Popular Activities

Most popular activities: Hiking/walking, biking, and relaxing/doing nothing

The regional system of parks and trails provides abundant recreational opportunities, as evidenced in the diversity of responses when visitors were asked to name all the activities they did during one day's visit (Table 7). Visitors were asked to choose from 29 possible activities, or they could name an activity not on the list. 46% of trail users and 59% of park users combined two or more activities within their visit. Diverse activities were shown to be part of a trail or park visit. Many visitors named "relaxing" (#2, parks) and "observing nature" (#5, trails) as an important part of their visit, even if not the main purpose for visiting.

Visitors also selected the activity that was the "main reason" for visiting the park or trail. The top 10 park activities are 86% of the total "main activities" reported by respondents. Five activities (biking, hiking/walking, dog walking/dog park, jogging/running, and observing nature) were 90% of the main reason visitors went to trails.

Hiking or walking was the most frequent primary activity in 9 of 10 park agencies (Table 8).

Visitors enjoyed multiple, diverse activities.

Rank	Parks	Trails
1	Hiking/walking (55%)	Biking (54%)
2	Relaxing/doing nothing^	Hiking/walking (40%)
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
11	Swimming	Picnicking
12	Commuting	Sports (soccer, volley/basketball, tennis)
13	Visiting the farm or gardens	Swimming*
14	Canoeing/kayaking/SUP	Mountain biking*
15	Fishing	Festival, concert, or community event*
16	Family event	Rollerblading/skating/scootering*
17	Festival, concert, or community event^	Fishing*
18	Camping^	Canoeing/kayaking/SUP*
19	Hammocking*	Visiting the farm or gardens^
20	Mountain biking*	Hammocking^
21	Boating or sailing^	Stargazing/astronomy*
22	Sports (soccer, volley/basketball, tennis)^	Attended a program or class*
23	Rollerblading/skating/scootering*	Family/friends meetup^
24	Disc golf*	Camping^
25	Attended a program or class*	Boating or sailing^
26	Stargazing/astronomy^	Disc golf*
27	Geocaching^	Geocaching*
28	Archery^	Horseback riding*
29	Horseback riding^	

Table 1: List of activities that visitors did on parks and trails on day of visit. Visitors could choose more than one activity

Sequential column items with ^ or * indicate that activities that are statistically tied in popularity.

>40% of visitors did this
20-30% of visitors did this
10-19% of visitors did this
3-9% of visitors did this

Visitors name hikes, walks, and biking as main activities.
Other activities were visitor favorites in just a few park agencies.

Park agency	Top	2nd	3rd	4th	5th, other answers >5%
Anoka County	Hike/walk & biking (TIE)		Dog walk/dog park and camping (TIE)		Running, swimming, fishing
Bloomington	Hike/walk	Dog walk/dog park	Biking	Running	Swimming
Carver County	Biking	Dog walk/dog park	Hike/walk and swimming (TIE)		Family/friend meetup, relax, camping
Dakota County	Hike/walk	Biking	Mountain biking	Dog walk/dog park	Running
Minneapolis	Hike/walk	Biking	Dog walk/dog park and running (TIE)		Family/friend meetup, observe nature
Ramsey County	Hike/walk & biking (TIE)		Dog walk/dog park	Playground	Running
Saint Paul	Hike/walk	Biking	Running	Dog walk/dog park	Family/friend meetup, swimming
Scott County	Hike/walk	Dog walk/dog park	Biking	Running	Paddling
Three Rivers	Hike/walk	Biking	Dog walk/dog park	Playground	Running, family/friend meetup
Washington County	Hike/walk	Biking	Swimming	Running	Camping, playground, family/friend meetup, dog walk/dog park

Table 2: Top primary activities by park agency

Activity patterns by social characteristics

Different groups have different activity patterns. At the same time, many activities are very popular with all groups or across many groups (Table 9). Across social groups, some activities were universally popular. This includes hiking/walking, relaxing/doing nothing, biking, observing nature, and meeting up with family and friends.

Analysis of differences in activity patterns (Figures 23-29) can help identify how underserved users enjoy parks and trails compared to others. Activity likelihood tables show activities that are more popular with a featured group relative to the comparison group. These are not the *most* popular activities of the featured group. For example, hammocking is 11 times more popular with visitors age 12-24 than with 45-64 year olds, but hiking/walking, relaxing, and biking are the top three most popular activities among visitors age 12-24.

Why do activity patterns matter?
- Activities currently more 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 demographic groups can be understood, and the implications can be considered.

Hiking/walking is the most popular activity for people across groups; Other popular activities include relaxing, biking, meeting family or friends, observing nature, and dog walking.

Most popular activity	**Hiking/walking** is the most popular activity for all groups			
2nd most popular activity	**Relax/do nothing**: Age 12-44; Black, Latino, Asian American, multiple race visitors; gender nonbinary	**Biking**: Ages 45+, American Indian, white visitors; men	**Dog walk/ dog park**: Women	**Observe nature**: Group inc. member with a disability
3rd most popular activity	**Biking**: Women, gender nonbinary; ages 12-44; Black, Latino, multiple races visitors	**Dog walk/dog park**: Ages 44-64; white visitors	**Family/friend meetup**: American Indian, Asian American	**Observe nature**: Ages 65+, men	**Relax/do nothing**: Group inc. member with a disability

Table 3: Top three most popular activities, disaggregated by social characteristics

BIPOC visitors more likely to meet up with family and friends, go running, and other activities compared to White visitors

The figures in this section compare the featured group to all other responses in the survey. For example, Figure 22 compares activities of Asian American visitors to visitors not identifying as Asian. Family events, family/friend meetups, playing sports, and fishing were some of the activities that were more popular among visitors of color compared with white visitors (Figures 22-25). Latino visitors had higher participation in a wider range of activities compared with all others (Figure 24).

How to interpret Figures 22-28: 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. For clarity, the confidence interval, the statistic that shows degree of uncertainty of calculated likelihood, is not shown in the figure but is available on request. All activities featured in these figures demonstrate statistically significant differences in activity between the comparison group and the featured group, at a 90% confidence level.

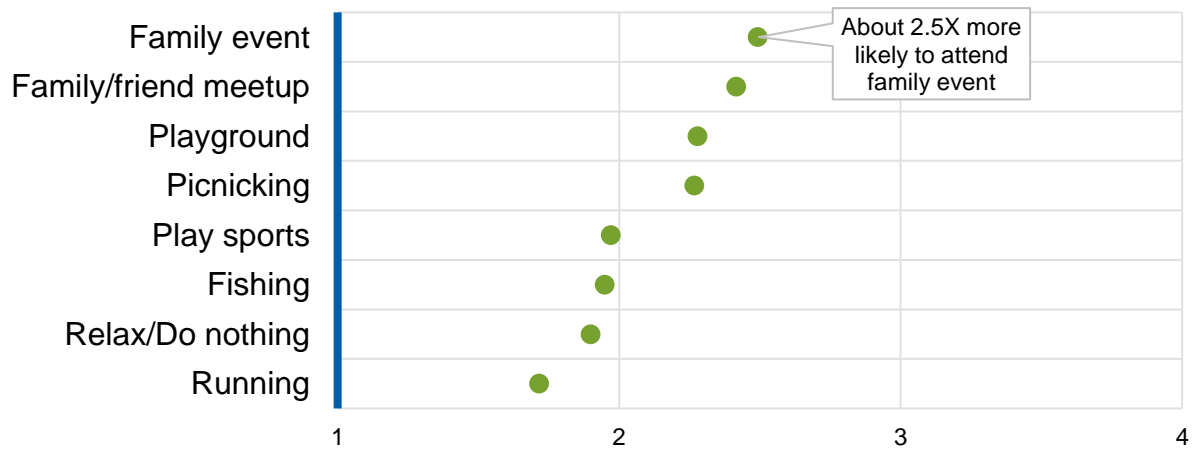### Likelihood of greater participation by Asian American visitors

Figure 1: Likelihood of activity participation by Asian American visitors compared with all other visitors in survey
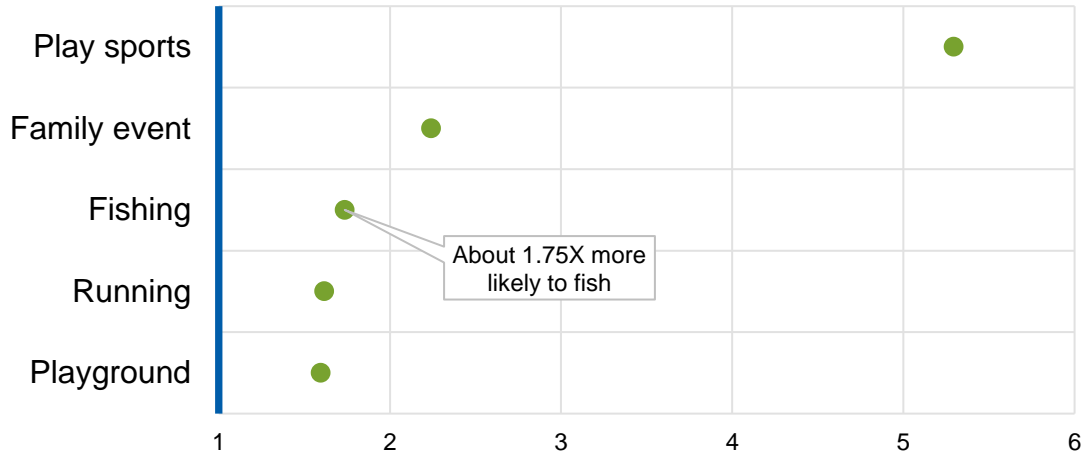
Likelihood of greater participation by Black visitors

Play sports

Family event

Fishing

About 1.75X more likely to fish

Running

Playground

1   2   3   4   5   6

Figure 2: Likelihood of activity participation by African American visitors compared with all other visitors in survey

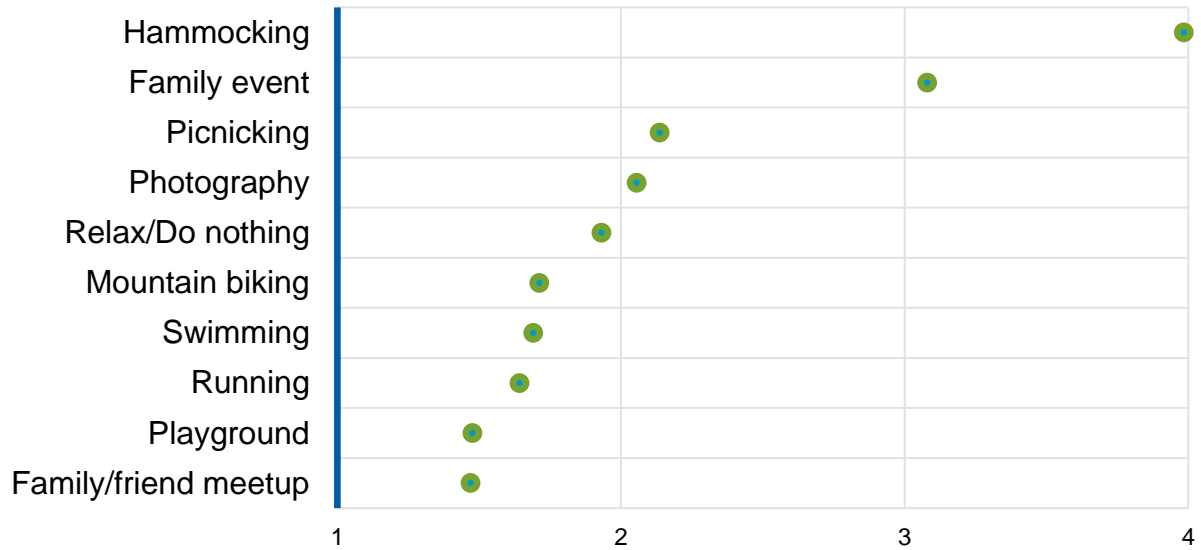## Likelihood of greater participation by Latino/a visitors

Hammocking

Family event

Picnicking

Photography

Relax/Do nothing

Mountain biking

Swimming

Running

Playground

Family/friend meetup

1   2   3   4

Figure 3: Likelihood of activity participation by Latino/Latina visitors compared with all other visitors in survey

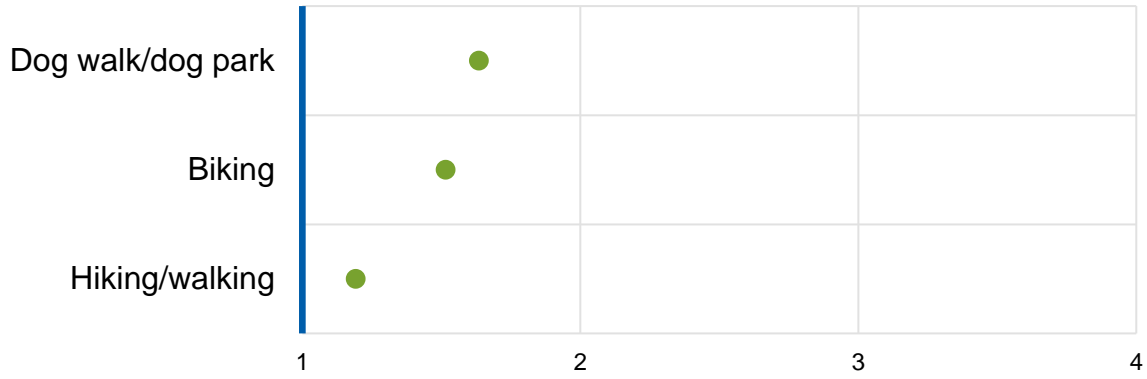## Likelihood of greater participation by white visitors

Figure 4: Likelihood of activity participation by White visitors compared with all other visitors in survey

Younger visitors more likely to do a wide variety of activities, including hammocking, sports, rollerblading and more.

Visitors ages 12-24 participated in 12 activities at a higher rate than visitors ages 45-64. This indicates that variety of activities was important for this age group compared with older visitors. Hammocking, sports, rollerblading, relaxing, and fishing were some of the activities that were more than three times more likely to be done by visitors ages 12-24 compared with visitors ages 45-64 (Figure 26).

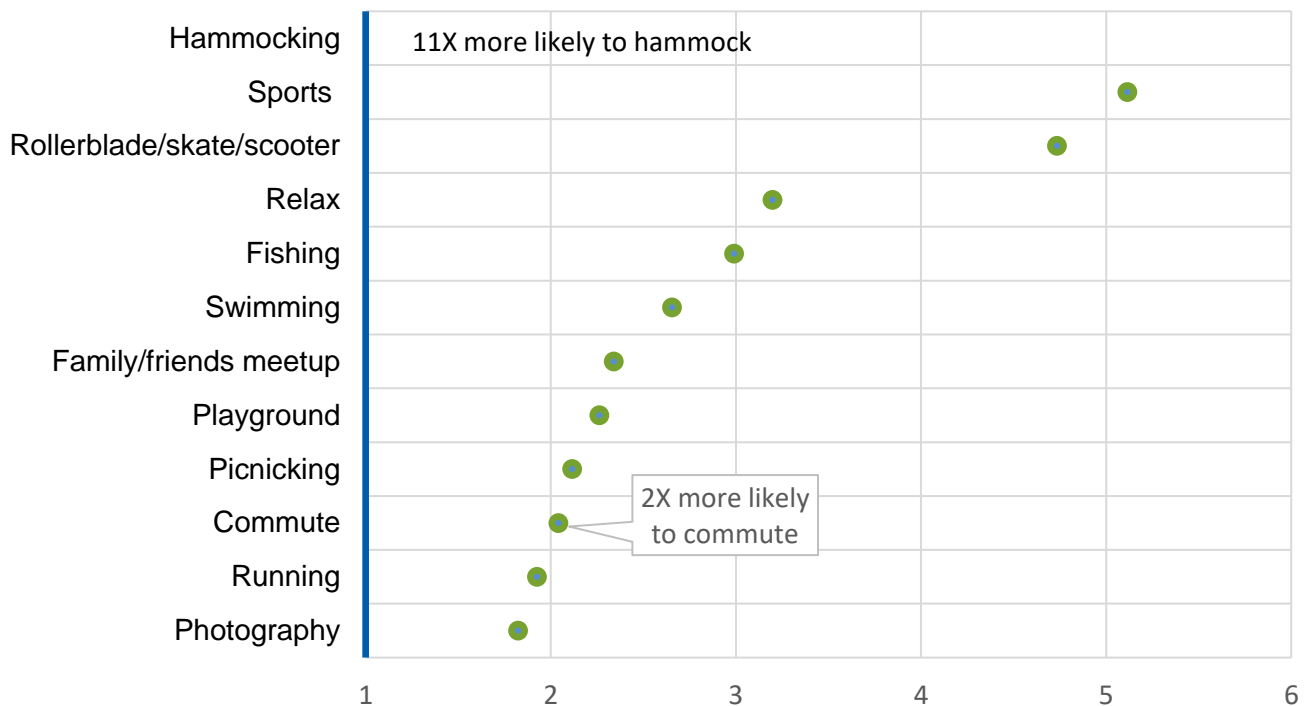## Likelihood of greater participation by visitors age 12-24

Figure 5: Likelihood of activity participation by visitors ages 12-24 compared with visitors ages 45-64

Swimming, observing nature are more likely among groups including people with disabilities

Groups that included a person with a disability participated in six activities at somewhat higher rates than groups with no one with a disability. These patterns may be related to age, since the youngest and oldest respondents reported that someone in their group had a disability. Swimming, observing nature, and relaxing were some of the activities that were more popular with such groups (Figure 27).

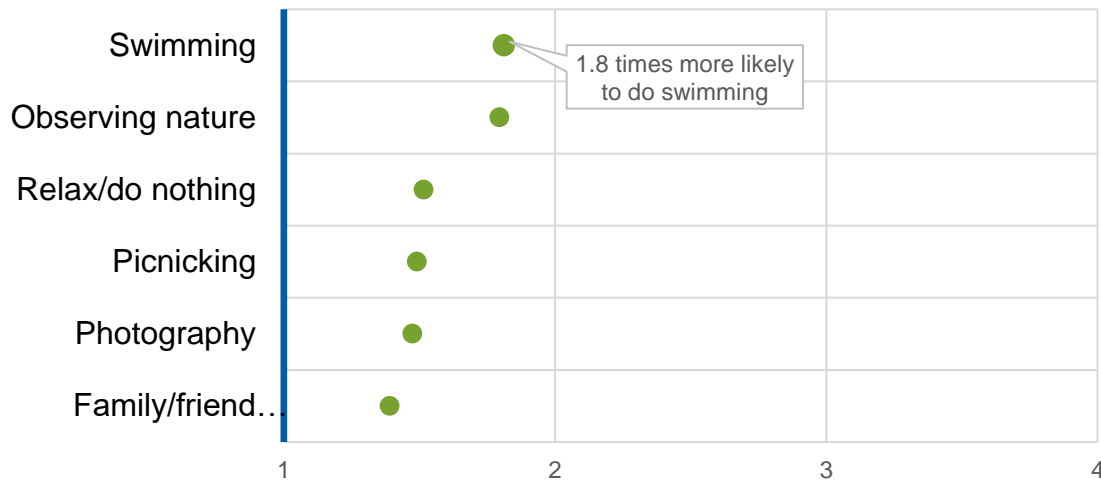**Likelihood of greater participation by groups including someone with a disability**

Figure 6: Likelihood of activity participation by groups including someone with a disability compared to groups without a person with a disability

Activity patterns vary by gender

Women and gender nonbinary visitors participated in several activities at higher rates than men. Nonbinary and women visitors were more likely to relax/do nothing, swim, dog walk, and hike/walk compared with men. Nonbinary visitors were more likely to be commuting during their visit. Additionally, women were more likely to participate in observing nature, picnicking, visiting the playground, photography, meeting a family member, or attending a community event. Due to small sample size, the magnitude of difference for nonbinary visitors should be interpreted with caution (Figure 28).
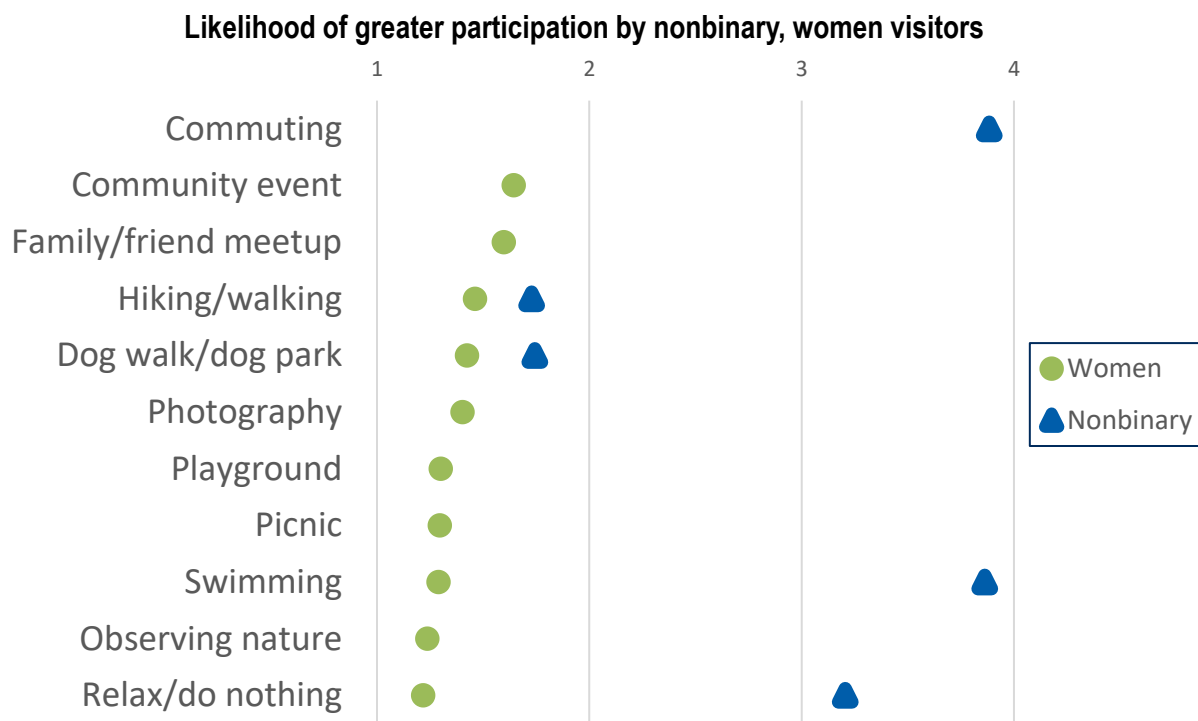
Likelihood of greater participation by nonbinary, women visitors

Figure 7: Likelihood of activity participation by gender nonbinary and women visitors compared with men

Group vs solo visit varies by gender, race/ethnicity, and type of facility

Whether visitors go solo or in a group depends on the type of unit (parks vs trails) and social characteristics (Table 10). Just under 2/3 of visits to parks happen in groups. For trails, the opposite is true, with just under 2/3 of visitors going solo. Compared to men, women and nonbinary visitors are more likely to visit in a group whether on parks or trails. Visitors who identify as Black, Indigenous, or a person of color are more likely to visit in groups compared to white visitors. However, almost all visitors across characteristics were more likely to visit in groups when going to parks than to trails.

Parks				Trails		
Gender	Visit with others	Visit solo	Total %, parks	Visit with others	Visit solo	Total %, trails
Female	67%	33%	100%	47%	53%	100%
Male	56%	44%	100%	28%	72%	100%
Nonbinary/third gender	64%	36%	100%	68%	32%	100%
Race/ethnicity						
Black, Indigenous, and people of color	72%	28%	100%	49%	51%	100%
White	60%	40%	100%	36%	64%	100%
All visitors	62%	38%	100%	37%	63%	100%

Table 4: Percent of visitors in groups vs solo on parks and trails by gender and race/ethnicity

Park agencies reflect on activity patterns and popular activities

> "'Doing nothing' was a popular activity. How can we support people coming to the park just to relax or hang out? People don't need a reason or activity to do at parks. It boils down to just simple activity: to just be."
>
> - Workshop participant, summer 2022

Park agency staff analyzed activity patterns. They reflected that programming and amenities need to invite users to learn new activities with low entrance barriers while also supporting current activities that are more popular among underserved users. They considered it important to listen to what diverse users want and need. The findings demonstrate that open, flexible spaces are important in park and trail design. More research is needed on several topics, including needs of BIPOC, women, and nonbinary visitors; visitors ages 75+; future recreation and population trends; more data on why people enjoy activities; and innovations in trail equity. A sample of comments are presented in Figure 29.

"We need to bring in people of different backgrounds and ask them what they would like to see at parks and what activities they enjoy to be able to bring them in. Classes can teach people how to do new activities, too."

"The activity patterns show how important open space is for recreational activity. We call open, mowed areas "unprogrammed" space. These are flexible areas that invite in new users to do a variety of activities."

"We have created shorter trails and 3D imagery. You can take an online tour of the entire trail, which can help make people be more comfortable and get acquainted with the space before actually going on the trail."

Workshop participants wanted more research on this issue: Gender and trail visitation, aging, and park use (over age 75), better data on disability, trends in income inequality and activities, more on why people enjoy specific activities, future activity trends.

"Understanding the people of the communities you are serving is really important in building the right spaces for the people."

"Expanding our definition of regional park and trail activities to include nontraditional-type activities might change level of use among different groups."

Figure 8: Analysis of activity data by park agencies in summer workshops