

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RECREATIONAL LAND CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

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The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has had a land classification system in place since 1972. This system was developed during the creation of the first Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. This system has become the backbone of the Park Master Planning Process. During the past few years the New York State Park System has undergone serious evaluation. This evaluation determined that the Parkland Classification System is out of date and no longer addresses today's needs or issues. This paper attempts to illustrate how the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) is approaching the redesign of their Recreational Land Classification System.

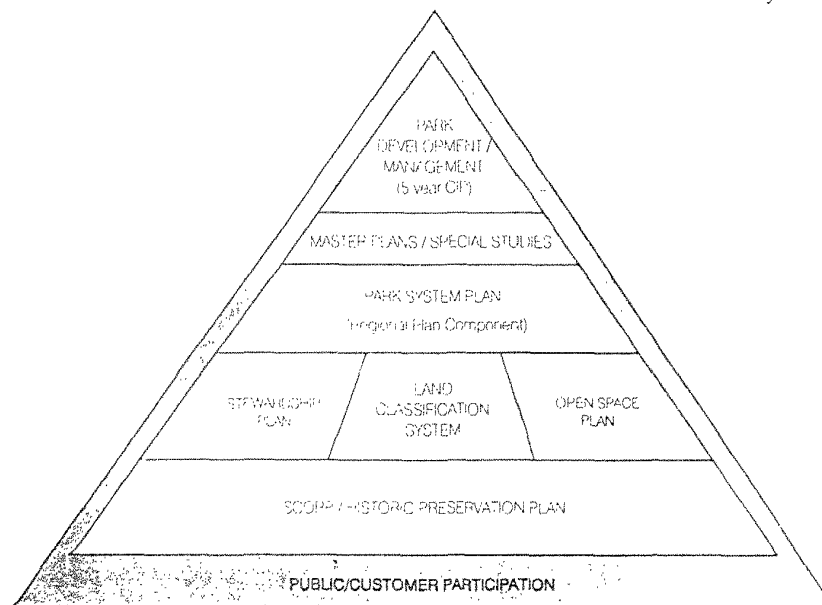


Figure 1. OPRHP's planning system.

At the base of the pyramid is the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The SCORP is a broad document that provides a vision for recreation in New York State over a five year period. This plan encompasses the recreation industry in the entire state and reaches beyond the scope of the New York State Park System.

The Purpose of a Recreational Land Classification System

Since New York first acquired the Niagara Frontier to protect it from the threat of development and obtained Washington's Headquarters in Newburg, the state's park system grew faster than ever imagined. Today the park system encompasses 150 parks, 35 historic sites (many of which are on both the State Register of Historic Places and the Federal Register of Historic Places), 19 boat launching facilities, 6 canal parks, 13 marinas, 14 Urban Cultural Parks, hundreds of miles of parkways and hundreds of miles of trails.

These parks and sites contain some of New York's most magnificent natural features. For example, within the park system there are 160 lakes and ponds, hundreds of acres of wetlands, miles of coastal shorelines, mineral springs, gorges, sand dunes and mature forests. The U.S. Geological Service has identified 67 parks with important and unique geologic features and the National Heritage Trust has also identified 45 parks that contain rare plants, animals and exemplary natural communities.

Through a Resources Steering committee, four main purposes of a classification system were identified: 1) to group parks and historic sites with similar natural, cultural and recreation resource characteristics; 2) to provide broad management, protection and development directions; 3) to provide guidance for the development of management and master plans; and 4) to inform the public/user as to what type of experience they may expect at a specific park or site.

The State Land Recreational Planning System

The State Land Recreational Planning System is a management system designed to meet the changing recreational needs of the public as well as protecting and preserving the natural resources unique to each site. It is a system that responds to identified public needs and involves public input throughout the planning and implementation process. Figure 1 shows how the Land Classification System (LCS) fits into the planning process (Figure 1).

Within the recreational planning system, the Conserving Open Space in New York State plan, OPRHP's Fostering Environmental Stewardship report and the Land Classification System provide more specific policy directions to guide OPRHP's planning system. The "Open Space Plan" defines the needs and outlines some strategies for conserving open space lands. The plan was

devised through the cooperation of both the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) as authorized under the provisions of section 49-0207 of the Environmental Conservation Law (NYS DEC and OPRHP, 1992).

The report, *Fostering Environmental Stewardship*, addresses the issue, not only, of the deterioration of the facilities and structures at state parks but also the loss and abuse of natural resources within the state parks. The "Stewardship Plan" provides a brief evaluation of the park system and lists over 100 management strategies and recommendations to "... inventory, assess, protect, or enhance the natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources of New York's system of state parks and historic sites" (NYS OPRHP, 1993).

The LCS categorizes the state parks according to the type of site (i.e. multipurpose, linear, historic or boat launch, etc.), the level of development, the purpose set forth in the enabling legislation, the available facility/activity development, and levels of use intensity. Under this system, similar state lands are grouped together. This approach allows for developing common management directives for lands of the same class. All of these components are used as a basis for developing OPRHP's Park System Plan. OPRHP's Park System Plan is a general plan that focuses on the entire park system and develops concepts, goals and objectives for the park classes.

OPRHP's Master Plans are park/site specific plans and will eventually use guidelines and management strategies identified in the Park System Plan. These plans define hands-on management actions that serve to satisfy the objectives, goals, concepts, and ultimately, the vision for recreation in New York State. Specific policies are identified, use and resource analysis is conducted, alternative management actions are considered and finally, a preferred alternative is selected.

The Capital Investment Plan outlines projects (i.e. the development or rehabilitation of facilities) that are scheduled to be started or completed within a five year time block. Ultimately, the public experiences the results of this planning system.

Land Classification System

The LCS has been a component of the New York State Parks Planning Process and the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) since its development in 1974. The proposed system uses various aspects of all OPRHP recreation lands such as level of development, physical capacity, environmental constraints, and other management related data, to identify appropriate activities and classify park types so that appropriate management directives can be developed.

The proposed LCS provides a more detailed and a clearer set of parameters for each classification. This includes the incorporation of new activities and facilities categories. Since every OPRHP park/site has distinctive features and a particular level of development, the categorization according to development intensity (High, Moderate, Low) introduces a new variable that is to be incorporated in the evaluation of each area. Also, two other activity indicators, "Allowed" and "Not Allowed", were added. The "Allowed" indicator permits the identification of activities that take place on parks/sites but do not require built facilities, while the "Not Allowed" level identifies activities that are expressly prohibited by either policy or legislation.

The system has been expanded to include new land categories: Underwater sites, Urban Cultural Parks, Interpretive areas and DEC land categories. Finally, within the revised classification system, the classification of each area is clearly identified. The classification represents the overall evaluation of the area based on natural/cultural resources, activities and facilities. The park/site may be zoned through the master planning process to reflect areas that require different types of management such as the identification of "preserve areas" within a park classified as a "Scenic" or "Recreation Park" (Figure 2).

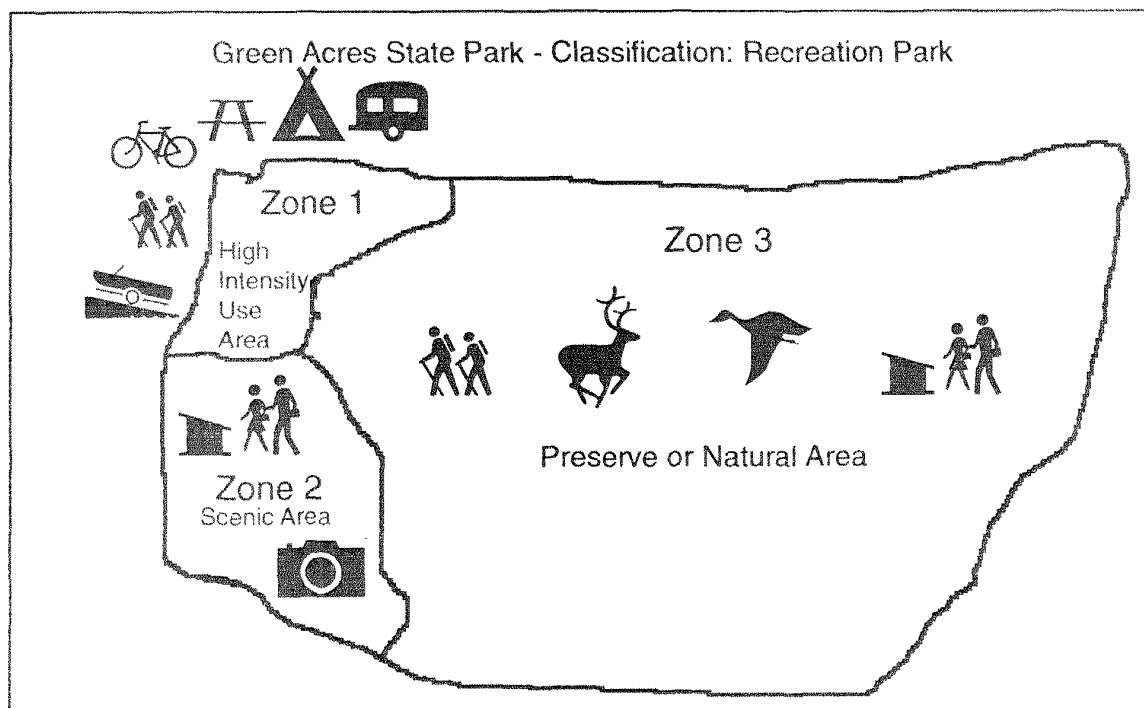


Figure 2. An example of park zoning.

Classification Framework:

The Conceptual Matrix

The initial classification system was based on natural resource, recreation facility and operational information that existed at the time of its development in 1974. The system is part of a dynamic process that evolves as the system is continuously refined and more information becomes available. The initial analysis grouped parks and sites with similar characteristics and provided a primary form of land capability analysis to ascertain what intensities of use a particular area or park can support (OPRHP, 1980). The 1974 classification system did not indicate areas where development should be totally prohibited or encouraged but did indicate the overall natural constraints faced in park development or management.

The proposed classification system is based on the combination of natural and cultural resources, the major types of recreational activities and facilities and the levels of development for each park. The progression from areas of intensive development to areas of limited development shows the importance of the ecological attributes and the vulnerability of the natural and historic resources offered by the different recreational units. Each cell of the conceptual matrix implies a particular management strategy that allows appropriate public use by setting specific developmental guidelines (Figure 3).

LEVELS OF DEVELOPMENT	Parks & Land Resources		Water Access	Historic	Linear Systems	Underwater	Environmental Education
	Intensive Development	Metro Park	Marine Park	Historic Site	Parkway	N/A	N/A
		Recreation Park		Urban Cultural Park	Linear Park		
	Low Intensity Development in Natural Surroundings	State Campground	Boat Launching Site	Historic Park	Canal Park	Historic Park	Fish Propagation Facilities
		Scenic Park			Recreationway	Park	Interpretive Environmental Education Centers
	Primitive	Management Areas	Cartop Boat & Fishing Access (Includes stream easements)	Historic Preserve	Primitive Trailway	Underwater Historic Preserve	Environmental Education Summer Camps
		Forest Preserve					
		Park Preserve					

Figure 3. The conceptual classification matrix.

By combining the major types of recreational activities and the levels of development intensity for each park, the matrix describes park categories that are sufficiently similar to maintain relatively uniform management analyses of potentials and constraints.

The levels of development in which the state parks and recreation areas were classified remains the same as those used in the 1983 SCORP (OPRHP, 1983).

INTENSIVE DEVELOPMENT: is associated with those properties compatible for high intensity, concentrated use. Facilities may be provided for indoor and outdoor activities; these and other man-made structures are predominant.

LOW INTENSITY DEVELOPMENT: is associated with those properties that are developed at a relatively low intensity in such a way to allow public use in natural surroundings.

PRIMITIVE: are those areas containing fragile ecological or cultural resources that must be protected through appropriate but limited public use.

Type of Activity/Facility

The proposed classification system also uses the existing four categories according to the type of activity/facility offered by the unit:

PARKS & LAND RESOURCES (P): open space areas utilized in various degrees for recreation and environmental purposes.

BOATING (B): facilities with a focus toward boating activities and its related uses.

HISTORIC (H): site with historical significance that are primarily managed for cultural interpretation or preservation.

UNDERWATER: aquatic areas of good water quality with geological and/or historical significance.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION (E): sites having significant interpretive and educational potential, managed primarily for public visitation.

LINEAR SYSTEMS (R): recreation ways, parkways, trails, movement corridors which link recreation, cultural or open space areas either to population centers or to other recreation/cultural areas.

To further refine the classification system, development levels were established for the activity/facility categories within each classification. The intensity levels include:

HIGH INTENSITY (H): Areas or activities within the park/site which require extensive or a higher level of development of indoor/outdoor facilities and programs (i.e. swimming pool complexes, high use developed beach areas, band shells, court game areas, campsite development with full hookup and electric, marinas, etc.)

MODERATE INTENSITY (M): Areas or activities within the park/site which require a moderate level of development of indoor/outdoor facilities and programs (i.e. smaller developed beach areas with basic supports facilities, campsite development with basic support facilities or paved boat launching sites).

LOW INTENSITY (L): Areas or activities within a park/site which require no or a limited level of development of indoor/outdoor facilities (i.e. primitive campsites, natural beaches with limited support facilities or unimproved boat launching sites).

ALLOWED (A): Activities that are low impact but may vary in type and level. There are no or limited developed and support facilities associated with the activity (i.e. hunting).

NOT ALLOWED (X): Activities that have been specifically defined not to be permitted within a particular area.

Through an agency "Park Planning Steering Committee," comprised of park professionals from each of the regions and appropriate bureaus, the recreation activity criteria for each classification was clarified and revised. A list of activities along with a level of development measure was created. However, not all the activities identified for a classification may be appropriate or desired for a particular park or site (Figure 4).

Once the type of activity is combined with the level of development, 23 subcategories emerge in the proposed classification system. The gradient from high intensity development to low intensity development within each general categorization denotes a new improvement to the classification system. An example is shown in Figure 5. The system, however, does not reflect the intensity of use a particular area or facility may experience. For instance, a low intensity developed area such as a canoe access area may receive a high level of use as compared to a paved boat launch site which may experience a low level of use. This is a factor of location and attributes which attract people.

The land use criteria for the proposed system gives a brief description of each classification, an overall level of development and a breakdown of the number of acres in built areas, managed areas or undeveloped natural areas (Figure 5).

PARK CLASSIFICATION

ACTIVITY / FACILITY	P-1	P-2	P-3	P-4	P-5	P-6	P-7	B-1	B-2	B-3	E-1	E-2	H-1	H-2	H-3	H-4	R-1	R-2	R-3	R-4	U-1	U-2	U-3	
DAY USE																								
PICNIC	H	H	M	H	L	L	L	H	M	L	M	L	H	M	L	H	L					L	L	L
PLAYGROUND	H	H	M	M				M								H								
COURT	H	H	M	M												H								
FIELD	H	H	M	M				L								H								
GOLFING		H		H	L											H								
NON-MOTORIZED TRAILS																								
Hiking	H	H	H	H	L	L	M	L			M			M	M	H	M							
Biking recreational	H	H	M	H	L	L	L	L						L	L	H	M	M	M	L				
mountain		H	M	M	L	L	L									H	M	M	M	L				
Nature	H	H	H	H	L	L	H	L			M					H	M	M	M	L				
Equestrian		H	M	H	L	L	L							M	L		M	M	M	L				
Horse Carriages		H	M	H			L									L	M	M	M	L				
MOTORIZED TRAIL																								
ATV						X											L	L	L					
Trail bikes						L/X											L	L	L					
4WD						L/X																		
ROCK CLIMBING		A	A	A	A		A																	
HUNTING		A	A	A	A	A	A				X	X												

Figure 4. The compatible activities/facilities matrix.

Applying the Land Classification System

The existing park and site classifications were then reevaluated using professional staff knowledge of each park and site. Based on the revised activity and land use criteria, several parks were reclassified. Some parks were reclassified in a classification that allows a higher level of development, while others received classifications that permitted lower levels of development. In most cases, the acreage of land uses and the significance and level of protection of a park's natural and cultural resources did not change. The system and individual park and site classifications will continually undergo additional refinements through the master planning process and as more natural and cultural resource information is developed.

The Park Steering Committee identified additional options to be considered in the further refinement of the system. The proposed system is based on a single classification for a park or site. An alternative would be to have a dual classification system in which there would be separate classifications for natural and cultural resources and recreation resources. This would provide additional guidance in land use, development and management decisions and strengthen the concept of establishing zones within parks and sites.

The central concept of the classification system lies in the progression from classification of park/site types and the identification of functions to the specification of appropriate management practices. The classification system is intended to provide direction and guidance for making land use decisions while retaining the flexibility to permit individual evaluation in specific park/site sub-zones. It is recognized that good planning and environmental review principles must remain in force relative to these issues. The system is intended to support such rational planning and environmental assessment activity, not preclude it.

In the ultimate application of the entire classification system, "gray" areas will always exist. This is due to the uniqueness and the character of each park and site. Even though the classification system will provide overall guidance, individual consideration for the determination of development, protection and management will occur at the park and site level.

The updating process of the Land Classification System responds to the necessity of getting more detailed information of the natural and cultural resources statewide and under OPRHP's responsibility. As more detailed information is developed, the classification of the recreational units can be accurately reevaluated.

PLANNING CATEGORY	RESOURCE CHARACTERISTICS	-----USE CHARACTERISTICS-----			
		DESIGNED LEVEL OF USE	% BUILT AREAS	% MANAGED AREAS*	% UNDEVELOPED NATURAL AREAS
METRO PARKS P-1	Located in urban, industrial or suburban surroundings with man-made architectural treatment of the environment.	High	0 to 75	25	0 to 75
RECREATION PARK P-2	Natural surroundings in suburban or rural areas. A mix of natural and developed areas, significant natural areas not essential.	High	0 to 15	0 to 100	0 to 100
STATE CAMPGROUNDS P-3	Primarily in rural setting. A mix of natural and developed areas, significant natural areas not essential.	Moderate	0 to 10	0 to 80	20 to 100
SCENIC PARKS P-4	Natural setting, limited development, scenic attractions within urban, suburban or rural areas. A mix of natural and developed areas with significant scenic features.	High	0 to 5	0 to 50	50 to 100
MANAGEMENT AREAS P-5	Primarily wooded or wetland areas; rural natural setting; limited or no development; offers significant recreation and wildlife observation opportunities.	Low	0 to 15	0 to 5	85 to 100
FOREST PRESERVE P-6	Natural, forested areas; low to moderate development of facilities usually related to compatible activities; recreation opportunities range from low-impact, wilderness activities to limited motorized activity	Low	0 to 5	0 to 5	95 to 100
PARK PRESERVES P-7	Natural areas, few developed facilities within urban, suburban or rural areas. Could have salt marshes, wetlands, bogs, dunes, unusually steep topography, flood prone areas, or other significant environmental resources.	Low	0 to 5	0 to 15	85 to 100

Figure 5. Land use criteria for the proposed land classification system.

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