

FACTORS IMPACTING THE SATISFACTION OF PRIVATE CAMPSITE OWNERS WITH CAMPGROUND RECREATION OPERATIONS

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This project investigated the satisfaction of private campsite owners with their campground recreation operations. Regression analysis found five items impacted the overall satisfaction of campsite owners: overall impression of the campground, staff training for both recreation and aquatics staff, noise, and fees and charges. The impacts of these items varied depending upon user group.

Introduction

Woodhaven Lakes Campground in Sublette, Illinois is America's largest ownership camping resort with over 6,000 campsites were sold. As the project was sold out by the developer, the ownership and management of the common areas of the resort was turned over to a nonprofit owner's association, "The Woodhaven Association." The association is managed by an elected board of directors who establish policy, set fees and hire staff. In order to be responsive to their owners, the board conducts periodic surveys of campsite owners. This survey is one such project.

Of general interest in this survey were questions about the current recreation facilities and programs as well as future development of recreational amenities, particularly winter and amenities (i.e., year round pool and spa, ice rinks, sledding hill etc.). Woodhaven was originally designed and sold as a seasonal operation but as time passed, interest has been expressed in developing the area into more of a year round operation, bringing with it a number of operating problems.

A special purpose of this study was to investigate factors impacting the satisfaction private campsite owners feel with the campground's recreation department using methodology developed in previous satisfaction studies done on boaters by Graefe and Drogin (1989), Drogin, Graefe and Titre (1990), and Holdnak, Graefe and Drogin (1992). These studies are based on the Expectancy Theory of Satisfaction.

Methodology

The study explored a number of potential impacts on campsite owners' satisfaction with Woodhaven Lakes Campground, Sublette, Illinois. Campsite owners were surveyed by mail in the summer of 1992 as part of a regular program of surveys conducted by the campground management organization. Since the primary source of funding for development and operations is membership dues, it was of particular importance to management to give each owner the opportunity to respond to the survey. Thus approximately 6,000 surveys were mailed to campsite owners and 1249 usable surveys were returned yielding a return rate of slightly better than 20.8%. Managers reported that this response rate was consistent with responses rates of their previous surveys. Due to the large numbers of surveys mailed, follow-up mailings were not used. Researchers recognize that this is a low response rate and that a random sample method with follow-ups might provide superior data.

Factors expected to impact satisfaction with the campground recreation department were developed by the campground recreation department staff with input from the researcher. Factors included: the overall impression of the campground operation, crowding, noise, fees and charges, as well as staff friendliness and training, facility supervision and facility condition for both recreation operations and aquatics operations. A series of items measured on a five point Lykert scale were used to assess the level of agreement with statements concerning each item. Items measuring crowding and noise were reverse coded. Overall satisfaction with the recreation department was measured with a single item on a ten point scale, where 10 = "extremely satisfied". A stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted testing the impacts of the study variables on the satisfaction of the campsite owners. This methodology is consistent the previously mentioned studies.

Results

In order to test the impact of the selected variables on overall satisfaction with the recreation operation, a stepwise multiple regression was run.

Results of the stepwise multiple regression indicated that five of the twelve variables studied did impact the owners impressions of the recreation department (Table 1). The higher the overall impression of the campground, the higher the satisfaction with the recreation operation. Also important was the perceived level of training of the recreation staff and the aquatics staff as well the perception that current fees and charges were appropriate. In addition, the noise of others at the facilities negatively impacted satisfaction. Overall, the multiple regression produced an R^2 of .488 which is comparable to previous studies.

An additional series of ANOVAs were run to see if any of the factors impacting satisfaction with the campground recreation department varied depending upon the user groups at the campground i.e., persons visiting as "individuals", "self and spouse", "immediate family with primarily children" and "immediate family with primarily grandchildren".

Though there was no significant difference between groups on their overall perception of the campground's recreation department, there were significant differences between groups on two of the variables found to impact the satisfaction with the department (Table 2). People who visited Woodhaven Lakes as "self and spouse" were lower in their evaluation of Woodhaven Lakes overall than were the other groups. Also, the impact of noise at the facilities was felt more strongly by those visiting as individuals or with spouses than by the groups visiting with children or grandchildren.

Table 1: Summary of multiple regression of selected variables on satisfaction of private campsite owners with campground recreation operations.

Independent Variable		Overall Impression of WHL Recreation Department
	r	Beta
Overall impression of Woodhaven Lakes Campground	.636	0.614
I avoided certain areas of the lake because of crowding.	-.003	
The noise at the facilities reduced my enjoyment.	.195	0.089
There is adequate supervision at recreation facilities.	.041	
There is adequate supervision at aquatics facilities.	.015	
The recreation staff is well trained.	.406	0.525
The recreation staff is friendly and helpful.	.049	
Recreation facilities are in good condition.	.044	
The aquatics staff is well trained.	.349	0.239
The aquatics staff is friendly and helpful.	.036	
Aquatics facilities are in good condition.	.044	
Current fees and charges are appropriate.	.278	0.159
Percent of Variance Explained (R square):	.488	

Table 2: The influence of "group" on selected impact variables

	Grand Mean	Group			F Value	Signif.
		Individ.	Self & spouse	Immed. Family		
Overall impression of WHL Recreation Dept	7.35	7.21	7.35	7.37	0.258	.773
N= 979		88	360	531		
Overall impression of WHL Campground	7.57	7.72	7.33	7.71	5.509	.004
N= 1027		90	391	546		
The recreation staff is well trained.	3.73	3.7	3.75	3.73	0.191	.826
N= 955		79	350	526		
The aquatics staff is well trained.	3.82	3.71	3.78	3.86	2.391	.092
N= 941		78	338	525		
Current fees and charges are appropriate.	3.44	3.48	3.5	3.4	1.282	.278
N= 926		77	337	512		
The noise at the facilities reduced my enjoyment.	3.09	2.87	2.86	3.28	13.53	.000
N= 938		77	345	516		

Discussion

This results of this study indicate that the expectancy theory of satisfaction can be valuable in the evaluation of campground recreation operations. By focusing on the factors shown to significantly impact the impressions of campsite owners, recreation managers can most efficiently improve the owners satisfaction with their operation.

Of particular note in this study was the relative importance of training for both the recreation and aquatics staff. Training was found to be significant while friendliness and quality of supervision was not. For this operation, additional staff training programs would seem to be appropriate.

Additionally, the respondents feelings about fees and charges impacted their overall satisfaction. Further studies of willingness to pay should be conducted at this campground.

The methodology used in previous satisfaction studies was shown to be applicable in the study of campground operations. Additional uses of this methodology in a variety of public and private outdoor recreation operations should be conducted.

Literature Cited

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