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**RESERVATIONS NORTHWEST SURVEY:
METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS**
OREGON PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT



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“RESERVATIONS NORTHWEST SURVEY: METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS”

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INTRODUCTION

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) introduced Reservations Northwest (RNW), a new telephone park reservation system that has replaced the mail-in reservation system since January of 1996. As part of a continuing effort to better serve the needs of Oregon and Washington parks users, OPRD contracted with the Oregon Survey Research Laboratory (OSRL) to conduct a representative survey of the users of Reservations Northwest to evaluate public reception of RNW as well as their satisfaction with Oregon and Washington State Parks. The first RNW Users Survey was conducted in 1996 to evaluate the first year of RNW operation, and other surveys were conducted in 1997 and 1999. This year's users survey is the fourth in the series.

This report is organized in two sections. Section 1 summarizes the survey methodology; Section 2 summarizes the results of the survey.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

This section describes OSRL's procedures for developing and implementing the telephone survey instrument and sample to conduct this representative survey. OSRL's quality control procedures were thoroughly presented in the inter-agency agreement and are not repeated.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Survey questions were developed in close consultation with OPRD representative Christopher A. Havel. The majority of the questions are replicated from the second RNW survey with some new questions. OSRL pre-tested individual questions and the entire survey instrument with members of the survey population, professionals, survey experts, and potential users of the data. OSRL obtained human subjects approval from the University of Oregon Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, as required by federal law.

The survey instrument includes the following subject areas:

1. RNW user characteristics, including age, income, and education;
2. RNW user experience with RNW, including ease/difficulty of making a reservation;
3. RNW user camping behavior, making plans and reservations to camp at state parks;
4. RNW user use of reservation resources;
5. RNW user knowledge of state park system operation, including knowledge of state park funding;
6. RNW user preferences, advance reservation time frame, reservation by telephone or World Wide Web;
7. RNW user satisfaction with RNW and State Parks, when making changes, satisfaction with the quality of campgrounds, facilities, and services;
8. RNW user camping behavior, including how frequently they camp on and off-season, the typical size of camp group, camping methods;
9. RNW user opinions on overbooking policies

The survey instrument was programmed into OSRL's computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI) system and further pre-tested. The survey instrument is provided in Section 2 of this documentation, with embedded number and percentage frequency results.

SAMPLE

The list of all RNW users, as of October, 2000, provided the master list. Before selection of the sample, duplicate entries (specifically duplicate telephone numbers) were removed from the master list, providing a total of 119,590 unique RNW users. From this master list, 800 individual RNW users were randomly drawn as the sample for the study. Altogether, 3,420 telephone calls were made to complete 405 interviews. Among the original 800 telephone numbers, 61 were unusable because the number was wrong, disconnected, non-residential, or no one in the household had called Reservations Northwest. The net CASRO response rate was 56.4% and the refusal rate was 1.8%.¹ A complete sample and response rate report is provided in Section 4 of this final report.

DATA COLLECTION

Interviewer training was conducted on October 17, 2000. See Section 3 for interviewer instructions. Interviewing was conducted everyday from Thursday, October 19th to Friday, October 27th until the target sample size of completed interviews was achieved. The telephone interviews' average length was 12 minutes. All interviews were conducted in English.

The survey was conducted with the use of OSRL's CATI system, in which sampling, interviewing, and data entry is accomplished interactively and seamlessly. The programmed survey instrument contains all survey questions, interviewer probes for consistency, and pre-

¹ CASRO = Council of American Survey Research Organizations. CASRO response rates, the most rigorous industry standard, are calculated in following manner. Completed interview / (Eligible sample + ((Eligible sample / (Eligible sample + Ineligible sample)) * Sample with unknown status)). Source: Robert M. Groves, *Survey Errors and Survey Costs*, 1989.

coded answer categories. Skip logic is programmed into the system, preventing inappropriate or incorrect questions from being asked.

In administering the survey, trained interviewers use telephone headsets in sound-reduced carrels at computer workstations connected by an NT network. Randomly distributed telephone numbers appear automatically at each workstation and are mated to pre-programmed survey instruments. Telephone calls are placed with a computer keystroke, preventing dialing errors. As respondents answer questions, interviewers enter the data into the CATI data file. Telephone numbers are automatically stripped from the interview data to ensure anonymity. The CATI system eliminates out-of-range responses and wild codes by validating each response interactively and not allowing inappropriate responses to be entered. Thus, the CATI system eliminates many routine and error-prone coding and data entry tasks and enables OSRL to maintain the highest standards of quality control.

SURVEY RESULTS

In this section, the overall results of the survey are presented, roughly organized around the survey subject areas.

A. RNW USER CHARACTERISTICS

The sex distribution of the users interviewed is 30% men and 70% women. Users' age range is from 17 to 98 years old, with the average age being 46 years old. The majority of users are between the ages of 30 and 70, constituting 83% of RNW users. The users age 60 and older constitute 43% of RNW users.

Categorically, the median annual household income of RNW users is \$40,000 - \$60,000, with the majority (73%) of RNW users' income in the range from \$ 20,000-\$100,000. The majority (76%) of the RNW users have an associate or higher degree of education. The average number of miles RNW users traveled to get to a campsite was 182 miles. The distribution of miles traveled, however is quite skewed. About 68% of RNW users traveled between 50 and 200 miles to get to their destination campsite.

The majority of RNW users live in either Oregon (45%) or Washington (45%) State. RNW users from California and Idaho constitute 2% and 1.2% respectively. Users from states other than the four western states previously mentioned states make up 2.7% of the users, and users from countries other than United States make up 2.7% of the users.

B. RNW USER EXPERIENCE WITH RNW SYSTEM

Roughly a quarter of RNW users (24%) made one or two phone calls to RNW in the last 12 months. About half of the users (52%) made two to five phone calls, and another quarter called RNW six or more times (see Figure 4). Most RNW users (62%) made their last telephone calls to RNW between April and August with the peak in June, July, and August. In the last 12 months, the users called mostly (96%) to make a camping reservation. Only 1% of users called to make picnic reservation and 3% called to make both reservations.

Figure 1 summarizes user experiences calling RNW such as: how easy or difficult to get through to an operator; how courteous was the telephone operator; and how knowledgeable

was the telephone operator. This year, 68% of users indicated that it was “very easy” or “somewhat easy” to get through to an operator to make reservations. This is the same as in 1999. However, this year the users who characterized as “very difficult” getting through to an operator to make reservation dropped to 14% from 1999’s 17%. RNW telephone operators are very highly rated by the users, and this year’s results are consistent with 1999’s and 1997’s results. About 98% of the users rated RNW operators as courteous, and 90% as knowledgeable.

C. RNW USER BEHAVIORS OF MAKING PLANS AND RESERVATIONS TO CAMP AT STATE PARKS

The periods of time which users make plans and make reservations in advance are consistent with each other. Most respondents (70-80%) normally start making camping plans and reservations from 3-4 weeks to as far as 7-11 months in advance. The users who start making plans or making reservations just 1 or 2 weeks in advance are about 10% (see Figure 2). On average, users start planning a camping tripweeks in advance and reserve a campsite....weeks in advance.

D. USE OF RESERVATION RESOURCES

The majority (89%) of RNW users indicated that they usually make camping reservation in advance. This is higher than 1999 of 83%. Only 18% (60 people) used Reserve America World Wide Web site to make reservation. Number of users who called Oregon and Washington state park information lines are 36% and 37% respectively (see Figure 3).

In the past 12 months, the numbers of times respondents called RNW or visited Reserve America Website are consistent. Of those 60 RNW users who visited the Reserve America Website, 42% visited once, and 48% visited 2-5 times (see Figure 4). When asked how they would respond to a future \$3 fee in addition to their campsite fee and the \$6 reservation fee for using the Reserve America Website, 70% said they would use “Reserve America” less (see Figure 14).

E. RNW USER KNOWLEDGE OF STATE PARK SYSTEM OPERATION, INCLUDING PARK FUNDING

Only about 42% of respondents knew that RNW could handle reservations calls after 5:00 pm on Saturday during the summer months. Most (86%) respondents are aware that some campsites are available without making reservation. Users awareness of the same day cancellation policy is about 60% (see Figure 5). These results are the same as in 1999.

To the question, “Where do you think your state park system gets most of its funding -- park fees, state property and income taxes, federal money, or something else?” 36% responded fees, 34% responded state taxes, 10% responded federal money, and 4% responded something else -- the same for both Oregon and Washington park visitors and in the same pattern as 1999 (see Figure 6).

Regarding, how much of Oregon State Parks’ funding comes from the Oregon Lottery, about 40% of RNW users didn’t know, 12-15% responded none, 33-35% responded <1/3, 7-

13% responded 1/3-2/3, and 2-4% responded >2/3 in standard and reversed answer categories. This shows that about 40-50% of the users knew that part of the funding came from the Oregon Lottery (see Figure 7).

F. RNW USER PREFERENCES

Advance reservation time frame

When asked, 51% of respondents preferred that the advance reservation time frame be shortened from the current 11 months to 9 months in order to reduce summertime busy signals (see Figure 8). The users who preferred 11 months is 31%, and those who had no preference is 18%.

Prefer to reserve by telephone or World Wide Web (WWW)

Most (60%) prefer to reserve by telephone, while 28% prefer to be able to make all arrangements by WWW (see Figure 8).

Think all sites in state parks should be by reservation

About 20% of the users think that all sites in state parks should be by reservation (see Figure 8).

G. USER SATISFACTION WITH RNW

Regarding a confirmation letter, 90% of respondents received the letter. Over 90% of those who received the letter read and brought the letter to a park (see Figure 9).

Figure 10 summarizes reservations canceled and changed in the last 12 months. Only 7% experienced any reservation problems. RNW allows users to make various changes to their reservations. Only 32% ever cancel the reservation. Regarding date changes, 24% of users made date changes before arriving at a park and 19% made changes after arriving at a park. Regarding site changes, 15% indicated they made site changes before arriving at a park and 22% changed sites after arriving at a park.

User satisfaction when making changes

Overall RNW user satisfaction with the handling of changes remained very high like as 1999. Overall, 70-90% of users were satisfied. Figure 11 shows the breakdown of user satisfaction with the way the changes were handled. Among the users who made date changes before and after arriving at the park, and made site changes after arriving at the park, satisfaction rates are very high, at 80-90%. Among the users who made site changes before arriving at the park, satisfaction rate is also high at 70%, but not as high as other changes. The greatest dissatisfaction (29%) occurred in the area of site changes before arrival. (By contrast, in 1999 the greatest dissatisfaction occurred in handling site changes after arrival).

Overall user satisfaction with the RNW telephone system

Almost 90% of RNW users are either “very satisfied” (50%) or “somewhat satisfied” (39%) with the RNW telephone system overall (see Figure 11). The rate of satisfaction is the same as in 1999, but this year the rate of “very satisfied” is lower than in 1999 (59%). Overall

user satisfaction with the RNW telephone system has grown from 63% in 1996 to almost 90% in 1999 and 2000.

User satisfaction with Oregon and Washington State Parks

As in 1999, the overwhelming majority (94-99%) of users are satisfied with the overall quality of campgrounds, campground facilities, and the services provided by the state park service people in both Oregon and Washington State parks (see Figure 12). Users gave higher “very satisfied” rates to Oregon (73-82%) than to Washington State park (51-67%). But dissatisfaction with Washington State parks, facilities and the overall quality of campgrounds dropped from 11% and 8% in 1999 to 5% and 2% this year, a definite sign of improvement.

H. RNW USER CAMPING BEHAVIORS

Camp group size

The most common number of people in one campsite is four (33%). About half (53%) of respondents had been in a group that used more than one campsite. Groups of 8-12 persons are the most common (41%) users of more than one campsite.

Camping method

Tent camping, at 36% (the same as last year) is most typical. The proportion of tent camping decreased considerably since 1997 (50%). Other camping methods include: trailer (28%), motorhome (10%), pick-up truck camper (8%), recreational vehicle with tent (4%), yurt (2%), the combination of those (10%), and cabin (1%). The proportion of trailer camping increased considerably from 20% in 1997, to 24% in 1999, and 28% in 2000. Yurt camping was 2% in 1997, 7% in 1999, and decreased to 2% again this year.

Frequency of camping trip on and off-season

Almost 90% of respondents camped during the summer season, and 44% have camped during the “off-season.” On the average, those camping during the summer season camped 4 times, and those who camped during the off-season camped 2 times. Among summer campers, most camped 1-3 times. Most off-season camping was just one or two times (see Figure 13).

Camping frequency retrospective and prospective

In response to the question, “Comparing 1999 to 2000, did you use campgrounds more, less, or about the same this year?” 21% reported they camped more, 18% camped less, and 61% camped about the same amount this year.

In projecting their camping for next year (2001), 39% of users projected they will camp more, 5% will camp less, and 56% will camp the same next year. Twice as many respondents plan to camp more in 2001 as those who reported actually camping more in 2000. See Figure 14.

I. POLICIES ON HOW TO REDUCE OVERBOOKING

The RNW system is considering a number of policies to try to reduce “over-booking.” Figure 15 summarizes RNW users opinions on different policies. Users approved of:

- 82% collecting full advance payment from those who reserve five or more campsites
- 70% charging a fee to people who cancel a reservation, or part of a reservation
- 60% charging people who cancel all or part of a reservation the cost of a one-night stay at the campground
- 60% collecting full advance payment for the first three nights of camping
- 56% collecting full advance payment from those who reserve a campsite less than four weeks in advance
- 27% charging both a fee and the cost of a one-night stay at the campground

It is clear that the policy on charging both a fee and the cost of a one-night stay at the campground is not well accepted. All other policies are approved of about 60-80%.

Similarly (Figure 16) the most popular (40%) overbooking policy is collecting full advance payment from those who reserve five or more campsites. Other policies are most strongly support only 10% or less. The most unpopular policy is charging both a fee and the cost of a one-night stay (only 3% of respondents strongly support).

If RNW implements these policies, about 80% of the respondents reported they would use RNW and would camp in state parks the same amount (see Figure 14).

SURVEY CONCLUSIONS

RNW is in its fifth year of operation. The results show that RNW is well liked by the majority of RNW usres. Overall user satisfaction with the RNW telephone system has grown from 63% in 1996 to almost 90% in 1999 and 2000. RNW telephone operators are very highly rated by the users, and this year's results are consistent with 1999's and 1997's results. About 98% of the users rated RNW operators as courteous, and 90% as knowledgeable. The overwhelming majority (94-99%) of users are satisfied with the overall quality of campgrounds, campground facilities, and the services provided by the state park service people in both Oregon and Washington state parks. Users gave higher "very satisfied" rates to Oregon than to Washington State park. But dissatisfaction with Washington State parks, facilities and the overall quality of campgrounds dropped from 11% and 8% in 1999 to 5% and 2% this year, a definite sign of improvement. However, if we aim for even better service, we could try to improve in these two areas.

Users preferred that the advance reservation time frame be shortened from the current 11 months to 9 months in order to reduce summertime busy signals. Regarding making changes of a reservation, the greatest dissatisfaction occurred in the area of site changes before arrival. This is contrast with 1999's result, which the greatest dissatisfaction occurred in handling site changes after arrival.

Tent camping is most typical (36%) the same as last year. It decreased considerably since 1997 (50%). The proportion of trailer camping increased considerably from 20% in 1997, to 24% in 1999, and 28% in 2000. Yurt camping was 2% in 1997, 7% in 1999, and decreased to 2% again this year.

It is a good indication that the number of users who project to camp more in 2001 increases to two times than what they reported “camp more” comparing 2000 to 1999 (39% and 21%).

The most popular (40%) overbooking policy is collecting full advance payment from those who reserve five or more campsites. The policy on charging both a fee and the cost of a one-night stay at the campground is not well accepted. All other policies are approved of about 60-80%. If RNW implements these overbooking policies, about 80% of the respondents reported they would use RNW and would camp in state parks the same amount.