

Whether or not charges should be made for recreation on public lands has been argued pro and con for many years. Growing pressures on all recreation resources and growing realization of the economic interrelationships between public and private recreational facilities and services have been factors tending to predispose public recreation agencies toward more widespread use of fees for the use of recreation facilities. Recent legislation, such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1964, is indicative of the growing acceptance of this practice.

Complaints from private investors about competition from free public facilities have added impetus to public policy decisions to require fees for an increasing array of services and facilities. Judging from current trends, fees for the use of public facilities will become increasingly important in the future. These, in turn, can encourage profit-motivated private investors to develop recreation enterprises. However, it should be emphasized that the proper or desirable roles of private and public recreation developments are poorly defined. Studies are needed to determine the multiplier effect of public investments in various recreation facilities, how they encourage complementary private development, the role of concessionaires in the desired composite pattern of development, and related economic problems.

The level of fees and charges for various kinds of recreation varies widely depending on the quality of the specific services offered, as well as the general location of the recreation enterprises, the degree of competition, and whether the firm is profit or nonprofit oriented.

Fully one-third of the firms operating recreational enterprises, covered in a survey, made no charges for recreational use of their facilities.¹⁵ In addition, an unknown number of nonprofit, quasi-public, and cooperative groups may have assessed only nominal charges for services, but have operated essentially on a nonprofit basis.

In two out of three enterprises, charges were made for recreational opportunities. Average dollar charges for 14 separate kinds of services and for situations where a single charge was made covering many types of services are shown in table 3. These are nationwide averages and may bear little relationship to fees charged in a single region or by a single firm.

¹⁵ Chilton report, table 34, p. 40.