



Recreation Trends Worth Talking About

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There's a difference between trends and fads, and astute park professionals know to look for the sometimes subtle signs between the two. Six areas of broad focus will be discussed in this article:

1. Demographic trends and the effect on the park and recreation profession
2. Outdoor recreation activities most desired
3. Our health and how we use our leisure and work time
4. How "convenience" is affecting our profession
5. Effect of technology on equipment and services
6. Broad policy trends

1. California's explosive growth and significant population shifts

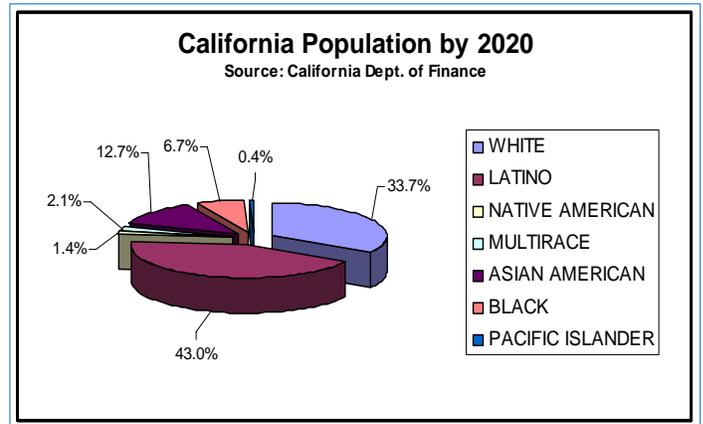
More than anything else, California's growth and shifts in demographic groups will drive the ability of our profession to deliver park and recreation services in the coming years. An understanding of trends and their implications is essential as the population increases and the rate of demographic changes accelerate. For example, more than 444,000 Californians call California their new home last year, according to the CA Department of Finance's projections. There are currently 37 million residents and it's expected that California population will exceed 50 million between 2035 and 2040. There are so many of us that in fact, one in eight U.S. citizens live in California.

A full 80% of Californians live in coastal communities, and the Central Valley and the Inland Empire are the fastest growing regions. People are moving more frequently. There's a trend of people not staying in one spot as long as previous generations; they are changing jobs and moving their children from school to school, community to community. And as we know, along with an increase in population comes an increase in demand for services. Dan Walters of the Sacramento Bee wrote on March 3, 2006, "*The baby boom is producing more than a baby a minute...Population growth increases demand for housing, **parks** water, transportation, schools and other forms of public infrastructure.*"

By 2010, one in five Californians will be older than 60. In fact, the senior population will double by 2020 and, as more and more near "senior" status; they are making more time to pursue recreation activities. From 2030 to 2040 the baby boomers will be reaching the age of 85. Every institution has been influenced by the generation known as the "Baby Boomers" and parks and recreation will be no different.

In addition to growing older, Californian's are also growing younger – in large part because of immigration. Three quarters of California's K-12 students live in just 10 of California's cities – the Los Angeles/Orange/Riverside area, San Diego, Bay Area and the Sacramento region. Almost 40% of households include children under 18 and they are much more ethnically and culturally diverse and more technologically advanced and demanding of park and recreation services, programs and opportunities than ever before. Many want riskier outdoor recreation opportunities like trail boarding, mountain biking, BMX courses and off-roading with vehicles.

More than one third of all Asian Americans and nearly one third of all Hispanic-Americans live in California. By 2030 the Hispanic population will rise to 43% and Spanish has the potential to be spoken in nearly half of California households. In fact, Hispanics are projected to increase by 58% between 2000 and 2020. During this same period, there will be 55% more Asian/Pacific Islanders, 29% more Native Americans and 20% more African Americans. There will be a decline of 4% by persons of European descent.



Implications to Population Changes

Lands, programs, services and facilities will have to be expanded to accommodate the future influx of park and recreation users. Lands not acquired now may be unavailable or too costly in the future. With such a diverse group of constituents, greater emphasis will need to be placed on programs that attract a variety of people. Seniors will continue to seek engaging outdoor experiences. Many immigrants are unfamiliar with the kinds of facilities and services we traditionally provide and the availability of outdoor recreation and public lands. Ways to educate and encourage these diverse groups and newcomers to become users of and advocates for parks and recreation will have to be developed. Understanding the most likely direction of change may enable providers to position their services and respond more quickly to market changes.

2. Changing recreation patterns

The trend toward securing blocks of time – long weekends, as well as vacations – for leisure activities will continue, however Californians are recreating less now than five years ago. The common reason cited is a lack of time and restrictions due to work. People are frequently tethered to their work via Blackberries, cell phones and lap tops. The Public Opinions and Attitudes Survey on Outdoor Recreation in California conducted by California State Parks indicated that time remains scarce for most adults. Highlighted findings include:

- Retirees might actually have less leisure time. Even though Californians are living longer, and generally staying fit, we are finding a noticeable number who grow tired of

travel, golf and gardening, and who are pursuing further education or even second careers – careers that are based more on their avocation than on their economic gain.

- Developmental aims for families with children will be important in selecting recreation investments. Parents will seek recreation that will improve their children's chances to compete in of school and work.
- As 24-hour service providers, attention will need to focus on non-traditional work hours such as between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am, especially by those employed in the service sector of the economy. Local service providers are encouraged to share inventive programs they have developed (similar to midnight softball and basketball games) to accommodate the demand and lack of additional facilities.
- Leisure opportunities for women, both married and single, will be more diverse and less tied to the family. In addition, singles will be accepted as a more common and less extraordinary way of life.
- "Activity stacking" will increase (reading the newspaper while speaking on the phone with the radio on and eating your dinner)

Implications of Changing Activity Patterns

With the continuing change towards an information-based economy, one that is world-based, the typical concept of going to an office where you work from 8:00 to 5:00 will change. Even now with the ability to email, voice mail, and fax – the office is now at home, airport, restaurant and even the park. Teaching people how to relax may require as much skill as teaching people how to be active. With the hurried pace of the workday world, there is a tendency for people to become couch-potatoes during their leisure time.

Favorite recreation activities

There are many outdoor recreation activities for Californians to choose from. The most popular and preferred activities do not require a great deal of experience or skill to enjoy. Also, they're not expensive or require a high initial outlay, they often can be done close to home and in time segments according to the participants' choice, and have appeal for aging populations. Surveys show the following highest participation rates:

Most Popular

Walking
Driving for pleasure
Visiting Historic sites and museums
Attending outdoor cultural events
Beach activities
Visiting nature oriented museums
Picnicking
Wildlife viewing
Hiking
Using turf-ed areas

Most Preferred

Camping in developed sites
Hiking
Walking
Wildlife viewing
Bicycling (paved)
Horseback riding
Freshwater fishing
Attending outdoor cultural events
Visiting nature oriented museums
Picnicking

How does California compare with the rest of the nation? According to the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, conducted in 2000, Californians participated more frequently in a variety of widely popular activities and generally prefer nature oriented

activities. Although we're not clear on the National survey methodology, we believe both the quantity of activities and California's climate contributes toward the purported higher percentages.

<u>Activities</u>	<u>National</u>	<u>California</u>
Walking	82%	91%
Hiking	33%	<u>69%</u>
Backpacking	10%	20%
Developed camping	26%	<u>50%</u>
Primitive camping	16%	28%
Driving for pleasure	50%	<u>90%</u>
Picnicking	55%	<u>77%</u>
Visiting historic/cultural sites	45%	<u>86%</u>
Visiting nature centers, zoos etc.	57%	<u>80%</u>

Activities and their implications

Even less popular activities with stable or declining participation rates will grow. Traditional activities (hiking, picnicking, soccer, bike riding, etc.) will remain popular and will continue to grow. Yet, as more users want to participate in a variety of activities, more user conflicts will occur. For example, even those activities that are not growing in participation rates like tennis will grow in use because there are simply so many more Californians. Secondly, the combined pressure from both the traditional forms of recreation use (trails, water-based, camping, picnicking, etc) and the newer activities (geo-caching, orienteering, bouldering, etc.) is creating conflicts between user groups, special interests and park facility managers.

3. Emphasis on health and wellness

Health and wellness issues have become hot topics because of the increasing number of unfit Californians and the economic and health care drain. The obesity epidemic is costing California over \$2 billion a year in medical care, lost productivity and workers' compensation. Parks and recreation programs are excellent inducements to physical activity and help to encourage life-long fitness habits.

While more recreation alternatives than ever before are available to today's youth, many are sedentary. Access to outdoor recreation must be available, modeled and encouraged for these youth to reap the health-related benefits associated with recreation. Participating in recreation activities has been shown to help our youth improve their education, lead a healthy lifestyle and deters them from negative behaviors. Several key points to know:

- o Lack of physical activity – according to an article in TrendsScan, May 2005; *Adolescents Increasingly Inactive*, UCLA Health Policy Brief, April 2005, 74% of Americans are not regularly active. One in four teens nationally have no safe park or open space near their home. Inactivity rates for teen girls in California doubled between 2001 and 2005. Physical inactivity is twice as high among California teens with no access to open space.

- Threats to our well-being. In California, 26% do not regularly engage in exercise or recreation and 26% of California's youth are considered overweight. Everybody – all gender groups, ages, race/ethnicities and cultures have increased their weight during the past decade.
- Lack of leisure time and its implications. It's a no brainer, when we aren't able to find time for physical activity, injuries and fatigue occurs, and when that happens so does job stress, increased consumption of high-fat, high caloric foods, less time for our children and adults and our community, and certainly less time for our own personal growth and self development.

4. The affects of “Convenience”

American's are working longer hours today than ever before. We are increasingly a nation of overworked, overscheduled, overstressed and overwhelmed employees. With the advent of the blackberry, cell phone, lap top and GPS, more and more people are connected to their offices. The question to ask is “how are these longer work hours affecting my ability to provide quality park facilities, recreation programs and services?” Stress leads to reduced time for physical activities, job burn out, fatigue, accidents and injuries, increased consumption of high-fat, high sugar foods, reduced time to care for our children and aging parents and little or no time for personal development and volunteering in our communities. For one, the need for “convenience” is largely affecting nearly everything we do – anything to save time.

5. Technology and its' effect on the park and recreation profession

Technological changes often create entirely new activities such as geocaching, mountain-boarding, slack-lining, using RVs, boating and off-roading with vehicles. With each new activity, demands for lands, facilities, programs and services follow. Also, baby-boomers want amenity-rich and exciting experiences using advanced goods, not just on weekends but throughout the week.

Almost all recreation providers have added an internet component to their communication and information efforts. The internet has increased access to information about opportunities for outdoor recreation. In addition, new metals such as titanium and the use of alloys makes bikes, skateboards, skis and backpacks lighter and stronger and enables the user to advance their ability to use the equipment. Manufacturers are using light weight, durable metals and improved synthetic fabrics for athletic shoes, clothing, tents, rackets and other recreation equipment.

Each generation is more educated and is more technologically adept. As technological advances continue, whole new forms of recreational pursuits appear. All-terrain equipment and navigational aids allow more people to go farther than every before.

Implications of technology and its' effect on the park and recreation profession

All this equipment-aided outdoor recreation can be costly to the consumer and to service providers. Park and recreation facility managers will increasingly be put in the position where the demand for a specific form of recreation activity will conflict with existing uses. At California State Parks, we've found this to be the case with many of our multi-use trails. Managers will also find themselves addressing visitor safety, noise, conflicts and environmental disturbances. Public land management has become highly visible through the internet. More people are learning about and commenting on outdoor recreation concerns on public lands. This makes land management more visible and increases the expectations of the public.

6. Policy Trends

According to the Public Opinions and Attitudes Survey of 2002, Californians continue to enjoy their parks and feel generally pleased with their conditions. However, many Californians don't think of some recreation areas as parks, such as beaches and historic buildings. In addition, even though they are happy with park and recreation facilities, they are generally unwilling to pay for services and facilities through higher taxes or additional fees.

People are generally unwilling to pay higher fees. However, when they are confronted with the reality of closing parks, they have demonstrated support. When State Parks raised fees this past year, comments by the public in news articles have been generally favorable.

Space scarcities for facilities such as trails, soccer and ball fields, play equipment areas and community centers will become more acute, especially in prime environments such as urban parks. The urban space crunch will be intensified by more multiple-unit housing and the shrinking of the private residential yard. Space-intensive activities such as golf will become more expensive and overcrowded at prime times.

Deferred backlog at park facilities is no longer at a potential critical stage, it is a crisis. Fewer maintenance staff ultimately means fewer land acquisitions resulting in an even stronger demand for services and facilities.

Parks and recreation, although largely accepted as integral to the 'quality of life' continues to lack top-of-the-mind status – especially with policy leaders that determine funding outcomes.

And finally, as many park profession baby-boomers plan for their well-earned retirement, agencies face an incredible brain and skill drain. Historic knowledge of an agency's in and outs, understanding of process or why something was done the way it was – is escaping us. It is critical to bring mid-level managers into inner circles for cross training and reference.

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