

RURAL RECREATION: THE QUINTESSENTIAL PARTNERSHIP

A Vignette and A Call for Attention

BY SUSAN MARKHAM



has the highest percentage of rural dwellers (61.9%), while Ontario has the lowest percentage (17.9%).

While all provinces have a substantial rural population,

ONE OF THE most important, but least analyzed, segments of the recreation delivery system is "rural recreation." The fierce demands of our ever-growing cities have monopolized much of the energy of our researchers, presenters and authors. However, we must not be permitted to inadvertently ignore rural recreation.

SO - WHO IS RURAL?

23.5 % of Canadians live in what Statistics Canada defines as rural areas. Rural areas are:

all territory lying outside 'urban areas'. The latter are defined as continuously built-up areas with a population concentration of 1,000 or more and a population density of 400 or more per square kilometre. (Statistics Canada, 1988, p. xix)

Table 1 below shows that there is a substantial variation in the degree of "ruralness" throughout the provinces and territories. As most Canadians could guess, Prince Edward Island

the four Atlantic provinces (Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick), two of the Prairie provinces (Manitoba and Saskatchewan) and both territories (Yukon and Northwest) have a larger percentage of rural dwellers than the national average.

This vignette about rural recreation draws from the experiences of three rural recreation directors in Nova Scotia: Eva Marks-MacIsaac, Municipality of the County of Colchester; Cindy Burke, Municipality and Town of Digby; and Jean Robinson-Dexter, Municipality of the County of Queens. These three municipal units are large, mainly rural areas on the Bay of Fundy, Annapolis Valley and South Shore areas of Nova Scotia (see Table 2).

Rural residents are certainly not a homogeneous group. These three municipalities each contain a variety of settlement patterns, from the relatively isolated rural areas, to small hamlets tucked away at a road junction, to larger settlements around a small industry and, of course, the rural/urban fringe at the edge of each municipality's large town. The residents in each of these settings may have different expectations for recreation services based on both the history of the area and the life stage of the residents. Well established community organizations in older areas may only request support in running their existing operations; while residents new to the rural life, and living in

TABLE 1 - URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION IN CANADA - 1986

| Province/ Territory | Total Population | Urban % | Rural % |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| Canada | 25,309,220 | 67.5 | 23.5 |
| Newfoundland | 568,345 | 58.9 | 41.1 |
| P.E.I. | 126,650 | 38.1 | 61.9 |
| Nova Scotia | 873,175 | 54.0 | 46.0 |
| New Brunswick | 709,445 | 49.4 | 50.6 |
| Quebec | 6,532,460 | 77.9 | 22.1 |
| Ontario | 9,101,695 | 82.1 | 17.9 |
| Manitoba | 1,063,015 | 72.1 | 27.9 |
| Saskatchewan | 1,009,615 | 61.4 | 38.6 |
| Alberta | 2,365,825 | 79.4 | 20.6 |
| British Columbia | 2,883,370 | 79.2 | 20.8 |
| Yukon | 23,505 | 64.6 | 35.3 |
| N.W.T. | 52,235 | 46.3 | 53.7 |

Source: Statistics Canada, 1988.

TABLE 2 - THREE RURAL MUNICIPALITIES

| Municipality (incl. Towns) | Total 1986 Population | Urban % (sq.km.) | Rural % | Size |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------|------|
| Colchester | 45,093 | 29.7 | 70.3 | 3622 |
| Digby | 21,852 | 11.6 | 88.4 | 2472 |
| Queens | 13,125 | 25.1 | 74.9 | 2368 |

Source: Statistics Canada, 1987.

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newly developing areas, may have no qualms about demanding services similar to what they had experienced in their former urban life. The resultant political juggling act is at the heart of rural recreation policy making.

"WITHOUT PARTNERSHIPS THINGS WOULDN'T HAPPEN!"

...was a comment from one of the recreation directors when she was asked to talk about the role of partnerships in rural recreation. That succinct comment sums up the views of all three directors on recreation service delivery, community development and rural Nova Scotia. These three municipal recreation agencies operate primarily as community developers, assisting community groups, and secondarily as direct providers, delivering services when there are identified gaps in the system. They each operate in one or two person departments, serve a large area, and deal with over a hundred community groups who are the direct links with the local residents.

Does this sound familiar to *Recreation Canada* readers? It should be a familiar mode of operation for many readers who are dealing with rural recreation, but who aren't often profiled. In Nova Scotia, 24 of the 69 municipal units are rural. Twenty-two of these municipalities have recreation staff. One-third of the recreation directors in Nova Scotia work in rural recreation. The situation is undoubtedly similar in the other provinces with a large rural population.

WHO ARE THE PARTNERS?

Partners in rural recreation come from all segments of recreation service delivery. They are local volunteer sports organizations, community cultural groups, commercial operations, school boards and any other organization which has resources and can benefit from the sharing arrangement. The following are a few of the partnerships in which these three directors are involved:

Colchester County, the Town of Truro and the Province of Nova Scotia have had a jointly funded Community Development Assistant to work with the 200 community groups in this area.

Queens County and the Town of Liverpool prepare a joint column in the local newspaper and a supplement to the local paper which includes all summer programs of the Recreation departments, community groups, special events, festivals, etc.

In Digby County, a private businessman operating a waterslide permits the recre-

ation department to use his pool for swim lessons each morning in exchange for lifeguarding in the afternoon.

Each department helps communities with special events - not "doing" the special event, but rather, as is the case in Digby, responding when contacted by community groups who indicate, "We need your team to help us with the organization."

The administrative resources of each department help groups with the rather mundane, but absolutely essential, services of photocopying, printing tickets, brochures, posters.

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True community development assistance comes from these departments as they help with leadership development, volunteer training, volunteer recognition, organizational strategic planning and financial assistance for park and playground development. As one of the directors stated, "You have to help those groups provide [programs] themselves, so we are very dependant upon the volunteer base."

As community groups become more self sufficient, they often become involved in the quest for provincial and federal employment grants to hire summer staff. Each department will assist with grant writing, will encourage groups to cooperate with each other to do joint programs and will assist with staff and volunteer training.

Financial assistance certainly does not involve a flood of support to each group, but rather means the allocation of small sums based on the degree of need. In Colchester County, the recommendation about how to allocate \$18,000 in grants is made by an advisory council made up of members from all the community organizations - truly an example of community-based decision making.

In Colchester County, community groups, with encouragement from the Leisure Services Department, are successfully operating local arenas.

The Nova Scotia Planning Act requires that 5% of the area of residential subdivisions be allocated for park, playground or similar public uses. These sites, scattered

throughout the municipality, are often maintained and developed by local groups.

Community groups have been involved in planning in Queens County, the first rural municipality in the province to get involved in long range planning, that would assist the department in determining its future.

All three rural recreation departments are somewhat involved in direct service provision. This often includes the development and maintenance of parks, beaches or pools which serve a larger area than just one small community. With beaches and pools comes the demand for swimming lessons - another direct service provided by the departments. The key element in this aspect of rural recreation is that direct provision is usually undertaken only as a step to initiate services which might be lacking, with the intent being to hand it off to others; or if there is absolutely no other organization that can operate the service. Direct provision of programs seems to be the choice of last resort. With 10,000 to 30,000 rural people to serve and one or two staff, is there any other choice?

THE CALL FOR ATTENTION!

The proportion of Canada's population which lives in the rural area is still considerable, even though we pay much attention to the urban milieu. But, are we in Recreation paying enough attention to the rural areas and the staff who struggle to deal with substantial populations, large geographic areas and, at times, perflous funding? I believe that we should work to investigate more thoroughly the creative approaches used in rural recreation, the commitment that they have to community development, the regard they have for volunteers, and the training and development needs that they have in their necessary quests to be the "jacks and jills of all trades." The investigation should stimulate the creation of communication networks among rural recreation staff, not just within provinces, but between provinces - there are things to be shared between rural Nova Scotia and rural Saskatchewan. To paraphrase the comments of a group of rural recreation people around a table at the 1990 CP/RA conference in Thunder Bay - "Rural Recreation Is Where It's At!"

References

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LES LOISIRS RURAUX : L'ULTIME PARTENARIAT RÉSUMÉ

LES LOISIRS RURAUX, l'un des plus importants chaînons des loisirs organisés, sont peu connus. Selon Statistique

PAR SUSAN MARKHAM



Canada, 23,5 pour cent de la population canadienne habite dans des régions rurales. Les populations rurales ne constituent pas un groupe homogène du fait même que les agglomérations rurales varient grandement. Certaines sont très isolées, d'autres ne sont en fait que des hameaux marquant la croisée de chemins. D'autres regroupent une population plus nombreuse autour de petites industries, et d'autres encore, bordent les zones urbanisées des municipalités.

«Sans partenariat, les services de parcs et loisirs en seraient au point mort». Ce commentaire résume à lui seul le rôle-clé du partenariat dans le milieu des loisirs ruraux. Dans les régions rurales ces agences axent principalement leur mode de fonctionnement sur le partenariat, et en tant que promoteurs de la communauté, apportent leur aide aux regroupements communautaires. En second lieu, elles s'occupent d'offrir directement des services lorsque des lacunes sont notées au sein du système. Les partenaires représentent tous les volets du système de prestation des loisirs. Les organismes sportifs

locaux constitués de bénévoles, les regroupements culturels communautaires, les commerçants, les conseils scolaires et autres organisations qui disposent de ressources tirent

tous profit d'ententes de ce type.

Le pourcentage de la population canadienne concentré dans les régions rurales est considérable. Dans le milieu des loisirs, n'avons-nous pas pourtant tendance à négliger les régions rurales et le personnel qui lutte pour offrir des services à une large population répartie dans de vastes régions géographiques, et qui dispose de fonds très limités? Nous aurions intérêt à nous pencher davantage sur les approches créatives déployées dans les régions rurales, sur l'engagement du personnel à favoriser l'épanouissement de leur communauté, sur la très haute estime manifestée à l'égard des bénévoles et sur les besoins de formation et de perfectionnement du personnel. Nous devrions par ailleurs encourager la création de réseaux de communication entre le personnel des régions rurales. Pour reprendre les propos d'un groupe de représentants des loisirs de communautés rurales présents à Thunder Bay à l'occasion de la conférence 1990 de l'ACL/P : «Dynamisme et loisirs ruraux ne font qu'un!»

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