

Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission

November 20, 2013

Agenda Item: 8a

Information

Topic: Let's Go - 2013 Report

Presented by: Steve Janiszewski & Vera Vollbrecht

Background:

Earlier this year, the Valleys Region was asked to develop a **Let's Go (LG) pilot project** patterned after the **Let's Go Camping (LGC)** model. The primary goal was to provide a variety of recreational activities that teach outdoor skills and provide a fun & safe experience for new park visitors. Willamette Mission State Park, Champoeg State Heritage Area, and Milo McIver State Park were selected as the "gateway parks". However, all parks within the Valleys Region participated in the first year under the "Let's Go" umbrella.

Seventy (70) LG activities in 18 different parks were scheduled over the summer months from mid-June through the Labor Day weekend. Recruitment for two qualified & skilled field instructors was successful with one for the North Valley and one for the South Valley. Both employees received orientation and training to conduct the four CORE activities (paddling, birding, hiking, and disc golf). All necessary equipment, supplies, and gear was purchased with support from the Valleys Region and Integrated Park Services Division. The Oregon State Parks Foundation provided a small grant which was used to purchase a number of new kayaks.

The LGC program embarked on its 25th season in 2013 with great success. LGC is the highly successful model upon which the expansion of the "Let's Go" family of programs is based. The program's goal is to introduce the basics of family camping to people who have little or no experience, emphasizing safe, fun, responsible camping practices. The program provides tents, sleeping bags, and other equipment to those who need it, and often includes several CORE interpretive and educational opportunities such as Leave No Trace, Jr. Ranger, Ranger-led hikes, Dutch oven cooking, owl prowls, campfire programs, and, of course, making s'mores.

Seventeen (17) LGC events in 16 different parks were completed between June 14th and September 8th, with the help and support of two permanent staff, one temporary staff, and 31 volunteers.

Findings & Lessons Learned:

The LG pilot project was very successful at creating a framework and structure to teach outdoor skills to new park visitors. The four activities attracted many enthusiastic participants and was supported by park field staff and volunteers from across the region. Paddling, specifically kayaking activities, was the most popular, followed by birding & hiking. Disc Golf had a much lower participation level than expected possibly caused by a perception of high cost (\$10/person). A bright spot this summer was the high participation level of children that attended LG Junior Ranger activities at Milo McIver State Park. Hybrid activities such as "Hiking with your Pet" and "Birding by Boat" were also a big hit.

One of our biggest challenges for LG was the late timing of the marketing and promotion efforts. We learned that many people make their plans early and have a wide array of choices. In addition, there are many other competitors in the Willamette Valley offering similar experiences which may have contributed to a lower than expected participation levels of some activities.

We can benefit by starting much earlier (March or April) with outreach and target specific groups to sign up early. There also may be opportunities to partner with non-profit groups such as the Willamette River Keepers and others to provide outdoor activities and share promotional costs. Another challenge was the call-in registration process which did not work well from a centralized location. Many participants learned about LG from park flyers and would show up the day of the activity. The overall satisfaction with the quality of activities was very high. On a scale of 1-5, 98% of the feedback for these activities was consistently rated at 5 (Very Satisfied).

LGC events were mostly full this year, with a maximum number of 35 participants at each event. Two LGC events were held for special audiences this season, one for participants who are Spanish speakers with English as their second language, and the other for families who have at least one child diagnosed on the autism spectrum. The overall response to LGC continues to be very high, with feedback for these programs consistently rated at 5 (Very Satisfied) or 4 (Satisfied) on a 1-5 scale.

Next Steps:

- Expand and roll-out program to more parks across the state.
- Combine Let's Go Camping with Let's Go under one comprehensive program.
- Plan Let's Go activities to encompass outdoor skills, outdoor recreation, and environmental education.
- Target underserved and special needs audiences.
- Improve marketing & promotion strategy – start advertising early in year.
- Stream-line registration process for all activities. Provide in-park sign up and fee payment.

Prior Action by Commission: None

Action Requested: None

Attachments: Survey Responses

Prepared by: Steve Janiszewski & Vera Vollbrecht



Item 8a - Attachment
Let's Go Pilot & Let's Go Camping
Summary of Survey Responses
Summer 2013

Kevin (Sutton) was awesome. He has lots of knowledge and shares it in a way that's interesting.

This was a great experience for me and I'm looking forward to do this again.

It rocked!!!

We loved hearing about all the plants and birds.

Fantastic! I will share with all my friends.

Great experience – Kevin (Sutton) and Andrew (Brainard) were fabulous.

The instructors encouraged us to get to know each other as a group and felt safe trying something new.

It was a well worth the trip. I would recommend it highly. I feel much more confident.

Garrett (Koepke) was a great guide, knowledgeable & personable.

The instructor was excellent and covered all the basics, and additional pointers were given. Nice to have the instructor enthusiastic about the activity, and SHE was.

Thanks Kevin (Sutton)! Micah was excited to see your email. He really wants to do the Next Adventure Kayak School; you've inspired him.

Thank you for the fantastic weekend!!! The kids both raved about it in the car on the way home, and they have already been asking, "When are we going camping again??" We are so grateful for the time and energy you and the volunteer invested in our family. We are truly thrilled to think that we will soon go out on our camping adventures with the assurance of having "rehearsed" once in a supportive setting.

My family returned from the camping safely and returning to everyday lives... we are still reminiscing the time we enjoyed in Umpqua State Park with you, Hannah (Baker), and Suzy. My kids keep asking where and when are we going camping again. They enjoyed the camping and your kindness greatly and feel appreciated.

Thank you! We had such a good time that our goal is to visit each State Park over the years ahead.