A Glimpse of Outdoor Recreation

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Since the forester is coming in closer contact with people and recreation every day, I decided to follow suit. This brought about my endeavors as an amateur park policeman (often called ranger) during the past summer.

The scene of this caper was the Kettle Moraine State Forest, which is located in the rolling hardwood-sprinkled hills of east-central Wisconsin. It was an ideal place to find recreation seekers in complete pandemonium, as the forest's two parks are located within an hour and a half drive of one half the state's population. Most any form of outdoor recreation, from egg-catching contests to beach parties, could be witnessed in these parks.

Of all the park's visitors it was the campers who provided the most unforgettable study of human nature. They were sometimes the worst of enemies, yet often seemed to think amazingly alike despite their various backgrounds. When the campmaster registered them for a campsite and asked, "Do you have any pets?" he usually heard, "No, just my wife . . . hee . . . hee . . . hee." They were often puzzled as to why the campmaster didn't laugh. The campers were, however, usually the most law abiding persons in the parks.

Management Problems

It was not long before many of the complex problems involved in the provision of outdoor recreation became evident. Since the concepts and values underlying these problems are abstract, most views and decisions concerning their solutions have been subjective. Whoever wishes to manage outdoor recreation in the future must be willing to analyze these problems and do so objectively if their provision of this use is to be justified.

The proper procedures of communication with people (public relations) is the backbone of many management conflicts and the basic problem in the provision of outdoor recreation. Conflicts arise between and within land management agencies as well as in public administration. For example, one crowded Sunday afternoon I asked a bus driver to park in another lot. Unfortunately, he had been previously instructed to park in several other lots, this
being the most recent. His passengers were already
gone and would be in mass confusion upon returning
to find no bus. The incident renewed all his doubts
about the area’s administration to say the least, and
only a humble reconsideration was appropriate. It
was necessary to establish a common point of view
with the driver to reconcile the misunderstanding
tactfully.

The state parks also provided some insight into
the controversy on the financing of recreation. In
general people appeared accustomed to the necessity
of paying for the heavily used facilities, which they
had been doing since 1960. Some costs of provision
and maintenance were obvious, and visitors appar-
ently felt the areas did hold benefits of some value.
A sticker fee (daily or annual) was assessed for
vehicle parking, and a daily registration fee was
charged for camping. Although I had little difficulty
enforcing these requirements, there were individuals
who consistently tried to evade buying a parking
sticker.

Regulations Abroad

With the population explosion and a diminishing
availability of developed recreation areas, the point
of maximum outdoor recreation capacity is slowly
coming into focus in many areas. This situation
necessitates heavy restriction upon the users of our
available facilities and areas for conservation pur-
poses as well as public safety and law enforcement.
Thus, I found a multitude of regulations conveniently
listed in the area’s park manual. Detailed and
flexible rules covering items such as personal con-
duct, unnecessary noise, refuse, fires, pets, camping,
parking, property damage, boating, and firearms
were in effect on state forests and parks. As one can
see, the future possibilities for regulations are fantas-
tic. But there is always some consolation in that
license fees are income tax deductible. The public
generally did, however, respect the authority of the
recreation area’s personnel.

Prestige was in fact one of my job’s biggest con-
solations. I was constantly hailed as “Mr. Ranger” by
all the youngsters who looked upon me as their true

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blue idol. Some of the picnickers, however, seemed to think of me as more of a well paid beachcomber. Once, a boy asked if I was really a ranger and I of course said yes. His reply... "Then how come you're cleaning out the restrooms?" I assured him that I was only inspecting them—confounded kids!

Then there was the little girl fishing off the pier while sadly watching her sandal float out into a weedbed. A fisherman at heart, I borrowed her tackle and tried to snag it, but ended up paying her father for all the lures that I lost. Another youngster later waded out and rescued the sandal. Did I mention prestige or tact?

Outdoor recreation still remains an important and constructive use of leisure time which benefits society by avoiding the consequences of idleness. This unfortunately does not eliminate the mischief and destruction found in our outdoor recreation areas. Will our future juveniles with more idle time on their hands seek the outdoors only to find strict regulation and supervision against which to rebel? Establishing regulations based on sometimes controversial principles of preservation, conservation, law enforcement, and public safety while maintaining some atmosphere of freedom will be an arduous task for the future recreation manager.

**Demand Versus Need**

A changing public attitude unveiled itself as another complication of management. The tenderfoot camper may demand isolated areas with all the conveniences of home one year and try to pitch a tent on the beach the next. Metamorphic preferences of recreation seekers as well as their differences of opinion should prevent long-run or universal generalizations about specific demands for outdoor recreation.

Present public demand for outdoor recreation and our responsibility to increase its benefits as well as promote the conservation and utilization of our natural resources have indicated the necessity of future outdoor education program development, or have they? Increased knowledge of nature could logically stimulate appreciation for our natural resources and increase support for their management. Individuals often, however, seek outdoor recreation in a somewhat random and aimless manner not readily knowing what they are after other than some type of enjoyment, adventure, or satisfaction. Perhaps outdoor education would show these people what is available and of particular interest to them. But what of the old-fashioned fantasy and adventure found in the great outdoors—will they be facets of yesteryear only to be found in story books and motion pictures?

The obvious increase in demand for outdoor recreation could indicate many things, such as a greater appreciation for our natural resources or a greater need for their benefits. It is commonly thought that outdoor recreation is required to satisfy physical, mental, and spiritual needs, but this concept is hard to prove and harder to quantify. There is the possibility that physical health may be adequately maintained through proper exercise conducted indoors. Perhaps there are as many emotionally ill-adjusted individuals wandering about outdoors as indoors, and what are the benefits of solitude—assuming that you can still find it?

If outdoor recreation does satisfy basic needs, the activities most effective in doing so should be intensively studied through research. This will require analysis of their effects on the individual and of the environment necessary for these effects. Some authorities believe that the release of emotional stress is one important process involved. Perhaps this was the case one Saturday morning when I observed several teenage girls holding up blankets to change clothes in the middle of a picnic area about two hundred feet from the bathhouse.

Thus, the recreation manager is hard put to treat the public fairly and administer his areas efficiently. He must objectively evaluate controversial, complex, and intangible alternatives and thoroughly explain his functions for society to ponder and maybe accept. If he can perceive the future, alleviate criticism, and enjoy dealing with people, perhaps an occasional smile will reveal appreciation.