

# A Look at Leisure

Results of the 1984 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks No. 16

## REGIONAL VARIATIONS

This bulletin, the sixteenth in a series published by Alberta Recreation and Parks, looks at regional variations in the findings from the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*. Most of the presentation focuses on differences in recreation participation patterns in various regions of Alberta. Other topics which are included are regional differences in starting new activities, ceasing participation in activities, and voluntarism.



**Alberta**  
RECREATION AND PARKS



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**INTRODUCTION**

It is useful to increase our understanding of recreation markets in Alberta by identifying differences in socio-economic characteristics of regional residents, as well as variations in their recreation interests and participation patterns. It is important to consider these variations when planning for recreation opportunities at a regional or community level, so that local leisure needs are adequately met.

Since the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* recorded the location of residence for each responding household, it was possible to group respondents by region and to look at similarities and differences in their survey responses.

Surveys were received from all areas of the province, and the proportions of households responding to the survey were quite similar to the actual population proportions for each of the provincial recreation regions. Details about the distribution of responses across the province were presented in the twelfth bulletin in the *A Look at Leisure* series, "A New Chapter: The 1984 Survey". Since the actual numbers of responses were quite small for some of the provincial recreation regions, responses were grouped into five larger regional categories for the analysis. A sketch map, showing the boundaries of these regions, and the percentage of the survey sample living in each region, is shown below.



It should be noted that the category identified as "Calgary area" consists mainly of Calgary residents, but there are also some respondents from non-urban areas outside of the city who are included in the grouping.

Some of the highlights from the survey include the following:

- Calgary area and Edmonton residents were similar in their preferences for outdoor and sports activities, with participation in swimming, jogging/running, tennis, and golf higher than for other provincial residents.
- Residents of northern Alberta tended to favour vigorous outdoor pursuits, while a greater proportion of southern Alberta residents was involved in moderate forms of exercise such as walking, picnicking, and bowling/lawnbowling.
- Many of the increases in household participation from 1981 to 1984 occurred in northern Alberta, and included activities such as swimming, golf, bicycling, ice hockey, cross-country skiing, and racquetball.
- There were some differences in socio-economic characteristics of respondents living in various regions of the province.

## PARTICIPATION IN RECREATION ACTIVITIES

In the survey, respondents were asked to identify three outdoor and sports activities in which they had participated most frequently in the previous year. There were 25 activities which were mentioned by a reasonably high number of respondents, and could be examined in the analysis. These "favorite" outdoor and sports activities were discussed in Bulletin No. 13 in the *A Look at Leisure* series (Participation Patterns). In Figure 1, the percentages of the survey sample mentioning each activity are shown in the first column, and the activities are ranked in descending order of importance. The findings for the south, central, and northern regions of the province, Edmonton, and the Calgary area, are also summarized in Figure 1. There were differences across provincial regions for 18 of the 25 activities. For the remaining pursuits, there seemed to be quite consistent participation levels across all areas of the province. These activities were horseback/trail riding, ice hockey, ice skating, motorcycling/trail biking, racquetball, and body building/weightlifting. Participation in cross-country skiing was similar in all regions, except for a lower interest in southern Alberta.

By reading down each column in Figure 1, it is possible to identify the activities which appear to be particularly important in each of the five settings. These are activities which were mentioned more frequently than the provincial average by the respondents in the region, or which had participation levels that were noticeably higher than those in the remaining regions. Frequently mentioned activities for Calgary area residents, and the percentage of



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Figure 1

**Regional Differences in Respondent Participation  
in Preferred Outdoor and Sports Activities \*\***

Activity (ranked)	Percent of Active Respondent	South	Central	North	Calgary	Edmonton
1. Walking for pleasure	34	•				
2. Swimming	22				•	•
3. Overnight camping	19	•	•	•		
4. Fishing	18	•	•	•		
5. Golf	18	•			•	•
6. Bicycling	18					•
7. Aerobics/fitness	12				•	
8. Softball/baseball	11			•		
9. Hunting	9			•		
10. Curling	8			•		
11. Downhill skiing	8				•	
12. Jogging/running	8				•	•
13. Picnicking	8	•				
14. Cross-country skiing	7					
15. Ice hockey	7					
16. Body-building/weightlifting	6					
17. Bowling/lawnbowling	6	•				
18. Racquetball	6					
19. Motor, trail biking	5					
20. Ice skating	5					
21. Day hiking	5				•	
22. Horseback, trail riding	4					
23. Motor boating	4			•		
24. Tennis	4				•	•
25. Snowmobiling	3		•	•		

\*\* The regional percentages are included in the text.

• Participation rates above the provincial average and higher than the remaining regions.



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respondents reporting these activities, were as follows: swimming (24%), aerobics/ fitness (15%), downhill skiing (11%), jogging/ running (10%), day hiking (8%), and tennis (6%). Edmonton residents showed some similar activity preferences, with swimming (24%), bicycling (20%), jogging/ running (11%), and tennis (6%) receiving frequent mention. There was also above-average participation in golf in both of these urban centres.

Northern Alberta residents expressed preferences for quite a different array of pursuits, including: overnight camping (23%), fishing (30%), Softball/baseball (18%), hunting (22%), curling (12%), motor boating (7%), and snowmobiling (9%). Only three of the activities had above average interest in central Alberta, and these were similar to those mentioned for Northern Alberta: overnight camping (21%), fishing (22%), and snowmobiling (8%). Southern Alberta residents showed a different pattern again, with walking for pleasure (37%), camping (23%), fishing (24%), golf (20%), picnicking (11%), and bowling/lawnbowling (8%) mentioned at above-average rates.

The analysis also looked at trends or changes in patterns of participation from 1981 to 1984, in order to see if any regional differences might be evident. The measure here was the percentage of households participating in each activity, rather than the activity preferences of respondents, which was dealt with above. This aspect of the survey looked at a broader range of activities, including creative, cultural, outdoor, and sports pursuits.

There were several activities which appeared to have a provincial increase in household participation from 1981 to 1984. In some cases, however, these changes in participation were especially evident in certain regions of the province. For most of the activities, the greatest increases in percentages of participating households appear to have occurred in northern Alberta. This pattern was evident for swimming, golf, bicycling, ice hockey, cross-country skiing, and racquetball. There also appeared to be increased participation in golf by Edmonton residents, while both Calgary and Edmonton residents indicated greater participation in organized groups and clubs in 1984 than in 1981.

There were also some activities for which a provincial decrease in household participation, from 1981 to 1984, was identified. A few of these activities showed regional patterns of decline in participation. Jogging had fewer participants in central and northern Alberta in 1984, while participation appears to have declined for football in southern Alberta. A decrease in the number of camping households was most evident for Calgary and Edmonton residents.



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## ACTIVITIES STARTED AND ACTIVITIES DISCONTINUED

One of the survey questions looked at types of activities which respondents had started in the previous year. The results of this question were reported in *A Look at Leisure* No. 14 (Choosing Recreation Activities). The types of activities which were started were closely related to the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, such as age and education. Regional differences were not as important as these latter factors in influencing the choice of new recreation activities.

Nevertheless, there were a few differences in activity choices which did show regional variations. Activities which were creative-cultural, social, or passive (such as hobbies or watching T.V.) were more likely to be started by residents of southern and central Alberta, than by those living in other areas. Residents of Calgary area and Edmonton were more likely than others to indicate that they had started exercise-oriented activities such as tennis, bicycling or ice skating. Both central and northern Alberta residents were more likely than residents of other areas to have started team sports, outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and mechanized pursuits such as snowmobiling.

Reasons for participating in the new recreation activities did not vary markedly from place to place. Physical health or exercise did appear more important to Edmonton and Calgary area residents. Southern and central residents more frequently indicated the importance of helping others and contributing to the community as reasons for starting a new activity.

Yearly expenditures for recreational equipment, travel, membership/entrance fees, or miscellaneous items did not differ significantly for residents of the various regions of the province.

Another survey question looked at activities which respondents discontinued in the previous year, and reasons for ceasing these activities (see *A Look at Leisure Bulletin* No. 15). It was not particularly meaningful to look at regional differences in activities ceased, since this depends largely on actual levels of participation for the various regions. There were very few regional differences in the importance of various reasons for ceasing participation. Residents of central Alberta did indicate that family commitments were important, and this reason appears to have increased as a concern since 1981. Calgary residents were more likely than those from other areas to indicate overcrowding of facilities and areas as a problem, a finding which was quite consistent with the 1981 results.



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## REASONS FOR REGIONAL VARIATIONS

There are several factors which might contribute to differences in recreation activity patterns for residents of various regions of the province. First, opportunities for participation may vary from place to place, depending on the natural resources or the types of facilities available. For example, northern Alberta residents participate in many activities which require a large land base or a lake setting. On the other hand, such opportunities may not be so readily available to residents of urban centres, but there may be more developed facilities and programs in urban locations.

Secondly, differences in participation may be associated with the socio-economic make-up of the respondents living in the various regions. Many researchers have shown that participation in recreation activities is related to respondent characteristics such as age, type of household, education, and income (see *A Look at Leisure* No. 13, "Participation Patterns"). Any differences in socio-economic profiles of the various regions might, therefore, help to explain regional variations in recreational activity patterns. In the survey analysis, it was possible to look at the characteristics of respondents living in each of the five regions, and to identify ways in which they differed from the sample as a whole. In addition to providing information which might help in understanding regional recreation patterns, these economic findings are also useful in pointing out possible differences in recreation clientele in various areas of the province. The socio-economic differences among regions are highlighted in Table 1. The findings reported for age and rural distributions are similar to regional profiles based on census information. This table also summarizes profiles for each region, based on the activity participation information discussed above.



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Table 1

### Regional Profiles of Socio-Demographic and Participation Characteristics

#### South (13.2% of sample)

**Socio-demographic Features:** Higher percentage of respondents over 65 years; more households consisting of a couple with no children; more respondents in lower income categories.

**Activities above Provincial Average:** Walking for pleasure; camping; fishing; picnicking; bowling/lawnbowling; golf.

**Activities Recently Started/Reasons:** Higher percentage started creative-cultural, social, and passive activities. Greater interest in helping others and contributing to the community.

**Trends (1981 to 1984):** Decline in participation in football.

#### Central (26.0% of sample)

**Socio-demographic Features:** Higher proportion of families with children and low percentage of single people; high proportion of rural residents.

**Activities above Provincial Average:** overnight camping, fishing, snowmobiling.

**Activities Recently Started/Reasons:** Higher percentage started creative-cultural, social, and passive activities, team sports, hunting/fishing, and mechanized outdoor pursuits. Greater interest in helping others and contributing to the community.

**Reasons for Ceasing Participation:** family commitments identified by a higher proportion of respondents.

**Trends (1981 to 1984):** Decline in participation in jogging. Increase in importance of family commitments as reason for ceasing participation.

#### North (5.2% of sample)

**Socio-demographic Features:** Higher proportion of respondents between 25 and 34 years of age, and low percentage of seniors over 65 years; more households consisting of families with children; high proportion of rural respondents; relatively high income levels.

**Activities above Provincial Average:** Overnight camping, fishing, Softball/baseball, hunting, curling, motorboating, snowmobiling.

**Activities Recently Started/Reasons:** Higher percentage started team sports, hunting/ fishing; mechanized outdoor pursuits.



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Trends (1981 to 1984): Increased participation in swimming, golf, bicycling, ice hockey, cross-country skiing, and racquetball. Decreased participation in jogging.

Calgary (32.1% of sample)

Socio-demographic Features: Higher percentage of single people, and respondents with higher education and income levels.

Activities above Provincial Average: Swimming, aerobics/fitness, downhill skiing, jogging/running, day hiking, tennis, golf.

Activities Recently Started/Reasons: Higher percentage started exercise-oriented activities (e.g., tennis, bicycling). Greater importance of physical health or exercise as reason for starting activities.

Reasons for Ceasing Participation: greater concern with overcrowding of facilities and areas.

Trends (1981 to 1984): Increased participation in organized groups and clubs. Decline in participation in camping. Concern with overcrowding in both years.

Edmonton (23.5% of sample)

Socio-demographic Features: Higher percentage of single people, and respondents with higher education and income levels.

Activities above Provincial Average: Swimming, bicycling, jogging/running, tennis, golf.

Activities Recently Started/Reasons: Higher percentage started exercise-oriented activities (e.g., tennis, bicycling). Greater importance of physical health or exercise as reason for starting activities.

Trends (1981 to 1984): Increased participation in organized groups and clubs, and golf. Decline in participation in camping.

Several examples help to show how these socio-demographic factors may contribute to regional recreation patterns. The tendency toward an older population in Southern Alberta may help to account for activity preferences such as walking for pleasure, picnicking, and bowling/ lawnbowling, and for recently started activities in the creative-culture, social, and passive categories. Motivations for participation, such as helping others and contributing to the community, are also more important in southern Alberta, and are more likely to be expressed by older respondents. In comparison, the more vigorous outdoor pursuits identified by the northern Alberta respondents may be partly due to the relatively high proportion of adults in the 25 to 34 year age range in this area of the province. Family commitments were especially important as a reason for ceasing participation for central Alberta residents; this relates closely to the relatively high proportion of responding



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households in this region which consisted of couples with children.

Research has also shown that recreational involvement tends to vary for rural and urban residents. For example, McPherson and Curtis found that, across Canada, urban residents tended to have higher levels of physical activity. They point out that a larger proportion of rural residents may have physically demanding occupations, and may have less energy and less perceived need for high levels of physical activity during leisure time. Since the five Alberta regions have different proportions of rural and urban residents, this may be an important factor in contributing to the variations in activity patterns across regions.

## VOLUNTARISM

The 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* also looked at the topic of voluntarism. Respondents were asked if they had worked as a volunteer in the previous twelve months. Approximately 40 percent of the respondents had worked as a volunteer, and the majority of volunteers contributed from one to five hours of volunteer work in an average week. Volunteers were likely to be between 35 and 44 years of age, married with school-age children, well-educated, and longer term residents of Alberta. This profile was very consistent with that found in the 1981 Public Opinion Survey.

This aspect of the analysis looked closely at volunteer participation in eight sub-regions of the province, rather than the five broad regions used in the discussion above. The lowest levels of volunteer involvement were in Edmonton and Calgary, where 38% of respondents had worked as a volunteer. The 1984 survey found two areas with particularly high levels of volunteer participation, namely the St. Paul and Red Deer areas. The percentages of volunteers in these two regions were 51% and 49%, respectively.

Comparisons were also made with the 1981 findings for regional volunteer participation. Overall, the proportion of respondents volunteering was identical (40%) in 1981 and 1984. In 1984, there was a decrease in participation in all areas of the province, except for Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer, where increases of three or four percent were identified. The greatest decrease in volunteer participation was in the Grande Prairie area, where the proportion of volunteers declined from 60% in 1981 to 44% in 1984. A decrease from 48% to 40% was reported for the Edson area. It is possible, however, that there may have been special events in these two centres which created unusually high levels of volunteer involvement in 1981.

## OTHER INFORMATION

This study has identified variations in recreation participation and volunteer involvement across different regions of Alberta. Within Alberta, there are many sources of information about regional and local patterns of recreation. Regional planning

commissions have conducted studies as part of their planning projects. In addition, many communities in Alberta have undertaken surveys in order to gather information for the planning of local recreation services.

Looking at regions within a province is one way of considering differences in recreation patterns on a geographical basis. Regional differences have also been found for various areas of Canada. The report by McPherson and Curtis, based on the Canada Fitness Survey, provides some interesting information about regional and community type differences in physical activity patterns across Canada. For example, these researchers found that a higher percentage of adults are active in the Western provinces (62%), compared with other areas of the country (53%). Adults in the west also tended to report that they would like to increase their level of physical activity during leisure, and to say that time constraints were an important barrier to increasing their participation. The *Canadian Atlas of Recreation and Exercise* also summarizes information on recreation patterns across the country.

## IMPLICATIONS

The survey results have shown that patterns of recreation behaviour may vary somewhat in different regions of the province, and for urban and rural residents. The results also point out that the socio-demographic profiles of residents may vary in different areas, and this may contribute to regional or community differences in recreation preferences. Both of these findings suggest that recreation agencies should be aware of community profiles and of the characteristics of the recreation clientele which they serve. This will assist agencies in planning for the particular recreation needs of their communities. As an example, the results indicate that central Alberta communities may have a relatively high proportion of families with children, and that family commitment is an important reason for discontinuing participation in activities. Recreation agencies in this area might, therefore, pay particular attention to developing family programs, or babysitting/daycare services for this segment of the recreation market. It may also be especially important for agencies in the southern region to consider senior citizens in their programming.

The survey results also suggest that there has been a decrease in the numbers of people volunteering in many areas of the province. Have you found this in your community? Can you identify some reasons for this? What are some ways in which you might increase volunteer involvement in your programs?

Looking at geographical differences in recreation patterns and socio-demographic characteristics is an important aspect of a marketing approach. It helps to determine "where" various recreation markets are, and which segments of the market may require special attention when planning for recreation services.



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## THE NEXT ISSUE

The next bulletin in the *A Look at Leisure* series will examine some of the remaining topics from the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*, such as membership in private clubs, and views about competition issues. The bulletin will also provide a review of some of the major findings in the series to date.

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