

Office of State Parks

Agency Number 06-264

Fiscal Year 2005-2006 through 2009-2010

Agency/Program Mission Statement

The Office of State Parks serves the citizens of Louisiana and visitors by preserving and interpreting natural areas of unique or exceptional scenic value, planning, developing and operating sites that provide outdoor recreation opportunities in natural surroundings, preserving and interpreting historical and scientific sites of statewide importance and administering intergovernmental programs related to outdoor recreation and trails.

Agency/Program Goal

The Office of State Parks will increase and improve opportunities for all Louisiana citizens and visitors to enjoy and appreciate Louisiana's natural, cultural and recreational resources by planning, constructing and operating a system of parks, historic sites and preservation areas in accordance with the highest standards of management, interpretation and conservation.

Program Objectives

- Objective 1.** To increase the number of visitors served by the park system to at least 2,328,500 by the end of fiscal year 2009-2010.
- Objective 2.** To increase to 20,690 the number of interpretive programs and events offered annually by the park system by the end of fiscal year 2009-2010.
- Objective 3.** To complete 10 new or expanded facilities in accordance with the State Parks Master Plan by the end of fiscal year 2009-2010.
- Objective 4.** To increase the compliance rate of recreation projects funded through the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund to 95% by the end of fiscal year 2009- 2010.

Objective 1. To increase the number of visitors served by the park system to at least 2,328,500 by the end of fiscal year 2009-2010.

Strategies

- 1.1 Maintain and operate all state park sites and facilities according to the highest standards of quality.
- 1.2 Provide all personnel with appropriate training, equipment and uniforms.
- 1.3 Revise and improve all agency policies and procedures.
- 1.4 Implement and upgrade all aspects of the Centralized Reservation System as feasible.
- 1.5 Develop and administer an orientation program for all new employees.
- 1.6 Promote the park offerings through marketing, public relations and outreach programs.
- 1.7 Conduct random surveys to measure the quality of visitors' experiences and receive suggestions for improvement.
- 1.8 Introduce new initiatives such as the American Wetlands Program and participation in other eco-cultural tourism programs in order to further enhance visitation.

Indicators

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| Input | Budget and staff. |
| Output | Annual visitation.
Number of reservations taken. |
| Outcome | Percent change in annual visitation. |
| Efficiency | Operating cost of the park system per visitor.
Number of new facilities repaired, renovated or replaced. |

Supporting Documentation for Objective #1 Performance Indicators

Rationale/Appropriateness

Visitation is one way to measure the number of people served by the park system. The visitation figure will include those who travel to parks but will not include participants in off-site park programs offered or off-site outreach activities participated in, such as school-based programs and community events. The visitation figures will not include the "opportunity value" or "existence value" of the park to non-users. That is, the value of having the option to use said facilities and the value of preserving significant sites and resources for future generations are not contemplated in the set of indicators related to the number of people served by the park system. The number of operational sites is included as an input indicator as a means of factoring in the effect of having greater accessibility to the agency's sites.

Primary Beneficiaries

The primary beneficiaries of the agency's efforts to achieve Objective #1 are the visitors themselves. The agency's efforts are geared toward (1) building awareness of park offerings among potential first-time or infrequent visitors, (2) ensuring customer satisfaction and (3) encouraging repeat visitation.

Data Collection Procedure/Source, Frequency and Timing of Data Collection, Calculation Methodology, etc.

Visitation data is collected annually and is included in a comprehensive report that includes total annual visitation and further breaks down visitation by in-state versus out-of-state visitation, day use versus overnight use, and visitation per site and per month. The visitation data is generated at the park gate and is collected on a fiscal year (July 1 - June 30) basis.

The percentage change in visitation is calculated using the standard formula:

$$\frac{V_2 - V_1}{V_1}$$

The first efficiency indicator, operating cost per visitor, is calculated by dividing the final expenditures of the park system by the number of visitors as reported in the latest OSP annual report on visitation and comparing the same information as reported by the other states' park systems in the annual report of the National Association of State Park Directors.

Limitations of the Indicators

As mentioned above, the visitation data is fairly conservative in that it only counts the number of people directly, but not indirectly, served by the park system. The visitation data only reflects the number of people served on-site and excludes participants who come in contact with the park system through off-site events and outreach programs. Also, comparisons to other states are not always indicative of efficiency due to differences in methods of collecting visitation information. Louisiana counts the actual visitors entering the parks through entrance stations, but many other states do not have entrance stations and use traffic counters and multipliers to determine visitation.

Objective 2. To increase to 20,690 the number of interpretive programs and events offered annually in the park system by fiscal year 2009-2010.

Strategies

- 2.1 Increase staff participation in interpretive training programs, outreach initiatives and research projects.
- 2.2 Increase the number and variety of interpretive programs and events offered.
- 2.3 Review and evaluate interpretive programming to ensure quality of the programs.
- 2.4 Offer new, targeted programs such as the Youth Outdoor Experiential Learning Program and the Childhood Healthy Life Styles Program.

Indicators

- Input** Baseline number of programs and events offered annually.
- Output** Number of interpretive programs and events offered annually.
Number of program and event participants.
Number of programs offered off-site.
Number of outreach activities attended off-site.
- Outcome** Percentage change in number of programs and events offered annually.
- Efficiency** Cost of interpretive programming per participant.
Ratio of participants at events to total visitation.

Supporting Documentation for Objective #2 Performance Indicators

Rationale/Appropriateness

Increasing the number and diversity of interpretive programs serves two complementary functions of the park system. First, program development encourages research of the culture, era, architecture, people, events, ecosystem, etc. that will be the subject of the program. Second, special programs help drive visitation by piquing the interest of first-time visitors and encouraging past visitors to return for new experiences. Therefore, programs enhance the educational value of the site and create opportunities for the park to reach more people with that information.

While program participation is measured, the output and outcome indicators focus on the number of programs developed and offered. Interpretive programs have been characterized as entertaining education. It is the goal of the agency to ensure that efforts at entertainment do not overshadow the educational component. If interpretive programs are deemed successful only in terms of participation, the interpretive staff would not be encouraged to approach unique angles of research and

academic pursuits in furtherance of the educational mission of the park system. Therefore, the number of programs rather than the number of participants

is the appropriate measurement of the agency's achievement in interpretation. The measurable impact of programs on visitation is already covered in the strategic plan under Objective #1.

Primary Beneficiaries

The primary beneficiaries of the agency's efforts to achieve Objective #2 are the program participants and educators, preservationists, academicians, local children (schools) and communities.

Data Collection Procedure/Source, Frequency and Timing of Data Collection, Calculation Methodology, etc.

The number of programs offered each year is determined by a number of factors. Each site within the park system submits to the central office an annual list of programs it would like to offer during the next fiscal year. The interpretive staff evaluates the pool of requests on the basis of a number of factors including staff availability, scheduling, budget constraints and the proposed program's historical and scientific validity. The approved list of programs is set at the beginning of the year. Any changes (cancellations or additions) will be included in the final program count.

The number of interpretive programs offered has increased dramatically over the last several years with the introduction of new interpretive rangers at many sites where interpretive programming had never been offered before, or had only been offered on a very limited basis. The number of programs should continue to rise steadily over the next several years.

Participation in the programs is measured at the site of the event and is reported to the central office. The park staff and public information section promotes the events through press releases and other media where possible. The efficiency indicator will be obtained by dividing the total expenditures of the interpretive budget by the total number of interpretive program participants annually.

Limitations of the Indicators

Under the current system, all programs are counted equally. This is a limitation because some programs are extremely labor-intensive and costly, while others are more modest, such as guided nature walks. Further, some programs may appear modest but require extensive research and preparation. The agency seeks to increase the number of programs

offered; yet at the same time, it seeks to maintain balance in the type of programs offered.

For purposes of data collection, an “interpretive program or event” is defined as an on-site program open to the public and scheduled prior to the start of the fiscal year as well as any program that was not planned in advance, such as programs planned for special groups, programs on demand and basic site tours that are attended. The number does not include off-site programs or off-site outreach activities.

Objective 3. To complete 10 new or expanded facilities in accordance with the State Parks Master Plan by the end of fiscal year 2009-2010.

Strategies

- 3.1 Pursue the development and completion of facilities contained in the Office of State Parks 15-Year Master Plan.
- 3.2 Develop and implement a system to inventory the resources at all sites through the capital outlay program.
- 3.3 Analyze the relationships between resources.
- 3.4 As appropriate, collaborate with experts from area universities, public agencies and/or professional experts.
- 3.5 Delineate the functionality of each site's resources and recreational or interpretive potential.
- 3.6 Constantly review trends and demands in resource management and park development to ensure all sites' plans are current.

Indicators

- Input**
 - Number of new/expanded sites contained in 15-year master plan.
 - Number of operational sites.
 - Number of projects requested in Capital Outlay.
- Output**
 - Total number of sites with a current master plan.
- Outcome**
 - Number of new/expanded sites.
 - Number of projects funded in Capital Outlay.
 - Percentage of sites with a current master plan.
 - Number of new or expanded facilities completed.

Supporting Documentation for Objective #3 Performance Indicators

Rationale/Appropriateness

The State Parks Master Plan, 1997-2012 is a comprehensive planning document prepared for the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Office of State Parks. The purpose of this plan is to guide the acquisition, development and management of Louisiana's State Parks System for the next fifteen years or, in this case, the remaining 8 years of the plan. This State Parks Master Plan 1997-2012 is a product of a comprehensive, team-oriented study and assessment. This approach combines statistical analyses, examinations of national recreation planning trends, professional expertise, user input and the Office of State Parks staff judgements. The outcome is a recommended plan of action to improve the Louisiana State Parks System over the remaining 8 years of the 15-year plan.

An individual "master plan" is a document that provides a blueprint for the location of current and future facilities, taking into consideration the location of ecological and cultural resources. A "current" master plan is one that is reflective of present-day resources and recreational or interpretive needs.

Progress should be measured on a site-by-site basis. While there are indicators relating to the number of acres and operational sites in the park system, these are merely input indicators that give some idea about the extent of the work involved.

Primary Beneficiaries

The primary beneficiaries of the agency's efforts to achieve Objective #3 are today's visitors who may enjoy the sites in top condition, and future generations of visitors who may enjoy the same.

Data Collection Procedure/Source, Frequency and Timing of Data Collection, Calculation Methodology, etc.

Much of the data collection and development of the master plans will be done in conjunction with other public agencies, universities and professionals as warranted, and in conjunction with the plans and specifications for construction.

Semi-annually, the agency will evaluate the rate of progress. Deadlines will be set to ensure that the five-year objective is met, as well as the objectives contained in the annual operating plan.

Limitations of the Indicators

This indicator is limited by its dependence on the capital outlay budget, but once a facility is in the system, complete or partial funding will be approved according to the priority and sale of bonds.

Objective 4. To increase the compliance rate of recreation projects funded through the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund to 95% by the end of fiscal year 2009- 2010.

Strategies

- 4.1 Process billing and conduct compliance inspections for LWCF construction projects so that all projects have been inspected in accordance with federal standards (at least once every five years).
- 4.2 Review state and federal permits for impact on park and recreation projects as required by LWCF standards.
- 4.3 Ensure that all new project applicants are fully aware of compliance requirements at outset.
- 4.4 Ensure that all new recreation projects meet at least one of the top needs identified in the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).

Indicators

- Input** Number of Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) projects.
- Output** Number of new LWCF projects funded annually.
Number of LWCF projects inspected annually.
- Outcome** Number of LWCF projects in good standing.
Percentage of LWCF projects in good standing.
Percentage of new projects funded meeting at least one of the top needs identified in the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).
- Efficiency** Ratio of number of projects inspected and permits reviewed to the number of project officers.

Supporting Documentation for the Objective #4 Performance Indicators

Rationale/Appropriateness

As per RS 56:1803, the Assistant Secretary of the Office of State Parks is designated as the authorized representative of the State of Louisiana under the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, and the Office of State Parks is charged with the duties of administering and monitoring recreation projects funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund did not receive federal funding for five years. However, there are approximately 613 projects throughout the state that, because they received funding through the federal program, must continue to comply with federal requirements. For its part, the Office of State Parks is required to inspect each project at least once every five years, and must review all environmental permits submitted by local entities to determine the impact on recreational sites (approximately 1,100 annually).

Therefore, the agency is required to inspect sites and review permits. The reason for the inspections and review is to ensure that the projects remain in good standing with the U.S. Department of Interior.

Since FY 2000-2001, Land and Water Conservation Fund monies have been appropriated by Congress.

It is the objective of the agency to achieve a high rate of projects in good standing with the U.S. Department of the Interior not only because it is required by law, but also because federal funds are now available and are likely to increase in the future. It will serve the agency well to have maintained a positive track record of administering the program.

The efficiency indicator contemplates the labor-intensive nature of the work involved in monitoring compliance with the federal program and relates such to the small number of staff (four) who oversee the program in addition to their regular agency duties.

Primary Beneficiaries

The primary beneficiaries of the agency's efforts to achieve Objective #4 are recreation enthusiasts who take advantage of the recreational offerings made available through the LWCF program in the past and those that will become available in the future.

Data Collection Procedure/Source, Frequency and Timing of Data Collection, Calculation Methodology, etc.

The agency annually tracks the number of projects inspected, permits reviewed, new projects funded and projects in good standing and submits this information to the U.S. Department of the Interior. This data will be included in the strategic planning reports required by the state as well.

Limitations on the Indicators

As time passes, more and more projects are likely to fall out of compliance. However, the agency (through inspections and permit reviews) can neither provide rewards nor penalties based on compliance. The agency can merely inform the entities of any deficiencies and encourage corrective action. However, the state remains ultimately responsible for site compliance, meaning that the state would have to pay the cost to bring the site into compliance if the local entity does not take corrective action. According to the federal law on the subject, noncompliance in LWCF projects puts all federal funding received by the state of Louisiana in jeopardy.

Office of State Parks Program Supporting Documentation

A. Statement identifying the principal clients and users of each program and program objective and the specific service or benefit derived by such persons or organizations:

As specified in its enabling legislation, the Office of State Parks is established to serve all Louisiana residents and their visitors. Included in this broad classification are tourists, school groups, educational institutions, academicians, historians, preservationists, recreation enthusiasts (cyclists, anglers, canoeists, hikers, campers, birders, runners, etc.), educators, scouting, Friends, 4H and other service organizations, state, federal and local agencies and professional and recreational organizations. Through its preservation role, the agency serves the interests of the above-mentioned groups, plus future generations of Louisiana citizens and visitors including those who do not avail themselves of park services. The benefit derived by these groups is the opportunity to take advantage of state's recreational resources and to learn about its natural, cultural and historical resources. Other beneficiaries of the agency's program are related businesses (e.g. canoe outfitters, bait shops, sutlers, tour operators, etc.) and support businesses and attractions (museums, hotels, shops, restaurants, gas stations, etc.). Their benefits are economic.

B. List of external variables:

The successful accomplishment of the agency's goals and objectives is heavily dependent upon a number of external variables. For example, visitation and quality of the park experience are affected by the weather, insects, lake draw-downs, hurricanes, floods, winter storms, tornadoes, power outages, droughts, pine beetle infestations and the aftermath associated therewith. Mechanical breakdowns, construction projects and major repairs impact and often temporarily disrupt access and /or services to the public. Further, the economy, highway signage (and lack thereof), funding levels and changing demographics and recreation trends will have an impact on the achievement of the program's goals.

C. Statement of how duplication will be avoided when the operations of more than one program are directed at achieving a single goal, objective or strategy:

The Office of State Parks has only one program, and one program goal. The program objectives complement each other in the achievement of the program goal.

D. Statement of how the plan will drive management decisions and other agency processes:

The strategic planning process has been the impetus for the agency to evaluate opportunities for improved and increased service to the public. Armed with a clear mission, a thorough self-assessment and stakeholder analysis, the agency formulated goals, objectives, strategies and priorities. As a result of the planning process, the agency has focused on a proactive approach to the management and conservation of its natural and man-made resources. The agency also plans to make a priority its investment in the human resources of the agency, through the development of new employee orientation programs and increased training opportunities in customer relations, interpretation, educational opportunities related to job performance in addition to law enforcement, safety and first aid training programs. Annually, the agency will measure the effectiveness of the strategies in the attainment of the desired outcomes. Based on the measurements, and taking into account the impact of any external variables, the agency will be able to determine the need to modify its strategies and reallocate resources.

E. Authorizations for each goal:

The Office of State Parks has one goal which is authorized under both La. RS 36:201 et seq. and La. RS 56:1681 et seq.

F. Program evaluation used to develop objectives and strategies:

In establishing its objectives and strategies, the agency referred to the Louisiana State Parks Master Plan 1997-2012, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, the 1998 Stakeholder Analysis, the Governor's Four- and Eight-Year Plans, the Master Plan for Marketing State Parks, the current interpretive program list and the agency's annual visitation reports.

The Louisiana State Parks Master Plan 1997-2012 is the guiding document for the acquisition, planning and construction of new and existing sites and facilities. In addition to the recommendations contained in the fifteen-year master plan, the agency regularly receives requests to conduct feasibility studies for the acquisition and development of other sites. The Division of Resource Planning and Development is responsible for these projects, repair and expansion projects and technical assistance provided to other state and local entities as requested. The number of capital outlay projects, feasibility studies, technical assistance projects and repair work undertaken depends on the needs and requests in a given year. Those activities are not contemplated under this strategic plan.