

PRORAGIS Update

Six Questions Members Asked

THE ROOM WAS PACKED, and the questions just kept coming. At the 2011 Congress in Atlanta, as NRPA Senior Research Manager Bill Beckner outlined the features, functions, and future direction of the PRORAGIS system, he paused periodically for questions. And with each Q&A break came a flood of questions.

“How can PRORAGIS help enhance my agency’s revenue?”

“How do I present this to my county’s GIS personnel?”

“Who’s making sure the data is accurate?”

Most of the questions involved a two-part answer: instructions for leveraging the existing platform and reminders that this current system represents just the first iteration of an ambitious long-term undertaking. It is, as Beckner said again and again, “the 1.0 version” of the first specialized, standards-based management and benchmarking application for public lands and park programs.

Participant questions fell into the categories of profile/account creation and management, revenue enhancement capabilities, budget comparison features, lands/facilities inventorying, and data quality control. We asked the PRORAGIS team to supply detailed written answers to the questions members posed at Congress.

Beckner’s overview of the PRORAGIS system is available on NRPA Connect in the 2011 Congress Resource Center: <http://nrpaconnect.org/library.htm?mode=view&did=151814&lid=130732&wf=131257>.

Revenue

1 What revenue-enhancing features of PRORAGIS are currently in place?

An agency may be able to identify program areas that are lacking or program areas that other like-sized agencies offer that they do not. Additionally, a key, revenue-supporting strength of the system is allowing agencies

to defend budgets based on local, regional, national, or other custom-filtered benchmarks pulled from the data.

Furthermore, although the demographic feature of the web-based maps is not currently loaded, it should be loaded before January. This feature allows you define the typical trade (user population) area for a recreation/community center and identify the demographic characteristics of the population within the trade area.

This data provides the programmers at the facility with the knowledge of current and potential users and enhances the ability to provide program offerings that may increase revenues. In addition, it enables the center management to contrast the space utilization at the center with the populations that might be able to use the facility at low use times. Increasing the number of users has an exponentially greater effect on the revenues generated than raising entry fees.

2 What revenue-enhancing features are planned?

As the system matures, it will offer users the ability to tie in demographic information and operations-related data with the GIS—so as to identify revenue opportunities and underserved areas within jurisdictions. Also in the pipeline are mobile apps, such as park locators and park events calendars.

Profile and Users

3 What should we do if our department is recreation-specific and has no jurisdiction over lands?

You have the option of simply leaving the land-related questions blank.

We have also received a question related to a community where the parks department functions separately from the recreation department. Since they may only have information for the recreation department, how do they address this in

PRORAGIS? If this is the case, it will be to their benefit for reporting and analysis if they can combine information from the two departments into one PRORAGIS account. This assumes that both departments share the same lands and facilities as a base for programs and services. If in fact the two departments have separate sites and functions, then they should each register and complete a profile. If both agencies are using the same profile, they should provide data for all of the lands, facilities, programs, and personnel over which they have combined budget responsibility.

If, however, the two agencies are not completing a shared profile, then neither department should include data about the other that would result in duplication or skewing of responses.

Budget

4 How much analysis will we be able to do with budget comparisons with other departments?

The budget section is organized as a top-down approach with operating expenditure analysis from both a categorical level (Personnel, Operations, Capital, and Other) and a functional level (i.e., Executive, Administrative, Operations, Programs, Maintenance, etc.) You can perform any analysis that draws from these categories.

The intent of the budget data is to provide PRORAGIS with the information it needs to calculate a variety of budget-related metrics. It is also intended to allow the user to quickly judge the similarity between departments. Further “drilling down” of data depends on your contacting the other benchmark agencies with specific questions relevant to your study. There are so many possible budget variables it would be unfair to ask all profiling agencies to provide that level of detail. We do try to get as much information as we logically will need without overburdening respondents.

What Land is Included?

5 Should we inventory only the lands that are recognized as parks and open spaces? Or should we inventory even tiny parcels of land (e.g., median strips and parking lot areas) for which our agency is responsible?

Everything your agency manages or maintains should be included.

The cost of maintaining the small parcels is incredibly expensive compared to their acreage. I [Bill Beckner] once conducted a maintenance analysis of an agency that had 2,000 acres being mowed by three equally-sized mowing crews. Two of these crews mowed 1,931 acres. The third mowed 69 acres in over 130 park sites. We ask you to indicate the amount of land that your agency manages or maintains so as to allow for a more accurate comparison of how maintenance resources are distributed.

Quality Control

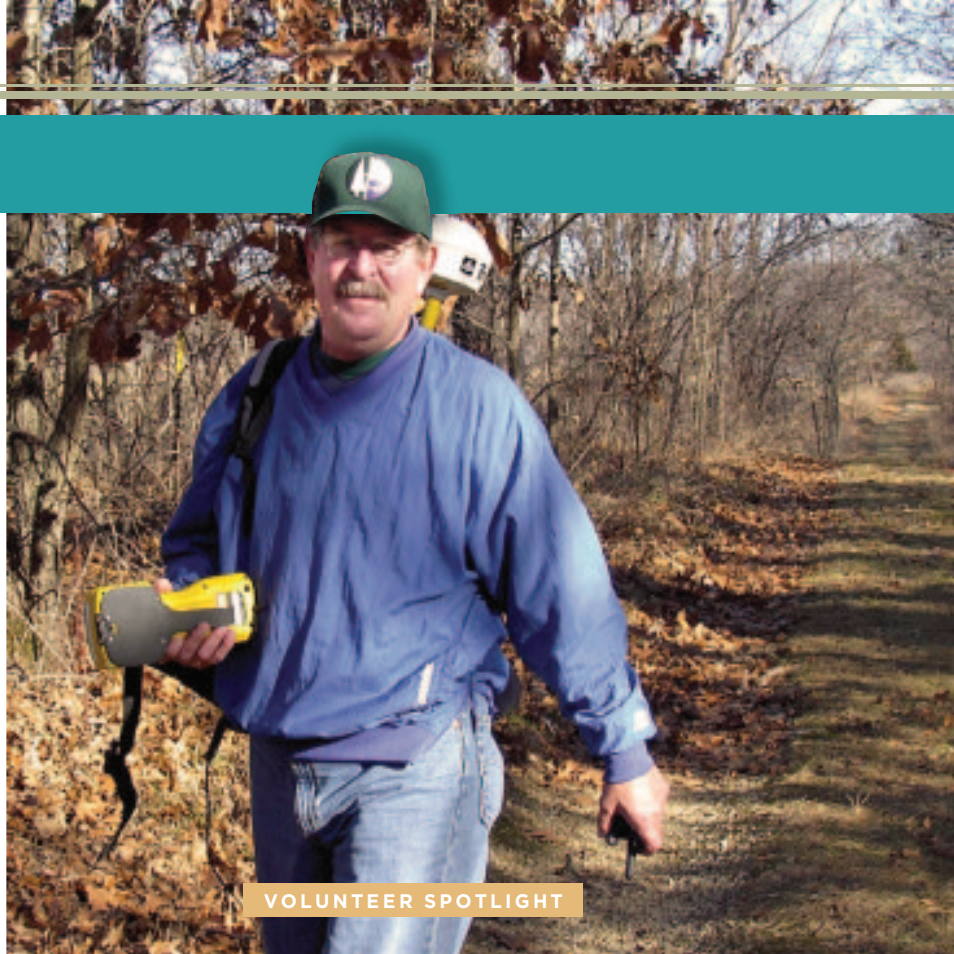
6 Since PRORAGIS is user-driven, how do I know there is someone on the other end making sure the data is accurate? I don't, for example, want to compare my costs to other agencies that do not make a distinction between maintaining developed and undeveloped land.

Since PRORAGIS is user-driven, we are inherently dependent on the persons submitting their data accurately. We are continually striving to make the form as straightforward as possible. Additionally, we provide explanations throughout the form to help agencies complete their profiles in a consistent manner. On the reporting side, PRORAGIS offers side-by-side reporting that allows users to review the data for each agency to which they are comparing themselves. Users therefore have the option of excluding anyone they feel is not an appropriate benchmarking "fit."

Industry Insights, the firm responsible for maintaining the database, also periodically reviews all of the data in the system for inconsistencies, irregularities, and errors. When necessary, Industry Insights will reach out to participating agencies for clarification on questionable items.

For more member questions—and the PRORAGIS team's answers—visit www.nrpa.org/proragis.

—Maureen Hannan



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Sid Stevenson

“You become a true professional when you start giving back”

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY Professor Sid Stevenson shared his time and expertise with NRPA—and with the entire parks and recreation field—when he compiled a complete data set of public lands and facilities for the state of Kansas and entered it into the national PRORAGIS database. Stevenson, who has been a parks and recreation educator for 29 years, believes in the high value of universally accessible park information—both for public enjoyment of resources and for park planning and benchmarking purposes. In addition to his contributions to PRORAGIS, Stevenson has developed RecFinder, an online interactive recreation database. We asked him to comment on the nature, rewards, and challenges of his volunteer work for NRPA.

1. PRORAGIS is probably the most important new product and

member benefit NRPA has initiated in the last few years. What led you to spearhead the campaign to get 100 percent Kansas participation in completing the PRORAGIS information?

The GIS component of PRORAGIS does indeed offer substantial benefits to park and recreation agencies, health care providers, and the general public by providing accurate and standardized data that aids, among other things, in planning for and ultimately supplying needed experiences in more optimal proximity to clients.

With these same benefits in mind, we had started compiling our state-wide geo-database of parks, facilities, and trails as part of the last Kansas' State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Our initial compilation had taken several years and thousands of hours. Hundreds of park

and recreation professionals contributed significant time and effort in the process. We used and converted published data where it existed, but that accounted for only about 20 percent of the total. Students in my park operations class were assigned communities; 4-Hers, trail associations, city clerks, and school secretaries also provided data. There are over 600 communities in Kansas. Fewer than 2 percent of these boast park and recreation staff with GIS expertise. We solved the lack of GIS knowledge by developing an online editor. Still, I spent hundreds of hours on the phone, emailing, and doing on-site fact-finding—just filling in the holes.

Once we had a statewide data set, it seemed a logical next step to convert it to the PRORAGIS model. It was easy for me to do most of the conversion for agencies, as I was most familiar with the data. The intent was to make the process simpler for them. Agencies don't have to start from scratch but have 95 percent of their data in the system. Now they can use the online editor to add specifics and updates.

I was partly motivated to convert to the PRORAGIS model because I could see Kansas serving as somewhat of a pilot study. We have already started the analysis phase that should be comparable nationwide. We have just completed a statewide proximity study of access to physical activity (by city class) and expect to follow that with an analysis of proximity to natural experiences. We also have RecFinder, an online, interactive service that allows the public to conveniently find parks, trails, and other recreational experiences. We are now planning significant upgrades to that service: adding mobile applications and user-generated content.

2. What advice do you have for prospective NRPA volunteers?

We have a great network of caring professionals, so you have plenty of partners. I've always felt this was a team effort. I'm not really a GIS specialist, so I had to rely on others for the next level of expertise. It grew from there with many people contributing in various fashions; some with

funding, some with technical expertise, others with agency contacts.

3. What rewards/challenges have you encountered as a NRPA volunteer?

The greatest reward for me has been being part of a team that just scored a touchdown. Professionals at all levels of government nationwide, as well as at NRPA, have taken a concept and made something great out of it. What started as an enhanced asset inventory has turned into a sophisticated professional benchmarking service and wonderful planning tool, and then into an interactive "help me find a quality experience" search engine for the public. It is now endorsed by health professionals and private enterprise, with other supporters coming on board.

Being recognized in this volunteer spotlight for my involvement certainly is appreciated and rewarding in itself.

The greatest challenge has been patience. This process of developing a mature national database will take several years, not months.

4. What do you want to give by being a volunteer?

I always tell my students that you become a true professional when you start giving back. To me it is just personal; I never liked the idea of not being an integral part of something. Being part of NRPA to me is committees and service and work sessions and presenting. It seems like a way of contributing to the greater good; and that is why I chose this profession in the first place. ✨

—Interview by Maureen Hannan

National Research Center Partnership

NRPA is excited to introduce a new partnership with the National Research Center (NRC) that will enable NRPA members to administer the Parks and Recreation Community Survey (PARCS) and the Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults (CASOA).

The Park and Recreation Community Survey can help your agency put its resources into the right programs by answering important questions about facilities, program quality, and who are your most active populations. The Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults is a strategic planning and evaluation tool to help develop programs and empower communities by developing projections of your population's future needs and communicating the needs of your older adult community.

These customizable mailed surveys will provide you with data to evaluate your programs, facilities, and policies and improve your service and communication to your populations. Your results are comparable with results from other communities, so you can see how you measure up to your neighboring communities.

NRC also provides customer service and research consultation to help you get the best results. For more information visit the www.nrpa.org/nrc.