

The Changing Future of Outdoor Recreation

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Several recent studies have provided current information on the trends and current status of outdoor recreation patterns. New methods and data have produced better projections of likely futures for recreation. In this article, we will present these recently identified changes and predictions.

Factors Influencing Recreation Participation

Many factors influence both the percent of the population participating in recreation activities and their frequency of participation in outdoor recreation, including of course, the available opportunities. Other factors include available leisure time, age, sex, income and education.

Leisure

Free time is perhaps the most essential element needed for enjoying the outdoors. Some indicators show a possible recent decline in leisure in the United States. A recent poll reports that "over the past decade, for the average American, the amount of leisure time has shrunk 31 percent, a loss of eight hours per week" (Harris, 1984). In a report prepared for the recent President's Commission on Americans Outdoors (MOR, 1986), it was found that "The current pattern for three-fourths of American adults includes one to two vacations of a week or more and multiple numbers of mini-vacations." This survey also found that "three out of 10 adults took six or more long weekends or mini-vaca-

tions during 1985 and another one-fifth took four or five." It appears that the extended vacation of two or more weeks is becoming less common, losing out to long weekend trips or other short blocks of time taken more frequently throughout the year.

There are many reasons for the recent trend of a decline in leisure. These include more women in the work force, more two-income households, more single parent families, pressures of work, job security concerns and continuing re-education. The Harris Poll (1984) found considerable leisure differences depending on gender, age, ethnic group and family status. Men, the elderly and whites had more leisure than women, young adults, blacks or Hispanics. These leisure differences undoubtedly produce different outdoor recreation patterns among various social strata.

Age

Age is perhaps the single demographic variable with the most conclusive relationship with recreation participation. As one gets older, one's physical abilities decline and participation in recreation changes, typically from the more physical to less physical pursuits; eventually all outdoor recreation participation declines with advanced age. Recent surveys show that age-related participation patterns of recreation differ with preferred activities, with some activities, such as walking for pleasure, actually increasing with advancing age (Hartmann and Cordell, in press).

Gender

Overall, participation in outdoor recreation does not differ much by gender. However, some activities seem to show higher participation by either men or women. For example, all forms of hunting show much broader participation by men than women, but women more commonly participate in other activities such as walking for pleasure and horseback riding. The most strenuous activities seem to show higher participation rates by men than women (Hartmann and Cordell, in press).

Income

In a review of the literature, O'Leary, Napier, Dottavio, Yoesting and Christensen (1982) concluded that income does not form tastes but rather limits their expression. In other words, lack of sufficient income can inhibit some people from participating in some forms of recreational activities, but not in others. Walking for pleasure is not dependent on income, but some activities such as sailing are definitely income-dependent. Other recent data indicate that individuals with higher incomes tend to travel further and stay longer at recreation areas once they reach them (Hartmann and Cordell, in press).

Education

There is a definite relationship between level of education and the recreation patterns of individuals. Zuznek (1978) found that the rates of participation for most

leisure activities increased almost linearly with level of education, but that there may be a saturation point at the very highest levels. Some activities do not show this relationship—TV watching, radio listening, playing cards, attending sports events, and fishing and hunting. Hartmann and Cordell (in press) found that the college-educated are the most frequent adult users of public recreation areas. They also found that highly-educated visitors tend to travel further, while high school-educated visitors stay longer.

Other Factors

Several other factors have been shown to influence recreation participation patterns, such as the activities chosen, frequency of participation, the duration of participation, amount of money spent and other measures. Among these factors are urbanism (whether the individual lives in a city or rural area), race, occupation and the social group with whom one recreates (Hartmann and Cordell, in press).

With recently available data from the Public Area Recreation Visitor Study and other sources, we now have a better understanding of the factors influencing recreation behavior. However, we do not know for certain if these relationships will hold true in the future. For most influencing factors, the future is a matter of speculation. Will the trend of more women entering the work force and more non-traditional families lead to a decline in available leisure? Will the in-

creasing number of elderly and breakthroughs in technology yield increases in leisure? Will advances in health care allow older people to pursue more physically demanding activities? Will the equal rights movement ultimately yield equal gender ratios in hunting camps?

In the short term, it appears that existing trends will continue. In the longer term, it is impossible to say. Whatever happens, however, leisure will strongly influence participation in outdoor recreation and future recreation patterns will be different.

Long-Term Trends in Outdoor Recreation Participation

Since 1959, more than 30 nationwide recreation surveys have been conducted by public agencies and private companies. Although technical differences between these studies make many of them difficult to compare, it is possible to make some general conclusions.

Participation data from the 1960, 1965 and 1982 National Recreation Surveys are similar in many respects. In all three surveys the respondents were 12 years and older and the interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes by the Bureau of the Census.

The participation rates for nine activities can be accurately compared across these three surveys. Among these nine activities, snow skiing and canoeing/kayak-

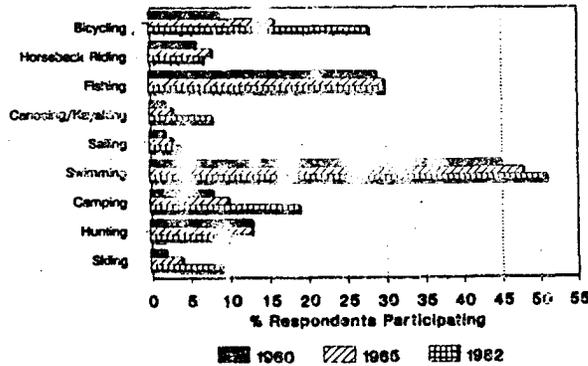
ing showed the most dramatic gains in reported participation in the 22 years—from 2 percent in 1960 to 8 percent by 1982. Bicycling was not far behind, more than tripling from 9 percent to a 28 percent adult participation rate.

Swimming was one of the most popular activities in 1960 and continued to be the most popular in 1982. But there was only a small increase, from 45 to 51 percent. Fishing and hunting both remained popular, but their participation rates have remained mostly stable since 1960, with hunting declining slightly to 1982.

In evaluating these participation percentages, it is important to recognize that during the 22 years covered by the surveys the U.S. population grew almost 30 percent. Increased population has meant more participants. When looking at the percentage change in *number* of participants, the growth in some activities appears more dramatic than growth in percentage of population participating. Of the nine activities in Figure 2 with the highest participant growth rates, more than half are physically demanding: canoeing, bicycling, water-skiing, walking and hiking/backpacking. While some of the activities with high, but less participant growth are more passive (e.g., attending outdoor cultural activities and sporting events), only camping is motor vehicle or energy dependent.

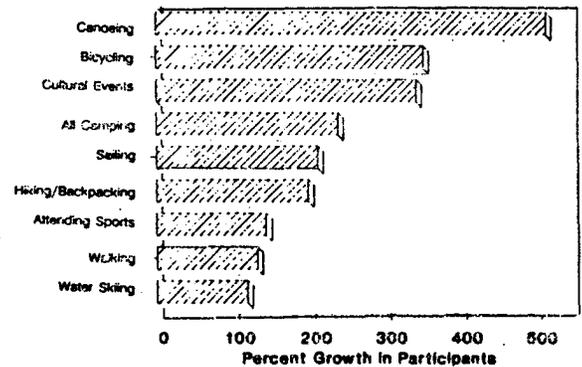
In a recent paper by Hartmann, Freilich and Cordell (in

Figure 1 - Activity Participation Trends
1960-1982 (summer seasons)



SOURCE: 1982-83 National Recreation Survey Final Report.

Figure 2 - Percent Change in Number of
Summer Participants in 9 Rapidly
Growing Activities, 1960-1982



SOURCE: 1960, 82-83 National Recreation Survey

press), the rank order of popularity of several activities was compared across five major national surveys conducted between 1960 and 1982. Picnicking was the most popular activity in all the surveys except for the most recent. The most dramatic change was seen in bicycling which became more popular than boating between 1960 and 1982. Swimming and walking for pleasure became more popular than picnicking and driving for pleasure. This corresponds to the observed trend toward more active recreation for many Americans.

Current Participation in Outdoor Recreation

The Public Area Recreation Visitor Study (PARVS) has recently been completed by a coalition of federal and state agencies to provide comparable and accurate information in the most cost-effective manner (Cordell, Hartmann, Watson, Fritschen, Propst

and Siverts, 1987). Interviewers for the PARVS project contacted visitors to public recreation areas to ask about their recreation patterns, trip characteristics, recreation expenditures and personal demographic information. This study was carefully designed so the results could be compared with past studies and other data (such as Census Bureau information). Almost 280 sites were selected for study and included national parks, national forests, Forest Service wilderness areas, Corps of Engineers projects and Tennessee Valley Authority sites, in addition to a large number of state parks. With almost 36,000 visitor contacts, PARVS represents the most detailed and accurate source of information on recreation users currently available. The information presented below comes primarily from PARVS.

The authors acknowledge the work of the PARVS Working Group—Forest Service, National Park Service, Corps of Engineers, Tennessee Valley Authority,

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and state agencies in Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

Hartmann, et al. (in press) compared data from the PARVS and the 1979 Federal Estate Visitor Survey and concluded that in the past ten years there had been relative increases in popularity ranking (percentage of sample participating at least once in the past 12 months) in downhill skiing, swimming outdoors, canoeing/kayaking, water skiing and cross country skiing.

Similarly, there had been relative decreases in "other boating," driving vehicles off road, sledging, ice skating, picnicking and pleasure driving. These results continue to show the pattern found by the 1982-83 National Recreation Survey that some of the more active recreational pursuits have become more popular and some of the more passive ac-

activities have declined in relative popularity.

There are many measures of the popularity of outdoor recreation activities. Table 1 describes the percent of the population participating one or more times annually and the median number of days of annual participation by those who participate. Other measures of popularity are how long people stay at a recreation area and how far people travel to a recreation area.

The various measures of participation do not result in the same relative rankings of activities. Swimming outdoors, sightseeing, picnicking and walking for pleasure are the most "popular" activities in terms of the percent of the population. However, if one considers the number of times participants engage in the activities annually, the ranking of "popularity" changes dramatically.

By this second measure, the most "popular" activities are running/jogging, walking for pleasure, driving for pleasure, bicycling and swimming outdoors. A third measure of popularity is the length of stay on-site for the designated main activity. By this measure, the most "popular" activities are developed camping, big game hunting, primitive camping, backpacking and "general recreation."

A final participation measure is the total number of trips taken by the population. By this measure, the popularity order is walking, pleasure driving, sightseeing,

TABLE 1: Annual participation characteristics among selected outdoor recreation activities

Activity	Percent of Population Participating One or More Times Annually (percent)	Median Number of Days of Participation Annually by Those People Who Participate (days)
Land-Based Activities		
Sightseeing	46.9	12
Picnicking	46.2	6
Walking for Pleasure	41.3	29
Driving for Pleasure	38.4	19
Nature Study/Photography	36.2	13
Developed Camping	34.9	7
Day Hiking	23.8	5
Primitive Camping	14.2	5
Other Hunting	11.8	9
Backpacking	10.4	4
Big Game Hunting	9.9	7
Driving ORVs	9.2	10
Horseback Riding	8.6	2
Water-Based Activities		
Swimming Outdoors	50.3	17
Warm Water & Saltwater Fishing	30.9	10
Motorboating	22.2	7
Cold Water Fishing	16.7	7
Water Skiing	12.9	4
Canoeing/Kayaking	13.9	2
Sailing	7.5	2
Snow and Ice-Based Activities		
Downhill Skiing	9.6	3
Sledding	9.3	3
Cross-Country Skiing	6.5	4
Ice Skating	6.0	2
Snowmobiling	2.7	3

SOURCE: 1985-87 Public Area Recreation Visitor Study, compiled by the Outdoor Recreation and Wilderness Assessment Group, Atlanta, Georgia. Percent participation figures represent weighted percent of the American public who use federal and state recreation areas and participate in the activities listed one or more times annually. Days of participation figures are the median number of days of participation by those individuals in the sample who participate in the selected activity.

pool swimming, picnicking, biking, lake and stream swimming, warm water fishing, wildlife observation and running/jogging (Forest Service, in press).

The Predicted Future of Recreation in the United States

By measuring the relationships

between current participation patterns, demographic characteristics and available recreation opportunities, predictions of possible future recreation patterns can be made. While such projections are based on a blend of science and art, they nevertheless provide a useful peek at the future.

Some results from the most re-

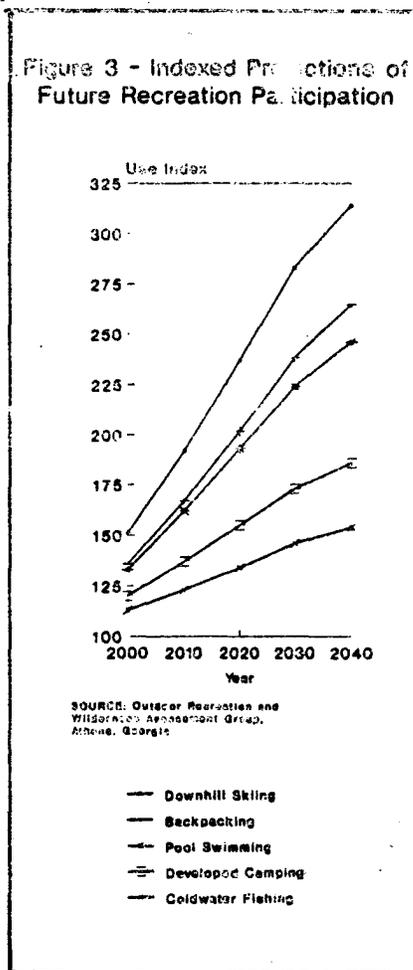
cent projections are shown in Figure 3. This figure describes the most expected future change in total number of outings or trips for five representative activities. The base level of use for each recreation activity in 1987 was assigned an index value of 100. As can be seen, participation in all activities is expected to increase over the next 50 years, but there are considerable differences in the rate of projected increases. The activities with the greatest expected use increases are the physically demanding activities. Some activities, such as developed camping and cold water fishing, show considerably less relative growth. Other activities (not shown in this figure), including warm water fishing and small game hunting, showed a projected decline in participation.

Conclusions

Declines in leisure and changes in social structures influence recreation patterns. Long weekends involving more close-to-home trips are replacing the extended vacation. There have also been changes toward recreation activities that are more physically active. Considering these and other changes, we offer three general observations or conclusions.

First, aside from considering the high rates of growth that exist among some activities, *the more simple and less specialized activities remain very popular.* Sight-seeing, picnicking, walking and swimming top the list. This means that opportunities for pursuit of these activities will con-

Figure 3 - Indexed Projections of Future Recreation Participation



tinue to be needed in the future. Sometimes "hot spots" of interest and "fadism" attract more of the attention of the public recreation providers than do the persistently popular and more broadly sought activities. More benefit to society may be achievable by making sure that attractive rural settings, casual space and trails, and unpolluted water are available.

Second, the most rapidly growing activities represent rapid growth markets. Most of these—bicycling, canoeing/kayaking,

camping and snow skiing—are equipment and skill-oriented. These activities represent *opportunities for private sector involvement* in providing equipment, instruction, outfitting and guiding, and fee sites. Projections for growth of these activities indicate continued strong private market opportunities in the future.

Finally, change is occurring and it will likely continue at a quickening pace. At issue is how quick the pace and in which directions. A strong national *base of data and projection capabilities* is a must to both public and private sectors if we are to be responsive in a timely manner to these changes. Consumptive wildlife activities are on the decline, while appreciative uses of wildlife are rising. Travel distances are generally shorter, while the number of close-to-home trips is increasing. Across these and the total array of trends and changes, a call for action to provide for recreation needs arises. An appropriately responsive answer to that call demands solid information about trends and the future.

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