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# MANAGEMENT SESSIONS

## MAINTAINING THE QUALITY OF PARK RESOURCES AND VISITOR EXPERIENCES: AN OVERVIEW OF A NEW HANDBOOK FOR MANAGERS

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**Abstract:** Recreation resource managers provide a public service through conscientious decision making and the intelligent stewardship of the lands that have been entrusted to them. Innovations in the field of recreation resource management such as the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Planning System, the Limits of Change (LAC) System for Wilderness Planning and the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) Planning Process have increased the capacity of recreation resource managers to address unacceptable impacts to resources and visitor experiences. However, due to increasing threats to our natural and cultural resources, increasing visitation levels, and an increasingly politicized management arena, managers need decision-making tools that enable them to swiftly and effectively solve their most pressing problems. To meet this need, the authors worked with planners and managers in the National Park Service to develop and field test a decision-making tool to maintain the quality of park resources and visitor experiences. This article provides a brief overview of the handbook that resulted from this effort entitled, *Maintaining the Quality of Park Resources and Visitor Experiences: A Handbook for Managers*.

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### Introduction

Park and recreation professionals are increasingly challenged to meet a dual mandate—to protect and sustain natural and cultural resources for future generations and to provide high quality recreational experiences for visitors. Many resource areas have been especially hard hit, sustaining numerous recreation-related impacts. For some managers the situation is reaching crisis proportions. The biophysical environment is being damaged beyond acceptable limits and the people visiting these areas are no longer attaining the quality experiences and benefits they seek.

Managers, planners and researchers have long wrestled with ways to effectively address unacceptable visitor-caused impacts, including crowding and congestion; visitor conflicts; trail and campsite deterioration; impacts to vegetation, wildlife, and water quality; and noncompliant visitor behavior. A large body of research exists to support decisions to eliminate or reduce these unacceptable impacts. In addition, managers possess a wealth of first-hand experience regarding how to solve problems on the ground. What is needed is a synthesis of the information and expertise relevant to decision making and a "hands-on" process to guide management decision making.

The National Park Service (Denver Service Center) commissioned the University of Minnesota to (1) identify a decision process that managers can use to address unacceptable impacts, and (2) develop resources to support managers in that process. The handbook complements the Park Service's efforts in developing the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) framework, which was developed to address issues of carrying capacity related to visitor-caused resource impacts and impacts to the quality of visitor experiences (USDI, NPS 1997a,b). The handbook may be used by managers who have implemented VERP or other planning frameworks, such as Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) and Visitor Impact Management (VIM); however, its effectiveness is not conditional upon the use of these frameworks.

The handbook was field-tested in early 1997 in four National Park Service units (Arches, Mesa Verde, Grand Tetons, and Yellowstone national parks). In addition to Park Service managers, representatives from at least one conservation organization as well as managers from the Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service, and several state resource management agencies evaluated the handbook. The authors conducted 2-3 day workshops at three of the study sites, Arches, Yellowstone and Mesa Verde, in which participants used the handbook to address real problems at their site. The participants also reviewed the content of the handbook for clarity and ease of use in a field situation. Significant changes in the handbook followed the pilot-test activities.

The result of this effort is a handbook entitled *Maintaining the Quality of Park Resources and Visitor Experiences: A Handbook for Managers*. The purpose of the handbook is twofold:

- To provide resource managers with a step-by-step, easy to use process for identifying and defining unacceptable impacts to biological and cultural resources and to visitor experiences.
- To identify a range of strategies and tactics managers can use to address unacceptable impacts to resources and experiences.

### The Handbook—An Overview

The handbook is a resource for public land managers who have identified unacceptable impacts to resources and visitor experiences and who want to act to eliminate them.

The handbook (1) assists in problem identification, (2) facilitates the identification of a range of possible solutions, (3) encourages an in-depth assessment of alternatives, and (4) enhances the political credibility of decision making through the strength of the process and the way in which decisions are documented. Using the handbook helps managers reduce the range of uncertainty associated with balancing scientific, legal, budgetary, administrative and political factors.

The handbook is divided into three parts. Part one outlines a *decision process* that helps managers analyze problems related to visitor use and options for solving them. The decision process consists of five separate but interrelated stages:

- (1) Problem awareness
- (2) Problem specification
- (3) Strategy and tactic selection
- (4) Plan implementation
- (5) Monitoring

*Figure 1* outlines specific decision-making steps for each stage in the process, identifies potential resources for decision making, and indicates which handbook worksheet corresponds to each stage.

Part Two includes the three *worksheets* that are used to implement the decision process. Each worksheet is designed to aid managers at a specific stage in the decision process. The first worksheet assists managers with problem specification. The second worksheet provides a list of possible strategies and tactics to resolve unacceptable impacts for managers to evaluate and consider for implementation. The third worksheet facilitates the development of a work plan listing specific actions for implementation, who is responsible for implementing the action(s), and the time frame within which it is to be implemented.

*Worksheet 1* is used for the problem specification stage of the decision process. The worksheet guides managers through each of the following steps. First, managers must write a clear description of the problem. The problem may be stated in very broad or very specific terms at this stage in the process. Next, managers list the impacts they believe to be related to the problem. For each impact listed, managers must determine the acceptable level of that impact. If indicators and standards of quality have been developed for the area, and if these indicators and standards address a specific impact, then the acceptable level of the impact is the prescribed standard. When prescribed

standards do not exist, managers must make their "best educated guess" as to the acceptable level of impact. Past research, colleagues, past and current visitors, and other resources can all be helpful in developing a best educated guess. Next managers are asked to record when the impact occurs, where it occurs, and how much of it is occurring. Monitoring data is extremely helpful in this stage of the process, although information can be drawn from observations made by managers and/or visitors. Once the location, timing and extent of the impact has been identified, managers must assess whether the amount of the impact is acceptable, unacceptable, or approaching unacceptable levels by comparing acceptable impact levels (prescribed standards or best educated guesses) with existing impact levels. If existing impact levels are approaching unacceptable levels, management action may be required. If existing impact levels are at unacceptable levels, management action is required. Finally, managers are asked to identify the root cause of those impacts which they have determined will require management actions to resolve.

*Worksheet 2* is used for the strategy and tactic selection stage of the decision process. The goal at this stage in the decision process is for managers to think strategically and to consider a wide variety of problem solving options. The worksheet outlines five strategies and 25 tactics for managers to consider implementing to address the unacceptable impacts they identified during the problem specification stage in the process. First managers review the five strategies outlined in worksheet 2. These strategies include approaches such as modifying the location, timing, and type of use or modifying visitor attitudes and expectations. After selecting one or more strategies for implementation, managers brainstorm all the potential tactics that could be used to resolve an unacceptable impact. Worksheet 2 ensures that managers consider a wide variety of tactics, including tactics related to (1) site management, (2) rationing and allocation, (3) regulation, (4) deterrence and enforcement and (5) visitor education. Space is provided for managers to record specific comments or potential applications of individual tactics. After managers identify potential tactics, they must evaluate and select tactics for implementation. The handbook outlines 11 criteria for managers to consider during tactic evaluation and selection. Selection criteria range from determining whether the tactic addresses the root cause of the problem to considering whether the tactic preserves visitor freedom of choice. The strategy and tactic selection stage of the process can be conducted individually or in a group decision-making context.

Figure 1. Stages in the Decision Process for Maintaining the Quality of Park Resources and Visitor Experiences.

Stages in the decision process	Potential resources for decision making	Appropriate handbook worksheets
<b>1. Problem awareness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize that unacceptable impacts exist and must be addressed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statements of park purposes, significance, primary interpretive themes, and specific resource conditions and visitor experiences to be achieved and maintained over time</li> <li>Observations of park staff</li> <li>Indicators and standards of quality</li> <li>Public input</li> </ul>	None
<b>2. Problem specification</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify impact</li> <li>Describe acceptable impact</li> <li>Describe existing impact</li> <li>Determine if existing impact is unacceptable</li> <li>Identify root cause of impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resource condition and visitor experience data available from:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research</li> <li>Resource use monitoring</li> <li>Public input</li> </ul> </li> <li>Comparison of existing condition with predetermined standard of quality</li> <li>Public input</li> </ul>	Worksheet 1
<b>3. Strategy and tactic selection</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Select appropriate strategy</li> <li>Identify potential tactics</li> <li>Evaluate and select appropriate tactics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This handbook</li> <li>Public input</li> </ul>	Worksheet 2
<b>4. Plan implementation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop implementation plan for selected management tactics</li> <li>Identify specific management actions</li> <li>Identify person responsible for carrying out management actions</li> <li>Implement actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supervisors, office staff, and field staff determine appropriate tasks and work loads</li> </ul>	Worksheet 3
<b>5. Monitoring</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor effectiveness of actions</li> <li>If problem arises, return to problem specification stage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resource condition and visitor experience data available from:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research</li> <li>Resource use data</li> <li>Public input</li> </ul> </li> <li>Comparison of existing condition with predetermined standard of quality</li> <li>Public input</li> <li>VERP handbook (USDI, NPS 1997a)</li> </ul>	None

Worksheet 3 is used for the plan implementation stage of the process. In this stage managers devise an implementation plan for tactics selected during the previous stage of the process. First managers identify specific management actions they will take to implement each of the selected tactics. Tactics may be implemented in a variety of ways. To increase tactic effectiveness, managers should consider management actions that respond to site-specific factors. After specific management actions are identified, managers then determine who will be

responsible for implementing each management action and the time frame for completion.

Part Three describes 25 different management tactics that can be used to address unacceptable visitor-caused impacts. The description of tactics is a reference section or source book to help guide managers in comparing, evaluating, and selecting courses of action to eliminate or reduce unacceptable impacts. The tactics are organized into five different categories: site management, rationing and

allocation, regulations, deterrence and enforcement, and visitor education. Each category represents a distinct approach to resolving unacceptable impacts to resources and visitor experiences. Tactics within each category vary in terms of whether they are direct or indirect, subtle or obtrusive. In addition, their applicability to addressing specific impacts varies on a site-by-site basis.

This handbook builds on previous research and management experience during the past three decades to identify and describe alternative management techniques to address visitor-caused impacts. Our effort has built heavily on the publications by Cole, Peterson and Lucas (1987), *Managing wilderness recreation use: Common problems and potential solutions*; and Cole (1989b), *Low-impact recreational practices for wilderness and backcountry*. While our work has expanded the management topic beyond wilderness to include all types of recreation settings and areas, we think our major contribution may be providing a process in which managers use worksheets to specify their most critical problems and identify alternative management tactics to address problems. The worksheets give users a visual process for evaluating and prioritizing which tactics to implement among those identified during brainstorming.

#### What Can and Cannot the Handbook Do?

The handbook stimulates the informed consideration of a range of options to address unacceptable use-related impacts to resources and visitor experiences. It does this by stimulating critical thinking and in-depth discussion of a range of strategies and tactics. The handbook provides information that can help managers assess strategies and tactics in light of both general and site-specific factors.

The handbook cannot, however, produce a single right answer. Selecting appropriate management tools is a value judgement. Ultimately, managers are left with the difficult decisions of how much use is appropriate, what kinds of activities are acceptable, and how visitor use is to be managed.

#### The handbook *can*:

- Address recreation-related impacts on resources and visitor experiences.
- Provide supporting rationale for informed, defensible decisions.
- Provide an analytical process for selecting for selecting appropriate management actions.

#### The handbook *cannot*:

- Provide a quick, easy solution to management problems related to visitor use.
- Solve problems unrelated to visitor use.
- Guarantee 100% scientific accuracy or eliminate the need for good judgement by resource professionals.

#### Who Should Use the Handbook?

The handbook was developed for use by National Park Service managers. Nevertheless, it can be used effectively by any federal, state, county or local public land manager responsible for managing recreational use and resources. The handbook also has applications in the commercial recreation industry and among private landowners.

Although the handbook was initially designed for use by managers in a group decision-making setting where people brainstorm, discuss options, and make decisions; it can be used in nongroup settings. In fact, during the field testing process managers frequently commented on the usefulness of the handbook for individual managers who want to solve relatively straightforward problems in an area of limited geographical size over which they have jurisdiction.

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# FOUNDER'S FORUM

## RECONCEIVING RECREATION POLICY IN AN ERA OF GROWING SOCIAL INEQUALITY

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**Abstract:** Economic inequality has grown rapidly in the United States over the past quarter century. An estimated 85% of the country's wealth is now controlled by only 10 percent of the population. This has led to an increasing emphasis on the production of private, luxury goods at the expense of public goods. Many of the planning and management concepts used in recreation today can be linked to this lack of public-sector funding, and thus influence the way we conceive and attempt to resolve problems in the field. At the same time, growing social inequality may create opportunities for alert private-sector producers and may highlight the benefits of public/private partnerships. In the public sector, the inequality implies the need to rethink our vision, mission, and guiding principles. Our professional forebears believed in the ability of recreation resources to play a positive role in people's lives. Their vision continues to offer guidance and purpose as we enter the 21st century.

### Introduction

That America is a middle-class country has long been one of our most cherished beliefs. The country itself was founded on the idea of the sanctity of the commons--"that all men are created equal," "with liberty and justice for all" -- such that the notion of a middle-class society is descriptive, in a way, of our national sense of ourselves. Yet, an examination of both the historical record and contemporary trends in income and social status suggest that the middle-class ideal is far from reality. In this paper, I contend that the growing social inequality we have been experiencing since the early 1970's has shaped--often in subtle ways--our very conception of recreation planning, management, and research. Recognizing this may lead to new opportunities to provide creative services for profit in the private sector. At the same time, recreation policy in the public sector needs to be rethought to be more reflective of contemporary social trends and to discover a reinvigorated sense of mission.

### Economic Inequality in the United States

Social inequality has many dimensions: there are inequalities associated with gender, race, and ethnicity, with social status and power, in exposure to crime, with mobility and age. The most basic of these may be economic inequality as measured by both income and wealth (total assets including income). As noted above, the United States was founded on the premise of egalitarianism. When Alexis de Tocqueville visited in the 1840's, he was surprised by the level of equality; while there was wealth, no single group monopolized it and

de Tocqueville believed it to be fluid. Unfortunately, contemporary historical scholarship disputes de Tocqueville's observations, finding that wealth inequality was a clear and constant condition in the early United States, particularly between the Revolution and the Civil War (Hurst 1998). Inequality declined somewhat after the Civil War, but peaked during the 1920's. However, the Great Depression and the social programs it spawned, including the growth of the graduated income tax, along with the great industrialization brought about by World War II brought the ideal of a middle-class society closer to reality than ever before. During the 1950's and 1960's, a rapidly growing economy divided the spoils of economic growth remarkably evenly so that, while there might be five classes ranging from rich to poor, the earnings expectations for each class were rising and the corresponding mood was optimistic (Cassidy 1995). People who might not be doing well financially themselves at least were able to believe that their children would be better off than they were. However, by the early 1970's, productivity growth had slowed and economic rewards no longer were shared equally. For example, in the mid 1970's, an average chief executive officer earned about 40 times more than an average worker, but by the mid-1990's this had increased to 190 times more (Cassidy 1995).

Such discrepancies are inevitably reflected in family incomes; between 1973 and 1993, the bottom 40% of American families saw their incomes decline in real terms while the top 20% of the households received 48.2% of aggregate household income. Although education helped ameliorate these effects for some, between 1979 and 1995 the earnings of the median male worker declined by 11.5% and the average high-school graduate's wages declined even more steeply (Cassidy 1995). Since 1987, the wages of college graduates and white-collar employees also have been declining (Hurst 1998).

The booming economy of the late 1990's has partially ameliorated these declines. Median household income rose to \$37,005 in 1997, up from \$34,000 in 1994, returning it to the pre-recessionary levels of the late 1980's (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1999). Perhaps more importantly, the stock market has created \$5 trillion worth of new financial wealth since 1990 (Frank 1999). And more people than ever before own stock--an estimated 43% of all Americans (Burlington Free Press 1998). That's the good news. The bad news is that if 43% own stocks, 57% do not. Additionally, most of the 43% who do own stocks are small holders, owning relatively small amounts through pension plans, 401K's, etc. Thus, the overwhelming beneficiaries of the \$5 trillion boom have been the major stockholders--the wealthiest 10% of the population. In fact, the gap between rich and poor has now grown so wide that economist Edward Wolfe of New York University estimates that 85% of the wealth of America is currently controlled by the wealthiest 10% of the population (cited in Cassidy 1999, p. 92). Of the world's developed countries, only Australia tops the United States in terms of economic inequality (Frank 1999). Meanwhile, we continue to read news stories of plant closings and downsizings, suggesting that the gap between rich and poor will continue to widen.

Under these circumstances, it makes little sense to speak of America as a middle-class country. Instead there are now four classes, according to Cassidy (1995, p. 18):

"At the top, there is an immensely wealthy elite, which has never had it so good. At the bottom, there is an underclass, which is increasingly divorced from the rest of society. And between these extremes there are, instead of a unified middle class, two distinct groups: an upper echelon of highly skilled, highly educated professionals who are doing pretty well, and a vast swath of unskilled and semiskilled workers who are experiencing falling wages, stagnant or declining living standards, and increased economic uncertainty."

As much as 57% of the U.S. population can be categorized as working class or below (Gilbert and Kahl, summarized in Hurst 1998). Who are these people? Gilbert and Kahl (in Hurst 1998) describe the working class as people with high school degrees in lower level white-collar or blue-collar positions and who earn about \$25,000 per year. The working poor tend to be those with some high school who are service workers or in the lowest paid clerical or blue-collar positions and earn less than \$20,000. The underclass consists of individuals with some high school education who work part-time, are unemployed, or on welfare, and who earn less than \$13,000 (all figures in 1990 dollars).

Perhaps even more descriptive is Lillian Rubin's (1994) analysis of working-class jobs. Rubin interviewed hairdressers, tool and die makers, cashiers, telephone operators, barbers, coal miners, steel workers, truck drivers, waitresses, hotel desk clerks, orderlies in nursing homes, security guards, mechanics, secretaries, UPS drivers, and the like. These are the kinds of people who have not fared well over the past 25 years, and who tend depend on public or low-cost private recreation facilities. Their financial problems are compounded by high-level or persistent credit card debt. In one study not limited to the working class, 89% of the sample reported debts of some kind (excluding mortgages); 66% had persistent credit card debt (Schor 1998). These figures parallel the national averages. Between 1990 and 1996, the volume of U.S. credit card debt doubled (Cassidy 1999).

Thus, over the past quarter century, the United States has been pulling apart socially and the gap between rich and poor has widened substantially. These trends are likely to continue, fostered by factors such as globalization of trade, technological innovations that enable workers to be replaced by machines, declining power of labor unions, immigration, spread of oligopolies (Harris 1987), and growth of "winner take all" markets (Frank 1999) in which small differences in performance can yield huge differences in rewards, e.g., in sports, the arts, and the computer industry. In combination, these factors suggest that things will get worse before they get better—that social inequality will grow and that the wealth of the country will continue to be concentrated in the upper

socioeconomic strata. As wealth is concentrated, there is likely to be an increasing emphasis on the production of private, luxury goods targeted at high-end consumers at the expense of public goods that provide service to everyone (Frank 1999).

This, then, represents the current social environment within which we must conceive recreation services, both public and private. With 57% of Americans now classed as working class or below, we need to understand how these trends affect our understanding of recreation and its concepts and their application to planning and management.

### Effects of Social Inequity on Recreation Concepts

Growing social inequality is likely to influence the concepts we use to understand recreation in many ways. A key issue is likely to be confusion over cause and effects. For example, changing family living modes, increasing numbers of single-parent households, frequently are attributed to a decline in family values. However, it is more likely that the new modes of living are a response to economic stresses and that changing values are an outcome rather than a cause of economic inequality (cf., Rubin 1994, Harris 1987). Similarly, I suspect that many of our most central concepts of recreation are a response to declining budgets rather than part of an objective analysis of biological or social conditions. To illustrate, consider a thought experiment involving playgrounds.

The playground movement in the United States began around the turn of the 20th century. It had a simple goal: to get children off the streets and into a safe, stimulating play environment. This goal had two beneficial consequences: it helped make the streets safer for other uses and provided healthy development opportunities for children. Suppose that the first playgrounds were well funded, efficiently run, appropriately maintained, and generally successful. Then suppose a fiscal downturn occurred, perhaps a recession or a series of unfortunate choices, and despite high enthusiasm on the part of users, funding was reduced substantially. What would happen?

The first thing users likely would notice would be signs of deterioration—grass would no longer be mowed regularly, a broken swing would remain unfixed, new paint would not be applied. They might complain to the administration, but the administration would tell the enthusiasts that it understood and was doing the best it could, and that it too valued playgrounds but times were difficult and its hands were tied, that we needed to work together for a better future. Shunted aside, the playground enthusiasts would not give up, continuing to complain about deteriorating conditions. Some would attribute these to overuse, raising questions about carrying capacity and sustainability. A few enthusiasts might seek solutions in new management techniques, e.g., more durable equipment or genetically improved grass, but many more would call for limits, now and in the future to preserve the benefits of the playgrounds for future generations of children. The call for limits would prompt a discussion of

mechanisms--lotteries, permits, etc.--and someone would propose fees as the ultimate rationing mechanism. Some in the movement would object, raising questions about fairness. Others would counter with concerns about efficiency in playground allocation.

The idea of excluding certain playground users would lead to interesting rationales, some of which would be designed to salve the consciences of those who remained in the movement. After all, they might argue, some children really benefit while others are marginal. Why not exclude "low-valued" playground users? They do nothing but cause trouble; they hang around with their boom boxes and bad attitudes--it would be better for everyone if they were gone. Then we finally could achieve a sustainable level of playground use. Only a few people might still puzzle about what had happened to the original goals of the movement--getting the children (all children) off the streets and into safe, stimulating play environments.

The playground in this example is only a metaphor for the American recreation estate as a whole, but it raises interesting questions. First, how many of our most significant recreation concepts are budget driven? Take use as an example. Suppose we had sufficient funds to repair, restore, replant, regrade, redesign, and so on. How much of the effects of overuse could be mitigated? And how much of the importance of concepts like carrying capacity, limits of acceptable change, or visitor impact management would be reduced? To be sure, not all of the effects of increasing use could be mitigated by adequate budgets--more people would create some impacts but many of these impacts could be minimized.

Critics will point out that we have not had adequate budgets in years, nor are they likely in the foreseeable future. The American recreation estate has deteriorated substantially and the amount of deferred maintenance is huge. In fact, some facilities built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's are still in use. Agreed. Most public recreation facilities have shared the fate of other public goods, as we have shifted our societal emphasis from them to the production of private luxury goods (Frank 1999). The key point is to understand just how many of our planning and management concepts are budget driven. When we speak of something like sustainability, it is appropriate to ask: Sustainability at what level of budgetary input?

Second, the idea of needing to divide users into groups, possibly excluding some, may have interesting permutations. When you exclude, do you also devalue? In the playground example, I suggested that the "low-valued" users were children who wanted to hang around with their boom boxes, spoiling it for everyone else. It is an easy step from this to exclusion on the basis of race, age, gender, and other personal characteristics. The idea of visitor exclusion has prompted a number of ways to salve our consciences. Here are four ways to feel good about excluded users: (1) Focus on agency or organizational well-being, making the welfare of the agency a prominent concern in any decision; (2) Adopt a "customer" approach that emphasizes people in aggregate rather than

focusing on marginal users. Obviously, excluded users are not customers and, therefore, need no consideration; (3) Argue in favor of resource protection--the need to forego present consumption to preserve the resource for future generations; (4) Escape into technocratic management, treating problems as technical rather than moral in nature. Each of these strategies is in full play in recreation planning, management, and research. I only ask that you consider them in relation to the spreading social inequality.

Finally, social class considerations enter into recreation management in multiple ways. For example, our conceptions of what constitutes "proper" behavior in recreation settings may be class related. As Cranz (1982) noted, social reformers can be patronizing by attempting to improve the lower classes to standards set by the upper classes rather than having the upper classes change to accommodate the standards of the poor. Similarly, Walter Kuentzel (Univ. of Vermont, pers. commun., 1999) has suggested that most of the benefits listed in Benefits-Based Management (BBM) reflect the values of upper middle-class white males. Would the same benefits apply to single mothers or to unemployed Chicano men? I do not know the answers to these questions, but it is important that such questions be posed.

#### Private-Sector Opportunities

Families in the working class and below have always had a multitude of essentially private (if not private sector) recreation opportunities available to them. Visiting, card games, television, civic activities associated with organizations like the church, and, of course, "the street" and all the excitement it provides have been major sources of entertainment in low-income neighborhoods. These opportunities are essentially private, but private in the sense of personal. What about private commercial opportunities? What matters most here is cost. People continue to have the desires to go, to see, to do, but opportunities grow scant as means decrease. For example, a recent Associated Press story described the anger of New York City Council speaker, Peter Vallone, when he described taking his grandchildren to the movies. When all was said and done, the outing cost him over \$100. As a result, he is concerned that people are being priced out of the movies and has asked the city to investigate Lowe's theaters (Burlington Free Press 1999).

At the same time, most low-income people have adjusted to the high price of movies. Working-class families purchase VCR's (often on credit) simply because it is more cost effective to have the entire family watch a rental movie than to pay \$7 to \$9 per person at a theater (Rubin 1994). Similarly, the "second run" theaters in my area (Burlington, VT) that show previously released movies for \$1.50 are continually sold out. In the food realm, the restaurant industry has responded to changing economic circumstances by creating inexpensive "all you can eat" buffets or low-priced, fast-food chain restaurants. Perhaps closer to resource management, entire tourist communities can cater to working-class vacations. For example, Gatlinburg, Tennessee is enormously popular with working-class families (Walter Kuentzel, Univ. of Vermont, pers. commun., 1999). National

Parks provide low-cost, public-sector recreation, while the many inexpensive motels promote competition and keep prices down. This raises the interesting issue of public/private partnerships in recreation investment and planning. Private-sector opportunities are fundamentally governed by supply and demand, but alert producers who recognize the public's changing circumstances may be well positioned to provide valued services in niche markets.

#### Public-Sector Responsibilities

The implications of growing social inequality for the public sector are far more complex and likely to affect the public agencies in many ways. Perhaps for much of the public, there is likely to be an increasing need for--and dependency on--public-sector opportunities, coupled with a decreasing ability to pay. This touches most directly on the issue of user fees (see More 1999a, b and More 1998). But more crucial is the issue of identifying the public purposes associated with public-sector recreation. The increased emphasis on marketing has led public agencies to ask the question: Who are our customers? But this may be the wrong question for the public sector. Instead, we need to ask: Who should our customers be? or, as Shultz et al. (1998) would ask: What are we in business *for*?

Such questions imply that agencies should have a proactive sense of need and mission rather than a reactive sense of demand. To illustrate the difference, consider the case of public libraries. In their volume on marketing government and social services, Crompton and Lamb (1986, p. 322) advocated pricing for public libraries on the basis that people who visit libraries have above average incomes, so it might be more equitable to charge a service fee than to rely on funding from regressive property or sales taxes. Indeed, if we conducted a library user survey, we would undoubtedly find that most library users have a middle or upper middle-class background. They probably would believe in libraries and be willing to pay to support them. By contrast, if we surveyed the working class and below, we might well find that they have a very limited interest in books. What would be easy to overlook in this case are the small groups of users at the edge-working-class people who try to use the library to improve their lives. Their limited ability to pay might be completely swamped by computing an average willingness to pay for all library users. Yet, this is the very group that the public library is designed to serve! Perhaps the single most critical function of public libraries is to provide access to educational materials for low-income users. Instead of pricing out low-income people, we should be exploring new ways to reach more of them as we search for new more progressive methods for financing libraries.

This also is the problem with our public lands. Have we lost our sense of vision? Of public purpose? Of our reasons for being? Is public-sector recreation a medium for the improvement of people (and hence a genuine public good) or is it a luxury good publicly provided at taxpayer expense to gratify the preferences of a few? Each of us needs to decide this question for ourselves. I believe that over the past 25 years, we have increasingly slipped into the habit of thinking

of many forms of resource-based recreation as essentially private goods--goods that primarily benefit the individual rather than the public at large. This line of thinking has been bolstered by arguments in favor of limiting use for resource protection and by concepts like BBM, which focuses on individual benefits. However, our professional forebears--Olmstead, Muir, even Teddy Roosevelt--believed strongly that parks were public goods capable of improving the lives of ordinary citizens. They would have claimed as key customers the very people we are talking about excluding today. Have we lost this vision during the past 25 years? If so, we need to understand why.

#### Conclusion

Although in this paper I have been concerned primarily with economic inequality, there are many other forms of inequality, for example, racial, ethnic, gender, status, and political (power) inequalities. All of these are related and all affect a person's life chances. They influence physical health and the way in which a person is diagnosed at a health clinic, family relationships and violence, the ability to obtain justice, mobility, exposure to crime, and a one's overall sense of well-being. Consider the Bardolino family of Antioch, California, a small working-class city north of San Francisco (described by Rubin 1994). Mr. Bardolino has been unemployed for several months; Mrs. Bardolino works nights for the telephone company. They are neither poor nor immobile but they do have a range of concerns that typify today's working-class families. Money is a primary concern; today working-class people are worried about losing their homes in an economic downturn, a situation that would have been unthinkable 25 years ago (Rubin 1994). The financial desperation that many of them feel often leads to second jobs, so time and child care also are concerns, and working-class families are immensely concerned about their children, sensing that there is an abyss beneath them such that, if the children slip, they will never recover (Rubin 1994).

These social conditions are very real for the Bardolinos and for for than half of the U.S. population. Moreover, social inequality is growing, bolstered by a variety of deeply embedded economic trends. Yet, it is precisely these areas that we must look to if we are to discover the new social functions of recreation. Most importantly, it is time we rethought the social purposes of recreation. The free market model so much in vogue today is essentially a reactive, demand-based model. As we approach the 21st century, we need to consider a more proactive role in dealing with social problems, especially for the public sector. I do not suggest that we should patronize people, or thrust our own conceptions of the good upon them. But we need a clear sense of purpose. If we in the public sector are, in any significant way, key purveyors of family recreation opportunities, then our plans, policies, and designs must flow from this. Similarly, if we are the custodians of solitude, this also must be reflected in the management of our resources.

We need a renewed sense of vision, mission, and purpose. Frederick Law Olmstead, John Muir, Jane Adams, Gifford Pinchot, Bob Marshall, Jacob Riis, and other forebears all believed that recreation offers the opportunity to intervene in

people's lives for the good. We must recover this sense of positive power of our resources and their management if we are to move forward.

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# KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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### PARKS HAVE A FUTURE - BUT IT HAS MORE PROBLEMS THAN THE PRESENT.

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Abstract: Parks are as old as human settlement. They seem to reflect something of the very character of being human, and to be based in the psycho-biological evolution of the human species.

There is now abundant evidence that in the contemporary world, they serve a diversity of human values and provide tangible benefits to those who experience them. As the world becomes increasingly urbanised, so there is a growing awareness of, and demand for, park experiences and park-based services.

*I asked professors who teach the meaning of life to tell me what is happiness.  
And I went to famous executives who boss the work of thousands of men.  
They all shook their heads and gave me a smile as though I was trying to fool with them.  
And then one Sunday afternoon I wandered out along the Desplaines river  
And I saw a crowd of Hungarians under the trees with their women and children  
and a keg of beer and an accordion.*

Carl Sandburg, 1916.

*A park is a living living-room in which to do anything and nothing - rest your fallen arches, or roam through the wilder parts exercising your imagination, or simply breathing - most important the breathing. And it will become increasingly important as this reckless anti-civilisation gathers momentum.*

Patrick White, 18 June, 1972.

But the ideology of economic rationalism, driven by the global financial system, has had a pervasive impact upon human society. At local, national and world levels, people are increasingly being polarised into rich and poor, while a decreasing proportion of the wealth of the world is available for the production of goods and services. The new public sector managerialism which has emerged in the wake of this financial crisis has led to the increasing industrialisation of recreation opportunities with some very negative impacts.

This means that park professionals face a new series of ethical and practical challenges. If we continue to act as if these challenges do not exist, then the future of parks will be indeed dim for many of the global population. But we can confront the issues in a positive way, and if this is done widely enough, the human values attached to parks will make possible a much brighter future.

#### A long tradition

Parks have been with us for a very long time indeed ; so long that their importance to the human species probably

needs no further justification. Formal gardens existed as long as 3,500 years ago, gardens feature in the beliefs of most religions, and both public and private gardens are recorded in the earliest cities of Asia, the Middle East and Europe. The evidence is that town squares or other open spaces are as old as the history of urban settlement.

I want to take this idea even further back into our ancestry. Some 4,000 years ago, the inhabitants of Malta left behind a truly enigmatic series of parallel grooves in the rock, often known as cart-ruts, and demonstrating the existence of a primitive transport system before there was any significant urban development. The greatest confluence of these cart-ruts (popularly known as 'Clapham Junction') is immediately adjacent to the Buskett Gardens - a wondrous park where the festival of St. Paul is chanted each year. Like many of the Christian festivals, this one certainly predates St. Paul by many centuries. Taken together, we have reasonable circumstantial evidence that the Buskett Gardens have been an important gathering place since the Neolithic, which is a very long time indeed - perhaps we might call them a pre-urban park.

Similarly, if we look at the life-style of non-urban societies, time and time again we will discover the importance of beautiful natural places - the oasis, the sacred grove or the beautiful campsite. For instance, I can see again in my mind an Australian site where a truly lovely lagoon is surrounded by a ring of rock-shelters, all overlooking the lagoon, all blackened with the smoke of innumerable campfires and decorated with murals in red and yellow ochre. One can envisage what a delight it would have been to sit in one's own shelter, enjoying the twinkling lights of neighbouring campfires along and across the lagoon. So we start from the position that the appreciation of beautiful places, which we express today through parks, is as old as the human species - and perhaps even older!

#### The Contemporary Situation

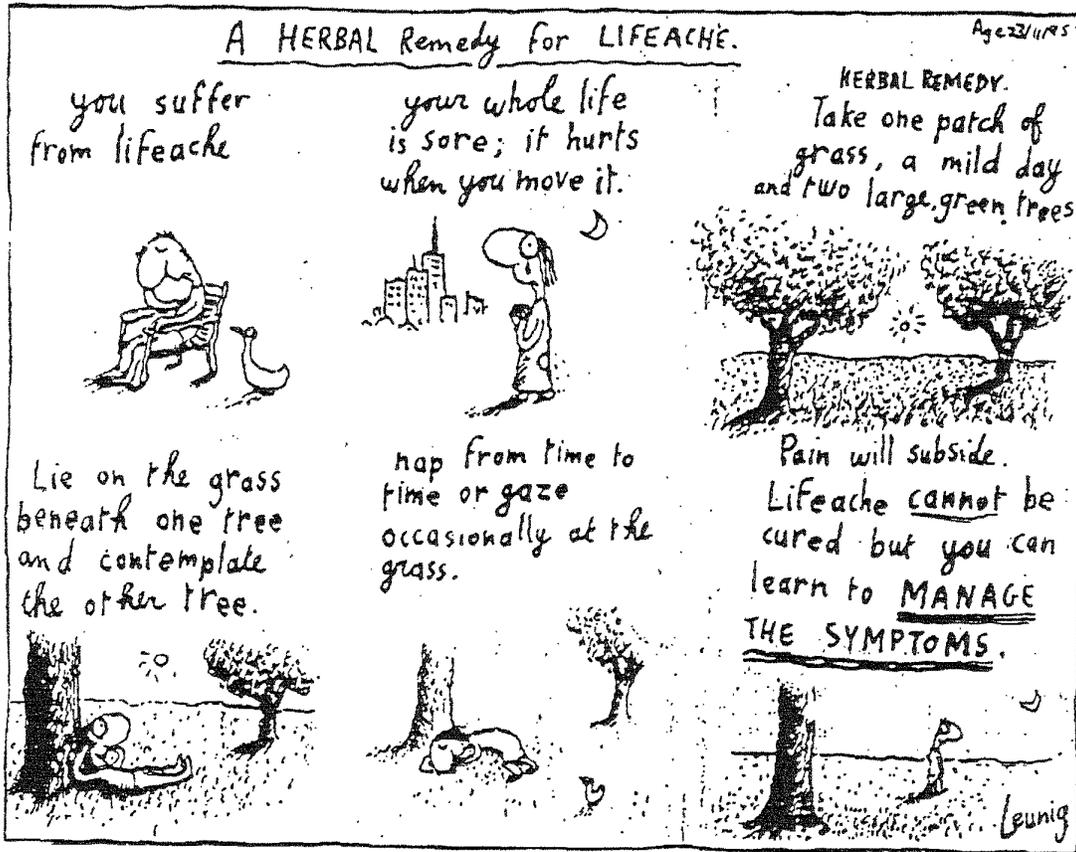
Today, parks are important for a whole range of reasons. Probably four major themes emerge when we look broadly at the current political meaning of parks as a key element in:

- social renewal of our major cities
- heritage conservation and hence in national identity

- the social well-being of people, particularly families
- and in particular, the provision of health and other benefits

The current widespread interest in recreation benefits probably excuses me from devoting a great deal of attention to the nature and remarkable scope of potential benefits. Suffice it to say that they are demonstrably immense. However, I must sound some caution about assuming too

much about benefits. The first is that like all human behaviour, the extent to which we derive benefits from any element of our social and bio-physical environment is indeed complex. Thus, we must recognise in research and management that no phenomenon ever has a single cause and no action ever has a single effect. Regrettably, when you look at the extent of simplism in research and management, this universal truth is all too often ignored.



The second is that it is not helpful to claim benefits for parks per se. Parks merely provide an opportunity; the extent to which any opportunity is actually realised is entirely dependent upon the way in and extent to which we utilise the opportunity. To take the example of the health benefits which may be provided through parks, these probably divide into three groups: relief from psycho-physiological stress, and hence improved functioning of the immune system; space for hobbies and other personal interests, or what we often know as 'serious leisure'; and space for physical activity, exercise and sport. Just to take the last of these, physical activity may or may not produce health benefits - certainly, moderate physical exercise on a regular and consistent basis is health producing, but over-strenuous exercise produces coronary illness and a range of other health problems, costing society many billions of dollars per annum.

#### A Problematic Future

The ideology of economic rationalism, driven by the global financial system, has had a pervasive impact upon human society. At local, national and world levels, people are increasingly being polarised into rich and poor. The two countries where the greatest polarisation occurs are Australia and the United States. This is not simply in terms of income, but also in terms of access to life quality and satisfaction. The current operation of the capitalist system means that a decreasing proportion of the wealth of the world is available for the production of goods and services, and so what we have always assumed to be readily available public goods are now no longer available, or have been transformed into private goods which are bought and sold in the market-place. So at the simplest, parks are

increasingly subject to user fees or other charges, at least to the point where the poorer members of society cannot use them. I am particularly appalled when I hear politicians or managers say that the public have a high acceptance of park fees as their data is virtually always based upon site surveys of existing park visitors !

The new public sector managerialism which has emerged in the wake of this financial crisis has led to the increasing industrialisation of recreation opportunities. It brings into play not only the emphasis upon user fees, but mass production of opportunity (the Macdonaldisation of everything ?) and on pseudo-accountability reflected in such simplistic technology as customer satisfaction measurement.

Although parks have probably not been hit as hard as some other public sector services, it is here that the challenge lies. If we do not find positive responses to the new problems and challenges, then the future of parks (and people) will indeed be increasingly dim.

#### Ethical and Practical Challenges

The first and most obvious problem is that of injustice. If we accept, as the evidence tells us we must, that parks can provide important health and other benefits to all people, then surely it is unjust to exclude some people from access to them. We must constantly examine the impact which managerial practices have upon the access to parks, and seek to eliminate barriers. At a simple level, this may mean developing a range of concessions on user fees. This in turn leads to a new set of practical challenges in finding a simple low-cost way to implement any concession system. There are solutions to the practical problems, and many countries have utilised them - what appears to be missing in our countries is a compelling sense of social justice or even compassion.

Then there is the further practical challenge of the extent to which political priorities and declining national budgets combine to produce severely tightened park budgets. This, of course, is seen as the reason for more emphasis upon visitor fees and other direct charges - which in itself is a pretty poor bit of reasoning. Some level of visitor fees may well be justifiable - but it essentially needs to be a socially just fee system. A colleague of mine has developed what he calls the Robin Hood system of park funding - offering a range of high quality exclusive services, e.g., special tours with a gourmet meal and quality wines included, for very high prices indeed; then using the profits to eliminate entry fees, fund development of free experience options, and to subsidise other mainstream tours and services.

The corresponding solution is to look at our budgets. Recent years have seen a remarkable increase in administrivia: more and more exchanges of paper, largely providing only a sort of pseudo-accountability. We need to constantly review expenditure and time allocation and subject each item to the test of whether it improves the quality of the park environment and/or the quality of the visitor experience. Anything that doesn't pass the test is probably totally un-necessary !

This leads me back to ethics. Park Managers need to be much clearer as to the game in which they are playing. If we are in the game of helping people to appreciate the environment, that provides one specific kind of ethical framework; if, on the other hand, we are in the entertainment business, then we have a very kind of different framework. But I see all too many park managers who have a superficial rhetoric about the environment and the human appreciation of it, yet behave as if they are in the entertainment game. But as I have emphasised above, the enduring values of parks and the benefits which accrue from visiting them are nothing to do with entertainment.

I conclude with another quotation, written in relation to education, but absolutely relevant to quality in parks management

*Boredom is so familiar that we rarely recognise that we are trained in it, addicted to a consumerism of the spirit, jaded to need ever more vivid diversions. . . we sometimes attempt to alleviate boredom by making bits and pieces of education entertaining, instead of discovering and supporting those modes of activity to which the experience of boredom is simply irrelevant.*

Mary Catherine Bateson 1994.

This is our central challenge - at least in parks, let's escape the trivialisation of experience and help visitors find true meanings and values in their park experience.

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