

Visitor Experiences at Eagle Days in Missouri

Christina Anderson

J. Mark Morgan, Ph.D., Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Eagle Days are series of organized wildlife viewing events that were created by the Missouri Department of Conservation to increase public awareness about bald eagles and their declining populations. Although Eagle Days have been held across Missouri since the winter of 1978-1979, only one formal study has been conducted on these events and it was after the first year. The purpose of this research is to evaluate visitors' perceptions of Eagle Days events in Missouri using the experience economy paradigm. During the winter of 2008-2009 on site surveys were conducted at 3 of the Eagle Days events (Smithville, Chain of Rocks, and Springfield). Independent samples t-tests were used to measure the viewing experience of, males and females; repeat and first time visitors; visitors who traveled shorter distances versus those traveling longer distances; groups with and without children; and visitors who spent a longer period of time at the event versus those who spent a shorter amount of time. Significant ($p < .05$) were found differences between males and females as well as between visitors who spent a longer period of time at the event versus those who spent a shorter amount of time at Eagle Days. These findings provide some useful insights into Eagle Days for managers to consider in planning and marketing these events for visitors.