

MINNESOTA

Best Practices for Parks and Outdoor Recreation Summit

April 4 & 5, 2006

TRENDS

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1. Loss of General Fund support/expectation that agencies move toward self-sufficiency.
 - In a poor economy, parks are often the first programs cut.
 - Park agencies are under pressure to maximize revenues.
 - There is an increased interest in privatizing programs and facilities.

TRENDS

2. The need for Capital Improvement funds is increasing – particularly to care for an aging infrastructure.
 - Inadequate maintenance dollars lead to deterioration of structures and the invasion of exotic plants.
 - Competition from the private sector is changing visitor expectations.
 - Pressure is increasing to provide facilities for new recreation equipment.

TRENDS

3. The landscape is changing from rural to urban.
 - Urban sprawl is increasing at an alarming rate.

TRENDS

4. The demographics of the population are changing.
 - Our population is aging.
 - Many parks are experiencing a significant increase in non-English speaking visitors.

TRENDS

5. Technology is creating a generation raised on instant communication, video games, and virtual experiences with a reduced level of physical activities and outdoor experiences.
 - There is more competition for people's discretionary time.

TRENDS

6. Energy costs are having an impact on parks.
 - Both visitors and agencies are making adjustments.

OPPORTUNITIES

and

IMPACTS

Loss of General Fund support/expected to move toward self-sufficiency

Opportunities

- Work with private citizens to gain interest/support for investments in parks.
- Create public/private partnerships for development.
- The “no new taxes” mentality should make it easier to sell other park providers with partnership opportunities that maximize funding and reduce duplication.
- The rise of flexible fee schedules driven by the need to generate more revenue.

Loss of General Fund support/expected to move toward self-sufficiency

Impacts

- The more success you have the more your elected leaders expect.
- Potential loss of visitors due to higher fee structure.

The need for Capital Improvement funds is increasing....

Opportunities:

- Positioning parks as an important and vital “green infrastructure” in the economic development and “quality of life” initiatives of the community.
- Large tracts of property are being sold off by corporations such as Weyehaeuser, Georgia Pacific, Duke Energy,...

The need for Capital Improvement funds is increasing....

Impacts:

- Many departments are quickly reaching the sink-or-swim stage of aging facilities – either renovate/repair them or close them.
- Reduction/loss of LWCF funds coming at a time when many of the initial LWCF parks and facilities are “aging out”.
- If we can’t purchase the large tracts now, many will be lost forever.
- At least 35 states have now created some type of dedicated fund (lottery, real estate transfer tax, license plates, sporting goods tax,....) to support state/local parks and recreation.

The landscape is changing from rural to urban.

Opportunities:

- With decreasing access to private lands for outdoor recreation, parks will take on this role. This, hopefully, will increase the public support for parks.
- Niche parks/programs that serve specific uses.
- Package park and recreation needs with compatible values to create win/win situations

The landscape is changing from rural to urban.

Impacts:

- Demand for open space is increasing.
- Gone from stepping out the backdoor into open space to needing public areas for open space.
- Inability to protect/buffer existing parks – including an interest in selling interior park land to private developers.
- “Dumming” down of society.
- From 5 kids on every block (urban) to cul-de-sacs (suburban) that kids can’t leave without a parent to drive them.

The demographics of the population are changing.

Opportunities:

- Participation of youth and babyboomers in volunteer programs.
- There is a portion of the population with substantial wealth who may be willing to provide financial support for parks.
- Aging population that have been park supporters provide endowments opportunities for “legacy gifts” that can dedicate funds for maintaining and enhancing parks.

The demographics of the population are changing.

Impacts:

- Re-kindled interest in traditional outdoor recreation experiences.
- More adults participating in recreation programs necessitating the expansion of programs.
- More interest in comfortable accommodations in outdoor settings.
- School systems turning back to park staff for interpretive programs – looking for those “educational moments” that might ignite the interest of a new generation of park users.
- No kids, why should I pay taxes for P&R?

Technology is creating a generation raised on instant communications,
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Opportunities:

- Ability to market to selected target groups for visits, volunteers, and financial support.
- On-line registration/reservation systems.
- Providing guests with modern conveniences (WiFi, cable, and internet) in recreation areas.

Technology is creating a generation raised on instant communications,
....

Impacts:

- Public expectation of instant access to information.
- Loss of face-to-face communication between staff and public.
- Adult's discretionary time is being eaten up by constant contact with the "office".
- Kids are so "connected" through x-boxes, IMing, and iPods that they don't have time for outdoor activities and may be losing basic social skills and courtesies.
- Over-weight/obesity has become a public health problem demonstrate a role in health/physical fitness.

Energy costs are having an impact on parks.

Opportunities:

- Marketing parks as close-to-home, great value, family based something-for-everyone opportunities.
- Justify increased costs of “going green” in new construction, publications, etc.

Energy costs are having an impact on parks.

Impacts:

- Loss of visitors.
- Operating costs.
- Capital expenses.
- Gas prices effect on use trends – jet skis, boats, RV's

What does it all mean?

- Need for parks, natural areas, and recreation programs is more important than ever.
- Focus on the mission, not on distractions/trends. The question should be, is it the right thing for us to do?
- Measure, justify, quantify your values (real estate values, quality of life, health,..)
- Use issues like the obesity/health issue because it is the right thing to do – not because there may be funds available.