

STATE PARK FORUM

Roundtable discussion with the Great Lakes State Directors

Jerry Pagac began introductions of those in attendance, and concluded by welcoming Bill Walters, former Indiana State Parks Director and current retiree from the National Parks Service. Discussion began with state or regional directors giving an update of their department from the past year as well as upcoming issues, including program accomplishments, additions to the park system, budget concerns, and political matters.

Tim Galvin, Wisconsin

This past year saw the director re-assigned and subsequently an interim in charge. The position has been filled and Wisconsin has a new director.

The bi-annual budget was finished and state government was said to be in “cut mode”, wherein positions were to be eliminated. The budget was approved by the democratic governor.

The Wisconsin parks department was trying to meet the reduction of 180 positions, when the governor revised the budget and decided against the job eliminations; “smart move”! Wisconsin parks projects an increase in their budget.

70% program revenue and 30% GPR.

Park system increased camping and admission fees to pay for new programs.

Park system will look into the idea of fees for resident/non-resident to be the same.

Jerry Reisinger, Iowa

Recently implemented a reservation system with new cabins running by the end of this session and camping available by next year.

The software company responsible for reservation system will be administered by the state of Iowa. This presents some problems, whereas other private companies may have technologically advanced systems and would likely have the bugs worked out already. Iowa parks used to have self-registration for camping with nearly all of them without from gates or guard shacks.

In the past, Iowa parks had a user fee, but not in recent years. The issue is back in legislature now.

Iowa parks are 40% self-sufficient and are considering implementing changes to increase this figure, namely an entrance fee or user fee.

However, if self-sufficiency increases, government funding may be decreased.

Tim Machowicz, Michigan

Current figures: 97 state parks in the system and 22 million visitors.

Current budget is \$41 million, a decrease from last year’s budget of \$50 million.

Currently employ 353 full-time and over a thousand part-time.

This year, fee increases and permit classifications were changed. Previously there were 3 classifications, now there are 8, including resident, non-resident, welfare, veteran, senior,

daily, annual, etc. So far, these fee hikes have not supplemented the \$9 million budget decrease.

Currently, Michigan state parks are \$1.5 million in the hole. However, they are not imposing any lay-offs.

This year saw a new director and new chief of operations, and things appear to be headed in a new direction.

Michigan parks reservation system contract is up for bid, and they will be looking at new companies.

Jerry Van Zile, Ohio

The state parks initiated another reservation system and point of sale (POS) system this year. They currently have three different companies overseeing the operations and while it is running well, they would like to lower that number. Because of this new system, they expect a revenue drop of \$1 million, and they have also figured that into their new budget. They predict that the POS and reservation system will attract younger visitors and hopefully increase sales.

To supplement this revenue drop, they are looking into having a user fee. At a recent forum meeting, the idea had a negative reception.

The state parks system recently cut 45 full-time positions. In turn, more part-time positions will be created.

Currently, all of the parks are being encouraged to work together and help out other departments.

Jerry Pagac, Indiana

This year a new republican governor was elected after 16 years of having a democrat. This governor appointed a new DNR director and there has been some skepticism. This new direct has no background in resource management; however he may offer good access to the governor's office. In turn, the hope is that this new director may be able to increase park budgets.

The Spherix Company which handles Indiana parks reservation system has one year left on their contract, and Indiana will consider its options. It was mentioned that some people feel that an out-of-state firm collecting money for Indiana is not good for the state; however, Spherix has done a good job thus far and are hoping to stick with them.

The Indiana state park budgets have been described as the "worst of all time"; however, they have begun to change things around. Previously, parks were steered toward being approximately 50% self-sufficient, whereas now they are going towards 80% and are seeing benefits.

This year saw an increase in state parks insurance.

This year's budget projects the state parks to be \$3million short. The projected 2-year budget has taken that into account.

Indiana added 5 new parks to the system; however no increase in full-time employees.

Prophetstown recently opened and received much excitement due to the fact that park staff has been working on this project since 1988.

Forum Questions

Tim Galvin brought up an issue with Wisconsin parks, wherein some of his parks are left with 5% discretionary money in their budgets after paying all the standard bills, and other parks are left with up to 30% discretionary money.

Q: What steps should be taken to even out park budgets? How do you figure a baseline for leveling out budgets? Should you “take” from the parks that have a lot of amenities and better budgets and give to the not so successful parks.

A: Develop accurate detailed budgets for each park.

A: Look into fleet management plans; vehicle purchases and maintenance.

A: Indiana has a similar issue, and they promote some of their lower attended and lower income generating parks to stimulate revenue.

State Park Forum led by Jerry Pagac, Indiana State Parks Director.

Notes taken by Angela Manuel, Indiana University graduate student.