



Cape Lookout, 1973

CHAPTER 5

We Learned How to Live with Less: **Running on Fumes, (1970 - 1990)**

In 1990, nearly thirty years into his career as the head of Oregon State Parks and Recreation, Dave Talbot sat down for a series of interviews for a new history of the Oregon parks system. The questions posed largely dealt with ideas, mission, and accomplishments. What was he most proud of? What was the ethos of state parks? He was tasked with looking back, but he couldn't help but return numerous times to the one thing that would define the future of the park system: money. "The whole funding issue is yet to be resolved," he proclaimed more than once, and he worried that parks would "have to live with a hand-to-mouth existence." This issue was never far from his mind. Finding enough money to pay for parks while still "do[ing] the thing that's right" would always be a constant concern.¹⁹¹

Through the 1970s and 80s, shifts in funding required shifts in philosophy. From the beginning of Oregon State Parks in the 1920s, the gas tax had been the largest single source of revenue in park budgets. During the international oil crises of the 1970s, this revenue was removed— "temporarily" in 1977, then permanently by constitutional amendment in 1980. But the oil crises were only the beginning of two decades defined by recession. By the 1980s, Oregon State Parks and Recreation was reliant on the General Fund and the whims of the legislature. Left with no other options, Oregon State Parks in the 1970s and 80s had to borrow against the future. Fewer parks were established than ever before, and critical maintenance was delayed in the hope of better times to come.

The budget crunch collided with an expansion of responsibility. Federal and state initiatives of the 1960s and early 1970s expanded the role of state parks along the coast and in communities across the state. Conservation and

191 David G. Talbot, "Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks," April 10, 1990, Interview with Lawrence C. Merriam and Elisabeth Walton Potter, p. 25, Folder: Administrative History – Oral History – David G. Talbot, Director, 1964 – 1992, Box: Staff Biographies and Oral Histories, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection, Oregon State Parks and Recreation, Salem, OR; David G. Talbot, "Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks," June 6, 1990, Interview with Lawrence C. Merriam and Elisabeth Walton Potter, 109, *ibid.*

historical preservation—aspects of Parks that had been underemphasized for decades—were now mandated. These new programs and priorities had to grow even as budgets shrank. New programs also served to highlight the fissures among the staff. As Oregon State Parks expanded, relations between employees and management became less fraternal and more professional. Discrimination and sexual harassment, which had been a part of Oregon State Parks from the beginning, became more visible and less acceptable—though these issues by no means disappeared (see Chapter 7). As Talbot and the rest of Parks leadership attempted to meet the needs of Oregonians and the demands of the legislature, they looked to layoffs, unpaid volunteer labor, and restructurings that left field staff shaken.

The 1950s and 60s had been an era of possibility and growth, both in the size and scope of the parks system. Throughout the 1970s and 80s park staff and management found ways to do more with less. Constant crises wore on morale and sanded down ambition. Land was given up, maintenance deferred, plans put on hold. And yet the parks soldiered on, by the end of 1980s serving more visitors than ever before despite the losses of money and employees. But park staff could barely hold it together. These decades came to define the tenure of Dave Talbot. He had started in 1964, a young man ready to bring Oregon State Parks in step with the nation. But when he sat down in 1990 to remember his time with parks, all questions led back to one. How could parks survive without a source of stable funding?

We Were Hunkered Down in Full-Scale War: **Budget Fights Amidst Prosperity**

Even before the budget crunches of the 1970s, there was tension over how much highway money to dedicate to parks. Dave Talbot later remembered the period immediately following his appointment in 1964 as the low point of relations between Parks and Highways, despite or perhaps because the deprivation of later decades had not yet set in:

[E]lements of the Highway Department who were always afraid the park people were going to go crazy and start spending a lot of money and doing a lot of crazy things. I think this was a control issue. It was clear to me that the money was certainly there. Large quantities of money to further park objectives, if I could get a hold of it.¹⁹²

For state parks supporters, this had been a worry since the 1920s. Being nestled into the budget for highways allowed parks to get much of their funding without a bruising appropriations process, but parks boosters from Robert

192 David G. Talbot, "Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks," April 10, 1990, p. 9.

Sawyer onwards had feared the possibility of Parks ceasing to be a priority. The ambitious and expanding agenda of Oregon State Parks in late 1960s had to be enacted under the supervision of highway administrators who considered it their duty to limit highway spending to road construction and maintenance, rather than parks or heritage programs. Oregon in the 1960s made some substantial investments in state parks and infrastructure. Talbot remembered this period of success as a “full-scale war”¹⁹³:

*We were hunkered down in full-scale war mode. I spent all day and all night for I don't know how many years in that ugly situation of working in a place where you knew you really weren't welcome, and people in important places would get you if they could.*¹⁹⁴

Dave Talbot noted in a 1968 staff newsletter that funding issues were at the forefront of his mind. Acquisition programs continued in 1968, but construction projects were completely shut down and staff salaries were kept abysmally low. Talbot hoped that the end of the year would bring an end to these shortages.¹⁹⁵

In the late 1960s, possibly in response to this battle for funding, there was a push within the Highway Department to make state parks a subordinate arm of Highway Maintenance. Park supporters used to worry that parks had the position of a pet dog under the Highway Department. This move would have turned the parks division into a hungry stray. Dave Talbot, only a few years into his leadership, threatened to quit—already, as he put it, “burning my bridges behind me by having confrontations with the [managers] of the world.” State Parks had friends in high places, and State Highway Commission Chair Glenn Jackson and Chair of Parks Advisory Committee Loren “Stub” Stewart intervened. The move to put parks further down the pecking order was quickly quashed.¹⁹⁶

Tensions eased following the reorganization of Highways into the Department of Transportation in 1969, but the feeling of being under siege still fueled the drive for independence. The generally bountiful budgets of the era and high-profile support for expansion suggested that boom times might continue with an independent park system. By the end of his career, Talbot had come to view these early clashes with Highways leadership as useful training for brutal choices on politics and staffing to come. “I learned how to fight inside like you wouldn't believe,” he later reflected. “I know how to do terrible things.”¹⁹⁷

193 Lawrence C. Merriam, Jr., *Oregon's Highway Park System, 1921 – 1989: An Administrative History* (Salem: Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, 1992), 50 – 51.

194 David G. Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” April 10, 1990, p. 17.

195 David G. Talbot, “The Superintendent Says,” *Oregon State Park Times* 6:3 (Nov. 1980), p. 1.

196 David G. Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” April 10, 1990, pp. 15 – 16.

197 David G. Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” April 10, 1990, p. 21.

Tak[ing] a bloody beating: The Willamette Greenway

The Highway Department's desire to relegate parks to a subset of maintenance was one sign that the growth and prosperity of the 1960s and 70s would not spell success for parks. The other was the disastrous Willamette Greenway project. Large-scale projects such as Scenic Waterways and Ocean Shores were able to make real progress in the move for scenic spaces for all Oregonians. Despite grumbings of government overreach, these successes solidified the position of State Parks as an agency to be reckoned with. In contrast, the rise and fall of the Willamette Greenway Project marked an epochal shift in Oregon parks. One of the most ambitious of the mammoth plans taken on in the 1960s, the Willamette Greenway was at its inception the largest project Oregon State Parks had attempted. In 1965, with calls for Willamette River protections from many directions and the just-passed federal Land and Water Conservation Act poised to pour funds into Oregon, the time seemed ripe to try something ambitious.



An excerpt from one of many plans for the Willamette River Greenway drawn up in the 1970s. Plans were no doubt prepared with great (but unfounded) hope.

In 1967, with both Governor Tom McCall and his erstwhile opponent Bob Straub supporting intervention along the river, what became the Willamette Greenway Project began to take shape. It was initially conceived of as a continuous greenway and park system stretching along the banks of the Willamette from Eugene to Portland, as a sort of riverine analog to the free travel available along Oregon beaches. In 1967, a committee convened by McCall released a plan full of ambition but light on specifics, promising “the preservation and enhancement of the river’s natural environment while at the same time developing the widest possible recreational opportunities.” It called for camping spots, recreation areas, boat launches, scenic conservation easements, large tracts for recreational centers, a vast network of trails—and no concrete plans regarding how any of it would be paid for. Supporters, the Highway Department, and the parks would have to find a way.¹⁹⁸

The project needed millions and got thousands. Estimates of the costs for the full plan ranged from \$10 million dollars on up; after a heated campaign the Oregon legislature was coaxed into ponying up \$800,000. In 1969, Highway Commission Chair Glenn Jackson got some headway with a plan to convince local areas to put up matching funds for a single Greenway park in each relevant county. But the biggest break would come in 1970 at the federal level, when Talbot had to respond to a schmoozing emergency. As he later recalled:

I was on Sawvie’s Island one day when a State policeman pulled me over, and I couldn’t imagine what I had done wrong... as it turned out, [State Legislator] L. B. Day had secured \$5,000,000 from the Secretary of the Interior. I was to get myself to Washington, D.C. as fast as I could to help get all the paper work and news releases and everything fixed. So, I just dropped everything [and] jumped on an airplane.

Within a day, five million dollars in matching federal funds for Greenway projects was in the bag. Suddenly there was “a lot of pressure down the pipe[,] with all this money to move it.” Although some legislative reluctance remained, there was enough commitment in the governor’s office and the Highway Commission to set aside some funds for the project even without additional monies being allocated. As a sort of triage, the focus came to be on preserving the river banks themselves, a natural corridor that might or might not be useful for recreation at a future date. Some tracts were easy to acquire; other property owners refused.¹⁹⁹ In 1972, the Willamette Greenway Project ran headlong into a backlash from many rural constituencies. The key point of contention was eminent domain.

198 Thomas R. Cox, *The Park Builders: A History of State Parks in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), pp. 137 – 152, esp. 151 – 152.

199 Cox, *The Park Builders*, 152 – 158; David G. Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” May 16, 1990, Interview with Lawrence C. Merriam and Elisabeth Walton Potter, 49 – 53, Folder: Administrative History – Oral History – David G. Talbot, Director, 1964 – 1992, Box: Staff Biographies and Oral Histories 49 – 53;

It was impossible to realize the original vision of the project—a riverfront recreation area that stretched from Portland to Eugene—without forcing at least some property owners to sell at market value. The legal right of Parks and Recreation to do so was well established. The original laws on state parks in 1921 and 1925 had endowed them with the power of eminent domain where necessary. But this was little known and less accepted by the 1970s. Many Oregonians still supported the original vision of the Greenway, not least governor-elect Bob Straub, one of the foremost champions of the idea from its inception. But even the mere threat of involuntary seizure of riverfront property was a bridge too far for a critical mass of citizens and their legislators.²⁰⁰

Oregon State Parks and Recreation faced a new statewide organized opposition, the Willamette River Frontage Owners Association, created in 1972 to beat back the Willamette Greenway. Responding to the “army of Highway right-of-way agents” sent to acquire riverfront land, this group pushed the legislature to cut off funding for acquisition in 1972, then pushed through legislation that sharply curtailed the possibilities of eminent domain for the Willamette Greenway. “[W]e were really in a hole over the condemnation thing,” Talbot later recalled, “even though we hadn’t condemned anything.” He had hoped to ease off and soothe the tensions of the moment, but Governor Bob Straub insisted on moving forward with the project he’d campaigned on. As Talbot floridly recalled it, the governor told him to “get on your horse and get your spear and get going, you wimpy bureaucrat.” But Talbot was unable to override the storm of opposition that was brewing.²⁰¹

Opponents passed the 1973 Willamette River Greenway Act which (together with its 1975 successor) effectively torpedoed the original vision of the park. It banned the use of condemnation along the riverfront to seize farmlands for park purposes, redefined conservation to include current farming practices, and shifted substantial decision-making power from the Department of Transportation to local governments. Legislative attempts to resurrect the original conception of the Willamette River Greenway as a park were unsuccessful, despite having the support of Governor Bob Straub. Indeed, the legislature came perilously close to stripping eminent domain from the State Parks’ toolbox altogether. The original Greenway project “was effectively shut down” in the late 1970s. Efforts for conservation continued, but vision of a continuous park along the river faded. The Willamette Greenway Park remained an unrealized dream. The “low key program” that bore the name going into the 1980s turned into an umbrella term for the uneven development of a checkerboard of parkland near the river. An attempt at the end of the decade to pursue the more ambitious version under a different name—“possibly just drop[ping] the ‘green’”—came

200 Sam A. Kozar, compiler, *State of Oregon Constitutional Amendments... Together with the General Laws...* (Salem: State Printing Department, 1921), Chapter 343 [S.B. 365], 654.

201 Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” May 16, 1990, p. 52; Cox, *The Park Builders*, 158 – 159.

to nothing, and a 1988 call to “implement [the Willamette Greenway] with high priority” fared little better. The Willamette Greenway never lost its name, and the dream has never died (see Chapter 7).²⁰²

Talbot saw the defeat of the Willamette Greenway Park as the end of an era, the point at which Parks and Recreation “moved from a land purchase program to a land-use planning program.” After “tak[ing] a bloody beating” on the Greenway, Talbot and the Parks Commission became more cautious in their approach to acquisition, and in their approach to politically sensitive issues. The budget crises to come would turn this caution from strategic wisdom to economic necessity.²⁰³

People with a Common Interest: **The Parks Party Bus?!**

Fights over the Willamette Greenway highlighted both the threat of rural backlash against parks, and also the need for coalition building. Managing a sprawling parks portfolio meant serving several sometimes contrary constituencies. New monies from federal programs also meant new forms of federal oversight. State parks had to navigate and complement moves for local parks on the one hand and National Parks or Natural Areas on the other. And most critically, Oregon State Parks and Recreation had to find ways to serve the whole population of Oregon amidst a deepening divide between urban and rural residents—a divide that came to threaten the bedrock the department was built upon.

Building relationships with rural residents had long been a critical part of building the park system. Parks served many functions, but their role in bringing urban dwellers “back to nature” had been at the forefront of many parks movements from the beginning (see Chapter 1). This framing ran the risk of alienating rural residents, who might feel excluded from park planning or even coerced into giving up rights or property for the enjoyment of others. From the beginning of Oregon State Parks, the help of influential power-brokers able to build support for parks in rural regions had been critical. Sam Boardman had Bob Sawyer. Dave Talbot had Stub Stewart.

202 Talbot remained convinced that a gentler approach might have succeeded; he blamed the failure in part on Highway men used to wielding eminent domain as a matter of routine. Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” May 16, 1990, pp. 49 – 53, quotations on 52 and 50; Webb Sterling Bauer, “A Case Analysis of Oregon’s Willamette River Greenway Program,” PhD Diss., Oregon State University, 1980, 102 – 152; David Talbot Memo to File, “Meeting with Governor Atiyeh,” Jan 22, 1979, p. 2, Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Nov. 14, 1980, p. 9, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; 2010 Citizen Advisory Committee, “Oregon State Parks 2010 Plan” (Salem: Oregon Parks and Recreation Division, Department of Transportation, 1988): 8 and 37 - 39, Box: Strategic Plans 1956 – 2012, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

203 Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” May 16, 1990, p. 53; Bauer, “A Case Analysis of Oregon’s Willamette River Greenway Program,” 180 – 181.

Loren “Stub” Stewart was an upstart lumber baron and a canny conservationist. He made a fortune building a midsized lumber empire in Oregon in the 1950s and 60s, where his company found special success by finding new uses for “waste” products, and by diversifying into areas like recreation and construction. Among many educational and conservationist causes, he spent over 40 years volunteering his time, services, and money for Oregon State Parks. For most of those years he was on the State Parks Advisory Committee, wielding power and influence both subtle and overt to shape the course of state parks.²⁰⁴

Along with his hard-nosed approach to organization, many Park personnel remembered Stewart’s Advisory Committee annual trips as especially significant. Likely starting in 1962 and (at least initially) funded by Stewart himself, the State Parks Advisory Committee would pile into a bus and visit a series of parks or potential parks in Oregon (and occasionally visiting parks in neighboring states). They would bring along a smorgasbord of park personnel and visiting officials, and would meet with local community leaders and would-be donors at each stop.

These annual tours were an educational opportunity and an outreach program, a way to connect those making decisions about state and national parks with local conditions and constituencies. As Talbot later recalled, the idea was:

*to be out and around talking to people about State Parks, how we could better coordinate with the counties, how we could help in a variety of ways. You have these people with a common interest in the bus talking (thirty-five to thirty-seven people from a wide variety of interests and agencies). Just being on the bus together for two, three or four days, especially for the new people, they could make contacts so fast that paid off for so long.*²⁰⁵

In addition to networking between state and national advisors and personnel, the trips also served to cultivate and demonstrate dedication to the areas of Oregon they were visiting:

Go to Eastern Oregon, go to Southern Oregon, go to these people and say ‘We are here to help. What do you think?’ They liked it a lot. They deserved that a lot, and they don’t get very much of it by organized government. And here you are bringing in the National Park Service from Seattle and the head of this and the head of that and the guy from Washington, D.C., and local people feel better about their relations with government as a result.

This was a lesson that stuck with Talbot in the hard times to come, and this (he thought) was the core purpose of the tours. For many, the early trips were

204 “Bohemia, Inc. History,” *International Directory of Company Histories* 13, Tina Grant, Ed. (St. James Press, 1996); “Loran L. Stewart” Biography, World Forestry Center Leadership Hall Exhibit (Portland, OR: 2003).

205 Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” June 13, 1990, p. 130.

remembered most vividly as a sort of roving party—“raucous, joke-telling, good ’ol boy, outrageous drinking bouts, among other things. Just crazy stuff.” Eventually “Stub and his cronies had to clean up their act” in later decades—out of chivalry when Lucille “Lu” Beck became the first woman on the committee in the 1970s (see Chapter 4), and out of necessity as norms changed in the 1980s. But the underlying function of the tours as a means of connection remained. The parties had a purpose. The warm relations built on these tours became especially vital as government ambition for state parks began to cool.²⁰⁶

Fear of the “White Elephant”: **Planning Parks in a More Modest Era**

This coalition building became more important as the decades wore on and the role of State Parks as a highway agency grew more tenuous. In 1973, the Oregon Legislature created a distinct Parks and Recreation Branch within the Department of Transportation. Still subject to the Highway Division, Parks and Recreation nonetheless had their status as a separate entity confirmed and clarified at this juncture. But 1973 also marked the onset of a difficult period. Throughout Talbot’s long career with Oregon State Parks (1964 – 1992), almost every move towards independence was coincident with calamity. Even as the new Parks and Recreation Branch gained more independence and responsibility, funding was in decline and popular support was wavering.²⁰⁷

One thing has always been true of Oregon State Parks: there is never enough money in the budget to do all that has been asked of the department. Park staff and the Advisory Committee spent most of their time together on budget concerns, even in the comparatively flush 1960s. During his time on the committee, Alfred “Cap” Collier was perhaps the most likely person to grill staff on the fundamentals. Like many others on the Committee, he combined business success (like Stub Stewart, in the lumber industry) with a commitment to state parks (including Collier Memorial State Park, much of which was donated to memorialize his family). In meetings, he combined folksy stories with practical questions. In conversations about new parks, he could be relied upon to bring up the necessity of adequate toilets. Collier was willing to get into the muck of the details.²⁰⁸

In 1972, Collier expressed his fear of spending state money on a “white elephant,” a park that did not fit the goals or needs of the system and would create continuing expenses if accepted. Looking back on decades of acquisition, staff and committee members in times of economic stress saw several white

206 When he was told to “take care” of a journalist in 1962, Dave Talbot took him to a tavern and taught him a gambling game to keep him out of trouble. If that was the “tame” activity, one can imagine what else the tour might have gotten up to. Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” June 13, 1990, pp. 132 – 135, quotes on 132 and 135.

207 Dave Talbot to Parks Staff, Feb 21, 1973, Folder: State Parks Departmental Bill, Steps towards Independence, 1985 – 1990, Box: Legislation and Statutes, Oregon Parks and Recreation Collections.

208 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee conference call minutes, April 6, 1972, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981.

elephants on the horizon. The move from “land purchase” to “land-use planning” that Talbot voiced regarding the 1970s was far from absolute—park acquisition continued in the decade, and even trickled on amidst the economic shocks of the 1980s. But fear of “white elephants” began to play a larger role in acquisition decisions. The reflexive protective purchasing of the Boardman era had been superseded by more deliberate strategic decision-making.²⁰⁹

In a special meeting called on December 19, 1972, “Stub” Stewart, the Advisory Committee, and Oregon State Parks leadership hammered out a set of park priorities. The first order of business was to speak to the balancing act that had been bubbling since Boardman: “Should emphasis be on recreation or preservation?”

*Even though 87% of the total Parks System acreage is currently undeveloped [they answered], it is not our intention to duplicate the preservation job now being done by other agencies, especially the federal agencies. Emphasis should be placed on recreation development, but at the same time protecting what natural resources we have under our jurisdiction.*²¹⁰

Preservation would persist, but moving forward the “Recreation” portion of the mission would gain increasing prominence. This was a culmination of a decades-long push in the direction of land use rather than land protection (see Chapter 3). The Committee also urged a continued focus on “land ac[qui]sition, especially when unique land areas become available.” Particularly, they urged that “[l]ands acquired should have some attraction and be located where demand is greatest.” The attraction could be a natural feature, a historic space, or something purpose-built for recreation (motorbike raceways were the example given). “Commercialism” would “not be encouraged,” but neither should the Boardman-esque “present policy of discouraging almost all commercial services” be continued. Fear of “white elephants” notwithstanding, the Committee and staff planned for steady growth with a more careful eye to the needs and desires of visitors. What they didn’t anticipate was the quarter-century of economic shocks that would slowly push the park system to the brink of oblivion.²¹¹

Worries of “white elephants” in 1972 must have seemed extremely prescient when the “black swan” oil embargo of 1973 sent the United States economy into a tailspin. Oil prices jumped 350%, helping to precipitate a series of economic crises that consumed the rest of the 1970s. Because of their reliance on gas taxes, Highways and State Parks in Oregon were hit especially hard. One of the arguments for placing and keeping Oregon State Parks under the

209 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee conference call minutes, Aug 7, 1972, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981.

210 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec 19, 1972, p. 1, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981, *ibid*.

211 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec 19, 1972, pp. 1 – 3, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981.



Preservation and recreation: The inherent tension between recreation and preservation has existed since day one at Parks. Leaders from Boardman forward have grappled with the mission.

jurisdiction of the Highway Department had been the perceived stability of the gas tax. Parks seemed prized by the public but vulnerable to cutbacks in times of economic stress. The assumption had been that gas revenues would be comparatively more reliable, as they had been during the Great Depression. But with gas prices at the center of the current crisis, gas taxes faced new scrutiny and protest. The main source of funding for Oregon State Parks and Recreation seemed like it might sputter out, just as the visitor boom that had propelled the breakneck pace of the 1960s flattened and fell. As lines for gasoline grew, state park use dropped by a third, and was still significantly below previous years by 1974. Although there remained “sufficient funds for the basic program,” the acquisition goals that had been the agreed-upon focus began to idle. Visitor numbers would recover and reach all-time highs by the late 1970s. The budget would not.²¹²

212 On the energy crisis that began in the 1970s, see Meg Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2016); State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec. 15, 1977, p. 1, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, April 12, 1974, p. 1. The term “black swan” has come to refer to a catastrophic unanticipated event. Kenneth A. Posner, *Stalking the Black Swan: Research and Decision Making in a World of Extreme Volatility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

The whole system was running on fumes. Rural counties hit especially hard by Department of Transportation cuts to the highway budget pushed for a removal of parks from the highway fund, and/or an effective “moratorium on immediate and future plans for state park acquisition and development until the State’s financial picture is improved.” By 1976, the proposed budget for Oregon State Parks and Recreation was roughly half of what it had been a decade earlier (when adjusted for inflation). Without at least a few cents increase in the gas tax, ODOT Director Bob Burco warned, “layoffs will continue and programs will suffer.” Voters, still feeling the sting of stagflation, soundly rejected every proposed gas tax increase. The layoffs continued. The programs suffered. And before the end of the 1970s state parks would be out of gas entirely, as first politicians and then voters prevented parks from getting any of the gas tax funds.²¹³

Amidst hard budget decisions, “Cap” Collier’s fear of “white elephants” combined with a narrower sense of what state parks should strive for amidst the tapestry of park and nature organizations and governmental bodies in Oregon. He saw more “natural” spaces in the template of Boardman as the right niche for Oregon State Parks. “What we want mainly,” he proclaimed in 1977, “is a place for people to wind-down.” If a particular acquisition seemed like “more of a wind-up park,” Collier thought it was best left to the counties or the country, rather than the state. Made at one of “Cap’s” last meetings, Collier’s call for state parks only as places of refuge seemed from an earlier era. He was listened to, in this case, because the “wind-up parks” he rejected were often more expensive to staff and run.²¹⁴

Increasingly, Oregon State Parks began moving land to county control, at least where the counties could reasonably pursue parks and recreation goals on their own. As late as 1971, this had seemed unlikely. When one such potential transfer was raised, “Cap” Collier had wondered if it would “establish a precedent,” and was assured it would not. Yet by 1972, transfers of parks were often considered and occasionally enacted. This could be a way of attempting more harmony with local governments, which might want to shape parkland on their own. Particularly, as Talbot later pointed out, the move toward county control helped to fund locally desired “small, relatively appealing, no sex appeal kind of projects” that lacked the “pizzazz” of big, splashy parks. And it seemed like a way to get more parks for less money.²¹⁵

213 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Nov 18, 1976, p. 3, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981. The estimate of “roughly half” includes adjustment for inflation; if not so adjusted, the budget was around two-thirds. Exact budget calculations vary depending on the nature of the records used and what is and is not included. State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Nov 18, 1976, p. 9, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Aug 10, 1979, p. 2, *ibid*. “Stagflation” is the term of art used to describe a state of high inflation, high unemployment, and stagnant demand—a particularly nasty kind of economic crisis.

214 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee conference call: Scoggins Reservoir, July 13, 1977, p. 3, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981.

215 Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” Apr 10, 1990, p. 37; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee conference call, Oct 7, 1971, p. 2, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, May 22, 1981, p. 4, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

Whether to move to local control was a complex question, one that was often scuttled by feasibility issues or the wishes of original donors. But at a time when Oregon Parks and Recreation could not afford to develop the land under their purview, local control and local dollars could make the difference between success and condemnation. By the mid-1980s, “Stub” Stewart and the rest of the Parks Advisory Committee praised efforts for “Parks to dispose of surplus lands” that did not fit into goals of a streamlined system. By 1989, in one of their last meetings, a majority of the Parks Advisory Committee pushed against efforts from the legislature to put an old-growth forest under state park control. The era of automatic acquisition was dead. Boardman’s long shadow had been eclipsed.²¹⁶

We Fell into Hard Times: **Gas Runs Out of the Park Budget**

Park staff hoped in vain that the budget shortfalls and austerity measures of the mid-1970s would not continue into the new decade. In 1979, the legislature made Oregon State Parks and Recreation a coequal branch of the Department of Transportation. This marked a shift to equal footing between Parks and Highways. But as was the case with every move toward independence in the era, the change was coupled with calamity. The move to equality was enabled in part by the loss of gas tax revenue. With the state budget feeling the squeeze of a tough economy in 1977, the state park system was “temporarily” deprived of its share of the gas tax. This money didn’t come back. After three years of temporary measures, the deprivation was made permanent. In May of 1980, by state constitutional amendment approved by over two-thirds of Oregon voters, Oregon Parks and Recreation was severed from this portion of highway funds. Attempts to get these moneys back in 1983, 1987, and especially 1992 did not come near success.²¹⁷

Revenue from other sources, particularly visitor fees, provided for many of the day-to-day costs of running parks, but they were not sufficient to meet demands for expansion, or even maintenance. The loss of gas tax income was a wrench. But it was not a surprise. Dave Talbot remembered being attacked many times over the years for not, as he put it, “throw[ing] myself on the spear as many thought I should.” But he thought this loss of funding was inevitable. And he was not alone. New Governor Victor Atiyeh and old Highway Commissioner Glenn Jackson echoed feelings across park leadership when they concluded in 1979 that “the constitutional amendment seemed to be inevitable

216 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec. 2, 1986, p. 2, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, April 28, 1989, p. 2, *ibid*.

217 David G. Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” April 10, 1990, p. 18; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, April 1, 1983, p. 6, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989; City Club of Portland, “Constitutional Amendment Limits Uses of Gasoline and Highway User Taxes (State Measure No. 1),” (Portland: City Club of Portland, 1980); *FYI* 153 (July 26?, 1996).

and we shouldn't fight it." Voters feeling an economic pinch and the first tailwinds of 1980s anti-tax movement (see Chapter 6) seemed determined. The official position of state parks became that they would "[s]tand back and let the chips fall where they may." As they maneuvered through a fundamental funding shift, Dave Talbot and other park personnel tried to reframe the continuing financial fallout as an opportunity. To Talbot, this loss signaled a need to move from specialized funding to the General Fund. "To risk the loss of money to strike out for independence was worth it," he proclaimed. But what many would later see as foolhardy bravado was, arguably, making the best of it. The money was already gone.²¹⁸

Despite shifts in the parties, platforms, philosophies in the governor's office through the 1970s and 80s, Oregon's state parks remained a popular cause. But there was a tangible shift in the sense of the possible, particularly when it came to budget. The 1980s saw significantly more collaboration with local groups and local governments—both in terms of decision-making and in terms of where the money for parks would come from. When it came to funding major acquisitions, Talbot wrote in the margins of one report, "the Gov. choked." As Oregon's economy limped through the 1980s, state parks remained popular, but getting enough money to run them seemed nearly impossible.²¹⁹

It was initially unclear how devastating the loss of the gas tax would be. Budgets and staff would have to be cut, but in its first year thrown into the state budget process Parks seemed to be "fairly successful." But then the 1980 crash hit and the economy tanked, again. As inflation, unemployment, and the worst recession since the 1930s gripped the nation, Oregon State Parks were at the mercy of a General Fund reeling from losses and dealing with crises. "We knew it would be tough financially, but we had no idea how bad it would be," Talbot confessed to park staff a few years later. "The transition... could not have come at a worse time." As Talbot remembered in 1990, "It took us a decade coming out of that vote in '80, and the terrible recession, and the game plan falling apart, the General Fund not being there, we then fell into hard times and learned how to live with less." This lesson was forced on parks time after time after time.²²⁰

Budget shortfalls came hard and fast. Almost every year Oregon state parks had to make up for another deficit by firing staff, abandoning projects,

218 David Talbot Memo to File, "Meeting with Governor Atiyeh," Jan 22, 1979, pp. ii and 13, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981; Talbot, "Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks," April 10, 1990, p. 19.

219 Talbot had been referring specifically to Gov. Vic Atiyeh, but his assertion was soon applied generally across state government. David Talbot Memo to File, "Meeting with Governor Atiyeh," Jan 22, 1979, p. 1, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981.

220 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Aug 10, 1979, p. 2, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981; David G. Talbot, "From the Administrator's Desk," *Oregon State Park Times* [issue unknown] (Dec 1984), Folder: Staff Newsletter—Park Times—1984 to 1990, Box: Publications – Staff Newsletters, 1963 – 1994, Oregon Parks and Recreation Collection; Talbot, "Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks," April 10, 1990, p. 23.

Strict divorce from Highway Division seen

Measure 1 poses dilemma for parks funding

By SUE HILL
Oregon Statesman Reporter

Use is down, fees are fewer, state legislators are critical, and now a two-month-old interoffice memo has surfaced to add to the woes besetting the once-resplendent state park system.

The memo, from the attorney general's office to the state Highway Division, says the severance of parks from the state highway fund — an issue up for a statewide vote this May — would be a greater financial setback to the Parks Division than originally thought.

The opinion, written by Jack Solis, an assistant attorney general assigned to the Transportation Department, says that if Measure 1 passes in May, the fiscal divorce between parks and highway will be "strict."

"IT IS NOT LEGALLY possible to stretch the meaning of the words ... Solis wrote to state Highway Engineer H.S. Coulter last November. "... the new language ... is probably the most restrictive of any constitutional dedication language relating to highway funds than will be found in the United States."

Solis says practice of leasing equipment have to be in rest

Highway Division, Solis also outlines other mutual aid areas that parks will no longer be able to enjoy.

THAT MEANS, IF VOTERS pass Measure 1, the Parks Division may have to go to the legislative Emergency Board seeking additional money to reimburse the highway fund for capital equipment, rentals in joint offices and other administrative services.

Parks officials said Friday they are not sure of the budgetary implications of Solis' opinion. However, an Oregon Statesman reporter learned of one \$400,000 estimate that one would officially confirm.

Measure 1 seeks to limit use of the tax and motor vehicle taxes making up Highway Fund exclusively to highway and maintenance.

Up until last year, parks and state drew partial funding from the Highway Fund. But the 1979 Legislature tossed them the \$60 million savings to highways.

MEASURE 1 WOULD SIMPLY budgetary separation into the two funds so that future legislative

The Secretary of State's office is required to attach an estimated fiscal impact to all legislative bills. The fiscal impact on Measure 1 is officially zero since the budgets are all balanced.

Norma Paulus said last week that certain all

public to turn to smaller cars and make fewer trips. As a result, the once booming gas tax now cannot keep pace with inflation.

GAS SHORTAGES ALSO HURT the parks' budget. Parks officials said Friday that park use in 1979 was down 17 percent, leaving a \$400,000 hole in its revenues in the first 6 months of the 1979-81 budget.

Times may turn tough for state parks system

By CHARLES E. BEGGS
Associated Press Writer

Oregon's state park system, after years of feasting on highway funds, is adjusting to what may be a permanently leaner diet. Concerned that parks now have to compete with such programs as welfare and education for General Fund tax dollars, officials are considering options including a statewide property tax increase. "We're going to see a different picture," says David ...

DOT officials report no danger to parks if Measure 1 approved

The Department of Transportation convinced Secretary of State Norma Paulus this week that the state Parks Division will suffer no hidden financial peril if voters approve Measure 1 at the polls in May.

Measure 1 would permanently restrict use of state gas and motor vehicle taxes to highway construction, repair and maintenance. Until last year, part of the highway fund was used to finance operation of parks and state police.

The 1979 Legislature jumped the gun and removed parks and state police from the highway fund in order to release \$60 million extra to repair potholes.

The secretary of state is required to attach a fiscal impact statement to all legislative bills. Original

1 passes. When the November memo came to light several weeks ago, it gave rise to fears that parks would have to buy thousands of dollars of equipment that wasn't budgeted.

Parks has been leasing about \$700,000 worth of equipment a year through the highway fund.

The Department of Transportation, parent of the parks division and guardian of the highway fund, reviewed the whole issue and decided this week that there is no fiscal impact.

Department officials now point out that rental rates charged to parks include a depreciation charge to finance new equipment. Accumulated depreciation should provide enough equity to allow purchase or replacement of equipment. The department argued this week when

Money crunch may close some state parks

PORTLAND (AP) — A money crunch may prompt the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Division to close or lease remote parks,

parks superintendent David Talbot said Friday.

The loss of gasoline tax funds has crippled the division's ability to purchase or

maintain parks in areas remote from urban centers, he said. He said the division must "concentrate bucks where the people are going to be."

Ballot Measure 1, passed by Oregon voters in the May primary, limits gas tax and license fees to highway maintenance. The measure forces the parks division

into competition for funds with other state government programs, Talbot said.

Recreational vehicle taxes are retained for parks but Talbot said high gas prices in future years could annihilate that source. He said recreational vehicle taxes provide about 34 percent of the division's money.

If the parks division does find itself cramped for money, maintenance of Oregon's parks system could suffer, Talbot said.

"We would rather start closing parks than cut back on the quality of service people are used to," he said.

The number of out-of-staters in Oregon parks is declining while more Ore-

gonians are using them, Talbot said. Last year 35 million persons cruised through the state's parks, he noted.

The parks division may have to charge visitors if money gets tighter, Talbot said, but he isn't in favor of that approach.

"We will have to get the money from the guy that goes to the beach and to the river, but we would rather go right for general fund money than try to collect it at the gate of every small park in the state," he said.



Bill to aid U.S. fishermen progresses

WASHINGTON (UPI) — A bill that could end foreign fishing in American

zone he introduced last fall at the request of Oregon fishermen.

The 1980 constitutional amendment removing Parks from the gas tax coffers was a watershed moment for Parks, leading to decades of financial struggle.

or deferring maintenance. Almost every year, these hard decisions were by a command to brace for more cuts. “[S]ome cuts are drastic,” as Warren Gaskill, Talbot’s second-in-command, warned the Advisory Committee in 1981. “[B]ut we are looking at a \$1 million dollar problem.” In the worst predictions, the gap yawned to 30-plus million dollars. The popularity of parks (and the political wiles of their supporters) kept the worst of these disasters at bay. There was little doubt in the 1980s that the “real gems in the parks system would be preserved at all costs.” But park staff had to reckon with near-constant uncertainty about their projects and their job prospects.²²¹

The most at-risk programs were centered on interpretation. Due to continuous budget shortfalls, “the history stuff in parks...languished.” The more ambitious plans of Elisabeth Walton had to be put on indefinite hold. “We have done bits and dabs,” Dave Talbot said of the history programs of the period, “but there is so much to be done.” As with all funding issues, “history stuff” was a question of priorities. In a later interview Talbot mourned that colleges were turning out too many “people who want to get into ‘interpretation,’” a “certain kind of people,” instead of “the kinds of people that we need.” Talbot did not clarify what “kinds of people” they needed, but interpretation people weren’t it. But Talbot also said that one of the “most satisfying parts of my career has been the rounding out of a good basic park system with historic properties that are really valuable and important.” To Talbot, interpretation in these properties (and parks generally) mattered. But it was a benefit rather than a necessity. Attempts in 1981 to make History its own department was beaten back—but then, there was little money to devote to *anything*. The State Historic Preservation Office still received federal funds, but those areas of history not under their purview, like museums and interpretation, withered. In the triage of the 1980s a lot of things that mattered went unsupported.²²²

Nickel and Dime Fees to the Public: **The Cents of Desperation**

With the gap in the budget looming larger, park personnel had to take a hard look at services previously provided for free. Sometimes this was a matter for the legislature, as in 1982, when parks were finally given a sufficient share of boat taxes to pay for the boat services they provided. Other perks previously

221 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Feb 19, 1981, p. 5 - 6, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 - 1989 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, May 22, 1981, pp. 4 - 5, *ibid*; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, June 16, 1982, p. 2, *ibid*.

222 David G. Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” April 8, 1990, Interview with Lawrence C. Merriam and Elisabeth Walton Potter, 64, Folder: Administrative History - Oral History - David G. Talbot, Director, 1964 - 1992, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” June 6, 1990, pp. 115 - 116; Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” June 13, 1990, p. 136; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Feb 19, 1981, p. 2, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 - 1989; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Feb 25, 1982, p. 2, *ibid*; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, June 16, 1982, p. 6, *ibid*.

given for free to visitors had to become fee-based to survive. The “days of free firewood [were] gone forever” by 1980, and fees for camp reservations were reinstated the following year. Many new small fees and taxes were suggested to try and make up the constant shortfalls in park budgets. Big-ticket items, like a one cent tax on cigarettes, were longer-term goals (in part because cigarette taxes had to increase by five-cent increments, since vending machines [!] didn’t take pennies). In the meantime, rental fees had to be hiked up, vehicle fees were rolled out in selected parks, and RV licensure costs were increased. There were worries about these efforts to patch the budget. Would visitors read these fees as an attempt to “nickel and dime them,” and get angry? But with holes in the budget looming large and “Highway funds...no longer available as the ‘balancer’ for [the] budget,” many at Oregon State Parks and Recreation felt they needed every



“Two dollars!!? Do you think I’m *made* of money?!!

Campsite surcharges for out-of-state visitors had little impact on Parks revenue, but generated ill will in the tourism industry for the 10 years it existed.

dollar they could get. By end of 1981, “nickel and dimes fees to the public” were a regular agenda item for the Parks Advisory Committee.²²³

The crisis also meant a slow acceptance of unpopular measures. In 1977, the Oregon legislature had added a \$2.00 surcharge for campers from out of state. This was a popular measure among many Oregon voters. Indeed, amidst the “Unsolicited Comments” in the 1975 visitor survey “[m]any comments were received from Oregonians suggesting that nonresidents should be charged higher fees.” Parks personnel, on the other hand, protested this shift, correctly predicting that it would generate significant ill-will and insignificant revenue. Despite the protests of personnel in 1977 and a unanimous call from the Parks Advisory Committee to repeal the surcharge in 1978, the special fee for out-of-state visitors remained.²²⁴ And by 1981, the Parks Advisory Committee and Dave Talbot had quietly dropped their previous protest against the surcharge. Every dollar counted. And then these surcharge dollars, too, disappeared in 1987.²²⁵

Some attempts at usage fees, however, proved immediately impossible. One such proposal was the charge of an extra \$1 fee for those who brought dogs to the parks, the logic perhaps being that dogs inflicted more wear and tear and required more kinds of clean-up and maintenance. The blowback at the very idea was immediate and enormous. Unable to fully express just how badly the notion had fared with the press and the public, Talbot had staff and the Parks Advisory Committee watch a “Dog Fee Tape” to see visceral reactions to even the suggestion of a fee to take pets to parks. Hearing the “howl of protest [that] was raised by the canine community... the idea was quickly dropped.”²²⁶

Replacing gas tax dollars with money from the General Fund had been unavoidable. When Talbot tried to spin this into a positive, he relied on popularity. The immediate solution for budget shortfalls, he suggested early in 1982, should be: “More General Fund [money]. People love parks—we need and deserve it—give us more money.”

223 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec 3, 1982, p. 1, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, June 16, 1982, p. 2, *ibid*; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Oct 15, 1980, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Nov 14, 1980, p. 7, 8, 4, *ibid*; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec. 3 – 4, 1981, p. 7, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec. 3 – 4, *ibid*.

224 Parks and Recreation Branch, Department of Transportation, “Oregon Parks Visitor Survey, 1975,” (Spring 1976), 16; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Nov 1, 1978, p. 4, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981.

225 Arguably, the disappearance of the surcharge in 1987 was a net positive, signaling a shift toward bringing in more tourist dollars overall. However, many Californian would-be visitors remembered the surcharge even a decade later, and some assumed it was still in force. State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Feb 19, 1981, p. 3, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, May 22, 1981, p. 7, *ibid*; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec. 4, 1987, p. 10, *ibid*; “Californians See OPRD Road Show,” FYI 225 (Jan 16, 1998).

226 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec 9, 1983, p. 2, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, April 17, 1984, p. 7, *ibid*.

Love of parks could be used to pry vital dollars out of a Governor or a committee at the last minute, but the positive associations Oregonians had with state parks did not lead to a demand for more taxes to fund them. In the political economic climate of the 1980s, such a move would have been unlikely. Park revenues improved over the summer of 1982 (with “the return of the nonresidents”) but did not fully rebound. Unable to thrive on a shrinking budget, Oregon State Parks in the 1980s pursued new donors, new rank-and-file supporters, and a new unpaid labor force.²²⁷

The Long-Term Salvation of Oregon State Parks: **Volunteer Programs and Citizen’s Groups**

From 1980 on, Oregon State Parks and Recreation came to rely on unpaid labor, particularly from expanding and empowered groups of volunteers. Of course, the system had leaned on volunteers nearly from its inception, from the park improvements Jessie Honeyman had organized to the interpretation offered by citizens’ groups at Champoege. But now the park system could not function without them. At the beginning of the hard times in 1970s there had still been “sufficient funds for basic operation.” In the grim 1980s, that was no longer the case. Volunteers and donations made up the difference. New park host programs had volunteers doing work previously accomplished by paid personnel. Growing “Friends of” groups enabled significant improvement, fundraising, and advocacy. As park budgets were cut to the bone, donations of time and money became the lifeblood of the system.

Donors had always been key. Most of the state park system had been built from donated land, and now more and more of the funding had to come directly from the citizenry. Just as Boardman, Sawyer, and Honeyman had done in the 1930s, Talbot, Stewart, and much of the rest of the Parks Advisory Committee found a lot of their work for parks was fundraising. Cultivating donors large and small was a critical part of getting big projects off the ground. For what became the Deschutes River State Recreation Area, much of the funding was raised by thousands of people giving through organized groups like the Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation. But Talbot also borrowed a helicopter through “Stub” Stewart to court a big donor who, just as Boardman had, “liked green stuff” in her wilderness rather than “the brown country”—and so needed to be flown to the green center of a proposed acquisition. “Stub,” of course, was a major donor in his own right, and a soft touch. Talbot remembered that when he was closing in on the last of the funding for the Deschutes River project, “[Stub] said, ‘I think

227 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Feb 25, 1982, p. 2, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, June 16, 1982, p. 2, *ibid*; John L. Mikesell, “The Path of the Tax Revolt: Statewide Expenditure and Tax Control Referenda since Proposition 13,” *State and Local Government Review* 18:1 (1986): 5 – 12; Clarence Y. H. Lo, *Small Property versus Big Government: The Social Origins of the Property Tax Revolt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).

I can get you [an additional] \$50,000. But you've got to pay me back.” Talbot never did. Stub kept giving anyway.²²⁸

“Friends of” groups rose to new importance in the 1980s. Citizens groups for parks predated the state system, of course, from Champoeg on (see Chapter 1). But now “Friends of” groups would work hand-in-glove with state parks people. “Lu” Beck came to the Parks Advisory Committee in 1976 after co-founding the first of this new kind of group, the “Friends of Tryon Creek,” in 1970. The group coordinated place-based volunteer labor, advocacy, and education—and built a base of donors small and large.²²⁹ In the 1980s, with Lu’s encouragement and eager acceptance by a cash-strapped state park service in need of allies, “Friends of” groups expanded. The Tryon Creek model, Talbot expounded in 1990, was

*the forerunner of what I think might be the long-term salvation of Oregon State Parks. That is the development of citizens groups [such as]; Friends of Tryon Creek, Friends of Silver Falls, a Friends of whoever movement that will take another decade.... At the end of that decade we will have twenty or thirty of those things with membership of thousands with a constituent body who really cares, who will go to “war” for Oregon State Parks.*²³⁰

It was increasingly clear in the 1980s that Oregon State Parks needed all the Friends they could get. Drawn by love of a specific park, these groups might become advocates for park affairs generally. In 1985, the state legislature made these already-growing relationships official, clearing the way for enduring partnerships between Oregon Parks and non-profits. In 1990, asked about how parks had changed since the 1960s, Talbot reflected:

*the business of doing things by yourself is long gone... has been gone for a decade. Very few things will ever occur anymore where you don't have a whole host of people being a party to it. The simplistic, one agency things aren't going to happen anymore in Oregon very much unless the financial situation changes a lot. And it's probably for the good.”*²³¹

“Friends of” groups, Talbot hoped, could act as foot-soldiers for parks in the budget battles to come. This new army of supporters would perhaps be a more organized and comprehensive evolution of what had come before.

228 Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” June 13, 1990, pp. 145 – 146..

229 Anon, “Founding Story of Tryon Creek,”

<https://tryonfriends.org/stories-of-tryon-creek/2020/3/founding-story>

230 Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” June 13, 1990, pp. 134 – 135.

231 David G. Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” June 13, 1990, p. 156.

But the park host program: that was brand-new. In the summer of 1979, Talbot's second-in-command Warren Gaskill oversaw the beginning of a volunteer host program at a few coastal parks, patterned after U.S. Forest Service campground volunteer programs. These new hosts would do a mix of guidance and maintenance tasks, in exchange for a free campsite and the pleasure of their work. Talbot reported in fall of 1979 that the new host program:

*has worked very successfully in most cases. The public and our own employees appreciate the assistance provided by the hosts and the hosts "love their work."*²³²

The park host program was rolled out officially in 1980, with immediate popularity. In addition to the badly needed free labor, it served to drum up excitement for the park system: park hosts, largely retirees, acted as ambassadors for the beauties of parks. Indeed, it proved so popular that by 1981:

a problem [had] arisen in that competition for the Host position was keen in certain parks. An Oregon couple complained that they were not selected for the park of their choice—a California couple was selected instead. They felt that Oregonians should have preference for Park Host positions over out-of-staters.

The Committee tended to agree, and backed down only after park personnel pointed out that "many of the apparent out-of-staters were actually Oregonians who wintered elsewhere but 'came home' for the summers." Oregonians' tendency to blame Californians notwithstanding, it was clear that the host program had generated plenty of interest.²³³

But what could hosts or volunteers reasonably be expected to do? What about the hard and grubby work of maintenance and cleaning? As host and volunteer programs were being rolled out across the state in 1982, Talbot praised the more long-standing Friends groups but worried that "generally we could expect a long-term loss of quality in many volunteer operations dealing with maintenance." Committee member Lynn Newbry warned that "volunteer workers get pretty tired of cleaning restrooms—after about a day," and fellow member Darald Walker worried that "poor maintenance would reflect on State Parks."

But worries couldn't stop the change. Volunteers were already essential, and Parks leadership were eager to expand their use into struggling parks where staff had already been laid off. They judged volunteers "well worth it" for the work they did in hosting and trail maintenance, whatever small prob-

232 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Oct 15, 1979, p. 9, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1971 – 1981.

233 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec 3 – 4, 1981, p. 3, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989.

lems might crop up. The “hard times,” Talbot reported in 1983, “forced us into many volunteer programs.” Some of these volunteer programs involved specific and temporary efforts, like the “Company’s Coming” beach clean-up campaigns begun in 1986. But it was the longer-term host programs that raised thorny questions about labor.²³⁴

Were the park hosts workers, even though they received no salary? Early in 1984, the state of Oregon said yes. After one park host succumbed to an illness on the job, his widow filed and won a Workers’ Compensation claim. Although Oregon State Parks and Recreation did not contest this ruling, the precedent made staff and the Parks Advisory Committee nervous. There were serious considerations of scrapping the whole host program over liability concerns. Park staff suggested mandatory health screening for park hosts, but such screenings would have stood on tenuous legal ground even before the passage of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. More serious consideration was given to pursuing the exemption of park hosts from Workers Compensation laws. There was precedent for this, both in the national Domestic Volunteer Service and in state-level volunteers at ski areas or sporting events. But in the end, the employees and advisors at Oregon State Parks and Recreation accepted the hosts as essential *and* unpaid workers, covered as such.²³⁵

And it was clear by the end of 1984 that the expansion of the volunteer program was a runaway success from a management perspective. As park administrator Steve Johansen tabulated the hours put in and the tasks done, he estimated that volunteers had done work “equating to nearly 31 full-time positions.” But, as he proclaimed,

[t]he real value of the program, beyond the money saved, is the positive response of the public to the volunteers, such as the park hosts, and the enjoyment the volunteer themselves receive from performing this service.

Leadership across parks agreed, proclaiming that despite “great initial reluctance” the program quickly drew “universal rave reviews.” The rise of volunteers had enabled parks to do more with less, and had helped to build out a constituency to fight for park programs. Many of the initial worries about the program faded. The worries about workers’ comp faded as problems remained minimal. Visitor satisfaction with cleanliness remained high even after volun-

234 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Feb 25, 1982, p. 2, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec 3, 1982, pp. 2 and 6, *ibid*; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, June 16, 1982, pp. 3 – 5, *ibid*; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec. 9, 1983, p. 6, *ibid*; State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec. 2, 1986, p. 2, *ibid*.

235 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, April 17, 1984, p. 3, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989; Legislative Council Committee, *ORS 656.027* (2019), https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/ors/ors656.html; U.S. Government Printing “Compilation of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 As Amended Through December 31, 1987,” Serial 100-F (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988).



Volunteers, and especially campground hosts, have become indispensable to park operations.

teers took over many of the on-the-ground responsibilities for park cleaning and maintenance. From interpretation to guidance to restroom maintenance, the volunteer program was flush with success without costing much money—only a little training, a free campsite, and (as the official 2013 park host guide put it) “recognition[, which] is indeed a volunteer’s pay.”²³⁶

But free labor often means fewer jobs. Some, perhaps much, of the 31-full-time-positions-worth of work done by volunteers in 1984 would never have been done without them. With budgets tight, volunteers filled in the gaps. The more than 30 Parks jobs that were eliminated between 1980 and 1984 would never return. The success of volunteer programs and other means of bringing “free” labor to the parks (see Chapter 6) may well have whittled down how many paid positions there could be. Even as visitor numbers rebounded and reached new heights by 1988, staffing did not fully recover, much less expand

236 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Dec 11, 1984, p. 7, Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; Parks and Recreation Division, Department of Transportation, “Oregon State Parks Visitor Survey, 1984,” (Winter, 1984), p. 17; “Volunteers and Constituency,” 1, Folder: The Governor’s Conference on State Parks, 1985, Box: Meetings and Events, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, “Oregon State Parks Host Program,” p. 7 (Jan 2013), https://stateparks.oregon.gov/ckfiles/files/2013_parkhostprgmbasics.pdf.

to keep up with unprecedented demand. Volunteer hours did increase, with the hosts alone now doing work equivalent to roughly 50 full-time positions, and numerous other volunteers providing free labor for trailblazing, interpretive work, and numerous other tasks. The parks could not go on without them.²³⁷

The move to volunteers let state parks keep running after funding had fallen. And despite the stutters of the early 1980s and the anti-government tenor of the times, parks remained popular. Unbowed by the “bloody beating” of twelve years of increasing austerity, in 1984 park boosters and personnel began gathering allies for a new campaign. Talbot dreamed of volunteer groups with a membership of thousands ready to “go to war” for the park system. The budget battles to come would be more grueling than he had dreamed.

Up Until Now, Everything Has Been Okay: **Burnt Toast and Town Halls**

As the national economic crises began to ease in 1984, Oregon Parks and Recreation pushed for an end to the austerity. Parks budgets had been slashed time and time again since the late 1960s, and had almost been bled dry by the early 1980s. Like Boardman before him, Talbot knew that public relations were a key to park success. Boardman, who had spent his tender years wandering the great outdoors, played the part of a lone philosopher, sending wisdom and wisecracks into the newspapers. Talbot, a track-and-field champion in his youth, launched a sort of democratic decathlon to win over the public. Staff, donors, the Committee, the community, and Talbot himself would each have roles to play. The sparse Parks successes of recent years had typically come from one of two paths. Sometimes a specific project was pushed past the finish line because it had enough champions. Other times, a particular park issue became an emergency, and that urgency moved the needle at the last second. Now the task was to frame the many issues plaguing Oregon State Parks as a single grand project and a singular emergency—and to bring enough champions on board to solve it all.²³⁸

One element of the strategy was what became known as the “Burnt Toast Tour.” For six months between 1984 and 1985, Dave Talbot embarked on a media marathon. He visited at least 22 Oregon communities, convened 13 open “Town Hall” meetings, and did enough interviews to flood the airwaves and

237 2010 Citizen Advisory Committee, “Oregon State Parks 2010 Plan” (Salem: Oregon Parks and Recreation Division, Department of Transportation, 1988): 20 and 48, Box: Strategic Plans 1956 – 2012, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; Carol Jusenius Romero, “The Economics of Volunteerism: A Review,” in *America’s Aging: Productive Roles in an Older Society* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1986): pp. 23 – 50; Dylan Lewis, “Unpaid Protectors: Volunteerism and the Diminishing Role of Federal Responsibility in the National Park Service,” in *Protected Areas in a Changing World: Proceedings of the 2013 George Wright Society Conference on Parks, Protected Areas, and Cultural sites*, Samantha Weber, ed. (Hancock, MI: George Wright Society, 2014): pp. 95 – 100. The implications of a cause and effect between the volunteers taking over duties that had previously been done by paid employees and the continued reduction in paid positions that had previously included those duties are put forward by the authors alone (based on conjecture, implication, and evidence from sources primary and secondary), and do not necessarily reflect the views of OPRD, the Oregon Public Employees Union, or any other body.

238 University of Oregon, *Oregana*, ed. Sue French (Eugene: University of Oregon Student Publications Board, 1956), pp. 307, 310.

op-ed pages with parks business. Field and headquarters personnel worked behind the scenes to make sure the tour would be well-attended and well-covered: distributing surveys and fliers, prodding reporters, and calling up anyone who had expressed an interest in attending. When one early meeting attendant was asked how he'd heard of the event, he said:

*Well, I read it in our local newspaper, heard it on the radio, received a personal letter from your administrator, and had two telephone calls yesterday from local field people wanting to make sure I know about the meeting tonight and that I was planning to attend.*²³⁹

Through the dogged work of parks personnel, the “Burnt Toast Tour” drew 745 people from 82 different Oregon communities to the “Town Halls,” with thousands more hearing about the events from newspapers, radio, or television. The “Burnt Toast” moniker came from the anecdote with which Talbot started most of the meetings:

There once was a five year old boy who had never uttered a word....

At the breakfast table one morning, like a bolt from the blue, the lad spoke his first words ever: “This toast is burned.”

His mother, recovering from a near faint, let out a scream of joy, hugged her son and asked why he had never spoken before.

*“Up until now, everything has been OK,” he said.*²⁴⁰

In other words, Parks was speaking out because there was a crisis. The budget crisis that had been building for the better part of a decade would finally get attention.

The “Burnt Toast Tour” was billed as a community problem-solving event, where Talbot would outline the problem parks had and solicit solutions from the public. “We’ll provide the questions,” a flyer for the Newport Town Hall read, “you bring the answers.” And parks staff did collect plenty of answers, from surveys handed at the townhall and distributed across the state. Talbot was in part applying lessons he’d learned on “Stub” Stewart’s party bus back in the 1960s. Coming face-to-face with people in their own communities mattered. “DAVE TALBOT, state parks administrator[,] will be there to listen to you and answer your questions,” the flyer concluded. Having the head of Oregon Parks and Recreation explain the problem personally, it was hoped, would help to build a constituency.²⁴¹

239 “The Future of Oregon State Parks... The Town Hall Tour” (1985), p. 7, Folder: Governor’s Conference on State Parks, 1985, Box: Meetings and Events, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

240 “The Future of Oregon State Parks... The Town Hall Tour” (1985), p. 1.

241 “The Future of Oregon State Parks... The Town Hall Tour” (1985), attachment 1.

In fact, the meetings were less about getting answers than educating about the problem and figuring out which answers would be acceptable. Using flipcharts on a display easel to work through the studies that parks had already done, sometime standing on tables in his shirtsleeves to be seen, Talbot made the case that the park system in Oregon was critically underfunded, and needed both more General Fund money for the present and some special source of funding (to replace the gas tax) for the future. He went through alternatives for funding, then opened the floor for questions and comments. As staff later reported:

Participants suggested dozens of ways to raise money, took exception (usually in a good natured way) to some existing policies and procedures, debated without resolving some continuing problem areas, and pledged time after time to do whatever is necessary to maintain and improve Oregon State Parks.²⁴²

Few new ideas came to light in these “Town Halls.” But they were highly effective in raising awareness, within and beyond the meetings, that Oregon Parks and Recreation had a budget problem that was not of their own making. The attendees were not average Oregonians—they were those people who chose to spend a night out of their week listening and talking about Oregon State Parks problems and solutions. Although Talbot and others would sometimes use the survey responses from these meetings as a proxy for the wishes of Oregonians generally, this was more a matter of bad statistics and/or good PR than fact.²⁴³

A majority of those surveyed would have agreed with Boardman about everything but camping. Large majorities favored stronger preservation efforts, above any other question of priorities. Nature was the most important thing, but about two-thirds of those surveyed also wanted more interpretation and history. A bare majority of 51% were in favor of selling books on Oregon history in parks, but every other possible commercial activity drew more negative than positive responses. Respondents were particularly disdainful of “Gift shops” (78% opposed), “Fast food service” (82% opposed), and “Full service restaurants” (84% opposed). Boardman’s line against hot dog water, it seemed, would hold.²⁴⁴

Although an earnest desire to protect the natural world motivated town hall attendees, in appeals to the legislature and the governor parks people leaned on the bottom line: State parks bring in more money than they cost. Since the time of Robert Sawyer, a central argument for the expansion of Oregon State Parks has been the tourist and visitor dollars they bring to the surrounding areas. From 1959 on, report after report has backed up this argument with facts. Armstrong and Astrup’s Progress Reports had pointed to profits. Visitor surveys included calculations of how much the draw of park had spurred tourist

242 “The Future of Oregon State Parks... The Town Hall Tour” (1985), p. 9.

243 “The Future of Oregon State Parks... The Town Hall Tour” (1985), pp. 7 – 8.

244 “The Future of Oregon State Parks... The Town Hall Tour” (1985), attachment 3, Folder: Governor’s Conference on State Parks, 1985, Box: Meetings and Events, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.



State Parks Director Dave Talbot, making the case to the public in 1985.

spending locally. Research in the 1980s corroborated all that had come before. The fact that money spent on state parks bring a net profit to the state as a whole has seldom been sufficient to prevent budget cuts. But it was enough, in the business-minded 1980s, to bring Governor Victor Atiyeh on side. The promise of tourist dollars and the momentum of “Burnt Toast” were enough to convince Atiyeh to call for a “Governor’s Conference on State Parks,” bringing together stakeholders, by the end of 1985.²⁴⁵

When the time arrived, Recreation Director Kathryn Straton kicked things off. She had been recommending something like the town halls since at least 1980, and had years of experience shaping the message of Oregon state parks for the public. Like Talbot, she focused her comments on the problem of money. Parks were popular, but popularity wasn’t enough to pay the bills. Where could the money come from?²⁴⁶

This time, checking in on the neighbors suggested a clearer solution. When the Parks Advisory Committee had consulted with neighboring states in the 1950s (see Chapter 3), they had found no obvious model to replicate in Oregon. Now,

245 Advanced Studies Unit, “The Economic Value of State Parks in Oregon, 1959,” (Salem: Oregon State Parks & Recreation Division, Oregon State Highway Dept, 1959); Chester H. Armstrong and Mark H. Astrup, “1960 Progress Report,” (Salem: Oregon State Parks & Recreation Division, Oregon State Highway Dept, 1961): 20, Box: Progress Reports 1959 – 2003, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; “The State Park Visitor in Oregon: A Report on 1964 State Park Travel and Use Survey,” esp. 8 – 11, Folder: Publications – Administrative—Visitor Surveys, Box: Publications—Rules, Surveys, and Reports, Oregon Parks and Recreation Collection.

246 Kathryn Straton to All Participants in the Montgomery Report Meetings, Feb 17, 1981, Folder: Outdoor Recreation Planning 1980s, Box: Meetings and Events, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

as Kathryn Straton argued before the 1985 Governor’s Committee, the model was clear: “more *general* funds ought to support the system,” because “*general* Oregon citizens as well as the specific park users benefitted from it” [emphasis in the original]. Oregon State Parks at the time received a low 19% of their budget from the General Fund, whereas Idaho received 39%, Washington 65%, and California (peak oil production notwithstanding) 60%.²⁴⁷ Straton’s focus on the “general Oregon citizens” was not (just) a fun play on words. It reflected the many duties of Oregon State Parks and Recreation beyond the “recreation” for which admission could be charged, particularly preservation. “We protect a lot of land purely for scenic, historical[,] or natural resource purposes,” Straton explained. “[B]ut there is no way to recover those costs through user fees.” Some things could not be nickel and dimed.²⁴⁸

Oregon State Parks faced two related problems from budget shortfalls: there was not enough money to perform existing duties, and practically none to continue acquisitions to meet the evolving needs of Oregonians. Nickel and dime charges could fill in small gaps, but something bigger was needed. Parks leadership came to the 1985 Governor’s conference with two potential strategies. Should parks get more money from the General Fund, to raise Oregon to parity with neighboring states? Or should there be a push for some special funding source, like the oil money that had funded California parks in an earlier era?

Both! A culmination of the plan to reframe the story of Oregon State Parks came in 1987, when a Citizen Committee spent the better part of the year crafting a blueprint for parks for the next two decades. The Oregon State Parks 2010 Plan, which was published in 1988, gave an ambitious overview of the problems and solutions facing the division. Money remained central, with an array of budget fixes large and small suggested. But the 2010 Plan also generated the best data the division had ever gotten on usage, and brought together the disparate dreams that had been collected over the years.

A Vision without a Task Is a Dream: **The Citizen Committee Gets Down in the Weeds**

The Oregon State Parks 2010 Plan tried to build support and appeal through data and specifics. Parks, after all, were already popular in theory. The work was in showing what had to be done, how much it would cost, and why it mattered. After gathering all the necessary expenses together under one mantle, the writers of the report could then speak to budget solutions. If the myriad issues were framed this way *and* solved, the division could move past scattershot nickels and dimes to a more stable source of funding.

One central building block of the plan was an enormous set of surveys. A survey of visitors to parks in July and August of 1988 netted 18,000 completed

²⁴⁷ Kathryn Straton, “Amended Speech Draft,” Nov. 27, 1985, pp. 1 – 2, Folder: Governor’s Conference on State Parks, 1985, Box: Meetings and Events, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

questionnaires. There was also a phone-and-mail survey in 1986 and 1987, which got detailed opinions on recreation from a little more than 2,000 Oregonians. Both surveys were rigorous compared to what had come before, with very high response rates for the targeted populations.²⁴⁹

They found a population with a wide mix of interests, but more room for rest and reverence than had been recorded in the ad hoc surveys of the 1960s and 70s. “Loafing” had topped the activity list back in 1963, and its less judgmental equivalent “Relaxing” still topped the list in 1988—tied with “Viewing scenery” at 81% of all visitors. “Solitude” was enjoyed by 69%, whereas “Getting together with friends” came in for 56%. Boardman’s dream of quiet contemplation still held sway for many.

Visitor surveys had been standard since Armstrong, but the State Parks 2010 Citizen Committee was unprecedented in the scope and range of its inquiry. In an “eleven-month, whirlwind schedule” of meeting, tours, and hearings, they took in the thoughts of hundreds of Oregonians, read the survey responses of hundreds more, and spoke to staff and volunteers at every level. They inspected not only current parks and future sites, but campsites, restrooms, sewer treatment facilities, and structures half-consumed by dry rot after almost two decades of deferred maintenance. It was the most comprehensive investigation of Oregon State Parks and Recreation yet attempted.²⁵⁰

That time on the ground showed. The top priority, the Citizen Committee insisted, had to be “[t]he rehabilitation or replacement of existing park facilities.” In the 1980s, when any park expenditure needed a champion, the unglamorous work of upkeep had been deferred again and again. Previous top-down charges had often begun and ended with a single “grand scheme” (as Talbot put it). This time, the Citizen Committee had spent time in the proverbial trenches, and they knew “maintenance and rehabilitation of the system [had] been compromised.” Big dreams needed to be built on a stable foundation—with working bathrooms and rot-free walls.²⁵¹

Most of the recommendations boiled down to “more, please.” More parks, more trails, more history. More, in other words, of what park personnel had already identified as necessary but impossible with the budget as it was, in meeting after meeting, report after report, standing in front of the governor or standing on top of tables. Carefully phrased over several pages, the main finding of the Citizen Committee had already been summed up by Talbot almost a decade before: “People love parks—we need and deserve it—give us more money.”²⁵²

249 The visitor survey had a return rate of about 60%, the phone-and-mail survey of a little over 70%. The response rates in previous surveys seem to have been much lower and/or unrecorded. 2010 Citizen Advisory Committee, “Oregon State Parks 2010 Plan” (Salem: Oregon Parks and Recreation Division, Department of Transportation, 1988): 12 – 13, Box: Strategic Plans 1956 – 2012, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

250 2010 Citizen Advisory Committee, “Oregon State Parks 2010 Plan,” 5.

251 Talbot, “Personal Views on the Development of Oregon State Parks,” May 16, 1990, p. 87; 2010 Citizen Advisory Committee, “Oregon State Parks 2010 Plan,” 7 and 18.

252 State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee meeting minutes, Feb 25, 1982, p. 2, Folder: Advisory Committee Minutes & Actions 1981 – 1989.

A newer element the Citizen Committee added was marketing. There had been parks advertising for decades, from simple billboards, to governor sloganeering, to 30 second TV spots featuring mostly silence and trees (perhaps even Boardman might have approved). But the Citizen Committee recommended Oregon Parks and Recreation market not only its parks but itself. “[E]ducate Oregonians about their park system,” the Citizen Committee instructed. “Emphasize the value of the park system as a market for attracting tourists... [and] as a crucial part of the state’s livability.” A major way to “enhance revenues to help the park system perform its mission” was to educate Oregonians about what that mission was and how much it helped the state.²⁵³ The plan reached a crescendo that balanced hope with crisis:

As State Parks approaches its 60th birthday with a history of great success and public support, we can’t help but reflect on the fact that the system has been dormant for more than a decade—no new parks, no new campgrounds, no new programs. The legacy of Oregon State Parks is clearly in jeopardy....*

[T]he time has come for a major, new parks program... State Parks has the people, the resources, the skills and the vision to begin to meet the challenges of the future. What is needed is the support and financial backing from Oregonians to make the 2010 proposals a reality.²⁵⁴

This was the core intervention of the 2010 plan. Rather than a “grand scheme” around a single big idea, like a coastline or a river, the plan was more a grand bundle, a thousand and one things that could be done to bring Oregon parks closer to their potential. All that was needed was funding—“\$3.40 each year” for each Oregonian.

Could they replace the nickel-and-dime with the big ticket? The 2010 plan was meant as blueprint for the future, but it was also hoped that bringing all of the major needs under one roof would allow for a clearer path towards paying for them. If parks supporters could get the right raise support for the right targeted tax, or get the right levy passed, the years of triage could finally end. The focus on specifics and process, it was believed, would help make the case.

The 2010 Plan was distilled into a glossy brochure that meshed inspirational quotes with specific actions. The cover page read, “A vision without a task is a dream,” a quote sometimes ascribed to Jessie Honeyman back in the 1930s.

253 2010 Citizen Advisory Committee, “Oregon State Parks 2010 Plan,” 10..

254 The notion that there were *no* new parks or programs was an exaggeration, one that echoed what Talbot had been saying for years at this point. Although there had been a few additions to parks in the 1980s, the rhetorical weight of “no” outweighed the more accurate blandness of “few.” 2010 Citizen Advisory Committee, “Oregon State Parks 2010 Plan,” 10. *The 60th birthday celebration posited Sam Boardman’s ascension to superintendency in 1929 as a sort of Year Zero, with all state parks activity before that consigned to an earlier era of darkness. See especially Elisabeth Walton Potter to Craig Tutor, cc Jim Lockwood and James Hamrick [email], Dec 1 1999, Folder: Tracing the Origins of OPRD, Box: Park History, Oregon Parks and Recreation Collection.

The rest distilled the wonky specifics of the full plan to a collection of major points, beautiful pictures, a long Boardman quotation (of course), and maxims of varying quality—leading up to “a vision with a task is victory.” The only missing ingredient was money.²⁵⁵

In 1989, as this new fight for park funding began in earnest, the possibility of new independent department came unexpectedly to the fore. When the 2010 Plan began to seem difficult to pursue under the mantle of ODOT, independence came through in a matter of months with little debate (see Chapter 6). At long last in 1990, there would be an independent Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. Every previous move toward autonomy had been met with incidental disaster. The creation of a distinct Parks division in 1973 had coincided with the slide into years of austerity. Becoming a co-equal branch of the Department of Transportation in 1979 had also marked the end of the gas tax moneys and the beginning of even harder times. But maybe this time would be different. Writing to staff about impending independence in 1990, Director Dave Talbot praised them for their efforts during the “turbulence and change” of the prior decades, and expressed his hope that the inauguration of the new Oregon Parks and Recreation Department would mark the end of the hard times.

But there was much, much more turbulence and change ahead.



“Independence” meant turbulence and change, but it also meant cake.

255 “Oregon State Parks 2010 Plan” brochure (1989?), Box: Strategic Plans, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; Lynn Newbry to “Friends of Oregon State Parks,” Jan 19, 1989 [public letter], Folder: Agency Publications, Box: Strategic Plans, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.