

# Education and Interpretation

Education and interpretation are essential to the achievement of the California State Parks mission. Interpretive and educational experiences add intrinsic value to the visitors' experience in our parks. Simultaneously, the public gains knowledge, appreciation for and insight into California's natural and cultural heritage, thereby leading to an understanding of the need to preserve the resources found both inside and outside of state parks.

## Current Status

### ■ Visitor Perception

The Department's visitor survey helps give insight into the effectiveness of educational and interpretive programs. The survey measures the visitors' perception of opportunities offered for learning, and the quality of experience both as a whole and broken into specific program types. The Department now has over 50,000 surveys in a database, and uses the data to evaluate where we are doing well, and the need for improvement at multiple levels of the organization.

### ■ Participant Hours in Education/Interpretation Programs

Part of the Department's mission is to provide educational or interpretive programs for visitors to state parks. Skilled interpretive staff and volunteers offer many hours of valuable interaction with the public. With a growing and increasingly diverse population of Californians, it is important to educate as many visitors as possible about California State Parks' values of preserving and protecting the natural and cultural heritage of California. The Department divides measurement into three major categories of programs: presented programs led by a guide or interpreter; non-presented self-guided or electronically led programs; and school groups for children in grades Kindergarten through Twelfth (K-12.)

### ■ Congruity with Educational Curricula

California State Parks provides an important piece of the educational program of students in the K-12 grade levels. Qualified staff and volunteers spend considerable time and effort preparing and delivering high quality programs for school groups to enhance their understanding of the



*Ranger and visitors at McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park*

## Measurement Rationale

The measures established for this outcome assess the degree to which the Department educates the public of the significance and value of the state's natural and cultural resources. Success in education and interpretation involves:

- Visitor perception
- Participant hours in education/interpretation programs
- Congruity with educational curricula
- Quality of programs based on professional standards



*Exhibit at Fort Ross State Historic Park*

rich cultural and natural resources of California. California State Parks develops teacher's guides, special tours, living history programs and demonstrations, and a variety of other in-park and off-site programs that contribute unique hands-on experiences for our state's school-age children.

As part of the commitment to provide high quality learning experiences, the Department aligns its school group programs with adopted curricula and content standards. This past year, a system was instituted that requires all staff who work with school groups to undergo training on how to best accomplish this alignment. A training CD was developed and distributed for this purpose. Each year, the Department conducts a statewide standardized survey of teachers bringing school groups to state parks. Survey results from the past five years show consistently high marks, and have proven to be of great value in identifying challenges and focusing improvement efforts. The survey helps park staff match park activities to the actual school curriculum, enabling the children to learn about historical events and natural features in their actual locations.

**Quality of Programs Based on Professional Standards**

A system of evaluating interpretive and educational programming called RAPPOR was developed to address quality of programs. RAPPOR is an acronym representing seven essential elements of successful interpretive programs identified by program experts.



*Equestrian program at Borderfield State Park*

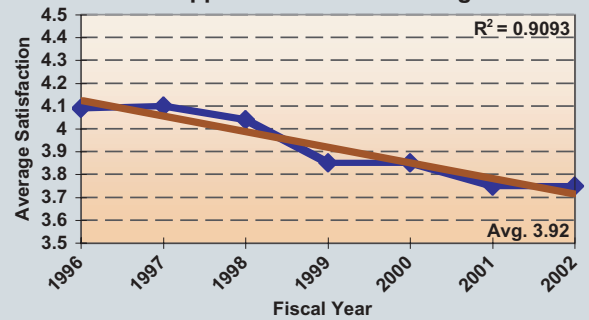


*Environmental Living Program at Sutter's Fort State Historic Park*

**Data**

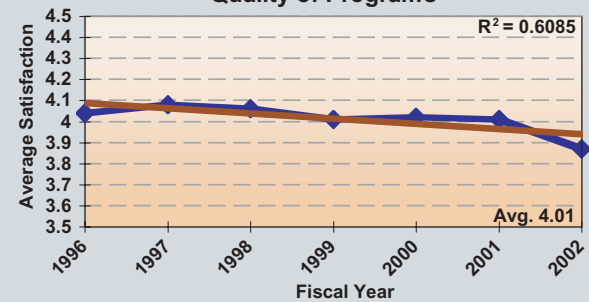
**Visitor Perception**

**Opportunities for Learning**



*Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the opportunities offered to learn about the natural and cultural resources found in the parks they visited. Seven years of data show a decrease in satisfaction.*

**Quality of Programs**



*Respondents rate quality of programs fairly high, with satisfaction dropping slightly over the past seven years.*



Environmental Living Program at Sutter's Fort State Historic Park

## Measures

Programs should be **Relevant, Accurate, Provocative/Enjoyable, Program-Accessible, Organized, Retained, and Thematic.** Currently, the Department evaluates the quality of our interpretive efforts using this system with three different survey forms intended for use by visitors, by supervisors or lead personnel, and by employees for self evaluation.

### ■ Visitor Perception

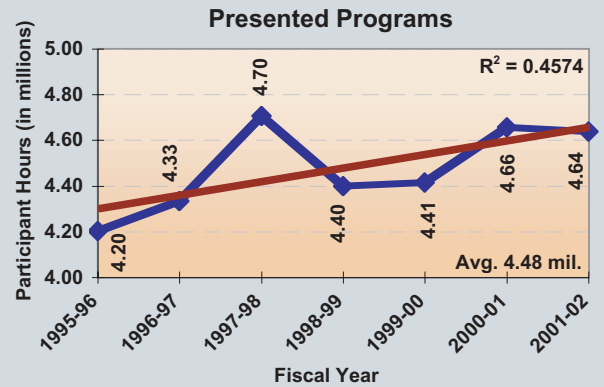
Data from the ongoing visitor survey, clearly shows a trend of decreased satisfaction with the opportunities offered for learning. While satisfaction levels decline in this category, visitors' perception of the quality of the programs remains higher, with only a recent dip in satisfaction levels.

In Fiscal Year 1999, the Department cut its fees in half, facilitating a significant increase in visitor attendance, beyond the Department's expectations. With insufficient staff, programs were not adjusted to handle more presented or self-guided nature hikes, electronically narrated tours, etc.

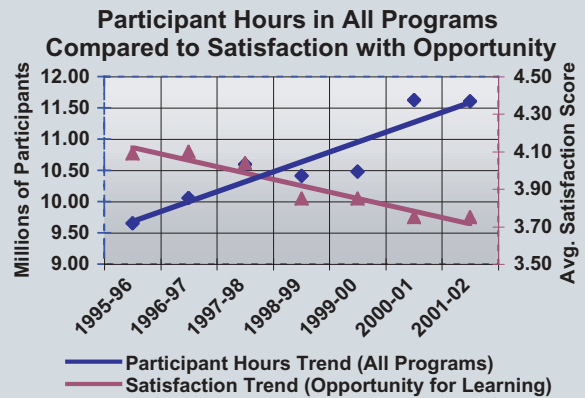
### ■ Participant Hours in Education/Interpretation Programs

The number of hours that visitors participate in educational and interpretive programs continues to be a leading indicator of success for interpretation. Presented programs are staff or volunteer led programs such as

## Participant Hours



Participation in presented educational and interpretive programs shows a steady increase overall.



Participation in all programs is increasing significantly, but satisfaction with opportunities for educational experiences is decreasing at a similar rate.



Living history at Columbia State Historic Park





*Environmental Living Program at Sutter's Fort State Historic Park*

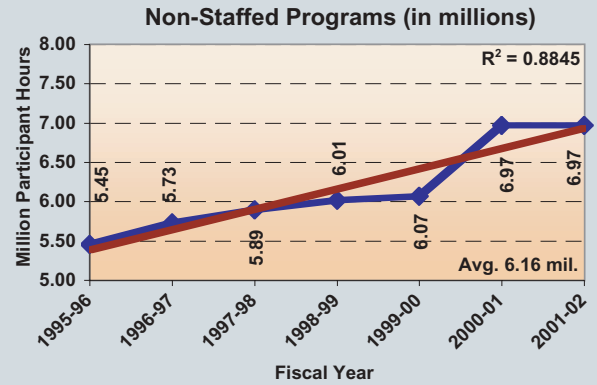
guided tours, campfire programs, environmental living programs and other staffed activities.

Self-guided programs include activities like museum visits, self-guided nature hikes, electronically narrated tours, etc. Programs for K-12 school groups are specifically designed to enhance the school curricula, and include special tours, environmental living programs, and other hands-on learning experiences.

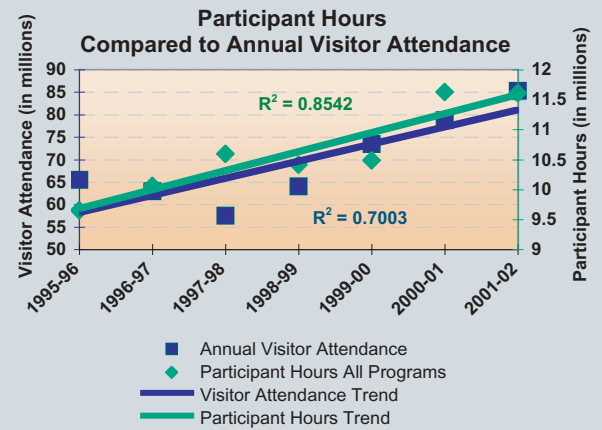
“Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation in California,” a statistical report which contains the results of a survey sample of all Californians, rates visiting museums and historic sites among the top five recreational activities with high unmet demand in the state. Data from the participant hours database and the visitor survey reflect this same pattern. Steadily increasing hours of participation in existing staffed and non-staffed programs, contrasts with steadily declining satisfaction with opportunities for learning. This clearly indicates that visitors to California State Parks want more programs than are currently being offered. The chart on the previous page depicts the opposing relationships of these two pieces of data.

Participation in K-12 educational programs is variable, but without any significant trend. The Department hosts over 15,000 school groups with an average annual participation of approximately 900,000 hours. Students visit state parks on day field trips and on overnight environmental living programs. Programs involve hands-on experiences and interaction with trained staff and volunteers.

### Participant Hours (cont.)



The chart above shows that participation in non-staffed programs is increasing at significantly high rates. Note that 2001-02 participation is almost 1.5 million higher than in 1995-96.



This chart shows the correlation between rising attendance and rising participation in combined presented and non-presented programs. Looking closely, the trend in participation slightly exceeds that of increase in general attendance.



*Interpretive panel used at many parks*



Tree planting at Sunset State Beach

### ■ Congruity with Educational Curricula

Because of this strong link to education, the Department seeks to align its educational experiences with California school curricula to facilitate a complete learning experience. A standardized teacher's survey assesses congruity with the standard California school curriculum.

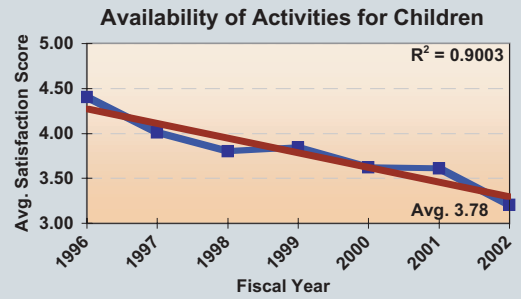
Five years of data reflect consistently high ratings and an increasing trendline, but with a degree of variation in the data. The Department is working on increasing the return rates of its teacher surveys and using more consistent methods for applying the surveys to increase the reliability of the data for projections.

Respondents noted the greatest opportunity for improvement is in pre-trip information, while satisfaction with program content remained high.



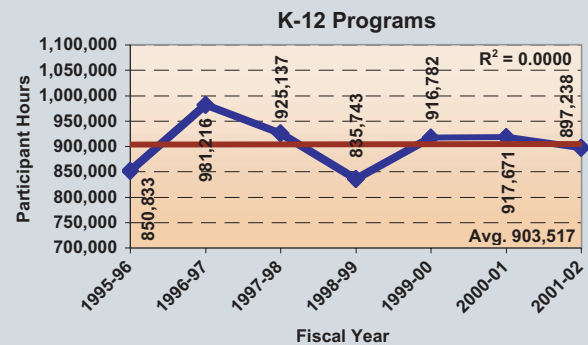
Candlemaking at Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park

## Visitor Perception



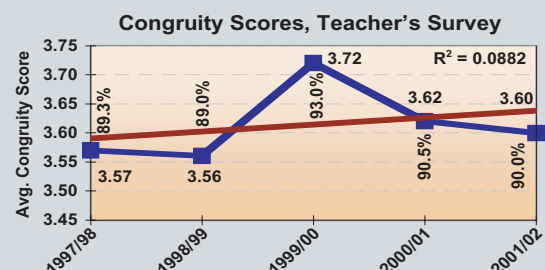
Satisfaction scores for availability of activities for children follow the same downward trend as for availability of all programs. A correlation can be made with increasing attendance without a complementary increase in staffing.

## Participant Hours



Participation in K-12 programs is not increasing at the high rates of regular programs. This could be due in part to continuously filled capacity during the peak school-year periods in popular park units. Participation in these programs is comprised mostly of school groups, not affected by the increase in general visitation to state parks.

## Congruity with Education



Congruity scores show increasing satisfaction, but with variation from year to year in the responses.

# Visitor Comments on Interpretation and Education

From the California State Parks Visitor Survey 2000-2002

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"Doc" gave us an unbelievable informative tour and took us even closer to the seals. An experience of a lifetime!"

Año Nuevo State Reserve, Summer 2001

"We come to Butano every Memorial Day weekend for the Jr. Ranger Program and Ranger led hikes. There were none! I can't believe it was so understaffed—not OK for State Park!"

Butano State Park, Spring 2001

"This park is a prime spot the quality of rangers and their personalities and assistance is the very best and as far as educational programs their assistance and willingness to give information is an education in itself. Thanks to you we shall return."

Half Moon Bay State Beach, Spring 2000

"Kids program was great. Litter picker up program was great for the kids too."

Calaveras Big Trees State Park, Summer 2000

"I would like to see much more information in displays and retail books on animals and plant life in Diablo. Maybe a flip chart with photos and descriptions of trees, flowers and animals seen on Mt. Diablo, in the museum."

Mount Diablo State Park, Summer 2000

"Your descriptions through written word and objects made impact for remembering what we saw. I/we especially liked the push button quiz that reviewed info and required response. I learn best when required to recall info I've read."

Indian Grinding Rock State Historic Park, Summer 2000

"Great for families! We can pass on a sense of respect and pride in environmental and ecological concerns to the future generations."

Caswell Memorial State Park, Summer 2001

"Existing information good—need more, to educate and enjoy what the park has to offer."

Mount Diablo State Park, Winter 2000

"Path of the Padres offers newcomers to the lake a chance to learn the history of the area and also a chance to learn reasons to respect the land."

San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area, Fall 2002

"I think the observatory programs are great. They even had someone to tell us about it. I have written a poem called Valley View that will be published this fall about Fremont Peak in 'Echoes of Nature.'"

Fremont Peak State Park, Summer 2000

"The teachers resource binder and class are well developed and useful. Fantastic. Your work is helping preserve important info by giving it importance and sharing the significance with others."

Monterey State Historic Park, Winter 2001

"Very pleased with your museum, presentation, period research video. Staff was excellent, docent staff well trained. Margaret kept info and presentation fresh and relevant. Excellent marks from a former museum director and staff member of Cal State."

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park, Winter 2000

"We had a fabulous campfire program given by park interpreter David on Animals of Big Sur and an excellent campfire program on snakes by Ranger Dan. They were both very open to questions and very well informed."

Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, Summer 2000

"Good for information on all aspects of sea and land fish and mammals."

Garrapata State Park, Winter 2001