



# Who Comes for a Visit?

HOSSA NATIONAL PARK

HOSSA REGION

FINLAND



Filling in the questionnaire on a coffee break

## Vital Information Collected for Management and Monitoring Purposes

*Hossa National Park was established in 2017 to replace a State Recreational Area. These two designations differ in many ways, and the status of a national park has attracted new visitor segments to Hossa. With all publicity Hossa gained as the national park of 100 years of Finnish independency, visitor numbers went through the roof, doubling from the previous year. This created an urgent need for new data on visitors, their preferences, popular activities and the most visited sites. Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland (PWF) was also interested in visitor experience; what visitors think of services of the area, what kind of health benefits do they experience mentally, socially and physically and whether something disturbed them on their visit.*

The visitor survey in Hossa National Park was carried out in summer 2017 and winter 2018. As conditions change dramatically between summer and winter, it was important to interview visitors in both seasons. Activities in Hossa vary from fishing, hiking and canoeing in the summer to skiing, snow shoe walking and dog sledding in the winter.

Survey questionnaires were handed out in different locations within the national park and interview dates were randomly chosen. The aim was to collect data that would reflect

the real visitor structure as accurately as possible. Interviews were therefore done on all days of the week, as well as in different seasons. A total of nearly 400 questionnaires were obtained, which was the original target and gives an accurate enough overall image of the visitors of the national park.

Visitor surveys are linked to managing and monitoring protected areas. The impact of nature tourism and recreation can be measured through a number of indicators. Visitor surveys feed data into many of those indicators. Monitoring the

change over the years is an essential tool in managing protected areas in a sustainable way. In order to take a step towards a more structured monitoring system, the LAC (Limits of Acceptable Change) method has been launched in Hossa National Park.

A groundbreaking new LAC ICT tool will enable PWF to measure the impact of nature tourism and expand monitoring nationwide in time. The LAC method is piloted in Hossa National Park as part of compiling a management plan for the area.

## Outcome

During summer, more questionnaires were obtained than expected; during winter less than expected. Very few people were met in the park in winter and most of them did not want to stop in the cold weather to fill in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was sometimes found too long and some questions a little ambiguous. Some people would have wanted to answer digitally, either on site or at home afterwards. Most visitors were happy to answer and they thought it was important to take part in the survey and to contribute to the management of the national park. They thought their opinions mattered. For some, the draw with a chance to win a weekend in one of the huts in Hossa National Park played an important role.

The biggest age group were visitors between 35 and 55 of age and most of them were Finnish. Only 5% of visitors were foreign, most of them French, no doubt due to two French husky companies operating in the area. The most popular activities were hiking, walking and cycling. Most visitors had come to Hossa to relax and to experience nature and the landscape. Most of them wanted to see the Julma Ölkky canyon lake, the Nature Centre and Värrikallio rock paintings. Visitors thought their mental, physical and social health improved during the visit. Their expectations were mainly met and most visitors couldn't state anything that would have disturbed them during their visit.



## Key Findings & Learning Points

Foreign visitors were probably slightly under represented in the data. Most of them arrived through a company which underlines the importance of liaising with entrepreneurs. Some feedback was given on the length of the questionnaire and some questions were found difficult. It may be that better instructions should have been given, at least on some occasions.

Choosing interview spots is an important step in planning a visitor survey. Some areas were very quiet, especially in winter time. Winter posed challenges not only with finding enough people to take part but also with cold temperatures making them not want to stop.

In the future, collecting data digitally would upgrade making visitor surveys - in fact, digital surveys have been piloted in three areas during summer 2018.



**Fishing is one of the most popular activities in Hossa**

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact details: Heidi Lumijärvi  
Senior Advisor  
Metsähallitus  
Parks & Wildlife Finland

e-mail: heidi.lumijarvi@metsa.fi  
mobile +358 406 283 243

<https://www.ascent-project.eu>