The Bonneville scene . . .

Park alcohol ban looms as hot campaign issue

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The political pulse

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One of the most ludicrous situations that developed was why there was such an outcry raised against an alcohol and beer ban in county parks when the city invoked a similar restriction on its many city parks without hardly a ripple two years ago.

After some blood-letting by citizens, the harassed Bonneville County Commissioners Tuesday night arrived at a compromise which likely left most people unhappy, but probably was the wisest decision that could be made under the circumstances.

The beer and alcohol ban applies to Lincoln Park, which is really the only recreation area that is ideal for picnic and family outings. The other two parks, Sand Creek and Noise, are for commercial purposes and have no lawn or shade to speak of, that is conducive for outings of this sort. They are surrounded by the hardy sagebrush and in the case of Sand Creek — sandhills.

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The city has 23 designated parks, most of which are ideal for picnics and family outings.

These include such outstanding recreation areas as Tautphaus, Freeman, Kate Curley, Central and Reinhart — but most of the others have shaded spots and playground facilities.

The city announced its ban proposal beforehand and there was little furor of objections at that time.

Mayor Thomas Campbell and the city councilmen pointed out the city had experienced considerable troubles with young beer drinkers at Tautphaus Park and that was interfering with other picnickers. As a result, it smoothly paved the way for enactment of the ordinance.

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The county's troubles, of course, stemmed from the unfortunate remarks of Bonneville County Commission Chairman Clyde A. Burtenshaw who without thinking said 90 percent of the people who used the parks didn't drink beer or other alcoholic beverages. He was referring to the usual family gatherings and this might be correct.

However, there are many club and group gatherings, and also the younger set, which have many beer and alcohol drinkers. These are usually controlled by the groups themselves and there have been few problems as a result.

The county hassle, however, has revived latent opposition which could become an issue in the upcoming city elections. It would be no surprise, therefore, if some aspirant City Council candidate doesn't make this a plank of his campaign platform.

It also is certain to become an issue in the 1980 state and county elections.

Other cities of East Idaho also have followed the Idaho Falls lead for the alcoholic ban at parks and other recreation areas.

The county could neatly dispose of the situation by holding an advisory referendum. It's likely of enough importance and interest for that purpose and the decision could also apply to city parks.

Voters forced a referendum on sale of table wines in grocery stores in January, 1972, but the proposal lost 8,409 against to 6,427 in favor. There has been talk and rumors but no serious effort has been launched since to force another vote. Maybe this could be considered for 1980.

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The situation has now forced the beer guzzlers to seek other spots. Many now go to such as the privately owned parks — Sealander and Heise parks.

Other groups find their way to vacant lots, or river and creek banks where they can indulge in drinking. This also has created some problems and there have been lives lost from drowning.

It might have happened anyway, park beer drinking ban or not.

Perhaps the controversy may be temporarily settled but it wouldn't be surprising if it is renewed.

At the recent county hearing there were many silly arguments raised, ranging from religious oppression and infringement of civil rights to threatening of public health.

The issue is not one of moral, religious or civil rights. It's simply one of whether beer and alcohol drinkers would interfere with the rights of those who don't drink. That's a tall order and no pun intended.