

Promoting Diversity on Federal Lands

June 2012



*Paul S. Sarbanes
Transit In Parks*

Technical Assistance Center

UNDERSTANDING

RESOURCES

SOLUTIONS

*This document was prepared for the Federal Transit Administration
by the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Technical Assistance Center*

DISCLAIMER

This document is disseminated under the sponsorship of the U.S. Department of Transportation in the interest of information exchange. The United States Government assumes no liability for its contents or use thereof. The United States Government does not endorse products of manufacturers. Trade or manufacturers' names appear herein solely because they are considered essential to the objective of this report.

AUTHOR

This document was co-authored by Natalie Villwock-Witte and Dana May of the Western Transportation Institute (WTI) at Montana State University Bozeman, the lead organization of the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Technical Assistance Center (TRIPTAC).

INTRODUCTION

Federal land managers are concerned with ensuring that future generations of Americans value national parks and federal lands. Transportation has been identified as a barrier for minorities and people of lower socio-economic levels. This underserved population may lack access to private vehicles in which to travel to national parks and federal lands. Some federal lands now offer alternative transportation systems, such as shuttle buses, which are accessible once inside the public land unit. Linking larger urban areas to the public land units or gateway communities via some form of public transportation is critical. In order for future generations to develop an appreciation for these national treasures, they must first be able to access them in order to experience all that they have to offer.

FEDERAL LANDS AND UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

The federal lands of the United States are not only a place of recreation, but are also outdoor classrooms for all visitors. Education programs provided by federal lands serve schools, adults, and children of all ages. Public lands can be found in every state and are usually accessible within 2 hours from some of the greatest metropolitan areas. Public lands are open to everyone and provide a wide array of experiences and adventures for people of all abilities (1).

While public lands host millions of visitors each year, there is a segment of the population that is under represented in this figure. Minorities and people of low socio-economic status often lack the resources to travel to our nation's public lands. A 2005 study commissioned by Mt. Baker - Snoqualmie National Forest found that access to transportation is a significant barrier for this underserved population. Minorities have indicated that if convenient transportation were available, they would visit parks more frequently (2). Public transportation to national forests is not simple - a lot of time and many transfers are required. In addition, buses that run adjacent to sites run infrequently, have restricted weekend availability, are poorly timed, and have unaccommodating schedules (3).

Federal land managers are concerned with ensuring that future generations of Americans continue to find public lands relevant. In order to foster that appreciation, potential underserved visitors must be physically connected to the land via some type of transportation. Special efforts should be made to ensure equal access to outdoor recreation. Outdoor recreation managers could include provisions for public transportation and market recreation programs more directly to minority subcultural groups (4).

TRANSPORTING UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS TO FEDERAL LANDS

The lack of transportation has been identified by multiple federal land units as a barrier for interpretive and outreach programs. Boston National Historic Park, Curecanti National Recreation Area, Rocky Mountain National park, and John Muir National Historic Site have all indicated the need for resources to resolve transportation issues, specifically when it came to school groups (5).

Where access is a concern for some populations, many lands have partnered with environmental groups, school districts, community-based organizations, and local governments to provide transportation assistance for those who cannot reach parks on their own (6). The following four initiatives have found innovative ways to connect underserved populations to federal lands.

MARCH FOR PARKS

March for Parks was originally established as a nation-wide initiative in 2001 between the National Park Service and National Park Conservation Association to connect a more diverse group of America's population to National Park Service units (FREE March for Parks Event Invites Community Residents to Explore Hidden Treasures of Everglades National Park, 2009). It



Park Ranger provides March for Parks participants with park information. (Photo source: Audrey Peterman, Earthwise Productions, Inc.)

was planned as a one-time event, however, it has continued in southern Florida, due in large part to the efforts of the South Florida Community Partners. The overarching goal of the event is to “expose diverse communities to their national parks in an effort to ensure national parks remain relevant to the next generation of Americans (March for Parks 2012: Connecting Americans to their National Parks, 2012).” The effort has attracted anywhere from 200 to 600 participants each year. Participants are picked up from identified locations and taken to one of three National Parks in southern Florida: Dry Tortugas, Biscayne, and Everglades. Transportation to and from the parks and lunch is provided free-of-charge. Although no formal studies have been conducted to determine if participants return on their own each year, park rangers have observed that a more diverse population of visitors is present.

TAKE ME TO THE RIVER

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) protects a 72-mile corridor along the Mississippi River from the cities of Dayton and Ramsey, Minnesota to just downstream of Hastings, Minnesota, including a stretch of river flowing through Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. This stretch of the upper Mississippi River includes natural, historical, recreational, cultural, scenic, scientific, and economic resources of national significance. In 2011 MNRRA initiated "Take Me to the River (Blitzer, 2012)." The program works with community centers and schools, teaching participants how to use available public transportation to travel to the park and providing activities once they arrive.

Grants from the National Park Foundation and Youth Outdoor Nation have helped pay for the transportation costs. While at the park, participants can fish or help with habitat restoration.



MNRRA Park Ranger rides public transportation with a "Take Me to the River" participant. (Photo source: National Park Service)



"Take Me to the River" participants prepare for fishing activity. (Photo source: National Park Service)

A local bike share program, NiceRide, provides free transportation via bicycles to show participants how the system works. The goal is that once participants and their families become educated on the availability of public transportation and recreation options, they will return to the park on a regular basis.

TIMUCUAN ECOLOGICAL & HISTORIC PRESERVE

Timucuan Ecological & Historic Preserve is a beautiful expanse of salt marshes, cultural sites, and wildlife in Jacksonville, Florida. The preserve targeted youths from a nearby subsidized housing community and worked with the development to provide transportation to the preserve for activities (Grauer, Hsu, Duncan, & Debenham, 2011).



Timucuan Ecological & Historical Preserve visitors wear masks made at the Kids' Corner during the Kingsley Heritage Celebration. (Photo source: National Park Service)

MUIR WOODS NATIONAL MONUMENT

Muir Woods National Monument in Mill Valley, California publishes “Car-less Ways to Visit Muir Woods,” an easy to read brochure illustrating ways for Bay Area residents to access not only Muir Woods, but other nearby park sites either by bus, bike, or hike (Car-less Ways to Muir Woods, 2012). During summer weekends and holidays, the Muir Woods shuttle picks up at three spots near the Golden Gate Bridge and takes visitors directly to the park. The brochure also provides hiking suggestions that will accommodate shuttle schedule with regards to distance and departure times.



From Car-less Ways to Muir Woods: Do your part to protect our nation's resources by visiting Muir Woods without a car. (Photo source: National Park Service)

CONCLUSION

While efforts have been made at sites across the country to transport and engage youth and school groups in visits and activities to federal lands, the efforts cannot bring about sustainable change unless adequate and consistent public transportation is made available to minorities and those of low income. The examples shown above illustrate the need for more than just single day events sponsored throughout the year. Linking urban areas to gateway communities where visitors may access a federal land sponsored alternative transportation system is necessary in order to continue engaging the underserved populations in federal lands.



WORKS CITED

- FREE March for Parks Event Invites Community Residents to Explore Hidden Treasures of Everglades National Park.* (2009). Retrieved March 22, 2012, from National Park Conservation Association:
http://www.npca.org/news/media-center/press-release/regions/march_for_parks_032709.html
- Car-less Ways to Muir Woods. (2012).
- March for Parks 2012: Connecting Americans to their National Parks. (2012). *National Park Conservation Association.*
- Blitzer, M. (2012, April 18). Park Ranger for the National Park Service, Mississippi national River and Recreation Area.
- Frescas, R., Martin, C., Steenken, C., & Koletty, D. (2004). *Public Transportation to Local National Forests.* Center for Law in the Public Interest.
- Grauer, A., Hsu, M., Duncan, S., & Debenham, P. (2011). *Park Prescriptions.* Sausalito: Institute at the Golden Gate - Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.
- Manning, R. E. (1999). *Studies in Outdoor Recreation.* Oregon State University Press.
- Maurer, S., & Dornan, E. (2007). *Geography of Freedom.* Public Lands Interpretive Association.
- Rodriguez, D. A., & Roberts, N. S. (n.d.). *The Association of Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Social Class in Outdoor Recreation Experiences.* Fort Collins: The National Park Service Social Science Program, Colorado State University.
- Scott, D. a. (1994). Perceived constraints to park usage among individuals with low incomes. *Journal of Park and REcreation Administration*, 12, 79-96.
- Taylor, P. A., Grandjean, B. D., & Gramann, J. H. (2011). *National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public - Racial and Ethnic Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors.* Fort Collins, Colorado: National Park Service.

