Alagnak *Aniakchak* *Katmai* *Kenai Fjords* *Lake Clark*

Visitor Use- Lake Clark NPP

Visitation and Timing

Over the last seven years the number of visitor use days reported by CUA operators (Commercial Use Authorization, i.e. vendors transporting visitors to parks) has more than doubled from approximately 4,000 days to 10,400 visitor use days. Most of this increase is on the Cook Inlet side of the park. In 2013, Crescent Lake, Silver Salmon Creek, and Chinitna Bay were the most highly visited places in the park and preserve, together accounting for over 75% of the reported user days (over 7,530 use days combined) in Lake Clark National Park and Preserve. Crescent Lake has seen a phenomenal growth in visitor use going from less than 250 reported visitor use days in 2007 to approximately 3600 in 2013 (Fig. 1).

The seasonality of the visitor use in Lake Clark can also be viewed via this information. Approximately two-thirds of the visitation occurs in July and August. In spite of the more than doubling of visitation over seven years this ratio has stayed about the same (Fig. 2).

Importance

Understanding visitor use patterns across the parks and across the years lets the park managers assess where rangers and staff need to be deployed, and where impacts (such as trampling or increase in social trails) may need to be monitored or mitigated in the future. Likewise, visitor use patterns may also inform commercial operators by providing insights to the areas visited currently and the timing of visits–details which are helpful when planning guiding operations. Because these remote Alaska park units do not have entrance stations, these data collected from CUA operators are the primary means to quantify and understand visitation patterns and public uses in these vast backcountry areas.

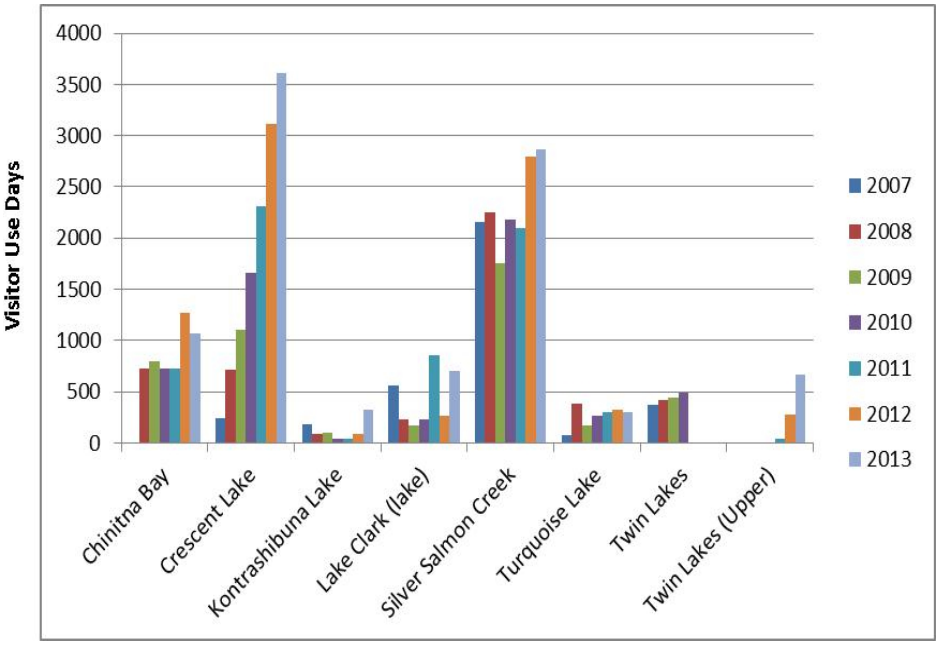


Figure 1. Total User Days by Location (2007-2013) for the three most visited locations on the coast and the four most visited locations in the interior of the park as reported by the commercial use operators. Upper and Lower Twin Lakes were broken out separatelstarting in 2011 resulting in the bar graph gaps. Data from the Lake Clark National Park & Preserve CUA database 03/20/14.

Photographers eyeing a bear near Silver Salmon Creek, Lake Clark NPP.

Activities

Three main activities reported by the commercial operators are bear viewing, sport fishing and photography (Fig. 3). There has been significant growth in the number of visitors coming to Lake Clark for these three main activities. For example, the number of visitor use days reporting bear viewing as their main activity has tripled from approximately 1,000 people (in 2007) to over 3,300 in 2013. The number of reported user days focused on sport fishing and photography has likewise more than doubled in this same period of time. In contrast, the number of reported visitor use days for all other activity categories has stayed relatively constant, although Lake Clark NPP may be seeing both better reporting as well as an increase in hiking tours (over 600 visitor use days for 2013; Fig. 3).

Status and Trends - Lake Clark National Park and Preserve

Visitors to the Park

Visitors to Lake Clark NPP have a choice of numerous permitted CUAs who offer a variety of services within the park and preserve. Visitors may also choose to come to the park utilizing their own plane or boat; however aside from the people who live or have a cabin in or near the park, this is much less common. The vast majority of visitors to the park and preserve utilize a lodge, guiding service, or air taxi operator. The commercial operators pay a small fee for each visitor they bring to the park, and report their usage in the park. This information provides a view of where, how and when the majority of visitors are coming to each park unit. These data are compiled through the CUA reports from each operator.

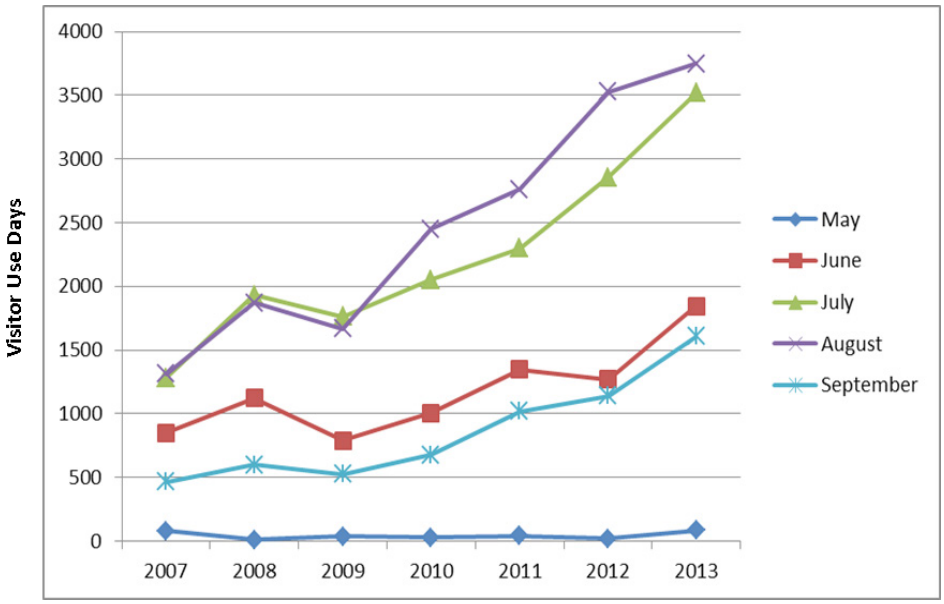
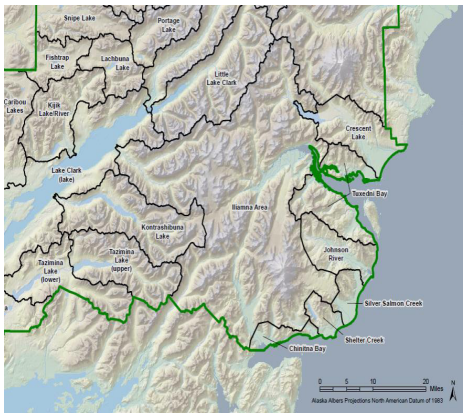


Figure 2. The number of visitor use days for May thru September for 2007 - 2013. Data from the Lake Clark National Park & Preserve CUA database 03/20/14.

User Days & Locations Defined

'User Days' are slightly more than the number of actual visitors to the park, since visitors who spend several days in the park will counted each day they are in the park. This definition of 'User Day' provides the park the best information of the potential impacts by location across the park. This access to broad trends and overall patterns provides the park managers with the information needed to assess potential impacts.

Each park unit is divided into areas (see map), roughly corresponding to watersheds in each park unit. Areas with concentrated use have been sub-divided into smaller areas. When reporting, CUAs choose the area of the visitors' main activity.



There are 33 Visitor Use Monitoring Areas for Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, Alaska, a portion of which are represented. The commercial operators (Commercial Use Authorized operators) report their use in these areas annually, the number of visitors and their main activity.

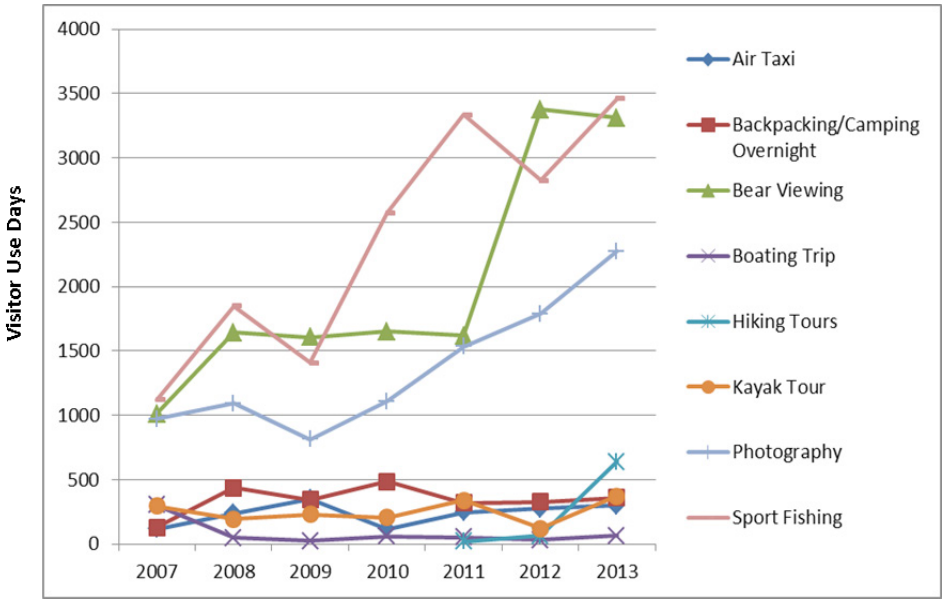


Figure 3. The number of visitors and the main activity for the visitors as reported by the Commercial operators working in Lake Clark NPP from 2007 through 2013. Data from the Lake Clark National Park & Preserve CUA database 03/20/14.

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Southwest Alaska Inventory and Monitoring Program Visitor Use Resource Brief