

Southwest Alaska Network Long-Term Visitor Use Monitoring Project



Ginny Fay in partnership with UAA, Institute of Social and Economic Research



Why Collect Visitor Data?



Why Monitor Visitor Use?

NPS needs defensible numbers for:

- Use trends & demand projections
- Monitoring visitor impacts
- Recreation use allocation decisions
- Field personnel allocation decisions
- Budget requests & allocation

Why Monitor Visitor Use?

Defensible numbers needed for:

- Meeting law/policy mandates—
NEPA/EIS processes
- Planning and baseline data
- Agency reporting, public
information requests

Clarify Objectives

- Why collect visitor use information?
- What question(s) are trying to be answered, and where?
- How will the information be used?
- Who is interested in this information?

Examples of Objectives

- Obtain baseline information
- Track trends
- Link visitor use with changes in ecological conditions
- Allocate/prioritize resources
- Analyze effects of closures & other administrative decisions
- Collect & store consistent data over time—institutionalize protocols.

Most managers indicate:

- Few systematic efforts to estimate use
- Little confidence in existing data
- Wide variation in experience with methods
- Limited resources available (funding, personnel, equipment, training)

SWAN Project

- Simplified & streamlined data fields to ensure continued collection of critical data; institutionalizes process
- Assumes no additional staff or financial resources
- Identifies data and protocols for collection and storage

Ideal Visitor Information

- Visitor and Visit Attributes
- Method of travel to & w/in park
- Group size
- Length of stay by location
- Activity(ies)
- Commercial/guiding services
- Timing of visits
- Location of visits

Critical Data Needs

For all types of visitors—guided & unguided, day visitors and overnight visitors:

- # visitors by location
- # visitor days by location*
- # visitor nights by location*
- Visitor activity(ies) by location*

*Critical information

Data Collection Research

- New procedures developed after extensive interviews w/ SWAN park staff and commercial operators
- Staff review of field data forms
- CUA review of reporting forms at spring meetings
- Fall review w/ staff & CUAs



CUA reports

Prior to 2006,

- # visitors by location—guided and unguided day visitors (if dropped off by commercial operator) & overnight guided visitors only
- Very limited and inadequate for monitoring long-term visitor use

New CUA Reports

- Prior to 2006, CUA reports were primarily for fee collections & accounting (+ # visitors to some areas)
- In 2006, added resource management information to reporting requirements of commercial operators

Commercial Operators

- Commercial operators—Primary NPS partners for collecting visitor information in KATM & LACL; submit VBR in KEFJ
- CUA operators provide significant & critical visitor data collected for NPS

Starting 2006 CUA also:

- # visitors by location—day visitors, guided and unguided
- # visitor days by location—day visitors guided and unguided
- # visitor nights by location—guided visitors

Starting 2006 CUA also:

- Visitor activity(ies) by location—guided visitors
- Length of stay by location—guided visitors
- Method of transportation access—deduced indirectly from commercial operator information

KEFJ VBR

- Completed by CUA for all guided trips
- Voluntary distribution to visitors by water taxis, kayak rental shops, and available in visitor centers.
- Collects all critical visitor information
- Loaded into database annually
- Simple, efficient system

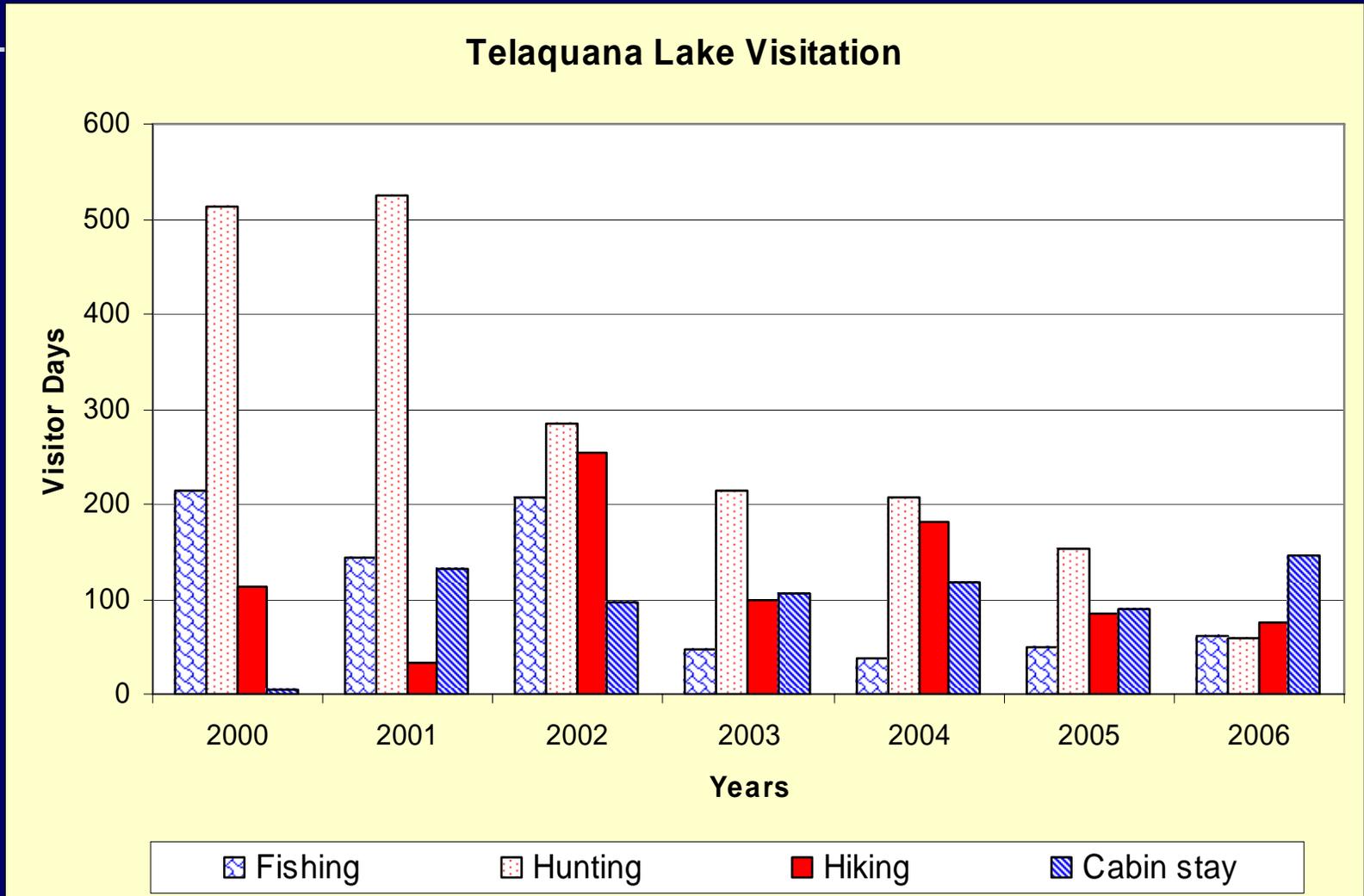
KEFJ Database & Protocol

- Very well done but improvements—streamlining to simplify data entry, reduce input errors
- Make system more user friendly—reports easy to use
- Link systematically to ranger observation data to improve estimate of total # of visitors
- Standardize ranger days to make data meaningful from year to year

Big Data Gap

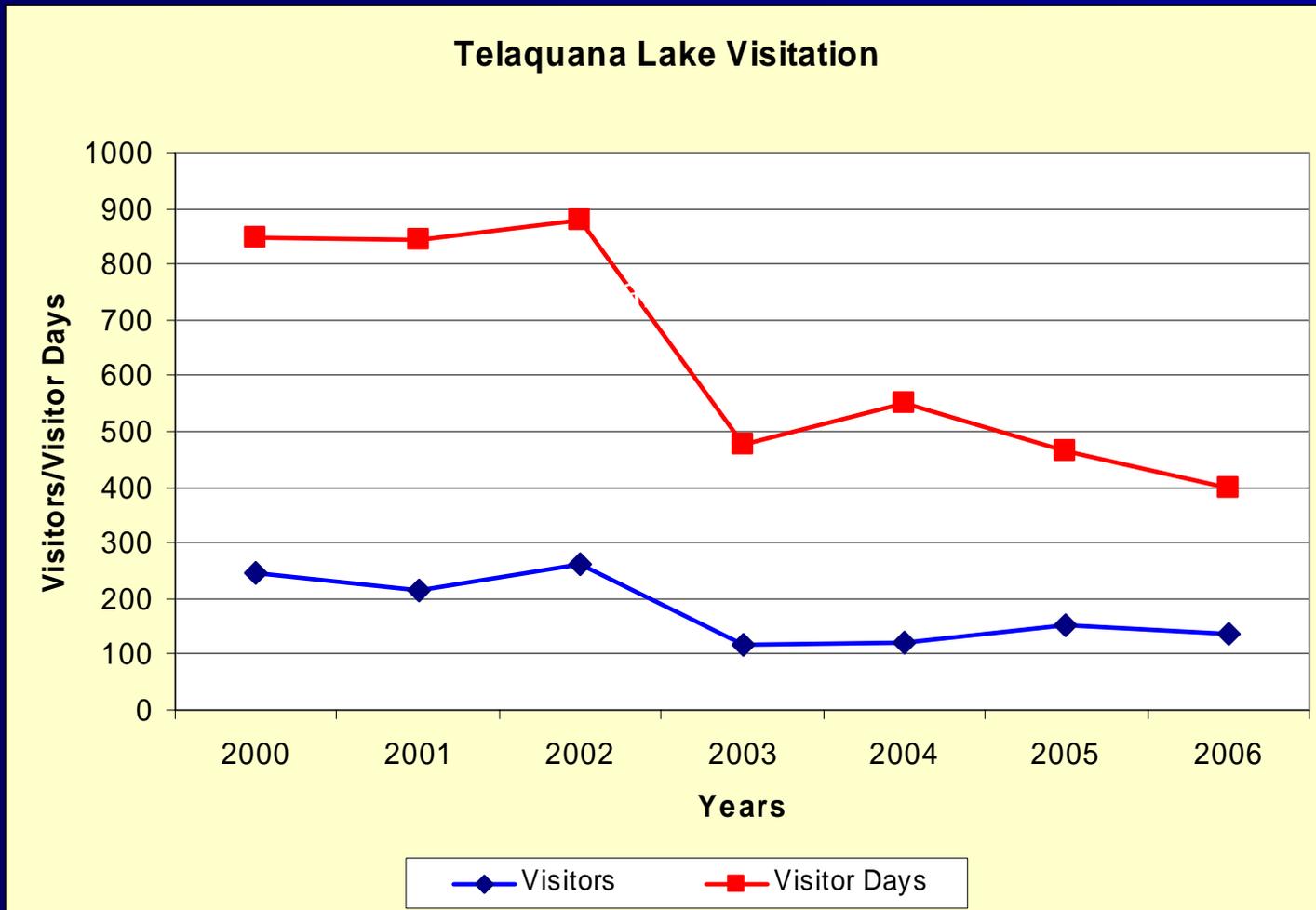
- All private parties (=visitor accessing park via private boat or plane & unguided)
- Unguided overnight visitors (if dropped off by commercial operator, visitor counts but no visitor days, locations, or activities)
- Unguided visitors dropped off & picked up below mean high tide.

Results



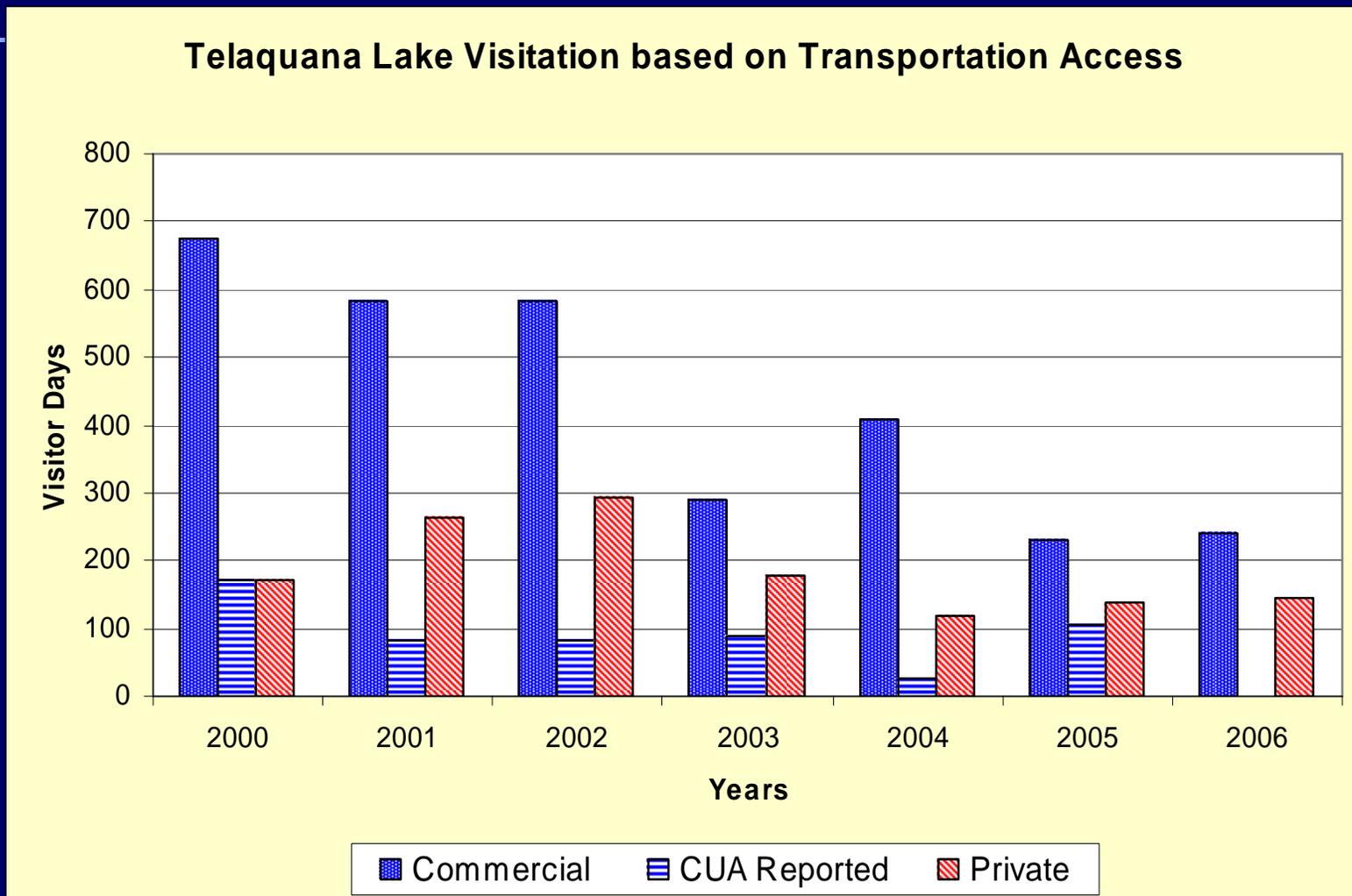
Source: Telaquana Lake ranger data, 2000-2006.

Visitors vs Visitor Days



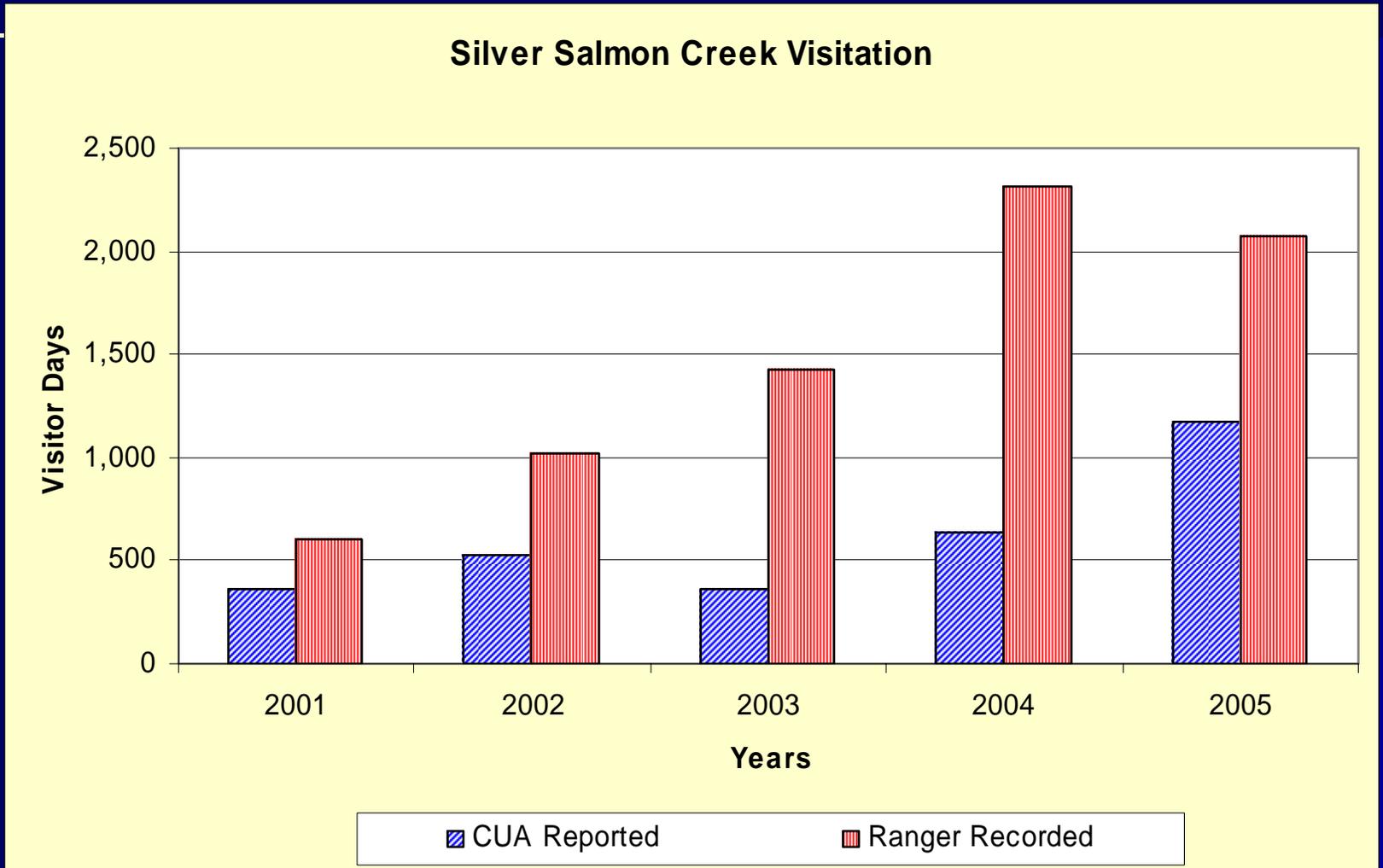
Source: Telaquana Lake ranger data, 2000-2006

Data gaps = under counts



Source: Telaquana Lake ranger data, 2000-2006; LACL historic CUA data, 2000-2005.

Field observations visitor data



Source: Silver Salmon Creek ranger data, 2000-2006; LACL historic CUA data, 2000-2005.

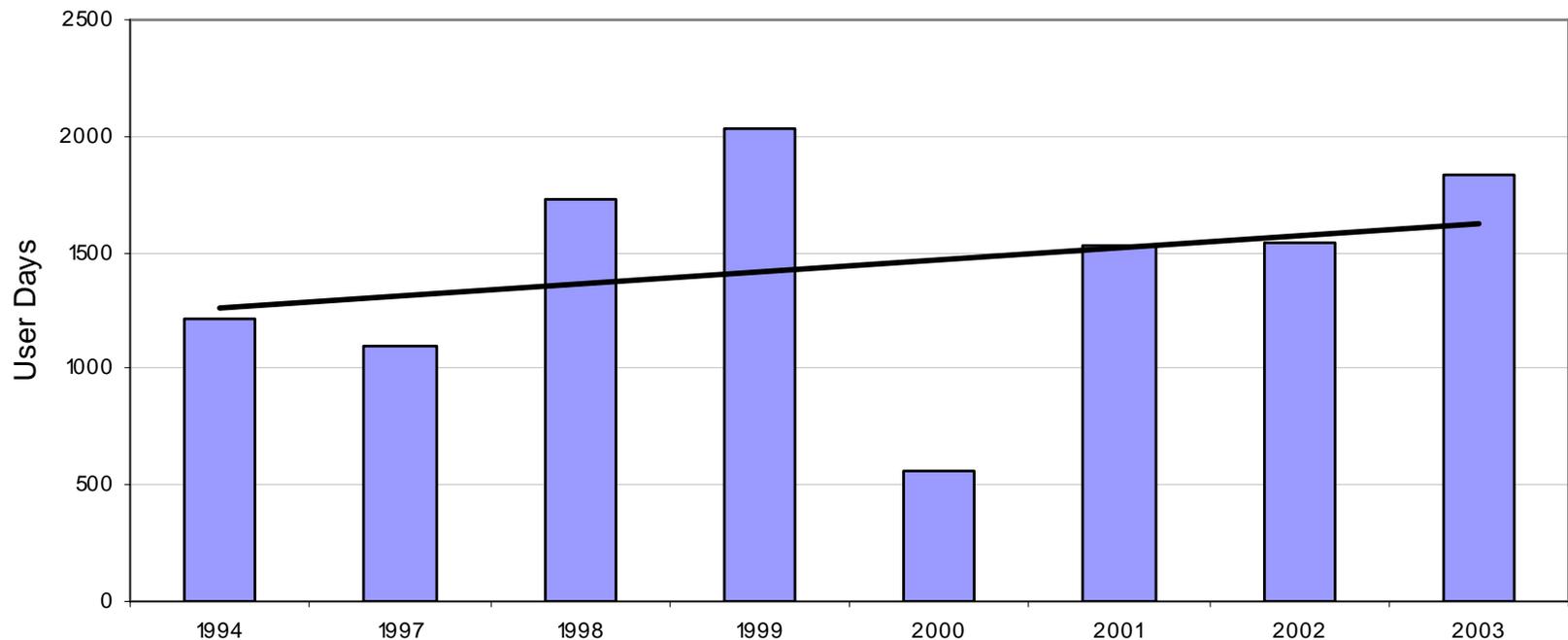
Sampling Rates Critical

Year	Visitor Days	Observation Days	Field Dates	Average visitor/day
2006	2,529	75	6/17 - 9/13	33.7
2006*	1,930	75	6/17 - 9/13	25.7
2005	2,077	71	6/20 - 9/8	29.3
2004	2,311	76	6/12 - 9/9	30.4
2003	1,396	83	6/18 - 9/7	16.8
2002	1,023	58	6/14 - 9/10	17.6
2001	604	33	7/29 - 8/30	18.3
1996	1,127	28	8/7 - 9/3	40.3
1995	690	11	8/15 - 8/25	62.7

Change—Visitor Days or Sampling Frequency?

**Total number of User Days in Ailaik Bay, June 1 to August 31
Based on Visitor Contacts Recorded by Backcountry Rangers***

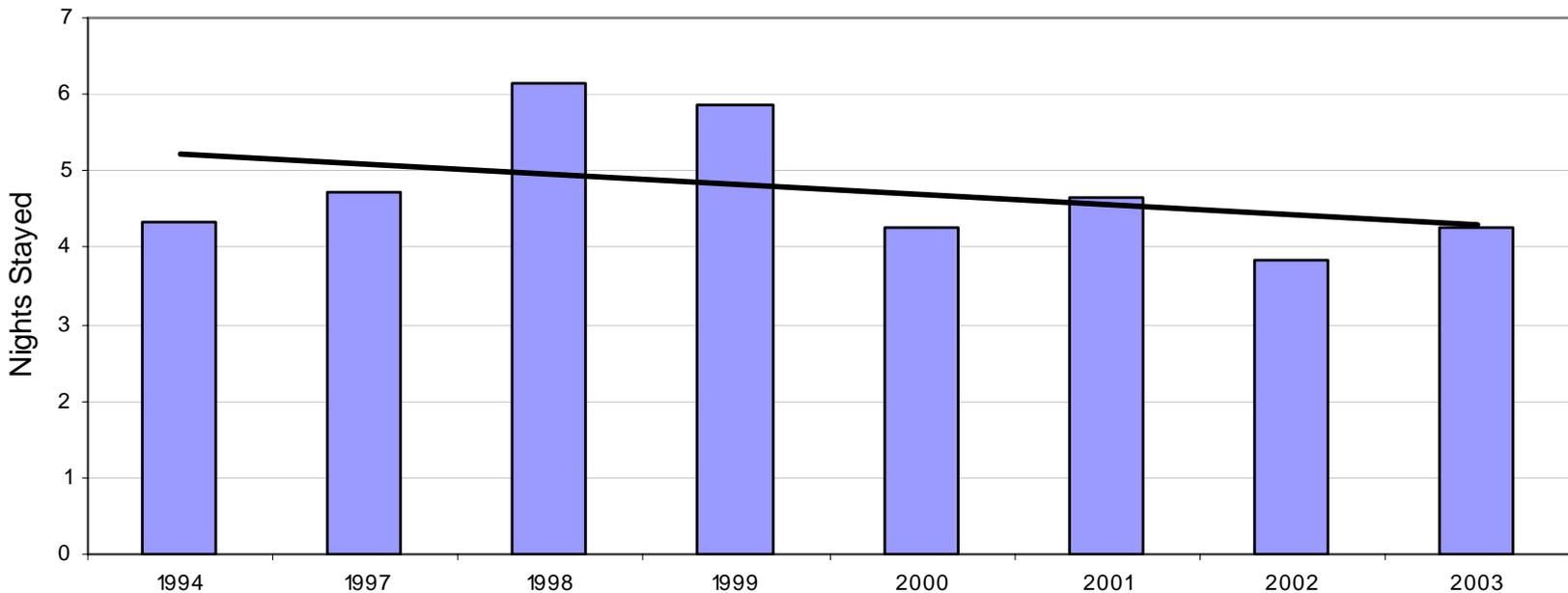
* Data for 2002 based on voluntary backcountry registrations



Change—Visitor Days or Sampling Frequency?

**Average Number of Nights Stayed by Overnight Parties
in Ailaik Bay, June 1 to August 31
Based on Visitor Contacts Recorded by Backcountry Rangers***

* Data for 2002 based on voluntary backcountry registrations



Visitor Data Goals

- One standard form for all field staff
- Data fields align w/ CUA reporting form
- Standardized protocol for collecting visitor data
- All field visitor data loaded into a master databases each season
- Consistent data across years & staff

Contact us

Ginny Fay, EcoSystems

- ginnyfay@montana.com
- 907-333-3568

■ Steve Colt, ISER

- steve_colt@uaa.alaska.edu
- 907-786-1753

