

IMPLICATIONS OF BOY SCOUT GROUP USE OF PUBLIC LANDS FOR NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGERS:

A REGIONAL COMPARISON

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Resource managers can apply group-specific rather than generic communications and management strategies to different public land user groups. This study compares use patterns of one user group, Boy Scout troops, from two regions of the United States. It identifies their public land use patterns, activities, needs, and motivations. Results can be used by resource managers to develop communications and management strategies to guide this group's appropriate behavior, enhance their experience, and solicit their help in protecting the resource.

Introduction

Resource managers of both natural and cultural sites use interpretation and other communications strategies for a variety of purposes: to enhance visitors' experiences, to achieve specific management goals, and to promote their agencies' images (Sharpe 1982). Managers often apply the same communications messages and strategies to all their visitors. Additionally, managers often apply a single technique to guide appropriate visitor behavior (such as using law enforcement to reduce vandalism) for all visitors. However, just as it is minimally effective to promote a program, site or product to a "typical" or "average" client or user, it is unlikely that carbon copy management or communications strategies used with different users will be equally effective in providing appropriate facilities, sites, programs and information; identifying sources of potential user conflicts; or protecting the sites.

Differences in user behavior can be particularly divergent when norms for appropriate behavior at resource sites are not known by the visitors. Appropriate opportunities and facilities cannot be provided unless the visitors' needs are known. Therefore, resource managers must attempt to identify these needs, then target their communications and management strategies for specific user groups just as business persons target market their products and programs (More 1983). Numerous studies have shown that such strategies can be effective. (See references listed in Vander Stoep, 1990 NERR Proceedings.)

At last year's NERR Symposium, I presented a paper describing the use patterns, activities, resource needs, and behavior motivators of Boy Scout groups in the southcentral region of the United States. Since that time, the survey of Boy Scout troops in the northeast region of the United States was completed. This paper presents the results of that study as well as compares them with results from the southcentral region.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to identify land use patterns, activities engaged in, information and other resource and service needs, effective methods for motivating and controlling behavior, and characteristics of Boy Scout groups who use public lands in both the northeast and southcentral regions of the United States. Results are used to identify implications of Scout group use of public lands, to help resource managers understand Scouts and their program, and to develop strategies for effective management of and information dissemination to Scout groups which use public lands.

Methods

Based on Dillman's (1978) "total design method" (TDM), surveys were sent to Scoutmasters in the southcentral United States (Arkansas, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee) and the northeastern United States (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont). In the southcentral region, surveys were sent to five troops in each of 30 councils (total sample size of 150); in the northeast region, surveys were sent to a stratified random sample of 258 troops based on community size in each of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) councils. The southcentral region sample was drawn with the assistance of staff from the national BSA headquarters in Irving, Texas while the northeast region sample was generated by staff in the northeast regional BSA office located in Dayton, New Jersey.

The national BSA staff actually mailed the surveys and reminder postcards for the southcentral region, limiting control by the researcher. For the northeast region, mailing labels for the stratified random sample were sent to the researcher, thereby permitting more control of the timing and consistency of survey administration. Also, second followup letters, containing assurances that the survey was authorized by BSA, and a duplicate survey were sent to non-respondents in addition to the initial reminder postcards. This improved the response rate for the northeast region.

Before final printing and distribution of the original survey to the southcentral region in 1985, the survey instrument was reviewed by several recreation and parks researchers and Boy Scout leaders, then revised. The survey contained both closed- and open-ended questions used to identify the troops' public land use patterns, activities, information and service needs, motivations, and Scoutmasters' strategies for guiding youth behavior during their visits to public lands. Some group demographic information was collected.

Only two revisions were made to the second survey, both based on differences in public lands available in the two regions. For the northeast region survey, *Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) projects* was deleted and replaced by *Military Facilities*; *State Lands*, which included a regional clarification, replaced *State Parks*. An additional question asked which level of development (ranging from highly developed to primitive) was preferred by the troop.

Open-ended questions for the southcentral survey were content analyzed independently by two social scientists (Labaw 1982). Each response was written on an individual index card. Each judge grouped and labelled several response categories based on general concepts included in the answers. Where differences existed, a final decision was made based on primary intent of the question. The same categories were used during analysis of the northeast region survey. Frequency tabulation of concept-coded responses was used to analyze data.

Results¹

A total of 65 questionnaires of the 150 mailed in the southcentral region were returned, resulting in a response rate of 43.3%. Two questionnaires were unusable. One was not completed because the troop did not use public lands, the other because the Scoutmaster was new and, therefore, unfamiliar with troop activities and use of public lands. A total of 173 northeast region surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 67%. Of these, three were undeliverable and seven were not usable for a variety of reasons, primarily because the troops were urban or served disabled populations which do not use public lands.

Troop Characteristics

Almost half of the southcentral troops (48% of those responding to this question) using public lands were relatively large, having more than 20 members, with 18% having 30 or more members. Only 35% had 15 or fewer members. Troops in the northeast tended to be smaller, with 52% having fewer than 15 members and only 21% having more than 20 members. Less than 9% had 30 or more members.

Eighty-five percent of the troops responding to the community size question were from communities having fewer than 50,000 residents, while approximately 19% of these were from quite small communities of less than 5,000. Only about 8% percent of the troops were from communities of more than 500,000

residents. Surprisingly, 70% of northeast troops were from communities smaller than 50,000 and only 6% from towns with populations larger than 500,000. Perhaps this is because residents in the northeast tend to identify more with their own towns than with a larger metropolitan area.

Many troop leaders in the southcentral region appear to be highly dedicated and committed to the BSA program as 48% of those responding had more than ten years of experience as Scoutmasters. Only 24% had three or fewer years of experience. Northeast troop leaders tend to have less experience, with 28% having three or fewer years experience and 31% having more than 10 years of Scoutmaster experience.

BSA Public Land Use Patterns

Types of lands used by Scout troops are varied in both regions. Southcentral troops use, in order of use frequency, state parks, national parks, water-based areas, (Army Corp of Engineers projects, TVA projects, and other waterways combined), national forests, local parks, state forests, and miscellaneous other federal and Canadian lands. Northeast troops also heavily use state parks, but other use differs. In order of use frequency, these troops use state forests, local parks and military areas extensively, followed by national parks and national forests. Water-based resources, used by 21% of troops, are used much less frequently than by southcentral troops. (See Figure 1.)

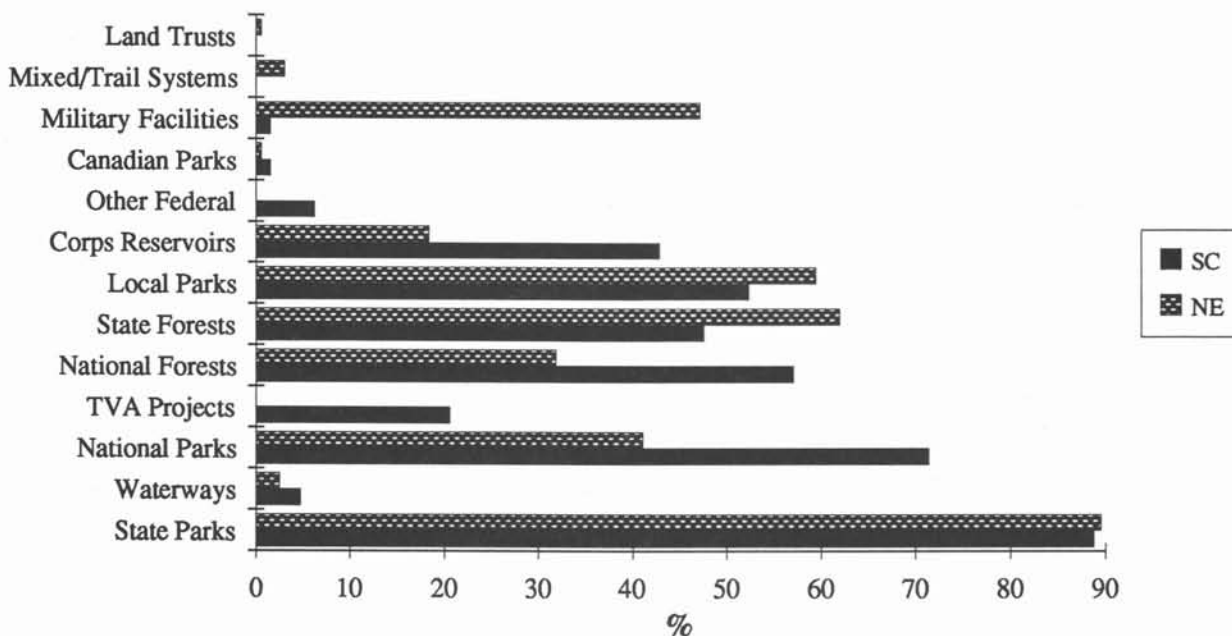


Figure 1. Types of public lands used by Boy Scout troops.

Patterns for day trips and overnight trips to public lands appear to be similar in both regions. Of the troops that take day trips, about 50% in each region take one to three per year while approximately 5% take 10 or more day trips per year. About 40% of the troops in each region take one to three overnight trips per year while about 41% take four to nine overnight trips.

Some troops appear to be quite active, with 12% of southcentral troops and 18% of northeast troops taking 10 or more overnight trips each year. The combined day/overnight trip pattern seems to indicate that troops tend to take about one day trip and/or one overnight trip each month, with the possible exception of December or August (possibly due to holidays or family vacations).

^{1/} Some discrepancies between results reported in 1990 for the southcentral region and this paper are due to previously incomplete survey data and some errors in data entry, discovered when combining and cleaning data for the two regions.

A variety of adults accompany Scout troops on their trips to public lands. BSA-trained adult leaders accompany 90.5% of southcentral and 81% of northeast troops. Both untrained volunteer parents (for 52% of southcentral and 69% of northeast troops) and trained volunteer parents (for 18% for southcentral

and 39% for northeast troops) either assist trained BSA leaders or take troops themselves on trips to public lands. About 12% of the troops in each region use college student or other adults to accompany youth during these trips. Though only 44% of the southcentral respondents answered the question regarding ratio of Scout youth to adults, the ratio (regardless of the level of training of adults) seems to vary quite a bit. Of those who responded, 39% of the troops have one adult for every five Scouts. Fifty-one percent have one adult for every six to ten Scouts. Less than 10% of the troops have only one adult for every 11-15 youth. Youth/adult ratios in the northeast region appear to enable better supervision, with 83% of troops having one adult for every five Scouts and 15% having one adult for every six to ten youth.

The relatively high rate of non-response (56%) to this question in the southcentral region raises the question of "why?" Was it because they did not want to admit to a youth to adult ratio that did not meet BSA standards? If so, such low levels of adult supervision could have major implications for control of Scout behavior during trips to public lands. This does not seem to be a problem in the northeast region.

Types of activities, activity patterns, and the source of trip/activity planning may all have implications for troop

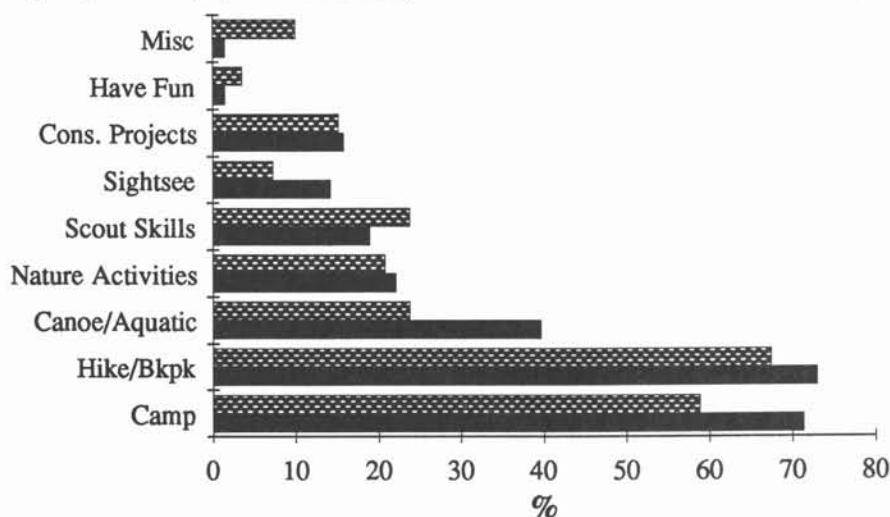


Figure 2. Activities engaged in by Boy Scouts on public lands.

Although troops usually have major programs of activities during their trips to public lands, most troops have some "free" or unplanned time. Most troops (about 98% in the southcentral region and 83% in the northeast) indicate four or fewer hours of free time. About 16% of northeast troops indicate five or more free hours, with almost 4% indicating more than 11 hours of unprogrammed time each day.

Often (for 90% of trips in the southcentral region and for 84% of trips in the northeast) activities engaged in by Scouts during trips to public lands result in their receiving some type of patch or award. Sometimes these are simply place identification patches which serve as souvenirs (13-14% in both regions). Participation awards (received 64% of the time in the southcentral region and 43% of the time in the northeast) also provide souvenir value. Other patches include awards received for demonstration of special skills or achievements. Achievement awards result from 30-32% of trips to public lands in both regions while BSA badges are earned during 24% (southcentral) to 34% (northeast) of the trips. Such patches and badges can serve as motivators for Scouts.

interactions with and impacts on the resource base. In both regions, about 72-75% of all the troops indicate that trips are planned by the adult leaders with some degree of input from the youth. Only about six percent of troops in each region indicate that trips are entirely adult-planned. Another 14-16% in each region indicate that trips are planned primarily by the Scouts themselves. Only a few trips are planned by youth with minimal adult input.

Scout troops take trips to public lands to engage in a variety of activities. Sometimes there is a primary activity; other times they engage in a variety of different activities during the same trip. By far the most frequently engaged in activities in both regions are camping and hiking/backpacking. More southcentral troops engage in canoeing and other aquatic activities than do troops in the northeast (40% as compared with 24%). Other activities include nature-related activities, development of Scouting skills, sightseeing, and conservation projects. Less than five percent of the troops mentioned having fun or miscellaneous other activities as the primary trip activity. Within the miscellaneous category, northeast troops tend to indicate more participation in civic or career development activities than do southcentral troops. (See Figure 2.)

Linking BSA Troops and Public Land Managers

The purposes of other questions in the survey were to determine (1) effective methods of information dissemination to Scout troops, and (2) Scoutmaster perceptions of appropriate troop/public land management agency interactions.

Responses to questions concerning Scout/management agency interactions suggest that, in addition to provision of facilities and supplies to facilitate troop activities, Scout groups would like to have more frequent and positive interactions with agency personnel. Direct staff involvement with Scouts, provision of programs, and provision of literature and informational services rank second through fourth (each cited by 11-18% of Scoutmasters) behind facility provision. Other troop needs (rule enforcement, reward system, and miscellaneous, or "nothing") identified in both regions follow similar patterns, with the exception that almost 22% of northeast troops indicate a desire for interpretive programs. (See Figure 3.)

Although the majority of Scoutmasters (almost 70% in both regions) report reading all information that they receive from

public agencies, the largest percent of troop leaders share with their troop members only the information that is considered interesting or pertinent. Results indicating that only 11-14% of the leaders in both regions share rules and regulations with boys suggest that this information is not deemed interesting or pertinent. This finding supports other research (Bradley 1981; Christensen 1981; Clark et al. 1972a, 1972b; LaHart and Bailey

1975; Petty and Cacioppo 1981; Ross and Moeller 1974; Roggenbuck and Berrier 1982) suggesting that written information seldom is attended to unless it is particularly interesting to, or needed by, the reader. More direct, personal methods may be needed in disseminating such information as regulations and management policies.

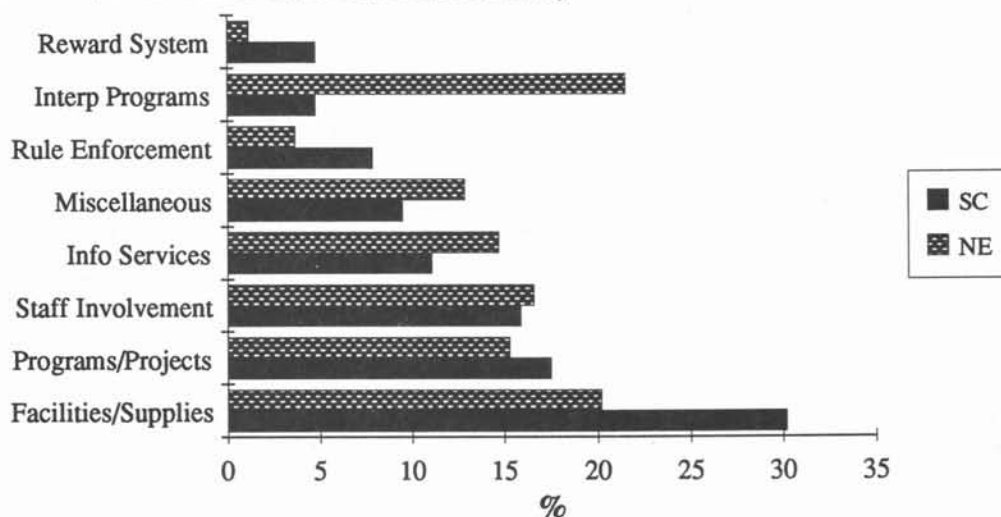


Figure 3. Services which Scoutmasters believe public land managers should provide.

Inappropriate BSA Behaviors Observed by Leaders

Several of the survey questions requested information relating to Scoutmaster perceptions of (1) types of depreciative behavior committed by other Scout or youth groups while visiting public lands, (2) the reasons for inappropriate behavior, (3) effective methods for dealing with young offenders, and (4) effective motivators for appropriate behavior.

Almost 15% of southcentral and 26% of northeast respondents stated they had never seen any Scouts behaving inappropriately while visiting public lands. Others identified a variety of general and specific behaviors engaged in by some Scouts. As observed by Scoutmasters, the most frequently reported inappropriate behavior by Scout groups using public lands was general misuse of and damage to the resources (56% in the southcentral region and 45% in the northeast). Other identified inappropriate behaviors included: little regard or respect for other visitors (24%/southcentral and 20%/north-east); lack of leader control of Scouts (14%/southcentral and 19%/ northeast); legal violations (11%/southcentral and 1%/northeast); other rule violations (10%/southcentral and 3%/northeast); and miscellaneous actions resulting in a poor Boy Scout image (6%/southcentral and 2%/ northeast). (See Figure 4.)

The four most frequently cited reasons for inappropriate behavior are (1) inadequate leadership and supervision, (2) lack of consistent, enforced behavior standards throughout the year, (3) lack of training (of both Scouts and leaders), and (4) no knowledge or understanding of agency regulations or expected behavior.

Appropriate & Inappropriate Behavior Motivators

Reflected in the reasons for inappropriate behavior are methods found by Scoutmasters to be most effective in controlling inappropriate behavior. The most frequently mentioned method by southcentral Scoutmasters (though rated considerably less and ranked third by northeast Scoutmasters) is to follow through with disciplinary sanctions (or to use the "big stick" approach). While this method involves post-behavioral sanctions, the

other most often identified reasons by southcentral Scoutmasters are preventive. These include (1) keeping youth involved in planned programs or activities, (2) informing youth of and explaining reasons for expected behavior, (3) providing appropriate role modeling by sincere, caring adults, (4) clarifying and adhering to behavioral expectations throughout the year, and (5) using boy-focused techniques such as using the patrol system, activating peer pressure for appropriate behavior, and giving specific responsibilities to the youth. Though northeastern Scoutmasters also cite preventive techniques, they rank them differently. "Keeping them busy" and "providing adequate supervision" are considerably more important. These strategies are followed by (1) using a variety of peer techniques, (2) pre-trip training, (3) enforcing BSA standards, and (4) providing conservation projects. (Figure 5.)

The two factors ranked by Scoutmasters in both regions as the most effective motivators for troop participation in service projects are positive adult reinforcement and providing individual badges and patches. Receiving comparable medium rankings for motivation effectiveness, with slightly a different order in rankings between the two regions, are (1) peer approval, (2) formal verbal recognition, (3) troop awards or certificates, and (4) challenge. Informal verbal recognition is ranked last in effectiveness by Scoutmasters in both regions. (See Figure 6.)

Discussion

As in any research, there are limitations to this study, many resulting from limited researcher control of survey administration and the low response rate to the southcentral region Scoutmaster survey (discussed more fully in Vander Stoep 1990). Most of these problems were resolved with the northeast survey. However, differences in survey administration should be considered when comparing regional results.

Some respondents answered only some of the survey questions, occasionally leaving open-ended questions unanswered. For such questions it is difficult to know if they were unanswered

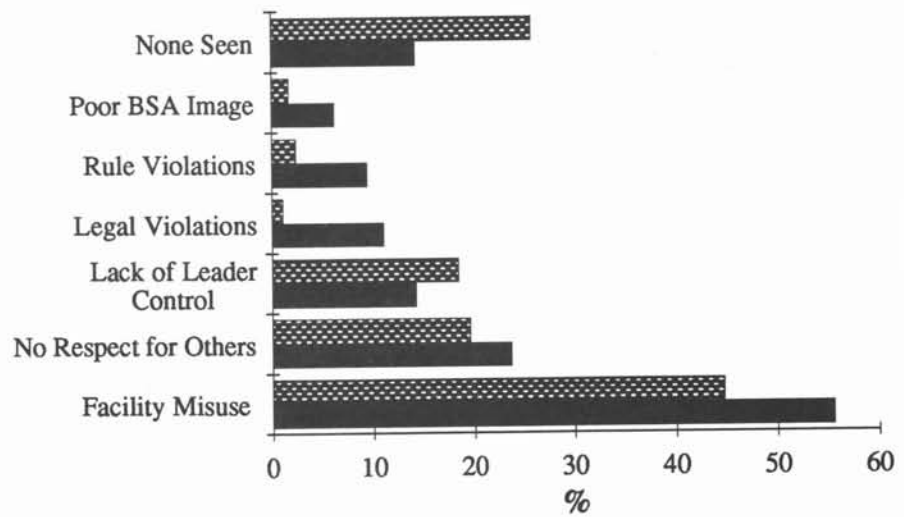


Figure 4. Boy Scout behavior problems on public lands as observed by Scoutmasters.

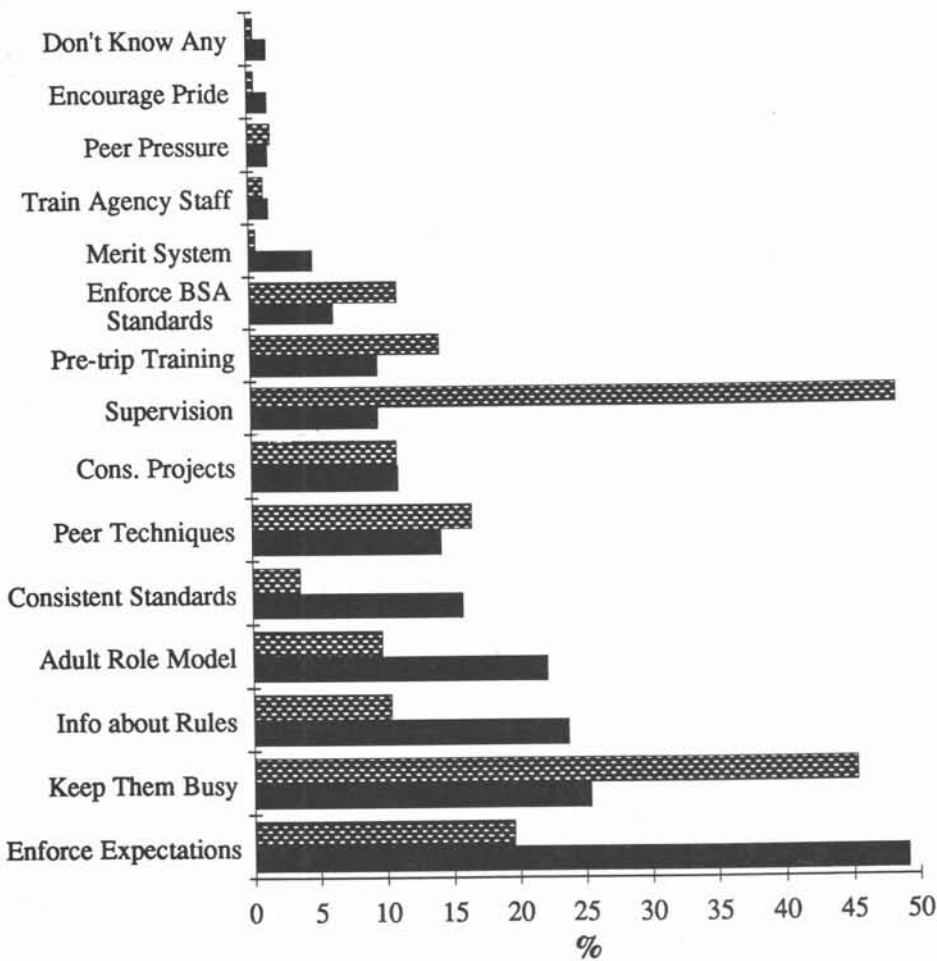


Figure 5. Effective behavior control techniques as identified by Scoutmasters.

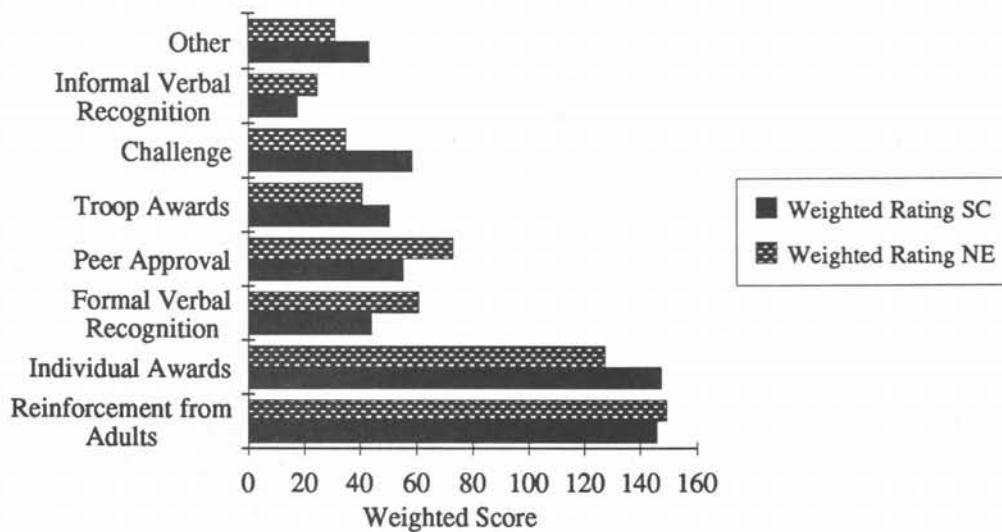


Figure 6. Motivators for appropriate Scout behavior, weighted by respondent rankings.

because they took more effort or because respondents chose not to address the specific issues. Some questions, such as the one asking for the ratio of adults to youth during trips, may have been left unanswered because of potential guilt or embarrassment about low levels of adult supervision. If this is the case, low levels of adult supervision could have implications for control of Scout behavior during trips to public lands.

Despite limitations of the survey process, the responses in combination with specific comments made on the open-ended questions provide insights which can be useful to public land managers who work with Scout group users on their sites. Taken together, results indicate that most Scoutmasters in both regions would like increased involvement of public land managers with their troops. Such interactions can occur both prior to and during troop visits to public sites. It should be noted also that many respondents took the time to make additional comments on the back of the survey or requested copies of results (23 in the southcentral region and 58 in the northeast, about 35% of usable surveys in each region).

Implications of Regional Differences in Troop Characteristics

Smaller troops and better adult to youth ratios (increased supervision) during trips to public lands in the northeast may help reduce the amount of depreciative behavior exhibited by Scouts. However, because northeast troops use more volunteer parents (untrained as well as BSA-trained) and because more Scoutmasters tend to have fewer years of experience, troops in this region may be looking for increased interaction with and information and/or programs from public land managers. Several comments and requests for brochures about public lands written on the surveys seem to reinforce this need.

Implications of Regional Differences in Use of Public Lands

Though northeast troops take slightly fewer trips to public lands than southcentral troops, they tend to take more overnight than day trips. Additionally, they tend to have more "free" or unprogrammed time than the southcentral troops which have more experienced Scoutmasters. Again, this may indicate a need for more direct agency involvement and/or programming for Scout troops, or at least more contact and perhaps information/training opportunities for Scoutmasters.

Northeast troops use slightly more local and state areas and considerably more military sites than southcentral troops. This indicates that local as well as state and federal land managers need to be aware of Scout troop needs, behavior and activity patterns. Additionally, northeast troops do more bicycling and winter activities, indicating multi-seasonal Scout use of public lands and participation in corridor activities for which troops may be using public lands during only part of their trips. This can make information dissemination by public land managers more difficult.

General Implications for Public Land Managers

Some things that managers might do in preparation for Scout visits are described below.

Understand the BSA Program and Participants. If new to a specific public site, or new to public land use in general, Scout groups may feel unwelcome or uneasy, either because they are placed away from other visitors, they are not sure what to expect, or because they have no direct contact with agency personnel. In some cases, agency staff may have negative perceptions of or reactions to Scout groups, often due to previous negative experiences or misperceptions. Because Scout groups are highly visible during their visits (groups often are large and Scouts often wear uniforms, making them recognizable), any inappropriate behaviors are noticeable. Scouts might feel more welcome if managers made efforts to understand the Scouting program and troop activities.

Just as important is that Scout leaders make efforts to communicate with managers about their planned activities and schedules, and seek out information about rules, regulations and appropriate behavior for public lands. This information must be relayed to the youth in a positive and justified manner. Perhaps collaborative information-sharing programs could be established between specific land management agencies and a variety of organized youth groups. Development of mutually beneficial on-site and outreach programs could be incorporated.

Identify Site-specific Periods of Intense Scout Use. By identifying periods of heavy Scout use, managers can plan more effectively how to allocate staff, programs, campsites, and other resources. Additionally, they can reduce potential conflict between Scouts and other site users by spatially or temporally separating use or specific activities.

Identify Troop Expectations for Site Use. As is clearly evident in the outdoor recreation literature, visitors whose actual experiences do not match their expectations will be less satisfied with the visit than those whose match. If managers could identify troop expectations (via phone or letter during troop inquiries or site reservations, or during collaborative programs as suggested above), they could better link troops with sites, facilities and programs to meet their needs. Also, they could direct troops to other, more appropriate sites if the agency's site could not adequately accommodate or meet the group's needs.

Use Interpretation to Clarify Appropriate Behavior. Northeast Scout troops appear to want much more information, participatory projects, and interpretive programs than they currently receive. Use of all of these can help disseminate agency information, can contribute to development of environmental ethics, and can provide project help for short-staffed agencies.

Also, groups often engage in inappropriate behavior because they simply are unaware of negative consequences of some behaviors. Informing them, preferably through interpretive strategies rather than through more authoritative or threatening strategies, can reduce negative behaviors as well as promote positive images of the agency. It also can establish positive relations between Scout groups and the agency. Direct personal interactions often are more effective than written regulations. Additionally, messages to guide appropriate behavior and achieve other management goals can be incorporated into other interpretive programs.

Final Comments and Recommendations

Involve Scout Groups in Public Land Projects. Scout groups can become involved in a variety of service and conservation projects such as trail building and maintenance, litter cleanup, bridge-building, and sign painting. Many agencies already participate in such cooperative programs. They often require staff time to plan, coordinate and supervise, but benefits are numerous. They include keeping Scouts active during their visits, accomplishing needed maintenance and management tasks for the agency, improving Scouts' self-image, teaching them new skills, and contributing to development of an appropriate land ethic. The Scouting program is structured to support such service activities. Also, such activities often can be linked directly into an existing award system (particularly with Scout groups), or with an agency recognition program.

Although it may not be feasible, particularly with staff and budget constraints, to assign a staff person to work primarily with Scout and other youth groups, it can be beneficial to ensure that each Scout or other youth group has some type of direct, personal contact with an agency representative. This can take the form of pre-trip phone conversations with a group member or leader, an informal welcome and overview of the site at an entry booth or visitor center, a special interpretive program (such as an evening campfire program) for all youth group visitors at one time, or simply an informal welcome during a patrol through the group campsite.

For sites which receive intensive local Scout troop use, the agency might consider an open house/training session for adult and/or youth leaders. All the issues (as discussed previously) could be addressed in an open and personal manner. Such a program could increase understanding of and appreciation for each others' roles, responsibilities and expectations. It could produce supportive advocacy rather than an adversarial relationship.

Regardless of the package of strategies used, it is important that public land managers and Scout groups communicate openly and personally about their roles, responsibilities and expectations of each other. In this time of increasing use of cooperative ventures between agencies and between public and private sectors, perhaps we should consider also building cooperative ventures between managers and public land users whenever possible. Scout troops provide a ready-made user group for such cooperative programs.

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