

# 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 RAPPORT was developed to address quality of programs. RAPPORT is an acronym representing seven essential elements of successful interpretive programs identified by program experts.



Equestrian program at Borderfield State Park

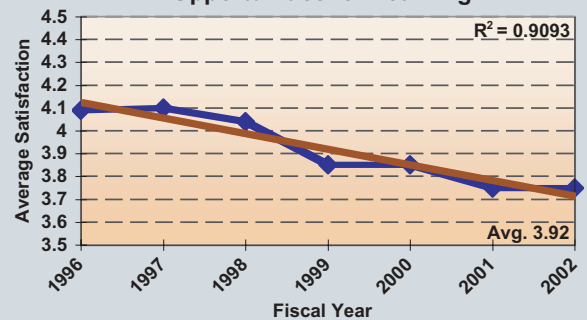


Environmental Living Program at Sutter's Fort State Historic Park

## Data

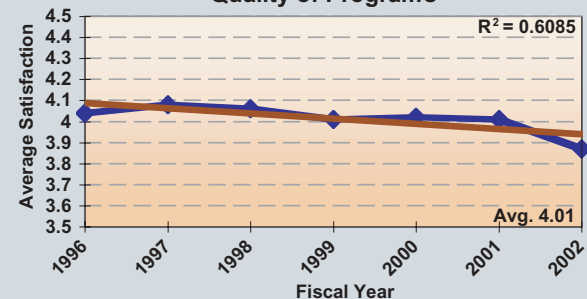
### Visitor Perception

#### 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

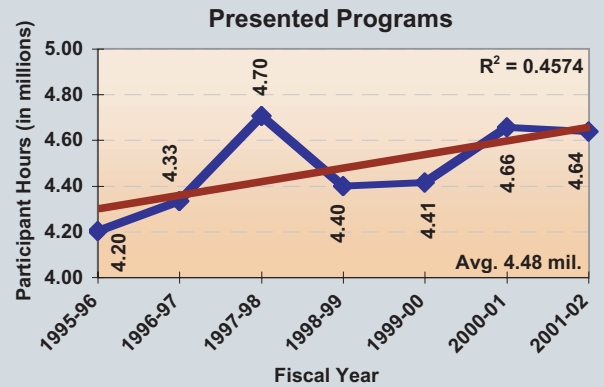
Data from the ongoing visitor survey, clearly shows a trend of decreased satisfaction with the opportunities offered for learning. While satisfaction levels decline in this category, visitors' perception of the quality of the programs remains higher, with only a recent dip in satisfaction levels.

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.

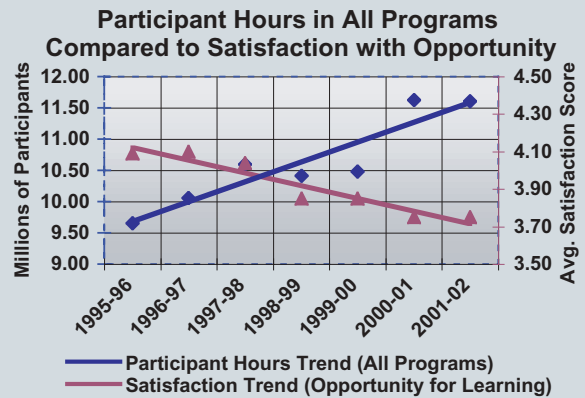
### ■ Participant Hours in Education/Interpretation Programs

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*

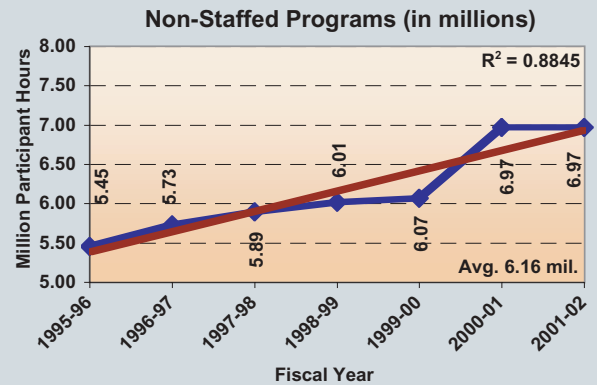
guided tours, campfire programs, environmental living programs and other staffed activities.

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.

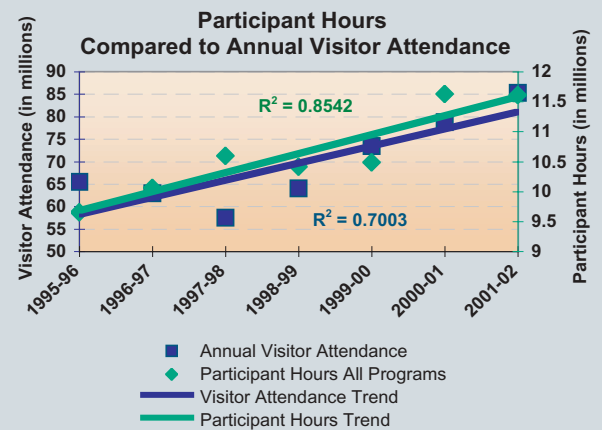
“Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation in California,” a statistical report which contains the results of a survey sample of all Californians, rates visiting museums and historic sites among the top five recreational activities with high unmet demand in the state. Data from the participant 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.

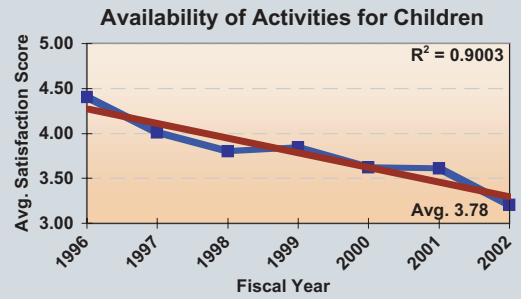
Five years of data reflect consistently high ratings and an increasing trendline, but with a degree of variation in the data. The Department is working on increasing the return rates of its teacher surveys and using more consistent methods for applying the surveys to increase the reliability of the data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

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



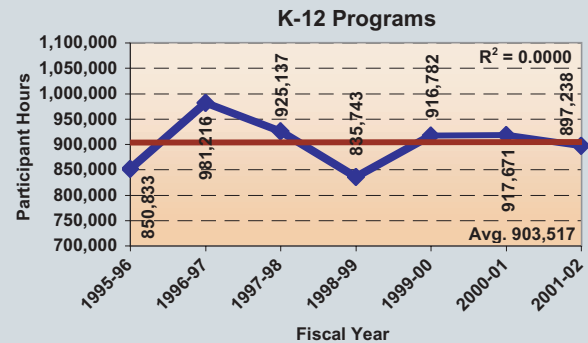
Candlemaking at Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park

## Visitor Perception



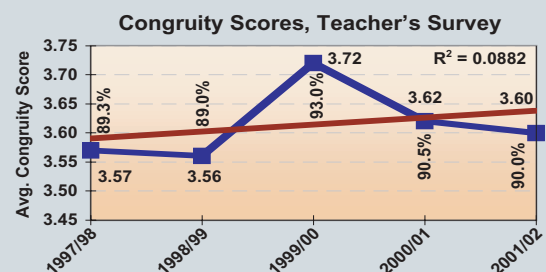
Satisfaction scores for availability of activities for children follow the same downward trend as for availability of all programs. A correlation can be made with increasing attendance without a complementary increase in staffing.

## 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

# Public Safety

More than 85 million people visit California State Parks each year. The Department employs over 800 peace officers to safeguard both visitors and the resources themselves. Rangers and lifeguards provide not only law enforcement and aquatic rescue services, they also provide public education through interpretation.

## Current Status

### ■ Ratio of Visitor Accidents and Ratio of Crimes to Visitors

The Department has ten years of data on accident rates and six years of crime rate data. Accident and crime rates are calculated based on the number of crimes and accidents compared to total visitation in state parks.

### ■ Visitor Perception of Safety and Security

The Department's Visitor Satisfaction Survey measures visitor perception of safety and security during visits to California State Parks. The survey asks visitors to rate services and facilities in terms of satisfaction as well as importance. The visitor perception of safety and security has consistently rated among the top three issues in importance since the survey began in 1994.

Personal perception of safety and security are paramount to a restful and enjoyable recreational experience. Understanding this perception enables the Department to plan improvements and adjust staffing to maximize the benefit to visitors.



*Canine officer at Silverwood Lake State Recreation Area*

## Measurement Rationale

The measures established for this outcome assess the degree of safety and security provided to visitors to the State Park System. The components of public safety measurement include:

- Ratio of visitor accidents
- Ratio of crimes to visitors
- Visitor perception of safety and security



*Ranger at Richardson Grove State Park*



*Lifeguard and tower at Bolsa Chica State Beach*



Safety signage at Mount Tamalpais State Park

## Measures

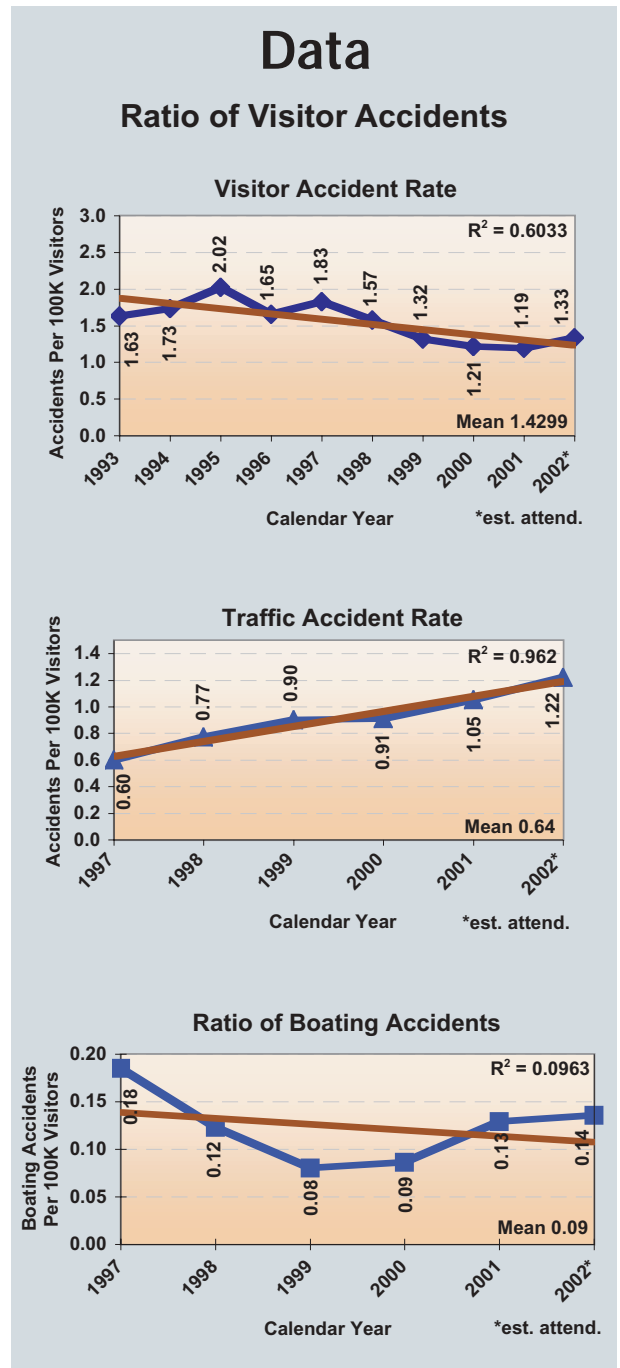
### Ratio of Visitor Accidents and Ratio of Crimes to Visitors

The Department uses many techniques designed to keep visitors safe. Park regulations and signage help deter potential accidents, trained staff provide first responder emergency services, and prevention programs help educate the public on public safety issues.

Despite a significant increase in attendance, accident rates have remained somewhat static. Traffic accidents show an increasing trend, while boating accidents reflect more normal peaks and valleys.



Grounded yacht at Pescadero State Beach



Lifeguard at Huntington State Beach





Boat patrol at Silverwood Lake State Recreation Area

Rangers and lifeguards provide a law enforcement presence and respond to public disturbances and crimes against people, property, and resources within state parks.

While crime rates were static from 1997 through 2000, there was a significant rise in 2001 and 2002. This could be due in part to the increase in attendance. Multiple visitor comments on surveys confirm this concern.

### ■ Visitor Perception of Safety and Security

The Department uses its visitor survey to measure visitor perception of safety, and to plan for improvements in its safety programs. The survey asks respondents how satisfied they are with the feeling of safety and security during their visit. Additionally, many visitors are asked to rate their satisfaction with the enforcement of rules and regulations, and with the availability of rangers and lifeguards.

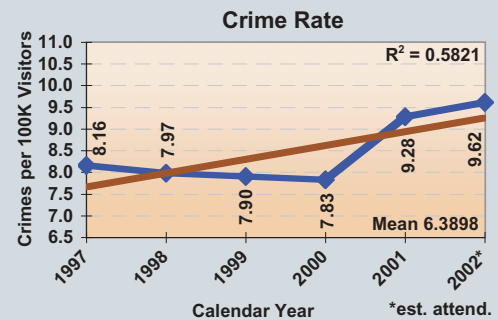


Lifeguards at San Clemente State Beach

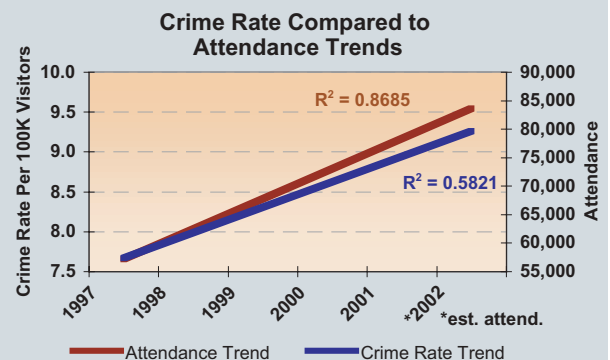


Ranger reading weatherstation at Mount Diablo State Park

### Ratio of Crimes per 100,000 Visitors



Crime rates show a significant increase, especially from 2001 to 2002. The chart below shows an interesting correlation between attendance increases and crime rates.

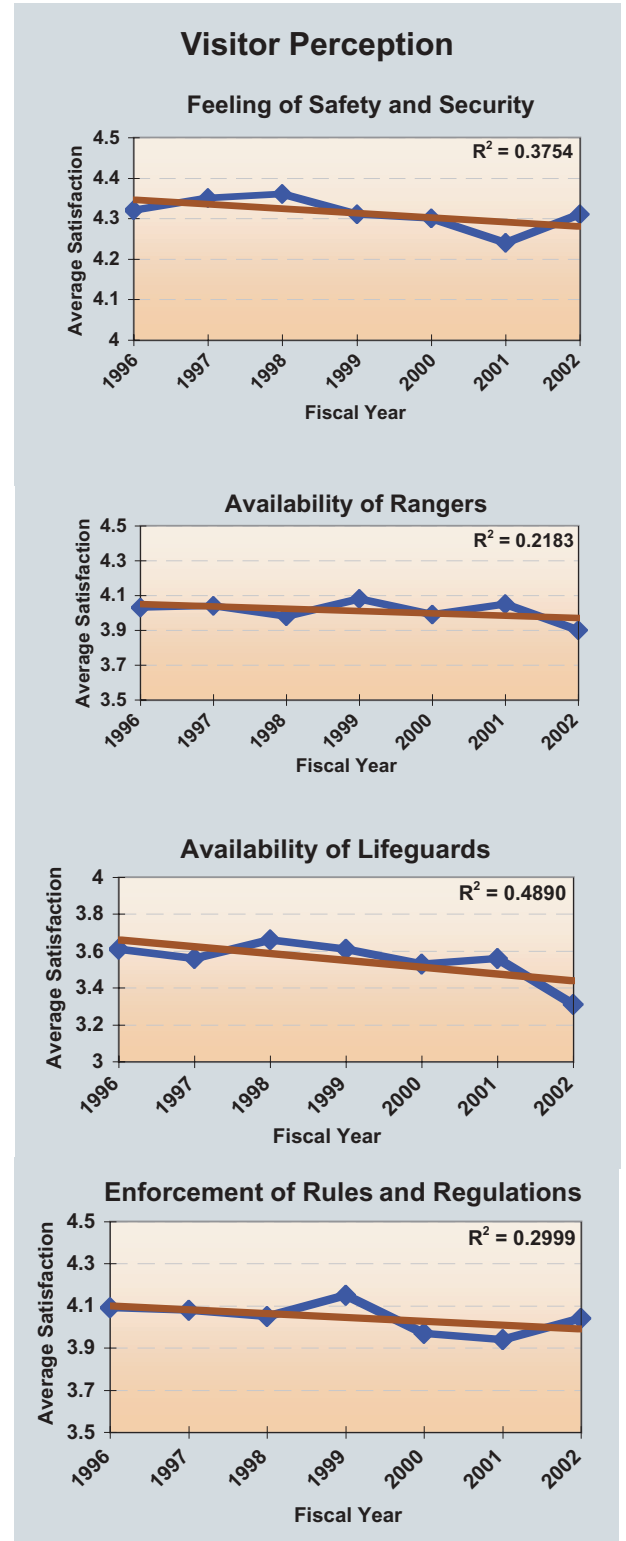




Rangers at Indian Grinding Rock State Historic Park

Seven years of data suggests that although scores were consistently in the high range, there is a slight downward trend in satisfaction with the perception of safety and security.

Likewise, visitors are showing slightly less satisfaction with the enforcement of rules and regulations, corresponding with their perceptions about the availability of rangers and particularly lifeguards.



Lifeguard rescue at Silverwood Lake State Recreation Area

# Visitor Comments on Public Safety

From the California State Parks Visitor Survey 2000-2002

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"Impressive how fast the rangers, et al, responded to an emergency..."

Butano State Park, Fall 2001

"Coming to the ranger program and seeing the rangers walking around checking things out made us feel safe and that everything is under control."

Caswell Memorial State Park, Summer 2001

"The gentleman was very careful to advise us of uneven walkways and low doors."

Monterey State Historic Park, Summer 2002

"Need for more park rangers and police to patrol late night and early morning hours."

San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area, Fall 2000

"I liked the safety talk before the tours."

San Juan Bautista State Historic Park, Winter 2001

"We appreciated seeing the park rangers do evening patrol on the lake as well as a nightly drive through the camp grounds."

Millerton Lake State Recreation Area, Summer 2000

"Just the right amount of 'enforcement show' to make the point but not be intimidating to 'normal' people."

Morro Bay State Park, Spring 2000

"My son cut his head. Staff and rangers were very helpful giving us a Band-Aid, and info on hospitals."

Big Basin Redwoods State Park, Spring 2001

"Always feel safe here."

Angel Island State Park, Fall 2001

"I was quite impressed on how quickly the fire was handled on Tuesday. The entire crew here were/are awesome. Thanks to you all!"

San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area, Summer 2001

"Lifeguard in tower and another driving on beach in truck. My children were safe."

Manresa State Beach, Summer 2001

"Safety was addressed and options for disabled or less ambulatory visitors; i.e., video for 3rd and 4th floors."

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park, Winter 2001

"Our daughter had a fall and your staff was completely overwhelming in being totally prepared. Thank you. Camp hosts were exceptional!"

Refugio State Beach, Fall 2000

"Because of rangers teaching my children about the rip tides it actually saved my son's life...he would have drowned had he not learned what to do. Everything was great!"

San Buenaventura State Beach, Fall 2000

"Would like at least one person here all night! I feel this is very important."

D. L. Bliss State Park, Summer 2001

"While on a trail, my brother-in-law, brother, nephew, and son ran out of water. How grateful I was to hear that the rangers gave them water and filled their water bottles."

Palomar Mountain State Park, Summer 2000

"The park rangers have too many people to police and no lifeguards on the beach at most towers. RAISE the FEES! HIRE rangers, lifeguards! Bring back nature programs to teach the kids!"

South Carlsbad State Beach, Summer 2002

"Very glad to see the rangers checking through out the park camping area!! Thank you."

MacKerricher State Park, Summer 2001

# Recreation

The Department's mission and legislative charge state a mandate to provide high quality recreational opportunities and experiences for the public. Recreation surveys have consistently shown that Californians feel that outdoor recreation areas, services, and facilities are essential to their quality of life.

## Current Status

### ■ Visitor Perception

California State Parks plays both active and passive roles in the delivery of recreational experiences to visitors. Available activities include hiking, biking, camping, swimming, fishing, nature walks, boating, off-highway vehicle activities, and many others. Some activities are Department or volunteer sponsored, but most recreation in parks is simply through the visitors' independent enjoyment of the natural and cultural resources that are available in California State Parks.

The Department must balance a dual responsibility of resource protection and obligation to its visitors to provide the best opportunity for a quality recreational experience. The Department now has nine full years of data for key questions from the Visitor Satisfaction Survey. This information is critical in understanding the visitors' recreation needs.



*Day-use visitors at San Clemente State Beach*



*Ranger and visitor at the falls in Russian Gulch State Park*

## Measurement Rationale

The measures for this outcome compare visitor perceptions to the actual services and opportunities that the Department delivers to the public. Performance levels target visitor satisfaction and meeting latent demand where possible. The components of successful measurement include:

- Visitor perception
- Visitor Attendance
- Accessibility



*Ranger at Caswell Memorial State Park*

## ■ Visitor Attendance

Attendance in state parks is affected by many factors, including weather, economic conditions and gasoline prices. During peak seasons when conditions are most favorable, many parks, especially campgrounds, reach capacity. This demonstrates that the demand for recreation far exceeds the number of parks locally available. During off-peak or “shoulder” seasons, demand is less, leaving opportunity for the Department to enhance programs attracting more visitation.

## ■ Accessibility

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits state and local agencies from discriminating against persons with disabilities and from excluding participation in or denying benefits of programs, services, or facilities to persons with disabilities.

Special funding earmarked for improvement of access to state park facilities and programs for recreation for people with disabilities is currently being allocated. The Department will then measure the results of actual recreational enhancement.

## Measures

### ■ Visitor Perception

The results of three survey questions give insight into the level of visitor satisfaction with recreation—satisfaction with opportunity for recreational experience, satisfaction with the courtesy of staff, and satisfaction with fees charged compared with value received.



*Playing in the sand at San Clemente State Beach*

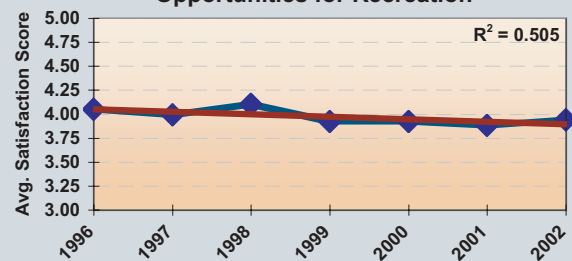


*Rock climbing at Mount San Jacinto State Park*

## Data

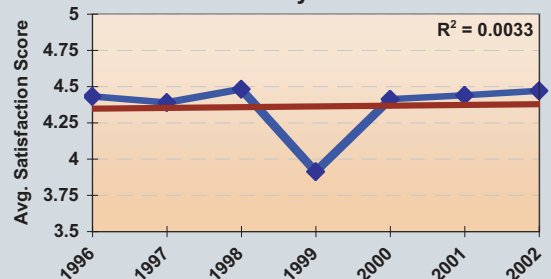
### Visitor Perception

#### Opportunities for Recreation



*Visitor survey data suggests a relatively stable trend of satisfaction with opportunity for recreation. Visitors rate satisfaction with the courtesy of park staff consistently very high. The data for 1999 requires further analysis due to the significant drop.*

#### Courtesy of Staff



### Opportunity for Recreational Experience

Data from the visitor survey reflects a stable, but gradual decline of satisfaction with opportunities for recreation. Data for State Recreation Areas only (not shown) shows a gradual increase in satisfaction.

### Courtesy of Staff

Visitors consistently rate courtesy of staff very high. Comments from the visitor survey reflect overwhelming satisfaction with the treatment they receive from staff as they enter state parks and throughout their stay. Fiscal Year 1999 requires further analysis to understand this temporary dip in satisfaction.

### Fees to Value

Data from the visitor survey reflects a significantly rising trend of satisfaction with fees paid compared to the value received in State Parks.

### Visitor Attendance

Beginning in July 2000, entrance fees for most state parks were cut dramatically. Many were cut to half of the previous rates, as well as many premium fees which had been charged previously, being eliminated.

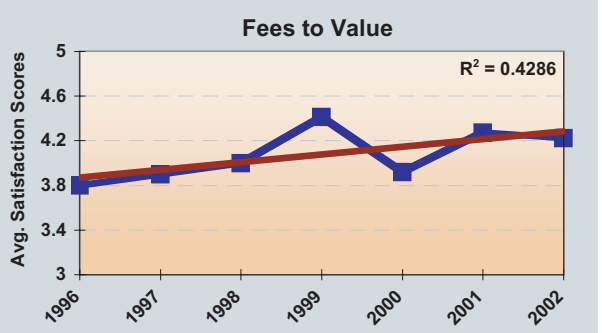
Results of the fee decrease are apparent in a significant rise in attendance rates corresponding to this time period. Overall paid attendance shows a continual increase, especially during the time of the fee decrease. Interestingly, free day-use attendance shows a similar increasing trend over time. However, the rise in camping attendance shows a less steep rise. This is due to the limited inventory of campgrounds which are often filled to capacity regardless of fees.



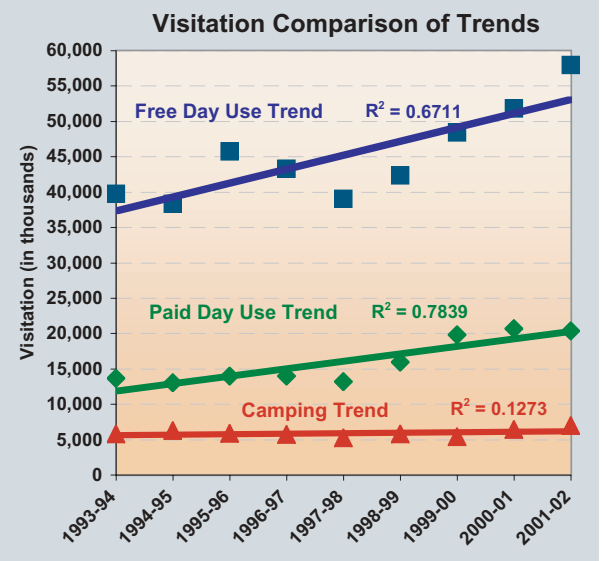
Kayaker participating in a PALS program



Paragliders at Thornton State Beach



Visitor survey data shows increases in satisfaction with fees paid compared to the value received. Comparisons of visitation trends show increased free and paid day use, while camping increases were smaller.



## ■ Accessibility

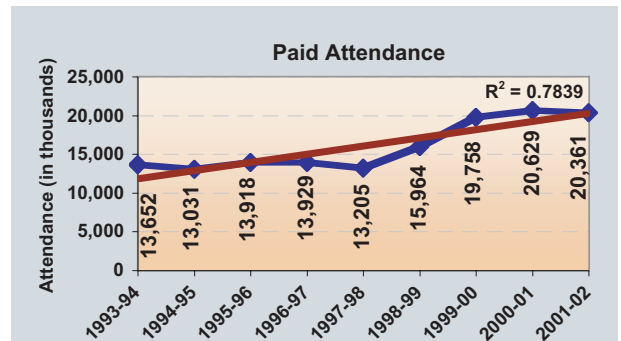
As a result of the ADA, the Department received special funding to enhance accessibility to parks. State Park planners are using the data gathered from accessibility surveys to forecast the extent to which recommended projects will enhance accessibility to recreational activities. The chart to the right depicts the estimated percent of these special funds that will be allocated to achieve outcomes of recreational enhancement in each of the eight categories listed. These activities are similar to the findings of *Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation in California, 1997*, pertaining to public support for state spending on recreational opportunity.



Visitors at San Elijo State Beach



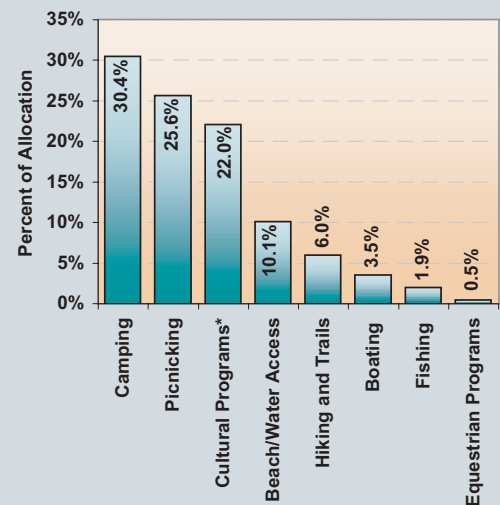
Windsurfing at Candlestick Point State Recreation Area



The chart above shows a sharp increase in paid attendance between fiscal years 1998/99 through 2001/02.

Below, camping, picnicking, and visiting museums lead priorities for accessibility enhancement of recreational programs.

### Percent of special funds allocated to improve accessibility to recreation (by category)



\* visiting museums, interpretive programs and exhibits

# Visitor Comments on Recreation

From the California State Parks Visitor Survey 2000-2002

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"We arrived to compete in the Gold Panning Championship, not knowing what to expect. We are delighted with the town and the way Larry Baumgarten arranged the event. World class."

Columbia State Historic Park, Summer 2000

Let's keep it simple — wild. There is more than enough activities right now. Horses, bikes, hiking, and minimal camping is plenty."

Mount Diablo State Park, Spring 2001

"A wonderful learning environment for children as well as a relaxing area for vacation/recreation activities! The campfire activities, museum tours and docent-led activities were outstanding!"

Indian Grinding Rock State Historic Park, Summer 2000

"This is the most beautiful place I have ever stayed. The food was great. Your staff is the most helpful to friendly I have ever encountered. I look forward to my next opportunity to come back here."

Asilomar State Beach, Summer 2000

"Beautiful park! Enjoyed our visit, hiking and learning about the history of this area"

Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, Winter 2000

"I fly hang gliders here and it is one of the premier coastal sites in the world. Also great for surfing."

Marina State Beach, Fall 2001

"You need more money for parks and facilities. This is one thing I'm glad to pay taxes for."

Mount Tamalpais State Park, Fall 2000

"I first came as a little girl 70 years ago, I appreciate your TLC."

Weaverville Joss House State Historic Park, Spring 2002

"The hiking in Mt. Tam State Park is the best" year round hiking in the U.S.! To have this resource so close to a major urban area is absolutely unique and improves the quality of city life dramatically."

Mount Tamalpais State Park, Spring 2000

"Recreational activities like horse riding are extremely important to me. Riding on the beach gave us the opportunity to see the beach and landscape from a new perspective."

MacKerricher State Park, Spring 2000

We are here at least once a month for a picnic at the back end of the park, near start of East Ridge Trail. We love this place."

Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve, Spring 2000

"Plumas Eureka is a beautiful, well run park. It is family oriented with multiple activities. We have been coming here for 20 years and have never been disappointed. Junior Rangers was great for our kids, now 21 and 19."

Plumas Eureka State Park, Summer 2001

"Enjoyed ability to rent bikes. Hiking trails nice. Some easy water activities, rowboats, kayaks in harbor would be nice."

Angel Island SP, Summer 2002

"Litter getter program is excellent for kids, look forward to it every year."

Leo Carrillo State Park, Fall 2002

"Trails were well marked. Campsites clean and in good repair. Enjoyed the open meadow area, rather than turn every inch covered with sites. Excellent, friendly hosts and staff."

Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, Spring 2000