

Iconic Places of the U.S. Forest Service

Values, Conditions, Challenges, and Opportunities

AUTUMN ELLISON, ERIC M. WHITE, AND MATTHEW ARNN

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About the authors

Autumn Ellison is a faculty research assistant in the Ecosystem Workforce Program, Institute for a Sustainable Environment, University of Oregon.

Eric M. White is a research social scientist with the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station.

Matthew Arnn is the chief landscape architect with the U.S. Forest Service Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources.

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Photo locations and credits:

Cover photo: Sawtooth National Recreation Area, Idaho. Intermountain Region 4. Credit: Autumn Ellison.

Page 1: Spring Mountains National Recreation Area, Nevada. U.S. Forest Service Intermountain Region 4.

Page 2: Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, Oregon. U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region 6.

Page 3: Bears Ears National Monument, Utah. U.S. Forest Service Intermountain Region 4.

Page 8: Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area, Oregon. U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region 6.

Page 16: Admiralty Island National Monument, Alaska. U.S. Forest Service Alaska Region 10.

Page 20: Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area, West Virginia. U.S. Forest Service Eastern Region 9.

Page 22: Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, Oregon and Idaho. U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region 6 and Northern Region 1.

Page 23: Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area, Kentucky and Tennessee. U.S. Forest Service Southern Region 8.

Page 24: Giant Sequoia National Monument, California. U.S. Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region 5.

Back Cover: Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area, Utah. U.S. Forest Service Intermountain Region 4.

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About this paper:

The purpose of this document is to introduce the reader to the U.S. Forest Service's iconic places and to provide basic information about the values they protect, their conditions, their management practices, and the challenges and opportunities that they face. Iconic places include national recreation areas, national scenic areas, national monuments, and others that have been protected either through congressional legislation or presidential proclamation. Reported information is drawn from a 2016–2017 survey of U.S. Forest Service site managers for 41 iconic places across the United States.

Ecosystem Workforce Program
Institute for a Sustainable Environment
5247 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403-5247-1472
ewp@uoregon.edu
ewp.uoregon.edu



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON





Spring Mountains National Recreation Area, Nevada. U.S. Forest Service Region 4: Intermountain

Executive summary

The United States Forest Service manages many areas that have been specially-designated either by Congress through legislation or by the Executive Branch via proclamation under the authority of the Antiquities Act. These special areas are protected for the unique characteristics and opportunities they provide, and they have different management guidelines and objectives.

We identified a subset of specially-designated areas on U.S. Forest Service land that we called “iconic places,” and in 2016-2017 we surveyed site managers at 41 iconic places. Our objectives were to gather information about the current conditions, needs, challenges, and opportunities of these places.

Key findings

- **Iconic places are diverse.** Iconic places were designated to provide for a variety of values. They differ in biophysical characteristics, such as size, vegetation, and landscape, as well as in how they are managed, publicized, and recognized.
- **Scenic values are key.** Managers commonly identified scenic values as a key designation factor. They reported scenic values as the most well-functioning resource at iconic places and scenic values were typically seen as sustainable in the near term.
- **Partners are critical.** Managers of iconic places are working closely with partners and believe partnerships offer the greatest opportunity for meeting future resource goals. Iconic place managers reported partnerships with a variety of organizations but partnered with non-governmental organizations more frequently than other federal or state agencies.
- **Iconic places are facing challenges.** Managers mostly saw their relevant resources as either well-functioning or impaired yet functional, but frequently declining in conditions. They identified a variety of challenges to maintaining the designated values of iconic places. Managers primarily noted internal challenges like staffing vacancies and decreasing funding levels, followed by increasing levels of recreation use. They also mentioned broader, external challenges such as climate change and natural disturbances, but less frequently.
- **Increasing recreation is a substantial concern for many iconic places.** Few iconic places had reliable systems in place to monitor recreation use. Most managers reported that the perceived current recreation levels were considered sustainable into the future. However, sustainability was less certain if the perceived trends of increasing recreation use continued over the next ten years. A key information gap noted by managers was information on current and expected future recreation use at the iconic place.
- **Visitors satisfaction is high at iconic places.** Managers of iconic places believed that visitors were generally satisfied with their recreation experiences on site. No manager felt that visitors were dissatisfied with their experience at the iconic place.



Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, Oregon and Washington. U.S. Forest Service Region 6: Pacific Northwest

Background and introduction

The U.S. Forest Service is responsible for managing and maintaining many different kinds of areas across the nation. In addition to the national forests and grasslands, which constitute most of the 193 million acres¹ that the agency manages, there are areas with different management needs including wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, national monuments, national scenic or recreation areas, and many others. These areas are designated for their unique qualities which merit special management or protection.

Areas on federal lands are specially-designated in two ways. One is through the Executive branch by presidential proclamation under the authority of the 1906 Antiquities Act, which “authorizes the President to protect landmarks, structures, and objects of historic or scientific interest by designating them as National Monuments.”² The other and more common method is through Congressional legislation. Special designations can happen on and across different landownerships. Federal special area management is by one or more of seven federal land management agencies.

In the national forest system, there is a distinction between wilderness area and other specially-designated areas, which are “lands not designated as wilderness and containing outstanding examples of plant and animal communities, geological features, scenic grandeur, or other special attributes that merit special management.”³ These non-wilderness special areas include national scenic areas, national historical areas, national recreation areas, and national monuments, among others. The many different types of designations have different management guidelines, intents, and policies, and the management objectives for each area are unique and distinct. Many but not all of the U.S. Forest Service’s specially-designated areas are on national forest lands. Some these areas are among the most visited places in the National Forest System. They are often culturally important to tribes and have considerable local significance. Recreation use of the areas is often an important driver of local economic activity and local businesses.

Despite their importance, there has been little research on the current conditions and special man-

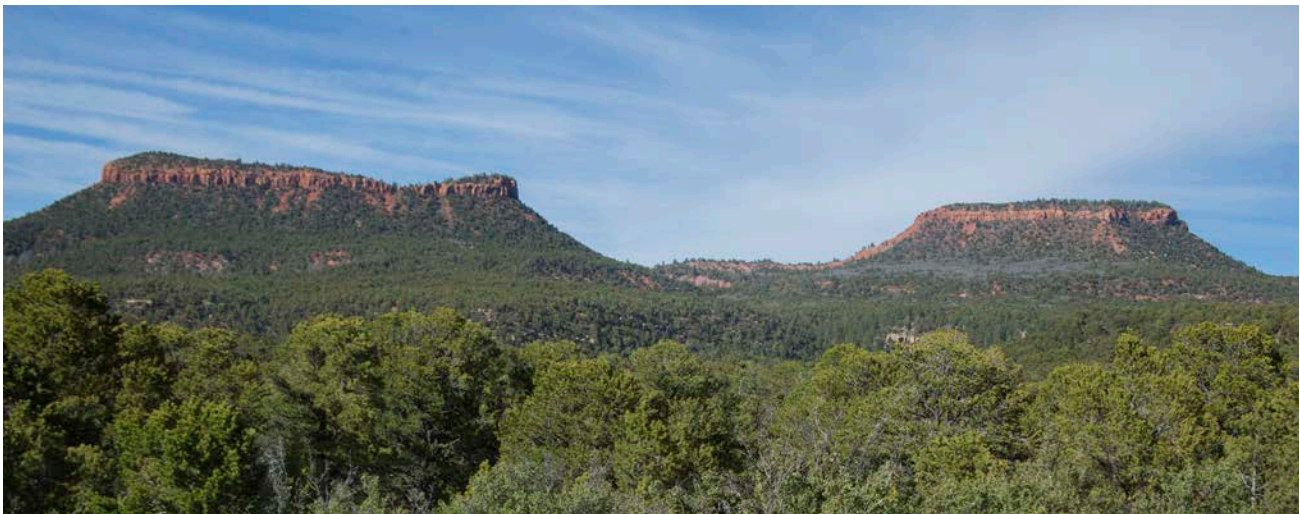
agement needs for the Forest Service’s specially-designated places, which vary widely in type, size, designated values, and history. In recent years, increases in visitation and changing recreation preferences have sparked discussions about resource sustainability and how well the designated values are maintained at some of these areas. The research presented here, conducted independently by the University of Oregon’s Ecosystem Workforce Program with information and outreach support by the U.S. Forest Service, investigates a subset of the Forest Service’s specially-designated areas which we called “iconic places.” The iconic places are highly-visible special areas that have some aspect of recreation management and relatively high visitation.

This working paper presents the results of a survey of iconic places across the country. The U.S. Forest Service’s iconic places have never been comprehensively surveyed, and this first effort was intended to gather a baseline understanding of the conditions and needs across the iconic places we identified. The survey asked site managers what was working well at iconic places, and areas where additional support may be necessary to ensure the longevity of their unique benefits and opportunities. As the Forest Service seeks ways to support these special areas and best attend to their unique management needs, the results offer a more comprehensive understanding of how iconic places operate, and the opportunities and challenges they experience in sustaining their valued characteristics.

Approach

We identified 47 specially-designated areas managed by the U.S. Forest Service, referred to henceforth as “iconic places.” For this initial exploration, we focused on designations that were most common and where recreation was typically a focus. In the future, this baseline survey may be expanded to assess additional places. The selected places included: 22 national recreation areas, 10 national monuments, 7 national scenic areas, 2 national volcanic monuments, 1 national scenic and research area, 1 national scenic recreation area, 1 national scenic and wildlife area, 1 national heritage area, 1 national historic area, and 1 national historic trail (see Table 1, page 4). Areas were located in 22 states and all nine U.S. Forest Service regions (see Figure 1, page 5).

During 2016–2017 we surveyed site managers at the iconic places. We created an online survey, contacted site managers at the iconic places, and requested their participation. Survey questions asked about site features and values, current resource conditions and trends, recreation use, management practices, partnerships, and ongoing challenges and opportunities. We gave site managers a unique response code to protect their identity and to ensure that only one response was submitted per site. We sent three reminders to managers who had not taken the survey before closing the survey. We then summarized and analyzed survey responses.



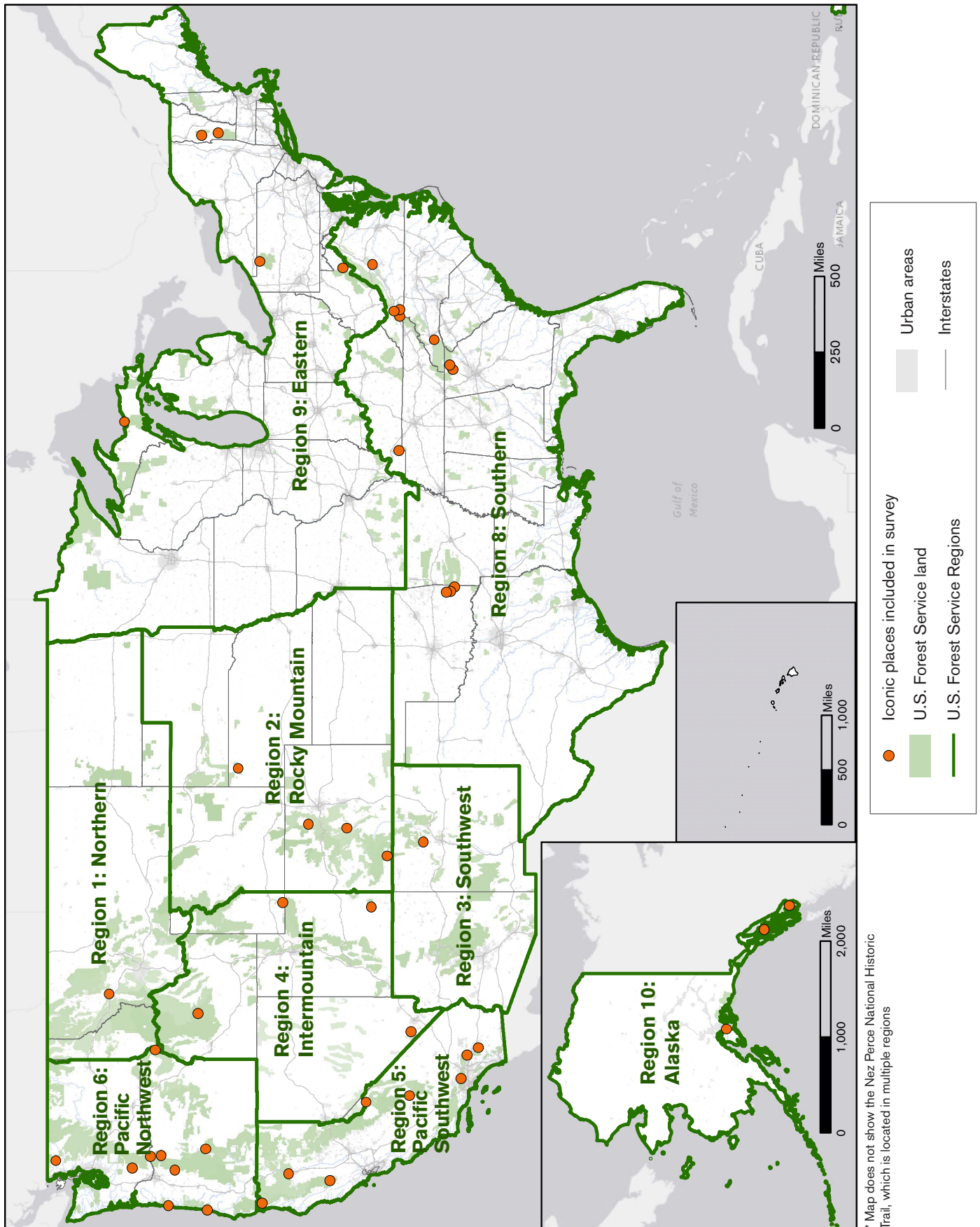
Bears Ears National Monument, Utah. U.S. Forest Service Region 4: Intermountain

Table 1 Iconic places identified for survey outreach: Areas and information

U.S. Forest Service region	Name	Area type	National forest	Year established	NFS area (acres) ¹
1: Northern	Rattlesnake	National Recreation Area	Lolo	1980	60,081
	Arapaho	National Recreation Area	Arapahoe and Roosevelt	1978	31,102
2: Rocky Mountain	Browns Canyon	National Monument	San Isabel	2015	11,819
	Chimney Rock	National Monument	San Juan	2012	4,724
	Pine Ridge	National Recreation Area	Nebraska	1986	6,636
3: Southwestern	Jemez	National Recreation Area	Santa Fe	1993	48,841
4: Intermountain	Bears Ears	National Monument	Manti LaSal	2016	NA
	Flaming Gorge	National Recreation Area	Ashley	1968	187,121
	Sawtooth	National Recreation Area	Sawtooth	1972	731,774
	Spring Mountains	National Recreation Area	Humboldt-Toiyabe	1993	316,698
5: Pacific Southwest	Berryessa	National Monument	Mendocino	2015	197,360
	Giant Sequoia	National Monument	Sequoia	2000	328,411
	Mono Basin	National Scenic Area	Inyo	1984	51,320
	San Gabriel Mountains	National Monument	Angeles/San Bernadino	2014	336,534
	Sand to Snow	National Monument	San Bernadino	2016	70,942
	Santa Rosa and San Jacinto	National Monument	San Bernadino	2000	69,384
	Smith River	National Recreation Area	Six Rivers	1990	323,137
6: Pacific Northwest	Whiskeytown Shasta-Trinity	National Recreation Area	Shasta-Trinity	1965	173,065
	Cascade Head	National Scenic and Research Area	Siuslaw	1974	7,162
	Columbia River Gorge	National Scenic Area	Administrative unit	1986	83,357
	Hells Canyon	National Recreation Area	Wallowa-Whitman	1975	634,579
	Mount Baker	National Recreation Area	Mount Baker-Snoqualmie	1984	8,789
	Mount Hood	National Recreation Area	Mount Hood	2009	34,465
	Mount St. Helens	National Volcanic Monument	Gifford Pinchot	1982	112,864
	Newberry	National Volcanic Monument	Deschutes	1990	56,563
	Opal Creek	National Scenic Recreation Area	Willamette	1998	13,666
	Oregon Dunes	National Recreation Area	Siuslaw	1972	30,230
8: Southern	Bear Creek	National Scenic Area	George Washington-Jefferson	2009	5,122
	Beech Creek	National Scenic Area	Ouachita	1988	8,042
	Coosa Bald	National Scenic Area	Chattahoochee-Oconee	1991	7,044
	Cradle of Forestry in America	National Historic Area	Pisgah	1968	7,793
	Ed Jenkins	National Recreation Area	Chattahoochee-Oconee	1992	23,541
	Indian Nations	National Scenic and Wildlife Area	Ouachita	1988	44,519
	Land Between the Lakes	National Recreation Area	Administrative unit	1963	171,251
	Mount Pleasant	National Scenic Area	George Washington-Jefferson	1994	6,864
	Mount Rogers	National Recreation Area	George Washington-Jefferson	1966	114,223
	Seng Mountain	National Scenic Area	George Washington-Jefferson	2009	5,195
9: Eastern	Winding Stair Mountain	National Recreation Area	Ouachita	1988	26,617
	Allegheny	National Recreation Area	Allegheny	1984	23,790
	Grand Island	National Recreation Area	Hiawatha	1990	13,335
	Moosalamoo	National Recreation Area	Green Mountain	2006	15,913
	Robert T. Stafford White Rocks	National Recreation Area	Green Mountain	1984	36,563
10: Alaska	Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks	National Recreation Area	Monongahela	1965	57,511
	Admiralty Island	National Monument	Tongass	1980	997,226
	Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm	National Heritage Area	Chugach	2009	NA
NA	Misty Fiords	National Monument	Tongass	1980	2,293,162
NA	Nez Perce	National Historic Trail	Multiple	1886	NA

¹ Source: 2017 Land Areas of the National Forest System. <https://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar-index.shtml>. Areas for iconic places that are not individually identified in this report are noted as NA.

Figure 1 Locations of iconic places included in survey outreach*



* Map does not show the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, which is located in multiple regions

Results

Of the 47 iconic places included in our survey outreach, we received usable responses from managers at 41 iconic places (83 percent).

Although all regions had at least one iconic place and one survey response (see Figure 2, below), Region 8 had the most iconic places and responses; combined Regions 5, 6, and 8 provided more than half of the responses. Responses were from sites associated with 36 different national forests and administrative units, and were designated between 1963 and 2015.

Reasons for designation

Special area designation occurs when an area is deemed an exceptional example of particular values or attributes that merit special attention and management.⁴ We asked site managers about the values for which the area received special designation. Many special areas are designated for multiple values, and managers most frequently selected four different values. “Scenic value” was selected most frequently, with 30 (73 percent) of managers selecting it as a value for which their site was des-

ignated (see Figure 3, page 7). In all but two responses, scenic value was reported along with other values. Unique biophysical attributes and “unique or highly-sought-after recreation opportunities” were also selected as reasons for designation by the majority of managers (27, 65 percent and 25, 61 percent, respectively). Some managers (14, 34 percent) noted “other” values, which included values based around education, science and research, ecological restoration, wildlife, cultural resources, and economic opportunities. Two managers were not sure of the values for which the site was designated.

Site recognition

We asked managers how well the special area was recognized among staff in the management unit containing the iconic place. Most (28, 68 percent) said their iconic places were widely recognized (see Figure 4, page 7). However, about a quarter of managers indicated a lack of recognition of the iconic place within the broader unit. Five managers said that their sites were mostly not recognized or not recognized at all among unit staff, and two were not sure how well-recognized it was.

Figure 2 Survey response rate by U.S. Forest Service region

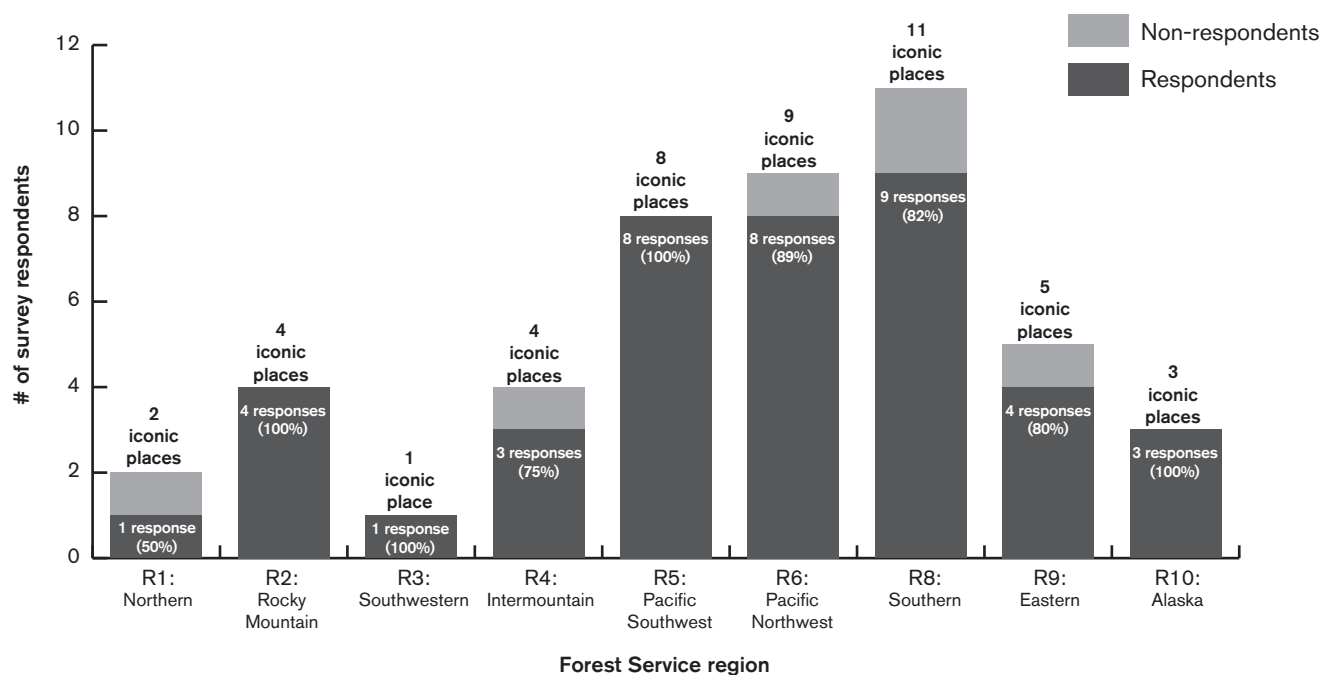


Figure 3 Manager perception of the values for which the iconic place received special designation

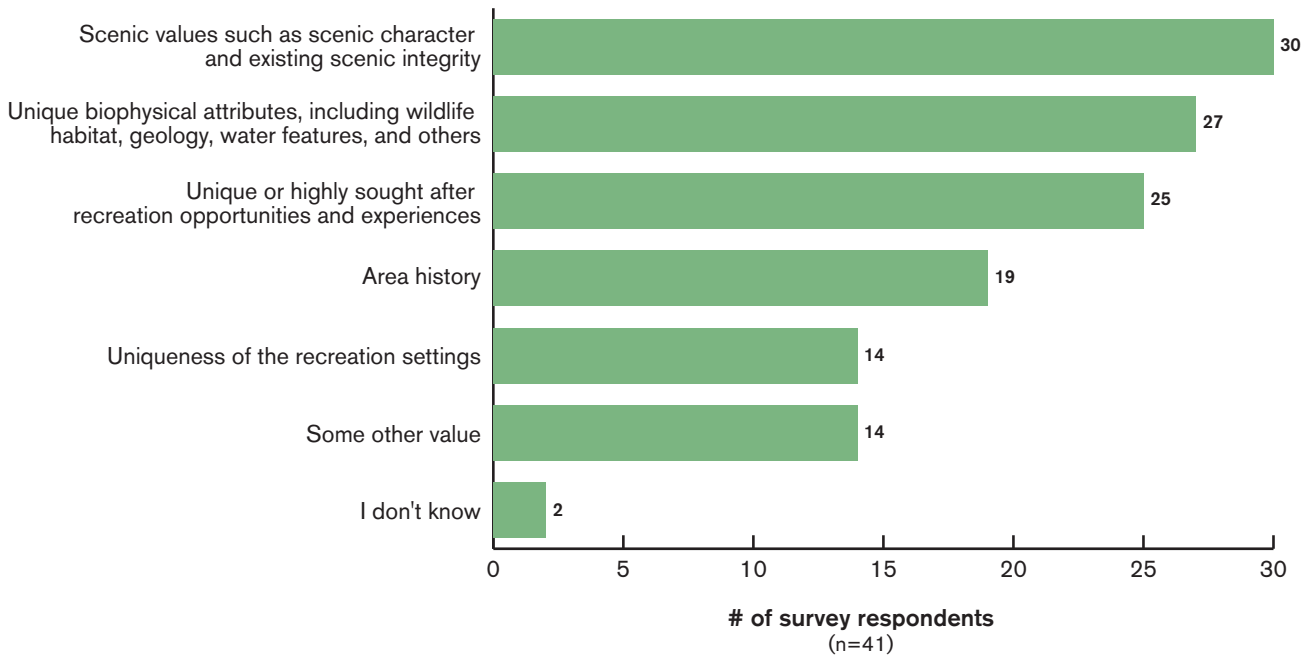
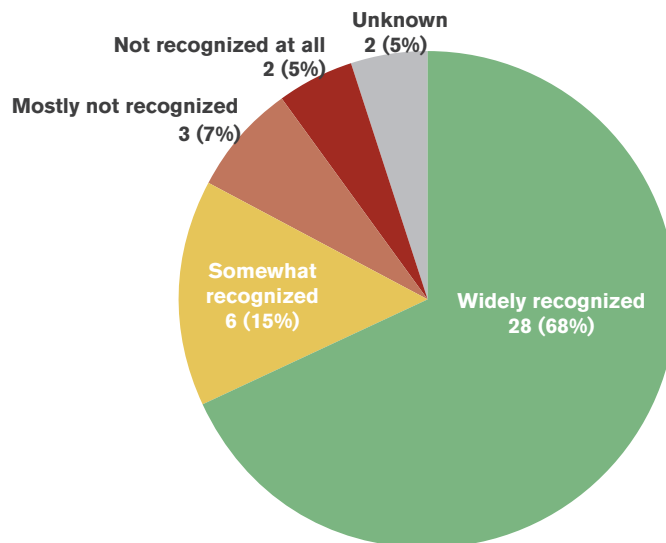


Figure 4 Manager perception of how well-recognized the iconic place is among U.S. Forest Service unit staff





Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area, Oregon. U.S. Forest Service Region 6: Pacific Northwest

Resource conditions

We asked site managers about the conditions of different resources at the iconic places, including scenic and recreation values as well as infrastructure resources such as trails, developed sites, facilities, and others. We then asked what the trends in condition were, or how the resource conditions were improving, declining, or staying the same.

Current conditions

In addition to being the most commonly noted reason for designation, scenic values were also reported to be the most highly-functioning resource value across sites. Managers for 30 of the iconic places (73 percent) reported that the area's scenic values were well-functioning (see Figure 5, page 9). The majority of managers (21, 51 percent) also reported that night sky quality was well-functioning.

For all other resources we asked about, managers most often reported that conditions were “impaired but functional.” Interpretive signs and facilities and trails least frequently were reported as well-functioning—only six managers (15 percent) said that these resources were well-functioning on their sites. Managers more frequently reported interpretive signs and facilities and dispersed recreation resources as deteriorated. Five managers wrote in “other” resources which included: research opportunities (well-functioning), cultural resources and invasive species containment (impaired but functional), and educational programs and government-owned buildings (deteriorated).

Trends

When asked about the trends in conditions at the iconic places, most managers (33, 80 percent) said that scenic values were static (see Figure 6, page 9), perhaps because scenic values were most often reported as well-functioning. More than half of the managers also said that recreation opportunities and night sky quality were static.

Managers most frequently reported declining conditions for trails and for dispersed recreation resources (18, 44 percent of managers, each). This was followed by developed sites, interpretive signs and facilities, and roads and access, which were reported as declining by 16 managers (39 percent). Few managers said that any of the resources we asked about were improving. Of all the resources, recreation opportunities were reported as improving most often, but still by only six managers (15 percent). Four managers (10 percent) said that trail conditions were improving. No manager indicated that the condition of roads and access on their site was improving.

Overall, trends mirrored current conditions. The most well-functioning values had the most static trends, and resources that were deteriorated at more places were also more often reported to have declining conditions. Four managers reported “other” resources, including: cultural resources which were reported as static at one site, and three values with declining conditions: research opportunities, government-owned buildings, and invasive species containment.

Figure 5 Manager perception of current conditions at the iconic place

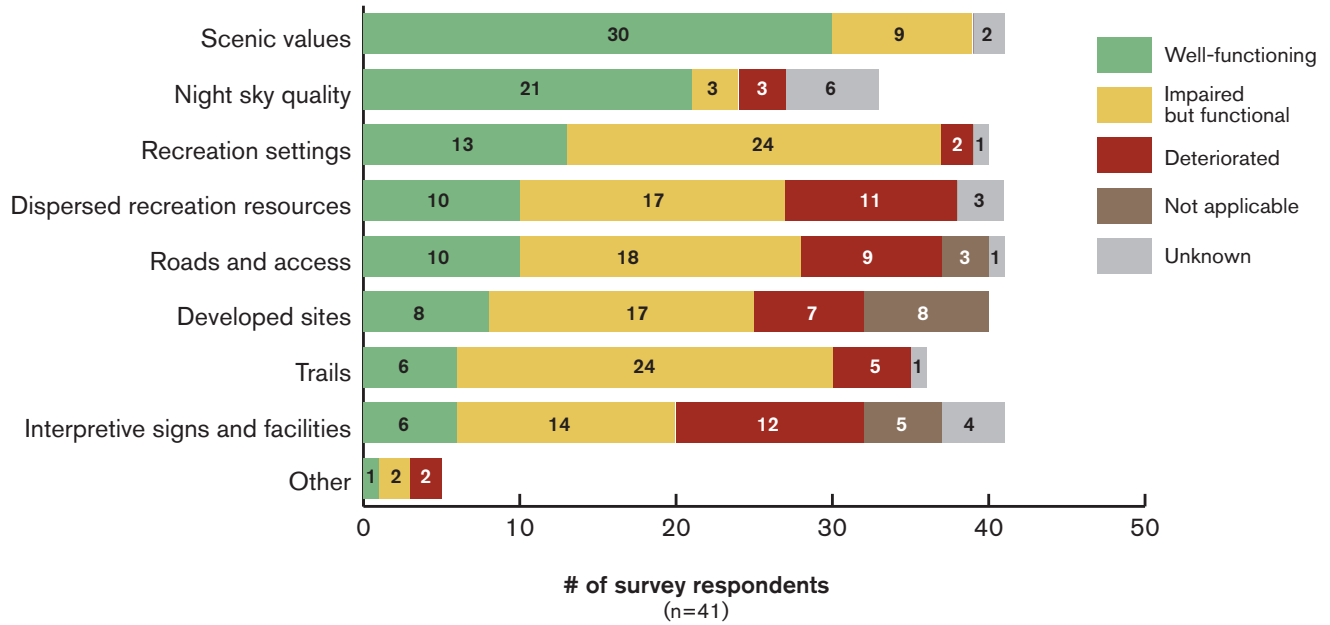
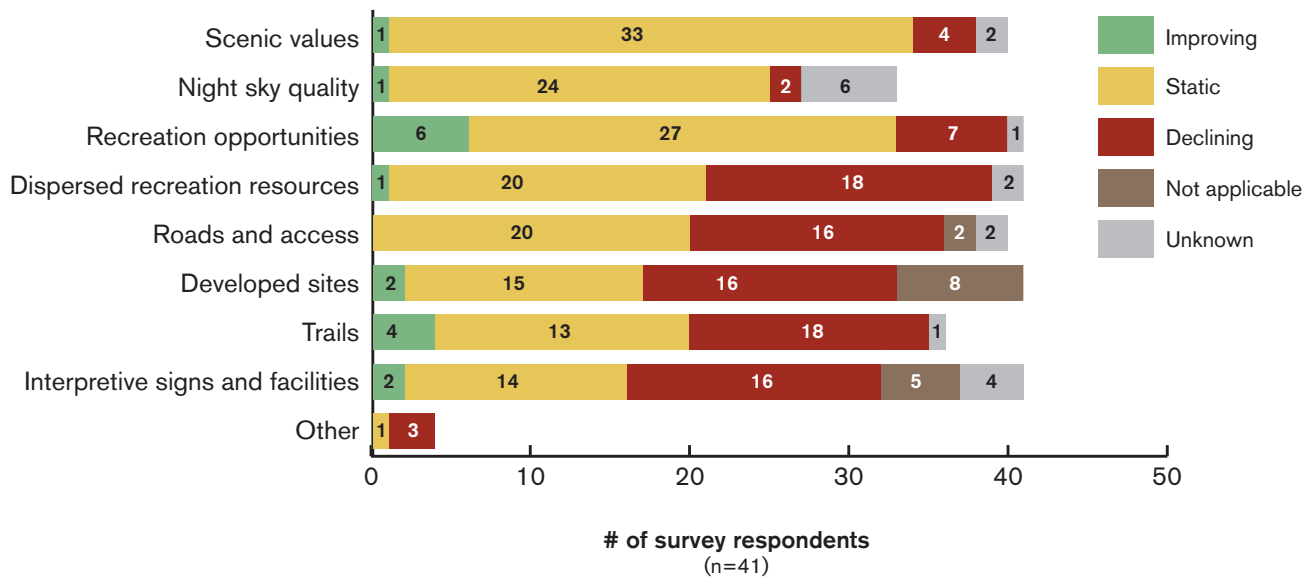


Figure 6 Manager perception of resource condition trends at the iconic place



Recreation use

We asked site managers about recreation use at their sites. In particular, we asked about recreation use estimates and their sources, the perceived sustainability of recreation use over the next decade, the perceived level of recreation use by different types of visitors to the site, and the perceived satisfaction of visitors with their recreation experiences.

Most managers (25, 61 percent) said that an estimate of recreation use across their site had been assessed during the last five years (see Figure 7, below). These estimates came from a variety of sources—but most common was the Forest Service National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM)⁵ Program (21 of the 25 sites with estimates, 84 percent). Ten managers reported that recreation use estimates were developed from counts of permits, fee receipts, or concessionaire records. Four managers reported estimates were developed from a permanent traffic counter, three said estimates came from outside groups, and three indicated other sources, which included traffic counts by a transportation planning organization, counts conducted by units, and a combination approach that included visitor, traffic, and nearby lands estimates and counts.

When asked if the current level of recreation use at the site was considered sustainable, two-thirds

of managers said that it was (see Figure 8, page 11). However, most managers (22, 54 percent) also said that the perceived *trend* in recreation use was not considered sustainable over the next ten years. This suggests that managers at some sites with currently sustainable recreation use expected use to increase to unsustainable levels over the next decade due to the trends they perceived at the site.

We asked managers about levels of recreation use from three different types of visitors to the area. All managers thought that nearby local residents had high or moderate levels of recreation use (see Figure 9, page 11). Most (23, 56 percent) also felt that there was high use of the area among tourists who traveled specifically to visit the area. Manager perception of use level by tourists who were visiting the site as a side trip while traveling for other reasons was more mixed. Eight managers (20 percent) thought there was little use among this type of visitor, but the rest thought that these tourists also had high or moderate recreation use at the area.

Most managers (32, 78 percent) felt that visitors were either satisfied or very satisfied with their recreation experiences at the site (see Figure 10, page 11). No manager felt that visitors were dissatisfied with their recreation experiences, although seven managers (17 percent) were not sure of visitor satisfaction level.

Figure 7 Estimates of recreation use at the iconic place in the last five years

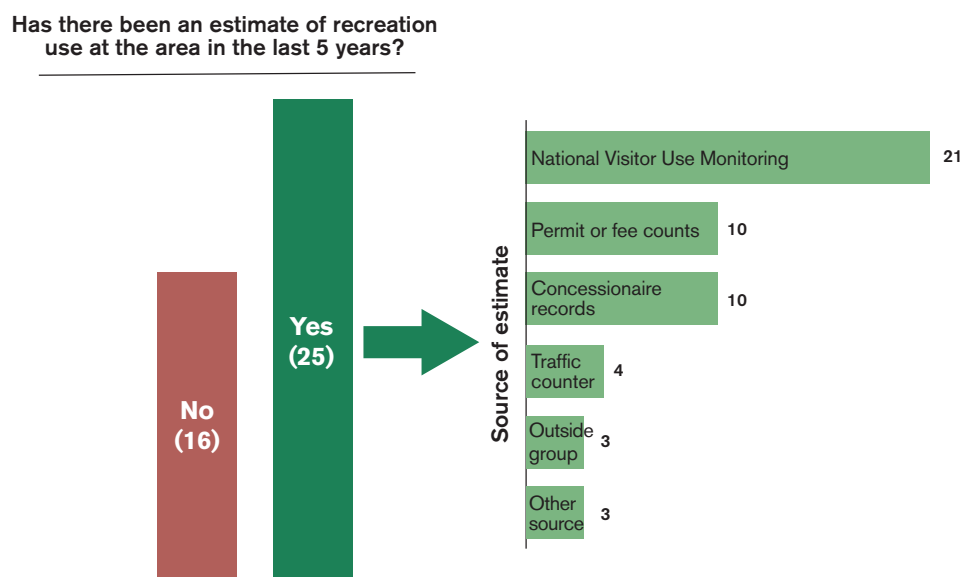


Figure 8 Manager perception of recreation use sustainability at the iconic place: Current use and perceived recreation use trends

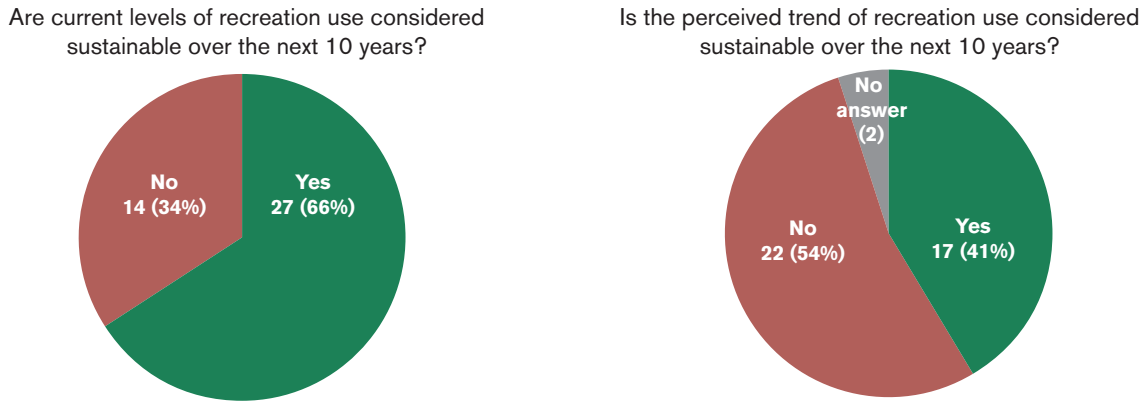


Figure 9 Manager perception of the levels of recreation use by different types of visitors to the iconic place

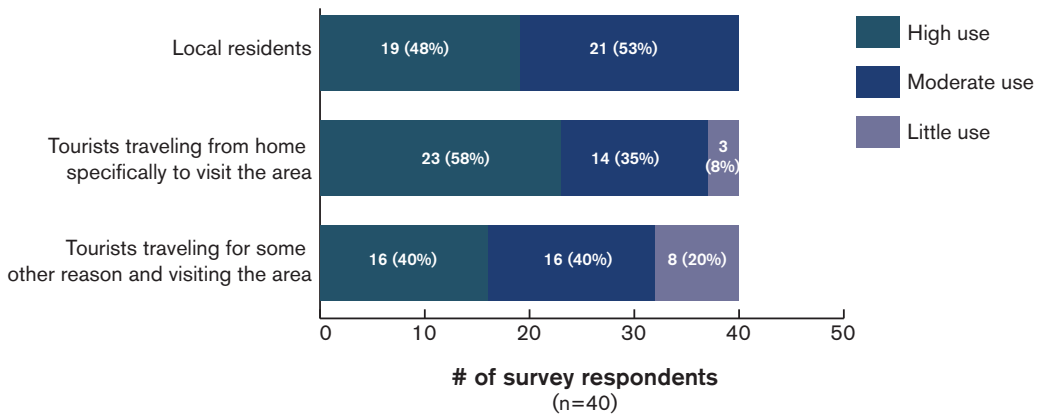
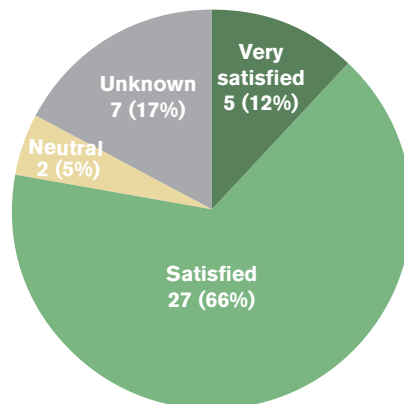


Figure 10 Manager perception of visitors' satisfaction with their recreation experiences at the iconic place



Site management

Management is a key component of specially-designation. Designated areas are meant to showcase national forest management standards, and “should be managed with emphasis on the primary values and resources as directed by the law that established the area.”⁶ The survey asked site managers at the iconic places how sites were managed, including questions about desired conditions, assessments, information gaps, challenges and opportunities, marketing, and partnerships.

Desired conditions

Managers from the majority of sites (34, 83 percent) said that desired conditions for the area were formally defined, and most managers (30, 73 percent) said that defined desired conditions drive short- and long-range planning for the area (see Figure 11, below). Four managers said that desired conditions were defined but did not drive planning for the area, but it is unclear why this was the case for these sites. Managers at sites with formally-defined desired conditions indicated that the conditions were defined most often in land and resource management plans, but other sources included interpre-

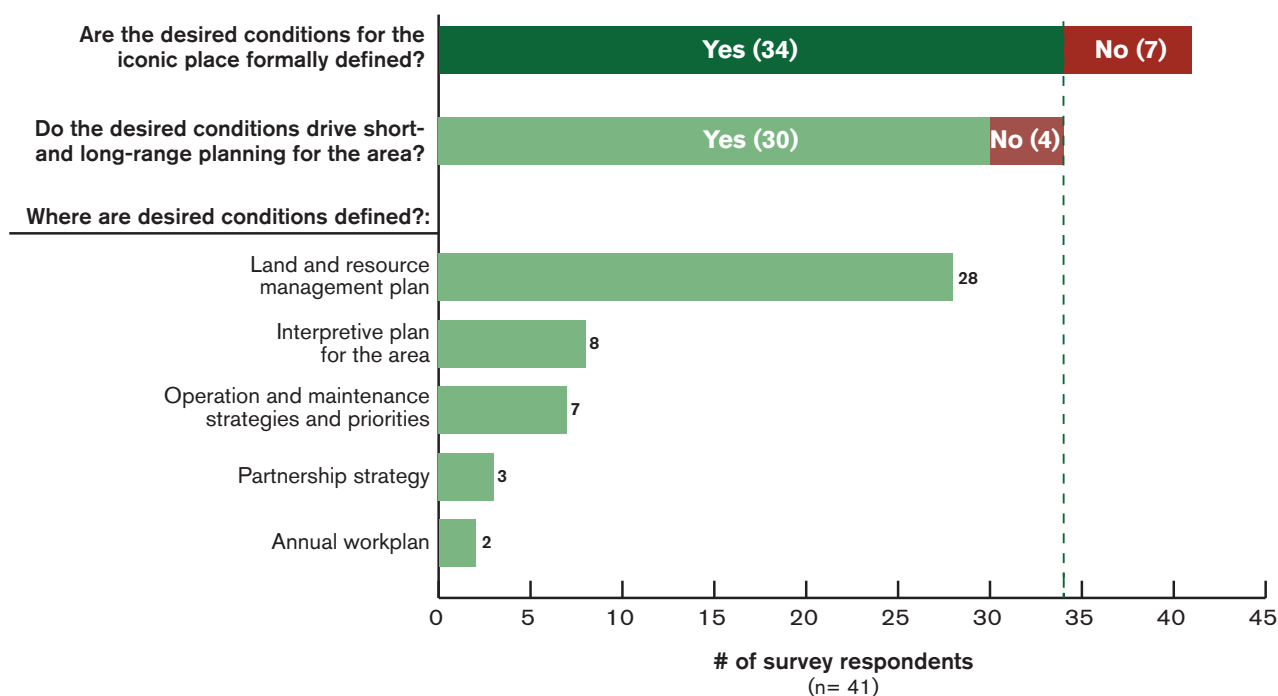
tive plans, operation and maintenance strategies and priorities, partnership strategies, and annual work plans.

Information and information gaps

Assessments, plans, and targets

We asked managers about six different types of assessments, and whether they had been done for the area during the last five years. Although 17 managers (41 percent) did not select any of the assessments, most (24, 59 percent) noted that at least one assessment had been completed. The most common type of assessment selected was a recreation facility analysis, indicated by managers for 18 sites (44 percent) (see Figure 12, page 13). Managers at fewer sites selected the other assessments we asked about, including an estimate of economic contribution from recreation at the site (8 managers, 20 percent), a user satisfaction assessment (7 managers, 17 percent), a social assessment of recreation visitors (6 managers, 15 percent), an estimate of recreation demand from potential visitors (6 managers, 15 percent), and a visitor capacity assessment (5 managers, 12 percent). In addition to the specific assessments we asked about, some managers (6,

Figure 11 Management for desired conditions at iconic places



15 percent) noted that others had been completed on their sites, including assessments for OHV (off-highway vehicle) illegal use, commercial needs, and wildlife impacts.

We also asked managers if any of five different plans, measures, or targets were in place to track resource conditions and social and economic outcomes at their sites. About a third of managers (13, 32 percent) said that none of the plans and targets

we asked about were in place at the iconic place. The most common types of plans or targets selected were recreation-related targets and ecological or forest management targets, each of these were selected by 19 managers (46 percent) (see Figure 13, page 13). Fourteen managers (34 percent) said that performance measures were in place, nine (22 percent) said a social or recreation monitoring plan was in place, and 8 (20 percent) said an ecological monitoring plan was in place.

Figure 12 Assessments done in the last five years at the iconic place

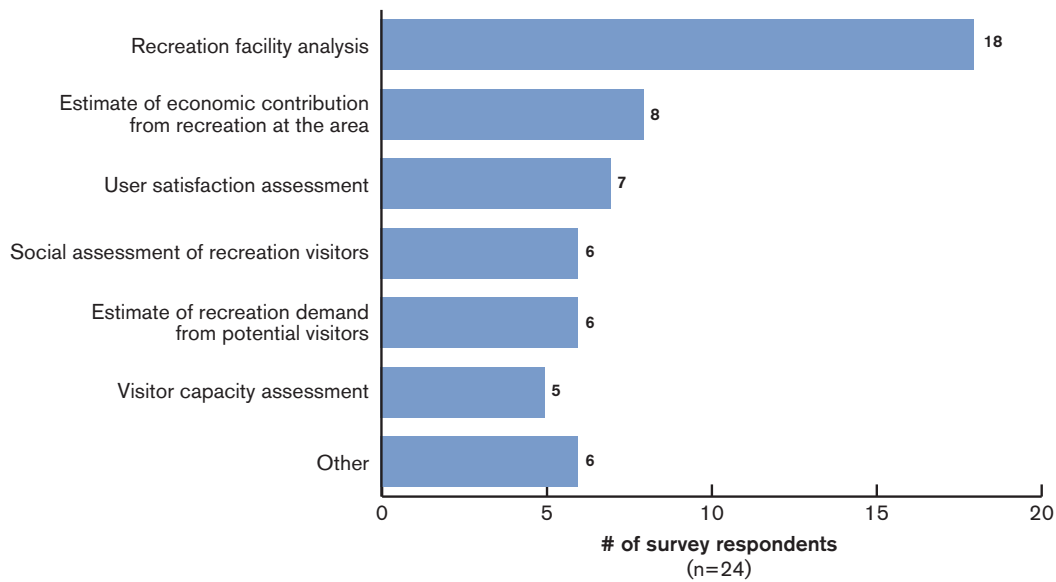
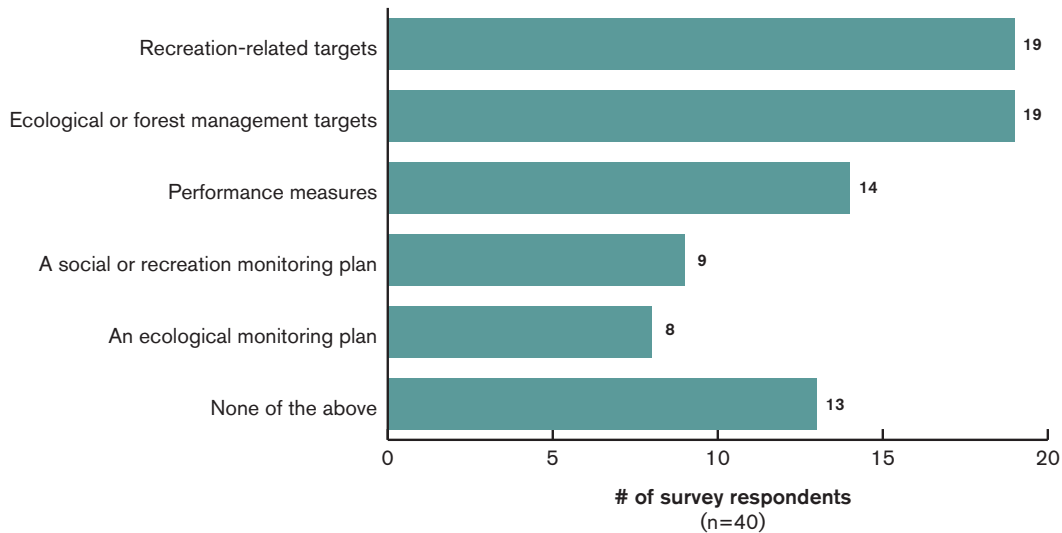


Figure 13 Plans and targets in place to track resource conditions and social and economic outcomes at the iconic place



Information gaps

We asked managers what key information gaps they had in managing recreation at the iconic places. Most of the managers (31, 76 percent) provided written answers identifying the gaps that they saw. The majority of the information gaps that managers identified related to visitors and their use of the site. For example 17 managers said they wanted more information on visitation (see Figure 14, below), particularly in relation to visitation estimates specifically for the iconic place rather than the broader unit, how visitation varied between seasons, how many visitors arrived for the different uses offered on site, and what the patterns of use on site were (see Table 1, page 15). Managers also said they wanted a better understanding of visitors themselves—their experiences, preferences, satis-

faction, travel time, and tolerance levels for things like fees—and a better understanding of changing recreation trends.

Other themes that emerged from the managers' answers included: information about administrative tasks and management (potential funding and partnerships, internal policies and practices, outreach avenues), information about on-site amenities (facilities, features, and capacity limits), and research related to dynamics at their site (social and economic impacts, scientific findings). Table 2 (see page 15) lists the specific information that managers identified as lacking for recreation management on their sites, organized by each of the broader themes we identified in their answers.

Figure 14 Themes in information gaps that managers identified at their sites

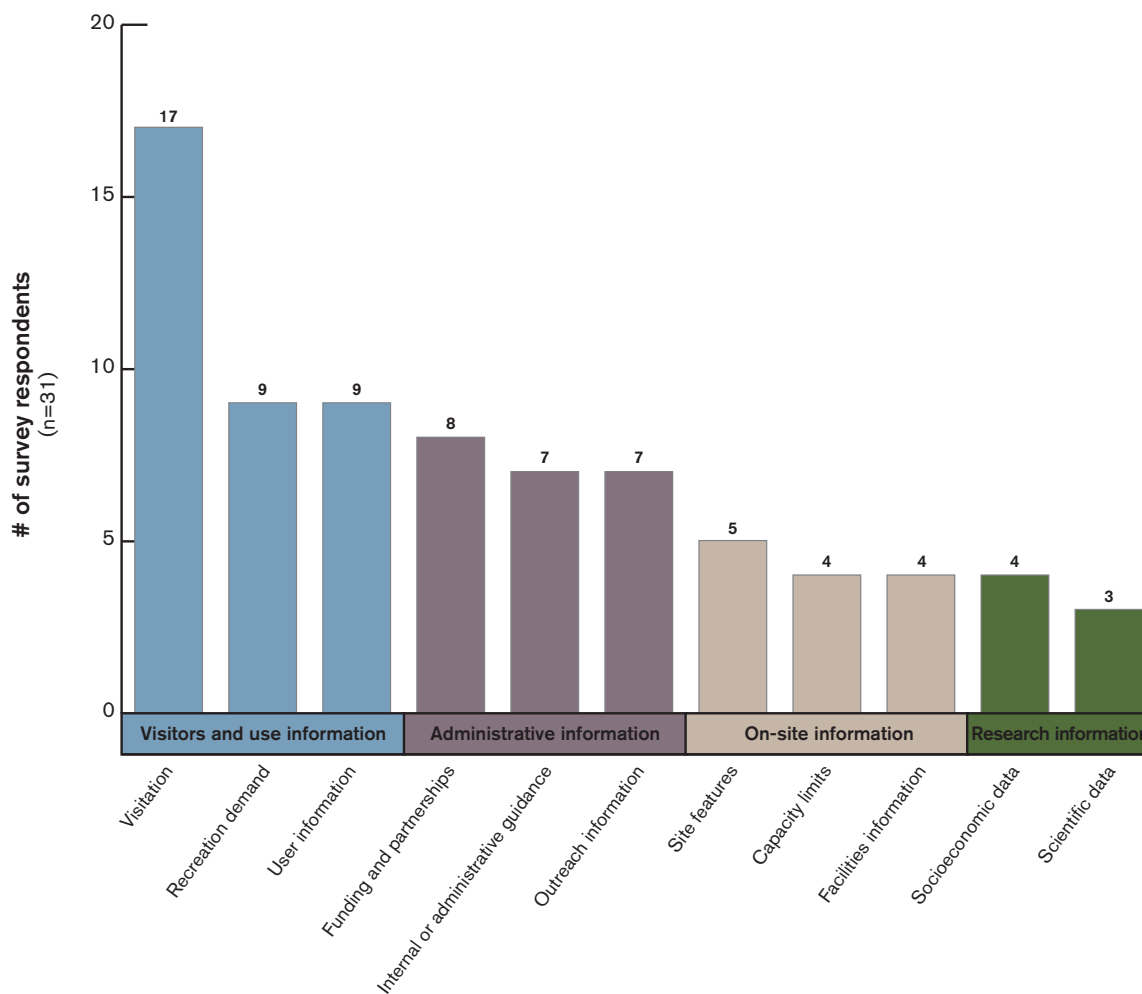
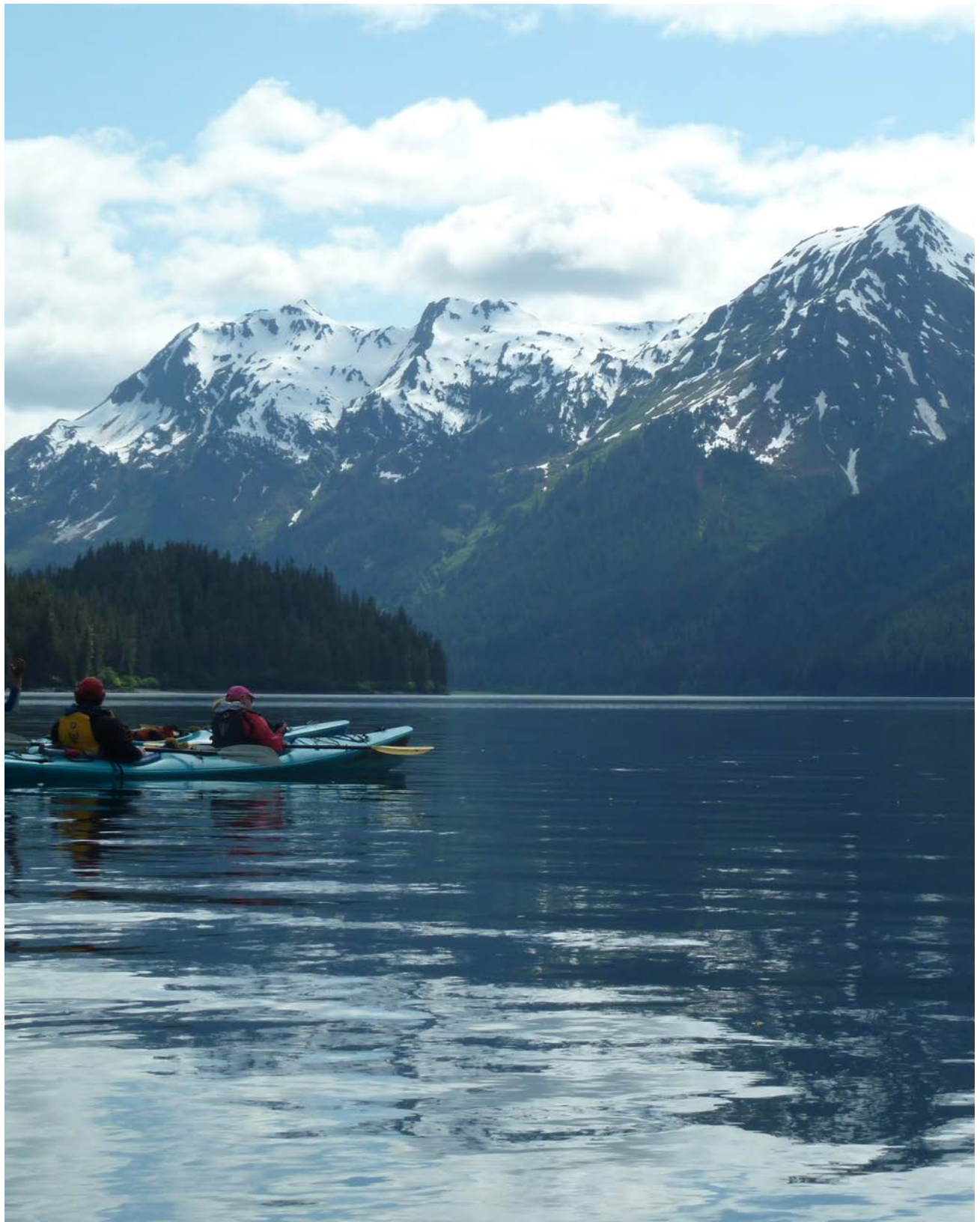


Table 2 Manager-identified information gaps in managing recreation at iconic places, themes and specific examples

Themes	Examples of information needed
Visitation data	Visitation estimates; volume of use overall and at site specific destinations; visitor use monitoring; accurate user counts including summer and winter activities, day use, overnight, type of recreation activity, length of stay, party size; where visitors spend time; user numbers at all entrance and exit points; seasonal user numbers; records of user numbers by activities; data on unauthorized uses such as OHV.
Recreation demand	A 10-year recreation market demand analysis that informs future recreation infrastructure alignment decisions; identifying evolving recreation interests, uses, and trends; clearer vision of future recreation trends and public needs; better understand the growing recreation demand of small local communities; understanding the rate of currently growing recreation demand; visitor use trends and evolution.
User data	Information on user preferences and changing demographics; better understanding of the people that are not using the area; surveys of why users visit; changes that users would like to see; what users are interested in seeing; user satisfaction; visitor opinions on fees and payment systems; what users will tolerate (fees, permits, etc.).
Funding and partnership avenues	A business plan; outside resources that could be tapped; how to get more funding assistance; methods for developing new funding source to stay in the area; partnership opportunities.
Internal capacity or administrative guidance	Ensuring the right skill set to manage a unique resource in the Forest Service; national message of funding gap versus unit by unit; more seamless work across forest and region; developing a funding source for the area separate from the forest; lack of knowledge around the benefits of managing the area separate from the forest; assistance with filling vacancies.
Outreach methods	Current methods to deliver information in respect to the spectrum of recreation endeavors; where visitors are getting information on the site from and how to work with those sources; outreach and engagement with the Hispanic population; better advertising and social media efforts; improved information to the public at trailheads, kiosks, online; review of interpretive messages; more info shared across boundaries.
Site features	Identified areas with wilderness characteristics; baseline data on natural and cultural resources on site; inventory of noxious weeds; current inventory of unmanaged recreation assets.
Capacity limits	Capacity assessments at popular sites; capacity analysis for the whole area; visitor and land capacity limits/carrying capacities.
Facilities	More up-to-date facility assessments; inventory of facilities that are needed to protect scenic quality and accommodate visitors; knowledge of facility updates needed to tolerate level of use.
Socioeconomic data	Thresholds for social encounters; economic benefits associated with recreation use in area; social benefits data; social science research on effective messaging for sustainable recreation.
Scientific data	Species habitat and necessary recovery management actions; climate change impacts; baseline scientific data on resources; social science research on effective messaging.
Other information gaps noted	Impacts on resources; desired conditions; legislative processes and intent.



Admiralty Island National Monument, Alaska. U.S. Forest Service Region 10: Alaska

Challenges

We wanted to gather a better understanding of the challenges that managers faced at the iconic places. We listed ten potential challenges and asked managers to select those that they saw as challenges to sustaining the valued characteristics and opportunities at the iconic places over the next ten years. Managers could also write in challenges that they perceived in addition to the ones that we listed.

Managers most frequently selected internal challenges. Managers from all but two sites (five percent) said that internal funding was a challenge (see Figure 15, below). Most managers also identified staffing concerns—staffing shortages and competing demands on existing staff were each selected as a challenge by more than three quarters of managers. Most also indicated challenging conditions on site, for example 28 managers (68 percent) said that the amount of recreation use was a challenge, and 27 managers (66 percent) identified challenging infrastructure conditions.

Of the challenges that were external in nature (i.e., not internal agency or on-site challenges), external funding was selected most often, by 27 managers (66 percent). Some managers said that broader en-

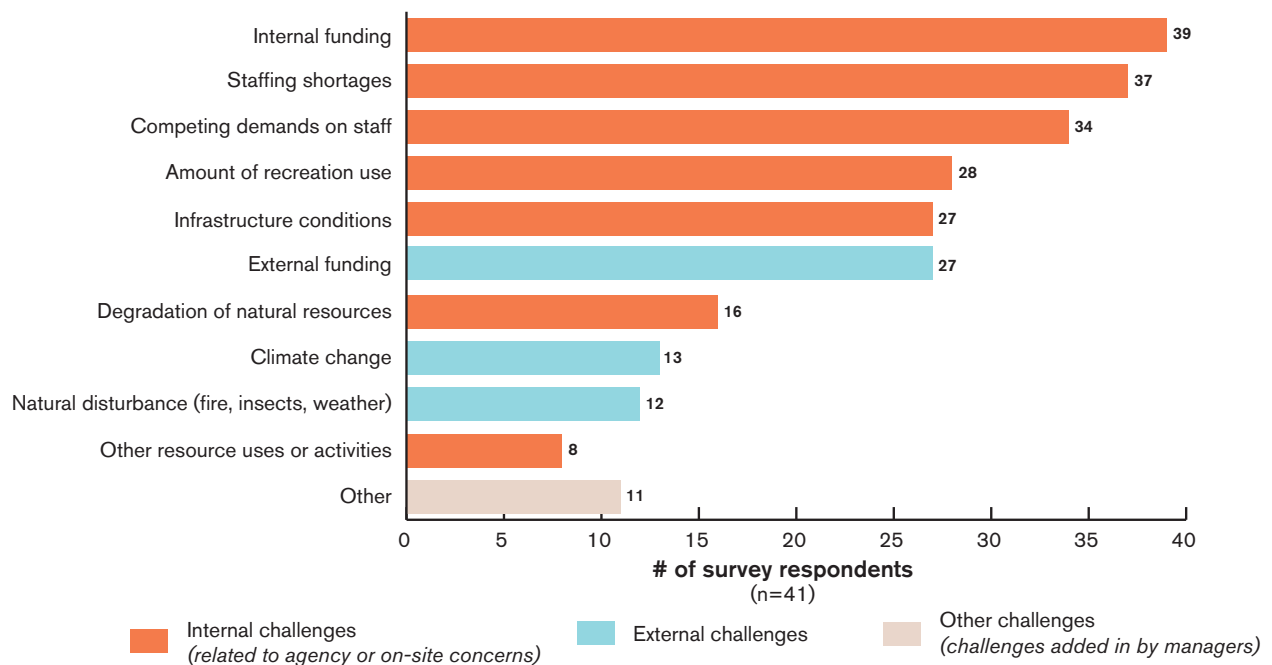
vironmental processes also posed challenges. For instance, 13 managers (32 percent) selected climate change as a challenge, and twelve (29 percent) selected natural disturbance such as fire, insects, or weather.

Some managers (eleven, 27 percent) also listed additional “other” challenges that they felt were prominent at their sites. These included urban encroachment and development pressures, competing agency and management priorities, limitations due to different land owners within site boundaries, a lack of capacity in social media and other media sources needed to connect with site users, concerns with access, increasing OHV use pressures, and opposing initiatives from land owners that surround the site.

Managers could select as many challenges as they felt appropriate, and every manager identified at least two. One manager selected eleven different challenges. Overall, managers most commonly selected six different challenges that they perceived to sustaining the valued characteristics and opportunities at the iconic places that they managed.

Opportunities

Figure 15 Manager perception of the challenges in sustaining the valued characteristics and opportunities at the iconic place over the next ten years



We also wanted to understand if there were any opportunities that managers perceived for the iconic places that they managed. We asked managers an open-ended question, inviting them to identify any opportunities they saw for sustaining the valued characteristics and opportunities at their sites over the next decade. Most managers (33, 80 percent) reported opportunities. From these responses, we identified themes. Because managers were not asked about each of the opportunities or themes we report on here, responses are not an evaluation or comparison of the opportunities, but instead represent the opportunities that multiple managers identified.

Managers most frequently wrote down opportunities that focused on partnerships—both seeking new ones and investing in or maintaining current and valuable partnerships (see Figure 16, below). Most managers who identified opportunities (24 of 33, 73 percent) noted the importance of partnership opportunities going forward. Partnerships were often mentioned in tandem with funding opportuni-

ties, which were noted by 15 managers (45 percent of the 33 respondents). In addition to leveraging partnerships, funding opportunities included applying for grants, increasing fees, increasing concessionaire offerings or eliminating concessionaire management to retain more fee income, and developing a sustainable business model for additional recreation opportunities.

The second most noted theme was for opportunities in recreation management, which were noted by most of the 33 managers (19, 58 percent) who offered opportunities. For example, managers identified opportunities such as: identifying priority areas, better managing noxious weeds in recreation areas, prioritizing interpretation services, focusing on dispersed recreation issues, evaluating and managing recreation use by carrying capacity, decommissioning unused infrastructure, and reducing congestion, among others. All of the opportunities that managers noted are listed with each of the eleven themes in Table 3 (see page 19).

Figure 16 Themes in opportunities that managers perceived for sustaining the valued characteristics at the iconic place over the next ten years

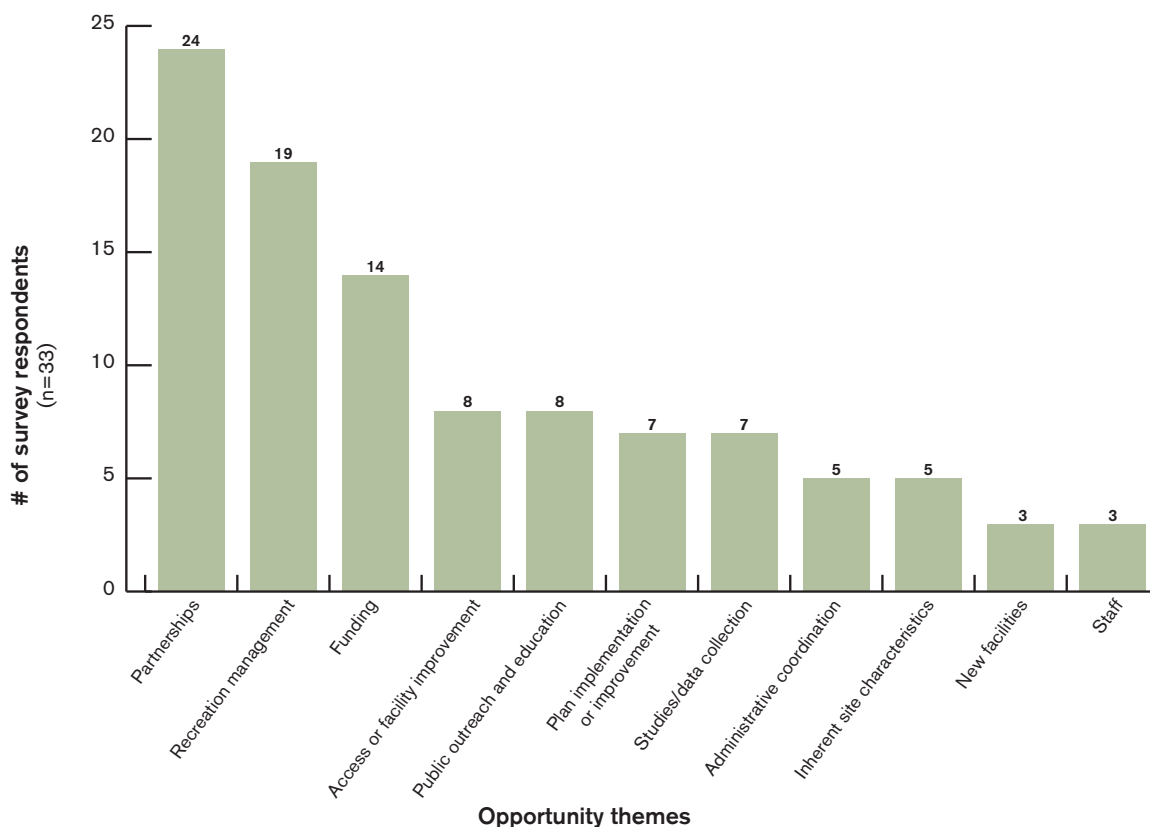


Table 3 Manager-identified opportunities for sustaining valued characteristics at iconic places, themes and specific examples

Opportunity themes	Examples of perceived opportunities
Access or facility improvement	Realigned infrastructure to future needs and expectations; improved signage; sustained investment in facilities; road restoration; reconstruction of sustainable trail systems; address deferred maintenance of facilities; better trail head resources.
Administrative coordination	Increased coordination with the governing national forest, region, Washington Office, or interagency projects and programs.
Formal plan implementation or improvement	Implement Management Plans, Recreation Facility Plans or Interpretive Plans; implementation of the Region's Sustainable Recreation Strategy; finalize Forest Plan revision; complete forest's Recreation Site Analysis; focus on interdisciplinary goals and objectives already lined out in the management plan.
Funding	Applying for grants; leveraging partner funding; developing partners for funding resources; increasing user fees; concessionaire more opportunities; eliminating concessionaire management and keeping revenue on site; developing a sustainable business model for value-added recreation; continuation of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, accessing Secure Rural Schools funding; accessing land stewardship and research funding.
Recreation management	Focus dispersed recreation management; implement agreed upon strategies; reduce congestion to provide for a manageable number of visitors during peak usage; disperse camping; modify current management to keep pace with growth in use; evaluate carrying capacity and possibly impose capacity limits at certain sites; vegetation management at vistas; better manage special use permits; maintain open area conditions at ridgetops; identify use priorities and manage by priorities; develop better understanding of current conditions to manage; increase priority on providing interpretation services; reduce infrastructure footprint; focus what is provided where the public have expectations; decommission the sites/trails that people are not using; concentrate on keeping trails cleared from fire damaged trees and noxious weed infestation after wildfires to improve recreation access and use by the public; reorganize around campground management approach.
Inherent site characteristics	Incredible beauty and attractiveness of the area; scenery and the Wild and Scenic River; unique biological characteristics within the area; rich historical and cultural aspects of the area; increased recognition of the value of public land as an economic driver.
New facilities	Adding interpretive kiosks, establishing a transit/shuttle system, adding a developed campground.
Partnerships	Develop new partnerships; strengthen existing partnerships; attention to new collaborations that could be pursued; more partnership coordination; external partnerships for bringing resources to the management of the area; engaged homeowners that are willing to help; partner with local tribal organizations to leverage funding opportunities for stewardship; partner with tourism businesses to assist visitors in accessing and enjoying the area; continue to work with interagency teams and efforts; work with outfitters/guides, volunteer trail, and facility maintenance organizations to accomplish work; partners with educational institutions for internships in citizen stewardship programs; increase the capacity of volunteers; work with small, local communities to come up with shared solutions to natural resource issues; work with partners on the preservation of resources; new partnerships with community or non-profit organizations or volunteers; follow partnership opportunities with colleges/universities, conservation groups, other land management agencies, area tribes, and other interest groups.
Public outreach and education	Area messaging campaign focuses on avoiding congestion and recreating safely and responsibly; area included in a mobile tour app; education of user groups (climbers, snowmobilers, horse riders, hikers) to encourage responsible stewardship of public lands; sustained investment in providing education/interpretive programs to the public; develop partnerships with educational institutions for internships in citizen stewardship programs that perform public outreach; improve interpretive facilities and experiences; conduct more resource interpretation of the area; re-establishment of a productive conservation education program; revitalize conservation education programs; increased priority on providing interpretation services.
Staffing	A dedicated manager position vs. split function; operate facilities with more Forest Service staff; current district staff a good fit for upcoming work
Studies or data collection	A congestion mitigation study; unique biological characteristics that are a high priority for research; evaluate carrying capacity; conduct more historical and cultural studies in the area; survey users; complete recreation site analysis; conduct visitor survey to determine what visitor services or needs aren't being met.



Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area, West Virginia. U.S. Forest Service Region 9: Eastern

Partnerships and contributed resources

We wanted to know about the types of partners that helped to manage the iconic places, as well as the kinds of contributions that the partners made. We asked managers about specific partners they worked with in the areas. Five of the 41 managers (12 percent) said that they do not have any partnerships for management of their sites and did not select any partners.

The other 36 managers (88 percent) did identify partners. The most commonly identified partnership (by 29 managers, 71 percent) for managing the area was with non-governmental organizations (see Figure 17, page 21). This was followed by partnerships with private organizations or groups (not including concessionaires) (22 managers, 54 percent), state governments or agencies (19 managers, 46 percent), local governments or agencies (17 managers, 41 percent), other federal agencies (15 managers, 37 percent), and academic institutions (13 managers, 32 percent). Eight managers (20 percent) wrote in

other partners—three (seven percent) noted tribal partners, three (seven percent) noted volunteers or volunteer groups, and one each noted concessionaires and a cooperating association. Managers could select as many partners as were relevant. They selected between one and six partners each, but most commonly indicated partnerships with three different types of partners.

We also asked about the types of contributions from partners. Most managers (33, 80 percent) said that partners contribute in-kind resources (goods and services), and 17 (41 percent) said that partners contribute monetary resources (see Figure 18, page 21). Ten managers noted other contributions from partners that included: communicating with other potential partners; volunteer hours, labor, and recruitment; education and interpretation services; restoration services; collaboration and facilitation services; and coordination on management for partners that own land or access points within site boundaries.

Figure 17 Partnerships that help manage the iconic place

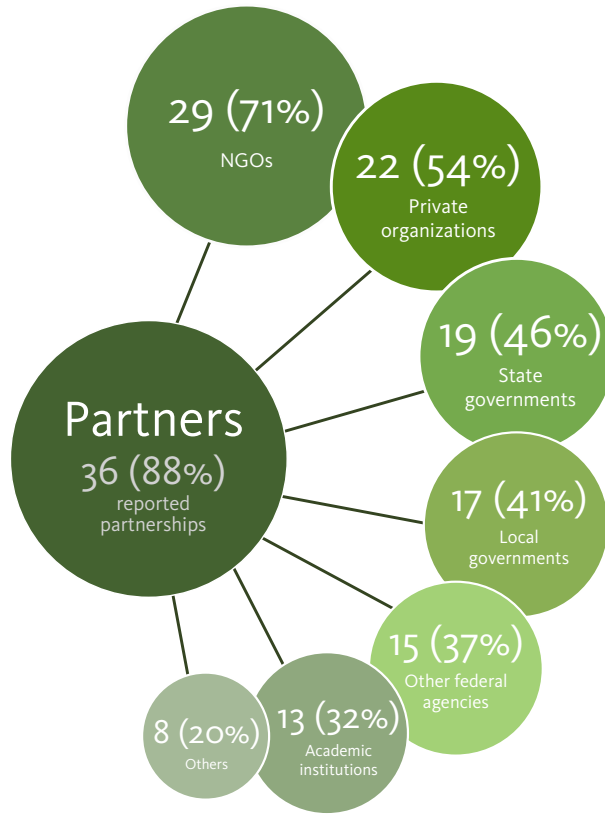
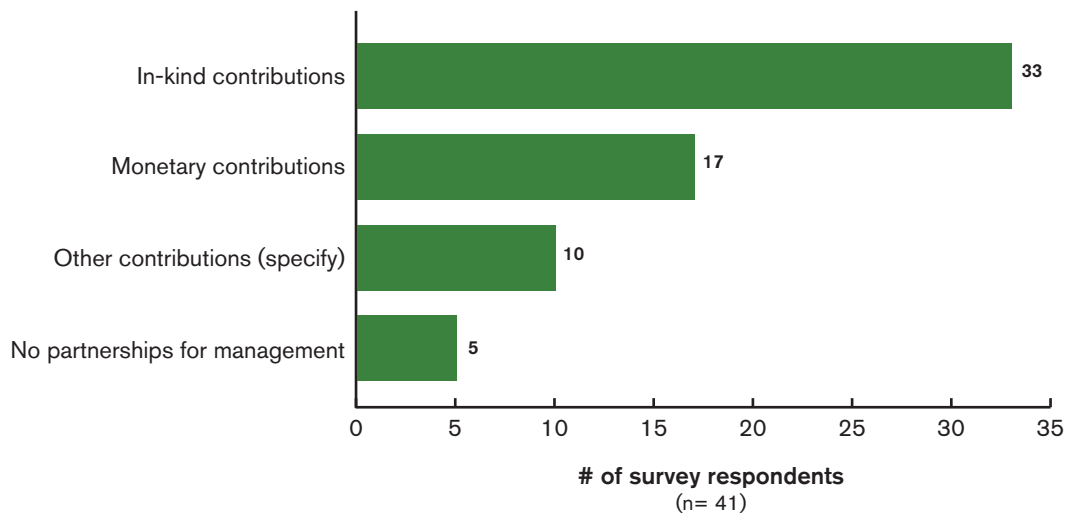


Figure 18 Partnership contributions to managing the iconic place





Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, Oregon. U.S. Forest Service Region 6: Pacific Northwest

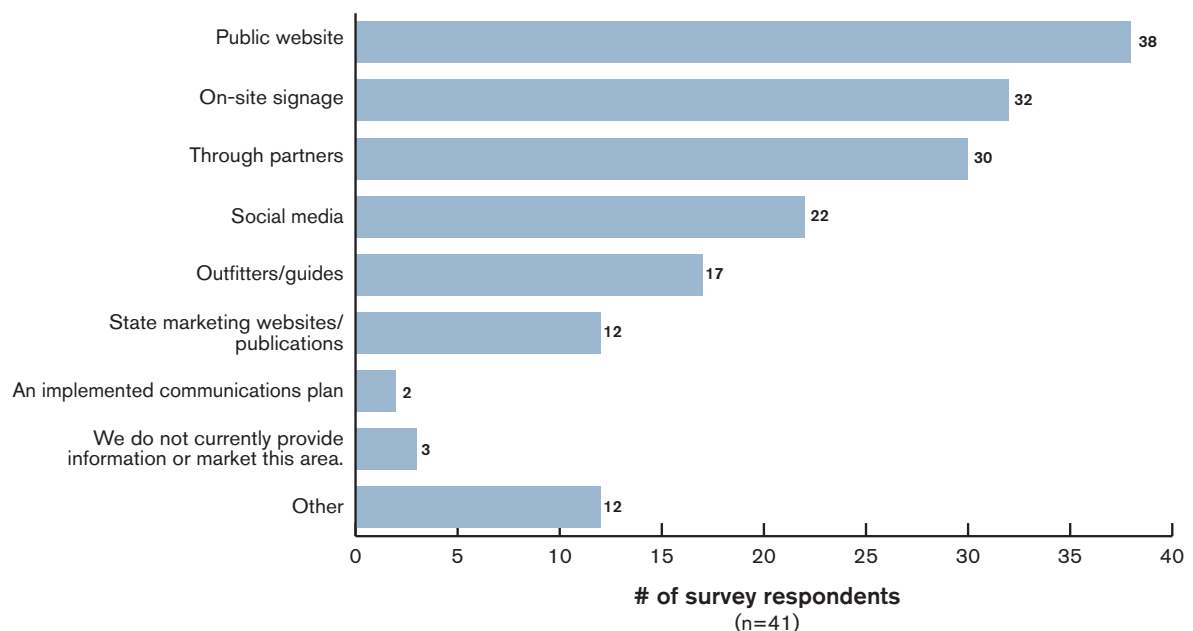
Site marketing

We asked managers how the iconic places were marketed to the public. Three managers (seven percent) said that no information or marketing of the site to the public was provided at the time. Managers from the other 38 sites (93 percent) all said that the sites were marketed via, at minimum, a public website (see Figure 19, below). For all but two responses a public website was in addition to other methods.

Other methods selected by the majority of managers included marketing through on-site signage (32,

78 percent), through partners (30, 73 percent), and through social media (22, 54 percent). All of the listed choices were selected by some respondents, but only two managers (five percent) said that their site was marketed via an implemented communications plan. Other methods that were not included as choices but were written in by managers included marketing through local governments, tribes, non-governmental organizations; newsletters; and special use permittees. Some of the marketing methods written in as “other” could also be considered as marketing through partners, further adding to the number of managers who indicated partners as helpful in marketing sites.

Figure 19 **Methods used for marketing the iconic place**



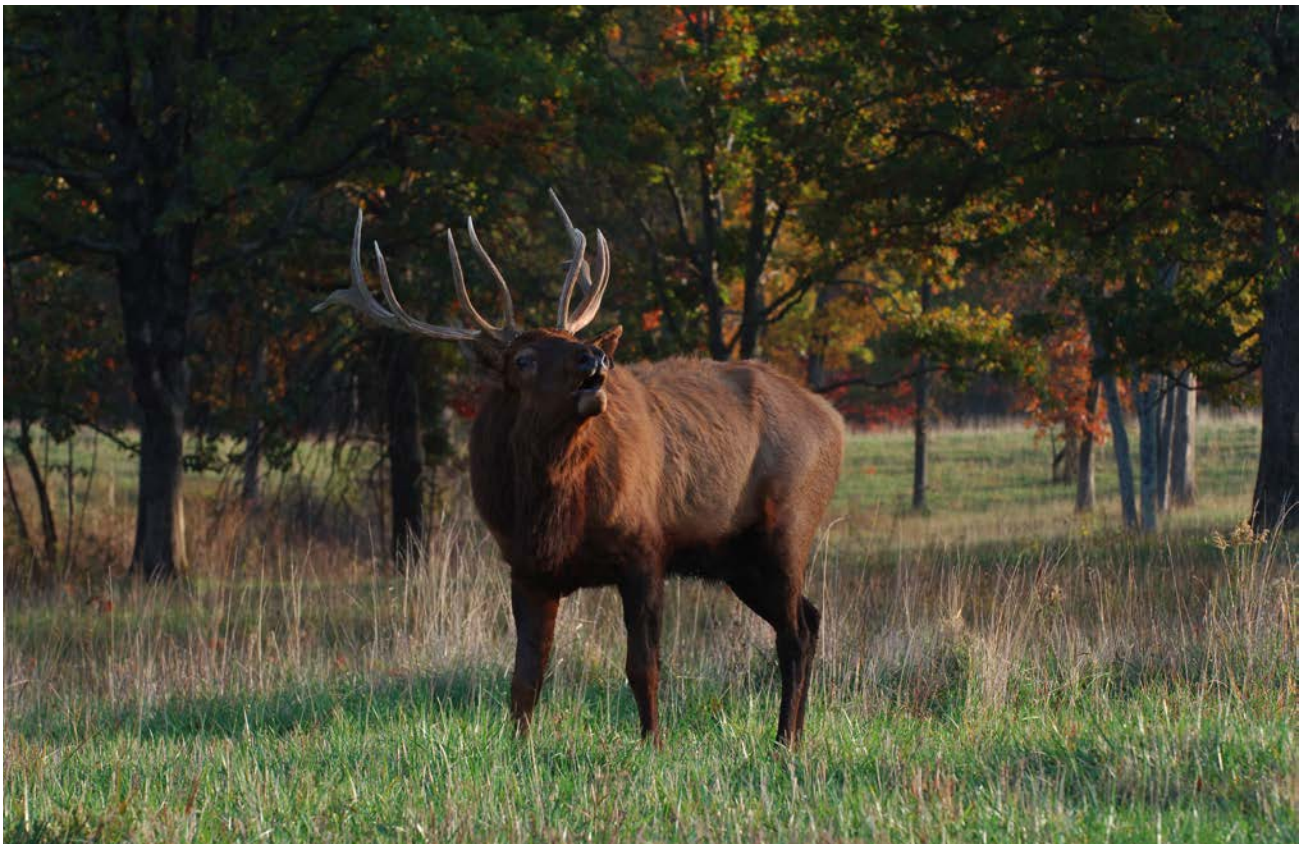
Discussion and conclusion

The results reported here represent the first effort to survey the U.S. Forest Service's specially-designated iconic places. The survey was intended to gather a baseline understanding of the conditions and needs across iconic places. Survey results highlight both common themes and the diversity among iconic places.

Generally, our results showed that most iconic places are well-recognized among agency staff and have formally defined desired conditions that drive management on the site, a variety of partners that contribute different types of resources, and multiple ways of site marketing that include at minimum a website. The iconic places as a whole expressed concerns about the sustainability of resources and the challenges of decreasing budget and staff capacities alongside increasing recreation demand. Most iconic places saw opportunities for sustaining valued characteristics, particularly around expanding partnerships and more tailored recreation management efforts.

The diverse values for which iconic places have been designated dictate different management actions and approaches. For example, management actions to sustain scenic values, unique recreation opportunities, or biophysical values may be very different. Some iconic places also have a much longer history than others. Locations included in this survey effort were established between 1963 and 2015. The historical context behind iconic place designation, both politically and with the public, is often a varied but important driver of management decisions, outreach, and visitor uses.

Iconic places are established because of the unique values and opportunities that they offer. These places have, to date, been poorly studied despite their popularity for recreation nationwide. The results of this survey help illuminate a better understanding of how iconic places operate, and particularly, the needs they have in sustaining their valued characteristics, both presently and in the future.



Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area, Kentucky and Tennessee. U.S. Forest Service Region 8: Southern

Endnotes

- 1 Land Areas of the National Forest System. 2017. <https://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar/LAR2017/lar2017index.html>. Accessed July 29, 2018.
- 2 "American Antiquities Act of 1906." National Park Service. June 22, 2017. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/legal/american-antiquities-act-of-1906.htm>
- 3 Forest Service Manual Chapter 2370. "Special Recreation Designations." Introduction. Available at https://www.fs.fed.us/cgi-bin/Directives/get_dirs/fsm?2300!.. Accessed July 30, 2018.
- 4 Forest Service Manual 2371.02: Objectives. "Special Recreation Designations." Available at https://www.fs.fed.us/cgi-bin/Directives/get_dirs/fsm?2300!.. Accessed July 30, 2018.
- 5 National Visitor Use Monitoring Program. U.S. Forest Service. February 16, 2018. <https://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum/>.
- 6 Forest Service Manual 2371.03: Policy. "Special Recreation Designations." Available at https://www.fs.fed.us/cgi-bin/Directives/get_dirs/fsm?2300!.. Accessed July 30, 2018.



Giant Sequoia National Monument, California. U.S. Forest Service Region 5: Pacific Southwest

