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Public Recreation on Private Lands – The Land Owners' Perspective
Michigan State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

Research Report

Donald F. Holecek, Richard D. Westfall, Park and Recreation Resources

Issued June 1977

12 pages

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RESEARCH REPORT

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RECREATION AND TOURISM

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Public Recreation on Private Lands —The Land Owners' Perspective¹



Public Recreation on Private Lands —The Land Owners' Perspective¹

By Donald F. Holecek and Richard D. Westfall²

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally many rural landowners have informally allowed the public to use their land for recreation such as hunting and fishing. Today, many recreationists, rural landowners and state and federal governmental agencies share an interest in more formal arrangements for facilitating and controlling public access to, and use of, private land.

This interest in formal arrangements to permit public recreation on private property has long been in evidence. However, today's interest level is likely higher than ever before because of growing concern with the broader issue of land use. Several other reasons specific to the above mentioned groups are pertinent and briefly highlighted in the following paragraphs.

A growing number of U.S. citizens participate in a broad category of activities referred to as outdoor recreation. Most of these activities require large, open areas. Out of necessity, urbanites have concentrated their outdoor recreation on day use activities provided by public recreation areas near their homes (7). For many, the resulting crowding has lessened the "quality" of the recreational experience and a growing number have sought access to privately owned land surrounding urban areas to snowmobile, hunt and pursue other outdoor recreation activities.

Rural landowners near major population centers have witnessed the increasing number of people using their land for recreation. This increase has led to conflicts resulting in the closing of some private properties to public recreationists. However, posting property against trespass is frequently not a solution be-

cause the dispersed nature of the activities makes enforcement difficult.

State and federal agencies responsible for providing the public with recreational opportunities have responded to a perceived need for more recreational open space near urban areas by attempting to purchase more land in these areas. However, the agencies have met with only partial success. Although land prices have skyrocketed, most of their land acquisition budgets have not kept pace with rising land prices (4). As a result, some agencies have started to examine the practice of relying upon outright purchase of land to provide recreational open space.

Many of these agencies have solicited contributions of private land for the public estate in response to inadequate land procurement budgets and the need for recreational open space (6). In addition, land procurement techniques such as leasing and easements have been investigated by some agencies as a way to open up private land to public recreation.

Characteristics of hunting, snowmobiling and hiking make them attractive candidates for non-purchase land acquisition programs. Requiring little, if any, supervision or facility development, they are compatible with other land uses, are limited to specific seasons and have always occurred on private and public land.

Current Programs

Many state and federal agencies are responsible for providing public recreational opportunities or helping rural land owners. Leasing rural land for public recreation has been attempted to increase recreational opportunities to the public and provide an additional source of income to rural landowners.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service operated a "Pilot Public Access Program" in 50 counties in 10 states from 1972 to 1974. The predominate recreational activity in this program was hunting (3).

¹This research was funded by McIntire-Stennis Federal funds and Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Park and Recreation Resources; and Graduate Assistant, Department of Park and Recreation Resources, and Doctoral Student, Department of Forestry.



Fig. 1. Cross-country skiing is an ideal recreational activity for public access program consideration because it requires minimal site development and has little impact on other land uses. (Photo courtesy of Michigan Travel Commission)

Michigan's Department of Natural Resources has operated a land leasing program for snowmobiling in southern lower Michigan since 1972 (5). These programs have been initiated on a small scale to determine if more extensive and permanent programs are feasible.

The results are not yet conclusive, in part due to the small amount of documented research as evidenced by the following statement from a recent land use task force report: "Land use studies do not deal with the most recent developments — purchase and leaseback [and] easements . . ." (1). Research has indicated the programs are a success. Other findings have suggested they are not a viable method of increasing recreation opportunities (2).

Considering interest in identifying and testing alternatives for public access to private lands, focusing on landowner willingness to allow public recreation on their properties is appropriate. In the summer of 1975, a study was conducted focusing upon rural landowners, their land, their willingness to allow public access without inducements and their willingness to participate in programs to increase public recreational use of their properties.

Study Area and Procedures

Because of the small research budget, selection of sample landowners to participate in the study was constrained. Furthermore, the nature of the informa-

tion needed from landowners could only be obtained via a personal in-depth interview with each responding landowner. Consequently, the State of Michigan was chosen as the study area.

However, Michigan's land ownership and recreational use patterns are typical of many states, particularly in the East, and it experiences the problems mentioned above. Thus, the results from this study have some significance to several other states. Kent County, in the Western portion of Southern lower Michigan, was selected as representative of the urban-fringe areas where public access programs appear most appropriate.

Kent County consists of an urban area dominated by the city of Grand Rapids (1970 population, 197,649) and the urban-fringe.³ The rural area of Kent County was divided into six regions. Representative townships from each region were chosen for selecting a sample of landowners. Ten percent of all properties on the six townships' tax roles of 11 or more acres were randomly selected and their owners identified.⁴ The resulting sample of landowners to be interviewed numbered 239.

The landowners were contacted for interviews of which 195 (82%) were completed in June of 1975. Non-response to the interview was generally the result of refusal or the inability to schedule interviews with landowners whose telephone numbers were not obtainable. Out-of-state owners, transfer of ownership, and inability to contact owners at scheduled interview times constituted the remainder of non-response. Though not feasible to eliminate entirely the possibility of non-response bias from the study's findings, we are reasonably confident that non-response bias does not limit acceptance of the findings (8).

General Findings

As mentioned, information on rural landowners, their land, willingness to allow public access and participate in public access programs was desired for better understanding the public access to private land issue. In this section, the relevant information from the 195 responding Kent County landowners is summarized under four headings: land, landowners, public access and, public access programs.

Land

Each landowner was identified with a particular parcel of land in Kent County although some individ-

³Urban-fringe was defined in this study as the non-urban area of Kent County within a one hour commuting time from the city of Grand Rapids. This area comprised all non-urban townships in Kent County.

⁴Eleven acres was chosen as the lower limit in order to exclude purely residential lots, and eliminate the disproportionate effect of the numerous ten acre parcels of land in Kent County which have resulted, in part, from subdivision regulations.

uals owned more than one parcel. In many cases, these additional parcels were adjacent to the sample parcel, but the information in this section pertains to only the sample parcels. This linking of responding landowners to the specific property should be kept in mind while interpreting the findings.

The sample parcel size distribution is given in Fig. 2. The mean size was 47.6 acres, ranging from 11 acres to 195 acres. The small average size of these parcels reduces their recreational value because they do not offer sufficient open space for many recreational activities.

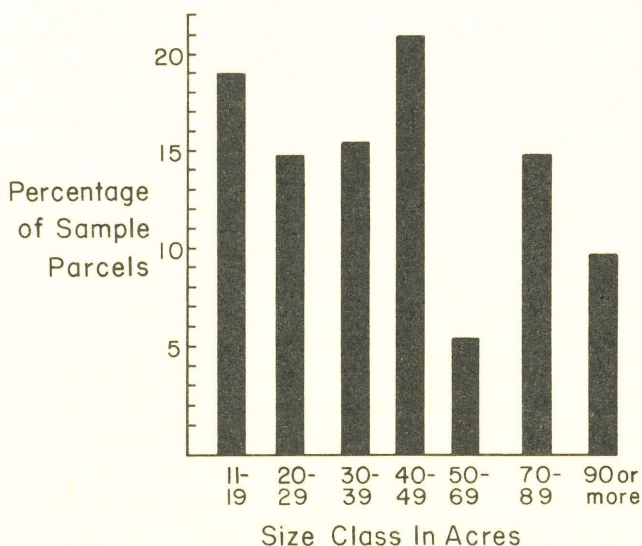


Fig. 2. Sample parcel size distribution.

These data are for only the sample parcels and not for all land these individuals owned in Kent County. For example, the average quantity of land in Kent County owned by the respondents was 112.5 acres, but total ownership was not necessarily contiguous.

To determine if these properties were suitable for recreation, the sample parcels were classified into seven types of land cover as shown in Fig. 3. As Fig. 3 illustrates, a sizable percentage of the parcels could be used for some form of recreation. The significant amount of land in "Woods," "Brush" and "Marsh" may indicate land with a definite appeal to recreationists.

Even land in the "Crops" and "Open Fields" categories might be suitable for recreation at various times during the year. For example, a farmer would probably not appreciate hikers traversing newly planted cropland during the planting and growing season. The same farmer, however, might permit snowmobiling

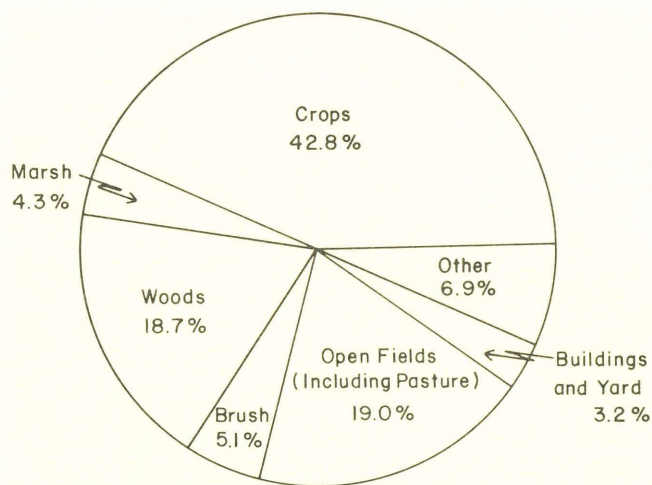


Fig. 3. Existing (1975) land cover distribution of total sample parcel acreage.

and hunting during late fall and winter when the land may be idle.

Posting is sometimes used as an indication of landowner willingness to allow public access, so the landowners interviewed were asked if they posted any of their land. Of the 180 landowners who responded to this question, 36.1% indicated a portion of their land was posted. Most of this land (90.8%) was completely posted.



Fig. 4. This typical southern Michigan landscape of mixed woods, fields and brush is attractive to hunters, as well as other public recreationists. (Photo courtesy of Michigan Travel Commission)

The landowners' reasons for posting are given in Table 1. "Hunters" was the most often cited reason, but actual objections regarding hunters were not specified.

TABLE 1. Sample Landowners' Reasons for Posting

| Reason | Number | Percent |
|-----------------|--------|---------|
| Hunters | 33 | 51.6 |
| Damages | 18 | 28.1 |
| Privacy | 6 | 9.4 |
| Other | 7 | 10.9 |
| Total | 64 | 100.0 |
| No Reason Given | 1 | |

The land parcels in this study averaged about 40 acres in size—relatively small when considering such properties for self contained dispersed recreation potential. However, many owners of these parcels own other property in Kent County and frequently these additional parcels are contiguous to the sample parcel. Thus, the average contiguous ownership is considerably larger than the average 40 acre sample parcel. The vast majority of the space in these land parcels is suitable for recreational use, and slightly more than one-third of these parcels are now posted.

Landowners

A landowner's socioeconomic characteristics may have a bearing on his willingness to allow public access. A number of questions aimed at eliciting such information were included in the survey instrument.

The landowners' age distribution is shown in Table 2. The mean age was 53.8 years, indicating that most of the individuals surveyed were middle-aged or older.

The distribution for years of education for the landowners is given in Table 3. The mean figure was 11.6

TABLE 2. Sample Landowners' Age Distribution

| Age | Number | Percent |
|--------------|--------|---------|
| 20 - 29 | 7 | 3.9 |
| 30 - 39 | 19 | 10.7 |
| 40 - 49 | 38 | 21.3 |
| 50 - 59 | 53 | 29.8 |
| 60 - 69 | 38 | 21.3 |
| 70 - 79 | 17 | 9.6 |
| 80+ | 6 | 3.4 |
| Total | 178 | 100.0 |
| Non-Response | 17 | |

TABLE 3. Sample Landowners' Years of Education Distribution

| Years | Number | Percent |
|--------------|--------|---------|
| 0 - 8 | 36 | 21.2 |
| 9 - 12 | 94 | 55.3 |
| 13+ | 40 | 23.5 |
| Total | 170 | 100.0 |
| Non-Response | 25 | |

years, indicating that almost half of the owners had completed high school.

The landowners' 1974 family income is shown in Table 4, and indicates that more than two-thirds of the owners (68.9%) had family incomes of \$10,000 or more in 1974.

The occupational breakdown for the landowners is given in Table 5. "Farmer" represented the largest occupational category (28.9%). It is interesting that "white-collar" and "blue-collar" groupings also encompassed sizeable proportions of the landowners. Thus, slightly more than 70 percent of all landowners surveyed did not consider their occupation to be farming which is likely an important factor in their landownership objectives.

TABLE 4. Sample Landowners' 1974 Family Income

| Income | Number | Percent |
|---------------------|--------|---------|
| \$0 - \$ 9,999 | 50 | 31.5 |
| \$10,000 - \$14,999 | 39 | 24.7 |
| \$15,000 - \$24,999 | 35 | 22.2 |
| \$25,000+ | 34 | 21.5 |
| Total | 158 | 100.0 |
| Non-Response | 37 | |

TABLE 5. Sample Landowners' Occupational Distribution

| Occupation | Number | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Professional/Technical | 19 | 10.6 |
| Manager/Administrative | 21 | 11.7 |
| Sales/Clerical | 9 | 5.0 |
| Craftsmen | 31 | 17.2 |
| Operative/Laborer | 14 | 7.8 |
| Farmer | 52 | 28.9 |
| Service | 1 | .5 |
| Retired | 22 | 12.2 |
| Unemployed (including housewives) | 11 | 6.1 |
| Total | 180 | 100.0 |
| Non-Response | 15 | |

A landowner's ownership objective(s) may be a clue to his position on public access, and so the landowners were asked why they acquired their parcels. Fifteen distinct ownership objectives were identified and condensed into seven closely related objective categories for reporting purposes. Table 6 indicates that only a slight majority of respondents (54.3%) apparently own land primarily for its income producing potential, i.e., "Farming," "Investment" and "Other (Economic)."

The fact that an individual lives on, or near, his land may affect his willingness to allow public access, so landowners were classified according to their residence location as shown in Table 7. As indicated, a large proportion (nearly 75%) of the landowners lived on, or adjacent to, their parcels.

TABLE 6. Sample Landowners' Ownership Objectives

| Objective | Number | Percent |
|--|--------|---------|
| Farming | 61 | 31.3 |
| Rural Environment | 53 | 27.2 |
| Investment | 25 | 12.8 |
| Family Reasons or Inheritance ^(a) | 13 | 6.7 |
| Recreation | 6 | 3.1 |
| Other (Economic) | 20 | 10.2 |
| Other (Non-economic) | 17 | 8.7 |
| Total | 195 | 100.0 |

^(a)Although "inheritance" was not among the ownership objectives listed by study interviewers, several respondents specified "inheritance" as their prime ownership objective. Since this response was not anticipated, study interviewers were not instructed to probe for a more specific ownership objective as might have been elicited if this relatively small number of respondents had been asked why they retained the property they had inherited.

TABLE 7. Sample Landowners' Residence Location

| Residence | Number | Percent |
|------------------------|--------|---------|
| On the parcel | 104 | 53.3 |
| Adjacent to the Parcel | 37 | 19.0 |
| In the Neighborhood | 17 | 8.7 |
| In a Nearby City | 22 | 11.3 |
| Other | 15 | 7.7 |
| Total | 195 | 100.0 |

It is possible that an individual's use of his own land for recreation may influence his attitude towards allowing use by others, so the landowners were asked if they hiked (walking for pleasure), hunted, or snowmobiled on their parcels. Of the 179 owners responding, 66.3% indicated that they hiked on their land, 43% hunted and 31.8% snowmobiled.

Several characteristics of the responding landowners may have some direct impact on their attitudes to public access programs. Their average age (53.8 years), for example, suggests that they are likely to be more "conservative" and less responsive to innovation than would a younger population.⁵ They are not typically farmers by occupation and do not necessarily view their primary purpose of land ownership as income generating. Therefore, in designing public access programs for these landowners, incentives other than the promise of additional earnings may need to be included if the programs are to be favorably received.

Public Access

The primary purpose of the study was to determine landowner willingness to allow public access for rec-

⁵Although this statement is included here primarily for illustrative purposes, there is considerable evidence that supports the assertion that an older population is likely to be more conservative than a younger population. The following excerpt from N. D. Glenn's article, "Aging and Conservatism," which was published in the September 1974 issue of *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* is an apropos summary statement on this point: "... the preponderance of evidence from contemporary Western societies shows that at any point in time older people as a whole are more conservative than young adults."

reation. It is obvious that a landowner's attitude toward access may change depending on the recreational activity under investigation. Therefore, hiking, hunting and snowmobiling were investigated.

These activities were selected because they appeared to represent a wide recreational activity intensity⁶ range. It was assumed that most landowners would view hiking as less intensive than hunting, and hunting would be viewed as less intensive than snowmobiling. Furthermore, many landowners are familiar with these activities and all three are common in this area of Michigan.

The landowners were asked if they allowed the public (not family or friends) to hike, hunt or snowmobile on their parcels. If the owners said they had received no requests for the activities, they were asked if they would allow the activities upon request. The landowners' responses to both questions for the three activities are given in Table 8.

As shown in Table 8, a majority of the landowners indicated that they did allow, or would if requested, all three of the activities. Furthermore, willingness to allow the activity was negatively related to the ac-



Fig. 5. A large majority of landowners surveyed indicated a willingness to allow hunting on their property if the hunter contacted the owner and asked permission to hunt. (Photo courtesy of Michigan Department of Natural Resources)

⁶Intensity, as used in this report, is utilized as a proxy for a number of recreational activity attributes which could impact landowners or their land. These attributes include such factors as: noise levels, visibility of participants, and potential for damaging property and/or people.

TABLE 8. Sample Landowners' Willingness to Allow Public Access to Their Parcels

| | | Number | Percent |
|--|--------------|--------|---------|
| Do you, or would you ^(a) , allow the public to hike on your land? | Yes | 139 | 78.1 |
| | No | 39 | 21.9 |
| | Total | 178 | 100.0 |
| | Non-Response | 17 | |
| Do you, or would you ^(a) , allow the public to hunt on your land? | Yes | 119 | 66.5 |
| | No | 60 | 33.5 |
| | Total | 179 | 100.0 |
| | Non-Response | 16 | |
| Do you, or would you ^(a) , allow the public to snowmobile on your land? | Yes | 92 | 52.9 |
| | No | 82 | 47.1 |
| | Total | 174 | 100.0 |
| | Non-Response | 21 | |

^(a)If respondents indicated that no one had requested or expressed an interest in using their properties for this activity, they were then asked if they would, if requested, permit use of their land for this activity. In the percentages reported here, responses to both the, "Do you . . . ?" and the follow up, "Would you . . . ?" queries are aggregated. Slightly more than one third of responding landowners (34.1%) stated that they received "No Requests" to hike on their land while the "No Request" rate for hunting and snowmobiling was 2.2% and 9.7% respectively.

tivity's intensity.⁷ More owners did/would allow hiking (78.1%) than hunting (66.5%), and more owners did/would allow hunting than snowmobiling (52.9%).

The landowners that did not, or would not, allow public access were asked their reasons for not granting permission. Their primary reason, as shown in Table 9, was the "Damages" category. Though it is possible some respondents cited concern with damage to their properties because they did not or would not reveal their true concerns; the relatively high frequency of this category deserves special attention by agencies contemplating sponsoring public access to private land programs. Insuring landowners that damages from participating in such programs would be minimal and/or they would be compensated for damages appears to be a contributing factor to program success.

The landowners that did allow public access for the activities were asked to estimate the number of hikers, hunters and snowmobilers they observed on their parcels per week during the activity's season. For example, the owners were asked how many hunters they observed on their parcels per week during the fall. Their estimates are given in Table 10. Based on these estimates, public use appears to be light with the possible exception of snowmobiling.

Although a landowner may allow public access for recreation, he may have some reservations about doing so. To examine these concerns, four issues were studied: damages, control, liability and number.

⁷This conclusion, though strongly suggested by the simple tabulation presented in Table 8, was supported by subjecting the data to a formal statistical analysis. The statistical test employed was the t-test (the "paired comparison" technique). "Yes" responses were assigned a numerical value of 1 and "no" responses a value of 2. The resulting mean responses, 1.229 for hiking, 1.335 for hunting and 1.480 for snowmobiling were paired and subjected to the t-test. The mean differences for all possible pairing combinations were found to be significant at the .01 significance level.

TABLE 9. Sample Landowners' Reasons for Refusing Public Access

| Reason | Number | Percent |
|----------------------------------|--------|---------|
| HIKING | | |
| Damages | 20 | 57.1 |
| Control | 6 | 17.1 |
| Privacy/Security | 3 | 11.4 |
| Other | 2 | 8.6 |
| Total | 35 | 100.0 |
| No Reason Given | | |
| HUNTING | | |
| Damages | 20 | 35.7 |
| Safety | 11 | 19.6 |
| Control | 9 | 16.1 |
| Moral Considerations | 8 | 14.3 |
| Want to Increase Game Population | 3 | 5.4 |
| Other | 5 | 8.9 |
| Total | 56 | 100.0 |
| No Reason Given | 4 | |
| SNOWMOBILING | | |
| Damages | 54 | 69.2 |
| Control | 8 | 10.3 |
| Noise | 8 | 10.3 |
| Privacy/Security | 4 | 5.1 |
| Other | 4 | 5.1 |
| Total | 78 | 100.0 |
| No Reason Given | 4 | |

TABLE 10. Sample Landowners' Estimates of Public Recreationists Observed on Their Parcels

| Number/Week | Number of Owners | Percent |
|---------------------|------------------|---------|
| HIKING | | |
| 1 - 5 | 36 | 67.9 |
| 6 - 10 | 13 | 24.5 |
| 11+ | 4 | 7.6 |
| Total | 53 | 100.0 |
| No Estimate Given | 36 | |
| HUNTING | | |
| 1 - 5 | 51 | 54.2 |
| 6 - 10 | 26 | 27.7 |
| 11+ | 17 | 18.1 |
| Total | 94 | 100.0 |
| No Estimate Given | 23 | |
| SNOWMOBILING | | |
| 1 - 5 | 28 | 40.3 |
| 6 - 10 | 21 | 29.2 |
| 11+ | 22 | 30.5 |
| Total | 71 | 100.0 |
| No Estimate Given | 15 | |

As defined, damages refer to the destruction to an owner's land or property; control refers to an owner's ability, or the lack of it, to regulate public use of his land; liability refers to the owner's legal liability resulting from injury to the public while on his land; and number refers to the number of public recreationists that would use the owner's land.

After explaining the general meaning of damages, control, liability and number to the landowners, they were asked how important these issues were with respect to public recreation on their parcels. The owner's responses are shown in Table 11. A majority of the landowners were concerned with each of the issues even though most of the owners did or would allow public access for the three recreational activities.

Responses indicated the majority of landowners felt number to be "very important." However, it was obvious to the study interviewers that after providing the definition on number, and with additional prompting, the concept of number remained ambiguous to many landowners. Consequently, the response to this questionnaire item may not be especially useful.

The responses to the remaining three items, though basically understood by respondents, may not have yielded highly meaningful results because of the "leading"⁸ introduction employed by study interviewers.

TABLE 11. Sample Landowners' Concern with Damages, Control and Liability

| Concern | Number | Percent |
|----------------------|--------|---------|
| DAMAGES | | |
| Very Important | 107 | 61.1 |
| Somewhat Important | 44 | 25.1 |
| Not at all Important | 24 | 13.8 |
| Total | 175 | 100.0 |
| Non-Response | 20 | |
| CONTROL | | |
| Very Important | 95 | 54.9 |
| Somewhat Important | 50 | 28.9 |
| Not at all Important | 28 | 16.2 |
| Total | 173 | 100.0 |
| Non-Response | 22 | |
| LIABILITY | | |
| Very Important | 111 | 64.2 |
| Somewhat Important | 36 | 20.8 |
| Not at all Important | 25 | 15.0 |
| Total | 173 | 100.0 |
| Non-Response | 22 | |
| NUMBER | | |
| Very Important | 89 | 51.7 |
| Somewhat Important | 56 | 32.6 |
| Not at all Important | 27 | 15.7 |
| Total | 172 | 100.0 |
| Non-Response | 23 | |

⁸This series of questions was introduced by the following statement: "Some landowners have indicated several reasons why they are hesitant to allow the public to use their land for recreation. One of these reasons is the possibility of damage to property, etc." The wording of this introduction is such that some responding landowners may have been influenced to state that they shared these concerns with their fellow landowners even though, in fact, these concerns were of little importance to them.

It appears most landowners do or would permit the public to use their property for recreational activities. However, landowners' willingness to permit access is related to the recreation activity involved.

As the intensity of the activity increases, landowner willingness to permit access decreases. Thus, nearly 80% of the landowners interviewed do or would allow the public to hike on their land while only about 50% would permit similar access for public snowmobiling. Landowners interviewed generally reported light use of their property by recreationists.

Low use is likely a factor in the landowners' generally positive attitude toward permitting free public access to their properties. Though this group of landowners viewed recreationists favorably, the vast majority felt "Damages," "Control," "Liability" and "Number" were "very important" concerns regarding the public access issue.

Public Access Programs

Although a landowner may allow public access to his property he may not wish to participate in a public program designed to facilitate such access. Thus, a number of questions dealing with public access programs were included. The concept of public access programs was explained to the landowner.⁹ They then were asked if they would favor participating in similar programs for the recreational activities of hiking, hunting and snowmobiling.¹⁰

Only 27.9% of responding landowners indicated they would favor participating in a program for hiking. Of those responding, only 26.9% indicated they would favor participating in a program for hunting. Only 26.2% of the respondents reacted favorably to participating in a program involving snowmobiling.

Although a majority of landowners did or would allow public access for the three recreational activities, a much smaller proportion were in favor of participating in public access programs for those same activities.

Those landowners that did favor participation in public access programs were asked the yearly payment per acre they would require. Their responses are given in Table 12. Most of these owners desired payments approximately the same as used in pilot public access programs, around \$2/acre/year.

⁹The concept of public access programs the study interviewers attempted to convey to responding landowners involved a payment to the landowner by a public agency for permitting public access to his property for the recreation activities of hiking, hunting and snowmobiling. The specifics of such programs were not presented to landowners. It was hoped that this approach would yield the landowner's attitude with respect to the general concept of public access programs.

¹⁰A very small number of the landowners (6.2%) indicated that they were participating in pilot public access programs at that time (1975) or had participated in such programs in the past.

TABLE 12. Sample Landowners' Preferred Payment for Participating in Public Access Programs

| Payment | Number | Percent |
|------------------------|--------|---------|
| HIKING | | |
| \$0 - \$2.00/acre/year | 19 | 50.0 |
| \$2.01 - \$4.00 | 14 | 36.8 |
| \$4.01 - \$6.00 | 3 | 7.9 |
| \$6.00+ | 2 | 5.3 |
| Total | 38 | 100.0 |
| No Payment Given | 10 | |
| HUNTING | | |
| \$0 - \$2.00/acre/year | 15 | 36.7 |
| \$2.01 - \$4.00 | 19 | 46.3 |
| \$4.01 - \$6.00 | 6 | 14.6 |
| \$6.00+ | 1 | 2.4 |
| Total | 41 | 100.0 |
| No Payment Given | 6 | |
| SNOWMOBILING | | |
| \$0 - \$2.00/acre/year | 7 | 26.9 |
| \$2.01 - \$4.00 | 12 | 46.2 |
| \$4.01 - \$6.00 | 5 | 19.2 |
| \$6.00+ | 2 | 7.7 |
| Total | 26 | 100.0 |
| No Payment Given | 9 | |

Of those landowners favoring public access program participation for at least one of the recreational activities investigated, 93.1% indicated that a year-to-year rather than a five year payment contract was most acceptable. Possibly, these data suggest that responding landowners favoring public access programs have some reservations about them and are hesitant to enter into long term arrangements.

This suggests that shorter term programs will meet with greater acceptance. Unfortunately, shorter term programs will likely be more expensive to administer and using public funds to improve private properties' recreation potential may not be economically justifiable.

It appears that only about 25% of the landowners interviewed favored the concept of public access programs as conveyed to them by the study interviewers. Such a result does not appear reasonable because the majority of landowners interviewed permit free access to their properties. Since this result was not anticipated, a specific explanation was not sought during the landowner interviews.

However, three subjectively derived explanations are offered for consideration:

First, most landowners interviewed had not seriously considered the concept of public access programs before being interviewed. Thus, acceptance of the concept may have been low because one typically responds negatively to a change whose consequences (positive or negative) are unknown.

Second, as defined to the responding landowners, the concept of public access programs included only a financial incentive. Given landowner concerns with

"Damages," "Control" and other factors, it is entirely possible that the concept did not adequately address enough of the issues landowners deem important regarding public access.

Third, from informal discussions, it appeared to interviewers that many landowners associated government sponsored programs of this nature with bothersome bureaucratic requirements. It is likely many respondents felt such requirements introduced a cost which exceeded the monetary benefit. It is probably unwise to conclude that this group of landowners would be opposed to public access programs, especially if the program's elements are clearly explained to include documentation of the expected consequences.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a desire, especially among urban Americans for more recreational open space. But because of rising land prices and diminishing governmental land acquisition budgets, there has been a growing interest in opening up more privately-owned land to public recreationists via nonpurchase land procurement methods such as leasing. Before any large scale programs of this nature are initiated, information about the receptiveness of landowners seems desirable. The purpose of this study was to develop some of this information.

The majority of landowners interviewed in Kent County, Michigan, do, or would if asked, allow public access for hiking, hunting and snowmobiling. The landowners were concerned, however, with damages, control, liability and the number of recreationists. An important finding showed the landowners, even though willing to allow public access for the three activities, did not favor participating in public access programs for the activities.

Based on the findings of the study, a number of suggestions regarding rural landowners and public access programs are offered. In some instances, these recommendations are based, not only on the formal results of the study, but also on information obtained by the authors from the sample landowners during the interviewing process.

Recommendation 1

Rural landowners on the immediate urban-fringe should be given a lower priority as a target group for public access programs.

There are two main reasons for making this suggestion. First, land ownership patterns in typical urban-fringe areas are likely similar to that encountered in this study, i.e., a majority of the sample parcels examined were relatively small in size, under 40 acres.

This recommendation is made because the study's findings indicated that sample landowners were more predisposed to allow public access for less intensive activities. The efforts and costs involved in establishing a successful public access program for hiking will likely be considerably less than one for snowmobiling. However, should anticipated benefits and land purchase costs be high, it may be desirable to undertake public access programs even for intensive recreational activities.

Recommendation 4

Indirect methods such as educational and information programs and campaigns should continue to be utilized.

These programs/campaigns, aimed at educating the public to proper means of gaining access to private land and proper behavior while using the land, have a long history of sponsorship by public agencies and organized groups of recreationists. This recommendation was given because it appears that formalized, legalistic, contractual "programs" frequently do not appeal to landowners.

Conclusion

This study was not designed to answer all questions about the issue of public access to private land, but it does provide some useful insights into many of the issues involved and a basis for expanded research in the future. Hopefully, as more information is provided and generated on the public access issue and the feasibility of utilizing non-purchase land acquisition methods for opening up private land, all interested parties—public recreationists, rural landowners and governmental agencies—will be able to arrive at a mutually beneficial solution.

This solution, barring unforeseen circumstances, will include utilizing private land to provide more outdoor recreation opportunities. In some cases, public agencies may allocate resources to purchase some land for

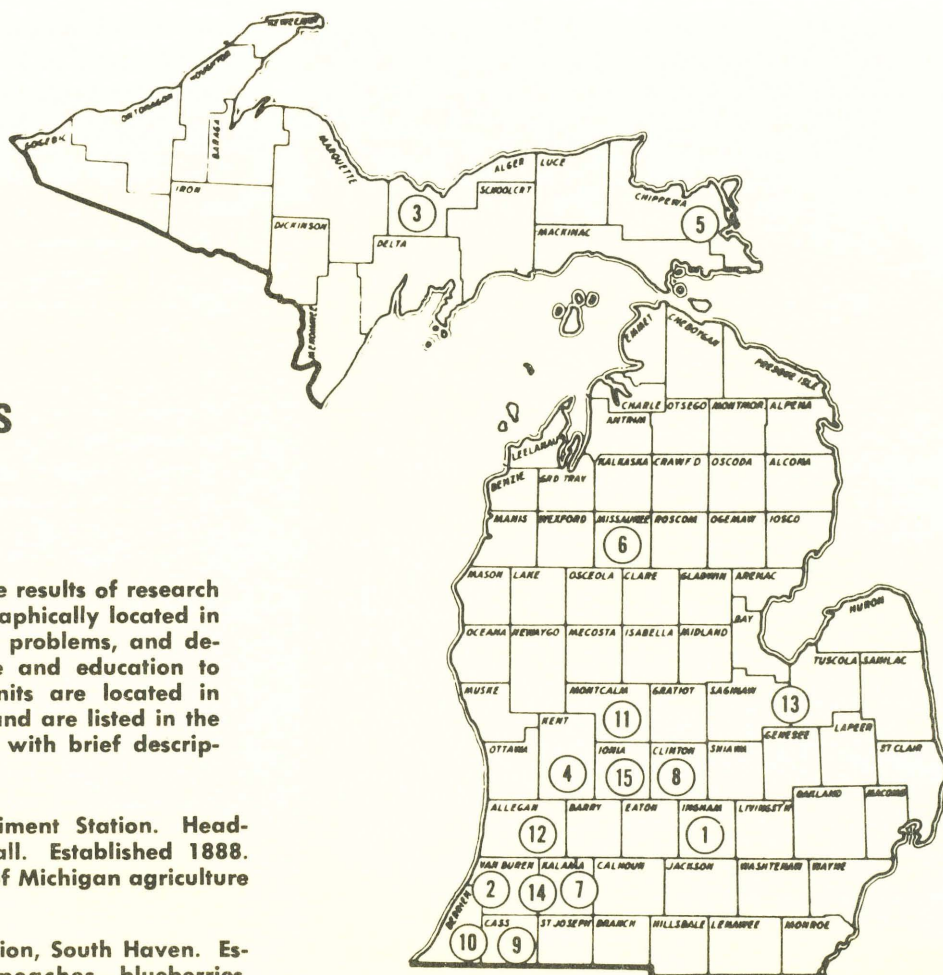
conversion to public recreation areas. In other cases, these agencies and other groups may sponsor programs to facilitate greater utilization of private properties by the recreating public. And, in some cases, the landowners may be able to enter into profitable enterprises based upon the recreational commodities that they can produce.

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Outlying Field Research Stations

These research units bring the results of research to the users. They are geographically located in Michigan to help solve local problems, and develop a closeness of science and education to the producers. These 15 units are located in important producing areas, and are listed in the order they were established with brief descriptions of their roles.



- ① Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station. Headquarters, 101 Agriculture Hall. Established 1888. Research work in all phases of Michigan agriculture and related fields.
- ② South Haven Experiment Station, South Haven. Established 1890. Breeding peaches, blueberries, apricots. Small fruit management.
- ③ Upper Peninsula Experiment Station, Chatham. Established 1907. Beef, dairy, soils and crops. In addition to the station proper, there is the Jim Wells Forest.
- ④ Graham Horticultural Experiment Station, Grand Rapids. Established 1919. Varieties, orchard soil management, spray methods.
- ⑤ Dunbar Forest Experiment Station, Sault Ste. Marie. Established 1925. Forest management.
- ⑥ Lake City Experiment Station, Lake City. Established 1928. Breeding, feeding and management of beef cattle and fish pond production studies.
- ⑦ W. K. Kellogg Farm and Bird Sanctuary, Hickory Corners, and W. K. Kellogg Forest, Augusta. Established 1928. Forest management, wildlife studies, mink and dairy nutrition.
- ⑧ Muck Experimental Farm, Laingsburg. Plots established 1941. Crop production practices on organic soils.
- ⑨ Fred Russ Forest, Cassopolis. Established 1942. Hardwood forest management.
- ⑩ Sodus Horticultural Experiment Station, Sodus. Established 1954. Production of small fruit and vegetable crops. (land leased)
- ⑪ Montcalm Experimental Farm, Entrican. Established 1966. Research on crops for processing, with special emphasis on potatoes. (land leased)
- ⑫ Trevor Nichols Experimental Farm, Fennville. Established 1967. Studies related to fruit crop production with emphasis on pesticides research.
- ⑬ Saginaw Valley Beet and Bean Research Farm, Saginaw. Established in 1971, the farm is owned by the beet and bean industries and leased to MSU. Studies related to production of sugar beets and dry edible beans in rotation programs.
- ⑭ Kalamazoo Orchard, Kalamazoo. Established 1974. Research on integrated pest control of fruit crops.
- ⑮ New Horticultural Field Station, Clarksville. Established 1974. Research on all types of tree fruits, vegetable crops, and ornamental plants. First research plots to be established during 1975.