

THE RECREATION-RESOURCE INVENTORY PROCESS FOR STATE AND REGIONAL PLANS

by HUGH C. DAVIS, *Associate Professor of Resource Planning,
Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Massachusetts,
Amherst, Mass.*

ABSTRACT. The establishment of guidelines for identifying recreation resources in the inventorying process should be limited to conditions and characteristics of the natural resources themselves. This requires not only that we define recreation, but also that we prescribe the combination of resources necessary to carry on a variety of recreational activities.

THIS PAPER deals with concepts rather than techniques. The traditional approach to the topic is *how* to make an inventory of recreation resources. This has been discussed in several government publications and new approaches have been reported in a variety of professional journals. Rather than summarize what we now know about inventorying recreation resources, I have chosen to explore several relevant topics that we do not know so much about, and to suggest a few areas that need study.

Perhaps the greatest problem in making an inventory arises from the physical requirements for outdoor recreation activities. Collectively these are so broad as to be almost without bounds. Compare, for example, the task of identifying potential new dam sites in the Northeastern United States with the task of identifying potential new campgrounds. Realistic minimum physical requirements for dam sites can be easily established. Air photos and topo maps can be studied and tentative locations can be placed on maps. A great quantity of necessary backup geological and hydrological data are already available, and these

can be collated with the specific sites identified. Coupled with on-site investigations, a strong economic, social, and physical case can be presented for the desirability of one site over another.

But what are the realistic minimum requirements for a public campground? Certainly by now we have all developed some sort of administrative and managerial "standards." But the real pertinent question is: Are these minimum requirements based on physical resource requirements necessary for camping?; or are they more-or-less arbitrary factors based on agency philosophy and personal values? Clearly the latter is most often the case. This is so because one can, from the resource-requirement point of view, "camp" almost anywhere. Unlike a dam site, natural-resource constraints on camping are few indeed.

A BASIC PROBLEM

Herein lies a basic problem in making an inventory of potential recreation resources. For we cannot in fact make an inventory without at one and the same time evaluating. Regardless of the techniques adopted

to locate new areas for recreation activities, we must first establish some guidelines that permit a rational and more-or-less consistent means of selecting one area and rejecting another.

We generally refer to such guidelines as "standards," and they are in fact a partial evaluation process, because they dictate that a particular combination of natural resources is suitable for a camping area while another set is not. In almost all cases, however, these standards are not based exclusively on resources capabilities, but rather are a combination of economic, social, and administrative factors coupled with resource characteristics.

To express this same point in another way: the identification of new areas for potential state parks will set some minimum total size, say 600 acres. This is largely an economic and administrative standard apart from the natural-resource capability, and it reflects the cost and management difficulties encountered in running a multitude of 50- or 100-acre parks scattered throughout a state. Social and political constraints are reflected in these standards by attention paid to the distance from centers of population and proximity to other already existing recreation areas.

All this is by way of saying that the broad basic guidelines used for identifying and making an inventory of recreation resources are not founded strictly on the characteristics of the resources themselves, but rather on a mixture of several kinds of constraints. Though it is clear why this is done, there are benefits to be derived if this were not always the case.

Consider the situation of a state beginning an inventory as a necessary early step in the revision of its state-wide recreation plan. Previous so called "demand" studies indicate a need for additional campground. We know that recreators do not just go camping, but that they engage in other recreational activities, and that the tent or trailer is often just home base. Thus the new campgrounds should be near water, and in association with woodland or forest for hiking and so on. We also know that certain parts of the state are currently better serviced with recreation areas than

other sections. Money for campground development is limited, and the dollar must be stretched. And finally we are well aware that funding agencies in Washington are more receptive to the creation of new areas close to urban centers.

THE SHORTCOMING

All these considerations and many others will be given attention in preparing the specifications or guidelines to assist in identifying potential campgrounds. The more specific the standards can be made, the easier and more efficient will be the job of identifying all areas meeting the criteria.

The inventory is then made, using whatever techniques are most appropriate. Assuming it has been done properly, when the inventory is completed, *all* areas meeting *all* the established standards will have been located and recorded. And perhaps more important, *all* areas that do not meet *all* standards will *not* be recorded.

In this greatly oversimplified example, what has actually happened? What is the difficulty with this rather standard approach? I suggest that too much of the total planning process has been made an integral part of what really should be only a data-gathering process. Too many planning considerations have been built into the "selection" process of identifying recreation resources. For, in fact, a vast number of resource complexes suitable for camping have not been identified because they lacked the non-resource characteristics that were built into the standards. In reality what happens in these situations is that, in terms of the recreation resource, a kind of development priority system became a major and inseparable part of the inventory process.

I believe this is undesirable for several reasons. First, it is not a complete inventory of areas physically suited for campgrounds. Second, and closely tied to the first, it greatly reduces the planners' ability to consider alternative development programs. Third, and by far the most important, while natural-resource complexes do change over time, they change at a much slower rate than do political, economic, social, and administrative condi-

tions. Thus, when any or all of these latter constraints change, the inventory will have to be repeated in light of the new situation and its effect on the standards and guidelines.

Finally, by placing so many different kinds of constraints on the data-gathering operation, economic and decision-making efficiency is increased but at the expense of planning flexibility. And an inflexible plan is almost always an extremely poor plan.

THE ALTERNATIVE

The alternative to this, it seems to me, is quite clear. The establishment of guidelines for the identification of recreation resources in the inventory process should be limited to conditions and characteristics of the natural resources themselves. This, as most of us know, is not as easy as it sounds. It not only requires that we define recreation (no small task in itself), but also that we prescribe the combination of resources necessary to carry on a variety of activities. It may perhaps be helpful to explore this task a bit further, and to consider some of the things involved.

First, as part of the definition process, a list of basic outdoor activities must be compiled. This list itself is a kind of definition in that what it includes is considered outdoor recreation and what is left out is not. The list is of prime importance, as only data pertinent to it will become part of the inventory; thus the list forms the limits of recreation content of a subsequent plan. It is my belief that initially this list should attempt to be all-inclusive and cover as complete an array as possible of those recreation activities that are dependent upon an identifiable nature resource base.

This activity list, I believe, is so important that if it is the responsibility of a public agency to make an inventory, that agency should involve citizen advisory groups in the task of its compilation to assure as many different kinds of activities as possible.

The second part of the task centers around the fact mentioned earlier: that there are certain kinds of outdoor recreation activities that are non-specific in their resource requirements. This of course

means that some specifications for identification must be established. The development of these specifications is extremely significant, for they in fact begin to attach a *quality* to the recreation experience.

Using again the simple example of a potential campground, if the identifying guidelines include such things as size of potential areas, presence of flat water, and percent of tree canopy cover, some degree of a quality environment for the camping experience is being established. Obviously additional increments of quality may be added or subtracted through area design and management techniques. But nevertheless the basic resource combinations looked for in the inventory are, or can be, a first stage in some sort of quality measurement for recreation experiences.

This concept is useful in another way as well. If the guidelines for identifying recreation resources include these sorts of things, as determinants of a "good or bad" environment for the list of activities, I suggest they may also be useful as one component in the actual planning task of establishing a series of priorities for development.

This is not contradictory to what I have suggested above, for it is only *one* of many factors in the planning process that must enter into a priority schedule. It is strictly limited to the character of the resource. It offers no assistance in regard to political, economic, social, and administrative priority considerations, which are, and should be kept, separate from natural resource capabilities.

IMPLICATIONS

This rather brief description of the identification and inventoring of recreation resources suggests several things. First, that the process be limited to natural resources. Second, that an activity list be developed that suggests the kinds of recreation one is seeking to provide. Third, that guidelines must be established that define the necessary characteristics of the resources needed to provide the recreation activity. Fourth, that the previous three steps can provide data that are useful in the planning job for

suggesting a set of alternative development priorities. Finally, it implies that additional information must be collected relating to other factors that enter in the recreation planning procedures. This material can perhaps be gathered at the same time as the resource data, but it should be a totally separate and distinct tabulation. Only *after* the inventory is made are these various sets of material combined and final plans established.

It is clear that in the identification of recreation resources the most critical element is to establish the guidelines or standards. Research in this area continues to be important. The studies on this broad topic have made some headway. But more studies of user responses to various resource con-

ditions will be most helpful. For example, how do people react to different sizes of beaches? Does length of stay on a beach change as density of users changes. Is there a preference for campgrounds etc. in coniferous stands over hardwood areas? What sorts of recreation can be combined in one area without diminishing the quality of a user's experience? How do these activity combinations shift, if at all, as resource characteristics change?

Finally I suggest that perhaps the single most important study needed, and one of the most difficult, is of how people perceive their environment. Were we to have this information at hand, it might well change many of the arbitrary standards we are forced to use at present.

