

Average age of national park visitors on the rise

By Gabe Gutierrez, NBC News

ESTES PARK, Colo. – At Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, rangers are seeing more than green this spring. They're also noticing a little more gray.

The average visitor to national parks is getting older.

Cyclist John O'Malley, 61, of Summit County, Colo., has enjoyed the trails for almost half a century.

"You do get close to nature," Malley said.

But apparently, not everyone shares that fondness anymore.

Back in 1996, at Death Valley National Park, almost a third of visitors were in their 20s. But in the last few years, that number has dropped to just 11 percent at Yosemite and six percent at Yellowstone, according to a University of Idaho analysis of Park Service attendance figures.

At Rocky Mountain National Park, the average age of visitors has risen to 46.

"Right now, we see a lot of youth not coming to the parks," said Larry Frederick, a park ranger for more than 15 years who has noticed the changing demographics. "I think there a lot of distractions right now for young people."

Frederick said the average age of visitors used to be late 20s and early 30s.

[Read the whole story](#)