The magic numbers - measuring the health and well-being benefits of Finnish national park visitors

Liisa Kajala
Senior Advisor
Parks & Wildlife Finland manages our most pristine nature and cultural heritage

- One organization to manage all state-owned areas reserved for nature conservation and hiking:
  - 40 national parks
  - 19 strict nature reserves
  - 5 national hiking areas
  - 12 wilderness areas in Lapland
  - over 3,000 other protected areas
  - and cultural heritage sites
We manage and protect Finland’s most valuable natural treasures in a responsible manner

- For the benefit of people and nature
National parks and national hiking areas

- 40 national parks, total area 10,018 km²
- 5 national hiking areas, total area 243 km²
- Parks & Wildlife Finland provides basic facilities, for example about
  - 5,000 km of trails,
  - 1,300 km of skiing routes,
  - 2,800 campfire sites, and
  - 400 wilderness huts.
Visitation to National Parks in constant growth
Local economic impacts of visitors’ spending

Local economy impacts of visitors’ spending in Finland’s national parks

mill. €

200
150
100
50
0


108,9 108,3 109,5 115,5 125,8 141,5 178,9 206,5 211,5
Increasing evidence shows that contact with nature

- Affects mental health
- Prevents chronic diseases
- Helps to recover from stress and illness
- Improves perceived quality of life
- Promotes positive attitudes towards life
- Enhances the sense of belongingness
Healthy Parks
HEALTHY PEOPLE
FINLAND

PARKS & WILDLIFE FINLAND
Health and Wellbeing 2025 programme

METSÄHALLITUS
THE GOAL

Healthy Parks
HEALTHY PEOPLE

Finland's diverse natural environment improves the health and well-being of its people.

The Finns are an active, outdoor people, for whom nature is an essential part of everyday life and leisure time. Their social, physical and mental well-being has improved due to the varied Finnish wilderness and their active relationship with nature.

THE ROLE OF PARKS & WILDLIFE FINLAND

- Guardian of the diverse natural environment and a provider of high-quality services that meet the needs of local recreation, tourism, hiking, hunting and fishing
- Inspiring people to go out into the natural environment and strengthen their relationship with nature
- An active developer, partner and coordinator in collaboration
Finland’s diverse natural environment improves the health and well-being of its people
- Healthy Parks, Healthy People

From nearby nature to national parks

Objectives

Actions

Everyone outdoors

Objectives

Actions

Results based on communications and cooperation

Objectives

Actions

Funding

Monitoring
Method development, 2013-2014

- A development project together with researchers from the Thule Institute, University Oulu
- 4 pilot parks across the country
- Short and long questionnaire
- Both surveys include
  1. questions on social, psychological and physical well-being as perceived by visitors
  2. a question on the perceived value of the visit
Standardized questions

16. How did this visit to the Kolovesi National Park influence the state of your health and well-being in the following sectors?
(Please answer each point and choose the alternative, which describes your feelings the best.). 5 = totally agree, 4 = somewhat agree, 3 = no opinion, 2 = somewhat disagree, 1 = totally disagree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally agree</th>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

**Increased social welfare** (e.g. strengthened social relations, improved working capacity, enjoyed going things alone or together)

**Increased mental welfare** (e.g. satisfaction with life, improved mood, recovery from mental stress, learned something new)

**Increased physical welfare** (e.g. enjoyed sensing the nature, maintained the fitness, learned new skills, physical well-being)

17. What kind of monetary value would you give to the influence of this visit in the Kolovesi National Park on your health and well-being?

You can compare with the value of commercial welfare services and products (gym 5 €, visit to spa for 2.5 hours 20 €, massage for one hour 50 €, treat in spa with different kinds of cures 200 €), cultural services (cinema 12 €, concert 100 €) or travelling costs (holiday at one’s own country 500 €, holiday abroad 3000 €).

__________________________ €

22. How long distance did you travel or intend to travel by following means of your own power during this visit in the Kolovesi National Park?

- **walking** ______ km
- **canoeing** ______ km
- **rowing** ______ km
- **other, please specify?** _________________________ km
Measurement of benefits is integrated into visitor monitoring methodology of P&WF

• Continuous counting
  → visitation numbers

• Visitor surveys every five to ten years in national parks and other protected areas of significant recreational use
  • Altogether 61 areas
  • On average 7 areas / year

• ASTA visitor information system used for data storage and reporting
Visitor surveys

- Visitor profile
- Activities
- When and where
- Expectations
- Economic impacts
- Duration
- Health and well-being
- Motives
- Satisfaction
Results 2016-2018

• 88% of visitors to protected areas perceived that the visit had a fairly or very high positive impact on their health and wellbeing.

• The average health and well-being effect of the visitors was 4.37 on a scale of 1-5, with 1 = totally disagree, ..., 5 = totally agree.
Health and well-being impacts perceived by visitors 2016-2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Respondents, n</th>
<th>Areas, n</th>
<th>Perceived health and well-being benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National parks</td>
<td>8,768</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other protected areas</td>
<td>1,715</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National hiking areas</td>
<td>1,631</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kvarken Archipelago World Heritage Site</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,566</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.37</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Health and well-being impacts of Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pallas-Yllästunturi NP 2016 (n=1879)</th>
<th>Evaluation, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Totally disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased social wellbeing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased psychological wellbeing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased physical wellbeing</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
National parks promote public health for millions of euros

Visitors estimated their health and well-being effects to around 110 euros per visit (median)

→ The self-defined worth of health benefits experienced by all Finnish national park visitors in 2018 is roughly 348 million euros in total
National parks move people

An average distance travelled by one’s own power on a typical national park trip varies between 5 and 20 km

- Hiking, cycling, kayaking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing etc.
- Information available from 17 parks

→ In these parks alone, visitors move about 29 million kilometers annually, equaling 724 laps around the world
How can parks and protected areas make and communicate the case better to our politicians and policy makers?

**Be sure to:**
1. Do good job
2. Have reliable data and results to report on impacts and benefits
3. Communicate efficiently to decision-makers:
   - metsa.fi/web/en/healthbenefitsfromnationalparks
   - nationalparks.fi/en/wellbeingfromnature
   Interactive on-line reporting, also available on mobile devices
4. Have the majority on your side in key decisions
Dashboard, also to decision makers directly
Interactive reporting for single areas, regions and national statistics
Healthy Parks

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