

RECREATION PLANNING IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MULTIPLE USE FORESTS

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SUMMARY

Recreation in forests in Western Australia has been subject to little past planning but caters for upwards of 750 000 visitors a year, mainly from Western Australians.

Current work by recreation staff is attempting to evolve supply and demand schedules for forest recreation, using visitor surveys, traffic counters and inventory techniques.

The results of this programme will be compiled as a Recreation Framework Plan for inclusion in the Forests Department General Working Plan.

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Western Australian forests have been used for various forms of recreation since the middle of the 19th century, when the isolated sawmilling townships and communities were dependent upon their own resources for their lesiure time activity. Although much of this recreation took the form of log-chopping and other competitive sports, it included hay-rides, pleasure trips on bush locomotives and organised picnics.

The more modern recreational use of our forests has developed in parallel with increasing public mobility and has become almost completely dependent on the automobile or motorcycle. The direct result has been to disperse visitors over a large portion of the forest and their discovery of attractive views, leafy glades, and new fishing locations.

Until the late 1960's, the regular use of some of these dispersed areas was used as a "planning guide", and facilities were usually provided merely in recognition of existing use. One of the observations from early visitor surveys (Spriggins 1975) was the realisation that the majority of recreationists can be led or guided to a chosen spot, provided that it met some simple criteria relative to easy road access, and unsophisticated picnic-ground furniture.

The potential advantages of planning for recreation were realized.

## RECREATION POLICY

The Forests Department is required by its Act to table a General Working Plan in the Parliament at intervals of not more than ten years, but in practice has reduced the interval to about 5 years. Working Plan No 86 of 1977 was novel in two major respects:

- \* It launched the Department into a firm commitment to multiple-use management.
- \* Part I, the general policies segment, was made available to the general public.

The major aspects of recreation policy are expressed as:

- \* To measure the demand for recreation in relation to type and locality.
- \* To investigate the capacity of the environment to absorb various types and levels of recreation activities and the means by which the environment may be protected.
- \* To provide facilities and sites for recreation pursuits as the demand is foreseen, and to locate these so as to avoid degradation of the environment and to protect the recreation attributes of the locality.
- \* To continue studies for the planned progressive development of recreation facilities on a regional basis.
- \* To liaise with State Government and Local Government in order to integrate forest based recreation with overall requirements.

It is likely that these policy objectives will not all be attained by the time of preparing the next General Working Plan but the current projects may be of interest to the the working group.

### Measuring Recreation Demand

Several visitor surveys have been conducted over the last decade and the results of one series have been published (Spriggins 1975).

The current investigation is in three parts.

#### 1. Traffic Survey

The Department has acquired a number of axle counters, two of them being punched tape records. A network of visitor survey routes has been defined for twelve administrative divisions, and sample points for vehicle counting have been established on the basis of one months survey per division per season.

A set of six traffic counters is installed in a region for one month and these are read every Friday and Monday, to establish parameters for week day and weekend traffic.

The whole forest area is administered by three regions and a set of counters is used in each of these regions.

By February 1979 we will have threshold data by season for every division in each of the three regions.

The punched tape recorders are being used in two centres where visitor levels are known to be high. These recorders will be installed for at least a year, and will eventually provide seasonal base lines, and an indication of growth in recreational activity.

## 2. Visitor Survey

Visitor surveys were initiated in January 1978 on 16 routes distributed over the twelve administrative divisions and covering virtually the entire 1.9 million hectares of State forest. One survey per month is conducted on a nominated day for four hours - from noon to 4 p.m. - when the observer records vehicles and people in the forest, and hands out a reply-paid questionnaire at recognised stopping places, picnic areas etc.

Returns are coded and processed by computer - Programme FORVISQUES - such that print-outs are available at three levels, divisional regional and State, updated for each subsequent survey date.

After three surveys this year the return of questionnaires has been approximately 51% of those issued, and one survey officer has a return rate of up to 55%.

## 3. Tourist Survey

Over the same period, a somewhat similar survey of camping and caravan activity is being conducted in liaison with camp ground managers in the "deep" southwest, where day visits to the forest are unusual.

Many of the questions are similar but more emphasis is placed on duration of visit and facility preferences.

## 4. Observation Studies

During winter and spring 1978, selected areas will be used for detailed observation of visitor behaviour at picnic areas, to detect patterns of use and problems in design and placement of facilities.

#### FRAMEWORK PLANNING

The next revision of the General Working Plan will incorporate a Recreation Framework Plan that provides for regular revision and for a more objective approach to recreation management.

The plan will include sections on

- \* History of recreation in forests
- \* Forest recreation policy
- \* Population projections for numbers, age groupings and mobility
- \* Supply of recreation areas.

A projection of population is a complex issue and one that is capable of many interpretations as has been shown in dialogue with those opposed to conifer plantations in Australia.

In the context of recreation the issue is made even more complex because of the effects of disposable income levels, age class distribution and public mobility,

The extremes may range between a continuing population explosion with unlimited expansion of income and mobility, on the one hand, and zero population growth, falling real income and a predicted end of private motor cars by 1985, on the other.

The former is a political belief, the latter that of realists. Somewhere between these extremes lies the immediate future, and recreation planning must include sufficient options to be directed in either way.

The DEMAND for recreation is being assessed mainly by survey of visitor activity, but assisted by analysis of organized recreation, liaison with clubs and societies that use, or wish to use, forests for recreation, and by regular study of activity in the industries that supply recreation equipment.

SUPPLY schedules are being evolved by inventory of the forest resource and from a series of Land Use Management Plans (L.U.M.P.) that are presently being developed for each administrative division of the forest estate.

LUMP plans are produced in outline by regional planning staff, with forest blocks recommended for a number of uses according to a scale of priorities and after making allowance for existing (legislative) constraints.

The divisional staff then prepare detailed management proposals for their own area, and into this phase, recreation proposals can be submitted. Some provision is made for reserving forests and sites from recreation development until such time that they are needed to replace areas that need rehabilitation or where demand requires the use of additional areas.

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