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FROM RIVER TO NATIONAL PARK

The Impact of New River Gorge
Becoming a National Park

Presented By: Brenna Dugan



Introduction

With the recent designation of the New River Gorge in West Virginia as a National Park in December of 2020, there has been a growing interest in the understanding of the impact of this designation on visitation numbers. In this analysis, we will be examining data collected by the National Park Service from 2017 - 2024 to assess the impact.



The History of New River Gorge ➤



320 Million Years Ago

The New River Gorge begins to form

19th Century

19th Century Industrialization

1960-1970

Construction of the New River Gorge Bridge begins

1978

Designation as a National River

1980

ACE Adventure Resort Opens

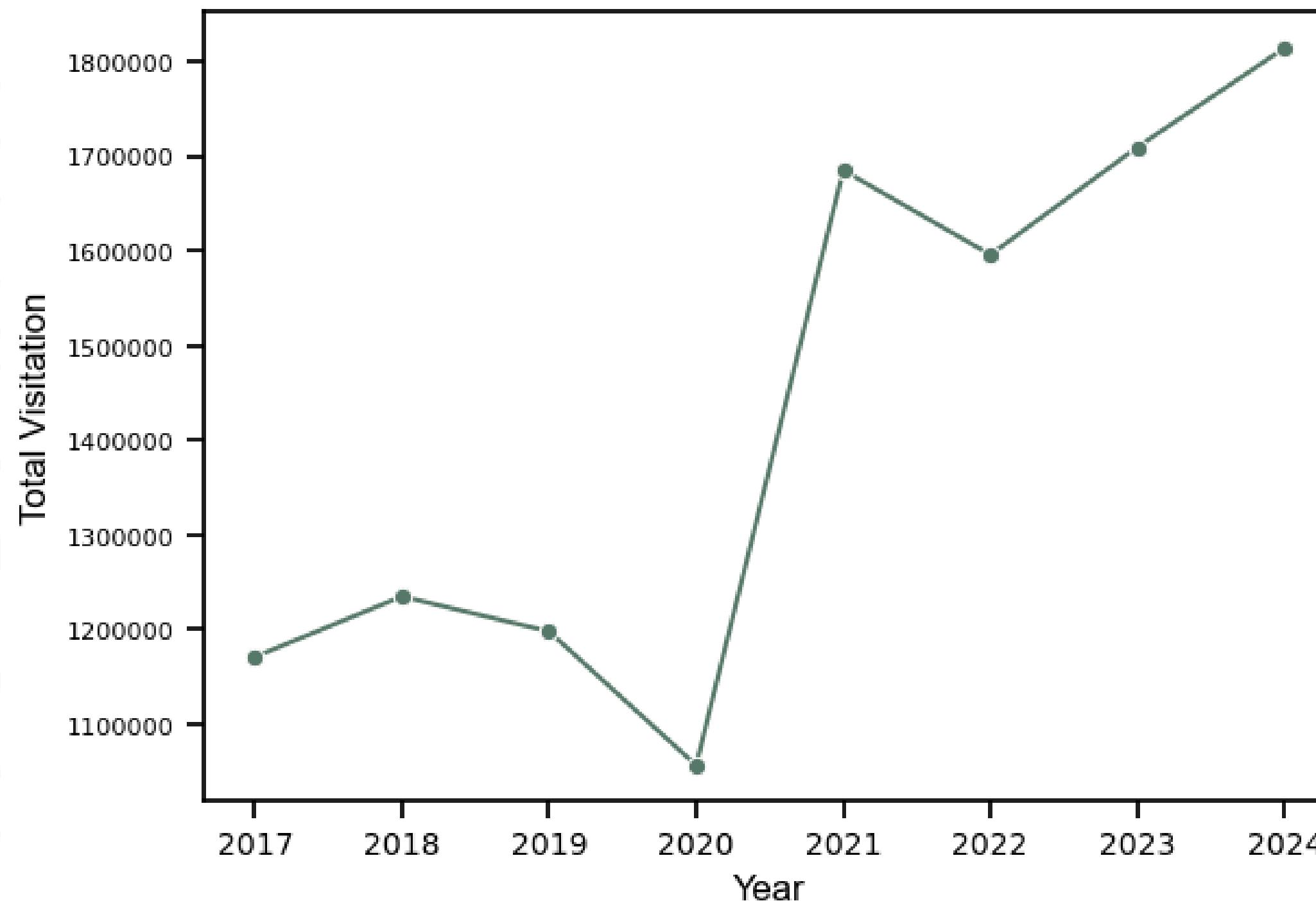
2020

Designation as a National Park

New River Gorge's Visitation



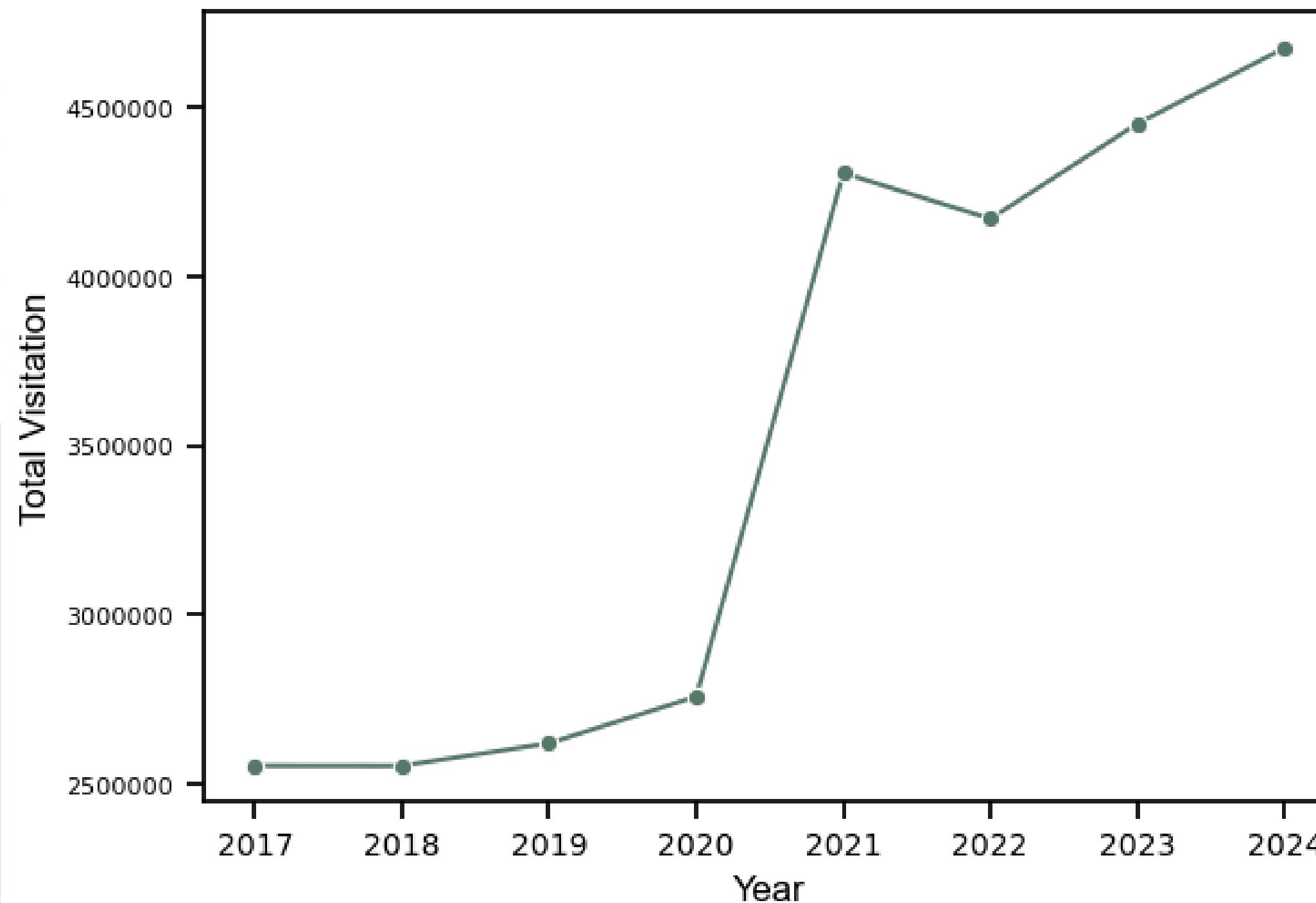
Visitation at the New River Gorge 2017 - 2024



From 2017 to 2024, visitation has continued to increase & surpass historic visitation:

- > With a significant dip in 2020 (the COVID Pandemic)
- > Visitation bounced back from the lowest level of visitation to the highest
- > With 1,056,774 visitors in 2020 to 1,685,120 visitors in 2021

Total Hours Visited at the New River Gorge 2017-2024

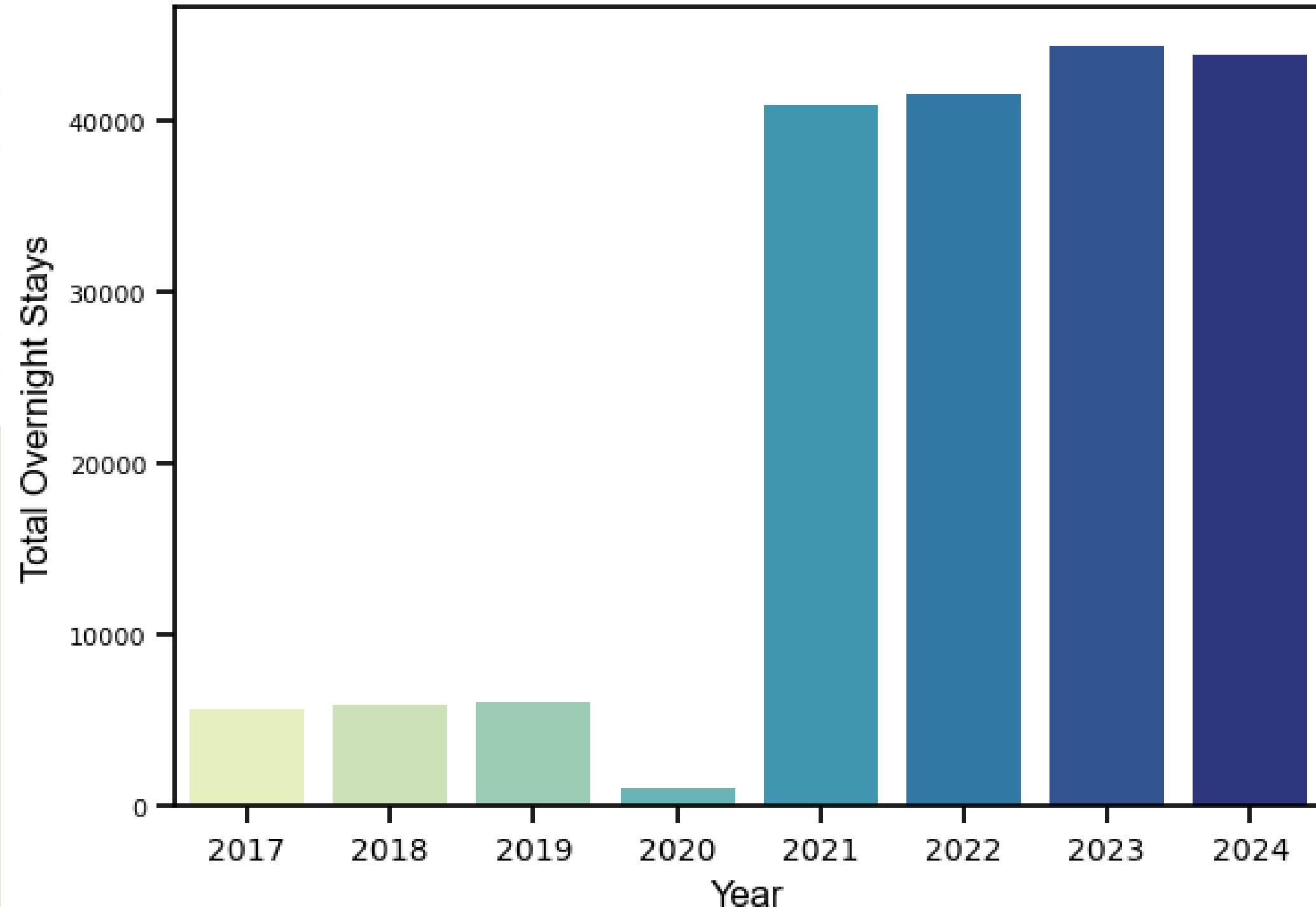


Time Spent at New River Gorge

From 2017 to 2024, visitation has continued to increase & surpass historic visitation:

-  No dip in 2020 during the COVID pandemic
-  Time spent has continued to increase implying longer stays
-  With 1,056,774 visitor hours in 2020 to 4,305,853 visitor hours in 2021

Overnight Stays at the New River Gorge 2017 - 2024



Overnight Stays At New River Gorge >>>

The amount of time spent at New River Gorge can be reflected in the amount of overnight stays:

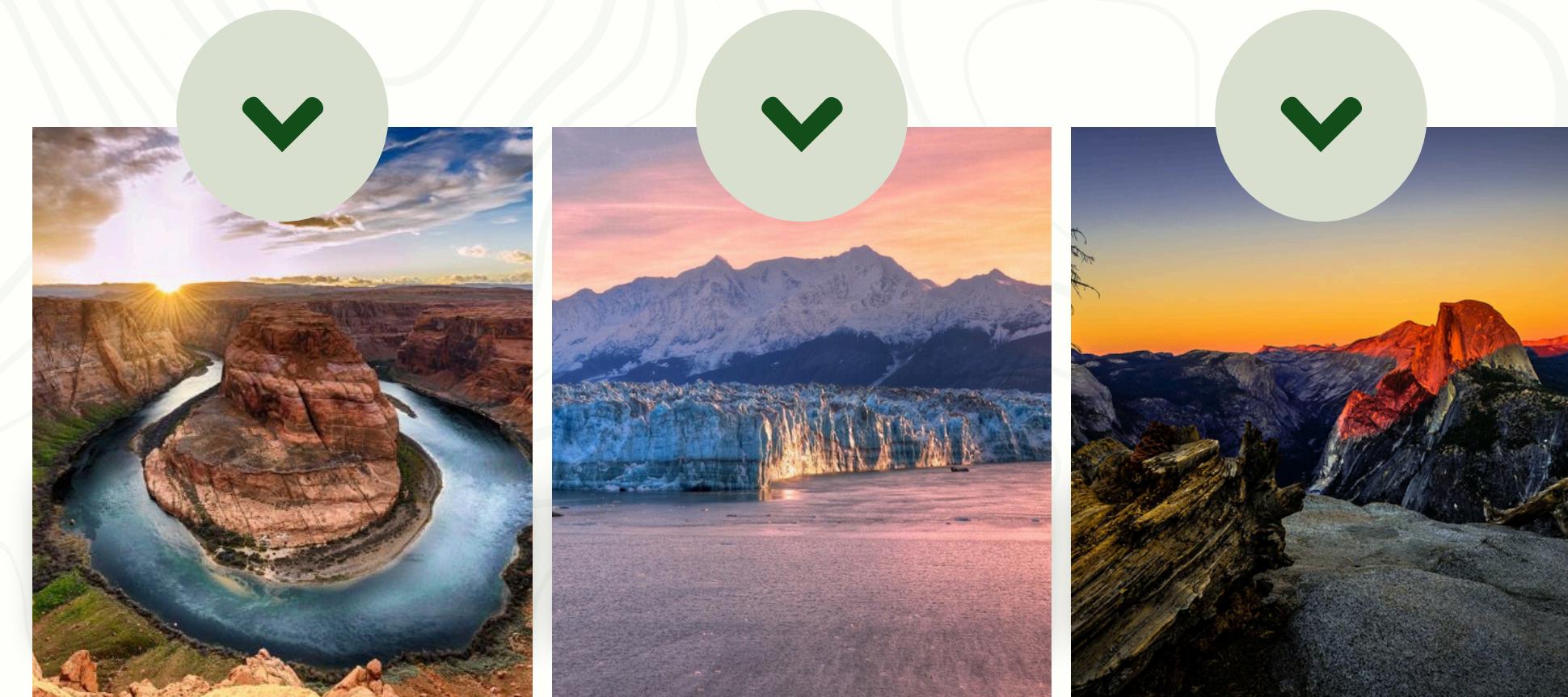
- A significant dip in 2020 (the COVID Pandemic)
- The amount of stays increased after 2020 (the designation)
- More infrastructure was built for more stays

The Factors Effecting Visitation

There are many factors that cause forest destruction, including:

- > Promotional incentives at other National Parks
- > The COVID Pandemic
- > The development of infrastructure

Yosemite, Grand Canyon and Glacier Bay all had promotions in 2022 that made their visitation numbers surpass a majority of other National Parks' numbers.

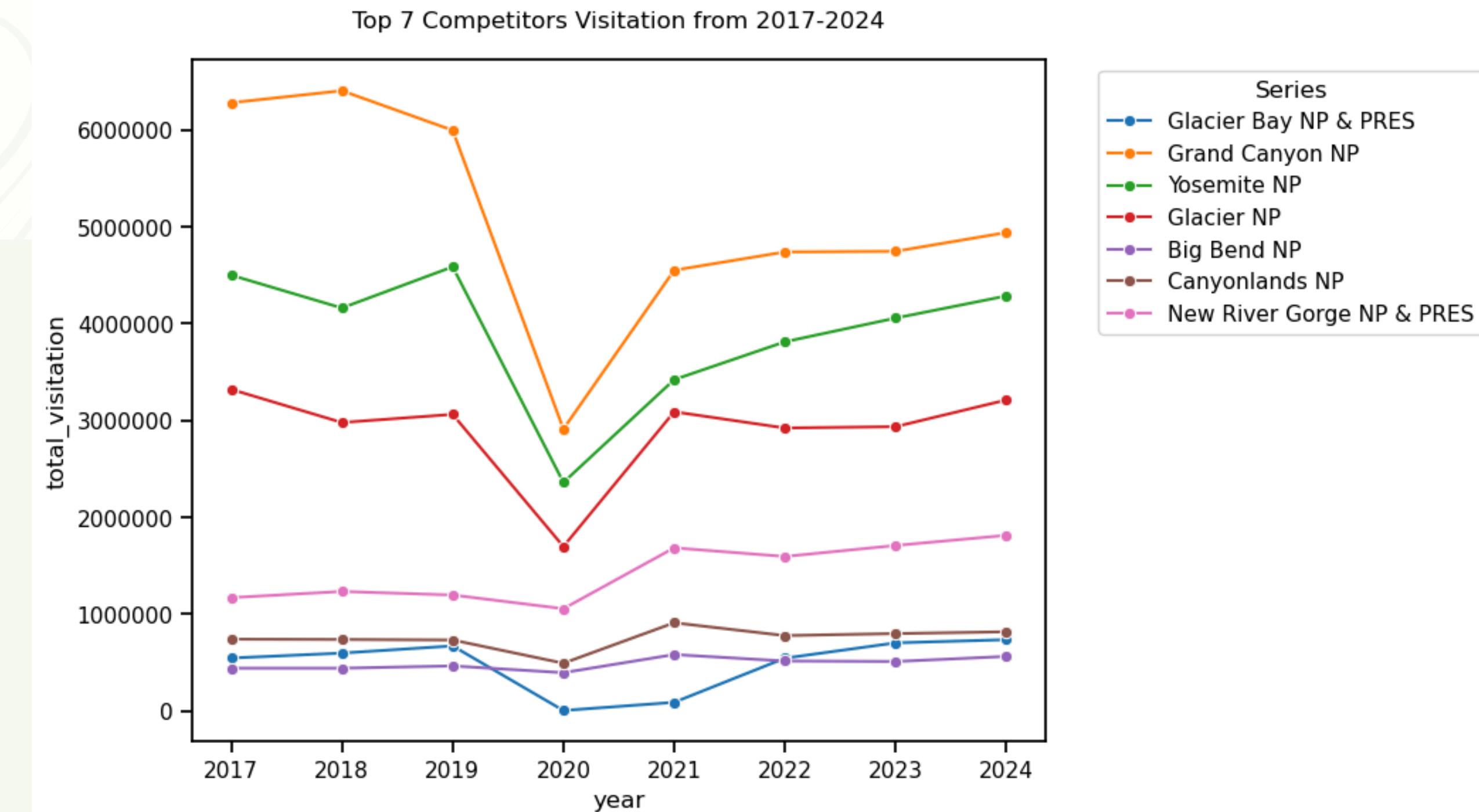


Other Parks Visitation Numbers



From 2017 to 2024, visitation has continued to increase & surpass historic visitation:

- ▶ A universal dip in 2020 (the COVID Pandemic)
- ▶ Yosemite & surrounding parks had a “third night free” promotion
- ▶ Glacier Bay offers one of the most accessible national park experiences



Taking a Closer Look At What Else Is Impacting Visitation



What we will be looking at:



Overnight Stays



East Coast Visitation

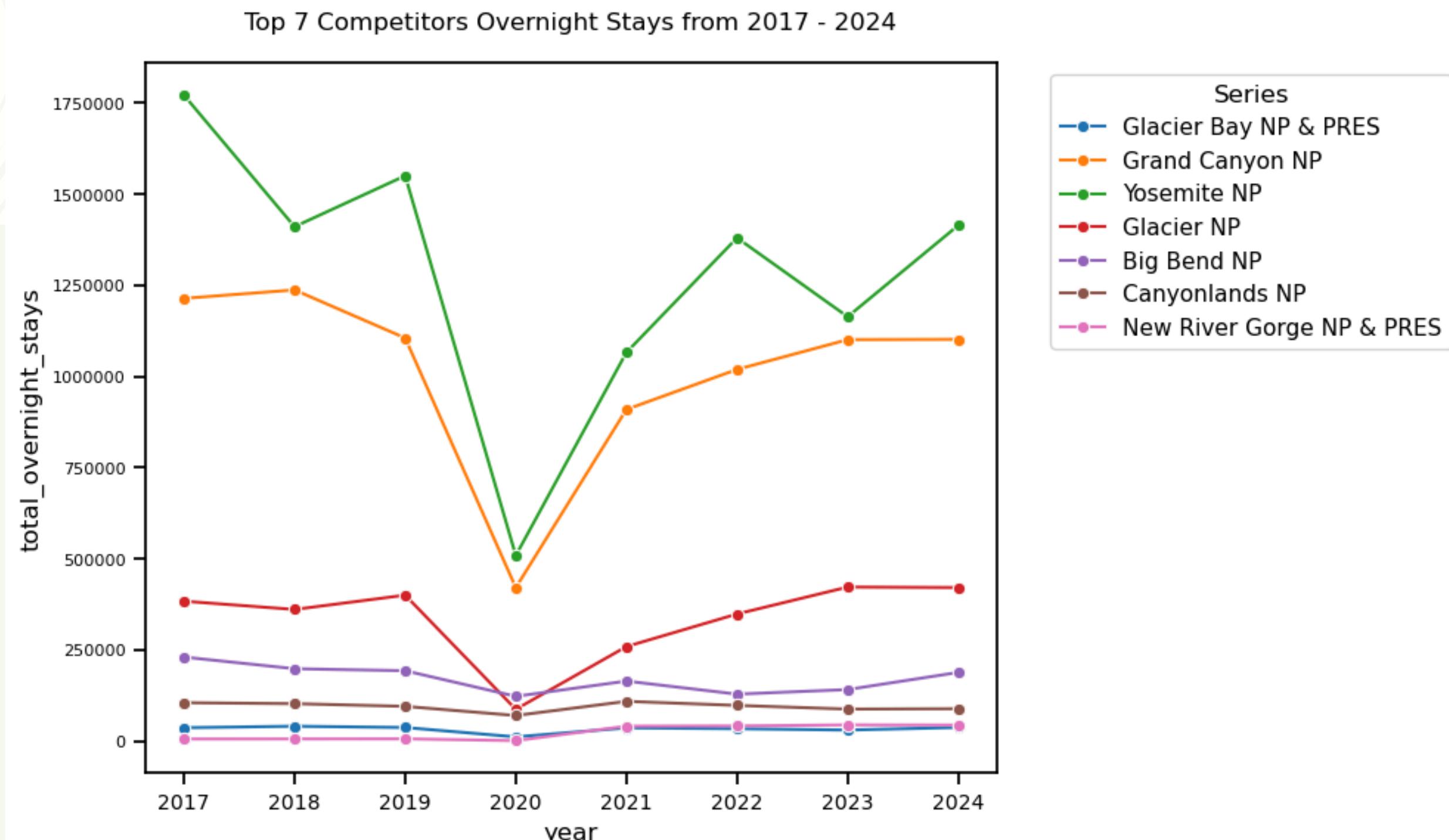


West Coast Visitation

Other Parks Overnight Stays

Overnight stays steadily declined since 2017, a few things effecting this is:

- ▶ The COVID Pandemic (2020)
- ▶ More rental vacation homes (AirBNB, VRBO, HotelBeds)
- ▶ Increase with promotions and renovations

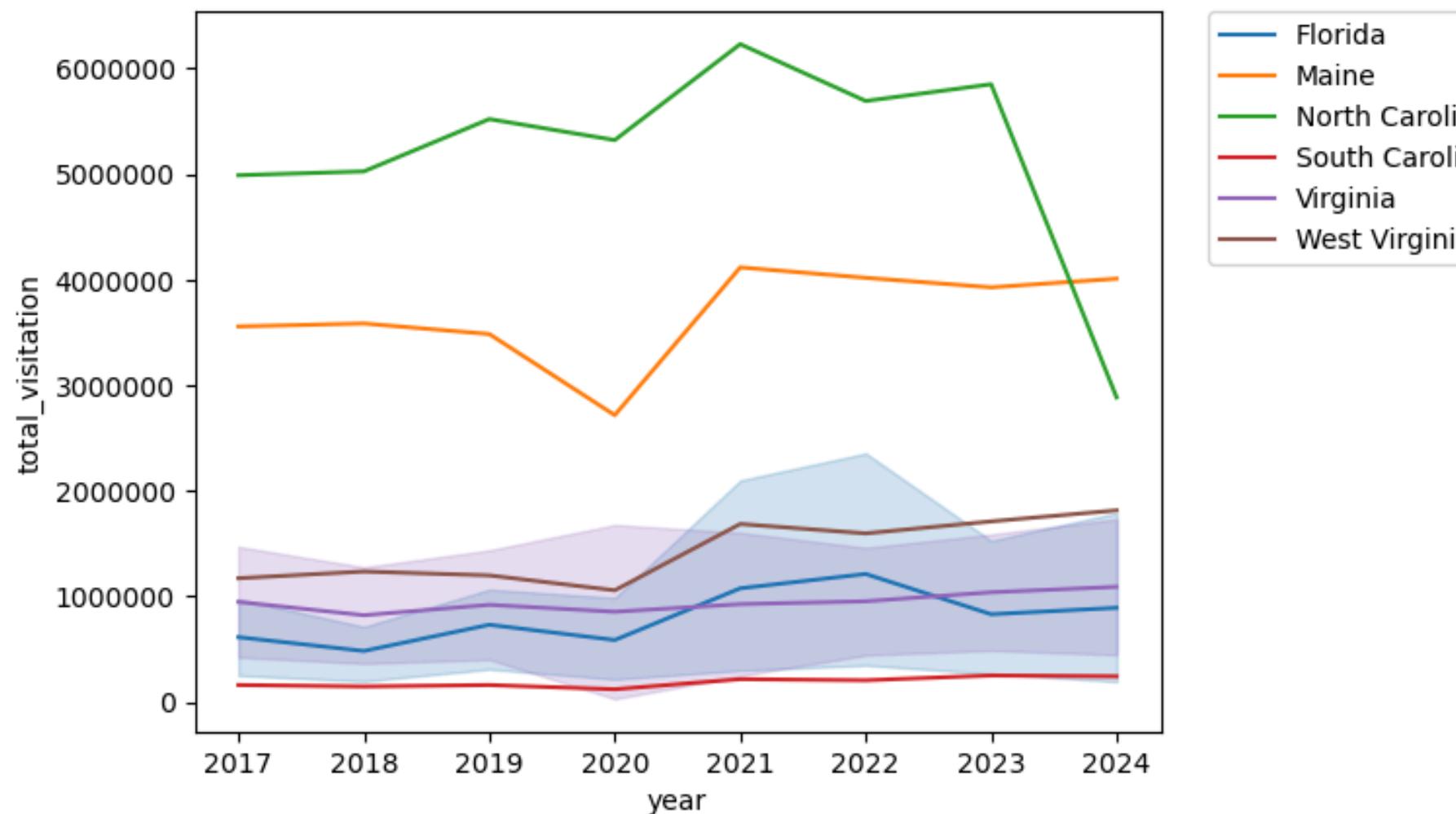


From Coast to Coast >>>

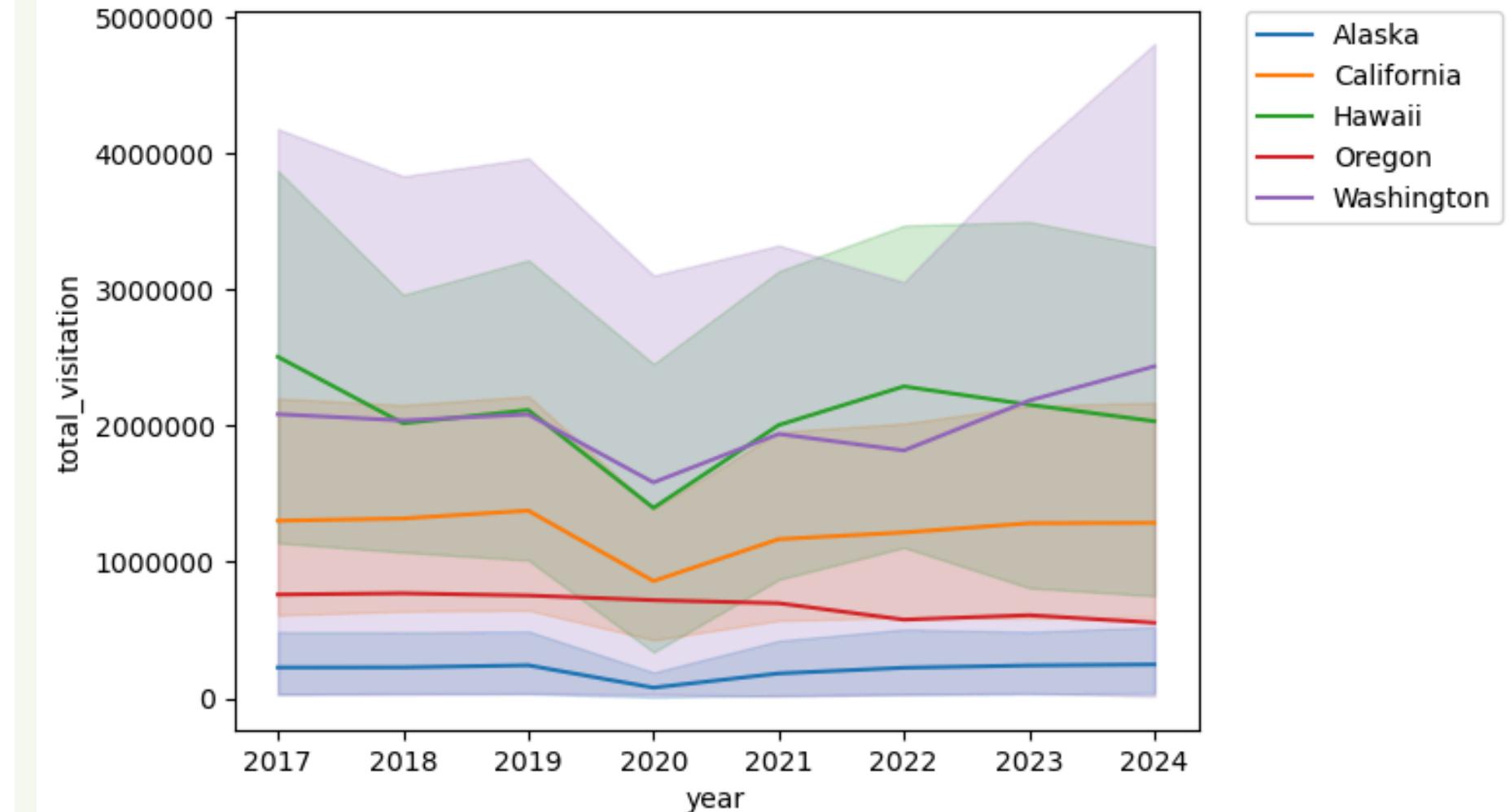
From 2017-2024, each side of the United States have seen similar visitation trends.



East Coast Visitation 2017-2024



West Coast Visitation 2017-2024





New River Gorge Ranks Top 3

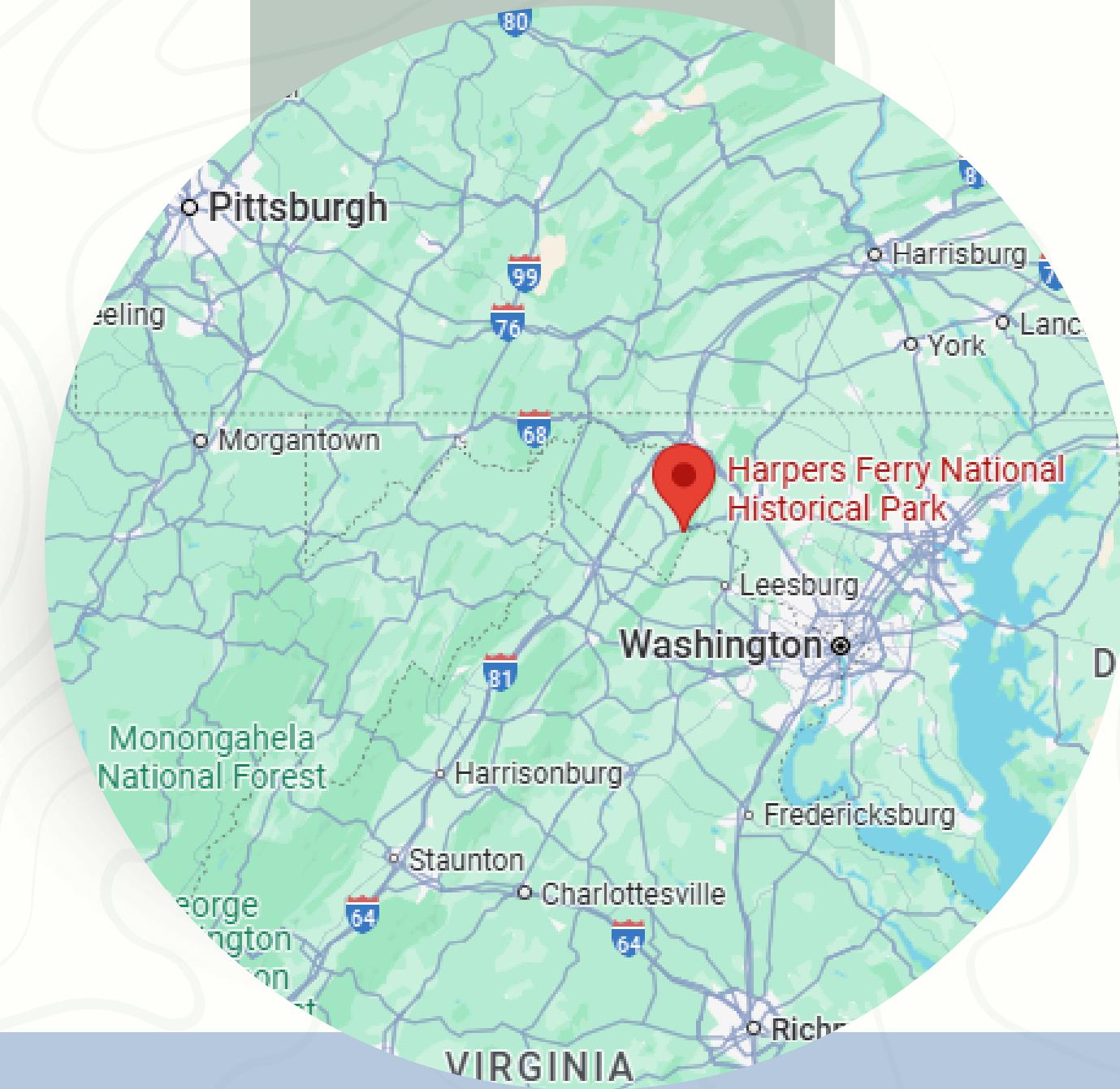
When comparing New River Gorge to other East Coast National Parks, it ranks in the top 3 for visitation numbers and continues to grow with the potential to surpass its West Coast friends that have a longer history and larger spaces.



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Did You Know?

West Virginia also has a National Historical Park called Harpers Ferry. It was designated as a National Historical Park in 1963 and consists of a total of 1,500 acres. It welcomed 488,049 visitors in 2024.





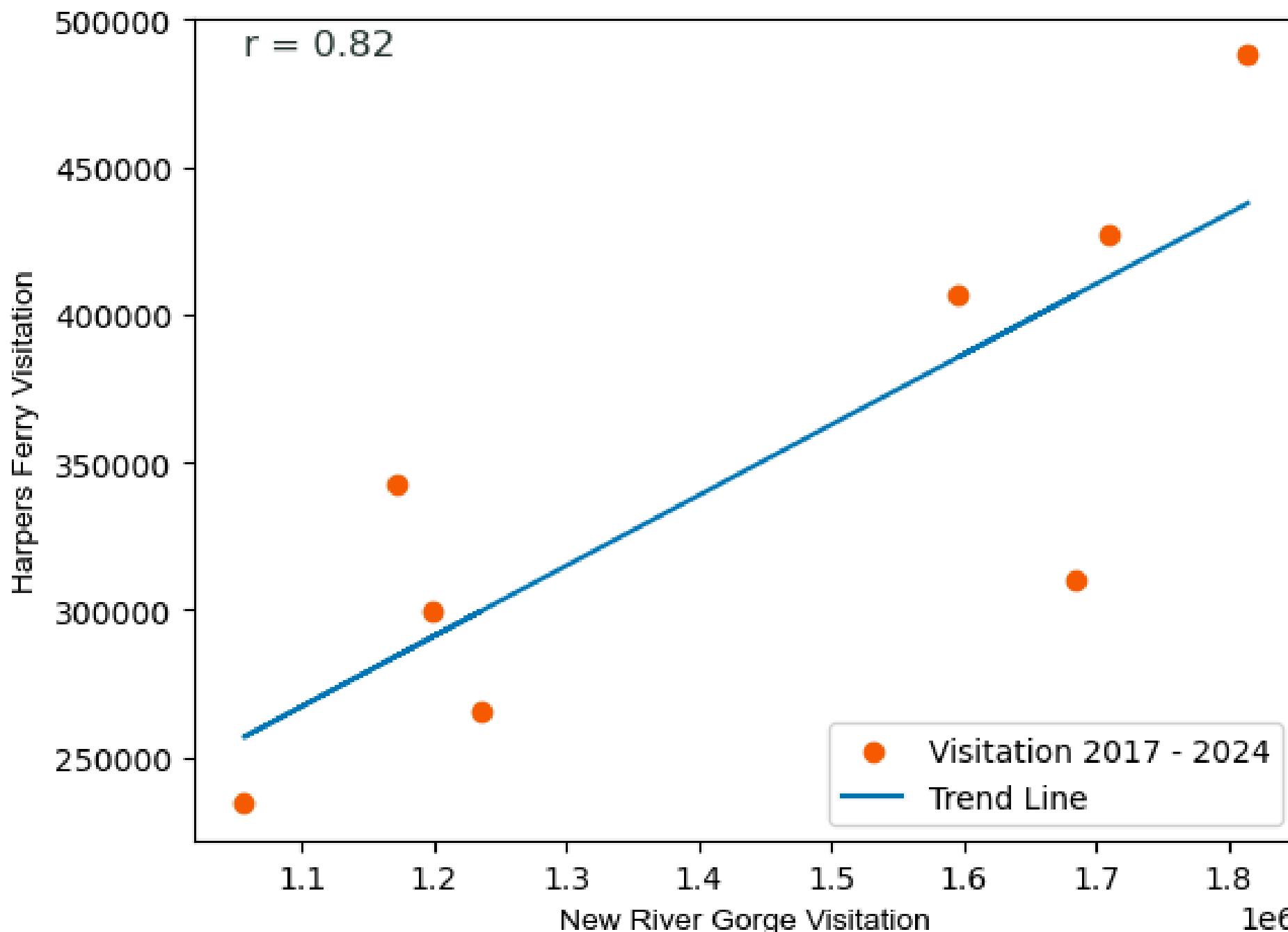
What's the Difference?

A National Park focuses on natural features such as landscapes, ecosystems, geological formations, wildlife. Its purpose is to preserve and protect natural beauty and biodiversity for recreation, education, and inspiration.

A National Historical Park focuses on cultural and historical significance and often has multiple historic sites or structures. Its purpose is to preserve places of national historical importance—e.g., events, people, movements, or architecture.

Did New River Gorge Effect Harpers Ferry? >>>

Does Visitation at New River Gorge Impact Visitation at Harpers Ferry?

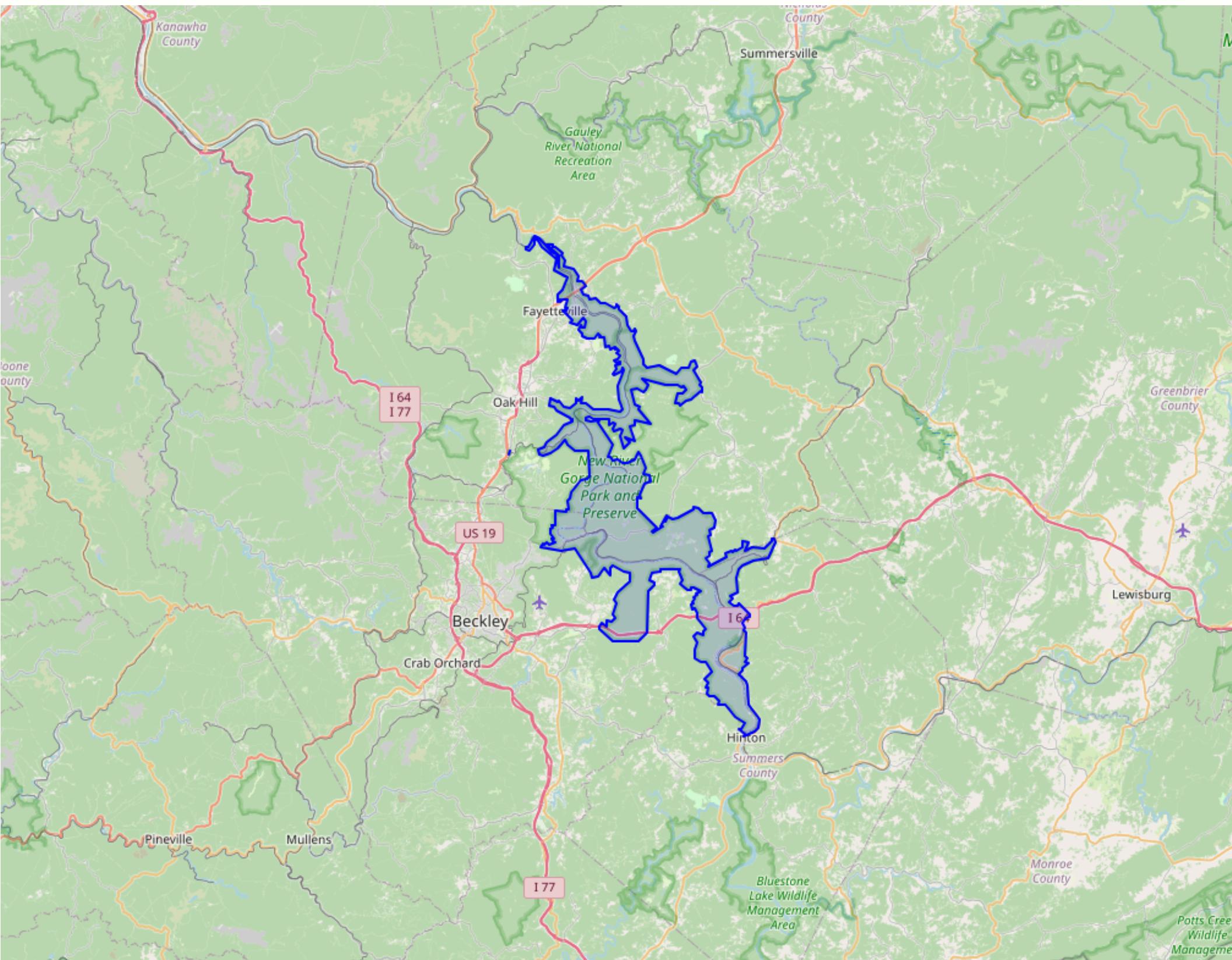


With the increased visitation at New River Gorge, Harpers Ferry visitation increased too:

- Not a perfect correlation, but a strong one
- Both places have continued to see visitation numbers increase
- Harpers Ferry had 234,473 visitors in 2020

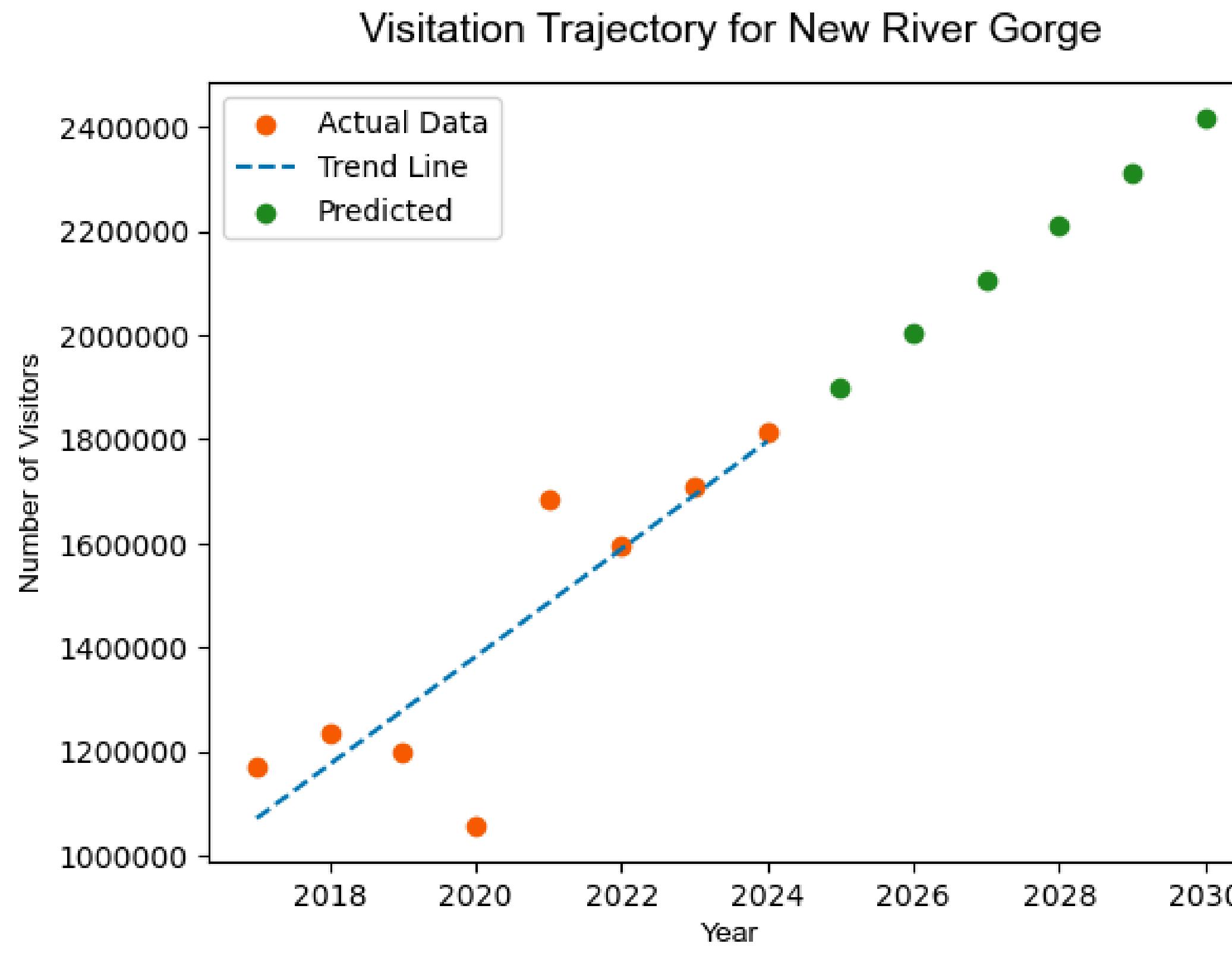
How Will Visitation Look In the Future? >>>

Without any interference and a global pandemic:



- **New River Gorge will continue to receive more visitors**
- **Even with the dip in 2020, growth is still anticipated**
- **By 2030, New River Gorge may see 2,416,915 visitors**

How Will Visitation Look In the Future? >>>



Without any interference and a global pandemic:

- ▶ New River Gorge will continue to receive more visitors
- ▶ Even with the dip in 2020, growth is still anticipated
- ▶ By 2030, New River Gorge may see 2,416,915 visitors

Conclusion



- New River Gorge is in the top 3 most visited National Parks on the East Coast.
- New River Gorge saw 1.8 million visitors this last year.
- If it continues to grow at the same pace as the previous years, it can be expected to see close to 2.5 million visitors in 2030.

The designation of New River Gorge as a National Park has effected visitation numbers across the state and will continue to do so with anticipated growth for years to come!





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THANK YOU!

Questions?

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