

UNIT 1

Foundations of Natural Resource Recreation Planning

The objective of Unit 1 is to ground the student in the basics of leisure/recreation history and philosophy, natural resource history and philosophy, and to introduce key natural resource recreation planning and management concepts, such as recreation carrying capacity, quality, diversity, conflict, crowding, and specialization. This unit will serve as leveling material for students unfamiliar with the field of natural resource recreation and as a refresher for those with a background in the field. In any event, the material in Unit 1 comprises a very important primer for the remainder of the course.

The Kelly and Freysinger (2000) reading provides a quick introduction to the concepts of recreation, leisure, and play, as well as the history of leisure and the basics of outdoor recreation. Students with academic training in recreation and leisure may want to skim this reading; others will need to read it carefully in order to absorb the basic concepts and terminology associated with the field of recreation.

Contemporary natural resource management and planning in the U.S. has its roots in the philosophies of utilitarian conservation and romantic preservation. As discussed by Wellman (1987), the long standing debate in natural resource policy, management, and planning is between those who want to scientifically manage natural landscapes for economic gain (utilitarian conservation) and those who want landscapes preserved in a natural (or an idealized version of a natural) state, which is referred to as romantic preservation. The settings and actors in these debates have changed since the days of Marsh, Thoreau, Muir, and other 19th century figures, but, as Wellman points out, the script—development versus preservation—is essentially the same.

The Zinser (1995) reading extends the discussion of history and philosophy well into the late 20th century and characterizes the conservation movement as a series of waves. The first wave of the conservation movement is associated with the presidency of Teddy Roosevelt in the early 1900s and included such watershed events as the destruction of Hetch-Hetchy Valley in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California, the creation by Congress of the U.S. Forest Service (1905) and the National Park Service (1916), and the passage of the Antiquities Act (1906) and the Weeks Act (1911).

According to Zinser, the second wave of the conservation movement coincided with the New Deal era of Franklin Roosevelt and included the passage of legislation and the creation of government agencies with a utilitarian conservation and/or a recreation resource development agenda. The third wave of the conservation movement started in the early 1960s and lasted until the beginning of presidency of Ronald Reagan (1981). It included the passage of various laws which are important to the field of natural resource recreation, including the Wilderness Act (1964), the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (1965), the National Trails System Act (1968), the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1968), the National Forest Management Act (1976), and others. Zinser's treatment of this time period probably over-emphasizes the role of the presidency (and under-

emphasizes the role of Congress and interest groups) in successful passage of these laws and a host of programs associated with them. The Zinser reading ends with the statement, “The fourth wave of conservation has not yet started in the U.S.”

A key component of Unit 1 deals with contemporary natural resource planning and management concepts, such as recreation carrying capacity, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, quality, diversity, crowding, conflict, and specialization. The Manning (1998) reading is perhaps the best single source of information on these subjects. As Manning suggests, the focus of natural resource recreation planning and management is on providing the visitor with high quality recreation opportunities. To accomplish this, planners and managers may find clues in the large body of applied research in the field of natural resource recreation. Manning distills this research into a set of principles that should be carefully considered by planners and managers. The principles include:

Outdoor recreation should be considered within a threefold framework of concerns: the natural environment, the social environment, and the managerial environment. The natural environment is comprised of the biophysical resources (e.g., soil morphology, vegetative cover, species diversity, etc.) upon which natural resource recreation occurs. These may be changed by even light levels of use. The social environment includes the characteristics, needs, and wants of visitors, a topic thoroughly explored in numerous chapters of the book. The managerial environment includes the agency’s mission statement, legal directives, policies and regulations, and financial and personnel constraints. As suggested by Manning, each component holds important implications for planning and managing natural resource recreation opportunities and experiences.

Diversity is needed in outdoor recreation opportunities. Research indicates that visitors are diverse in socioeconomic and cultural characteristics, use and setting preferences, experience level, motivations, sensitivity to crowding and conflict, etc. It is logical to assume that recreation opportunities must be diverse and that a spectrum of opportunities needs to be planned for and managed across a system of parks and recreation areas to ensure that overall visitor satisfaction is achieved.

Recreation planning and management should be conducted thoughtfully but deliberately. As indicated by Manning, there can be significant social problems associated with natural resource recreation, including crowding and conflict between users. Without planning and management, these problems can be magnified. Planning and management frequently involves making value judgements about the allocation of scarce recreation resources. But these judgements can and should be made based on the best available information about visitors and biophysical resources, rather than by gut instinct or seat-of-the-pants decision making.

(Related to the previous principle:) *A concerted effort is needed to obtain systematic and objective information about and from visitors.* Research indicates that managers and visitors have different perception of outdoor recreation. Planners and managers need to collect information from visitors about what defines satisfying recreation experiences.

To accomplish this planners and managers should seek to implement research programs in their parks/agencies.

Outdoor recreation is most appropriately defined in terms of motivations and benefits rather than participation in activities. Motivations and benefits drive participation. Planning and management should focus on the motivations behind participation and on the personal, community, and economic benefits associated with participation.

Outdoor recreation opportunities should be planned and managed for identifiable segments of the visitor population. Research indicates that visitors can be segmented into relatively homogenous groups based on such variables as experiences, motivations, preferences, and sensitivity to crowding and conflict. By planning and managing for segments, visitor satisfaction can be maximized.

Quality in outdoor recreation can be defined as the degree to which recreation opportunities provide the experiences for which they are planned and managed. This principle implies that recreation planners and managers deliberately design and manage for a diversity of opportunities so that whatever opportunity the visitor chooses to “plug into,” he or she has the possibility of a high quality experience.

Near the close of the Manning text is a chapter devoted to alternative management practices for addressing many of the issues and problems associated with providing the visitor with high quality recreation opportunities. As you will see in future units of the course, one of the steps in the natural resource recreation planning process is implementation and monitoring. You are encouraged to read Manning’s chapter on alternative management practices in order to more clearly see how recommendations that flow from the planning process could be implemented in a park/recreation area or across a system of parks and recreation areas.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the difference between utilitarian conservation and romantic preservation. Roughly speaking, which philosophy best fits the mission/purpose of each of the following agencies: U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, a state parks agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management. (You may need to visit the website of the agencies in an attempt to find their mission statements.) Finally, identify a resource management issue in your agency that characterizes the development-preservation debate and describe it. What was at stake in the debate? Who were the principal actors (what interest groups, agencies, communities, etc. were involved) and what did each want? How was the debate resolved or addressed?
2. At the time of its publication (1995), the Zinser reading claimed that, “The fourth wave of the conservation movement has not yet started.” In the time that has

- elapsed since then, assume the “fourth wave” *has* started. Based on your experience, knowledge of resource management issues and events, and your professional and personal perspectives, characterize the fourth wave. How is it different from previous waves? What is its theme? What are its key events, who are its key figures, etc.? (Be imaginative and bold in answering this question as there is no correct response!)
3. How can an understanding of the principles articulated in chapter 13 of the Manning text lead to better planning and management of recreation opportunities in your agency or in an agency with which you are familiar? To answer this question, choose three principles that seem most relevant to natural resource recreation planning and management (or the lack thereof) in your agency. Then discuss how adherence to each principle could help your agency better plan for and manage high quality recreation opportunities. If your agency already uses the principles in planning and managing its recreation resources, then evaluate their success in doing so. In your answer, make specific references to relevant concepts covered in the text, such as quality, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, conflict, crowding, motivations, benefits, satisfaction, specialization, etc.