

EXPANDING & STRENGTHENING OUTDOOR RECREATION RESEARCH

by WALTER S. HOPKINS, *Chief, Branch of Forest Recreation and Related Human Environment Research, Division of Forest Environment Research, Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.*

ABSTRACT. Though the Forest Service has pioneered in outdoor recreation research, the funding for recreation research has been inadequate. Specific needs for research are outlined. There is a need to define recreation and recreation research in terms that busy legislators can understand.

SIXTEEN YEARS AGO it was evident that visits to America's forests and parks were no longer a minor and incidental resource use. Fifteen years ago the Forest Service started a program of recreation research by hiring Dr. Sam Dana to develop the first problem analysis for outdoor recreation research. Twelve years ago the Eisenhower administration launched the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission. Nine years ago the ORRRC reports urged considerable expansion in recreation management and research.

Now it is 1971, and the Forest Service program of recreation research started by Sam Dana in 1956 continues as the only organized program of research attempting to span the broad field of outdoor recreation—in or out of the Government.

Before you look upon that as a bragging statement, let me point out (1) that the Forest Service has eight programs of research dealing with major forest uses and major forest problems (such as fire, insects, watershed, timber, wildlife, and range), and (2) that the Forest Service program in recreation research has a firm position at the bottom of the list in terms of financing and scientific manpower.

For example, the Forest Service employs 270 professionals in timber-management research and 21 professionals in recreation research. The research of the 270 scientists in timber-resource research is much needed. My point is that a comparable number could be used effectively in recreation research.

In 1962 the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission determined outdoor recreation to be a \$20-billion industry (it is at least \$30 billion today), and Congress established the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and authorized it, among other tasks, to conduct and sponsor outdoor-recreation research. Considering the magnitude of outdoor recreation and its impacts, we can ask: Why is recreation research so poorly financed?

MUST WE HAVE FUN?

Support for almost any research one can name is made available because those who provide the support can see a clearly defined need. We *must* control forest fires. We *must* have more timber. We *must* have good, clear water. We *must* beat the Russians to the moon—and we did. To date,

despite all the chest-beating about the therapeutic benefits of recreation, no one has yet documented recreation as a commodity that society *must* have.

Part of the problem rests in the term *recreation* itself. Health we must have. Food we must have, Recreation, maybe. Recreation connotes fun. Do we *have* to have fun? Dr. Phillip O. Foss, at Colorado State University, has pointed out that the founders of our American society "... brought with them a concept of the nobility of work and the sinfulness of idleness." He also pointed out that one of our popular hymns is "Work for the night is coming"; and that the "idle rich" were resented not because they were rich but because they were idle.

Though many may not look upon recreation as immoral, neither do they consider it necessary. It is not hard to see why the U.S. Congress, State legislators, and other fact-finding groups find it difficult to appropriate money to research "fun"—to research frivolity. In fact, we have been asked by members of appropriations committees, "Isn't there some way you can keep all of these people out of the woods?"

What can you and I do? First, we should recognize that the term "recreation" at this point in our culture does not have the magic appeal some of us thought it had 10 years ago. Perhaps it will in another few years; but for now we might fare better by taking an environmental approach to this need. Man and his family are going to continue to come to the forests, beaches, and parks in great numbers. As they do so, they are going to have an impact upon and be part of the environment—theirs, yours, and mine. It is just as necessary for these people to understand, cope with, and benefit by the outdoor environment as it is for the environment to cope with them.

I think two approaches should be made: First, I believe a general approach of "Man and his interactions with outdoor environments" will yield more than one of "Man and his need for outdoor recreation." Second, I think we should pinpoint opportunities as they present themselves. (As I talk about pinpointing and opportunities,

please do not look upon this as an essay on politicking, but as examples of "the way it is"—and for us in recreation, perhaps the way it can be. Congress and other legislating bodies, despite all the criticism they receive, are dedicated hard-working people. We can be grateful that they must be convinced of a need before they loosen the purse strings—or your taxes and mine would be 10 times as much as they are now.

An excellent recent example of pinpointing was Rachel Carson. Almost immediately after the publication of *SILENT SPRING*, funds for pesticide research were made available. More recently, funding for pollution research has improved. We should recognize and remember these examples as we seek strengthening for recreation research.

RESEARCH NEEDS

Now for a few examples of specific recreation research needs.

1. Recreation is a "people" subject. Most of us are pretty adept at managing trees and turf, but our real task is people. We can learn a lot through experience. But through research we can move faster. We need to be much better able to understand recreation visitors, their interests, their motivations, their perceptions. These are rather nebulous items. I cannot see Congress enthusiastically providing funds to study "motivations." But I can see their supporting studies of vandalism, littering, and related unbecoming behavior. And this would be a good place to start.
2. Outdoor education, interpretation, and communication. Millions are spent annually on outdoor education and related communication programs, yet until 2 years ago, when Wagar started some interpretation research, no one was conducting research in this area. Again, interpretation research is sort of vague. But I believe most of our legislators recognize the great need for instilling in our visitors a stronger conservation conscience and a more meaningful understanding of ecology.

3. Closely related is the need to present today's absurd clean-up and maintenance costs. We need much better public cooperation; and research can help show the way. The Forest Service now receives \$40 million for recreation management, and \$30 million of this is going for clean-up and maintenance! And this \$3 out of \$4 relationship is not unique on the National Forests. The need for research here should not be hard to explain.
4. So long as we continue to have 200 million people in this great country, and so long as we attempt to maintain something resembling our present standard of living, not very many of us are going to be able to go back to nature. It will be necessary to produce wood and other commodities from most of our better forest lands—but this does not mean that these lands cannot remain or be made beautiful and used and enjoyed by recreation visitors. What it does mean is the need for more forest-landscape management research—both in design and application. This is not a vague topic, and it should not be hard to explain.
5. What are the human benefits of outdoor recreation? Most of us are convinced that playing with a group of kids in a park is far better than having police chasing the kids in the streets. Isn't it time we documented the benefits (if any) of forest and park experiences for our youth? Several key legislators are interested in this; but they need some solid, sincere, grass-roots support.

We can ask: "How can the private and public sectors of outdoor recreation be better coordinated?" "How can we encourage uses more compatible with the resource?" "Can we develop acceptable methods for considering intangible values as we make land-use decisions?" "What are the economic impacts of various recreation development alternatives?"

We could ask many more key questions, but these are more than enough for today. What we need to do is to define recreation and recreation research needs in terms that a busy legislator can understand, can be convinced of, and can convince others of. We can do it, and we cannot start any later than today.

