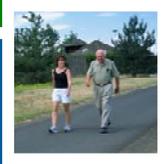




Defining and Measuring Success: The Role of State Government in Outdoor Recreation

A State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning Document



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2 Current Recreation Participation

Recreation reflects Washington’s changing population. A few decades ago, residents expected to live in a rural state and enjoy the benefits of a resource-based economy. Today, the state’s population lives “in town,” participating in an economy that has become service and technology oriented. Recreation trends reflect these changes.

A survey conducted for this report yielded data on no fewer than 170 activities in 15 major categories, and new variations and specialization in many categories are appearing regularly. The same categories have been used in two surveys.⁵ The following table summarizes the results of two surveys.

Participation Survey Results 2002 and 2007

Rank	Reported in 2002	Reported in 2007
1	Walking-hiking	Walking-hiking
2	Team-individual sports	Team-individual sports
3	Nature (photography-gardening)	Nature (photography, gardening)
4	Sightseeing	Picnicking
5	Bicycle riding	Indoor activities (classes, events)
6	Indoor	Water activities
7	Picnicking	Sightseeing
8	Water activities	Bicycle riding
9	Snow-ice activities	ORV use
10	Fishing	Snow-ice activities
11	Camping	Camping
12	ORV use	Fishing
13	Hunting-shooting	Hunting-shooting
14	Equestrian activities	Equestrian activities
15	Air activities	Air activities

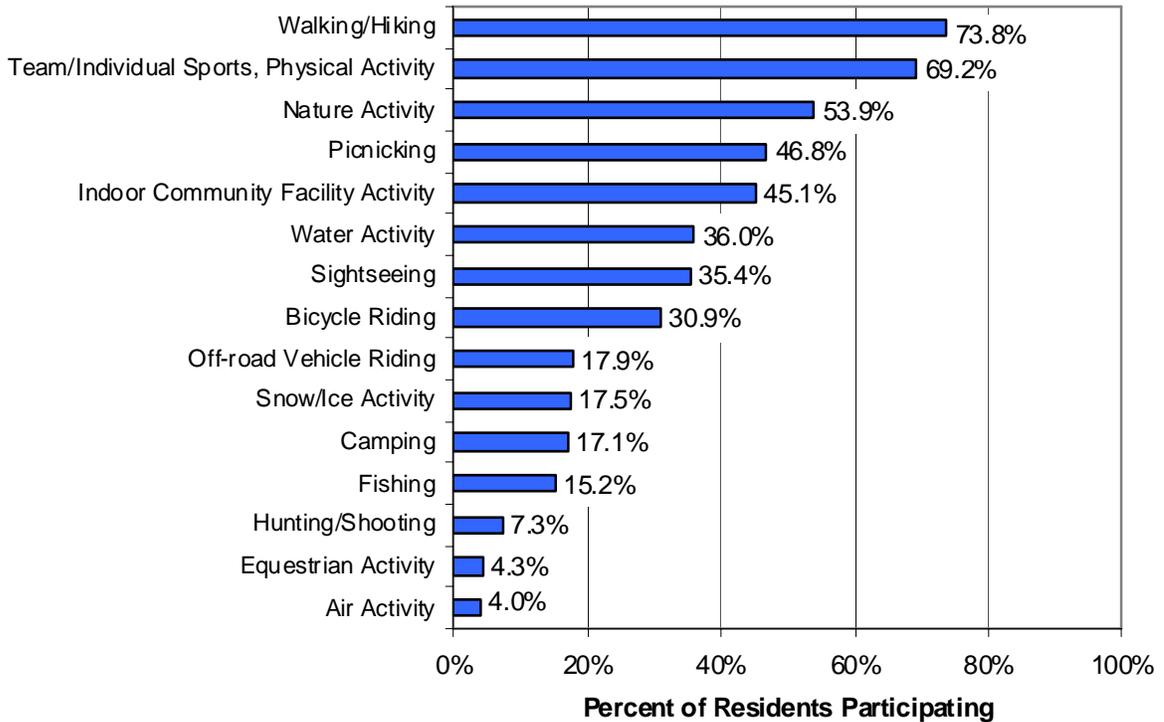
Comparing the results provides indicators of change, but because the two surveys were done differently, the results cannot be considered a clear trend.

⁵ 2002 results are from a diary-based statewide panel; 2007 results are from a telephone survey.



More detail from the 2007 survey is reported below.⁶

Ranking of Major Activity Areas, 2006-07



Important Resource Recreation Activities

Observing and photographing nature

Nearly a third of the population (31 percent) reports participation, most prominent among adults 50-64. There is less participation among younger people. Women are more likely to participate than men.

There is a need for further research on how women might be willing to pay to support non-consumptive fish and wildlife activities.

Sightseeing

Together, Washingtonians went sightseeing more than 12 million times during the survey year. The most prevalent setting for sightseeing was scenic areas. Significantly more sightseeing was done in summer than in fall.

⁶ All data from 2006 *Outdoor Recreation Survey*, Clearwater Research, August 2007



Camping

Current estimates indicate that tent camping is as popular as recreational vehicle camping. Up to 24 percent of the state's residents will tent camp in July. Recreational vehicle camping peaks in September, when about 20 percent of residents participate. Asked whether they would like to do more camping, children and young adults were most likely to say yes. RCO suggests that providers exercise caution when considering development of places for more recreation vehicle campers. More research is advised.

Hiking

Hiking is popular statewide, with about 20 percent of the population participating. Hiking draws people with higher incomes, and males are more likely to hike than females. Hiking takes place year-round, with summer the most likely season.

Fishing

Data estimates that 16 percent of the state's residents fish from a boat or bank. Fishing is done primarily by men. When asked about the desire to fish more, women were likely to say no. Related research done by the Oregon State Marine Board suggests that women are more likely to go boating if clean sanitary facilities are available. RCO recommends investigation of the needs suggested by women.

Off-road vehicle use

The data showed 13 percent of the state's residents drive 4x4 vehicles for recreation, mostly on roads. The data does not reveal whether the 4x4 vehicles are sport utility vehicles (SUVs) or street legal, off-road ready specialty vehicles. Another 7 percent of residents report using all terrain vehicles (ATVs), mostly on rural trails, interpreted here as likely a combination of user-made and official trails, mostly on public lands. Off-road motorcycling has roughly 5 percent to 6 percent participation, predominantly male. There is a noticeable spike in the participation of teenage riders.

Hunting

Hunting participation is 6 percent of state residents in peak season, overwhelmingly practiced by men. License sales appear to be steady, but are shrinking as a percent of population. Consistent with national trends, increased participation is highly unlikely as the state's population continues a general rural-to-urban migration.



Equestrian activities

About 4 percent of Washington residents rode horses in an average month in 2006. Riding at stables and grounds was more likely than trail riding. Considering people reporting all types of riding and settings, the age groups with the highest prevalence of horseback riding were children under 10 (9 percent) and children 11 to 17 (8.3 percent).

Important Facility-Based Recreation Activities

Most facility-based recreation is managed by local agencies.

Walking

Walking is hugely popular, with 67 percent participation, common to all ages, in all regions. Most walking happens on the transportation system: sidewalks, streets, roads. People prefer to walk on unpaved paths and sidewalks. When planning trails or paths, it is of interest to know that research done for the Washington Department of Transportation found that the public will support new facilities when they offer a new, safe place to walk.⁷ Most walks are short: averaging about 1.9 miles.⁸

Sports

Playground use was measured under the “sport” category, and turned out to be the number one “sport” statewide. Roughly the same number of people use playgrounds at parks as at schools. Playgrounds host 34 percent of the population, with girls most likely to use them.

More typical sports participation includes swimming at a pool (23 percent statewide participation), basketball (16 percent), soccer (13 percent), baseball (9 percent), football (7 percent), and softball (5 percent). Field sports tend to compete with one another for available facilities, with apparent demand especially high for practice. This explains why the appearance of a relatively new sport with low participation (for example, lacrosse, with roughly 2 percent statewide participation) will have a relatively high impact on local facilities and programs.

⁷ *Public Attitude Survey of Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning*, Gilmore Research, May 2007

⁸ *Ibid*



Cycling

About 32 percent of the state's residents report that they bicycle at least once a year. Most riding is done by children ages 10 and younger, and most riding takes place on roads and streets. Only about 4 percent ride on forest or mountain trails, and less than 1 percent ride on overnight or longer tours. A typical bicycle ride is about 6.5 miles.⁹

Water activities

Swimming at a pool is the most popular form of water activity. Next are beachcombing, swimming or wading at a beach, and motor boating.

Confirming the State's Interest in Recreation

Recreation offers more than play. Recreation, as physical activity, has a direct contribution to public health. Walking and bicycling contributes to personal mobility.

It is in the state's interest to encourage local activity by supporting local facilities. Support of parks and sports facilities is obvious. Less obvious is that support for school facilities including playgrounds and sports fields will result in increased opportunities for recreation and physical activity. A state policy requiring that publicly funded school facilities be made available for after school use is worth exploration. Likewise, encouraging walking and cycling on and to local facilities (e.g., a safe route to school that uses a grade-separated trail) addresses multiple priorities and public benefits.

Challenges

Modest, average participation in individual categories, if considered in isolation, may mask the true impact of recreation. Most activity usually happens "all at once," usually on weekends, in often-unknown combinations of activity types. Some of the activities taking place concurrently on state lands are challenging to manage, while others are conflicting with each other or with the primary purpose of resource management.

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission requires reservations months ahead of peak season. The extent of user-made trails on Department of Natural Resource-managed land may be 250 percent or more than the official inventory. As the Department of

⁹ *Public Attitude Survey of Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning*, Gilmore Research, May 2007.



Natural Resources' practice has been to adapt as many user-made trails into its official system as possible, the potential future budget impact is large. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's wildlife recreation lands often see unintended, undesirable uses, from poaching to garbage dumping.

The on-the-ground stress has been summarized by the Office of Financial Management (*Priorities of Government*, November 2006): "A lack of resources devoted to an on-the-ground management presence at state-owned recreation sites has resulted in unquantified but potentially significant levels of inappropriate public use and impacts. Examples include informal trails and campsites on trust and wildlife lands that degrade trust assets, create environmental damage, and, in extreme cases, result in deaths and injuries to the recreationists themselves."