

Managing Public Lands Along the Willamette River

Results of a Statewide Survey of Oregonians

March-April, 2004

Final Report for the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department

July 28, 2004

by Joel D. Bloom, Ph.D.
Oregon Survey Research Laboratory



OREGON SURVEY RESEARCH LABORATORY

5245 UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

EUGENE, OR 97403-5245

TELEPHONE: 541-346-0824

FAX: 541-346-0388

osrl@uoregon.edu

<http://osrl.uoregon.edu>

Managing Public Lands Along the Willamette River

Table of Contents

I.	INTRODUCTION	2
II.	METHODOLOGY	2
III.	FINDINGS	3
	a. Parks Use Question	3
	b. River Management Questions.....	3
	c. Funding Priorities Questions.....	5
	d. Open-Ended Question.....	6
	e. Are We Really Measuring Opinions?	7
III.	CONCLUSIONS.....	7

Tables and Figures

Table 1:	Percent of Oregon Population Recreating on Public Lands Along the Willamette River	3
Table 2:	Priorities for Managing Public-Owned Lands Along the Willamette River	3
Figure 1:	Percentage Responding "Very Important" and "Somewhat Important" by Category - Management Priorities	4
Table 3:	Funding Priorities for Managing and Protecting Public-Owned Lands Along the Willamette River.....	5
Figure 2:	Percentage Responding "Very Important," and "Somewhat Important" by Category - Funding Priorities.....	6

I. INTRODUCTION

This document reports a summary of results of questions commissioned by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (subsequently “OPRD”) as part of the Oregon Annual Social Indicators Survey, (OASIS) 2004. The survey was conducted by the Oregon Survey Research Laboratory (OSRL) between March 19th and April 27th, 2004. Other clients included the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, the Oregon Department of Transportation, and researchers at the University of Oregon.

Questions were developed collaboratively between principal investigator Joel Bloom and other OSRL staff, and client Terry Bergerson and other OPRD staff. Questions were carefully designed to enable OPRD to determine Oregonians’ priorities in allocating OPRD resources among a variety of priorities related to management of publicly-owned lands around the Willamette River.

II. METHODOLOGY

- The University of Oregon Survey Research Laboratory completed 805 anonymous telephone interviews with adult Oregonians between March 19th and April 27th, 2004.
- OASIS respondents were randomly assigned to receive the OPRD question groups or not, based on a 5/8 ratio, so that we would have a total sample size of at least 500 completed surveys with responses on these questions. As we approached the end of the survey’s time in the field, we increased the ratio in order to ensure the 500 interviews. Even with that adjustment, we still needed to conduct a small number of callbacks to respondents not originally assigned to receive the OPRD questions; this was also done randomly and does not impact the results. In the end, we achieved 505 completed interviews for the OPRD question group, or slightly greater than the required number.
- For the total sample, the CASRO-type response rate was 52% and the refusal rate was 14%.¹ We are not able to calculate these figures separately for the OPRD sample, but there is no reason to expect that they would differ from the overall sample numbers.
- Based on the overall sample size of 505, the margin of error for a variable with a 50-50 proportional split is 4.4 percentage points, at the 95% confidence level. This means readers can be 95% sure that the true population figure is between 45.6% and 54.4% (i.e., 50% \pm 4.4 percentage points). For a variable with a 90-10 proportional split the margin of error is 2.6 percentage points (i.e., 90% \pm 2.6 percentage points). Because all respondents were asked all questions, no subsamples exist with higher margins of error, except if we break results down by demographic categories.
- To assess the margin of error for demographic subgroups contained in the banner tables (e.g., women or men, urban or rural, different age groups or income categories), see: <http://osrl.uoregon.edu/papers/sampler/>

¹ See the accompanying “How OSRL Calculates Response Rates and Refusal Rates” for a detailed description of how response and refusal rates are calculated.

III. FINDINGS

Parks Use Question

Respondents were first asked whether “during the past year, have you used city, county or state park lands along the Willamette River for recreational purposes?” Just over one third of the sample, or 35% answered that they had, while 64% said they had not (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Percent of Oregon Population Recreating on Park Lands Along the Willamette River		
	% Yes	% No
Used park lands along the Willamette River	36%	64%
Sample Size: 505; Sampling Error: +/- 4.4% (95% confidence interval, 50/50 proportional split)		

River Management Questions:

The next group of questions asked respondents about their “priorities for managing publicly-owned lands along the Willamette River.” Respondents were asked whether they thought management in a number of areas was “not very important, somewhat important, or very important.” The survey results for these questions are shown in Figure 1 and Table 2, below.

Table 2: Priorities for Managing Public-Owned Lands Along the Willamette River		
Management Strategies	Very Important	Very + Somewhat Important
Protecting and restoring Willamette River fish and wildlife habitat	67%	94%
Informing the public about historic or archeological sites along the river	47%	87%
Using the Willamette River in promoting tourism in the Willamette Valley	41%	80%
Providing more river bike and pedestrian trails for commuting	25%	69%
Providing more river bike and pedestrian trails for recreation	22%	74%
Increasing public access to the Willamette River to encourage recreational use in *urban* settings	21%	70%
Increasing public access to the Willamette River to encourage recreational use in *rural* settings	19%	65%
Sample Size: 505; Sampling Error: +/- 4.4% (95% confidence interval, 50/50 proportional split)		

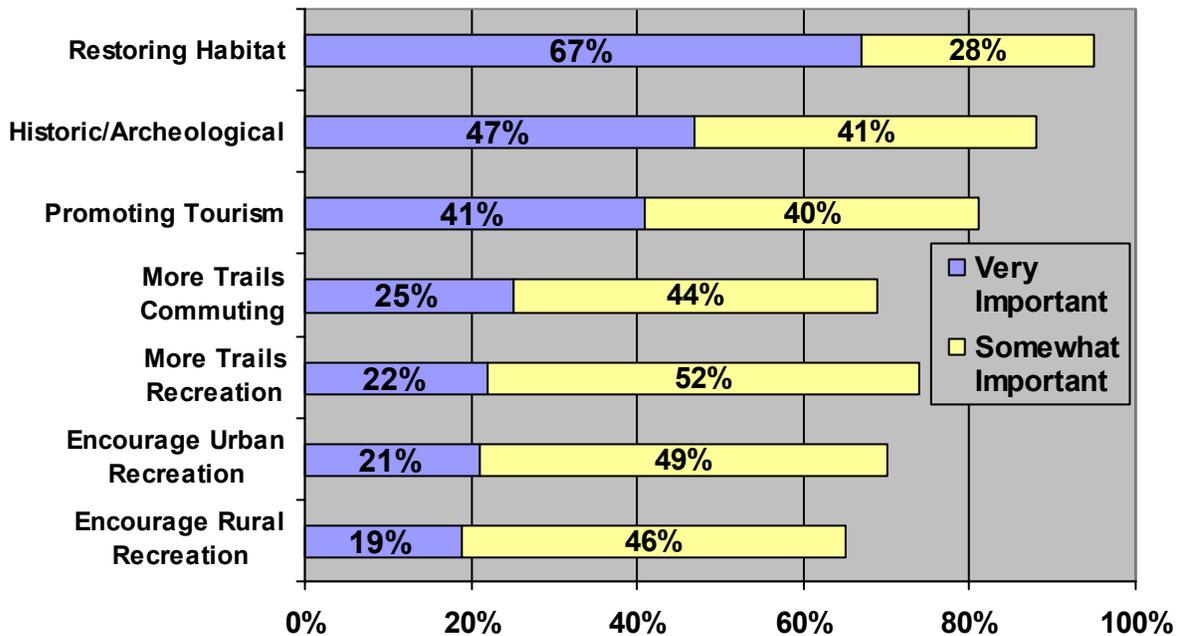
The survey results indicate that the public has essentially three categories of priorities. The highest priority was assigned to “protecting and restoring Willamette River fish and wildlife habitat,” which 67% of respondents said was “very important.” After this, two additional issues received moderate levels of support: “informing the public about historic or archeological sites along the Willamette River,” received 47% “very important” responses, and “promoting tourism in the Willamette Valley,” received 41% “very important” responses.

The four remaining issues received only low levels of strong public support as indicated by “very important” percentages ranging from 19% (“increasing public access to the Willamette River to encourage recreational use in *rural* setting”) to 25% (“providing more river bike and pedestrian trails for commuting”).

However, when we add “somewhat important” to “very important” responses, even the least popular item (rural recreation again) is supported at some level by nearly 2/3 of Oregonians according to the survey.

Figure 1 (below) shows the three categories for both the strong (“very important”) support and combined (“very” plus “somewhat important”) support. Precise wording of the categories can be found in Table 2.

Figure 1: Percentage Responding "Very Important", and "Somewhat Important" by Category -- Management Priorities



Looking at the combined figures we again see restoring habitat in a category by itself, with 94% support, followed again by historic/archeological sites and tourism at 87% and 80% respectively. The remaining four categories, range between 65% and 74% support.

In summary, looking at “very important” responses provides a clear categorization of Oregonians’ priorities, while looking at combined “very” and “somewhat important” responses shows strong and consistent support for a wide variety of program areas related to managing public lands along the Willamette River. In fact, the survey finds that *every program area receives at least around 2/3 support from the public!*

Looking at the data using two additional methods – average response on these questions, and percentage rating each area “not very important” – yields essentially similar results.

Funding Priorities Questions

The next group of questions asked more specifically about funding:

“Thank you. Next, land managers have limited resources to manage and protect publicly-owned lands along the Willamette River and must focus their time and money on the most serious needs first. In your opinion, how important is it that they commit resources for [specific category]? [Do you think it is] not very important, somewhat important, or very important?”

Results to these questions are included in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Funding Priorities For Managing and Protecting Public-Owned Lands Along the Willamette River		
Funding Priority	Very Important	Very + Somewhat Important
Working with private property owners to improve management of fish and wildlife”	58%	91%
Acquiring land to protect important fish and wildlife habitats	55%	83%
Enhancing and restoring habitats on existing public lands	53%	90%
Improving existing park facilities	38%	85%
Acquiring and developing additional parks and open space	29%	74%
Developing trails and walkways	22%	75%
Acquiring land to provide public access to water	19%	70%
Sample Size: 505 Sampling Error: +/- 4.4% (95% confidence interval, 50/50 proportional split)		

Here once again, “very important” responses provide OPRD with an excellent range representing public priorities on the issues discussed. We again see a clear top tier of three priority items in which between 53% and 58% of respondents labeled the items as “very important.”² These items relate to funding for “working with private property owners to improve management of fish and wildlife” (58%); “acquiring land to protect fish and wildlife habitats” (55%); and “enhancing and restoring habitat on existing public lands” (53%).

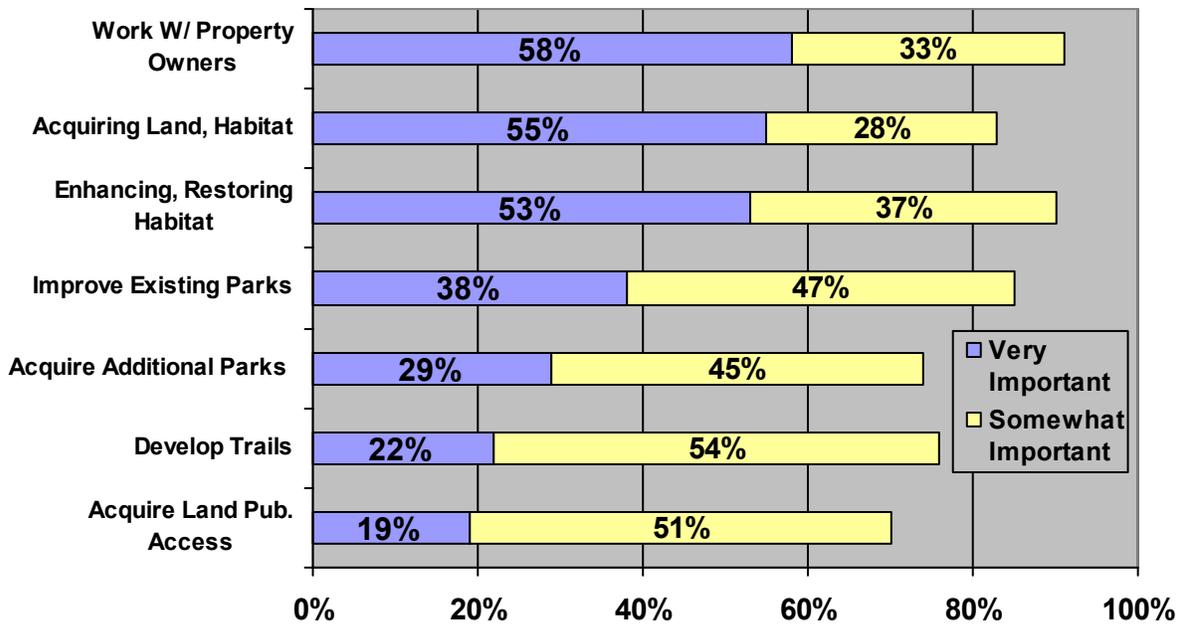
After that, with the remaining items we have a broader range than with the general management questions and no clear division into priority areas. 38% rate “improving existing park facilities”

² Due to the 4.4% margin of error we advise OPRD to view responses on these three items as essentially the same.

as very important, followed by 29% for “acquiring and developing additional parks and open space. The two remaining items – “developing trails and walkways” (22%) and “acquiring land to provide public access to water” (19%) receive lower levels of “very important” support.

As with the general management questions, however, the sometimes low rate of “very important” responses obscures higher general levels of support in several areas. Looking at Figure 2 (below), the top tier is still comprised of the same three items, in slightly different order – working with property owners (91%), restoring habitat (90%), and acquiring land for habitat (83%), along with the addition of improving existing parks (85%). But combined support for the remaining three funding areas is also high, ranging between 70% and 75%.

Figure 2: Percentage Responding "Very Important", and "Somewhat Important" by Category -- Funding Priorities



In summary, as with the general management questions, the “very important” category provides the best indicator of Oregonians’ top priorities, focused on working with property owners and improving habitat. At the same time, the combined measure of support that includes “very” and “somewhat” important responses shows that Oregonians still favor funding for a wide variety of programmatic areas.

Open-Ended Question

In addition to the questions on management and funding priorities, an open-ended question was included to provide respondents with an opportunity to make any additional comments in their own words:

“Is there anything else you would like to tell us about managing public lands along the Willamette River?”

A complete transcription of all responses to this question is included in the full project report. Responses to this question involve a very wide range of thoughts and opinions and will provide OPRD analysts with some excellent feedback when analyzed qualitatively.

Are We Really Measuring Opinions?

Given the fairly large number of people who commented that they didn't have very strong opinions on these matters, combined with the fact that only roughly one third of the sample reported having used Willamette park lands during the past year, one potential area of concern is that responses to these questions might not represent respondents' true attitudes, but rather ad-hoc answers made up to get through the interview.

Research about this sort of so-called "nonattitudes" suggests that this could be a problem; however we feel that the more applicable literature is one that suggests evidence for the "power of aggregation." (See most importantly, *The Rational Public*, by Page and Shapiro, 1992, University of Chicago Press.) This research suggests that even when individuals do not hold strong views on a topic, we can still meaningfully measure public opinion on it because when aggregating large numbers of individual opinions, error in one direction is counterbalanced by error in the other and the results are therefore meaningful, stable, and unbiased.

In this instance, while any given individual might not have a strongly-held, longstanding opinion on the importance of prioritizing or funding a particular type of program, the survey sample as a whole provide very meaningful comparisons from program area to program area. Thus, while we would not recommend spending a great deal of time analyzing what is behind individual-level responses on particular survey questions, we are confident that the overall aggregate numbers are very robust measures of public values and priorities in the areas we are measuring.

On the other hand, this concern does provide a strong argument in favor of giving the most weight to "very important" responses when analyzing the data.

III. CONCLUSIONS

When asked about the importance of a variety of management and funding areas related to use of public lands around the Willamette River, Oregonians do not value all program areas equally. We find the highest level of strongly-held support, as measured by "very important" responses, for prioritizing programs related to fish and wildlife habitat. Moderate levels of support exist for improving existing park facilities, promoting tourism, and educating the public about historical and archeological sites. Less support exists for trails and recreational use of parks.

But supporters of those types of program have some good news as well. On the one hand, they did not make the top of the public's priority list. On the other hand, when we include those who rated particular topics as "somewhat important," we find that every program area received 2/3 or greater support from the public.