

The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex Visitor Surveys 2003 – 2004: Some Lessons Learned

Presented at:
Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex Public Meeting
April 9, 2005

Scientists Involved:
Steve McCool, Bill Borrie,
Alan Watson, Chad Dear, Josh Whitmore

What was done

- Visitor surveys conducted in both 2003 and 2004
 - Recreation management direction from 1987 requires visitor monitoring every 10 years
- Survey conducted in 2003 affected by fires
- Survey was conducted in 2004, but at a lower level of sampling intensity
- 2003 survey – challenge cost share grant
 - McCool, Dear, Borrie
- 2004 – ALWRI funded
 - Borrie, Whitmore, Watson

Study Design

- 10 – 13 heaviest used trailheads
- Initial contact, mail return questionnaire
- 2003 – 78%, 462 respondents
- 2004 – 72%, 297 respondents
- Tables and figures in presentation adapted from:
 - Whitmore, J.G., W.T. Borrie, and A.E. Watson. 2005. Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex 2004 Visitor Study. Technical Completion Report, College of Forestry and Conservation, The University of Montana, Missoula, MT. 148 p.
 - Dear, C., S.F. McCool and W.T. Borrie. 2005. Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex 2003 Visitor Study. Technical Completion Report, College of Forestry and Conservation, The University of Montana, Missoula, MT. 49 p. plus appendices.

Analysis

- Splits by
 - Outfitted -- non-outfitted
 - Day – overnight
 - Fall – summer
 - Horse – hiker
- Two reports
 - 2003 visitors
 - Dear, McCool and Borrie
 - Comparison Studies
 - Whitmore, Borrie and Watson
 - Comparison of 1970, 1982 and 2004 visitors
 - Comparison of 2003-2004

Lesson # 1:

No such thing as an average year

- There is year to year variability in use patterns, characteristics of visitors
- But some years are very different than others
- 2003 very different year because of fires
 - May make 2003 survey data unrepresentative

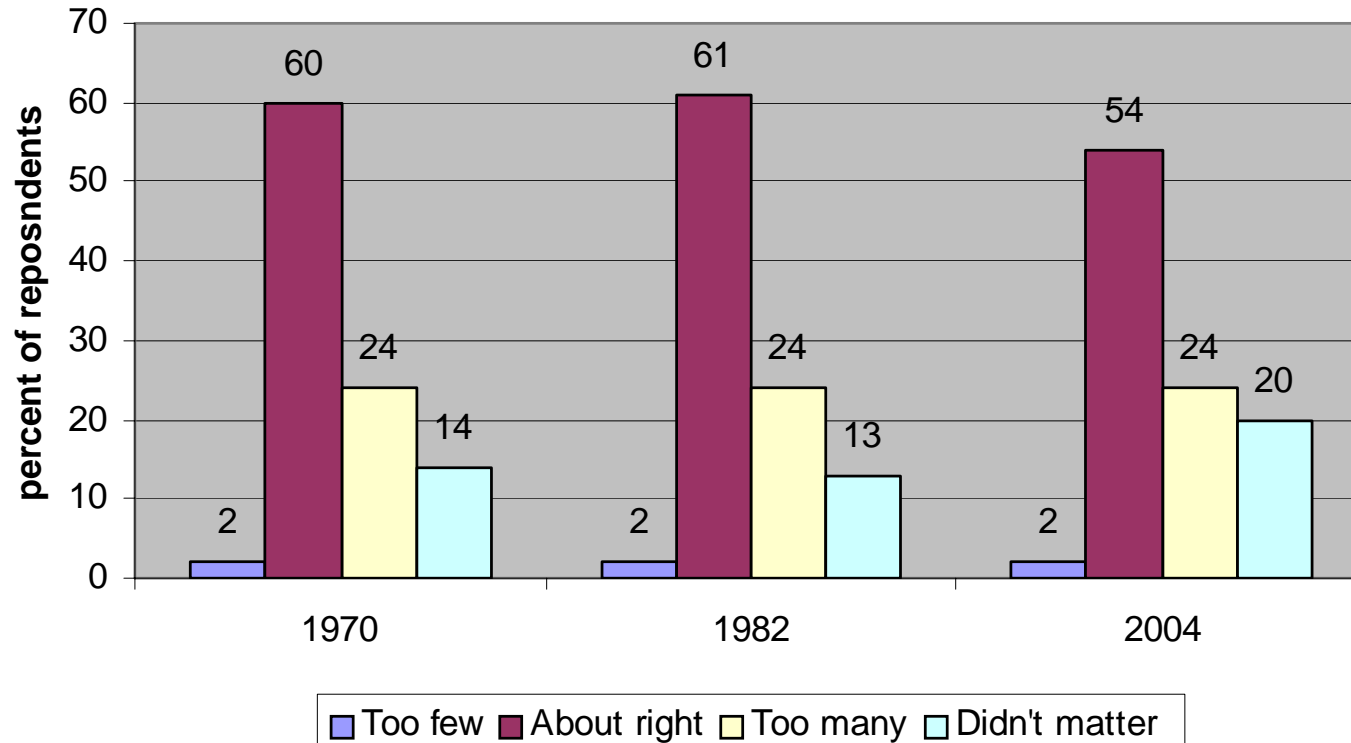
Lesson #2:

Motivations remain fairly constant

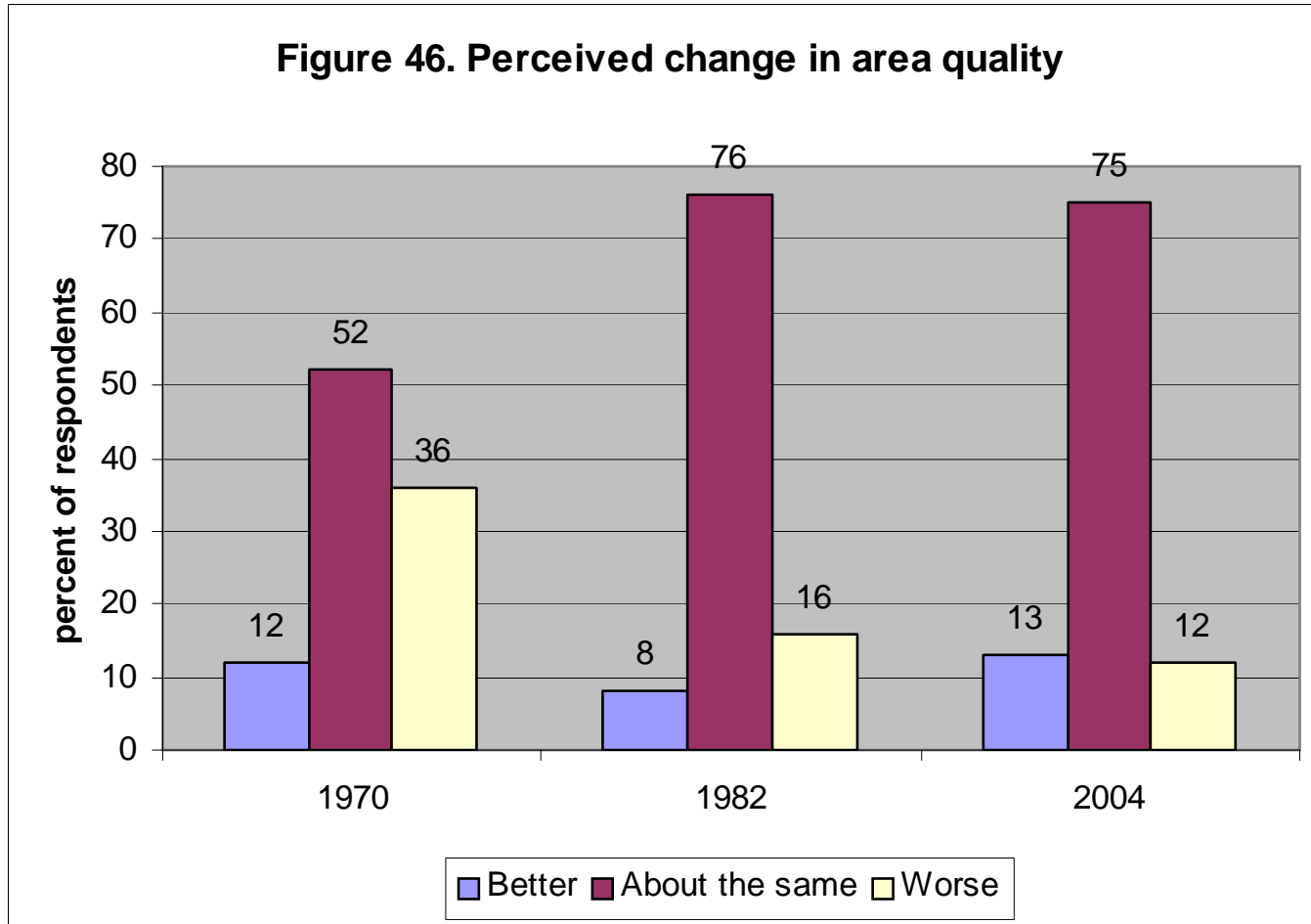
- People visit for:
 - solitude, adventure, challenge, learning about and appreciating nature and scenery, strengthening family and friendship ties.
- Perceptions and response to conditions are similar to what past surveys have shown

Reactions to visitors encountered

Figure 44. Opinions of numbers met

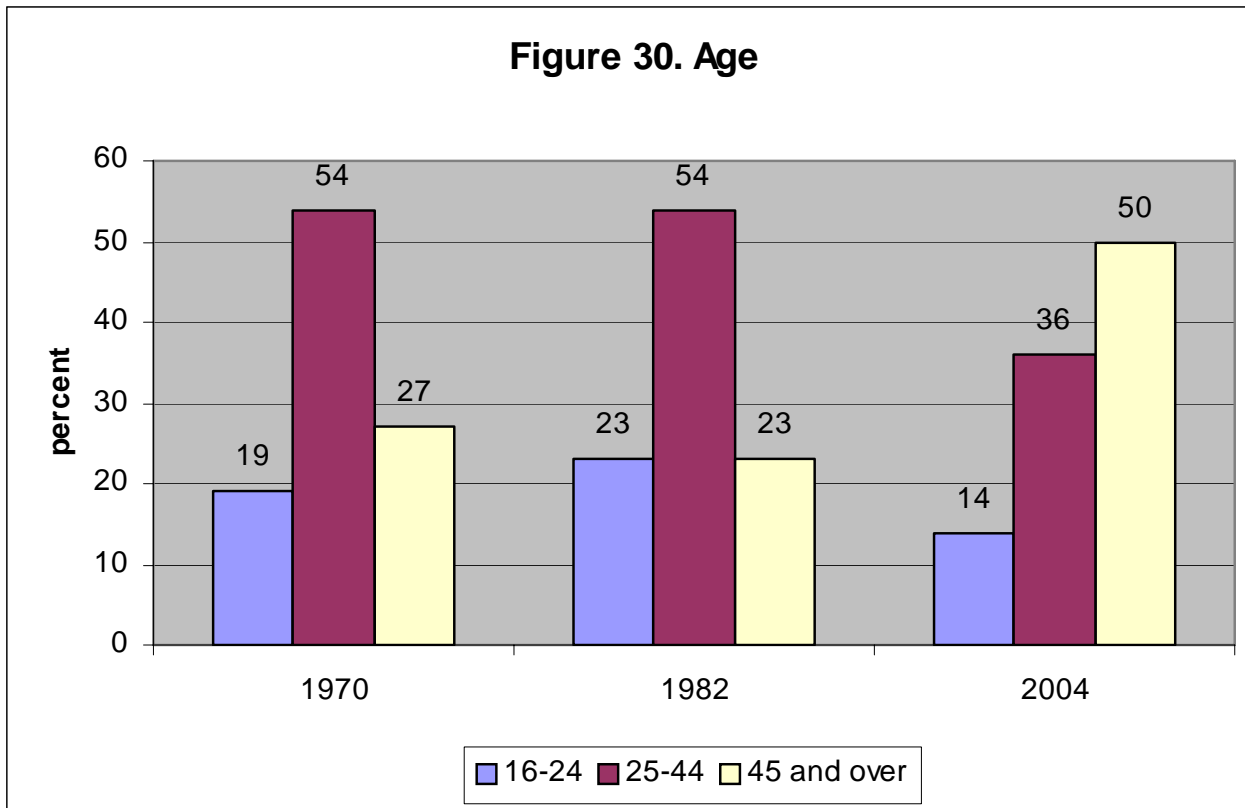


Perceived changes in quality



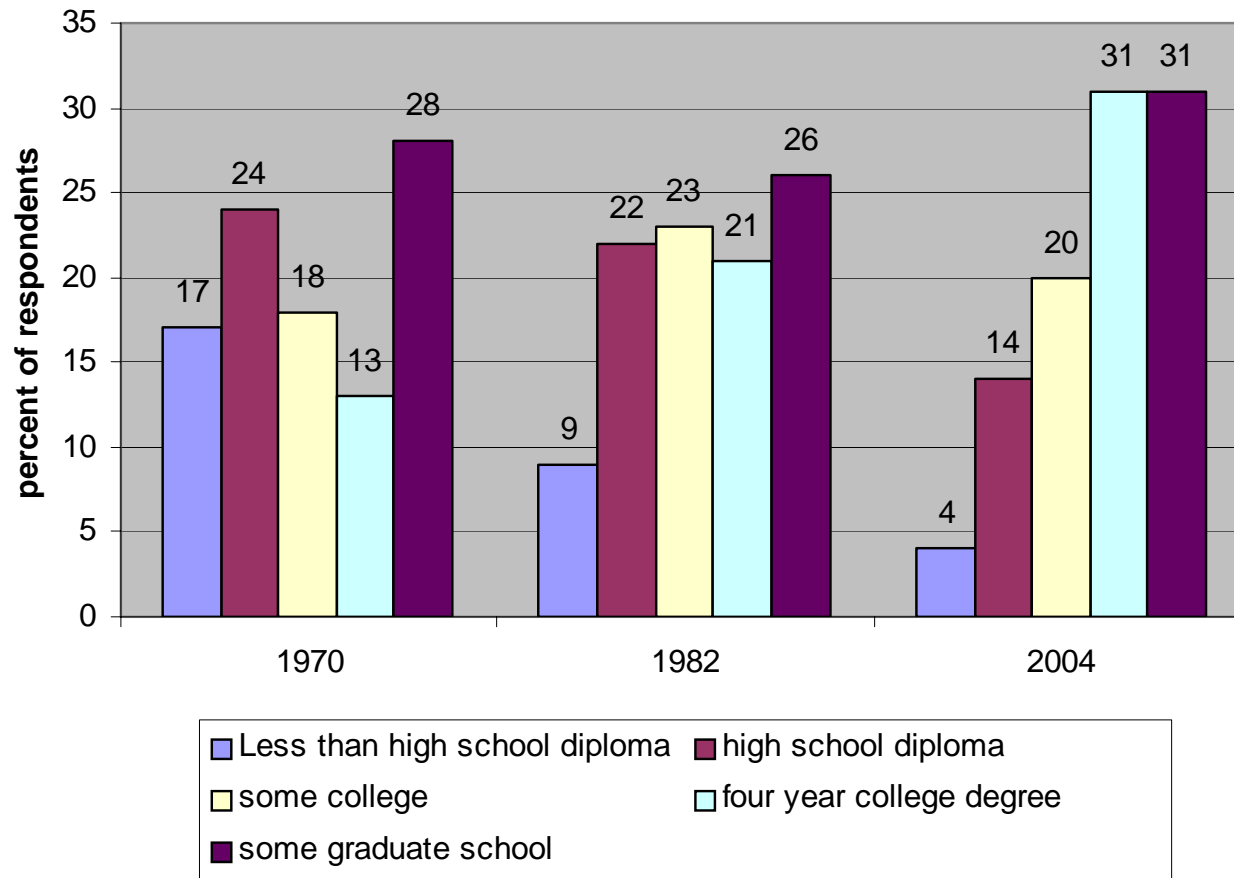
Lesson #3

- Visitors are older, more experienced, and higher educated

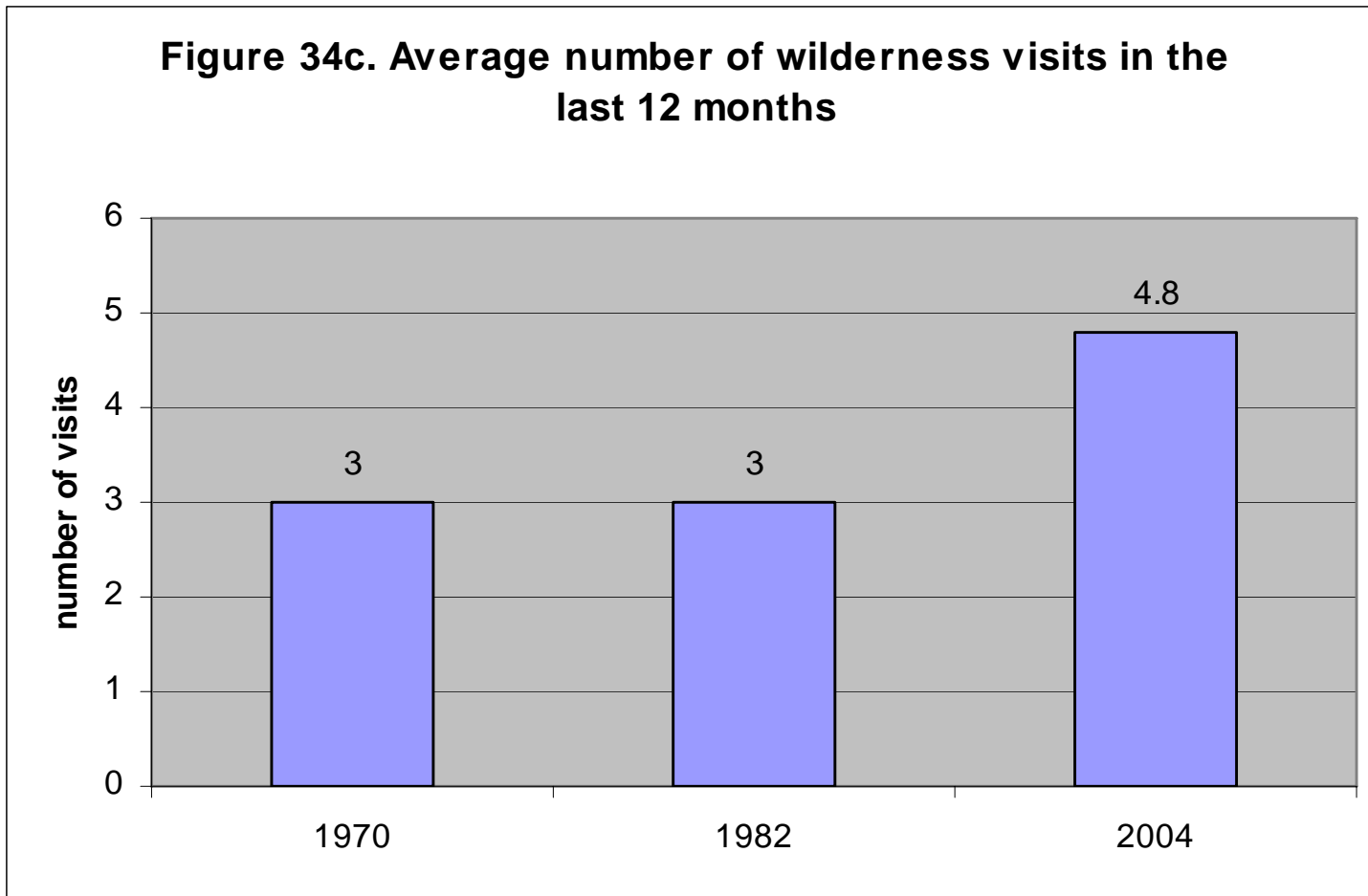


Educational levels rising

Figure 32a. Education level of visitors

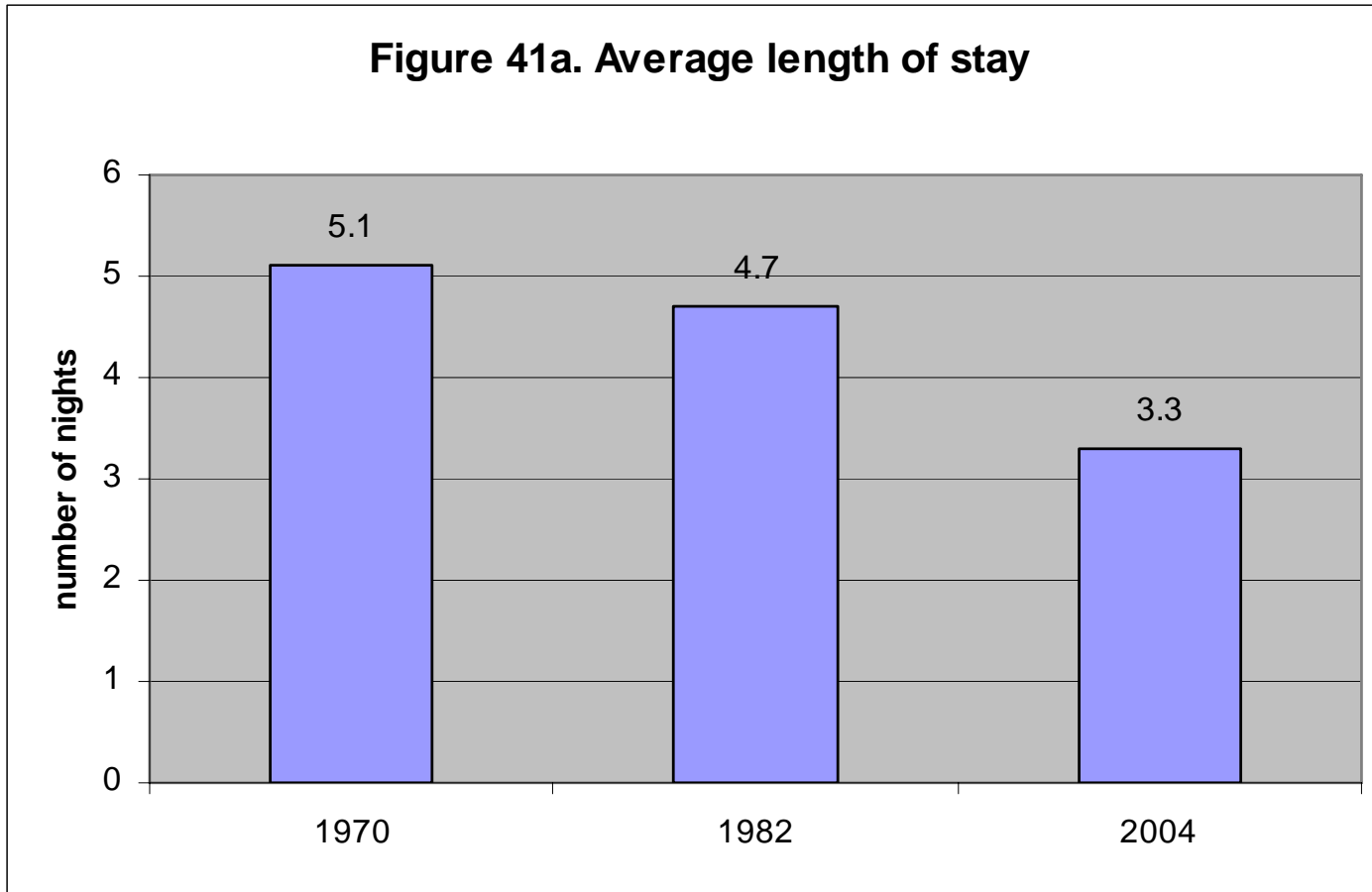


Previous Wilderness Experience Increasing



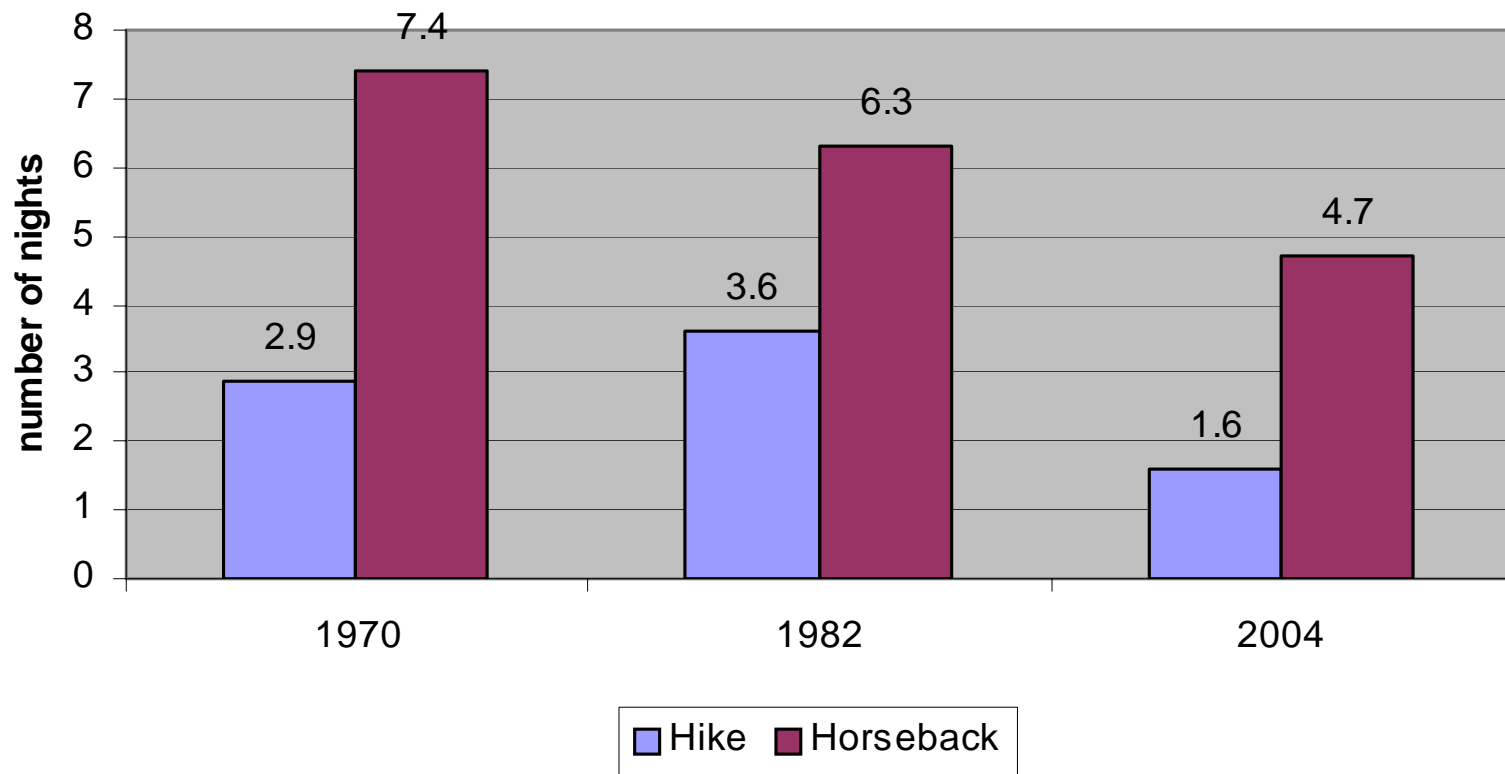
Lesson #4:

Day use and short stays rising in frequency



All visitors are shortening their stays

Figure 41b. Average length of stay split by mode of travel

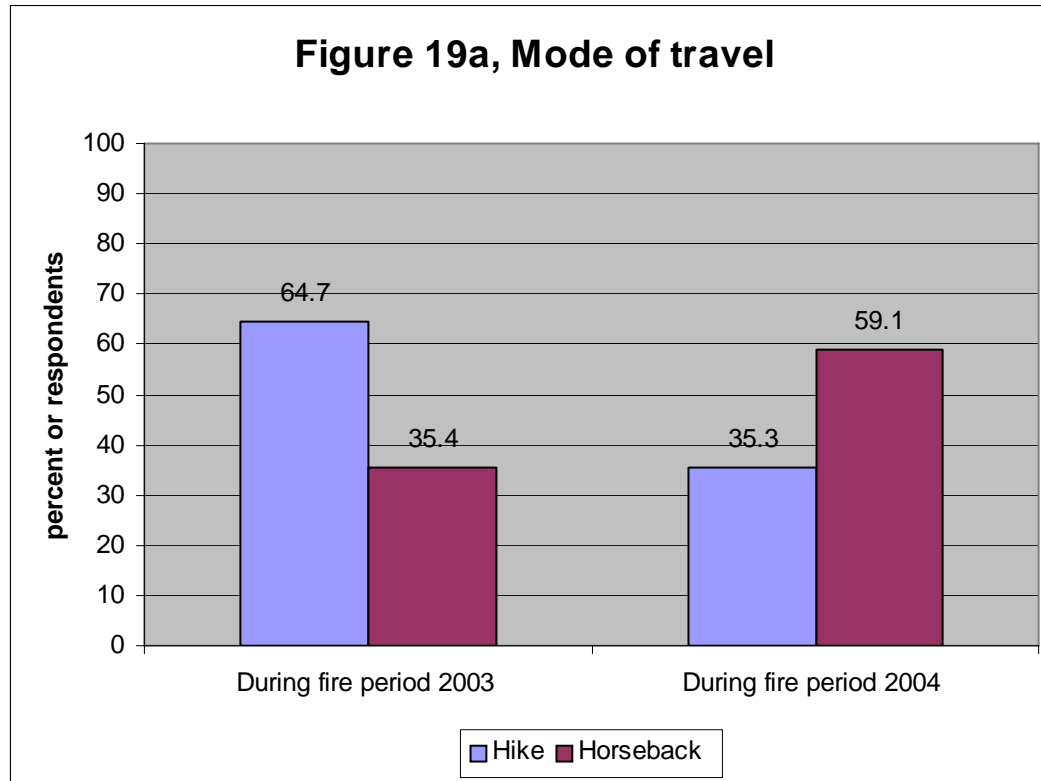


Lesson #5:

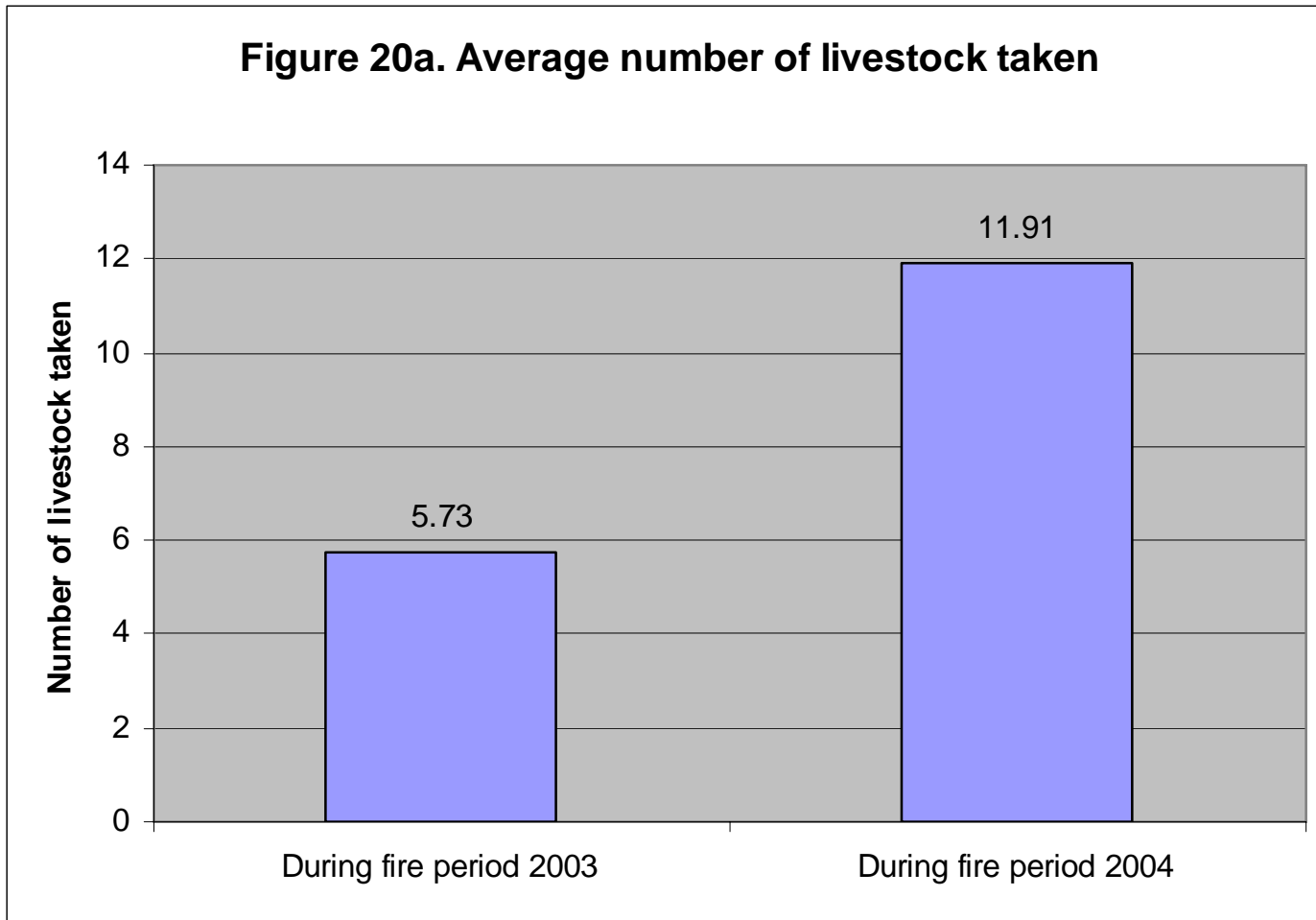
A strong desire to visit wilderness remains,
despite fires

- Shift from horse to hike in 2003
- Livestock users took fewer stock in 2003
- Shorter stays
- Shifted areas to visit

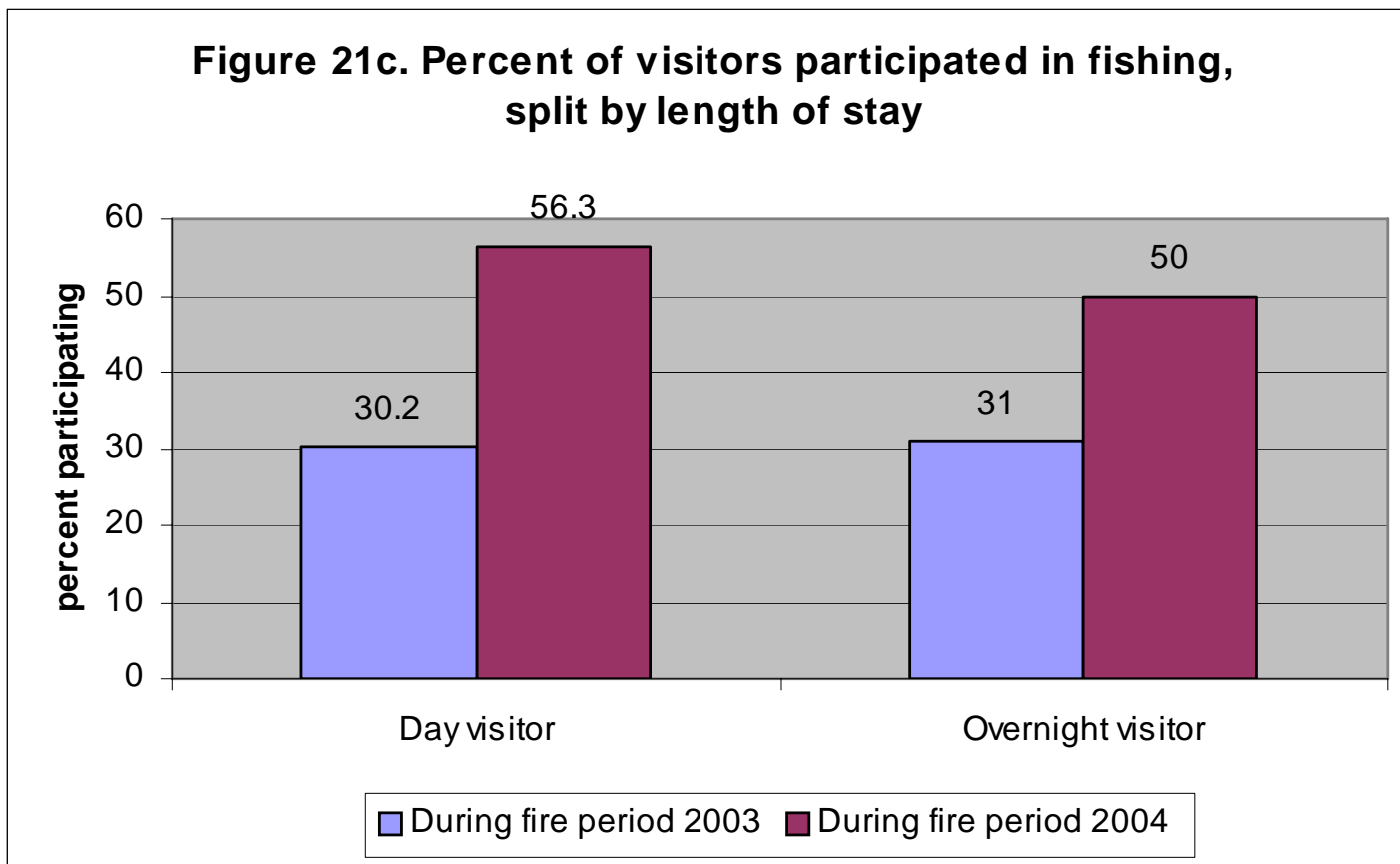
Mode of travel changed



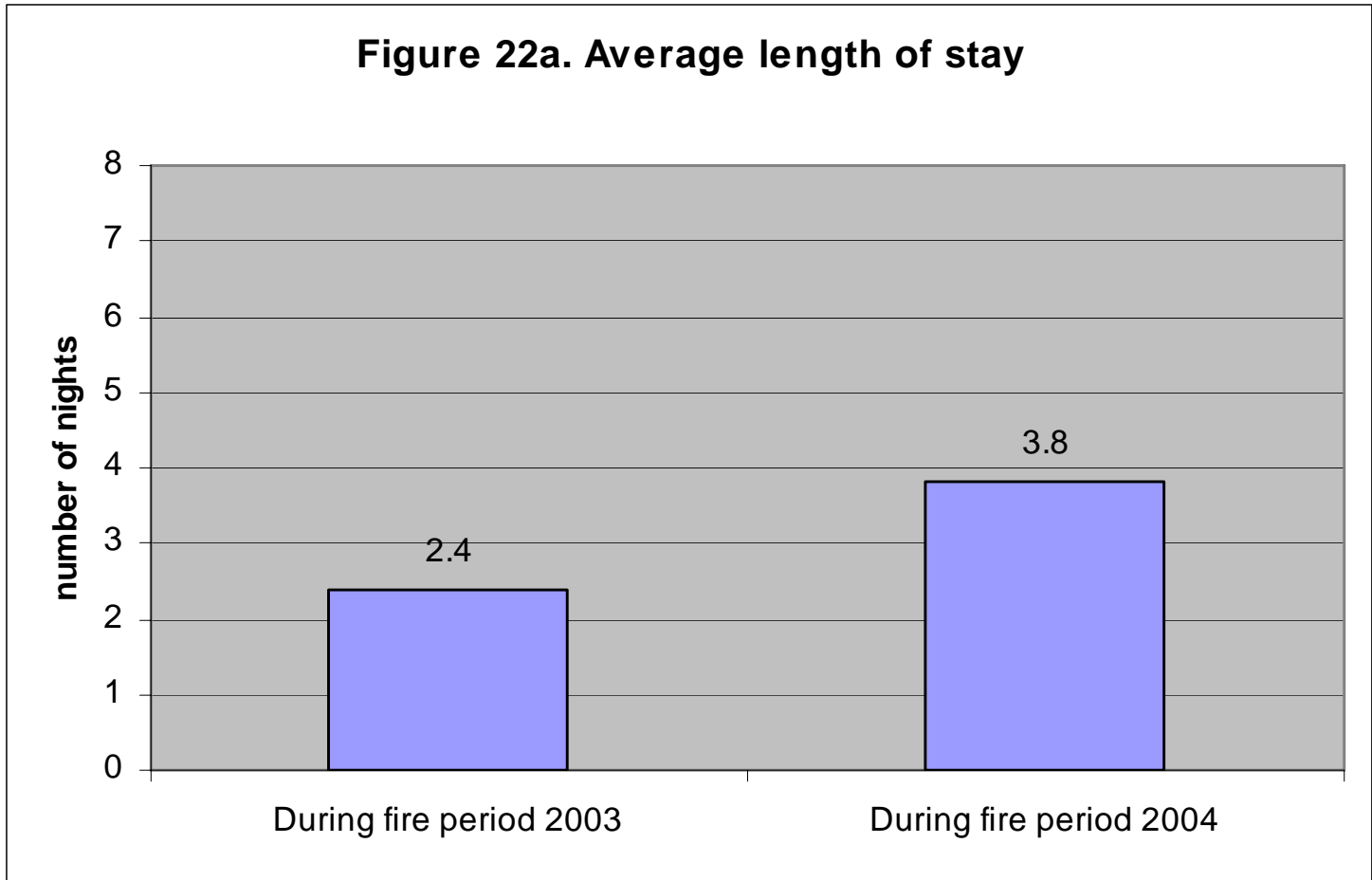
Use of packstock declined during the fire period



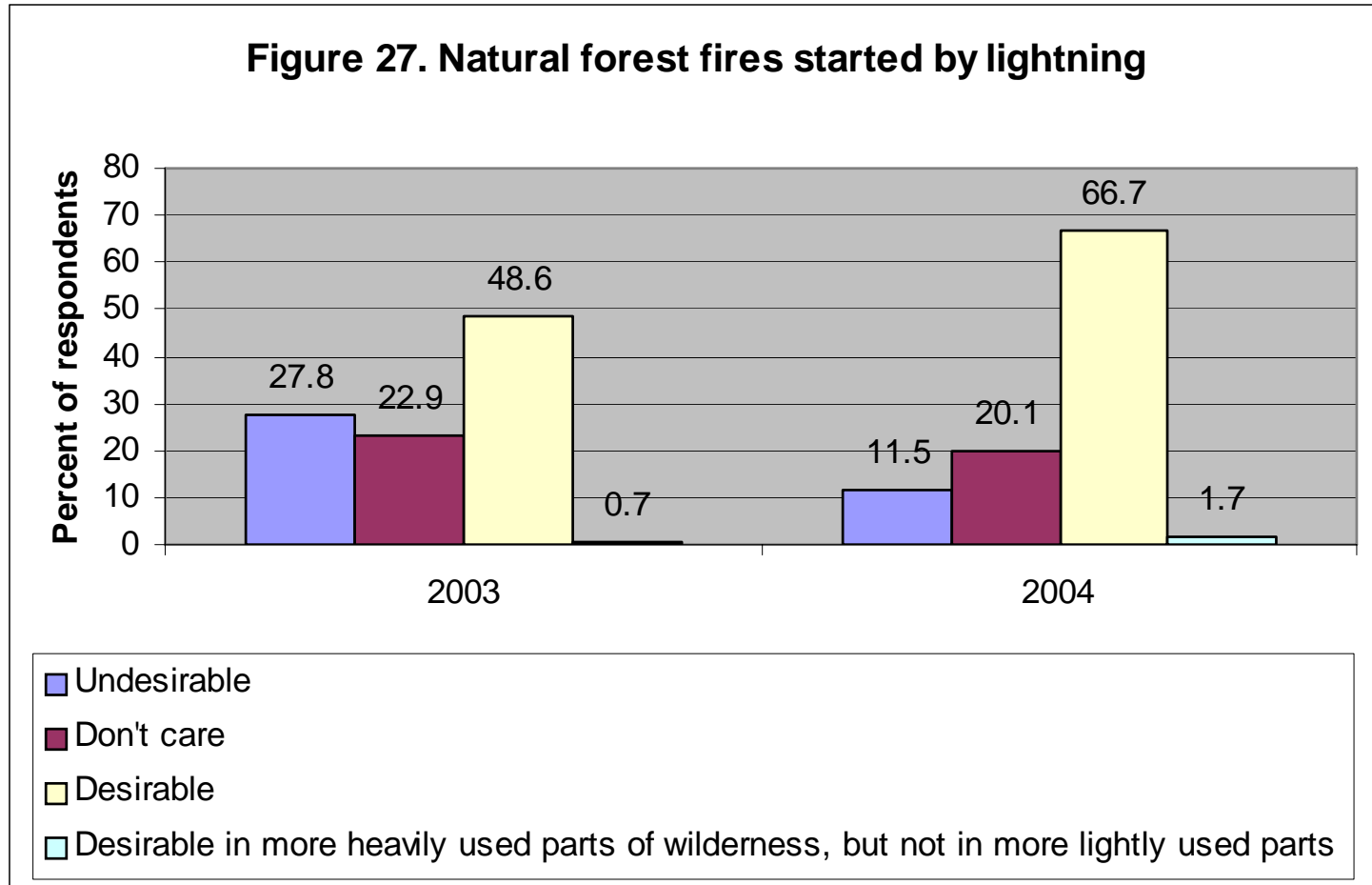
Participation in some activities was affected by the fires



Visitor length of stay shortened during the fires



Visitor attitudes remain constant, except for those concerning fire management



Some observations

- In general, trends in use patterns and characteristics are probably typical of other wildernesses.
- Rise in short trips may mean central parts of the wilderness are receiving substantially less use, but this means the peripheral areas are more important for the experience