

Oregon's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

Outdoor Recreation and an Aging Oregon Population

Final Summary Report

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Kreg Lindberg
Oregon State University – Cascades Campus
2600 NW College Way
Bend, OR 97701

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In preparation for the 2008-2012 Oregon State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning (SCORP) plan, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) contracted Oregon State University (OSU) to conduct a survey of “baby boomers” and “pre boomers.” In this study, baby boomers, or simply boomers, are Oregon residents born between 1946 through 1964, while pre-boomers are Oregon residents born between 1926 and 1945.

Information about the recreation patterns of an aging population can help planners provide the recreation opportunities Oregonians seek. Recreation demand may increase as population increases or change as new activities are introduced (e.g., mountain biking and snowboarding). The boomer generation introduces a new dynamic. Due to the numeric size of this generation, it will create a different balance between 1) increased demand as youth begin engaging in outdoor recreation and 2) decreased demand as the elderly age. Moreover, if the conventional wisdom that boomers will remain physically active is true, the pattern of demand across recreation activities will change. The combination of these forces may lead to increased demand for physically active recreation opportunities.

The survey focused on three broad issues:

- Current and expected future participation in outdoor recreation activities.
- Migration and the factors affecting it.
- Volunteerism.

Survey results can help recreation professionals provide the recreation opportunities that boomers and pre-boomers currently seek and expect to seek in the future. Migration and volunteerism results help recreation professionals identify where these opportunities will be demanded (e.g., more in migration destinations than in origins) and how to involve volunteers in providing recreation and other services. This report will be supplemented by a separate report focusing on migration issues; that report will use migration survey responses as well as analysis of secondary migration data.

Survey results can be used by state, local, and federal agencies to meet future outdoor recreation needs as Oregon’s population ages. Results can also identify trends that can provide opportunities for the private sector.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted using a random sample of boomers and pre-boomers, with names and addresses based on DMV records. In order to ensure sufficient responses within specific population groups, the sample was stratified (split) using three criteria:

- Generation: boomers vs. pre-boomers.
- Migration status: aging in place vs. intra-state migrants vs. inter-state migrants.
- Location: by county or groups of counties.

A total of 4,562 surveys were mailed, with 1,219 returned. Adjusting for undeliverables, there was a 31% response rate. U.S. Census and Portland State University population data were used to adjust for the stratification and non-response. Results presented here and in the full report reflect this weighting and represent the diversity of the Oregon boomer and pre-boomer population.

OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTICIPATION

Overall changes

The survey began by asking how overall participation in outdoor recreation has changed in the past five years. Respondents are more likely to be spending less time rather than more time engaged in outdoor recreation:

- 22% spend more time engaged in outdoor recreation currently than they did 5 years ago.
- 46% spend about the same amount of time.
- 32% spend less time.

Older respondents are much more likely than others to be spending less time. This is consistent with the expectation that recreation participation declines with age despite greater free time in retirement. Likewise, women and persons in lower income households are more likely than others to be spending less time.

For those that currently spend more time in outdoor recreation, retirement and more available time are the reasons given. Age, physical limitations, health, and work commitments are the reasons for those that currently spend less time.

Looking to the future, respondents are more likely to expect an increase rather than a decrease in their outdoor recreation activities:

- 45% expect to spend more time engaged in outdoor recreation 10 years from now.
- 41% expect to spend about the same amount of time.
- 14% expect to spend less time.

Similar to results for past transitions, older, female, and low income respondents are more likely than others to expect to spend less time in the future.

Retirement and more available time are the reasons given for those that expect to spend more time in outdoor recreation. Age and physical limitations are the reasons given by those that expect to spend less time.

Respondents reported how many days they spent engaging in each of 54 activities during the past year. These activities range from physically easy (e.g., picnicking or walking on sidewalks) to physically demanding (e.g., rock climbing or whitewater kayaking). The participation intensity for individuals is the total number of days each individual spent engaged in outdoor recreation, summed across all 54 activities. The participation rate for individuals is the total number of activities each person engaged in at least once during the year.

Participation intensity and rate differ only modestly across genders. Participation intensity tends to peak at age 45-49, decline with age, and then increase in the late 70s – though this increase appears due to a few particularly active individuals. Participation rate also tends to peak at age 45-49 and then slowly decline with age. This indicates that Oregonians are “giving up” some activities as they age. Participation intensity and rate both increase with income.

Respondents self-reported their health using five categories from excellent to poor. As expected, both recreation intensity and rate decrease with declining health. They also decrease with retirement. The relationship between age, income, health, and participation is complex, but results suggest that income decreases and health declines with aging, and this combination of factors leads to reduced recreation participation.

The results reported above support the traditional negative relationship between age and recreation activity. An important question is whether this will continue in the future. In other words, will boomers reduce their participation as they age, following the example of previous generations? Forecasting can be difficult and uncertain, but respondents are more likely to forecast future increases in overall participation than future decreases (45% versus 14%). Respondents also were asked to forecast their participation in each of the 54 specific activities. On average across all activities, respondents expect to spend 28% more days recreating 10 years from now than they do currently. In other words, boomers expect to “break the trend” of decreasing recreation with age. This provides challenges and opportunities for recreation providers.

Participation across activities

Turning to individual activities, the following are the Top 5 activities in terms of percent of respondents engaging in them at least once in the past year (activity participation rate):

- 80%, walking.
- 68%, picnicking.
- 63%, sightseeing.
- 62%, visiting historic sites.
- 54%, ocean beach activities.

The following are the Top 5 activities in terms of average number of days engaged in the activity in the past year (activity participation intensity):

- 64.3 days, walking.
- 16.2 days, bird watching.
- 12.6 days, jogging.
- 9.9 days, sightseeing.
- 7.7 days, bicycling (road / path).

Walking tops both lists. A comparison across age categories for Top 5 activities by participation intensity leads to the following conclusions:

- Walking is the top activity across all age categories (40-79).
- Jogging is a top activity between the ages of 40-59, but it is also popular for those in their 70s; only 15% of respondents in the latter age group jog, but they do so many days of the year.

- Bicycling is a top activity between the ages of 40-64.
- Sightseeing is a top activity between the ages of 45-74.
- Bird watching is a top activity between the ages of 55-79.
- RV/trailer camping is a top activity between the ages of 65-74.

Looking to the future, the following are the Top 5 activities in terms of expected increases in average number of recreation days over the next 10 years:

- 7.2 additional days, taking children/grand children to playground.
- 3.5 additional days, bicycling (road / path).
- 3.4 additional days picnicking.
- 3.3 additional days, ocean beach activities.
- 3.1 additional days, day hiking.

The following are the Top 5 activities in terms of percent increase in average number of recreation days:

- 404% increase, snowshoeing.
- 247% increase, cross-country skiing.
- 229% increase, waterfowl hunting.
- 228% increase, yurts or camper cabins.
- 170% increase, sailing.

Respondents were asked whether there was any outdoor recreation activity they would like to start doing – or do more often. Almost a third indicated that they would like to expand their participation, with non-motorized boating, hiking, cross-country skiing, and camping being the activities targeted for expansion. The factors that would help respondents participate in these activities include more time, someone to do the activity with, better health, and more facilities and information.

RECREATION MOTIVATIONS

Respondents were asked how important each of 16 motivations was when they currently engage in outdoor recreation, as well as how important they expect each to be 10 years from now. The most important current motivations are:

- To have fun.
- To be in the outdoors.

The least important motivations are:

- To meet new people.
- To experience challenge and excitement.

Looking to the future, fun and being outdoors will remain the most important motivations, but the following will increase most in importance:

- To keep fit and healthy.
- To expose your children or grandchildren to something new.

- To learn something new.
- To meet new people.

Motivations are fairly stable across the genders, but (relative to males) females tend to place higher importance on spiritual fulfillment and feeling safe and secure, while they place lower importance on challenge and excitement. Relative to retirees, respondents who are still working place higher importance on escaping the daily routine, reducing tension, and challenge.

Over half the respondents agreed that family members encourage them to engage in outdoor recreation (only 16% disagreed), while just under half agreed that friends encourage them. Two-thirds of respondents agreed that the activities they participated in as a child have helped shape their current outdoor recreation interests (15% disagreed). A clear majority (78% agreed, 6% disagreed) would like to pass their love of outdoor recreation on to their child and/or grandchild. Forty percent agreed (20% disagreed) that schools encourage their child/grandchild to participate in outdoor recreation.

AGENCY PROGRAMS AND ACTIONS

Respondents were asked their preference across characteristics of programs offered by community parks and recreation departments. A condensed question format was used in order to generate information without significantly lengthening the survey. As a result, it is possible that some respondents found the question difficult. Given this caveat, approximately one-fifth of respondents were not interested in such programs, and another quarter did not have a preference across characteristics. For those with a preference, the majority preferred programs:

- Without a guide / leader (vs. those with).
- Open to all ages (vs. limited to one's age group).
- With friends or family members (vs. everyone in program is new).
- That are physically easy (vs. physically challenging).
- That are 1-2 hours in duration (vs. whole-day).

Preferences were evenly split between weekday vs. evening or weekend programs.

Respondents indicated whether each of several management strategies would lead to a small, large, or no increase in outdoor recreation participation. The strategies that would lead to a large increase amongst the greatest percentage of respondents were:

- 42%, provide clean and well-maintained facilities.
- 39%, develop trails closer to home.
- 39%, provide more free-of-charge recreation opportunities.
- 38%, make parks safer from crime.

In general, management actions will have the greatest impact on low income and working respondents (as opposed to high income and retired respondents).

RV OWNERSHIP

As part of the participation component, respondents were asked whether they own an RV (recreational vehicle such as a camper or motor home). Frequencies across the various response options are:

- 27%, Yes
- 3%, No, but I plan to rent one on occasion
- 6%, No, but I expect to own one between now and when I retire
- 8%, No, but I expect to own one after I retire
- 56%, No, and I do not expect to ever own one

More than a quarter own an RV, and another 17% expect to rent or own one in the future. With respect to age, respondents between 65 and 74 were the most likely to currently own an RV, whereas those in their 50s were most likely to plan/expect to rent or own one. Ownership is fairly similar across income categories, but respondents with \$75,000 to \$100,000 were the most likely to currently own an RV. Relative to those still working, retirees are more likely to own an RV currently and, conversely, less likely to be planning/expecting to rent or own one.

MIGRATION

Respondents were asked about their past and expected future moves (migration). Roughly half have moved or expect to move:

- 32% have moved in the past 10 years; of those who have moved, 40% came from elsewhere in Oregon, 9% from Washington, 25% from California, and 25% from other states.
- 14% expect to move in the next 10 years; of those, 69% expect to move within Oregon.
- 47% have not moved in the past 10 years and don't expect to move in the next 10 years.

Respondents who have moved or expect to move were asked about the considerations or community characteristics that affected (or will affect) their selection of a destination community. They rated 23 potential characteristics on a scale from 1=not at all important to 5=very important. The characteristics with the highest combined 4 and 5 ratings were:

- 83%, beautiful scenery.
- 77%, low crime rates.
- 65%, high quality health care.
- 56%, low tax levels.
- 54%, general outdoor recreation opportunities.

Ratings varied across location and age, as one would expect. The following characteristics generally become more important with age:

- Proximity to assisted living facilities.
- Number of people one's age.
- Low tax levels.
- High quality health care.

The following generally become less important:

- Proximity to winter recreation activities.
- Other/general outdoor recreation activities.
- Work opportunities.

With respect to income, the following characteristics become more important as income increases:

- Golfing opportunities.
- Winter recreation opportunities.
- Other recreation opportunities.
- Four-season climate.
- Job opportunities.

The following become less important:

- Public transport.
- Number of people one's age.
- High quality assisted living facilities.
- Being near the coast.
- Being a small town.
- Low cost of housing.
- Low tax levels.

These results may be affected by the distribution of respondents. The counties with above average percents of respondent households earning \$75,000 or more are all in the Willamette Valley or in the amenity counties of Hood River or Deschutes. This may help explain the importance of winter recreation and four-season climate, and the unimportance of being near the coast.

With respect to perceived health, the following characteristics become more important as health declines:

- Assisted living facilities.
- Being near the coast.
- High quality health care.

The following become less important:

- Golf opportunities.
- Winter recreation.
- Other outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Fitness centers.
- Number of people one's age.

In short, health considerations may "drive" migration decisions for those with poor health.

VOLUNTEERISM

Respondents were asked several questions about volunteerism. Over a third (38%) volunteer in their community, with an average time commitment of 5.3 hours per week. Those that volunteer were asked the type of organization and type of activity that they mostly volunteer in. The intention was for each volunteer to pick one category for each question, but some picked more than one category, so percentages total more than 100.

- 28% volunteer with church or religious organizations.
- 27%, non-profit community organizations, such as United Way, Salvation Army, or Humane Society.
- 21%, school or youth organizations, such as high school sports/activities, Little League, or Boys & Girls Clubs.
- 10%, recreation or natural resource agency/organizations, such as community parks and recreation, watershed council, or Oregon State Parks.
- 3%, library or literacy program.
- 41%, other organizations.

With respect to the type of activity, volunteers engage in:

- 31%, participating – special events, fundraising, work projects.
- 25%, teaching / program oversight.
- 23%, leadership – including leading groups.
- 23%, labor – construction, maintenance, clean-up.
- 20%, professional – decisionmaking, managing, supervising.
- 6%, clerical – photocopy, filing, mailing.
- 3%, transport – driving vans or trucks.
- 18%, other.

In terms of demographics, males are somewhat more likely than females to volunteer (40% versus 36%), and they also volunteer more hours per week (5.9 versus 4.6). Respondents from high income households are more likely to volunteer than are respondents from low income households; however, they are likely to volunteer for fewer hours.

Of those who volunteer, 43% expect future changes in their volunteer activities, with most of the changes involving greater volunteerism: more time, more projects at current volunteer opportunity, and new volunteer opportunities. However, some respondents indicated they would have less time due to age and health reasons.

When asked what recreation or natural resource agencies can do to increase the time respondents spend volunteering with them or to attract new volunteers, the overwhelming response was to provide more information. Some respondents indicated the need for financial incentives (e.g., reduced fees for agency programs), expanded opportunities, transportation, or more professional-oriented activities.

Volunteer motivations

Respondents were asked their level of agreement with 22 statements relating to volunteering. A 7-point scale was used, from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. The greatest agreement in terms of combined percentages of 6 and 7 responses was for the following statements:

- 62%, I feel it is important to help others.
- 56%, Volunteering allows me to do something for a cause that is important to me.
- 47%, I do not have enough time to volunteer as much as I would like.
- 47%, I am genuinely concerned about the particular group I am serving.
- 45%, My volunteer experience has positively impacted my life.

These responses indicate that philanthropic motivations are more important than self-oriented motivations (e.g., volunteering helps one feel less lonely).

Agreement with the volunteerism statements is generally consistent across age groups. However, older respondents are less likely to agree with career-oriented statements, such as volunteering looking good on one's resume. They are more likely to agree that their friends volunteer and that people they know share an interest in community service. They tend to disagree that time is a constraint on volunteering.

Turning to gender, females more strongly agree than males on most items. The difference is greatest for the following items:

- Volunteering experience will look good on my resume.
- Volunteering helps me explore my own strengths.
- By volunteering I feel less lonely.
- Volunteering makes me feel needed.
- Volunteering is an important activity to the people I know best.

In terms of income, respondents in higher-income households are more likely to agree with:

- My culture values service to others.
- My volunteer experience has positively impacted my life.
- Volunteering allows me to do something for a cause that is important to me.
- I feel it is important to help others.

Respondents in low income households are more likely to agree with:

- Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.

Respondents were asked whether they prefer donating their time/skills or their money. About a quarter prefer donating time, a quarter money, and 38% both. Only 13% are unlikely to donate either.

Recreation/resource volunteers

For the 10% that volunteer for recreation or natural resource agencies, the following provides a "snapshot" of their characteristics:

- Volunteers engage in a range of activity types, with a focus on professional and labor.
- They tend to be either in their late 40s or late 50s/early 60s.
- Most are male.
- They tend to be from households with high income levels.
- About a third is retired.
- They come from a range of educational backgrounds.
- Most are in good health.

The “recreation volunteers” agree more strongly than the sample as a whole with several motivational statements, particularly:

- My volunteer experience has positively impacted my life.
- I am genuinely concerned about the particular group I am serving.
- Volunteering makes me feel better about myself.
- Volunteering helps me explore my own strengths.
- Volunteering makes me feel needed.
- Volunteering allows me to do something for a cause that is important to me.

DISABILITY

Approximately a third of respondents indicated that they or someone in their household has a disability. Of those, 81% of the disabilities were physical, 6% mental, and 13% both. Almost two-thirds indicated that the disability hampered their ability to recreate outdoors in Oregon. The most common barriers to outdoor recreation were facilities, trails, and programs that were not accessible. Only one percent of those with a disability reported that park agency employees have negative attitudes toward the disability, while nine percent reported that other visitors have negative attitudes. Those with a disability (own or household member) have a recreation participation pattern that is similar to others in terms of what activities are in their Top 5. However, those with a disability generally have lower participation rates.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Because the sample of respondents was weighted to reflect the demographic characteristics of boomers and pre-boomers in Oregon, the basic demographic characteristics of the weighted sample are not noteworthy. The following are selected results that are noteworthy.

Respondents were asked how old they are and how old they feel. A comparison of these numbers indicates that most boomers feel younger than their actual age. However, it is interesting to note that pre-boomers were similar in that regard; indeed, pre-boomers were more likely than boomers to feel more than 20 years younger than they were. In other words, the self-perception of youthfulness is not unique to boomers. The following are results for boomers;

- 8% felt 20+ years younger than their actual age.
- 34% felt 11-20 years younger.
- 21% felt 6-10 years younger.
- 12% felt 1-5 years younger.
- 17% felt actual age.
- 2% felt 1-5 years older.

- 2% felt 6-10 years older.
- 3% felt 11-20 years older.
- 1% felt 21+ years older.

Keeping in mind the adjustment to reflect statewide demographic characteristics, including income, respondents exhibited a range of household income levels, with 25% earning \$75,000 or more and 59% earning \$35,000 or more. However, a somewhat different picture emerges in terms of discretionary income. Respondents were asked to estimate their monthly discretionary income after fixed expenses such as mortgage payments and taxes. About a quarter of households reported monthly discretionary income of \$199 or less, while 55% had monthly discretionary income of \$499 or less.

Lastly, respondents reported their perceived health, with only 4% indicating poor health:

- 21%, excellent.
- 34%, very good.
- 29%, good.
- 13%, fair.
- 4%, poor.

Looking ahead 10 years, health was expected to decline, but half expected their health to remain excellent or good:

- 15%, excellent.
- 34%, very good.
- 32%, good.
- 11%, fair.
- 7%, poor.

Focusing on the 7% who expect poor health 10 years from now, women are more likely than men to fall into this category. In addition, low income respondents are far more likely than high income respondents to expect their health to be poor 10 years from now.

SUMMARY

Survey results provide a picture of the recreation, migration, and volunteerism patterns of boomers and pre-boomers. In doing so, they also provide perspective on conventional wisdoms. Responses do support the belief that boomers feel younger than they are, though this is even more true for pre-boomers. Evaluations of past changes in overall recreation participation and comparisons across age groups within the sample support the traditional concept that recreation participation declines with age. However, respondents clearly expect their participation to increase over the next 10 years, both overall and, on average, with respect to individual activities. Only time will tell whether these expectations are realized, but they are consistent with the conventional wisdom that boomers will remain physically active. The resulting increase in recreation demand provides challenges and opportunities for recreation providers.

With respect to agency actions to increase participation, the most important is to provide clean and well-maintained facilities. The next most important are to develop trails closer to home,

provide free-of-charge opportunities, and to make parks safer from crime. These actions will have a disproportionately positive effect on low-income and working Oregonians.

With respect to migration, some factors are out of human control (e.g., climate). Nonetheless, the most important factors affecting migration can be managed to varying degrees. These factors include beautiful scenery and outdoor recreation opportunities, which are affected by local, state, and federal land management agencies.

Lastly, more than a third of respondents volunteer, and they expect their involvement to increase in the future. Opportunities to utilize professional skills is important for some, but for many access to information about volunteer opportunities is the most important avenue for increasing volunteer involvement.