

**A Cultural Use Study of  
Jones Beach State Park,  
Lake Welch at Harriman State Park, and  
Walkway over the Hudson State Historic Park**

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## Executive Summary

The Public Space Research Group conducted a Cultural Use Study for the Alliance for New York State Parks during summer and early fall 2012. Conducted in cooperation with the State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, the project sought to gather information on park uses and users that can support the Alliance's fundraising and advocacy. The Alliance is interested in developing a replicable research model to apply in parks across the state; it also seeks to demonstrate that citizens can be empowered to protect and advocate for parks by participating in the research process. The Alliance chose Jones Beach State Park, Lake Welch in Harriman State Park, and Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park for study in 2012.

Fieldwork, in the form of a visitor survey followed by visitor interviews, took place at Jones Beach and Lake Welch in July and at Walkway in September. Public Space Research Group anthropologists examined the cultural dimensions of visitor uses and views. At Walkway, we trained citizen volunteers to do the work of surveying and interviewing park visitors. Fieldwork consisted of two complementary segments at each park: a Demographic Assessment involving a statistically representative survey of the visitor population and an Ethnographic Assessment involving value-oriented interviews with visitors, participant observations, and mapping of visitor behavior; in deliberately chosen, characteristic locations within the park. The Demographic Assessment involved larger numbers of visitors than the Ethnographic Assessment—over 600 at Jones Beach, nearly 500 at Lake Welch, and 184 at Walkway. The ethnographic segment reached 164 visitors at Jones, 74 visitors at Lake Welch, and about 40 visitors at Walkway. This report is delivered in two parts, one reporting and interpreting the study findings; the other reporting the methodology, reflecting on the research model, and describing how this type of research may be replicated with citizen involvement.

Jones Beach and Lake Welch, both within an hour's ride from many points in New York City, draw about half their visitation from the city—a little under 50 percent for Jones Beach, a little over 50 percent for Lake Welch. Although Lake Welch is known for multigenerational histories among its mainly Hispanic/Latino visitors, Jones Beach has the larger proportion of long-term visitors. At Jones, 33 percent of the ethnographic sample reported coming for 31 or more years, versus only 7 percent of the Lake Welch ethnographic sample. Similarly, 35 percent at Jones had been coming between 11 and 30 years as compared to 14 percent at Lake Welch. Lake Welch had correspondingly higher proportions of newer visitors. Walkway, only three years old, had no long-term visitors. Walkway had a higher proportion of tourists among its visitors than the other two parks and a markedly higher proportion of older people. Persons 61 or older were 41 percent of the Walkway ethnographic sample versus 12 percent at Jones Beach and 3 percent at Lake Welch. Walkway is, of course, more suited to older people, who enjoy walking for exercise. However, the Walkway research was skewed away from the more mobile visitors—e.g., cyclists and runners—because of the difficulty of stopping them for interviews. As the runners and cyclists are likely to be younger, there are probably proportionally fewer older people at Walkway than our sample would indicate.

Across the board, the parks are beloved, but for different reasons and by diverse sets of people. At all three we found strong evidence of community identity. While everyday life in modern societies is marked by encounter with strangers, in these parks people tend to regard strangers favorably as fellow citizens. Perhaps visitors feel the choice of park itself is something they share in common with the other visitors. At Lake Welch, the sense of community among the predominantly Hispanic visitors is reinforced by their shared cultural practices. At Jones Beach, where the usership is much more diverse overall, visitors nonetheless remark on the friendliness and courtesy of other visitors. The sense of community among shared values is marked by boundaries: People will say that other visitors, while friendly, are not looking to make new friends at the park but rather to socialize with the people they came with. Even at Lake Welch, which visitors describe with sobriquets like “one big happy family,” encounters among strangers are mainly limited to borrowing staples, minding children, and other limited interactions. These parks are a locus of identity formation, as visitors identify with larger social groups by participating with others in shared recreation rituals. It was during an earlier visit to Jones Beach that one visitor, an immigrant, told us he first felt the sense of belonging as an American. Similarly, parents use visits to Jones Beach and Lake Welch as a means of building family and group identity among their children. Visitors also think consciously about these places as desirable social environments, particularly as places (e.g., Zach’s Bay) where children can play safely while having experiences of wildlife.

All three parks are important recreation sites but they also figure prominently in visitors’ minds as places of nature. In different ways, people come to the parks for encounters with the natural world and to leave some of the stress and time-boundedness of the human world behind them. Another aspect of the parks as material spaces is their histories—not so much for Lake Welch, but at Jones Beach and especially at Walkway, visitors remarked on feeling a connection to history while visiting these parks. Many Jones Beach visitors, aware of the Moses legacy, participate in re-enacting the fabled Jones Beach experience of varied recreational activity among throngs of strangers on a grand stage. At Walkway, many visitors are touched by the successful adaptive reuse of a landmark structure from the industrial age. As a new resource that people worked for a long time to bring into being, Walkway is a catalyst that sparks a new excitement and regional pride among its visitors.

Visitors strongly support maintaining these spaces as public parks and are wary of privatization. However, no one had anything unfavorable to say at Walkway in that regard, where a privately-organized group manages the park in partnership with two state agencies. Visitors at Jones Beach and Lake Welch were supportive of the prevailing “free but with a fee” system at both, where admission is free but one pays to park one's car.

It is the right of every American to have access to and to enjoy safe, just, and inclusive public space where there is respect for and value of the dignity of each individual. It is the role of government to provide such spaces, and to support and protect the resources and processes within them that foster an inclusive society. Public parks are among the primary settings where American values are expressed and upheld, and where American cultural identity is nourished. However, decreasing funding for the maintenance and development of public parks threatens the availability of these spaces that are so central to American life. The Alliance for New York

State Parks believes studying the ways that citizens use, perceive, and value public parks can remind us of the importance that public parks have to American society, and they can underscore how urgent it is to provide support for New York State’s public parks. The three parks chosen for this study are very different places—one famous for the audacity of its creator, one rather obscure except among its devotees, the third not a park at all in the traditional sense of landscaped grounds but one of a new generation of dissimilar industrial facilities abandoned by capital and redeemed for public use. The popularity of all three attest to people’s continuing need for public places for recreation and sociability, for finding community among strangers, and for encounters with the natural world.

## Introduction

The Public Space Research Group conducted a Cultural Use Study for the Alliance for New York State Parks during summer and early fall 2012. The work was conducted in cooperation with the State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. The primary idea of the project is to gather information on park uses and users that can support the Alliance's fundraising and advocacy. The Alliance is also interested in developing a replicable research model to apply in parks across the state. For this demonstration project in 2012, the Alliance chose to study Jones Beach State Park, Lake Welch in Harriman State Park, and Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park. Fieldwork, in the form of a visitor survey followed by visitor interviews, took place in July at Jones Beach and Lake Welch in July and at Walkway in September.

Based at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, the Public Space Research Group has studied urban and beachfront parks as cultural spaces. Much writing on parks focuses on the material features, parks as works of landscape architecture or as natural systems. User research often involves surveys of opinions and ratings of facilities and services. We study parks as integrated systems involving users, staff and managers, spatial features, histories, and cultural systems. We see visitors as comprising diverse and overlapping constituencies, such as swimmers, sunbathers, bird watchers, hikers, and other use categories; sociocultural categories that sort by class, race, and ethnicity; people who live nearby versus farther away, longtime users and newcomers, and so on. These overlapping constituencies often lead to conflicts over spatial resources or behavior that will be important for management to understand. Users inhabit parks in a manner of speaking; through rituals and other cultural practices, different groups take possession of certain territories. This process gives life to the park but can create inter-group conflicts and management challenges. Users have expectations of their park experiences and ascribe meanings to the parks they use: these are park-associated values. In our work we try to uncover how parks function as social ecologies, to describe the who and the what, reveal the conflicts, ascertain the values, and consider how these human systems interact with the spatial characteristics that come into being through site characteristics and design. If the management practices, funding systems, and political discourses around parks can be informed by such a grounded social ecological perspective we believe there will be a better fit between public space resources and the public, and ultimately user and management satisfaction.

There are many reasons for undertaking user research: knowing who the users are, how many come, and where they come from can be critical in obtaining adequate funding. Understanding park-associated user values can help managers and funders understand whether they are satisfying users' needs. As managers and advocates develop new initiatives, understanding user perspectives can guide decision makers toward choices that reflect user expectations and values. Understanding conflicts can help managers find ameliorative measures.

State parks keep attendance figures based on vehicle admissions, and in the past have conducted visitor surveys to gauge preferences. Operating budgets in recent years have not allowed for such in-house user research. In its efforts to replenish public funding on parks and build other sources of support, the Alliance for New York State Parks seeks to both restore user research to the park system and to improve upon the former visitor-survey model. This year's work a pilot-test of a new, robust but workable research model that could be replicated at many other parks in coming years.

This final report covers our research and analysis of data from the field research at the three parks. A separate document will contain the research methodology and recommendations for continuing the research model next year.

## Jones Beach State Park

### Locating the Park

Jones Beach is one of New York's most prized state parks. Located on Long Island barrier island in Nassau County, the park's picturesque bays, white dunes and dramatic ocean waves gives Jones Beach the look of a national park. Indeed, some visitors perceive Jones Beach as having the status of a national park. We heard several visitors describe the park as a "national treasure" or as having a "national seashore." As one Hispanic visitor from East Harlem said, "You want the park to always be there. It's an American institution." Visitors who come to this park sense that they are in an important place. They are proud to be visitors of Jones Beach, and they enjoy talking about their experiences in the park.

A conundrum associated with national parks applies to Jones Beach: How can a park accommodate millions of visitors each year and still be a place of pristine, seemingly untouched nature? Ten miles of beach, dunes dotted by wild beach grass and bayberry shrubs, and the piping plover flying about undisturbed creates the illusion of a rare natural environment unaffected by humans. In reality, Jones Beach receives six million human visits a year and is thoroughly integrated into the global economy via its location within and connections to the New York Metropolitan Area. Three state parkways as well as railroad and bus service provide easy access for visitors coming from New York City, which is only 30 miles away. The well-developed highway system brings streams of visitors from Long Island and other parts of the metropolitan area, including Westchester County and Connecticut, where many Jones Beach visitors say private property and town residency restrictions lock them out of shorefront lands there; also New Jersey.

As a result of this access, the park is a multicultural space. Diverse cultural groups visit the park, each using its resources in distinct ways. An excerpt from one of our field researcher's notes illustrates the diversity of people and visitation patterns, as well as a shared perception among visitors that there is room for everyone in the park: *The parking lot is apparently full because the attendants tried to turn us away when we came in; however, the beach doesn't feel overwhelmingly crowded. The air is dry and hot but there is a slight breeze. The seagulls are out in full force menacing the people who are eating. The water is a shade of blue. It feels relaxed, there is a sense of spaciousness, expansiveness. People are moving through the space on their way to the beach, but again, it doesn't feel crowded. Demographically, I have the impression that the park is very diverse. I see people who appear to be Caucasian, African American, Asian, South Asian, and Hispanic. I see all different kinds of groups—couples, families, individuals—and all different ages. I see people heading down to the beach and people leaving. I see an Asian-looking pair of men wheeling a BBQ across the concession area. Then a double-amputee comes by in a very sophisticated looking wheelchair. He seems to be getting exercise. A few others are exercising too—among them a trio of young girls are going for a run. I can hear people chatting at the picnic tables in all different languages—few of which I can't identify, but it doesn't seem noisy.*

Jones Beach has a number of distinguishing features. The central portions of the park were designed and built under the leadership of Robert Moses in the mid-1920s. Moses, the urban planner and formidable "power broker" in state politics, envisioned a system of parks and parkways on Long Island with Jones Beach as the centerpiece. Extensive lands were reserved for the park, with the towns strong-armed into giving up their territorial claims, and tons of sand dredged to create the beach. Infrastructure in the park was built to an impressive scale—for example, the 231-foot-tall brick and limestone water tower, visible for miles away, and monumentally sited to anchor the visual axis of the last stretch of the Wantagh Parkway. The

tower announces a public works composition of formal grandeur unprecedented in beach development. Other highlights of the composition were the expansive, lavishly detailed bathhouses of up-to-the-minute architectural style, each with an enormous pool to supplement the salt water bathing. Jones Beach was not just a place to swim, however; Moses imagined the park as a complete day resort of recreational facilities, beautiful landscaping, and elegant appointments in the fashionable design idiom of transatlantic ocean liners. Even the harshest of Moses' many critics concede the importance of his legacy at Jones Beach.

In the twenties, art-deco reflected an orientation toward technology and engineering, and it romanticized fast and newly luxurious modes of travel over land, sea and in the air. Moses drew upon on these themes in the architecture and furnishings of the park, for he saw himself as a master engineer of the city and a modern, progressive reformer. The smooth curves, angles, and streamlined shapes of the art-deco style were liberally applied throughout buildings, passageways, signage, and other surfaces. To echo the romance of modern sea travel, he designed the boardwalk to resemble the deck of an ocean liner, complete with ship funnels that serve as trash receptacles on the boardwalk. A ship anchor and a ship mast with nautical flags adorned the central mall. Park staff wore outfits that resembled sailors' uniforms. Although the staff no longer don maritime dress, nautical symbols are still evident in the park, if not as prominent as they were at its opening. For example, a large sea horse mosaic, the logo of Jones Beach, is located in a part of the boardwalk that coincides with a portion of the beach that is closed due to limited funds available for staffing lifeguards.

The popularity of the park led to its expansion in the postwar era. Full service beach facilities were opened beyond the West Bathhouse at West End Fields 1 and 2, and Fields 1 and 2; and, at the other end of the beach, at Fields 6 and 9. This expansion involved none of the stylized architectural treatments and landscaping of the original park: Each of these new areas had a simple, foursquare bathhouse, a big parking lot, and a swimming beach. The greatly expanded

<b>Place of Residence — Jones Beach</b>		
	Number	Percent
Queens	163	26
Brooklyn	56	9
Bronx	45	7
Manhattan	41	6
Staten Island	5	0
NYC subtotal	310	49
Nassau County	190	30
Westchester- Rockland	54	8
Suffolk County	30	5
Out of New York State	26	4
Out of the U.S.A.	8	1
Upstate New York	7	1
Not applicable	14	2
Total	639	100

park enjoyed high visitation and, one assumes, ample budgets into the 1980s. Since then, visitation and budgets have both declined, and many of the facilities the beach offered in its heyday have been closed or lost to the tides. The East Bath House and numerous parking lots and associated beach facilities are closed or unused; Field 9 was lost in Hurricane Gloria, and West End 2 was converted to a lightly used "nature center." The archery fields and arts and craft village have been permanently removed. Some facilities have been significantly remodeled in order to meet the recreational needs of contemporary populations. For example, the original amphitheater, now the Nikon Theater, has been transformed into a state of the art performance center. Numerous concessions have been renovated and a Friendly's Ice Cream shop, occupying half of the original main dining room at West Bathhouse, has become a new 'hot spot' in the park. Donald Trump is expected to enhance the Central Mall by building a

new structure on the site of the Jones Beach Restaurant, although this already long-delayed improvement may have to wait longer since Hurricane Sandy flooded the site and damaged the surrounding infrastructure. As of this moment, the park faces new challenges and is in need



of much support to restore its status as the showcase of the New York State park system.

## Profile of Visitors

### Place of Residence

Almost half the visitors in our survey sample live in the city of New York. Of these, the majority come from Queens and predominantly reside in Astoria, Fresh Meadows and Jamaica. Visitors from Brooklyn tend to live in neighborhoods such as Bushwick, East New York and Canarsie.

Many visitors from the Bronx live in such East Bronx neighborhoods as Co-op City, Westchester Square, Parkchester, Clason Point, and Soundview. A large proportion of the visitors from Manhattan reside in Harlem and Washington Heights.

The table at right gives residence by town for the two Long Island counties outside New York City. Jones Beach State Park lies within the town limits of Hempstead, and not surprisingly, Hempstead town is the largest contributor of visitors among Long Island towns. Overall, 190 visitors came from Nassau County versus only 30 from Suffolk, where the residents have many other beaches to choose from. One might say that the two local counties that contribute the most visitors to Jones Beach are

### Visitor Residence by Town, Long Island

Town	Number
<b>Nassau County</b>	
Town of Hempstead	110
<i>Mineola, Freeport, Garden City, E. Meadow, Merrick, Bellmore</i>	
Town of North Hempstead	39
<i>Roslyn, Westbury, Great Neck, Port Washington</i>	
City of Glen Cove	5
Town of Oyster Bay	36
<i>Bethpage, Farmingdale, Levittown, Massapequa, Hicksville</i>	
<b>Nassau total</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>Suffolk County</b>	
Town of Babylon	10
<i>Amityville, Copaque, Deer Park</i>	
Town of Islip	6
<i>Bay Shore, Bohemia, Brightwaters</i>	
Town of Brookhaven	5
<i>Blue Point, Farmingville, Port Jefferson</i>	
Town of Huntington	6
<i>Melville, Huntington Station</i>	
Town of Smithtown	2
<i>Kings Park, St. James</i>	
Town of Southampton	1
<i>Hampton Bays</i>	
<b>Suffolk total</b>	<b>30</b>

Nassau (30 percent of the survey sample) and Queens (26 percent of the survey sample). No other county in the metropolitan area approaches these two.

### Race and Ethnicity

At Jones Beach, we discovered a culturally diverse group of people visit the park. To some extent, the responses resonate with demographic patterns in Nassau County and New York State where White and Hispanic or Latino populations comprise the largest groups. African Americans and Asians comprise the third and fourth largest groups. However, according to 2011 census data, the

Race / Ethnicity	Number Percent	
	Number	Percent
White	270	42
Hispanic/Latino	190	30
African American/Black	59	9
Choose not to Identify with any category	57	9
Indian and Middle Eastern	19	3
Asian/Chinese/Korean	15	2
Two or More Races or Ethnicities	14	2
Other Race/Ethnicity	13	2
Native American	2	0
Total	639	100

White/non-Hispanic population is approximately 64 percent of the total population in Nassau County and 58 percent in New York. The Hispanic/Latino population is 15 and 18 percent, respectively (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36/36059.html>) It appears that we encountered many more Hispanic/Latino visitors at Jones Beach relative to the percentage of Hispanic/Latinos in Nassau County and New York State.

**Race / Ethnicity by County of Residence — Jones Beach**

	White	Hispanic/ Latino	African American	Indian/ Middle Eastern	Asian	Native American	Two or more races	Other
Queens	54	57	18	7	4	0	5	2
Brooklyn	15	17	14	2	2	0	0	0
Bronx	7	24	2	0	1	1	3	0
Manhattan	11	18	7	1	0	0	1	2
Staten Is	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nassau	114	34	10	6	6	0	3	5
Westchester	27	21	3	1	0	1	1	1
Suffolk	21	7	1	0	0	0	0	1
Out of NYS	8	4	2	2	2	0	0	1
Out of US	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
Upstate N. Y.	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
N/A	5	3	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	270	190	59	19	15	2	14	13

The table above breaks down the race/ethnicity variable by county and more distant aggregations (e.g., “out of NYS”). White visitors come from all over but in highest proportions from Long Island. Hispanic/Latino visitors come from all over as well—New York City mostly but also in considerable numbers from Nassau and Westchester. African Americans came predominantly from Queens and Brooklyn. Other groups are too small to show any geographical patterns.

## Sex

Through random sampling, we found a relatively even mix of men and women at Jones Beach. When we interviewed visitors in specific areas of the park, however, we saw a different pattern. Women outnumbered men in Zach’s Bay, an area of the park where families with small children prefer to play and swim because the water is calm and there is a playground and trees that provide shade. In contrast, men outnumbered women in the eastern end of the beach. This section of the beach is predominantly visited by gay couples who prefer an area that is far away from others to avoid visitors who might be uncomfortable or even stare at them.

The table below shows sex cross-tabulated with county of residence. Here we notice a slight pattern: somewhat larger proportions of women than men coming from Brooklyn, Manhattan, the Bronx, and Westchester, but more men than women coming from some other areas, Nassau County in particular, with Queens County being about even between the sexes. Overall, there are more men than women in the sample. We guess that the larger proportions from

Nassau in particular reflect in part the presence of older, retired men who live nearby—in Nassau and Queens, mostly—and who are regular visitors to Jones Beach.

### Age

Although a diverse range of age groups visit Jones Beach, middle-aged visitors comprise the majority of visitors in the park.

**Age by County of Residence — Jones Beach**

	61+	46-60	31-45	21-30	18-20	N/A	Total
Queens	14	44	43	46	11	5	163
Brooklyn	1	11	22	21	0	1	56
Bronx	1	12	15	13	1	3	45
Manhattan	0	7	14	18	1	1	41
Staten Is.	0	1	1	3	0	0	5
NYC subtotal	16	75	95	101	13	10	310
Nassau	47	51	48	31	9	4	190
Westchester	3	21	13	14	2	1	54
Suffolk	3	10	12	4	1	0	30
Out of N. Y. State	2	7	10	5	0	2	26
Out of U. S.	1	0	2	4	1	0	8
Upstate N. Y.	0	4	1	2	0	0	7
N/A	2	4	2	3	0	3	14
Subtotal	58	97	88	63	13	10	
Total	74	172	183	164	26	20	639

In the table at left, age is broken down by county. One notices that the visitors from Nassau are disproportionately older than visitors from NYC boroughs or from Westchester and Suffolk. Of the 190 survey participants from Nassau, 47 were 61 or older and 51 were between 46 and 60 years old. Contrast that with Brooklyn for which, out of 56 visitors overall, only one was 61 or more and only 11 were from 46 to 60. Queens County, the biggest contributor overall after Nassau, shows more balance than Nassau across the age spectrum.

**Sex by County of Residence**

	Male	Female
Queens	82	81
Brooklyn	26	30
Bronx	19	26
Manhattan	17	24
Staten Is.	4	1
NYC subtotal	148	162
Nassau	103	86
Westchester-Rockland	23	31
Suffolk	16	14
Out of NYS	18	8
Out of U. S.	5	3
Upstate N. Y.	4	3
N/A	7	7
Subtotal	176	152
Total	324	314

Visit Group Size			Size and Composition of Visitor Group
Persons	Number	Percent	
3-5	240	38	Often the size of park visitor groups is assumed to reflect the “typical” American family size of 3-4 people. Based on our survey results, it appears that Jones Beach is visited by many groups besides this typical American family. In addition to groups of 3-4 people, there are many couples, people who come by themselves as well as parties with 10-20 people.
2	203	31	
1	78	12.2	
6-9	69	11	
10-19	40	6	
20 +	7	1	
N/A	2	0	
Total	639	100	

Examining who visitors come with to the park illuminates how

**Visit Frequency — Jones Beach**

Frequency	Number	Percent
Several times a month (1-3 times)	230	36
Several times a week (1-3 times)	170	27
First-time visitor	93	19
Frequently during a month (6+ times)	82	15
N/A	64	10
Total	639	100

visitors use the park and what it means to them. When asked about the other members in visitors' groups, researchers recorded multiple answers per participant. While many visitors come to the park with friends and co-workers, a large portion of visitors come to the park to be with their families.

**Frequency of Visitation**

The survey results show that a large portion of visitors routinely visit the park. Nearly half of the people we surveyed report that they come to the park several times a week or more than 6 times during a month.

**Group Composition — Jones Beach**

Group Type	Number	Percent
Came with family and relatives	285	33
Came with friends	162	19
Came with partner or spouse	145	18
Came with my children	108	13
Came with a combination of friends, family, partners or spouse, friends, and my children	82	10
Came by myself	77	9
Came with co-workers or an association	4	1
N/A	4	1
Total	867	100

**Length of Relationship to the Park**

Among the 164 persons interviewed, many visitors have long histories of visiting Jones Beach. Fifty-four of them (33 percent) had been coming for 31 years or longer. Another 24 percent of the visitors we interviewed have been coming to the park for over ten years. Unfortunately this data was not collected using random sampling, but through the ethnography and might be skewed due to our interest in comparing the views of local residents in Field 6 and non- local residents in Field 4.

Apart from the ethnographic fieldwork in Field 6, the participants were randomly selected. Overall it was exciting to see that the park

	Long-term / Short-term	
	Number	Percent
31 or more years	54	33
11-20 years	29	18
21-30 years	28	17
1-5 years	20	12
6-10 years	16	10
1st Time	11	7
N/A	6	4
Total	164	100

has been a part of so many visitors' lives for such long periods of time.

**Activities**

The structure of visitation at Jones Beach varies by time of day and area of the park that people visit. Some visitors come in the early morning to jog or fish before the crowds come, or to have breakfast and read the newspaper on the beach. Others come in the mid-morning and plan to stay until the late afternoon. These visitors are often seen making their way from the parking lots to the beach carrying tote bags overflowing with food, and umbrellas, beach chairs, and towels strapped to their bodies. They are often dragging coolers in one hand while carrying soccer balls, Kadima paddles, Kan Jam equipment, or sand toys in the other. Yet another crowd begins their visit to the park in the evening. Some of these visitors arrive with coolers and beach chairs which they use for tailgating in the parking lots. Others come to stroll on the boardwalk or to hear a band play in the band shell or at the Nikon Theater.

**Jones Beach — Thematic Activity Groupings**

Grouping	Activity	Number	Percent
Beach Related Activities	Ocean swimming	401	63
	Relaxing	368	58
	Sunbathing	312	49
	Picnicking	108	17
	Playing in the sand	95	15
	Reading	88	14
	Wading	46	7
	Boogie Boarding	44	7
	Frisbee	17	3
	Gaming and board games	16	2
	Volleyball	15	2
	Collecting seashells and driftwood	6	1
	Paddle surfing	2	0
	Paddle tennis	1	0
Category Subtotal		1,519	
Boardwalk and Late Afternoon Activities	Walking	52	8
	Cruising	52	8
	People watching	50	8
	Meeting a friend	38	6
	Running	20	3
	Sunset watching	10	2
	Biking	6	1
Category Subtotal		228	36
Visiting Other Facilities and Pursuing Other Activities	Visiting Food Concession	86	14
	Swimming in the pool	63	10
	Visiting the playground	54	8
	Attending a concert	19	3
	Barbequing	13	2
	Visiting the beach shop	4	1
	Playing basketball	3	0
	Playing Pitch and Putt	2	0
	Attending a sports event or program	2	0
	Visiting the Water Tower	1	0
	Visiting the marina	1	0
Category Subtotal		248	
Nature Appreciation	Pier Fishing	23	
	“Appreciating nature”	22	
	Bird watching	7	
	Surf casting	5	
	Star gazing	1	
	Category Subtotal		58

Of the visitors who arrive during the day, the majority come to recreate on the beach. Many swim in the water; others just relax on the beach and never set foot in the water. Others hang out on the boardwalk. A few come with the objective of using some of the other facilities along the boardwalk, such as the Pitch and Putt, the miniature golf course, and basketball courts. Certain groups avoid the beach, spending their time at locations such as Zach’s Bay, where it is easy to supervise small children in the calm water and enjoy a playground with relatively new slides and swings. Or they drive to boat basin in order to meet up with friends who have arrived aboard their boats, and who animate the dock by setting up cocktail tables and portable chairs, hibachi grills, radios and umbrellas. Others spend their time in Field 10, where avid fishermen (mostly men) cast lines off the pier, and where nature lovers enjoy looking at crabs in the tidal pools.

Yet, within each distinct area of the park it is possible to meet individuals who try to do it all. For example, there are visitors who habitually situate themselves in a shaded area of Zach’s Bay near the parkway where they can take advantage of both bay and the ocean and boardwalk. A family that routinely arrives by boat spends the day in the basin and then takes an early evening “hike” to the boardwalk for an ice cream. They consider their ice cream walk to be a family tradition. Another group of people have a family reunion on the beach in Field 6, an area they call “the main entrance” to the park. Before the sun goes down,

they caravan over to the West End to have a barbequed dinner and to party into the night. In sum, there are recreational opportunities for nearly everyone at Jones Beach. As a result, visitation patterns are diverse and complex.

The organization of activities into specific categories is challenging at Jones Beach because the park offers so many activities and people use the park in diverse ways at different times of the day. Given the number of activities that visitors typically engage in during one visit, it was difficult to determine whether the activities happened exclusively on the beach or boardwalk, or exclusively in the day or in the evening. Therefore, while the activities table represents one way to represent the structure of activity we observed in the park, some activities may apply to two or more categories (i.e. there are people who walk on the boardwalk in the day as well as the evening; there are people who spend the day on the beach and finish it with a concert, and others who arrive specifically for a concert and never set foot on the beach, etc.). Nevertheless, the picture of activities that emerges from this chart resonates with the patterns of visitor use that we documented using participant observation.

## **Park Related Attitudes and Values**

### *How Do Visitors Experience the Park?*

Throughout the park, visitors express the sentiment that, by having enough space available to them in the park, they are able to solve a number of problems. Like visitors at Lake Welch, many urban visitors from New York City lack backyards and neighborhood parks. Jones Beach is a needed space for recreation. For example, a Hispanic visitor from Manhattan who has been visiting Jones Beach for 22 years notes that Jones Beach is important to her because residents of Manhattan do not have access to many beaches. A Latina who lives in Queens concurs: “For people who don’t live near here this place is crucial. People from the Bronx and Queens can and should have access to the beach like anybody else.” A visitor from Flushing says, “I depend on this park. I live in Queens and I could go to the Rockaways. It is closer, but the drive ends up being the same because of traffic. And the parking is better at Jones. It is more convenient to come to Jones, even though I would like to go to the Rockaways. Here, they have a lot of parking, it’s never a problem.”

Like visitors at Lake Welch, some Jones Beach visitors view the park as an extension of one’s private domestic space. Visitors bring portable cookout equipment, chairs, blankets, pillows, games, music and a tent to replicate their home on the beach. These home extensions are visible throughout the park. For example, on the beach in Field 6, one can see families setting up large umbrellas, chairs, coolers, bags of food—they bring enough equipment to make themselves feel at home. When it is windy one can see visitors feeling so at home that they are wrapped in blankets and asleep on Ottoman-style beach chairs. It is as if the beach has become their living room.

In Field 10, Chinese women from Flushing appear to replicate their kitchens in the park. They heat up home cooked food in aluminum trays on a nearby barbeque. They sit around a picnic table playing mahjong with big, bright green tiles. They chat and laugh in Mandarin. When we asked what made everyone laugh, one woman pointed to a bucket of crabs near the picnic table. The women had collected a bucket nearly brimming over with crabs. The women’s husbands, in contrast, were not catching much of anything. The comparison implied that the men were failing a pretend test of manhood. This idea made the women laugh and carry on with more kidding around.

We asked the women about the special meaning of the park and one woman explained that she feels so at home in Field 10 that she is not interested in visiting other parts of the park. She says, “We don’t go to other places because when we go to a place that we like, we just keep going there. This is ‘my’ area.” She also commented that once she arrives at “her” area, she

does not want to leave. For example, she is loath to find that she has forgotten to bring a basic item from her home like matches, salt, or cups. She wishes the beach shops sold some of these things so that people could fully enjoy their stay.

While some achieve more private space in their lives by replicating an aspect of their domestic space in the park, others have a less elaborate approach to finding private space: They find a spot in the park where they can be by themselves and relax. This theme is striking because visitors in the eastern and western ends of the park, where blankets are spaced out 20 or more feet apart, express this as well as visitors in Field 4, where blankets are often inches apart from one another and where this area of the beach is viewed as having a party atmosphere. A resident from Flushing sitting in the back of the Field 4 beach near the boardwalk says, "I come here for the quiet and space that the park offers. I don't know why anyone complains about the crowdedness and party atmosphere here. If you just walk a few extra minutes you can get away from it and have peace and privacy." In Field 6 and the West End, visitors talk about the park being a place of community. But this sense of community does not encroach on visitor's needs for a private space for themselves and their family. Many visitors, especially in the West End, claim to know other visitors by face and sometimes by name. Sometimes they know a few small details about their lives, and they inquire about each other's lives if they have not seen each other at the beach for awhile. These expressions of care and community do not translate into visitors recreating together on the beach. Several visitors comment upon this pattern of widespread friendliness and the clear-cut boundaries of visitors' private space. A Latina from Port Washington interviewed at Field 6 put it this way: "I feel like people come here to hang out with the people they came here with and they are not interested in meeting new people." Her comment is not meant to be taken as a criticism of other visitors. Rather it is a neutral observation of how people experience Jones Beach.

Another problem resolved by claiming a space of one's own in the park is the need to escape from the stress of life. In Field 6, a visitor from Bushwick, Brooklyn calls the park a "sanctuary" for residents of New York who feel stressed by the pace of city life. This woman comes to the park with her husband in the summer and winter. She and her husband arrive around 8:00 a.m. and leave by 10:00 a.m., and they walk from one end of the beach, then sometimes sit at the edge of the water, read, and eat breakfast. She says, "This is a place where you can escape and get your head together. You have time to meditate here. Without Jones Beach, I wouldn't live in New York City!" An 18 year old youth from Ossining, New York, shares a similar sentiment. To him, the park is a place to relax and escape the stress of life by playing football, soccer, and swimming with a large group of friends. He says Jones Beach is special to him because it provides him with a day where he is completely happy, with "no worries at all."

Men in the eastern end of the park talk about the park affording them an opportunity to take a break from the obligation of having to interact with other people, being "on", and fitting in. One man in the area says, "I always come here to get away from people. The further east you go, the more peace you have....Nobody bothers you if you don't want to be bothered. People ignore each other, but they are friendly about it." Another man in the same section says "I like being east of Field 6, as far as you can go, because this place is private and calm, and the farther you go you do not run into loud families with children. You can truly relax without being bothered by patrons or staff. So, when you see the last kid, walk ten more minutes and plant yourself. Kids have to be taken care of by everybody who sees them. I don't want that responsibility."

If Jones Beach permits some visitors a space of their own and an opportunity for escape, it provides others with an opportunity to fill a void in one's life. Some visitors, for example, visit the park to restore a connection to nature. Visitors throughout the park talk about getting in

touch with nature by visiting the park. This view is most strongly expressed in the West End of the park, the least populated section of Jones Beach, and the location of the park's Nature Center. In the West End we met a resident from Roslyn Heights who is an avid bird watcher. In addition to carrying a cooler and beach umbrella, he had binoculars around his neck and a bird guide in his bag. This visitor sees himself as an environmental activist. He loves observing the piping plover move up and down on the beach, and he even enjoys seeing the frogs in the bathroom. But he is upset by the jet skiers who come too close to the shore. In his view, this is bad for the environment and dangerous for people. He reports that he wrote to the authorities about this and in the middle of our conversation he scrolls through his cell phone contact list to show us that he has stored the phone numbers for the Nassau County police and the Environmental Protection Agency. "I call them whenever I see something. Yeah, I'm a complainer!!" As he proudly announced this about himself his wife rolls her eyeballs.

The West End is full of nature lovers who enact small gestures of activism during their visit. Numerous visitors to the West End bring their own garbage bags and spend time during their visits picking up trash strewn across the beach. One visitor talks about this as a community effort because visitors pile their trash bags together for the park staff to pick up. The pile symbolizes to the visitors the shared desire and effort to protect the natural environment.

The appreciation for nature is expressed more passively in other parts of the park. Visitors in Fields 4 and 6 say that what they love about the park is the beauty of its natural resources. One visitor on the beach in Field 6 finds the beauty of the coastline moving; it has remained "pristine" the many years he has visited the park. It is the beauty of the park and the sense of the timelessness of nature that keeps him coming back to Jones Beach.

A feeling of timelessness at the park highlights another lost connection that visitors seek to restore through visits to Jones Beach. A number of visitors associate the feeling of timelessness at the park with nostalgia for the past. Natural aspects of the park evoke this nostalgia for some. For example, one visitor says, "It could have been today, or it could have been last week, or years ago....the long, continuous coastline makes me feel lost, as if I am living out of time...this is one of the reasons that I come to the park. This same visitor talked about his fond memories of attending a Billy Joel concert in the park during his youth. Billy Joel has become a pop music singer for all of the ages, thus, it is interesting to note that the park has been a site where "classics" have been created. It is also interesting to note that Billy Joel contemporaries continue to perform in the park. In light of this, the beauty of the park alone evokes nostalgia for some, while park programs work to promote a nostalgic image of the park as a place where time has stopped.

Visitors in the park feel nostalgic in other ways. A large number of visitors say that the park makes them recall special childhood memories. Visitors cite special family events, such as reunions and birthday parties, as well as ordinary moments such as playing in the sand, being surprised to see a grandparent do a handstand in the ocean, and just being with the family in the park. A young woman from Roslyn Heights said, "Jones Beach has special meaning to me because it makes me think of my childhood, just going with my family as a child and swimming, all of us being together. It makes me feel like a little kid again."

Several adults who grew up visiting the park feel strongly about reproducing those good memories for their own children. Parents talk about enjoying the beach and wanting their children to experience the sand and the ocean. One grandparent who has visited the park for over 50 years, makes a routine visit to Zach's Bay with her granddaughter in the summer. It is her belief that Zach's Bay is a wonderful place to socialize children. She says, "Here, it's easy to watch children. There is so much wildlife for them to see, and the children all interact with one



another here. They share things, their sand toys and shovels. This is very good. In other parts of the park it's not the same. There is not as much interaction with others."

A parent from Baldwin feels strongly that the park is important to the socialization of children. But she is also nostalgic for the programs and learning opportunities that the park used to offer before budget cuts. She says, "I've been coming to this park my whole life...I know all of the paths and coves and special places. One time, I chaperoned a school group to the Nature Center. The kids got bored after a while but since I know the park intimately, I was able to take them on a "secret" path that leads from the Nature Center to the boat basin. They loved it! They looked for crabs, took note of the waves, and looked at the boats. My insider knowledge saved the day! But you know, over the years, my husband and I did so many things with our kids in the park. We learned so many things, and we took the kids to so many programs. Now I see that today's kids are not getting the same experience from the park. The park is going downhill. The nature center is not very entertaining anymore, and a number of services are not up to par—the bathrooms are not clean, the sewerage hose is broken at the boat basin. The park is a jewel and we don't want to lose this! We have to stay ahead of it. They are going to have to have a plan to stay ahead of it."

One reason many visitors may feel strongly that the park play a role in the socialization of young children is because one's personal and cultural identity is at stake in this process. Parents seek to establish routines and traditions so that children identify with the family. It is noteworthy that Jones Beach plays such a significant role in this way in so many individuals' lives. The park plays another significant role in the identity formation of many visitors too. We heard many visitors speak of the park as fortifying or reflecting their identities with other "families" that are defined by geographic boundaries. For example, several residents of New York City conflate the park with New York City parks. When talking about his experience in Field 4, a 28 year old man from Jamaica says, "Everyone should have a chance to access this beach. There are a lot of families here, it's pretty lively. Everyone gets along. That's what New Yorkers are—tolerant." In this comment, the visitor asserts that tolerance at Jones Beach is an extension of life in New York City, implying that the park lies within the city's boundaries.

Other visitors relate the park to their identities as residents of New York State. One fisherman in Field 10 loves the park because it is a "landmark" of New York State. Others talk about their fondness for the elegance of the water tower, the art-deco architecture, and nautical themes in the park. They enjoy thinking back on the history of Robert Moses and his contributions to developing New York State. As one visitor puts it, "When you are walking in the park, you feel that you are walking in something great."

Another woman who relates to the park as a reflection of her identification with New York State has a different take. She recalls being reminded of Jones Beach while visiting Lake Ontario in Buffalo: "I saw the same style of building—you know, with those bricks. And even though it was winter, it was the same scenery, but maybe it was a bit different in terms of the landscape. It made me realize that the parks are the same all over New York State. You know what? They are all aging. They all have that look of being old and worn down."

A number of people indicated that the park prompts reflections on their national identity. A visitor from Jamaica who visits the park once a week throughout the summer and fall, talks about a time when he took a group of Chinese teachers out to Jones Beach. The teachers were from central China and were a part of an exchange program. Some had never been to a beach before. The women wore high heels and dressy clothing for the visit. This amused the visitor because he typically wears tee-shirts and sweatshirts. The visitor recalls how excited the

Chinese guests were to see the beach. It made him proud to show his guests such an important part of American culture.

A new American who grew up in El Salvador reinforces the point that Jones Beach is a place that prompts reflection on one's national identity. He says, "The first time I visited the park with my wife I finally felt like I belonged to this country. We played in the ocean with hundreds of other folks. Somehow this made me feel special. That is a special memory for me. Now walking the boardwalk with my wife is a special tradition."

### *Social Diversity at the Park*

Visitors discuss social diversity at the park in at least two ways. Some acknowledge social diversity and see it as a "problem" in the park. Many more, however, acknowledge the diversity of visitors, celebrate differences, and marvel at the examples of tolerance, solidarity, and community they witness in the park.

Those who tend to view social diversity at the park as a problem are often local, white visitors who fear that the park is being taken over by "city folk," especially in Field 4. Indeed, sometimes the term city folk is used as code for people of color. Visitors who tend to talk about city visitors as a problem tend to recreate in Field 6, or they have moved to the West End to avoid city visitors (although many white visitors in the West End are actually from Brooklyn and Queens). These visitors feel that city visitors play loud music, overcrowd Field 4, and show disrespect toward the park by not picking up their trash and by making the bathrooms especially dirty. City visitors are often referred to in stark as well as masked terms of racism. For example, we heard the terms "uncivilized," "uneducated," "riff raff," "animals," "lazy," and "dirty."

In contrast to these negative views, many more see the park as welcoming and accommodating of difference. To begin, visitors interpret the concept of "social diversity" in diverse ways. Some use the concept to talk about the mixture of ages and group compositions in the park. A few visitors comment that they perceived the park to be diverse because families, couples, and individuals of all ages make use of the park.

Others define the term in terms of race and ethnicity. We heard African Americans note that there are more white and Latino visitors in the park than African Americans. But one African American man, age 38 and a resident of Baychester (Bronx) said, "At Jones Beach there is a friendly crowd. People are out with family and friends. It's a diverse place. I feel welcome here. Just look at this place. This is America!" A group of young Southeast Asian Indian men from Valley Stream concur with the view that the park is inclusive. One member of the group says, "There are more 'brown' people playing ball and hanging out. It's getting more animated....people do not look at you just because of your color." A 43 year old Latina from Glen Cove says that in order for the park to be more diverse it should have more minorities, especially African Americans. But she hypothesizes that the underrepresentation of African Americans has to do with the fact that there are not many who live near the park. It is not due to exclusion. She says that she is a minority, and she feels included.

In addition to these views, many white local visitors express tolerance and embrace diversity in the park. One visitor said, "Can you imagine if we didn't let people from New York City come here? That would be like telling us we can't go to New York to see a show on Broadway!" Others take it for granted that the park is a place for everyone. Indeed some visitors were slightly bothered by a research question about social diversity. They shrug their shoulders as they express their hope that no one felt excluded in the park on the basis of any social identity marker.

## *Views on Public Parks*

The majority of visitors strongly believe that public parks should remain public. People talk about the notion that natural environments, by definition are part of the public realm; therefore, they should be accessible to everyone, no matter race, ethnicity, or class background. A long term visitor in Field 6 says, "I think everything about this park should be public." Pointing to the ocean, he says, "Look at this! This doesn't belong to anybody!!" An Egyptian-American woman at the pier in Field 10 says, "People are now more aware of the environment, even more than before. This should remain public because everyone has his or her right to nature. If you make it private you exclude groups, and this is a summer resource for all people to enjoy."

A fear of losing access to beaches due to privatization is another issue that many visitors discuss. A visitor from Manhattan, for example, says he would not like to see Jones Beach be treated like a Connecticut beach: "they have big fights over the beaches in Connecticut because they are town beaches. A lot of people live close to the beach but cannot go to it." A resident of Westchester says that she drove an hour and a half to arrive at Jones Beach when she lives ten minutes from a beach, but she is not permitted to visit it. Residents of Suffolk County at Jones Beach also talk about this problem. A middle aged man from Hampton Bays feels locked out of beaches on the eastern end of Long Island due to township privatization. He says that he makes the trip to Jones Beach from eastern Long Island every weekend in the summer and occasionally during the week on his commute home from his job in Manhattan just to access a beach whose beauty is on par with the beauty of beaches in the Hamptons. A middle-aged working class white man from Seaford sees privatization as a class issue. He loves the park and is not opposed to Donald Trump building a new concession in the park, but he is concerned about giving control over access to the park to a privileged class. He says, "Forget about privatization—stay out of my backyard! This is the only beach that we have. If it is privatized, then only the highfalutin will have it."

Some visitors, such as a 79 year old visitor from Lindenhurst, are not worried that the park will ever be privatized. In this senior's view, Jones Beach is one of the biggest and best parks in New York State. The state would never dream of giving it up.

In contrast to the view that all natural areas should be under public control, many visitors express a particular American notion of public space—even though a public park belongs to everyone, additional fees need to be charged in order to maintain it. The "public with a fee" philosophy necessarily excludes some people from having access to the park. Some current visitors at Jones Beach, of course, are anxious that increased parking fees would prevent them from coming to the park. Others, however, find paying extra fees as better than giving up the park to a private company. A visitor from Jamaica says, "If the beach is privatized, then maybe we can't go. I'm not so worried about the cost increases for parking, but if I didn't live in beach zone, maybe I wouldn't be able to go to the beach at all." A visitor from Long Island City says that it would make a difference if the park were private: "We wouldn't come if it was private—public is supposed to mean open to all without exceptions to race and culture—but in the U.S., public is not free. You have to pay here."

A Puerto Rican visitor from Mineola has a slightly different concern about increased entrance fees as a way of maintaining public access to Jones Beach. He says, "A public place is where anybody can come. It should be cheaper than a private place. But it shouldn't be free because this would allow everybody to come in and that would bring the park down. At Jones Beach, we see our tax money being well spent. But this is not so in the Rockaways."

Visitors throughout the park share a sense of ambivalence toward making the park more accessible. On the one hand, many realize that it is a citizen’s right to have access to this beach. On the other hand, if more visitors have access, current visitors may lose access to the spaces in the park that are central to attaining solitude and privacy. One visitor from Oyster Bay expresses a view which several other visitors share. He says, “New Yorkers should be able to come to the park for free.” This visitor, however, appeared to define a New Yorker as a resident of one the suburban counties on Long Island: “There should be no charge for parking if you are a resident of Nassau or Suffolk County....that’s where our taxes should go.”

Only a few visitors at the park spoke in favor of privatization for public parks, especially Jones Beach. One person who travels from New Jersey to visit the park, has high expectations for more amenities. This visitor uses the pool and the ocean, and would like to see even more activities offered. In her view, “The park needs more attractions. Maybe a private company can prop it up—just make sure it is an American private company!”

### How do Visitors Evaluate the Park?

Below is a summary of rating results. It is interesting to note that although many people appear to be satisfied with the cleanliness of the restrooms and bathhouses, the numbers do not tell the whole story. Many people assume that there are limited resources for the maintenance of this amenity in the park, and therefore rated this service relative to the expectation that in the context of budget cuts it is difficult to keep the bathrooms especially clean. Indeed many are not satisfied by the cleanliness and talk about their displeasure of seeing dirty diapers left on the ground, sand in the sinks, an absence of toilet paper, and clogged toilets.

**Jones Beach — Ratings of Facilities and Services**

	Excellent-4	Good-3	Fair-2	Poor-1	NA-0
Staff Courtesy & Helpfulness	82	45	6	0	31
Cleanliness of Restrooms/Bathhouse	41	61	41	13	8
Conditions of Roads and Parking Lots	74	62	13	0	15
Usefulness of Signs/Maps	42	40	18	11	53
Conditions of Buildings	43	77	26	2	16
Cleanliness of Outdoor Areas	67	66	17	3	11
Safety and Security	77	54	15	4	14
Access to information	30	33	29	20	52
Quality of Educational and Recreational Programs	43	77	26	2	16
Quality of Gift Shop	29	39	12	3	81
Quality of Concessions	21	37	27	4	75

Many people also talked about the need for more signs and clearer signage. Newcomers are especially unaware of the various facilities offered, such as the pool and the pitch and putt.

Many visitors who have been visiting the park for more than five years, it turns out, are also unaware that the park has a pool, a nature center, and other facilities. At least one newcomer did not understand why the park calls the bathrooms “comfort stations,” and feels confused by these signs. Another visitor feels that the signs to the parking lots are placed too close to the entranceways, leaving drivers little time to figure out if they need to turn or keep going.

Many long term visitors, proud of their insiders’ knowledge, see no need for more signage. In fact, one visitor who has been coming to the park for over 50 years prefers the absence of signs. She proudly says, “The park is so large, I couldn’t possibly know it all!” This visitor seems to be saying that she prefers the sense of mystery that comes without signs. It gives her the feeling that after 50 years of visitation there is still more to discover in the park.

*Visitor Preferences*

A majority of visitors love Jones Beach and evaluate it favorably. But when asked about improvements that could be made, many have suggestions. There does not appear to be a pattern to the suggestions, other than many recognize that maintenance is difficult to address given the current budget climate. One visitor summarizes this perspective when he says, “The park needs to keep up maintenance. The boardwalk is rotting. The theater is run down. Why is this happening? [Even] with all of the money they are getting for parking, there is still more that needs to be done.”

<b>Desired Improvements</b>	<b>Number</b>		
Improve or add facilities	100	Some visitors feel that more security is needed at the park. One visitor talks about the trucks on the beach. She says, “They drive too fast and too close to the people on the beach.” Another visitor echoes this point and wishes that the beach clean-up would occur before 8:00 a.m. because the trucks on the beach make her nervous and worried that she might need to move out of the way. Another visitor talks about the roundabout near the water tower as a place that invites accidents, especially after concerts when people have potentially been drinking. Several visitors remarked that cancelling 4 <sup>th</sup> of July fireworks for lack of security was a major disappointment. Some called the cancellation of fireworks “un-American.”	
Clean the beach and water	38		
Clean the bathrooms	29		
Other	26		
Re-open closed park facilities	17		
None	17		
Re-open restaurant	11		
Provide better security	11		
Change the staff	11		
Provide more educational/recreational programs	9		Many people feel that they lack information about events and programs the park offers. A Latina from Flushing said, “I hear about activities from the radio and I’m not sure that I am always hearing everything that is going on. Since I live in Queens, I feel like I don’t know what’s happening out here. It would be good if I could receive an email with updates.”
Provide more publicity about park events	8		
Provide more signs and maps	5		
Provide more shade	4		
Total Responses	286		
N/A	206	Visitors in the West End also feel that since they recreate far away from the center of the park, they are missing information that other park visitors have access to.	
Total	492		

*Food Price and Food Choice*

The majority of people who answered this question feel the food prices are too high, while a number of visitors feel the prices are high but typical of concession stands in public parks and recreation areas.

Nearly half the visitors we interviewed say they would like more healthy food to be offered at the food concessions. Visitors mention items such as salads, yogurts, fresh fruit and lobster roll! A significant number of visitors do not care about the food choices. One reason for this is that many bring their own food to the park. If they buy food, it is an ice cream cone, the park’s famous French fries, or some other stand-alone “treat”. Expectations for healthy food many not be very high in these instances. That being said, some visitors wish that less fried food and junk food were sold at the concessions.

<b>Food Choices — Jones Beach</b>			<b>Food Prices — Jones Beach</b>		
	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Food choices are fine for the beach	31	19	Prices are too high	48	62
Would like more healthy food	44	47	Prices are high, but that is to be expected	16	21
Would like less fried food/junk food	4	4	Prices are reasonable	13	17
Does not care about the food choices	15	16	Total Responses	77	100
Total Responses	94	100	N/A	87	
N/A	70		Total	164	
Total	164				

## Lake Welch, Harriman State Park

### **Locating the Park**

Lake Welch is one of a few mass visitation sites within Harriman State Park, most of which is rugged, rocky woodland characteristic of the Ramapo-Hudson Highlands region. After a period of intensive resource extraction in the nineteenth century, particularly iron mining, much of the Highlands west of the Hudson was purchased by the railroad magnate Edward H. Harriman for use as a private estate. Through the efforts of Mary Averell Harriman and George W. Perkins, the state of New York agreed to accept gifts of land and money to build a park, withdrawing its plan to relocate the Sing Sing Prison to Bear Mountain. Construction of roads, visitor facilities, and other amenities at Bear Mountain/Harriman State Parks was placed in the capable hands of Major William A. Welch in 1912. Over his nearly 30-year tenure, Welch directed the construction of Hessian Lake, Sebago, and 30 other lakes; Seven Lakes Drive and other roads, and the visitor amenities at Bear Mountain. There were major advances in the construction of trails, roads, and other visitor facilities during the 1930s as the Civilian Conservation Corps set crews of hundreds of workers to work. Welch supervised the establishment of 103 woodland camps for city children. Welch designed the Bear Mountain Bridge, the Storm King Highway between West Point and Cornwall, and proposed a parkway to the park from New York City. The Palisades Interstate Parkway was built after Welch's death under the supervision of Robert Moses. Upon his death in 1941 the New York Times called Major Welch the father of the state park movement.

Harriman and Bear Mountain State Parks serve distinct constituencies. One, typified by the scene at Lake Welch, comprises summertime swimmers and picnickers attracted to the park's few mass visitation sites, of which the more famous (and upscale) site is Bear Mountain itself. Another major constituency is the hiker: the park is laced with hundreds of miles of hiking trails maintained in partnership with the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference. A third constituency, a personal favorite of Major Welch, comprises the campers from poor neighborhoods in New York City and elsewhere. Lake Welch is a recent addition to the many constructed lakes within Harriman Park: plans were made in the 1940s, site preparation and filling of the lake got under way in the 1950s and Lake Welch opened to the public in 1962. The year of this study, 2012, is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary season of Lake Welch and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Major Welch's appointment as chief engineer of Harriman/Bear Mountain State Parks.

The original approach to the lake, from Willow Grove Road, climbs from 400 feet above sea level at Exit 14 on the Palisades Parkway to 1,000 feet near the eastern lake shore. After crossing two short causeways over the lake's southern reaches, one comes first to a fishing boat launch and then to the original main entrance. Parking Fields 1 and 2, the first lots to be built, give access to the many picnic tables and grills under the tree canopy, areas called the "Upper Grove" and the "Lower Grove". Trails lead through the picnic groves down to the lakeshore. Field one has a restroom. Field 2 has a level open field of an acre or two adjacent to the parking lot. On the three other sides this field borders groves and tables.

Leaving Fields 1 and 2 and the picnic groves to the right, the entrance road descends to level terrain at the northern edge of the lake. Most of this area is devoted to a very large parking lot, Field 3; the rest to the park's main visitor facilities: beach, beach house, and picnic grounds.

Another approach to Lake Welch was built later from the north is a divided parkway from Exit 16 of the Palisades Interstate Parkway. This is now the main approach to the lake. Field 3 was built to serve visitors entering from the northern approach.

The beach, a long, wide crescent, forms the entire north shore of the lake. While the lake itself could pass for a natural formation, the beach is more evidently a constructed recreational

landscape. The beach has a dozen or so guarded sections, each with a lifeguard tower, but only the few sections closest to the bathhouse were open under the lean operating budget of 2012. Visitors are not allowed to swim anywhere other than in guarded sections of beach. The ends of the beach are used, mainly on Saturdays, for baptisms. Lake Welch is a popular site for adult baptisms performed by evangelical Protestant churches.

At the center of the beachfront is the bathhouse, a 1960s modern wooden structure with spacious shower, restroom, and locker facilities; also a snack bar and supply shop offering beach and cooking supplies that visitors may have forgotten. The concessionaire says he does a good business at Lake Welch, which seems remarkable considering how many of the visitors arrive with their own food and supplies. “They always forget something,” he said.

East and west of the bathhouse are level, square fields enclosed in privet hedge. The field west of the bathhouse is known as the “manager’s panel;” the one to the right as the “concession panel.” The well shaded concession panel is a favorite place for family and church groups to set up. Beyond the concession panel is a larger, level, less shaded area known as the “lagoon,” which refers to an actual lagoon just beyond that separates the public day-use area at Lake Welch from Beaver Pond Campground. The lagoon is another very popular place for people to set up for the day. On the other side of the bathhouse, the manager’s panel is less popular as it has less shade. All three areas have very dry, coarse, patchy grass, the victim of too many feet and Canada geese.

There is a noticeable presence of trash at Lake Welch. Due in part to the way people occupy the space – staying for hours at a time and loaded with food and disposable plates, napkins, utensils, cups, and so on – trash and garbage accumulates fast. There are many trash barrels distributed through the park, although our field researchers thought there were not enough of them in the heavily used picnic areas. Staff often circulate among the picnickers offering plastic garbage bags. The level areas—manager’s panel, concession panel, lagoon, parking lots—are somewhat easier for staff to maintain. In the uneven terrain of the picnic groves, however, litter is more difficult to pick up. Some of the picnickers complained about finding trash lying around when they arrived at their sites in the morning and having to clean the sites themselves.

County	Number	Percent
Bronx	102	21
Manhattan	75	15
Queens	49	10
Rockland	46	9
Westchester	37	8
Brooklyn	32	7
Passaic	29	6
Bergen	24	5
Hudson	22	5
Orange	13	3
Essex	9	2
Other	9	2
NJ Other	8	2
Ulster	5	1
NYS Other	5	1
Staten Island	3	1
Sullivan	2	0
Putnam	1	0
Dutchess	1	0
No Answer	16	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>100</b>



### Residence for Selected Boroughs

Area	No.
<b>Bronx</b>	
South / West Bronx <i>(Mott Haven, Melrose, Univ Hgts, Pt Morris, Morrisania, Belmont-F'dham, Tremont, Longwood, West Farms, Hunts Point)</i>	53
Kingsbridge & Northwest <i>(Kingsbridge, Kingsbridge Hgts, Woodlawn, Riverdale)</i>	20
East Bronx <i>(Soundview, Bx River, Parkchester, Westchester)</i>	19
Northeast <i>(Coop City, Baychester, Wakefield, Edenwald)</i>	9
<b>Bronx total</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Manhattan</b>	
Below 59th Street	9
Upper West Side	7
Hamilton Heights, Washington Heights, Inwood	45
Harlem, East Harlem	11
<b>Manhattan total</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Queens</b>	
Ridgewood, Maspeth, Richmond Hill, Woodhaven, Ozone Park	15
Long Is. City, Astoria, Sunnyside, Woodside	5
Elmhurst, Jackson Hgts, Corona, Forest Hills	20
Flushing	3
Hollis	2
No data	4
<b>Queens total</b>	<b>49</b>

### Profile of Visitors

#### Place of Residence

Lake Welch is popular among Latinos from the northern sections of New York City, especially the Bronx, also northern Manhattan, which, as it happens, hold the major concentrations of the city's Hispanic residents. It is a relatively short drive from upper Manhattan or the Bronx – only half an hour, visitors say. The Palisades Parkway was built to give access to city residents to Bear Mountain and Harriman State Parks and the shortest route in miles is via the George Washington Bridge and Palisades Parkway. Bronx residents may be more likely to take the Thruway and the Tappan Zee Bridge to the Palisades Parkway. Either way, the trip can be made in 30 to 45 minutes. The five counties in New York City contributed 261, or 53 percent, of the 488 visitors in the survey. By county, the Bronx is the largest generator of visitor traffic to Lake Welch, followed by Manhattan. Visitors from Bronx and Manhattan come from predominantly Hispanic/Latino neighborhoods such as Washington Heights and Inwood and South Bronx areas such as Morrisania, Mott Haven, University Heights, and others.

A significant share of the visitors – 21 percent – come from the New York counties immediately north of New York City: Westchester, Rockland, Orange, Sullivan, Dutchess, and Putnam contributed 104 visitors. Another five visitors came from elsewhere in New York, including Suffolk and Greene Counties. Nineteen percent, or 92 visitors, came from New Jersey. Of these, 84 came from four counties: Passaic, Bergen, Hudson, and Essex.

Lake Welch has been attracting Hispanic/Latino visitors for a long time. Several people we spoke with

remember coming as children or talked about their families coming. A woman with a family group at the Concession Panel said "I first came here with my uncles about 40 years ago and I never stopped. Everybody has a good time here. The beach and the lake are clean [compared to Orchard Beach.]" The Latino patronage may go back to the park's first decade, the 1960s. A Latino on Wed, July 25, had been coming here for 45 years: My parents came before me. It's a way of getting away from the city. The air is clean and fresh. You've got water, trees... It's a

getaway.”

<b>Race / Ethnicity — Lake Welch</b>		
Group	Number	Pct
Hispanic / Latino		
Puerto Rican	57	
Dominican	83	
Mexican	24	
South American	32	
Central American	22	
Hispanic not otherwise noted	143	
Hisp / Latino subtotal	361	74
Black / African Heritage	29	7
White	55	11
Asian	16	3
Other	1	0
No data	26	5
Total	48	100

**Race and Ethnicity**

Based on the survey sample of 488 visitors, Lake Welch visitors are self identified as about three-quarters Hispanic/Latino. Eleven percent (55 visitors) were self identified as white and 7 percent (29 visitors) were self identified as black.

**Sex, Age**

There were 266 men and 222 women in the survey. Age was well distributed except for people 61 and more. While older people may be better represented in the park than these figures indicate, it is likely that in any given group, the person who took the survey was a younger or middle-aged adult.

<b>Long / Short-term Visitor</b>		
	Number	Percent
1st time	10	14
0-5 years	27	37
6-10 years	18	24
11-20 years	8	10
21-30 years	3	4
31 or more years	5	7
No answer/ Did not ask	3	4
Total	74	100

**Length of Relationship to the Park**

Among the 74 visitors interviewed, 10 were at Lake Welch for the first time. Twenty-seven had been coming for up to five years, 18 for between six and ten years, and seven had been coming between 11 and 20 years. Nine of the visitors interviewed had been coming for over 20 years.

<b>Age</b>		
	Number	Percent
Adult (31-45)	25	34
Young Adult (21-30)	21	28
Middle-aged Adult (46-60)	20	27
Older Adult (61 and up)	2	3
Youth (0-20)	1	1
No answer/Did not ask	5	7
Total	74	100

**Frequency of Visitation**

The structure of visitation at Lake Welch is for families to come early, establish themselves at a spot of their choice, and stay several hours. On weekends people wanting choice spots will arrive very early. Other members of the family or group arrive later on. People do not generally arrive later than early afternoon. By then, the picnic tables have been claimed, the groups are established, and the pattern is set. In July many leave in late afternoon but many others stay well into the evening. So far as we know there are no separate groups arriving in the evening. However, in addition to the predominant temporal structure of large and very large groups arriving in the morning and staying many hours, we observe a much smaller flow of people, mostly local, who come to the beach to swim and sunbathe, stay awhile, and then leave.

**Activity Groupings — Lake Welch**

Water & Beach	Swimming	426	
	Sunbathing	149	
	Playing in the sand	82	
	Fishing	28	
	Playing ball/frisbee	74	
	Reading	24	783
Cooking, Eating, and being together	Barbecuing	290	
	Picnicking	168	
	Attending party	15	
	Food concession	19	
	Picnic tables/grills	211	
	Games	27	
	Playing cards	1	
	Cruising	1	
	People watching	7	
	Meeting friends/family	45	
	Games	27	811
Sports	Football	6	
	Baseball/softball	21	
	Soccer	63	
	Volleyball	44	
	Sports other	6	140
Nature appreciation	Bird watching	2	
	Enjoying nature	94	
	Fresh air/calm	47	
	Relaxing	268	
	Walking	13	
	Camping	2	426
Religious	Baptism	11	11

**Park Activity**

In the survey, visitors were asked to state their activities that day. The data are reported in the table below, with individual activities grouped into like categories.

Swimming and barbecuing are the predominant activities. Many other activities are not mutually exclusive categories: Playing in the sand, playing ball and/or Frisbee, sunbathing, and reading can all be considered part of the experience of spending time at the beach, even if swimming is the main event.

As with water-beach activities, one finds at Lake Welch a group of interrelated activities that include barbecuing, picnicking, meeting friends and family, playing games, attending a party, and using the park's picnic tables and grills.

Sports activity has been grouped separately but most such games are informal and ancillary either to time spent on the beach or time spent in the picnic areas. Lake Welch does not have dedicated athletic fields; even so, plenty of people say they are or will be playing

sports such as soccer, football, volleyball, and so on. Some of this activity is on the beach but most of it takes place in open areas of level ground such as the manager's and the concessions panels, where games must compete for space with family encampments.

The activity groupings show a rough balance between water-beach activities and the cooking, eating, and socializing that characterize much of the park scene beyond the beach. The water-beach group totals 783 responses, versus 811 in the "Cooking, eating, and being together" grouping. Park visitors, of course, routinely and frequently move back and forth between their family/group encampments and the beach.

"Nature appreciation" includes mainly qualities of the experience that the survey takers recorded in categories such as "enjoying nature" and "fresh air/calm". People have many ways of

expressing such qualities but most such were counted as one or the other. The experience of being at the park can be relaxing (268 responses) no matter what the mix of activities.

Seven of the people interviewed cited walking and/or hiking. Some talked about walking through the hilly picnic areas for exercise while others talked about walking on the trails. We do not know whether these trails are Harriman trails outside of the immediate Lake Welch area but there appears to be some interest among the visitors in hiking and/or walking, which implies that offering and publicizing walking trails, and/or better connecting Lake Welch with the Harriman Park trail system, would serve the needs of some visitors.

## **Park-related Attitudes and Values**

### *How Do Visitors Experience the Park?*

The visitor experience at Lake Welch is characterized by family and religious groups making a place for themselves to spend the day relaxing, swimming, socializing, cooking, eating, and playing games. The park serves as an extension of people's living rooms, kitchens, and backyards. People perform the ordinarily private functions of food preparation, cooking, socializing over dominoes and other games, here in full view of one another. The privacy of domestic functions, sequestered indoors and in backyards, or in private clubs, that characterizes middle class American life, is not a factor in the cultural life at Lake Welch. Here, little is hidden; there is no embarrassment at hanging out in this public setting. The barbecue, smoke, food, music, laughing and talking, children playing everywhere, and so on, are the practices of the setting that are widely recognized, shared, and reciprocated by the various participants.

The scene is similar from one location to another within the park. On a Sunday in July at 9:30 in the morning in the Lower Grove, a field researcher writes...*a volleyball net has been constructed and a large group of men and women are engrossed in the game, laughing and playfully chiding anyone who misses the ball. Across the trail I count a total of nine groups, all of whom have barbecues going. At this hour only one group has music playing, which the researcher recognizes as the famous Mexican corrido, "I Continue to be King," an old-fashioned song that speaks to the identity politics of many Mexican men.*

*Here and elsewhere, children wander in and out of groups as they play, making friends and ignoring the concept of personal space that most adults take so seriously. A woman comes down from the hills with a bunch of dry branches to be used for cooking, and as she approaches her group's spots a man from the group who is borrowing lighter fluid from a neighbor. I sit and watch them struggle to get the fire going, fanning it with a piece of cardboard gathered from the ground.*

*Nearby, a family has a nice view of the lake from their spot as the barbecue and table is located close to the edge of the cliff. The family is using only one table but have several camping chairs set up. Two women are busy cooking chicken on the barbecue, and three young children are walking around the site exploring the area. Later, [during an interview] the children move down the hill to the next group and begin making a fuss over an infant there. As I walk up some of the women are eating tortas de jamon with avocado, and almost immediately upon arriving they put a sandwich together for me. The family all laugh when I agree to adding jalapeños to my sandwich. A large amplifier is playing some very old fashioned Mexican corridos, perhaps as a*

*way of nailing the family's national origin to the mast. The children wear bathing suits as do two of the women and two of the men. The respondent for the interview (perhaps the patriarch today) is wearing pants, cowboy boots, and a long sleeved shirt.*

On Saturday in the concession panel, a large Latino group has commandeered three tables and are cooking hamburgers and ribs. The mood is relaxed and friendly. Children run through the space. Four men sit playing at dominoes. Two other men are busy cooking, and three young teenagers remain attached to the apron strings of an interviewee. An old woman sits by herself in a beach chair while two other women talk about someone at work who has annoyed them. There is beer and wine, and some of the adults are drinking out of plastic cups.

Nearby, in the "Lagoon" (the field between the lagoon and the beach), another field researcher observes... *how people seem to group themselves around the trees, organizing the tables to take advantage of what shade can be had. The largest groups take the center of the area and the smaller locate themselves along the margins and along the lagoon. By 9:40 in the morning almost no tables are left, although there is some available space.*

One man comments, ". We do that too. There is something special about this place that breeds that kind of behavior. This place has many Latinos. We naturally gravitate towards them when we hear people speaking Spanish. It's a normal human reaction. This place is good for families. Sometimes when people are leaving they want to share [unused] items." On the beach promenade, a Jamaican man comments, "I enjoy coming here because everybody is welcome. I see families, little children, young people playing games. It's a good place, a happy place."

Another field worker, working in the Upper Grove writes, *One thing that jumps at you is how big the visiting groups are. The smallest group has 10 members while the larger groups – usually church groups – have more than 100 people in them. This makes tables and grills a hot commodity. Groups line up at the gate before the park even opens to assure they will have the tables they need for the day's events. In this regard, the "early bird gets his worm" must be the motto of Lake Welch. Also in Lake Welch there is no limit to how many tables one can snatch. One church group I looked at had over 30 tables. They had lined the tables up to form a circle: it reminded me of an encampment of pioneers in their Conestoga wagons, as you see in old Westerns. I saw another group which had some 20 tables. At first I couldn't make out whether it was a church group or summer camp since they all had the same shirts and had brought their own volleyball net. As it turns out they were actually one huge family who had come out to celebrate the 100th birthday of their great grandmother.*

Reflecting on the same phenomenon, as another field worker writes, *Everybody at the Upper Grove has at least a table. From what I can tell, the early groups accommodate later groups. I saw a number of instances where it happened that a newly arrived group would request a table from an adjoining group. This I think speaks to willingness to share things amongst people in the park – not just tables but all types of stuff, from cooking material, to cups, balls, and even food.*

A West Indian group, also in the Upper Grove, on a weekday has gathered over 30 park tables. *They have brought their own volleyball, a number of sun tents, and have five or six barbecues going at once. They are located right at the heart of the upper grove near the open field by parking field two. At first I thought this was a church group, both because of the size of the group and the fact that they were wearing the same yellow shirt. It turns out to be a family reunion including extended family and friends – 145 in all, they tell me. The writer continues, I am struck by the case that some family member would come in really early to get tables and grills and wait for other family members who would bring food and drinks. One person told me about how they would alternate between family members, so that it wasn't always the same family member getting up at six o'clock in the morning to secure tables at Lake Welch. I also notice the organization of work here-- men, mostly, involved in the cooking, women preparing*

*the food and supervising the children.* Quite a few of the Hispanics recall the fun they had on an occasion when the rain made them leave the place and they still managed to have a great time.

A park that people return to over time will hold many meanings. To find out what the park means to people we have, in the past, asked “Does the park have any special meaning for you?” This time we tried a different route to get at meaning: the question asked was “What is your best memory of Lake Welch?” The answers were coded according to the categories in the table below. There were 88 responses, meaning that some respondents cited more than one thing and others, especially first-time visitors, had nothing to say.

Because of the way the question was asked, many responses fit into the “personal/family event/experience” category. Such a memorable event might be an encounter with wildlife: as one Russian woman said, “The best day was finding a turtle in the road on the way here. I took it out of the road and brought it here. The rangers thanked me when I showed it to them. They took it and released it into the lagoon. You could see that they cared about the environment.” Another visitor was excited to have seen three turkey vultures that very day. Another type of event people recalled was getting through a downpour; looking back, it seemed good to have withstood the rain and continued to have a good time, especially if the weather cleared later on.

The next largest group involves family and parenting—for example, “Coming with family and friends, there is really only one day (Sunday) that we can see each other.” The “nature experience” category refers not to specific events but to the more general experience of being in a beautiful, natural place with clean water, trees, hills, and forest all around. For some visitors the park reminded them of their own childhood experiences elsewhere: as one Mexican couple explained, “It reminds us of playing outside in Mexico when we were children.” The meaning also might lie in childhood memories here at Lake Welch—for example, “Coming here with my parents when I was a kid on Sundays. We’d have four or five cars of family in a caravan (sic) every Sunday. Just having all the family together every Sunday, knowing it would happen. It was something to look forward to.”

For a number of people the meaning of the park was religious. One man said, “The first time I came here was for my sister’s baptism. I was new to the church but it was a special day. It was the first time I knew for certain that I could commit myself to God. It happened right over there.”

### *Social Diversity*

The idea of a Latino community, or of a wider community of mainly nonwhite urban people with family roots in other or countries in rural parts of this country, is present among Lake Welch visitors. For many of the visitors, particularly the Hispanic/Latino visitors, the Lake Welch experience involves participating in a familiar set of cultural practices in this relatively safe public space. People remark on how connected they feel to one another even though they are strangers. The Spanish language and familiar cultural practices of other visitors give people a strong sense of community. They talk in particular about borrowing things back and forth, lending lighter fluid, matches, fuel, food, even picnic tables. Here, as perhaps not at home in the city, children can play freely. As one field researcher observed in the concession panel, the children move freely around between theirs and neighboring spots. Nobody told them to come back, or shooed them away, as they mingled with other children. One male visitor remarked, “People here are very nice...Whenever I need a lighter for the BBQ somebody lends me one.” Another observed, “This place has many Latinos. We naturally gravitate towards them when we hear people speaking Spanish. It’s a normal human reaction.”

The question about social diversity was trying to get at whether visitors felt welcome, whether they perceived any conflict among different visitor groups, and whether they themselves bore any ill will toward other groups of visitors. Given the community sensibilities here, it is not

surprising that most people felt welcome themselves and saw no conflicts. As one said, the park is "...safe. The police check everything. There's not a lot of drinking. This is a family place, a good place." A woman in the concession panel said "People share their stuff or leave it for the next person. People are more outgoing here. We talk to each other. More outgoing and friendly than Orchard Beach." And a man remarked, Lake Welch is "...a large Latin community. Nobody is offended by other people's music. The only thing we fight over is tables and grills (laughing)."

### *Changes Over Time*

In response to the "changes" question, people were overwhelmingly positive. Of the 37 whose answers fall into the "no change" category, many added something like "and that's a good thing." People felt the park was a good place and, if it had changed at all, had changed for the better: seven thought it was cleaner, four thought facilities had been added, and three cited improvement without specificity. As one visitor put it, Lake Welch is always "...the same. It's the same every time. It's beautiful."

### **Visitor Views on Public Parks**

With so much public discourse about declining budgets, closing public facilities including parks (e.g., Lake Sebago beach was closed in 2012), corporate sponsorships in public space, and privatization of public space, we asked users whether they thought it important that places like Lake Welch be public. Of those who answered the question, only one suggested erecting some sort of barrier, such as privatization of the park, to get a better class of visitors. Everyone else agreed with the question's implication—yes, *public* parks are important. Most people based their response in fairness and cost, saying that people with limited means should have beautiful, welcoming places like this to get together with their families and friends. In this vein people said this is "the only place that city dwellers can come to," and that "we need places for people without a lot of money: it's very important for our families. Without spaces like Welch we would have very few options;" and "We come from New York City and there is no place like this there." The fairness idea is exemplified by the comment "...everyone can come, regardless of their race or culture." Racial barriers were implied in the response "Public means everybody can come in. If it is private only white Americans would be allowed and we, Latinos would be excluded."

A few said the exposure to nature was important for their children. A larger number thought that pursuing their recreational activities in this particular natural setting had a salubrious effect, that one can "get the stress off " by relaxing with others here in this natural and highly sociable setting. A woman in her 70s, at the lagoon with several younger adult family members, points out the contrast between the outdoor environment at Lake Welch and their daily life in the room where they live. The park gives her the chance to clear her mind (*despejarse*). She says, "... we like the beach, the water, and we live closed within a room (*encerrados*)". Here, we get to go out."

### **How Do Visitors Evaluate the Park?**

Visitors were mainly happy with the park staff. One woman, becoming emotional in telling the story, praised the lifeguards and rangers for pulling everybody out of the water one time when a child was lost. Happily the child was found. A man said, "They do a good job here. They should ask for more money to improve the place. A lot of people use this place." A Russian woman

### Lake Welch — Rating of Facilities and Services

	Excellent – 4	Good – 3	Fair – 2	Poor – 1	NA – 0
Staff Courtesy & Helpfulness	39	20	3	1	10
Cleanliness of Restrooms/ Bathhouse	19	26	15	5	8
Conditions of Roads and Parking Lots	28	25	9	0	11
Usefulness of Signs/Maps	26	15	5	3	25
Conditions of Buildings	17	21	8	2	25
Cleanliness of Outdoor Areas	34	23	10	2	5
Safety and Security	41	19	6	1	7
Access to Information	11	10	0	0	53

gave this blunt assessment: “You get the picnic area and the beach. Downstate you can’t have both. It’s inexpensive, the lake is clean, and the rangers are not assholes.” Negative comments about park staff were in regard to checking for alcohol: some people didn’t like the “vigilance” and one or two saw a contradiction in selling alcohol at the park store but not letting people drink it elsewhere in the park.

Bathroom cleanliness received the lowest ratings. People felt the bathrooms should be cleaned more often. They disliked the stench and flies. Some remarked that they found the bathrooms already dirty early in the day. On the cleanliness of grounds, one field worker observed that even those who give low ratings on outdoor cleanliness will say that cleanliness is one of the reasons why they choose the park. We think that when people say, as many do, that the park is clean, they refer to the larger environment characterized by woodland, lake, and clear air, and not to the immediate conditions on the ground.

Safety and security ranked very high. Access to information and usefulness of signs and maps had low participation rates—that is, many “NA”s, meaning either “no answer” or “not applicable.”

Overall visitors like Lake Welch. At the favorable end of the scale, one Mexican man told the field researcher that the first time he saw this place he was shocked: “I had never seen such a beautiful place in this country in years. It has become my favorite place in the U.S. when I want to spend time with my family.”

#### Improvements

Visitors were asked about any improvements they would make to the park and whether they had seen changes over time. Of the 74 persons interviewed, 24 suggested some improvement in facilities or services. For example, umbrella rentals, chair rentals, boat rentals. Another asked for basketball, observing that Hispanic people like playing basketball and volleyball. Several



were interested in boats. Two recalled there being pedal boats in the past. One father expressed interest in swimming lessons and junior life guard training.

<b>Desired Improvements — Lake Welch</b>		
	Number	Percent
Improve/add facilities/services	24	32
More/bigger grills/ tables/better table maintenance	18	24
Playground	13	18
Cleaner grounds	12	16
None	11	15
Other	11	15
Cleaner bathroom	9	12
More shade	6	8
Educational/recreational programs	5	7
Staff changes	3	4
Reopen closed park facilities/guarded beach sections	3	4
Less trash/litter	3	4
More trash barrels	2	3
Lower prices	2	3
More publicity/information about park/park events	1	1
Pavement/potholes	1	1
	124	

Eighteen people wanted more grills, more tables, larger grills, or better maintenance of existing tables. Thirteen people suggested a playground. Twelve wanted cleaner grounds, 11 cleaner bathrooms, and six asked for more shade trees

#### Healthy Food

We had very few responses on this question. Two of the field workers skipped over it, thinking that people here have their own food. The one field worker who did ask about food service quality, food prices, and healthy choices, found many responses saying it did not apply to them. Others said the food was OK, and a few said they should have healthier choices.

## Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park

### **Locating the Park**

Opened in 2009, Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park is a unique addition to the New York State park system. The park is only three years old, but already many visitors have developed a strong attachment to it.

The walkway rises 212 feet above the Hudson River and is 1.28 miles long, making it the longest elevated footbridge in the world. The site is approximately 85 miles from New York City and 75 miles from Albany. Visitors walk, bike, take the train, and drive to Walkway Over the Hudson.

The concrete bridge deck is 25 feet wide, and is enclosed by a four and a half foot high railing which provides adults an unobstructed view of the Hudson Valley and sufficient safety for small children. Along the railing posted placards convey the history of the bridge and facts about the local ecology. In addition to reading the information on the placards, visitors can access the information by calling into the "Talkway" program on their cell phones.

The ample width of the walkway provides for a lively social scene on the bridge and for diverse forms of movement along it. During the week one is likely to see pairs of women, elders, and small groups of shirtless male college students jogging over the bridge. Women pushing babies in strollers or pulling them in wagons may also be seen briskly walking on the bridge; it is part of their exercise regime. At lunch time, pairs and small groups of men and women in work attire stroll along the deck while appearing to be deeply engaged in conversation. As the afternoon goes on, teenagers appear on bicycles and middle-aged dog walkers also come out for a stroll.

During the weekend, the bridge deck is extremely busy. There is a mixture of people moving at different speeds. Individuals, couples, and small groups move at a leisurely pace. They often stop to look over the bridge, take a photograph, put a small child back onto a tricycle, or clean up after a pet on a leash. At the same time, bicyclists weave through the groups, sometimes calling out to walkers to warn them of their approach. A unicyclist goes back and forth on the Highland side of the bridge, smiling and waving to other visitors. A dog in a frilly dress sits up in a stroller as if she is people-watching and greeting on-lookers while enjoying the stroll. Some visitors are dressed in comfortable clothing and footwear that suggests they are prepared for a long walk. Others are more dressed up, suggesting that their visit to the bridge is in addition to attending another event, or they view a walk on the bridge as a special occasion.

On the weekend, the scene on both ends of the bridge are lively as well. Both ends have open spaces with concession stands, picnic tables, resting benches, bathrooms, and drinking water for pets. The Poughkeepsie side has slightly more shade than the Highland side, and it is slightly less animated. Couples maybe found chatting over cups of coffee at the tables, and individuals resting on the benches may be checking tour guidebooks or meditating for a moment. Larger groups often meet and hang out in the parking lot such as members of a Harley Davidson motorcycle club and families meeting up with other families for a communal walk across the bridge.

On the Highland side, in addition to the concession stands, picnic tables, a bathroom, the Walkway organization maintains the West Pavilion, a shed serving several functions. Here park ambassadors (volunteers) meet up before heading out on the bridge to help visitors. Visitors

come to the pavilion to get information about the park, and the Walkway stores bikes, wheel chairs, pamphlets, and other materials and equipment. The Ambassadors sell walkway memorabilia at the pavilion. The pavilion makes the west side of the bridge seem like a primary meeting place and a place for holding special events. For example, craft fairs, fundraisers, and musical performances are often held in this area. Even though the space is small, some groups are so enthusiastic about creating community that they set up microphones to amplify their message. Sometimes the amplifiers drown out intimate conversations happening at the picnic tables among families and cyclists who are taking a break.

The Ambassadors contribute to the animated vibe on this side of the park. They are outgoing and friendly individuals who eagerly greet newcomers to the park and strike up conversations with regular visitors, many of whom they know. They add vitality to the open space on the west side, making it a place where there is much socializing and laughter, and a place where relationships are forged.

Another area in the park that is associated with lively social interaction is the midpoint of the bridge. This area of the walkway is slightly wider than the rest of the bridge. It offers several lookout areas and benches for resting. Visitors often linger at this point on the bridge, taking pictures, and striking up conversations with other visitors and volunteers. But some visitors find the area to be a prime spot for people-watching as well as observing the boats and trains passing underneath the bridge, the big open sky, and the foliage and mountains of the valley. These individuals sit on the benches watching, thinking, and keeping to themselves. Some do not wait for a spot on a bench to open up; they sit silently on the ground. Indeed, the view of the valley from this point of the bridge is so stunning that some are prompted to talk about it while others prefer to contemplate it in silence.

Another aspect of Walkway Over the Hudson that prompts conversation and reflection is the bridge's interesting history. It was first opened in 1889 as the Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge. At the time, it was the longest bridge in North America, and the first to cross the Hudson between Albany and New York. According to a 2009 article in the New York Times, "In its early years it was one of the longest bridges in the world and, at 6,700 feet, is still impressively long, shorter by 2,200 feet than the Golden Gate Bridge and longer by the same amount than the Sydney Harbor Bridge. Its length and dizzying height, 212 feet, contribute to accolades even today. 'It's phenomenal what they were able to achieve during that period,' said Mr. Melewski, a partner in the engineering firm Bergmann and Associates [who designed and supervised construction of the walkway]. 'It's quite a landmark. It had a lot of firsts.'"<sup>1</sup> This sturdy steel and iron structure played an important role in facilitating the movement of raw goods from the west to industrial centers in New England. For various reasons, mostly the decline in rail freight once the interstate highway system came into being, traffic on the bridge declined. In 1974, sparks from a train started a fire on the creosote-soaked wooden planks around the tracks on the then-poorly maintained bridge. Fire fighters could not pump up water to the bridge fast enough. As a result, the fire destroyed the railbed. The owner at the time, the bankrupt Penn Central Corporation, eagerly petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission to agree to close the bridge. In this case, the ICC agreed, and the bridge never again saw rail service.

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<sup>1</sup> Negroni, C. (2009). Poughkeepsie Journal: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Makeover for a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Wonder. New York Times. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/25/nyregion/25metjournal.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/25/nyregion/25metjournal.html?_r=0)

Although trains could no longer cross, residents of Poughkeepsie and Highland never lost their connection to the bridge. By the mid-1980s, dirt trails to the bridge were covered by overgrown bushes, and trees from the river bank were growing up through the broken train tracks. Nonetheless, people continued to visit the bridge. The dangers associated with the public walking out on the decrepit structure and pieces of the ties falling on boaters below raised concern among residents and town officials. However romantic and intriguing the burned out bridge appeared, it was clearly not a safe place for the public.

In 1992, local citizens formed an association to advocate for transforming the bridge into a walkway and a safe place for the public to visit. This organization, Walkway Over the Hudson, worked tirelessly for the next fifteen years to create community support and to raise funds for the project. During this time, the organization gained control over the bridge and became the bridge's primary source of maintenance and protection. In the late 2000s, Walkway Over the Hudson entered into a public-private partnership with the Dyson Foundation and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation to rebuild the bridge for contemporary pedestrian use. Construction on the Walkway began in 2008, and the park officially opened in 2009.

Plans for expanding recreational opportunities at Walkway Over the Hudson continue to develop. Soon, an elevator will be installed on the Poughkeepsie side of the bridge so that visitors arriving by train or from downtown Poughkeepsie will be able to quickly get up to the bridge deck. There are also plans to connect the park to the Dutchess County rail trail in Poughkeepsie. These plans highlight how Walkway Over the Hudson is viewed by many in the region as an exciting, new tourist destination. However, the walkway does much more than provide a new outlet for tourism. It contributes to the health and well-being of many regular visitors. It is a symbol of social progress and a beacon of hope for long awaited economic development in the region. It is a site where community forms and the cultural identity of New York State residents is expressed. Evidence of these contributions from the walkway is described below.

## **Profile of the Visitors**

### *Where are the visitors from?*

Place of residence for the 182 persons in the sample for whom we have residence data can be summarized as follows:

- 62 percent are from Ulster and Dutchess counties, including:
  - 23 percent of the total from two Poughkeepsie area zip codes alone;
- 15 percent came from downstate areas,
- 8 percent came from New Jersey and other bordering states, and
- 13 percent from elsewhere in the United States or from other countries.

It is significant for the Walkway that 38 percent of visitors in the sample came from farther away than the Dutchess-Ulster home territory. As some Walkway Ambassadors told us, some visitors hear about the Walkway and combine a visit here with visits to other touristic sights in the vicinity.

Place of Residence — Walkway	
New York City	9
Long Island	2
Westchester-Putnam-Rockland-Orange	16
Downstate subtotal	27
Ulster County	
New Paltz 12561	5
Highland 12528	16
Ulster other	22
Ulster subtotal	43
Dutchess County	
Hyde Park 12538	5
Wappingers Falls 12590	5
Poughkeepsie city 12601	19
Poughkeepsie suburban 12603	23
Dutchess other	17
Dutchess subtotal	69
Upstate	4
New Jersey	
Penn, Mass	5
Bordering states subtotal	15
Other states	21
Other countries	3
Other subtotal	24
missing data	2
Total	184

## Race / Ethnicity

The Walkway survey sample was about 80 percent white.

Race/Ethnicity — Walkway		
	Number	Percent
White	147	79%
Hispanic/Latino	12	6%
African American/Black	13	7%
Indian and Other South Asian	2	1%
Asian/Chinese/Korean	7	4%
Native American	4	2%
Total	184	

## Sex

One would expect to find men and women at the walkway in proportion to their numbers in the general population, or approximately half and half. In our sample, men outnumber women 98 to 86. We attribute this to the predominance of men among the volunteer survey takers who either found it easier to approach other men or who had more success surveying men than women.

## Age

The age distribution is strikingly weighted toward older people. Adults 61 and older comprise 41 percent of the survey sample, as compared to 12 percent at Jones Beach and three percent at Lake Welch. The 46-to-60 group is 28 percent which matches that at Jones Beach (28%) and Lake Welch (27%). The larger proportions of older people at Walkway result in correspondingly smaller proportions of younger people as compared to Jones Beach and Lake Welch.

Age — Walkway		
	Number	Percent
Youth (0-20)	3	2
Young adult (21-30)	22	12
Adult (31-45)	32	17
Middle-aged adult (46-60)	51	28
Older adult (61+)	76	41
Total	184	100

## Size and Composition of Visitor Group

Based on the results of the qualitative interviews with 41 visitors, nearly half report coming to the walkway with a spouse, partner, or with members of the immediate family. A small portion of people say they come with a friend or by themselves. Compared to the size of visitor groups at Jones Beach and Lake Welch, groups at Walkway Over the Hudson are small.

The park has only been open for three years; therefore, it is expected that many visitors would not have very long relationships to the park. Thirty percent of the sample—56 people—were on their first visit to the walkway. Nearly all the rest came frequently, either several times a week (48 people) or several times a month (70 people). Among these two groups of regular visitors, 29 said they come in other seasons too.

Frequency of Visitation		
	Number	Percent
First visit	56	30
Several times a week (1-5 times)	48	26
Several times a month (1-5 times)	70	40
Other	10	5
	184	100

Group size	
Group size	Number of persons
2	69
1	54
4	20
3	20
5	9
6	4
8	3
10	2
52	1
40	1
7	1
Total	184

## Activities

In the visitor survey we asked people what they were doing. The question was broken down into a “mode of movement” part and a “while doing that” part. In other words, this is a space for a) moving through and b) noticing and doing things while moving through the space. As shown in the “Mode of Movement” table, people walking comprised 82 percent of the survey participant responses. The other categories—dog walking, running, cycling, and the rest—collectively comprise only 18 percent. However, very likely the sample is skewed toward more approachable visitors. Walkers and dog walkers are comparatively approachable, while cyclists,

Mode of Movement Through the Walkway		
	Number	Percent
Walking	149	69
Dog Walking	18	8
Running/Jogging	22	10
Cycling	15	7
Roller Skating	4	2
Walking with children/stroller	9	4
	217	100

runners, roller skaters, and others engaged in fast movement or exercise (or both) are more difficult to catch. Having spent some hours on the Walkway, we think the proportions of cyclists and runners should be higher than they are.

As visitors move through the space in one way or another, what else do they do? Some answers to that question appear in the second part of activity responses.

**Park Related Attitudes and Values**  
*How Do Visitors Experience the Park?*

The park caters to at least two different populations—local residents and tourists. Visitors in these categories tend to experience the park in distinct ways.

<b>What People Do While Moving Through the Walkway</b>			
	Activity	Number	Percent
Most report looking at the scenery:	Observing scenery/leaves	142	86
...and/or.....	Observing the river	144	87
While looking, some are.....	Taking pictures	63	38
A few report.....	Bird watching	21	13
	Reading the information placards	73	44
Nearly half report.....	Concession stand	20	12
Some would visit a.....	Picnicking/ Eating	14	9
A few were.....			
And, while engaged in these activities, many were.....	Socializing	101	61

**Local Residents**

Local residents tend to emphasize the physical and mental health benefits gained by walking and exercising on the bridge. A number of local residents place the greatest value on the physical benefits and view the beautiful scenery as enhancing their opportunity for exercise. For example, a middle-aged African American man talks about walking the bridge religiously as a means of preventing having another stroke. In addition to the benefit of physical exercise, the bridge is mentally therapeutic for this visitor. He says, “The bridge is my sanctuary. I love the water. I don’t want to go in the water, but I love looking at it. It helps me think, make sense of my life.” Another visitor who runs over the bridge several times a week recognizes the faces of other regular visitors. This motivates her to exercise on the bridge as does the scenery of the surrounding environment. She talks about picking up the pace of her run when she gets to the bridge because the air is cool and the wind makes her feel alive. Another Highland resident uses the bridge to add variety to her exercise regime. She says, “I love looking at the boats and down at the water, and the houses. I love being outside like this. It’s a backup plan for not going to the gym. Sometimes it’s too nice outside and I don’t want to be inside, so I come here.”

Another avid female walker emphasizes that the walkway makes her feel safe compared to other places she occasionally goes to for exercise. She says, “Everybody here is very friendly. Luckily everyone I come across lets me pet their dog and they are very friendly. Some of the parks that I go to I worry about some of the people there. But I’ve never come across anybody who made me feel uncomfortable or unsafe on the walkway. I think it’s that there are the types of people who just walk here to have a peaceful experience and to free their mind of whatever is on it, especially when you are working out. I think one of the reasons I come to the walkway is because I feel safe and I can get lost in my thoughts. It’s a very peaceful place.”

Only one person mentions a negative health issue related to the walkway. A 50 year old Latina from Poughkeepsie says, “I walk here and at Vanderbilt and this is the difference for me: Vanderbilt is nice. It’s got grass. Although this is beautiful, it’s so hard on the feet. My feet hurt now. I know that my feet are going to hurt even more by the time I get home. It’s because of the type of surface that is here. Vanderbilt is much softer.”

If a portion of local residents appreciate the walkway as an inspirational site for exercise, another portion of local residents appreciate the walkways first and foremost as a place to enjoy beautiful scenery. Taking a walk and having a view seems to be secondary to the power of the scenery. Some visitors, for example, cannot emphasize enough the beauty of the area. An elder from Poughkeepsie says, “I enjoy its beauty. It’s soothing, makes me feel high. I enjoy the beauty of God’s creation more than I used to because I appreciate it more here.” Another middle-aged resident of Poughkeepsie says, “It’s just an amazing walk. You forget your problems; it’s such an amazing view.” Another individual attests to the therapeutic values of the visual scenery. He says, ““Even my friend who has a fear of heights can get on the bridge. It’s not a problem because the scenery is so alive!”

For some, the view reminds them of happy times in their lives. They are compelled to go back to the park in order to reconnect with those memories. For example, a middle-aged couple reports, “We look at the foliage, the water, and we try to locate the church that we got married in. This is the backdrop to our wedding.” A 29 year old woman says, “The walkway is sentimental. It’s one of the places I used to go to a lot with my ex-husband and my son. So we love coming here. It’s kind of a neutral place where I still come with him and my son. It’s so beautiful. It makes for a better time and for a peace of mind.”

A number of people talk about the walk on the bridge as prompting them to think about changes in the natural environment. For example, many people are inspired by views of the changing colors of the foliage. This reminds visitors that the seasons are changing, and time is marching on. Others talk about enjoying watching the changing patterns of the clouds and waves in the water.

A number of people talk about taking pleasure in peering in on other people’s lives as they cross the bridge. One visitor talks about enjoying the view of people’s “tiny backyards.” A 59 year old visitor from the suburbs says that views from the bridge of the surrounding built environment make him dream about a life that he would like to have but probably never will achieve. He says, “South of the river there’s a house that I want to buy....I lust after that one.” A music teacher from Poughkeepsie also talks about enjoying a view of a nearby park that is being built. She likes to take note of the changes that are taking place in the area.

Without a doubt, the bridge is a symbol of community pride for many local residents. Residents who grew up in the area remember the bridge when trains used to cross it, and they are proud that citizens were able to turn the bridge into a historic site. One elder from Poughkeepsie says, “I grew up in the area and I remember this place when it was a railroad bridge. I remember the fire in ’74. So I have 35 years of memories of trains going over. I’ve seen a lot of development in this area, but now it’s just exciting to walk the bridge, and you know, just look at the scenery, enjoy the four seasons, watch the leaves change in the fall.” A much younger Highland resident shares this same sense of pride. She says, “I used to work at a retail outlet in Poughkeepsie and I remember having handouts for the walkway way back when they were making plans to rebuild the bridge. It’s kind of nice to see that all of the hard work paid off.” A Poughkeepsie resident’s sense of pride comes through in her comparison of Walkway to national parks and other popular tourist destinations. This middle-aged Latina school teacher says, “I’ve gone to Yellowstone, to Hawaii, to Europe, and this place just reminds me of how beautiful it is where I live....I am so lucky to be 15 minutes away from here. Yellowstone is



beautiful, but there is no variety as far as the trees. Yellowstone is flat. And here, there's a nice mixture of nature and different things. It's a therapeutic experience just because of the beauty of it all." Residents who participated in the Walkway Over the Hudson association especially feel a sense of pride. One visitor says, "I was in the salvage business and one of my dreams was to tear the old bridge down. Since I used to be a salvage driver I knew how to do that type of job. But I found myself here 4-5 years before the walkway was built with my truck removing planks and ties, putting in lights. There were probably a couple of hundred people in the volunteer group and 30-40 of us were workers. It's ironic, a strange coincidence that I went from wanting to tear down the old bridge to now walking on it and loving it."

Another common perception that local residents express is a concern that the grass is always greener—literally—on the other side of the bridge. One resident of Poughkeepsie says, "I think, honestly, they do things more on that side (Highland), and when they do things, it's so much nicer than this side...whereas here, I don't see anything going on here, just one or two vendors, and it just doesn't seem to match the two ends of the place... It would be nice to have a sitting area where you could have coffee, but then it would have to be a place that is aesthetically pleasing to the eye and a little more upscale, like with gardens. I know there is not a lot of sunlight here, but maybe one of the gardening associations could create some kind of little garden on the bridge or just outside here. Again, they have it on that side."

A Highland resident has a similar critique of the development of "his" side. He says, "Poughkeepsie is doing a lot more than Highland to promote the bridge. Highland needs to offer shuttle buses and promote the walkway. Poughkeepsie advertises, but Highland, no."

## Tourists

There are many different kinds of tourists at the walkway. The majority comes from other parts of New York State, and some come from other states and other countries. A few local residents who do not frequently visit the park sometimes express the views of tourists, too. For example, an African American woman from Poughkeepsie says, "I was shocked by the amount of people who walk this area. It's one of the most popular attractions in Poughkeepsie right now. I had a family reunion last year and some of my family wanted to drive to the walkway just to see it. They heard about it, so I brought them here."

Tourists' views overlap with local visitors' views to some extent. For example, many come to the park for the scenery, the fresh air, and the opportunity to walk. Some tourists from counties other than Dutchess and Ulster are excited about the walkway because it expands the lists of tourist destinations in the area. They talk about the region as not having many places to visit other than the Vanderbilt Mansion, Minnewaska State Park, Mohonk Preserve, and the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park.

Some visitors from New York City feel that more could be done to develop tourism related to the walkway. A Latino couple from the Bronx who own a "country" house in Ulster, spoke to us at length about the need to develop more upscale, gourmet restaurants and cafes in Poughkeepsie. They notice a difference in restaurants in Poughkeepsie and New York City in terms of the creativity of menus as well as the pace of service. While they do not wish to impose New York City norms on the restaurant scene in Poughkeepsie, they feel that more could be done to close the gap.

Tourists who are both aware and unaware of the community's role in turning the bridge into a park celebrate the bridge and tend to see it as a symbol of social progress. One visitor from Saratoga had the opportunity to get out on the bridge before it was restored into a walkway. He is amazed by the transformation. He says, "You have here one great engineering feat!... The

scenery here is beautiful and the people of Poughkeepsie are alive and well!" A view of the bridge prompts some visitors to reflect on economic history in the U.S. A tourist from New Hampshire says, "It's so impressive to think about when the bridge was originally built. It took some 3000 people. We need projects like that today. Thinking about when it was built and how many years it would take to build this today, getting the permits, etc. This bridge has special meaning." Some people celebrate the transformation of the bridge because they romanticize the time when the bridge was inoperable. An elder from Croton-on-Hudson says, "I do a lot of kayaking and I kayak under this bridge. I took a lot of pictures of it from underneath when it was decrepit. Well, I took a lot of pictures of all of the bridges that I passed under, but this one has a special feeling of history to me." One visitor who is familiar with the community's role in the development of the walkway says, "Poughkeepsie is a place that has been overlooked, but democracy works. The people saved their own great walkway. They honored it by saving it."

## **Social Diversity**

When asked to describe the social scene at the park, the majority of visitors at Walkway describe the park as a friendly place. Some have the perception that visitors are extremely friendly. One middle-aged woman says, "Since I started walking I've found that people who walk have similar interests...they are so pleasant and friendly...they say hello even if they don't know you, especially if you walk all of the time. A twenty-year old woman from Hopewell Junction also celebrates the friendly atmosphere at the walkway. She emphatically says, "Look at the bridge now! Everyone is having a good time!"

Other visitors have a more tempered view of the friendly social scene at the walkway. A local visitor says, "Most people are friendly. You see some of the same faces every day. Most people, as you go by, will say hello. You say hello back. Some people are just in their own world and just got their headphones on and don't want to be bothered. But most people acknowledge you and say hello, good morning." A Latina from Poughkeepsie echoes this view to some degree. She says, "I think it's a lot like being in New York City where people keep to themselves, but if you see people you know you stop and say 'Hi'. I think people are very respectful of one another. And, there's a lot of diversity up here...you get everybody, families, people by themselves—and people with their dogs in a baby carriage! There's a gentleman who comes every day with a golden retriever. He's not the friendliest person. I've tried talking with him, but what are you going to do?"

When probing a little further by asking visitors to describe the social diversity of the park, the majority of visitors prefer to talk about diversity in terms of age and activity group instead of race, ethnicity, or class. For example, a visitor from Croton-on-the Hudson says "I like the diversity in age and folks that are walking on this bridge. I see diversity and that pleases me." Another visitor says, "This place is bubbling. It's great to see groups of school kids, families, all ages. It's wonderful. I'd say it's the Grand Central Park of Poughkeepsie and this area; the Central Park of this part of New York; it draws everybody across the board." Even people of color in the park tend to express a similar view. A Jamaican visitor says, "You have a wide mixture of people here. You have students, you have elderly folks, I guess doing their daily walks. You have visitors, you have joggers, who are doing their daily exercise. The mixture of people is a good thing. That's what you need.... And then I noticed that most of the people here are very friendly. They say good morning, which you don't find a lot in many places any more. We are originally from Jamaica now living in Toronto, Canada, and we are really sticklers for good manners."

Some individuals include a mention of dogs as part of the overall description of the friendly and socially diverse park. One visitor says, "The dogs are friendly here. I pet them. One dog wanted

to go with us over the walkway. This makes it a different park in that anyone can use it. Some are running, some are jogging. Some are with dogs. There's a lot of different people."

It is possible that the fairly homogeneous view of friendliness at the park and the tendency to avoid describing social diversity in terms of anything other than age and activity group is a facet of the predominantly white demographic at the park. A predominantly white volunteer interview team may have contributed to this outcome as well. As members of a historically privileged cultural group in American society, white visitors' views are sometimes expressed as if they represent a norm. The norm is so strongly felt within a public space that others with different views converge on the norm. We wonder about the possibility of this dynamic in operation since we also heard white visitors express some concern about social diversity in the park. A white resident of Highland puts it this way, "I don't know how to say this and be politically correct, but I definitely hope that the park stays as nice as it is and it doesn't get destroyed because of where it's located. Sometimes people don't appreciate the things around them and they end up getting destroyed." In this expression, "location" is most likely a reference to the non-white and/or working class residents of Poughkeepsie. In short, it is unusual to hear a nearly unanimous and homogenous description of friendliness and social diversity in urban public space in American society. That said, it is fair to say that many visitors deeply appreciate the walkway and feel at home in this space.

### **Visitor Survey: Ratings of Facilities and Services**

As at Jones Beach and Lake Welch, visitors were asked to rate the park on a number of criteria and on a four-point scale, from excellent (4) to poor (1). Results appear in the table below. Survey participants were generous in their ratings although, on some criteria, many people chose "not applicable" rather than give a rating. Among this group are the questions about recreational or educational programming, the food concession, and staff courtesy. People gave "N/A" as a response if they felt they hadn't patronized the food concession or consulted staff. In the case of recreational and educational programming, some of the Ambassadors themselves said they didn't know of any such offerings. Even so, 30 respondents judged the recreational and educational programming to be excellent. This indicates a possible tendency among the survey population—and the visitor population overall—to think of the old childish phrase, "If I can't say something nice, don't say anything at all". People want to say good things about the Walkway.

### **Anticipated Impacts: The Region**

In contrast to Jones Beach where the arrival of more tourists and outsiders is seen by local visitors as an invasion of private space, many visitors at the walkway feel that increased tourism to the walkway would be good for the park as well as Poughkeepsie and Highland towns. Some residents feel that increased tourism at the bridge will boost Poughkeepsie and Highland economies, especially small businesses. Interestingly, some people feel that Poughkeepsie already has enough help, and it is Highland's turn to get a boost. Some feel that increased tourism to Poughkeepsie will help improve the image of the city, projecting a new and needed picture of a clean and safe town.

Only a few people raised a concern that more tourism would result in the need to make a concerted effort to maintain the bridge. These visitors wonder if the staff would have the capacity to maintain the bridge. One local resident of Poughkeepsie complains that the bridge

**Ratings of Facilities and Services — Walkway**

	Excellent - 4	Good - 3	Fair - 2	Poor - 1	N/A
Staff courtesy & helpfulness	103	11	0	0	70
Cleanliness of restrooms	56	39	7	1	81
Condition of bridge surface and parking lots	141	37	3	1	2
Park cleanliness	151	29	2	0	2
Usefulness of signs & maps	109	40	8	0	27
Access to information/publicity about park events and programs	76	44	19	0	45
Safety & security	135	38	6	0	5
Quality of recreational or educational programs	30	13	3	0	138
Ease of parking	111	40	12	1	20
Quality of offerings at food concession	16	24	10	0	134
Prices at food concession	12	13	25	3	131

requires people to pay to park, and it is difficult to park on the street. He wonders if the elevator will have the same effect; he proposes tourists pay for the elevator ride instead of locals paying for parking.

A few people see the bridge as providing a positive health impact to the area by providing a safe place to walk and a closeness among people. One visitor comments, “On the bridge you are one step away from others. Everyone knows about this bridge. It’s a place where there are no worries. No worries about cars, about openings and closings.”

**Impact of Elevator**

Nearly half of the people we interviewed have not heard about the plans to build an elevator. Approximately half of the visitors we interviewed approve of installing an elevator. These visitors anticipate that an elevator will bring more people to the park. Nearly half of the visitors say that the elevator will not impact the way that they use the bridge. They will continue to drive or bike to the bridge. Only three people say that it might change their visitation. One visitor from Westchester says, “If I can get my bike on the train, I will consider taking the train and then the elevator. I don’t like driving up Route 9.” Another person thinks that it might encourage him to come to the park on bike instead of by car. Another person says he will use the elevator to get to get down to the train station.

Only a few people do not approve of the elevator. Three individuals feel that building an elevator is not the best use of tax dollars. One elder resident of Poughkeepsie says “I actually wrote a letter in opposition to the elevator, but then I tore it up. I just think that we have two excellent access points to the bridge already. I know the elevator is paid for, but I just think that money could be use someplace else, either for this project or another. What do we need an elevator for? Will we have it for 12 people? Who is going to operate it? Are we going to operate it in the winter?”

Nearly a quarter of the people we spoke with imagine that the elevator will prompt the need to further develop the water front area and to increase tourist opportunities in Poughkeepsie. One person imagines the elevator will help handicapped individuals have greater access to the bridge. Another individual believes that a fee should be charged for using the elevator.

**Proposed Elevator: Will it Affect Your interest in Visiting the Park?**

Positive Views	Number	Percent	Negative Views	Number	Percent
Will increase my interest (general)	40	30	Will decrease my interest (general)	3	8
Easier access	67	50	Will become more crowded	10	27
Increase the density of visitors	92	61	Will attract another 'element'	12	32
Can change my mode of transportation	9	7	Will be ugly	4	11
May visit at other times/days/seasons	11	8	Parking/food will become more expensive	6	16
Livelier walkway	53	40	Other negative	13	35
Parking will be easier	22	16	Total negative	48	
Other positive	8	6			
Total positive	292				

**Impact of the Dutchess County Rail Trail**

Visitors did not have a lot to say about the proposal to develop the Dutchess County Rail Trail. An equal number of people had heard about the plans as had not heard about the plans. Most people approve of the plan. More than a quarter of the respondents say that the rail trail connection will prompt them to ride their bike to the bridge. A handful of people believe that the trail will have no impact on the way that they visit the walkway. Some people say that the plan will allow them to access a winery, improve their health, or give them more reasons to recreate within the local region. The notion that the trail will motivate many people to prefer recreating in the region over recreating in other areas is expressed by one visitor who says “I think the trail would be wonderful. It seems like it will be very safe. Watch the news in the city—forget it—you can’t even go to Central Park anymore.”

**Improvements**

Overall, visitors love the walkway in its current form and condition. When asked for suggestions for improvement, despite visitors’ overall satisfaction, they have many things to say.

Thirteen out of forty-one visitors commented on the impact of dogs on the bridge. Half of these visitors feel that visitors with dogs do not clean up adequately after their pet. It is suggested that the park install a baggie dispenser at a mid-point on the bridge. Another group feels that dogs create confusion on the bridge. One visitor says, “I don’t know if there is anything to improve. Maybe one thing: I love animals, but the one thing that is a bad note is that even though people are supposed to pick up after their animals, there are droppings that you see along the way. And I know the bridge staff is very good at coming back and forth and picking it up, but that is one of the deterrents for me. And I love animals. But if you got to go, you got to go, and that is a mile and a quarter long bridge. And even when they do pick it up, there is a smear on the deck. And that, in my opinion, is the one negative thing, I could say.”

Another visitor shares a similar view. This avid walker and resident of Highland says, “I know some people clean up after their dogs, but some don’t. It’s a problem and you have to walk with your head down. There are bicycles—I didn’t know that bikes were going to be on it—and then you got the little kids with their bikes, and skateboarders....but really my biggest concern is the dogs. And when it is really hot out, the stench is pretty bad. I’ve seen the bags with the poop in it on the side of the walkway.”

Bikers on the walkway are also troubled by dogs on the bridge. One cyclist says, “The dogs are a problem. If you ride a bike, sometimes the owner is on the right side of the bridge and the dog is on the left side of the bridge, and you don’t see the leash. “

In addition to dog-related problems, a preponderance of visitors mention the issue of signage for the walkway. Seven out of forty-one visitors found the entrances on both sides of the bridge difficult to locate. One visitor suggests having signs to the bridge on highways within a 70-80 mile radius. One visitor says, “It’s not like Niagara Falls which is widely publicized. Everywhere you go there are signs as you enter Canada, as you enter the Toronto airport, there are signs that say “Visit the Niagara Falls.” How I knew about the bridge is I went into the bank to get an account for my daughter. The guy said, “Before you leave, you have to walk the Hudson River bridge. I was here in June, and I don’t recall seeing anything about the Hudson River bridge....there should be something close by as you are approaching there....somewhere coming into the Poughkeepsie-Hyde Park area along the main thoroughfare. You should be having these signs similar to service area signs, “Hilton Hotel...when you do your research for hotels in the area, the Hudson River bridge should pop up.”

This same visitor made some important observations about parking too. She says, “When I was driving to the bridge I was thinking, ‘Do I have to pay??? I don’t know if I have enough money in my pocket.’ That information has to be out there somewhere. The parking signs aren’t clear either. I had to ask about five times, “Where do I park? How do I get onto the bridge?”

In addition to dogs and signs, visitors also mention the need for more bathrooms (one visitor suggests having a bathroom on the bridge), cleaning up the trash on the bridge (one visitor suggests having recycling bins for water bottles on the bridge), and increasing the availability of shade.

Apart from these suggestions, there is a host of issues that no more than one or two individuals mention. Perhaps if the quantitative interview sample were larger, a clearer pattern to these suggestions would be salient.

The suggestions include ideas for building new structures in the park such as new areas for washing hands, a water fountain, an amphitheater for jazz concerts, a garden, and a museum that interprets the history of the region.

Visitors would like to see services improved at the park. For example, some people ask for more wheelchairs and carts. Other would like to see more activities for the public, especially for children. They would like to have educational tours about the history of the bridge. Some feel there could be more concession stands, more up-scale concessions, and more healthy food offered by the concessions.

Some mention that the park could improve the social scene at both the ends of the bridge, but especially the Poughkeepsie side. One visitor suggests that the park host craft fairs and hold more running or athletic competitions.

Some people feel visitors need more education about how to behave on the bridge. For example, some visitors mentioned the need to improve education about respecting lanes on the bridge in order to minimize the confusion. Others feel more pet care education is needed. At times the bridge deck is too hot for dogs’ feet, yet people attempt to traverse the bridge with dogs. One visitor says, “it is really upsetting to see these dogs walking in such extremely hot weather, practically dying. I have dogs and when I see that, I just don’t want to go on the walkway.....maybe they should have a cartoon showing a dog tip toeing on the bridge. I don’t think the park’s sign is big enough. I don’t think people see the sign. It’s terrible, really, to see these dogs that are practically passing out. That really bothers me.”

Finally, some people feel a better job could be done on publicity for the park. Some suggest that the public needs more information about parking fees, about other tourist activities in the area. The park could publicize at the colleges and local hotels, restaurants, and local businesses, and farmers markets.

## Conclusion

The three parks chosen for this study are very different places—one famous for the audacity of its creator, one rather obscure except among its devotees, the third not a park at all in the traditional sense of landscaped grounds but one of a new generation of dissimilar industrial facilities abandoned by capital and redeemed for public use. The popularity of all three attest to people's continuing need for public places for recreation and sociability and for encounters with the natural world.

Jones Beach and Lake Welch, both within an hour's ride from many points in New York City, draw about half their visitation from the city—49 percent for Jones Beach, 53 percent for Lake Welch. Although Lake Welch is known for multigenerational histories among its mainly Latino visitors, Jones Beach has the larger proportion of long-term visitors. At Jones, 33 percent of the ethnographic sample reported coming for 31 or more years, versus only 7 percent of the Lake Welch ethnographic sample. Similarly, 35 percent at Jones had been coming between 11 and 30 years as compared to 14 percent at Lake Welch. Lake Welch had correspondingly higher proportions of newer visitors. Walkway, only three years old, had no long-term visitors. Walkway had a somewhat higher proportion of tourists among its visitors than the other two parks and a markedly higher proportion of older people. Persons 61 or older were 41 percent of the Walkway ethnographic sample versus 12 percent at Jones Beach and 3 percent at Lake Welch. Walkway is, of course, more suited to older people, who enjoy walking for exercise. However, the Walkway research was skewed away from the more mobile visitors—e.g., cyclists and runners—because of the difficulty of stopping them for interviews. As the runners and cyclists are likely to be younger, there are probably proportionally fewer older people at Walkway than our sample would indicate.

While everyday life in modern societies is marked by encounter with strangers, in these parks people tend to regard strangers favorably as fellow citizens. Perhaps visitors feel the choice of park itself is something they share in common with the other visitors. At Lake Welch, the sense of community among the predominantly Hispanic visitors is reinforced by their shared cultural practices. At Jones Beach, where the usership is much more diverse overall, visitors nonetheless remark on the friendliness and courtesy of other visitors. The sense of community among shared values is marked by boundaries: People will say that other visitors, while friendly, are not looking to make new friends at the park but rather to socialize with the people they came with. Even at Lake Welch, which some describe with the sobriquet “one big happy family,” encounters among strangers are mainly limited to borrowing staples, minding children, and other limited interactions. The sense of community extends to self-identity: these parks are a locus of identity formation, as visitors identify with larger social groups by participating with others in shared recreation rituals. It was during an earlier visit to Jones Beach that one visitor, an immigrant, told us he first felt the sense of belonging as an American. Similarly, parents use visits to Jones Beach and Lake Welch as a means of building family and group identity among their children. Visitors also think consciously about these places as desirable social environments, particularly as places (e.g., Zach's Bay) where children can play safely while having experiences of wildlife.



All three parks are important recreation sites but they also figure prominently in visitors' minds as places of nature. In different ways, people come to the parks for encounters with the natural world and to leave some of the stress and time-boundedness of the human world behind them. Another aspect of the parks as material spaces is their histories—not so much for Lake Welch, but at Jones Beach and especially at Walkway, visitors remarked on feeling a connection to history while visiting these parks. Many Jones Beach visitors, aware of the Moses legacy, participate in re-enacting the fabled Jones Beach experience of varied recreational activity among throngs of strangers on a grand stage. Lake Welch is relatively unknown and the experience there is not so much the great world of strangers but that of a familiar cultural and class group: One may not know the people one sees individually but one feels and reciprocates the cultural connection. The Lake Welch visitor, for the most part, is attracted to Lake Welch because of the welcoming cultural vibe. Still, the attraction would not be what it is without the fundamentals of a beautiful wooded setting, a spacious beach, and clean, tranquil fresh water.

Walkway Over the Hudson is a catalyst, a new resource that people worked for a long time to bring into being and that sparks a new excitement and regional pride among its visitors. Where Jones Beach was provided to the public by the audacious beneficence of the god-like Moses; and Lake Welch by government as it worked at mid-century, turning out formulaic facilities for a burgeoning public with rapidly increasing leisure time; Walkway is the work of citizen activism reclaiming one of the many artifacts abandoned by the retreat of domestic industrial production. At Walkway, many visitors are touched by the successful adaptive reuse of a landmark structure from the industrial age. Many love looking at the bridge, recalling its history, and marveling at its popularity. At the same time the walkway is a key locus of recreation and regular exercise for many local people. And while a diverse population visits the bridge, the walkway is especially beloved by elders in the region who have special memories of the bridge before it burned, and who rely on the bridge daily because it provides a safe place for exercise and an especially lively social scene.

Across the board, the parks are beloved, but for different reasons and by diverse sets of people. We found surprising aspects of each park: For example, Jones Beach is assumed to be a Long Island park, but about half the visitors come from the five boroughs of New York City, especially the boroughs physically on Long Island but we also found substantial representation from Manhattan and the Bronx. It is also assumed to be a beach/recreation site, but knowing and making sense of the park's historical value is an important part of many visitors' experience.

Those who know of Lake Welch at all consider it to be largely the resort of Bronx residents. While the Bronx sends the biggest delegation by county, Lake Welch visitors also come in large numbers from other boroughs and from nearby Latino communities in New Jersey. At the same time, Lake Welch continues to be important to local people in Rockland County and nearby for recreation and religious reasons. This park is primarily thought of as a recreational spot valued by its visitors for the sociocultural scene, and not a historic site. But, in fact, the park is the site of many local histories. It is full of families that tell their histories through years of experiences in the park.

It is the right of every American to have access to and to enjoy safe, just, and inclusive public space where there is respect for and value of the dignity of each individual. In its quest to wrest expenditures from the citizen as consumer, the "private sector" offers a multiplicity of places to

go and do things, all of them programmed to manipulate one's feelings. Public parks offer a respite from commercial machinations and, to varying degrees, remain mostly free of commercial sponsors. The three parks in this study all offer people the chance to construct their own meanings as they pursue their spatial practices. It is the role of government to provide such spaces, and to support and protect the resources and processes within them that foster an inclusive society. Public parks are among the primary settings where American values are expressed and upheld, and where American cultural identity is nourished. However, decreasing funding for the maintenance and development of public parks threatens the availability of these spaces that are so central to American life. The Alliance for New York State Parks believes studying the ways that citizens use, perceive, and value public parks can remind us of the importance that public parks have to American society, and they can underscore how urgent it is to provide support for New York State's public parks.