

## Chapter IV

### RESULTS OF PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

#### INTRODUCTION

Two surveys of public opinion of County residents were conducted under this planning program in 1995 to gather information on public perceptions of outdoor recreation, the County park system, and protection of natural resources. A summary of the survey findings are presented in this chapter.

The surveys were conducted on behalf of the County by the Urban Research Center of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. They were designed with the assistance of the Washington County Park and Open Space Plan Advisory Committee and were viewed by that Committee as an important means of broadening citizen participation in the preparation of the new County park and open space plan.

#### TELEPHONE SURVEY FINDINGS

A telephone survey, conducted during November 1995, interviewed 603 randomly selected County residents. It was designed to help determine how familiar County residents were with the County park system and how often they used the parks, the type of recreational activities which County residents were interested in pursuing, and the public support for funding the acquisition of new parks and environmentally sensitive lands and for the development of additional park facilities. The questions asked and the findings of the telephone survey are documented in a report entitled Resident Views on Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces in Washington County, January 1996, published by the Urban Research Center of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.<sup>1</sup> A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix B. The major findings of the telephone survey are described below.

##### Use of County Parks and Interest in Various Recreational Activities

Use of County Parks: The telephone survey found that 66 percent of those surveyed had visited a County park at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey. The three County parks visited most often were Ridge Run, Sandy Knoll, and Glacier Hills. About 25 percent of respondents had visited one County park in the previous year, another 23 percent had visited two parks, and 18 percent had visited three or more parks.

The survey also found that households with children were more likely to have used a County park than those without

children, with 75 percent of households with children using a County park at least once in the year preceding the survey, compared to 54 percent of households without children. Households located in cities and villages were somewhat more likely to use County parks than households in unincorporated areas, with 69 percent of households in incorporated areas reporting a visit to a County park, compared to 60 percent of households in unincorporated areas. This finding may reflect the proximity of two County parks, Ridge Run and Sandy Knoll, to the City of West Bend and the location of a third County Park, Homestead Hollow, in the Village of Germantown.

Recreational Interests and Participation: One of the purposes of the telephone survey was to identify the level of interest and participation of County residents in a variety of specified recreational activities, in order to help determine the types of recreational facilities that should be considered when designing the new park and open space plan. The survey listed resource-related activities that are commonly provided at County and State parks, including hiking and other trail-related activities, picnicking, beach swimming, camping, fishing, and boating, as well as more intensive recreational activities, such as tennis, soccer, and softball that are more commonly accommodated at City, Village, and Town parks.

Survey respondents were first asked if they or anyone in their household had an interest in a certain activity and, if so, if anyone in the household had participated in the activity in the preceding year. The responses are summarized on Table 15. As shown by the table, hiking and walking, fishing, picnicking, beach swimming, and swimming in pools were the five most often mentioned outdoor recreational activities. It should be noted that the summer of 1994 was a particularly warm one in Southeastern Wisconsin and that this may have had a bearing on the relative popularity of swimming. Over all, survey respondents participated less often in organized sports than in individual or family recreational activities.

Location of Recreational Activities: Survey respondents who had participated in one of the specified recreational activities were asked where they had performed the activity. As might be expected, the responses were numerous and varied; many respondents had participated in a specific recreational activity in more than one location over the course of the previous year.

Responses were broadly organized into three categories, on the basis of the sites utilized, as follows: publicly-owned sites and private yards and neighborhoods within Washington County, publicly-owned sites outside the County, and other privately-owned sites. The first category was further sub-

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<sup>1</sup>Copies of the report are available from the Washington County Land Use and Park Department.

divided to differentiate between publicly-owned sites owned by school districts; by State, County, and local levels of government; privately-owned neighborhood areas; and private yards.

Washington County parks were mentioned most often as the locations for such activities as cross-country skiing on ungroomed trails, tobogganing and sledding, picnicking, and pleasure driving. Organized sports such as softball, volleyball, tennis, and soccer were most commonly pursued in sites owned by local units of government. Pike Lake State Park was the most frequently mentioned site for beach swimming and was also frequently cited as a location for cross-country skiing on groomed trails.

Participation in basketball, roller hockey, and football by survey respondents and their household members took place most often at school sites within the County. Private yards and nearby streets and neighborhood areas were most commonly used for bicycling, walking, jogging, rollerblading and skateboarding.

The activities most likely to have occurred outside the County were camping, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, visiting water parks, and driving in parks, which can probably be attributed to the lack of facilities for many of these activities within the County. For example, camping within the County is limited to Pike Lake State Park and four private campgrounds, groomed cross-country ski trails are available only at Pike Lake State Park, and there are no mountain biking trails or water parks within the County.

The activities most likely to have occurred at private sites or facilities were soccer and golf. Public soccer fields are limited to those developed by local units of government within the County and there are currently no publicly owned golf courses within the County, although a course is under development by the County.

Proximity and Participation in Recreational Activities: Survey respondents were asked if anyone in their household would have participated, or participated more often, in specified recreational activities if sites or facilities for such activities had been available closer to home. Forty-two percent of respondents replied affirmatively. These respondents were then asked to identify the activities in which they would have participated. The activities identified are listed in Table 16. Swimming in pools and hiking or walking were each identified by more than 10 percent of respondents and golfing, bicycling on roads, and rollerblading or skateboarding were identified by between 5 and 10 percent of respondents. An additional eight activities were identified by less than 5 percent of respondents each.

Increased Use of Washington County Parks: Respondents were asked if there was anything that would make it more likely that they or members of their household would use

Washington County parks more often. About 23 percent of respondents replied affirmatively, citing more advertising, more bicycle and hiking trails, such additional or improved parks facilities as rest rooms and cooking grills, additional lakes access, and swimming pools and camping facilities as measures or facilities that might cause them to visit County parks more frequently.

#### Views on Acquisition, Protection, and Development of Parkland and Natural Resource Areas

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions about their views on acquiring and developing additional lands for parks, developing a County trail system, and acquiring land for resource-protection purposes. Respondents were also asked their opinions regarding various means of raising funds for acquisition and development of park and open space lands. These questions relate directly to the emphasis placed in previous regional and County park and open space plans on preserving land with important natural resources, particularly lands within the primary environmental corridors, and in providing a regional recreational trail system along major streams and in the Kettle Moraine.

The first question asked respondents the extent to which they agreed with the statement: "Conserving land for public parks, recreation, water quality, and wildlife habitat is a good use of public funds." A high level of support was expressed, with 93 percent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with that statement, 3 percent disagreeing, and 4 percent expressing no opinion.

Somewhat less agreement was given to the next statement: "County government is doing enough to preserve natural resources and open space in your community." Here, 54 percent agreed or strongly agreed, 22 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 24 percent had no opinion.

The last statement in this series read: "The County should provide a system of recreation trails to connect County parks and other public recreational lands and trails." Agreement with the statement outweighed disagreement by about three to one, with 67 percent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing and 17 percent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Some 17 percent expressed no opinion.

The next set of questions asked respondents their views regarding potential County actions to protect the environment and to expand and improve the park system. Strong support was expressed for County acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands, with 73 percent of respondents expressing support for such acquisition, 17 percent expressing opposition, and 10 percent expressing no opinion. Although favored by most respondents, there was somewhat less support given to improving or expanding the County park system. Some 50 percent of respondents expressed support for improving facilities at existing County parks, while 31 percent

expressed opposition and 19 percent expressed no opinion. Opinions were more closely divided on the question of acquiring land to establish new County parks, with 47 percent of respondents expressing support, 37 percent expressing opposition, and 16 percent expressing no opinion.

Respondents who responded affirmatively to the proposition that the County should take action to acquire lands for resource-protection purposes and to expand the park system were asked how the County should finance the action. Three options were read to respondents: increased taxes, borrowing money through bonds to be repaid over time, and fees charged to users.

User fees were the financial mechanism identified most often by respondents as the preferred means to finance land acquisition or park improvements. Some 49 percent of respondents said user fees should be used to finance purchase of woodlands and wetlands, 51 percent said user fees should be used to support improvements to existing County parks, and 40 percent said user fees would be appropriate for financing land acquisition for new parks. Bonds were the second most favored financing mechanism. Increased taxes for land acquisition and facility improvements was much less popular, being favored by only small percentages of respondents.

## MAIL SURVEY FINDINGS

A mail survey was intended primarily to determine user satisfaction with park facilities and to help determine additional facilities park users would like to have provided at County parks. The findings of the mail survey are documented in a report entitled Views and Assessments of Individuals Who Reserved Sites in Washington County Parks, 1994-1995, February 1996, published by the Urban Research Center of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.<sup>2</sup>

The mail survey was sent in January 1996 to 495 County residents who had, within the two years prior to the survey, reserved a facility at a County park. A total of 212 surveys, or 43 percent of those mailed, were returned and included in the analysis. A copy of the survey instrument is provided in Appendix B. A summary of the results is provided below.

### Use of County Park Facilities

Park facilities were reserved at Glacier Hills, Homestead Hollow, Ridge Run, and Sandy Knoll parks. Facilities at Sandy Knoll Park were reserved most often, by 34 percent of respondents, with Glacier Hills, Homestead Hollow, and Ridge Run parks reserved by 21 percent, 19 percent, and

23 percent of respondents, respectively. Most respondents, 80 percent, had reserved a picnic shelter, 8 percent had reserved a cabin, 4 percent had reserved the chapel at Glacier Hills park, and 8 percent had reserved another facility.

Some 61 percent of respondents had reserved a park site for a group picnic, which included family, company, church, scout, and other organization picnics. Another 27 percent of respondents reported reserving a site for a party, and about 12 percent of respondents reserved the site for functions other than a picnic or party, including weddings, meetings, school reunions, and organized sporting events.

Respondents were asked the age of persons participating in the function for which the site was reserved. Adults aged 18 to 64 were present at nearly all functions. Children 13 years or younger were present at about 66 percent of all functions, while high-school-aged children were present at slightly more than half of all functions. Those 65 years of age and over were present at only 39 percent of park functions.

### Features Liked Best at Washington County Parks

Survey respondents were asked in an open-ended question to identify the things they liked best about the park where they had reserved a site. The 212 respondents identified 398 features they liked best, which were organized into six general categories. As shown by Table 17, about 41 percent of respondents identified such park amenities as shelters, rest rooms, parking facilities, and cooking grills as things they liked best. Twenty-five percent indicated that they liked best park characteristics such as the natural setting, privacy, and spaciousness.

### Features Liked Least at Washington County Parks

Respondents were also asked to identify features they liked least about the park in which they had reserved a site. Of the 212 respondents, 150 features were identified. The responses were organized into seven general categories. As shown by Table 18, 39 percent of features liked least concerned park rest rooms. Some 17 percent of the least-liked features related to park administration, including maintenance, 13 percent were related to park amenities, with most negative comments in this category related to the lack of potable water, and another 13 percent related to park characteristics, such as lack of shade and perceived poor access.

### Suggestions for Improving County Parks

Survey respondents were asked for their suggestions for improving existing park facilities and for suggestions related to new or expanded park facilities. The majority of suggestions, 30 percent, related to improved rest room facilities, primarily requesting flush toilets, sinks, and running water. Some 16 percent of the respondents suggested adding more shelters. Better park security, improved maintenance, provision of potable water, additional recreational facilities, concession stands, and electrical service for picnic shelters were also suggested by 5 percent or more of the respondents.

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<sup>2</sup>Copies of the report are available from the Washington County Land Use and Park Department.

Swimming pools and camping facilities were the most frequently suggested new recreational facilities, suggested by 8 percent and 7 percent of respondents, respectively.

#### Assessment of Park Reservation System and Costs

The mail survey also asked if respondents were satisfied with the existing in-person reservation system. Some 45 percent expressed satisfaction with the existing reservation system, and almost all, 96 percent, responded that County staff had been helpful to them when making reservations.

Respondents were asked if they would prefer a telephone, mail-in, or some other type of reservation system. Some 26 percent would prefer a telephone reservation system, 17 percent a system that would allow them to reserve a site by telephone and mail the deposit, and 9 percent favored a mail-only system.

Survey respondents were asked to assess the cost of reserving a park site. About 85 percent replied that the cost was about right, 13 percent said it was too high, and 2 percent said it was too low. Of course, residents who felt that the cost was too high would likely have not reserved a site at all, and thus were not represented in the survey.

#### COMPARISON TO REGIONAL PARK AND OPEN SPACE PLAN

As part of its planning program, the Regional Planning Commission in 1973 conducted a series of outdoor recreation surveys intended to obtain information on the nature of outdoor activities.<sup>3</sup> The relative popularity of outdoor recreational activities in the Region was determined by asking survey respondents to name the activities that one or more members of his or her household had engaged in during the previous year. The results, shown on Table 19 indicate that the four most popular activities were pleasure driving, beach swimming, picnicking, and snowmobiling. Both beach swimming and picnicking were also among the four activities identified most often in the 1995 telephone survey as those in which County residents had participated during the year preceding the survey. The two other activities mentioned most often in the 1995 survey, fishing and hiking and walking, were the fourth and thirteenth most popular activities identified in the 1973 survey.

#### SUMMARY

##### Telephone Survey Results

The telephone survey, interviewing 603 County residents selected at random, was conducted during November 1995.

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<sup>3</sup>The results of the 1973 survey are documented in Chapter VI of SEWRPC Planning Report No. 27, A Regional Park and Open Space Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin: 2000, November 1977.

The survey was intended to help determine how familiar County residents were with the County park system and how often they used the parks; the type of recreational activities in which County residents desired to participate; and public support for funding the acquisition and development of additional parks, park facilities, and environmentally sensitive lands.

The survey indicated that 66 percent of respondents or members of their household had visited a County park during the preceding year. Ridge Run, Sandy Knoll, and Glacial Hills were the parks visited most by County residents. Households with children reported using the County parks more than those without children. Park use also varied depending on whether the household resided in an incorporated or unincorporated municipality, with households located in incorporated areas being more likely to visit a County park than households within unincorporated areas.

Survey respondents were asked to indicate recreational activities in which they had an interest from a list of such activities, in order to help determine the types of recreational facilities that should be considered when designing the new park and open space plan. More than half of those interviewed expressed an interest in hiking or walking, fishing, picnicking, and beach swimming, all of which are activities commonly provided for at County parks. Respondents who indicated that they were interested in an activity were then asked if anyone in their household had participated in the activity in the previous year. Although the percentage of those participating in an activity was lower than the percentage who said they had an interest in the activity, the same four activities, hiking and walking, fishing, picnicking, and beach swimming, were the four most commonly mentioned by respondents.

Survey respondents who said they had participated in an activity were then asked where they had performed the activity. Washington County parks were mentioned most often as the locations for such activities as cross-country skiing on ungroomed trails, tobogganing and sledding, picnicking, and pleasure driving. Organized sports such as softball, volleyball, tennis, and soccer most commonly took place in sites owned by local units of government. Pike Lake State Park was the most frequently mentioned place for beach swimming and was also frequently cited as a location for cross-country skiing on groomed trails.

Activities most likely to have occurred outside the County were camping, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, visiting water parks, and driving in parks. The activities most likely to have occurred at private sites or facilities were soccer and golf.

Survey respondents expressed strong support for public acquisition of lands for resource-protection purposes and more qualified support for improving facilities at existing County parks and purchasing land to establish new County parks. Most respondents favored user fees to raise the funds

needed to carry out these activities. Very few respondents favored increased taxes to pay for land acquisition or park improvements.

#### Mail Survey Results

The mail survey was intended primarily to determine user satisfaction with park facilities and to help determine additional facilities park users would like to have provided at County parks. The mail survey was sent in January 1996 to 495 County residents who had, within the two years prior to the survey, reserved a facility at a County park. A total of 212 surveys were returned.

Park facilities were reserved at Glacier Hills, Homestead Hollow, Ridge Run, and Sandy Knoll parks. Facilities at Sandy Knoll Park were reserved most often. Most respondents, 80 percent, had reserved a picnic shelter.

Some 61 percent of respondents had reserved a park site for a group picnic, which included family, company, church, scout, and other organization picnics. Another 27 percent of respondents reported reserving a site for a party. About 12 percent of respondents reserved the site for such functions as weddings, meetings, school reunions, and organized sporting events.

Adults aged 18 to 64 were present at nearly all functions. Children 13 years or younger were present at about 66 percent of all functions, while high-school-aged children were present at slightly more than half of all functions. Those 65 years of age and over were present at only 39 percent of park functions.

Over all, respondents were favorably impressed with park sites and facilities, with far more favorable than unfavorable responses. The most often-stated favorable comments were

satisfaction with such park amenities as shelters, rest rooms, parking facilities, and grills and such park characteristics as the natural setting, privacy, and spaciousness. The most often-stated unfavorable comments were dissatisfaction with park rest rooms and the lack of potable water.

The majority of suggestions for improving park facilities related to improving rest rooms. Other suggestions included adding more shelters, providing better park security, improved maintenance, and providing potable water, additional recreational facilities, concession stands, and electrical service for picnic shelters. Swimming pools and camping facilities were cited most frequently as desired recreational facilities.

Mail survey respondents were also generally satisfied with the existing in-person reservation system for County park facilities and almost all responded that County staff had been helpful to them when making reservations. Survey respondents were also generally satisfied with the cost of reserving a County park site.

**Table 15**

**RECREATIONAL INTERESTS AND PARTICIPATION  
 LEVELS BY WASHINGTON COUNTY HOUSEHOLDS**

Recreational Activity	Percent of Washington County Households Where One or More Members Have Interest in the Activity	Percent of Households that Have Interest in Activity and Actually Participated in Activity in Past Year
Hiking or Walking	69	65
Fishing	55	48
Picnicking	52	44
Beach Swimming	50	42
Ice Skating	46	31
Tobogganing or Sledding	45	37
Swimming in Pools	44	38
Golfing	43	37
Driving through Parks	42	35
Camping	37	29
Children's Playground	34	32
Bicycling on Roads	33	29
Water Slides or Water Parks	29	21
Motor Boating	26	24
Softball	25	20
Cross-Country Skiing, Ungroomed Trails	24	14
Volleyball	23	19
Baseball	23	18
Nature Education Programs	21	13
Basketball	21	19
Rollerblading or	21	18
Canoeing	20	12
Jogging	20	19
Cross-Country Skiing, Groomed Trails	20	13
Bicycling on Off-Road Paths	19	13
Tennis	18	14
Football	17	11
Frisbee or Disc Golf	17	13
Archery	14	11
Soccer	13	10
Dog Training or Exercise Off Leash	13	11
Mountain Biking	13	9
Roller Hockey	4	2

Source: UWM Urban Research Center.

**Table 16**

**ACTIVITIES IN WHICH RESIDENTS WOULD  
PARTICIPATE MORE OFTEN IF AVAILABLE CLOSER  
TO HOME**

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Recreational Activity	Percent of Responses
Swimming in Pools	13
Hiking or Walking	12
Golfing	7
Bicycling on Road Surface	7
Rollerblading or Skateboarding	5
Tennis	4
Picnicking	4
Cross-Country Skiing, General	4
Baseball	4
Mountain Biking	3
Cross-Country Skiing, Groomed Trails	3
Water Slides or Water Parks	3
Camping	3

Source: UWM Urban Research Center.

**Table 17**

**WASHINGTON COUNTY PARK FEATURES AND FACILITIES LIKED BEST**

Features and Facilities	Number	Percent
<b>Park Amenities</b>		
Sanitation.....	32	8
Potable Water.....	9	2
Shelter.....	76	19
Parking.....	22	6
Picnic Tables.....	11	3
Grills and Fire Pits.....	13	3
Subtotal	163	41
<b>Park Characteristics</b>		
Privacy.....	25	6
Park Setting.....	36	9
Spaciousness.....	20	5
Convenient Location of Park.....	19	5
Subtotal	100	25
<b>Recreation</b>		
Trails and Hiking.....	9	2
Recreation Facilities.....	61	15
Subtotal	70	17
<b>Park Administration</b>		
Maintenance and Cleanliness.....	27	7
Park Policy.....	2	1
Park Staff.....	3	1
Subtotal	32	9
<b>Shelter Amenities</b>		
Electricity.....	13	3
Telephone Service.....	4	1
Cooking Facilities.....	11	3
Subtotal	28	7
<b>Safety &amp; Security.....</b>	5	1
Subtotal	5	1
<b>Total</b>	398	100

Source: UWM Urban Research Center.

**Table 18**

**WASHINGTON COUNTY PARK FEATURES AND FACILITIES LIKED LEAST**

Features and Facilities	Number	Percent
<b>Restroom Facilities</b>		
General Complaint.....	23	15
No Water to Wash With.....	7	5
Odor, Smell, Cleanliness.....	10	7
Pit Toilets.....	11	7
Distance to Restrooms.....	7	5
Subtotal	58	39
<b>Park Administration</b>		
Maintenance.....	13	9
Park Policy.....	5	3
Park Staff.....	1	1
Lack of Supplies.....	6	4
Subtotal	25	17
<b>Park Amenities</b>		
Lack of Potable Water.....	14	9
Parking.....	1	1
Lack of Tables.....	5	3
Subtotal	20	13
<b>Park Characteristics</b>		
Lack of Privacy.....	3	2
Lack of Shade.....	8	5
Inconvenient Location of Park.....	2	1
Poor Access to Park Site.....	7	5
Subtotal	20	13
<b>Shelter Amenities</b>		
Inadequate Electrical Service.....	6	4
Inadequate Cooking Facilities.....	1	1
Poor Lighting.....	4	3
Subtotal	11	8
<b>Inadequate Recreation Facilities.....</b>	9	6
Subtotal	9	6
<b>Safety.....</b>	7	4
Subtotal	7	4
<b>Total</b>	150	100

Source: UWM Urban Research Center.

**Table 19**

**RELATIVE POPULARITY OF OUTDOOR RECREATION  
ACTIVITIES IN SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN: 1973**

Rank	Activity Name	Percent of Households Participating
1	Pleasure Driving	46.4
2	Swimming, Beach	35.0
3	Picnicking	34.4
4	Fishing	29.1
5	Snowmobiling	18.8
6	Ice Fishing	16.3
7	Camping	16.0
8	Softball	15.8
9	Bicycling	15.3
10	Golf	13.3
11	Motorboating	13.0
12	Swimming, Pool	12.9
13	Hiking	12.8
14	Ice-Skating	12.1
15	Playfield Activities	9.9
16	Tennis	9.8
17	Skiing, Downhill	9.3
18	Basketball	8.3
19	Playground Activities	6.2
20	Water Skiing	3.6
21	Horseback Riding	3.4
22	Baseball	3.3
23	Nature Study	3.1
24	Cross-Country Skiing	3.0
25	Sailing	2.1
26	Canoeing	2.0

Source: SEWRPC.