

CHAPTER 1

Americans and the Outdoors

As in previous nationwide recreation surveys, respondents were given a list of outdoor recreation activities and asked to identify the ones in which they had engaged one or more times during the previous 12 months. Participation during the 3 months immediately prior to the survey was also ascertained. Before examining the list, the respondents were asked to name any outdoor activities (up to a limit of three) which they particularly enjoyed. Those who named one or more such activities were invited to select, from further listings, any applicable reasons for liking those activities and/or constraints upon their favored pursuits.

Analysis of the resulting data yields certain measures or indicators of the breadth and depth of involvement with outdoor recreation exhibited by the United States population and its various segments. Table 1 lists two such indicators of breadth, two of depth, and three of change. What do these indicators tell about people's involvement in outdoor pursuits?

Respondents participated in an average of 7.2 of the 36 outdoor activities listed in the survey. They cited an average of 1.7 pursuits as particularly enjoyed and logged an estimated 37 activity days¹ of the listed activities during the 12 months prior to the interview—for all of which they spent about \$355 each.

INDICATORS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION INVOLVEMENT

Seven measures or indicators are presented in table 1 and described here. They will be utilized in the next section to examine the similarities and differences in

the outdoor recreation involvements of Americans of various backgrounds.

Breadth Indicators

The first two columns in table 1 are indicators of the breadth of an individual's (or a grouping of individuals') involvement in outdoor recreation pursuits. The first column lists the average number of outdoor activities (from the 36 listed in the questionnaire) which the respondent claimed to have done once or more in the previous 12 months. The second column is the average number of activities (a maximum of three) cited by the respondent as "particularly enjoyed."

Depth Indicators

For 22 of the 36 activities listed on the NRS questionnaire, participants (respondents who said they did the activity once or more in the prior 12 months) were asked to give three additional items of information. They were asked to estimate the number of different days on which they did the activity during the prior 3 months and during the prior 12 months, and their age when they started participating in the activity. From this information, one of the indicators of depth (and one of change) were derived.

The last two columns of table 1 are indicators of activity depth or of the commitment of the respondent's personal resources of time and money to outdoor recreation pursuits. The sixth column lists "activity-days," an indicator of time commitment derived from the respondent's estimates of the number of different days on which they did each activity during the previous 12 months—summed over all activities in which they engaged.²

²A conservative estimate based on the midpoints of the first three ranges from which the respondent chose an estimate (A = 1-2 days, B = 3-10 days, C = 11-25 days) and the low point of the highest range (D = more than 25 days).

The result is an indicator of time commitment which is useful in drawing comparisons among activities and between population segments. It should not be interpreted as the number of full days committed to outdoor recreation, nor even as the number of calendar days on which any recreation took place. An activity-day was generated for any calendar day on which the respondent did the activity, even if for a very short time. Moreover, more than one activity-day could be generated per calendar day—one for each activity engaged in on that day. Very likely, the average American commits much less than 37 full calendar days to outdoor recreation annually.

The final column is the respondents' estimate of their annual (prior 12 months) dollar expenditure on outdoor recreation as defined in the survey.³

Change Indicators

To permit the estimation of short-run trends, respondents were asked to name any outdoor recreation activities they had stopped doing in the 2 years prior to the interview, and any they anticipated starting in the next 2 years. These items were used, along with the respondent's age at the time they started the activity, to generate the three indicators of short-run change presented in the third, fourth, and fifth columns of table 1.

Activities recently started by respondents were identified by subtracting their age when they began the activity from their age at the time of the interview. If the difference was two or less, the person was counted as having started the activity in the prior 2 years. The figures in the third column are the averages of the number of such recently started activities for each respondent.

³"Outdoor recreation" was implicitly defined by exposing the respondent to the activity list, various arrays of outdoor locales, etc. See questionnaire.

¹Much less than 37 calendar days. An "activity-day" was counted for each different calendar day on which the respondent engaged in a given activity, even if for a very short time.

The numbers of activities which respondents said they had stopped in the prior 2 years or expected to start in the next 2 years were used to derive the averages in the fourth and fifth columns of the table. Although the interviewer asked for anticipated new activities which the respondent had never done before, many persons cited activities which they said they had stopped earlier. Since such instances bear little relation to trends, they were dropped from the data—for both stopping and expecting to start—before the averages were derived.

The seven outdoor recreation indicators or yardsticks in table 1 will now be applied to selected categories of the United States population.

THE VARIETY OF AMERICANS AND THEIR RECREATION INVOLVEMENTS

In table 1, the NRS respondents are divided into numerous categories based on 14 criteria or demographic characteristics—sex, age, etc. This information about each respondent was derived from the National Crime Survey interviews (as many as seven) which were conducted during the 3 years preceding the NRS interview. Therefore, no demographic questions will be found in the NRS questionnaire in appendix C of this report. The recreation involvements of these population segments will now be examined on the basis of the seven indicators listed in the table, supplemented by information derived from succeeding tables, especially table 4 which contains the activity participation rates.

Caution should be exercised in inferring causality from the associations between population characteristics and patterns of recreation involvement. Even the associations which are evident in the table may reflect, in part, more deeply underlying factors. For instance, widowed, divorced, or separated status is associated with a more drastic reduction in recreation involvement than would be expected from the loss of a spouse. Widows and widowers are, however, generally in the older age categories associated with greatly reduced outdoor activity. Also, divorce and separation are often associated with single parenting—a further constraint on free time pursuits. More such instances will be pointed out throughout this report.

Four of the 14 demographic characteristics examined here—place of residence (SMSA), household members under 12, occupation, and hours worked per week—were found to be associated with rather modest differences in outdoor recreation behavior and will, therefore, be dropped from the tables in the rest of the report. An exception will be found in chapter 5, where the presence of young children and the number of hours in the work week are found to be important in

understanding the changing allocations of time and money to outdoor recreation.

Sex

The outdoors is no longer, as in previous centuries, a predominantly male domain. Women still exhibit a somewhat lesser tendency to commit time and money to outdoor pursuits, but their participation patterns are substantially similar to those of men—even in such “rugged” activities as horseback riding and skiing. Exceptions are fishing, golf, and (especially) hunting, in which the traditional male predominance persists.

Age

As in all previous nationwide surveys of outdoor recreation activity, increasing age is associated with a marked decline in all indicators of involvement with outdoor pursuits. This is especially severe in the age 60 and over category of our sample, 30 percent of which claimed to have participated in no outdoor recreation activities whatever during the prior 12 months. Chapter 6 of this report is a detailed examination of aging and outdoor recreation.

Place of Residence

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget has established 318 Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) in the United States, which typically consist of an aggregation of towns and counties surrounding a central city.⁴

Though the match is far from perfect, central cities are generally urban in character, areas within SMSAs but not in central cities tend to be suburban, and areas not in any SMSA are mostly rural. Rural-suburban-urban differences in culture, preference, and opportunity have been thought to be major influences on outdoor recreation behavior. The NRS data do not support this belief. There is a general, but slight, tendency of suburbanites to rank highest on the indicators, followed by rural residents and city people. Rural people predominate, however, in hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, and off-road vehicle driving.

Education

Increasing years of education are associated with substantially higher values for all outdoor involvement indicators and with increased participation in most activities. The principal exceptions are fishing and hunting, in which college graduates among our respondents engaged at lower rates than the population average. In addition to fishing and hunting, respondents of less-than-high-

school education tended to participate in walking, picnics, pleasure driving, and visiting events and attractions. Twenty-nine percent of the non-high school graduates said they did nothing at all in outdoor recreation during the 12 months prior to the interview.

Race

Of the racial categories recorded in the National Crime Survey, only two—White and Black—were sufficiently well represented in the NRS sample to permit a detailed analysis. A third “other” category consisting mainly of Native American and Asian-American respondents is examined in chapter 5. Blacks are lower (usually much lower) than Whites on all indicators and all activity participation rates except outdoor team sports and “running or jogging.” Other activities with substantial Black participation include bicycling, tennis, swimming, fishing, walking, picnics, pleasure driving, sight-seeing, and visiting events and attractions. Black respondents started an average of 0.26 new activities during the 2 years prior to the survey, as compared to 0.39 new starts for Whites (table 1). Since the reported quitting rates for the two races are similar, this suggests that the Black-White gap in most activities probably widened during that period—at least for the age-12-plus population.

Annual Family Income

As in previous surveys, higher incomes are associated with higher rankings on outdoor recreation indicators including, as might be expected, dollar expenditures. This is consistent with the finding (table 10) that 20 percent of all respondents cite “not enough money” as a constraint on their outdoor recreation participation.

Number of Persons in Household

Our indicators rise with increasing numbers of household members up to a size of four. Then they flatten out or decline in the highest (five or more) category. The same is true for most of the activity participation rates. It should be remembered, however, that many of the one- and two-person households consist of older persons who tend to be much less active.

Household Members Under Age 12

The number of small children seems to have little effect on outdoor recreation indicators or participation rates. However, the data on reasons for changes in time and money allocations, analyzed in chapter 5, suggest that the birth-through-age-11

⁴Status as of January 1, 1984.

category is too broad to reveal the relationship of the presence of children to the recreation involvements of family members. A severe drop in family activity in the first few years of the child's life appears to be followed by a rise in later childhood.

Marital Status

The single (never married) respondents in the survey had the highest participation rates and indicators of involvement, followed by the marrieds, and (at a distance) by the widowed, divorced, or separated. For many

persons, however, these life cycle stages parallel their progression from youth through old age. Hence, the implications of being married, single, etc., for outdoor recreation remain unclear.

Household Cars Owned

The availability of increasing numbers of cars and similar motor vehicles in a household is strongly associated with more outdoor recreation involvement. Especially dramatic is the severe drop in activity in the

no-car category. Part of this may be explained by the association of non-car ownership with poverty and old age. No-car status is, however, often also associated with youth, which is strongly related to high participation. The strong propensity of young people to cite "inadequate transportation or too far to travel" as a constraint on their recreation activities (table 10) suggests a relationship with automobile access which warrants more attention from recreation providers.

Table 1. Outdoor Recreation Involvement by Demographic Characteristic

Demographic characteristic	Average number of activities					Average activity-days participation in prior 12 months ^{1 2}	Average expenditure in prior 12 months (dollars) ³
	Participated once or more in prior 12 months	Particularly enjoyed (maximum 3 activities)	Started in prior 2 years	Stopped in prior 2 years	Expect to start in next 2 years		
Total sample	7	1.7	.37	.14	.25	37	355
Sex							
Male	8	1.9	.38	.14	.24	44	396
Female	7	1.5	.36	.14	.27	30	307
Age							
12 to 24	10	2.2	.89	.09	.39	60	236
25 to 39	8	2.0	.30	.16	.31	40	375
40 to 59	6	1.5	.13	.15	.19	27	413
60 and over	3	2.0	.08	.16	.07	12	391
Place of residence							
SMSA, ⁴ central city	6	1.5	.30	.15	.27	29	336
SMSA, not central city	8	1.8	.38	.14	.27	40	383
Not SMSA	7	1.8	.42	.13	.22	40	333
Education							
Less than high school	3	.9	.10	.14	.10	13	275
High school	6	1.6	.22	.14	.23	30	363
Less than 4 years of college	8	1.9	.26	.18	.30	40	419
4 or more years of college	9	2.1	.29	.20	.32	44	450
Race							
White	8	1.8	.39	.14	.24	40	371
Black and other	5	1.4	.26	.11	.32	21	211
Annual family income (dollars)							
Under 5,000	5	1.2	.27	.14	.23	26	200
5,000 to 14,999	5	1.4	.27	.16	.19	27	260
15,000 to 24,999	8	1.8	.38	.14	.27	39	335
25,000 to 49,999	9	2.0	.50	.13	.30	48	430
50,000 or more	10	2.2	.40	.13	.31	51	536
Number of persons in household							
1	5	1.2	.17	.16	.17	23	324
2	6	1.6	.24	.16	.22	31	399
3	8	1.8	.37	.17	.29	39	345
4	9	1.9	.57	.12	.31	47	354
5 or more	8	1.9	.51	.09	.26	42	311
Household members under 12							
0	7	1.6	.36	.14	.25	35	362
1	8	1.9	.42	.14	.24	42	346
2	8	1.9	.39	.12	.31	41	353
3	7	1.9	.42	.12	.24	37	324
4 or more	6	1.8	.25	.13	.25	33	229

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 1. Outdoor Recreation Involvement by Demographic Characteristic – Continued

Demographic characteristic	Average number of activities					Average activity-days participation in prior 12 months ¹ ²	Average expenditure in prior 12 months (dollars) ³
	Participated once or more in prior 12 months	Particularly enjoyed (maximum 3 activities)	Started in prior 2 years	Stopped in prior 2 years	Expect to start in next 2 years		
Marital status							
Married	7	1.7	.22	.16	.21	32	402
Widowed, divorced, separated	5	1.2	.14	.17	.17	20	322
Never married	9	2.0	.57	.11	.39	48	245
Household cars owned							
None	4	1.0	.20	.13	.18	16	189
1	6	1.5	.32	.15	.22	29	290
2	8	1.8	.37	.16	.27	39	378
3	8	2.0	.45	.09	.32	46	399
4 or more	9	2.1	.49	.12	.25	51	392
Employment status							
At work	8	1.8	.31	.15	.27	39	376
With job, not at work	7	1.8	.25	.13	.30	35	394
Unemployed	8	2.0	.42	.14	.32	47	258
Keeping house	5	1.1	.17	.13	.17	20	312
Going to school	9	2.1	.76	.07	.38	55	200
Unable to work	2	1.0	.10	.32	.03	9	274
Retired	3	1.1	.12	.15	.07	14	423
Other	7	1.8	.43	.23	.28	36	290
Occupation							
Professional	9	2.1	.35	.19	.30	45	416
Manager	8	1.9	.25	.14	.27	38	492
Salesperson	8	1.9	.38	.18	.27	40	388
Clerical worker	8	1.7	.33	.17	.32	33	322
Craftsperson	7	1.9	.26	.17	.18	41	385
Operative	6	1.6	.24	.12	.22	33	340
Laborer	7	1.9	.34	.09	.29	42	255
Service worker	7	1.8	.37	.10	.37	37	274
Other	7	1.7	.41	.20	.29	41	253
Number of hours worked							
None	6	1.4	.27	.14	.22	28	317
1 to 20	8	1.9	.52	.12	.30	46	297
21 to 39	8	1.8	.34	.17	.31	38	341
40	7	1.8	.26	.15	.25	36	388
More than 40	8	1.9	.25	.15	.24	41	430
Size of locality of residence (population)							
Under 5,000	7	1.6	.41	.15	.21	38	385
5,000 to 24,999	8	1.8	.39	.16	.22	39	352
25,000 to 49,999	8	1.7	.40	.14	.33	39	373
50,000 to 999,999	7	1.6	.29	.14	.26	30	348
1,000,000 or more	5	1.3	.25	.16	.23	21	295
Region							
Northeast	7	1.6	.39	.13	.23	35	313
North Central	8	1.8	.37	.15	.27	35	370
South	6	1.6	.33	.14	.23	30	334
West	8	1.8	.43	.20	.32	37	414

¹Conservative estimate based on midpoints of ranges of days selected by respondents.

²On a given calendar day, a person generates an activity-day for each activity participated in.

³Average of midpoints of ranges from which the respondent selected an estimated expenditure level for outdoor recreation. See question 6h in the questionnaire, appendix C.

⁴Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Region

The United States is divided, for Census purposes, into four regions—Northeast, North Central, South, and West—as depicted in figure 8. The NRS respondents are identified with the region in which they lived at the time of the interview. The region where the cited outdoor activities actually took place is not available from the survey data. In many cases, the participation cited by the respondents probably took place outside their region of residence. Examples are ice and snow sports by southern residents and winter outdoor swimming, golf, etc., by northern residents. With few exceptions, however, regional differences in outdoor recreation involvement among the NRS respondents tended to be modest. Overall, the participation rates and involvement indicators tended to be lowest in the South and highest in the North Central States. The South was understandably very low in ice and snow sports participation, but led the country in hunting and fishing. The Northeast and North Central regions together led in most winter sports, with the Northeast topping the list in ice skating. An exception was downhill skiing, in which the West has taken a strong lead. The West was also preeminent in all forms of camping—including backpacking—as well as in day

hiking. The North Central States led in motorboating and shared with the Northeast a strong lead in canoeing and kayaking.

Employment Status

The involvement indicators and participation rates suggest that going to school and being unemployed are the conditions most conducive to outdoor recreation (but not to spending money on outdoor recreation). In both cases, youth may have something to do with it.

Number of Hours Worked

The number of hours in the respondent's work week was derived from the response to a National Crime Survey question which asked, "How many hours did you work last week at all jobs?" Since "not enough time" is the most frequently cited constraint on recreation activity (in this and previous surveys), one would expect long work weeks to be associated with a lack of recreation involvement. According to our indicators, the reverse is true, although involvement flattens out at the longest work week (more than 40 hours). Little meaning attaches to the "none" category, which includes a great diversity of life conditions.

Size of Place of Residence

Population size, as a measure of the character of the respondent's community, is more strongly associated with outdoor recreation than was "place of residence" (SMSA) discussed earlier. And the association is negative. Residence in a city of 1 million or more people appears to be especially inconducive to outdoor recreation. On the basis of these observations, size of place of residence will be retained as a demographic characteristic in the remainder of this report, and place of residence (SMSA) will be dropped.

SUMMARY

This chapter has examined the extent to which various kinds of Americans pursue the outdoor life in their free time. The demographic segments of the Nationwide Recreation Survey sample will be examined later from the standpoints of trip taking, use of national parks and other recreation areas, attitudes towards fees and other management issues, and the changing allocations of time and money to outdoor recreation. First, however, the outdoor recreation phenomenon will be examined on the basis of the individual activities.

FIGURE 8.
Census Regions

