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RECREATION RESOURCES CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EXTENSION
HISTORY, ACTIVITIES, PROBLEMS

BY

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ABSTRACT

The Recreation Resources Center (RRC), University of Wisconsin-Extension provides research based educational programming to individuals and communities, with particular emphasis in the Wisconsin recreation-tourism industry. It originated in 1969 as a demonstration project funded by the Upper Great Lakes Regional Commission (UGLRC) to do for the HRT industry what UW-Extension has been doing for farming and agribusiness for several generations. RRC activities include applied research, workshops, and counseling, information dissemination, networking and back up support for Extension Agents. The budget gradually grew, replacing the UGLRC funding with UW-Extension funding, to 8.0 staff. Budget cuts have reduced its staff to the current 5.0 FTE. Future funding efforts will hopefully increase the FTE count.

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INTRODUCTION

The Recreation Resources Center (RRC), University of Wisconsin-Extension, is a free standing(1) administrative unit in Cooperative Extension Service (CES). It presently has five FTE faculty and academic staff(2), three classified support staff, three graduate students, and five undergraduates. It is located on the UW-Madison Campus in Madison, Wisconsin.

The RRC is the extension arm of the UW-System to the Wisconsin Hospitality Recreation Tourism (HRT) industry. It provides backup support to county and area based Extension Community Resource Development (CRD) agents throughout the state; plans, coordinates and teaches extension workshops; conducts applied research; does individual business

and trade association counseling; and disseminates information to the industry.

HISTORY

The RRC was created in 1969 as a demonstration project with a \$40,000 grant from the Upper Great Lakes Regional Commission (UGLRC). The impetus came from community leaders, Extension agent Don Schink, and CES Director Gale Van de Berg.

Its charge came in terms of doing for the HRT Industry what the College of Agriculture and CES have been doing for farmers and agribusinesses for several generations.

The RRC grew in staff with increased UGLRC funding and Extension funding. The UGLRC funding shifted to a reduced research project by project basis as Extension funds were gradually increased. Finally UGLRC funds dried up and the budget was picked up entirely by UW-Extension. A total of eight FTE faculty and academic staff plus student research assistants and classified staff comprised the Recreation Resources Center at its strongest position.

ACTIVITIES

RESEARCH

The RRC earns program revenue through teaching fees and research projects. It also receives some funding from the UW

Sea Grant Institute and from the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Program which in Wisconsin is administered through UW-Extension. The RRC is a designated SBDC Center. Early research projects included efforts to identify the Wisconsin HRT industry with inventories of overnight lodging, camping and eating and drinking establishments, and a state-wide inventory of recreation areas, facilities, and services, in cooperation with the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).

Later on efforts were conducted to document the economic impact of the HRT industry. Enterprise studies on the microeconomics of campgrounds, resorts, golf courses, and marinas were conducted to assist in providing data for workshops and business counseling to those clientele groups. Early networking efforts resulted in the creation of the Wisconsin Tourism Federation (WTF), an umbrella federation of statewide HRT and HRT related trade associations, and regional tourism promotional organizations. User studies were conducted on campers, resort customers and golfers. The effects of the gasoline crisis were surveyed.

Current research activities include an assessment of the magnitude of the liability insurance/risk problem on the HRT industry, market

studies of the major Wisconsin tourism market areas, user studies on camping, charter fishing, non-consumptive recreationists, financial analyses of campgrounds, supply and demand for Wisconsin great lakes marina slips, and market surveys of Wisconsin attractions such as the Experimental Aircraft Association Exposition and the Wisconsin State Fair.

GROUP TEACHING

Teaching activities have centered around the offering of workshops to specific client groups including operators of cabin resorts, campgrounds, marinas, charter fishing operations, horse operations, restaurants, chambers of commerce, motels, and taverns, extending applied research when available. Workshops/tours and a four day short course for campgrounds are offered annually on a statewide level in cooperation with the Wisconsin Association of Campground Owners. Bed and Breakfast workshops are offered in cooperation with University of Wisconsin and University of Illinois Sea Grant programs and the Wisconsin Bed and Breakfast Association. Workshops for resorts, motels and restaurants are taught for the respective state trade associations. Extension county and area CRD agents plan workshops in their respective areas and utilize RRC staff as teachers.

Such small business programs have evolved into fee programs with a current level of about \$5 per business per teaching hour. This program revenue helps to offset the operational costs of the RRC.

COUNSELING

Counseling has been a significant teaching method throughout the history of Recreation Resources Center. Early in the RRC history such counseling often included a complete market feasibility--cash flow analysis for recreation-tourism developers. Graduate students from the UW-Madison would conduct such studies under the supervision of RRC staff. More recently such services have been discontinued, as private consultants entered the HRT field and budget cutbacks forced a reduction in Recreation Resources Center Staff.

The RRC still performs on site counseling, using the thumb rule that everyone gets a free day from the RRC. SBDC funding allows this service.

CRD AGENT SUPPORT

As Extension specialists, RRC faculty/staff provide technical support to county and area CRD agents. This takes the forms of information dissemination, teaching of in-service professional improvement workshops and one-on-one counseling. In addition, two RRC faculty are regional program leaders for CRD agents. This involves advisory assistance in planning, coordinating, conducting and evaluating

CRD agents' programs.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Information is disseminated from the RRC on a personal request basis to enterprise operators, students, community leaders and to government officials and academic personnel. In addition, research publication and fact sheets are disseminated to a mailing list including the CRD agent network, the Extension specialist network and government agencies. To date most of this is sent free of charge although a fee program is being planned.

NETWORKING

Networking is a very important function carried out by RRC staff. Close networking relationships have been developed with the Wisconsin Association of Campground Owners, the Wisconsin Hospitality, Recreation, and Tourism Association and the Wisconsin Bed and Breakfast Association. Early networking efforts resulted in the creation of the Wisconsin Tourism Federation (WTF), an umbrella federation of statewide HRT trade associations and regional tourism promotional organizations. State agencies networks include the Department of Natural Resources, the Division of Tourism Development and Bureau of Research in the Department of Development, the Department of Revenue, the Department of Health and Social Services, the Department of Transportation and the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance.

Networking within the Extension system, both within the state and nationwide, although mainly in the surrounding states, has included the sharing of extension programs and research.

Research networking has also been found necessary. For the past three years the RRC has coordinated a research update forum for researchers and those interested in research on the recreation-tourism industry in Wisconsin.

PROBLEMS BUDGET PROBLEMS AND REACTIONS

The Graham-Ruddman legislation devastated Extension budgets around the country. The impact was made worse in Wisconsin because of a simultaneous state budget cutback and a state salary increase. The latter mandated UW-Extension to provide state funds for federal salary increases for which there was no federal increase. UW-Extension administration solved this by freezing all open positions and eliminating most of them. In addition, a freeze was placed on the granting of tenure and academic staff and non-tenured faculty were laid off.

The RRC had unusual attrition in this period, due to two

resignations, a retirement and a tenure rejection. Its budget was reduced by almost a third (32%).

Efforts have been made to get the budget restored, although none have been successful to date. A UW-Extension staffing plan has included as high priority the restoration of one RRC position. This position has also been included in other budget proposals.

A current state budget proposal for 1988-89 included applied research projects in HRT. A continuing budget problem is that RRC research is usually directed by funding available. Industry segments that can't afford the research won't benefit if a publicly funded program doesn't provide for it.

INTERDISCIPLINARY EFFORTS

One of the continuing problems is communication between researchers in travel/tourism. Professional associations such as the Travel and Tourism Research Association (TTRA) help tremendously in the area of informing everyone on current research.

In Wisconsin the RRC just coordinated the third Recreation-Tourism Research Update Forum. It invites individuals to report on recently completed recreation-tourism research in Wisconsin. The last one included research reports from wildlife ecologists, sociologists, economists, and market share and conversion study briefings from the Division of Tourism Development in the Wisconsin Department of Development.

FUTURE PLANS

This past Spring the RRC went through a strategic planning process. Although still in process at the time of this writing, general goals decided upon included the conducting of more research-based extension programs and train the trainer programs. The RRC further plans to do more networking with other University researchers.

FOOTNOTES

1 Not integrated in the UW-Madison Campus, although individual faculty have held joint appointments with academic appointments in UW-Madison departments.

2 The present RRC faculty and academic staff include the following:

Rollin Cooper, Recreation Economist and Director
Jack Gray, Marketing Specialist
Harriett Moyer, Extension Sociologist
Kim Peterson, Research Analyst

Sue Sadowske, Marketing Specialist
Darrell Aderman, Community Specialist-Arts (Adjunct)