

# Nature Tourism Project

## Capitol Forest

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**Natural Resources**

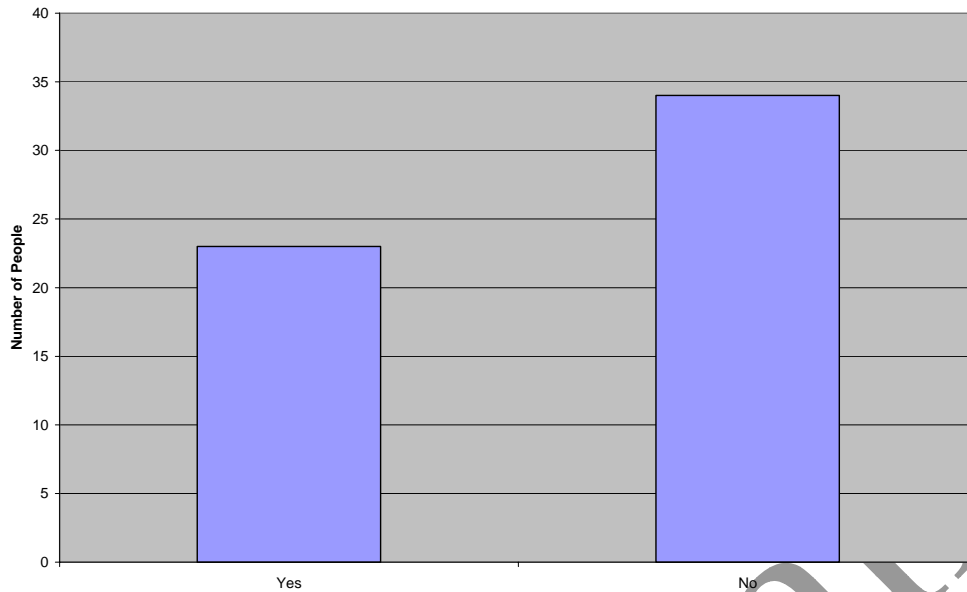
Capitol Forest and Nature Tourism  
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Through this study of *nature tourism*, our group has looked into Capitol Forest and possible recommendations that can be made to the Department of Natural Resources for improving the forest with respect to nature tourism.

Nature tourism is the travel through and enjoyment of the natural world, its seasonal cycles and events, carried out in a manner that promotes the protection of natural and human communities and consideration for those who will inherit our world. Capitol Forest presents unique issues for nature tourism because many of the activities that go on there are geared only to a very specific part of the community. The Capitol State Forest is located in the Black Hills outside of Olympia, WA. The logging of the forest provides money to fund schools, which makes Capitol Forest an educational trust fund. The forest gives its annual 800,000 visitors opportunities to hike, horseback ride, camp, mountain bike, ATV, hunt and sightsee. Many of these opportunities are available to the community, but the community is not willing to take them because of concerns of the forest. If these concerns and problems of the forest were fixed, then all members of the community would possibly be able to take advantage of what the forest has to offer.

We have come up with some recommendations based on community surveys and interactive studies to help make Capitol Forest more appealing to the whole community rather than just the groups that currently use the forest of hunters and off-road vehicle users. When community members were asked if they had ever used Capitol Forest, we obtained the following data:

Have You Ever Used Capitol Forest?



This graph shows that the majority of people in our community have not ever been to Capitol Forest. We believe that we could increase the usage of the forest by the community through fixing the current problems that people said were deterring them from the forest. When community members were asked if they thought that there were any problems in the forest today, they gave many responses. People complained about dumping in the forest, people drinking and the trash associated with that drinking, drugs, guns, theft, and noise. Logically and through asking people we deduced that were these problems to be fixed, that many more people would use the forest.

Our first recommendation to DNR for improving the forest would be to improve safety in the forest. Many of those surveyed shared complaints about safety in relation to gun use, drinking, drugs and others within the forest. Also, there were concerns about the being hit by off road vehicles while enjoying the forest because of a lack of control. Once, while visiting Capitol Forest to survey the users, we decided to stop at a shooting range. We saw one man firing a pistol with one hand while holding an infant in his other arm. We have never been more

appalled then when we saw that horrifying image. Also, the shooting ranges have very little markings to ensure that people do not walk through, other than the massive amounts of discarded shells on the ground. To make Capitol Forest safer for nature tourists, we would recommend several options. First, we would recommend that rules are posted more clearly throughout the forest so that everyone who comes to use the forest is aware of rules. Also we would recommend that some areas be designated as specifically for one form of recreation, such as the shooting ranges, so that hikers or bikers do not have to worry. These designated areas would also have to be made very obvious to avoid confusion. The next step would be to make sure that the rules of the forest are enforced. To do this we could post a phone number that visitors would call when they see a rule being broken. Also we could have regular patrols through the forest. However, unless this was done by volunteers, the patrols would be a more expensive option.

Another common issue that the community has with Capitol Forest is the large amount of dumping of trash that occurs in the forest. When we visited Capitol Forest, we immediately saw empty cans of beer, used shells and a lot of other trash. Instead of paying to dispose trash at the dump, many people would rather dump their trash in Capitol Forest illegally for free. However, this destroys the environment and does not make people want to visit the forest. Again, we would recommend that signs are posted against dumping, including the current fine for those that break the law. Also, we would recommend that volunteer groups are organized to clean up the trash that already exists on the trails.

The last issue that we are suggesting that needs to be corrected in Capitol Forest is the reputation of the forest. Many people that we talked to in our surveys that hadn't been to the forest and had only heard things from other people were too put off by the reputation of the forest to even give going there a chance. This destroys any hope of lots of people from the community going to the forest. We talked to some people that have used the forest frequently for

many years and they said that the forest has had the reputation of being a place to drink and do illegal things for at least the last 20 years. The only way to fix this reputation that we can really think of is to try and correct the problems in the forest and then get the word out. How we think the problems should be corrected is what we talked about above and so the only problem left is getting the word out that Capitol Forest is a different place. We recommend that the word that Capitol Forest is no longer scummy get out to the people that are most likely to use the trail systems and camping areas and then let them spread the word to everyone they know. An article could be published in the Olympian about how Capitol Forest is a new place and then people would go there to check it out and spread the word to all their friends. News posts could also be put at the local outdoor stores like The Alpine Experience and Olympic Outfitters and so the outdoor community would learn of the new Capitol Forest and they would go and use it and tell everyone about how great it was. This would improve the forest's reputation, because the word would get out that it was changed. With this new reputation the forest would have many new visitors visiting.

In conclusion there are clearly improvements that could be made to the forest and we realize that the improvements would be hard to make. Even by correcting the problems in the forest it would be hard to make the forest appeal to all members in the community because by correcting the current problems current users would also be eliminated. These recommendations would also take a long time to implement in the forest, but we feel that in the end the forest can be improved a lot to allow for a large majority of the community to use what it has to offer.