Figure 26 How Changes will Affect Use of Provincial Parks

Investment Priorities

Survey participants were asked to rate the degree of increased or decreased investment in a range of facilities, services and programs. Figure 27 illustrates the investment priorities given by park users.

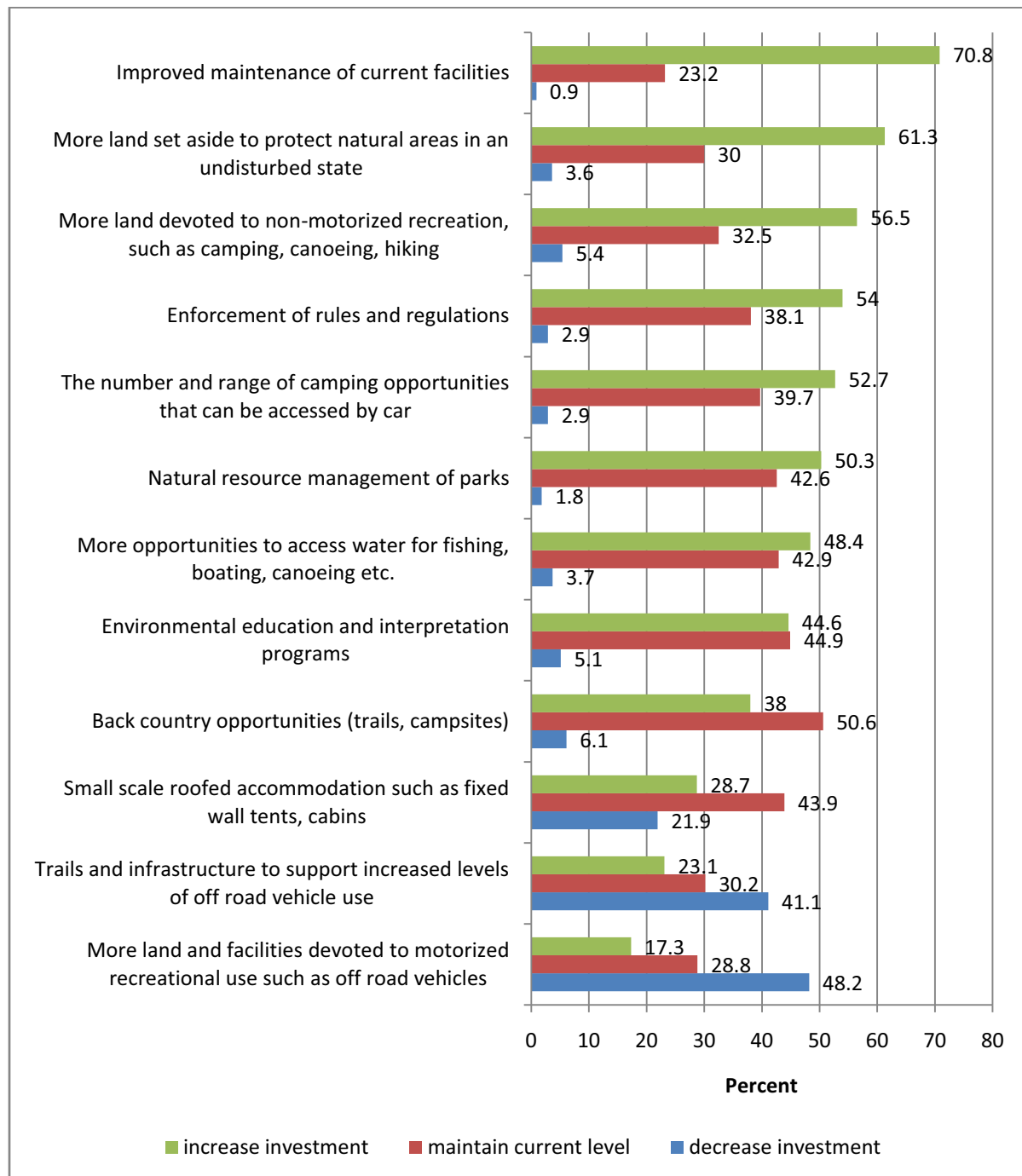


Figure 27 Increased or Decreased Investment in Programs, Facilities and Services

Improved maintenance of current facilities topped the list (71%) followed by setting aside more land in an undisturbed state (61%). These attributes were among the top priorities among telephone survey respondents as well (Figure 9) where they were ranked 4th and 1st respectively.

When asked to choose their number one priority, three areas emerged as the clear top priorities; more camping opportunities accessed by car, land set aside to protect natural resources, and improved maintenance of existing infrastructure.

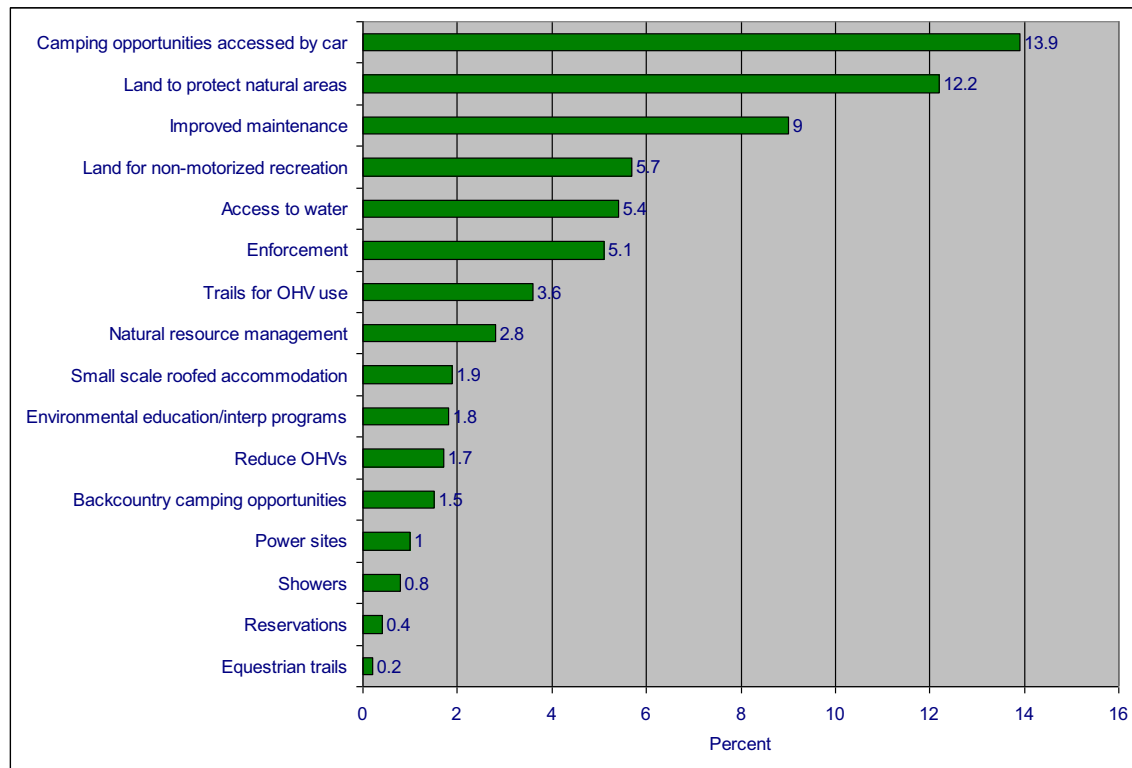


Figure 28 Number One Priority for Future Investment

Consulting with the Public on Changes to Provincial Parks

Survey participants were asked the importance of being consulted on a range of program and policy decisions.

All items were considered important for consultation; however, changes to park boundaries and removal of parks lands had the highest mean score (mean = 4.22).

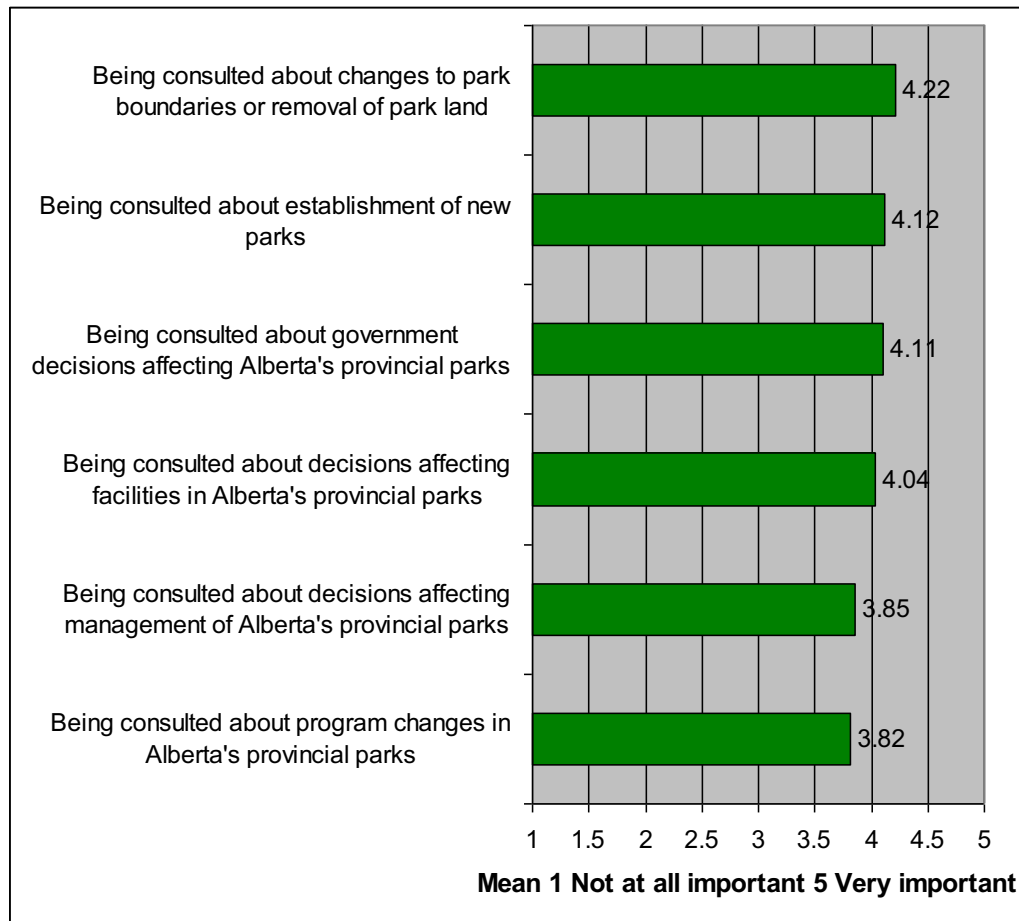


Figure 29 Importance of Consulting on Changes to Provincial Parks

Participants were asked an open-ended question related to the best way to obtain their input on the future of provincial parks. Developing an email list and keeping in contact with park visitors through this list was seen as the best method. Many people provided positive comments about the survey process used in this study and indicated this was a highly desirable means of getting their input.

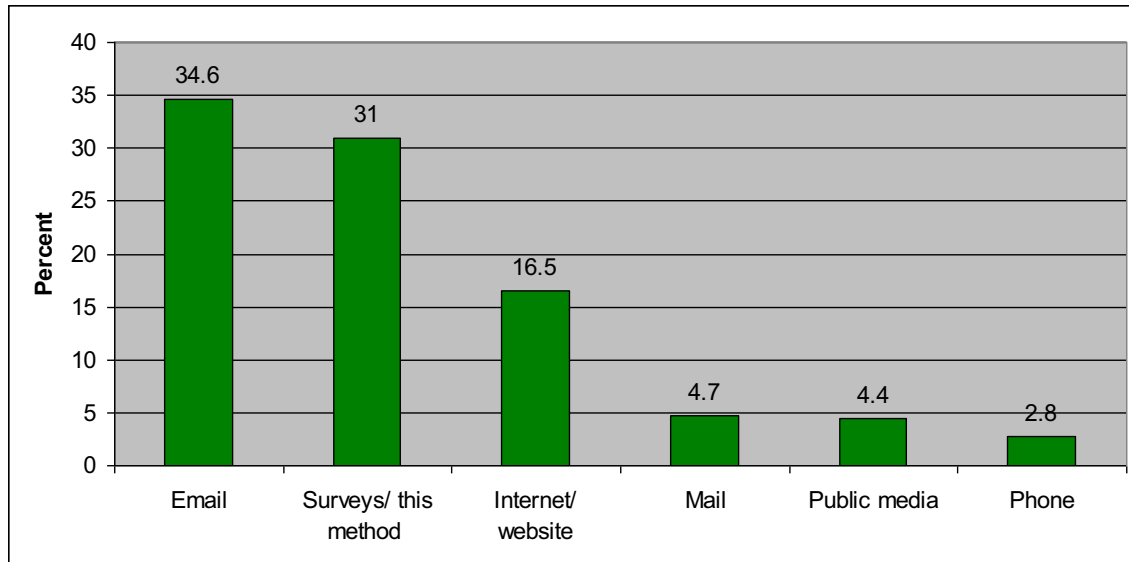


Figure 30 Best Way to Obtain Input About the Future of Parks

I have been camping in these parks for years and this is the first time I have been approached. I think this is a wonderful way to reach people for their opinion.

This survey is an excellent option. Lets me go home and think about stuff, versus asking me when I am camping, as then I don't see the larger picture, just at the moment get mad at a toilet that does not flush.

Build a mailing list (like Parks Canada) and send out materials...or Email notifications so one can log in and see how they want to be involved...changes over time.

Exactly this method, an invitation to input thoughts through an online survey or well publicized public forums or community meetings, both have advantages and disadvantages

I have been in "travel and tourism" for many years and have never seen any chances for input to government decisions. This is a first.



Priorities for Alberta Park's Programs, Facilities and Services

The province-wide random sample telephone survey (telephone survey) and the park user intercept survey (park user survey) asked many similar questions. The two research methods were intended to compliment each other. The telephone survey was able to arrive at perspectives of non-users, and provide a macro-level understanding of park use. It also provides a perspective of all Albertans. The park user survey was intended to gather insights from current users of a much wider range of parks than could be gathered through a telephone sample.

Non-visitors

From the telephone survey it was determined that over 40% of Albertans visit Alberta's provincial parks and provincial recreation areas. Among those who do not visit Alberta's parks, 40% are visiting national parks, private recreation properties or provincial parks in other provinces. A further 30% are simply not interested in parks (do not like the outdoors). Factors related to the lack of opportunity (access, cost, travel distance, crowdedness) accounted for 8% of the reasons given for not using Alberta's parks. This is not to suggest that the Government should lessen its focus on improving access, just that the gains made will be minimal in terms of increased overall use.

Top Priorities for Investment

To arrive at the public's perspective on investment priorities, two types of questions were asked in both the telephone and the park user surveys. First, respondents were asked to rate a list of attributes in terms of the need for decreased investment, maintaining current levels or increasing investment. Then they were asked to identify a single "top priority".

Set Aside Land in an Undisturbed State

Setting aside land in an undisturbed state was ranked first in the telephone survey and second overall in the park user survey in terms of areas for increased investment. When asked to choose only one area as their top investment priority, environmental protection topped the list in the phone survey, and again, setting aside land in an undisturbed state was second in the park user survey.

Maintenance of Parks Facilities

Maintenance of existing facilities was first as an area for increased investment from the park user survey respondents, and was fourth (after increased enforcement and natural resource management) in the telephone survey. When asked to choose only one top area for future investment, maintenance of

existing facilities ranked third in the park user survey and second in the telephone survey. Increasing the number and range of camping opportunities accessible by car ranked first in the park user survey.

While campsites themselves received positive ratings, the recreational opportunities around the campsites and in day use areas were not rated as highly. Picnic tables, trails, beaches and washrooms were the most noted in need of maintenance. While beaches had vastly different ratings between parks, the main issues noted were beaches being overgrown, garbage, bird and dog feces, and scum along the shoreline.

Providing Showers

Providing showers is a high priority for many park users. Even though lack of showers does not appear to have a significant impact on length of stay, they are seen as an important service while camping.

Increased Enforcement

Enforcement is seen as a priority in two areas; enforcement of rules within parks that relate to disturbance of visitors (dogs, noise, speeding etc.) and enforcement of rules related to environmental protection.



More Electric Sites

Providing more electric sites, while a lower priority than the other items mentioned above, is seen as a high priority among those hauling RV's. It is also a priority for those who are disturbed by the use of generators.

A Centralized Reservation System

Many park visitors noted the need for an improved reservation system. The ability to go online and see what is available and book sites was suggested as a means to increase park use. It is also perceived that the current reservation system is being abused by too many visitors in terms of booking more weekends than they plan. Respondents suggested that people are reserving multiple weekends and not showing up because the penalty is not high enough. Campgrounds are posted as full, when over the course of the weekend many sites are left vacant when reserved sites are not occupied. Field teams counted more than 20 vacant sites in three campgrounds that were posted full and turning away visitors. A related issue is that prime camping sites are being given out as reserved sites for weekends, and sit vacant all week because campers arriving during the week without a reservation can only have the reserved site until the weekend.

Improving Awareness of the System

Albertans clearly have their favourite parks that they frequent. The research showed high levels of repeat visitation and the majority of users indicated they visit only one park. Factors contributing to this pattern relate to proximity to home, enjoyment of their



previous visit and lack of familiarity with alternatives. Many of the features being sought by Albertans are available in a wide array of the parks. Encouraging use of multiple parks makes sense from the perspective of distributing demand, but also will enhance the public's appreciation of the system of parks and the variety of ecosystems within which they fall.

One of the top contact methods preferred is email. It was suggested that Alberta parks should develop a contact list that can be used for information about parks and programs. This could be constructed on a voluntary basis as part of the campground check-in, or through media promotion.

Areas not considered a priority

It is also interesting to note the areas where the public feels there should be no investment or less investment.

Land and infrastructure to support OHV use received the lowest level of public support. Providing small scale roofed accommodation and environmental education programs were also not seen as priorities for investment. Equestrian trails were noted as a low investment priority.



Consulting with the Public

The Alberta public are passionate about their parks. With over 40% of the population using the province's parks, and generating millions of visits, the importance of consultation is clear. Visitors really appreciated the opportunity to provide input through the surveys conducted this summer. They also would like to be consulted in the future, especially as it relates to changes to boundaries and new parks. Both surveys showed clear support for consultation. Both surveys also showed a move away from the traditional open-houses, and increased support for using web-based and email-based methods.



Appendix A – Parks Included in Field Research

Park	N	Park	N
Bow Valley	70	Hillard's Bay	11
Cypress Hills	64	Moose Lake	11
Carson_Pegasus	53	Goldeye Lake	11
Little Bow	44	Crescent Falls	10
Gooseberry Lake	42	Allen Bill Pond	9
McLean Creek	41	Musreau Lake	9
Lesser Slave Lake	38	Kinbrook Island	9
Dinosaur	37	North Buck Lake	8
Writing-on-Stone	34	Wyndham Carseland	8
Fish Lake	33	Whitehorse Creek	6
Long Lake	33	St. Mary Reservoir	5
Wabamun Lake	33	Winagami Lake	5
Lakeland	31	William A. Switzer	4
Cold Lake	29	Sulphur Gates	3
Fish Creek	27	Buffalo Lake	2
Saskatoon Island	26	Two O'Clock Creek	2
Canmore Nordic Centre	23	Tolman Badlands	2
Cooking Lake Blackfoot	22	Jarvis Bay	2
Sir Winston Churchill	21	Sherwood Park	1
Aspen Beach	20	Wilmore	1
Dillberry Lake	20	Thompson Creek	1
Pigeon Lake	19	Dry Haven Creek	1
Franchere Bay	18	Pierre Grey's Lake	1
Dunvegan	15	Snow Creek	1
Lundbreck Falls	14	Wakahigaqn River	1
Young's Point	13	Miquelon Lake	1
Moonshine Lake	13	Ghost Reservoir	1
Rochon Sands	13		
Gregoire Lake	11		

N=Number of Respondents

Fifty parks were visited by Praxis employees. Alberta Parks' staff put posters up in several remote locations, resulting in surveys being received in six more parks, for a total of 56.