



Defining and Measuring Success: The Role of State Government in Outdoor Recreation

A State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning Document



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Executive Summary

This State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning document is developed to help decision-makers better understand the most important recreation issues statewide and to maintain Washington's eligibility for federal Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars.

State government invests tens of millions of dollars each budget in outdoor recreation: from the purchase and development of park land to salaries for staff charged with managing sites and facilities. In total dollars, the investment is impressive; in a percent of total state expenditures, the investment is quite modest.

Success in providing outdoor recreation, as well as success in protecting the resources on which recreation depends, needs to be defined and measured. Defining success is relatively easy. However, to date, there has been no satisfactory way to measure the effectiveness of the state's investment in outdoor recreation. Measures used to estimate the impact of the investment are inadequate and inconsistent across state programs.

To help address this inadequacy, the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) recommends consideration of a level of service approach to measuring the state's investment in recreation. This approach is a well-understood concept in transportation, land use, and urban planning.

RCO has developed two preliminary level of service tools, one addressing state agency sites and facilities, and one addressing local agency sites and facilities. With these tools:

- State agencies are encouraged to emphasize sustainable access to state resources, measuring success by the degree to which resources *are protected*, with further emphasis on service area, facility condition, and public satisfaction.
- Local agencies are encouraged to emphasize individual *active participation*, balanced with facility capacity, service area, facility condition, and public satisfaction.

RCO recommends testing the tools in the Land and Water Conservation Fund grant program.



Principles and Policies

People do not regard outdoor recreation and nature as frills: they are essential elements of social and personal identity, health, and economic well-being.

The State of Washington, consistent with this popular view, recognizes recreation as a priority of government.

It is the policy of the State of Washington:

- To recognize outdoor recreation sites and facilities as vital elements of the public infrastructure, essential to the health and well-being of Washington citizens, and important to visitors.
- To assist local and state agencies in providing recreation sites and facilities that benefit our citizens' health and well-being.
- To provide adequate and continuing funding for operation and maintenance needs of state-owned fish and wildlife habitat, natural areas, parks, and other recreation lands to protect the state's investment in such lands.
- To work in partnership with federal agencies to ensure the availability of a variety of opportunities and settings for outdoor recreation.
- To encourage the private sector to contribute needed public recreation opportunities.
- To encourage all agencies to establish a variety of financial resources which can be used to significantly reduce the backlog of needed outdoor recreation, habitat, and open space projects.



1 Outdoor Recreation Providers

There are four major providers of the land necessary for outdoor recreation: state government, local government, federal government, and the private sector.

State Government

Resource Recreation and Support to Others

State government has two important roles in outdoor recreation.

Its first important role is as the owner and manager of lands and facilities for resource recreation. That is, recreation that depends on sustainable management of natural, cultural, historic, and other resources. These resources include but are not limited to:

- Forests
- Ocean beaches
- Shorelines
- Fish and wildlife
- Historic sites and structures
- Cultural sites

For resource recreation to be sustained over time, resource protection must come first. Whether to prevent over-fishing or damage caused by user-made trails, state agencies have a primary duty to preserve and protect resources, emphasizing sustainable recreation and access.

A key component of resource protection is the establishment of site-appropriate facilities. A boat launch with well-defined parking can help prevent riverbank erosion and traffic problems on adjacent roads. A well-designed and located trail can guide users away from sensitive resources while still providing an opportunity to walk or ride. A restroom will protect the environment and public health.



The second important state role is funding and providing other support for resource recreation provided by local, federal, and private providers.

Local Government

Facility Recreation

Local agency recreation opportunities tend to be service- and facility-driven (recreation programming, ball fields, courts, pools, trails, and paths). These activities represent behaviors important to the priorities of state government:

- Recreation, especially close-to-home opportunities.
- Public health, supported by facilities that encourage physical activity, especially shared use trails, paths, or routes for walking and bicycling, and fields and courts for individual and team sports.¹
- Personal mobility, supported by facilities such as shared use trails, paths, or routes for walking and bicycling.²

Local sidewalks, streets, and roads are important for walking, jogging, and bicycling. Local schools are important providers of playgrounds and ball fields.

Federal Government

Resource Recreation

The National Park Service, the Forest Service, and, to a lesser extent, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Land Management offer resource-oriented recreation opportunities similar to those offered by state agencies, but on a broader landscape. The large, open landscapes provide visual and aesthetic interest, watershed functions such as storm water retention and water filtration, and carbon sequestration, among other non-recreational benefits.

Recreation opportunities on the federal landscape take many forms, from technical mountaineering to motorcycle or horseback riding, from

¹ *Washington State Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan, Policy and Environmental Approaches*, Washington State Department of Health, June 2003

² Commuting use of the Burke-Gilman Trail in King County increased from 6 percent of all uses in 1985 to 32 percent of all uses in 2000, Puget Sound Regional Council November 2000 Puget Sound Trends Newsletter



camping to sightseeing. Forest and park roads are important for sightseeing, watching wildlife, and other dispersed recreation.

Private Providers: Individual to Corporate

Whether a family gathering in the backyard, or golf at a members-only club, recreation in all its forms is critical to the mental and physical health and well-being of the state’s residents.³

Commercial ventures offer recreation opportunities as a way to make money, whether in highly-developed water parks or convenient, travel-oriented recreational vehicle parking. Some private entities, especially large tract commercial forest owners, often find they have a challenge to manage access, not provide recreation, to protect their lands, minimize costs, and maintain their ability to produce income.

Summary of Recreation Acres by Major Providers⁴

State owned	649,000 acres for outdoor recreation, habitat, or environmental protection. 3 million acres for resource production and extraction (often available for public use, intended or not, and access management).
Local government owned	237,000 acres for recreation, habitat, or environmental protection.
Federally owned	9,100,000 acres for recreation, habitat, or environmental protection.
Privately owned	Unknown, includes private timberland to backyards, supporting highly popular forms of recreation from hunting to picnicking.

³ See Revised Code of Washington 79A.25.005(1)
⁴ *The 1999 Public and Tribal Lands Inventory*, Final Report, December 2001, Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation



2 Current Recreation Participation

Recreation reflects Washington’s changing population. A few decades ago, residents expected to live in a rural state and enjoy the benefits of a resource-based economy. Today, the state’s population lives “in town,” participating in an economy that has become service and technology oriented. Recreation trends reflect these changes.

A survey conducted for this report yielded data on no fewer than 170 activities in 15 major categories, and new variations and specialization in many categories are appearing regularly. The same categories have been used in two surveys.⁵ The following table summarizes the results of two surveys.

Participation Survey Results 2002 and 2007

Rank	Reported in 2002	Reported in 2007
1	Walking-hiking	Walking-hiking
2	Team-individual sports	Team-individual sports
3	Nature (photography-gardening)	Nature (photography, gardening)
4	Sightseeing	Picnicking
5	Bicycle riding	Indoor activities (classes, events)
6	Indoor	Water activities
7	Picnicking	Sightseeing
8	Water activities	Bicycle riding
9	Snow-ice activities	ORV use
10	Fishing	Snow-ice activities
11	Camping	Camping
12	ORV use	Fishing
13	Hunting-shooting	Hunting-shooting
14	Equestrian activities	Equestrian activities
15	Air activities	Air activities

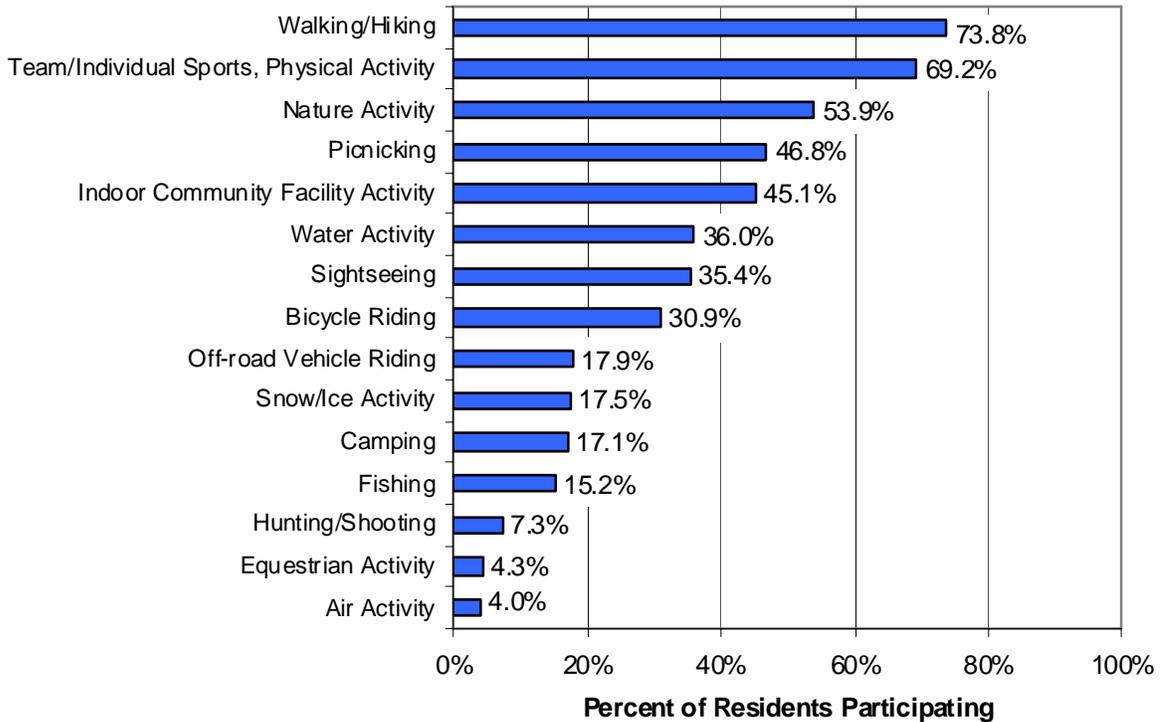
Comparing the results provides indicators of change, but because the two surveys were done differently, the results cannot be considered a clear trend.

⁵ 2002 results are from a diary-based statewide panel; 2007 results are from a telephone survey.



More detail from the 2007 survey is reported below.⁶

Ranking of Major Activity Areas, 2006-07



Important Resource Recreation Activities

Observing and photographing nature

Nearly a third of the population (31 percent) reports participation, most prominent among adults 50-64. There is less participation among younger people. Women are more likely to participate than men.

There is a need for further research on how women might be willing to pay to support non-consumptive fish and wildlife activities.

Sightseeing

Together, Washingtonians went sightseeing more than 12 million times during the survey year. The most prevalent setting for sightseeing was scenic areas. Significantly more sightseeing was done in summer than in fall.

⁶ All data from 2006 *Outdoor Recreation Survey*, Clearwater Research, August 2007



Camping

Current estimates indicate that tent camping is as popular as recreational vehicle camping. Up to 24 percent of the state's residents will tent camp in July. Recreational vehicle camping peaks in September, when about 20 percent of residents participate. Asked whether they would like to do more camping, children and young adults were most likely to say yes. RCO suggests that providers exercise caution when considering development of places for more recreation vehicle campers. More research is advised.

Hiking

Hiking is popular statewide, with about 20 percent of the population participating. Hiking draws people with higher incomes, and males are more likely to hike than females. Hiking takes place year-round, with summer the most likely season.

Fishing

Data estimates that 16 percent of the state's residents fish from a boat or bank. Fishing is done primarily by men. When asked about the desire to fish more, women were likely to say no. Related research done by the Oregon State Marine Board suggests that women are more likely to go boating if clean sanitary facilities are available. RCO recommends investigation of the needs suggested by women.

Off-road vehicle use

The data showed 13 percent of the state's residents drive 4x4 vehicles for recreation, mostly on roads. The data does not reveal whether the 4x4 vehicles are sport utility vehicles (SUVs) or street legal, off-road ready specialty vehicles. Another 7 percent of residents report using all terrain vehicles (ATVs), mostly on rural trails, interpreted here as likely a combination of user-made and official trails, mostly on public lands. Off-road motorcycling has roughly 5 percent to 6 percent participation, predominantly male. There is a noticeable spike in the participation of teenage riders.

Hunting

Hunting participation is 6 percent of state residents in peak season, overwhelmingly practiced by men. License sales appear to be steady, but are shrinking as a percent of population. Consistent with national trends, increased participation is highly unlikely as the state's population continues a general rural-to-urban migration.



Equestrian activities

About 4 percent of Washington residents rode horses in an average month in 2006. Riding at stables and grounds was more likely than trail riding. Considering people reporting all types of riding and settings, the age groups with the highest prevalence of horseback riding were children under 10 (9 percent) and children 11 to 17 (8.3 percent).

Important Facility-Based Recreation Activities

Most facility-based recreation is managed by local agencies.

Walking

Walking is hugely popular, with 67 percent participation, common to all ages, in all regions. Most walking happens on the transportation system: sidewalks, streets, roads. People prefer to walk on unpaved paths and sidewalks. When planning trails or paths, it is of interest to know that research done for the Washington Department of Transportation found that the public will support new facilities when they offer a new, safe place to walk.⁷ Most walks are short: averaging about 1.9 miles.⁸

Sports

Playground use was measured under the “sport” category, and turned out to be the number one “sport” statewide. Roughly the same number of people use playgrounds at parks as at schools. Playgrounds host 34 percent of the population, with girls most likely to use them.

More typical sports participation includes swimming at a pool (23 percent statewide participation), basketball (16 percent), soccer (13 percent), baseball (9 percent), football (7 percent), and softball (5 percent). Field sports tend to compete with one another for available facilities, with apparent demand especially high for practice. This explains why the appearance of a relatively new sport with low participation (for example, lacrosse, with roughly 2 percent statewide participation) will have a relatively high impact on local facilities and programs.

⁷ *Public Attitude Survey of Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning*, Gilmore Research, May 2007

⁸ *Ibid*



Cycling

About 32 percent of the state's residents report that they bicycle at least once a year. Most riding is done by children ages 10 and younger, and most riding takes place on roads and streets. Only about 4 percent ride on forest or mountain trails, and less than 1 percent ride on overnight or longer tours. A typical bicycle ride is about 6.5 miles.⁹

Water activities

Swimming at a pool is the most popular form of water activity. Next are beachcombing, swimming or wading at a beach, and motor boating.

Confirming the State's Interest in Recreation

Recreation offers more than play. Recreation, as physical activity, has a direct contribution to public health. Walking and bicycling contributes to personal mobility.

It is in the state's interest to encourage local activity by supporting local facilities. Support of parks and sports facilities is obvious. Less obvious is that support for school facilities including playgrounds and sports fields will result in increased opportunities for recreation and physical activity. A state policy requiring that publicly funded school facilities be made available for after school use is worth exploration. Likewise, encouraging walking and cycling on and to local facilities (e.g., a safe route to school that uses a grade-separated trail) addresses multiple priorities and public benefits.

Challenges

Modest, average participation in individual categories, if considered in isolation, may mask the true impact of recreation. Most activity usually happens "all at once," usually on weekends, in often-unknown combinations of activity types. Some of the activities taking place concurrently on state lands are challenging to manage, while others are conflicting with each other or with the primary purpose of resource management.

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission requires reservations months ahead of peak season. The extent of user-made trails on Department of Natural Resource-managed land may be 250 percent or more than the official inventory. As the Department of

⁹ *Public Attitude Survey of Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning*, Gilmore Research, May 2007.



Natural Resources' practice has been to adapt as many user-made trails into its official system as possible, the potential future budget impact is large. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's wildlife recreation lands often see unintended, undesirable uses, from poaching to garbage dumping.

The on-the-ground stress has been summarized by the Office of Financial Management (*Priorities of Government*, November 2006): "A lack of resources devoted to an on-the-ground management presence at state-owned recreation sites has resulted in unquantified but potentially significant levels of inappropriate public use and impacts. Examples include informal trails and campsites on trust and wildlife lands that degrade trust assets, create environmental damage, and, in extreme cases, result in deaths and injuries to the recreationists themselves."



3 Defining Success

Success in outdoor recreation is defined by the following characteristics:

- A large majority of the population engages in active recreation. “Active” recreation means recreation that helps people meet recommended physical activity levels. Examples include walking, jogging, field sports, court sports, paddling, bicycling, hiking, and swimming.
- The state resources people want to enjoy, from state forests to ocean beaches, are available for use while being protected for future generations.
- The facilities that the public enjoys are used within capacity, not overcrowded or over-used.
- The sites and facilities the public demands are within a defined service area measured by distance.
- The facilities people use are functional according to specific design and safety guidelines, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- The public is satisfied with the types of facilities available, as well as the condition of these facilities.
- The sites and facilities are operated and maintained as required by their owners and managers.
- People can get to sites and facilities by walking, bicycling, or using public transportation.

Each of these characteristics can be measured. Usually, when one of these is measured, it is separate or isolated from others. Often, a single characteristic (for example, service area or population ratio) is considered the definition of success.



Currently, there is no recreation planning model that takes multiple characteristics into account when measuring for success. Some models still in use include:

Supply-demand

Among others, the Land and Water Conservation Fund continues to assume that a supply-demand model has relevance, while in reality it may never have established relevance at all.¹⁰ Supply-demand is a concept borrowed from economics. In economics, supply-demand is used to explain the price of, and not the need for, goods and services. The classic planning formula of “supply minus demand equals need” is probably obsolete. While facility inventories and participation data sets are both valuable, it makes no sense to subtract inventory from participation to determine something as subjective as “need.”

Population ratio

Recreation professionals, including the National Recreation and Park Association, have offered guidance to communities by publishing “ratios” for parks based on acres or facilities per thousand people. These ratios have been adapted by a number of communities in Washington, with noticeable inconsistency. One community uses a population ratio of 4,000 people per ball field; another nearby community uses 6,000 people per ball field. The 50 percent difference points out that the population ratio method is blind to demographics, current demand, institutional capacity, and other factors.

Service area or travel distance

Distance from people’s homes to parks and trails can make a measurable difference in use. However, service area alone is not adequate to measure success. Close-to-home facilities in poor condition are of little use to anyone and may represent a management liability.

There is a clear need for a better model for measuring success. The next chapter examines the *de facto* definitions of success used for the state’s operating and capital budgets.

¹⁰ “Replacing Conventional Park Level of Service (LOS) Analysis with the ‘Composite Values’ Approach,” Teresa Penbrooke, *Practicing Planner*, American Institute of Certified Planners, Fall 2007



4 Investing for Success

State government invests hundreds of millions of dollars every budget in natural resources and recreation. In total dollars, the investment is impressive; in a percent of total state expenditures, the investment is quite modest and declining.

The question raised is the public return on the investment of public funds. To what extent is the state investing in recreation facilities in a way that contributes to success?

General Fund Operating and Capital Expenditures¹¹

	Biennium (Dollars in Millions)						
	1991-93	1993-95	1995-97	1997-99	1999-01	2001-03	2003-05
Total Expenditures	\$20,206	\$22,516	\$24,302	\$26,488	\$29,867	\$32,762	\$35,0636
Natural Resources and Recreation Expenditures	\$389	\$400	\$389	\$412	\$479	\$562	\$575
% of Total	1.9%	1.7%	1.6%	1.5%	1.6%	1.7%	1.6%

Making Investment Decisions

When making investment decisions, the state uses different criteria for capital and operating budgets. The criteria are discussed below.

Operating Budget

While recreation has changed significantly during the past few decades, most models used to measure, plan for, or invest in recreation sites and facilities have not changed.

In recent biennia, the state's Office of Financial Management has used a process called Priorities of Government to develop the state operating budget.¹² One of the priorities of government is "cultural and recreational opportunities." When considering operating budget

¹¹ 2005 Data Book, Washington State Office of Financial Management, 2005

¹² Office of Financial Management Internet site <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/budget/pog/default.htm> August 2007



proposals for recreation, the Office of Financial Management uses the following measures:

- Per capita participation in cultural and recreational activities.
- Equity of participation in cultural and recreational activities.
- Percentage of users satisfied with their experience of cultural and recreational opportunities.
- Dollar value of volunteers' time, and private dollars donated to culture and recreation.

The Office of Financial Management and other participants have acknowledged that the measures are inadequate to reflect the complexity of access and recreation issues.

A closer look may help to assess whether the measures are adequate or if additional or entirely different measures are needed.

Per Capita Participation

As with data on any subject, there is more than one way to rank the activities in which Washington residents participate.

One way is to list the top 20 activities ranked by peak month prevalence. That is, in which month did most activity take place?

Another way to rank activities is by average month participation. This measure evens out the variation of prevalence in the monthly samples and gives a sense of the relative level of the activity among Washington residents for the year as a whole.

A third way is to count the number of times that an individual member of the population engaged in an activity.



Top 20 Recreation Activities in 2006¹³

Activity	Ranked by Highest Peak Season Participation	Ranked by Highest Monthly Average Participation	Ranked by Highest Frequency
Picnic, barbecue, or cookout	1	2	9
Walking without a pet	2	1	1
Swimming or wading at a beach	3	15	19
Sightseeing	4	3	10
Flower or vegetable gardening	5	7	7
Swimming in a pool	6	12	13
Walking with a pet	7	4	3
Playground recreation	8	5	5
Bicycling	9	6	6
Social event (indoor, community center)	10	9	20
Observing or photographing wildlife or nature	11	8	2
Jogging or running	12	10	4
Aerobics or fitness activities at indoor facility	13	11	8
Beachcombing	14	14	
Sledding, inner tubing, other snow play	15		12
Hiking	16	13	
Motor boating	17		
Weight conditioning at an indoor facility	18	16	11
Camping with a car or motorcycle	19		
Basketball	20	17	15
Gathering or collecting things in nature setting		18	14
Indoor class or instruction		19	18
Soccer		20	
4-wheel drive vehicle			16
Activity center			17

Discussion

General participation data is an inadequate indicator for making investment decisions. However, using data on specific activities that support multiple priorities of government appears to be valuable in guiding budget discussions. For example, the Department of Health has established the relationship between levels of physical activity and levels of personal health. In addition, the Department of Transportation is working to encourage people

¹³ *Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office 2006 Outdoor Recreation Survey*, Clearwater Research, July 2007



to walk or bicycle for personal mobility; transportation facilities are commonly used for recreation purposes.

Therefore, the “per capita participation” measure should be refined. The measure should be better focused to consider recreation’s contribution to multiple state priorities. From the Office of Financial Management report, *Priorities of Government*,¹⁴ at least two state goals are relevant and measurable:

1. From Improve the Health of Washingtonians: “Invest in expanding community and business based pilot projects to improve *wellness activities*¹⁵ and expand our basic understanding of best practices [emphasis added].”
2. From Improve Statewide Mobility of People, Goods, and Services: “Increase share of ridership of transit and other alternative travel modes. Increase non-motorized trips¹⁶ in urban areas.”

The measure of per capita participation should focus on activities contributing to these goals.

¹⁴ November 2006

¹⁵ According to the Washington State Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan, Department of Health, 2003, wellness activities include recreational opportunities such as walking, hiking, bicycling, playground activities, paddling, and field and court sports.

¹⁶ According to the Washington State Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan, Department of Health, 2003, non-motorized trips include walking and bicycling.



Equity of Participation (Geographic, Demographic, Socioeconomic)
 Access sites and facilities are distributed statewide. Boating facilities, for example, appear to be adequately distributed on a geographic basis.¹⁷ Free and low cost facilities from school playgrounds to sidewalks are found in virtually every community.

The Office of Financial Management has evidence that recreation participation is directly related to income and level of education: both higher income and higher levels of education appear to result in higher levels of recreational participation.

Participation in Recreational Activities by Income¹⁸

Annual Income	Recreational Participation
\$0-\$4,999	27%
\$5,000-\$14,999	21%
\$15,000-\$24,999	27%
\$25,000-\$34,999	38%
\$35,000-\$49,999	47%
\$50,000-\$74,999	55%
\$75,000-\$99,999	64%
\$100,000-\$149,000	75%
\$150,000 and over	78%

Similarly, there appears to be a direct relationship between education and recreation participation.

Participation in Recreational Activities by Education¹⁹

Education	Recreational Participation
< High School	16%
High School Graduate	34%
Some College	46%
Bachelor's Degree	61%
Graduate or Professional Degree	64%

The same relationship among income, education, and participation has been noted in other states.²⁰

¹⁷ *Washington Boater Needs Assessment*, Responsive Management, 2007

¹⁸ *Washington State Population Survey*, Office of Financial Management, 2006

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ *Research/Findings*, Issue 54, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, October 2005



Participation by race or ethnicity is somewhat uncertain. While data from the Office of Financial Management indicate lower recreational participation among Black/African Americans and Hispanics generally, the 2006 statewide survey by Clearwater Research found only few specific activities with significant racial/ethnic differences (skiing, recreational vehicle camping, all-terrain vehicle riding).²¹ The differences may be in the methods used by the two surveys.

Discussion

Most public agencies address the question of income: access to public recreation sites and facilities is predominantly free or at low cost. Local recreation programs offer discounted rates or other means to encourage people of all incomes and backgrounds to participate.

Research into barriers to recreation participation often identifies work schedules and family obligations, as well as lack of facilities close to home.²² It is known that an urban park's proximity to residential areas has a direct impact on actual use,²³ and that a key barrier to participation for low income people in Washington is lack of transportation to parks and recreation sites.²⁴ Therefore, site and facility location become a critical issue, one that needs to be measured as a partial surrogate for "equity." Ideally, sites and facilities would be close to where people live, and would be accessible by public transportation, foot, or bicycle.

Service area analysis with Geographic Information System tools is an obvious approach to this issue.

Users Satisfied With Their Experiences

A survey of Washington residents concerning attitudes about State Parks found Washington residents are, for the most part, satisfied with Washington State Parks: About half are *very* satisfied and another third are *somewhat* satisfied. Results are

²¹ *Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office 2006 Outdoor Recreation Survey*, Clearwater Research, July 2007

²² *A Look at Leisure*, "Desired Activities and Barriers to Participation," Alberta Recreation and Parks, March 1990

²³ *Park Use and Physical Activity in a Sample of Public Parks in the City of Los Angeles*, Rand Corporation, 2006

²⁴ *Voices of Washington: Public Opinion on Outdoor Recreation and Habitat Issues*, State of Washington Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation, November 1995



similar regarding satisfaction with State Park employees and State Park facilities.²⁵

In a similar result, a report of a survey of residents of counties bordering Puget Sound found a majority of Puget Sound area residents are satisfied with current public access points to Puget Sound, with 57 percent saying they are satisfied with the number of parks and public access points to Puget Sound, and 39 percent saying they would prefer more parks and other public access points.²⁶

Local area surveys find similar levels of satisfaction. A recreation study done for Chelan County Public Utility District asked about satisfaction with existing developed sites and concluded visitors are generally very satisfied with the recreation sites in the project area.²⁷ During on-site interviews, visitors were asked to rate the site they were visiting on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most satisfied with the site. All seven of the recreation sites were given very high ratings, with five of the parks given average ratings of nine or above.²⁸

Discussion

Of note is that each survey focused on designated parks and sites. However, many popular forms of recreation do not, for the most part, take place in a park.

In 2003, the RCO²⁹ contracted with the Department of Health to have walking-specific questions added to its Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS³⁰). Survey participants were asked about physical activity, both work and recreation related. Those respondents who reported walking as a recreational activity were asked what surface they walked on most often, and which surface they preferred for walking.

²⁵ *Washington State Parks Centennial 2013 Survey*, Responsive Management, under contract to Washington State Parks, 2006

²⁶ Puget Sound Residents Survey, Moore Information, May 2006, conducted for the Puget Sound Partnership

²⁷ DES and Howe Consulting, Inc., 2001d

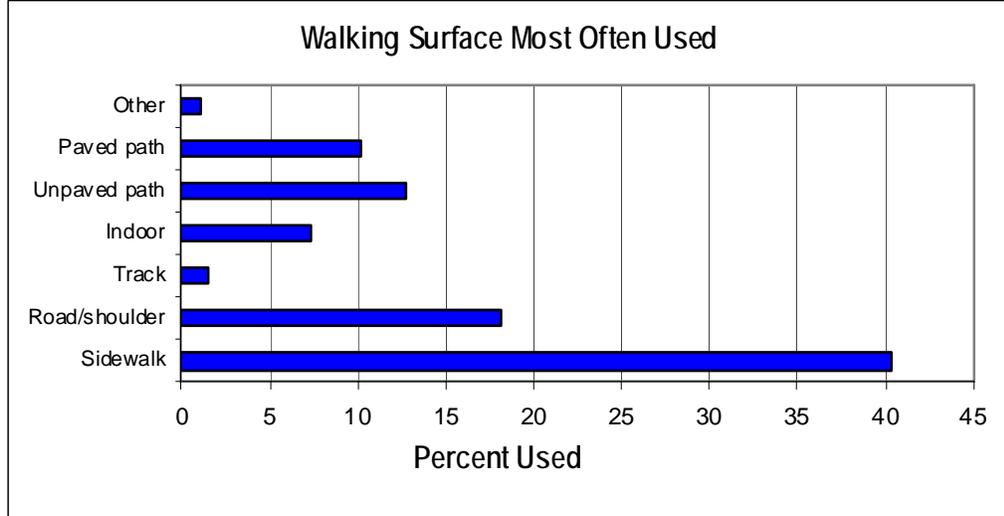
²⁸ Preliminary Draft Environmental Assessment (Final) for Hydropower License Rocky Reach Hydroelectric Project FERC Project No. 2145, Chelan County PUD, June 2004

²⁹ Formerly known as the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation, renamed the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) in July 2007

³⁰ The BRFSS collects information from adults on health behaviors and preventive practices related to several leading causes of death.

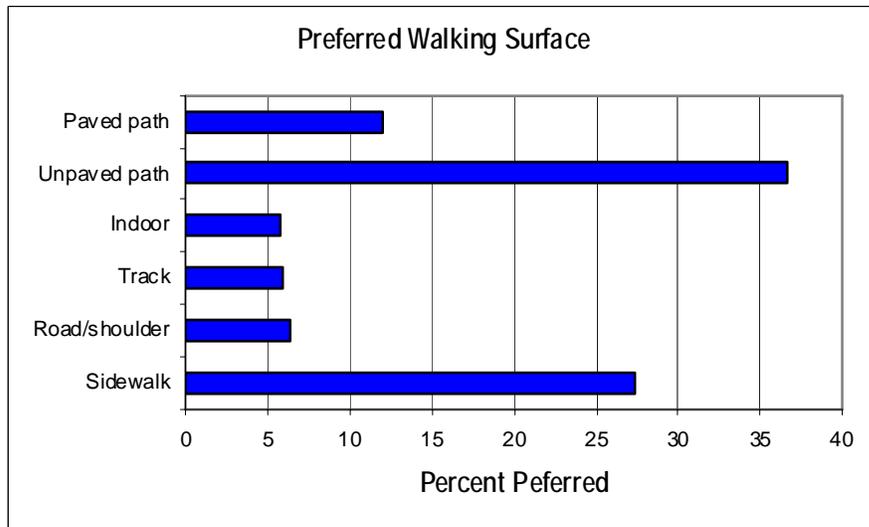


The BRFSS data on the walking surface most often used confirms the widespread use of transportation facilities for recreation.



From BRFSS data provided to RCO by Department of Health, August 2004

An additional question was the surface *preferred* for walking. The results are shown in the following graph.



From BRFSS data provided to RCO by Department of Health, August 2004

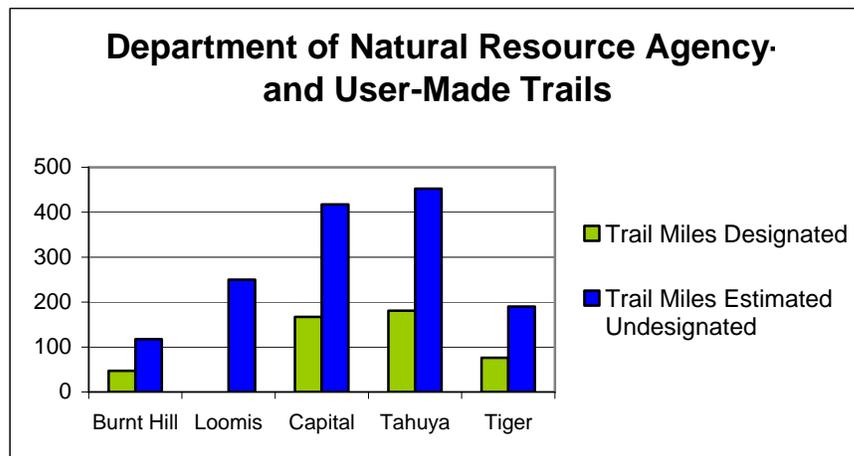
The high level of preference for the unpaved path may not be an indicator of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with walking on sidewalks and road shoulders, but may be reasonably interpreted as an indicator of unmet demand.



Satisfaction with available opportunity can be inferred from public behavior. Finding little or no acceptable inventory, the public will sometimes create its own.

State forests managed by the Department of Natural Resources are popular destinations for trail uses of all kinds. Statewide, mountain bike riders, equestrians, and off-road vehicle users have become adept at finding and adapting to undeveloped areas, both public and private. The phenomenon of the “user-made” trail is the most visible evidence of this adaptation.

One estimate is that the ratio of designated trail miles to undesignated trails miles on property owned by the Department of Natural Resources is about 1 to 2.5.³¹ This ratio is probably conservative. If accurate, the estimate means that the department has, at minimum, 3,000 miles of user-made trail on its property statewide.



The user-made inventory represents the potential for significant impact on land management. When in the context of the agency’s past practice to incorporate user-made trails into its official system, the user-made inventory could represent an unmet agency need for a trail budget 250 percent higher than actual.

Discussion

The relationship between satisfaction and actual participation cannot be adequately explained with the data available. User

³¹ RCO estimate developed for Department of Natural Resources, September 2006



satisfaction does not consider the institutional capacity of facility providers, and it does not take resource protection needs into account. In any event, user satisfaction is an important measure, but it must be balanced with other measures including the needs of land and facility managers.

Dollar value of volunteers' time and private dollars donated to culture and recreation

"Volunteers play a vital role in sustaining the treasure that is Washington state parks, providing more than 275,000 hours of service each year (the equivalent of 145 full-time employees). Helping hands are needed everywhere for a wide variety of short- and long-term projects, providing interesting and rewarding volunteer opportunities for individuals, couples, schools, families, corporations, citizen groups and service organizations."³²

Data is not available from other state agencies, but it may be reasonable to estimate that the Departments of Natural Resources and Fish and Wildlife both enjoy volunteer support.

Discussion

To estimate the value of volunteer time in grant applications, RCO uses the hourly rates determined by the Employment Security Department. The unskilled labor rate of \$13 an hour may be a suitable average, resulting in a volunteer value of \$3.5 million for State Parks. This compares to State Parks' estimated capital improvement backlog of about \$292 million.³³

While volunteerism is to be valued and encouraged, it appears not to be an adequate measure for recreation. For every volunteer able to contribute a day's worth of labor, no doubt there are countless others who do not have the time, who believe they have contributed through taxes and fees, or who simply have no interest. This measure should be augmented with other measures.

³² <http://www.parks.wa.gov/volunteer.asp>, August 2007

³³ State Parks 2010: A Capital Facilities Condition Report, December 2001



Recommendation on Operating Budget Criteria

The Priorities of Government budget process uses several criteria to help make state operating budget decisions. RCO recommends the following:

- Per capita participation in cultural and recreational activities

Keep this measure, but focus by measuring those activities that support additional priorities of government, specifically, those that contribute to physical activity and to personal mobility.
- Equity of participation in cultural and recreational activities

Keep this measure, but use Geographic Information System analysis to determine service area (proximity and access) as a key indicator representing “equity.”
- Percentage of users satisfied with their experience of cultural and recreational opportunities

Keep this measure, and combine with other elements.
- Dollar value of volunteers’ time, and private dollars donated to culture and recreation.

Enhance this measure with a measure of sustainability: that is, how well state agencies are achieving resource protection goals while managing recreation access.

Nowhere do the priorities of government relate access and recreation directly to natural resource protection. This connection needs to be made. The state is an important provider of resource recreation. Sustainable access, in which resource needs are addressed first, must be measured. In addition, measures should be considered for:

- An assessment of facility conditions based on design standards and safety conditions.
- Agency operation and maintenance goals.
- Access by public transportation, foot, and bicycle.

Finally, it is important to treat state and local lands and facilities differently. Though there is occasional overlap between state and local



sites (for example, a very small number of State Parks offer sports fields), core missions are different.

Criteria for the Capital Budget

Criteria for the capital budget for the most part do not match criteria used for the operating budget.

Most capital funding for additional state recreation land comes from the sale of state bonds. Bond funds are distributed through two primary methods: Competitive grant processes managed by the Recreation and Conservation Office, and the trust land transfer program managed by the Department of Natural Resources.

Distribution of Bond Revenue for Acquisition of Recreation and Habitat Lands 1990-2005³⁴

	Trust Land Transfer	Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program	Other*
Department of Natural Resources	79%	18%	3%
State Parks	59%	28%	13%
Department of Fish and Wildlife	0%	77%	23%

* Includes federal funds, direct budget appropriations, and other sources

Trust Land Transfer Program

The Department of Natural Resources identifies a list of properties each biennium for consideration by the Board of Natural Resources and the Legislature as candidates for the Trust Land Transfer program. Criteria for identifying property for transfer include "...low potential for income production due to factors such as steep, unstable slopes, critical fish and wildlife habitat, public use demands, environmental and social concerns, and other issues that complicate income production from certain trust lands. One key criterion is that properties, in aggregate, have a high timber to land value to ensure the greater part of the appropriation is deposited directly to fund school construction in the current biennium."³⁵

Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program

The criteria for distributing funds under this program vary by category. Some criteria are prescribed by statute. A cursory review of a few Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program categories shows the following:

³⁴ *Toward a Coordination Strategy for Habitat and Land Acquisitions in Washington State*, RCO, 2005

³⁵ *Trust Land Transfer Program 2007-2009*, Department of Natural Resources



Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program Evaluation Criteria

Category	Criteria	Statute
Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community support - Immediacy of threat to the site - Linkage between communities - Linkage between trails - Existing or potential usage - Consistency with an existing local land use plan or a regional or statewide recreational or resource plan - Availability of water access or views - Enhancement of wildlife habitat - Scenic values of the site 	RCW 79A.15.070
Water Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community support - Distance from similar water access opportunities - Immediacy of threat to the site - Diversity of possible recreational uses - Public demand in the area 	RCW 79A.15.070
Local Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need - Scope - Project design - Immediacy of threat - Site suitability - Expansion/renovation - Project support - Cost efficiencies - Growth Management Act preference - Proximity to human populations 	Not in statute

A comparison can be made to the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development's Youth Recreational Facilities program, which pays for youth recreational facilities, both indoor and outdoor. Its project selection criteria include:

- Percent of project funds raised.
- Design work started.
- Professionally prepared fundraising feasibility plan completed.
- Professionally prepared project feasibility study completed.
- Project readiness.
- Organizational capacity.



- Project results.
- Community need.
- Stakeholder participation.
- “High-performance” building (bonus points).

Other state grant programs distribute state capital funds for recreation facilities. Among them are the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account, Boating Facilities Program, and the Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities Program. Each, of course, has its own set of criteria for selecting projects. There are commonalities among the criteria, including:

- Need.
- Site suitability.
- Design.
- Community or public support.
- Growth Management Preference.
- Proximity to people.

Of the criteria, “proximity to people” most closely reflects criteria used for operating budget guidance.

Discussion

Criteria for state operating and capital budgets for the most part do not use the same measures. The relationship between the two is indirect at best. As one example, “equity of participation” is not directly measured when considering capital investment whether through grants or general fund budgeting.

If the state’s interest is to fund the best projects that help meet priorities of government, grant criteria should address measures used for priorities of government.

Recommendation

Criteria for the capital budget should, at minimum, reflect the criteria for the operating budget.



5 Proposal for Measuring Success

State government has an interest in accurate measures of its investments in access and recreation sites. The state also needs to better understand the outcomes that result from financial and other assistance to local and federal agencies.

Currently, there is no satisfactory way to measure the effectiveness of the state's investment in local recreation sites and facilities. While anecdote abounds, the state has little data with which to explain "what's working and what's not." As discussed previously, traditional recreation planning models from "supply-demand" to "facilities per thousand" ratios have been tested and found, at least individually, to be inadequate.³⁶

A concept well understood in land use planning is "level of service." Level of service measures can be adapted to a variety of public services and infrastructure types. Recreation facilities and access sites are no exception.

RCO recommends consideration of a level of service approach to measuring the state's investment in recreation. The measure is based on a grading system, similar to those used for school achievement and transportation systems: A being the best, and E being the worst. Presumably, a lower score argues for the need for more investment to achieve a target level of service. State agencies or individual communities are free to determine their target from A through E.

RCO has developed two preliminary level of service tools, one addressing state agency sites and facilities, and one addressing local agency sites and facilities. By preliminary, we mean these are concepts that need additional discussion and field testing over time.

The current initial approach to a statewide level of service is comprised of three sets of guidelines. This multiple guideline approach reflects public input that just one indicator of need is not enough to

³⁶ See "Methods Used" in Appendix.



adequately capture the complex nature of determining and providing access and recreation opportunities. As a result, the three sets of level of service guidelines help address the complexity of properly identifying and quantifying access and recreation site and facility needs. It also acknowledges the needs of agencies with differing planning capabilities and resources, as well as the need for a “sliding scale” methodology.

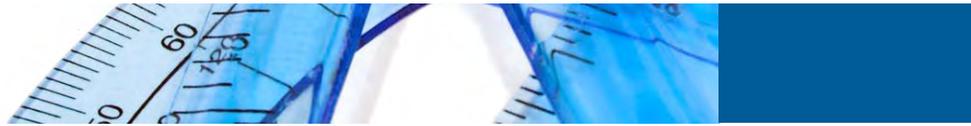
1. The “baseline” is intended as a minimum required measure. For state agencies, the baseline is resource protection. For local agencies, the baseline is per capita participation in activities that support priorities of government.
2. The “enhanced” criteria are meant to be added to the baseline if Geographic Information System resources are available.
3. The “in-depth” criteria also are to be added if the agency has the resources available.

An agency using the level of service tool could use an average of all items or simply score individual items to assess current level.

Proposed for State Agencies

The proposed level of service for state agency sites and facilities begins with the assumption that the state’s primary role is in resource recreation. Resource recreation demands sufficient stewardship of resources to allow sustainable access and recreation.

RCO recommends that state agencies use existing processes and available data to self-assess this indicator. Sustainable access is management of appropriate recreation over time in a manner that maintains resource qualities for future generations. We further recommend that “resource protection” must quantify the potentially significant levels of inappropriate public use and impacts. Examples of items that are appropriate to measure include miles of informal (user-made) trails, and the number and extent of user-made (dispersed) campsites. Additional measurable impacts include introduction of invasive species, incidents and amounts of vandalism, theft, illegal drug sites, poaching, and garbage dumping. These impacts have been identified by the Office of Financial Management as those that “...degrade trust assets, create environmental damage, and, in extreme cases, result in deaths and injuries to the recreationists themselves.”

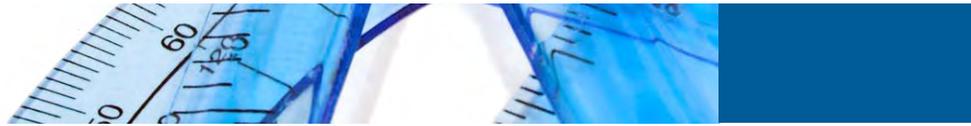


The service area distance assumes access via private motor vehicle. Access via other modes of transportation is addressed below in the access indicator.

State natural resource agencies currently use distinct facility condition measures. Agreement among the agencies, perhaps including the Department of General Administration and the Office of Financial Management, on access and recreation facility condition measures is needed.

State Agency Level of Service Indicators

Indicator	Level of Service Ratings				
	A	B	C	D	E
Baseline Criteria: Sustainable Access					
Sustainable access The agency provides sustainable access while meeting this percentage of its resource protection goals	More than 70%	61-70%	51-60%	50-59%	0-50%
Enhanced Criteria: Service Area, Population-Based (Equity)					
Distance to parks, trails, access sites Percentage of population within 1 hour of a state site	66-100%	51-65%	36-50%	21-35%	0-20%
In-Depth Criteria: Function-Based Guidelines					
Agency-based assessment Percentage of facilities that are fully functional per their specific design and safety guidelines	81-100%	61-80%	41-60%	21-40%	0-20%
Public satisfaction Percentage of users satisfied with the condition (facility condition, cleanliness, etc.) of outdoor access and recreation facilities	66-100%	51-65%	36-50%	35-49%	0-35%
Operations and Maintenance On average, routine operations and maintenance funded at this percentage of annual need	81-100%	61-80%	41-60%	21-40%	0-20%
Access Percentage of facilities that may be accessed safely via foot, bicycle, or public transportation	66-100%	51-65%	36-50%	21-35%	0-20%



Proposed for Local Agencies

Participation, or demand for specific types of park and recreation facilities, forms the first set of statewide level of service guidelines. Participation was chosen because it can be measured quantitatively, is a good indicator of actual demand for recreation facilities, and can be used to estimate future needs.

Even the smallest community with the fewest resources could use the “individual active participation” criterion, simply by using statewide participation data available from RCO. RCO’s participation data is both standardized and statistically defensible by regions enabling more accurate comparisons across statewide communities.

The enhanced criteria would use the power of Geographic Information System technology to graphically analyze and display service areas (which approximate travel distances) and the population served within the established service areas. There is compelling evidence that a person’s proximity to a park or recreation facility greatly determines their potential use of it. As such, service areas are an effective means of encouraging equitable distribution (or the provision of links/paths to) parks and recreation facilities.

Public school playgrounds and ball fields should be considered for inclusion in service area inventories. For communities planning under the Growth Management Act, we recommend comparing inventory in existing city limits to inventory in urban growth boundaries to help estimate future needs.

Function-based guidelines focus on the function, as opposed to the provision, of specific types of park and recreation facilities. These guidelines are intended to provide direction regarding the ongoing operation of park and recreation facilities, the adequate funding of operations and maintenance activities, and the provision of safe, convenient access to park and recreation facilities.



Local Agency Level of Service Indicators

Indicators	Level of Service Ratings				
	A	B	C	D	E
Baseline Criteria: Per Capita Participation					
Individual Active Participation Percent of population that participates in one or more active outdoor activities	66-100%	51-65%	41-50%	31-40%	0-30%
Facility Capacity: Activity-Specific Participation Existing facilities meet this percentage of activity-specific demand	76-100%	61-75%	46-60%	31-45%	0-30%
ENHANCED CRITERIA: Service Area/Population-Based (Equity)					
Urban Park, Trail Percentage of population within ½ mile of a neighborhood park or trail	76-100%	61-75%	46-60%	31-45%	0-30%
County Park, Trail* Percentage of population within 1-1/2 miles of a county park/trail	76-100%	61-75%	46-60%	31-45%	0-30%
Regional Park, Trail* Percentage of the population within 25 miles of a regional park or trail	76-100%	61-75%	46-60%	31-45%	0-30%
In-depth Enhancement: Function-Based Guidelines					
Agency-based Assessment Percentage of facilities that are fully functional per their specific design and safety guidelines (based on manager assessment)	81-100%	61-80%	41-60%	21-40%	0-20%
Public satisfaction Percentage of population satisfied with the condition (including facility condition, cleanliness, etc.) of existing outdoor park and recreation facilities	66-100%	51-65%	36-50%	26-35%	0-25%
Operations and Maintenance On average, routine operations and maintenance funded at this percentage of annual need (does not include major capital development)	80-100%	61-80%	41-60%	21-40%	0-20%
Access Percentage of facilities that may be accessed safely via foot, bicycle, or public transportation	80-100%	61-80%	41-60%	21-40%	0-20%

* "County" is defined as a site or facility intended to serve the providing county's population. "Regional" is defined as a site or facility intended to serve populations that cross jurisdictional boundaries.



Use of the Criteria

Agencies using the proposed criteria would be able to conduct a self-assessment. An agency could give itself a single grade based on the baseline criteria. It could go further, using enhanced and in-depth criteria to better estimate success in service delivery. An agency using multiple criteria could use an average of grades for all criteria, or establish a separate grade for each selected criterion to help determine where more investment might be needed.

Access and recreation providers have historically found it difficult to “tell their story” when competing for money, whether in grant competition or at budget time. The recreation level of service is intended as a tool for better communication of access and recreation needs. RCO’s recommendation is to test this tool at local and state level. Tests could include:

- State funding for local communities willing to use its guidance in developing access and recreation plans.
- Use of level of service in grant evaluation instruments.
- Use of level of service as a discussion tool in the state’s operating budget process.

Outputs from the Criteria

If used, the level of service tool will not only help the state and communities objectively assess how well their trails and parks are functioning, but can help determine with more precision what additional investments are necessary to improve service, with obvious implications for budgets and funding decisions.

At some point, full use of the criteria could help guide state funding decisions. It could be decided that communities with lower level of service scores would be given priority in state grant processes.

Use of uniform criteria would help to explain and clarify “need” statewide. Acceptance of uniform criteria would advance public understanding of the obstacles and opportunities faced by providers.

As the in-depth criteria emphasize the partnership between providers and the public, the results should be better communication and better results on the ground.



Potential Outcomes

A fully functioning system of public lands and facilities would provide more than just an opportunity to recreate in a quality setting. Other outcomes, all measurable, may be reasonably anticipated.

Reasonable outcomes from a system of lands, parks, access sites, and trails:

- Attracting tourism
- Attracting businesses
- Attracting retirees
- Enhancing real estate values of adjacent properties
- Increased retail sales
- Decrease in rates of obesity, cost savings for preventing obesity-related conditions (heart disease, diabetes)

In addition to the above, the State Parks system can enjoy:

- Better informed citizens: improved awareness of state natural heritage, geography, and history.
- Better preservation of natural, historic, and cultural sites.

The Department of Natural Resources could realize:

- Lower cost of managing lands due to reduced vandalism, less garbage dumping, fewer drug labs.
- Less exposure to liability-related lawsuits.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife could see:

- Increased sale of licenses.
- Less illegal behavior.
- Less exposure to liability-related lawsuits.



A Note on Open Space

The Growth Management Act establishes 14 goals for cities and counties to assure that their high quality of life is sustained as their communities grow. One of these goals is to “retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreational facilities” (Revised Code of Washington 36.70A.020(9)).

The act encourages planning for open space and recreational needs of a community to be integrated with planning for other needs. For example, planning for open space and recreation in conjunction with protection of critical environmental areas can provide numerous benefits to a community’s human population as well as fish and wildlife. Open space also provides direct health and safety benefits, especially when combined with planning for natural hazard mitigation, such as in flood zones and groundwater aquifer recharge areas.

The Open Space Taxation Act, enacted in 1970 and found in Revised Code of Washington 84.34, allows property owners to have their open space, farm and agricultural, and timber lands valued at their current use rather than at their highest and best use.

Work done to date on the level of service concept has not included this wide variety of issues and interests. For this reason, RCO does not propose a level of service for measuring open space at this time. Further research and public involvement is called for.



6 Testing the Proposal

The level of service concept appears to have merit as a new model for defining and measuring success in outdoor recreation sites, facilities, and programs. It incorporates multiple criteria suggested by best professional practice and public guidance (see Appendix). However, the concept needs field testing over time and in multiple settings before it can be fully adopted as a working tool.

RCO proposes to test the level of service concept in cooperation with the National Park Service in future grant cycles of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grant program.

The test would be done in two areas. First, RCO would identify communities that have a need to revise their recreation plans. RCO would provide technical assistance to a cross-section of these communities with diverse populations, locations, and conditions. Technical assistance would include providing participation data or helping to gather local data; funding Geographic Information System work to determine service area; and assisting in addressing in-depth criteria. The end result would be a recommendation on the level of service approach. The recommendation could be for full adoption, revision and further testing, or outright rejection as unworkable.

Second, RCO would make further changes to the state's open project selection process. These changes would build on the previously successful changes made in 2002-03. At that time, RCO appointed a standing advisory committee to evaluate Land and Water Conservation Fund grant applications, and updated the evaluation criteria. The criteria update was designed to help identify those grant applications most closely aligned with current trends and state needs. New changes to the open selection process³⁷ could include use of a level of service criterion in place of an existing criterion such as "need" or "readiness to proceed." RCO would need to work closely with the National Parks Service, the standing advisory committee, grant

³⁷ RCO Manual 15 would be modified.



applicants, and the public to determine the changes needed to adequately test the level of service concept.

Whether or not the level of service is tested in the Land and Water Conservation Fund program, RCO recommends the following priorities, in order of importance, for the Land and Water Conservation Fund grant program in the next five years:

1. Projects supporting individual active participation. “Active” means those forms of recreation that rely predominantly on human muscles and includes walking, sports of all kinds, bicycling, and other activities that help people achieve currently accepted recommendations for physical activity levels.

Reason: Walking, sports, and bicycling are among the most popular activities statewide. It is in the state’s best interests to leverage the public’s willingness to be active to meet physical activity (and potentially health) goals.

2. Projects that provide continued improvement of existing sites and facilities previously funded with Land and Water Conservation Fund grants.

Reasons: To emphasize the importance of Land and Water Conservation Fund-supported sites and facilities; respond to changes in participation trends over time; and address the public’s concern about the condition of existing recreation sites and facilities.

3. The provision of active connections between communities and recreation sites and facilities. “Active connections” means shared use trails and paths, greenways, and other facilities and features that encourage walking, jogging, running, and bicycling for more than recreation.

Reason: Leverage funding to address multiple priorities of government, including recreation, health through physical activity, and personal mobility.

The open project selection process is in place and is easily adaptable to these priorities.³⁸

³⁸ RCO Manual 15 would be modified.



Technical note: Federal rules for the development of state comprehensive outdoor recreation plans require the inclusion of a wetlands priority component.³⁹ The Recreation and Conservation Office has no jurisdiction over wetlands in Washington and therefore has no authority to identify wetland priorities. Washington State law assigns primary responsibility for wetland issues to the Washington Department of Ecology.⁴⁰ Ecology is guided by the “antidegradation policy” found in Chapter 173-201A-070 of the Washington Administrative Code.⁴¹ Ecology works closely with the Pacific Coast Joint Venture⁴² to identify wetlands acquisition projects as well as funding sources such as RCO grants. Ecology’s wetlands strategy is found in publication #95-100 *State Wetlands Integration Strategy* on the Internet at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/95100.pdf>.

³⁹ Land and Water Conservation Fund Grants Manual (C630.1)

⁴⁰ Ecology derives its authority from federal and state laws, including the Clean Water Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act, the State Water Pollution Control Act (Revised Code of Washington 90.48) and the Shoreline Management Act (Revised Code of Washington 90.58).

⁴¹ See Ecology publication 97-112 How Ecology Regulates Wetlands 1999

⁴² The Joint Venture is a non-government organization working to help implement the North American Wetlands Conservation Act in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Appendix: Methods Used

Level of Service Development

In its 2005-06 session, the Legislature passed Engrossed Senate Substitute Bill 6384, which directed RCO to develop “recommendations for a statewide approach to a recreation level of service for active local and regional active recreation facilities, including indicators with which to measure progress in achieving level of service objectives.”

RCO understood level of service required consideration of a number of factors including but not limited to service area, accessibility, level and quality of development, regional context or connectivity, and response to public demand.

RCO assembled an advisory team to help clarify terms, identify issues, and recommend approaches. The team members were

- Larry Otos, Washington Parks and Recreation Association
- Speed Fitzhugh, recreation specialist, Avista Utilities
- Nancy Craig, land use and recreation manager, Grant County Public Utility District
- Grant Griffin, recreation planner, Pierce County
- Greg Jones, citizen volunteer, Wenatchee
- Linda Steinman, Washington State Office of Financial Management

In addition, RCO had outreach assistance from Leonard Bauer, managing director of Growth Management Services, Washington Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development; and Brit Kramer, executive director of the Washington Recreation and Parks Association.



RCO retained the services of EDAW, an international consulting firm, which tested a number of level of service options using public information available from six local communities (Spokane County, Winthrop, Wenatchee, Snohomish County, Tacoma, and Aberdeen).

The options tested were:

1. Population ratio (“facilities per thousand,” as originally published by the National Recreation and Park Association)
2. Service area (Geographic Information System-based)
3. Community-driven, based on typical public meetings (“those who speak up”)
4. Demand-based, relying on participation data (“actual play”)
5. Service area/population ratio, using Geographic Information System technology
6. Community-driven/demand based, combined
7. Preferred service area, attempting to recognize the relationship between distance and use

For example, data from Winthrop was compared to the National Recreation and Park Association “facilities per thousand” guidelines. It was found that the guidelines suggested zero facilities for that community. In reality, Winthrop enjoys parks, trails, and ball fields in addition to nearby state and federal sites and facilities.

In December 2006, RCO held a series of workshops to explain the options, to present test results, and to get public comment on a possible preferred option. Eight workshops were held, two each in Spokane, Wenatchee, Everett, Tacoma, and Aberdeen.

Additional presentations and workshops were held with the Washington Recreation and Park Association in April 2007, November 2007, and February 2008.

Participation Data Collection

In 2005, the RCO contracted with Clearwater to conduct the 2006 outdoor recreation survey. The survey would gather original, objective,



statistically defensible data about participation in outdoor recreational activities in Washington.

The RCO had established several criteria for the survey results. The collection method had to be based on a statistically valid sample that would support defensible conclusions for the state as a whole and for each of ten regions. The statewide survey results had to have a precision of plus or minus 5 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Finally, the method had to minimize bias in the survey results.

To meet those criteria, Clearwater used a telephone survey method based on a stratified random-digit-dialing sample design. The design would yield a minimum of 3,000 interviews with randomly selected residents of Washington. Compared with other sample frames, this approach has the benefit of high coverage of the target population. Compared with other data collection modes, computer-assisted telephone interviewing has the benefits of relatively quick sample processing, repeated and timely contacts to complete an interview, and a high degree of accuracy and completeness in recording respondents' answers. Finally, stratification of the sample would, while minimizing cost, achieve equitable precision in the survey estimates for each tourism region.

Clearwater used a repeated cross-sectional design for sampling. The sample was stratified proportionately by month and disproportionately by tourism region. That approach collected the same number of interviews in each of the ten Washington tourism regions each month for a year. The design provided comparable precision (confidence intervals) for the survey results in each tourism region and for each season.

Clearwater designed a questionnaire that collected data comparable to the data reported in 2002, which permitted analysis of changes in outdoor recreation participation. This included statistically defensible results for activities in the 15 major categories. The instrumentation permitted analysis of current participation by season of the year; frequency or activity occasion; setting or facility type used; and demographic characteristics, including age, gender, ethnicity, and income. Finally, the design measured recreation preferences, as distinct from actual participation.

A complete report including methods, data results, and cross-tab files, is available from RCO. See www.rco.wa.gov.



Public Input on Criteria for Priorities of Government

Governor Chris Gregoire met with Washington residents during a series of town halls in 2006.⁴³ The town halls were held in Spokane, Vancouver, Pasco, Puyallup, and Everett. Residents were invited to “share their thoughts on the issues most important to them.”

Structured around the issue list of Priorities of Government, the town halls gave people the chance to describe top issues and to suggest ways to measure progress on the issues. In each of the town hall meetings, recreation and cultural opportunities were the public’s lowest priority. When asked about ways to measure success, the replies were:

- Percentage of residents by regional and demographics, who feel they have good access to desirable recreational activities.
- Percentage of state-managed cultural and recreational assets judged to be in good or excellent condition.
- Percentage of user fees actually used for those activities.
- Per capita participation in cultural and recreational activities.

⁴³ News release, Office of the Governor, June 26, 2006

