

# **ADDENDUM**

## **Retired Adults**

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:*



## Retired Adults (Lapsed/Non-User) Target

### **Respondent Profile**

A focus group of Retired respondents was conducted July 23, 2007 in San Antonio.

- Ages 60 and over
- Retired (and spouse is not employed)
- High level of interest in nature-related outdoor activities at parks or recreational areas
- Have not visited a Texas state park in the past two years
- 3 had visited a park in the past two years (not a screening requirement)
- Do not own an RV
- Income over \$30,000
- 4 Hispanic, 6 Caucasian
- 6 Males, 4 Females

### **Outdoor Activities: General Perceptions, Usage and Decision Factors**

#### Perceptions

- Top-of-mind perceptions when thinking of enjoying the outdoors away from home included plants, leaves, animals, smells, sunrises, quiet, relaxing, getting away.
- Visuals of favorite times spent outdoors frequently brought to mind experiences from childhood and a strong sense of family unity as well as the beauty of nature, flowers, clouds, and fresh air.

#### Usage and Habits

In the screening process, only three named a park or recreational area they had visited in the past 2 years. Although this group of Retirees reported high interest in nature-related outdoor activities, few use parks or recreational areas to enjoy it and relatively few seemed to express deep appreciation of the outdoors experience.

- When enjoying the outdoors away from home, Retirees:
  - Tend to go on weekdays because it is less crowded, more animals are out, and more discounts are available
  - Some will go on weekends, particularly if traveling with their family
  - Sometimes go with family/children, but frequently by themselves/spouse

*“If everybody’s working, and you’re busy at your job and working all the time, then it’s good to have like a cabin out there to get away from it all. That’s what I call relaxing.”*

- While Retirees enjoy some activities such as boating, golfing or hunting; hiking and walking are most likely to be mentioned. Simply being in the outdoors and enjoying the scenery, beauty, nature and animals around is important to many.

*“To me the rivers in Texas are very, very beautiful, and that’s why I will take my family to Garner Park, because of the river, also the Guadalupe Park, because of the Guadalupe River. Those are beautiful rivers.”*

- Favorite outdoor experiences were varied, from family camping in Garner State Park to rain forests and eagles soaring in Alaska.
- Retirees do not necessarily travel far to enjoy outdoor experiences, naming local parks in San Antonio and nearby state parks such as Garner and Lost Maples as places they have been to enjoy outdoor activities.

*“One of the things in San Antonio is Lost Maples in the fall. It’s beautiful. We make it a point to go at least once in the fall to walk. We don’t climb, but we walk around the trail.”*

### Decision Process

- Key factors in the decision process as to where to go for weekday trips to enjoy the outdoors included (in order of importance):
  - Crowds/time of year (go off-season)
  - Good hotels and restaurants nearby
  - Weather
  - Cost/affordability (cost of gas, entrance fees, etc.)
  - Offers new experiences
  - Facilities available (bathrooms, showers, trash removal)
  - Trails accessible for hiking and walking

*“Yes, I’m staying over night in the area, but I’m not staying over night in the park.”*

*“Weekdays at the park are good, because that’s when they are clear of people, and more animals come out.”*

*“If you make the over night trips, the hotels seem to be a lot cheaper during the week.”*

*“Travel during the week’s a better time, less traffic.”*

*“My wife says call ahead and find out when there’s the least number of people in the park, and then we’ll plan something around that. But, no matter where you go in Texas, these parks, they’re loaded. They’re loaded, wherever we go. We planned this way in advance, sometimes six, eight, ten weeks at a time.”*

*“Some of the parks really don’t have enough facilities for people to use, or there’s an over surplus of people using them.”*

*“To me it’s the accessibility of trails. If the trails...like Lost Maples has trails for difficulty in climbing, and the other you can walk around, and it’s not that difficult.”*

Other factors include the distance, water/beach, activities such as music/bands, kayaking, and medical care available.

- Information sources when planning these trips can be varied, but most consider internet and websites to be the best source.

Other sources are AAA, magazines such as *Texas Highways*, travel sections of the newspaper, travel channel, and tourist information at chambers/visitors centers.

## **Texas State Parks**

### Awareness and Usage

- Lost Maples and Garner tend to be the most popular state parks. Others mentioned were Mustang Island, Corpus, Matagorda, Balmorhea, Big Bend, McKinney Falls, and Palo Duro Canyon.
- Although Retirees have prior experience with Texas state parks, currently they are not likely to consider a state park when they are planning their trips to enjoy outdoor experiences. Most would not consider a state park as a primary destination.

*“I guess it’s like... if you stumble upon a park, okay, but that park is not the destination.”*

*“I gave it a six, because if I’m thinking about going to a Texas state park, I’m not thinking about a month’s time for it, but just a couple days, and so it’s a short term visit to a state park.”*

*“My kids are now adults, and they’re traveling with their kids, so I tend to travel with friends, and we go to a different kind of place.”*

*“Foreign travel, places I haven’t been before. I’ve done most of the state park things around here in the past. I still like to make, like a day trip. But, life just changes.”*

- Information about state parks comes from multiple sources, including: internet, word of mouth, magazines such as *Texas Highways*, *Texas Parks and Wildlife*, and shows on the public Channel 9 (at random times/hit or miss).

### Image of State Parks

- Texas state parks bring to mind images of walking, wildlife (birds, migration patterns, bugs), water, family gatherings and activities.

- Most indicated moderate levels of satisfaction ratings with state parks, with few really negative. The ratings do not seem to match the level of negative comments and few positives about state parks.
- Those that gave lowest ratings pointed to their dissatisfaction with the lack of facilities and poor condition of the facilities.

*“When I first started going there it was beautiful. Now you see some of the places are falling apart.”*

*“We stopped going, we used to go quite a bit, but now we don’t go as often as we’d like to go, because it’s crowded. The parks are very crowded. As we got older, we got kind of picky, even the facilities, you know, they need to be better kept or better cleaned, because some of these facilities, by noon time there are a mess, and now my wife, we used to camp out, now it’s got to be a hotel. Otherwise she won’t stay in there. And the facilities, the cabins that we used to rent, at least where we went, they’re not the best anymore.”*

*“It was a lack of facilities. Other than that, you know, the experience was fine. But, I think they could improve the facilities.”*

*“I don’t think they keep them up as much as they used to, or we have more people going in there.”*

*Like when I first started going there it was beautiful. Now you see some of the places are falling apart. The cabins... coming apart. It’s not there. They need to do better with it.”*

- Exploring why Retirees are not currently going to state parks tended to reveal changes in their lives and lifestyle that have impacted their connection to state parks.
  - Some feel state parks are too primitive and rugged for them now, preferring the comforts of home and hotels.
  - State parks used to be part of the family experience when their children were younger. As the children left home, the state park experience became less frequent.
 

*“Well, we’re going through different stages right now. So, when we were younger we had more energy, and more time with our kids, you know, take them out to the river and do that with them, camping and all that. So, now we’ve jumped into another stage of life where we kind of get away from it.”*
  - They like to travel more, but to destinations further away and offering new experiences (other states and foreign travel).
- Specific negative experiences and perceptions of state parks are also deterrents to considering state parks, and include:

- Lack of facilities and cleanliness (aware of decline)
- Over crowded
- Not convenient – other places or lakes are closer for short trips
- Expensive – cabins, entrance fees (lower value)
- Too hot much of the year

*“The entrance fees with what you get, it’s just not all there”*

- In addition, publicity seems to have impacted their impressions of the state parks, such as newspaper articles about the state diverting funds back to the park, flooding, fires, limited availability for nature walks (Government Park can only take the first 10 people who sign up for a nature walk). Some conclude that perhaps the park improvements are *“not ready for the public yet.”*

*“I think if you read in the paper, just like you read about the Government Park, when you read about it, hear about it, you do get curious and say, gosh that sounds like it’s going to be nice, it’s going to have the walking trails, and all that. So, I think that does influence you when you’re hearing about it. Especially if you’re hearing positive things about it. You’re more likely to go there. Then, on the other hand, when somebody’s been some place and they’re saying oh my gosh, that place is really run down. You’ll think about it and say, well maybe I don’t want to go there.”*

### Increasing Usage of State Parks

- Suggested changes or ways to increase visits were varied, and included:
  - Increasing awareness of the state parks and promoting a more positive image

*“They need to elaborate on the particular park facilities, what it has to offer, as far as a river, the activities, trails, to describe the park, and how it would fit me, my particular needs. In other words, the facilities there, is there restaurants where we can eat, or do we need to bring it. Really sell the situation.”*

*“If there’s any new activity or anything going on the weekend or week that would bring you into the area?”*

*“Get their image out. Just advertising isn’t going to change it. There’s got to be something that comes out of the woodwork somehow, that gets that image up, that says this is a good place to go, because right now there’s news paper articles and the stuff that you hear, that image is not good. It’s got to change.”*

- Making the overall visit more pleasant, such as:

- Offer facilities and cabins with amenities comparable to a hotel  
(rough and rugged and smell of garbage is “not fun” for retirees)

*But now, my wife and I, if we're going to visit a park, and we want to stay overnight, there's got to be some facilities. If I rent a cabin, that cabin has to be air conditioned, that's the way it's going to get us there. You're not going to get me and my wife to stay there at the park, just with the cabins the way they are right now, the situation, the mosquitoes coming in, forget it. It's not going to happen. Give me a hotel, air condition, and I'll be visiting you in the morning again, but I will not stay there.”*

*“I think as seniors, it is a whole different story. Just like a lot of people said, we get older, you don't want to sleep on the ground, you don't want to do that, it is a completely different story than when you were young, and you would have done this stuff. You look for all those different things now. You want it to be comfortable. You're not a rough and rugged. You don't want to be uncomfortable. You want to go home and say oh my gosh, I don't want to, do that again. I'll never go back.”*

*“It was horrible, the ground was hard, there was nothing around, it smelled of garbage, I mean, you watch for stuff like that now.”*

- Clean and well-equipped bathrooms

*“Facilities, increase the number. If I get older, I need more facilities. They need better kept facilities as far as that's concerned.”*

- Insect and animal control (mosquitoes, fire ants, snakes)
- Feel safe – more park rangers, fewer crowds  
(need to feel safe staying over night, especially with grandkids)

*“Safety, to make sure that, you know, to make you feel safe out there, if you decide to spend the night. You know, you're brave enough to stay in a tent. You know.”*

*“Have more park rangers, and well you know they can't really process everybody to make sure you have a felon among you or anything like that. And you really can't say it's limited just to families, so that's a hard situation to control.”*

*“I do think when we were talking about safety before, I do think that's an issue too. When you're taking your grandkids, you do get very nervous about making sure they do stay safe. I don't want any predators around or whatever, because you hear about it and read about it in the papers and news, so you are a little leery about that. I'm responsible for my grandkids when I take them out there, so you do get scared. I don't know what they can do about it, increase their staff of Park Rangers, but even so it's just something you've got to be aware of when you're out there.”*

- Discounts such as free passes to Seniors/lifetime passes, more reasonable prices for cabins (like national parks)

*“More in line with what the National Parks charge to stay overnight at the park.”*

- Offer and promote classes, programs or group tours (including grandkids is attractive)
- For day trips to state parks, provide current, updated maps and well-maintained facilities/bathrooms.

*“The restroom facilities need to be kept pristine, and well equipped. It’s really disgusting to go all the way to the park and find you can’t go pee there, because they don’t have any water or toilet paper. Bathrooms are extremely important to me.”*

- Some Retirees consider stopping at state parks while traveling to other destinations to stretch their legs or have a picnic lunch. To promote drop-in visits, they suggested:
  - Promoting different/unique scenery, vegetation, or wildlife
  - Enhance the entrances to the parks, make them “more enticing”
  - Low entrance fee

*“If there was a specific kind of card for the different parts you’re in, my wife would make me stop. You know, particular flowers for that location. We would be out there with a digital camera.”*

*“Enticing entrance if you really want to see what’s there instead of just the usual.”*

- The idea of group travel to state parks was favorably received, thinking of tours and nature walks with others, such as church groups. The convenience of simply joining a trip that someone else had organized was appealing.
  - *“It’s nice to have somebody else organize the whole thing for you.”*
- Several Retirees were interested to know there are 9 parks within 60 miles of San Antonio. They wanted to know more about them, and felt that this information should be publicized.

*“I want to know what they offer and where they’re located and what the cost is”*  
*“I was surprised to find we had 9 parks here...more information needs to go out”*

*“It would be interesting to know where they are.”*

*“It makes me want to go home and look them up.”*

- The newspaper and internet would be the preferred means of communication about Texas state parks.

A comprehensive website with full information was suggested, as was email. Newspaper advertising was suggested in the Sports section and articles in the Travel section. Other suggestions were mail and magazines such as *Texas Highways*.

*“A publication from Texas Parks and Wildlife. It’s a list of the phone numbers, parks, what’s available at each park. I think I just recently got one. I subscribed to it, and they sent me one, with a list of phone numbers and everything that I didn’t know about.”*

*“Especially the travel section on Sundays.”*

*“We get the Texas Highways, and the Parks and Recreation, and we specifically get that for Texas so we know what’s going on.”*

- In the advertising and/or websites, Retirees would like to know:

- Park facilities – what is offered, activities, trails and how does it fit my needs

*“I think if they advertise and let people know what they have available at the different parks.”*

*“Let me know what they have, what they offer, then I’ll decide if I can go to that park or somewhere else.”*

- New activities or functions

*“Advertisements on where you could meet in different activities, where you’re meeting for the day.”*

*“Activities for the day.”*

- Updates on any changes at the parks

- Safety updates – on weather issues, fires, wildlife problems or reports on being safe from wildlife

*“I get a magazine called Power People. I know more about bathroom facilities of the highway department...than I do about facilities in parks, because they have articles....I don’t think the highway department should be getting us more information than the parks and wildlife does.”*

## 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 moderate among Retired, with one-third indicating interest in a yurt that might have electricity and water. When confirmed that the yurt would have water and air conditioning, interest doubled and the value rose from \$40 to \$60 a night. Perceived benefits were less to pack, has a flooring/not on the ground, easy and convenient.

### Group Facilities

- The group facilities were quite popular, with well over half strongly interested. Perceived value varied dramatically among those who were interested in the facility for church retreats, family reunions, and alumni reunions. Expected rental fees varied dramatically, from \$50 to \$1,000 (\$10 per person) a day, with most \$150-\$250.

Questions were raised as to who cleaned up the kitchen and if it could be shared with other groups.

### Outdoors Workshops

- Participating in outdoors workshops received a positive response with almost half interested in participating, typically with their grandchildren. Fees were expected to be \$10-\$30 per person.

### Summer Camps (Day camps)

- Retirees tended to respond positively to the idea of day camps at state parks, generally thinking of this for their grandchildren. Expected fees typically ranged from \$150-\$250, which several felt was in line with other camps and activities that they or the parents took the kids to during the summer. They liked the idea of getting kids away from the TV and ipods.