



## Levels and Sources of Satisfaction among Users of the Park District

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### Part One: High Use Does Not Equal Satisfaction

Awareness and use of Cleveland Metroparks is high. Citizens of the Park District visit on average 13 times a year and a significant minority visit 150 to 300 times a year. What other proof does one need that the people of Cuyahoga County and the Hinckley Township are wildly happy with the Park District? Frequent visits are not necessarily an indicator of high satisfaction, as this is a simple measure of behavior, not a reasoned evaluation. Hypothetically, people could be dissatisfied with the parks and just visit them because they have no other choices, or just because they are nearby. So, asking people how satisfied they are with the Park District (and why) is a worthwhile exercise.

The 2011 in-park study of visitors asked park visitors how satisfied they were on a 10-point scale, with 10 being highly satisfied. The mean or average score for the sample of 4,503 park users was 8.92 with 91% of respondents giving the Park District a rating of 8, 9 or 10. In the leisure industry, a mean of 8.0 is considered acceptable, with concerns being raised if the mean is below 8.0. These scores are a strong endorsement of the Park District.

Visitors participating in the in-park study were also asked if they were satisfied with specific qualities of the reservations. The specific qualities that visitors provided satisfaction ratings for on a five-point scale are listed in Table 1. These questions help identify what qualities visitors were thinking about when they answered the 1-10 overall satisfaction question discussed above. Mean ratings for specific attributes were all above 4.0 putting all attributes between “very good” and “excellent” ratings. “Cleanliness of the park”, “Personal Safety” and “Scenic Beauty of the Park” were the three highest ranked qualities. Except for “courtesy of park employees”, all qualities were moderately correlated (>.30) with the “Overall Satisfaction” question. Further analysis with the regression identified scenic beauty (B=.18), cleanliness of the parks (B=.14), and cleanliness of restrooms (B=.16) as having the strongest unique contributions to overall satisfaction. These results indicate that satisfaction with the Park District among visitors is due to more than just users’ proximity to the parks.

Table 1. Satisfaction level with specific attributes of the reservations.

| Park Quality                                           | Mean <sup>1</sup> | Correlation w/Overall Satisfaction |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Cleanliness of the park                                | 4.64              | .44                                |
| Personal safety                                        | 4.55              | .38                                |
| Scenic beauty of the park                              | 4.54              | .40                                |
| Park trails                                            | 4.47              | .40                                |
| Maintenance of facilities (roads, shelters, buildings) | 4.45              | .49                                |
| Traffic flow                                           | 4.41              | .40                                |
| Availability of picnic facilities                      | 4.41              | .37                                |
| Natural areas or places to view wildlife               | 4.37              | .40                                |
| Restroom cleanliness                                   | 4.35              | .33                                |
| Restroom availability                                  | 4.29              | .33                                |
| Ranger visibility                                      | 4.16              | .36                                |
| Courtesy of park employees                             | 4.06              | .28                                |
| Ranger courtesy                                        | 4.03              | .40                                |

<sup>1</sup>based on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1=poor and 5=excellent.

## Part Two: Still Skeptical?

Unlike work and personal maintenance activities (housework, child care), people can almost instantly abandon a leisure activity or place if they are unhappy with it. A skeptic would quickly suggest that a survey done in a park would always yield high marks, because those who are dissatisfied are no longer going to the parks. This argument is one reason that an additional study of community members through phone and mail surveys was conducted to capture the opinions of both users and nonusers of the Park District.

Use of parks in northeast Ohio was high with just 4.1 percent of respondents reporting that they do not go to parks. Just over 60 percent of residents reported that they wished they could visit parks more than they currently do. All but 1.5 percent of the sample had heard of Cleveland Metroparks. Just about 30 percent of this sample reported visiting a Park District reservation at least once a week. In this study, satisfaction was measured with a standard five-point scale ranging from “very poor” to “excellent”. An excellent rating was received from 54.2 percent of respondents with another 39.9 percent selecting “Good”. Combining these two ratings, 94.1 percent of the community members rated the parks at least good. The mean for the scale is 4.49/5.

A second question asked for a rating of the facilities in Cleveland Metroparks, defined as consisting of picnic areas, restrooms, nature centers and All Purpose Trails. Using the same “very poor” to “excellent” five-point scale, 82.4 percent of community members rated these facilities as a group as at least good. The mean for this scale is 4.17/5.

Data from both these studies indicate high overall satisfaction with facilities. Scenic beauty, perceptions of personal safety, cleanliness of the parks, and cleanliness of restrooms are significant contributors to these ratings among ALL users. These characteristics range from basic needs (safety and cleanliness) to higher level experiences of the aesthetic of natural environments that contrast with the urban settings found in Cleveland and its suburbs. Providing safe, clean and contrasting natural settings should continue to be a priority in the management of Cleveland Metroparks.

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