

## Can the battle on park and recreation research be resolved?

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Over the last ten years or more that I have been involved with recreation research, I have watched with growing concern the development of an apparent alienation between administrators in the parks and recreation field, and scientists involved in parks and recreation research, especially between local agency administrators and researchers.

Prior to the early 1960's very little recreation research was done which had any direct applicability to the work of administrators. The ORRRC commission studies provided a high visibility research product which clearly benefited the profession and there appeared to be widespread tentative acceptance of the potential value of research. Many federal and state agencies which traditionally had been involved in environmental research diversified to include recreation research. Because research has always been a part of the management contribution in many of these agencies, acceptance or at worst tolerance was the reaction of most agency personnel to agency produced recreation research.

Parks and recreation personnel at the local level have never had an ongoing first hand relationship with research endeavors. Since 1960, considerable research has been done for various local recreation agencies, most of it by universities, some by consultants and some by private groups. In terms of the total dollars expended, much of the research money spent for local research has come from Federal sources such as NSF, HUD or BOR.

Based on this situation two things

have occurred. Because much of the research was being funded by non-local sources, researcher/local administrator relationships and interactions were often maintained at just enough above minimum to assure that the research was intelligently executed. Secondly, non-local funding agencies were often seeking answers to different questions than local administrators. Obviously the funding source will have the greatest influence in the direction of the research. This has set the stage for many of the attitudinal expressions of researchers and administrators for one another which I believe are a detriment to both the advancement of scientific enquiry and the delivery of recreation services and opportunities.

I have personally heard the following types of criticisms about recreation research in general made by administrators.

1) The research questions researchers are interested in do not bear directly on solutions to problems that I face from day to day.

2) The researchers did not understand adequately enough the local situation to be able to deal with its complexities in their research design.

3) The researcher seemed to feel that I had nothing to contribute to the ongoing execution of the research.

4) The research was reported in such a way that it looked like a "statistical and jargon snowjob."

5) The research disrupted recreation users and my operations too much.

This is not at all a complete list but it represents a spectrum of concerns.

On the other hand, I have heard different researchers object to certain situations they have encountered on the following grounds:

1) Day to day problem solving type research will not lead to an understanding of underlying relationships so that solutions can be generalized beyond the specific situation being researched.

2) The administrator seemed more concerned about protecting himself and the existing program than in trying to deal with the research problem objectively.

3) Inadequate financial resources are available to do an adequate job of solving the problem at hand.

4) The agency needs the results much sooner than we can get them to them. They don't understand what goes into a research project.

5) They want us to give them answers to all their problems in a "one shot" research effort.

A few observations might be helpful in summarizing and reconciling these complaints:

1) Sometimes competency of the administrator and/or researcher might be a problem but usually it is more of a communications problem than anything else.

A. Each should clearly understand the other's objectives at the outset of the research.

B. There should be regular and close interaction between the administrator and the researcher from the earliest planning efforts until the action implementation stage which results from the research.

C. Knowledge of the research should be communicated throughout the agency except where it would be detrimental to the research.

2) Multiple research objectives can be achieved if they are planned for. There seems to be little if any research funding available for strictly theoretical studies. On the other hand many competent researchers resist undertaking studies whose total purpose is to answer specific and short run problems. Answers to both types of questions can be sought



together if care and sensitivity is exercised in developing the study.

3) Regional institutes located at major universities in various parts of the country should be established to promote and execute research. They should be located at universities with long standing commitments to recreation and parks as an academic discipline. Institute staff should consist of administrators brought in on a sabbatic basis as well as academics. Funding should involve federal, state and local sources to provide adequate scale and continuity. Governance of the Institute should include interested field administrators who would have an official voice in the development of policy and direction for the organization. These would serve to teach researchers and administrators more about one another's work.

4) A definite effort should be made

to report results in a form that is clear and understandable to administrative personnel. On occasion, I have reviewed research papers that, in my judgement, were of questionable conceptual value where statistical gimmickry and heavy use of jargon occurred which seemed almost contrived to put the reader on the defensive so they would not ask any "hard" questions. Double reporting - - one in a technical form as well as one in a non-technical form - - may be the answer.

5) Consideration should be given to forms of research other than surveys. Much fruitful research could and should be done which would not require any communication with users. These include participant and non-participant observations, experiments in use and behavior, using design and planning management analyses, archives and content

analyses, and erosion and accretion studies. Often these kinds of studies tell a great deal about use and users and about organization performance without disrupting use or organizational responsibilities.

There is undoubtedly at least a vague awareness of the situation outlined in this paper in most organizations involved in recreation research. However, there does not seem to be much evidence of an effort to adjust the research/field interface in any non-federal research organization that I know of. It would seem appropriate to begin considering remedial efforts if the situation as has been described here is accurate. In all likelihood no one has all the answers to the objective of better implementing research application in the field. But agreeing that there is a problem at least gets us to the first stage of seeking solutions. ■

### PM contest open for best maintenance ideas in parks, golf courses, campuses

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### Golf Course Maintenance

Last fall I acquired a new tool that we have been using almost daily. It has not only saved us a great number of manhours, but has performed jobs we were never able to do before. As a result, our course is in the best shape ever. We have healthier turf on the fairways and roughs, and grass in wooded areas that have had sparse

growth (mostly weeds) in the past.

The new tool I acquired is a flexible harrow. While it has apparently been around for awhile, it was new to me and apparently not known to most golf courses, as golf course maintenance instructors at nearby Kishwaukee College and the area implement dealers had never heard of it.

The harrow is a series of 7/16"

special steel tine teeth, 3 1/2" long, linked together in a "blanket-like" effect. There are no rigid braces on the harrow. Thus it follows all the contours of the ground. When you attach the front end of the harrow to the draw bar with the tine teeth down, you get maximum penetration. (Tine teeth automatically point slightly back.) If you hook the rear of the harrow to the draw bar, the penetration is minimum, because the teeth automatically tilt much further back. When harrow is turned on its back with tine teeth up, it is then set for smoothing and floating.

Since each section of harrow is made up of two half sections that hook across the middle, the front section, as example, can be set for maximum penetration, and the rear for light penetration or floating. The brand name is, Fuerst F-l-e-x-i-b-l-e Tine Harrow.

We have used our harrow on:  
*Fairways and roughs*

*Breaking up soil cores:* After fairway aeration, we ran the harrow with tines up to break up soil cores. It evenly distributed the top soil and did not damage existing established grass.

*Spring raking:* We used the harrow with tines down, to fluff the leaves out of low spots. They were then easy to pick up with our sweeper. We use it



with tines down in roughs to help stand up matted grass so it can be easily cut.

**Fairways and roughs:** We ran over all fairways and roughs this spring with tines down. It aerated the turf, loosened thatch and stimulated rapid green up and growth. I have pictures of our number 3 fairway taken on March 30, the day we did our first harrowing, and again on April 9, and the green up and growth is really amazing. During that time we had only had 1/2" rain on April 2. We later used the harrow with tines down prior to overseeding and fertilizing some of our fairways. It saved hand raking and produced a much better seed bed. After seeding and fertilizing, we ran with tines up. This shook loose any fertilizer and seed left on the grass so it came in better contact with the soil

**Fertilizing and overseeding worn areas:** We harrowed worn areas last fall with tine teeth down before fertilizing and overseeding. It aerated the turf and worked up a fine seed bed without disturbing the existing growth. After seeding, we went over the areas with tines up. This procedure allowed the fertilizer to penetrate the soil faster and covered the seed which gave us a much greater percentage of germination than we have had in the past.

**New Construction**

We harrowed two newly constructed tees and one area along number eight fairway where we had removed a large amount of brush and trees. We did this with the tine teeth down. It smoothed out the sharp

edges of the rough grading, while working in the fertilizer as the seed bed was prepared. I'm sure it would work as well in smoothing out rough uneven ground to put the touches on newly constructed greens and fairways. It reduces our hand raking prior to seeding to an absolute minimum.

**Wooded areas**

We used the harrow with tines down in our wooded areas (we have a lot of oaks) early this spring. It fluffed the leaves up so well, it was easy to pick them up with our sweeper. We

used it later this spring in some of our woods to aerate the soil and stimulate growth. In doing so, it picked up sticks and twigs and carried them along so that we could gather them up and easily dispose of them. Our wooded areas have never been cleaner, nor had a more lush growth in them.

**Traps**

Early this spring we harrowed our traps with the tines down. It broke up the crust, loosened the sand and at the same time, pulled out sticks and leaves buried late last fall and winter.

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