BALTIMORE FISHBOWL

ENVIRONMENT

UMBC Poll surveys Marylanders' views on state parks, forests, and public lands

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A waterway winds through the forest in Gunpowder Falls State Park. Photo credit: Larissa Smith/Flickr Creative Commons.

Three-quarters of Marylanders consider how close they are to outdoor recreational opportunities when choosing where to live, according to a new poll by the UMBC Institute of Politics.

Among those respondents, 35% said proximity was a “major” factor in their decision, while 42% said it was a “minor” factor. Another 19% said it was not a factor.

The poll also asked residents how often they visit Maryland’s state parks, forests, and other public lands; what they enjoy doing while there; and what they would like to experience at these sites.

An overwhelming majority of residents visit Maryland’s state parks, forests, and other public lands at least once or twice per year, the poll found.

The most frequent visitors, who reported going to these sites several times a month or more, made up 12% of the survey’s respondents.

Another 11% visit Maryland’s public lands about once a month, while 31% went to these places a few times a year, and 26% said they only visited once or twice a year.

Seventeen percent of respondents said they never visit at all.

Asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how interested they were in various activities at some of Maryland’s public lands, more than half (55%) of respondents expressed high interest in hiking or walking. That included those who rated the activity a 4 (very interested) or a 5 (extremely interested).

At this same level of interest, 45% enjoyed picnicking, 43% said wildlife and nature viewing and photography, 32% said fishing, and 31% said camping.

Other activities included biking (29% of respondents were very or extremely interested in this activity), boating (29%), paddling (28%), target shooting (25%), off-road vehicle riding (24%), horseback riding (21%), and hunting (17%).

The pollsters also asked respondents an open-ended question about the types of amenities, services, and activities that would make them more likely to visit a state park or other public lands this year.

The top four themes were: improved access or affordability (12%); improved or expanded trails, outdoor recreation spaces, and camping sites (11%); expanded social activities and places for families and groups

(11%); and improved facilities, maintenance, and safety (10%).

Maryland's Department of Nature Resources offers **various passes** for visitation to state parks.

For example, **"Maryland Passport"** passholders get access for a vehicle of up to 10 people to visit any of Maryland's state parks and facilities. The pass also includes unlimited boat launching at all state park facilities and a 10 percent discount on state-operated concession items and boat rentals. The "Maryland Passport" is good for one year from the month of purchase, and costs $75 for Maryland residents or $100 for out-of-state residents.

Other types of passes are available at different pricepoints, including free passes for older adults and disabled individuals.

UMBC pollsters surveyed 804 Maryland adults, including 731 registered voters, by phone from March 17 to March 22.

There is a 95% probability that the survey results have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5% for the sample of 804 Maryland adults. There is a 95% probability that the survey results have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.6% for the sample of 731 Maryland adults.