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EFFECTIVENESS OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS AS A PRIMARY DATA
GATHERING METHOD FOR RECREATION NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

By

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ABSTRACT

EFFECTIVENESS OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS AS A PRIMARY DATA GATHERING METHOD FOR RECREATION NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

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The effectiveness of the focus group interview as the primary data collection method for recreation needs assessments is largely untested. This study evaluated the effectiveness of the method as it was used for the 1999 Ingham County, Michigan recreation needs assessment. Evaluation criteria were based on the goals of the Ingham County Parks Board and generally accepted social science research standards.

Findings suggested that the focus group interview method was effective for several reasons. Recreation, a relatively non-controversial topic, was discussed with ease. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques provided a diverse sample, reaching groups underrepresented in previous assessments. Group dynamics, flexibility in questioning, and a diverse sample provided a broad variety of responses.

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Dr. Florian J. and Delphine Knap who shared with me their lifelong joy of learning.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The purpose of an evaluation is to make a judgment about the worth of what is being evaluated so that informed decisions may be made. Henderson (1995) describes an evaluation as, "the systematic collection and analysis of data to address criteria and make judgments about the worth or improvement of something" (p.3). Henderson (1995) identifies five evaluation models, including the professional (expert) judgment model. This model is "criterion referenced". "Criterion referenced evaluation is not compared to any other organization but simply is used as a standard for measurement" (Henderson, 1995, p.55). This evaluation examines the worth of the focus group interview as the primary data gathering method for recreation needs assessments using comparison with criteria as the standard of measurement.

Henderson (1995) describes the purpose recreation needs assessments and how the results are used:

Assessment is a process of determining and making specific what a program, a facility, a staff member, a participant's behavior, or administrative procedure is. In community recreation programs, we often conduct needs assessments. These assessments identify the difference between 'what is' and 'what should be.' The needs assessment often results in a process of

prioritizing results to use in planning programs, places, policies or the use of personnel. (p. 46)

In addition to the planning of programs, places, policies and the use of personnel, recreation needs assessments are conducted to avoid the "rubber-stamp replication of standard facilities" and the imposition of the park designer's view to the exclusion of the user's need (Molnar & Rutledge, 1992). Molnar and Rutledge (1992) also identified the role of recreation needs assessments in the planning of capital improvements (p. 28). They recognized that recreation needs assessments "do not reveal every facet of need" but that "whatever people say they want springs from a need" (p.23). They conclude that "Realistically, the science of sorting out little-understood human needs is inexact at best. . ." (p. 23).

Recreation needs assessments have been conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods, both separately and in combination (Yoder, et al., 1995). The following description of the conventional roles of each approach comes from the field of evaluation research. "The view adopted by most of the research community is that quantitative techniques are the most appropriate source for corroborating findings initially noted from qualitative methods. Likewise,

qualitative methods are best used to provide richness or detail to quantitative findings (elaboration), but should precede quantitative ones when clarifying the direction of inquiry (initiation)" (Rossman & Wilson, 1985, p.633). The fullest understanding of social phenomena is achieved through the use of both approaches, the strengths of each compensating for the weaknesses of the other.

Reichardt and Rallis summarize more current thinking:

The qualitative and quantitative research traditions differ. Qualitative researchers usually seek to explicate the meaning of social reality from the participants' perspectives, while quantitative researchers usually seek to understand relationships, often of a causal nature, without particular emphasis on the participants' perspectives. Nonetheless, at the most global level, the two traditions have a common goal: to understand and improve the human condition.

A defensible understanding of reality can withstand scrutiny from different perspectives and methodologies. Indeed, given its complexities and multiple facets, a complete understanding of human nature is likely to require more than one perspective and methodology. The qualitative and quantitative traditions can provide a binocular vision with which to deepen our understandings. That the qualitative and quantitative perspectives remain partly adversarial in their relationship does not preclude cooperation in working together toward their shared goal. In fact, just the opposite is true. By working together, the two traditions can enhance the practice and utilization of research and evaluation. (Reichardt & Rallis, 1994, p.11)

The use of multiple methods in social research study design is recommended to take advantage of the strengths of each (Babbie, 1998, p.108). Yoder et al., (1995) describe the rationale for the use of multiple approaches in research involving parks and recreation agencies. "The understanding of any complex social phenomenon can be enhanced with the use of different points of reference. A social entity, especially one as complex and diverse as a public park and recreation agency, cannot be fully investigated from any single perspective" (p.28).

Yet, the decision to use multiple methods will not produce satisfactory results if those methods are employed haphazardly (Yoder et al., 1995, p.27) and few agencies are large enough to support in-house research staffs (Webb & Hatry, 1973, p.59). Limited financial resources and time constraints are major concerns for public agencies conducting citizen surveys and needs assessments (Hudson, 1988, p.21; Webb & Hatry, 1973, pp.51-53; Yoder et al., 1995, p.39). As a result, public agencies tend to choose from methods available to them, rather than attempting to integrate multiple methods into a single study (Hudson, 1988, p.21).

In parks and recreation needs assessments and similar research in closely related fields, the most commonly used data collection methods are mail surveys, telephone interviews, and personal interviews (Bannon, 1976; Gold, 1980; Hudson, 1988). Hudson (1988), in her step by step guide to conducting community needs assessments in public parks and recreation, listed the three "major methods utilized by leisure agencies to collect survey information" as: mail questionnaires, telephone interviews, and personal interviews (p.21). Community surveys for leisure planning were described by Bannon (1976). He explained that the term "questionnaire" often includes both personal and self-administered surveys and that, "It [the questionnaire] is probably the most widely used data source in survey research" (p.137). Gold (1980) listed five common survey methods used in the study of leisure behavior of a community. They were: mail questionnaires, self-administered questionnaires, personal interviews, telephone interviews, and field observations (Gold, 1980, p. 188). Hudson and Witt (1984) listed the three types of data collection methods available to leisure agencies as: mailed surveys, telephone interviews, and personal interviews (pp. 18-21).

Krueger (1994) contends that such quantitative needs assessment methods as surveys are often incomplete and that, "needs assessment surveys tend to identify concerns that already have achieved some visibility within the community as opposed to the less visible concerns that lie below the surface" (p. 30). He described four different ways that focus groups may be used in relation to quantitative methods. They may be used before quantitative procedures; at the same time, including triangulation; after quantitative procedures; and alone (Krueger, 1994, p. 29). Focus groups used alone, "are helpful when insights, perceptions, and explanations are more important than numbers" (Krueger, 1994, p. 30).

Krueger (1994) recommends the use of focus groups for public sector needs assessments. He defined the focus group data collection method through the identification of six characteristics. "These characteristics relate to the ingredients of a focus group: (1) people, (2) assembled in a series of groups, (3) possess certain characteristics, and (4) provide data (5) of a qualitative nature (6) in a focused discussion" (Krueger, 1994, p. 16).

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to provide an evaluation of effectiveness of the focus group interview method in recreation needs assessments. This evaluation is intended to expand the choice of methods available to recreation researchers to include focus group interviews and to improve the understanding of focus group interview data for recreation research consumers.

While both a self-administered written questionnaire and focus group interviews were used, the needs assessment in this study neither triangulated nor integrated methods. The dual approach used is best described by Rossman and Wilson (1985) as "situationalist". There was no attempt to gather the same data using both methods. The questionnaire was used to gather socioeconomic and residency data and estimates of park use. The data gathered using the questionnaire provided an indication of how well the sample represented the study population for socioeconomic and residency characteristics. The data verified the inclusion in the sample of both users and nonusers of the park system under study. Reports of outdoor recreation behavior, reasons for visiting and not visiting parks, and attributes desired were gathered in the focus group interviews.

Potential users of this study are those entrusted with the selection of research methods for recreation needs assessments, including parks governance boards, academic institutions, and private consultants. Other potential users are the consumers of recreation research: park planners, administrators and managers.

The benefit to those selecting methods may be an increased understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the focus group interview method, a method which seems well suited to recreation needs assessments but is largely untested. This understanding may broaden the choice of methods under consideration. The benefit to consumers of recreation research may be an increased familiarity with the data generated using focus group interviews. Familiarity may improve confidence in and reliance on qualitative data for recreation resource decision making.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Traditional survey methods are used with such frequency that they have been widely accepted in the social sciences, and specifically, in leisure research (Babbie, 1998; Bannon, 1976; Gold, 1980; Hudson, 1988). They are not, however, without weaknesses. These methods continue to be used with some modifications, including their combination with qualitative methods, to compensate for those weaknesses (Wicks & Norman, 1996). This review begins with a discussion of survey methodology, followed by a review of the focus group interview method in recreation research and related fields. The review of the focus group interview method examines its changing role, advantages and disadvantages, and its suitability for recreation needs assessments.

Traditional Survey Methods

Babbie (1998) characterizes survey research as, "perhaps the most frequently used mode of observation in the social sciences" (p.255). He identifies the three main methods of administering survey questionnaires as: 1) the self-administered questionnaire, typically the mail survey, 2) the interview survey, typically a "face-to-face encounter", and 3) the telephone survey (p.276). Although

Babbie is referring to social science in general, these classifications closely correspond to those most commonly used in recreation needs assessments (Bannon, 1976; Gold, 1980; Hudson, 1988). As such, Babbie's discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of survey research as a concept embracing all three methods, and his discussion of the comparative strengths and weaknesses of each method are appropriate.

The strengths of survey research include: 1) the ability to describe the characteristics of large populations, 2) flexibility of analysis, and 3) standardized responses produced by asking all respondents exactly the same questions (Babbie, 1998, p.273).

The weaknesses of survey research include: 1) the use of standardized questions that represent the least common denominator, 2) the superficial coverage of complex topics, 3) an inability to deal with the context of social life, 4) an inflexibility in the uniformity of the instrument throughout the study, 5) an inability to measure social action (only self-reports of recalled past action or of prospective or hypothetical action) and 6) a general weakness in validity (Babbie, 1998, pp. 273-274).

Babbie (1998) compares self-administered questionnaires, face-to-face interview surveys, and telephone surveys, illuminating the strengths of each method within the realm of survey research. He contends that self-administered questionnaires are quicker and cheaper than face-to-face interview surveys. They are cheaper than telephone surveys if the survey is national in scope. Mail surveys may be conducted with a small staff. Anonymous self-administered questionnaires are more effective for sensitive or controversial issues than interview surveys (Babbie, 1998, p.271). Self-administered surveys lack interviewer bias (Babbie, 1998, p.276).

Interview surveys have higher completion rates (i.e., fewer incomplete questionnaires), fewer misunderstood questions, and higher return rates than self-administered questionnaires. Interview surveys allow for greater flexibility in sampling in the sense that interviewers may select the appropriate respondent. Self-administered surveys delivered by mail may be completed by virtually anyone in the household (Babbie, 1998, p.276). Interview surveys are more effective for complicated issues than are self-administered surveys (Babbie, 1998, p.271). In face-to-face interviews, observations made by the interviewer may be

recorded in addition to verbal responses to the questions asked, providing more extensive data than either self-administered or telephone interviews (Babbie, 1998, p.272).

Telephone interviews are cheaper than face-to-face interviews, may be started and executed quickly, and are safer than door-to-door interviews. Finally, the impact of the interviewer on the response is smaller when the interviewer cannot be seen by the respondent, an advantage of telephone interviews over face-to-face interviews (Babbie, 1998, p.274).

Gold (1980) identified many of the same survey methods for use in the study of leisure behavior. He characterizes survey research as, "the best way to study the leisure behavior of a community" and argued that, "Survey research techniques can also be used to assess the recreation needs of special populations, identify major problems and potentials, describe public opinion, and determine the effectiveness of existing facilities or programs" (Gold, 1980, p.118).

Gold (1980) advocated the use of probability sampling of both users and nonusers, on-site and in the home. He identified five commonly used survey methods: 1) mail questionnaires, 2) self-administered questionnaires, 3)

personal interviews, 4) telephone interviews, and 5) field observations (Table 1). These methods have been employed in recreation needs assessments with such regularity that their limitations are well known.

Some of these limitations have been addressed, particularly for population subgroups. Wicks and Norman (1996) address the lack of participation by African Americans in mail survey research and the possibility of nonresponse bias in the results of such surveys. They suggest that the reason for nonparticipation by African Americans in mail surveys is, "the lack of perceived personal connection felt by participants to the subject content being surveyed" (Wicks & Norman, 1996, p.1). They presented a case study in which higher response rates were achieved by modifying the traditional mail survey to achieve a more "personal connection".

Citing the work of Rossman (1994), Wicks and Norman question the validity of responses of African Americans when they do participate in mail surveys. "[M]inorities often offer idealized answers or what they feel might be the 'correct' answer" (Wicks & Norman, 1996, p.3).

Wicks and Norman (1996) conducted focus groups to identify ways of obtaining information from low income

Table 1. Leisure behavior survey methods* (Gold, 1980).

Major factors	Survey Methods				
	Mail question- naire	Self- administered	Personal interview	Telephone interview	Field observa- tion
Cost	L	M	H	M	H
Administration	L	M	H	M	H
Privacy/ anonymity	H	M	L	M	L
Sample size/ coverage	H	M	L	H	L
Nonresponse bias	H	M	L	M	L
Follow-up required	H	M	M	M	L
Time required	H	M	M	M	H
Depth/detail	L	L	H	H	H
Personal contact	L	M	H	M	L
Flexibility	L	L	H	M	L
Interviewer bias	L	L	H	M	H
Use of visual material	L	L	H	L	L
Logistics/ travel	L	H	H	L	H

*Summary of relative advantages and disadvantages for typical situation expressed in terms of high (H), medium (M), or low (L), based on criteria described in *Survey Research for Community Recreation Services*, Michigan State University, Experiment Station Research Report No. 291, February 1976, p. 9.

African Americans. The focus groups revealed that nonresponse to mail surveys by this group may be due to the perception that mail surveys: 1) were too complicated, 2) took too much time, 3) were irrelevant to the respondents' needs, and 4) required reading skills beyond those possessed by the respondent (Wicks & Norman, 1996, p.7).

Suggestions for overcoming nonparticipation by this group included: 1) working through "a person or organization that is already established and trusted within their community and then conduct personal interviews or group meetings", 2) using community center staff as informants, 3) speaking or writing in language appropriate to the respondent, 4) offering incentives, and 5) making respondents more comfortable by explaining the need for information, especially that of a personal nature (Wicks & Norman, 1996, p.9).

Wicks and Norman (1996) identified the personal interview as possibly the best alternative to the mail survey for low income African Americans. However, the personal interview was not used for their study due to cost, the need for trained interviewers, and concern for interviewer bias. Instead, a telephone survey which was a modified version of their mail survey was conducted. The

wording of the telephone script was changed to achieve a less formal, more conversational tone. Wicks and Norman (1996) concluded that a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative methods may be necessary to reach minority populations and that while qualitative methods, "are likely to be more effective with minorities", challenges in interpretation will occur (p.13).

Focus Group Interview Method

Social science researchers are not completely unfamiliar with the focus interview method. The use of focus group interviews in the preparation of surveys and other quantitative instruments is common (Minnis et al., 1997; Mitra, 1994; Wicks & Norman, 1996). Their use as a stand-alone method, however, is infrequent outside of marketing (Morgan, 1988, p.10). Support for using focus group interviews as a stand-alone method in social science research, and specifically in public sector needs assessments, seems to be growing (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1988). While some of this support predates this thesis by over ten years, the use of focus group interviews in recreation needs assessments as a stand-alone, or even a primary, data gathering method remains largely untested.

Focus groups are not new to social science research. Merton et al.(1956) used focus groups in studies of the effectiveness of mass communications. This early work followed experimental procedures. Subjects were exposed to the same stimulus, typically viewing a film, and subsequently participated in a focus group interview.

Merton et al. (1956) identified the advantages of focus group interviews as compared with individual focused interviews. They included: 1) release of respondents' inhibitions, 2) greater variations in responses, and 3) activation of forgotten details via group discussions (Merton et al., 1956, p. 146).

Disadvantages stemmed from responses that "may be more nearly related to this interplay of personalities and status claims in the group than to the subject matter" (Merton et al., 1956, p.147). These included the "leader effect", irrelevant discussions, interruptions in continuity, and inhibitions caused by fears of "public speaking" (Merton et al., 1956, pp. 149-153).

More recently, Morgan (1988) used focus group interviews employing a less experimental approach than Merton et al.(1956). Morgan (1988) identified the strengths and weaknesses of focus group interviews and their role as a

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self-contained method¹.¹ He identified pairs of strengths and their corresponding weaknesses in the use of focus groups. He found focus groups: 1) are easy to conduct, but not based on natural settings, leaving "residual uncertainty about the accuracy of what participants say", 2) are effective in exploring topics and generating hypotheses, but researchers have less control over data, and 3) create opportunities for group interaction without preconceived questions, but may not "mirror" individual behavior (Morgan, 1988, pp. 20-21).

Morgan (1988) stated, "From a social science point of view, focus groups are useful either as a self-contained means of collecting data or as a supplement to both quantitative and other qualitative methods" (p. 10). He pointed out that in asserting the importance of using focus group interviews as a self-contained method, researchers should not overlook their value in combination with other methods. In combination with other methods, he found focus groups suited to: 1) orientation to a field new to the researcher, 2) hypothesis generation, 3) evaluation of study

¹The terms "self-contained" and "stand-alone" are used interchangeably herein to describe the focus group interview method when it is not used in conjunction with other methods or in the preparation of survey instruments. This is not to suggest that it cannot be used with other methods.

sites or populations, 4) development of interview schedules and questionnaires, and 5) interpretation of the results of previous studies (Morgan, 1988, p. 11).

Morgan (1988) suggested that the decision to use focus groups depends on how "actively and easily" participants can discuss the topic under study (p.23). Focus groups were appropriate as a self-contained method when new areas are being explored or the participants' point of view is sought in well-known areas (p. 24). Morgan (1988) reiterates, "The key distinguishing feature of a self-contained focus group is that the results can stand on their own" (p.25).

Krueger (1994) also recognized this stand-alone feature and suggested a broader range of uses. Krueger's (1994) practical guide to focus groups was intended specifically for use by public and nonprofit sectors (p.vii), suggesting applications for public sector recreation agencies.

Krueger (1994) contends that focus groups "work" because they: 1) tap into human tendencies; that as products of our environment, we are influenced by the others around us, and 2) provide a nonjudgmental environment where people tend toward self-disclosure (pp. 10-11). He stated the purpose of focus groups is, "to determine the perceptions, feelings, and manner of thinking of consumers regarding

products, services, or opportunities" (Krueger, 1994, p.19). He organized the uses of focus groups according to the stage of the process being studied from planning to "postmortems", specifically identifying "needs assessments" (Krueger, 1994, pp. 21-25).

Krueger (1994) identified the following limitations of focus groups: 1) compared with individual interviews, there is less researcher control, 2) group interaction makes the data more difficult to analyze, 3) trained interviewers are required, 4) variations in group demeanor make a sufficient number of groups necessary, 5) groups are difficult to assemble, and 6) logistical problems may require participant incentives (p.36).

Focus group interviews have been used in natural resource planning. Minnis et al. (1997) discussed the pre-quantitative uses of focus groups in natural resource policy research. In the Minnis et al. study, focus groups provided insights into the level of hunters' understanding of state bear hunting policies. These insights led to the use of hypothetical scenarios in the subsequent mail questionnaire.

Minnis et al. (1997) compared the use of focus groups in questionnaire design with questionnaire development exclusively from the researcher perspective. They concluded:

1) focus groups enabled researchers to better develop and address research questions, 2) focus groups exposed factors unanticipated by researchers, but critical to the topic, 3) focus groups provided a participant perspective, and 4) focus groups are useful, and perhaps underutilized, in human dimensions research (pp. 46-47).

Henderson (1991), in her discussion of qualitative methods for recreation, parks, and leisure research states:

Indepth interviewing can be expensive, time consuming, biased, and sometimes inefficient, but the method also provides some of the richest data that we can find. Indepth interviews are hard to pretest, have unpredictable results because different people tend to respond differently, and are difficult to standardize and replicate. On the other hand, they also offer many advantages in allowing the researcher to have a greater understanding of the complexities of social reality from a number of perspectives. (p.72)

She identifies focus group interviews as a variation of qualitative interviewing (p.82). Her discussion extensively cites a 1988 work by Krueger, linking the focus group interview method as defined by Krueger, with recreation, parks, and leisure research. She concurs with Krueger that focus group interviews may be used alone or in combination with other methods adding that they are appropriate for program evaluation (p. 82). Henderson's (1991) identification of focus group interviews for recreation

program evaluation suggests their suitability for recreation needs assessments.

Mitra (1994) used focus group interviews in connection with a public sector recreation needs assessment, not as a stand-alone or even a primary data collection method, but in a pre-quantitative role. She discussed the use of focus groups in developing a written questionnaire for a public sector recreation needs assessment. She found focus groups, "help to make a questionnaire specific to a community" by: 1) providing community specific input, and 2) helping to design a final instrument for specific programs. She noted that by conducting preliminary focus groups, it was possible to increase awareness of recreation opportunities and to publicize the study which may increase response rates to the subsequent survey. She identified an additional value to focus groups, that of creating a "public relations channel" for the recreation provider (Mitra, 1994, p.134).

Mitra (1994) established two criteria for focus group success: 1) sufficient interest in providing input, and 2) moderator awareness of recreation issues to keep special interests from turning focus groups into "forums for airing complaints and grievances" or digressing to irrelevant issues (p. 138).

Mitra (1994) concluded that, "a very good understanding of the leisure needs of the community" may be obtained solely through focus groups, but rejected them as a single data gathering method for recreation needs assessments. She stated two reasons: 1) focus groups most often represent frequent users of the recreation provider, not necessarily a random sample of the community², and 2) recreation planners and administrators tend to prefer "hard numbers". She stated this tendency can be "corrected" by increasing focus group use and improving qualitative data coding methods (Mitra, 1994, p.139).

The effectiveness of focus groups in leisure research was studied by Siegenthaler et al.(1998), but as a secondary objective. They also found focus group interviews activated forgotten details, a feature identified by Merton et al.(1956). Siegenthaler et al.(1998) used focus groups to examine the leisure perceptions of older women in retirement communities. A second purpose of the study was, "to examine the effectiveness of focus groups for stimulating thought

²Groups in her study were made up of recreation staff, interest groups, and volunteers responding to press releases. It seems that the sampling method, not the use of focus groups, was the cause of this limitation.

and discussion about leisure and recreation with older women" (Siegenthaler et al., 1998, p.55).

The authors found focus groups were an "effective means of eliciting discussion" and "the interactions with other group members appeared to stimulate their own thoughts about their experiences and perceptions" (Siegenthaler et al., 1998, p. 65). Finally, "the women clearly enjoyed the discussion and seemed to appreciate the social interaction it provided" (Siegenthaler et al., 1998, p. 65).

In summary, the uses of focus groups largely have been pre-quantitative (e.g., to prepare self-administered questionnaires) or in combination with other methods, both quantitative and qualitative. Uses have been determined by the purpose of the research and the ease with which the topic is likely to be discussed by participants.

Strengths of focus groups stem from group interaction and gaining the participant's perspective, although the degree to which they provide a "natural" setting conducive to discussion appears to be debatable. Weaknesses of focus groups lie in the logistical difficulties of recruiting and assembling groups, the lack of researcher control, and in the interpretation and analysis of results.

"Assessment involves getting potential baseline information about available inputs, what needs and interests people have, current involvement, attitudes and reactions to leisure or a particular situation, and an assessment of what knowledge, skills, aspirations, and attitudes now exist" (Henderson, 1995, p. 52). The focus group interview method is appropriate for recreation needs assessments because focus group interviews: 1) access participant perspectives, 2) activate forgotten details through group interaction, 3) avoid forcing participants to answer preconceived questions and choose from limited options, 4) mirror the natural decision making process which involves outside influences, 5) provide the opportunity for indepth explanations and details, 6) are well suited to noncontroversial topics such as recreation, 7) allow for the modification of questions as unanticipated topics arise, 8) provide personal contact that improves response for typically underrepresented groups such as African Americans, 9) open public relations channels, and 10) may be used in subsequent design of a quantitative instrument. In light of the challenges presented to traditional methods by diverse populations, the foundations of focus group interviews in social sciences, the support for focus group interviews as a stand-alone method, and its

prior inclusion in leisure research, consideration of the focus group interview as the primary data gathering method for public recreation needs assessments is merited.

Problem

Traditionally, parks and recreation agencies have selected from among mailed surveys, telephone interviews and personal interviews in collecting data for recreation needs assessments. The focus group interview has been identified as a useful, self-contained data collection method for social science research (Morgan, 1988) and appropriate for public sector needs assessments (Krueger, 1994). Yet, the method is rarely used as the primary data collection method in recreation needs assessments. Its effectiveness in this role remains largely untested.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- 1.) to conduct a recreation needs assessment using focus group interviews as the primary data gathering method.
- 2.) to identify criteria for evaluating the focus group interview method based on the goals of the parks agency using the findings for planning purposes and generally accepted social science research standards.

3.) to evaluate the focus group interview method along the criteria identified.

4.) to provide recommendations for the effective use of the focus group interview method in recreation needs assessments.

CHAPTER 3

Procedures

Two sets of procedures are explained in this chapter. First, the procedures used to conduct the needs assessment are described including sampling, recruiting focus groups, conducting focus group interviews, coding data, analyzing data, and reporting data. Second, the procedures used to evaluate the focus group interview method used in the needs assessment are described including criteria as determined by the goals of the agency sponsoring the study, and criteria as determined by generally accepted social science research standards.

Needs Assessment Procedures

The needs assessment was conducted to determine the recreation needs of the residents of Ingham County for the Ingham County Parks Department. Ingham County is located in the center of Michigan's lower peninsula. The county may be characterized as the home of Michigan's state capital in Lansing, Michigan State University--the state's largest institution of higher learning, and General Motors Corporation manufacturing (Huisjen, 1999). A majority (65%) of the county's 281,912 residents live in East Lansing and Lansing (U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and

Statistics Administration, Bureau of the Census, [U.S. Census], 1992). The Ingham County parks system is comprised of over 1,000 acres of parkland in five parks located primarily in the northwest corner of the county near the county's population centers. The size of parks ranges from 40 acre Baldwin Park to 540 acre William Burchfield Park and Riverbend Nature Center. System facilities include softball fields, volleyball courts, basketball courts, playgrounds, picnic shelters, horseshoe pits, swimming beaches, snack bars, fishing ponds, canoe rentals, pedal boat rentals, sledding hills, ice skating rinks, cross-country ski trails, hiking trails, and a nature day camp. A soccer complex is scheduled to open in 2000 (Ingham County Parks Department, 1999).

Sampling

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed in the selection of pre-existing and constructed groups along a sampling matrix (Figure 1). The vertical axis of the matrix comprised a list of communities located throughout the county. The horizontal axis comprised a selection of socioeconomic and special interest characteristics. There was no attempt made to fill all of

Location/ Population Distribution	Recreation	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Other³
Lansing		Big Brothers/ Big Sisters	Big Brothers/ Big Sisters		
					Friends of Fenner
				St. Mary's Cathedral Altar Society	
	Police Athletic League	Police Athletic League	Police Athletic League		
					Greater Lansing Labor Council
			NAACP		
					Center for Independent Living
East Lansing	MSU Outing Club	MSU Outing Club			
	ASMSU				
	Outdoor retailers				
		East Lansing Seniors' Commission			
		Julian Samora Institute	Julian Samora Institute		
Stockbridge					Stockbridge Township Supervisors
Webberville					Webberville Parks Advisory Committee
Leslie		Leslie High School students			
					Leslie Lions Club
Mason		Mason High School students			
					Mason Rotary
Okemos		Meridian Senior Center			
Williamston					Williamston City Council
Dansville		Dansville Board of Education			Dansville Board of Education
Countywide					Park professionals
	bicyclists				
	Boy Scout leaders	Boy Scout leaders		Boy Scout leaders	
					Ingham County Commissioners
		Retired and Senior Volunteer Program			

Figure 1. Sampling matrix of focus groups conducted.

³Consists of environmental interests, units of government, park professionals and other community leadership groups.

the resulting cells of the matrix, but to insure an even distribution. The geographic locations and characteristics that formed the basis of the matrix were determined by the Ingham County Parks Board, a nine-member appointed body. These locations and characteristics were chosen by the parks board to include persons in the study that were unrepresented in previous attempts to obtain citizen input such as public hearings (R. Moore, personal communication, July 28, 1999).

Ingham County Parks Board members and park staff were encouraged to suggest existing groups and constructed groups of individuals that were homogeneous along the sampling characteristics of the matrix. Published lists of organizations were also utilized. Groups declining participation were asked to recommend groups with similar characteristics. Twenty-six groups were interviewed (Figure 1). Twenty-three of the groups were pre-existing, three were constructed (outdoor retailers, park professionals, and Boy Scout leaders).

Pre-existing groups were selected for several reasons in addition to homogeneity along sampling characteristics. First, pre-existing groups tend to have a pre-established

comfort level among members that is not present among strangers. Second, focus group interviews were conducted in conjunction with that group's regularly scheduled meeting at their regular meeting place which reduced logistical difficulties for participants. Third, the use of pre-existing groups provided an opportunity for agency outreach.

Traditionally, focus groups are intentionally made up of persons unknown to each other but sharing a given characteristic (i.e., constructed groups). According to Morgan (1988), the risks in using groups composed of friends include: 1) "taken-for-granted assumptions" among friends that can hide information, and 2) topics tacitly deemed unsuitable for discussion (p.48). Krueger (1994) warned that: 1) people who interact socially on a regular basis may be responding to past experiences instead of the current topic, 2) "familiarity tends to inhibit disclosure" (p.18), 3) superior-subordinate relationships, such as supervisor-employee, inhibit discussion, and 4) "pre-established lines of communications" among colleagues or friends makes interpretation difficult (p.87). Yet, he reported the uncertainty among researchers of the necessity and practicality of recruiting groups of strangers, particularly in community-based research where it may be virtually

impossible for participants to be unacquainted with each other. He suggested that the effects of the familiarity of participants is an issue for analysis (Krueger, 1994). Wicks and Norman (1996) conducted a pre-quantitative focus group study to determine more effective ways to survey low-income African Americans. They selected pre-existing groups, "to ensure that each group would be homogeneous and compatible" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990 cited in Wicks & Norman, 1996, p.5). Wicks and Norman (1996) also contend that less energy needs to be devoted to "group maintenance" in homogeneous groups, particularly if the topic under study is a sensitive issue (p.5).

A list of six groups was assembled according to the sampling matrix for the first wave of recruiting. Recruiting was done in several waves so that an even distribution of groups in the matrix would result.

Recruiting Focus Groups

Initial contact was via telephone, when necessary, to determine or confirm the name, address, and telephone number of the contact person for the selected group. Both the Ingham County Parks Department and Michigan State University were identified as the sponsor and researcher, respectively, in all calls and correspondence associated with the study. A

personalized letter on University letterhead was sent explaining the purpose of the study, questions to be asked, the amount of time required for the discussion, and the approximate date the contact person could expect a follow-up call from a member of the research team (Appendix A). Each letter was signed by each researcher. Follow-up calls were placed within two to four business days after expected receipt of the letter (Appendix B). Confirmation calls were placed to groups agreeing to participate one to two days prior to the scheduled meeting. Groups were not offered, nor did they receive, compensation.

Sixty-one groups were contacted. Groups declined to participate for a variety of reasons. Some believed their meetings were already too long so that the addition of the focus group interview would reduce participation below the ten person minimum suggested in the recruitment letter. Some declined to participate because they believed their membership did not visit Ingham County parks. Recruiters assured group leaders that the views of nonusers of parks were sought which persuaded some groups to reconsider. Some groups did not give reasons for not participating, stating simply that they were not interested. None of the groups

stated that they declined because incentives were not offered.

Conducting Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews took place immediately before, after, or within a group's regular meeting or event at the group's meeting location, with the exception of constructed groups. Constructed groups met in various conference room settings that were convenient to participants.

Each participant was asked to complete a self-administered written questionnaire designed to gather socioeconomic data and self-reported county park use estimates (Appendix C). Participants also were asked if they wished to receive further county park information via mail and if they wanted to be contacted for an informational county park presentation to any groups to which they belonged. The socioeconomic and residency data were used to determine the representativeness of the sample. Information request data were gathered to enhance outreach efforts by the Ingham County Parks Department. Participant names and addresses of those requesting information were recorded separately to retain individual anonymity (Appendix C).

Focus group interview questions were designed to gather data according to the goals of the Ingham County Parks

Board, Michigan Department of Natural Resources funding guidelines, and generally accepted focus group methods (Appendix D). Five main discussion questions were asked regarding outdoor recreation participation, where that recreation took place, reasons for visiting or not visiting Ingham County parks, attributes desired in Ingham County parks, and support for or opposition to a list of suggested attributes. In addition, probe questions were asked as needed to clarify a response or encourage further, more indepth discussion. The research team arranged the sequence of the discussion questions to guide the participants from general, easy to answer questions to specific, thought provoking issues. This approach eased groups into more difficult discussions only after rapport had been established and participants became fully engaged in the topic.

Interviews were limited to one hour in length. Audio recordings were made and transcribed. Transcripts were prepared by the Michigan State University Office Services Department using word processing computer software.

A moderator team approach was used for the majority of interviews. An experienced lead moderator identified county parks for participants using photographs and a county map

prior to questioning. The lead moderator and one or two apprentice moderators asked questions. The lead moderator asked the majority of questions and directed the flow of discussion. Apprentice moderators took notes, distributed and collected questionnaires, arranged seating and handled other logistical details. Informational brochures were distributed after the discussion.

Moderators were provided with an on-site tour of the Ingham County parks by the parks director. They familiarized themselves with the park literature and local recreation issues.

Coding Data

Socioeconomic, residency, park usage, and information request data, gathered via the self-administered written questionnaire were coded and entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), release 8.0.0, computer software (SPSS, Inc., 1998).

Because a fairly structured interview guide was used, the focus group interview data coding system was based on the guide. A global code was established for each question in the guide. Four person codes (self, family, client, and others) were established to distinguish self-reports from informant reports. Place codes indicated if the response

referred to county parks or parks, in general. Response codes indicated the substance of the idea expressed in the response. Responses that clearly and distinctly expressed recurring themes were assigned a quote code (Appendix E).

Responses were coded using combinations of the codes described above. Combinations differed based on the nature of the question (Appendix E). For example, if in response to question 1, a participant said, "I play golf", the response would receive three codes: the global code for question 1 "recreation participation"; the person code "self" because it is a self-report; and the response code "golf" because that is the substance of the idea expressed. A place code would not have been assigned because a place was not indicated by the participant.

Each transcript was coded twice. The first coding was performed independently. The second coding was an evaluation of the first coding. Additions and changes identified in the second coding were incorporated into the final coding. Differences in interpretation were resolved by the two coders working together to achieve a consensus. Coded transcripts were entered into Ethnograph v5.02 computer software for the analysis of text-based data (Qualis Research, 1998) (Figure 2).

Focus Group 18 Julian Samora Research	1				
Institute January 22, 1999	2				
 F1: Okay, the first question that we	4				
have is, what kinds of outdoor	5				
recreation do you engage in, and it	6				
doesn't have to be just in these parks	7				
or really in any parks but what kinds	8				
of things do you do for recreation	9				
outdoors?	10				
 !-RECPART !-SELF !-BIKE !-WALK !-SWIM					
R: Bike riding, walking, swimming.	12	!			
 F1: Riding, would that be...	14				
 R: Bike riding.	16				
 F1: Okay.	18				
 #-RECPART #-SELF #-CONCERT					
R: We attend outdoor concerts at times	20	-#			
the summer.	21	-#			
 #-RECPART #-SELF #-SOCIALIZE #-PLAYGROUND					
R: Take kids to the park. Play on the	23	-#			
swings.	24	-#			
 #-RECPART #-SELF #-SLED					
R: Do tobogganing some. I've got kids	26	-#			
I get into a lot of that.	27	-#			
 #-RECPART #-SELF #-SLED					
R: Yeah, the wintertime, sledding and	29	-#			
stuff.	30	-#			
 F1: Okay. What about you guys?	32				
 #-RECPART #-SELF #-FISH #-SPORTS #-BASEBALL #-BASKETBALL					
R: Yeah, fishing, pretty much, a little	34	-#			
bit, sports, baseball, basketball.	35	-#			

Figure 2. Page of coded transcript.

Analyzing Data

Using SPSS, frequencies and percentages were calculated for the socioeconomic, residency, park usage, and information request data. Percentages for socioeconomic and residency data were compared with respective categories of the 1990 U.S. Census for Ingham County.

As discussed in the literature review, data generated using focus group interviews present challenges in interpretation of results. Morgan (1988) describes two approaches to focus group data analysis: "ethnographic", relying on direct quotation, and "content analysis", producing numerical descriptions of data. Recognizing the strength in combining the two approaches, he stated, "Thus a largely ethnographic approach may benefit from a systematic tallying of one or two key topics, while a basically quantitative summary of the data is improved immensely by including quotes that demonstrate the points being made" (Morgan, 1988, p.64).

Krueger (1994) cautioned against the use of numbers in analyzing focus group results. "Numbers sometimes convey the impression that results can be projected to a population, and this is not within the capabilities of qualitative research procedures" (Krueger, 1994, pp.154-155). He listed

seven considerations in analysis, including the frequency and extensiveness of comments and warned against equating frequency and extensiveness with importance. He suggested finding the "big ideas" that "emerge from an accumulation of the evidence" (Krueger, 1994, pp.150-151).

As recommended by Morgan (1988), qualitative data from focus group interviews were analyzed using content analysis. Frequencies of response were counted and ranked for each discussion question (Appendix F). For the top five ranked responses, frequencies by focus group and percentage across groups were calculated to identify the origin and distribution of the most frequently given responses.

As suggested by both Morgan (1988) and Krueger (1994), major concepts also were identified by the research team using the ethnographic approach. Major concepts were determined by their tendency to surface in response to different discussion questions. A narrative summary of each major concept was illustrated with quotations from focus group interview participants. In addition, frequencies were recalculated along response codes regardless of question code providing content analysis for major concepts (Appendix G).

Reporting Data

Reports to the parks board were made on a monthly basis throughout the course of the study. The parks board's input was sought including suggestions for discussion and questionnaire questions, recommendations of groups to be recruited, decisions on topics for analysis and analysis formats, and the content and format of the final report.

As suggested by Morgan (1988), decisions about how to report findings were largely already made in the choice of an approach to analysis. Two approaches were used to report the results. First, ranked frequency counts were reported, organized by discussion question (Appendix F). Second, major concepts as identified by the research team and requested by parks board members were described in short narratives, verified by frequency counts and illustrated by direct quotations from focus group interview transcripts (Knap & Propst, 1999 and Appendix G).

Evaluation Procedures

Objective 2 of this study is to identify criteria for evaluating the focus group interview method. In a discussion of evaluation research, Babbie (1998) stated, "[O]ne of the biggest problems faced by researchers is getting people to agree on criteria of success and failure" (p.25). The

criteria used in this evaluation had two origins: (1) the goals of the Ingham County recreation needs assessment and (2) generally accepted social science research standards.

Several sources were consulted to determine the goals of the assessment. Yoder et al., (1995) recommended that the agency's "expressed and unexpressed desires for planning should be gathered. This will come from a variety of sources including minutes of meetings, letters to other agencies, notes from within the agency, or personal conversations inside and outside the agency" (p.31). The first set of criteria was compiled from the Ingham County Parks Department's Request for Proposal #30-98 (Ingham County Parks Department, 1998b), Michigan Department of Natural Resources guidelines, Community Recreation Planning (Michigan Department of Natural Resources [MDNR], 1999), and the Ingham County Parks Board (Ingham County Parks Board, 1998).

Criteria as Determined by the Goals of the Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment:

Criterion 1.

To provide "a barometer of current and future demands for recreational facilities and services" (Ingham County Parks Department, 1998b).

Criterion 2.

To fulfill the requirements of the state funding application process (Ingham County Parks Department, 1998b).

Criterion 3.

To limit the assessment to the residents of Ingham County (Ingham County Parks Department, 1998b).

Criterion 4.

"To conduct a needs assessment in such a way that the diversity of the county, in terms of socioeconomic characteristics and geographical distribution, will be represented" (Ingham County Parks Department, 1998b).

Criterion 5.

To "hold costs and time requirements to a minimum" (Ingham County Parks Department, 1998b).

Criterion 6.

To provide "more than just a wish list" of facilities (Ingham County Parks Board meeting, 1998).

Criterion 7.

To establish contacts with constituency groups to further "outreach" efforts (Ingham County Parks Board, 1998).

The criteria identified by the Ingham County Parks Department are among the criteria of a well conducted community needs assessment according to recreation research literature. In generalized terms these criteria are: identification of current and future desires (Hudson & Witt, 1984, p. 15), meeting funding requirements (Yoder et al., 1995, p.31), identification of the population under study (Howard & Crompton, 1984, pp.35-36), representativeness of the population by the sample (Howard & Crompton, 1984, p.35; Hudson & Witt, 1984, p.22), cost effectiveness (Hudson, 1988, p.4; Hudson & Witt, 1984, p.14), and expansion of community outreach (Hudson & Witt, 1984, p. 14).

The second set of criteria was based on generally accepted social science research standards. These criteria are important in performing credible social science research. The combination of both sets of criteria resulted in an evaluation that was both pragmatic and rigorous. Babbie (1998) offered a list of questions consumers of

social science research should ask. The following criteria were selected and adapted from that list.

Criteria as Determined by Generally Accepted Social Science Research Standards:

Criterion 8.

Subjects and observations should be selected in such a way as to provide a broad overview of the phenomenon under study to determine if the researcher has paid special attention to deviant or disconfirming cases (Babbie, 1998, p.462).

Criterion 9.

Measures obtained should be reliable and valid (Babbie, 1998, p.463).

Tests for reliability of focus group data were not found in the literature on focus group methods. However, Babbie (1998) recommended certain practices may be followed to guard against researcher unreliability. These practices include: 1) a coding system agreed upon by coders, 2) multiple independent coding, and 3) resolution and re-evaluation of disagreements in coding (Babbie, 1998, p.133).

Tests for validity were similarly absent from focus group literature. Krueger (1994) argued that because, "Validity is the degree to which the procedure really

measures what it proposes to measure" that "*Focus groups are valid if they are used carefully for a problem that is suitable for focus group inquiry*" (Italics is in the original.) (Krueger, 1994, p.31). "Typically focus groups have high face validity, which is due in large part to the believability of comments from participants" and because "The decision maker, when confronted with focus group results, may find explanations that seem infinitely reasonable, explanations that have come directly from the clients and not from secondhand summaries" (Krueger, 1994, p.32).

Criterion 10.

Conclusions reported should be based on actual findings (Babbie, 1998, p. 464).

In Chapter 4, Results and Discussion, the focus group interview method is evaluated along each criterion (Objective 3). The results of the recreation needs assessment (Objective 1) are presented within the context of the criteria. For a fuller discussion of the recreation needs assessment, see Knap and Propst, 1999.

CHAPTER 4

Results and Discussion

In this chapter, each criterion described in Chapter 3 is restated along with an operational definition. Then the method is evaluated along each criterion. The data used in the evaluation were gathered using both the self-administered questionnaire and the focus group interview.

Evaluation along Criteria based on the Goals of the Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment

Criterion 1

To provide "a barometer of current and future demands⁴ for recreational facilities and services" (Ingham County Parks Department, 1998b).

Jubenville (1976) described the importance of identifying needs in the outdoor recreation planning process. "It is imperative that we properly allocate our limited fiscal and natural resources for recreation, using

⁴ The word "needs" has been used as a substitute for the word "demands" to conform to "needs assessment" terminology and because "demands" may have unintended economic connotations for some readers. The word "demands" appears in the original request for proposal as a goal for the recreation needs assessment. The word "needs" is not intended to infer basic human needs commonly referred to in psychology literature.

some priority system. Generally, the priority system should conform to identified *leisure needs* of the potential user population. . ." (Italics is in the original.) (p.65). To provide measures of current and future needs for recreational facilities and services, responses to three questions were examined (Appendix D). Discussion question 3 asked participants why they did or did not recreate in Ingham County parks at present. Responses to this question as they related to facilities and services were used to determine if a measure of current needs was provided. Discussion question 4 asked participants to name facilities and services they thought the county should provide in the future. Question 5 also was concerned with the future, asking participants which facilities they would support from a list of suggestions. Responses to questions 4 and 5, as they related to facilities and services, were used to determine if a measure of future needs was provided.

Only some reasons for visiting Ingham County parks were related to facilities and services. The following reasons were facilities and services related and were given five or more times: playground play, picnicking, availability of picnic pavilions, canoeing, cross-country skiing, well-maintained parks, swimming, walking, observing nature,

enjoying the beach (excluding swimming), trails, boating (excluding canoeing), and the availability of varied activities in the parks (Table 22, Appendix F).

Only some reasons given for not visiting Ingham County parks were related to facilities and services. The following reasons were facilities and services related and were given five or more times: poor water quality of swimming lakes, a lack of activities available in parks, and the presence of jetskis on park waters (Table 23, Appendix F).

Thirty-three facilities and services needed in the future in Ingham County parks were named. For brevity, only the top ten ranked by frequency of response appear here. They were: land acquisition, connecting parks with trails/greenways, bicycle trails (not including mountain bike trails), nature areas, youth programming, hiking trails, skateboard park, clean lake water for swimming, minimal development in parks, and more access to natural waterways (e.g., lakes, rivers) (Table 26, Appendix F).

Participants had the opportunity to express their support for or opposition to facilities presented to them on the list of suggestions (Appendix D, Question 5). Respondents expressed support for twenty-one facilities and services in response to a list of suggestions. The list

contained ten items, three of which were open-ended (additional trails, please specify trail type; other athletic facilities, please describe; other, please describe) accounting for more than ten types of responses (Appendix D). For brevity, only the top ten ranked by frequency of response appear here. They were: paved paths, land acquisition, water park, campgrounds, skateboard park, soccer fields, softball/baseball fields, hiking trails (not including paved paths), well-maintained sports facilities/groomed trails and tent campgrounds (Table 27, Appendix F).

Facilities opposed by participants and named five or more times were: water park, soccer fields, skateboard park, campgrounds, paved paths, and land acquisition (Table 28, Appendix F).

Evaluation of Criterion 1.

A "barometer" of current and future needs for recreation facilities and services was provided using the focus group interview method. Two indicators were identified. First, the variety of responses given indicated thorough coverage of the topic. One hundred twenty different facilities and services were named in response to discussion questions 3, 4 and 5. A recreation needs assessment for Kent

County, using a self-administrated questionnaire, provided forty responses for participants to choose from in response to similar questions (Nelson & Johnson, 1997). Second, the range of frequencies provided a numerical description of the data which may be used to prioritize management and planning actions (The number of times a given facility or service was named ranged from one to forty-six.). So, while there is no objective standard for the variety and number of responses that determines the effectiveness of a method, the depth and breadth of response achieved seemed to provide an appropriate measure of current and future needs.

Criterion 2

To fulfill the requirements of the state funding application process (Ingham County Parks Department, 1998b).

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (Michigan Department of Natural Resources [MDNR], 1999) requires a community recreation plan for grant eligibility. The planning process must include citizen input. Solicitation of citizen input may take many forms. MDNR (1999) suggests public hearings, surveys, workshops, informational letters and flyers, and telephone calls. Whatever form citizen input takes, two requirements must be satisfied. To satisfy the

first requirement, the method must involve the public in the process of creating a community recreation plan including:

1) diversity in representation, 2) inclusion of underrepresented groups, and 3) use of multiple media for public notification. To satisfy the second requirement, the data collected must provide insights into the "recreation priorities" of the community to maintain and improve recreation opportunities (MDNR, 1999, p.7).

Evaluation of Criterion 2.

The MDNR (1999) requires representation by "diverse segments" of the population and recommends involving "segments of the population whose concerns are often overlooked" (MDNR, 1999, p.7 and p.3). Previous efforts by Ingham County solicited public input through of public hearings. These efforts tended to be dominated by persons living near the parks or special interest groups (R. Moore, personal communication, July 28, 1999). The purposive sampling method used in the Ingham County recreation needs assessment employed a sampling matrix for selection and recruitment of groups. The representativeness of the sample was monitored and adjusted throughout the course of the study to insure diversity along those variables listed in the matrix (Figure 1, p.30). This sampling method met the

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MDNR requirement of diversity and followed its recommendation to involve "overlooked" segments. Focus group interviews are not listed among MDNR suggested methods for public notification (MDNR, 1999, p.7) probably due to their infrequent use in recreation needs assessments.

The data collected in the Ingham County recreation needs assessment satisfied and exceeded MDNR requirements for determining community recreation priorities. Discussion questions gathered data on participant priorities as required. In addition, data were gathered on outdoor recreation participation, reasons for visiting parks, and suggested media for distribution of park information. Written questionnaire items collected data on frequency of park use and socioeconomic characteristics, also in excess of MDNR requirements.

This recreation needs assessment met and exceeded MDNR requirements for citizen input in the planning process with the exception of using multiple media for public notification. The Ingham County Parks Department will advertise and conduct public hearings on the draft plan prior to adoption, in compliance with this requirement (R. Moore, personal communication, September 20, 1999). Citizen

input, in whatever form it takes, is only one component of a complex application process for state grant eligibility.

Criterion 3

To limit the assessment to the residents of Ingham County (Ingham County Parks Department, 1998b).

Seventeen out of 211 focus group participants that reported residency (8.1%) were not residents of Ingham County. Of the seventeen nonresidents, nine resided in Delta Township in Eaton County. Three identified their place of residency as Clinton County. One participant resided in Bath in Clinton County, one in DeWitt in Clinton County, one in Eaton Rapids in Clinton County, one in Grand Ledge in Eaton County and one in Watertown Township in Clinton County (Table 2). Clinton County borders Ingham County to the north. Eaton County borders Ingham County to the west.

Table 2. Places of residence of nonresident respondents.

Residence	Frequency
Delta Township	9
Clinton County	3
Bath	1
DeWitt	1
Eaton Rapids	1
Grand Ledge	1
Watertown Township	1
Total	17

Nonresidents were present in six groups. The highest number of nonresidents in a single group was nine. The highest proportion of nonresidents in a single group was 75% (Table 3).

Table 3. Nonresident distribution in groups.

Group	Frequency	% Nonresident within group	Frequency/Residence	
St. Mary's Cathedral Altar Society (n=24)	9	37.5	7 2	Delta Twp Clinton County
Big Brothers/Big Sisters Staff (n=4)	3	75.0	1 1 1	DeWitt Grand Ledge Watertown Twp
Julian Samora Institute (n=9)	2	22.2	1 1	Bath Eaton Rapids
Michigan State University Outing Club (n=5)	1	20.0	1	Delta Twp
East Lansing Seniors' Commission (n=12)	1	8.3	1	Clinton County
NAACP (n=12)	1	8.3	1	Delta Twp

Evaluation of Criterion 3.

All of the groups that contained nonresident participants were selected, in part, due to their geographic location in the Lansing and East Lansing areas. The boundaries of these metropolitan areas extend beyond Ingham County. These nonresidents, by belonging to Lansing and East

Lansing based groups, demonstrate the lack of importance of these political boundaries. The percentage of nonresidents was small (8.1%). Furthermore, nonresidents probably do not differ in any way that would substantially affect the results of this study. The inability to identify, in analysis, the origin of responses by individual respondent is one limitation of the focus group interview method used in this study.

The focus group method used employed preexisting groups. To exclude nonresidents, a screening question could have been asked prior to the interview. The disadvantage of excluding nonresident members of preexisting groups would have been the loss of comfort, one of the advantages of using preexisting groups.

Because residency data show which groups contained nonresident participants and to what degree, entire groups containing nonresidents could have been excluded from analysis. The disadvantage of excluding such groups would have been the loss of data from residents in the group. Exclusion of an entire group may have significantly altered representativeness of the entire sample on variables other than residency. For public recreation agencies, residency is important more for its political implications than the

ability of nonresidents to provide useful information. The importance of residency and the extent to which nonresidency occurred were weighed against the importance of the other characteristics possessed by nonresidents. The decision was made to accept some nonresidency in exchange for inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups.

Certain groups that contained nonresidents were recruited as informants. Focus Group 1, Big Brothers-Big Sisters staff, contained 75% nonresidents but reported on resident clients. Inclusion of informant focus groups in the sample presented an alternative method of gathering data on groups that typically do not return mail surveys (i.e., low income, poorly educated).

The goal of limiting the assessment to the residents of Ingham County was substantially met. A majority of the sample, 91.9%, resided in Ingham County.

Criterion 4

To conduct a needs assessment in such a way that the diversity of the county, in terms of socioeconomic characteristics and geographical distribution, will be represented (Ingham County Parks Department, 1998b).

Socioeconomic data were collected using a self-administered written questionnaire. The socioeconomic characteristics assessed were: age, gender, education, race/origin, and household type. In addition, data on residency were collected to measure geographic distribution. To evaluate representativeness, the socioeconomic characteristics and geographic distribution of the sample were compared with the population of Ingham County as recorded in the 1990 U.S. Census (Tables 4-9). In some cases, sample categories were collapsed for comparability with 1990 U.S. Census categories.

Table 4. Age of sample compared with 1990 U.S. Census for Ingham County.

AGE	PERCENT OF SAMPLE (n=210)	PERCENT OF POPULATION
under 18 years	13.3	24.3
18-24 years	10.0	19.6
25-44 years	17.6	32.7
45-64 years	36.2	14.9
65-79 years	14.3	6.5
80 years and over	8.6	2.1
Total ⁵	100.0	100.1

⁵ Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 5. Gender of sample compared with 1990 U.S. Census for Ingham County.

GENDER	PERCENT OF SAMPLE (n=213)	PERCENT OF POPULATION
Male	44.1	48.0
Female	55.9	52.0
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 6. Education of sample compared with 1990 U.S. Census for Ingham County.

EDUCATION	PERCENT OF SAMPLE⁶ (n=213)	PERCENT OF POPULATION 18 YEARS AND OLDER
less than high school	15.5	14.5
high school graduate	12.7	22.0
some college + two-year college graduate	24.9	39.4
four-year college graduate + some graduate work + graduate degree + professional degree	46.5	24.1
certified trade (no equivalent census category)	.5	N/A
Total ⁷	100.1	100.0

⁶ Sample data includes persons under 18 years of age.

⁷ Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 7. Race/origin of sample compared with 1990 U.S. Census for Ingham County.

RACE/ORIGIN	PERCENT OF SAMPLE (n=211)	PERCENT OF POPULATION
White (not of Hispanic origin)	85.8	82.1
Black (not of Hispanic origin)	7.1	9.7
American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut (not of Hispanic origin)	0	.6
Asian or Pacific Islander (not of Hispanic origin)	0	2.6
Hispanic origin (of any race)	5.2	4.8
Multiracial (no equivalent census category)	1.4	N/A
Other race (not of Hispanic origin)	.5	.2
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 8. Household type of sample compared with 1990 U.S. Census for Ingham County.

HOUSEHOLD TYPE	PERCENT OF SAMPLE (n=213)	PERCENT OF POPULATION
couple with children at home (married-couple family with own children under 18 years) ⁸	29.6	23.5
single with children at home (female householder, no husband present with own children under 18 years)	5.2	8.2
couple without children at home (married-couple family total less married-couple family with own children under 18 years)	27.2	24.3
single without children at home (householder living alone, total)	27.2	26.3
other	10.8	17.7
Total	100.0	100.0

⁸Descriptions in parentheses are 1990 U.S. Census categories.

Table 9. Residence of sample compared with 1990 U.S. Census for Ingham County.

COUNTY SUBDIVISION	PERCENT OF SAMPLE (n=211)	PERCENT OF POPULATION
Alaiedon township	1.4	1.1
Aurelius township	.9	1.0
Bunker Hill township	0	.7
Delhi Charter township	1.4	6.8
East Lansing city	12.3	18.0
Ingham township	1.9	.7
Lansing ⁹	19.9	46.7
Leroy township	4.7	1.3
Leslie ¹⁰	7.1	1.6
Locke township	.9	.5
Mason city	8.1	2.4
Meridian township	10.4	12.6
Onondaga township	.5	.9
Stockbridge township	5.2	1.1
Vevay township	1.4	1.3
Wheatfield township	1.4	.6
White Oak township	.9	.4
Williamston city	.5	1.0
Williamstown township	4.3	1.5
Incorrect responses	1.9	N/A
Responded "Ingham County"	6.6	N/A
Reside outside Ingham County	8.1	N/A
Total ¹¹	99.8	100.2

⁹ Respondents did not distinguish between Lansing City and Lansing Township; these two categories are combined and identified as "Lansing".

¹⁰ Respondents did not distinguish between Leslie City and Leslie Township; these two categories are combined and identified as "Leslie".

¹¹ Does equal total 100% due to rounding.

In comparison with the 1990 U.S. Census data (U.S. Census, 1992), the sample contained more persons 45 years of age and older and contained fewer persons 44 years of age and younger. The sample was composed of more females (55.9%) than the population (52.0%). The highest level of education achieved by the sample was higher than that of the population. Regarding race/origin, the sample contained more Whites (85.8%) than the population (82.1%), fewer Blacks (7.1%) than the population (9.7%), and more Hispanics (5.2%) than the population (4.8%). Regarding household type, the sample contained more couples with children living at home (29.6%) than the population (23.5%), more couples without children at home (27.2%) than the population (24.3%) and fewer singles with children at home (5.2%) than the population (8.2%).

The geographic distribution of the sample, as indicated by residency, underrepresented Lansing (19.9%) compared with the population (46.7%). Other areas surrounding Lansing were also underrepresented including East Lansing (12.3%), Delhi Charter Township (1.4%), and Meridian Township (10.4%) compared with the population at 18.0%, 6.8%, and 12.6%, respectively. Less densely populated areas that tended to be overrepresented include Stockbridge Township (5.2%), Leroy

Township (4.7%), and Williamstown Township (4.3%) compared with the population at 1.1%, 1.3%, and 1.5%, respectively. Leslie (7.1%) and Mason (8.1%) were overrepresented in comparison with the population at 1.6% and 2.4%, respectively.

Evaluation of Criterion 4.

The purposive sampling technique used in this study was largely responsible for the degree of representativeness achieved. Some overrepresentation of less densely populated geographic areas was anticipated. Efforts were intentionally made to include at least one group from each of the smaller communities outside the Lansing area. According to the parks director, these communities tended to be underrepresented in previous parks department efforts at obtaining citizen input (R. Moore, personal communication, July 28, 1999).

Regarding education, 15.5% of the sample reported their highest level of education to be "less than high school". The sample appeared to be representative of the population. However, the sample included persons under 18 years of age. The 1990 U.S. Census data for this category did not. The sample underrepresented persons over 18 years of age with education levels less than high school. Education was not one of the sampling matrix variables and, as such, was not

used in the recruitment of groups which may explain the lack of comparability.

One strength of the method is the ability to make adjustments to the sample throughout the course of the study to achieve representativeness across sampling variables (Figure 1, p.30). Efforts were made to include groups underrepresented by previous attempts to solicit citizen input. The effect these efforts may have had on representativeness were anticipated and accepted by the research team. Overall, the goal of achieving a representation of socioeconomic diversity and geographic distribution was achieved.

Criterion 5

To "hold costs and time requirements to a minimum while meeting the standards for needs assessments as set forth by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR)" (Ingham County Parks Department, 1998b).

Proposed costs for the Ingham County recreation needs assessment using twenty-six to thirty-four focus groups totaled \$14,242-15,250. The oral report was scheduled to be delivered on May 3, 1999. The deadline for the written report was June 30, 1999 (Propst, 1998).

Evaluation of Criterion 5.

Twenty-six focus groups were conducted. Actual costs for the study totaled \$15,000, which was within the proposed budget. An oral report was presented to the Ingham County Parks Board meeting of May 3, 1999. The final written report was also delivered on time. The Ingham County recreation needs assessment met and exceeded needs assessment requirements for grant eligibility (See Criterion 2 discussion.).

Criterion 6

To provide "more than just a wish list" of facilities (Ingham County Parks Board meeting, 1998).

In stating this goal, parks board members wanted to insure that the recreation needs assessment provided more than merely a list of suggestions for capital improvements. Effectiveness for this criterion has been evaluated in two ways. First, lists of reasons for visiting or not visiting Ingham County parks and lists of attributes desired in Ingham County parks are reviewed for evidence of reasons and attributes that are unrelated to facilities¹². Second, the

¹²Data described in Criterion 1 are facilities related.

data reported in the recreation needs assessment are reviewed for evidence that the focus group interview method produces not only mere lists but also complex concepts illustrated by direct quotations from participants.

Responses to discussion questions 3, 4, and 5 (Appendix D) revealed attributes unrelated to facilities (Tables 10-13). Question 3 asked respondents to identify reasons for visiting (Table 10) or not visiting (Table 11) Ingham County parks. Question 4 asked respondents to identify attributes they desired in Ingham County parks (Table 12). Question 5 asked respondents to support or oppose attributed from a pre-determined list (Table 13).

Table 10. Non-facilities related attributes named in response to discussion question 3, reasons for visiting Ingham County parks.

ATTRIBUTE	RANK AMONG ALL RESPONSES TO QUESTION 3	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSE
socializing	1	26
organized celebrations	2	24
lack of crime	9	9
escaping the city	10	8
convenience	10	8
familiarity	18	5
relaxing	not ranked	less than 5
service from park personnel	not ranked	less than 5
low cost	not ranked	less than 5

Nine different reasons were given for visiting Ingham County parks that were not related to facilities. Of these nine, five were ranked in the top ten for all reasons

(facilities and non-facilities) given. Socializing and organized celebrations ranked first and second, respectively (Table 10).

Table 11. Non-facilities related attributes named in response to discussion question 3, reasons for not visiting Ingham County parks.

ATTRIBUTE	RANK AMONG ALL RESPONSES TO QUESTION 3	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSE
lack of awareness of park locations and services offered	1	58
inconvenient	2	43
fear of crime	4	19
too crowded	5	11
no interest/too busy	6	8
change in family structure	6	8
prefer state parks	9	5
prefer MSU	10	5
prefer metroparks	not ranked	less than 5
prefer local parks	not ranked	less than 5
needs someone to go with	not ranked	less than 5
unable to drink alcoholic beverages	not ranked	less than 5
too lazy to explore new places	not ranked	less than 5
fear of injury	not ranked	less than 5
poor health	not ranked	less than 5
too many rules	not ranked	less than 5
too many unruly people	not ranked	less than 5
fees	not ranked	less than 5
lack of significant natural features	not ranked	less than 5

Similarly, nineteen different reasons were given for not visiting Ingham County parks that were not related to facilities. Eight of the nineteen reasons ranked in the top ten for all reasons given. A lack of awareness of park

locations and services and inconvenience ranked first and second, respectively, (Table 11).

Table 12. Non-facilities related attributes named in response to discussion question 4, attributes desired in Ingham County parks.

ATTRIBUTE	RANK AMONG ALL RESPONSES TO QUESTION 4	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSE
information	1	43
convenience/access to public transportation	3	38
interagency cooperation	4	35
fees	7	26
youth programming	10	19
safety/security patrols	13	15
volunteer opportunities	20	11
senior programming	22	10
entertainment	24	9
education	29	7
increases in funding for parks	29	7
existence value	not ranked	less than 6
control of dogs	not ranked	less than 6
ban alcoholic beverages from parks	not ranked	less than 6

Fourteen different attributes desired in Ingham County parks were named that were not related to facilities. Five of the fourteen ranked in the top ten for all attributes named. Information and convenience/access to public transportation ranked first and third, respectively (Table 12).

Table 13. Non-facilities related attributes named in response to discussion question 5, attributes desired in Ingham County parks (from a pre-determined list).

ATTRIBUTE	RANK AMONG ALL RESPONSES TO QUESTION 5	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSE
fees	7	15
education	11	11
interagency cooperation	17	7
youth programming	18	6
safety/security patrols	18	6
information	23	5
convenience/access to public transportation	not ranked	less than 5
volunteer opportunities	not ranked	less than 5
entertainment	not ranked	less than 5
increases in funding for parks	not ranked	Less than 5
programming for the disabled	not ranked	less than 5
free entrance fees	not ranked	less than 5

Twelve different attributes were named in response to question 5 indicating those attributes participants would support or oppose from a list of suggestions. All of the attributes on the list of suggestions were related to facilities. Still, attributes unrelated to facilities surfaced in the discussion of this question and with enough frequency for one of the attributes, nominal entrance and equipment rental fees, to rank seventh among all attributes named in response to question 5 (Table 13).

All attributes opposed in county parks were related to specific facilities. They were: water park (14 responses),

soccer fields (12 responses), skateboard park (11 responses), campgrounds (unspecified facilities) (10 responses), paved paths (8 responses), land acquisition (5 responses), softball/baseball fields (1 response), interpretive trails (1 response), golf course (1 response), RV camping (1 response), and the physical separation of activities (1 response).

Evaluation along this criterion is also based on the expression of concepts in the data as opposed to mere lists. Nine major concepts were identified. Presentation of the concepts, illustrated by participant quotations, provided complexities and subtleties of recreation needs beyond a mere list of capital improvements. The nine concepts were: 1) convenience/access to public transportation, 2) land acquisition, 3) campgrounds, 4) information, 5) interagency cooperation, 6) connecting parks, 7) nominal entrance and rental fees, 8) low cost/free entrance and services, and 9) a water park. In the interest of brevity, only one concept, the water park, is discussed here as an illustration (Knap & Propst, 1999). See Appendix G for Major Concepts 1-8.

Concept 9: Water Park

Participants seemed to like the idea of a water park. There were concerns, however, about the county's role as

provider. Some feared its failure as a business enterprise, a risk they felt should be borne by the private sector. They referred to plans already underway in East Lansing as an alternative and questioned whether or not there is a need to duplicate the East Lansing facility.

In response to the aided request for suggested facilities, favorable responses occurred 35 times in 16 groups (Table 27, Appendix F) and unfavorable responses occurred 14 times in 7 groups (Table 28, Appendix F). In response to the unaided request for facilities it occurred only twice, once in each of 2 groups (Footnote to Table 26, Appendix F). Therefore, responses total 37 favorable and 14 unfavorable in 18 groups. Groups responding both favorably and unfavorably were: Police Athletic League, Meridian Senior Center, Julian Samora Institute, Boy Scout Leaders, Ingham County Commissioners, and RSVP, indicating disagreement within those groups. The most frequent favorable responses occurred in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Mason High School Student, and Leslie High School Student groups (Tables 14 and 15).

Table 14. Frequency of response in support of a water park, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 2: WATER PARK (FAVORABLE)		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
BIG BROTHERS/SISTERS	5	14%
PARK PROFESSIONALS	1	3%
ST. MARY'S ALTAR SOCIETY	2	5%
MASON HIGH SCHOOL	7	19%
POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE	1	3%
LESLIE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	6	16%
OUTDOOR RETAILERS	1	3%
MERIDIAN SENIOR CENTER	2	5%
GREATER LANSING LABOR COUNCIL	1	3%
JULIAN SAMORA INSTITUTE	1	3%
BOY SCOUT LEADERS	1	3%
NAACP	2	5%
CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING	1	3%
INGHAM CO. COMMISSIONERS	2	5%
RSVP	1	3%
DANSVILLE BOARD OF EDUCATION	3	8%
TOTAL	37	101%

Table 15. Frequency of response in opposition to a water park, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 2: WATER PARK (UNFAVORABLE)		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
FRIENDS OF FENNER	4	29%
POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE	2	14%
MERIDIAN SENIOR CENTER	2	14%
JULIAN SAMORA INSTITUTE	2	14%
BOY SCOUT LEADERS	1	7%
INGHAM CO. COMMISSIONERS	1	7%
RSVP	2	14%
TOTAL	14	99%

Quotations: Water Park (Favorable)

From Leslie High School Students

" Yeah, like Soak City or something like that, something that's up in Muskegon."

"Well, I'm talkin' like if it's a big water park, they could charge more than ten bucks and you'd still get people to go. I mean, even close to twenty, I'd say."

"[A] water park would have to be, like, pretty wide variety for little kids and older kids and adults."

"You got to have a water slide that you go backwards. The water pushes you up it. I've been on one like that in Florida. It's bad!"

"You want to put in a water park, you can't just put in one slide like Funtime 'cause people will get bored with it. You got to have, like, six or seven or eight and, like, different variety type of slides like a speed slide. . ."

From Outdoor Retailers

"I think it's gonna depend on the focus that they want to take as a whole. Um, if they want to cater to the youth in the communities, as a whole, in using the parks, probably the water park idea. . ."

From Meridian Senior Center

"Well, I don't know how important it is, but those places that have a water park, they are really well-attended, I'd say."

From Greater Lansing Labor Council

"It's a great idea, what is the liability, and so forth, of something like that."

From Julian Samora Institute

"Well, there's a lot of liabilities there. So, it could be good and it could be bad. For the most part, I think it would be good, but. . ."

Quotations: Water Park (Unfavorable)

From Police Athletic League

"I don't think it's government's job to put up [what] private industry would do anyway."

From Meridian Senior Center

"...the private ones have gone belly up just recently around Michigan."

"Well, everyone knows the county's got all kinds of money. You know where the county's money is going to come from. Us."

It'd be a big expense to get one going. That would be a big expense."

From Julian Samora Institute

"Not in a park, I don't think in a park."

From Boy Scout Leaders

"All they do is create traffic jams as far as I'm concerned."

From Ingham County Commissioners

"A comment on the water park, they are going to be building something in East Lansing very shortly that will be accessible to a lot of people that will be a large swimming pool, they'll have water type activities and, you know, mushrooms that spout water, etc. So that will just be another expense really to us when we have the Mac and we have East Lansing. There are some other areas also that have water facilities. And, plus, you'd have to staff it. You'd have to have somebody that would be kind of responsible in that area. So, that would be really low on my list."

From RSVP

"I think the water slides and wave pool is too costly."

"Well, to me, that's already, that need is met, because Funtime has that. They have a water slide. I don't know if they have a wave pool. Wave pool, um, they are really expensive. But, I guess, the qualification, if they are going to have a water park, then are they going to have to charge accordingly. To, like it is a private business. This is public money, I don't know."

From Friends of Fenner

"Well, is the thinking that they should be doing more? Is that part of what all this is about as far as some of the things that maybe other investors outside of the government can be putting in?"

"It seems like a liability."

"Not in my backyard. . ."

"Don't put it in Lake Lansing Park."

Evaluation of Criterion 6.

The criterion of providing information beyond a "wish list" of facilities was met by both the number and variety of responses unrelated to specific facilities (i.e., not just facilities) and the nine major concepts (i.e., not just a list). As shown in the illustration of the water park concept, the data went beyond a "yes" or "no" answer to the question "Do you want a water park in an Ingham County park?" The data provided an answer to the "Why?" question. They revealed specific objections including a desire for the financial risk of a water park to be borne by private enterprise, a concern for legal liability for accidents, a view that a water park is an inappropriate use of public funds, and a concern for the unnecessary duplication of services. Similarly, for the other eight major concepts (Appendix G), the focus group interview method provided a full discussion of participants' perspectives, illustrated by direct quotations. A list of desired facilities, by itself, would have left the answer to the "Why?" question open to the interpretation of researchers and research consumers.

Criterion 7

To establish contacts with constituency groups to further "outreach" efforts. (Ingham County Parks Board meeting, 1998).

To evaluate the establishment of contacts for outreach efforts, the nature of the relationship of each focus group with the Ingham County Parks Department prior to and subsequent to the study was examined. The type of relationship that existed prior to the study was defined by the source of the recommendation for recruitment (Table 16). Sources for recruitment recommendations were individuals, not the entire organization listed. For example, when "MSU faculty" is listed as the source of the relationship, this indicates that a recruitment recommendation came from an individual faculty member, not the entire MSU faculty as a group. The sources of recommendations for groups that were subsequently interviewed were: Michigan State University faculty members, Ingham County Parks Department staff, Ingham County Parks Board members, Ingham County Commissioners, and reputation. The designation "reputation" means that the group was recommended to the research team only by virtue of its prominence in the community or reputation for serving certain target client groups.

Table 16. Focus group recruitment sources.

GROUP	SOURCE OF RECOMMENDATION
Big Brothers/Big Sisters Staff	MSU faculty
Park Professionals	Parks staff
St. Mary's Cathedral Altar Society	Parks board
Stockbridge Township Board	reputation
Webberville Parks Advisory Board	Parks staff
Mason High School Students	reputation
Friends of Fenner	Parks board
Michigan State University Outing Club	reputation
ASMSU	reputation
Police Athletic League	reputation
Leslie High School Students	reputation
Outdoor Retailers	reputation
Bicyclists	reputation
Meridian Senior Center	Parks board
East Lansing Seniors' Commission	Parks board
Greater Lansing Labor Council	Parks board
Leslie Lions Club	Parks board
Julian Samora Institute	reputation
Mason Rotary	reputation
Boy Scout Leaders	Parks board
NAACP	MSU faculty
Center for Independent Living	reputation
Ingham County Board of Commissioners	Parks board/parks staff
Retired and Senior Volunteer Program	Ingham County Commissioner
Williamston City Council	reputation
Dansville Board of Education	Parks board

The establishment of new contacts is determined by the number of groups that were selected based only on their reputation in the community and that participated in the study.

Evaluation of Criterion 7.

Twelve of the twenty-six groups interviewed were recommended only by virtue of their reputation in the community. These groups seemed most likely to produce new outreach contacts because it may be expected that they had not had a similar opportunity to express an interest in Ingham County parks nor had parks department representatives previously created the opportunity to involve these groups. Using the definition of the establishment of new contacts as the number of groups selected only by virtue of their reputation, the goal of establishing contacts with constituency groups was met. The degree of success of outreach efforts is difficult to measure. Much depends upon the follow-up action by the Ingham County Parks Department and Ingham County Parks Board.

The next three criteria were based on generally accepted social science research standards and address non-probability sampling, validity and reliability of the focus group interview method, and reporting.

Evaluation along Criteria based on Generally Accepted Social
Science Research Standards

Criterion 8

Subjects and observations should be selected in such a way as to provide a broad overview of the phenomenon under study to determine if the researcher has paid special attention to deviant or disconfirming cases (Babbie, 1998, p.462).

The Ingham County recreation needs assessment used two non-probability sampling techniques: purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Babbie (1998) recommended that when non-probability sampling is used, readers of the research findings should ask if "subjects and observations [have] been selected in such a way as to provide a broad overview of the phenomenon being examined" and if "the researcher has paid special attention to deviant or disconfirming cases" (p.462). Babbie's comments were designed as tips for consumers of research intended to stimulate critical thinking (Babbie, 1998). As such, he did not offer a test for determining if a broad overview of the phenomenon was achieved.

To determine if a broad overview of the phenomenon was achieved, the breadth of the overview obtained in a recreation needs assessment that used probability sampling

was compared with the breadth of the overview obtained in the Ingham County study that used non-probability sampling. Such a comparison reveals differences in breadth that may have been caused by sampling method.

The study selected for this comparison was the 1997 Recreation Needs Assessment for Kent County Parks (Nelson & Johnson, 1997) which utilized probability sampling. Comparability was not exact. Sampling technique was not the only difference between the two studies. Data gathering methods also differed. The Kent County study used a self-administered mail survey (Nelson & Johnson, 1997) in contrast to the focus group interview method used by the Ingham County study. The two studies, however, shared many characteristics. Both studies were recreation needs assessments for county park systems, sharing similar planning and funding goals. Both counties are geographically situated in central lower Michigan. The studies were conducted within one year of each other.

The use of the Kent County study is not meant to suggest that this criterion is a comparison of the two studies to determine method superiority. The purpose of the comparison is to determine if the nonprobability sampling

methods failed to provide a broad overview of the phenomenon under study.

The Kent County study distributed a self-administered mail questionnaire to a systematic sampling of registered voters. Of 755 valid addresses 324 useable questionnaires were returned. The response rate was 43% (Nelson & Johnson, 1997).

If subjects and observations selected in the Ingham County study did not include deviant or disconfirming cases, it is expected that the overview of the phenomenon under study would not be as broad as the Kent County study. Two questions were selected from each study based on their similarity.

Kent County Study: Question 5

(For county park users) "Check the activities you or others in your household participated in at the Kent County Parks in the past 12 months." (Nelson & Johnson, 1997). Twenty-four choices were provided and four additional comments appeared in that study's Appendix B (Table 17).

Ingham County Study: Question 3

(For county park users) "Why do you recreate in these parks?" (Appendix D). Seventy-five types of responses, as

Table 17. Comparison of responses to Kent County question 5 and Ingham County question 3.

Kent County Question 5: (For county park users) "Check the activities you or others in your household participated in at the Kent County Parks in the past 12 months."	Ingham County Question 3: (For county park users) "Why do you recreate in these parks?"
Choices Provided	Response Codes
nature observation	nature areas nature appreciation birdwatching
scenic drive	driving
picnic	picnicking picnic areas picnic pavilions for rent use of picnic pavilions
camp	camping group camping
sunbathe	sunbathing enjoying beach (not swimming)
boat/canoe	canoeing canoe launch boating (excluding canoeing) paddleboats
fish	fishing
swim	swimming
golf	(no comparable response)
discgolf	frisbee
use playground	playground play
soccer	soccer
baseball/softball	baseball softball
run/jog	running
in-line skate	rollerblading
walk pet	(no comparable response)
bicycle	biking mountain biking mountain biking trails
walk/hike	walking hiking hiking trails trails
attend a concert	(no comparable response)
attend other special event	(no comparable response)

Table 17 (cont'd).	
ice skate	iceskating ice skating rink warming house
ice fish	(no comparable response)
cross country ski	cross country skiing ski trails
sled/toboggan	snow sledding sled hills
Comments in Appendix B	
"We enjoy the parks; the relaxing atmosphere..."	relaxing
"Only for family picnics"	organized celebrations
"We like having the parks close to where we live and we appreciate having the parks clean."	Convenience well-maintained parks
"... pleasures I had with my family and friends"	socializing

indicated by response code, were given (Table 22, Appendix F) (Table 17).

Ingham County study data contained the following additional responses: lack of crime, escaping the city, a variety of activities are available, familiarity, community education, near other facilities (e.g., fairgrounds), open all year, pleased with park personnel, environmental education, low cost, clean water, life guards, traffic control, basketball, berrypicking, exercising, orienteering, amusement park, sports (in general), spectator, unorganized sports, childcare, Bigwheels, bonfires, jetskis, league

sports, volleyball courts, wheelchair accessible playgrounds, and youth programming (Appendix F).

Evaluation of Criterion 8.

(Kent County Question 5, Ingham County Question 3)

The comparison of responses to similar questions about why users visit county parks indicated that the overview of the Ingham County study was broader than that of the Kent County study suggesting that the focus group method using nonprobability sampling included, but did not emphasize, deviant or disconfirming cases. The Ingham County study produced a similar, but broader, data set. It was not likely that nonprobability sampling alone, however, accounted for the breadth of response. The additional thirty-one responses given in the Ingham County study may also be attributed to the qualitative nature of the data gathering method.

Furthermore, minor differences in responses were due to differences in recreation opportunities offered by the two park systems. For example, the response "golf" is not found in the Ingham County study because the Ingham County park system does not provide golfing facilities.

Kent County Study: Question 2

"If not, (meaning if the respondent or others in their household had not visited a Kent County park in the past 12

months) what has been the single most important reason for not visiting Kent County Parks? _____"

Question 2 is an open-ended question. Responses were found in Kent County's Appendix B (Nelson & Johnson, 1997).

Ingham County Study: Question 3

(For nonusers) "Why don't you recreate in Ingham County parks?" (Appendix D).

Table 18. Comparison of responses to Kent County question 2 and Ingham County question 3.

Kent County Question 2: "If not, (meaning if the respondent or others in their household had not visited a Kent County park in the past 12 months) what has been the single most important reason for not visiting Kent County Parks? _____"	Ingham County Question 3: (For nonusers) "Why don't you recreate in Ingham County parks?"
Responses in Appendix B	Response Codes
"Being as old as I am I probably am not much help but we used to go to parks a lot when our children were home..."	in poor health/too old change in family structure
"Need to know locations better and what you can do there and how much it will cost us."	lack of awareness of location and facilities/services
"We had to leave because of obnoxious people, dogs, etc... I am concerned about concerts (not family oriented, but teenage, young adult) and their problems."	too many wild/unruly people fear of crime
"...it seems we're always busy doing other things."	no interest/too busy/no time
"I hardly ever go to parks, because they seem like they always have too many bugs!"	too many bugs
"I would get involved, but like I say, I'm disabled."	not wheelchair accessible no handicap van access
"I feel park system is outdated. Most people enjoy their own yards, decks, pools."	(no comparable response)

The following thirty-four additional response were given in the Ingham County study: inconvenient, lack of water quality of swimming lakes, not enough activities, prefer state parks, prefer Michigan State University, presence of jetskis, don't own a boat, can't climb, need someone to go with, might visit to walk, might visit if babysitting, might go to beach, unable to drink beer/alcohol, might go to escape, too lazy to explore new places, fear of injury, prefer Great Lakes, prefer local parks, prefer Metroparks, prefer Pleasant Lake, too many rules, poor quality of beach sand, not enough benches, no campgrounds, don't want to pay fee, no horseback riding, no significant natural features, won't tolerate skateboarders, too small, parking too far from activities, lack wilderness character, wait too long for volleyball court, not enough water access, don't like woodchips on trails (Table 23, Appendix F).

Evaluation of Criterion 8.

(Kent County Question 2, Ingham County Question 3)

The Ingham County study yielded a broader overview than the Kent County study for reasons nonusers do not visit county parks. The Ingham County study produced all of the same responses as the Kent County study and thirty-four

additional responses suggesting that the focus group method using nonprobability sampling included, but did not emphasize, deviant and disconfirming cases. There were only seven responses to the Kent County question.

The difference in breadth may have been due to the differences in data gathering methods, not the sampling methods. The narrower overview of the Kent County study may have been due to respondents' dislike of the extra effort open-ended questions on self-administered questionnaires require. Nonusers in the Ingham County study expressed their lack of interest in the question and a feeling that they were not qualified to answer. This may also have been true for Kent County respondents. However, the group dynamics of the focus group interview method encouraged discussion by nonusers and may account for the greater breadth in Ingham County data.

Criterion 9

Measures obtained should be reliable and valid (Babbie, 1998, p.463).

Tests for reliability of focus group data were not found in the literature on focus group methods. However, Babbie (1998) recommends certain practices may be followed

to guard against researcher unreliability. These practices include: 1) a coding system agreed upon by coders, 2) multiple independent coding, and 3) re-evaluation and resolution of disagreements in coding (Babbie, 1998, p.133).

The coding system (Appendix E) was agreed upon by both coders in this study. New codes were created throughout the coding process as unique responses occurred. These new codes were integrated into the existing system.

Each interview transcript was coded twice. Codings were not performed independently. The second coding was an evaluation of the first coding with additions, deletions, and discrepancies noted. Disagreements in coding were re-evaluated and final coding negotiated by the two coders. Time and cost constraints prevented the practice of multiple independent codings.

Evaluation of Criterion 9.

Reliability of the data was not tested due to the absence of tests for reliability for focus group interview data. The practices recommended by Babbie (1998) to guard against researcher unreliability were followed with the exception of multiple independent codings.

Tests for validity are similarly absent from focus group literature. Krueger (1994) argued that because,

"Validity is the degree to which the procedure really measures what it proposes to measure" that "*Focus groups are valid if they are used carefully for a problem that is suitable for focus group inquiry*" (Italics is in the original.) (Krueger, 1994, p.31). "Typically focus groups have high face validity, which is due in large part to the believability of comments from participants" and that "The decision maker, when confronted with focus group results, may find explanations that seem infinitely reasonable, explanations that have come directly from the clients and not from secondhand summaries" (Krueger, 1994, p.32).

An evaluation of the face validity of the data gathered using the focus group method begins with the identification of the phenomenon the method proposes to measure. The overall goal of the Ingham County recreation needs assessment and recreation needs assessments, in general, is to aid decision-makers by providing an assessment of the current and future desires for recreation facilities and services, including policies, of the people they serve.

The evaluation of face validity is a difficult task. One cannot simply conduct a test to determine if the data are or are not inherently believable. However, the focus group method produced a breadth of responses not found using

a self-administered written questionnaire (Criterion 8). Direct quotations from participants provided a more personal connection between decision-makers and respondents which enhances believability. The data answered the "Why?" question without requiring conjecture on the part of the researcher (See discussion of Water Park, Criterion 6.). Focus group interview questions are, by nature, largely open-ended, providing a more realistic report than the process of selection from among pre-conceived answers allows (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1988).

There is also an indication of high content validity. Babbie (1998) defined content validity as, "how much a measure covers the range of meanings included within the concept" (p.134). For example, the Kent County questionnaire contained the question, "Which of the list of existing facilities below do the parks need more of? Please rank only the three most important to expand by writing a 1 before the most important, 2 second most important and 3 third most important. Leave all others blank." A list of fourteen facilities, including "Campgrounds" follows (Nelson & Johnson, 1997). Respondents either select or do not select "campgrounds" based on their personal concept of a campground. Their concept may differ from that of

researchers and park planners and administrators. The Kent County questionnaire is typical of this type of survey instrument. Although more choices that specify campground types could be added, this approach is generally avoided to keep questionnaires shorter which tends to improve response rates. This method does not produce a range of meaning for the concept "campgrounds".

The Ingham County study, using the focus group interview method, produced a range meanings for the concept "campgrounds" that included: tent campgrounds, RV campgrounds, wheelchair accessible campgrounds, and campgrounds with unspecified facilities. Beyond amenities, campgrounds were defined by access available to users. The greatest support for campgrounds was for organizational group campsites for groups that do not have access to such facilities owned by the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. The concept of "group" included not only church and school groups, but also reunions, retreats, and private parties.

For measures to be valid, they must also exclude meanings that are not part of the concept. The focus group method allows moderators to probe for meanings during the discussion. Coders may then exclude inappropriate responses from a concept. For example, if a respondent indicated that

they stayed in a hotel when they camped, the moderator would ask them to describe the experience further. The respondent may be describing a picnic or cookout, not camping. Such a response would be coded as "picnic", and exclude hotel stays from the concept of camping.

Criterion 10

Conclusions reported should be based on actual findings (Babbie, 1998, p. 464).

This criterion is concerned not as much with the accuracy of reporting as it is with the limits and ethics of reporting. Babbie's (1998) instruction to report conclusions based on actual findings was a caution to not go beyond the findings in reaching conclusions.

There appears to be some debate over the reporting of focus group results. The debate concerns the use of numbers in reporting and the impression they give to the decision-makers who use the information.

According to Morgan (1988), the reporting of focus group results largely depends upon the structure of the interviews (i.e., if a discussion guide was used) and the analysis (i.e., ethnographic or content analysis). "In the more ethnographic approach, there must be a balance between the direct quotation of the participants and the

summarization of their discussions. Too much quotation gives the report a stream-of-consciousness flavor, while too much summarization is not only dry but also deprives the reader of even the indirect contact with participants available through their verbatim statements of their perspectives" (Morgan, 1988, p. 70).

Krueger (1994) emphasized reporting that serves the practical needs of decision-makers as opposed to adding to a body of academic knowledge. He recommended written reports that are organized by key discussion questions or "the big ideas that have emerged from the discussion" (Krueger, 1994, pp.166-167). Krueger (1994) cautioned against the use of numbers in the reporting of focus group results out of a concern that, "numbers sometimes convey the impression that results can be projected to a population, and this is not within the capabilities of qualitative research procedures" (Krueger, 1994, pp. 154-155).

The Ingham County recreation needs assessment (Knap & Propst, 1999) reported results using both ranked frequency counts organized by discussion question and narrative summaries of major concepts illustrated with direct quotations from the focus group interviews. Out of a concern that the final report be understandable and usable, monthly

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reports of preliminary results were made to the parks board. Their suggestions for format changes and requests for analyses of specific topics were incorporated into the final report.

Evaluation of Criterion 10.

The reporting approach used in the Ingham County recreation needs assessment is supported by the focus group literature. By involving the parks board in virtually all aspects of the study, including reporting, a degree of usability was assured.

As cautioned by Mitra (1994), park planners and administrators have an affinity for numbers. Yet Krueger (1994) cautioned against the false impressions of generalizability given by numbers. The use of both numbers and direct quotations in the Ingham County recreation needs assessment improved usability for planners and administrators without sacrificing the personal contact of verbatim statements. The criterion of conclusions based on actual findings was met.

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CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusions

The 1999 Ingham County recreation needs assessment utilized the focus group interview as the primary data gathering method. Socioeconomic and residency data were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire. Ten criteria were established based on both the goals of the parks agency using the data for planning purposes and generally accepted social science research standards. How well the data gathered using these methods met the criteria established was evaluated.

Summary of Findings

The method provided a "barometer" for current and future needs for recreation facilities and services. A total of one hundred twenty different responses were given to questions about why respondents visited or did not visit Ingham County parks and their needs for the future.

The assessment fulfilled citizen involvement requirements for Michigan Department of Natural Resources grant eligibility with the possible exception of public notification. Both the method that was used to gather data and the insights provided by the data met and exceeded MNDR requirements (MDNR, 1999).

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The assessment was not limited to the residents of Ingham County as proposed. However, only eight percent of the sample resided outside of the county.

Socioeconomic diversity and geographic distribution were represented in the sample. As anticipated, efforts to target traditionally underrepresented groups and less densely populated areas of the county resulted in underrepresentation of the Lansing/East Lansing area. The nonprobability sampling techniques provided for adjustments throughout the course of the study.

Cost and time requirements for the study were met. Michigan Department of Natural Resources standards for needs assessments as they related to grant eligibility were met within these cost and time limits.

The needs expressed in the needs assessment go beyond a "wish list" for facilities. Attributes unrelated to facilities were identified. Major concepts provided narratives of complex recreation issues and direct quotations from participants.

Contacts with constituency groups were established. Follow-up by the parks department will determine the ultimate level of success of community outreach.

Subjects and observations were selected in such a way as to provide a broad overview of the phenomenon under study. Comparisons of responses to similar questions asked in the 1997 Recreation Needs Assessment for Kent County Parks (Nelson & Johnson, 1997) and the Ingham County recreation needs assessment revealed a similarity of responses between the studies and a greater breadth of overview in the Ingham County study. The similarities indicated that the nonprobability sampling methods used in the Ingham County study included, but did not emphasize, deviant or disconfirming cases. Ingham County data were richer, which was expected with the use of a qualitative method.

Assessing reliability and validity was difficult for focus group data. Tests were absent from the literature. Procedures that improve reliability such as twice-coded transcripts, a pre-coding system agreement, and negotiated coding discrepancies were used. Content validity and face validity appeared to be high.

Conclusions reported in the Ingham County recreation needs assessment were based on actual findings. Reporting procedures were supported in the focus group literature.

Conclusions

The focus group interview method was effective as the primary data gathering method for this recreation needs assessment. Effectiveness has been attributed to several reasons. The topic of the interviews was well suited to the focus group interview method. Recreation was a relatively non-controversial topic and was discussed with ease, even enjoyment. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques provided a diverse sample, reaching underrepresented groups. Group dynamics, flexibility in questioning, and a diverse sample provided a broad variety of responses. Community outreach was enhanced, not only through the development of a mailing list, but also through the personal nature of the focus group interviews themselves. The process of meeting with people in groups of their own choosing, in surroundings familiar to them, at times convenient to them to seek their input gave the impression that the parks department was sincere in its attempt to provide recreation opportunities desired by the people they serve.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study have been classified into two main categories: 1) limitations of the needs assessment

method and 2) limitations of the evaluation method.

Limitations of the Needs Assessment Method

Reporting results in a way that engenders confidence in users who are unfamiliar with qualitative methods presented a challenge. As Mitra (1994) recognized, administrators have an affinity for numbers. Yet, Krueger (1994) warns against the use of numbers out of a concern for incorrect assumptions of generalizability. The needs assessment results were reported using both numbers and narrative descriptions of major concepts. Users were involved throughout the course of the study and presentations of preliminary data were made. Still, unfamiliarity with qualitative methods required additional effort in educating research consumers in the meaning and use of the data.

There may have been an overuse of numbers in the final report, giving consumers a false impression of generalizability and a encouraging a tendency to equate "frequency and extensiveness with importance" (Krueger, 1994). Frequency counts should be used in analysis to guide the researcher in identification of major concepts, already suggested by researcher intuition, that surfaced in response to multiple questions. In reporting, words such as "few", "many" and "most" are more appropriate than frequency

counts. Frequencies may be included in a written report as appendices.

Focus groups were selected based on their homogeneity for certain sampling characteristics. Homogeneity for these characteristics was not absolute. For example, a group of Mason High School students was selected for the sampling characteristic "age". Their teacher also participated in the discussion. Frequencies of response and quotations were then reported as they were distributed among groups. It may have been possible for users of the data to attribute responses to a high school student group that was not composed entirely of high school students. For example, support for the water park has been attributed to groups of youth or informant reports from groups that serve youth.

Three focus groups contained three or fewer persons. In these groups, participants seemed to feel compelled to answer every question. One-to-one interactions with the moderator occurred more frequently than in larger groups. As a result, discussions tended to resemble personal interviews.

Incomplete questioning occurred in four groups. This may have affected frequencies of response to question 5, support for or opposition to a list of suggested attributes.

Self-reports were not segregated from informant reports. Krueger (1994) suggests more weight should be given to first person accounts. (See Recommendations for Further Study, p. 108.)

Limitations of the Evaluation Method

Data from the 1997 Recreation Needs Assessment for Kent County Parks (Nelson & Johnson, 1997) were used as the basis for comparison (Criterion 8). Breadth of Kent County study data were compared to breadth of Ingham County data to determine if deviant cases were selected in the Ingham County study. The two studies were not completely comparable. Differences occurred in the recreation resources provided by the park systems under study, data gathering methods used, study dates, and study populations. Similarities occurred in types of park systems (i.e., county), general geographic location, state funding goals of the study, and subject matter of the questions selected for the comparison.

Criterion 8 addresses the ability of nonprobability sampling to select deviant and disconfirming cases. A comparison of representativeness along socioeconomic characteristics of the Kent County sample could have been compared to that of the Ingham County study sample. This

comparison was not made due to limited socioeconomic descriptions in the Kent County study. Only gender percentages, mean age, and percent of White respondents were provided by the Kent County study. Comparisons of representativeness for multiple studies or a parallel focus group interview study using probability sampling are possible alternative approaches to the evaluation along this criterion.

Recommendations for the Effective Use of the Focus Group Interview Method in Recreation Needs Assessments

The following recommendations are specific pragmatic suggestions for the effective use of the method in recreation needs assessments (Objective 4). These recommendations are organized according to the steps in the focus group interview procedure including: involving consumers of the research in the research process, adjusting the sample, recruiting to meet sampling goals, coding to retain richness of data, and reporting for clarity.

Throughout the course of this study, the parks board, parks director, and parks staff were involved in virtually every aspect of the research process. Researchers should be willing to relinquish some control over question construction, selection of groups, topics discussed in

reporting and report format. Periodic reports of study progress and preliminary data are helpful in acclimating consumers of research to the focus group interview method and the results it produces. By encouraging and integrating consumer input, the study becomes more meaningful and the results are more likely to be used in the planning process.

Purposive sampling and recruitment of groups presented several challenges. Groups were selected for recruitment based on their geographic and socioeconomic characteristics as identified in the sampling matrix (Figure 1, page 30). Placement in the matrix is largely a subjective process. Groups may not bear the characteristics attributed to them in the selection process. Therefore, it is useful to review residency and socioeconomic data throughout the course of the study so that decisions may be made regarding which groups still need to be recruited. As groups are interviewed, groups bearing similar characteristics are no longer recruited. For this reason, a single mass recruitment at the beginning of the study is not recommended. A better approach is to recruit six to eight groups each week. For example, senior and student groups were relatively easy to recruit while African American groups were difficult to recruit. As a result, recruitment of seniors and student

groups ended early in the study while African American groups were recruited throughout. Less than half (42.6%) of groups contacted participated in interviews. Recruiting constructed groups was more difficult and attendance was lower than pre-existing groups. Incentives may be appropriate for constructed groups, although they were not used in this study.

Coding should reflect both specificity and commonality of response. In the extreme, it may be argued that each response is unique in some way. Coding according to this reasoning would result in frequency counts of one for an unmanageable number of response types. Yet, one of the advantages of this and other qualitative methods is the richness of the data. If responses are grouped under too few codes, much of this richness is lost. The level of specificity of coding needs to reflect a balance of these extremes. Decisions about the level of specificity need to be made early in the coding process to minimize the re-coding of transcripts. For example, in this study initially all forms of camping were coded as "camping". After coding several transcripts it became clear to both coders that the various concepts participants had of camping were important to the experience and that knowledge of these distinctions

were likely to be useful to park planners and administrators. Codes were changed to identify the various types of camping and transcripts that were already coded at the time of the change were re-coded accordingly. The codebook is not pre-established. It evolves throughout the coding process. New codes must be created to describe only new ideas or transcripts must be re-coded. Combinations of code categories are easier to manage than overly specific single codes. This study utilized a combination of code categories: global (question), person, place, response, and quote codes.

Reporting in this study used both frequency counts organized by discussion question and narrative descriptions and frequency counts of major concepts that surfaced in response to several questions. It must be made clear to research consumers (who are likely to be more familiar with quantitative data) how frequencies of response produced by focus group interviews differ from those produced by surveys. In simplistic terms, consumers need to understand that one response does not equal one person. Otherwise, the use of numerical expressions of frequency of response is likely to confuse and even mislead consumers. Narrative

descriptions such as "few", "many", and "most" are better suited to the description of focus group interview data.

Focus group interviews may be used effectively for recreation needs assessments. Success depends upon the willingness of researchers and consumers to rethink their roles and responsibilities, manage an evolving sample and codebook, and accept results that are not packaged in numerical terminology.

Recommendations for Further Study

Self-administered written questionnaires used in recreation needs assessments typically ask participants to respond for themselves or themselves and members of their household. The focus group interview data collected for the Ingham County recreation needs assessment contained unsegregated reports by the respondent about themselves and their household, family members not in the respondent's household, clients or constituents of the respondent, and other persons in general. While the transcripts were coded by "person", these distinctions were not recognized in analysis and reporting. The data set could be analyzed using the "person" codes to determine if a significant difference exists between self-reports and the reports about others by informants.

Focus group interviews often serve a pre-quantitative function, typically providing the basis for a self-administered written questionnaire. By using the focus group interview data, a questionnaire could be constructed that is specific to Ingham County and local park issues. Because communities and issues tend to change over time, the value of a questionnaire constructed from this focus group interview data will diminish over time. The most effective use of the focus group interview data in a pre-quantitative role would occur within the next five to ten years.

Final Thoughts

The selection of a method for recreation needs assessments is largely a function of habit. Traditional survey methods are familiar to both the researchers conducting the study and the consumers of the data such research produces. Familiarity creates a clear sense of direction for researchers and a comforting sense of confidence in the data for consumers.

The danger in such familiarity is that both researchers and consumers have come to accept a narrow perspective, a limited view of the phenomena under study. To widen the view, new and underutilized methods need to be explored in a

responsible and credible fashion. They must be critically but fairly evaluated and improved upon.

The focus group interview method provides a different perspective on recreation needs assessments. It merits consideration among the mainstays in recreation research and deserves further exploration into its potential contributions to the field.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT LETTER

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

November 23, 1998

Melanie Murrell
Dansville Village Board
PO Box 221
Dansville, MI 48819-0221

Dear Ms. Murrell:

The Ingham County Parks Department is in the process of assessing the degree to which the recreational needs of Ingham County residents are being met. A large part of this process is gathering information about the visions and priorities of Ingham County residents for meeting future recreational needs. This information will be incorporated into the five-year master plan for the Ingham County Parks Department. Without this information, the county parks department will not be able to solicit matching funds for parks from the State of Michigan and other sources. Even if you have never used an Ingham County Park, your input is vital. We want to hear from both users and nonusers of Ingham County Parks!

We were wondering if the Dansville Village Board is interested in contributing to this process by having a group discussion on the following topics:

- The types of outdoor recreation activities you participate in
- Where you participate in these activities
- Whether or not you use Ingham County Parks
- Why you use or do not use Ingham County Parks, and
- Your ideas for future county park facilities and services.

Before the discussion, we will give a brief presentation with photographs and locations of Ingham County Parks so that you can distinguish them from other parks. During the discussion, we will ask you to fill out a 2-minute, anonymous questionnaire so that we can keep track of the characteristics of the people we are talking to. This is important as we are trying to seek input from as diverse a section of Ingham County residents as possible.

We estimate that the questionnaire and discussion will take about 45 minutes. All aspects of this process are voluntary so you may stop at any time. We will tape record the discussion so that valuable comments are not lost or misinterpreted. The recording will be transcribed without names so that all comments will remain confidential.



Michigan State University
131 Natural Resources Bldg
East Lansing, Michigan
48824-1222
517/353-5190
FAX 517/432-3597

MSU is an affirmative action
equal opportunity institution

The focus group facilitators, Patrick Smith or Nancy Knap, will call you around December 16 to see if your organization is interested in participating and to set up a mutually convenient time and place. If possible, we could conduct our discussion at the end of or during one of your regularly scheduled meetings. It would be helpful if you could gather 8 to 12 interested people to participate in the discussion.

We hope that your organization will be able to participate in this special opportunity to influence the future of park development offered by the Ingham County Parks Department.

Sincerely,



Dennis B. Propst
Associate Professor &
Ingham County Parks
Commissioner



Patrick Smith
Graduate Assistant



Nancy Knap
Graduate Assistant

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT TELEPHONE SCRIPT

Sample recruitment phone script for talking to group or organization leaders:

"Hello, my name is () and I'm calling from Michigan State University. About a week ago, you should have received a letter describing a project to collect information from Ingham County residents about their visions for the Ingham County Parks Department. I'm calling to answer any questions you may have and to ask if your group is interested in participating. I want to emphasize that your participation is voluntary and that if you decide to participate, anyone will be free to stop or leave at any time. The discussion will be tape-recorded and transcribed without names so participants' comments will remain confidential. Also, the questionnaire will be anonymous—no names will be associated with it. The whole process should take about 45 minutes.

Is your group interested in participating?

Answer any questions and, if they are willing, set up a time and place for the meeting.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE

Assessment of Ingham County Recreational Needs Assessment

Michigan State University, in conjunction with the Ingham County Parks Department, is trying to learn more about the recreational needs of Ingham County residents. Filling out this questionnaire is voluntary and you may stop at any time. It is also anonymous, so please do not sign your name. You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and returning this questionnaire. This should take 2 minutes or less to complete. Concerns or questions should be addressed to Patrick Smith at 517/353-5103 or Dennis Propst at 517/353-5190, ext.119.

1. In the past 12 months, how many times did you or someone in your immediate household recreate one of Ingham County's parks.

- ☐ zero
- ☐ 1 - 5 times
- ☐ 6 - 20 times
- ☐ more than 20 times (Please indicate how many times. _____)

We are trying our best to represent the diversity of the residents of Ingham County. To that end, the master plan for Ingham County Parks will be greatly enhanced by knowing the following:

2. The name of the township or city in which I live is

_____.

3. My age is _____.

4. I am (Please circle one.) Male Female.

5. Highest level of education completed:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ less than high school | ☐ two-year college graduate | ☐ graduate degree |
| ☐ high school graduate | ☐ four-year college graduate | ☐ professional degree |
| ☐ some college | ☐ some graduate work | ☐ certified trade |

6. Race/origin:

- ☐ White ☐ Hispanic origin (of any race)
☐ Black ☐ Multiracial
☐ American Indian, Eskimo or Aleut ☐ other race
☐ Asian or Pacific Islander

7. My household type is:

- ☐ couple with children at home ☐ couple without children at home
☐ single with children at home ☐ single without children at home
☐ other, please describe _____

8. Are you interested in receiving Ingham County Parks information on a regular basis?

Please circle one. YES NO

If yes, please provide your name and address on the separate sign-up sheet.

9. The Ingham County Parks Department occasionally makes presentations to various groups and organizations. Is your group or organization interested in such presentations?

Please circle one. YES NO

If yes, please provide your name and address on the separate sign-up sheet.

Thank you.

Dennis Propst

517/353-5190 extension 119

Department of Park, Recreation & Tourism Resources
131 Natural Resources Building
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824

Ingham County Parks Board
P.O. Box 178
Mason, MI 48854

APPENDIX D

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment
Focus Group Questions**

1. What types of outdoor recreation activities do you participate in ?

(a very wide range of activities that is based on the person's own definition, but could include things as diverse as softball, gardening and strolling on the riverwalk)

2. Where do you participate in these activities?

-does not have to be Ingham county park, backyard ok
-name of area

3. Have you ever visited an Ingham County Park? (refer them to map)

YES

Why do you recreate in these parks?

Probes:

Are the current facilities in these parks adequate? Why or Why not?

Is there anything you'd like to do in Ingham County Parks that you cannot do now?

NO

Why don't you recreate in Ingham County Parks?

Probes:

What would it take to get you to recreate in an Ingham County Park?

What are the barriers?

4. In the future, what types of park facilities and services should the county provide its residents?

-hopes for Ingham County for your children, great grand children and beyond?

Probes:

-acquire more park land?

-Should fees be charged?

-Should the parks be designed more for active recreation, like athletics or for passive recreation, like hiking? What's the balance?

5. Here are some suggestions for future Ingham County Park development or expansion. We'd like to know which of these you would support. (hand them a list as you read the choices aloud).

Which of these ideas do you think are more important than others?

- _____ a water park (with water slides, wave pool, etc)
- _____ campgrounds
- _____ paved paths
- _____ additional trails (please specify trail type): _____
- _____ additional soccer fields
- _____ additional softball fields
- _____ skateboard facilities
- _____ other athletic facilities (please describe): _____
- _____ acquisition of more park land or open space
- _____ other (please describe): _____

APPENDIX E

CODEBOOK

CODES

CODE NAME	DESCRIPTION
Classification Codes	
Who	
SELF	self reports, "I" or "we"
FAMILY	reports of family members not in the company of the respondent, "my kids", "my grandchildren", etc.
CLIENT	reports of clients or constituents served by group being interviewed
OTHERS	reports of unspecified others, "they", "some people", "kids"
Where	
COUNTYPARK	a county park name is mentioned or the county park system is mentioned or the discussion is clearly about county parks (Refers to question 3; combine with a "who" code, WHYVISIT or WHYNOVISIT code, and a response code.)
PARKSGENL	a non-county park name is mentioned or the city/state/municipal park system is mentioned or the discussion is clearly about non-county parks (Refers to question 3; combine with a "who" code, WHYVISIT or WHYNOVISIT code, and a response code.)
Quote	
QUOTE	representative statements marked for use in report writing
Global Codes	
RECPART (1)	recreation participation (Refers to question 1; combine with "who" code and response code.)
LOCATION (2)	reports of where recreation takes place, specific place names (Refers to question 2; combine with a response code.)
WHYVISIT (3)	reasons for visiting parks (Refers to question 3; combine with "who" code, "where" code, and response code.)
WHYNOVISIT (3)	reasons for not visiting parks (Refers to question 3; combine with a "who" code, "where" code, and a response code.)
PARKID (3)	parks the respondent identifies as county parks he/she has visited in response to the direct question asking which county parks they have visited (Refers to question 3; includes parks misidentified as county parks; combine with a response code.)
WANTS (4)	attributes wanted in county parks (Refers to question 4; combine with a "who" code and a response code.)
WANTSLIST (5)	attributes wanted in county parks, prompted by list (Refers to question 5; combine with a "who" code and a response code.)
NOWANTLIST (5)	attributes the county should not provide, prompted by list (Refers to question 5; combine with a "who" code and a response code.)
INFORM (a probe to 3)	recommendations for information distribution; combine with a response code.

Response Codes	
Generally used with Questions 1 & 3 (RECPART & WHY/WHYNOVISIT)	
ARCHERY	
BACKPACK	
BASEBALL	
BASKETBALL	
BERRYPICK	
BIKE	touring biking, or unspecified biking; excludes mountain biking
BIRDWATCH	
BLADE	rollerblading
BMX	BMX biking
BOARD	skateboarding
BOAT	excludes canoeing
CAMP	
CANOE	canoeing
CELEBRATE	includes family reunions, birthdays, school/work parties, retreats
CLIMBING	
COACH	coaching any sport
CONCERT	includes outdoor music, concerts
DARTS	
DISKGOLF	
DOWNHILL	downhill skiing
DRIVE	
EXERCISE	
FISH	
FOOTBALL	
FRISBEE	
GARDEN	
GOLF	
HIKE	
HORSEBACK	
HORSESHOES	
HUNT	
ICESKATE	
INDOOR	indoor activities, includes gamble, cards, mall walk, senior dance lessons, bingo/board games,
KAYAK	
KICKBALL	
MTNBIKE	mountainbiking
NATUREWALK	“being outside”, “feed the geese”, “enjoying beauty”

NOINTEREST	“not on outdoor person”, “doesn’t interest me”, “too busy” to go to parks, no time
ORIENTEER	
PHOTOGRAPH	includes places to take photos
PICNIC	
RACQUETBAL	racquetball
RELAX	
ROLLERCOAS	rollercoaster, ferris wheel, merry-go-round, attend a carnival
RUGBY	
RUN	running
SAIL	sailboating
SCUBA	
SKYDIVE	
SLED	snowsledding
SPORTS	unspecified “sports”
SNOWBOARD	
SNOWMOBILE	
SNOWSHOE	
SOCCER	
SOCIALIZE	includes spend time with family, be with friends, meet people, reduce isolation, “hang out”, teen smoking
SOFTBALL	
SPECTATOR	
SWIM	
TENNIS	track and field
TRACK	
TUBE	water innertubing
UNORGSPORT	unorganized sports, “pick-up” games
VOLLEYBALL	
WALK	
WATERAEROB	water aerobics
WATCHKIDS	childcare
WHEEL	accessing/using facilities/areas in a wheelchair; comparable to walking
WHEELHOOPS	wheelchair basketball
WHEELRACE	wheelchair races
XSKI	cross-country skiing

Generally used with Question 2 (LOCATION)	
BSP	Boy Scout Park, Grand Ledge
CITYGOLF	city golf course
CITYPARK	unnamed city park
CLEARLAKE	Clear Lake
COUNTYPARK	unspecified county park
FENNER	Fenner Nature Center, Fenner Arboretum
FITCLUB	fitness club, includes USA Fitness, “the Mac”, “the Y”,
FITZGERALD	Fitzgerald Park, Grand Ledge
HANNAH	Hannah Middle School
HIGH	high school
HOFFMASTER	Hoffmaster State Park
HOME	at home, any private home
HOOD	neighborhood
KENSINGTON	Kensington Metropark
LAKELAND	Lakeland Trails State Park
MALL	
MECOSTA	Mecosta County
MERIDIAN	Meridian Twp parks
MSU	outdoors, (e.g., Forest Akers)
NANCYMOORE	Nancy Moore Park
OUTSTATE	out of state
PARK	unspecified
PATRIARCH	Patriarch Park
PLEASANTLK	Pleasant Lake
POTAWATAME	Potawatamee Trail
POTTERPARK	Potter Park
PRIVATELND	private land
RIVERWALK	
ROAD	“along road”, “in the road”, “bikelanes” usually refers to walking/running, biking
ROSELAKE	
SCHOOLS	
SCOTWOODS	
SCOUTCAMP	includes all organized youth camps
SLEEPYHOLL	Sleepy Hollow State Park
STATEPARK	unspecified state park
UPNORTH	“up north”, Mackinac Is.,
WATERLOO	Waterloo Recreation Area
WMSTON	“Williamston”, unspecified

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WMSTONRAPI	Williamston rapids
WOLDUMAR	Woldumar Nature Center
Generally used with Question 3 (WHY/WHYNO VISIT)	
BEACH	has a swimming beach
BIGWHEELS	bigwheel tricycles
BUGS	too many bugs
COMMED	visited park as part of a community education program
CRIME	crime/lack of crime
CROWDED	crowded, too many people
DRINKBEER	unable to drink beer/alcohol in county park
ESCAPE	escape the city, exploring, "checking things out"
FAMCHANGE	change in family structure, empty nest
FAMILIAR	familiarity with a given park, includes "gets media coverage"
INJURY	safety issues referring to injuries, includes falling on ice, includes discussion of safety equipment and skateboard facilities. (See CRIME)
LACKACTIVE	not enough to do
LIKEBIGLK	prefer great lakes
LIKELOCAL	prefer local, regional recreation
LIKEMETRO	prefer metropark
LIKESMU	prefer MSU, MSU is a separate community, more comfortable on campus
LIKEPLLK	prefer Pleasant Lake
LIKESTATE	prefer state park, state land
MANYACTIVE	opportunities to do "lots of things"
NEAROTHER	park is near other facilities or events (e.g., Visited Rayner because visited the fairgrounds.)
OPENALLYR	open all year
PADDLEBOAT	
PAVILION	pavilion rental available
PERSONNEL	pleased with park personnel
PICNICAREA	picnic areas, not pavilions
POORHEALTH	poor health, includes "too old"
RULES	too many rules
SANDYBEACH	beach needs more, better sand
SHADE	
SUNBATHE	
UNAWARE	unaware of county parks altogether, unaware of facilities, (e.g., cross-country skiing)
WILDPEOPLE	noisy, wild people

Generally refers to Question 3 (PARK ID) & 2 (LOCATION)	
ALL	visited all parks
BALDWIN	
BURCHFIELD	includes “Grand River”, “Riverbend”
HAWKISLAND	Hawk Island, includes Solomon Gravel Pit
KENHOPE	Kenneth Hope Soccer Complex
LKLANSING	Lake Lansing, includes whether or not north or south is specified
MISID	misidentified, (i.e., the park is not a county park, but given in response to question 3)
RAYNER	
Generally refers to Questions 4 & 5 (WANTS) & 3 (WHY/WHYNO VISIT)	
ACCESSIBLE	unspecified accessibility by disabled
ANNUALPASS	
ARCHERYRNG	archery range
BADMINTON	
BALLFIELD	includes softball and baseball fields
BENCH	benches along trails
BIKERENTAL	
BIKETRAIL	unspecified bike trail, touring bike trail, excludes “paved path” and mountain bike trail (See MBIKETRAIL.)
BMXCOURSE	BMX course
BOARDWALK	
BOATING	excludes canoeing, canoe facilities and services
BOATRIDES	
BONFIRES	
CAMPGROUND	unspecified camping facilities
CANOEDROP	put-in for canoes
CANOERENT	canoe rental
CLEANWATER	clean lake water for swimming
CLIMBWALL	climbing wall
CLOSEPARK	parking close to activities, NOT handicap parking
CONCESSION	unspecified concessions
CONNECT	connect parks with trails, greenways
COOPERATE	interagency cooperation, avoid duplication, regional park system, coordinate
CURB	curb on boardwalk for wheelchair safety

DOGRUN	park areas where dogs can run
ENTERTAIN	entertainment, includes concerts, carnivals, midways, festivals
ENVIRONED	environmental education, interpretive trails
EVENINGHRS	evening hours of use
EXISTENCE	don't use parks, but glad they're there, existence value.
EXERTRAIL	trail with exercise stations
EXTREME	a level of excitement, challenge; not any specific sport
FEES	nominal entrance and rental fees
FINISHHAWK	finish Hawk Island Park
FISHING	includes fishing dock
FOOTBALLFD	football field
FUND	increased/redirected funding to parks, use park fees for parks
GAZEBO	
GOCART	
GOLFCOURSE	
GROUPCAMP	organizational group campground
HCAPDRINK	handicap accessible drinking fountains
HCAPPARK	accessible parking
HCAPPROG	programming, events for the disabled
HCAPREST	handicap accessible restrooms
HIKETRAIL	includes hiking trail, walking path, running path (excludes "paved path")
HOOPS	basketball backboards, nets
HORSE	includes horse trails and horse rental
HRSHOEPITS	horseshoe pits
ICESKATERK	ice skating rink, coils for ice, covered rink, also, lake skating and ice skate rental
INDOORPOOL	
INFO	information, includes map of all area parks, topo maps
INFRASTRUC	unspecified infrastructure
JETSKI	
LAND	land acquisition
LOWCOST	includes low cost/free services
LEAGUE	soccer leagues, softball leagues, summer football leagues
LEASH	enforce leash laws
LESSONS	instruction in outdoor sports (e.g., xski lessons)
LIFEGUARD	
MAINTAINED	well maintained, clean, groomed trails, maintained sports fields
MARKTRAIL	well-marked trails
MBIKETRAIL	mountain bike trail
MICROPHONE	microphone use for organized groups
MORESTAFF	more park staff to deal with organized groups

MORESWIM	more places to lake swim
MORESWIMLL	expansion of Lake Lansing beach area
MOTORTRAIL	motorized golf carts on trails
MULTIPARK	multipurpose park
MULTITRAIL	multi-use trails, needs to be wide enough to accommodate, shared trail (hike/bike/rollerblade)
NATUREAREA	includes “quiet area”, “birdwatching area”, “real woods”, nature center
NIGHTHIKE	
NODRINK	a “no alcohol” policy in parks
OPENFIELD	for sunbathing, unorganized sports, (not “open space” See UNDEVELOP)
ORIENTAREA	an area for orienteering
PATROL	safety/security patrols
PAVEDPATH	
PHONES	security phones
PICNICPAV	picnic pavilion
PLAYGROUND	playground play, includes swings, slides, playing on playscapes also, has playground equipment, playscapes, maze, “facilities for children”
POOL	
PUTTPUTT	putt putt golf course
RACQUETCT	outdoor racquetball courts
RAISED	raised sandboxes, raised flowerbeds, raised exhibits for wheelchair access/enjoyment by disabled
RESTROOMS	includes clean restrooms, convenient restrooms, restrooms close to pavilions, restrooms open in winter
RIVER	designate, coordinate river as a canoe route
ROLLERHOCK	rollerhockey
RVCAMP	
SCOOPERLAW	rules governing pet waste removal
SECURITY	unspecified security
SENIORCTR	senior center
SENIORPROG	senior programming, includes senior sports, senior water aerobics, senior dance, computer training
SEPARATE	separate activities (e.g., separate hike and bike trails, be big enough to separate activities)
SHUFFLEBD	shuffleboard
SKATEBOARD	skateboard facility, skate park
SKIHILL	
SKIRENT	cross-country ski rental
SKITRAIL	cross-country ski trail
SLEDHILL	

SRTABLE	picnic tables that are more comfortable for seniors, don't need to lift legs to sit
SOCCERFLD	soccer field
STAGE	
STARGAZE	
TENNISCT	tennis court
TETHERBALL	
TENTRENT	tent rental
TENTCAMP	
TOOSMALL	
TRAFFICCON	traffic control, speed bumps, parking near facilities (not hcap designated), road maintenance
TRAIL	unspecified trails
TRANSPORT	includes access to transportation, proximity to home, convenience
TUBEDROP	inner tube transport to float river
UNDEVELOP	natural character of park, minimal development, includes "open space"
VANACCESS	hcap parking that is van accessible
VOLLEYCT	volleyball court
VOLUNTEER	volunteer opportunities in county parks
WARMHOUSE	warming house for winter activities
WATERACCES	water access, more lakes
WATERFALL	
WATERPARK	
WATERSKI	
WATERTOYS	rope swings, slides into lakes (not a waterpark)
WHEELBEACH	wheelchair accessible beach
WHEELBOAT	wheelchair accessible boats and boating area, fishing from boat
WHEELCAMP	accessible camping
WHEELCHAIR	wheelchair access, unspecified
WHEELGAMES	accessible games, includes paintball, darts
WHEELHOOPS	wheelchair basketball courts (also used in recpart)
WHEELPAV	wheelchair accessible picnic pavilions
WHEELPIER	wheelchair accessible pier, fishing pier
WHEELPLAY	playgrounds for children with disabilities; playgrounds where adults with disabilities can play with children with or without disabilities
WHEELRACE	wheelchair races (also under RECPART)
WHEELTRAIL	
WHITEWATER	rafting/kayaking course
WOODCHIPS	woodchips on trails make walking and wheelchair access difficult
YOUTHPROG	youth programming
YOUTHSUPER	youth supervision, youth employment by parks
ZOO	

Generally refers to INFORM	
BROCHURE	
CHURCH	
CITYREC	through city recreation depts.
COMMORG	community organizations, includes Tri-county Office on Aging
COMPAPER	community newspaper
EMAIL	
EVENT	special event, giveaway, party, river clean-up day
GROUPTRIP	organized group trips
LATINOCOUN	Latino council
MAP	
MAIL	U.S. mail
NEWSLETTER	
NEWSPAPER	unspecified, "the paper"
OUTDOOR	outdoor advertising, billboards
PHONEBOOK	
PSA	public service announcements
RADIO	
REGULAR	no specific form or medium suggested, but needs to be more regular, consistent
RESTSTOP	make brochures available at rest stops
ROADSIGN	
SCHOOLS	promotion through schools, field trips, races, track meets
SENIORPOST	postings at senior housing complexes
SENIORTV	senior public access television program
SHOPGUIDE	shoppers' guide
STATEJNL	State Journal
STATENEWS	State News, the MSU newspaper
TV	television
TWNCOURIER	Town Courier
WEBSITE	

APPENDIX F

RANKED FREQUENCY COUNTS

Table 19. Participation in outdoor recreation ranked by frequency of response, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1999).

ACTIVITY	RANK	FREQUENCY
SWIMMING	1	23
WALKING	2	22
CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING	3	19
GOLF	3	19
BIKING (touring bikes or unspecified, excludes mountain biking)	5	18
FISHING	6	14
HIKING	7	13
PICNICKING	7	13
SNOW SLEDDING	9	12
BASEBALL	10	11
SOFTBALL	10	11
CAMPING	12	10
ROLLERBLADING	12	10
BASKETBALL	14	9
CANOEING	14	9
BOATING	16	8
NATURE APPRECIATION	16	8
RUNNING	16	8
SOCCER	16	8
FOOTBALL	20	7
CELEBRATIONS (family reunions, company picnics, retreats)	21	6
DOWNHILL SKIING	21	6
MOUNTAIN BIKING	21	6
TENNIS	21	6

All of the remaining responses occurred 5 or fewer times: archery, backpacking, BMX, skateboarding, climbing, coaching, attending concerts, darts, diskgolf, exercise, frisbee, gardening, horseback riding, horseshoes, hunting, iceskating, indoor activities, kayaking, kickball, no interest in outdoors, orienteering, playground play, photography, racquetball, rollercoasters, rugby, sailing, scuba diving, skydiving, sports (in general), snowboarding, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, socializing, acting as a spectator, track, tubing, unorganized sports, volleyball, watching kids, being outside in a wheelchair.

Table 20. Location of outdoor recreation engaged in ranked by frequency of response, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1999).

LOCATION	RANK	FREQUENCY
LAKE LANSING PARK	1	15
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY	1	15
UPNORTH	3	14
AT HOME	4	11
COUNTY PARKS (unspecified)	5	10
NEIGHBORHOODS	6	6
OUT OF STATE	7	5
ON PRIVATE LAND	7	5
RAYNER PARK	7	5

All of the remaining responses occurred 1 to 4 time(s): Baldwin Park, Boy Scout Park, Burchfield Park, city golf courses, city parks, Clear Lake, Fenner Nature Center, county parks (unspecified), Fitness/health clubs, Fitzgerald Park, Hannah Middle School, high schools, Hoffmaster State Park, Kensington Metropark, Lakeland Trails, malls, Mecosta, Meridian Township parks, Nancy Moore Park, parks (unspecified), Patriarch Park, Pleasant Lake, Potter Park, Riverwalk, roadsides (biking/running), Rose Lake, schools, Scot Woods, Sleepyhollow State Park, state parks (unspecified), Waterloo Recreation Area, Williamston, Williamston Rapids, Woldumar Nature Center.

Table 21. Identification of Ingham County parks visited ranked by frequency of response, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1999).

COUNTY PARK VISITED	RANK	FREQUENCY
LAKE LANSING	1	28
BURCHFIELD	2	26
RAYNER	3	20
BALDWIN	4	6
MISIDENTIFIED	5	5
ALL COUNTY PARKS	6	3
HAWK ISLAND	7	2
KENNETH HOPE	8	1

Table 22. Reasons for visiting Ingham County parks ranked by frequency of response, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1999).

REASON	RANK	FREQUENCY
SOCIALIZING (spending time with family, meeting people)	1	26
ORGANIZED CELEBRATIONS (family reunions, company picnics, retreats)	2	24
PLAYGROUND PLAY	3	21
PICNICKING	4	14
PICNIC PAVILIONS AVAILABLE FOR RENT	5	11
CANOEING	6	10
CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING	6	10
PARKS WELL-MAINTAINED	6	10
LACK OF CRIME	9	9
SWIMMING	9	9
WALKING	10	8
ESCAPING	10	8
NATURE AREAS (quiet areas, birdwatching areas, nature center)	10	8
CONVENIENCE (proximity to home)	10	8
BEACH (enjoying the beach without swimming)	10	8
TRAILS	15	7
BOATING (excludes canoeing)	16	6
MANY ACTIVITIES	17	6
FAMILIARITY	18	5

All of the remaining responses occurred 1 to 4 time(s): baseball, basketball, berrypicking, biking, birdwatching, rollerblading, driving, exercising, fishing, frisbee, hiking, iceskating, mountain biking, nature appreciation, orienteering, relaxing, amusement park, running, snow sledding, sports (in general), soccer, softball, spectators, unorganized sports, childcare, Bigwheels, community education, near other facilities (Rayner near fairgrounds), open all year, paddleboats, pleased with park personnel, picnic areas (not pavilions), shade, sunbathing, ballfields, bonfires, camping, canoe launch, clean water, environmental education, group camping, hiking trails, iceskating rink, jetskiing, low cost, league sports, life guards, well-marked trails, mountain biking trails, open fields, use of picnic pavilions, ski trails, sled hills, traffic control, volleyball courts, warming house, water access, wheelchair accessible playground, youth programming.

Table 23. Reasons for not visiting Ingham County parks ranked by frequency of response, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1999).

REASON	RANK	FREQUENCY
LACK OF AWARENESS OF LOCATION AND FACILITIES/SERVICES	1	58
INCONVENIENT (too far away, lack of public transportation)	2	43
LACK OF WATER QUALITY OF SWIMMING LAKES	3	23
FEAR OF CRIME	4	19
TOO CROWDED	5	11
NO INTEREST/TOO BUSY/NO TIME	6	8
CHANGE IN FAMILY STRUCTURE (perception that parks are for families with young children)	6	8
NOT ENOUGH ACTIVITIES	8	7
PREFER STATE PARKS	9	6
PREFER MICHIGAN STATE	10	5
PRESENCE OF JETSKIS	10	5

All of the remaining responses occurred 1 to 4 time(s): don't own a boat, can't climb, need someone to go with, might visit to walk, might visit if babysitting, might go to beach, unable to drink beer/alcohol, might go to escape, too lazy to explore new places, fear of injury, prefer Great Lakes, prefer local parks, prefer Metroparks, prefer Pleasant Lake, in poor health/too old, too many rules, poor quality of beach sand, too many wild/unruly people, not enough benches, no campgrounds, don't want to pay fee, no horseback riding, no significant natural features, won't tolerate skateboarders, too small, parking too far from activities, lack wilderness character, no handicap van access, wait too long for volleyball court, not enough water access, not wheelchair accessible, don't like woodchips on trails.

Table 24. Reasons for visiting noncounty parks, Ingham County parks ranked by frequency of response, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1999).

REASON	RANK	FREQUENCY
SOCIALIZING	1	6
HIKING TRAILS	2	5
BIKING TRAILS	3	4
PLAYGROUNDS	3	4
ROLLERBLADING	5	3
PAVED PATHS	5	3

All of the following responses occurred 1 to 2 time(s): baseball, boating, camping, celebrations, exercising, fishing, frisbee, hiking, nature appreciation, picnicking, snow sledding, soccer, swimming, walking, beach, lack of crime, escaping, picnic areas, shade, sunbathing, golfcourse, accessible drinking fountains, accessible restrooms, accessible playgrounds, accessibility (in general), natural areas, openfields, picnic pavilions, swimming pool, closer to home.

Table 25. Reasons for not visiting noncounty parks, Ingham County parks ranked by frequency of response, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1999).

REASON	RANK	FREQUENCY
NO INTEREST/TOO BUSY/NO TIME	1	4
FEAR OF CRIME	2	3
FEAR OF INJURY	2	3
CHANGE IN FAMILY STRUCTURE (perception that parks are for families with young children)	4	2
INCONVENIENT (too far away, lack of public transportation)	4	2

All of the following responses occurred once: walkers' competition with bikes, mosquitoes, lack of activities, unaware of parks, fees, lack of information, dogs not on leash, no lifeguards, lack of senior programs, lack of wheelchair accessibility (in general), lack of wheelchair accessibility to picnic pavilions.

Table 26. Attributes desired in Ingham County parks ranked by frequency of response, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1999).

ATTRIBUTE	RANK	FREQUENCY
INFORMATION (includes maps of all area parks)	1	43
LAND ACQUISITION	2	40
ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION/ CONVENIENCE/ PROXIMITY TO HOME	3	38
INTERAGENCY COOPERATION (includes regional park system, avoiding duplication of services and facilities, county as coordinator)	4	35
CONNECT PARKS WITH TRAILS, GREENWAYS	5	32
LOWCOST/FREE ENTRANCE/SERVICES	6	28
NOMINAL ENTRANCE AND RENTAL FEES	7	26
BIKETRAILS (excludes mountain biking)	8	20
NATURE AREAS (quiet areas, birdwatching areas, nature center)	8	20
YOUTH PROGRAMMING	10	19
HIKING TRAILS (excludes paved paths)	11	18
SKATEBOARD PARK	11	18
CLEAN LAKE WATER FOR SWIMMING	13	15
SAFETY/SECURITY PATROLS	13	15
MINIMAL DEVELOPMENT IN PARKS/OPEN SPACE	13	15
WATER ACCESS/MORE LAKES	16	14
MAINTAINED SPORTS FACILITIES/GROOMED TRAILS	17	13
WELL-MARKED TRAILS	17	13
PAVED PATHS	19	12
SEPARATE ACTIVITIES (e.g., separate hike and bike trails)	20	11
VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES IN PARKS	20	11
MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS	22	10
SENIOR PROGRAMMING	22	10
CAMPGROUNDS (unspecified facilities)	24	9
ENTERTAINMENT (includes concerts, carnivals, midways, festivals)	24	9
MULTI-USE TRAILS (shared trails for hike/bike/rollerblades)	26	8
PICNIC PAVILIONS	26	8
TRAILS (unspecified)	26	8
DOG RUNS	29	7
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION/INTERPRETIVE TRAILS	29	7
INCREASE/REDIRECT FUNDING TO PARKS	29	7
ORGANIZATIONAL GROUP CAMPGROUND	29	7
HORSE TRAILS/HORSE RENTAL	29	7
ICESKATING RINK/SKATE RENTAL	29	7
SHUFFLEBOARD	29	7
TENT CAMPGROUNDS	29	7
SOFTBALL/BASEBALL FIELDS	37	6
BOATRIDES	37	6
CONCESSIONS	37	6
FISHING FACILITIES/DOCK	37	6
SOCCER FIELDS	37	6
PICNIC AREAS (not pavilions)	37	6

All of the remaining responses occurred 1 to 5 times: archery range, benches, bike rentals, BMX course, boardwalk, boating, canoe launch, canoe rental, climbing wall, parking closer to activities, curbs on boardwalks, open evenings, existence value, finish Hawk Island, football fields, gazebo, gocarts, golf course, accessible drinking fountains, accessible parking, accessible restrooms, basketball courts, horseshoes, indoor pool, general infrastructure, league sports, dogs on leashes, lessons, lifeguards, more staff, more places to lake swim, expand Lake Lansing beach, trails for golf carts, multipurpose park, night hiking, ban alcoholic beverages, open fields, orienteering area, security telephones, playgrounds, pool, putt putt golf, racquetball courts, raised flower beds/sandboxes, more convenient/clean restrooms, coordinate river canoe route, rules governing pet waste removal, unspecified security, senior center, downhill ski hill, cross-country ski rental, cross-country ski trail, sled hill, picnic tables for seniors/disabled, stage for entertainment, stargazing, tennis courts, tetherball, tent rental, traffic controls/road maintenance, tube launch, volleyball courts, waterfall, waterpark, accessible beach, accessible boat, accessibility (in general), wheelchair basketball, accessible picnic pavilions, wheelchair fishing pier, accessible playground, wheelchair races, accessible trails, youth supervision/employment, zoo, improve sand quality at beaches, provide more activities, shady areas.

Table 27. Attributes desired in Ingham County parks (aided) ranked by frequency of response, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1999).

ATTRIBUTE	RANK	FREQUENCY
PAVED PATHS	1	46
LAND ACQUISITION	2	38
WATERPARK	3	35
CAMPGROUNDS (unspecified facilities)	4	27
SKATEBOARD PARK	5	25
SOCCER FIELDS	6	19
NOMINAL ENTRANCE AND RENTAL FEES	7	15
SOFTBALL/BASEBALL FIELDS	8	13
HIKING TRAILS (excludes paved paths)	9	12
MAINTAINED SPORTS FACILITIES/GROOMED TRAILS	9	12
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION/INTERPRETIVE TRAILS	11	11
TENT CAMPGROUNDS	11	11
SEPARATE ACTIVITIES (e.g., separate hike and bike trails)	13	10
CONNECT PARKS WITH TRAILS, GREENWAYS	14	9
LEAGUE SPORTS	14	9
TRAILS (unspecified)	14	9
INTERAGENCY COOPERATION (includes regional park system, avoiding duplication of services and facilities, county as coordinator)	17	7
BIKETRAILS (excludes mountain biking)	18	6
NATURE AREAS (quiet areas, birdwatching areas, nature center)	18	6
SAFETY/SECURITY PATROLS	18	6
YOUTH PROGRAMMING	18	6
YOUTH SUPERVISION/EMPLOYMENT	18	6
ICESKATING RINK/SKATE RENTAL	23	5
INFORMATION (includes maps of all area parks)	23	5
MULTI-USE TRAILS (shared trails for hike/bike/rollerblades)	23	5
MINIMAL DEVELOPMENT IN PARKS/OPEN SPACE	23	5

All of the remaining responses occurred 1 to 4 time(s): annual entrance pass, badminton, benches, boardwalk, boat rides, boating, bonfires, climbing wall, entertainment (concerts, etc.), extreme level of excitement/danger, fishing facilities, increase/redirect funding, football fields, gocarts, golf course, group campground, programming for disabled, accessible restrooms, basketball courts, indoor pool, jetskis, lowcost/free entrance and services, lifeguards, trails for golfcarts, open fields, playgrounds, pool, raised flower beds/sandboxes, more convenient/clean restrooms, senior center, stage for entertainment, swimming beach, tennis courts, tetherball, volleyball courts, accessible boat, accessible camping, accessible games (paint ball, etc.), accessibility (in general), wheelchair basketball, provide more activities, well-marked trails, mountain bike trails, microphone use, roller hockey, RV camping, shuffleboard, access to public transportation/convenience, volunteer opportunities, water access, water skiing, water toys (rope swings, etc.), rafting/kayaking course.

Table 28. Attributes not desired in Ingham County parks (aided) ranked by frequency of response, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1999).

ATTRIBUTE	RANK	FREQUENCY
WATERPARK	1	14
SOCCER FIELDS	2	12
SKATEBOARD PARK	3	11
CAMPGROUNDS (unspecified facilities)	4	10
PAVED PATHS	5	8
LAND ACQUISITION	6	5

All of the remaining responses occurred once: softball/baseball fields, environmental education/interpretive trails, golfcourse, RV camping, separate activities.

Table 29. Suggested media for information distribution ranked by frequency of response, Ingham County recreation needs assessment (1999).

MEDIA	RANK	FREQUENCY
SPECIAL EVENTS/GIVEAWAY/PARTY	1	20
COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER (unspecified)	2	4
NEWSPAPER (unspecified)	2	4
SCHOOLS	2	4
STATE JOURNAL	2	4
BROCHURES	6	3
MAPS	6	3
TELEPHONE DIRECTORY	6	3
STATE NEWS	6	3
TELEVISION (unspecified)	6	3

All of the remaining responses occurred 2 or fewer times: churches, city recreation departments, community organizations, e-mail, organized group trips, Latino Council, mail, newsletter, billboards, public service announcements, radio, regular/consistent messages without specific media mentioned, reststops, roadsigns, postings in senior housing complexes, senior television, shopping guides, The Town Courier, website.

APPENDIX G

MAJOR CONCEPTS 1-8

Concept 1: Convenience/Access to Public Transportation

There was some concern that parks are “too far away” or are inconvenient. Access to public transportation was perceived as lacking. These concerns were expressed most forcefully as reasons for not visiting existing parks (Table 23).

In response to the questions about why county parks are visited (Table 22), 8 responses in 6 groups indicated convenience or proximity to home as a reason for visiting county parks; 43 responses in 16 groups indicated inconvenience or lack of public transportation as a reason for not visiting county parks (Table 23).

In response to the aided request for suggested facilities, 3 responses in 5 groups indicated a desire for access to public transportation (Table 27). In response to the unaided request, 38 responses in 12 groups indicated a desire for access to public transportation, convenience and close proximity to home (Table 20). In Table 30, responses indicating that existing parks are not visited due lack of transportation/convenience are combined with those reflecting a desire for improved public transportation/convenience (84 responses in 20 groups).

Groups that responded most strongly in favor of/across two separate questions (Tables 22 and 23) were: St. Mary’s Altar Society, Mason High School Students, Friends of Fenner, Outdoor Retailers, Meridian Senior Center, Leslie Lions Club, Julian Samora Institute, and Center for Independent Living. The Julian Samora Institute was the most vocal of all (20%) concerning the need for convenience and better public transportation.

The six groups indicating that parks are visited due to their convenience are shown in Table 31.

Table 30. Nonvisitation due to inconvenience & desire for improved public transportation/convenience, Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 1: EXISTING PARKS ARE NOT VISITED DUE TO INCONVENIENCE & DESIRE FOR IMPROVED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION/CONVENIENCE		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
BIG BROTHERS/SISTERS	3	4%
PARK PROFESSIONALS	1	1%
ST. MARY'S ALTAR SOCIETY	2	2%
STOCKBRIDGE TWP BOARD	1	1%
WEBBERVILLE PARKS ADVISORY BOARD	4	5%
MASON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	7	8%
FRIENDS OF FENNER	5	6%
ASMSU	7	8%
POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE	2	2%
LESLIE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	2	2%
OUTDOOR RETAILERS	2	2%
BICYCLISTS	5	6%
MERIDIAN SENIOR CENTER	7	8%
LESLIE LIONS CLUB	6	7%
JULIAN SAMORA INSTITUTE	17	20%
CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING	3	4%
INGHAM CO. COMMISSIONERS	4	5%
RSVP	2	2%
WILLIAMSTON CITY COUNCIL	2	2%
DANSVILLE BOARD OF EDUCATION	2	2%
TOTAL²²	84	97%

Table 31. Visitation due to convenience, Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 1: EXISTING PARKS ARE VISITED DUE TO CONVENIENCE		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
MASON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	1	13%
FRIENDS OF FENNER	1	13%
MSU OUTING CLUB	3	38%
EAST LANSING SENIORS' COMMISSION	1	13%
GREATER LANSING LABOR COUNCIL	1	13%
LESLIE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	1	13%
TOTAL²³	8	103%

²² Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

²³ Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

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Quotations: Convenience/Access to Public Transportation

From ASMSU

"No, I mean, I, it was kinda like I'm sure there are other parks around but I've never been inclined to find them or to go, never had a way to get there, anyway, so.

From Webberville Parks Advisory Board

"Just didn't like to drive all the way there to do it. I wish we could do it in our own backyard."

From Dansville Board of Education

"Well, I think it's surprising sometimes how many parks there are in certain areas of the county but most of the are out in the north and western part of the county."

From Williamston City Council

"Well when I lived in Lansing, ah, I'd go down to the Grand River Park south of town and that was big and some fishing and some walking around and so forth, but that's too far away now."

From Center for Independent Living

"Are they [the parks] accessible by bus, by CATA? Spectran?"

"The big thing is, is transportation, readily accessible to get there."

From Police Athletic League

"[I]t's frustrating that you have to get in a car and drive an hour and a half to get to a lake that I feel comfortable swimming in or that I feel is a recreational place or a beautiful place for me to go to the beach and for the size of Lansing and the fact that it's the capitol city, I think Lake Lansing needs a lot of work."

From Bicyclists

"I think access by, by bus, especially after CATA gets the bike racks."

"Get them on the bus line."

From Meridian Senior Center

"It would seem to me that as seniors we need the park close...we are not going to drive 20 miles to sit someplace, unless there is something really nice there that, you know, it's a mountain view or something."

"Are there buses that go by these places?"

"Are there buses that go by these and their bus schedules that people could maybe have that would get, direct them to these parks or are they so far out that there is no buses?"

From Leslie Lions Club

"I think it'd be nice if it had a natural area where you could, where the youngsters, you know, where the school could utilize it in terms of doing some things with nature with the kids but again, there, it'd have to be relatively close because busing would become a problem if it's too far away, spend more time going and coming than you would learning."

From Julian Samora Institute

"if you wanted [to] go out there and they could call a number, have you know, like someone from the park come pick 'em up and take 'em out there..."

"Especially if it's group."

"Maybe work something out with CATA..."

"CATA has a program that also goes out to Leslie and all them, those areas. So if they go there they can go..."

"CATA, got to get CATA out there."

"Yeah, you got to get CATA out there."

From Park Professionals

"I just wonder that, you know, I've always thought that a lot of kids don't get in to an opportunity to [go to] the lake and I've always been a proponent of busing kids out to Lake Lansing or to Grand River Park just for swimming experiences and maybe even lessons and so forth. I don't know if that is a need, because maybe that's already taken care of."

From Ingham County Commissioners

"...the great enhancement is a park that is sort of near the center of population in the county that is available to kids without having to get their parents to take them there and to people who don't have access to automobiles and just generally what amounts to a large regional park, but actually embedded in the city of Lansing..."

"I'd just like to follow up with the Hawk Island. One thing that isn't so planned so well so far is ... transportation connections to Hawk Island. I mean the sidewalk connections are somewhere between non-existent and very poor. The public transit connections are somewhere between non-existent and a bad oversight. I mean it just isn't in the right spot for any of the things that might have worked. Um, I mean I think, you know, either it is going to end up being an awkward distance from a whole lot of high traffic corridors, I mean you know, a half mile from a whole lot of places or we are going to have to, you know, modify some, you know, existing corridor somehow."

"Would you all agree, though, that for this to be utilized by people in the neighborhood, and maybe not the immediate neighborhood, the bike path will be a necessity for the park

to insure that pedestrians and people on bicycles can get to the park rather than make it a park that's dependent upon cars to get to? And I think you talked about some perceived negatives to the county parks now. Unfortunately, due to location and there is not a lot sometimes you can do about that, they are all only really accessible, mostly by automobiles. So this park will have to make sure that there is reasonable accommodations as XXXX said, by whatever they want for those sidewalks to be able to walk or bike in that area will be critical.”

From RSVP

“So if they offered a program that was low-cost with a bus, say hey on Tuesdays we'll pick you up, come out and spend the day at the park and we'll ... do this and this regardless of the weather because it is, you know, I know that Burchfield has a nature center.”

Concept 2: Land Acquisition

Generally, those in support of land acquisition viewed it as a smart thing to do (e.g., “Buy up land before it’s gone.” “It won’t get cheaper.”). Nearly one-fourth (24%) of responses in favor of land acquisition were contributed by the Webberville Parks Advisory Board. The Webberville Parks Advisory Board had specific parcels in mind. They were somewhat discouraged by failures to obtain large tracts of land on their own and look to the county and/or state for a larger river park. They reported utilizing Kensington Metropark heavily, preferring it to Lake Lansing with travel time being roughly the same. Williamston was expanding outdoor recreation opportunities. While Webberville and Williamston are geographically close, Williamston, as a city, seemed to want to have exclusive control. The Williamston City Council saw the county’s role as condemning property or creating easements.

In response to the aided request, favorable responses occurred 38 times in 15 groups (Table 27) and unfavorable responses occurred 5 times in 2 groups (Table 28). In response to the unaided request, land acquisition occurred 40 times in 9 groups (Table 26). Six groups responded favorably in response to both the aided and unaided requests: Webberville Parks Advisory Board, Mason High School Students, Friends of Fenner, Meridian Senior Center, Leslie Lions Club, and Ingham County Commissioners. Therefore, responses totaled 78 favorable and 5 unfavorable in 27 groups (Table 32). Groups responding both favorably and unfavorably were: Ingham County Commissioners

and Meridian Senior Center, indicating some disagreement within those groups. Support was most strongly voiced by the Webberville Parks Advisory Board (24%), Meridian Senior Center (13%), and Mason High School Students (12%).

Table 32. In support of land acquisition, Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 2: SUPPORT FOR LAND ACQUISITION		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
PARK PROFESSIONALS	2	3%
ST. MARY'S ALTAR SOCIETY	4	5%
STOCKBRIDGE TWP BOARD	1	1%
WEBBERVILLE PARKS ADVISORY BOARD	19	24%
MASON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	9	12%
FRIENDS OF FENNER	4	5%
MSU OUTING CLUB	2	3%
POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE	2	3%
BICYCLISTS	2	3%
MERIDIAN SENIOR CENTER	10	13%
EAST LANSING SENIORS' COMMISSION	2	3%
GREATER LANSING LABOR COUNCIL	3	4%
LESLIE LIONS CLUB	4	5%
JULIAN SAMORA INSTITUTE	5	6%
BOY SCOUT LEADERS	1	1%
INGHAM CO. COMMISSIONERS	3	4%
RSVP	4	5%
DANSVILLE BOARD OF EDUCATION	1	1%
TOTAL²⁴	78	101%

Table 33. In opposition to land acquisition, Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 2: OPPOSITION TO LAND ACQUISITION		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
MERIDIAN SENIOR CENTER	1	20%
INGHAM CO. COMMISSIONERS	4	80%
TOTAL	5	100%

Quotations: Land Acquisition

From Bicyclists

"If you don't pick up the property it is going to be gone and then..."

²⁴ Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

From Meridian Senior Center

"And it would seem to me that even if you don't develop these areas, just to get some money assigned you can buy the property, so you know, so you got this area and you can't afford to do anything with it right this minute. But, hey, you've got it, because land prices are going to go up."

"I like the idea of the open space. I like the idea of, of wildlife having some place where they can have a refuge. Um, recreation is fine, but it seems to me that we are focusing too much on recreation anymore as far as active recreation with the schools athletics programs and now other entities feeling that they have to be furnishing active recreation possibilities for everybody. Um, just the open space, as far as I'm concerned. And the senior citizens like to walk, they like to see the wildflowers in the spring."

. It just plain has to be, unless there is a big recession or something. "But as I said, you know, Williamston is not that far away. And one of these days, maybe 40 years from now, it will be built up between here and Williamston. And if there is to be a park and there's a nice area there, now is the area of time to see if you can't get hold of a bunch of acres, and, ah, rent it out to a farmer or something for the next 20 years. Because I think you're going to need a park."

"I mean they are building all over the place. You know, and in another 30 years, this is going to be quite a metropolis So, you just have to do something ahead of time if you can find, you know, you don't just want flat farmland you like one alongside the river or where there is a couple of hills or something."

"It seems maybe that the county should be thinking of bigger things. You've got, you know, all the smaller townships like Meridian do a pretty good job of parks. Maybe, I don't know quite how, but the county is a bigger entity than Meridian is and Lansing, and whatnot maybe they should be thinking bigger. Maybe only one place or maybe you know, the places they've got making them bigger."

"Well, land is going fast and I agree with the Williamston and probably Webberville, Williamston, Haslett will all be this one long group of whatever. If they can buy some land over out that way, that would probably be nice. Because it is going, going, gone, I'm sure."

From Leslie Lions Club

"So, there just isn't anything down at this end of the county."

From Park Professionals

"And, you know, in looking at your map, I was noticing that the eastern half of the county is probably a little bit underserved, not just by the county, but by the cities and little towns that are there and it is an area that's just starting to grow. Williamston has a lot of new houses and that sort of thing and they recently bought some park land, but whoops, forgot to have money to develop it. So, now it is still just sitting there. And

they go through with the active team sports, you know, every season it is, you know, fighting over the little bit of soccer fields and the one baseball field, you know, and it is just, it is always a mess.”

From Webberville Parks Advisory Board

“Would there be any advantage for a community like us, what advantages are there to look to the county to help us get a park?”

“I see two pieces of property in this town, right at this town, that would make a lovely park. Right out here on the corner of Webberville Road and Grand River, where that little shack of a building there, is. There is about 12 to 20 acres in there. It would be a beautiful piece of property, there is a little creek runs through that thing, excellent piece of property for a park.”

“We are not here to throw stones at anybody, but we got a farm right here in this town that would be better off a park right here coming in to the east side of this town. There is a big old barn and some horses right there, belong to one of our previous mayors here. That would be an excellent place for a park right there, right in town. We get it in town to be a park, instead of a horse barn there. It would be better to have a park. I don't know how we purchase that property either. That's already in the village limits.”

“We want a park. We may be better off going after it by ourself. We don't know what advantages that you have for us to join your organization or your, hop on your bandwagon to, to get the parks, will it end up some other county or some other township or could we have one here.”

“We are right on the edge of the county. Way out here a long way from the county seat. And we tend to get forgotten out here sometimes, 'cause we are on the edge of it. However, it is the first place that people see when they come in here from Livingston County, from Shiawassee County, Clinton County, we are right here on the corner. It would be nice to have a good appearance of a county, have a nice county park with a sign on it right here at the door, at the threshold of the county.

“Well that's a good idea.

“So you want something to put in your bandwagon, take that one.”

“And we are saying, hey, we started looking a little further, we started, we actually looked at and said, well you know all the way from the corner of that road on back to the Red Cedar River, if you followed it, there is green way and wetlands and water features and that's way too big of a park for the village to afford, probably, but and that's probably too big for the township and the village. So, hey, what about the county. Another thing we've looked at and we have tried for grants twice to do some amount of trail along the Kalamink Creek. And that did have some enthusiastic response from the DNR, especially if we get it out to the Red Cedar River, because they like the idea of a more regional trail. For instance, running down the Red Cedar River. And there is a group of

seven counties to the east of us, basically once you get east of Pontiac, they are doing many miles of trailways between communities. Rails to Trails and also along waterbys.

“And that's what we are looking at, too, is that if you get on the Red Cedar and you've got Williamston which has their community park there right on the Red Cedar with their white[water] rapids, that's you know, something that just came up. And then with or Williamston Township with their park where they are trying to build right along the Red Cedar River, just before Meridian Road, it just adds a perfect start to have it at Webberville, so that they can go and meet there. So that's something that could be, still have to try to get the land and everything.”

“You know for years we've applied for grants through the Ingham County Department of Development and they say there are grants available for the development of parks. We never get it. I wonder if we would have a better chance if we joined with LeRoy and Locke Townships and the surrounding townships and apply for a grant as a joint base. Maybe we have done this in the past, I am not sure, but as far as I know, I think we've always applied as the Village of Webberville. Would we carry more clout and would we be more likely to be granted a grant if we joined with the other townships and applied jointly for a grant to develop a park? We never get the funds. They always say it's available and we pay the fees to make the grant, to apply and we never get the grant.”

“Get us a big park over here.”

“This year we are at 206 with increasing numbers and they want more programs given to them. They want a soccer team here. We have no place to play soccer. Okay. And we started with fall football program this year and next year we are going to increase it two more and we will not have a space next year to try to run all those teams up there on the schools. So, I mean, I know we are a little community off to the east side of the county, but we are here and there's kids out here too.”

“Have a nice big park we could go to without having to travel a long way to do it.”

“But we wouldn't want to have another five-year plan that produced no park. We've been on one five-year plan, started a five-year plan, we lived five years and we are no closer to a park and to get on somebody else's five-year plan and spend another five years and have no park. What would we have to do in the next five years to get a park in this vicinity that would cater to the whole area, community, have people want to drive over here from Kensington Park to spend the day, would be my dream. I'm not settling for anything short of that.”

“We are trying to involve the township and the county to see, you know, rather than put a park downtown Webberville, if we could contribute and work together and have a nicer park a couple miles out, yeah, I'd rather have that, too. But what do we have to do, I think we have to show our intent by moving ahead on our own at one level and at the same time trying to work with the coalition to see if we can't make something out,

something bigger happen at the same time. And then if these things merge, then you got a network, you got multiple opportunities, that's what we are trying to do as a committee."

"Personally what I'd like to see is you take the northeast quadrant of the county or quarter of the county, I'd like to see a county park in there somewhere. You know, it doesn't have to be Webberville."

"If they wanted it to be that would be great and I'd support it 100 percent, but if they wanted to center it more say we need a county park to service this quarter of the county and have it large enough to have organized activities and you know, more like a Metropark where there is room for everybody."

From Friends of Fenner

"I think as the populations grow, there's always going to be that need for more park space and ...you could diversify and separate some of the activities perhaps a little better."

From Greater Lansing Labor Council

"I think you ought to buy the land even if you don't need it right now. It is a good investment. And you've got it if you want to expand it. If you don't have the land at the time you need it, you are going to pay the top dollar and, maybe, not find what you want. If there is land available, I think you ought to buy it."

"It is probably never going to be any cheaper."

"I think you ought to have it strategically located so they can serve all the county residents. I mean, even if they can't afford to put the facilities in, buy some land in that area knowing that it is going to be populated, eventually you are going to need some park land. If you have that ahead of time worse case scenario they can sell it back and make a profit. And buy land somewhere else with that money. But if they invest in land, I don't think you can go wrong. I'm sure they do population studies and ah, what's going to happen with their expansion and subdivisions and new places that are going to be built, so it is a lot more convenient, the parks'll get more use if they are adjacent to the area where people live use it. If you've got to get up and drive ten miles to use a park, I don't think you're as apt to use it."

From Leslie Lions Club

"I don't think they'd purchase the property in town but I'm sure there'd be stuff outside of town that you could purchase, that you could put paved paths on and people would sure, I'm sure they would utilize it."

From Julian Samora Institute

"Because you see all these construction going on already, that keeps on going, the rate it's going then Lansing won't have no land."

From RSVP

"I feel that we are going to be losing out and when you think of, you know, the carbon dioxide and the oxygen cycle and some of these things that we sometimes when you look at building and instead of how to prevent, you know, a lot of things, but when you think things in order to maintain...the balance of nature."

From Stockbridge Township Board

(Facilitator asks how close would parks need to be.)

"Well in our proximity, yeah, not necessarily Stockbridge Township, but when you are talking you have to go way to Lansing. That's, I mean who's going to do that? Well, I think somewhere in a triangle between Stockbridge, Dansville, Leslie."

From Mason High School Students

"I don't think you can have too many parks."

"Yeah, you can't have too many of those. They are fun."

"I think we need a park that had a lot of hiking trails because I would just spend my whole life there."

From Ingham County Commissioners

"...most of our parks are too far from the urban areas for my taste anyway and I can't imagine we are going to find another piece of land in Lansing or you know, the heavily settled areas for anything like what we'd be willing to pay for it. So, I just think that really a lot of these expansion possibilities are a distraction."

"I think a lot of those people in those [outlying] areas, they have to depend upon themselves to provide their own transportation in a lot of facilities. So they are used to that. They are used to, you know, if they've got, um, the vehicle with the trailer and the two waterskis on the back, ah, they are going to go to Lake Lansing or they are going to go two hours up north or over to Lake Michigan and for them, they just wouldn't see the idea of having a facility like that in their backyard and that's just, that's not their need."

"...my view is that we have adequate resources, we have adequate land to keep us busy for a long time, really, let's not encourage talk about ah, a millage to support additional parks. I don't see, I don't see a big public demand for a big expansion of parkland. I see considerable interest in developing, you know, Hawk Island, but I just don't, I don't hear people who can't find, you know, a hundred square feet of grass on which to spread a blanket. I think those needs are satisfied by the existing infrastructure."

Concept 3: Campgrounds

The strongest support for campgrounds in Ingham County parks was for the type that catered to organized group activities, such as youth group campouts, family reunions,

retreats, or teen “sleepovers”. Participants who camped with small groups or as single families tended to want to travel a significant distance from home and be located near major natural resources, such as large lakes.

In response to the unaided request for facilities and services the county should provide, 7 responses occurred in 2 groups in support of campgrounds for organized group use (Table 26). In response to the aided request, 2 responses occurred in 1 group in support of campgrounds for organized group use (Footnote to Table 27). There was virtually no support for campgrounds for use by small groups or single families in Ingham County parks.

Support for campgrounds was divided along a range of facilities that defined the type of campground rather than the users. Types of campgrounds as described by participants and defined by facilities provided included: tent campgrounds, RV campgrounds, wheelchair accessible campgrounds, and campgrounds with unspecified facilities.

In response to the unaided request for facilities and services, 7 responses occurred in 3 groups in support of tent campgrounds (Table 26). In response to the aided request, 11 responses occurred in 4 groups in support of tent campgrounds (Table 27).

In response to the aided request for facilities and services, 4 responses occurred in 3 groups in support of RV campgrounds (Footnote to Table 27) and 1 response occurred in opposition to RV campgrounds (Footnote to Table 28).

In response to the aided request for facilities and services, 2 responses occurred in 1 group in support of wheelchair accessible campgrounds (Footnote to Table 27).

In response to the unaided request for facilities and services, 9 responses occurred in 4 groups in support of campgrounds with unspecified facilities (Table 26). In response to the aided request, 27 responses occurred in 7 groups in support of campgrounds with unspecified facilities and 10 responses occurred in 8 groups in opposition to campgrounds with unspecified facilities (Table 28).

In Table 34, support of all types of campgrounds, combined, is summarized (69 responses in 25 groups). Groups that supported more than one type of campground were: Julian Samora Institute, Parks Professionals, MSU Outing Club, St. Mary’s Altar Society, Boy Scout Leaders, and Outdoor Retailers.

In Table 35, opposition to all types of campgrounds, combined, is summarized (12 responses in 10 groups).

Support for campgrounds exceeded opposition by more than 6 to 1 (69:11). However, as the subsequent quotations indicate, this was a complicated issue with a variety of opinions about the type of campground that would be most appropriate. While a single purpose--use by organized groups--was supported most often, support for the type of campground desired varied widely.

Table 34. In support of campgrounds (all types), Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 3: SUPPORT FOR CAMPGROUNDS (all types combined)		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
PARK PROFESSIONALS	13	19%
ST. MARY'S ALTAR SOCIETY	6	9%
MASON HIGH SCHOOL	7	10%
MSU OUTING CLUB	7	10%
POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE	7	10%
LESLIE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	2	3%
OUTDOOR RETAILERS	4	6%
EAST LANSING SENIORS' COMMISSION	2	3%
GREATER LANSING LABOR COUNCIL	3	4%
JULIAN SAMORA INSTITUTE	6	9%
BOY SCOUT LEADERS	10	14%
CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING	2	3%
TOTAL	69	100%

Table 35. In opposition to campgrounds (all types), Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 3: OPPOSITION TO CAMPGROUNDS (all types combined)		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
MASON HIGH SCHOOL	2	18%
FRIENDS OF FENNER	2	18%
POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE	1	9%
LESLIE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	1	9%
LESLIE LIONS CLUB	1	9%
GREATER LANSING LABOR COUNCIL	1	9%
JULIAN SAMORA INSTITUTE	1	9%
INGHAM CO. COMMISSIONERS	1	9%
RSVP	1	9%
DANSVILLE BOARD OF EDUCATION	1	9%
TOTAL²⁵	12	108%

²⁵ Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Quotations: Campgrounds

In Support of Campgrounds, in General

From Park Professionals

“the one thing that I heard earlier ... about the overnights, ...exposing more urbanites to and not just kids, I mean just the general population being able to, not necessarily have a full-fledged Sleepy Hollow thing going, but I think just an opportunity for parents and kids or, in our case, taking some of our programming out for an overnight for an extended period of time, maybe two or three nights. I don't know that, other than Sleepy Hollow, that that exists.”

“Because I think there is such a, and again green space being at such a premium in an urban area, you just don't have it. And so if you don't have it, ... we wouldn't be able to expose our kids or their friends, to some kind of overnight camping experience.”

From Boy Scout Leaders

“One of the things our troop wanted to do this, over Christmas break, was we wanted to go to Burchfield, I guess, and go cross-country skiing and have a campfire pit where we could set up some Dutch oven cakes and then heat up some cider and a couple of bowls and bring the whole families out and go skiing and sit around and sing songs, just as a family activity over the Christmas holidays and the place closes up at 6 o'clock and we don't get out of work until five and they don't allow campfires and so we said, well, never mind but I mean, that's something we would like to have facilities that would enable us to do that.”

From MSU Outing Club

“I don't even know if it's possible but if you could even have a campground, that would be kinda neat because there's, there's not very, any places to campground here and it's not even that it has to offer something, you know, spectacular like Sleeping Bear Dunes has the dunes or whatever and there's Sleepy ... Hollow but, you know, what's there but a bunch of trees? But that's nice. That's a nice place.”

From Police Athletic League

“I think, well, speaking from my own personal experience, ... when I was growing up, I mean, growing up in a big city in Detroit and this area is a lot of rural area, I mean, I never went camping but maybe once or twice in my life but with all the ruralness here, you know, I think ... a campground would be good. The closest place I guess you can go, where is that place, Sleepy Hollow, and that's, you know, that's a nice little ways to travel just to go camping.”

“It'd be like a little escape or a little getaway.”

From Leslie High School Students

"If we had like a really nice camping ground like they have up north with like a little arcade and a store, a little store inside of it and, you know, that'd be nice."

From Outdoor Retailers

"A campground, I mean, there's really no campgrounds in this area and that's something that definitely would be in demand."

"I get people coming into the store, you know, who are just traveling through town who camp up there and I think, you know, more, another camping facility would be beneficial."

From Julian Samora Institute

"I know what I look for when we go up north camping, we like going to places where they're near lakes, where you can go, you know, swimming or boating, canoeing..."

From St. Mary's Altar Society

"I think if the county had something like for campgrounds and everything, we have relatives from out of state that happen to do a lot of camping and they, you know, we go to Lake Michigan and meet them because there is nothing really around here unless you go further north."

"Well I wouldn't want it to be rustic. You know, not completely."

"No, you wouldn't need a lot of spaces and that, but with a little electricity..."

"People would pay a fee for it and everything."

From Mason High School Students

"Instead of staying on the fairground people could stay at the campground where there would be other stuff to do."

"They will come in a lot for like the fair and the horse shows"

"They'd probably bring tourism and stuff."

"If a group of friends wanted to go get away from family."

"For a slumber party."

In Support of Tent Campgrounds

From Park Professionals

"I think you'd also want to leave some spots that people could bring their own tents. I don't know if you'd want to get in, want to get in to pop-up tents. I certainly don't think you want to get in to motor homes or RV's or anything like that."

From Boy Scout Leaders

"I worked in a park system once and the most popular thing in one of the parks that I worked in was a primitive camping area and you had to literally fight to keep people who shouldn't be in there out. And there really wasn't much in the expenditure to put the thing in. It was really just a matter of isolating it and saying that's, that's what it's got to be."

From MSU Outing Club

"It could be, you know, family camping like, like I would imagine something rustic, not for like RV's but mostly, you know, mainly just for tents or even, maybe even pop-ups but mostly just tents."

From Julian Samora Institute

"We've talked about fishing. What else? Like, just kind of touring the scenery or whatever, where you can have a campfire, set up a tent, just hang out, whatever."

"One other thing, too, ... one of the things that I like about the place that we go is they have showers, clean showers and, you know, the bathrooms where they're not outhouses or whatever. That's another really attractive feature, I guess, at that campground."

"You miss the whole point of camping."

"That's what some people say. I don't know. I think it is, you can camp without having to rough it completely, and you can still have fun."

"No, but I mean, I think the funnest part that we have when we're camping is, like, we were out swimming and we're cooking out and we're, you know, sitting around the campfire. That's always the funnest."

From Boy Scout Leaders

"...if you want to camp there you bring your own shelters, just 'cause I've seen what's happening to the state parks, the more they've made 'em easier to deal with, they become... we don't go to them anymore, our family, because the kids are going in there and just going in there as a place to drink and party and be rowdy all night until 3 o'clock in the morning. So it's no longer a place where I want to take a family with small children, where you have to put 'em to bed at 8 or 9 o'clock."

"And that is the concern you have if you establish a shelter in a place like that, you know, you keep the people in that you want in and the people out that you don't want."

"So if it's primitive it's less inviting to people that are into a big party. But, you know, obviously, everybody has a right to public facilities so it's hard to choose..."

From MSU Outing Club

"Flush toilets ... that's the one thing that I like though is nice, I mean, I guess I rough it to a sense but I like clean bathrooms, like you know, nice drinking fountains, clean bathrooms, toilets, and showers."

"Yeah, that sounds good. I like, I think it being restricted to just tenting."

In Support of RV Campgrounds**From East Lansing Seniors' Commission**

"We had an RV, we did do that on occasion, we would like to get one in the county or something, so it would be there near the community and we could visit the community without coming in from a far distance. Whether or not there would be something in that that might be able to be promoted as part of the tourism of the area. I think that's the only RV type parking site there is close to Lansing except for the private one. And the next closest is Sleepy Hollow."

In Support of Group Campgrounds**From Park Professionals**

"I like your idea of the camping quite honestly. Because when you look at the potential of doing that, not only within the recreation programs, but you have the Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts and I don't really know too much about what the YMCA has there or what these agencies utilize for camping on weekends and where they don't have to go very far. How far do they go for camping?"

"You look at that population of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and for camping, I know there is a little bit of camping that's done at Fenner Arboretum. But it can't be very much, but, that would be to me an exciting thing to do and you think about the church youth organizations that may want to do that. You [already] supply cross-country skis. Probably help them out by supplying tents, too. Offer that, and then they provide the supervision."

"I'm thinking in terms of, you know, programming when my daughter was younger, like going out to Wacousta to they have the Girl Scout, little cabins there. And you can loosely call that camping because you are not outside, but they bring sleeping bags and they have like, you know, roll out mats that they do, it is just like a loft and then a downstairs activity room with, you know, a kitchen for cooking and then an outdoor area that you can cook over also. You know, platform tents are okay, but they are a limited use. I mean you can fit like, you know, four little cots in there and that kind of a thing. I think in terms of a large building that the kids can just bed down on the floor and you can have a huge fireplace, you know. Just a facility. If you did a group camping thing, like a facility that had like a loft that they could just throw their sleeping bags in and they would have ah, you know, a roof, your cancellation would be less, I mean you wouldn't have to worry about the weather necessarily. You could do winter, also, and I know right now I mean if you don't ask at the Girl Scout office in September, you will not get in there, period. You know, that kind of a thing, but just an area, you know, and then you've got

your trails and you've got your programming there and your things that they can work on badges and that kind of a thing. But just like your winter sports building, if that was, you know, available for people just to, you know, bed down and had a kitchen there and an outdoor say cooking area or something like that..."

"I would have...taken 12 girls out for my daughter's birthday and we had a blast as the Girl Scouts we got one every year. But I couldn't take nonGirl Scouts out there, it is just not allowed."

"You know, so you can take a church group, you can take a, you know, a birthday party, you can do a family reunion or you know..."

From Boy Scout Leaders

"Well, I think I remember almost 20 years ago that there was an Ingham County park that had a map that said, this is where the organizational group campsite's gonna go and it's 20 years later and there's still nothing that we actually have this organizational group camp. I mean, our scouts utilize much more Fenner Nature Center because we can go camp there and we can't camp as far as I know in any of the Ingham County parks, and I think that's a real problem that, certainly an opportunity to put some kind of an organizational group campground in one of these parks."

"But we've camped at Lake Lansing. The Cub Scouts have camped at Lake Lansing and my wife took girls, takes Girl Scouts there. I mean, but it's not really set up for camping."

"Yeah, on the northeast corner of Fenner they have what they call the organizational campground, right, in fact, you drive through the cemetery to get there, not through Fenner but they have water. They've got a shelter with picnic tables and a campfire bowl and so forth. So they do have it specifically set up for..."

"Yeah, that would be, yeah that would be, I mean, and a latrine, basically, some place you get water, a latrine, and probably a campfire bowl would be useful because you wouldn't want people building fires all over the place, some place you would center that."

"Also, I mean, you know, I have kids, my son's not just in Boy Scouts, he's also involved in church. They have church youth groups and you can't take those to [Camp] Kiwanis."

"There's many other groups that may want to do some camping or just even an overnight or late night campfire and then they close everything up and they leave at midnight after, you know, things like organized hayrides and campfires once in a while during the fall would be a fun activity..."

"And then just give us another opportunity. There's, I mean, if there were some place like Burchfield, there's a lot of nice trails there and things. You could have the, that would work, meld well with having a camping area there."

In Support of Wheelchair Accessible Campgrounds

From Center for Independent Living

"We're putting together a summer camp for [inaudible] children during the summer and it is one thing, the accessibility of the campgrounds, they are not very accessible."

"And that would be great. I mean at least we'd have opportunities to camp."

"Especially again it goes back to the bathrooms. The bathroom, shower areas. Cabins, there's a place, I think it is called [inaudible] Park up in Rogers City, that is wonderful. It has great, great restrooms and showers."

In Opposition to Campgrounds (All Types)

From Leslie High School Students

"I think for campgrounds, I mean, a lot of people don't really care to camp in, like, the area they live around ..."

From Leslie Lions Club

"You'd almost have to have quite a bit of land, wouldn't you, for campgrounds? Because that kind of implies that there's gonna be some trails and some things to do, outdoors type of things."

"I'm not a social camper. If I camp, I'm out in the boonies."

"You're talking a large, large park."

"Yeah, and that's what I was getting at."

"I don't think the county could..."

"That's the point I was getting at. I don't think they could afford to get into something where if we go camping there's, we like to go out where you can go out in the woods and walk or have trails that you can walk and stuff. I think cost would be prohibitive in a residential area such as Ingham County."

From Ingham County Commissioners

"The only thing on here that [I] wouldn't be really interested in would be campgrounds."

"Amen."

"We don't need campgrounds."

"Yeah."

From RSVP

"I'm not for that because we got enough campgrounds around."

From Dansville Board of Education

"I'm wondering where they'd be. And I –county parks up north tend to be on some isolated lake. I wonder where they'd be around here. You have the campground down Aurelius it seems to be full all the time. But it's right in town. It wouldn't make me, when I go camping I want to be close to water some places."

From Friends of Fenner

"But as far as your campgrounds, I think you ought to leave that to the state."

"...when you start thinking campgrounds on this level you're thinking of staff and everything else and ah..."

Concept 4: Information

In response to the unaided request for facilities and services the county parks should provide, a desire for information was expressed 43 times in 13 groups (Table 26). Five responses occurred in 2 groups in response to the aided request (Table 27). Table 36 contains the combined responses to these two questions, the unaided and aided.

Responses to both questions (the unaided and aided) occurred in only one group, the Julian Samora Institute. (For participant recommendations concerning specific methods of distributing information, see Table 29.)

Table 36. Desire for information, Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 4: INFORMATION		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
BIG BROTHERS/SISTERS	4	8%
FRIENDS OF FENNER	6	13%
OUTDOOR RETAILERS	2	4%
BICYCLISTS	4	8%
MERIDIAN SENIOR CENTER	1	2%
EAST LANSING SENIORS' COMMISSION	4	8%
GREATER LANSING LABOR COUNCIL	1	2%
JULIAN SAMORA INSTITUTE	6	13%
BOY SCOUT LEADERS	8	17%
NAACP	4	8%
CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING	3	6%
INGHAM CO. COMMISSIONERS	1	2%
RSVP	1	2%
WILLIAMSTON CITY COUNCIL	3	6%
TOTAL²⁶	48	99%

²⁶ Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Quotations: Information

From Outdoor Retailers

“There is very little about any programming, if any, that goes on in 'em and that type of activities. I mean, I don't know if any of the parks have interpretative trails or anything of that nature which all would be beneficial and, you know, it's more or less just a lack of knowledge.”

“I think the biggest thing for the current is just getting the word out to people. I bet you, you know, half the population, over three-quarters of the population at MSU has not clue there's county parks.”

From Bicyclists

“What needs to happen, too, is whatever product you come out with be disseminated to decision makers and to clubs.”

From East Lansing Seniors' Commission

“I can't recall ... whether you have a sheet for maps or things now available, but maybe add a safety sheet to do while you are in here. For instance, one of the things brought up in youth groups a long time, if you are going to be out on the trails with one or two, have a loud whistle with you. You know, things to watch for when you are out. In other words, a little something to get some guidance that they could put other promo stuff on it, too.”

From Greater Lansing Labor Council

“... maybe the only thing they'd need to do is just advertise themselves better. I for one, hope they don't. I don't want to see them over utilized.”

From Julian Samora Institute

“More I think just promoting what you do have 'cause we tend to forget that you guys have that, canoes and paddleboats and stuff like that.”

“I would highly recommend advertising because, I mean, if you don't know, if you're not around from this area obviously you're not gonna know anything, so how are people gonna know, especially students around MSU, I think would really enjoy some of these parks...”

“And I don't know how you'd be able to advertise or promote, 'cause you know, they say that bad publicity stands out, you know, people remember that more than they remember the good or whatever but somehow or another to promote that they are doing something to take care of the condition of the water so it's safe to be swimming at Grand River and Lake Lansing and somehow reassure people that it's not gonna be a problem.”

From Boy Scout Leaders

"Probably the biggest shortcoming is that there isn't a good map of it. She emphasizes topographic features and the closest thing that she has been able to get is just a U.S.G.S topo map which is not..."

"It seems to me that as a kind of a natural area which that's the way you look at MacNamara Landing that if, that might be something that the park system wanted to look at in the future is to develop a map and a good topographic map because, particularly for scouts with orienteering and stuff like that. I could see that would be an excellent place to do something like that."

"...where the heck is William Burchfield Park? I would think that maybe a little bit more identification there would help. You can over-identify because you really don't want to, you know, turn it into a cluttered mess but, you know, there ought to be some relatively simple directions for people coming from Lansing to be able to get to where they're going..."

From NAACP

"... the last time was at Lake Lansing I was looking for some people that was supposed to be in a certain area and it was very hard to find. Maybe I was given bad directions but it was hard."

"I think they would probably make it lot easier for people if they, you know, if there was something that told people how to get there and once they got to the park, you know, maybe some signs that could tell them what direction or whatever it is, what specific area they were looking for, where it is located within that park."

From Ingham County Commissioners

(re: Hawk Island)

"I think you will need to aggressively market the park as the county resource in the city that is safe, clean, attractive, family oriented. 'Cause its history had been a little unusual in the past."

From RSVP

"We don't use the swimming as much or the trails, but...I always maintained that if they had programs to attract the age group, they would come if they were advertised and asked. And parks...haven't done that."

From Williamston City Council

"And we were going to coordinate an effort, not only coordinate an effort a coordinated advertisement or community communication type thing of what is available with all of these parks. Like Meridian Township, has some excellent parks."

“Alright, if there was a recreation map that created sort of like you are talking as a document that all communities could hand out to anybody...showing where all these are and what the connectivity [is], I think you would find a better utilization.”

From Friends of Fenner

“That’s been a problem I think with the parks with all the, not just the county parks, but parks in general, there’s not a good guide for people to find parks. It’d be nice to have like a regional guide to all the parks and what’s available or something.”

“There’s what we need, is the map of the whole system...”

(re: county park brochure)

“I have, I think I got it about 25 years ago, a big map, I mean, it unfolds like that and it’s of the Ingham County park system...be more informational than this is.”

From Center for Independent Living

“You had one place where you knew...that’s a great place for people with wheelchairs and walkers. That would get a big audience.”

Concept 5: Interagency Cooperation

A number of participants in 14 groups stated that agencies should cooperate regardless of political affiliation to avoid duplication of services/facilities. Regional or metropark type systems had some support. The county, specifically, was expected to play a coordinating role in crossing or uniting smaller jurisdictions. For example, some participants called for a map of all parks/outdoor recreation opportunities, regardless of who runs them.

In response to the aided request, 7 responses in favor of interagency cooperation occurred in 5 groups (Table 27). In response to the unaided request it occurred 35 times in 11 groups (Table 26). Two groups requested interagency cooperation in response to both aided and unaided requests: Webberville Parks Advisory Board and Dansville Board of Education. Therefore, responses totaled 42 in 14 groups (Table 37). The Friends of Fenner (21%), Park Professionals (17%), and the Williamston City Council (17%) most frequently voiced support for interagency cooperation.

Table 37. In support of interagency cooperation, Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 5: INTERAGENCY COOPERATION (includes regional park system, avoiding duplication of services and facilities, county as coordinator)		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
PARK PROFESSIONALS	7	17%
WEBBERVILLE PARKS ADVISORY BOARD	2	5%
FRIENDS OF FENNER	9	21%
OUTDOOR RETAILERS	1	2%
BICYCLISTS	2	5%
MERIDIAN SENIOR CENTER	1	2%
EAST LANSING SENIORS' COMMISSION	3	7%
GREATER LANSING LABOR COUNCIL	2	5%
MASON ROTARY	1	2%
BOY SCOUT LEADERS	2	5%
NAACP	1	2%
INGHAM CO. COMMISSIONERS	1	2%
WILLIAMSTON CITY COUNCIL	7	17%
DANSVILLE BOARD OF EDUCATION	3	7%
TOTAL²⁷	42	99%

Quotations: Interagency Cooperation

From Meridian Senior Center

“Well my concern is that's there so much duplication. Every entity feels that that their park system has to serve everybody's interests.”

From East Lansing Seniors' Commission

“...if your jurisdictional lines could mesh better, it would seem to me that you would have a lot more confluence of what purposes are going to be. And I know that isn't always possible, but I will make that as a comment because your participants really don't care who runs them.”

“And it makes it very confusing just as we evidenced here, you know, does this belong to who and so on. So as a comment for your study, if there would be any enhancement of bringing any of those together under some kind of regional board or something.”

From Greater Lansing Labor Council

“Like if you said additional softball fields, would that be competing with maybe some other cities and municipalities that have those already? Would that be a duplication of services that maybe if your effort should maybe go elsewhere, maybe I don't know.”

²⁷ Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

"Well, traditionally your fishing and your hiking trails and things of that sort that the city doesn't really get in to. But you think like ah, softball, there is a lot of softball fields, the city has a big softball program, Delta Township has their programs. And maybe if the county got into that, maybe just trying to compete against too many other services, providing the same thing, I don't know."

From Boy Scout Leaders

"...other places I've lived there's sort of been a combined city-county park structures and it all cooperated together. Here it seems like we've got the City of Lansing and City of East Lansing and the towns all developing each their own plan. Is there a sort of coordination of effort that goes on here? We'll build the soccer fields so you don't build a soccer field. We think this is something we want to have. Who's going to do this, the city or the county..."

From Williamston City Council

"It would be nice if Ingham County would work with the various communities and help coordinate the connection of these trails."

"Cause there are a lot of trails that just aren't connected. And Ingham [County] could really facilitate that. Whether it was, ah, going through and forcing it and condemning it in those places where they don't want to, to cooperate and force the trail in, but that would make a big difference for everybody. Sort of create the connectivity that we need and then you would see the social structure start to change because of that connectivity."

"I think the coordination of resources, I think it would be excellent, the map, ... and to help with some of these jurisdictional problems. That would be excellent. Plus, not just the river, we concentrated on the river, but for other types of recreation..."

From Webberville Parks Advisory Board

"You know, if we look at what the county should do and what the local government should do, I would think that the county should focus on, you know, connecting recreational activities, so maybe they should be involved in the trails ... that somebody can get on and go from one place to another. If you look at soccer fields, softball fields, that is something you would think you would have day-to-day use and it would be a lot more local. ... if the local government concentrated on those kind of things...and maybe looking at it in terms of what the county should do and what the village should do."

"Shouldn't Ingham County be responsible for putting the townships together?"

From Friends of Fenner

"Has there been any talk of a regionalized park system as opposed to a county system?"

"Well, I think everybody related [that] they go to the closest park that's available to them and the, for the bulk of the population in Lansing the closest parks are going to be Eaton

County and Clinton County, not Ingham County. Therefore, there should be a regional park system...”

“Right, tri-county system ... and not individualized by counties...tri-counties...and not individualized counties trying to operate on their own.”

Concept 6: Connecting Parks

Participants in 13 out of 26 groups expressed a desire to connect parks with multiple-use trails or greenways, utilizing railroad rights-of-way whenever possible and linking recreation areas under different jurisdictions, if required (Table 38). In response to the unaided request for facilities and services the county should provide, connecting parks, as a concept, occurred 32 times, in 8 groups (Table 26). In response to the aided request, it occurred 9 times in 5 groups (Table 27), for a total of 41 times in 13 groups. Twelve groups are shown in the table below because one group, the Webberville Parks Advisory Board, expressed the desire to connect parks in response to both the aided and unaided requests. The concept was mentioned most frequently (47%/99%) by two groups, the constructed group of park professionals (20%) and the bicyclists (27%).

Table 38. In support of connecting parks, Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 6: CONNECTING PARKS		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
PARK PROFESSIONALS	8	20%
WEBBERVILLE PARKS ADVISORY BOARD	2	5%
FRIENDS OF FENNER	1	2%
MSU OUTING CLUB	3	7%
BICYCLISTS	11	27%
MASON ROTARY	1	2%
INGHAM CO. COMMISSIONERS	4	10%
WILLAMSTON CITY COUNCIL	3	7%
OUTDOOR RETAILERS	1	2%
LESLIE LIONS CLUB	2	5%
BOY SCOUT LEADERS	2	5%
DANSVILLE BOARD OF EDUCATION	3	7%
TOTAL²⁸	41	99%

²⁸ Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Quotations: Connecting Parks

From Bicyclists

"With respect to the parks on the west side of the county, there [had] been [a] presentation a number of years ago, it was just sort of a brainstorming session. There had been the concept brought up of forming a linear park out of that by using rail right-of-way or abandoned rail right-of-way to hook those parks...that's something I'd like to see happen..."

"I'd definitely like to see as much connecting as you can."

"Yeah, to be able to have families, you know, be able to be off the road, whole families, you know, be able to get to parks."

"And the east-west corridor is really deficient."

"Anymore, I think, you know, it's more enjoyable for people to be able to get their exercise and their outing with the park being the destination, you know, and be able to get to the park and back from the park, make a day of it. Out on a bicycle or hiking, you know, so you can get their fitness in and also have their outing at the park and not have it be like driving your car to the park, you know."

"...let's expand the River Trail in better form, whatever, all the way across the county."

"If we could try to develop sort of a linear trail along the Red Cedar all the way from one side of the county to the other, that would be a real step."

"This would be kind of like, you know, in Boston they have the Emerald Necklace, you know, where they have connecting parks."

"You know, utilizing railroad right-of-ways, you know, and have the parks, have the county start picking up some of that property and connecting this and make it part of a county park system."

From Ingham County Commissioners

"...we really need to have you participate in the River Trail and bringing it south to Hawk Island and heading it for Mason ..."

"Well, it seems like the River Trail has really enhanced the river so much. It is one of the most, aesthetic things about Lansing that we have to offer and I think we just need to take advantage of the beauty of the water in every possible way we can. So, the more we can extend that I think the more attractive it is for our region. So the more we can enhance that, the better."

From Friends of Fenner

"I think we're definitely missing biking, mountain biking and biking trails and it's just there's nothing here. I know there's the River Trail, but other than that, there's nothing that connects to anything and there's nothing in the parks."

From MSU Outing Club

"I'd have to say more trails. I know out by us, what they do, is they have the park set up so there's just a jogging trail going through the woods, you know, just a huge, huge, huge jogging trail that goes on forever and some of them you can even go through the city and it connects parks together. That may be a cool idea."

"Going off, the thing about connecting parks, I think it would be cool to have, like, kind of what they have in Battle Creek, like a linear trail, like a, 'cause that region and, you connects, that connects like all the areas of Battle Creek...and I think it'd be a good idea to have like the smooth, paved rollerblade trails connecting parks or just have, you know, a long way to go 'cause, I mean, I don't know, I like that a lot."

From Outdoor Retailers

"But, you know, in general, definitely more trails, multi-use trails because that's becoming, I know the rails to trails is really growing and becoming more active in this know, linking, working with a group like that in attempting to connect the parks with a trail system would be a great idea if it's feasible."

From Webberville Parks Advisory Board

"I would think that, you know, the county should focus on, you know, connecting recreational activities, so maybe they should be involved in trails that are, that somebody can get on and go from one place to another."

From Boy Scout Leaders

"Everybody talks about, you know, these, what do they call 'em, greenways or whatever it is, to connect different park areas and that's the way development is being set up now and I think that's what the parks need to be looking at."

"I used to live in Minnesota. They had, all the parks had little trails between 'em, ... they had a park every mile, I mean smaller parks, but a play area type thing, but you could get from one to the other by riding your bike and so you go on a real long bike ride for a day and go through ten or twelve parks..."

Concept 7: Nominal Entrance and Rental Fees

Fees for equipment rentals and specialized facilities (e.g., water park) were acceptable and even expected. Entry/parking fees had less support but generally accepted, if reasonable. There was a desire to use revenues generated by the parks for park projects.

Objections seemed to be philosophical (e.g., “nature should be free”, “I don’t think I should have to pay to go for a walk”) rather than financial hardship. Fees or higher fees for nonresidents of the county had support. There was concern that the cost of collection would exceed revenues. Some wanted an “annual sticker” option. If implemented, considering the lack of awareness of county parks, there may be considerable confusion about which parks the sticker would cover.

In response to the aided request, support for charging fees occurred 15 times in 8 groups (Table 27). In response to the unaided request, it occurred 26 times in 7 groups (Table 26). Therefore, responses totaled 41 in 15 groups. Groups responding to both unaided and aided requests in support of fees were: Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Friends of Fenner, and Meridian Senior Center. The most support was voiced by the Friends of Fenner (37%) and the Julian Samora Institute (15%). The least support was voiced by several groups, including the Ingham County Commissioners (5%) (Table 39).

Table 39. In support of nominal entrance and rental fees, Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 7: SUPPORT FOR NOMINAL ENTRANCE AND RENTAL FEES		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
BIG BROTHERS/SISTERS	4	10%
ST. MARY’S ALTAR SOCIETY	1	2%
FRIENDS OF FENNER	15	37%
POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE	1	2%
LESLIE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	1	2%
OUTDOOR RETAILERS	1	2%
MERIDIAN SENIOR CENTER	3	7%
GREATER LANSING LABOR COUNCIL	2	5%
JULIAN SAMORA INSTITUTE	6	15%
MASON ROTARY	1	2%
BOY SCOUT LEADERS	4	10%
INGHAM CO. COMMISSIONERS	2	5%
TOTAL²⁹	41	99%

Quotations: Nominal Entrance and Rental Fees

From Leslie High School Students

(Facilitator asks if participants would be willing to pay a fee to use the water park.)

“Oh, heck, yes...we weren’t even thinkin’ about it for free, you know.”

²⁹ Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

From Greater Lansing Labor Council

"I think if you are out of the county, you should have some kind of, contribute in some way financially."

From Police Athletic League

"I'm more than willing to pay for a sticker for those...maybe like a 50 cent parking fee. That's no big deal."

From Outdoor Retailers

"It depends on the situation and the activity. Like toboggan runs, something like that, I think there definitely should be a fee charged, you know, even if it's small, you know, a dollar or two for the day. You know, at the boat launches, you know, that's an area where, if the money is going to stay there in the park to maintain that boat launch and stuff, yes. But if the money being generated by fees is going just into the general fund to pay for the flu shots, no. You know, any fees that a park generates should go to the maintenance of that park and be part of that, not operating budget for the park, but specifically for the maintenance and upkeep 'cause that way you can justify it to the users and say, well, your money is gonna stay in the park and, you know, it may go to spray painting that yellow line in the parking lot and it may go to create new outhouses five miles out on the trail, but we're going to keep that money here and it's gonna be used to keep the park up and running and looking good."

From Meridian Senior Center

"I guess the zoo is doing okay. But their fees, that hasn't stopped people from going there."

From Julian Samora Institute

"I think just depending on [what] they have to offer, I think. I mean, if people want to go and just hike, I don't see why they should pay a fee. But I think in other situations, I think they should be [charged]."

"...maybe if there was, maybe, campsites, I think there should be a fee for that. I mean, it shouldn't cost so much, just more or less reserving the space."

"It's not necessarily, I mean, it doesn't have to be free, the opportunity just needs to be there."

From Mason Rotary

"I would expect to pay for the use of equipment."

From Friends of Fenner

"I don't have a problem for those who use it to, you know, pay that little bit extra."

"Oh sure. When you go to Sleepy Hollow, you pay..."

“I don’t mind paying the money if I could have a little sticker or something, but not have to do that every time.”

“I guess I don’t have a problem with fees for any of it.”

“User fees are never gonna totally fund it. It’s always going to have to be subsidized but I don’t, I don’t have a problem with some minor fee structure. You don’t want to out, price yourself out so people can’t go, but for maybe specialized recreation or specialized, you know, components of the recreational system, they have some user fees.

“Well, and that way the people who use it help pay for it.

“You pay for it one way or the other and I don’t have a problem with user fees as long as they’re reasonable fees.”

Concept 8: Low Cost/Free Entrance and Services

There was some opposition to user fees as described above. Individuals in a variety of groups either wanted free services, expressed a concern about cost, or opposed fees on a philosophical basis.

In response to the aided request, free entrance fees or concerns about cost were expressed 4 times in 4 groups (Table 27). In response to the unaided request, such concerns occurred 28 times in 9 groups (Table 26). In response to the question regarding reasons for not visiting parks of any kind, a concern for fees occurred 5 times in 3 groups (Table 29). Two responses occurred, one in each of two groups, stating that the reason they visited county parks was because they were free or low in cost (Table 28). Therefore, opposition to fees was expressed a total of 39 times in 18 groups. Groups which expressed opposition included: Police Athletic League, Mason High School Students, Outdoor Retailers, Julian Samora Institute, and MSU Outing Club (Table 40).

Table 40. In support of lowcost/free entrance and services, Ingham County Recreation Needs Assessment (1998-1999).

CONCEPT 8: SUPPORT FOR LOWCOST/FREE ENTRANCE AND SERVICES		
FOCUS GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT ACROSS ALL GROUPS
BIG BROTHER/SISTERS	2	5%
PARK PROFESSIONALS	1	3%
ST. MARY'S ALTAR SOCIETY	1	3%
MASON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	7	18%
FRIENDS OF FENNER	2	5%
MSU OUTING CLUB	3	8%
POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE	5	14%
LESLIE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	1	3%
OUTDOOR RETAILERS	2	5%
GREATER LANSING LABOR COUNCIL	1	3%
JULIAN SAMORA INSTITUTE	9	23%
MASON ROTARY	1	3%
RSVP	4	10%
TOTAL³⁰	39	103%

Quotations: Lowcost/Free Entrance and Services

From St. Mary's Altar Society

"Now a lot of the older adults, lovely older adults they do play tennis and they don't, you now, unless you have money and you can belong to a club of some sort, you just can't go out and find many places to play tennis. And the schools don't allow you to use their tennis courts."

From Police Athletic League

"Nature is free."

"I think it should be free."

From Outdoor Retailers

"You know, have to pay to launch a canoe is a little ridiculous ... charging a boat launch fee to someone who is dropping a canoe in the water, you know, I think that's a little

"Nature should be, like, free."

"I'd like to see like more programs for, like, inner city youth to be able to experience some of the parks because a lot of times they might not have the means to actually get into the park, you know, on a regular basis... Those kids, you know, obviously wouldn't be able to afford to go there, so I think, you know, maybe we should try to target, you know, some of the inner city youth that don't have that opportunity sometimes."

³⁰ Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

"We went to Grand River because it was free. So we didn't experience any of the other parks but, you know, we always used to take our kidscamp kids to Grand River and, you know, they had a really nice time."

"Yeah, I think you're right, yeah, 'cause if it was a well-publicized, you know, like a weekly concert series or something and you advertised it and ,people, I think people would be willing to pay but it's always fun to go free."

From Mason Rotary

(The facilitator asks if the county should charge to get into the parks.)

"That, I don't know. I don't think I would pay it but, you know, I would certainly expect to pay to like rent equipment and things like that, but it's nice to be able to just walk into the park and not have to pay anything."

From RSVP

"So if they offered a program that was low-cost with a bus, say hey on Tuesdays we'll pick you up, come out and spend the day at the park and we'll ... do this and this regardless of the weather because it is, you know, I know that Burchfield has a nature center."

"But you know like there is one day that's the fishing is all free, no license required and if the county would offer, um, a deal for the seniors and say this is a free fishing day, come out and discover what kind of fish we have in our ponds."

"... the population aging and changing in the Lansing community, we got to start providing these kind of recreational things, because a lot of people do not have the money to go out, into, and having, you know, all these activities."

From Mason High School Students

"I think a dollar is fine, but it is just like if it is \$4 to go canoeing, and then, if you paid, I mean, I don't want to spend \$7 just to go. That sucks."

"Yeah, I think if everyone that comes in pays a dollar and then you pay additional for whatever, like if you want to go canoeing or something like that."

"But I don't know, it would just be a little bit too much to pay \$3 a car, \$4 to canoe and then you have to pay extra for those little pads that you want to sit on and that would just get ridiculous."

"[It's] too expensive to park."

From Friends of Fenner

"Cause I have a, I don't know how to explain this but I have symbolic problem about having to go pay \$2 to take a walk. It's just, there's something odd about having to go and get a ticket to take a walk in a park but I could see paying and I'd rather pay it in

taxes and let everybody, I think it opens it, more people are likely to take advantage of it but pay fees for some of the other pieces of it.”

“It just seems odd to me to have to go, plus hire someone to stand at the start of the trail to collect your money, you know. You'd find a way to get in there...”

From MSU Outing Club

“I really haven't been in the park itself because it requires a fee to get in. So when I found that out it was just like, forget it. I'll take my canoe and go up the road a little more and take it in.

“Yeah, it's \$2, but when you get paid next to nothing you'd rather have some bread and milk than pay the \$2 to get in, at least that's my assessment of it.

“And Lake Lansing, like Lake Lansing North is totally free to get into. So, those are my county parks. Really haven't been to the ones that are closer into the cities.”

From Leslie High School Students

“It was fun. It was a lot of fun. Just canoed and stuff but, and it wasn't, the prices weren't all that bad, so.”

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