

**South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks
2016 Stakeholder Engagement
Summary Report**



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SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH & PARKS 2016 REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER SESSIONS

SUMMARY REPORT

OVERVIEW

The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks hosted a series of four regional stakeholder sessions across South Dakota in September 2016 to share the Department's preliminary 2016-2021 Strategic Plan. The purpose of the sessions was to gather input from key stakeholder organizations and individuals throughout the state regarding the Department's past performance and its future direction. More than 300 individuals were invited to attend one of four sessions which were held in Rapid City, Fort Pierre, Sioux Falls and Watertown during the week of September 6-9, 2016. A total of 100 individuals representing 68 organizations participated in the four sessions.

SESSION FORMAT

Each stakeholder session was three hours in length. The sessions opened with a warm-up exercise led by Kitty Kinsman, The K Group, and facilitator of the sessions. Participants were surveyed to gather some demographic information and share a one-word description about what they like about South Dakota's outdoors. Participants used their cell phones to text responses to the questions. See Figure 1. for a representation of one-word responses received.

Figure 1.



Figure 1. What participants like about South Dakota's outdoors

The warm-up was followed by a presentation from Kelly Hepler, Secretary of the Department of Game, Fish and Parks on the Department's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan. He shared his motivation for undertaking the department-wide effort – to engage the entire department in a common mission and set forth a process for setting future priorities and evaluating and communicating results. Secretary Hepler explained the Department's extensive internal process to arrive at the latest version of the plan and the importance of engaging stakeholders in helping the Department refine the plan and set priorities. He encouraged those in attendance to participate in the process and acknowledged that the plan would continue to be a work-in-progress. Participants were then invited to evaluate the past 5-year performance of the Department in its core program areas using their cell phones to text responses to questions. The core program areas included:

- Hunting
- Trapping
- Fishing
- State Parks & Park Recreation Opportunities
- Other Recreational Opportunities.

Response totals were immediately available and provided feedback to participants and Department staff in preparation for the small group discussions that followed.

The next phase of the stakeholder sessions involved small group brainstorming and discussion. Participants self-selected to join one of three topical groups for smaller roundtable discussions. The groups were: Hunting/Trapping, Fishing, and Parks/Other Recreation. Groups were asked to brainstorm their ideas for success outcomes they'd like to see during the next five years in their topic area and vote on their top three outcomes. They were also asked to generate a positive news headline about successful outcome they'd like to see in 5 years. Small groups were then asked to brainstorm strategies for achieving those outcomes and identify what partnerships would be important to improve opportunities for success. Each of the small groups reported out their top ideas to the large group at the conclusion of each discussion.

The final stage of the session was devoted to a Q & A discussion with Secretary Hepler, where participants were invited to ask questions or discuss any topic of interest. Participants were then asked to evaluate their experience of the sessions by answering a series of questions, either using their cell phones to text responses or by completing a written evaluation comprised of the same questions. Some participants elected to do both.

SESSION PARTICIPANTS

One hundred persons participated from across the state. Fifty-three percent (53%) came from communities over 10,000, while thirty-two (36%) reported living in communities under 1000, in the country or on a farm or ranch. Participants represented 68 different organizations including associations, interest groups, concessionaires, vendors, government agencies, elected officials.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Participants consistently gave high rankings to the Department for its performance during the last five in key program areas. Below are highlights from the survey conducted during the sessions:

- 86% of respondents rated the Department's performance in enhancing state park facilities and experiences as very good to excellent
- 71% of respondents rated the Department's performance in enhancing other outdoor recreational experiences as very good to excellent, while 25% rated it fair.
- 64% of respondents rated the Department's performance in enhancing fishing opportunities as very good to excellent, while 11% rated it fair.
- 46% rated the Department's performance in enhancing hunting opportunities as very good to excellent, while 36% rated it fair.
- 27% reported a very strong & productive relationship with the Department, while 49% reported a good relationship, but looking for more opportunities.
- 95% reported a good to excellent personal experience as a customer of the Department.

** NOTE: Respondents who did not participate in an activity such as hunting or fishing had option to respond "I don't know." In addition, not every participant responded to each question, so results should be viewed as generally descriptive of the session responses.*

Each of the sessions had unique discussion threads that reflected the concerns of the region and its resources, however there were also some consistent themes that emerged from the discussions that can guide and reinforce future Department planning efforts. Participants throughout the state echoed the following priorities for the future work of the Department:

- Increase the number of youth involved in all outdoor activities through partnerships with schools, youth organizations, mentor organizations and the like.
- Expand collaboration among public and private partners to improve habitat and increase access to hunting, fishing and other recreational opportunities.
- Manage park development to optimize the visitor experience by avoiding overdevelopment.
- Enhance opportunities for other recreational interests to help support conservation and preservation.

- Increase citizen awareness about outdoor opportunities and how to access them.
- Identify new revenue sources to support initiatives.

The results are presented by regional session (Rapid City, Fort Pierre, Sioux Falls and Watertown) and by topical area within each region (Hunting/Trapping, Fishing, and Parks & Other Recreation). In some sessions, more than one small group discussed a topic and those results are reported separately. Each small group report highlights the top three success outcomes, their success headline and their strategy ideas as they were reported to the large group and recorded by GFP staff members who served as recorders and resources in their small groups.

SESSION EVALUATION

Participants had the opportunity to evaluate their satisfaction with the stakeholder sessions immediately following each of the sessions using two methods – text polling and a written evaluation.

Seventy seven (77) participants submitted responses to the evaluation questions during text polling, while a total of 57 participants completed written evaluations.

Participant satisfaction with the sessions was very favorable overall. Respondents reported a higher level of awareness about the future direction of the Department and viewed the session process and content very favorably. They also reported a high degree of confidence about their ability to partner with the Department on some of the ideas from the sessions. Comments from each of the sessions reflected a desire to partner and collaborate with the Department and other stakeholders going forward, gratitude to the Department for hosting the sessions and a desire to stay informed about the Department's future progress.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The invite-only stakeholder sessions organized by the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks to gather input from stakeholders and partners regarding the Department's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan were well-received and emphasized the importance of engaging stakeholders during the planning process to help identify opportunities, set priorities and cultivate partnerships. The Department has a diverse and highly engaged group of stakeholders that provided the Department with valuable insights about stakeholder issues and priorities. It also opened channels of communication among different interest groups as they discussed what common outcomes they supported and how they might work together with each other and with the Department in advancing some of the ideas. Whether groups were talking about

wildlife, fisheries, or state parks, access, habitat quality and conservation of the outdoors were unifying themes along with a desire to find new funding sources to support efforts. Participants also expressed a genuine desire to engage more young people in the outdoors in order to enhance preserve the future of South Dakota's outdoor heritage.

The future progress and implementation of the Department's strategic plan is of great interest to stakeholders. Many consider themselves and their respective organizations as vested partners in the future of South Dakota's outdoors. As the Department moves forward in setting priorities, developing implementation plans and reporting on results, stakeholders should continue to be engaged in meaningful ways to help achieve many of the desired outcomes discussed during the sessions.

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