

# A Look at Leisure

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Results of the 1984 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks No. 12

## **A NEW CHAPTER: THE 1984 SURVEY**

This is the twelfth bulletin in a series published by Alberta Recreation and Parks which presents results of public opinion surveys conducted by the Department. The previous eleven issues discussed findings from the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*. They covered such topics as favorite recreation activities, expenditures, barriers to participation, voluntarism, leisure attitudes, and social settings for recreation. With this issue, *A Look at Leisure* begins a new chapter the presentation of findings from the recently analyzed 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*. Practitioners and others concerned with the provision of recreation opportunities are faced with the challenge of understanding the recreation needs of the; public, and with providing an appropriate range of opportunities to meet these needs. In order to plan for the future, it is necessary to recognize trends in the recreation field, and to be aware of changes in society which may influence recreation patterns.



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Research findings can play a key role in helping practitioners to meet these challenges. They can assist agencies in deciding whether current programs are meeting present recreation needs. By pointing out trends, research results also provide a basis for more effective management of recreation opportunities, and assist in planning for anticipated future needs.

## THE SERIES

The *A Look at Leisure* information series is intended to provide a general description of the survey research findings and their implications for programming and planning. It is directed to a broad audience involved or interested in the delivery of recreation opportunities. For those readers who may wish to examine the survey results in greater detail, technical reports are available from the Department for both the 1981 and 1984 surveys. Details about obtaining further information are included at the end of the bulletin.

In addition to Bulletin No. 12, which introduces the series, five *A Look at Leisure* issues are planned for 1986. Each bulletin will focus on a different topic, and will describe the findings from one aspect of the survey. Comparisons of 1981 and 1984 survey findings will be made throughout the series.

## THE 1984 SURVEY

The 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* is the latest study in a set conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks to collect current information on the recreation pursuits and views of Albertans.

Several topics covered in the 1984 survey are similar to those addressed in the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*. Both surveys looked at participation in leisure pursuits, barriers to participation, voluntarism, and the opinions of Albertans about various aspects of recreation. It was therefore possible to compare certain findings from the two surveys and to examine some recreation trends in the province.

The 1984 survey looked at participation in seventy-one recreation pursuits. It also dealt with participation in preferred outdoor and sports activities, as well as activities which respondents recently started or discontinued. Involvement in private recreation clubs, and voluntarism were examined. The survey also asked for respondents' opinions about sports competition and Provincial Parks programs and services. Other questions gathered



demographic information about respondents and their households.

## **HOW WAS THE SURVEY DONE?**

The survey was designed and administered by staff of Alberta Recreation and Parks. Questionnaires were sent to 8,031 randomly selected Alberta households in October, 1984. After deletions from the mailing list to account for wrong addresses and other non-contacts, this was reduced to 7247 households. Questionnaires were returned by 3921 households, resulting in a response rate of 54% of the sample.

The survey analysis was designed to provide information about recreation markets at three different levels. First, general recreation patterns and opinions were examined. Secondly, the demographic characteristics of respondents with specific participation patterns or opinions were identified. For example, when involvement in aerobics/fitness activities was examined, it was found that nine times as many females as males participated, and Calgary residents had higher rates of participation than did people living in other areas of the province. Finally, there was an attempt to understand the underlying reasons for participation patterns by looking at such factors as leisure choices and motivations.

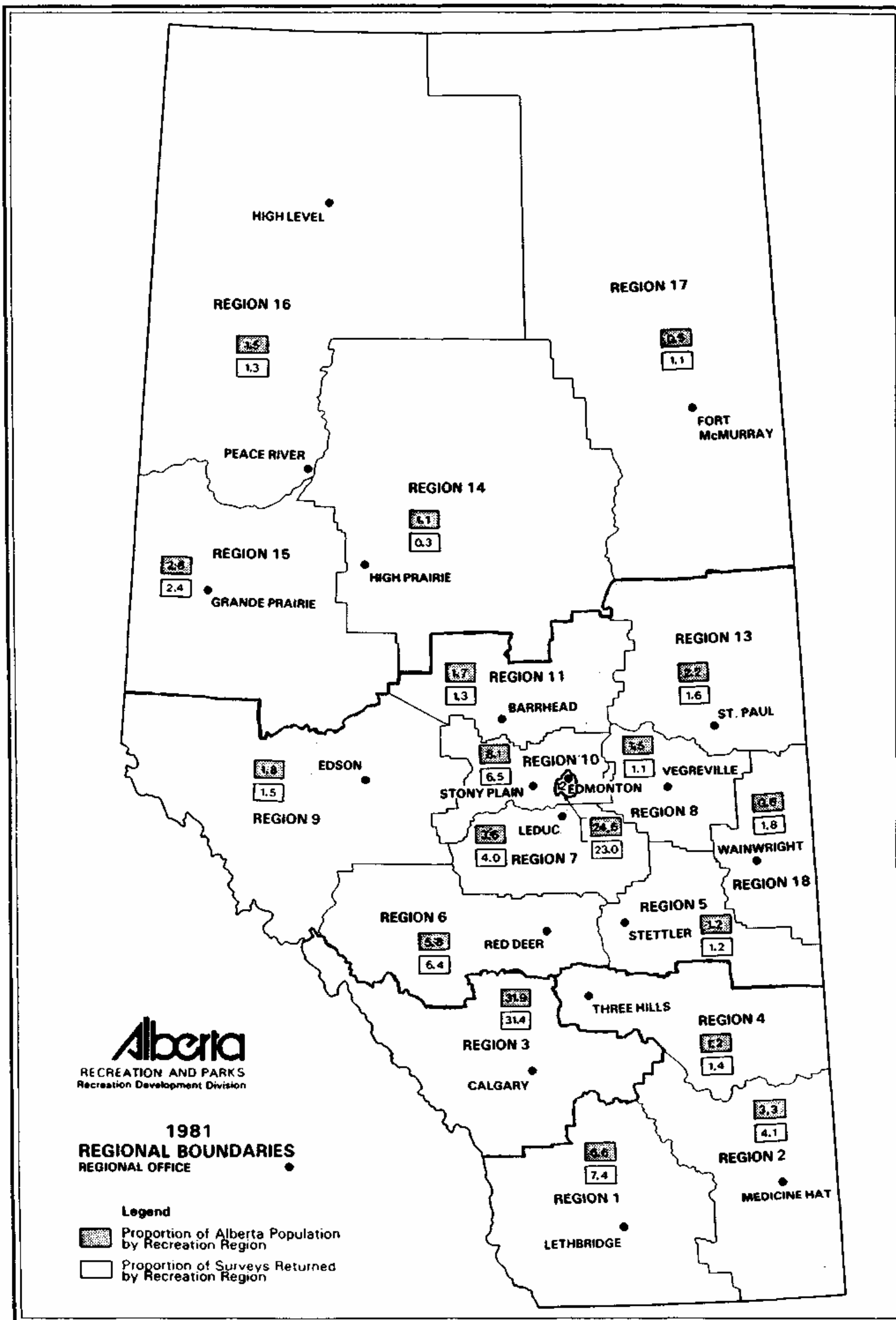
## **WHO ANSWERED THE SURVEY?**

A map showing the percentage of respondents from various regions of the province is provided in Figure 1. The survey response proportions were quite similar to the population proportions for each area. The actual number of responses from many of these regions was quite small, however. Responses therefore had to be combined into five larger regional categories for the analysis. These areas were Calgary, Edmonton, and South, Central, and Northern Alberta. The boundaries of these regions are outlined in the map.

Most of the respondents (85%) lived in villages, towns, or cities, with a small proportion (10%) living on farms or acreages. This was similar to the 1981 percentages, and was consistent with the urban-rural distribution of the Alberta population.

More males (64%) than females (34%) answered the survey. This picture was identical to the 1981 survey. The survey results thus tend to be biased somewhat





toward male participation patterns and opinions.

The percentage of respondents in various age categories is shown in Table 1. Compared to the 1981 survey, the 1984 survey sample had a smaller proportion of respondents in the youngest age category, and higher proportions in the three oldest categories. This pattern probably reflects the trend toward an aging population in the province, and has important implications for recreation participation and program planning.

**TABLE 1**

	<b>1984 (%)</b>	<b>1981 (%)</b>
<b>Under 25 years</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>17.6</b>
<b>25 to 34 years</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>32.6</b>
<b>35 to 44 years</b>	<b>22.6</b>	<b>17.9</b>
<b>45 to 64 years</b>	<b>26.1</b>	<b>22.9</b>
<b>65 years or over</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>8.9</b>

Differences were also found when profiles for length of residence in Alberta were compared for 1984 and 1981 respondents. In 1984, there were fewer newcomers to the province than there were in 1981, and more people who had lived in the province for eleven years or longer. This likely reflects the fact that migration into the province stabilized between 1981 and 1984. Future issues will comment on the relevance of this finding to recreation patterns in the province.

Since most of the profile characteristics of the 1981 and 1984 survey samples were similar, it was thus valid to compare the findings from the two surveys. Variations between the two samples, such as for the age profiles, were useful in interpreting differences in participation patterns or opinions which were found when results from the two surveys were compared.

## LIMITATIONS

The results of survey research should be interpreted with caution, since there are many factors which cannot be controlled in research of this nature. As each topic in the series is presented, specific limitations which apply to the interpretation of the data will be discussed.



The survey looked at general recreation issues on a broad provincial and regional level. It is, therefore, generally not able to provide specific information on localized topics of interest. In reviewing the survey findings presented in the *A Look at Leisure* bulletins, recreation practitioners should always evaluate the degree to which the findings apply to their specific agency or community.

## **FUTURE ISSUES IN THE SERIES**

Future topics in the *A Look at Leisure* series will include:

- **PARTICIPATION IN RECREATION ACTIVITIES.** The top activities were visiting, watching TV, and listening to the radio. How did participation rates compare to 1981? Who are the participants?
- **LEISURE ACTIVITY CHOICES.** Physical fitness/aerobics, swimming, and walking were common activities started in the past year. How important were reasons such as relaxation, socializing, and competition when respondents selected new activities?
- **REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN RECREATION PATTERNS.** Fishing appears to be more common for northern Albertans. St. Paul and Red Deer area residents are more likely to be volunteers. What other recreation patterns occur in the province?
- **BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION.** Time commitments are a major barrier, but over-crowding of facilities is also a problem. Who are most affected by barriers? Have there been any changes since 1981?
- **LEISURE PATTERNS IN 1981 AND 1984.** Compared to 1981, there are more households participating in swimming and golf. What are the other interesting trends?



## WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Alberta Recreation and Parks is currently compiling an inventory of recreation research conducted in the province since 1980. If you have been involved in a survey research project, or if you know of research that has been done, please let us know. Your contributions will help us to build a more complete picture of recreation patterns in the province. Please contact Janet Fletcher at Alberta Recreation and Parks (address below).

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Would you like more information about the ,4 *Look at Leisure publication* or the technical research reports for the 1981 or 1984 surveys? Are there any requests for analyses you would like to see? For further information about the survey, or to have your mailing address changed, please contact:

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