

BACKGROUND

Day-use fees are standard in park jurisdictions globally but not in British Columbia (BC). This exploratory study examined whether and how visitors to BC Parks could address the spillover impacts of park conservation outside provincial park boundaries using day-use fees in the South Coast region (see map). Home to over 61% of BC's population, the South Coast region is the most populated in the province and has some of BC's highest-trafficked parks¹. It was considered the most appropriate region to pilot a day-use fee.

RESEARCH QUESTION



What is public sentiment toward day-use fees as a means to address conservation concerns in BC provincial parks?

METHODOLOGY

A two-part online survey ($n=585$) was conducted to collect primary data from current and potential BC Parks visitors. Over 98% of respondents were from British Columbia, Alberta, or Ontario. Respondents were recruited through Angus Reid, social media groups, and snowballing methods.

Part A (9 questions): Demographic questions asked about age, gender, family status, education level, household income, region of residence, employment status, ethnicity, previous experiences in BC Parks, and WTP a day-use fee.

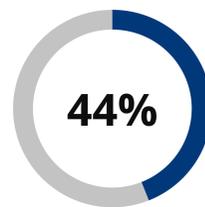
Part B (7 questions): Scenario-based questions used the contingent valuation method (CVM) to estimate the monetary day-use fee value current and potential BC Parks visitors attach to park experiences.

REFERENCES

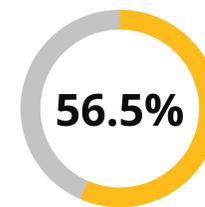
¹Government of British Columbia. (2022). South Coast, Regional Overview [Government]. Gov.Bc.Ca. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/cumulative-effects-framework/regional-assessments/south-coast>
²BC Parks. (2023). Facts and figures—Province of British Columbia. BC Parks. <https://bcparks.ca/about/facts-figures/>

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Only 44% of people are willing to pay a day-use fee. Further, the most popular BC Parks activities were hiking (14.5%), frontcountry camping (11%), picnicking (11%), and wildlife viewing (9%). The findings suggest that fee revenue should focus on maintaining and improving those mentioned areas if implemented. 268+ comments were also provided.

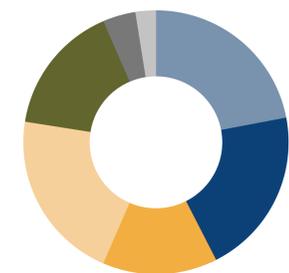


said they were willing to pay day-use fees in BC Parks



said a day-use fee would make them rethink their recreational plans

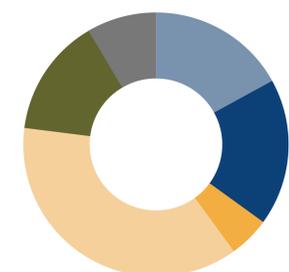
SUPPORTING FACTORS



- Improved park facilities and maintenance | 22%
- Habitat conservation | 20.5%
- Safety and emergency services | 14%
- Preserving nature for future generations | 21%
- Increased recreation opportunities | 16%
- Decreased provincial taxes | 4%
- Other* | 2.5%

*Other reasons included reduced congestion on popular trails, better access to premium parking, deterrence of vandals and litter, and the belief that paying for a service makes people value it more.

OPPOSING FACTORS



- Desire to reduce personal costs | 17%
- Distrust of fee management by agency | 18%
- Belief another agency should pay for fees | 5%
- Belief that park access should be free | 37%
- Belief that non-BC locals should pay fees | 14.5%
- Other* | 8.5%

*Other reasons included concern over the disproportionate burden day-use fees would have for low-income people and the colonial tensions with unceded Indigenous land being managed by BC Parks.

FACTS & FIGURES

\$15.26

mean WTP per vehicle for day-use parking

\$6.88

mean WTP per adult for day-use entrance

- Over **14.4%** of BC's land is protected by parks—more than any Canadian jurisdiction².
- BC is one of the only large provinces not using day-use fees in their park system.
- During the 2018-2019 season, BC Parks recorded over **23,015,600 day-use visits**²
- A day-use fee of just \$5 per adult would generate over **\$115,078,000*** using day-use visit data from 2018-2019.

*This figure does not include visitors with fee exceptions or reductions, such as seniors, children, veterans, group rates, and those with disabilities.

DISCUSSION & SUMMARY

The survey ($n=585$) showed that **day-use fees are contentious and divisive**. Supporting factors included reduced crowding, habitat conservation, preservation of nature, and the possibility of future park recreational infrastructure. Opposing factors included the burden of cost, distrust of government agencies, and intrinsic belief that nature access should be free, especially for BC residents. Those in opposition were also more likely to leave comments, suggesting that day-use fees in BC Parks could be met with strong resistance if implemented. However, the park functions that visitors value the most also have substantial maintenance costs, suggesting a balance must be found.

RECOMMENDATIONS

BC Parks can carefully consider day-use fees to offset negative externalities through:

- Tiered fee options for residents vs. out-of-province visitors
- Using day-use fee revenue on projects that create highest value to the most visitors (ex. trail maintenance, washrooms)
- Transparent and responsible spending of fee revenue
- Appropriate and continued Indigenous engagement
- Clear communication strategy on how day-use fees are collected, managed, and spent
- Looking to jurisdictions like Ontario, Québec, or Hawaii