

QUESTION

Mr. Shymanski, the National Parks Conservation Association published a Pullman Transportation Plan report in September 2017, which stated that Pullman National Monument was projected to attract about 300,000 visitors a year by 2020.

Has Pullman National Monument received 300,000 visitors in any of the years since it was designated in 2015, as was predicted in this report? Can you tell me how many visitors Pullman National Monument has received each year since designation in 2015?

ANSWER

Ranking Member Fulcher:

The National Parks Conservation Association commissioned in 2013 an economic impact report from Market & Feasibility Advisors, a Chicago-based firm that specializes in tourism drivers, including sites owned and managed by the National Park Service. The project was designed to forecast job creation and economic impact of a national park site in Pullman. This 2013 study was also cited in the 2017 Pullman Transportation Plan and many in other reports, studies, and media accounts.

The economists issued several key assumptions that would drive the ultimate figure of 300,000 annual visitors to Pullman and most of these key assumptions have not yet been met. Included in these assumptions were the following:

- Within 5 years, the NPS would renovate the 27,000 square-foot factory, open it to visitors, and program it with interpretive programming to attract visitors;
- Within 5 years, the State of Illinois would open the Hotel Florence to the public. This historic structure would also include a café or restaurant facilities to serve visitors;
- Within 5 years, NPS staffing at Pullman would increase to 10 full and part time or seasonal staff;
- Within 10 years, four other historic assets (Rear Erecting Shops, Firehouse, Market Square, Hotel Annex) would be renovated and open to the public.

As these assumptions are met, visitation is forecast to increase from approximately 35,000-50,000 to 300,000 annually. It is important to reinforce that most of these key assumptions have not been met due to budgetary and fundraising reasons or due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A portion of the factory will be open to the public later this year as a national park visitor center.

Regarding annual visitation between 2015 and 2021, the official NPS numbers of between 10,000 and 20,000 are lower than actual visitation numbers because **NPS counted only the people who came into the temporary visitor center. And the visitor center is only open on weekends.** Annual visitation numbers for 2015 to 2019 are closer to an average of 40,000 due to multiple large-scale events held annually in the National Monument, and these events do not require a stop in the visitor center. Numbers for 2020 and 2021 year to date are not available due to the COVID-19 requirements that shuttered museums, visitor centers and other institutions.