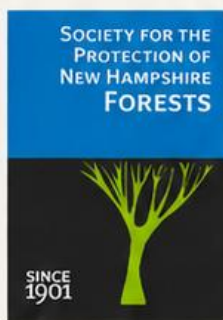


# A Visitor Use Management Assessment and Framework for Mount Major: Final Technical Management Report

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**Submitted to:**

**Society for the Protection  
of New Hampshire Forests**



**OUTDOOR  
RESEARCH  
INSIGHTS**

**Prepared by:**

**Outdoor Research  
Insights, LLC**

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# **A Visitor Use Management Assessment and Framework for Mt. Major: Final Report**

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The organization, technical assistance, field interviewing, data processing, and project support provided by Outdoor Research Insights, LLC and the dedicated field research team were also essential to the completion of this project. Their professionalism, consistency, and care in collecting high-quality visitor data at Mt. Major contributed directly to the strength and usefulness of the study findings.

The authors also thank the many Mt. Major visitors who took the time to participate in the survey and share information about their recreation experiences, perceptions, concerns, and management preferences. Their input provides important guidance for protecting the quality of the Mt. Major visitor experience while supporting the long-term stewardship of this highly valued recreation landscape.

Generative artificial intelligence tools were used to support the creation of infographic-style images included in this report. All report content, analyses, interpretations, and recommendations were developed, reviewed, and finalized by Outdoor Research Insights, LLC.

## **Disclosure Statement**

Outdoor Research Insights, LLC is an independent consulting firm and is not affiliated with, sponsored by, or endorsed by the University of New Hampshire. This consulting work was conducted independently by Outdoor Research Insights, LLC and does not represent the University of New Hampshire or use University resources.

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## **1.0 Executive Summary**

### **1.1 Study Purpose**

Mt. Major is one of the most heavily visited and recognizable hiking destinations in New Hampshire and continues to experience increasing recreation demand from both local and regional visitors. The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (Forest Society) owns and manages more than 200 acres of land at Mt. Major, and the area represents an important example of successful and proactive recreation stewardship within New England. Through continued investments in trail maintenance, conservation, volunteer outreach, visitor education, and recreation infrastructure, the Forest Society has helped maintain Mt. Major as a highly accessible, scenic, welcoming, and well-managed outdoor recreation destination despite steadily increasing visitation pressures. As visitation continues increasing, understanding how visitors use, experience, and evaluate Mt. Major becomes increasingly important for supporting long-term visitor use management and resource protection efforts.

This report presents findings from a comprehensive visitor use management assessment conducted in 2025 to evaluate visitor characteristics, recreation behaviors, experience quality, management preferences, and stewardship opportunities at Mt. Major. The study was conducted by Outdoor Research Insights (ORI), a New Hampshire-based applied recreation, tourism, and environmental consulting firm specializing in visitor use management, outdoor recreation planning, tourism research, and data-informed natural resource decision-making. The study was designed to provide the Forest Society with a scientifically rigorous and highly applied foundation for supporting long-term planning, operational decision-making, recreation sustainability, and stewardship at Mt. Major.

Specifically, the study sought to: 1) establish baseline visitor use data, 2) improve understanding of visitor motivations and expectations, 3) assess perceived crowding, conflict, and experience quality, 4) guide future infrastructure, communication, and outreach strategies, and 5) promote safe, welcoming, and sustainable recreation opportunities at Mt. Major. Collectively, these findings provide the Forest Society with a practical framework for balancing experience quality, ecological protection, stewardship, and increasing recreation demand moving forward.

### **1.2 Study Methods**

From June through October 2025, the study team conducted an on-site exit intercept survey of Mt. Major visitors. Sampling procedures were developed collaboratively with Forest Society managers to ensure representative coverage across peak recreation periods and primary trailhead access points. As visitors exited the trail system, trained field researchers invited them to participate in a 10–15 minute survey administered on tablet devices. Participants provided informed consent and either self-completed the survey or verbally responded to the field researcher. Survey questions examined visitor demographics, recreation behaviors, preparedness, experience quality, stewardship attitudes, and future engagement intentions.

The study achieved a strong response rate of 79%, with 717 visitors approached and 566 completed surveys collected. Data collection occurred across both summer and fall recreation seasons, including June (30%), July (17%), August (12%), September (19%), and October (23%). Quantitative survey data were analyzed using R, while qualitative open-ended responses were analyzed and coded using Python. Collectively, these findings provide Forest Society managers and constituents with a scientifically rigorous and highly applied foundation for understanding visitor use dynamics, maintaining high-quality recreation experiences, protecting natural resources, and proactively addressing increasing visitation pressures at Mt. Major.

### 1.3 Interpreting Mean Scores

All scales presented throughout this report utilize 7-point scale response formats commonly applied in outdoor recreation and social science research. These scales assess visitor perceptions, experience quality, management support, preparedness, stewardship attitudes, future behavioral intentions, and related visitor use management variables.

To support consistent interpretation throughout the report, the following general guidelines are used when interpreting average (mean) scores across study variables (Table 1):

**Table 1. Mean Score Interpretations**

| Score Range | General Interpretation                       |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 1.0–2.9     | Low / Negative / Opposition                  |
| 3.0–3.4     | Slightly Low / Limited Support               |
| 3.5–5.0     | Moderate / Neutral to Somewhat Positive      |
| 5.1–6.0     | High / Positive                              |
| 6.1–7.0     | Very High / Exceptionally Positive or Strong |

Importantly, mean scores should always be interpreted within the context of the specific response scale being used (e.g., satisfaction, support, importance, agreement, expectation, or intention). Additionally, relatively small differences in mean scores may still represent meaningful management patterns when interpreted comparatively across visitor groups or recreation conditions.



## 1.4 Key Findings

The following key findings summarize the most important and management-relevant patterns identified throughout the study. Together, these findings provide a concise overview of the primary visitor use trends, experience dynamics, and stewardship implications emerging from the broader dataset (see Section 2.0 Key Study Highlights for additional detail and supporting analyses).

- **Mt. Major is a highly successful recreation site, so the central management challenge is protection, not reinvention.** Overall visitor satisfaction was exceptionally high (6.49/7.0), while visitors also reported very strong feelings of safety (6.75), welcome (6.78), and return intention (6.43). Collectively, these findings suggest that Mt. Major currently maintains a very high-quality recreation environment despite increasing visitation pressures. Open-ended comments similarly reflected strong visitor appreciation and place attachment, with one repeat visitor simply noting: “Always great. Hiked it about 70 times.”
- **Visitors support functional improvements without changing Mt. Major’s natural character.** Visitors consistently valued Mt. Major’s relatively simple, nature-based, and low-development recreation character. Open-ended comments consistently emphasized scenic views, trail experiences, accessibility, and overall recreation quality, while several visitors explicitly expressed support for keeping Mt. Major “simple,” “natural,” and “wild.” As one visitor explained, “Quality hike because it is simple and not overdeveloped. Felt quite natural.”
- **Parking, crowding, and congestion represent Mt. Major’s most important emerging management challenge.** Ratings associated with parking availability (5.14/7.0), the number of people on the trail (5.19), and crowding at the summit (5.19) remained positive overall but were comparatively lower relative to most other evaluated conditions. Open-ended comments similarly identified crowding, parking limitations, and peak-use congestion as recurring concerns. One visitor summarized this tension directly, noting concern that expanding parking could “increase crowding,” and instead suggested redirecting overflow visitors to “other hikes on the busiest days.”
- **Mt. Major is evolving into a regional recreation and tourism destination.** Mt. Major functions as both a regional recreation destination and a repeat-use hiking site. Visitors traveled an average of approximately 1.5 hours to reach the site, with most visitors originating from Massachusetts (41%) and New Hampshire (40%). Repeat visitation exceeds first-time visitation (58.5% vs. 41.5%).
- **Visitor use management and long-term stewardship increasingly need to happen before visitors arrive.** Digital recreation technologies played a dominant role in trip planning and preparedness, with visitors most frequently relying on AllTrails (44.5%) and Google searches (37.6%) for pre-trip planning. At the same time, visitors demonstrated strong attachment to Mt. Major but comparatively limited formal engagement with the Forest Society, as familiarity with the organization remained moderate overall (3.50/7.0) and only 3.7% of respondents identified as current Forest Society members.



## EXPECTATIONS ALIGN WITH THE EXPERIENCE

Average Expectation (1 = Didn't expect at all, 7 = Fully expected this)



Hike to the Summit



6.71

Strongly expected –  
the highlight of the visit



Restrooms



4.07

Moderate  
expectation



Trash Cans

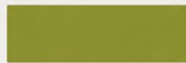


2.97

Lower  
expectation



Parking Fees



2.42

Not typically  
expected



Drinking Water  
Availability



1.72

Not typically  
expected



Dog Waste Bags



1.82

Not typically  
expected

*Visitors know this is a  
low-development hiking  
destination.*

## **2.0 Key Study Highlights**

This section summarizes the major findings associated with visitor characteristics, recreation use patterns, trip planning behaviors, visitor experience quality, and stewardship engagement at Mt. Major. Collectively, the results establish an important foundation for understanding current recreation use dynamics and informing future visitor use management and stewardship efforts at Mt. Major.

### **2.1 Visitor Profile**

Visitor profile variables examined demographic characteristics of Mt. Major visitors, including gender, age, race and ethnicity, household income, and education level (Table 2). Together, these findings provide baseline insight into who is recreating at Mt. Major and the types of audiences currently utilizing the site. The results also help establish an important demographic foundation for understanding visitor use trends, recreation demand, and future outreach opportunities at Mt. Major.

#### **Key Takeaways**

- Visitors were relatively balanced by gender, with slightly more female visitors (51.2%) than male visitors (47.8%), while a small proportion identified as non-binary or third gender (1.1%). This pattern suggests broad appeal across visitor groups.
- Visitors tended to skew younger, with adults ages 25–34 representing the largest age cohort (30.2%), followed by visitors ages 35–44 (17.3%) and 18–24 (15.7%). Collectively, these findings indicate strong use among younger and early middle-aged recreationists.
- The visitor population was predominantly White (80.6%), though some racial and ethnic diversity was present. Asian visitors represented the second largest racial group (11.7%), followed by Spanish/Hispanic/Latino visitors (4.1%). These findings suggest opportunities to continue supporting inclusive recreation access and outreach.
- Visitors were generally highly educated and higher income. Approximately 74.5% reported earning at least a bachelor's degree, while 55.9% reported household incomes of \$100,000 or greater. This pattern is consistent with broader outdoor recreation participation trends observed at many high-use hiking destinations.

#### **Summary**

Overall, Mt. Major attracts a relatively young, highly educated, and generally higher-income visitor population from across New England. The balanced gender distribution and presence of some racial and ethnic diversity suggest broad recreation appeal, while the large proportion of repeat and highly educated visitors reflects Mt. Major's strong regional reputation and accessibility. Although visitation remains dominated by White visitors, findings suggest opportunities to continue improving outreach and inclusivity efforts aimed at expanding participation among historically underrepresented recreation groups. Collectively, these findings reinforce Mt. Major's importance as a highly visible and widely utilized regional outdoor recreation destination.

**Table 2. Visitor Profile**

| <b>Variable</b>                                          | <b>Valid Percentages</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Gender (Q28)</b>                                      |                          |
| Female                                                   | 51.2                     |
| Male                                                     | 47.8                     |
| Non-binary/third gender                                  | 1.1                      |
| <b>Age (Q27)</b>                                         |                          |
| 25-34                                                    | 30.2                     |
| 35-44                                                    | 17.3                     |
| 18-24                                                    | 15.7                     |
| 55-64                                                    | 13.7                     |
| 45-54                                                    | 13.3                     |
| 65-74                                                    | 8.4                      |
| 75+                                                      | 1.4                      |
| <b>Race (Q29)</b>                                        |                          |
| White                                                    | 80.6                     |
| Asian                                                    | 11.7                     |
| Spanish/Hispanic/Latino                                  | 4.1                      |
| Black/African American                                   | 1.2                      |
| Other                                                    | 1.2                      |
| Middle Eastern/North African                             | 1.1                      |
| Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander                  | 0.5                      |
| American Indian/ Alaskan Native                          | 0.2                      |
| <b>Household income (Q30)</b>                            |                          |
| \$200,000 or more                                        | 21.0                     |
| \$100,000-\$149,999                                      | 19.7                     |
| \$50,000-\$74,999                                        | 16.5                     |
| \$150,000-\$199,999                                      | 15.2                     |
| \$75,000-\$99,999                                        | 13.0                     |
| \$25,000-\$49,999                                        | 8.7                      |
| Under \$25,000                                           | 6.1                      |
| <b>Education (Q31)</b>                                   |                          |
| Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS)                         | 42.6                     |
| Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MEd)                      | 19.8                     |
| Some college, but no degree                              | 13.7                     |
| Doctoral or professional degree (e.g., PhD, EdD, JD, MD) | 12.1                     |
| Associate degree (e.g., AA, AS)                          | 5.8                      |
| High school graduate or GED                              | 5.5                      |
| Less than high school                                    | 0.6                      |

\*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

## 2.2 Visitor Use Patterns

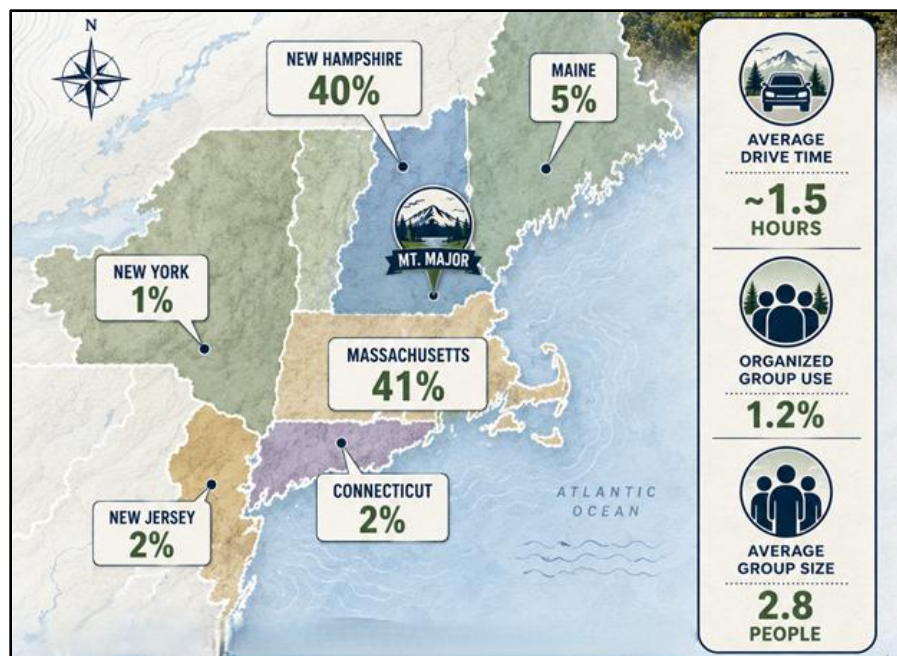
Visitor use pattern variables examined visitation history, frequency of use, recreation behaviors, group characteristics, visitor origin, and travel patterns at Mt. Major (Table 3). These findings provide important insight into how visitors use the site and the extent to which Mt. Major functions as both a local and regional recreation destination. The results also help establish a clearer understanding of long-term recreation demand and patterns of visitor dependence on the site.

### Key Takeaways

- Repeat visitation slightly exceeded first-time visitation, with 58.5% identifying as repeat visitors compared to 41.5% first-time visitors. Visitors also reported recreating at Mt. Major an average of 4.9 times during the previous 12 months and for an average of 10.5 total years.
- Summit attainment was nearly universal, with 98.1% of respondents successfully reaching the summit during their visit. This finding reinforces the importance of summit views and scenic overlook experiences as central components of the Mt. Major recreation experience.
- Organized group use was extremely limited (1.2%), while average group size remained relatively small (2.8 people). This pattern suggests that Mt. Major primarily functions as an independently organized recreation destination rather than a heavily programmed or guided recreation site.
- Visitors originated primarily from Massachusetts (41%) and New Hampshire (40%), with smaller proportions traveling from Maine (5%), Connecticut (2%), New Jersey (2%), and New York (1%). Average drive time was approximately 1.5 hours, highlighting Mt. Major's importance as a regional recreation destination.

### Summary

Overall, Mt. Major functions as both a regional recreation destination and a repeat-use hiking site for many visitors throughout New England. Visitors frequently returned to the site over long periods of time and commonly traveled moderate distances to access the hiking and summit experience. Recreation use was overwhelmingly characterized by small, independently organized hiking groups rather than guided or commercial activities. Collectively, these findings reinforce Mt. Major's role as an accessible, informal, and highly popular outdoor recreation destination.



**Table 3. Visitor Use Patterns**

| <b>Variable</b>                                                  | <b>Valid Percentages or Means</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>First time vs repeat visitation (Q1)</b>                      |                                   |
| First time visitors                                              | 41.5                              |
| Repeat visitors                                                  | 58.5                              |
| <b>Average visitation frequency- in the past 12 months (Q1a)</b> | 4.9 visits                        |
| <b>Average Visitation frequency - total years (1b)</b>           | 10.5 years                        |
| <b>Dog use during the visit (Q2)</b>                             |                                   |
| Yes                                                              | 17.5                              |
| No                                                               | 82.5                              |
| <b>Summit attainment (Q3)</b>                                    |                                   |
| Yes                                                              | 98.1                              |
| No                                                               | 1.9                               |
| <b>Organized group use (Q4)</b>                                  |                                   |
| Yes                                                              | 1.2                               |
| No                                                               | 98.8                              |
| <b>Average group size (Q5)</b>                                   | 2.8 people                        |
| <b>Zip code/visitor origin (Q7)</b>                              |                                   |
| Massachusetts                                                    | 41                                |
| New Hampshire                                                    | 40                                |
| Maine                                                            | 5                                 |
| Connecticut                                                      | 2                                 |
| New Jersey                                                       | 2                                 |
| New York                                                         | 1                                 |
| <b>Average drive time to Mt. Major (Q8)</b>                      | 1.5 hours                         |

\*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

## 2.3 Visitor Trip Planning and Preparedness

Visitor trip planning and preparedness variables examined pre-trip information sources, preparedness behaviors, and visitor expectations associated with facilities and services at Mt. Major (Table 4). These findings provide insight into how visitors prepare for their recreation experience and the types of conditions they expect to encounter on-site. The results also help clarify the growing role of digital recreation technologies and visitor self-sufficiency within the Mt. Major experience.

### Key Takeaways

- Digital recreation platforms played a dominant role in pre-trip planning. AllTrails emerged as the most frequently used information source (44.5%), followed by Google searches (37.6%) and word of mouth recommendations (31.1%). In contrast, relatively few visitors utilized the Forest Society website (3.0%) or social media platforms.
- Visitors generally appeared well-prepared for their recreation experience. Nearly all respondents reported bringing water (94.9%) and many also carried food (74.2%), digital trail information (39.6%), bug spray (35.7%), extra clothes (30.9%), and first aid kits (30.0%).
- Visitors very strongly expected to hike to the summit during their visit (M=6.71 on a 7-point scale), reinforcing the importance of summit attainment to the overall recreation experience. Expectations for restrooms were moderate (M=4.07), while expectations for trash cans (2.97) and parking fees (2.42) were notably lower.
- Expectations for developed infrastructure and visitor services were generally limited overall, particularly for drinking water availability (M=1.72) and dog waste bags (M=1.82). This pattern suggests that many visitors already recognize Mt. Major as a relatively low-development hiking destination.

### Summary

Overall, Mt. Major visitors appeared generally well-prepared, digitally connected, and strongly focused on the hiking and summit experience itself. Visitors relied heavily on online recreation platforms and digital information sources while demonstrating relatively limited expectations for developed infrastructure or visitor services. Preparedness behaviors suggested a largely self-sufficient visitor population familiar with outdoor recreation conditions. Collectively, these findings highlight opportunities to continue emphasizing digital communication, visitor preparedness education, and stewardship messaging.



**Table 4. Visitor Trip Planning and Preparedness**

| Variable                                                        | Valid Percentages or Means |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Pre-trip information sources (Q6)</b>                        |                            |
| AllTrails                                                       | 44.5                       |
| Google search                                                   | 37.6                       |
| Word of mouth                                                   | 31.1                       |
| Forest Society website                                          | 3.0                        |
| Facebook                                                        | 2.7                        |
| Instagram                                                       | 2.1                        |
| YouTube                                                         | 1.1                        |
| TripAdvisor                                                     | ---                        |
| <b>Visitor preparedness and items brought on the hike (Q11)</b> |                            |
| Water                                                           | 94.9                       |
| Food                                                            | 74.2                       |
| Digital- Map/trail info                                         | 39.6                       |
| Bug spray                                                       | 35.7                       |
| Extra clothes                                                   | 30.9                       |
| First aid kit                                                   | 30.0                       |
| Trash bags                                                      | 22.4                       |
| Rain jacket                                                     | 20.8                       |
| Paper- Map/trail info                                           | 8.0                        |
| <b>Pre-trip expectations (Q12) <sup>1</sup></b>                 |                            |
| Hike to the summit                                              | 6.71                       |
| Restrooms                                                       | 4.07                       |
| Trash cans                                                      | 2.97                       |
| Required day use or parking fee                                 | 2.42                       |
| Dog waste bags                                                  | 1.82                       |
| Drinking water                                                  | 1.72                       |

\*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

<sup>1</sup>Response Code: 1= Didn't expect at all, 7= Fully expected this



## 2.4 Visitor Impacts and Safety

Visitor impacts and safety variables examined overall satisfaction, perceptions of how on-site conditions influenced recreation experiences, and visitor agreement with statements related to safety, inclusivity, access, and wayfinding at Mt. Major (Tables 5-7). Collectively, these findings provide insight into how visitors evaluate the quality of their recreation experience and the broader social and environmental conditions present at Mt. Major. The results also help identify strengths and emerging pressures associated with increasing visitation.

### Key Takeaways

- Overall visitor satisfaction was exceptionally high (M=6.49 on a 7-point scale), indicating that most visitors evaluated their experience very positively despite increasing visitation and associated management pressures.
- Environmental cleanliness emerged as the strongest positive contributor to experience quality and was evaluated very positively (M=6.31), followed by distance from parking to the trailhead (M=6.10) and clarity of trail signage (M=5.89). These findings highlight the importance of maintaining basic infrastructure and site conditions.
- Visitors generally viewed crowding conditions positively, though ratings for the number of people on the trail (M=5.19) and at the summit (M=5.19) were lower relative to other evaluated conditions. While visitors remained satisfied overall, crowding may represent an emerging management consideration during peak use periods.
- Perceptions of safety, welcome, and social interactions were extremely strong overall. Visitors most strongly agreed that they felt welcome at Mt. Major (M=6.78), followed by feeling safe while hiking (M=6.75) and safe walking from their vehicle to the trailhead (M=6.74). Visitors also positively evaluated inclusivity, accessibility, and trail signage.

### Summary

Overall, visitors reported exceptionally positive recreation experiences at Mt. Major, particularly regarding safety, welcome, cleanliness, and overall site conditions. Environmental quality, trail signage, and accessibility emerged as important contributors to experience quality, reinforcing the value of maintaining core infrastructure and operational conditions. Although visitors evaluated crowding positively overall, comparatively lower ratings associated with trail and summit congestion suggest that crowding may become an increasingly important management consideration during peak use periods. Collectively, these findings indicate that Mt. Major currently maintains a high-quality recreation environment for most users.



**Table 5. Visitor Impacts and Safety**

| <b>Variable</b>                                                              | <b>Valid Percentages or Means</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Overall satisfaction (Q9)<sup>1</sup></b>                                 | 6.49                              |
| <b>Impacts of on-site conditions on experience quality (Q13)<sup>2</sup></b> |                                   |
| Cleanliness of the environment                                               | 6.31                              |
| Distance from parking to trailhead                                           | 6.10                              |
| Clarity of trail signage                                                     | 5.89                              |
| Presence of dogs                                                             | 5.54                              |
| Number of people on the trail                                                | 5.19                              |
| Number of people at the summit                                               | 5.19                              |
| Availability of parking spaces                                               | 5.14                              |
| Cleanliness of restroom facilities                                           | 4.84                              |
| <b>Agreement with safety, access, and wayfinding (Q15)<sup>3</sup></b>       |                                   |
| I felt safe while hiking the trail at MM                                     | 6.75                              |
| I felt safe walking from my car to the trailhead at MM                       | 6.74                              |
| Interactions with other hikers were generally positive at MM                 | 6.71                              |
| MM is welcoming to people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds               | 6.69                              |
| I felt welcome at MM                                                         | 6.78                              |
| MM was easy to drive to and find                                             | 6.64                              |
| I interacted with people from different backgrounds at MM                    | 6.08                              |
| Trail signage was clear and easy to follow at MM                             | 6.04                              |

\*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

<sup>1</sup>Response Code: 1 = Poor, 7 = Perfect

<sup>2</sup>Response Code: 1 = Negative impact, 7 = Positive impact

<sup>3</sup>Response Code: 1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree

**Table 6. Open-Ended Comments: Visitor Experience Highlights and Challenges**

Q14: *What aspects of your visit to MM stood out to you most today, either positively or negatively?*

| Themes and Sub-Themes                                    | Theme N <sup>1</sup><br>(Sub-Theme N <sup>2</sup> ) | Theme Valid %<br>(Sub-Theme Valid %) |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Scenic/natural setting and summit experience</b>      | <b>168</b>                                          | <b>29.4</b>                          |
| Summit views, lake scenery, and panoramic vistas         | (137)                                               | (81.5)                               |
| Weather, quiet, and natural atmosphere                   | (25)                                                | (14.9)                               |
| Simplicity and natural recreation character              | (6)                                                 | (3.6)                                |
| <b>Overall recreation quality and social experience</b>  | <b>140</b>                                          | <b>24.5</b>                          |
| Overall hike quality, challenge, and exercise            | (107)                                               | (76.4)                               |
| Friendly visitors, community, and shared experience      | (20)                                                | (14.3)                               |
| Trail etiquette, noise, and visitor behavior concerns    | (13)                                                | (9.3)                                |
| <b>Trail quality, maintenance, and wayfinding</b>        | <b>134</b>                                          | <b>23.5</b>                          |
| Trail markings, maps, and signage                        | (57)                                                | (42.5)                               |
| Trail improvements, stairs, and lower trail upgrades     | (42)                                                | (31.3)                               |
| Trail condition, maintenance, erosion, and clearing      | (35)                                                | (26.1)                               |
| <b>Access, parking, crowding, and visitor use levels</b> | <b>74</b>                                           | <b>13.0</b>                          |
| Crowding, busyness, and visitor volume                   | (33)                                                | (44.6)                               |
| Accessibility, approachability, and family friendliness  | (24)                                                | (32.4)                               |
| Parking capacity and arrival/access issues               | (17)                                                | (23.0)                               |
| <b>Facilities, amenities, and site services</b>          | <b>55</b>                                           | <b>9.6</b>                           |
| Water, food, and visitor support amenities               | (20)                                                | (36.4)                               |
| Bathrooms, toilet paper, and sanitation                  | (18)                                                | (32.7)                               |
| Trash, litter, and dog waste services                    | (17)                                                | (30.9)                               |
| <b>Total comments</b>                                    | <b>571</b>                                          | <b>100%</b>                          |

\*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

<sup>1</sup>Theme N refers to the total number of individual comments coded within each major thematic category.

<sup>2</sup>Sub-Theme N refers to the number of comments coded within a specific sub-category under each broader theme.

### Illustrative Quotes- Visitor Experience Highlights and Challenges

The following quotes were selected to illustrate common sentiments expressed by visitors regarding visitor experience highlights and challenges at Mt. Major.

- *“Short hike for a 5-star view, perfect temps, overcast skies, no bugs. The blue trail was shockingly maintained with staircases. Remarkable.”*
- *“The peacefulness of the red trail. I loved that not many guests are on that specific trail. Everybody we met on the mountain was polite and conscientious of the environment.”*
- *“Mt. Major is a wonderful hike for beginners and the trail updates on the main trail are amazing...there is room for improvement on signage.”*
- *“Great views, wonderful update to trail at base of main trail, massive erosion on Brook Trail since I last hiked it.”*

**Table 7. Open-Ended Comments: Social interactions and Inclusivity**

| <i>Q16: What could make the experience at Mt. Major feel more welcoming?</i> |                                                              |                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Themes and Sub-Themes</b>                                                 | <b>Theme N<sup>1</sup><br/>(Sub-Theme<br/>N<sup>2</sup>)</b> | <b>Theme Valid %<br/>(Sub-Theme Valid<br/>%)</b> |
| <b>Basic facilities, amenities, and visitor services</b>                     | <b>39</b>                                                    | <b>32.8</b>                                      |
| Bathrooms, sanitation, and general facility improvements                     | (15)                                                         | (38.5)                                           |
| Water, food, and trailhead support amenities                                 | (14)                                                         | (35.9)                                           |
| Trash, litter, and dog waste infrastructure                                  | (10)                                                         | (25.6)                                           |
| <b>Already welcoming or no specific change needed</b>                        | <b>24</b>                                                    | <b>20.2</b>                                      |
| Positive overall experience                                                  | (16)                                                         | (66.7)                                           |
| Already welcoming/no specific suggestion                                     | (8)                                                          | (33.3)                                           |
| <b>Trail information, wayfinding, and orientation</b>                        | <b>22</b>                                                    | <b>18.5</b>                                      |
| Trail blazes, markings, and route clarity                                    | (8)                                                          | (36.4)                                           |
| Directional signs and on-trail orientation                                   | (8)                                                          | (36.4)                                           |
| Maps, trail difficulty, and visitor information                              | (6)                                                          | (27.3)                                           |
| <b>Access, parking, and physical comfort</b>                                 | <b>19</b>                                                    | <b>16.0</b>                                      |
| Parking capacity and roadside access                                         | (12)                                                         | (63.2)                                           |
| Physical comfort, accessibility, and trail surface improvements              | (7)                                                          | (36.8)                                           |
| <b>Social environment, etiquette, and inclusivity</b>                        | <b>15</b>                                                    | <b>12.6</b>                                      |
| Visitor etiquette, noise, and pet behavior                                   | (6)                                                          | (40.0)                                           |
| Friendly atmosphere and participatory/place-based features                   | (7)                                                          | (46.7)                                           |
| Visible inclusivity and representation                                       | (2)                                                          | (13.3)                                           |
| <b>Total comments</b>                                                        | <b>119</b>                                                   | <b>100%</b>                                      |

\*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

<sup>1</sup>Theme N refers to the total number of individual comments coded within each major thematic category.

<sup>2</sup>Sub-Theme N refers to the number of comments coded within a specific sub-category under each broader theme.

### **Illustrative Quotes- Social interactions and Inclusivity**

The following quotes were selected to illustrate common sentiments expressed by visitors regarding social interactions and inclusivity at Mt. Major.

- *“Water station somewhere at base.”*
- *“More parking so people don't need to park on the road.”*
- *“Better bathroom facilities and better signage on the way down.”*
- *“People need to be more aware of hiking rules: priority to people going up, if you're slow let people pass...”*
- *“The more diversity there is among hikers, the more welcoming it will be.”*

## 2.6 Visitor Preferences for Stewardship, Support, and Future Engagement

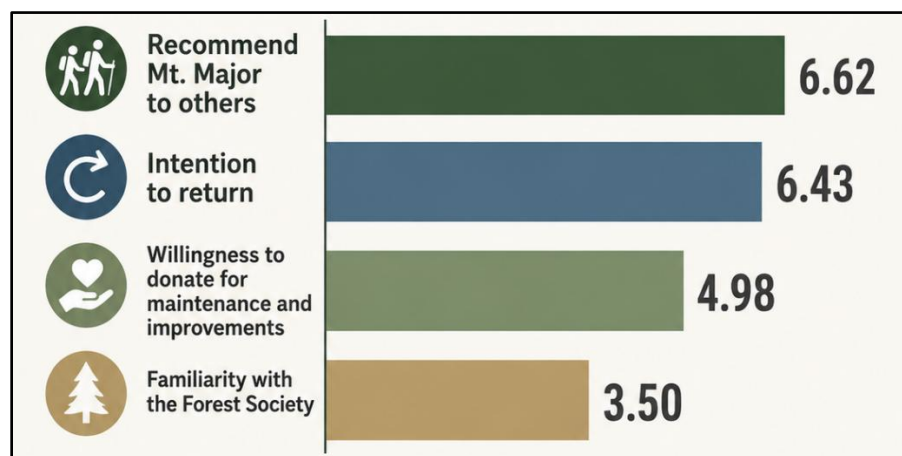
Visitor stewardship and engagement variables examined visitor intention to return, loyalty behaviors, conservation organization affiliation, familiarity with the Forest Society, and current Forest Society membership status (Tables 10 and 11). Together, these findings provide insight into long-term visitor attachment to Mt. Major and the extent to which visitors may be receptive to future stewardship and engagement efforts. The results also help clarify current levels of organizational awareness and visitor connection to conservation-oriented recreation behaviors.

### Key Takeaways

- Visitors reported very strong intentions to return to Mt. Major in the future (M=6.43 on a 7-point scale), reinforcing the site's importance as a repeat-use recreation destination.
- Visitor loyalty measures were strongest for future recommendation behavior. Recommending Mt. Major to others emerged as a very strong loyalty behavior overall (M=6.62), while willingness to donate to support maintenance and improvements was moderate (M=4.98). Intentions to join the Forest Society as a member were also moderate (M=3.60), while volunteer intention was slightly low (M=3.21).
- 20% of respondents reported affiliation with a conservation or outdoor recreation organization. Among reported affiliations, the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) emerged most frequently (25.5%), followed by local or regional land trusts and conservation groups (11.8%).
- Familiarity with the Forest Society was moderate overall (M=3.5), while only 3.7% of respondents identified as current Forest Society members. These findings suggest opportunities to strengthen visitor awareness, stewardship communication, and long-term organizational engagement.

### Summary

Overall, findings indicate exceptionally strong return and recommendation intentions, with many visitors expressing very high loyalty to the Mt. Major recreation experience. However, familiarity and formal engagement with the Forest Society remained comparatively limited. While some visitors already participate in broader conservation organizations, current Forest Society membership levels were low overall. Collectively, these findings suggest opportunities to strengthen stewardship communication, organizational visibility, and long-term visitor engagement efforts at Mt. Major.



**Table 8. Visitor Preferences for Stewardship, Support, and Future Engagement**

| <b>Variable</b>                                                      | <b>Valid Percentages or Means</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Intention to return (Q10)<sup>1</sup></b>                         | 6.43                              |
| <b>Visitor loyalty (Q24)<sup>1</sup></b>                             |                                   |
| Recommend Mt. Major to others                                        | 6.62                              |
| Donate to help maintain and improve Mt. Major                        | 4.98                              |
| Join the Forest Society as a member to support Mt. Major             | 3.60                              |
| Volunteer with the Forest Society at Mt. Major                       | 3.21                              |
| <b>Conservation and outdoor organization affiliation (Q25)</b>       |                                   |
| Yes                                                                  | 20.0                              |
| No                                                                   | 80.0                              |
| <b>Top conservation and outdoor organization affiliations (Q25a)</b> |                                   |
| Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC)                                      | 25.5                              |
| Local / Regional Land Trusts & Conservation Groups                   | 11.8                              |
| The Trustees of Reservations (Trustees)                              | 8.2                               |
| Sierra Club                                                          | 6.4                               |
| National Audubon Society (Audubon)                                   | 6.4                               |
| Trail / Recreation Organizations                                     | 5.5                               |
| The Nature Conservancy                                               | 3.6                               |
| <b>Familiarity with the Forest Society (Q23)<sup>2</sup></b>         | 3.5                               |
| <b>Current Forest Society membership status (Q26)</b>                |                                   |
| Yes                                                                  | 3.7                               |
| No                                                                   | 96.3                              |

\*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

<sup>1</sup>Response Code: 1 = Definitely not, 7 = Without a doubt

<sup>2</sup>Response Code: 1 = Not at all familiar, 7 = Very familiar

**Table 9. Open-Ended Comments: Perceived Barriers to Forest Society Membership**

Q26a: *If you are not currently a member of the Forest Society, what, if anything, would encourage you to become a member?*

| Themes and Sub-Themes                                              | Theme N <sup>1</sup><br>(Sub-Theme N <sup>2</sup> ) | Theme Valid %<br>(Sub-Theme Valid %) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Information, awareness, and understanding of membership</b>     | <b>37</b>                                           | <b>33.9</b>                          |
| Basic awareness of the organization                                | (25)                                                | (67.6)                               |
| Advertising, reminders, or outreach                                | (5)                                                 | (13.5)                               |
| Benefits, costs, and use of membership funds                       | (4)                                                 | (10.8)                               |
| Mission, agenda, and organizational purpose                        | (3)                                                 | (8.1)                                |
| <b>Local connection, proximity, and residency</b>                  | <b>22</b>                                           | <b>20.2</b>                          |
| Living closer to Mt. Major or Forest Society lands                 | (15)                                                | (68.2)                               |
| Living in New Hampshire or the United States                       | (7)                                                 | (31.8)                               |
| <b>Tangible member incentives, programs, and benefits</b>          | <b>22</b>                                           | <b>20.2</b>                          |
| Discounts, perks, and financial incentives                         | (9)                                                 | (40.9)                               |
| Employment, compensation, or direct financial benefit              | (7)                                                 | (31.8)                               |
| Programs, events, and hiking groups                                | (6)                                                 | (27.3)                               |
| <b>Stewardship values, site improvements, and general openness</b> | <b>16</b>                                           | <b>14.7</b>                          |
| General openness or unclear willingness                            | (9)                                                 | (56.3)                               |
| Visible site improvements or management actions                    | (3)                                                 | (18.8)                               |
| Stewardship, learning, and land protection values                  | (2)                                                 | (12.5)                               |
| Low barrier joining or membership structure                        | (2)                                                 | (12.5)                               |
| <b>Personal capacity, timing, and recreation identity</b>          | <b>12</b>                                           | <b>11.0</b>                          |
| More time or life stage capacity                                   | (8)                                                 | (66.7)                               |
| Stronger hiking or outdoor recreation identity                     | (2)                                                 | (16.7)                               |
| Age, retirement, or life stage                                     | (2)                                                 | (16.7)                               |
| <b>Total coded comments</b>                                        | <b>109</b>                                          | <b>100%</b>                          |

\*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

<sup>1</sup>Theme N refers to the total number of individual comments coded within each major thematic category.

<sup>2</sup>Sub-Theme N refers to the number of comments coded within a specific sub-category under each broader theme.

### Illustrative Quotes- Perceived Barriers to Forest Society Membership

The following quotes were selected to illustrate common sentiments expressed by visitors regarding perceived barriers to Forest Society membership.

- *“Would want to understand benefits of being a member and where the money is spent.”*
- *“Learn more about it. I have not heard of it but have donated and joined similar things I think.”*
- *“I don’t live here. But if I did, I would consider it.”*
- *“Not sure but either a discount on something or like programs and hiking groups I could join.”*
- *“See improvements in trail maintenance, this would encourage them to join as a member.”*

**Table 10. Open-Ended Comments: Visitor Identified Management Priorities and Improvements***Q32: Is there anything else you want to share with Mt. Major managers?*

| <b>Themes and Sub-Themes</b>                                    | <b>Theme N<sup>1</sup><br/>(Sub-Theme N<sup>2</sup>)</b> | <b>Theme Valid %<br/>(Sub-Theme Valid %)</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Appreciation, gratitude, and positive overall experience</b> | <b>57</b>                                                | <b>64.0</b>                                  |
| Thanks and appreciation for management efforts                  | (31)                                                     | (54.4)                                       |
| Positive overall experience, place attachment, and enjoyment    | (24)                                                     | (42.1)                                       |
| Noted improvements and visible progress                         | (2)                                                      | (3.5)                                        |
| <b>Trail stewardship, maintenance, and environmental care</b>   | <b>13</b>                                                | <b>14.6</b>                                  |
| Trail markings, signage, and distance information               | (4)                                                      | (30.8)                                       |
| Trail maintenance, cleanliness, and litter concerns             | (5)                                                      | (38.5)                                       |
| Natural character and ecological stewardship                    | (4)                                                      | (30.8)                                       |
| <b>Facilities, amenities, and visitor support services</b>      | <b>6</b>                                                 | <b>6.7</b>                                   |
| Bathrooms, toilet paper, and sanitation                         | (2)                                                      | (33.3)                                       |
| Drinking water or natural spring access                         | (1)                                                      | (16.7)                                       |
| Staff, volunteers, and visitor support                          | (3)                                                      | (50.0)                                       |
| <b>Visitor rules, etiquette, and social climate</b>             | <b>3</b>                                                 | <b>3.4</b>                                   |
| Dog leash rule enforcement                                      | (1)                                                      | (33.3)                                       |
| Visitor distribution across trails                              | (1)                                                      | (33.3)                                       |
| Survey inclusivity or identity question concern                 | (1)                                                      | (33.3)                                       |
| <b>Total coded comments</b>                                     | <b>89</b>                                                | <b>100%</b>                                  |

\*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

<sup>1</sup>Theme N refers to the total number of individual comments coded within each major thematic category.<sup>2</sup>Sub-Theme N refers to the number of comments coded within a specific sub-category under each broader theme.**Illustrative Quotes- Visitor Identified Management Priorities and Improvements**

The following quotes were selected to illustrate common sentiments expressed by visitors regarding visitor identified management priorities and improvements at Mt. Major.

- *“Thank you for continuing to maintain this beautiful place and trails.”*
- *“The volunteers are AWESOME.”*
- *“Great hiking experience, keep the trail clean and well maintained.”*
- *“Please keep it ‘wild.’”*

### **3.0 Overall Summary Conclusions**

Overall, findings from this visitor use survey suggest that Mt. Major currently represents a highly successful and well-managed outdoor recreation and tourism destination that continues to provide exceptionally positive visitor experiences despite increasing local and regional recreation demand. Visitors consistently expressed strong appreciation for the scenic quality, accessibility, trail experience, and relatively informal nature-based character of Mt. Major, while also expressing appreciation for many of the Forest Society's ongoing stewardship and management efforts. Importantly, the study findings suggest that the central long-term management challenge at Mt. Major is not fundamentally improving the recreation experience itself, but rather protecting and sustaining the high-quality recreation conditions that already exist as visitation pressures continue increasing. At the same time, findings suggest that Mt. Major is increasingly functioning as both a local community recreation asset and a highly visible regional tourism destination.