Part I

Foundations and Background
A building is only as sound as the foundation that supports it. In the same way, being an effective outdoor recreation professional depends on having a thorough grounding in some basic concepts. We use the term *outdoor recreation professional* to refer to any person who has responsibilities for providing outdoor recreation opportunities and managing outdoor recreation resources and who has acquired and applies the professional body of knowledge necessary to do so effectively. Developing such an understanding is far more than an academic exercise. Our conceptual underpinnings have real implications for what we do and do not do professionally. They directly affect the kinds of settings planners and managers choose to provide and the types of experiences outdoor recreationists have when they use these settings. By establishing a conceptual foundation on which to hang your thoughts, you begin to develop and to refine a professional philosophy—the point of view from which we each take in the world professionally. In outdoor recreation resource management, the conceptual point of view from which we take in the world guides and influences how we manage resources and how we relate to the people who use and make decisions about resources. Just as every building requires a solid foundation to support it, our profession will not reach its potential or be able to adapt in a changing world if not solidly grounded.

The field of outdoor recreation is inherently multidisciplinary. At the most basic level, however, outdoor recreation and outdoor recreation resource management involve interactions between two distinct elements: people and natural environments (Figure 1.1).

Both human and natural resource elements are essential, whether we are considering recreationists using natural resources or managers who plan what are provided. The terms *leisure* and *recreation* are used as nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, as well as in combination with related words, such as leisure time, leisure activities, leisure experiences, recreation activities, recreation experiences, leisure lifestyle, being at leisure, and leisurely. The objective of this chapter is to examine some of this murky water and to provide a clearer understanding of the concepts of natural resource management, leisure, recreation, and especially outdoor recreation. By the end of this chapter the reader should more clearly understand the distinctions among these concepts and the implications they have for providing outdoor recreation opportunities.

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settings; professionals understanding, conserving, planning for, and managing natural resources; or policy makers and voters making decisions that affect natural areas. The human aspects of our profession are rooted in psychology, sociology, social psychology, geography, economics, political science, public administration, history, archeology, landscape architecture, and other fields. The natural resource aspects build on the environmental sciences, including biology, ecology, forestry, geology, botany, hydrology, range science, wildlife biology, soil science, and many others. Most public outdoor recreation agencies recognize that all of these disciplines are important to providing outdoor recreation opportunities. Some agencies refer to the natural resource aspects as resource management or resource protection and the human aspects as visitor services. We refer to these two broad areas of outdoor recreation policy making and management as the natural resource dimensions and the human dimensions of outdoor recreation. Although the level of emphasis on each of these dimensions varies from site to site and agency to agency, the field of outdoor recreation always involves both. We introduce the basic concepts of each of these areas in the remainder of this chapter.

Natural Resource Dimensions of Outdoor Recreation

In the broadest sense, the natural resource dimensions of outdoor recreation involve assuring that high quality, sustainable natural resources and ecosystems are available, now and in the future, for a host of purposes, including outdoor recreation. The programs and management activities needed to accommodate these uses are rarely carried out by outdoor recreation professionals acting on their own. Outdoor recreation professionals typically work in partnership with teams of other professional natural resource managers that can include foresters, biologists, ecologists, geologists, botanists, hydrologists, range scientists, wildlife and fisheries biologists, soil scientists, and other experts. Therefore, it is important that outdoor recreation professionals have a basic knowledge of these other disciplines to understand and to mitigate the effects of their programs and outdoor recreation use on the environment. Even a cursory treatment of these disciplines, however, is beyond the scope of this text. Chapter 5 provides information on the natural resources available for outdoor recreation as well as who owns and manages these recreation lands and waters. Chapter 14 deals directly with assessing and managing the negative impacts recreation use can have on natural resources. We limit our broader discussion of the natural resource dimensions of outdoor recreation here to presenting the following outdoor recreation related natural resource principles. Managers should keep these principles clearly in mind as they carry out their duties.

Outdoor Recreation Depends on the Availability of High-Quality Natural Areas

There are two fundamental ways of viewing life and natural resources: the anthropocentric (i.e., human-centered) perspective and the ecocentric (i.e., life-centered) perspective. The former views humans as the most important species on the planet and sees resources as existing for human benefits. The other perspective sees all life as equally important. Regardless of which view an outdoor recreation professional holds, some natural resources must obviously be preserved and the remainder conserved and used wisely if they are to continue to be available for future generations. This applies to outdoor recreation resources as much as it applies to the land, clean water, forests, wildlife, and minerals necessary for other essential purposes.

Diverse Environments Exist on the Planet, and Outdoor Recreation Takes Place in All of Them

Outdoor recreation occurs in virtually every natural and seminatural setting, in every part of the earth’s biosphere, in all major climate zones and regions, and in all environments.

Outdoor Recreation Is an Important Part of Any Ecosystem

An ecosystem is much more than a landscape. An ecosystem is formed by the interaction of all living organisms (including people) with their environment (USDA Forest Service, 1995, p. xi) and can be small or vast. As such, an ecosystem includes flora, fauna, water, air, and humans.
Outdoor recreation involves people interacting with natural environments. The presence, and especially the behavior, of these recreationists must be taken into account when considering the ecosystem.

**Integrity of All Elements of the Ecosystem Is Vital to High-Quality Outdoor Recreation**

All elements of an ecosystem (including humans) are interconnected and interact with one another. Therefore, changes in one component affect the other components, including the people who recreate there. For example, forest succession affects food supplies and which animals will thrive, and therefore what hunting opportunities will be available. Similarly, acid precipitation changes species health and composition, which affects the desirability of various sites to recreationists. This can cause changes in visitation patterns and associated economic impacts on local communities. Careless behavior by users can start wildfires which destroy forests and cause siltation of streams, which kills fish, thereby reducing the food available to other species, and so on. In this sense, everything (including outdoor recreation) is connected to everything else ecologically.

**Whenever Possible, Outdoor Recreation Areas Should Be Managed From an Ecosystems Management Approach**

Sustainable ecosystem management is “the skillful, integrated use of ecological knowledge at various scales to produce desired resource values, products, services and conditions in ways that also sustain the diversity and productivity of ecosystems” (USDA Forest Service, 1995, p. xii). Generally, ecosystems should be managed at the size of a watershed or larger.

**Each Generation Has the Responsibility to Pass on a Healthy and Sustainable Natural World to the Next**

All life has value and biodiversity should be preserved whenever possible. Renewable resources should be conserved and used in a sustainable manner with no waste. Resources should be managed to assure that they continue to remain available in a healthy ecosystem long term. Resources should be viewed and managed under a philosophy of “intergenerational equity” where each person takes responsibility for his or her own actions and leaves the earth at least as good as he or she found it (Miller, 2002).

**Not All Outdoor Recreation Requires Large, Wild, or Completely Natural Environments**

Outdoor recreation can occur in small, urban “vest-pocket” parks as well as vast wilderness areas and any natural setting between these extremes.

**“Outdoor Recreation Resources” Must Be Defined Broadly**

*Outdoor recreation resources* are any natural resources and related facilities that make outdoor recreation possible. This certainly includes the natural resources of land, water, vegetation, wildlife, air, and minerals, but from the perspective of outdoor recreation professionals the term also includes the facilities and other developments used in outdoor recreation engagements. The job description for Outdoor Recreation Planners in federal agencies describes outdoor recreation resources as the land, water, mountains, forests, wildlife, and other outdoor elements useful for recreational purposes (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2002a). The Park Ranger job series description uses the word *resource* to include natural, historical, cultural, archeological, or other similar kinds of resources (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2002b). To be most accurate and of most use to managers and planners, outdoor recreation resources must be conceived broadly enough to also include trails, marinas, picnic facilities, campgrounds, forest roads, and so forth.

**Human Dimensions of Outdoor Recreation**

The many definitions of leisure and recreation have caused considerable confusion and created a lack of agreement on what these words mean. Because of that widespread confusion, and the intellectual baggage that goes with it, this section will begin with a brief review of how the words *leisure* and *recreation* are used in this text. We will then elaborate on each concept. The purpose of this review is

![Wildlife](http://www.sagamorepub.com/products/introduction-outdoor-recreation?src=lipdf)
to assure that the reader will understand clearly how we use these foundational terms in this text.

Herein, the word leisure is used in two ways. One is to refer to a state of being (i.e., the state of leisure) in which a person is relatively free to engage in activity (including recreational activity) of his or her own choosing. So, being in the state of leisure is a precondition for such engagement. The other way leisure is used is as an umbrella term that covers all areas of specialization within the broad field of leisure as an area of inquiry and practice. Outdoor recreation is, therefore, a subarea of leisure. In this text recreation is defined in experimental terms, with a recreation experience being an intrinsically rewarding experience that results from engagements freely chosen and not accompanied by strong external time pressures. Any human activity that provides this type of experience is a recreational activity, regardless of whether the opportunities to engage in the activity are provided by public or quasi-public agencies, private enterprises, or the individual. With this basic distinction between leisure and recreation in mind, we will now explore each more closely, paying particular attention to how they affect outdoor recreation management.

Leisure

The way individuals think about leisure is extremely important. In conscious and unconscious ways, how we view leisure affects what we choose to do and who we become. The ways individuals think and choose become the rudders that steer societies and cultures. Philosopher Josef Pieper (1963) made a compelling case that leisure is actually the basis of culture. As outdoor recreation professionals, the ways we view leisure, therefore, are crucial. We are the ones who provide the places where people spend much of their free time and the opportunities for them to participate in rewarding activities of their choosing. These are the opportunities for people to achieve a state of mind they find rewarding, and whether or not they can clearly articulate it, these are the places and the opportunities where each person hopes to live out a life he or she believes is worthwhile. In this sense, outdoor recreation professionals have a very important responsibility. What we provide and how we do it affects individuals, and through them can influence many aspects of the larger world. Suddenly, the implications of understanding and providing for leisure become extremely important.

The concept of leisure has been interpreted and defined in many ways. Our word leisure comes from the Latin word licere meaning “to be free” (Kelly, 1996, p. 7) and the ancient Greek word scholē meaning “serious activity without the pressure of necessity” (Godbey, 1994, p. 4). From these roots, however, our current notions of leisure have grown in many directions through the work of psychologists, sociologists, social psychologists, historians, philosophers, economists, anthropologists, and others. Godbey classifies the many existing definitions of leisure into four basic types: time, activities, state of mind, and state of existence. Similarly, Kelly considers three approaches to viewing leisure: time, activity, or condition. They and other experts offer the following observations about these different ways of viewing leisure.

Leisure as Free Time

When most people think of leisure, their ideas relate in one way or another to free time. Many people use the terms leisure and free time synonymously and imply as much by commonly referring to “leisure time.” Formal definitions of leisure as free time typically describe it as time unobligated and opposed to work. These definitions present leisure as that time remaining after subsistence (work) and existence (e.g., sleeping, eating, bathing) needs are met. MacLean, Peterson, and Martin (1985, p. 7) defined leisure as “that portion of time not obligated by subsistence or existence demands. It represents discretionary or free time, time in which one may make voluntary choices of experience.”

The obvious advantages to thinking about leisure as free or discretionary time is that it seems clear-cut and practical. Leisure viewed this way can be easily quantified, making it possible to identify trends and to compare amounts of leisure among different groups. The emphasis on freedom of choice is also appealing. At first glance, equating leisure with free time seems to make it a concept that nearly everyone can relate to and support. However, freedom is a relative term, and the degree of freedom a person experiences varies for different aspects of life and for different situations. Is anyone ever completely free politically, economically, physically, or socially? Is a person’s free time actually the goal or simply a necessary precondition that makes something else possible? Doesn’t

Outdoor recreation always involves people interacting with natural settings in some way.
leisure have something to do with a certain quality rather than just a quantity? The ancient Greeks certainly believed it did and most scholars and practitioners today do as well.

**Leisure as Particular Activities**

Many people think about leisure as engaging in certain activities. This is consistent with the ancient notion of **schole**. When people refer to leisure activities they typically mean pursuits freely chosen, pleasurable, and not participated in for pay. Outdoor recreation planners today routinely estimate participation in activities such as downhill skiing, hiking, birdwatching, and mountain biking, but not pursuits such as studying, working, or singing, even though these and many other activities can occur in outdoor recreation areas. Once again, viewing leisure in terms of certain activities has the advantages of being simple and emphasizing freedom of choice. But again, many feel leisure is more. No activity is leisure to all people in all situations. A ski instructor, for example, may hit the slopes out of financial need and loath every minute spent with students. Likewise, few (if any) activities cannot be leisure to certain people under certain circumstances. While splitting firewood may be an unwanted drudgery to most, it may be a pleasurable, freely chosen challenge to a harried urbanite on vacation in the country. Limiting our idea of leisure to lists of activities is simple, but it ignores peoples’ motives and experiences.

**Leisure as a State of Mind**

Definitions of leisure from psychologists and social psychologists tend to present leisure as a state of mind involving **perceived freedom** and **intrinsic motivation** (Iso-Ahola, 1980; Neulinger, 1994, p. 18). In other words, leisure is something that must be freely chosen and engaged in for reasons intrinsically satisfying rather than for extrinsic reasons, such as money or increased status. Seeing leisure in this way explains why it often seems so situational. Why, for example, one boy scout who is told by his leader to build a campfire on a rainy morning can see it as work, while it is leisure to another if he volunteers to challenge himself. Defining leisure as a state of mind reminds us that it is just as much or more about what something **means** to a person than when it occurs or what the particular activity might be. A shortcoming of leisure defined solely as a state of mind, however, is that it seems to ignore the external world. Should a daydream, hallucination, or drug-induced state of mind be considered leisure? Can having the willpower to think positively about a truly bad situation make it leisure?

**Leisure as a State of Being or Existence**

Aristotle described leisure as the “absence of the necessity of being occupied” (De Grazia, 1961, p. 19). He and other classical philosophers saw leisure as an ideal condition necessary for individuals to achieve virtue and to perfect themselves. Their belief was that virtuous individuals would contribute to the creation of a more virtuous society and leisure was a crucial ingredient to make this happen. Similarly today, leisure is often thought of as a state of tranquillity, contemplation, spiritual celebration, or even prayerfulness in mind and soul (Pieper, 1963). The appeal of such a definition is that it presents an ideal we can strive for—an ideal with potentially important implications for individuals and society. A possible shortcoming of considering leisure as an ideal condition is that it can be easy to dismiss as unrealistic. Critics point out that even if some ancient Greeks got close to this ideal, they did it at the expense of slaves and by creating a society where only free males could be citizens and realistically pursue leisure. Some find a concept of leisure based on an ideal condition to be esoteric and difficult to put into practice today.

**How Can the Way We Define Leisure Affect Outdoor Recreation Management?**

If outdoor recreation professionals hold the perspective that leisure is simply free time, it is natural to regard leisure as not particularly important. After all, wouldn’t leisure, by definition, be essentially “left over time” after attending to other more important priorities? Managers with such a perspective might then simply concentrate on providing visitors with opportunities for entertainment and diversion to fill their leftover time. Such a perspective might even communicate that leisure and things related to it (e.g., parks and recreation areas) are luxuries. Luxuries have low funding priorities for taxpayers and government agencies. Viewing leisure as simply free time does not communicate that leisure provides significant, meaningful, and important outcomes.

Defining leisure only as particular activities inaccurately limits the scope of the outdoor recreation profession and its important contributions. Such an approach could narrow planning and programming to pursuits that happen to appear on particular lists of “leisure activities,” when no such list will ever be complete or accurate. Viewing leisure as participation in certain activities makes it easy to count participants and to quantify “production,” but ignores the **qualities** crucial to what leisure really is. Providing outdoor recreation should not be about limiting visitors to a menu of approved activities. It also needs to consider what goes on inside visitors—the intangibles they bring with them and take away.

A state of mind characterized by intrinsic motivation and perceived freedom is certainly an important part of leisure. Although outdoor recreation professionals need to
consider the psychology of leisure, it is certainly more than just what goes on in a visitor’s head. The kinds of leisure considered in this book depend on actual natural settings. There is certainly a role for virtual outdoor recreation, but leisure and outdoor recreation are grounded in the real world, not just in a particular state of mind. Again, viewing leisure solely as a state of mind begs the question of whether leisure has meaningful and important outcomes. Aren’t leisure and outdoor recreation more than a feeling? If not, why are natural resources needed for leisure and recreation at all?

The perspective that leisure is a state of being or existence does have important implications for outdoor recreation professionals. By viewing leisure as an ideal condition with the potential for great good, leisure could have great value, as the ancient Greeks believed. Such a definition (and professional philosophy) could provide the outdoor recreation professional with important guidance. It implies there is more to leisure and outdoor recreation management than simply providing places and activities to entertain visitors during their leftover time. The focus becomes providing settings, conditions, and opportunities that can be crucial for the enrichment of individuals, communities, and society. Few may ever completely achieve the long-term “absence of the necessity of being occupied” described by Aristotle. But the term ideal implies a desired good worthy of effort. Providing opportunities for people that can enrich their existence and improve their world (and encouraging them to do so) are certainly ideals worthy of our effort.

The Definition of Leisure Used in This Text

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion no universally accepted definition of leisure exists, nor is there likely to be one any time soon. The term and the concept itself have a tremendously rich heritage, which continues to provide direction for us as professionals today. Reducing leisure to activities that occur in free time would fall far short of its true meaning and potential. Leisure is more than free time or certain activities. A particular state of mind or state of being are closer to the mark, but neither captures the richness nor the potential of leisure. While each of these perspectives offers some guidance to outdoor recreation professionals, leisure is more.

In this text, leisure is the umbrella concept from which all recreation, including outdoor recreation, flows. However, it differs qualitatively from recreation. We adopt the view that leisure is a state of being (i.e., the state of leisure) in which a person is relatively free to engage in activities of their choosing (including recreational activity). Therefore, leisure is a precondition for all recreational engagements and is the state or condition where recreation becomes possible. This state may exist for a few minutes, a few hours, or much longer for some people. The leisure condition is characterized by relative freedom from obligations and other constraints. But most importantly, this state of leisure is one of opportunity and potential. It allows each of us to choose activities and experiences and ways of living that we find rewarding, satisfying, and worthwhile (Godbey, 1994, p. 11). Leisure begins with the ideal condition Aristotle described as the “absence of the necessity of being occupied.” It is the condition of licere (“to be free”) where the schola (“serious activity without the pressure of necessity”) can happen. It is an ideal that should be reflected in our planning for and management of recreation opportunities.

Viewing leisure from this perspective should remind outdoor recreation professionals that our efforts are directed toward a part of people’s lives where they have the freedom to make important choices. These choices are instrumental in defining who they are and in determining the quality of their individual lives. In turn, their lives can affect our world in meaningful ways. What leisure and outdoor recreation professionals provide in terms of places, activity opportunities, and images of what is possible and desirable shape these important choices for better or worse. The question all outdoor recreation and natural resource professionals should ask themselves and their agencies is: Do we simply help people to fill their free time or do we create desirable, even ideal conditions where people have the opportunity to enhance their lives and, perhaps, our world?

Before we leave our discussion of leisure, we want to clarify a point sometimes contentious among recreation professionals and sometimes a misconception about leisure in particular. It relates to a concept we refer to as visitor sovereignty. In economics consumer sovereignty literally means the consumer is king. In other words, there is the expectation that business will provide the goods and services they believe the consumer demands, and consumers will decide to buy, or not buy, those goods and services based on the utility they expect to derive from them. We approach outdoor recreation resource management in a similar way. That is, managers will generally provide a wide array of outdoor recreation opportunities for people to choose from during their leisure. We know and expect that visitors will choose and use those opportunities that best meet their preferences. The alternative view would be that park and recreation managers should provide only those opportunities that they believe are the “best” ones and the only ones that visitors or customers “should” choose. This alternative approach can rapidly become one that resembles attempts at social engineering and has very little place in the realms of recreation or leisure. This does not mean leisure programming should not be used to reach socially agreed on outcomes, such as
promoting environmental responsibility through ecotourism or designing recreation-based interventions for youth at risk. Nor does approaching our field from a perspective of visitor sovereignty mean that we need to provide every opportunity in every setting. Clearly, doing so would not be appropriate and would often conflict with land management objectives. What it does mean is we realize customers will make their own choices of recreation opportunities and experiences and we need to plan accordingly.

Recreation
The word recreation comes from the Latin root recreate meaning to create anew or to be refreshed. Re-creation of mind, body, and spirit captures the essence of recreation. The word creation in recreation denotes that recreation includes such things as growth and development, learning, creative expression, and nurturing. The concept of recreation, therefore, includes two important elements. First, pressures and demands (often our work) wear us down, and these are things from which we regularly need to be refreshed or restored. Second, positive, refreshing outcomes, such as challenge and growth, result from engaging in recreation.

The concepts of leisure and recreation are obviously related. Definitions of the two sometimes overlap as they relate to free time, activities, and state of mind. Recreation, however, is not the same thing as leisure, even though some people use the two terms interchangeably. In the simplest terms, recreation can be thought of as the activities a person engages in during their leisure and the experiences that result from those activities. Remember, though, that leisure is more than free time. Refreshing “recreation activities,” therefore, are not strictly limited to a block of free time in the traditional sense.

While leisure emphasizes the condition characterized by freedom, recreation emphasizes both the activities undertaken during this leisure and the experiences that result from engaging in those activities. Although both leisure and recreation have something to do with a particular state of mind, it is our recreation that most directly produces the refreshing, satisfying experiences. It is incomplete and inaccurate to consider recreation to be just an activity, because the activity is simply the means of achieving certain desired experiences. In sum, recreation always involves activities voluntarily chosen and the resulting experiences.

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of the experience itself (in contrast to the activity that produces it) in understanding recreation. The idea that people engage in particular recreation activities to realize desired psychological and physiological experiences is the most fundamental aspect of all recreation, including outdoor recreation. A large body of research documents the importance of experiences to all aspects of leisure and recreation. The concept of recreation experiences, therefore, has become the underpinning of most of the important approaches for planning and managing outdoor recreation opportunities described throughout this text. The management systems discussed in Chapters 12 and 13 are based on the concept of managing recreation resources not only to provide opportunities to engage in particular outdoor activities in particular settings but also ultimately to realize specific types of satisfying experiences. Because the concept of recreation experiences is so fundamental to understanding leisure and recreation, it will be briefly explained here. The types of recreational experiences will be elaborated in Chapter 2.

All human experience is a psychological or physiological response to encountering something, and recreation experience is no exception. Recreation experience is a response to a recreational engagement. All recreation experiences occur at the individual level, albeit strongly influenced by social and cultural influences. The experience can be psychological, physiological, or psychophysiological in nature. Examples include experiencing physical and mental relaxation, enjoyment of natural settings, learning, being with one’s family or friends, testing and applying particular skills, introspecting about one’s personal values, or nurturing nature-based spirituality.

A widely accepted definition of recreation experience considers it an intrinsically rewarding experience that finds its source in voluntary engagements during nonobligated time (Driver & Tocher, 1970, p. 10). These three essential dimensions—type of reward, freedom to choose, and degree of external time pressure—are at the heart of the recreation experience. An intrinsic reward is a reward inherently satisfying to the individual—something that produces pleasure inherent to the recreational engagement for its own sake rather than rewarding for any external reasons such as financial gain or increased status. Put simply, intrinsic rewards are “internal” to the recreation activity while extrinsic rewards are from some “external” source. For example, a person who hates to play golf may play with his boss in the extrinsic hope of gaining his or her favor, and perhaps eventually a pay increase. The second, often related, defining characteristic of a recreation experience is that the engagement is freely or voluntarily chosen by the participant, rather than an obligation of any kind. Someone who chooses to go deer hunting because he or she really wants to is more likely to have a satisfying recreation experience than someone who goes “because my friends expect me to” (see also Iso-Ahola, 1999) The final characteristic of a recreation experience relates to time considerations, some not immediately apparent in the previous definition. The most basic is that a pure recreation experience is only possible during unobligated
time—time not obligated by existence or subsistence demands as mentioned in the earlier discussion of leisure. Once this basic condition has been met, however, the way the individual perceives time continues to be important to his or her recreation experience. For example, the recreation experience is diminished by feelings of external time pressure. A person who feels external pressure to get back to the office by a certain time will have a very different recreation experience than someone who feels little or no time pressure. In contrast, “internal” intrinsically rewarding and voluntarily chosen time pressures do not diminish the recreation experience. Internal time pressure can enhance the recreation experience for some people, and in some cases is essential. This is often the case with competitive experiences, regardless of whether the competition is with others or oneself. Examples would include a person trying to set a personal speed record kayaking a whitewater slalom course or a person who is competing with others to see which team can spot and identify the most species of birds in a 24-hour “big day” birding event. While external time pressures can diminish the recreation experience by bounding it and constraining it, internal time pressures can enhance it for some people in some situations.

The flow experience described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) is a special case regarding the perception of time during a recreation experience. When in flow a person is so engrossed in a particular activity and experience that they lose consciousness of time. This could be the case with a person so perfectly challenged by a particular rock climb that he or she completely loses track of time while absorbed in climbing it. Someone completely in the groove playing in a basketball game or swinging at a fastball might similarly be focused on the moment so intensely that he or she may lose track of time altogether. While the flow experience often occurs during recreation, it is certainly not necessary for a satisfying recreation experience nor is it some sort of “ultimate recreation experience” that should be strived for over all others.

Considering these three dimensions—type of reward, freedom to choose, and degree of external time pressure—the “ideal” recreation experience is one that is voluntarily chosen, intrinsically rewarding, and unaffected by external time pressures. These three dimensions can be visualized as three continua illustrated in Figure 1.2, which shows the recreation experiences of four hypothetical individuals. The left pole of each continua represents the condition consistent with a purely recreational experience, while the right hand pole does not. Any individual’s particular recreation experience could be plotted anywhere along each continuum. To illustrate, assume that four people each take a day-long snowboarding trip as illustrated in Figure 1.2. Person A has a purely recreational experience characterized by a totally intrinsically rewarding experience in which she engaged as a totally voluntary choice and felt no external time pressure while participating. Person B finds much intrinsic reward, does not feel much external time pressure while recreating, but is recreating mostly because his girlfriend wanted him to accompany her. While willing to go with his girlfriend, his decision to recreate was not as voluntary as it would have been if entirely his choice. Person C could be someone who loves to snowboard and chose to take part of the day off to make the trip, but needs to get back to the office for an afternoon meeting and so is experiencing some external time pressure. And Person D could be a college student employed as a part-time ski patroller primarily to earn money. Assume that although she has to hold down a part-time job, her choice of that particular job is made voluntarily because she likes to snowboard. Also assume her work is done within a relatively flexible schedule that requires some consciousness of time but does not create oppressive external time pressure. As such, the work of Person D is also recreational to some extent. Although each of these four people is having a somewhat different experience and some of their experiences are more constrained (and perhaps less “ideal”) than others, each is having a recreational experience.

The purpose of comparing Persons A, B, C, and D in Figure 1.2 is not to suggest that any one of those people is getting more recreational enjoyment than another. Instead, it is included to show visually the three most essential characteristics of recreation experiences to help differentiate recreational from other types of human experiences. It is also, and more importantly, included to lay

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**Figure 1.2** Three essential dimensions of a recreation experience

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the groundwork for a fuller understanding that an experiential definition of outdoor recreation is professionally important from a managerial perspective, elaborated in later chapters (especially Chapters 2, 12, and 13).

From this discussion, one should recognize that perceived freedom is a particularly important dimension of recreation when defined experientially (as we do in this text). The essential role of perceived freedom has important implications for the planners and managers of recreation resources. We emphasize that park and recreation planners and managers must be ever attentive to helping recreationists preserve this sense of perceived freedom. This means among other things not being overly restrictive in rules and regulations imposed in recreation setting. Leisure scientists, as well, must be mindful to not impose too greatly on recreationists when studying their use of the recreation facilities, areas, and sites where they choose to exercise this freedom.

**Outdoor Recreation and Related Concepts**

The term *outdoor recreation* obviously refers to a particular type of recreation. However, the term has been used in many ways over the past half century and is still defined differently by various groups and providers. Some examples of various perspectives on outdoor recreation include the following:

Outdoor recreation…is the wholesome recreation that is done without the confines of a building. (Douglas, 2000, p. 4)

Outdoor recreation includes any sort of fun or enjoyment found in the outdoors that involves resource use for any activity or series of activities of choice. (Cottrell & Cottrell, 1998, p. 65)

Realizing satisfactory experiences…by participating in preferred recreation activities in preferred surroundings or settings. (USDA Forest Service, 1982)

At some point trying to define exactly what is and what is not outdoor recreation becomes an exercise in semantics. It is, however, very important to clarify what we as outdoor recreation professionals mean by the term. Although the term “outdoor recreation” could imply (and has sometimes been defined as) any recreation that happens to take place outdoors, historically (and for purposes of this text) it is much more specific than that. We will use the following definition:

**Outdoor recreation:** recreation experiences that result from recreation activities that occur in and depend on the natural environment

This definition emphasizes that like all other types of recreation, outdoor recreation is more than an activity. The activity is the means to achieve some desired experience. It also distinguishes outdoor recreation from the many other forms of recreation in that outdoor recreation occurs in and depends on a natural environment. Figure 1.3 presents this graphically.

A specific example of outdoor recreation might be the solitude and self-reliance that result from wilderness hiking in the high peaks of the Colorado Rockies (Figure 1.4). The actual outdoor recreation trip or outing is referred to as an *outdoor recreation engagement*.

Similarly, think about the excitement of mountain biking in a county park or enjoying the sights and sounds of nature while horseback riding on a greenway trail near
an urban area. It is essential for professionals to conceptualize outdoor recreation as the combination of the activity, the outcome (e.g., experience) that results from the action, and the environment where they take place. Although simple lists of “outdoor recreation activities” are commonly generated as can be seen in any State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), to adequately define outdoor recreation for effective planning and management we must consider what the user is doing, why the user is doing it (i.e., what experience is desired) and the role of the natural environment in the experience. Our definition explicitly directs attention to all three aspects of outdoor recreation.

Notice also this definition addresses two things that distinguish outdoor recreation from other forms of recreation. The first is the extent to which the setting is natural. The second is the extent to which the activity and experience depends on the natural environment. The most extreme degrees of these two dimensions are not necessary for an engagement to be considered outdoor recreation, of course. In fact, each dimension is best viewed as a continuum. Some outdoor recreation settings are completely natural and undeveloped while others are highly modified and include sophisticated constructed facilities. Sometimes the experience is completely dependent on a natural setting (e.g., the solitude often sought in wilderness areas). Other times the natural setting is less crucial (e.g., for people gardening in their backyard or who choose a greenway trail for a walk with a friend rather than a neighborhood sidewalk). Both dimensions can be somewhat subjective as well. A setting that may seem quite “natural” to one person may not be to another. It is also important to remember that the degree of naturalness or how much the experience depends on the natural environment do not imply a hierarchy where some types of outdoor recreation are necessarily better than others. To clarify what is and what is not outdoor recreation, consider how the field of outdoor recreation fits and often overlaps with other related ones.

**Natural Resource Recreation and Resource-Based Recreation**

These terms are synonymous with outdoor recreation as defined here and in some ways are more descriptive titles than “outdoor recreation” because they more explicitly indicate the importance of the natural setting.

**Wildland Recreation and Forest Recreation**

These terms typically refer to subsets of outdoor recreation that take place in particular settings.

*Wildland recreation* has been defined as

...recreational activities conducted outdoors in wildland areas that are dependent on the natural resources of these areas. (Hammitt & Cole, 1998, p. 3)

...that segment of outdoor recreation activity that takes place in and depends on relatively undeveloped natural environments. (Graefe, 1987, p. 169)

The term wildland, as used here, refers not only to wilderness, but to any lands where the works of nature, rather than those of people, are the main attractions. (Wellman, 1987, p. 2)

*Forest recreation* has been defined as

...any outdoor recreation that takes place in forested areas, whether or not the forest provides the primary purpose for the activity. (Douglas, 2000, p. 10)
Tourism and Commercial Recreation

The natural resources and environment are “the very basis of much of tourism” (Goeldner & Richie, 2003, p. 14). Tourism has been defined as “the entire world industry of travel, hotels, transportation, and all other components, including promotion, that serves the needs and wants of travelers” (Goeldner & Richie, 2003, p. 592). The World Tourism Organization defines tourism as “the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes” (Goeldner & Richie, 2003, p. 7). Some, but by no means all, outdoor recreation is consistent with these definitions of tourism. Likewise, many outdoor recreation opportunities are provided by commercial providers, such as guides and outfitters, private ski area corporations, and private campground operators. As such there is considerable overlap between outdoor recreation and tourism and commercial recreation.

Nature Tourism

This particular form of tourism (often referred to as nature-based tourism) has been defined as

an aspect of adventure tourism where the focus is upon the study and/or observation of flora, fauna and/or landscape. It tends toward the small-scale, but it can become mass or incipient mass tourism in many national parks (e.g., Yosemite). It is sometimes perceived as synonymous with ecotourism since one of its aims is to protect natural areas. (France, 1997, p. 16)

Ecotourism

Much of ecotourism is outdoor recreation as defined in this text. Ecotourism is generally considered to be a form of alternative tourism (as opposed to mass tourism) and

a product as well as a principle. “The attributes of ecological and socioeconomic integrity, responsibility and sustainability are qualities that may, or unfortunately may not, pertain to ecotourism as a product.” (Cater & Lowman, 1994, p. 3). Ecotourism has been defined as “responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people” (The Ecotourism Society, as cited in Western, 1993, p. 8). It has also been defined as

a sustainable form of natural resource based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, nonconsumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits, and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas. (Fennell, 1999, p. 43)

Adventure Recreation, Outdoor Adventure, and Risk Recreation

Most adventure recreation (sometimes referred to as outdoor adventure or risk recreation) is actually a type of outdoor recreation as we define it here. Adventure recreation typically includes activities such as mountaineering, whitewater kayaking and rafting, spelunking, ropes courses, skydiving, and scuba diving. Of course, adventure recreation, such as rock climbing in climbing gyms or bungee jumping off bridges, does not need to occur in or depend on outdoor or natural settings. Outdoor adventure pursuits have been defined as “a variety of self-initiated activities utilizing an interaction with the natural environment that contain elements of real or apparent danger, in which the outcome, while uncertain, can be influenced by the participant and circumstances” (Ewert, 1989, p. 6).
Outdoor Sports and Athletics

Because outdoor recreation occurs in and depends on the natural environment, most outdoor athletics and sports are not considered outdoor recreation. However, there are types of outdoor recreation that are clearly sports and visa versa. Eco-Challenge, competitive trail running, and organized mountain bike racing are examples where outdoor sports and outdoor recreation do overlap. Competition can certainly be a part of outdoor recreation for some people at certain times. Note that hunting and fishing are called “sports” although they do not usually involve competition nor are they participated in “in the game form,” which are generally defining aspects of a sport.

The previous examples should make it clear that what we are referring to as outdoor recreation is a very broad topic and should emphasize that outdoor recreation as a profession is equally broad. It should also be clear that outdoor recreation, even if called something different, is an important topic in fields as diverse as natural resource management, forest and wildland management, tourism, adventure programming, and even sport. Figure 1.5 presents an illustration of how these and other areas overlap and relate to our concept of outdoor recreation.

Outdoor Recreation Experiences

The experiences that result from outdoor recreation engagements are an important key to managing outdoor recreation resources. Public and private outdoor recreation providers increasingly realize they cannot be responsive and effective unless they have an understanding of the experiences their customers desire. Examples of common outdoor recreation experiences include solitude, challenge, enjoying the sights and sounds of nature, and testing skills. Chapter 2 will present a more comprehensive list and discuss outdoor recreation experiences. However, several basic concepts need to be introduced here to provide an adequate foundation.

Most outdoor recreation experiences can also be achieved in ways other than engaging in traditional outdoor recreation in natural settings. For example, visiting indoor climbing gyms, using virtual reality units, watching certain movies, or walking with friends in a climate-controlled shopping mall could produce experiences very similar to ones that occur in and depend on a natural environment.
Also, be aware that because achieving these desired experiences is often the motivating force for people to choose to participate in outdoor recreation, these same experiences are sometimes called motives, desired outcomes, experience preferences, or recreation experience preferences.

Where do human motives come from? Some, like hunger, are biological and instinctive. Most of the motives for engaging in outdoor recreation, however, we learn based on past experience and relate to what we and our reference groups enjoy. Some experts organize outdoor recreation motives along a continuum with escape or “push” motives at one end and engagement or “pull” motives at the other. Push motives are often caused by external factors, like stresses from work, and frequently lead to passive recreation behaviors, like sunbathing on a beach. Pull motives are best thought of as an internal draw to some desired experience and more frequently lead to active behaviors, like hiking or birding.

Two final things are important to realize about motivations for outdoor recreation. First, not all motives are conscious to the person engaging in the recreation. Second, most people have multiple motives for engaging in any particular outdoor recreation engagement.

**An Outdoor Recreation Experience Model**

Outdoor recreation behavior is best viewed from a social psychological perspective, which assumes people participate in outdoor recreation because they hope to gain certain rewards or outcomes, particularly outdoor recreation experiences. This way of thinking about outdoor recreation is based on **expectancy theory**, which proposes people engage in particular behaviors with the expectation the activity will meet their particular needs and help them to achieve what they desire. Outdoor recreation professionals using this perspective commonly refer to it as the **behavioral approach**, because it focuses on why people engage in outdoor recreation and acknowledges the importance of the experiences and other benefits that result (Manning, 1999, p. 3). The essence of the behavioral approach to outdoor recreation management is understanding why people do what they do and what they hope to gain. This information is essential to effective recreation resource management.

Note that this behavioral perspective implies that managers must consider certain key aspects of any outdoor recreation engagement, including the user’s motivations or needs, the recreation activity engaged in, the recreation settings where the activity and experience take place, the companions (if any) for the recreation engagement, and the experience or other desired outcomes that result from the recreation engagement. None of the aspects are complete or adequate when considered alone.

A simple outdoor recreation experience model as provided in Figure 1.6 can help to visualize how these aspects interrelate. Consider this the “who, what, where, and why” of outdoor recreation behavior from the user (or customer) perspective.

Figure 1.6 emphasizes that users engage in outdoor recreation because they have certain recreation-related motivations, preferences, or desires. They bring these preferences with them to recreation settings as the input to this model. Driven by these motives or preferences, users must make certain choices to engage in outdoor recreation. They must choose a setting, an activity, and with whom (if anyone) they will participate. By engaging in the recreation outing based on their choices, users hope to achieve their desired outcome, generally some combination of outdoor recreation experiences.

Viewed in terms of this model, an example of an outdoor recreation experience might be understood as in Figure 1.7. An office worker who had a particularly difficult and stressful week of indoor work spent mostly in meetings and in front of a computer might simply want to escape to find some peace and quiet and fresh air. Based on these desires, she might choose to walk alone on a quiet trail around a lake in a park near her home. As a result of this engagement she hopes to experience a state of solitude and relaxation.

Notice that Figure 1.7 is presented from the user’s perspective. Outdoor recreation managers can view this from
their perspective as well to focus on why their visitors or customers do what they do and to begin to anticipate what outcomes their customers desire (Figure 1.8).

Several important things to note about outdoor recreation behavior might not be immediately obvious from these examples. First, because outdoor recreation involves people interacting with natural environments, the setting element of the model is essential and the one over which recreation resource managers and planners typically have the most control. Second, users make their outdoor recreation choices from the settings, activities, and companions available to them. Taken together, these are called outdoor recreation opportunities. The USDA Forest Service (1982, p. 4) defines a recreation opportunity as “the availability of a real choice for a user to participate in a preferred activity within a preferred setting, in order to realize those satisfying experiences which are desired.” This terminology emphasizes the third important fact: outdoor recreation experiences are produced by the visitor, not the manager. Managers can only provide the outdoor recreation opportunities that make the visitors’ engagements and associated experiences possible.

Visitors desire a tremendous variety of experiences from their outdoor recreation engagements. These experiences will be described in Chapter 2. The outdoor recreation experience model (Figure 1.6) illustrates that each experience can be produced by many different combinations of activities, settings, and companions. Similarly, the same combination of opportunities (i.e., setting, activity, and companions) could be used by different people to produce different experiences. The same person can even use the same recreation opportunities to produce completely different experiences during different engagements. In other words, outdoor recreation experiences can be situational, individually specific, and highly variable, and their meaning to the individual can depend on the context of the engagement.

Finally, notice that we have used both users and customers to refer to the people actually engaging in the outdoor recreation. The term visitors is also commonly used in some circles, such as in the National Park Service, to refer to outdoor recreationists. Each of these terms has advantages. The concept of user emphasizes that the person uses a particular opportunity to produce some outcome they desire. The term visitor can convey a certain host-guest relationship between managers of an area and those who recreate there. Such a guest, hopefully, finds it easier to remember that they have some responsibility to treat the area and other visitors with respect. Using the term customers to refer to outdoor recreationists is growing in popularity among recreation resource managers. The customer concept explicitly requires that managers of outdoor recreation and related amenity resources adapt and apply a customer-oriented style of management. That style is now being used by most effective and successful organizations that provide goods and services and is increasingly important for outdoor recreation resource managers as well. The word customer was first used by the private sector to mean someone who pays a price for a good or service. Despite the fact that some people still hold that definition of customer, that narrow use of the word is now archaic. The word customer now does not necessarily have anything to
do with marketing for profit or requiring that a price be paid. It has everything to do with attempting to meet the preferences of the people who use the goods and services provide, whether provided by a public agency or a private enterprise. We will use the words customers, users, and visitors interchangeably in this text.

The basic ideas illustrated in the outdoor recreation experience model are at the heart of what outdoor recreation management is all about. At its core are the concepts of providing opportunities for desired experiences and doing so in ways that sustain the health and integrity of the natural settings that make the opportunities possible. Therefore, we define outdoor recreation management as follows:

**Outdoor recreation management**: providing opportunities for satisfying outdoor recreation experiences while sustaining the health of the natural environments on which these opportunities depend.

Outdoor recreation management, so defined, intends to direct attention to both the human dimensions and the natural resources dimensions of outdoor recreation. The term *outdoor recreation resources management* refers more specifically to the natural resources dimensions of outdoor recreation. We will use both of these terms in this text, as appropriate.

**Timing and Phases of the Outdoor Recreation Experience**

The model of outdoor recreation behavior presented here does not explicitly address the important issue of the timing. Obviously, many factors affect the time when a person engages in outdoor recreation, such as when he or she has unobligated time, how far away his or her preferred setting is, when his or her companions are available, weather conditions, and factors related to the nature of the experience itself. The best birdwatching times are in the early morning, flyfishing is best in the early morning and late evening, and the light conditions and long shadows of afternoon are preferred by many photographers and artists.

A more basic time-related aspect of outdoor recreation participation has to do with what is referred to as the phases of the outdoor recreation experience. It has been recognized for decades that outdoor recreation participation involves much more than simply the time actually spent in the natural setting itself. Five major phases comprise the total outdoor recreation experience (Clausen & Knetsch, 1966, pp. 33–36).

**Anticipation**

Anticipation includes planning and preparing for the engagement as well as looking forward to it. It may be very short and spontaneous or long and involved. In fact, if the actual recreation outing never occurs, the anticipation could end up being the entire experience.

**Travel To**

Getting from home or work to the outdoor recreation setting is certainly a part of the total recreation experience. This phase could take minutes, as in walking from home to a nearby suburban park. Or it could last weeks, as in international travel from the United States to Nepal followed by a long trek on foot to a mountaineering base camp in the Himalayas. Travel to recreation settings can be a large or small proportion of the entire experience, inexpensive or costly, enjoyable or a dreaded burden. Likewise, it could involve any or all modes of travel.

**On-Site Experience**

This phase is the actual participation in the outdoor recreation activities and the experiences that result in the recreation setting. The on-site recreation engagement itself is generally the primary focus of recreation managers, although it should not be their only focus.

**Travel Back**

Much like travel to the recreation setting, travel back can take many forms. It can be long or brief and involve any or all modes of transit. It could be an enjoyable part of the total experience, but may not. Travel back may be very different from travel to in terms of pace, attitude, energy level, and emotion.

**Recollection**

The complete outdoor recreation experience generally does not end abruptly when the participant arrives home. Recollection of the experience continues through memories, pictures, and souvenirs. The recollection phase might
be the longest and most enjoyable aspect of the total experience (particularly if the participant forgets or minimizes any unpleasant things that occurred during the other four phases). It is also possible that the recollection phase is the most important for some, particularly if the primary motive was obtaining some sort of “trophy,” even if the trophy is an accomplishment of some sort.

Note that the five phases of the outdoor recreation experience vary in length and importance depending on the individual and the particular trip. Also notice that outdoor recreation professionals (or any of their partners that help them to provide the recreation opportunities) can influence and enhance the experience during any of these phases. For example, managers provide information and planning assistance in advance. Public land managing agencies place environmental education staff on commercial passenger trains and ferry boats. Providing mass transit and other transportation alternatives within natural areas themselves is also becoming more common. Information and souvenirs can be provided for visitors to take home with them, and newsletters or e-mail updates can be offered for people who want to learn more or to recall pleasant memories long after their trip has ended.

Summary

In this chapter we introduced the foundational concepts needed to be effective and thoughtful outdoor recreation professionals. We demonstrated that outdoor recreation and outdoor recreation management always involve both natural resource dimensions and human dimensions. We emphasized the essential role of high-quality natural resources for outdoor recreation and presented a number of key principles regarding natural resource management. Most of the chapter addressed the human dimensions of our field by clarifying the differences and importance of leisure, recreation, and outdoor recreation. We concluded that how we define these important concepts, especially leisure, can and should affect how we manage outdoor recreation resources. In particular, we advocated that outdoor recreation professionals who define leisure properly will not focus on helping people to fill their free time, but work to create desirable, even ideal conditions where people are most likely to enhance their lives. A considerable part of the chapter addressed defining and discussing outdoor recreation and differentiating it from other related fields. The central role of the experience (as opposed to the activity that produces it) was presented and reinforced using a model of outdoor recreation that attempted to focus attention on the who, what, where, and why of outdoor recreation behavior from the users’ and the managers’ perspectives. With these basic concepts in mind, we are now ready to more fully address the many benefits of leisure, including outdoor recreation, as well as the increasingly important role of outdoor recreation and outdoor recreation professionals in modern society. These topics are the focus of Chapter 2.

Literature Cited


