

Jefferson County Open Space 2011 Citizen Survey Overview of Findings

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION / METHODOLOGY	1
RESPONDENT PROFILE	3
YOUR USE OF OPEN SPACE PARKS, FACILITIES AND TRAILS.....	6
VALUES YOU PLACE ON OPEN SPACE.....	15
YOUR VIEWS ON PARK AND TRAIL MANAGEMENT	19
COMMUNICATING WITH YOU.....	26
SUGGESTIONS AND COMMENTS (OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES).....	28

INTRODUCTION / METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gather public feedback on Jefferson County Open Space Parks with respect to usage characteristics of parks, trails and other facilities, community values with respect to open space, satisfaction with current facilities and the importance of various park features, views on park and trail management, and communication. This feedback and subsequent analysis was designed to assist Jefferson County Open Space in future planning and policy formulation efforts.

The survey was conducted using three methods: 1) a mail-back survey, 2) an online invitation only survey to further stimulate response from those residents already within the defined random sample, and 3) an open link online survey for members of the public who did not receive a randomly selected survey in the mail. Unless stated otherwise, the analysis herein focuses primarily on surveys received via the first two methods. A total of 10,000 surveys were mailed to a random sample of Jefferson County residents in early October 2011, with 9,990 being delivered after subtracting undeliverable mail. The final sample size for this statistically valid survey was 1,345, resulting in a response rate of 13.5 percent and having a margin of error of approximately +/- 2.7 percentage points calculated for questions at 50% response¹. Results from the open link survey generated an additional 1,255 responses.

The primary list source used for the mailing was a third party list purchased from Melissa Data Corp., a leading provider of data quality solutions with emphasis on U.S., Canadian, and international address and phone verification and postal software. Use of the Melissa Data list also includes renters in the sample who are frequently missed in other list sources such as utility billing lists.

The underlying tabular data for the random sample responses were weighted by age to ensure appropriate representation of Jefferson County residents across different demographic cohorts in the overall sample, and so that the resulting analysis reflects the conclusions and opinions of the underlying population.

As responses to the open-link version of the questionnaire are “self-selected” and not a part of the randomly selected sample of residents, results from the open-link questionnaire are kept separate from the mail and invitation web versions of the survey for the overall analysis. The majority of the discussion that follows focuses primarily on results from the randomly selected sample of residents, although notations are made where significant differences (and similarities) between the two samples exist.

¹ For the total sample size of 1,345 margin of error is +/- 2.7 percent calculated for questions at 50% response (if the response for a particular question is “50%”—the standard way to generalize margin of error is to state the larger margin, which occurs for responses at 50%). Note that the margin of error is different for every single question response on the survey depending on the resultant sample sizes, proportion of responses, and number of answer categories for each question. Comparison of differences in the data between various segments, therefore, should take into consideration these factors. As a general comment, it is sometimes more appropriate to focus attention on the general trends and patterns in the data rather than on the individual percentages.

This report is organized around topics that generally follow those explored by the survey instrument. First, the Demographic Profile of respondents is explained. Then, the report summarizes findings from the following subject areas:

- About you and your household (Respondent Profile/Demographics)
- Your use of Open Space Parks, facilities and trails
- Values you place on open space
- Your views on park and trail management
- Communicating with you
- Suggestions and comments (open-ended responses)

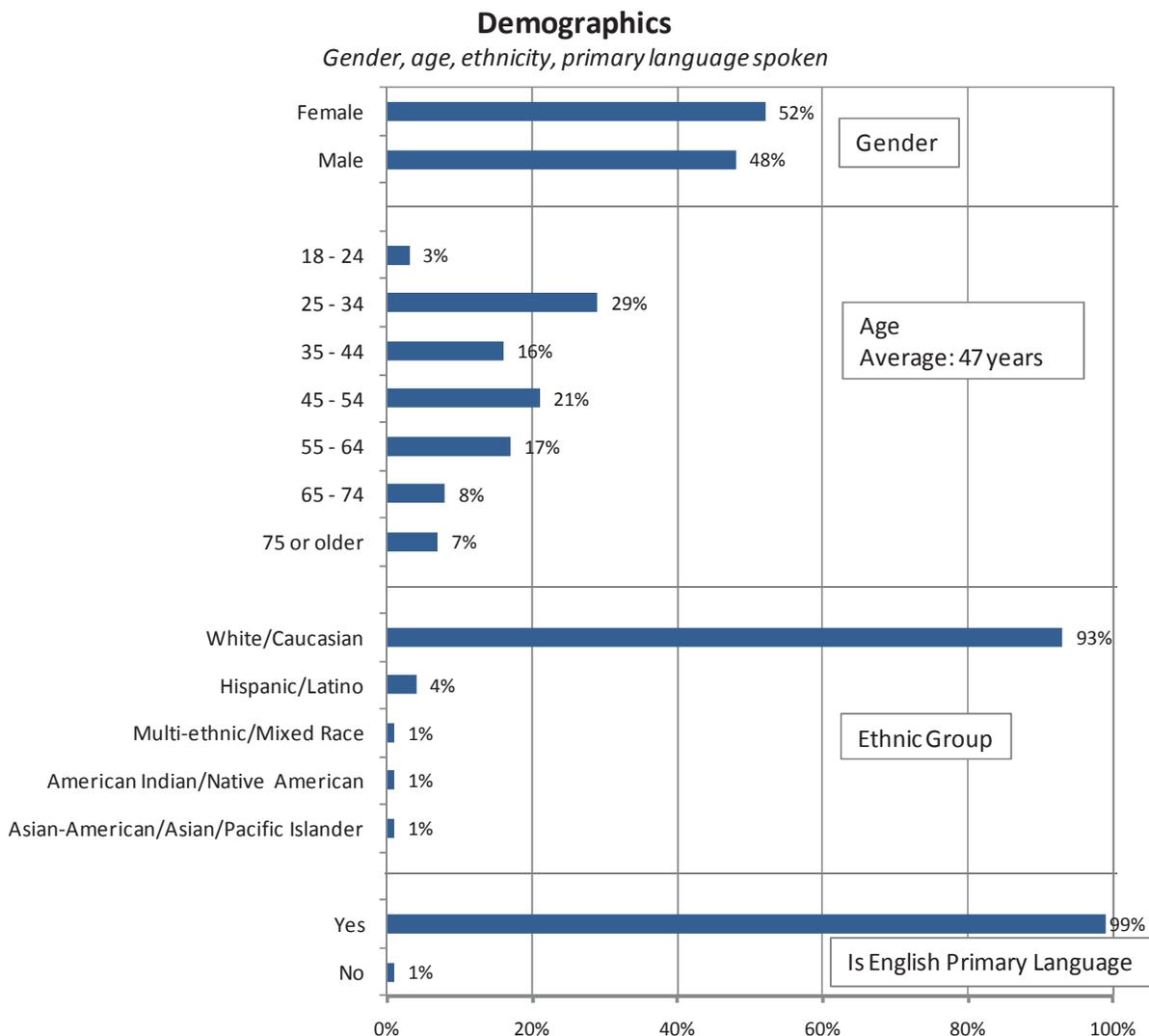
The results from the study have been presented in several different formats. This report provides an overview of findings, highlighting selected results using graphs and charts to summarize data. A PowerPoint presentation has also been provided that presents findings in a slide show format. This package of slides was used for a presentation to the Jefferson County Open Space Advisory Committee and will be used in other presentations by department staff. Additionally, an extensive set of “cross-tabulation” tables are provided. These tables break the results down by the Random Survey and the Open Link survey and segment responses by key variables including age, geography, length of residency in the County, park most used, activity most often participated in, makeup of household, gender and membership in organization(s). Together, these tables provide the County staff and interested parties with an ability to explore survey results in detail.

Finally, the open-ended comments from the study are presented. They represent over 280 pages of input, presented verbatim. The comments were received from both the mail surveys and the web surveys. All responses from the Internet versions of the survey have been presented along with a sampling of approximately one third of the paper surveys. These responses are presented in formats that combine comments with several other variables (including “overall satisfaction with the parks” and “primary activity”) in order to provide greater usability of responses. In addition, the results from the Random Survey are separated from those obtained via the Open Link.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

The questionnaire contained a series of demographic questions designed to portray various attributes of responding household members. These questions were used to ensure the representativeness of responses, and they were also used to crosstab responses so that survey results could be segmented and differences and similarities between groups (such as male/female, or over 40 years/under 40 years) could be probed.

Respondents were almost equally divided female (52%) and male (48%). The random survey was targeted at residents 18 years and older. The age profile of responses is virtually identical to the County as a whole because of the weighting of results. The average age of respondents was 47 years. The ethnicity of respondents included 93% White/Caucasian respondents, 4% Hispanic/Latino and 3% identifying themselves as other races. Virtually all respondents (99%) indicated that English is the primary language spoken at home.

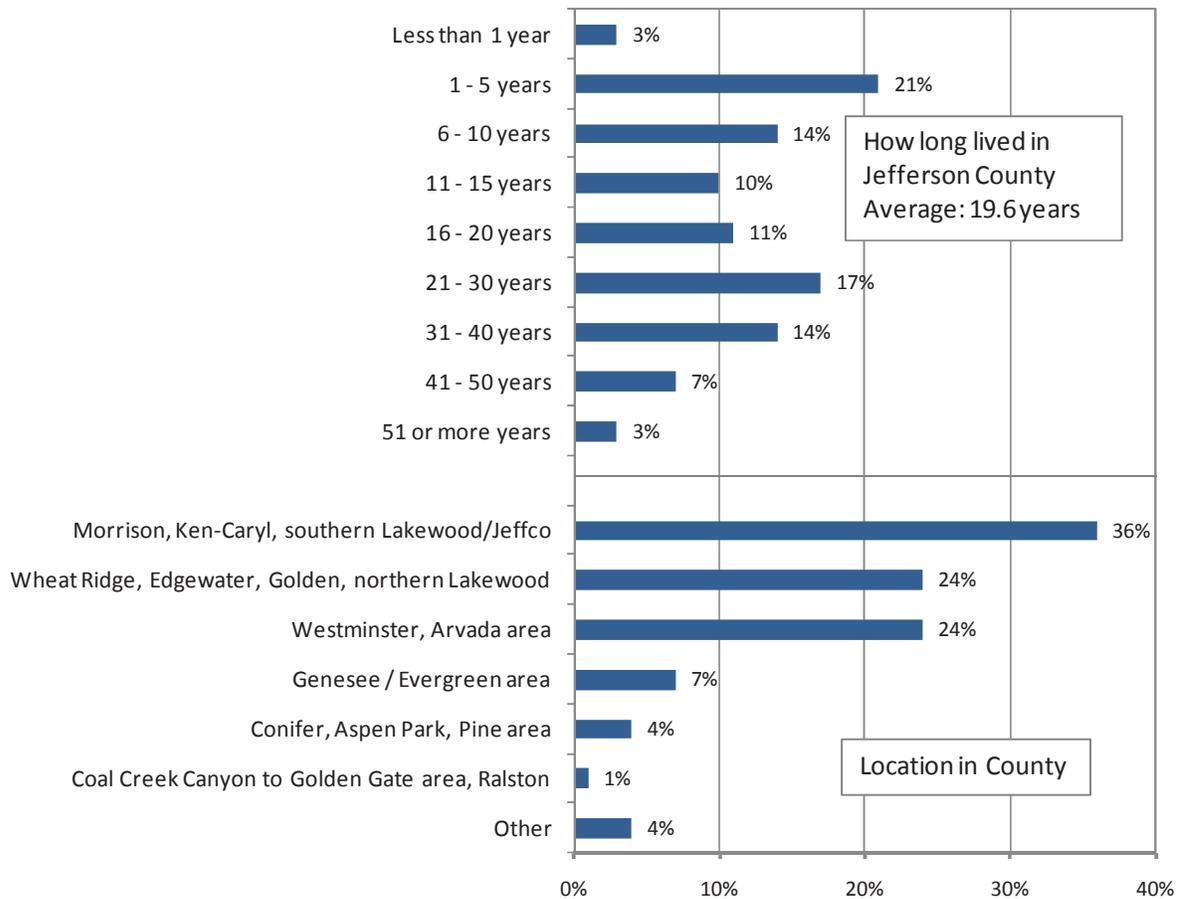


The survey asked, “How long have you lived in Jefferson County?” and the overall average was 19.6 years. About 24% of respondents had lived in the County less than five years.

Survey responses were also grouped geographically. The survey had two questions that considered geographic locations: ZIP Codes, and the geographic categories summarized in the graph below. The responses are generally representative of the distribution of overall population in Jefferson County. Additionally, the Open Link survey contained a question on location of residence, in or outside the County. This question was not included in the Random sample survey because it was only distributed to County residents.

Demographics

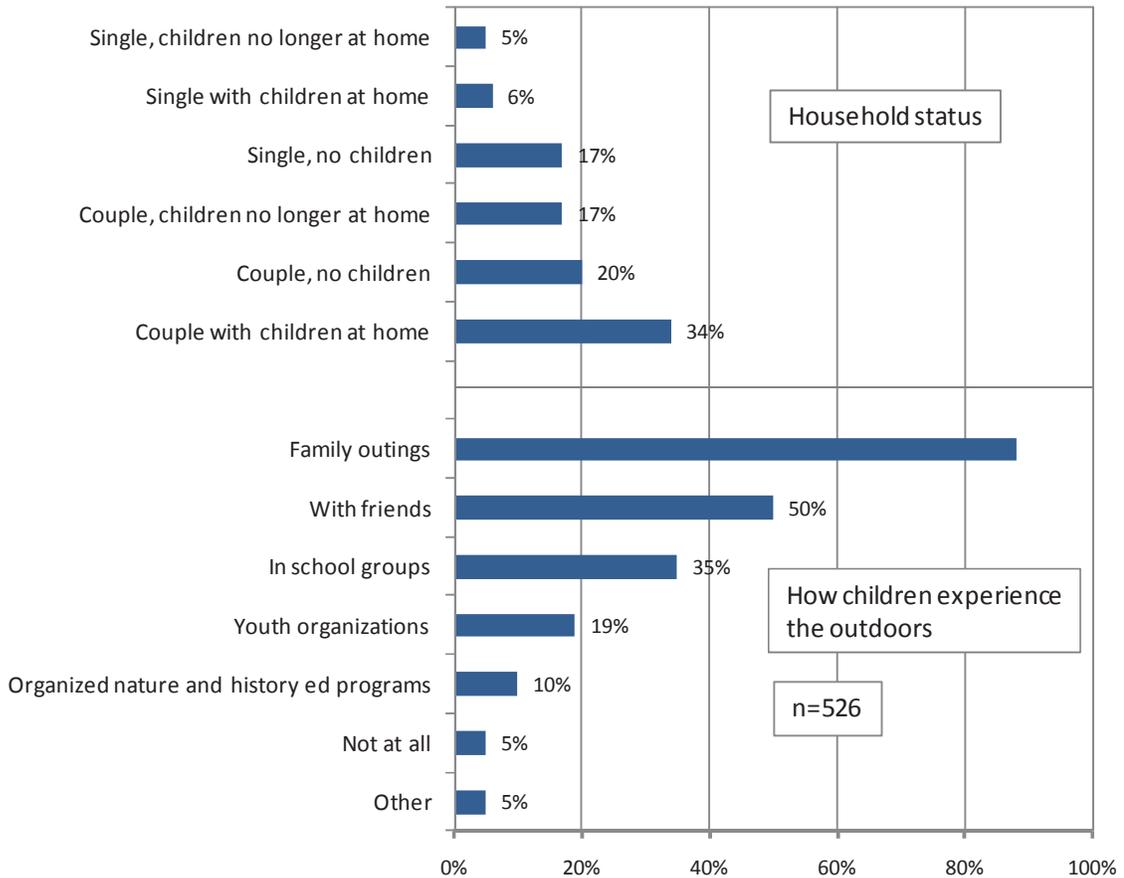
Time spent in Jeffco, zip code, location in county



The questionnaire contained a question designed to determine “household status” or the makeup of the family unit. About 28% of respondents reported that they are single. About 72% are couples, with 34% reporting that they are couples with children at home. The survey contained several questions concerning how children experience outdoors and which parks are most used by children. In general, the most identified source of youth participation was “family outings” followed by “with friends” and “school groups.” Results are summarized in the graph below.

Demographics

Household status, experience for children, size of household

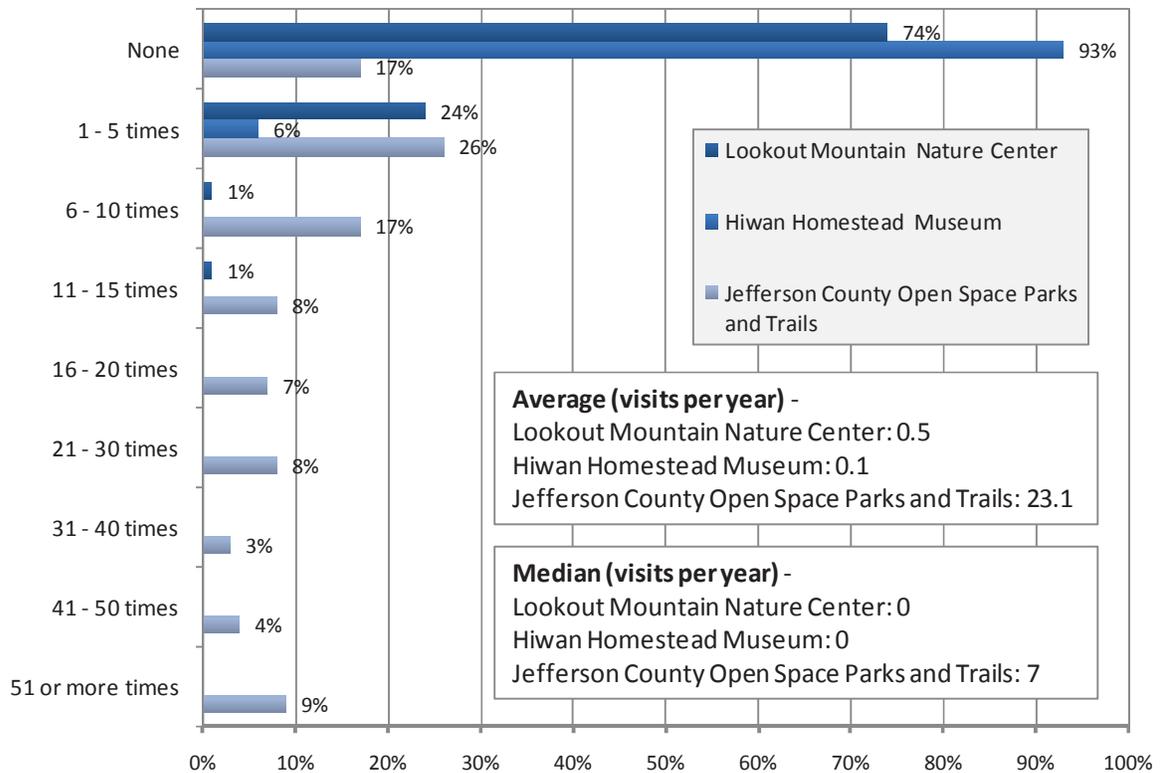


YOUR USE OF OPEN SPACE PARKS, FACILITIES AND TRAILS

The survey measured use of open space facilities including the most frequently identified Jefferson County Open Space Parks, the Lookout Mountain Nature Center, and the Hiwan Homestead Museum. Results suggest that about 83% of County residents visited the Open Space Parks, 26% Lookout Mountain, and 7% the Hiwan Homestead Museum. The median number of visits per year to Open Space Parks was 7 visits and the average was 23 visits.

Open Space Usage

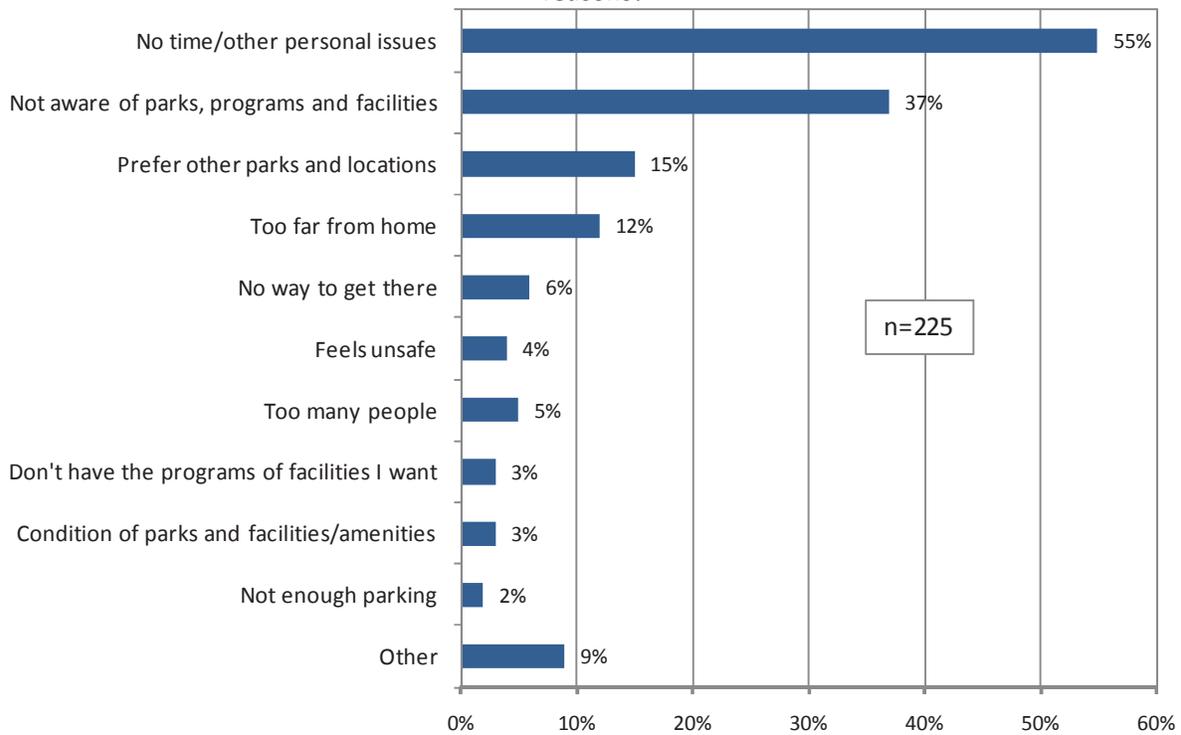
Q. Approximately how many times in the last 12 months have you and/or members of your household visited Jefferson County Open Space Parks and facilities?



The survey indicates that about one in five residents (17%) do not visit the parks. One of the purposes of the study was to understand in more detail the reasons that Open Space Parks are not used. As illustrated below, lack of time and personal issues are most identified as the reason for not visiting (55%), followed by “not aware of parks, programs and facilities” (37%) and “prefer other parks and locations.” Factors like safety, crowding, condition of parks and facilities, and parking are seldom identified as the reason for not visiting (typically less than 5% of responses for each of these reasons).

Reasons not used

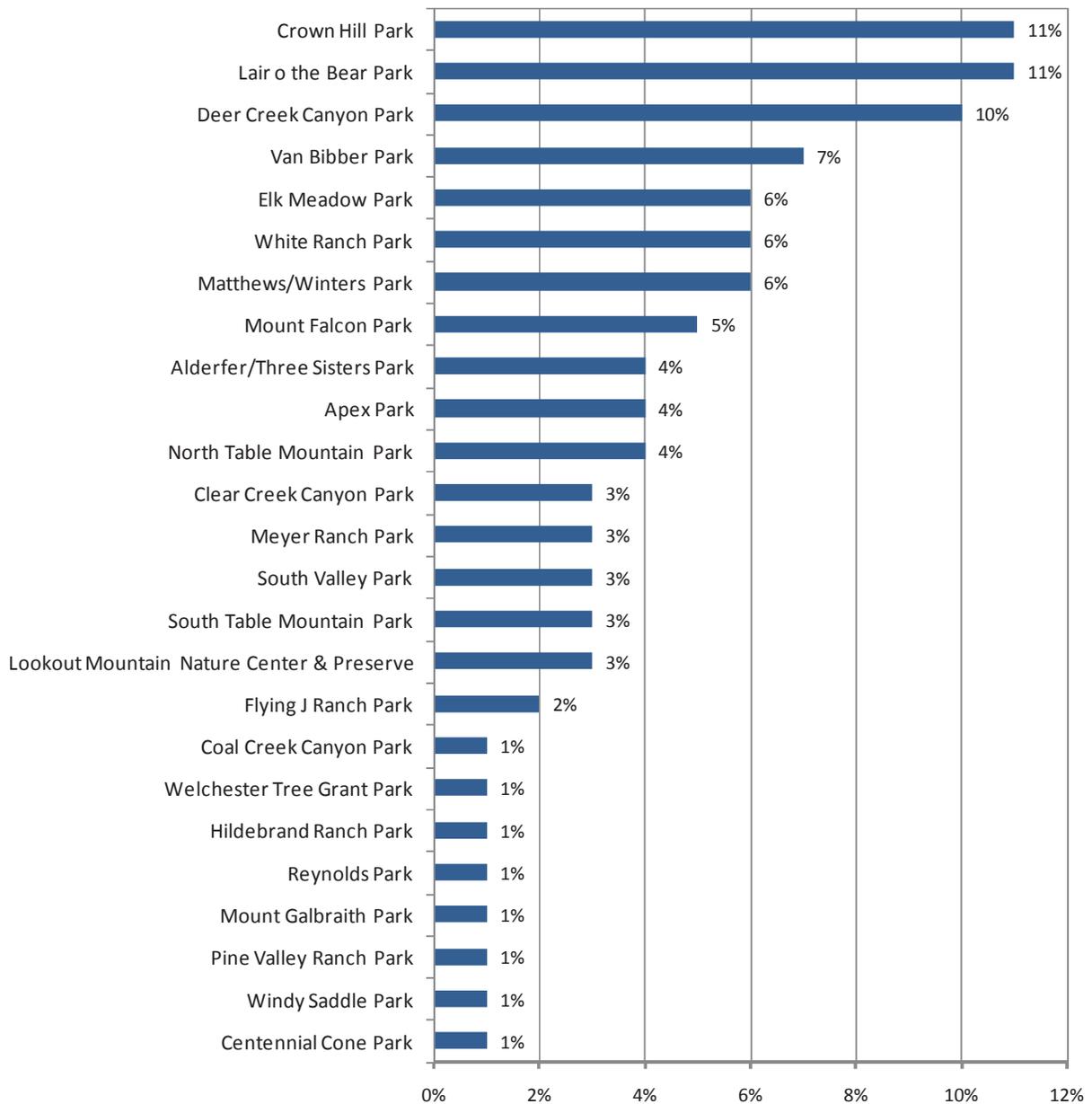
Q. If you don't use Jefferson County Open Space Parks and facilities, what are the reasons?



The survey examined the “Jefferson County Open Space Park visited most frequently” and the parks most used for children’s activities. These results show distinct differences in use, with Crown Hill, Lair o’ the Bear and Deer Creek Canyon parks most identified. These results have been cross-tabulated and this procedure indicates distinct differences in use patterns that are explained in part by nearby population densities, but also by available activities and general attractiveness to the overall population in both Jefferson County and the surrounding region. These results provide a resource for considering the relative attractiveness of different facilities for various groups of users.

Most Frequent Park

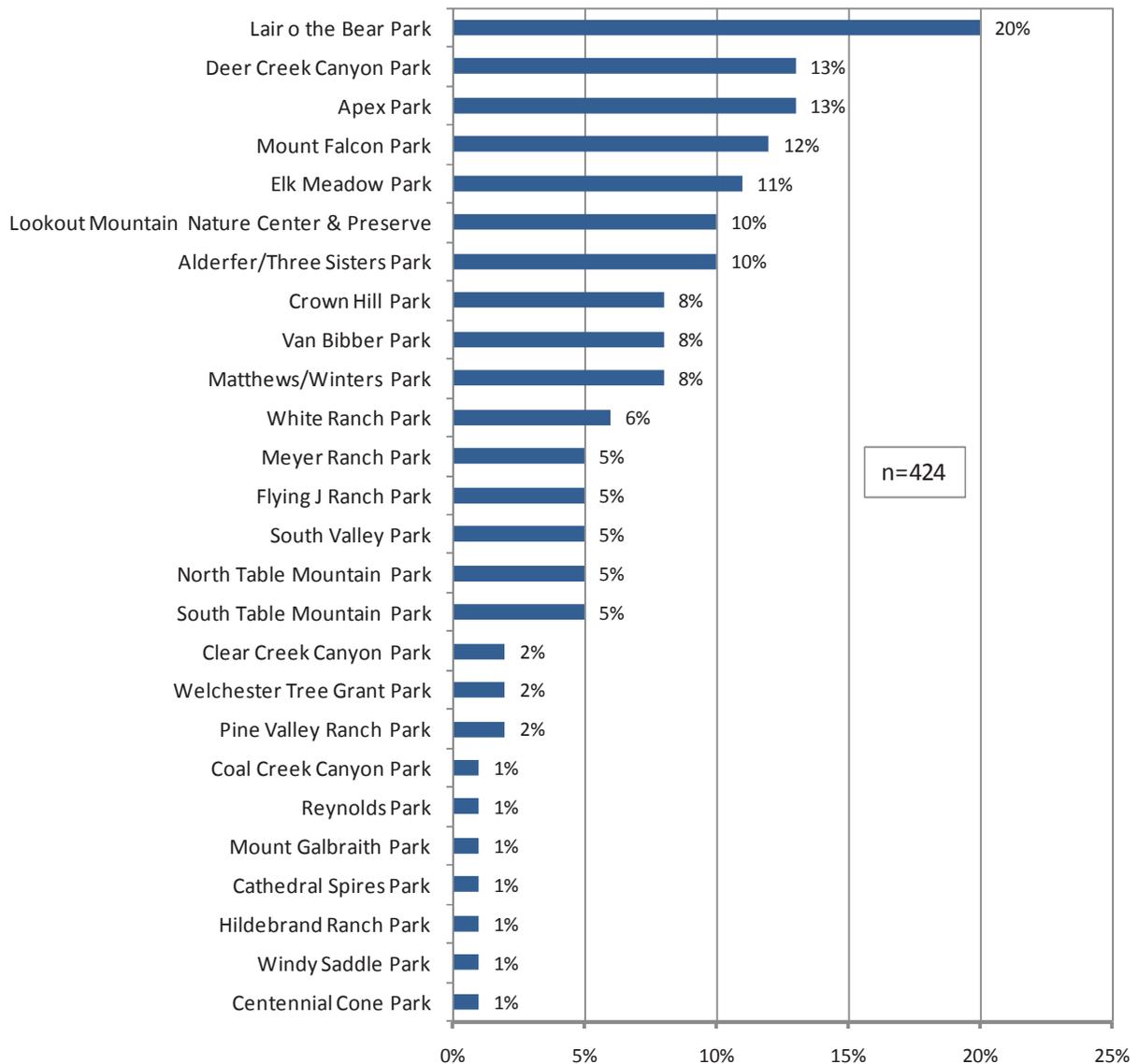
Q. Which Jefferson County Open Space Park do you visit most frequently?



Results are similar for children’s activities and use with both Lair o’ the Bear and Deer Creek Canyon Park most identified. However, Apex, Mount Falcon and Elk Mountain parks are especially likely to be mentioned as parks most frequented for children’s activities (see the graph below). Lookout Mountain Nature Center and Preserve is also more likely to be most frequently visited by parties with children (10%) compared to 3% among all adult respondents.

Children's Park Usage

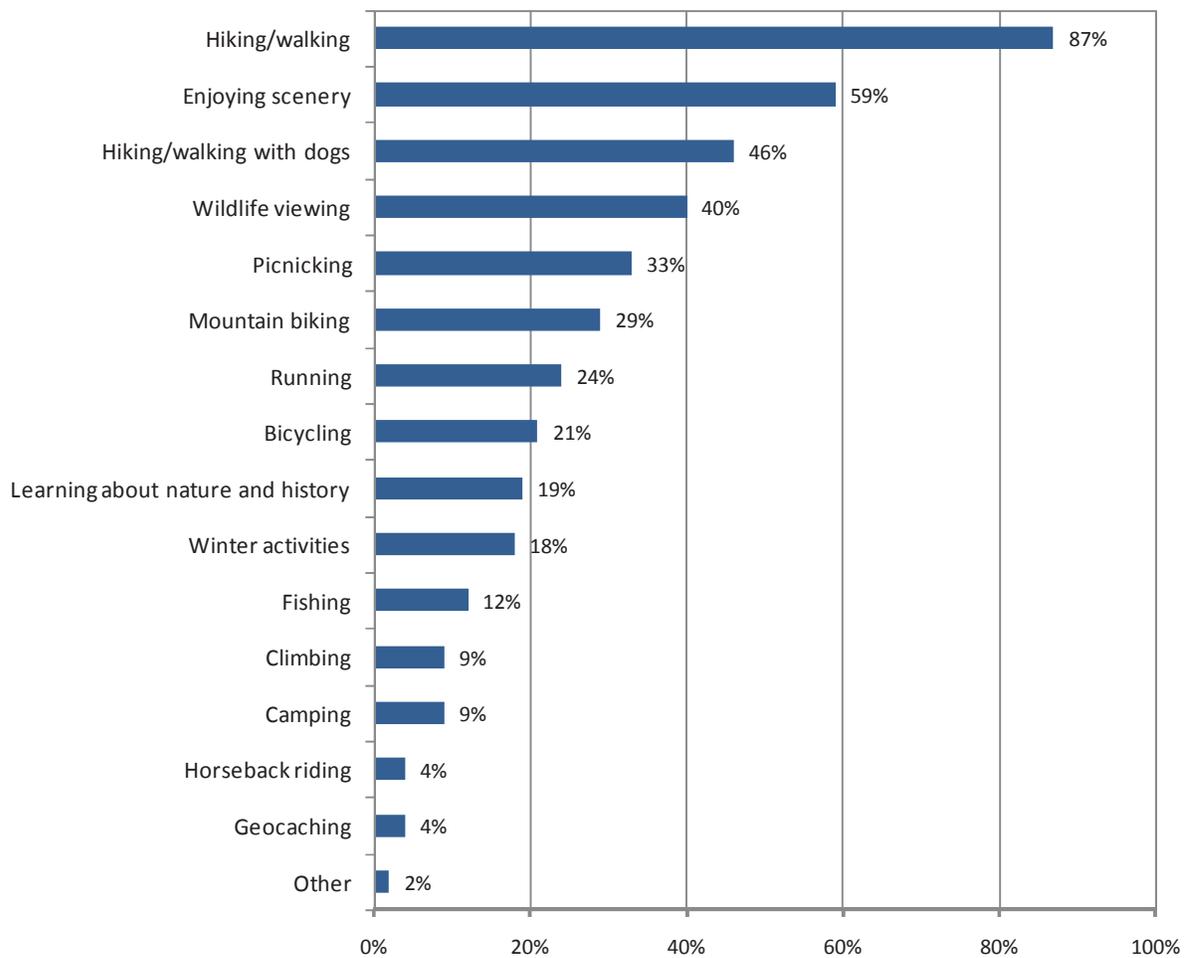
Q. If your children experience the outdoors, which Jefferson County Open Space Parks do you use most often for their activities?



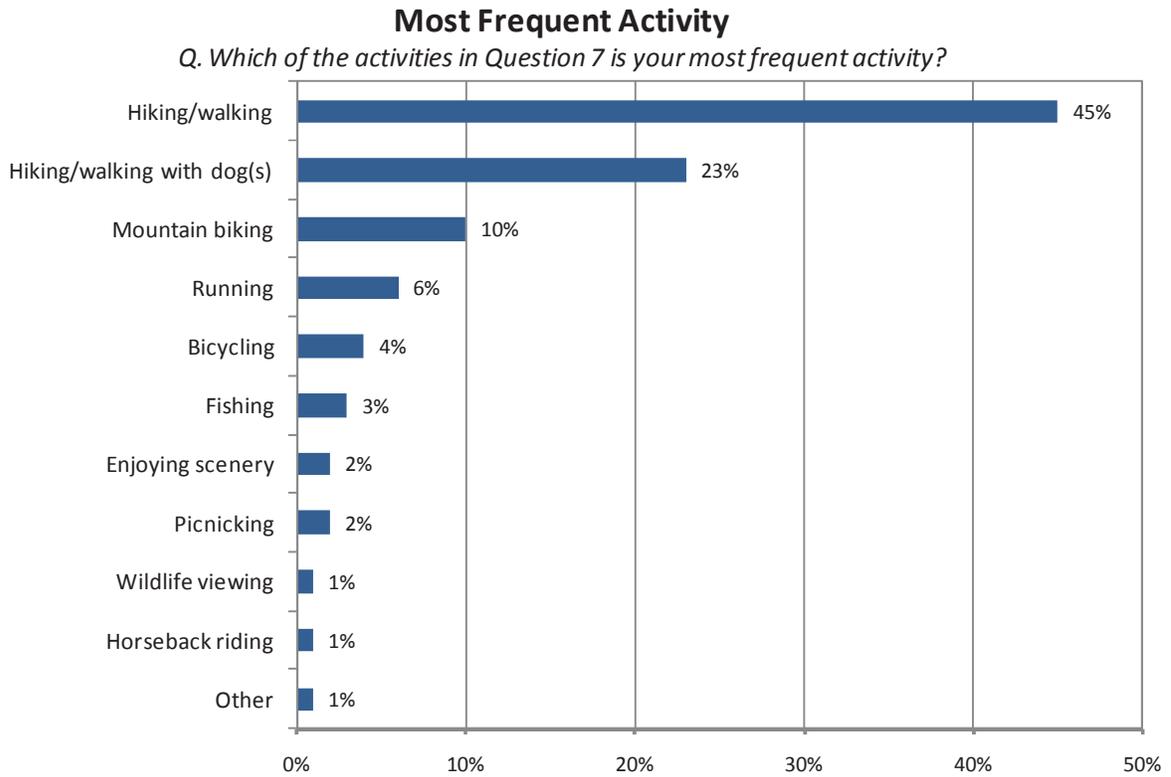
Activities in the parks were probed in detail and results are graphed below. The question was phrased, “What activities have you done in Jefferson County Open Space Parks?” Most respondents participate in more than one activity, either on a single trip or on multiple trips over the course of time. The graph below shows these patterns with 15 different activities measured and an “other” category that resulted in additional activities being described. Results indicate that the most frequent activities are: Hiking/walking (87%) and hiking/walking with dogs (46%), enjoying the scenery (59%), wildlife viewing (40%), picnicking (33%) and mountain biking (29%).

Activities

Q. Which activities have you done in Jefferson County Open Space Parks?



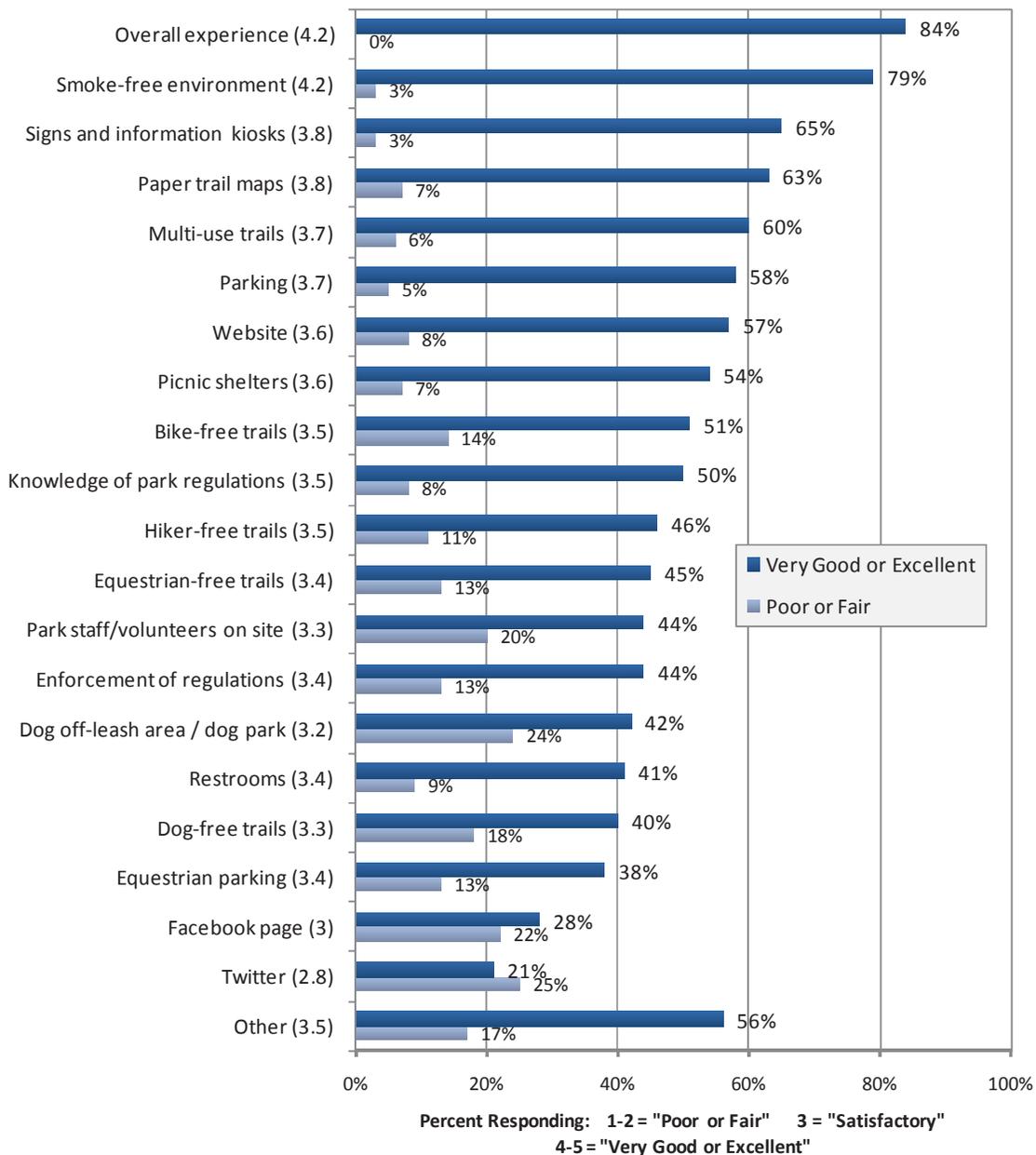
A follow-up question concerning activities asked, “Which of the activities in the previous question is your most frequent?” Again hiking/walking (45%) and hiking/walking with dogs (23%) was most identified, followed by mountain biking (10%) and running (4%).



The survey contained a series of questions designed to rate various aspects of the park facilities and experience. A 5-point scale was used to measure responses: 1-2="poor or fair," 3="satisfactory" and 4-5="very good/excellent." In general, ratings were very positive as illustrated by the graph below. Note that in this graph the "satisfactory" (midrange) responses are not portrayed in order to emphasize areas of particular strength or weakness. On a very positive note, the highest rated category was for "Overall experience" with 84% calling it excellent or very good and an average rating of 4.2 on the 5-point scale. "Smoke free environment" was next highest rated (average 4.2), followed by signs and information kiosks (3.8) and paper trail maps (3.8).

Rating of Elements of Parks

Q. When visiting Jefferson County Open Space Parks, how would you rate the following?

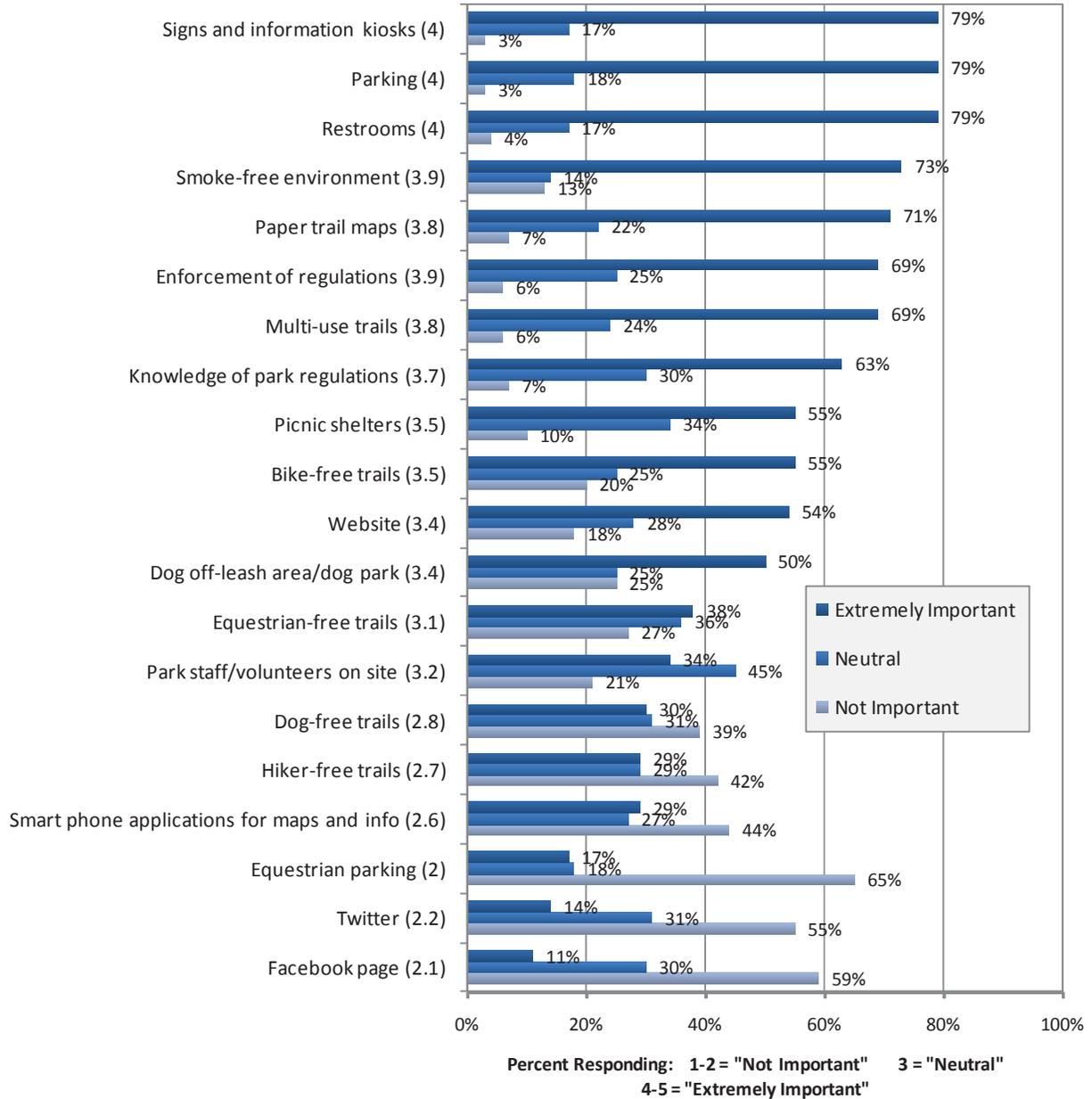


The survey also included a group of questions designed to examine the importance of various park elements in determining the “quality of your experience when visiting the Jefferson County Open Space Parks.” By this measure, signs and kiosks, parking and restrooms were most often identified as “extremely” or “very important” on the 5-point scale.

The ratings and importance survey results have been combined to examine those factors that are both most important and very highly rated (like “smoke-free environment” and “signs and kiosks” and those that are not rated as well or of more limited importance (like “Facebook” and “Twitter.”) Taken together, the ratings and importance factors provide a benchmark for understanding current performance and community attitudes. These qualities can be used to gauge various priorities at the parks and also to measure changes in perceptions over time.

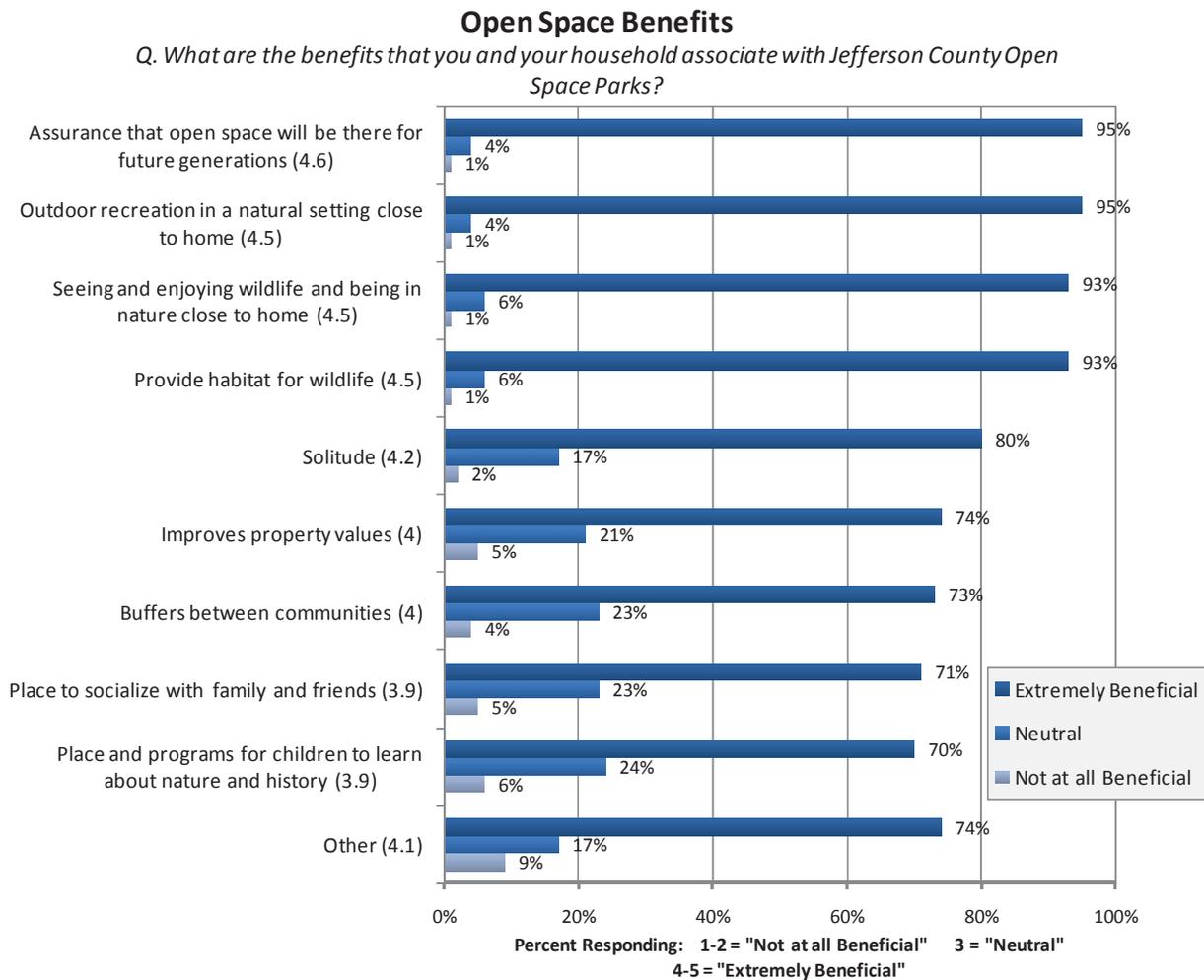
Importance of Park Elements

Q. How important are each of the following to the quality of your experience when visiting a Jefferson County Open Space Park?



VALUES YOU PLACE ON OPEN SPACE

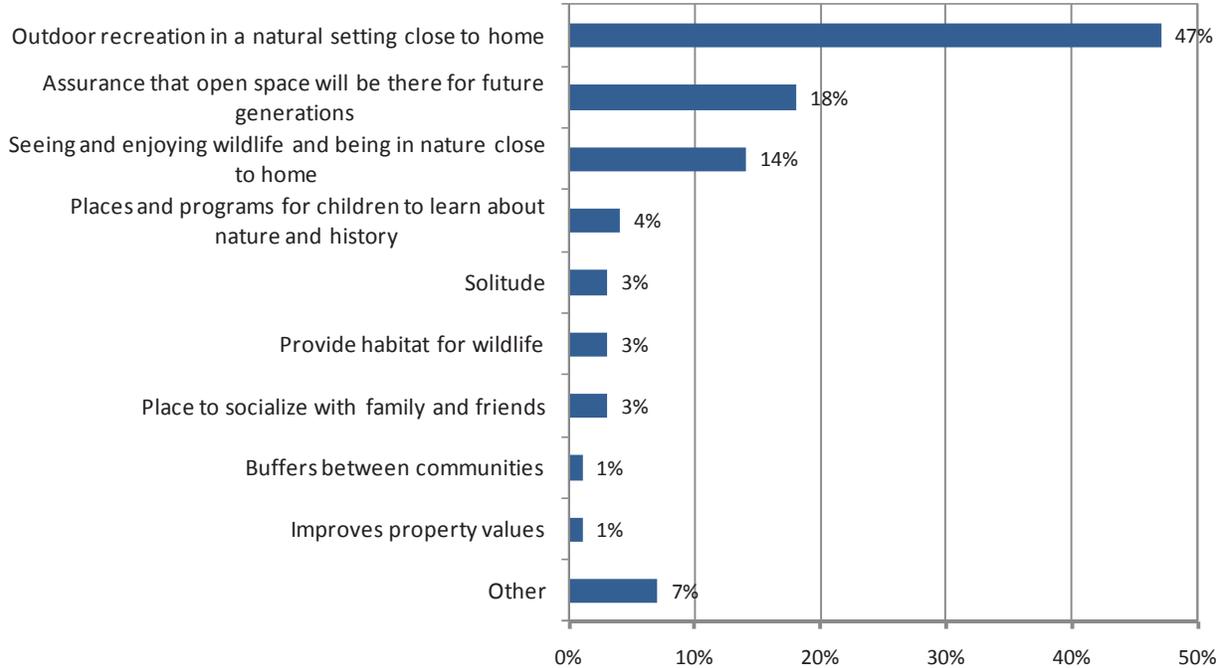
The survey measured community attitudes regarding the benefits associated with open space. These responses were based on a question that identified nine categories together with an opportunity to identify “other” factors. Virtually all respondents identified “Assurance that open space will be there for future generations” and “Outdoor recreation in a natural setting close to home” as “very or extremely beneficial” (95%). All of the categories that were evaluated garnered significant support as “benefits” but the results provide a rank ordering of overall perceptions.



These findings were further probed in a follow-up question that asked respondents to identify the “Greatest Value” among the list of benefits. As shown below, outdoor recreation close to home was most identified (47%), followed by assurance that open space will be there for future generations (18%).

Greatest Value

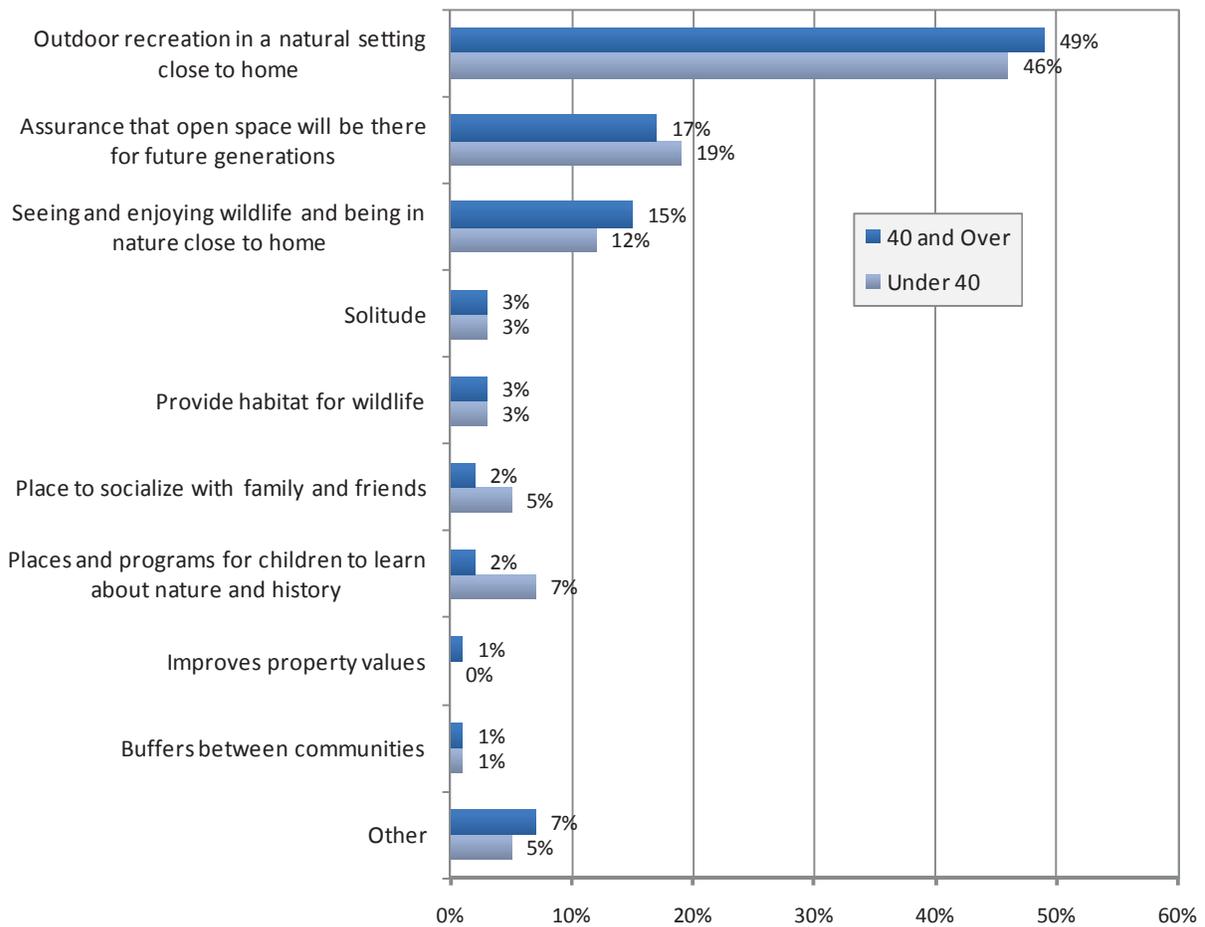
Q. From Question 12, which single benefit is of greatest value to you and your household?



These results were further probed by age of respondents. As illustrated, there was strong consensus on this question among older (over 40 years) and younger respondents. While households with younger respondents were especially likely to identify the importance of open space for children, the results show remarkable similarities across the two age groups of respondents.

Greatest Value

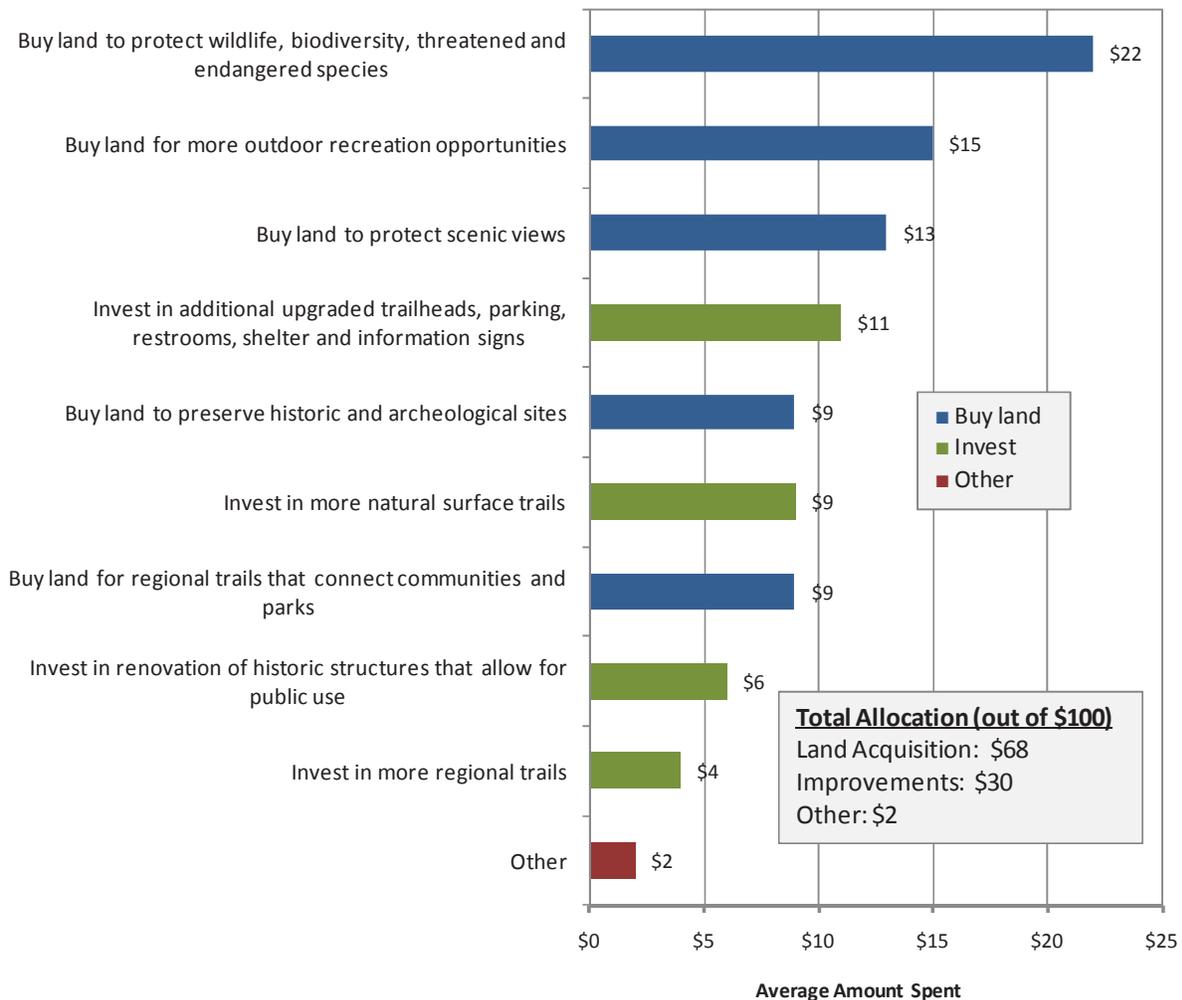
Q. From Question 12, which single benefit is of greatest value to you and your family?



A question on the survey was designed to elicit feedback on priorities for future expenditures. The question asked, “With \$5 increments being the smallest amount you might use, if you had \$100 to spend on land and/or park and trail improvements, how would you allocate those funds?” The survey provided nine categories for expenditures that were broken into various types of land acquisitions and improvements. As illustrated below, the responses provide an overall prioritization of investments. Further, the responses have been segmented under separate cover so that the results can be considered in more depth. For example, the responses from different parts of the County, and from those respondents that have children still at home, are portrayed separately. In general, there is similarity between the responses from different subgroups when cross-tabulations are performed but the survey results provide a tool for looking at responses in greater detail and with more precision than simply considering the overall response patterns.

Dollar Allocation

Q. With \$5 increments being the smallest amount you might use, if you had \$100 to spend on land and/or park and trail improvements, how would you allocate those funds?

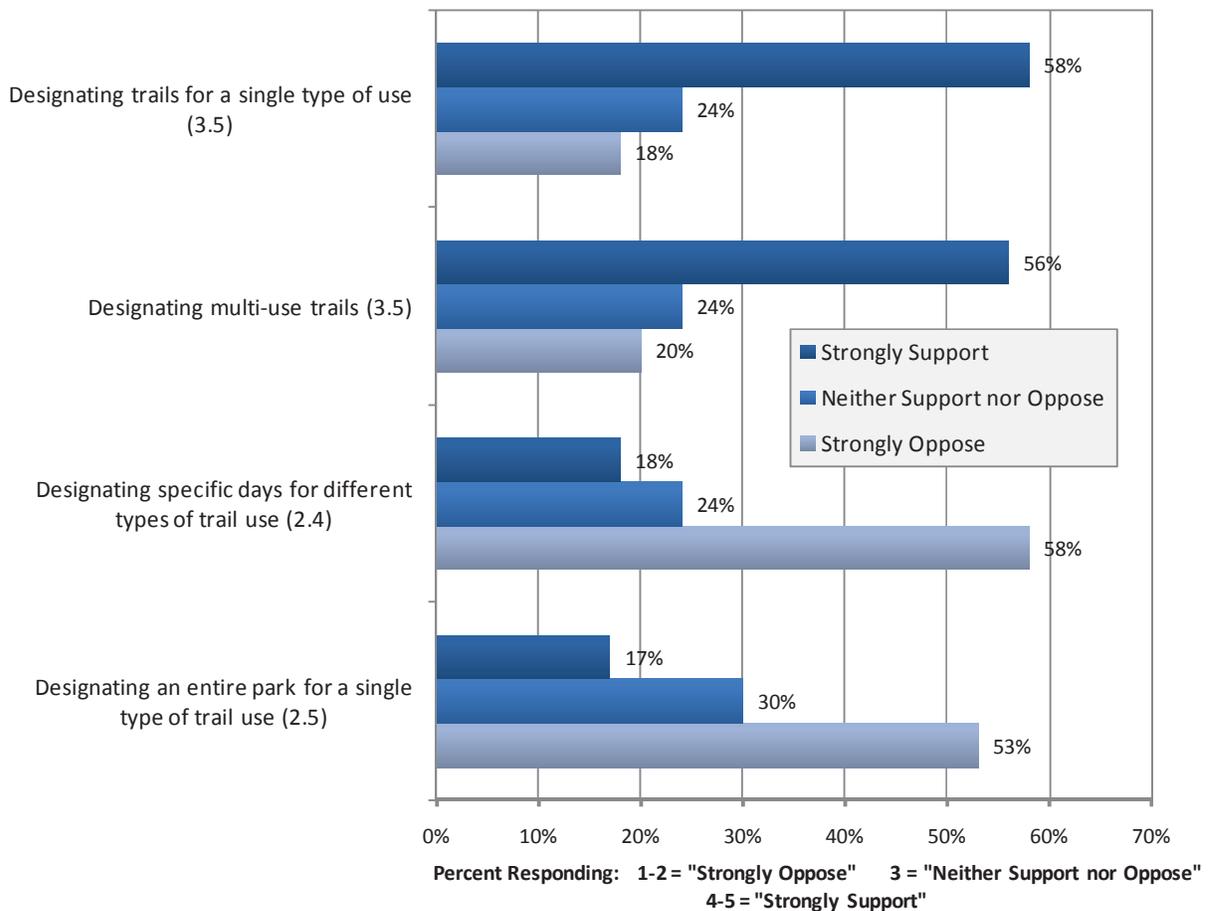


YOUR VIEWS ON PARK AND TRAIL MANAGEMENT

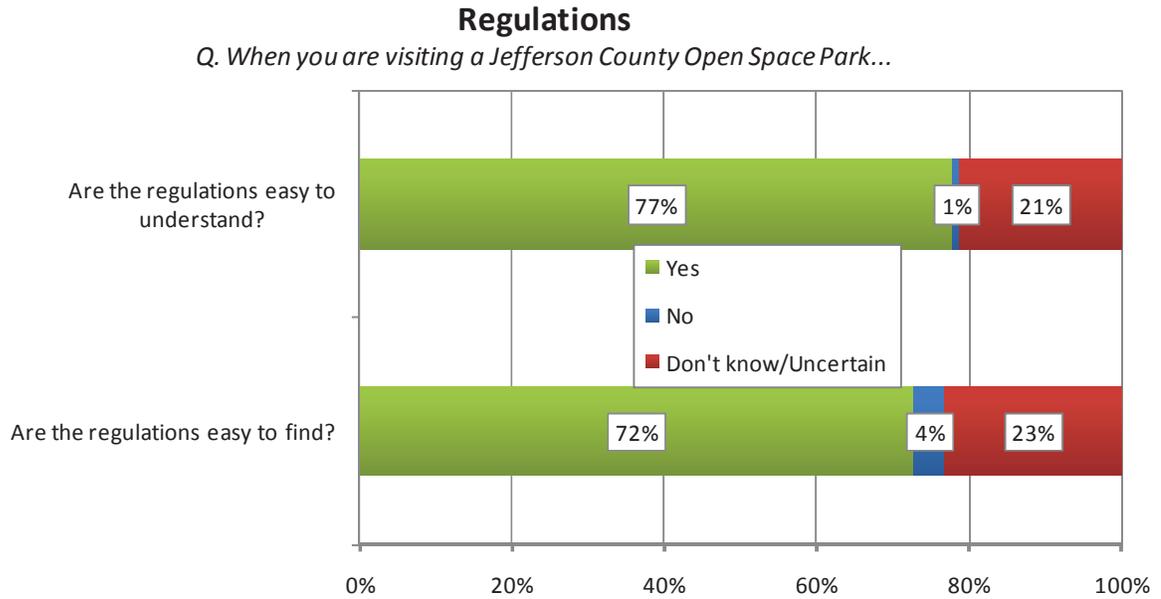
Various trail management strategies or programs were investigated through the survey. As shown below, there was relatively stronger support for either designating trails for a single type of use, or for designating multi-use trails. Both alternatives received about 58% support. In contrast, limiting access by a single type of trail use or by specific days for different types of uses received less support, with over 50 percent of respondents indicating opposition to these choices.

Level of Support-Trail Management Strategies

Q. Please indicate your level of support for Jefferson County Open Space using the different tools listed.



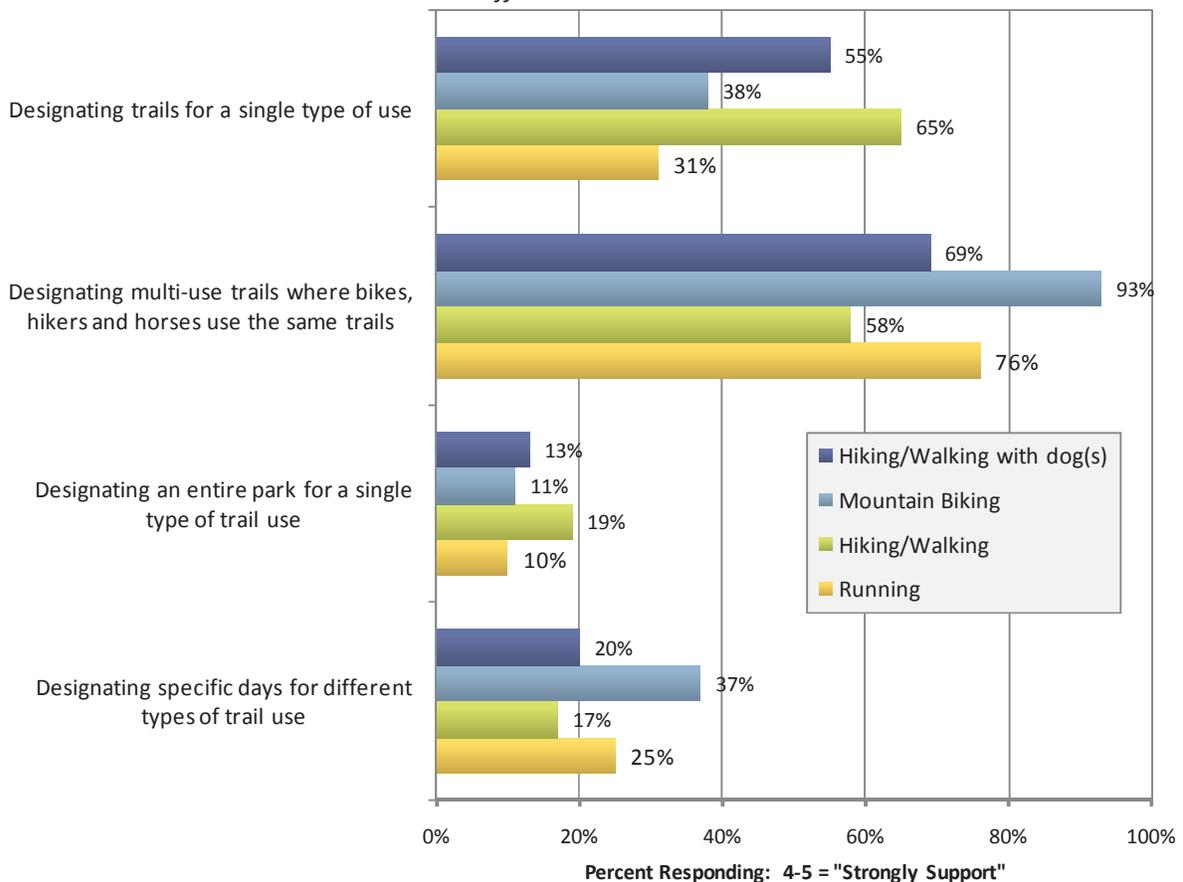
Respondents were asked about regulations in the parks, both ease of understanding and ease of finding the rules. Both were rated very positively, with 77% and 72% respectively finding the regulations easy to understand and to find. About 20% indicated that the “didn’t know” or were “uncertain.”



These trail management policies were further evaluated through cross-tabulations and the results provide additional insights. The group of respondents that said they were most likely to be mountain bikers or runners when using open space are especially likely to favor multiple uses of trails and are generally more likely to be against single types of usage. The mountain bikers also show relatively greater support for designating specific days for different types of trail usage (37% giving the choice a 4 or 5 indicating “support”), but this option was not favored by a majority of any group including mountain bikers. These results are further confirmed by some of the open-ended comments. A number of respondents asked that the trails be kept open for access at all times and in all parks; generally, these responses suggested that users want to be able to use the system when and as they wish, without keeping track of varying restrictions.

Level of Support-Trail Management Strategies (by most frequent activity, random sample only)

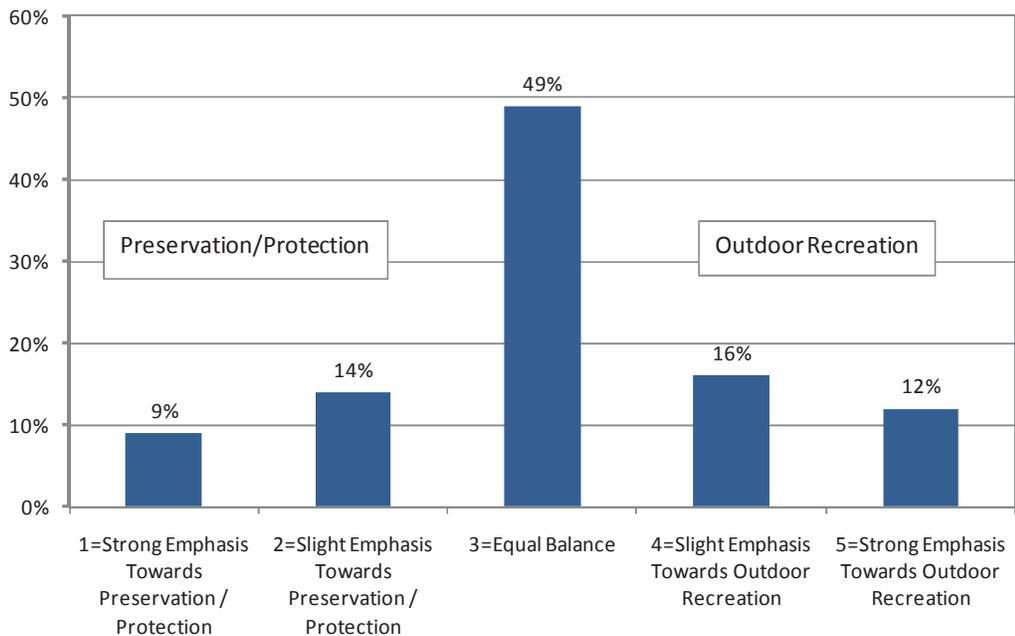
Q. Please indicate your level of support for Jefferson County Open Space using the different tools listed.



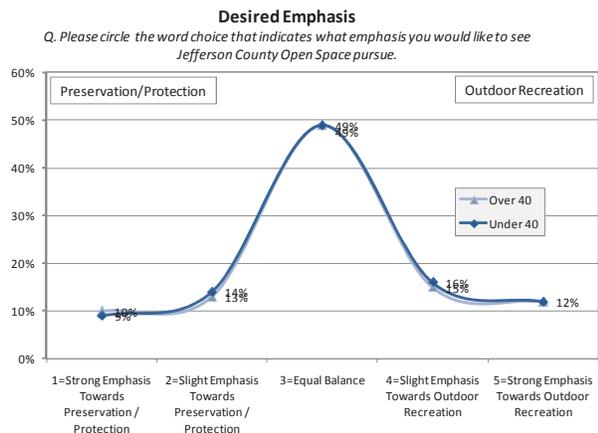
A scale question was used to determine where citizens place themselves in terms of the “emphasis they would like to see Jefferson County open space pursue.” At one end of the spectrum was emphasis “Towards preservation/protection” and at the other end was emphasis “Towards outdoor recreation.” In the middle was “Equal balance.” Result showed an almost perfect “bell curve” distribution with most respondents (49%) in favor of balance, and about equal numbers on either side of balance, tending toward either preservation/protection or outdoor recreation.

Desired Emphasis

Q. Please circle the word choice that indicates what emphasis you would like to see Jefferson County Open Space pursue.



This question was examined carefully by conducting a series of crosstabs to compare results from segments of respondents. Interestingly, there was very little difference in opinion by the age of respondents (over or under 40 years). As shown below, the results show remarkable consensus in Jefferson County among the young and older alike.

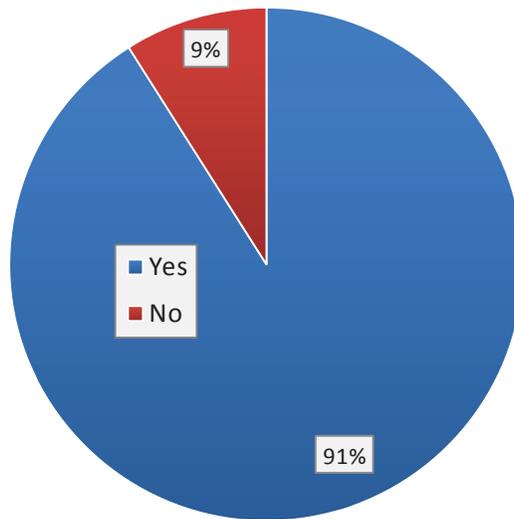


There was a slight difference by the geography of where respondents lived, with those in mountain locations more likely to indicate they favored an emphasis on recreation. The differences become more pronounced when results are evaluated by the most frequent activity of respondents, with mountain bikers especially likely to want to see recreation emphasized.

The responses indicate that most residents find the hours of parks and open space operations to be adequate (90%). However, this is one area where the Open Link respondents have distinctly different opinions. They are especially likely to respond that the hours of operation do not meet their needs. They would like to see more access to the lands after sunset (about 41% indicating needs are not met).

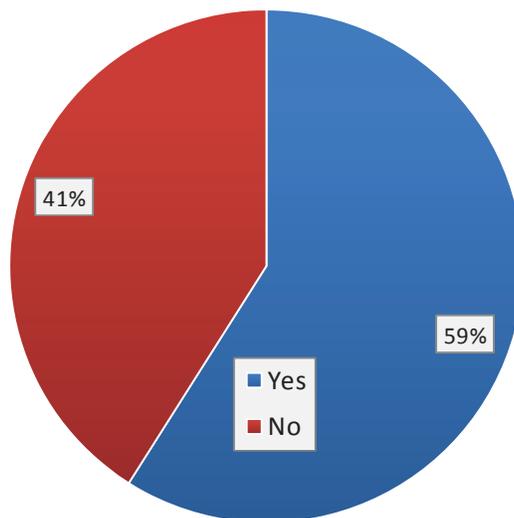
Hours of Operation (Random Sample)

Q. Do current hours of operation adequately meet your household's needs?



Hours of Operation (Open Link)

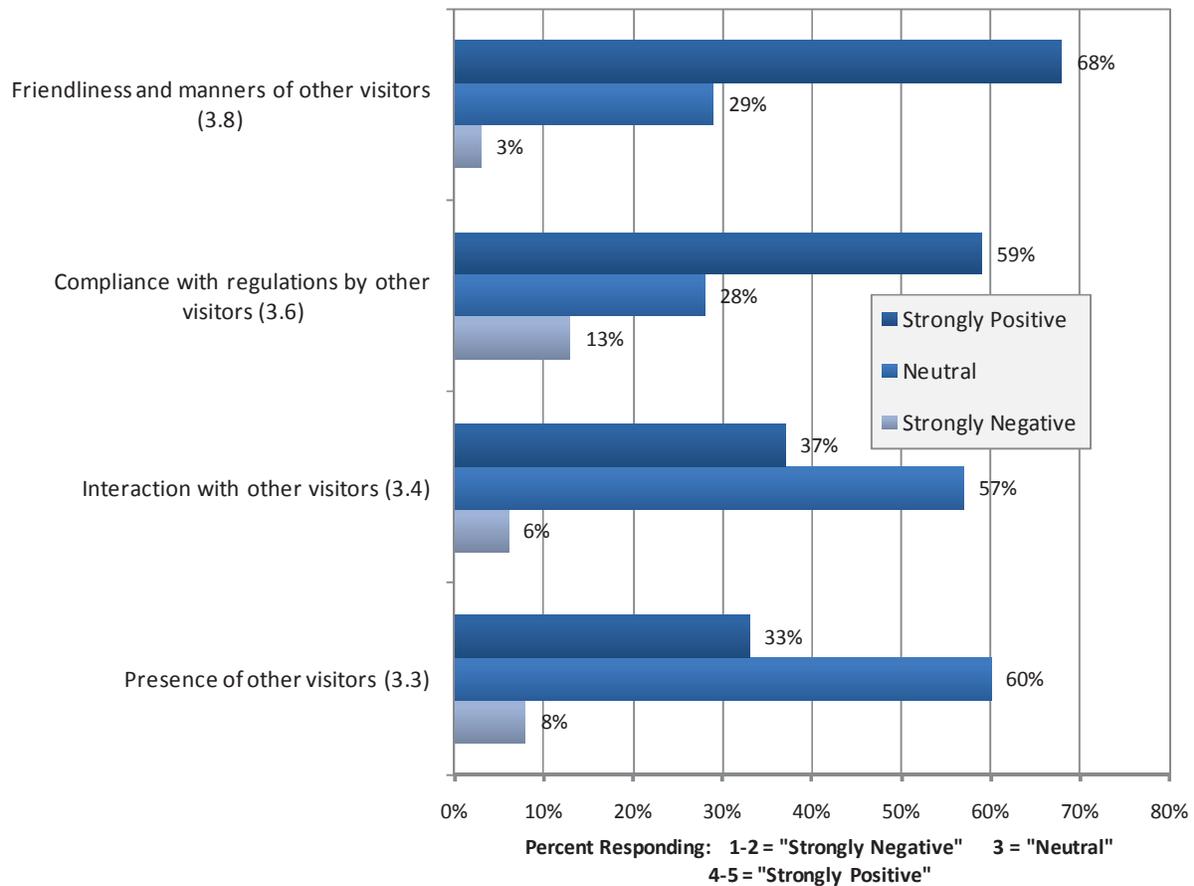
Q. Do current hours of operation adequately meet your household's needs?



Respondents were asked about “Situational Influences” created by other users of the system and results are graphed below. In general, respondents were positive, with more than half indicating that their contacts were positive in terms of: friendliness (68% positive), compliance with regulations by other visitors (59%), interaction with other visitors (37%) and presence of other visitors (33% positive). Generally, less than 10 percent of responses were in the negative or strongly negative categories. Responses on this question were evaluated using crosstabs and the differences by user groups were generally minor. Both trail runners (78%) and mountain bikers (73%) were more likely than the overall (68%) to call the “Friendliness and manners of other visitors” positive.

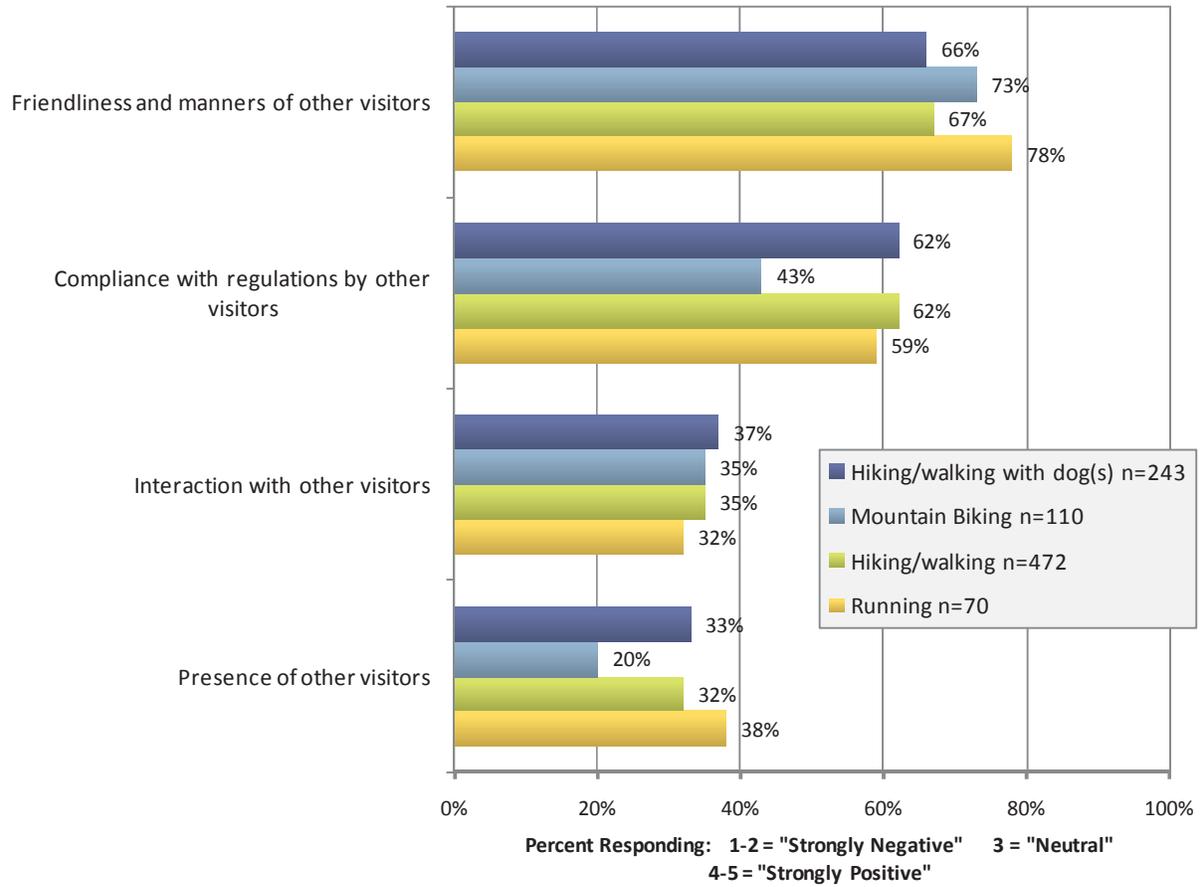
Situational Influence

Q. How do the following situations influence your Jefferson County Open Space Park experience?



Situational Influence (by most frequent activity, random sample only)

Q. How do the following situations influence your Jefferson County Open Space Park experience?

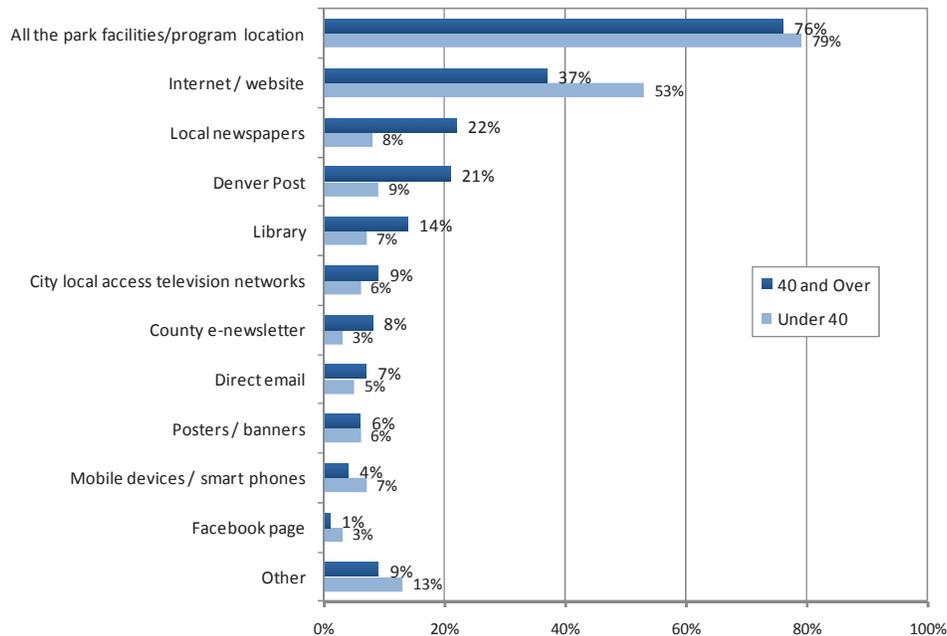
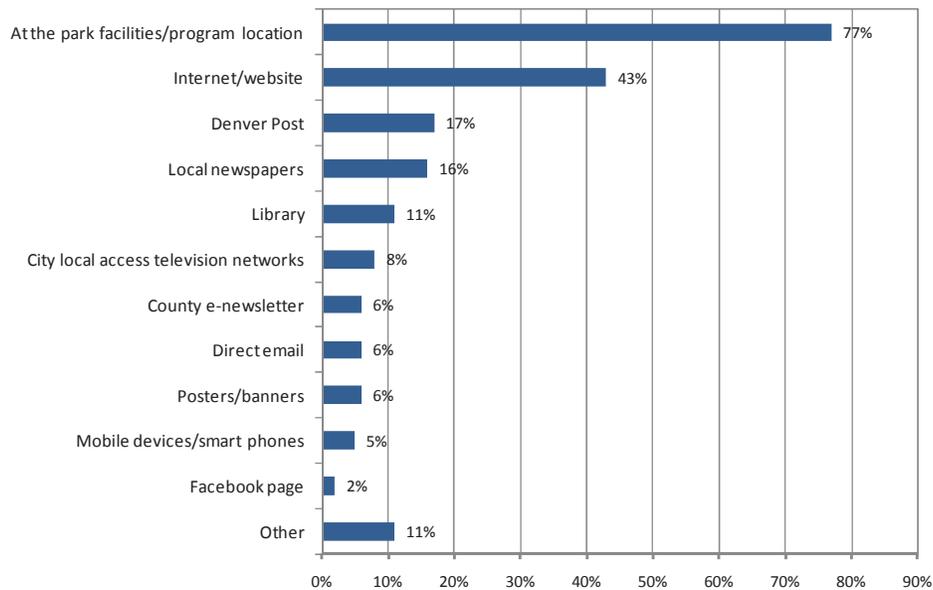


COMMUNICATING WITH YOU

Survey results indicate that the most used source of information about Jefferson County Open Space parks occurs at the parks (77%), followed by Internet/website (43%). These results were probed by the age of respondents and there were some minor but important differences with Internet/website and mobile/smartphones especially likely to be used by younger age groups. In contrast, the Denver Post, the library and the county email newsletter receives greater mention from those over 40 years.

Information Source

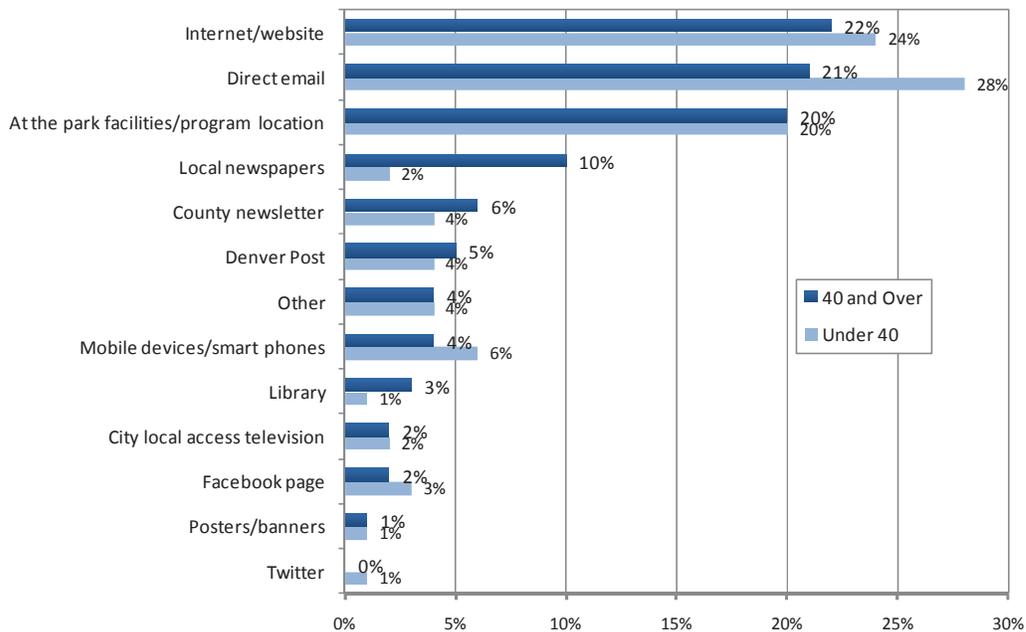
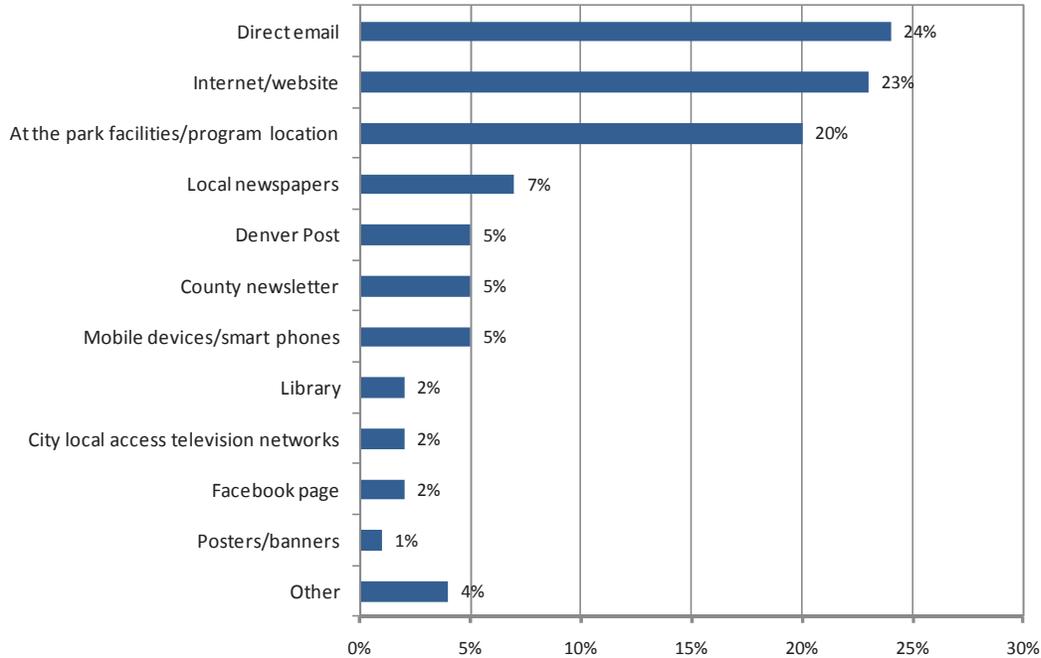
Q. How do you usually or currently receive information about Jefferson County Open Space Parks, facilities, trails and programs?



Respondents also indicated the “Best way to reach you” and three categories received almost equal responses at about 20%: direct email, Internet/website and at the park facilities/program location. Not surprisingly, these results also show differences by the age of respondents with direct email most identified as the most effective communications vehicle by those under 40 years (28% compared to 21% choosing this among those over 40).

Most Effective Communication

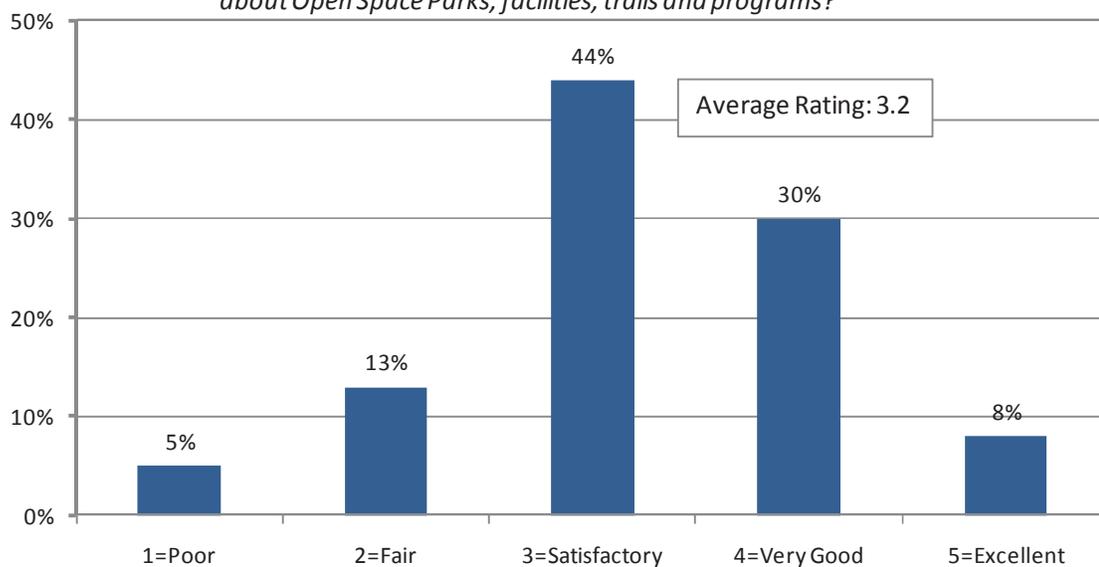
Q. What is the best way to reach you?



Satisfaction with communications was also evaluated. While responses are satisfactory to positive (an average score of 3.2 on the 5-point scale), there is likely room for some improvement by more effectively reaching out. The results suggest both a need and an opportunity to target communications differently and broadly in order to reach the broad needs and preferences of the different groups of users of the system. Both on-site communications and effective use of digital technology (direct emails, websites, and even mobile devices and social media) are desired by various segments of residents.

Satisfaction with Communication

Q. Overall, how good a job does Jefferson County do in providing you with information about Open Space Parks, facilities, trails and programs?



SUGGESTIONS AND COMMENTS (OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES)

The survey contained several open-ended questions designed to elicit feedback in residents' "own words." These comments were consolidated and have been provided under separate cover. As noted previously, they represent over 280 pages of input, a substantial volume of commentary and a strong indication of the depth of attention and time that was invested by interested citizens in the Jefferson County Open Space 2011 Citizen Survey.

Open ended comments were sorted in several different ways. First, they were organized by whether they were obtained through the Random or the Open Link Survey. Next, other questions were linked to the comments in order to provide additional insights. For example, some were sorted by the "Most frequent activity in open space," along with "Overall satisfaction with the experience." Other blocks of comments reflect input from respondents that identified a negative rating (a "1" or a "2" on a 5-point scale). The Table of Contents for the Open Ended questions is provided on the following page.

Jefferson County Open Space 2011 Citizen Survey: Comments

Further comments on how your experiences can be improved in Jefferson County Open Space Parks – Random.....	1
Further comments on how your experiences can be improved in Jefferson County Open Space Parks - Open Link	13
When visiting Jefferson County Open Space Parks, how would you rate the following?-Random.....	44
When visiting Jefferson County Open Space Parks, how would you rate the following?-Random.....	56
What benefits do you associate with Jefferson County Open Space? - Random Sample	140
What benefits do you associate with Jefferson County Open Space? - Open Link	141
Your Allocations to Land and/or Park and Trail Improvements - Random Sample	146
Your Allocations to Land and/or Park and Trail Improvements - Open Link	148
Comments on trail management tools - Random Sample	151
Comments on trail management tools - Open Link	158
When visiting a park, are the regulations easy to find? - Random Sample	202
When visiting a park, are the regulations easy to find? - Open Link	205
When visiting a park, are the regulations easy to understand? – Random	219
Suggestions on how best to convey regulations in a friendly and effective way - Random Sample	220
Suggestions on how best to convey regulations in a friendly and effective way - Open Link	225
Why the park hours do not adequately meet your household's needs - Random Sample	243
Why the park hours do not adequately meet your household's needs - Open Link	245
Conservation/Recreation Group	266
Why you don't use Jefferson County Open Space Parks	271
On a typical visit you are with (other)	272
Activities you have done in Jefferson County Open Space Parks (other)	273
How do you receive information about Jeffco Open Space Parks? (Other/newspaper name)	274
Children experience the outdoors with groups from	277
Racial/ethnic group (other)	280
Location of home (other)	281