



Cleveland Metroparks Outdoor Recreation Use Levels Contrasted with National Data

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This paper compares participation rates in outdoor recreation collected in the community survey for Cleveland Metroparks to data available on national rates.

There are several organizations that regularly collect data about participation rates on national and regional levels. Two federal agencies, the US Forest Service (National Survey on Recreation and the Environment) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation) regularly conduct national surveys of participation rates in (some) outdoor recreation activities. To qualify for federal assistance, states are required to conduct State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORP) which must include surveys of state residents about their participation in outdoor recreation. These studies are conducted every 5 years. Unfortunately, most of these government studies are being conducted this year, and available data is at least five years old. Private and Not-For-Profit organizations also generate data for use by the outdoor recreation industry. The Recreation Round Table, which represents outdoor activity equipment manufacturers, has conducted studies in the past. Other sources of data, if publically available, come from equipment manufacturing associations that report sales volumes for equipment. For instance, the National Bicycle Dealers Association provides data on bicycle sales volume each year.

Care must be taken in using and comparing data from different studies, particularly with question format. For instance, the US Forest Service asks people whether they watch birds, while the US Fish and Wildlife Service asks whether respondents have taken trips specifically to watch birds. The US Forest Service data shows a much higher percentage of Americans involved in bird watching because the question is less restrictive.

For our purposes, data from the *Outdoor Recreation Participation Report 2011* commissioned by the Outdoor Foundation is compared with the Community Study done in 2011 for Cleveland Metroparks. Only questions and activities that were reasonably similar were used in these comparisons:

Outdoor Foundation: 48.6 percent of Americans participated in outdoor recreation.

Cleveland Metroparks: Visited a park in northeast Ohio: 95.9%. Participated in at least one outdoor recreation activity or special event: 90.1%.

Outdoor Foundation: 60 percent enjoyed outdoor outings less than once a week. Forty percent participated in outdoor recreation at least once a week.

Cleveland Metroparks: 60.8 percent visited parks in northeastern Ohio less than once a week. 34.7 visited parks in northeastern Ohio at least once a week. 4.5 percent were "not sure".

The Outdoor Foundation study also asked respondents about their participation in a variety of activities. In Table One, comparisons are made between activity participation rates at the national level and those reported in the Cleveland Metroparks Community Survey. Differences in wording of questions are noted in the table. For all but one activity, participation rates in outdoor activities were notably higher for participants in the Cleveland Metroparks study.

Table One. Comparisons of national participation rates in outdoor recreation and rates in Cuyahoga County.

Activity (Cleveland Metroparks wording)	Outdoor Foundation (wording if different)	Cleveland Community Survey
Bicycling on paved trails	14.9%	30.8%
Canoeing/kayaking	3.7%/2.3%	8.5%
Fishing	13.7%	18.5%
Horseback Riding	3.5%	3.5%
Golf	9.2% (9 or 18 hole)	18.9%
Jogging/running	17.7%	22.3%
Mountain biking	2.5%	5.9%
Observe nature/bird watching	4.7% (bird watching more than ¼ mile from home)	26.3%

Conclusions

Conclusions based on comparisons between studies are always tenuous because of differences in wording of questions and how the sample of respondents was created. The Outdoor Foundation concluded from their data that areas with walking and biking routes (such as Cuyahoga County) had higher participation rates than areas without these routes. The comparisons in this analysis largely confirm that Cuyahoga County residents, with access to 16 Cleveland Metroparks reservations, participate in a number of activities in a greater percentage than national percentages. The Outdoor Foundation report goes on to conclude, based on respondents' self ratings of their fitness and health, that people who live in communities with walking and bike routes are healthier.

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