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VISITOR REACTIONS TO VISTA CLEARINGS IN ITASCA STATE PARK, MINNESOTA
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Park users' complaints about their inability to see Lake Itasca plus the availability of labor funds for "distress areas" led to the creation by Itasca Park personnel of five vista clearings between the main park drive and the east arm of the lake in 1958.^{2/} Vegetation on this shore consists of a canopy of varied density of old growth red and white pines, a secondary tree canopy of deciduous species, and a dense brush layer six to eight feet in height which almost completely blocks the view of the lake from the drive. Shrubs consist predominantly of beaked hazel (Corylus rostrata Ait.) and American hazel (Corylus americana Walt.) with minor representation of dogwoods (Cornus spp.), Viburnums (Viburnum spp.), maples (Acer spp.) and other upland species.

The shrubs were cut down on plots of about an acre each in mid-summer using hand tools, and the slash was removed from the area. The stubble was sprayed using a 50-50 mixture of 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T in fuel oil. This treatment was prescribed to reduce the frequent reclearing necessary with purely mechanical treatment and to eliminate the unsightly browning of foliage which follows a conventional summer foliage spray treatment.

Because the creation of the vistas might be considered an inappropriate management activity, it was felt desirable to assess park users' reactions.

The Survey

Visitors were interviewed in 1967 "on site" and "off site" in an attempt to get a broad spectrum sample. On-site contacts were with motorists who had just driven past the series of vistas. Off-site contacts were with campers at the two park campgrounds. It was felt this would provide representation from both the transient motorist and the camper who was more intimately involved with the park and its resources. Of the total of 160 interviews, 70 were conducted in the campgrounds and 90 near the vistas. Approximately 28 percent of those contacted at the campgrounds were not aware of the vistas. Interviews were conducted only with those who did recall having seen them. The basic information acquired included:

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- ^{2/} This study was part of a broader project supported by federal McIntire-Stennis funds and a grant from the Minnesota Resources Commission. The authors are appreciative of cooperation by the Minnesota Division of Parks and Recreation in connection with the project.

1. Descriptive information about those interviewed
2. Degree of their approval or disapproval of the vistas
3. Reasons for reactions to the vistas
4. Attitudes toward additional vistas
5. Opinion as to potential traffic hazards

Results

While there is no certainty that the park users were contacted in a way which would assure representative sampling, it is felt that a sufficiently broad coverage of types of visitors was contacted to elicit the general pattern of user reactions.

Relevant statistics obtained are summarized in the Table. These document the following general conclusions:

1. Visitors sampled overwhelmingly approved of the vistas and favored the addition of more.
2. A majority of those favoring additional clearing felt it should be limited in number of areas and size rather than encompassing the entire shoreline.
3. More than a third of those interviewed felt the vistas constituted a possible traffic hazard.

TABLE
Park Visitor Opinions Relative to Vistas

	Off site (percent)	On site (percent)
Approve	80	95
Disapprove	10	3
Neutral	10	2
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Favor a great deal more	8	19
Favor more but limited	50	65
No more needed	26	12
Too much now	4	2
No response	12	2
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A potential traffic hazard	38	41
No particular hazard	52	49
No response	10	10

Management Implications

Visitors strongly endorsed the opening of vistas along the main drive of Lake Itasca and felt this has aesthetically improved the park. The combination of cutting the dense brush and spraying the stubble has been an effective means of creating such openings which are still effective vistas ten years after they were developed.

The present vistas apparently could be expanded without adverse public reaction but need not involve the entire park drive. The enlarged vistas could be gradually blended into the adjacent forest to appear as natural as possible. This might also tend to reduce the traffic hazard created by motorists braking their cars to see the suddenly exposed views of the lake.