

Session: Meeting the Needs of Special Interest Groups

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Audience Listing of Special Interest Request Affecting Use of Parkland

Facilities

- Metal Detecting
- Shed Antler Hunting
- Advertising
- Cell Towers
- Leasing for other than park purposes
- Purchasing parkland for non-park purposes
- Taking off-site buildings and moving them into parks
- Orienteering Courses
- Horse Trails and camps
- Geocaching
- Climbing walls
- Model airplane fields
- Archery ranges
- Boat Regattas
- Snowmobile Trails
- Dog parks – dog trial areas
- Mountain Bike Courses
- Ski Skating Trails in addition to Classic stride
- Sled Dog areas
- Memorials
- Skate parks
- OHV trails/areas
- Disc Golf
- Farmer's Markets
- Sail Boat Docks
- Community Gardens
- Gun Ranges

Special Uses of Existing Facilities

- Baptisms
- Church Services/Weddings

- Movies – major motion pictures
- Distribution of cremation ashes
- Commercial Photography
- Druid Ceremonies
- Harvesting/Picking natural resources
- Fundraisers
- Car Shows/Equipment Shows
- Art Festivals
- Concerts/Symposiums
- Races
- Paint Ball
- Endurance Rides – Triathalons

Panel Presentations Best Practices

Steve Sullivan, Director Dakota Co. Parks

- Need to take a broader look at what a Special Interest Group is – Categorize (1) Protectionists (2) Traditionalist (3) Expansionists
- Protectionists – Protect group interest at the expense of others (NIMBY's)

Example – sometimes environmentalists can fall into this category. They want to protect what use to be.
- Traditionalists – Focus on the current mission, current practice. Their message is that we should do what we do and tread carefully into new areas. These SIG's may not be responsive to change.
- Expansionists – Aware and responsive to changing public values. Since we don't always have pulse of public, they can be educators of political representatives. Come in with new ideas – challenge us. Examples – Skate parks and Mt. Biking came into park systems by expansionists but have become traditional. Possible negative side – don't care about impact to others.
- Overall, impact of SIG's can be to create awareness! We have the benefit of being educated by SIG's which can lead to increased and better decision making.
- New customers – niche markets. Parks may be too institutional and traditional. SIG's are agents of change.
- How to best manage SIG's.
 - Have a well defined mission as an anchor.
 - Need to have processes to allow mission to be tested. We will be the same today as tomorrow, but the public has changed.

- Need to broaden public participation. Go to where the people are and don't expect to come to us.
- Connect political decision makers earlier in the process.
- Try pilots – make sure park plans are updated and contemporary. Be ahead of trends.
- Get rid of stuff that doesn't work. Try some things out.

Dolf Moon – Hutchinson.

- Representing greater Minnesota interests. Some issues in rural MN may be different issues but other issues migrate from the Metro area.
- Often best to replicate hard-work already done in dealing with special interests. How do you develop policies and procedures?
- Don't know who is going to come knocking at the office. Never say "Hell No" – use "Maybe."
- Check with peers – get a pulse of what elected folks are thinking.
- Can't write a policy for each thing. Common sense approach.

Jody Yungers, Ramsey County

- Ramsey co. very urbanized and populated resulting in a great demand for special interest use of parklands.
- Community groups want to recreate in county. Diverse population requests.
- Be prepared. Types of special use permits. Created a gate keeper system. Consistency key element.
- Work with agency attorneys to develop a template for various requests. Example – meets, sound amplification.
- Municipal ordinances different and may affect policies/procedures/permits.
- In regards to SIG's using parklands it is important to have an up to date development plan.
- Be proactive in responding to requests. Meet broader community interests.
- Financial impacts are a key consideration and be sure to run up the political flag pole.

Tom McDowell, Three Rivers Park District

- Need to look at SIG's in a positive light. Often we see them just as a complaint – "You are not providing what I need to recreate."
- Responding to SIG can be satisfying. Provides an opportunity to let SIG representative know about problem and work together to analyze.
- SIG's can be primary agents for change. Innovations – beyond staff. Example during the 1980's snowboarding was resisted and now has become traditional.
- Need to have in place a process to respond. Three Rivers Park District has a process, but it does have built in flexibility. A consistent evaluation process let's the SIG know you are being fair. Documented and shared.
- Pilot projects can work well if the evaluation and review piece is in place up front and followed through on.

Audience Comments and Best Practices

- Bob Lambert (Eden Prairie) cautioned about the need for good follow up when doing Pilot projects. Must be willing evaluate and establish boundaries.
- Question was posed about the limit of staff authority in making decisions regarding special uses. Jody Yungers responded that it depends on situation. All highly visible uses, not covered in routine policy are referred up to the Commissioner's Office.
- Comment made that if request is outside of realm and judgmental they need to go to the Board. An example being dealt with by many agencies is **(OLDA's)** – Off-leash dog areas.
- Often need to cross departmental lines in evaluating requests due to impacts on other services such as public safety, public works, public relations, etc.
- Dolf Moon commented that in a smaller community, he seeks organizational feedback but also often relies on “gut feeling” as a strong indicator.
- Realize that Park professionals can lose battles – Commissioners can go over your head. Political decisions.
- Tom McDowell commented that there is not a single formula for handling every special interest request situation. SIG use of parkland should fit the organizational mission.
- An important evaluation criterion is to assess the level of support that is needed to accommodate the activity. Does the group have the resources to assist or do they just want us to take it on?
- Important to evaluate impact on natural resources and other park use.
- Steve Michaud (Lakeville) stated that fees policies should be set to make the activity/use self-sustaining, including maintenance. Host clubs that handle activities and establish expectations. Don't just give it to them – get something back. Fee protocol based on number of users for some events – i.e. trails events.
- Dolf Moon indicated that the Parks and Recreation Department now has a staff liaison on all youth organizations – staff persons serve as a liaison. This helps take some of the fight out of the organization and they are better able to visualize the need to share limited resources. This is a way of getting people on your team. SIG's may assist in paying for facility upgrades. Community gets better understanding that “nothing is free.”
- Bob Lambert commented that this was a good effort but that it will take commitment and action on everybody's part to share these ideas and best practices share with others. He challenged all to get on web site and put BMP and resource information for all to share. .
- Bob Lambert shared that at first he resisted dog parks because of the amount of parkland that was needed. Anything that has that much demand – we out to have. Have lots and small ones. He suggested that municipalities all have unused hockey rinks that could be used as dog parks. He commented that all these dogs have owners and we are providing social recreation opportunities for people when opening dog parks.
- John Keprios shared that he believed it is positive that people want to use the parks, except Park Uses. He sees one of the biggest issues being dealing with NIMBY's in a fully developed community. He used the term “NOTE's” standing for people whose perspective is “Not over there either.”
- Always keep a positive attitude. Have a predetermined plan in place to review. Question as to how much land should be set aside for exclusive use. Determine before the call comes. In the City of Edina they had to scale back – too much private use.
- Master Plan for the park one of the first places to go when determining how much land for special use. Clearly becomes one of the biggest professional challenges. If you let people who live closest to the park determine the uses – you will never get any changes. Let public know not private land.

- When assessing a special use, go out and find others in the community who may be interested – not just advocates or park neighbors. (Good practice) Broaden the base.
- Set up a broad base – diverse planning team. - Committee Approach for evaluation.
- An Open House Forum - rather than a community meeting is a good format to use. It does not provide individuals the opportunity to grandstand. All questions and comments are handled individually.
- A public involvement process taught in a program entitled “Blieker Training” – was referenced as a good tool for soliciting public input.
- Jeannie Daniels (Mn State Parks) shared information about a Coastal Zone Management Program, a process identifying 35 techniques for dealing with different public input situations.
- Request made for sharing best practices related to “Memorials” in parks. What are people doing? Please put on web site.
- Request made for sharing best practices – dealing with public art?
- In some cases when dealing with SIG’s, professionals should determine which level of agency (local, regional, state) is best able to deal with request? May be able to work with each other on joint projects. Example - DNR working with County land departments. Identify what is the strength of each agency.
- Share what we know and get ahead of the issues.
- Request was made that agencies put their Geochacing policies on the Best Practices Web site.