

**USER FEES: ISSUES AND POLICY ON
WASHINGTON STATE PUBLIC LANDS**

by

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ABSTRACT

Outdoor recreational activities on public lands have increased dramatically in the past few decades. Americans are logging millions of recreational visitor days (RVD's) participating in activities such as hiking, biking, wildlife viewing, photography and many others. This increased participation though is having detrimental effects on these lands and the agencies that provide and manage them. Budgets to provide for and manage these lands have been decreasing. This has put park managers and others who manage these lands in the position of having to become less reliant on general fund monies. They have had to look elsewhere for funding to operate and maintain the state's public lands. One common method to provide supplemental income has been through the implementation of user fees, which include but are not exclusive to camping fees, rental fees, entrance fees, license fees and special service fees. Table 1 shows a classification of recreation related user fees.

The objectives of this research were to look at the implementation of user fees as a method for generating supplemental income at public agencies and the issues and policies associated with their use both currently and historically. Also an examination of how user fee policy has been changed by the increased pressures of outdoor recreationists how this has created a need for increased appropriations and how public agencies and lawmakers in Washington have reacted to these changes.

In conducting this research a thorough review of literature pertaining to user fees was undertaken, particularly issues and policy associated with public lands. The mandates and user fee policies of the four Washington state agencies (Departments of Fisheries, Wildlife, Natural Resources and the State Parks and Recreation Commission) charged with managing State lands

for recreation were examined along with documents discussing user fees, and the effects on the lands and agencies associated with recreational use of State lands. Personal conversations and interviews with personnel involved with recreation and user fee policies at the four managing agencies were also done to attain a better perspective of each agency's mission and experience with user fees.

User numbers are growing and so is the use of user fees by managers of public recreational lands and facilities to offset costs created by this increased use. Managers are trying to put in place more equitable user fee policies to help with these costs. Studies show recreationists do pay and are willing to pay more for their recreational activities. Public land management agencies in the state of Washington have a history of charging user fees to some recreationists but not all. Only a small percentage of those using Washington public lands are paying and they are providing opportunities free of charge to a majority of users. These inequities exist within each of the agencies and will continue to exist until each agency or the four agencies, combined with the help of the state legislature, develop a consistent user fee policy for all users of public land.

INTRODUCTION

In the state of Washington the situation is much the same. User visits are increasing and funding problems are growing for agencies providing these recreational opportunities. Four agencies manage the roughly five million acres of Washington lands. They are the Washington Department of Natural Resources, the State Parks and Recreation Commission, Department of Fisheries and Department of Wildlife. (The Departments of Fisheries and Wildlife recently merged; however, this paper will discuss these agencies prior to merger.) Each agency provides different levels of recreational activities, much of this due to its mission statement and its individuality as an agency. Each agency also has very different funding scenarios and individual policies regarding use fees.

**TABLE 1. CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM FOR RECREATION-RELATED
USER FEES AND CHARGES**

Principal Category	Brief Definition	Examples
Entrance Fees	Charge for privilege of entering and using facilities of large park, arboretum, game or wildlife preserve, campgrounds or other recreation area.	A major state park, Capitol Forest, and L.T. Murray Wildlife-Recreation Area.
User Fees	A charge made for the use of a facility where the users usually enjoys the use privilege simultaneously or in conjunction with others. (It is not an exclusive right as in the case of the rental fee.)	Swimming area, boat launching facility, fishing pond, picnic areas, and parking areas.
License Fees	A fee for a privilege or liberty normally in written form and issued by an agency of government. It ordinarily involves permission to perform an action.	Fishing license, hunting license, boat license, camping permit.
Rental Fees	A payment made for the exclusive use of various kinds of tangible personal property.	Boats, canoes, fishing gear, horses, golf carts, etc.
Sales Revenue	Money received from the operation of stores, concessions, restaurants, etc. Unconditional ownership of the item must pass from the seller to the buyer with each sale.	Food and beverage service, package foods and beverages, merchandise, supplies and souvenirs.
Admission Fees	Charge made for entrance to a building structure, or natural chamber which offers and exhibit, show, performance, etc.	Arena, museum, observatory, historical building.
Special Service Fees	Charges made for supplying goods and services in support of organized recreational or cultural activities.	Summer camp fees, class instructions, tournament fees, sport league fees, etc.

(Source: 1970 Legislative Budget Committee Report)

USER FEES

General Background

Most outdoor recreationists today are willing to pay a user fee to camp, enter a favorite park or hike a trail. User fees are quite common at public recreation facilities and are becoming even more so as demand increases, but this was not always the case. The increased use and dependence on user fees has often been met with staunch opposition by those counter to historical use of public lands.

Historically, there has been a widespread view by the public that public recreation should be provided as a "free" (i.e., tax supported) government service (Kerr, 1991). This is especially true of non-consumptive users such as hikers, picnickers, swimmers, wildlife watchers and photographers who believe little or no costs are associated with their use. Unlike the non-consumptive users, hunters and anglers have been paying their way through the purchase of hunting and fishing licenses. And while much is the same for the hunting and fishing public, things have and continue to change for the non-consumptive recreationists.

Several factors can be attributed to the changes in the provision of recreational opportunities to the public which stem from the changing demographics and attitudes by the public. During the early years public parks and lands budgets were relatively small, but land acquisitions increased as did the number of parks along with their operating budgets. Over time, the American public became increasingly unwilling to provide the tax dollars to fund the providing agencies. The public and many recreationists felt the burden of funding these areas should be put on those participating. Another factor was the dramatic increase in those participating in activities on public lands following the end of World War II. The American public saw an increase in affluence after WWII. Many high paying factory jobs were available with shorter work weeks, which in turn led to more leisure time and expendable income. Also, more Americans owned cars and the road system grew very rapidly and quite extensively. All of these factors allowed the public an increased opportunity to participate in outdoor activities at public parks and other outdoor recreational facilities.

While the demand increased for the provision of more governmental services, parks and recreation budgets received a smaller percentage of appropriations (Strong, Duke, 1972). As

appropriations decreased park managers and other recreational providers turned to other sources of funding, namely, user fees to supplement their budgets to be able to continue to provide their services. User fees have provided funding where, otherwise, parks and programs may have been curtailed or cut completely.

Historical Background

The increased dependence on user fees as a revenue producer is a rather recent phenomenon; however, user fees are by no means new to public recreational facilities. In 1908 in Mt. Rainier National Park an automobile fee was instituted to help regulate the use of cars on the newly completed road leading to Nisqually Glacier. The fee for a one-year permit was \$5; 117 permits were sold the first year. This was the first time a fee was charged in a National Park. By 1915 automobiles were permitted to enter all national parks, but only eight parks charged fees for them to enter (Hines, 1974).

Due to increased use by tourists and the need to develop roads, trails and other accommodations; it became necessary to develop a policy on the financing of such improvements. In 1915 the then Superintendent of National Parks believed fees should be classified as taxes in proportion to the benefit received rather than ability to pay. He also proposed the question as to whether the parks should be administered to maximize revenues or keep costs at a minimum for the tourist. In 1918 this question was resolved when the Secretary of the Interior set forth a policy which diverted any revenues collected at the national parks into the U.S. Treasury. This dampened any hopes that the park managers may have had of raising revenue to support projects in their parks since their appropriations would now be determined by Congress (Wolcott, 1984).

In the mid 1920's the national parks suffered another setback at the hands of Louis B. Crampton, the Chairman of the House Subcommittee that handled the Department of Interior appropriations. Crampton, a staunch believer in parks, thought parks should get away from producing revenue, but congress believed differently. However, Crampton was successful in persuading Congress to lower the fees charged at national parks.

To counter the loss of revenue from lower fees, the Executive Branch considered administering camping fees in the parks. Congress would have no part of this and in 1938 a proviso was included with that year's parks appropriation stating that any parks or national monument charging camping fees would receive no federal appropriations. In 1939 Congress extended this to include any appropriation from then on whenever passed (Hines, 1974).

According to most of the literature on the history of user fees, Connecticut was the first state to charge user fees. In 1933 its state parks charged a preferential parking fee during their busiest times during the summer months. [However, the Washington State Parks & Recreation Commission states that it began assessing fees in 1924. The State Parks Board chose to charge 25 cents per night for camping at two parks(Smith, 1991)]. In 1942 a state level questionnaire of user fees at state parks sent out to all U.S. managing agencies received 38 replies, 14 stating they were collecting some form of entrance or road fee (Hines, 1974).

Philosophy & Issues

The philosophy behind user fees is itself simple. Fees are to be charged to those participating and therefore requiring services at publicly owned outdoor recreational facilities and areas. This is seen as a more equitable way to fund these lands and facilities than depending entirely on general tax revenues. These fees, when collected, can be put toward the addition of new programs, trail maintenance, litter pick-up, or any other area where additional revenue may be needed.

Equity is not the only issue in the implementation of user fees at public recreational areas. As visitation has increased and tax dollars decrease, survival becomes an issue for many agencies. Visitation at state parks across the nation has grown dramatically from 183 million in 1955 to 725 million in 1993 (O'toole, 1995). Washington has seen similar growth at its state parks from 12.9 million in 1965 to 47.2 in 1994, a 265% increase (Smith, 1991). This growth, combined with a decrease in general fund appropriations, has led to an increased dependence on user fees to provide what many believe is minimal or less than minimal services and maintenance requirements of public lands.

The combined effect of the aforementioned issues has led to the increased utilization of fees and an escalation in amounts being charged for the use of public recreation facilities. These changes have been fairly rapid in the last decade and those opposed to user fees are voicing dissatisfaction with this policy. This has created a lively debate between those in favor of charging user fees as a revenue producer and those opposed. Each group has clearly stated its arguments regarding this issue, all of which should be taken into account when considering implementation of user fees. Below is a sampling of arguments for and against user fees. Also included with arguments against are some of the rebuttals to these arguments.

Con - The arguments against user fees are numerous, and not without merit; however, proponents are quick to point out the weaknesses of these arguments. The first argument is one of principle: Public lands for the most part have been open and free to those wishing to hike, fish or camp. It is the obligation of the government to provide recreational lands to its citizens at no cost. Traditionally this has been true and has been validated by government policy and law. Gifford Pinchot said in 1907, "National forests are made for and owned by the people . . . what the people as a whole want will be done" (Gould, 1984).

Opponents of user fees believe charging fees at public facilities amounts to "double taxation" and that their tax dollars have already gone towards the purchase and upkeep of these areas. Proponents counter that in reality , most areas were purchased much earlier and many lands were purchased by federal dollars from excise taxes on a particular group. Also, the case can be made that if these areas are seeing revenue shortages then their tax dollars are being used elsewhere and these areas are underfunded.

Opponents also argue that fees exclude those who need the facilities the most: children, the elderly and the poor. These groups are said to be excluded because they cannot afford the fees to use these areas. The reality of this may be that travel costs represent a much larger percentage of the cost to participate and may be the excluding issue for these groups (Walsh, et al, 1992). The other side of this issue is that user fees often provide funds for the provision of free areas for low income groups.

Some feel the charging of fees will lead to an overemphasis on generating revenue and less on providing recreational opportunities. Their fear is fee levels will continue to rise while

services will decrease as public agencies try to maximize profits. The possibility of this seems unlikely since the consumer, the public, is quick to voice concern to public officials who can influence the policy of public agencies.

Opponents voice concern that tax appropriations for public recreation will decline as fee revenues increase. Indeed, this is a situation that has happened in the past and may be a realistic concern to managing agencies. However, it is a situation that does not happen as often as perceived. In actuality becoming more self-sufficient may convey an image of fiscal responsibility to legislative members (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1979).

Negative public reaction to user fees and decreased visitation numbers is cited as an argument against user fees. Overall, there is little evidence to suggest this is a lasting trend if it ever occurs at all. Parks enlisting user fees sometimes see a drop in visitors for short periods, but visitation returns to normal within a season or two following the start of a user fee program (U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1979). One only needs to look at visitation trends to see that attracting visitors is not a concern to most agencies.

The costs of administering a new program of user fees can be cost prohibitive. This is a valid concern among public resource agencies that are considering a user fee program. The costs of personnel to collect fees and process paperwork, enforcement, equipment and start-up costs are all important points to consider. Any agency considering a user fee program must know its clientele, numbers, and the ability and willingness of its users to pay.

Pro- The following is a sampling of some of the main arguments by proponents of user fees. The first and foremost being the generation of revenue to improve or add new programs and facilities or trails which makes a facility more attractive to users and increases their willingness to pay. Revenues from fees can also supplement agency budgets when general fund monies become short and agencies are asked to carry more of the financial burden.

Users show increased interest and tend to take better care of facilities when they are asked to contribute. Visitors will self-regulate and enforce how others use public areas also. Fees also tend to prevent problems such as litter, vandalism, and harassment of other visitors (Johnson, 1991). Loretta Hanseon of Olympic National Park stated that vandalism decreased significantly in the park when admission fees became required at areas that fees were not previously charged.

Those users intent on creating problems are more often than not discouraged by user fees and tend to go elsewhere.

User fees promote equity among users. The theory being that those participating and therefore creating the need for services, enforcement, facilities and the associated costs, should carry more of the burden of paying for said services. The non-using segment of the public would then not be asked to carry the burden of financing services they themselves do not use (Aukerman, 1987.).

Charging fees enables the state to recover costs of non-residents using state lands who would otherwise receive the same benefits as those taxpayers financing these facilities.

The charging of fees reduces unfair competition between public and private interests providing similar recreational opportunities. By charging fees at public facilities, the private entrepreneur is able to compete as opposed to a free public facility. Also, services often improve due to competition to provide a better opportunity at the same or comparable price (Smith, 1991).

Fees enable better management of public recreation facilities by the managing agency. Managers can regulate numbers to control problems of crowding and environmental degradation due to overuse. Visitors can also be directed toward other facilities and to use facilities during off days when visitation is lower. Casual drive-thrus are also less frequent at fee areas which further reduces crowding and congestion (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1979).

The number of public agencies and public recreation facilities charging user fees has grown and continues to do so. It seems most of this growth can be attributed to need brought on by loss of revenue from general funds rather than as supplemental income for growth and creation of new programs and facilities. A danger here lies in becoming too dependent on fees. Fees should not be used to become self-supporting, but only as supplemental income to already existing sources such as taxes, federal grants and other traditional sources (Strong, Duke, 1972).

Willingness to Pay - When discussions of implementing user fees or increasing user fees at public recreation areas occur, a recurring topic is the public's willingness to pay. As previously mentioned, a rationale against user fees is that the public opposes them; however, increased recreational visitation along with increased use of user fees, indicates that this is not the case. Recreationists are paying user fees more often and fees are increasing with great

regularity. Respondents to recreational studies say they are willing to pay as long as these revenues are going to a useful purpose such as improving quality and quantity of recreational opportunities (Driver, 1984).

Legislation supporting user fees seldom is addressed because legislators see the public as being opposed to such fees and that fees will be viewed as another form of taxation. Passage of recent legislation such as Measure 5 in Oregon and Initiative 601 in Washington are clear indicators that the taxpayers want to limit government spending. Unlike taxation, however, user fees give the public a choice of whether they want to participate or not. If so, they pay the fee. The success of user fees comes from users being offered a choice. It is a voluntary contribution to participate in an activity they enjoy, much unlike taxes in which participation is mandatory. In those cases taxes may go to fund a program where those paying may receive no benefit.

Willingness to pay among recreational participants and even non users is high and the amounts they are willing to pay are also high. In fact, most users surveyed said they are willing to pay beyond inherent costs of recreation activities (e.g. travel, equipment) to participate in favorite outdoor activities. This "willingness to pay more" is termed consumer surplus (Aukerman, 1987). A 1991 study shows the average per person consumer surplus the public is willing to pay for several outdoor recreation activities. Consumer surplus per day for biking was \$13.30; for primitive camping, \$8.24; photography, \$10.54; day hiking, \$12.31; and backpacking, \$25.88. This would seem to indicate that user fees of a reasonable level for the use of public recreational facilities are not out of line and would be readily received by those participating (Bergstrom, Cordell, 1991).

And while willingness to pay is high, participants have certain expectations of which recreational managers need to be aware. Willingness to pay is based on certain factors that these participants cite as making the implementation of fees and fee increases more acceptable to them. Responses to questions from a survey on willingness to pay indicate what these factors are:

- Support is greater for proposed fees or increases when revenues were to be reinvested into the collecting agency and allocated for recreational resources;
- Users are more supportive of fees that help offset costs and provide increased opportunities than fees to ration use to prevent congestion;

- Because of a perceived right of access to public lands, users show more opposition to an entrance fee to gain access than a fee to cover costs;
- When fees are increased, it is important to inform the public of the need for the increase, of the services being provided and those services that would be lost without an increase;
- Users with higher incomes show greater support for fees and fee increases;
- Users who have paid fees in the past for a particular type of activity are more supportive of fees for that activity than those who have not paid (Driver, 1984).

These factors and others create a greater acceptance of user fees for public lands. They must be figured into any plan concerning user fees if it is to be successful.

WASHINGTON STATE

The state of Washington is unsurpassed in natural beauty, diversity of habitat, plants, fish and wildlife and the opportunities to enjoy them. The popularity of outdoor recreation is seen in the numbers visiting its 6 national forests, 3 national parks, 107 state parks, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas and other publicly owned facilities and lands. Activities enjoyed at these areas are as diverse as the areas themselves: skiing, fishing, hiking, photography, wildlife viewing and many others. Much of the burden of providing the land and facilities for these recreational opportunities falls to the State's four land managing agencies: the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Fisheries, State Parks and Recreation Commission and the Department of Wildlife.

Between these four agencies, approximately six million acres of land are managed for several activities which include recreation. Washington's parks, beaches, wildlife and trust lands are visited by millions of residents and non-residents each year. The Washington State Parks, which receives a large share of this visitation has seen a 36% increase in visitor days since 1981 (O'toole, 1995). The three other agencies providing a more primitive recreation experience have also seen dramatic growth in user numbers.

Washington agencies managing recreational areas are suffering the same problems as like agencies across the country. Pressured by state budget cuts and increased demand for

recreational resources, these agencies have had to find new ways of doing business. Some agencies have found new sources of funds such as ORV fuel taxes, license plate fees and federal grants, but agencies are still under-funded and making hard decisions on how to manage our public lands.

Recreational Funding Studies

Several studies have been done in Washington and documents written addressing the issues of recreation on public lands and the agencies involved. These studies have focused on issues such as budget problems, recreational users, and innovative ways for these agencies to fund their growing budgetary needs. Looking at two similar documents from different time periods enables the reader to gain a better understanding of the history and extent of these problems. Viewing policy from these two eras, and any changes that took place as a result of these documents provides further understanding of current policy and future directions for recreation resources and the managing agencies.

1970 Legislative Budget Committee Report

In 1970 a report, "User Fees and Charges for State Outdoor Recreation Services", was produced by the Legislative Budget Committee. The scope of the study was to examine the feasibility of new or increased user fees and charges for the public outdoor recreation services provided by the four above-mentioned agencies. The committee acknowledged the long standing tradition of user fees in Washington for hunting and fishing dating back to 1906 and 1913, respectively, and fees for overnight camping dating to 1924.

What the committee hoped to find were alternatives to current funding of these four agencies. It realized increased use of State facilities was quite real and that budgets needed to increase to avoid reduction of services. One of the reasons for the timeliness of this study was an economic downturn and a resulting decrease in the rate of revenue growth. These coupled together presented the legislature with a major budget balancing problem in 1971 (Legislative Budget Committee 1970).

The committee examined the agencies involved and their current fee structures. It also took into account the rationale for user fees and level of affluence of recreationists. And in addition to producing revenue, the committee pointed out the other benefits of user fees such as crowd control, better management capabilities and an all-around better balance of public lands. The committee also produced a long list of findings from its efforts and made several recommendations to the legislature.

The committee's findings focused on where agencies currently charged fees and where it felt new fees or fee increases could be applied. Most of these would be applied to the non-consumptive user, but not all. It also found that, considering the low percentage of funding provided by current user fees, self-sufficiency was unlikely without drastic increases of existing and proposed fees and charges (Legislative Budget Committee, 1970).

Recommendations by the committee were to enact legislation enabling the four agencies to charge new fees to several services and activities. These recommendations essentially looked at all the services and activities by each agency and suggested the legislature give the managing agencies more authority to apply user fees. Throughout the report it was suggested that "reasonable fees" be charged consistent with agencies providing similar services. These included overnight camping fees at the State parks, personal foodfish and shellfish fees by the Department of Fisheries and user fees for non-consumptive use of Department of Natural Resources and Department of Game Lands (Legislative Budget Committee, 1970).

Legacy at Risk

In 1992 a report similar to the Legislative Budget Committee report was published. The report "Legacy at Risk" was produced by the State Wildlife and Recreation Lands Management Task Force. This group was formed by the legislature after the unanimous passage of SHD 2594. This act established State policy to provide adequate and continued funding for the operation and maintenance of State-owned fish and wildlife habitat, natural areas, parks and other recreation lands. What the bill did not do was provide any immediate funding (State Wildlife and Recreation Lands Management Task Force, 1992).

This task force was created and directed to look for long-term revenue sources to fund the

agencies managing recreational resources. It, too, looked at current funding and sources, studied operations and maintenance needs and considered several potential revenue sources to fulfill these needs. It stated that funding must be able to cover ongoing shortfalls which are estimated at \$42 million per biennium and a one-time catch-up amount of \$61 million (see Table 2) resulting from deferred maintenance. These funds would not necessarily replace current funding, but augment current general fund dollars (State Wildlife and Recreation Lands Management Task Force, 1992).

TABLE 2. ONGOING BIENNIAL SHORTFALL AND ONE-TIME, OPERATING CATCH-UP³
(by agency, in millions)

	1991-93 Operating Budget	Ongoing Biennial Shortfall	One-Time Operating Catch-up⁴
State Parks and Recreation Commission			
Parks Management Program	\$50.0	\$21.3	\$31.0
Department of Natural Resources			
Natural Area Preserve Program	\$0.5	\$1.4	\$0.0
Conservation Areas Program	\$0.5	\$3.5	\$0.0
Recreation Program	<u>\$3.8</u>	<u>\$2.3</u>	<u>\$2.2</u>
Subtotal	\$4.8	\$7.2	\$2.2
Department of Wildlife			
Wildlife Areas Program	\$5.3	\$9.9	\$15.4
Wildlife Access Areas Program	<u>\$1.3</u>	<u>\$3.0</u>	<u>\$12.5</u>
Subtotal	\$6.6	\$12.9	\$27.9
Department of Fisheries			
Habitat and Recreation Program	\$0.7	\$0.6	\$0.0
Total	\$62.1	\$42.0	\$61.1

(Source: Legacy at Risk)

The task force's findings were not that dissimilar from those of the 1970 Legislative Budget Committee report. It found that the State's recreational lands are valuable resources and add to the quality of life in Washington. These lands provide vast recreational opportunities for residents and non-residents alike and play a vital role in the State's economy. In 1993 alone, campers staying at public campgrounds contributed \$214.9 million in expenditures to the State (Dean Runyan & Associates, 1994).

The task force also found that current appropriations were not meeting the needs of the managing agencies. Years of under-funding had also created a backlog of needed facilities, outdated equipment and deferred maintenance which left these agencies with substandard buildings, roads and lands. Inaction on the part of the legislature and continued budget shortages had left State lands in a miserable state of disrepair and the costs to get them back to previous standards appears almost insurmountable.

In completing its mission, the task force recommended several sources of revenues to fund these agencies. Listed below are the seven revenue options the task force recommended for consideration by the legislature:

- a motor vehicle excise tax increase,
- off-road vehicle use permit fee increase,
- automobile rental fee,
- retail sales tax on motor vehicle fuel,
- real estate excise tax increase,
- additional retail sales tax on recreational equipment,
- State lands recreational use permit fee.

Like the 1970 report, Legacy at Risk stated that certain segments of the user population received benefits without cost and recommended that this audience be targeted (State Wildlife and Recreation Lands Management Task Force, 1992). User fees seemed the most direct and equitable method to achieve this end and like the 1970 report, it illustrated that little has been done by the legislature concerning these issues since the recommendations were presented to them.

These two reports provide a snapshot of the problems facing the Washington state agencies managing our public lands in 1970 and again in 1992. The issues have not changed a great deal over time, although time and inaction in addressing these problems has exacerbated them. It seems that following the recommendations of the 1970 study and enabling the four agencies to expand user fees may have helped in avoiding the huge budget problems now facing these agencies. Currently, user fee policies are much the same as they were twenty years ago.

VISITATION TRENDS

Trends in recreational uses seem to indicate that there is no relief in site from the ever growing numbers of recreationists on public lands. Several agencies are reporting steady increases in recreational visitor days (RVD's) in Washington. Between 1974 and 1994, RVD's at the State's six national forests grew from 11,887,300 to 24,746,000, which is more than doubled. Olympic National Park recorded 4,350,000 RVD's in 1994, a 20% increase over the previous year's 3,621,318. Washington lands also saw dramatic increases. Since 1965, attendance at Washington state parks has increased 265% from 12.9 million to 47.2 million in 1994. Table 3 shows attendance figures from 1982 to 1994 for State parks. The Departments of Fisheries,

TABLE 3. WASHINGTON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION TOTAL ATTENDANCE

YEAR	TOTAL	YEAR	TOTAL
1982	39,696,139	1989	40,954,785
1983	42,201,422	1990	39,947,584
1984	41,900,754	1991	43,743,843
1985	46,113,652	1992	46,228,028
1986	47,381,639	1993	45,113,971
1987	42,384,148	1994	47,186,082
1988	40,667,191		

(Source: Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission)

Natural Resources and Wildlife do not keep attendance figures, but increases in recreational visitation has been noted.

All four agencies, (Natural Resources, Fisheries, Wildlife and Parks and Recreation) have been affected by this increased use. Agency budgets have not been able to provide the necessary services for these new users and still fulfill their agency mandates. This inability has forced agencies to make difficult decisions concerning their policies and their paths for the future. Each agency continues to try to do more with less until new revenue sources are found or the legislature provides either funding or legislation enabling them to become more self sufficient through the innovative use of user fees.

WASHINGTON STATE PUBLIC LANDS AGENCIES

Department of Natural Resources

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages approximately five million acres of public trust lands, 2.1 million acres of forest, 2.1 million acres of tidelands and 800,000 acres of agriculture and range lands. It manages these lands to provide money for schools, universities, building construction and other purposes (State Wildlife and Recreation Lands Management Task Force, 1992).

DNR's large land holdings plays host to a large variety of recreational activities. In the mid 1960's DNR took the opportunity to apply for grant monies to be used to acquire and develop primitive recreation sites and right-of-ways that would provide more public access to State trust lands. Prior to this, recreation was an obscure part of DNR's fire protection program. "Fire Camps", as they were known, were developed from spots created over time from public use. DNR sometimes placed picnic tables, fire rings and pit toilets at these sites. Since then, they have developed approximately 140 free recreation sites statewide including 400 miles of trails, picnic sites and campgrounds, all free to the public (Task Force, 1992).

David Trayler, Parks Planner for the DNR, stated that recreational use of the State trust lands has grown quite rapidly and the agency is investing more resources into recreational planning for the future. At large landholdings such as Capitol State Forest and Tiger Mountain, the agency sees large numbers of visitors, especially during the summer months and weekends.

Visitors hunt, hike, camp, ride horses and bikes and do all of these things free of cost. Currently, DNR only charges fees for commercial uses of its lands. DNR is now considering recreational user fees to cover the escalating costs of providing for this group.

While recreational use is not yet overwhelming, DNR realizes the need to plan for future use. Ken Hoover, Assistant Division Manager of the Forest Resource Division, deals with user fee issues for the agency. He stated that DNR is looking at options for user fees being used by both public and private groups that deal with recreation on its lands. DNR has studied successful fee programs that Champion and Weyerhaeuser timber companies have implemented on their lands and feel a similar program might work for DNR. The agency is also concerned about liability once a fee program begins. DNR is being cautious, but foresees a system of recreational fees in the future. With five million acres of land, the potential for user fee supported recreation seems great.

Department of Fisheries

The Department of Fisheries' role in providing recreational opportunities is different from the large landholding agencies, although hundreds of thousands of people participate in activities regulated by the agency. The State Wildlife and Recreation Lands Management Task Force through the "Legacy at Risk" report stated that Fisheries' role is to preserve, protect, perpetuate and manage the food and shellfish in State and offshore waters, and enhance and improve recreational and commercial fishing.

The fisheries department owns about 8,000 acres of land statewide and several access sites. It also has numerous fish hatcheries and other facilities and structures, but these are not for recreational purposes. The Department has done a good job in avoiding the role of recreation provider by transferring operations and maintenance responsibilities, recreation lands and facilities to local governments. It can then concentrate its efforts on providing a healthy foodfish and shellfish fishery for the commercial and recreational anglers.

Much of Fisheries' funding comes from fees from commercial and recreational license fees. However, low fish returns and shortened seasons or closures have decreased income from these sources. It also receives user fee money in the form of federal grants called D-J or Dingell

Johnson grants. This money comes from excise taxes on fishing related goods and must be earmarked for particular programs. It is likely that Fisheries will become more dependent on general fund money in the future with decreasing license fees and no real opportunity to charge new fees other than license fee increases. Other options would be gas taxes, real estate taxes and other such programs that are often unpopular among those asked to give.

State Parks and Recreation Commission

State Park lands are managed to provide recreational opportunities for visitors while protecting the integrity of the area's resources. The State Parks and Recreation Commission manages close to a quarter million acres of land containing 107 parks, 8,000 campsites, 120 boat launches, 700 miles of trail and numerous other interpretive areas and learning centers (Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, 1994).

The State parks have a well developed system of user fees which began with the 25¢ camping fee in 1924. Currently, fees are charged in accordance with RCW 43.51.060(6) which states "The Commission may . . . charge such fees for services, utilities and use of facilities as the Commission shall deem proper" (Washington State Parks & Recreation Commission, 1993). State Parks and Recreation charges fees for reservations, camping, boat launch, moorage and several other activities. These fees constitute about 20-25% of the agency's budget. These revenues which amounted to \$5.3 million in 1994 are not dedicated funds and are required to be deposited in the general fund to be reappropriated, a system which does not provide much incentive for the State Parks and Recreation Commission to promote user fees.

The Parks and Recreation Commission has been lobbying for years to be allowed to keep user fees in an unappropriated park fund. Its position is this will provide incentive for managers to do a better job which in turn will increase public willingness to pay. The commission also asked for changes in fee policy to make fees more comprehensive and enable the commission to meet revenue targets set by the legislature.

The legislature has agreed to some of these requests, and for the first time, fees will be plowed back into the agency. The legislature, however, increased the revenue target to be met by fees to approximately 40% of the agencies entire budget. Despite this increase, fees are seen as a

victory by agency personnel and will give the State Parks and Recreation Commission the opportunity to meet some of its critical funding needs that have not been met.

One victory the State Parks and Recreation Commission has not been able to win is the ability to charge fees to day users. Day use fees have been proposed to the legislature numerous times through the years but the legislature has continued to refuse this request. When the legislature increased the agency's revenue target in the 1993-95 biennium, a new system of fees which includes a daily parking fee was proposed to meet this budget. The proposed package was aimed at increasing revenue by \$7.7 million, but several factors led the legislature to reject this proposal and at the same time lower the agency's revenue target. The legislature and the governor want access to State recreational lands to be free to all Washington residents as they feel it is a benefit of residency.

Washington State Parks could benefit greatly from a day use fee. As seen in Table 3, visitation to State parks is close to 50 million visitors per year. A \$2-3 per day use fee could be a step toward making the parks self-sufficient. Day use charges would also provide a more equitable user fee policy at State Parks. At this time Washington is the only western state not charging some form of day use fee (O'toole, 1995). Bethany Miller, Chief of Budget Services with the State Parks and Recreation Commission, states that presently 80% of user fee income from camping fees is collected from 4% of park visitors. A day use fee would allow for a more equitable method of funding parks and a means to supplement current and future funding deficiencies.

Under-funding at State parks has had detrimental effects on park resources. Many sites and facilities are rundown and deteriorated, and environmental degradation is increasing at many parks (see Table 2). Funding shortfalls of approximately \$20 million per biennium have had serious effects on the parks, including drastic reductions in field personnel. Between 1981 and 1993, The State Parks and Recreation Commission experienced a 42% reduction in field staff and, concurrently, park visitation increased 36% (Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, 1993). Current funding by the legislature is obviously falling short of agency goals and the legislature needs to make a serious effort of considering policy changes being put forth by the State Parks and Recreation Commission.

Department of Wildlife

The Washington State Department of Wildlife (WDW) is charged to preserve, protect and perpetuate Washington's wildlife while maximizing outdoor recreational opportunities compatible with healthy and diverse fish and wildlife populations (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 1994).

Traditionally, maximizing outdoor recreational opportunities within the agency equated to providing good hunting and fishing opportunities. This, however, is changing with increased population, changing demographics and more diverse recreational interests. WDW is seeing more non-consumptive use of its lands. In fact, RVD's of non-consumptive wildlife appreciation use are now estimated to be greater than the more traditional uses of anglers and hunters (Interagency Committee on Outdoor Recreation, 1990). In some ways this is concerning news for the Department of Wildlife because the agency is highly dependent on hunting and fishing license user fees. Close to half of the agency's funding is through licenses and other hunting-related fees (Figure 1). This is down considerably from 1970 when 77% of the department's budget was from hunting and fishing licenses alone (Legislative Budget Committee, 1970).

In 1992 the WDW opened its books to a 28 member budget and revenue review committee to assess the state of the agency and the resources it managed. The committee reported, "Washington State is perilously close to a wildlife disaster" and it found that much of this was due to inadequate funding. It concluded the agency could no longer continue its dependence on hunting and fishing license fees to fund the necessary programs. The agency would need more help from the legislature in the form of general fund monies or through other options such as those suggested in *Legacy at Risk*, including user fees (Washington Department of Wildlife, 1992). As Table 2 shows, WDW's funding problems will need a serious commitment by the legislature to bring the agency back to the level its programs require to properly carry out the agency mandate.

As mentioned above, the WDW is an agency very dependent on user fees, specifically hunting and fishing licenses. In the 1991-93 biennium WDW received 11% of its \$107 million funding from the State's general fund which represents only one-tenth of 1% of the State's entire expenditures. Hunters and anglers, who comprise approximately 19% of Washington's

WDW Revenue

1991 - 1993

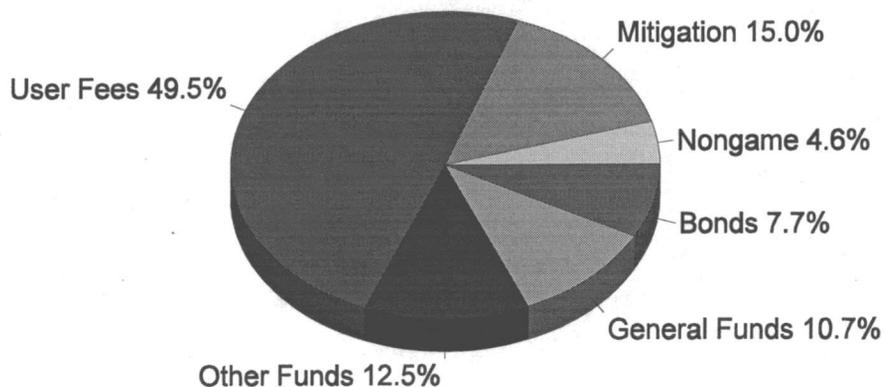


Figure 1

population, fund 50% of the agency, at a level which is inadequately funding hunting and fishing programs. This is because these dollars are being spread to other programs that have inadequate or no funding other than hunting and fishing dollars. This situation very blatantly shows the inequities involved in the present system and signals a need for a change in funding sources.

Previously it was quite common to raise license fees to meet budget shortfalls. The agency was often left with limited choice but to raise fees when continued appeals to the legislature for increased funding were turned down. The alternative, cutting programs, was

usually a less favorable option. Raising license fees or creating new licensed hunts had also become increasingly detrimental to the WDW. Continued increases in the 1970's and 1980's turned away numerous hunters and after peaking in the early 1980's, sales subsequently have fallen off sharply (Figure 2). This user group, also well aware of its contribution to WDW, became continually disgruntled over the inequity of user fees. Hunters began to question the lack of user fees for the ever-increasing presence of non-consumptive users on public lands and continue to ask others to pay their share (Washington Department of Wildlife, 1992).

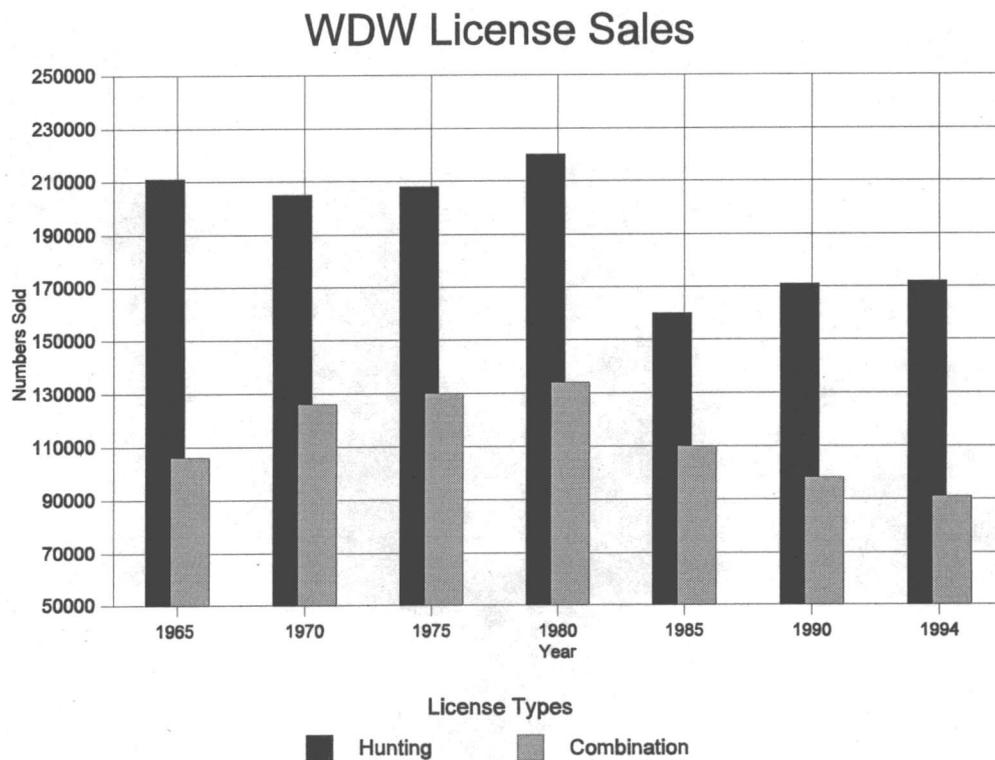


Figure 2

An early attempt to find alternative funding sources for one of the WDW's programs has proven quite successful. The non-game program, looking to become less dependent on hunting

and fishing license dollars, convinced the legislature and the voting public to dedicate personalized license plate fees to its program. In 1973 a referendum was passed by Washington residents over Governor Dan Evans' veto to go ahead with this program.

Tom Juelson, Manager of the Wildlife Diversity Program (formerly the Non-Game Program) explained that in the first year of sales, 1974, only 35,000 plates were sold. This year approximately 2 million will be sold providing revenues in the range of 5 million dollars. Each plate sells for \$50 with approximately 12% of that going to administration costs, and the rest going to WDW's Wildlife Diversity program. What seems to have made this program a success was advertising by the agency which informed the public where the funds would be spent. Also, being a voluntary program seems to add to its acceptance by the public.

In the late 1970's the WDW recognized the changing user patterns and increased use by non-consumptive users. Unlike the hunting and fishing public, who carried the burden of funding for WDW lands and programs, the non-consumptive users shared in little if any of the costs. In response to this, in 1981 the WDW implemented the conservation license. This license cost ten dollars per year, per family and allowed access to WDW access sites and wildlife areas throughout the state. Hunters and fishermen with a valid license were not required to purchase a conservation license because it was felt that by purchasing licenses, they had already contributed.

The conservation license was to be used as a mechanism for drawing in revenues from the non-hunting fishing public using agency lands. The estimated revenue for the first year was \$1.6 million with continued growth thereafter (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 1995). However, in its thirteen years of existence, the conservation license has only once sold more than 2,000 licenses in a single year. Although the concept was a good idea, the license has never been accepted. It was a poorly advertised program and was sold at establishments where hunting and fishing licenses were sold which were seldom frequented by the non-consumptive users. Also, it was not voluntary like the personalized license plate and it went against the long-held belief that access to public lands should be free.

The conservation license is still in existence and in 1994, sales totaled 897 licenses. Proposals have been made to rework it or repeal it, but no action has been taken at this point. The conservation license effort was a good lesson on the importance of advertiseing, and

informing the public of the need for the proposed fee. If the public is not aware of a program or its need and does not back it, the program is destined to fail.

Although the conservation license proved unsuccessful, user fees still are considered a viable option for raising revenue. The Legislative Budget Committee's 1970 user fee study suggested the Department should begin by charging camping fees because of the primitive nature of the wildlife areas. The 1992 Task Force that produced "Legacy at Risk" also suggested user fees as one of its seven preferred funding recommendations. This evidence seems to suggest that willingness to pay by outdoor recreationists exists and is quite high.

Those most familiar with the increased use by non-consumptive users on WDW lands and the costs their use creates are the wildlife area managers. Managers are currently writing management plans for their areas which are a guideline for management over the next four years. In several of these plans under the topics of issues and funding, non-consumptive use and user fees are discussed. Statements in the plans suggest the need to evaluate user fees and their enforceability, and that fees should be assessed according to use and that the revenues generated would be used to offset specific impacts of that use (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 1994).

The plans also included public input by Citizens Advisory Groups (CAG's) which dealt with these issues. Public statements addressing access issues suggested the department needs to attract more non-consumptive users. Another statement by a public advisory group suggested more non-consumptive use fees are needed and that fees should be used to give equal emphasis to hunters and non-consumptive users (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 1995). These statements indicate that the public realizes the agency's budgetary concerns, and current inequities in WDW's fee policy; and perhaps, represents its level of willingness to pay.

The WDW's landholdings of approximately 840,000 acres and over 600 access sites offers ample opportunity to charge for parking, boat launching and campsites. Before the agency attempts another user fee for non-consumptive users, several issues need to be considered. One such issue is the primitive nature of the wildlife areas and the lack of facilities. Many agency lands were purchased as critical habitat for the management of game and non-game species and are geared toward traditional recreational use such as hunting and fishing. Certain facilities such

as camping areas, toilets, additional parking and signage would have to be put in place on several of the areas to provide for new nontraditional uses.

Most of the wildlife areas have several remote access points which would make collection of fees on-site quite difficult or impossible. Additionally, personnel would be needed to collect fees and provide enforcement. Costs for these services and added personnel may be much higher than user fee income and would therefore prove impractical. The alternative to on-site collection would be a stamp or a license similar to the conservation license mentioned previously.

The question remains whether or not the agency can continue to fulfill its mandate to protect, preserve and perpetuate the diverse wildlife and at the same time promote increased recreational activities. Several areas currently with restricted use are extremely sensitive habitat sites and require protection. Can this protection be provided alongside recreation? Will conflicts develop between traditional uses and new uses? Many wildlife areas were bought with hunting and fishing dollars for hunting and fishing activities and it would be unfair to ask these groups to curtail activities on lands they have funded.

These are just a few of the many issues involved in pursuing a user fee policy for public lands. The WDW, like other agencies, needs to consider these issues, past successes and failures and decide whether this is the path it wants to take. If it pursues non-consumptive user fees it must demonstrate its need to those who will be asked to contribute and inform them of the changes. WDW must also paint a clear picture of how these revenues will be used and then show results.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

User fees can be a very important tool for creating revenues at public parks, wildlife areas and outdoor recreational facilities. Fees also provide a mechanism for better management by controlling crowding and helping reduce vandalism and littering. But their most important function may be in producing revenues that help maintain our parks and recreational areas and provide the public at a minimal cost, new and continued opportunities to enjoy outdoor recreational activities on public lands.

As Americans' leisure time has grown along with more disposable income, the numbers of people participating in outdoor activities on public lands has grown dramatically. With this growth came pressures for more parks, more trails, and more facilities for camping and picnicking. At the same time, budgets for essential activities such as police and fire protection, schools and new streets increased leaving less for the provision of public recreation and recreational lands. This led to fewer staff, a decrease in the construction of new facilities and the curtailing of maintenance and upkeep of existing facilities. From this came the increased dependence of user fees by recreational resource providers to fund public recreational facilities.

The increased utilization of user fees at public facilities has not been without its conflicts. Opponents claim user fees on public lands amount to double taxation and that those most needing of these opportunities may not be able to afford the charges. Proponents counter that fees are actually a more equitable method of funding public recreation areas because those who use them the most will be paying. They also believe that ample opportunities exist for free recreational activities and programs that provide discounts for lower income users are quite common. Proponents also point to the public's general acceptance of user fees and willingness to pay.

This is not to say that user fee programs should be implemented indiscriminately for there are many issues that must be considered in starting such a program. Studies show that the willingness to pay for recreational activities and the associated lands and facilities is high, but it comes with conditions. The public still feels it has a constitutional right to enter public lands so entrance fees are very unpopular yet fees for parking, maintenance, environmental protection or use of facilities are much more acceptable. Fees are also more accepted when the public is made aware of why they are needed and when revenues from fees are reinvested into the activity, facility or program in which the user paid to participate. Fees also should not be used to make a program or area self-sufficient but instead be used to supplement current funding sources.

As noted earlier, the charging of user fees is not new to Washington. Fees for entrance in the national parks began in 1908 and State Parks Board implemented a 25 cent camping fee in 1924. Currently, fees are charged at all national parks, many Forest Service and State campgrounds. The State Parks and Recreation Commission has developed user fees for many

other programs and facilities that they provide to the public. However, the largest share of those participating in activities on State owned lands do so free of charge.

At a time when many of the State agencies responsible for providing recreational opportunities on public lands struggle to provide minimal services, many are questioning this policy. The State Parks and Recreation Commission, while providing recreation to nearly 50 million users each year, charges no daily user fee and produces 80% of its fee revenues from 4% of its users. There are obviously some glaring inequities in this policy. The other three agencies, while seeing increased recreational use, also provide use of their lands and facilities free for this purpose.

As non-consumptive use of State lands grows, increased pressure is put on the already thin budgets to provide for these new users and uses. Current programs suffer and in the case of hunters and anglers who provide a large share of the revenues to Fish and Wildlife budgets, the inequity of funding these programs grows. This situation would seemingly point to making those who benefit share a larger portion of funding their programs such as is the case with hunters, anglers, and campers at State parks.

Washington's population has grown from 4.3 million in 1984 to 5.3 million in 1994 and rapid growth is projected to continue. This increased population has led to a dramatic increase in use of public lands, yet the agencies managing these lands continue to attempt to make due with stagnating budgets. The public lands amount to 6 million acres with millions of user days each year. Lands and facilities are deteriorating at a rapid rate as budgets fall short of necessary funding levels to perform routine operations and maintenance. A small minority of users pay user fees to provide services for the majority of users. This system is desperately outdated. A new system of user fees may be necessary to provide for the needed revenue to fund these agencies at realistic levels of maintenance and service and erase the inequities of the current fee system.

The Department of Wildlife alone has over 600 access sites and 840,000 acres of land throughout the state. Like other public lands, use of WDW is increasing rapidly by non-consumptive users such as hikers, climbers, bikers, bird watchers and photographers. A user fee system for these users would be essential to address several concerns. First and foremost is the

revenue problem, user fees could be used to provide facilities such as parking, toilets, signs, trails, and campsites for these users. Fees also could be used to steer non-consumptive users to areas that will avoid conflicts with the hunting and fishing users and away from areas containing sensitive habitats and animal species.

It appears that without the help of the legislature, all four agencies will need to consider alternative funding methods. User fees appear to be one of the most equitable methods, and in times when tax payers are looking for relief from added tax burdens, any tax increase for the purpose of funding these agencies seems unlikely. The agencies need to take an aggressive approach and act rather than react. This will mean providing a clear policy on lands that are suited for specific recreational activities and lands that are more sensitive to increased use and need a higher level of protection. The agencies need to follow their mandate and at the same time adapt to a changing constituency. A well planned system of user fees for camping, boat launch, parking and use of facilities would provide needed revenue to address current shortfalls and anticipated future needs.

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