FUTURE
RECREATIONAL USE OF WATER

Presented by
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I am pleased to discover that the organizers of a program dealing with the
future of water in Texas found recreation a worthy topic. Perhaps this is
recognition that recreation is not all fun and games—that it has a serious side.
In the next few moments, I shall focus my attention on what present trends in
water recreation suggest for the future.

Water Recreation in Texas

For the outsider, it seems a paradox that a state reputed to dominate in
arid land, cowboys and oil should have more surface area of fresh water than
any other state except Alaska. (TORP:1974,11,103) And, to the 21.5 million
people of Texas and the surrounding states, this means recreational opportunity.

All popular water-oriented activities now take place in and around these
relatively new waterbodies. In 1975, some 3.2 million Texas fishermen spent
more than 64 million recreational days on Texas inland waters. (Texas Almanac:
1975, 57) In the process of catching a great variety of fish, they spent about
$168 million. (TORP:1974, 26) Swimming is the number one activity, which of
course includes beach lounging and girl-watching as recreational adjuncts.
Boating has increased dramatically, even doubling since 1968. (TPWD:1976

Boat sales in Texas are now estimated at more than $100 million a year. The
17,500 miles of shoreline along these reservoirs has escalated shoreland values
to approximately a total of $900 million. Along these reservoirs are over
300 marinas catering to the many recreational needs of boaters and fishermen.
All this takes place on the 200 or more reservoirs, built not for recreation
as a prime purpose, but basically for flood control and water supply. (TORP:
1974, 23)

And, in addition, there are nearly 4,000 rivers and streams in Texas that
total about 80,000 miles. (TORP: 1974, 71) Of this, 13,000 miles have been
classified as major waterways. Canoeing and float trips are becoming increasingly
popular on these Texas waters.

Of very special recreational interest is the approximately 1,000 miles of
Gulf coast shoreline providing a great variety of marine-oriented recreational
activity. While some of the picnicking, camping and boating activities are
similar to inland water use, there are dramatic differences in much of the
equipment, place use and interest in coastal recreation.

This brief summary has been sketched only to underscore the magnitude
of Texas water recreation. We are beginning to document the quantitative
aspects so that a better job of planning can be accomplished.

The Future

But, in the process of developing water resources for recreation and managing
facilities and services for recreational uses can we observe some clues to the future?

Quantitatively, there seem to be strong arguments for continued growth. We are told that an additional 66 reservoirs are planned to be built before 2020, creating even more recreational opportunity. (Suggitt: 1970, 17). We already know that reservoirs are much like highways—they induce use that was not ever expressed before their construction. If and when these reservoirs are added to our stock, our freshwater area will be large enough to cover the entire states of Delaware and Rhode Island. (Suggitt: 1970, 17) In spite of inflation, increased taxes and increased competition for discretionary dollars, outdoor recreation continues to grow. Projections by the state Parks and Wildlife Department show even further increases of 150 percent by 1980 and over 400 percent by 2000. (TORP: 1974, 7) These statistics certainly suggest that from a quantitative point of view, water recreation in Texas is already large and seems destined to get larger and larger.

Social Reaction

Important and helpful as this inventory and projection may be, there is another side of water recreation development in Texas. It is part of a larger national societal change that certainly is having an impact. The people of the United States, and Texas as well, have turned their attention in recent years to the qualitative.

Looking back I may be more conscious of this change than those who are younger. I grew up in a generation that believed in and came to depend upon science and technology because they were responsible for both more and better of all things we considered important to life. Electricity reduced the drudgery of many chores; mass production reduced the cost of an automobile or furniture; and the larger the city, the greater the opportunities and amenities for a good life, especially increased incomes. The emphasis was on the quantitative because this translated into more possessions and activities than anyone had ever before experienced. We did not ask "What was the meaning of 'progress' in these terms, if no one ever asked whether it serves to make people happier?" (Telch: 1972, ix)

Perhaps the most dramatic period of science and technology occurred after World War II. Platt has identified many areas of explosion: dramatic change in communication mechanisms; increased travel because of the automobile and jet planes; several generations of data processing mechanisms; and exploration of space. (Platt: 1976) And, few would question that great good has come from these events.

However, there is now, since about 1968, a social reaction. (Platt: 1976) Society, not only in America but world-wide, has reacted to these profound advances with new international relations, new international money, new sex laws, new university curricula and, of course a new discovery of ecology. And, recreation is caught up in this same social reaction. Suggitt recognized the importance of this when, in 1968, he said, "Whatever the motivation, and however we may personally feel about it, recreation has taken a large position in the scheme of priorities of many agencies and units of government, as well as in the allocation of time and money by individuals and groups." (Suggitt: 1968, 3) Today, we have a quality-conscious public, more and more concerned about they way in which things are done and the impact they might have.
So, as we look to the future of water recreation in Texas, I see not only increasing quantitative demands, but a greater insistence upon quality. And, I see this expressed in five different ways.

Water Quality

I see no letup in the demand for better water quality. All the measures that have been initiated in the last few years are already paying off—but, there is much to be done. Major cities of Texas that continue to place raw sewage into recreational waters will be forced to correct these ills. A final refinement of water quality, important to recreation, will be that of esthetics. Especially in urban areas, recreational waters must appear clear and free from floating trash as well as being free from chemical and bacteriological problems.

Water's Edge

A second change in the future will be greater social pressure on environmental quality concerns over the water's edge. Land, adjacent to water, is special land.

On our coast, we will exercise greater stewardship over what we place on the edge of the land. Developers, both public agencies and private interests, will come to recognize that not all markets for recreational activity must have permanent structures in this volatile zone. Hurricanes and erosion have already proven their strength. We may learn to respect such forces. Our open beach law, although inadequate in planning and management controls, is a move in this direction.

On inland waters, several developers are already recognizing the value of keeping waterfronts open, either in public ownership or with private control. Vacation home complexes located back from the water, are becoming saleable on these more stable lands, provided that ample access and recreational use of the edge is kept open. Texas may want to follow the lead of several states in placing the water's edge in public control such as Wisconsin and Minnesota have ruled.

Urban Waterway Reclamation

In the future, I see a third major program—reclamation of esthetic and recreational use of urban waterways. Cities all over, such as Wichita and Lansing are beginning to question heavy commercial uses and abuses of the water's edge that now mar pleasant views up and down the river. In 1974, for example, we found that out of 107 major cities that have water resources suitable for redevelopment, 68 had proposals, 59 had proposals that had reached the planning stage, 28 were implementing plans and 14 had completed some kind of waterfront development. (Hanna:1974). Most of this interest has developed since 1960. It was particularly interesting to discover that the majority of projects that have resulted in development were initiated not by government agencies but by others, such as downtown businessmen, historical societies, service clubs, Chambers of Commerce, environmental groups and professional designers and planners.

Our own San Antonio River Walk is not only a major urban river recreational accomplishment in Texas but has served as a prototype for the nation. A very small amount of water located in the city core has turned downtown into an attractive and a desirable place for both outside visitors and local citizens.
It demonstrates that high social and economic value can be derived from urban river redevelopment.

As yet, we have not looked upon our harbors and ports as desirable urban amenities, such as has been done in some locations such as Victoria, British Columbia. Here, the parliament buildings, a major museum, a fine park and the landmark Empress Hotel face directly on the tip of the harbor in a very attractive parklike setting.

The potential of our urban rivers has caught even the attention of the National Park Service, custodian of our natural scenic wonders.

There is no doubt that a thriving recreation industry could be developed on most rivers of the United States, and such development would be most appropriate, not to say profitable, at places where the river runs through heavily populated areas. (Sudia:n.d.,12)

Rural River Development

In spite of problems of management, our rural waters will finally be turned into recreational waterways at the same time that adjacent owners will be able to protect their land uses. Greatest attention will have to be given to nodes where highways cross. Navigable rivers will have greater use by cruise boats, providing entertainment or interpretive tours, explaining the interesting scenic, wildlife and historic sites along the way. Washington on the Brazos, one of the most important historic sites in Texas, has this potential.

Two massive waterway plans, one in Canada and one in New York state, illustrate new rural river recreational concepts. The Trent-Severn-Rideau Waterway in Ontario extends 425 miles and traverses interesting scenic and historic sites between Lake Ontario and Georgian Bay. It contains 92 locks, mostly hand operated as they were one hundred years ago. In order to set goals and make plans for recreational development, two major organizations have been created. The Canada-Ontario-Trent-Severn (CORTS) Advisory Committee is composed of private citizens and the CORTS Agreement Board provides coordinated government input from federal and provincial agencies. (CORTS: 1975, Rideau: 1971 and Quinte: 1973).

The New York State Canal Recreation Development Program encompasses the 524 mile canal barge route across upper New York state. With recreation already pressing heavily upon spots along this system, a pilot experiment of six canal parks and three trails was initiated in 1973. The response was so great and now two state agencies--the Department of Transportation and the Office of Parks and Recreation--are collaborating on plans for the entire system. The agreement between DOT and OPR allows for policy changes as the planning process dictates and as experience, awareness and usage evolve. (New York:1975)

Vicinity Development

I see in the future an increasing acceptance of new rules governing land areas surrounding reservoirs, coasts and rivers. These new rules will disallow the development of the roadside clutter of signs and shacks that now line our approaches to recreational waters. While we cannot guarantee financial success of resort and vacation home ventures, new rules can provide guidelines to developers to aid them in selecting more "successful" locations. The new rules
must reflect a balance between former land uses such as agriculture, ranching and forestry and the new recreational uses so that both economic and social values can be protected. Communities will demand aid in coping with the new problems of handling outsiders at the same time they maintain their former stability. Development guidance for communities and counties that are impacted by reservoir development will increasingly be the responsibility of those creating the reservoirs.

Conclusions

From observation and review of recreational water development in Texas, three conclusions can be drawn.

First, a new view of reservoirs and all waterfront areas - a more comprehensive view - must be taken if the many facets can function in harmony. Such a total water development concern will be spread over three zones - not just the water as a commodity. The first zone, that of all water recreation activity, will need special plans and controls in order to keep the many uses from conflicting and maximize the many values we place on water, including recreation. Water flow, levels and quality will become more important considerations alongside those of volume. The second zone is the land and water interface. Increased effort will be directed toward protection of esthetic and access values of this critical zone. The third, and equally important zone is that of the vicinity influenced by the reservoir, river or coast. Perhaps this will be the most difficult to accomplish because of the many political jurisdictions and conflict with traditional land uses. But, its problems of land development will have to be solved.

Second, the quality revolution will demand larger scale planning. The individual land owners represent a scale that is too small a match for the scale of the problems. This is true not only geographically but functionally as well. The recreational users will demand that their flow of needs, all the way from the nearby sports goods store to the marina and onto the waterbody, will be properly planned. The planning scale must also reach both upstream and downstream.

Third, in order for this overall planning to take place - considering both the wishes of society and characteristics of the environment - it will be necessary for the actors to get together. Personally, I am not pursuaded that new legislation and new agencies are needed or are likely to be effective. Rather, the existing actors, public and private, can maintain their integrity at the same time they can agree upon development goals if they are willing to meet on some neutral ground. In many instances, I believe that the actors will be surprised how frequently their goals are complementary rather than conflicting. Each actor will have to engage in the longer and more tedious approach of cooperation and collaboration - not after the fact, but in early planning and conceptual stages. In a country and state founded upon free enterprise and a strong land ownership ethic, this may be asking for a lot. But, I see it coming - not because anyone wishes to impose his will upon land development but because the several actors will see the value in doing so for their own protection and success.

Increasingly, I am observing examples of development across the country that illustrate this trend in collaborative planning and development. One such is the Lake Lanier Islands recreational complex located on Lake Lanier, a reservoir created by the Army Corps of Engineers by impounding the waters of the
Chattahoochee River, north of Atlanta, Georgia. This is a beautifully designed complex that offers a variety of recreational land and water uses including swimming, golf, water shows, camping, fishing, boating, vacation home use, hotel, marinas and other support facilities such as a restaurant. A quasi-public organization, the Lake Lanier Development Authority provides overall planning and development collaboration.

Our own River Walk in San Antonio represents on a smaller land scale a dramatic collaborative example. Over six major agencies and organizations, each created for quite diverse purposes, now assist in the development of policies and management practices for this beautiful and interesting recreational land development.

It can be done. Furthermore, in my opinion, it will be done in many more instances all over Texas because of the trend toward better quality development of our waters for recreation.


