

Local and Regional Land Conservation Organizations: An Emerging Actor in Outdoor Recreation Provision

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ABSTRACT: The provision of outdoor recreation has been accomplished through the efforts of both the public and private sectors. However, this provision has historically been heavily dominated by the public sector and, in many cases, the private sector role has been slight. In particular, the role of the private nonprofit sector has been almost completely discounted. This paper reports on a study which investigated one segment of the private nonprofit sector as an active provider of outdoor recreation: local and regional land conservation organizations (LRLCOs). Specifically, the paper describes the current role and explores the future potential of LRLCOs in outdoor recreation provision in the Great Lakes Region.

The study found that, while LRLCOs are currently providing few outdoor recreation opportunities, their role cannot be completely ignored due to the quality of outdoor recreation provision and the ability of the organizations to meet specific activity goals. In addition, the study found that the future growth potential of LRLCOs may enhance the role of the organizations in outdoor recreation provision. The study determined that LRLCOs are especially suited to outdoor recreation provision in two primary areas: environmental education centers and open space/trail corridors.

KEYWORDS: Private sector, outdoor recreation provision, land trusts, future providers.

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Introduction

The evolution of outdoor recreation provision in the U.S. has led to an outdoor recreation network with a significant public-sector financial commitment and a provision system that is dominated by the public sector (Kraus 1986; Jensen 1985; Clawson and Van Doren 1984; Jensen and Thorstenson 1977). Currently, there is a growing concern regarding the ability of the public sector to sustain its dominant role in outdoor recreation provision in the future (McClellan 1986; Sampson 1986; Gray 1984; Mertes 1985; Peterson 1981). In

fact, many sources indicate that outdoor recreation is on the verge of a "provision crisis" (Meitzger 1983; Kilborn 1983; Cordell and Hendee 1982; Maguire 1982; Curtis 1981). The primary elements involved in this impending crisis include an increasing public demand for outdoor recreation opportunities, a decreasing public-sector commitment of financial resources for outdoor recreation provision, and deterioration of the current outdoor recreation infrastructure (McClellan 1986; Clawson 1985; Cordell *et al.* 1985; USDI 1985; Cordell and Hendee 1982; Maguire 1982). The basic question that arises is, "Who will provide future outdoor recreation opportunities?"

In response to this question, a number of sources have indicated that the role of the private sector in outdoor recreation provision will increase. And while the private sector has a long, well-documented history of outdoor recreation provision, it is the nonprofit component of this sector whose role is beginning to change.

The private nonprofit sector represents a diverse conglomeration of entities including advocacy groups, funding groups, and those organizations that undertake direct action in outdoor recreation provision. It is the direct-action organizations that are currently emerging as actors in the provision of outdoor recreation. This study focuses on the current and future role of direct-action nonprofit outdoor recreation organizations.

Local and regional land conservation organizations (LRLCOs) form one segment of the direct-action nonprofit private sector that is involved in outdoor recreation provision and has undergone extensive growth in the last twenty years. LRLCOs have been defined as "nonprofit organizations that work within a local community, a state, or a regional area for the direct protection of lands that have open space, recreation, or ecological importance" (Emory 1985, p.45). Whereas the first land trust was founded in Massachusetts in 1891, it has been only recently that these organizations have begun to grow rapidly and to take a prominent role in the protection and conservation of key natural resource lands. In 1965, there were only 79 land trusts in the U.S.; within a decade another 175 had been founded. By 1985 this number had doubled again to over 500 land trusts operating throughout the country (Stone 1985). Since 1985, the number of LRLCOs has grown to 743 (Land Trust Exchange 1989).

LRLCOs have been instrumental in the preservation and protection of over 1.7 million acres of land in the United States (Emory 1985). The organizations are particularly effective in terms of direct action due to their ability to use a variety of land preservation techniques and also due to their ability to work quickly and in a flexible manner. LRLCOs represent a "grass roots" environmental movement; they have helped to involve over 350,000 citizens in the preservation and protection of land resources.

In terms of outdoor recreation, one national survey (Land Trust Exchange 1989) reports that one of the primary land uses associated with LRLCO preservation is outdoor recreation. However, the role of the organizations' involvement in outdoor recreation is neither clearly defined nor well understood. Furthermore, the potential of the sector in future outdoor recreation provision is unknown. The purpose of this study was to describe the current role of local and

regional land conservation organizations in outdoor recreation provision and to explore the organizations' future potential in outdoor recreation provision.

Method

The study area was the Great Lakes region (the U.S. Census Bureau's East North Central Division). The Great Lakes region was selected for investigation because it contains a significant number of LRLCOs ($N=70$) and, in a previous survey, approximately 71 percent of these identified outdoor recreation provision as a function of the organization (Stone 1985).

The research employed a two-step method. The first was a telephone survey of the seventy identified LRLCOs in the Great Lakes region. Sixty-two completed the telephone survey, for a response rate of 88.6 percent. In the survey, the respondents assessed their organization's current role in outdoor recreation provision and evaluated the potential of LRLCOs in future provision of outdoor recreation. Specifically, the survey included information on the background of the LRLCO foundation, member information, organizational finances, operating philosophy, and outdoor recreation provision. In terms of outdoor recreation provision, the survey focused on land resources available, as well as on activities, facilities, and services for outdoor recreation. In addition, the reasons for organizational involvement in outdoor recreation and problems associated with outdoor recreation provision were investigated. The average completion time for the survey was thirty-three minutes.

The second step was case-study analysis of four selected LRLCOs in the Great Lakes region. Information collected in the telephone survey provided the foundation for this sampling. The cases were selected based on the following criteria: current outdoor recreation provision, organization success, preservation vs. use orientation, and current organizational life cycle stage. The case studies allowed in-depth, comprehensive investigation of the current and future roles of LRLCOs in outdoor recreation provision. Organizations included in the case studies were Natural Areas Preservation, Inc., Illinois Prairie Path, West Bloomfield Land Conservancy, and Dane County Natural Heritage Foundation.

Table 1
LRLCO Survey Respondents by State

State	LRLCOs surveyed	Total LRLCOs*	Percent Total
Illinois	26	28	92.9
Indiana	3	3	100.0
Michigan	12	15	80.0
Ohio	13	14	92.9
Wisconsin	8	10	80.0
Total	62	75	82.7

(After Stone 1985)

Results

The study found that the LRLCOs were providing outdoor recreation land resources and opportunities. Of the sixty-two LRLCOs surveyed, fifty (80.6 percent) currently owned or managed land. Furthermore, access to this land was allowed in 96 percent of the cases and, in most instances, this access was open to the general public (91.7 percent). The majority of land was located in a rural setting (64.0 percent) with additional sites being located in suburban and urban settings (26.0 percent and 8.0 percent respectively). Most of the organizations owned/managed less than five sites and about one third owned/managed only one area. Approximately 86 percent of the land managing organizations indicated that their sites contained surface-water resources.

In the survey, forty-seven of the respondents who owned or managed land (94.0 percent) indicated that the land was available specifically for outdoor recreation. A total of 57,848 acres of land was accounted for in the survey and 98.2 percent of this land (56,782 acres) was available for outdoor recreation activities. Table 2 presents a comparison of LRLCO acreage and total statewide outdoor recreation acreage in the Great Lakes region.

Table 2
Outdoor Recreation Acreage by State

State	Total outdoor recreation acres	LRLCO acres	LRLCO percent
Illinois	1,140,354	15,359	1.30
Indiana	846,972	2,190	.26
Michigan	7,394,404	23,186	.31
Ohio	1,278,595	11,893	.93
Wisconsin	6,186,161	4,154	.07
Total	16,846,486	56,782	.33

(Source: IDC 1983; IDNR 1984; MDNR 1985; GCCOO 1986; and WDNR 1985)

The LRLCOs hosted a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities on their lands. A total of fifteen different activities were identified; however, the most commonly occurring activities were passive, particularly those involving nature or wildlife. The top five activities on LRLCO land were: hiking, naturalist activities, cross-country skiing, nature observation, and birdwatching.

Approximately 80 percent of the LRLCOs kept records on the number of site visitors. Visitation ranged from fewer than 1,000 visitors per year to well over 50,000 visitors per year. In total, the survey accounted for 1,269,145 visitor days per year from the forty organizations that maintained records.

Over 80 percent of the land-managing organizations provided outdoor

recreation facilities such as trails, parking facilities, and restrooms (Table 3). In terms of site development, the study found that LRLCO sites were not hardened; their facilities were minimal, complementing the passive outdoor recreation activities offered. In most cases (86.8 percent), access to the facilities was open to the general public, either with or without permission. However, five of the organizations indicated that their facilities were open only to members of the organization, despite the fact that their land remained accessible to the public.

Table 3
LRLCO Outdoor Recreation Facilities* (N=38)

	Number	Percent
Trails	30	78.9
Parking	24	63.2
Restrooms	19	50.0
Picnic facilities	10	26.3
Nature center	3	7.9
Swimming pool	1	2.6
Museum	1	2.6
Horse facilities	1	2.6

* Respondents could choose up to three facilities.

As with facilities, approximately 80 percent of the land-managing organizations provided outdoor recreation services. The most common service was naturalist activities; other services were concessions, equipment rental, site rental, and outdoor recreation lessons. Once again it was found that outdoor recreation services were limited in scope and occurrence and strongly oriented towards the passive nature of the outdoor recreation provision. In most cases (84.2 percent), access to the outdoor recreation services was open to the general public.

A crucial element in deciphering the entire nonprofit outdoor recreation experience was determining what factors led to the organizations becoming involved in outdoor recreation provision initially. Such information allows insights as to what might encourage or discourage organizations from providing future outdoor recreation opportunities.

The study found that the most common reason for involvement in outdoor recreation provision was to facilitate public education (table 4). In essence, the LRLCOs wanted to draw the public onto their property to espouse their philosophy, to encourage greater understanding of land preservation and protection, and to solicit additional organization members. The organizations perceived recreation as a vehicle to enhance land conservation efforts; they seemed to be trying to foster respect for land preservation and protection through public enjoyment of what has been preserved.

Table 4
Why LRLCOs Chose to Become Involved
in Outdoor Recreation Provision (N=47)

	Number	Percent
Education	14	30.4
To integrate people with natural lands	8	17.4
Preserve a way of life	4	8.7
Public need	4	8.7
Maintain charitable status ¹	3	6.5
Implicit in accepting land	3	6.5
Gamer public support	2	4.3
Provide a financial support base	2	4.3

¹Land trusts usually claim exemption as charitable organizations under Sec. 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The overriding issue is whether the organization has been formed for an allowable public purpose rather than to serve the private interests of particular individuals. There is no specific rule that mandates public access to land trust properties. In some cases, to obtain maximum donor deductions under "Public Charity Status" an organization may choose to provide public facilities or services as evidence of public support.

Whereas most of the organizations envisioned outdoor recreation as a positive factor in land preservation and protection projects, three organizations, of the fifty that owned/managed land, chose not to become involved in outdoor recreation provision. In two cases, the organizations indicated that they wished "to keep the area natural and did not want human intrusion." In the third case, the organization chose to restrict their involvement in outdoor recreation due to the fear of lawsuits over personal injury, as well as to the prohibitive costs of liability insurance. Given the strong philosophical orientation of the organizations to land preservation, as opposed to use, it was not surprising that they wanted to limit human-caused site deterioration. In fact, what was surprising was the study's finding of extensive involvement in outdoor recreation provision by the other forty-seven organizations. It appeared that the organizations' preservation orientation was mitigated by their opportunity to influence people through outdoor recreation participation.

Prior to the study, it was anticipated that a major deterrent to outdoor recreation provision by LRLCOs might be the many problems that accompany public access. However, fewer than half of the organizations (38.3 percent) reported problems while providing outdoor recreation opportunities. The major problems that were encountered were trespassing, liability insurance, and lack of adequate funding to provide needed facilities. Beyond these, a variety of additional problems were mentioned: vandalism, regulation violations, user

conflicts, and wildlife poaching. These basically mirror the list of problems encountered by the public sector in passive recreation provision and were relatively infrequent in occurrence.

In addition to the current role of LRLCOs in outdoor recreation provision, the study looked at the future potential of the organizations in outdoor recreation provision. Four areas were investigated.

First, the organizations were asked to rate their potential for acquisition of new land resources. A slight majority (53.2 percent) indicated that their land base would increase. However, a surprisingly large percentage (32.3 percent) felt that their acreage would remain the same. Furthermore, the four organizations who did not own or manage land currently had no desire to do so in the future.

Next the LRLCOs speculated on the potential for new land uses on their sites. Approximately half (54.8 percent) of the LRLCOs envisioned new uses for their organizations' land. The most frequently mentioned new uses were wildlife habitat and educational activities. While outdoor recreation was not specifically mentioned, it is already been noted that education activities were often accomplished through recreational activities.

The third area explored was expansion of outdoor recreation involvement. The organizations that were currently involved in outdoor recreation provision were asked if they thought their involvement in outdoor recreation would increase in the future. A strong majority (80.9 percent) indicated that their involvement in outdoor recreation would expand. When asked how that would occur, respondents indicated that they would increase outdoor recreation services (57.9 percent), increase educational services (34.2 percent), and add facilities to the site (28.9 percent).

The same organizations were also asked about their motivations for expanding outdoor recreation. Overall, the responses mirrored the original purposes for involvement in outdoor recreation. The LRLCOs felt that expanded involvement in outdoor recreation would enable them to continue educating the public about the importance of land resource protection and preservation. It would also allow the organization to influence people's perception and understanding of nature.

When comparing why the organizations wanted to expand their involvement and how they envisioned expanding their involvement, a logical connection was evident. The organizations wanted to expand to educate and influence users. As a result, their primary approaches to expansion were through services and education. Interestingly, the third most frequently mentioned reason for expansion was to provide more recreation opportunities and the third and fourth expansion techniques were more facilities and more areas.

The organizations that foresaw expansion in outdoor recreation provision were asked if government incentives might assist LRLCOs in providing additional outdoor recreation. The majority (63.2 percent) felt that government incentives could assist. The most frequently mentioned incentives included charitable tax deductions (58.3 percent), state funding/grants (50.0 percent), and cooperation/technical assistance from state agencies (25.0 percent).

The final area was a general assessment by the LRLCOs of their potential

to provide outdoor recreation opportunities. Overall, the study found that the respondents were largely optimistic. The majority (69.4 percent) rated the potential as very great or great. Only 13 percent of the respondents indicated that the potential was "little or "very little." On the five-point scale, the mean was 1.983, with 1 being "very great" and 5 being "not great."

Discussion

In response to the question "Who will provide future outdoor recreation opportunities?", perhaps a new actor has emerged. The study documents that LRLCOs are currently providing some outdoor recreation opportunities. The vast majority of organizations in the study (80.6 percent) owned or managed land resources and 98 percent of the land was open for public outdoor recreation. However, a more relevant question might be, "What is the impact of this new actor?"

There is no question that the quantity of outdoor recreation provision afforded by the LRLCOs at this time is minimal. They provided only 0.33 percent of the Great Lakes region's outdoor recreation acreage and only a small percentage of the visitor days. In addition, only half of the established organizations foresaw extensive land resource acquisition in the near future. However, it is still difficult to completely dismiss LRLCOs as an insignificant participant in outdoor recreation provision. Their participation is significant for several reasons.

First, the provision of outdoor recreation by LRLCOs represents an opportunity for the use of private action to satisfy specific outdoor recreation goals (Foti and Jacobs 1989). While the public sector may not be able to focus resources on a specific goal due to pressures from multiple users or multiple goals, the private sector can achieve specific activity provision on a site without the charges of inequity by various user groups. LRLCOs present one option for groups who desire a specific outdoor recreation goal and may not be able to reach this goal through public agency action.

Along the same lines, LRLCOs present an opportunity to achieve public outdoor recreation goals through innovative, creative, and swift private action. LRLCOs are not constrained by legislative approval on acquisition expenditures, nor are they limited to fee simple acquisition. They have the potential to achieve public goals using the diversity of tools available to the private sector.

Finally, the provision of outdoor recreation by LRLCOs is significant merely as an alternative for providing additional outdoor recreation opportunities. With the current trend of public sector retrenchment and austerity budgets, any provision of outdoor recreation sites by entities other than the public sector is important.

Beyond the question of quantity, however, is the question of quality of outdoor recreation provision: Are the LRLCOs providing what is needed? In looking at the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans for the study area, it was determined that passive trail-based and water-based outdoor recreation opportunities were high-priority needs. The study found that LRLCOs are

providing passive outdoor recreation opportunities involving nature, wildlife, and trails. In addition, a large percentage (86 percent) of the LRLCO sites contained surface-water resources. It appears that LRLCOs are meeting high-priority public outdoor recreation needs through private direct action and this is significant.

While meeting outdoor recreation needs is a key issue in quality of provision, other quality factors include such things as organizational commitment to outdoor recreation and financial resources available for outdoor recreation facilities and services. The study found evidence that the LRLCOs were committed to high-quality outdoor recreation provision in terms of financial resources. Nine of the organizations maintained a separate outdoor recreation budget ranging from \$200/year to \$90,000/year. In addition, the organizations had committed funds to the development of nature education centers, trail networks for hiking and cross-country skiing, restrooms, parking lots, and year-round interpretive schedules.

On the other hand, the organizational commitment to outdoor recreation provision was not as clear. There was very little administrative, maintenance, or operating structure within the organizations for the outdoor recreation opportunities provided by the LRLCOs. For example, while 84 percent of the organizations recognized the need for regulatory structures on the land, only 66 percent of the LRLCO's actively enforced their rules or provided for an enforcement mechanism. It appeared that the organizations were willing to allow outdoor recreation on the land and they were willing to commit financial resources to both attracting and providing outdoor recreation opportunities as a means of educating regarding land resource protection and their organization's goals; but they were not willing to recognize themselves as land-managing outdoor recreation providers. At this point, it appears that outdoor recreation is really only a by-product of land resource preservation for the majority of organizations.

While the current significance of LRLCOs on outdoor recreation provision is variable (meeting important needs but at a low level), the future impact may be enhanced if there is potential for continued growth of the phenomena. There are a number of variables to consider in predicting the future of outdoor recreation provision by LRLCOs. To begin with, the organizations themselves do not foresee extensive land acquisition. While half of the organizations envisioned some increase in acreage or change in land uses or land protection techniques, one-third foresaw no increases in land base or changes in land uses or land protection techniques. Furthermore, the organizations are not noted for extensive land holdings and large land systems. Most of the growth in sites and acreage will come from the formation of new organizations.

Regarding the formation of new organizations, current data suggest that the phenomena of LRLCO foundation is continuing to grow (Land Trust Exchange 1989). Since 1985, more than 240 new organizations have been founded, and continued growth is predicted. The preservation of locally significant land resources through private action will proceed as a viable option for individuals or groups who are not satisfied with public sector initiative. As a result, the

LRLCO land base will increase and there will be gains for outdoor recreation provision.

There will also be land base increases due to increased member participation in the organizations. The major goal of LRLCOs, like all organizations, is survival. To nonprofit organizations, survival means goal attainment (in the case of LRLCOs, land preservation and protection). To achieve this goal the organizations rely on paying members. They pay for access to the LRLCO's site for the purpose of outdoor recreation. Therefore, there will be increases in the LRLCO land base for outdoor recreation and these increases will improve on the 0.33 percent of total Great Lakes region outdoor recreation acreage. While LRLCOs may not become a major land resource holder, they will continue to emerge as a significant actor in the outdoor recreation provision system.

Directions for the Future

The final question is, "What direction will the LRLCO's role in outdoor recreation provision take?" The data collected suggest that LRLCOs have potential for outdoor recreation provision in two primary areas: environmental education centers and open space/trail corridors.

The potential for LRLCOs in environmental education centers became particularly evident during one of the case studies. In the case of Natural Areas Preservation, Inc., the nonprofit private sector successfully captured the role of environmental educator from the public sector, and this capture was noted and lauded by the state bureaucracy. There are several reasons for successful implementation of environmental education centers by LRLCOs. First, the operation of the center enables the nonprofit organization to fit into an open niche in the public sector outdoor recreation provision system. While the public sector has provided environmental education centers, they have often been neither locally nor regionally accessible. In many states, there are only two or three environmental education centers. LRLCOs present the opportunity to provide environmental education centers that are accessible to the population and focused on locally important resources. Second, operation of an environmental education center enables the LRLCO to link up with a stabilized public sector function (primary and secondary education) and establish credibility in the community through continued service. It also gives the organization a constant source of income by providing school programs. Finally, this role links the organization's goals of land preservation and education with the implementation of these goals via public access/outdoor recreation.

In a number of cases in this study, the ability of LRLCOs to participate in trail corridor provision was demonstrated. For example, cross-country-skiing and hiking trails were one of the main forms of facilities provided by the organizations. In one case study, Illinois Prairie Path, a trail corridor was the focus of the entire mission of the organization. The potential for LRLCOs in this area is good for a couple of reasons. First, the preserved corridor provides passive outdoor recreation opportunities—the type of activities that the LRLCOs have chosen to provide. Second, the trail corridors present many opportunities

for environmental education and other outdoor recreation services—a major emphasis of the organizations. Third, trail corridor projects attract broad-based public support that can be used to solicit revenue.

LRLCOs are definitely an emerging actor in the provision of outdoor recreation. They are an actor to be nurtured by the public sector in their contribution to meeting public outdoor recreation and land preservation goals. In addition, they are an option to be considered by the private sector in the search for ways to meet specific activity goals and satisfy other resource needs not being met by the public sector. Some states (Wisconsin, Iowa, and New Jersey) have already identified the importance of forming partnerships with the LRLCOs and have provided grant-in-aid programs to assist them in meeting their goals. In other cases, the public sector has worked closely with the organizations in both the acquisition and operation of an outdoor recreation site. It is anticipated that such public-private partnerships will increase and diversify in the future and that LRLCOs will continue as actors in the provision of outdoor recreation.

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Important-Performance Analysis as a Staff Evaluation Tool

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ABSTRACT: This study explored the practicality of using an increasingly popular program evaluation technique, Importance-Performance analysis, as a method of staff evaluation. Four versions of a questionnaire suitable for conducting an internal evaluation of task importance and departmental performance were developed at the request of the Department of Parks and Recreation in a major midwestern city. The four versions of the instrument were used to reflect the differing job-related tasks performed by clerical staff, administrators, maintenance staff, and programmers. The analysis revealed differences in the perceived importance of various job-related tasks and in perceptions of the department's performance of those tasks across the four categories of employees. The results of the study should be useful for guiding future management decisions pertaining to job assignments, employee morale, and resource allocation.

KEYWORDS: Importance-Performance analysis, staff evaluation, job-related tasks.

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Importance-Performance analysis was introduced to the marketing literature by Martilla and James (1977) as a method of measuring consumer satisfaction. Several studies have been published in the park and recreation management literature that explain the technique (Guadagnolo 1985; Richardson 1987). Guadagnolo (1985) noted that Importance-Performance analysis can be used to answer three questions. First, it identifies which features of a program or service are important to producing participant satisfaction. Second, it can document the relative importance of each program feature compared to the other features identified. Third, it can document how well the agency performed regarding each feature. The end product of an Importance-Performance analysis is an easy-to-interpret two-dimensional grid that suggests possible courses of action based upon where a particular feature falls (Figure 1).

Programs or tasks that are placed into Quadrant I (concentrate here) may require additional allocations of staff and resources to meet desired standards.