



St. Croix County Parks Survey

County Resident Opinions

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Executive Summary

The Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls completed a phone survey of 200 St. Croix County residents and 49 non-County residents during November 2004. The objective of the survey was to gauge public opinion about outdoor recreational facilities and amenities offered by the County, to identify areas of potential expansion or contraction of these services, and determine funding preferences.

Statistical analyses of the data suggest that the sample doesn't contain any significant demographic biases and should provide results that are accurate to within plus or minus 7 percent of the reported values.

In terms of major outdoor recreational facilities provided by the County, a substantial proportion of the population are not aware of them. Those who are familiar with these facilities generally give them high marks for quality. Newer residents tend to be less aware of County facilities than are those who have been living in the County for a longer period of time. These results suggest that efforts to more broadly publicize the availability of these facilities are warranted and selected upgrades to existing facilities, especially Troy Beach, may be in order.

In terms of amenities within the major facilities, County residents identified such basic items as playgrounds, boat ramps and picnic facilities as being of greatest importance. To the extent that the County is interested in attracting non-County residents to the area (e.g. to increase tourism spending), snowmobile and hiking trails are expected to be the biggest draw.

St. Croix County residents appear uninterested in reducing the supply of outdoor recreational facilities or amenities. They also did not provide a clear signal that significant expansions of these services are wanted. While substantially more respondents indicated a preference for expanding these services than favored their contraction, fairly solid majorities preferred that the current supply be maintained or did not have an opinion one way or the other.

The most popular funding mechanism for outdoor recreational services appears to be increases in user fees. In terms of funding mechanisms that would be supported by broader sets of County residents, general county tax revenues are a more popular option than bond issues.

A. Description of the Survey

During November 2004, the Survey Research Center (SRC) conducted a phone survey on behalf of the St. Croix County Parks Department. The SRC spoke to 200 residents of St. Croix County and 49 in neighboring counties who were 18 years of age or older. The primary focus of the study was to determine the opinions of St. Croix County residents regarding facilities and amenities managed by the Parks Department. With 200 St. Croix County residents in the sample, the estimates included in this report are expected to be within plus or minus 7 percent of the average opinion of all adults in the County.

Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic profile of the people with whom we spoke. Comparing the sample to the demographic profile of the County from the U.S. Census, a number of deviations become apparent. Table 1 indicates that there is a significantly higher proportion of females in the sample than expected; for the county as a whole, females and males make up 50 percent of the actual total population. We also note that the youngest two age groups (those less than 35 years of age) are somewhat under-represented in the sample, that we have significantly more people with college degrees, that we have a higher proportion of home-owners, and that this is a somewhat more affluent set of people than is true for the county as a whole.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Characteristic	N							
Gender	246	Male	Female					
		44%	56%					
Age	246	18 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65+	
		6%	14%	31%	26%	15%	8%	
Employment	245	Full time	Part time	Unemployed	Self-employed	Retired	Other	
		53%	11%	7%	10%	16%	2%	
Housing	244	Rent	Own					
		11%	89%					
Adults in house	244	1	2	3	4+			
		12%	80%	7%	1%			
Kids in house	233	0%	1%	2	3	4+		
		45%	22%	22%	9%	2%		
Years in region	245	< 1	1 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 25	25+		
		3%	16%	24%	24%	33%		
Education	245	Less High School	High School	Tech/Some College	College	Grad School		
		2%	22%	34%	37%	6%		
Income	210	< \$15,000	\$15-\$24,999	\$25-\$49,999	\$50-\$74,999	\$75-\$99,999	\$100,000+	
		4%	8%	24%	29%	28%	8%	

To see if these deviations from U.S. Census' demographic profile of the County are likely to bias the survey results, the Survey Research Center tested for statistical differences in opinions of all of these sub-groups with respect to the questions included in the questionnaire. While individual statistical

differences were observed, there were no patterns of differences that suggest that the sample is biased in any way or that the results need to be adjusted to account for the observed deviations.

B. St. Croix County’s Outdoor Recreational Facilities

The first battery of questions asked whether the respondent was aware of, had used and their impression of the quality of a variety of outdoor recreational facilities operated by St. Croix County. Table 2 summarizes the opinions of St. Croix County residents and those from neighboring counties. Awareness of County operated facilities seems to be an issue given that a majority of County residents called were aware of only three of the properties (the Apple River property, Glen Hills Park, and the snowmobile trail). Non-St. Croix County residents appear to be nearly as aware of County facilities as are residents.

Table 2: Opinions about St. Croix County Outdoor Recreation Facilities

Facility	St Croix Residents				Non St Croix Residents			
	N	% Aware	% used	Ave Rating (1)	N	% Aware	% used	Ave Rating (1)
Apple River Property	200	62%	31%	1.40	49	65%	41%	1.35
Glen Hills Park	200	58%	39%	1.42	49	51%	35%	1.65
Snowmobile Trail	200	50%	26%	1.41	49	43%	24%	1.42
Bass Lake Boat Landing	200	47%	29%	1.34	49	33%	20%	1.27
Troy Beach	200	46%	25%	1.58	49	35%	24%	1.42
Pine Lake Park	200	43%	25%	1.34	49	24%	12%	1.17
Homestead Parklands (Perch Lake)	200	42%	24%	1.37	49	27%	14%	1.14
On-Road Bike Routes	200	36%	12%	1.40	49	27%	10%	1.40
Wildwood Bike Trail	199	28%	10%	1.25	49	31%	4%	1.50

1. Properties were rated as 1=good, 2=average, and 3=poor.

Awareness of County outdoor recreation properties follows a fairly consistent pattern. Those in the youngest age category (18-24) and oldest age category (65+) are consistently (and in almost all cases, significantly) lower than those in the middle age categories. The level of awareness of individual properties peaks at different age categories. For instance, those in the:

- 25 – 34 age group have the highest level of awareness of Glen Hills Park (74%)
- 35-44 age group have the highest level of awareness of Homestead Parklands (53%), Bass Lake Boat Landing (64%), Wildwood Bike Trail (40%), and On-Road Bike Trails (53%)
- 45-54 age group have the highest awareness of Pine Lake Park (60%), Troy Beach (58%), and Snowmobile Trail (66%)
- 55-64 age group are most aware of the Apple River Property (74%)

Awareness is also related to length of residence in the county for many outdoor recreation properties. Those who have resided in the County for 6-10 years are significantly more aware of Bass Lake Boat Ramp (67%), Troy Beach (56%), the Apple River Property (71%) and the Snowmobile Trail (56%). Newer residents, those here for 1-5 years, have the highest level of awareness of the Wildwood Bike Trail (47%). Given the rapid population growth in St. Croix County, fueled by in-migration, efforts to make new residents aware of these properties will be an on-going challenge for the Parks Department.

Other than the on-road and off-road biking facilities, there is fairly consistent usage of County facilities with all falling between about one-quarter and 40 percent of the population. As would be expected, use of St. Croix County facilities is slightly lower for non-residents in all except the Apple River Property.

Survey respondents were asked to rate the quality of the facilities listed in Table 2. The closer the rating is to 1, the higher the rating. For all but a few exceptions, approximately two-thirds of St. Croix County residents gave the facilities a rating of good, about one-third said they were average and relatively few rated them as poor. The key exceptions are Troy Beach, the snowmobile trail and the on-road bike routes. Nearly half (46 percent) rated Troy Beach as average and another 6 percent gave it a poor rating. For the snowmobile and on-road bike trails, 8 percent and 7 percent respectively, rated these as poor. Interestingly, County residents were significantly more pleased with Glen Hills Park and the Wildwood Bike Trail and significantly less enthusiastic about Troy Beach, Pine Lake Park and Homestead Parklands than were non-county residents. In short, there appears to be a high level of satisfaction with the quality of County outdoor recreation facilities, though Troy Beach may need some attention.

C. St. Croix County’s Outdoor Recreational Amenities

In addition to the outdoor recreational facilities, respondents were asked about the amenities within these facilities. Table 3 summarizes the views of County and non-County residents concerning these amenities. Again, we asked respondents if they were aware of these amenities, if they had used them, and their opinion of their quality. We also asked them to identify the amenity that is most important to them.

Table 3: Opinions about St. Croix County Outdoor Recreation Amenities

Amenity or Service	St Croix Residents					Non St Croix Residents				
	N	% Aware	% used	Ave Rating (1)	Number most imp	N	% Aware	% used	Ave Rating (1)	Number most imp
Playgrounds	199	80%	58%	1.42	42	49	59%	43%	1.48	11
Picnic facilities	200	71%	50%	1.57	26	48	43%	18%	1.33	1
Campgrounds	199	68%	32%	1.31	18	49	53%	22%	1.18	0
Boat Ramps	199	66%	37%	1.50	28	49	49%	24%	1.17	3
Swimming beaches	200	66%	39%	1.56	11	49	47%	31%	1.47	2
Hiking Trails	200	55%	41%	1.30	18	49	43%	29%	1.43	5
Snowmobile trails	198	50%	24%	1.48	21	48	49%	20%	1.40	7
Volleyball facilities	200	48%	23%	1.70	1	49	45%	24%	1.83	3
Shoreline fishing	199	46%	33%	1.45	10	49	43%	29%	1.36	4
Canoe & Boat Rentals	199	45%	18%	1.28	3	49	51%	24%	1.17	1
On-road bike routes	198	33%	12%	1.46	6	49	20%	6%	1.00	1
Off-road bike trails	200	29%	10%	1.30	3	49	18%	4%	1.50	1
Horseshoe Pits	199	28%	8%	1.33	0	49	16%	4%	1.00	0
Snowshoe & CC Ski Trails	200	27%	10%	1.32	0	49	16%	4%	1.50	0

1. Properties were rated as 1=good, 2=average, and 3=poor.

Interestingly, Table 3 indicates that awareness of these amenities tends to be much higher than the facilities in which they are located! It is probable that at least some respondents were referring not to

specific County amenities such as playgrounds but to ones that are provided by cities, counties or other public entities. More than half of County residents reported being aware of County provided playgrounds, picnic facilities, campgrounds, boat ramps, swimming beaches, hiking trails and snowmobile trails. In virtually all cases County residents were more aware of these amenities than were non-County residents. Use of these amenities was also reported at much higher levels than the facilities discussed in Table 2. Use of these amenities is loosely correlated with awareness (amenities in the upper half of Table 3 tended to be both more familiar to residents and to be used by a higher percentage of the sample than those in the lower half of the Table).

There is a good deal more variability in the rating that St. Croix County residents gave these amenities than was true of the facilities discussed in Table 2. Two-thirds or more rated the following amenities as “good”: canoe and boat rentals, campgrounds, hiking trails, snowshoe and ski trails, horseshoe pits, and off-road bike trails. In contrast, only about half thought the following amenities were “good”: boat ramps, shoreline fishing facilities, swimming beaches, picnic facilities, volleyball facilities, and snowmobile trails.

County residents identified basic things such as playgrounds, boat ramps and picnic facilities as the most important amenities. Snowmobile trails were also identified by at least 10 percent of the sample as their single most valued amenity. Non-residents are most interested in playgrounds, snowmobile trails and hiking trails. Apparently, non-residents are willing to drive into St. Croix County for things of interest to their children or to more unique amenities such as trails but not for more generic things such as picnic facilities.

D. Adequacy of St. Croix County Outdoor Recreational Services

Respondents were asked to indicate whether St. Croix County should expand, leave the same, or reduce a range of outdoor recreational facilities or amenities. The opinions of St. Croix County residents and residents of nearby Counties are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4 clearly shows that St. Croix County residents don't feel that they have too many outdoor recreational services given the very small percentage suggesting that they be reduced. Likewise, there is relatively little support for expanding these services. Only one feature, playgrounds, garnered a majority who felt that an expanded supply was warranted. Playgrounds were also, by a wide margin, the single most important outdoor recreational feature for this set of residents. Substantial minorities (between one-quarter and one-third of the sample) were supportive of expanding snowmobile trails, boat ramps, hiking trails, a new park, campgrounds, picnic facilities and swimming beaches. So, in general, County residents seem content to maintain the current array of facilities and amenities or have no opinion on these matters.

Table 4 also indicates that non-residents were slightly more willing to see the County reduce its supply of outdoor recreational services. They agreed that playgrounds were the single most important amenity and this was also the item that most would like to see expanded.

There are relatively few differences of opinion regarding the need to change the supply of outdoor recreational facilities when different demographic subgroups are considered. Women and families with more children are more supportive of expanding off-road bike trails while those who are unemployed

would like to see more on-road bike trails. Younger County residents are statistically more supportive of expanding snowmobile trails and volleyball facilities. Boat ramps have greater than expected support from those less than 55 years of age, the unemployed, those self-employed, and homeowners. Females are slightly more supportive of adding a new park to the County’s facilities.

Table 4: Opinions about future needs

Facility/Activities	St. Croix Residents						Non St Croix Residents					
	N	Reduce	Leave Same	Expand	Don't Know	Number most imp	N	Reduce	Leave Same	Expand	Don't Know	Number most imp
Playgrounds	200	1%	34%	55%	11%	38	49	4%	41%	33%	22%	7
Snowmobile Trails	200	3%	40%	28%	31%	22	49	8%	35%	16%	41%	5
Boat Ramps	200	1%	50%	26%	25%	21	49	4%	45%	16%	35%	1
Hiking Trails	200	0%	49%	31%	21%	17	49	4%	45%	14%	37%	3
Additional/New County Park	200	1%	41%	34%	24%	17	49	8%	39%	18%	35%	1
Campgrounds	200	2%	50%	31%	17%	13	49	4%	55%	20%	20%	2
On-Road Bike Routes	200	5%	41%	18%	38%	11	49	6%	35%	6%	53%	2
Picnic Facilities	200	1%	49%	33%	18%	10	49	4%	51%	18%	27%	2
Swimming Beaches	200	2%	50%	27%	22%	10	49	2%	51%	20%	27%	3
Shoreline Fishing Facilities	200	2%	49%	23%	28%	8	49	2%	45%	18%	35%	3
Off-Road Bike Trails	200	2%	46%	16%	37%	4	49	4%	31%	10%	55%	2
Snowshoe and CC Ski Trails	200	4%	44%	10%	43%	2	49	4%	37%	6%	53%	0
Canoe and Boat Rentals	199	2%	53%	11%	34%	2	49	2%	49%	10%	39%	1
Volleyball Facilities	200	0%	57%	9%	34%	1	49	2%	57%	4%	37%	0
Horseshoe Pits	200	6%	46%	6%	42%	0	49	4%	39%	2%	55%	0

E. Funding outdoor recreational services

The final set of questions in the questionnaire dealt with preferred means of funding the maintenance or expansion of outdoor recreational services. The respondents were asked to identify three funding mechanism in order of preference. So, as Table 5 indicates, 60 County respondents identified grant funding as their most preferred funding option and the second highest number (125) listed this somewhere in their top three choices. The most popular funding mechanism overall, however, was to increase user fees for people using these services. Interestingly, the two mechanisms that spread the cost of these services most broadly across County residents (general tax revenues and bond issues) received the fewest “votes” as preferred funding sources. Given that many of the facilities and amenities will benefit both current and future County residents, the unpopularity of funding them via County bond sales, which would spread these costs across time, is somewhat surprising.

The bottom portion of Table 5 indicates that even non-County residents are open to the prospect of higher user fees for St. Croix County outdoor recreational services.

Table 5: Funding preferences for outdoor recreational service

St Croix Residents							
Funding Source	Number in top 3	First	Second	Third	Percent First	Percent Second	Percent Third
Grant Funding	125	60	32	33	48%	26%	26%
Increase User Fees	144	51	53	40	35%	37%	28%
General County Tax Revenue	90	46	25	19	51%	28%	21%
Impact Fee on New Devel	122	30	50	42	25%	41%	34%
County Bond Issue	65	11	28	26	17%	43%	40%

Non St. Croix Residents							
Funding Source	Number in top 3	First	Second	Third	Percent First	Percent Second	Percent Third
Increase User Fees	34	15	9	10	44%	26%	29%
Impact Fee on New Devel	25	3	13	9	12%	52%	36%
General County Tax Revenue	24	14	2	8	58%	8%	33%
Grant Funding	23	9	8	6	39%	35%	26%
County Bond Issue	15	3	7	5	20%	47%	33%

There are very few demographic differences in terms of funding preferences. St. Croix county homeowners are statistically more likely to support user fees than are renters. Males are slightly more favorably disposed toward impact fees on developers than are females.