

ADDENDUM

Mature Adults Summary

Focus Groups with
Recent Users and Lapsed/Non-Users
of Texas State Parks
Contract #177796

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Attracting Texas Residents to Texas State Parks

Conducted for:

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Austin, Texas

Conducted by:



Mature Adults (Lapsed/Non-User) Target

Respondent Profile

A focus group of Mature respondents was conducted in Austin on July 26, 2007.

- Ages 35-59 with no children at home
- Employed or spouse is employed
- Income over \$30,000
- High level of interest in nature-related outdoor activities at parks or recreational areas
- Visited a city or county park in the past two years (not a requirement for participation)
- Have not visited a Texas state park in the past two years
- Do not own an RV
- 3 Hispanic, 2 African-American, 5 Caucasian
- 6 Males, 4 Females

Outdoor Activities: General Perceptions, Usage and Decision Factors

Perceptions

- Top of mind images when thinking of enjoying the outdoors away from home included specific activities such as sailing, camping, and hiking, but primarily focused on the senses engaged when enjoying the outdoors. Descriptions of the stars at night, the wildlife and plants that you don't normally see, new smells, the feel of fresh air on the skin – all create a sense of peacefulness and absence of stress.

“Maybe seeing some wildlife. Seeing some of the more natural plants in this area as opposed to all those manicured types of planting.”

“You hear things that you don't normally hear in the city. You hear birds and crickets and things that in the hustle and bustle of the city you just forget.”

Seeing the stars at night engaged agreement by many respondents – this seemed to be an especially memorable and unique experience to be enjoyed outdoors.

- Thinking of favorite times spent outdoors frequently brings to mind experiences from childhood and a strong sense of family times including fireflies, campfires, exposing children to the wonders of nature.

Usage and Habits

- When enjoying the outdoors away from home, Matures:
 - Prefer to go to an area with water, such as lakes, rivers or the beach.
 - Activities are varied, and include: hiking, walking trails, swimming/water sports, camping, fishing.

- Tend to go on weekends due to their work schedule, although some go on weekdays to enjoy a more secluded experience.
- Spring and Fall are their favorite times of year due to weather
- Most tend to go with family or friends; a few go alone
- Plan trips if going to an out of town area, but in-town outdoor activities tend to be spontaneous (and are preferred by many)

“Especially if you’re going to a state park which is what we did a lot because you have to have a reservation.”

Just around town, that’s one thing that’s nice about Austin, there’s lots of places where you can just be spur of the moment, “Let’s go for a hike somewhere,” and you can be more spontaneous.”

“There’s just something energizing about it. You can do as many different things as possible in one trip. You got a river, you’ve got trees, you’ve got hills, mountains, camping. You can just sort of do a lot of things at one time.”

“I like to go someplace where there’s less people. I actually sometimes like unplanned things. Somehow my whole life I’m planning every minute, I don’t want to plan every minute on my vacation as well.”

- Favorite outdoor places and activities were varied, although mostly within the state of Texas. Camping was frequently involved, some at state parks relatively close to Austin such as Bastrop, Paleface, and Enchanted Rock, others at Lake Travis, Kerrville, Big Bend, Central Park and City Park (Austin), Corpus/the beach.

The camping experiences were special because of the camaraderie of friends/family and the unique outdoor/nature experiences such as diversity of the landscape/terrain, and nights and morning experiences of new sounds and sights.

“I definitely love Big Bend here in Texas. One thing I enjoy about it is you can drive out there, the landscape is different. You have different rock formations, different color soil, it just looks a lot different. It’s nice feeling like you’re in a totally unexplored place from your own point of view.”

“Kerrville-Schreiner State Park. They have it all. They’ve got a mountain, they’ve got a river, they’ve got camping. My kids loved, when they were little, to see the deer. You can go hiking in the woods. They have an awesome mountain loop that you can ride your bikes on, which we always did.”

“For me it was Mustang Island. The neat part about the state park is you go in and it’s very modern facilities with restrooms and showers, then you go down to the park and you can actually camp on the beach. Even though it’s a public area, it’s very private at night especially. No worries about people, no worries about security, you can hear the waves and things at night. It was a nice compromise because you can do things during the day but yet you had a nice area to get cleaned up if you want to go to a restaurant or something that night. It’s just one of my favorite places.”

Decision Process

- Key factors in the decision process as to where to go for an overnight/weekend stay included (in order of importance):
 - Cleanliness/well-maintained
 - Terrain, vistas, lakes, water
 - Activities (variety, canoes, courts, rentals)
 - Distance/proximity
 - Temperature

 - Cost
 - Facilities (restrooms, tents, cabins)
 - Access (open, hours not restricted)
 - Kid-friendly activities, playgrounds
 - Safety
 - Fewer bugs

“I don’t like the ones that are over-regulated. They won’t let you stay after dark because the nighttime is an awesome time for nature. I remember going to Lost Maples and being kind of disappointed because I think they closed it and while it was very beautiful you felt like you were being directed all the way. It was real pretty but I hardly ever go back because it felt over controlled.”

“Proximity, are you going to be able to get to it, are you going to have a hard time getting there. Time problems, if you have to go at a certain time or you can go whenever you want. Just how open it is to get to.”

“Are there plenty of garbage cans to place things. I think most people will put things in a garbage if there’s a place readily for it. Do they have people come in to pick it up on a routine basis. Restroom facilities and such. Public bathrooms are bad enough. Nasty”

*“With safety you would want security along with safety. You want to have security of some kind but you don’t want security tampering you from doing anything.”
 “Park personnel just if you have questions or ideas, maybe to direct you to activities.”*

“What type of activities. Do they have canoeing, can you rent canoes? Do they have outdoor courts if you’re interested in basketball or tennis, volleyball or something.”

- For a day trip, the distance becomes one of the most important factors while the number of activities declines in importance.

The facilities maybe a little less because you’re not going to stay there overnight.”

“Distance becomes real important.” (All agree).

“Activities not so much because you’re probably going to go there for one thing and you already know that.”

- Preferred information sources when planning outdoor trips are varied, and include:
 - Websites, internet because of visuals – can see where they are going
 - Word of mouth/recommendations from friends
 - TV such as Travis Country, County Access TV, PBS on Texas state parks, Visitor books and brochures from state, travel guides, hotel pamphlets
 - Magazines such as Texas Monthly, electric co-op newsletters

“There’s a wonderful book called something like, Back Roads of Texas that is really a neat source for all sorts of information about parks and areas and all that.”

“Sometimes I get excited about it, I haven’t gone on a trip yet. But I want to. Travis County has something on access TV that talks about county parks. That always gets me interested in these places. Also they also have little specials about their state parks. Something will be on the news, it’s real motivating. Sometimes I’ll just look at a map and think, “There’s a state park or a lake,” and I’ll just drive up and check it out.”

Texas State Parks

Awareness and Usage

- Texas state parks bring to mind images of nature and wildlife and open spaces, places further away (requiring travel) and camping.
- Specific state parks which came to mind included some that were not actually state parks. Matures named McKinney Falls, Enchanted Rock, Garner, Marble Falls, Kerrville-Schreiner, Corpus Christi, Palmetto, Bastrop, Inks, Buescher, Lost Maples, Mustang, and Palo Duro Canyon (but were uncertain if this was a national park).
- Favorite state parks included Garner, McKinney Falls, Corpus/Mustang Island, and some that were not state parks, such as Port Aransas and Marble Falls.

These were favorite parks because of the camping experiences, specific terrain (water, mountains), and diversity of activities/attractions.

- Because Matures tended to be uncertain which areas they visited were state parks and which were other parks, they were asked to differentiate state, county and city parks.
 - State parks were characterized by rural areas away from home (it’s far away), nature preserves, staff/rangers, fees, for longer visits (overnight, not day).
 - County parks were characterized as smaller but with more activities within that area, more entertaining, some nature but not extensive, more crowded, “want people there,” go for the day, picnics.

“When I think of state parks versus city or county parks, we live near a county park, there’s so many things to do. There’s walks, water, there’s hiking, there’s biking, there’s

running, there's camping, there's an actual water park for children, there's fishing. I think where the county parks are aimed at a whole lot of activities at a smaller area aimed very much at families and a lot of people. My experience with the state parks, they're more rural than that, it's more of a camping."

"That's usually a good distinction. Usually the state parks are trying to preserve an area against development. They'll set aside that area more to keep it natural, where county parks are put together to bring people there. They'll put a soccer field or a baseball field to get people to come to activities. It's manmade."

- City parks are differentiated as smaller, with playscapes, swimming pools, fewer activities available, limited hours, and visited year-round, more a part of their everyday life, might use for birthdays, picnics.
- Most were quite surprised to learn that there were 14 state parks within 60 miles of Austin. This information received a very positive reception and definitely increased interest in visiting state parks.

"I would never have guessed that."

"I'd think about going more if I knew they were that close."

Image of State Parks

- As might be expected of infrequent or lapsed users, familiarity with the state parks was somewhat limited.

"I've probably been to more than I know. I have that habit of just following someone and I don't know where I'm going. I know that I have been to McKinney Falls. I've probably been to more, but I can't think of them."

"I just have a feeling there are some really neat ones, but it is hard to find out unless there's some way to see it or know about it."

- State parks tend to be considered distant destinations, describing it as "it's trouble to go," and uncertainty as to what they will find there. They need to be assured of a positive experience and have their expectations met.
- Satisfaction with state parks appeared to be moderate, with only two rating it high due to the preservation of huge tracts of land and family memories.

Lack of high satisfaction seems to be due to lack of information/awareness, distance/have to travel too far, and lack of facilities/things to do. Without knowing what to expect at a state park, they are hesitant to rate it highly and hesitant to visit.

"Something kind of negative, I think that our information sometimes is not as good as other state's information to promote our parks. Like Big Bend, there's a ton of stuff there, but it's kind of hard to find it all in one place. In Hawaii or Colorado, they really pump it up. We have some neat stuff here but they don't actually promote it as much. I

think Texas doesn't promote some of its natural things maybe as effectively as some of the other states."

I think as a general rule Texas doesn't do as good a job at promoting tourism as some other states. I was trying to find out about Caddo Lake, which is apparently a really interesting thing, but it's really hard to get information about that."

- Some of the positives of state parks (experienced or expected) include:

- Nature experiences, stars, unique ecosystems
- Peace, get away (from the rat race)
- Not crowded
- Timelessness

"That's usually a good distinction. Usually the state parks are trying to preserve an area against development. They'll set aside that area more to keep it natural, where county parks are put together to bring people there."

"I would think it would be nice of state parks because we have so many different eco systems in Texas if that state park represented how nature is supposed to be and how it has naturally evolved. To keep those different disparate environments in tact as much as possible would maybe be a draw. It would have to be something like, 'In this area we have these types of endangered species or we have this or that."

- Negative experiences and expectations of state parks include:

- Distance (most are far away)
- Not maintained, trash, run down, followed by
- Rules and regulations (e.g., staying on trails at Lost Maples, observation/security cams)
- Limited hours / restricted entry and exit
- River water was not clean (McKinney)
- Poor website with limited visuals/no tours of the parks

- Matures tend to think of state parks for overnight or multi-day visits, primarily because of the perceived distance.

"It's my first impression that it would be a multi-day visit, but it would be nice if it was a little closer you could do something for the day and then come back."

Increasing Usage of State Parks

- Matures do not visit state parks more often because it's not top of mind – they have limited awareness and nothing is in the media to remind them or make them think of visiting state parks.

“We’re waiting for them to give us a reason to go and visit a state park. They are somewhat out of the way. Like Enchanted Rock. I’ve heard that. “

In addition, they have limited time with plenty of competition for their time and no reason to go to a state park which is “out of the way” rather than a nearby park.

- Underlying factors emerged as needed to increase visitation:
 - Increasing awareness of the parks (especially nearby parks) and what's available (have to make it worth the trip)
 - Educational programs/informative tours or plaques along trails which would be descriptive of the history of the area and/or natural ecosystems of the area
 - Clean/better maintained facilities and restrooms, food/drink and benches for those less physically fit (from those with previous state park experience)

“I would say that would come to mind too. If you go to a state park and you see trash and stuff that isn't representative of what that nature area should be. It's run down or it's not maintained, that would be very disappointing.”

- Effective and visual website or marketing pieces so that the benefits of the state park are easily and clearly communicated, stressing visuals so they know what to expect

“I was going to add something to what he was talking about. I went on the Internet last night to look at some of the parks around here. The sites are sufficient in some of the ways, but they could go further in the visual aspect of it. Showing what this park has. Just bouncing from park to park and doing a little guessing of what's there and you have a picture “this” big to try surmise what's there. It would be nice to have several different pictures of several vantage points of what it has to offer. It was lacking from what I saw.”

“I'm going to try to make this short, but I think it best serves cost wise to put some good money into a very very comprehensive colorful, lots of pictures, lots of bells and whistles, that once you get there you've got the entire Texas park system at your fingertips with tons of stimulation. It wouldn't cost that much to advertise it, as long as you've got a www. That's short, sweet, and will get enough attention that website. It's gotta keep you there.”

“When you're trying to plan wherever you're going, the most convinced you are that what you're going to get is what you think you're going to get would draw more people into it. Having that website to where you've got a really good idea of what you're getting into when you get there, the things that will stimulate you.”

- Suggestions were also made for a pamphlet with a list of the state parks and the unique features/things of interest at each. Some talked of checking off each of the parks as they visited them – even thinking of achieving a special “club” membership if they visited all the state parks.

“Or even like a pamphlet that they could mail out once a year. Something very nice, color, told about all the different parks, something that was really easy to find. I think a lot of people, especially with families, would store those away.”

- Promotion of outdoor workshops should be effective with Matures who have a love of the outdoors but are lacking the skills and knowledge the workshops would provide.
- Suggested communication tools include:
 - Comprehensive website with more visuals
(advertising will be needed to support this)
 - Emails (if solicited) with reminders and features
 - Television advertising or shows featuring the state parks
 - Also mentioned were billboards
 - Radio ads/talk shows

“I would have to say radio because I’m never going to look for anything. Like talk shows. I hear so many plugs for the different government entities, health and crime prevention, I hear all these plugs on radio announcements on talk radio. To me, that’s just a quick 15 or 30 seconds. You can repeat it and subliminally you can absorb it.”

Reactions to Concepts

Note: Respondents were made aware that there are a number of state parks within 60 miles, which may have contributed to higher interest.

Yurts

- Interest in Yurts was minimal among the Mature target. They would prefer a cabin or inexpensive hotel due to concerns with cleanliness, canvas structure that might not have windows. It appears that several had difficulty visualizing a yurt from the description, indicating that promotion of the yurts would require visual support.

Those who indicated strong interest in yurts cited the ease of having everything there and having little to pack. They would expect to pay \$30 to \$50 per night.

Group Facilities

- Interest in renting a group facility was fairly strong, with 4 indicating definite interest for corporate team building, retreats and family reunions. Expected rental fees typically ranged from \$200 to \$300 per day. Those who were not interested in the group facility expressed concern that it would impact the seclusion and nature experience of a state park.

Outdoors Workshops

- Participating in outdoors workshops received the most positive response with over half interested in participating. Fees were expected to be \$10-\$25 per person.

This was described as offering a “test drive” of the state parks, a nice blending of nature and activities with a variety of activities/learning and all gear and equipment would be provided.

Summer Camps

- Matures did not have children at home, but they tended to respond to the appeal of the general idea or for their nephews or grandchildren. Almost half expressed interest in summer camps, whether day camps or overnight camps. Expected fees typically ranged from \$200-\$300, although one increased to \$1,000 for an overnight camp.

Summer camps were attractive because they felt that children needed to be outside and away from television and video games.