USDA Forest Service Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Survey Results

Kelly S. Bricker
University of Utah

Patricia L. Winter
USDA FS

Jeremy R. Schultz
University of Utah

Funded by the USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station
Current Study

• Explores Forest Service (FS) managers’ perceptions of sustainable recreation and tourism
• Goal is to inform current and future efforts focused on sustainability
Initial concepts derived from:

- Previous sustainable operations survey results (see Winter, 2008)
- Conversations with key recreation and tourism contacts within USDA FS
- Replication of concepts explored by Cottrell et al. (2007)
Sustainability Defined

• SRT meets the needs of present visitors/tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisioned as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems (UNWTO, 1996).
Methods

• Conducted through online survey
• Gathered names from directories and FS contacts
• 872 surveys sent out, 1 volunteer
• 433 responses, 50.5% response rate
Who Responded?

• **Most:**
  - Were recreation managers (47.8%) or recreation staff officers (28.9%)
  - Worked full-time (97.9%)
  - Were assigned at district (57.0%), or forest-level (33.5%)
  - Had been in current assignment an average of 7.4 years
  - Were well educated
    - Degrees included 59.1% BA, 21.7% MA, and 8.5% Ph.D.
Respondent Distribution by Region

- Region 1: 13%
- Region 2: 12%
- Region 3: 12%
- Region 4: 12%
- Region 5: 14%
- Region 6: 3%
- Region 7: 11%
- Region 8: 11%
- Region 9: 12%
- Region 10: 12%
Overview of Findings

- How important is SRT?
  - Was viewed as important and included professional responsibility
  - Was not always viewed as a FS priority
Results: importance of sustainability

- Personal concern
- Professional responsibility to practice sustainable operations
- Personally important in mgt. area
- Warrants additional investment
- Is a FS priority

Note: Management is abbreviated as mgt.
Overview of Findings

• How did respondents rate considerations important to sustainability?
  - A majority viewed the following considerations as important
  - Environmental impacts and capacity of FS personnel to support SRT were rated ‘very important’ by the vast majority
Results: importance of considerations in sustainability

Capacity of FS personnel to support
- Increased appreciation of surrounding communities
- Improved health for recreating public
- Increased environmental appreciation
- Environmental impacts
- Economic impacts

Very important: Orange
Important: Yellow
Neither: Black
Unimportant: Red
Very unimportant: Pink

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80
Overview of Findings

• Perceived impact of SRT development in respondents’ management area was examined in relation to economic and community/cultural impacts...
  – Most agreed that positive economic impacts were an outcome
  – Local cultures were considered in the provision of information and in opportunities
  – Most agreed that visitors were encouraged to learn about local cultures
Results: Economic aspects of SRT development

- Prices of local products increase because of RT
- RT creates job opportunities for residents in surrounding communities
- RT diversifies the local economy
- RT brings new income to surrounding communities

Note: Recreation/tourism is abbreviated as RT
Results: community and culture aspects of SRT development

- Visitors are encouraged to learn about local cultures
- Local cultures considered in provision of opportunities
- Local cultures are considered in provision of information
- Quality of life improved for surrounding communities
- There are more educational opportunities for locals

![Bar chart showing responses to the above statements, with categories for strongly agree, agree, neither, disagree, and strongly disagree.]
Overview of Findings

- Perceived impact of SRT development in respondents’ management area was examined regarding partnerships and collaboration.
  - Partnerships were a part of RT development, though not typically with local businesses.
  - Concessionaires/outfitters were expected to minimize impacts while maximizing visitor satisfaction.
  - Most agreed opportunities for collaboration with local community were important, fewer agreed that good communication among involved parties existed.
Results: partnership aspects of SRT development

- The FS has a partnership with the ST industry
- Volunteers assist with RT mgt.
- The FS relies upon partnerships to provide RT in my mgt. area
- RT facilities are developed in cooperation with local businesses

![Bar chart showing the level of agreement on partnership aspects of SRT development]

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
The FS should require outfitters/concessionaires to follow established sustainability guidelines for all recreation activities in order to:

- Minimize visitor impact
- Enhance visitor enjoyment

The chart shows the responses to these statements, with options ranging from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree.'
Results: collaborative aspects of SRT development

There is good communication among parties involved in the policy and decision making processes regarding RT.

Community residents should have an opportunity to be involved in RT decision making.
Overview of Findings

• Among additional aspects of SRT were the following:
  - FS operations were viewed as part of the SRT industry
  - Most agreed that visitor satisfaction should be monitored
  - The vast majority felt FS resources were not adequate to cover the demand for recreation and tourism
  - RT was not believed to be associated with a decrease in criminal activity
Results: remaining aspects of SRT development

- Criminal activities have decreased due to RT in and near the forest
- FS resources are adequate to cover demand for recreation and tourism
- FS operations are part of the sustainable tourism industry
- We should monitor visitor satisfaction

Bar chart showing responses with categories: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither, Disagree, Strongly disagree.
Overview of Findings

• Additional items with majority agreement surrounding RT and the FS were:
  – FS lands increase the value of the tourist experience (94.3% agreed)
  – FS lands increase quality of life for surrounding residents (89.8%)
  – The quality of the available supply of RT services in my mgt. area is good (60.1% agreed)
Overview of Findings

- The majority of respondents agreed:
  - RT should strengthen environmental conservation efforts
  - RT increases the public’s awareness for environmental protection
  - However, RT puts increased demand on water and energy resources and may be associated with environmental pollution
Results: environmental aspects of RT

- RT on FS lands causes environmental pollution
- RT increases demands on energy and water resources
- RT improves awareness of environmental protection
- RT should strengthen efforts for env. conservation

![Bar chart showing responses to environmental aspects of RT questions.](chart.png)

Legend:
- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**
Overview of Findings

• Additional items with majority agreement and an environmentally-oriented theme were:
  – RT on FS lands must be developed in harmony with natural env. (93.2% agreed)
  – The FS should provide env. interpretive/educational programs to visitors (90.4% agreed)
  – The FS should provide env. interpretive/educational programs to employees (84.3% agreed)
  – The FS supports environmental conservation (85.6% agreed)
Sources of Concern about Environmental Problems

• Respondents were most concerned about environmental problems because of the consequences for future generations and children.

• They were least concerned about these same problems because of consequences for their lifestyle, their future, and their prosperity.
Issues Facing Mgt. Area of Most Concern

- An array of concerns were expressed...the most common themes were
  - Lack of resources (funding and personnel)
  - Unmanaged use
  - Increased use
  - Agency relationship with the public
Most expressed somewhat to a great deal of concern about climate change and FS lands.
Impacts from Climate Change that will affect RT on Mgt. Area

- Some of our respondents felt climate change was not occurring
- Others felt if it was occurring it would not make a difference in recreation
- Some expressed concern over increases in wildfire risk and changes in vegetation
- Others suggested a shift in where recreation would take place
  - Geographic-based variations were evident
  - Decreased recreation was not always anticipated, sometimes more recreation was expected
Most agreed the FS should take each of the above actions. Only 8% felt the agency should do nothing.
Overview of Findings

- Other FS actions respondents offered to address global climate change included...
  - Invest in educational programs and delivery
  - Design FS buildings around sustainability guidelines
  - More science to examine impacts and how to manage
  - Encourage non-motorized recreation
  - Lead by example, show the public how it’s done
Overview of Findings

• The following slides show degree of consideration given to actions that would ensure SRT in the future on FS lands
  – Most respondents are recycling
  – Fleet-related measures are in place to some degree, with more being implemented
  – Visitor education programs focus on environmental issues
  – Some partnering with local community and business is used to develop RT
  – Less than one-fifth have transportation mgt. in high use areas involving shuttles or buses
Results: Actions to Ensure SRT in the Future on FS Managed Lands

- Have not considered this
- Have considered but not implemented
- We are in the process of implementation
- In place to some degree
- Routinely practiced

- Recycling at headquarters
- Recycling in field
- Use of green products
Results: Actions to Ensure SRT in the Future on FS Managed Lands

- Include hybrid vehicles in fleet
- Reduce number of vehicles in FS fleet
- Use reservation/sharing system

- Have not considered this
- Have considered but not implemented
- We are in the process of implementation
- In place to some degree
- Routinely practiced
Results: Actions to Ensure SRT in the Future on FS Managed Lands

Transportation mgt. with bus or shuttle in high use areas
- Have not considered this
- Have considered but not implemented
- We are in the process of implementation
- In place to some degree
- Routinely practiced

Educ and interp focused on informing visitors about env. Important issues

Partner with local community to develop RT opportunities

Partner with business to identify & develop RT opportunities
Additional Measures to Ensure SRT on FS Lands

- “The quality of sustainable recreation/tourism on FS lands will continue to spiral downward with the agency until there is appropriate staffing and budget support for the task at hand.”

- “FS needs to become more proactive in the field of educating the public about natural resources and their role in enjoying them, using them wisely and protecting them.”
Where do We Go from Here?

Additional work is being planned...if you are interested in these future studies or additional details from this manager study contact us.