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**Division of State Parks and Historic Sites
and Stockton State Park
Food Service Delivery Study**

Project Completion Report

Submitted to

**Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Division of State Parks**

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Executive Summary

The goal of this report is to provide management information and analysis specific to SSP, as well as to provide a means for determining the level of food service delivery required at other state parks and historic sites in the Missouri system. The following information summarizes the results of the study.

Industry Trends

A review of the literature regarding the food service industry clearly indicates several prominent consumer trends and delivery challenges.

- One-third of consumers say that eating out is an “essential” way of life. Convenience seems to be the driving force behind consumers’ need to dine out: 70% of consumers feel that eating out is a better use of their leisure than cooking and cleaning up, allowing them more time for other activities such as socializing with family and friends.
- Consumers are increasingly subscribing to the notion of “look before you leap”, as indicated by the growing number who are using the Internet and email to gather information about restaurants they’ve never patronized, view restaurant menus, and make reservations or place orders online.
- The biggest challenge to the restaurant industry is the recruitment and retention of employees. Other challenges include competition and rising operational costs.
- Growth in natural resource recreation and the need for greater self-sufficiency in revenue generation have compelled many state park systems to offer a diversity of amenity services not traditionally associated with state parks, including food service provision.
- In addition to the labor challenges, increasing competition and growing operational costs experienced by the restaurant industry, state park food operators also face the challenge of generating greater revenue in an industry known for its marginal ability to do so.

Stockton State Park Survey Results

It is clear from survey results that Stockton State Park has two demographically but equally important cohort groups.

- The typical Stockton State Park (SSP) visitor was 48 years old, was white, was almost equally likely to be male or female, had some college, had an annual household income of between \$25,000 and \$50,000, was married with children grown, and was engaged in a professional or technical occupation. Most were from Missouri with over half coming from the Kansas City and Springfield areas.
- The typical SSP boat slip renter was also white and married with children grown, but was older (57) and more likely to be male than female, have

a four-year college or graduate degree, have an annual household income of over \$75,000, and be retired, when compared to the typical SSP visitor. Most were from Missouri, with over half coming from the Springfield and Kansas City areas.

- The majority of both SSP visitors and slip renters were repeat visitors, although a much higher percentage of slip renters reported visiting SSP during the past year than was reported by SSP visitors. Additional differences included the fact that two-thirds of SSP visitors indicated they were staying overnight during their visit, while a little over half of the slip renters reported staying overnight during their last visit. Of the overnight users, the majority of SSP visitors stayed in one of the overnight facilities within the park (campgrounds, motel, duplex condominiums), whereas the majority of slip renters stayed overnight on their boats.
- Both groups were more likely to visit SSP with family and friends, and the predominant recreation activities participated in by both groups clearly reflects the water-oriented personality of SSP: boating, fishing and swimming.
- The majority of both cohort groups indicated having eaten at the dining lodge at least once in the past. Of interest is the fact that the subgroup of motel and condo visitors (for both SSP visitors and slip renters) was more likely to have eaten at the dining lodge than other subgroups,

indicating a direct link between the amenity services.

- The results also indicate a clear preference, by both SSP visitors and slip renters, for eating breakfast and dinner at the lodge. This preference for breakfast and dinner at the lodge also translates into higher expectations and acceptance of service types. Dinner, in particular, had the highest expectations associated with it. The majority of both cohort groups expected table service for dinner and were least accepting of the possibility of prepackaged food for dinner.

Comprehensive Remarks from Focus Group Participants

Five prominent themes emerged from the focus group sessions.

- Mission Clarity – there was a consistent divergence of opinion toward the purpose of food service delivery in DSP, occurring at all levels of occupation from concessionaire to park superintendent to park planner. Opinions ranged from viewing food service dining as a destination itself to the opinion that DSP should base food service provision on the primary park visitor, consistent with the dominant recreational activities of the park.
- Site-Specific Provision of Food Services – there was a consistency of opinion throughout the focus group discussions that suggested food service should align itself with the distinguishing attributes and characteristics of the individual

parks and historic sites, including the personality of the park or site, the personality of dominant recreation activity patterns, the personality of the visitor, the location of the park and site and community spillover, etc.

- Flexibility – a third focus group opinion was that food service delivery should display logical management flexibility to meet visitor needs, especially in contract development, particularly in regard to determining hours of operation, type of food service delivery offered, menu selection, and even building design and location, etc.
- Food Trends – much of what was discussed regarding food trends was consistent with the literature regarding consumers’ desire for convenience and the social aspect of eating out. Another food trend response by participants was the

trend toward “branding” in food service delivery.

- Concessionaire Operations Constraints – uniformly recognized operational constraints from concessionaire forum participants provide the basis for this last theme, many of which were consistent with literature findings, particularly the problems of persistent labor shortages, the marginality of revenue generation, increasing operational costs, competition from other restaurants, etc. Additional comments focused on the amenity services at SSP, with a consensus of opinion among all focus group participants suggesting that the dining lodge be located closer to the water with a better view of the lake and be more accessible to marina users.

Acknowledgements

Conducting and successfully completing a study of this magnitude and complexity could not have been accomplished without the cooperation of many individuals. The authors would like to express their appreciation for those visitors and boat slip renters who voluntarily agreed to provide the survey information included in this report. Much thanks goes to the focus group participants, many of whom put aside their busy schedules and drove long hours to attend. Their input is absolutely invaluable. Special acknowledgement goes to Ron Vine and Dr. Jim Groves, for their input during the study; to Vicki Hutson, for facilitating the focus groups; to Doug Rusk, for accommodating the data collection at Stockton State Park; and to John Koontz, for his data collection efforts.

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Introduction

NEED FOR RESEARCH

Management issues frequently arise to challenge the continual quality service process in outdoor recreation settings. A plethora of rising and changing expectations has emerged over the past two decades that challenges existing services and, more importantly, planning decisions for future services of public recreation providers (Cordell & Super, 2000). Demographic trends, activity engagement trends, equipment and amenity trends have all combined to change the manner in which people recreate in the outdoors, and the reality of service availability to satisfactorily meet expectations (Cordell & Super, 2000).

Concession service is one area of service provision that is facing increased pressure to adapt and change to adequately meet and sustain user

demand. Food service delivery is an important subset of concession service that warrants management consideration due to the conflicting delivery demand of concessionaire economic success, recreation user satisfaction and expectation variability.

STUDY PURPOSE

Currently, the Missouri State Park System provides food service delivery at 19 of its 81 state parks and historic sites, ranging in provision type from campground and marina stores selling prepackaged foods to full service dining lodges (Table 1). The Division of State Parks (DSP) has expressed a need for determining the level of food service required by its mission in general and, more specifically, the level of food services required at Stockton State Park (SSP).

Table 1. Food Service Concessions at Missouri’s State Parks & Historic Sites

| State Park or Historic Site | Dining Lodge | Snack Bar | Store |
|--|--------------|-----------|-------|
| Arrow Rock State Historic Site | ✓ | | |
| Dr. Edmund A. Babler Memorial State Park | | ✓ | |
| Sam A. Baker State Park | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Bennett Spring State Park | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Big Lake State Park | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Johnson’s Shut-Ins State Park | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Lake of the Ozarks State Park | | | ✓ |
| Long Branch State Park* | | | ✓ |
| Meramec State Park | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Montauk State Park | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Onondaga Cave State Park | | | ✓ |
| Pomme de Terre State Park | | | ✓ |
| Roaring River State Park | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Stockton State Park | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Table Rock State Park | | | ✓ |
| Thousand Hills State Park | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Harry S Truman State Park | | | ✓ |
| Wakonda State Park | | ✓ | |
| Washington State Park | | ✓ | ✓ |

* Facility currently under construction.

The goal of this report is to provide management information and analysis specific to SSP, as well as to provide a means for determining the level of food service delivery required at other state parks and historic sites in the Missouri system. Specifically, this report provides an analysis of food service industry trends as well as a discussion of the role of food service delivery in state parks. Results of information gathered from two user surveys and from two focus groups of concession operators and park managers are also provided.

STUDY AREA

Located in rural Cedar County, Stockton State Park overlooks the 25,000-acre Stockton Reservoir. The park provides a myriad of recreational opportunities to a diverse group of visitors, including fishermen, sailing enthusiasts, boaters, etc. In addition to its full service, casual-dining restaurant, concession services at Stockton State Park include a full service marina with a gas dock and provision store, an 11-room motel and two duplexes. The issue challenging DSP is determining what services its diverse visitors expect and need, and determining the effects of modifying the current concession services at SSP.

IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

Several phrases regarding the food service industry are frequently used throughout this report. For purposes of clarification, they are defined here.

- ◆ **Casual dining segment** – table service restaurants whose checks average between \$8.00 and \$24.99 per person.
- ◆ **Quick service** – a restaurant offering hot or cold prepackaged food items (fastfood).
- ◆ **Restaurant industry** – that which encompasses all meals and snacks prepared away from home, including all takeout meals and beverages.
- ◆ **Self service** – a restaurant offering hot or cold buffet items and no servers.
- ◆ **State park resort** – although there is no common definition among state parks regarding state park resorts (McLean & Brayley, 1999), for the purposes of this report a state park resort is defined as a lodging facility of varying size offering dining and other amenities.
- ◆ **Table service** – a full service restaurant with servers.

Analysis of Industry Trends

As the title indicates, this section provides an analysis of the food service industry in the United States. Also provided, however, is an analysis of the state park “industry” and its role in providing an increasing and diverse set of amenity services to its customers.

FOOD SERVICE INDUSTRY: CONSUMER TRENDS & DELIVERY CHALLENGES

In October of 2000, the National Restaurant Association (NRA) conducted two research studies analyzing both the table service and quick service industries (NRA, 2001a & 2001b). Each study was designed to include two research components: a survey of food service operators and a survey of consumers. Although the restaurant at SSP is a table service facility, several of the food service concessions throughout the state park system can be categorized as quick service operations; therefore, because both studies have relevance to state park managers, results from both are presented.

Consumer Trends

The restaurant industry (table and quick service combined) is a vast enterprise, projected to generate \$399 billion in sales this year alone. Significantly contributing to this high volume of sales is the fact that the typical American consumes an average of 4.2 commercially prepared meals a week. In fact, almost 40% of consumers say that they are cooking fewer meals at home than they were two years ago and one-third agree that meals prepared at a

restaurant are *essential* (authors’ emphasis) to the way they live.

Not surprisingly, convenience seems to be the hallmark of this rising need to dine out. In fact, the NRA has ascribed the growth in the restaurant industry to “consumers’ insatiable desire for convenience.” Seventy percent (70%) of consumers feel that dining out allows them more time for other activities, particularly for socializing with family and friends, and is a better use of their leisure time than “cooking and cleaning up.”

Further indicators that convenience is the driving force behind consumers’ decision to dine out include the fact that

- ◆ more than half of all restaurant traffic (combining both table and quick service) is off-premises, which includes drive-thru, take-out and delivery;
- ◆ almost 30% of consumers feel that purchasing take-out is essential to the way they live;
- ◆ 42% of customers have indicated that if a drive-thru was available at their favorite table service restaurant, they would likely make use of it;
- ◆ more than 95% of casual-dining restaurants offer carry-out to their customers; about 20% offer delivery as well.
- ◆ consumers cite their hectic lifestyle and having children as reasons for the increased frequency of eating in their cars and eating handheld food;
- ◆ the restaurant industry has identified families with children as “frequent dinner customers” (those customers for whom purchasing

dinner at a restaurant has become a way of life);

- ◆ frequent dinner customers account for 74% of all dinner occasions when the meal is purchased outside the home;
- ◆ 40% of customers would use a credit card option to pay at a quick service restaurant if it were offered;
- ◆ 18% of consumers use email or the Internet to find out about a restaurant they haven't patronized before and another 30% say they would like to be able to;
- ◆ 12% use the Internet to view a restaurant's menu and 34% say they would like to be able to;
- ◆ one-third of customers would like to use email or the Internet to make reservations or place an order for dining-in, carry-out or delivery.
- ◆ almost half of customers indicate that they sometimes order a larger portion so they will have enough to take home for another meal.

The restaurant industry has been successful in its efforts to accommodate their customers' busy lifestyles and need for convenience, as evidenced by the fact that repeat customers account for 70% of annual sales. However, as the proportion of the food dollar spent on food away from home rises (it is projected to reach 53% of total household food expenditures by 2010), both table service and quick service restaurants must continually develop innovative and competitive ways to meet consumers' ever-increasing demands for convenience.

Challenges to Food Service Delivery

By far, the biggest challenge of the restaurant industry (both table and quick

service combined) is the recruitment and retention of employees. Both segments of the restaurant industry cite a perpetual shortage of employees and a high turnover rate, particularly in the more rural areas. The number of qualified applicants for both hourly and salaried positions has decreased compared to two years ago, resulting in job vacancies remaining unfilled for a longer period of time. The shortage of cooks is a particular problem, as indicated by 60% of table service operators. Competition from other restaurants is also a serious problem and is particularly intense in the casual dining segment. Quick service restaurants also suffer from competition but doubly so, for not only do they face competition from each other, they must also compete with other food service providers, including grocery stores, convenience stores, and gas stations.

Rising operational costs also plague restaurant operators, particularly as many are having to increase wages and increase training efforts to recruit new employees. Roughly 75% of table service restaurants have also noticed an increase in utility costs and 60% reported an increase in trash collection/disposal costs, both contributing to the overall increase in operational costs. In spite of these challenges, however, most restaurants have still been very successful in delivering a high level of customer service in their establishments, as indicated by an overwhelming 93% of customers who say they are satisfied with the service they receive.

STATE PARK INDUSTRY

Tourism is perhaps the largest consumer-based industry in the world, and outdoor recreation is fast becoming

the most popular segment of the tourism industry. In fact, of all the selective types of tourist opportunities that exist, those associated with outdoor recreation far exceed all other types in terms of visitor numbers and diversity of activity (Samuels & Foucar-Szocki, 1999). In other words, there are more tourists in the natural resource-based outdoor environments than there are in any other tourist venue, including theme and amusement parks, cruise lines, urban centers, and special events (Samuels & Foucar-Szocki, 1999). And, as long as transportation remains as affordable and as convenient as it is today, the growth in outdoor recreation tourism is expected to continue (Cordell & Super, 2000).

This growth and the trend toward shorter, weekend and holiday vacations have combined to create the need for closer-to-home recreational opportunities (McLean, 1999; Cordell & Super, 2000; Nickerson & Black, 2000). State parks are fast becoming a primary provider fulfilling this need and are, in fact, bearing the bulk of the growth in outdoor recreation visitation (Cordell & Super, 2000; McLean & Chavez, 2000). For instance, the total number of visits to state parks is three times the level at national parks and ranks second only behind the USDA Forest Service; and yet, state parks rank fifth in the provision of acreage for outdoor recreation (Cordell & Super, 2000; McLean & Chavez, 2000). It is clear that state parks provide recreational opportunities far in excess of the areas they manage, filling a much-needed public service niche.

As these trends continue, pressures for additional places to recreate and for additional recreation infrastructure to support the growing number and

diversity of recreationists will also continue to increase. These pressures in the face of budget cuts and decreased funding from external sources have forced state park systems to become more self-sufficient by creating new sources of revenue (Lowry, 1995 & 1997; McLean, Hurd, Breggs, & Chavez, 2000). In addition to implementing user fees, many systems have begun providing commercially developed amenities not traditionally associated with state parks, including vacation complexes, gift shops, restaurants, lodges, sports facilities, golf courses, etc. (Lowry, 1995 & 1997; McLean, 1999). The following is a discussion of the trends in provision of amenity and food services in state parks.

State Park Provision of Amenity Services

While state park resorts and their associated amenities is not a new phenomena, recent attention given by some state park systems toward emphasizing the revenue-generating potential of resorts is burgeoning (Warren & Rea, 1998; Landrum, 1999; McLean & Brayley, 1999). For instance, development of lodges as revenue-producing facilities for state parks has increased by 31% since 1991 (McLean, 1999). Lodges are the largest revenue producers for Alabama's state park system, generating almost half (46.5%) of their total state park revenue during fiscal year 1995-1996 (Warren & Rea, 1998). Kentucky, Ohio and Oklahoma have specifically identified selected state parks as "State Resort Parks" and, in fact, Kentucky's state park system is the largest state-based resort system in the U.S. with 17 state resort parks (McLean, Chavez & Hurd, 2000).

In addition to lodges, a myriad of other amenities is represented across the various state park systems in the U.S. Besides lodges, the most common state park amenity facilities include cabins and cottages, golf courses, marinas, swimming pools, stables, and ski slopes (McLean, 1999); however, this is by no means an all-encompassing list. Diversity rather than commonality seems to be the prevailing trend in providing amenity services at all levels of parks, resulting in a wide range of mission definition and performance across the recreation opportunity spectrum. For instance, facilities at Oglebay Park in Wheeling, West Virginia, include a swimming pool, tennis courts, a 212-room hotel and conference center, vacation cabins, golf courses, a zoo, a museum, formal gardens, and a ski slope (Warren & Rea, 1998). Another example is the California park system, which includes waysides, agricultural museums, ranches, open space preserves, state beaches, and underwater parks (McLean, Chavez & Hurd, 2000). Such diversity is likely to continue into the future, as will be the continued development of new facilities, especially of the more up-scale variety, in an effort to draw additional visitors from further distances (Landrum, 1999; McLean, 1999).

State Park Provision of Food Services

In 1987, a study by the National Institute for the Foodservice Industry identified 12 distinct and separate segments of the food service industry, each requiring different sales and marketing techniques (Warner, 1991). One of these 12 segments is classified as recreational food services, a rapidly growing segment of the food service industry. In 1989, for example, recreational food services sales

generated \$7.4 billion dollars (Warner, 1991). Projections for 2001 have predicted that recreational food service sales will climb to \$12.5 billion (NRA, 2000c).

Although food service provision in state parks is included as a subset of the recreational food services classification, much of the literature regarding recreational food services has focused mainly on food service provision in amusement business venues such as stadiums and arenas, theme and amusement parks, special attractions, convention centers, fairs and expositions, zoos, sporting facilities, movie theaters, etc. (Ely, 1998 & 1999; Robeson, 1998; NRA, 2000c). Very little of the literature has focused on recreational food services within state parks and other nature-based outdoor recreational facilities, except a brief mention in conjunction with the trend in state parks toward privatization of amenity and concession services (Alexander, 1997; Lowry, 1997; King, 1998).

Despite the lack of literature, some logical associations and common sense assumptions can be made regarding trends and challenges of food service provision in state parks. For instance, the convenience aspect associated with eating out, as well as the perception that dining out is a better use of leisure time and allows more opportunity to socialize with friends and family, would certainly be prevalent in food service operations in state parks. The challenges facing food service delivery in general are almost certainly experienced by food service operators in state parks, as well. For instance, because of the seasonal aspect of visitation and the consequent

seasonal provision of amenity services in state parks, the recruitment and retention of qualified employees is an especial challenge for food service operators in state parks.

Another challenge to food service operations in state parks, particularly if managed by private concessionaires, is their ability to generate any kind of net profit. Food service provision in state parks tends to be a marginal revenue producer (Alexander, 1997; Warren & Rea, 1998) and is often combined with other operations that can be expected to generate enough profit to justify providing food service, such as lodges and marinas. An example of this is Missouri's state park system. The majority of food service operations in Missouri's state park system, both table and quick service, are offered in conjunction with overnight lodging facilities (other than campgrounds) or other amenity services (Table 2).

The tendency to “bundle” all amenity services into one concession contract, particularly when parks are geographically isolated, is often seen as the most economically efficient way to manage amenity services in state parks (Alexander, 1997; Warren & Rea, 1997). However, food service is frequently a secondary aspect of a concession contract, the management of which is sometimes forced onto a concessionaire with little expertise in this area (Alexander, 1997). It has been suggested that a more effective and efficient means of providing amenity services in state parks would be to separate the specialized services and bid them out to specialists rather than generalists, if at all possible (Alexander, 1997). However, geographic isolation continues to be a primary decision-making factor in contract construction and, in most cases, cannot be ignored.

Table 2. Amenity Services Associated with Food Services at Missouri's State Parks

| Park | Dining Lodge | Snack bar &/or store | Motel | Cabins/ Duplexes | Marina | Swimming Pool &/or Stables |
|-----------------------|--------------|----------------------|-------|------------------|--------|----------------------------|
| Babler Memorial SP | | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Same A. Baker SP | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| Bennett Spring SP | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Big Lake SP | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Lake of the Ozarks SP | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Long Branch SP* | | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Meramec SP | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Montauk SP | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Pomme de Terre SP | | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Roaring River SP | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Stockton SP | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Table Rock SP | | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Thousand Hills SP | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Harry S Truman SP | | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Wakonda SP | | ✓ | | RV rental | | |
| Washington SP | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |

* Facilities currently under construction.

SUMMARY

The fact that dining out has become an expected way of life for many consumers has management implications for the provision of food services in state parks. The desire for convenience, coupled with the notion that dining out is a better use of leisure time than food preparation and clean-up, indicates that the provision of food services in state parks may very well become a standard fixture in amenity service offerings. Consumers' increasing "look before you leap" mentality in the use of the Internet and email may also impact the type of amenity services provided, as more and more consumers "go online" to determine availability of expected services and facilities.

As new amenity services in state parks are provided to meet the rising expectations of visitors and to meet the need for greater revenue generation, state park managers can expect to encounter situations beyond their training and experience (Cordell & Super, 2000). Challenges will continually arise that will task the ingenuity of management, from increasing the profitability of marginal revenue producers to replenishing a seasonal labor base. Also of concern is

the ability of state parks to maintain their mission of preservation and conservation in the face of ever-increasing commercial development (Lowry, 1995 & 1997). Maintaining the balance between use and preservation will continue to be the most fundamental issue with which state park professionals have to deal in the years to come (Landrum, 1999).

Because of the system's dedicated revenue source and its statutory mission, the Missouri state park system has not been as driven to take on the profit role so many other state park systems have had to assume. However, many of the same managerial questions asked of these other state park systems are also questions posed to the Missouri state park system. For instance, in order to provide satisfying recreational experiences to its visitors, what level of additional amenity services, particularly food services, must be provided to meet the needs and expectations of its visitors? How does the provision of food service fit within the parameters of its mission? This report seeks to shed light on these and other questions regarding the role of food service provision in Missouri's state parks in general, and at Stockton State Park in particular.

Methodology

This section describes the methodology used in collecting information from visitors to Stockton State Park, from Stockton State Park Marina boat slip renters, and from Missouri state park concession operators and park planners and managers.

SAMPLING PROCEDURES, SELECTION OF SUBJECTS, AND DATA COLLECTION

Stockton State Park Visitor Survey

A random sample of adult visitors (18 years of age and older) who visited SSP during the study period were the respondents for this phase of the study. Surveys were collected during July and August, 2001. To ensure that visitors visiting SSP during various times of the day would have equal opportunity for being surveyed, three time slots were chosen for surveying. The three time slots were as follows: Time Slot 1 = 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., Time Slot 2 = 12:00 – 4 :00 p.m., and Time Slot 3 = 4:00 – 8:00 p.m. A time slot was randomly chosen and assigned to the first of the scheduled survey dates. Thereafter, time slots were assigned in ranking order based upon the first time slot. One time slot was surveyed during each survey day.

The survey of visitors to SSP was administered on-site. Because an exit survey was not feasible, four recreation areas were identified in which to survey: the campgrounds at SSP, the swimming beach and north picnic area, the marina, and the park motel and duplex condominiums. The surveyor walked a roving route in the campgrounds, at the

swimming beach and north picnic area, and at the marina. During the selected time slot, the surveyor asked every visitor 18 years of age and older and in the assigned recreation areas to voluntarily complete a survey. Surveys were also left in the motel rooms and duplex condominiums for visitors to fill out.

The questionnaire used in this phase of the study was adapted from the questionnaire used during the 1997-2000 Missouri State Park Visitor Study, with input from DSP, Ron Vine (private consultant, Leisure Vision), and Dr. Jim Groves (University of Missouri's Department of Hotel & Restaurant Management). A copy of the questionnaire used during this phase of the study is provided in Appendix A.

Stockton State Park Marina Boat Slip Renter Survey

A mail-back survey was conducted of Stockton State Park Marina boat slip renters. A list of boat slip renters and their addresses was obtained from the Stockton State Park Marina. Eliminating duplicate names, 280 renters were identified as potential participants for this phase of the study. A cover letter explaining the reason for the study, assuring anonymity of responses, and detailing instructions for returning the survey, along with a questionnaire and a postage-paid return envelope, were sent to each of the 280 renters on the list. Because of the high response rate from the initial mailing, no additional mailings followed. The response rate was 51.6% and, in leisure research, a

response rate of 25% is considered adequate for data analysis (Mitra & Lankford, 1999).

The questionnaire used in this phase of the study was also adapted from the questionnaire used during the 1997-2000 Missouri State Park Visitor Study, with input from DSP, Ron Vine, and Dr. Jim Groves. A copy of the cover letter and questionnaire are provided in Appendix B.

Food Service Delivery Focus Groups

Two two-hour focus groups were conducted at the University of Missouri. Participants were selected by DSP and were sent letters of invitation by the University's Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. Follow-up contact was made by DSP. Participants at each focus group included a mix of state park concession operators, state park planners, and state park managers. Dr. C. Randal Vessell, principal investigator, and Dr. Jim Groves were the moderators for the focus groups. After describing the focus group rules, consent and anonymity policy, a series of probing questions was asked, encouraging participants to discuss issues related to the provision of food and other amenity services within the state park system as a whole, and at Stockton State Park specifically. The moderators allowed the participants to broadly discuss the issues, but did attempt to focus discussion on the food service and amenity provision at Stockton State Park. A video was also shown describing the current amenity service facilities at SSP.

The following is a list of questions asked during the focus groups. Structural format and question content were

developed with input from DSP, Ron Vine, and Dr. Jim Groves.

1. How important is food service provision to our customers of today?
2. What is "right" about food service delivery in DSP?
3. What trends and expectations in food service provision do you see, and what do you anticipate will be required to meet the changing needs of today's and future park visitors?
4. From your perspective, what is the fundamental purpose of food service provision in DSP?
5. From your perspective, what current challenges do you face in providing food service delivery (full-service dining) at your facility?
6. How does food service complement (or not) your other concession operations (i.e., marina, store, motel/cabins, etc.)?
7. The Food Services & Restaurant Industry identifies three basic categories of food service: table service, self-service, and quick service. If it were possible to align DSP parks and sites to this paradigm, what criteria should help determine placement?
8. Do you think using "brand name" food chains would benefit food service operations in selected parks and sites?
9. If you were given the money and current concession property at Stockton State Park and advised that you were to provide a food service component (i.e., table service, self-service, or quick service), what would you provide?
10. Where would you it provide and your reasoning for such?

DATA ANALYSIS

The survey data obtained for the SSP study was analyzed with the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (SPSS, 1996).

Stockton State Park Visitor Survey

Frequency distributions and percentages of responses to the survey questions were determined. The responses to the open-ended question (question 24) were listed as well as grouped into categories for frequency and percentage calculations. The number of surveys collected by area was also determined.

Comparisons using chi-square for each group were made to determine any statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) in the following select groups' expectations of the type of food service offered at SSP (questions 11-13) and the acceptability of prepackaged food at the marina being the only type of food service offered at SSP (question 14):

1. First time visitors versus repeat visitors (question 1).
2. Overnight visitors versus day-users (question 3). Overnight visitors are those visitors staying overnight at the overnight facilities in the park (campgrounds, motel, and duplex condominiums). Day-users include both day-users and those overnight visitors not staying in the overnight facilities at SSP.
3. Weekend visitors versus weekday visitors.
4. The socio-demographic characteristics of age, sex, household composition, primary occupation and annual household income.

5. Visitors who have dined at least once at the dining lodge versus those who haven't (question 8).

Stockton State Park Marina Boat Slip Renter Survey

Frequency distributions and percentages of responses to the survey questions were determined. The responses to the open-ended question (question 24) were listed as well as grouped into categories for frequency and percentage calculations.

Comparisons using chi-square for each group were made to determine any statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) in the following select groups' expectations of the type of food service offered at SSP (questions 11-13) and the acceptability of prepackaged food at the marina being the only type of food service offered at SSP (question 14).

1. Boat slip renters who visited SSP in the past year versus those who didn't (question 1).
2. Slip renters who stayed overnight during their last visit versus those who didn't (question 2).
3. The socio-demographic characteristics of age, sex, household composition, primary occupation and annual household income.
4. Renters who have dined at the lodge at least once in the past versus those who have never dined at the lodge (question 8).

Food Service Delivery Focus Groups

Video tapes of each focus group were transcribed for analysis. Content analysis was conducted through three readings to verify thematic opinion patterns.

Survey Results

This section describes the results of the visitor survey and the boat slip renter survey. For the percentages of responses to each question from the visitor survey, see Appendix C. For the percentages of responses to each question from the boat slip renter survey, see Appendix D. The number of individuals responding to each question is represented as “n=”.

SURVEYS COLLECTED & RESPONSE RATES

Stockton State Park Visitor Survey

A total of 47 surveys were collected at SSP during the July and August study period, with 37% collected at the campgrounds, 28.3% collected at the marina, 21.7% collected at the swimming beach and north picnic area, and 13.0% collected at the motel and condos. The small sample size was due to lower visitation caused by extreme

temperatures during the study period. The overall response rate was 64.4%

Stockton State Park Marina (SSPM) Boat Slip Renter Survey

Of the 280 surveys mailed out, 11 were returned due to expired addresses or unknown addressees, leaving 269 useable questionnaires. Of those 269 surveys, a total of 139 were mailed back, with a response rate of 51.7%.

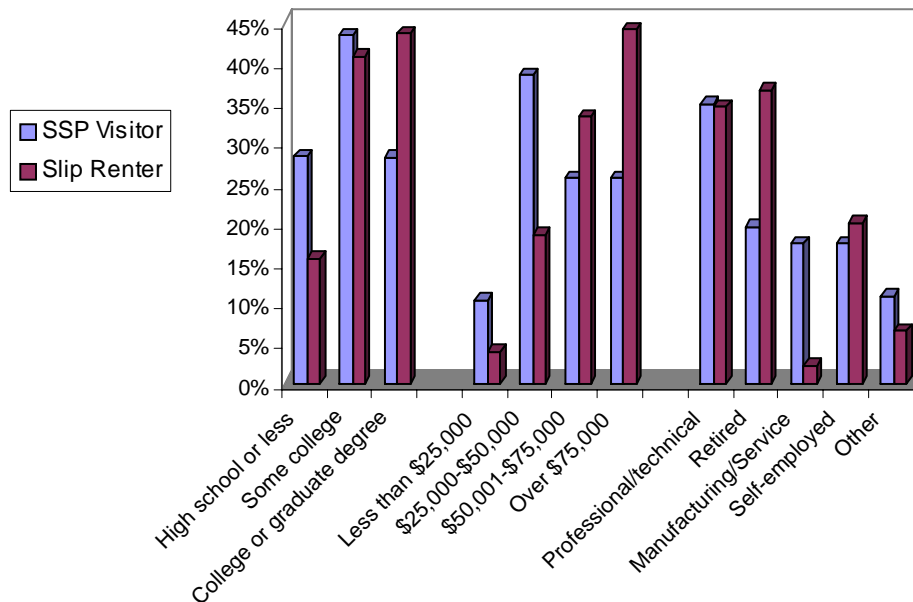
SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Figure 1 compares the socio-demographic characteristics of education level, income and occupation of the visitors surveyed at SSP and the respondents to the slip renter survey.

SSP Visitors

The average adult visitor surveyed at SSP during the study period was 47.6

Figure 1. Comparison of Select Socio-demographic Characteristics Between SSP Visitors & SSPM Slip Renters



years of age and more likely to be female (54.3%) than male (45.7%). The majority (93.6%) of respondents were white, most (43.4%) had some college or vocational school as their highest level of education, and a high percentage (38.5%) had an annual household income of between \$25,000 and \$50,000. Almost half (46.8%) were married with children grown and over a third (34.8%) were engaged in a professional or technical primary occupation. Less than 3% (2.3%) reported having a disability that substantially limited their life activities.

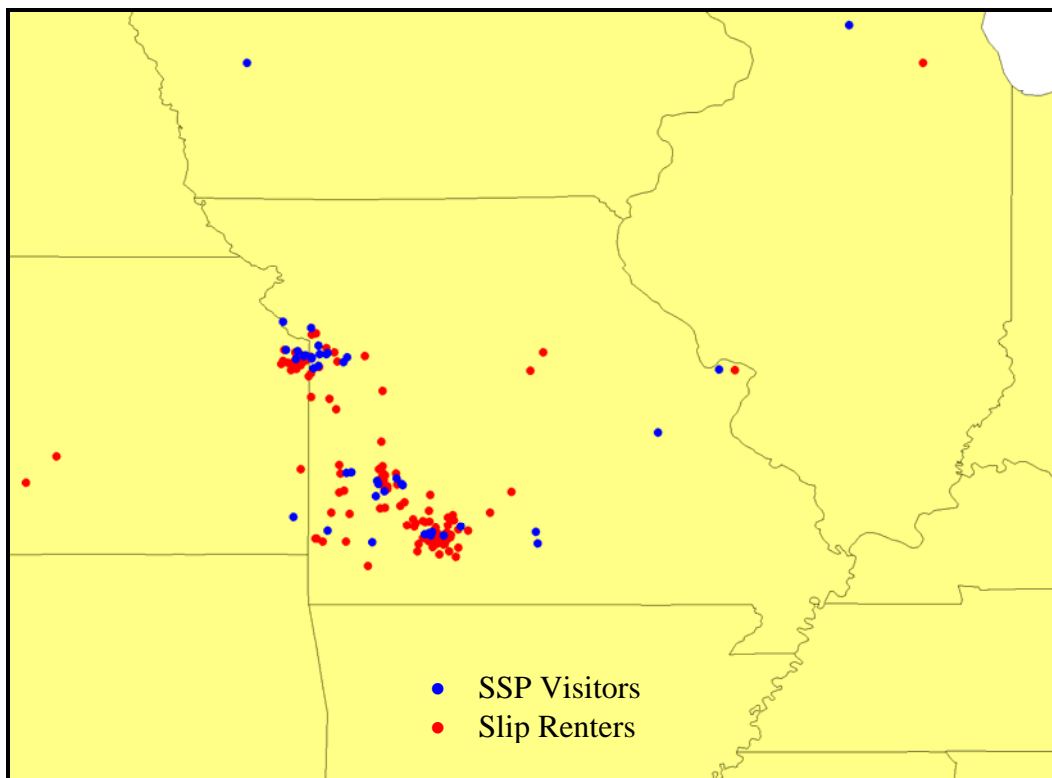
The majority (80.5%) of the visitors surveyed were from Missouri, with the rest (19.5%) of visitors coming from other states, including Kansas (14.6%), Illinois (2.4%), and Iowa (2.4%).

Almost half (45.9%) of the visitors were from the Kansas City Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and 16.2% were from the Springfield MSA. Figure 2 shows the residence of visitors by zip code.

SSPM Boat Slip Renters

The average adult respondent was 56.7 years of age and much more likely to be male (79.1%) than female (20.9%). The vast majority (98.5%) of respondents were white, most (43.7%) had a four-year college degree or an advanced graduate degree as their highest level of education, and a high percentage (44.2%) had an annual household income of over \$75,000. Over half (58.8%) were married with children grown, and over one-third (36.7%) were retired or engaged in a professional/

Figure 2. Residence of SSP Visitors & Slip Renters by Zip Code



technical occupation (34.5%). Less than 3% (2.2%) reported having a disability that substantially limited their life activities.

The majority (83.0%) of the respondents were from Missouri, with the rest coming from Kansas (16.3%) and Illinois (0.8%). A high percentage (43.5%) of the respondents were from the Springfield MSA, with another 25.0% coming from the Kansas City MSA. Figure 2 shows the residence of respondents by zip code.

USE PATTERNS

Figure 3 compares the trip characteristics and Figure 4 compares the visit characteristics between SSP visitors and respondents to the boat slip renter survey.

SSP Visitors' Trip Characteristics

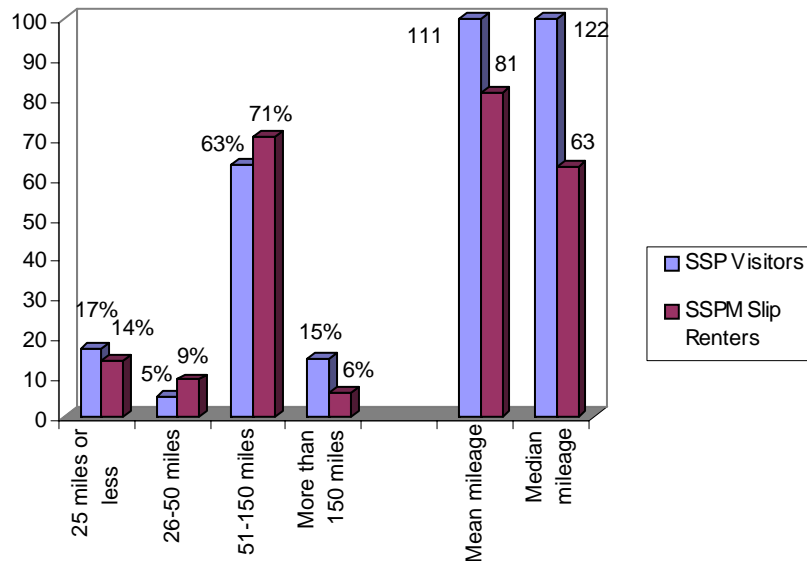
Based on zip code data, the majority (85.4%) of visitors to SSP traveled less than a day's drive to visit the park (a

day's drive is defined as 150 miles or less, not exceeding 300 miles round trip). Of those traveling less than a day's drive, most (74.3%) drove between 50 and 150 miles to visit the park. Of those driving 25 miles or less to reach the park, all came from the town of Stockton. The average number of miles visitors traveled was 111.2 miles. The median number of miles was 122, indicating that half of the visitors drove more than 122 miles and half drove less than 122 to visit the park.

SSPM Boat Slip Renters' Typical Trip Characteristics

Based on zip code data provided by the respondents, the majority (93.8%) of boat slip renters live less than a day's drive from SSP. Of those living less than a day's drive, most (75.2%) live between 50 and 150 miles from the park, over one-third (36.3%) of whom live in Springfield. The average number of miles boat slip renters live from the park is 81.2 miles, and the median number of miles renters live from the park is 63.0,

Figure 3. Comparison of Trip Characteristics Between SSP Visitors & SSPM Slip Renters



indicating that half of the renters live farther than 63 miles and half live closer than 63 miles.

SSP Visitors’ Visit Characteristics

Over three-fourths (78.3%) of the visitors to SSP were repeat visitors, with 21.7% of the visitors being first time visitors. However, although most of the visitors were not first time visitors, almost half (44.7%) had not visited SSP during the past year. The average number of times repeat visitors reported visiting SSP within the past year was 7.6 times.

Two-thirds (67.4%) of SSP visitors during the study period indicated that they were staying overnight during their visit, with 32.6% indicating that they were day-users. Of those staying overnight, most (79.3%) reported staying in the overnight facilities at the park, 58.6% at the campground, 13.8% in the

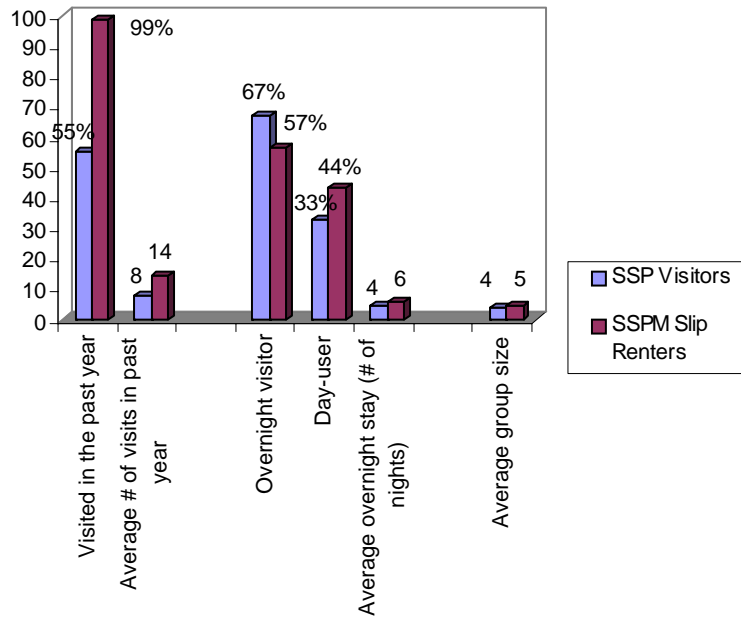
duplex condominiums, and 6.9% at the motel. Of those camping in the campground, almost two-thirds (64.7%) reported camping in a RV rather than a tent (35.3%). An average overnight stay was 4.4 nights, although half of the overnight visitors stayed less than four nights and half stayed more than four nights.

The majority (82.3%) of visitors came to the park with family and/or friends. Less than 15% (11.1%) came alone. The average group size for visitors to SSP was 3.9 people (including adults and children), although half of the visitors brought fewer than three people with them and half brought more than three people with them during a visit to SSP.

SSPM Boat Slip Renters’ Typical Visit Characteristics

The vast majority (98.6%) of slip renters indicated having been to SSP at least

Figure 4. Comparison of Visit Characteristics Between SSP Visitors & SSPM Slip Renters



once within the past year. The average number of times slip renters reported visiting SSP in the past year was 14.4 times, although half of the renters indicated visiting less than ten times and half indicated visiting more than ten times within the past year. During a typical visit to SSP, a little over half (56.5%) of the slip renters stay overnight while the rest (43.5%) are day-users. Most overnighters (41.0%) stay on their own boats, but 24.4% indicated staying in the campground during a typical visit. Of those camping in the campground, most (94.7%) stay in a RV rather than a tent (5.3%). The average overnight stay for boat slip renters is 5.9 nights, although half indicate staying less than three nights and half indicate staying more than three nights during a typical visit.

During a typical visit to SSP, the vast majority (94.9%) of respondents come with family and/or friends. Only 5.1% indicate they come alone during a visit. The average number of people

(including adults and children) respondents reported bringing with them during their last visit to SSP was 4.5 people, although half of the respondents reported bringing fewer than four people and half reported bringing more than four people.

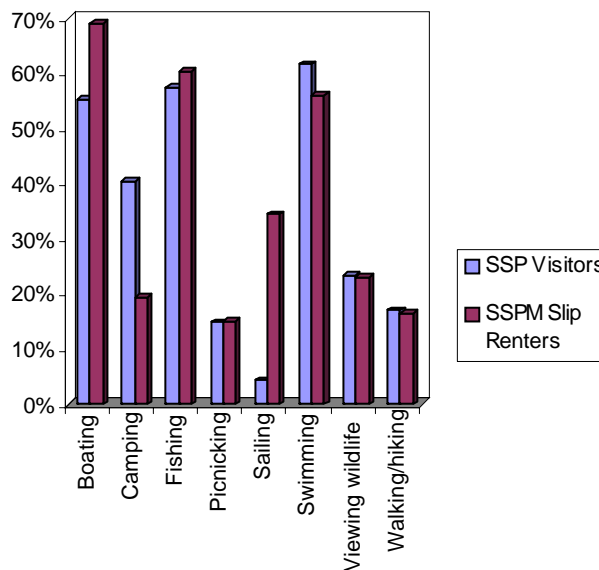
RECREATION ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION

Figure 5 compares the percentage of recreation activity participation between SSP visitors and SSPM slip renters.

SSP Visitors' Recreation Activity Participation

Visitors were asked what activities they were participating in during their visit to SSP. Swimming was the most participated in activity, as reported by 61.7% of visitors. A high percentage of visitors also participated in fishing (57.4%), boating (55.3%), and camping (40.4%). Other activities SSP visitors participated in were viewing wildlife

Figure 5. Comparison of Recreation Activity Participation Between SSP Visitors & SSPM Slip Renters



(23.4%), walking or hiking (17.0%), and picnicking (14.9%).

SSPM Boat Slip Renters’ Activity Participation

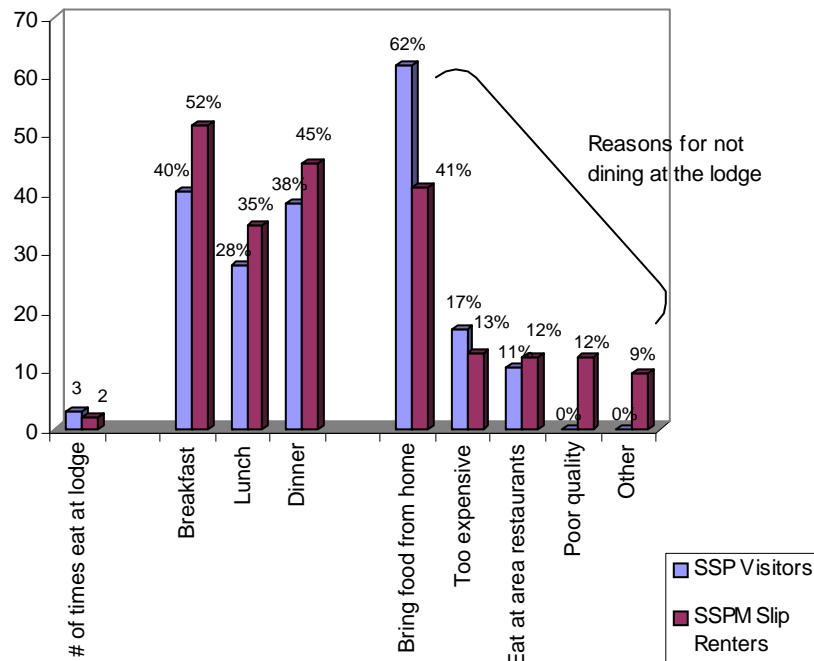
Respondents to the slip renter survey were also asked to indicate what recreational activities they participated in during a typical visit. Not surprisingly, boating is the most participated in activity, as reported by 69.1% of respondents. Fishing is second (60.4%), swimming is third (56.1%), and sailing is fourth (34.5%). Other activities respondents engage in during a typical visit include viewing wildlife (23.0%), camping (19.4%), walking or hiking (16.5%), and picnicking (15.1%).

DINING PATTERNS WHILE VISITING THE PARK

Both SSP visitors and respondents to the slip renter survey were asked to describe the frequency of their dining at the dining lodge, as well as which meals they typically eat at the lodge during a visit. Figure 6 compares the dining habits of SSP visitors and SSPM slip renters.

Of the SSP visitors, small sample size precluded statistical comparisons for differences between first time and repeat visitors, between overnight visitors and day-users, between weekend and weekday visitors, and between their socio-demographic characteristics, regarding visitors’ dining patterns and food service delivery expectations. Of SSPM slip renters, the small number of respondents who reported not having visited SSP during the past year precluded a comparison between these

Figure 6. Comparison of Dining Patterns of SSP Visitors & SSPM Slip Renters



respondents and the respondents who indicated visiting SSP in the past year, regarding their dining patterns and their expectations of the food service delivery at SSP.

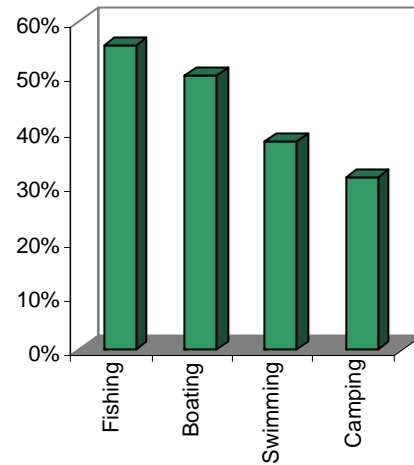
SSP Visitors’ Dining Patterns

Forty-five percent (44.7%) of SSP visitors had not eaten at the lodge restaurant during this particular visit, whereas 42.6% indicated they had. Six percent (6.4%) of the visitors reported that while they hadn’t yet eaten at the lodge, they were still planning to sometime during their visit; another 6.4% hadn’t eaten at the lodge during this particular visit but had eaten there in the past.

When asked how many times they ate at the dining lodge during a typical visit, only 35.0% of visitors reported never having eaten at the lodge while 65.0% indicated eating at the lodge at least once during a typical visit. The average number of times visitors reported eating at the lodge during a typical visit was 3.2 times, although the most frequent response from visitors was that they usually ate at the dining lodge twice during a visit to SSP. Figure 7 shows, by recreation activity participation, the percentage of visitors who indicated eating at the dining lodge during their visit.

Of descriptive note, a comparison of the percentage of overnight visitors who indicated dining at the lodge during their visit to SSP showed that 100.0% of the visitors staying in the motel had eaten at the lodge during their visit. Over one-fifth (23.5%) of the visitors who reported staying in the campgrounds also reported dining at the lodge during their visit with another 11.8% planning to

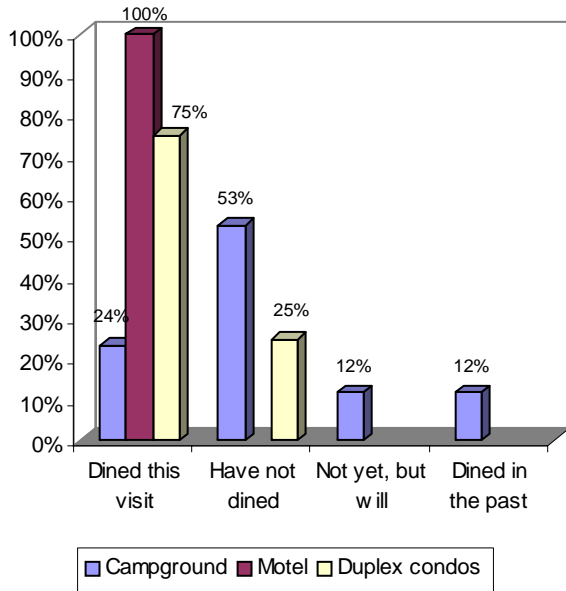
Figure 7. Percentage of SSP Visitors Who Dined at the Lodge During Their Visit, by Recreation Activity Participation



dine there sometime during their visit. Three-fourths (75.0%) of those visitors who reported staying in the duplex condominiums had also dined at the dining lodge during their visit. Figure 8 compares the percentage of overnight visitors staying in the park who reported dining at the dining lodge during their visit.

A comparison between the visitors who were surveyed at the four recreational areas showed that 40.0% of those visitors surveyed at the swimming beach and north picnic area had dined at the lodge during this particular visit. Almost half (46.2%) of the visitors surveyed at the marina had also dined at the lodge during their visit and another 7.7% were planning to. Of the visitors surveyed in the campground, 23.5% of them had dined at the lodge during their visit and another 11.8% were planning to. Eighty-three percent (83.2%) of the visitors surveyed at the motel and condos had also dined at the lodge during their visit. Figure 9 shows the percentage of visitors surveyed in the

Figure 8. Percentage of Overnight Visitors Staying in the Park & Eating at the Dining Lodge



four recreation areas who reported dining at the dining lodge during their visit.

Visitors were also asked which meals they typically eat at the dining lodge during a visit. Breakfast was the most frequent meal eaten at the lodge, as indicated by 40.4% of the visitors. Dinner was second (38.3%) and lunch was third (27.7%). Bringing food from home was the number one reason, as indicated by 61.7% of the visitors, for not eating at the lodge. Other reasons included too expensive prices (17.0%) and eating at area restaurants instead (10.6%).

SSPM Boat Slip Renters' Dining Habits

Almost half (48.2%) of the respondents to the slip renter survey indicated that they had eaten at the lodge during their last visit. Of the other 52.8% of respondents who had not dined at the

restaurant during their last visit, over half (55.6%) of those indicated that although they had not eaten at the dining lodge during their last visit, they had eaten there in the past.

When asked how many times they eat at the dining lodge during a typical visit, less than 10% (7.7%) of the respondents indicated never having eaten at the lodge. Ninety-two percent (92.3%) of respondents reported that, during a typical visit, they eat at least once at the dining lodge. The average number of times respondents indicated eating at the dining lodge during a typical visit was 1.9 times. Figure 10 shows the percentage of respondents who reported dining at the lodge during their last visit, by the recreational activities they participate in during a typical visit.

Over half (51.8%) of the respondents reported that breakfast was the meal

Figure 9. Percentage of SSP Visitors Eating at the Dining Lodge, by Recreation Area

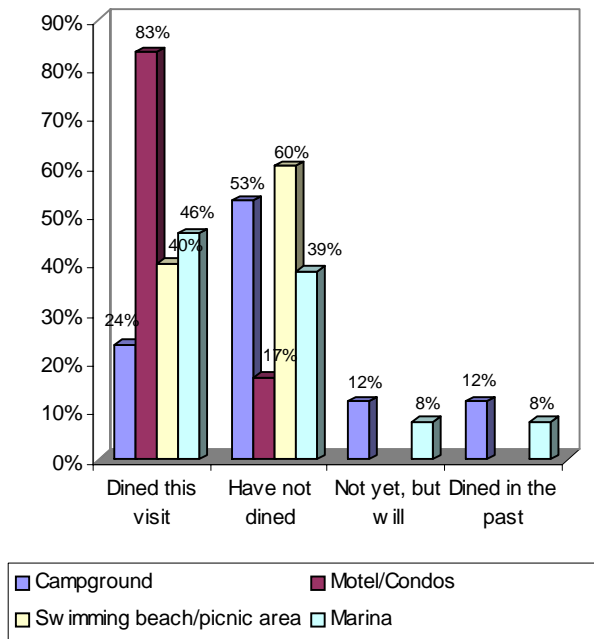
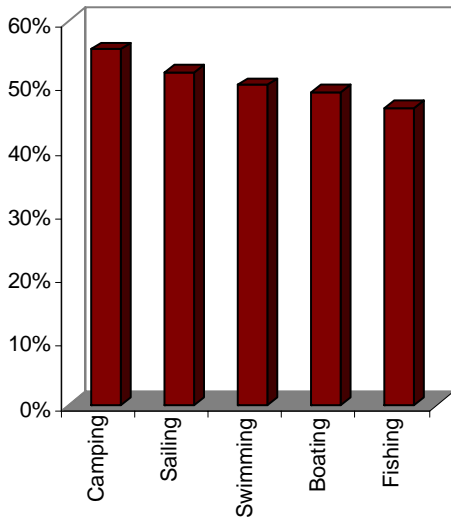


Figure 10. Percentage of SSPM Slip Renters Who Dined at the Lodge During Their Last Visit, by Recreational Activity Participation



most often consumed during a typical visit, while dinner was the second most frequent (45.3%), and lunch was third (34.5%). Reasons for not eating at the dining lodge included bringing food from home (41.0%), prices too expensive (12.9%), eating at local restaurants instead (12.2%), and not liking the quality of food at the lodge (12.2%). Almost 10% (9.4%) of respondents also had other reasons for not eating at SSP’s dining lodge, the majority of which were negative comments about the quality of service.

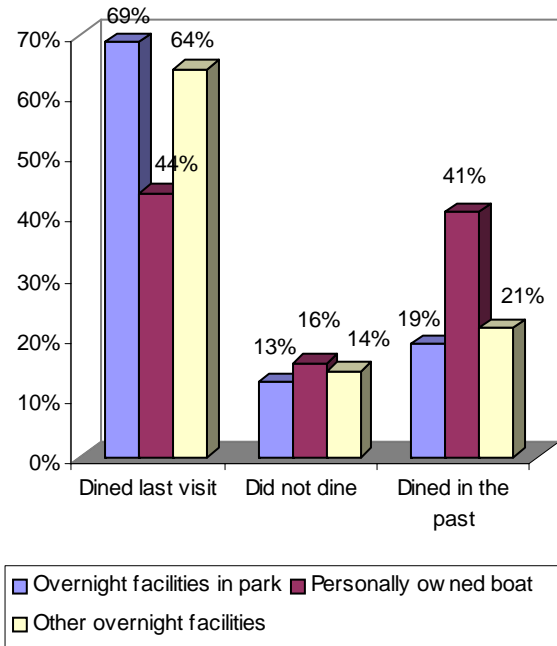
No significant differences were found in the number of times respondents typically dine at the lodge during a visit by whether or not respondents reported staying overnight during their last visit. Nor were there any statistical differences in the number of times respondents indicated dining at the lodge during a typical visit by whether respondents had stayed in overnight facilities in the park, stayed in their personal boats, or stayed in other overnight facilities during their

last visit to SSP. No significant differences were found in the number of times respondents typically eat at the lodge during a visit when comparing their socio-demographic characteristics.

Respondents who indicated that they stayed overnight during their last visit to the park were significantly ($p=.01$) more likely to eat at the dining lodge than those respondents who were day-users. Over half (57.7%) of the overnight respondents reported eating at the lodge during their last visit, whereas 36.7% of day-use respondents reported eating at the lodge during their last visit.

There were no significant differences in overnight respondents who reported staying in the overnight facilities (campgrounds, motel, or duplex condominiums) in the park compared to those who reported staying overnight on personally owned boats, and whether or not they dined at the lodge during their last visit. However, while there was no statistical difference in percentages, overnight respondents staying in the park were more likely to eat at the lodge. For instance, over two-thirds (68.8%) of the respondents who stayed in the overnight facilities within the park indicated dining in the lodge, whereas less than half (43.8%) of the overnight respondents staying in their own boats dined at the lodge during their last visit to the park (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Percentage of SSPM Overnight Respondents Who Dined at the Lodge During Their Last Visit



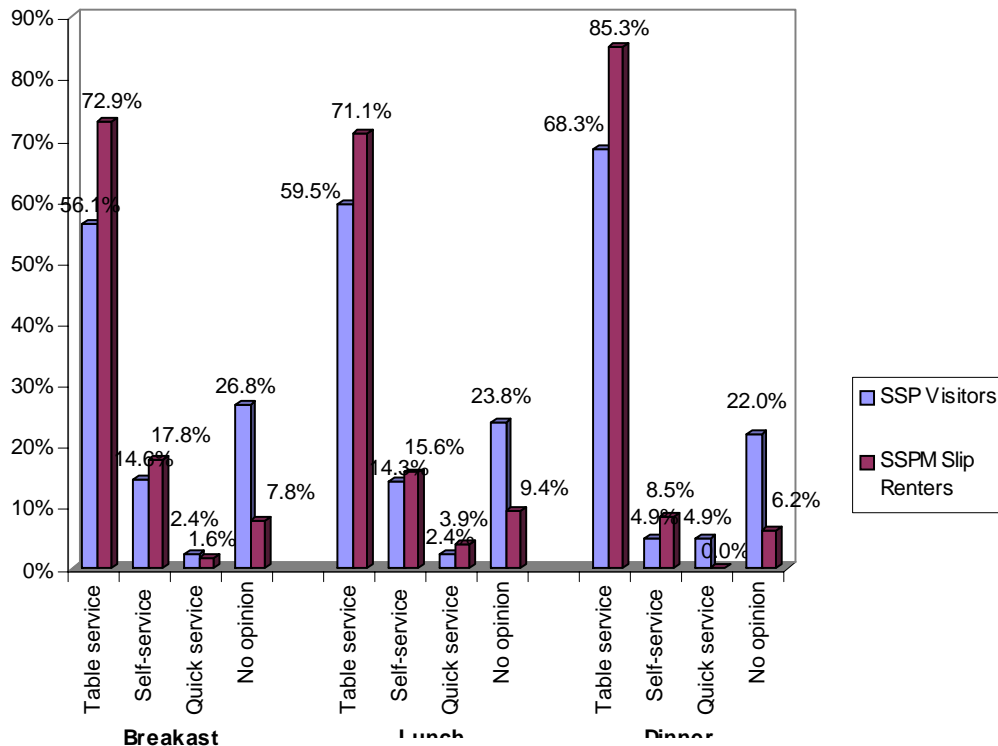
FOOD SERVICE EXPECTATIONS

Both visitors to SSP and the boat slip renters were asked to describe their expectations of what type of food service delivery should be offered at SSP. Figure 12 compares the food service expectations between SSP visitors and respondents to the SSPM boat slip renter survey. It is important to note that both sets of respondents' food service expectations may have been influenced by prior experience.

SSP Visitors' Food Service Expectations

When asked to indicate the type of food service delivery that would most meet their expectations for breakfast, over half (56.1%) of visitors indicated that table service would most meet their

Figure 12. Comparison of Food Service Delivery Expectations Between SSP Visitors & SSPM Slip Renters

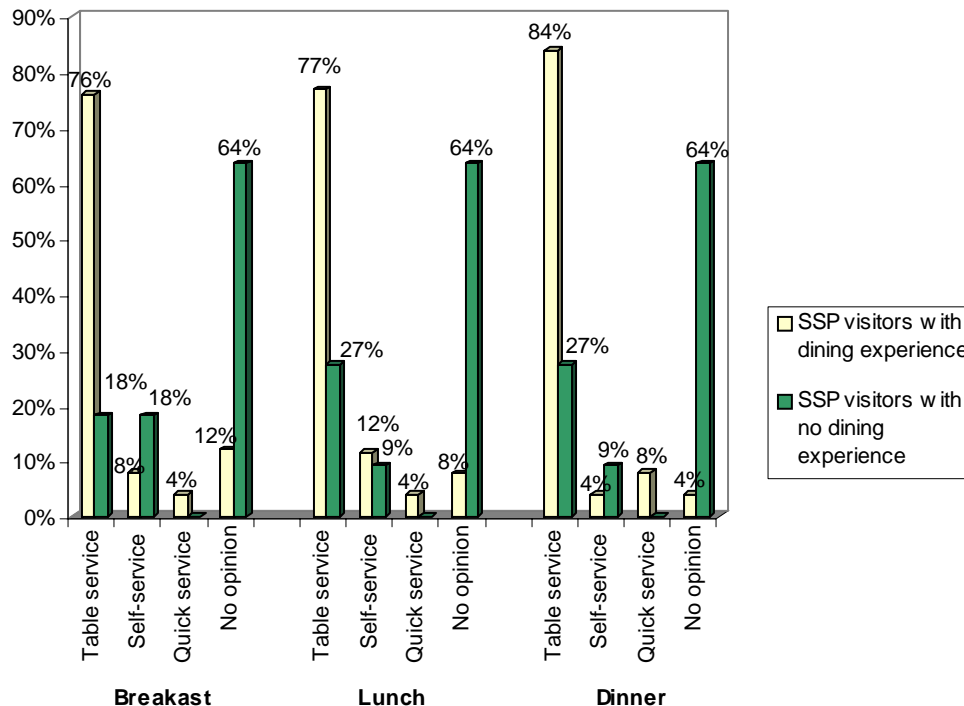


expectations. A high percentage of visitors also indicated that table service for lunch (59.5%) was the type of food service that would most meet their expectations. Visitors had the highest expectations for dinner, however, as indicated by over two-thirds (68.3%) of visitors who expected table service for dinner.

There was no significant difference in the breakfast expectations between first time and repeat visitors and what type of food service delivery they expected for breakfast. Nor were there any differences in lunch and dinner expectations between first time and repeat visitors. There were no differences in breakfast, lunch, and dinner expectations between overnight visitors and day-users and between weekend and weekday visitors, as well.

A significant difference ($p < .01$) was found, however, in visitors' expectations of food service and whether they had eaten at the dining lodge at least once in the past (Figure 13). Not surprisingly, 63.6% of visitors who had never eaten at the lodge had no opinion about the type of food service delivered for breakfast, while 76.0% of visitors who had dined at least once at the lodge expected table service for breakfast. Lunch and dinner expectations were very similar to breakfast expectations, with significant differences between visitors who had dined at least once at the lodge and visitors who hadn't. For instance, the majority of visitors with past dining experiences expected table service for lunch (76.9%) and dinner (84.0%), whereas visitors with no past dining experiences had no such expectations (63.6% reporting "no opinion" in both cases).

Figure 13. Food Service Delivery Expectations of SSP Visitors with Past Dining Experiences Compared to SSP Visitors with No Dining Experiences



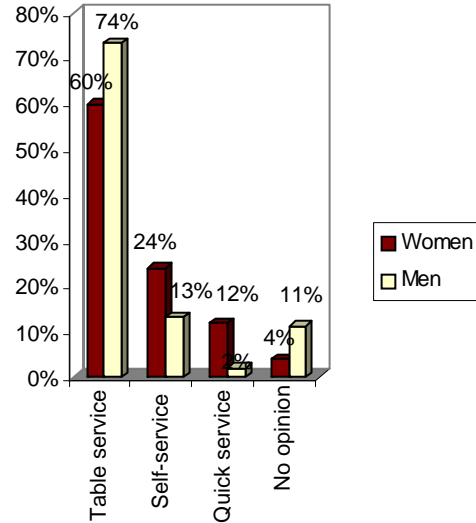
SSPM Slip Renters' Food Service Expectations

Over three-fourths (72.9%) of the respondents to the boat slip renter survey reported expecting table service for breakfast. A high percentage of respondents also expected table service for lunch (71.1%). Dinner expectations were the highest, however, with 85.3% of respondents indicating that table service for dinner would most meet their expectations.

Comparisons between respondents who indicated staying overnight during their last visit and respondents who were day-users during their last visit indicated no significant differences in the expectations of food service delivery for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Of the socio-demographic characteristics, gender was the only characteristic that showed a significant difference ($p < .05$) in food service delivery expectations. A higher percentage of men than women expected table service for lunch, whereas a higher percentage of women than men expected self-service or quick service for lunch (Figure 14).

Significant differences in food service delivery expectations were also found between those respondents who had eaten at the lodge at least once in the past and those respondents who had never eaten at the lodge (Figure 15). For instance, respondents with past dining experiences were significantly ($p < .05$) more likely to expect table service (74.6%) for breakfast, whereas respondents who had never dined at the lodge before were equally likely to expect table service (37.5%) and self-service (37.5%). A significantly ($p < .001$) higher percentage of

Figure 14. Comparison of Lunch Delivery Expectations Between Men & Women Boat Slip Renters



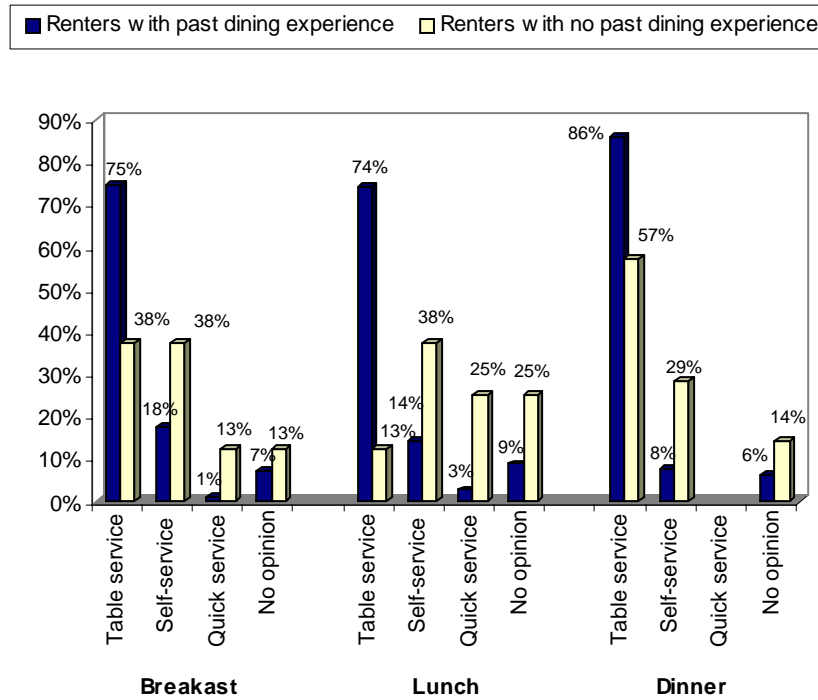
respondents with past dining experiences also expected table service for lunch, when compared to the expectations from respondents with no past dining experiences (12.5%).

Dinner again evoked a stronger response from the participants of the slip renter survey. Although there were no statistically significant differences in the expectations of food service delivery for dinner, a majority (86.1%) of those respondents with past dining experiences expected table service and over half (57.1%) of the respondents who had never eaten at the lodge also expected table service for dinner. It is interesting to note that neither set chose the quick service option as a dinner expectation.

ACCEPTABILITY OF QUICK SERVICE DELIVERY AT SSP

Both SSP visitors and respondents to the slip renter survey were asked to rate their acceptance of quick service foods

Figure 15. Comparison of Food Service Delivery Expectations of SSPM Slip Renters, by Past Dining Experience



at the marina being the only type of food service delivery offered at SSP. Figure 16 compares their acceptance of this scenario.

SSP Visitors’ Acceptance of Quick Service Food at the Marina

Half (50.0%) of the SSP visitors surveyed found the idea of breakfast served as prepackaged (quick service) foods in the marina unacceptable (28.9%) or very unacceptable (21.1%). Less than a third (31.6%) found the idea acceptable (23.7%) or very acceptable (7.9%). Visitors were equally divided, however, on the issue of prepackaged

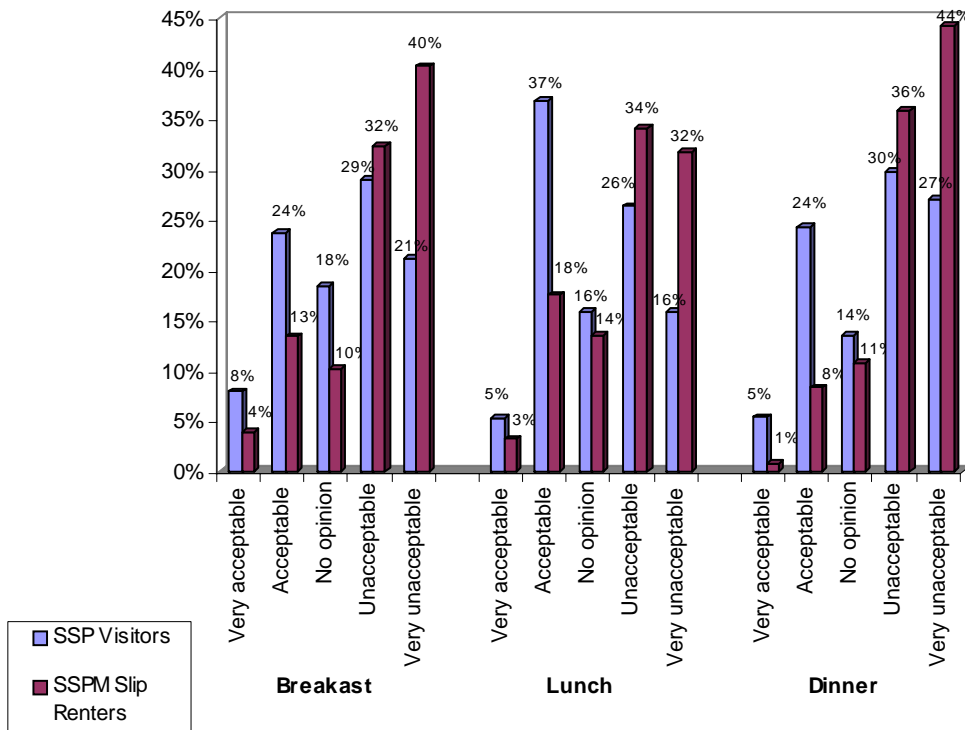
foods for lunch. Forty-two percent (42.1%) thought that serving prepackaged foods at the marina for lunch was acceptable (36.8%) or very acceptable (5.3%), while another 42.1% found it unacceptable (26.3%) or very unacceptable (15.8%). Visitors felt most strongly about serving prepackaged foods at the marina for dinner. Over half (56.7%) were not at all amenable to this possibility, with 29.7% finding it unacceptable and 27.0% finding the idea very unacceptable. Less than a third (29.7%) of visitors thought it acceptable (24.3%) or very acceptable (5.4%) to serve prepackaged foods for dinner.

Of descriptive note, first time visitors were much more likely to either have no opinion (57.1%) or find it acceptable (42.9%) to offer prepackaged foods at the marina for breakfast and lunch when compared to repeat visitors. The majority of repeat visitors found it unacceptable to serve only prepackaged foods at the marina, both for breakfast (63.3%) and lunch (53.3%). Dinner, however, evoked a stronger response in first time visitors, who were slightly more likely (28.6%) to find the idea of serving prepackaged foods for dinner unacceptable than they had felt about breakfast or lunch. Two-thirds (65.5%) of repeat visitors were also unaccepting of the idea.

Additional comparisons between the visitors surveyed at the four different

recreation areas reveal that, while not statistically significant, hotel visitors were much more likely to find serving only prepackaged foods at SSP unacceptable, when compared to the visitors surveyed at the other three areas. One hundred percent (100.0%) of hotel visitors disliked the idea of serving only prepackaged foods for breakfast and dinner, and 75.0% disliked the idea of serving only prepackaged foods for lunch. Only a third (35.7%) of visitors surveyed in the campgrounds, however, found serving prepackaged foods for breakfast unacceptable; 30.8% felt the same for lunch and 53.9% found it unacceptable for dinner. Half of the visitors surveyed at the swimming beach and north picnic area were not accepting of serving only prepackaged foods for breakfast and dinner, and 44.4% also

Figure 16. Comparison of the Acceptability of Quick Service at SSP's Marina Between SSP Visitors & SSPM Slip Renters



didn't like the idea for lunch. Forty-six percent (45.5%) of marina visitors were also unaccepting of serving only prepackaged foods for breakfast and dinner, and over a third (36.4%) weren't willing for lunch to be prepackaged either.

SSPM Boat Slip Renters' Acceptance of Quick Service Food at the Marina

The majority of respondents to the slip renter survey were not at all accepting of prepackaged foods (quick service foods) at the marina being the only type of food service delivery at SSP. Over 70.0% (72.5%) of respondents either found the idea unacceptable (32.3%) or very unacceptable (40.2%) for breakfast. Two-thirds (65.8%) found prepackaged foods for lunch unacceptable (34.1%) or very unacceptable (31.7%). An overwhelming 80.0% of respondents were not at all amenable to prepackaged foods for dinner, with 35.8% finding the idea unacceptable and 44.2% finding it very unacceptable. There were no significant differences in the acceptability of prepackaged food service delivery at SSP, by the socio-demographic characteristics of age, sex, household composition, primary occupation, and household income.

When comparing respondents who stayed overnight during their last visit to respondents who were day-users, no significant differences were found in their acceptability of prepackaged foods at the marina. The majority of both types of respondents found unacceptable the possibility of prepackaged foods for breakfast (77.0% of overnight respondents and 66.0% of day-users) and lunch (70.2% of overnight respondents and 60.8% of day-users). Both were even less amenable to the idea of

prepackaged foods for dinner, with 85.0% of overnight respondents reporting it as unacceptable (32.9%) or very unacceptable (52.1%) and 72.3% of day-users finding it unacceptable (40.4%) or very unacceptable (31.9%).

A significant difference ($p=.05$) was found in the percentage of respondents who felt that prepackaged foods served at the marina for breakfast was acceptable, by whether or not they had ever eaten at the dining lodge. Not surprisingly, the majority (66.6%) of respondents who had no past dining experiences either had no opinion (22.2%) on the matter or found the idea acceptable (33.3%) or very acceptable (11.1%). The majority (75.9%) of those respondents who had eaten at the lodge before, however, found the possibility to be unacceptable (33.0%) or very unacceptable (42.9%). Attitudes toward lunch were very similar. Over half (55.5%) of respondents who had never eaten at the dining lodge found it acceptable (44.4%) or very acceptable (11.1%) if lunch were offered as quick service only, while 22.2% didn't have an opinion on the matter. The majority (70.0%) of respondents who had past dining experiences, however, found a quick service lunch either unacceptable (36.4%) or very unacceptable (33.6%).

The possibility of a prepackaged dinner, on the other hand, evoked a stronger response from both types of respondents. Although never having dined at the lodge before, the majority (62.5%) of these respondents did not find a prepackaged dinner an acceptable proposition. An overwhelming majority (81.2%) of respondents who had dined at the lodge before also did not favor a prepackaged dinner, with 34.0% finding

it unacceptable and 47.2% finding it very unacceptable.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS FROM SSP VISITORS & SSPM SLIP RENTERS

Respondents to both surveys were also given the opportunity to write any additional comment and suggestions about the food service at SSP or comments and suggestions about how DNR could make their experience at SSP better (question 24). Twenty-three percent (23.4%) of the visitor survey

participants responded to this question, with 11 responses. Forty-four percent (43.9%) of the slip renter survey participants responded to this question with 71 comments given by 61 respondents. Both sets of comments were listed and grouped into seven categories based on similarities for frequency and percentage calculations. The list of comments and suggestions is found in Appendix E. Table 3 lists the frequencies and percentages of the comments and suggestions by category.

Table 3. Frequency & Percentage of Additional Comments & Suggestions from SSP Visitors & SSPM Slip Renters

| Category | SSP Visitor | | SSPM Slip Renter | |
|--|-------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|
| | Frequency | Percent | Frequency | Percent |
| 1. General positive comments about dining lodge | 4 | 36.4% | 26 | 36.6% |
| 2. Comments/suggestions about improving food service or requests to keep food service the same | 4 | 36.4% | 21 | 29.6% |
| 3. Comments/suggestions about improving other concession services at SSP | 1 | 9.1% | 12 | 16.9% |
| 4. General positive comments about SSP | 1 | 9.1% | 4 | 5.6% |
| 5. Comments/suggestions about improving park facilities & services at SSP | 1 | 9.1% | 2 | 2.8% |
| 6. General positive comments about other concession services at SSP | | | 2 | 2.8% |
| 7. Other comments | | | 4 | 5.6% |
| Total | 11 | 100.0% | 71 | 100.0% |

Focus Group Results

Analysis of the focus group transcripts clearly indicates a number of coherent themes. The following describes each theme as well as provides quotes from the transcripts that are indicative of each one. A copy of the transcripts are provided in Appendix F. Five prominent themes emerged and are as follows.

THEME 1. MISSION CLARITY

Content analysis of both focus groups points to a consistent divergence of opinion toward the purpose of food service in DSP. At one end of the spectrum is the view that food service dining can become a destination itself, thereby creating an expectation in the visitor's mind and creating a new park visitor.

"...we are in the business of shaping and changing expectations...I think we need to be a little more aggressive about seeking out changes and trying to attract new clientele."

"I think food service is important...and I think we need to figure out how we can get more people in them [state parks and historic sites]."

"Your customer base is not just who use the state park, it's those who use the lake. And that's the people you're going to draw, and you have to have the right facility to draw them in."

At the other end of the spectrum is the view that DSP should base food service provision on the primary park visitor

profile consistent with the dominant recreational activities of the park.

"I think the purpose is simple. It's to meet or exceed the expectation of the park visitor, period ...is it our job to go out and create new things?"

"If we got into forming expectations, we'd be stepping on the toes of private enterprise. We don't want to go out and create new needs and expectations."

"I think it's to serve the visitor we have at the park."

"The people already using it [the park] are the people I think we should serve."

"We should be dealing with those people who come to us. People are saying they could make this [dining lodge] something, but is that why we want them there, to come to eat? I think it's not. I think it's to come and recreate in our park, and then we serve those who come to do that."

The divergence in purpose was consistent with all forum subgroups, occurring at all levels of occupation from concessionaires to park superintendents to park planners. This divergence of opinion forms a singular recommendation later in the report.

THEME 2. SITE-SPECIFIC PROVISION OF SERVICES

There was a consistency of opinion throughout the focus group discussions that suggested food service should align

itself with the distinguishing attributes and characteristics of the individual parks and historic sites. These attributes and characteristics should include the personality of the park or site, the personality of dominant recreation activity patterns, the personality of the visitor, the location of the park and site and community spillover, etc.

“I think it makes a difference what you offer in that particular park, what the opportunities are, if there are other available opportunities in the area.”

“It depends on where the facility is, what you need.”

“...does food service availability basically match the function of the park?”

“If they go to Roaring River State Park and know it is a river, and they know the lodge is there, then they expect to have a nice meal there before they even leave home...if they go to Johnson’s Shut-Ins, I think the food service there is probably perfect. It’s a snack bar, that sort of thing, serving the day-users.”

“I would say the hard part [is determining] what the people want. At Bennett Springs, it’s trout fishing. The focus is so narrow, [although] I know people go there for the hiking or the nature center.”

“[At Stockton], they go there for the lake part, they go there to fish. They don’t go to hike trails and all that. They go there to fish, they’re out on the water, they don’t want to mess with food. Then when they come

home, they want to go to a restaurant.”

“...the focus for Stockton is the water and we should be focusing on those users. I don’t think we should be making this something it’s not.”

THEME 3. FLEXIBILITY

A third focus group opinion was that food service delivery should display logical management flexibility to meet visitor needs. This includes flexibility in contract development, particularly in regard to determining hours of operation, type of food service delivery offered, menu selection, and even building design and location, etc. Flexibility is required in order to change with the flow of visitor expectations and patterns of behavior.

“I think there are some occasions where we have properly identified our clientele, and are serving that clientele, Thousand Hills and Bennett Springs being examples. I think we have provided the right service and the challenge for us is to keep on top of that curve and not slip back.”

“It’s important to keep your eye on the ball because it does change over the years. Big Lake is a decent example for us. Twenty-five, 35 years ago, we had one of the better restaurants in the state park system, at least as far as volume is concerned. We went in and upgraded the restaurant, perhaps made it a little too fancy for the crowd, other situations changed in the area and we lost our customers. To gain them back, we went back in and made the restaurant a little

simpler, added a little store, made it more of a quasi-fastfood kind of place...just because something worked 20 years ago doesn't mean it's going to work today. You have to stay on top of the changes."

"I think the park system can look at these park by park. If circumstances change, the park needs to react to that."

"Years ago, we had a problem in the parks where they wanted to make all the parks the same. [For instance], if you had a steak at Bennetts Springs, you were supposed to have a steak at Thousand Hills. If [the restaurant] at Bennetts Springs opened at 7:00 a.m., they were supposed to open Meramec at 7:00 a.m. Now, each park should stand on it's own. I think that is probably the most positive thing that happened to parks since I've been with them, is now they're getting park-specific, instead of just generalizing everything for all parks."

"We have to be more flexible, where, 'oops, that didn't work, let's just change everything'."

"...maybe that's where you have the dining lodge closed from the breakfast and afternoon crowd and serve that out of the store or something."

"...let's write this contract to give you some wiggle room. So what you do in the morning, there's breakfast there and it's self-serve hot and cold buffet, we don't want to put a lot out because we don't know who's

coming, but we're going to replenish it."

"The other thing is, there may be instances where all three [types of food service] can be utilized in one park. And the question is, are we restricting concessionaires by saying, 'Okay, you've got to have table service all the time'?"

"My feeling is this, I think the concessionaire needs to be given a lot of flexibility."

THEME 4. FOOD TRENDS

While there were fewer direct comments regarding food trends, the importance given by the focus group participants to this particular topic and its relationship to the other three themes justifies its inclusion for review. Much of what was discussed was consistent with the literature regarding consumers' desire for convenience and the social aspect of eating out.

"I think more people in this culture eat out now, but they're eating at McDonald's, or Pizza Hut, not in restaurants."

"We have an older clientele but, for a lot of them, going out to dinner is a social thing."

"Instead of somebody going out for a hike, what some people do for enjoyment is go out to the park and watch over the lake or the river and enjoy a meal. Camping is so involved in the last few years – trailers have a microwave and everything else. Most of the people you see now are retired or baby boomers, but they still like to get out

of the camper and come over and have a sit-down meal. They have a stove, a microwave, a kitchen, but people still like to get out for the experience. They can prepare a meal at home, but I think it's because they're tired of it."

"I think it's because the wives don't want to cook – they're on vacation, too."

"State parks just don't strike the public as high-level cuisine places, they just don't – they're more convenience oriented, I think, with the exception of the big parks like we were talking about."

"...it seems like food is a form of recreation and the parks are a form of recreation...it's something they can come to the lake and enjoy."

"...a lot of people take it home to eat it. Instead of going out to eat now, the big thing is you call and order it or you go and get it and you eat it at home."

Another food trend response by participants was the trend toward "branding" in food service delivery. Participants did not respond positively to the concept and felt that "brand name" restaurant chains were inappropriate for state parks, although some merit was given to the idea of developing niche markets that sold products or services that patterned name brands.

"I don't think people would like it. I think when people go to a state park, the last thing they want to see is a McDonald's or a Taco Bell. I'm not saying that you couldn't sell

something that they sell, go to pizzas and make as much money as you would a full service restaurant, but I think you would get complaints if you saw a Pizza Hut sign in the state park."

"...one of the things you get with the state park experience, you get this wonderful state park experience with no brand names, hopefully, but you've got to have somebody who knows a little bit about cooking. If I go to Blimpie's, I put the Blimpie's hat on and I just follow the directions from the manager on how to make the sandwich and cut it and just listen to what the customer wants on it and get them out of there."

"...I don't know that the franchises serve anybody any better than you all can serve them, or any non-franchise...anybody can get the franchise stuff anywhere. I'm about making the state parks special. And if you can get the very same thing there that you can get anywhere else, what's special about it?"

"We didn't make it overly apparent to people, it wasn't a St. Louis Bread Company sign or anything, but on our menu it said, 'featuring St. Louis Bread Company bread', and on a sign over the menu board it said that, too. And, particularly when people came back, we had a lot of regulars, people said, 'we just love this'. It was good bread, and it's better than anything I can haul down here and make myself, so I think that was a plus."

“[The concessionaire at Pomme de Terre] would drive to Camdenton once a week and pick up gallons of Central Dairy ice cream, and they became known for that. They sell soft-ball size scoops, and they just blow that stuff out of there. And they continue, even with the new concessionaire today, they continue to blow that ice cream out of there, and people just line up. Now, is it a branding thing because it’s Central Dairy ice cream? Is it because they are providing a quantity for a cheap price? Or is it both? But they’ve done well there.”

THEME 5. CONCESSIONAIRE OPERATIONS CONSTRAINTS

Uniformly recognized operational constraints from concessionaire forum participants provide the basis for this last theme. Many of the operational challenges facing the concessionaire participants are consistent with literature findings, particularly the problems of persistent labor shortages, the marginality of revenue generation, increasing operational costs, competition from other restaurants, etc.

“All the cooks I’ve hired this year are on probation for some kind of offense. I’m not exaggerating at all, but we can’t help it. We’re closed four months of the year so we can’t hire good cooks. A good cook isn’t going to take unemployment for four months of the year.”

“My food is freezer to table. I don’t prepare anything. For one thing, I don’t have time to, and I don’t have the help because we’re seasonal.”

“From a developmental standpoint, restaurants are just a black hole...there’s just not that much profit in it.”

“Let’s talk about employees. First of all, it’s hard to keep good employees, they’re not making any money...you have to pay them more to keep them, so it’s costing you, your labor cost is going up. The customer, if you cut back on the type of help or the quality...they’re not going to be happy with the service or the quality of the food. Trying to be there for everybody all the time doesn’t work. There’s a lot of challenges. I think food service is necessary in these parks, but I think it has to be looked at closely and it has to be controlled by us.”

“...you can’t get a concessionaire in the food industry to make any money, because you can’t have liquor. It’s very difficult because concessionaires won’t even bid on a restaurant if there’s no liquor, even the biggest ones.”

“It’s hard every day when you go home and say, ‘Wow, I haven’t seen the Jones’ this month and they used to eat here every day’ and you go by your competition in town and they’re in there because they’re selling food 50¢ cheaper and they’ve got the lounge, and a bar, and they’re making so much off the lounge and the bar that they’re giving the food away. Now, I’m wanting to add onto the restaurant, and add more windows. I know if I can have more windows and have a little lounge, I can more or less save the restaurant

from the bad day when Tuesday's or Friday's or Bob Evans comes in."

An additional challenge for state park concessionaires is the differential pricing by their vendors.

"Right now, with our food service provider, I have a real problem with this: all the big chain food companies use the same one, I buy about \$2000 a week from them and Country Kitchen buys the same amount from them, but I pay much more per item, for the same product, the same brand, the same truck, because I am a little guy."

"They rate you at different things, and no matter how much I buy, I will never get the volume discount. They don't treat everyone the same."

Additional comments focused on the amenity services at SSP. A consensus of opinion among all focus group

participants suggested that the dining lodge be located closer to the water with a better view of the lake and be more accessible to marina users.

"I think I would provide table service but put it closer to the water and the marina."

"...the thing ought to be designed around the deck, so everybody has a view of the lake. I agree, it is possible that moving it will cause a complication for getting back and forth in the park, but if you put it down there you're going to attract maybe some people off the lake, and certainly people coming down for the view, and from in town coming out for the experience."

"So if people are going to go to the restaurant, you've got to be closer to the water."

Recommendations

Based on input from focus group participants, examination of the literature, and analysis of visitor use and expectations of food service provision at SSP, the following four recommendations are made. The first three recommendations together form a paradigm for determining the level of food service required in Missouri’s state park system (Figure 17).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MISSOURI’S STATE PARK SYSTEM

Mission Clarity

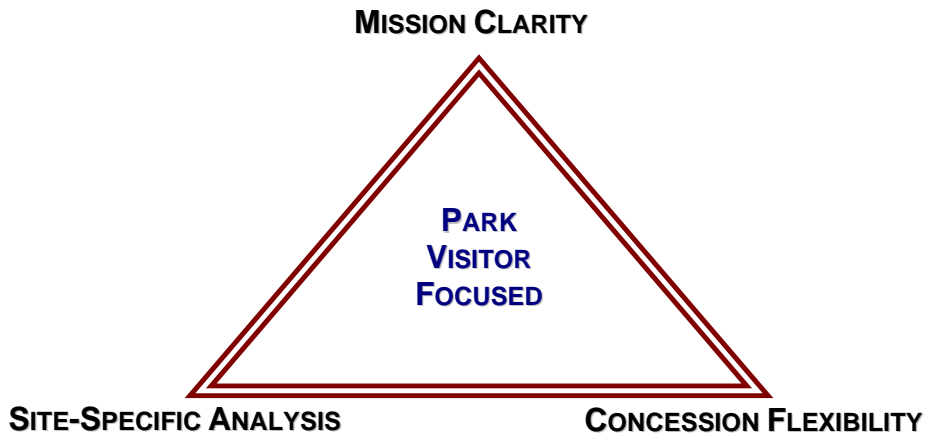
DSP should develop a mission clarity of food service that uses the park visitor’s needs as the cornerstone for determining the need of food service provision, rather than a primary focus as the sole destination. From the foundation of site visitor profiles, successful niches can be added but the niche should not stand apart from the park and its visitor profile. As one focus group participant suggested, “The question is not what do we need to do with the restaurant, but

what do we need to do with the park.” Food service adds to the overall visitor experience and complements the other services and opportunities at the parks and sites but, in the words of another focus group participant, “...food service is not a major component, but is a very important component in a number of parks.” Obviously, visitor needs do not decree food service provision in all state parks and historic sites; therefore, a site-specific analysis of each park and site within the system will aid in ascertaining the level, if any, of food service required.

Site-Specific Analysis

The diversity of resources and recreational opportunities found within Missouri’s state park system and the consequent diversity of its users make obsolete the “one size fits all” approach to providing food service. As one focus group participant put it, “You’re selling the unique experience.” The ability to sell a unique experience, setting, theme, etc., requires a site-specific examination.

Figure 17. Food Service Provision Paradigm



In other words, utilize the basic recreational activity analysis tenet. The literature has identified three types of food service provision: table service, quick service, and self-service. A site-specific analysis of each park and site will dictate the type or combination of types of food service that should be offered.

Concession Flexibility

Pursuant to this idea of site-specificity is the need for flexibility in concession contract design. Flexibility between DSP and concessionaires will allow concessionaires to develop serving patterns consistent with the dominant personality of the park or site (dominant personality includes the primary recreation activities of the park, the common characteristics of its visitors, the park's geographic location, and the nature and attributes of surrounding communities). From this, niche markets will evolve, giving concessionaires the opportunity to accurately identify their clientele, provide the expected services, and perhaps experience some measure of economic success.

A secondary aspect of concession flexibility is the need to adequately provide service information to visitors. The literature suggests that an increasing number of consumers are using technology to ascertain service type and availability. Concessionaires need the flexibility to be able to advertise food service in multiple venues (print, Internet, etc.) to ensure a greater visibility of service offerings. Some concern was expressed during the focus groups that visitors don't know what services are available. For instance, a focus group participant discussed the situation at Montauk, "...if I had a dollar

for everyone who walked into our store, which is right next to our restaurant, and said, 'Is there a restaurant around here?'. And people call on the phone and want to know if they can get a room at the lodge, and we say we don't have one, and they say, 'Oh, I thought there was a lodge there'. And then people think that the dining lodge is for people that are in our cabins or are camping to go eat. And there's nothing there that says 'restaurant'. There's a little sign that has a fork, knife, and spoon, and so many people come into the store for a cup of coffee and we tell them they can get it at the restaurant, and they say, 'Where's the restaurant?'. We're here, but there's a lot of people that don't know that. That 'dining lodge' kind of throws them a little. So we call it 'The Lodge Restaurant' in all of our advertising, we've been doing that...if we start throwing 'restaurant' in there, people start thinking it is a restaurant and not a 'dining lodge'."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STOCKTON STATE PARK

Consistent with the above recommendations, the literature, and an analysis of the visitor and slip renter surveys, if new facilities are to be built at SSP, the following recommendations are given.

New facilities should provide better access to marina and lake users and incorporate a multiple service design to include both table service and a more convenience-driven informal dining. Building design might include a glassed-in deck or outside eating area overlooking the lake. In other words, leverage the dominant water aspect of the park and its users. Hours of operation should be flexible to provide

table service during peak evening hours and/or provide a grill or other quick service for non-peak hours. In addition, it should be recognized that study results indicate that construction of motel/condo

type units link directly to food service utilization (83% of motel/condo users indicated eating at the dining lodge).

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Appendix A. Stockton State Park Visitor Survey



Stockton State Park



The Missouri Department of Natural Resources and the University of Missouri are seeking your input regarding the role of food services at Stockton State Park. This survey is voluntary and completely anonymous. Your cooperation is important in helping us make decisions about managing food services at this park. Thank you for your time.

1. **Is this your first visit to Stockton State Park?** *(Check only one box.)*
 yes no **If no, about how many times have you visited the park in the past year?** _____

2. **Are you staying overnight during your visit to Stockton State Park?** *(Check only one box.)*

yes **If yes, how many nights are you staying?** _____
 no *(If no, skip to question 4.)*

3. **If staying overnight, where are you staying?** *(Check only one box.)*

- campground in Stockton State Park
 - tent
 - RV, camper, trailer, van conversion, etc.
- motel in Stockton State Park
- duplex condominium in Stockton State Park
- personally owned boat
- boat rented from Stockton State Park Marina
- nearby campground
- nearby lodging facilities
- friends/relatives
- other *(Please specify.)* _____

4. **Who did you come to Stockton State Park with during this visit?** *(Check only one box.)*

- I came alone
- family & friends
- club or organized group
- family
- friends
- other *(Please specify.)* _____

5. **Including yourself, how many people did you bring with you during this park visit?** *(Please specify number of people.)* _____

6. **Which recreational activities are you engaging in during this park visit?** *(Check all that apply.)*

- fishing
- camping
- studying nature
- sailing
- picnicking
- attending naturalist-led program
- boating
- walking/hiking
- attending special event (i.e., family reunion, fishing tournament, etc.)
- swimming
- viewing wildlife
- other *(Please specify.)* _____

7. **Have you dined at the dining lodge during this park visit?** *(Check only one box.)*

- yes
- no
- haven't yet, but am planning to
- not during this park visit, but have in the past

8. **When at the park, typically how many times do you eat at the dining lodge during a visit?**

- I usually eat at the dining lodge _____ times. *(Please specify number of times.)*
- I have never eaten at the dining lodge. *(If you have never eaten at the lodge, please skip to question 10.)*

9. **Typically, which meal(s) do you eat at the dining lodge during a park visit?** *(Check all that apply.)*

- breakfast
- lunch
- dinner

10. **If you do not dine at the lodge, please indicate why not.** *(Check all that apply.)*

- bring food from home
- eat at restaurants in local area instead
- prices in dining lodge too expensive
- don't like quality of food at dining lodge
- other *(Please specify.)* _____

 PLEASE TURN SURVEY OVER. 

11. For breakfast served in the dining lodge, which of the following would most meet your expectations? (Check only one box.)

- a. table service (full service with servers & a full breakfast menu)
- b. self service (hot/cold buffet items, no servers)
- c. quick service (hot/cold prepackaged food items)
- d. no opinion

12. For lunch served in the dining lodge, which of the following would most meet your expectations? (Check only one box.)

- a. table service (full service with servers & a full lunch menu)
- b. self service (hot/cold buffet items, no servers)
- c. quick service (hot/cold prepackaged food items)
- d. no opinion

13. For dinner served at the dining lodge, which of the following would most meet your expectations? (Check only one box.)

- a. table service (full service with servers & a full dinner menu)
- b. self service (hot/cold buffet items, no servers)
- c. quick service (hot/cold prepackaged food items)
- d. no opinion

14. If prepackaged foods (quick service foods) at the marina were the only foods served in the park, please rate how acceptable this would be to you for breakfast, lunch and dinner. (Check only one box for each meal.)

| | Very Acceptable | Acceptable | No Opinion | Unacceptable | Very Unacceptable |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. breakfast | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. lunch | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. dinner | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

15. What is your age? _____

16. What is your sex? female male

17. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Check only one box.)

- grade school vocational school graduate of 4-year college
- high school some college advanced graduate degree

18. What is your primary occupation? (Check only one box.)

- homemaker retired
- self-employed student
- service-based employee other (Please specify.) _____
- manufacturing-based employee _____
- professional/technical _____

19. What is your household composition? (Check only one box.)

- single with no children married with children living at home
- single with children married with children grown
- married with no children other (Please specify.) _____

20. What is your ethnic origin or racial background? (Check only one box.)

- African American Asian White
- American Indian Hispanic other (Please specify.) _____

21. Do you have a disability that substantially limits one or more life activities or might require special accommodations?

- no yes **If yes, what disability or disabilities do you have? (Please specify.)** _____

22. What is your 5-digit zip code (or country of residence, if you live outside the U.S.)? _____

23. What is your annual household income? (Check only one box.)

- less than \$25,000 \$50,001 - \$75,000
- \$25,000 - \$50,000 over \$75,000

24. Please write any additional comments or suggestions about the food service at Stockton State Park or suggestions on how the Missouri Department of Natural Resources can make your experience at Stockton State Park a better one.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.
YOU ARE ALWAYS WELCOME IN MISSOURI STATE PARKS.**

Appendix B. Stockton State Park Marina Boat Slip Renter Survey

Dr. Randal Vessell
Department Chair
Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism
105 ABNR, University of Missouri
Columbia, MO 65211-7230

July 20, 2001

Name
Street
City, State Zip

RE: Evaluating the food services at Stockton State Park

Dear Name:

We need your help! The Missouri Department of Natural Resources and the University of Missouri are seeking your input into the role of food service operations in the Missouri State Park system, specifically Stockton State Park. We are conducting a survey of all boat slip renters from the Stockton State Park Marina and asking their opinion of the food services at Stockton State Park. The information you provide will be useful in helping the park provide services to meet the needs and wishes of its visitors.

Please take the time to complete the enclosed questionnaire. There are no right or wrong answers, only your much-needed opinion. The identification code on the questionnaire will be used for follow-up purposes only so that we do not re-mail mistakenly. **All responses will be treated confidentially and will in no way be traceable to individual respondents once the survey process has been concluded.** Please drop your postage-paid, preaddressed envelope in the mail by August 17, 2001.

Thank you for your assistance. We care what you think.

Sincerely,

Randal Vessell, Ph.D.
Department Chair



Stockton State Park



The Missouri Department of Natural Resources and the University of Missouri are seeking your input regarding the role of food services at Stockton State Park. This survey is voluntary and completely anonymous. Your cooperation is important in helping us make decisions about managing food services at this park. Thank you for your time.

1. Have you visited Stockton State Park in the past year? (Check only one box.)

- no
- yes **If yes, about how many times have you visited the park in the past year?** _____

2. Did you stay overnight during your last visit to Stockton State Park? (Check only one box.)

- yes **If yes, how many nights did you stay?** _____
- no (If no, skip to question 4.)

3. If you stayed overnight, where did you stay? (Check only one box.)

- campground in Stockton State Park
 - tent
 - RV, camper, trailer, van conversion, etc.
- motel in Stockton State Park
- duplex condominium in Stockton State Park
- personally owned boat
- boat rented from Stockton State Park Marina
- nearby campground
- nearby lodging facilities
- friends/relatives
- other (Please specify.) _____

4. Typically, who do you bring with you during a visit to Stockton State Park? (Check only one box.)

- I come alone
- family
- family & friends
- friends
- club or organized group
- other (Please specify.) _____

5. Including yourself, how many people did you bring with you during your last visit? (Please specify number of people.) _____

6. Which recreational activities do you typically engage in during your park visits? (Check all that apply.)

- fishing
- sailing
- boating
- swimming
- other (Please specify.) _____
- camping
- picnicking
- walking/hiking
- viewing wildlife
- studying nature
- attending naturalist-led program
- attending special event (i.e., family reunion, fishing tournament, etc.)

7. Did you dine at the dining lodge during your last park visit? (Check only one box.)

- yes
- no
- not during the last park visit, but have in the past

8. When at the park, typically how many times do you eat at the dining lodge during a visit?

- I usually eat at the dining lodge _____ times. (Please specify number of times.)
- I have never eaten at the dining lodge. (If you have never eaten at the lodge, please skip to question 10.)

9. Typically, which meal(s) do you eat at the dining lodge during a park visit? (Check all that apply.)

- breakfast
- lunch
- dinner

10. If you do not dine at the lodge, please indicate why not. (Check all that apply.)

- bring food from home
- eat at restaurants in local area instead
- prices in dining lodge too expensive
- don't like quality of food at dining lodge
- other (Please specify.) _____

PLEASE TURN SURVEY OVER.

11. For breakfast served in the dining lodge, which of the following would most meet your expectations? (Check only one box.)

- a. table service (full service with servers & a full breakfast menu)
- b. self service (hot/cold buffet items, no servers)
- c. quick service (hot/cold prepackaged food items)
- d. no opinion

12. For lunch served in the dining lodge, which of the following would most meet your expectations? (Check only one box.)

- a. table service (full service with servers & a full lunch menu)
- b. self service (hot/cold buffet items, no servers)
- c. quick service (hot/cold prepackaged food items)
- d. no opinion

13. For dinner served at the dining lodge, which of the following would most meet your expectations? (Check only one box.)

- a. table service (full service with servers & a full dinner menu)
- b. self service (hot/cold buffet items, no servers)
- c. quick service (hot/cold prepackaged food items)
- d. no opinion

14. If prepackaged foods (quick service foods) at the marina were the only foods served in the park, please rate how acceptable this would be to you for breakfast, lunch and dinner. (Check only one box for each meal.)

| | Very Acceptable | Acceptable | No Opinion | Unacceptable | Very Unacceptable |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. breakfast | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. lunch | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. dinner | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

15. What is your age? _____

16. What is your sex? female male

17. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Check only one box.)

- grade school vocational school graduate of 4-year college
- high school some college advanced graduate degree

18. What is your primary occupation? (Check only one box.)

- homemaker retired
- self-employed student
- service-based employee other (Please specify.) _____
- manufacturing-based employee _____
- professional/technical _____

19. What is your household composition? (Check only one box.)

- single with no children married with children living at home
- single with children married with children grown
- married with no children other (Please specify.) _____

20. What is your ethnic origin or racial background? (Check only one box.)

- African American Asian White
- American Indian Hispanic other (Please specify.) _____

21. Do you have a disability that substantially limits one or more life activities or might require special accommodations?

- no yes **If yes, what disability or disabilities do you have? (Please specify.)** _____

22. What is your 5-digit zip code (or country of residence, if you live outside the U.S.)? _____

23. What is your annual household income? (Check only one box.)

- less than \$25,000 \$50,001 - \$75,000
- \$25,000 - \$50,000 over \$75,000

24. Please write any additional comments or suggestions about the food service at Stockton State Park or suggestions on how the Missouri Department of Natural Resources can make your experience at Stockton State Park a better one.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.
YOU ARE ALWAYS WELCOME IN MISSOURI STATE PARKS.**

Appendix C. Responses to Visitor Survey Questions

Stockton State Park Visitor Survey

1. Is this your first visit to Stockton State Park? (n=46)

yes 64.4%
no 35.6%

If no, about how many times have you visited the park in the past year?
(n=47) *The responses from this open ended question are grouped into the following five categories:*

0 44.7%
1-2 10.7%
3-4 10.7%
5-10 18.1%
11+ 15.8%

The average number of times repeat visitors visited the park in the past year was 7.6 times.

2. Are you staying overnight during your visit to Stockton State Park?

(n=46) yes 67.4%
no 32.6%

If yes, how many nights are you staying? (n=28)

The responses from this open-ended question are grouped into the following five categories:

1-2 32.2%
3 14.3%
4 21.4%
5-10 25.0%
11+ 7.1%

The average number of nights respondents stayed overnight was 4.4 nights.

3. If staying overnight, where are you staying? (n=29)

| | |
|---|-------|
| campground in Stockton State Park | 58.6% |
| tent | 35.3% |
| RV, camper, trailer, van conversion, etc. | 64.7% |
| motel in Stockton State Park | 6.9% |
| duplex condominium in Stockton State Park | 13.8% |
| personally owned boat | 3.4% |
| boat rented from Stockton State Park Marina | 0.0% |
| nearby campground | 3.4% |
| nearby lodging facilities | 6.9% |
| friends/relatives | 3.4% |
| other | 3.4% |

4. Who did you come to Stockton State Park with during this visit? (n=45)

| | |
|----------------------|-------|
| I came alone | 11.1% |
| family | 60.0% |
| family & friends | 15.6% |
| friends | 6.7% |
| club/organized group | 6.7% |
| other | 0.0% |

5. Including yourself, how many people did you bring with you during this park visit? (n=41)

The responses from this open-ended question were grouped into the following six categories:

| | |
|------|-------|
| 1-2 | 34.2% |
| 3 | 17.1% |
| 4 | 22.0% |
| 5-6 | 17.1% |
| 7-10 | 7.3% |
| 11+ | 2.4% |

The average group size was 3.9 people.

6. Which recreational activities are you engaging in during this park visit? (n=47)

| | | | | | |
|----------|-------|------------------|-------|----------------------------------|------|
| fishing | 57.4% | camping | 40.4% | studying nature | 6.4% |
| sailing | 4.3% | picnicking | 14.9% | attending naturalist-led program | 4.3% |
| boating | 55.3% | walking/hiking | 17.0% | attending special event | 4.3% |
| swimming | 61.7% | viewing wildlife | 23.4% | | |
| other | 2.1% | | | | |

Other activities:
Dining out.

7. Have you dined at the dining lodge during this park visit? (n=47)

| | | | |
|-----|-------|--|------|
| yes | 42.6% | not yet, but am planning to | 6.4% |
| no | 44.7% | not during this park visit, but have in the past | 6.4% |

8. When at the park, typically how many times do you eat at the dining lodge during a visit? (n=40)

| | |
|--|-------|
| I usually eat at the dining lodge _____ times. | 65.0% |
| I have never eaten at the dining lodge. | 35.0% |

The following responses indicate the number of times visitors reported eating at the lodge during a visit:

| | |
|-----|-------|
| 1 | 24.0% |
| 2 | 32.0% |
| 3 | 12.0% |
| 4-5 | 12.0% |
| 6 | 12.0% |
| 7+ | 8.0% |

The average number of times respondents indicating dining at the lodge during a typical visit was 3.2 times.

9. Typically, which meal(s) do you eat at the dining lodge during a park visit? (n=47)

breakfast 40.4%
 lunch 27.7%
 dinner 38.3%

10. If you do not dine at the lodge, please indicate why not. (n=47)

bring food from home 61.7%
 eat at restaurants in local area instead 10.6%
 prices in dining lodge too expensive 17.0%
 don't like quality of food at dining lodge 0.0%
 other 2.1%

Other reasons:

Didn't know there was a dining lodge.

11. For breakfast served in the dining lodge, which of the following would most meet your expectations? (n=41)

table service 56.1%
 self-service 14.6%
 quick service 2.4%
 no opinion 26.8%

12. For lunch served in the dining lodge, which of the following would most meet your expectations? (n=42)

table service 59.5%
 self-service 14.3%
 quick service 2.4%
 no opinion 23.8%

13. For dinner served in the dining lodge, which of the following would most meet your expectations? (n=41)

table service 68.3%
 self-service 4.9%
 quick service 4.9%
 no opinion 22.0%

14. If prepackaged foods (quick service foods) at the marina were the only foods served in the park, please rate how acceptable this would be to you for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

| | Very Acceptable | Acceptable | No Opinion | Unacceptable | Very Unacceptable | |
|-----------|-----------------|------------|------------|--------------|-------------------|--------|
| breakfast | 7.9% | 23.7% | 18.4% | 28.9% | 21.1% | (n=38) |
| lunch | 5.3% | 36.8% | 15.8% | 26.3% | 15.8% | (n=38) |
| dinner | 5.4% | 24.3% | 13.5% | 29.7% | 27.0% | (n=37) |

15. What is your age? (n=45)

Responses were divided into the following four categories:

| | |
|--------------------|-------|
| 18-34 | 15.6% |
| 35-54 | 46.6% |
| 55-64 | 28.9% |
| 65+ | 8.9% |
| Average age = 47.6 | |

16. What is your sex? (n=46)

| | |
|--------|-------|
| female | 54.3% |
| male | 45.7% |

17. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (n=46)

| | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| grade school | 0.0% |
| high school | 28.3% |
| vocational school | 13.0% |
| some college | 30.4% |
| graduate of 4-year college | 15.2% |
| advanced graduate degree | 13.0% |

18. What is your primary occupation? (n=46)

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| homemaker | 4.3% |
| self-employed | 17.4% |
| service-based employee | 8.7% |
| manufacturing-based employee | 8.7% |
| professional/technical | 34.8% |
| retired | 19.6% |
| student | 4.3% |
| other | 2.2% |

Other occupations:

Sales.

19. What is your household composition? (n=47)

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| single with no children | 10.6% |
| single with children | 2.1% |
| married with no children | 8.5% |
| married with children living at home | 31.9% |
| married with children grown | 46.8% |
| other | 0.0% |

20. What is your ethnic origin or racial background? (n=47)

| | | | |
|------------------|------|----------|-------|
| African American | 4.3% | Hispanic | 2.1% |
| American Indian | 0.0% | White | 93.6% |
| Asian | 0.0% | other | 0.0% |

21. Do you have a disability that substantially limits one or more life activities or might require special accommodations? (n=44)

no 97.7%
yes 2.3%

22. What is your 5-digit zip code (or country of residence, if you live outside the U.S.)? (n=41)

The states with the highest percentages of respondents were:

Missouri 80.5%
Kansas 14.6%
Illinois 2.4%
Iowa 2.4%

23. What is your annual household income? (n=39)

| | | | |
|---------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|
| less than \$25,000 | 10.3% | \$50,001 - \$75,000 | 25.6% |
| \$25,000 - \$50,000 | 38.5% | over \$75,000 | 25.6% |

24. Please write any additional comments or suggestions about the food service at Stockton State Park or suggestions on how the Missouri Department of Natural Resources can make your experience at Stockton State Park a better one.

11 of the 47 respondents (23.4%) responded to this question. Frequencies and percentages of responses in five categories are listed:

| | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| 1. General positive comments about dining lodge | 4 | 36.4% |
| 2. Comments/suggestions about improving food service or requests to keep food service same | 4 | 36.4% |
| 3. Comments/suggestions about improving other concession services at SSP | 1 | 9.1% |
| 4. General positive comments about SSP | 1 | 9.1% |
| 5. Comments/suggestions about improving park facilities & services at SSP | <u>1</u> | <u>9.1%</u> |
| Total | 11 | 100.0% |

Appendix D. Responses to Boat Slip Renter Survey Questions

Stockton State Park Marina Boat Slip Renter Survey

1. Have you visited Stockton State Park in the past year? (n=139)

no 1.4%
yes 98.6%

If yes, about how many times have you visited the park in the past year?
(n=139) *The responses from this open ended question are grouped into the following six categories:*

0 13.7%
1-5 16.5%
6-10 23.0%
11-20 28.1%
21-50 15.1%
51+ 3.6%

The average number of times respondents visited the park in the past year was 14.4 times.

2. Did you stay overnight during your last visit to Stockton State Park?

(n=138) yes 56.5%
no 43.5%

If yes, how many nights did you stay? (n=70)

The responses from this open-ended question are grouped into the following six categories:

1 22.9%
2 21.4%
3-4 15.7%
5 15.7%
6-10 14.3%
11+ 10.0%

The average number of nights respondents stayed overnight was 5.9 nights.

4. If you stayed overnight, where did you stay? (n=78)

campground in Stockton State Park 24.4%
tent 5.3%
RV, camper, trailer, van conversion, etc. 94.7%
motel in Stockton State Park 7.7%
duplex condominium in Stockton State Park 9.0%
personally owned boat 41.0%
boat rented from Stockton State Park Marina 0.0%
nearby campground 0.0%
nearby lodging facilities 9.0%
friends/relatives 0.0%

| | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| other | 9.0% |
| <i>Other lodging:</i> | |
| Lake home. | |
| Lake home. | |
| Personal boat and park motel. | |
| Personal boat and campground. | |
| Park motel and other lodging. | |
| Vacation home near park. | |
| Vacation home. | |

4. Typically, who do you bring with you during a visit to Stockton State Park? (n=138)

| | |
|----------------------|-------|
| I come alone | 5.1% |
| family | 38.4% |
| family & friends | 55.1% |
| friends | 1.4% |
| club/organized group | 0.0% |
| other | 0.0% |

5. Including yourself, how many people did you bring with you during your last visit? (n=133)

The responses from this open-ended question were grouped into the following five categories:

| | |
|------|-------|
| 1 | 12.0% |
| 2 | 27.8% |
| 3-4 | 26.3% |
| 5-10 | 29.3% |
| 11+ | 4.8% |

The average group size was 4.5 people.

6. Which recreational activities do you typically engage in during your park visits? (n=139)

| | | | | | |
|----------|-------|------------------|-------|----------------------------------|------|
| fishing | 60.4% | camping | 19.4% | studying nature | 6.5% |
| sailing | 34.5% | picnicking | 15.1% | attending naturalist-led program | 1.4% |
| boating | 69.1% | walking/hiking | 16.5% | attending special event | 5.0% |
| swimming | 56.1% | viewing wildlife | 23.0% | | |
| other | 2.2% | | | | |

Other activities:

- Reading, relaxing.
- Sailboat racing.
- Scuba diving.

7. Did you dine at the dining lodge during your last visit? (n=139)

| | |
|--|-------|
| yes | 48.2% |
| no | 23.0% |
| not during the last park visit, but have in the past | 28.8% |

8. When at the park, typically how many times do you eat at the dining lodge during a visit? (n=130)

I usually eat at the dining lodge _____ times. 92.3%

I have never eaten at the dining lodge. 7.7%

The following responses indicate the number of times visitors reported eating at the lodge during a visit:

| | |
|----|-------|
| 1 | 51.8% |
| 2 | 28.2% |
| 3 | 10.0% |
| 4+ | 10.0% |

The average number of times respondents indicating dining at the lodge during a typical visit was 1.9 times.

9. Typically, which meal(s) do you eat at the dining lodge during a park visit? (n=139)

breakfast 51.8%

lunch 34.5%

dinner 45.3%

10. If you do not dine at the lodge, please indicate why not. (n=139)

bring food from home 41.0%

eat at restaurants in local area instead 12.2%

prices in dining lodge too expensive 12.9%

don't like quality of food at dining lodge 12.2%

other 9.4%

Other reasons:

Eat at home, three miles from marina.

Long wait for service

Not open late enough.

Prepare food on my boat.

Quality of service has gone down.

Service a bit slow.

Service bad.

Service is sometimes not very good.

The service is horrible.

Too formal for area.

11. For breakfast served in the dining lodge, which of the following would most meet your expectations? (n=129)

table service 72.9%

self-service 17.8%

quick service 1.6%

no opinion 7.8%

12. For lunch served in the dining lodge, which of the following would most meet your expectations? (n=128)

table service 71.1%
 self-service 15.6%
 quick service 3.9%
 no opinion 9.4%

13. For dinner served in the dining lodge, which of the following would most meet your expectations? (n=129)

table service 85.3%
 self-service 8.5%
 quick service 0.0%
 no opinion 6.2%

14. If prepackaged foods (quick service foods) at the marina were the only foods served in the park, please rate how acceptable this would be to you for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

| | Very Acceptable | Acceptable | No Opinion | Unacceptable | Very Unacceptable |
|-----------|-----------------|------------|------------|--------------|-------------------|
| breakfast | 3.9% | 13.4% | 10.2% | 32.3% | 40.2% (n=127) |
| lunch | 3.2% | 17.5% | 13.5% | 34.1% | 31.7% (n=126) |
| dinner | 0.8% | 8.3% | 10.8% | 35.8% | 44.2% (n=120) |

15. What is your age? (n=133)

Responses were divided into the following four categories:

18-35 3.0%
 35-55 40.6%
 55-65 33.1%
 65+ 23.3%
 Average age = 56.7

16. What is your sex? (n=134)

female 20.9%
 male 79.1%

17. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (n=135)

grade school 0.7%
 high school 14.8%
 vocational school 5.2%
 some college 35.6%
 graduate of 4-year college 23.7%
 advanced graduate degree 20.0%

18. What is your primary occupation? (n=139)

homemaker 2.2%
 self-employed 20.1%
 service-based employee 0.7%

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| manufacturing-based employee | 1.4% |
| professional/technical | 34.5% |
| retired | 36.7% |
| student | 0.0% |
| other | 4.3% |

19. What is your household composition? (n=136)

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| single with no children | 6.6% |
| single with children | 1.5% |
| married with no children | 8.8% |
| married with children living at home | 22.1% |
| married with children grown | 58.8% |
| other | 2.2% |

20. What is your ethnic origin or racial background? (n=135)

| | | | |
|------------------|------|----------|-------|
| African American | 0.7% | Hispanic | 0.0% |
| American Indian | 0.7% | White | 98.5% |
| Asian | 0.0% | other | 0.0% |

21. Do you have a disability that substantially limits one or more life activities or might require special accommodations? (n=135)

| | |
|-----|-------|
| no | 97.8% |
| yes | 2.2% |

Disabilities:

- Back injury.
- Heart condition and one lung.
- Osteoarthritis in both knees.

22. What is your 5-digit zip code (or country of residence, if you live outside the U.S.)? (n=129)

The states with the highest percentages of respondents were:

| | |
|----------|-------|
| Missouri | 83.0% |
| Kansas | 16.3% |
| Illinois | 0.8% |

23. What is your annual household income? (n=129)

| | | | |
|---------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|
| less than \$25,000 | 3.9% | \$50,001 - \$75,000 | 33.3% |
| \$25,000 - \$50,000 | 18.6% | over \$75,000 | 44.2% |

24. Please write any additional comments or suggestions about the food service at Stockton State Park or suggestions on how the Missouri Department of Natural Resources can make your experience at Stockton State Park a better one.

64 of the 139 respondents (46.0%) responded to this question with 71 comments. Frequencies and percentages of responses in five categories are listed:

| | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| 1. General positive comments about dining lodge | 26 | 36.6% |
| 2. Comments/suggestions about improving food service or requests to keep food service same | 21 | 29.6% |
| 3. Comments/suggestions about improving other concession services at SSP | 12 | 16.9% |
| 4. General positive comments about SSP | 4 | 5.6% |
| 5. Comments/suggestions about improving park facilities & services at SSP | 2 | 2.8% |
| 6. General positive comments about other concession services at SSP | 2 | 2.8% |
| 7. Other comments | <u>4</u> | <u>5.6%</u> |
| Total | 71 | 100.0% |

Appendix E. Responses to Question 24

Additional Comments from Visitors Surveyed at Stockton State Park

General positive comments:

- Been coming for years. Don't change!
- Friendly service.
- The dining lodge is what makes this a good place to come to.
- We love it as is!

Comments about and/or suggestions to improve service or requests to keep food service the same:

- Clean, pleasant employees, full service and full menu – no fast food.
- Full service meals, please. Otherwise, would go to Orleans Trail for breakfast.
- Need to have area for smoking, especially during meeting dinners.
- Would have to look for a different place to stay without the restaurant and duplex lodges.

General positive comments about Stockton State Park:

- Stockton is a great place to boat and bring your family.

Comments about and suggestions to improve other concession services at Stockton State Park:

- Water pressure in cabin #15 shower is very low. Kitchen sink faucet leaks, drips. Light bulbs out and floor lamp does not turn on. Very courteous housekeeping staff.

Comments about and suggestions to improve park facilities and services at Stockton State Park:

- The tips on the arrows on the signs on #215 are too small!! Hard to tell which direction they are pointing until it's time to immediately turn (picnic area, park office, motel, etc.).

**Additional Comments from Stockton State Park Marina
Boat Slip Renters**

General positive comments about restaurant:

- Always good, quick and the help is always friendly.
- Check up on dock maintenance – food service is very good.
- Excellent.
- Food always very good, excellent service.
- Food is delicious, we just usually picnic when there is a large group. We love the state park.
- Food has always been good and the service also.
- Food service has been very good and priced fair. I am satisfied with present system.
- Food service at Stockton State Park is unusually good. We enjoy it.
- I love the restaurant (and view). The food has always been good. Like the area without too many improvements to make it better. Sometimes stay overnight in motel or with family in motorhome – from Kansas.
- I think they do a great job at the dining lodge.
- I enjoy eating at the restaurant. The food and service are excellent.
- I rely on them being there – would hate to see them close!!
- Restaurant is great with great employees. No changes needed.
- The full service and menu is very enjoyable. Breakfast meal in the dining lodge is a very important plus and enhances my overnight stays at the campground.
- The potatoes are very good.
- The state park restaurant is very good – it is our treat to ourselves each time we go the lake!
- The dining facility is top-notch with a relaxing and friendly atmosphere. Great meals and outstanding service.
- The restaurant is a great asset to the park.
- The dining lodge at Stockton is one of the things we look forward to when we come – good food, good service, beautiful view. Please don't stop!
- There is no other restaurant within ten miles of state park. Very good breakfast.
- We spend at least two weekends a month there. We love the food, the view, and the restaurant. It is relaxing and has a nice atmosphere.
- We enjoy everything at the park, especially the motel and breakfast at the dining lodge!
- We enjoy eating at the state park as we have found there are not very many good places to eat in Stockton. Most of the time we will drive 20 to 25 miles to eat at the dining lodge.
- We enjoy the state park area and eating at the dining lodge.

Comments about and/or suggestions to improve food service or requests to keep food service the same:

- Although we used to enjoy eating at the lodge, now that we have retired we won't use facilities any longer. Currently reputation has been tarnished by the turnover of personnel and reported poor quality of food. Probably more smoke than fire. Suggest a little P.R. program to hype restaurant, i.e. specials, advertisements.
- Restaurant quits serving breakfast at 11 a.m. This should be extended.
- Food service very poor and not clean – have seen maggots.
- Food at Orleans Trail and downtown is generally better and more reasonably priced. Breakfast at state park can run \$7.00, in town \$5.00 on buffet. Prices are on high side.
- Has no bar and can't smoke.
- Have always enjoyed food in past. Last time we ate was not as good as in the past.
- I will not tolerate the State of Missouri telling me I can't smoke while I'm trying to relax for the weekend. We have been using the park area for more than 15 years and the restaurant business has died since the state turned it into a non-smoking facility.
- It takes two hours to eat a meal there. For this reason, we avoid the restaurant when feasible. The food is good, prices right, but the kitchen is slow.
- It would be nice to have specials at the dining lodge which could be counted on to be super special, i.e. homemade cinnamon rolls for breakfast, hamburger buffet, excellent fried chicken or other super specials.
- It would cost \$45 to \$50 a day to eat three meals and for retired people, that is high.
- Menu hasn't changed for years. Quality of food questionable.
- Menu at restaurant has not changed in years. Service is slow. Menu needs more variety.
- On weekends, need quick service outdoor type of BBQ with hamburgers, fish or chicken, and a beer garden.
- Please don't close the restaurant!
- Price conscious. Was able to go into Stockton and ate at Sundae's. Cost for six people -- \$22.00. Price at dining lodge too high and takes longer time to prepare.
- Quality of food has deteriorated compared to five years ago. Do not like non-smoking (smoke-free) facility. Thank you.
- Restaurant should be open later in the evening.
- Shredded hashbrowns rather than chunks of last night's baked potatoes.
- Too much food, can't eat it all for too much cost.
- Too much ala carte – no combination meals on breakfast menu. Need a menu with ordinary food at a reasonable price.
- We seldom eat dinner at the dining lodge because there are few, if any, heart-healthy choices. Nearly everything is fried – even the chicken and fish. We would welcome a restaurant with a nice selection of salads, pastas, sautéed fish, chicken, etc.

Comments about and suggestions to improve other concession services at Stockton State Park:

- Check up on dock maintenance – food service is very good.
- Dock fees are getting expensive. We're on outside dock with no shelter overhead and no place to store anything like the other boats have.
- Expansion of Doug's marina office with snack bar, fountain drinks, ice cream...would be great.
- I believe the food service as it stands is very acceptable, but I would like to see a few more services offered to the sailor. We need to replace the block and tackle on the ramp-side pole to raise and lower masts. Also, the facility for storing boats is overgrown with weeds and the only area not paved. I would think that the state park would welcome sailors as they don't pollute our lake and generally bring disposable income to the area. Our slips desperately need attention. I'm not sure if ANY maintenance has occurred since they were installed and nails and boards are popping up everywhere, but the prices keep going up. Thank you for your time, John.
- I moved my boat out of the marina because they raised the price every year. This year it was \$700.00, no senior citizen discount.
- Need additional marina. Rentals are getting out of sight for slips, especially on a fixed income.
- Need better security at the marina and slips!!
- The boat slips are very expensive.
- The docks are in need of much repair. Some of the dock walkways are very dangerous, especially for children. When the previous operator had the facility, it was well maintained.
- The marina needs work and friendlier people. Nothing to buy inside, usually shelves are empty. Dock scratches boat every time we pull in to dock.
- We spend many evenings on the lake and, with the dock closing early, resources are limited. It would be helpful, especially weekends, if the dock was open later.

General positive comments about Stockton State Park:

- It's a great park.
- The state park is the finest park on Stockton Lake.
- We enjoy Stockton State Park. It is our primary vacation spot.
- We love the state park.

Comments about and suggestions to improve park facilities and services at Stockton State Park:

- Adjust camping rate to same as Corps for seniors with Golden Age card.
- Full hook-ups for RVs!

General positive comments about other concession services at Stockton State Park:

- Doug Hufferd is a fine owner/manager, etc.
- Love the marina. Enjoy the convenience of boat slips.

Other comments:

- Evaluate the food service only – leave the personal questions OFF THE FORM!
- This is a waste of tax dollars!
- Twenty m.p.h. speed limit in state park is ridiculous, as is the strict enforcement by the Stockton State Park ranger.
- Wife retired in March '01. Bought pontoon boat, have slip at state park marina.

Appendix F. Focus Group Transcripts

August 1, 2001 Focus Group
Video Transcript

F: Facilitator Comments and Questions (in Bold Type)

R: Response

F: How important is food service provision to today's visitors?

R: I think it depends on the park. (Asked to elaborate) If they are a place that they're going to spend the day and there's no food service available anywhere else, within say ½ hour, then you probably would provide the visitor some sort of food there. I think a lot of park services are based on what the park visitor expects, also.

R: I agree. I think it makes a difference what you offer in that particular park, what the opportunities are, if there are other available opportunities in the area.

F: So it's affected not only by the type of activity you are there for but by the site?

R: I think it affects the whole community. Our restaurant filled the gap that there's no sit-down places to eat anymore. Most of our customers come from a 60-mile radius because they know they can sit down and get steak or seafood and full service. Our town is just so fast-food oriented, I think the park caters to maybe what people aren't getting in the community around them. We could probably sell pizza and make more money, but we've got a community that covers more personal service, and we get a lot of compliments on that.

R: It depends on what your goal is. Is it customer service, or to make more money so you can provide other forms of service at the facility? His (above respondent) operation of a restaurant essentially supports the cabins and boathouse operation.

F: Is food service more important than it used to be?

R: I think more people eat out, number one, and number two it seems like food is a form of recreation and the parks are a form of recreation. We have more of an older clientele, but for a lot of them going out to dinner is a social thing, it's entertainment, like going out to a movie, spending time with your husband or with friends, birthdays, anniversaries. It's something they can come to the lake and enjoy themselves and they say that's a form of recreation. They are enjoying the park while they are eating dinner. But in different areas, it depends on...If you are out in the middle of nowhere, there's nobody there, there's no reason to have food service. You're not going to be able to drag them through all the food services in St. Louis, he can't compete with all that competition. So every park is set up individually.

R: It's important to keep your eye on the ball because it does change over the years. Big Lake is a decent example for us. Twenty five, thirty years ago, we had one of the better restaurants in the state park system, at least as far as volume is concerned. We went in and upgraded the restaurant, perhaps made it a little too fancy for the crowd, other situations changed in the area and we lost our customers. To gain them back, we went back in and made the restaurant a little simpler, added a little store, made it more of a quasi-fast-food kind of place. Not to say that a full-service restaurant would not have worked, but it was more difficult to get to that at that particular point in time. Just because something worked 20 years ago doesn't mean it's going to work today. You have to stay on top of the changes.

R: I think it can be part of the park experience, especially when you have a dining lodge or an old CCC structure, that is part of the park, something special, not just a place to eat, but that's the special place to go.

R: Instead of somebody going out for a hike, what some people do for enjoyment is go out to the park and watch over the lake or the river and enjoy a meal. Camping is so involved in the last few years – trailers have a microwave and everything else. Most of the people you see now are retired or baby boomers. They still like to get out of the camper and come over and have a sit-down meal. They have a stove, a microwave, a kitchen, but people still like to get out for the experience. They can prepare a meal at home, but I think it's because they're tired of it.

R: I think it's because the wives don't want to cook – they're on vacation too.

R: It's not like they're eating every meal in the dining lodge but they love to eat dinner out.

R: I talked to a family of four, they were out and played on the lake all day. They're staying two weeks, they're out 4-5 hours on the lake, it's 90 degrees, and she says, "It's too hot to cook"! So, they say, "ok, we'll go out", no cooking, no dishes, no hassle.

R: How often do folks come to the place and go out onto the porch, or to the big bank of windows you've got there?

R: Everybody wants the view, the porch and the window seats.

R: Sometimes at your place they just go right into the main body, don't they?

R: The way our dining lodge is set up, one side is a view of the road and a building and the other side is yard. They don't care if they're at the windows or not. The porch is for our smoking area. But, it comes down to serving the visitors, so I think it becomes a part of their expectations. If they go to Roaring River State Park and know it is a river, and they know the lodge is there, then they expect to have a nice meal there before they even leave home. I think that's important to acknowledge. If they go to Johnson's Shut-Ins, I think the food service there is probably perfect. It's a snack bar, that sort of thing, serving the day-users that are riding their ATV's or whatever.

R: They're just happy to have a hamburger or a hot dog, or something like that.

R: At Bennett Springs, taking away from that question and going to personal experience, as a restaurant manager there I can't serve what I want to, or how, or when, or where, or anything like that. I have to serve what the public demands, and that is a reasonable food, in a quick amount of time, and occasionally the high-dollar food. So I can't go into my restaurant and please everyone. My restaurant is designed to take care of the park visitor, not the people in Lebanon, they're not going to drive to our restaurant. I have a pet theory about some of these things, and that is that the dining lodge at Bennett will always be the dining lodge at Bennett and the dining lodge at Stockton will always be the dining lodge at Stockton. I can bring in the people from the lake that have the Blue Heron and the Potted Steer, and bring in those same people into the dining lodge at Bennett, serve the same food, and do everything the same, but we're not going to have any business, because it'll still be the dining lodge at Bennett. I might draw some people in from Columbia, who've never been there before. But we're still saddled with certain constraints that our visitation is such repeat, that Bennett Springs is not going to look at changing our customer base, or changing our menus, or changing anything. I'm trying to serve 300 breakfasts on Saturday morning in a dining room that seats 100, to my campers. Looking at it from DNR's point of view, they're probably looking at this because food service, one, you can't get a concessionaire in the food industry to make any money, because you can't have liquor. It's very difficult because concessionaires won't even bid on a restaurant if there's no liquor, even the biggest ones. I don't think that they're sacred cows that can't be slaughtered. I think the park system can look at these park by park. If circumstances change, the park needs to react to that. I think some restaurants need to be Blimpie's, and some, at my place for instance, we could even make an addition and make it a go. But that may be profit-motivated instead of customer-satisfaction-motivated. I think private enterprise will dictate a lot of the answers to that question, as far as customer demands and expectations. I think a lot of Missouri parks missed the boat many years ago, not expanding and

seeing what the public wanted in any of the destination parks, where now around a lot of these parks, all of the biggest parks, we're swamped with private businesses encroaching, and we're losing our park feeling. I think maybe if we'd had more foresight 50 years ago we might not have that problem.

R: I think you're right. I don't think government's strong suit is even keeping up with trends, much less getting ahead of trends. Over the years, we've kind of done a cookie-cutter approach. I was at Stockton a couple of years ago and I thought the facilities were very well cared for, nice concessionaires, etc., but I thought the facilities were out of place. It didn't seem to fit Stockton in my mind. It might have fit Bennett Springs, or a Thousand Hills, but when I drove in it didn't leave me with the impression that I wanted to be left with. It left me with this CCC sort of impression, rough stone, cedar siding, interior facing, that sort of thing, and that wasn't what I thought I was going to get at Stockton. I thought I was going to get something more...yuppie, a little more on the edge, more sailboating. And that's not what was there. It was nice enough, but it just wasn't what was there. I think one of the things we've done over the years, we do a good job in the conceptual planning process, but we kind of fail when we take a look at the facilities and try to develop a theme through the years. So we have cabins, a motel, and a restaurant built at three different times, a little bit different style, but it doesn't seem to have a central theme.

R: In that particular case, we didn't build them, they were there and we bought them.

R: The question is not what we need to do with the restaurant, but what do we need to do with the park. Let's look at 20 years, because it's going to take that long to get there, let's maybe start with the restaurant and develop that theme for the park. Stockton's located in a beautiful part of the state, close to Springfield, one of the fastest-growing parts of the state. We could do some wonderful things at Stockton, if we have a plan. If we start with the restaurant, we need to bring the rest of it in too.

F: What's right about the food service in the parks?

R: I think there are some occasions where we have properly identified our clientele, and are serving that clientele, Thousand Hills and Bennett Springs being examples. Sam A. Baker used to be. I think we have provided the right service and the challenge for us is to keep on top of that curve and not slip back.

R: Years ago we had a problem in the parks where they wanted to make all parks the same, and if you had steak at Bennett Springs, you were supposed to have steak at Thousand Hills. If we opened our restaurant at Bennett Springs at 7:00, they were supposed to open Meramec at 7:00. Now, each park should stand on its own, and I think that is probably the most positive thing that happened with parks since I've been with them, is now they're getting park-specific, instead of just generalizing everything for all the parks.

R: You're selling the unique experience about Bennett Springs or Meramec or Sam A. Baker or wherever you go, even though the packaging is the same everywhere you go. I think that's one thing we're doing, and in the dining lodges we're doing well, we're selling the experience. At Baker, it's the CCC, and at a Thousand Hills, it's the lakeviews, and at Bennett Springs it's unique too.

R: I think there's a built-in thing there too, to pat ourselves on the back. I'm not saying the state couldn't operate it, but we're concession operated, so we have immediate reward or punishment for a job well done or not. Not employees of the state, because that person does not get a raise or a pat on the back for doing a better job. So I think that the concession-oriented part lets us react quicker and is good motivation.

R: How do you learn your clients? Is this an art or a science, is it trial and error? How did you learn that you were this niche? How did you determine who your client was over the years?

R: Well, I was lucky, I started out in the old days when we had the old boathouse and the restaurant had 7 tables and \$100 was a big day. We served hamburgers and fries. And all of a sudden the gossip came along one day that they were going to build a dining lodge at the lake. I had questions they wouldn't answer before we opened it, and when it was built, the day it was to open up, finally I called and said, "hey, if you want me to run this place, we're going to at least have to have some french fryers you can cook a fish in. You've got 3 little French fryers that automatically come up, they're worthless, you can't even cook a catfish in 'em". Ever since then he kind of listened to me, and we've worked things out. But I was lucky and Kirksville's only 6 miles away; there was a need there for some better dining. All we had was a lot of fast food coming into town, it seems to average 5 new places a year. We needed the meeting room which the park added on. We're lucky with the colleges, and the doctors, they've used the meeting room and off from the parties and the meetings they come to eat with their families. If we would lose those two groups, the university or the other, the restaurant would take a big hit.

R: What I've seen him do over the years, I wasn't in the parks but I was in the Kirksville area back in the hamburger joint days, I've seen him be opportunistic in the business. I don't think he started out planning to end up here, but he saw an opportunity in his mind to make money. We call it customer service, same kind of thing, and he seized the opportunity. When you look at successful operations, you'll find people who can see and seize opportunities.

R: One of the things I remember is that a lot of the parks had the dining concession bid separately from the motel and stores and that kind of thing. So at one time, we must have felt, correctly or incorrectly, that the dining lodges could stand on their own. Now, we've combined the two. I remember at Bennett Springs two different people had the two different ends of the business, until one had to leave the business and we went to (the current operator) and said, not only "please could you...", but "you are going to do this." The bottom line is he took this thing and he's kept it going, he's at least kept the park image up, and I think he's made a few bucks over the years. I don't think it'll ever make him wealthy, but, my question is, has this whole dining experience changed? And how? And have we kept up?

R: The Drurys hired the finest restaurant people in the world, they went to Marriot and hired their general food service manager for the nation and several of their restaurant managers from the Marriot corporation in the 1970's when Marriot was known for special food and so forth. And I happened to be sent to their first prototype, in Springfield. They called it the Drury Lodge. They had ice carvings and a typical dinner was Steak Diane and Bananas Flambe and Cherries Jubilee and Bananas Foster and we put it on and did a successful business there. Because our lounge grossed \$1100 a day with 74% of it profit. The lounge made more money than the motel did or the restaurant. Those were the 2-martini lunches you heard about back then. But as those times changed, your restaurant concessionaires went broke. And the only way you could get a bidder on a restaurant concession was to make the lodging person take it. And that was how that happened. It happened at Roaring River. No one would take the state park restaurants by themselves. Now he has a restaurant concession that is important to him but I don't know financially if it can make it alone. I look at my business, and first of all I don't try to create something I enjoy. I am a realistic person. I look at Bennett Springs and I've got a bunch of fishermen coming in with their waders and stuff and they want in and out of there NOW. Fast as they can be. And my food is freezer to table. I don't prepare anything. For one thing I don't have time to, and I don't have the help because we're seasonal. It came about because you couldn't make money in the restaurants and the concessions went down. The state has taken a different point of view now and is allowing lower bids in some cases to where the concessionaires can absorb this loss. So the state is not as...ruthless as far as trying to get the money from the concessionaires as they used to be. I think they thought they had to be that way in the past. Now, the state is more open and more willing to allow the concessionaire to make money. That's helped us. My restaurant grosses three to four hundred thousand a year and with a food cost of 44%, that's extremely high, I don't make any money in my restaurant. If I ever make \$20,000 in a year I'll be doing cartwheels. But the Drurys, getting back to my point, got smart. After they lost their shirt at the one in Springfield, now it's a Ramada, the Drurys built a motel, gave the land to Denny's, and walked away. Now they've

accomplished their goal. For state parks, I'm not so sure that their goal isn't the same thing. If the goal is to provide customer satisfaction and not put a black eye to the park system, the goal may be to go around and let some of these small chains into the some of these places. Because they've got the expertise to make the money. But most of Missouri's parks aren't put where the people want to go, they're put where the resources are. The reason Bennett Springs is successful is I-44. Whether you can make Stockton a success, I don't know. You're not going to do much better than Bennett Springs, and it's not because of me. We're on I-44 and we've got water and we've got trout. Now I could run them off trying to do what I want to do instead of what they want. But I don't do that. I don't buy what I like, I don't sell what I like, and I don't like to eat in my restaurant. But my customers do.

F: Expectations and trends change. How do you stay up with it? What are you going to put in there that a trend or an expectation isn't going to take you out of? Where do you think DSP needs to go, and concessionaires need to go, to meet expectations in the future?

R: We're kind of lucky that we don't have to worry about that at Bennett Springs. They're expecting a Yellowstone National Park experience for \$5 a day at Bennett Springs. And we're having a record year this year. The expectation at Bennett Springs is that they're going to a lodge there and they want to get biscuits and gravy for breakfast and they don't want a croissant sandwich for lunch. We tried that. And they don't even care about specials. So we're kind of protected about trends and expectations at Bennett Springs. I think some, a lot of, the parks are. Now if I were opening something new, that would be a big important thing for me to look at. But I think a lot of the parks, it's easy to see what the expectation is and I think the resource dictates that.

R: What percentage of your gross sales come from somebody from town coming out, and somebody from the park?

R: From town? Maybe 5% (Bennett Springs).

R: Probable 90% (Thousand Hills)

R: I say 1 percent (Stockton)

R: I'm going to tie in a second question. I have two experiments going on in town which I have nothing to do with but I'm watching. Lebanon had maybe 2 or 3 Chinese restaurants. There are about 3 new Chinese restaurants. You have Diamond Head, two new ones, one on one end of town and one at the other, you've got The Great Wall, you've got the guy with the little bitty no-name place, a Master Wok or something. I don't think they're all going to make it. For a while there was no one serving Chinese food. Same side of the coin, where I'm going with this is brand name, I'm going to do a Nike thing and tie all three of these together. There's a guy in town at Cornerstone that serves the best sub sandwiches in town. But now there's a Blimpie's and a Subway. I don't think Lebanon's big enough for all three. Now Nike had a little shortfall around 3 years ago because what they found was the kids saw their moms and dads wearing Nike shoes and just said, "we don't want anything to do with Nikes". And Nike had a little crash there for a while. My question is, if we're going to be re-bidding restaurant service at someplace like Stockton that doesn't have a strong CCC tradition, how much could name brands influence? Could someone have a restaurant, only get a Blimpie's franchise as part of that setup? And that would be something totally different than we've ever seen in the park system before.

R: I don't think people would like it. I think when people go to a state park the last thing they want to see is a McDonald's or a Taco Bell. I'm not saying that you couldn't sell something that they sell, go to pizzas and probably make as much money as you would with a full service restaurant. But, I think you would get complaints if you saw a Pizza Hut sign in the state park.

R: I agree.

R: I think you're crossing into the wrong territory there.

R: When I was talking about specific things coming in there that's not necessarily going to McDonald's, that's going to the local people in Lebanon, that's going to Harry who has a restaurant there in Lebanon and saying hey, do you want to put a sub-franchise in, a deli.

R: But talking about competition, I do worry. Since 90% of my business is from town, I worry every day. Kirksville has just exploded with fast food. And Wal-Mart is now up north of town. Three Mexican restaurants opened up this year and they have just killed my lunch business. But I'm still known for steak and seafood, nobody's into that and our business is up, but not a lot, lunches are dead. People come in for lunch and ask where everybody's at and I say, well, most of them are at the Mexican restaurant. Because they can eat there for \$5 dollars, get margaritas for \$2, and get in and out.

R: Has that been on the down-swing for a while?

R: A long time.

R: Columbia had an article in the paper a few weeks ago that 3 or 4 of the fancy restaurants in town stopped doing lunch. They can't sell those for \$5 or \$6, and they're focusing on catering and on their dinners.

R: We dropped our breakfast hours this year. I got the change from the director. I was losing about \$80 a day for breakfast having two waitresses, a cook, a hostess, and myself every morning from 8:00-11:00 and we averaged 4 people a day for the last 3 years. In the last 10-year contract I had what I lost. Now we're doing the same for lunch but yet, I feel I owe it to the people in the cabins and we owe it to the people who come out for the parties. We don't want to just be open only certain hours. You're talking about (name of other restaurant owner) that has a place, he's got a little gold mine but he's only open during the gold time, Wednesday through Saturday, he's closed Sunday through Tuesday. He's not wasting his utilities being open during 3 of the dead days. If they want to eat the good food, they've got to do it when he's open. He's very independent.

R: If you were sitting inside the park and had complete control over your own business, they gave you the building, etc, would you drop lunches?

R: I'd drop lunches in a heartbeat.

R: During the week?

R: Oh yeah. I'd keep it open all day on Saturdays and Sundays, when all the crowd and campers are there, but through the week we have nobody in the park. There's nobody in the campground. But then on the other end I'm scared of the big competition coming. The Wal-Mart's the closest thing to the park now, and you've got all this land for sale around it. I'm scared to death of the day I hear that Tuesday's comes in, or Friday's. My business is going to drop 50% overnight.

R: If someone takes half your business, I don't know how profitable your restaurant is, but if it's not really profitable, they can have half of mine, I don't care.

R: Well, but it still hurts. We had competition – 3 years ago we had people come up from Lake of the Ozarks and open up a Dead Dog/Shamrock that 12 other people tried to run and they ended up dumping \$300,000 into it. And my business dropped bad. And it hurt just my feelings. It's hard every day when you go home and say, wow, I haven't seen the Jones' this month and they used to eat here every other day and you go by your competition in town and they're in there because they're selling food 50c cheaper and they've got the lounge, and a bar, and they're making so much off the lounge and the bar that they're giving the food away. Now I'm wanting to add on to the

restaurant, and add more windows. I know if I can have more windows and have a little lounge I can more or less save the restaurant from the bad day when Tuesday's or Friday's or Bob Evans comes in. There was a rumor that Ryan's buffet was supposed to come in, and that would kill us.

R: At the end of the year, what you put in your pocket, what percentage comes from the cabins, what percentage comes from the restaurant, and what comes from the boats?

R: I think right now, with my new contract, it's definitely the cabins that are making the money to pay the bills for everything. The restaurant, the bills are so high, the overhead is so high, the rent is so high, the utilities, the taxes, and everything. There's money to be made there, but I don't know because I throw all the bills together. All the bills are paid out of one checkbook, so it's harder for me to say exactly what my food cost is. Like (he) was saying 44%, I know mine are 44-50%. But the thing is, when we sell a steak for \$12, I've got \$6 in the steak before we do the potato, the salad, the lettuce, and all that; our food cost is high.

R: But your liquor cost makes up the difference.

R: Right. But I've got a nephew looking for a job who picked up a P&L on a pizza place in St. Louis. He wants to get a franchise. They're selling a million and a half worth of pizza, \$300,000 a year is what the guy is making, and he only runs one store. I'm selling \$500,000 a year and I'm not making \$100,000 – I'm only making \$50,000 off of everything. So what does the restaurant make for all the hours I work? I don't have to give myself minimum wage, I know that, I can work for less.

R: This is not going to be popular, what I'm going to say, but DNR probably doesn't really truly care how happy I am at my fly-fishing school at Bennett Springs, something I have. They're more interested in fulfilling the needs of the people that come to that park, more than I am showing off fly-casting. So I think they don't have that same approach toward your restaurant and mine and yours. Also, he loves his restaurant business and is probably the best restaurant guy we've got in the whole state, but at Bennett Springs if somebody came in and took 90% of my restaurant business and it was town business, God bless them. I now don't have 8 cooks I've got one, I'll go to table service. That would just thrill me to death. Steve on the other hand, this is an important passionate part of his life and his livelihood. I think the parks ought to, if there are park visitors there who expect a breakfast at his restaurant, it should be open, but he should be compensated to allow that to happen. If not, then we let the park visitors know, there's no breakfast service at this park. But there are certain things they expect, and if they were to come to Bennett Springs, I wouldn't want to close my breakfast, that's where I make my money. If they come to Bennett Springs and I don't have breakfast or lunch, I've got a major problem because they expect to have it. And if I can't financially make it, I think today we can go to the people and say look, there it is, I can't make it. You're going to have to find another concessionaire. And they'll say, we'll lower your percentage a little, and keep the restaurant open for breakfast. I think that's the approach that DNR should have, not, "You'll stay open for breakfast" or "Close your breakfast" – because then the public won't be properly served.

R: I think that's one of the important trends, the way DNR has changed through the years. I don't suggest we're where we should be right now, but we're more on that path than we have been in years past.

F: From your perspective, what is the fundamental purpose of food service provision in DSP?

R: I think the purpose is simple. It's to meet or exceed the expectation of the park visitor. Period. I don't think it has anything to do with the state making money off the restaurants, or with concessionaires making money off the restaurants. If we're talking about DNR's point of view, they're in it because they've got to be in it, and they've got to take care of that expectation. Now, if that expectation means some of the cabins don't get clean because he's losing money there, then we've got to work out something else. I don't think we need these white elephants. I had a choice

about 5 years ago with my food service provider as to what to do at Bennett Springs. He said, "I guarantee you that next to the Potted Steer and the Blue Heron, you'll have the finest eating establishment in this part of Missouri. But you won't make any more money than you're making right now". We tried it, and had beautiful food and a fancy Sunday buffet. But no, I didn't make any more money. We had some new ritzy people come out who liked it, but I wasn't doing what DNR set me there to do. People still wanted the fried food and breakfast and lunch as always. But that's my situation, and [Thousand Hills] is a different situation. It is a major icon there, the way Roaring River used to be at the lodge, where you paid a lot for your meal and it was beautiful. But they couldn't take care of today's stuff. It's not there anymore because they couldn't deal with the competition. Out at Trail of Tears, I was part of a trip out there, there was a proposal, and there was a great spot to build a restaurant, but it would be competing with local business. So that's my question for DNR – is it our job to go out and create new things like that in parks? Or is it our job to take care of what the visitor expects and a little more?

R: Let me ask you, should we be in the job of helping form those expectations or do we just respond to them as they occur?

R: I don't think we can form them as much as we can guide them. I think they're formed over their whole life from seeing pictures of fly fishing in Alaska and such. But Missouri's pretty much water-oriented on these state parks. If we got into forming expectations, we'd be stepping on the toes of private enterprise. We don't want to go out and create new needs and expectations. There are already expectations in place of the state parks, and that expectation isn't Manhattan. We don't want to turn into the national parks.

R: In the state parks, one of the ways you can form expectations is from the theme of that particular state park. If it's an historic site, you may have period food and such and advertise it that way.

R: In other words, describe what's there and form the expectations that way, and don't go create a new need and decide to fulfill it.

R: I know the Bennett Springs people are never going to turn away from biscuits and gravy, and if you change it all of a sudden then you're not going to get a good response. For the superintendents, do you think it's the same purpose for food service provision as we've described?

R: I would say the hard part about that is, what the people want. At Bennett Springs, it's trout fishing. The focus is so narrow. I know people go there for the hiking or the nature center. But at Stockton, there's people who go there for the sailboats and all kinds of other things. The way I look at it, it's much broader, because people don't just come there to fish. There's a broad range of people, all classes and such, it's hard to nail one thing down. Some people come in and want a \$30 dollar steak, but others don't.

R: I think it's to serve the visitor we have at the park. If we looked at it all over again, and we tried to decide, I think we'd be hard pressed to say that Thousand Hills needed a restaurant, especially with all the food service in Kirksville to serve the cabin guests. But in other parks, we do, like at Stockton. It depends on how we need to serve them, but I think it is to serve the park user. But all those users are different. I also think quality is a consideration, for whatever we do, whether it's a fast food thing or a sit-down thing, it's quality we need to be concerned with. There are also other considerations, like what we already have at the facility. If we have old CCC facilities at the park, that works as a dining lodge. And we want to keep those functioning. They may not make a lot of money, but if you can serve those people and use those buildings, you don't need to make a lot of money.

R: When you started serving the fish there, I think that's a good theme to our park, the walleye and such. Stockton is stocked with walleye, and we have a lot of people come in there from the north to fish for walleye. We've had professional walleye tournaments there, and to me that was pretty unique because we are a walleye lake.

R: We still serve a lot of walleye but we serve 10 times more catfish.

R: We also serve a lot of catfish.

R: Catfish seems to be what they really want. But I keep walleye on the menu and I don't think we lose any money on it or anything.

R: I think the beauty of state government is, we are in the business of shaping and changing expectations. I think we have to be if we want to stay on top of stuff to keep our customer base. We can help shape the futures of the parks. I think we get into these situations like trying to figure out what to do with Stockton by holding back. I think we need to be a little more aggressive about seeking out changes and trying to attract new clientele. What we've got at Bennett Springs, we're probably going to have the same thing for 50 years. But it's not that way everywhere. It depends on competition also, what's in the area already and what's there now.

R: I think that's the direction it needs to go. As far as creating the expectation, I think we need to educate, but I don't think we need to go about creating new things. If I were looking at Stockton, I'd be looking at all the competition around there, I'd do surveys to find out if people want steaks or hamburgers, or just to get in and get out.

R: We are doing surveys now.

R: Are we talking about Stockton here or the whole state park system?

F: The quick answer is we're talking about both. We're going to get to some Stockton-specific questions and get the input from the group about that situation, because that situation is immediate. But those answers may provide answers to that situation or to many.

R: The broader issue is, should we be heading in one direction, or park specific, or what?

R: From talking to people, I think the Stockton issue is extremely important, but it's also a trigger mechanism for looking at other concerns. That's a difficult issue for any state agency to deal with, to declare their purpose.

F: From your perspective, what current challenges do you face in providing food service delivery (full-service dining) at your facility?

R: Right now, with our food service provider, I have a real problem with this, all the big chain food companies use the same one, I buy about \$2000 a week from them, and Country Kitchen buys the same amount from them, but I pay much more per item, for the same product, the same brand, the same truck, because I am the little guy.

R: That's right. When you go to Sysco and look at their stuff, they don't have the prices, because they look it up in the computer and rate everyone at different prices.

R: They rate you at different things, and no matter how much I buy, I will never get the volume discount. They don't treat everyone the same.

R: I can't get the discounts either.

R: And most people don't realize that and don't like it when the menu price goes up. And with all our deliveries it's the same, from the candy man to the coffee man. We pay more because we're the little guy. We pay more for our product.

R: I'll share what we do. I have four food service providers to choose from. And I say, "one of you is going to get 100% of my business, and if anyone ever buys anything cheaper than I do, you

don't get any of my business." And for years, everything I buy is as cheap as the chain restaurants. A lot of that is your salesman, because he works on commission. I buy all my stuff from one salesman and he makes a lot of money off me, so I have some power there. There's some good parts and some bad parts off that. He knows if he doesn't give me the best deal, I'll switch 100% of my business to someone else. He gives me the deals from the restaurant shows. But it's the salesman, not the company, that makes the difference.

R: I've tried to get products from different providers, I've even had them come in to eat there, and I invite them back to see if we can do business but they never show up. I buy from several different buyers to get the best deals and the best product. I can't get everything I want, and the quality I want, from just one buyer.

R: Change the product, or drop it off the menu. If it will make my life easier and doesn't hurt my customer, if he's still happy, then I'm going to do it. We don't have any complaints and we're directly from freezer to table. It's terrible, but...

R: We're not. We do a lot of salads, we do everything fresh. We can make the amount that we need. We are very consistent in quality, and kind.

R: Does your restaurant make money?

R: No.

R: I know you guys are pretty independent, but one of the things you ought to consider is combining your buying power.

R: We can't do it. We're too far apart. We've always said we should buy toilet paper, and cups, and such, together, but it doesn't work out.

R: There's not a free ride in this world – you may have to do a little consulting. If all three of you get together and go to one of these companies and say, "look, we're going to buy from one company," and if all our business they're getting is doubled or tripled, then you'll get the better price.

R: But if he likes something from one company, and she likes something from another, then that won't work out.

R: Well, he may have to give up something.

R: One thing we have looked at is a statewide selling contract. You get national rates, national prices.

F: Any other challenges, other than food costs or labor?

R: Credit cards. The average Joe does not understand that you're getting stuck about 2 ½ % up front. I take checks, because it saves me money over the credit cards. It costs me about \$12,000 a year to take credit cards.

R: How much would it cost you not to take credit cards?

R: I wouldn't want to find out. But we don't get very many bad checks.

R: I just got one last week – I hadn't gotten one forever. But it was for over \$900. We get driver's license numbers, so we'll see if we can work it out.

R: You were talking about labor? All the cooks I've hired this year are on probation for some kind of offense. I'm not exaggerating at all. But we can't help it. We're closed 4 months of the year so we can't hire good cooks. A good cook isn't going to take unemployment for 4 months of the year. Unemployment is low and we're closed 4 months of the year. I don't like hiring these people, but I don't have a choice.

R: I worry about that too – this summer my best choice was on probation. But I hired them anyway. I didn't have another choice.

R: It's terrible. But I also have some people who have worked for me for 20 years.

R: When you close 4 months of the year it's hard to get people back, too.

R: We've made a proposal to stay open in the winter, to keep the cabins open, not the restaurant. The restaurant is really just a necessary evil. I have to keep the customers to my cabins and my store happy, so that's why I have the restaurant.

R: Our customers take an hour and a half to eat, on average. We have leisurely dining. We book reservations for 90% of our seating.

R: You also have liquor. You'll have a high average ticket, too.

R: Our liquor sales are only about 10% of our food sales.

F: Does food service compliment the rest of your business? Is the connection there?

R: Yes, because our motel rooms are so small, and we're 10 miles from town. That's about the only option, other than driving to town. So I do think it compliments the motel rooms, and the marina, and the campground. But I don't make any money. It's kind of like selling minnows, it's just one of those things you do.

R: Have you raised your prices?

R: We're not cheap. We have raised our prices.

R: Where do you get your help to come from?

R: That's another problem.

R: I've been spoiled, because there's a college town 6 miles away. 90% of the people I hire are college kids.

R: Last year I just begged for help all year. This year has been better, I've got some better applicants, people who actually want to work, instead of just draw a paycheck. But it's still difficult, I've got 4 or 5 key people.

R: Do you serve alcohol there?

R: We do. Our contract says we can only serve it with food, so they can't just come in and drink. Which is fine with me.

R: Our bar is in the kitchen, it's just table service. It's not written in my contract, but we don't have just a bar.

R: All we serve is beer and wine, and we don't serve a lot of it. But we're right there on the edge of the Bible Belt, too.

R: If we didn't have it we would lose business, badly.

R: I think we would lose sales if we didn't have it, too.

R: We have a lot of big parties, and we sell quite a bit of liquor there.

R: There's a key question at Stockton we've got to spend time on. Do all the motel rooms at Thousand Hills have a kitchenette?

R: Not all of them. We've got 14 rooms and 9 kitchens.

R: We have 65 rooms and 22 are motel. Everyone who stays in the motel gets a free breakfast per room.

R: I'm concerned at Stockton, because with only 10 motel rooms we have every intention of bulldozing it in the next few years. So we need to know how much of the restaurant business there comes directly out of the motel. We need to know, because we need to decide about building the motel. We need to know what bulldozing that motel will do to the restaurant business, and the other aspects there.

R: Quite a bit. Maybe 30% or half of them use the restaurant, and the motel is always full on the weekends. I don't think the restaurant would go at all, without the motel. One of the things I thought about was having everything self-contained, the way the duplexes are. But as a woman on vacation, part of my vacation is not cooking and cleaning, doing dishes, etc. They come to play in the water. I don't make any money off the sailors, because they don't buy gas or anything, but at different times of the year it's fishing, families, watersports, etc. I have built up my retirement business, so they come during the week.

R: How many people do you serve and how busy are you?

R: We have seating for 78. We're sort of busy Friday night and really busy Saturday and Sunday. But it's varied. I never know from day to day if I'm going to have 1 person for breakfast or 100. Last Thursday night, I was swamped. I have no idea where they came from. Friday night, I had servers twiddling their thumbs because business was so slow.

R: How much private enterprise do you compete with?

R: There's one other restaurant on the lake.

R: Why would I go to Stockton instead of somewhere else?

R: It's beautiful. And, we're non-commercial, you don't stand in line. And for the state park experience.

F: Video of Stockton facilities

R: Have you thought about food service down by the docks?

R: We have sandwiches and such down there.

R: Have you thought about having sit-down dining there? On the water?

R: I think that's what we're trying to figure out here.

R: Are your sandwiches pre-bought or do you make them?

R: We buy them.

R: What about like the Clown at Lake of the Ozarks (Boat drive-in restaurant)? Is there that much traffic on the lake?

R: The sailboats don't really come off the lake. It's not like the fishing boats where you have constant trade.

R: The slips finance the whole operation, right?

R: Right.

F: If you could redesign the operation and they gave you the money to do it, what would you do with it?

R: We've been talking about that for about the last two years and we keep leaning towards that food, rather than what we're doing. We're kind of fine dining, they come in and sit down and we do a lot of our own prep work and we try not to go from the freezer to the fryer to give them as good a meal as possible. But when you look at and think about the trends, I think maybe, you know, it's fast food in all the cities, hurry and go. I'm not sure we're not missing the boat by doing that.

R: What's your average dining time? Gross/year? When are you open?

R: About 45 minutes, probably about 20 of that waiting for food. We gross about \$200,000 a year. We're open April 1 to October 30. It's been our dream to keep it open all year, but we don't draw the business from town. One of the things that's a problem is that Stockton doesn't have a lot to draw. There's high unemployment, most of the kids in the school system are on free lunches. And it's 10 miles away.

R: What do they have in town to eat?

R: McDonalds. A Subway, now. A few local places.

R: One of the things I've noticed down there is all the boarded up restaurants.

R: There's been a lot of restaurants that have turned over 4 or 5 times since I've been there. A lot of them don't stay around very long. Café Corner is a small town diner – they do only breakfast and lunch.

F: Where would you have the food service in the future?

R: One of the problems is, once they've got their boat in the slip, it's quite a hike up that hill. We might get more business off the lake if we were closer to the water. We also try to cater to those tournaments, but once the boat's in the water, they won't come back and walk up the hill to eat. So one year I made sack lunches for the tournament and sold them for 5 bucks, but I only sold one. They don't want it. They're so excited about getting out on the water, they won't stop to eat.

R: I have the same thing at Bennett Springs. They want to get in and get out and they won't come in from fishing.

R: I could have saved you some grief – I used to get up at 4:30 to serve breakfast to the bass tournaments - they begged me to open early for breakfast. And it makes for a long day and you have to pay overtime. Last time they begged me to open, said there would be 50 of them, and six showed up. As I was driving out I saw all their cars at Pancake City, which is open 24 hours. I learned my lesson on that one.

R: Do you think a majority of your restaurant users are your boaters, coming from being on the lake, or from the campground?

R: I don't think they're coming from being on the lake. The host and hostess in the campground really push the restaurant, they are wonderful, but I still think most of it's coming from people on the lake.

R: So if you made it more convenient for them, you might be serving more of that clientele.

R: Do you think your fishing tournaments, or even just the boat people in general, once they get on the lake, once they get in the boat, if it's easy walking distance you're going to get them in the restaurant?

R: I don't know that the fishermen, no. The families, probably. But the fishermen, I've just about written them off. And then I thought, well I'll get them on the way back by. Well that doesn't work either because their wives are already mad because they're fishing. So all they can see is, I didn't win, she's going to be mad at me, and they're gone.

R: They're not going to spend any money with you. The pontoon people will.

R: And the families. We get vacationing families that come and stay in a duplex for three, four, or five days go out and play, and like you said, Mom's on vacation too, so we get a lot of those that eat in there.

R: Well, you certainly wouldn't drive off your motel guests by having it down by the water, so there's a plus.

R: She'd do more business down by the water.

R: I agree.

R: What about on the water?

R: We had one on the water at Mutton Creek, and it didn't.

R: Mutton Creek itself last year just about didn't, with the fluctuation of the water levels.

R: Plus the development license on the lake.

R: I wouldn't. And you know, now that I think about it, where we were talking about, that wouldn't work. It'll flood.

R: Well they do it on Truman. Long Shoal on Truman has a decent little restaurant and that's... you see a lot of fisherman in there because they kind of stick close to the water.

R: Does DNR have to justify the cost of the restaurant you're going to build?

R: The legislators.

R: Well we're not sure we're going to build a restaurant.

R: If you do. How critical is something like that?

R: Well we sell it on public service.

R: It doesn't have to financially float it's own boat? Because it's not going to.

R: No.

R: If we did that we wouldn't have a park system.

R: I think it stands a chance if you start selling atmosphere. That's what you guys are selling now. Their problem there is that they don't have any atmosphere to sell. Because we've got to create it.

R: One of our problems is, we don't have a major highway by us either.

R: That's right. When you're taking a full 30% of your motel guests, which is fantastic, all 8 of those people, feeding them in the restaurant a day, I mean, God bless you, but there's nobody there. We can't... you aren't going to make them go there. If they're not... if they haven't discovered Stockton, this is just my opinion, if they haven't discovered Stockton yet, it's been there, probably, a long time, then the only way that this restaurant will float financially and make a big deal would be to create this need we were talking about that's not there, we're going to make you come here whether you want to or not, and this is why you're going to come there, it's because I've got a restaurant there. Now, that's fine. Who are those people we're going to target?

R: You and I.

R: I'm not driving there - that's too far for me. Where are they going to come from? What's your population radius around there?

R: How far away is Springfield?

R: About 45 minutes.

R: I don't think you have a shot at Springfield except for the boaters.

R: Bolivar.

R: I don't think Bolivar either. I wouldn't think that.

R: You're catering to your guests and people staying up at Mount Carmel.

R: I do get guests from Mount Carmel.

R: It depends on what we want here. Are we wanting an excuse to build a nice beautiful restaurant on this lake that we're going to have to maintain and upkeep for the next 25, 30, 40 years, or are wanting to serve a need and not put too much financial burden on somebody else, whoever that somebody - that's the way I look at it, and I'm leaning toward, without being asked, toward the latter. I can't see building a huge, multi-hundred thousand dollar restaurant, 2, 3, hundred thousand dollar restaurant there to cater to all 20 of your 30 people a day.

R: And even when, when you have, say, Lebanon close by, you have people to draw from, you have the ambiance already, an old structure, you have a nice park with water in it, you're saying still, you could change the style, and you could get those people to come, but that doesn't make you any more money - so who have you served? You haven't served the park visitor by doing that, and wouldn't it kind of be the same situation, it would serve you, or just that style that you would prefer, but it doesn't serve that customer.

R: I'd rather sell a \$1000 fly rod than 10 \$100 rods.

R: Your customer base is not just those who use the state park, it's those who use the lake. And that's the people you're going to draw, and you have to have the right facility to draw them in.

R: No offense, but are we in that business? Is that our goal to create something here?

R: See maybe that's where he and I disagree.

R: That's where she and I disagree.

R: I think we're about getting people to come and use this park, and it's not about getting them to come and use a restaurant. If they need a restaurant, a food service while they're there, great, we provide that, but it's not just about coming and just, although at that point they become a part of the user, but they're not going to come out and even maybe use the lake. The people already using it are the people I think we should serve.

R: My restaurant flow also depends on the weather. If it rains on Saturday morning, it's just wonderful, but if it rains on Thursday, it's not so great.

R: I'm not suggesting we go with his \$300,000 restaurant idea, either, but...

R: He wants a \$30,000 restaurant.

R: But a \$30,000 restaurant with a \$30,000 deck right along the water's edge, hit the beer and wine heavy, serve hamburgers, fancy yuppie food, whatever that is, that'll go.

R: I agree on that. That's what we need there.

R: Slap up some nice condominiums, throw out that old park board brown, which is actually pretty depressing after 25 years of looking at it, paint the damn things white, put a bright green tin roof on those things, and get people like me who if I'm fishing and tired out, the wife and I don't mind dropping \$50, \$75 bucks, having some beers.

R: I want to share something with you. When I went to Bennett Springs we had about 400 campsites. Now we have 188. We had 83 lodging units. Now we have 65. And I know some of the thought behind that was that that was being overused. And that the way to kind of increase the attendance at Montauk and the attendance at Roaring River was to kind of cut back on availability at Bennett Springs. And you know what happened?

R: They built around it.

R: No. And they're not done. It's not going to happen. You're not going to make them go there. If that's the goal, I don't care if you put free food there, you have no one to draw from. And where you do have people it's too far away. And we don't have what they want there, a unique dining experience. If we go for the unique dining experience, you're talking some major bucks and you're going to be serving those \$30 steaks, and that's not who's there to eat them in the first place. And that's not why we're in the park system.

R: Visitation didn't increase, the monies went somewhere else.

R: Yeah. And Montauk didn't increase attendance, their record days were in the early '70's. Roaring River's attendance hasn't increased. Now what we have is three state parks and Bennett's full all the time and the people are unhappy because they can't get a campsite there and they can't get a room there so all you did was create unhappy customers. I mean that's what happened at Bennett Springs. You don't hear me griping about it and calling and saying we need more motel rooms and campsites, I'm never going to say that. But that was the outcome of that. And this doesn't work. These people aren't cattle anymore. When I came in the park system they treated all the park visitors like they were cattle, and "give the park visitor his choice he'd pave every piece of ground we've got, don't let the park visitor have any decisions whatsoever." Well, they're not that way. In my opinion, it's very difficult to get the park visitor in Missouri to go somewhere and do

something they don't want to do. And if they haven't discovered Stockton already, they're not going to discover it. That's my opinion. And I think you probably serve the public more providing lodging instead of restaurants.

R: Well, I know, and they would fight over my motel rooms and over more condos.

R: Why try to create a need that isn't there?

R: You said something that I really want to leave as one of my themes here. I just want to make sure that whatever we present when we present the contract for re-bid doesn't hurt anybody. Because I don't want to get into telling [the concessionaires] when they re-bid on the contract if they get it, "you've got to do this, you've got to do this," full well knowing that full-steam ahead it's going to cost them \$200,000 right off the top every year. They start off day one, January 1, every year, \$200,000 in the hole if we force this restaurant on them, or we told them they couldn't have these certain kind of cabins or motel units.

R: It will cost *you* \$200,000.

R: Sooner or later, because they won't bid on it, yeah.

R: I don't know how many motel bookings I would lose if I didn't have the restaurant, though. Just because they might have plans to eat there, whatever. It's a convenience. I'm just afraid that there's nothing I might lose from the motel bookings.

R: If I could fast-forward, what I'm trying to fast forward to is, what I'm trying to figure out is, do we do more sleeping-somethings, continue with some kind of eating-something, and put that in a contract that's fair. And that's what I'm trying to figure out. I've got some ideas in my own mind but I want to see how all these panels play out.

R: The other options are rebuild all cabins that have stoves and refrigerators in them and the fishermen like to use them, and you don't have any food service. You know, that would be one option for the park. Or you build something that is more like a sleeper unit and you probably don't need to provide that.

R: Well I'll say this – we have more demand for our duplexes than we do for our small motel units. You know, for some reason America seems to think the bigger the better. I mean that is the trend.

R: And that's at \$90 a night.

R: Right.

R: My next question to you would be, then, what percent of those people eat in your restaurant?

R: You know, I don't know the percentage, it just depends. Like I know if the [name of family] reunion is coming, they're not going to eat in there. Because they rent the south shelter house and they all do their own cooking and eating in there. But I know if the [name of family] reunion is coming, they're going to be in there for breakfast, and they're going to be in there for supper.

R: And the quantity of those you have too, all makes a difference. I mean, if you only have two, and you have four people that are showing up, or then if you have twenty, and you have twenty people showing up, which is kind of what [he] was getting at before, you know that will make a difference in how many of those units...

R: And how many units do you build when basically you're full the three holiday weekends and every Friday and Saturday night, how do you get the attendance up during the week? That's what we've struggled with for years.

R: You cannot do it.

R: I mean, how many motel rooms and stuff do you build for Friday and Saturday?

R: You cannot get people to take off work for a vacation. That's it in a nutshell. If you want weekday business, they've got to conduct business at your place. That's what many convention business....how many times have you quit work here to go anywhere, on Monday through Friday?

R: Not often, unless it's for business.

R: That's right. You have them conduct business at your place. That's what Roaring River does, if we had convention facilities at Bennett Springs that's what we'd do, we'd have you all down there all the time, we just had BPS down there, we have all kinds of businesses there during the week as an excuse to have a little mini-vacation. They won't take...I can't get anyone to take off work to come to Bennett Springs. We've tried, when I built the motel outside the park, a private enterprise out there, we offered the third night free, we offered half price, we tried everything you could try that's too confining and too difficult for the state to react to. Because in private enterprise I can give them away if I want to. They're not coming. They're still not coming.

R: Well, we did. We've reduced them Sunday through Thursday, you know, to try to draw the retired people in, golf packages...

R: If you can get them to take off work to come there you've worked out a miracle. And then the ones that aren't working, don't have any money. They're all fixed income or they're in Florida. If they've got money then they're where we go.

R: The beauty of operating within state government is sometimes you have time to play. I agree, you can't do that overnight, but if you used this theory you're talking about at Thousand Hills, he's still flipping a burger in a concrete-block boathouse. We wouldn't have built a restaurant, we wouldn't have this there grossing how many thousands of dollars a year he makes in the restaurant. You can build that. It takes time, and you have to have the infrastructure in place. You have to convince people like me to spend my money there.

R: If she had nicer cabins, and if she has a nice little restaurant, her business would be a lot better. It's not going to make her more money, because she'll have a lot more overhead, but it's going to be nicer for the guests, it's going to be nicer for the state park. The restaurant at Thousand Hills brings in a big part of the meter count every day.

R: Yeah, but you're bringing in people to eat there. Is that what we're trying to do?

R: I could rent some more cabins, we're starving for cabins, we don't have enough. But if we had more cabins, it would help the restaurant.

R: We all totally agree to that but....

R: The cabins are the answer to everything at my place.

F: One of the things of the theme here, is the idea that all of this is very site-specific. The restaurant industry talks about 3 kinds of service – table service, self-service, and quick-service. One of the things you could use as a paradigm is to look at your site and from a direction standpoint say, this site is best suited to this type of food service. Which you all have been saying all along here. What criteria would you use to put a certain site in a certain category?

R: I'm going to be composing and writing a proposal for a fast-food restaurant at Bennett Springs. Because we cannot take care of the people with the building and the restaurants in the park now.

We've got that little private inholdings. We've got that Hillbilly Burgers thing there. Several years ago I made a proposal to the superintendent to, if you come in the front door of my store, on the right hand side there there is a storeroom, to put two windows in there, and it's going to be hamburgers and hotdogs and French fries and soft-serve ice cream, and then take it out of the other one, because we cannot serve the people and they will not go in my restaurant for lunch even if it was a dollar for a hamburger, because that's the old dining lodge and it's heavy feeling and you will not walk in there and eat lunch in there; lunch business is pitiful. They'll drive to Lebanon before they'll walk in my restaurant and eat for lunch because it's not atmospheric or whatever ...conducive to lunch.

R: But they pack in there for breakfast.

R: Right.

R: So then what happens to your dinner crowd?

R: It's good, excellent.

R: So you do breakfast and dinner but not much lunch.

R: Not much lunch at all. It's hot, they're out on the water, my people are fishing, they want it now, to get in and out of there. It's not a...lunch today is not a...it's a business lunch or it's...

R: Well, and see, I don't draw the businesses from town because by the time they drive out there, and eat, they can't get back to town. And of course, we don't have that many businesses to draw.

R: And you don't have the meeting room that Thousand Hills has, to draw them

R: Well now I will draw...I do do a few things that I will...now not on the weekends but during the week, I will let them have meetings out on my deck. And they can close the door, and they can have their meeting and I'll feed them either breakfast or lunch or both, preferably, and let them do that. That is an option that I do give them.

R: And not to throw water on a nice fancy restaurant here...it may be that at Stockton, the restaurant contributes to the whole ambience, you know, of the visit. I look at things...I've always tried not to buck the trend. And I've tried it with all these parks that I've been involved with, to create "this is what I think you need." And boy, when I get into that, especially something that's been around a hundred years, they've probably figured out what they need. It's hard to create a desire with someone that's very familiar with the place.

R: Well, and there's just not enough special occasions. Because I draw the people out that want to celebrate somebody's birthday, somebody's anniversary, you know. I do a lot of after-funeral places because they like to come out there and eat afterwards, that sort of thing. But as far as just, mom and dad are home from work let's drive out and have dinner, I don't get that. I do the special occasion thing.

R: I have a restaurant with a...door, where you can have those little meetings and divide it off, and get the Lion's Club or whatever out there. But this is another thing that isn't worth what it costs you, we don't want any of the clubs in our restaurant. Because they won't come back there to eat with their families. Now if you don't have any competition, it may be a different story.

F: Let's take for example at Stockton your marina enterprise. What type of service do you need down on the water?

R: Basically what they're getting seems to satisfy them, the packaged sandwiches, that sort of thing. But what I'm seeing is, people don't eat three meals a day. Lunch is kind of a snack.

They'll come in for the ice cream, or the packaged sandwich, quick service. But if they eat a big breakfast they don't eat much for lunch and then they come back for dinner. They're not going to stop and play. If that water's ski-able, or that wind's blowing the sails, they're gone.

R: The day-use won't eat supper then. They head back home. They eat on the way back home. At least that's what we found. And they won't eat breakfast there either.

R: Because they eat on the way.

R: That's right.

R: I think if I recall right, we decided the focus for Stockton is the water. And we should be focusing on those users. I don't think we should be making this something it's not. I think we should be focusing on those users, especially since we don't have a draw, a big draw. Somebody to draw from. We should be dealing with those people who come to us. People are saying they could make this something, but is that why we want them there, to come to eat, and I think it's not. I think it's to come and recreate in our park. And then we serve those who come to do that.

R: There was a dining lodge off the lake that was called the Red Barn. And a lot of people used to drive 45 minutes just to go to the Red Barn. That was the place, and people came there. They grew up there. And that might have been how it was. Recently it went out of business.

R: It's on an airstrip, so people would fly into it to.

R: But not anymore.

R: We used to hear about the Red Barn and when we first took the marina over in '87, the Red Barn was a big thing. But I'd say two years after that they just went down.

R: Probably everyone started going to Truman.

R: I think we lost them to Truman in the beginning, but I think they're coming back.

R: People don't ski Truman. I've heard people say you can ski Truman. But I'm hearing today that you can't ski there. There is open water, but it's brown water, and it's reputation is that it's a fishing lake. And Stockton is pretty much known as a sailing lake. But there's a lot more to Stockton than that.

R: Right, that's what my husband gets real irritated that a lot of people just advertise it as sailing, because it's so much more. We're the #1 walleye lake in the state, state record smallmouth, the fishing is wonderful. It's great sailing time, and that's on of the things that we push. If your family likes the fast track and likes the go-cart track and that sort of thing, then this probably isn't the thing for you. But if you want to spend some quality time with your family, whether it's playing badminton, whether you sit down and play cards, or go swimming, or whatever you do, you're going to really get some good feelings about that.

R: There's a direction there that we were talking about earlier that's not happening. We've run the cycle and it's attention span. I have a fly-fishing school for kids, and the other day I had three kids in there who can't listen, and I could not keep their attention but about 5 minutes. They want instant gratification right now. The videos worked pretty good – their skin was as white as could be, when I was that age I was all skinned up and burned up from being outside. It's so different. And the grandfather was there, part of the class, trying, and he was looking at me like, please make these people listen. And I'm trying everything under the sun. And when I wasn't looking they were fighting each other with the fly rods and stuff. And it's just so hard today to get that family thing, and that's what we want too you know. They're 18 year olds with their own vehicles, they've got money and they've got stuff, so I don't know....

R: I think you're right, but I think you're fighting a losing battle.

R: Oh, I'm not fighting it, I done given in to it.

R: I think you're right as well, but I think that has implications for our concession operations. If we want to continue as we have in the past....For me the thing to do is take a chance. Let's try to draw that crowd in. Let's try to make a buck. Let's try serving a different segment of our clientele, if you want to put it in terms of service. But let's also try not to repeat the mistakes we've made in the past and continue down that road. Let's give up and change Stockton into a park without a restaurant and lodging, and just make it a camping park. Or a marina.

R: Makes me no difference. I'm just a very realistic person. And I know why Bennett Springs is a success, I've got water and I've got trout. They're city people who come out, 38% from St. Louis, 33% from Kansas City, and here comes the hard part, they come 8 times a year. I don't want repeaters. They know every pothole that's in that park, they can tell you, that wasn't fixed 3 years ago, that tree's about to fall over. When I was at Roaring River, they were tourists, you could sell them rubber tomahawks all day and they'd thank you for having a room open and letting them come there. At Bennett Springs it's not like that. And they come so often they're a pain. And I don't want reunions and I don't want big groups, because they expect something special, and they're more trouble than they're worth. Now if I wasn't having the business, I'd be wanting all of those things.

F: And that speaks to that site-specific issue that we keep talking about. Also, I need your opinions about the branding, bringing in brand name franchises.

R: In general they're the only ones making money anymore, anyone knows that. But, my opinion is, they don't belong in the state parks.

R: I agree.

R: I'm sorry, but I'm old-fashioned. And I still have the opinion that a new lodge and new cabins will bring more customers to that park too.

R: Oh I know it will. But you've got to have the people wanting to come there.

R: Well they will, if they've got better cabins, and if they've got nice cabins. The cabins she's got there, she's got problems.

R: They're not cabins, it's the old motel.

R: The cabins are nice, well not cabins, but the duplexes.

R: We have to remember at Stockton, we bought that motel so nobody else would be in there and it would be worse.

R: I think if they built 20 or 50, if you're filling up on the weekends, you could probably put 50 in there and fill up on the weekends. And if that's the goal of the park service, then I think they could do that, could rent those 50 rooms a night on Friday and Saturday night. And 3-day holiday weekends, 10 weekends a year.

R: The franchise thing, if we're there to serve our visitors, and not try to draw them, if we're not just about making the money, because we're hearing we're not really making the money on the restaurants, I don't know that that franchise serves anybody any better than you all can serve them, or any non-franchise. So I'd say no, anybody can get to the franchise stuff anywhere. I'm about making the state parks special. And if you can get the very same thing there that you can get anywhere else, what's special about it?

R: The only thing the franchise would do, and I'm not saying it's what I want, is it would give that concessionaire the buying power with the distributors, that sort of thing.

R: One of the things I'm looking at at Bennett Springs is when we put in the store at Bennett Springs I suggested that on one side, where the coolers are, they put in a delicatessen. We could then serve the sliced meats to the campers and they would know we were there when they came – it'd all be in our store. You've got to know what's there, the expectation. The other suggestion was that we have the sandwiches for sale when they're out there fishing, when they buy their tags. Subway has concessions now that take up an eight-foot space. They have these in a lot of service stations now where the service station has a Taco Bell, a McDonalds, a Burger King. And it's just an 8-foot deal. If that was the only way I could get a food service at Johnson Shut-Ins, was if I talked to Subway and they put in an 8-foot thing there, and I was the park system, that's what I would do. Because that might be the only way that money could be made there. Because the parks may not want to run it themselves. If they wanted to run it themselves and lose money or make money they may not have to go franchise with it. But if I couldn't get anything else I might look at one of those 8-foot Subway deals, if for no other reason, is maybe put one of those in there and learn all they've got to know about it, and all they've got to share about it, and pay my franchise fee for a year or two, then kick them out and do my own thing. That's terrible, but that might be what I'd do.

F: You've got two things with the branding idea – you've got a name, but you also have a type of service. You all could do the type of service and set up and not have the name, but it is what people are used to and relate to that in terms of some of the clientele. Or, you could do the brand name. Obviously here at the University we went brand name, we don't do any food service here anymore, if you go over here in Brady Commons we're just exactly like he described. But, the clientele is 18-22 years old with name recognition and everything...

R: You're fulfilling that need.

R: I'm starting to get this perspective of 50-year-olds that haven't grown up on Steak-n-Shake and McDonalds, Wendy's, you know. When I used to go out with a business partner, he wanted roast beef and green beans for lunch. People don't eat like that anymore.

R: And you know, a lot of people take it home to eat it. Instead of going out to eat now, the big thing is you call and order it or you go and get it and you eat it at home.

R: And in your grocery stores, that's becoming true for them – everything's pre-packaged. Salad bags, Caesar salads, everything's all bagged up. In HyVee now, right past the deli, it's all stuff to take home. The food industry is changing.

R: And that's why we're here.

F: How much of that transitions to the park experience is the question. Do they come in with certain expectations. What else have we not discussed that we should be discussing?

R: How's your labor force?

R: Last year I begged for help. This year it's better. Now I just went through a little crunch because I had several, you know, you hire them in the summer and you hope that they don't take vacations, but I hire a lot of teachers and it's the only time their husbands are off. So you have that problem. But basically it's better this year. The big problem is finding a qualified dependable chef or cook.

R: See that's why I'm back to that question – one of the things you get with that state park experience, you get this wonderful state park experience with no brand names hopefully, but you've got to have somebody who knows a little bit about cooking. If I go to Blimpie's I put the

Blimpie's hat on and I just follow the directions from the manager on how to make the sandwich and cut it and just listen to what the customer wants on it and get them out of there.

R: And I don't have any problem with that service, that style of service, indeed that might be the very kind of food service that you needed.

R: This is just terrible, and I don't mean to pick on these people, but we got a new Sonic two years ago and I was dying to see how they were going to do, because I thought, that would be a piece of cake because everything is just cut and dried. You do it this way, you come in, they train you, and that's it. Well, I went in there to eat and ...well they're fine now, but it was not that easy. The service was poor, the food was poor, everything was poor. And I'm not saying that to complain, because I would never do that to them. And they're fine now. But I had that in the back of my head, that it would be so simple, and it's not as simple as you might think.

R: My brother just had his 49th birthday and I called him and he started to tell me about his youngest daughter, who's working at Sonic and making 13 dollars an hour – he said he didn't know there were that kind of tips in it, and I said come on – we both worked at Steak and Shake and my brother was very quiet, very subdued, and he didn't make that kind of money but I did – I had the personality and I could talk to anybody. The bottom line is, later in the conversation he said, the lady that owns the Sonic said, I'll take six more like her, because she knows what to do and the other kids just stand around and can't figure out what to do. We went to the Show-Me games in Columbia and McDonalds has a new 8-9 piece McNugget. It's a 9-piece McNugget but you only put 8 pieces in it. The bottom line is, that's why I asked the labor question – are some of these things easier to do if we get a.... maybe even buy the Blimpie's place and say, now tell me what they do. And I don't know what the answer is at Stockton. I'm trying to stay absolutely neutral on this because we've got 26, 27 years in on the restaurant.

R: A thought for that restaurant there is, let's say we make a nice restaurant there, a beautiful restaurant – it doesn't have to be that way all three meals. At lunchtime you could have a limited staff, or a miniature fast-food thing, and then at suppertime you could have your nice meals, and you may end up drawing enough crowd that you put in the tablecloths, and the fine china, and the whole bit. But we have to be as flexible and open and not have any barriers around us. Because it may be that the Stockton experience is a restaurant. I look at numbers, where are they going to come from, how are they going to get there, how many are going to come – that's what I look at.

R: One of the things I'm picking up on is, let's write this contract to give you some wiggle room. So what you do in the morning, there's breakfast there, and it's self-serve, hot and cold buffet, we don't want to put a lot out because we don't know who's coming, but we're going to replenish it.

R: And that's what we've done with breakfast. We've had some pretty successful breakfasts. We just do a small buffet and pretty well keep it going in the kitchen, you know if we need more bacon or whatever. Because it just kills me to throw that food away, when you don't know the number coming in. But that's the only buffet we've had that's successful.

R: And at lunch, you can even set the atmosphere as different, more casual, and have people come up to the window to pick up their food when their number's called or whatever. But that evening again, we bring servers back, and say hey, you're going to be served this evening.

R: In parks, and I do consider myself a state park employee, it's so determined on making something work. We will throw millions of dollars at something to justify our decision. And that's really not the best thing for the park visitor or for the concessionaire. All that's doing is...and most everybody now has got tenure or whatever you call that with the parks, the merit system – we don't need to do that anymore. And I've seen days where, by golly, that's going to work and they just pour money in there and it just sets there. We have to be more flexible where, oops, that didn't work, let's just change everything. I don't know how it works out there, but you may build a restaurant at Stockton that costs 3, 4, who knows how many hundreds of thousands of dollars, and

seats 200 people, and you find out, that isn't going to work. You've got to be flexible and turn it into a restaurant that seats 100 and turn that other hundred part and turn it into a motel room or turn it into a maintenance shed or something, instead of being so bent on this decision, that whoever made it, works.

R: What if we ended up somewhere down the road saying we are going to do a hard, hard restaurant, but we set that thing up in such a way that there's all this beautiful glass and all these beautiful views, close to the water. And in 3 years, the concessionaire calls and says, this sucker ain't working. It's a bust. But we had such a way we came in and laid walls down in the thing and had 9 motel rooms. If we could think this thing through in such a way that it is changeable for a 10 or 15 year period, lay something out that made some sense, if we decided not to go on the water or whatever, or the Corps, or would the Orleans Trail just blow up and curse and scream and yell if we approached the Corps and said, we want to put a restaurant on the water. We're going to put our restaurant on the water, and we want to allow fishing cabins right here. And if not, you can have your whole damn park back.

R: Now if you put a restaurant on the water, and it becomes something unique, special, then you will draw people to your restaurant. Because there aren't any around. But I don't really know the situation. I'm just throwing out darts.

R: But I think that's what we're looking for, because we know what kind of experience the different concessionaires have. When it's all done, hopefully we'll sift this stuff out and say, here are four proposals we can take a look at with a blend of these kinds of things.

R: And the decision, ultimately, probably won't be the concessionaire's, on whether that restaurant is a success or not. The park visitor will determine that. Either with attendance or happiness. And because financially, it is not going to be a success for many many years to come. I don't know any restaurants that are making it that either don't have liquor, have very something unique, or are some type of fast food business. I'm just not aware of any.

R: Well why don't you create that – create liquor and create something unique?

R: Well that's what I'm saying – if you were to go in and build a restaurant on the water, Stockton's restaurant on the water, then you've got something that you can get people to come in and eat there. But you are looking at a few years down the road to build that business up, and then now you are looking at a labor situation. And you're looking at some unique food items, and that category of quality dining and so forth, and where are they going to come from...

R: And what's that do for the park visitor? What advantage is that for the park visitor?

R: Brings more people in the park, brings more support for the sales tax.

R: So we have more people in the park – what does that do?

R: Serves the public. The concessionaire makes a buck, the state makes a buck...

R: You've got to understand too that a lot of our visitors aren't on the state park lake. They're on the Corps of Engineers lake. So the fun that they're deriving isn't always necessarily from the state park. It's where they access the lake, some of these bass tournaments, they put in at 6:30 in the morning, and buzz around all day, and oh, where were you today, I was at Stockton State Park – you probably really weren't that much at Stockton State Park. You were on the CoE lake and you put in and out at Stockton State Park, and they probably used our bathrooms and our pavement, that's about it.

R: What's the odds of the Corps opening up more marinas and more space there?

R: You may be right, but if you take that argument to the other extreme, then isn't the argument let's get rid of the restaurant and let's get rid of the lodging, we don't have that much anyway and it's pretty low quality; if there is that need for lodging there let's build another motel at the edge of the park. But I think we have an obligation to go in this direction. I see it as providing additional service to the people like me who want it and need it. When I come to Stockton, I would like to have a restaurant along the way where I could have gotten a hamburger and drink my six-pack of beer, instead of where I'm going, out on the deck. That's what I want, someplace like that. And I tend to think there's a whole bunch of people like me out there. And if we start providing that...

R: I agree with that. I'm just saying if we try to make it a big fancy one, then we're trying to make something happen.

R: I wouldn't do a Thousand Hills there.

R: Thousand Hills isn't really that fancy.

R: You've got to offer the setting – I want right on that lake. I want to be able to smell the dead fish floating in Stockton lake.

R: When they built Thousand Hills, it was...the director was wanting to put it up on the hill, and some other people wanted to put it down below, and I said, you'd better put it as close to the marina....don't get me all spread out, and that's what Stockton's kind of got a problem with.

R: And the Corps has given us only 300 feet of shoreline, so being right on the water isn't always an option.

R: One of the things that's changed, in just the time that you've had the contract, is how many areas has the Corps closed down. The Corps is getting out of the recreation business. We can blackmail the Corps a little bit by saying look- you won't let us do what we want to do – we may just take all the chips and go home. We'll stay above your mark, but by golly this is what we think needs....now if you want to....he has a staff of five...if you want to put 375 or 400,000 dollars in and you want him to run this or if you want to tell the people at Stockton that you're walking away, that's fine. But we're going to say, we're walking away because you won't let us do things that we think make sense in the year 2002. Don't get me wrong, it'd be a really rough political move, to make a statement like that, but I think seeing what happened to Table Rock and all the things that got shut down at Table Rock, and all the things that got closed up, I think the last thing the Corps wants to hear is that we might be gutsy enough to do that. I don't know if we will, but I think we could go to the Corps and say if we want to, that we want to be right on the water or so close to the water that he can smell the dead fish, we will do this this this and this, we will stay above your high water mark, but we're going to play a little bit of hardball with you. When 20 years ago or in the 60's when everybody's going out and recreating, we're going to take whatever you give us. Sure, if you want to let us have this, that's fine.

F: (to Stockton concessionaire) You get the last word. What would you like to tell the group about food service?

R: It's been tough. We've tried many things up there and every year we change something. We started with...our menu's still pretty varied but it used to be just really varied. We've sized the menu down, we've put liquor in, we've taken liquor out, we've now got the beer and wine, but we've still pretty well kept where we do serve the people, where it's not self-service, where they are waited on and that sort of thing. I don't know. I get excited every year and think, this is the year I'm going to make money here, this is the year I'm going to do this or do that, and it seems like the figures are just so similar to what they were the year before.

R: What if money wasn't an issue? What if profitability wasn't an obstacle? Because this is what they're talking about. They're not saying how to make money. They're going to give you that

opportunity to make money. And they want you to tell us how to do it. Let's say you make \$10,000 profit a year from the restaurant – let's say under this new contract they're going to come up with, and this new restaurant or facility, you're going to make more than you're making now. How would you like that to be? What restaurant – isn't that what you're asking?

F: Yes, and you've already told me you want to be closer to the water, whatever food service you do.

R: I think it might be...this is something we haven't even thought about, is the location, because I thought that wasn't something that we would have any input in.

F: But you told me they won't walk up the hill.

R: They will not walk up the hill. I get a few, but it is a tough walk up.

R: So if people are going to go to the restaurant, you've got to be closer to the water.

R: Right.

R: Well if we ever did a new restaurant, we would certainly consider it's location. Because half the deal is location.

F: And it fits the nature of your site. Because that marina is a big part of your site. So we're talking about those type of criteria that make sense and you've served them, and you know who would come and who wouldn't, and who would take part no matter what type of food service type you do, and you may do a variety like we mentioned, but one of the primary users is the marina person. And if they could park their boat and get something and it fits their experience....

R: Right.

R: Like if you were closer to the water, you might get X-amount more marina users. So that might offset the people that are coming out of your motel rooms right now. So in turn, you might be able to say, well, we should have six or twelve fisherman cabins, that we know they maybe not use the restaurant as much but one night out of four nights they're going to stay there because they have the kind of cabins they want now, they might come one night, so that's all the stuff we're going to have to look at.

R: And you know everybody that stays in my motel uses the marina, basically. I have a few that come for some other reason but basically they're coming to use that marina or that lake or that water. But be it full service or self service or quick service, to me, it's got to be quality food and it's got to be clean. Those are the two things that are just not an option. Those are two that just have to be. I don't think quick service would do very well, I think people expect more than that, but I'm not so sure about the fast food, the quick hamburger or hot dog and that sort of thing, that it wouldn't do better than the fine dining. I'm just really interested to see what these surveys come back and say.

F: (Surveys described for rest of group); Closing.

August 7, 2001
Focus Group Transcript

F: Facilitator comments in bold type

R: Participant Responses

F: Question 1: How important is food service provision to our visitors of today?

R: I think probably it's a minimal amount, I think also it depends on the hours. I think some meals are more important to the customers than the others. I think the basic of camping and being in a cabin or whatever, they've come equipped to cook over their fire or equipped to cook in their cabins, so I don't think there's a need for all the aspects, all the fast food or other food service. I know when I go I like to eat dinner out sometimes, but not all the time.

R: I think, and we assessed this coming down in the car today, that the whole thing of the dining lodge is really something out of the '30's, the CCC; that's why they're called dining lodges instead of restaurants. And you know back then most people camped in tents, we didn't have RV's with televisions and satellite systems in them; when they came down the accommodations were usually hotels, they weren't full-service cabins; if they were cabins, we're renovating cabins now in the system that were built by the CCC and when you look at the original plans a lot of them didn't even have bathrooms. So I think there was a greater service then. But I think that's changed over time. People are much more mobile now and they'll drive into town to go to McDonald's. One thing I always try to keep in mind with the parks is, we get into these discussions where we toss around, "we need this, we need this, we need this" – when in reality we need nothing. Other than a sign that says this is a state park. It's a choice. I think we need to keep in mind that there is no need for any service business in a state park. There are choices, there are services we can choose. And we've really got to get away from that concept that we need this. We chose to, and (now) we can choose not to or we can choose to.

R: If you're looking at customer satisfaction, though, I think we have to give some choices to customers. We can build a park that is, and we have parks that are, just trails. When we're building a park to bring people in overnight or for longer stays, for customer satisfaction sometimes we do need a limited scope, of packaged foods or all the way up to full dining.

R: It depends on where the facility is, what you need. If you're in a remote area, where there isn't a lot of fast-food service close by, and you're inviting the customer to come in and stay several days, food service is kind of nice to have. But if you're in an area where food service is around, then maybe just something quick and convenient, where they can pick up what they need and go to the beach or before they go out on the boat or whatever, maybe that kind of thing is what you need and not a full-service restaurant.

R: Based on my experience, I'd say the nature of the park and the experience that people are coming to have – if you're at Montauk and you're coming down on a Saturday morning, it's nice to have a place to go eat breakfast. At Table Rock these guys are doing a different job – they're not making hand-made sandwiches but they're selling quality packaged foods. Which, people come in off the lake, they're hungry, they want to cool down, they can come in and grab a quality pre-made and eat it and go. I think that's part of the experience they're looking for. And we have people come up and say, do you have any place to eat in the park, and we tell them what they have down at the marina. Or in Branson, they can go anywhere they want. But it has to do with the nature of the park or historic site.

R: I agree with that, but it also has to do with what you're trying to do with the facility you have. At Meramec we had an idea of building a motel and conference center, 6 or 7 years ago. We tried to bring in small conferences. The concept is still there, but it hasn't been marketed very well. And food service is an important part of that idea. If you want to do those type of activities, you have

to do the three meals a day. It's not just the certain hours for the park visitor. Because you're catering to the group for up to several days. But you can't just make it all just for those kind of activities – you've got to have a – I think you've got to look at when people are wanting that Sunday dinner, or Saturday night buffet.

R: That's exactly right. When we have a conference coming in, you know exactly what they want to eat, when they're going to be there, and exactly what you need, and your labor, your food costs, it's all right there. When you don't have that, and you're just open for breakfast, you have no idea if you're going to get two tables, or 10 tables. And so it depends on that. If you know what's there, there's a great opportunity. But it depends on a lot of different factors, like weather, and the customers, what kind of food service you need there. (paraphrase – original unintelligible).

R: I think there's a lot of different concepts I hope we run with this morning, but the prevalent one to me is, does food service availability basically match the function of the park, the major amenities of the park? Do people expect food service to be available? And I think that expectation probably is growing as we at least try to position our concession to be competitive with the other things to do in the area. I think visitors would expect us to have probably even more than we offer now. Which I think would probably be the case with all parks. In the past the intention which has been to modernize a bit, to add those newer services to be competitive with the other services that are available we often forgot to look at the services that are important to the park. From a business perspectives one of the limitations that we have in particular, and I'm sure it's the same in every park, is that we have a very limited season. And so, in order to put in an infrastructure for a quality food service in place, it just doesn't make financial...I'm not going to say it doesn't make any financial sense, but you have to be very careful. As he said, it's an unpredictable flow, even if you knew you had a good flow you're limited to a peak time of the season, and that makes it more difficult to delve into food service from a quality standpoint, when you've got fluctuations and seasonality. It's tough enough in my limited experience in a restaurant, to run a restaurant 12 months a year. Then you say, now we've got to do it in 3 really good months and a couple of shoulder months on the side of that so, having said that, I'll go back to my original thought – I think it's becoming more important to visitors. And if we can figure out a way to solve that, so we can provide.

R: I'll go back to choice – from a developmental standpoint, restaurants are just a black hole. We've already got kitchen service at \$300 a square foot in the building so if you operate 5 months a year, you don't have a profit or it's almost nil on food service. There's just not that much profit in it. But we're providing the restaurant furnishings and equipment, and for us, that's why it comes down to choice. Because from an economic standpoint, food service makes no sense whatsoever. It's purely service – we make no money at all off the food service. We lose money, because it costs us so much to develop it. And it's insane that you can't say you're doing it for economically viable reasons. It's a choice of a service you'd like to provide, or subsidize. But then again a lot of the services we do provide in parks are exactly for service. If it was a profit-making organization we wouldn't need a second park – people would be out there saying we need to find natural areas and develop them, because people just won't come unless we make a lot of money off of them. But that's not true – that's why we have a state park system. But the question is, how much are you willing to lose off the restaurants? For the bottom line, we make X-amount of dollars a year – how much of that budget are we willing to put into this service? Which is a very capital-consuming service for us. I would pose the question – is food service more valuable to the visitor than it was in the '30's, we were talking about the designs and the old park concept – is food service more valuable now than then? I would argue yes.

R: Because a person has so much more opportunity to obtain food. I'd just be interested to know, for instance in stores, when I go camping and go to park stores, I very seldom see a store that has a lot of produce, or a lot of anything for that matter – I know when I go camping I go to the grocery store before I leave home and get everything I need. The only thing I pick up locally is milk. I'm stocked by the time I hit that park.

R: I think food service is very important. I talk about the business side, but I'm also a traditionalist. We haven't built a new restaurant in probably 30 years, except for at Roaring River, and that was a replacement. Traditionally, our dining lodges were our food service. And I think it's an important part that our visitors want to see. They're important historic buildings. And I think we need to figure out how we can get more people in them. How we do that, I don't know.

F: I think we need to go back to that question of whether it's more important to today's visitor than it was 40 years ago, or is food service less important.

R: I think more people in this culture eat out now. But they're eating at McDonald's, or Pizza Hut, not in restaurants.

R: I think that's beginning to change. I know myself, I don't particularly like McDonald's or something unless I'm on the run. I like more quality stuff, like St. Louis Bread.

R: I think income, I know income goes up every year for food service industries, everyone's income is going up and they're going out to restaurants. Also there is less family structure and people don't sit down together at 6 o'clock every night to eat dinner anymore [unintelligible].

R: I think to get them in [to the dining lodges] you have to be creative and you have to be flexible.

R: I think from what I've seen over the years, and I keep thinking of Montauk because that's the biggest food service I'm familiar with, they wanted a "supersize" kitchen and a walk-in freezer and cooler and we wanted to remodel the whole kitchen and increase the square footage and the type of appliances. And what he was trying to do was run a major restaurant there in the park and draw in the local public. And that's expensive. Big-time dollars. And you can't draw people in, not even day-use visitors, you can't get that many people in except maybe on Sunday afternoon. So maybe it's the size of what we're trying to provide. We're trying to be too big, we're trying to be a major restaurant in the dining lodge, and you just can't get the people in to do that. But people do like some food service there. [unintelligible].

R: We do have a handful of these lodges in the system, [unintelligible], I think they work well at places like Sam A. Baker, and I think they work well at the trout parks. What amazes me, and has always amazed me, is that when we hire a concessionaire we say, "this is what you're going to provide". And sometimes we're asking them to provide something that doesn't work. And if that's something we want, we need to share in the loss. We need to share in subsidizing that because we're the ones that choose to provide that service. And we do a lot of things like that in the park system. It really comes down to where you would want to provide those facilities and what you're willing to not have at other facilities or to give up or to gain somewhere else.

R: I think if the costs weren't so excessive to run a restaurant, that would help the concessionaire and that's part of the problem. I think the state's asking us to do too much, too often, for too many, for too little money.

R: For not a lot of people.

R: Yes, for very few. People do want food service, but to what extent can we offer it to everybody, all the time. To have 4 people come in for breakfast and they've got a cook, a hostess, a server, and a manager there.

R: We're also battling, I think, an expectation that has grown over years, that there is or isn't food available in a particular park, and it is or isn't right for that particular visitor. So I don't particularly subscribe to the theory "if you build it they'll come", because we have to try to change that expectation of the visitor of what they're going to do when they get there, and try to make a conscious shift to maybe promote those services, promote food differently. State parks just don't strike the public as high-level cuisine places, they just don't – they're more convenience oriented I

think, with the exception of the big parks like we were talking about. There's a lot of people there and they do expect to be fed when they come to Meramec or Montauk or Roaring River. But our park [which unknown] they don't, because it's more of a convenience. I'm not saying we couldn't develop it into a more premiere service, but then we'd have to solve the other issues – how do you do it? How do you make it financially work for everybody?

F: What's right about food service in your park or the whole park system currently?

R: For the customer? The availability for the customer is there, it's good. Some people want to have breakfast and it's there, it's good for them. The availability of it is good. [unintelligible]

R: Everything being right for the customer isn't always good for the park service or the concessionaire, but right now, in a park like Sam A. Baker, if they want lunch or dinner it's there and that's good. [unintelligible; paraphrased].

R: I think the state parks offer, especially at Meramec and Montauk and Roaring River, kind of a unique dining experience at these facilities, just the ambience. People like to come to that, particularly the local people. So that's good for the park and it's good for the community. It's a different kind of atmosphere than the local restaurants.

R: For those that go fishing early, having a nice breakfast [unintelligible].

R: Something got lost there just a little bit – we were talking about matching the service with the park – we've kind of had that problem in our restaurant, because there used to be more or less a little lodge, right on the river, people just walked up and felt comfortable about coming in, with the waiters or whatever. And then, to move the location up on top of the hill overlooking the whole area, and to build a lodge style place up there, just intimidates people. First of all, it's not an easy walk up there. So we've created a whole new market, more or less, for something up here that we didn't have before.

R: I think it's interesting, I go out to the job site and work in the building, the crews always know where the best place to eat lunch is. And it's never in the park. We always end up going to some greasy nasty little place, that has the best hamburgers you've ever had. It's the clientele, sometimes I think we miss the clientele. Sometimes I think we overdo it, and a lot of our users may be uncomfortable to walk in there. Because they just are so nice.

R: I can attest to that. I took my parents after the dining lodge was finished at Roaring River one Sunday afternoon, and we felt intimidated because the chef came out there in his white coat, you know, and the price was really high and set my dad off like a rocket. We didn't feel comfortable there. It was just too much.

R: We have such a great diversity at our park, you'll see people trout fishing with everything from a Zebco to a \$2000 rod. There's just such a great diversity of people you're dealing with. So that makes our job a little harder, because all those people need food service. But not particularly at the same level.

R: You'll find that in a lot of campground, though, because you'll have somebody pull in with a \$200,000 mobile home and the guys camping next door have a cheap tent from Wal-Mart. And I've even had campers come up and say, "can they put up that tent beside my...because they're basically in a condo that can go anyplace, and somebody's putting up a \$59 tent in their yard. And I know where you're coming from too; you've probably seen more of a broad range, but we still, and a lot of other parks still, see that broad range of people. For young families starting out, it's a good way to get a vacation, it's cheap to go out and camp for \$7 a night, and spend a week there, all the way up to people who travel year round. And we work trying to provide food service for that different class. And that's the same thing you've got down there.

R: One thing I've always found interesting whenever I've camped in a park that does have food service available, is I've never seen anything in the campground that says, "we have a dining lodge" – it's just not promoted.

R: I think what's right about the food service is what was said about the atmosphere – it's unique. I think people use that food service because of that atmosphere, to go in an not rush. I think the service, at least that I've dealt with, is very good, and the price has been good for the most part. And I think those are the right things that we ought to be supplying. And I say we meaning the concessionaire and the park service as partners. We've just got to make it right for them.

R: I think it probably works better, it's probably right, when it's actually part of a lot more concessions. If we just had a restaurant by itself, well we started that at Washington, and it didn't work. I always see it as a choice, and I see it as something in reality that is subsidized by the other things. I don't see it as a cash cow in itself.

R: I don't see how any concessionaire could go in there and make a living.

R: Neither do I. I don't see how a concessionaire could make a profit. It's just not possible. It's not there to do that.

R: You'd almost have to have to use the lodging to subsidize it, and maybe eventually we'll have to use the campgrounds.

F: Do you think the types of food that are being offered in the dining lodge and in parks is correct for the park users?

R: I think most of the facilities we have are restaurants, and I think they're probably more of the place for fast food, more of a deli, [unintelligible], downsizing the restaurant. But the kitchen is exactly the same, and they don't serve...just [unintelligible] running the restaurant. A combination of the store....

R: I was going to say at Big Lake, I think we've...that had been a full-service restaurant with linen tablecloths, linen napkins, and now we have it where anyone, if you're in a bathing suit with shorts pulled on and sandals, can just walk in and order a burger, and they have been very successful with that. The numbers have been real good. It has worked. They've cut their labor cost, and we all know food costs are very high and they take up 40-50% of your gross. I think having the means change, when Meramec in the old days was the place to shop, where you had food service [unintelligible] town, you've heard that year after year. So it's changed, that breakfast crowd does not come out to the park anymore. That lunch crowd doesn't come out to the park anymore. I think our users have changed, and I don't know that we're in step with that at this point in time. I think there's a need for that full-service dining, but [unintelligible].

R: Thinking back to Roaring River, the food was great, but it just didn't seem to be the right dining experience for that time of day. I felt like I was in a nice dining area, but...

R: But see, we have changed. And that's the thing, we have more demands for doing more. How many of us just go out and grab something to eat back at our offices?

R: We do something a little different, and I've kind of got it in my mind, food service and your whole tradition of that, which is dining hall restaurant stuff, but we do a food service in a way...we've had a deli, on the water, at the marina store, and actually got away from that part of last year because it really lost for us, but we did supplement it back with pre-packaged sandwiches, which are meeting the needs of visitors pretty well. Either campers coming off the ground, or folks coming off the lake, can get a hamburger, can get a fresh sandwich, that's a day or two pre-packaged, chips, coffee, sodas, all that kind of stuff. So we feel good at least, to answer the question of what's right about that, that we do have some options for people, that didn't used to be

there. But then, we're always gauging ourselves against the higher standard, what if we had more? And we used to have more. But again, we got into constraint problems, the limited season, and particularly for us, because the operation totally is on the water and floating, we're very limited by the equipment, etc. that you can have, basically you can't have any kind of stove. You can have cold sandwiches, we brought pizza in and had a little warmer, and that kind of stuff.

R: Is that working this year?

R: Yes, it is. I don't think that we can honestly look at everyone and say it is as nice of an experience as when we had the deli going, because I don't think it is. We had a place to sit down, we had fresh-made sandwiches, etc, but we lost our you-know-what on that deli. And that was a rough decision we had to make, was let's continue to offer sandwiches, but we've got to do it in a way that won't bury us.

F: What trends and expectations are there, and what changes do we need to make, to meet the changing needs of today and future park visitors?

R: I have a question – I know that with your deli sandwiches you used the Panera or St. Louis Bread - did the branding have any effect? Did it matter that you were doing St. Louis Bread vs. Blimpie's vs. Subway...

R: I think it did. Especially for our repeat customers. We didn't make it overly apparent to people, it wasn't a St. Louis Bread Company sign or anything, but on our menu it said, "featuring St. Louis Bread Company bread", and on a sign over the menu board it said that too. And particularly when people came back, we had a lot of regulars, people said, "we just love this" – it was good bread, and it's better than anything I can haul everything down here and make it myself, so I think that was a plus.

R: This year at Lake of the Ozarks at the larger marina, there are slip renters and a lot of fishermen and recreational boaters going in and out, he's provided more of a food service than we had in the past. He's running a coffee bar, which is kind of interesting, they make their own sandwiches but they don't use a brand or anything, and that's pretty limited. They just make them on kind of an as-needed basis. One thing that's kind of worked for them, with the slip renters and the early fishermen in particular, they have a grill, and they'll cook something for breakfast, like eggs and bacon sandwiches, those kinds of things, and those have gone over very well. They're talking about doing more, and I think the need is there. I think with the beach and the traffic that goes in and out of there, putting some hot dogs on the grill, just the smell of that cooking will generate business. Now on the other side of the lake there's a smaller marina, really more for the boat launch and beach users, that wouldn't go over well. They don't provide anything other than ice cream bars and chips and that kind of thing. I don't know what would work over there.

R: So what I keep hearing is people saying "I don't know if that would work" – I think it's interesting when it comes down to signing a concession, [unintelligible] . You know, we have in our mind what we want provided, and we put it in our contract.

R: We don't put in our contract that they're going to run a full-service restaurant – they're going to operate a dining lodge. It doesn't tellwhat the menu is.

R: Well, if I walk into the dining lodge at Meramec, or Sam A. Baker, I would expect a full menu. Just by the appearance of it, I would say that's what's expected. I wouldn't expect to go into the dining lodge at Meramec and order a Blimpie's sandwich. It just seems out of character.

R: But maybe that's where you have the dining lodge closed from the breakfast and afternoon crowd and serve that out of the store or something.

R: That's where your store comes in. The trend is, they get up and they either have, well a lot of

our cabins have full kitchens so they just eat breakfast in the cabin, a lot of the campers bring a lot of their own food, in fact they probably end up hauling it back home with them because they bring too much, they want to hit the river, they want to go canoeing, they're on vacation, they've got to get going. They don't want to sit around in the afternoon and sit in a restaurant and eat lunch. Or even breakfast for that matter. Then, in the evening, they're done, they're tired, they don't want to cook – then they wander into the restaurant and that's where you get your business. And I think the locals – well, both my restaurants are in very poor areas. They come from the poorest counties in the state. We don't get much local traffic. But when you do it's on the weekends. It's Friday night for our catfish buffet or Saturday for our special or it's the Sunday church crowd for our buffet Sunday afternoon. But Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, it's not....we're 18 miles from town, there's probably not 15 folks that live on our road, so there isn't that much there. I think the truth is, they're on vacation, they want to get out and do stuff, I'm sure they want to hit your lake, they want to go rent stuff, they're on the go, they want to grab a sandwich and some chips. The Hostess man won't even come out to my facility because we don't sell any donuts. If we had more people buying snack food and sandwiches and stuff, they would do it.

R: Given the proximity of the store (at Lake of the Ozarks) to the lake and to the slip renters, and your proximity with your boaters coming in and out, easy access, do you think if your food service was being offered up and away from that, say up on the hill where the parking area is or over by the swim area, do you think they would enjoy that same kind of success or they would say, "no, it's too much of a hassle to go there"?

R: I think location is important.

R: Location, location, location.

R: I can't imagine how Thousand Hills is making it, out there by the service road.

R: Not to say that there couldn't be some land-based food operation there, or if you decided food service was something you needed to add seriously to the park, you could come in there and build a restaurant that had a deck, close to the lake, you could probably hit the middle ground, but the location is very important. Which is again one of the constraints for us, ok, location's great we want to build on the water, you have real difficulties, really you don't want to build a restaurant on the water - you can but it's very, very expensive.

R: Well, like the situation at Table Rock, you could put a café on the bluff, a middle-of-the-road type arrangement. You talk about building a big major type of restaurant, you could really [unintelligible] money there, ...

R: You could overshoot your target.

R: But if you stay within your target and market it well you might....it could be an experience, looking over the lake with the sun coming down.

R: And it could be great. The only problem that we have is, not the only problem but the biggest problem, is we cannot count on business. It's as expensive as it can be to put it in and to maintain it. So we would need some kind of [unintelligible] partnership with the state, in order to even be interested in something like that. If you had someplace where you could go up and just get a wonderful omelet for breakfast or something, something that doesn't take a lot of cooking, or big equipment, that's the kind of thing that people like. I like that.

R: I think the hard thing [unintelligible; paraphrase] is hiring, especially because the business is so seasonal. Finding somebody who has the desire to go all out. I think that's probably one of the biggest problems, the seasonal issue. I think you have to look at it as the entire mix of concessions.

R: I think we have....at Baker, we have a full breakfast, lunch, and dinner, our breakfasts are made

to order, it's not a buffet, we do omelets, it's great food, it's real butter, real milk, at dinner we have USDA choice steaks. Very rarely, when you go in a restaurant, do they have choice steaks. We cut a lot of them ourselves, we've gone all out. We've doubled the restaurant business in the 5 years we've been there. But still, to cover the cost of going all out, all your breakfast people come in early, all your lunch people sit in there all afternoon, all my waitresses, I have to pay them minimum wage now during the day, they won't stay. They come in and get two tables, they make 3 bucks an hour, you can't keep good help. If you can't keep good help, you can't keep good service. The food can be great, but if the service is lousy...you've got to try to concentrate it into a certain amount so you can control it, instead of it controlling you.

R: One thing people really enjoy is that special thing – like over at Deer Run where you can get that bacon sandwich that probably hacks 5 years off your life – but people just stop in there by the droves every morning to get this greasy, nasty sandwich. It's great, it's got about a quarter of a pound of bacon on it, and you wait in line to get that sandwich every morning. For some guys it's like a religious thing, it's like going to communion every morning.

F: From your perspective, what's the fundamental purpose of food service provision in a state park?

R: If we're not making any money at it, why do we do it? Because the contract says so.

R: It adds to the experience, to give them that choice in service.

R: I think it's a service to the customer. At Stockton, they usually open the motel mid-March, and they open the dining lodge the first of April. We were talking after the session last week and she said she has had people call up and make reservations for the motel in March, the crappie fishing is good and people want to come down and fish, and they find out that the dining lodge isn't open and they'll cancel. Our motel doesn't have food prep areas, it's just a motel room with two beds in it, and they're not coming down with coolers to eat all day long. I think it kind of goes hand-in-hand with the motel operation. If people are going down to stay in a cabin that has a food-prep area, stoves and refrigerators and everything, they can get by without it, but when you go to a motel, the people are...well when I go to a motel I like to travel light. If I'm going to take my food and cook stove and everything, I'll go camping.

R: But if the motel fell over, which it very easily could, (laughter) and that was replaced by four or five more cabins, we probably wouldn't have that situation.

R: I don't know. It depends on the type of cabins. I don't know if you'd lose some of your draw, I know that we have quite a few people that come down for the condominium use, that make their own breakfast or a quick lunch but still like to come down for the evening dining.

R: Well if its there, they'll use it. But did we lose clientele when we took the dining lodge out at [unintelligible]?

R: No.

R: But Stockton is...they go there for the lake part, they go there to fish. They don't go to hike trails, and all that. They go there to fish, they're out on the water, they don't want to mess with food. Then when they come home, they want to go to a restaurant. When I go fishing, that's what I do. I go stay in a motel and I fish and then I eat. I don't want to take my Fry-Daddy in the motel. So every one of them is different. I think someone said it – I don't know if it's an expectation, but it's a tradition and it's a choice that we have made to have food service in some of our parks. We're talking about trends and where we need to go – I don't know if we know where we need to go. I think we need to ask our visitors what they want. And I think that will tell us. We can sit here and say, well we need to do fast food or we need to do this or that, but maybe they don't want fast food. They see enough fast food on every corner when they go to the city. Maybe they want,

you know, an omelet. Or a nice big fat belly sandwich. I think we need to ask them, maybe do some of our surveying that we've been doing with them and target some of that in the next year or two, and really target people that are using our cabins and motels and the campgrounds and just specifically talk about food service and other amenities that we offer. And get that idea.

R: We're currently doing that.

R: And like a lot of other issues, every park is different. Like your marina isn't the destination, but at our park it is.

R: Part of it is providing the setting. But a big part of it is [unintelligible]. You can have the finest restaurant in the world and the food tastes like crap. That's just the nature of the beast. And I think you have to have somebody who has a real interest. Like he was saying, he seems to be putting in a lot of effort. They have the same problem at Thousand Hills. [unintelligible]. Last time he was up he said his lunch business is just crap because he loses it all to the fast food. [Unintelligible]. So he's losing all his convention business, Kiwanis club and things like that. He wants to add on a bar – what he can't sell in food he's going to make up in alcohol. You laugh, but it will provide a restaurant on the lake. It's the only thing he can see as salvaging what he really enjoys doing is restaurants. And if it means he's going to have to sell some alcohol to do it, he's going to do it. He's got to find some way to get more people in there.

R: Something you said a while ago – about that greasy burger joint, we had the fast burger in town, you may not know the name of the place, but you remember that. And we'll talk about that. I think some of the time we need to look at something about having the best thing in town that people are going to talk about, one item, that you can zero in on and have that be the best. You're going to get more word of mouth on something like that than trying to do too much.

R: I noticed he said something about catfish, and we discussed this a little bit last week, you think of Stockton as a walleye lake, and they do some walleye, but the catfish outsells it. That kind of surprises me, but that's what people want when they go out to a buffet or whatever.

R: Friday night's got that traditional catfish thing.

R: And Stockton's doing the same thing, on Saturday night you can go in and get catfish.

R: One of our concessionaires could not make it today, our concessionaire at Pomme de Terre State Park. They have the marina, and the marina stores like yours in the park and they have a little food service there. But the concessionaire before them, and they have had the good sense or ability to continue it, is they're known as the ice cream place on Pomme de Terre. The concessionaire before them would drive to Camdenton once a week and pick up gallons of Central Dairy ice cream. And they became known for that. They sell soft-ball size scoops, and they just blow that stuff out of there. And they continue, even with the new concessionaire today, they continue to blow that ice cream out of there, and people just line up. Now, is it a branding thing because it's Central Dairy ice cream, is it because they are providing a quantity for a cheap price, or is it both, but they've done well. And their other food service, they do burgers, big burgers, good price, and they're very successful there.

R: They're fulfilling a need.

R: Filling a need is [unintelligible]. It also creates a unique experience.

R: But you've still got to have the volume, to make it work. And that's the other wedge that we don't have necessarily, is the volume. You know it's like all parks are [unintelligible].

R: Rightfully so.

R: They'll come in on the weekends, that's when everybody's here. You come into a park during the middle of the week, even during the summer, and the campground's half empty. In a lot of the parks. And you think about trying to sell food, that's like having a five month season that's based on weekends. That's only 40 days a year that you're trying to make a living on.

R: No concessionaire can rely on the overnight customer, even if it's just a drive out.

F: What other challenges do you have?

R: Let's talk about the employees. First of all, it's hard to keep good employees, they're not making any money, so your good, experienced help....it's hard to keep them. You have to pay them more to keep them, so it's costing you, your labor cost is going up. There's no job security. The employee is there for 3 good months and then they're gone. For weekends, maybe you can get some of the college kids and it works out good for you. But to have a stable dining room supervisor or something, they can make money for 3 months and then towards the end of that 3 months they start dropping like rocks. Because the writing is on the wall and they know you've got to cut back, and they have families to take care of. There's excessive slow periods for them when there's no challenge and it's not a fun job – it's hard to keep it a fun job for them. The customer, if you cut back on the type of help or the quality, the customer's going to suffer. They're not going to be happy with the service or the quality of the food. You don't know when that busy time's going to hit, the last few days you didn't have anybody so you only have one waitress on and sure enough, 6 tables walk in at once and everybody's blown away and it's not a good experience for anybody. The customer suffers too. And the concessionaire suffers. High food costs, high labor costs, low sales, if you can't control the situation a little better, and just going full service is almost impossible to do as far as I can tell. Trying to be there for everybody all the time doesn't work. It is extremely time consuming for you, and for your managers. When you start adding up how much money you have to do a day in sales just to pay your help, you're up over \$200, and there's days you're losing right off the bat. There's a lot of challenges. I think food service is necessary in these parks, but I think it has to be looked at closely and it has to be controlled by us. There has to be some creativity involved and if the state can get involved in that....Maybe if all the campers can get a coupon for \$1 off at the restaurant, or something, that's the state's way of helping us, something that we can come up with to get them in the restaurant for the times we're open. I think we serve good food, and I think it's a shame to not [unintelligible]. But at this point 6 years it really needs to be looked at knowing that I have 9 more years at Meramec, it's really something that has to be looked at closely.

R: When we took Roaring River in, we basically had a kitchen designed. And [unintelligible] came in and said that won't work. So we basically said, you draw up a kitchen that will work.

R: Has it worked?

R: [unintelligible] we can do a lot of things with the conference rooms...

R: I mean, does it work with the restaurant and the usage and everybody coming in...

R: For the conference facilities it is an indicator that we're trying, that we do now and that we've actually picked up on, which we're selling more conferences and doing more [unintelligible] packages, yes it does. It fills the needs because you can still run the restaurant and still have everything you need to get the food and to do what you need to do with the [unintelligible]. We have a wonderful cook who makes great pastries for our wedding parties and such, so that's a good upsell for us. (paraphrase).

R: Is she local?

R: She's from the area, from around Cassville originally.

R: [unintelligible]

R: About the only thing I can see wrong with the kitchen there [referring to Stockton] is that the traffic from the kitchen to the dining room is across a hallway that goes to the rooms. I'm not sure how that got pictured in there. So we have waiters coming out of the kitchen and have to cross a hallway that people are trying to get down to their rooms...

R: Well the choice was, it would be preferable to cross the hall to get to the kitchen than to have all the rooms face the parking lot. That was the trade. But it is an awkward situation.

R: If Bob and his brother want to put a restaurant in at Table Rock State Park, they would be in some serious competition, because the waiters in Branson make between \$100 and \$200 dollars a night, easy. And they're not going to come out and work for you.

R: It would be the same problem at other parks, the competition.

R: We have to find a niche and exploit it. [unintelligible] Not to say it couldn't be done, but it would be a real challenge. Fortunately, our current [unintelligible] isn't full service - we don't have the facilities. We're not opposed to that, it's just that there are a lot regarding even the success of existing operations. Of course, I'm looking at it from the perspective of would it work in our situation, and it very well might. But there's a lot of things that would be issues and certainly we'd need a lot of help from the state because it would become a loss sooner or later. But if the state feels that this is a service that is very important to this park, like all the other services that the state provides, and is willing to share in that, [unintelligible].

R: You have what I would call a limited service – what challenges do you have in the food service that you all provide right now?

R: We had a space challenge, that was probably our biggest challenge. The space that we had to allocate for food preparation and a small dining table in our structure was better used, quite frankly, to put coolers in and sell water. Because there's more money in selling water than in selling sandwiches. Secondly, from a staffing problem that was difficult because we could not count on and never really had the sales volume necessary to staff someone on a full-time basis even during the summer. So that was difficult. When you put the staff and the space utilization together because of our...again, we're on the water, and basically floating...We had to make that call to put coolers in and go with prepared stuff, which then cut out all the materials and the labor necessary, and gave us additional space for merchandise.

R: Say for instance he takes the concession at Meramec. And he decides he wants to put new stuff in there. By his contract, can he do that? Can he convert Meramec into a fast food restaurant?

R: No.

R: Is he told that he has to serve a full sit-down restaurant? I'm just curious.

R: No. Well I think, and I have to look at your contract again, it just says full-service restaurant. But if he wanted to start serving Pizza Hut pizza, he could do that. It would have to be dignified, because it would have to fit with the....

R: I'm just wondering by contract how much leeway the people with the restaurants in the parks are allowed.

R: All I can say is, I would walk very softly with that, but I think we have got to look out of the box a little bit. And I'm not saying changing to the Pizza Hut restaurants, but I think they're [unintelligible].

R: I remember we built a restaurant on a dock – remember that one? Nobody ever went there to eat so they converted it into a nature center. Sometimes I think a lot of what we do in parks is we see [unintelligible], rather than really seeming to understand the visitor.

R: Things can become very dignified and very complementary. If you walk into Bass Pro you can see the small golden arches and they have a McDonald's in there.

R: I'm just wondering how much leeway they have. I'm sure a McDonald's or a could be franchised in a park. But I'm just wondering how much flexibility they have because of operations and buildings on a reduced capacity.

F: How does food service complement (or not) your other concession operations?

R: I think if you have cabins and get some fishermen in them it's nice to have a restaurant.

R: I think it complements the whole park, the whole Sam Baker state park. It's got a little bit of everything, it's got the nature center, the hiking trails, the bike path, there's cabins, it's great. It's great to have it there. It makes it a whole package. There's fishing, there's floating, everything kind of complements the others and works on each other. The other facets of the park supplement the restaurant, and also subsidize it. But it makes a great park and I think it's important. But they may only want to have one meal there, in their 5 days.

R: Well Sam A. Baker is remote enough that without the restaurant getting food is impossible. Where Meramec is the opposite, it's right off the highway.

R: It complements all of it. It's nice to have, people like coming in there, it's a great atmosphere, good food. They come in and sit down and just relax. I think it would be a shame not to have it.

R: We run a food service at Washington, a little concession stand. And we do fine there but we are very limited. We've got a 24-inch grill where we cook hot dogs and hamburgers and one deep fryer for French fries. And we have soda and it does real well. But we re-fabbed that building and expanded it about 8 years ago and it was a good move. The dining lodge at Washington is an old CCC dining lodge, never had made any money. And it wasn't very complementary to the cabins because of it's location, when it was run by the prior concessionaire. And we took it over, the whole concession, about 6 years ago, and we turned it into a store. And we didn't have any complaints. Because it just wasn't being used. And some of it was the operation, but mostly it was the location within the park itself. So I think food service is not a major component, but is a very important component in a number of parks.

R: I think the limited scope of food service that we provide is a nice complement to the services the marina has; I think we've looked beyond maybe moving up to four service operations. We have to really look at keeping that complement. Because then you run into other issues like boat traffic turning off the lake and wanting to stay a while; we don't have those facilities so they can. Traffic coming in off the land that wants to stay a while, we can't afford those parking spots either. So that's a possibility, but food service beyond what we've got right now... in our current concession arrangement, our piece of land, etc, and our current docking structure, is perfectly complementary in our vision. And if we were to increase that any we would [unintelligible] at supporting that.

R: At Roaring River, is it an add-on, or a necessary evil?

R: It's not a downer...we're kind of in a unique situation, because we have a replacement restaurant. We had the old lodge that was there for years, and it was well-liked. From what I understand, it was kind of where the local folks met in the morning for coffee, too, not just the fishermen. Once that went away, we changed locations, and built an upscale restaurant...the niche was there, but what we had there at one time... without listening to the public or anything, we made our own niche. And now we are trying to get the convention business, and things like that,

but then we've only got a total of 26 rooms, what kind of convention business are you going to do? There's a real small niche now that we've confined ourselves to, to kind of these smaller convention-type things, to be able to keep that restaurant.

R: The other negative we have too is, the cabins at Stockton, we would like to bring everything up to hotel-quality. With some type of lodge. Getting to that point, I'm sure that would help lodging capabilities. Where we could have some people stay in the lodge and some people stay in the cabins. With some type of lodge and then all the existing stuff...well, some of it could fall to the ground... (paraphrase).

R: We've got a building...that structure can't set...we've got to have bodies in that thing and it's got to be running all the time. It can't be a 3 month or a 5 month operation. With the number of rooms we have, you get the people in there on the conventions...if we do fill that, fill the rooms up, when the convention's done for the evening, what do those people do? We're 9 or 10 miles away from a small town, and also when people see a building like that they expect there to be amenities in there too, to go along with the upscale dining. It's a difficult niche to fill.

R: When this facility was built, we were under limitations. The restaurant and the 26-room limit was decided by the hotel that was demolished, so it was supposedly a replacement project, and not an expansion. But the quality was definitely kicked up a notch. And the reason it was located where it was, was because there wasn't any flat land down by the creek. It had to go on the hill somewhere.

R: Has the provision of this new food service changed the nature of the park? Is the park doing anything differently, or has it changed the visitors to the park?

R: It really hasn't changed the visitors that much, I don't think. We maybe draw a few more people that heard about the new lodge. There's still a majority of people coming there to fish. That's still the main draw of the park.

R: I remember the old lodge, you would go out to fish, and then you would come in to eat lunch. For lunch, it was packed, even in the middle of the week. Now, of course, you have to walk uphill, and there's a few folks in there but it's not like it's being filled. It's a different atmosphere. The old one was.... I hate to say rustic, but it was more...middle class friendly, maybe? Now when you walk in you see these big vaulted ceilings and everything.

R: There's been some things done ambiguous down there too. When I first got there a year and a half ago, the first time I walked into the dining lodge and picked up a menu, I thought, I can't afford to eat here. Everything was \$18 to \$24 dollars a plate. And there's people who expect that and want that when they go down there. But for a lot of people staying down there it's a lot cheaper to go to the grocery store and take care of their own meals.

R: Once again from an advertising point of view, it would be nice if there was something that mentioned that Roaring River existed, at all the other parks. We don't ever cross park lines. Marketing wise, a lot of our marketing is still word of mouth. People call up and get a brochure, but as far as somebody who goes regularly to, say, Meramec, realizing that the lodge at Roaring River even exists...I mean, how many small business that could use that as a convention even realize that it exists?

R: It's got a checkmark by dining, but what is that?

R: I think there's an attempt to address that somewhat, on the webpage, but that's about it. I think marketing's always been an issue.

R: It's a typical thing to have, like last spring, a seafood buffet. As a regular event, every Friday, that attracts more people, then we fill the restaurant. (paraphrase).

R: Is that mostly locals, or is that people coming out of the park?

R: That's the locals.

R: A lot of locals come down for that.

F: If it were possible to align DSP sites to this paradigm (Table Service, Self-Service, or Quick Service), what criteria should help to determine placement? Which levels belong in the state parks?

R: I think it's totally driven by the park. It depends on the park and it also depends on the person providing the food service, to decide what kind of service they feel comfortable providing. The other thing is, there may be instances where all 3 can be utilized in one park. And the question is, are we restricting concessionaires by saying, ok, you've got to have table service all the time. Or, would it be better utilized to have table service for a certain meal, but quick service for, I don't know. Or even, in your case, two different locations. Maybe you go back down by the river and you build a place that has breakfast and sandwiches.

R: Or you could operate two different types of service out of one dining lodge, and do that out of one building.

R: The question might be, can you afford to do that? Because it's going to be a lot more expensive to turn on the lights at the dining lodge at Sam A. Baker than to have a little fast food area in your store where you've already got retail traffic and everything else going on.

R: In my case the table service would be available at the restaurant, on a limited basis, and when it's not available the other would be available at both stores, just packaged sandwiches and stuff.

R: That's exactly what we were looking at down at Roaring River. The first floor of the CCC lodge was an Orvis shop. It was doing some business, but not very much; they moved the Orvis shop upstairs, and as soon as they moved that shop upstairs, they did more business with the Orvis upstairs and everything else, than they ever did. Now that leaves open space on the ground floor, and that's what we're talking about – putting in some sandwiches, maybe some breakfast items, and things like that. But it's already located right by the river and that's where the fishermen are.

R: Are you going to have hamburger flippers and that kind of thing?

R: No, it'll be more of the...maybe some packaged, maybe some deli, because there is the opportunity to do that sort of thing without putting in any grills, putting in the exhaust and all that. We're not going to go that route. But sandwiches and breakfast items and things like that, I think we can do. And it's just trying to get a little back to the fishermen, because that's what we're having a hard time drawing out.

R: The concessionaire has to have the desire to do the kind of food service, also. I think there's that individual pride. And a lot of this is experimentation. Our contracts do allow flexibility of trying things. And the other really difficult part is because the park system owns the facilities....you come up with an idea and in 5 years we might think about it. Make that current happen and find that space. There's a lot of things we really should have that flexibility with. It does make it difficult to do that.

R: At Thousand Hills, it started as more of a Dairy Queen or something like that, and Steve was hired for the kitchen – now after the third addition they have that view out over the water.

R: [unintelligible]

R: Do you run a breakfast buffet?

R: We do on weekends. We do a fishermen's buffet on Saturday and Sunday, and then we do a brunch on Sunday also that draws well, more after the church group comes in.

R: Is that affected by the weather? If it rains, do you have more people? Our concessionaire says it's hard to guess the amount of food you're going to need.

R: We do the Friday night catfish and the Sunday lunch buffet. If I had the volume I wouldn't. I don't like breakfast buffets. Personally, I kind of tier my restaurant how I like it, and if I want to have a choice steak I have a choice steak and if I like fresh eggs I like to have fresh eggs. I don't like breakfast buffets. You can get an omelet and it's fresh and it's cooked to order. Also, if you do put up a buffet and nobody comes, then you just throw it all away. Some people love buffets and ask me why I don't have them, and I just say that all the food is cooked to order here. And I know at those buffets we'll see people. But Saturday breakfast is really low, and Sunday breakfast is good, but people come to have breakfast there because they know they'll get a good breakfast. I'm doing the same thing at Meramec, I tried a breakfast buffet there a couple of times, and the volume's not there. Unless there's a convention or a group, and that's a whole other issue that I think we need to talk about. The flexibility to let a group take over the restaurant. So you know how many, when, and what kind of food they want and you can feed them and get them in and out and make some money.

F: What about brand names? In terms of what your visitors might or might not want want?

R: Well I think it's really America. McDonald's burgers may taste crappy but you know exactly what they're going to taste like. It's sort of sad. [unintelligible]. Now on the fast food things, that quick service, I could see doing it with that.

R: I think using brand names would be a shame, fast-food brand names in the park. Why ever leave the city? It would be like prostituting yourself. I would hate it. It would lower the quality of the whole state park system. People have it all up and down every highway they go on. They want to get away when they go to the parks. We have our own brand, the CCC setting, the enamel tableware, and that's how we like it, and it's our own style.

R: Looking at the scenario, like at Sam A Baker and Meramec, mornings are just killing us. We're getting ready to add on to the store at Baker, and we want to add on to Meramec – they pre-make sausage biscuits with eggs, or whatever, and we could just have a small hot thing at the store with juice and milk and whatever. And deli sandwiches. And that takes care of, they're still getting good service there, they're getting quick service, then in the evenings they have the full table service. Then on weekends, when you know you're going to have the people there; those are the things I think we need to look at before we sit there and design and build.

R: Even if we wanted to totally subsidize the restaurants, you're still going to have the same problems of hiring staff and all that stuff. You're still going to have the same problems. What is your labor market for a 5 month year?

R: But you know, then, I mean you can keep staff there all the time, if they know on Friday and Saturday nights they're going to make some money.

(Stockton video shown)

F: With that in mind, if given the money and current concession property at Stockton state park and advised that you were to provide a food service component (i.e., table service, self service, or quick service), what would you provide and where?

R: I think I would provide table service but put it closer to the water and the marina.

R: What we're looking at, just so you know, we're hoping in the next 2 or 3 years that we'll be tearing down the motel. At this time we don't know what's going back in its place.

(Questions posed to Stockton concessionaire about occupancy, amenities, etc, answered).

R: Well the challenge is what you're going to do with the motel replacement, or with the dining lodge?

R: Both. This is kind of looking at where we're going with the dining lodge. And it will affect what we'll do in the motel business or the overnight lodging, and the overnight lodging will affect what we do with the restaurant.

R: That's the way I would look at it – whatever you replace that motel with is going to determine what you're going to do with the dining lodge. If you go back with 15 motel rooms that are nice, then that's going to determine what you're going to do with the food service. Then I think your dining lodge, you need to keep full table service but also figure out some quick food service type during the week, maybe down by the marina. If you go back with 6 more duplexes, you might as well close that thing up. Because I don't think you draw a lot out of the campground.

R: We draw a few. When it's raining, all of a sudden you'll get a big increase.

R: It looks rather cold. And I think a lot more could be done with that environment. [unintelligible]. It's kind of been worked around by the concessionaires over the years. [unintelligible].

R: My feeling is, I think the concessionaire needs to be given a lot of flexibility. I look at something, a combination of a facility that does have some sit-down capacity, but if wonder of wonders happens and it takes off, gets busy, let them expand, make it bigger; if it doesn't take off it can be rented as a boat showroom or something – give them that flexibility. Also, have a walk-up place, a nice place where you can have a burger or a hot dog and maybe an ice cream cone, and sit out there on a patio without having to go into the dining lodge. And you can operate that. Somehow, even though you only have one shot, allow for some flexibility. And if the concessionaire goes in and says, the restaurant business here is just nothing, be able to turn that into something else. The worst thing you can do in the food service business is get a bad reputation for bad food or bad service. I think it's got to be a combination – the big problem is flexibility. What you build is equally important as how you operate it.

(more questions about competition at Stockton and other facilities in the area, Corps contracts, etc).

R: We've got the duplex condos, and a lot of people come down on weekends to fish, or sail. And they don't want to pay \$90 to stay there, they just want a place to sleep, because they're out on their boat all day. And if we build back 6 units versus 12 or 15 nice motel rooms, we also have to look at how much are we going to make back on 6 units versus 12 units.

R: We've talked about the possibility that it might not be a motel, but camper cabins. But that calls up different images in people's minds – anywhere from nothing in it but a bed all the way up to really nice. The motel does good business on the weekends. In March, April, early in the season when the crappie...that's one reason they open early, is crappie season and walleye season. The motel does good business on the weekends there, but not as much – 20-40% occupancy. They would like to see a new motel. When we talked to people about it in the past, they all thought we

wanted to tear down the motel and build a new one. They weren't used to the idea that we wanted their input – we wanted to know what they thought would work.

R: The thing is, though, the housekeeping cabins aren't all that expensive, in the sense that they're often rented by several people. If 3 couples go in for one of those condos, they're getting it for \$30 a night, for a couple. That's pretty cheap. And they're usually rented.

R: The question is, what do we need to provide at Stockton. Stockton is a park to go out on the lake. Maybe just build an efficient motel. I like to lake fish, and I usually go to Truman, and we stay in a motel and eat in a restaurant at night. We grab something quick in the morning, a candy bar or something for lunch, and at night we go out and eat. And we fish Truman for four days.

R: That's about what we do at Montauk and it does work nicely. The dining is adjoining 20 motel rooms, and then you've got a series of cabins.

R: That's what Stockton is. Its not a park where you're going to go hike the trails, or that kind of stuff. People go there to fish. Or sail. Or recreate on that lake in some way. The condo units are nice, but do we need another series of them?

R: It would be nice if you could build that like Montauk, build whatever food service attached to whatever you build in place of the motel. Because the motel and the restaurant are interconnected. If the motel is set away somewhere then it's a transition. It seems to work well at Montauk because of that.

R: If you were going to put in a dining lodge at Stockton, where would you put it.

R: Well you all are near a flood pool, that's why it's up there – you can't put it...

R: The highest I've seen it is in the marina parking lot, and I've been there 7 years.

R: If you took the restaurant off that main road, what would it do to the restaurant? It seems to be centrally located.

R: If you put it down the hill by the marina I think you would pick up some lake traffic. But you might lose a little bit of campground traffic. You'd have to walk downhill, which is fairly easy, but I wouldn't want to walk back uphill after a catfish buffet. I might need to, but I wouldn't want to.

R: I think the one thing from a food service standpoint that all parks should have going for them is environment, location, a nice place to sit, obviously the deck part, you talked about the deck part being twice as popular as the inside, the thing ought to be designed around the deck, so everybody has a view of the lake. I agree, it is possible that moving it will cause a complication for getting back and forth in the park, but if you put it down there you're going to attract maybe some people off the lake, and certainly people coming down for the view, and from in town coming out for the experience.

R: And we do already have a store and such on the marina. We could do both.

R: One of the concessionaire problems we have is that you can't be everywhere at once. The more you can concentrate things, people see activity, the management can leverage that.

R: Would you say that Montauk is the most successful food service operation? What would be the most successful food service operation?

R: Thousand Hills.

R: That's the draw, there, Kirksville.

R: But he also does a very good job.

R: But like he said, his business is hard, and he's tried and worked at it.

R: Montauk and Bennet, probably. But you've got people coming in there to put money into fishing.

R: I just meant the most successful fit of the facilities.

R: At Montauk we're talking about building a new store, extending the building to put in a store and putting the coffee shop back, and allowing him to keep the dining lodge, the dining room, and if he gets a lot of people in he can open it up and spill back in there. But he'll basically operate his food service out of a snack bar.

R: Something like at Roaring River where they have the coffee shop in the dining lodge? Also, the concessionaire is very successful with his restaurant at Sam A. Baker – if you look at the numbers from before he came and now. I think all of our food service entities have been successful in what they're doing with their customers. But what we're here to do is, can we do something better in working with our concessionaires, from a design or whether it's hours, or working with the store or whatever.

R: Along that line, if I had a dollar for everyone who walked into our store which is right next to our restaurant and said, "is there a restaurant around here?". Because, "dining lodge" – and people call on the phone and want to know if they can get a room at the lodge. And we say we don't have one, and they say, oh, I thought there was a lodge there. And then people think that the dining lodge is for people that are in our cabins or are camping to go eat. And there's nothing there that says "Restaurant". There's a little sign that has a fork, knife, and spoon, but so many people come into the store for a cup of coffee and we tell them they can get it at the restaurant, and they say, "Where's the restaurant?" We're here, but there's a lot of people that don't know that. That "dining lodge" kind of throws them a little. So we call it "The Lodge Restaurant" in all of our advertising, we've been doing that. At Meramec, we call it "The Fireside Lodge Restaurant". If we start throwing "restaurant" in there, people start thinking that it is a restaurant and not a "dining lodge".

R: How's that working?

R: It's worked great at Baker, but it just started at Meramec. And when you look at it, there's nothing there. There's no lighting, there's no sign at the restaurant, it's just blank rock. People don't know what it is.

R: As a new person, when I started with the parks, I was confused by the term. But it is a biblical thing, because it goes back to the CCC days.

R: We had the same problem with our facility at Roaring River, the building is really awesome when you're standing at the bottom of the hill looking up at it, but we still have people come into the office and ask if there's anyplace to eat.

R: You're right, and I've heard that about Roaring River. I've heard people say they thought it was someone's house.

R: That's one thing we're working on now, is a sign. That the concessionaire, I'm sure, will pay for themselves. Some of our signs are badly placed, too, like as you're coming down the big hill into Roaring River and trying to make that turn to save your life, there's a sign there. You're not too worried about reading it.

R: That's always been a problem, that sign.

R: We have nice big carved signs, at Table Rock now, that really help. People going to the marina know exactly where they're going. It really focuses entry to the marina. Before we had to give people directions all the time, but good signage works wonders. It directs people, no matter what it is.

R: I would also agree, but even if it's a beautiful sign that says "Dining Lodge" I'd still probably sit there and scratch my head. You know, the old dining hall...that's not a really inviting thing.

R: Like a military thing.

R: Yes, and you don't know if you belong there or not. And is it rows of picnic tables and benches in there, or what? We get a lot of that.

R: The CCC, that's what it was.

R: That's a great point.

F: Closing.