

OUTDOOR COMMUNITY FORUM
21st Century Recreation
Saturday, June 29, 2019

Participants:

Ski Witzofsky
David Nickell
Dick Cook
Julie Warner
Judy Brookhiser
Don Bailey
Darrie Parker

Forest Service Staff:

Jeff Laird
Gary Hawkins
Kyle Varel
Jamey Thweatt
Will Harris
Wanda Crump
Tina Tilley (for part of the meeting)

Participants of the meeting were welcomed by Gary Hawkins. Gary discussed the purpose of the meeting:

- 1) First, to discuss 1 of 3 strategic sustainability goals for Land Between the Lake's recreation and environmental education programs. These goals were identified following a Community Visioning Session we held in December 2018.
- 2) Second, to help identify specific, community-supported objectives to support these goals, and
- 3) Third, to explore opportunities for collaboration to fulfill these goals.

Gary then discussed the desired outcomes of the meeting:

- Hope to have open, honest and respectful dialogue
- Hope to encourage a feeling of shared responsibility and aspiration towards meeting the goal
- To identify community-supported objectives to work towards
- To take advantage of the deep well of community creativity and expertise gathered at the meeting through brainstorming new, creative and innovative strategies
- Hope to strengthen our existing relationships and consider opportunities to expand our partnerships where there is mutual interest

Jeff Laird provided background information on the planning process that has taken place prior to this forum and reminded participants of the Vision, Strategic Areas of Focus and the Goals.

Forward to the Future is a strategic planning initiative which began in December 2017. It focuses on the future of recreation and environmental education at Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area. The purpose of this effort is to develop the organization's first Strategic Sustainability Plan. The plan will steer program-level direction, priorities and resources for the next ten to fifteen years through identification of 3 things:

1. vision, priority areas of focus, and set of goals and objectives
2. Strategies which will help Land Between the Lakes, as an organization, to be more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable; and
3. Ways in which Land Between the Lakes can help to cultivate regional sustainability through collaboration and partnership.

Public engagement has been an important part of this initiative from the beginning. There have been several opportunities for public input, comment and dialogue. Starting in July of 2018, LBL sought input

to better understand public needs, values, interests and concerns. This input was collected through an online engagement tool called MindMixer and through open houses. In December 2018, a Community Visioning Session was held to help understand what the public wants to see in the future. Many of you have participated in these engagement opportunities and we thank you for taking the time to be a part of this process.

The Outdoor Community Forum builds upon what has been done through the Assessment and Visioning Steps. It uses the vision, areas of focus and goals as its foundation and seeks to identify specific objectives and strategies that should be met to achieve the goals.

VISION		
<i>Working together with visitors and local communities to bring positive, sustainable change through exceptional nature-based experiences that inspire all generations.</i>		
STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS		
21st Century Recreation	Healthy Habitats	Inspire Youth
STRATEGIC GOAL 1	STRATEGIC GOAL 2	STRATEGIC GOAL 3
Anticipate changing recreation needs, demonstrate innovative management practices, and sustainably transform to meet 21 st century expectations.	Restore and sustain healthy habitats to be a destination for hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing of abundant and diverse species.	Inspire youth in neighboring counties and states to connect with their natural lands and cultural heritage.
MANAGEMENT AREA OF FOCUS		
Create a Culture of Innovation		
MANAGEMENT GOAL		
Respect the past and innovate for the future.		

Jeff then talked about the challenges that the Forest Service is facing:

- Changing Demographics
- Changing Technology
- Reduced Funding
- Changing Recreation Demands
- Climate Change

There was then an opportunity for questions and comments.

Connections issues – paper copy vs online, less trash with online. People want to be connected. Very important, no longer have phone booths.

Recyclables - having containers at each campsite encourages people to recycle. Helps to have a collections center at sites. In Korea, everything is recycled. Signs that say “proceeds go to xxxxx”.

While at Piney, saw big Winnebago with satellite on top and family was sitting around watching tv. Emphasis should be on environmental education.

“Where to go”. People want an app on their phone. Be nice to push their (Ft. Donelson) events through the Forest Service.

Of everything we talk about, main thing comes down to funding. Smokey Mountains Friends group supplements the National Park Service budget. There is a big difference in visitation at Smokey Mountains vs LBL. Maybe have two friends groups, one TN and one KY, which work together. Jeff shared that some Forest Service staff and Friends staff are going to meet with the Smokey Mountains Friends Group.

Someone asked if we are allowed to take private donations. Tina explained that we are a demonstration area and we are allowed to accept donations. It is easier to use the Friends group to accept donations. The Forest Service is currently working on updating our agreement with the Friends group. Asked if a facility had a fundraiser, could the money raised go specifically to that facility. Tina explained that yes, it could. Has to be in alignment with our goals and mission.

Asked if someone wants to donate to Friends, can they specify where the donation is to be used? Donations to the Friends group can be specified on how the funds will be used. Due to demographics, not an easy area to raise money. Approach groups that have a passion about something.

You have to have the connection now in regards to technology. Focus on apps that get youth and adults to focus on education.

Do we have the Junior Ranger Program? Interactive apps are not that expensive. This is the future whether people like it or not.

Can't ignore the older population. Agencies have to be careful about ageism. This is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Suggested having a list of apps on our website that people could download before they come.

Students drive down The Trace and don't know where to go, what to do.

Pay attention to things that are steady, what is most popular.

People aren't sure what roads they can drive down or not.

Possibly have road condition signs at the beginning. Some roads start out paved then turn to gravel.

The next part of the meeting was for the group to discuss the following questions and begin to brainstorm specific objectives.

1. What do we ultimately want to achieve?
2. What does success look like?

3. What needs to be done to get there?

4. Brainstorm specific objectives.

How do we make our information more available?

How do we get people through quicker at Turkey Bay effectively? Possibly bar code or QR code. If we are checking people in quick, are we inviting more people in than Turkey Bay can handle.

Reading maps, finding where I am going. Gives him lots of brain conflict because that is the way he would like it to stay.

Teach recreation management/programing. Looking at research. Parks RX, some doctors are prescribing people to go outside for stress relief, etc. Focus on outdoors as health.

People come here because of the water primarily. Part of connections involve water, lakes drive activities. Possibly make ramps more accessible.

Trails as related to hiking, biking, horses, and tie in history and environmental education. Trails as corridors to interpretive experience.

Agree with mental health aspect. Something lots of people don't understand. Wants people to mostly get an appreciation of the forest itself, listen to it and be present in it.

Tries to teach students to use a compass and a map, not completely rely on GPS.

Trees are there because they are protected. Human/nature relationship.

Environmental Education – Focus on learning about the forest, management and importance of it.

Camps on how to read a map and compass. (Kyle brought up Brandon Spring Group Center and someone asked how hard is it promoted).

No pairing and sharing, either through Friends Facebook or Forest Service. Show and tell, update pictures.

Four different groups: weekenders, day use, seasonal, and people who live here.

Make sure we pass that on to our grandchildren. If we don't do as kids, much less to do as adults.

LBL has something for everybody. To anticipate changing recreation needs. Hear people talk about things we used to have and don't have.

Demonstrating innovate management practices.

You can put money into anything you do. This place was built for the time. Things are different. You can either get stuck in the rut or be inclusive and open to other ideas. Let everyone have their "cup of tea". Stay relevant. Embrace our past and be relevant and stay with the times.

Find a way to effectively get people into the Elk & Bison Prairie (EBP).

Possible objective – check-in issue at major attractions by June 2020.

Provide a connected recreation experience (How would you measure?)

What this place is and what it means, learn to appreciate what it is. National Geographic came through and recorded over 40 minutes without a human sound, longest since they left Louisiana. Something unique about this place.

Jeff said one objective could be to increase people's knowledge about how LBL came to be.

From economic standpoint, to supplement the budget.

Have to show that there is a reason to come. People want to see new things. Nothing new here for people to do outside of biking, hiking, etc. No Empire Farm or Silo. Possible objective – Create a new visitor program or attraction every few years.

Create online healthy outdoor itineraries by xxxxxx (June 2020; January 2021), measure by site.

Working with Chris Thornock to develop a map/app to do guided tours of churches/cemeteries.

Objective – to create a cultural and heritage tour with signage and maps.

To have wifi available by 2022 at all facilities.

Everything is great but if not on paper, I am not going to get it. Got to be able to share experiences and if there is not a way, people aren't going to know about it. If don't get wifi, so many people will miss.

Establish and maintain five county partnerships a year. Five big states in the area (KY, TN, MO, IL, IN).

Of six years at EBP, only one year did not see a license plate from every state.

Establishment of connectivity (wifi) will impact other objectives. A high priority but a big investment. (Per Jeff, both AT&T and Verizon are interested in providing more coverage).

Five county partnership already exists.

Have to have access to sharing.

Cost is an obstacle to a lot of people. On fee free days, visitation is doubled.

Minority groups not using public lands, that should be a goal too. (Another person sees a lot of diversity at riding stables).

Have to know what your customers are asking for.

One of unique things about LBL is sometimes the draw for people is because there is not a lot here.

If you want to hike trails and camp, it's free (backpacking permit). Many people don't know that. There are free things you can do here.

We keep coming back to connectivity/wifi, getting word out. Feel like we need to incorporate communication and marketing and funding.

Have to have dollars backing. Have to have draws for people to want to come spend money. Money has to be coming into LBL to sustain this place. Have to come up with programs and ways to keep people coming.

Portion of budget from fees is very small.

Original plan was to stimulate the economy. Shouldn't be in competition with outside. When concept came out, put together a map regarding a business that TVA wanted to put it. Former residents will fight that "tooth and nail". That will never happen.

Need to improve area to draw people in. What can we do to make more attractive to bring in more money.

If we don't bring people in, this will all be in vain.

Need to tap into outside to help (local, county, & state government), since they benefit.

Not only focus on revenue, need to also focus on hiking trails, etc. too. Need balance of different areas.

What is relationship to this and the Land Between the Lakes Advisory Board that disbanded? Jeff explained that the Forest Service is trying to get as much public involvement as possible, want this to be public driven. Before the advisory board's charter expired, it was involved in sustainable recreation. The Forest Service currently cannot meet with the board as a group. Individual Advisory Board members are welcome to provide input by attending all public meetings.

Kyle grouped the items that were being discussed into three possible draft objectives. The group then discussed collaboration and partnerships and tried to identify what groups or partners there might be for each draft objective:

1. Establish technology/connectivity advancements as part of current program implementation.

- Forest Service IT Staff
- Cell providers
- Local governments
- Major businesses
- Google
- University IT or computer science departments
- State tourism
- KY State Parks Commissioner
- Use campground check-in question to gauge public support

2. Establish new funding outlets for each program area every year.
 - Use Facebook poll to gather public support
 - Fiscal courts
 - Regional coalition
 - Tourism bureaus and chamber of commerces

3. Develop or maintain cultural heritage resource interpretation programs.
 - Historical societies and members
 - Forest Service Heritage staff
 - Archives

The group then discussed challenges and barriers for each draft objective:

1. Establish technology/connectivity advancements as part of current program implementation.
 - Lack basic infrastructure
 - NEPA requirements

2. Establish new funding outlets for each program area every year.
 - Lack of people to do the work

3. Develop or maintain cultural heritage resource interpretation programs.
 - Laws
 - Education

What's next:

1. Have Forest Service staff go through the same exercises to build on what we heard today. Will publish draft objectives so everyone can see once objectives are identified.

2. Once objectives are finalized, meet with representatives from stakeholder groups to develop more refined strategies and tactics. Notes will go out to all participants, from all meetings.

What advice do you have as we continue?

- Not expect things to happen overnight
- Patience
- Transparency
- Gotta get it right
- Goal has to be realistic
- Maintain project
- Expand community network, get out to more people
- Promote Friends group memberships more
- Be involved
- Donation boxes (referenced Cades Cove in Smokey Mountains National Park)
- Social media apps
- Grant writer

- Look to how you hire and who you hire, “look to the future”
- Is there a way to involve each facility, make easily available to people. (i.e. have staff/someone make sure users know this is available). Possibly basic surveys where people check a box.
- Keep up communication that we have been doing.