VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF AND SUPPORT FOR MANAGEMENT ACTIONS 
AT AN URBAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

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Abstract.—This study examined visitor use patterns, perceptions of crowding, and preferences for mixed-use management plans for the Kennesaw Mountain Road at Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park (KMNBP) outside Atlanta, GA. Survey data showed significant differences between first-time visitors to KMNBP and repeat visitors. Most felt that the road should have open access to all users and 81 percent thought that other road users did not interfere with their enjoyment of the park. Most also felt that there was enough room on the road for all types of activities. Half of the respondents supported the idea of offering an annual entrance pass costing $20 per vehicle while 36 percent opposed the introduction of any visitor pass. Discussion focuses on efforts to manage increased and diverse visitation while maintaining the integrity of the park’s historic and natural resources.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the second phase of a research project examining visitor use patterns, perceptions of crowding, preferences for proposed management plans for a mountain road, and preferences for proposed fee structures at Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park (KMNBP) outside Atlanta, GA. Information on the first phase of the research and on KMNBP is available in Strack and Miller (2008). In brief, KMNBP was the site of an 1864 Civil War battle in which 5,350 soldiers were killed. The 2,888-acre park today has earthworks, cannon emplacements, monuments, and interpretive information about the battle and its context in the Civil War. It is also a very popular outdoor recreation site with an extensive network of trails that are used for walking, running, horseback riding, cross country skiing, and a variety of other activities. KMNBP was visited by more than 1.3 million people in 2007, making it the second most visited national battlefield in the country, behind Gettysburg National Military Park (Natl. Park Serv., n.d.). An inherent conflict exists between the National Park Service’s dual missions of preserving the park’s historical features and providing outdoor recreation opportunities for large numbers of visitors.

2.0 METHODS

Data for this study were obtained via intercept survey of a random sample of 1,088 visitors at KMNBP between February and September 2007. The population for this study consisted of individuals over 18 years of age who were visiting KMNBP for at least one type of use. Data were stratified by days of the week and hours of the day, and by sites within KMNBP. Visitors were approached, informed of the intent of the survey, and told that participation was voluntary and that their answers would remain confidential. Visitors who agreed to participate in the survey were handed a questionnaire and a letter from the supervisor of KMNBP explaining the purpose of the study. If visitors were unable to complete the questionnaire right away, they were given the options of returning it to a staff member at the information desk in the Visitor Center or mailing it to the researchers at the University of Georgia. Survey distributors were students from the University of Georgia wearing hats and vests that identified them as National Park Service (NPS) volunteers.

An intercept survey was deemed appropriate for this study because it allowed the researchers to address complicated issues and gather more data than might have been possible by telephone or mail survey.
Since visitors to the park come from throughout the United States and beyond, an intercept survey ensured capturing the appropriate sample frame. The survey instrument was designed in cooperation with NPS staff at KMNBP following guidelines for the modified Dillman (2007) approach.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 User Characteristics

Of the 1,088 visitors who completed the survey, the mean age was 42 years old and 60.7 percent were male. Respondents were asked how many minutes they drove that day to get to KMNBP; the mean reported driving time was 19 minutes, indicating that most visitors live in the local area or are staying nearby during their visit. More than 85 percent of respondents indicated this was not their first visit to KMNBP. Eighty-one percent indicated their main reason for visiting the park that day was for a fitness activity (including walking/hiking, running/jogging, bicycling, and walking their dog), while only 12 percent indicated that they were visiting to learn about the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain or the Civil War.

3.2 User Preferences

Visitors who had been to the top of Kennesaw Mountain were asked to respond to a set of questions specifically pertaining to Kennesaw Mountain Road (MR), which goes to the top of the mountain. The NPS staff at KMNBP are considering several options for managing the various types of users (pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists) on the MR. Respondents were asked to select their preferred management alternative from three choices, or to provide their own recommendation. The proposed management alternatives provided to survey participants were as follows:

- Option 1: Improve/reroute the trail to the top of the Mountain to make it accessible, and reserve the road for motor vehicles and bicycles.
- Option 2: Allow all current users on the Mountain Road, but separate different types of uses by time of day.
- Option 3: Prohibit personal vehicles and provide daily shuttle service to the top of Kennesaw Mountain, allowing pedestrian access daily and bicycle access Monday through Friday.

None of these options was preferred by a majority of survey respondents; 38 percent chose option 3, 31 percent chose Option 1, 14 percent chose Option 2, and 16 percent offered their own suggestions. Option 1 was generally favored by first-time visitors, while Option 3 was most favored by returning visitors. Examination of option preference by frequency of visit found significant differences ($\chi^2 = 14.91, p < 0.01$) between first-time visitors and repeat visitors. Repeat visitors had a stronger preference for keeping vehicles off the road, whereas first-time visitors had a stronger preference for reserving the road for vehicles. The differing preferences among user types are shown in Figure 1.

![Preferred management options by user type](image)

**Figure 1.**—Preferred management options by user type (respondents could choose more than one use).
Respondents were asked to respond to a series of statements regarding Kennesaw Mountain Road by circling a number on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = “strongly disagree;” 3 = “unsure;” 5 = “strongly agree”). Most visitors (81 percent) disagreed with the statement that other visitors on the road interfered with their enjoyment of Kennesaw Mountain, and 65 percent agreed that the MR should be open to all visitors, regardless of type of use. A majority (65 percent) disagreed that there were too many different types of activities allowed on the MR, but 22 percent responded that they were unsure about this statement. Fifty-eight percent of visitors surveyed agreed that there was adequate room on the MR to allow for a variety of activities, while 20 percent were unsure. About 71 percent disagreed that the number of pedestrians on the MR made it difficult for them to take part in their activities.

The U.S. Congress recently passed legislation permitting National Park Service sites to collect daily and/or annual entrance fees; between 80 percent and 100 percent of those funds can be used for improvements in the parks where they are collected. Under this law, KMNBP would be permitted to keep all of the funds raised through daily or annual visitor passes to improve services and facilities in the park. The research survey informed respondents about this law and asked them to choose one of four potential fee options. The options were:

- Option 1: Daily entrance pass costing $5 per person if entering by foot, bicycle, or bus
- Option 2: Daily entrance pass costing $10 per vehicle (excluding buses)
- Option 3: Annual entrance pass costing $20 per vehicle (or per family if not entering by vehicle)
- Option 4: I would not be willing to pay for any entrance pass

Fifty percent of the respondents indicated they were willing to pay a $20 annual fee, but 36 percent of visitors responded that they were not willing to pay any fee. Differences in fee options were noted between first-time visitors and more frequent visitors (Fig. 2).

Visitors who responded that this was not their first visit to the park were asked how often they visited. Preferred entrance pass options were analyzed in relation to frequency of visits to KMNBP; the preference for the $20 annual fee increased with frequency of visit.

Respondents were asked to evaluate selected park facilities and services available at KMNBP on a 4-point unilateral scale ranging from “Poor” to “Excellent.” Overall, the majority of visitors rated the facilities at KMNBP as “Good” or “Excellent,” with the exception of “Number of Parking Spaces,” which received a “Poor” or “Fair” rating from 52 percent of the visitors. Respondents were asked which parking areas they had used that day as well as, “Is the place you are now parked the first place you tried to park today?” Seventeen percent of respondents answered that this was not the first place they had tried to park that day. Visitors who parked on the shoulder of Old

Figure 2.—Preferred entrance pass options (by frequency of visit).
Highway 41 and at Kolb Farm reported higher rates of trying to park elsewhere than visitors at other locations. Most visitors rated parking availability at the Illinois Monument (64 percent) and Kolb Farm (63 percent) as “Good” or “Excellent.” Parking along Old Highway 41 was rated “Poor” by 33 percent of respondents, the lowest rating among the sites listed. Overall, ratings of parking quality were lower among visitors who had had trouble finding parking that day.

4.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Regarding management options for the MR, visitors would prefer to have pedestrians and personal vehicles separated by some means; 69 percent of respondents chose either Option 1 (“Improve/reroute the trail to the top of the Mountain to make it accessible, and reserve the road for motor vehicles and bicycles”) or Option 3 (“Prohibit personal vehicles and provide daily shuttle service to the top of Kennesaw Mountain, allowing pedestrian access daily and bicycle access Monday through Friday”) as their preferred option. Option 2 (“Allow all current users on the MR, but separate different types of uses by time of day”) was the least popular option with a 14-percent selection rate. Similarly, only 16 percent of respondents indicated that they would prefer some other option not listed.

First-time visitors to the park overwhelmingly chose MR management Option 1 over the other options provided, whereas more frequent visitors were more evenly split between Options 1 and 3. Walkers, joggers, bicyclists, and dog walkers all chose Option 3 as their most preferred management option. None of the bicyclists chose Option 2, which was the least popular option for each group with the exception of dog walkers, who chose this option approximately as frequently as Option 1.

The majority of respondents indicated that other users did not interfere with their enjoyment of the road, that the road should be open to all users, and that there is enough room for all types of activities on the road. Responses to all six statements regarding users on the MR indicated that the majority of visitors do not have problems with anyone on the road. Although crowding is currently an issue in terms of safety and management of the road, it does not appear to be an issue with those visitors who were surveyed.

Regarding the proposed user fees at the park, the most popular option was a $20 annual vehicle pass. The only exception was among people who visit the park about once a year – for them, the $20 annual pass was the least preferred option and the majority responded that they would not be willing to pay a user fee at all. Overall, the least popular option was the $10 daily pass. Including a shuttle fee as part of the entrance fee was also not a popular option, as 64 percent of respondents indicated that they would not support an annual entrance pass that included an extra $5 for the shuttle bus, as opposed to an additional charge to ride the shuttle. This lack of support for including the shuttle fee was most likely due to the high proportion of visitors who do not currently use the shuttle services.

Parking was an issue throughout the park at the time of this study, but perceptions of the issue differed from site to site within the park. Two-thirds of respondents indicated that the number of parking areas/spaces available was either “Fair” or “Good.” Only 15 percent of visitors thought that the number of parking areas/spaces was “Excellent.” Visitors who indicated that they did not park in the first place they had tried that day were twice as likely to respond that the number of parking areas/spaces was “Poor.” Visitors who had parked on the road shoulder of Old Highway 41 were most likely to indicate that it was not the first place they had tried to park that day, and to feel that the number of available parking areas/spaces was “Poor.” It should be noted that some respondents possibly were visiting several areas of the park during their visit, and therefore parked in other places within the park. However, as the question was worded “... tried to park” (emphasis ours) the assumption is that visitors made unsuccessful attempts to park in other areas of the park. Given the safety issue and the impact parking availability has on visitor perceptions, it is likely that the problem will grow worse over time.
5.0 CITATIONS

