

HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PARKS

January 29, 1997 Hearing Room E

1:30 Tapes 1 - 2

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Mark Simmons, Chair

Rep. Michael Fahey, Vice-Chair

Rep. Mike Lehman

Rep. Leslie Lewis

MEMBER EXCUSED:

Rep. Jim Welsh

STAFF PRESENT:

Pat Zwick, Policy Analyst

Marjorie Taylor, Administrative Support

MEASURE/ISSUES HEARD:

"Save the Parks" Critical Issues Council

Oregon Good Sam

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department

These minutes are in compliance with Senate and House Rules. Only text enclosed in quotation marks reports a speaker's exact words. For complete contents, please refer to the tapes.

Tape/#	Speaker	Comments
TAPE 1, A		
001	Chair Simmons	Calls the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m.
004	Chair Simmons	Introduces members of the Parks subcommittee and describes the purpose of the committee.
010	Chair	Speaks briefly about the history of the operation and funding of the state parks and what the committee hopes to

	Simmons	accomplish.
020	Chair Simmons	Calls Rep. Thompson and Rep. Westlund from the Parks Critical Issues Committee.
<u>"SAVE THE PARKS"</u> <u>CRITICAL ISSUES</u> <u>COUNCIL</u>		
034	Rep. Thompson	The Parks department is running into budget problems due to a build up of deferred maintenance. The citizens of Oregon see the funding issue as a high priority during the legislative session.
039	Rep. Westlund	Evidence from their study of the Parks system has unveiled three things: * First, the Parks department runs at an exceptional level of efficiency. There is no "fat" to cut out.
053	Rep. Westlund	* Second, the budget problems evolved when the Parks department was separated from the gas tax in 1981 as a stable revenue source.
061	Rep. Westlund	* Third, there is overwhelming public support for funding of the parks and a desire for expansion of services.
073	Rep. Westlund	States that the overwhelming support from the public should deem the funding of parks, plus they are of interest to the tourist industry.
080	Rep. Thompson	Investigated fees charged that were directly related to the parks and found that it is difficult to collect fees since some parks are so remote.
099	Rep. Thompson	One possible funding solution is a \$5 fee increase in automobile registrations. They are directly related to the use of parks and would be a viable source of income for the parks.
100	Rep. Westlund	Over three million vehicles are registered per year and over two million of those are passenger vehicles. Depending on which vehicles are assessed the fee, the revenues could be over \$16 million per year.
109	Rep. Thompson	Indicates that the vehicle fee is an efficient way to gather funds due to the lack of bureaucracy needed to collect them.
114	Rep. Thompson	The problem with the vehicle fee was that it was passed by an initiative and would need to be approved later by voters.
122	Rep. Thompson	A second problem with the proposed fee was related to Recreational Vehicle (RV) licensing - Owners found a loophole with the licensing so they wouldn't have to pay the additional fee.
	Rep.	RVs were not registering under normal processes but using

137	Westlund	trip permits.
147	Rep. Westlund	Expected revenues were lost due to the trip permit loophole.
157	Rep. Thompson	The public is extremely concerned with the funding of the parks and that shows in all of the phone calls and letters that state Representatives constantly receive.
171	Rep. Westlund	Declares that how parks are funded is critically important, but even more so is THAT parks are funded.
175	Rep. Simmons	Acknowledges the work of the Parks Critical Issues Committee and calls for questions related to the presentation.
183	Rep. Lehman	Verifies that the two main funding needs are to maintain the parks and to also expand the services provided.
188	Rep. Thompson	Indicates that there are three main needs: maintain the parks, rejuvenate the parks, and develop new parks.
193	Rep. Lehman	Inquires about the amount of money needed to satisfy the goals.
196	Rep. Westlund	On a biennium basis, approximately \$30-35 million of sustainable income is needed to achieve all goals.
202	Rep. Lehman	Asks how much money is being spent now.
204	Rep. Westlund	Approximately \$10 million per year.
207	Rep. Lehman	Asks if there are any ways to increase efficiency of the department.
214	Rep. Thompson	The are no major ways to improve the system, but maybe a few minor areas could be changed.
223	Rep. Westlund	Indicates that the Oregon State Parks Department is uniquely Oregon so citizens and lawmakers must work to save it.
244	Rep. Thompson	Another potential solution to the funding problem was harvesting of timber off state park land, but revenue generated wouldn't be enough.
251	Rep. Fahey	Asks what problems were associated with finding funding possibilities.
256	Rep. Westlund	The goal was to find the most efficient method way to get legislation passed. The two criteria to meet that efficiency are if the citizens would need to vote for it and if there was a collection mechanism in place.
269	Rep. Thompson	Another idea discussed was bonding, but they have to be repaid, which is difficult without financial regeneration.
	Rep.	Prison labor, gas tax, bottle tax, increased park fees, and increased fees for out-of-state users were also discussed,

279	Westlund	but many solutions were just minor fixes to a major problem.
312	Rep. Lewis	Asks if the "Adopt-a" programs were investigated as a solution.
322	Rep. Thompson	The programs were studied but the possible revenue generated would not be of consequence. Corporate sponsorships were another idea.
334	Rep. Lewis	Verifies that corporate sponsorships are not a viable option due to the lack of interest and not enough money.
340	Rep. Thompson	No corporate sponsors would step forward in support of the program.
346	Rep. Lewis	Verifies that the problem with automobile fees is that they are currently dedicated to road maintenance meaning that any changes would go to the voters.
353	Rep. Thompson	A park fee based system might not be popular since over a given year, a person's fees would accrue. A bottle tax is a viable alternative.
376	Rep. Lehman	Asks if Oregon State Parks are as great if not better than the rest of the country.
TAPE 2, A		
006	Rep. Thompson	There was an investigation of other states and systems and Oregon's program is very good.
016	Rep. Westlund	Many funding systems have three parts and two parts of most systems are a gas tax and a vehicle registration fee with the third part coming from lottery or general fund.
023	Chair Simmons	Asks for examples of efficiencies in the Parks Department.
029	Rep. Westlund	There are no specific examples, but the system as a whole was exceptional.
040	Rep. Thompson	Parks Department and the Oregon Department of Transportation were efficiently overlapping in jurisdiction.
045	Chair Simmons	Expresses the hope that the subcommittee can build on the work done by the Parks Critical Issues Committee.
050	Rep. Thompson	Bob Meinen, Director of the Oregon State Parks Department is a wealth of information.
056	Rep. Westlund	States his preference is to not go with corporate sponsorship.
061	Chair Simmons	Asks if audience members want to speak about parks.
OREGON GOOD SAM		
073	Bob Clausen	State Director, Oregon Good Sam. The organization is in support of state parks.

076	Clausen	Good Sam is against RV license fees being increased by 50% to fund the Parks Department. Indicates that licensing fees were increased in 1993 by 50% .
086	Clausen	RV licensing fees currently take care of 27% of the total Parks budget.
097	Clausen	Camper use fees equal 35% of the budget.
110	Clausen	There are 80 Good Sam chapters in Oregon with approximately 75,000 members participating.
117	Clausen	Many members volunteer for clean up and other activities in the state parks.
126	Clausen	Suggests that the Governor's beverage container tax might be a viable option for funding. Remembers that the Parks Department did very well with the gas tax.
144	Clausen	Another possible source of funding might be from a deduction on the income tax form.
153	Clausen	Suggests the Parks Department needs three budgets: operational, maintenance, and development.
159	Rep. Lehman	Asks if Oregon does have good parks in comparison to other states.
163	Clausen	Answers that the parks are great, but campground facilities are in need of updating.
177	Chair Simmons	Inquires how the organization members would react to a \$5 registration fee for vehicles.
180	Clausen	There would be a lack of opposition to a \$5 fee in comparison to an increase in RV registration fees.
<u>OREGON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT</u>		
200	Bob Meinen	Director, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD).
208	Meinen	Expresses appreciation to the Parks Critical Issues Committee for their work.
228	Meinen	The Parks Department is not perfect due to the area that it covers.
240	Meinen	Expresses appreciation to the Parks subcommittee for work to be done.
249	Meinen	Provides a table of recommendations from the Critical Issues report and explains what current action is being taken and planned actions (EXHIBIT A).
272	Meinen	Working with local governments was the first recommendation - OPRD is currently doing that.
303	Meinen	The second recommendation was for contracting out

		services.
317	Meinen	The Parks Department does have some private operators working for them. OPRD is in the process of defining what contracting is and what the limits are.
325	Meinen	A third is to renegotiate the labor contracts - actions have been unsuccessful.
337	Meinen	The fourth recommendation was to expand the host program to the day use parks. OPRD is open to the program, but it costs more money.
360	Meinen	A negative issue related to the host program is the need for safety backup because of vandalism and alcohol abuse.
369	Meinen	A fifth recommendation was to increase usage of volunteers. Storm damage and the need for clean up brought out many volunteers in 1996.
TAPE 1, B		
012	Meinen	The final recommendation was to utilize more prison inmates. Parks has a long history of using inmates and the total of 1996 work hours was equivalent to 1,100 prisoners.
028	Meinen	Expresses appreciation for the support of the Good Sam RV group.
032	Meinen	In 1967, Oregon started assigning part of the recreational vehicle fee to the state parks.
042	Meinen	Investments need to be made to keep up with the trends and markets for the use of parks, such as building meeting facilities for RV groups.
050	Meinen	Tent users and campers want more walk-in facilities.
068	Meinen	Expresses willingness to give a budget presentation at a later date.
077	Chair Simmons	Asks if Rep. Westlund's interpretation of the efficiency of OPRD is correct.
082	Meinen	Parks employees are very dedicated to doing their work - it's not just a job to them and for that reason, they go the extra mile.
091	Meinen	Some changes in recent years have not been well received, such as lost jobs due to erasing of management levels.
101	Meinen	The philosophy behind the change in the staff/management ratio was not to eliminate positions, but move them lower to be in touch with the customer.
127	Meinen	To promote better operation, the department has switched to a "team" orientation and there is more focus on customer service.
145	Meinen	OPRD has changed to be more proactive and businesslike, more importantly the staff is extremely dedicated.

149	Chair Simmons	Inquires about the competitiveness of state park fees when similar services in private sector are cheaper.
165	Meinen	Indicates that competitiveness is not the goal of the state parks, but they want to provide a clean, nice, affordable space for use.
200	Meinen	States that off-season camping is under utilized and hopes to promote it.
220	Rep. Fahey	Inquires as to how the employees will feel about subcontracting their jobs to private operators and at what level subcontracting should stop.
240	Meinen	Acknowledges that if contracting is a solution, public and contracted employees need to be compared with similar benefit plans.
268	Meinen	There are some areas where OPRD can investigate privatization to help provide more services to users.
274	Rep. Lewis	Asks how much the RV license fee is currently.
279	Meinen	Indicates that it is a two year fee and it's better to look at an average since there is a base fee with additions made to it.
292	Rep. Lewis	Asks what portion of the fee OPRD receives.
299	Meinen	The RV fee is collected by the Department of Motor Vehicles. DMV takes an administrative cost and the remainder goes to OPRD with 30% for county parks and 70% to state parks.
319	Rep. Lewis	Asks how much the new reservation system costs OPRD and suggests the use of female inmates to run the system.
339	Meinen	States that inmates were studied as a solution, but there was a very low acceptance rate for them.
TAPE 2, B		
005	Meinen	There is a possibility that the Parks information system might be run by inmates.
012	Rep. Fahey	Asks if the reservation system will give priority to residents.
014	Meinen	Acknowledges that there will be a shut down period so that residents will have priority in registration.
025	Meinen	Explains that there is an eleven month window to make reservations in advance. Indicates that 80% of early reservations are from Oregonians.
037	Chair Simmons	Acknowledges Mr. Meinen's offers of assistance to the committee.
048	Chair Simmons	Adjourns the meeting at 2:57 p.m.

Submitted By, Reviewed By,

Marjorie Taylor, Pat Zwick,

Administrative Support Policy Analyst

EXHIBIT SUMMARY

A - Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Summary of recommendations from "Save the Parks" Critical Issues Council, Bob Meinen, 2 pp.