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RESEARCH REPORT

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Recreation and Tourism

FROM THE MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION EAST LANSING

Genesee County Parks and Recreation Study¹

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INTRODUCTION

This study was done during the summer of 1973 by the Recreation Research and Planning Unit of the Department of Park and Recreation Resources, Michigan State University, for the Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission. Its overall purpose was to provide the commission with information to guide them in designing new financing proposals to submit to county voters and additional information on which they could base future management of the county park system. The specific objectives were to:

1. Determine the views of the general citizenry regarding county parks as related to:
 - a) existing park facilities and programs
 - b) future planning, acquisition and development
 - c) image of the park system, including depth of knowledge about it
2. Determine a, b and c above as they concerned park users specifically
3. Determine park user origins
4. Determine any existing ethnic or racial conflicts concerning the county park system
5. Determine the amount of support that could be expected in seeking additional financial commitments from county voters
6. Determine attitudes towards development of existing parks versus continued parkland acquisition

It was decided to explore these issues by means of a three-phase survey:

1. Park users survey
2. General population survey
3. Community leadership survey

Each of these surveys is discussed separately in following sections of this report.

PARK USERS SURVEY

As a result of discussions with commission representatives, it was decided to conduct personal interviews of randomly selected on-site users within the county park system. Nine park areas that typically received the heaviest use and were considered to be representative of the park system as a whole were selected. Interviews were also conducted at various shore fishing sites. A total of 1,037 park users was administered a standard questionnaire during July to determine their attitudes and desires regarding the county park system. A breakdown of the number of respondents and the percent of total from each park area is shown in Table 1.

Park User Characteristics

It was decided to restrict administration of most of the questionnaire to registered voters of Genesee County, as most issues dealt with financing and tax

¹ This research was funded by a grant from the Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission, with support from the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station.

Table 1. Total response from each park

	Number	Percent
Bluebell Beach	179	17.5
Buttercup Beach	169	16.3
Richfield County Park	112	10.7
Bluegill Boat Launch	112	10.7
Walleye Boat Launch	108	10.3
Flushing County Park	107	10.3
The Mounds	89	8.5
Linden County Park	80	7.7
Stepping Stone Falls	65	6.3
Various shore fishing sites	16	1.5

measures that would ultimately be decided on by these persons. This also provided a measure of the amount of county park use generated by out-of-county residents. The survey results show that 816 (78.9%) of the respondents were registered voters of Genesee County. Of the remaining 221 respondents, 87 were Genesee County residents, but not registered voters. A total of 903 persons, approximately 87.1% of the sample, is Genesee County residents. On the basis of this survey, it appears that only a small percentage (13%) of users are out-of-county residents.

As an indication of their knowledge of the Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission system, respondents were asked if they knew what level of government was operating the park they were using. Sixty-two percent of the respondents were aware that the park was operated by Genesee County. However, 19% thought the park was operated by another level of government (city, township, regional, state or federal), and an additional 19% did not know what level of government operated the park.

Respondents were asked how they first became aware of the existence of the park they were using. The results are given in Table 2.

This indicates that knowledge of the park system is being spread primarily through informal channels. Use of the media is largely ineffective, with the possible exception of the newspaper. Brochures are apparently either not an effective way to reach the

Table 2. Source of awareness of existence of park and its facilities

	Number	Percent
Word of mouth	451	43.5
Newspaper	159	15.3
Live nearby	137	13.2
Driving by	105	10.1
Television	49	4.7
Radio	45	4.3
Park personnel	22	2.1
Brochures	10	1.0
Other	44	4.2
No response	15	1.4

people of the county or they are being used improperly.

A breakdown of the respondents by sex, age and race is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Sex, age and race of respondents

Sex	Percent
Male	63
Female	37
Race	Percent
Caucasian	81
Negro	17
Chicano	1
Other	1
Age	Percent
18-25	20
26-35	34
36-45	24
46-60	16
61 and older	5

Attitudes Toward Financing

Strong support for the park system, at least in principle, is evident. Ninety-four percent of the sample favored use of public tax monies to support a county park and recreation program. Of the 6% opposed, most cited high taxes as the reason for their opposition. Only six persons would like to see the county dissolve the Parks and Recreation Commission. It should be kept in mind that this section is dealing with people who were interviewed while actually using a park, so it is to be expected that most of them would support the park concept.

There appears to be little support at this time for continued expansion in the number of the park areas within the system. Seventy-two percent of the respondents favored further development of existing parks, as opposed to additional land acquisition. In addition, 60% of those responding felt the county presently has enough parklands to adequately serve the needs of its citizens. Good potential exists, however, for substantial development projects. Seventy-five percent of the sample would be willing to vote to increase the current special county park millage to speed up the development of the park and recreation program. Ninety-three percent of those in favor would be willing to increase the millage by not more than $\frac{1}{4}$ mill.

Use of entrance fees or other charges as an additional source of funding would not be acceptable to most park users. Fifty-seven percent of the sample preferred that fees or charges not be imposed for use of park facilities and services. Of the 43% in favor of such charges, 90% would be willing to pay a fee of 50¢ per car each time they entered the park.

Several questions were asked concerning 1972 park millage and bond issues in an effort to determine the

reason for their failure. Only 38% of the respondents were able to recall these issues, and of this number, 239 or 73% were in favor of the proposals. Of the 69 persons who opposed the issues, the most frequently mentioned reason for their opposition was that taxes were too high. This indicates that the proposals may have largely been victims of unfavorable economic conditions at the time. The most frequently mentioned reasons for opposition are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4. Reasons for opposition to park millage and bonding issues

	Opposed	
	Number	Percentage
Taxes too high	21	26.9
Too much emphasis on developing new parks	18	23.1
Lack of information on proposals	15	19.2
Not enough emphasis on developing existing parks	10	12.8
Millage too high	7	9.0
Whole plan not needed	4	5.1
Would promote use of parks by undesirable persons	3	3.9

Few significant differences were found between sex, age and race groups by holding these variables constant for several key questions. No differences were found between male and female respondents. Of the five age groups, the youngest and oldest were most opposed to a user fee or entrance charge; this was probably related to their perceived ability to pay such a charge. Although not statistically significant, the age group 61 and above were the least in favor of increasing the current special county park millage.

The various races favored the use of public tax monies to support a county park and recreation program to the degrees shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Relative support for the use of taxes to support parks among various racial groups

	% in favor
Caucasian	94.6
Negro	92.3
Chicano	87.5
Other	66.7

Concerning willingness to increase the current special county park millage, there appeared to be little difference between those who knew which level of government operates the parks and those who did not. Approximately 76% of those persons who knew the park they were visiting was operated by the county were in favor of increasing the millage, as opposed to 73% of those who did not know.

Only 38.6% of those in favor of increasing the park millage were also in favor of the imposition of park user charges or entrance fees. Of those opposed to increasing the millage, 57.3% preferred that user fees or entrance charges be imposed.

Activities and Preferences

Each person was asked what activities he and his group were participating in that day. The results are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Recreational participation of respondents on day of interview

	Number	Percent
Picnicking	360	34.7
Swimming	298	28.7
Sunning	113	10.9
Playgrounds	103	9.9
Power boating	96	9.3
Fishing	87	8.4
Non-power boating	75	7.2
Driving for pleasure	71	6.9
Sightseeing	63	6.1
Organized outing	62	6.0
Hiking	54	5.2
Off-road vehicles	53	5.1
Court games	44	4.2
Camping	30	2.9
Field activities (softball, frisbee, etc.)	24	2.3
Bicycling	23	2.2
Canoeing	11	1.1

It was then asked what kinds of outdoor recreation facilities or services were desired that were not presently available. Up to three different responses were recorded for each person. A total of 601 wide-ranging responses was recorded, with the most frequent (107) being a desire for more sports facilities—softball, tennis, basketball, etc. The second most frequent response (52) was a call for more children's activity areas—playgrounds, tot lots, etc. Forty-two respondents indicated a desire for more swimming areas (primarily pools), and there were 33 responses each for more picnic areas and facilities (grills, tables, trash cans, etc.) and more hiking and bicycle trails.

Finally, each person was asked to select his first, second and third priorities from a list of 15 facilities proposed for development in the county park system. The five most frequently mentioned facilities under each priority are listed in Table 7.

Complaints and Overall Rating

Question 14 asked for any complaints related to county parks. Up to two complaints were allowed each person, and 301 responses were recorded. The

Table 7. Public priorities in the provision of recreation areas, facilities and services

	Number	Percent
First Priority		
Children's and North American zoo	221	25.9
Bicycling and hiking trails	138	16.1
Overnight campgrounds	118	13.8
Flush toilet facilities	98	11.5
Swimming beaches	64	7.5
Second Priority		
Bicycling and hiking trails	119	14.3
Swimming beaches	99	11.9
Overnight campgrounds	85	10.2
Picnic areas and pavilions	76	9.1
Children's and North American zoo	75	9.0
Third Priority		
Nature centers and trails	101	12.6
Bicycling and hiking trails	78	9.7
Children's and North American zoo	75	9.4
Swimming beaches	68	8.5
Flush toilet facilities	62	7.7
Overall		
Children's and North American zoo	371	14.9
Bicycling and hiking trails	335	13.5
Overnight campgrounds	262	10.5
Flush toilet facilities	234	9.4
Swimming beaches	231	9.4

most frequently mentioned suggestions are outlined in Table 8.

Table 8. Frequently mentioned complaints regarding the county park system

	Number	Percent
Clean up areas and improve maintenance	64	21.2
More supervision and enforcement of rules	40	13.2
Not enough picnic areas and facilities	33	10.3
Need improved and additional restroom facilities	26	8.6
Too many restrictions on areas	22	7.3
Need more pest control (insects, etc.)	19	6.3
Need more facilities per recreation area	19	6.3

One hundred and sixty-two persons (19% of those responding) said they had noticed problems in the parks related to use by "undesirable persons." One hundred and twenty-five of these respondents were able to elaborate on the kinds of problems noticed (Table 9).

On the above issue there were some significant differences between racial groups. Twenty-one percent of Caucasians stated that they were aware of problems in the parks related to undesirable people using the parks, while only 8.2% of Negroes were aware of any such problems. This indicates that there may be a much larger degree of racial prejudice within the county than was revealed in the survey answers. In addition, Negroes rated the commission lower (3.71 on a scale of 1 to 5) than did Caucasians (3.91).

Table 9. Complaints related to use of parks by "undesirable persons"

	Number	Percent
Motorcycles or motorcycle gangs	30	24.0
Excessive littering	23	18.4
Excessive drinking	17	13.6
Race-related problems	15	12.0
Youth-related problems	12	9.6
Excessive noise and rowdiness	10	8.0
Drug-related problems	9	7.2
Excessive vandalism	6	4.8
Hippies	3	2.4

The Parks and Recreation Commission received an overall rating from the sample averaging just under "good." The exact results to the question are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Public ratings of the job being done by the County Park and Recreation Commission

	Number	Percent
Poor	11	1.3
Inadequate	16	1.9
Adequate	174	20.1
Good	483	55.8
Excellent	137	15.8
No response	40	4.6

With one exception, there was a direct relationship between those who rated the commission higher and the percent willing to increase the park millage (Table 11).

Table 11. Public rating of performance in relation to willingness to support increased recreation millage

Rating ^(a)	% willing to increase millage
Excellent	82.7
Good	77.3
Adequate	67.6
Inadequate	53.3
Poor	90.9

^(a) It should be noted that only 11 persons rated the commission as poor.

GENERAL POPULATION SURVEY

A survey of the registered voters of Genesee County was conducted during August and September 1973 concerning their attitudes and desires toward the Genesee County park system. Due to the county's large population, it was decided to cluster sample in areas felt to be representative of the county as a whole. Thirteen areas were selected, as shown in Table 12. Also shown are the number of registered voters in each area, percentage of total this represents

and actual number and percentage of interviews from these areas.

Table 12. Number of general population interviews in relation to total population in various areas of Genesee County

Area	Number of Reg. Voters	% of Total	Number of Interviews	% of Total
Davison	2,940	1.6	24	2.4
Grand Blanc	3,130	1.7	28	2.8
Swartz Creek	2,247	1.2	18	1.8
Flushing	4,348	2.3	37	3.7
Burton	15,272	8.1	87	8.7
Flint	94,401	50.4	453	45.4
Davison Twp.	4,717	2.5	27	2.7
Grand Blanc Twp.	10,400	5.5	61	6.1
Mt. Morris Twp.	12,500	6.7	48	4.8
Flushing Twp.	4,000	2.1	23	2.3
Richfield Twp.	2,508	1.3	22	2.2
Genesee Twp.	11,577	6.2	71	7.1
Flint Twp.	19,386	10.3	99	9.9

A representative sample was randomly selected from the lists of registered voters of each area, and 3,000 questionnaires were mailed to this sample on August 7. A follow-up telephone survey of a portion of those not responding was conducted between August 27 and September 10. A total of 1,020 interviews was administered; 767 (or 75.3%) were mailed returns and 253 (or 24.6%) were telephone follow-ups.

Sample Characteristics and Visitation

Each respondent was asked if he had visited any of the parks operated by Genesee County last year. Four hundred and forty-three (44.8%) had not. Of the 542 who did visit the parks, 50.4% made three or fewer visits last year. Approximately 69% made five or fewer visits. Only a small percentage of the sample visits the parks frequently. Each park visitor was asked to list the three parks he visited most in order of frequency. The parks most frequently mentioned are listed in Table 13.

Three park areas—Bluebell Beach, Flushing and Richfield County Parks—were mentioned 62.3% of the time, which may indicate that a very large percentage of public opinion is based primarily on these three parks. Nearly 50% of all park visitors visited Bluebell Beach at least once last year.

The average size of groups visiting the parks is given in Table 14.

A breakdown of respondents by age is given in Table 15.

By holding these age groups constant, it was found that park visitation differed significantly among them. The three younger age groups visited the parks at

Table 13. Visitation rates among general population respondents

	Number	Percent
Bluebell Beach	274	28.6
Flushing Co. Park	174	18.9
Richfield Co. Park	136	14.8
Buttercup Beach	61	6.6
Stepping Stone Falls	59	6.4
Linden Co. Park	40	4.3
Golden Rod Beach	39	4.2
For-Mar Nature Preserve	21	2.3
Bluegill Boat Launch	13	1.4
Mott Farm	11	1.2
The Mounds	5	0.5
Buell Lake	4	0.4
Walleyed Boat Launch	2	0.2
Non-county facilities	90	9.8

Table 14. Average size of groups visiting parks as reported by respondents

Size of Group	Number	Percent
1	8	1.5
2	84	15.9
3	66	12.5
4	119	22.5
5	75	14.2
6	61	11.5
7	22	4.2
8	18	3.4
9	4	.8
10+	72	13.6

Table 15. Age of respondents

	Number	Percent
18-25	142	14.2
26-35	209	21.0
36-45	212	21.3
46-60	257	25.8
61+	177	17.8

the rates of 69.5% for those 26-35; 66.4% for those 18-25; and 62.3% for those 36-45. The two older age groups visited the parks to a far lesser extent. Approximately 45% of persons 46-60 and only 35.1% of those 61 and over visited county parks last year.

Visitation also differed significantly among various areas of the county sampled (Table 16).

Attitudes Toward Financing

Strong support, at least in principle, for the park system was evident in the fact that 79.1% of the sample favored the use of public tax monies to support a county park and recreation program. Of the 203 persons opposed, the most frequently cited reason (57) was high taxes. Other frequently cited reasons were that it was unfair to non-users (40), overuse by special interest groups (29), and a preference for user

Table 16. Visitation rates to parks from various areas of Genesee County

Location ^(a)	% visiting County Parks
Flushing	65.6
Flushing Twp.	50.0
Swartz Creek	44.4
Davison	43.5
Grand Blanc Twp.	41.4
Burton	38.4
Mt. Morris Twp.	37.5
Flint Twp.	36.3
Flint	34.8
Richfield Twp.	33.8
Davison Twp.	30.8
Genesee Twp.	28.8
Grand Blanc	18.5

(a) It should be kept in mind that not all county areas were sampled.

or entrance fees (23). Fifty persons (4.9% of the sample) would like to see Genesee County dissolve the Parks and Recreation Commission. The two most frequently mentioned reasons were that the commission is not serving a useful purpose (13) and that taxes are too high (12).

There appears to be limited support at this time for expanding the park system. Approximately 56% of the respondents favored more fully developing existing park areas as opposed to acquiring additional parklands. In addition, 47.6% of the sample felt the county has enough parklands to adequately serve the needs of its citizens. Support is also limited for increasing the current special county park millage to speed up development of the park and recreation program. Only 48.6% of the sample would favor such an increase. Of that number, 77.8% would be willing to increase the millage by not more than $\frac{1}{8}$ mill.

Perhaps the best source of additional funds, according to the sample, would be through user fees. Approximately 70% would prefer that fees and charges for use of park facilities and services be imposed to help pay for operational costs. Seventy-eight percent would be willing to pay a fee of 50¢ per car each time they entered the parks.

Several questions were asked concerning proposed park millage and bond issues defeated in August 1972. Each person was asked if he agreed or disagreed with each of seven reasons as to why the issues were turned down. Results are shown in Table 17.

Ten other reasons were mentioned (Table 18).

A surprising result was that 54.4% of those responding said they were in favor of these millage and bond proposals. However, the issues were defeated by a nearly 4 to 1 margin for the county as a whole.

Controlling for certain variables it was found that, as a group, persons who visited county parks differed

Table 17. Primary reasons for failure of park financing elections as suggested by respondents of general population survey

	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Too much emphasis on acquiring new parks	398	51.7	370	48.1
Not enough emphasis on development of existing parks	526	68.7	244	31.7
Millage was too high	463	62.4	278	37.5
Whole plan was not needed	217	29.6	515	70.3
Lack of information in regard to proposals	592	76.1	186	23.9
Taxes too high	702	81.7	157	18.3
Would promote use of the parks by undesirable persons	331	42.7	445	57.4

Table 18. Other reasons for failure of park financing elections given in general population survey

	Number	Percent
Overuse by special interest groups	46	20.1
Apathy	35	15.3
Misuse of appropriated funds	28	12.2
General non-use	24	10.5
Use by non-taxpayer (prefer entrance fees)	22	9.6
Parks are not safe	22	9.6
Poor maintenance (litter pollution)	21	9.2
Prefer other use of government funds	16	7.0
Taking private lands	10	4.4
Need more activity programs	5	2.2

significantly from those who did not on several important matters. A little over 55% of the persons who visited county parks felt the county did not have enough parklands to adequately serve the needs of its citizens, while only 48.4% of non-park-visitors shared this feeling. Even higher levels of significance were found in regard to the imposition of entrance or user fees and support for future millage increases. Sixty-three percent of park users favored the establishment of entrance fees or user charges, as compared to 79.8% of non-park-users.

Perhaps most importantly, persons who use county parks were in favor of increasing the current special county park millage (56.3%), while non-park-users were strongly opposed to such action (only 40% would be willing to support such a measure). This suggests an obvious strategy of encouraging a greater percentage of county residents to use county parks, and might be implemented through special emphasis on developing facilities and activities catering to these people. No differences were found between the two groups concerning the issue of development of existing parks versus continued parkland acquisition.

Significant differences were also found regarding certain matters as a function of age and location of respondent. Regarding age in each of these cases, results varied directly with increasing or decreasing age

category. Younger age groups favored the use of public tax monies to support a county park and recreation program to a greater degree than older age groups. Only the 18-25 age group favored continued parkland acquisition as opposed to further development of existing parks. The older age groups increasingly favored development up to a maximum of 68% for those 61 and over.

Similar results were obtained with the question of the county having enough parklands to adequately serve the needs of its citizens. The three younger age groups felt the county did not presently have enough parklands, while the two older groups felt it did. All age groups favored imposition of entrance or user fees. However, this ranged from a slim majority of 51.8% for those 18-25 to 73% for those 61 and over.

Finally, in regard to willingness to increase the special county park millage, it was found that the three younger age groups favored such a measure (by an average of 53.1%), as opposed to the two older age groups who opposed such a measure (57.4%).

Significant differences were found to exist between the location of respondents and the two issues: 1) willingness to increase the special county park millage and 2) the matter of development versus continued parkland acquisition (Table 19).

Table 19. Proportion of public support of park financing measures among various areas of Genesee County

Location	% willing to increase millage	Rank	% favoring development over acquisition	Rank
Davison	52.2	4	58.3	7
Grand Blanc	66.7	1	48.0	11
Swartz Creek	38.9	12	58.3	8
Flushing	63.6	2	61.8	5
Burton	34.2	13	62.8	4
Flint	53.1	3	54.1	10
Davison Twp.	46.2	8	70.8	2
Grand Blanc Twp.	39.0	11	56.4	9
Mt. Morris Twp.	40.9	9	61.4	6
Flushing Twp.	50.0	6	44.4	12
Richfield Twp.	47.6	7	70.0	3
Genesee Twp.	40.3	10	73.5	1
Flint Twp.	51.6	5	43.5	13

Significant differences were also found on several issues between those interviewed by mail and those interviewed by telephone. The group interviewed by telephone consistently gave answers more favorable to the commission. Of those interviewed by telephone, 84.7% favored the use of public tax monies to support a county park and recreation program, as opposed to 77.3% of those who returned their questionnaires by mail. Similar results were obtained on the question

of increasing the current special county park millage, with 63.3% of telephone interviewees supporting such a measure, as opposed to 43.9% of those mailing returns. Of those interviewed by telephone, 74.8% favored the imposition of entrance fees or user charges, as opposed to 68.6% of those interviewed by mail.

Development Preferences

Each respondent was asked for any kinds of outdoor recreation facilities or services desired but not presently available. Up to three different responses were recorded for each person in order of priority. Four hundred and twenty-six persons had at least one suggestion, and 732 wide-ranging responses were recorded. The five most frequently mentioned activities are given in Table 20.

Table 20. Kinds of outdoor recreation facilities and services desired but not presently available

First Priority	Number	Percent
More swimming areas (i.e., pools)	56	13.2
More camping areas	39	9.2
Court games (tennis, basketball, etc.)	33	7.8
More sports facilities (baseball, softball, frisbee, etc.)	32	7.5
More trails for walking and biking	32	7.5
Second Priority		
More swimming areas (i.e., pools)	20	9.2
Court games (tennis, basketball, etc.)	19	8.8
More sports facilities (baseball, softball, frisbee, etc.)	18	8.3
More trails for walking and biking	16	7.4
More children's activity areas	16	7.4
Third Priority		
More swimming areas (i.e., pools)	10	11.2
More trails for walking and biking	9	10.1
Additional recreation activity programs	8	9.0
Court games (tennis, basketball, etc.)	7	7.9
More children's activity areas	6	6.7
More picnic areas and equipment	6	6.7
Overall		
More swimming areas (i.e., pools)	86	11.7
Court games (tennis, basketball)	59	8.1
More trails for walking and biking	57	7.8
More camping areas	54	7.4
More sports facilities (baseball, softball, frisbee, etc.)	51	7.0
More children's activity areas	50	6.8

Complaints and Overall Rating

Question 21 asked for any complaints about anything related to county parks. Two hundred and thirty-one persons (26.2%) had at least one complaint. Up to three complaints were recorded for each person, and 255 responses were recorded. The most frequently mentioned complaints are listed in Table 21.

Table 21. Complaints among general population regarding park management

	Number	Percent
Need more supervision and enforcement of rules	60	23.5
Clean up areas and improve maintenance	42	16.5
Expand areas	28	11.0
Dissatisfaction with park planning and use of funds	15	5.9

Each person was asked if he was aware of any problem related to undesirable people using the parks. Three hundred and thirty-two persons (36.1%) said they were aware of such problems. Three hundred and nine of these respondents were able to elaborate on the existing problems. Each person was allowed up to three different responses, and results are shown in Table 22.

Table 22. Complaints regarding "undesirable persons" as expressed in general population survey

	Number	Percent
Inconsiderate behavior	82	16.5
Drug-related problems	77	15.5
Excessive littering	67	13.5
Excessive drinking	55	11.1
Motorcycles and motorcycle groups	51	9.3
Excessive vandalism	48	9.9
Race-related problems	28	5.6
Youth-related problems	21	4.2
Excessive noise	21	4.2
Hippies	16	3.2
Parks unsafe	15	3.0
Sex-related problems	10	2.0
Non-taxpayers	4	.8

The Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission received an overall rating from the sample averaging between "adequate" and "good" (Table 23).

Table 23. Rating of performance of the county park commission by general population

	Number	Percent
Excellent	115	13.5
Good	391	45.9
Adequate	265	31.1
Inadequate	56	6.6
Poor	25	2.9

Again, by holding certain variables constant, some important differences were found. The overall rating of the commission varied widely by type of return (mailed versus phoned) and by park visitors and non-park-visitors. Those interviewed by telephone rated the commission higher (3.97 on a scale of 1 to

5) than those who returned their questionnaires by mail (3.55). People who visited county parks rated the commission higher (3.73) than those who did not (3.45).

In addition, there was wide variation by location of respondent on the percentage of persons who said they were aware of problems regarding undesirable people using the parks (Table 24).

Table 24. Assessment of problems caused by "undesirable people" in relation to origin of respondents

Location	Percent	Location	Percent
Grand Blanc	18.5	Burton	38.4
Genesee Twp.	28.8	Grand Blanc Twp.	41.1
Davison Twp.	30.8	Davison	43.5
Richfield Twp.	33.3	Swartz Creek	44.4
Flint	34.8	Flushing Twp.	50.0
Flint Twp.	36.3	Flushing	65.6
Mt. Morris Twp.	37.5		

As might be expected, significantly more of those persons who visited the parks (159 or 32.8%) had complaints concerning some phase of the park system than those who did not (67 or 18.1%). Those persons rating the commission higher were significantly more inclined to be willing to increase the current special county park millage. The results are given in Table 25.

Table 25. Rating of performance in relation to willingness to support increased financial support of county parks

Rating	% willing to increase millage
Excellent	60.2
Good	56.5
Adequate	43.0
Inadequate	41.8
Poor	36.0

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP SURVEY

The third phase of the study utilized a personal interview procedure in obtaining information from 42 representative community leaders identified by commission representatives. Interviews were conducted from mid-July to early August.

The objective of this portion of the study was to obtain general information related to topics of concern within other phases of the overall study. Of specific concern were the following:

- 1) Perceptions of the reasons for the previous defeat of park millage and bond issues
- 2) Attitudes towards major bond issue proposals (new acquisition versus existing area development)
- 3) Recommendations for:
 - a) new park and recreation resource developments
 - b) expected plausible millage increases for park and recreation programs
 - c) improvements in public relations
 - d) proposed user fee and charge systems
 - e) planning, development and operating procedures
- 4) Personal evaluations
 - a) on the adequacy of the department's park maintenance and security programs
 - b) concerning the overall progress of the commission

The sample comprised a strong representation by union officials, who reportedly represent over 75,000 persons, a relatively large percentage of the Genesee County population. Various representatives of special interest user groups, Board of Education officials and concerned environmental group representatives made up the bulk of the remaining sample.

The format for this section will be a question-by-question analysis, noting detailed response classifications where appropriate.

Question 1: Leadership perceptions as to major reasons why park millage and bond issues were defeated in August 1972.

The following reasons, as identified by the County Parks and Recreation Commission, were utilized and the number and percent of responses for each are shown in Table 26.

Table 26. Reasons for failure of public finance measures as suggested by community leaders

	Leadership Survey	
	Number	Percent
Too much emphasis on developing new parks	5	12
Not enough emphasis on developing new parks	0	0
Millage too high	8	19
Whole plan not needed	3	7
Lack of information regarding proposals	19	45
Taxes too high	20	48
Would promote use of the parks by undesirable people	6	14

Beyond the above reasons, numerous and varied comments better defining their perceptions on the defeat of the issues made up the remainder of recorded responses. Approximately one-third of the respondents noted improper timing of the vote in terms of both the number of other miscellaneous millage issues on the ballot and the general negative tax environment in the country as being an essential reason for the defeat of the millage and bond issues. Other miscellaneous comments included:

- 1) Poor publicity and the need for more public demonstrations (i.e., slide shows at public malls), additional park tours, group presentations, etc. (17 responses).
- 2) Public relations information was confusing to the general public and there was a need for greater clarification of proposed tax increases and estimated returns to the average citizen (11 responses).
- 3) Need for public relations program designed to get more people involved in the millage campaign, i.e., gain support of volunteers from special interest groups (environmental, sports and outdoor recreational user clubs), to distribute and support public relations materials to park users, park sign advertising (especially on peak weekends), use of park-user photos showing crowded peak-period usage, distribution of materials to PTAs and students, use of mailed circulars, additional public hearings focused on related controversial issues, and earlier initiation of millage campaign and distribution of public relations materials.
- 4) Antigovernmental feelings were carried over in the vote (reflections of mistrust in governmental financial procedures and policies) (8 responses), and a negative vote is the only means the average citizen has to lessen his growing tax load (5 responses).
- 5) Non-Flint area residents felt that new parks would only further encourage increased Flint usage (5 responses).
- 6) Opposition groups were felt to be better organized and carried a stronger appeal related to anticondemnation procedures (12 responses). (A number of respondents noted that the opposition group was most successful in confusing the issue from one of increased park acquisition to one of increased condemnation usage. These respondents recommended that a future land acquisition policy not include this technique. This proposal is probably not feasible, however.)

Six respondents stated that they felt the commission's campaign seemed geared towards the upper aristocratic segments of the county's population and needed to be redirected toward the average citizen and his family. The majority of union representatives noted that the commission should first seek support of the regional U.A.W. office in its next campaign and then recommended use of local union newspapers as an important media in which to reach the rank and file laborers.

In general, most respondents felt major improvements were needed in the commission's previous public relations program. Increased public media exposure and the need for increased public involvement at all stages of the next millage campaign were comments repeated many times. Respondents indicated that beyond the unions, schools, PTAs, sports clubs and environmental groups, park users and many of the special interest service organizations of the community should be sought out to gain their active support.

Question 2: Attitudes toward increased development of existing parks versus continued parkland acquisition.

The results obtained from this question are given in Table 27.

Table 27. Attitudes of community leaders regarding increased development of existing parks versus land acquisition for additional parks

	Responses	
	Number	Percent
Favor increased development of existing park and recreation areas	12	28
Favor acquisition of additional land areas still available	16	38
Both of the above	13	31
No comment	1	2

It was not surprising to note that the majority of community leaders were in favor of new land acquisition programs. It may be assumed that experience within their leadership roles has put them in tune with the problems of land availability and the needs of well planned land acquisition programs when land is still available. Many respondents indicated that the commission should stay actively involved in both programs, noting that existing developments provided the important establishment of credibility of the commission to the community and that the emphasis in future projects should be carefully balanced between these programs.

Specific types of development projects recommended are listed in Table 28.

Table 28. Types of park developments recommended by community leaders

Type of Facility	Respondents	
	Number	Percent
Water-based recreation facilities	17	40
Zoo	5	12
Hiking and biking trails	11	26
Nature education programs (including additional trail development and historical museum)	6	14
Camping facilities in the city of Flint	10	24
Picnic areas	4	9
Youth and senior citizen activity areas and centers	5	12
Snowmobile trails	4	9

It is apparent that the divergence of opinion in this area is as varied as the special interest groups each respondent represented. Of interest, though, were the limited responses noting a strong need for the development of new facilities within the city of Flint. Those who recommended such facilities were basically those involved with minority group programs and felt that many segments of Flint's population, especially those residing in southern sections of the city, were unable to get to existing county parks. Recommendations for reviewing the feasibility of public bus transport to the parks for peak summer usage were made several times.

Question 3: The third question was designed to cover perceptions on several related issues. It was broken down into two parts:

a) What specific recommendations would you have concerning the type of park and recreation facilities that need to be developed?

Generally, the responses received were limited, as most of the sample indicated that they were not basically outdoor oriented or intensive park users. Many respondents indicated that they felt the commission was doing a more than adequate job in providing a variety of park and recreation facilities to meet the special interests of many user groups. Specific recommendations were extremely varied, and those of consequence have been noted above. The greatest response was need for the general category of "water-based recreation facilities," as many respondents were aware of the intense demand these facilities have currently been receiving in the Genesee County area.

b) What specific recommendations would you have concerning the millage increase that should be asked for in the next millage campaign?

It was understood that the above question would be difficult to respond to, and it was not surprising that over 70% of the respondents indicated that they felt any millage increase would be extremely difficult to obtain but the lower the request, the better. Nine respondents stated that if the park system needs outlined in last year's millage campaign were still valid, the commission should continue to ask for a full mill. Several respondents also noted that careful explanation would be necessary to explain any decrease in a future requested millage to indicate changes in pre-established priorities and needs. Several additional comments included:

- 1) Utilization of research surveys to determine what county residents are willing to support (4 responses).
- 2) Could easily obtain a full mill if use of the condemnation procedure was eliminated (3 responses).
- 3) A more important issue than the size of the millage request is whether or not the commission will utilize any newly acquired public funds for the purposes for which they were intended (3 responses).

Generally, the point was made that emphasis on a new millage campaign should not be placed on the size of the millage but on what will be done with it and how it will affect the life of the average county resident.

Question 4: Do you feel the commission should establish a new policy designed to increase the fees and revenues it generates from ongoing services to offset future development and operating costs?

Approximately 50% of the sample was in favor of such a policy, as seen in Table 29.

Table 29. Attitudes related to fees and charges

	Respondents	
	Number	Percent
For the policy	20	48
Against the policy	18	43
No decision	4	9

Of the twenty respondents who favored the fees and charges policy, five indicated support was given only for a fee for out-of-county residents. Several comments were made by those who supported the user fee policy:

- a) People who use the park and recreation facilities most should provide additional financial support for their management (6 responses). It was also indicated on several occasions that such a policy would increase the chances of gaining

public support for a future millage issue by curbing the opposition from non-park-users who feel they are supporting park and recreation facilities to an unjustifiable extent.

- b) Use of an entrance sticker system similar to that for state parks was recommended as a means to administer such a policy (4 responses).
- c) The commission should attempt to augment such revenues through administration of special interest, revenue-generating activities, i.e., softball league playoff games, carnivals or fairs, rock concerts, etc. (4 responses).
- d) Recommended the use of a county population survey to determine a reasonable fee (5 responses).

Comments from those who opposed the policy included the following:

- a) The commission should attempt to gain necessary supportive funding from a millage tax and not double-charge county residents by using a fee as well (5 responses).
- b) Entrance fees would generally discourage or eliminate park usage by people who may have the greatest need but the least ability to pay (6 responses).

Question 5: In assuming the role of a Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission member, what recommendations would you make, if any, in terms of your current knowledge of the commission's efforts in program planning, development, operations and public relations?

This question was designed to explore any general recommendations the sample respondents might have. Responses were limited, and it was apparent that exposure to the commission and its operations was limited to controversial issues or topics of a general nature. The majority of responses are noted below:

- a) Eight respondents indicated concern over what was felt to be an unfair distribution of county park facilities throughout the county. Most of these respondents personally resided or represented residents living in the southwest part of the county, where there are few county park facilities.
- b) Three respondents recommended improving park toilet facilities, commenting that there were presently too few such facilities and that existing toilets were not being adequately maintained.
- c) Three respondents recommended better control and supervision over park maintenance and lifeguard seasonal staffs.
- d) Additional control and supervision over park users to curb vandalism (2 responses).

- e) Fewer overall park restrictions (2 responses).
- f) Change policy affecting the appointment of commission members to insure greater representation from the average citizen, i.e., labor and minority representatives (2 responses).
- g) Additional drinking fountains in the picnic areas (2 responses).

Question 6: Do you feel confident that if the Parks and Recreation Commission were able to follow through on your proposed recommendations and/or take action on your noted criticisms, that the majority of county residents whom you represent would support the commission in its future efforts to gain financial assistance from the county?

The purpose of this question was to establish the level of confidence each respondent had in terms of the representativeness of his views of his or her constituency. Approximately 70% of the respondents indicated a positive response with relatively few qualifying conditions. The majority of union representatives qualified their responses by stating that each local union should be furnished with appropriate campaign information early enough for its distribution and subsequent review. An important note made several times was that all publicity materials be geared toward the educational levels of rank and file employees.

The remaining 30% of the respondents indicated they could not or would not predict the support of the groups they represented. These 10 respondents indicated that many conditions would need to exist before such financial support could be achieved. Specific examples cited were the type of financial proposal made and its timing, and, more importantly, the adequacy and quality of its presentation, including the ability to justify the need for additional dollars to both city and rural county residents.

Question 7: When you and your family visit the county parks, do you feel they are safe and well maintained?

The results are given in Table 30.

Table 30. Attitudes related to park maintenance and safety

		Respondents	
		Number	Percent
Are they safe?	Yes:	37	88
	No:	1	2
	No response:	4	9
Are they well maintained?	Yes:	35	83
	No:	—	—
	No response:	7	17

Only a limited number of the sample had had or had been willing to take the opportunity to utilize county park facilities. Having busy schedules, and being of the upper middle or better economic class, many of the respondents stated that they traveled out of the county for their limited recreation activity. Yet as indicated above, the majority of the sample felt they had had an adequate exposure to the park system to be able to respond without additional supportive comment.

Question 8: In evaluating the overall progress of the Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission in the last four years, would you say the job they are doing is poor, inadequate, adequate, good or excellent?

The results are shown in Table 31.

Table 31. Community leaders' evaluation of performance of the county parks and recreation commission

	Respondents	
	Number	Percent
Poor	1	2
Inadequate	5	12
Adequate	8	19
Good	15	36
Excellent	12	28
Don't know	1	2

Four of the negative responses were felt to be based on specific reasons of several special interest group representatives. As a whole, the sample respondents were favorably impressed with the accomplishments of the commission and highly praised the work of its present administrator, Mr. Ken Smithee.

Question 9: Miscellaneous comments and recommendations.

The following is a review of some miscellaneous comments brought out in the course of the interviews. In speaking with several union representatives, the issue over the use of county ball diamonds was continually brought up and interpreted in different ways. It was recommended to the commission that they make an effort to clarify their position on this issue or similar ones that may arise in the future, and disseminate this policy to key union representatives. In this regard, further communication with members of the recreation committee of the regional U.A.W. office might be a worthwhile effort.

Minority group representatives were generally displeased concerning the accessibility of existing county parks to many disadvantaged urban residents. A possible solution is the establishment of a working committee, to include representatives of urban minor-

ity agencies, that would explore alternative ways in which the delivery of existing and future county park and recreation services can be improved to the non-mobile urban resident. Possible alternatives include the development of a bus transit system and county facilities within city limits.

Several interviews with representatives of special interest user groups indicated that a problem in communications exists, noting that strong unfavorable reactions have been recorded as a result of what were

felt to be unkept promises for the development of special use facilities.

The majority of sample respondents indicated they would encourage the commission to make a presentation before their group when a new millage campaign gets underway. It was indicated that the previous public relations campaign was lacking and that all efforts to keep these representative groups informed and involved would be beneficial.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The general citizenry appears to be fairly well pleased with the county park system. The commission received relatively high ratings from all groups involved and from the sample as a whole. The number of complaints concerning the park system was not excessive. The most consistent complaints from both park users and non-users concerned a need for improved maintenance and increased supervision and enforcement of rules. Regarding future planning and development, five areas were consistently mentioned more frequently than any others: swimming or water sports areas, sports facilities of all kinds, trails for walking and biking, camping and children's activity areas.

A little over half the county residents appear to be using the parks, but very significant differences exist between different age groups and locations within the county. Older adults and senior citizens do not use the parks to the extent younger persons do, and they are alienated toward further development of the park system. More needs to be done to attract these persons, perhaps in the form of recreation programming services.

General knowledge about the commission and its park system is somewhat lacking; only about 60% of park users were aware the park they were using was operated by the commission. In addition, non-county parks were mentioned 90 times as being county parks visited.

It is readily apparent from survey results that by far the majority of park use is generated by Genesee County residents. Less than 13% of all park users were non-county residents.

The question concerning problems over use of the parks by undesirable persons was an attempt to detect and measure the extent of any racial or ethnic conflicts existing in the county in regard to the park system. Such matters are inherently difficult to get at and the results were not definitive. Nineteen percent of park users stated that they were aware of such prob-

lems, but only a small portion of these persons attributed the problems to racial matters. However, significantly more Caucasians were aware of such problems than were Negroes, indicating that in reality a substantial portion of these problems may be racially oriented. In addition, in the registered voter survey, which assured a greater degree of anonymity, 36.1% of the sample stated that they were aware of such undesirable people problems.

County residents are overwhelmingly in favor of supporting a park and recreation program from public tax monies, but efforts to increase present levels of funding will be difficult. Slightly less than half the county's registered voters would be willing to increase the current park millage at this time. However, the majority of opposition is located within the older age groups of the county and within certain geographical areas, and expanded efforts to reach these people through special programs may prove helpful. A better public relations program is also needed if a millage increase is attempted, and close contact with community leaders is essential to gain their support. An increase of up to $\frac{3}{4}$ mill is acceptable to most of those in favor of such an increase.

The most frequently cited reason in all cases for the defeat of last year's financing proposals was the concern over high tax levels. This may be the single most important variable in the success or failure of future millage issues, and care should be taken in selecting a time when economic conditions appear to be most favorable for the introduction of such an issue.

Consideration should be given to the use of entrance fees or user charges as an alternative to tax increases for increasing future financing. Seventy percent of the county's registered voters favor the use of such fees and only 57% of park users are opposed. A fee of 50¢ per car is considered reasonable by almost all of those in favor of such fees. It should be noted that increasing the park millage and imposing user fees is an either/or situation and it would probably

be unwise to seek both. Those who are willing to increase the millage do not favor the use of a user fee and vice versa.

Finally, both park users and the county's registered voters favor the development of existing parks as opposed to continued parkland acquisition as the emphasis of commission action in the future. The county

has seen rapid expansion of its park and recreation system in the past 5 years, and its citizens appear to be anxious to take greater advantage of what is now available to them. The issue of whether the county has enough parklands to adequately serve the needs of its citizens was about equally divided between park users and registered voters.

STRATEGIES FOR GENERATING SUPPORT FOR INCREASED TAXES FOR COUNTY PARKS

In considering the issue of public financial support of county parks, the context of the last millage and bond election must be considered. The measures were decisively defeated by a 4 to 1 margin. These measures were submitted to the people during the 1972 primary elections. During that time there was a great deal of uncertainty associated with the national political climate of the economy. Possibly of greater significance was the intense competition for tax resources during that election. Several issues related to school financing were up for vote at the same time. Not a single park and recreation financing election in the state was passed during that election.

The climate for submitting the issue to the people for another vote is still very uncertain. Politically, Watergate has subsided but the economy is a big question mark. The automobile industry will possibly be adversely affected in 1975 if there is a significant downturn in the economy. This would adversely affect the number of jobs, the amount of unemployment, and the amount of tax monies generated through the general fund.

The following points are proposed for consideration in submitting further bonding or millage proposals to the people:

1. Serious distinction should be made between efforts to maintain the status quo in the park system and significant expansion efforts either in the form of major capital improvements or land acquisition. Very likely a millage renewal and perhaps an increase will be asked for. In our judgment, this millage should be as low as practicable— $\frac{3}{4}$ mill or less. Significant expansion efforts such as a children's zoo or other major developments should probably be financed by bonds. In making a case for approval of these monies, stress should be placed on the necessity to pass the millage. Any bonding should not be tied too closely to the millage in campaign publicity because its extra weight might sink the entire ship. In fact, it is the authors' considered judgment that millage should be submitted to the people by itself with proposed bonding sub-

mitted at a later election so as not to confuse the issue.

2. There is a very consistent pattern in all three surveys of preference for development over additional acquisition. No attempt should be made to acquire additional large tracts of land at this time.
3. In promoting the millage, as much electronic media as possible should be used and the theme should probably be something on the order of "Look what we have, let's not lose it." A strong subemphasis should be upon the relatively small cost of the millage to each individual taxpayer. If the media could be encouraged to run a series of stories on the growth of and level of service provided by the county park system a few months prior to the election, it would likely be helpful. Commission personnel could provide much assistance and impetus for such an effort.
4. In the promotional campaign, personal contact should be emphasized. Apparently pamphlets and written promotional materials have had very little beneficial impact in the past. The use of personal contact through booths and audiovisual presentations in shopping malls and perhaps high schools and union meetings might be very effective.
5. The authors further recommend that thought be given to combining the Flint Park and Recreation Department with the Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission. There are several reasons for this recommendation. First, the public does not seem to be able to distinguish among agencies providing parks and recreation services. Second, there was a strong preference for the county to provide more active recreation opportunities. Third, a combined city-county effort might create the critical mass to more efficiently and effectively provide for public services on a broad spectrum of recreation and parks fronts. The charge to consider such a move was not within the original purpose of this research, but indications of possible wisdom of such action surfaced several times.

Copies of the surveys mentioned in this report are available through MSU's Department of Park and Recreation Resources.

