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Economics of OUTDOOR RECREATION
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Economics of
OUTDOOR
RECREATION

By Marion Clawson and Jack L. Knetsch

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The demand for outdoor recreation is booming today, as is obvious to anyone even modestly familiar with the situation. Less publicized but no less impressive has been the enormously heightened interest in outdoor recreation as a field for professional study in the last decade or so. Park lovers and administrators, dedicated conservationists, and others deeply interested have long written and spoken about parks and recreation, and they have often been influential in securing public action to reserve or manage parks and other areas in ways which they thought desirable or essential. But this type of concern has not really been a professional one, and it has rarely included research, especially research in the social sciences, about outdoor recreation. These park and recreation people have been advocates of a point of view or of specific actions; they have not generally been concerned with analysis of social and economic processes.

All of this has changed greatly; there has been a major upsurge of professional interest in outdoor recreation. In a recent bibliographical survey, Wolfe has listed some 160 books and articles, in addition to the studies of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, nearly all of which have been published within the past decade.¹ This upsurge of professional interest has not been confined to any single professional group; economists, sociologists, geographers, lawyers, foresters, landscape architects, park and recreation executives, and other groups have shared in it. For many of these men, outdoor recreation has not yet become, and perhaps never will become, a professional field in and of itself;

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rather, it is subject matter for workers from various professional fields. National interest in outdoor recreation was given a major boost by the work of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission.\(^2\) One outcome of its work was the passage in 1964 of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, under which substantial sums will be granted by the federal government to the states for aid in acquiring and improving park and recreation areas. The requirement that the states have a recreation plan will give much increased weight to the usefulness of research in the general field, and we may well expect to see further proliferation of research in response to this stimulus.

Our concern with outdoor recreation is, we think, a natural one. Outdoor recreation requires natural resources, sometimes rather large amounts, and the mounting demand for outdoor recreation will bring major pressure for shifts in resource use. In the coming years, money is going to be invested in outdoor recreation—large amounts, by all indications. Decisions affecting recreation are going to have to be made. We think that they would be better made if more were known about the subject and about the outcomes of alternative ways of dealing with it.

Numerous issues of public policy on outdoor recreation are now before the American people. Shall government (at any level) try to meet the apparent demand for outdoor recreation on an essentially free entrance basis? Are we prepared to pay the price required to maintain the quality of the recreation experience? Can some means be devised to obtain effectively co-ordinated planning among the numerous private groups and public agencies? Shall natural resources be allocated to recreation and to competing uses on the basis of their comparative value for each purpose? If on some other basis, which one? How can the public use of privately owned land and water areas for recreation best be stimulated and assisted? How is the nation going to pay for the outdoor recreation it demands? More specifically, who is going to pay for it?

These are some of the policy issues which we raise in this book; we do not try to solve them, much less to advocate a line of policy on outdoor recreation. In the solution of issues of social policy, the value standards and philosophy of the persons concerned may be as critical as the technical and economic aspects of the issues. But the latter do set limits or raise problems of cost which often condition, if not determine, the answers. We think the general analytical framework erected in this book, and the methods of analysis outlined, can be very helpful in

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enabling any individual or group to arrive at a sounder decision on recreation policy issues.

This book has been written by economists, but it is not directed primarily toward economists. Instead, it is aimed primarily at park and recreation workers, and at students in these fields. There are many employees of federal, state, and local park, forest, and recreation agencies who will be, we think, interested in the ideas and the approach we have developed herein. Most of these men and women are not economists, and we have tried to write in a nontechnical style that does not introduce economists' jargon unnecessarily and which tries to explain the concepts used in analysis. At the same time, there is a growing interest among such workers in the economic and social aspects of recreation, and we hope this book will thus be of value to them. Many nonprofessionals—citizens deeply concerned with recreation—may find the book useful in the same way. At the same time, we have tried to present ideas, concepts, and data that will be considered valuable by other economists and social scientists generally. In particular, we hope to stimulate university and other professional workers to initiate research on some of the problems we outline, and thus to test our ideas.

Our main concern has been with the United States. The analysis we make, and the problems we raise, are generally directly applicable to Canada also, although we have explicitly introduced but little of the Canadian experience into our discussion. The situation is different in the older countries of Europe and Asia where comparatively little land has been set aside specifically for outdoor recreation and where settlement on the land is often heavy. The situation is still different in many low-income countries, where incomes, transportation facilities, and leisure do not permit the kind of mass outdoor recreation we have in the United States. Yet, we believe that similarities are growing and that many parts of our analysis could fruitfully be adapted to the special problems of all these countries where the resource and population situations are so different from our own.

This book presents our views on the economic and social aspects of outdoor recreation, as of now. It brings together many ideas, analyses, and viewpoints which are scattered through other writings; but it also includes much new material, presented here for the first time. Its greatest virtue, in our eyes, is that it puts numerous specific materials into a reasonably consistent and comprehensive framework.

Outdoor recreation is a growing and changing field, and a definitive book simply cannot be written today. What is written here will be partially out of date in five years, or at least we hope it will. The basic principles and approaches should stand the test of time; but there should be amplification, enrichment, and change as these basic ideas are applied
in specific situations of widely varying kinds. We badly need more re­
search, in many areas and kinds of situations, both to test and modify
ideas and to provide a body of quantitative research results.

We encourage other researchers to develop, challenge, modify, and
amplify the ideas and concepts we advance in this book. We hope that
it, and our earlier studies, will serve to stimulate many workers in various
professional fields, as well as to provide useful and workable ideas to
those in the administration of outdoor recreation.

We owe thanks to a very large number of persons who have con­
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has been our privilege to meet with many workers on outdoor recreation
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FOREWORD


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We are glad to acknowledge our debt to these people, and to any others whom we may have inadvertently omitted. Full responsibility for errors, omissions, viewpoints, and conclusions rests with the authors, of course.

Marion Clawson
Jack L. Knetsch

May 1966
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The Setting
Introduction

The purpose of this book is to present a review of outdoor recreation in the United States with particular concern for the significant policy issues of the next decade or two. From the extremely large number of subjects or topics that could be involved in questions of outdoor recreation, we have chosen those which seemed to us, conditioned by our own particular interests, to be most useful for dealing with the important policy and operational decisions.

If the problems and opportunities of outdoor recreation are to be properly understood, they must be seen in terms of the whole society and whole economy. Accordingly, considerable attention is given to the role of leisure in the total life and economy of the United States today and in the future, and to the role of outdoor recreation as one of many uses of leisure.

The discussion at many points will emphasize the limited nature of our present knowledge about outdoor recreation. With a few notable exceptions, the various physical, economic, social, political, and other problems relating to outdoor recreation have not been the subject of serious research and study. In no small part, this has been due to the fact that recreation has been equated to a degree with play, and both have been considered beneath the dignity of serious research effort. Fact-gathering and fact-analysis have been infrequent enough, but sound theorizing has been especially lacking. The shortcomings of many years of neglect obviously cannot be made good in any single book. We hope that some new ideas, new methodology, new facts will be found here. But, perhaps most of all, we hope that this book will serve to clarify and to organize what is known, or believed to be known, and that it will stimulate others to greatly extend present knowledge.
THE SETTING

Major emphasis is placed in this book upon the economic and social aspects of outdoor recreation. This emphasis arises out of two considerations: (1) these seem the most important and at the same time the most neglected aspects of outdoor recreation at present, and (2) these are the aspects on which we feel best qualified to speak.

We approach outdoor recreation as social scientists. The starting point of the whole analysis is people and their wants and demands for outdoor recreation; from this, the resource and institutional problems are considered, and lastly the major policy issues—as we see them—are posed. Other authors, with different professional backgrounds, might well include somewhat different ranges of subject matter under the same title.

Our objective is not to present, much less to advocate, an “action” program; rather, the purpose is to suggest things to be considered in developing any program and to raise what seem to be significant issues for public discussion and hence for ultimate resolution. Increasingly in the future, conflicts of value and dynamic changes in our society are going to require a better awareness of what is happening and a better analysis of recreation alternatives.

Major attention is focused throughout upon outdoor recreation on publicly owned land and water areas—the areas that have been of major importance in the past and about which more is known. Much of the discussion, though illustrated by examples from public areas, is equally applicable to private areas, which may well increase in importance.

THE SHAPE OF THE FUTURE

Since outdoor recreation is but a part of the total life of the nation, and since the demand for outdoor recreation will be determined in large measure by factors external to recreation itself, a brief consideration of our social and economic structure may be helpful at the outset.

Most would agree that the society and economy of the United States during the next several decades will evolve gradually, and in directions now rather evident, from the present society and economy. Radical departures and drastic changes are ruled out; but continued modification, which over a period of decades will bring changes so great in magnitude as almost to be changes in kind, is definitely assumed. To anticipate a little the discussion which follows, a “more so” society and economy is forecast. There will be more people, more income, more leisure, more travel, more opportunity for individual choice and growth, and more varied activities generally. But the change each year will be comparatively modest; the forecast is evolution, not revolution. We also assume
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that developments in science and technology will be evolutionary in nature. A constantly increasing volume and variety of consumer goods is probable. Some of these goods will add to the enjoyment of outdoor recreation; others will compete with recreation for the time, interest, and money of the average citizen.

Of prime importance among the factors affecting outdoor recreation are population trends. Steady growth in population is probably the most persistent social change in this country. But growth is not the only kind of population change that has an impact on the recreation situation. People are also becoming better educated and healthier. Shifts are taking place in the age distribution of people and in their locations or places of residence. This last includes the steady movement of people westward and the all-important movement of people from rural areas to urban areas. These trends have been subject to minor fluctuations, but the directions are clearly indicated by long periods of observation and they will surely continue.

Another important change is the increase in leisure time (a subject explored in more detail in Chapter 2). The average workweek has decreased from around 70 hours in 1850 to about 40 hours today, and there are signs that it may well become shorter in the future. Changes are also occurring in the timing and sizes of pieces of leisure. Annual vacations are becoming the rule for workers in nearly all occupations, and the average length is growing. Retirement years are also increasing owing to increased longevity and changes in retirement programs. Again, the future will see more changes in the amount and arrangement of leisure time.

The population is also becoming more mobile. Total travel per capita has increased from around 480 miles annually in 1900 to over 5,000 miles in 1956. Better roads, more automobiles, and the airplane are among the contributing factors. This upward trend is also expected to continue.

Incomes are also increasing. The trends here, though more irregular than others, are clearly upward, and are expected to continue. Per capita disposable incomes have increased, in 1958 dollars, from about $1,236 in 1929 to $2,200 in 1965.3 Along with changes in average incomes, there are shifts in the distribution of income, which make it economically possible for more and more people to engage in different kinds of outdoor activity.

The indications are imposingly those of a more-so society. And so it is with recreation. Attendance and use figures for outdoor areas are

already reflecting the trends of related factors and are rising at continued high rates. National park attendance rose from about a million in 1920 to 102 million in 1964. Total state park attendance increased from about 69 million to 285 million over the years 1942 to 1962. Some areas, particularly those which are water-oriented, are experiencing even higher rates of increase in use. In view of the trends in recreation participation and in the factors having a direct relationship to outdoor recreation, greater pressures on recreation resources seem inevitable.

A FEW DEFINITIONS

Discussion about recreation matters has been plagued by much misunderstanding and vagueness, in no small part because the same word means quite different things to different people. For this reason, a few definitions seem desirable; those that follow are a prelude to discussion in following chapters.

Recreation, as the word is used in this book, means activity (or planned inactivity) undertaken because one wants to do it. In a deeper psychological sense, recreation refers to the human emotional and inspirational experience arising out of the recreation act; we use the latter to stand for the whole. Recreation contrasts with work, which is done primarily to earn money or otherwise to provide the "necessities" of life, or what have come to be so considered, for one's self and one's family. It also contrasts with the mechanics of life, such as eating, sleeping, housekeeping, and personal care. There is no sharp line between recreation and all other activities. The same activity may be work at some times and recreation at others. Cooking, dressmaking, embroidery, furniture making, and other specific activities may fall into either classification. Even some jobs which are the chief source of income may be essentially recreation. One college professor friend of the authors has admitted that, had he other income, he would gladly pay for the opportunity to do a modest amount of college teaching.

The distinguishing characteristic of recreation is not the activity itself but the attitude with which it is undertaken. When there is little or no feeling of compulsion or "ought to," an activity (or inactivity) is almost surely recreation. In the modern, complex world, where so many aspects

\[2\] Others have included as leisure, and hence perhaps inferentially as recreation, time spent eating and sometimes in other activities that would be excluded by the above definition. For instance, see George A. Lundberg, Mirra Komarovsky, and Mary Alice McInerny, "The Amount and Uses of Leisure," in Leisure: A Suburban Study (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934). Reprinted in Eric Larrabee and Rolf Meyersohn, ed., Mass Leisure (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1958).
of life are socially ordered, recreation is often a major opportunity for self-expression. However, elements of social compulsion are present even for recreation, as we shall see in later chapters.

Recreation is closely related to leisure. Briefly, if leisure is taken to mean time in which activities (or inactivity) consciously decided upon are undertaken, then the relation of recreation and leisure is very close. On this basis, mere idleness is neither leisure nor recreation.

Outdoor recreation is simply recreation that is typically carried on outdoors. As such, it contrasts with the various forms of recreation typically carried on indoors. There are some borderline activities, that can take place either outdoors or indoors. Basketball courts are typically indoors, yet on occasion are outdoors. Track activities are typically outdoors, yet often are held indoors. Outdoor recreation obviously requires space and resources, sometimes large quantities, for its enjoyment. Some kinds are best carried on where the natural landscape has had the minimum modification, others require extensive investment.

Natural resources for outdoor recreation include areas of land, bodies of water, forests, swamps, and other natural features, and even air spaces, which are in demand for outdoor recreation or likely to become so. The physical characteristics of these natural elements of the landscape affect their use for outdoor recreation, but they become resources for outdoor recreation only as they are useful for this purpose. Land, water, forests, and other natural features which for any reason are not or cannot be used for recreation are not part of the present outdoor recreation resource, although they may have future value for this purpose. In this respect, outdoor recreation is no different from any other use of natural resources such as farming, forestry, grazing, and mining. There is nothing in the physical landscape or features of any particular piece of land or body of water that makes it a recreation resource; it is the combination of the natural qualities and the ability and desire of man to use it, that makes a resource out of what otherwise may be a more or less meaningless combination of rocks, soil, and trees.

Recreation activities include those specific actions undertaken as part of recreation, whether indoors or outdoors. Some activities are relatively formal, as is the case with many organized games and other group activities. But most activities—picnics, hikes, fishing expeditions, and many others—are characterized by their informality. Very often it is the informality, the formlessness, the absence of order and pressure, and the spontaneity that give outdoor recreation its appeal and its value. In our modern urban and industrial society the job and the workday have relatively a lot of order and form, and as a relief from them many
people seek outdoor recreation. This is one reason why outdoor recreation "activity" must always include a large measure of inactivity; many people stress the opportunity merely to lie around, loaf, talk informally, or merely rest.

**PLAN OF THIS BOOK**

As a means of organizing ideas and facts on this general subject, we have divided this book into five major parts and into sixteen chapters. There is to us, and we hope to our readers as well, a logical progression from chapter to chapter.

*Part I: The Setting* includes three relatively short chapters. There is this introductory one, with a little general setting and some definitions. Chapter 2 considers leisure in modest detail; recreation is so peculiarly a time-oriented activity, that it seems essential to consider first the limitations of time available for recreation. There has been much interest, and much misunderstanding, about leisure. On the one hand, we judge there will be more leisure in the future, as a result of numerous aspects of modern life which are described in the chapter; but, on the other hand, we judge that productive work to earn income will still dominate most of the life span for most people, either for themselves or for their married partner. Outdoor recreation will be a growing use of leisure, but only one use of it. In Chapter 3, we describe some general aspects of outdoor recreation, including the "whole experience" and the nature of outdoor recreation areas, which are basic to the analysis of later chapters.

*Part II: Demands for Outdoor Recreation* is the longest single part in the book, and in some respects the most important part. In our judgment, demand for recreation is always important and sometimes it is crucial, but it has often been neglected. Although demand and supply are closely interrelated, as is pointed out at several places in this part, here we focus on demand, leaving a more detailed consideration of supply for later.

Chapter 4, *Some Elements of Recreation Demand*, is designed to show the noneconomist how the powerful tool of demand analysis, developed by economists over several decades, can help solve some of the difficult problems existing in outdoor recreation. The best solution to such practical problems as to how much land to buy for parks, its best location, the allocation of costs among project purposes, the best level of development of a park, and others can often be facilitated by a good demand analysis. The chapter is also designed to show economists some of the practical problems within recreation to which demand curve
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analysis is applicable. Chapter 5, The Nature of the Demand for Outdoor Recreation, applies this general demand approach to specific recreation situations of the general kinds described in Chapter 3, with illustrative examples. The value and limitations of this demand approach are also discussed here.

In Chapter 6, Behavior of Some Causal Factors in Demand, we temporarily put aside the analytical demand approach, to look again and in more detail at some of the factors which have underlain demand for outdoor recreation in the past—population, leisure, transportation, and income, which we had more briefly mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 7, Alternative Methods of Estimating Future Use, takes up a number of alternative ways of making the necessary but difficult projections of future use which must underlie the planning of any outdoor recreation area. All the methods we consider are based to some degree on the demand analysis of preceding chapters. No method is infallible; each method considered may have value under some circumstances. The difficulties of projection lie not in the lack of suitable methodology, but rather in the dynamics and uncertainty of the future.

Part III: Recreation Resources is largely concerned with resource supply aspects of outdoor recreation. Chapter 8, Use of Resources for Recreation, applies economic concepts about resources, which have proven fruitful for other uses, to the problems of recreation. Chapter 9 deals with preservation of recreation quality, a matter that must receive much more attention if increasing use is not to be offset by declining quality. Chapter 10, Existing Areas and Their Use, is primarily factual and descriptive, summarizing data from a number of sources. But the synthesis of these data produces some new conclusions about the regional distribution of recreational resources in relation to need.

Part IV: Some Economic Considerations brings the whole demand and supply approach to outdoor recreation a little closer to the solution of a number of current policy issues. Chapter 11, The Value of Land and Water Resources When Used for Recreation, considers the best methods of measuring these values in ways that will be comparable with value measurements for competing uses of the same resources. Chapter 12, Economic Impacts of Outdoor Recreation on Local Areas, gets into a subject of intense interest to localities, regions, states, and even the national government. How far can outdoor recreation provide economic salvation to depressed areas? (The answer: often, not very far.) Chapter 13, Cost and Investment Considerations in Providing Public Outdoor Recreation Facilities, provides some guidelines for investment decisions. In Chapter 14, Pricing and Paying for Public Outdoor Recreation Facilities, the inescapable problems of who pays and how, are con-
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sidered in modest detail; issues and methods of analysis are presented, not pat answers.

Part V: Outdoor Recreation for the Future is the brief concluding part. Chapter 15, Research for Outdoor Recreation, analyzes the need for research in this general field, makes a number of suggestions for lines of research, and some suggestions about how best to secure the desired research. Chapter 16, Major Issues of Public Policy, seeks to pose, as sharply and clearly as possible, the really significant issues of public policy; but it does not try to answer these issues, much less to advocate a line of action.