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Current Challenges, Funding, and Popularity Trends in State Parks

Responses to a Survey of Park Directors

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Jeff Ferris, and Joe Maher

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Current Challenges, Funding, and Popularity Trends in State Parks: Responses to a Survey of Park Directors

Margaret Walls, Juha Siikamäki, Sarah Darley, Jeff Ferris, and Joe Maher*

The first state park in the United States was established in the late 19th century. In the 1930s, through the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps, many state park systems grew and prospered. In the 1970s, with significant federal funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund state grant program, state park systems further expanded. Today, there are 6,600 state park units in the United States covering 14 million acres of land. These parks provide a wide range of recreation opportunities in locations that are relatively close-to-home. In fact, state parks serve 2.5 times as many visitors as the National Park System with only 16 percent of the acreage.

As part of a broader research study of conservation, recreation, and open space and in support of the bipartisan review commission, the Outdoor Resources Review Group, Resources for the Future conducted a survey of state park directors in the fall of 2008. A structured mail-survey was sent electronically to park directors in the 50 states (plus Puerto Rico) with assistance from the National Association of State Park Directors. Forty-seven out of 50 state surveys were completed and returned, for a 94 percent response rate. All of the states returned surveys except for Hawaii, Michigan, and Washington; Puerto Rico also did not submit a response.

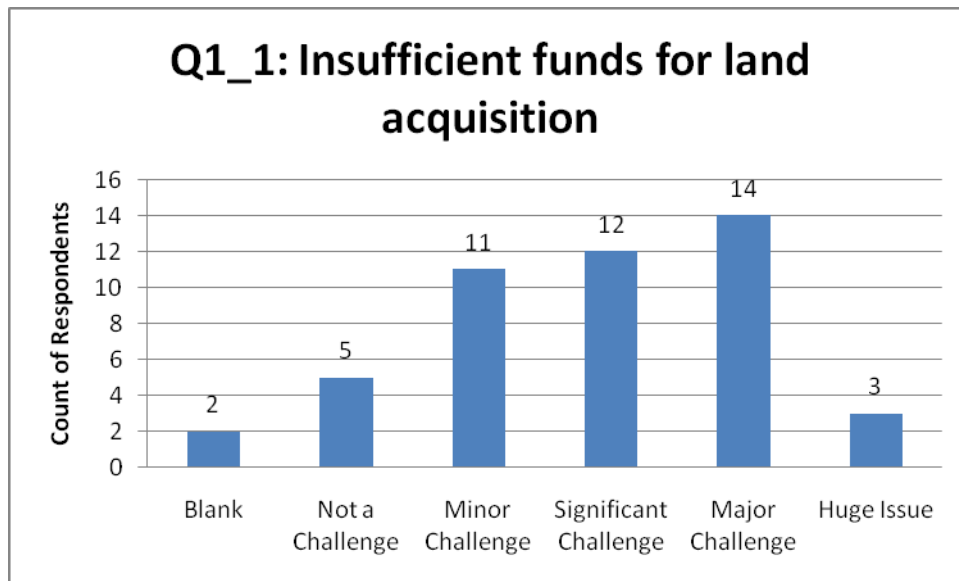
The survey included a wide range of questions regarding current issues and challenges facing state governments and the parks and recreation areas they provide. For example, the survey asked for budget information and sources of funding. We also inquired about current challenges that the states were facing and about perceived popularity trends of a variety of recreational activities. The survey instrument developed and used for this research is included as an Appendix to this document.

The purpose of this document is to summarize responses to the survey. In the following, we present the key summary statistics of responses for each question. Our summary covers the entire survey and proceeds systematically, question by question, from the beginning of the

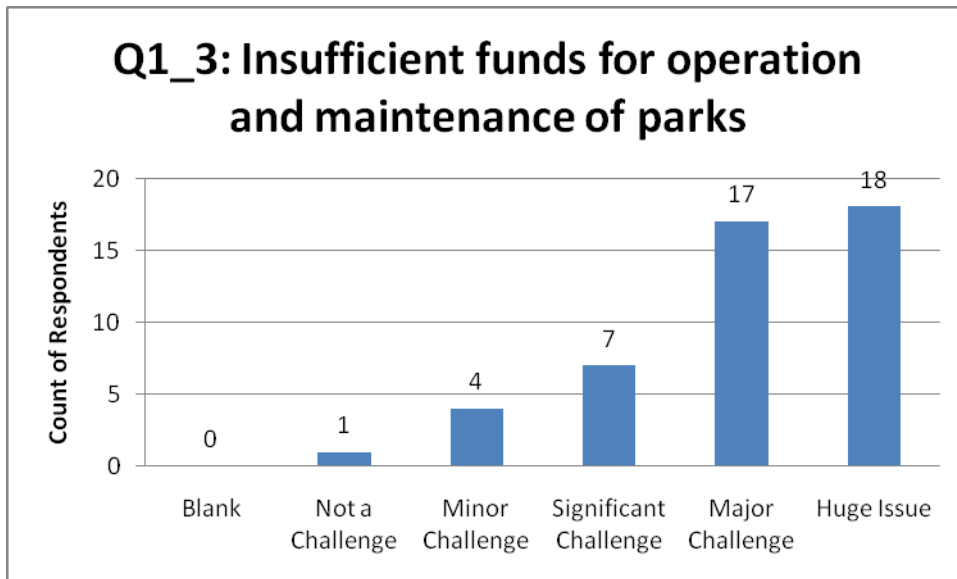
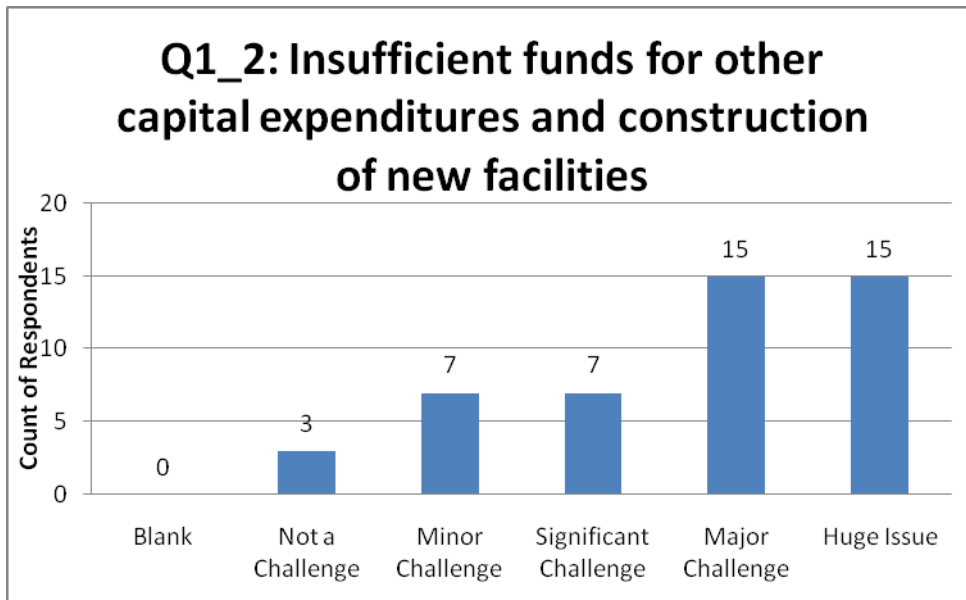
* The authors are, respectively, Senior Fellow, Fellow, Research Associate, Research Assistant, and Research Assistant at Resources for the Future. This backgrounder is one in a series of backgrounders for the Outdoor Resources Review Group (see www.rff.org/orrg).

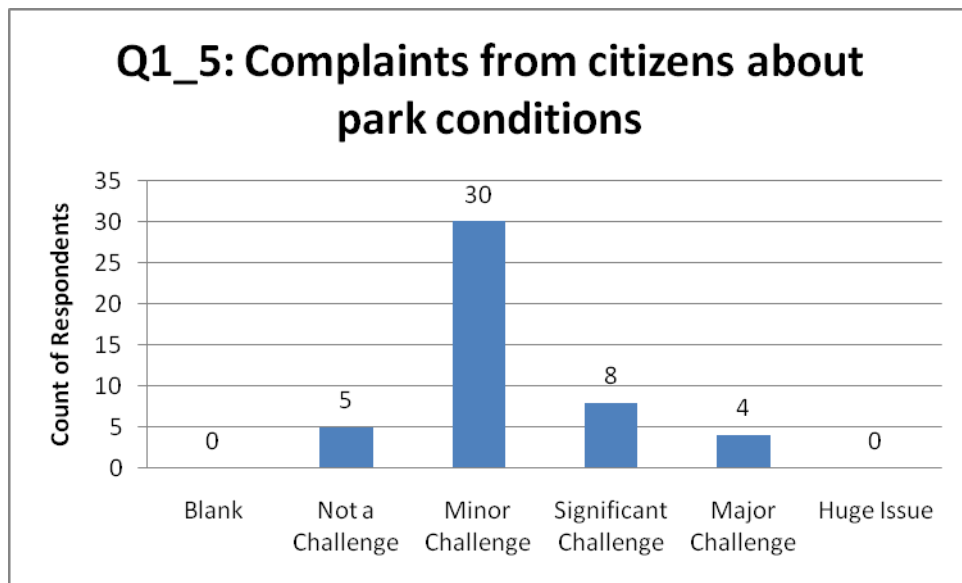
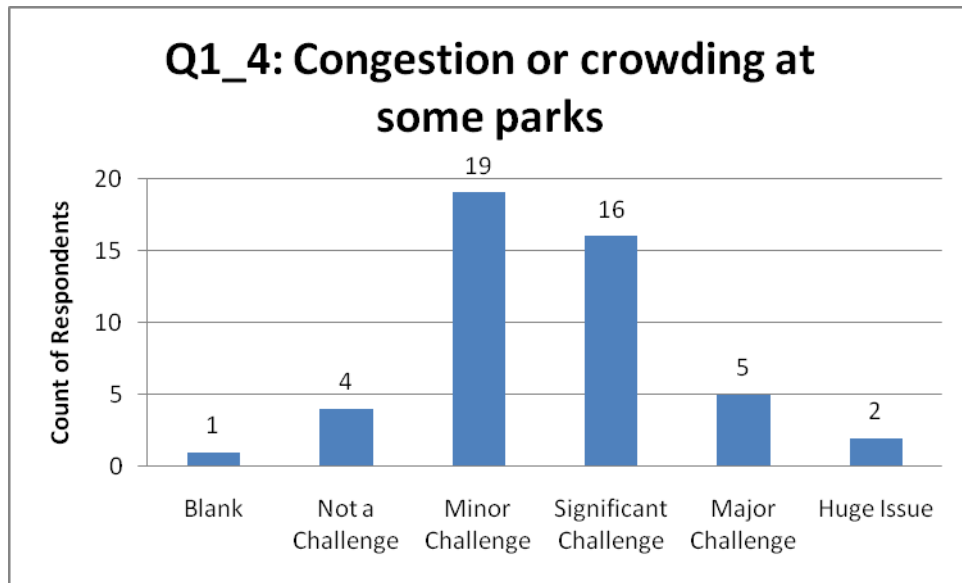
survey to the end of it. The survey instrument in the appendix provides a helpful context for examining the results. This report includes only summary statistics, and it does not comprise any further analyses or interpretation of the results. However, the survey responses, along with additional information and analysis, will contribute to broader research studies being conducted as part of the Outdoor Resources Review Group efforts.¹

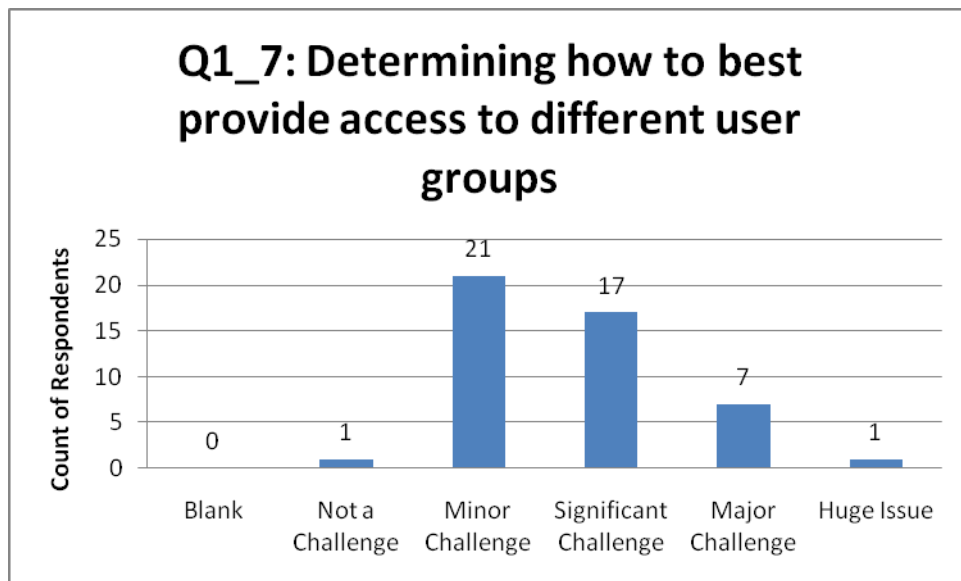
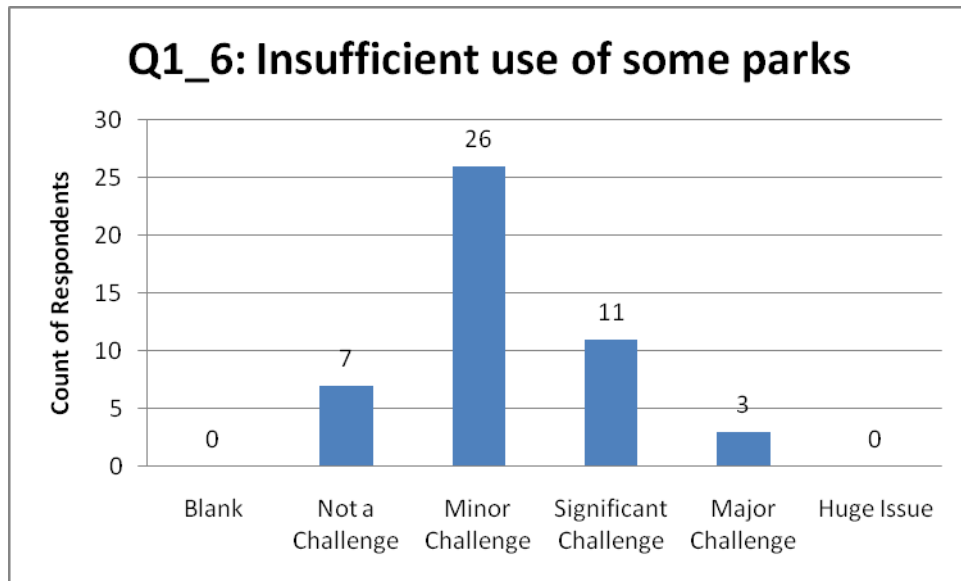
Question 1: How big are the following challenges in your state? (Please check the alternative that best describes your view.)

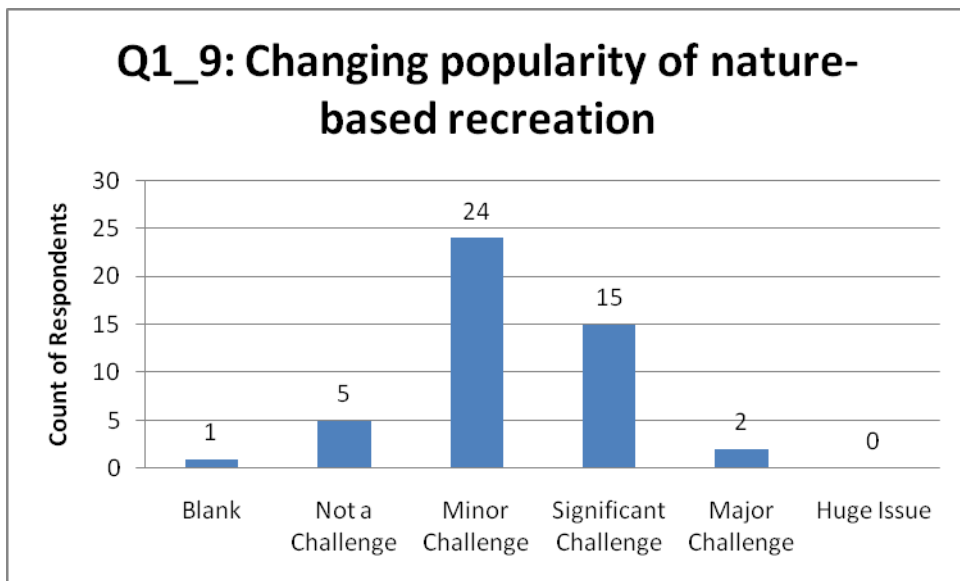
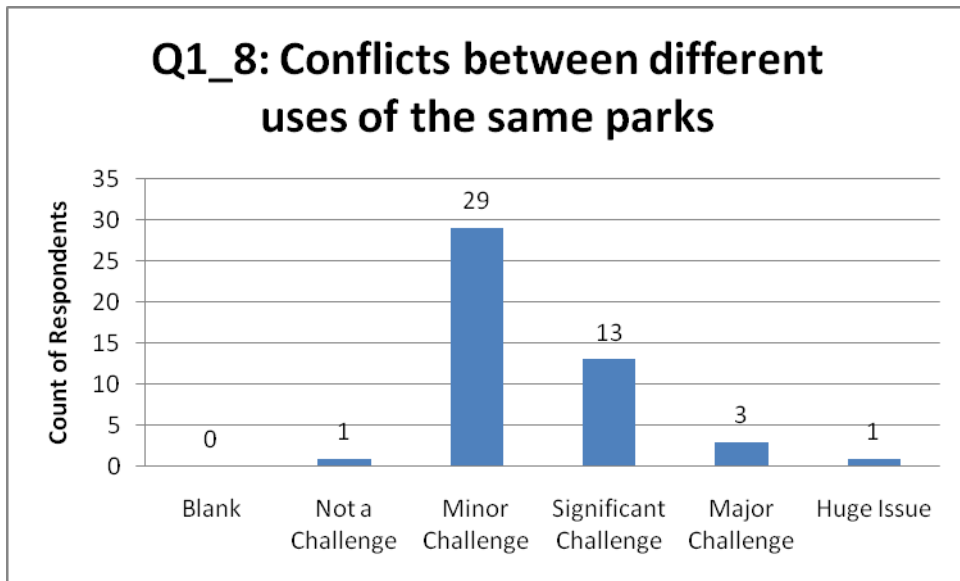


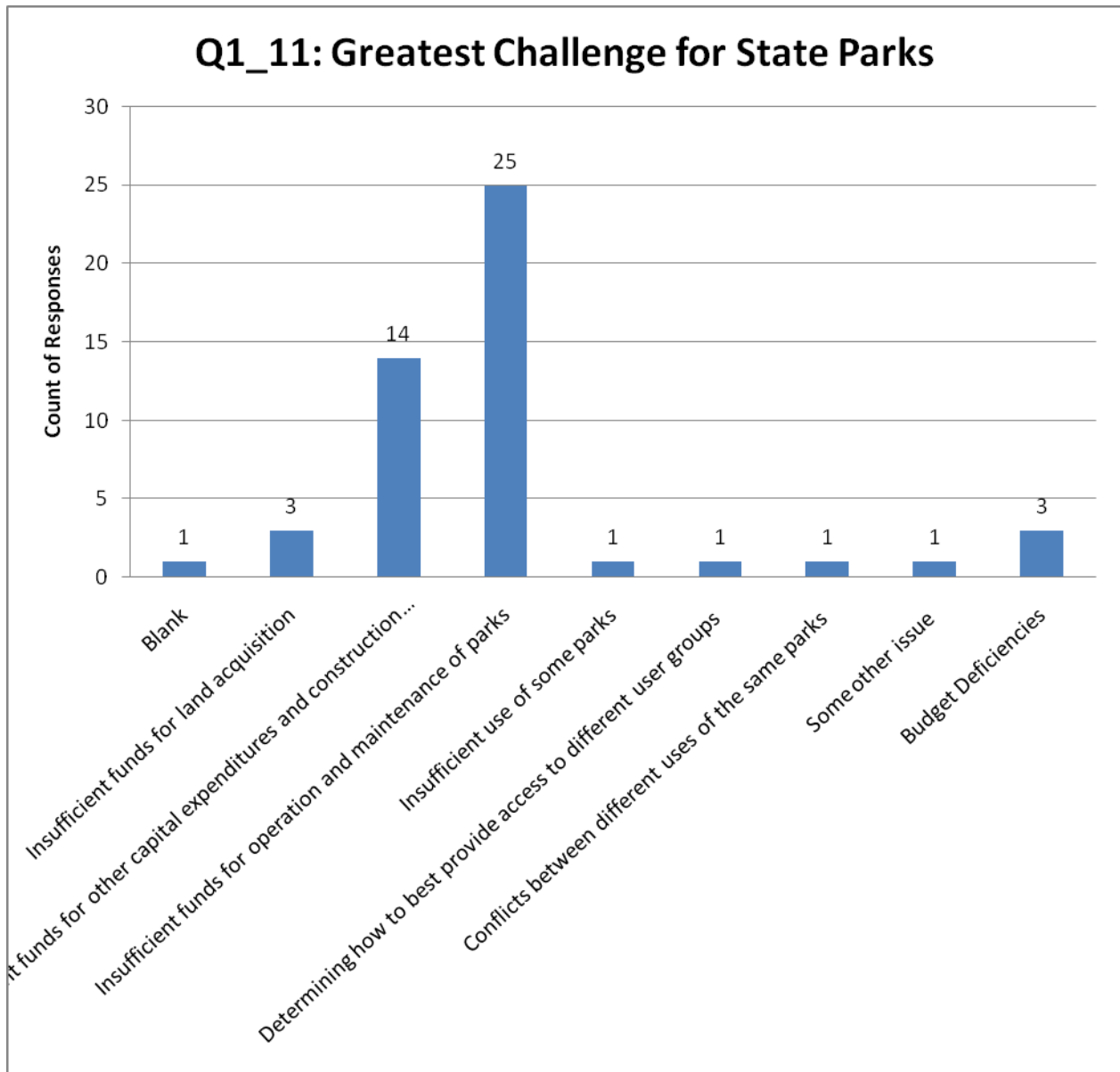
¹ Most of the studies will be available on our website: www.rff.org/org. For a broader analysis of trends and issues related to state parks see Margaret Walls, “Parks and Recreation in the United States: State Park Systems,” Resources for the Future Background, January 2009. We have also conducted a similar survey of urban park directors; for a summary of those findings, see Margaret Walls, Juha Siikamäki, Sarah Darley, Jeff Ferris, and Joe Maher, “Current Challenges, Funding, and Popularity Trends in Local Parks: Responses to a Survey of Park Directors,” Resources for the Future Background, March 2009. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Phil McKnelly, Executive Director of the National Association of State Park Directors, in distributing the survey and encouraging states to return it. We also appreciate the helpful comments and assistance of Yvonne Ferrell, Executive Director of NASORLO.







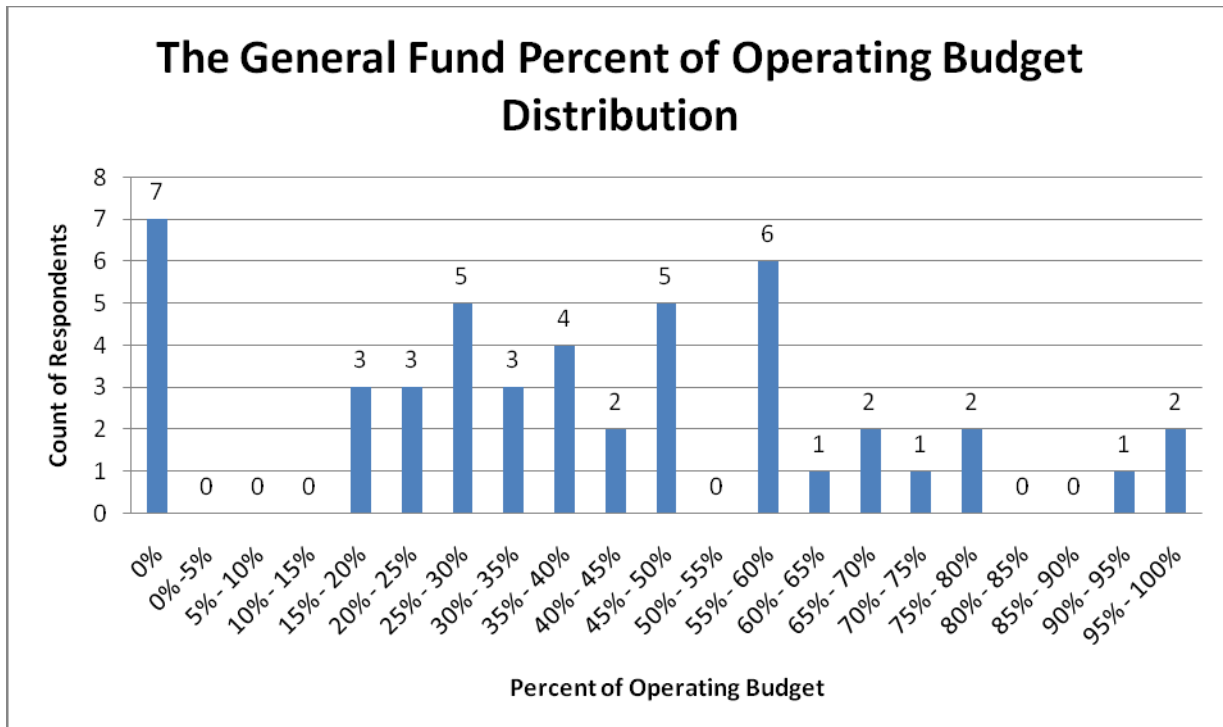




Question 2: What percentage (approximately) of your operating budget comes from the following sources (please try to have the percentages add to 100):

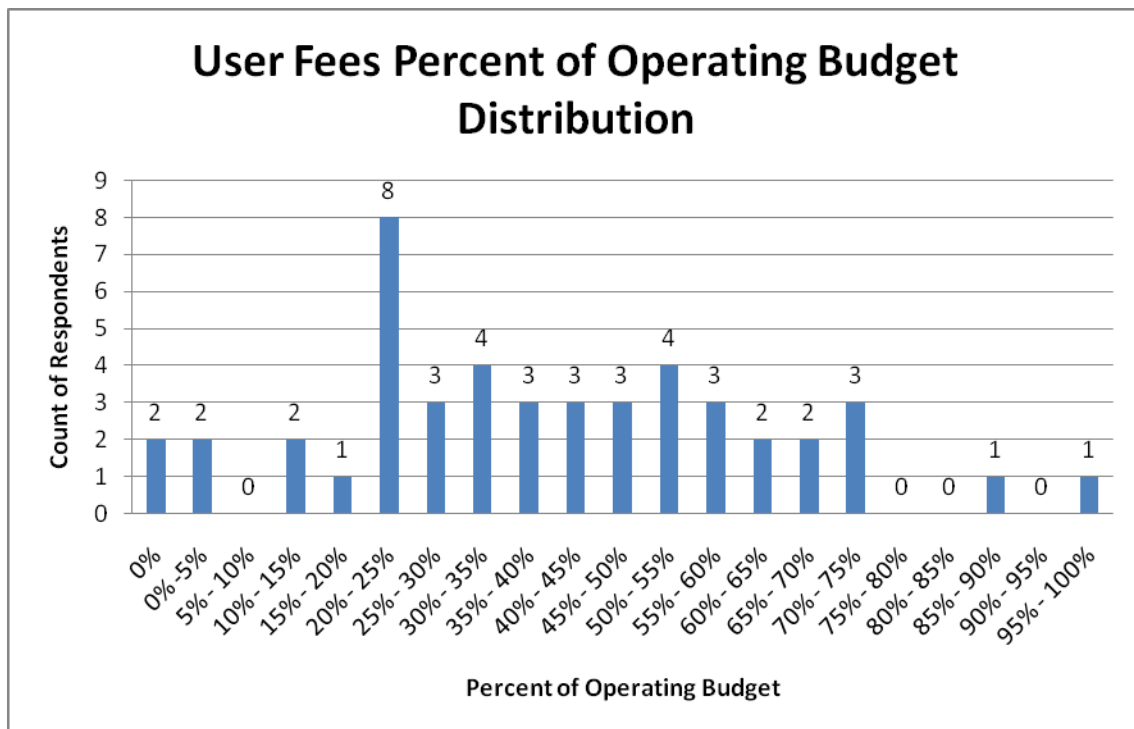
The General Fund Percent of Operating Budget

Mean	41.23%
Median	40%
Standard Deviation	27%
Range	100%
Minimum	0%
Maximum	100%
Count	47



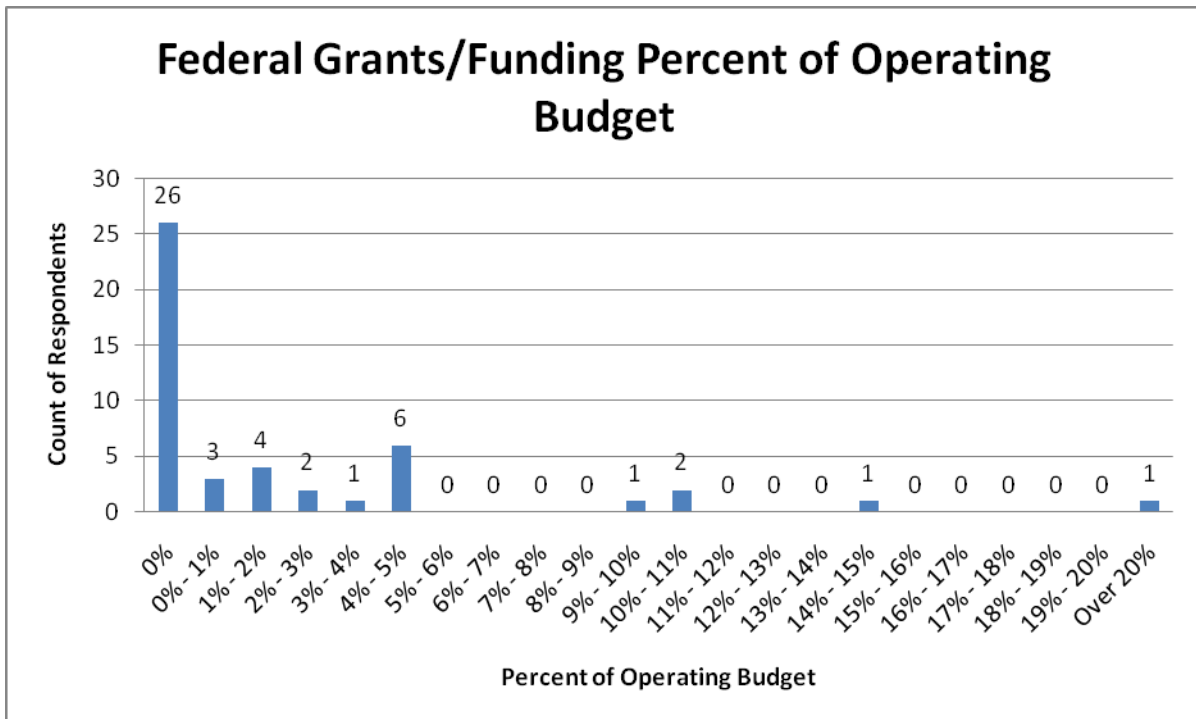
User Fees Percent of Operating Budget

Mean	41.15%
Median	40%
Standard Deviation	22.89%
Range	100%
Minimum	0%
Maximum	100%
Count	47



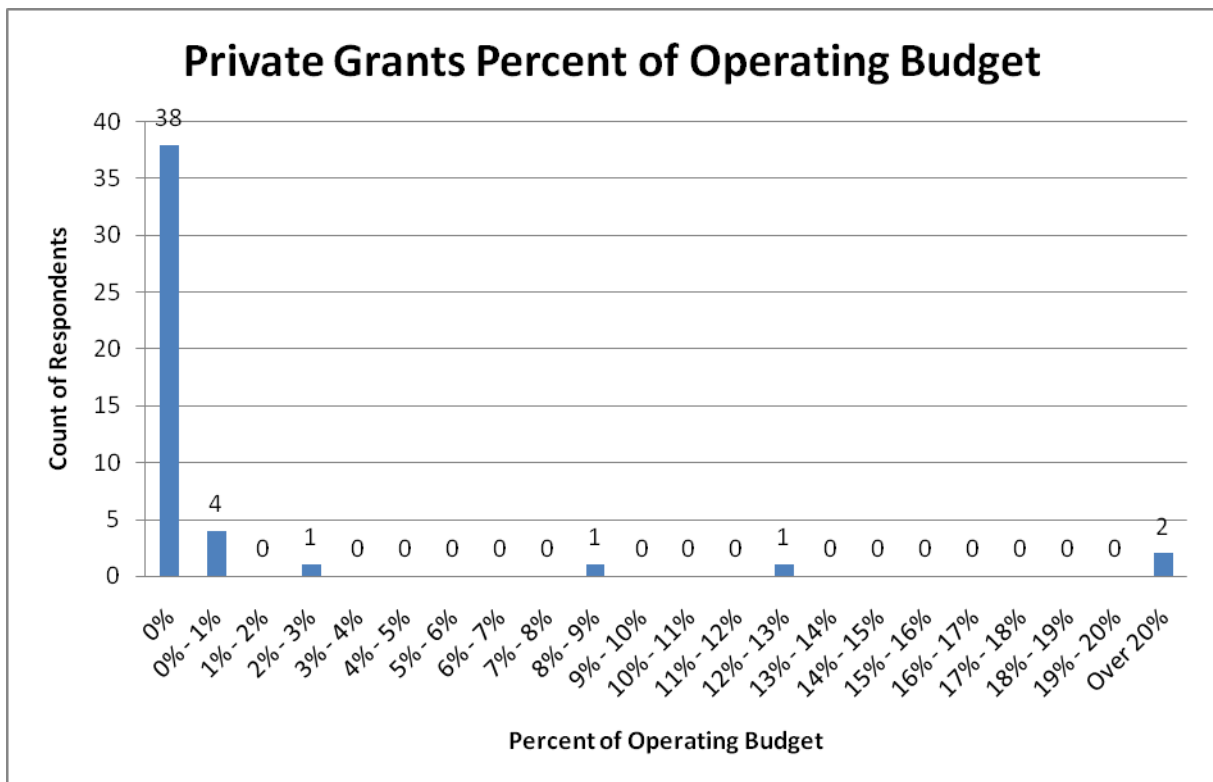
Federal Grants/Funding Percent of Operating Budget

Mean	2.7%
Median	0%
Standard Deviation	5.25%
Range	29%
Minimum	0%
Maximum	29%
Count	47



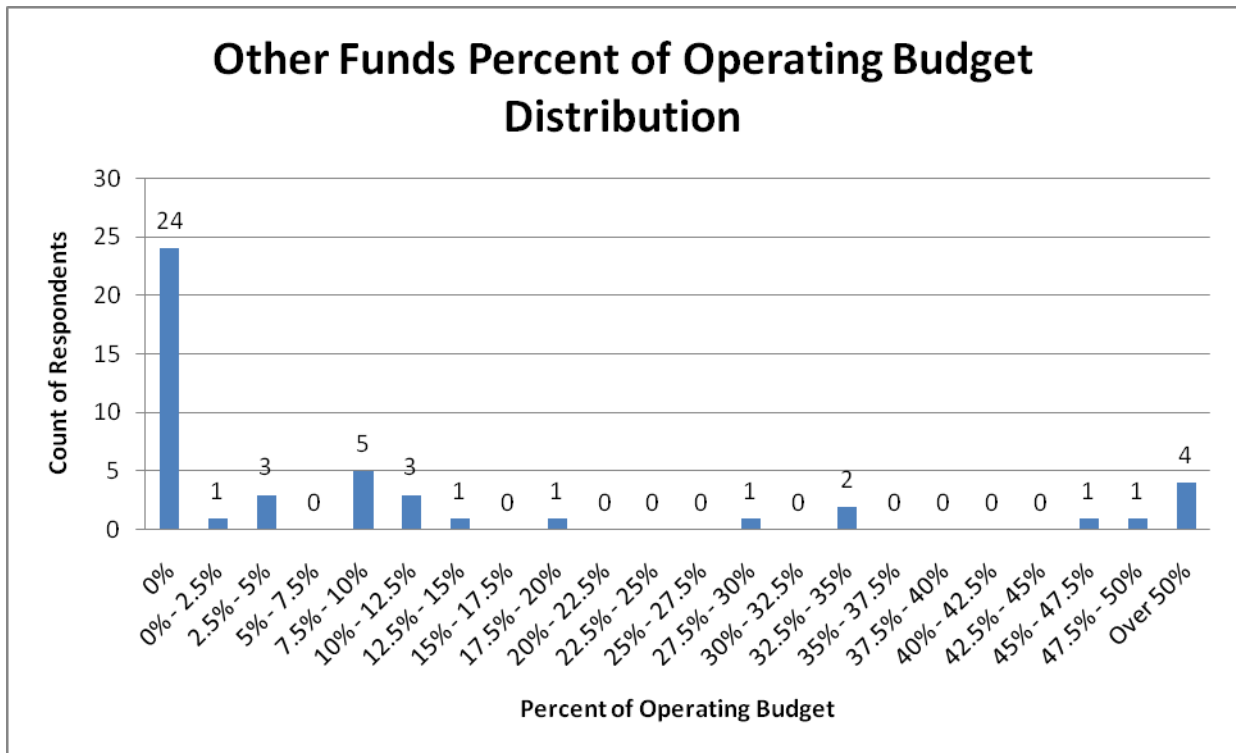
Private Grants Percent of Operating Budget

Mean	1.85%
Median	0%
Standard Deviation	6.26%
Range	32%
Minimum	0%
Maximum	32%
Count	47

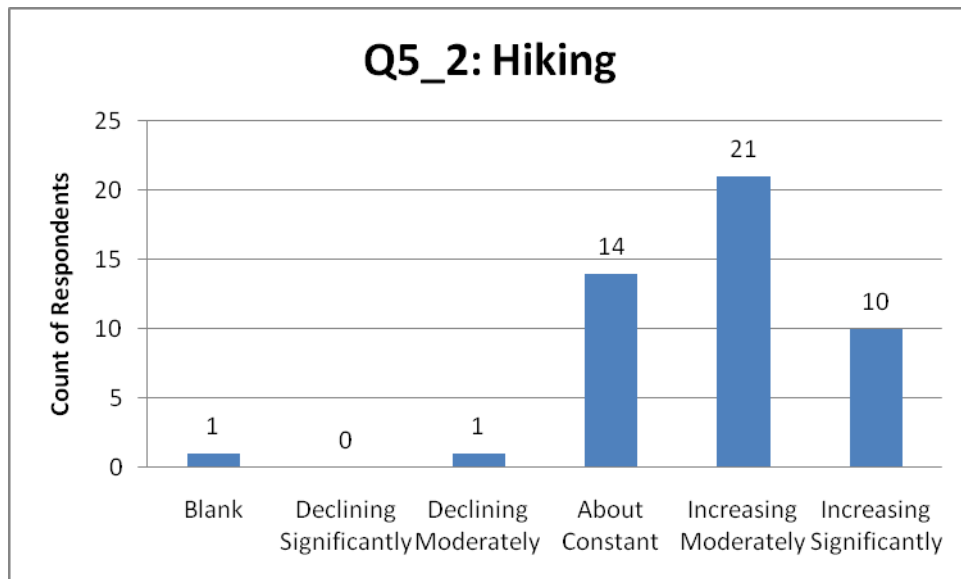
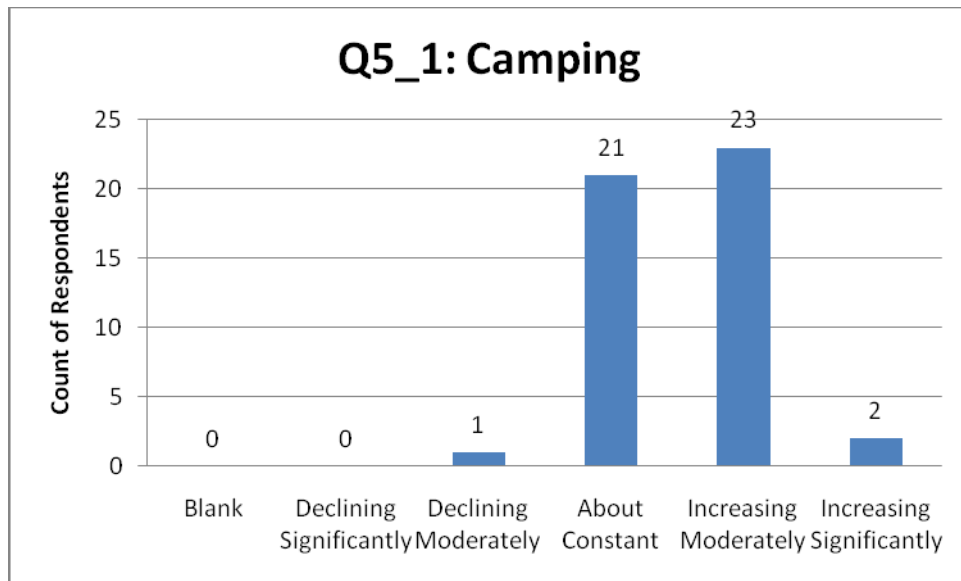


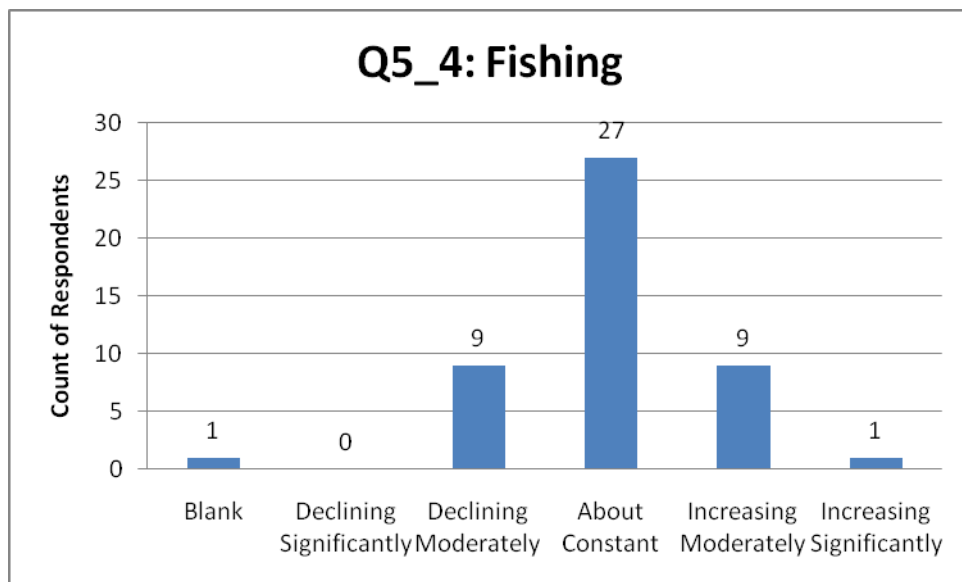
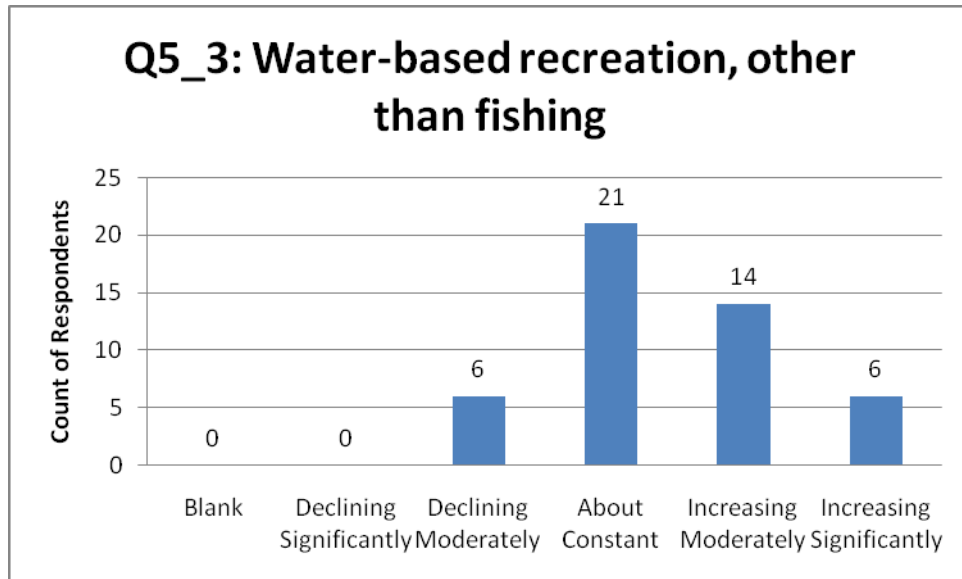
Other Funds Percent of Operating Budget

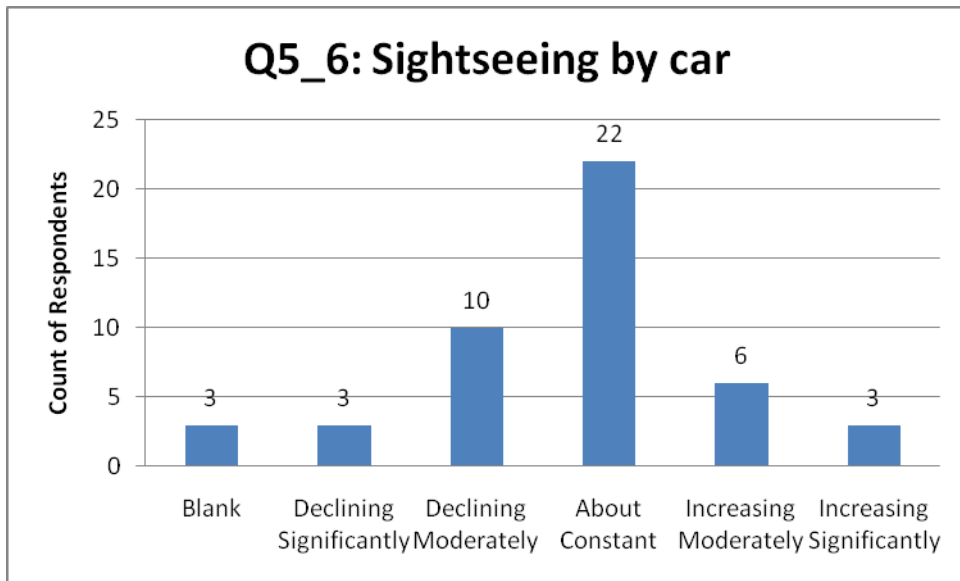
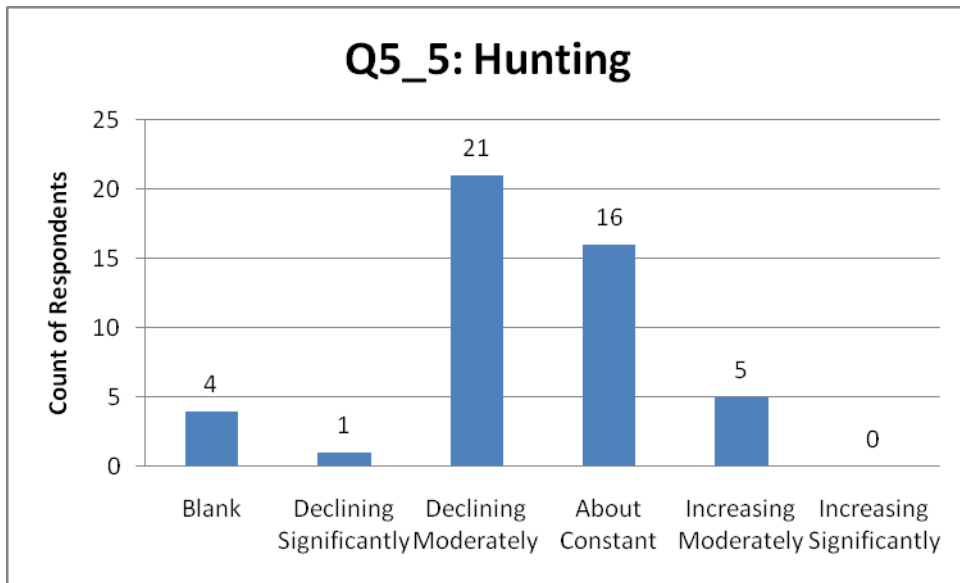
Mean	13.19%
Median	0%
Standard Deviation	22.63%
Range	81%
Minimum	0%
Maximum	81%
Count	47

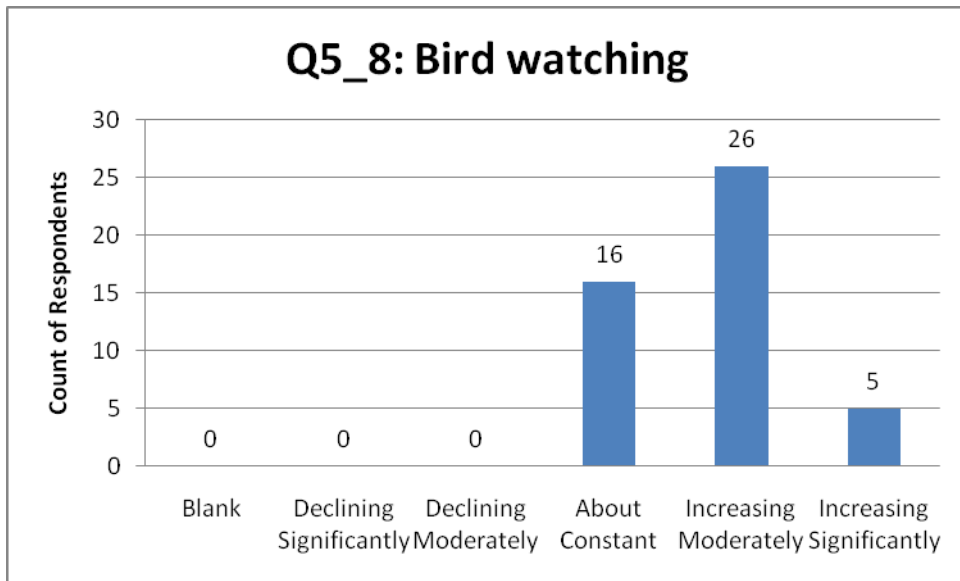
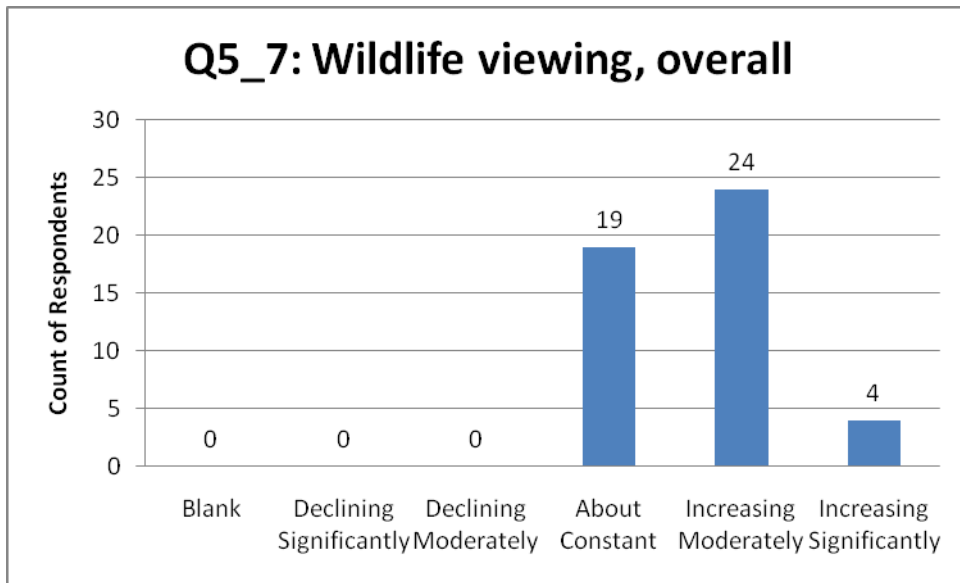


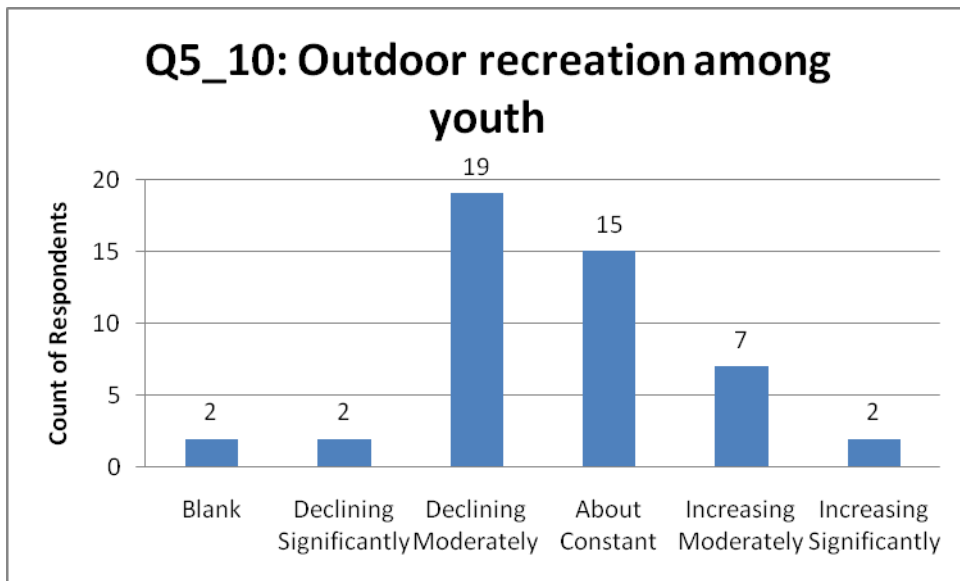
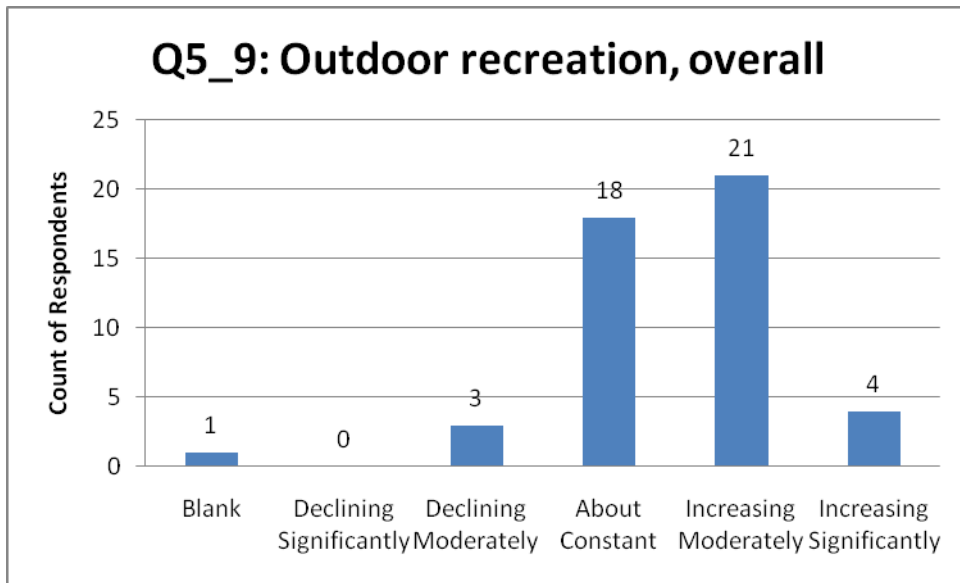
Question 5: In your opinion, what are the overall popularity trends of the following nature-based recreation activities in your state's parks?











Appendix A: Resources for the Future Survey of State Park Directors

Name: _____
 Street Address 1 _____
 Street Address 2 _____
 City _____ State _____ ZIP _____
 Phone _____ 1 () _____ Email: _____ at _____

(1) How big are the following challenges in your state? (Please check the alternative that best describes your view.)

	Not a challenge	Minor challenge	Significant challenge	Major challenge	Huge issue
1 Insufficient funds for land acquisition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Insufficient funds for other capital expenditures and construction of new facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Insufficient funds for operation and maintenance of parks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Congestion or crowding at some parks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Complaints from citizens about park conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Insufficient use of some parks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Determining how to best provide access to different user groups (e.g. hikers, hunters, anglers, mountain bikers, ATV users).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 Conflicts between different uses of the same parks (e.g. hunting vs. hiking vs. ATVs).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 Changing popularity of nature-based recreation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Some other issue (s), please list (if any): _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you had to name the single biggest challenge, which one of the above issues would you pick? (list the number) _____

(2) What percentage (approximately) of your operating budget comes from the following sources (please try to have the percentages add to 100):

(a) The general fund_____

(b) User fees_____

(c) Federal grants/funding _____

Please list the sources (note: the writing space below expands automatically)_____

(d) Private grants/funding_____

(e) Other_____

(3) Do you have a separate source of funding for land acquisition? If so, explain. _____

Include any additional discussion/explanation related to the previous two questions in the space below (or attach additional information). (Note: the writing space below expands automatically. If you are filling in a hard copy, please write your answer below.) _____

(4) Does your department make use of private lands, particularly lands under conservation easement, for parks and recreation purposes? If so, please provide a brief explanation or attach additional information. _____

(5) In your opinion, what are the overall popularity trends of the following nature-based recreation activities in your state's parks?

	Declining significantly	Declining moderately	About constant	Increasing moderately	Increasing significantly
Camping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hiking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Water-based recreation, other than fishing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fishing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hunting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sightseeing by car	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wildlife viewing, overall	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bird watching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outdoor recreation, overall	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outdoor recreation among youth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>