

WASO SOCIAL SCIENCE PROGRAM

G/20/91 #44

ASSESSING THE BENEFITS OF PARKS

Park plan means tourism, jobs, pride

Recreation vs. conservation

Park: Showdown on snowmobiling

**Recreation trends and
public lands tourism**

Rhetoric Easier Than Action on Environment

Tons of trampling tourists

**The federal role in outdoor
recreation**

**Parks' neighbors buried
under tourism 'slop-over'**

**Visitors
set sights on
amenities**

VOICES/Do you like the way the national parks are run?



United States Department of the Interior



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20013-7127

IN REPLY REFER TO:

June 20, 1991

Memorandum

To: Park Superintendents

From: Assistant to the Director for Science and Technology

Subject: **ASSESSING THE BENEFITS OF NPS RECREATIONAL, INTERPRETIVE AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS**

This memorandum deals with the BENEFITS derived from recreation programs and leisure services offered by the national parks. These benefits include considerably more than just the personal benefits associated with providing a quality experience to visitors. They include, in addition, various socio-cultural benefits, (e.g., a better appreciation of our nation's heritage), economic benefits (e.g., contributions to local, regional and national economic growth), and environmental benefits (e.g., enhanced environmental awareness and stewardship). While each of us is aware that recreational and leisure time activities in national parks contribute in many different ways to the good of individuals, local communities and society at large, most of us don't think much about these matters, probably because it often is quite difficult to quantify the values of intrinsic benefits. For example, what is it worth for a family unit to be brought closer together via a park wilderness experience; or what is the value of having visitors better understand ecosystem processes or the importance of preserving threatened and endangered native species?

Still, by considering a broad array of such recreation-related benefits, we can accomplish a number of things: First, we can develop for ourselves, and convey to others, a better appreciation of the many diverse and important ways that the national parks contribute to people's lives. Second, we can provide a more systematic framework for determining the full value or worth of the national parks; this information will be of use to planners who are preparing benefit/cost analyses, or to managers who may wish to quantify the value of the visitor experience provided through recreational, interpretive and educational programs. Third, by considering a broad spectrum of benefits that derive from park activities, we can provide useful information that will help Superintendents select and deliver leisure services so as to maximize TOTAL BENEFITS to visitors, local communities, and the environment, as versus focusing on recreation opportunities that emphasize the immediate enjoyment or pleasure experienced by individual visitors. And finally, it is important to remember that we must compete with many other programs for public support and dollars, and that by documenting the broad range of immediate and longer term, direct and intrinsic benefits that derive from park activities, we can provide a better and more complete justification for future funding support for NPS programs.

The discussion that follows is concerned with such matters, specifically with increasing our recognition and understanding of the wide array of benefits attributable to NPS parks and park programs.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dick Briceland". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "D" and "B".

Richard H. Briceland

Attachment

ASSESSING THE BENEFITS OF NPS RECREATIONAL, INTERPRETIVE AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Three years ago, a group of university researchers, state and Federal government personnel, and individuals from the recreation industry met in Snowbird, Utah, to discuss what was known about benefits that derive from individual participation in leisure time activities. ("The Benefits of Leisure," Driver et al, in press). Three weeks ago, a second group met in Estes Park, Colorado, to discuss ways in which managers, planners and recreational professionals can use information about the benefits of leisure activities to help make informed management decisions about the selection, design and delivery of recreation programs. For the NPS, the relevance of this work is that if we can provide Superintendents with good information about the benefits of the leisure services delivered to park visitors, as well as information about the value or worth of those leisure benefits, this potentially could help Superintendents determine which recreational opportunities to provide, how to prioritize and allocate resources for the delivery of recreational services, and how to better construct and justify budgets for recreation activities and programs. Out of this BENEFITS-BASED APPROACH to leisure activities are evolving some new techniques that I think will enable Superintendents and recreation planners to better evaluate different options for delivering leisure services to park visitors. What I am talking about here is simple in concept, but may be difficult to implement because some of the most important benefits that visitors derive from their visits to national parks are hard to quantify and assign measures of worth or value to.

Let me explain this concept more fully. Park managers currently provide certain ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES to visitors . . . i.e., opportunities for hiking, sightseeing, backpacking, camping, viewing historic sites, etc. Associated with these various recreation activities are a set of EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES that each visitor personally can enjoy . . . inspiration, solitude, challenge, awe, grandeur, humbleness, quiet, peacefulness, etc. These experiential feelings are measured by a visitor's individual response (psychological, physiological, spiritual, etc.) to a situation or setting provided in a park.

When we currently develop a General Management Plan for a park, we usually start with a set of visitor experiences that we wish to provide based on factors such as the unique features or attributes of the site, specific objectives prescribed by the park's enabling legislation, the capacity of the site to accommodate various recreational activities, operational considerations such as visitor safety, and general management objectives for the area. Furthermore, when we attempt to assess whether or not the park is fulfilling its desired mission, we do so by measuring the quality of the visitor experience through visitor survey questionnaires. So, in large measure, we currently select, design and deliver recreational opportunities based on the kind of visitor experience that we wish to offer and the quality of the visitor experience that we wish to provide.

What the BENEFITS-BASED APPROACH does is to broaden our perspective so as to include consideration not only of the visitor experiences we offer, but also consideration of the benefits that derive from those experiences. . . i.e.,



In other words, rather than selecting, designing and delivering leisure services so as to optimize the visitor experience, we instead could select, design and deliver our leisure services programs so as to optimize the overall benefits of those programs.

While visitor experiences are individual in character and result from personal responses to recreational opportunities, the benefits that derive from participation in recreational activities in parks are much more encompassing and include not only personal benefits, but also socio-cultural benefits, economic benefits and environmental benefits. Under the **BENEFITS-BASED APPROACH**, when we assess the value or worth of a park's recreational opportunities, we can account for the full range of direct and intrinsic benefits associated with those leisure activities. For example:

Personal benefits associated with participation in park recreation activities include:

- . . better physical health
- . . better mental state
- . . enhanced self-image/self-esteem
- . . relief from everyday stress
- . . improved mood/emotions
- . . enhanced self-reliance
- . . quality of life satisfaction
- . . improved sense of freedom
- . . improved sense of control.

Socio-cultural benefits associated with participation in park recreation activities include:

- . . better historical awareness and appreciation
- . . enhanced ethnic and cultural identity
- . . improved family bonding and cohesion
- . . increased pride in the nation's heritage
- . . enhanced sense of cultural stability.

Economic benefits associated with participation in park recreation activities include:

- . . increased local and regional economic activity
- . . contribution to net national economic development
- . . contribution to net balance of payments
- . . increased tax revenues
- . . less work absenteeism and job turnover
- . . increased productivity
- . . increased employment opportunities.
- . . reduced health costs

Environmental benefits associated with participation in park recreation activities include:

- . . increased environmental awareness and stewardship
- . . enhanced preservation and environmental ethic
- . . increased understanding of natural processes and species diversity
- . . increased understanding and appreciation of human dependency
- . . increased political involvement in environmental issues
- . . increased understanding of the importance of ecosystem protection.

As noted above, the value or worth of certain of these benefits can be difficult to calculate, just as it is difficult to determine the value of wildlife, or pastoral scenes, or wilderness areas, or irreplaceable historic or cultural treasures, or the value of intrinsic experiential qualities such as solitude, exhilaration, or contentment. But clearly there are ways to proceed . . . for example by determining an individual's willingness to pay for a leisure service or recreational opportunity that that individual perceives to be desirable or needed and that results in a personal benefit, a socio-cultural benefit, an economic benefit, or an environmental benefit. We often are aware of such benefits, but frequently do not pay much attention to them except perhaps through a sort of intuitive recognition that they exist and have intrinsic value.

Just as managers can provide recreational activity opportunities (hiking, fishing, rock climbing, etc.) or experience opportunities (quiet, solitude, inspiration, etc.), so managers also can offer recreation and leisure services that provide desired benefits to visitors, to society, to local communities, and to the environment. Such benefit-related recreational opportunities are referred to as benefit opportunities and include, for example, the following:

- . . opportunities for physical skills development
- . . opportunities for education
- . . opportunities for better appreciating natural resources
- . . opportunities for improving economic conditions
- . . opportunities for enhancing cultural growth in local communities
- . . opportunities for improving public health
- . . opportunities for enhancing visitor self-esteem
- . . opportunities for enhancing the likelihood of resource preservation for future generations.

When designing recreational programs, Superintendents could select the benefit opportunities that they wish to provide through park recreation activities, and then could manage their people resources, physical resources, dollar resources, and their natural and cultural resources accordingly so as to maximize those benefits. This is totally analogous to the current practice of selecting desired experience opportunities that one may wish to provide, and then managing available resources so as to achieve the desired quality of the visitor experience.

The BENEFITS-BASED APPROACH potentially is a very powerful technique. It is broader in scope than decision processes that are based on quantifying the values of either recreational activities or visitor recreational experiences. It will provide

Superintendents with better data on which to compare and judge candidate alternate recreational opportunities and also will provide a much more comprehensive assessment of the value of various recreational or leisure service alternatives.

As a final comment, I believe it would be very instructive to try out the BENEFITS-BASED APPROACH through one or two NPS pilot demonstration projects or GMP planning projects, the objective being to see how a better understanding of the worth or value of the benefits associated with various recreation alternatives might impact our selection of and delivery of visitor recreation programs and leisure services. This is something that perhaps we could work out in coordination with the DSC and the Office of Interpretation. If any Superintendents have an interest in participating in such a project, please let me know.