

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

An Assessment of the Bureau of Reclamation's Non-Federal Recreation Management Partners



**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Denver, Colorado**

August 2005

Mission Statements

The mission of the Department of the Interior is to protect and provide access to our Nation's natural and cultural heritage and honor our trust responsibilities to tribes.

The mission of the Bureau of Reclamation is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.

An Assessment of the Bureau of Reclamation's Non-Federal Recreation Management Partners

Submitted to:

Bureau of Reclamation
Office of Program and Policy Services
Denver, Colorado

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 1976, there have been 29 recreation areas on Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) lands that were managed by non-Federal partners that have been returned to Reclamation for management. In recent years there have been discussions of additional areas that may be on the verge of being returned to Reclamation. In response, Reclamation's Office of Program and Policy Services commissioned a study in 2004 to determine the overall welfare of the 67 non-Federal partners that manage 156 recreation areas on Reclamation land and water throughout the 17 Western States. The study objectives were to:

- assess the current welfare of the managing partners
- identify factors that would enable the partnerships to be strengthened
- identify factors that signal potential at-risk or turn-back situations
- develop a set of recommendations

Aukerman, Haas, and Associates, who were contracted to conduct the study, developed a questionnaire in close collaboration with Reclamation's recreation coordinators during the spring of 2004. Survey distribution to the 67 non-Federal partners began on a regional basis in early July. (See Appendix A for a list of non-Federal partners.) By October 2004, 100 percent of the partners had responded. Preliminary analysis was completed in November 2004 and final analysis in February 2005.

The contractor met with approximately 25 Reclamation officials during the course of the final data analysis and report preparation. Preliminary results were presented at these various meetings, followed by a discussion that was very helpful in providing a deeper and clearer understanding of the survey results.

Two key survey questions were designed to assess the overall welfare of the partnerships with Reclamation:

1. Overall, how would you *rate your success* in providing quality outdoor recreation opportunities while protecting the resource.
2. As you look toward the future, how would you *rate your ability to maintain or improve the quality* of opportunities you are providing today.

The partners were asked to respond to these two key questions by circling a number on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being labeled very poor and 10 excellent. For purposes of this study, those partners who responded with a score of 5 or lower to either question were labeled as potential at-risk partners. The names of the at-risk partners are not included in this report.

Thirty percent of Reclamation's non-Federal managing partners have one or more areas that are considered at-risk of turn-back. A comparison across all the survey questions of the partners that are at-risk versus the partners that are not at-risk identified several key differences. At-risk partners were found to have fewer plans, did less marketing, used friends groups and volunteers to a lesser extent, had less media coverage, had a decreasing staff in the last 5 years, met with Reclamation officials less often, had a lower cost recovery rate, and had a higher percentage of facilities over 20 years old than partners that were not at-risk.

The survey looked at over 75 aspects of the partnership. Some of the more interesting results include that, on average, Reclamation officials met formally with their partners twice a year, and informally more than four times a year. Respondents indicated that some 46 percent of their facilities were 20 years old or older, 28 percent of their facilities needed replacement, and 39 percent of the facilities did not meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards. Two out of every three partners had not developed or revised, in the last 5 years, any kind of a resource management plan, recreation management plan, or business plan. Cost-recovery (i.e., the amount of fees and charges collected relative to the total annual operating budget) ranged from 0 to 100 percent among the partners. The average cost-recovery rate was 40 percent.

The managing partners were asked to identify the three most significant issues that will affect their future ability to provide quality outdoor recreation opportunities. Some 95 percent of the partners indicated stable and sufficient funding as a most significant issue. More specifically, the partners indicated a need for money for capital construction, operations and maintenance, deferred maintenance, and planning, along with more consistent funding policies and support across Reclamation's regions.

Other significant future issues expressed by the partners included the need for more and better recreation facilities (20 percent), concern about sufficient water levels for recreational use (17 percent), conflicts with changing adjacent land uses (14 percent), and the requirements of Federal regulations (14 percent).

In summary, 30 percent of the Reclamation's non-Federal partners were defined in this study as potentially at-risk. Special attention and support for the at-risk partners is advised to include periodic management evaluation discussions with all Reclamation partners in the future. The study concludes with four recommendations:

- assist the partners in developing or improving their recreation management plans
- encourage the use of best recreation business practices
- strengthen the partner's financial solvency
- continue collaborative communications

CHAPTER 1: STUDY OVERVIEW

Introduction to the Report

The purposes of this report are to:

- describe Reclamation’s efforts in 2004 to assess the welfare of its partnership with non-Federal partners
- present and summarize the results of the survey
- make recommendations on the ways Reclamation can strengthen its partnerships

Background of the Partners Study

The Federal Water Project Recreation Act of 1965, Public Law 89–72, as amended, requires that recreation and fish and wildlife resources be given full consideration at Federal water projects and that the project shall be constructed, operated, and maintained accordingly. Public Law 89–72 further states that “project construction agencies shall encourage non-Federal public bodies to administer project land and water areas for recreation and fish and wildlife enhancement purposes and operate, maintain, and replace facilities provided for those purposes.”

Reclamation has 310 designated recreation areas on its projects throughout the 17 Western States. These areas draw almost 90 million visits annually, and the number is increasing at an average rate of 1.2 million visits per year. Of these 310 designated recreation areas, 156 are managed by non-Federal partners, mainly State, county, and city park departments. The facilities are usually developed on a cost-share basis with Reclamation and managed by the non-Federal partner through management agreement contracts. For a variety of reasons, it has become more difficult for some non-Federal partners to continue to manage the areas. Some partners have terminated their contracts with Reclamation and turned recreation management responsibilities back to Reclamation.

The Congress has declared that “there is a Federal responsibility to provide for public recreation at Federal water projects” and “that responsibility for all costs of operation, maintenance, and replacement of recreation facilities result in an unfair burden (non-Federal partners), especially in cases where the facilities are old and under-designed.” Reclamation has attempted to assist its non-Federal partners using laws such as Public Law 102–575, Title 28, to alleviate some of the non-Federal financial burden.

Since 1976, there have been 29 turn-backs and recent discussions suggest that additional areas may be on the verge of being returned to Reclamation. Most turn-backs occur in a short time-frame, and Reclamation has no contingency plan in place that would provide for a smooth management transition. Furthermore, Reclamation has limited authority and resources to manage turn-backs. If a turn-back were to occur, Reclamation would need adequate time to prepare contingency plans and to obtain necessary authorities and resources so that it could continue to meet public needs and expectations with no interruption in service.

Study Objectives

The goal of this study is to determine the overall welfare of the 67 non-Federal partners that manage recreation and concessions on Reclamation land and water. The objectives are to:

1. Assess the current welfare of Reclamation's non-Federal recreation managing partners.
2. Identify factors that would enable the partnerships to be strengthened.
3. Identify factors that signal potential at-risk (i.e., turn-back) situations.
4. Develop a set of recommendations based on the study results.

Methodology

Definition of Managing Partner

For purposes of this study, a managing partner is an agency or organization that has an agreement with Reclamation to manage the recreation resources or other agreed upon resources at a Reclamation project. The partners in this study ranged from State park agencies that manage multiple sites or projects to small entities that manage a single site or project. The respondent was selected based on the criterion of being the most knowledgeable of the partnership relationship.

Potential Limitations of Study

There are several limitations of this study. First, the sampling unit in this study was the managing partner and not each individual Reclamation area managed by a partner. Second, in some cases the respondent completed the survey based on its experience at a single Reclamation project, while in other cases a respondent

completed the survey based upon what was believed to be typical or average across a number of areas that it managed. Third, it was assumed that the respondent was very knowledgeable of the partnership relationship over the years.

Survey Development

Development of the survey questions involved an iterative process. Initially, a literature review was conducted to identify key factors important in any kind of partnership relationship. This resulted in the identification of several hundred factors. The factors were then screened on the criteria of (a) relevancy to outdoor recreation partnerships and (b) applicability to Federal land and water resource management. The screening process reduced the key factors to approximately 50 that were then reviewed by Reclamation's Office of Program and Policy Services (OPPS) and Reclamation's recreation coordinators for content and applicability. Some factors were dropped, some added, and others revised. Reclamation's OPPS sent the revised survey to the regional directors for their input in March 2004. Review comments were addressed and the survey finalized in June 2004.

Survey Administration and Response Rate

In late June and early July 2004, Reclamation's regional recreation coordinators compiled a list of primary contact people to receive the survey. The coordinators also contacted the partners to explain the purpose of the study and to emphasize its importance. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Glenn Haas of Aukerman, Haas, and Associates, sent an e-mail-based survey with an introductory e-mail message to the managing partners. In several instances, the surveys were faxed to people without Internet capabilities.

The surveys were sent out in waves to the partners in each of Reclamation's regions, with a 10-day separation period between each. The strategy helped to maintain organization and timely follow-up to any questions or reminders.

If there was no e-mail response in 10 days, Dr. Haas personally telephoned the primary contact person to encourage participation and further explain the study. If there was no survey response after 21 days, the regional recreation coordinators would make personal telephone contact to encourage participation.

The strategy worked well, as is evidenced by a 100 percent response rate from the partners by November 1, 2004.

CHAPTER 2: STUDY RESULTS

The study results are divided into three sections. First are the results of the closed-ended or scaled-survey questions, followed by the open-ended question responses, and then the identification of the factors signaling potential at-risk partners.

Descriptive Statistics for the Scaled-Survey Questions

Table 1 displays the two key survey questions that were designed to assess the overall welfare of the partnerships with Reclamation:

- (1) Overall, how would you *rate your success* in providing quality outdoor recreation opportunities while protecting the resource.
- (2) As you look toward the future, how would you *rate your ability to maintain or improve the quality* of opportunities you are providing today.

Table 1.—The Frequency Distribution of Responses to the Survey Questions Regarding Partnership Success, Ability to Maintain, and Quality of the Partnership with Reclamation

Questions	Actual Number of Responses for Each Point on a 10-Point Scale										Mean Score
	1 very poor	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 excellent	
Overall, how would you rate your <i>success</i> in providing quality outdoor recreation opportunities while protecting the resource?	0	0	3	0	7	3	14	22	7	9	7.6
As you look toward the future, how would you rate your <i>ability</i> to maintain or improve the quality of opportunities you are providing today?	1	0	2	2	8	17	12	12	4	7	6.9

Table 2.—Condition of the Resources Managed by Partners

Resources	Percentage of Partners Responding by Category (N=67)						
	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Not Sure or Not Applicable
Fishery	12%	29%	27%	24%	5%	2%	N=25
Shoreline	2%	25%	30%	30%	13%	0%	N=13
Wildlife	14%	32%	37%	18%	0%	0%	N=9
Aquatic Vegetation	11%	25%	23%	34%	7%	0%	N=22
Terrestrial Vegetation	9%	15%	33%	32%	7%	4%	N=12
Aesthetics	18%	30%	29%	15%	8%	0%	N=6
Water Quality	6%	23%	34%	28%	9%	0%	N=13
Cultural Resources	2%	26%	30%	38%	2%	2%	N=19
Historic Resources	0%	21%	36%	36%	7%	0%	N=24

Table 3 indicates that the services involved in recreation management at Reclamation projects are numerous and diverse. Most partners, except in the case of fire management, paid entirely for all the 11 services listed in table 2. Law enforcement and fire management services were provided at no charge to about one out of every four partners. Cost-sharing services with other non-Reclamation partners (e.g., county, subdivision) did occur, and ranged from 12 percent of the partner's cost-sharing electricity to 38 percent cost-sharing resource management activities.

Table 3.—Percentage Distribution of those Services Provided by the Partners, Cost-Shared with Others, or Provided at No Charge by Others

Services	Percent of Responses to the Response Categories (N=67)		
	Paid by Your Organization	Costs Shared with Others	Provided at No Charge by Others
Law enforcement	60%	18%	22%
Resource management	56%	38%	6%
Trash collection	81%	17%	2%
Sewer and water	87%	12%	1%
Electricity	83%	15%	2%
Visitor interpretation	60%	34%	6%
Facility maintenance	80%	19%	1%
Road maintenance	61%	32%	7%
Monitoring	75%	23%	2%
Weed or pest control	67%	31%	2%
Fire management	43%	34%	23%

Table 4 presents the percentage of responses to a series of related questions about services provided to recreationists. Approximately 44 percent of the partners indicated the “local communities (e.g., Chamber, businesses) typically market, advertise, or otherwise promote visitation to your recreation area” on a frequent or very frequent basis. Half of the partners indicated “not at all” or “very little” to the question of “having a local friends group, cooperating association, or organized group of volunteers that regularly help with the management of the area.” Thirty-seven percent of the partners indicated that “the media write or talk about your recreation areas” on a frequent or very frequent basis. Only 11 percent of the partners indicated that adjacent land uses were frequent or very frequent factors that hinder their recreation management.

Almost half the partners indicated that their recreation areas were highly or very highly valued as an economic contributor by the local communities and were also viewed by their local officials as an asset and contributor to the quality of life of the area.

Table 4.—Percentage of Responses to Selected Situations

Selected Situations	Percent of Response to the Response Categories (N=67)					
	Not at all 1	Very Little 2	Occasionally 3	Frequently 4	Very Frequently 5	Overall Average Score
Do the local communities (e.g., chamber of commerce, businesses) typically market, advertise, or otherwise promote visitation to your recreation area?	12%	19%	25%	35%	9%	3.1 occasionally
Do your recreation areas have a local “friends” group, cooperating association, or organized group of volunteers that regularly help with the management of the area?	31%	19%	28%	14%	8%	2.5 very little
To what extent do the media write or talk about your recreation areas?	6%	12%	45%	31%	6%	3.2 occasionally
To what extent are there adjacent land uses that hinder your recreation management (e.g., private cabins, docks, trailers, grazing operations, or sand and gravel operations)?	19%	38%	32%	9%	2%	2.4 very little
	Not at all 1	Very Little 2	Moderately 3	High 4	Very High 5	Overall Average Score
To what extent do the local communities value your recreation areas as an economic contributor to the area and as part of their tourism industry?	5%	15%	32%	34%	14%	3.4 moderately
To what extent do the elected local and State officials (outside your organization) view your recreation areas as an asset and contributor to the quality of life?	6%	15%	31%	34%	14%	3.3 moderately

Table 5 contains the results to a collection of questions that describe the partner's management situation. Over 70 percent of the recreation facilities managed by the partners are over 11 years old, and 46 percent are 20 years old or older. Approximately one out of every four facilities (28 percent) needs to be rehabilitated or replaced because of public health and safety concerns or for resource protection reasons, while 4 out of every 10 (39 percent) facilities do not meet the current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility standards. The number of paid personnel has remained largely the same (55 percent of the partners) over the last 5 years, while 24 percent indicated a decrease and 21 percent an increase.

Approximately half the partners had a resource management plan or a recreation management plan developed in the last 5 years, or were developing one. Less than one out of three partners has developed or is preparing a business management plan.

The partners indicated that, on average, they had over six formal and informal meetings or visits with Reclamation officials a year. Reclamation officials visited the areas an average of 2.3 times a year as part of a formal review (e.g., oversight activity, inspection, contract requirement) and an average of 4.4 times a year as part of informal meetings or visits to discuss management issues or opportunities.

Cost recovery rates, defined in this study as the percent of the annual total operating budget typically recovered by various fees and charges each year, ranged from 0 to 100 percent. On average, the cost-recovery rate was 40 percent. Half (i.e., median) of the partners had a cost-recovery rate greater than 35 percent, and half lower than 35 percent.

Deferred maintenance is difficult to interpret because some respondents were speaking on behalf of large State Park systems, while other respondents were speaking for individual areas. The median amount of dollars is the best statistic to use in this case, and it shows that half the partners had a deferred maintenance of greater than \$200,000.

Table 5.—Descriptive Statistics for Selected Questions

Questions	Descriptive Statistics to Each Question (N=67)
<p>What percent of your recreation facilities are</p> <p>Less than 5 year old?</p> <p>5–10 years old?</p> <p>11–20 years old?</p> <p>Over 20 years?</p>	<p>11%</p> <p>17%</p> <p>26%</p> <p>46%</p>
<p>What percent of your facilities need to be rehabilitated or replaced because of public health and safety concerns or for resource protection reasons?</p>	<p>28%</p>
<p>What percent of your facilities meet the current ADA accessibility standards?</p>	<p>61%</p>
<p>Over the last 5 years, circle if the number of paid personnel (full-time and seasonal) has been:</p> <p>Increasing: 21% About the Same: 55% Decreasing: 24%</p>	
<p>Circle if you have developed or updated any of the following plans in the last 5 years:</p> <p>Resource management plan? Yes: 40% No: 44% In Progress: 16%</p> <p>Recreation management plan? Yes: 34% No: 50% In Progress: 16%</p> <p>Business management plan? Yes: 19% No: 71% In Progress: 11%</p>	
<p>Estimate the total number of concessions (permanent or on-going seasonal) that operate in your recreation areas?</p>	<p>Average = 2.7</p> <p>Median = 1.0</p>
<p>How many times a year do Reclamation officials visit the areas as part of a formal review, oversight activity, inspection, or contract requirement?</p>	<p>Average = 2.3</p> <p>Median = 2.0</p>
<p>How many times a year are there informal meetings or visits with Reclamation officials to discuss management issues or opportunities?</p>	<p>Average = 4.4</p> <p>Median = 3.0</p>
<p>What has been your cost-recovery rate over the last several years; that is, what percent of your annual total operating budget is typically recovered by various fees and charges each year?</p>	<p>Average = 39.6%</p> <p>Median = 35%</p>
<p>Please estimate your current amount of deferred (i.e., backlogged) maintenance in dollars.</p>	<p>Average = \$4.6 M</p> <p>Median = \$200K</p>

Content Analysis of Open-Ended Survey Questions

The partners survey contained a series of open-ended (versus closed ended or scaled) questions to permit the respondents to describe, in their own words, the partnership. This section includes six verbatim questions (in bold) and the author's content analysis (summary categories) of the respondent's answers. Actual responses are included in italics to provide a clearer understanding and context for the reader.

Question #1: Briefly describe the three most significant issues that will affect your future ability to provide quality outdoor recreation opportunities on the areas you manage for Reclamation.

Issues Affecting Future Ability	Percentage of responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of sufficient funding / No stable source of funds for capital improvement / development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>capital improvement / development</i> ○ <i>operations and maintenance</i> ○ <i>deferred maintenance</i> ○ <i>planning</i> 	95%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more facilities to meet visitor demands / Recreation capacity problem / Demand exceeds supply / Aging facilities 	20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quantity / Lack of water resources due to drought / Low water levels 	17%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encroachment from adjacent development and surrounding cities / Changing land uses 	14%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal regulations / Additional requirements / New rules implemented / Regulatory requirements to construct facilities / ADA requirements 	14%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quality (e.g., insufficient to support fishery, public swimming, aquatic vegetation) 	12%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient staffing / Need to increase staff to meet recreation demand 	11%

Question #2: What resources or activities do you manage for Reclamation that are not recreation-related (e.g., weed control, trespass resolution, boundary fencing, cultural resources protection, or wetlands issues)?

Non-recreation management activities	Percentage of Responses
• Weed control / Pest management	48%
• None, our focus is entirely on recreation	33%
• Boundary fencing	32%
• Cultural resources protection	27%
• Trespass resolution	23%
• Wetlands management and protection	21%
• Wildlife management and protection	12%
• Law enforcement and security	11%

Question #3: What stipulations in the management agreement with Reclamation may limit your ability to manage?

Stipulations that may limit ability to manage	Percentage of Responses
• None / Our agreement with Reclamation is very accommodating with few limitations / Reclamation staff is very accessible and responsive to questions and issues	58%
• Years of lease agreement / Delays in renewal and approval / Need for periodic reviews and updates / Need to be more specific and detailed	8%
• Not familiar with the management agreement / Unknown / Unsure	6%

Question #4: What would you recommend in order to strengthen your partnership with Reclamation?

Recommendations to Strengthen Partnerships	Percentage of Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more funding for operations and maintenance and capital improvements 	42%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our existing partnership with Reclamation is excellent / Strong / Has improved greatly 	39%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve communication / Improve amount and flow of information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>to understand how our recreation area is prioritized in Reclamation's organization</i> ○ <i>to see more of Reclamation's vision of what they want to do with the property</i> ○ <i>there needs to be a better communication protocol. The level of communication between the District and the agency has been cyclic. It seems to depend on the influx of new staff</i> ○ <i>it would assist us if certain lake level projections and water release information was made known before being released to the general public</i> ○ <i>there should be regular meetings and a regular dialogue among Reclamation and the agencies and it should involve not only Reclamation recreation staff, but top level Reclamation and Department of the Interior officials</i> ○ <i>notify the appropriate staff of scheduled inspections</i> ○ <i>yearly workshops with Reclamation</i> 	32%

Question #5: What could your organization do to strengthen the partnership with Reclamation?

Suggestions to Improve Partnership	Percentage of Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No suggestions / The partnership is excellent 	33%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve communication / Improve amount and flow of information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>better communicate park improvement planning to allow better coordination of Title 28 assistance</i> ○ <i>more frequent “standard” reporting, perhaps a quarterly report would be beneficial</i> ○ <i>better written communication, reflecting status of projects</i> ○ <i>the establishment of a meeting and/or reporting system with a progress check form and bi-annual meetings</i> ○ <i>develop agency contacts</i> ○ <i>have annual meetings to update each agency on current business</i> ○ <i>continue to involve some of our more senior management in discussions, tours, and projects with Reclamation</i> ○ <i>explain mission and goals for the future</i> ○ <i>continue to meet regularly to review goals, etc.</i> ○ <i>hold annual brainstorming meeting</i> ○ <i>make an effort to meet with Reclamation for an annual property review/discussion about each project</i> ○ <i>keep Reclamation informed and updated on activities</i> ○ <i>improve overall communication by providing organizational newsletter, share annual goals</i> 	29%

- Improve cooperation with Reclamation 11%
 - *the agency leaders could be more assertive to accommodate Reclamation's needs in creating a leaseholder partnership*
 - *work with Reclamation to develop new policies and procedures for these new partnerships*
 - *work with Reclamation to obtain needed planning and funding of partnership issues*
 - *work harder to educate Congress about partnerships and Reclamation funding needs*
 - *brief more top level officials in Reclamation on our programs, collaborations, needs, etc.*
 - *feature Reclamation history and programs more prominently in facilities, interpretation and education*
 - *incorporate Reclamation staff involvement in all major developments and day to day operations*
 - *joint project work*
 - *work together on strategies*

- Improve and support long-term planning 11%
 - *do more long-term planning with Reclamation input*
 - *request input from Reclamation on master plan and resource management plan revisions*
 - *remain involved with future plans*
 - *identify long-term management/capital plan for recreation area*
 - *be more pro-active in the planning for the long range*
 - *more organization as far as master plans along with short-term and long-term goals*
 - *develop priorities*

Question #6: Are there other important considerations that we might have missed or other ideas you have to strengthen your partnership with Reclamation?

List of considerations/comments given:

1. *I am very pleased with things the way they are currently*
2. *Once the projects are complete and we are maintaining the sites, a greater presence of Reclamation might result in greater cooperation in the areas of operations, maintenance and security*
3. *We're very pleased with our relationship with Reclamation*
4. *There should be some type of publication/notification on available Reclamation granting funding cycles and availability*
5. *We appreciate the opportunity to work with Reclamation and feel that we have a very good partnership. We want to ensure that this effort continues*
6. *We would like to acknowledge the many fine Reclamation employees. Some of them in particular stand out and work to make the partnership work and assist our program. We have complementary missions and many similar goals. There is particularly good cooperation on NEPA compliance issues*
7. *Individual managers and administrators change, as do relationships between agencies as time goes by. It took a local stakeholders public outreach partnership group, meeting on a regular basis, to bring our agency's staff closer together. Agency support of such groups and organizations is vital for future interaction*
8. *We have an excellent relationship with our representative*
9. *Recognize the substantial local contribution to managing the recreation resource created by Reclamation activities*
10. *The Reclamation group is committed to setting up with the district. We as operators will be forced to absorb the expense of approximately \$300,000 to set up and continue charges for service all on a four month operation*

11. *Maybe an updated mission statement from Reclamation*
12. *There is no doubt that partnership operations are more challenging than single agency operations day in and day out. That being said, this partnership (and likely many others) has the potential to allow more public benefit, and a better product than either agency might be able to effect on its own in today's challenging budget climate*
13. *I am sure there are, but I have probably said enough. Reclamation needs to emphasize better cooperation with their partners and try to make it as easy as possible. If we get bogged down in the process, the studies, reports, paperwork, etc., then the partners are going to pull back and either terminate their agreements, or become minimal silent partners. Recreational facilities will continue to deteriorate and resources left unprotected. Recreational facilities are not mandatory, funds are limited, and facilities that do not produce revenues to offset expenditures are going to become low priorities. Right now, I am very frustrated with Reclamation and have little confidence they can perform in a timely fashion. They are making completion of facility improvements very difficult and cumbersome. Instead of looking at Reclamation as a partner, they are becoming a hurdle to encounter*
14. *Not at this time. I think we have a very good working relationship and we will work hard to maintain that*
15. *Make provisions available to allow non-profit agencies to apply for grants and/or Federal funding*
16. *Improvements occurring in coordinated decision making, regarding who can best manage third party land use agreements, i.e. more direct management by Reclamation*
17. *We need to have a strong ongoing relationship due to all the changes in our area*
18. *We manage areas that provide significant fish and wildlife resources and significant recreation opportunities. To strengthen our partnership, long-term funding agreements are critical to ensure these values are protected into the future. These resources are becoming more important and valuable to citizens in or visiting our state. It is difficult to build the infrastructure necessary to succeed if funding is committed to periods of 5 years or less. Trust funds or endowments would be a great alternative but require a commitment to pursue congressional authorization*
19. *Better working relationship needed with the Office (Reclamation)*

20. *Reclamation has been a good partner with the State for recreational purposes*
21. *Maintain, cultivate and foster on-going communication with Reclamation that does not always revolve around “what have you done for me lately” attitude. Our relationship with Reclamation has been favorable. We appreciate the opportunity they give us to manage our sites through cooperative effort and agreement. We view them as viable partners that will help us get where we need to go in meeting user demands.*

Factors Signaling Potential At-Risk Partners

One objective of the study was to identify factors that may signal potential at-risk partnerships; that is, those partnerships that have a higher likelihood of dissolving with the result that the recreation areas are turned-back to Reclamation.

As previously stated, at-risk partners in this study were defined as those respondents that scored 5 or less on the 10-point scale to the questions of (a) *Overall, how would you rate your success in providing quality outdoor recreation opportunities while protecting the resource?* or (b) *As you look toward the future, how would you rate your ability to maintain or improve the quality of opportunities you are providing today?* The response to these two questions is reported in table 1, which shows that 10 partners scored 5 or less to the first question and 13 partners scored 5 or less to the second question. Three respondents scored 5 or less on both questions, thus the overall number of partners that are defined as at-risk are 20 individual partners. Stated otherwise, based upon the definition of at-risk in this study, 30 percent of Reclamation’s non-Federal managing partners have one or more areas that are considered at-risk of turn-back. (NOTE: Since the study sampled the 67 managing partners and not each of the 156 areas managed by the partners, it is not known what percent are the individual areas are at-risk).

For purposes of identifying factors that may predict or forecast potential at-risk situations, the total of 67 non-Federal partners in this study was subdivided into two groups: (a) the 20 at-risk partners and (b) the 47 partners that are not at-risk. The two groups were compared on each of the survey variables to determine what factors may predict a potential at-risk situation. Table 6 presents the results of key factors that differentiate the two groups.

Table 6.—A Comparison of Responses on Key Factors between the At-Risk Partners and the Non At-Risk Partners.

Key Factors	At-Risk Partners (N=20)	Non At-Risk Partners (N=47)
Updated resource management plan	11%—yes	45%—yes
Updated recreation management plan	8%—yes	41%—yes
Updated business plan	0%—yes	23%—yes
Extent of marketing	42%—no marketing at all	6%—no marketing at all
Use of friends groups	58%—not at all; 0%—frequently or very frequently	24%—not at all; 27%—frequently or very frequently
Extent of media coverage	33%—not at all; 11%—frequently or very frequently	2%—not at all; 40%—frequently or very frequently
Percent with staff decreasing in the last 5 years	58%—decreasing staff	15%—decreasing staff
Number of formal meetings with Reclamation per year	0–1 meetings per year	2.5 meetings per year
Age of recreation facilities	72% of facilities over 20 years old	41% of facilities over 20 years old
Percent of cost-recovery	13% average cost recovery	44% average cost recovery

CHAPTER 3: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The survey examined 75 aspects of the partnership. Some of the more interesting results include that, on average, Reclamation officials met formally with their partners twice a year and informally more than four times a year. Respondents indicated that some 46 percent of their facilities were 20 years old or older, 28 percent of their facilities needed replacement, and 39 percent of their facilities did not meet ADA standards. Some two out of every three partners had not developed or revised in the last 5 years any kind of a resource management plan, recreation management plan, or business plan. Cost-recovery (i.e., the amount of fees and charges collected relative to total annual operating budget) ranged from 0 to 100 percent among the partners. The average cost-recovery rate was 40 percent.

Thirty percent of Reclamation's non-Federal managing partners have one or more areas that are considered at-risk of turn-back. A comparison across all the survey questions of the partners that are at-risk to the partners that are not at-risk identified several key differences. At-risk partners were found to have fewer plans, did less marketing, used friends groups and volunteers to a lesser extent, had less media coverage, had a decreasing staff in the last 5 years, met with Reclamation officials less often, had a lower cost recovery rate, and had a higher percentage of facilities over 20 years old than partners that were not at-risk.

The managing partners were asked to identify the three most significant issues affecting their future ability to provide quality outdoor recreation opportunities. Some 95 percent of the partners indicated stable and sufficient funding as a most significant issue. More specifically, the partners indicated a need for money for capital construction, operations and maintenance, deferred maintenance, and planning, along with more consistent funding policies and support across Reclamation's regions.

Other significant future issues expressed by the partners included the need for more and better recreation facilities (20 percent), concern about sufficient water levels for recreational use (17 percent), conflicts with changing adjacent land uses (14 percent), and the requirements of Federal regulations (14 percent).

Recommendations

Based on the study results and the discussion sessions with Reclamation officials, four recommendations are provided.

Recreation Planning

More than 50 percent of the managing partners did not have a recreation management plan developed or updated in the last 5 years. More revealing is that 92 percent of the partners at-risk did not have a current recreation management plan. This may not have been a problem several decades ago, but today it is. Planning, particularly recreation planning in the case of Reclamation's recreation management partners is necessary for resource, recreation, and financial sustainability.

Reclamation recognized this need and in 2004 completed a new system for recreation inventory, planning, and management called the Water Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (WROS) system. The development of WROS spanned more than 3 years and involved testing and the input from local, State, and Federal officials across the United States. The system and support information can be found at www.usbr.gov.

Managing partners should be made aware of this tool and encouraged to use it to develop or update their plans. WROS is an indispensable tool for inventorying, planning, and managing water resources where recreation is an important public use and benefit to the local communities. More specifically, WROS is valuable to managing partners for:

- Inventorying and mapping the current recreation opportunities
- Marketing to current and potential tourists and local recreationists
- Developing a special recreation niche and visitor market segment
- Communicating to recreationists about what opportunities are available and where
- Assessing the effects of proposed changes in facilities or regulations
- Improving management efficiency, effectiveness, and use of best business practices
- Helping to make decisions about boating and facility capacities
- Helping to make decisions about reasonable fees and charges
- Improving regional coordination and collaboration among recreation providers

WROS is a state-of-the-art tool. Future planning efforts by Reclamation (e.g., resource management planning) or its managing partners should be required to incorporate WROS.

Toward that end, it is recommended that Reclamation sponsor several WROS training workshops for its managing partners and Reclamation planners. Also,

Reclamation is encouraged to establish several recreation planning demonstration projects for the purpose of developing a “model” recreation plan for its partners. Such a model plan would be very helpful and provide a tangible tool to strengthen the welfare of its partners.

Best Recreation Business Practices

The average cost recovery rate in this study was 40 percent, with a range from 0 to 100 percent. Perhaps more noticeable was that the at-risk partners had an average cost-recovery rate of 13 percent. Why is there such variation in cost recovery? While it is not realistic to expect all partners to achieve a 100 percent cost recovery, it would seem reasonable that improving the partner’s recreation business and entrepreneurial skills would lead to a greater cost-recovery rate and financial solvency.

Recreation and tourism is a multi-billion dollar industry in the Western United States. A short 10 years ago, many outdoor recreation opportunities were provided as a free public service. Today, after several years of Federal fee demonstration projects and increasing private sector management of public facilities, the public largely accepts that reasonable fees and charges are appropriate and necessary. The need for park and recreation providers to be most businesslike and entrepreneurial is well accepted.

Thus, numerous training opportunities, workshops, conferences, and other tutorials have been developed related to best recreation business practices. The National Recreation and Park Association is an excellent point of contact (www.nrpa.org). Reclamation can help (a) make managing partners aware of the recent use of recreation “user-fee” systems, (b) encourage the development of good plans and marketing strategies, and (c) inform partners of the many training opportunities available in best recreation business practices.

It is believed that often managing partners, like many small businesses, cannot see what opportunities are available or what relatively simple and inexpensive improvements could be made. Thus, it is recommended that Reclamation provide a voluntary service to its managing partners, particularly those at-risk, whereby a small team of recreation professionals with diverse competencies would spend 2-3 days conducting a “recreation-best-practices” field review. The team would provide sound, professional, expert advice and collaboration to strengthen the welfare of the managing partner.

New Financial Support

Nine out of 10 partners indicated that the most significant factor affecting their future was related to funding. This concern with funding is apparent in a variety of survey responses.

For example, two out of three partners paid the full cost of such services as law enforcement, resource management, trash removal, sewer, electricity, interpretation, facility maintenance, road maintenance, monitoring, and weed and pest control. Almost half of all the recreation facilities are 20 years old or older. Approximately 28 percent of the facilities need to be rehabilitated or replaced and 39 percent do not meet ADA accessibility standards.

Given these indicators, coupled with the fact that 30 percent of Reclamation's partners are considered at-risk, it is logical to conclude that the future for Reclamation's non-Federal managing partnerships under the current financial arrangements is problematic. Stated otherwise, the data from this study would indicate that increased turn-backs to Reclamation, under the current financial arrangements, are inevitable and will increase as operating costs and aging facilities increase.

Simply reallocating current Reclamation dollars to partnerships is likely not feasible or attractive for many reasons. The looming problem is larger than current congressional allocations.

Outdoor recreation and tourism is a multi-billion dollar industry for rural communities, and broad-based public demand for water-based recreation in the Western United States is what continues to increase. Table 4 reports that half the partners indicated that their recreation areas were highly or very highly valued as an economic contributor to the area by the local communities and were also viewed by local officials as assets and contributors to the quality of life in the area.

Thus, it is recommended that Reclamation, in collaboration with its Federal and non-Federal partners, propose a new 7-year "Mission 66" type program that was so successfully used by the National Park Service to upgrade its facilities and operations in the 1960s. This program would require congressional appropriations separate from and above the Title 28 monies and other currently allocated monies.

The program goal would be to improve the financial solvency of Reclamation's managing partners. The program would not be intended to simply build more facilities or pay for current operations and maintenance. Rather, the program would be designed to have the partners applying for these monies to clearly demonstrate how they intend to use the monies to address all the factors identified in this study that contribute to at-risk and turn-back situations (e.g., adequate

recreation management plan, use of best business practices, application of WROS, use of reasonable fees and charges, increased cost recovery rate, marketing program).

Of particular importance in such a program would be a requirement that the partners identify a deliberate set of actions that would lead to an increase in their current cost-recovery rate. While this criterion should be duly considered, it should be restated that 100 percent cost-recovery for all the 156 areas managed by non-Federal partners is not realistic. Not all the areas are the same, and some are better suited to increase their cost-recovery rates and to be financially solvent than others. The ability to increase cost-recovery rates and financial solvency is not simply a matter of more facilities and services, but there are factors that will inherently limit a partner's potential such as fishery resources, size of water body, aesthetics, weather, topography, population base, local community services, road access, and conversion of private exclusive use to public use.

Another aspect of financial support found in the study was the belief that the distribution of recreation support monies was uneven across regions and that the regional policies defining what is, an acceptable allocation also varied. Reclamation should re-evaluate its current distribution scheme(s) and associated policies for the purpose of making sure they are fair and reasoned. Subsequent to this review, a communication from each regional office to its managing partners would help to clarify any misunderstanding or apparent variation from region to region.

Continued Communications

Reclamation officials met with their managing partners, on average, more than six times a year (i.e., two formal visits and four informal contacts). Yet, at-risk partners averaged less than one formal meeting a year. The open-ended responses to questions 4 and 5 provide additional evidence of the desire for more and better communication.

Meaningful communication and collaboration is fundamental to maintaining partnerships. It is recommended that Reclamation continue to target 2 formal meetings a year, particularly for those at-risk partners. The purpose of these meetings should be to collaborate and solve problems. For example, discussing these survey results may stimulate new ideas related to recreation management planning, fees and charges, working with the media, tourism familiarization trips, and friends groups. Another example would be a recreation-best- practices field review, previously discussed. This kind of communication and collaboration is particularly important for the at-risk partners.

Reclamation should take note that a 100 percent response rate to any social survey is most unusual, and this reflects the commitment and concern of Reclamation's managing partners. Some level of feedback, appreciation, and recognition would seem appropriate.

It is recommended that Reclamation consider organizing and hosting a 2–3 day national workshop for its managing partners and that both Reclamation and the partner's senior leadership attend. The benefit to Reclamation of a national workshop would be (a) increased goodwill and collaboration, (b) partners learning about successes and failures from each other, (c) development of a partner's network, and (d) a strengthening of the welfare of its managing partners.

CONCLUSION

The study found that 30 percent of Reclamation's non-Federal partners were potentially at-risk. Special attention and support for the at-risk partners is advised, as well as periodic and routine management evaluations with all of Reclamation's partners. The study concludes with four recommendations: (1) assist the partners in developing and improving their recreation management plans, (2) encourage the use of best recreation business practices, (3) strengthen the partners' financial solvency, and (4) continue collaborative communications.

APPENDICES

- A. List of Non-Federal Partners Surveyed in this Study
- B. Copy of the 2004 Partner's Survey

APPENDIX A

List of Non-Federal Partners Surveyed in this Study

Pacific Northwest Region (21)

Bingham County, Idaho
Bonneville County, Idaho
Cascade 4-H Camp, Idaho
City of American Falls, Idaho
City of Boise, Idaho
City of Cascade, Idaho
City of Donnelly, Idaho
Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation
Jackson County, Oregon
Lake Cascade, Idaho
Lewiston Parks and Recreation, Idaho
Malheur County, Oregon
Oregon Parks and Recreation, Prineville, Oregon
Oregon State Department of Parks and Recreation
Seagull Bay Yacht Club, Idaho
Union County, Oregon
Washington County, Oregon
Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
Washington State Parks and Recreation

Mid Pacific Region (12)

Auburn Area Recreation and Parks District, California
California Department of Fish and Game
California Department of Parks and Recreation
East Bay Regional Park District, California
Kern County, California
Klamath County, Oregon
Nevada Department of Wildlife
Nevada Division of State Parks
Oregon Department of Fish and Game
San Benito County, California
Santa Barbara County, California
Solano County Regional Parks, California

Lower Colorado Region (12)

Bullhead City, Nevada
City of Henderson, Nevada
City of Phoenix, Arizona
City of Scottsdale, Arizona
Clark County, Nevada
Coachella Valley Recreation and Park District, California
Lake Pleasant Park, Arizona
Mohave County, Arizona
Pima County, Arizona
Riverside County, California
Salton Community Services District, California
Salton Sea State Recreation Area, California

Upper Colorado Region (6)

Colorado Division of Parks and Recreation
Eddy County, New Mexico
New Mexico State Parks
Pine River Irrigation District, Colorado
Pueblo of Nambe, New Mexico
Utah Division of State Parks

Great Plains Region (16)

Choke Canyon State Park, Texas
City of Dickinson, North Dakota
City of San Angelo, Texas
Estes Valley Recreation and Park District, Colorado
Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks
Larimer County, Colorado
Natrona County, Wyoming
Nebraska Game and Parks
North Dakota Game and Fish
North Dakota State Parks
Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department
Sheridan County, North Dakota
South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks
Stutsman County, North Dakota
Turtle Lake Park Board, North Dakota
Wyoming State Parks and Historic Sites

APPENDIX B

Copy of the 2004 Partner's Survey

1. Please print the name of your organization: _____

2. What is your name? _____ Title? _____
Phone #? _____ E-mail? _____

3. How many Reclamation areas (e.g., reservoirs) does your organization manage? # _____

4. In what year did your organization first develop a partnership agreement with Reclamation? _____

5. What percent of your recreation facilities are:

Less than 5 years old? _____% 5–10 years old? _____%
11–20 years old? _____% Over 20 years? _____%

6. What percent of your facilities need to be rehabilitated or replaced because of public health and safety concerns or for resource protection reasons? _____%

7. What percent of your facilities meet the current Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility standards? _____%

8. Over the last 5 years, circle if the number of paid personnel (full-time and seasonal) has been either:

a. *Increasing* b. *About the same* c. *Decreasing*

9. Circle if you have developed or updated any of the following plans in the last five years:

a. resource management plan? Yes No In Progress
b. recreation management plan? Yes No In Progress
c. business management plan? Yes No In Progress
d. Other? Yes No In Progress

10. Listed below are services that might be provided at your recreation areas. If provided, circle if the services are paid by your organization, if the expenses are shared with others, or are provided at no charge by another organization. (If a service is not provided, do not circle any answer)

Services	Circle one answer for each Service:		
Law enforcement	<i>Paid by Your Organization</i>	<i>Costs Shared with Others</i>	<i>Provided at No Charge by Others</i>
Resource Management	<i>Paid by Your Organization</i>	<i>Costs Shared with Others</i>	<i>Provided at No Charge by Others</i>
Trash collection	<i>Paid by Your Organization</i>	<i>Costs Shared with Others</i>	<i>Provided at No Charge by Others</i>
Sewer and water	<i>Paid by Your Organization</i>	<i>Costs Shared with Others</i>	<i>Provided at No Charge by Others</i>
Electricity	<i>Paid by Your Organization</i>	<i>Costs Shared with Others</i>	<i>Provided at No Charge by Others</i>
Visitor interpretation	<i>Paid by Your Organization</i>	<i>Costs Shared with Others</i>	<i>Provided at No Charge by Others</i>
Facility maintenance	<i>Paid by Your Organization</i>	<i>Costs Shared with Others</i>	<i>Provided at No Charge by Others</i>
Road maintenance	<i>Paid by Your Organization</i>	<i>Costs Shared with Others</i>	<i>Provided at No Charge by Others</i>
Monitoring	<i>Paid by Your Organization</i>	<i>Costs Shared with Others</i>	<i>Provided at No Charge by Others</i>
Weed/pest control	<i>Paid by Your Organization</i>	<i>Costs Shared with Others</i>	<i>Provided at No Charge by Others</i>
Fire Management	<i>Paid by Your Organization</i>	<i>Costs Shared with Others</i>	<i>Provided at No Charge by Others</i>

11. Estimate the total number of concessions (permanent or on-going seasonal) who operate in your recreation areas? # _____
12. Do the local communities (e.g., Chamber, businesses) typically market, advertise, or otherwise promote visitation to your recreation areas?
(Circle one)

Not at all Very little Occasionally Frequently Very frequently

13. Do your recreation areas have a local “friends” group, cooperating association, or organized group of volunteers that regularly help with the management of the area? (*Circle one*)

Not at all Very little Occasionally Frequently Very frequently

14. To what extent does the media write or talk about your recreation areas? (*Circle one*)

Not at all Very little Occasionally Frequently Very frequently

15. To what extent do the local communities value your recreation areas as an economic contributor to the area and as part of their tourism industry? (*Circle one*)

Not at all Very little Occasionally Frequently Very frequently

16. To what extent do the elected local and state officials (outside your organization) view your recreation areas as an asset and contributor to the quality of life? (*Circle one*)

Not at all Very little Occasionally Frequently Very frequently

17. How many times per year do Reclamation officials visit the areas as part of a formal review, oversight activity, inspection, or contract requirement?

18. How many times per year are there informal meetings or visits with Reclamation officials to discuss management issues or opportunities?

19. To what extent are there adjacent land uses that hinder your recreation management (e.g., private cabins, docks, trailers, grazing operations, or sand and gravel operations)? (*Circle one*)

Not at all Very little Occasionally Frequently Very frequently

20. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the resource conditions that you manage?

Resources	Circle the most applicable answer for each resource:						
Fishery	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Not sure or not applicable</i>
Shoreline	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Not sure or not applicable</i>
Wildlife	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Not sure or not applicable</i>
Aquatic Vegetation	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Not sure or not applicable</i>
Terrestrial Vegetation	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Not sure or not applicable</i>
Aesthetics	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Not sure or not applicable</i>
Water quality	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Not sure or not applicable</i>
Cultural Resources	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Not sure or not applicable</i>
Historic resources	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>	<i>Not sure or not applicable</i>

21. Briefly describe the three **most significant issues that will affect your future ability** to provide quality outdoor recreation opportunities on the areas you manage for Reclamation.

a.

b.

c.

- b. If you perform non-recreation related activities, do you consider this as part of your responsibility under the management agreement?
(Circle one)

Yes No NA

29. What stipulations in the management agreement with Reclamation may limit your ability to manage?
30. What would you recommend in order to strengthen your partnership with Reclamation? (e.g., improve communication; be more proactive, available, and willing to meet; do more to cooperate and explain mission and goals; provide additional funds).
31. What could your organization do to strengthen the partnership with Reclamation?
32. Are there other important considerations that we might have missed, or other ideas you have to strengthen your partnership with Reclamation?