

Trends in Local Park and Recreation Department Finances and Staffing in the Early Twenty-First Century

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: This paper is a replication of a 2003 study by Crompton and Kaczynski, analyzing local park and recreation agency financing and staffing trends. Whereas the original analysis examined data from 1964–1965 to 1999–2000, this paper covers financial data from 2000–2001 to 2013–2014, and employment data from 2000–2001 to 2014–2015. In light of the housing crisis, Great Recession, and subsequent economic recovery, the early twenty-first century provides a compelling backdrop for this replication analysis. Although the American economy experienced smaller economic downturns during the original study period, the recession that occurred during the current period was the most severe since the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s. Utilizing census data, the current analysis monitors four areas identified in the original analysis: i) self-generated revenue, ii) operating expenditures, iii) capital expenditures, and iv) employment. Crompton and Kaczynski (2003) postulated that based on unprecedented annual expenditures, the latter half of the 1990s would eventually be considered the “golden era” of local parks and recreation. Data from the current analysis indicate that high levels of support continued until the Great Recession, which impacted local government spending as a whole, and particularly parks and recreation. In adjusted dollars, total park and recreation agency expenditures fell annually every year in the post-recession period, by more than \$6.5 billion from 2007–2008 to 2013–2014. Park and recreation expenditures were reduced by a greater amount relative to competing services, accounting for a smaller proportion of total local government spending. Park capital expenditures were disproportionately cut during this period, falling by more than \$5 billion from 2007–2008 to 2013–2014. Self-generated revenue accounted for approximately one-quarter of total, and one-third of operational expenditures by park and recreation agencies, lending support for trends identified in the original analysis. Local park and recreation agencies disproportionately cut full-time positions in response to the economic downturn, with more than 14,000 full-time positions lost in the post-recession period. More than 17,000 part-time positions were added post-recession, indicating an acceleration of the shift away from full-time employment noted by Crompton and Kaczynski (2003). Implications for park professionals and researchers, as well as the need for ongoing trend analysis, are discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Local government, public parks and recreation, funding, replication, trends*

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Introduction

Securing adequate and reliable funding is a common concern for public park and recreation professionals, and has been identified as among the most pressing issues facing the field (Crompton, 1999; Mowen, Graefe, Elmendorf, & Barrett, 2015). Like other public services, park and recreation agencies have traditionally been funded through a tax-based model, wherein funding for capital, operational, and staffing expenses is primarily drawn from local government general funds. Parks and recreation also generates revenue from programs, services, and facilities, which has historically accounted for a much smaller percentage of operational and capital budgets than general fund allocations (Crompton & Kaczynski, 2003). As local government spending is responsive to larger economic and societal forces, monitoring trends in park and recreation revenues and expenditures over time may provide important insights for practitioners, advocates, and researchers. Such analyses allow for an understanding of how money is generated and spent, and can help identify areas of concern to be addressed by the field.

In 2003 Crompton and Kaczynski performed an analysis of trends in local park and recreation department financing and staffing from 1964–2000. Their period of analysis spanned from the beginning of the “modern” era of public park and recreation services” (p. 125) following the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission reports and the passing of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, to the conclusion of the twentieth century. Using data collected and distributed by the United States Census Bureau, Crompton and Kaczynski monitored trends in four specific areas: i) self-generated revenue, ii) operating expenditures, iii) capital expenditures, and iv) employment.

In the period since the original analysis, significant economic turmoil has occurred in the United States as a result of the housing crisis and Great Recession. Officially spanning 19 months from December 2007 to June 2009, the Great Recession was the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression. Consumer and business spending were dramatically cut, and approximately 8.4 million jobs were lost from the labor market, signifying a 6.1% drop in employment. The recovery has been gradual, with slow wage and employment growth putting significant financial strain on American taxpayers and the services they depend on (Economic Policy Institute, n.d.). Local government spending has suffered concomitantly, experiencing significant declines in revenue generated and expenditures (Jonas, 2012). As park and recreation agencies draw on local government municipal funds, assessing park based spending, revenue, and staffing during this period is of interest to a variety of stakeholders.

This paper is intended as a replication of earlier analyses, using the most current data available to analyze the same trends identified by Crompton and Kaczynski (2003). The period of analysis will encompass financial data from 2000 to 2014, and employment data from 2000 to 2015 (in both cases the most recent data available). The housing crisis, Great Recession and subsequent recovery will be used as a lens through which to view trends in local public park and recreation financing and staffing. Because of the significant and unprecedented economic volatility that has occurred since the original analysis, such

replication may provide important insight for park and recreation professionals, advocates, educators, and researchers.

Methods

Data for both the original and replication analyses were drawn from the United States Census Bureau, pertaining to State and Local Government Finances (<https://www.census.gov/govs/local/>) and Local Government Employment and Payroll Data (<https://www.census.gov/govs/apes/>). The Census Bureau collects this information from approximately 90,000 local governments in the United States during years that end with a “2” or a “7.” During intervening years, a smaller sample of state and local governments is used to provide the data. Following the method of Crompton and Kaczynski (2003), the data used in this analysis is confined to local governments comprised of municipalities, counties, townships, special districts, and school district governments (excluding school systems dependent on a county, municipal, township, or state government). Definitions of the different local governmental units are described in Figure 1.

The Census Bureau identified 90,056 governments during the 2012 Census of Governments. In addition to the Federal Government and the 50 state governments, the Census Bureau recognizes five basic types of local governments:

- *County Governments* (3,031). Organized county governments are found throughout the nation, except in Connecticut, Rhode Island, the District of Columbia, and limited portions of other states where county areas lack a distinct county government. They are created to provide general government activities in specified geographic areas. In Census Bureau statistics, counties include those entities called boroughs in Alaska and parishes in Louisiana.
- *Municipal Governments* (19,519). Municipalities are sub-county general purpose governments established to provide general services for a specific population concentration in a defined area. Municipal governments include cities, boroughs (except in Alaska), villages, and towns (except in the six New England states, Minnesota, New York, and Wisconsin). Consolidated city-county governments are treated as municipal governments for Census Bureau statistics.
- *Township Governments* (16,360). Townships are sub-county general purpose governments established to provide general services for areas without regard to population concentrations. They include towns in the six New England states, Minnesota, New York, and Wisconsin, and townships in eleven other states.
- *Special District Governments* (32,266). These are established to provide only one or a limited number of designated services (functions) and have sufficient administrative and fiscal autonomy to qualify as independent governments.
- *School District Governments* (12,880). These are created to provide public elementary, secondary and/or higher education services and have sufficient administrative and fiscal autonomy to qualify as independent governments. They exclude school systems that are “dependent” on a county, municipal, township, or state government.

Definitions drawn from Government Finance and Employment Classification Manual (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006); totals drawn from Census of Governments (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)

Figure 1. Definition of Local Government Types Used in Data Collection

Park and recreation services are defined by the Census Bureau as the government agency responsible for the “provision and support of recreational and cultural-scientific facilities maintained for the benefit of residents and visitors” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006, p. 5–57). Examples include golf courses, fitness centers, parks, and natural areas. Activities and facilities operated by school systems, as well as commercial marinas are excluded from this definition.



Although data reported by the Census Bureau over time is in actual dollars, in order to facilitate the comparison of trends over time yearly dollar amounts were adjusted to 2014 dollars. Revenue and noncapital expenditure dollars were adjusted using price indices for state and local government consumption expenditures (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2016). Capital expenditures were adjusted using historical construction cost indices provided by RSMMeans, a leading supplier of construction cost information in North America (RSMMeans, 2016). As with the original analysis, “the use of indexes facilitated comparisons of annual data on a longitudinal basis by establishing inflation-free trends” (Crompton & Kaczynski, 2003, p. 128). Unless otherwise noted, all dollar amounts reported refer to 2014 adjusted dollars.

Results

The following sections will discuss the four main areas identified by Crompton and Kaczynski during their original 2003 analysis: i) self-generated revenue, ii) operating expenditures, iii) capital expenditures, and iv) employment. Main findings from the original analysis will be presented in italicized text, followed by relevant findings from the current analysis.

Revenue Generated by Local Park and Recreation Departments

The percentage of total park and recreation agency expenditures covered by self-generated revenue reached a stable plateau of approximately 24%–25% beginning in the 1990’s, suggesting this is a maximum and unlikely to increase.

Crompton and Kaczynski (2003) hypothesized that self-generated revenue was unlikely to account for more than approximately one-quarter of agency expenditures, and data from the current analysis supports this idea (Table 1, column 5). However, the proportion of total expenditures accounted for by self-generated revenue dropped to as low as 21.25% during the Great Recession, before subsequently rebounding to 26.07% through annual increases from 2009–2014.

Similarly, self-generated revenue accounted for on average approximately one-third of operating expenditures.

During the current analysis revenue continued to account for approximately one-third of operating (noncapital) expenditures. Again however, this figure dropped to 29.85% in 2008–2009, before rebounding to pre-recession levels (Table 1, column 7). Annual reductions in self-generated revenue occurred from 2008–2009 to 2010–2011, reflecting the period of greatest economic turmoil and the greatest reduction in spending power for average American families. During the same time period, total expenditures dropped in a more dramatic fashion, increasing the proportion of noncapital expenditures covered through self-generated revenue.

Self-generated revenue increased by 450% across the period of analysis.

During the current period self-generated revenue grew by 106%. The comparatively flat growth in revenue reflects the economic flux of the Great Recession, and multiple years of relative decrease in self-generated revenue. In adjusted dollars revenue grew in a consistent fashion until the Great Recession. In the post-recession period revenue fluctuated, falling for three consecutive years from 2008–2009 to 2010–2011, growing from 2011–2012 to 2012–2013, and subsequently falling again in 2013–2014 (Table 1, column 3).



Table 1

Revenue Generated by Local Park and Recreation Agencies (millions of dollars) Expressed as a Ratio of Their Total Expenditures and Their Operational (Non-Capital) Expenditures

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Year	Actual Revenue	Adjusted Revenue	Annual Revenue Difference	Adjusted Total Expenditures	Revenue as a % of Total Expenditures	Adjusted Non-Capital Expenditures	Revenue as a % of Non-Capital Expenditures
2000-2001	5,287	8,029	-	35,519	22.60%	24,351	32.97%
2001-2002	5,822	8,655	614	37,386	23.15%	26,072	33.19%
2002-2003	6,140	8,778	121	38,788	22.63%	27,170	32.31%
2003-2004	6,191	8,409	-362	35,246	23.86%	25,847	32.53%
2004-2005	6,578	8,493	82	35,495	23.93%	26,172	32.45%
2005-2006	7,112	8,767	269	36,800	23.82%	26,813	32.70%
2006-2007	7,297	8,587	-177	38,020	22.59%	27,565	31.15%
2007-2008	8,018	8,965	371	39,205	22.87%	27,475	32.63%
2008-2009	7,677	8,650	-310	40,710	21.25%	28,979	29.85%
2009-2010	7,813	8,521	-126	38,539	22.11%	27,849	30.60%
2010-2011	7,883	8,332	-185	35,444	23.51%	26,859	31.02%
2011-2012	8,212	8,537	201	34,115	25.02%	26,248	32.52%
2012-2013	8,527	8,688	148	33,677	25.80%	26,467	32.83%
2013-2014	8,480	8,480	-208	32,523	26.07%	25,914	32.72%

*The bold line included in this and subsequent tables represents the onset of the Great Recession

Crompton and Kaczynski (2003) implied their data on self-generated revenue indicated a drift away from the original roots of public parks and recreation. Whereas parks and recreation was initially conceived of as a welfare service with opportunity for all members of society, the increased reliance on self-generated revenue suggests a shift to a market based model wherein constituents purchase as little or as much of a service as they desire, or can afford. The current data appear to confirm that the status quo as of the end of the twentieth century persists, as self-generated revenue continues to play an important role in total and non-capital expenditures of park and recreation agencies.

Total Local Government Expenditures and Expenditures on Park and Recreation Services

Spending on parks and recreation services accounted for approximately 2% of total local government expenditures from the mid 1980s onward, dipping as low as 1.68% in 1985–1986 during a period of economic recession.

During the current period of analysis local governmental spending on parks and recreation once again accounted for approximately 2% of total local government spending



(Table 2, column 7). Although the figure was as high as 2.27% in 2002–2003, it dropped annually in the post-recession period to 1.89% by 2013–2014. The response to the Great Recession appears to mirror the response to the less severe economic recession of the mid 1980s.

Table 2

Total Expenditures of Local Governments and Their Expenditures on Park and Recreation Services (millions of dollars)

Year	Total Local Government Expenditures			Local Government Expenditures on Parks & Recreation			Ratio of Column 5 to Column 2 (%)
	1 Actual	2 Adjusted	3 Annual Difference	4 Actual	5 Adjusted	6 Annual Difference	
2000-2001	1,070,081	1,624,974	-	23,390	35,519	-	2.19
2001-2002	1,155,334	1,717,514	92,540	25,149	37,386	1,867	2.18
2002-2003	1,194,932	1,708,505	-9,008	27,129	38,788	1,402	2.27
2003-2004	1,259,075	1,710,279	1,774	25,948	35,246	-3,542	2.06
2004-2005	1,310,747	1,692,329	-17,951	27,492	35,495	249	2.10
2005-2006	1,386,596	1,709,380	17,052	29,851	36,800	1,305	2.15
2006-2007	1,516,344	1,784,441	75,061	32,307	38,020	1,220	2.13
2007-2008	1,590,333	1,778,168	-6,273	35,064	39,205	1,185	2.20
2008-2009	1,662,509	1,873,182	95,014	36,132	40,710	1,505	2.17
2009-2010	1,666,796	1,817,913	-55,269	35,225	38,539	-2,171	2.12
2010-2011	1,660,030	1,754,570	-63,343	33,535	35,444	-3,095	2.02
2011-2012	1,665,546	1,731,536	-23,034	32,815	34,115	-1,330	1.97
2012-2013	1,698,603	1,730,754	-782	33,052	33,677	-438	1.95
2013-2014	1,722,749	1,722,749	-8,005	32,523	32,523	-1,154	1.89

Parks and recreation was largely unsuccessful in securing increases relative to competitive public services when economic conditions were good, as the proportion of total local government spending on parks and recreation services was never greater than approximately 2.5%. During the same time period, education received by far the largest proportion of total local government spending (approximately 43%) followed by hospitals and health (approximately 8%), and transportation (approximately 6.5%). Corrections (approximately 1.75%) and libraries (approximately .75%) were the only services that received a smaller relative allocation than parks and recreation (Kaczynski & Crompton, 2006). However, parks and recreation appeared to be relatively successful in fending off disproportionate cuts during difficult economic times, as this ratio rarely dipped below 2%.

The current data lends credence to the notion that during periods of economic stability parks and recreation agencies have been unable to secure increases relative to competitive public services. During the period from 2000–2008 spending on parks and recreation never accounted for more than 2.27% of total local government spending, consistent with the findings of Crompton and Kaczynski's (2003) original analysis. Once again, education received the greatest share of total local government spending (approximately 42%), while only corrections (approximately 1.8%) and libraries (approximately .8%) received less funding than parks and recreation. However, it would appear that the Great Recession resulted in disproportionate cuts to park and recreation spending relative to competitive public services. Every year from 2008–2009 to 2013–2014 the ratio declined, to a low of 1.89% in 2013–2014 (Table 2, column 7). Although total local government spending was negatively impacted by the Great Recession, spending on park and recreation services were disproportionately impacted during this time.

Total Local Government and Park and Recreation Capital and Non-Capital Spending

Capital expenditures on park and recreation services accounted for approximately 4% of total local government capital outlay, and capital expenditures accounted for approximately one-quarter of total spending by park and recreation agencies.

In the period prior to the Great Recession, capital expenditures on park and recreation services accounted for as much as 4.86% of total local government capital expenditures in 2000–2001, and as low as 3.85% in 2003–2004, largely mirroring the results of Crompton and Kaczynski's original 2003 analysis. However, this proportion decreased every year following the Great Recession to a low of 3.23% in 2013–2014 (Table 3, column 5). In the period prior to the Great Recession, capital expenditures accounted for approximately one-third of total spending by park and recreation agencies. Following the Great Recession however, that figure fell annually to a low of 20.32% in 2013–2014, the lowest proportion across both the original and current analyses (Table 3, column 6). This reduced percentage indicates that capital expenditures were disproportionately impacted by the recession relative to non-capital expenditures. In adjusted dollars, capital outlay for parks and recreation services fell by \$5.44 billion across the 2000–01 to 2013–14 study period (Table 3, column 4). As a growing body of evidence supports the potential contribution of parks and the built environment to healthy outcomes for both individuals and communities (e.g. Cohen et al., 2007; Pitas et al., 2017), this disinvestment in capital outlay should be of alarm to decision makers and the general public. A longer period of analysis in the post-recession period will be needed to monitor whether these trends continue, or capital expenditure returns to pre-recession levels.

Noncapital expenditures on park and recreation services accounted for approximately 1.75% of total local government non-capital expenditures, and noncapital expenditures accounted for approximately three-quarters of total spending by park and recreation agencies.

Similar to the original analysis, in both the periods prior to and following the Great Recession, noncapital expenditures on park and recreation services accounted for approximately 1.75% of total local government noncapital expenditures. This figure fell annually in the post-recession period however, to a low of 1.71% in 2013–2014 (Table 4, column 5). In the period prior to the Great Recession, noncapital expenditures accounted for approximately 70% of total spending by park and recreation agencies. Following the Great Recession however, that figure rose annually to a high of 79.68% in 2013–2014 (Table 4, column 6). This increase indicates that relative to capital expenditures, noncapital expenditures were impacted less during the recessionary period. Whereas capital expenditures fell across the study period, adjusted non-capital expenditures increased by \$1.56 billion (Table 4, column 4).



Table 3

Local Government Capital Expenditure and Their Capital Expenditures on Parks and Recreation (millions of dollars)

Year	Local Government Total		Local Government Parks and Recreation			
	1 Actual Capital Expenditures	2 Adjusted Capital Expenditures	3 Actual Capital Expenditures	4 Adjusted Capital Expenditures	5 Ratio of Column 4 to Column 2 (%)	6 P&R Capital Expenditures as a % of P&R Total Expenditures
2000-2001	151,374	247,933	7,355	12,046	4.86	33.91
2001-2002	167,304	266,361	7,611	12,117	4.55	32.41
2002-2003	171,255	265,835	8,126	12,613	4.74	32.52
2003-2004	179,777	256,342	6,920	9,867	3.85	27.99
2004-2005	182,908	247,215	7,221	9,759	3.95	27.49
2005-2006	193,907	245,256	8,101	10,246	4.18	27.84
2006-2007	215,564	260,738	8,883	10,745	4.12	28.26
2007-2008	237,014	269,203	10,491	11,915	4.43	30.39
2008-2009	245,622	279,445	10,412	11,846	4.24	29.10
2009-2010	237,426	265,115	9,802	10,945	4.13	28.40
2010-2011	220,770	236,588	8,123	8,705	3.68	24.56
2011-2012	213,501	224,801	7,567	7,968	3.54	23.36
2012-2013	208,080	211,906	7,076	7,206	3.40	21.40
2013-2014	204,780	204,780	6,609	6,609	3.23	20.32

While \$38.76 billion (1990 adjusted dollars) were invested in capital expenditures on park and recreation services across the original study period, local agencies received only an additional \$3.05 billion in operational funds, of which \$1.35 billion were self-generated revenue. Thus, the annual tax resource made available was less than 5% of the capital investment.

The data suggest that the low ratio of annual tax-derived operational funding to capital investments observed by Crompton and Kaczynski (2003) has become exacerbated. From 2000–2001 to 2013–2014 a total of \$142.59 billion (Table 3, sum of column 4) were invested in capital expenditures on park and recreation services. Comparing operational funding levels from 2000–2001 and 2013–2014, local agencies received an additional \$1.56 billion in operational funds (Table 4, column 4), of which \$451 million were self-

Table 4

Local Government Operational (Non-Capital) Expenditures and Their Operational Expenditures on Parks and Recreation (millions of dollars)

Year	Local Government Total		Local Government Parks and Recreation			
	1 Actual Noncapital Expenditures	2 Adjusted Noncapital Expenditures	3 Actual Non- Capital Expenditures	4 Adjusted Noncapital Expenditures	5 Ratio of Column 4 to Column 2 (%)	6 P&R Noncapital Expenditures as a % of P&R Total Expenditures
2000-2001	918,708	1,395,105	16,035	24,351	1.75	68.56
2001-2002	988,030	1,468,800	17,538	26,072	1.78	69.74
2002-2003	1,023,688	1,463,662	19,003	27,170	1.86	70.05
2003-2004	1,079,298	1,466,077	19,028	25,847	1.76	73.33
2004-2005	1,127,839	1,456,173	20,271	26,172	1.80	73.74
2005-2006	1,192,689	1,470,334	21,750	26,813	1.82	72.86
2006-2007	1,300,781	1,530,765	23,424	27,565	1.80	72.50
2007-2008	1,353,319	1,513,160	24,573	27,475	1.82	70.08
2008-2009	1,416,887	1,596,435	25,720	28,979	1.82	71.18
2009-2010	1,429,370	1,558,961	25,534	27,849	1.79	72.26
2010-2011	1,439,261	1,521,227	25,412	26,859	1.77	75.78
2011-2012	1,452,045	1,509,576	25,248	26,248	1.74	76.94
2012-2013	1,490,524	1,518,736	25,975	26,467	1.74	78.59
2013-2014	1,517,969	1,517,969	25,914	25,914	1.71	79.68

generated revenue (Table 1, column 2). Thus, the annual tax resource made available was approximately .78% of capital expenditures. Although it is not possible to directly compare 1990 dollar amounts to 2014 dollar amounts, the respective proportions illustrate a trend. Crompton and Kaczynski (2003) saw this as evidence that while citizens are generally in favor of capital expenditures on parks and recreation (usually approved through voter referenda), elected and appointed officials may be reluctant to provide adequate tax-based operational funding to support those capital investments. Following the same logic, our analysis suggests that this is still the case, and in fact may have become more pronounced.

In 2000, the top states in terms of per capita spending (in 2014 adjusted dollars) on park and recreation services were North Dakota (\$282.42), Nevada (\$277.72), Colorado (\$246.66), Illinois (\$231.42) and Hawaii (\$222.33); the bottom states were Vermont (\$32.43), Arkansas (\$36.72), and Delaware (\$40.04).



In 2014, the top five states in terms of per capita spending on park and recreation services were North Dakota (\$309.92), Wyoming (\$224.29), South Dakota (\$195.25), Colorado (\$194.15) and Illinois (\$191.98); the bottom states were Delaware (\$33.44), Massachusetts (\$40.24), and Kentucky (\$43.22). For agencies who wish to benchmark themselves, data for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and national averages are included in Table 5.

Table 5*Local Government Parks and Recreation Actual and Per Capita Expenditures in 2013-2014*

State	1 Population (thousands)	2 Total Expenditures (thousands)	3 Per Capita Total Expenditures (\$)	4 Capital Expenditures (thousands)	5 Per Capita Capital Expenditures (\$)	6 Noncapital Expenditures (thousands)	7 Per Capita Noncapital Expenditures
Alabama	4,843	\$386,593	\$79.82	\$35,467	\$7.32	\$351,126	\$72.50
Alaska	737	\$84,878	\$115.21	\$29,353	\$39.84	\$55,525	\$75.37
Arizona	6,720	\$547,715	\$81.51	\$73,546	\$10.94	\$474,169	\$70.56
Arkansas	2,967	\$170,697	\$57.53	\$45,605	\$15.37	\$125,092	\$42.16
California	38,681	\$4,818,234	\$124.56	\$816,457	\$21.11	\$4,001,777	\$103.46
Colorado	5,350	\$1,038,646	\$194.15	\$211,278	\$39.49	\$827,368	\$154.66
Connecticut	3,592	\$221,654	\$61.71	\$13,444	\$3.74	\$208,210	\$57.97
Delaware	935	\$31,264	\$33.44	\$5,649	\$6.04	\$25,615	\$27.40
D.C*	659	\$237,839	\$360.91	\$69,047	\$104.77	\$168,792	\$256.13
Florida	19,889	\$2,618,464	\$131.66	\$432,595	\$21.75	\$2,185,869	\$109.90
Georgia	10,087	\$595,866	\$59.07	\$164,119	\$16.27	\$431,747	\$42.80
Hawaii	1,416	\$187,324	\$132.26	\$30,638	\$21.63	\$156,686	\$110.63
Idaho	1,634	\$111,675	\$68.36	\$13,717	\$8.40	\$97,958	\$59.97
Illinois	12,868	\$2,470,373	\$191.98	\$466,200	\$36.23	\$2,004,173	\$155.75
Indiana	6,595	\$383,290	\$58.12	\$54,510	\$8.27	\$328,780	\$49.85
Iowa	3,108	\$285,661	\$91.91	\$31,054	\$9.99	\$254,607	\$81.92
Kansas	2,899	\$267,201	\$92.16	\$43,518	\$15.01	\$223,683	\$77.15
Kentucky	4,413	\$190,743	\$43.22	\$55,009	\$12.47	\$135,734	\$30.76
Louisiana	4,648	\$691,298	\$148.73	\$130,045	\$27.98	\$561,253	\$120.75
Maine	1,331	\$103,467	\$77.75	\$33,788	\$25.39	\$69,679	\$52.36
Maryland	5,967	\$766,748	\$128.49	\$43,200	\$7.24	\$723,548	\$121.25
Massachusetts	6,750	\$271,597	\$40.24	\$68,309	\$10.12	\$203,288	\$30.12
Michigan	9,916	\$767,972	\$77.45	\$223,622	\$22.55	\$544,350	\$54.90
Minnesota	5,453	\$799,313	\$146.58	\$139,985	\$25.67	\$659,328	\$120.91
Mississippi	2,992	\$168,089	\$56.17	\$27,768	\$9.28	\$140,321	\$46.89
Missouri	6,061	\$615,638	\$101.57	\$101,612	\$16.77	\$514,026	\$84.81
Montana	1,023	\$63,572	\$62.15	\$8,036	\$7.86	\$55,536	\$54.29
Nebraska	1,881	\$167,762	\$89.18	\$39,605	\$21.05	\$128,157	\$68.13
Nevada	2,833	\$527,688	\$186.26	\$112,079	\$39.56	\$415,609	\$146.70
New Hampshire	1,329	\$68,964	\$51.90	\$3,532	\$2.66	\$65,432	\$49.24
New Jersey	8,925	\$561,449	\$62.91	\$139,427	\$15.62	\$422,022	\$47.29
New Mexico	2,083	\$261,858	\$125.71	\$54,288	\$26.06	\$207,570	\$99.65
New York	19,719	\$2,141,489	\$108.60	\$651,953	\$33.06	\$1,489,536	\$75.54
North Carolina	9,934	\$803,703	\$80.90	\$178,801	\$18.00	\$624,902	\$62.90
North Dakota	740	\$229,312	\$309.92	\$84,258	\$113.88	\$145,054	\$196.04
Ohio	11,594	\$1,069,206	\$92.22	\$186,328	\$16.07	\$882,878	\$76.15
Oklahoma	3,877	\$363,032	\$93.63	\$118,401	\$30.54	\$244,631	\$63.09
Oregon	3,968	\$544,910	\$137.31	\$123,587	\$31.14	\$421,323	\$106.17
Pennsylvania	12,791	\$636,821	\$49.79	\$99,191	\$7.76	\$537,630	\$42.03
Rhode Island	1,054	\$46,599	\$44.19	\$4,520	\$4.29	\$42,079	\$39.90
South Carolina	4,828	\$383,149	\$79.35	\$81,610	\$16.90	\$301,539	\$62.45
South Dakota	853	\$166,459	\$195.25	\$78,220	\$91.75	\$88,239	\$103.50
Tennessee	6,545	\$448,885	\$68.59	\$87,612	\$13.39	\$361,273	\$55.20
Texas	26,945	\$2,103,520	\$78.07	\$565,402	\$20.98	\$1,538,118	\$57.08
Utah	2,942	\$404,432	\$137.48	\$76,271	\$25.93	\$328,161	\$111.55
Vermont	627	\$39,359	\$62.78	\$7,716	\$12.31	\$31,643	\$50.47
Virginia	8,317	\$942,242	\$113.29	\$180,162	\$21.66	\$762,080	\$91.63
Washington	7,054	\$873,607	\$123.84	\$184,579	\$26.17	\$689,028	\$97.68
West Virginia	1,849	\$121,222	\$65.58	\$5,094	\$2.76	\$116,128	\$62.82
Wisconsin	5,758	\$590,412	\$102.53	\$131,558	\$22.85	\$458,854	\$79.68
Wyoming	584	\$130,907	\$224.29	\$47,223	\$80.91	\$83,684	\$143.38
Average of States		\$645,699	\$102.79	\$130,799	\$22.84	\$514,900	\$79.95

*The District of Columbia was not included in the average or list of highest spending states

Parks and Recreation Employment in Local Government

The number of full-time employees increased steadily until 1977–1978, then decreased as a result of the tax revolt of the 1970s from 1978–1979 to 1983–1984. From 1984–1985 to 1999–2000, full-time employment experienced gradual gains and reached pre-tax revolt levels. Prior to 1978–1979, part-time employment increased at approximately the same rate as full-time, but since that time accounts for nearly all net increase in employment, indicating a shift away from full-time employees.

The gradual increases in full-time employees reported by Crompton and Kaczynski (2003) since 1984–1985 continued until the onset of the Great Recession. However, from 2007–2008 to 2014–2015 14,186 full-time jobs in parks and recreation were lost, and a net of 3,170 full-time jobs were lost across the entire study period (Table 6). Part-time employment continued to grow throughout the study period, with the exception of 2007–2008 and 2010–2011. Across the study period a net of 45,382 part-time positions were added, and from 2007–2008 to 2014–2015 17,403 part-time positions were added. The net increase of 42,212 total jobs was accounted for entirely by part-time positions. It is worth noting that in the final three years of analysis, full-time positions rebounded significantly, with 4,497 positions added. Additional analysis in the coming years should continue to monitor these trends.

Table 6

Parks and Recreation Employment in Local Government

Year	FT Employees	Annual Change FT Employees	PT Employees	Annual Change PT Employees	Total FT and PT Employees
2000-2001	156,192	-	172,463	-	328,655
2001-2002	159,762	3,570	175,851	3,388	335,613
2002-2003	159,468	-294	180,726	4,875	340,194
2003-2004	161,501	2,033	181,547	821	343,048
2004-2005	161,729	228	187,412	5,865	349,141
2005-2006	165,080	3,351	192,721	5,309	357,801
2006-2007	165,532	452	201,716	8,995	367,248
2007-2008	167,208	1,676	200,442	-1,274	367,650
2008-2009	162,136	-5,072	204,298	3,856	366,434
2009-2010	158,316	-3,820	204,992	694	363,308
2010-2011	152,327	-5,989	199,380	-5,612	351,707
2011-2012	148,525	-3,802	201,605	2,225	350,130
2012-2013	148,629	104	210,326	8,721	358,955
2013-2014	151,628	2,999	217,469	7,143	369,097
2014-2015	153,022	1,394	217,845	376	370,867
Change 2007-2008 to 2014-2015:	-14,186		17,403		3,217
Net Change:	-3,170		45,382		42,212

Approximately \$70 billion (1990 adjusted dollars) were invested in capital outlay during the original study, and 8,000 full-time staff were added during the same time period. This amounts to approximately one full-time staff person for each \$9 million of new capital investment.

Approximately \$142.59 billion (Table 3, sum of column 4) were invested in capital outlay during the current study period, and 3,170 full-time jobs were lost over the same time window. Because full-time staff were lost during this time period, it is not possible



to perform the same calculation of new full-time employees to new capital investments. With additional capital outlay invested during the current study period, accompanied by a reduction in full-time staff, increasing demands were placed on a shrinking full-time workforce.

Between 1977–1978 and 1999–2000 approximately 94,000 jobs were transferred from the public sector to the private sector or volunteers. Approximately one of every four jobs associated with the delivery of park and recreation services were done by contractors or volunteers.

Between 2000–2001 and 2014–2015 approximately 21,121 jobs were transferred to the public sector from the private sector or volunteers (Table 7). This figure seems to suggest a reversal of the trend Crompton and Kaczynski (2003) observed towards outsourcing and privatization. However, the loss of full-time jobs combined with the large increase in part-time jobs may have skewed this analysis.

Table 7

An Approach to Estimating the Number of Jobs Contracted Out Between 2000-2001 and 2014-2015

FY 2000-2001	
Operating expenditures	\$24,351 million
Personnel expenditures (75%)	\$18,263 million
Number of employees (full and part-time)	328,655
“Cost per job” ratio	55,569\$
FY 2014-2015	
Operating expenditures	\$25,914 million
Personnel expenditures (75%)	\$19,435 million
Number of employees (full and part-time)	370,867
“Cost per job” ratio	52,404
Jobs contracted out = (\$19,435 million/\$55,569) – 370,867 = -21,121	

The original and current figure were calculated through a method described by Crompton and Kaczynski (2003, p.137–142), using ratios of operating expenditures on park and recreation services to number of employees. The calculation assumes that 75% of operating expenditures represent expenditures on personnel. The cost per job ratio is calculated by dividing this figure by the number of total jobs in a given year. Because there is no reason that in adjusted dollars the cost per job figure should change from 2000–2001 to 2014-2015, an explanation is that some employees are moving between the public and private sectors. To attain the same cost per job ratio in 2014–2015 present in 2000–2001 would require 349,746 full-time jobs rather than the 370,867 that were reported, yielding the figure of 21,121 jobs transferred from the private sector.

Conclusion

Crompton and Kaczynski (2003) concluded that the late 1990s would eventually be viewed as the “golden era” of public parks and recreation. During that period local agencies received unprecedented allocations from local government municipal funds as a result of a strong national economy and increasing recognition of the value of park and recreation services to individuals and communities. The data in our analysis indicate that this high level of support continued into the beginning of the 21st century. It appears the “golden era” observed by Crompton and Kaczynski drew to a close with the onset of the housing crisis and Great Recession, which disproportionately impacted local park and recreation agencies relative to other public services (e.g., hospitals and fire protection). Adjusted spending on parks and recreation services fell on an annual basis after the onset of the recession, as did the ratio of spending on parks and recreation to total local government expenditures. Whereas Crompton and Kaczynski concluded parks and recreation agencies

were largely successful in fending off disproportionate cuts in past difficult economic periods, it does not appear this was the case during the Great Recession and subsequent recovery. The data presented in this paper should serve as a warning, as well as a tool for advocates making the argument for increased support of local public park and recreation services. Continued trend analysis is needed to determine whether or not the impact of the Great Recession is long-term, or whether local park and recreation services will eventually return to pre-recession levels of public support.

Crompton and Kaczynski (2003) also made three specific observations based on their data: i) increases in capital investments far outstripped nonoperational investments; ii) self-generated revenue accounted for approximately one-quarter of total park expenditures and one-third of operational expenditures, a ceiling they did not expect to exceed; and iii) local governments increasingly utilized part-time employees and outside contractors to perform the necessary duties once assigned to full-time staff. Data from the current period offers support for a continuation of the second trend and mixed support for the third, while illustrating a reversal of the first.

The housing crisis, Great Recession, and resulting recovery provided the backdrop for the current analysis. The impact of these events on the United States economy has been the most severe and prolonged since the Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s. Local governments have experienced financial difficulty, with total expenditure falling from \$1.87 trillion in 2008–2009 to \$1.72 trillion in 2013–2014 (Table 2, column 2). The housing crisis interrupted the flow of property taxes collected by municipalities, disrupting an important source of revenue for local governmental general funds. Expenditures on parks and recreation reflect this overall downturn. Park based capital expenditures in particular suffered in the post-recession period, falling annually from 2008–2009 to 2013–2014. Self-generated revenue also fell in the immediate post-recession years, and struggled to return to pre-recession levels. Park based capital expenditures in particular suffered in the post-recession period, falling annually from 2008–2009 to 2013–2014. This reduction in capital expenditure comes despite the conventional wisdom that during a recession, when the cost of materials, labor, and interest rates are depressed, may be an ideal time to make such investments (Pollin & Thompson, 2011).

The loss of full-time positions is perhaps the most striking trend observed in the post-recession period. Crompton and Kaczynski (2003) noted the shift toward part-time employees, pointing to slow growth in full-time jobs and an increase in the proportion of part-time employees in the latter half of their study period. The Great Recession appears to have accelerated this trend in a significant fashion, with approximately 14,000 full-time jobs lost in the period after 2007–2008; during the same period more than 17,000 part-time jobs were added. Although the Affordable Care Act employer mandate, which requires organizations with greater than 50 full-time equivalent employees to provide health insurance, has been popularly blamed for fueling this shift towards part-time employees, there is limited evidence to support this argument (Moriya, Selden, & Simon, 2016). Early analysis suggests however that an estimated 3 million jobs may be lost as a result of repealing the Affordable Care Act, although the majority of those losses would be accounted for by the private sector (Ku, Steinmetz, Brantley, & Bruen, 2017). With the future of the Affordable Care Act in flux, future analysis will be needed to determine the long-term effects of any potential reform or replacement legislation.

Using the same calculation as Crompton and Kaczynski (2003), an estimated 21,000 jobs were shifted from the private sector to the public sector from 2000–2001 to 2014–2015. Although this may suggest a shift in the trend observed by Crompton and Kaczynski, it may also be that the disproportionate addition of part-time jobs has skewed this figure. Future research must continue to monitor this trend, and build on the growing body of research examining privatization practices in public spaces (e.g., Mowen et al., 2016; Pitas, Mowen, Liechty, & Trautwein, 2015).

The 2013–2014 per capita expenditure data in Table 5 illustrates the wide disparity between certain states. Many of the same states that were particularly high or low in per capita spending in the original analysis remain in a similar position, while others have shifted. As Crompton and Kaczynski noted in 2003, it is difficult to generalize information to specific jurisdictions or agencies; because the state and national level data represent

average values, some agencies will necessarily be higher and others lower. However, this updated data once again provides a benchmark for local agencies wishing to measure their expenditures compared to their state or the United States in general.

Although the United States economy experienced less severe periods of economic recession during the original period of analysis, it may be that the Great Recession represents a turning point for local government spending. The “new normal” perspective suggests that the impacts of the Great Recession will be longer lasting than previous periods of economic difficulty, and that the effects will be felt long after recovery occurs (Martin, Levey, & Cawley, 2012). The new normal may involve fewer resources, smaller workforces, and new methods of service delivery (e.g., increased privatization and outsourcing). Local governments and public agencies may be asked to deliver the same level of service, or even meet elevated demands, with fewer relative resources (Mathers, 2010). Future trend analysis will be necessary to determine whether the new normal is indeed here to stay, or whether the recovery from the Great Recession is simply ongoing. Researchers must continue to regularly assess the position of local public park and recreation services relative to competitors in order to ensure the long-term viability of public parks and recreation, and to provide evidence for advocates and partners who wish to argue in favor of increased support.

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