

**RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY PREFERENCES  
REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING  
AND THE SATISFACTION OF NEEDS  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Analysis of Data from the  
Public Opinion Survey on Recreation**

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## **A. INTRODUCTION**

**This Executive Summary presents a condensed description of the main findings and implications of a comprehensive examination among a sample of Albertans of:**

- i) recreational activity preferences,**
- ii) reasons for participation, and**
- iii) needs satisfied by participation.**

**The data upon which the conclusions are based were derived from the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation.**

**The data provided answers to the following questions:**

- 0 what are the main reasons why people participate in various types of recreational activities?**
- 0 what are the main needs satisfied by participation in a favourite recreational activity?**
- 0 which types of recreational activity represent the most appropriate outlets for the fulfilment of reasons for participating and for the satisfaction of needs?**
- 0 to what extent do various types of recreational activity appeal to sub-sections of the population defined according to socio-economic characteristics?**

**Reference should be made to the complete report by E. Jackson for statistical tables, detailed information on methods of data treatment and analysis, and guides to the interpretation of data.**

## **B. BACKGROUND**

The Public Opinion Survey on Recreation was mailed to a sample of 4,700 randomly selected Albertans in February 1981. A response rate of 51.6% (2,425 individuals) was achieved.

Relatively simple methods of data analysis were employed. Where more sophisticated forms of multi-variate analysis were utilized as a check on basic two-variable relationships, the original results were generally confirmed. The conclusions can thus be accepted as a reasonably reliable interpretation of Albertans' recreational activity preferences and associated factors.

## **C. RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY PREFERENCES**

### **1. Classification and Analysis of Preferences**

The analysis of recreational activity preferences was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the results were based on an initial five-part classification developed by Alberta Recreation and Parks, primarily for the purpose of administering the questionnaire. In the second stage, an alternative classification of eleven groups was used because of several serious limitations of the original classification from an interpretive (though not necessarily administrative) standpoint. All results referred to here are based on the revised classification.

## 2. Specific Activity Preferences

Respondents expressing a preference for specific activities ranged from a high of 191 in the case of camping to a low of one response for ballet and stamp collecting. Only four additional activities were mentioned by more than one hundred respondents: golf (115), downhill skiing (111), fishing (108), and hockey (101). Only a total of 20 out of approximately 90 activities were listed as the "favourite" by thirty or more respondents. For this and other reasons, the data were examined on the basis of the classification referred to above.

## 3. Grouped Activity Preferences

Recreational activity preferences of respondents in rank order were as follows: exercise-oriented activities (preferred by 21.1%), team sports (12.1%), camping (7.9%), hunting and fishing (7.3%), passive indoor activities (5.5%), non-self-propelled and/or mechanized outdoor recreational activities (5.2%), creative-cultural activities (4.8%), golf (4.7%), social activities (4.7%), downhill skiing (4.6%), and self-propelled and/or non mechanized outdoor recreational activities (4.0%).

### **D. REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE FAVOURITE ACTIVITY, AND THE NEEDS WHICH ARE SATISFIED BY PARTICIPATION**

#### 1. Rank-order of Reasons and Needs

On the basis of the proportion of the total sample rating them as "important", the following was the rank-order of reasons for

**participating in the favourite recreational activity: pleasure (82.0%), relaxation (64.4%), health and exercise (64.0%), an alternative to work (59.0%), pleasant surroundings (56.8%), socialization with others (46.7%), being with the family (46.6%), improving skills and knowledge (45.3%), challenge (41.6%), excitement (41.0%), commitment (18.8%), competition (15.0%), "because I am good at it" (14.6%), community contribution (14.5%), solitude (14.2%), and recognition (6.9%).**

**The following was the rank order of needs satisfied "often" by participating in a favorite recreational activity: relaxation (71.7%), staying healthy (66.4%), pleasant places (66.5%), sense of accomplishment (52.4%), physical challenge (51.6%), socializing with others (49.8%), increasing knowledge (42.1%), and trying new things (40.1%).**

## **2. Recreational Outlets for Reasons and Needs**

**As far as the main reasons for participating are concerned, the following types of recreational activity are stated most frequently as the most appropriate outlets:**

**0 pleasure: all types**

**o relaxation: camping, golf, creative-cultural activities, social activities**

**o health and exercise: exercise-oriented activities, team sports**

**o alternative to work: camping**

**o pleasant surroundings: hunting and fishing, self-propelled activities**

**o socialization: social activities, team sports, golf**

- o being with the family: camping**
- o improving skills and knowledge: creative-cultural activities**
- o challenge, excitement: team sports, downhill skiing**
- o competition: team sports**
- o solitude: passive activities, hunting and fishing, self-propelled activities**

**The following activities are stated most frequently as the most appropriate outlets for the satisfaction of needs:**

- o relaxation: hunting and fishing, camping**
- o staying healthy, physical challenge: exercise-oriented activities, self-propelled activities, team sports, downhill skiing**
- o pleasant places: downhill skiing, camping, self-propelled activities**
- o socializing with others: team sports, golf, social activities**
- o sense of accomplishment: creative-cultural activities**
- o increasing knowledge: hunting and fishing, creative-cultural activities, passive activities**
- o trying new things: creative-cultural activities, camping**

### **3. Consistency between Reasons and Needs**

**In general, the proportion of each sub-group of respondents, defined according to recreational activity preferences, who reported a specific need being satisfied "often", was comparable to the proportion who rated the corresponding reason as "important". This indicates that,**

for the most part, the recreational activities which the majority of people identify as their "favourite" adequately satisfy the reasons which motivate that choice. In several cases, a need was reported as satisfied more frequently than the corresponding reason was considered important, whereas examples of the failure to fulfil reasons for participating were rare.

#### E. SOCIO-ECONOMIC VARIATIONS IN RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY PREFERENCES

Of the five socio-economic variables examined, age and sex were the most closely related to recreational activity preferences while income acted relatively poorly as a predictor of preference. Education and type of household occupied an intermediate position between these two extremes. Some highlights of the findings are as follows:

o Age: Preferences for exercise-oriented activities, team sports, and downhill skiing declined with advancing age, while preferences for social and passive activities and golf increased with age. Preferences for extractive, self-propelled, and mechanized activities, and for camping were highest among the intermediate age groups; preferences for creative-cultural activities were not influenced by age.

o Sex: Larger proportions of males than females preferred team sports, golf, and especially, extractive activities, while more females than males preferred creative-cultural, social, passive, and

exercise-oriented activities. Preferences for downhill skiing, camping, self-propelled, and mechanized activities did not differ between males and females.

o Education: Preferences for exercise-oriented, passive, and self-propelled activities, and downhill skiing increased in frequency with increasing education, while the opposite was true in the case of camping, extractive, and mechanized activities. No clear trends emerged according to education for the remaining classes of activity.

o Income: Differences between sub-groups of the sample defined according to income were small and few meaningful trends emerged, with the exceptions of golf and downhill skiing, for which preferences increased with increasing income, and creative-cultural activities, for which a decline in preference with income was apparent. Preferences for team sports and camping were strongest among the middle income groups.

o Type of Household: Preferences for creative-cultural activities and golf were more frequently expressed by couples with no children. Social and mechanized activities were most often preferred by respondents from single-parent families. These respondents also shared a high preference for exercise-oriented activities with respondents from households containing one or more unrelated adults, who were also more likely than others to prefer downhill skiing. Couples were more likely to prefer extractive activities and camping. The presence of children in the family also exerted a positive influence on the preference for camping.

For the most part, the rank-order of preference for recreational activities was maintained across socio-economic groups; the differences were in terms of the strength of preference.

Situational factors may override the influence of reasons for participating for three "special populations". These were respondents aged 65 and over, those with an income of \$10,000 or less, and respondents from single-parent families. The findings indicate the effects of barriers to participation among these groups, which should be addressed in recreation planning and management.

#### F. PROFILES OF RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY PREFERENCE GROUPS

o Creative-cultural activities: preferred by respondents who evaluated pleasure, relaxation, an alternative to work, the improvement of skills and knowledge, pleasant surroundings, commitment, egoism and solitude as important. Needs satisfied included a sense of accomplishment, relaxation, pleasant places, trying new things, and increasing knowledge. Preferences for creative-cultural activities were more frequent among females than males, and among couples with no children, but were not influenced by age, education, or income.

o Social activities: preferred by respondents who evaluated pleasure, relaxation, an alternative to work, socialization, contribution to the community, and recognition as important. Needs satisfied included relaxation and socialization. Preferences for social activities increased among successively older age-groups, among females, among respondents with a high school education, and among single-parent families, but were not influenced by income.

o Passive activities: preferred by respondents who evaluated pleasure, relaxation, and solitude as important. Needs satisfied included relaxation and increasing knowledge. Preferences for passive activities were most frequently expressed among older age-groups, females, and the better-educated, but were not influenced by income or type of household.

o Exercise-oriented activities: ranked first in preference among the sample as a whole and among almost all sub-groups, but were more frequently preferred by respondents who evaluated health and exercise as important. Needs satisfied included staying healthy, physical challenge, and relaxation. Preferences for exercise-oriented activities declined with age, increased with education, and were more frequent among females, single-parent families, and households with unrelated adults, but were not influenced by income.

o Team sports: preferred by respondents who evaluated pleasure, health and exercise, socialization, an alternative to work, challenge, and excitement as important. Needs satisfied included staying healthy,

physical challenge, and socialization. Preferences for team sports declined with age, and were most frequently expressed by males and respondents with a high school education and a middle-level income, but were not influenced by the type of household.

o Golf: preferred by respondents who evaluated pleasure, relaxation, health and exercise, pleasant surroundings, and socialization as important. Needs satisfied included pleasant places and socialization. Preferences for golf were more frequent among males, couples with no children, and those with intermediate levels of education, and they increased with age and income.

o Downhill skiing: preferred by respondents who evaluated pleasure, health and exercise, pleasant surroundings, excitement, and challenge as important. Needs satisfied included staying healthy, physical challenge, pleasant places, and relaxation. Preferences for downhill skiing were approximately equal among males and females, and increased with both education and income, but declined sharply with age; they were also more frequent among respondents from households with one or more unrelated adults.

o Hunting and fishing: preferred by respondents who evaluated pleasure, pleasant surroundings, relaxation, an alternative to work, and being with the family as important. Needs satisfied included relaxation, pleasant places, and increasing knowledge. Preferences for hunting and fishing were almost exclusively expressed by males, were more prevalent among the intermediate age-groups and couples regardless of the

presence of children in the family, declined with education, and were not influenced by income.

o Camping: preferred by respondents who evaluated pleasure, pleasant surroundings, relaxation, being with the family, and an alternative to work as important. Needs satisfied included relaxation, pleasant places, and increasing knowledge. Preferences for camping were not influenced by sex and declined with education, but were more frequent among respondents from intermediate age and income groups, and among couples, especially those with children.

o Self-propelled and/or non-mechanized activities: preferred by respondents who evaluated pleasure, pleasant surroundings, health and exercise, relaxation, and solitude as important. Needs satisfied included staying healthy, physical challenge, pleasant places, and relaxation, but not socialization. Preferences for self-propelled activities increased with education and were more prevalent among intermediate age-groups, but were not influenced by sex, income, or type of household.

o Mechanized and/or non-self-propelled activities: preferred by respondents who evaluated pleasure, an alternative to work, relaxation, challenge, and excitement as important. Needs satisfied included relaxation and pleasant places. Preferences for mechanized activities declined with education, and were more frequent among the intermediate age-groups and among respondents from single-parent families, but were not influenced by sex or income.

On the basis of these profiles, the choice of recreational activities must be viewed as a complex process reflecting interactions between situational factors (socio-economic characteristics), motivational factors (reasons for participating), and needs which are satisfied in various types of activity. No single factor alone fully explains variations in recreational activity preference across a population. Furthermore, it is combinations of motivations and needs which best distinguish between types of activity. While every activity type shared the importance of at least one reason or need with other types, no two types of recreational activity were characterized by the same combination of reasons and needs, nor did they appeal to identical segments of the population.

#### G. DISCUSSION

The information contained in this summary should have implications for recreational policy, planning, and management at all levels of service delivery.

The data concerning socio-economic variations in activity preferences can assist in providing crude forecasts of demand and participation at the provincial, regional, and local levels, and may act as a check on both the adequacy of currently available resources, facilities, and programs, and the need for further allocation and development in the short- to medium term future. For example, as the population grows toward larger proportions of older people and senior citizens, one would expect a rising demand for social and passive activities and for golf, while the demand

for downhill skiing and team sport facilities would decrease. Care must be taken, however, to distinguish trends at the specific level to which the service is directed and to recognize the variety of population trends which may yield different conclusions when considered jointly.

The data concerning reasons for participating and the satisfaction of needs may be utilized to guide the enhancement of the quality of recreation resources and facilities so that these needs can be better satisfied. Though it is difficult to translate the findings concerning motivational and satisfaction variables into practice, there is an advantage in knowing that recreational experiences are associated with combinations of motivations and needs. From this, general conclusions can be drawn regarding why people participate; programs can be directed towards groups of people with similar motivations.

The data concerning reasons for participating and the satisfaction of needs also have value in terms of leisure counselling. Recreation counsellors may utilize the findings in assisting individuals in their choice of activities, resources, facilities, and programs. Leisure counselling is becoming more critical as an increasingly complex and varied array of recreation opportunities confronts the individual.

It remains the challenge of those working in recreation to help their clientele satisfy their recreation needs by providing as many opportunities as possible to meet that goal.