

A Look at Leisure

March 1991

No. 31

LOOKING BACK - LOOKING AHEAD

Alberta Recreation and Parks has conducted three province-wide general recreation surveys during the 1980s. This bulletin reviews the recreation trends of the past decade, as indicated by these surveys, and looks ahead to the future of recreation in the 1990s.



Alberta
RECREATION AND PARKS
Recreation Development Division



Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). You are free to edit the documents you download and use them for your own projects, but you should show your appreciation by providing credit to the originator of the document. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>

INTRODUCTION

All agencies need to deal with planning for the future - for land use, facility development, and programming. This is an uncertain process, especially in our rapidly changing times. To operate effectively, recreation professionals will need to keep well informed of emerging trends and community needs.

Past trends provide one source of information which is useful in planning for the future. By looking at past trends in recreation patterns, we can identify areas of *stability* and *change* (Kelly, 1987). The series of surveys conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks during the 1980s provides this type of information.

In the first part of the bulletin, trend data for the 1980s is presented, based on information from:

- The 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*;
- The 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*; and,
- The 1988 *General Recreation Survey*.

The topics which are discussed include:

- household participation patterns;
- favorite recreation activities and reasons for participation;
- desired activities and barriers to participation; and,
- volunteerism.

In the second part of the bulletin, information is drawn from several sources to highlight current and future trends.

PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITIES

What activity trends did we see in Alberta in the 1980s? For many activities, we were able to compare household participation rates for 1981, 1984, and 1988.

Activities which had high levels of participation in all three surveys were:

- walking for pleasure
- driving for pleasure
- gardening
- crafts and hobbies
- visiting museums and galleries
- bicycling
- attending sports events as a spectator
- swimming
- picnicking
- camping.



A core group of at-home activities, such as reading, television viewing, and board games, ranked highly in previous surveys but were not included in the 1988 study.

When looking at trends, activities could be divided into three groups. Some activities showed fairly stable participation or a slight decline during the 1980s. A second group of activities showed a moderate decline, while the third group showed quite a marked decline in participation. Table 1 shows the activities in each of these categories.

Golf and bicycling are two activities that showed an increase in participation during the decade. Although participation in creative activities such as drama, writing, and music was stable during the early 1980s, there was a noticeable decline in 1988. On the other hand, participation in bowling declined during the first half of the decade, but remained stable thereafter. Participation in video games appears to have peaked in 1984.

Short-term trend information is available for activities that were assessed in 1984 and 1988, but not in 1981. The most marked declines in participation during the last half of the 1980s were for trail biking, table tennis, gymnastics, canoeing/kayaking, shooting, squash and tobogganing.

Many of these patterns are similar to those seen in other areas of North America. Based on a detailed review of American surveys, Kelly (1987) found increased participation in walking, bicycling and golf. He noted that participation in fitness programs and racquetball peaked around 1983/84, and has declined since then. Participation in swimming and fishing has been quite stable.

The Campbell's Survey on Well-being in Canada (1988) did find an increase, however, in the proportion of respondents participating in some form of physical activity (compared to 1981). This increase was observed among all age groups.

Why have participation rates declined for many activities? Some of the reasons which have been suggested include:



Table 1: Trends in Participation During the 1980s

Percent of Households Participating *

	1981	1984	1988
<i>Stable or Slight Decline</i>			
Walking for pleasure	88%	85%	89%
Gardening	74%	75%	70%
Visiting museums, galleries	74%	62%	65%
Bicycling	62%	63%	64%
Fishing	55%	52%	50%
Golf	35%	39%	40%
Downhill skiing	36%	36%	34%
Soccer	20%	21%	17%
Skateboarding	14%	n/a	12%
<i>Moderate Decline</i>			
Crafts, hobbies	78%	73%	68%
Spectator at sports events	75%	71%	64%
Camping	65%	57%	51%
Ice skating	58%	53%	46%
Video, electronic games	44%	52%	37%
Softball, baseball	42%	44%	34%
Ice hockey	28%	28%	22%
Hunting	28%	22%	22%
Curling	26%	23%	21%
Cross-country skiing	31%	29%	21%
Tennis	31%	25%	20%
Badminton	22%	22%	16%
<i>Marked Decline</i>			
Drama, music, writing	47%	45%	33%
Jogging, running	54%	45%	31%
Bowling/lawnbowling	43%	29%	26%
Racquetball	28%	26%	16%
Rollerskating	33%	24%	11%
Football	24%	19%	11%
Backpacking	20%	13%	8%

Troportion of households having at least one member who participated in the previous year. Includes adults and children, n/a Not measured in this survey.

- Changes in the structure of society - Since participation in most activities declines with age, there is a decline as the population ages. The average size of households has declined slightly, resulting in fewer activities per household.



- Many people are experiencing a time famine - the amount of leisure time is reduced, and there is an increasing problem in scheduling recreational activities.
- The range of activities in which one can participate has been expanding. This may contribute to a decline in participation for any one activity (Warnick, 1987).
- There is an increasing proportion of immigrants in the population who may enjoy leisure interests which have not been addressed in the recreation surveys.

Although the proportion of households participating may show a decline, an actual loss of participants is partly offset by an increase in the number of households in the province from 1981 to 1988.

FAVORITE ACTIVITIES

Comparisons were also made for Albertans' favorite activities in 1988 and 1981. Table 2 shows the highest ranked activities in 1988 and how these activities ranked in 1981.

- Camping was mentioned most often as a favorite activity in both 1981 and 1988. Golf and fishing were also consistently popular.
- Walking for pleasure, swimming and bicycling have increased in popularity as favorite activities. Although not among the top 10 activities, a marked increase in popularity was also seen for gardening.
- Downhill skiing and ice hockey lost popularity during the decade.

All of the favorite activities mentioned were grouped into 11 categories. In Table 3, the frequency of mention of each category is compared for 1981 and 1988.

There were two types of favorite activities which increased in importance over the decade. These were exercise-oriented activities and creative-cultural pursuits. On the other hand, team sports and social-passive activities such as reading and board games declined in importance. The remaining favorite activity categories have been quite consistent in popularity during the decade.

Reasons for participation in favorite recreation activities seem to have been quite stable during the 1980s. In both 1981 and 1988, the most important reasons were: pleasure; relaxation;



physical health or exercise; and doing something different from work..

INTEREST IN NEW ACTIVITIES

Other topics for which trend information is available are interest in starting a new activity and barriers to participation. The following patterns were found when results from the 1981 and 1988 surveys were compared (Jackson, 1989):

Table 2: Favorite Recreation Activities (1981 and 1988)

	Rank in 1981	Rank in 1988
Camping	1	1
Walking for pleasure	6	2
Golf	2	3
Rshing	4	4
Swimming	8	5
Bicycling	15	6
Downhill skiing	3	7
Reading books and magazines	7	8
Handicrafts	n/a	9
Ice hockey	5	10

n/a Not available for 1981.

Table 3: Favorite Types of Activities in 1981 and 1988

	Percent of Activities Mentioned	
	1981	1988
Exercise-oriented	25%	30%
Cultural Team sports	6%	10%
Fishing/Hunting Social-passive (e.g., watching T.V)	14%	9%
Mechanical/assisted outdoor activities (e.g. snowmobiling)	8%	8%
Non-mechanized outdoor activities (e.g., canoeing)	12%	6%
Camping	6%	6%
Golf	5% 9%	3%
Downhill skiing	6% 5%	10%
Other	5%	8%
		4%



Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). You are free to edit the documents you download and use them for your own projects, but you should show your appreciation by providing credit to the originator of the document. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>

- In both surveys, close to one-half of the respondents reported an interest in starting a new activity.
- Exercise-oriented activities ranked highest in both surveys in terms of desired activities, and interest in starting this type of activity increased over the decade.
- Increased interest was also evident for resource-based activities such as fishing, as well as golf. There was a moderate decline in desire to participate in team sports and racquet sports from 1981 to 1988.
- Barriers to participation which ranked highly in importance in both 1981 and 1988 were: a perceived lack of opportunity near home; costs of equipment and supplies; and work commitments.
- Costs of equipment and admission fees appear to have become more important as barriers during the 1980s. Problems of overcrowding of facilities and difficulty in finding partners seem to have declined in importance since 1981.

VOLUNTEERISM

The topic of volunteerism was addressed in all three surveys in the series. An important finding was that the types of people most likely to volunteer were quite consistent over the decade. In each survey, volunteers were most likely to be between the ages of 35 and 44 years and to live in households with school age children. Both males and females volunteered at similar rates. Volunteerism also increased with education and income level and there was a higher proportion of volunteers in rural communities than in large urban centres.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The Alberta Recreation and Parks surveys indicate some stable recreation patterns in Alberta, but also highlight some important changes to consider for the 1990s.

We cannot simply project from past trends, however. Recreation patterns must be viewed in relation to changing demographic and social shifts. Economic and technological factors will also have an impact on leisure patterns of the future.

Activities have "product life cycles", in which there is a period of growth, peak, decline, and a gradual plateau. In order to forecast participation, it is necessary to look at the appeal of the activity to various segments of society, and the types of alternative activities that are available (Kelly, 1987).



In addition to participation patterns, there are many types of trends of concern to recreation professionals. Management and planning approaches associated with recreation service provision also change. In a recent article in *Recreation Canada*, Harper and Balmer (1990) identified various strategies which emerged during the 1980s. These include such approaches as enabler and facilitator, privatization, integrated strategic planning, co-operative development, and value-for-money audits.

SOCIAL AND LIFESTYLE TRENDS

What are the demographic, social, and lifestyle trends that are relevant to the future of recreation services? Some of the most frequently mentioned trends are:

- An increase in the following segments of society: seniors; singles; single parent families, especially those led by males; working women; and the physically challenged.
- Early retirement and more "active oldsters".
- An increase in the ethnic mix of the population.
- An increase in the number of non-traditional households.
- A decrease in the average family size.

Changes are also occurring in the use of leisure and views about the importance of leisure. Some of the lifestyle patterns seen in today's society are:

- More leisure time is being spent at home (cocooning). entertainment electronics play an important role
- Although tourism is booming, much of recreation is occurring closer to home, such as local parks and recreation areas.
- One of the major concerns with today's society is "time famine". Time is a scarce resource due to increased work hours and more households with working parents. Leisure is taken in blocks of time such as long weekends and vacations.
- On the other hand, many people are experiencing enforced leisure because of unemployment or underemployment.
- More time is being spent on education, including continuing education to keep up with changing job demands.
- The public's attitudes toward leisure may be changing. A recent U.S. survey found that people



rank work higher as a preferred life activity than leisure activities such as playing sports, entertainment, or hobbies (see Kraus, 1988).

PROGRAMMING AND PLANNING TRENDS

What do these demographic, social and lifestyle trends imply for the future of leisure services? What recreation participation patterns will we expect to see in the 1990s?. What planning and programming directions will be important? These are concerns for recreation professionals developing strategies for the future.

Some predictions and ideas for the future are summarized in Tables 4 and 5. These have been drawn from a number of sources. They are not the final answer but suggest the variety of issues that recreation professionals may encounter.

The challenge facing recreation service agencies will be to determine the trends affecting their local communities. Strategic planning and flexibility will be key approaches in dealing with changing community leisure and recreation needs in the 1990s.

Table 4: Activity and Programming Trends

- Growth is predicted in bicycling, golf, walking, and day hiking. Participation in swimming, tennis, fishing, and camping will remain stable. Environmental awareness will boost the popularity of non-consumptive activities.
- The growth areas in recreation markets are predicted to be women and women's activities, singles, and the active senior years.
- There will be increasing demand for activities and competitions for older age groups. Older adults will become increasingly involved in planning their own pursuits. They will provide a well-educated volunteer base.
- Fitness activities will continue to diversify: lower-impact, slower-paced exercise; at-home exercise and family activities; and an emphasis on health over competition. Although the popular press suggests a "fitness revolution", the majority of the population is unfit and will need assistance and a comfortable setting in which to improve their fitness.
- Changes in the ethnic composition of society will influence the type of sport and recreation activities demanded.
- There is a tendency toward specialization in leisure activity. There will be a need for a broad range of programs that allow individuals to develop their special interests to the desired skill levels.
- To deal with today's households, there will be a need for leisure services that go beyond the traditional, including: day care services, food services,



better information, leisure-oriented support programs for "latch key" children of working adults.

- Increased flexibility in program times and more short-term courses will be necessary for time-pressured participants. There will be more demand for adults to participate in recreation activities while their children learn skills.
- There will be more emphasis on the social and therapeutic aspects of sport, recreation, and fitness.
- With more non-traditional households, the challenge will be to bring groups of people together and to promote new social groups during leisure.
- Recreation professionals will play a key role in educating people about the benefits of recreation and positive use of leisure, and in assisting people to cope with stress.
- There will be a need to plan for different styles of participation. For example, a pool could be managed for a number of behaviors including fitness, cooling off, relaxation, and socializing.
- Recreation agencies will need to respond to increased concerns about social and environmental issues. There are opportunities to take a leadership role, such as offering courses in environmentally sensitive living.
- There may be an increased emphasis on the use of recreation facilities as locations for activity rather than organized programs. Programs will be offered anywhere in the community.

Sources: Dunn, 1989; Godbey, 1985,1989; Goho, 1990; Gray, 1987; Kelly, 1987; Ross, 1989; Wallach, 1985.

Table 5: Trends in Planning and Management

- There is an emphasis on the marketing model. Practitioners will need to monitor consumer needs and package and promote services to attract consumer attention.
- Safety and liability are of increasing concern.
Canadian recreation facilities will require ever-increasing maintenance over the next decade.
The emphasis will be on multi-purpose community centers such as the "Leisure Concept" building which meets multiple rather than single needs.
- Citizens are increasingly well informed and can mobilize to deal with community issues that concern them.
- There will be continued focus on accessibility of facilities for the disabled.
- As the population ages, there will be more interest in natural aesthetics, maintenance, and safety.



- There will be an increase in public sector partnerships with private sector operators, and recreation service partnerships with health and social agencies. Services will be funded from a variety of sources.
- Park and recreation organizations will need to lead the way in preserving green space and encouraging leisure opportunities that are environmentally responsible.

Sources: Dunn, 1989; Godbey, 1985,1989; Goho, 1990; Gray, 1987; Ross, 1989.

REFERENCES

Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. 1989. "Campbell's Survey on Well-Being in Canada: Highlights". Ottawa, Canada.

Dunn, Diane R. 1989. "Global Leisure and Recreation Perspectives for the Future Manager". *Recreation Canada* Vol. 47, No. 3pp. 14-18.

Godbey, Geoffrey. 1989. "Leisure and Recreation: The Emerging Centre of the Economy". Presented at University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Godbey, Geoffrey. 1989. *The Future of Leisure Services: Thriving on Change*. Venture Publishing, Inc., State College, Pennsylvania.

Goho, James. 1990. "Community Research and Evaluation Strategies for the 90's". *Recreation Canada* Vol. 48, No. 1 pp. 6-11.

Gray, David. 1987. "Managing our Way to a Preferred Future" in *Current Issues in Leisure Services: Looking Ahead in a Time of Transition*. ICMA Practical Management Series, (ed.) Joseph L. Bannon.

Harper, Jack and Ken Balmer. 1990. "Conceptualizing the Benefit of Public Leisure Services" *Recreation Canada* Vol. 48, No. 1. pp. 34-39.

Jackson, Edgar L. 1989. Barriers to Participation in Desired Leisure Activities: Analysis of Data from the 1988 General Recreation Survey. Prepared for Alberta Recreation and Parks, Edmonton.



Kelly, John R. 1987. *Recreation Trends Toward the Year 2000*. Management Learning Laboratories Ltd., Champaign, Illinois.

Kraus, Richard G. 1988. "Changing Views of Tomorrow's Leisure" *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*. Vol. 59, No. 6, pp. 83-87.

National Recreation and Park Association. 1985. *Leisure and Society: Future Trends Papers from Schola I*. (ed.) J.S. Shivers. Alexandria, Virginia.

Ross, J.H. (Chip). 1989. "Thoughts on the Future". Alberta Recreation and Parks, Recreation Development Division.

Wallach, F. 1985 "Leisure and the Fitness Game". *Leisure and Society: Future Trends Papers from Schola I*. (ed.) J.S. Shivers. National Recreation and Park Association. Alexandria, Virginia.

Warnick, Rodney B. 1987. "Recreation and Leisure Participation Patterns Among the Adult Middle-Aged Market from 1975 to 1984". *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*. Vol. 58, No. 8. pp. 49-55.

FURTHER INFORMATION

From time to time, special analyses of the General Recreation Survey data are carried out. If you have any analysis requests, please let us know. We may be able to help. We can also provide copies of the questionnaire used in the survey.

For further information, or to have your mailing address changed, please contact:

J.H. (Chip) Ross
Recreation Development Division
Alberta Recreation and Parks
10405 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 3N4



Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). You are free to edit the documents you download and use them for your own projects, but you should show your appreciation by providing credit to the originator of the document. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>