METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

2021 Visitor Study data discussion

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Visitor Study Background

- Help inform planning, policy, and management

- Evaluate and strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails in accordance with the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan

- Update data in funding formulas to help determine where funding goes for parks and trails

- One of two ongoing research responsibilities: Other is annual use estimate

- Only captures summer activities on the day of visit

2021 Visitor Study

- Surveys administered in the field by Wilder Research
- Over 5,400 surveys, over 50% response rate. Survey quotas proportionate to visitation
- At least 393 surveys per implementing agency. One unit in each implementing agency was "oversampled" to have data at the unit level
- Data were reviewed and analyzed by Council staff

2021 Visitor Study Process

Data collection & preparation
Summer/Fall 2021

Funding inputs calculated, preliminary data analysis
Winter/Spring 2022

Data workshops with Imp. Agencies & MPOSC
Summer & Fall 2022

Publication of findings, including workshop insights
Fall 2022

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Spring 2022: New multipliers

Effect of new multipliers

- Fewer persons per vehicle, introduced vehicle multipliers for trails recognize changes in visitor use. Will probably have negative net effect.

- Fewer persons per vehicle due to COVID-19 concerns

- Seasonal multipliers for fall/spring, winter are similar to 2016

- Nonlocal visitation shares went up on average

- All are inputs to funding formulas.

All ten implementing agencies participated in one-on-ones to understand the context of multiplier trends observed.

Workshop topics: Satisfaction & suggestions

Study details/ visitor satisfaction

- 88% reported facilities very good or excellent
- Higher satisfaction in suburbs; slightly lower in systems with older facilities (MPRB, St Paul)

Visitor Suggestions

- Top parks suggestion: everything's good
- Top for trails: Better trail maintenance
- Bathrooms, water, signage, shade are important

Implementing agency comments:

- Hard to fund "less exciting" maintenance, but clearly important
- Bathrooms an equity issue; system nonusers value basic facilities
- More data disaggregation

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Visitors suggest trail condition improvement, basic amenities, relief from heat. Many had no suggestions.

Implementing Agency	Most mentioned	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Anoka County	Better trail maintenance	Nothing/all good	More bathroom facilities	More water/drinking fountain access	More trashcans/litter issues
Bloomington	Nothing/all good	Less garbage/litter, better trash service	Better water quality	Water/drinking fountain access	More trails; longer/extended trails
Carver County	Nothing/all good	More shade/more trees	Better trail maintenance	More trashcans	Enforce rules for pets in parks (leash, pick up)
Dakota County	Nothing/all good	More/better signage	Water/drinking fountain access	More trails; longer/extended trails	Construction
MPRB	Better trail maintenance	Bathroom access	Water/drinking fountain access	Water fountains turned off	Nothing/all good
Ramsey County	Better trail maintenance	Nothing/all good	Litter/trash/animal waste	More trails; longer/extended trails	More/better signage
Saint Paul	Nothing/all good	Better trail maintenance	Litter/trash	More shade/more trees	Bathrooms cleaner
Scott County	Nothing/all good	More trash cans	Better trail maintenance	Better water quality	Separate paths for bikes and pedestrians
TRPD	Nothing/all good	Better trail maintenance	Water/drinking fountain access	More/better signage	More shade/more trees
Washington County	Nothing/all good	More bathrooms	More/better signage	Better trail maintenance	Water/drinking fountain access

Table 1: Visitor suggestions for improvement the day of visit. Source: Metropolitan Council 2021 Visitor Study

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Workshop topics: Visitor activities

Top activities

- Parks: Hike/walk; relaxing/doing nothing; observing nature
- Trails: Biking; hike/walk; dog walk/dog park; running

Activity patterns

- Most popular activity for all demographic groups: Hiking/walking
- Exploring activity patterns; different ages, races/ethnicities, genders participated at different rates, even with less popular activities.

Implementing agency comments:

- Flexible open spaces
- Hiking/walking can be supported
- Research is valuable, guides thinking
- Learn more about age +62

Most popular activities

Visitors enjoyed diverse activities during visits to the Regional Park and Trail System.

Rank	Parks	Trails
1	Hiking/walking	Biking
2	Relaxing/Doing nothing^	Hiking/walking
3	Observing nature^	Dog walking/dog park*
4	Biking	Jogging/running*
5	Family/friends meetup*	Observing nature*
6	Dog walking/dog park*	Relaxing/doing nothing*
7	Taking photographs	Commuting^
8	Using the playground	Family/friends meetup^
9	Picnicking	Using the playground
10	Jogging/running	Taking photographs

Table 2: Most popular activities. Source: Metropolitan Council 2021 Visitor Study

>40% of visitors did this
20-30% of visitors did this
10-19% of visitors did this

Exploring differences in activity patterns: Race/ethnicity

Figure 1: Likelihood of greater participation by Asian American visitors

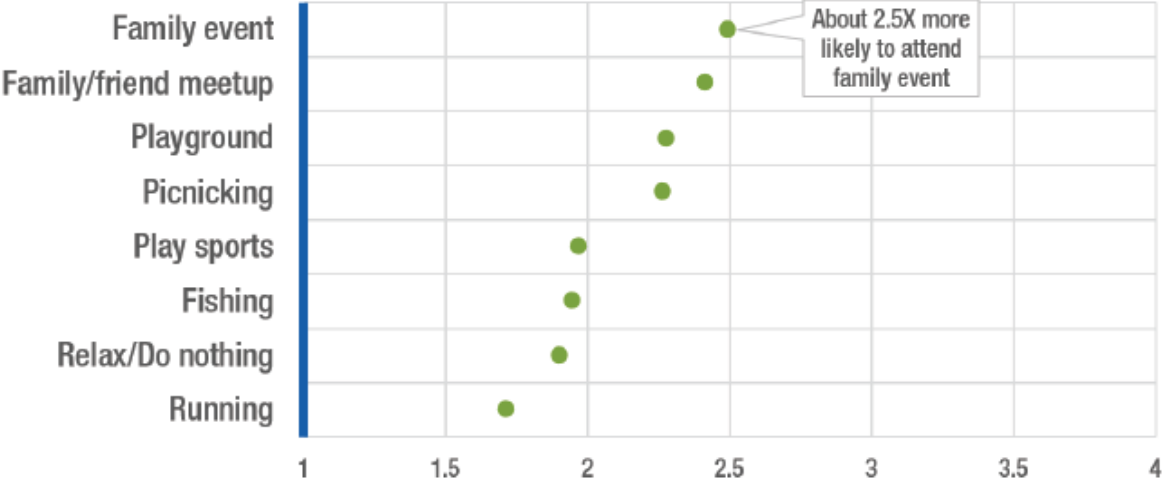About 2.5X more likely to attend family event

Figure 2: Likelihood of greater participation by Latino/a visitors
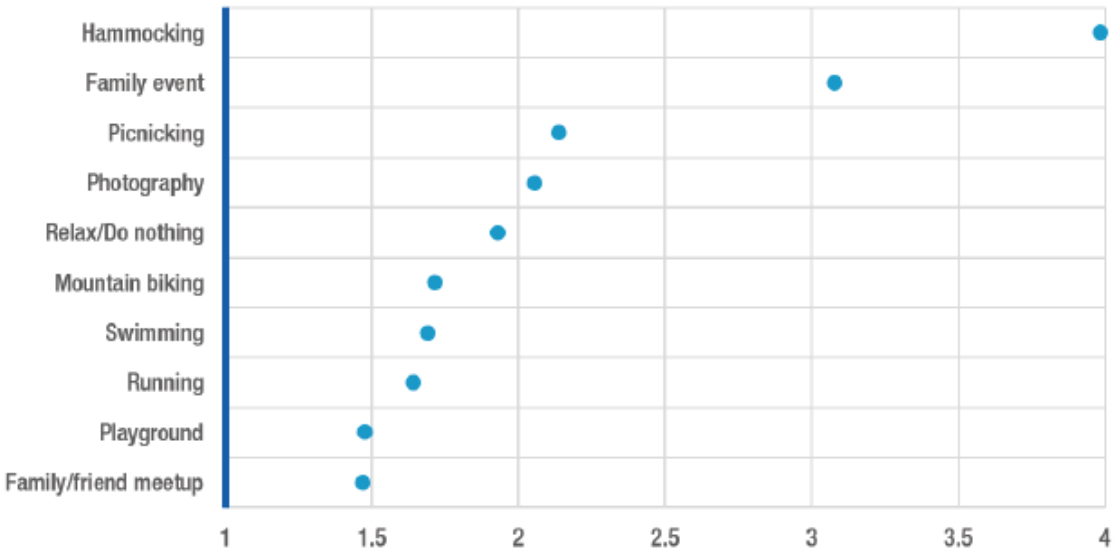
Figure 3: Likelihood of greater participation by African American visitors

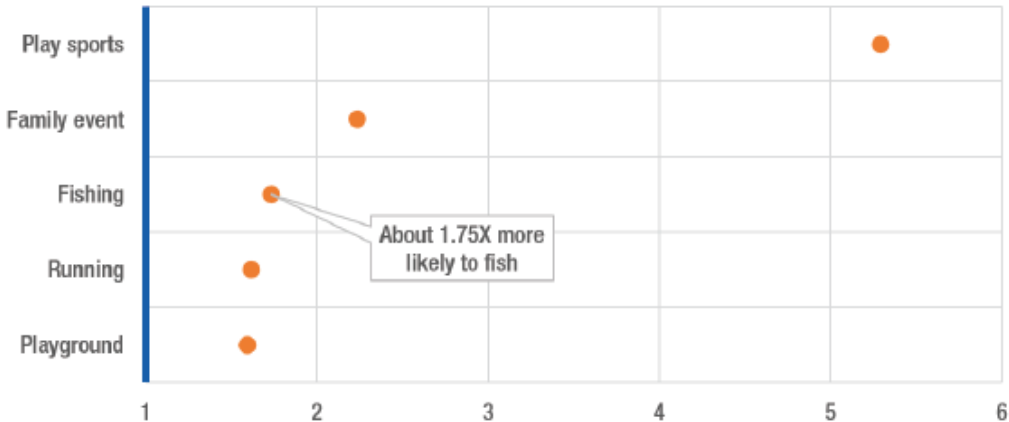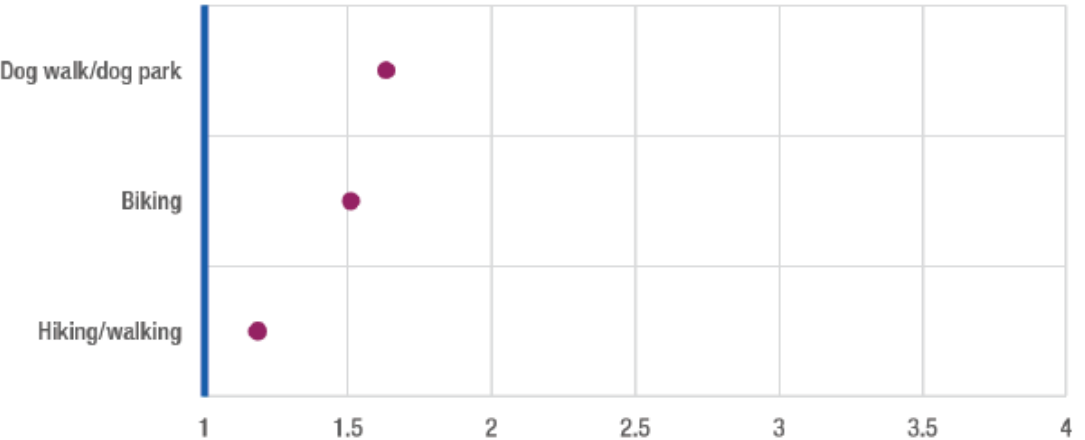About 1.75X more likely to fish

Figure 4: Likelihood of greater participation by white visitors

Source: Metropolitan Council 2021 Visitor Study

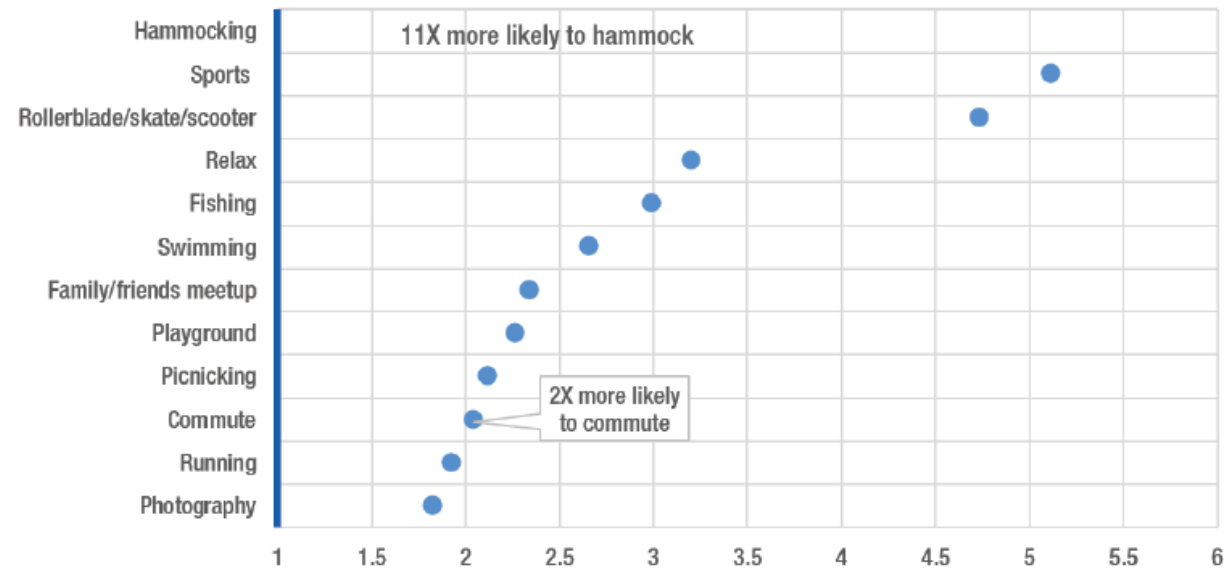## Figure 5: Likelihood of greater participation by visitors age 12-24

11X more likely to hammock

2X more likely to commute

(Activities listed top to bottom: Hammocking, Sports, Rollerblade/skate/scooter, Relax, Fishing, Swimming, Family/friends meetup, Playground, Picnicking, Commute, Running, Photography)

Figure 6: Likelihood of greater part. by groups incl. someone w/ disability

1.8 times more likely to do swimming

(Activities listed top to bottom: Swimming, Observing nature, Relax/do nothing, Picnicking, Photography, Family/friend meetup)
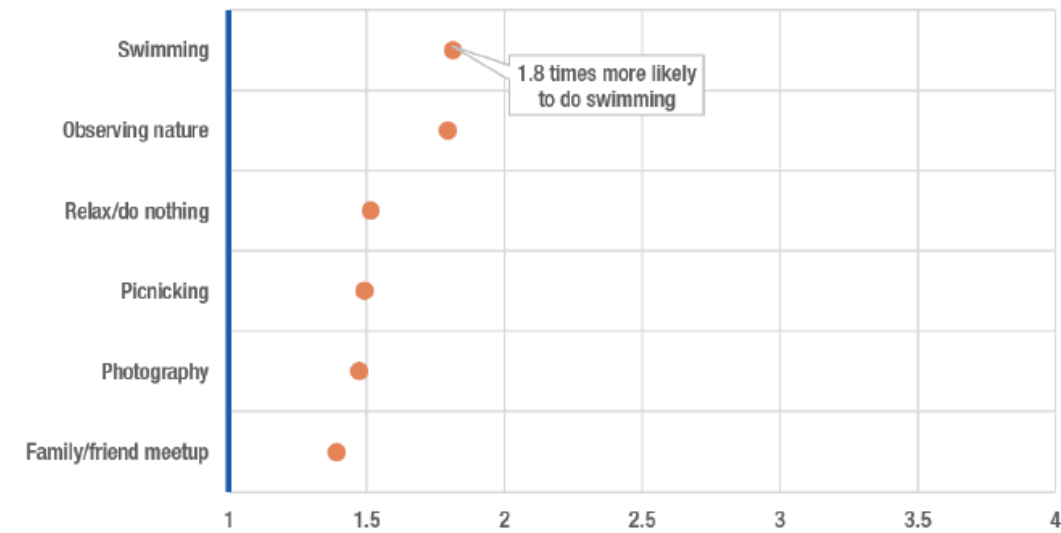
Figure 7: Likelihood of greater participation by nonbinary, women visitors

● Women
▲ Nonbinary

(Activities listed top to bottom: Relax/do nothing, Observing nature, Swimming, Picnic, Playground, Photography, Dog walk/dog park, Hiking/walking, Family/friend meetup, Community event, Commuting)
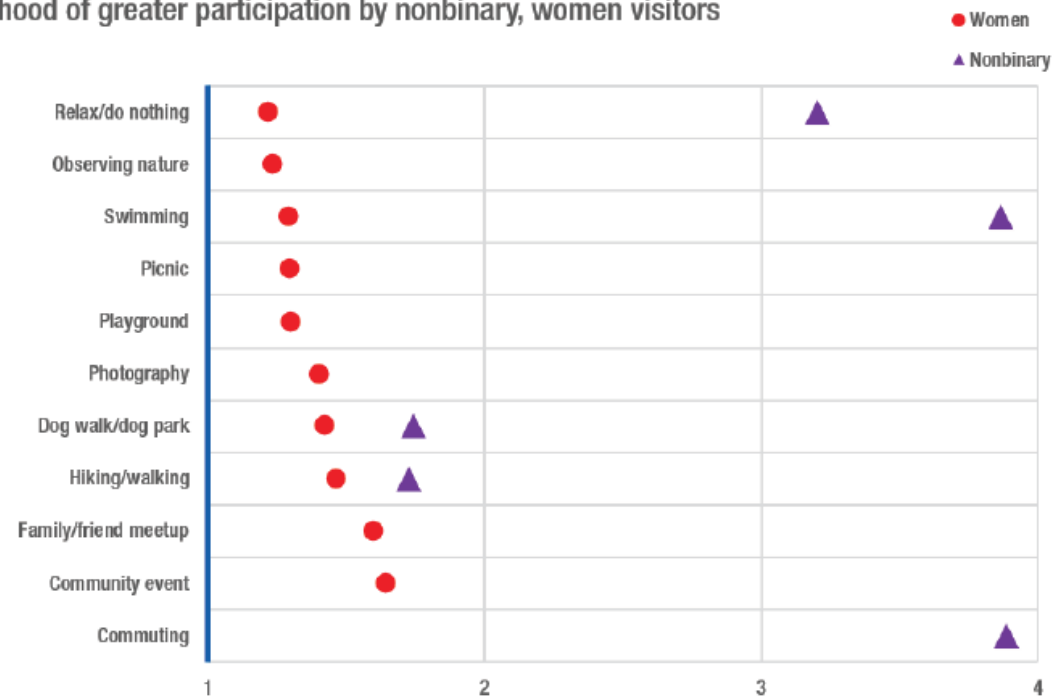
Why does it matter?

- Activities currently popular with an underserved group can inform investments and programming to expand equitable use.
- Activities currently unpopular with an underserved group can help identify systemic, historical, economic, and cultural barriers to access.
- Activities popular with dominant/adequately served users can be understood, and we can consider implications.

How to interpret the figures: The thick bold vertical line in each figure is the rate of activity by baseline comparison group. A dot on the right side of the thick comparison line means that the group featured is more likely than the comparison group to do the activity. If no significant difference was seen between groups, the activity is not listed in the figure.

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Overlapping popular activities

Different groups have different activity patterns. At the same time, many activities are very popular with all groups or across many groups.

Most popular activity	**Hiking/walking** is the most popular activity for all groups				Note: Respondents can be members of more than one group. A 19-year-old African American man would be counted with men, African Americans, and age 12-24.
2nd most popular activity	**Relax/do nothing**: Age 12-44; Black, Latino, Asian American, multiple race visitors; gender nonbinary	**Biking**: Age 45+, American Indian, white visitors; men		**Dog walking/ dog park**: women	**Observing nature**: Group incl member with a disability
3rd most popular activity	**Biking**: Women, gender nonbinary; ages 12-44; Black, Latino, multiple races visitors	**Dog walk/dog park**: Age 44-64; white visitors	**Family/friend meetup**: American Indian, Asian American	**Observing nature**: Age 65+, men	**Relaxing/do nothing**: Group incl. member with a disability

Table 3: Most popular activities, disaggregated by social characteristics. Source: Metropolitan Council 2021 Visitor Study

Emergent themes from workshops

Policy

> Discuss value of flexible open spaces in policy plan update

> Can we create a "friends of regional park" funding?

> Think differently, more dynamic trails ("linear park") to attract new users.

Additional data needed

> Activity patterns by youth, 62+

> More data needed on winter activity

Open, flexible spaces important

> Many activities can be done in these open spaces

> Notable to think about family/friends meetup or "doing nothing" as key activities

Your analysis, comments, questions

Discussion questions

- What findings stand out to me?

- How does the Regional Park and Trail system have influence to respond to these trends? What factors lie outside of our control? How should the Council respond to these trends?

- What else would I like to know?

- What are the implications for our work as Commissioners?

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