

ABSTRACT

PARKE E. PUTERBAUGH. Status and Trends of State Park Funding in North Carolina and the Southeast. (Under the direction of Dr. RICHARD ANDREWS)

North Carolina's state parks system has been chronically underfunded since its creation in 1916. Systemwide plans identify nearly \$250 million in capital improvements and land acquisition needs in existing parks. Until 1993, state parks received inconsistent and usually meager appropriations from the General Assembly. Nationally, North Carolina has for decades ranked at or near the bottom in terms of per capita spending for state parks. Compared to 12 other Southeast states over the period 1989-1994, North Carolina finished at or near the bottom on all funding-related indices. A \$35 million bond issue in 1993 and the approval of a dedicated source of funding in 1995 - the state's share of the real-estate transfer tax - will remedy the parks system's most pressing needs and provide a dependable revenue stream. Yet North Carolina will still rank low in per capita spending, partly because that statistic is computed from operating expenditures and North Carolina's parks are geared toward natural-resource preservation rather than providing costly, resort-style amenities.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: North Carolina's State Parks: History and Funding...1	
Section 1: The current picture: a major bond issue and a dedicated source of funding...1	
Section 2: A historical overview: North Carolina state parks, 1915-1986...3	
Section 3: Progress and regress: state parks policy and funding, 1987-1993...7	
Section 4: The present and future of North Carolina state parks...12	
CHAPTER II: A Comparative Look at Park Funding in North Carolina and Twelve Other Southeast States...15	
Section 1: Statistical data on state parks: what is available and where it comes from...15	
Section 2: Kentucky and North Carolina: a case study of per capita funding...16	
Section 3: Per capita funding of state parks during the 1990s: the big picture...20	
Section 4: Demographic trends in the Southeast...21	
Section 5: Per capita funding: a five-year overview...22	
Section 6: Fixed capital outlay expenditures: another gauge of per capita spending...22	
Section 7: State parks visitation...24	
Section 8: Percent of state budget devoted to state parks...25	
Section 9: State park expenditures as a function of acreage...26	
Section 10: State park revenue relative to operating costs...26	
CHAPTER III: Summary and Conclusions...28	
Section 1: North Carolina state parks: down at the bottom, but looking up...28	
Section 2: Volunteerism and corporate partnerships...29	
Section 3: The next challenge: staffing and operations...30	
Section 4: Summary and recommendations...30a	
REFERENCES...31	
APPENDIX 1: Tables	
Table 1: Population of Southeast States, 1990...35	
Table 2: Per Capita Spending on State Parks by State, 1993-94...35	
Table 3: Fixed Capital Outlay Expenditures for Southeast State Parks, 1989-94...37	
Table 4: Average Annual Per Capita Spending on State Parks in Dollars, 1989-94 (Operating Expenditures + Fixed Capital Outlay Expenditures)...38	
Table 5: Southeast State Parks Visitation, 1993-94...39	
Table 6: Inventory of Southeast State Park Systems, by Unit Type...40	
Table 7: Total Acreage of Southeast State Park Systems...41	
Table 8: Land Acquisition Appropriations for North Carolina State Parks, 1915-1994...42	
Table 9: Capital Improvements Appropriations for North Carolina State Parks, 1915-1994...43	
Table 10: Operating Budgets for North Carolina State Parks, 1984-1995...44	
Table 11: Dedicated Funding Revenues as a Source of Operating Expenditures and Fixed Capital Outlays in Southeast States, in Dollars, 1993-94...45	
Table 12: Southeast States, Grouped by Intervals in Terms of Per Capita Spending on State Parks, 1993-94...46	
Table 13: Annual State Parks Visitation Relative to Resident Population, with Rankings, 1993-94...47a	
Table 14: Annual Visitation in North Carolina State Parks with Percentage Changes, 1983-1995...47b	

APPENDIX 2: Graphs and Charts

- Figure 1: Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks in Dollars, 1993-94 (Based on Operating Expenditures)...49
- Figure 2: Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks in Dollars, 1992-93 (Based on Operating Expenditures)...50
- Figure 3: Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks in Dollars, 1991-92 (Based on Operating Expenditures)...51
- Figure 4: Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks in Dollars, 1990-91 (Based on Operating Expenditures)...52
- Figure 5: Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks in Dollars, 1989-90 (Based on Operating Expenditures)...53
- Figure 6: Average Annual Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks in Dollars, 1989-1994 (Based on Operating Expenditures)...54
- Figure 7: Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks in Dollars, 1993-94, Adjusted for Estimated Population Change Since 1990 Census (Based on Operating Expenditures)...55
- Figure 8: Per Capita Spending on State Parks, 1993-94, Top 25 States (Based on Operating Expenditures)...56
- Figure 9: Per Capita Spending on State Parks, 1993-94, Bottom 25 States (Based on Operating Expenditures)...56
- Figure 10: Total Fixed Capital Outlay Expenditures for Southeast State Parks, 1989-94, in Millions of Dollars...57
- Figure 11: Average Annual Per Capita Fixed Capital Outlay Expenditures for Southeast State Parks, 1989-94...58
- Figure 12: Average Annual Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks, 1989-94 (Operating and Capital Outlay Expenditures Combined)...59
- Figure 13: Southeast State Parks Visitation, in Millions, 1993-94...60
- Figure 14: Amount Spent Per State Park Visitor, 1993-94 (Operating Expenditures + Total Park Visitors)...61
- Figure 15: Percent of State Budget Devoted to State Parks, 1993-94...62
- Figure 16: Dollars Spent Per Acre of State Parkland, 1993-94 (Operating Expenditures + Total Acreage)...63
- Figure 17: Land Acquisition Appropriations for North Carolina State Parks, 1970-1994 (in Millions of Dollars)...64
- Figure 18: Capital Improvements Appropriations for North Carolina State Parks, 1970-1994 (in Millions of Dollars)...65
- Figure 19: Operating Expenditures for North Carolina State Parks, 1984-1995 (in Millions of Dollars)...66
- Figure 20: Graphic Overlay of Expenditures and Appropriations for North Carolina State Parks, 1984-94 (in Millions of Dollars)...67
- Figure 21: Combined Expenditures and Appropriations for North Carolina State Parks, 1984-94 (in Millions of Dollars)...68
- Figure 22: State Park Revenue as a Percentage of Operating Costs, Southeast States, 1993-94...69
- Figure 23: Dedicated Funding Revenue as a Percentage of Operating Expenses in Southeast States, 1993-94...70
- Figure 24: Dedicated Funding Revenue as a Percentage of Fixed Capital Outlay Expenditures in Southeast States, 1993-94...71a
- Figure 25: Annual Visitation in North Carolina State Parks, 1983-1995 (in millions)...71b

APPENDIX 3: Interviews

- Bayard C. Alcorn, Head of Comprehensive Planning Program, Division of Parks and Recreation, North Carolina Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources...73
- Ney C. Landrum, Executive Director, National Association of State Park Directors...88
- Jim Stevens, President, Friends of State Parks, and former director, N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation...93

**STATUS AND TRENDS OF STATE PARK
FUNDING IN NORTH CAROLINA AND THE SOUTHEAST**

By Parke Puterbaugh

I. NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS: HISTORY AND FUNDING

1. The current picture: a major bond issue and a dedicated source of funding

"Poor no more." Those words serve as a kicker to an article in Tar Heel Trails, a publication of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, reporting on the ratification of House Bill 718 in the North Carolina General Assembly on July 17, 1995. The culmination of a half-decade's worth of work, the bill turns over the state's share of the excise tax on deed transfers (a.k.a., the real estate transfer tax) to the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. From this fund, 25% will go to the Natural Heritage Trust Fund to inventory and purchase lands of statewide natural and cultural significance. The remaining 75% will be divided among state parks, local parks and recreation departments, and a beach-access program. According to a proscribed formula, state parks will receive 65% of that 75%, or 48.75% of the state's share of the real estate transfer tax. It has been estimated that the tax will generate between \$10 million and \$14 million annually (6), which would theoretically funnel between \$4,875,000 and \$6,825,000 directly to the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation for land acquisition, capital improvements, and maintenance and repair of state parks. A more optimistic projection, made by the Fiscal Research Division of the General Assembly, estimates that \$21.2 million will be channeled into the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund in its first year (FY 1997), of which \$10.3 million would go to state parks. (18) In addition, state parks will indirectly benefit from the 25% share given to the Natural Heritage Trust Fund, as lands acquired under that program often eventually become part of the parks system (38).

The park-funding bill passed the State Senate by a vote of 49-0 and the State House by a vote of 104-0 (6, 13). It received endorsement from more than 200 organizations, ranging from the North Carolina Conservation Council to North Carolina Citizens for Business and Industry

(6,40). It also reflected the legislature's awareness of public support for state parks, as demonstrated by the passage of a \$35 million state park bond issue by a 56-44 margin in November 1993. Bayard Alcorn, head of the Comprehensive Planning Program for the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, sees a connection between the voting public's passage of the bond in 1993 and the General Assembly's passage of the Park Fund in 1995, with the former serving as a "test case" for the latter. "It was very important that the bond passed," said Alcorn. "Had the bond lost, it would have been difficult to go to the General Assembly and say, 'Well, the citizens voted us down, but we're coming back and we want significant money from you guys.' It would have been a difficult mountain to climb." (1)

Together, the bond money and the trust fund - along with a \$10 million appropriation from the 1995 General Assembly to serve as a bridge until the trust fund begins accruing in July 1996 - provide the park with a level of funding and support unknown in its 80-year history. That is not to say the park system's problems are now or will soon be solved. With a \$248.6 million backlog of documented needs - \$80,860,000 for land acquisition and \$167,733,000 for capital improvements (14) - a one-time input of \$35 million and the implementation of a dedicated revenue stream that will provide an estimated \$5 to \$7 million a year still fall short of what it will take for existing parks to meet needs identified in master plans and general management plans (GMPs).

What must be overcome is the state government's historical record of inertia toward a parks system that has been stewarded according to a philosophy that can best be described as one of benign neglect. One reason for this state of affairs, it was noted by former chief of planning Franklin E. Boteler, is that "state parks do not have a large enough constituency voicing its support to the General Assembly. The groups which do voice support represent too narrow a spectrum of interests to garner sufficient votes in the legislature." (8) In other words, the recreation-minded public that uses the parks system must become more vocal in its advocacy for parks and insistence on their proper stewardship and upkeep.

2. A historical overview: North Carolina state parks, 1915-1986

The North Carolina State Park system formally came into existence with the acquisition of Mount Mitchell Park in 1916. With the purchase of Mount Mitchell for the appropriated sum of \$20,000, North Carolina became the first state in the Southeast with a state park (15). The language authorizing the acquisition, from Chapter 76 of the Public Laws of 1915, expresses what would eventually become the legal and philosophical mission of the state parks system:

"Whereas the summit of Mount Mitchell in Yancey County is the greatest altitude east of the Rocky Mountains, and whereas the headwaters of many of the important streams of the State are at, or near, the said summit, and the forest is being cleared, which tends to damage and injure the streams flowing through the said State from the mountains to the Atlantic Ocean; and whereas it is deemed desirable that this beautiful and elevated spot shall be acquired and permanently dedicated as a State park for the use of the entire State seeking health and recreation..."

The motive of preserving a unique and significant natural resource by acquiring land and establishing a state park echoes the latter-day State Parks System Mission Statement. That mission statement, drafted in the wake of the State Parks Act of 1987, reads, in full:

"The North Carolina state parks system exists for the enjoyment, education, health and inspiration of all our citizens and visitors. The mission of the state parks system is to conserve and protect representative examples of the natural beauty, ecological features and recreational resources of statewide significance; to provide outdoor recreational opportunities in a safe and healthy environment; and to provide environmental education opportunities that promote stewardship of the state's natural heritage." (14)

Between the Public Laws of 1915 and the State Parks Act of 1987, the parks system suffered chronic underfunding and indifferent stewardship. From 1915 to 1986, total funding for North Carolina's parks amounted to less than the operating expenditures for Kentucky's state

parks system in 1987 alone (20). Other early state park acquisitions included Fort Macon, surplus property of the federal government donated to the state in 1924, and White Lake, one of seven coastal-plain lakes (a.k.a. Carolina bays) that have been designated "State Lakes." At this time, management of state parks and forests fell to the Department of Conservation and Development, created by the General Assembly in 1925 for that purpose. In 1929, the General Assembly enacted a law that effectively prevented further appropriation of state funds for park land acquisition. Henceforth, North Carolina's fledgling parks system grew only when gifts of land were made by "public spirited citizens," private corporations, federal and county governments, conservation organizations and local support groups. As a result, the parks system expanded slowly and erratically, with six units added in the 1930s, two in the 1940s, two in the 1950s, and four between 1961-68. (15)

In response to rising public demand for parks, the Division of State Parks was created in 1948. A \$1 million appropriation was made the following year in order to acquire inholdings and make capital improvements in existing parks. But such attention from the legislature was all too rare, prompting a former parks director to observe in 1952: "Had it not been for...federal agencies, the development of the North Carolina State Parks would now be little better than it was when Mount Mitchell was established 37 years ago." In 1955, a set of principles outlining "the purpose of the North Carolina State Parks System" - essentially, the preservation and protection of exceptional natural areas and resources, balanced with the provision of opportunities for recreation in natural surroundings - was drafted. However, financial commitments to the parks by the legislature remained minimal. (15)

The policy of land acquisition that relied on citizen beneficence and federal government land transfers ended after 40 years when the state approved \$24,250 in 1969 to acquire land for Carolina Beach State Park (15, 20). The state began availing itself of federal money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a program introduced in 1965 that provided matching funds to states for land acquisition and development for parks. In 1967, the first State Parks Study Commission was convened. Though the commission's recommendations

unsurprisingly included purchasing new parks, upgrading existing facilities and adding staff (15), appropriations for capital improvements and land acquisition remained miserly, if not altogether nonexistent, until 1974. (See Tables 8 and 9 and Figs. 17 and 18.)

During the early 1970s, a period of heightened awareness leading to environmental legislation across all levels of government, North Carolina passed the Natural and Scenic Rivers Act (1971), the State Trails Act (1973), the North Carolina Environmental Policy Act (1971) and a constitutional amendment "to conserve and protect its lands and waters" (1972). In 1971, park management was vested in the Office of Recreation Resources, a division within the newly formed Department of Natural and Economic Resources. One of its first actions was to issue a report entitled Now or Never that outlined acquisition needs for proposed and existing parks. The period 1971-79 was one of rapid expansion for the park system. The number of park units nearly doubled (from 21 to 40) during this time. Appropriations of \$11.5 million and \$5.5 million for land acquisition were made in 1974 and 1975, respectively, providing momentum to efforts at upgrading the parks system urged on legislators by such advocacy groups as Friends of State Parks. The drawing up of master plans for individual parks commenced in the early 1970s. The Natural Heritage Program was established in 1976 to inventory, acquire and preserve outstanding natural areas in the state (15).

Subsequently, a second State Parks Study Commission drafted a five-year plan (1979-84) that reflected a policy shift away from continued acquisition to improvement of existing facilities. Titled New Directions, this far-sighted study went largely unheeded. Between 1980-86, the state legislature reverted to its old habit of ignoring state parks until the situation reached the crisis stage (11, 20, 26). Lack of state appropriations also meant a reduction in matching federal funds from the LWCF grant program. Meanwhile, park visitation and infrastructure needs increased substantially. Between 1978 and 1987, annual park visitation rose from 4.8 million to 7.6 million, a boost in attendance of 58.3%. During that same period, the parks system's operating budget, in real dollars, rose from \$2.68 million to \$3.45 million, an increase in funding of only 25.0% (15).

By the mid-to-late 1980s, the system was in such a state of disrepair that one incentive for spending money was fear of visitor injuries and lawsuits from visits to parks where deteriorating facilities and poorly maintained trails posed public hazards. "In every way we are the last state park system in the United States," lamented parks director William "Wes" Davis in 1987. "We can't even say, 'Thank God for Mississippi.'" (3)

Stresses on the parks were beginning to show in alarming ways. A broken, outmoded sewage system sent raw waste running down Mount Mitchell. Old cement boat docks at Carolina Beach State Park were collapsing. Methane fumes filled bathrooms at Waynesborough State Park. (10) Overused trails in Hanging Rock State Park had turned into eroded, poorly marked gullies, while repairs to a CCC-constructed bathhouse dating from the 1930s, as well as failing electrical and sewage systems, were urgently needed (11). Condemned buildings, exposed electrical wiring, erosion of trails, damage to campsites, vandalism and litter, and aesthetic encroachments from nearby trailer parks were but a handful of problems identified at Kerr Lake State Recreation Area(15).

Fort Macon State Park alone identified \$7.5 million in documented needs in 1987, as all 29 buildings on the grounds (including the fort itself) posed public safety hazards such as crumbling foundations, broken floors and weakened roofs (15). Mitchells Mill State Recreation Area was routinely used as a garbage dump by local residents. (20). Bridges at Duke Power State Park were tagged as unsafe. Officials at Weymouth Woods State Natural Area lacked sufficient funding even to stuff and mount an owl for a science display (26).

In 1986, officials with the state department of Natural Resources and Community Development threatened to close four popular parks (Hanging Rock, Morrow Mountain, Hammocks Beach and Lake Wacamaw) and restrict access to two others (Mount Mitchell and Carolina Beach) because of needed repairs that posed public health, safety and liability problems (5).

A study by the engineering school at North Carolina State University determined that 70% of the 981 buildings in the park system needed repair (4). Park rangers were underpaid to

the point of meeting eligibility requirements for food stamps, with experienced full-time rangers earning salaries as low as \$16,000 per year (26). The entire 53-unit system employed only six full-time maintenance workers. "It is not a stated policy," commented an editorial in the Greensboro News and Record, "but the implication is that parks will get funding only when they are so bad people can't use them anymore" (42).

Largely through pressure from conservation organizations, citizens groups, the print media and a determined parks director, William "Wes" Davis, the parks issue made it onto the political agenda again in the mid-to-late 1980s. Reports from the third State Parks and Recreation Areas Study Commission in 1985 (35) and the State Goals and Policy Board in 1986 depicted a parks system in dire need of emergency funding. In its 1986 Report to the Governor, the State Goals and Policy Board declared: "North Carolina's parks and recreation system is in generally deplorable condition, is a burden to the full development of the State's tourism industry, and is inarguably a worst-case example of abuse of public trust and abdication of responsibility." (15)

The General Assembly responded with a massive appropriation of \$25 million, to be divided over two years (FY 1986 and 1987). However, such a large sum of money thrown at the understaffed and unprepared Division of Parks and Recreation presented its own set of administrative challenges in terms of planning and disbursement. Planning head Alcorn recalls: "We got \$25 million for land acquisition, and none of that money came with extra staff to go about spending it. So we had trying to spend \$25 million on land, and that's negotiating with a variety of owners. We had not made very good progress in spending the money, and they essentially took half of it away. So it's important to have a reasonable amount of money relative to the staff you have to spend it." (1)

3. Progress and regress: state parks policy and funding, 1987-1993

The rising tide of concern over the condition of North Carolina's state parks led to the passage of the State Parks Act of 1987, a long-overdue attempt to establish an affirmative

legislative commitment to state parks. "The whole reason for this act is to prevent the helter-skelter way that parks have been dropped on us like they came from the Planet Mongo," said parks spokesman Don Follmer (11). Its eight statutes explicitly recognize the need for land acquisition, park maintenance and regularly updated systemwide plans. It complements the authorizing language of the North Carolina Constitution, vis-a-vis state parks.

North Carolina's State Constitution broadly declares the acquisition, conservation and preservation of natural resources to be a proper function of state government. The State Parks Act (GS 113-44.8) reinforces the primary role of the parks system, which is to manage and preserve natural resources. As the "heritage of the people of this state," these "unique archaeological, geologic, biological, scenic and recreational resources...should be preserved and managed by those people for their use....This system shall consist of parks which include representative examples of the resources sought to be preserved by this Article." In terms of funding, the article asserts that "the tax dollars of the people of the State should be expended in an efficient and effective manner for the purpose of assuring that the State Parks System is adequate to accomplish the goals as defined in this Article." (15)

The stated focus is less on recreation than preservation. Unlike other parks systems, such as those in Kentucky and West Virginia, the state parks of North Carolina are intended to preserve resources and provide recreation, not generate revenue. The state of North Carolina historically has not and currently does not charge entry fees to its parks (with the exception of Jordan Lake and Falls Lake, state recreation areas that border federal reservoirs).

That is not to say levying park fees hasn't been entertained as an option for raising park revenue over the years. A report entitled Assessment of Entrance Fees for the North Carolina State Parks System was released in 1990. It weighed the pros and cons of collecting user fees in state parks and identified those parks where fees would be most feasible and practical. (14) According to head parks planner Bayard Alcorn, however, that remains an unlikely possibility, at least at the present time. "Our opinion is you almost have to put a little house as a point of contact out on the main park entrance road and run electricity, bathroom, telephone," said Alcorn

in 1996. "You put all those together, and you're looking at a pretty fair capital expenditure. The road system has to be widened, and then you're paying someone to stand and collect fees." (1) The most likely scenario would involve "iron rangers" like those used by the U.S. Forest System: honor boxes for deposits in state parks where an entrance fee is warranted.

In its 1994 Systemwide Plan for the North Carolina State Parks System - a comprehensive evaluation prepared by statutory mandate every five years - the Division of Parks and Recreation summarized its management policy as follows: "It is the policy of the Division that natural resources will be managed by allowing environments to evolve through natural processes with minimal influence from human activities....When intervention is necessary, direct or secondary effects on park resources will be minimized to the greatest extent possible." (14).

This resource-oriented management philosophy differs radically from that of states such as Kentucky and West Virginia, whose operating budgets are larger than North Carolina's by a factor of ten. Much of their budget comprises operating expenses and capital outlays for golf courses, lodges, swimming pools, marinas and other resort attractions. (The issue of resort vs. resource approaches is discussed in greater detail in Chapter II.)

Yet as commendable as it may seem on the surface, North Carolina's low-cost preservationist approach has been more a matter of economic necessity than environmental altruism, reflecting an 80-year record of penurious and inadequate funding. It can be argued from the record that the General Assembly has traditionally viewed the parks system as an encumbrance to be dealt with only in times of crisis, at which point a large, one-time appropriation is handed the system like a Band-Aid applied to a gaping wound. Had North Carolina truly been committed to "conserv[ing] and protect[ing] representative examples of the natural beauty, ecological features and recreational resources of statewide significance," in the words of the state parks mission statement, there would have been a more aggressive record of land acquisition, rather than no effort at all from 1916-1969 and woefully inconsistent appropriations from 1970 to the present. (See Table 8 and Figs. 17 and 18.)

After the initial flush of attention generated by the State Parks Act of 1987, the \$25 million appropriation at mid-decade and the publication of the first Systemwide Plan for the North Carolina State Parks System in 1988, a familiar pattern of legislative inattention crippled the parks system yet again. "With increasing attendance and an operating budget remaining the same, we are fast approaching a level at which we cannot continue to provide a quality recreation experience for the visitor," parks director Wes Davis noted in 1989 (19). A year earlier, Davis went so far as to declare North Carolina's parks system the worst in the country: "They're pretty depressing.... We are in every respect the last state park system in the country." (20)

The possibility of charging entrance fees to raise income for the parks was briefly raised but rejected. "Entrance fees will raise visitor expectations," noted Frank Boteler, chief of planning in 1991, "and fee collection costs can be significant." (8) In a sense, the parks system found itself in a Catch-22: it couldn't raise revenue for its improvement by charging user fees, because it didn't offer an experience that would justify such charges.

"[The N.C. Dept. of] Travel and Tourism doesn't promote our parks effectively because they're afraid people will be disappointed," said public information officer Donald Reuter in 1991. "Take Hanging Rock State Park. Say you travel from South Carolina. All you've got is primitive camping, and you get to look at a rock after hiking a trail. There's no place to park your camper, no place to go. Nothing. They [the public] view other facilities as a better use of their money." (34)

The North Carolina state parks system celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1991, but there was no budget to promote this milestone and not much at that time to celebrate. In FY 1991 and 1992, total appropriations for land acquisition were zero. In 1991, the parks system's 75th anniversary year, the legislature reclaimed \$2 million previously earmarked for capital improvements in state parks. "We don't do any promotional work," said public information officer Don Reuter. "Putting together any kind of program other than trying to make parks available to visitors is impossible." (34)

The 1988 Systemwide Plan identified \$179.5 million in needs, with \$121.1 million for capital improvements and \$58.4 million for land acquisitions to complete parks with master plans. As the cost of unaddressed needs mounted with each passing year, nudged along by 5% inflation, park system appropriations actually dropped from \$11.8 million in 1985 to \$2.1 million in 1993 (24). After 53 years of indifference followed by 26 years of inconsistency, the General Assembly turned the issue of state park funding over to the public in a November 1993 bond referendum. In a time of mounting taxpayer resentment toward government spending, the public approved the \$35 million state parks bond by a 56-44 margin and set the stage for the General Assembly's follow-through with a dedicated funding source in 1995.

"We were put on the bond at the very last minute," recalls Alcorn. "There had been a bond in the works in the General Assembly for universities, prisons and sewer systems, and at the last hour, they put us on the referendum. The standard wisdom around the country was that you needed about two years and \$2 million for a campaign to build awareness. We had about 12 weeks to build a case with the public, and no money. But two weeks before the elections - that period when politicians say everybody makes up their mind - there was quite a push in the media in terms of radio and TV, and an awful lot of things were done around the state at different parks to highlight needs. We had the second highest margin of victory of all the issues in that bond."

(1)

Presently, North Carolina's state parks system consists of 58 units, broken down as follows: State Parks (29), State Natural Areas (10), State Lakes (7), State Recreation Areas (4), State Rivers (4) and State Trails (4). Recently, the parks system got approval to purchase portions of Okameechee Mountain (near the Eno River) and Run Hill Dune (near Jockey's Ridge). These may become additional units to the system at some time in the future, but no land has been purchased at either site as of this writing. (1)

Even as it began emerging from another spell of insufficient funding, the parks system could point to a number of accomplishments made during the five years that followed passage of the State Parks Act. The Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Fund, set up in 1989 to disburse

funds from personalized license plate fees and deed transfer taxes to eligible state agencies, provided \$5.57 million in land-acquisition funding to state parks. Combined with dwindling federal LWCF grant money and yearly appropriations for land that ranged from nothing to \$1.6 million, the parks system acquired 80 tracts in 18 parks totaling 4,463 acres from 1988-93. In addition, field staff positions throughout the system were increased by 61%, and the creation of 24 new maintenance and 23 new clerk positions enabled park rangers to devote more time and attention to visitor services and environmental education (14).

4. The present and future of North Carolina state parks

While the parks system may be "poor no more," it faces a daunting backlog of needs. Nonetheless, the \$35 million in bond money - \$24.5 million earmarked for capital improvements and \$10.5 million for land acquisition - is already giving the park system a facelift. Unlike the \$25 million appropriation from the mid-1980s, the parks department was adequately staffed and prepared to oversee projects. "We have been gearing up, thinking one of these years, we're going to get the money," said planning head Alcorn. "We were doing design contracts, getting projects in place so that when the money came in, we didn't have a lag. We're in better shape for spending construction money." As for land acquisition, "Money for land is harder to spend, because we're involved in each negotiation." (1)

However, at no time have land acquisition needs been more thoroughly documented as they are at the present, with five-year General Management Plans prepared and approved for 17 state parks and overall Master Plans completed for 24 park units. (One of the latter, the State Lakes Master Plan, covers seven state-owned lakes in Bladen County.)

All the same, it will be many years before the park system reaches a point where it can claim existing and long-documented needs have been met. The \$35 million in bond money from 1993 and the \$10 million stopgap appropriation in 1995 bring the total "needs" amount down to roughly \$205 million. Annual revenue from the real estate transfer tax can be counted on to provide between \$5 and \$10 million. Over the last five years, the park system's operating budget

has averaged \$12.4 million. (27-31). That would leave a shortfall in future years of between \$2.4 million and \$7.4 million that must be made up by park revenues (\$2.26 million in FY 1994), federal funds (\$0.43 million in FY 1994), other sources (\$0.15 in FY 1994), and an annual appropriation from the state legislature. (27)

That is to say, even given the new, dedicated revenue stream, the General Assembly will still have to make a yearly appropriation just to meet an operating budget that's on par with the last five years. And that is without putting a further dent in the \$205 million in remaining needs for land acquisition and capital improvements. Then there's the matter of escalating land prices and inflation, which, for example, caused land values at several state parks that were studied to increase between 223% and 515% from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. (14)

All the while park visitation continues to grow, further straining operating budgets. Just as the total annual number of state park visitors rose by 58.3% between 1978 and 1987 (from 4.8 million to 7.58 million), visitation jumped by 57.9% between 1987 and 1995 (from 7.58 million to 11.97 million). (16) Attendance at state parks has been jumping by approximately 7% each year - a figure that must be taken into account by legislators when formulating appropriations. In 1990, for the first time, more North Carolinians lived in the city than the country. Parks become more important to maintain the quality of life, an admittedly intangible criteria, in an increasingly urbanized state like North Carolina. Park visitation has been growing roughly five times faster than the state's population. (14)

The next major funding issue to be brought before the General Assembly by the Division of Parks and Recreation is park staffing. "Really, staffing is where it's at when it comes to being able to protect the resource and to be able to interpret and educate the public as far as what North Carolina's natural heritage is all about," says planning head Alcorn. "If you don't have staff, that certainly doesn't happen as much. Public safety, too. That is harder to put a figure on, and it's also much less attractive to the legislature, so it will be a harder battle to fight.

"It's much more attractive for a legislator to be able to say, 'I've added this visitor center' or 'We added a thousand acres of most significant land to South Mountain State Park with this

money.' As opposed to saying, 'We've got two more rangers here.' It doesn't have the same ring. But it's very important. And that's the next priority.

"The thing we're trying to sell is that there should be one ranger on duty at all times the park is open to the public. I think the number is 26 or 28 positions that we need in order to do that. That's practically one position per park that we have open to the public. In most of our parks, there is typically somebody on duty to open and close the gates, but at some point during the day, there's nobody on duty. Just in terms of any part of our mission - natural resource management, interpretation and education of the public, public safety - there's nobody home. Those aren't getting done. One of our parks, Stone Mountain, is 13,000 acres, and we're trying for one person to be on duty." (1)

II. A COMPARATIVE LOOK AT PARK FUNDING IN NORTH CAROLINA AND 12 OTHER SOUTHEAST STATES

1. Statistical data on state parks: what is available and where it comes from

Data on state parks is collected and distributed by the National Association of State Park Directors (NASPD), an organization that was founded in 1961. The systematic compiling and publishing of statistical data pertaining to state parks systems has been undertaken each year since 1979. Data is provided to NASPD by parks departments in all 50 states. NASPD publishes an Annual Information Exchange, which contains raw tabulated data for a given fiscal year (July 1st - June 30th). No analysis or interpretation of data accompanies the report. The annual reports are distributed to parks directors and interested parties who request them. The tables contained in the last six annual reports provided raw data for much of the statistical analysis I've undertaken in this paper, particularly the 24 charts and 13 tables in the appendix.

The tables in each Annual Information Exchange are organized by the following headings:

Inventory - defined as "the real property assets of a state park system, i.e., the various areas of land and water managed directly by the state parks agency." (27). These are subdivided by unit type: state parks, state recreation areas, state forests, etc.

Facilities - "Man-made structures and improvements provided in state park areas to facilitate appropriate use of the parks by the visiting public." (27) These include campsites, cabins, lodges, restaurants, golf courses, marinas, etc.

Visitation and Use - Yearly attendance figures, broken down by day use and overnight stay.

Capital Outlay Progress - Consists of (a) new land acquisition (broken down into purchased land and donated or transferred land) and (b) new construction (what was spent on construction initiated that year).

Financing - Expenditures by state park systems are divided into two categories: (a) Operating Expenditures (operation and maintenance of state parks) and (b) Fixed Capital Outlay Expenditures (a combined figure for land acquisition, park construction and improvements to existing infrastructure). Both figures are broken down by funding source. In addition, user fees and revenue generated within parks are given in this section.

Personnel - Number of staff positions, by "professionals" and "other staff," further subdivided into "full-time," "part-time" and "seasonal" employees. Also, salary ranges and employee benefits are given.

2. Kentucky and North Carolina: a case study of per capita funding

One of the more commonly cited statistics derived from NASPD data is per capita funding of state parks. It is not a statistic that can be found in the Annual Information Exchange, but is rather a popular "yardstick" figure computed by parties interested in tracking state-park expenditures for whatever reason: journalists, parks advocacy groups, academics, politicians and parks administrators. It is computed by dividing a state's total operating expenditures (found in Table V, Part A of each NASPD Annual Operating Exchange) by its population. Per capita funding, based on operating expenditures, is arguably the best way to gauge how much a state is spending on its parks relative to its population.

"Operating expenditures are fairly stable," notes Ney Landrum, executive director of the National Association of State Park Directors. "They're built on the same base each year." (22) The other component on the expenditures list, Fixed Capital Outlays, tends to fluctuate from year to year and is therefore not as reliable an indicator. "A state will spend a lot of money for a few years, buying land and building facilities, and then they'll have a dry spell, whereas other states might come in at that time," notes Landrum. "So it's hard to draw much of a comparison from those unless you average over a long period of time." (22)

Per capita spending on state parks, as computed from operating expenditures, is a useful comparative statistic that conveys part, but by no means all, of the picture. Because each

park system has its own defined mission, and these missions involve vastly different levels of funding and revenue generation, it is not entirely fair or accurate to compare, for instance, Kentucky (which routinely tops the list of states) with North Carolina (which typically finishes at or near the bottom). In FY 1990, Kentucky spent \$15.00 per capita on its state parks, while North Carolina spent \$1.38. That year, on a per capita basis, Kentucky's operating budget for parks was larger than North Carolina's by more than an order of magnitude. Does that mean Kentucky's parks were ten times as well-tended or inviting to visitors? The answer is no - at least not to that degree.

Kentucky's parks system largely consists of developed resort parks intended to bolster the economy of the state. Each of its 15 state parks has a lodge, restaurant, golf course, swimming pool and marina. Its operating budget is high: \$59.5 million in FY 1994, representing expenditures on 15 state parks, 22 recreation areas and 10 historic areas. But so is its revenue - \$42.0 million for the same year - which is largely returned to the parks. Kentucky's parks system is largely self-financing, with high per capita figures reflecting revenues from park users that have been reappropriated for operating expenses. In the final analysis, Kentucky's parks system is more user-funded than taxpayer-funded. In FY 1994, 68.3% of its operating expenditures (\$40.6 million) came from revenue (see Fig. 22), while 31.7% (\$18.8 million) was appropriated from the general fund. That legislative appropriation was only \$7.7 million more than North Carolina's General Assembly appropriated for its parks in FY 1994, so the gulf between the 1st and 47th states, in terms of per capita spending, is not as great as it might first appear.

Given the ideological differences in management philosophy between the two park systems, that apparent gulf (as gauged by per capita funding) might shrink still further. North Carolina, by contrast to Kentucky, is more of a resource-preservation oriented system. It is philosophically constrained from intensive development of its parks by its stated mission, which, first and foremost, is "to conserve and protect representative examples of the natural beauty, ecological features and recreational resources of statewide significance." (14) Bayard Alcom, chief planner for North Carolina's parks system, noted: "There are differences in park systems,

and it's pretty much dictated by enabling legislation. North Carolina is very much a natural resource-oriented park system. In some ways, we really don't want to be at the top of the list [of per capita spending]."

On a practical level, the parks system has been financially constrained from development by its tattered funding history. At least one vocal parks advocate, the late Margaret Nygard, executive director of the Eno River Association, felt that the system actually benefited from being ignored. "I think it's a fine, magnificent system of state parks," Nygard said in 1987. "There is a kind of simplicity to them. They're not overdeveloped." (3)

She might have been pleased to learn that, even with the recent surge in funding, North Carolina will not likely advance far up the list of states in terms of per capita spending. "We found that it would be almost a factor of doubling or tripling our budget just to get up to the national medium," planning chief Alcorn observed. In FY 1994, for example, North Carolina would have had to increase its operating expenditures by 220% to reach the national average of \$4.78 spent per capita on state parks. "Although it might seem like a fair amount of money with the bond and these other issues, on a per capita basis, it's not that big a bone," Alcorn added. "It will make a difference. It may not make as big a difference as we would like to hope."

The other side of Nygard's defense of the benign-neglect approach to the parks system was articulated in a 1995 editorial by Albert E. Radford, a former UNC-CH biology professor and co-author of a book on North Carolina parks. While making the case that "recreation has priority over preservation" in North Carolina's parks, Radford raised a disturbing point: not only has North Carolina historically not spent much money on its parks, but the bulk of its current efforts are directed at making them more appealing to recreationists and not preserving the resource base.

"Not a single unique or representative biological, geological, archaeological, recreational or scenic resource is properly protected and managed in any natural area in the entire state parks system of North Carolina," Radford contended. "The Division of Parks and Recreation...is providing justification for disturbance, damage and destruction of significant natural resources in

dedicated state nature preserves, registered natural heritage areas and national natural landmarks. It gives priority to construction, public access, public health and public safety over proper protection, responsible management and compatible use of significant biologic, geologic, archeologic, scenic and recreational resources in the natural areas of the park system. Why can't the potential for the renowned state parks system in North Carolina be realized with checks and balances between recreationists, conservationists and environmentalists?" (33)

In summary, it can be argued that the gulf separating the most highly funded state parks system in the country (Kentucky) from one of the lowest (North Carolina) is somewhat illusory. And yet the two systems in reality do exist at opposite ends of the spectrum, both in terms of funding and ideology. North Carolina has a resource preservation-oriented parks system, while Kentucky's is resort-oriented. Between these two extremes lies a vast middle ground of states whose parks programs are more evenly balanced between resource preservation and public recreation missions. Toward the middle of the list, states tend to provide the public with opportunities for outdoor recreation, as opposed to resort amenities, a la Kentucky, and are more aggressive about land acquisition than North Carolina, despite its specified mission of resource preservation.

As magnificent as its inventory of state parks and natural areas most certainly is, North Carolina's parks system has suffered from decades of neglect and it will take decades to reach a state of adequacy, as defined by parks system master plans. "We're still talking about 40 years or more to do what we want to do right now, and that's if nothing breaks or wears out," parks director Phil McKnelly said in 1993, days before the passage of the bond issue. "The bottom line is, in a system that's been in place for 75 years and with 75 years of not getting adequate funds, it won't be fixed overnight. It's not going to happen as fast as anybody would like to see it happen, but we are making progress." (21)

Despite the vision and determination of its present administration, the Division of Parks and Recreation must overcome 80 years of inertia. Asked to offer guidelines by which a state's stewardship of its parks can be assessed, NASPD executive director Ney Landrum replied: "I'm

not sure the raw data will help very much. You've got to look at the mission statement and the philosophy and policy guidance that comes from the top office; the traditions that have been established in the state for the state park system; and what type of training and indoctrination they give their personnel.

"It comes down to a question of philosophy and direction, on the one hand, and wherewithal in terms of money and staff, on the other hand. One sets the direction, and the other implements it. You can't do without both."

3. Per capita funding of state parks during the 1990s: the big picture

Statistical comparisons among states in terms of per capita funding of parks can be found in Figs. 1 through 12 and Tables 2, 3 and 4. I will summarize and interpret my findings here and in the following sections. Many of the tables compare states in the Southeast, which I've defined as the following 13 states: Alabama (AL), Arkansas (AR), Florida (FL), Georgia (GA), Kentucky (KY), Louisiana (LA), Maryland (MD), Mississippi (MS), North Carolina (NC), South Carolina (SC), Tennessee (TN), Virginia (VA) and West Virginia (WV). In addition, I've frequently calculated means for the Southeast (SE) as a region and the United States (US) as a whole.

Table 2 and Figs. 8 and 9 examine per capita spending on state parks across the nation in 1993-94. They were computed from raw data in the NASPD'S 1995's Annual Information Exchange (the most recent data set available) by dividing operating expenditures by population. North Carolina spent \$2.10 per resident on its parks in FY 1994, which ranked 47th in the nation and 12th among the 13 Southeast states. Kentucky led the nation in per capita spending (\$16.14), for reasons explained in the preceding section. The national average for per capita spending on state parks was \$4.78; the figure was 14.6% greater in the Southeast, at \$5.48. West Virginia, with a resort-park system very much like Kentucky's, ranked second both in the nation and the Southeast, at \$13.92. Except for Delaware (\$12.44) and South Dakota (\$10.13), no other state spent more than \$10 per capita on its parks in 1993-94.

The difference between Kentucky's top figure (\$16.14) and Louisiana's bottom (\$1.63) is very nearly an order of magnitude. Clumping states at two-dollar intervals yielded the breakdown in Table 12.

I calculated the standard deviation for the data set in Table 2 to be \$2.38. The range for one standard deviation from the national mean of \$4.79 was between \$2.41 and \$7.17. Thirty-two states fell within one standard deviation of the mean, 14 states (including North Carolina) fall within two standard deviations, and 4 states (all at the high end) fall within three standard deviations. If the four states at the top of the list - Kentucky, West Virginia, Delaware and South Dakota - are regarded as outliers and discarded from the list, mean per capita funding in the remaining 46 states drops from \$4.79 to 4.06. That figure is probably a more realistic one for a state trying to gauge its ranking relative to a practicable national mean in the mid-1990s.

4. Demographic trends in the Southeast

Demographically, the Southeast as a region grew faster than the rest of the country during the 1980s. The population of the 13 Southeast states increased by 12.6% during that decade, while the U.S. as a whole grew by 8.9%. (See Table 1.) This relative increase in population mitigates the proportionally greater spending on state parks in the Southeast. In other words, although the Southeast states spent 14.6% more per capita than the national average on parks in 1993-94, the region's population grew at a rate that was 29.2% greater than the national average in the previous decade. Using figures from the 1990 census, the 13 Southeast states accounted for slightly more than one-fourth (25.7%) of the nation's population. The four most populous Southeast states - in order, Florida, North Carolina, Georgia and Virginia - accounted for approximately half (50.3%) of the region's population and slightly more than one-eighth (13.0%) of the nation's population. As a whole, the Southeast's population increased by 7,166,085 during the 1980s.

North Carolina, the tenth most populous state in the U.S., grew by 12.7% during the decade - a rate virtually identical to the Southeast as a whole. It was the fifth fastest-growing of

the 13 Southeast States. One point to ponder, given its existing population and rate of growth, is that North Carolina can ill afford to neglect its state parks as it has in the past. In fact, their role in the state's economy should not be underestimated. According to a business short in the Raleigh News and Observer (dated January 19, 1996), preliminary statistics reveal that tourism accounted for more than \$8 billion worth of business in North Carolina in 1995. The top attraction was the Blue Ridge Parkway, while North Carolina State Parks placed second, ahead of Great Smoky Mountains National Park - the most heavily visited National Park in the nation.

5. Per capita funding: a five-year overview

Tables 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 chart per capita funding in Southeast state parks in each of the last five years for which data is available (FY 1990 through FY 1994). Per capita spending in the Southeast as a region and the U.S. as a whole rose by 15.9% (\$0.53) and 12.2% (\$0.52), respectively, during the five-year period. North Carolina's per capita spending increased by 52.2% (\$0.72), a statistic that should be put in context. That is, North Carolina started from a low figure (\$1.38 per capita in FY 1990). Though it finished markedly higher (\$2.10 in FY 1994), the state still spent less than half of the national mean and barely 38% of the mean in the Southeast. Over the five-year period, North Carolina ranked 11th twice and 12th on three occasions among the 13 Southeast states. Averaged over five years (Fig. 6), North Carolina finished next to last, ahead of only Louisiana in terms of per capita spending on state parks, based on operating expenditures.

6. Fixed capital outlay expenditures: another gauge of per capita spending

The other element in the expenditures equation is fixed capital outlay. Since this figure is less stable from year to year than operating expenditures, reflecting intermittent "spikes" in appropriations for land acquisition, new construction and capital improvements, it is not an accurate gauge of per capita spending on parks unless averaged over time (22). I have calculated total fixed capital outlay expenditures for the five-year period, FY 1990 through FY

1994, used in the above discussion of operating expenditures. Total fixed capital outlays expenditures in each state over the five-year period were summed (Table 3 and Fig. 10) and then converted into a per capita figure by dividing that sum by five and dividing again by the state's population (Fig. 11).

In terms of total outlays, Alabama finished at the bottom (\$0.46 million), while Maryland ranked at the top (\$67.9 million). North Carolina finished 7th among the 13th states (\$17.2 million), a higher placement than in previous tables but well below the top six states. A gulf of \$10.9 million separated North Carolina from the next position on the list, 6th-ranked Georgia (\$28.1 million). When total fixed capital outlay expenditures were translated into an average annual per capita figure, North Carolina dropped down to 12th place among the 13 Southeast States. North Carolina spent an average of \$0.52 per person per year on fixed capital outlay expenditures. That figure amounted to 41.6% of the regional mean of \$1.25. Alabama finished last, with what appears to be a severely under-capitalized program (2 cents per person, per year spent on fixed capital outlays from FY 1990 to FY 1994).

Kentucky placed first (\$2.99) - an unsurprising fact, given the capital-intensive nature of its parks system. Close behind were Maryland (\$2.84) and South Carolina (\$2.60), representing per capita expenditures for land acquisition, new construction and capital improvements that outdistanced all other Southeast states by a wide margin.

The parks expenditures picture comes into even clearer focus in Table 4 and Fig. 12, which combine average annual per capita expenditures on operations and fixed capital outlays into a single comprehensive measure of per capita spending on state parks over the most recent five-year period for which data is available (FY 1990 through FY 1994). Here, North Carolina finishes dead last among the 13 Southeast states, outspent even by Louisiana (by a margin of \$2.32 to \$2.24). The average annual per capita spending mean for total park expenditures in the Southeast during the first half of the 1990s was \$7.20. North Carolina's per capita figure (\$2.24) was not even one-third of that. North Carolina and Louisiana trailed the 11th state on the list, Florida (\$4.27), by nearly half in both cases. The standard deviation for this statistic was \$2.96.

Four of the 13 states fell more than one standard deviation away from the \$7.20 mean: Kentucky (\$18.60) and West Virginia (\$14.02) at the high end, and Louisiana and North Carolina on the bottom.

7. State parks visitation

While North Carolina's parks system finished last, on a per capita basis, in terms of total average annual expenditures among the 13 Southeast states between FY 1990 and FY 1994, it was the fifth most visited system in the region. NASPD data for 1993-94 shows that North Carolina's parks were visited by 11.3 million people. According to preliminary figures from the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, 12.0 million people visited North Carolina's state parks during the 1995 calendar year (16), offering further evidence of rapidly increasing numbers. Tennessee state parks were the most heavily visited in the Southeast in 1993-94 (29.7 million), followed by Kentucky (28.9 million). It was then a steep drop to the third state on the list, Georgia (15.7 million), followed by Florida (11.9 million) and North Carolina (11.3 million).

To put these figures in a more useful context, I've ranked them in Table 13 according to their visitation-to-population ratio (using 1993-94 visitation data and 1990 census data). A primary mission of most state park systems is to provide recreational opportunities to their resident populations. The visitation/population ratio can be interpreted as a general measure of park usage by resident populations, expressing some combination of demand, popularity and visitor satisfaction.

When a visitation-to-population (V/P) ratio is relatively high (>1.5) and a state spends more than the regional average per capita on its parks, I would argue that the system is heavily visited because it is popular and meets visitor needs and expectations. When a V/P ratio is greater than 1.5 and a state spends significantly less per capita on its parks than the regional average, I would argue that its parks system probably experiences high demand by residents for recreation opportunities and a budget that may not be able to adequately meet that demand.

Three states in Table 13 - Mississippi, Georgia and North Carolina - fall into that category. North

Carolina has the widest gap of any Southeast state between its V/P ratio ranking (8th) and its ranking in terms of total average annual per capita spending on parks (13th).

It is, moreover, interesting to note that while North Carolina's parks ranked fifth in the Southeast in terms of overall visitation in 1993-94, the rankings change when that figure is broken down into "day use" and "overnight stay." North Carolina moves up to fourth place in terms of day-use visitation (10.9 million), surpassing Florida (10.8 million). However, North Carolina falls to last place in overnight stays (0.37 million). North Carolina's parks system, according to NASPD data, offers 2,440 improved and 246 primitive campsites in 19 park units. As far as more developed overnight accommodations, the entire system offers 12 cabins in two parks, no lodges and one restaurant.

Another way to interpret visitation is by computing the amount spent by a given state on each park visitor in a given year. That information appears in Fig. 14, which divides operating expenditures by total park visitors for 1993-94. Again, North Carolina places last on the list, spending an average of \$1.24 per state visitor. Curiously, perennial last-place finisher Louisiana tops the list, spending an average of \$5.05 per state park visitor. Alabama finishes a close second, at \$4.91. Tennessee and North Carolina finish at the bottom, but Tennessee's low ranking can be explained by its extremely high visitation figures, which are nearly three times that of North Carolina's.

8. Percent of state budget devoted to state parks

Louisiana returned to the bottom of the list on this measure of parks system operating expenditures as a percentage of a state's entire budget in 1993-94 (Fig. 15). North Carolina finished 12th among the 13 Southeast states. Kentucky and West Virginia topped the list, respectively. The difference between first place (Kentucky, 0.65%) and last (Louisiana, 0.06%) was one order of magnitude. North Carolina's state park operating expenditures represented 0.1% of the state's budget, tying North Dakota and Connecticut for third lowest in the U.S. Only Arizona (0.9%) and Louisiana (0.6) spent proportionally less.

9. State park expenditures as a function of acreage

Comparing operating expenditures with land holdings in a parks system may be another means of assessing whether a given system is adequately funded. Table 7 gives total parks-system acreage per state, while Fig. 9 charts dollars spent per acre of state parkland, based on operating expenses in 1993-94. With \$94 spent per acre, Florida finished at the bottom of the list, no doubt due to the enormity of its land holdings. At 432,879 acres, Florida owns 1.8 times as much parkland as the state with the next largest holdings, which is Maryland (242,513 acres). At 135,922 acres, North Carolina's parks system is the third largest in the Southeast and ranked 12th in terms of dollars spent per acre (\$103). Kentucky, with relatively small land holdings (42,594 acres) and a massive operating budget, greatly exceeded all other Southeast states, spending an average of \$1,396 per acre in 1993-94.

With more detailed information, a more sophisticated analysis of this statistic might examine dollar-per-acre expenditures within bonafide state parks only, separating out natural areas, state forests, fish and wildlife areas, etc., which account for considerable acreage while consuming relatively little in the way of operating expenses. However, as is, this statistic can still serve as a useful measure of priorities, when considered in context and alongside all the other statistics offered in this report.

10. State park revenue relative to operating costs

This comparison between revenue taken in by parks and outgoing expenditures on operations essentially measures to what degree a parks system is self-supporting. I've computed it by dividing total revenue from all parks operations - entrance fees, camping, cabins/cottages, lodges, group facilities, restaurants, concessions, beaches/pools, golf and other revenue sources (figures found in Table V, Section E of NASPD's Annual Information Exchange - by total operating expenditures.

The system that comes closest to paying its own way is Alabama, where total revenue is 83.5% of operating expenditures. Kentucky (70.7%) and West Virginia (65%) follow. Perhaps surprisingly, South Carolina's park system generates a revenue-to-expenditures figure of 64.2%, which comes very close to that of West Virginia, a resort-park system. At the bottom of the list is North Carolina, where revenues are only 16.2% of expenditures. The average in the Southeast is 55%, and somewhat lower across the U.S. as a whole at 44.8%.

It should be noted that North Carolina's parks system has traditionally eschewed entrance fees, at least in part because it's felt that residents have already paid for the parks with state taxes and are therefore entitled to use them without additional charge. In that sense, there is no disgrace in being last on the list in terms of revenue collection relative to operating expenditures. However, it should be added that in this decade the state has studied the feasibility of charging entrance fees and found it impractical because of collection expenses and the condition of the parks. (1, 14)

Twenty-four other state parks systems are free, or close to it, charging residents \$2 or less per passenger vehicle or adult individual at the gate. (27) To put it another way, exactly half the state parks systems in the country are free or very inexpensive.

III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. North Carolina state parks: down at the bottom, but looking up

As was demonstrated in the previous section, North Carolina finishes last or close to it when put to just about any statistical test one can think of involving per capita expenditures on state parks. The following table summarizes the state's ranking among the 13 Southeast states on various spending-related indices:

Statistical Measure	Rank
Per capita spending, FY 1994, based on operating expenditures	12
Per capita spending, FY 1993, based on operating expenditures	11
Per capita spending, FY 1992, based on operating expenditures	12
Per capita spending, FY 1991, based on operating expenditures	11
Per capita spending, FY 1990, based on operating expenditures	12
Per capita spending, averaged from FY 1990 - FY 1994, based on operating expenditures	12
Per capita spending, FY 1994, adjusted for estimated population change since 1990 census	12
Per capita spending, averaged from FY 1990 - FY 1994, based on fixed capital outlay expenditures	12
Per capita spending, averaged from FY 1990 - FY 1994, based on operating expenditures and fixed capital outlays combined	13
Amount spent per state park visitor, FY 1994, based on operating expenditures	13
Percent of state budget devoted to state parks, FY 1994, based on operating expenditures	12
Dollars spent per acre of state parkland, FY 1994, based on operating expenditures	12
State park revenue as a percentage of operating expenditures, FY 1994	13

Much has happened since and even during 1993-94 to brighten the funding picture for North Carolina's parks system. The \$35 million state parks bond issue passed in November 1993, and the General Assembly unanimously approved funneling the state's share of the real-estate transfer tax into the newly created Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. According to an appropriative formula, 48.75% of that transfer tax will go to state parks, 25% to the Natural Heritage Trust Fund, 22.5% to local government parks and recreation departments, and 3.75% to the Coastal Beach Access Program. The trust fund begins accruing in July 1996. Estimates of what the transfer tax will yield on a yearly basis to the Trust Fund range from \$10 million to \$21

(6, 18), which works out to between \$5 million and \$10 million annually for state parks. North Carolina joins four other Southeast states - Arkansas, Florida, Maryland and Tennessee - that receive dedicated funding from the real-estate transfer tax (18).

The danger facing North Carolina's parks system is that it could encounter another period of legislative laxity, based on the supposition that the parks funding problem has been "solved." If it is assumed that the real estate transfer tax will pump between \$5 and \$10 million to state parks, that is still only an additional \$0.75 to \$1.50 per capita - that is, provided other sources of funding, including annual appropriations from the state legislature, are held constant. The \$35 million in bond money in 1993 and \$10 million appropriation in 1995 are a welcome shot in the arm, but they go only 18% of the way toward addressing longstanding needs for land acquisition, new construction and capital improvement in the parks system, currently estimated at \$250 million (14).

2. Volunteerism and corporate partnerships

Volunteerism is one way in which parks needs are being addressed at no cost to the parks system or the state. At Merchants Millpond - to cite one example of a state park with which I am personally familiar - new construction, repairs and tree-planing programs have been undertaken by local businesses, private citizens and school groups in recent years. These volunteer-made improvements are complemented by an attractive, modern new visitor center built with park funds. In many ways, the park appears to be in good shape these days. At the same time, overgrown, unsigned hiking paths trail off to nowhere and a thick skin of duckweed, triggered by uncontrolled agricultural runoff, cover the millpond itself, so much remains to be done. An additional 807 acres is needed to protect Lassiter Swamp and better preserve water quality in the millpond. Such a purchase would enlarge the park by 28%.

The Division of Parks and Recreation has initiated public-private partnerships with companies such as Carolina Power & Light, which became the first corporate sponsor in the nation to adopt a state park system, providing a \$144,000 grant for a four-year pilot program.

Between 1988-93, the Division's Volunteer Program logged 190,000 worker hours, worth an estimated \$1,235,000 (14). Creative solutions such as these are a sign of the times, in which budgets for such "non-essential services" as parks are shrinking at all levels of government.

3. The next challenge: staffing and operations

However, the North Carolina state legislature cannot now afford, as it has throughout much of this century, to pass the buck to "public spirited citizens" when it comes to meeting basic obligations to its parks system. After nearly eight decades of benign neglect, the General Assembly has finally addressed its ailing parks system in a serious way. Phil McKnelly, director of the Division of Parks and Recreation, called the establishment of the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund in 1995 "the most important piece of legislation in the history of the state parks system." (13) However, the overall backlog of needs and problems will not be solved with one piece of legislation. Putting North Carolina's parks system on track will, quite simply, take many years and a protracted commitment that goes beyond the commendable first steps of a major bond issue and a dedicated funding source.

In the words of parks planner Bayard Alcorn, "Park funding is a three-legged stool. You need land acquisitions to protect the resource; you need capital improvements to allow people to visit the parks and be able to handle the use without damaging the resource; and you need personnel and operating funds to manage it. The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund has hit a home run on the first two of those. Operations is our next challenge...We need to be aware that it takes people to run the parks."

4: Summary and recommendations

How did North Carolina get into the practice of ignoring its parks in the first place? As I see it, there was a negative precedent of underfunding and inattention established early in the park system's history that was perpetuated throughout most of this century. Only recently have

long-term commitments been made by the General Assembly to establish state parks on a sound, stable and consistent funding basis.

There are three distinct stages in the history of North Carolina's parks system. The first was a period of benign neglect that lasted from the system's founding in 1915 (with the acquisition of Mount Mitchell, the first state park in the Southeast) until 1969 (at which point the state authorized a meager appropriation of \$24,500 for land acquisition at Carolina Beach State Park). During that period, which spans six decades, state government basically handed over responsibility for the growth and development of the parks system to "public spirited citizens." This philosophy was consistent with the historically conservative outlook of the General Assembly in North Carolina, which did not regard the use of public funds for parks and recreation as a legitimate or necessary obligation.

This was followed by a transitional quarter century of stewardship, lasting from 1970 to 1994, during which needs of the state park system were addressed, albeit on an inconsistent and sporadic basis. The early 1970s was a time of heightened environmental awareness on the part of the public that translated into state and federal government initiatives in the environmental realm. As a result of the burgeoning environmental movement, North Carolina's legislators finally began paying attention to the degraded conditions of its parks and recognized the enormous backlog of needs and liabilities. It was also acknowledged that the system needed to expand in order to keep pace with population growth and resident demands for outdoor recreation in an increasingly urbanized state.

On the positive side, the number of units in the park system doubled during the 1970s. State Parks Study Commissions issued studies and made recommendations in 1985, 1987 and 1989. The first attempt at a comprehensive systemwide plan appeared in 1988. However, the momentum throughout the 1970s and 1980s was halting and inconsistent. The General Assembly passed whopping appropriations in some years (i.e., \$25 million for land acquisition in 1986 and 1987) and meager or nonexistent appropriations in other years (no money was appropriated for land acquisition in 1980, 1982, 1983 and 1985).

The passage of the State Parks Act of 1987 appeared to signal a long-term commitment to the parks system by explicitly defining the role of state parks and affirming the principle that it is legal, proper and necessary to allocate tax dollars to the parks system to meet its defined mission. However, in the wake of the State Parks Act's passage, those words were not backed up with adequate funding appropriations or revenue streams. Meanwhile, the parks continued to languish in an increasing state of disrepair. The second Systemwide Plan for the North Carolina State Parks System, issued in 1994, identified a \$248.6 million backlog of existing needs for capital improvements and land acquisition.

The third stage in the history of North Carolina state parks commenced in 1995 with the passage of legislation allocating the state's share of the real-estate transfer tax to the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. This was a historic moment for the parks system, since it represented the first dedicated funding source for state parks in the system's 80-year history. It has been estimated that the park system's share of this windfall will average between \$5 million and \$10 million.

The arrival of a stable, consistent source of funding for capital improvements, land acquisition and planning - supplemented by a one-time \$10 million appropriation in 1994 and the passage of a \$35 million state-park bond issue in 1993 - will go a long way toward addressing the system's most pressing needs. It is an encouraging new beginning that augurs well for the park system's future. But will it go far enough, given needs that have been estimated at nearly a quarter of a billion dollars? And what can be done to make certain that North Carolina's state parks continue to remain a priority with the General Assembly and the citizens of North Carolina?

I would offer the following recommendations to ensure that the parks system continues to receive adequate funding and oversight so that it can prosper in the coming decades while maintaining its essential character as a natural resource-oriented park system:

Build broad-based support for state parks by forming a coalition of citizen and corporate advocates. The passage of the park-funding bill in 1995 was due in large measure to the vocal and broad-based support that the bill received from more than 200 organizations

across the state. These ranged from business groups to environmental organizations. Everyone could see some benefit in a healthy state parks system. This consensus would continue to benefit state parks if it were organized into a high-profile advocacy group serving as a watchdog for state parks and commanding the ear of the General Assembly when needed. The North Carolina State Zoo, for instance, has a development support group that includes influential citizens and powerful corporations such as Food Lion, RJR and Hardee's. The state-park equivalent, Friends of the State Parks, is composed of knowledgeable and committed citizen advocates but lacks the same sort of high-profile clout.

Exercise and pursue the fundraising option built into authorizing legislation for the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. In addition to land acquisition and capital improvements, money that is funneled to the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation from the state's share of the real-estate transfer tax via the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund can be allocated to "receive public and private donations; solicit financial and material support; develop effective public and private support for the programs and operations of the park and recreation areas...." This would seem to offer the opportunity to set up a fundraising mechanism for state parks. A well-managed fundraising campaign could provide additional revenue that would allow the park system to be brought to a condition of adequacy more quickly than the 40-year time frame projected by state-parks director Phil McNally at present funding levels. There is a matter of urgency in all this and much in the way of benefits to be obtained by addressing systemic needs. Public-spirited individuals and corporations in North Carolina would no doubt be willing to contribute to the cause of improving our long-neglected state parks.

Make sure that park funding for acquisition and improvements includes adequate funding for administration of those funds. Back in 1986-87, the General Assembly authorized \$25 million for land acquisition for state parks but not a dime to create additional positions to deal with the enormous administrative burden of overseeing the identification, purchasing and acquisition of land tracts. In effect, the money was allocated but the means of spending it was denied. As a result, appropriations for land acquisition shrank back down to nothing by 1989.

That issue was addressed with the 1995 park-funding bill, which authorizes the Division of Parks and Recreation to spend up to 3% to administer the money. Even so, the possibility exists that this is an insufficient amount, considering that it must go toward planning and overseeing land acquisition and construction projects, as well as preparing the necessary environmental assessment documents. In addition, that 3% must also cover funding to administer the local-government share of the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and to plan, support and oversee quarterly meetings of the trust fund board. Considering how high administrative overheads run in the business world, these administrative tasks seem like a lot to accomplish with only 3% of the budget, and the progress of needed projects could mire in an administrative morass caused by underfunding. At the very least, the General Assembly should be willing to revisit the issue and increase the percentage allowed for project administration should 3% prove insufficient.

Consider instituting entrance fees in at least some state parks. The prevailing argument is that because North Carolinians are already subsidizing state parks with their tax money, they shouldn't have to pay again at the gate. However, because funding levels have been so historically low in North Carolina - a state that for decades has routinely finished 49th or 50th in the nation in terms of per capita spending on its parks - this argument is a weak one. It would stand to reason that at least some of the cost of maintenance and improvements of parks should be born by park users. Given that the parks system faces \$248.6 million in documented needs and that a revenue stream of only \$5 million to \$10 million per year will be coming from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, it would seem reasonable to charge entrance fees where feasible and dedicate that money to improvements and acquisition in state parks. Charging fees, especially at some of the more popular parks, would have additional benefits. For one, it would cut down on the incidence of people who drive through with the intent to vandalize. For another, it would cut down on overcrowding and the stresses it places on facilities and the resource base. Of course, charging entrance fees involves expenditures such as a gate, kiosk and personnel. In situations where it is justified and profitable, North Carolina should not hesitate to assess modest entrance fees, such as the \$2.50-\$3.50 per car levied at most Florida state parks. Already, the

state charges user fees at its reservoirs, per its contract with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. I cannot see why this program shouldn't be selectively extended to state parks as well.

Market the state park system more aggressively. It is safe to say that with so many pressing issues competing for tax dollars, yearly appropriations from the General Assembly for the parks system are not likely to increase in the foreseeable future, especially since a dedicated revenue stream was approved in 1995. The parks system could both raise money and public awareness by marketing itself with the sale of items based around the state park theme. The California State Parks System, for example, has very successfully addressed revenue needs in a time of shrinking state budgets by operating a state parks "store" via a catalog and 800 number. Everything from items of clothing and coffee mugs to state parks guidebooks and trail maps are sold. While North Carolina's state parks still have a long ways to go, they are steadily improving and could be successfully marketed in this fashion at some appropriate point in the future.

Expand the state park system. One way to insure continued support for state parks among the voting public is to make sure they are geographically distributed across the state. That is not currently the case. The park system has been growing sluggishly, with only one new state park (Lumber River) having been added since 1988. Meanwhile, some of the most heavily populated counties in the state, such as Guilford and Mecklenberg, have no state parks in them. None of the dozen counties that lie west of Mount Mitchell have a state park. The north-central Piedmont is under-represented. Of the 18 counties that border South Carolina, only one has a state park - a situation that might be sending resident recreational dollars over the state line. The general population and the legislators who represent them are more likely to take up the cause of parks if one is situated closer to home.

Build an environmental-education center at every park at which it is feasible to do so. It is essential to educate the next generation about the natural-resource heritage of the state in which they live. This duty is spelled out in the State Parks System Mission Statement as one of three defined missions: i.e., "to provide environmental education opportunities that promote stewardship of the state's natural heritage." However, very few state parks are presently

equipped with adequate indoor facilities for interpretation and educational programming - to say nothing of the \$28,000 in estimated audio-visual equipment needs per visitor center across the parks system. (14) All the same, this is an extremely important area of park operations that has been almost totally neglected over the decades for lack of personnel, facilities, materials and will. In the words of Jim Stevens, a former state parks director and current president of Friends of State Parks, "Every state park needs an environmental education center that becomes an outdoor classroom for young people. We will have a better population respecting state parks if we get them at the school age, bring them out and teach them the value of natural resources and the role they play in everyday life." (37)

Stay out of the resort park business. North Carolina's mission statement is clear in its stated goal of preserving the state's natural resource heritage and educating the public about it. Several states, notably Kentucky and West Virginia, have turned their state parklands into developed resorts for a variety of reasons. There is no need to do so in North Carolina. In fact, ever-encroaching developmental pressures upon the state reinforce the need for more land and resource preservation. There are no lack of commercial resorts to be found across North Carolina. What the citizens of this state need more of is recreational greenspace and environmental education, so that natural-resource preservation becomes a value ingrained in the populace in order to provide a fitting legacy to future generations. While the clamor to build state-park resorts - complete with golf courses, marinas and/or ski lifts, plus conspicuous lodge and restaurant buildings - may grow, these would necessarily obscure the resource-preservation and environmental-education missions of the state parks system.

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APPENDIX 1:

TABLES

Table 1. Population of Southeast States, 1990

State	Population (1990)	National Population Ranking	% Change in Population, 1980-90	Rank in % Change, Southeast and U.S.
Florida	12,937,926	4	32.7	1 (4)
North Carolina	6,628,637	10	12.7	5 (16)
Georgia	6,478,216	11	18.6	2 (8)
Virginia	6,187,358	12	15.7	3 (12)
Tennessee	4,877,185	17	6.2	7 (24)
Maryland	4,781,468	19	13.4	4 (15)
Louisiana	4,218,973	21	0.3	12 (44)
Alabama	4,040,587	22	3.8	8 (33)
Kentucky	3,685,296	23	0.7	11 (40)
South Carolina	3,486,703	25	11.7	6 (18)
Mississippi	2,573,216	31	2.1	10 (36)
Arkansas	2,350,725	33	2.8	9 (34)
West Virginia	1,793,477	34	-8.0	13 (50)
Southeast States	64,039,767		12.6	
Other States	184,670,106		8.9	
United States	248,102,973		9.8	

Source: Bureau of the Census

Table 2: Per Capita Spending on State Parks by State, in Dollars, 1993-94
(Based on Operating Expenditures)

State	State Park Operating Expenditures (1993-94)	Population (1990 Census)	Per Capita Spending on State Parks
Alabama	30,371,501	4,040,587	7.52
Alaska	5,202,977	550,043	9.46
Arizona	7,442,142	3,665,228	2.03
Arkansas	22,253,692	2,350,725	9.47
California	164,408,000	29,760,021	5.52
Colorado	13,521,688	3,294,394	4.10
Connecticut	9,772,000	3,287,116	2.97
Delaware	8,284,600	666,168	12.44
Florida	40,474,515	12,937,926	3.13
Georgia	38,688,355	6,478,216	5.97
Hawaii	7,808,090	1,108,229	7.05
Idaho	5,778,990	1,006,749	5.74
Illinois	29,996,300	11,430,602	2.62
Indiana	12,555,149	5,544,159	2.26
Iowa	8,500,000	2,776,755	3.06
Kansas	8,338,806	2,477,574	3.37
Kentucky	59,470,872	3,685,296	16.14
Louisiana	6,878,094	4,219,973	1.63
Maine	4,497,749	1,227,928	3.66
Maryland	25,708,160	4,781,468	5.38
Massachusetts	37,710,435	6,016,425	6.27
Michigan	30,681,700	9,295,297	3.30
Minnesota	20,231,700	4,375,099	4.62
Mississippi	13,363,631	2,573,216	5.19
Missouri	17,671,142	5,117,073	3.45
Montana	4,371,516	799,065	5.47
Nebraska	10,247,578	1,578,385	6.49
Nevada	4,764,593	1,201,833	3.96
New Hampshire	4,933,213	1,109,252	4.45
New Jersey	25,813,573	7,730,188	3.34
New Mexico	11,660,816	1,515,069	7.70
New York	121,643,050	17,990,455	6.76
North Carolina	13,942,418	6,628,637	2.10
North Dakota	1,826,695	638,800	2.86
Ohio	49,852,706	10,847,115	4.60
Oklahoma	21,352,716	3,145,585	6.79
Oregon	23,708,320	2,842,321	8.34
Pennsylvania	54,095,078	11,881,543	4.55
Rhode Island	6,406,855	1,003,464	6.38
South Carolina	20,446,414	3,486,703	5.86
South Dakota	7,051,559	696,004	10.13
Tennessee	39,131,982	4,877,185	8.02
Texas	34,697,062	16,986,510	2.04
Utah	14,452,321	1,722,850	8.39
Vermont	4,688,729	562,758	8.33
Virginia	15,307,000	6,187,358	2.47
Washington	26,655,400	4,866,692	5.48
West Virginia	24,957,620	1,793,477	13.92
Wisconsin	13,557,499	4,891,769	2.77
Wyoming	3,335,745	453,588	7.35
Southeast States	64,039,767	350,994,254	5.48
United States	1,188,510,726	248,102,973	4.79

**Table 3. Fixed Capital Outlay Expenditures for Southeast State Parks,
in Dollars, 1989-94**

State	1993-94	1992-93	1991-92	1990-91	1989-90	Total
Maryland	11,880,000	7,160,000	15,979,000	16,411,424	16,500,000	67,930,424
Florida	13,635,000	14,100,000	14,100,000	8,375,000	12,361,452	62,571,452
Kentucky	5,784,034	10,906,042	14,286,740	22,512,100	1,610,200	55,099,116
South Carolina	4,610,872	3,871,199	4,760,758	14,546,610	17,617,641	45,407,080
Virginia	11,913,922	5,766,819	10,976,985	7,267,397	4,330,915	40,226,038
Georgia	7,395,594	4,525,095	4,401,271	4,510,044	7,260,136	28,092,140
North Carolina	3,133,515	2,839,334	1,665,758	3,861,082	5,747,350	17,247,039
Louisiana	3,220,000	2,675,000	2,600,000	1,860,187	4,916,927	15,272,114
Tennessee	7,105,420	0	2,214,000	0	6,505,000	15,824,420
Arkansas	2,299,285	2,322,811	2,218,307	2,572,066	1,957,287	11,369,756
Mississippi	1,849,500	1,562,266	1,585,359	338,272	4,769,635	10,105,032
West Virginia	2,792,792	2,748,083	1,005,617	347,286	1,395,723	8,289,501
Alabama	0	83,589	20,976	25,862	329,010	459,437

Source: Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995)

**Table 4. Average Annual Per Capita Spending on State Parks, in Dollars,
1989-94 (Operating Expenditures + Fixed Capital Outlay Expenditures)**

State	Operating Expenditures	Fixed Capital Outlay Expenditures	Total Per Capita Spending
Kentucky	15.61	2.99	18.60
West Virginia	13.10	0.92	14.02
Arkansas	8.71	0.97	9.68
Tennessee	7.49	0.65	8.14
South Carolina	5.30	2.60	7.90
Maryland	4.88	2.84	7.72
Alabama	7.05	0.11	7.16
Georgia	5.39	0.87	6.26
Mississippi	4.55	0.79	5.34
Florida	3.30	0.97	4.27
Virginia	1.77	1.40	3.17
Louisiana	1.60	0.72	2.32
North Carolina	1.72	0.52	2.24

Source: Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995)

Table 5. Southeast State Parks Visitation, 1993-94

State	Day Use	Overnight Stay	Total
Tennessee	28,377,992	1,355,427	29,733,419
Kentucky	27,800,000	1,148,221	28,948,221
Georgia	15,145,863	580,133	15,725,996
Florida	10,784,176	1,119,122	11,903,298
North Carolina	10,894,109	386,911	11,281,020
Maryland	8,971,299	633,864	9,605,163
West Virginia	8,102,910	787,767	8,890,677
South Carolina	7,693,134	1,168,346	8,861,440
Arkansas	5,735,912	617,689	6,353,601
Alabama	5,068,845	1,114,549	6,183,384
Virginia	3,891,936	394,557	4,286,493
Mississippi	3,619,404	558,036	4,177,440
Louisiana	940,634	421,613	1,362,247

Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Table 6. Inventory of Southeast State Park Systems, by Unit Type

State	Parks	Recreation Areas	Natural Areas	Historic Areas	Forests	Fish & Wildlife Areas	Total Units
Alabama	24	0	0	0	0	0	24
Arkansas	12	17	2	14	0	0	45
Florida	39	35	15	30	0	1	120
Georgia	45	0	0	16	0	0	61
Kentucky	15	22	0	10	0	0	47
Louisiana	25	0	7	23	0	0	55
Maryland	11	15	8	10	6	0	50
Mississippi	27	0	0	0	0	0	27
N. Carolina	30	4	9	0	0	0	43
S. Carolina	50	0	1	5	0	0	56
Tennessee	34	0	18	24	0	0	76
Virginia	28	0	16	6	0	0	48
W. Virginia	28	0	3	9	7	7	52
Total	364	93	79	147	13	8	704

Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Table 7. Total Acreage of Southeast State Park Systems

State	State-Owned Parkland (acres)
Alabama	49,710
Arkansas	50,893
Florida	432,879
Georgia	59,137
Kentucky	42,594
Louisiana	38,751
Maryland	242,513
Mississippi	22,784
North Carolina	135,922
South Carolina	80,388
Tennessee	133,118
Virginia	69,065
West Virginia	198,765
Total	1,556,339

Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

**Table 8. Land Acquisition Appropriations for North Carolina State Parks,
in Dollars, 1915-1994**

Fiscal Year	Amount	Fiscal Year	Amount
1915-1947	57,845	1971	24,250
1948	0	1972	0
1949	*	1973	0
1950	0	1974	11,500,000
1951	*	1975	5,500,000
1952	*	1976	500,000
1953	*	1977	500,000
1954	*	1978	500,000
1955	*	1979	500,000
1956	*	1980	0
1957	*	1981	250,000
1958	0	1982	0
1959	*	1983	0
1960	0	1984	215,000
1961	*	1985	0
1962	*	1986	11,435,000
1963	*	1987	3,800,000
1964	0	1988	3,020,000
1965	0	1989	250,000
1966	0	1990	1,600,000
1967	0	1991	0
1968	0	1992	0
1969	0	1993	500,000
1970	0	1994	1,050,000
55-year subtotal	\$57,845	24-year subtotal	\$41,144,250

*No data available

Source: Financial Records, Division of Parks and Recreation, N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources

**Table 9. Capital Improvements Appropriations for North Carolina State Parks,
in Dollars, 1915-1994**

Fiscal Year	Amount	Fiscal Year	Amount
1915-1947	47,664	1971	400,000
1948	500,000	1972	500,000
1949	*	1973	500,000
1950	1,074,144	1974	2,500,000
1951	*	1975	3,000,000
1952	*	1976	1,000,000
1953	*	1977	750,000
1954	*	1978	1,200,000
1955	*	1979	1,200,000
1956	*	1980	500,000
1957	*	1981	500,000
1958	608,000	1982	100,000
1959	*	1983	0
1960	480,500	1984	707,000
1961	*	1985	329,000
1962	*	1986	1,137,000
1963	*	1987	2,750,000
1964	714,220	1988	3,800,000
1965	714,220	1989	1,310,000
1966	429,460	1990	6,000,000
1967	429,460	1991	<2,000,000>**
1968	319,740	1992	2,000,000
1969	319,740	1993	500,000
1970	424,350	1994	1,400,000
55-year subtotal	\$6,061,498	24-year subtotal	\$29,883,000

*No data available

**Reversion

Source: Financial Records, Division of Parks and Recreation, N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources

Table 10. Operating Budgets for North Carolina State Parks, in Dollars, 1984-1995

Fiscal Year	Amount
1984	4,870,601
1985	5,549,306
1986	6,138,161
1987	7,325,328
1988	6,500,000
1989	6,917,111
1990	9,178,474
1991	10,595,120
1992	11,517,378
1993	11,956,099
1994	13,942,418
1995	14,237,307

Source: Financial Records, Division of Parks and Recreation, N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources, and Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors (1990-1995)

Table 11. Dedicated Funding Revenues as a Source of Operating Expenditures and Fixed Capital Outlays in Southeast States, in Dollars, 1993-94

State	Contributions to Operating Expenditures	Contributions to Fixed Capita Outlay Expenditures	Total Contribution of Dedicated Funding Sources
Alabama	0	0	0
Arkansas	3,376	1,412,720	1,433,594
Florida	19,661,255	12,600,000	32,261,255
Georgia	481,075	0	481,075
Kentucky	0	0	0
Louisiana	0	0	0
Maryland	0	11,880,000	11,880,000
Mississippi	361,196	1,849,600	2,210,696
North Carolina	24,931	1,271,651	1,296,582
South Carolina	0	353,257	353,257
Tennessee	0	810,519	810,519
Virginia	0	28,757	28,757
West Virginia	0	1,256,721	1,256,721
Total	20,531,833	31,463,175	51,995,008

Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Table 12. Southeast states, grouped by intervals in terms of per capita spending on state parks, 1993-94

Per capita spending, 1993-94	Number of states
\$16-\$17.99	1
\$14-\$15.99	0
\$12-\$13.99	2
\$10-\$11.99	1
\$8-\$9.99	6
\$6-\$7.99	9
\$4-\$5.99	13
\$2-\$3.99	17
\$0-\$1.99	1

Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Table 13. Annual State Parks Visitation Relative to Resident Population, with Rankings, 1993-94

State	Visitation-to-Population Ratio	Rank in Visitation-to-Population Ratio	Rank in Total Per Capita Spending, FY 1990-94
Kentucky	7.86	1	1
Tennessee	6.10	2	4
West Virginia	4.96	3	2
Arkansas	2.70	4	3
South Carolina	2.54	5	5
Georgia	2.43	6	8
Maryland	2.01	7	6
North Carolina	1.70	8	13
Mississippi	1.62	9	9
Alabama	1.53	10	7
Florida	0.92	11	10
Virginia	0.69	12	11
Louisiana	0.32	13	12

Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

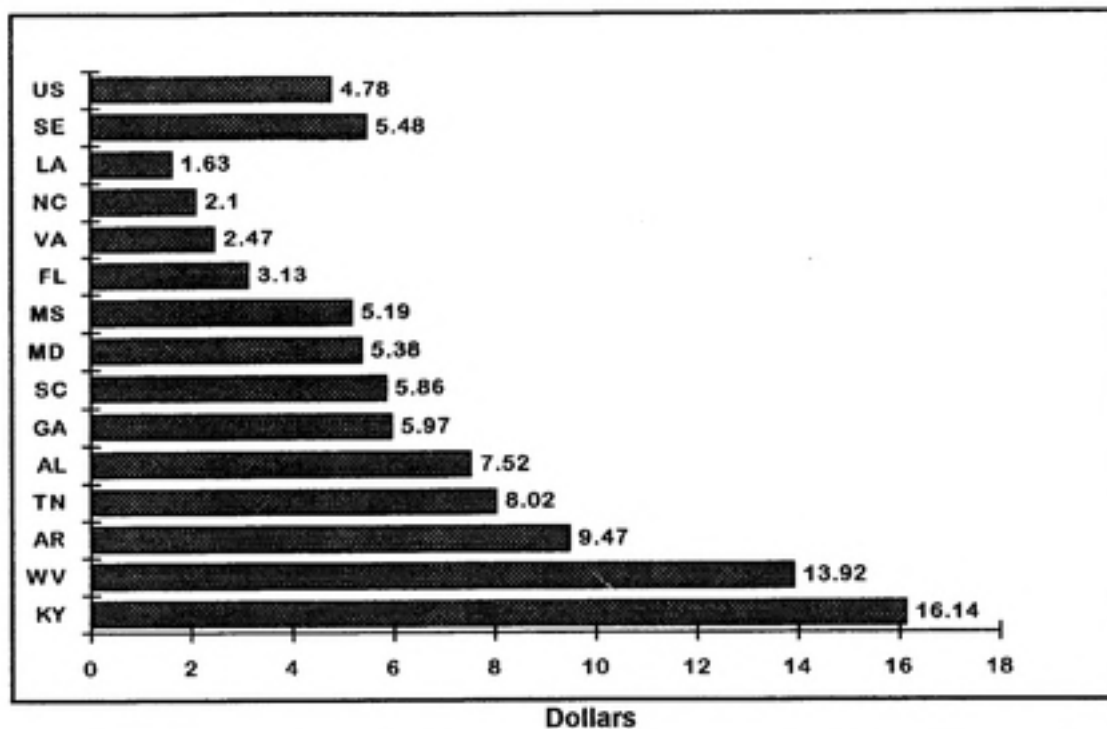
**Table 14. Annual visitation in North Carolina State Parks
with percentage changes, 1983-1995**

Year	Total visitation	Percent change
1983	5,506,092	
1984	5,982,153	+6.8%
1985	6,617,234	+10.8%
1986	7,083,059	+7.0%
1987	7,580,232	+7.0%
1988	7,894,178	+4.1%
1989	8,083,658	+2.4%
1990	8,549,059	+5.8%
1991	9,463,067	+10.7%
1992	10,211,828	+7.9%
1993	11,829,070	+15.8%
1994	11,281,020	-4.6%
1995	11,967,019	+6.1%
		Avg.: 6.7%

Source: Division of Parks and Recreation, N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources, and Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors (1983-1995)

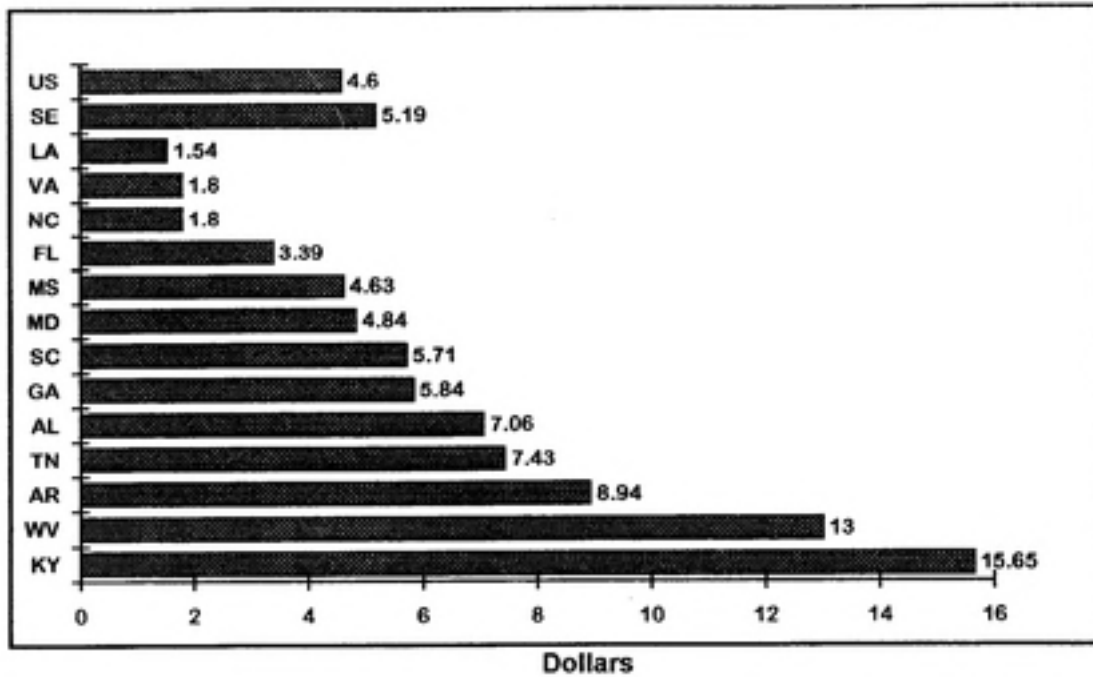
APPENDIX 2:
GRAPHS AND CHARTS

**Figure 1. Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks, in Dollars, 1993-94
(Based on Operating Expenditures)**



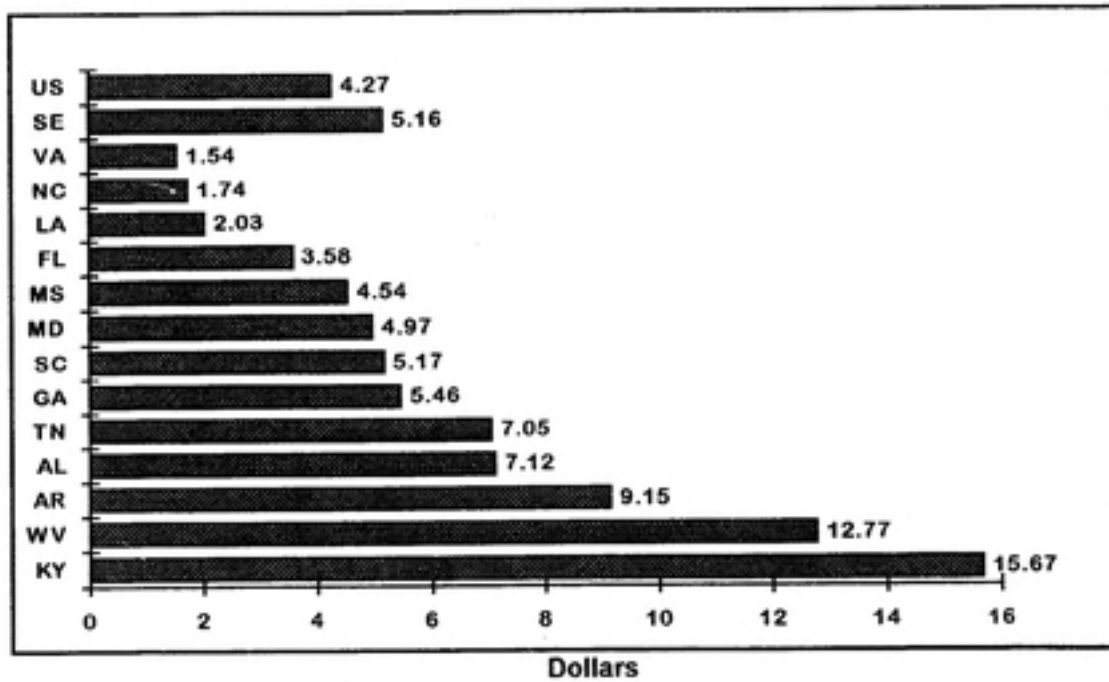
Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 2. Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks, in Dollars, 1992-93
(Based on Operating Expenditures)



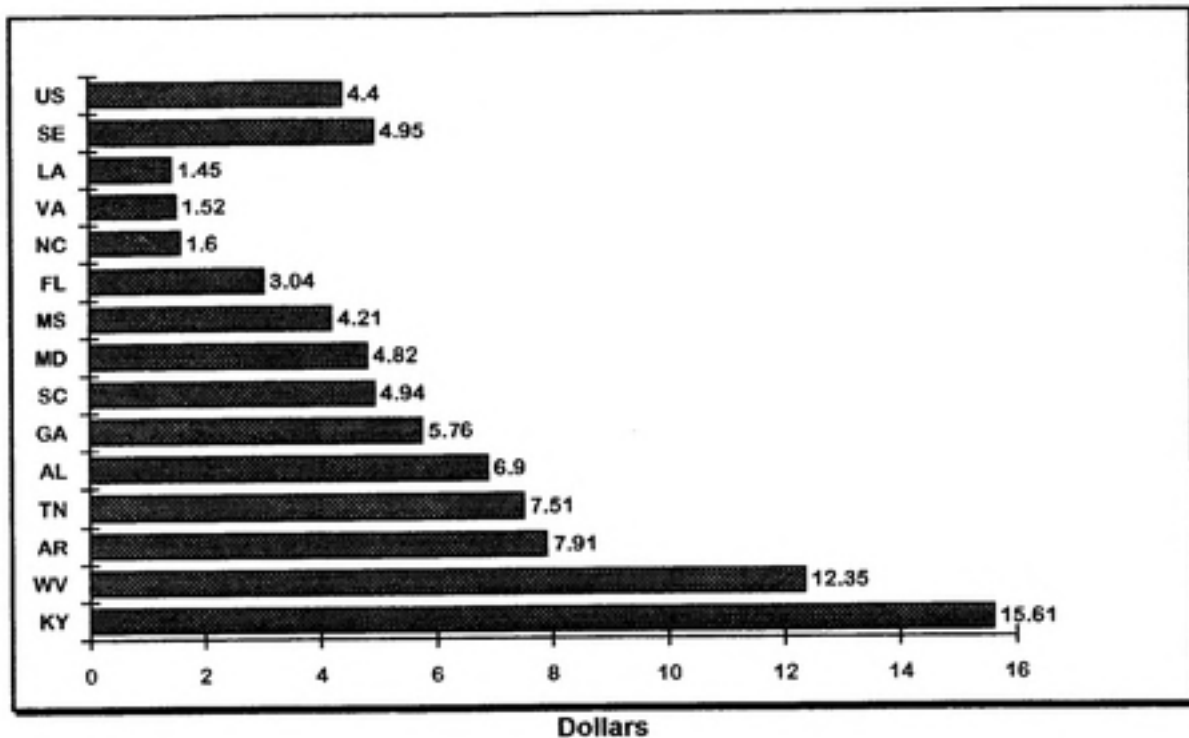
Source: 1994 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 3. Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks, in Dollars, 1991-92
(Based on Operating Expenditures)



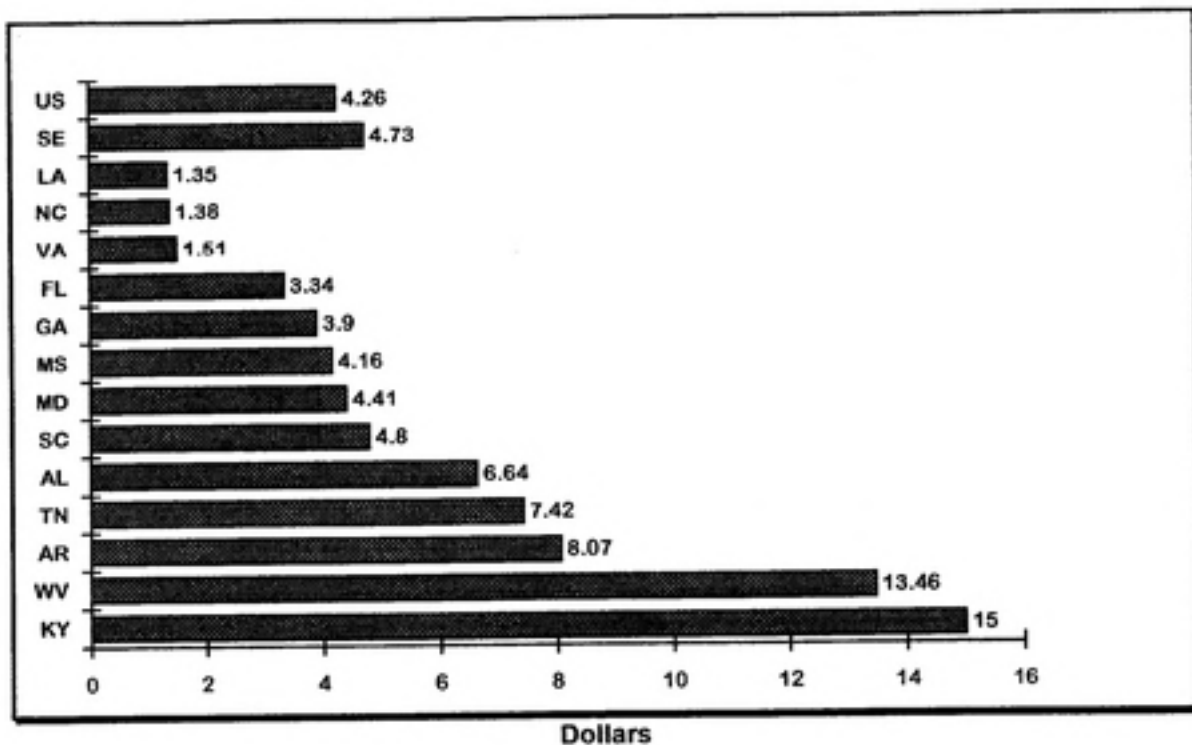
Source: 1993 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 4. Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks, in Dollars, 1990-91
(Based on Operating Expenditures)



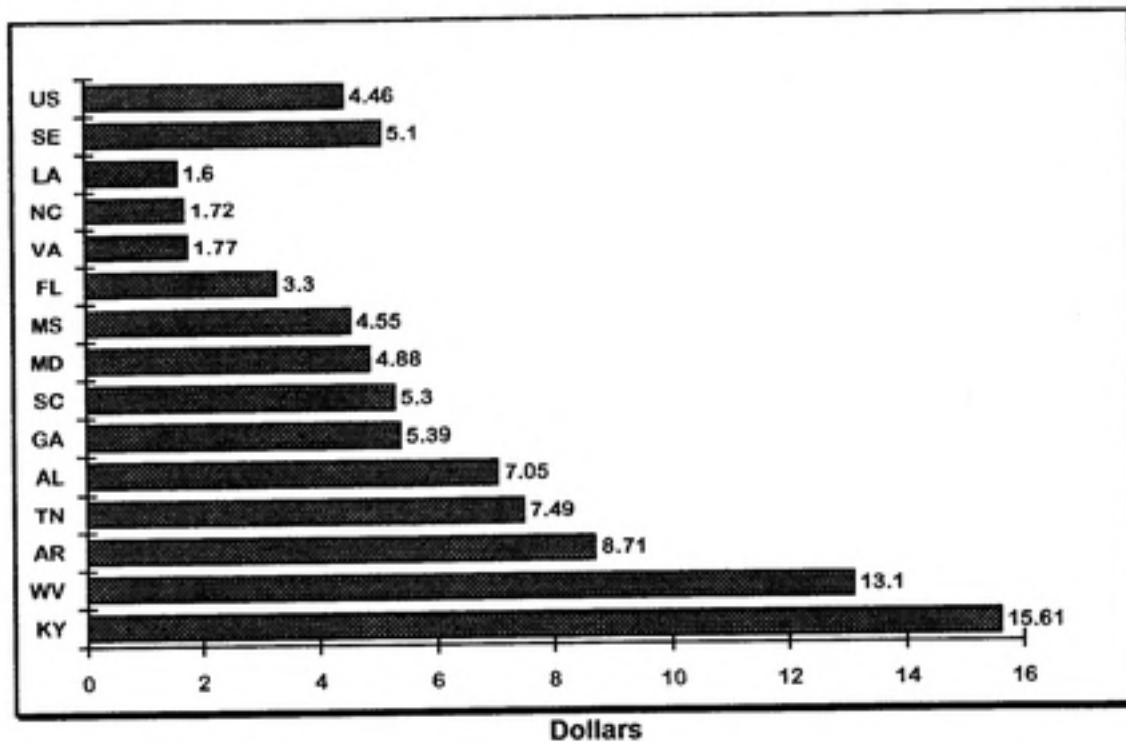
Source: 1992 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 5. Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks, in Dollars, 1989-90
(Based on Operating Expenditures)



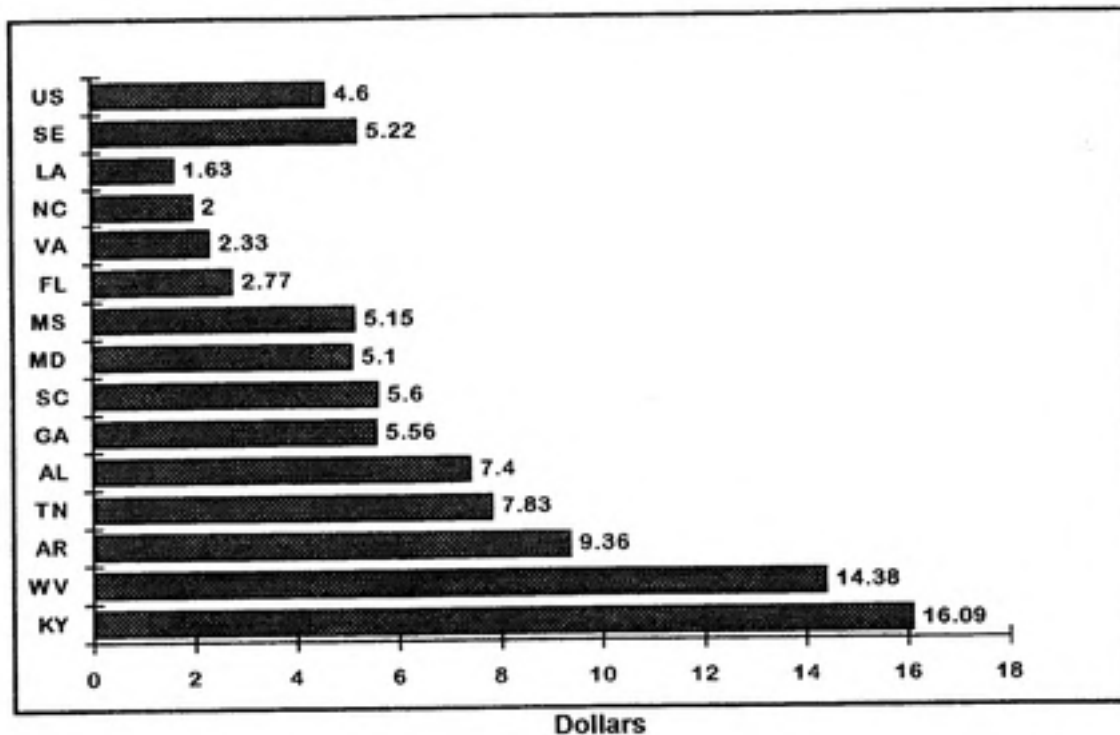
Source: 1991 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 6. Average Annual Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks, in Dollars, 1989-1994 (Based on Operating Expenditures)



Source: Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995)

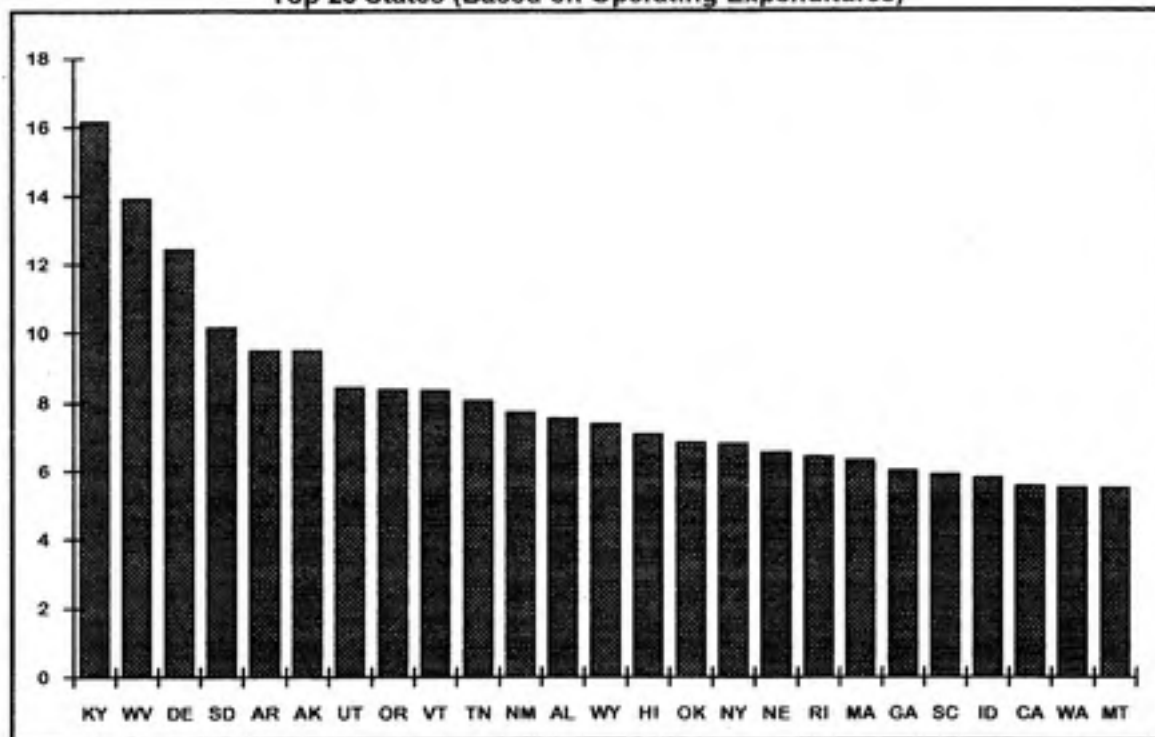
**Figure 7. Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks, in Dollars, 1993-94,
Adjusted for Estimated Population Change Since 1990 Census*
(Based on Operating Expenditures)**



Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

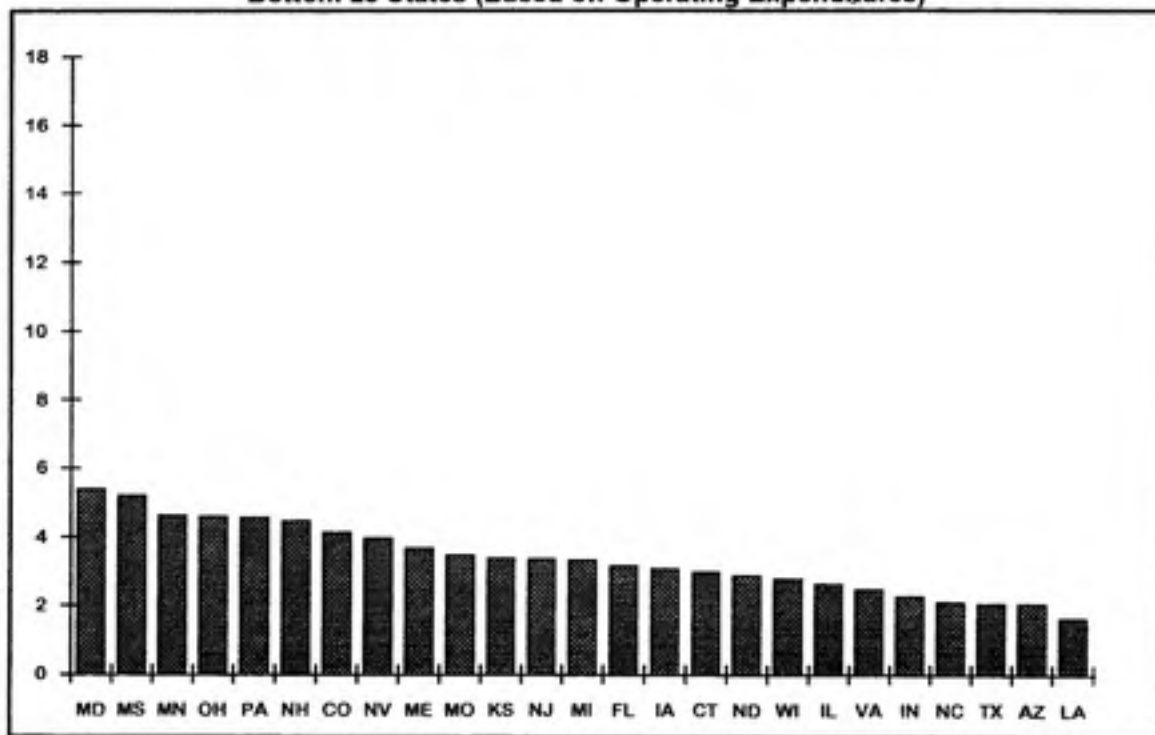
*The percentage of population change in each state between 1980-90 (see Table 1) is applied to 1990 census figures on a pro rated basis to estimate a given state's population in 1994.

**Figure 8. Per Capita Spending on State Parks, in Dollars, 1993-94,
Top 25 States (Based on Operating Expenditures)**



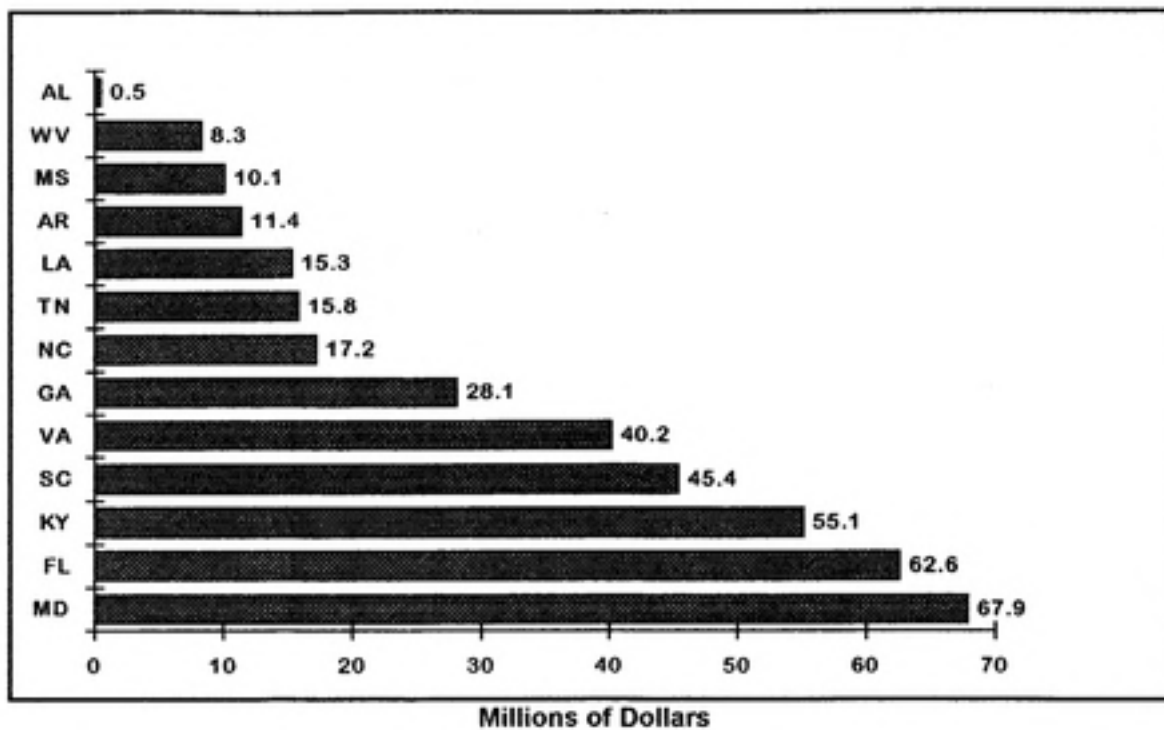
Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

**Figure 9. Per Capita Spending on State Parks, in Dollars, 1993-94,
Bottom 25 States (Based on Operating Expenditures)**



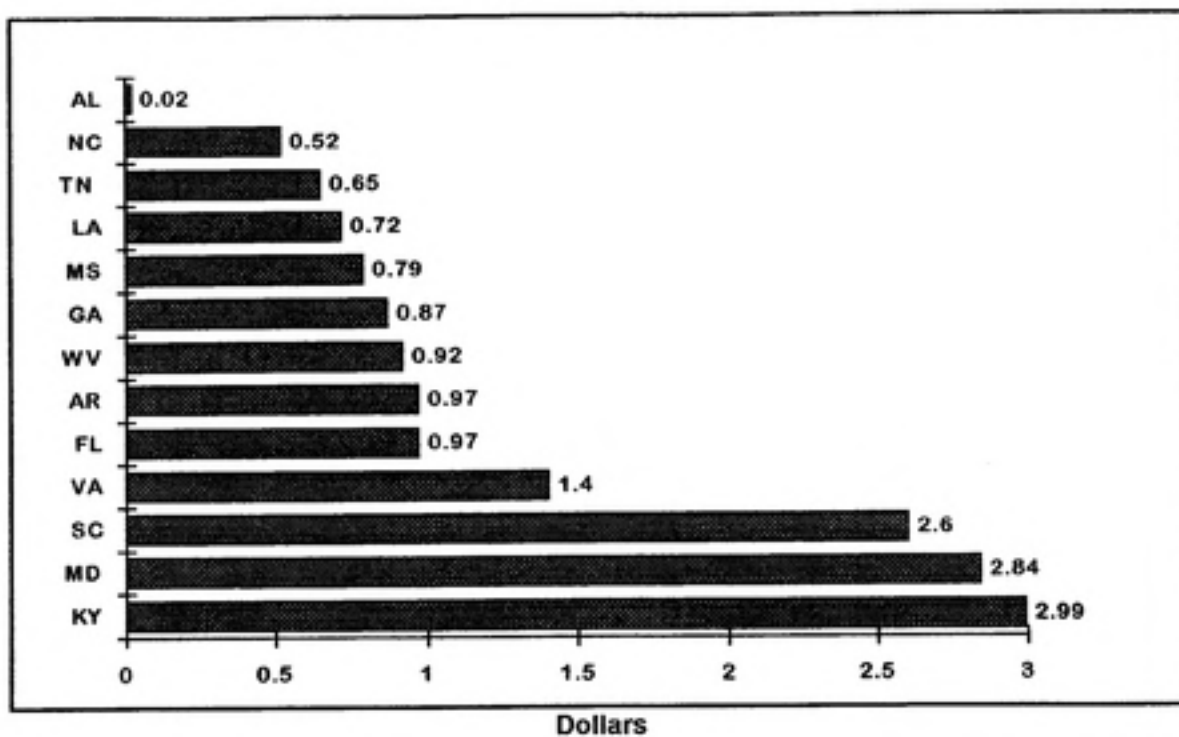
Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 10. Total Fixed Capital Outlay Expenditures for Southeast State Parks, 1989-94, in Millions of Dollars



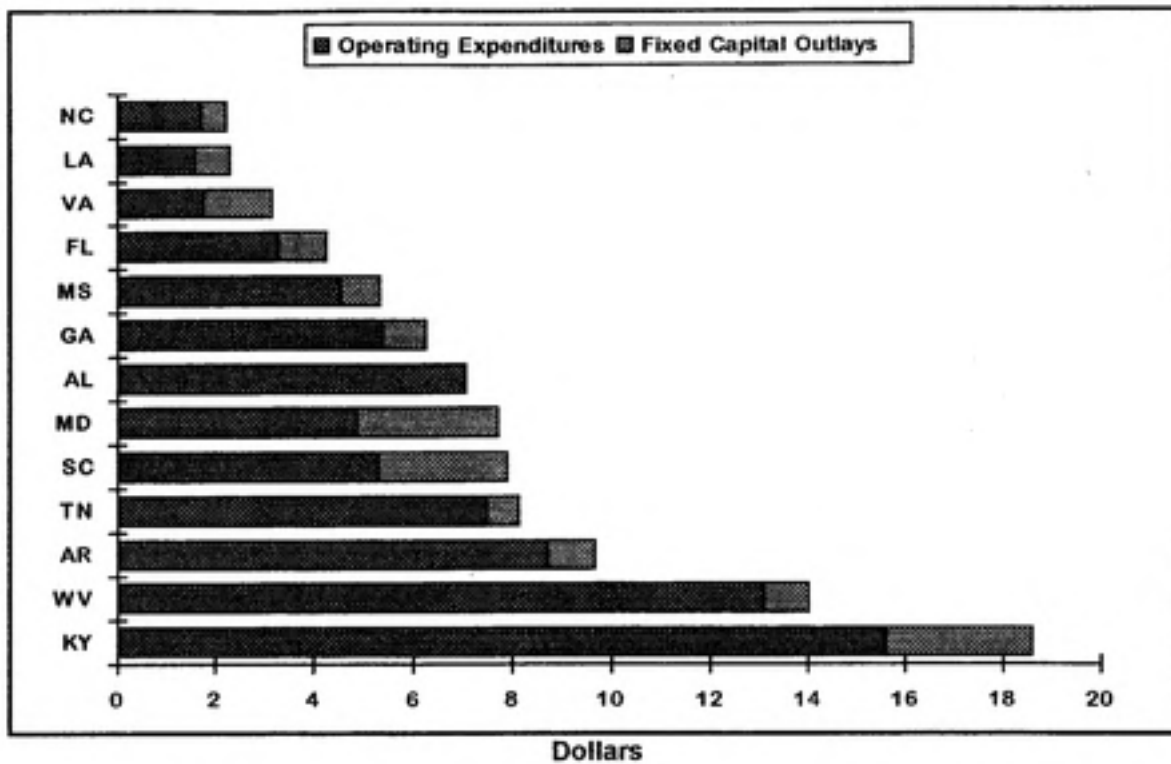
Source: Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995)

Figure 11. Average Annual Per Capita Fixed Capital Outlay Expenditures for Southeast State Parks, 1989-94 (in Dollars)



Source: Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995)

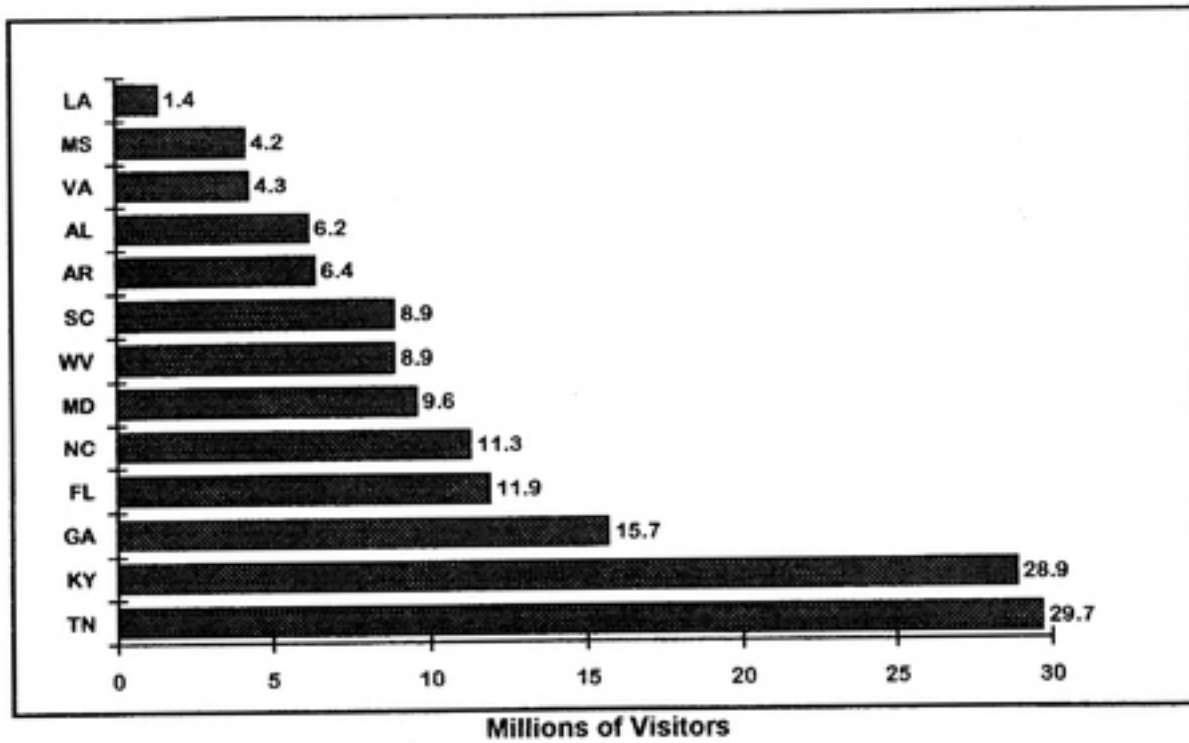
Figure 12. Average Annual Per Capita Spending on Southeast State Parks, in Dollars 1989-94 (Operating and Capital Outlay Expenditures Combined)



Source: Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995)

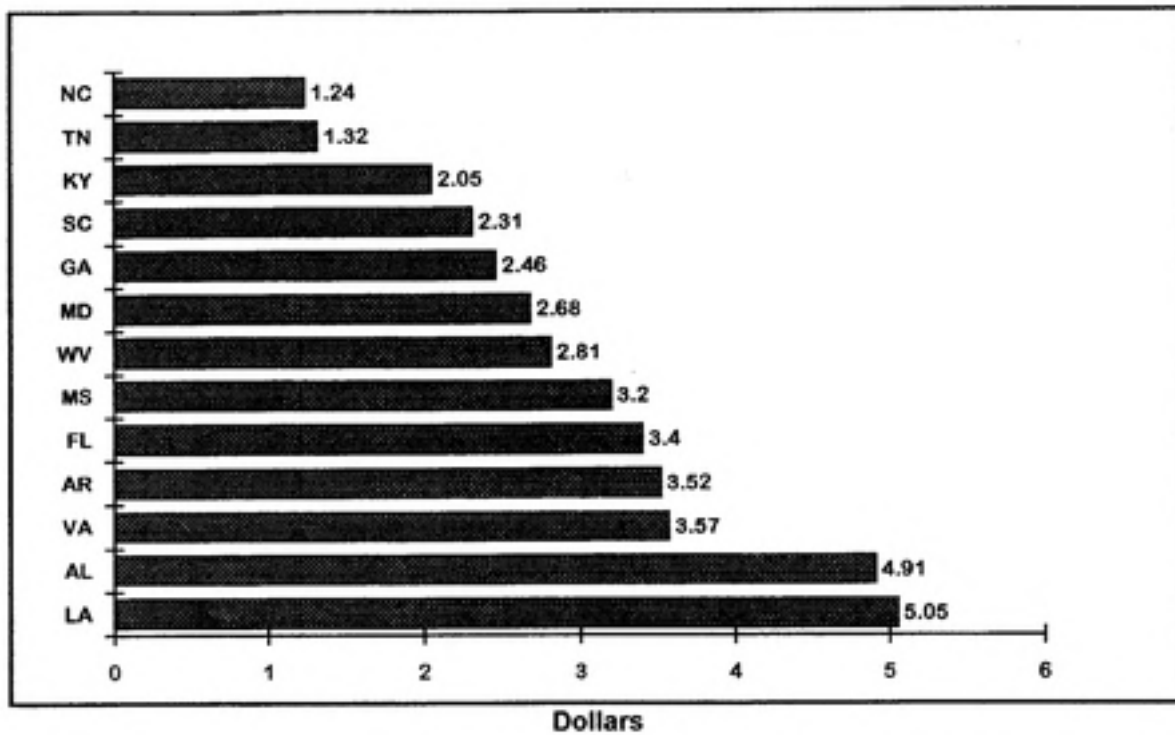
Note: This graph was compiled using information from Figures 6 and 11 in this paper.

Figure 13. Southeast State Parks Visitation, in Millions, 1993-94



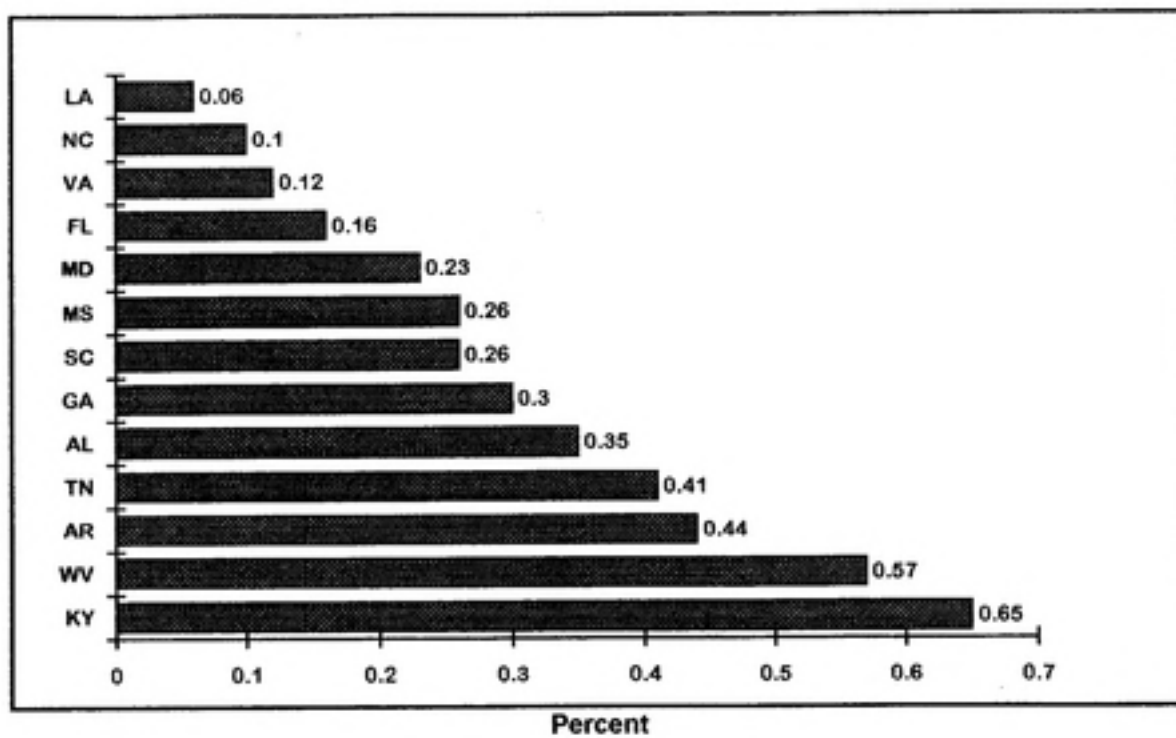
Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 14. Amount Spent Per State Park Visitor, in Dollars, 1993-94
(Operating Expenditures ÷ Total Park Visitors)



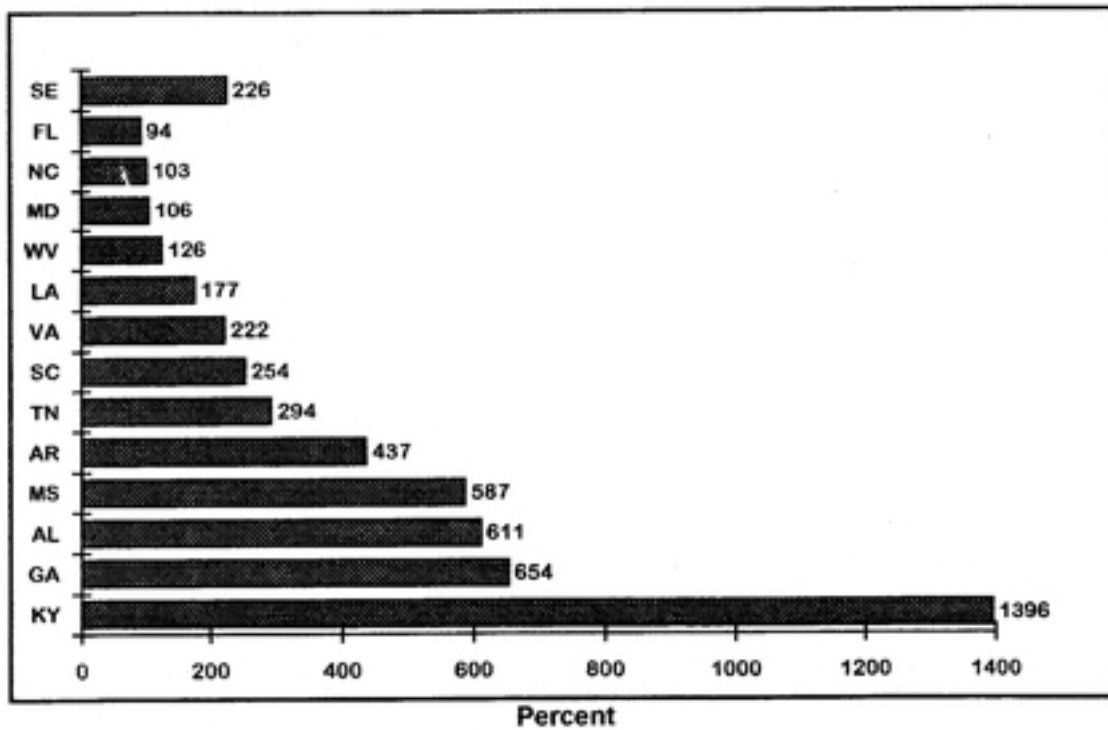
Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 15. Percent of State Budget Devoted to State Parks, 1993-94



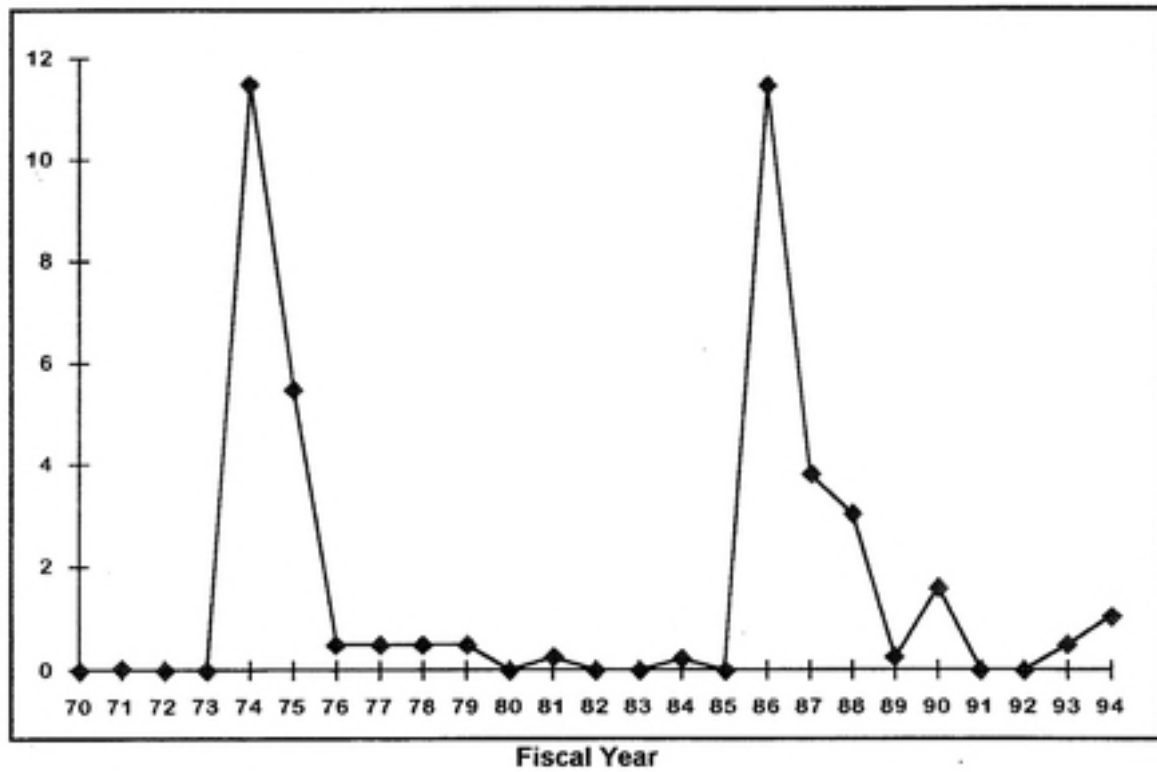
Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 16. Dollars Spent Per Acre of State Parkland, 1993-94
(Operating Expenditures ÷ Total Acreage)



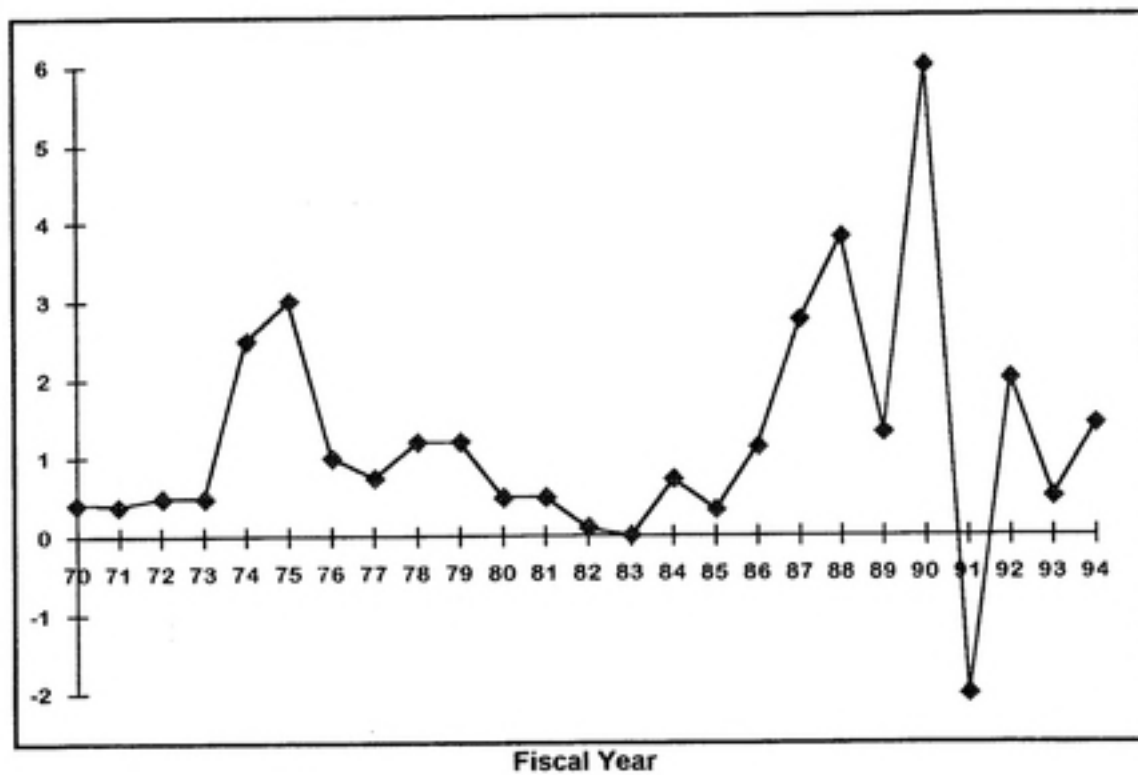
Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 17. Land Acquisition Appropriations for North Carolina State Parks, 1970-1994
(in Millions of Dollars)



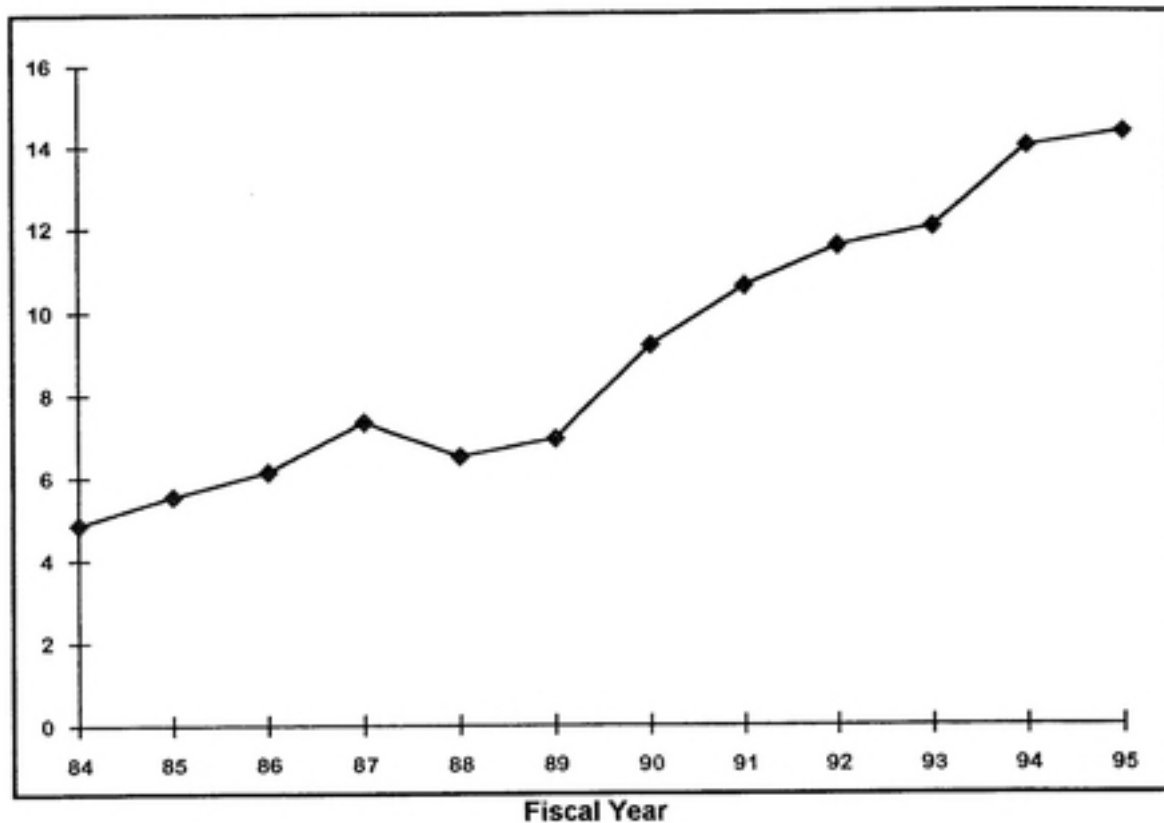
Source: Financial Records, Division of Parks and Recreation, N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources

Figure 18. Capital Improvements Appropriations for North Carolina State Parks, 1970-1994
(in Millions of Dollars)



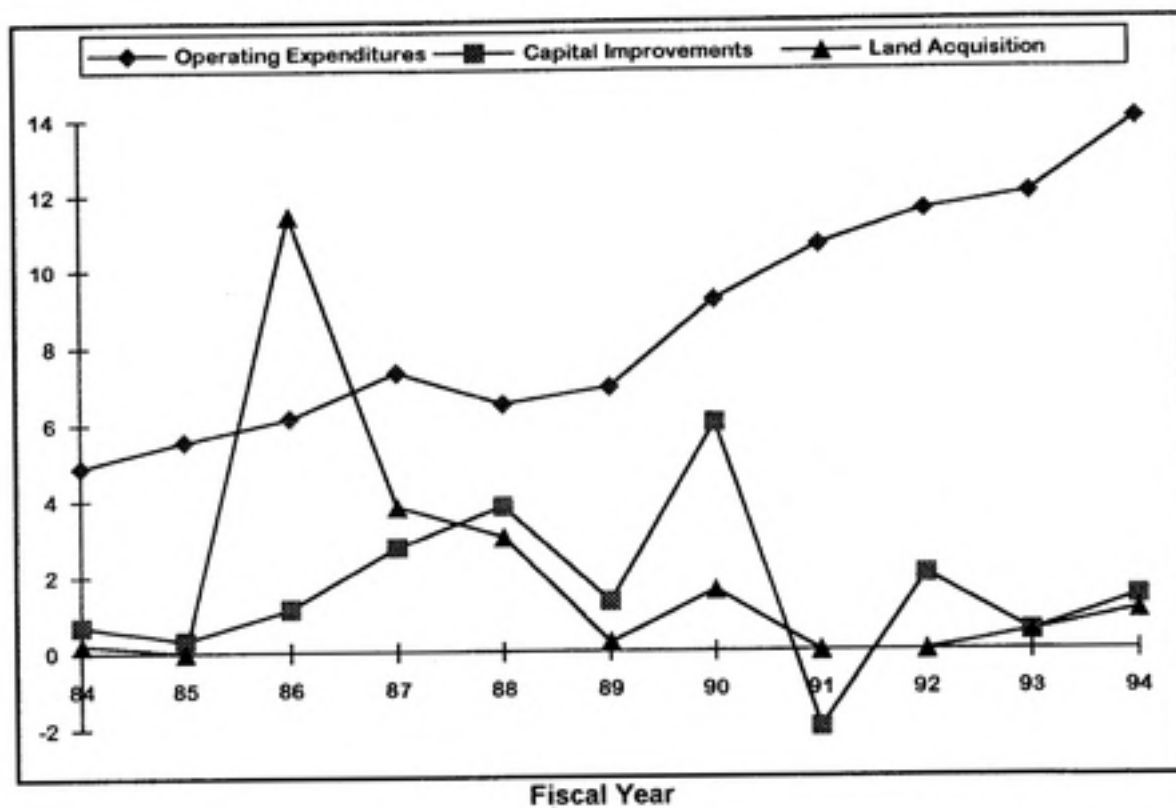
Source: Financial Records, Division of Parks and Recreation, N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources

Figure 19. Operating Expenditures for North Carolina State Parks, 1984-1995
(in Millions of Dollars)



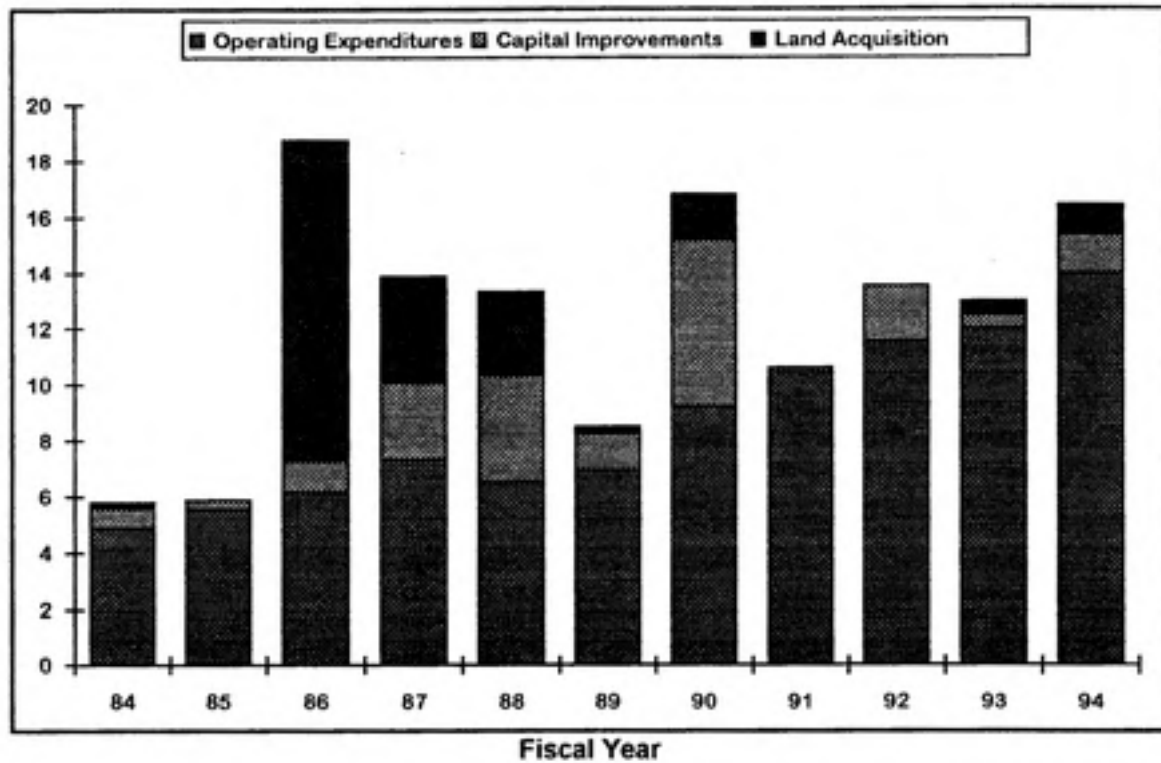
Source: Financial Records, Division of Parks and Recreation, N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources, and Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors (1990-1995)

Figure 20. Graphic Overlay of Expenditures and Appropriations for North Carolina State Parks, 1984-1994 (in Millions of Dollars)



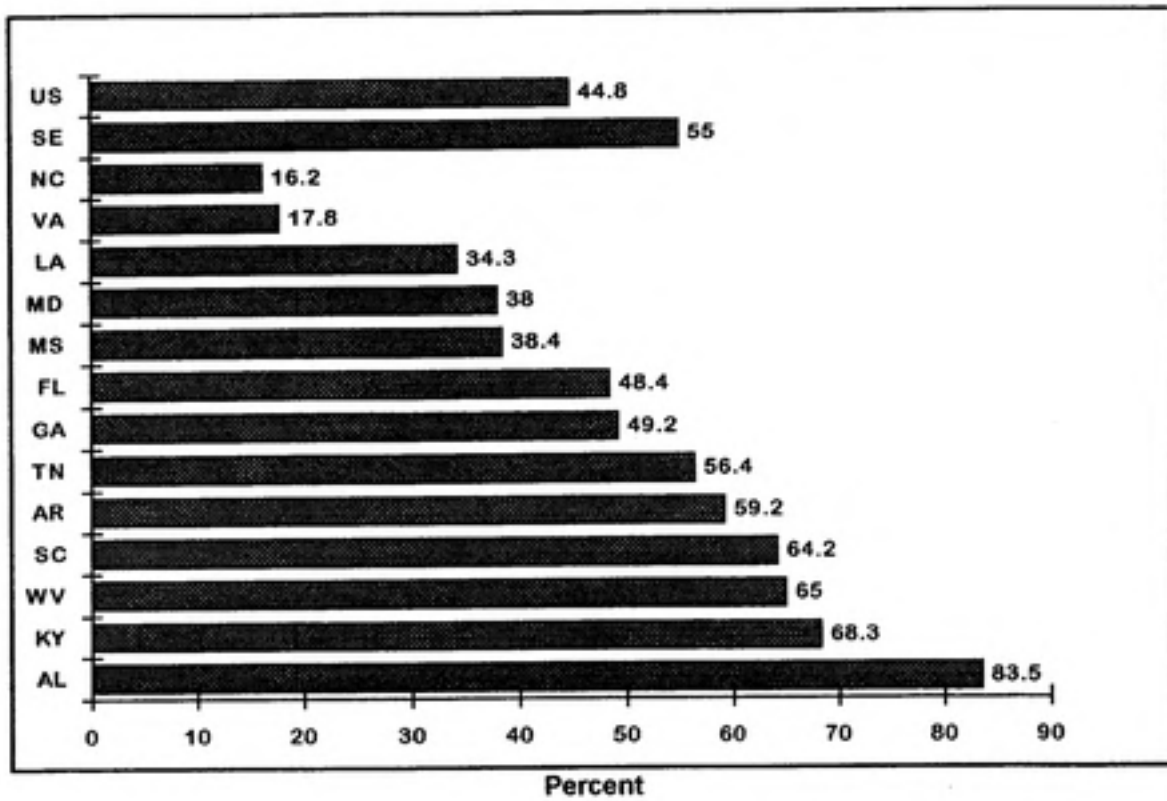
Source: Financial Records, Division of Parks and Recreation, N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources, and Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors (1990-1995)

**Figure 21. Combined Expenditures and Appropriations for
North Carolina State Parks, 1984-1994
(in Millions of Dollars)**



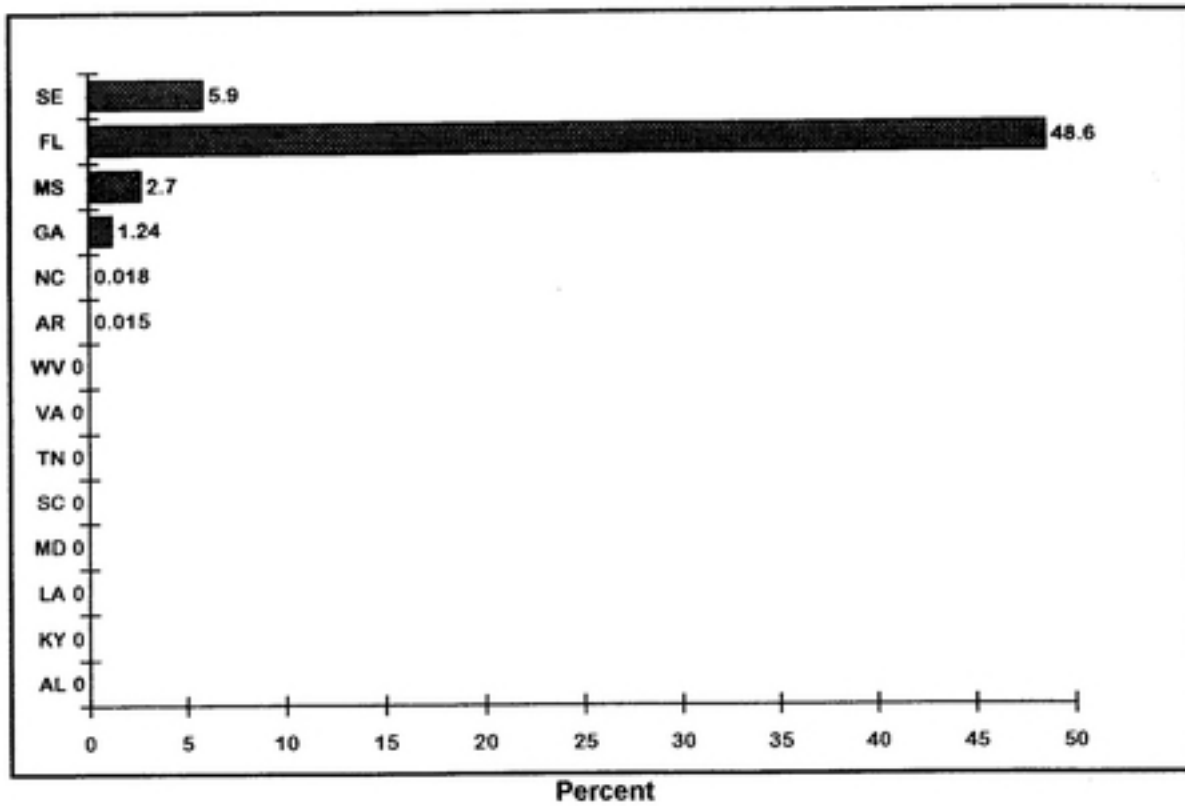
Source: Financial Records, Division of Parks and Recreation, N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources, and Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors (1990-1995)

Figure 22. State Park Revenue as a Percentage of Operating Costs,
Southeast States, 1993-94



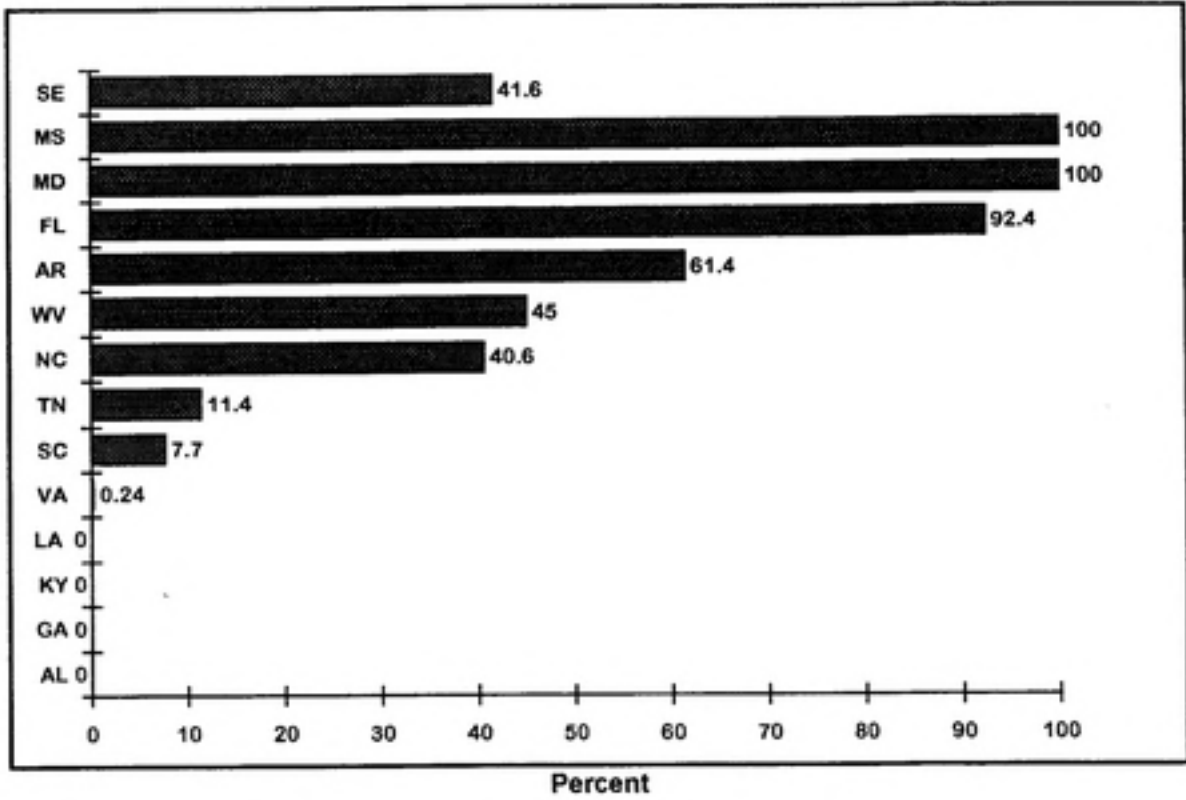
Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 23. Dedicated Funding Revenue as a Percentage of Operating Expenses
in Southeast States, 1993-94



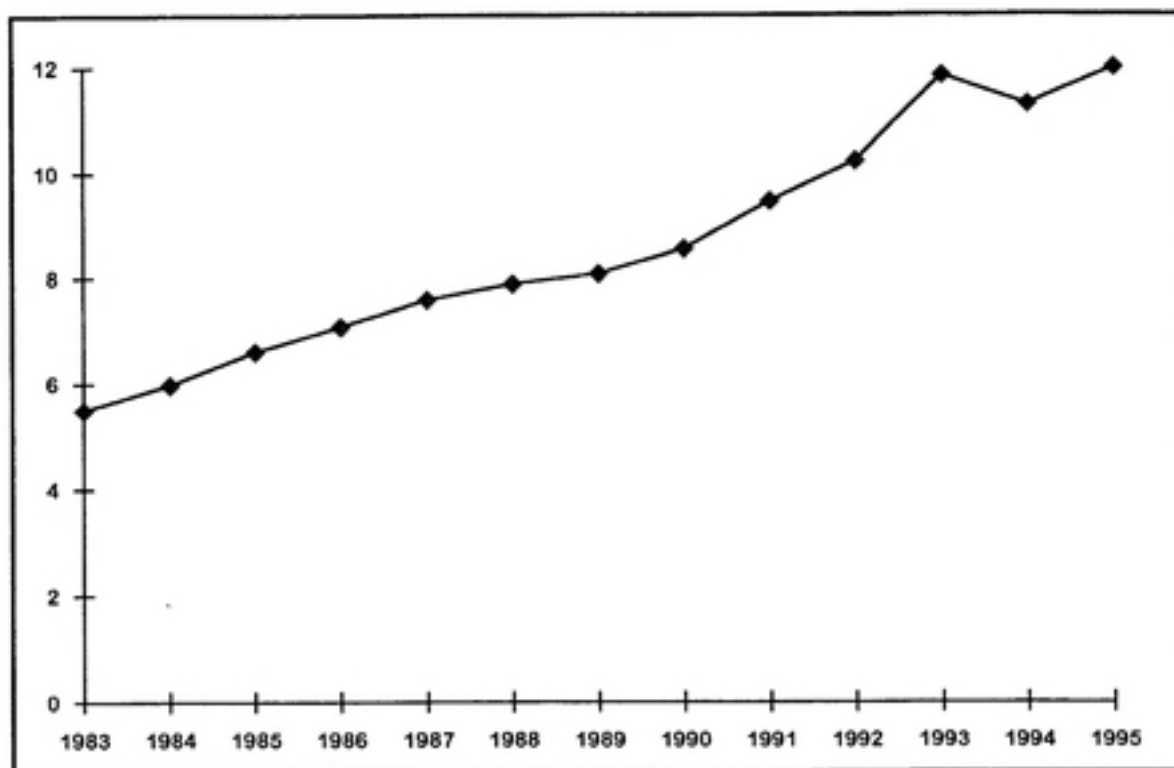
Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 24. Dedicated Funding Revenue as a Percentage of Fixed Capital Outlay Expenditures in Southeast States, 1993-94



Source: 1995 Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors

Figure 25: Annual Visitation in North Carolina State Parks, 1983-1995
(in Millions of Dollars)



Source: Division of Parks and Recreation, N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources, and Annual Information Exchange, National Association of State Park Directors (1983-1995)

**APPENDIX 3:
INTERVIEWS**

INTERVIEW WITH BAYARD C. ALCORN

Head of Comprehensive Planning Program, Division of Parks and Recreation, North Carolina Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources (interviewed 12/15/95)

Tell me about the survey you sent out regarding funding sources in other southeastern states?

This actually preceded the bond issue. I guess we were developing ammunition for the bond issue. What we did was to take a look at the southeastern states. We sent a survey to 13 states and tried to take a look at what they were doing in terms of dedicated funds for outdoor recreation and natural resources. Not particularly state parks; it's broader than state parks. The survey form we sent them asking about dedicated funds - who was eligible for funding, cause that's what we have in mind. Our park fund is broken out into state parks, local parks and coastal access. And then how the funds were to be spent, because typically when you have dedicated funding, you're restricted on what you can spend in on. How much money is available in a typical year and is it a true trust fund - is there a corpus there and you spend the interest, or is it done a different way. We summarized the results as far as who had dedicated funds and what they were used for. Even then North Carolina had a Natural Heritage Trust Fund for land acquisition that was funded by vanity license plates, as well as the real estate transfer tax. State Parks, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and the N.C. Department of Agriculture were eligible.

That real-estate transfer tax that was benefiting the Natural Heritage Trust Fund, is that now dedicated to the State Park System?

Right, a portion is. They've split it up. What they do is take I believe they raised the real estate transfer tax from \$1 per \$1000 in value of real-estate transfer, they raised it to \$2. That first dollar still goes exclusively two the counties. That second dollar is still collected by the same people, the counties, and the register of deeds sends it in to the Secretary of State. That portion is now divided. The Heritage Trust Fund had been getting 15 cents out of that dollar, and the other 85 cents was going into the General Fund. But they had in mind doing this, so they raised the 15% to 25% for the Heritage Fund and then Park Fund got the remaining 75% of that dollar. Now the Heritage Fund still gets the vanity license plate fees, and that runs \$3 million a year.

So the Heritage Fund is now receiving \$8 million a year in projected funding, and some of that comes back to state parks.

That's right. We are one of the eligible agencies. From this 75%, this is what's projected for the 1996-97 FY; state parks will have \$10 million, local parks \$4.7, then beach access would be just under a million. That's a projection. Over the next five years, those are fairly rosy. Those aren't guarantees if the economy wouldn't do so well, these would go down. It completely depends on the amount of real-estate activity in the state. If people buy fewer houses, then our fund goes down. There is some logic in that. As the state becomes more developed, you want to set aside some money to protect some land for recreation and resource preservation.

What about the bond fund?

The bond fund that passed in '93 in an off-year election was \$35 million. Of that, \$24.5 was to be spent on capital improvements and \$10.5 on land acquisition. That did specify in existing state park units. So you couldn't take that money and start a new park.

That is for purchasing inholdings and purchasing additional acreage around the perimeter?

Yes. We did quite a bit of work documenting the needs of the state park system, did facility inventories where we looked at buildings and said, what would it take to bring them up to current construction codes. Some of them are Civilian Conservation Corps-era buildings, so it takes a fair amount. I think we identified \$135 in needs for capital, and about \$60 million in needs for land. Given that as a scope of existing needs, it made a lot of sense that you address what's a problem now before you go out and get other ones. I think that was a real good move and that's spread all over the state, both in land and in capital. Then you look at the Park Fund that came along a couple of years later. I tie an awful lot of connection between the two in that in the years we were going for, in '93 when we got the bond we were actually going for the Park Fund, and I think that it was almost a test case in that, in about August the General Assembly set

a date of first Tuesday in November for this bond referendum. In other words, if people thought so highly of the state park system, they'll pass the bond. So it was very important that the bond passed. It passed by about 55-45.

So legislators viewed it as a public referendum on how much state parks meant to people of this state, and if they indicated it meant something to them then the legislature was willing to take the next step, which was the park fund?

I think so, I think so. It certainly took an awful lot to go from the success of the bond and also have the park fund be successful, but I think had the bond lost, it would have been mighty difficult to come back to the General Assembly and say, well, the citizens voted us down, but here we're coming back and we want significant money from you guys. It would have really been a mountain to climb.

So you stood the chance of either winning twice or losing twice?

That's right. And it was an interesting period in that...bonds are a very standard way of financing park development or capital expenditures period. We were put on the bond at the very last minute. There had been a bond in the works in the General Assembly for universities, prisons, and assistance for sewer systems, and kind of at the last hour, they put us on the referendum. We had about 12 weeks to build a case with the public, and no money. The standard wisdom around the country was that you needed about two years to build awareness: "this is what it's about, and this is what you'll get." I think they said two years and \$2 million, but you needed a campaign. But because the state government was solidly behind the other portions of the bond and felt pretty good, towards the end of that period, the two weeks before the election - that period when politicians say everybody makes up their mind - there was quite a push in the media in terms of radio, TV and an awful lot of things around the state at the different parks that were done to highlight needs. If we were not the highest we were the second highest margin of victory in that bond. I think all of them passed, but the margins of victory got smaller.

I think that maybe over the years that had been ingrained in the psyche of people who at least read newspapers or whatever - that the state parks had some pressing needs. How has that moved North Carolina out from its traditional 50th place in terms of per capita spending?

There will be a little bit of a delay, in that the National Association of State Park Directors Information Exchange is the information that we use, and the '94 report covers fiscal '93. So there'll be some catch-up time there. The other thing to consider is those figures are operating expenditures, because those are the most consistent from year to year. Land and capital tend to go up and down, but as far as an ongoing trend of commitment, the operating expenditures - staffing, equipment, supplies - are what we're tracking. And so it'll be a bit slow in that when we build visitor centers, there will be staff and equipment and supplies that'll come along with it that will bump it up. But the visitor center itself, the big expenditure, doesn't really affect the operating dollar.

So when they compute per capita expenditures, it's based on operating budget?

Operating expenditures.

They wouldn't throw the \$35 million that was given the system in a bond referendum into the mix?

We're going to work on that. We're going to work on that. That is a concern. That is a large outlay of money, and we're going to work out ways to compute that on a national basis.

So in some sense those figures are misleading?

I guess the thing is that it's not the total expenditures, but it's the most stable number. Cause there's another kind of twist to the capital and land money. People have a hard time computing exactly how you keep track of that. Sometimes the surveys, it's more easy to confuse land and capital as to when to record that. Do you record the \$35 million the minute the bond passes, so there's \$35 million in that year, or do you report it as you expend the money? We've worked on looking at the report and looking at tying both of those together. The first look at that,

though, it doesn't bump us up too much, even when you do that, and it's because there are a few states with low populations that have an easy source of money (like the oil money in Alaska). Alaska spends a phenomenal amount of money per capita on their parks. And then there are some differences in park systems, and it's pretty much dictated by enabling legislation. North Carolina is very much a natural resource oriented park system. In some ways, we really don't want to be at the top of the list, but we do want to be not on the bottom. The thing that we typically found is that it would be almost a factor of doubling or tripling of our budget to get up to the national medium. Although it may seem like a fair amount of money with the bond and these other issues, on a per capita basis, it's a bone, but it's not that big a bone. I think, for purposes of accuracy, it is important that we crank into these numbers, these capital figures, and we would actually wish that would make more of a splash than it's going to. But it will move us up the list. I guess the thing is that it's relative. The operating budget is the most consistent expression of the resources going into the state park system. However, to try to put in both capital and operating, the people with high operating expenses also bump pretty well when you add in land and capital, and so although we jump up, they jump up, too. It will make a difference. It may not make as big a difference as we would like to hope. We would like to be able to say to the legislature, "We've been 50th as long as we can remember. We have numbers back in the Fifties, the Forties and the Thirties - back that far - and we were on the bottom then. We would like to be able to say, "You pass this legislation, we're number 35 or number 25."

But aren't there tradeoffs to moving up that list? You have to get into the business of running golf resorts or something like that.

To some degree. Although there are systems, such as Florida, that has had this type of real estate transfer tax in existence for ten or twelve years, they have a similar system but are much higher up the list. For instance, our big push in this next legislative session is going to be related to staffing. The thing we're trying to sell is that there should be one ranger on duty at all times the park is open to the public. I think the number is 26 or 28 positions that we need in order to do that. That's practically a position per park that we have open to the public. In most of our parks, there is typically somebody on duty to open the gates and close the gates, but at some point during the day, there's nobody on duty. Just in terms of any part of our mission - natural resource management, interpretation and education of the public, public safety - there's nobody home. Those aren't getting done. Some of our parks, like Stone Mountain, is 13,000 acres, and we're trying for one person to be on duty! (laughs)

That's not asking for so very much!

It's a little hard to say that even that is an appropriate level of staffing.

It's a step.

It's a step, it's a concept people should be able to grasp. (talk turns to Stone Mountain State Park for a while).

North Carolina is one of the five fastest-growing states in the country. As these population pressures keep encroaching on the land, what is the long-term strategy in terms of land acquisition and expanding the system?

We have a system plan that identifies the type of resources we want to go after. We don't so much at this point have particular areas of land in mind as much as...our enabling legislation says our state park system to contain examples of geologic, biologic, archeologic, scenic and recreation resources of statewide significance, so we took committees that were skills in each one of those areas and identified what's important, what types of resources in those categories are important. Geologically, the granite domes like Stone Mountain, caves, waterfalls, that sort of thing. We have between 15 and 25 types of resources within each of those categories, then we took a look across the state and said in what regions are those significant? And then we said, of those significant resources, what's in state parks? And from there we said, we may have good coverage of granite domes, monadnocks, waterfalls, so what don't we have? And so in our system plan we've identified the types of resources that we would need to represent those important and significant resources that exist in the state. So we have types of

resources we want to go after more than, "We need this thousand acres here or that thousand acres there." We've set up on a matrix basis, and essentially we're trying to fill in the matrix. Is there something significant we don't have an example of in the park system? Those significant resources should describe North Carolina's natural heritage. We want to be representative. We don't necessarily have to have them all, but we need to have examples. Like Hammocks Beach, I don't know that there's a counterpart on the East Coast that, except for our bathhouse, would be a completely undeveloped barrier island.

False Cape State Park in Virginia?

Yeah, that would be very close. Very pretty place. Anyway, that's the direction that we take. In evaluating new sites, the ones that would be most interesting to us would be the ones that would capture more of those resources that would be significant, that would offer recreational opportunities.

What's an example of where you would be looking next to fill in the matrix?

With this money, we have all kinds of potential candidates, pretty much statewide. One park that has been hanging around or one suggestion has been what they would call a fossil park. It's maybe not exactly what you would think about as a state park but would be a nice educational opportunity. It's up in the Pamlico-Craven-Beaufort area. Because that was all coastal plain, it's a fossil depository that is sufficiently significant that the Smithsonian comes down. That's one thing that is on the table. There are usually places in the mountains that people want to protect. We're also dealing very much with the interest in resort parks, particularly in the west. That's one that people are kind of split on, because it would be a new direction for our system. It would to some degree change the character of the system. That has always been an issue, but with an influx of money, it will become more of one.

Do any of the state park systems in the country with that resort-park approach operate in the black?

Some parks do, but you really have to be very well set with visitor services. One park that operates nearly in the black in Tennessee is Fall Creek Falls. (tape change) ...cabins, a golf course that was rated in the top 50 public courses in the nation as far as design, a big lake where you can rent boats and fish, numerous picnic areas, large campgrounds, a restaurant that operates all year round. It's very much developed for creature comforts and the resort atmosphere. We looked at it a little bit. You really need that level of development so that you'll have year-round income. You've got to be able to pull in conferences and conventions, you gotta be able to have golf that will bring in a lot of money that will stay for awhile, and you need lodges that will generate money.

At that point you're becoming a resort operator, and the whole natural resource preservation mission becomes a little fuzzy.

It suffers. Has to. See, the thing the southeastern park systems have really struggled with is, you start out with a resource orientation, but where do people want to put the lodge? Well, they want to put it in the most beautiful, scenic place, which in many cases is also because of the unusual conditions the most highly significant as far as natural resources go. The most fragile. For instance, at Fall Creek Falls, it just gets pounded. You pretty much have to harden, lay asphalt, over any place the public is going to go. And people just kind of feed off from there, so everything looks trampled. And so in drawing masses of people, the people in the con group say as you draw more and more people in and the level of amenities goes up, because that becomes the driving force, that those indirectly impact the natural resource and orient the whole focus toward amenities and away from the natural resource. The question is, is that a role for the state? If you could make money doing that, the private sector would be in there doing it. So do you want to sacrifice the natural resource in order to provide this experience at a deficit.

Is that an option for North Carolina? Because the enabling legislation is pretty explicit.

I think it will always be option. It just depends on who's behind it.

Some would see it as an option, some as a danger.

Right. And so I think it's just yet to be seen. And really, I think that we have recreation areas, like Jordan Lake, Falls Lake and Kerr Lake, and in terms of natural significance, there's not that much. By that we usually mean undisturbed natural areas, things that have been there for a long time and have essentially been untouched. It takes awhile. Once they've been disturbed with roads or buildings or whatever, they are no longer natural for quite a while.

Actually, those lakes are drowned bottomlands, aren't they?

That's right. And so it's set up for recreation, set up for camping, boating, fishing, swimming, and we're not there protecting significant natural resources. That said, they are good bald eagle habitat, which is federally endangered. I don't know that people really have problems with that, because you take a place that may be disturbed anyway, perhaps they need more recreational opportunities and the area lends itself to provide those, I don't know that anybody's against that. It's sort of when the two start coming into conflict, and also the level of investment of the resort areas becomes more and more of a driving force in your system, because a lot of times just the fact that so much money and manpower is tied up in those makes it become a driving force. Perhaps in terms of your mission these other things are more important, but in the day to day government people would tend to focus on where's your staff, where's your operating dollars and where's your capital dollars going, and those would be going to the resort parks. That's some of the issues involved.

Who decides how those moneys are apportioned among land acquisition, capital improvements and operating expenses?

It will be up to what's called the Park Authority. The best way to tell you would be to just give you a copy of the legislation. The Park Authority is set up by the government, president pro tem of the senate and speaker of the house, three appointments each. It was created in the last General Assembly session and it will take effect July 1, 1996. That's when they start meeting, and that's when the money comes. So the park authority has the final say. We'll make recommendations, and for local grants we'll have a competitive grant process, but for state parks we'll be making recommendations as to what the needs are, but they'll have the final signoff.

Is there or will there be any appropriations made from general funding from here on out or does this dedicated supersede the need for a yearly appropriation from the legislature?

This is capital and land. The operating budget will continue to be a combination of appropriations and revenue generated at the parks - camping fees, entrance fees, swimming fees.

Where are there entrance fees? I wasn't aware of them.

There are only two: Jordan Lake and Falls Lake. And those are state recreation areas on federal reservoirs.

Does that ever get brought up, the idea of charging entrance fees?

Oh, sure, all the time.

And the argument against them would be that the taxpayers have already paid for these parks so they're entitled to go in and use them?

That's part of it. It's also, there's a cost to collecting fees. Got to have somebody out there to collect it.

Unless you're doing it on the honor system with an iron ranger or something.

And that is an option. And it would be a possibility. That's probably the most painless. You come into a park. There's a little pulloff that says the fee is \$3, put the money in an envelope and the ticket in your window. The U.S. Forest Service does that quite a bit, and I guess if we did that we would use their model. But to have a point of contact, our opinion is you almost have to put a little house out on the main park entrance road, run electricity, bathroom, telephone, and you put all those together and you put it out away from the rest of the complex

and you're looking at a pretty fair capital expenditure to build that, and then the road system has to be widened out, and then you're paying someone to stand and collect fees.

And when you're done computing all the fees that have been collected, less salaries and capital expenditures, have you really made any money?

Right, right. It's a question, and I'm sure there are ways to do it more cheaply. In our parks, because our parks tend to really have high peak periods of attendance and a lot of low times that for the most part the little honor system would make more sense.

I've just finished spending a lot of time on the coast of California where there are a lot of state parks and beaches, and one of the reasons I think they collect user fees is to deal with visitor demand. That sort of weeds out the inundation of people you'd see if it were free, and I don't think that's probably a problem in North Carolina parts, right?

Not so much, although I think that places are more urban, maybe it would. The joyriders. The people who like fees believe that in cases where you are having problems with depreciative behavior and all that means, to charge someone to come in to misuse the park is a deterrent.

So, to sort of wrap it all up, the situation now with funding, is it pretty much where you'd like it to be for the foreseeable future?

It's what we've been asking for. The thing that's important about what the park fund does, it allows you to plan. Those projections may be off by a percentage, but it allows you to look out over time, identify your highest priorities and say, that's what you're going to go for in your first year, second year, and know that the money in later years is going to come in. For 20 years, I'd say, we made master plans that had no money. We'd have a plan that would say, that's where a visitor center is going to go. Twenty years later, it was still in the book but it wasn't on the land.

You talked about inventorying the parks and identifying close to \$200 million in capital improvements and land acquisition needs. With the funding levels coming in, it's still going to fall far short of what you'd like to have, ideally. Do you foresee a horizon at which you'd say you'd caught up?

I've heard people talk about that. It's down there, it's down the road. But there's another constraint on that, and that is after such a long time of not having money, it really takes staff to spend money. In 1985, for instance, we got \$25 million for land acquisition, and they came right back the next year and none of that money came with extra staff to spend it. So we had one person trying to spend \$25 million on land, and that's negotiating with a variety of owners. We had not made very good progress in spending the money, and they took essentially half of it away. And so it's important to have a reasonable amount of money compared to the staff you have the ability to spend it. It will make us look better to be able to say that we're making good progress spending the money available rather than getting such a great amount that perhaps it would better address your immediate needs but it would create chaos. The legislation says we have 3% for administration. We assume next year that's about seven positions, and that's to purchase land, build the state parks but also to operate the local funding cycle. We're going to have probably 200 applications for local park and recreation development coming out of this money, so to staff that grants program has to come out of here, too.

Has there been adequate staffing to deal with the '93 bond allocation?

That came with no money for staffing.

Is there a danger that might be lost, like the '95 appropriation?

No. We have more staff than we had in '85, and '85 was only land and this is capital and land. We have been gearing up, thinking one of these years we're going to get the money. The capital process is a two-step process: first you have to design the building, that's one contract, and then you build it. And so far previous years, building up, thinking by gosh next year's going to be our year, we were doing design contracts, getting projects in place so that when the money came in we didn't have the design contract lag. We're in better shape for spending construction

money. In that case, you get the contract and the construction company's out there doing it, and we're just overseeing it. Land is harder to spend, because we're involved in each negotiation.

And how much of that \$35 million is earmarked for land and capital?

\$24.5 million for capital, \$10.5 for land. The bond actually said "no more than 33% for land," but the constituencies are that. There are a lot of people around the state who want to see us buy as much undeveloped land as possible, so we bought the maximum.

So that money's already been spent?

It's in the process. It's already been allocated, all of those projects are in the works.

And the capital money has been allocated as well.

Yeah. In order to sell the bond, we identified all the projects that "if you pass this bond, this is what's going to happen at all these state parks."

Did every park unit in the system benefit to some degree?

Practically, I think almost all. That was our strategy. Everybody has needs, and rather than trying to choose a favorite we spread it around so that everybody would feel some benefit from the bond.

Who among the legislators are the staunchest state park advocates?

The two who are given credit for having the most to do with the Park Fund were Lyons Gray in the House, who really pushed it, and J.K. Sharon in the Senate. However, it really had a tremendous amount of support. Once we could navigate through all the committees, the floor passage was unanimous or one or two dissenting votes. There are some people who don't like dedicated funds period, and they don't care if it's mom or apple pie, they don't want to say in upcoming years you're going to be able to spend this amount of money for this purpose. They want the whole pot every year to be able to decide at the pleasure of the General Assembly. Other than that we had unanimous support.

Is there still a grassroots movement? I'm aware of Friends of State Parks. Do they have the ear of the General Assembly?

They do. The constituency that passed the Park Fund was bigger than that, though. The combination they went for was both local park interests as well as natural resource side of it - Nature Conservancy, the Sierra Club, Conservation Council all were in there. Plus we worked on getting people like county commissioners, League of Municipalities, and there are also groups that have environmental crosses to bear like chemical producers, big supporters. People that don't have a stellar environmental reputation there, it's good to be identified with this issue. It had an awful lot of support.

So the various environmental organizations have become adjunct friends of state parks?

That's right. An awful lot of significant natural resources are in state parks, and this will be the most significant funding source for acquiring natural areas in the state.

Is this source of funding indefinite? Does it have a specified end? Does it come up for renewal?

No. Until the General Assembly acts to the contrary, we just keep getting the money. So we hope to do an excellent job on it, make everybody happy, and give them no reason to reconsider.

That's a lot brighter picture than the one the last time I put together a paper on this subject, I'm sure.

It's interesting to get the perspective that the figures might be slightly misleading, that even though North Carolina may rank toward the bottom, it reflects a philosophy of park management that is more natural resource management oriented and that some of the capital expenditures don't find their way into the per capita spending figures.

I guess the other thing to remember is that last is still last. In looking at this, even cranking in some of those initial bond expenditures, we don't move up the list very far, even if you add those in.

Well, is it enough? Will you continue to press for more revenue streams?

I don't think we'll be back anytime soon in terms of land and capital, but I do think the next thing we focus on is staffing, because of the kinds of situations I've talked about. Really, staffing is where it's at when it comes to being able to protect the resource and to be able to interpret and educate the public as far as what North Carolina's natural heritage is all about. If you don't have staff, that certainly doesn't happen as much. And public safety, too. That is harder to put a figure on, and it's also much less attractive to the legislature, so it will be a harder battle to fight. It's much more attractive for a legislator to be able to say, I've added this visitor center. Or we added a thousand acres of most significant land to South Mountain State Park with this money. As opposed to saying, "We've got two more rangers here." It doesn't have the same ring. But it's very important. And that's the next priority.

Have there been any studies or polling of the public as far as their attitudes toward state parks - what they want, how willing they are to support them, that kind of thing?

The surveys from other parts of the country are typically overwhelmingly supportive. All those issues concerning outdoor recreation and resource preservation have very high levels of support.

What would you like to know, what would you be curious to learn about their attitudes?

To some degree, I think our most important area as far as the public goes is to educate as far as our mission goes and the degree to which people know who we are and the kinds of things that the state parks try to do. There's a general finding when people do research that in government you're constantly aware of who does what: state parks, county parks, local parks, federal parks. To the general public, it's parks. "I'm going to a park." And so we have a piece of that, and I think it's really important. I think our piece is really an important piece. And so I certainly would be interested to know the degree to which people know of the state park system and what we stand for and then agree with those general concepts. Also, what types of things we can do to improve that, and I think a lot of that's wrapped up in staffing and outreach and some of the educational message. The more we can do with school groups, the more visibility we have in communities around the state parks, the better off we would be. Just sell our message.

(followup questions, by phone, 4/3/96)

How has the money from the 1993 bond issue for state parks been handed out? Through what channels and by whom is it allocated?

When the idea of the bond came about, we looked at how to distribute that across the state, so we tried to do a little something from nearly every park. The legislation said the percentage is - I think it's 30%, maybe 33% - but it was worked out that \$24.5 million was spent for capital improvements, because in the legislation it said that not more than \$10.5 million could be spent on land. And that's how it was broken down. Of that, we created projects that pretty much touched every park.

Is that money pretty much spent at this point?

It is being spent. Both the land and the construction process are fairly lengthy. We are spending it; it has all been allocated to projects.

That bond money - where does that show up? Is that hidden or separate from the figures for land acquisition and capital improvements appropriations? Do they not reflect the bond money?

Well, it will come out as the money is actually spent. I know that you've been using the NASPD report. We've reported as it's been spent. I think there may be several categories of expenditure, I believe I'm right, where you give the total that's been spent and break it down according to the funding source, and I believe there would be a category there that would show

the bond money. We would not have reported \$35 million on that questionnaire that we receive. As we spend it, that's how we report it. That's the most accurate way to keep track of it, and there's a comparable figure for other states as well. It's the one called fixed capital outlay.

Probably that hasn't yet shown up in the NASPD figures that have been disseminated.

That's right. The report we have now, the 1995 report, that's for the 1993-94 year (Fiscal Year 1994). At that point, the bond had just passed.

But you hadn't yet spent the money.

That's right.

And it's in the process of being spent now.

That's correct.

In the course of doing this, it seems to me to be the key issue, as I go over all this, people obsess over comparative per capita spending between the states, based on operating expenditures, at which North Carolina places at the low end, but it's almost like comparing apples and oranges when you talk about a resort-oriented park system vs. a resource-preservation oriented park system.

I agree. I guess you can look at it two ways. In terms of the types of system that we have, at least in my mind we don't want to be a Kentucky. It's perhaps more accurate to look at park systems that you are more similar to. So I think that we report the ranking, but as far as our target goes, we wouldn't want to pick the Kentuckys of the world. Even the national average is up in the five-dollar range. But no matter what comparison you choose, when you're at the bottom, you're at the bottom of nearly all of those.

There is an unassailable reality that the legislature hasn't paid the system the attention and funding it's deserved over its long history.

Yeah, and I think that would come out in the various comparisons.

Do you happen to know why there's some missing data on land acquisition and capital improvements appropriations throughout the Fifties and Sixties?

I believe that the problem is just basic record-keeping, number one. It's hard to go back and get the historical data. The other thing is I'm not exactly sure this is a hard and fast rule, but up until 1971, there had been at least an informal policy, if not an official one, that the state park system would grow based on the actions of public-minded citizens. So a lot of federal help and a lot of donations were the rule. Again, I don't know if this is 100% accurate, but as we looked into it, 1971 was the first year in many, many years where the General Assembly had put some money, if any at all, in state park land and construction. There again, I'm not 100% sure, but I've at least read some things that have said prior to 1971 they didn't have that funding.

Yes, I figured that where the data was missing, it was at or close to zero, like a lot of the years surrounding it.

I think the farther you go back, the colder the trail gets. Unless you have a person's files that was there and they kept good records, you're out of luck.

Am I right in my conclusion about states like Kentucky and West Virginia that they aren't so much a taxpayer-supported system as a user-supported system in that a lot of the money that gets figured into them is revenue that was generated by park users and funneled back into it?

There's a fair amount of that. I think that's true in different ways of different systems. The ones that are the more resort-oriented parks, they do pay more of their own way. I think it's one of the central issues as far park systems go as to which is going to take precedence: the revenue generation and visitor services or resource protection. For the West Virginias and Kentuckys of the world, they really are set up very much like a business, and natural resource considerations, except for providing the settings, take second place.

(followup questions, by phone, 4/12/96)

According to the 1994 Systemwide Plan for the North Carolina State Parks System, there are 58 units in the parks system that break down as follows: 29 state parks, 7 state lakes, 4 state recreation areas, 4 state rivers, 4 state trails, and 7 state natural areas. Is that inventory still current? Have there been any additions to the system?

Well, we've got approval to purchase portions of Okameechee Mountain and a place called Run Hill Dune. Okameechee Mountain is near Eno River. Run Hill Dune is near Jockey's Ridge. We've been given the authority to purchase land there. No land has been purchased, though.

Will those become separate units, or will those be absorbed into Eno River State Park and Jockey's Ridge State Park?

I believe they would be separate units, although that would be more of a management decision. But at this point I would just go with the list in the Systemwide Plan. I think the decision on those two sites is yet to be made.

Candidly, I got the impression that you feel that despite the latest funding sources that have come along that it's still not enough and that the General Assembly needs to be aware that this doesn't solve the problem, that this is a step in the right direction.

I guess the way a previous director had put it, park funding is a three-legged stool. You need land acquisitions to protect the resource, you need capital improvements to allow people to visit the parks and be able to handle the use without damaging the resource, and you need personnel to manage it and operating funding. And the Park Fund has hit a home run on the first two of those. The operations is our next challenge. I would do nothing to downplay the importance of the Park Fund, because it is by far the best thing that has ever happened to state parks.

But it will still need to be augmented by a yearly appropriation.

That's right. We need to be aware that it takes people to run the parks.

(followup interview by phone, 4/30/96)

How important and effective have Friends of State Parks been, as far as promoting parks issues to the legislature?

They are a large group. They are the most involved group on a day to day basis. They have people who have known the parks and been interested in parks for many, many years, so they're a very knowledgeable group. They have a person that works as a lobbyist in the legislature. The person at Friends of State Parks is Jim Stevens, and he is one of the past directors of the division. I think they've been effective. With some of the later successes that we've had recently, I think it's important that we've shown our support is broader than the Friends group there. They're not the type...I don't know if you know anything about the zoo, for instance, but the zoo has a development support group that includes RJR, Hardee's, Food Lion - the really big corporations in North Carolina. Friends of State Parks is not like that. They're more your average citizen advocates. So they don't have the power that some of the larger corporations and more influential people would have. However, they've been very important in just having the statewide network and people who really keep up with different issues.

Would it take a well-connected group like Friends of the Zoo to keep the legislature's feet to the fire on this issue?

I think a couple things need to occur. The first one would be our responsibility, and that would be doing an effective job in administering the park fund. I think that maybe our closest to the connection to the General Assembly will be the group set up by the park fund legislation, and that's the Park Authority Board. Those nine individuals - three are named by the governor, three by the Speaker of the House, and three by the president pro tem of the Senate - because they'll

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And I imagine that over time, in addition to the existing backlog of needs, there will be new things arising all the time.

That's the point Phil McNally was making. Basically, we've identified a large backlog. However, each time a source of funding occurs, it's a natural tendency for people across the state to say "how about our share?" There really will be quite a few suggestions for new parks in the system. It's just going to be a fact.

So that money will have to not only go to deal with this huge backlog, but there's going to be people in different legislative districts clamoring to get a park up and running in their area.

That's correct. That's not to say you don't add additional park, because the system plan identifies quite a few areas or types of resources that should be in the system to represent North Carolina's natural heritage. We've identified our high, medium and low priorities for expanding the park system to protect these representative examples of North Carolina's natural heritage. To pay attention to the backlog is an important point, because we've gone so long. Given the current system and its great need for repair and need for just basic visitor facilities or maintenance areas, you certainly should put a large, large portion toward this backlog of projects.

When you look at it that way, \$5 to \$10 million a year still doesn't sound like nearly enough.

The one thing to consider in the amount of funding per year is your ability to effectively spend it, and that's one thing that I really think hurt us back in the mid-Eighties. The \$25 million in land acquisition came with no money to administer the fund. You had one person who had been bumping along spending just a little bit of money. Then with \$25 million, you really couldn't get that money spent. I think they've addressed that with the three percent. In the park fund it says we can spend up to three percent to administer the money, which would include people to oversee the construction projects, people to help purchase the land and people to do environmental assessment documents that are needed to push the construction projects along. That's a very important part of that, although a portion of that three percent is going to be spent to help administer the local side of the park and recreation trust fund, which is going to be a competitive branch program, as well as a person to help support the park and recreation trust fund board. They're meeting quarterly, so he'll help with the logistics and just making sure those meetings occur as they should.

So that money will probably disappear pretty fast.

It will.

But at least there's some there.

That's right.

You said no operating costs can come out of this, so where is that going to come from?

Well, one of the things we have done recently is in submitting construction and some land acquisition projects, we can estimate the new funding that will be required - for instance, opening up a visitor center or adding a new campground or a significant amount of acreage, how many staff positions would be needed in addition to what's already in the park. If those positions are approved, they come on-line when the project is completed or land acquisition is completed. It is a way to address the additional operating cost of new facilities or new acreage within the parks system.

The park system still gets the revenue that is raised within the park system?

For the reservoirs, it does go back into the park system. For revenue at state parks, the money goes just in the general fund. It is used to decrease the appropriation that we get. I don't know if we really benefit at this point from revenue generated at the state park. With the reservoirs, the funding goes back to the operation of those parks, according to the lease agreement that we have with the Army Corps of Engineers.

When I'm talking about operating costs, in the sense that the NASPD computes it, that's "expenditures for operation and maintenance of the state parks system." And that you say comes essentially from what - if not revenue, than from a yearly appropriation?

That's correct.

So you're still going to have to go to them every year and make a case for an appropriation and hope it's sufficient?

The thing we need to go to the General Assembly is to make increases. You don't have to go back each year and justify the current level of staffing. Any time you would ask for a staffing increase, you would have to go back. The two examples that are most recent are when we received maintenance staff and clerical staff in the parks. Those were two separate funding requests. I guess our next request will have to do with ranger staff.

You told me you were looking for 26 to 28 new positions. Once those are approved, that budget remains constant on a yearly basis?

That's correct.

So they won't or can't tamper with it?

It stays the same until the General Assembly acts again. We have 200 people working in the state parks system, and that funding will continue through time unless there's legislative action to increase or decrease that.

You mean yearly legislative action?

No, just an act of the General Assembly.

Because I look at these figures, and they're up and down and all over the place over the years historically. Now that you have a more or less stable source of income for land acquisition and capital improvements, I just wondered on the operations side, is that not still vulnerable to the same vicissitudes that historically have been seen in the system?

Probably not as much. Again, with the land and capital funding - a capital project is a one-time appropriation, and once you spend it, you have to wait for the General Assembly to give you some more. With positions, once those positions are established, they stay there until the General Assembly acts otherwise.

How about the steady increase in state parks visitation? The way I've calculated it, it's almost seven percent a year. It's almost like clockwork, if you look at the figures averaged over the last twenty years. That's pretty sizable. Do they take that into account? Are they aware of that growth and use of the system and the pressures that puts on it?

It's certainly something that we have identified, and I think that the General Assembly has looked very vigorously at the park system for a number of years. You had included some reference to the State Parks Study Commissions. Essentially, they have come out with lists of recommendations that would address capital as well as operations. But in many of those General Assemblies, those bills didn't go anywhere. Also, just in terms of the types of things that are funded by the General Assembly, it is easier to get the land and capital appropriations than the operating expenditures, the positions.

How do you explain the unanimity in both houses for the bill? There's hardly anything on a political level that finds everybody voting yea. Why? Were they almost embarrassed into doing it?

I don't know if it was so much that. I think that in the legislative process, I think the disagreements tend to be ironed out in the committee process, and as we worked on the park fund in years past, there were different committees that looked at it, and where we were not able to overcome a problem that the General Assembly found with that bill, it just stalled in that committee. After we were able to address those concerns and I think also you have to give credit to the broad range of support that we got for the park fund in the past General Assembly. Once it got to the floor, all the disagreements had been taken into account and changes made or people

convinced that we had covered what they were concerned about. By the time it got to the floor, there was really no conflict.

Weren't there something like 200 groups that had weighed in favor of it?

That's right.

Who went out and publicly got them to come out for the park fund? How was such a thing organized?

It was a combination of efforts. What we were able to do was contact both people who were supported both local recreation as well as the state park system. That would include environmental organizations, the Friends of State Parks, as well as the local recreation agencies and local recreation interests. That's a coalition that really has not been put together quite so much.

Who built that coalition? Did you do it from that office?

It was a combination of the division and the department and the governor's office. It really took all three, and obviously with support from the General Assembly as well. In the past, there had been support in the General Assembly, and just based on all the competing demands, it was not a priority in the governor's budget. Then there was a time when it was a priority in the governor's budget, and we had problems in the General Assembly. This past time around, the division was able to work with the department and the governor's office to make it one of the highest priorities, not only for our department but for Governor Hunt. Given that backing, as well as the cooperation of the groups around the state that supported these types of things, that was the nucleus that could then go out and gather the support of all these various organizations. It's quite a network, when you put together the statewide environmental organizations as well as recreation departments all over the state and then have a firm proposal to support on the part of the department and the governor's office.

Is there any danger of complacency on the legislative side at this point, of thinking we've given all this money and set up this fund, so now the problem's solved, even though there is still a 75-year backlog of unaddressed needs? Is there going to be a temptation to turn toward other issues, or do you need them need them at this point?

We certainly always need them. I don't know if it's the complacency as much as just the nature of things, where the state park system competes against the whole range of concerns that come before the governor and secretary and General Assembly. Apparently, Senator Basnight was mentioning that we need to address land purchases along the Neuse River with a dedicated fund similar to that of what parks and recreation has.

What kinds of sources for such things are left?

Well, I don't know. We just hope that it doesn't cut into the funding for us. You look at the hogs farms and the Neuse River - just a whole range of things. I don't know that they seriously think that we've been completely taken care of and have no other needs, but just in terms of our success through time, they've given us more than we've ever had before, and it may be natural to say, "Well, okay, we've done our share and need to go on to something else."

How do you explain the fact that a state that's as outdoor-recreation oriented as North Carolina have a situation like this arise with the parks in the first place? How did they wind up tending them so badly for so many years? I was asked that question in my defense, and the only answer I could come up with was a bad historical precedent set early on that was perpetuated through most of this century.

Right. I'd say that if you look at North Carolina's General Assembly through time, we have been very conservative. I think that typically North Carolina has not spent large amounts of money on a lot of things. So I think that maybe other states are far more liberal in spending money on a lot of things, including state parks, and North Carolina has generally been more conservative. In particular, it's unusual for the General Assembly to set up the type of funding program that we have with the Park and Recreation Trust Fund, and that is one that obligates

money for years to come for a particular purpose. I think also if you look at parks and recreation, that has changed radically in the last 30-35 years. If you look back at North Carolina prior to the mid-Sixties, parks and recreation was something that was taken care of by churches and civic organizations and that sort of thing. You really didn't have a large public role in parks and recreation on the local level and, as you had mentioned, with the General Assembly passing a law where we'd go with the "public spirited citizens" to expand the park system. You had a whole different perception of how parks and recreation should be administered or provided by public agencies. It was more of a private concern. With the rise of the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the increase of recreation agencies across the state, and I think also you could say in the Seventies with the legislation that was passed - the Trails Act, the National Scenic Rivers Act - that was also the beginning of the environmental awareness era. That would increase the public sentiment to fund state parks and protect land in the state park system. So I think that how people see the environment and how people see parks and recreation has changed. If you start with our history back in 1915 and then take it up to the year 1970, that was sort of a different world and a different way of looking at things than occurred after that. I think the public role has become more emphasized since the 1970s.

Was Mount Mitchell indeed the first state park in the southeast?

I believe it was. That's what we say. That was the time also when the first national parks were beginning.

Do you think in North Carolina too there is so much federal parkland and when people think of things like the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Great Smoky Mountains and the Outer Banks that there's a tendency to overlook the state parks?

I think that's true, and I also think one of the things that people have found is that the general public does not distinguish who manages what. I have seen surveys where people talk about the state park system, asking what are their favorite state parks, and they name some of the federal parks. Although to people who work in the managing agencies it's very clear what the differences between a national park, a state park and a county park are, and we know what they're trying to accomplish and how they might be different, the public isn't necessarily aware of those distinctions.

So is raising public awareness, is that an important aspect of keeping the focus trained on state parks? Do you want people to know what the state park system is all about?

Yes, and I think that the people who are your main supporters have no trouble with that sort of thing. I think that just in terms of what we're educating the public about, although we would like for them to know that it's the North Carolina state parks system, it's even more important for our educational programs to communicate information about what the natural features are and why those are important. The environmental education is more central to our mission. I think that if we do our job well and state parks are a place that people value, that will work itself out.

Leaving West Virginia and Kentucky out of it, which state in the southeast would you point to as a consistently well-funded and operated park system?

Florida. They've had the document-transfer tax for a long time. They're close to our philosophy, and their budget per capita is about double ours. I think that their mission is very similar to ours and they protect quite a bit of land and have natural resource protection and outdoor recreation in a natural resource environment as basic tenets of their mission.

INTERVIEW WITH NEY C. LANDRUM
Executive Director, National Association of State Park Directors

(First interview: 3/21/96)

I had a couple questions about your methodology. One of the statistics that states seems to extract from your data is per capita spending. Now, that must be something they compute themselves because I don't see it in any of the tables in the Annual Information Exchange.

No, I compute that for them.

So that's something that you compute, but it's not a part of the annual reports?

They don't submit that. They used to, but everybody used a different source for their population or whatnot, so when I took it over I said we're going to use a common source for population data. I simply take the operating budget information they submit and divide that by the latest population figures.

For the period 1990-94, would you simply use the 1990 census figures?

The latest. I go to the latest census bureau figures. I was surprised this time that I could not find any later than the 1992 figures, published in the 1994-95 "Book of the states."

So you use the operating expenditures, and then divide that by the census data on population to get those figures on per capita spending on state parks?

Yes.

And you publish those separately from the Annual Information Exchange?

No, I'm sorry, we may be talking about two different things. I'm talking about the annual ratio of state expenditures to park expenditures.

Oh, you see, I'm talking about per capita spending on state parks in a given year.

No, we do not compute that.

So some park systems take it upon themselves to compute that from your raw data, correct?

Yes. They have complete flexibility to analyze the raw data anyway they want to.

If I were going to compute that from the information given in the Annual Information Exchange, what would be to your mind the fairest or most accurate way to go about that? What figures should I use?

The operating expenditures.

Not capital outlay?

No. Well, I'd compute that separately, anyway, 'cause that figure fluctuates a lot. States seem to go in spurts.

There could be a huge bond issue in one year and nothing for several years after.

Exactly. They'll spend a lot of money for a few years, buying land and building facilities, and then they'll have a dry spell, whereas other states might come in at that time, so it's hard to draw much of a comparison from those unless you average it over a long period of time. But the operating expenditures are fairly stable. They've built on the same base each year.

So for a yearly figure, that would be a good indicator of per capita spending, and maybe for a five-year period to look at capital outlays?

I would say at least five. Ten would even be better.

What is the history of this organization?

It was formed back in 1961. A group of the park directors were attending another meeting and decided it was time they had their own organization, so they got together and agreed to form one. It has survived for lo these many years.

How long have you been involved with it?

Since I became state park director here in Florida in 1970. But I've been serving in my present capacity as executive director since just before my retirement. That's the fall of 1988.

I had one very specific question about these figures. Under operating expenditures, what is the difference between "revenues (unappropriated)" and "revenues (appropriated)"?

Some park systems have the option of spending the money as they take it in. In other words, if they raise a million dollars, they can turn around and spend it. Most states, however, have to funnel that money through the legislature. The legislature wants to keep control, so the money goes into a fund, usually a dedicated fund, and the legislature will appropriate it out of that fund to the parks and say where it wants it to go rather than leaving that discretion to the parks administrator.

For instance, under revenue for North Carolina in 1994, the total of all operations is \$2.2 million. That figure shows up exactly under operating expenditures under "revenues (appropriated)." And that money they've taken in does go back to the parks, not into the General Fund, but as an appropriation through the state legislature.

Yes, the legislature retains control over how that money is used, and they do that through the appropriations process.

How many states use the real estate transfer tax to raise money for state parks?

To my knowledge, only half a dozen or so. Florida was first, Maryland was second, Arkansas has one, North Carolina did one last year, and there may be one or two others.

Is that an effective mechanism, do you think? Is that a stable, consistent source of income for the parks?

It has been for Florida. It varies depending on the economy and the real-estate market. In a growth state like Florida, of course, it was a very productive revenue source. There have been several downturns, but you have to anticipate those.

The chief of planning for North Carolina State Parks made the point that you can philosophically tie activity in the real estate market for the need for parks and land and resource preservation.

I don't think you can correlate it as a quantitative thing, but there is a tie-in philosophically in that the real estate market reflects growth, and growth generates demand for parks, so in a way it's like hedging to take some of the money from the transfer of real estate and use it to buy more parks.

(2nd phone interview, 4/1/96)

I was going over all these figures, and particularly in this state, North Carolina, there's a raft of articles about how underfunded the park system is and everybody gets up in arms. They start comparing statistics with other states, and particularly the per capita statistics that come up. It seems to me that there are at least two and maybe more philosophies of state park systems that kind of make that a little like comparing apples and oranges - i.e., the natural resource preservation philosophy vs. the resort and recreation approach in parks that are quite a bit more intensively developed. Would you agree with that?

Yes I would. In trying to evaluate the relative importance of the per capita expenditure, that's very important. Cause if you'll notice, most of those that are very high are the big resort park states, like Kentucky, West Virginia, Tennessee and so forth. The ones that have more basic type state park systems, such as North Carolina and Florida, are going to be lower because there's not nearly as much cost and overhead in operating the latter type of system.

The other thing that's a little deceptive is that a lot of that isn't really per capita spending by the state legislature; it's revenue that gets taken in by the parks and re-appropriated for the parks.

Well, it's the same thing in my opinion. It makes no difference where the money comes from. It's what you actually spend to maintain and operate a park system, or I should say build and operate and maintain, although the figures we use for our comparison are operating expenditures only. They don't take into account fixed capital, because that fluctuates too much.

What is it about Kentucky's system in particular? Why is that so far out in front of the pack?

Well, because their system, and they're very honest about it, was developed to try to bolster the economy in that state. And in order to do that they built a large number of resort parks which have lodges, golf courses, marinas and in some cases fancy facilities, swimming pools and things, that you don't find in a more nature-oriented park system that is designed primarily to meet the needs of a resident population. They're very honest about that, as is West Virginia and, more recently, states like Alabama, Tennessee, and Oklahoma, which have followed suit. Ohio is heavily into that area, although I'm not as familiar with their system. But that's it, you're just building up a large inventory of high-cost facilities, both in terms of maintenance and operation.

But that doesn't necessarily mean they're doing a better job of preserving their natural resource heritage.

It really has no correlation in that matter at all, because they can be spending every penny of that on replacing furniture in their lodge rooms rather than resource maintenance.

What sort of criteria would you look at in a given state to establish whether or not they're doing an adequate job of maintaining their parks?

That's a very difficult thing to come to grips with. For the past several years, Wilbur LaPage, the recently retired parks director of New Hampshire, now out at Colorado State, has been attempting to assess that using methodology similar to that CSU has used trying to assess the quality of the maintenance and operation of the National Park system. I don't think it has done a very good job, not even an adequate job, in that respect, because it's very difficult to come to grips with. But what he attempts to do in a very subjective way is to ask the individual states to rate themselves in things like resource management and threats to the park and deferred maintenance and the quality of their maintenance and so forth. But I don't think that really is very reliable.

Virginia, Florida and North Carolina are all natural resource-oriented state park systems, but from my experience of Virginia and Florida, they are better maintained park systems. I tend to go up to Virginia's parks more than North Carolina's to camp and hike simply because the facilities aren't as rundown and the trails are easier to follow. North Carolina has some wonderful areas; they just don't offer the same experience to the visitor in terms of quality. I'm trying to figure out how such differences among states might be determined from looking at the raw data.

I'm not sure the raw data will help you very much. I think you've got to look at the mission statement and the philosophy and policy guidance that comes from the top office; the traditions that have been established in the state for the state park system; what type of training and indoctrination they give their personnel. Those are the things that will ultimately make a difference in the quality, rather than the statistics, which deal with quantity.

I've talked to several people that work for the North Carolina parks program, and they've got some really good, dedicated people.

I think Phil McKnelly is heading in the right direction with the program there.

It's like turning a big ship around in open water, though. I think they figure they're \$250 million behind in basic repairs, maintenance and land acquisition to get their park units anywhere near the master plans that were written for them.

Well, I would say that's typical of most park systems, virtually all of the state park systems and certainly the national park system as well. And it comes down to a question of philosophy and direction, on the one hand, and wherewithal in terms of money and staff on the other hand. One sets the direction and the other implements it. You can't do it without both.

The latest thrust, now that they've got a dedicated source of funding and also a healthy bond issue, passed a few years ago, is personnel and staffing in the parks, which are at the moment pretty understaffed.

That's certainly important. As I think about it, not long before I retired, which was 1989, we devised a checklist of quality indicators for each park that we had the park manager assess on a regular basis. That might be of interest to you, if you can put your hands on it, because it attempted to identify all of the factors that, in my estimation, contributed to a quality park operation. You can call Joe Knoll, he's the assistant director there, at (904) 488-6131, and ask if he can put his hands on a copy of the quality indicator assessment for the individual parks. It was just a couple pages, nothing more than a checklist, but the object was to have each park manager address each of those factors on a regular basis, just to make them more conscience - things like appearance of the park, condition of the signs. It dealt more with the infrastructure than the natural resources, although at one time several years earlier we did attempt to devise a system for measuring the resource health, the ecological health, and we started a series of resource assessments. Those were done not by the park staff but by a separate staff that was not directly involved in the operation and management of the park, and the object there was to make sure that it was as objective as possible. If you're interested in that, the person to talk to would be Jim Stevenson, who was the chief naturalist for our state park system. His number is (904) 488-8338. He's still with the department, although he's no longer working in parks. To trigger his memory there, just tell it's the state park resource assessment that he initiated for me some years ago.

Last of all, if you had to create a typology of state park missions, with natural-resource preservation at one extreme and revenue-generating resorts at the other, are there any other types that come to mind?

I'm not sure I know exactly what you mean. Tell me again in somewhat different words.

Okay. North Carolina at one extreme seems to be very much a natural resource-preservation type of park system. They really don't care about generating revenue or putting money into building lodges, golf courses, that kind of thing. At the other extreme, states like West Virginia and Kentucky preserve some nice resources, but their parks are pretty much covered with golf courses, restaurants, swimming pools and so on. Between those two extremes, if I were looking to classify state parks into categories - resource, resort or a hybrid of those two - are there any other missions that I've left out?

I would say there would be one other that comes to mind very quickly. Some of the smaller states - Rhode Island comes to mind - their parks are developed more along the lines of a good county park system, where they're primarily designed to meet the active recreation needs of the resident population. There wouldn't be but a very few that would fall into that category but in those states such as Rhode Island and Connecticut, they simply don't have the geography, the area, the resources and whatnot to get evolved in the more expansive types of projects that the larger states do. That would be a subcategory. Then, really, I think before the two extremes that you've described, you think in terms of a more balanced system that would have both, and I think that's what most states are striving for. California, Florida, Missouri, Texas, Washington and Oregon, just about every state is trying to do both, to identify and preserve the basic resources while at the same time trying to appropriately develop them and make them available to people for appropriate use. So that's the key to a good system. I used to talk about it in terms of overlays. You can overlay the state with a system of parks designed to preserve the choice resources, a balance of resources that are available. You don't want all of one kind to the exclusion of another kind; you want a balance of resource types. And then the next overlay would be the parks appropriately developed to meet the quantified need of the people. People will tell you, through surveys of various means, what they want. They want to go to the beach, they want to swim, they want to picnic, they want to go boating - that type of thing. So you have to make sure you're addressing those needs. So on the one hand your first overlay is qualitative: you're looking for the best. The second overlay is quantitative: you're looking for enough in the right places to meet the identified need. To the extent you can find areas that will serve both purposes, both in terms of where they're located and what they are and also whether or not they

can be suitably developed without undue deterioration of the resource, then you've got the ideal situation. But more often than not, you find areas of lesser quality, but in the right places to meet the quantitative demand and the better properties you find to meet the qualitative need are not located as well in terms of where the people are. It's just like the National Park System. It started out west with Yellowstone, Yosemite and Grand Canyon, where there were virtually no people at the time. They were the spectacular resources. Only in recent years have they gotten involved in the Fire Islands, the Gateways and so forth. My point is, you can't think in terms just of the quality of the resource, you can't think in terms just of the quantity of resources you're providing to meet the need. You've got to think in terms of all of it and seek a balance.

That sums it up nicely!

All this is set forth nicely in the formula we developed for the Florida park system to try to head off the constant pressures you get to build resort parks - you know, people go to Kentucky and West Virginia then come back and say, "Why can't we have the big lodges and nice golf courses and so forth?" So you need to have a pretty clear-cut philosophy established in order to explain why you're doing what you do. Then you've got to stick to it. Then you've got to educate not only the politicians but the people who pressure the politicians to make sure they understand and support you. It's a never-ending struggle, you know. Even the national park service has had difficulties.

INTERVIEW WITH JIM STEVENS

President, Friends of State Parks, and former director, North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation (interviewed 4/30/96)

Are you the current or past president of Friends of State Parks?

I'm currently the president. I'm in my second year in that position.

How large is the organization at this point?

We have right at 700 members.

What is the work of the organization? Is it primarily to lobby the legislature on behalf of parks?

If it was, we wouldn't have a 501c3 rating. You can only have upwards to 20% of your income go for lobbying. We have a lot of contact with the legislature, because we are all volunteers, and we do not have to list it. Therefore we do more legislative contact work than our budget would indicate.

Because it's done voluntarily?

That is correct.

How do you explain the turnabout in the fortunes of the state parks in the past three years, with the bond issue and the Trust Fund? The whole parks movements seems to have turned a propitious corner lately.

Very much so.

To what do you attribute that?

I was a state park director from 1977 to 1985 here in North Carolina - parks, recreation, trails, reservoirs, you name it. Advisory Service, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the State Trails System, on and on. This is one of the things that led up to it, and that is we began to put Humpty-Dumpty together. The thing of it is, back in the old days, before the mid-Seventies, we were going over there - the trails group was going over, the natural resource group was going over, the reservoir group was going over, the recreation group was going over, and on and on. All individually. None of us had any real impact. Then it dawned on us, in the shift and changes and all, and particularly with the current director, Phil McNally...Phil was able to get a coalition of either 11 or 13 different organizations to come together and say, "We are going to do something for state parks. We are going to do something to support county parks and city parks." Because if you divide them and split them, then you have people wanting tennis courts and ball fields and swimming pools and recreation centers in the state parks. That is the last place where we can say we've got a true natural resource system. So the state park people finally came around to saying, "We need to work with the city and the county people," and the city and county people said, "We've got to work with the state park people." It all came together.

In addition to that, we were able to get the travel and tourist industry. We were able to get the most conservative organization in North Carolina, which is the North Carolina Business and Industry Association. The president, right about this time, was a fellow named Bill Cook, who used to be the number one staff member for Congress and Jim Broyhill. But Bill was a schoolteacher at one time, and he was out there in Rowan County. We set out a Rowan County Parks and Recreation Commission. He was not only appointed but elected chairman of a county recreation commission. So he got his feet wet. Then when he was with the Congress and Broyhill, he got exposed to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is federal funding coming in. Then we got the Homebuilders' Association, we got the Farm Bureau, the Sierra Club Conservation Council, the Eno River Association and many others to all put their shoulder to the wheel.

Back in 1961, we had six bond issues. It was the first time state parks had ever appeared on a bond issue in North Carolina. Like all the other bond issues that were run at that time, they all got defeated. It was the only time that state parks had ever been on the ballot. It wasn't except for Jim Hunt insisting that we have state parks join the community college system, the university system and water and sewer issues on the bond referendum. People said, "State parks

are going to pull us down. People are going to vote against that, and then they're going to vote against the rest of it." To the contrary, water and sewers came out first. Parks came out second. Community colleges, third. And the university system, last. Now, there wasn't but one or two percentage differences. They found out that parks and recreation could run with the big boys. This was the breakthrough. It was due to everybody getting the word out through Little League Baseball and youth football and square dancing and senior citizen's clubs and naturalists and the hikers and the bikers and the campers. The word went out through all these 13 organizations. It was this coalition of 13 groups that got a favorable impact on the state parks bond issue.

Looking at those different groups, I guess that is what they mean when they say "politics makes strange bedfellows."

That is correct! Well said. In addition to that, then we had a land transfer tax. But the first year, there was no money available, so the legislature, based upon the success of the state bond issue, appropriated \$10 million in 1994. Then there was a million dollars appropriated the next year, and that was more or less to keep things alive and tide things over until this land-transfer tax kicked in. There again, my first appearance before the state appropriations committee was 1949. I've seen a lot of things come and go since '49. But I have never seen things come to the head like it did last year when they voted. Now, they were voting for multiple things. It was money for state parks. Then there was beach access. There was money, 25% of it, for the Natural Heritage Trust Fund. And then 36% or something like that was for local government.

The grant program for county and local parks.

That is correct. The equivalent of LWCF. When all is said and done, the cities and counties will get as much or more than they ever did from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The highest point in my administration was \$5.6 million for everything. And then it went up to \$7.2 million. Then Reagan came in and it just went downhill. But anyway, that being neither here nor there, coming back to the legislature in '95, of course we had a change in politics, too. The Republicans moved into the House. A fellow by the name of Lyons Gray was the chairman of the finance committee, and Jim Black was the Democratic assistant in finance. Well, Jim Black and Lyons Gray got together, and Jim Black had a lot of exposure to parks and recreation through the Charlotte program, the Mecklenberg program, through Sugar Creek, which was a big LWCF project. He was familiar with Carowinds, a private for-profit park, and things like this. Then Lyons Gray became very familiar with what was going on in Winston-Salem. Not only the city of Winston-Salem, but Forsyth County, and then Clemmons, the R.J. Reynolds estate. He was familiar with Hanes Hosiery, when they had industrial recreation at one time. He could see the combination of public and private nonprofit and private for profit. With all of this pulling together, when the city and the county people... You see, there's a 130-odd local government units. Every one of them has a citizen board, anywhere from 9 to 15 in number, which represents over a thousand people appointed by mayor and council. Then we have 59 of the 100 counties with full-time county parks departments. They all had citizen board members appointed by the county commissioners. Then you throw in all the environmental groups, and on and on.

Well, the vote in the House on a Monday night - usually, they get 80 or 90 to show up on a Monday night and vote - there were 104 there, and the vote was 104-0 in the House. It went over two days later to the Senate. The Senate is 50 in number, and the vote was 49-0 for this bill. So in the House and the Senate there was not one legislator present voting against parks and recreation.

When you look at the funding history of the park system, this was a huge turnaround.

Complete. Plus the fact that not only was \$7.2 million the highest we ever got in the federal program. This starts out with \$13 million in 1996, and they expect by the year 2000 it will be up to \$20 million a year. Of course, Phil McNally has budgetary needs in excess of \$200 million. It's big bucks. The Land and Water Conservation Fund - of course, I was involved with that from the beginning, and in 1963 we got that bill drafted and in '64 it went into effect. It was authorized for 25 years. I said, "My gracious, what do we need something like this for 25 years? 25 years come and go overnight. Now it's been extended for another 25 years - the authorization, but not the appropriation. Now that's federal. We not only got the authorization at

the state level, but we got the appropriation to go along with it. So this is where we stand now. Now, what the legislature giveth, the legislature can take away. We must be en garde. But it would seem rather strange to me that a legislature with the citizen support that parks and recreation has had since 1993, identified at the ballot box, I don't see how they in good faith would begin to start cutting away or chipping away at the money that has been earmarked for parks and recreation.

I gather from talking to people over there that the next battlefield for funding will be going to the legislature for an increase in yearly appropriations for operating expenses and to meet growing personnel needs.

This is all fine and good, but some of the hardest money to come by - and it has to come up annually - is your operating budget. I think about eight or nine major parks still do not have enough personnel to have a full-time trained staff member in that park. There's not enough staff to look after the park and keep it open. It's understaffed. We've been gradually hitting away at it and one of these days it will come about. That's one of the other shortcomings right now. The thing of it is, with the demand for Smart Start in schools and prisons and drug abuse, you could go on and on, with all of these demands that legislators have, they are not going to be able to come up with this capital or additional operating expenses and may very well put the pressure on the Division of Parks and Recreation, at the state level particularly, to raise more funds through charging fees. There's a real scary thing there. Legislators have a wonderful way of saying, "You can earn maybe 15% or 20% of your budget through charges and fees" - entrance fees, concessions fees, etc. Then they'll say, "That will bring in \$2 to \$3 million." Fine. But then they'll turn around and cut the money out of the general fund by \$2 to \$3 million, and you're no better off than you were before.

And you're incurring collection expenses, and you're no doubt disappointing the public, who are used to going to the parks for free.

You've got to go along in good faith. My goal was 25% of the budget would come in through charges and fees, and through recreation anywhere from 35% to 40%. By that I mean natural resources are not the moneymaker. You have to have a Fort Macon or Mount Mitchell or some spectacular drawing card in addition to the natural resource. My easiest way to distinguish between parks and recreation is that state parks are natural and state recreation areas are man-made. When you get man-made facilities, then you can have campgrounds, a boating ramp, entrance fees, things like this.

Actually, isn't there a campground at Hanging Rock, where you have both a combination of the natural feature and some man-made recreational opportunities?

Every park is a little different, as it should be. There should be no standardized park. The biggest thing - and we've got one member in the Friends of State Parks who is constantly pounding away - is to identify the natural areas. Like the Piedmont beach. It's out here at Umpstead State Park, right between Raleigh and Chapel Hill. It's not supposed to be there, but it's a natural resource identification area. Now, if you put too many hiking trails or a road access too close to it, the people use will do damage to the natural resource. You can't build fences and bar them from doing this or that. But the way you plan and design your park, you've just got to make sure to protect a lot of the natural resources. That's why I feel that every state park needs an educational or environmental center in which it becomes an outdoor classroom for the young people. We will have a better population respecting state parks if we get them at the school age and bring them out and teach them the value of natural resources and the role they play in everyday life.

I think North Carolina is fortunate to have a natural resource-based park system, even though there are negatives in its funding history. I wouldn't want a system like Kentucky's or West Virginia's.

Amen. I'm glad to hear you say that! When I came here there were only 11 state parks. One of the things I got criticized for was buying land. Once you get land, you've got it protected, you've got it under your control, and then you can do whatever you want to with it. But if you

don't have that land....People say, "You've got to build picnic shelters! You've got to build cabins! You've got to do this, you've got to do that!" No!! Although my background is more recreation than parks, I got a good understanding and briefing when I was growing up, and I certainly hope we can hold the line. I've been retired for 12 years, but this is why I'm still active and why I want to be in a volunteer organization. My energy level is limited at 73, and it's just one of the things I want to devote to Friends of State Parks is to protect them as much and as far as we can. I appreciate any effort you put forth in this, and I hope I will see your thesis one of these days.