



VERS Modernization

Spokesperson: Richard (Dick) Kasul
ERDC-Vicksburg

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Corps of Engineers Approach to Estimation Visitation

Framework

- Decentralized visitation estimation and reporting system.
- Each Project monitors and reports it's own visitation.
- Procedural guidance and tools provided on behalf of nation program.

Relies primarily on automated traffic counters

- Pneumatic hose counters invented in 1920's.
- Used at Corps projects in 1940's.
- ~4500 active "meters" currently in WebVERS traffic meter inventory.



Traffic Counter-based Visitation Estimation

Previous Visitation Modernization Initiatives

Assessment and Improvement Initiatives

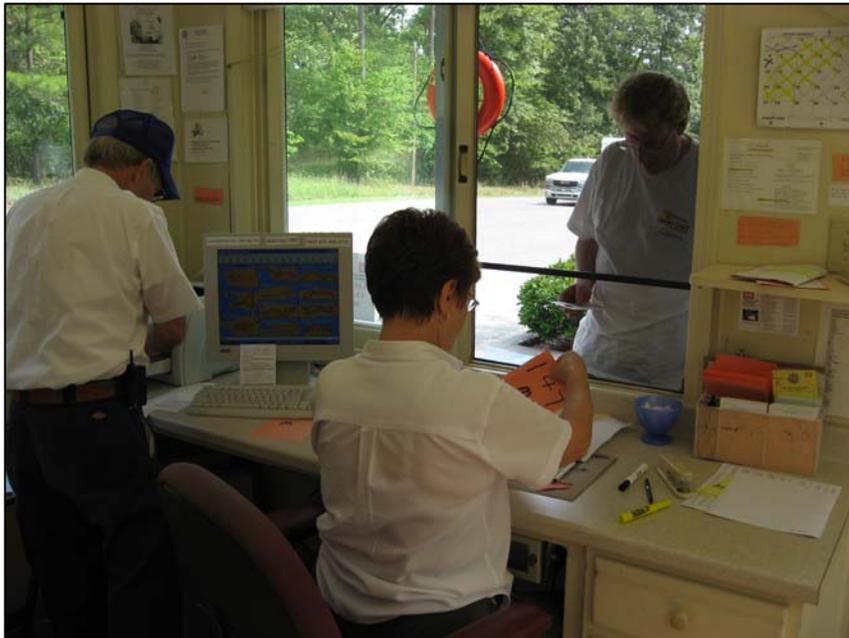
- All have focused on achieving more consistent estimates of visitation from project to project.
- Primarily addressed survey component of estimation methodology.
 - 1963** - Introduced standard survey forms.
 - 1969** - Plan Formulation Studies (Recreation) demonstrated use of standardized survey practices for calibrating meters.
 - 1978** - Mischon and Wyatt contract report indicted need for more uniformity in visitation survey and reporting procedures.
 - 1990** – Visitation Estimation and Reporting System (VERS)
 - Major advances in survey standardization (VERS software tools)
 - First to offer guidance on metering practices.



Next Generation Visitation Estimation At Corps-Managed Recreation Areas

Day-use Visitation

- Further improve existing survey process
- Standardize monitoring / metering protocols
- Create institutional framework for long-term sustainability



Separate methods for fee-camping visitation

- NRRS transaction data
- CEFMS campground receipts



Camping Visitation

Why Change Estimation Procedures?

- Business processes generate data suitable for use in estimating visitation
 - NRRS in use for 85% of CE-managed fee inventory
 - Remaining Corps fee camping captured in CEFMS (\$\$)
- Agreement between visitation estimated by current methods and NRRS ranges from good to poor
- Believe that business data can produce more consistently realistic estimates of camping visitation
 - Highly skewed departure patterns of camping visitors can adversely affect VERS camping estimates
- Reduce meter reading effort (100+ recreation areas)
 - At camping-only recreation areas
 - At camping areas allowing day-use guests

Campground Survey

Highlights

- Administered same as comment card
- Required to estimate visitation for CEFMS campers
- Supplemental for NRRS campers
 - Facility utilization
 - Activities
 - Day-use visits by guests of registered campers

Tomorrow's Activities

Add:

Fitness exercise such as hiking, jogging, or fitness walking

Expand:

Fishing (total)

Fishing from a boat

Fishing from lakeshore, dock, or pier

Watercraft (total)

Powered watercraft

Non-powered watercraft

Move to seasonal/optional:

Hunting

Waterskiing

New seasonal / optional:

Attend interpretative program led by park staff

Visit a visitor center

Tow sport such as waterskiing, wakeboarding, or para-sailing

Wheel sport such as bicycling, inline skating, or skateboarding

Field sport such as soccer, volleyball, or softball

Current Activities

Overnight

Fishing

Hunting

Picnicking

Watercraft

Waterskiing

Sightseeing

Winter

Other

The image shows two versions of the 'Campground Visitor Survey' form. The left form is the main survey, divided into several sections: 'Your Recreation Plans For Tomorrow' (with questions about checking out, staying overnight, and home location), 'Use of Park Facilities' (with questions about tenting, sleeping, and recreation activities), and 'Your Current Stay At This Campground' (with questions about overnight stays, recreation activities, and future plans). The right form is a shorter version titled 'If you had guests from outside this campground visit you during your stay here, please answer the following questions.' It contains questions about the number of guests, their stay duration, and their recreation activities. Both forms include a 'Thank You!' message and contact information for the Corps of Engineers.

Day-Use Visitation

Building on the Existing System

- Day-use comprises ~90% of Corps recreation visits.
- Survey component delivering load-factors is well developed.
- Monitoring component delivering counts of traffic to the recreation area is not well addressed.





VERS Documentation Exercise

What We Learned To Date

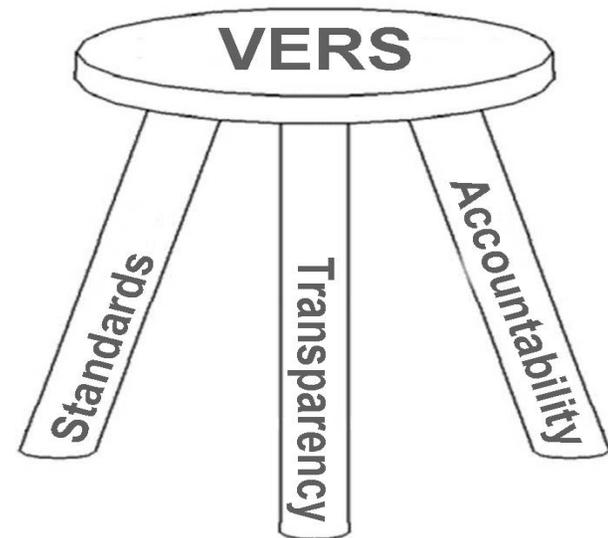
- Effectiveness of monitoring program has declined over time
- Standard monitoring protocols may not work well at complex recreation areas
- External factors constrain feasible visitation monitoring options
 - Staffing
 - Project size / driving distances
- Projects looking for guidance
- Adjustments prior to surveys needed at many projects
 - 35% of projects request meter / VERS changes.
 - 15% of projects request change in PSA definition.

VERS Modernization

Main Goal: More consistent visitation estimates from Project to Project that are sustainable over time.

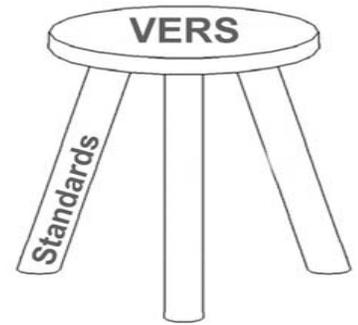
Requirements

- **Transparency:** Making visibly known what is currently being done.
- **Standards:** Clarifying the procedures and practices everyone should follow
- **Accountability:** Ensuring procedures and practices adhere to established standards



Institutional Support for VERS System

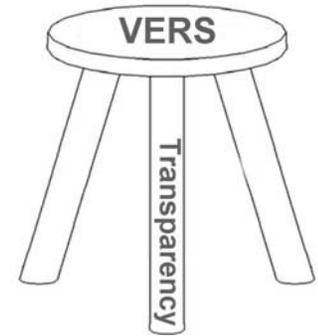
Best Practices



- **What to count as visitation**
 - Visitor center visits – yes
 - Highway travelers across dam - probably no
 - Visits to parks located on non-Corps lands - ?
- **Meter setup and monitoring practices**
 - Options for different recreation area configurations
 - Best places to install meters
 - Places to avoid installing meters (unstable load-factors)
- **Monthly VERS Activities**
 - Including meter reading, maintenance, and reporting
 - Continuous meter readings
 - Explain reset meters- i.e., vandalism and malfunction

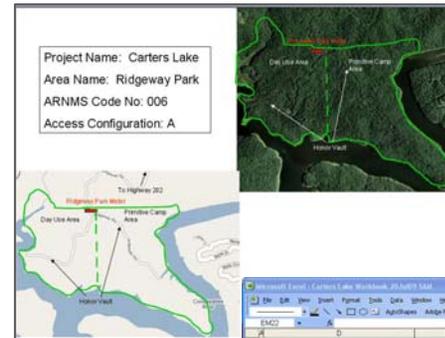
VERS Exercise

Documentation of Recreation Areas and Traffic Meters



● Maps

- Recreation area layout
- Visitor road access patterns
- Visitation monitoring setup



Maps

● Workbooks

- Describe conditions at recreation area and monitoring site
- Identify monitoring set up and protocol
- Flag conditions that create traffic monitoring challenges requiring special attention

Recreation Area	Area Status Check	What agencies or organizations provide visitor services at this recreation area?	Which diagram best matches the access road configuration for this recreation area?	How many vehicle and pedestrian traffic counters are in use at this recreation area?
CARTERS LAKE MARINA	OK	CE concessionaire	A-Single site with single access point	1 0
CARTERS LAKE POWER PLANT	OK	CE	A-Single site with single access point	1 0
DAMSITE	OK	CE	A-Single site with single access point	1 0
DOLL MT CAMPGROUND	OK	CE	A-Single site with single access point	1 0
DOLL MT DAY USE	OK	CE	A-Single site with single access point	1 0
INDERS BRANCH	OK	CE	A-Single site with single access point	1 0
NORTHBANK	OK	CE	A-Single site with single access point	1 0
INDERS DAM	OK	CE	D-More complex situation	2 0
RODGEWAY PARK	OK	CE	A-Single site with single access point	1 0
WOODRING CAMPGROUND	OK	CE	D-More complex situation	2 0
WOODRING DAY USE	OK	CE	A-Single site with single access point	1 0

Project workbook

● Beyond Transparency

- Main data source for assessing compliance with Best Practices
- Needed for survey planning / execution
- Central to determining load-factors for areas that will not be surveyed
- Maps: Many uses beyond VERS

Status

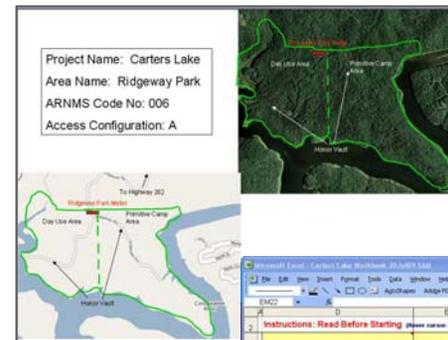
VERS Documentation Exercise

Scope

- 387 projects reporting “designated-area” visitation
- 3700 recreation areas
- 4500 active traffic “meters”

Status

- Initial submissions due 15Nov09
- Maps for 352 projects
- Workbooks for 349 projects



Maps

Recreation Area	Area Status Check	What agencies or organizations provide visitor services at this recreation area?	Which diagram best matches the access road configuration for this recreation area?	How many vehicle and pedestrian traffic counters are in use at this recreation area?
4				
5				
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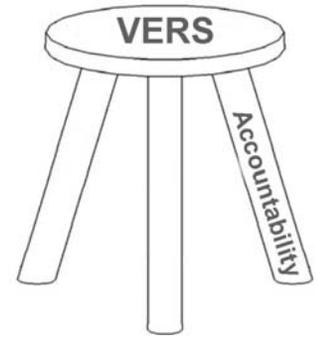
Project workbook

Next

- Review and finalize data submissions
- Document projects currently reporting visitation directly into OMBIL

VERS-CATT

VERS Coach, Assist, and Train Team



Goals / Functions

- Specified in VERS-CATT Charter (on NRM Gateway)
- Maximize compliance with VERS Best Practices
- Sustain compliance over time

Composition

- District VERS-CATT Leader
- Members (1-3) to assist Leader, as needed
 - From District and/or Project
- Member from ERDC

District VERS-CATT Leader

- Needs to be VERS-fluent and engaged with Projects
- Within the District:
 - Hands-on oversight of visitation monitoring on projects
 - Works with Projects to improve visitation monitoring and reporting practices
- Beyond the District:
 - Work through ERDC to identify / resolve monitoring challenges
 - Annual Visitation Monitoring Report

VERS and OMBIL

How they interact:

- Recreation areas (PSA's) are defined in OMBIL.
- These are the only recreation areas that can be reported in VERS
- Non-PSA visitation is aggregated into "dispersed-use"
 - Not connected to any OMBIL PSA

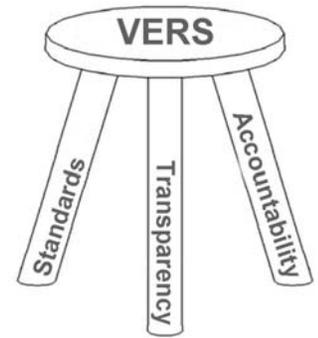
Issues / Concerns:

- Alignment of definitions and classifications with field needs
- Desire to separately report visitation for non-Recreation PSA's (e.g., WMA's)
- Others
 - Status of visitor centers in OMBIL
 - Dual visitation reporting systems

Actions

- Moratorium on PSA changes
- ERDC and OMBIL Working Group cooperation on clarifying recreation area definitions
- Other efforts to address PSA definition and classification issues

Where Should We Be Compliant With Best Practices?



- Places with Corps facilities
- Places where Corps personnel provide visitor services
- Corps parks – greatest emphasis
- Corps access points – less emphasis
- Outgrant partner parks – least emphasis

More On Outgrants

Situation:

- Some outgrant partners measure their own visitation
- What they measure and how they measure differs from us

Monthly Visitation Report

Sample Recreation Area Monthly Visitation Report

Division: SWD
 District: Little Rock
 Project: Table Rock
 Month: October, 2006

PSA	Total			Day-use			Overnight			Cautions
	Visits	Visitor Hours	Recreation Days	Visits	Visitor Hours	Recreation Days	Visits	Visitor Hours	Recreation Days	
Corps of Engineers										
Multiple Use Area A	52,000	294,000	56,000	50,000	150,000	50,000	2,000	144,000	6,000	*
Day-use Area A	6,000	18,000	6,000	6,000	18,000	6,000	0	0	0	
Stand Alone Visitor Center	800	12,000	800	800	12,000	800	0	0	0	
Corps of Engineers Subtotal	58,800	324,000	62,800	56,800	180,000	56,800	2,000	144,000	6,000	
Concession										
Multiple-Use Area A (Marina)	3,000	9,000	3,000	3,000	9,000	3,000	0	0	0	**
Concessionaire Subtotal	3,000	9,000	3,000	3,000	9,000	3,000	0	0	0	
State gov										
State Park	80,000	585,000	90,000	75,000	225,000	75,000	5,000	360,000	15,000	
State Access Ramp	1,000	3,500	165,000	1,000	3,500	1,000	0	0	0	
State gov Subtotal	81,000	588,500	255,000	76,000	228,500	76,000	5,000	360,000	15,000	
Municipal Gov										
County Park A	15,000	45,000	15,000	15,000	45,000	15,000	0	0	0	
City Park A	8,000	24,000	8,000	8,000	24,000	8,000	0	0	0	
Municipal Gov Subtotal	15,000	45,000	15,000	15,000	45,000	15,000	0	0	0	
Dispersed Use										
Dispersed use 01	500	1,500	500	500	1,500	500	0	0	0	
Dispersed use 02	100	300	100	100	300	100	0	0	0	
Dispersed Use Subtotal	600	1,800	600	600	1,800	600	0	0	0	
Total	143,400	923,300	321,400	136,400	419,300	136,400	7,000	504,000	21,000	

Additional Report Features

- Subtotals by service provider
 - Corps of Engineers
 - State government
 - Local government
 - Quasi-public entity
 - Dispersed use
- Best practice cautions

What's Next

- Complete VERS best practices
- Finalize VERS inventory of map and workbook documentation
- Initiate and train the VERS-CATT

- PSA definitions and classifications
- Visitor Center issues
- Mechanism to track campsite fee collections by recreation area (CEFMS camping piece of VERS)

