PUBLIC-PRIVATE RECREATION RELATIONSHIPS

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Today, I have been asked to talk about public-private recreation relationships. I am pleased to see that this is the theme for your entire conference because I know of no other topic today that deserves greater attention.

I am confident that every one of you assembled at this conference is well aware of many of the problems in public-private recreation relationships. But, today I would like to set the tone of the conference by making just three statements:

1. Good public-private relationships are absolutely critical to the success of recreation, nationally.

2. Today, in this country, our public-private relationships in recreation are at the worst level ever in our history.

3. We can expect more and more trouble from concerned citizen groups if we don't do something about it.

For the next few minutes, I would like to expand on these topics.

First let's talk about the critical interdependency between public and private forces in recreation.

As many of you know, the state of Michigan was very tolerant of me for twenty years while I used it as an experimental ground for tourism and recreational study. We called it "extension work" at the time. But, while we gave out many tidbits of guidance and information, we observed many things about both public and private recreation. There were many lessons to be learned.
For one thing, we learned that both forces were equally important. This was a hard lesson—one that is not generally known and, unfortunately, one that is not being taught in the halls of higher education today. University teaching is as fragmented and sectarian as the practices in the field. Right today, many of my colleagues in the parks and recreation field across this land believe and preach that anyone who benefits by profits from recreation is immoral. By the same token, many of my friends in the field of tourism sincerely believe that the greatest evil facing private enterprise today is that of government, particularly in its agencies dealing with recreation. Each fails to realize that it would die without the other.

It is nonsense to speak of pure public or pure private recreation. They are abstractions that do not exist in real life. Show me the public recreation area that isn't dependent upon private enterprise for the manufacture of products and supply of services that make it possible for you and me to use it. Show me the private recreation enterprise that isn't dependent upon public support whether direct governmental subsidy or through the support of elements basic to private enterprise. How long would the resorts, hotels and marinas survive if it were not for public investment in parks, beaches, transportation and many public services such as water supply, waste disposal, fire protection and police? How could public agencies possibly provide all the recreational needs of this country without the provision of goods and services by private enterprise? For example, there is no question in my mind that the success of Rocky Mountain National Park is as dependent upon the commercialism of Denver and other cities throughout the country as Denver is upon Rocky Mountain National Park. The symbiosis between public and private forces is a fundamental principle that can be documented anywhere you wish to go in this country.

Let me go one step farther.

Actually, there is a synergistic effect of this relationship. Because of the public-private mix, there is much more available to the public not only in sheer quantities of opportunity for recreation but in the variety of offerings available. The effective sum of the two—public and private recreation—is much greater than the total.

For me, this was brought very sharply into focus recently through a project with Dr. Reid in Guatemala. Our main task was to research the country and make recommendations for the establishment of national parks and a national park system. In order to do this, we found ourselves examining very critically the success factors of national parks here in the United States and elsewhere.

It was our conclusion that the prototype of the United States was
only partially suited to Guatemala because we had alienated private development with our National Parks. We recommended that a national park program had to be accompanied by a national tourism and commercial recreation program. We were recognizing that a very powerful synergistic relationship could be developed between public and private recreation and that our system was not fostering this relationship.

I argue that not only is there no way for either public or private recreation to succeed without the other; there is no way for total recreation to be successful unless both inputs are made.

My second point is my challenge to you today.

I know of no time when public and private recreation have been farther apart nor when there was as much factionalism and even sectism. We had greater collaboration in the early 1900s when Yellowstone National Park supported hotel and tour interests at the same time it protected the resource base.

Everywhere I look and everything I read shows evidence of polarization and fragmentation rather than collaboration. Agencies and private interests that once respected one another and communicated with one another are now suspicious and no longer communicate. I am sure you can name more examples than I can, but here are a few from my files.

Even though Biscayne National Monument was created in Florida six years ago, all development has been halted by a private resort development firm that controls access to the island. Recently, the attorney for Anglers Properties, Inc., an elite private club whose principal is Mrs. Benson Ford, said, "Hell no, we're not going to be willing sellers... Let the Government develop their own boat basin." (Miami Herald, 1974)

Public and private interests are in conflict in and around John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park in Key Largo, Florida, in spite of the fact they depend on each other. The delicate biological balance that makes the coral reef possible is being upset by the sewage wastes, currents carrying silt and the "reef robbers"—all exponents of the tourism that depend on the reef. A writer recently reported, "I was surprised at the attitude of the dive shop owners who make their livings renting diving equipment and taking the scuba divers to the reef. They recognize that the reef is in ill health, but they dread any publicity which might frighten divers off to other areas." (Mclain, 1973)

Many of you are familiar with the recent protest against the installation of residence halls, cafeterias, gift shops, cocktail lounge and trailer camp on the south rim of Grand Canyon National Park. (UPI, December 18, 1973) The National Parks and Conservation Association
argues that these facilities must be installed outside the park boundaries.

In Kansas, action by the Department of Interior in Prairie National Park is stymied because of the "vehement and uncompromising opposition of the cattlemen and ranchers," even though their numbers are small. Many speculate that if a public referendum were made, the voters of the state would favor the park. (Kansas City Star, 1973)

One resort development proved to be a social success but a business failure because of government strangulation. There were costly duplications of facilities, uneconomical dispersion of operating areas, and no opportunity of selling liquor demanded by the visitors. Yet, the government agency that prevents financial success is the one that benefits from the services rendered. (NTRRC, 1973:35)

Government infighting frequently causes recreation development problems. The Corps of Engineers is planning a 350-berth boat basin adjacent to Dungeness Wildlife Refuge near Port Angeles, Washington. The BSFW opposes this on the basis that it would destroy rich and ecologically important shellfish and that better locations can be found elsewhere. Ironically, private enterprise is willing and anxious to develop a marina on less fragile land just six miles from this site. (Conservation News, 1973:14)

A dramatic, as well as tragic, example comes from our federal government as we attempt to grind out the long-awaited national outdoor recreation plan. The Bureau of Land Management was asked by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation to evaluate the reports from groups assigned to specific work drafts for the Nationwide Plan. Let me read to you the reaction of the Work Group, entitled "Roles and Responsibilities of Public and Private Institutions for Recreation Resources and Opportunities":

This should have been the best organized and the best documented of all the Work Groups reports. Unfortunately, it is rather poorly organized. . . . Many of the identified problems and proposed solutions reflect strong agency biases and thus tend to dilute the real intent of a Nationwide Plan. Also, one of the most critical issues has not been addressed, i.e., the imperative for treating recreation resources as a part of total environmental management in which juridicalional fragmentation is minimized in favor of meeting human need within the innate capability of resources and programs. (BLM, 1973:2)
And, reading further on, in the section, "Specific Federal Agency Roles in Recreation,"

The principal problem in this section concerns the rather apparent attempt of several Federal agencies to expand their outdoor recreation roles and responsibilities. In most instances, sound land use planning and management are ignored in favor of empire building or destruction, depending upon one's viewpoint. (BLM, 1973:3)

And, in the section, "Private Sector Contribution to Recreation,"

This draft report points out the lack of data available concerning the extent and magnitude of the private sector's contribution in the total national recreation picture. It would appear that the report would have benefited from more input by representatives of the private sector involved in all phases of recreation.

In the Recommendations Section, it states that the private sector should be brought into the main stream of public decision-making. We feel this should be an integral part of the regular public involvement procedure of most, if not all, Federal agencies. (BLM, 1973:7)

I call this tragic because it does not come from the lowest level of recreation activity but from the very highest level of thinking and action in this nation today. If BLM's evaluation is anywhere near correct, and it may even be understated, I believe that we are in trouble.

This brings me to my third point. We can expect even more trouble if we don't do something about it.

I would be remiss if I only harangued about the ills of our present public-private relationships and did not either hint at or try to offer positive recommendations.

I am optimistic. I see some signs of change. Perhaps with encouragement by recreation leaders such as yourselves, we will see a turnaround in relationships.

Not long ago, at a conference in California, similar to yours here in Colorado, architect and planner Wayne Williams, described a very
innovative experiment that is catching on in California. He is demonstrating the value of a public-private mix at the local level.

He told recreation and park leaders of California that instead of trying to fight for increased budgets to hire staff and build buildings, they could make use of commercial talent and facilities already existing in their communities. All they had to do was ask. He said to first make a list of what people like to see and do with their leisure time. Then, define the scope of what your department can and should help to provide. Then, inventory and map the locations in the community where commercial activity suggests the opportunity of creating new "theme centers." He said that these are their new parks--no purchase necessary.

For example, suppose you wished to establish a "Garden Center."

1. Find an open area amidst proposed Center that allows for off-hours parking and perhaps some outdoor display space (probably someone's parking lot).

2. Provide sign or banner identifying area as Garden Center Tour Departures Point.

3. Schedule with owners regular tours of various product display facilities nearby, led by retired gardener, and providing desirable product exposure for retailers.

4. Get commitment for off-hours use of meeting space (in showrooms, board rooms, etc.) and make available to garden clubs.

5. Have various clubs arrange public volunteer speaker program on aspects of gardening.

6. Have clubs and/or owners arrange temporary exhibitions in open area (under inflatable enclosure where necessary.)

7. Have clubs arrange public tours of fine homes and gardens, departing from tour departure point.

8. Identify entire Center with continuous planting of flowering tree throughout area, plus encouragement of other uniform decorative planting, potting, and banners.

9. Establish Garden Club Sick Plant and Garden
Information Clinic as community service, staffed by garden club or retired horticulturalist volunteers.

10. Encourage theme "greenhouse" or highly decorated restaurant operations into area. (Williams, 1972:88)

Quite an idea—and furthermore, it's working.

An example at a different scale is that of Voyageurs National Park in Minnesota. Although there were a few flares set off in the process, generally there has been strong collaboration between private and public interests, right from the start. At the state level is a governor's committee and at the grass roots level is a citizen's committee. A great amount of behind-the-scenes effort was put in by the Extension Service from the University of Minnesota. Area communities are cooperating to avoid flashing neon signs and souvenir shops around the park. The perimeter is being planned to offer canoe trips guided by Nett Lake Indians, to offer tours of logging camps and ice fishing expeditions. The surrounding lands will be planned for private developments as carefully as will the interior of the park. (Duluth News-Tribune, 1973)

Another urban example is that of the San Antonio River Walk. Here is a beautiful, enjoyable, interesting and heavily visited park/business complex in the heart of a major city. Today, you see it as a unified development that has its own identity and cohesiveness. It would appear to be the result of a single planning and management effort. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is a dramatic example of several private and public agencies collaborating over a long period of time to work toward a single goal. Over six agencies and organizations—both public and private—now control and guide both the development and management of the River Walk. Each retains its own identity and integrity but makes its own contribution toward success of this very special area.

The Central Waterfront Park in Seattle promises to be another example of public-private recreational mix in an urban setting. Seattle recognized the fragmentation and segregation usually demanded by either park or commercial development and decided that this traditional pattern would not do for the new Central Waterfront Park. Here is the basic statement that is guiding the planning and development of this park:

*We propose, then, a park which is a "working park," i.e., a park which encompasses joint private commercial and public uses, joint private and public effort and joint private and public gain. We are providing a framework which is not an architectural artifact but a container for activity appropriately balanced between terraced open deck, weather-protected public spaces and marine-oriented commercial*
endeavors. (Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation, 1972:12-13)

I think that you can see by these illustrations the imperative of the planning stage. It is at this point that collaboration is most critical. Several agencies and organizations can own and operate separate parts of a total recreational complex. But, it is doubtful if they will be complementary or even compatible if not planned that way at the start. Fragmented planning cannot help but produce three results—all detrimental: less than optimum rewards to owners-developers; less than optimum satisfactions to the recreationist and certainly less than the best of land use. Coordination at the planning stage is not only desirable from many standpoints; it is a real possibility—if we want it badly enough.

From what I am observing in the public-private relationships, I would like to make just two recommendations in addition to the many excellent topics I see on your program for the next few days.

1. First, as an educator, I would encourage everyone involved in either public or private recreation to change his reading habits and learn more about his "competitors."

If you are now engaged in public recreation and parks, I recommend that you become acquainted with the facts about tourism, I suggest that you read:

THE TOURIST BUSINESS by Donald Lundberg
TOURISM PRINCIPLES, PRACTICES AND PHILOSOPHIES by Robert McIntosh
DESTINATION, USA by the National Tourism Resources Review Commission
VACATIONSCAPE by Clare A. Gunn

I wonder if you know that right here in Colorado is the home of the only national tourism research organization, The Travel Research Association, with its headquarters at the Bureau of Business Research, University of Colorado.

If you are now engaged in private recreation and tourism, I suggest that you read about public recreation policy and administration. Although your selection here is much greater than in the private sector, the following are rather important:

RECREATION AND SPECIAL POPULATIONS by Stein and Sessoms
ECONOMICS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION by Clawson and Knetsch
RECREATION, LEISURE AND POLITICS by Green
OUR NATIONAL PARK POLICY by John Ise

2. Second, let's encourage every opportunity to foster sincere and
honest contact between private and public interests. This conference is an excellent example, but there should be hundreds more here and perhaps a better balance between public and private.

Let me relate a personal experience—where we used our educational "immunity" to bring public and private interests together.

When I first came to Texas, I was impressed with the Gulf Coast. It seemed to be a rare recreational resource but was badly neglected. For me, it seemed obvious that the first step was to get the private and public leaders together to work out solutions of mutual interest. To my surprise, I found that this had not been done.

So, I arranged a workshop, under the auspices of Sea Grant, bringing together just 50 top leaders and knowledgeable in three subject-matter areas: planners—private and public planners, architects, landscape architects; investors-developers—park administrators, legislators and private land developers; environmentalists—biologists, ecologists and preservationists.

I was much surprised, pleasantly so, to see how quickly they could set aside their personal and agency boundaries to work toward a common goal—in this case, better planning and development of the Texas Gulf Coast for tourism and recreation. I am confident that much of the improvement of state planning, legislation and private development we now see on the Coast is an outgrowth of this conference. And, I did no more than anyone else might have done.

And so, in conclusion, I am pleased to see your interest by attending this conference and encourage you to demand from the conference every bit of guidance you can that will help open the doors to greater and greater collaboration between public and private recreation.
REFERENCES


Miami Herald, January 14, 1974.


