



4. RECREATION ONE-STOP

THE NEED of the public for more accessible information about recreation opportunities and better ways to participate in advocacy and planning.

Surveys of public participation in recreation activities have consistently identified lack of information as a significant barrier. The 2009 TRAB Survey probed the question of recreation information and found that, for 23.5% of Tennesseans, not knowing where to go is a reason why they do not participate more often in outdoor recreation.

The primary constraint, cited by 50% of Tennesseans, was lack of time; and it is possible that this perception arises in part from not knowing about parks located close to where they live. In another question, 27.7% of respondents who had visited a State Park within the past two years said they were not familiar with the State Parks, and another 37.5% were only moderately familiar. Asked for their opinion about the availability of recreation information in Tennessee, 28% said they were dissatisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Given the option of a single website with all Tennessee recreation information in one place, 72.2% said they

would use such a site somewhat (29%) or very much (43.2%), and 63.2% said this improved information access would increase their participation in recreation either somewhat or a lot or very much. In a different question in the online survey for this plan, 79.9% said that, if a website existed where they could find more information about recreation and conservation issues, that would encourage them to become more involved.

Information about recreation opportunities is highly fragmented in Tennessee, as it is in all states, among many different federal, state, and local agencies. As one public meeting participant put it: “Figuring out

where to go for outdoor recreation is a major research project.” Lack of easily accessible information touches on several of the issues identified in this plan. Families who do not know about safe, appropriate places for unstructured play in nature near their homes are less likely to give their children these experiences. If the 67.9% of adult Tennesseans who are overweight or obese are unaware of nearby fitness programs and facilities, they are less likely to take advantage of them. Likewise, knowing more about accessible fitness programs could make a real difference in the lives of the 26.7% of Tennesseans, including 31% of women, who believe they are not physically able to engage in recreation activities, according to the 2009 TRAB Survey.

The TRAC committee that guided this planning effort was especially interested in addressing issues relating to public participation in recreation. In their discussions, it was decided that public participation should be defined to include three related areas:

Participation in recreation activities. Tennessee is experiencing high rates of preventable diseases, such as obesity and diabetes, which could be avoided through regular exercise. In addition, studies show that young people are getting far less exercise and exposure to nature than any generation before them. These two conditions alone warrant an aggressive effort to motivate more adults and children to get outside and engage in recreational activities.

Participation in recreation planning. Holding public meetings has been the traditional means used by recreation planners to learn more about the needs and concerns of the public. For past State Recreation Plans, meetings have been held at locations all across the state, and the total attendance has barely risen above 100. The TRAC members were not satisfied that such a limited amount of input could yield an accurate and comprehensive representation of the needs of all Tennesseans. They challenged the planning team to develop more effective methods for public input that would engage far greater numbers of Tennesseans in the future.

Participation in advocacy for parks and recreation.

Parks have long been undervalued and underfunded in Tennessee. They will receive the priority they deserve among legislators, agency decision-makers, and local land use planners and permitting agencies only if the public gives these resources more vocal support. The TRAC called for an increased effort to engage the public as advocates for parks and recreation.

Fortunately, a single solution has emerged for all three of these public participation issues. The Internet’s role as a source of public information continues to grow, with research showing the public increasingly turning to online searches to plan recreational outings and trips. Several recent developments suggest that the time has arrived to pursue the concept of a recreation one-stop website at the state level.

- The emergence of Web 2.0, now allows robust forms of online interaction and mobile computing. Options for geospatial online platforms have emerged that allow information to be presented via interactive maps, making trip planning far easier.
- The Web now offers new comment and survey opportunities for agencies that plan and manage recreation resources and for advocacy organizations, allowing them to connect more directly and dynamically with the public, to gain a much better understanding of their needs and interests, and to engage participation at the grassroots level. This plan’s online survey was a first for a State Recreation Plan in Tennessee.
- Recreation.gov, the National Park Service’s national recreation one-stop, was intended to serve this purpose but has proved to be a disappointment. The site does contain information about most federal resources, linked with a centralized reservation system for cabins and campsites, but it has very little state information and virtually no local information, making it ineffective as a way to increase participation.

It is not difficult to imagine a future in which highly mobile, user-friendly computing will become an integral part of everyday life. Indeed, the recent explosive growth of iPhone applications and GPS use suggest that this future is arriving very quickly. Tennessee has an opportunity to establish a national model through proactive adoption of these emerging information technologies.

Public/Private Partnership

Discussion of this proposal by the TRAC and its Working Group on Public Participation and Advocacy arrived at a consensus that no state agency in Tennessee has the resources and special talents needed to implement a comprehensive, Web 2.0 recreation one-stop. The Tennessee Department of Tourist Development's (TDTD) "Tennessee Vacations" website does an excellent job of connecting in-state and out-of-state visitors with the information needed to select and plan trips, but it is not designed to facilitate recreation down to the level this plan envisions. The two sites do share commonalities, since a Recreation One-Stop can certainly help visitors plan trips in Tennessee, but neither site can accomplish what the other is designed to do best. It is likely this new site will help TDTD reach certain visitor market niches that their Sustainable Tourism initiative is designed to address.

A few other states have developed websites with some Web 2.0 functionalities. State park agencies in Georgia, North Carolina, and California now have websites based on the Google Maps platform. North Carolina's site includes the ability to upload linked photos to the Flickr website. The private state parks website N. Georgia.com includes some social networking features. All these sites are limited to the state parks system, except for Georgia's site, under development in partnership with Google, which does plan to include local resources at some point. None provides robust search functions by activity and resource types.

A public/private partnership appears to be the most effective path for achieving the goal of implementing a

website that can increase public participation in recreation activities and generate grassroots advocacy. Each partner will be able to contribute what it does best. The State already has GIS data for all state and federal recreation resources as well as a network of contacts across the state well-suited to provide local data. A private entity will have access to the investments needed to build and market the site and the ad revenues needed to operate and maintain it at a level of high quality. A negotiated contract between the partners can define whatever provisions are necessary to protect the State's image and interests.

2015 Action Plan

It is recommended that TDEC should recruit a private partner to develop a Tennessee Recreation One-Stop website. The features of this site are envisioned to include:

1. **Comprehensive recreation database.** Initially, all state and federal recreation resources in Tennessee, using currently available data shared through existing interagency partnerships. Local and private resource information will be added as it becomes available through existing networks of local and regional partners.
2. **Geospatial platform.** Google Maps or Google Earth platform, with latitude/longitude coordinates attached to each site in the resource database.
3. **User profiles.** New visitors to the site define their personal recreation activity preferences with a questionnaire, creating a user profile that allows them to receive individually tailored information.
4. **Robust search functions.** Users request searches based on a comprehensive list of activities or resource types. The search can be limited to a given area or a specified radius from a starting point.
5. **Information-rich site pages.** For each site, a page containing a general description, recreation opportunities, unique or interesting features, a site map, link to USGS topo maps, visitor information about hours and regulations, photos, guidebook

information (nature and history), GPS data, trail descriptions if applicable, and events descriptions if applicable.

6. **Social networking.** The user's personal profile allows the site to connect the user with others who share the same interests. This feature addresses two of the barriers to recreation participation: not having someone to go with and needing an expert guide. The user can become aware of organized groups that provide outings or instruction in areas of interest and learn about opportunities for targeted citizen action.
7. **Organization links.** The site encourages active grass-roots involvement by displaying links to non-profit advocacy organizations that focus on the resource types preferred by the user.
8. **User-generated content.** The user can contribute content to the pages of sites visited, allowing the website to grow richer over time, giving resource

managers input about user impressions, and giving the public a greater sense of ownership and participation. Uploadable content includes: photos, comments, GPS data (to help park managers collect geographic data about their resources), and suggestions for related outings ("Users who liked this destination also recommended...")

9. **Online surveys.** An online survey mechanism captures data about the behavior, preferences, and unmet needs of resource users, giving resource managers and decision-makers an ongoing stream of information that can inform policy and management decisions. This may include park visitor spending data to help measure economic impacts.

Development Stages

The goal is for this website to be online and operational by 2015. The following sequence of actions is designed to achieve that:



1. TDEC will recruit a private partner for this project, and negotiate a formal a public/private partnership agreement.
2. TDEC will convene a Parks and Recreation Summit in 2010 of all state and federal agencies that manage recreation resources in Tennessee to solicit ideas and suggestions for the website content and to develop agreements for data sharing.
3. TDEC will convene a forum of all recreation-related non-profit organizations in Tennessee to solicit ideas and suggestions for the website content and functions.
4. The private partner will seek federal R&D funding to develop the technical components and design of the website.
5. During the R&D period, the State partners will provide GIS resource data for the site.
6. The site will undergo beta testing.
7. The site will go live, accompanied by high-profile public announcements from the Governor and from the partnering agencies to build widespread public awareness.

2020 Vision

Tennessee will be the national model in the creative use of emerging Internet and geospatial technology to encourage greater public participation. All Tennesseans will have access to a user-friendly source of information about the whole spectrum of the state's recreation opportunities. A vibrant, online community will enable the public to share recreation experiences with others, receive training for new activities, find partners for outings, and become more directly involved in advocacy for parks, recreation and natural resources.

Coordination Links

Advocacy and Funding. The website will make the findings of economic impact research available at the grassroots level, giving citizen activists and organizations the tools to make their efforts more effective.

State Parks Management. Online comments and

surveys will establish an ongoing dialogue between resource managers and the public they serve.

Public Health. The website will ensure that information about programming and places for fitness activities is readily accessible and that users will be able to find close-to-home opportunities with ease.

Every Child Outdoors. The website will contain information about local parks and stream sites where families can take children for unstructured play in nature.

Environmental Education. The website will give teachers access to information about local creeks and stream sites that can serve as outdoor classrooms to help them meet curricular requirements and improve student outcomes, as well as information about interpretive specialists and environmental educators in their area.

Rural Economic Development. For the many rural counties that contain most of the state's large parks, protected lands, and historic sites, the website will make the public more aware of what they have to offer, attracting increased visitation and contributing to the local economy. State Heritage Areas, State Recreation Areas, and State Scenic Byways will become more viable

