

Public Support, Demand, and Potential Revenue for Recreation on the McDonald-Dunn Forest

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Introduction and Objectives

The McDonald-Dunn forest is a popular area for recreation activities such as hiking, horseback riding, and mountain biking. Oregon State University manages this forest and provides public access free of charge. Budget constraints, however, are making it difficult to manage this forest and accommodate high use levels without deteriorating resource conditions and visitor experiences. In addition, recreation use at this forest is expected to continue increasing, especially given its close proximity to growing population centers such as Corvallis, Adair Village, and Albany.

The goal of this project is to examine public willingness to pay for access to the McDonald-Dunn forest and support for alternative funding sources that could be used as opportunities for generating revenue and recovering costs. Specific objectives of this project are to:

- (a) Determine the extent to which current users are willing to pay for access to the McDonald-Dunn forest under various mechanisms (e.g., donations, endowments, fees, adopt a trail), their support and opposition for these mechanisms, and their expectations for any onsite improvements.
- (b) Estimate demand for recreation use of the McDonald-Dunn forest for current user groups, understand users' experiences (e.g., motivations for visiting, satisfaction) and characteristics (e.g., age, location of residence), and examine this forest's role in relation to existing recreation opportunities in the surrounding area.
- (c) Examine community members' willingness to pay for access to and use of the McDonald-Dunn forest, attributes that would increase involvement and participation, their likelihood of visitation under various payment mechanisms, and their perceptions of values and benefits of the forest.

Justification and Rationale

This project is expected to generate scientifically defensible baseline data that will identify funding sources and revenue opportunities for the McDonald-Dunn forest; provide an understanding of and relationships among users, community members, and this forest; involve students in conducting research; and address critical research needs outlined in recent planning documents for this forest.

Funding sources and revenue generation. This project will reveal the probability of public support for alternative sources of funding recreation management at the McDonald-Dunn forest, and the amount of revenue that may be generated by these sources conditional on any applicable liability and administrative issues. Data may also be used in the future to leverage opportunities for attracting investment from additional sources and external research funds.

Understanding relevant stakeholders. This project will provide a more complete understanding of recreation users of the McDonald-Dunn forest and this forest's role in the community.

Educational opportunities. This project will: (a) generate cutting edge data for incorporating into courses and other teaching opportunities including integrating the forests in recreation resource management courses, (b) involve undergraduate students in data collection and other aspects of scientific research, and (c) promote graduate student research culminating in rigorous theses.

Forest plan priorities. This project will address critical research priorities for the McDonald-Dunn forest as identified in the forest plan and recently approved monitoring plan, which highlighted the need for estimating demand for recreation by category of use and examining alternative mechanisms for funding delivery of recreation at this forest.

Methods

To ensure methodological and statistical rigor, data will be obtained from onsite surveys of users and mail surveys of community members. Surveys of users will be administered at trailheads and parking areas in summer, fall, and winter to account for possible seasonality differences in visitation and activity groups. A random sample of community members will be selected from tax records or a private sampling frame (e.g., SSI) and mail surveys will be administered in multiple phases (e.g., initial mailing, multiple reminders) to ensure an adequate and representative sample. The sample size will be no less than $n = 800$ (i.e., 400 users, 400 community members) to allow generalizations about the populations at the 95% confidence level with a margin of error of less than 5%. Surveys will combine well established and cutting edge approaches from recreation economics and human dimensions of natural resources (e.g., stated choice / conjoint models, contingent valuation, attitude theory). Survey responses will be analyzed using bivariate and multivariate statistics.

Deliverables and Timeline

Written report. This report will summarize the study and recommendations. Included in this report will be a list of alternative sources for funding, the extent to which the public supports these options, and estimates of revenue that may be attained from these sources.

Date of completion: Fall 2009.

Presentations. Various presentations will be made to academicians, managers, other practitioners, and affected publics.

Date of completion: Fall 2009 through Winter 2010.

Journal articles, conference presentations, and theses. Data from this project will be reported in peer reviewed journal articles, conference presentations, and graduate student theses.

Endorsements

This project's objectives and methodology have been shaped and supported by Chris Jackson, Debbie Johnson, Dave Lysne, and the Forest Recreation Advisory Council.

Start Date: June 2008.

Budget

Item	OSU cash contribution	OSU non-cash contribution
Graduate student salary and fringe ¹	\$40,400	
Undergraduate student hourly	\$3,200	
Survey printing	\$2,400	
Survey mailing	\$2,200	
Miscellaneous supplies and services	\$300	
Tuition (graduate assistant)		\$21,640
Total	\$48,500	\$21,640

¹ Graduate research assistant: MS student for 1.75 years at .49 FTE plus fringe (i.e., insurance, GCE, OPE).

In the most recent approved monitoring plan for the McDonald-Dunn forest, it was projected to cost \$75,000 to estimate demand for recreation use of this forest. This project will address this research priority plus other critical needs (e.g., mechanisms for funding delivery of recreation opportunities) for a much lower cost (\$48,500). The PI and Co-PI will volunteer their time to work on this project.