Who Benefits from America's "Great Places?" Exploring Recreational Equity in the National Park Service, United States of America

by

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A Thesis Submitted to McGill University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the B.A. in Geography Honours Degree

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April 2022

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Brian Robinson, for his help and guidance over the course of this process. I didn't get to meet with him in person due to COVID, but I could tell he really cared about the project and did enough to let me take the initiative independently while at the same time helping when needed and steering me through many of the tougher parts.

I would like to thank my reader, Prof. Kevin Manaugh, for his feedback and guidance throughout the year.

I would like to thank and all of the wonderful staff at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore for their help and collaboration.

I would also like to thank all the National Park Service employees, not only at Sleeping Bear Dunes but also from the research and program teams around the country, who participated in the research. I would specifically like to thank John McGreevy, who helped us out tremendously by sharing a dataset and list of programs. This thesis would not look the way it does today without the resources that John shared with us.

Additionally, I would like to thank my parents, Michael and Lori Bird, for their support of my education and their willingness to hear me talk about geography for days on end. I would like to thank my partner, Selena Jin, my sister Caroline Bird, my friends Namjun Cho, Wendell Wu, Nivash Jayaram, and Jonathan Liu, and my cousin Chris Falcione for their continued accompaniment and support throughout my university experience. There are countless others who I could not name here but for whom I am also grateful.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank three people within the Department of Geography at McGill who were not directly involved in this project but were certainly a big factor in me choosing to participate in the Honours program: Prof. Sarah Turner, Prof. Oliver Coomes, and Michelle Maillet. You all inspired me to choose this path and make this department an exciting and intellectually stimulating place to be every day.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

In recent years, issues of equitable access and utilization of national parks have become a focal point of academic and popular discussions of racial and environmental justice. I investigate how the National Park Service (NPS) of the United States of America has implemented policy changes to fulfill its dual mission of preserving America's "great places" and serving all Americans. I examine the NPS' latest Comprehensive Survey of the American Public (CSAP) report to understand differences in *utilization* between different racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups, analyze NPS program websites to understand how the agency seeks to improve equitable *access*, and use the case study of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (SBDNL) to examine how local NPS units ensure equitable *access* and *utilization*. I conclude that while the NPS has made great improvements in recent years, there are still several concrete steps that they could take to further improve equitable access and utilization.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The goals of the National Park Service (NPS) in the United States are to protect the country's "great places" as well as to ensure equitable access to and utilization of its precious resources (Pletcher, 2016). These goals reflect different priorities and require different actions to realize them.

Recently, the issue of equity has become more prominent in national discourse in the United States, particularly as it relates to racial issues. For example, American President Joseph R. Biden declared in January 2021, "We need to make equity and justice part of what we do every day – today, tomorrow, and every day" (Biden, 2021). Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland described a primary goal of her department (which oversees the NPS) as ensuring that "the folks who are suffering those environmental injustices have an opportunity to talk about it and be heard" (Cabrera, 2021).

For years, studies have demonstrated that access to and utilization of green space is heavily correlated with income levels (Sefcik et al., 2019) and that access to green space is important for physical and mental health (Mayer et al., 2009; Hassen, 2016). Racial equity in green space access is an important component of equity (Fisher, 2017; Heynen et al., 2006). Racial inequities in terms of not just access to, but conception of, green spaces manifests in less quantifiable ways; Ho and Chang (2021) describe the idealized notion of green space as a recluse from "dirtier" urban spaces as exclusionary to non-white citizens and upholding white conceptions of wilderness. These social and psychological barriers, in addition to more material and economic ones, contribute to inequities in access to green space among different racial groups.

Equity can be thought of from two perspectives: equitable access to a resource and equitable utilization of that resource. Equitable access (Ribot and Peluso, 2003) refers to all demographic groups having equal ability to access resources, in this case NPS resources; it refers to the absence of barriers. Equitable utilization refers to demographic groups using (in this case, visiting) resources at equal rates. In this thesis, I will investigate how access and utilization of NPS resources is distributed across racial and socioeconomic factors.

The NPS itself has undertaken efforts to better understand some of these issues, including the conducting the Comprehensive Survey of the American Public (CSAP) and conducting

Socioeconomic Monitoring (SEM) (J. McGreevy, personal communication, November 3, 2021; National Park Service). In this thesis, I will analyze the CSAP data to investigate national utilization of NPS resources and conduct a case study of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (SBDNL) to investigate the intersection of access and utilization. I conclude with specific recommendations for both future research and policy action.

1.1 Research Question and Objectives

My overarching research question is: how do public institutions such as the NPS mediate access to green space and natural resources in an equitable fashion? To investigate this question, my specific research objectives are to:

1) understand the current situation in terms of NPS *utilization* rates across various racial and socioeconomic groups,
2) investigate current programs and analyze how they aim to ensure equitable *access*, and
3) understand how individual national park units promote equitable *access* and *utilization* through the case study of SBDNL

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this thesis investigate these questions, respectively.

1.2 The National Park Service and Equity

This thesis investigates equitable access to NPS resources at multiple spatial scales. My primary focus is to examine NPS efforts to promote equitable access to and utilization of its resources at a national level drawing on national-level policies, statistics, and trends. In addition to the national scale, I will examine SBDNL in Michigan. I will use the case study of Sleeping Bear Dunes to analyze the role of individual parks in implementing equity policies.

1.2.1 The National Park Service of the United States

The National Park Service was founded in 1916 by the Organic Act, signed by President Woodrow Wilson, but its origins can be found much earlier (Pletcher, 2016). As the United States expanded westward, imaginations of the great scenic places of the West, such as Yellowstone, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon, became prominent in the national consciousness. William Henry Jackson's photos from an expedition to Yellowstone enthralled the American

public in 1871, and the next year Congress authorized the creation of Yellowstone National Park, the first in the country. Over the following decades, more than a dozen new national parks were designated by Congress. Environmentalists like John Muir became concerned that these spaces were not being adequately protected (Pletcher, 2016). Most national parks at this time were being run ineffectively, and there were multiple agencies within the Department of Interior responsible for different parks (Pletcher, 2016). Business tycoon Stephen Mather wrote to the secretary of the interior bemoaning the poor condition of the parks, and the secretary suggested that he join the department and work to better the parks; when Congress passed the Organic Act formalizing the creation of the NPS two years later, Mather was named the first director The NPS continued to expand and consolidate its authority over protected spaces of various kinds across the nation throughout the remainder of the 20th century (Pletcher, 2016). Today the NPS administers over four hundred units across the country (J. McGreevy, personal communication, November 3, 2021).

In recent decades, the National Park Service has come under scrutiny for disparities in visitation rates between white and nonwhite Americans (Floyd, 1999; O'Brien and Njambi, 2012). Remedying historical and present-day injustices in the accessibility and governance of its lands is a priority for the NPS today (J. McGreevy, personal communication, November 3, 2021). However, even national parks intentionally targeted, at least in part, to serve marginalized communities often exhibit disproportionately low rates of nonwhite visitors relative to the local population (Byrne, Wolch, and Zhang, 2009). Therefore, the need for policies and initiatives to promote equity is still present.

1.2.2 Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (SBDNL)

SBDNL is located predominantly in Leelanau County, with a small portion of the park extending into Benzie County, in the northwest corner of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan. Named after the Anishinaabe legend of the Sleeping Bear, SBDNL was formally established in 1970; today it receives over one million visits per year and boasts a wide array of natural, recreational, and cultural resources ("Park Statistics," 2015). Located in Northwestern Michigan, the National Lakeshore is in a predominantly white and politically conservative area. Within recent years, Leelanau County's "politics have crept leftward" with increased attention to racial injustices, particularly following the Black Lives Matter movement (House, 2020). Thus, both at an

administrative level within the NPS context and within the wider local community context, issues of race and equity have become a focal point of policy and debate at SBDNL.

1.3 Thesis Outline

The thesis is structured in the following manner. In Chapter 2, I present a conceptual framework for the research and review relevant bodies of literature. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I discuss my first, second, and third research aims, respectively. In each chapter I provide background, outline methodology, describe results, and provide a conclusion synthesizing and summarizing the findings. In Chapter 6, I provide a general summary of the entire thesis, and discuss policy recommendations and outline potential lessons for future research.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALIZING THE THESIS

In this chapter, I outline my conceptual framework, review the bodies of literature that will serve as the foundation for the research, and discuss my positionality. Section 2.1 reviews literature pertaining to equity to natural space, which I divide into two sections: equity in green spaces such as urban parks, national parks, and other green spaces (2.1.1), and protected spaces (2.1.2). Section 2.2, discusses the political ecology literature, which informs my understanding of the spatial power relations which help to shape the present-day situation of park utilization and access among different groups. In section 2.3, I review the public administration literature to better understand the institutional structure of the NPS and the theoretical framework behind public institution administration, especially as it relates to equity issues. Section 2.4 provides context relating to my personal positionality and how it may impact the thesis. In section 2.5, I synthesize the bodies of literature contained in my literature review and conclude by reemphasizing the benefits of this conceptual framework and how it will underpin my research. This chapter starts by reviewing three bodies of literature form the foundation of my thesis, as shown in Figure 2.1.

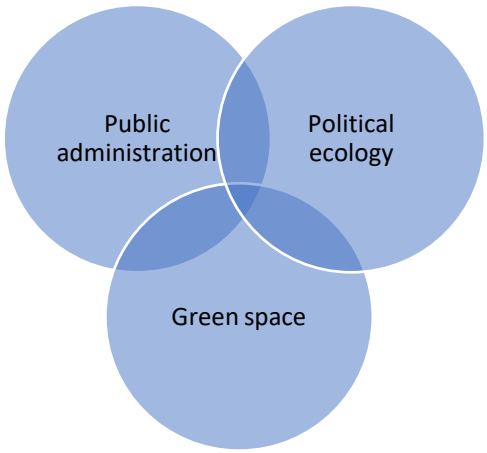


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

2.1 Green Space Literature

Green space is any space that is "partly or completely covered with grass, trees, shrubs, or other vegetation," including "parks, community gardens, and cemeteries" ("What is Open Space/Green Space?", n.d.). National parks are an example of green space, but in this section, I will include local and state parks as well as other forms of green space. Much of the literature on equity in green spaces focuses on urban green space, but I will include a broad range of sources that are relevant to and inform the study of the National Park system in the United States. I consider two important branches of the green space literature – equity in green space and protected spaces – covering important perspectives, theories, and frameworks for analyzing green space within the context of an institution like the NPS.

2.1.1 Equity in Green Spaces

"Equity" as a term is somewhat vague, and definitions vary across different disciplines and works by different authors. Two different, but interconnected, metrics of equity are related to equitable access and equitable utilization. Equitable *access* refers to people of different social groups having equal opportunity to utilize green space or other environmental resources, often characterized as a lack of barriers to visiting and enjoying green space. Equitable *utilization* refers to different socio-demographic groups visiting parks at equal rates. A disparity in utilization does not necessarily mean that a disparity in access is present.

Equity in green space is a concept closely linked with the idea of environmental justice, which is a political movement that originated in the late mid-twentieth century with "citizen revolts against the siting of toxic waste or hazardous and polluting industries in areas inhabited predominantly by people of colour" (Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans, 2002, p. 81). The focus of environmental justice has since broadened to additionally emphasize the "positive contributions" of environmental amenities like green space to health and well-being and link the "inequitable distribution of these nature-related benefits" to wider socio-demographic inequities, particularly health inequities (Jennings, Larson, and Yun, 2016, p. 2). This broader conception of justice, deeply connected to equity, is important to consider when analyzing the role of the NPS in ensuring equitable access to its resources.

Studies have found vastly unequal rates of utilization of green space among different demographic groups (Byrne, Wolch, and Zhang, 2009; Jennings, Larson, and Yun, 2016; Sefcik et al., 2019). Sefcik et al. (2019) demonstrate the complex nature of green space access across varying social landscapes and that proximity to green space is not always enough.

Equitable access is often assumed to be primarily a factor of spatial proximity to green space (Byrne, Wolch, and Zhang, 2009; Santana and Flegal, 2021); reflecting Tobler's first foundational principle of geography (Waters, 2017) that "everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things" (Tobler, 1970, p. 236). Spatial proximity is indeed a major barrier to access natural spaces; for example, nearly two-thirds of California residents live in areas that "do not meet the California Department of Parks and Recreation recommendation of three acres of park land per 1,000 residents" (Santana and Flegal, 2021, p. 4). Half of Los Angeles County residents do not have access to a park within walking distance and ninety percent of those residents are people of color. The spatial distribution of public parks is unequal and is a major barrier to access for many communities.

Byrne, Wolch, and Zhang (2009)'s findings also support the importance of spatial proximity to parks. Their study looked at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area in Los Angeles, the largest urban national park in the United States, finding that park visitors were much more likely to have a college degree than the general population and people of colour made up a disproportionate percentage of first-time visitors to the park.

Finally, the size of an urban green space has implications for equity and user populations. Smaller urban green spaces are often used locally, while larger ones also attract non-local visitors (Iraegui, Augusto, and Cabral 2020). These different user bases may have implications for who accesses space, who it is designed for, and thus how principles of equity are reflected in intended park access.

2.1.2 Protected Spaces

Protected spaces, also known as protected areas, are defined geographical spaces that are "recognized, dedicated, and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values" (IUCN,

2008). Protected spaces are a subset of green spaces defined by their special recognition and management structure to maintain their various ecological and cultural resources. Theories of protected spaces are key to understanding the present-day situation of the NPS, especially considering the NPS' role as one of the first modern large-scale governing systems overseeing protected areas (Pletcher, 2016). To investigate equity in park access and utilization, it is useful to first investigate why parks exist and their role in society.

Theories of protected spaces are very diverse. Dilsaver (2009) mentioned six possible perspectives on national parks' role in the American context: parks as reserves for natural resources and systems, parks as repositories of the United States' heritage, parks as recreation sites, parks as political entities, parks as economic entities, and parks as reflections of society. A park's role can influence researchers' perspective and thus the way that parks are studied.

Achana and O'Leary (2000) describe the tension between the "Yellowstone model" of national parks as "instruments of conservation with minimal human involvement" and nearby human communities (p. 68). The authors discuss some of the negative impacts of national parks on surrounding communities, including disruption to local landscapes and economic structures and higher prices, which can lead to locals being "crowded out of some leisure and recreation activities" (p. 77). The model of protected areas they advance considers local economic development to be an important goal, which differs from the "Yellowstone model" they outline as being a predominant conventional approach to theorizing protected spaces (p. 68).

Users of protected spaces can have various ideas for why they exist (Arnberger et al., 2012; Krymkowski, Manning, and Valliere, 2014; Mayo, 1975). In a case study of visitors to the Gesaeuse National Park in Austria, over 90% of respondents agreed that the primary goals of the park should be protecting species and habitats, maintaining the pristine landscapes, and providing recreational experiences (Arnberger et al., 2012). They also found that most visitors suggest the national park "label" was not important (Arnberger et al., 2012, p. 53). Thus, while understanding visitors' viewpoints can help inform management of these spaces, this calls into question which populations visit, and whose perspectives are being considered.

Further literature seeks to understand the role of theories of land management in practical decision-making in protected areas. Russell (1994) describes the formation of the Pinelands National Reserve to protect the New Jersey Pine Barrens in the United States. Russell outlines

the theoretical debate between advocates of different protection schema for the Pine Barrens. Ecologists applied forest island biogeography theory in devising the protected reserve, which included recommending that "the two largest areas of protected habitat be connected by a corridor of protected habitat" (p. 266-67). The reserve system was devised to "incorporate sustainable human activities into a conservation strategy" (p. 265). The integration of social and ecological theories into establishing a national reserve in the Pine Barrens is evidence of the value of applying theory to land-use regulation.

Recent scholarship on protected spaces also emphasizes threats to protected areas and the role of modern capitalism in promoting the conservation of protected spaces. Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe (2008) present a study of conservation by comparing the "histories that the winners circulate, and those the losers remember" and investigating the "broader processes" with which protected space establishment and regulation are "intertwined" (p. xi). Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe (2008), like Achana and O'Leary (2000), mention the "Yellowstone model" as encapsulating the original idea of the protected area movement (p. 19). However, the Indigenous inhabitants of these areas of "pristine beauty and wildness" would later be "systematically purged from the newly created national parks," rendering a straightforward reading of the "myths" surrounding the Yellowstone model "problematic" (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe, 2008, p. 18-19).

The mainstream narrative of protected areas has also ignored the works of societies outside of "large powerful societies (states)," propelling a common vision of protected areas as the unique birthchild of Western colonial societies and ignoring conservation of resources in Indigenous societies from East Africa and New Zealand to India and Alaska (p. 20). Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe (2008) identify how most protected areas were established "before any of the current concerns about extinction and habitat loss were well formulated," leaving most conservation lobbies to play "catch up" in the modern era (p. 39). The authors emphasize the need for a new approach to conservation that emphasizes "connections and relationships between human beings, as well as between humans and non-humans, rather than a focus on objects" (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe, p. 200). To address many of the complex issues of Indigenous rights, economic development and poverty alleviation, globalization, privatization, and local

management, a new paradigm is needed for theorizing protected spaces, one that moves beyond the Yellowstone model and values Indigenous knowledge and diversity of local communities.

2.2 Political Ecology Literature

Political ecology is defined by Peet, Robbins, and Watts (2010) as being predicated on "an ecologically conceptualized view of politics" (p. 23). The term "political ecology" is necessarily broad and inter-disciplinary, and thus has no one settled definition (Minch, 2011). However, political ecology broadly can be categorized as emphasizing "power relationships, and how these relationships are constituted, perpetuated, and changed through engagements with nature" (McManus, 2009, p. 299).

Political Ecology across Spaces, Scales, and Social Groups (Paulson and Gezon, eds., 2005) provides an overview of the geographical implications of political ecology, describing how political ecology can be applied to a wide variety of situations, with each case study applying "distinct concepts to address specific issues" such as "the use and contestation of resources such as land, water, soil, trees, biodiversity, money, knowledge, and information" (Paulson and Gezon, eds., p. 2). Common themes of political ecology range from "commodification" and "gender" to "modes of production," "territorialization," and "webs or chains of causality" (Paulson and Gezon, eds., p. 3).

One chapter within this book discusses conflicts over land-use in Arizona (Brogden and Greenberg, 2005). The authors outline the problem of achieving sustainability within an economic system that is based on "prices, markets, and costs that are quite different from those governing ecological systems" (Brogden and Greenberg, 2005, p. 42). They describe the problems with land being "commodified as real estate rather than being seen as an integral part of ecosystems" and how due to the nature of land as "spatially fixed," its commodification "takes on somewhat different dynamics as compared to mobile resources" (Brogden and Greenberg, 2005, p. 43). This means that "even in complex contemporary societies," the nature of land resources "inextricably remains tied to local contexts, even if ownership is not" (Brogden and Greenberg, 2005, p. 43). Part of these processes of commodification are related to processes of territorialization, defined as carving up natural spaces into "both physical spaces that define

territorial units and their boundaries and conceptual spaces through which jurisdiction over particular resources is divided among bureaucratic structures" (Brogden and Greenberg, 2005, p. 44).

The process of "reterritorialization" describes a "reassignment of resource access rights to a different population or interest group" (Brogden and Greenberg, 2005, p. 45). Reterritorializing processes involve previous users losing access to "territories supporting early commodity values" as a "new value conflicts with the old," aided by "discursive strategies" which cast the historical user as having "degraded the natural system" (Brogden and Greenberg, 2005, p. 45). The linking of territorializing and reterritorializing procedures underscores the complex procedures where physical and conceptual space are coproduced, a natural outcome of the way that land and power is divided among various unequal social actors.

Political ecology also focuses on the scientific processes by which knowledge is produced, and how these processes interact with ecological, political, and economic ones, as described by both Bixler (2013) and Yi Chien Jade Ho and David Chang (2021). Bixler (2013) describes the need to consider the power of narratives as knowledge and the "subjectivities and ideologies of individuals" as they "understand complex social-ecological relations" (p. 281). Yi Chien Jade Ho and David Chang (2021) describe the way narratives of outdoor space have historically excluded non-white groups from enjoying the same benefits as "white middle-class" settlers, a process which continues to the present day (p. 2), as well as the role played by "white environmentalism" in perpetuating an "idyllic vision of wilderness" that often excludes non-white communities from enjoying the benefits of outdoor recreation spaces (pp. 4-5). These issues are critically important to consider in analyzing questions of equitable access and utilization across vastly different sociodemographic groups in this thesis.

Heynen, Perkins, and Roy (2006) describe the political ecology of the uneven spatial distribution of urban green space. The authors draw on the case study of Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the United States to analyze disparities in urban tree canopy cover. They note the intrinsically linked nature of (perceived) neighborhood stability and socio-economic conditions with investments in urban forests. They observe a problem wherein "landlords are unlikely to spend more than the minimum necessary for upkeep of their properties, which is unlikely to include expenditure on trees" (Heynen, Perkins, and Roy, 2006, p. 14), evidence of "increasing

privatization of urban environmental management," which has intensified "inequity in the availability of resources such as urban trees" (Heynen, Perkins, and Roy, 2006, p. 20). Increased intervention by public institutions is a potential solution to rectify the reduction in minority well-being caused by the uneven distribution of urban green space such as tree cover.

In conclusion, political ecology provides a valuable framework for studying power relationships and the social (re)production of natural spaces, as well as how political and social conflicts play out in a natural setting. By drawing on analyses of narratives and discourse of natural spaces and power (Bixler, 2013; Brogden and Greenberg, 2005; Ho and Chang, 2021) as well as the distribution of urban green space (Heynen, Perkins, and Roy, 2006), I aim to understand the key concepts of political ecology to build a theoretical foundation for my investigation of equitable access to NPS resources.

2.3 Public Administration Literature

As the NPS is a public institution, it is important to consider theoretical approaches to public administration in building a conceptual framework for this study. Public administration theory has emerged as an increasingly relevant and interdisciplinary field, offering valuable insight into relationships between the public and the government (Wright, 2011). However, "analysis of journal citations" demonstrates that research in this interdisciplinary field is "largely isolated from the three disciplines that are commonly believed to form its underlying foundation:" law, management, and political science (Wright, 2011, p. 98). Wright (2011) advocates a more integrated approach in public administration theory literature, which I seek to draw on in incorporating public administration theory into my conceptual framework.

A major concept in public administration theory is governance, which includes different approaches such as "the minimalist state, corporate governance, the new public management, good governance, international interdependence, socio-cybernetics, and networks" (Rhodes, 2000, p. 3). Each of these different conceptions have answers for issues like the "implications of governance for representative democracy," the inevitability of governance failures, and the novelty of governance (Rhodes, 2000,p. 3). The perspectives most relevant for this thesis are governance as the new public management and governance as a socio-cybernetic system. Rhodes

(2000) outlines the theory of governance as the new public management as stressing "entrepreneurial government" based on "competitions, markets, customers, and measuring outcomes" (p. 8). This perspective on governance can be found in many of the findings of studies under the umbrella of green space and political ecology (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe, 2008; Heynen, Perkins, and Roy, 2006; Sefick et al., 2019). The idea of governance as a socio-cybernetic system describes how when central governments pass a law or implement a policy, "it interacts with local government, health authorities, the voluntary sector, the private sector and, in turn, they interact with one another" (Rhodes, 2000, p. 11). This perspective is appropriate for discussing issues of equity and political relationships in green space, as many different actors and complex power dynamics are often involved in these situations (Bixler, 2013; Russell, 1994).

An important aspect of public administration is systemic propagations of inequity. In recent years, the lack of attention paid to equity in public administration has come under scrutiny (Blessett et al., 2019; Dooley, 2020; Gadson; 2020). This is particularly relevant within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Gadson, 2020).

Blesset et al. (2019) present a "call to action" encouraging the emphasis of social equity in the "research, teaching, and practice of public administration" (p. 283). The authors assert that equity has remained "unfinished business" within the field of public administration and its "centrality is missing" within public administration curricula (Blesset et al, 2019, p. 292). This finding is echoed by Dooley (2020). Blesset et al. (2019) assert that through concentrated effort by people at all levels of the public administration academic hierarchy, social equity can be prioritized and "fill in the 'skeletal pillar'" of public administration (p. 296). They outline seven principles of social equity in public administration that could be adopted, ranging from commitments to eliminating inequities "of all kinds" to asserting that, on average, public administration programs are not currently "equipping or preparing the future of public administrators for the practical work of equity in public service" (Blesset et al., 2019, p. 296).

Gadson (2020) outlines how the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitate fundamental shifts in theories of public administration. Gadson (2000) advocates prioritizing equality of outcomes over equality of access in the context of diagnostic testing and other measures to combat a deadly pandemic, describing a socially equitable strategy as

"prudent" and "data-informed" within the "context of the social inequalities complicating plans to resume a sense of normalcy in society" (p. 450). Gadson (2000) condemns the "public lectures to minority populations on the topic of personal responsibility" during the pandemic, instead proposing that public health administrators employ an "empathic understanding" to address inequities in testing facilities, as the only way to end the pandemic (p. 453). The context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its many fundamental shifts for recreation, equity, and various sociopolitical discourses pertinent to issues of equity in green space cannot be ignored when analyzing a public institution responsible for outdoor resources like the NPS.

By reviewing a wide array of literature within the field of public administration theory, I hope to better understand the conceptual underpinnings of the management of an institution such as the NPS. Drawing on the work of Blesset et al. (2019), Rhodes (2000), and Wright (2011), I will incorporate public administration theory as I investigate and analyze both the present state and historical-geographical background of equitable access to NPS resources.

2.4 Positionality

My positionality as a white male student significantly impacts the way in which I conduct research as a geographer, especially when investigating racially charged issues such as the ones in this thesis. I have made significant efforts to mitigate any potential impacts of my own personal biases on this research, including: researching news and opinion articles written by the perspective of people of colour about their experiences in local parks, national parks, and in the surrounding area of Sleeping Bear Dunes specifically; incorporating the voices of scholars of colour in my literature review; seeking to interview key informants of colour for my interviews in Chapter 5. Despite these efforts, I recognize that, as described by Rose (1997), all knowledge must be situated within their individual and social contexts and biases. Thus, I fully admit that this thesis may be influenced by my personal positionality.

2.5 Synthesis and Conclusion

By considering the bodies of literature above, I hope to form a cohesive conceptual framework that informs my research into the issue of equity within the NPS. While the bodies of literature I have considered are distinct, there are a myriad of connections between them that help to integrate a wide range of scholarship into one cohesive conceptual approach. In fact, many pieces I reviewed could fit into multiple categories, which testifies to the interdisciplinary bona fides of this conceptual approach. Thus, it is critical to consider many concepts, theories, and studies from multiple perspectives under the scope of this literature review and conceptual framework. Taking my positionality (addressed in this chapter) into account as well is necessary for a cohesive understanding of the theoretical grounding of my research in the chapters ahead.

CHAPTER 3: RACIAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC UTILIZATION OF US NATIONAL PARKS

This chapter will discuss my first research objective: to understand the utilization of NPS resources across racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and regional groups. First, I will outline the background, introduction, and justification for the study of this objective under the scope of the overarching research question. Second, I will describe the methodology I will use for this objective (Section 3.2). Finally, I will summarize the findings of my data collection in Section 3.3: "Results."

3.1 Background and Introduction

In considering equity in the usage of park resources, it is important to ascertain an accurate picture of current rates of park utilization across various racial and socioeconomic groups. It is only possible to understand the major challenges facing the NPS in promoting equitable utilization after gaining a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of the facts on the ground. This chapter analyzes participant responses from the NPS' 2018 Comprehensive Survey of the American Public (CSAP). Building on the NPS' derivative "National Technical Report" (2019) and "Racial and Ethnic Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors" report (2019), my own analysis of the data assesses differences across racial and socioeconomic groups. This data analysis enabled me to assess different viewpoints and behavioural patterns of park visitation and non-visitation among different demographic groups.

3.2 Methodology

The goal of the CSAP survey was to understand differing rates of utilization. I use this data to support my central aim of understanding how equitable utilization is realized and regarded by the National Park Service as an institution. I analyze survey respondents' responses

to key questions by race, socioeconomic status, and education through several graphics, tables, and maps.

The NPS' 2018 summary report of the CSAP did not incorporate income data into its analysis of racial/ethnic group respondents; however, this is an important aspect that may vary by race, and thus have relevance to barriers that impede access and/or utilization. I perform cross-variable analysis of the survey looking at both park visitors and non-visitors, often stratified by income, to better understand variation by region, race, and income. In this chapter, I integrate summary data, tables, and other figures to further describe the findings of the 2018 CSAP survey.

For most of the graphs, tables, and charts, pivot table operations were used (Microsoft Excel, 2022). Weighted figures were produced in Stata 15 (StataCorp, 2022). I often utilized logical commands such as 'if' statements (sometimes including 'and' or 'or' statements) to create additional columns to make the data easier to manipulate in the tables. To identify visitors, I used the 'visitor' variable which includes those visitors who were able to accurately name a NPS unit that they had visited. For most graphics, I included respondents identifying with five major racial/ethnic groups (white, Latino, African American/Black, Asian, and Native American/Indigenous). The survey reports on Hawaiian natives and those who selected "other", as well, but sample sizes were low for these categories. 'Refused' or 'not answered' responses were not included for clarity and consistency. Respondents reported annual incomes within seven categories, which I condensed into three: under $50,000 USD, $50,000-$100,000, and over $100,000. Finally, respondents were allowed to select more than one race, so some respondents' answers may be included in multiple categories. However, this was the case for only roughly eight percent of respondents so I decided to leave the data as is because these individuals' multiple identities can still be valid for their responses. Thus, these individuals are counted more than once.

To assess the regional representativeness of park visitors I devised a metric I call a utilization equity coefficient (UEC). The UEC is a regional metric that is based on differences in the proportion of visitors from each race. First define the number of visitors in a region from race j (out of a total number of races J) as v_j and the total population of that race in the region as N_j. Thus, the proportion of visitors in that race is $P_j = \frac{v_j}{N_j}$. I define UEC then as:

$$\frac{\sum_{j=1}^{J}\left|P_j-\frac{\sum_{j=1}^{J}P_j}{J}\right|}{J} \quad \text{(eq 1).}$$

If the average of all visitors, by race, in a region is called $\overline{P_J}=\frac{\sum_{j=1}^{J}P_j}{J}$,then equation (1) becomes, $\frac{\sum_{j=1}^{J}|P_j-\overline{P_J}|}{J}$, which can then further simplify to:

$$UEC=\overline{\left|P_J-\overline{P_J}\right|} \quad \text{(eq 2).}$$

By measuring the disparities between respondent demographics and visitor demographics across different regions, I hope to provide a numeric measure that will provide an overview of regional variations in inequitable utilization. To display the UEC values of the various NPS regions, I created a basemap of the US with NPS regional boundaries (arcgis.com, 2022). I used weights included in the CSAP dataset to ensure results are representative of the general American public.

3.3 Results

First, I assessed the representativeness of the sample. Sampling was stratified by NPS region, thus each NPS region has a roughly even number of respondents. Table 3.1 illustrates the number of people of each race/ethnic group in each region in the sample. Totals of the five main groups included in the table may not add up to the total number of respondents due to some other groups, those who refused, and double counting in some instances. In all other results that follow, I use the statistical weights provided with CSAP to ensure regional and national representativeness of the results.

Region	White (NH)	Latino	Black	Asian	Native American	**Total**
Alaska	349	14	10	10	58	**412**
Intermountain	295	56	20	17	25	**398**
Midwest	329	8	22	10	18	**385**
National Capital	152	21	112	13	12	**302**
Northeast	279	34	49	21	17	**405**
Pacific West	294	55	13	22	23	**409**
Southeast	293	23	48	5	21	**386**
Missing region	1	1	2	0	1	**7**
All regions	**1,991**	**211**	**274**	**98**	**174**	**2,704**

Table 3.1: Raw number of Respondents by Race/Ethnicity and Region, Weighted NPS CSAP Data, 2018

There were important differences in park visitation among different groups. Figure 3.1 shows data across racial/levels groups of different income levels. Within most racial/ethnic group, respondents with higher incomes were more likely to have visited national parks, although this was not true for Black or Native American respondents. Among respondents with less than $50,000 USD in annual income, Asian and White respondents were most likely to have visited a NPS unit, while Black and Native American respondents were least likely to have visited.

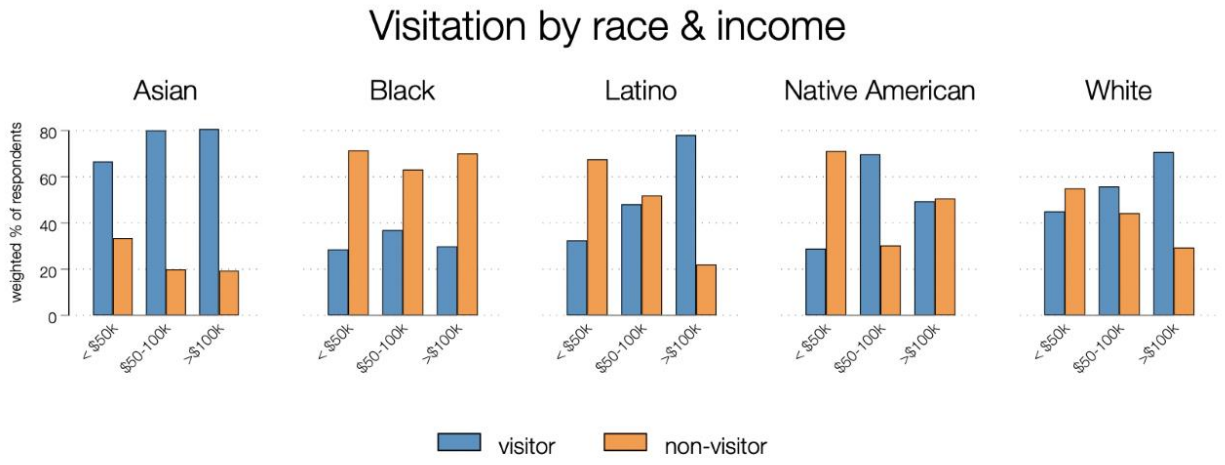
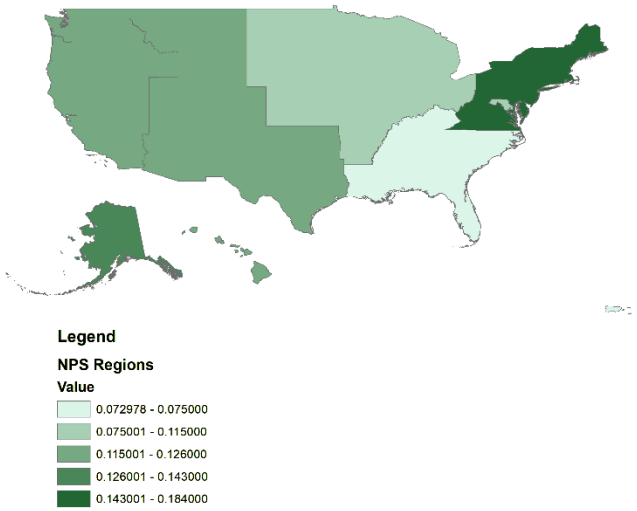


Figure 3.1: Percent of Respondents Reporting Different Levels of National Park Visitation by Race/Ethnicity and Income Level, Weighted NPS CSAP Data, 2018

Among respondents reporting incomes between $50,000 and $100,000 a year, differences in park visitation between racial groups were also very pronounced (Figure 3.1). The racial/ethnic group within this income category reporting the lowest rate of visitation was Asian respondents, with roughly 80 percent, while the lowest rate was that of Black respondents at less than 40 percent. Among respondents with incomes of over $100,000 a year, the differences between racial and ethnic groups were also incredibly dramatic, with Asian and Latino respondents visiting at the highest rates, while Black respondents reported by far the lowest rates. Among each racial group, middle-income respondents were more likely to visit than their lower-income counterparts, but among Black and Native respondents, higher-income respondents were less likely to visit than their middle-income counterparts.

To assess racial equity in utilization of NPS resources by region, I created a map of the utilization equity coefficient (UEC) (Figure 3.2).



Map 3.1: UEC Values by NPS region, Weighted NPS CSAP Data, 2018

A higher UEC value indicates higher levels of inequality in park visitation rates. The highest UEC value was found in the Northeast region, with the Alaska region having the second highest. The UEC values for the Pacific West and Intermountain regions were relatively high, but not as high as the Northeast or Alaska regions, while the UEC values for the Midwest and National Capital regions were similar and fell below those of the Pacific West and Intermountain. The region with the lowest UEC value, and thus the most equal levels of park visitation rates across racial/ethnic groups, was the Southeast region.

To gain some insight into the preferences of different racial groups, I examined the reasons for visitation of visitors by race (grouped into social, individual, and recreational categories), as shown in Figure 3.2. Understanding the preferences of different racial groups helps in elucidating potential cultural differences between different groups in their perceptions of national parks that may impact their utilization of NPS resources, acting as an important component in the analysis of utilization as a function of both access and preferences.

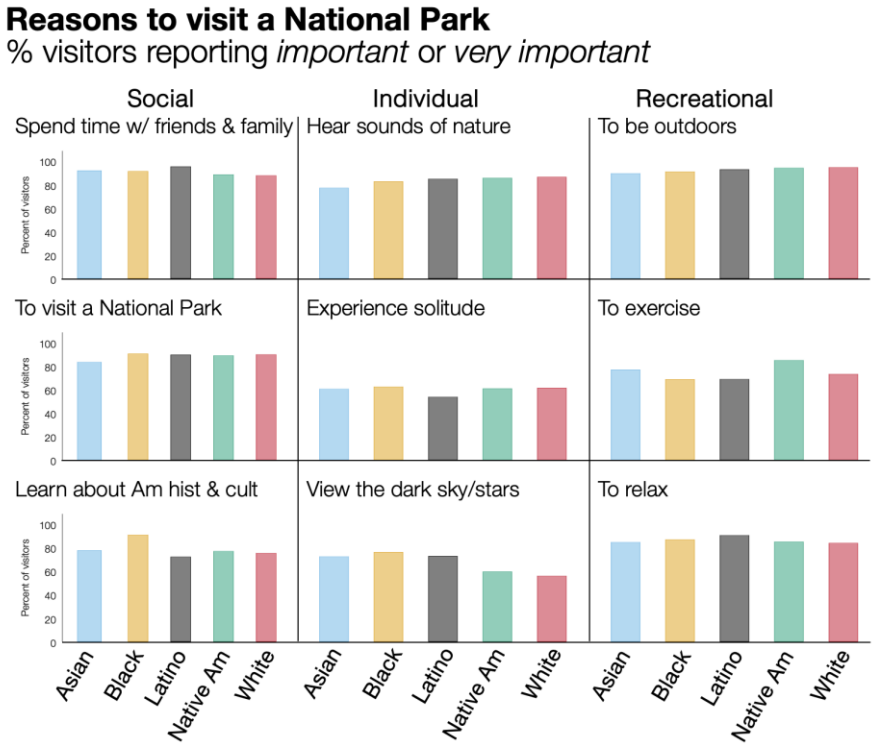


Figure 3.2: Percent of Visitors in Different Racial Groups Describing Various Reasons as "Very Important" or "Important" in Visiting a National Park, Weighted NPS CSAP Data, 2018

The reasons ranked as most important across racial/ethnic groups included being outdoors, relaxation, and spending time with family. Respondents across various groups tended to rank solitude, exercise, and viewing dark night skies/stars as relatively less important reasons to visit a national park. Most reasons for visiting were relatively equally valued across racial/ethnic lines, with Black visitors being more likely to value "learning about American history and culture," and Asian visitors being less likely to value the importance of visiting a national park (for the sake of visiting one). Black visitors were less likely to value national parks as places to exercise than other groups. All respondents asked these questions had visited national parks within their lifetimes and were able to name a national park.

In conclusion, the CSAP data demonstrates a multitude of racial/ethnic-based, income-based, and regional differences in national park visitation. Asian respondents tended to visit national parks at higher rates than those of other groups, with Latinos and non-Hispanic Whites visiting more than Black and Native respondents, but less than Asians. In terms of regional differences, the Northeast and Alaska regions demonstrated the highest levels of inequitable utilization across racial/ethnic groups by far, while the Southeast region had the most equitable distribution of visitors. The responses of various racial/income groups to questions about reasons for visitation were similar across racial and ethnic lines, with most visitors tending to value social and recreational aspects of national parks more than individual reasons. To fully understand utilization rates, which are a function of both access and preferences, it is necessary to further investigate access, which I will do in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYZING HOW NPS PROGRAMS PROMOTE EQUITABLE ACCESS

In this chapter, I will investigate my second research objective: to investigate the different programs that the NPS is currently implementing to increase equitable access to park resources. First, I will provide some context on many of these programs, before outlining my methodology, and finally describing the results.

4.1 Background and Introduction

In the past several decades, NPS programs and administration have increasingly focused on community outreach and increasing engagement with diverse communities (Gaskins et al., 2021). In recent years, many of these efforts have been (re)framed as equity programs (J. McGreevy, personal communication, October 22, 2021). To investigate how an institution like the National Park Service promotes access to its resources a critical analysis of the programs that the NPS itself claims to promote equity (J. McGreevy, personal communication, October 22, 2021) is appropriate. I conducted a content analysis of the presentation, themes, and structures (represented by images/visual design, content of text, and format of websites/documents, respectively) used by various NPS program websites and documents.

4.2 Methodology

Content analysis involves analyzing material including "visual, verbal, graphic, oral – indeed, any kind of meaningful visual/verbal information" (Bell 2001, pp. 14-15). My content analysis also incorporates elements of semiotic analysis. Semiotic analysis is like content analysis, but it is more descriptive and holistic (Bell, 2001). Bell (2001) describes semiotic analysis as focusing on "each text or text-genre in much the way that a critic focuses on a particular gallery painting or on the aesthetics or cultural connotations of a particular film or class of films" (p. 15). I will include comprehensive analyses of whole texts in the results section as well.

Bell also discusses the key concepts of variables and values. A variable is "any such dimension… or any range of options of a similar type which could be substituted for each other" (Bell, 2001, p. 15). Values represent the "elements which are of the same logical kind" that together "constitute a variable" (Bell, 2001, p. 16). For each type of analysis, I created a variable and value table to display and organize the results.

My methods and utilization of variable and value tables will differ considerably from Bell's, however. As this research question is addressed more qualitatively, I will use the variable/value table as a springboard to organize my observations and will not have all values within each variable be mutually exclusive. This method is further supported by the context of my research; the goal of my content analysis is to understand NPS programs aimed at reducing barriers to equitable access within the wider context of understanding equity in the NPS. The most appropriate usage of content analysis in this thesis is a mixed-methods approach. As described by Philip (1998), it is critically important for research methodology to prioritize the specific disciplinary, theoretical, topical, and geographical contexts of the research objectives, rather than dogmatically adhering to rigid methodological rules.

I include both qualitative and quantitative elements in my content analysis. As described by Bell, an important element of content analysis is reliability, as content analysis "claims to be objective and therefore capable of being replicated" (2001, p. 22). To ensure reliability, I set out clear categories and I also include quantitative elements to ground the analysis.

For each program selected, I chose one "text." A text could be a document or an entire website or sections of a website that are meant to inform the public about the program in question. For each program, I accessed its website or viewed PDF documents as shared to me by John McGreevy, except in the case of the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP). The ORLP is not a public-facing program; it does not seek to engage individual citizens directly. Thus, I found that there is not one centralized website for the ORLP as there is for the other programs. For the ORLP I chose a PDF document on the website of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) because it seemed to be the most public-focused and visually presentative of the various web texts describing the ORLP.

For each text, I prepared a variable/value table for each category. I will first summarize the key findings and conclusions to be drawn from my analysis of that text. Many of the texts

contain multiple webpages that are linked to on the main webpage, and when relevant, I will treat these collectively. Each table contains some quantitative information about how much each value within each quantifiable variable was represented in each document. I will then further expand on interesting points, key ideas, and descriptive results of my analysis in the paragraphs following the table. Figure 4.1, "Content Analysis Methodology Diagram," displays the different components included in my analysis in this chapter.

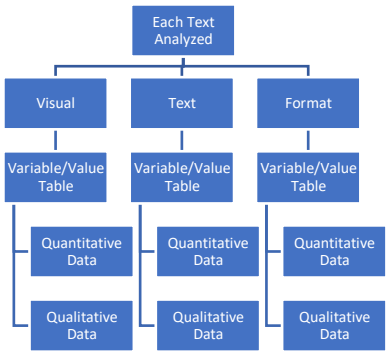


Figure 4.1: Content Analysis Methodology Diagram

I conduct content analysis of the publicly available documents of NPS programs for several reasons. First, as related to access, it is important to understand the way the NPS presents its programs to the public both to see the public's perception of the NPS (what the public sees) and the NPS' perception of its own mission (how the NPS chooses to present itself). In addition, this content analysis will further my understanding of the goals, parameters, and presentation of the various NPS programs that are (re)framed as promoting equity. As such, each program that I analyze, both in terms of the variables on which I choose to focus and the content of the written analyses, will be analyzed through the lens of promotion of equitable access.

I selected five different national programs that are designed to reduce barriers to access to NPS resources. The programs included Every Kid Outdoors, the Junior Ranger Program, the Buddy Bison Program, Fee Free Days, and the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP). These programs were selected from a list of NPS initiatives designed to promote equitable access to NPS resources sent to me by John McGreevy. The ORLP differs from the other programs in that it is a decentralized, grant-based program, but was important to include because it recently

received a major investment from the Department of Interior (DOI) and seems to be an important part of the federal government's efforts to increase access to green space in urban communities.

4.3 Results

The first text (website) I analyzed was the Every Kid Outdoors program. The Every Kid Outdoors program was established in 2015 by President Barack Obama and was originally called Every Kid in a Park ("Every Kid Outdoors," n.d.). The basic premise of the Every Kid Outdoors program is to provide free annual passes to fourth graders (and their families) throughout the United States in order to encourage young families to enjoy the national parks. Any fourth grader in the United States can go to the website, complete a quick diary-like adventure game simulating a park journey, and then claim their pass. Alternatively, educators can print out passes (up to 300 at a time) for their students. I analyzed the homepage of the website in concert with some elements of other pages and organized this data into a variable/value table (see Table 4.1).

Visual

	Variables				
	Colours used	**Images of parks**	**Logos**	**Images of participants**	**Graphic design elements**
Values	Blue (thin strip at the bottom)	Grand nature scene (Grand Canyon) (1, prominent)	Program logo (1)	Children (all persons pictured are children)	Connective designs connecting each element (3)
	Green (as part of the image of nature; part of text at bottom)	Scenes of nature with human participants (4)	Dept. of Interior logo (1)	People of visible minority status (prominent)	Use of highlighted buttons/links to connect to other pages (7)
	Cream (varying shades; thin strip at the bottom and some of the buttons)			Active participation in park activities (using binoculars, canoeing, rock climbing, displaying passes → 1 each)	
	Red (dominant in middle section)				
	Black (text and thin strip)				
	White (text)				

Text

	Variables			
	References to NPS and program mission(s)	**Explanation of program logistics**	**Explanation of program benefits**	**Elements directed at different groups**
Values	"America's natural wonders and historic sites for free"	**For free**	"Play outdoors" "Explore with friends" "Go climbing" "Try something new"	Pages: • "Learn more" for parents and guardians • "More info" for educators
	"This is for you"	How it works page	"plan a life changing trip for your fourth-grade students"	En Español page
	"this year's the perfect time for an unforgettable outing"	"You and your family get free access to hundreds of parks, lands, and waters for an entire year"	"Explore ancient dwellings" "See a waterfall taller than a building"	
	"these sites belong to all of us – including you"	"Get passes, download our activities"	"Stay close to home or travel somewhere new"	

Format

	Variables			
	Accessibility to different formats	**Different pages for different sections**	**Type of page**	**Menu display**
Values	Web format	Parents	Website homepage	Top right corner
	Other buttons linking to other pages (7)	Educators		
		About		
		En Español		

Table 4.1: Variable/Value Summary Tables for Every Kid Outdoors Program Website

The data in the table summarizes the key visual, textual, and format information found on the homepage of the Every Kid Outdoors program website. For values for which it was appropriate, I included quantitative counts of how much an item of that value appeared in the text. The same format is used for all subsequent tables in this section. Overall, my analysis found that the Every Kid Outdoors program's website contains many visual and textual elements designed to attract various demographics related to the program's main goal – to get fourth graders and their families to use the park. The layout and visual nature of the website is clearly designed to appeal to and be useable by children, educators, and parents – the three main constituencies of the Every Kid Outdoors program. Separate pages for these three groups that are linked to on the main page provide the basis for a cohesive but differentiated user experience that is straightforward, visually appealing, and full of information about the program. The website's "About" page also contains a link to a PDF of a brochure about the program that can be printed out and shared. There is also an option to view the website in Spanish ("En Español"), increasing accessibility to Spanish-speaking Americans.

The Every Kid Outdoors program reflects the missions of the National Park Service: to protect the great landscapes of the United States and to provide opportunities for all Americans to enjoy these landscapes. The values and ideas underpinning the program's *raison d'être* are summarized on the "About" page of the website (Figure 4.2).

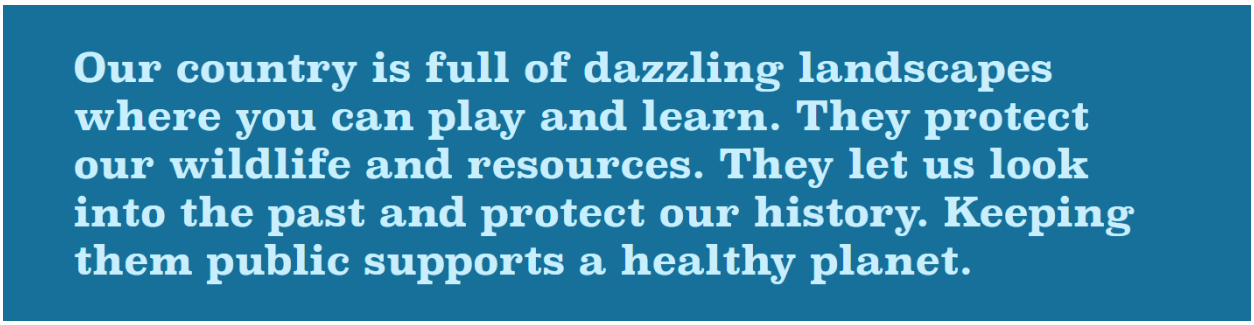


Figure 4.2: Excerpt from "About" Page on the Website of the Every Kid Outdoors Program

The values reflected by the website support the role of national parks and the NPS as an institution that can protect America's "dazzling landscapes" and provide safe and entertaining places and activities for children's environmental education and recreation. However, the inclusion of the sentence "they let us look into the past and protect our history" raises the question: when the NPS discusses the history of the United States, whose history is it telling? Could the history of national parks and of the United States in general be a perceived barrier preventing nonwhite and socioeconomically disadvantaged from recreating on NPS lands? These issues of narratives of outdoor spaces are discussed by Ho and Chang (2021) and will be discussed further in Chapter 5, within the context of the case study of Sleeping Bear Dunes.

Despite the imperfections of this program and its depiction, its zero cost and its depiction of children, including visible minority children, actively participating in the park's activities on the homepage of the website clearly help to portray the program as accessible to all Americans. Thus, this program can certainly be said to be a program with the potential to foster equitable access to NPS resources. However, the limited scope of the program – it is only available to fourth graders and their families – and the steps involved (filling out a diary), while they are not overly cumbersome, still place certain limits on the potential impact of the program on increasing equitable access.

The second text I analyzed was the Junior Ranger program. This program focuses on teaching young children about parks – their management, their benefits, the challenges they face – through the perspective of park rangers. Children complete activities and booklets to earn "badges" at various national parks and are given a uniform that resembles that of a park ranger ("Become a Junior Ranger," n.d.). The Junior Ranger program also includes the Junior Angler

program, which encourages youth participation in fishing in NPS waters. The Junior Ranger program main webpage contains valuable information about the program (Table 4.2).

Visual

	Variables				
	Colours used	**Images of parks**	**Logos**	**Images of participants**	**Graphic design elements**
Values	White (majority)	Images of children participating in the program (park is just backdrop, not emphasized at all)	NPS logo (2)	One image: contains three visible minority children Second image: two children who are not visible minorities	Junior Ranger Online: embedded link with large image
	Black (bands at top and bottom and text colour)		Junior Ranger/Angler Program logo (1)		
	Coffee (band at top)				

Text

	Variables			
	References to NPS mission(s)	**Explanation of program logistics**	**Explanation of program goals**	**Elements directed at different groups**
Values	"Explore. Learn. Protect."	"The NPS Junior Ranger program is an activity-based program conducted in almost all parks, and some Junior Ranger programs are national. Many national parks offer young visitors the opportunity to join the National Park Service 'family' as Junior Rangers."	"Each taking an oath of their own to protect parks, continue to learn about parks, and share their own ranger story with friends and family."	"Events for Kids" "Visit Parks with Kids"
	"Each taking an oath of their own to protect parks, continue to learn about parks, and share their own ranger story with friends and family."	"Interested youth complete a series of activities during a park visit, share their answers with a park ranger, and receive an official Junior Ranger patch and Junior Ranger certificate. Junior Rangers are typically between the ages of 5 to 13, although people of all ages can participate."		

Format

	Variables			
	Accessibility to different formats	**Different pages for different sections**	**Type of page**	**Menu display**
Values	Question about helpful nature of the webpage (Y/N)	Junior Ranger Online	Website page (not homepage)	"Home" "Become a Junior Ranger" "Articles & News" "Visit Parks with Kids" "Events for Kids"
		Get Your Junior Ranger Book		Top left middle
		Find Your Park: Junior Rangers		

Table 4.2: Variable/Value Summary Tables for Junior Ranger Program Website

The Junior Ranger program's website is not as visually dramatic and promotional as the Every Kid Outdoors website. The webpage is located on the NPS official website and appears to be focused on giving information to people who have some level of interest in or knowledge about the program, rather than a more promotional layout like the website of Every Kid Outdoors. The website describes how the program promotes the values of the NPS and encourages participants to "continue to learn about parks" and "share their own ranger story with friends and family" ("Become a Junior Ranger," n.d.). The images on the website show a diverse visual representation of participations and include links to more information. The Junior Ranger program is free at most parks and provides quality education about national parks. However, the Junior Ranger program does not guarantee free admission to the park for children or their

families like the Every Kid Outdoors program does and, as such, may not be as feasible for socioeconomically disadvantaged families.

The Buddy Bison program (Table 4.3) is the only NPS-led public-facing initiative (in partnership with the National Park Trust) I analyzed as part of this section of content analysis that explicitly focuses on lower-income visitors, in this case Title I schools. Title I in the United States refers to schools that have a relatively high percentage of students from low-income families ("Improving Basic Programs," n.d.). The Buddy Bison program's main activities are field trips that are coordinated with teachers and organized to help educate lower-income students about recreation opportunities near them.

Visual

	Variables				
	Colours used	**Images of parks**	**Logos**	**Images of participants**	**Graphic design elements**
Values	Green	Top image of kids and Buddy Bison mascot in a forest	National Park Trust logo (1)	Image of kids in park, including several visible minorities	Interactive map of Buddy Bison schools
	White Black (text)	Image of education materials and paper spread on grassy ground			

Text

	Variables			
	References to NPS mission(s)	**Explanation of program logistics**	**Explanation of program goals**	**Elements directed at different groups**
Values	N/A	"We currently serve 211 Title I public, public charter, and private elementary and middle schools in 39 states and Washington, D.C."	Encourage outdoor activity for kids: "enhance classroom curricula" "encourage health and wellness through outdoor recreation" "foster future park stewards and conservationists"	Request for donations
		"Each school is supported by individuals, corporations, and foundations."		
		"The Buddy Bison School Program provides environmental education to elementary and middle schools in under-served communities. We work closely with teachers to plan each trip — using parks, public lands, and waterways as outdoor classrooms."		
		"More than 80% of our students qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch, the federal indicator of low income."		
		"COVID-19 has …temporarily paused our Buddy Bison School Program."		

Format

	Variables			
	Accessibility to different formats	**Different pages for different sections**	**Type of page**	**Menu display**
Values	Doesn't export well as PDF	"Learn more" "Donate" "Read the press release"	Main page for this program within the National Park Trust website	Top bar, within NPT website
		But as for different pages, they seem to be other programs within the National Park Trust website		

Table 4.3: Variable/Value Summary Tables for Buddy Bison Program Website

The website of the Buddy Bison Program takes a more promotional role, similar to the Every Kid Outdoors website. It outlines the logistics of the program and emphasizes that over 80

percent of the children who participate in the program "qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, the federal indicator of low income" ("Buddy Bison Programs," n.d.). The website heavily features the Buddy Bison mascot, and shows pictures of children engaged in the program, including several visible minority students. The website describes in detail the virtual field trips they have developed during the pandemic – although all in-person activities are still suspended. The website also features a map of all the participating schools across the nation. The slogan of the Buddy Bison program is "explore outdoors, the parks are yours!"

The Buddy Bison Program is not solely focused on national parks, but on environmental education and park access more broadly. The Buddy Bison program does an excellent job of demonstrating its utility in building connections between lower-income schoolchildren and parks, but unlike the Every Kid Outdoors program (which can be participated in at the school or family level), it requires coordination with school districts, meaning it may be difficult for individual families to get involved. On the other hand, the outreach the Buddy Bison program prioritizes in building connections with schools may ultimately be able to better improve access to parks in a broader sense.

The fourth text I analyzed was the Fee Free Days program (Table 4.4). This program involves five days each year where all NPS sites that normally collect fees are open to everyone for free. Only entrance fees are waived; additional fees such as those for transportation, boat launching, and camping still apply ("Free Entrance Days in the National Parks," n.d.).

Visual

	Variables				
	Colours used	**Images of parks**	**Logos**	**Images of participants**	**Graphic design elements**
Values	Coffee (Blurb at top and bottom)	Snow-capped mountains	NPS logo (2)	Only one person (racially ambiguous, but lighter skinned, shown from behind)	Your fee dollars at work blurb
	Blue (image)	Desert scene (with a person shown from behind)		In the desert scene	
	Black (text)				
	White (dominant)				

Text

	Variables			
	References to NPS mission(s)	**Explanation of program logistics**	**Explanation of program goals**	**Elements directed at different groups**
Variables	"National parks are America's best idea"	The fee-free days provide a great opportunity to visit a new place or an old favorite, especially one of the national parks that normally charge an entrance fee.	Come experience the national parks!	There are also free or discounted passes available for senior citizens, current members of the military, families of fourth-grade students, and disabled citizens.
	Fee Free Days 2022: **January 17:** Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. **April 16:** First day of National Park Week **August 4:** Anniversary of the Great American Outdoors Act **September 24:** National Public Lands Day **November 11:** Veterans Day			

Format

	Variables			
	Accessibility to different formats	**Different pages for different sections**	**Type of page**	**Menu display**
Values	Question about helpful nature of the website (Y/N)	Hyperlinks to pages about different holidays	Webpage (not homepage) within NPS website	No sub-menu for this program
		Hyperlinks to park finder		
		Hyperlink to information about park fees and passes		

Table 4.4: Variable/Value Summary Tables for Fee Free Days Program Website

The Fee Free Days website is very simple; as opposed to the Junior Ranger, Buddy Bison, or Every Kid Outdoors websites, which emphasize participation in the program (reflected in both images and text), the Fee Free Days website is very informative, listing the five Fee Free Days for 2022 and describing free and discounted passes for certain groups. The Fee Free Days website also includes information about how to find parks and information about the stories behind the dates selected for Fee Free Days. The website is informative and captures the slogan of the NPS: "national parks are America's best idea."

The final text I analyzed was the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP). As mentioned in section 4.2, this program differs considerably from the remainder of the programs analyzed in this section because it is not outwardly public facing; its goal is not to directly entice visitors to come to parks (Table 4.5). The main goal of this program is to provide grant money to increase access to high-quality green space opportunities in low-income, urban areas ("Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program," n.d.).

Visual

	Variables				
	Colours used	**Images of parks**	**Logos**	**Images of participants**	**Graphic design elements**
Values	Blue (bars at top and bottom of each page)	Picture of an urban park with lots of tree cover at the top of 1st page	LWCF logo (2)	Image of two young girls (visible minorities) planting something at Montbello Open Space Park, Denver, CO	Sidebar with table of benefits on 2nd page
	White (some text and backdrop)				
	Black (text)				
	Green (bar on the left side of 2nd page)				

Text

	Variables			
	References to NPS mission(s)	**Explanation of program logistics**	**Explanation of program goals**	**Elements directed at different groups**
Values	This is an expansion of NPS mission	"ORLP provides grants directly to cities and localities" "priority given to projects located in economically disadvantaged areas and places lacking in outdoor recreation opportunities."	"helps urban communities address outdoor recreation deficits by supporting projects in cities and urbanized areas that create new outdoor recreation spaces, reinvigorate already existing parks, and form connections between people and the outdoors.	N/A
	"form connections between people and the outdoors."	"ORLP is the only federal program focused exclusively on supporting parks and outdoor recreation opportunities in cities."	"• Creating and improving local parks in economically disadvantaged areas and places lacking in in outdoor recreation • City parks are an essential component to attracting and retaining a strong workforce and spurring local investment • Conserves natural areas, wildlife habitat and open space in urban parks • Promotes active, healthy lifestyles and gets kids and families outdoors • Supports recreational access sites and open spaces in denser urban areas • Promotes the development of new or enhanced partnerships in urban communities across the nation"	
	Also includes LWCF mission info → similar to NPS			

Format

	Variables			
	Accessibility to different formats	**Different pages for different sections**	**Type of page**	**Menu display**
Values	None	None	PDF	No menu

Table 4.5: Variable/Value Summary Tables for ORLP Program Website

The text I analyzed describing the ORLP described the mission of the program – a collaboration between the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the NPS – as to "form connections between people and the outdoors" (LWCF). It stipulates that the ORLP is the only federal program "focused exclusively on supporting parks and outdoor recreation opportunities in cities" (LWCF). The ORLP provides grants to projects in urban areas that are economically disadvantaged and/or lack sufficient outdoor recreation resources. The ORLP is distributed by the National Park Service and represents an expansion of the NPS mission: to bring natural recreation to historically underserved areas of America's cities. While the projects are not managed by the NPS, they represent a 'new frontier' for the NPS' mission to preserve America's great places and serve all Americans.

4.4 Conclusion

The results of my content analysis of NPS programs revealed that the National Park Service has prioritized promoting its resources and opportunities to various communities through a myriad of channels. For example, the Buddy Bison program partners with Title I schools while programs such as the Junior Ranger Program and Every Kid Outdoors are not explicitly aimed at children of any sociodemographic group. The Fee Free Days program applies to all visitors to NPS units, although it may be more meaningful to poorer visitors. The ORLP provides grants to historically underserved urban parks and outdoor amenities but does not directly engage with visitors.

The Junior Ranger and Fee Free Days programs are both websites within the NPS' official website, whereas the Buddy Bison program as a partnership with the National Park Foundation and the Every Kid Outdoors program (an interagency program) are on outside

websites. The display of these different website types are vastly different, which may impact public perception and comprehension of the information presented by these websites (Lee, Lee-Geiller, and Lee, 2020). The various programs analyzed in this section represent a cohesive and dynamic approach to increasing engagement and removing certain barriers to NPS resources. However, the only programs that focus explicitly on reaching lower-income populations are the Buddy Bison and ORLP programs, which are also the least-focused on NPS resources specifically, although still important. The Junior Ranger and Every Kid Outdoors program may benefit from additional partnerships and support given to lower-income schools in the mould of the Buddy Bison program. The Fee Free Days could be expanded and marketed more extensively in a more visually striking format in order to reach more Americans who may not easily access NPS resources.

There are many limitations to this type of analysis. I am analyzing the ways that the NPS is promoting equitable access, but I fundamentally cannot see what they are not doing, and I am not comparing what they are doing to other organizations. Considering this, my findings in the section are limited to an understanding of the public-facing outreach and justifications given for NPS programming, and how the websites of NPS programs reflect equity goals.

In addition to the programs analyzed in this section, many local NPS units throughout the country engage in their own initiatives to increase equitable access to NPS resources. Many of these initiatives are organized and promoted in concert with federal-level grant funding. Some of these partnerships will be explored in depth through the case study of Sleeping Bear Dunes in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: THE INTERPLAY OF ACCESS AND UTILIZATION – THE CASE OF SLEEPING BEAR DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE

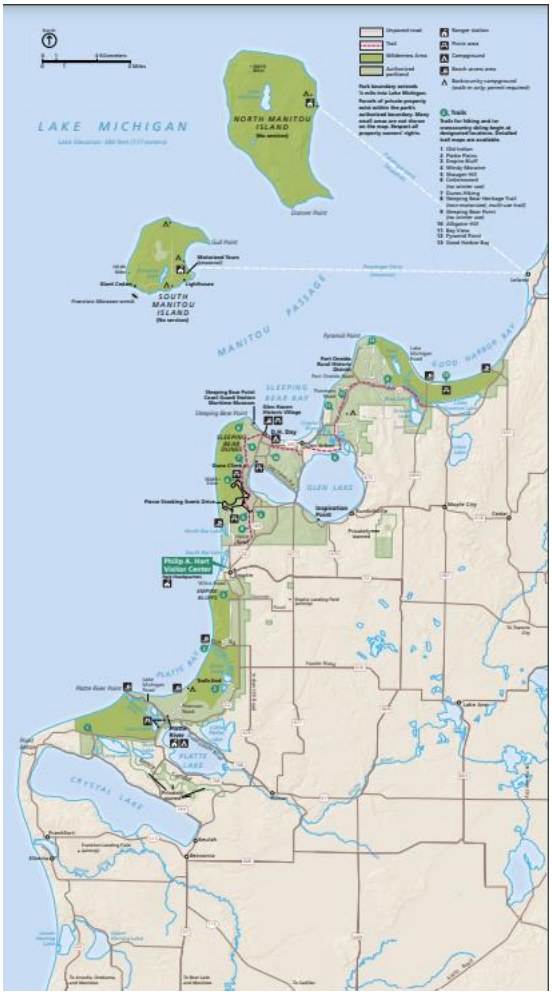
In this chapter, I will discuss my third research objective: to understand amount of discretion local NPS units have in implementing NPS equity policy through examining the case study of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (SBDNL). I use the case study of SBDNL to explore how the interplay of equitable access and utilization of park resources plays out in the administration of local NPS units. I will begin by laying out an in-depth context of SBDNL in Section 5.1: "Background and Introduction." I will then describe my methodology, followed by a section summarizing the results of my interviews with park staff. I will then include a section detailing the results of my narrative analysis of promotional and educational literature about SBDNL. In the final section of this chapter, I will summarize the case study of SBDNL as it relates to my third research objective and offer concluding remarks.

5.1 Background and Introduction

I use SBDNL as a case study to investigate the implementation of NPS equity initiatives within local parks. As shown in Chapter 3, the utilization of national parks can ultimately be thought of as a function of both access and preferences. Thus, investigating the circumstances and policies of local NPS unit management, as in the case of SBDNL, will provide insight into how the NPS ensures equitable access to and utilization of its resources. SBDNL was chosen for this case study because of its status as a park that has significant outdoor and cultural resources, its significantly well-known status, and its remote yet accessible location. SBDNL can be thought of as a "median" park – it is not too famous, but not too small; it is well known enough to be a possible destination, but it is not overly crowded. In this setting, how do they promote equity?

When it was founded in 1970, SBDNL was originally controversial with many local inhabitants because of opposition to the government buying private property and concerns over the potential impacts of an influx of tourists (Participant #1, January 28, 2022). Over the past several decades, most locals have begun to take pride in the park and resistance to its establishment has mostly subsided as the park contributes to local economic development while

simultaneously protecting over 70,000 acres of land from being "bought up by the rich" (Participant #1, January 28, 2022). In 2011, ABC's *Good Morning America* named Sleeping Bear Dunes the "most beautiful place in America" (Participant #1, January 28, 2022; National Park Service). Today, SBDNL receives over 1.7 million annual visitors (Participant #1, January 28, 2022). The National Lakeshore spans a long range of the Lake Michigan coastline, as well as two large, uninhabited islands. It features a variety of hiking and biking trails, campgrounds, beaches, and historic sites (Map 5.1).



Map 5.1: Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

SBDNL is located primarily within Michigan's Leelanau County, although a portion of the park is also located in nearby Benzie County. The reach of the park's tourism impact also extends into Grand Traverse County, home to Traverse City's Cherry Capital Airport, the closest commercial airport to the park (Sleeping Bear Dunes Visitors Bureau).

Leelanau County's identity, culture, economy, and politics have largely been shaped by the National Lakeshore over the last five decades (Stocking, 2019). Two (locally) best-selling books, *From the Place of the Gathering Light* and *Letters from the Leelanau*, both written by the daughter of famous Leelanau lumberman Pierce Stocking, Kathleen Stocking, describe the identity and heritage of the area. This narrative ties the culture and social landscape of Leelanau to the natural landscapes. Stocking describes Leelanau County as an "inspiring" place in which "people are doing a lot of good things and they aren't doing them just for the money" (2019, p. v). Stocking ties this spirit back to the land, describing a primary goal of people in Leelanau County to be "keeping the scenic beauty of the hills and orchards free from development and the towns from urban sprawl and public beaches free of pollution" (2019, p. v).

It is important to note that as a national lakeshore, SBNDL is not classified as a "national park," although it is still a unit of the NPS and is often colloquially referred to as a "park." The implications of the different designations of NPS units are not insignificant, as described by Weiler and Seidl (2004) in their analysis of the economic impacts of NPS unit redesignations. Weiler and Seidl mention the disconnect between the "understandably nonlocal" nature of (re)designation decisions and the fact that "such designations and redesignations are likely to have sizeable local and regional economic implications" (p. 261). Indiana Dunes National Park was originally a national lakeshore, before shedding that designation and choosing to become a national park (Participant #1, January 28, 2022). NPS units typically will not choose to take on the expense of changing signage unless they think a "national park" designation will improve their visitorship and revenue (Weiler and Seidl, 2004).

In order to understand the way that local parks implement and tailor NPS policies, programs, and initiatives regarding equity in parks, I conducted interviews with key informants at SBDNL, as described further in Section 5.2.

5.2 Methodology

For this research objective, I conducted interviews with key informants related to equity policies at SBDNL by Zoom. I was able to interview three staff members and one independent consultant, with myself and my supervisor, Prof. Brian Robinson, asking questions and having

conversations with the interviewees. The staff I interviewed occupy various positions in the park. The independent consultant I interviewed identifies as an Anishinaabe-Odawa historian and has been extensively involved in the designing of inclusive programming at SBDNL related to Native American issues and stories. I recorded the interviews with consent of the interviewees and stored the recordings and transcriptions in a secure, password-protected folder on my McGill OneDrive, in keeping with Research Ethics Board (REB) regulations. This part of my research was approved by the REB on August 12, 2021 (see Appendix A).

In July of 2021, after my project was approved by McGill's Emergency Operations Centre (see Appendix B), I made in-person inquiries at various ranger stations and visitor centres within the park to gain the contact information of park staff who would be willing to be interviewed. I used snowball sampling methods to build on my contacts and find more staff who would be willing to participate. This sampling method was appropriate due to the low number of participants, the difficulty in contacting or sampling a wide array of rangers through other methods, and the purpose of the data collected in this step. The purpose of my interviews with park staff was to gain an in-depth understanding of how policies to promote both equitable access and utilization of NPS resources were implemented on a local scale. The administration of SBDNL expressed that the most efficient way for us to conduct interviews with park staff was to conduct in-depth interviews with a very small number of relevant park staff who had the most experience and expertise related to equity programming and the socio-spatial landscape of the park and the surrounding areas.

Interviews were semi-structured (Dunn 2016), consisting of designed but open-ended questions that guided my discussions with park staff. However, our conversations were not limited to the prepared questions. The prepared questions (see Appendix C) included questions about the staff members' perceptions related to several topics, including their own personal relationships to the park, the demographic makeup of park staff compared to park visitors, prioritization of equity in the park, equity initiatives and their implementation in the park, funding for various park initiatives, and their personal opinions and suggestions about various initiatives in the park. These questions included four main categories: introduction/personal background; programming at SBDNL; the historical and current situation in the park (and surrounding region); and the NPS commitment to equity at SBDNL. Although the questions

asked to the one Anishinaabe interviewee we spoke to (not a park employee) were markedly different than the standard question set, the topics covered were similar.

I selected my interviewees as key informants (Pinto et al. 2015). As my questions focused on intricate details of SBDNL equity policy, programming, and history, I decided it was best to focus on a select few interviewees with specialized knowledge in these issues, rather than a general survey of employees (which was also considered).

Following the interviews, I analyzed the response data by using thematic qualitative coding as described by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). This method of analysis relies on drawing out the main themes from the raw data and supporting the interpretation of the data with evidence, such as quotes (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). Due to the semi-structured and flexible nature of the interviews, I did not transcribe the entire interview but rather re-watched the recordings and took notes on key concepts and transcribed quotes.

I coded the interviews for key themes related to the overarching themes of the prepared questions that I used to guide our discussion (see Appendix C). I separated the topics of my conversations into the same four categories as the prepared questions followed.

Some of the interviewees shared additional material such as PDFs, web links, or other documents to supplement or support our discussion of Sleeping Bear Dunes policies and administration. Some of the material contained in those texts is referenced in the results below but is not interview data itself.

5.3 Results

My first interview subject (Participant #1) was the Deputy Superintendent of SBDNL. He grew up in Kalamazoo, Michigan and has worked in the NPS for 35 years, working on natural resource management, interpretation, education, and law enforcement. When asked about programming at SBDNL and how it relates to reaching out to traditionally underserved communities, he emphasized the decentralized nature of the NPS and the emphasis placed on engaging populations within the park's geographic reach. To that end, he described how the national lakeshore has received federally funded grants to improve their interpretative services

related to Anishinaabe stories and peoples, including a new park film that includes Native speakers telling the Sleeping Bear origin story in the Anishinaabe language with English subtitles. He also described grants from the National Park Foundation to help with transportation for school visits from districts that could not afford to visit the park but mentioned that this did not necessarily include "any sort of ethnic diversity representation," implying that most of the schools within reach of SBDNL are predominantly white (Participant #1, January 28, 2022). He also described the mobile visitor center the park has made, which was intended to show pictures of the park's scenery to "urban populations" in Detroit and Grand Rapids but has only been used locally due to COVID-19 concerns (Participant #1, January 28, 2022). All the major initiatives he shared were of the national lakeshore's own volition, but when asked specifically about the Fee Free Days, Junior Ranger, and Every Kid Outdoors program, he mentioned that they all have been major successes at SBDNL.

In terms of the history and current situation of the park, he described a "sea change" in the way the NPS works, saying that while they "paid lip service" to equity-based programming for a long time, it has made great strides in the last decade in terms of engaging young people and trying to reach demographics beyond the "same rich white people" who historically frequented the park(s) (Participant #1, January 28, 2022). He described how parks are increasingly places to talk about deeper issues, while acknowledging that this is easier to do at some parks than others, depending on the history and the mission of each individual park. He described the changing dynamics of SBDNL's role in the wider community since its founding, with visitorship booming, especially since the pandemic started, driving local economic activity. He said that while the NPS had previously focused just on managing the territory within its boundaries, they have now moved "well beyond that" to being an "integral part of the community" and recognizing that they "depend on the community" (Participant #1, January 28, 2022).

He continued to cite the 2009 Sleeping Bear Dunes Visitor Study in saying that most of their visitors are from Michigan and other Midwest states, with very little national draw. He also mentioned that there is a "surprisingly high" Latino population in the area, largely comprised of agricultural workers, and said that they "haven't really tapped into" this demographic, despite "making some efforts," including Spanish language interpretive services (Participant #1, January

28, 2022). He identified this community as a potential population that needs further improvement in the park's outreach efforts.

He admitted that the park administration sometimes struggles to see what they can do on a day-to-day business to promote equitable access to and utilization of SBDNL resources, but he identified concrete steps they take to promote equity:

> Make the park as welcoming as possible, remove barriers. Some of those are, if you get the eyes on it of folks who might otherwise perceive a barrier that I might not. So, I think having the Anishinaabe partners is a help to that. And some of that has affirmed that "you guys haven't institutionalized barriers here." (Participant #1, January 28, 2022)

He identified NPS hiring practices as something that could be changed to improve diversity and thus contribute to more emphasis placed on racial equity issues. He mentioned that a big issue in NPS hiring is that they hire internally for most positions, so even if a person of colour is promoted within the agency, they have not improved the overall representation unless entry-level positions are also filled with diverse candidates, which they often are not. He claimed that the NPS staff is less diverse now than it was twenty years ago, despite all the lip service paid to diversity in hiring. He advocated for the NPS to open all job opportunities to external candidates, saying that the effort it takes to train someone within the NPS bureaucracy is well worth it.

He also mentioned how SBDNL administrators have participated in various "support groups" that exist across NPS units, including LGBT+, women's, and Latinx support groups (Participant #1, January 28, 2022). He said that this was a relatively new phenomenon, within the last six or seven years. He closed with a discussion of the NPS' preliminary ideas for the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026, and the ways in which the NPS is looking to expand its mission and increase its reach to all Americans.

My second interview subject (Participant #2) was the Head of Interpretive Services at the national lakeshore. She is originally from Wisconsin and had worked in interpretation at many NPS units throughout the Midwest before coming to Sleeping Bear Dunes. She described the interpreter's task as conveying the mission of each NPS unit and helping to "connect people with that story" (Participant #2, February 14, 2022). She discussed many formal, informal, personal, and non-personal interpretive activities at SBDNL, including the visitor center, trail signage,

"campfire programs," kayak trips, bike tours, and hikes (see Figure 5.1). She described the shift in the last decade from synchronous, scheduled activities, to "pop up programs," in which park staff notices which spots are busy in the park and then hold ad hoc activities that engage visitors (Participant #2, February 14, 2022).

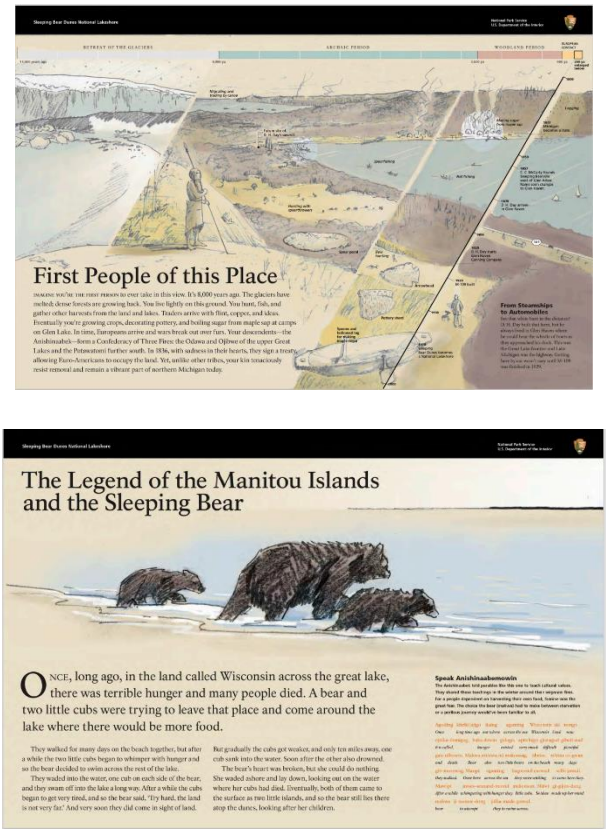


Figure 5.1: Examples of Signs at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

She also described the ways that SBDNL builds relationships with schools and discussed how park programming differs in parks of different size. At SBDNL, the interpretative services seek to support, supplement, and guide the visitors who are mostly drawn to the area's stunning natural landscapes. This contrasts with smaller, historical-focused parks where interpretive services and re-enactments play a central role in drawing visitors to the park. She described grant money that SBDNL has received to arrange transportation to the park for field trips for Title I schools, including schools as far away as Grand Rapids and Flint. She said that the park "reached out specifically" to these schools to offer to pay for transportation (Participant #2, February 14, 2022). She mentioned that the Junior Ranger program is "huge" at Sleeping Bear Dunes (Participant #2, February 14, 2022).

She also described the work the national lakeshore has done in reaching out to Anishinaabe partners in the area, including advertising positions to students at tribal colleges and partnering with the tribal museum in Peshawbestown. She detailed the ways that NPS units collaborate with each other on various projects, as projects are more likely to get congressional funding if they include multiple parks.

Participant #2 described how interpretation has changed in the last few decades. She said that the viewpoint used to be that the expert "blessed people" with their knowledge, but now the motto is "don't be the sage on the stage, be the guide on the side" (Participant #2, February 14, 2022). She concluded by discussing the importance of their relationships with tribal partners and the value they place on personal connections, before outlining the two main goals of the park's relationship with the Anishinaabe: to make them aware of their rights in accessing the park for traditional usage and having them tell their stories to "enrich interpretation" for all visitors to the park (Participant #2, February 14, 2022).

My third interview subject (Participant #3) was the "education lead" at Sleeping Bear Dunes. She is currently working in a temporary position and has worked for the park in a variety of positions since 2017. She discussed her role in designing curriculum for school programs to teach about the park in a way that satisfies state curriculum standards, the most important goal for teachers. She described how SBDNL-developed curricula incorporates Native arts and compares Anishinaabe skills with the skills of European settlers and was developed in consultation with Anishinaabe consultants. She says that some of the curricula for older students includes in-depth conversations about the "dominant narrative" and how "historically, a lot of the documentation of native peoples has been from a voice other than their own" (Participant #3, February 23, 2022).

When asked about outreach to socioeconomically disadvantaged school districts, Participant #3 said that they will work with schools and meet their needs if the schools reach out to them, but:

> We often don't pick one school over another if we're advertising a program because that's not super equitable if we're spending more time trying to reach one specific school because they meet a certain demographic. (Participant #3, February 23, 2022)

Participant #3 said that there is not much coordination and communication between different NPS units for "on the ground" operations, but that the "National Park Service has a goal of telling all stories, not just the good ones," which is conveyed to all NPS units through NPS trainings about telling Native histories, equity and inclusion, unconscious biases, and accessibility for people with various disabilities (Participant #3, February 23, 2022).

My fourth interview subject was not a member of the SBDNL staff but has worked closely with SBDNL for roughly a decade as an independent consultant. He identifies as Anishinaabe-Odawa and has worked with the park on their efforts to update their signage and interpretive programs. He grew up in a Native community and curates Native histories in a variety of capacities – education, interpretation, litigation, exhibits, signage – to support his tribe.

Participant #4 often leads walks called "history hikes" throughout the park where he discusses Native histories of the region. He described these hikes in a way that provides a new perspective on the NPS' dual mission of providing equitable access and protecting America's great places:

> I don't really pull any punches in my programs. We're going to talk about Indian Removal. We're going to talk about the struggle to stay here. It's not just fluff. We're going to get into heavy stuff. I think people appreciate that because it's a true story. It adds to the awe or the power of Sleeping Bear that all these people went through these incredible things to stay in this place. (Participant #4, March 4, 2022)

He described the national parks as often being located near tribal religious sites, as "special," having a lot of "allure and power," and said that "tribes have known this for thousands of years" (Participant #4, March 4, 2022). He outlined how many tribes have collaborated with the NPS under the purview of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, which has allowed tribes to take more control over burials and existing graves on federal lands. He cited examples of tribes in the Grand Canyon and in Minnesota as examples of collaboration between Native American organizations and the NPS.

When he was asked about the importance of an Indigenous woman – Deb Haaland – being appointed as Secretary of the Interior, he said he was "lost for words" on just how crucial it has been for their community, citing efforts to investigate cases of missing and murdered

Indigenous women, residential schools, and problematic place names (Participant #4, March 4, 2022). He proceeded to describe the importance of oral histories and of including Native voices in park management and storytelling.

He concluded by describing potential room for improvement in terms of putting up new signage, increasing programming and classroom education, and grounding the presentation of the national lakeshore in Native histories, saying, "this is something that hasn't happened historically at Sleeping Bear for the last 30-40 years, so they're starting out, but I think that their intention and commitment is good" (Participant #4, March 4, 2022). He described the importance of "seeing ourselves reflected in the park, whether it's a word, a sign, a program" rather than being "omitted or just a footnote" (Participant #4, March 4, 2022). He agreed with the basic goals of NPS outreach to local Anishinaabe partners as outlined by Participant #2 and said that he has a great relationship with SBDNL management. When asked about if there is still a divide between the Anishinaabe people and NPS management, he said:

> It still is a federal park. There's that level of intimidation. It's a little intimidating. You're going into this area where everyone's got the ranger uniforms and the hats. Everyone's really nice, but it's an institution. (Participant #4, March 4, 2022)

5.4 Discussion

Key themes that appeared throughout the interviews included the decentralized nature of NPS equity programming, the importance of connections and relationships with tribal partners, and the focus placed in recent years on incorporating Native narratives in the park's personal and non-personal interpretation programming. Park staff emphasized their aim of reducing barriers and making all people feel welcome in the park within the confines of their mission and the limited actions they can take. In addition, all interviewees emphasized the importance of situating SBDNL's management within its local context. All interviewees agreed that there has been a sea change in NPS posturing regarding equity issues and the importance placed on taking more initiative in expanding the reach of national parks. The interviews I conducted provided a fascinating insight into the individuals, relationships, histories, and administrative structures that facilitate the management of an NPS unit like SBDNL.

CHAPTER 6: SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I will comprehensively discuss the results of my research and offer concluding remarks. I will first summarize the understanding of equitable access and utilization of NPS resources in section 6.1. In section 6.2, I will outline recommendations for both future academic study of equitable access and utilization of green space resources, particularly as it relates to the National Park Service as an organization, as well as policy recommendations that could be carried out by the NPS.

6.1 Understanding Equity Within the National Park Service

The results of my research have shown that equitable access and utilization of NPS resources is a significant priority for the National Park Service, and the importance attached to it has grown tremendously in recent years, especially in the last decade. Interviews with local staff at Sleeping Bear Dunes and a conversation with John McGreevy, who works as the coordinator for socioeconomic monitoring (SEM) for the NPS, revealed that not only has the NPS given greater priority to issues of equitable access and utilization in recent years, but it has implemented programs to ameliorate inequities that persist.

However, it is clear based on the results of my study that inequities in access to and utilization of NPS resources still exist. The NPS' CSAP study, last commissioned in 2018, revealed that Black and Native Americans visit national parks at rates lower than their white, Latino, and Asian counterparts. Differences in park visitation rates across income groups are particularly stark, and the divide can be seen across regions as well, with the Midwest and Southeast regions demonstrating the most inequity in visitation rates.

In looking at NPS programs that facilitate equitable access, programs such as Every Kid Outdoors and Fee Free Days eliminate the barrier of entrance fees for potential visitors, but only for children (and their families) of a particular grade level and on certain days of the year, respectively. The Junior Ranger program provides excellent opportunities for children to learn about national parks, but at most NPS units, this program is mostly participated in by students

who show up at the visitor center of their own volition (Participant #1, January 28, 2022). The Buddy Bison and ORLP programs promote usage of outdoor resources by lower-income and underprivileged communities, but their scope is not focused specifically on NPS resources, despite the important role the NPS plays in those programs.

Through the case study of SBDNL and the analysis of the intersection of equitable access and utilization in local NPS unit management, I noticed three major trends and key points. First, SBDNL is making great efforts at integrating Anishinaabe stories into interpretive services through tours, signage, film, and exhibits. Second, SBDNL exemplifies what many interviewees assert is a nationwide trend of NPS units becoming more involved in and integrated with the surrounding communities. Third, active outreach to communities such as local Latino communities, relatively far urban communities in Grand Rapids, Flint, and Detroit, or poorer, local schools, is still somewhat limited and initiating connections between schools and the national lakeshore is still largely incumbent upon schools. Transportation grants and snowshoe programs are in place in collaboration with the National Park Foundation to provide support to Title I schools, but the vast majority of SBDNL equity programming is largely limited to schools and youth (Participant #1, January 28, 2022; Participant #2, February 14, 2022).

6.2 Future Considerations and Policy Recommendations

The results of my study have revealed several key lessons for future academic study of equitable access and utilization of green space resources, whether related to the NPS or other institutions. The first and most important lesson is that the enormous breadth and depth of the issue requires researchers to consider complex and nuance aspects and factors that may impact equitable access and utilization. The framework of delineating between access and utilization proves useful, but it should be noted that these are not black and white categories. Utilization, the ultimate measurement of park visitation and usage, is a function of both access and preferences. However, many peoples' preferences may ultimately be shaped by their lack of access, or a perceived cultural barrier that is a function of historical barriers to access. Just because no one is currently forcefully preventing Black Americans from using national parks does not mean that Black Americans will feel comfortable in national parks after centuries of discrimination and cultural disconnect (Floyd, 1999). These issues are often hard to categorize as part of access or

preferences; they fall into a grey zone in between these two categories. Thus, further research should explicitly investigate this grey zone, including the diverse historical relationships various minority communities have with the National Park System, in order to comprehensively appraise the current situation and evaluate NPS programming.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the programs the NPS has introduced to increase equitable access and utilization of its resources on both a national and local level must include more input and study from and participation of the public. In this study, I was limited by constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic; originally, I planned to conduct extensive visitor surveys at SBDNL but the increased bureaucratic hurdles of doing research during COVID-19 derailed those plans.

On the subject of COVID-19, more specialized research into the impacts of COVID-19 on national park visitation is needed. Multiple interviewees at Sleeping Bear Dunes mentioned that their park received record visitation numbers during the pandemic, which they attributed to the desire of many Americans for safe, open, outdoor recreational opportunities in the context of pandemic restrictions and the perceived risk of indoor activities. Despite the increase in overall visitation, many of the formal programming offered by NPS units has been significantly curtailed by pandemic restrictions, which may have a disproportionate effect on certain populations (Kupfer et al, 2021). However, given that the latest CSAP survey occurred in 2018, there has not been comprehensive data on the socioeconomic and racial/ethnic composition of new/returning NPS visitors. Are minorities taking the pandemic as an opportunity to utilize NPS resources at similar rates to white Americans?

The Deputy Superintendent of SBDNL told me that in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests around the world in 2020, NPS units in the Minneapolis area used the parks as places for dialogue and grieving surrounding racial justice issues. The renewed focus on racial issues in the academic, political, and business mainstream (still largely dominated by white voices in the United States) certainly could have had a multitude of impacts on minority NPS visitation. Further research is needed in the context of the political, social, and cultural environment of 2022 to understand what may have changed in the past few tumultuous years.

One of the most intriguing findings of the interviews I conducted was the NPS's preliminary planning in developing programming for the 250th anniversary of the United States'

founding in 2026. The NPS is looking into how to find a "nexus" between the historical role of parks and a new vision for parks as a place for civil dialogue and conversations about racial justice and other issues that represent an expansion of its original mission (Participant #1, January 28, 2022).

One of the major goals of my research from the outset has been developing concrete recommendations that can be implemented by the NPS. Throughout the research process, I have found that the NPS has made considerable strides in reducing barriers to equitable access and promoting equitable utilization of its resources. Many of the policies that I would have recommended at the start of this project have already been implemented by the NPS or local units, such as increased funding for transportation, increased advertisement of park opportunities in historically under-represented communities (such as the mobile visitor center at SBDNL), consultations with Native American nations and communities, and training employees in various diversity, equity, and inclusion issues.

One policy action that could also build on past and present NPS efforts to increase equitable access would be to create an office within the NPS that can coordinate equity efforts across parks and regions. One part of this should be opening job opportunities to more diverse talent pools rather than only recruiting internally, as mentioned by Participant #1. The relationships that underpin much of local NPS equitable programming, as evidenced by Sleeping Bear Dunes, are dependent on certain circumstances, such as a favourable superintendent or a connection with a particular individual. There needs to be more systemic apparatuses to serve as an impetus to continue policies which increase equitable access even in the even that people and trends shift. Many policies that could increase utilization of Sleeping Bear Dunes among minority populations may not be applicable to every NPS unit; thus, there is still a role for decentralized management to play, while still following a framework that is more focused on equity.

One way to more directly improve equitable access to and utilization of park resources would be ending the taboo about reaching out to specific communities and recognizing that historical injustices require special attention being paid to forging connections with populations that are underrepresented amongst park visitors. Ideally, there should also be a study commissioned by the NPS to fully audit what every single park is doing to further equity. In

addition, a CSAP-like study that focuses on racial/ethnic minority groups and visitors making less than $50,000 a year would help the NPS to gain a better understanding of the communities that do not use the national park system as often. One problem with the CSAP 2018 data was the small sample size for minority groups.

In conclusion, my research has revealed that the NPS has made great strides in improving equitable access to and utilization of park resources. However, there is still room for further improvement that can come in the form of four concrete steps: increasing diversity in hiring practices, coordinating equity policy across NPS units (while allowing room for local discretion and implementation), developing programming to specifically reach out to underprivileged communities, and increasing research and monitoring into equity issues at both the local and national level.

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APPENDIX A

REB Approval Email

McGill

Research Ethics Board Office
James Administration Bldg.
845 Sherbrooke Street West. Rm 325
Montreal, QC H3A 0G4

Tel: (514) 398-6831
Fax: (514) 398-4644
Website: www.mcgill.ca/research/research/compliance/human/

Research Ethics Board 4
Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans

REB File #: 21-07-063

Project Title: Who Gets to Sleep (and Play) at Sleeping Bear Dunes? Exploring the Relationship Between a National Lakeshore and Inequality, Michigan, USA

Principal Investigator: Prof. Brian Robinson

Dept: Geography

Other researchers: Ethan Bird

Approval Period: **August 12, 2021 to August 11, 2022**

The REB 4 reviewed and approved this project by delegated review in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

Deanna Collin
Senior Research Ethics Administrator

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* Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described.
* Modifications to the approved research must be reviewed and approved by the REB before they can be implemented.
* A Request for Renewal form must be submitted before the above expiry date. Research cannot be conducted without a current ethics approval. Submit 2-3 weeks ahead of the expiry date.
* When a project has been completed or terminated, a Study Closure form must be submitted.
* Unanticipated issues that may increase the risk level to participants or that may have other ethical implications must be promptly reported to the REB. Serious adverse events experienced by a participant in conjunction with the research must be reported to the REB without delay.
* The REB must be promptly notified of any new information that may affect the welfare or consent of participants.
* The REB must be notified of any suspension or cancellation imposed by a funding agency or regulatory body that is related to this study.
* The REB must be notified of any findings that may have ethical implications or may affect the decision of the REB.

APPENDIX B

EOC Approval Email

McGill

Office of
Student Life and Learning

Bureau des
études et vie étudiante

***Fabrice Labeau**, Ph.D.*
Deputy Provost
(Student Life and Learning)
Premier vice-principal exécutif adjoint
(études et vie étudiante)

June 23, 2021

ETHAN BIRD

Via email: ethan.bird@mail.mcgill.ca

SUBJECT: Exemption Letter – Summer 2021

Dear Ethan Bird,

Your request to undertake a research in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Empire, Michigan, United States of America in Summer 2021, has been reviewed and approved.

The University recognizes the learning needs of its community which sometimes involve activities in areas under Government of Canada advisory "Avoid non-essential travel". We also recognize that you are requesting permission to remain in your current home city to undertake research in Empire, Michigan, USA and will not require any further travel to take part in the University-sanctioned activity. At this time, we encourage you to carefully consider your options.

If you do choose to proceed with your academic plans, you would have to accept full responsibility for your own safety, with knowledge of the risks involved, including remaining in your current location because of government measures to address the pandemic. In case you decide to move forward with the University-sanctioned activity abroad, the following conditions apply:

- You are required to submit a signed copy of the Student Acceptance Form Acknowledgment and Consent to the Office of International Education.
- Any changes to your original request will require a new exemption request.
- Should the Travel Advisory for your destination move to a Level 4 "Avoid all travel", McGill may terminate your participation in the International Activity.

McGill

Office of
Student Life and Learning

Bureau des
études et vie étudiante

***Fabrice Labeau**, Ph.D.*
Deputy Provost
(Student Life and Learning)
Premier vice-principal exécutif adjoint
(études et vie étudiante)

We strongly suggest that you take the following security provisions and use extreme caution when remaining in the area:

- Regularly review the travel and country information available at https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories;
- Contact your insurance provider to ensure you have sufficient health and emergency coverage for the duration of your stay;
- Ensure that you have sufficient finances, medications, and other necessities in case your stay is extended;
- Remain vigilant and sensitive to changing developments on the ground which may include:
    - facing strict movement restrictions and quarantines during your stay.
- Follow the advice of local authorities.

Please note that you will need to observe government directives including potential quarantine upon return and may have difficulty returning to Canada. Also, please remain cognizant of your environment at all times.

We wish you a safe and productive semester.

Sincerely,

Fabrice Labeau
Deputy Provost (Student Life & Learning)

cc: Bruce Lennox, Dean, Faculty of Science

APPENDIX C

Drafted Interview Questions

Interviews with Park Staff

Section 1: Intro/Personal information

General question: First I'd like to start by asking you just a bit about your job and background just so I have some context. Can you tell me a little about your career trajectory with SBDNL?

Be sure following info is covered:

1) job title
2) how long have you worked at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (maybe: prior work at a other NPS or State Park site, other prior jobs, etc.)
3) how long lived in the state of Michigan?
4) before getting a job with Sleeping Bear Dunes NL any personal relationship with this park? If so, what was that like and how did it change after working here?

Section 2: Programming at Sleeping Bear Dunes

General question: there are some programs we've learned about such as [lsit a few from below] – does SBDNL participate/implement any of these? I'm curious about things like how they're implemented (your staff or outside staff), how participants get involved, etc…

Some programs to use as prompts:

a) Every Kid Outdoors
b) Partnerships with the National Park Foundation such as:
    a. The Junior Angler Program
    b. ParkVentures
c) Fee Free Days
d) Buddy Bison Program
e) National Public Lands Day (partnership with NEEF)

f) Junior Ranger Program
g) Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP)
h) Any other programs you feel are relevant?

Section 3: Historical & current situation in the park

General question: I know you mentioned there might be others with expertise on this, so you could just tell me to talk to them, but part of what I'm interested in is how SBDNL was initially developed/designated, and how the surrounding region has developed and changed over the years since the park inception. Do you have any thoughts/insights on the dynamic between the surrounding region and the park?

General question: What do you think is the role that Sleeping Bear Dunes plays in the surrounding community?

> * *if needed, prompt with:* When we talked to John McGreevy, the NSP socioeconomic monitoring coordinator in Denver, he mentioned they put parks into categories of Recreation, Historic Urban, Historical Rural, and Nature. Which do you think SBDNL fits into?

Try to steer conversation to discuss some of these points

5) on a day-to-day basis in the park, would you say that you encounter visitors from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, or a narrow range? Do these reflect the surrounding community or other demographic?
6) Do you think the demographic makeup of park staff is different than park visitors? If so, how?
7) Do you think the demographic makeup of park staff is different than residents of the surrounding three counties? If so, how?

Section 4: NPS Commitment to Equity at Sleeping Bear Dunes

General question: In my thesis, I am exploring two different notions of equity in parks: equitable access and utilization. Equitable access refers to an absence of barriers present in allowing various racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups to use the parks. Equitable utilization refers to people of different groups using park resources at equal or similar rates. Can you talk about this dynamic in SBDNL? How do you think about these?

Try to steer conversation toward things like:

- What does SLDNL do to ensure equitable access to its resources?
- Is equitable access to the park a big issue here vs other NPS locations?
- How much discretion is given to local parks, like Sleeping Bear Dunes, to implement equity-related policies carried out by the NPS?
- Is there funding specifically related to this? How do budgets work for implementing equity-related concerns?

Section 6: Demographic Questions

Could I ask you some personal questions? What race do you identify as? What is your education level? What is your age?

(Conclude the interview amicably)