



amidon research report

November 2008

Do Illinois Park Closings Show Party Bias?

As of early November, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) is still planning to close eleven state parks at the end of the month. The question here is, *Do these closings have a disproportionate impact on Republican or Democratic counties?*

The eleven facilities scheduled for closing are limited to nine counties, as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ▪ Castle Rock State Park | <i>Ogle County</i> |
| ▪ Channahon Parkway State Park | <i>Will County</i> |
| ▪ Gebhard Woods State Park | <i>Grundy County</i> |
| ▪ Hennepin Canal Parkway State Trail | <i>Bureau County</i> |
| ▪ Hidden Springs State Forest | <i>Shelby County</i> |
| ▪ Illini State Park | <i>LaSalle County</i> |
| ▪ Kickapoo State Recreation Area | <i>Vermilion County</i> |
| ▪ Lowden State Park | <i>Ogle County</i> |
| ▪ Moraine View State Recreation Area | <i>McLean County</i> |
| ▪ Weldon Springs State Park | <i>DeWitt County</i> |
| ▪ Wolf Creek State Park | <i>Shelby County</i> |

NOTE: Media reports that correctly label Hidden Springs a state forest typically identify all ten other facilities as state parks, even though the IDNR Website designates Hennepin Canal as a state trail and both Kickapoo and Moraine View as state recreation areas. Please note below all the different designations used to group 125 facilities.

Seven of the nine counties gave Republican Judy Barr Topinka more votes than Democrat Rod Blagojevich, in the 2006 gubernatorial election. LaSalle and Will are the two counties that favored Governor Blagojevich in his contest for re-election. Those results are consistent with expectations that most state parks and recreational areas lie in or near rural and small-town settings where Republican candidates traditionally perform well at the polls; but this political bias does not appear compelling if we consider the full range of properties managed by the IDNR.

The IDNR's Website lists 125 parks and recreation sites: 43 wildlife or fish and wildlife areas, 42 parks, 18 recreation areas, eleven natural areas, six forests, three trails, one marina and one shooting complex. (Not counted in that total but listed in the Website index are a canal incorporated largely into four of the parks and a wildlife park funded

by a private foundation.) Seventy-two of 102 Illinois counties are home to one of more of the 125 properties.

The IDNR has organized its holdings into five regions: Northwest, Northeast, East Central, West Central and South. Affected sites are scattered across northern and eastern counties. The two regions to the south and west face no closings, although those regions fall clearly on the “downstate” and presumably Republican side of the divide between Metropolitan Chicago and the rest of the state. Indeed, each of the eleven sites slated to close lies within 205 miles of downtown Chicago.

Yet the large number of unaffected facilities and their geographic distribution do not entirely belie a partisan split. The table below arrays, by two-party balance, all 125 properties, the few to close and the many to remain open. The left side of the table gives actual counts; the right side projects the most likely random or chance distribution.

	OBSERVED DISTRIBUTION			PREDICTED DISTRIBUTION		
	In Counties Topinka Vote >54%	In Competitive Counties	In Counties Blagojevich Vote >54%	In Counties Topinka Vote >54%	In Competitive Counties	In Counties Blagojevich Vote >54%
Sites Closing	7	4	0	5	4	2
Sites Not Closing	50	38	26	52	38	24

The observed distribution in competitive counties, four closings and 38 non-closings, is exactly what we would expect as a chance result. Counties that voted heavily for Topinka have seven closings, instead of the five predicted. Conversely, the strong Blagojevich counties have no closings, when we would expect two. The degree to which closings skew toward Topinka strongholds is modest, to be sure. Nonetheless, if we drop the data from competitive counties, the disparity is statistically significant. That is, the odds of getting the reported numbers by chance do not exceed 10%.

Because net operating expenses for fish, wildlife and natural areas presumably include relatively low labor costs, the IDNR may not have considered the 54 sites in those categories to be good candidates for closing, as a means of saving state funds. Closing the marina or shooting complex, on the other hand, might have cost the agency too much in lost revenue. If we eliminate those 56 properties from our analysis, as in the table below, what we conclude about the 69 remaining sites is essentially unchanged from our conclusion about all 125 holdings. Namely, the IDNR has designated a slightly disproportionate number of closings for solidly Republican counties, as compared to solidly Democratic counties; but the disparity does not reach a threshold level of

statistical significance (0.10) unless we exclude, from consideration, the sites in competitive counties.

	OBSERVED DISTRIBUTION			PREDICTED DISTRIBUTION		
	In Counties Topinka Vote >54%	In Competitive Counties	In Counties Blagojevich Vote >54%	In Counties Topinka Vote >54%	In Competitive Counties	In Counties Blagojevich Vote >54%
Sites Closing	7	4	0	5	4	2
Sites Not Closing	26	19	13	28	19	11

Statistical “bias” against Republican counties appears somewhat stronger if we limit our sample to the nine counties facing park closings and extend consideration of party balance to successive elections. Chances are lower than 5% that four closings would fall, two each, in two counties that remained solidly Republican from 2006 to 2008, while seven other closings would be distributed singly among the one other Republican county, two counties that favored the Democratic Party marginally in 2006 and more strongly in 2008, two counties that shifted from Judy Barr Topinka to Barack Obama and one county that went from a small Republican edge to a virtual tie.

	OBSERVED DISTRIBUTION		PREDICTED DISTRIBUTION	
	Republican Counties	Competitive and Democratic Counties	Republican Counties	Competitive and Democratic Counties
2 Closings	2	0	0.67	1.33
1 Closing	1	6	2.33	4.67

None of these observations technically demonstrates “cause and effect.” Even if the IDNR’s selections diverged more sharply from random choices, evidence of such a relationship or *correlation* is never, by itself, proof of *causation*. State legislators from both major political parties have raised objections to the park closings; and some have

suggested that, in this issue as in others, what separates the two sides is the cleavage between Governor and Speaker of the House of Representatives, both Democrats.

Please note: Data on IDNR properties come from the agency's Website, and data on election returns derive from the Illinois Secretary of State's *Blue Book* (available online) and from www.CNN.com. In virtually every county, the combined two-party vote in 2008 differs by no more than 1% to 2% from all votes cast. A much higher percentage of votes went to the 2006 Green Party ticket. It took more than 20% of the total vote in each of four counties, including Ogle County.

For details on sources and data, please submit requests to askus@amidonresearch.com.

©amidon research



amidon research analyzes economic, political and human-capital data to provide consulting services to business enterprises, nonprofit organizations and government units.

- We report and evaluate marketplace trends and regulatory developments.
- We develop multiple-year business plans and financial projections.
- We conduct market analysis and structure marketing programs.
- We analyze operations to promote increased productivity and improved service.
- We examine sourcing and supply arrangements for costs and performance.
- We audit and design human-resources systems, including programs that cover organization development, workforce utilization and total rewards. (*Please see our companion Website www.payline.us.)*

In consulting assignments, we employ a variety of statistical analytical techniques, and we seek to make optimal use of a client organization's existing software and databases, in order to integrate information across the enterprise. Where a client chooses, we can conduct workshops for client personnel; and we can organize multiple-client work groups within and across different industries and trades.

For more information, please email askus@amidonresearch.com or contact

amidon research • P.O. Box 5305 • River Forest, Illinois 60305
(708) 488-1950 • Fax (708) 488-1951 • www.amidonresearch.com