RECREATIONAL IMPLICATIONS of the HORSE INDUSTRY

by

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DEPARTMENTAL INFORMATION REPORT NUMBER 3
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Introduction

In the United States today, the horse is utilized predominantly as a recreational product. The full significance of the effect of horse-related activities within the recreational field is relatively unknown. However, as the available statistics are analyzed, some very interesting speculations appear.

The horse has a distinct heritage in the American culture due to the fact that prior to industrialization, agriculture and transportation were dependant upon this source of power. Actually, the horse is then one generation removed as a necessity in much of the American economy. With the machine age came economic and population change. As the mode of transportation and the production of agricultural products became more mechanized, and as people began to follow the source of the economy to factories in the cities, the use of the horse faded—until recently.

"Paradoxical as it may seem, in our automated, computer-governed age, the horse is once again becoming an important part of American life," not as a product of necessity, but as one of pleasure for recreational purposes. It is difficult to determine the number of horses since the United States Census Bureau no longer includes horses in its statistics. However, the American Horse Council has estimated the present horse population as being between 7 million and 10 million. This would indicate a doubling of the horse population of 4.5 million counted in 1959, and a further doubling of the present number of horses within the next ten years.

The estimated horse industry in the United States today exceeds an investment of $7.5 billion and it costs about $5 billion per year just to keep and feed the horses in this country. It has been estimated that the value of all horses in the United States is something more than 52 billion. Texas' horse population is estimated at 600,000 for an average value of $400 per horse—a total value for horses of $240 million.

The recent increase in horse interest is located primarily around urban and metropolitan areas, as indicated by Alampi: “….New Jersey, one of the smallest and most urban of the 50 states where the horse population has risen in the last 10 years from roughly 20,000 to an estimated 50,000, contributing one billion dollars to that state's economy.”

Horse-related Activities Compared to Other Recreational Pursuits

In 1969, Americans spent $83 billion for leisure activities, which is now recognized as the fastest-growing business in the United States. This figure tops the current annual outlays for national defense. The revenue derived from horse-related activities is not included in this total. It
is apparent, therefore, that the horse industry has not been recognized as a major contributing factor to the field of recreation. A comparison of figures derived from activities compiled in 1969 reveals that there were 4 million snow skiers; 7 million horses owned; 8 million boats, ranging from flat-bottomed rowboats to sleek yachts, which are stored at 5,500 docks and marinas; 9 million tennis enthusiasts; 10 million water skiing participants; and 12 million golfers utilizing 1,000 courses. The areas of snow skiing, tennis, water skiing and golf were reported in figures establishing the actual participation of users; whereas, the number of horses and boats reported could be used several times a day by different people yielding a greater participation count.

The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission reported that in 1960 horseback riding was ranked as the thirteenth most popular outdoor recreational activity in the United States, ranking one below camping and ranking above water skiing, hiking, and attending outdoor concerts and plays. In 1965, there were 77 million recreational horseback riding occasions experienced by Americans. This is expected to increase 44 per cent to 111 million occasions by the year 1980, and to increase 132 per cent to 179 million occasions by 2000. It should be remembered, however, that this survey occurred on non-urban public designated recreation areas of the United states. At this point, consideration should be given to the fact that present demands have far exceeded those predicted in the 1965 report and as stated previously, most horse-related activities occur in urban areas which were not considered in the above-mentioned report.

The scope of the issue is more clearly brought into focus as we review the individual's expression of preference of a desire to participate in specific activities in the future. Horseback riding received top priority. (See Figure 1).

In a national recreation publication recently, a challenge was issued to the recreation profession through the inclusion of a special section concerning horses, which stated: "Although only a few of the many equestrian programs around the country are featured in this section, those included make it clear that people enjoy horses and that recreation specialists would be well-advised to encourage their fullest use. The horse industry and people who are users of horse-related activities should work together with recreation professionals in order to bring about the proper facilities required for present and anticipated participation. The horse-park concept is more prevalent in areas other than Texas. Prior to the present time, parks in Texas were not needed to satisfy demands because many equestrians had their favorite trails. However, with the construction of fences, development of subdivisions

There is one primary prerequisite for any recreational facility--DEMAND. People demand activities and are willing to pay for them; therefore, facilities result. Private and public recreation growth is determined by the user. Consider the activity of boating--the large number of boaters has grown out of the increase of leisure and income. Several factors have influenced the growth of this industry: (1) publicity; (2) convenient name-brand distributors; (3) various methods of finance; (4) demonstrations, shows and exhibits in areas of heavy use, such as shopping centers; (5) accessibility of a wide-range of types and prices on boats; and (6) the
availability of facilities for boating. These factors allow more people to own boats which in turn creates more of a demand for boating facilities, i.e., lakes, rivers, and reservoirs.

Fig. 1.--The individual's expression of preference of a desire to participate in specific activities in the future

Therefore, in lieu of the statistics available, it is advisable for the leaders of the horse industry to become aware of the fact that if they want to compete with other components of the recreation and leisure billion-dollar business, they need to be informed about horse-related recreational research.

Areas of Research Under Consideration Pertaining to Recreation and Horse-Related Activities

As a result of current horse-related activity trends, the following areas of recreational research are indicated: federal, state, and local legislation concerning horses; establishment of a horseback riding trails system; urbanization of the horse; design of horse facilities; and characteristics of the user of the horse.

Federal, State, and Local Legislation Concerning Horses

The legal basis for horse-related activities is very significant in its effect upon the horse industry. Federal, state, and local laws pertaining to horse-related activities should be examined for their interpretation as applied to Texans. These regulations, ranging from federal
statutes such as the National Trail Systems Act to individual agency policy, control the future of many equestrian activities,

Three states which have established trails systems for horseback riding through legislation are California, New Jersey and Massachusetts. Connecticut legislation has aided horsemen through the passage of a limiting liability bill and has established horse trails through the formation of a land trust. Many Texans are currently facing zoning restrictions affecting their horses. Church assisted the Connecticut Equine Advisory Committee in formulating Model Zoning Regulations for keeping horses for personal use, for commercial use, and for the holding of horse shows. It is feasible that these models could be applied within Texas.

The agency policies established by Fairfax County, Virginia, and Cook County, Illinois, are two examples of local legislation which could serve as guidelines for several Texas agencies. The Forest Preserve District of Cook County maintains 200 miles of trails for horsemen. A unique feature of the preserve is its issuance of a license for each horse and each rider using the facility. The rider's annual license is at a cost of fifty cents. The purpose of the license is to control the use of the trails by informing the rider of their regulations.

Establishment of a Horseback Riding Trails System

The need of additional trails for horseback riders is becoming more evident. With an ever-increasing number of horses being located near urban complexes, safe areas for riding are becoming a necessity. Phoenix, Arizona, has constructed a horse interchange as a part of its boulevard system in order to decrease the hazards to horsemen.

In California, trail riding is probably already one of the largest participant sports. There are approximately 350,000 pleasure horses in the state and an estimated 300 riding clubs. Unfortunately, as the horse population and trail riding has increased, the amount of open space, especially around metropolitan areas, has decreased. Mott's recommendations to the California State Horseman's Association were:

1. That the riding and hiking trail concept be broadened.
2. That the grand loop trail concept be revised.
3. That each county develop a master riding and hiking trail plan.
4. That the State Department of Parks and Recreation give greater emphasis to trail construction within units of the State Park System.
5. That county trails be coordinated between the counties, the state and the federal government.
6. That an inventory of easement and rights-of-way be secured.
7. That the Resources Code pertaining to the hiking and riding trail program be clarified insofar as eminent domain procedures are concerned.
8. That the State Department of Parks and Recreation assists counties in their planning efforts.
9. That each county develop a coordination committee to develop a master trail plan.

10. That the State Riding and Biking Trails Advisory Committee be expanded in its interests and responsibilities.  

Much of the financing of rights-of-way to build hiking and riding trails were received from a pleasure riding tax imposed by the counties in California, with matching funds from the State's Land and Water Conservation Fund.

A feasible trails system is contingent upon many factors. Therefore, a unified effort toward planning is necessary if the network is to receive optimum use, A survey of Texas is needed in order to determine what facilities and properties are available on national parks, state parks, forest preserves, private lands, abandoned railroad right-of-way, municipal parks, easements, Corps of Engineers projects, etc., for horse-related activities.

The State of Texas Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan revealed that there were 53 miles of horseback riding trails in the State in 1964, and 22 of these miles were located within city parks. There were no plans to develop more trails between 1965 and 1970. Estimated requirements, to meet the 1970 horseback riding demand in Texas, were 877 miles requiring 12,278 acres of land. The major allocation of trails according to demand should be located near metropolitan areas.

**Urbanization of the Horse**

Since a major portion of the horse population is centered around and in urban areas, the needs and uses of the horse must be considered in the light of the environment to which he is confined. Some objectives included in this research area are:

1. To determine the desired program of management pertaining to the optimum health of the urbanized horse, including nutrition, grooming, exercise, parasite control, immunization, etc.;
2. To define objectionable features involved with maintaining a horse in the urban setting such as odor and flies;
3. To determine the criteria for adequate facilities such as equestrian centers and arenas which would be functional as well as attractive;
4. To develop guidelines which could serve as a basis for the establishment of a horse trails system, keeping horses off free-ways and busy streets;
5. To provide instructional programs in horse-related activities for groups of all ages, skill limits, interest, etc.;
6. To determine feasible methods of locating facilities based upon user distribution and compatibility with other recreational activities; and
7. That the Resources Code pertaining to the hiking and riding trail program be clarified insofar as eminent domain procedures are concerned.
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7. To test the model developed by Church as to its applicability in Texas municipalities.
On December 17, 1970, the Board of Recreation and Park Commissioners of the City of Los Angeles, California approved a 70-acre equestrian facility to be developed at Griffin Park. The documents and plans of this undertaking should be of interest to those who contemplate similar developments.

Design of Horse Facilities

"There may not yet be a horse in every garage in California, but at the rate their popularity and population are growing one thing is certain—places for riding horses and facilities for housing them, other than the family garage, are an increasing need. Another need, apparently, is for horsemen to be with other horsemen.

Advanced knowledge and technology could cause a complete innovation in the design of horse facilities. Consider an attractive stable with automatic watering units, automatic feeding units, automatic waste disposal units, automatic exercise devices, automatic grooming units and you will eliminate many people from the horse business. However, many design features are feasible and imagination is the key.

Some of the most marketable horse facilities are those located in planned community developments and retire-resort developments. The plots designed for horse use are the first to sell.

Characteristics of the User of the Horse

The user is the most important item to be considered in the horse industry because he is the buyer of the product. Horses do not usually come with a money back guarantee as is the case with most recreational products. Age; income; preferences of breed, color, size, performance, finish, etc.; skill and ability of the rider; leisure time; willingness to travel; and purpose preferences are some of the user characteristics which need to be determined in order to know what kind of horses are most in demand.

Conclusion

Research can aid in bringing about adequate legislation, trails, and facilities to insure a place for the horse in the present society for those individuals who believe that "The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man."
REFERENCES


5. Ibid.


9. Ibid., p. 59.

10. Yeates.


13. Ibid.


