



PORTLAND PARKS & RECREATION

Healthy Parks, Healthy Portland

DRAFT



Park System Plan

People, Places and Experiences

May 2009

DRAFT

Park System Plan

Concept Paper

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**PORTLAND
PARKS & RECREATION**

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1

Introduction - Why a Park System Plan?..... 3

System Plan Goals4

Background

Portland’s Park System: A Result of Place, History, People 5

Services, Public Support and Recreation Experiences 5

Traditional Approach to Park Planning..... 6

Challenges 6

Positioning 7

Into the 21st Century: Influential Ideas..... 9

Nature | People | Experience Approach..... 11

N/P Matrix - How it Works 12

Recreation Settings 13

Three Primary Settings - Nature 14

Three Primary Settings - Nature | People 14

Three Primary Settings - People..... 15

Recreation Activities 18

Experiences 19

Variables Affecting Experiences..... 20

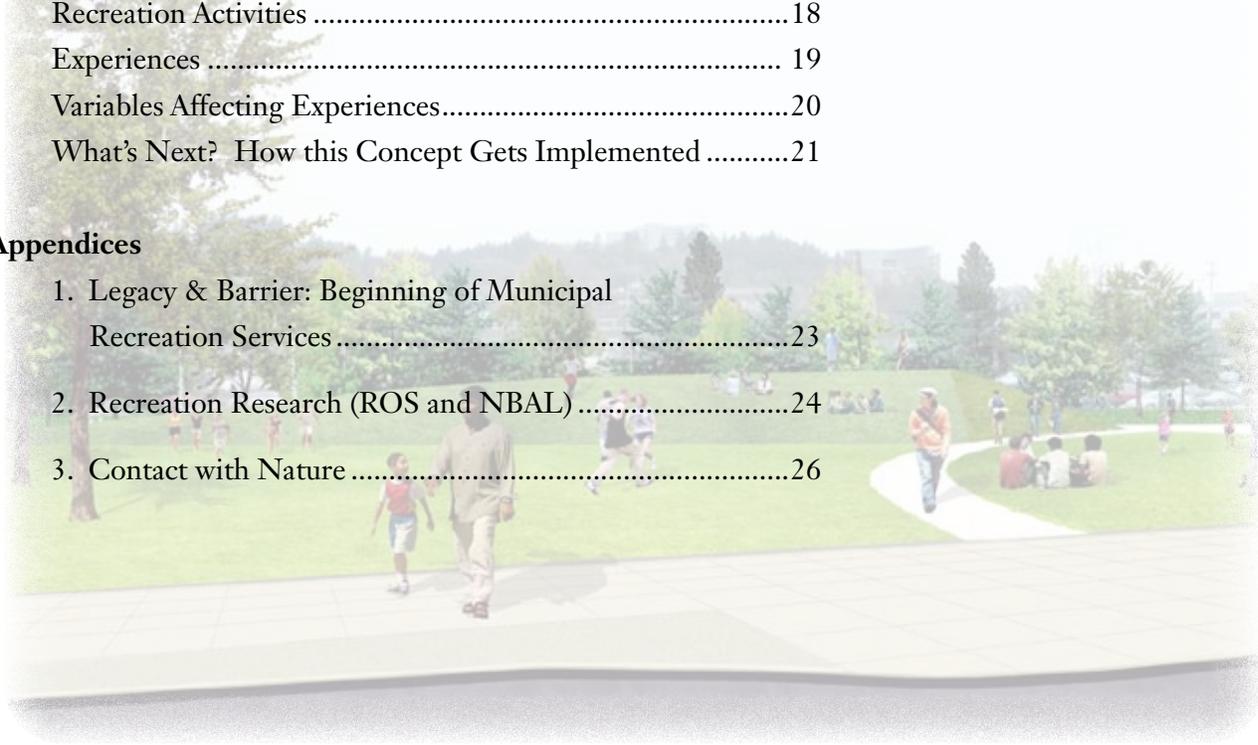
What’s Next? How this Concept Gets Implemented 21

Appendices

1. Legacy & Barrier: Beginning of Municipal
Recreation Services 23

2. Recreation Research (ROS and NBAL) 24

3. Contact with Nature 26





Waterfront Park along the Willamette River

Executive Summary



The Park System Plan’s basic tenets are as follows:

1. The traditional approach to parks and recreation planning, influenced by three major, mostly separate fields of study (landscape architecture, recreation, and natural resource management) needs a more holistic approach with better integration of the three disciplines.
2. Park agencies need to focus on understanding, expanding, diversifying, and improving the park experience.
3. The basic formula for defining the parks and recreation experience is: People + Activities + Settings = Experiences.
4. There is a full spectrum of park system settings, from the most remote and inaccessible natural area or darkest forest, to the most intensively used public space or square, full of people at all hours, with perhaps no trees, plants, or landscaping.
5. The three primary settings in the park system spectrum are: Nature, Nature-People, and People.
6. Settings tend to be the most critical component in determining the park system experience. A setting is like a stage that creates a suitable environment for the action to be performed. Each setting has unique qualities that make it appropriate (or inappropriate) for different types and intensity of recreation use. A park may have multiple settings.
7. The Park System Plan sets guidelines for the balanced management of people, activities, and settings in order to maintain and enhance the recreation experience.

		Settings		
		N Nature	NP Nature/People	P People
Activities	Walk	Renewal, awe, sense of connectedness		
	Sit		Escape; Beauty; Peace	
	Play Tennis			Test skills, Part of team, Exhilaration

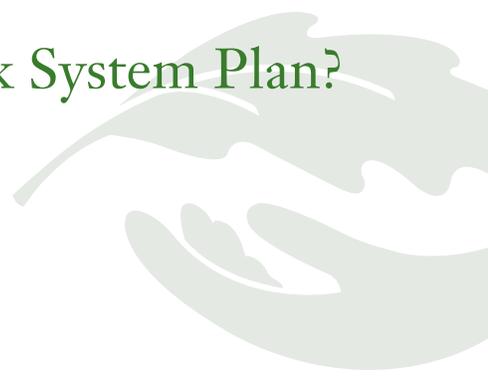
At the intersection of settings and activities lay *experiences*

The Park System Plan concept will be implemented through development of a forthcoming document, currently titled the “Park System Code.” The Park System Code will define the major settings in the park system, provide guidance on the type and level of use in these settings and create a new process for planning future park system settings.



North Park Blocks

Introduction - Why a Park System Plan?



INTRODUCTION: WHY A PARK SYSTEM PLAN?

Park planning and open space management must respond to changes in the urban environment. A new and more flexible approach is warranted in order to address population growth, new demographic patterns, shifting recreation and leisure demands, economic transformation, and changes in the earth's climate.

Plans and methods must also adequately address local conditions. A large part of Portland's open space system is comprised of natural areas with distinctive features: rivers, lakes, streams, buttes, sloughs, wetlands, bluffs, and millions of trees. Nature permeates the city. Managing access, use and protection of these spaces is critical. Open space managers must fully integrate them into the City and understand their role alongside the other components of the system: "developed" city parks, trails, gardens, plazas, community centers, and other recreation facilities).

An integrated approach to managing resources while providing for the recreational needs of the community is essential if the city's park legacy is to continue to thrive and benefit future generations.

In 2001, the Parks 2020 Vision plan called for a comprehensive and creative approach to meeting future challenges facing Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) and the City's park system. The Park System Plan is one of the planning documents intended to assist PP&R in meeting those challenges.

Park Resources are adequately but not holistically managed, ... Without an overall framework, we can't optimize resources and meet demands. We need proactive management and valid and reliable inventory and assessment information

(p. 17, Parks 2020 Vision Plan)

Introduction - Why a Park System Plan?

SYSTEM PLAN GOALS

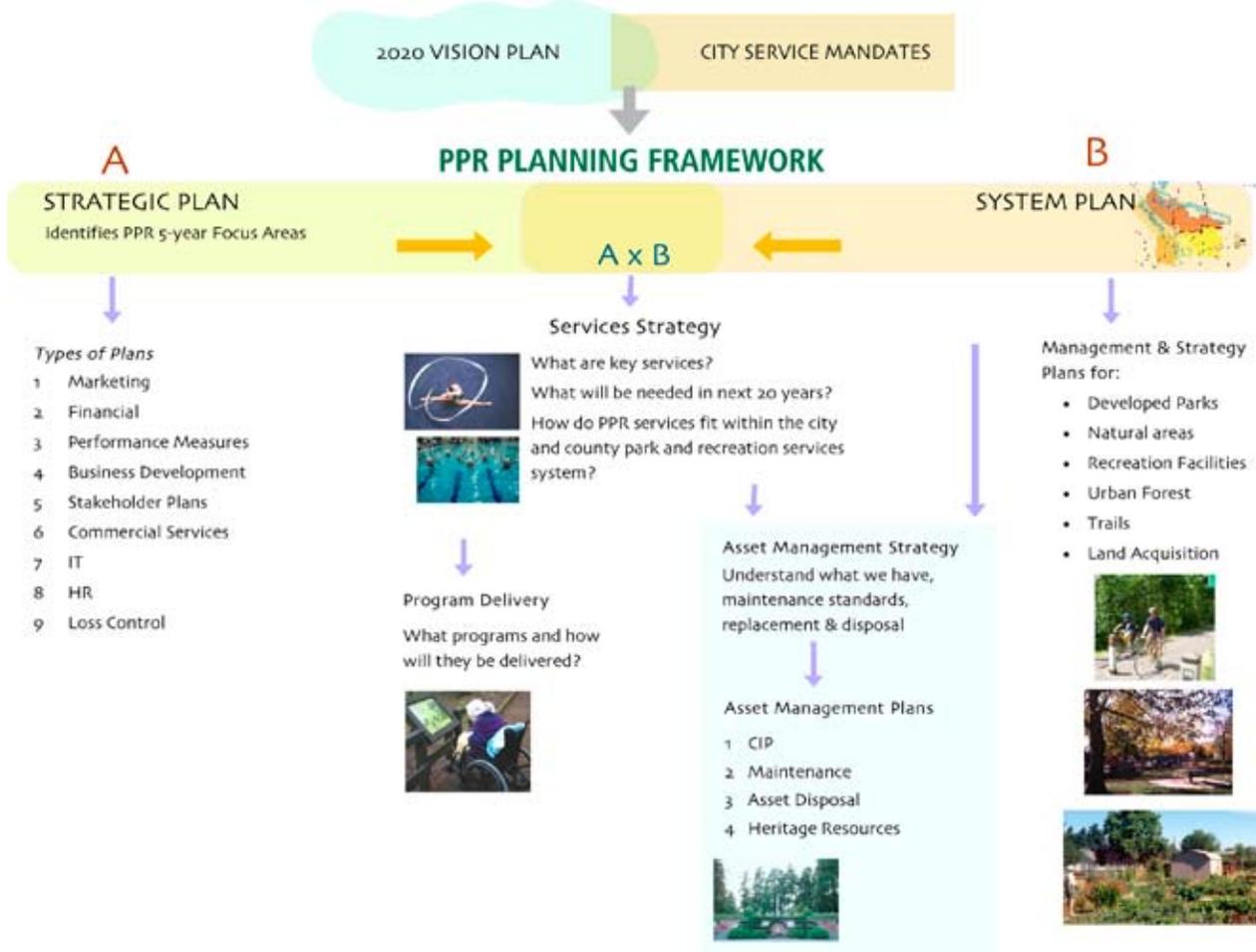
Incorporate Vision 2020 Plan goals and objectives, with refinements based on more recent research and analyses.

Focus on visitor experiences to provide a wide spectrum of recreation opportunities, and meet community needs within available resources.

Create a road map, broad in scope- not a set of detailed instructions - to achieve PP&R's mission, with flexibility at the site level.

Link to other plans in PP&R's planning framework, complementing the Strategic Business Plan and informing the Service Delivery Plan, the Total Asset Management Strategy, and park planning process.

Inform city-wide planning efforts, including the Portland Plan, Urban Renewal Area Planning, Zoning Code, Sustainability plans and regional Greenspaces planning.



BACKGROUND: PARK SYSTEM A RESULT OF PLACE, HISTORY, PEOPLE

Portland's "landscape structure creates an admirable framework for the park system," wrote JC Olmsted in his report to the Park Board in 1903. The plan he devised for the city's system of parks took advantage of the city's most important natural features. This straightforward concept continues to be an inspiration for park advocates, planners and designers.

Today Portland has thousands of acres of parks and natural areas, miles of trails and an extensive recreation program that serves millions of people. These physical assets are essential to Portland's renowned quality of life and connect to everyday lives in a most fundamental way. The park system is a source of pride, belonging, meaning and lasting memories. Portlanders value these resources and care for them, build strong emotional attachments to them and advocate passionately for their protection and enhancement. Nevertheless, maintaining the system so that it can meet future needs will require increasing efficiency (doing more with less) without sacrificing effectiveness.



Early drawing of the city of Portland

SERVICES, PUBLIC SUPPORT AND RECREATION EXPERIENCES

This achievement is a product of using resources to provide the services that support and continually improve the system. The future health of the park system depends on continuing public support and satisfaction with its benefits. People judge the effectiveness and quality of services primarily through their own personal experiences and base their support on them. So it is essential to understand people's experiences with the recreation places they value and to incorporate this knowledge into plans and management goals.

Defining characteristics of recreation are freedom and choice. People use PP&R's services voluntarily, motivated by a desire for satisfying recreation experiences. This makes PP&R's services different from other city services because they are not mandatory. This makes it all the more important to make sure services are tailored to local conditions and reflect the diversity of the community. The challenge to PP&R over the next decades will be to maintain and enhance this network so that future generations have equal or better opportunities to enjoy it.

Portland's Park System *by the numbers*

- Over 10,500 acres of parks
- 175 miles of trails
- 123 tennis courts
- Over 360 sports fields
- 142 playgrounds
- 30 community gardens
- 5 golf courses
- 4 skateparks
- 20,000 rose plantings
- 61 nature parks

TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO PARK PLANNING

Traditional park planning was based on utilitarian values that emphasized the physical products, such as parks, facilities and programs rather than whether they met the needs and experience of its users. Inputs to the system became ends in themselves, instead of the means to an end. Over the past 50 years the definition of recreation has expanded into a more holistic concept. Today recreation agencies are increasingly focusing on services that contribute to human growth and development across the life cycle and on the long term benefits of services to the community. Factoring in people - who use and enjoy recreation in parks and natural areas - shifts the focus from inputs to outcomes – satisfying experiences and benefits to the community.

CHALLENGES

Like most other North American cities, Portland is experiencing challenging demographic, economic and technological changes. The 2020 Vision Plan mentions the ones most relevant to PP&R. The time since then (2000) has been one of reflection, evaluation and visioning within the City. PP&R implemented 2020 Plan recommendations to establish a Parks Board and a Parks Foundation. A new strategic planning framework (2004) set out a strategy to achieve the vision.

A valued park system is the basis for public support.

VisionPDX was launched in 2005 and the Portland Plan in 2008 which attest to the level of concern about the future of the city. Both reflect Portlanders' preoccupations - concern for sustainable quality of life, environmental protection, locally based economic stability and equal access to services. Residents expect City government to play a leading role in achieving these goals.

Portland's population is growing and becoming more diverse. Not only is demand for recreation increasing but also the nature of the demand is changing, putting more pressure on the most popular and well-used recreation settings and creating new demands for non-traditional recreation pursuits and facilities. Linked to more people and higher densities is higher cost of land, less of it in smaller parcels, and higher expectations for quality services that protect existing assets.

Citizens across the country, including Portlanders, are demanding to be involved in environmental decision-making, and voters expect all units of government to be more efficient, cost-effective, responsive, and accountable. They are increasingly concerned about the quality of their lives and are committing increasing amounts of personal resources to improve that quality. People are more serious about how they can balance their work with leisure and are making more time for leisure, although it is available in smaller blocks of time.

They are also becoming more aware of the many benefits of recreation which is contributing to growing levels of recreational use to more clearly articulated demands for specific types of benefits. These trends and pressures create opportunities as well as challenges for PP&R.

POSITIONING

The public park and recreation system affects many aspects of city life and form and at multiple scales. PP&R is thus in a critical position to contribute to pressing issues that the city is facing and will face in the future: What is the role and function of public space? What form should the city have in the future? What is the role of nature in the city? How can the city be more accessible? How does recreation relate to health problems such as obesity, stress and overall well-being? How do PP&R's services improve livability, community development and sense of place?

PP&R's policies and plans should articulate what we do and how its services influence the larger issues in which the physical components of the system play such a significant role. To help answer these questions, PP&R planning must be more integrated with City-wide and Metro planning efforts that affect provision of parks and recreation services.



Pier Park skatepark

Into the 21st Century: Influential Ideas

INTO THE 21ST CENTURY: INFLUENTIAL IDEAS

Prior to the 1960's research on leisure and recreation was limited in scope and primarily descriptive. Since then the state of both scientific and sociological-psychological knowledge has increased dramatically. The results come from many disciplines and there is a corresponding need to combine this new knowledge and new techniques into a more integrated approach. Threads include natural resource management, landscape ecology, outdoor nature-based recreation, managing for results movement, environment-behavior research and sustainable design. More and better leisure research has raised public awareness about the scope and benefits of park and recreation services at the individual, community and societal level. This in turn helps to justify the funding needed to achieve those benefits.

Recreation and resource management research has proven that recreation is a complex phenomenon that we can't fully explain and predict. This, combined with imperatives for public recreation agencies to be accountable, efficient, responsive and sustainable, makes it all the more important to use the best approaches and tools, while continuing to monitor new findings.

Adding to local challenges are the spectres of environmental degradation, climate change and the energy crisis. Conventional thinking about resource management, economics and services is being undermined by new paradigms. Rapid change requires flexible, adaptable plans and policies that allow for continuous adjustment, all within constrained resources.

Public agencies across the country are adopting systems and methods that help them respond to a future not envisioned fifty years ago. These approaches frequently challenge prevailing assumptions and propose new models of management, couched in terms of organizational learning, innovation and creativity. Ideas will continue to evolve and there is by no means one perspective or approach to meeting the future. Some models used to develop the Park System Plan and its Nature | People | Experience approach include the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), the Net Benefits Approach to Leisure (NBAL), Limits of Acceptable Change, and Visitor Impact Management. ROS and NBAL are discussed more fully in the appendix section.





IndaFest at East Portland Community Center

Nature | People | Experience Approach

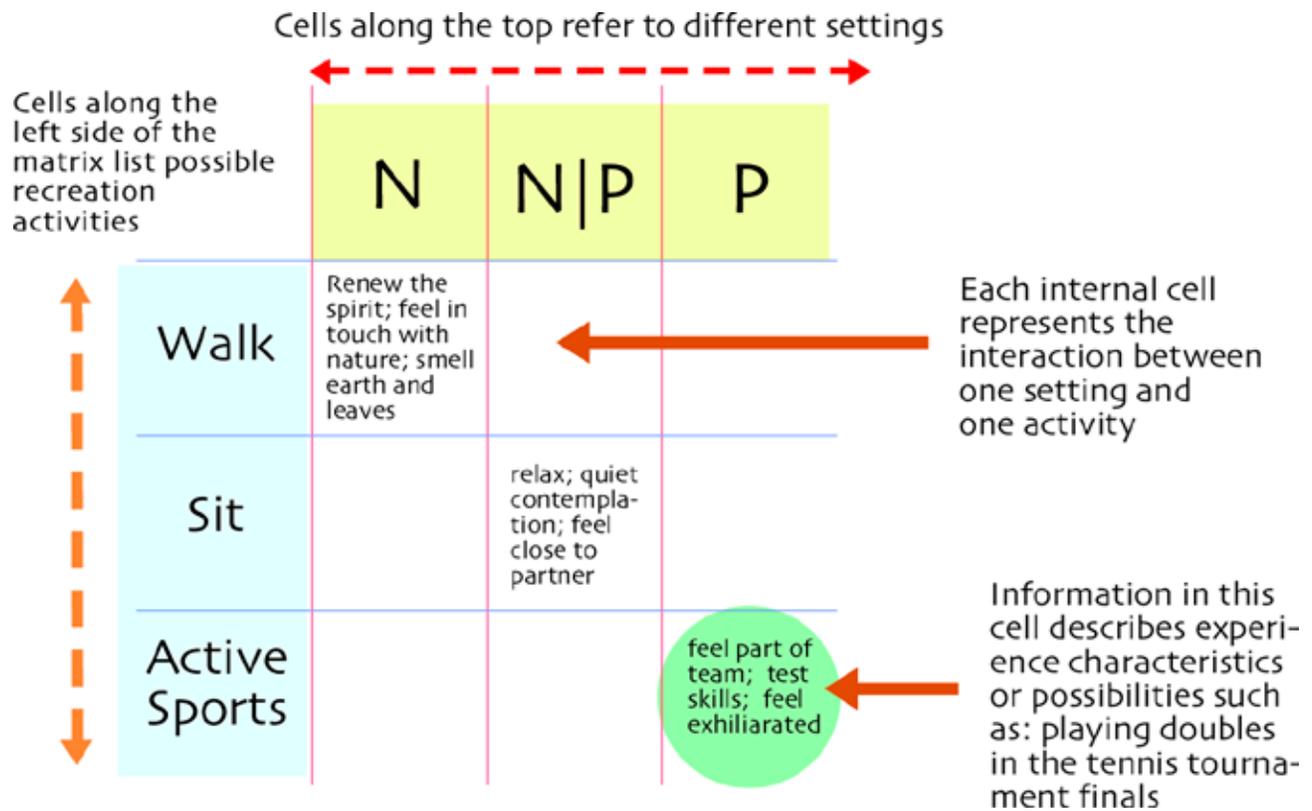
Creating opportunities for satisfying recreation experiences and community benefits is at the heart of the System Plan. Recreation, broadly defined, is an integral component of a normal healthy life, and a major contributor to the city's quality of life. The System Plan was developed to fit Portland's natural environment, its history and its people. The diagram below encapsulates the basic concept, called the Nature People Experiences approach. It creates an over-arching framework for integrating PP&R's three-mission areas – recreation programs, developed parks, and natural resource protection. These three components can operate independently, but they also need to be understood and treated as components of one integrated park system. The key variables (settings and activities) are arranged along two axes: settings along the top axis and activities along the vertical axis. The experience resulting from the interaction of a setting and activity can be portrayed in the cell formed by their intersection.



Setting x Activities + People = Experiences

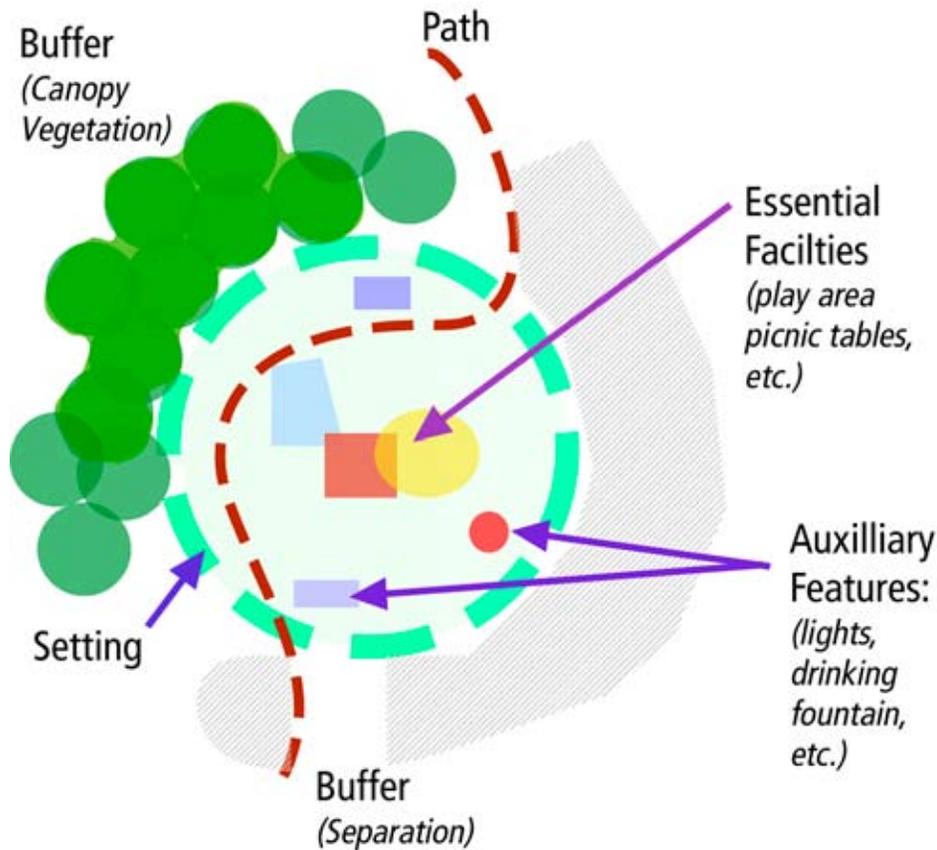
N/P MATRIX - HOW IT WORKS

In its simplest terms the approach can be summarized as:
 people + activities + settings = experiences



RECREATION SETTINGS

A recreation setting is simply a space that has specific physical characteristics, both naturally occurring and constructed, which offer recreation opportunities for people to enjoy. A park site, depending on its size and design, may have a few or many different types of settings. In a way a setting is like a stage set with backdrop and props that create a suitable environment for the action to be performed. Like a stage set, the setting can be a determining factor in the activities or it can be merely incidental to the experience. Each setting has unique qualities that make it suitable for different types and intensity of recreational use. In addition settings can be modified or programmed to create opportunities people want, depending upon the type and quality of the natural features and resources in the setting.



THE THREE PRIMARY SETTINGS

Nature

These settings are intended primarily to protect the city's ecological health, and diversity of wildlife and native plants. They provide valuable ecosystem services, such as improved air and water quality, and protection from flooding through managing stormwater. In these settings ecosystems are the primary focus of attention. Some natural areas are zoned to allow nature-based recreation, such as hiking, and people can have access through volunteering to restore habitat, or using the site to learn about nature. In other areas there is no visitor access, temporary or permanent, due to resource sensitivity. They also can be enjoyed by viewing from afar.

City residents value nature and would like to see more wild areas. More than half of the respondents of the 2004 Godbe Survey of Residents and Park Users said that there was a need for more natural areas, which was the highest of all 13 types of recreation areas listed. These settings are found only in Natural Area parks or in "hybrid" parks, a term used to describe a developed park that includes a natural area. Gabriel Park is one example of a hybrid park that includes all three settings. Due to its size and configuration, it accommodates them successfully.

Nature | People

These settings are important for linking people with the natural environment in contrast to the surrounding urban environment. Vegetation is dominant, creating opportunities to see wildlife, smell fragrant flowers, hear leaves rustling and mark the natural progression of the seasons. The traditional pastoral park is a main example, but this type of setting also includes examples like Crystal Springs Rhododendron Garden and the Park Blocks, along with recreational trails. Parks have decreased in size as property values have increased, so sometimes the People | Nature setting can be part of a larger park with more facilities. Such areas may be compromised because there is not enough buffer from the more people-oriented parts of the park.

Most parks include a combination of People | Nature and People settings and the ratio of each varies considerably. Over the years, as the size of parks has decreased, facilities are taking up a larger percentage of space in a developed park, often at the expense of the Nature | People setting. It is very difficult to determine precisely how much land should be acquired since these are settings for informal recreation activities and thus have less specific land and facility requirements. There also is not a clear constituency such as the interest groups supporting sports activities or natural resource protection. However, activities that People | Nature support, such as walking or informal play, are very popular and the demand is increasing.

One benefit of improving the quality of this setting type is to create places where people can have rich experiences of nature without going to sensitive natural areas. While not wild or even dramatic, these experiences become significant parts of people's lives and their sense of attachment and belonging. Many people enjoy this urban type of nature experience and prefer it to Nature settings in part because of security concerns, but also because there is a variety of vegetation, open areas and colorful flowers.

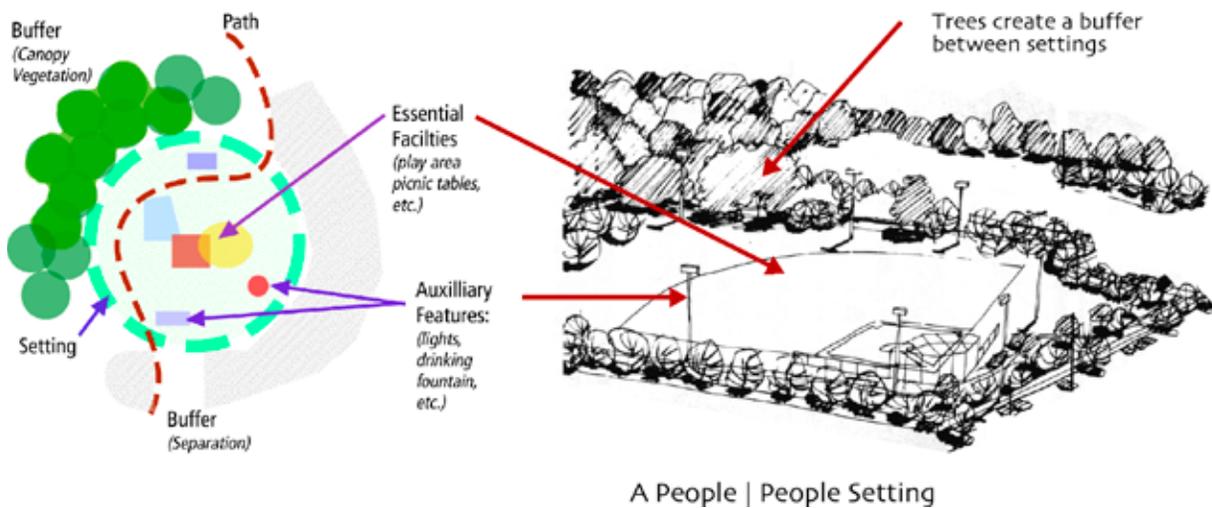
People

These are highly developed "urban" settings, where recreation is primarily social and the main motivation is interaction with others. People come to these settings either with friends or family or as part of a group such as a team or club. Examples include community centers, pools, stadiums, event venues and fields for competitive sports. People settings are in high demand. The Godbe survey showed that people want more swimming pools and recreation centers. Play areas are also popular -- more than a third of respondents said they visited playgrounds daily, weekly or monthly.

From a park provider standpoint, these are the most expensive of all setting types to develop and maintain, although some have the potential to generate revenue. Often they require specialized recreation facilities and typically there is a high expectation of comfort and cleanliness. They need to be designed for durability, safety, easy maintenance and resistance to vandalism.

In “people” areas of a park, facilities such as courts or fields are located. Some parks, like Pioneer Courthouse Square, are completely people-oriented. These settings are asset-dependent, and can support intense use. Maintenance costs are generally high.

Setting Components





This diagram provides examples of places within PP&R's system and shows where they fall along the spectrum of settings.

RECREATION ACTIVITIES

Based on a variety of surveys over broad areas, we know that the range of recreation pursuits is diverse and the number of people engaging in them is high (94.5% in one study, see www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/ja/ja_cordell010.pdf). Over time, some of these rise or fall in popularity as demographics and values change. Technological innovation has spawned new types of activities, with implications for resource management and services. Examples include mountain biking, skateboarding and various types of extreme sports.

Recreation activities range from completely spontaneous to the tightly regimented. They can be classified in many different ways, depending on the intended purpose. They can be organized by facility type, level of competition, type of body movement, the type, age or gender of people participating, or by intended results (learn to swim, etc). Organized and programmed activities require facilities, amenities and services. Spontaneous or unprogrammed activities are accommodated by providing flexible spaces and resources that can be freely accessed. For many people (perhaps a majority) participation in recreation activities is a means of social interaction.

The experiences approach raises questions about the relationship between asset dependence and quality of experiences, among other things. Additional research and data are needed about relationships between settings, activities, and preferences, and could result in changing current approaches to providing services.

EXPERIENCES

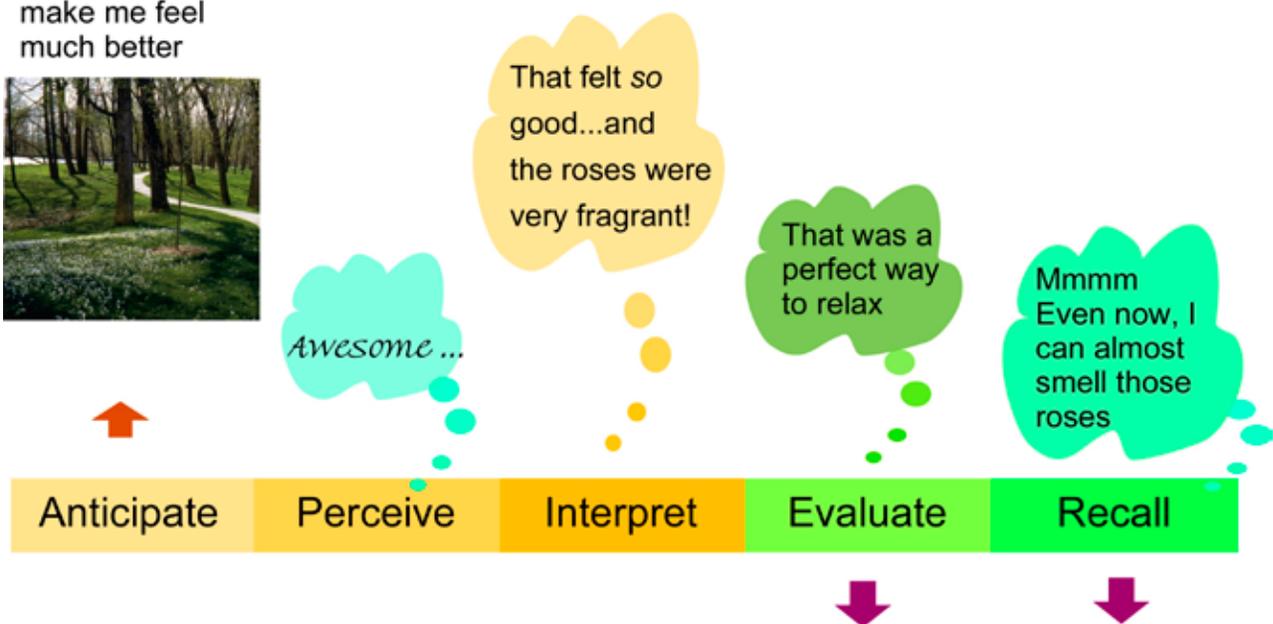
Experiences are the result of a process; they develop and change over a period of time. Some research even shows that experiences change as we think about them and share them with others. An experience begins with a feeling of anticipation and progresses through stages, including preparation, travel to a place, engagement, evaluation and finally to reflection, and recollection. Information available at each stage in the process affects what we experience. For example, advance information about conditions and facilities create a set of expectations about the experience we will have. The journey there and things that happen during the experience can also affect our reactions and judgments. When conditions meet expectations or exceed them, it is likely we will enjoy it and feel satisfied. An important implication for recreation marketing and management is that surveys will be most informative when questions are asked at different stages in the experience process. Other considerations in applying the experience approach:



People create their own experiences, but PP&R can create opportunities for experiences through the design and management of settings and activities.



I need a break!
A stroll through
the park will
make me feel
much better



Many factors contribute to the type and quality of experiences that people will have. These include age, gender, level of expertise and many other cultural and political factors. Providing a setting and activity will not guarantee that a person will have a positive experience, but providing a wide variety of both settings and activities improves the likelihood that people can find the experiences they want. Individual experiences are usually shared with others and can become the basis for bonding people together and to places they value in common.

VARIABLES AFFECTING EXPERIENCES

Our knowledge about all the types of recreation experiences visitors have, want or expect is by no means complete. Some of the most difficult issues concern the relationship between experiences formation, attachment to place and social cohesion. There is a growing body of information about measuring the type and quality of experiences and about motivations and behaviors. This information can be used to guide allocation of resources and management actions. The literature in this area is expanding and quite fascinating, and will, in the future, continue to expand our understanding and improve our ability to deliver the quality and type of services that people want and need.



Southwest Community
Center swim pool

One result of this work is that we better understand what characteristics in an environment interfere with having a satisfying experience, such as confusing information or lack of it. Certain characteristics of settings have broad appeal. People are attracted to places in which they feel comfortable. It follows that settings should be designed to function as intended. We feel comfortable and safe in places in which we can find our way easily, where we can see others without mingling and that stimulate the senses without being confusing. Some theories propose that attractive places have characteristics that are biologically favorable and so we instinctively respond positively to them. These theories hold that environments we create for people will be successful if they meet basic needs for information, wayfinding and exploration.

Attributes commonly associated with favored environments are: cleanliness, safety, access, “naturalness”, aesthetics and appropriate development. These dimensions are interdependent and also seem to hold across a range of environments and show remarkable consistency

even across cultures. In the US there is no significant difference among urban, suburban and rural residents but there are some interesting variations by region and culture.

These findings were borne out in PP&R's focus groups (part of the Godbe survey). People reported enjoying a variety of sensory experiences: watching the sky and moving clouds, hearing birds sing and smelling fragrant flowers. Highly valued park features included attractive vegetation, evidence of daily and seasonal variations and the presence of water. These are important findings that need further discussion as part of park planning processes.

WHAT'S NEXT? HOW THIS CONCEPT GETS IMPLEMENTED

This document introduces the basic Park System Plan concept. The next step is to complete an accompanying implementation document that will accomplish the following:

Further define the various settings in the park system;

Provide substantive guidance to park planners, landscape designers, recreation programmers, city planners, and the public on the type and level of appropriate use in the settings; and

Establish a new process for planning future parks, creating settings and focusing on park experiences.

Inform the Portland Plan and ultimately, the City's Zoning Code.

The implementing document, currently titled "The Park System Code," will contain detailed information that elaborates on the types and level of uses, activities and experiences to be programmed in the various settings. Public input will be sought throughout development of the Park System Code. The Code will ultimately inform and guide the City's zoning code with regard to parks and open space as part of the Portland Plan process.



Peninsula Park swim pool

1. LEGACY & BARRIER: BEGINNING OF MUNICIPAL RECREATION SERVICES

While it is increasingly recognized that a system wide and integrated perspective is needed to meet challenges, the origins of public park and recreation services explains why this has been difficult to accomplish. Beginning in the late 19th C, the urban parks movement expanded into an international movement that forever altered American cities. Frederick Law Olmsted introduced the concept of an urban park “system”, which he defined as “a network of urban parks systematically laid out and interconnected by stretches of greenery called parkways.” Parkway linked together parks within the city and also linked the city to large suburban parks in outlying areas. By 1902, nearly 800 American cities and towns had adopted the idea of a park system and had the parks to prove it.



The movement began in Britain but flowered in the US where it was fueled by many different efforts to improve public health and welfare of people living in the congestion and disorder of rapidly growing industrial cities between 1840 and 1910. The three separate reform movements were particularly effective in marshaling support and they continue to have a strong influence on contemporary municipal parks and recreation services. The recreation movement had a moral agenda and also aimed at getting people out for exercise and fresh air. The urban planning movement sought to develop visual relief from the dense built environment. The nature conservation movement was inspired to ensure that future generations would continue to have access to wilderness and natural beauty. The broad appeal of these visions across political, social and religious lines guaranteed success in improving cities.

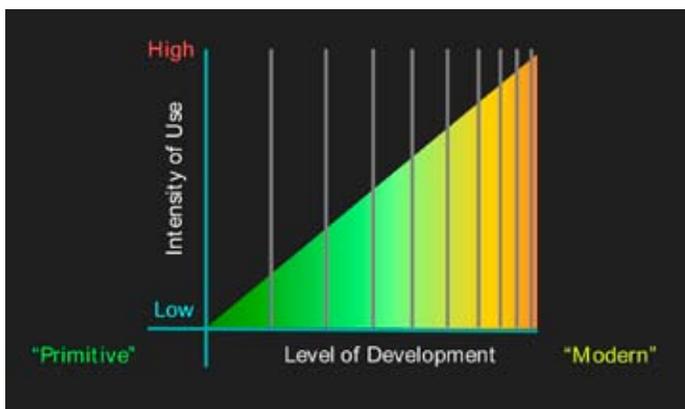
Between 1880 – 1914:
“ ... sweeping changes in technology and culture created distinctive new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space.” Telephone, automobile, airplane, cinema, x-rays – all opened new vistas of experience, transforming, “ ...the dimensions of life and thought”. From *The Culture of Time and Space*, pg 1-2.

Proponents of these three movements focused on different aspects of urban conditions and sometimes clashed over implementation. Leaders in the recreation field were reformists and educators, looking for active recreation sites where young people could build muscles and moral strength. Promoters of civic beautification were frequently horticulturalists, landscape architects and engineers who thought of parks as artful compositions defining urban form and places for civilized activities. Supporters of wilderness wanted to protect remaining pristine fragments of natural beauty in or near the city and sought to acquire large tracts of rapidly disappearing “wild” land on the outskirts of cities.



2. RECREATION RESEARCH

History, new knowledge and the character of our existing services is evidence that current approaches and practices come out of a patchwork of concepts and bureaucratic structures. Many need change or adopted and ultimately coalesced into a new systematic set of policies and actions. Small adjustments to existing approaches will not be enough. The Nature, People Experience approach provides an integrated framework. The Nature People spectrum assumes that the health of natural and human systems are inextricably linked and that we need to experience the full spectrum in order to thrive.



Federal land management agencies have been and continue to be a key source of research and knowledge about park and recreation planning, and especially about wilderness and nature-based recreation. One influential and innovative approach is known as the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). The US Forest Service began to use it in the 1970's to inventory and manage recreation use in large tracts of forest land.

Key characteristics of this approach are:

Opportunities for recreation experiences result from the interaction of physical settings and activities.

Settings, activities and individual characteristics influence the type and quality of experiences people have when participating in recreation.

Other factors (individual, social, cultural) can significantly modify reactions.

Recreation motivations and behaviors are a result of both cognitive (rational) and emotional processes.

Diverse population requires a broad spectrum of opportunities in order to meet their needs and preferences for recreation.

Understanding people's expectations and preferences for settings and activities is the foundation for determining services to be provided. Variety of opportunity can be achieved by combining different settings and activities. For example a walk around Pioneer Square is a much different experience than walking through Marquam Nature Park. Success can be measured in terms of visitor and stakeholder satisfaction, support and beneficial impacts.

ROS was an initial source of inspiration for the Nature|People|Experience approach. While the two share some commonalities there are also some significant differences. In the ROS settings are inventoried and evaluated based on their wilderness attributes – or lack of them. Recreation settings in urban areas are very different, in size, type of opportunities, level of development, planning and maintenance. In the N|P|E approach settings are classified according to the type of interactions as well as character of the setting. In an urban environment the entire range of settings and experiences are included and assumed to be equally important.

The urban spectrum of settings is also significantly different in size, compared to forest settings, which are usually hundreds or thousands of acres. Urban recreation settings are typically much smaller and can be as small as half an acre (Forest Park, at over 5000 acres, is a notable exception). There is more research focused on nature-based outdoor recreation than on recreation in urban areas and the results cannot be directly applied to planning and managing urban recreation experiences.

The Managing for Results movement has expanded the scope of recreation planning beyond analysis of individual experiences to incorporate of the short and long term benefits of recreation to individuals and society as a whole. Participating in recreation activities is a way to optimize personal beneficial outcomes for the participants. The array of benefits has been documented and is growing. Implementation requires identifying desired benefits (involving public discussion) and then determining services needed to get the desired outcomes. A recent variation, known as the Net Benefits Approach to Leisure (NBAL) is a science-based approach that considers both the positive and negative impacts of use and management of recreation resources. An essential part of this process is that it must include close collaborative partnerships with all relevant stakeholders.

3. CONTACT WITH NATURE

The effects of global urbanization and the unprecedented disengagement of humans from natural environments has become a widespread topic of debate, instigating a reconsideration of the interdependence between people, health and physical and social environments. Some research shows that too much artificial stimulation and a purely human existence may cause exhaustion and produce loss of vitality and health.



For people who spend the majority of their time insulated from outdoor environmental stimuli, parks and natural areas are often the only means of access to these experiences.

Questions about the role of nature in meeting psychological, emotional and spiritual needs are now being examined empirically. Evidence of benefits includes positive impacts on blood pressure, cholesterol, outlook on life, stress reduction. Psychological responses include feelings of pleasure, sustained attention or interest, relaxed

wakefulness and reduced negative emotion such as anger and anxiety. Even the simple act of viewing a natural scene (or even a tree through the window) can be beneficial. Introspection and contemplation in natural settings can help strengthen the activities of the right hemisphere of brain. (Furnass, 1979). In everyday terms we might describe the effect as clearing the head. For urbanites worldwide, parks can be a fundamental health resource because they can help prevent disease. Relationships between environmental health and human health deserve more intense study because they are still only partially understood (Brown, 1996).

In the meantime recreation surveys consistently show that people want and value environments that foster recovery from mental fatigue:

- Fascination (involuntary attention not requiring effort)

- Sense of being away (temporary escape from the usual)

- Sense of being part of larger whole

- In the right setting at the right time to match mood and needs