Theory, Practice & Application of the Utilization-Focused Evaluation Approach: Case Studies from Environmental Education

Environmental Evaluators Networking Forum

Washington, DC

June 9, 2009

Session Overview

- Introductions
- Review of Utilization-Focused Evaluation
- Case Study #1: Montana “Hooked on Fishing” Evaluation - Lisa Flowers, Boone & Crockett Club
- Case Study #2: Yellowstone National Park “Windows into Wonderland” Evaluation - Annelise Carleton-Hug, Trillium Associates
- Questions & Discussion

Evaluation:

Program Evaluation is the **systematic** collection of information about activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming.

Utilization-focused program evaluation as opposed to program evaluation in general) is evaluation **done for and with specific, intended primary users** for **specific, intended uses**.

(Patton, 1997/2008)

Utilization-focused evaluation is evaluation done for and with specific intended primary users for specific, intended uses. Utilization-focused evaluation begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use; therefore, evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful consideration for how everything that is done, from beginning to end, will affect use.

Use concerns how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experience the evaluation process. Therefore, the focus in utilization-focused evaluation is on *intended use by intended users.*

Guiding Principles for Evaluators
(American Evaluation Association, 1995)

- **Systematic Inquiry** - Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries about what is being evaluated.
- **Competence** - Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.
- **Integrity/Honesty** - Evaluators ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.
- **Respect for People** - Evaluators respect the security, dignity, and self-worth f the respondents, program participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they interact.
- **Responsibilities for General & Public Welfare** - Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare.

Standards for Evaluation

Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994)

- **Utility** - standards intended to ensure that an evaluation will serve the practical information needs of the intended users.
- **Feasibility** - standards intended to ensure that an evaluation will be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal.
- **Propriety** - standards intended to ensure that an evaluation will be conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results.
- **Accuracy** - standards intended to ensure that an evaluation will reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine worth or merit of the program being evaluated.

Features of U-FE

- Philosophy & Process of Evaluation:
  - Built in from onset
- Collaborative:
  - Involves working relationship between evaluators & primary users
- Contextual:
  - Specific to situation

Focus on intended use of results

Key Stages in U-FE

- Gain commitment to evaluation process
  - Active participants; open to change
- Identify intended users of evaluation
- Engage primary users in decisions related to evaluation
  - Evaluation Focus & questions
  - Deliverables = how will data be used?
- Identify methods & formulate Evaluation plan
- Involve users in interpreting findings, generating recommendations, disseminating results

Potential Outcomes of U-FE

- Increases utilization of evaluation
- Builds evaluation capacity
- Contributes to a culture of evaluation

Utilization-Focused Evaluation Resources

- Patton, Michael Quinn. (2008) *Utilization-Focused Evaluation - 4th edition*

- Utilization-Focused evaluation checklist:

Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University
http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/ufe.pdf

Journal of Evaluation & Program Planning ~ Aug. 09

- Environmental Education Evaluation: Time to Reflect, Time for Change. (Kara Shea Davis Crohn and Matt Birnbaum)
- Challenges and Opportunities for Evaluating Environmental Education Programs. (Annelise Carleton-Hug and J. William Hug)
- Blazing an evaluation pathway: lessons learned from applying utilization-focused evaluation to a conservation education program.(Alice Lisa Flowers)
- Building environmental educators' evaluation capacity through distance education. (Lynette Fleming and Janice Easton)
- An Introduction to *My Environmental Education Evaluation Resource Assistant* (MEERA), a web-based resource for self-directed learning about environmental education program evaluation. (Michaela Zint)
- Environmental Education Evaluation: Reinterpreting Education as a Strategy for Meeting Mission. (Joe Heimlich)
- The Evolution of Rare Pride: Using Evaluation to Drive Adaptive Management in a Biodiversity Conservation Organization (Brett Jenks, Peter W. Vaughan, and Paul J. Butler)
- Interview with Brent Jenks, President & CEO, Rare. (Matt Birnbaum and Brett Jenks)

Utility is what evaluation is all about.

- Carol Weiss (2004)

Utilization-Focused Evaluation in Practice: An Evaluation of Yellowstone National Park's Electronic Field Trips

Annelise Carleton-Hug

J. William Hug

Trillium Associates

Windows Into Wonderland - Microsoft Internet Explorer

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yellowstone National Park

Windows Into Wonderland

HOW TO ATTEND AN eTRIP | REGISTRATION | CONTACT US

Welcome

Explore our award winning electronic field trips! Since 2001, Yellowstone has been offering eTrips to share the resources and treasures of the world's first national park. Embark on these exciting adventures and look through new Windows Into Wonderland.

Please Register Now!

Partners

The Yellowstone Park Foundation

Eight partners have contributed to the Windows Into Wonderland Project.

Major funders of Windows Into Wonderland eTrips are:

Now Showing

Getting Into Getting Into Hot Water | START TRIP

17 eTrips

~ 50 minutes each

Internet

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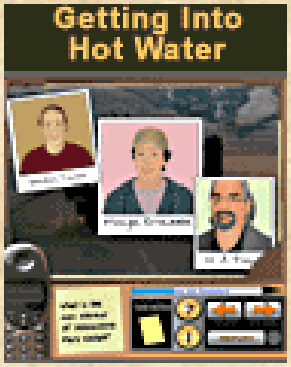
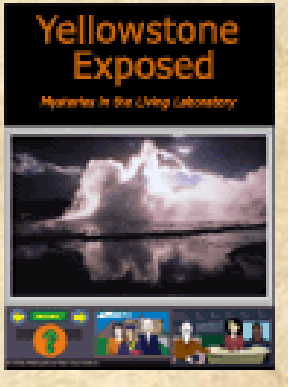
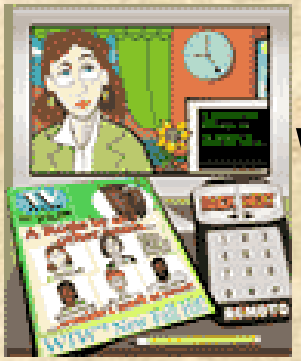


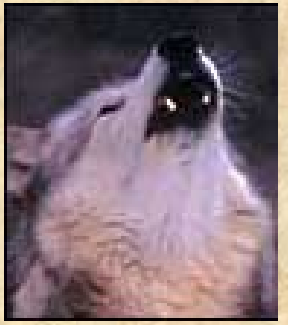
Getting into Hot Water



Yellowstone Exposed

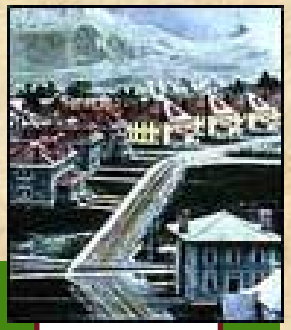


Where the Bison Roam

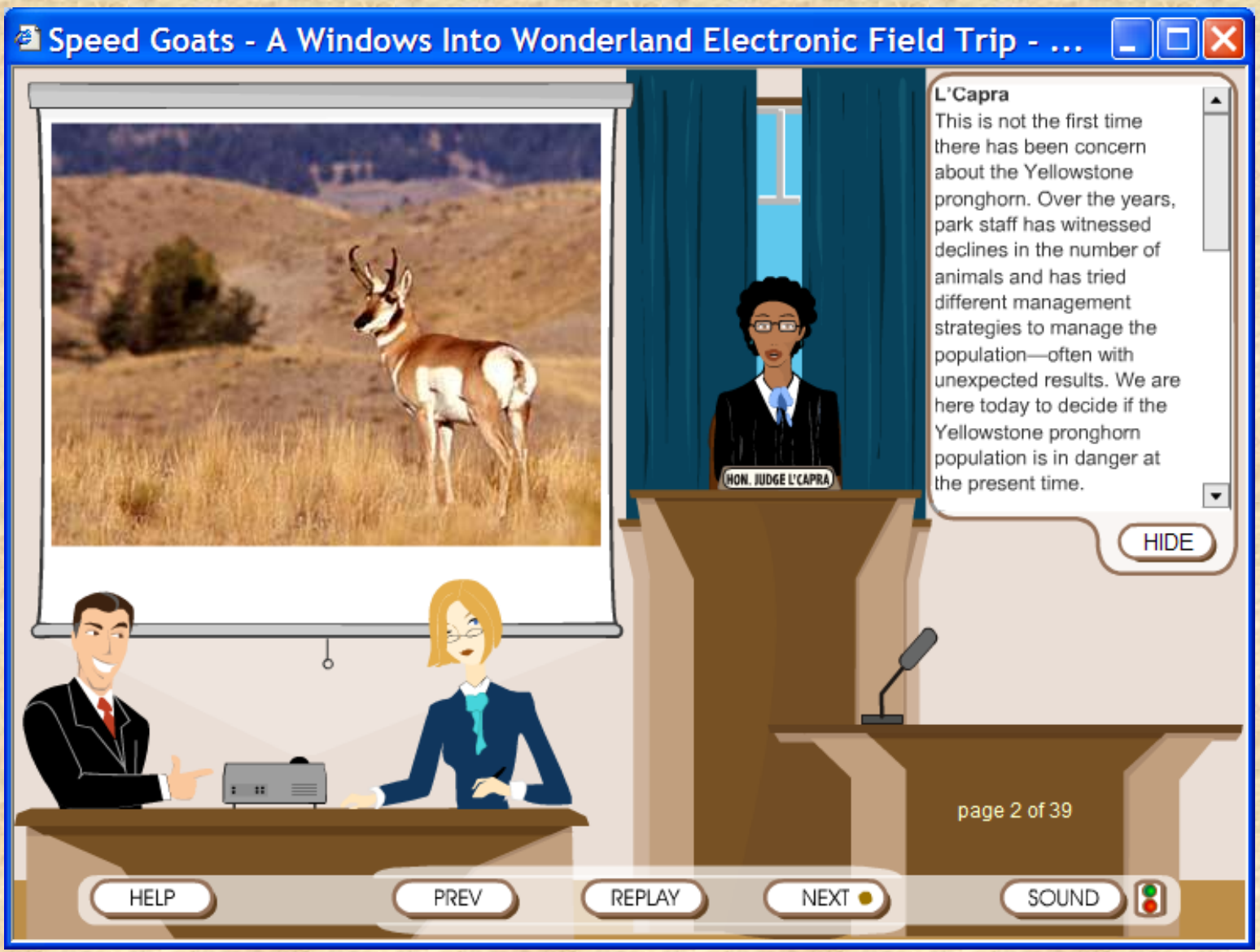


Wolves of Yellowstone

Influences of Art on Yellowstone



Yellowstone History


Speed Goats - A Windows Into Wonderland Electronic Field Trip - ...
HON. JUDGE L'CAPRA
L'Capra
This is not the first time there has been concern about the Yellowstone pronghorn. Over the years, park staff has witnessed declines in the number of animals and has tried different management strategies to manage the population—often with unexpected results. We are here today to decide if the Yellowstone pronghorn population is in danger at the present time.
HIDE
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HELP
PREV
REPLAY
NEXT
SOUND

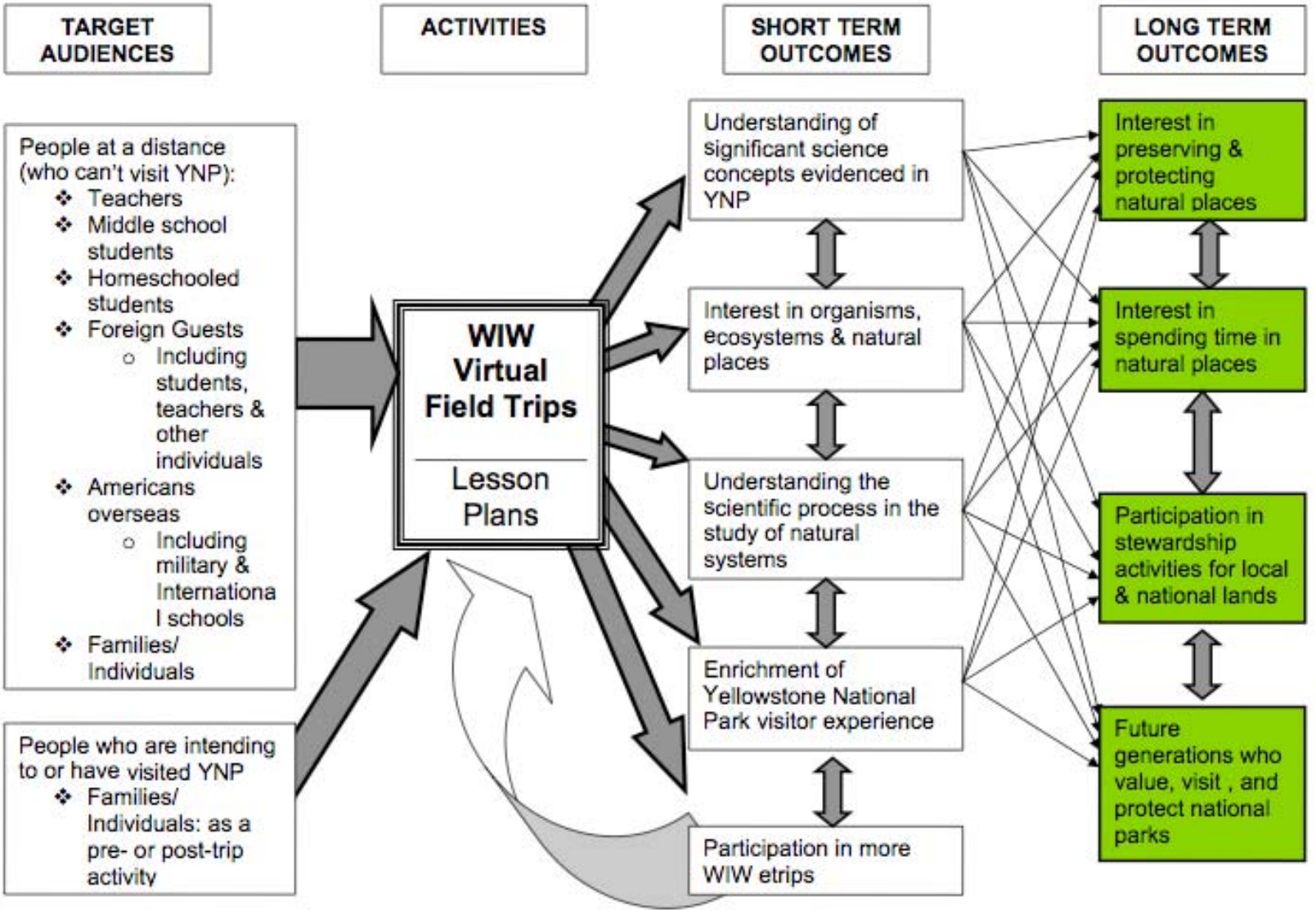
Background

- Program had never been formally evaluated
- Funding for evaluation became available during creation of final eTrip
- YNP Education staff were enthusiastic partners eager to participate in & learn from evaluation

Initial Focus Group with YNP Education Staff

- Who do you hope to reach with WIW?
- Identify Goals: What you hope to accomplish for each user group?
- What evidence would support the conclusion that you achieved your goals?
- Who are the intended users of this evaluation data?
- What do you plan to do with the evaluation data?

Windows Into Wonderland: Conceptual Map depicting Desired Outcomes



Development of Evaluation Plan in collaboration with YNP Staff

- Teacher interviews
  - Defined key questions
- Classroom Observations
- Online Survey
  - Identified topical priorities
  - Assisted in question development
  - Sent out initial invitations

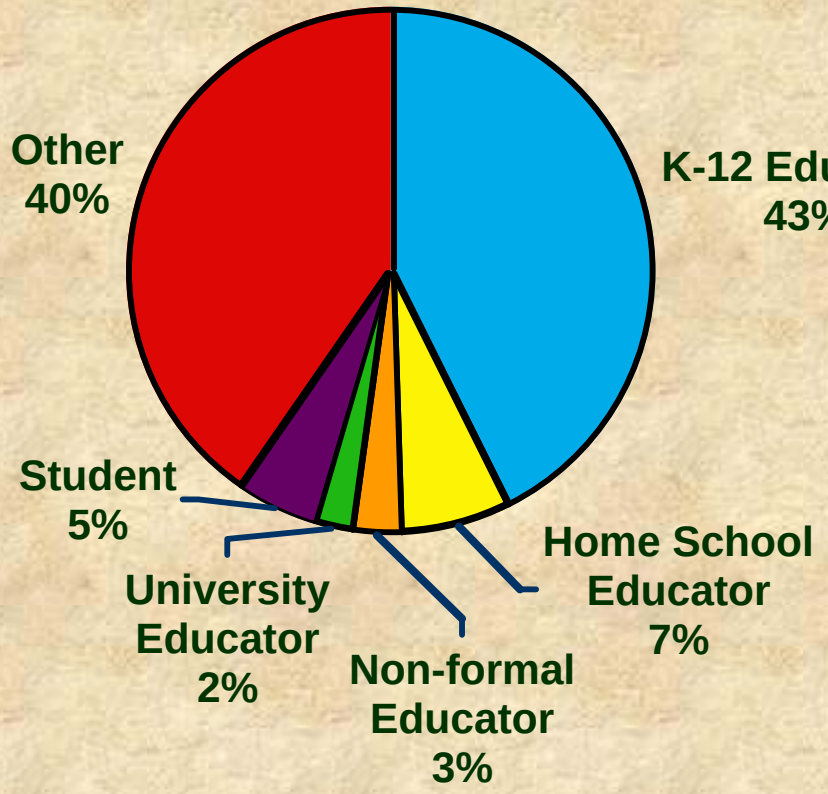
Key Findings

- Teacher Interviews
  - Described use of eTrips in classrooms
  - Identified barriers to implementation
  - Provided educational recommendations
- Student Observations
  - Clarified student engagement
- Online survey
  - Profiled categories of WIW users
  - Assessed satisfaction with eTrips
  - Assessed attitude toward National Parks/YNP
  - Investigated environmental concern, attitude, behavior

Teacher Feedback:

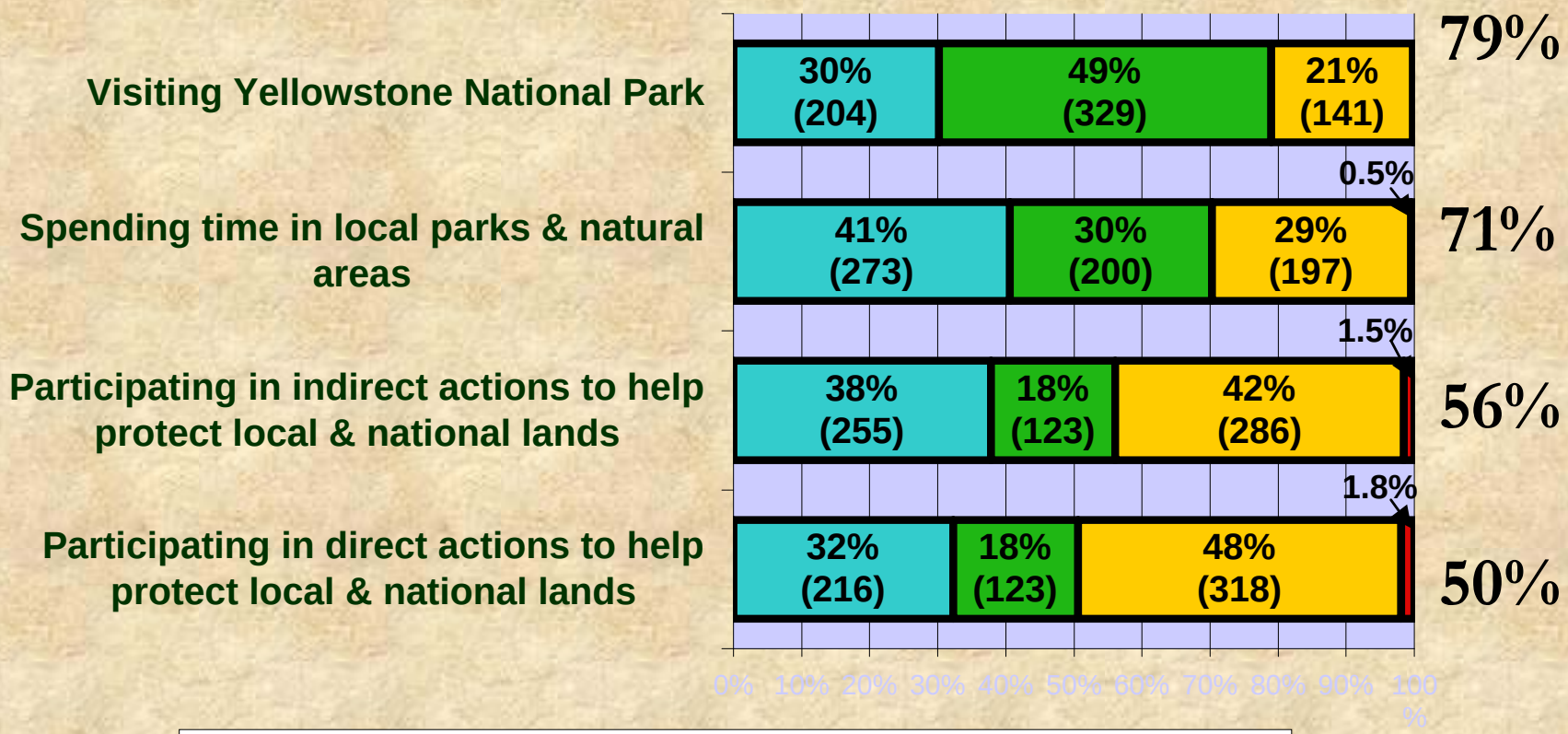
- **Possible Barriers to Using WIW**
  - Technology Barriers
  - Adherence to Standards
  - Length of Class Periods/Length of eTrips
  - Lack of Comfort with Technology and/or Subject Matter
  - Lack Knowledge of Program

Primary Roles of Survey Respondents



- Verified additional user groups:
  - Other: not affiliated with school
  - Home Schools
  - University

Survey: Attitudinal/Behavioral Questions



I can't stress enough the value of these eTrips. They make it possible for me to introduce a different world (Yellowstone) to students who may never have the opportunity to see this special place--and then give students a basis for appreciating and understanding the worth and value of other natural places.

- elementary teacher, CO

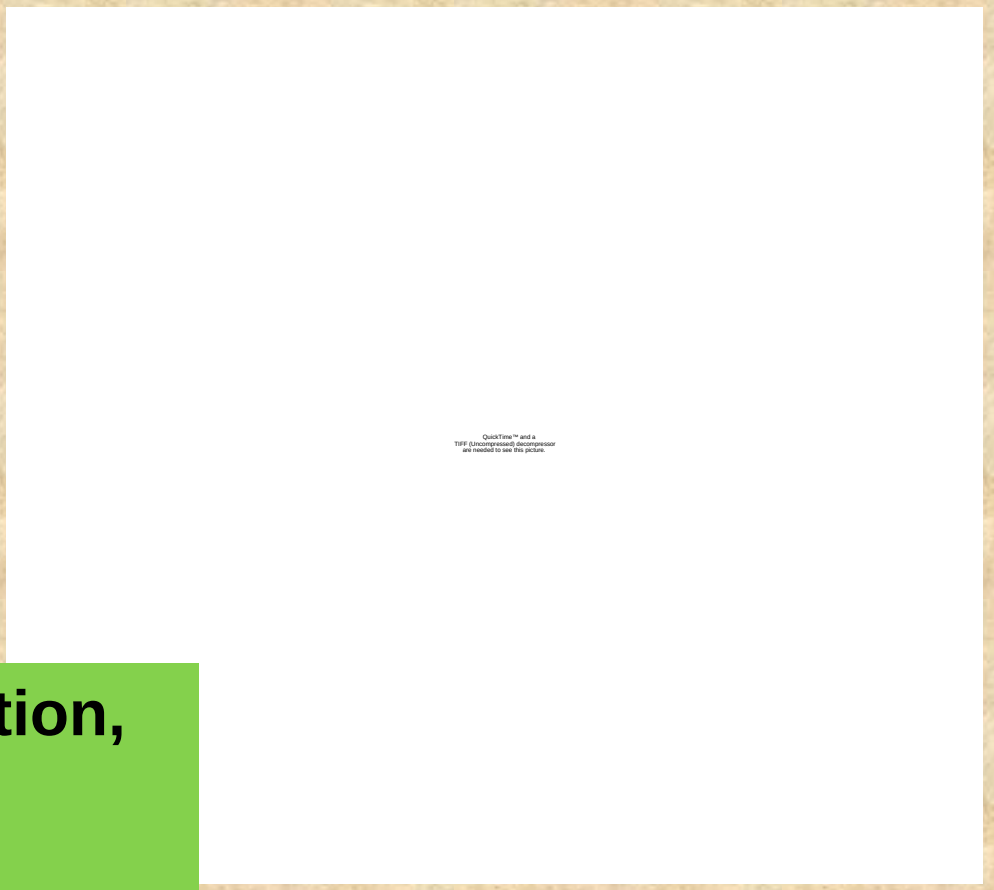
So…what became of the evaluation?

- Final report was disseminated by key users to YNP staff (education office staff,chief and deputy chief) in hard copy form as well as an electronic version on a shared network.
- Evaluation was discussed among staff formally at training sessions, and informally.
- Ellen Petrick, YNP education specialist described the evaluation in an article: “The Unexamined Program is not Worth Giving” *The Interpreter* (May/June 2008,Vol. 4(3)
- Numerous requests were made for full report, originating from both field & administrative personnel from around the country.
- Conference presentations to NPS, USFS personnel, etc.

We have a much better sense of possible barriers to participation, and a detailed list of recommendations for improvement. Tables, graphs, photographs, and numerous quotes from this evaluation will be invaluable for conference presentations, future project proposals, and in-park communications. …

Despite the fact that we do not currently have funding for further eTrip development, this evaluation has provided compelling evidence of the value of this program and the means to justify future funding opportunities.

- Petrick (2008) *The Interpreter*



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