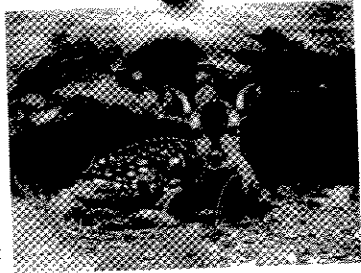
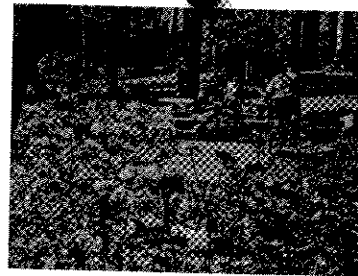


A Second Century of Outdoor Recreation in Oklahoma

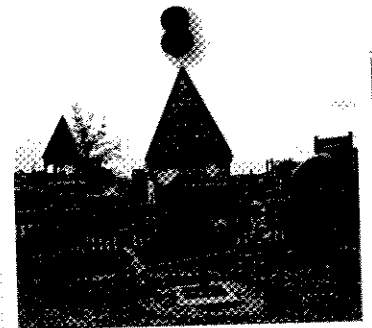
2007 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan



*Fawn at
Sequoayah State Park*



*Having fun at the Azalea
Festival in Muskogee*



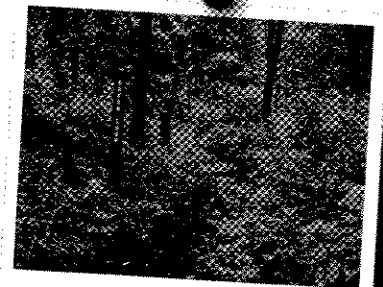
*Imagination Station
in Altus*



*Camping at
Robbers Cave State Park*



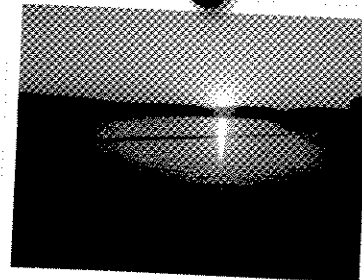
*Relaxing on the rocks at
Turner Falls near Davis*



*Bike Trail at
Lake Thunderbird*



*Swimming at the Chickasaw
National Recreation Area*



*Sunset at
Tenkiller State Park*



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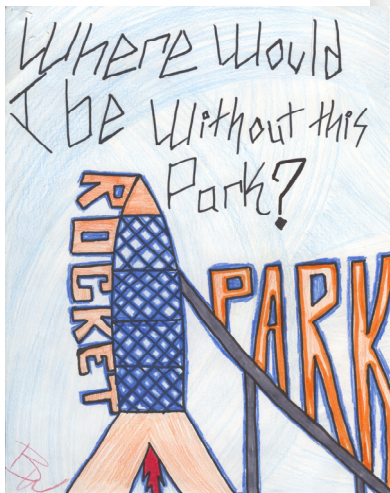
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A Second Century of Outdoor Recreation in Oklahoma: 2007 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan



Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

**A Second Century of Outdoor Recreation in Oklahoma
2007 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan**

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July 2007



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Foreword

The intent of a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is, in part, to bring a state into compliance with federal law to retain funding eligibility. However, a SCORP can achieve more significant purposes in addressing demand for and supply of outdoor recreation opportunities, and the attitudes and perceptions of people toward those opportunities and resources. It is the intent of the authors of this generation of SCORP for Oklahoma to achieve these more significant purposes while assuring compliance with the law.

This document and the processes utilized to prepare it involved scientific methods—both conventional and innovative—to achieve the stated purposes. Traditional data such as facts, figures, and numbers are used to provide the foundation for understanding the resource base and challenges facing this base. In addition, this generation of the SCORP has taken an innovative approach to asking the people of Oklahoma about parks. Citizens from all regions of the state provided drawings and essays that portray their views of parks. The information gleaned from this research provides support for understanding the human connection to the state’s outdoor recreation resources. Thus, throughout this document drawings submitted from people of all ages provide illustrations depicting the importance of parks to Oklahomans.

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Preface

In 2007, Oklahoma celebrated its 100th year of statehood. With that milestone, the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department also marked the 9th generation of Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan development as mandated by the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (16 U.S.C. § 4601-4 through 4601-11). The purposes of that historic act were to assist in preserving, developing and assuring accessibility to outdoor recreation resources and to strengthen the health and vitality of citizens by providing funds and authorizing federal assistance to states. This assistance focused on planning, acquiring and developing land and water areas and facilities. The act also established the Land and Water Conservation Fund under the U.S. Treasury Department.

Over the years various amendments have modified the original legislation. Some of those amendments have adjusted funding sources and funding levels. Some of the amendments have expanded the focus of the act to include crime reduction, increase safety, and concentrate on capital improvements. Within the various elements of the law, Oklahoma has benefited greatly from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) as evidenced by projects statewide.

State participation in the LWCF requires the preparation of a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) every five years. The SCORP requires the approval of the National Park Service and serves as a principal determinant in eligibility for grant funds from the federal government to the state.

Regardless of the funding levels since 1965, Oklahoma has remained committed to preparation of a SCORP at the specified intervals. As a result, this present plan is the ninth generation of that sequence of plans regarding outdoor recreation resources of importance to the state and its people.

Chapter 630.1 of the National Park Service LWCF guidelines specifies the following requirements for a SCORP as mandated by the LWCF Act.

1. Identity of the state agency having authority to represent and act for the state in dealing with the Secretary of the Interior for the purposes of the LWCF Act;
2. Evaluation of the demand for and supply of outdoor recreation resources and facilities in the state;
3. A program for implementation of the plan;

4. Certification by the Governor that adequate opportunity for public participation has taken place in the development of the plan; and
5. Other necessary information as determined by the Secretary of the Interior, including:
 - a. A description of the processes and methodologies utilized;
 - b. Ample opportunity for public participation in the planning process involving all segments of the state's population;
 - c. Comprehensive coverage of issues of statewide importance, demand or preferences for public outdoor recreation, and supply of outdoor recreation resources and facilities.
 - d. An implementation program that identifies the state's strategies, priorities and actions for apportionment of LWCF monies;
 - e. A wetlands priority component consistent with the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 § 303; and
 - f. A recreational trails plan.

As the state agency with authority to represent and act for the State of Oklahoma regarding the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department contracted with Oklahoma State University to prepare this SCORP. This plan is organized for a wide range of readers including resource managers, governmental decision makers, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, and others.

- Chapter 1 provides information about the foundations and methodologies on which this SCORP is based.
- Chapter 2 presents the findings of a statewide drawing and writing contest regarding the meaning of parks in the lives of Oklahomans. This research offered a wide range of public participation in expression of the values associated with outdoor recreation resources and experiences.
- Chapter 3 summarizes other aspects of public participation in the SCORP process including reports from a statewide recreation rally and related research efforts.
- Chapter 4 places the findings, issues and related topics encompassed in this SCORP into the context of the state of Oklahoma.
- Chapter 5 provides the outdoor recreation plan for Oklahoma for the five year period 2008 – 2012.



Chapter 1 – Introduction

The People of Oklahoma

In 2007 Oklahoma celebrated its 100th anniversary as the 46th state in the United States. The population of Oklahoma grew to an estimated 3,579,212 persons in 2006. That represented a 3.7% increase since the 2000 census, showing a growth rate lower than the national average (6.4%) and lower than the growth rate during the preceding decade.

The distribution of the Oklahoma population remained very similar to that of the prior decade in that 70% of the state's population resides in a 100-mile wide corridor running diagonally from the northeast corner to the southwest corner of Oklahoma. Of the remaining population, 20% of Oklahomans live southeast of this diagonal corridor and 10% live northwest of the corridor.

Slightly more than one quarter of the population of Oklahoma lives in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. As was true in 2000, more than 50% of the state's population lives in six counties: Oklahoma County, Tulsa County, Cleveland County, Comanche County, Canadian County and Rogers County. The remaining 50% of the population is distributed among the remaining 71 counties. The trend that had been demonstrated during the decade of the 1990s showed that young rural residents were moving into the state's metropolitan areas or out of state. This trend resulted in the aging of a diminishing population in specific rural counties, particularly in northwest Oklahoma. That trend has continued in these early years of the new millennium.

Oklahoma is a state with slightly more than 68,667 square miles of diverse landscape. As indicated, the population of the state is not evenly distributed across that area. However, on average Oklahoma has a density of 50.3 persons per square mile. This population density is well below the national average of 79.6 persons per square mile.

As of 2006, approximately 6.9% of the Oklahoma population was under the age of five, while 24.1% of the Oklahoma population was under the age of 18. On the other end of the age spectrum, 13.2% of Oklahomans were 65 years of age or older in 2006. All of these percentages are close to the national averages. However, Oklahoma does report a slightly older population than is demonstrated by the national average, which is 12.4% of the national population above 65 years of age.

In terms of race and ethnicity, the percentage of White Oklahomans is relatively close to that of the national level (see Table 1), but differences between the state and national figures are evident within the various minority populations. Oklahoma has a smaller

percentage of Blacks, Asians, and persons reporting two or more races than the national levels. On the other hand, the percentage of American Indians and persons reporting Hispanic/Latino origin are a good deal greater than that within the broader U.S.

Table 1 – Oklahoma Population by Race/Ethnicity

Race or Ethnicity	Percent of Oklahoma Population	Percent of United States Population
White	78.5	80.2
Black	7.7	12.8
American Indian or Alaskan Native	8.1	1.0
Asian	1.5	4.3
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander	0.1	0.2
Persons reporting Hispanic/Latino origin	6.6	1.5
Persons reporting two or more races	4.0	14.4
Persons speaking a language other than English at home (5 years and older)	8.1	19.4

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census (2000)

Other salient data from the U.S. Bureau of Census demonstrates that Oklahomans are below the national average (\$21,587) in per capita annual income, at \$17,646 per person in the state. In addition, 14.0% of the Oklahoma population is below the federally defined poverty level, while nationally 12.7% of the population is at this level. Specifically, Oklahomans reported an average annual household income of \$37,109 in 2006. This was an increase of 23.7% from the 2000 figures, but this average household income was still below the national average of \$44,334.

Education level impacts economic status and Oklahoma faces some challenges in this area. The 2000 U.S. Bureau of Census report indicated that four-fifths (80.6%) of Oklahomans over age 25 have completed a high school degree; this is comparable to the same U.S. population at 80.4%. At the next level of education, 20.3% of the population of Oklahoma earns a bachelor's degree or higher, which is somewhat lower than the national figure of 24.4%.

As mentioned, economic status is closely related to educational status; it is also highly correlated with prevalence of disabilities within the population. Upon the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, inclusive recreation became a legal mandate for public agencies in all states. As a result, each generation of Oklahoma SCORP since 1992 has included extensive detail on appropriate accommodations for persons with disabilities. The primary concerns are accessibility and opportunity. To understand the moral and ethical commitment implied in the ADA, it is necessary to consider the prevalence of people with disabilities in society.

As of 2007, Oklahoma continued its ranking as the 5th highest state in percentage of citizens who report one or more disabilities. The 2005 American Community Survey (University of California, San Francisco, 2007) provided detail and insight into the

prevalence of disabilities among the Oklahoma population. In 2005, an estimated 633,000 people in Oklahoma had a disability. This is 19.8% of the population five years of age and above. An estimated 121,000 people (3.8% of the population five years of age and older) have difficulty performing self-care activities known as Activities of Daily Living (ADL). These activities include such things as dressing, bathing and getting around inside the home without assistance.

The frequencies with which disabilities are reported in society vary greatly by sex, age and race. In Oklahoma, 19.2% of males reported an identifiable disability while 20.4% of females indicated having a disability. These disabilities can be identified by type as conveyed in Table 2. The number of people with a disability within each category should not be added together because any one individual may report multiple types of disabilities. As can be seen, the most frequently reported disability is associated with mobility. The second most frequently reported disability is associated with the ability to be gainfully employed (among those of employment age).

Table 2 – Disability Type in the Oklahoma Population

Disability type	Number of persons with disability	Percentage of persons with disability	Number of persons with self-care difficulty	Percentage of persons with a self-care difficulty
Sensory	194,000	5.4%	41,000	1.1%
Mobility	416,000	11.6%	112,000	3.1%
Cognitive	226,000	6.3%	67,000	1.9%
Self-care	121,000	3.3%	121,000	3.4%
Leaving home	171,000	4.8%	88,000	2.5%
Work disability	354,000	9.9%	104,000	3.0%

Source: 2005 American Community Survey

The frequency of disability varies by age of the population. In general, as an individual ages the likelihood of being impacted by one or more disabilities increases dramatically. Table 3 reports the percentage of the population by various age groups that have one or more disabilities. Many of these disabilities can be corrected or accommodated during engagement in outdoor recreation activities and experiences. However, Table 3 also reports the percentage of the population who have a disability that interferes with one or more ADLs; accommodations for involvement in outdoor recreation may be difficult to achieve for these individuals.

Among those persons in Oklahoma living in poverty, 30.2% of individuals have one or more disabling conditions. Of this segment of the population, 7.0% have a disability that adversely affects an ADL. The relationship of income and disabilities is demonstrated by the contrasting statistics that show that among Oklahomans below the poverty income levels, 18.0% of the population have one or more disabling conditions. Among those above the poverty level, 3.2% persons have a disability that adversely affects an ADL. In general, the rate of disability increases five times for those persons below the poverty level.

Table 3 – Disability by Age Group in Oklahoma

Age Group	Percent of persons with disability	Percent of persons with a self-care difficulty
Ages 5 – 15	7.0%	0.9%
Ages 16 – 17	10.1%	1.0%
Ages 18 – 44	11.1%	1.8%
Ages 45 – 64	25.2%	5.1%
Ages 65 – 74	41.7%	7.0%
Ages 75 – 84	59.0%	13.0%
Ages 85 and above	78.1%	25.6%

Source: 2005 American Community Survey

Disabilities also vary greatly by race and ethnic group. The statistics reported in Table 4 have been consistent for more than a decade. These statistics are related to economic status, as well, in that those with disabilities tend to report less income and greater economic need than those without such conditions.

Table 4 – Disability by Race and Ethnicity in Oklahoma

Race and Ethnicity	Percent of persons with disability	Percent of persons with a self-care difficulty
White	20.3%	3.9%
African American (Black)	21.8%	4.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	9.8%	1.6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	20.9%	4.2%
Hispanic	9.1%	1.0%
Non-Hispanic (of any race)	20.5%	4.0%

Source: 2005 American Community Survey

In general, as the population continues to age the number and percentage of people with disabilities will increase. As the populations of specific racial or ethnic groups increase, the number and percentage of people with disabilities will increase without additional intervention. Economics, age, health care services, and lifestyle are major factors associated with the presence of disabilities in all segments of the population.

The 2001 SCORP (Caneday, 2002) reported related data from the National Survey of Recreation and the Environment (NSRE, 2007). This large study has been repeated several times since the mid-1960s and reports data through 2003. In particular, the NSRE has drawn the following conclusions related to participation by persons with disabilities in specific recreation activities.

- **Sports Activities:** The highest proportion of people (both with and without disabilities) indicated that they engage in walking as a recreational activity. People with a disability over the age of 55 participated in physical activities at much lower rates than did those without a disability. However, for persons under the age of 55, people with a disability reported participating in one or more physical activities at higher rates than persons without disabilities.

- **Swimming Activities:** Individuals with a disability under the age of 25 and those over the age of 75 participated in swimming (primarily in swimming pools) at higher rates than did their peers without disabilities. Age-averaged participation rates indicated that approximately 52% of persons with disabilities and 55.5% of persons without disabilities reported swimming outdoors within the past year.
- **Outdoor Recreation Activities:** The most common outdoor recreation activities in which people indicated they participated were day hiking, fishing, and horseback riding. Across age groups, few differences were found between persons with disabilities and those without disabilities in boating, fishing and hunting. People with disabilities participate at higher rates in nature study than do people without disabilities, while those without disabilities reported camping more frequently than those with disabilities.
- **Watercraft Activities:** Power boating has been one of the most popular activities for people with or without disabilities. People without disabilities participated at higher rates in water-skiing and jet skiing, largely because those activities are more physically demanding and equipment is relatively easy to obtain. Less demanding boating activities such as canoeing showed no difference in age-averaged rates of participation.
- Lower participation rates for people with disabilities in general outdoor recreation activities was attributed to concerns related to health and physical functioning in an outdoor environment. Another concern noted by outdoor recreation enthusiasts who have disabilities was dealing with ‘outdoor pests.’

The Outdoor Recreation Estate in Oklahoma

Only minor changes have occurred during the past five years related to public properties available for outdoor recreation experiences in Oklahoma. The changes that have occurred are primarily related to replacement or updating of equipment and facilities at various sites around the state. Little change has occurred in the ownership of public property or the designation of those properties. As a result the detail of the managing agencies as delineated in the 2001 SCORP (Caneday, 2002) remains as an accurate portrait of properties in Oklahoma.

A common way to consider the total of public properties in a given state is to classify those properties by acreage and ownership. Table 5 presents public properties in Oklahoma, land and water, by acreage and the agency and level of government that presently owns that property.

Table 5 – Oklahoma’s Public Recreation Estate by Acreage

Local, State and Federal Recreation Property

Level of Government and Managing Agency	Land Acreage	Water Acreage	Total
Local governments			
• Cities	28,175	51,530	79,705
• Counties	7	0	7
State government			
• Colleges/Universities/State Regents	14,870	4,212	19,082
• Grand River Dam Authority	57	69,050	69,107
• Oklahoma Dept. of Wildlife Conservation*	765,238	2,120	767,358
• Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Dept.*	70,987	6,080	77,067
• School Land Office	2,785	249	3,034
Federal government			
• Army Corps of Engineers*	79,680	432,337	512,017
• Bureau of Indian Affairs	54	0	54
• Bureau of Land Management	320	0	320
• Bureau of Reclamation*	7,121	6,070	13,191
• National Park Service	7,416	2,346	9,762
• U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	140,814	0	140,814
• U.S. Forest Service*	249,010	91	249,101
Totals	1,366,534	574,085	1,940,619

* Reported figures include leased properties that may be connected to other agencies.

Another way to look at the public recreation estate in Oklahoma is to consider the percentage of property available for public use. In most cases this is a representation of the public ownership of those properties and may not always represent properties that are continuously accessible for recreation purposes.

Table 6 reveals that a much greater percentage of Oklahoma is in private ownership than is true across the nation. A general pattern of land ownership shows that eastern and central states have a higher percentage of private ownership of property than is true in western mountain states or Alaska. However, most eastern and central states have a greater percentage of property in ownership by the respective state governments and local government agencies than is true in Oklahoma.

For some people this ownership pattern presented by Oklahoma can have a negative impact on participation in outdoor recreation. It is particularly evident in consideration of hunting and fishing access. In Oklahoma, access to game species that are in the public domain is limited for many state residents. This is due to the dominant ownership group, private landowners, who control access to wildlife through decisions to lease or not to lease properties.

Table 6 – Oklahoma’s Land Ownership by Percentage of Area

Ownership of Property	Acreage by agency	Total acreage	Oklahoma percentage	National average
Private properties	>	39,626,218	90.20%	58.0%
• The Nature Conservancy	38,371			
• Other private owners	39,587,847			
Federal government	>	1,290,336	2.94%	33.0%
• Army Corps of Engineers	531,536			
• Bureau of Indian Affairs	41,150			
• Bureau of Land Management	320			
• Bureau of Reclamation	49,575			
• Department of Defense	148,323			
• National Park Service	7,005			
• U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	118,619			
• U.S. Forest Service	383,243			
• Other federal agencies	10,565			
State government	>	1,124,109	2.56%	4.5%
• Grand River Dam Authority	82			
• Dept. of Wildlife Conservation	300,046			
• Tourism and Recreation Dept.	33,436			
• School Land Office	772,784			
• State Regents, other state agencies	17,761			
Local government	>	28,182	0.06%	2.5%
• Cities	28,175			
• Counties	7			
Indian lands		1,391,949	3.17%	2.0%
Water	471,056	471,056	1.07%	
Totals		43,954,560	100.00%	100.0%

Oklahoma’s Wetlands

Oklahoma is not typically considered to be a state in which wetlands are a major feature. However, approximately 733,000 acres within the state are freshwater wetlands. In addition, Oklahoma ranks among the top ten states in the nation in total acres enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program (NRCS, 2007). The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their private property. The Natural Resources Conservation Service and state agencies provide technical and financial assistance to aid those landowners in restoration of wetlands. Oklahoma currently has 60 active WRP projects with another 40 projects in the application phase.

Oklahoma supports many distinct types of wetlands, such as playa lakes, riparian wetlands, swamps, bogs, marshes, oxbow lakes, closed depressions, and cypress swamps (Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 2007). These wetlands are under an umbrella of regulations from a number of governmental agencies. At the federal level, wetlands are

affected by management and regulations of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency. At the state level, these wetlands receive oversight from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, and the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality.

A SCORP is required to have a wetland priority component consistent with section 303 of the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986. The Land and Water Conservation Fund Grants-in-Aid Manual, chapter 630.1.4(E) states that this component must (1) be consistent with the “National Wetland Priority Conservation Plan” prepared by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, (2) provide evidence of consultation with the state agency responsible for fish and wildlife resources, and (3) contain a listing of those wetland types which should receive priority for acquisition.

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission has developed a comprehensive plan for Oklahoma’s wetlands (OCC, 1996). This plan identifies priority wetlands by size and location. The targeted wetland types have been defined and categorized in that plan. The comprehensive plan acknowledges the importance of wetlands for a variety of environmental benefits and human benefits, including recreation.

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan utilizes the inventory provided by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission as the authoritative state inventory of wetlands. In addition, the SCORP supports the priority plan provided by the Commission for protection, restoration, or acquisition of wetlands in Oklahoma.

Oklahoma’s Trails

The Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department cooperates with the Federal Highway Administration for the administration of the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). This program was originally authorized under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 and has been amended since that time. Presently RTP is included in P.L. 109-59 Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA-LU). Under this program, Oklahoma has granted almost seven million dollars for statewide trail projects (OTRD-RTP, 2007).

Oklahoma has established the Oklahoma Trails Advisory Board to oversee the RTP, for which motorized and non-motorized recreational trail use is represented. This advisory board consists of nine members, seven of whom represent various types of trail use and two members are at-large.

The Recreational Trails Plan prepared as a part of the 2001 SCORP continues to be the basis on which RTP operates. Updates and modifications to this plan have been regularly communicated through newsletters and other means.

Methodology

The agreement between OTRD and Oklahoma State University for the preparation of this SCORP includes a number of tasks specifically designed to achieve the requirements

specified in the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965. Further, in consultation with staff from OTRD the authors of this SCORP agreed that the desired product was more than facts and figures yielding a plan. As a result, this SCORP includes use of methodologies beyond those normally associated with statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plans. In particular, the following methods were included in the agreement between Oklahoma State University and OTRD.

To seek public input on concepts, perceptions and values associated with parks, the investigators chose to implement an innovative research method. The investigators coordinated a statewide contest to collect artifacts (written essays and drawings) from Oklahoma citizens in response to the question: “What do public parks mean to you?” The contest was extended to all age groups and all citizens in the state. These essays and drawings served two purposes: (1) the artifacts were part of a contest from which quotes and drawings will be selected for use in statewide outdoor recreation promotional efforts, and (2) the artifacts served as data for qualitative analysis to answer the following questions.

1. What meanings do public parks have for Oklahoma citizens across the lifespan, across demographic groups, and across geographic locations?
2. What is the human connection to public parks?
3. How do Oklahoma citizens feel about the importance of public parks?

Chapter 2 presents the results of this research effort – the Meaning of Parks.

A second effort to gain public input in the SCORP process was a statewide recreation rally held during spring 2007. This rally included representatives from multiple recreation providers (e.g., municipal, state, and federal agencies), professional organizations, special interest groups, and other specified groups and individuals. The rally focused on issues being faced in management of the public recreation estate.

Chapter 3 presents the results of this research effort – the Recreation Rally.

Other methods we utilized to generate this SCORP incorporated reviews of literature, including previous statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plans and other outdoor recreation-based research conducted during the past five years. In addition, the investigators reviewed newspapers and electronic media for current issues related to outdoor recreation in Oklahoma.

In support of the SCORP, additional work was completed on the Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping of recreation facilities in Oklahoma, which was initiated for the 2001 SCORP. This information required updating; in addition, improvements were made for data access and usability by the public. The intent of the mapping was for internal OTRD use in planning and, ultimately, for public accessibility to the information included in appropriate portions of the GIS database.

Chapter 2 – The Meaning of Parks



As previously mentioned for this generation of the SCORP, Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department staff and the investigators desired to go beyond the simple use of facts and figures to support the developed plan. Thus, we designed a statewide essay and drawing contest whereby Oklahoma citizens school-aged and older were asked to respond to the theme, “What Parks Mean to Me”. Participants could submit an original essay ($\leq 1,000$ words) and/or drawing representing their personal meaning of parks.

Announcements and invitations to participate went out in state newspapers, letters to schools and special interest groups, at public meetings, and on the web. The material on the web was provided both in English and in Spanish, and participants had four months to submit their entries. Contest winners received prizes and public recognition of their work.

Over 450 essays and drawings were received from citizens of all ages (from 5 years to 95 years old) and racial/ethnic groups, as well as from both genders. Essays ranged from 50 words to 1,000 words; the drawings were completed in crayon, pencil, charcoal, and markers.

Analysis

We know that ‘things’ have meaning to people and these meanings are central to the individuals who express them. When people are asked to write or draw “What Parks Mean to Me”, for instance, they engage in reflexive behaviors (they have to think about the meanings they hold for parks). They then have to interpret these meanings within themselves, and choose words and pictures that best represent their beliefs. The meanings of these symbols have their origins in particular experiences and views of parks, which are defined by the individuals. Thus, with in-depth analysis, we are able to interpret meaning from words and illustrations presented by the participants.

Because the data set was so large, we analyzed a random sample of essays and drawings and selected up to 25 entries from each age category (all artifacts were selected if the age category had fewer than 25 entries). As a result, we analyzed 125 essays and 90 drawings for this SCORP.

Three researchers were utilized to conduct content analyses on the chosen essays and drawings. We examined the artifacts both objectively and subjectively (what was actually depicted, and for expressed feelings). In doing so we examined each essay and noted the choice of words and their apparent connotations and denotations. We also noted the order of the words and frequency of use. In analyzing the drawings, the researchers looked at

color choices, relative size and position of objects, and the apparent meaning as well as underlying meanings for each illustration.

Response

Due to the depth and intensity of analysis required with non-numerical data, qualitative researchers generally limit data collection to fewer than 50 artifacts (i.e., interviews, essays, drawings). Over 450 people responded to the request for essays and drawings for this SCORP; they provided a wide variety of artifacts representing many views. We received nine times the typical number of artifacts in support of a qualitative research effort. Because of this, we conducted a random sampling technique to reduce the number of artifacts analyzed. The number of artifacts, along with the random sampling method employed gives us great confidence in these research findings.

As can be seen in Figures I and II, responses were submitted from all areas of the state. The only geographic area not represented in the submissions was the far northwest (panhandle); a very small percentage of citizens live in this area of the state.

In the following maps depicting areas from which essays and drawings were submitted, the size of the circle represents the quantity of artifacts submitted from that particular region. As can be seen in the legend the smallest circle indicates that between one and five entries were submitted. By increments of a quantity of five, the largest circle represents the receipt of over 20 essays or drawings from that area of the state.

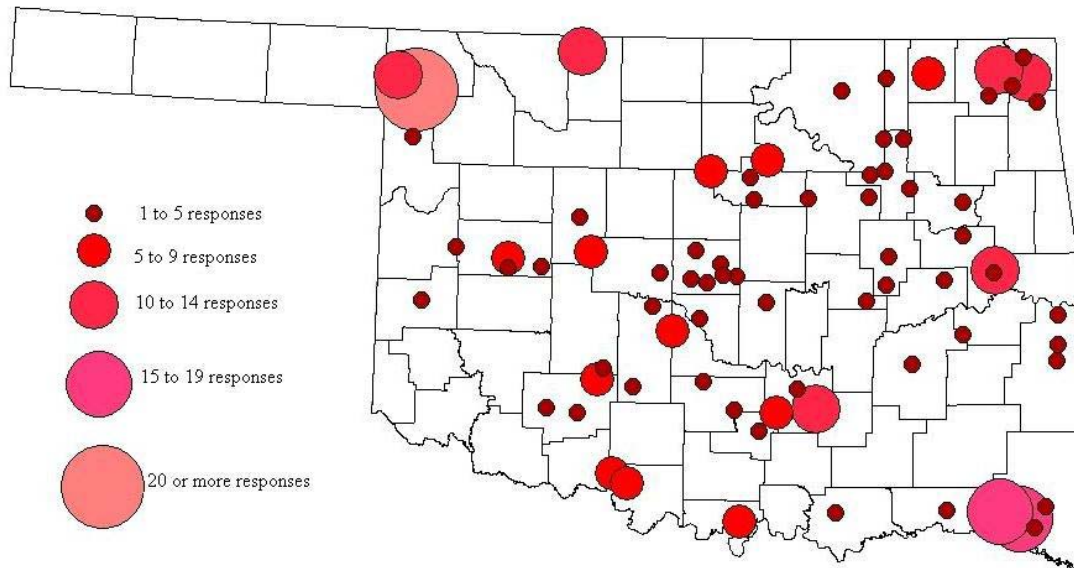


FIGURE I. Zip codes from which essays were submitted

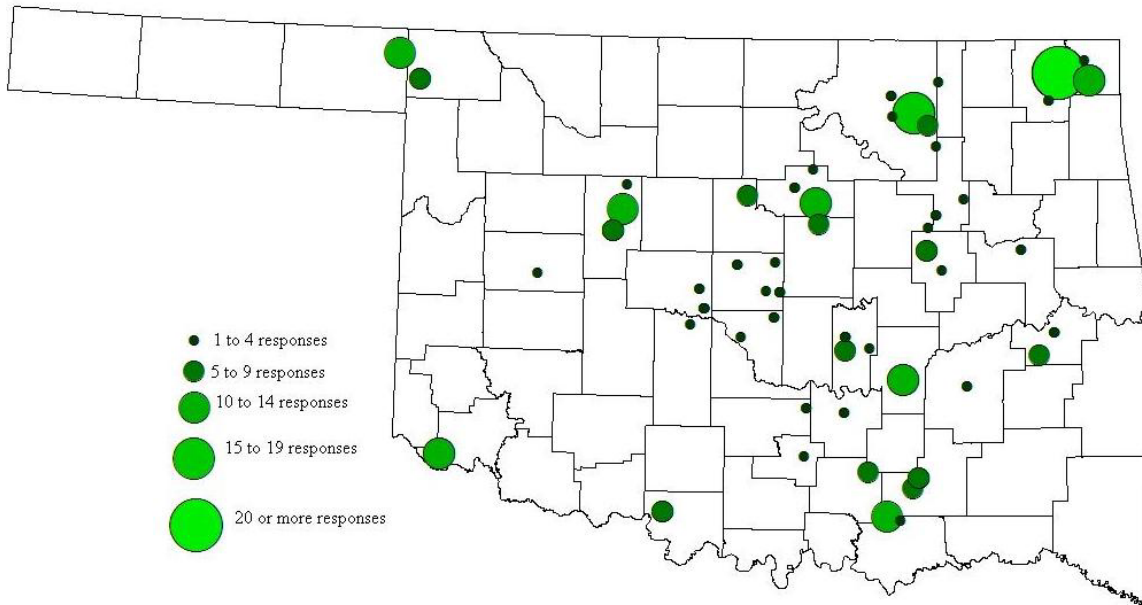


FIGURE II. Zip codes from which drawings were submitted

With regard to demographic characteristics, those who submitted entries to the contest were comparable to the broader state population with a few exceptions. A higher percentage of American Indians participated in the contest (13.8%) than are represented in the state (8.1%). Further, we received significantly lower percentages of submissions from Blacks (2.2% of participants; 7.7% state population) and people who self-report as Hispanics (3.7% of participants; 6.6% state population) than are represented in the state. Only 15 people (3.3% of entries) reported a disability compared to over 19% of the state population who report having a disability. Because of this, we cannot draw any conclusions as to the impact of disability on the meaning of parks to Oklahoma citizens.

Table 7 presents the demographic data of all those who participated in the Meaning of Parks contest. The first table provides information about the entire population of individuals who submitted an entry. Table 8 reports the demographic data of the sample selected for analysis and utilized in the development of this SCORP.

Table 7 – Demographics of All Submissions

(Essays and Drawings combined)

N	Age Group	Female	White	American Indian	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Mixed Races
90	1-3 rd grade	55 61.1%	62 68.9%	20 22.2%	0 0.0%	2 2.2%	2 2.2%	3 3.3%
157	4-6 th grade	99 63.1%	112 71.3%	19 12.1%	5 3.2%	5 3.2%	3 1.9%	7 4.5%
104	7-9 th grade	63 60.6%	68 65.4%	16 15.4%	2 1.9%	9 8.7%	1 0.9%	8 7.7%
44	10-12 th grade	23 52.3%	35 79.5%	6 13.6%	0 0.0%	1 2.3%	0 0.0%	1 2.3%
63	Adults	53 84.1%	54 85.7%	2 3.2%	3 4.8%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 3.2%
458	TOTAL	293 63.9%	331 72.2%	63 13.7%	10 2.2%	17 3.7%	6 1.3%	21 4.6%

Table 8 – Demographics of Sample

(Essays and Drawings combined)

N	Age Group	Female	White	American Indian	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Mixed Races
50	1-3 rd grade	32 64.0%	34 68.0%	12 24.0%	0 0.0%	1 2.0%	1 2.0%	1 2.0%
50	4-6 th grade	28 56.0%	36 72.0%	8 16.0%	1 2.0%	1 2.0%	2 4.0%	1 2.0%
50	7-9 th grade	29 58.0%	31 62.0%	10 20.0%	1 2.0%	3 6.0%	0 0.0%	5 10.0%
33	10-12 th grade	18 54.5%	25 82.5%	6 18.2%	0 0.0%	1 3.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
32	Adults	26 81.3%	29 90.6%	1 3.1%	1 3.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 3.1%
215	TOTAL	133 61.9%	185 86.0%	37 17.2%	3 1.4%	6 2.8%	3 1.4%	8 3.7%

Qualitative Analysis

Parks are important to Oklahomans from all across the state for a wide variety of reasons. It is also clear that Oklahomans have a wide range of experiences in and expectations of parks. Some people experience parks as natural settings (where nature is dominant), while to others nature is clearly secondary—they experience parks as grassy areas with playgrounds and walking/biking trails. The latter types of parks tend to be located in neighborhoods and have greater visitation than the more natural state parks or national areas. It is clear that local parks carry high levels of importance to Oklahomans. It is in these types of settings that people learn about themselves, others, the local community, and the natural environment.

Parks are important for several reasons—they serve as settings for the development and maturation of relationships between and among various individuals and groups, as a setting for memories and hope for the future, for physical activity and recreation, to interact with nature, as settings to enhance personal development/quality of life, and to express state pride. Various age groups experience the importance of parks differently from one another; in addition, females and males value parks for different reasons. The following sections provide further detail in each of these areas.

Settings for Development and Maturation of Relationships

- Parks are settings where people join together to explore, enhance, and redefine relationships.

Family

People clearly use park settings as locations to develop and reestablish family relationships. Children, youth, and teens all mentioned the importance of parks as places to make deep personal connections with parents and grandparents. The reverse is also true—adults use parks to develop and maintain bonds with their children and grandchildren. It is apparent that people view parks as facilitators for relationship development. Extended family ties are maintained through special events such as family reunions, which commonly occur in parks. Further, the act of going to a park requires deliberate effort to get the family together to engage in shared experiences; this type of purposeful behavior holds great meaning for Oklahomans.

Because park experiences cause people to slow down, to simplify, and to breathe more deeply, the time spent in parks is focused or concentrated—people are free from outside distractions and are present in the moment. This present-in-the-moment experience appears to be a core element for developing and maintaining deep familial connections. The sense of belonging and bonding sentiments are important to all ages, including



7th grade female, American Indian

teenagers. We found that high school-aged boys referred to the value of shared family experiences in parks more so than did girls in this age group. Further, adults of both sexes provided illustrations of the importance of family time in parks more than any other age group. Lastly, the intergenerational aspect of family ties was depicted frequently—parks are places where children and grandparents come to know one another, develop lasting bonds, and establish warm and meaningful memories.

Boiling Springs [State Park] has helped me to appreciate the simple things that in our

everyday life we don't stop to think about. In our busy lives my family doesn't get to spend the time together that we'd like. Going camping brought us closer as a family. –11th grade female, White

My dad pushed me in the large tire swing, and we talked until the sky turned that pale shade of purple which signaled our time was up. –Adult female, White

Whenever my cousins come to visit, we all go to the lake. The ladies gossip, the men fish, and the kids are kids. –11th grade female, White

There were times when we would have debates going on with the Elders, about whether or not people were family and if they were how were they related. In the end it didn't matter because to us family, was, is and always will be family—with proof or otherwise. –Adult female, Black

Staying in a cabin is a good way for families to get away from their daily life and bond with each other. Parks make life more enjoyable and easier to be with ones [sic] family. –10th grade male, White

A parents [sic] easiest way to entertain their child is to go to a park and just play around with your kids and maybe take a few pictures. They are really fun to look at when your child grows up. If you're a kid, and your parents do this, don't think they're weird. They are just trying to remember when they were young. –6th grade male, White

Friends

People use parks to meet friends, cultivate new friendships, and connect with community members. This happens on the playground, on sports fields, at special events (such as birthday parties, weddings, or reunions), and at festivals held in parks. Oklahomans shared stories of meeting people with whom they had a lot in common, as well as people who were very different from them; parks provided an opportunity for cross-cultural interactions and connections on a personal level. Special and romantic relationships were initiated, nurtured, and matured in park settings. The foundation for memories is an outgrowth of these types of interactions.

The events and experiences in parks seem to provide an “even playing field” for such encounters. Park settings are both comfortable and non-threatening, and they facilitate shared experiences where people interact with one another and with the environment free



from distractions. These experiences are different than going to a movie, for instance, where attention is directed away from one's fellow human beings and to the screen; parks cause attention to be directed between and among individuals, thus deepening personal connections and building social capital. In addition, parks provided great value to youth as they developed long-lasting friendships and learned more about themselves.

I love playing with my friends. We love to play hide and seek. I love playing at Hafer Park. –2nd grade female, White

One day we gather at the park, with loud laughter exploding from every one of us, to play basketball. Usually many of our friends join to play and some people join to play that we do not know, but eventually they become our friends, too.

–11th grade female, White

My friends and I camp out at the lake during the summer.

We once camped out at the lake and stayed up for hours.

We shared stories from our pasts and plans for our future.

We sat around the crackling campfire and enjoyed this simple pleasure of life.

–10th grade male, ethnicity unknown

My friends and I started going to the Park just to waste all our free time, but the unseen force of the Park captured our souls and kept drawing us back for more like a candy bowl drawing a child. Many memories have been made in just a year of going there, and we have become closer friends; like a family outside of our own family. –11th grade male, American Indian

At age eight I gained a dad, two brothers, and a sister, and my summers were spent cheering on Stanley Tigers. My dad coached and my brothers played. It was a second family who sat in those bleachers night after night –building community. They were friends. They looked out for one another, care for one another, yes, sometimes disagreed with one another, but I saw how it all worked together. –Adult female, White



8th grade female, White

Age and Sex Differences

All age groups, except for the 1st through 3rd graders, noted the importance of nurturing relationships in parks. The youngest group perhaps did not mention or depict relationships very often because they were so focused playing in the parks—not an unexpected focus for young people. Every other age group depicted relationships with others as important to their experience of parks. Youth (grades 4 – 6) more frequently talked about relationship development with friends, while others discussed the importance of relationships with family members. As mentioned earlier, teenaged boys

(grades 7 – 9) particularly noted the value of parks as a setting for family connections. Adults viewed relationship development as a central to their park experiences. Adult females find parks to be more important for connecting and bonding with others than do adult males.

Settings for Memories and Hope for the Future

- Parks are backdrops for warm and meaningful memories; park memories set the stage for hope of future generations.

As relationships are initiated, cultivated, and redefined through shared experiences in parks, memories are made. We found memories to be a common theme among all age groups, although as one might suspect, they were especially salient for the high school and adult groups. It was clear that ‘making memories in parks’ is significant to Oklahomans—especially to the female respondents. Most memories were of lost loved ones (parents and grandparents who had passed away) and of friends from earlier times in life. Parks provide settings for feeling affection, being nurtured, and experiencing joyful remembrances of associations with other human beings.

Memories involved people, shared activities, and the park environment. When people joined in activities and experiences, fond memories and comfortable feelings were stimulated, whether those individuals were fishing, boating, cooking-out, or playing. These memories evoked strong feelings and emotions years later and resulted in people expressing warm feelings for the roles parks played in their lives. Childhood was relived, and a sense of poignancy was evident as people reminisced of simpler times.

The reason this park means so much to me is because I used to go there with my grandpa whenever I was a little girl. There are lots of memories of that park of me and my grandpa. –8th grade female, White

Not much has changed at the Park except the volleyball net is gone; but when I drive by on my way home from school, I can still see everything the way it was last summer; as I scan the empty Park, I always look for an extra minute at the basketball court. It looks lonely without innocent kids running up and down it playing the greatest game ever; but in my mind the court is not empty and the Park is not empty; it will never be, as long as my memories are alive. –11th grade male, American Indian

While lying in the park, I remember all the events and time spent with friends and family and I feel at home as a person after a long days [sic] work. –11th grade female, White

Many of the good memories that flow from my heart like a river flowing downstream come from time spent at the park with my friends. –11th grade female, White

In some places parks play a huge role in life. It could be where you had your first picnic. Or, for some people, where you met your best friend. –6th grade male, White

Oklahoma parks have given me rich experiences and many good memories. They have provided a haven in hard times, an opportunity for family sharing,

a playground for grandchildren, a place for laughter and tears, and a refuge to embrace nature. –Adult female, White

Hope for the Future

In expressing memories, respondents looked into the past. They were able to draw upon experiences and memories the past, bring it to the present (where they expressed the value and importance of parks to their current lives), and project their memories as hopes for the future. Parks and people live on—in future relationships and future experiences in parks, humanity reconnects.

You have so many memories that it is hard to pick the one that is the most enjoyable to you. To me, that is what is important about my park. It carries our past, present, and future memories and my park will always hold a special place in my heart. –6th grade female, White

It always gives me a neat feeling to find shells and driftwood, and I could share with my children the memories I had from my childhood that were now becoming some of their memories. Now, my children are nearly grown, and hopefully someday they too will build those special memories with their future families. –Adult female, White

In August that year, Daddy passed on. If I had my guess, heaven for him is sitting in a little aluminum fishing boat on a sunny afternoon on a glassy smooth Clayton lake with evenings around the campfire listening to his children, grand children, and great-grand children tell stories of all the memories made in this place. –Adult female, White

All small children, and even big ones, should spend plenty of time at a park. Someday I wish to live near a park for my kids. I want them to have every experience I had and may have in the future. Parks are great places to live, laugh, and love. –10th grade female, American Indian

May all the parks continue to give joy and peace to all who come here. And may the park at Sulphur, Oklahoma give peace and joy to all the future generations. Our souls need a place of solace. –Adult female, White

Settings for Physical Activity and Recreation

- Parks are important to people in maintaining healthy lifestyles.

With the rise in sedentary lifestyles and obesity levels across all age groups, this finding is particularly significant. Parks are being used by all ages for playful physical activity. While we often think of healthy living activities as purposeful efforts (jogging, biking, weight training), physical activities in which people engage during outdoor recreation are just as important to general well being. Physical activities are important for all age groups, and particularly important for youth grades 1 through 6. These activities serve as a framework for the development of friendships, and aid in healthy living.

Children and youth find parks to be safe places to play, whether alone, with friends, or with family. For most youngsters parks are local settings with playground equipment where most of them experience freedom, happiness, and joy. They climb on monkey

bars, climb trees, utilize slides, and just ‘run around’. In general, young boys experience parks as settings for physical activities more so than girls. The one exception to this was for 7th through 9th grade girls, who also conveyed the importance of parks as venues for positive physical activity.



2nd grade female, American Indian

In these activity experiences, park users are challenging and stretching themselves; they are engaging in ‘wholesome’ socially acceptable activities in outdoor spaces. These activities might be individual in nature, where a person tests her or himself (such as in rock climbing or spelunking) or they might be group or team activities with competition and opportunities for community development. A sense of accomplishment and support of self-concept and self-

esteem occur through activities in parks. The activities tend to be inclusive—everyone is invited to participate and fun is the key outcome. For youth, parks are often the answer to boredom—there is always ‘something’ to do.

Leisure and recreational experiences are typically described as including several components: freedom, enjoyment, socially acceptable activities that are engaged in during unobligated time. Respondents to the “What Parks Mean to Me” contest clearly articulated these elements in their experiences of parks.

When I was at the park I felt wild and free like I could just be what I wanted to be and that is free. –2nd grade male, White

At these amazing parks you can participate in a multitude of exciting activities including water sports, fishing, boating, hiking, swimming pools, volleyball, and basketball courts, picnic areas, and nature centers. –10th grade female, White

The first hour that we got to the park, our teachers let us do whatever we wanted. I for one didn’t know where to start. There were the swings and the monkey bars. I could hang out by the creek, play tag, or just talk with my friends. That first day at the park I felt so overwhelmed I didn’t know where to start.

–6th grade female, White



6th grade male, American Indian

I learned how to drive my Barbies in the park, shoot hoops on the dunk ball court, ride my bike and scooter on the cement, and even took my hunting dog to the park to play. –2nd grade female, White

There is so many things to do there like you could play in the sand, go on the slide, or the swings, or the monkey bars, it is so much fun. –3rd grade female, White, has a visual impairment

A city park is a safe place to have fun playing basketball or swinging in a swing. A suburban park could be a place to jog with your dog or a place to picnic with your family. A park in the country could be a way to meeting and hold a carnival or even a watermelon festival. For me, a park is an aquatic playground. –11th grade male, White

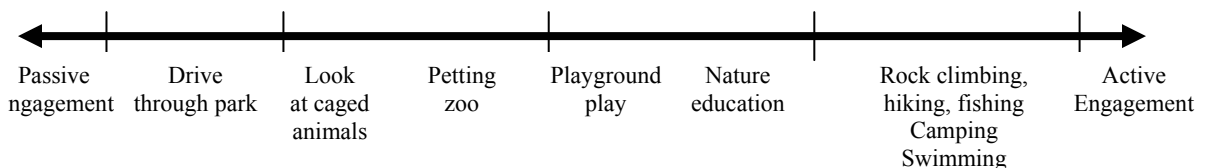
I get to exercise at Hafer Park. I can skateboard and stretch. I can run with my dog Mikko, I like to skateboard at the skate park. I try to do my double kick-flip on the half-pipe. Parks make me feel happy. –2nd grade male, White

Settings for Interactions with Nature

- Parks evoke sensory experiences in the natural environment.

As one would imagine, parks are opportunities for people to interact with their natural surroundings; we found several levels of interaction from passive viewing to active engagement. Those who were active in parks also varied along a continuum where nature was not a prominent factor to nature as paramount to their experiences. For example, some visitors used parks to engage in non-nature-based activity in an outdoor environment (e.g., playing basketball) while others used parks for activities that required an engagement with nature or natural elements (such as rock climbing). For all of these visitors, activity in parks held great meaning for them.

Some users use parks as places to simply view nature and they spoke of the positive impact of the scenery on their state of mind. In fact, some described their park experiences from a perspective of an outside viewer—they simply looked at the park environment (from a car, for instance). Others walked in the park, but still only looked—they did not interact with the park environment at all.



Some of the distinctions in terms of park experiences seem to be a function of the type of park one visited. Local parks or school parks often consisted of a lawn and independent playground structures—these were most commonly depicted by youngsters who had regular access to these types of parks. More mature writers and artists portrayed more

typical state and national parks which held great vistas, important geologic or recreational opportunities for visitors, and opportunities for deep engagement.

Regardless of the type of park noted, visitors expressed a wide range of positive emotions based on their experiences. Many described feelings of relief over park-facilitated opportunities to simplify, to breathe more easily, and to escape the “mayhem” of everyday life. People expressed the joy of getting in touch with basic elements of themselves; they were able to reconnect and re-discover their role as a human being in nature. Many of the respondents talked about enlivening their senses (smell, touch, taste, hear, sight) through their interactions with nature in a park setting. Adult women described their sensory experiences more so than adult men; this was also true for girls and boys in 7th through 9th grades.

We read and analyzed many essays and drawings that described of the impact that natural beauty had on Oklahoma citizens. For some, simply being able to see the park (across the street, perhaps) made a difference in their lives. The physical beauty and splendor of the natural environment resulted in participants of all ages expressing feelings of wonder, awe, and amazement. For some, the physical beauty and the range in physical features of the parks served as points of pride related to their home state; for others these outdoor attributes is what brought them back again and again to experience parks.

We drove through the park with my whole family. We drove through the park looking at all the wild life. And the prairie dogs were cute, but you can't hold them because they bite. We learned that at the information center. –5th grade female, White/American Indian

A man we had just met caught a spoonbill about three feet long, mostly because of the nose it had. Anyway he caught it and let my sister and me feel it. It felt slimy and weird. After we felt it he had his friend take pictures of the fish with him right along side of it. Then before it died he threw it back in the water. This might not seem a big deal to you but to me it was fascinating. –6th grade female, American Indian



5th grade female, White

When I watch the animals play, I get a feeling that can never be taken away from me. I love animals and everything they do. –8th grade female, White

Some kids who live in a big city or in an apartment complex may not have a yard to play in. They could go to the nearby park to play outside and enjoy the fresh air. –8th grade female, White/American Indian

You have not lived until you have endured the scenery that Oklahoma and its parks have to offer. It has lively trees surrounding you on every side, but not making you feel [sic] scared and trapped in. you can sit on the shore and stare at all of the wildlife, knowing they share the only life they have with you. Parks are an extraordinary thing to see; they are like living in the wild for a few days, but the wild is openly sharing their lives and not pushing you away. –9th grade female, White

I have been privileged to enjoy almost every park in the state. From the vast openness of Black Mesa, the fairytale beauty of Turner Falls, the majestic views of Quartz Mountain, the water sport wonderland of Keystone, and the sportsmen's paradise of Dripping Springs, our state is blessed with many beautiful places to enjoy. –Adult female, White

It's fun to just lie in the grass and look at the sky trying to spot cloud shaped like things. –2nd grade male, White

There is a close interaction between the natural environment and us. Whether we are playing in trees, being simply fascinated with one of the landforms, or observing the wildlife, there is that connection. –7th grade male, Black

We went to the creek and Tiger taught me how to fish. That is where I caught my first fish; it was a tiny white perch. I was only 4 years old and it was a great day. –6th grade male, White

Settings for Personal Development/Quality of Life

- Parks are personal sanctuaries and places for self-actualization.

For those in middle school and older, parks are places to discover and reassert one's identity, to reflect on and find one's place in the universe, and as a setting for self-healing. These experiences were related to enhancement of quality of life and personal development. People use parks to relax, escape pressures of daily life, and to restore themselves; to many, this facilitated a view of parks as personal havens. Descriptors used by participants included parks as...

- Sanctuary
- Haven
- Peace
- Serenity
- Refuge
- Soothing

The peaceful feelings often were a result of taking time in parks to relax, to let go of daily worries, to slow down, and to use parks as venues for stress release. We found that these types of experiences in parks began as early as middle school and continued through adulthood. More females than males described the meaning of parks in these terms.

In addition to being a physical site where one can regain a sense of peace, parks are viewed as places for reconnecting with self and nature; with finding personal meaning in the expanse of creation. Teens and adults find parks to be desirable locations to engage in soul searching—in seeking their place in the world.

Other aspects of personal growth and development were evident in the material provided to us by participants. Parks were described as settings for rites of passage (such as first girl/boyfriend relationships or marriage), life lessons, and life restoring moments. Some learned that they could do more than previously thought, some overcame fears, and yet others realized life dreams in parks. Respondents shared the value of parks in both personal and “academic” education—many learned about themselves, others, and the natural world through their experiences with parks.

To escape the monotonous mayhem, many seek refuge in parks. A park should be a place of freedom and relaxation, a place that one can look forward to for recuperation and also, to release everyday stress. –11th grade female, American Indian

Little Sahara State Park is an excellent getaway from the worries and troubles of everyday life. One weekend at Little Sahara and all worries and troubles are driven back to almost being non-existent. Like many Oklahoma state parks, Little Sahara has a calming effect on the soul. –Adult male, White

I realize now why so many people, of so many different ages, are drawn to parks, to being outdoors. For a time, while swinging or running toes through warm sand, we are no longer consumed with proposals and demands, becoming kids again. We can be rejuvenated. The world quiets down and all that matters is the rushing wind in our faces and the pumping of legs as they fly through the air, unburdened.

–Adult female, White



Adult female, American Indian

By going to a park, I can temporarily ignore the issues I face outside the park’s perimeter. Personally, I believe that parks of Oklahoma are a blissful escape from the trials and tribulations of reality. –7th grade male, Black

That is what I like best about the parks I frequent ... is shedding the responsibilities of home and completely relaxing. There is something about the water, bird songs, campfires, and gentle breezes that wipe away frustrations and lowers blood pressure. –Adult female, ethnicity unknown

Throughout our busy year we have returned time after time to the park to eat lunch with one another, to work on homework together, watch a fitness group work out, watch little kids play war with air soft guns, but mainly to release the stress of our everyday life. Through the Park we have learned we can

count on each other; we can rely on each other. The Park is my river to escape reality. –11th grade male, American Indian

Parks are salvation. Never judging, never insistent, all they ask is that we come and play. The emotions evoked are consistent; we are the ones that change. Parks make us feel known and yet mysterious all at once. Worries are forgotten, if but for a fleeting moment. –Adult female, White

Looking back, I realize that I have learned a number of lessons from my time spent in the parks. It's important to dream and to believe that you might touch the sky with your toes. Ballparks taught me teamwork and how you win some and lose some and life goes on. The deep end of the Del City pool taught me that you can watch and learn and everyone can be brave. Most importantly, when you are at a park, you are making memories, and when you get older it is the memories that matter. It is the memories that make your heart smile. –Adult female, White

“Look, girls. See those holes carved in the rock that of all the way to the rim of the canyon? Those were made a long time ago by Native Americans who were here.” Daddy was always teaching us something. I was awed by those toe-and-finger holes. When were they carved? How did the people do it? I imagined moccasined men walking those walls, clinging to the niches. Maybe my lifelong love of history and archeology began then. –Adult female, White

Settings for Positive Emotions

- Parks are settings where people experience joy, excitement, happiness, and laughter.

As human beings we experience a wide range of emotions and parks provide settings where these occur. Some of the emotions are in response to the natural environment—the physical setting, wildlife, and vegetation; other emotions are in response to interactions with family and friends while engaged in various activities.

Parks provide structured settings for physical activity (such as basketball and softball) where friends and family engage in peer and intergenerational pursuits. These are often ‘pick up’ games where the joy of playing overrides the stresses of formal competition. Through these sports and games friendships are forged and ‘bragging rights’ established.

Many people experience high levels of excitement and dynamism in their park experiences. Dynamism is described by a sense of being alive, connected, challenged, and experiencing high levels of energy. Adult men depicted this feeling in their high risk activities such as four-wheeling on the sand dunes in various parks. Children and youth expressed this sense of dynamism in exploration, playing sports, and new discoveries.

Among the many positive emotions described and depicted in the essays and drawings were the following:

- Acceptance
- Romance
- Nurturing
- Laughter
- Dynamism
- Amazement
- Challenge
- Peace
- Happiness
- Energy
- Excitement
- Joy
- Love
- Special feelings (typically noted as “indescribable”)

I really enjoy all the fun and thrilling activities that Kiamichi has to offer. It also provides an exciting adrenaline rush that is completely exhilarating.
–10th grade male, American Indian

Our souls must be allowed to be children at play and parks sanction this. Parks are a window into a new peaceful world, free from worry. –Adult female, White

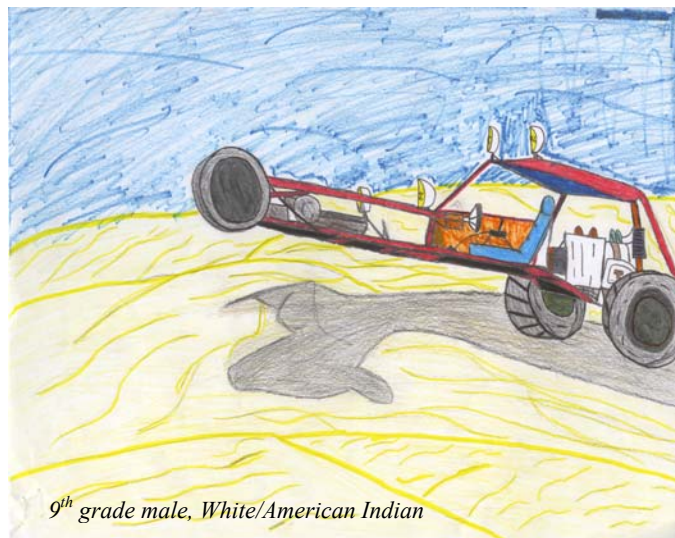
Watching the joy on the faces of children as their imaginations grow. Parents can enjoy being there themselves, listening to the children giggling and the water in the stream flowing over the tiny pebbles and the song birds singing in key and smelling the fragrant wild flowers in the warm summer breeze, walking barefooted in the warm, golden sand. –10th grade female, American Indian

These are the reasons parks must be protected. Not merely for beauty’s sake, or for the environment, but for the good of humanity, for the heart. Our souls must be allowed to be children at play and parks sanction this. Parks are a window into a new, peaceful world, free from worry. –Adult female, White

The park has a magic that brings people together in moments of laughter.
–Adult female, White

Do you remember the feeling of wanting to slip back into childhood? Get away from everyday life and have fun or maybe just relax? This is the reason for parks! –10th grade female, American Indian

Our world is changing so quickly. My grandchildren don’t know a world without cell phones, the internet, video games and instant gratification. They don’t know the joy of lying on your



9th grade male, White/American Indian

back and watching the clouds, feeling the wind caress your cheek, and watching a new tree carefully to catch a glimpse of a busy squirrel. And they are poorer for it. –Adult female, White

Settings in Which to Express Pride and Ownership in Oklahoma

- Parks provide Oklahomans an opportunity to express state pride.

For many, parks and the resources they offer provide a medium through which people express patriotism and loyalty to their home state. This connection to the resources is an important element in establishing a caring and concerned citizenry. Participants talked about taking pride in the parks near their homes, the pride they feel when they see exceptional scenery and topography, and pride in what tourists might encounter.

Many respondents talked about parks as being ‘theirs’—as though they owned the park. This sense of ownership appeared to be due to deep personal connections with a particular park as well as a perception that this was ‘home.’ This expression of ownership and pride resulted in several respondents portraying their own experiences and projecting those experiences on to potential tourists, presumably from out-of-state.

My park is McGee Creek Park, my own personal paradise. –11th grade female, American Indian

Oklahoma parks make me feel like I need to shout “WOW!” –3rd grade female, White

*It seems like everyone in America should get to visit a park at least sometime in their life. Parks throughout America are what make our country so great!
–7th grade female, White*

Oklahoma parks make sure that every individual coming to our magical state takes with them a newfound love for nature. The moment you leave you will be so eager and enthusiastic to return. –9th grade female, White

*I have been to parks and recreational areas throughout our great state and the thing that strikes me about our parks is that they put the Home in Oklahoma.
–Adult male, White*

Our parks are like home to us and we all need to be proud of our home. –Adult male, White

*Oklahoma’s parks are the heart of tourism with a beauty that gathers many to them.
–10th grade female, White*

The tourists that come to Oklahoma are captivated when they view the amazing scenery we have to offer. –9th grade female, White



Settings for Alternative Views of Parks

- Parks provide opportunities for highly personal values and perspectives – some positive and some negative.

While we learned that parks are positive places for engagement by most everyone, it was clear that some Oklahomans do not view parks with the same level of fondness. The data showed that a number of young people find parks to be scary, uninviting, barren and forbidding places. Some of these feelings appeared to be due to the physical nature of the park (e.g., the parks were run-down, trash-filled, unsafe, or with few amenities) while others were related to social concerns. It is unclear if these concerns were based in actual experiences or media reports about antisocial behaviors in parks.

The buffalo were big and scary looking. –5th grade female, White/American Indian

There are some disadvantages to parks. There has [sic] been occasional shootouts and gangs sometimes jump people who get close to them. One of the worst parts about parks is when some teenagers get stupid and start selling and taking drugs. Most of the time it involves smoking, chewing, or drinking. This can be prevented by having police patrol parks. Or, possibly the best way is to have parents care enough about their kids to go with them to make sure nothing bad or abstract happens. Some parents do go with their kids but obviously not enough. –6th grade male, White

I also wish there was a law that stated that all city parks must be fenced. To [sic] many children are abducted each day. I know this wouldn't eliminate all abductions but it would help. –6th grade female, White



8th grade male, Hispanic

Summary

It is clear from the data that parks have a wide range of meaning to Oklahomans. There is great value and importance in parks for those who participated in this aspect of the research. We must remain aware that citizens who did not participate in this research also have valid views, and those perceptions may not have been expressed through the artifacts received.

The range of meanings people ascribe to parks is a result of passive viewing, playing in structured and defined spaces, and active engagement in outdoor recreation experiences. People experience parks as part of school grounds, as neighborhood or city play areas, and more natural state parks and federal recreation areas. Parks are settings where lifelong happy memories are made and where life's lessons can be learned.

Oklahomans value parks for the various opportunities available there—from walking on trails, to playing on playgrounds, to learning about natural phenomena, and as a place of personal solace and healing. A wide range of activity levels were reported; some park visitors engaged in canoeing and rock climbing, others fished and hiked, many shared cookouts and games with family and friends; some merely sat and enjoyed being in the park. Clearly, both the natural environment and human connections are important and valued aspects of parks and park experiences.

Chapter 3 – The Voice of the People



As a requirement for the SCORP, it is essential that the public be provided ample opportunity for input into the planning process. In addition to the foregoing discussion of the statewide contest, the investigators on this project chose to provide other structured mechanisms for public input. These efforts are summarized in this chapter.

Outdoor Recreation Rally

Among the recommendations from the 2001 SCORP was the coordination and hosting of a statewide recreation rally in which resource managers from various agencies could meet with representatives of user groups. Such a recreation rally focused on outdoor recreation would provide communication, focus groups, and planning opportunities among those management agencies and the recreation participant.

That goal was achieved March 21, 2007, with the hosting of the 2007 Recreation Rally as a component of this statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan. The rally was held on the campus of Oklahoma State University providing reasonably central accessibility to persons from around the state. Forty-six individuals attended the rally representing federal resource management agencies (10% of participants), state parks and other state agencies (38% of participants), municipal park and recreation agencies (14% of participants), academic personnel allied with outdoor recreation (27% of those in attendance), and private recreation providers (10% of participants). In addition, most of those in attendance were active outdoor recreation participants.

The Rally began with an overview of the SCORP process and an update on on-going activities, including the statewide “What Parks Mean to Me” contest. Break-out discussion sessions were organized around themes suggested from earlier research and from comments provided by leaders in the state. Each rally participant was provided with background information on central themes for discussion. The background information was designed to provide documented information related to each topic so that those in attendance would have a common base for discussion. This information is included in Appendix B. These themes were:

1. Accessibility for people with disabilities
2. Air, water and environmental issues
3. Cultural resources and issues
4. Funding issues
5. Outdoor recreation policies

6. Public domain and property issues
7. Trails and trail use

Note-takers and recorders for each of the discussion groups summarized conversations of participants in the various break-out sessions. In addition, response cards were provided to each participant to solicit additional feedback. From the notes and response cards, the comments were grouped by topics and analyzed by those topics. Further, an overall evaluation of the Recreation Rally was included for those in attendance at the Recreation Rally. The input provided by rally participants is summarized in the following sections by topic.

Accessibility for People with Disabilities

Discussions related to accessibility for persons with disabilities were integrated into other break-out sessions. Three principal conclusions resulted from these integrated conversations.

1. The range and scope of disabilities and numbers of persons with disabilities present in Oklahoma and the broader society was eye-opening to those in attendance. These discussions increased awareness of the intent and requirements of the ADA in terms of physical and social accessibility for all citizens.
2. To date, ADA compliance has primarily focused on structural access for people with mobility limitations and the progress that has been made in that area. Additional work and attention is required to focus on program and facility access issues related to mobility impairment as well as sensory challenges (vision and hearing impairments).
3. Professionals in recreation, park resources and leisure services must become more aware of the diverse disability conditions as well as the types of reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities. Awareness of the types of technical assistance available to resource managers is also an area to be further addressed.

Air, Water and Environmental Issues

Those in attendance at the Recreation Rally indicated there was a great need to develop cooperative partnerships among governmental agencies at all levels, but that those partnerships were not occurring at present. In fact, a significant portion of the discussion focused on getting acquainted with the management purposes and practices from the varying agencies present. There was consensus from those in attendance on the following items:

1. Water is a major, if not the major, attraction for outdoor recreation in Oklahoma. Lakes and rivers are inadequately protected at present as indicated by reduced water quality.
2. Young people in Oklahoma unfortunately fit the national discussion related to topics such as “Last Child in the Woods” (Louv, 2005) and “No child left inside.” Outdoor recreation participation by youth in Oklahoma appears to be declining. However, hunting and fishing are part of the history and culture of Oklahoma and youth are engaged in these activities.

3. Invasive species (e.g., Eastern red cedar, zebra mussels) are an increasing problem and management efforts must be implemented to minimize negative impacts.
4. Air, water and environmental quality have deteriorated in Oklahoma to a point where those factors are now affecting recreation. Environmental quality is now a health issue, a recreation issue, and occasionally an economic issue because of its relationship to tourism.
5. The sale of water from southeastern Oklahoma lakes to Texas or any other buyer outside of Oklahoma was a cause for concern now and into the future.

Cultural Resources and Issues

Demographic changes in the population of Oklahoma have affected visitation patterns and expectations in recreation experiences at all levels. In particular, the growth of identifiable Hispanic communities and their use of public recreation resources has stimulated the need for large gathering areas and bilingual signs. Native American culture is a major tourism attraction for Oklahoma, but there is residual resentment among some tribal members for the “taking” of what once was Indian land and culture.

Those in attendance at the Recreation Rally concluded the following related to cultural resources and associated issues.

1. Parks are neutral “turf” that can become settings of communication to cross cultural barriers.
2. Self segregation is occurring and probably will continue to occur because of variation in expectations of and purposes for park visitation.
3. Communication and education are the keys to developing a more progressive attitude and response to cultural diversity in Oklahoma.
4. Improving that communication will require bilingual signs, bilingual employees, and improved interpretive programs (e.g., natural, cultural, social, and historical) through all agencies.

Funding Issues

Funding for outdoor recreation resources and services has been a topic included in each SCORP over the years. In general, Oklahoma has followed a pattern of limited use of fees for services at the municipal and state levels. As a result, Oklahoma residents have concluded that these resources and services are included in their tax payments or that provision of such resources and services do not cost anything for delivery. Those attending the Recreation Rally agreed on the following:

1. The public expects to pay something for quality service.
2. Federal agencies have collected fees, which then go into the general fund, and there has been no apparent negative impact on users.

3. When implemented, fees can be problematic (i.e., negative public perceptions, experiences of “push-back”) for the initial few years, until the public adjusts to them.
4. Reduced fees for special user groups (e.g., senior citizen discounts) are problematic in terms of management and equitable application.
5. It is important to be aware of legal constraints when addressing fees and charges. For example, LWCF funded projects cannot be restricted by gate fees.
6. Privatization of once-public resources automatically excludes certain sectors of society. It appears that crime and other depreciative behaviors increase with privatization.
7. The sale of public recreation properties is not a solution to funding concerns.
8. Solutions appear to include public/private partnerships, sponsorships, naming rights, and non-profit advocacy groups.

Outdoor Recreation Policies

Many of the topics related to policies in outdoor recreation settings were integrated into discussions in other break-out sessions, or those other topics were introduced into the discussions on policy. The summary of the discussion related to policies focused on the following points.

1. Recreation management agencies in Oklahoma have tended to maximize development leading to over-concentration of use in certain areas and conflicting use in many settings.
2. Demand for outdoor recreation exceeds the available supply at least twice a year in most locations in Oklahoma. This tends to occur on summer holidays and may occur on additional summer weekends in specific locations.
3. Privatization of outdoor recreation resources will reduce the opportunity for recreation participation by many Oklahomans.
4. Few communities in Oklahoma have land dedication ordinances or dedicated funding sources for recreation provision.
5. The State of Oklahoma took a major step forward in dedication of a portion of the state sales tax for capital improvement in Oklahoma State Parks in 2005.
6. Decision-making regarding recreation, cultural and historic resources cannot be revenue driven. Parks were designed for community, interaction with nature, and to produce memories that cannot be linked to economics.

Public Domain and Property Issues

As with the previous topic, discussions related to public domain and property issues tended to be intertwined with topics from some of the other break-out sessions. Those topics that were distinctly identified with public domain and property included the following.

1. There is considerable evidence that parks increase property values for surrounding private properties.
2. Oklahoma is extremely limited in available public land for hunting thereby reducing the opportunity for many to participate in this activity. The same situation may influence people fishing on particular smaller bodies of water in Oklahoma.
3. Several cities perceive the present situation to be one of “too much property for available funds.” As a consequence, management in these settings believes they have too much to maintain and operate, resulting in inefficiencies and reduced effectiveness. Some city leaders are choosing to divest their government of some of this property.
4. By contrast, other representatives believed there was a need to change the mindset that public properties must be developed. These representatives believed there was great value in open green space and that providing this type of resource is a responsibility of government.

Trails and Trail Use

Representatives from the Oklahoma Trails Advisory Council were present for the Recreation Rally, as were managers of resources that include trails and trail users. The discussion in these break-out sessions yielded a higher volume of input than that from any of the other sessions. Conclusions reached by these participants at the Recreation Rally included the following.

1. Oklahoma is not a walker-friendly or bicycle-friendly state.
2. Previous research and on-going local input indicates that trails are the #1 most-highly desired outdoor resource among Oklahoma citizens. Paved trails tend to be used while unpaved trails receive little use, little attention, and tend to deteriorate.
3. Some conflict in use is beginning to occur on Oklahoma trails between bikers and walkers, hunters and equestrian riders, and other special interest groups.
4. The Executive Order against state agency involvement in rail-to-trail conversion needs to be revisited. That Order has been in place for almost two decades and has seriously limited development of longer connective trails.
5. Several cities have plans to develop loop trails with connectors into neighborhoods. These trails are eligible for grant assistance and promote multiple uses. However, Oklahoma needs connector trails from community to community.
6. Trails are important components of healthy living and healthy communities in Oklahoma, but there are social impediments to consider. These include cultural issues related to trails, the NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) mentality, perceptions of trails as security problems, and reduction in number of children who ride bicycles.
7. Oklahoma needs to improve its educational effort related to trails. These efforts should include trail etiquette, conflict management, volunteer management and trail adoption, and interpretive programming. Dogs and dog waste are an

increasing concern on most trails and should be addressed through educational programs.

Overall Evaluation of the Recreation Rally

Participants at the Recreation Rally were encouraged to complete an evaluation at the completion of the day's events. All those in attendance rated the SCORP as being somewhat or extremely important to their organization and the delivery of services through that organization. Since this rally was the first such event held in more than a decade, the organizers were interested in how frequently a statewide recreation rally should be scheduled. Forty-seven percent of respondents believed the event should be annual, while an additional 29% believed the rally should occur every two years.

In review of the Recreation Rally, participants indicated the greatest value of the experience was learning of shared issues, concerns, and solutions from other professionals in the state. Secondly, participants identified a range of specific knowledge that they acquired during the one day event.

Participants were asked to identify the major issues they believe are facing outdoor recreation professionals in Oklahoma. Among those in attendance, the top four issues identified were: (1) funding concerns, (2) cultural issues, (3) safety and accessibility, and (4) environmental concerns.

Related Research and Activity Since 2002

State Park Visitor Study

In 2002 following the completion of the prior generation of statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plans, the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department contracted a park visitor research study with Oklahoma State University (Caneday and Jordan, 2003). The objectives of that research were to:

1. Develop a process for collecting valid and reliable data from Oklahoma State Park visitors and managers,
2. Develop information sources needed to support that process; and
3. Assist Oklahoma recreation providers in identifying and assessing current and future recreation opportunities within Oklahoma State Parks.

The field research was conducted from May 2002 through May 2003 and utilized a modified Dillman Total Design Method for face-to-face surveys. Researchers visited all state parks at least six times during the study period and interviewed visitors about their views of the Oklahoma State Parks. Interviews were conducted with day visitors, campers, cabin guests and lodge guests.

A sampling error of plus/minus 3% was utilized and interviews were secured from 3,414 park visitors. Data were examined for all visitors (as an aggregate) and by visitor type—day users, campers, cabin guests and lodge guests. Additional analyses investigated differences between types of visitors, and between visitors at different types of parks

(parks providing basic services, parks with cabins, and resort parks). In addition, based on the presence of significant surface water, parks were categorized as being land-oriented or lake-oriented.

Investigators found that most visitors to Oklahoma State Parks visit a state park twice a year. They are usually in small family units and visit the park to rest and relax, to be with friends and family, and because the park is close to home. Visitors do not favor park entrance fees and believe that future priorities for the State Park system should focus on preserving the natural resources.

Of those who were interviewed, 1,505 were day visitors, 1,759 were campers, 112 were cabin guests and 42 were lodge guests. As might be expected, lodge guests traveled the farthest to visit the park and spent the most money during their trip. They were followed by cabin guests, campers and day visitors in terms of distance traveled and trip expenditures. The research showed that overall, visitors to Oklahoma State Parks believe most facilities and amenities in the parks are important, and they are satisfied with the current provision of those amenities.

Analyses revealed differences on several survey items among types of users based on types of parks, and whether or not there was significant surface water at the park. Based on the results, the following conclusions were drawn and recommendations for changes made.

Conclusions of the 2002 – 2003 State Park Visitor Study
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The findings of this study were valid and reliable at the 95% level of confidence for the aggregate park visitor, for the day visitor and for the camper.2. Oklahoma state park visitors tend to be repeat visitors, highly familiar with their chosen park, and they tend to be “weekend” visitors.3. Day visitors tend to use Oklahoma state parks as “local” parks, traveling relatively short distances and having established a sense of local ownership for the park.4. Campers in Oklahoma state parks have found their preferred parks, making those selections based upon facilities, services, activities and environmental features.5. Cabin guests tended to be younger than campers, yet use the parks in much the same way that campers do; they were the most satisfied customers in the study.6. Lodge guests in Oklahoma’s resort parks were the youngest of the visitors who used overnight accommodations in the parks and were noticeably less involved in park-based activities.7. Numerous visitors to Oklahoma state parks could not properly distinguish properties that were state parks from properties that were managed by other agencies.8. Oklahoma state parks serve various purposes for various visitors. |
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9. Recreation visits to Oklahoma state parks are relatively expensive experiences based on the expenditure reports from respondents.
10. Oklahoma state park visitors are satisfied. This raises questions as to their level of expectation of professional standards in provision of service.

The principal investigators recommended that Oklahoma State Parks –

1. Review its mission and vision.
2. Develop a distinctive “branding” of the parks and park system to distinguish a state park from other recreation properties.
3. Review their policies and enforcement of those policies with particular emphasis on those behaviors that detract from the “park” environment.
4. Review the importance of various components of a recreation experience – whether as a part of the natural environment or a ‘built’ environment.
5. Reconsider their role in education and interpretive programming.

A secondary element of this study was to determine how well the perceptions of park personnel matched those of visitors. To permit direct comparative analysis between the perceptions of visitors and those of park staff, the instrument utilized in this aspect of the research included appropriate items from the Visitor Assessment.

Three-hundred-fifty State Park personnel chose to participate in the survey. They were directed to respond to the survey as they believed a visitor to their respective park would respond. Items asked about motivations for visits to parks; future priorities for the State Parks; and importance of, and satisfaction with, various amenities found in the parks. Of the park staff who responded to this survey, 15.7% were employed as a park manager or an assistant, 11.4% were employed as rangers and 65.4% were employed by Oklahoma State Parks in some other category. Approximately 20% of the respondents had 20 or more years of service with OTRD, while 41% of the respondents reported five or fewer years of employment with the department.

Overall, park management was quite accurate in their understanding of the actual park activities of visitors and their reasons for park visitation. Differences existed, however, in perceived and actual visitor priorities for State Parks. Staff believed that visitors had a stronger economic orientation than did visitors actually expressed.

In terms of general park amenities, management overrated the importance and satisfaction of an airport, golf course, lodge and convenience store in state parks. Depending on the type of visitor (day visitor, camper, cabin or lodge guest), staff either overrated or underrated the importance and satisfaction of several other amenities. Overall, staff better understood the desires and satisfaction of day visitors and campers than other types of users. Analysis revealed some differences in understanding of visitors based on type of park at which personnel worked.

Finally, based on the findings of this research, the investigators offered conclusions and made recommendations for future action. These conclusions and recommendations are summarized as follows.

Conclusions of the 2002 – 2003 State Park Visitor Survey (Managers’ portion)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There will be significant turnover among present Oklahoma State Parks’ staff in the next five years (2003 – 2007). 2. Oklahoma State Park personnel tend to be seasoned in both age and years of service. 3. Management’s perspectives on park visitation are dependent upon the category of park at which they are employed. 4. Management personnel tended to rate perception of visitor satisfaction based on their present place of employment. 5. Management personnel better understand day visitors and campers than they do cabin guests and lodge guests. 6. Management personnel showed no discrimination or discernment between importance and satisfaction of various amenities. Everything was important; everything was satisfying from management’s perspective. 7. Oklahoma state parks have operated with a philosophy of “if you build it, they will come.” 8. Management personnel showed a limited perspective on what a “park experience” is or what a state park should be. 9. Management differed from state park visitors in projecting priorities for the future of Oklahoma state parks.
The principal investigators recommended that Oklahoma State Parks:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Embark on a serious discussion of the vision and mission. 2. Review the concept of “park office”. 3. Develop a policy to routinely check parks for their level of preparedness to host recreational visitors, particularly on high usage dates (i.e. holidays and weekends). 4. Support one or more professional staff members from OTRD to attend the National Playground Safety Institute and become certified inspectors. 5. Initiate a limb management program or properly execute the present program in every park. 6. Strictly enforce “Pets must be kept on a leash”: begin that enforcement with strict control of pets owned by management personnel. 7. Review their practices related to location of designated swimming areas and boating areas, and that management review its role in prevention of submersion injuries and drowning in the context of a recreation experience in an Oklahoma

state park.

8. Limit the two-week maximum continuous occupancy and enforce the policy equally and equitably.
9. Review and modify the reservation policies and practices associated with cabins and lodges.
10. Review the 1992 National Park Service report and apply several of the recommendations related to professionalism of personnel.
11. Reconsider the quality of the recreation experience provided and the effect of human activity on the environment.
12. Initiate a planning process with the goal of having a master plan for each park, a management plan for each park, and a management plan for the Division.

Since the completion of this research effort, several of the recommendations have been implemented by the Division of State Parks and by the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, more broadly. Among these recommendations that have been implemented are branding of Oklahoma State Parks for marketing purposes, establishment of a dedicated funding source through a portion of the statewide sales tax, and initiation of resource management plans for individual parks. This study and the resulting changes provide evidence that the voices of the people of Oklahoma and visitors to Oklahoma's state parks have been heeded by management.

Evaluation of Oklahoma State Parks

Upon completion of the statewide assessment of visitors to Oklahoma State Parks, the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department initiated an effort to benchmark its performance. This benchmarking effort was contracted to Oklahoma State University in association with Dornbusch Associates and included four phases. This project resulted in several reports (Caneday, Jordan, et. al., 2003). The specific phases included: (1) the development of a Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping system for public and private outdoor recreation facilities statewide; (2) a statewide needs assessment that encompassed a telephone survey of Oklahoma residents, an on-line survey for park visitors, and an array of focus groups in population centers around the state; (3) the benchmarking study utilizing other state park systems as similar and dissimilar partners for comparison; and (4) a preferred future for Oklahoma State Parks.

As mentioned earlier, the GIS mapping system project (Phase 1) continues to be refined. The data and mapping capabilities of that system, however, provided a great deal of background information for this SCORP, as well as serving other on-going projects and purposes. That mapping system is not yet accessible to the public.

In phase two of this project, 2013 telephone calls to Oklahoma residents seeking input on visitation patterns and management preferences were completed. An additional 651 respondents provided input to similar issues through an on-line survey. Finally, eight focus groups were scheduled and hosted at population centers around the state. These

efforts provided extensive opportunity for public input regarding parks, recreation experiences, and future plans for the state.

Primary conclusions from the telephone, on-line and focus group activities included:

- 50% of Oklahomans visit one or more state parks each year, but fewer than 20% visit one of the state lodges in any given year.
- Oklahomans are confused as to which properties are state parks and which properties are managed by other agencies.
- Visitors self-select specific properties, activities and associated peers for their outdoor recreation experiences. As a result, racial and ethnic differences are apparent in use of several properties.

The third phase of this project followed a detailed, eight-step benchmarking process that included identification of performance measures to be assessed, determination of benchmarking partners, and the benchmarking assessment. A Delphi panel determined the key benchmarking factors for state parks to be (1) financial operations, (2) operations of concessions, (3) marketing and public contact, (4) maintenance of existing properties, (5) planning, (6) public involvement and service to visitors, (7) personnel qualifications, training and development, and (8) stewardship of properties and resources.

Based on data provided through the Annual Information Exchange (AIX) of the National Association of State Park Directors, the principal investigators conducted a K-means cluster analysis to determine typology of state parks. A seven-cluster solution showed that Oklahoma was among those state park systems that were “developed and staffed for tourism.” Other similar state park systems included Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

Benchmarking partners were then selected from among all fifty possible partners. Those similar partners selected for benchmarking were Indiana and Georgia. The dissimilar systems selected for benchmarking were Arkansas, Missouri, North Carolina, and Colorado.

A summary of the benchmarking of the Oklahoma State Park system on the key factors resulted in the following findings.

1. Oklahoma was significantly below the benchmarking partners in capital expenditure and those available funds came from limited sources.
2. Oklahoma utilized a lower rate of return of gross revenues from concessionaires than that demonstrated by the benchmarking partners. In addition, Oklahoma was one of two systems that did not identify specific performance measures for contractors of concessions.
3. Oklahoma operated marketing and public information systems similar to three of the benchmarking partners, but was significantly under-staffed and under-programmed in interpretive programming within the parks.

4. Oklahoma lacked a maintenance plan for each property and did not utilize national or industry standards for maintenance practices.
5. Oklahoma lacked a system-wide master plan and individual master plans for state parks. All the benchmarking partners had some components of master plans established within their respective systems.
6. Oklahoma scored well in public involvement and constituent understanding, due in large part to the dedication to seek input from visitors and residents.
7. Oklahoma, Georgia, and Indiana showed a higher level of staffing per property than did other state park systems, a fact that reflected their classification as parks 'staffed and developed for tourism'. Oklahoma averaged one interpretive professional for five parks while other systems averaged at least one interpreter per park; this was the most glaring deficit noted in staffing.
8. Oklahoma was the only benchmarked system that did not utilize a resource management model for decisions. In addition, Oklahoma was the only system that did not utilize a monitoring process to determine the level of care necessary to protect resources.

The final step in this project, phase four, established a plan of action for Oklahoma State Parks. Numerous recommendations were provided for the state park system and for the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department. Several of these recommendations have received positive action and have been implemented since 2004.

Carrying Capacity of Oklahoma's Sand Dune Parks

One of the recommendations from the previous benchmarking study was the need to implement a resource management model in Oklahoma parks and to develop a monitoring process for care of resources. As a pilot project, Oklahoma State Parks requested a study on the carrying capacity of Oklahoma's sand dune parks (Caneday and Farris, 2005). Two premier sand dune parks in Oklahoma – Beaver Dunes and Little Sahara – cater to off-road motorized activities. Each presents its own set of management issues. Little Sahara, in particular, receives high levels of visitation with traditional and non-traditional recreation associated with the dominant off-road usage.

This project applied the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) model (National Park Service) to management of these unique ecosystems. VERP provides a methodology for assessment of current use, projection of preferred future expectations, development of indicators for specific variables, and implementation of a monitoring plan.

While the details of that project are too extensive for inclusion in this summary, the project provided the first application of a recommended resource management model with a monitoring plan for Oklahoma State Parks. As a result, this project demonstrates the application of specific recommendations from prior research and inclusion of public input into the management process.

Lake Murray

In the spring 2006, the Ardmore Economic Development Authority and the Oklahoma Tourism Commission began discussions of an agreement for private construction on a portion of Lake Murray State Park. Since this action would affect a historically important portion of one of Oklahoma's original and largest state parks, OTRD sought public input on the decision related to that action (Jordan, Caneday, and Choi, 2006).

Through a computer-assisted telephone survey, 503 individuals who lived within a 30-mile radius of Lake Murray were contacted and interviewed. The individuals in this geographic region reported mixed levels of education (one-third have a high school degree or less), and in general, do not stay at Oklahoma state park lodges. Those who had stayed at the lodge at Lake Murray State Park were generally very satisfied with the maintenance and operation of the lodge and felt as though they received a fair vacation value.

While many survey participants had no opinion about the ownership of the state park lodges, one-half believed that the state should retain ownership and operation of the lodges. Further, if state park land or lodges were to be sold or leased to a private entity, respondents overwhelmingly believed that the state should direct or require that entity to offer comparable facilities.

Lastly, survey respondents generally believed that lodges should provide revenue for the state park system, and that the purpose of state parks is to provide inexpensive outdoor recreation for Oklahomans. No meaningful comparisons were found among the other survey items.

Lake Texoma

On a related note to the events occurring at Lake Murray State Park and at approximately the same time, the Oklahoma Tourism Commission was working with the Commissioners of the Land Office to transfer 192 acres of Lake Texoma State Park from one agency to the other. The intent of this transfer was to permit the Commissioners of the Land Office to solicit a company to develop the property to allow for the lease or sale of the land (Packham, 2005). An additional 558 acres of adjoining lakefront property was sold by the Army Corps of Engineers to supplement the 192 acre transfer. The state park property that was included in this transfer surrounded the Lake Texoma Lodge, duplicating in many ways the potential for private development on what was once public recreation property. In the Lake Texoma situation, title ownership to the property would transfer the land from public property to private ownership.

By March 2006 a private development deal was disclosed (Price, 2006) with plans for a multi-million dollar project to include a new resort, conference center and cottages, and modification of the existing Chickasaw Pointe Golf Course. The sale agreement was project to save OTRD about \$250,000 in operating expenses annually, while sale proceeds would be distributed to state schools through the Commissioners of the Land Office. By May 2006 the privatization of the Lake Texoma state lodge and the development deal had been canceled (Packham, 2006).

Efforts continued as the Commission attempted to find private buyers for what once were public recreation properties. Finally, in November 2006 a development company owned by Oklahoma energy partners purchased the Lake Texoma Lodge and surrounding property with the intent of developing a convention center, luxury homes and family entertainment attractions (Talley, 2006). The new owners, Pointe Vista Development, anticipated an early 2007 demolition of the existing lodge and other surrounding buildings, to be followed by construction of the new facilities. As of the date of preparation of this SCORP, that demolition and development had not occurred.

Citizen response to this sale of public domain varied greatly. Comments included questions as to the best interests of state government to be involved in operating resorts. Others suggested that the proceeds from the sale should be used to upgrade camping facilities or other outdoor recreation properties rather than being invested in public schools. Still others expressed serious concerns about the state selling property to the highest bidder that had been acquired (in the public's mind) through eminent domain. The tone of these expressions was that public lands were intended to be shared by and among the public for appropriate uses, not private development.

Controversy related to this development (particularly related to the impact on capacity of Catfish Bay to support boat slips) continued into the summer 2007 (Bisbee, 2007). In a presentation to the Oklahoma Tourism Commission, Pointe Vista development plans were described as shoreline condominiums, a convention center, a water park and a four-star hotel. The controversy surrounded a request for a marina with 800 boat slips that would potentially encroach on the existing business of Catfish Bay Marina. Catfish Bay Marina is a concession operating on leased property within the boundaries of the state park.

The concerns expressed by the public and existing business owners mirrored those raised in earlier research and in the topics discussed at the Recreation Rally. Oklahoma has limited public domain and selling existing public domain to private investors will reduce outdoor recreation opportunities for specific segments of society.

Illinois River and Lake Tenkiller

Outdoor recreation in Oklahoma often includes a float trip on the Illinois River, one of the state's designated scenic rivers. The Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission manages the Illinois River above Lake Tenkiller, the Baron Fork Creek, Lee Creek, Little Lee Creek, Flint Creek, and the Upper Mountain Fork River as the designated scenic rivers in Oklahoma. The Illinois River has become the "people's river" as a popular float stream with approximately 350,000 visitors annually.

During the period since 2002, Oklahoma and Arkansas have been involved in a lawsuit over water quality in the Illinois River, specifically focused on the rapid buildup of phosphorus attributed to litter from the chicken industry in Arkansas (Money, 2002). As a result of the increased load of phosphorus, scientists have generally agreed that the water quality in the Illinois River and Lake Tenkiller has been "spiraling downward."

Ultimately the dispute resulted in lawsuits between Oklahoma, Arkansas, and the poultry industry. Oklahoma is basing its legal claim on a 1992 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that upstream states are subject to downriver state's water quality regulations (Bellamy, 2003).

At present Oklahoma has established a phosphorus standard of 0.037 milligrams per liter of water flowing into Oklahoma from Arkansas on the Illinois River. Arkansas authorities do not believe they can achieve that level (U.S. Water News Online, 2003). Arkansas officials believe this standard would create an economic hardship for poultry companies (Money), while Oklahoma officials believe this standard is essential to the economy in the Illinois River corridor and the health of that environment (U.S. Water News Online, 2002).

By 2006, the Oklahoma-Arkansas dispute had become an example of a national trend as states and localities began suing polluters outside their jurisdiction in efforts to "curb air and water contamination that respects no borders" (Eilperin, 2006). Protecting public health and the environment had garnered the attention of several states' attorneys general who were more aggressive in pursuing such cases.

For Oklahoma, protection of the Illinois River corridor and Lake Tenkiller is critical to outdoor recreation – floating, swimming, fishing, sightseeing, boating, SCUBA – and public health in the watershed. With an estimated economic impact of \$42 million, recreation and related tourism activities are also crucial to the economic health of the area.

Grand Lake

As one of the premier recreational lakes in Oklahoma, Grand Lake of the Cherokees is licensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to the Grand River Dam Authority (GRDA) for operations. During the past five years there have been a number of significant events surrounding the operation of Grand Lake. Among the issues being addressed are expansion and development of marinas to serve an increasing population of residents and recreational visitors. Further, maintenance and construction on equipment at the Salina Pumped Storage Project required a draw-down on lake levels for Grand Lake and Lake Hudson early in 2006. This draw-down adversely affected local residents and recreation activities.

FERC has provided several opportunities for public response and input into management under the license for operation of Grand Lake. This included a large contingent of FERC representatives who hosted a meeting in Miami (OK) in May 2006 with area residents and representatives of state agencies.

In addition, GRDA has contracted with Kleinschmidt Associates for preparation of a shoreline management plan based upon a carrying capacity study and a recreation management plan. Each of these components provides documentation essential to the re-licensing of GRDA as the managing authority for Grand Lake. At the time of preparation of this SCORP these documents were in varying draft stages (GRDA 2006, 2007). Each

of these components provided opportunity for public input into planning for a premier recreational lake in Oklahoma.

These studies estimate the current recreational use of Grand Lake to be four million recreation days annually and 1.5 million recreation nights. A recreation day or night is defined as recreation activity within the project boundaries by one person for any period of time during one 24-hour day. In addition, GRDA projects demand for recreation to be as many as 4.9 million recreation days annually by 2020.

These studies also indicated that the number of fishing tournaments had declined in a five year period, while the number of boats per tournament had increased. Further, boating activity on the south end of the lake is much heavier than on the north end of the lake. A plan for monitoring boating is presented in the GRDA documents.

Grand Lake of the Cherokees is managed differently than most other lakes in Oklahoma in that private property and development extends to the shoreline. However, as public land sales occur on other shorelines, the issues and concerns present at Grand Lake will become increasingly present in other locations.

Sale of Oklahoma Water to Out-of-State Buyers

The 2001 SCORP presented evidence of the limnetic drive in humans to be around water for recreation, for quality of life, for aesthetics, and for other purposes. In addition to the traditional uses of surface water for swimming, fishing, and boating, Oklahoma's lakes and rivers are major sources of economic potential through tourism and other commercial purposes. For at least a decade, Oklahoma has been discussing the possible sale of a portion of that water resource to Texas. That sale of surface waters from southeastern Oklahoma has been motivated, at least in part, by construction of Sardis Reservoir by the Oklahoma Water Resources Board (OWRB) without specific authorization of the Oklahoma legislature (Hale, 2002). As a result, OWRB owes the Army Corps of Engineers for that construction and has been in arrears in payment since 1997 (Oklahoma State Senate, 2002).

In the ensuing years there were a number of events associated with the possible water sale:

- Late in the legislative session of 2002, Senate Bill 1410 established a three-year moratorium on out-of-state sales of Oklahoma water.
- HCR 1066 was enacted in 1999 for the preparation of the Kiamichi River Basin Water Resources Development Plan involving the Oklahoma Water Resources Board working with the Choctaw and Chickasaw Tribal Nations. The completed plan recommended that the State develop a formal compact with the Choctaw and Chickasaw Tribal Nations and gather public comments about any plan to transfer water out of the Kiamichi River basin.
- HCR 1109 was adopted in 2000 directing the OWRB to coordinate with the Corps of Engineers regarding the study of southeast Oklahoma's water resources and bringing water resources development proposals to the State Legislature.

- The State/Tribal Water Compact was drafted and made public in the early part of 2002 with a binding agreement between the State and the two tribal nations regarding water rights administration, water quality standards administration, and economic development.
- Two proposals were considered prior to the moratorium of water sale: one from North Texas Water Agency (NTWA) and the other one from Oklahoma City Water Utilities Trust (OCWUT).

With extensions and modifications to the legislation, the moratorium on water sales out-of-state was extended to November 2009. That has now resulted in a lawsuit against Oklahoma on behalf of the Tarrant Regional Water District serving the Fort Worth (TX) area (Price, 2007). A spokesperson for the water district has indicated that the purchase of water would not affect lake levels. The intent would be to purchase and utilize water exiting the state of Oklahoma prior to flow into the Red River. The water permit applications total 460,000 acre feet of water per year, or about one-ninth of the discharge from the Kiamichi River, Cache Creek and Beaver Creek (Price, 2007).

Contrasting views have been expressed by several individuals and organizations. For example, the Sierra Club differs in interpretation on the amount of water included in the sale and the number and locations of the streams that would be utilized (Hale). The primary concerns expressed by those in disagreement with the proposed water sale are: (1) possible adverse effects on the biodiversity in southeastern Oklahoma; (2) possible adverse effects on threatened and endangered species that rely on natural processes and are present in the streams; (3) construction of up to 17 new dams and reservoirs; (4) the likely reduction in water quality across southeastern Oklahoma; and (5) failure to complete an environmental impact study.

These water concerns were raised by citizens in various research efforts during the past five years. In addition, the topic was addressed during the Recreation Rally held to gather information for this SCORP. As a result, the principal investigators acknowledge that water concerns are a serious topic for outdoor recreation planning.

Surface Water and Recreation in Oklahoma

Oklahoma has 23 major groundwater basins underlying the surface of the state. This groundwater is the dominant source of water for the western half of the state. In addition, throughout the state, Oklahoma has more than 78,000 miles of rivers and streams with an estimated 11,611 miles of shoreline. This shoreline distance is just slightly less than the estimated combined coastline of the Atlantic, Gulf, Pacific, and Arctic coasts of the United States (12,383 miles). As a result, surface water and its accompanying shoreline is an important resource for Oklahoma and essential to many aspects of outdoor recreation.

Currently recognized beneficial uses for some or all of the waters in Oklahoma include public and private water supply, agriculture, hydropower, municipal and industrial processes and cooling water, navigation, fish and wildlife propagation, primary body contact recreation, secondary body contact recreation, and aesthetics (OWRB). Although recreation may rely on several of these beneficial uses, it is directly related to the latter

five. Primary body contact recreation includes swimming and diving, while secondary body contact recreation includes boating and fishing.

Table 9 – Surface Water in Oklahoma

Number of major watershed basins	7
Total number of river and stream miles	78,778
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of perennial river and stream miles • Number of intermittent stream miles • Number of canals or ditches • Number of river border miles 	<p>22,386</p> <p>55,413</p> <p>175</p> <p>517</p>
Total number of lakes/reservoirs/playa/ponds	224,948
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of large lakes • Number of public & private lakes • Number of watershed protection lakes • Number of playa lakes (wet season only) • Number of oxbow lakes (10 acres or more) • Number of farm ponds 	<p>34</p> <p>2,303</p> <p>1,964</p> <p>585</p> <p>62</p> <p>220,000</p>
Total number of lakes/reservoirs/playa/ponds (acres)	1,041,884
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of large lakes (acres) • Number of public & private lakes (acres) • Number of watershed protection lakes (acres) • Number of playa lakes (acres) • Number of oxbow lakes (acres) • Number of farm ponds (acres) 	<p>555,450</p> <p>89,836</p> <p>54,261</p> <p>9,572</p> <p>2,765</p> <p>330,000</p>
Total number of freshwater wetland (acres)	733,895

Source: Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, 2004

Oklahoma’s Water Quality Standards are established under statutory authority of the OWRB under 82 O.S. § 1085.30. It is the intent of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board to assign as many beneficial uses as are attainable. For water bodies with quality standards that exceed those required to protect beneficial uses (e.g. Scenic Rivers, some lakes, and critical habitat for endangered species) the Water Quality Standards include an anti-degradation policy statement. The OWRB then works with the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in monitoring those standards. DEQ develops draft National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for the control and abatement of municipal and industrial pollution and participates in monitoring and permit compliance.

In order to determine attainment of Primary Body Contact Recreation (PBCR) beneficial use, samples must be taken at a point of a drinking water intake from a body of surface water. Detailed standards are established for fecal coliform, *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), and Enterococci, in addition to other factors. These standards include specifics related to dates of sampling, number of samples, number of colonies per milliliter, and other details. Sampling must occur during the principal recreation period from May 1 through September 30. Attainment for the Secondary Body Contact Recreation (SBCR) beneficial

use is identical in methodology to that for PBCR, but uses five times the PBCR numerical criteria and screening levels (ODEQ, 2004).

Public Health and Outdoor Recreation in Oklahoma

At the time of the preparation of the 2001 SCORP, a newly identified exotic disease had made its appearance on the east coast of the United States. West Nile virus had been found in dead birds in the northeast. As authors of the SCORP, the principal investigators contacted the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, regarding the rate of advancement of West Nile virus. Upon receiving assurances that it would take more than five years for the virus to reach the Mississippi flyway, West Nile virus was not included in the 2001 SCORP. Unfortunately by the summer of 2002, West Nile virus was affecting birds, horses and humans in Oklahoma.

The speed at which some exotic diseases can move has surprised the health community. Equally surprising is the lack of knowledge regarding many of these public health concerns for participants in outdoor recreation.

Public health concerns were reported in the 2001 SCORP and were separated into two broad categories: (1) accidents and injuries, and (2) environmental hazards. Among the accidents and injuries that occur in outdoor recreation involvement in Oklahoma are drowning, submersion injuries, boating accidents, traumatic brain injuries (TBI), and spinal cord injuries. The environmental hazards encompassed such concerns as amoebic meningitis, giardia (Beaver fever), fecal coliform, E. coli, cryptosporidium, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Lyme disease, Tularemia, European milfoil and zebra mussels. Some of these are extremely serious for human health; some are extremely serious for the health of the ecosystem.

As indicated in the previous discussions, considerable attention has been focused on phosphorus and nitrogen loading in the Illinois River and Lake Tenkiller. Other lakes, Lake Wister for example, are already over-loaded with the same nutrients and exhibit the characteristics of a eutrophic state. These characteristics include nutrient rich waters that appear dark or green in color and support high levels of plant life or algae blooms. Eutrophic waters and hyper-eutrophic waters are undesirable for most outdoor recreation and may include some life forms that are hazardous for Primary Body Contact Recreation.

Probably the public health issue that has received the greatest focus of concern in recent years has been obesity and lack of physical activity among Oklahomans. Recent statistics from the Oklahoma State Board of Health (2006) indicate very sobering facts for the present and dire predictions for the future. Several of these statistics are related to the earlier discussion of disabling conditions present in society.

- 60% of adult Oklahomans are overweight;
- 30% of Oklahomans over the age of 20 are obese;
- 16% of Oklahomans under the age of 20 are obese;

- 30% of Oklahomans report having high blood pressure;
- 10% of Oklahomans have some form of diabetes;
- A higher percentage of Oklahomans report no physical activity within the past month than is true nationwide.

The solutions recommended by the State Board of Health detail several recreational activities: “walk, cycle, jog, skate, play, dance, and swim.” A specific suggestion is for communities to develop walking trails in and around public outdoor recreation areas.

Outdoor Recreation Personalities

The National Recreation Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE, 2007) provides a national perspective on trends related to human interaction with the natural and modified environments. In particular, this study projected expectations for the 21st century related to outdoor recreation demand (Cordell, 2004). One of the more intriguing projections is the presentation of eight personality types represented among the population related to outdoor recreation.

Data on participation for over 42,000 respondents to the NSRE were analyzed using cluster analysis. This statistical process classified respondents into eight distinct groups, distinguishable by the number and type of activities they favor. While this is based on national data, it is clear that Oklahomans represent similar patterns. These eight identifiable personalities are:

1. The Inactives (23.9% of the population)
 - a. The least outdoor active segment of the American society – almost one quarter of the population
 - b. Disproportionately more females; more Black and Hispanic members; older, with lower incomes; more of foreign-born origin
 - c. Walking is the only identifiable outdoor activity in which these individuals engage; family gatherings are a second type of involvement
2. The Passives (15.0%)
 - a. Most sight-see, drive for pleasure, walk for pleasure, attend outdoor family gatherings, and picnic
 - b. Relatively high proportions of females, Blacks, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and people 65 years of age and older
3. The Non-consumptive Moderates (11.7%)
 - a. Activities include visiting a beach and swimming in natural waters, surfing, downhill skiing, snowboarding, visiting nature centers, mountain biking, snorkeling, picnicking, saltwater fishing, attending family gatherings, camping in developed areas, visiting historic sites, walking, sailing, visiting prehistoric sites, and making use of water-parks

- b. The only preferred consumptive activity is saltwater fishing; all other activities are non-consumptive in nature
 - c. Equally male and female; disproportionately Asian/Pacific Islanders and Hispanics; younger than the general population, with moderate incomes; more urban than the general population; more likely to be foreign born relative to other groups
 - d. Disproportionately large percentage live in New England, Middle Atlantic, South Atlantic, and Pacific states
4. The Nature Lovers (12.5%)
- a. Preferred activities include viewing/learning activities—especially birding, wildflowers, fish, wildlife, and natural scenery
 - b. Other activities of involvement include walking, picnicking, visiting historic sites, attending family gatherings outdoors, sightseeing, gathering natural products, and driving for pleasure
 - c. Rejected activities include water-based or snow/ice-based recreation, hunting and fishing
 - d. 60% are female; a similar proportion of those over 45 years of age
 - e. More rural than the general population and more likely to come from West North Central states (Minnesota and Dakotas) or the Mountain states
5. The Water Bugs (13.3%)
- a. Distinguishing characteristic is preference for water-based activity: swimming, snorkeling, sailing, motor boating, SCUBA, kayaking, and surfing
 - b. Non-preferred activities include hunting, primitive camping, backpacking, snowmobiling and motorized recreation (unless connected to a boat)
 - c. Two thirds are women and disproportionately White
 - d. Middle aged, upper income, much more U.S.-born, more urban
 - e. Most frequently from New England, Middle Atlantic, Southern Atlantic, and Southern coastal states
6. The Backcountry Actives (8.6%)
- a. Distinguished by high percentages of participation in backpacking, primitive camping, visiting wilderness, day hiking, cross-country skiing – all at a rate 2.5 times that of the general population
 - b. Active in other outdoor recreation activities, except motorized water activity and marine recreation, which are not on the list of favored recreational activities
 - c. More male than female; predominantly White, but includes greater than proportionate representation by Native Americans; U.S.-born, rural, and younger

- d. Disproportionately from the Mountain and Pacific states
7. The Outdoor Avids (7.5%)
- a. Higher than average participation across the entire spectrum of outdoor recreation activities – participate at a rate five times or more than that of the general population
 - b. Most favored activities require skill and physical exertion
 - c. 62% male; 87% White; 80% under 45 years of age, upper income and U.S.-born
 - d. Typically from New England, North Central, and Mountain states
8. The Motorized Consumptives (7.5%)
- a. Distinguished by preference for hunting, fishing, and motorized activities whether on land, water, or snow; distinguished from other outdoor behavior by emphasis on consumptive activity and motorized activity – as opposed to muscle-powered activities
 - b. Dominated by males; 85% White; 60% under age 35 and almost all are U.S.-born; more rural than any other group
 - c. Disproportionately from the Midwest and South

With specific application to Oklahoma, members from each of the personality clusters are clearly present in the state. At least one quarter of Oklahomans are represented in the characteristics of the “Inactives.” Oklahoma is also within the market area for the “Motorized Consumptives” – a fact that may be best characterized by the popularity of hunting, fishing, and off-road vehicle activity in numerous outdoor locations in Oklahoma. The population profile and characteristics would also indicate that Oklahoma is at or above the national percentage in “Water Bugs.”

Parks for the Future

As we prepared this generation of SCORP for Oklahoma, cities and states around the nation identified similar patterns related to planning and development of parks to meet present expectations and future demands. The *Wall Street Journal* stated that “cities are building new parks at a rate not seen for 100 years” (Weinbach, 2007). Parks were once perceived as symbols of democracy, public health, and progressive social planning. Today, parks are perceived as providing health benefits, marketing tools, and economic stimulation. The discussion focuses on one principal question: What is the purpose of a park?

Similarly, park managers and their respective agencies struggle with increasingly diverse demands for parks. The *Washington Post* reported on the need to tailor park services to specialized groups while educating immigrants on rules for park use (Gowen, 2007). As the number of immigrants to the United States increases, cultural clashes in parks have become commonplace. Oklahoma has experienced this recent pattern to a lesser extent

than many large cities, but the need to educate park visitors on rules, behaviors, and use of the park environment is increasing.



Chapter 4 – The Oklahoma Context

This SCORP presents information about the people, the outdoor recreation estate, and issues and concerns related to the breadth of outdoor recreation in the state of Oklahoma. The material found throughout this SCORP is based on nationally reported statistics and information gathered from Oklahoma citizens and resource managers over the past several years. The data collection methods have been broad. Telephone interviews, on-line surveys, mail-in surveys, in-person interviews, focus groups, essays and drawings, and an outdoor recreation rally have all yielded a wealth of information on which this SCORP and other outdoor recreation resource processes have been based.

Further, through these various methodologies we have gathered information from Oklahoma residents of all ages, racial and ethnic backgrounds, income and education levels, some with disabilities, and from both genders. Contributors have come from all regions of the state and have represented various types of user and non-user groups. We have heard from day users, campers, and cabin and lodge guests; hikers, bikers, horseback riders, and all terrain vehicle enthusiasts; boaters, water skiers, anglers, and hunters; and those who want to relax and read a book as well as those who are interested in actively exploring the natural environment. Clearly, the voice of the public has been heard and is captured in this SCORP.

The multiple methods, the time frame of data collection (the past five years), and the regional representation of those involved give us great confidence in the information presented in this SCORP; at the same time, we are aware that more is to be done. A more pointed effort needs to be made to ensure that we respond to all citizen needs; this includes obtaining additional information from those who are commonly underserved by outdoor recreation providers. These individuals include people with disabilities, people of minority racial and ethnic groups (particularly those who are American Indian, Black, and Hispanic), those who are in poverty and are undereducated, as well as those who live in rural areas.

Having said all that, here is what we know.

The Oklahoma People

Challenges

Oklahoma residents are both similar to and dissimilar from others in the nation. We are a rural state with a low population density; almost three-quarters of residents live within a 100-mile wide diagonal corridor across the state. Females and males are about equally represented; Oklahoma tends to have a slightly larger older population than the national

average. In terms of variability in race and ethnicity, Oklahoma has fewer Blacks yet more American Indians and Hispanics than most other states. Economically, we face challenges as we have higher rates of poverty than the national average, low high school graduation levels, and higher incidences of people living with disabilities. The state is affected by health concerns with two-thirds of the population identified as being overweight and leading relatively sedentary lives.

Through the information gathered and compiled for this SCORP we know that while Oklahoma faces some challenges in terms of its citizenry, people are actively engaged in outdoor recreation throughout the state. This engagement varies from young children playing on a park playground, to teens actively exploring natural features of a park, to seniors driving through a park or natural area and enjoying the scenery. All of these users gain from their interactions with the natural environment.

The Impact of Racial/Ethnic Heritage on Outdoor Recreation Involvement

Historically, outdoor recreation resource managers have been (and continue to be) White, middle class males; park visitors have tended to mirror these demographics. As a result, management often operates under assumptions that park users desire outdoor recreation facilities, amenities, and experiences similar to their own preferences. It is clear, however, that park users represent all racial and ethnic groups and that some groups have unique desires and preferences for types of outdoor recreation engagement.

In many cases management policies and practices unknowingly inhibit participation by minority population groups. Some of these challenges include perceived park management discrimination toward minority park visitors, a lack of preferred facilities (e.g., open space, playgrounds, day use/picnicking areas), facilities and amenities unsuitable for average group sizes (pavilions and on-site cooking areas), communication difficulties (in signage and printed materials), lack of park management education regarding cultural needs, and lack of education by park visitors in terms of appropriate resource use.

In 2002 a Corps of Engineers study (Dunn) described distinct recreational styles of four racial/ethnic minority groups; all four groups are represented in outdoor recreation user groups in Oklahoma. The Corps found that Hispanics generally participate in outdoor recreation in large groups (often extended family groups of 25 or more people) where cultural and linguistic traditions are valued. Individuals with a Hispanic heritage expressed preferences for large day use areas and developed campsites with opportunities for on-site outdoor cooking, and a moderate interest in water-based recreation.

Individuals who self-reported as African American or Black expressed strong interests in using parks for engagement in team sports and involvement in community events. In addition, large day use areas with on-site cooking structures were important for family reunions. Persons of African American descent were not particularly interested in camping or water-based recreation (other than fishing).

The study further reported that those who were of Asian descent were a very heterogeneous group with differing levels of acculturation. Newly arrived immigrants tended to favor subsistence related outdoor recreation such as hunting and fishing, with limited interest in non-consumptive forms of outdoor recreation. Those who had been in the U.S. longer preferred day use areas providing places for all age groups to enjoy the park.

The last racial/ethnic group to be reported on in this study was Native Americans. With relatively large group sizes, American Indian groups preferred outdoor recreation spaces that were compatible with cultural practices including such things as dance arbors, nature trails, interpretive facilities, and opportunities for evening recreation. This group reported the greatest sense of perceived discrimination than any other ethnic population.

Over the next five years Oklahoma resource managers increasingly will be faced with addressing the needs of various racial and ethnic groups in outdoor recreation settings. Attending to the expressed needs of various population groups will include enhancing staff education, reviewing and amending policies and practices, ensuring availability of desired amenities, and examining and responding to issues of user-group conflicts that may arise.

The Impact of Disabilities on Outdoor Recreation Involvement

People of all ages are impacted by physical, cognitive, and behavioral disabilities. In Oklahoma, a greater percentage of people are affected by various disabilities than what is seen across the nation. In particular, as the population ages, the number and severity of disabilities increases. Therefore, Oklahoma is likely to face increasing percentages of the population with a variety of disabilities over the next five years. Associated with this, challenges related to providing accessible outdoor recreation opportunities to this population will continue to increase.

While nationally reported data indicate that people with disabilities participate in outdoor recreation at similar rates as those without disabilities, research in Oklahoma has not found this to be the case. In the various studies directly related to outdoor recreation involvement in Oklahoma noted in this SCORP, very little evidence was found demonstrating involvement of people with disabilities in outdoor recreation. In many cases, study respondents indicated that they did not participate in outdoor recreation or visit state parks due to health issues or disabling conditions.

Challenges continue to face outdoor recreation resource managers in providing accessible amenities such as bathrooms, fishing docks, campsites, trails, playgrounds, and picnic and day use areas. In addition to addressing physical access issues, signage in Braille and audio listening devices are necessary for full inclusion of individuals with sensory impairments. By addressing accessibility needs for people with disabilities, accessibility is enhanced for other groups, as well. Parents pushing small children in strollers, anglers pulling wheeled wagons or coolers, and large groups utilizing small spaces all benefit from physical changes to structures that improve accessibility.

The Oklahoma Environment

With 90% of the state in private ownership, Oklahoma offers fewer public recreation spaces than most states. Although much of that land remains rural or “open”, it is limited in opportunity for recreational experiences for most people since it is primarily private property. In addition, several public agencies at the state level and local municipalities are seeking to divest themselves of significant portions of the existing public recreation estate in an effort to privatize responsibility for these properties. The motivation for this privatization appears to be financial, but those efforts may have an adverse effect upon the general population that is increasingly limited in access to outdoor recreation space.

Oklahomans and visitors to the state have tended to concentrate their recreational use of the outdoor environment into relatively short time periods. As a result, the period from Memorial Day to Labor Day, with particular emphasis on holiday weekends, produces the vast majority of recreational interaction between people and the environment. These concentrated visits have led to degradation of the environment, exceeding the carrying capacity of the area being visited. In addition, many of the visitors are unaware of the adverse effects their behaviors have on the environment. Conversely, many of the visitors are unaware of the potentially adverse effects a degraded environment may have on their outdoor recreation experience.

The degradation of the natural environment becomes apparent in several ways. Trash and litter are common occurrences along Oklahoma’s highways, in Oklahoma’s lakes and rivers, and in Oklahoma’s parks. The visual degradation is only one aspect of the adverse impact on the environment. The Oklahoma City and Tulsa metropolitan areas have several days each summer in which air quality is jeopardized, primarily as documented by ozone alerts. Industrial activity and motor vehicles are the primary culprits in the reduction of air quality, but other behaviors certainly aid and abet that decline. As indicated earlier, most lakes and rivers in Oklahoma are below acceptable standards for primary body contact recreation at some point during any given year, primarily during the summer (ODEQ, 2004). Other bodies of water are continuously below those standards. In almost every case, current or prior human activity has been the agent of change leading to those degraded conditions.

As presented earlier in this SCORP, the Oklahoma Water Resources Board establishes water quality standards, while the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality monitors lakes and streams related to those standards. It is recognized that activities beyond the control of recreation managers affect water quality in recreation settings. For example, urban or agricultural run-off in a small stream may adversely affect water quality in one of Oklahoma’s larger rivers or lakes.

Information regarding environmental quality is difficult to access and difficult to interpret for the average consumer – members of the public and managers of Oklahoma’s recreation resources. As a result, the technical information regarding environmental quality may inhibit communication to the general public and become a hindrance to understanding and implementation for recreation resource managers.

Interactions between Oklahomans and Their Environment

As previously discussed, Oklahomans are similar to the broader national population in their interaction with and perception of their environment. Research has shown that outdoor places are important in the development of individual and corporate values. Learning about meanings of outdoor places is important as it sheds light on the values and emotions connected to natural resources (Hutson, 2007). Places have the potential to shape attitudes, values, and qualities of life. Therefore, it is important that resource managers understand the place, the people, and the relationship between people and places.

Cultivating an awareness of place meanings to people leads to stronger environmental attachment. Even the Oklahoma state song asserts, “We belong to the land, and the land we belong to is grand.” The connection between an agrarian Oklahoma and the land has been well documented, but that agrarian connection is becoming increasingly rare.

Low and Altman (1992) found that place meanings share three common elements for people in those places. Those common elements in place meaning are (1) affect, (2) cognition, and (3) practice. The affective dimension reflects the bonding relationship established through emotions, positive and negative, toward particular settings. The cognitive dimension encompasses the integration of people and their environment, reflecting elements of the lived experience in a particular place. Research shows that the more history a person has with a place, the higher their identification with that place. As a result, it can be concluded that familiarity with and frequent visits to a park will increase the identification of that person to that park. The practice dimension of place meaning documents how people seek out specific places for certain types of experiences. Through practice, social meanings are constructed out of the behaviors that occur in a place. As a result, meanings are attached to interpersonal relationships that occur in a particular place and carry over into other places.

Meanings include real and perceived interactions; thus, people can hold multiple meanings for places. The study of human geography seeks to discover and reveal the symbols, environmental perceptions, landscape aesthetics, and culture meanings that different settings elicit. These concepts have often been associated with Native American culture; similar emotional bonds have been found in other cultures, as well.

Emotional bonds with the environment evolve from interaction with specific environments, ecosystems, parks, and other places. These bonds range from objective meaning and understanding to creative ideas of how places shape expressive attitudes and beliefs of observers. Human geographers have found that places have spirits, personalities, and character; they elicit affection from those who visit (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1981; Casey, 2001). Those emotional bonds between people and places can be organized into specific patterns.

One such pattern identified by Hutson in his assessment of recreation professionals in Oklahoma is supported by the research conducted for this SCORP. Hutson revealed three distinct views of person-nature interaction among those involved in outdoor activity,

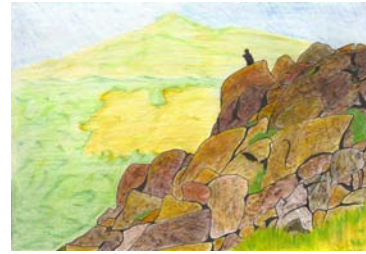
instruction, land management, and other aspects of outdoor recreation. These three distinct views of person-nature interaction are (1) relational, (2) natural, and (3) spiritual.

The relational perspective on interaction between people and the natural world describes an unfolding of a relationship over time as outdoor spaces become embedded in memories. These memories include time with family or friends, positive and repeated exposure to a place, relating to the natural environment, and feeling connected to nature. The memories may include special events or rituals that occur in natural places that leave the visitor psychologically rejuvenated.

A second perspective, natural, is based on sensory experiences between the visitor and the natural world. The visitor utilizes the five senses to develop an emotional connection to the outdoors. The visitor experiences solitude, and seeks independence and oneness with the outdoors. The visitor in this perspective develops a feeling of attachment to nature, and confidence, comfort, and safety while in nature. In addition, the natural visitor seeks an escape from responsibilities while in nature.

The third identified perspective is spiritual. These visitors have developed spiritual beliefs that are grounded in nature, and seek spiritual unity and integration with nature. They discover personal spirituality and encounter God during an outdoor experience. These spiritual visitors feel oneness with nature, are attached to the land, and tend to become introspective and contemplative while in the outdoors.

Based upon these discoveries in Oklahoma, around the nation, and internationally, it can be concluded that there is no “typical visitor” to a park or outdoor setting. Visitors have differing yet discernable perspectives, and it is incumbent upon managers to provide public places in which these differing perspectives may be nurtured.



Chapter 5 – A Look to the Future

This chapter considers the information found in previous chapters and utilizes that information in making recommendations for the period from 2008 – 2012. Prior to presenting those recommendations, however, we felt it valuable to examine the recommendations made in the 2001 SCORP, and report on progress related to those suggestions.

Update on 2001 Recommendations

Several recommendations from the 2001 SCORP had been advanced from prior statewide outdoor recreation plans. Significant progress has been made in achieving or addressing a number of these 2001 recommendations. Other recommendations remain to be addressed. A summary of these recommendations from 2001 and earlier shows the work that remains to be addressed and the work that has been completed.

1. *The Open Project Selection Process employed by the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department remains as the appropriate mechanism for a fair and equitable evaluation of projects in consideration for Land and Water Conservation Fund monies.*

The Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) has been in compliance with the National Park Service Land and Water Conservation Fund Manual, Section 660.4, July 1985, and continues to be a workable process for OTRD and applicants.

2. *Oklahoma must define travel, tourism and recreation as they are to be provided through the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department.*

OTRD has taken major strides in defining its mission, its vision, and its role in serving the combination of travel, tourism and recreation for the state. Those efforts continue with “branding” the department and its marketing collateral.

3. *During the next five years (2002 – 2007) it is much more important for OTRD to focus on the quality of the recreation experience provided at state parks and lodges than to be distracted by the quantity of locations available.*

During this five year period OTRD has not expanded its property holdings and has done little construction other than routine maintenance. As a result, the quantity of public recreation places and spaces has remained constant. Efforts must continue to enhance the recreation experience for visitors to state parks and lodges, particularly in education and interpretation.

4. *Oklahoma must take an active and immediate initiative to protect its natural and cultural resources.*

This responsibility rests with several agencies of state government, counties, cities, and individual residents of the state of Oklahoma. Some advancement has been made in protection of natural and cultural resources, but much remains to be achieved. This issue was raised as a topic of concern in numerous venues during the past five years, with particular focus on water, air, and reduction of invasive species.

5. *Oklahoma must develop programs that encourage and promote outdoor recreation participation at an early age and continue an active, outdoor lifestyle into adult years.*

This recommendation has not been achieved in Oklahoma or any other state. OTRD, the State Department of Education, the Oklahoma Wildlife Commission, cities, educational systems, and non-profit organizations must continue early interventions with progressive, sequential development across the lifespan.

6. *Oklahoma must expand the use of valid and reliable economic data to support providing and maintaining outdoor recreation facilities and activities.*

During the past five years more valid and reliable data have been collected and have been incorporated into decision-making, particularly at the state level. OTRD has been the leader in seeking this valid and reliable economic data, with additional efforts to gather related sociological and experiential data. Communication and sharing of that information is essential for improved decision-making by state agencies and local communities in Oklahoma.

7. *Oklahoma must seek to provide long-term, consistent funding for outdoor recreation and resource conservation at the state and local level.*

The state of Oklahoma took a significant step forward with the dedication of a portion of the statewide sales tax to be allocated for capital improvement in Oklahoma State Parks. Continued appropriations for operation and allocation of this dedicated funding source will yield benefits for outdoor recreation and resource conservation at the state level.

Cities and counties in Oklahoma continue to under-fund recreation and conservation efforts at the local level. In general, cities and counties have relied upon a portion of the local sales tax to permit whatever funding is possible for parks, recreation, and conservation. As a result, these services tend to be perceived as nonessential with funding being first directed toward the essential services of government. Cities and counties in Oklahoma have been reluctant to charge user fees or other fees for service, thus reducing the perceived values of the programs and services related to recreation, parks, and conservation.

8. *Oklahoma must seek to reduce conflicts between competing outdoor recreation use groups to increase carrying capacity of recreation properties and improve quality of outdoor recreation experiences.*

Little has changed over the past five years from a management perspective related to this recommendation. Conflict does continue and is increasing in specific activities and areas. Technological advances offer more choices for potential conflict. Recreation providers must continue to address this conflict and the competition for limited outdoor recreation resources.

9. *OTRD should partner with the Oklahoma Recreation and Park Society in preparing and delivering education and technical assistance for smaller communities statewide.*

Underserved communities in Oklahoma remain underserved despite improved communication technologies. OTRD and ORPS should continue to work toward this goal and utilize the Oklahoma Municipal League as another avenue of support.

10. *OTRD should seek to re-establish an annual Outdoor Recreation Rally hosted at an Oklahoma State Park.*

With the hosting of the 2007 Outdoor Recreation Rally at Oklahoma State University, OTRD achieved this recommendation. Those in attendance encouraged the continuation of an annual rally for the near future to address on-going common issues.

11. *Recreation providers at the federal, state, county, and local government levels should seek better coordination and communication in meeting the needs of the public.*

Coordination and communication was the theme of the 2007 Outdoor Recreation Rally and should be continued with future rallies for recreation providers across the state. Additional communication efforts are necessary to fully achieve this recommendation.

Recommendations for 2008 – 2012

The foregoing recommendations from the previous five year period provided direction for Oklahoma and its leadership. As indicated, several of these recommendations were achieved during the past five years, while others may be rolled forward. In addition, the information included in this SCORP provides the foundation for several other recommendations that can provide direction for Oklahoma and its leadership during the next five-year period. These recommendations provide appropriate goals at the transition to a second century of statehood.

1. *The Open Project Selection Process employed by the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department remains as the appropriate mechanism for a fair and equitable evaluation of projects in consideration for Land and Water Conservation Fund monies.*

The Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) has been in compliance with the National Park Service Land and Water Conservation Fund Manual, Section 660.4, July 1985, and continues to be a workable process for

OTRD and applicants. This process should be continued with additional ease of application and electronic communication.

2. *The Oklahoma Trails Advisory Board and other trails advocates should seek opportunities for connector trails from community to community. This may include the need to reverse a 1990 Executive Order to keep OTRD from being involved with rails-to-trail conversions.*

Trails are highly desirable recreation resources with potential for economic development, tourism stimulation, and increased physical activity. Since 1990, OTRD has been restricted from involvement in or encouragement of rail-to-trail planning. Without the statewide leadership provided by OTRD and the Oklahoma Trails Advisory Board, trails between political jurisdictions are unlikely.

3. *Over the next five years, water rights and the value of freshwater for recreation and tourism, as well as other uses, will continue to be increasingly sensitive topics. Oklahoma must develop a water plan including informed voices representing recreational interests.*

Oklahoma's water plan has included the voices of decision makers representing a variety of beneficial uses. However, recreation professionals have only occasionally been present at those discussions. The rights to water, the quality and quantity of that water are crucial to the future of Oklahoma recreation and tourism.

4. *During the next five years, communication, education, and interpretation of natural, cultural, historic, and environmental resources will be crucial to the attitudes and perceptions of those resources. It is essential that outdoor recreation resource managers and educational agencies improve the communication, education, and interpretation of those resources.*

Visitors to Oklahoma State Parks have indicated that they desire information on how to best enjoy their state recreational resources. At present, the behaviors of many visitors indicate that they are unaware of the effect of those behaviors on the environment. Other indicators demonstrate that many Oklahomans and visitors to the state are unaware of the history, culture, natural and environmental features around them. Conservation of those resources and enjoyment by future generations demands educational and interpretive activities now.

5. *It is essential that outdoor recreation managers and their respective agencies seek to achieve and maintain compliance with updated standards of the U.S. Access Board.*

As technology advances, the United States Access Board continually updates the standards that define accommodation in outdoor recreation settings. These standards address trails, picnic tables, beach access, campground facilities, fire rings, restrooms, and much more. While these standards are too lengthy to include in this SCORP, they are readily available on the World Wide Web (<http://www.access-board.gov/>).

6. *To meet the needs of all constituent groups, agencies and staff at all levels should increase their awareness and sensitivity to the outdoor recreation needs and preferences of minority groups.*

Changes in demographics make it apparent that all outdoor recreation providers will see an increase in resource user groups that represent ethnic and racial minorities. These groups have differences in preferences for space, facilities, and amenities. They have varying needs for education related to resource use and for access to materials in languages other than English. Policies, procedures, and maintenance and operations all need to be reviewed and updated to reflect these unique needs.

7. *In light of the expressed desire for undeveloped open space, outdoor recreation resource management agencies should review their policies and practices related to development of outdoor recreation space.*

Various groups of Oklahoma citizens strongly conveyed their wishes for undeveloped open space where visitors can engage in self-selected outdoor recreation activities. Further, it will be important to develop and/or maintain buffer zones between various types of uses in park and open space areas to minimize user conflicts and maximize positive use of the resource.

8. *Many Oklahomans articulated a sense of ownership and pride in the parks across the state. Resource managers should take advantage of this local patriotism and develop personal partnerships with visitors.*

When people feel a sense of ownership and pride in something, they tend to attend to it, and take care of it. Oklahoma resource managers have an opportunity to promote these feelings and call on individual users to assist them in local park management. Establishing local “Friends of Parks” groups, holding trash pick-up and beautification days, and creating hotlines for notifying park staff of problems are ways to achieve this.

9. *Clearly, Oklahoma faces challenges related to a stagnant or diminishing supply of public outdoor recreation resources. All efforts should be made to maintain what is currently in the public domain.*

It has been demonstrated that low-income and rural constituents often face unique challenges in accessing outdoor recreation resources that are in the public domain. Further depletion of the available outdoor recreation resource base would increase the negative impacts on these population groups. Maintaining what is currently held in the public sector and purposefully managing some of these spaces for undeveloped outdoor recreation use would address some of the needs of these minority populations.

10. *Funding issues continue to be stressed as a primary concern of resource managers. Additional and long-term funding sources are needed to maintain and enhance the outdoor recreation estate in Oklahoma.*

Outdoor recreation managers representing all levels of government and the private sector continue to identify challenges in funding for maintenance and development of outdoor recreation opportunities across the state. Continued study and experimentation with innovative funding mechanisms is called for in this generation of the SCORP.



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Appendices



Appendix A – “What Parks Mean to Me” contest information

THE 'PEOPLE SPEAK ABOUT PARKS' CONTEST

WHAT: An original essay and drawing contest: “What parks mean to me.” Each contest participant is asked to write an original essay [1000 word maximum] or draw an original picture (or create one of each) of what parks mean to her/him. For judging purposes, entries will be categorized by school grade, with an additional category of ‘adults’.

THEME: Think about a park that you have visited IN OKLAHOMA—it might be a neighborhood, city, county, or state park, or a federal recreation area. Think about your experiences and feelings while in the park and then write an original essay or create an original drawing that describes:

“WHAT PARKS MEAN TO ME”

WHY: The Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department (OTRD) wants to learn how Oklahoma citizens experience parks of all sizes and what parks mean to people’s lives. This information will be used in the development of the statewide report of outdoor recreation in Oklahoma. Your essay or drawing will be anonymously judged by a panel and the top awardees will win valuable prizes. Essays or drawings may also be used as part of a research project to help write the “state of the state” report of outdoor recreation in Oklahoma (Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan).

WHO: All (grade school and older) Oklahoma citizens* are eligible to enter. Age groups will be:

- 1st through 3rd grades
- 4th through 6th grades
- 7th through 9th grades
- 10th through 12th grades
- Adults

** OTRD employees and Project staff are not eligible to win prizes*

WHEN: Essays and drawings will be accepted from September through March 1, 2007

WHERE: Send in by mail, fax, or email to the research team at Oklahoma State University

HOW: Complete one entry form and submit it with your essay or drawing; use a separate form for each entry (see attached). Only one essay and drawing per person will be accepted. All submissions become the property of OTRD and OSU; returns will not be possible. All entries must be accompanied by a fully completed entry form (both sides) for consideration in the contest and research project.

PRIZES:

• Recognition by the Governor for youth and school	• Outdoor equipment and gear
• Top drawings framed and hung at Oklahoma Welcome Centers	• Potential publication in <i>Oklahoma Today</i> magazine for top essays
• Weekend stay at a state park cabin/lodge of your choice (family of 4)	• Recognition at the Centennial celebration
• In addition, a framed copy of the winning essay and drawing in each category will be presented to the winner	

**“PEOPLE SPEAK ABOUT PARKS IN OKLAHOMA”
ESSAY AND DRAWING CONTEST
ENTRY FORM**

Please use one entry form per submission. Maximum of one drawing and one essay per contestant.

Name _____ **Date** _____

Street _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

Phone () _____ **Email** _____

So we can ensure that submissions are in the correct category for judging and to help us with the research report, please complete the information below. Judges will not have access to any participant information related to the essays/drawings until after winners are announced. For the research portion, identifying information will be kept separate from the original works; demographic information will only be used in making general comments about the views of people across the state. In the research report, we will combine the information we have learned in such a way that no one person will be identifiable. Thank you for helping us to understand how Oklahomans view parks!

Sex (circle one): FEMALE MALE **Age** _____ **Grade in school** if applicable _____

School attended _____

Ethnicity: WHITE/CAUCASIAN AFRICAN AMERICAN/BLACK HISPANIC/LATINO/CHICANO
 AMERICAN INDIAN ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER OTHER _____

Please indicate if you have a disability (circle all that apply): I HAVE A...
MOBILITY IMPAIRMENT VISUAL IMPAIRMENT/AM BLIND HEARING IMPAIRMENT/I AM DEAF
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY OTHER _____

I am submitting a(n) (circle one): ORIGINAL ESSAY ORIGINAL DRAWING

BY SIGNING BELOW I AFFIRM THAT THE ATTACHED ESSAY OR DRAWING IS ORIGINAL WORK AND WAS CREATED BY THE INDIVIDUAL NAMED ON THIS ENTRY FORM.

Author/Artist signature

Date

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: MARCH 1, 2007

SEND ALL SUBMISSIONS OF ORIGINAL ESSAYS AND ARTWORK TO:

OKLAHOMA PARKS CONTEST

180 COLVIN CENTER, OSU

STILLWATER, OK 74078

EMAIL: OKPARKS@OKSTATE.EDU

FAX: 405-744-6507

PLEASE COMPLETE BOTH SIDES OF THIS FORM

“PEOPLE SPEAK ABOUT PARKS IN OKLAHOMA” ESSAY AND DRAWING CONTEST

PLEASE READ AND SIGN

I understand that I am submitting an original essay or drawing for a contest and that upon submission the essay or drawing will become the joint property of the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department (OTRD) and Oklahoma State University (OSU). This original work will be considered as part of the Oklahoma Parks “People Speak” Contest.

My original work may be used by OTRD for non-remunerated promotional purposes and/or by OSU staff in a research project where essays/drawings from people around the state will be analyzed and summarized. The information I provide may be used as a source for the final report of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). While some direct quotes or drawings may be used in the final report, all analyses and findings from the research will omit names of authors/artists. The results will be presented in aggregate and project participants will be unknown.

My participation is voluntary and I know that I may withdraw my original work at any time prior to completion of the research. If I have any questions about my rights or the project, I can contact the project directors (Drs. Caneday and Jordan at 405-744-5503) or the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Sue Jacobs at 405-744-1676).

Signature of participant _____ Date _____

Signature of parent/guardian
if contestant is under age 18 _____ Date _____

You are encouraged to make a copy of this page and retain it for your records.

Stay In A Cabin or Lodge Room at A State Park for Free!



**Do you bike, skate or play in a park in your neighborhood or city?
Do you camp, hike, fish or swim in a State Park or Federal Recreation Area?**



If you enjoy outdoor recreation in a park, here's how you can win a 2-night stay for four at a state park lodge or cabin:

The Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department and The Oklahoma State Department of Education, along with Oklahoma State University, are sponsoring a "People Speak About Parks" contest to find out what Oklahoma parks mean to you. Let us know your thoughts by writing an essay of 1000 words or less or drawing a picture of what parks mean to you. It can be a park in your neighborhood, your city, a state park or a federal park.

We want to know how you feel about parks!

Who can enter?

Any Oklahoma citizen from first grade to adults.

How and when can you enter?

Visit oklahomaparks.com or <http://okparks.okstate.edu> websites for an entry form. Written essays and/or drawings can be submitted from November 1 until March 1, 2007

Where do you send everything?

Send the entry form, release and original essays and/or drawing to:

Oklahoma Parks Contest
180 Colvin Center, OSU
Stillwater, OK 74078

e-mail: okparks@okstate.edu

Fax: 405-744-6507

What About Prizes?

Top winners in each age group will receive:

- Recognition by the Governor
- 2-day stay for 4 persons at a State Park
- Outdoor equipment and gear
- Original drawings framed and displayed at Oklahoma Welcome Centers

Plus other winning prizes!

Framed copies of winning essays and drawings in each category will be presented to winners

All entries submitted will be anonymously judged by a panel and used in a research project by Oklahoma State University for the development of a statewide report of outdoor recreation in Oklahoma.

*Oklahoma Tourism employees and OSU project staff are not eligible to win prizes



**ENTER YOUR ESSAY OR
DRAWING TODAY!**



EL CONCURSO “LA GENTE HABLA DE LOS PARQUES”

Qué es: Un concurso de ensayo y dibujo originales: “Lo que me significan los parques.” Cada participante debe escribir un ensayo original de mil palabras o menos y/o dibujar una obra original sobre lo que le significan los parques. Las entradas serán categorizadas por el año escolar del concurrente, con una categoría adicional para los ‘adultos.’

El Tema: Piense sobre uno de los parques de Oklahoma que ha visitado—un parque de la vecindad, de la ciudad, del estado, o una área federal de recreo. Recuerde sus experiencias y sentimientos durante su estancia en el parque y después, escriba un ensayo original o dibuje una obra original que describa:

“LO QUE LOS PARQUES ME SIGNIFICAN”

Por qué: El departamento de turismo y recreo de Oklahoma (Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department—OTRD) quisiera saber cómo experimentan los parques los ciudadanos de Oklahoma, y qué significan los parques—de cualquier tamaño—en la vida de la gente. Los datos se usarán en el desarrollo de un informe sobre el recreo al aire libre en Oklahoma. Los ensayos y dibujos serán juzgados anónimamente y los mejores serán premiados. Puede que las entradas se utilicen también en un proyecto de investigación para el desarrollo de un informe definitivo sobre el estado del recreo al aire libre en Oklahoma (Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan).

Quién: Todo ciudadano* (los de primaria hasta los adultos) puede inscribirse. Las categorías serán:

- 1^{er} a 3^{er} año escolar
- 4^o a 6^o año escolar
- 7^o a 9^o año escolar
- 10^o a 12^o año escolar
- Adultos

** Ni los empleados de OTRD ni los que trabajan en el proyecto de investigación pueden ganar premios*

Cuándo: Se aceptarán ensayos y dibujos desde el 1 de septiembre hasta el 1 de marzo de 2007.

Dónde: Envíe por correos, por FAX o por correo electrónico al equipo de investigación de Oklahoma State University

Cómo: Complete un boleto de inscripción y envíelo junto con su ensayo o dibujo; use un boleto para cada entrada (vea lo adjunto). Se acepta(n) solamente un ensayo y/o un dibujo por persona. Todo material llega a ser propiedad de OTRD y OSU; no se puede devolver. Cada sumisión debe ser acompañada por un boleto lleno (las dos caras) para ser juzgada en el Concurso y analizada en la investigación.

PREMIOS:

• Reconocimiento por el gobernador para los ganadores y sus escuelas	• Equipo para el recreo al aire libre
• Los dibujos ganadores serán colgados en los Centros de ‘Bienvenidos a Oklahoma’	• Los ensayos ganadores posiblemente se publicarán en la revista <i>Oklahoma Today</i>
• Un fin de semana en un parque estatal para la familia del ganador (4 personas)	• Reconocimiento en el festival del centenario de Oklahoma
• También se pondrá un marco al ensayo y al dibujo del ganador de cada categoría del Concurso.	

**“LA GENTE HABLA DE LOS PARQUES”
CONCURSO DE ENSAYO Y DIBUJO
BOLETO DE INSCRIPCIÓN**

Favor de usar un boleto por sumisión. Máximo de un dibujo y un ensayo por concurrente.

Nombre y Apellido _____ **Fecha** _____

Dirección _____

Ciudad _____ **Estado** _____ **Código postal** _____

Teléfono (_____) _____ **Correo electrónico** _____

Para estar seguros de que las sumisiones estén clasificadas correctamente y para ayudarnos con el informe sobre la investigación, favor de responder a las siguientes preguntas. Los jueces no tendrán acceso a ninguna información personal relacionada con los ensayistas/artistas hasta que se haya anunciado los ganadores. En cuanto a la investigación, cualquier información identificadora se mantendrá aparte la información demográfica se utilizará solamente en hacer comentarios generales sobre las perspectivas de la gente de todo el estado. Para el informe sobre la investigación combinaremos los datos de tal manera que ninguna persona se pueda identificar. Gracias por ayudarnos a entender qué opinan los ciudadanos de Oklahoma de los parques!

Sexo (encerrar en círculo): HEMBRA VARON **Edad** _____ **Año escolar** Si se refiere a Ud. _____

Escuela _____

Ethnicidad: BLANCO/CAUCÁSICO AFRICANO-AMERICANO/NEGRO HISPANO/LATINO/CHICANO
AMERICANO NATIVO ISLEÑO DEL PACÍFICO/ DE ASIA OTRO _____

Favor de indicar cualquier incapacidad suya (encerrar en círculo): SUFRO DE...
INCAPACIDAD DE MOVIMIENTO INCAPACIDAD VISUAL/SOY CIEGO INCAPACIDAD AUDITIVA/SOY SORDO
DESARROLLO LENTO OTRO _____

Presento un (encerrar en círculo): ENSAYO ORIGINAL DIBUJO ORIGINAL

POR MI FIRMA JURO QUE EL ENSAYO O DIBUJO ADJUNTO ES OBRA ORIGINAL CREADA POR EL INDIVIDUO NOMBRADO EN ESTE BOLETO DE INSCRIPCIÓN.

Firma del ensayista/artista

Fecha

FECHA DE LÍMITE PARA LA SUMISIÓN: 1 DE MARZO, 2007

ENVIE CADA SUMISIÓN DE ENSAYO Y OBRA DE ARTE ORIGINAL A:

OKLAHOMA PARKS CONTEST

180 COLVIN CENTER, OSU

STILLWATER, OK 74078

EMAIL: OKPARKS@OKSTATE.EDU

FAX: 405-744-6507

FAVOR DE LLENAR LAS DOS CARAS DEL BOLETO DE INSCRIPCIÓN

“LA GENTE HABLA DE LOS PARQUES” CONCURSO DE ENSAYO Y DIBUJO

LEA Y FIRME, POR FAVOR

Entiendo que estoy entregando un ensayo o dibujo original para un concurso y que al hacerlo, el ensayo o dibujo llega a ser propiedad del departamento de turismo y recreo de Oklahoma (Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department—OTRD) y la universidad Oklahoma State (OSU). Esta obra original será considerada parte de “La Gente Habla de Los Parques,” un concurso estatal de Oklahoma.

Mi obra original puede ser utilizada por el OTRD para propósitos de promoción no remunerados y/o por el equipo de investigación de OSU en un proyecto en el cual los ensayos/dibujos de los ciudadanos del estado serán analizados y los resultados serán resumidos. La información que yo proveo se puede usar como fuente de datos para el informe ‘Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan’ (SCORP). Aunque varios dibujos o citas pueden aparecerse en el informe definitivo, los nombres de ensayistas/artistas serán omitidos en el análisis de datos y en las conclusiones que resultan.

Mi participación es voluntaria y entiendo que puedo abandonar el Concurso por retirar mi obra original en cualquier momento antes de acabarse la investigación. Si tengo cualquier pregunta sobre mis derechos o sobre el proyecto, puedo ponerme en contacto con los investigadores (el Dr. Caneday, la Dra. Jordan) por llamar al 405-744-5503, o con la directora de Institutional Review Board (Dr. Sue Jacobs) por llamar al 405-744-1676.

Firma del participante _____ Fecha _____

Firma del padre/guardián
si el participante es menor de 18 años de edad _____ Fecha _____

Se recomienda sacar fotocopia de esta página para archivar.

FAVOR DE LLENAR LAS DOS CARAS DEL BOLETO DE INSCRIPCIÓN

Appendix B – Recreation Rally information

2007 SCORP Recreation Rally

March 21, 2007

Topic: Accessibility for People with Disabilities

Background:

According to 2006 Oklahoma data from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey:

- 19.8% of Oklahomans aged 5 and older have a disability of some sort
- 21.0% of Oklahomans with disabilities have sensory disabilities (affecting hearing or vision)
- 27.0% of Oklahomans with disabilities have mobility impairments (use walkers or wheelchairs)
- 29.8% of Oklahomans with disabilities have cognitive disabilities (such as mental retardation)

The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990; its requirements and mandates are still being implemented today. Under the ADA, every person has basic rights:

Right to Participate: A person with a disability has the right to register for and participate in recreation or leisure activities.

The Right to the Most Integrated Setting: Every recreation opportunity that is offered for people without disabilities must also be available to individuals who have a disability (with a reasonable accommodation).

Right to Reasonable Accommodations: A person with a disability has the right to reasonable accommodations provided by the recreation provider or sponsor. Accommodations include changes in rules and policies; extra staff for management of the activity or access; a sign language interpreter or other aids for recreation consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing; Braille or large print documents for recreation consumers who are blind or have impaired vision; and other efforts to facilitate participation.

Right to Adaptive Equipment: Another type of reasonable accommodation is the use of adaptive equipment such as equipment to enable better grasping for such things as fishing rods, golf clubs, and other equipment.

Disparate Impact: People with disabilities shall not be discriminated against by an unfair application of administrative rules or policies. When rules and policies are implemented they cannot have a greater impact on people with disabilities than on people without disabilities.

Fees: No recreation provider may charge a higher fee, or a surcharge, for the cost of accommodations or the cost of providing recreation in the most integrated setting.

Issues for Discussion:

- Outdoor recreation settings in Oklahoma are often inaccessible to persons with a disability; how much of a concern is this for parks and recreation providers?
- The perceived cost of accessibility and its impact on outdoor recreation spaces
- A lack of knowledge/awareness (by the general public, staff) regarding the ADA, its requirements, and the need for accessibility
- Resource development and management for accessibility
- Perceived lack of interest by people with disabilities to engage in outdoor recreation
- The need for knowledge and information for park managers and the general population
- Others?

2007 SCORP Recreation Rally

March 21, 2007

Topic: Cultural Resources and Issues

Background:

According to 2005 Oklahoma data from several sources:

- 24.1% of Oklahomans are under the age of 18 years
- 13.2% are older than 65 years
- 78.5% are White, non Hispanic
- 07.7% are Black/African American
- 08.1% are American Indian (the largest population percentage of any state)
- 01.5% are Asian American
- 07.4% speak a language other than English at home
- 20.3% have a bachelor's degree or higher
- \$27,840 is the state personal income, per capita among adults
- Oklahoma reports 50.3 persons per square mile
- 38 to 67—the range in reported number of federally recognized Indian tribes in Oklahoma
- 13 historically Black towns still exist in Oklahoma; 11 others have disappeared
- 100+ rodeos take place in Oklahoma each year
- Oklahoma has two active army bases and three active air force bases
- Oklahoma offers hundreds of Indian Powwows each year; a Bluegrass Festival; Kolache festival; Scottish Games; and two state fairs
- Numerous recreation areas include sensitive properties, artifacts, and potentially conflicting uses representing various cultures

Issues for Discussion:

- Are parks equally open and welcoming to all cultural groups in Oklahoma? Why/why not?
- How should outdoor recreation planners address inequities in use (if at all)?
- What misperceptions exist between various user groups (by cultural designation)?
- What conflicts exist between various user groups? Between users and the local community?
- What outdoor recreation concerns exist of various outdoor recreation user groups?
- Do different user groups require different management policies, techniques, and strategies? If so, what are they?
- How do language difficulties impact on outdoor recreation use, park management, enforcement of policies, etc.?
- What is appropriate protocol for handling sensitive properties and artifacts? (e.g. ancient burial grounds, cultural artifacts, antiquities)
- How are varying cultural values incorporated into management plans?
- Others?

<p style="text-align: center;">2007 SCORP Recreation Rally March 21, 2007 Topic: Air, Water and Environmental Issues</p>

Background:

- Oklahoma lakes, all human-made, are aging and silting in.
- Sport fishing for human consumption is limited in numerous lakes and rivers in Oklahoma. In particular, children and women are encouraged not to consume fish taken in some Oklahoma waters.
- Most water treatment methods utilizing surface waters in Oklahoma yield THMs (trihalomethanes) as a byproduct of water treatment. THMs are known carcinogens, but result from chlorination as a treatment of water that includes certain common algae (blue-green), nitrates and phosphorus.
- Although there is some disagreement on terms and conditions, most rivers and lakes in Oklahoma contain water that is unacceptable for full-body-contact recreation at least some time during any given year.
- Both Oklahoma City and Tulsa must address air quality warnings every summer.
- Trash and litter continue to be growing problems in parks of all types.
- Oklahoma has been among the nation's leaders in submersion injuries (e.g. drowning, boating accidents, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury) for the past decade and continues to demonstrate this high rate of occurrence

Issues:

- Impacts on Oklahoma waterways by pollution from nearby agriculture, septic tanks, park restrooms, litter, oil, gasoline, etc. This could include eutrophication, water borne diseases, and the introduction of non-native species.
- Water quality in Oklahoma rivers and lakes
- Unknown impact of long-term drought upon the environment
- Unknown impact of grass fires upon air and water quality
- Wetlands management including restoration, enhancement, and creation of new or replacement wetlands
- Lakes have a definable lifespan—what is the impact of outdoor recreation activities, management practices, etc. on the aging and death of Oklahoma lakes?
- The role and funding of parks and professionals in addressing water and air quality
- Environmental concerns that affect outdoor recreation choices. Outdoor recreation choices that affect environmental concerns.
- The movement toward “green practices” — ‘green’ construction, environmental management, recycling, and other sustainable practices
- Environmental education as a priority for park staff, park users, and the general Oklahoma citizenry
- Environmental ethics and responsibility in park users and the general Oklahoma population
- The need to address litter and trash dumping along Oklahoma trails and parks
- Others?

Recreation Rally March 21, 2007 Outdoor Recreation Policies

Background:

- Several public parks at all levels have become known for unacceptable behaviors – sexual predation, illegal drug use, drive-by shootings, theft, assault, and more.
- Conflicting use has generated controversy and problems in numerous parks.
- Recreation visits to some popular Oklahoma properties – the Illinois River, a city park in north Tulsa, and others – have resulted in deaths during the past year.
- Personal water craft have been restricted at properties such as Lake of the Arbuckles, but continue to be used on other lakes. Personal water craft have displaced other recreational use on numerous lakes in Oklahoma.
- Parks are often viewed as being critically important to the local economy.
- Most parks have ‘open door policies.’ This means that in many parks across the state, on holidays and peak weekends, parks users overwhelm the resources (restrooms, camping areas, picnic areas, potable water) and may cause environmental damage.
- Many parks include amenities that do not necessarily support outdoor recreation (e.g., mini-golf, trains, cell phone towers, wireless computer access). This changes the nature of the environment and users the parks attract.
- Outdoor recreation policies struggle with balancing the needs of the population, the environment, and economic development in the acquisition, management, and development of parks.
- Research in 2005 demonstrated that Oklahomans do not know the difference between a federal, state, city, or private park.

Issues:

- Safety is an on-going concern in parks and open spaces—safety from harm of others, safety from weather. What is the role of policy development and enforcement in addressing user safety?
- What are the impacts of user conflicts on users (e.g., displacement), the environment (e.g., degradation), and the economy (tourism and related revenue generation)?
- How should outdoor recreation policies address conflicts between user groups?
- Is crowding on Oklahoma lakes, rivers, and in campgrounds a problem? What are the policy issues related to carrying capacity, use priorities, and other outdoor recreation management issues?
- The impact of entrance fees, user fees, taxes, and other funding sources to maintain and enhance outdoor recreation in Oklahoma
- Balancing economic impact with environmental impact with desires of users
- How do outdoor recreation policies impact on different elements of the population? Are certain types of people afforded unintentional benefits while others are unintentionally penalized? (Based on education, social class, language, national origin, gender, age, religion, etc.)
- Others?

Recreation Rally March 21, 2007 Public Domain and Property Issues

Background:

Oklahoma population is unevenly distributed around the state. Seventy percent of the population lives in a 100 mile wide band stretching from the northeastern corner of the state to the southwestern corner; 20% of the population lives southeast of the strip; 10% of the population lives northwest of the strip. Oklahomans have very limited opportunities to enjoy public land within the borders of the state when compared to national averages.

Ownership	National Average	Oklahoma	Oklahoma Acreage
Private property	58.0%	89.94%	39,532,396
Federal government	33.0%	2.70%	1,188,309
State government	4.5%	2.15%	945,648
Local government	2.5%	0.21%	90,479
Indian lands	2.0%	5.00%	2,197,728
Total	100.0%	100.0%	43,954,560

The Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation have been limited on the tools available to these agencies for acquisition of new properties. As a result, these two agencies are unlikely to acquire additional significant properties. In addition, since 1990, the state of Oklahoma has been under a governor's executive order not to participate in rail-to-trail programs.

Issues:

- What are the recreation opportunity equity issues of the distribution of available public land and the distribution of the population for the residents of the state?
- Oklahoma offers about 1/10 of the public recreation estate as compared with other states. What impact does this have on outdoor recreation opportunities for Oklahomans?
- What should be the priorities of government with regard to the acquisition of additional properties, and the development and maintenance of existing properties?
- With numerous management agencies operating various properties and operating under different missions and policies, what issues exist related to informing the visiting public so as to ensure an enjoyable and safe recreation visit?
- What is the role of government in establishing or articulating a common acquisition and management mission for Oklahoma public lands?
- Public access to rivers and lakes – is there adequate access to meet public need? Are these access points managed?
- Others?

Recreation Rally

March 21, 2007

Trails and Trail Use

Background:

- Nationally, 75% of the population reports regular use of trails. In Oklahoma, about 40% of the population use trails at any time. Trail users tend to represent segments of the population that are better educated and have higher incomes than average.
- Most states have found that long-distance trails, such as rail-to-trail conversions, have become popular recreation attractions and have stimulated local economies. Since 1990, following former Governor Walters' executive order, Oklahoma has not participated in any rail-to-trail activity.
- Oklahoma reports approximately 600 miles of trails, almost entirely confined within single management jurisdictions. A few exceptions to this exist in the Tulsa area.
- Grant programs exist for trail development through the Recreational Trails Program (OTRD) and highway enhancement programs (Oklahoma Department of Transportation). There are minor differences in definition of a trail under these two programs combined with significant difference in requirements.
- Conclusions of the 2001 Oklahoma Recreational Trails plan included:
 - Demand for trails is increasing and diversity of trail users is increasing.
 - Trails are important considerations in community development as alternative transportation routes, green space and linkages, properties that stimulate the local economy and properties that improve quality of life.
 - Information regarding Oklahoma's trails is difficult to find and inadequate when it can be located.

Issues:

- What are the issues surrounding trail development between jurisdictions outside of Oklahoma's metropolitan areas?
- What role should the government fill with regard to development of trails between jurisdictions within metropolitan areas?
- What are the management issues related to trail construction and maintenance? Are those issues shared among the varying management entities?
- What are the issues surrounding the dissemination of information for existing and planned trails? What information is important to users and potential users of trails?
- Have the available grant programs been of value to communities in Oklahoma? Are the benefits received worthwhile? Are people aware of the different types of grant opportunities?
- What conflicts occur in trail use in Oklahoma (between users, between trail users and adjacent property owners)?
- What is the impact of trails on local economies? Is such information available to other communities considering trail development?
- Programs to enhance healthy lifestyles utilizing trails
- Others?

Recreation Rally

March 21, 2007

Funding Issues

Background:

- Outdoor recreation involves several funding levels
 - Acquisition of new properties
 - Maintenance of existing properties
 - Development of new and existing properties
 - Provision of outdoor recreation activities (personnel, programs, equipment, structures, etc)
 - The integration of concessions
- Funding sources are dependent upon property ownership and management agency (federal, state, county, city, private, nonprofit)
- State and municipal management agencies in Oklahoma rely on sales tax revenues or other funding sources since property taxes are limited to counties and schools
- Funding for outdoor recreation spaces is a statewide issue, although it is commonly perceived as local problem.
- Few communities in Oklahoma have been successful in proposing, passing, and executing bond programs focused on recreation and park facilities

Issues:

- Most communities across Oklahoma are financially limited in operations and maintenance. How can quality be maintained within limited funding environments?
- The public has come to expect “free” public recreation. How can the profession educate the public regarding the expense of operating public recreation programs and facilities?
- The public frequently perceives public recreation opportunities as being of lesser quality than those offered by private entities. Should this be of concern to professionals in public recreation provision?
- Do fees reduce access for certain people who are most in need of services and places for recreation opportunities?
- What creative funding mechanisms are possible? What is acceptable to the public?
- Selling of state park properties for private development
- Budget priorities: health, education, highways, where do parks fit in?
- Others?