

Review of Opportunities for Campers with Off-Highway Vehicles in Roseau County.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources-Parks and Trails Division.



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Executive Summary

During the 2018 Legislative Session a bill was introduced in the Minnesota House of Representatives to permit all-terrain vehicle (ATV) access to limited areas of Hayes Lake State Park for camping access utilizing existing Park roads. This bill was revised to direct the DNR to conduct a feasibility analysis to permit ATV access to Hayes Lake State Park. This language was ultimately included in a larger bill that was vetoed by the Governor. The DNR understands there is still a desire to explore camping opportunities for campers with off-highway vehicles (OHVs) with expanded amenities such as electrical campsites and showers. This report is a result of a public engagement process designed to better understand these desires as well as the best location to provide them.

The area

The area considered consists of Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest. Four sites were initially considered within Hayes Lake State Park and two sites considered in Beltrami Island State Forest. Hayes Lake was established in 1967 to provide recreational opportunities in a wilderness setting and be a gateway to recreation within Beltrami Island State Forest. The main feature of Hayes Lake State Park is Hayes Lake—a 182-acre impoundment of the Roseau River. The lake provides fishing, non-motorized boating and swimming opportunities for park visitors. Beltrami Island State Forest contains 703,000 acres of land and is a working forest. Popular forms of recreation include berry picking, hiking, hunting, OHV riding, picnicking, snowmobiling, trapping and wildlife watching.

Public process

Parks and Trails followed a standard public scoping process for this review. This included a statewide news release followed by a 30-day public comment period. Parks and Trails also hosted two listening meetings to discuss the project with citizens. Meetings were held in Warroad and St. Paul. Comments were accepted through an online questionnaire, by email, by mail and in person at the listening meetings.

Parks and Trails received 1,387 comments during the public comment period. This included 652 written comments. An analysis of the comments took into account commenter location, if the commenter has visited Hayes Lake State Park or Beltrami Island State Forest and if the commenter uses ATVs or not. Major themes found within the comments include concern about displacing current visitors, conflicts with State Statute, concern that the process was not inclusive, environmental concerns, comments that Hayes Lake is underutilized and support for limited use in various areas.

Recommendation

Parks and Trails reviewed the comments received and discussed them along with other factors such as infrastructure, natural resource impacts and cost to operate. Based on these factors and the public input, Parks and Trails believes the Clear River Site within Beltrami Island State Forest is the best opportunity to provide the amenities most OHV campers desire in a semi-modern OHV

campground. Parks and Trails has a preliminary concept design plan to construct an OHV campground at the site and the site is central to the state forest trail system.

Development of the site would include utilizing an existing road through the site and an existing well. Parks and Trails would install pre-fabricated concrete shower building- to keep construction and operating costs at a minimum. Electrical service would be provided by extending existing electrical service approximately two miles to the site. The site location would also provide OHV campers with easy access to nearby trails.

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Introduction

Campers in the off-highway vehicle (OHV) community have expressed a desire for camping opportunities that provide semi-modern facilities with the opportunity to ride their OHV directly from the campsite to the trail system. For several years, statewide organizations such as the All-Terrain Vehicle Association of Minnesota (ATVAM), the Amateur Riders of Motorcycles Association-AMA District 23 (ARMCA) and the Minnesota Four- Wheel Drive Association (Mn4WDA) have asked the DNR to review camping opportunities.

The DNR currently provides ride in/ride out opportunities for OHVs at eight forest recreation areas (FRAs). In the winter of 2018, the DNR began to review the potential to permit OHV ride in/ride out at additional FRAs.

Generally, FRAs provide primitive camping opportunities with facilities such as pit or vault toilets, picnic tables, fire rings and a water source. The sites may be remote and difficult to provide some of the services that are desired by the OHV community, such as electric hook-ups and showers. The DNR intends to permit OHV ride in/ride out at five additional FRAs by May, 2019 and continue to review additional FRAs in the future.

During the 2018 Legislative Session, a bill was introduced in the Minnesota House of Representatives to permit all-terrain vehicle (ATV) access to limited areas of Hayes Lake State Park for camping access utilizing existing Park roads. This bill was revised to direct the DNR to conduct a feasibility analysis to permit ATV access to Hayes Lake State Park. This language was ultimately included in a larger bill that was vetoed by the Governor. In summer, 2018, the DNR decided to review the camping opportunities near OHV trails in northern Minnesota, seeking to better understand what campers with OHVs enjoy while recreating and determine where the DNR can provide these opportunities. The area including Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest was selected for this review.

Hayes Lake State Park

Hayes Lake State Park is located in Roseau County, approximately 22 miles southeast of Roseau and 20 miles southwest of Warroad. The Park was established in 1967 to provide recreational opportunities in a wilderness setting and be a gateway to recreation within Beltrami Island State Forest. Hayes Lake State Park is part of the Minnesota Parks and Trails System, which is governed by the Outdoor Recreation Act (*Minnesota Statute* 86A) and the Outdoor Recreation Rules (*Minnesota Rules* Ch. 6100) and managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Trails Division.

The main feature of the Park is Hayes Lake. Hayes Lake is a 182-acre impoundment of the Roseau River. Created in 1973, Hayes Lake provides lake access in an area where there are few natural lakes. Today, visitors to Hayes Lake enjoy swimming, non-motorized boating, fishing and wildlife watching.

Statutory authority establishing Hayes Lake State Park

Under the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1975 (M.S. 86 A), state parks were classified into two classifications: Natural-which focus primarily on preserving and protecting the natural world-and recreational state parks. Hayes Lake State Park was identified as a recreational state park. Under the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1975, recreational state parks were defined “...to provide a broad selection of outdoor recreation opportunities in a natural setting which may be used by large numbers of people.” (Minnesota Laws 1973, Ch. 353, Sec. 5, Subd. 3). These sites contain natural or artificial resources that provide outstanding recreational opportunities that will attract visitors from beyond the local area. In 1993, Minnesota Law amended M.S. 86A.05. The definition of a recreational state park was changed to that of state recreation areas. Although the definition of a recreational state park was identical to the current definition of a state recreation area, many recreational state parks, including Hayes Lake, were not reclassified as state recreation areas and are now managed under the original definition of natural state parks. DNR’s natural resources programs have also evolved over the years, providing more robust survey information about rare and special natural features that occur within Minnesota’s state parks. This evolved understanding of the natural resources found within our parks may change the perspective of whether parks are “natural” or “recreational” in nature. Hayes Lake, for example, sensitive plant communities have since been identified and restored.

Management plans utilized for Hayes Lake State Park

A Management Plan for Hayes Lake State Park was completed in 1979. The Plan identifies the Park as a “recreational” park because the main feature (Hayes Lake) is not natural. The management plan identifies six park zones:

- Zone 1: Potential Ecological Protection Zone;
- Zone 2: Potential Outstanding Natural Feature Zone;
- Zone 3: Potential Primitive Zone;
- Zone 4: Potential General Environment Zone;
- Zone 5: Potential Cultural Zone; and
- Zone 6: Potential Development Zone.

Of the six zones, only five exist within the Park. No Zone 2 areas were identified. Areas of the other five Zones are found in Figure 1.

In addition to the Management Plan, management of Hayes Lake State Park is guided by the Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan (2015). Under the System Plan, Hayes Lake is identified as a Core/Classic Park.

Core/Classic Parks provide “close-to-home, basic, high quality facilities that visitors have come to know and expect” (*Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan*, P. 14).

Finally, approximately 600 acres within the Park boundaries are part of the Land Utilization Program (LUP). LUP lands are owned by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and leased to the Minnesota DNR for

wildlife habitat. LUP lands are subject to the terms of the lease and LUP management plan. Sections of the LUP parcels are currently part of a land exchange between the DNR and USFWS.

There are also several private inholdings within Hayes Lake State Park, including sections of the Red Lake Indian Reservation. No recreational facilities exist on these lands.

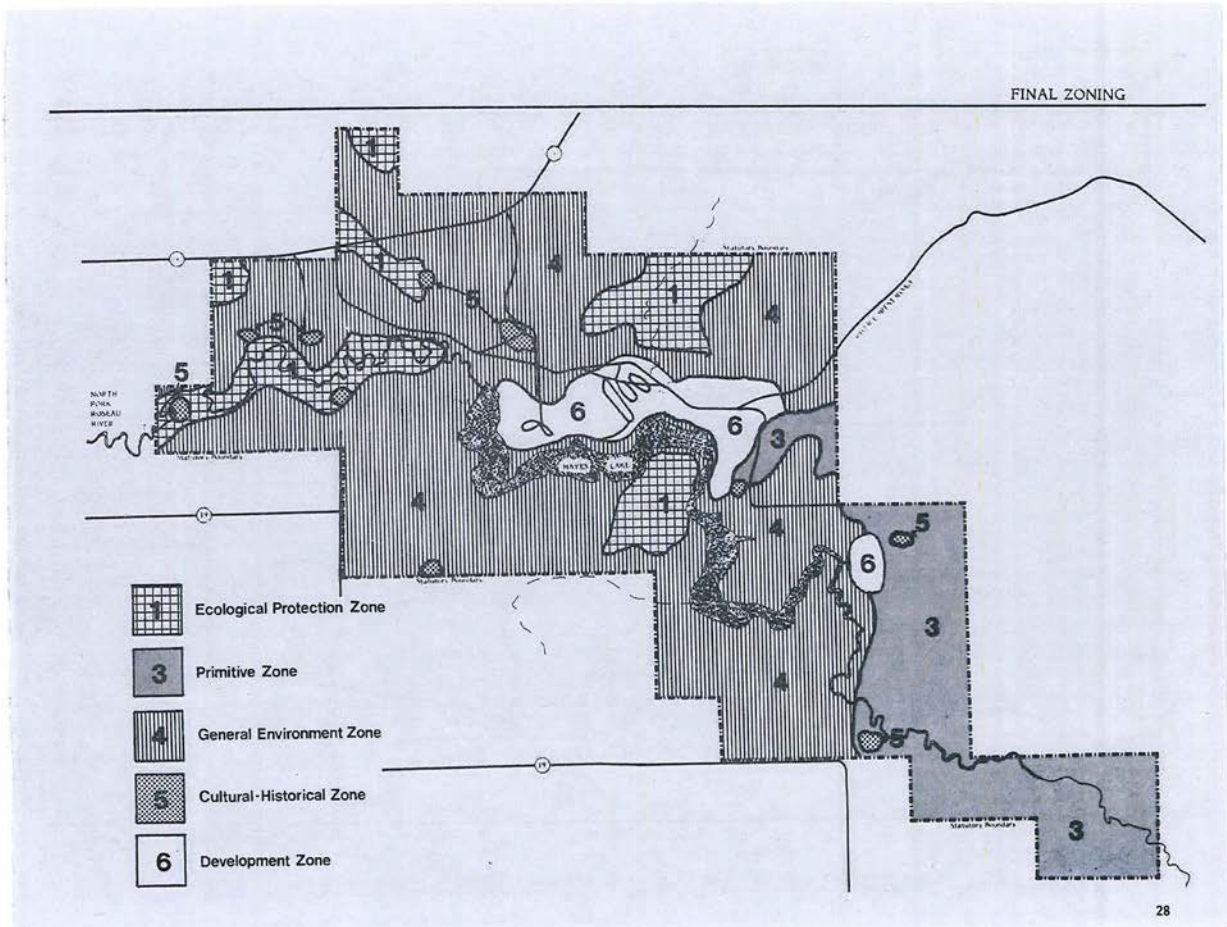


Figure 1: Management Zones Identified in the Hayes Lake Management Plan.

Recreational facilities within the Park

In addition to Hayes Lake, Hayes Lake State Park hosts many other recreational amenities. Campers enjoy the 35-site campground with 18 electric sites, two cart-in sites and two camper cabins. The park also hosts two self-guided interpretive trails, 13 miles of hiking trails, five miles of mountain bike trails, seven miles of equestrian trails and six miles of snowmobile trails. Two picnic areas-one near the Hayes Lake Dam and one adjacent to the swim beach are found within the Park. Figure 2 maps existing recreational facilities within Hayes Lake State Park.

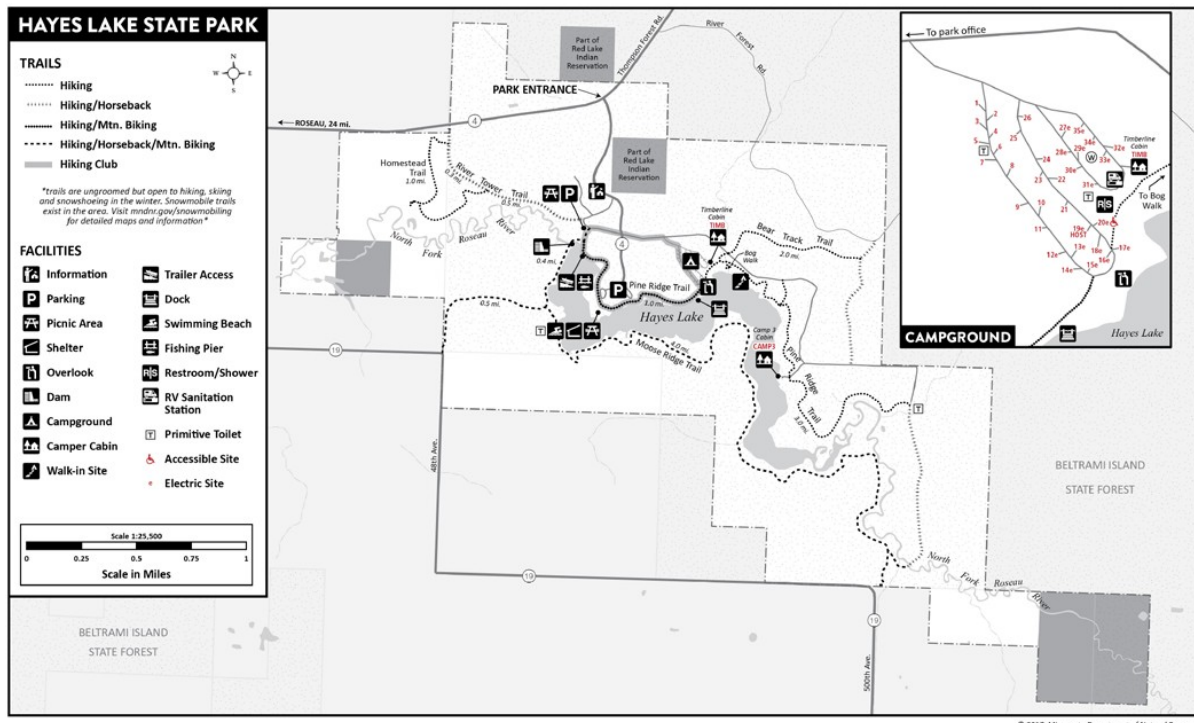


Figure 2: Map of Hayes Lake State Park.

Beltrami Island State Forest

Beltrami Island State Forest (BISF) is located in Beltrami, Lake of the Woods and Roseau Counties. BISF contains over 703,000 acres of land, making it Minnesota's second-largest state forest. BISF abuts Hayes Lake State Park and can provide additional recreation activities for park visitors. Also within the boundaries of BISF are seven scientific and natural areas and the Red Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA), the largest WMA in Minnesota. Beltrami Island is a working forest and is managed for timber, wildlife and recreation. Portions of the forest are part of the LUP and are managed under the same lease agreement and management plan as the LUP parcels within Hayes Lake State Park. Some of the LUP parcels in BISF are part of the same land exchange as parcels within the park.

Recreation

Beltrami Island State Forest provides opportunities for many types of recreation. Popular forms of recreation include berry picking, hiking, hunting, OHV riding, picnicking, snowmobiling, trapping and wildlife watching. For trails, BISF contains approximately 25 miles of hiking, 27 miles of equestrian, 262 miles of OHV, 138 miles of snowmobile and 141 miles of hunter walking trails. Beltrami Island is classified as managed for OHV use, meaning, in addition to the designated trails, OHV enthusiasts may use any access route within the forest so long as they do not cause rutting or damage to plants or trees.

The Forest contains three designated campgrounds managed by the Parks and Trails Division: Bemis Hill, Blueberry Hill and Faunce. Bemis Hill Campground also contains a day use area with an enclosed picnic shelter, hiking trails and a winter sliding hill. Each of the three campgrounds have designated campsites, pit or vault toilets and a water source. Campers may also disperse camp anywhere on lands managed by the Forestry Division within BISF.

Minnesota Statute and Rules

In addition to the Hayes Lake State Park Master Plan and the Parks and Trails Division System Plan, Hayes Lake State Park and state forest camping facilities are governed by Minnesota Statute and Rules. State parks, recreation areas and forest recreation areas are governed by the Outdoor Recreation Act (M.S. 86A) and State Park Rules (M.R. 6100). Under State Park Rules, only highway licensed vehicles may operate in state parks and forest recreation areas. Exceptions may be made for OHVs to operate on roads and trails in forest recreation areas that are posted and designated for that use (M.R. 6100.1950).

OHV use within BISF is governed by the forest motor vehicle classification. BISF is classified as a managed state forest. The managed classification allows OHVs to operate on designated forest roads and trails as well as undesignated access routes (M.S. 84.777).

The area

The area immediately surrounding Beltrami Island State Forest and Hayes Lake State Park consists mostly of rural farmland. Larger cities (population greater than 1,000) within the vicinity of the park and forest include Baudette (pop. 1,004), Roseau (pop. 2,693) and Warroad (pop. 1,763). Other smaller cities and unincorporated areas include Grygla, Roosevelt and Wannaska. Thief River Falls (pop. 8,836) is located approximately 65 driving miles from Hayes Lake State Park. Hayes Lake State Park is located completely within Roseau County (pop. 15,327). BISF is also partially located within Roseau County. Parts of BISF are also located in Beltrami (Pop. 46,513) and Lake of the Woods (Pop. 3,744) Counties.

Off-highway vehicles are popular in the three-county area of Beltrami Island State Forest and Hayes Lake State Park. As of January 2, 2018, 10,194 off-highway vehicle were registered in the three county area. Of those registered OHVs, 9,776 were ATVs. In addition, two of the largest domestic ATV manufactures in the United States have their main manufacturing facilities within 65 miles of the planning area.

Location of Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest

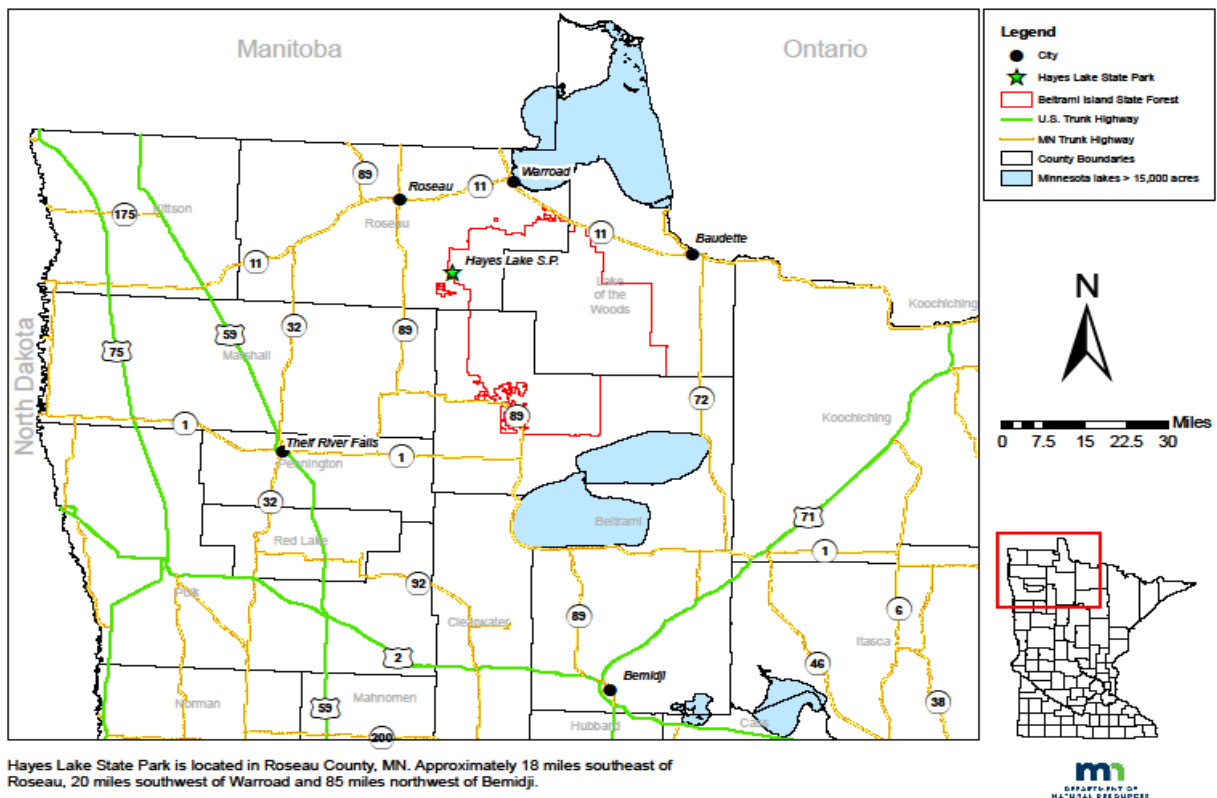


Figure 3: Location of Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest in northwestern Minnesota.

Cultural and Natural Resources

The area of Beltrami Island State Forest and Hayes Lake State Park is unique as it contains a high number of cultural and natural resources. Several ghost towns and abandoned homesteads can be found within the state forest and park. Unique natural resources are also prevalent in Hayes Lake and BISF. BISF contains seven scientific and natural areas (SNAs) which are exceptional places where native plants and animals flourish and rare species are protected, while the park is managed for protection of native plant and wildlife species.

Cultural resources

As stated above, the area surrounding Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest is rich with history. The area was extensively settled during the early twentieth century as European Americans continued to move west. At first, the area was popular with small towns established and loans for ditches to drain wetlands credited. However, because of the short growing season and inadequate soils, the land was difficult to farm and many settlers went broke attempting to farm and

relocated. The Great Depression was the final straw. Many farmers, unable to pay back loans for the ditch construction and their taxes, fell in to foreclosure. In 1934, the US Government began purchasing remaining lands under the Land Utilization Program. The Government then restored the farmland to its natural wooded state.

Today, many of the former homesteads and town sites are still found on maps. Standing remnants include the Penturen Church, Winners Silo and various cemeteries scattered throughout Beltrami Island State Forest. Other historic structures within the forest include the picnic shelter at the Bemis Hill Forest Recreation Area and the Norris Camp Red Lake WMA headquarters, which was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression. Visitors to the forest enjoy exploring the sites to learn about the rich history of the area.



Figure 4: Winner's Silo is all that remains of a general store in BISF.

Natural resources

The area of Beltrami Island State Forest and Hayes Lake State Park contains several special natural resource features. As stated above, BISF contains seven SNAs as well as habitat for a variety of plants and animals. As a State Park, Hayes Lake is managed to protect the natural resources within the park. Many areas in the northern section of the park are now classified as S1 or S2 communities. S rankings (S1 to S5) rank the occurrence of a plant community in its geographic range. S1 plant communities are critically imperiled and S2 plant communities are imperiled. Although some of these plant species may be in abundance in the local area, when considering their natural range, the plants are considered imperiled. Tables 1 through 3 identify listed species in the planning area. Figure 4 identifies areas where S1 or S2 plant communities exist within Hayes Lake.

Type	Scientific Name	Common Name
Vertebrate animal	Accipiter gentilis	Northern goshawk
Vertebrate animal	Haliaeetus leucocephalus	Bald eagle
Invertebrate animal	Ylodes frontalis	Caddisfly
Invertebrate animal	Oxyethira itascae	Caddisfly
Plant	Botrychium simplex	Least moonwort
Plant	Botrychium pallidum	Pale moonwort
Plant	Botrychium minganense	Mingan moonwort
Plant	Botrychium lunaria	Common moonwort
Plant	Botrychium michiganense	Michigan moonwort

Table 1: listed species within Hayes Lake State Park.

Type	Scientific Name	Common Name
Ecological	N/A	Lake and wetland composite

Table 2: listed species near Bemis Hill Forest Recreation Area.

Type	Scientific Name	Common Name
Plant	Botrychium simplex	Least moonwort
Plant	Botrychium pallidum	Pale moonwort
Plant	Botrychium michiganense	Michigan moonwort

Table 3: listed species near the Clear River area.

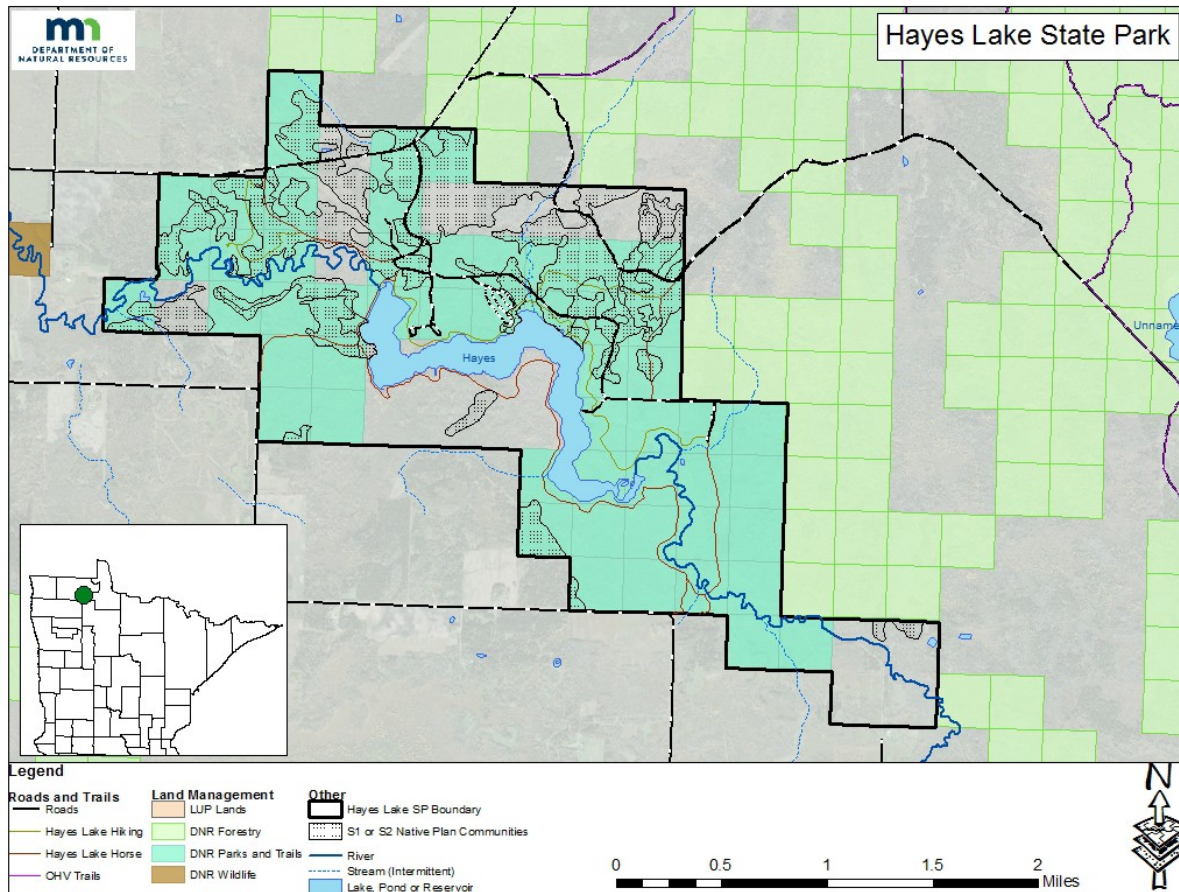


Figure 5: Map identifying S1 and S2 plant communities within Hayes Lake State Park.

Sites Considered

The DNR initially identified six sites for potential OHV camping. Each site has its own unique character that must be considered when identifying a potential OHV camping area. Four sites are located within the statutory boundaries of Hayes Lake State Park. The other two sites are located within Beltrami Island State Forest and include the existing Bemis Hill Campground and the Clear River area. An additional site (4A, not on map) was identified within Hayes Lake State Park just east of Site 2 during the review process. The set of sites are illustrated in Figure 5. The following brief site descriptions highlight early considerations about the possibility of OHV camping and trail connections.

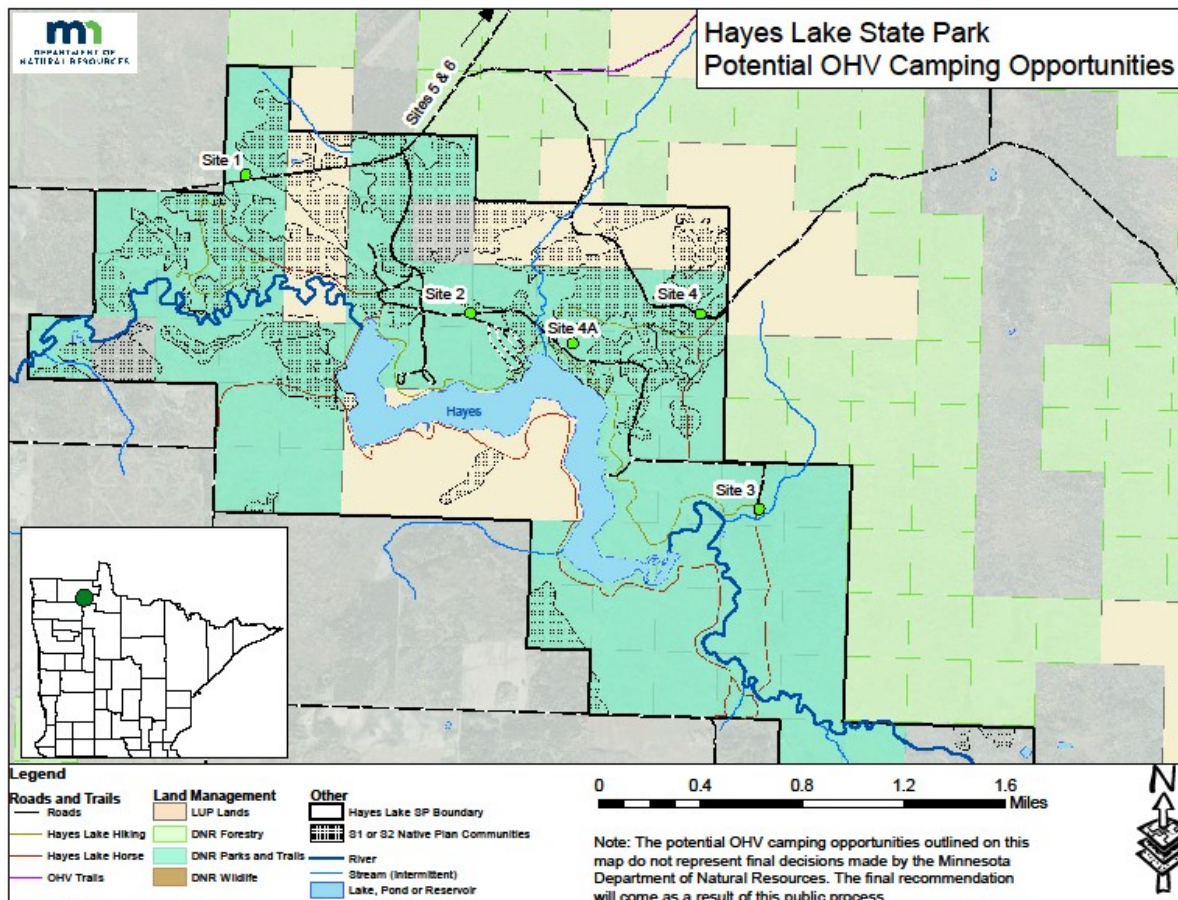


Figure 6: Map of sites DNR considered.

Site 1

Site 1 is located on approximately 80 acres within the boundaries of Hayes Lake State Park on land managed by DNR Parks and Trails, but is separated from the main park unit by County Road 4. This site is currently undeveloped and new facilities would need to be developed for camping. The site is easily accessed from CR-4 and a trail connection to the existing OHV trail system in Beltrami Island State Forest may be constructed by connecting to the trail approximately 1/2-mile north of the State Park boundary. Part of this area contains an S-2 plant communities, which would need to be considered prior to the start of any construction.

Site 2

Site 2 encompasses the existing Hayes Lake State Park campground. The campground contains 35 drive-in campsites, of which 18 have electrical hook-ups, a shower house and a dump station. Campsites are relatively small for modern campers and for those with recreational vehicles (RVs). A trail connection

may be made to the River Forest Rd. by utilizing a former roadbed. The trail connection would require a plant survey as it is in an S-2 plant community.

Site 3

Site 3 is the former group camp in Hayes Lake State Park. The existing area of the group camp is relatively small and would need to be expanded for a viable multi-site campground. The road to the site may also need to be improved to accommodate an increase in traffic. The former group camp currently contains one pit toilet and a hand pump well. Electrical service ends approximately two miles before the site along the access road. A connection to the Beltrami Island State Forest trail system may be made by constructing a new trail between the group site and the River Forest Road.

Site 4

Site 4 is located within the State Park on land managed by DNR Parks and Trails Division. The site is located along the River Forest Rd. and may utilize the road to access the trail system in Beltrami Island State Forest. The site is connected to rest of the Park by a non-motorized trail. This site is currently undeveloped and new facilities would need to be developed for camping. The site is surrounded by S-2 communities, which would need to be considered prior to the start of any construction.

Site 4A

Site 4A was considered during the review process. The site is located in a patch of non-S2 community just east of the existing campground (Site 2). Electrical service is provided at the site and it is located along the same road as Sites 2 and 3. However the site is surrounded by S2 communities, making a trail connection difficult.

Site 5

Site 5 is located approximately six miles northeast of Hayes Lake State Park along the Thompson Forest Road. The site contains the Bemis Hill Forest Recreation Area, which includes an enclosed picnic shelter, ten campsites, pit toilets and a well with a hand pump. Electric and showers are not currently available at the site. OHVs are currently permitted to ride directly from the campsites to the trail system.

Site 6

Site 6 is located approximately 12.5 miles northeast of Hayes Lake State Park at the end of the Thompson Forest Road. The area is known as the Clear River site and, although not a designated forest recreation area, experiences a high volume of users. The site contains some picnic tables and a hand pump well, which also can be powered by a generator. This site can be accessed via Warroad on the blacktopped CR-5 or via Hayes Lake State Park on the dirt Thompson Rd.

Management plan and rule change considerations

Because State Park Rules prohibit OHVs from operating within a state park, the DNR must consider alternative management options for Hayes Lake if it is determined one of Sites 1-4 is the most viable option. There are two options the DNR may consider for Sites 1-4:

- Option A. Request a legislative designation change for Hayes Lake State Park from state park to state recreation area. Under this option, OHVs could be permitted, if legislation directed DNR to allow use on roads and trails that were signed open to their use. A master plan amendment would also need to be completed to allow for the new use and terms of the use within recreation area.
- Option B. Request a legislative designation change for *specific sections* of Hayes Lake State Park to become a secondary State Recreation Area (SRA) unit. With legislative direction, this designation change could permit OHVs to operate in the areas of the SRA on signed roads and trails. A master plan amendment would also need completed to allow for the new use and terms of use within the SRA secondary unit.

In the 2017 Minnesota State Parks Visitor Survey¹ approximately half of respondents did not support allowing OHV ride in access to state park campgrounds. OHVs may currently operate from both the Bemis Hill Forest Recreation Area and the undeveloped Clear River Site. Therefore, no rule change is necessary to allow OHV operation at these sites; however, a development plan may be necessary if improvements are planned.

Public Involvement

To better understand the desires of campers within Roseau County, the DNR completed a public scoping period from November 26-December 27, 2018. This included an online questionnaire, acceptance of comments through mail and email and two public meetings: one in Warroad and one in St. Paul. The purpose of the comments and public meetings was to understand what amenities campers with OHVs desire and where the DNR can provide these opportunities in northwestern Minnesota. In addition, the DNR was interested to learn the feelings of current state park visitors toward allowing OHV access to areas within Hayes Lake State Park.

Distribution methodology and limitations

On November 26, 2018, the DNR issued a statewide news release announcing the public meetings and seeking public comment (see Appendix A). To be as inclusive as possible, the DNR directly emailed representatives of statewide Parks and OHV organizations, informing them of the scoping period and public meetings. The organizations were asked to pass the information along to membership. These organizations included the Amateur Riders of Motorcycles Association-AMA District 23, ATV Association

¹ https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/parks/2017_state_parks_visitor_survey.pdf

of Minnesota, the Minnesota Four-Wheel Drive Association and the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota. This process is typical for notification of scoping periods.

To get the input of people who camped at Hayes Lake State Park, the DNR sent the online questionnaire directly to Hayes Lake campers who opted in to receive emails from the DNR when making camping reservations. After eliminating duplicates, 97 individuals were emailed. Three emails were returned as undeliverable. Due to the lack of registrations, it was not possible to directly email individuals who camped at the Bemis Hill FRA or the Clear River Area.

Two public meetings were held to discuss the project and give citizens an opportunity to ask questions, discuss their ideas, air concerns and submit comments. Both meetings used the same format. The meeting began with a PowerPoint presentation explaining background information, what the DNR is considering and how to comment. Questions were asked throughout the PowerPoint and answers were provided by the Parks and Trails staff present. Once this was complete, the meetings moved to an open house format, providing time for one on one conversations with staff present. Written comment forms, identical to the online questionnaire, were provided at both meetings. The first meeting was held at the DNR Forestry Office in Warroad on December 10, 2018.

Approximately forty citizens attended this meeting and the DNR received twenty comments. The second meeting was held at the DNR Central Office in St. Paul. Eight citizens attended this meeting and the DNR received five comments.

Inherently, there are limitations and challenges to gathering public comments. Because not all visitors to Hayes Lake State Park and no visitors to Beltrami Island State Forest are required to register or provide email address, it is not possible to directly contact every visitor. Also, because one of the desired outcomes of this project is to understand the desires of campers with OHVs, some questions on the questionnaire were targeted toward OHV enthusiasts. Some respondents who do not use OHVs felt the questions did not apply to them and did not complete the questionnaire.

Comment methodology

In the news release, the DNR identified several methods to comment: By email, by mail/fax, utilizing the online comment form (see Appendix B) or commenting at either public meeting using a comment form identical to the online form. Many comments received via email were written comments and did not include responses to the survey questions. A total of 1,387 comments were received, of which 652 provided written comment.

Citizen concerns

The DNR took steps to be as inclusive as possible during the scoping period. However, several concerns were expressed by citizens including park and forest users fearing they would be “out voiced” by others and the process was not inclusive enough.

Concern about users being “out voiced.” This concern was raised at the Warroad public meeting by several individuals. The concern was that in past planning efforts, when local views may differ from views in other areas of the State, the local citizens cannot fully voice their opinion because Hayes Lake and Beltrami Island are located in a rural area. On the online questionnaire and comment sheet, the DNR asked for the respondents’ ZIP code. Responses were sorted by ZIP code to determine if there is a difference in opinion between local respondents and respondents at large. The DNR also added a question to the questionnaire asking if the respondent had ever visited Hayes Lake State Park or Beltrami Island State Forest. The DNR used this information to determine if there is a difference in opinion between park/forest users and non-park/forest users. The DNR will take any differences into consideration when making a recommendation.

Process not inclusive. This concern came mostly from non-motorized users. The concern was that the process focused on the desires of the OHV community and the wording of the questionnaire seemed to be focused on OHV users. One focus of the questionnaire was to understand the needs and desires of OHV enthusiasts.

Because some sites under consideration are within Hayes Lake State Park, questions asked about their feelings of permitting OHV access to Hayes Lake State Park and potential designation change options for the park if OHVs were permitted to access. All Likert Scale questions used on the questionnaire included an “N/A” or “not applicable” response choice for those who felt the question did not apply.

To include as many citizens as possible, the DNR issued a statewide news release on November 26, 2018 announcing the opportunity to comment and the upcoming public meetings. The DNR also forwarded the information to stakeholder groups and asked they pass along the information to their membership. Typically for pre-project scoping, the DNR will hold one meeting in the local area. The meeting in Warroad satisfied this meeting. Because of the remoteness of the project area and to give more Minnesotans the opportunity to attend a meeting, the DNR held a second meeting in St. Paul.

Respondents taking multiple surveys. Because multiple people may respond to the survey from the same computer (e.g., at a library), Parks and Trails did not restrict computers to only one survey. Therefore, there was a risk that respondents could take the survey multiple times. Parks and Trails reminded respondents that survey and comment forms were not a means to vote, but rather a way to receive input. Unfortunately, the survey platform used (Snap Survey) does not identify multiple surveys taken by the same computer. This factor was considered when reviewing the comments; however, the comments still provided Parks and Trails with a clear picture of what campers with OHVs desire at a semi-modern campground.

Questionnaire and Comment Results

The DNR received a total of 1,387 total comments of which 652 respondents submitted a written response. The remainder of the respondents submitted only the questionnaire portion of the comment sheet. Parks and Trails also held two public meetings, one in Warroad, MN (Dec. 10-31 sign-ins) and one in St. Paul, MN (Dec. 13- 8 sign-ins). At the meetings, Parks and Trails presented background information, answered questions and solicited comments. More detailed results can be found in

Appendices C and D.

Commenter location and visitation

To address the concern that local citizens typically feel “out voiced” by greater Minnesota citizens, Parks and Trails asked commenters for ZIP code location to determine if there are any differences between local citizens and greater Minnesota citizens (and beyond). The following ZIP codes were used to identify the respondent as local: 56756, 56763, 56673, 56751, 56714, 56726, 56737, 56724, 56727, 56761, 56623, 56629, 56654, 56671, 56666, 56650, 56630, 56661, 56660 and 56627. According to the 2010 US Census, the population of this area is 29,290. Of the 1,323 respondents who answered this question, 224 (17%) were local. Parks and Trails also reviewed the locations of campers registered in 2018. Approximately 32% of Hayes Lake Campers were local.

Parks and Trails was also interested to learn if the respondent had visited Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest. This question was a late add-on to the questionnaire and 66 (5%) responded prior to the addition of this question.

Desired facilities

In general OHV campers overwhelmingly desire water and fire rings/picnic tables at campsites. Other items desired include showers and electrical hook-ups. A greater percentage of OHV campers compared to campers in general prefer spots for larger campers and RVs. It is important to have sites large enough for travel trailers and 5th wheels. Access to trails was also highly desired by OHV campers.

Level of agreement

Questionnaire respondents were given 14 statements to determine their level of agreement. A five-point Likert Scale was used as well as a not applicable field. Results of these statements can be found in Appendix C. Overall, there were two major groups responding to the questionnaire: one group that disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statements and another group that agreed/strongly agreed with the statements. The OHV community and responses of local citizens were generally similar.

Recommendation

An interdisciplinary team of Parks and Trails professionals reviewed and discussed all comments received during this process. This team was comprised of staff members from park management, resource, trail, acquisition and development, planning and leadership. The team reviewed the areas originally considered as well as one additional area within Hayes Lake. The additional area is located just east of Site 2 along a park road and is indicated on maps as “Site 4A.” Ten factors were developed to help identify the recommended campground site.

Ability to perform site maintenance. Site maintenance is an important factor to consider for any campground. In addition to basic maintenance such as campsite clean-up and trash removal, facilities such as showers and electric sites may require additional maintenance. In addition, more heavily used campgrounds may require more frequent basic maintenance. Some basic maintenance tasks such as campsite/restroom clean up and trash removal may be performed by a campground host, if available. The time for staff to travel to the site was also considered, but travel time to all sites considered is less than thirty minutes.

Ability to provide for other recreational uses. Other user groups may use the camping facilities in addition to OHVs. For example, equestrian users may also benefit from larger camping spots, electricity and showers.

Hitching rails are already provided for equestrian users at the Bemis Hill and Clear River sites. Anglers fishing Lake of the Woods may also benefit from a semi-modern campground at the Clear River site because of its proximity to Warroad/Lake of the Woods.

Ability to provide what is indicated in the questionnaire/written comments. The written comments provided many more themes than what was used on the score sheet. These additional themes were considered together and scored here. To see how Parks and Trails considered and responded to the additional major themes, refer to Appendix C.

Connection with OHV trails. One of the primary objectives of this exercise was to determine the best location for a semi-modern campground with direct OHV access. Therefore providing safe access to the OHV trail system was considered. OHV road travel, such as along Thompson Forest Road, as well as private property and LUP land restrictions and natural resource concerns were factored into this score.

Day Use Facilities. As reflected in the comments and during discussions at the Warroad public meeting, Parks and Trails discovered that, in addition to camping, many OHV enthusiasts also desire access to day use areas such as the swim beach within Hayes Lake State Park. Providing access to day use sites was also then considered as part of this exercise.

Existing Amenities. As development of a semi-modern campground is considered, facilities such as water, electric and existing sites must be considered. Sites with more existing amenities may decrease the development costs.

Feasibility to Provide Power. Providing electricity at campsites is one of the key focuses for this project. Not only do electric campsites require power, but also a well for water and shower houses require power. The cost to provide electric to the site is factored into the recommendation.

Impacts to Natural Features. Many areas within Hayes Lake State Park are S-2 native plant communities. This means that the native species in these areas are imperiled and DNR is actively managing the area to protect them. Disruption to the environment by constructing a new campground or new trails in these areas would require additional review and large footprint projects such as a campground may not be possible.

Impacts to Wetlands. The area of Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest are in a very wet area. Wetlands may make some development difficult. Constructing campgrounds and trails in wetlands is an expensive task and may require the purchase of wetland credits or mitigation.

Site Security. Site security is a major issue for campers with OHVs. As the enthusiasts will spend hours away from their campsite while enjoying trails, they want to make sure the items left at their campsite are safe.

Scoring table

After meeting to discuss the options, the team developed a scoring table to rank the areas considered. The team individually scored each site based on criteria outlined above on a scale of 1-10, with a final site score out of 100. Table 4 provides averages of these scores.

Factor	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 4A	Site 5	Site 6
Ability to perform site maintenance	8.4	9.5	7.6	6.6	8.75	7	6.9
Ability to provide for other recreational uses (horses, other campers, etc.)	6.5	7.8	7.8	6.8	6.8	9.4	9.4
Ability to provide what is indicated in the questionnaire/written comments.	4.8	6.6	5.5	6.5	6	8.3	8.6
Connection with OHV trails	2.25	3.1	2.75	5.25	3.25	10	9.8
Day Use Features	3	6.7	6.2	4.1	4.1	7.25	7.25
Existing Amenities	2.3	6.2	5.5	4.5	3.25	6.8	7.6
Feasibility to provide power	6.6	9.5	5.1	8.5	7.1	4	5.9
Impact to natural features*	2.5	7.25	5.8	3.2	4	8.8	9.7
Impact to wetlands*	2.3	4.8	5.5	6.1	6.1	9.8	9.8
Site Security	8	9.6	7	6.3	7.75	5.8	5.8
Total Score	46.65	71.05	59.05	57.85	57.1	77.15	80.75

Table 4: Average of scores for sites considered. *Score 1=many impacts, 10=no impacts.

Recommendation

Based on the criteria above, Parks and Trails recommends Site 6: the Clear River Site be developed for semi-modern OHV camping. The site provides excellent connections to the City of Warroad by use of CSAH 5 (a paved road) as well as the Bemis Hill and Carp Pit riding areas. An ATV/snowmobile bridge may be considered as part of site development to provide safer access across the Warroad River. Clear River is also popular among hunters who use ATVs to access their hunting locations. The additional facilities provided by a semi-modern campground will enhance their experiences as well. The site already contains a hand pump/generator-powered well, which could be converted to electric to provide running water throughout the site. Power would need to be connected approximately 2.5 miles to the site. Instead of developing a traditional shower building, Parks and Trails may install a prefabricated 2-stall shower building. Sewage vaults may also be installed so no septic or sewer system would be required. Parks and Trails currently has a preliminary concept design plan for an OHV campground at the Clear River Site, which with some modifications to provide semi-modern camping, would allow development to begin sooner.

Although the Clear River Site contains two parcels of LUP lands, these should not affect development. The original campground designs took the LUP lands into consideration and will not impact these parcels. In addition, the two parcels are part of the LUP land exchange. Once the exchange is complete, development on these parcels may be considered.

Considerations of other areas for Camping

Site 1

Site 1 was initially considered because it is close to the main park facilities, making it easy to monitor. It is also separated from CSAH 4, which would serve as a prevalent boundary for OHVs. Power also runs relatively close to the site. However, the site is dry and a well would need to be installed at the site or a water line from the park office would need to be installed. In addition, the S2 community in the area and LUP lands limit the size of campground that could be constructed.

Site 2

Site 2 is the existing campground in Hayes Lake State Park. Water, electric and showers exist at the site. However, the campsites were designed in the 1960s and are too small to accommodate larger RVs and travel trailers. The site is surrounded by an S2 community to the north and east, Hayes Lake to the south and a large wetland to the west--making expansion almost impossible. To construct larger campsites to accommodate larger camping vehicles and pull through sites, the number of campsites would be reduced to about half, displacing other users. Under this recommendation, existing management of the campground will continue-providing a semi-modern experience for campers without OHVs.

Site 3

Site 3 is the former group campground in Hayes Lake State Park. The site was considered because it is remote from many of the other users in the park. A trail would be constructed through state forest land to connect to the state forest trail system. The area on the state forest land is very wet and would

require approximately one mile of trail through wetland. The road leading to the site would also need significant improvements to accommodate an increase in use. Although within the park, power would need to be extended approximately two miles to provide electric at the site.

Site 4

Site 4 provides direct trail access along River Forest Road and electric runs through the site. However a well would need to be drilled or a water line extended from the existing campground to provide water. The site is also within an S2 community, making construction of a campground difficult.

Site 4A

Site 4A was a later suggestion for the review team. It provides electrical service and water can easily be extended from the existing campground. However, as with Site 3, the road to the site would need significant upgrades to accommodate the increase in traffic. A direct connection to the trail system would also be difficult from this site because it is surrounded by S2 communities.

Site 5

Site 5 is the existing Bemis Hill Forest Recreation Area. The site was considered because it is popular with OHV campers and non-OHV campers alike. To provide electricity to the site will require electric connections for approximately 7.5 miles at a cost of approximately \$80,000. The site would also need significant upgrades to provide semi-modern campsites. Finally, in comments received, some raised concern that by developing Bemis Hill, existing users would be displaced.

Conclusion

Parks and Trails initiated this project to understand the desires of campers with off-highway vehicles. Through the public engagement process, we learned that access to semi-modern camping facilities with sites large enough for large travel trailers and 5th wheels is most important to campers with OHVs. Additionally, 75% of ATV questionnaire respondents do not care where the semi-modern facilities are located, just having the facilities is important enough. Developing a he semi-modern campground at the Clear River Site will satisfy this desire while also providing easy access to the trail system.

Appendix A: News release for public meetings and comment period

Minnesota DNR News

For Immediate Release:

November 26, 2018

Contact: [Amy Barrett](#), Parks and Trails Division, information officer, 651-259-5627; [Joe Unger](#), Parks and Trails Division, OHV planner, 651-259-5279

DNR invites public input for a better understanding of OHV camping desires in Roseau County

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) invites anyone with an interest in off-highway vehicle (OHV) camping facilities in Beltrami Island State Forest or Hayes Lake State Park area to two open houses in November. The first open house will be from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM on December 10 at the Warroad Forestry Office, 803 Cherne Dr. NW, Warroad. The second open house will be from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM on December 13 at the DNR Headquarters Building, 500 Lafayette Rd., St. Paul. Both open houses will cover the same information.

The DNR invites the public to visit the meetings to review maps of existing and potentially new camping areas, discuss the needs and desires of OHV campers, and submit comments. The DNR will also accept written comments through 4:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 27, 2018.

Hayes Lake State Park was established in 1967 to provide recreational opportunities in a wilderness setting. Beltrami Island State Forest is a 703,000-acre working forest surrounding Hayes Lake State Park. The DNR understands there is demand for additional facilities for off-highway vehicle (OHV) camping in the Hayes Lake/Beltrami Island area. This effort will be to better understand what OHV campers' desire and how the DNR can accommodate these desires.

Comments received at the meetings and during the public comment period will be used to develop a recommendation to improve camping facilities for OHV users. This recommendation may result in a master plan amendment for Hayes Lake State Park. The master plan amendment will be completed prior to any designation change to the Park allowing OHV access.

Written comments may be submitted by:

- E-mail to joe.unger@state.mn.us.
- Utilize the online questionnaire found on the DNR website.
- Fax to 651-297-1157.
- Mail to Joe Unger, Parks and Trails Division, DNR, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4039.

For more information, please call:

- The DNR's Parks and Trails Division central office in St. Paul, 651-259-5279.
- Hayes Lake State Park 218-425-7504.

Information is also available online at mndnr.gov

(https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/parks_trails/open.html).

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Appendix B: Questionnaire and comment sheet

Public Input Form-Beltrami Island State Forest and Hayes Lake State Park Camping Opportunities Review.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Trails Division is interested in learning the wants and desires of campers with off-highway vehicles (OHVs) in and around Hayes Lake State Park. We ask you to please take a few minutes to answer the questions below to help us in the effort. Thank you in advance for your time!

1. What is your home ZIP code? _____

2. How have you visited Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest recreation facilities?
☐ I visited for the day, but did not stay overnight.
☐ I visited overnight (camped).
☐ I have not visited Hayes Lake State Park or Beltrami Island State Forest.

3. What recreational activities do you enjoy within Beltrami Island State Forest/Hayes Lake State Park? (Check all that apply)
☐ ATVing ☐ Fishing ☐ OHMing ☐ Snowmobiling
☐ Being with friends/family ☐ Hiking ☐ ORVing ☐ Wildlife watching/birding
☐ Boating/canoeing/kayaking ☐ Horseback riding ☐ Picnicking ☐ Other _____
☐ Camping ☐ Hunting ☐ Relaxing

4. What facilities do you enjoy while camping? (Check all that apply)
☐ Dump station ☐ Pit toilets ☐ Spot for small camper/RV
☐ Electrical hook-ups ☐ Showers ☐ Spot for large camper/RV/5th wheel
☐ Fire rings/picnic tables ☐ Spot for tents ☐ Water at campground
☐ Other _____

5. Please rate the following based on your level of agreement (1=strongly disagree-5=strongly agree).

I like peace and quiet when camping.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
OHV access to semi-modern (electric, showers, etc.) camping is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
OHV access to day-use areas (swimming area, picnic areas, etc.) is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Direct OHV trail access from camping is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
When camping with my OHV, I like to participate in other activities. What activities? _____	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
It does not matter to me where, I just want better camping facilities that are OHV-friendly.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
OHVs should be able to access camping within Hayes Lake State Park.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
OHV use in Hayes Lake will reduce my enjoyment during my visit.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
OHV use is incompatible with current uses at Hayes Lake State Park.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I would support the development of camping facilities for OHVs in Hayes Lake State Park, but separate from the main park campground.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Having an OHV campground with expanded amenities (showers, electric, etc.) is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Please continue on back



6. Under Minnesota Rule, non-highway licensed motor vehicles are not permitted in state parks (M.R. 6100.1900). Please rate your level of agreement for the following options regarding Hayes Lake State Park (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

I would not support any changes to the current state park status of Hayes Lake.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I would support legislation for Hayes Lake State Park which would allow for a master plan amendment permitting OHVs to operate in certain areas of the park.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
I would support a special recreation unit within Hayes Lake State Park that would allow for a management plan amendment to permit OHVs to operate in those areas of the park <u>only</u> .	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

7. Please provide additional comments in the space below.

To Submit Comment:

Email: Joe.unger@state.mn.us

Fax: Attn.: Joe Unger 651-297-1157

Mail: Joe Unger, Parks and Trails

500 Lafayette Rd.

St. Paul, MN 55155

Online: <http://survey.mn.gov/s.asp?k=153995553270>

Comments must be submitted by December 27, 2018

Appendix C: Questionnaire results summary

Results Summary: Hayes Lake State Park/Beltrami Island State Forest Camping Opportunities

Parks and Trails solicited comments for the scoping process to determine the best options for campers with off-highway vehicles (OHVs) at Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest between November 27 and December 27, 2018. The DNR received a total of 1,387 total comments. Of which, 652 respondents submitted a written response. The remainder of the respondents submitted only the questionnaire portion of the comment sheet. Parks and Trails also held two public meetings, one in Warroad, MN (Dec. 10-31 sign-ins) and one in St. Paul, MN (Dec. 13-8 sign-ins). At the meetings, Parks and Trails presented background information, answered questions and solicited comments.

Commenter Location

One concern we heard at the Warroad meeting was local citizens are typically “out voiced” by greater Minnesota citizens. Parks and Trails asked commenters for ZIP code location to determine if there are any differences between local citizens and greater Minnesota citizens (and beyond). The following ZIP codes were used to identify the respondent as local: 56756, 56763, 56673, 56751, 56714, 56726, 56737, 56724, 56727,

56761, 56623, 56629, 56654, 56671, 56666, 56650, 56630, 56661, 56660 and 56627. According to the 2010 US Census, the population of this area is 29,290. Of the 1,323 respondents who answered this question, 224 (17%) were local. Parks and Trails also reviewed the locations of campers registered in 2018. Approximately 32% of Hayes Lake Campers were local.

Visitation to Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest

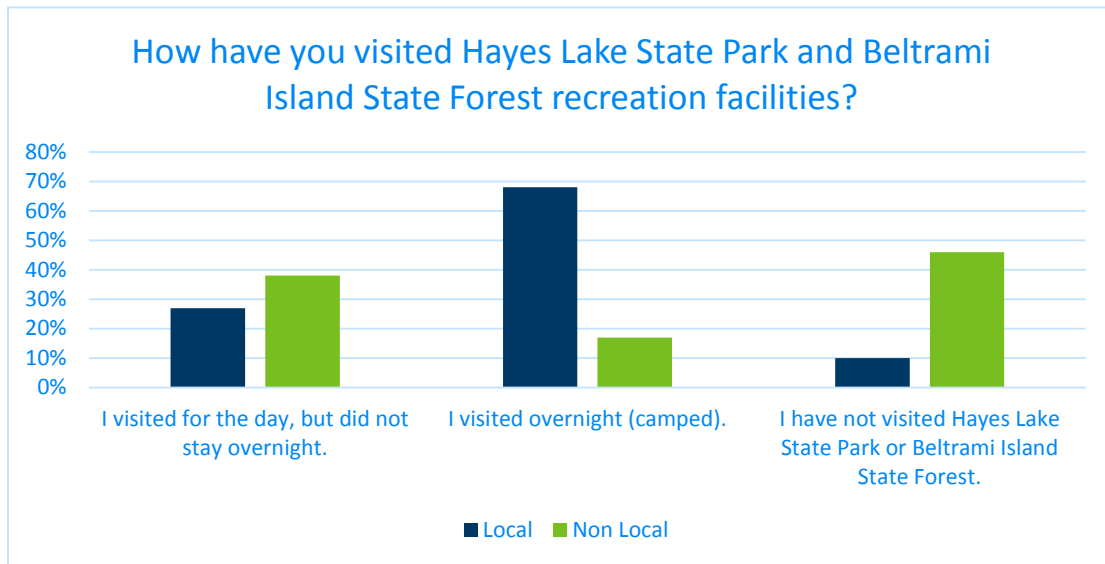
Parks and Trails was also interested to learn if the respondent had visited Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest. This question was a late add-on to the questionnaire and 66 (5%) responded prior to the addition of this question.

Total Respondents (*n*=1,209)

Question	Response
I visited for the day, but did not stay overnight	440 (36%)
I visited overnight (camped)	320 (26%)
I have not visited Hayes Lake State Park or Beltrami Island State Forest	449 (37%)

Local Compared to Non Local

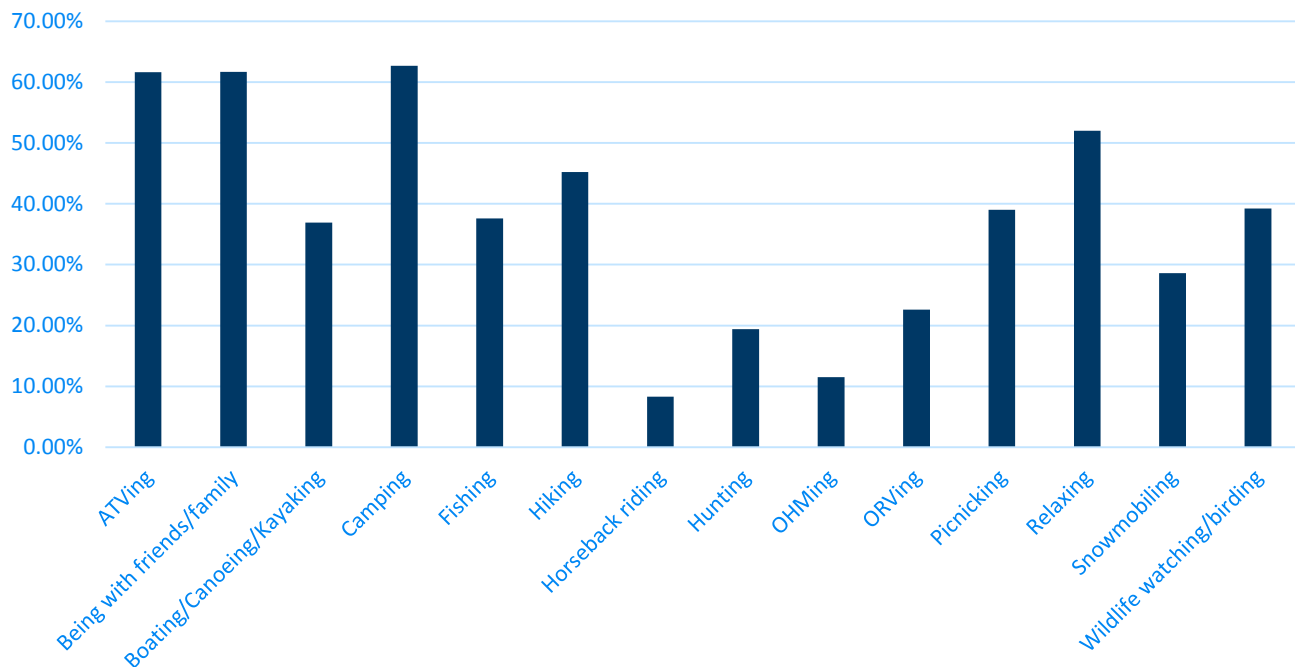
Question	Local Response (n=229)	Non Local Response (n=980)
I visited for the day, but did not stay overnight	63 (27%)	377 (38%)
I visited overnight (camped)	155 (68%)	165 (17%)
I have not visited Hayes Lake State Park or Beltrami Island State Forest	2 (1%)	447 (46%)



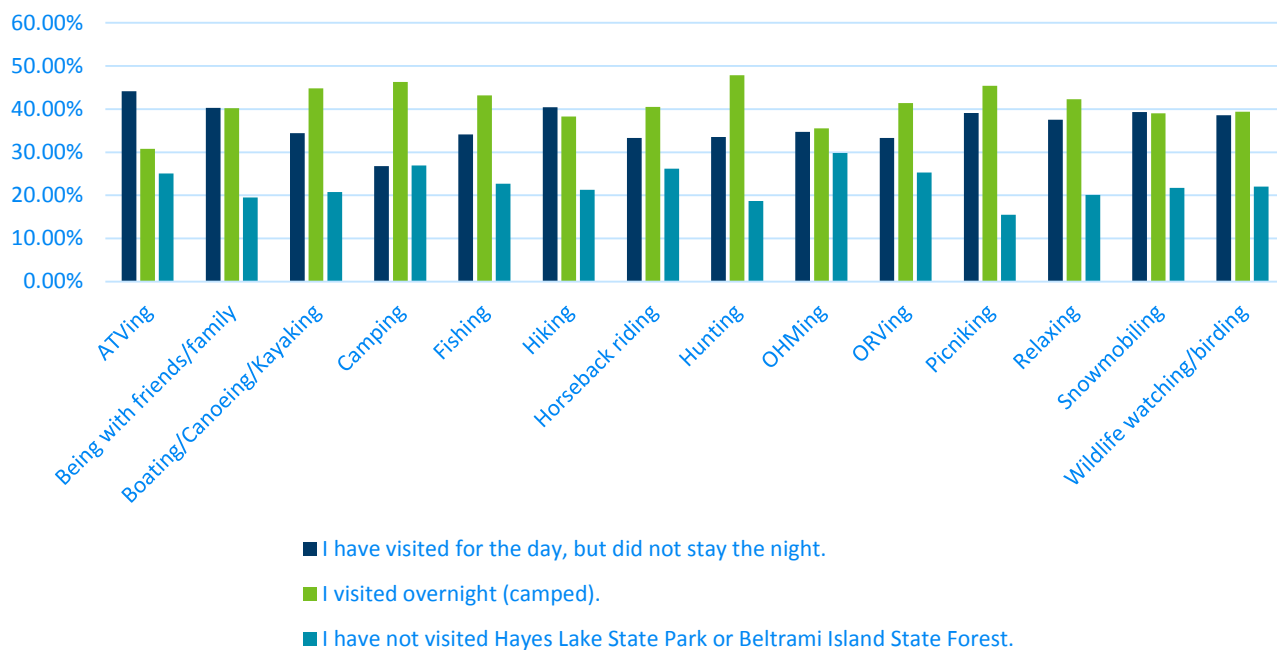
Recreational Activities Enjoyed

The next question asked what recreational activities respondents enjoyed at Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest. Respondents were given a list of popular activities as well as an “Other” field for additional activities. Respondents had the ability to choose as many activities as they participate in. 1,063 respondents answered this question. The top three activities were camping (666, 63%), being with friends and family (656; 62%) and ATVing (655; 62%). Popular “Other” activities include: swimming, snowshoeing and quiet.

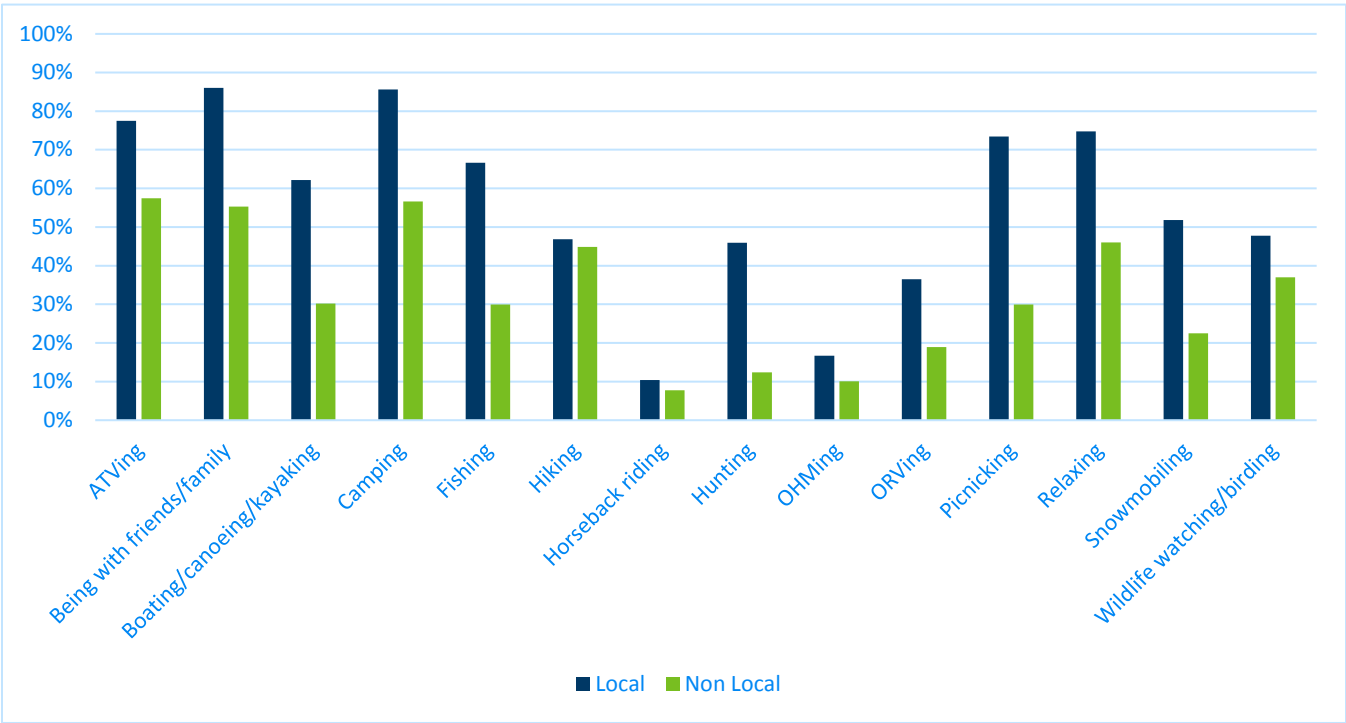
Popular Recreation Activities



Visitation to Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest-All Respondents

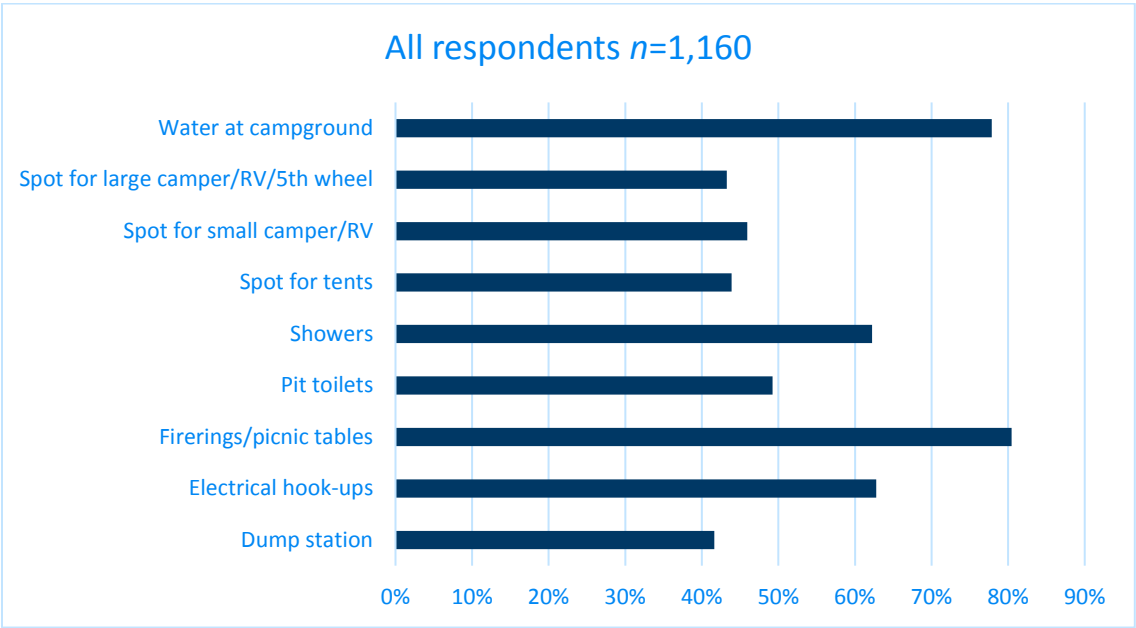


Visitation to Hayes Lake State Park and Beltrami Island State Forest-Local Compared to Non Local

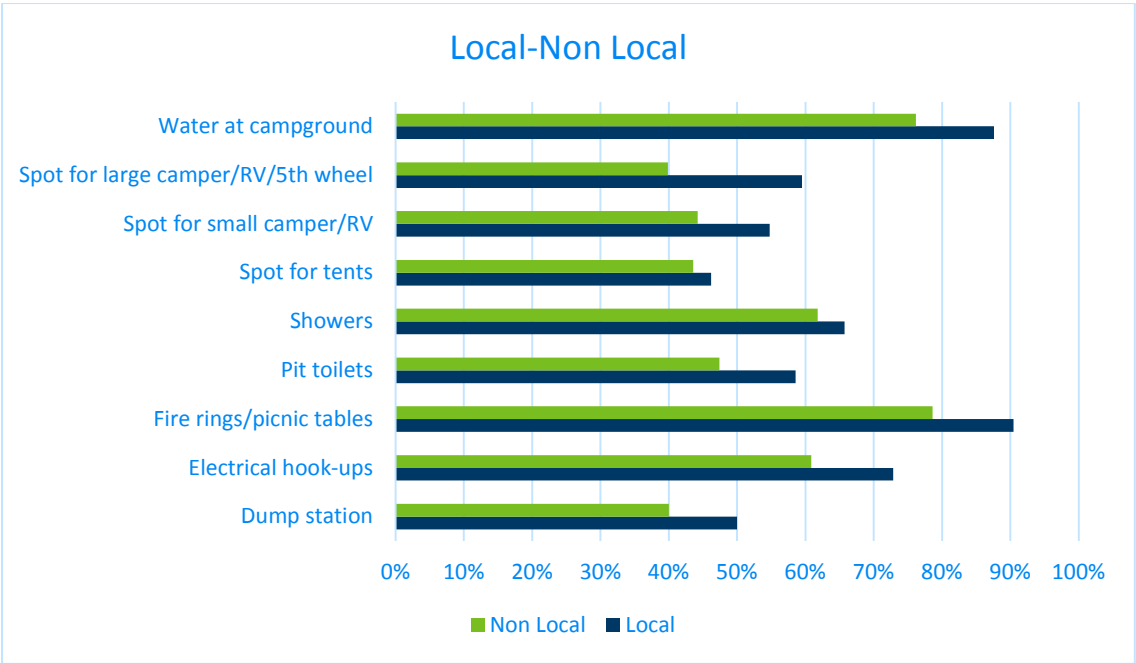
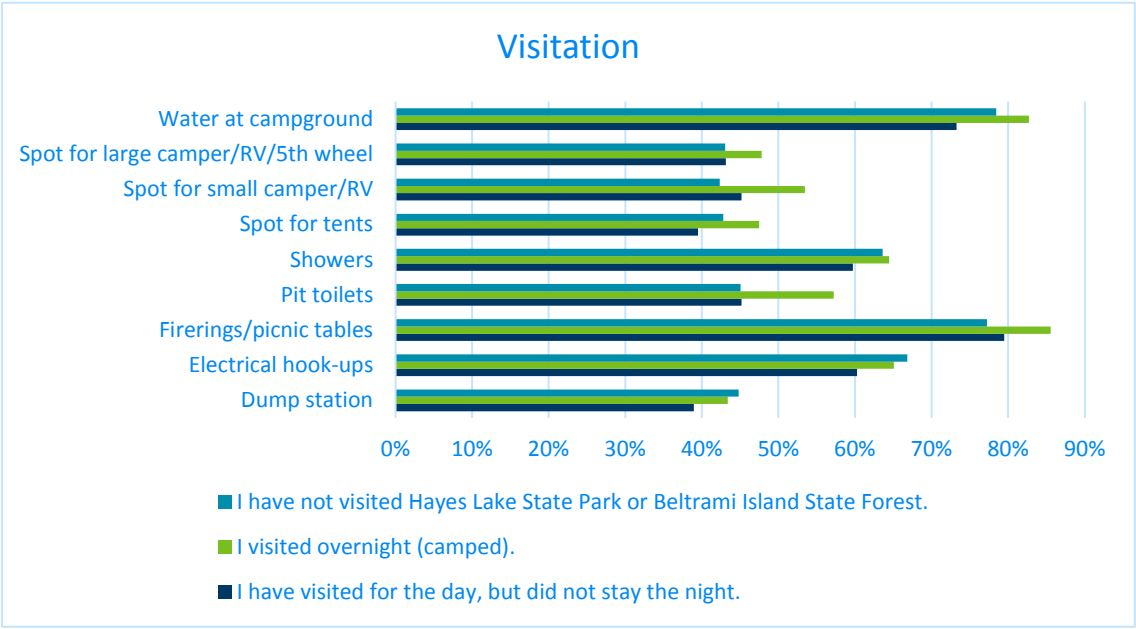


Amenities Desired While Camping

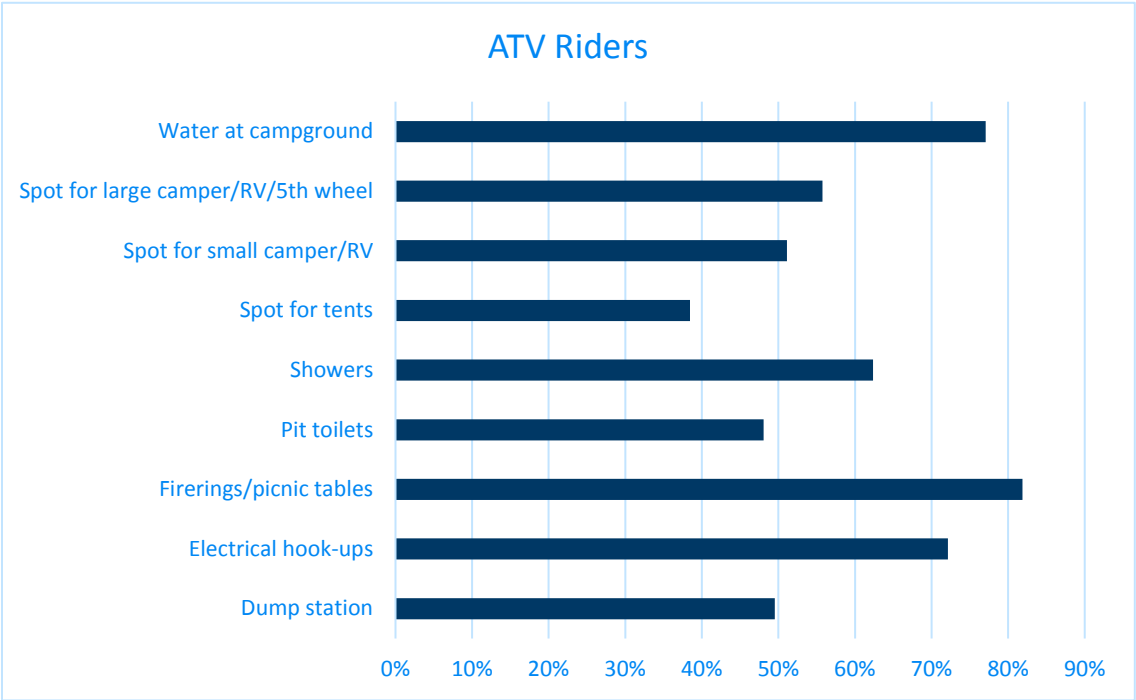
Respondents were asked about what amenities they enjoy while camping. Nine typically desired amenities were offered. An “other” category was provided for additional responses.



Amenities Desired While Camping (continued)



Amenities Desired While Camping (continued)

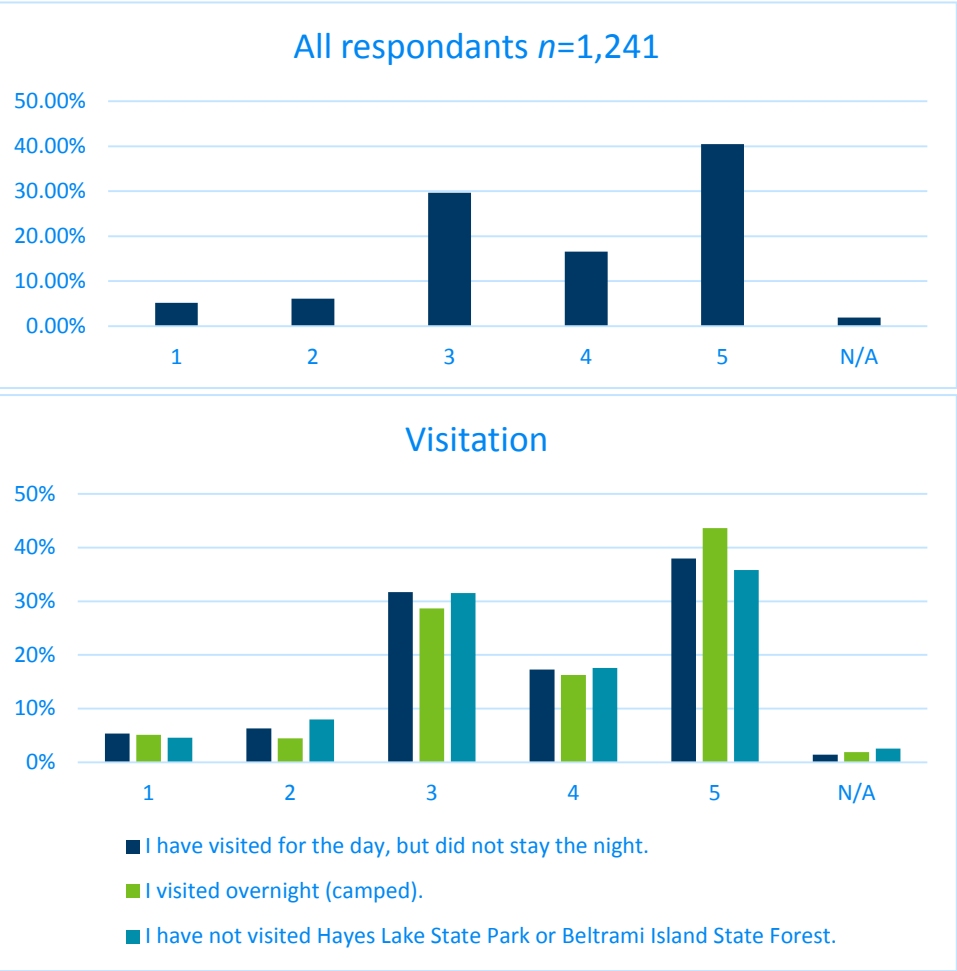


Other facilities indicated include: Access to Trails, horse facilities, quiet and beach access.

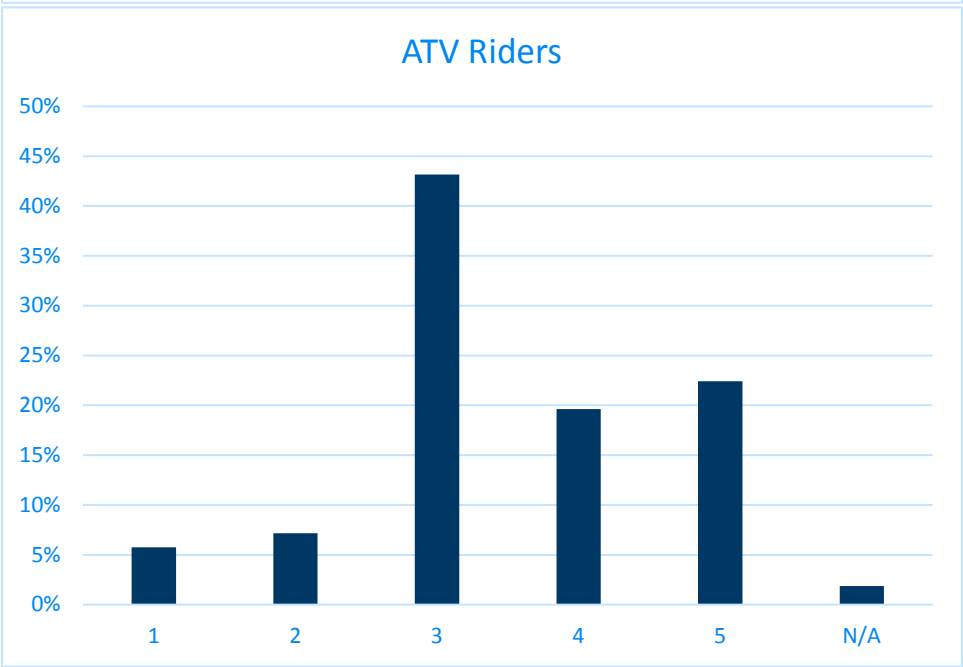
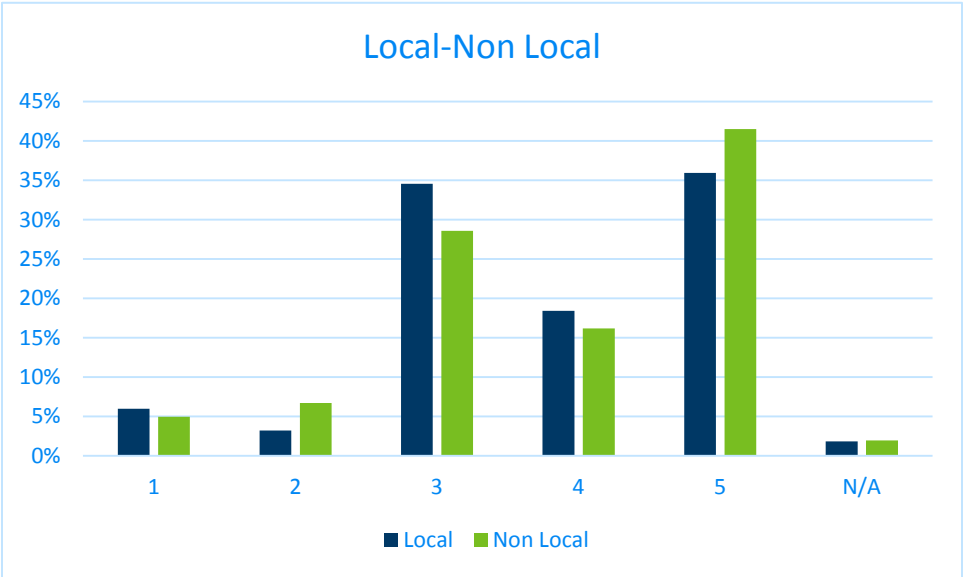
Level of Agreement

Respondents were given 11 statements and asked their level of agreement based on a five-point Likert Scale, where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. A choice of N/A, or not applicable, was also provided.

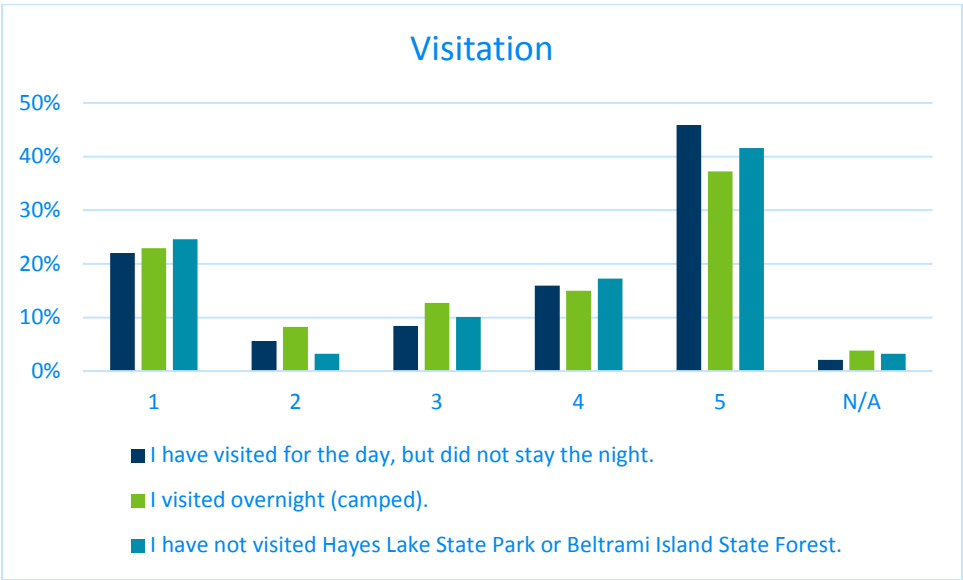
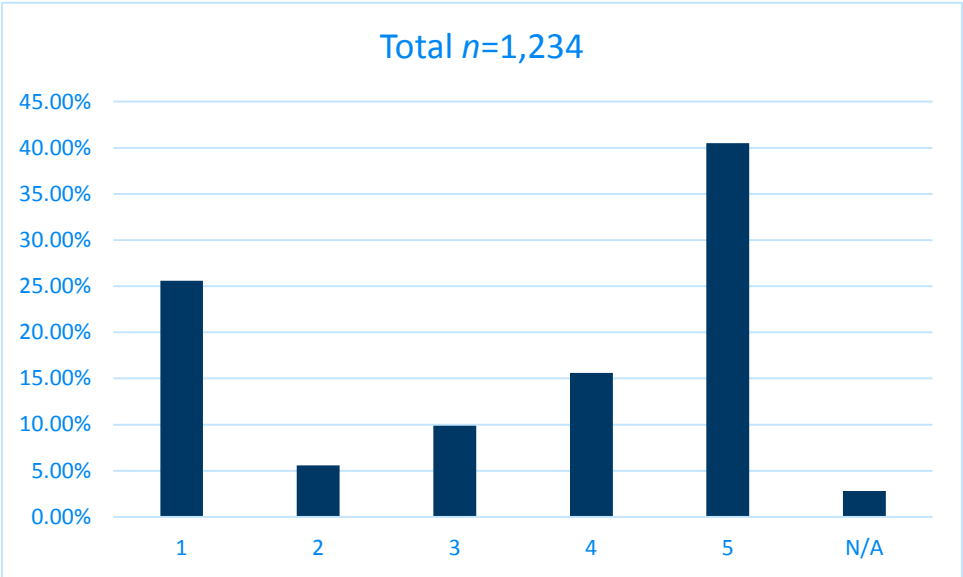
I like peace and quiet when camping.



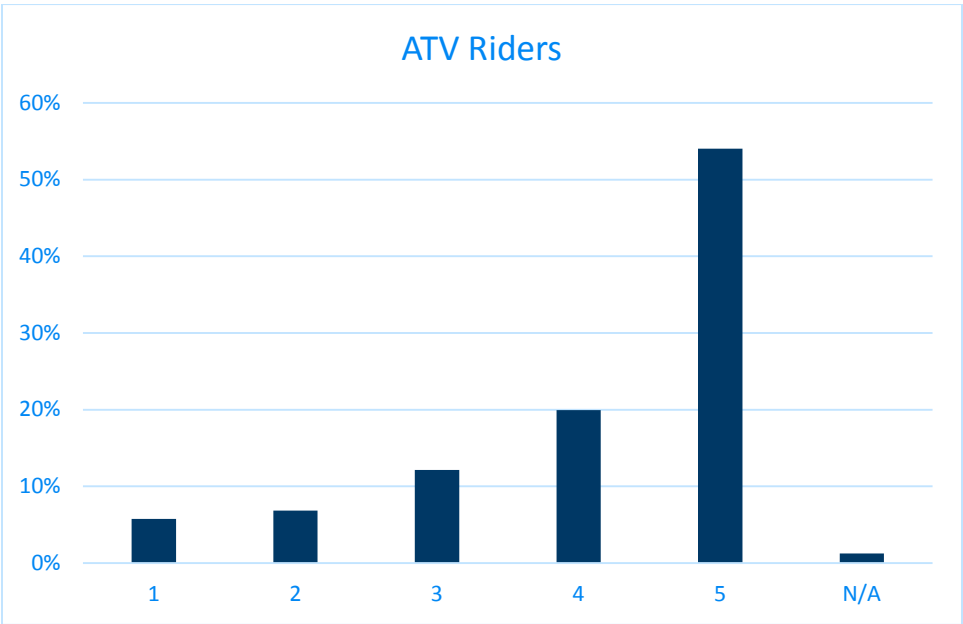
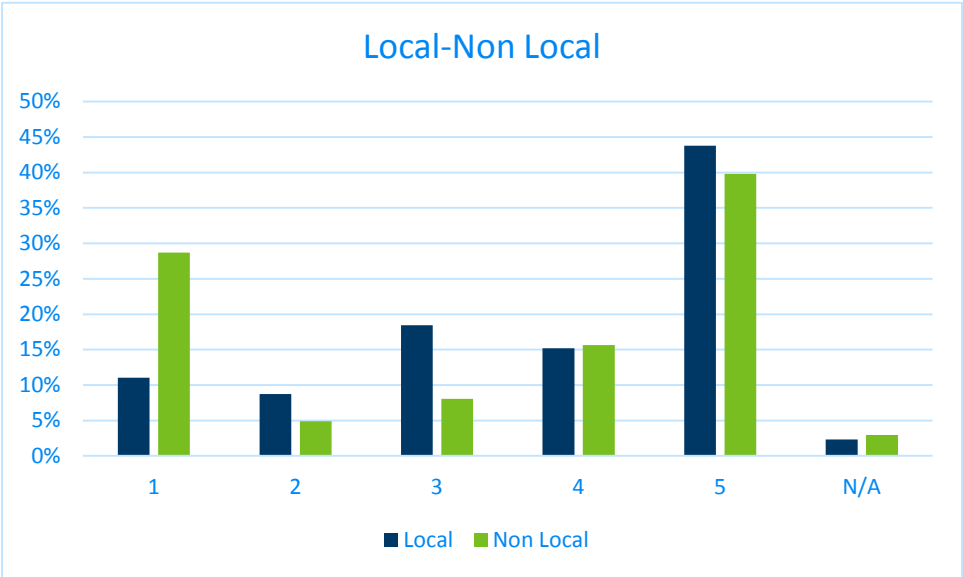
I like peace and quiet when camping. (continued)



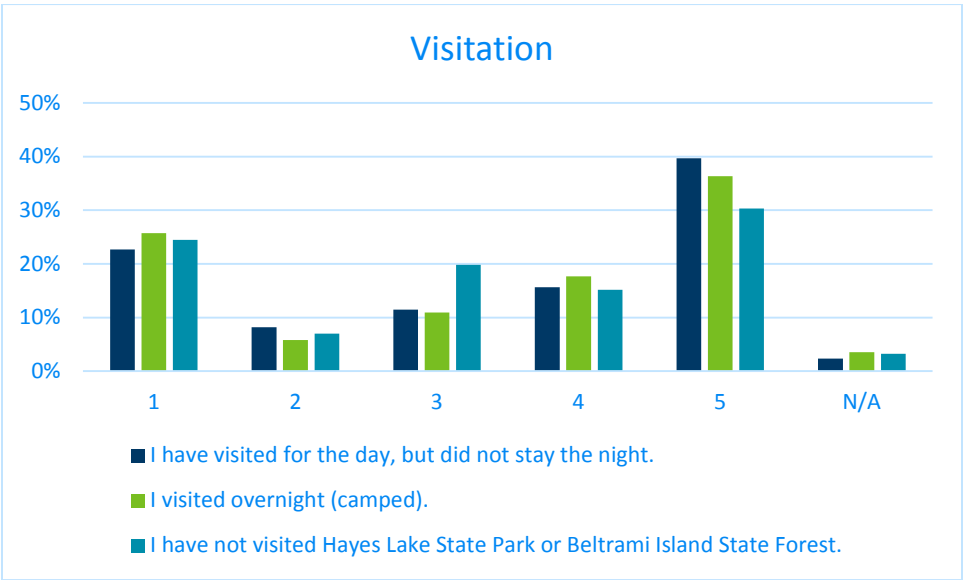
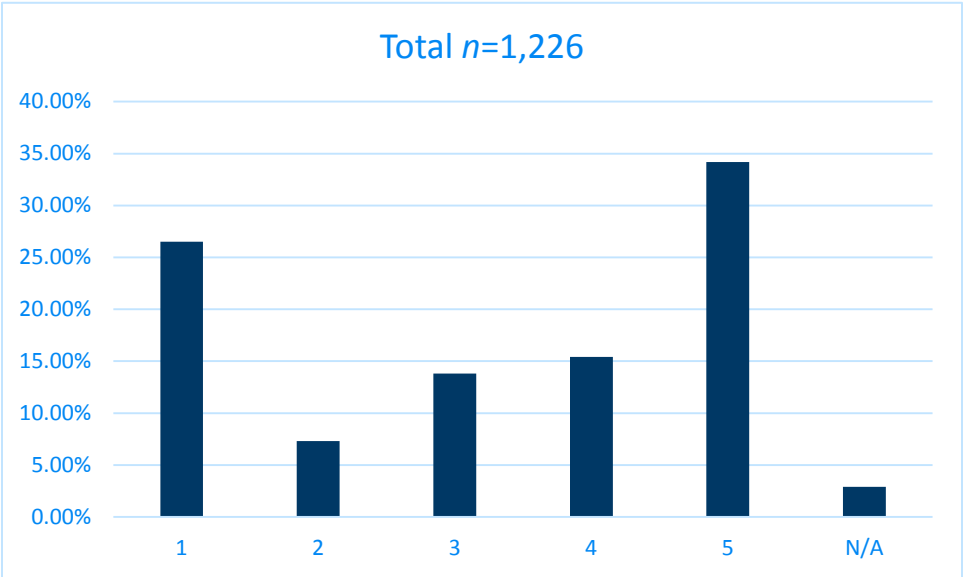
OHV access to semi-modern (electric, showers, etc.) camping is important to me.



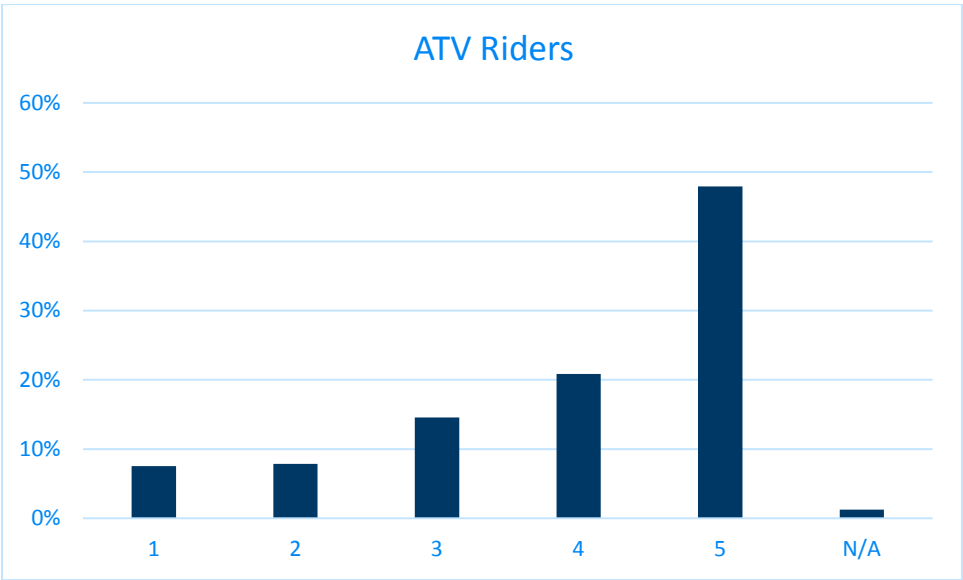
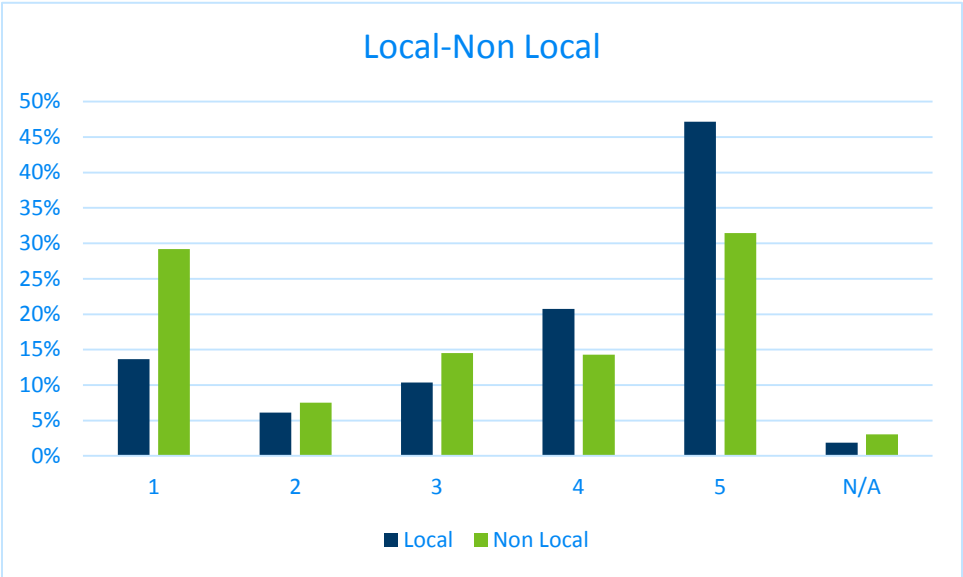
OHV access to semi-modern (electric, showers, etc.) camping is important to me. (continued)



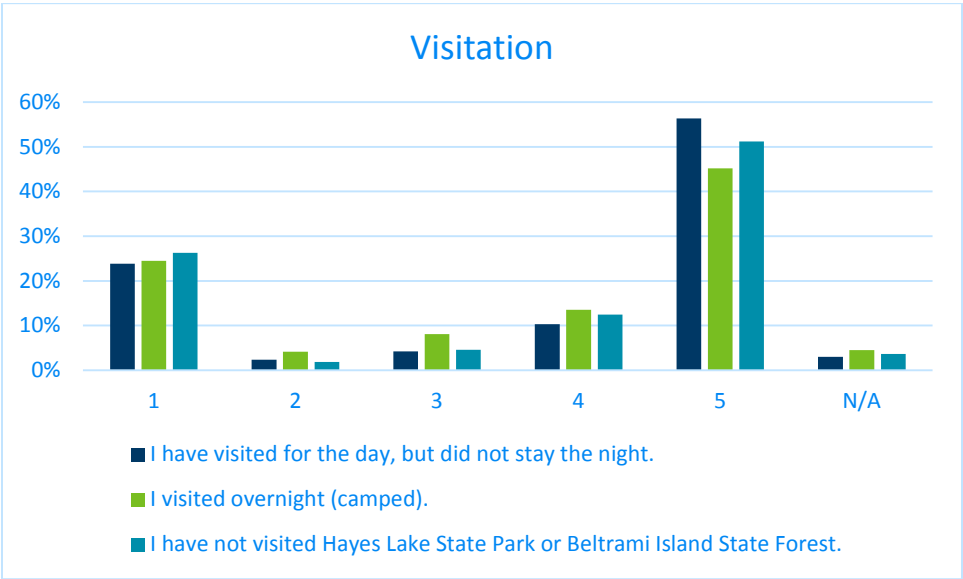
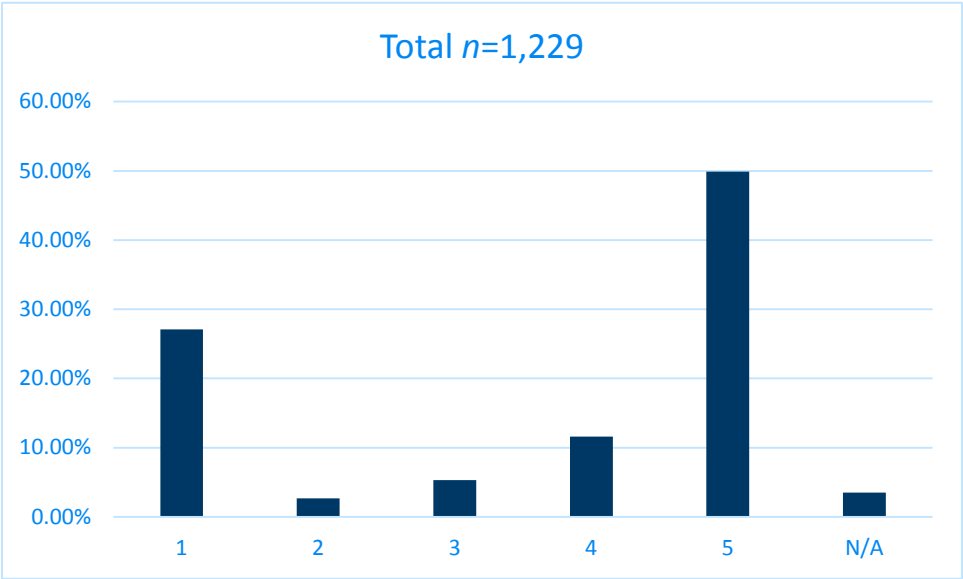
OHV access to day-use areas (swimming area, picnic areas, etc.) is important to me.



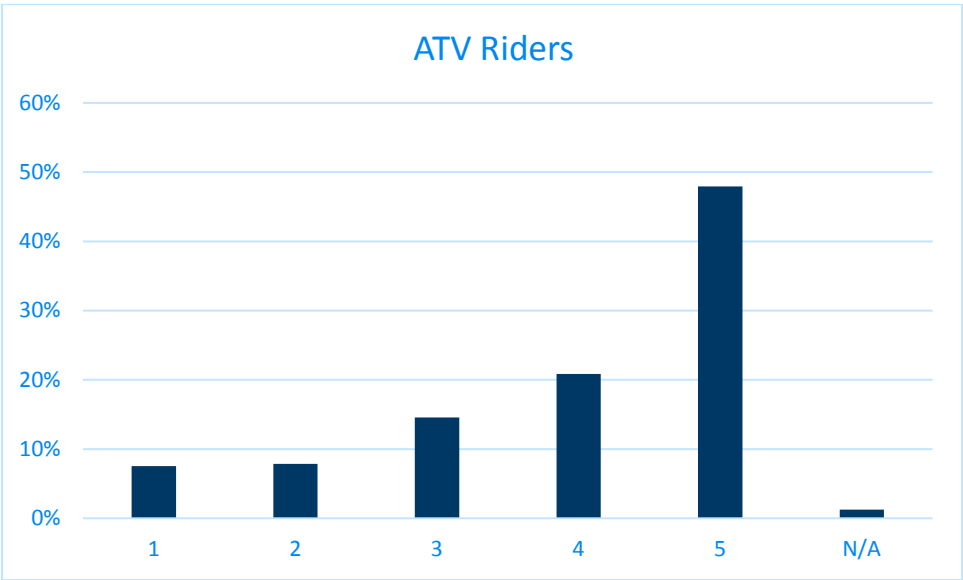
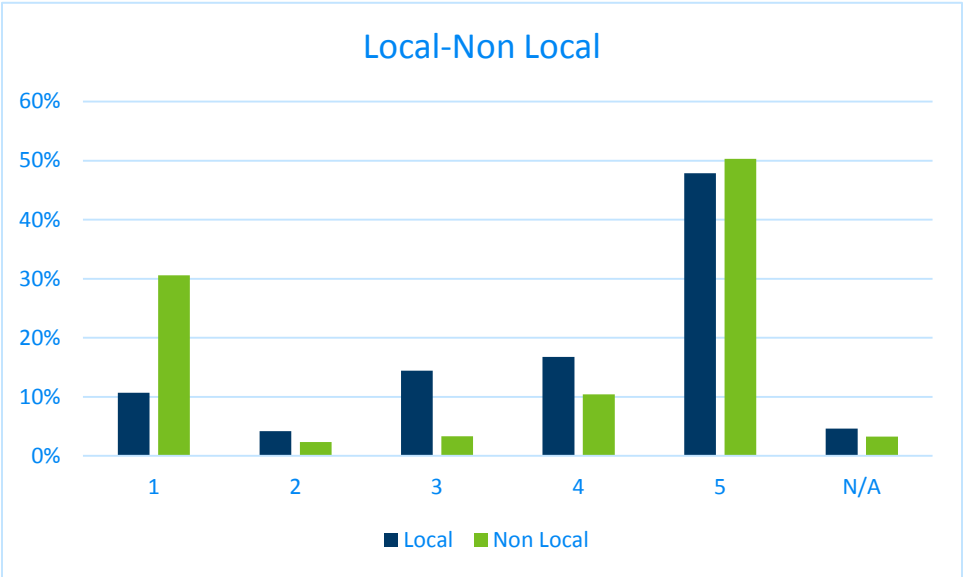
OHV access to day-use areas (swimming area, picnic areas, etc.) is important to me. (continued)



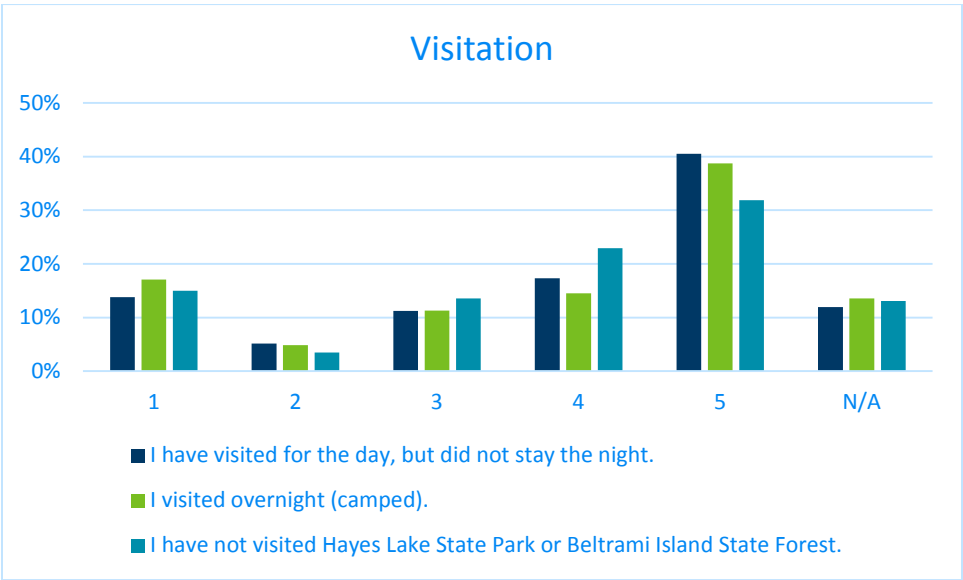
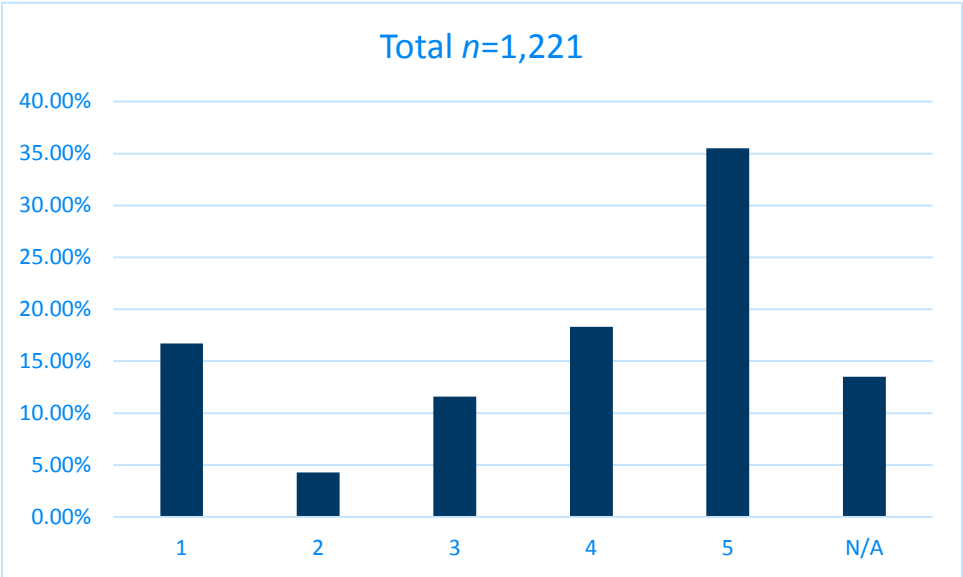
Direct OHV trail access from camping is important to me.



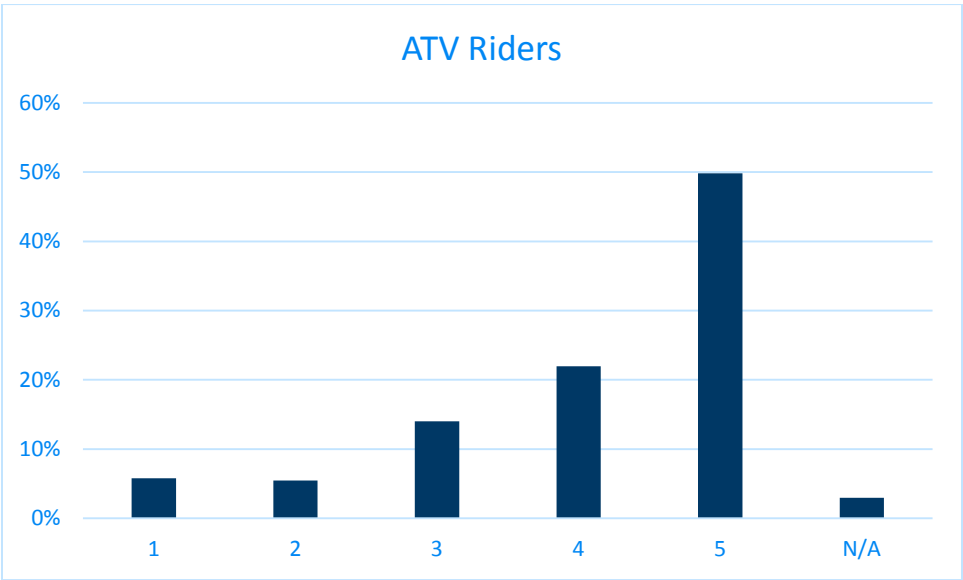
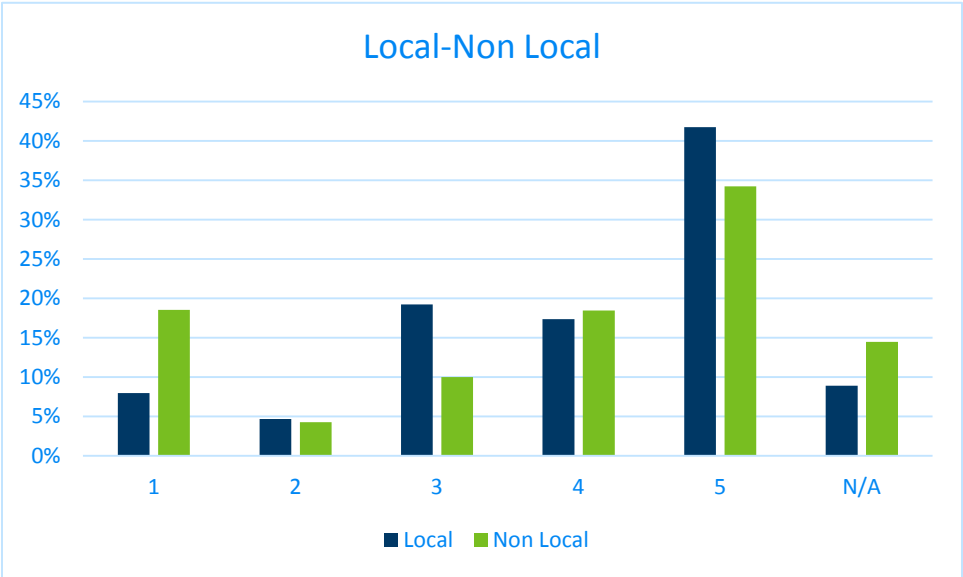
Direct OHV trail access from camping is important to me. (continued)



When camping with my OHV, I like to participate in other activities.

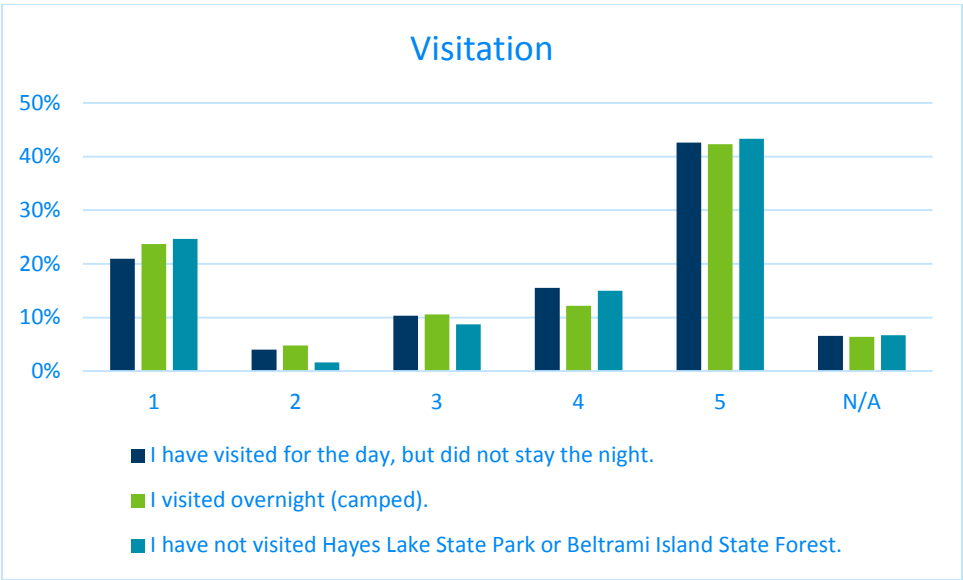
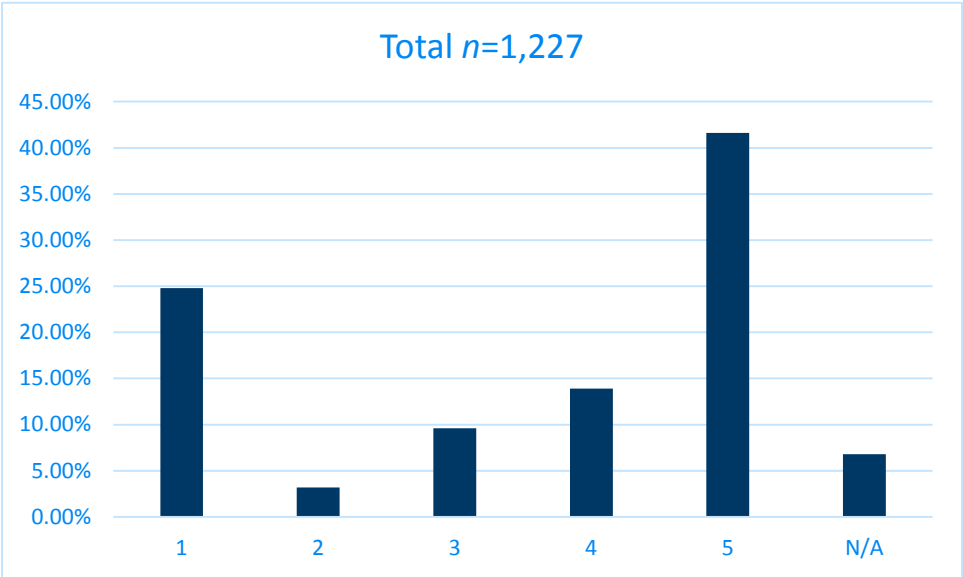


When camping with my OHV, I like to participate in other activities. (continued)

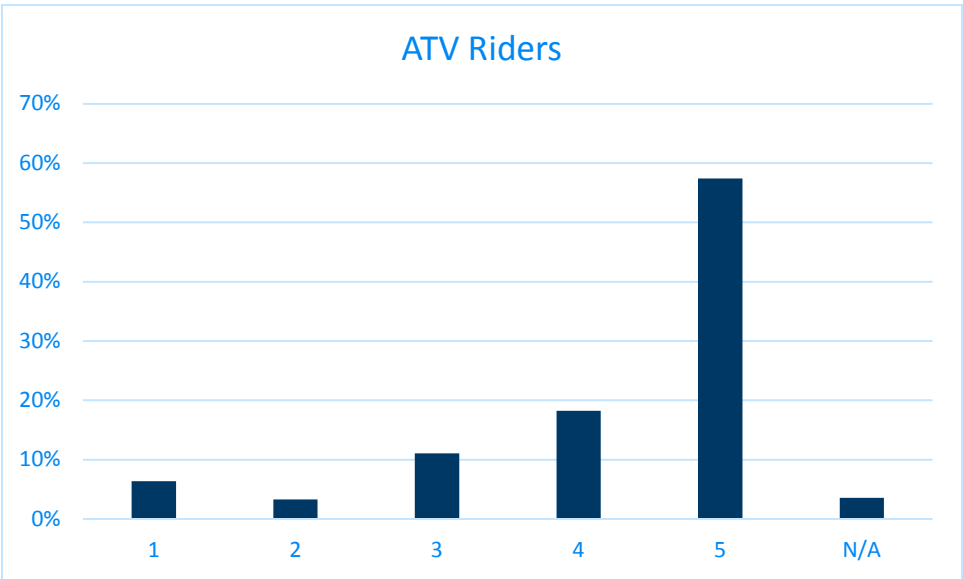
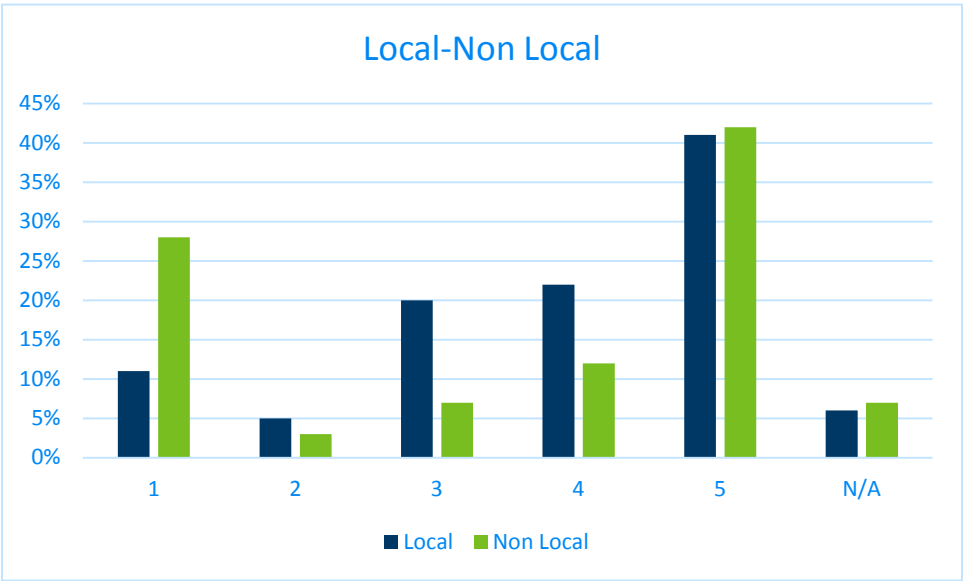


Respondents who indicated they “agreed” (4) or “strongly agreed” (5) with the above question were asked a follow-up question of what additional activities they enjoyed. The top three responses were fishing, hiking and swimming.

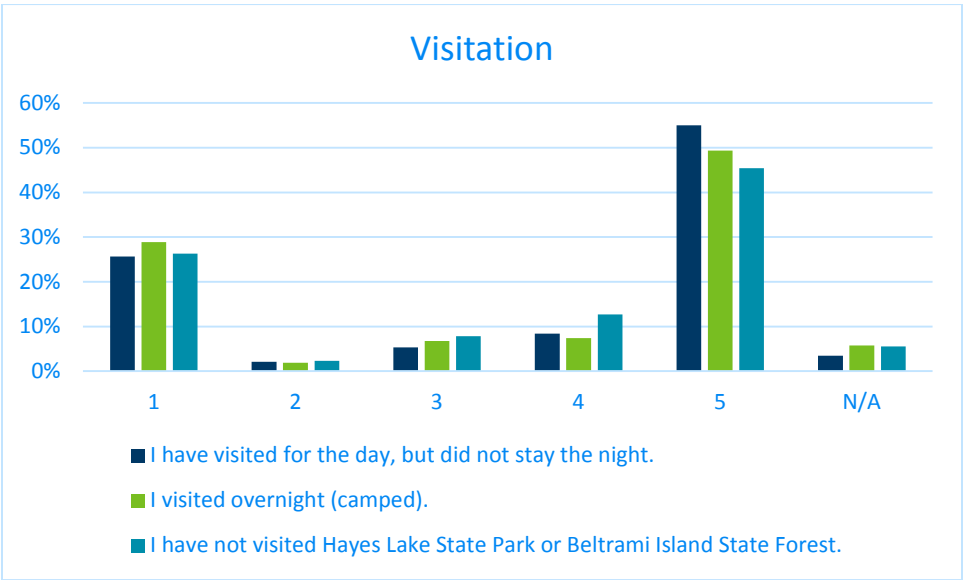
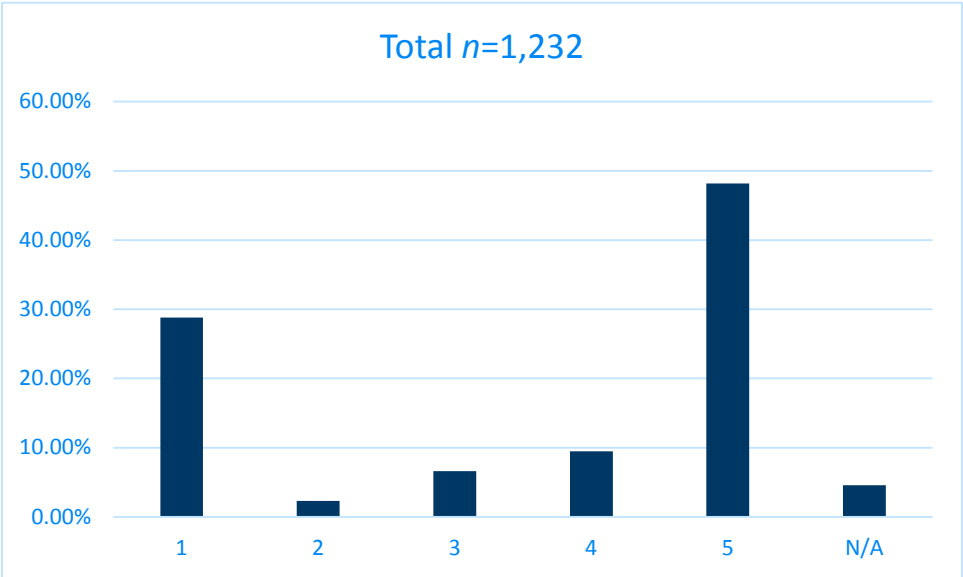
It does not matter to me where, I just want better camping facilities that are OHV-friendly.



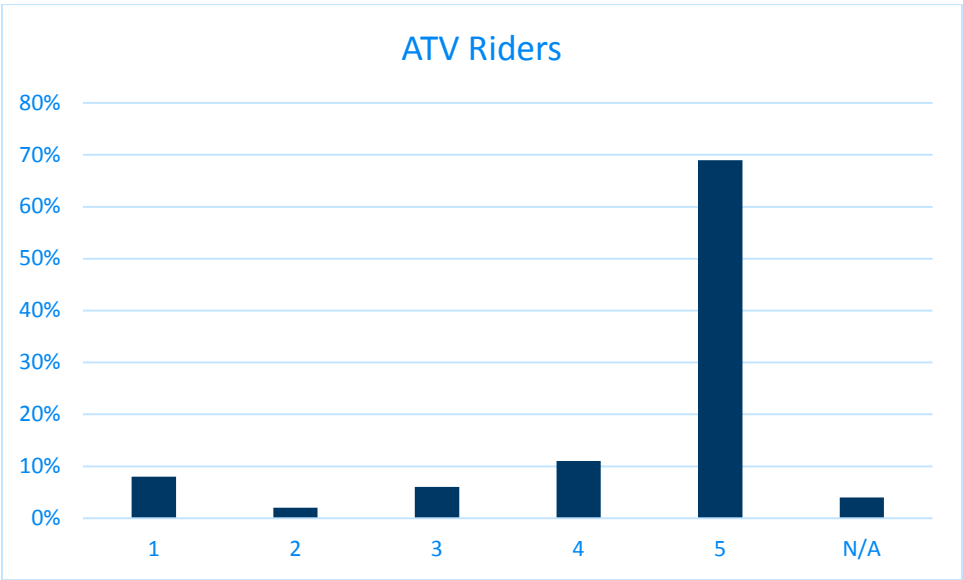
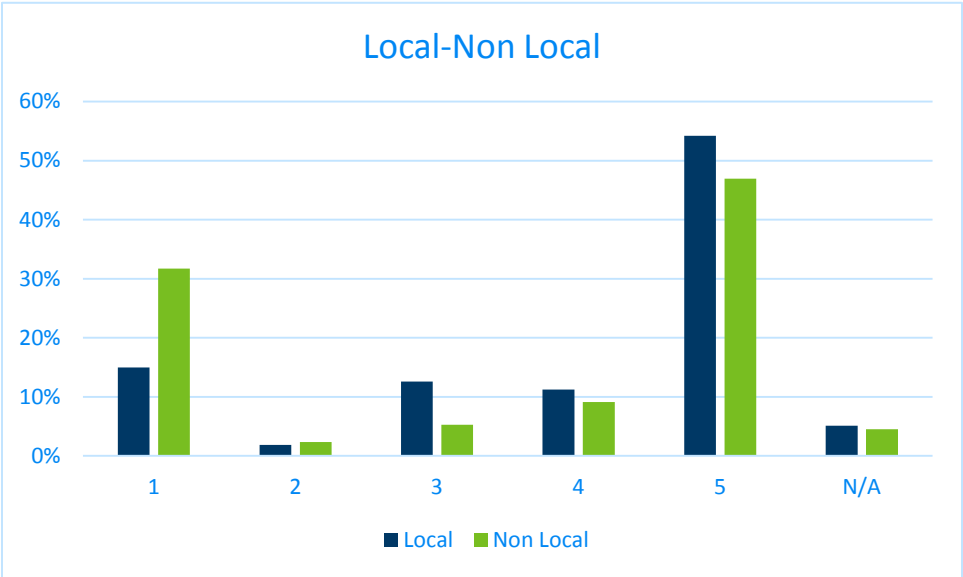
It does not matter to me where, I just want better camping facilities that are OHV-friendly.
(continued)



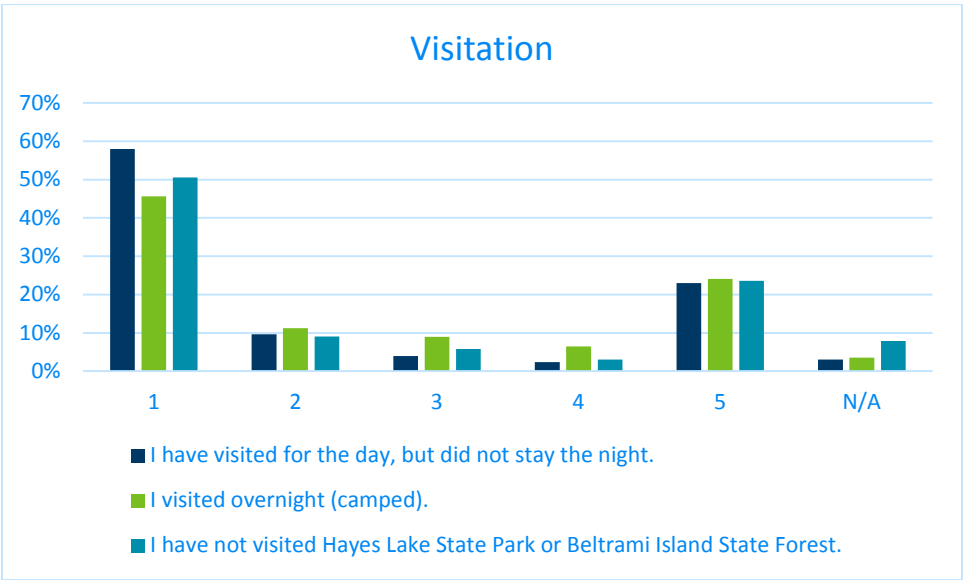
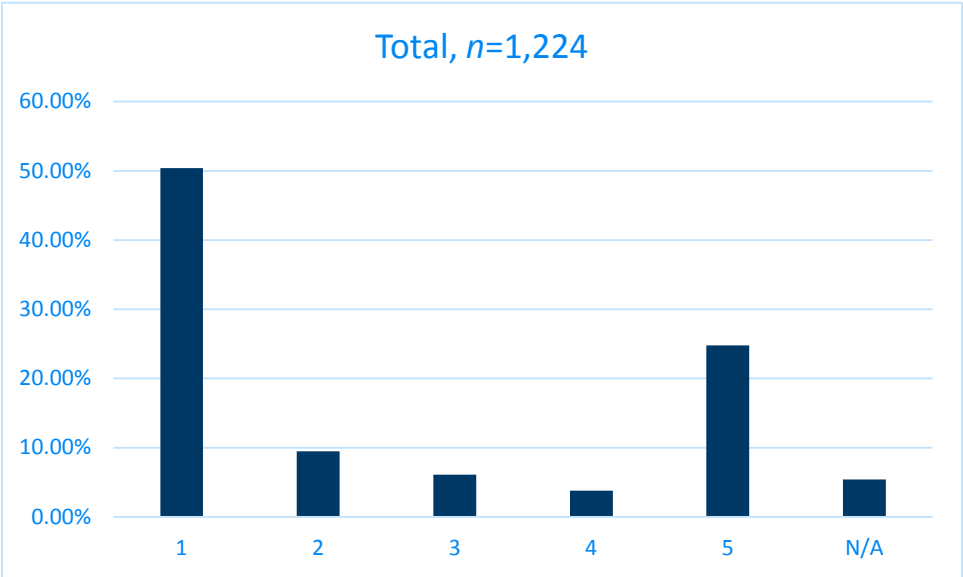
OHVs should be able to access camping within Hayes Lake State Park.



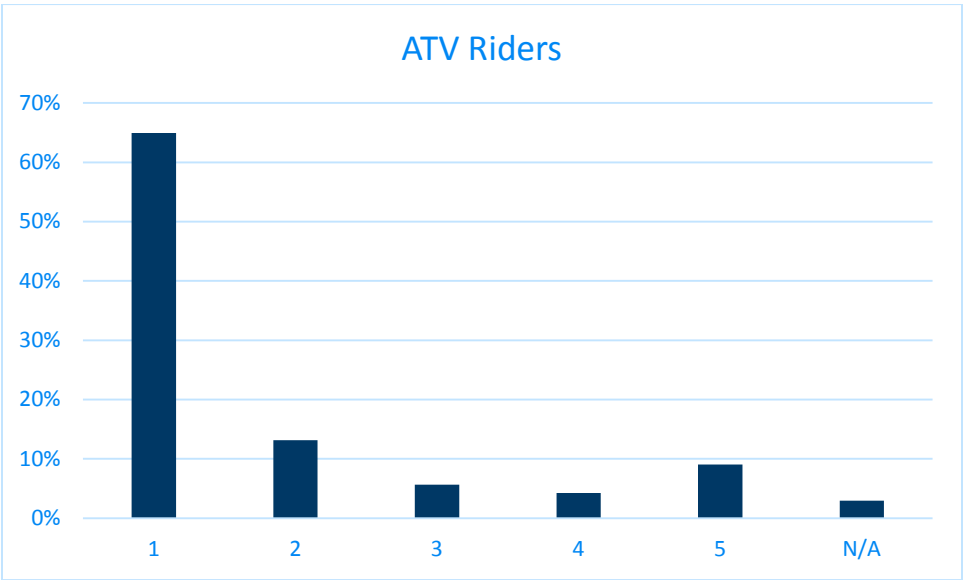
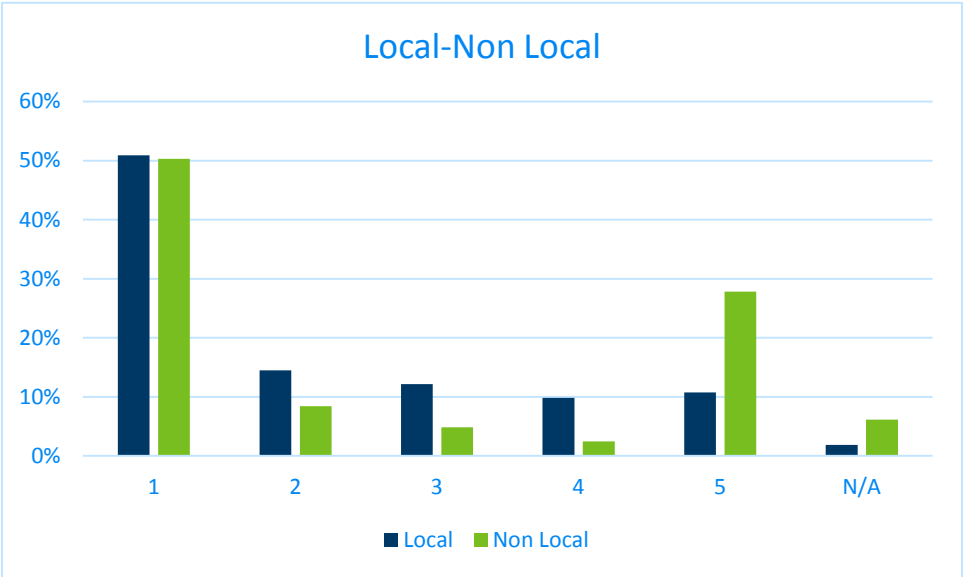
OHVs should be able to access camping within Hayes Lake State Park. (continued)



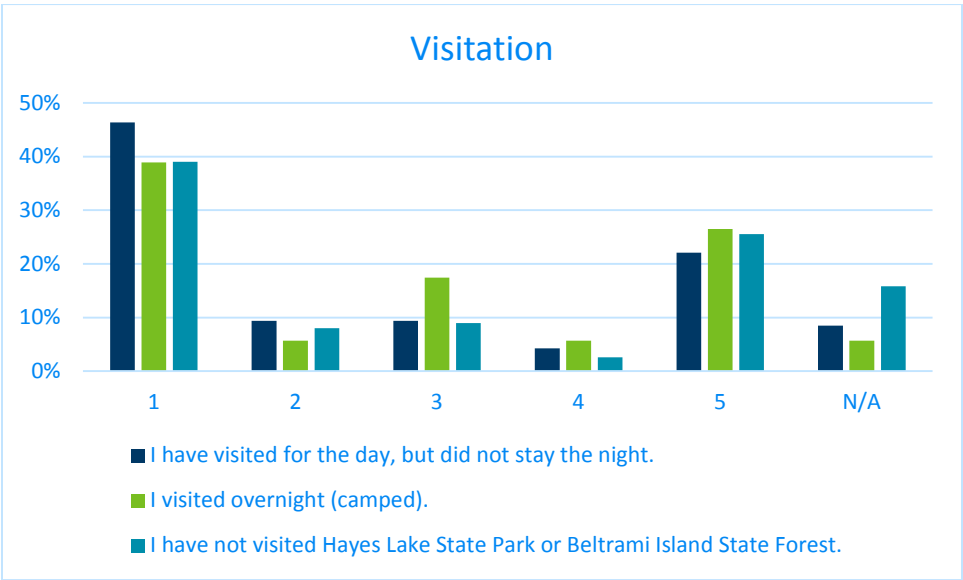
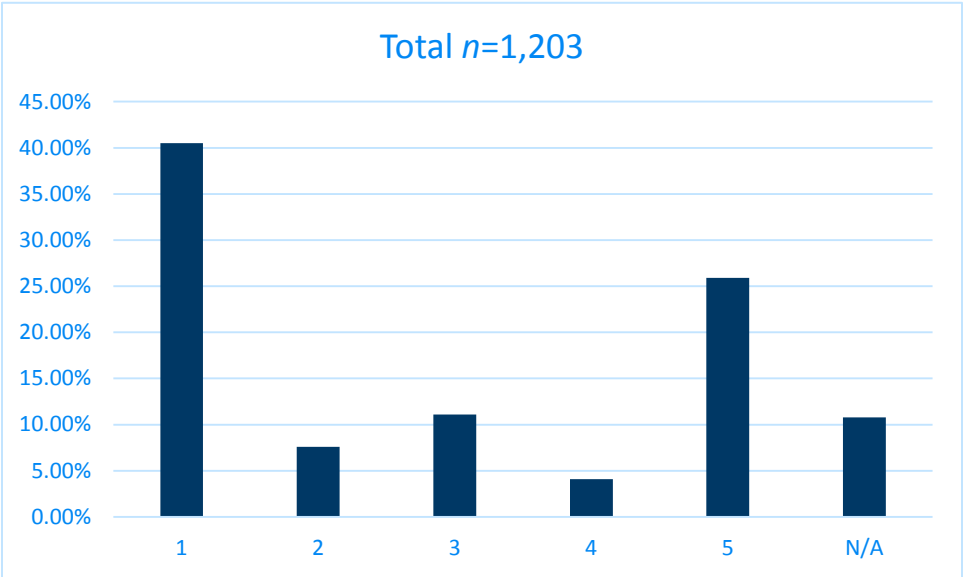
OHV use in Hayes Lake will reduce my enjoyment during my visit.



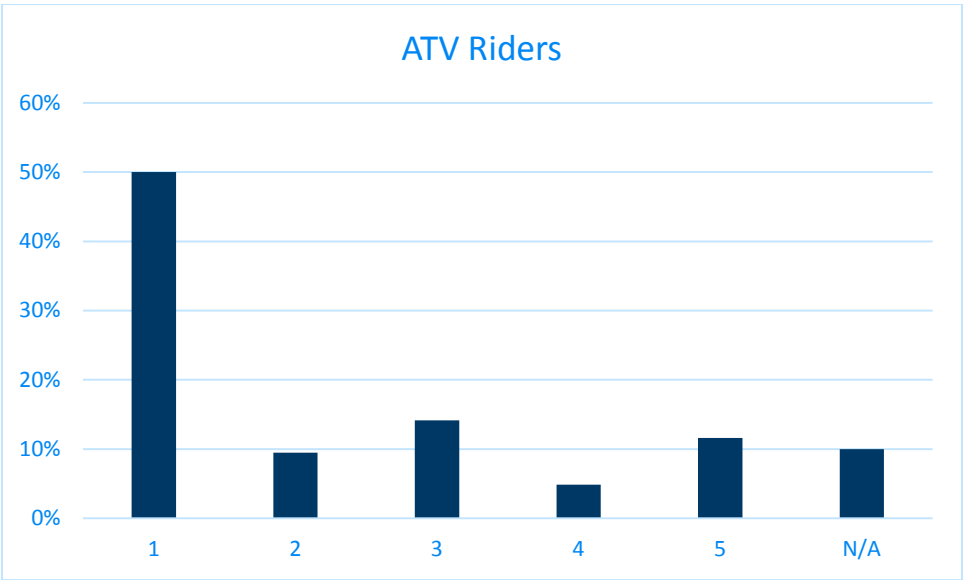
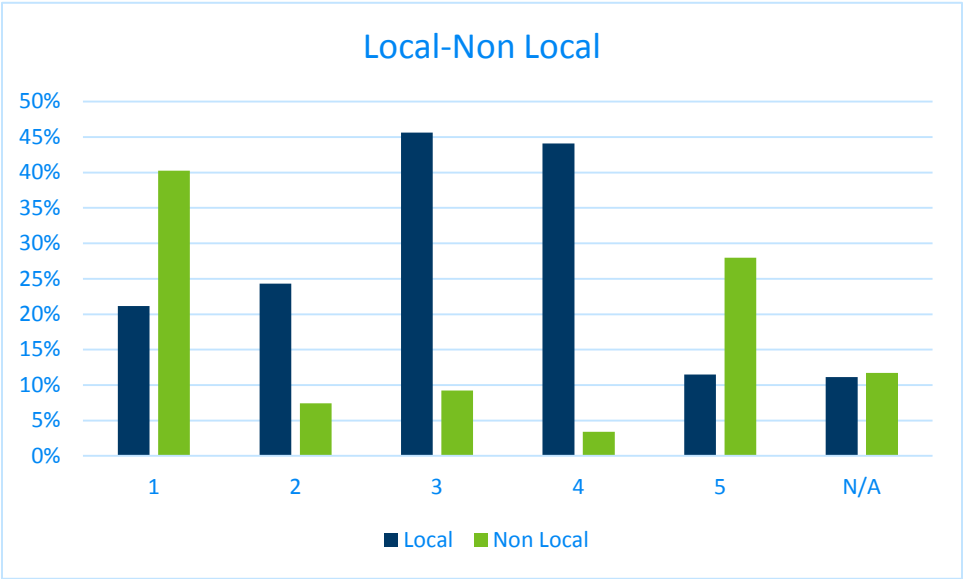
OHV use in Hayes Lake will reduce my enjoyment during my visit. (continued)



OHV use is incompatible with current uses at Hayes Lake State Park.



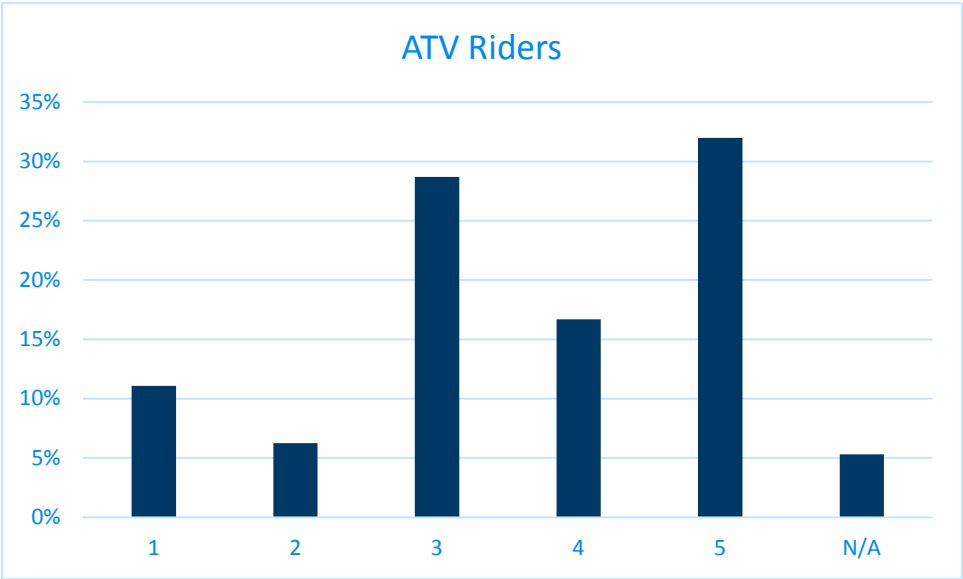
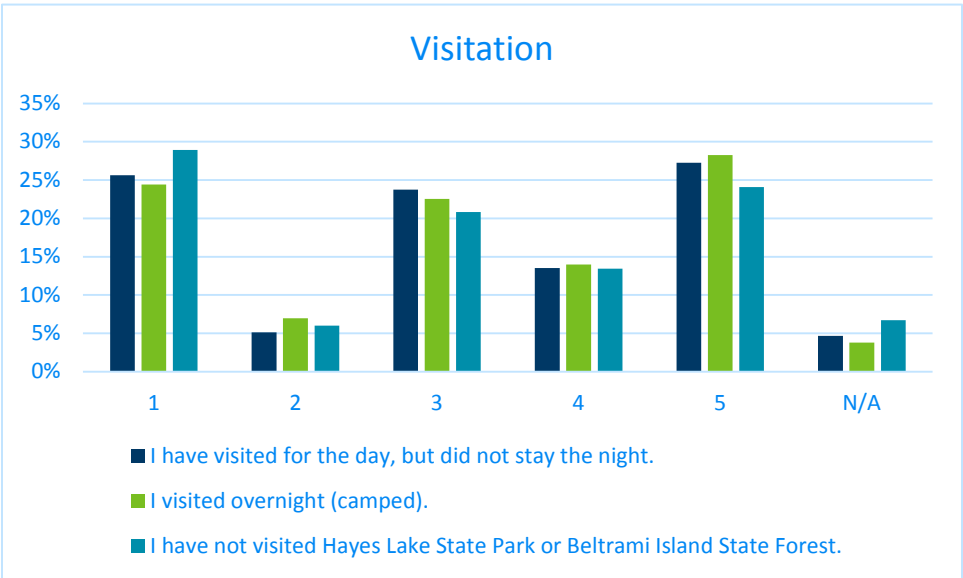
OHV use is incompatible with current uses at Hayes Lake State Park. (continued)



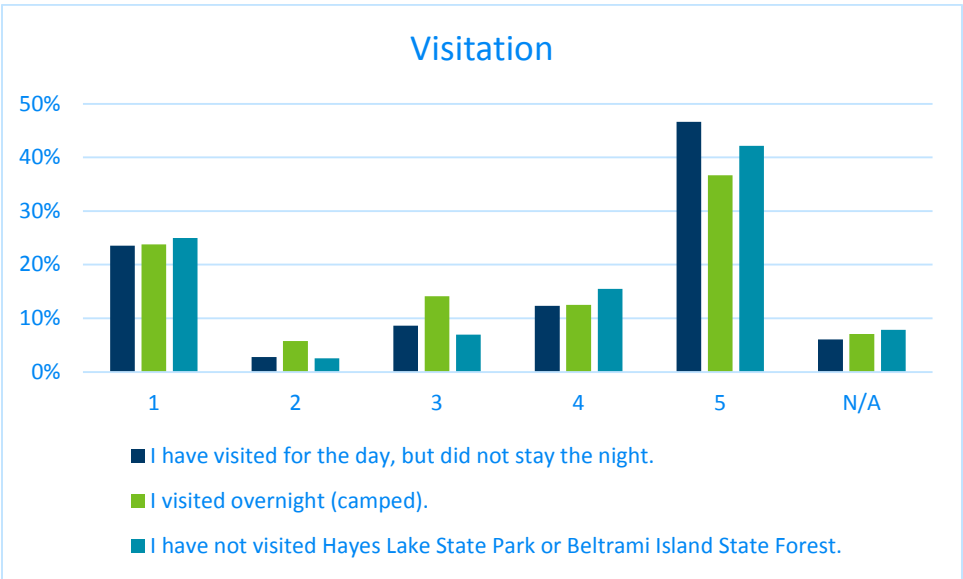
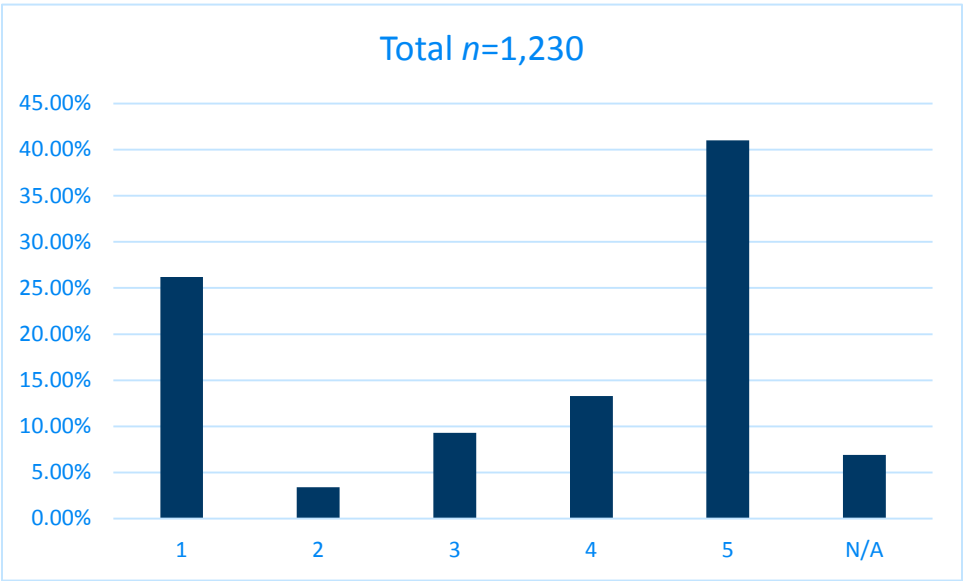
I would support the development of camping facilities for OHVs in Hayes Lake State Park, but separate from the main park campground.



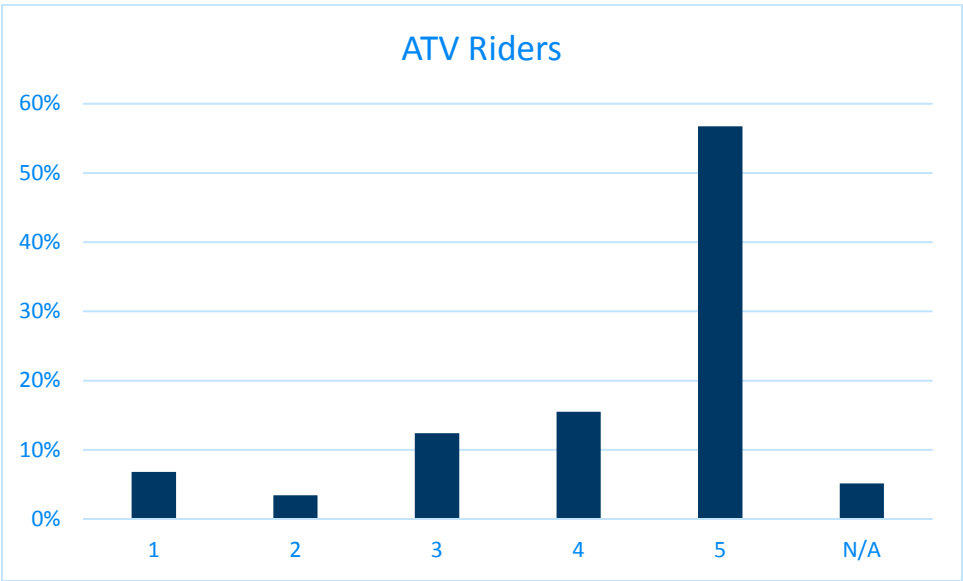
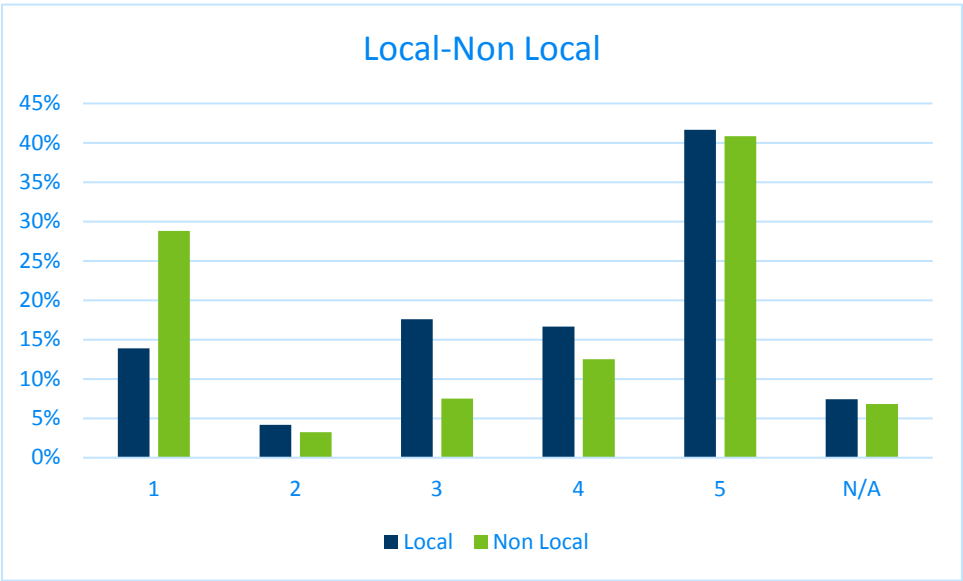
I would support the development of camping facilities for OHVs in Hayes Lake State Park, but separate from the main park campground. (continued)



Having an OHV campground with expanded amenities (showers, electric, etc.) is important to me.



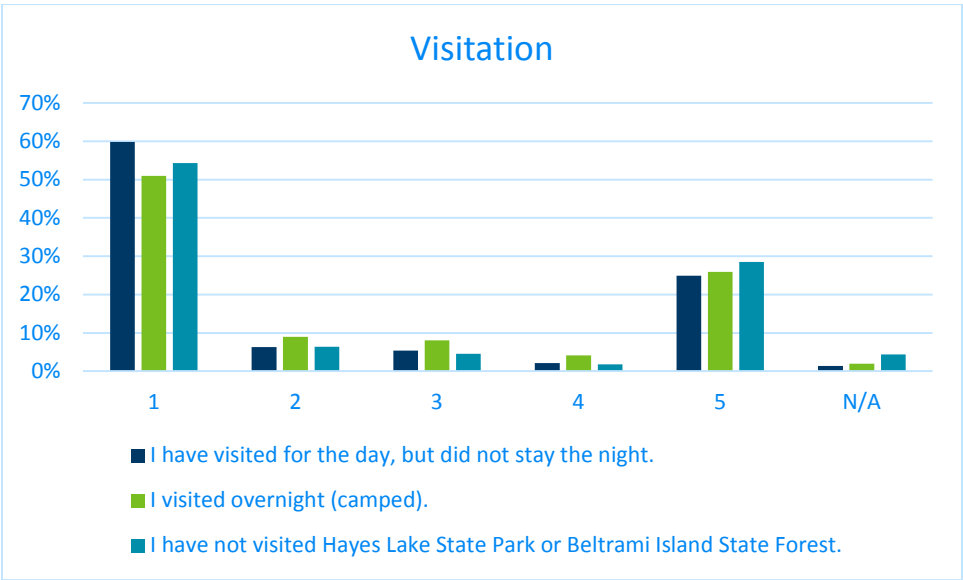
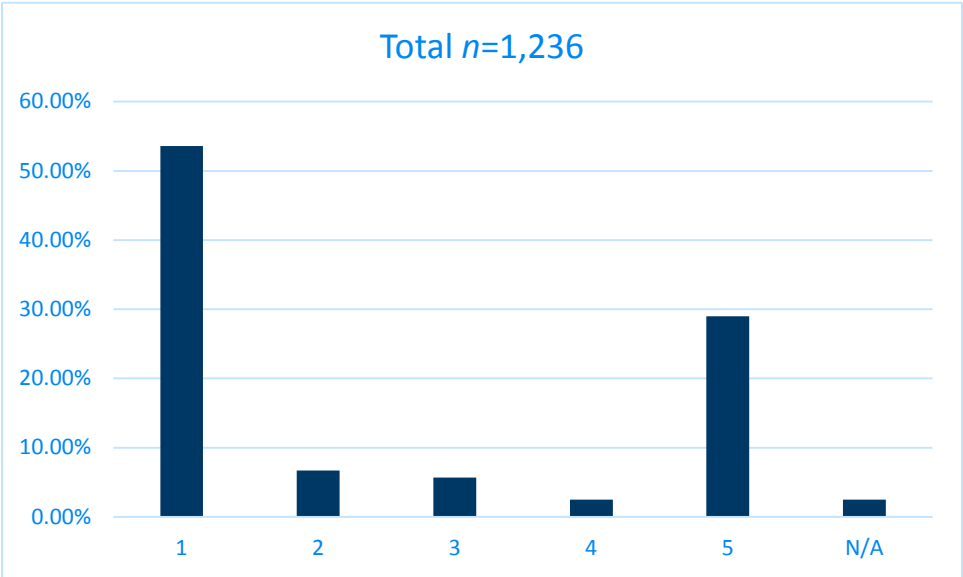
Having an OHV campground with expanded amenities (showers, electric, etc.) is important to me. (continued)



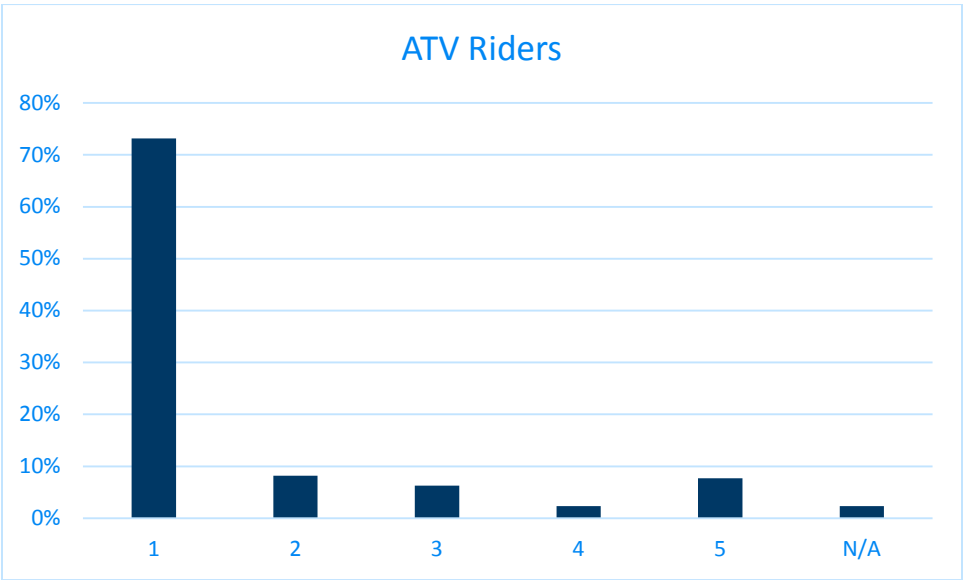
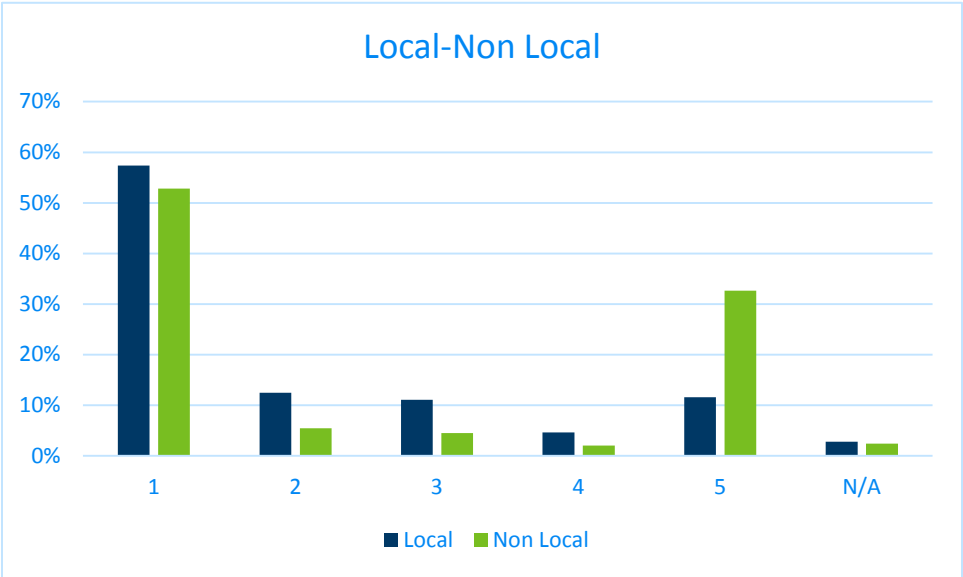
Park Designation Changes

Under Minnesota Rule, non-highway licensed motor vehicles are not permitted in state parks (M.R. 6100.1900). Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) with the following option for designation changes.

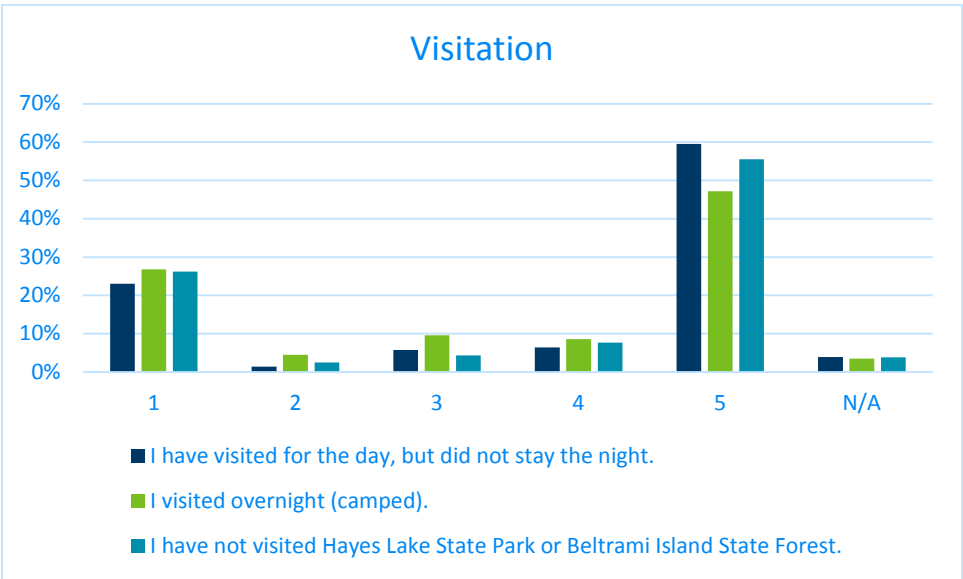
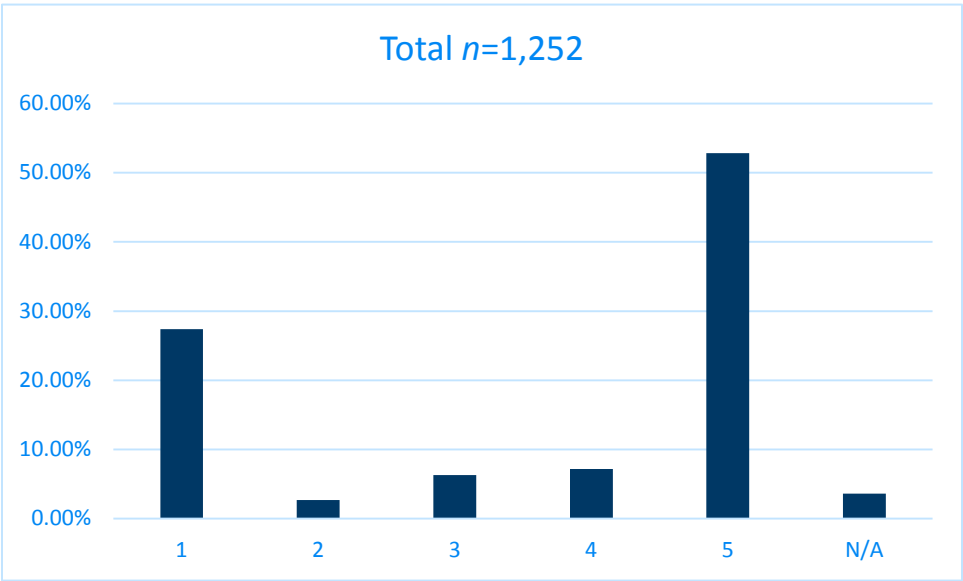
I would not support any changes to the current state park status of Hayes Lake.



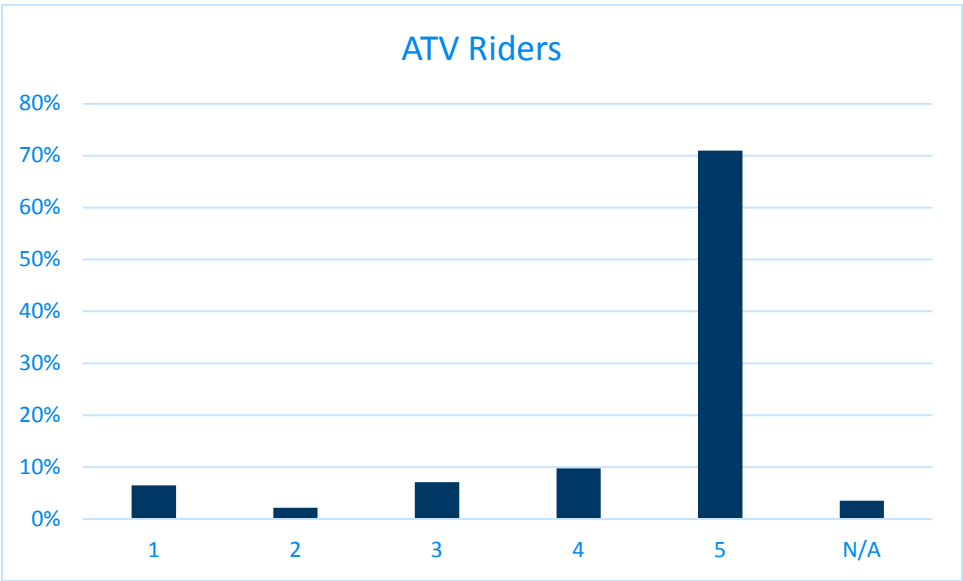
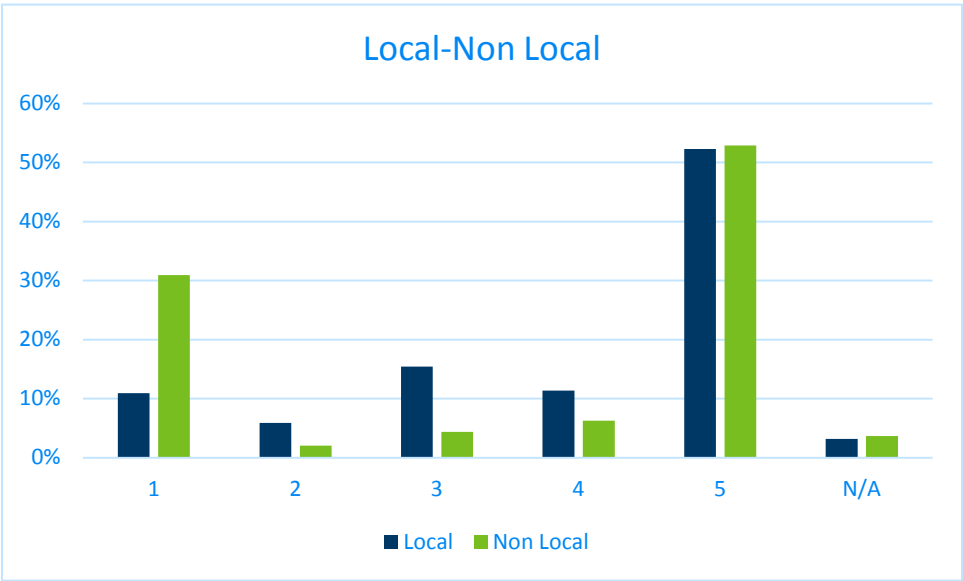
I would not support any changes to the current state park status of Hayes Lake. (continued)



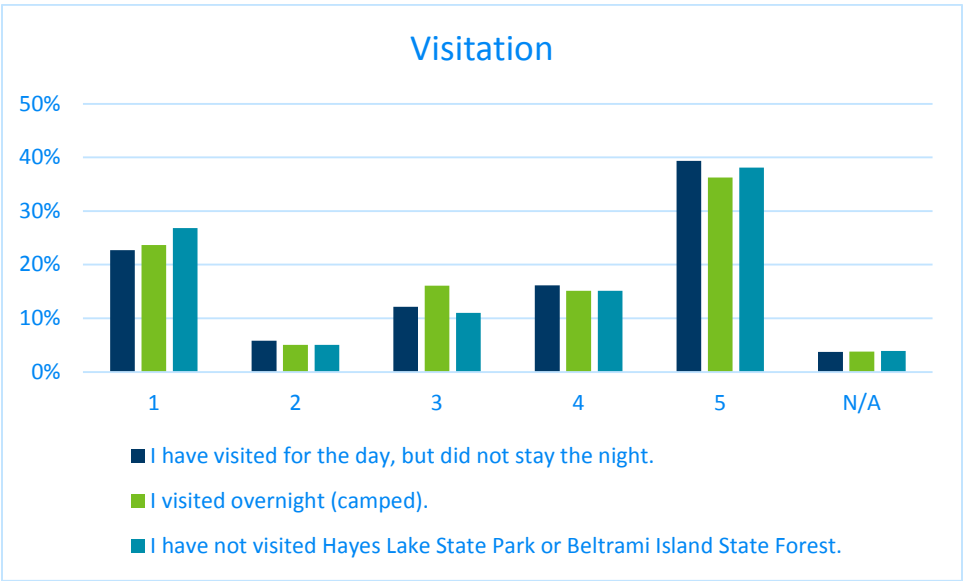
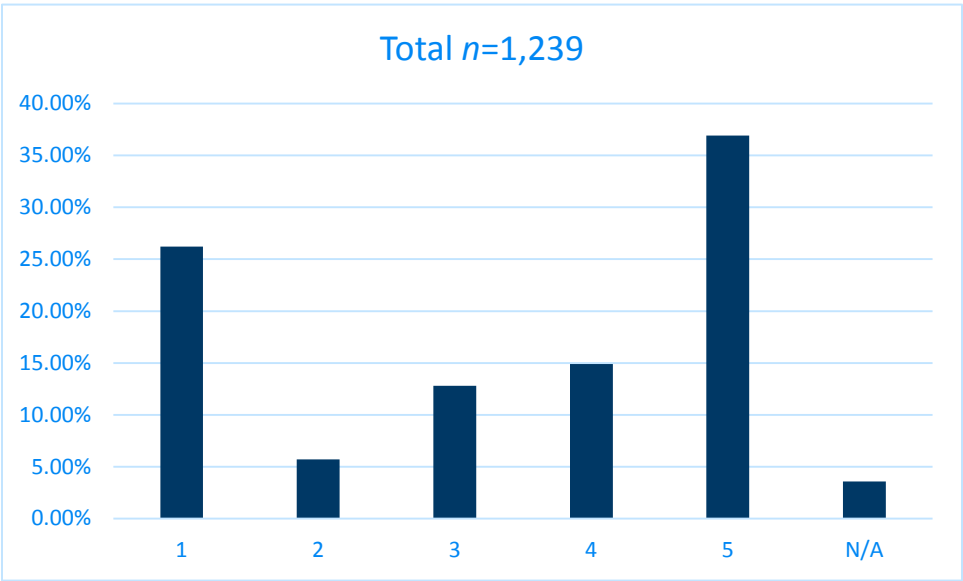
I would support legislation for Hayes Lake State Park which would allow for a master plan amendment permitting OHVs to operate in certain areas of the park.



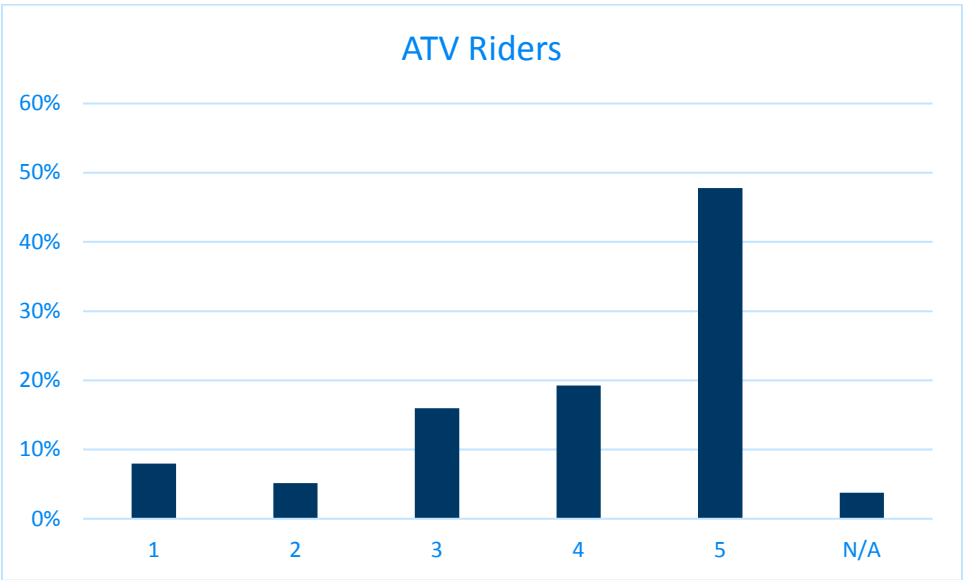
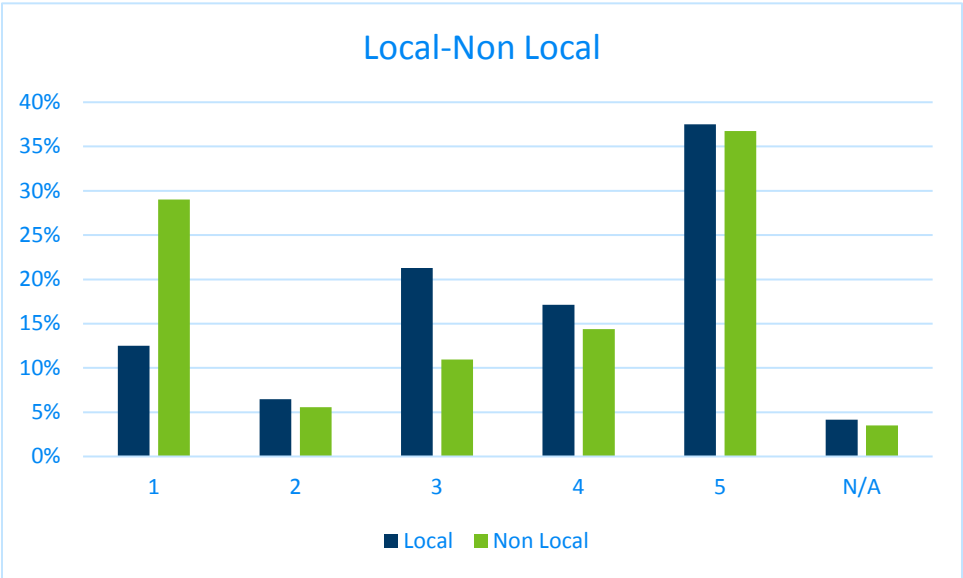
I would support legislation for Hayes Lake State Park which would allow for a master plan amendment permitting OHVs to operate in certain areas of the park. (continued)



I would support a special recreation unit within Hayes Lake State Park that would allow for a management plan amendment to permit OHVs to operate in those areas of the park only.



I would support a special recreation unit within Hayes Lake State Park that would allow for a management plan amendment to permit OHVs to operate in those areas of the park only.
(continued)



Additional Comments

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments at the end of the questionnaire. An additional 114 comments were provided through e-mail/USPS mail, which did not use the questionnaire. These comments were included this section. Below are some of the common themes found throughout the additional comments section. All comments may be found in Appendix of the report. Parks and Trails responses are in *italics*.

Building a new campground at the former Hayes Lake group campsite. Several commenters suggested the potential of developing a new campground in the area of the old group campsite.

Parks and Trails reviewed this option and felt the actual campsite location had promise for an OHV campground. However, the road leading to the site would need significant upgrades to allow the increase in the number of vehicles anticipated with the new campground. Also, to construct a trail across state forest land to connect with the existing OHV trail system would require significant wetland crossings.

Compared to other states, Minnesota is lacking in OHV camping opportunities. 18 respondents indicated they feel Minnesota is lacking compared to other states when it comes to OHV camping opportunities. Specific examples include Wisconsin and South Dakota.

Currently OHV camping opportunities on state land consist of eight forest recreation areas (FRAs). Parks and Trails is reviewing five additional FRAs to allow OHV access. That is in addition to this exercise. Future planning may allow additional semi-modern OHV camping on a case by case basis.

Conflicts with State Statute/Outdoor Recreation Act. A number of respondents (36) were concerned the project violated State Statute and the Outdoor Recreation Act. Many of these comments claim that the ORA specifically prohibits OHVs from operation within a state park.

The Outdoor Recreation Act (Minnesota Statute 86A) does not specifically prohibit OHV operation from state parks. The ORA does state that state parks “shall not be designed to accommodate all forms or unlimited volumes of recreational use” (M.S. 86A.05, Subd. 2 (c)). Minnesota Rules 6100.1900 prohibit use of motor vehicles that are not licensed for use on Minnesota highways.

Displacing visitors to Bemis Hill. The Bemis Hill Forest Recreation Area, located approximately seven miles northeast of Hayes Lake State Park is another location under consideration for an increase of amenities. Some respondents (4) indicated that adding amenities to Bemis Hill FRA may displace the current users of the site who go there for the rustic setting.

Through this recommendation, Parks and Trails intends to keep Bemis Hill FRA as a primitive recreation area. Existing facilities will remain, but visitors should not expect showers or electricity.

Environmental/Pollution Concerns. A number of respondents (41) indicated environmental/pollution concerns if OHVs were permitted to access Hayes Lake. Specific examples include “Study after study has demonstrated the many dangers off-highway vehicles (OHVs) pose to the natural environment, ranging from soil erosion, soil compaction, spreading weeds, trampling vegetation, disrupting watersheds, fragmenting habitat, displacing wildlife, and creating noise pollution.” And “...OHVs are polluters. I would not want to camp with or near OHVs and breathe polluted air.”

Properly designed OHV trails lessen the impact on the environment. OHV trails are routinely monitored by Trail Ambassadors and DNR staff, who, if they discover erosion or invasive weed issues will report the issues to the appropriate maintenance personnel who will mitigate the issues. Non-motorized trails also risk erosion and invasive weed issues if not properly designed. As with all vehicles with internal combustion engines, OHVs do produce pollution. However, with modern emission standards, modern OHVs produce less pollution than earlier models.

Hayes Lake is underutilized. Some respondents indicated that Hayes Lake State Park is underutilized and the addition of OHVs may bring additional users/revenue to the Park. One respondent indicated “Hayes Lake State Park does not get the use that it could do to the restrictions on use, especially when considering the interests and lively hood of the majority of people in the area.” Another respondent indicated “State Parks, like Hayes Lake is a perfect example of an under-utilized park that could easily accommodate the added...”

Some state parks, such as Hayes Lake may be able to accommodate a larger amount of visitors. However, some visitors come to parks, such as Hayes Lake, seeking a more solitude experience. On normal summer weekends, campsite use at Hayes Lake State Park is high, as most electrical campsites and approximately half nonelectrical campsites are occupied. Parks and Trails must balance the current use and potential new uses to provide an optimal utilization level.

Larger campsites. Some (2) respondents indicated the desire for larger campsites for campers with OHVs. Both commenters indicated they desire sites that can accommodate vehicle/trailer combinations of up to 65 feet.

The campground at the Clear River Site will include larger campsites with pull through capabilities. These sites will be able to accommodate the larger vehicles.

Limited use in State Park. Some respondents indicated they would support OHVs to operate only within certain areas of the park. For example, limited to roads (2), for access to the campground (9) or access to a separate parking area (5).

This recommendation will permit OHVs on existing roads and trails within BISF. No use within Hayes Lake State Park is identified in this recommendation.

Noise Concerns. Approximately 90 respondents indicated that the noise made for off-highway vehicles will disturb their experience in Hayes Lake State Park. Specific examples include “state parks are a refuge from noise,” “They [state parks] are noisy enough with dogs barking, loud radios, etc.” and “My mom goes there [Hayes Lake] to seek silence.”

Under Minnesota Statute, the maximum decibel level for ATVs and OHMs manufactured prior to January 1, 1998 is 99 decibels. The maximum decibel level for OHMs manufactured after January 1, 1998 is 96 decibels.

Not an inclusive process. Some (16) respondents were concerned the scoping process was swayed to target only OHV stakeholders and not the public at-large.

The DNR made every effort to make the process as inclusive as possible. As typical with scoping processes, the DNR announced the comment period through a statewide news release. The DNR held two public meetings-one in Warroad and one in St. Paul. Holding a meeting in St. Paul is unusual and was done to allow as many citizens as possible to participate. Some questions in the online questionnaire were targeted to OHV users because, as indicated in the news release, on the website and at the public meetings, one of the primary focuses of this exercise was to understand the needs and desires of campers with OHVs and not solely on permitting OHV operation within Hayes Lake State Park. The questionnaire did contain other questions that could be answered by all. In addition, commenters were not required to use the online comment form and many choose to email or mail comments.

OHV users have more land. Many respondents indicated that OHV recreationists have “1800% more opportunities” than non-motorized recreationists.

Parks and Trails assumes this figure counts all state forest land that is classified as limited or managed as available to OHVs. However, OHVs are limited to designated trails and roadways in limited state forests and access routes and designated trails and roadways in managed state forests. Non-motorized recreationists may go anywhere in these forests in addition to areas within state parks, closed state forests, wildlife management areas and scientific and natural areas. There are a variety of ways to perceive access and opportunity, but all outdoor recreationists desire camping opportunities; Parks and Trails aims to understand the variety of these interests.

OHVs are not compatible with other uses at the state park. Many respondents (69) were concerned that OHVs are not compatible with current uses at Hayes Lake State Park. Examples include “Allowing OHVs in state parks is counter to the whole idea of having state parks.” “The damage the tires do is incompatible with preserving those lands.” “Admitting this [sic] vehicles will disrupt the beauty, natural habitat or animals, and the quietness of the parks.” Safety concerns also were identified as a compatibility concern. Specific safety concerns include interaction with horses and children playing in the campground may be hit by a passing OHV.

Parks and Trails is not planning to displace any other forms of recreation within Hayes Lake under this recommendation. Off-highway vehicles will not be permitted on non-motorized trails.

Security of the state park. Some respondents (14) indicated that the state park provides a level of security often not found at forest recreation areas. Some OHVs cost over \$20,000 and owners feel more comfortable leaving their equipment in a secure, patrolled area such as a state park.

Parks and Trails understands the concern of site security. The campground at Clear River will include a campground host to provide a visible presence as well as patrols by Parks and Trails staff and DNR Conservation Officers. This approach is similar to the security at the state park campground.

Slippery Slope/Bad Precedent. Thirty-three respondents were concerned about setting a bad precedent. Their concern was that if OHVs are permitted to operate in one state park, or if legislative changes are enacted to change the designation of a state park, other parks may be affected. For example, one respondent indicated “Although only one park is being considered for now, it is a terrible precedent that would change MN state law and open the door to others.”

A campground in Lake Vermillion-Soudan Underground Mine State Park is the only other park under consideration for an OHV campground. This is a unique situation because the campground was part of the original vision for the park and was included in the park master plan; a secondary unit designation change for this section of the Park will be required.