

A Look at Leisure

Results of the 1988 General Recreation Survey conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks

No. 24

THE 1988 GENERAL RECREATION SURVEY

Alberta Recreation and Parks has just completed a new province-wide survey - the 1988 *General Recreation Survey*. The next issues of *Look at Leisure* will present the main findings from this survey. This will provide recreation practitioners with up-to-date information on the recreation behaviours and opinions of Albertans. Since this survey is the third in a series, we will also be able to provide some insights into recreation trends in the province.



Alberta

RECREATION AND PARKS
Recreation Development Division

THE SERIES

The *Look at Leisure* bulletins provide a general description of research findings from the series of surveys conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks. The surveys conducted to date are:

- The 1980-81 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*
- The 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*
- The 1988 *General Recreation Survey*.

In addition to Bulletin No. 24, which introduces the series, further *Look at Leisure* issues are planned for 1988-89. Each will describe the findings from one aspect of the survey. Wherever possible, comparisons will be made with results of the 1981 and 1984 surveys. Information from other current sources is also provided in the bulletins. Each bulletin outlines the implications of the survey findings for recreation programming and planning in Alberta. Recreation practitioners are faced with meeting changing consumer preferences in a world of changing technologies and social concerns. These research findings can provide practitioners with a clearer understanding of the current preferences and behaviours of their clientele. They can also assist agencies to evaluate their programs to see if they are meeting consumer needs, and to prepare for future changes.

THE 1988 SURVEY

The 1988 *General Recreation Survey* gathered current information on the recreation behaviours and views of Albertans.

Topics covered in the 1988 survey were:

- Participation in 65 leisure activities;
- Favorite leisure or recreational activities;
- Reasons for participating;
- Desired activities;
- Reasons for not taking part in activities;
- Volunteer involvement;
- Opinions about the provision of services and activities in provincial parks and recreation areas. Q
- Demographic characteristics of households and respondents.

The information obtained in this survey will help to answer questions such as:



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LOOKING AT RECREATION TRENDS

Many of the topics included in the 1988 *General Recreation Survey* were also covered in the 1981 and 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*. It may not be possible to make direct comparisons for every topic, but for much of the survey we can make indirect comparisons across the years. In interpreting the findings, we must also take into consideration the socio-demographic and economic trends taking place in society.

It is very useful to have a long-term data base which looks at recreation participation and recreation behaviours. The Alberta Recreation and Parks survey series appears to be the only one in Canada to provide this long-term perspective.

With this series, it is possible to compare findings across an eight-year time frame (1981 to 1988). We can identify what recreation behaviours are stable and where changes are occurring.

HOW WAS THE SURVEY DONE?

The survey was designed and administered by staff of Alberta Recreation and Parks. It was conducted between March and July, 1988. Questionnaires were mailed to 7,669 randomly selected Alberta households. Wrong addresses and other non-contacts reduced this to an effective sample size of 7,038 households. Questionnaires were returned by 4,044 households, resulting in a response rate of 57%.

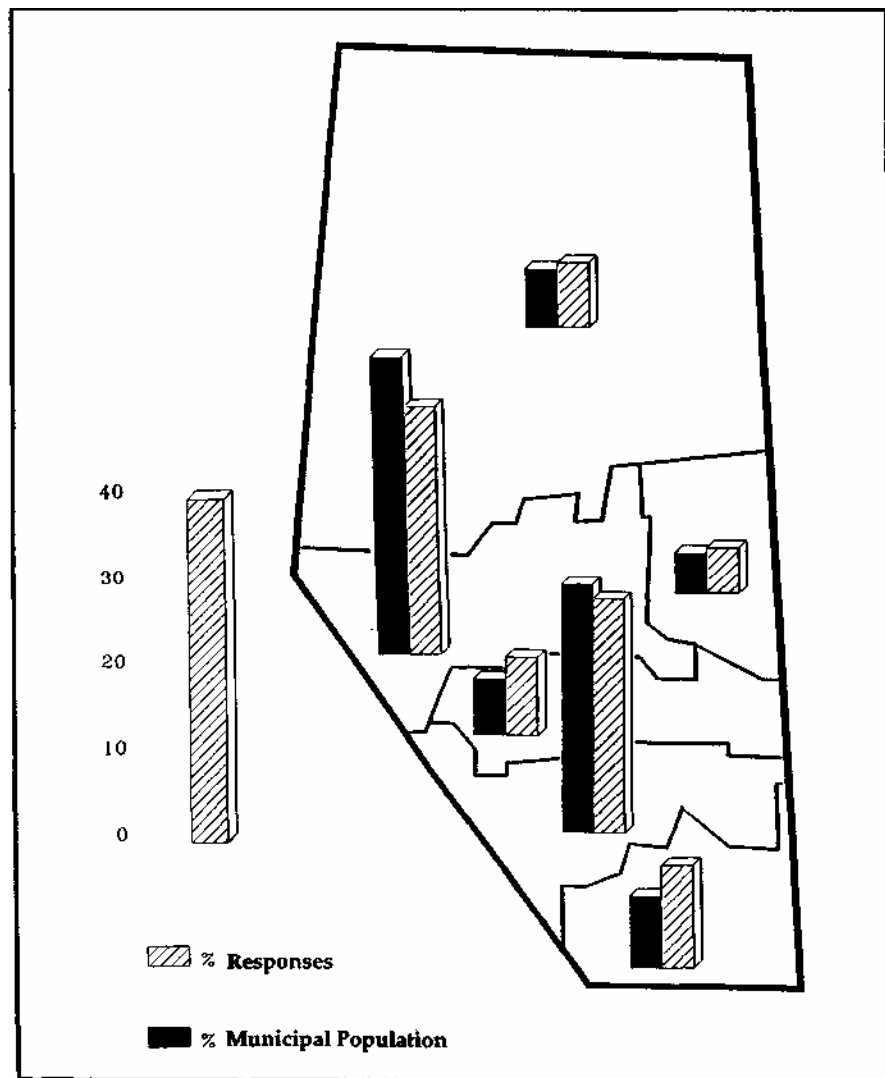


To date, a descriptive summary of the study findings (including basic frequencies and percentages) has been produced. With more detailed analysis, it will also be possible to look at relationships among the variables. For example, it will be possible to see how participation patterns or opinions vary for different types of respondents.

WHO ANSWERED THE SURVEY?

Responses were received from all areas of the province. The distribution of responses across each of the Recreation and Parks administrative regions is shown in Map 1. This also shows that the distribution of survey responses is generally representative of the population distribution in Alberta.

Map of Respondent Distribution



Information was obtained about respondent and household characteristics. These socio-demographic variables are a useful way of describing sub-groups in the survey sample. We can then look at similarities and differences in recreation behaviours across various market groups. Many of the respondent profiles also provide a good reflection of socio-demographic patterns and trends in society.

This year, more females (55%) than males (45%) answered the survey. This is close to the Alberta population profile of 50.1% females and 49.9% males. In the previous surveys, over 60% of the respondents were male. In order to reduce this male bias which we feel may have affected the survey results, we changed the sampling procedure slightly in 1988.

Age is an important factor in recreation participation. The percentages of respondents in various age categories are shown in Table 1. For comparison, age profiles are provided for the 1981 and 1984 survey samples and the Alberta population.

The percentage of adult respondents in the 65 years or older category has increased over the past eight years. The gradual change in the age structure of the survey respondents is consistent with the overall provincial trend toward an aging population.

**Table 1: Comparison of Age Profile
for 1981, 1984, and 1988**

	Percent of Respondent			Alberta Population
	1981 (%)	1984 (%)	1988 (%)	(1986 Census) (%)
Adults under 25 years	18	10	8	18*
25 to 34 years	33	31	30	29
35 to 44 years	18	23	23	20
45 to 64 years	23	26	25	23
65 years or older	9	10	14	11

**Population census data for adults 18 to 24 years.*



Details of respondents' household structure are summarized in Table 2. One-half of the households consisted of families with children or single parent families. Just over one-quarter consisted of couples with no children. The proportion of respondent households consisting of couples with children has been gradually declining since 1981. Compared to the Alberta population, couples (with or without children) are slightly over-represented in the survey sample.

Twenty percent of the households had children under 6 years of age; 30% of the households had children between 6 and 17 years of age. This is a very slight drop in percentage figures from 1981 and 1984.

Table 2: Household Structure

	Percent of Households		Alberta Population	
	1981	1984	1988	(1986 Census)
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Couple with children	50	48	46	41
Couple with no children	26	25	27	24
Single person	*	14	14	21
Two or more adults	*	10	10	5
Single parent family	6	4	4	9

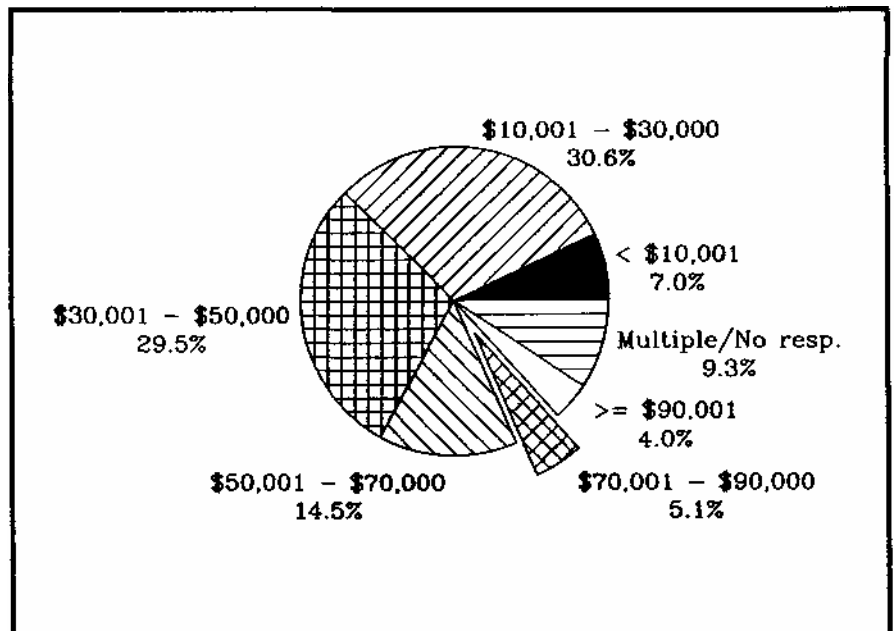
These categories were combined in 1981 (18%)

About one-half of the survey respondents had some post-secondary education at a technical school, college, or university. This is similar to the profile seen in the 1981 and 1984 surveys and similar to the education profile for the Alberta population.

The household income distribution of the sample is shown in Figure 1. Middle and upper income groups were slightly over-represented in the survey compared to the Alberta population.



Figure 1: Household Income Distribution



More than two-thirds of the responding households reported more than one wage-earner. This picture is consistent from 1981 to 1988.

LIMITATIONS

As with all surveys, results should be interpreted with caution, since there are many factors which cannot be controlled in research of this nature. For example, changing economic and social trends may affect survey responses. Limitations which apply to specific data will be discussed in appropriate bulletins.

The survey looks at general recreation issues on a broad provincial and regional level. It is not able to provide specific information on localized topics of interest. Recreation practitioners should always assess the degree to which the findings apply to their specific agency or community, and try to supplement the findings with their own local research and observations.

FUTURE ISSUES

These are some future topics to look for in the *Look at Leisure* series:

- **PARTICIPATION IN RECREATION ACTIVITIES.** What activities have the highest household participation rates in 1988? How do the



participation rates compare with those of 1981 and 1984? Can recreation consumer markets be identified?

FAVORITE ACTIVITIES. Camping, walking for pleasure, and golf rate highly as favorite activities. Various needs are being met by participation in activities. How important are reasons such as physical health or exercise, socializing, and competition?

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION. About one-half of the respondents wanted to start a new recreation activity. What are the desired activities? What are the obstacles standing in the way of participation?

VOLUNTEERISM. Just over one-third of respondents were volunteers. Has participation decreased since 1984? With what kind of groups do the volunteers work? What proportion of volunteers receive training?

INFORM ATION

Would you like more information about the *Look at Leisure* publication or the background research reports?

Do you have any requests for future *Look at Leisure* topics? For further information about the survey, or to have your mailing address changed, please contact:

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