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OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPENDITURES:
A NATIONWIDE STUDY

BY

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ABSTRACT

Outdoor recreation expenditures are examined in this paper. Data from the 1982-83 Nationwide Recreation Survey are used to determine the nature and extent of expenditures for outdoor recreation by a nationally representative sample of individuals. In addition, anticipated future expenditures by the same group are reported. The implications of these data for the leisure industry are discussed.

OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPENDITURES:
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INTRODUCTION

Outdoor recreation participation has become a major facet of leisure behavior. Greater than 75% of the American public participates in outdoor recreation on a regular basis. From 1965-1981, spending on leisure activities increased by 47% (accounting for inflation) to \$250 billion. Today, one dollar out of every eight dollars is spent on some form of leisure. Crowded campgrounds, waiting lines at boat launch ramps, and the ubiquitous outdoor clothing catalogs further attest to the popularity of outdoor pursuits. An important aspect of this leisure boom is the amount and types of expenditures which have accompanied it. Although a large body of research on participation patterns exists,

(1,2,3) little systematic effort has been directed toward evaluating the cost of this involvement on a nationwide basis.

The purpose of this study was to use data from a nationally representative sample to answer the following questions:

1. What is the extent and nature of current outdoor recreation related expenditures?
2. Has there been an increase or decrease in outdoor recreation expenditures?
3. Do individuals anticipate increasing or decreasing outdoor recreation expenditures in the future?

METHODOLOGY

The data used in this study were gathered as part of the 1982-1983 Nationwide Recreation Survey (NRS). The NRS is a jointly sponsored survey of the National Park Service, United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Administration on Aging. The National Park Service is the principal coordinator of the survey. Data were collected during September, 1982 from a sample of individuals (n=1647) 12 years of age or older in the non-institutionalized United States population. Personal interviews were conducted by trained interviewers working for the United States Bureau of the Census. The total number of usable responses was 1,397.

RESULTS

Respondents were asked whether they had spent any money on outdoor recreation in the 12 month period preceeding the study. Approximately half of the respondents (49.2%) had. Over 75% of these individuals incurred travel costs for outdoor recreation, including food and lodging. The second most common expense was for fees to enter and use recreation facilities (61.7%). Other expenses included sporting goods, such as balls, golf clubs, and fishing tackle (49.1%), clothing (39.3%), other equipment and supplies (34.4%), vehicles, including boats, snowmobiles and recreation vehicles (26.9%), maintenance and repair of outdoor recreation equipment (22.6%), and camping equipment (18.8%).

Table 1 lists all expenditures included in the study, as well as the number and percentage of respondents identifying each.

Study participants were also asked to identify their most costly outdoor recreation expenditure. Travel costs were named most costly by 48.2% of the respondents. It was followed by entry and user fees (13.2%), sporting goods (12.3%), and outdoor recreation related vehicles (9.0%) (Table 2).

A final question concerning current expenditures related to the amount of money spent in the previous year was asked. As can be seen in Table 3, there was a wide diversity in money spent. The most typical response was \$100-\$249, followed by under \$50 and \$250-\$499.

PAST EXPERIENCES

Approximately 40% of the respondents answering the question relating to changes in outdoor recreation expenditures over the two years preceeding the study had increased the percentage of money spent. Thirty-seven percent were spending the same percentage, and 22.2% were spending a smaller percentage.

FUTURE EXPENDITURES

Few respondents (10.3%) anticipated spending less on outdoor recreation two years from the time of the study. Over 40% of the respondents anticipated increasing the percentage of their money spent for outdoor recreation.

DISCUSSION

The data from the study point toward the pervasiveness of outdoor recreation in this country. In the past year, approximately one-half of the American public spent money for outdoor recreation. This supports the notion that outdoor recreation constitutes a substantial portion of the leisure industry in general. Items such as travel, clothing, sporting goods and entry fees appear to be included in the budget in a large number of households. Over 25% of the individuals who spent money on outdoor recreation claimed to have spent \$500 or more. Obviously, outdoor recreation is big business. The future of the outdoor recreation enterprise looks even brighter. Eighty-five percent of the respondents planned to spend almost the same percentage or a higher percentage of their money on outdoor recreation in the next two years.

IMPLICATIONS

Given the already high levels of expenditures, the implication is that outdoor recreation is going to continue to be a major part of the leisure industry. Therefore, companies producing equipment for outdoor recreation activities will continue to grow and product lines will expand.

Increased expenditures for outdoor recreation equipment will be accompanied by increased use of areas and facilities where such equipment will be used. The demands on public parks will continue to increase. As a result, management approaches will need to be developed to relieve the pressures of high demand for a limited resource.

The constriction of the federal role in the provision of outdoor recreation facilities and services will continue in spite of the projected increase in demand for them. The void created by the withdrawal of the federal government will provide an incentive for the private sector to increase its role in meeting the demand. For instance, a recent trend toward the operation of campgrounds by the private sector within national parks and forests can be expected to continue and become more common.

The use of outdoor facilities can expect increases in fees and charges as tax support for outdoor recreation is withdrawn and private entrepreneurship increases. Users will be asked to pay for their own recreation as the public no longer will be subsidizing it.

Finally, these trends suggest the need for park and recreation professionals to emphasize the skills needed to contend with the business of outdoor recreation. The education of leisure service providers will need to include training in business administration, marketing, public relations and financing.

CONCLUSION

Projections suggest the demand for outdoor recreation will continue to increase for at least the next twenty years. In fact, the leisure industry is expected to be larger than any other business by 1990. While the recreational preferences of users may change, these data support the idea that demand and expenditures for outdoor recreation will continue unabated for the near future.

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TABLE 1

EXPENDITURES FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

(Base: Those respondents who spent more money in the past 12 months on outdoor recreation, N=810)

Expenditures	N	%
Fees for entering and using outdoor recreation areas and facilities	500	61.7
Boats, snowmobiles, aircraft, bicycles, and recreation vehicles, including campers, etc.	218	26.9
Sporting goods, including balls, golf clubs, fishing tackle, etc.	398	49.1
Camping equipment	152	18.8
Clothing for outdoor recreation	318	39.3
Other equipment and supplies	279	34.4
Maintenance and repair of outdoor recreation equipment	183	22.6
Travel costs for outdoor recreation including food and lodging	608	75.1
Lessons	1	0.1
Licenses	8	1.0
Rentals	3	0.4
Do not know	4	0.5

TABLE 2

TYPE OF EXPENDITURE COSTING THE MOST MONEY

(Base: Respondents identifying most costly expenditure, N=643)

Expenditure	N	%
Fees for entering and using outdoor recreation areas and facilities, including membership fees	85	13.2
Boats, snowmobiles, aircraft, bicycles, and recreation vehicles, including campers, etc.	58	9.0
Sporting goods, including balls, golf clubs, fishing tackle, etc.	79	12.3
Camping equipment	20	3.1
Clothing for outdoor recreation	22	3.4
Other equipment and supplies	30	4.7
Maintenance and repair of outdoor recreation equipment	25	3.9
Travel costs for outdoor recreation including food and lodging	310	48.2
Other	8	1.2
No one item was most expensive	6	1.0

TABLE 3

DOLLARS SPENT ON OUTDOOR RECREATION
Over a 12 Month Period

Amount	N	%
None	2	0.1
Under \$500	137	8.3
\$50-\$99	123	7.5
\$100-\$249	185	11.2
\$250-\$499	127	7.7
\$500-\$999	118	7.2
\$1,000 and over	112	6.8
N.A.	843	51.2

