

PROCEEDINGS

Symposium
**RIVER RECREATION
MANAGEMENT and RESEARCH**

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SYMPOSIUM SUMMARY

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SYMPOSIUM SUMMARY

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ATTENDANCE

Nearly 400 people showed up for the first-of-a-kind symposium on river recreation management and research. This attendance far exceeded the expectations of the symposium planners and was strong evidence of the high level of interest in the topic of river recreation, especially in light of the well publicized severe winter weather that had gripped the eastern and mid-western parts of the country. It seems fair to assume that the 400 people came to Minneapolis in January in response to un-mixed professional motivations. Even wide-spread drought that greatly reduced flows in many streams apparently did not dry up interest in river recreation.

The discussions also revealed a high degree of interest. There was never a lull, and session moderators had their hands full trying to field the constant flurry of questions from the floor in a fair and orderly way. Even in the waning hours of the symposium the attendance remained high; the usual dwindling of the audience was not evident. Similarly, almost no one delivered a paper and then slipped away, as is all too common at such meetings.

Evening sessions were developed on a volunteer, unofficial basis by a number of conference participants. Attendance was surprisingly good, another tangible indication of the deep interest in the subject of river recreation.

Symposium participants were diverse as well as numerous; geographic representation was widespread. Almost all States and most Canadian provinces were represented. A map near the registration desk was covered with red pins showing the origin of participants--a remarkably wide, even distribution. Two persons from Anchorage, Alaska, took the prize for long-distance travel.

Participants were also diverse in terms of interests and affiliations, although there were some gaps. Government river managers were numerous, representing Federal, State, and special, local districts. Lawyers were there, as were university professors, students, and government researchers. Commercial outfitters, especially from the western white-water rivers, were out in force, but some other segments of the private outfitting industry had little or no representation. Private river runners and their organizations were present, but probably under-represented proportionately. (The lack of expense accounts might be a partial explanation for the shortage of representatives of the private parties.) Absent or very scarce were representatives from some groups with major roles in river recreation--including politicians, river developers and dam builders, equipment manufacturers, youth-serving organizations, and organizations representing urban people and their needs.

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

The symposium reflected careful planning and much hard work in advance. The preliminary proceedings, including all the papers, was sent to all participants who pre-registered. Despite a wry comment by Tom Heberlein that this procedure resulted in a high level of "collective guilt feelings" because of failure to read the proceedings in advance, it was my impression that many people had done their homework and the floor discussions showed it.

Papers were summarized, not read, and this worked reasonably well. Most authors highlighted major points effectively within the limited time allotted to them.

Discussions were always active and searching, although there were a few speeches from the floor disguised as

questions. Generally the questions and exchanges of viewpoints were constructive and reflected mutual respect, although acrimony was not entirely absent and at least once the questioning resembled a Perry Mason cross-examination.

It seemed to me, and a number of the workshop reporters as well, that the symposium was a success. I conducted a thoroughly unscientific survey in the halls during breaks and the evaluations were unanimously favorable. I think most of us learned a good deal about a new subject. There is great regional variation in river recreation situations, and this was the first time people had gathered from such a large area to exchange their ideas and experiences.

I thought I sensed some increased understanding and even a little added empathy for "the other side". It was hard not to appreciate just how difficult a position river managers find themselves in, especially if use must be limited. It was also clear that conscientious outfitters face a difficult, changing situation. The growing numbers of private parties also are up against tough problems.

The broadened horizons and empathy were the main results of the symposium, I think, along with many valuable new contacts for future communication. Group conclusions and resolutions were not sought and would not have been appropriate, especially at the first symposium on such a complex, rapidly evolving topic.

The workshops were useful, but the unexpectedly large attendance forced them to become something more formal than workshops. More than 100 people attended most workshops, and that many people with only a little more than an hour available just cannot function as a workshop. However, there were more in-depth discussions of specific topics than were possible in the general sessions. Perhaps if the large attendance had been foreseen, more workshops might have been scheduled.

The program and the papers were better balanced than the discussions. Perhaps because of the background of many of the participants or maybe because of the perception of what are the most pressing current problems, the discussions tended to concentrate on rivers in wilderness-type settings and largely overlooked the inter-

mediate, pastoral, and urban rivers. Several of the workshop reporters also saw this wilderness emphasis in discussions, despite a number of good papers and interesting oral summaries of the urban end of the river recreation opportunity spectrum.

SPECIFIC THEMES DEVELOPED

The emphasis on wilderness was related to the strongly recurring theme of allocation, i.e., for a river on which use is rationed (and these are generally wilderness-type rivers) how is the permitted use allocated to different classes of users--specifically, how much is allocated to commercial outfitters and how much to private parties? This problem surfaced in Roderick Nash's opening paper, kept recurring in other papers, and was vigorously debated from the floor. (Several people seemed to have attended the symposium mainly to defend or enlarge the allocation to their interest group.)

As George Stankey points out in his report on the rationing workshop, allocation is a normative question and is inherently a political issue, largely outside solution by either managers or scientists. However, there surely are aspects of the issue that research could clarify, and opportunities for objective knowledge to narrow the range of disagreement and to single out the normative value judgments from what are basically questions of fact. It was unfortunate that little discussion was aimed at identifying the researchable components of the problem, for, obviously, the symposium was not intended to decide on the politics of allocation.

Another overriding theme throughout the symposium was the complexity of the river recreation environment. To a degree usually unequalled elsewhere, rivers are enmeshed in an intricate web of mixed legal jurisdictions, management responsibilities by numerous agencies, diverse ownership, and conflicting recreational and commodity users.

Concepts of rivers as recreation resources have themselves changed drastically in recent history, adding to the complexity of the situation. Rugged, white-water rivers, especially, have been redefined in a revolution in resource perception, described by Roderick Nash. A few decades ago such wild rivers were viewed as dan-

gerous, foreboding, and unnavigable. Controlling and harnessing them seemed to be obviously desirable. Changing ideas, new equipment, and development of new skills led to exploding recreational use and growing concern for keeping some rivers free-flowing.

As a result, use pressures are mounting on a finite, dwindling resource, a point made by Darrell Lewis the first morning and many other symposium participants. This situation is the basic source of the river recreation management problem.

Another key idea, expressed several times by different people, but usually rather quickly forgotten in discussions, is the need to consider individual rivers in a broader context of a system of rivers. A system of rivers must provide diversity in types of use, amounts of use, level of development, and nature of the landscape setting. How to define a balance in types of opportunities within a diverse river system is a critical question.

The need to define clear, specific management objectives for individual rivers was emphasized often during the symposium, but there was also agreement that this has usually not been done well. Management objectives must be the starting point for any consideration of carrying capacity. Capacity is not an intrinsic quality inherent in the rivers--a number that exists, waiting to be discovered. It is a more complex concept, basically an assemblage of impacts on resources and recreational experiences resulting from a given pattern and level of use that are acceptable in the light of management objectives, intensity of management, visitor behavior, visitor perceptions, and site characteristics.

There was much interest in improving visitor behavior to reduce impacts and, in effect, raise capacities by developing a system to license river runners. Obtaining a license would require proof of the would-be river runner's knowledge and skill. The details of operating a license system could become complicated, but the general idea seemed to be favored by many symposium participants.

Tom Heberlein, Joyce Nielson, and Bo Shelby reported that, at least for some rivers, social carrying capacity may be less clearly defined than in other settings studied. Particularly on the Colorado

River in Grand Canyon, visitor expectations in terms of solitude were not well crystallized and satisfactions were not strongly influenced by numbers of other visitors encountered. The symposium participants found it hard to believe that crowding and loss of solitude were not still important, and the consensus, reflected in Ken Cordell's workshop report, seemed to be that further research, especially on a wider range of types of rivers, was needed. Concern was also expressed about the need to consider individual, as opposed to aggregate, satisfaction related to congestion. The authors concluded that maintaining certain levels of solitude was desirable, but that social norms, rather than satisfactions, were the key to defining optimum solitude levels. This conclusion seems to bring their work back into the mainstream of previous wilderness carrying capacity research.

Management of river recreation is potentially complex. Many aspects of the setting and its use can be influenced by management in various ways. For example, there are many alternatives to rationing use that deserve thorough exploration by managers before they resort to such restrictive actions.

There seemed to be agreement that river recreation management is in its infancy. Not only has it suffered from a lack of clear objectives, but it has tended to be reactive to crises rather than leading. As management develops and matures, increased coordination will be necessary because of the complex mixture of jurisdictions. The Western Interagency Whitewater Committee is an example of a response to the coordination need for one region of the country.

The roles of public agencies and private businesses, landowners, and organizations are still not well defined, and some sharp differences of opinion on this issue surfaced at the symposium. Many assumed that governmental control was the obvious approach to most if not all river problems. This view was challenged; for example, Wilbur LaPage said, "If you say you don't trust private enterprise you are only admitting you are incompetent to work with the private sector."

The necessity for involving the public in government decisionmaking for river recreation was generally recognized. The

public must play a major role in defining objectives, evaluating management policies and actions, and weighing the tradeoffs involved in many decisions. Agency personnel seemed to accept this role for the public and to see involving the public effectively as a professional responsibility. There were some interesting examples of public participation, particularly the Georgia experience described by Claude Terry.

There were occasional reminders from the audience of the need to be concerned about the loss of free-flowing rivers as a result of dams, diversions, and ground water depletion, but the momentum of the discussions focusing on immediate or short-range river recreation management problems seemed too strong to overcome, and the preservation issue continued to be shortchanged.

River recreation needs to be put in perspective, to be viewed as a part of larger systems. It is one part of an outdoor recreation system, which in turn is part of a much larger system intended to meet a variety of human needs. Temporarily, in focusing on rivers, I think we forgot all about the larger systems they fit into.

Research needs surfaced constantly. One of the most obvious is for basic descriptive data, especially of recreation use. One workshop concentrated on recreation use measurement. Better knowledge of the benefits derived from river recreation and how management affects them was also a common theme, often related to the capacity issue and also the allocation issue. For example, do visitor benefits increase with greater self-sufficiency during the visit?

At times, as a researcher, it was a bit disconcerting to see how much was being expected of research, as though some managers had confused scientists with wizards. But, then there were jolts of healthy skepticism, as some managers stressed the need for research's aid in developing practical managerial tools that could pass some sort of cost/benefit test. But, it is important for all to remember that research results will not make the managers' decisions for them--research can only provide a better understanding of the probable consequences of different actions or events and improved knowledge of processes. Managers must still make the decisions in light of objectives and constraints, making use of information from research.

THE FUTURE

This first symposium on river recreation was, on balance, unusually successful and made a good start in improving both river recreation management and research's contribution to it.

The symposium could lead, and I hope it will, to continued communication among managers, the public, and research scientists. This communication should lead managers to consider a wider range of policies and actions and choose those that most effectively provide benefits to people. Better communication should also contribute to expanded, improved, and more relevant research.

If the symposium has any of these results, it was indeed unusually successful.