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RELATIONAL MARKETING: FOCUSING ON RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND PUBLIC LANDS

Keywords: segmentation, social responsibility, non-economic criteria, public sector, recreation fees

Background & Management Issues: With recreation demands on public lands in the U.S. intensifying, marketing and market segmentation are being used by land management agencies in an attempt to better meet the users' needs. With this increased emphasis on marketing come concerns that a traditional marketing approach conflicts with the fundamental public purposes of federal agencies. "Relational marketing" has been proposed as an alternative approach to address those concerns. In contrast to transactive marketing, which emphasizes the selling and purchase of goods and services within the context of a discrete transaction, relational marketing highlights the importance of a long-term relationship between a customer and a provider of services.

Project Objectives:

- ❖ To outline the concept of relational marketing for public land managers, as an alternative to traditional, transactive marketing.
- ❖ To assess the public's response to activities of public land management agencies, based on their relationship to public lands.

Project Description: Revisions to the recreation fee program in the Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Region provided an opportunity to test applications of different marketing approaches to public land management. Of particular interest was the public's attitude toward fees, as a function of their relationship with the Forest Service. Using a Random-Digit Dial process, residents of Oregon and Washington

were surveyed via telephone.

The survey examined respondents' perceptions of and relationship with the Forest Service in three conceptual areas. Trust in the agency was quantified through respondents' perceptions of shared values, direction, goals, views, actions, and thoughts. Commitment was defined by frequency of visits to national forests, attitude toward user fees, and psychological attachment to the agency. Social responsibility referred to respondents' view of the agency's public purpose and its fulfillment of that purpose. Four distinct market segments were identified based on respondents' relationship to the agency. The survey results were then analyzed within the context of the agency's possible approaches to marketing.



Results: Segment one comprised 26% of the sample. These individuals reported fairly high levels of trust in the agency, but had little direct contact with the agency or national forests. This segment showed stronger support for the agency's public purpose, given their lack of contact, than other respondents. Women and individuals reporting lower income levels made up a disproportionate part of this segment. Segment two (21% of the sample) also reported little contact with the Forest Service, but contrastingly had very little trust in the agency. People in this segment placed significantly less emphasis on excitement as a benefit of public lands recreation than did respondents in the other segments.

People in segments three and four were on average younger than those in one and two. Segment three (34% of the sample) showed the highest levels of trust in and commitment to the agency. These individuals frequently recreated on public land and were highly concerned with the agency's public purpose. This segment contained the highest percentage of Anglo-Americans.

Segment four made up 19% of the sample. These individuals reported the lowest levels of trust in the agency, and low levels of commitment and social responsibility despite their frequent recreation on

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public lands. This segment was characterized by a higher percentage of men and rural residents.

The survey yielded four distinct and valid market segments, demonstrating that “the public” is not a homogenous entity. Different segments of the public have different perceptions of the Forest

Service, and differing relationships with the agency and the public lands. An approach to marketing that builds on these relationships is consistent with the public purpose and statutory mandates of the agency.

Management Implications:

- ❖ In addition to providing benefits enjoyed by visitors, the management of recreational land serves off-site and symbolic values. Members of the public who never recreate on public land are still stakeholders in the management of that land, and may have strong feelings about that management.
- ❖ Different segments of the public hold divergent views concerning federal land management agencies. In interacting with different “publics”, an agency’s message will likely be better received if it is crafted with an awareness of the characteristics of each particular audience.
- ❖ Marketing methods used by an agency will be more appropriate if they reflect the values of the public, the trust placed in that agency, and the agency’s public purpose. Marketing efforts taking these factors into account may help foster trust between the public and the agency.
- ❖ There is not necessarily a correlation between frequent recreation on federal land and shared values with the land management agency. As demonstrated by segment four of the population surveyed, some who recreate on public land don’t support the managing agency’s purpose, and have little trust in that agency.
- ❖ An approach to assessing recreation experience quality that emphasizes long-term relationships to the place is likely to strengthen commitment to the land and agency.

Publications / Products:

- ❖ Borrie, W. T., Christensen, N., Watson, A.E., Miller, T.A., and McCollum, D.W. 2002. Public purpose marketing: A focus on the relationships between the public and public lands. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*. 20(2): 49-68.

Leopold Publication Number 457

- ❖ Watson, Alan E.; Borrie, William T. 2003. Applying public purpose marketing in the USA to protect relationships with public land. In: Buckley, R.; Pickering, C.; Weaver, D.B., eds. *Nature-based tourism, environment and land management*. Oxon, UK, Cambridge, MA: CABI Publishing: 25-33.

Leopold Publication Number 481

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Mt. Rainer Wilderness, Washington. Photo: NWPS database.

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