



National Salary Study of Outdoor Recreation Planners - 2008

An evaluation of reported compensation among
outdoor recreation planning professionals in the
United States

*Conducted by the National Association of Recreation
Resource Planners (NARRP)*

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Introduction

This project focused on reported compensation of outdoor recreation planners in the United States in 2008, encompassing professionals employed by federal, state and local governments, as well as the private sector. Authorized by the Board of Directors of the National Association of Recreation Resource Planners (NARRP), this study was conducted by the ad-hoc Salary Study Committee.

NARRP is an organization comprised of outdoor recreation professionals and others interested in recreation resource planning. It is a nationwide organization with members in nearly every state, representing professionals employed by state, federal, regional and local governmental agencies, consultants, non-profits and academic institutions. The mission of the Association is to advance the recreation resource planning profession. The Objectives of the Association are to:

1. Provide a professional support network for recreation resource planners across the nation.
2. Serve as a conduit for information and technology transfer.
3. Advance educational and professional development.
4. Promote scholarship and advancement for students and young professionals.

During the past two years, NARRP has been asked by employing agencies if it had any prevalent compensation data available to assist in establishing or adjusting salaries for their recreation resource planning professionals. Although several compensation studies in the recreation profession have been commissioned during the past several years through the National Recreation & Park Association and by some of its state affiliate associations, those studies focused on recreation and park directors, and selected subordinate positions (park managers, recreation, athletic and aquatic supervisors, park rangers, etc... (Beeler, 2008 and 1993; and Ivy & Cunningham, 2002). However, none of those studies included the “outdoor recreation planner” benchmark position.

Given this recognized need for recreation resource planning professionals and their employers, NARRP's Board of Directors authorized and created an ad-hoc committee to develop and conduct the first-known compensation study of outdoor recreation planners in the United States.

Study Limitations and Application

The results of this study were limited to only those professionals employed in positions that selected one of the tiered job descriptions in the survey instrument (see Addendum) and indicated that their jobs matched at least 70% of the provided job descriptions (see Survey Assessment and Results). The salary results reflect reported actual income (not including fringe benefits) and do not represent salary ranges under which their positions were classified by their employers. The results are also limited to the accuracy of the information reported by each respondent. However, it is not known if other professionals who did not respond to this survey would have had any effect on the findings in this assessment.

The data were collected during the months of July and August, 2008. If the same study were conducted today, the results would most likely be different for a number of reasons, including changes in economic conditions and job responsibilities, changes within agencies / employers, turnover and attrition, among others. The results in this study were intended to provide recreation resource planning professionals, students of the profession and employers in making more informed decisions about compensation and professional development.

Methods

A self-administered web survey questionnaire (see Addendum) was developed and made available online through the NARRP website. An emailed invitation was sent to each professional from the NARRP Business Manager, along with an exclusive link to the survey, an attachment which provided instructions, and three generalized job descriptions. The job descriptions (see Survey Results section) were deduced from a

collection of similar job descriptions which served primarily in an outdoor recreation resource planning capacity, representing more than 20 different organizations.

McMahon and Hand (2006) suggested not using job titles to identify positions when making comparisons, but rather to focus on the job roles and responsibilities if that level of information is available. This issue surfaced during the review of available job descriptions across the agencies, where the same primary responsibilities found in a number of jobs had confusing or misunderstood titles. Some of those titles included: planner (I-IV), project manager, supervisor, program specialist (I-IV), program administrator, consultant, director of programs and planning director (among others).

As these job descriptions were reviewed and found to have outdoor recreation planning as their primary roles, they were then categorized into three obvious levels of progressing responsibility. Each level's description included a commonly occurring set of roles and responsibilities, minimum required education and minimum years of experience, all progressively increasing with each tier. For the purposes of this assessment, these three descriptions are considered tiers of the benchmark position, "outdoor recreation planner," and are as follows: Tier 1 – outdoor recreation planner; Tier II – senior outdoor recreation planner; and Tier III – manager / director of outdoor recreation planning. The complete tier descriptions are provided in the Assessment and Results section.

Only those professionals who received the invitation to participate were given access to the survey. After an initial two-week period, a reminder email was sent to all professionals in the sample frame and an extended response period of three weeks was given to allow more time since the survey was being conducted during July (a popular time of the year when extended vacations are taken). The questionnaire also communicated to the respondents that the information they provided would only be assessed and presented collectively and would be held in strictest confidence.

The survey questionnaire was designed to filter only those professionals who mostly matched the benchmark criteria outlined in the job descriptions. McMahon and Hand (2006) prescribed that only those positions that match 70 percent or more in the

provided job descriptions should be included in assessing and comparing compensation. Therefore, respondents who reported that their current jobs did not match at least 70 percent of any one of the provided descriptions were omitted from the assessment.

Sample Frame

The sample for this study included members of several outdoor recreation planning related organizations, including NARRP, the Organization of Wildlife Planners (OWP) and the National Society for Park Resources (NSPR). A total of 1,068 professionals were approached by email and invited to participate in the survey through a web link and attached instructions on completing the survey.

In the survey design, two factors were used to determine if the respondents adequately met the minimum criteria for use in the study. Respondents were first asked which one of the three provided job descriptions most closely represented their current position. The second factor required that the respondent's current position match at least 70 percent of any one of the provided job descriptions. Based on responses to these two factors, 68 respondents were omitted from the assessment, leaving a return of 160 qualifying responses.

Precision of Estimates

Completed surveys were received from 228 professionals between July and August 2008. There were 68 responses omitted from the assessment as described in the Methods section, giving an effective response of 160 completed surveys. The precision of estimates for this assessment were essentially derived from the number of completed survey questionnaires (N = 160). Estimates of proportion such that 0.50 (or 50%) have a corresponding margin of error of +/- 7.8%; and for estimates that have a proportion of 0.2 or 0.8 (20% or 80%), there is a corresponding margin of error of +/- 6.2%.

Survey Assessment and Results

Several of the questions in the survey instrument were intended only for assessment at the tier level and were not reported collectively. However, the following discussion reflects the results of all qualified respondents (n = 160) so that some generalizations can be made about the sample of respondents.

National Summary

Among the respondents, 14.4 percent selected the first tier (outdoor recreation planner), 40.6 percent selected the second tier (senior outdoor recreation planner) and 45 percent selected the third tier (manager / director of outdoor recreation planning) (Table 1). Although age of the respondent was not asked in the survey, this may indicate a trend of a large proportion of professionals approaching retirement. Evidence of this trend is also supported by results of respondents' reported years of prevalent experience as shown in the tier assessments later in this section.

Table 1. Percentage of respondents by their selected benchmark tier position (n = 160).

Benchmark Tier Position	N	Percentage
Outdoor Recreation Planner	23	14.4%
Senior Outdoor Recreation Planner	65	40.6%
Manager / Director of Outdoor Recreation Planning	72	45.0%

Although all types of employers were represented (except academic institutions), approximately one-half (50.6%) represented state level agencies (Table 2). Another 31.3 percent of employers were from federal agencies. This shows a disproportionate representation of employers at the regional, local and private sector levels. However, the state and federal level agencies typically own or manage a larger proportion of the natural recreation resource inventory in the United States. It is also known that many of the private sector employers serve in consulting / contracting relationships for outdoor recreation planning to those state and federal agencies.

Table 2. Percentage of respondents by their employing agency type (n = 160).

Agency Type	N	Percentage
State	81	50.6%
Federal	50	31.3%
Regional	5	3.1%
Local (city / county)	14	8.8%
Private organization / consulting firm	10	6.2%
College / University	-	-

While most respondents (76.2%) indicated that their positions were located within a metropolitan area (Table 3), they were well dispersed throughout the United States. The respondents indicated the state in which their job was located, and those results were placed into the NARRP regions to illustrate this (Table 4).

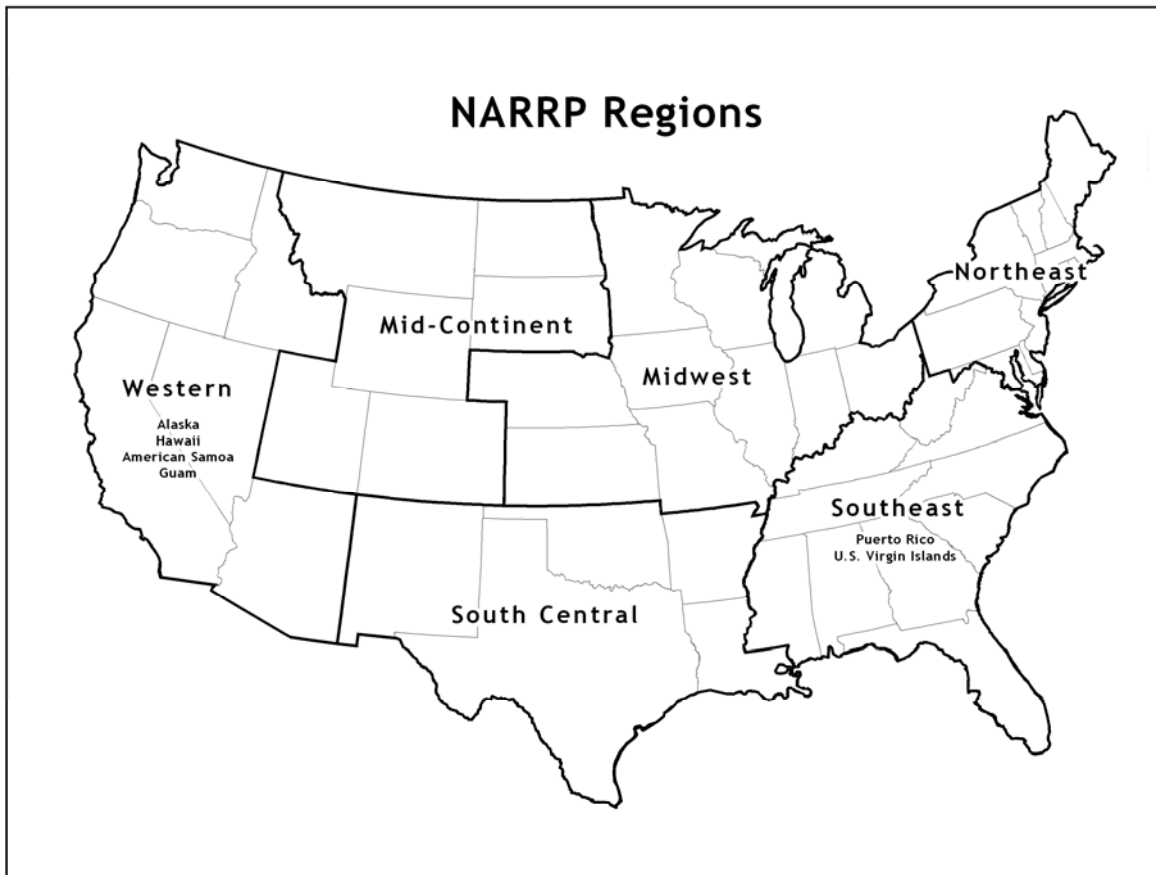
Table 3. Percent of respondent positions located in a metropolitan area (n = 160).

Location of Position	N	Percent
Within a metropolitan area	122	76.2%
Not within a metropolitan area	38	23.8%

Table 4. Distribution of respondents' work location by the NARRP Regions (n = 159).

NARRP Region	N	Percentage
Northeast	28	17.6%
Southeast	20	12.6%
Midwest	41	25.8%
South Central	10	6.3%
Mid-Continent	19	11.9%
Western	41	25.8%

Note: NARRP regions are displayed in the following illustration.



Tier I: Outdoor Recreation Planner

The first tier represented professionals who were at the level which required the least amount of responsibilities, education and experience. The following position description was provided to the respondents and was presented with the title of “outdoor recreation planner.”

Nature of Work: Under direct supervision, the employee in this position manages tasks of moderate difficulty and may be responsible for developing and coordinating strategic planning efforts, policy initiatives, comprehensive plans or master plans that guide the overall development and delivery of a public parks and recreation system. Responsibilities may involve the planning, organizing and coordination of a wide variety of professional services, such as contract administration, comprehensive planning, land use planning, land acquisition,

grant writing, site master planning, resource and environmental impact assessments, special recreation studies and related projects. The employee may develop and coordinate comprehensive public input processes, including public meetings and presentations as required by various projects, and deliver oral presentations to internal and external audiences. These responsibilities are not limited nor are they all-inclusive, and the employee may perform any combination of these (or similar) responsibilities.

Qualifications: Graduation from an accredited college or university with a bachelor’s degree in recreation resource planning, parks and recreation management, planning, public or business administration, landscape architecture, or a related field. One to three years of experience relevant to the position.

The mean years of minimum required experience in this tier was 2.0 years, and the mean number of relevant years of experience actually held by the respondents was 9.1 years (Table 5). However, most of the respondents (93.1%) indicated that their positions required, at minimum, a relevant bachelor’s degree, but 43.5% of the respondents indicated that they actually held a relevant master’s degree (Table 6).

Only 17.4% of respondents in this tier indicated that they held supervisory responsibilities with a mean of 1.5 employees. However, 43.5% indicated that they held budgetary responsibilities. The mean monthly salary reported by respondents in this tier was \$3,435, with a minimum salary of \$2,400 and a maximum salary of \$5,500 (Table 7).

Table 5. Minimum years of experience required for current job and total years of relevant experience held by respondent for Tier I (n = 23).

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Years of Experience Required	2.0	1	3
Relevant Years of Experience Held by Respondent	9.1	2	30

Table 6. Minimum level of relevant college education required for current job and actual level of relevant college education held by respondent, by percent for Tier I (n = 23).

	None	Bachelors	Masters	Ph.D.
Minimum Required College	8.7%	91.3%	0	0
Relevant College Held by Respondent	0	52.2%	43.5%	4.3

Table 7. Reported monthly and annual compensation for Tier I - outdoor recreation planner (n = 23).

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Monthly salary	\$3,435	\$2,400	\$5,500
Annual salary	\$41,220	\$28,800	\$66,000

Note: Annual salaries were derived by multiplying the reported monthly salaries by 12 months.

Tier II: Senior Outdoor Recreation Planner

The second tier represented professionals who were at the level which required a higher level of responsibilities, education and / or experience than what was required in the first tier. The following position description was provided to the respondents and was presented with the title of “senior outdoor recreation planner.”

Nature of Work: Under limited supervision and with an intermediate level of independent judgment, the employee in this position manages tasks of moderate to high levels of difficulty and may be responsible for developing and coordinating strategic planning efforts, policy initiatives, comprehensive plans or master plans that guide the overall development and delivery of a public parks and recreation system. Responsibilities may involve the planning, organizing and coordination of a wide variety of professional services, such as contract administration, comprehensive planning, land use planning, land acquisition, grant writing, site master planning, resource and environmental impact assessments, special recreation studies and related projects. The employee may develop and coordinate comprehensive public input processes, including public meetings and presentations as required by various projects, and deliver oral presentations to

internal and external audiences. The senior outdoor recreation planner may serve as a team leader in complex projects and may also hold first-line supervisory responsibilities. These responsibilities are not limited nor are they all-inclusive, and the employee may perform any combination of these (or similar) responsibilities.

Qualifications: Graduation from an accredited college or university with a bachelor’s degree in recreation resource planning, parks and recreation administration / management, planning, public or business administration, landscape architecture, or a related field. Master’s degree is preferred. Three to five years of experience relevant to the position.

The mean years of minimum required experience in this tier was 3.6 years, and the mean number of relevant years of experience actually held by the respondents was 13.4 years (Table 8). However, most of the respondents (95.3%) indicated that their positions required a relevant bachelor’s degree or higher and 58.4% of the respondents indicated that they actually held a relevant master’s degree or Ph.D. (Table 9).

About one-third (32.3%) of respondents in this tier indicated that they held supervisory responsibilities with a mean of 2.3 employees. However, 43.1% indicated that they held budgetary responsibilities. The mean monthly salary reported by respondents in this tier was \$5,068, with a minimum monthly salary of \$2,600 and a maximum salary of \$8,166 (Table 10).

Table 8. Minimum years of experience required for current job and total years of relevant experience held by respondent for Tier II (n = 65).

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Years of Experience Required	3.6	1	7
Relevant Years of Experience Held by Respondent	13.4	2	35

Table 9. Minimum level of relevant college education required for current job and actual level of relevant college education held by respondent, by percent for Tier II (n = 65).

	None	Bachelors	Masters	Ph.D.
Minimum Required College	4.6%	81.5%	13.8%	0
Relevant College Held by Respondent	0	41.5%	55.4%	3.0%

Table 10. Reported monthly and annual compensation for Tier II – senior outdoor recreation planner (n = 65).

Tier II	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Monthly salary	\$5,068	\$2,600	\$8,166
Annual salary	\$60,816	\$31,200	\$97,992

Note: Annual salaries were derived by multiplying the reported monthly salaries by 12 months.

Tier III: Manager / Director of Outdoor Recreation Planning

The third tier represented professionals who held the highest level of responsibilities and were required to have the highest level of education and / or experience than what was required in the first two tiers. The following position description was provided to the respondents and was presented with the title of “manager / director of outdoor recreation planning.”

Nature of Work: Under minimal supervision and with wide use of independent judgment, the employee in this position will supervise other outdoor recreation planners and support staff, while managing an outdoor recreation planning program or unit (including budgetary responsibilities). The manager / director of outdoor recreation planning develops program priorities, delegates responsibilities and assigns tasks to subordinate staff, and reviews, disciplines and evaluates the work of subordinates in the program or unit. The employee’s program or work unit responsibilities may include tasks of moderate to high levels of difficulty and may be responsible for developing and coordinating strategic planning efforts, policy initiatives, comprehensive plans or master plans that guide the overall development and delivery of a public parks and recreation

system. Responsibilities may also involve the planning, organizing and coordination of a wide variety of professional services, such as contract administration, comprehensive planning, land use planning, acquisition, grant writing, site master planning, resource and environmental impact assessments, special recreation studies and related projects. The employee may hold program or work unit responsibility for the development and coordination of comprehensive public input processes, including public meetings and presentations as required by various projects, and deliver oral presentations to internal and external audiences. These responsibilities are not limited nor are they all-inclusive, and the employee may perform any combination of these (or similar) responsibilities.

Qualifications: Graduation from an accredited college or university with a bachelor's degree in recreation resource planning, parks and recreation administration / management, planning, public or business administration, landscape architecture, or a related field. Master's degree is preferred. Five to seven years of experience relevant to the position, with at least three years of supervisory experience.

The mean years of minimum required experience in this tier was 5.8 years, and the mean number of relevant years of experience actually held by the respondents was 20.6 years (Table 11). However, most of the respondents (93%) indicated that their positions required a relevant bachelor's degree or higher, but more than one-half (51.4%) of the respondents indicated that they actually held a relevant master's degree or Ph.D. (Table 12).

About three-fourths (79.2%) of respondents in this tier indicated that they held supervisory responsibilities with a mean of 8.3 employees, and 86.1% indicated that they held budgetary responsibilities. The mean monthly salary reported by respondents in this tier was \$6,614, with a minimum monthly salary of \$3,500 and a maximum salary of \$12,172 (Table 13).

Table 11. Minimum years of experience required for current job and total years of relevant experience held by respondent for Tier III (n = 72).

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Years of Experience Required	5.8	1	20
Relevant Years of Experience Held by Respondent	20.6	3	37

Table 12. Minimum level of relevant college education required for current job and actual level of relevant college education held by respondent, by percent for Tier III (n = 72).

	None	Bachelors	Masters	Ph.D.
Minimum Required College	7.0%	84.5%	8.5%	0
Relevant College Held by Respondent	5.5%	43.1%	48.6%	2.8%

Table 13. Reported monthly and annual compensation for Tier III – manager / director of outdoor recreation planning (n = 72).

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Monthly salary	\$6,614	\$3,500	\$12,172
Annual salary	\$79,368	\$42,000	\$146,064

Note: Annual salaries were derived by multiplying the reported monthly salaries by 12 months.

Recommendations

It is recommended that this study be replicated once every five years in order to monitor and evaluate changes in reported compensation. It is also suggested that improvements to the study be made to capture more information about the demographic profile of the respondents and perhaps their fringe benefits.

There may be other sources to add to the sample list of potential respondents who might meet the qualifying criteria for one of the tiers of the benchmark position. It is recommended that greater efforts are made in subsequent studies to expand the sample list.

About NARRP

The National Association of Recreation Resource Planners (NARRP) is a professional planning association dedicated to providing the public opportunities for the enjoyment and benefits of quality outdoor recreation, in balance with natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resource protection. NARRP provides its members with the opportunity to reach out to recreation resource stewards nationwide in order to advance professional educational development, interagency networking, information and technology exchange, and nurture working relationships and long-term friendships. For more information about NARRP, visit: www.narrp.org.

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ADDENDUM

Survey Questionnaire



National Salary Study of Outdoor Recreation Planners - 2008

Conducted by the National Association of Recreation Resource Planners

Please read carefully over the attached position tier descriptions before answering the following questions. It is very important that you complete this for YOUR position ONLY and not for another employee within your agency. The individual information that you provide will be held in strictest confidence, and survey results will only be assessed and presented collectively. As a professional service to the outdoor recreation planning profession, the results of this study will be made available through the National Association of Recreation Resource Planners at no charge later this year. Therefore, your participation in this survey is essential and sincerely appreciated.

1. Based on the three tiers of the benchmark position (attached), which tier do you feel your current position most closely represents?
 - a. Tier I: Outdoor Recreation Planner
 - b. Tier II: Senior Outdoor Recreation Planner
 - c. Tier III: Manager / Director of Outdoor Recreation Planning

2. Do you feel that the position in which you are currently employed represents **at least 70%** of that tier's position description and requirements that you selected in question #1? A. Yes B. No [it represents less than 70% of that description]

3. How many years of experience does your current position require in order to qualify for employment? Minimum of ____ years of relevant experience.

4. How many years of relevant experience in outdoor recreation planning do you have in your career? ____ years in outdoor recreation planning.

5. What is the minimum level of relevant college education required for your current position? Minimum: None Bachelor's Master's Ph.D.

6. What is the level of relevant college education that you currently have in your career? None Bachelor's Master's Ph.D.

7. IF you currently supervise employees, how many do you supervise?

__ employees; or N/A (I don't supervise anyone)

8. Does your position currently hold direct budgeting responsibilities? Yes No

9. What is your current **monthly** salary? \$ _____

10. What type of agency do you work for in this position?

- A. Federal
- B. State
- C. Regional
- D. Local (city / county)
- E. Private organization / consulting firm
- F. College or University

11. What is the estimated population of your service area? _____

12. Where is your position located? City: _____; State: _____

Zip Code: _____;

13. Is this position located within a metropolitan area? Yes No

That completes our survey. Thanks again for your participation