

# TOURISM PACKAGE PREFERENCES OF WEST VIRGINIA STATE PARK VISITORS

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**Abstract.**—This study was a preliminary examination of the activity and spending behavior of visitors to Pipestem State Park in West Virginia. This state park is being used as a case study area to determine whether a new fish stocking program accompanied by appropriate marketing activities can increase park visitation by anglers and other sports-oriented people. The research was done very shortly after the first stocking activity and reached only 49 visitors, but it does provide a baseline against which to measure the impacts of stocking efforts.

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## 1.0 PURPOSE OF PROJECT

This study is part of a larger project examining the use of targeted fish stocking as an attraction enhancer at select West Virginia state parks. This paper covers an initial phase of research to examine the activity preferences and spending behavior of visitors to Pipestem State Park. The project is funded by West Virginia University Extension Service's Aquaculture Development Program.

### 1.1 Review of Literature

An extensive body of literature finds that vacationers frequently seek an assortment of activities for their vacation experience. These activity combinations are referred to as packages and packaging is a major element of tourism marketing (Fridgen 1996). Activity packages offer clients better economy, more convenience, and an introduction to unfamiliar activities. Tourism packages allow travelers to arrange several days' worth of accommodations and activities

through a single contact agency. This convenience appeals to many vacationers (Bloomquist and Sem 1994). Tourism service providers may develop activity packages based on consumer demand, availability of facilities and services, or a combination of demand and availability. Benefit packages may also be built around specialized interests or demographic characteristics. Tourism agencies use packages to improve target marketing, to maintain participation levels during off-peak periods, and to capitalize on cooperative efforts with other nearby attractions (Bloomquist and Sem 1994).

Fishing is one of the most popular outdoor recreation activities in the United States. Fishing is especially popular in West Virginia, where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2007) estimates that more than 21 percent of West Virginia residents participate in fishing. Fishing typically serves as a gateway activity so that many people who take up fishing will subsequently develop an interest in other outdoor sports and activities (Outdoor Industry Foundation 2007). Therefore, promotion of fishing should lead to greater demand for and participation in other outdoor activities.

Preliminary research by Mei, Pierskalla, and Schuett (2006) found six distinct market segments derived from a factor analysis of 27 outdoor recreation opportunities: experiencing nature and adventure; social relaxation; trophy fishing; escape; family; and fishing for food and fun. These market segments reflect the motives of the participants as well as the activity selections that factored together. The study found that though few visitors to West Virginia participated in tourism activity packages, a significant percentage would be interested in doing so.

### 1.2 Overview of Pipestem State Park

Pipestem State Park is located in southern West Virginia. The park extends over 4,025 acres and

encompasses a portion of the Bluestone Wild and Scenic River. The Bluestone River flows through a gorge that is approximately 1,100 feet deep. A 113-room lodge hotel is the primary feature of the state park. A smaller 30-room lodge along the Bluestone River is accessible only by an aerial tram. The aerial tram system also offers the only convenient access to the river for anglers and the tram system is closed during the winter months (November to late April).

The Bluestone River is primarily a warm water fishery, but the upper and middle sections of the river are heavily shaded with fast-running water. The survival rate of stocked trout in this river is an issue of concern to the overall study.

## 2.0 STUDY METHODOLOGY

A 16-item survey was administered to 50 randomly selected state park visitors during October 2007. Surveys were administered by four researchers following a scripted protocol and were collected at the main lodge area and at the aerial tram where anglers could access the river. This effort was the first data

collection in a long-term project to assess visitor activity preferences and the role of stocked trout fishing as an attraction for visitors.

## 3.0 RESULTS

The primary questions on the survey asked about daily activity participation both within the state park and in the local area. Results in the graphs below (Figs. 1 and 2) represent frequency distributions for all activities with more than one positive response.

During the brief study period discussed in this report, visitors to Pipestem State Park were heavily involved in nature observation activities, walking and hiking, golf, and vehicle camping (Fig. 1). Fishing on the Bluestone River was not a common pursuit during the time of this study.

### 3.1 Experience Quality

The survey asked participants about the “eventfulness” of their day at the state park. Responses to this question used a 7-point Likert scale with “1” representing an uneventful day and “7” representing

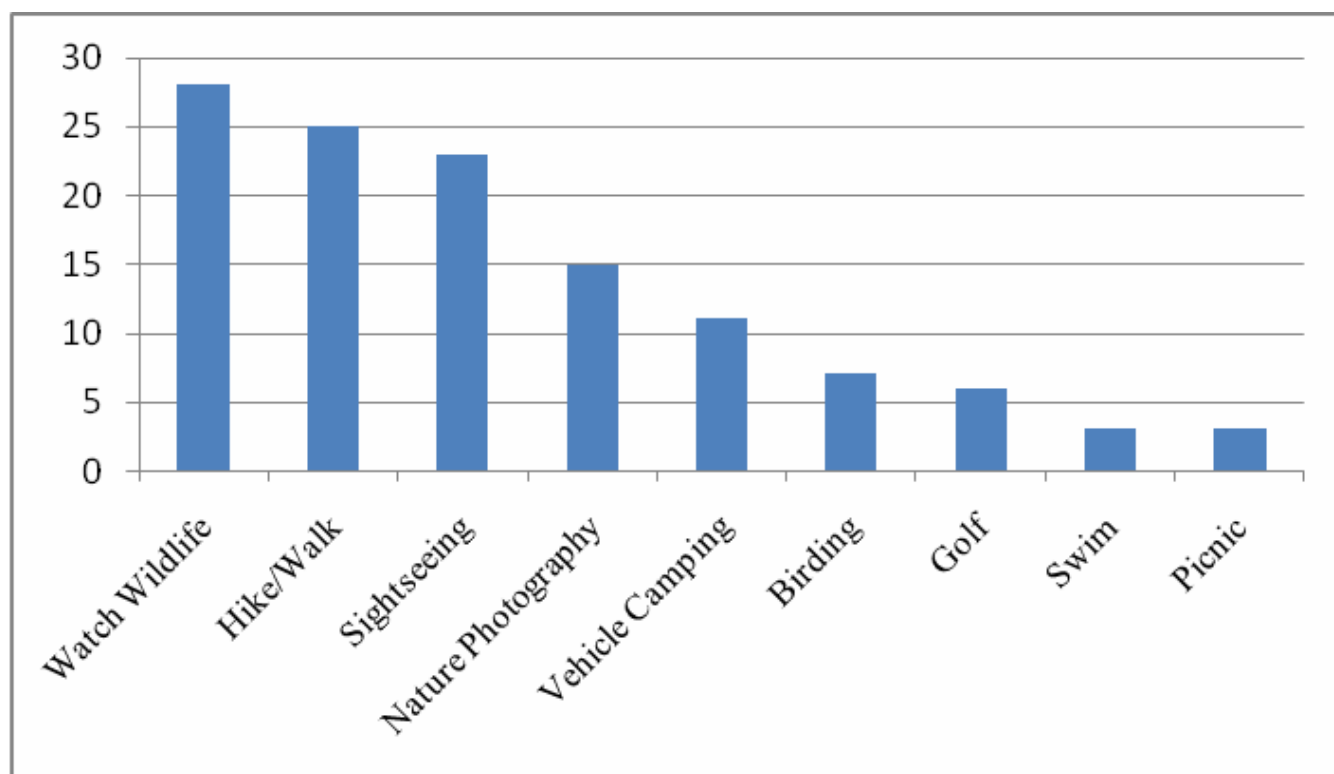


Figure 1.—Frequency distribution of participants' activities in Pipestem State Park.

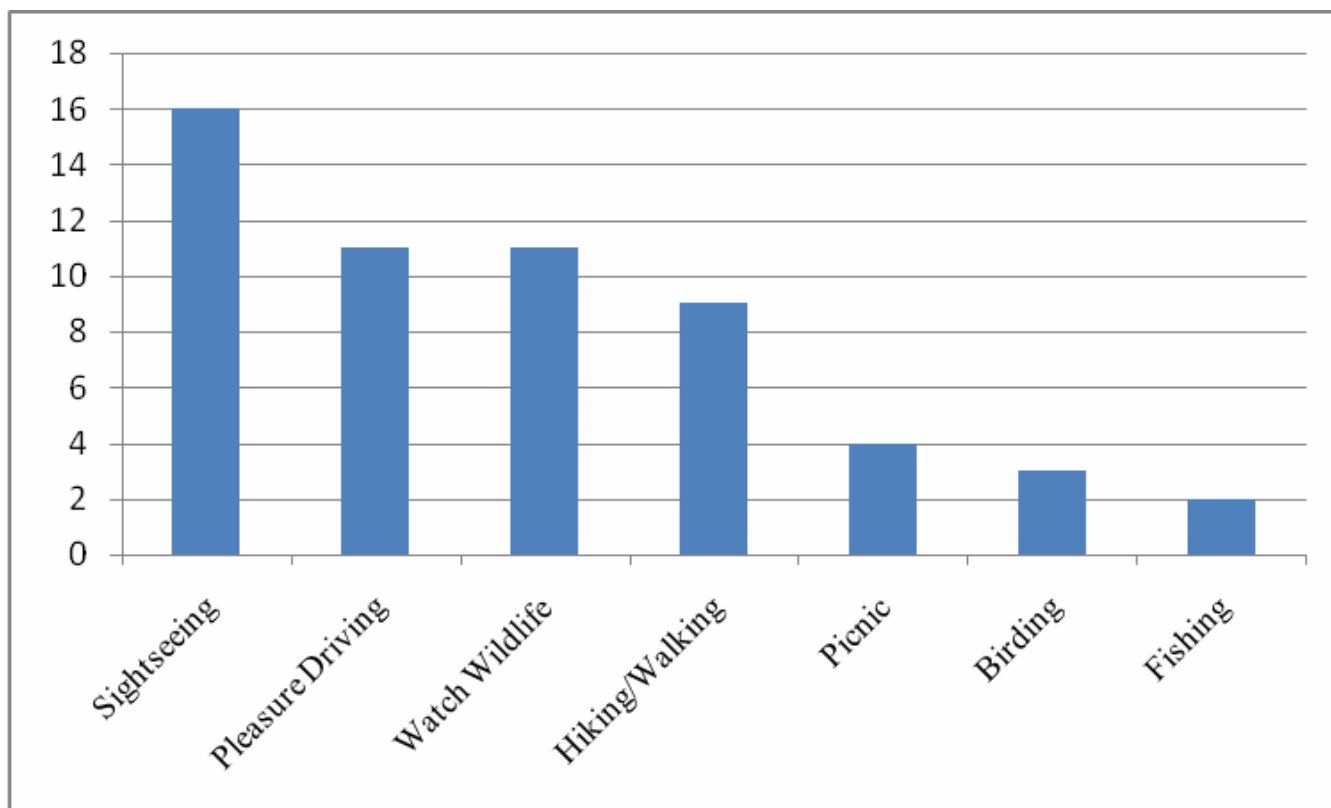


Figure 2.—Frequency distribution of participants' activities outside Pipestem State Park.

a very busy day. Results from this question produce a mean value of 4.84 on the 7-point scale (Standard Deviation = 1.51), indicating that the majority of respondents found their visit moderately eventful.

Participants were also asked to evaluate the quality of their daily recreation experiences at the state park. This question also used a 7-point Likert scale with “1” representing a poor-quality experience and “7” representing an exceptional level of quality. The mean score for this item was 5.39 (Standard Deviation = 1.39), indicating that respondents were very pleased with the quality of their state park experience.

### 3.2 Visitor Spending

A series of questions asked about participants' daily spending behavior.

Spending by visitors demonstrated a great deal of variability (Fig. 3). While mean spending totals were generally modest (Fig. 4), some individuals spent very freely for such items as guide and outfitter services (Fig. 5). In general, visitors to the park routinely pay

for golf instruction and horseback tours. This pattern suggests that the state park visitor population is able to afford activity packages.

## 4.0 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Marketing

Pipestem State Park is widely known and widely advertised and has long been one of the “flagship” parks in the West Virginia system. Marketing and advertising for the park focus on the scenic location and opportunities for viewing nature and wildlife. The visitors who responded to this survey were seeking and participating in all the activities that are emphasized in the park's marketing. Further research will be necessary to determine the extent to which the park's current marketing drives activity participation. The park's future marketing plan will need to highlight the presence of stocked trout in the Bluestone River in order for the trout to draw visitors and serve as an anchor for activity packages. Such marketing must also be conducted well in advance of fish stocking efforts.

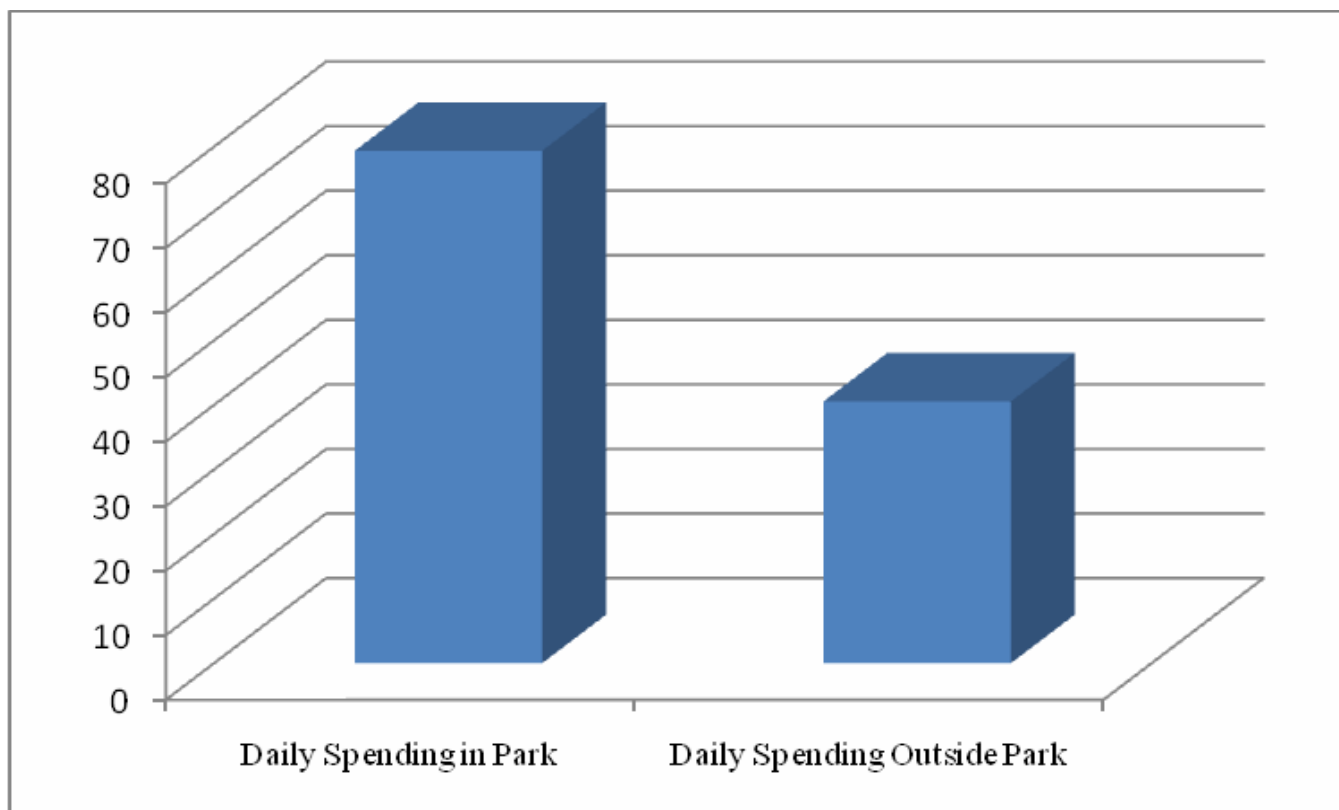


Figure 3.—Daily mean visitor spending. (Spending inside the park: range = \$0 to \$661, standard deviation = \$110.59; spending outside the park: range = \$0 to \$465, standard deviation = \$76.67)

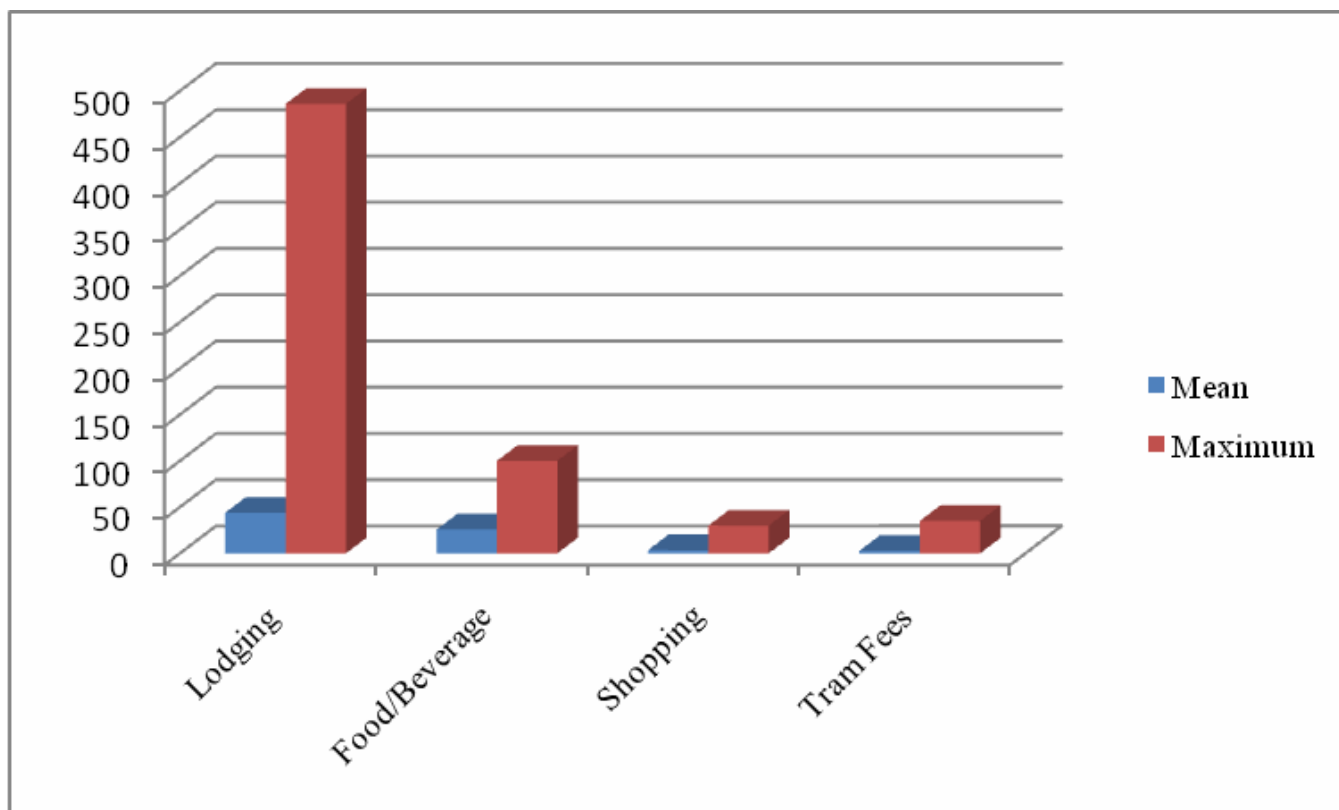


Figure 4.—Mean and maximum spending inside Pipestem State Park by category.

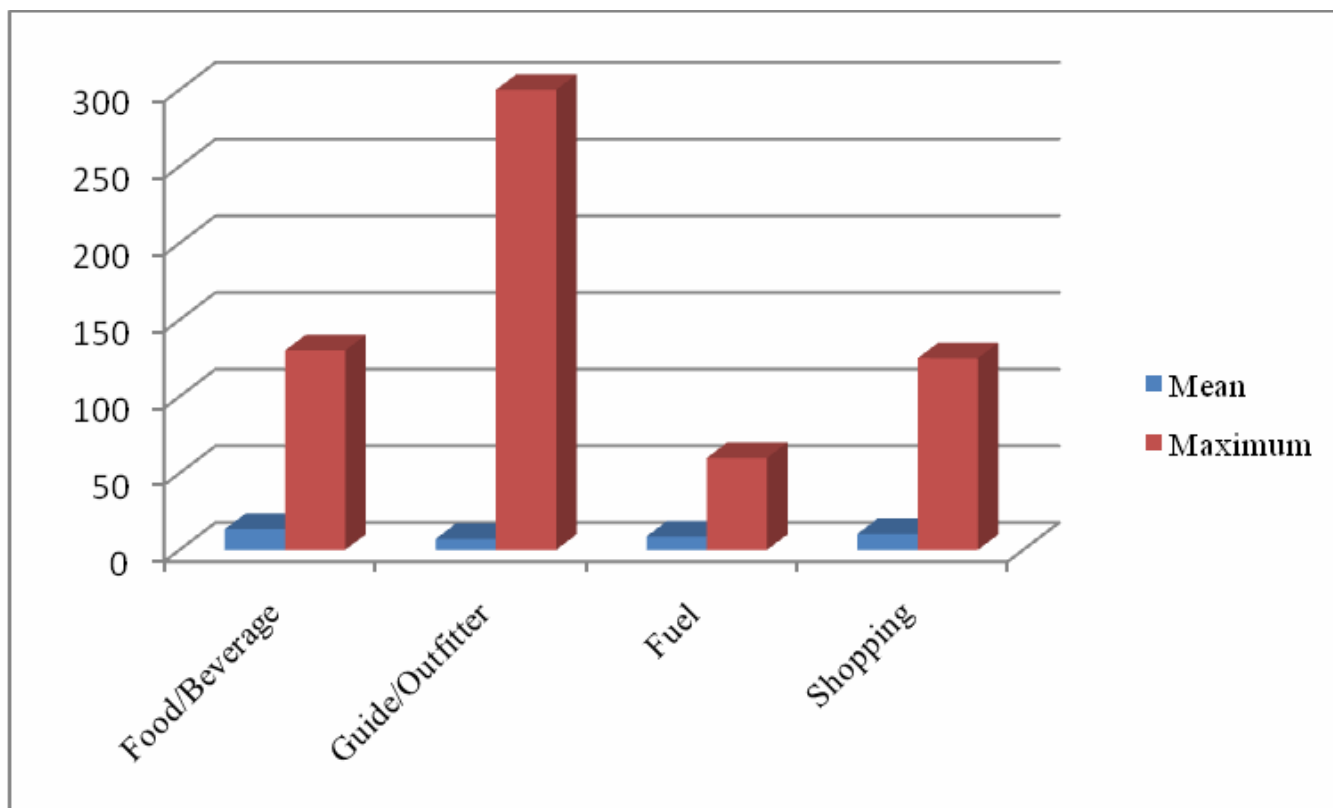


Figure 5.—Mean and maximum spending outside Pipestem State Park by category.

## 4.2 Seasonality

This survey research was significantly limited by seasonality. The data were collected during a brief period in late October. At this time of the year, West Virginia state parks are extremely popular with visitors traveling the area to see autumn foliage and wildlife. The late-October survey period probably skews the sample away from family-oriented participation and toward an older and less active population. It is possible that future targeted stocking of trout may “broaden the shoulders” of the tourism season by increasing visitation during times when visitor numbers typically tail off. An enhanced marketing effort to make visitors aware of the stocking program will be necessary for this stretching of the season to be successful.

## 4.3 Timing

Data collection periods were scheduled throughout the daylight hours including very early in the morning. The phrasing of the questions asked subjects which

activities they had participated in during that day only. A better representation of activity participation may have occurred if respondents had been asked about their *expected* activities for the day or their activities during their entire trip, or if data collection had taken place later in the day after respondents had had adequate time to participate in more activities.

## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides only limited information about the relationship between angling and tourism package preferences at Pipestem. The research timing was less than ideal because it was late in the tourism season and only a few days after the start of a new fish stocking program. This study is most useful as a baseline reflection of late-season visitors’ spending and activity participation trends. Future research can assess the effectiveness of stocked fish angling as a tourism enhancement and package development activity using the baseline data reported here.

## 6.0 CITATIONS

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