

MEASURING AND IMPROVING CUSTOMER

SATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT

SERVICES

Glen D. Alexander

Chief, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation, 1952 Belcher Dr. C-3 Columbus, OH 43224

Two years ago, Ohio State Parks developed a methodology of measuring customer satisfaction to gauge the effectiveness of our customer service. What follows is a discussion of our installation of systems to measure and improve customer satisfaction, the interpretation of the data, and the positive results we have enjoyed.

Measuring Customer Satisfaction

We elected to develop our own customer satisfaction survey form (see Figure 1 on following pages) to enable our customers to respond to us about how they enjoyed their visit to one of our Ohio State Parks. This form is pre-franked and is mailed directly to our Columbus headquarters. It contains both structured and unstructured response sections. The survey is run for the five summer months of May, June, July, August, and September when 80% of the visitation to Ohio State Parks occurs. Since it takes at least two employees to operate and imposes a strain on many other managers it is not cost effective to operate during the seven off season months.

In Columbus the structured response section is entered into our computer data base and means and standard deviations are calculated from this base for the Ohio State Park system as a whole and for each of the 72 individual parks.

We are most interested in the responses to the question: "How would you rate your visit to this park overall?". A five point scale is used for responses to all structured questions with excellent = 5 and unacceptable = 1. The customer returns are tabulated by park and means are calculated to 3 decimal places. The comparison in how these means fare from month to month is tracked by park and for the Ohio State park system as a whole. We have found a very high correlation with what is going on in a park and the trend of this mean. When it goes down we can usually identify the reasons why; and likewise when it goes up. Certainly small spot random variations do occur, however they easily are weeded out by trend line analysis. (The table of means calculated for 1992 and 1993 is attached in Table 1; see following pages.)

The balance of the structured portion of the questionnaire is used to spot problem areas in particular service categories and to make rough comparisons of service categories between parks.

The unstructured response areas of the questionnaire provide the park staff with ideas, examples, and data on how they improve customer satisfaction by resolving problems, instituting innovations, and capitalizing on particularly customer pleasing situations. In the unstructured portions of the customer survey forms we find many of our best ideas and innovations. We do read these in Columbus and do an anecdotal analysis of these returns over the winter period.

To provide a statistical validation of our in-house analysis of the customer survey returns, we have engaged The Ohio State University Polymetrics Laboratory to run a random telephone survey concurrently in the same time period each year that we are operating our own survey. They use exactly the same questionnaire form and gather some additional information as well. The results of the OSU surveys, randomly conducted with

rigorously sound statistically protocols, have provided means that are not statistically different from our own means. The OSU means have an error factor of $\pm 4.4\%$ for the 305 valid response sample they use. We feel quite confident that our "N's" which equal 9,800 returns in 1992 and 20,200 returns in 1993, are sufficiently high enough to give us statistically valid data as corroborated by the OSU surveys. (A comparison of OSU means and our own means is shown in Table 2.) Ohio State Parks experience 65,000,000 visitors annually who picked up about 600,000 surveys in 1993. The 20,200 received in Columbus represents a return of 3.5%, which is excellent by industry standards.

Improving Customer Satisfaction

We have established Total Quality Management (TQM) feedback loops with the employee teams in each of our parks as one of our methods of continuously making improvements in customer satisfaction. Copies of the surveys are returned to each park each week. The entire park staff sits down as a team and reviews the results of the surveys and especially the non-structured comments. Our central office also returns the means calculated for each park on a monthly basis with comparisons with the previous year, some indication of how the division is doing as a whole, and trends in how other parks are doing.

Each park staff team has been empowered to unilaterally make whatever changes are appropriate to improve customer satisfaction. The Ohio State Park system has 72 parks and some of those are large enough to have separate employee team meetings along functional lines. Golf course employees for example tend to meet by themselves and work on improving golf course customer satisfaction. With many, many teams operating, the results drive customer satisfaction far better than any possible effort from some central administration. Literally hundreds of changes in the way we do business are implemented each visitor season by the employees themselves.

Ideas implemented by these park teams have ranged from changing the hours of checking in and out of campsites and cabins to the acceptance of credit cards in the state system for the first time, and providing multiple picnic tables for groups staying together in cabins or campsites. We are overhauling the entire check-in procedure for cabins and campgrounds and eliminating all but one simple universal form statewide at employees' suggestion. This will speed up check-in time and greatly simplify check-in procedures which pleases our customers. One park built a small, inexpensive fish cleaning station. Another rehabilitated a shower building into a model of what a modern shower house should be like. Yet another changed its entire cleaning schedule to meet customer preferences.

Most importantly is the feedback received on cleanliness of facilities. This is the most commented upon service and the one we have been able to influence most significantly as a direct result of this feedback. The 1993 OSU survey found a statistically significant increase in customers' favorable perception of cleanliness in Ohio State Parks versus 1992's users. The OSU survey also indicated that a significant increase in favorable response to our campground employees was seen as well. Expansion of pet camping to all parks in the system, the systematic improvement of food service at restaurants, camper store services of firewood, ice, and other products, and greatly increased naturalist programs are additional examples of how this feedback is driving increased customer satisfaction in Ohio State Parks today.

Many parks post the customer survey results and significant returns on bulletin boards. The Chief of Parks writes a personal letter to any employee who gets a personal mention on the forms coming back in. We provide annual awards for the parks whose means achieve 4.500 or better. In 1992 ten parks made that rating. In 1993 seventeen parks made that rating. The plaque presented at the annual managers conference is large enough for the names of all the employees in that park to be engraved as recognition of the idea that customer satisfaction is a team effort that all employees

must participate in to be successful. The employees like the system, like the feedback which is over 80% positive, and like the freedom to make changes they see fit.

Positive Results We Have Enjoyed

Since its inception the customer survey means for the Ohio State Park system as a whole have increased each and every month over the previous month's means for ten straight months (5-month summer seasons each in 1992 and 1993). A graphic display of those means is shown in Figure 2. Whether one agrees with the "elegance" of our statistical approach or not, the indisputable fact remains that each month we have impressed more of our customers favorably, and fewer customers unfavorably, than the previous month. The actual numerical counts of complaints are down and the numerical counts of compliments are up.

Favorable mention of this program and focus upon pleasing our customers has begun to appear in the press. Legislators are also becoming aware of the "new look" in parks and are responding favorably to more satisfied constituents.

Our employees are responding favorably to this program in a variety of ways. As mentioned above they particularly like the positive feedback dimension from the people they serve. It simply means more to employees to receive feedback from their customers as opposed to their boss. They also like the recognition they receive in the form of letters, plaques, and peer awards. Our employees have adopted a "go out of your way to please our customers" attitude as a major positive result. This new attitude in our employees is gaining favorable comment from many quarters as the "new look" in Ohio State Parks.

Certainly not the least benefit from our increased customer satisfaction has come at the polls in November, 1993 in the form of a \$200.0 million referendum passed to rebuild Ohio Parks infrastructure. Ohio State Parks was fortunate enough to be the point agency in the Ohio Parks and Natural Resources Fund bond issue authorization. This bond issue authorization had to pass the Ohio General Assembly by a 60% margin as a referendum and then be successful at the polls with all voters. The goal of this referendum is to rehabilitate, renovate, and modernize existing facilities in Ohio State Parks and other natural resource areas in Ohio. It included a dimension of matching grants for local park systems.

In our efforts to pass this referendum with state legislators first, and then in a grass roots effort with our park users and neighbors, we constantly came across the feedback that the parks had seen many changes for the better in customer service. People seemed to be responsive to our customer satisfaction emphasis and felt that if the referendum passed, its funds would likely be put to good use to take care of our customers. The referendum passed by a 61% to 39% margin which reflected in part the growing support for serving our customers right in Ohio's state parks.

As chief of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation, I strive to provide the best possible experience for all park visitors. Your comments can help me make our parks a better place for you to visit. Please take just a few minutes to fill out applicable sections of this evaluation form and drop it in the mail to me.

How would you rate your visit to this park overall? Excellent Good Average Poor Unacceptable

Specifically, how would you rate the following ...

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Unacceptable	
General Park						
Appearance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Comments: _____ _____ _____
Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Convenience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Employee Helpfulness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Facilities Condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Your Experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Services You Received	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Campground						
Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Comments: _____ _____ _____
Appearance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Employee Helpfulness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Facilities Condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Cabin						
Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Comments: _____ _____ _____
Comfort	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Facilities Condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Lodge						
Activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Comments: _____ _____ _____
Facilities Condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Employee Helpfulness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Picnic Areas						
Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Comments: _____ _____
Facilities Condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Food Service						
Quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Comments: _____ _____
Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Beach						
Employee Helpfulness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Comments: _____ _____ _____
Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Facilities Condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marina						
Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Comments: _____ _____ _____
Facilities Condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Employee Helpfulness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Golf Course						
Course Condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Comments: _____ _____ _____
Employee Helpfulness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pro Shop Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Date of Visit _____ Park Visited _____

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Figure 1. Customer satisfaction survey for Ohio State Parks.

Table 1. Summary of results of Ohio State Parks customer satisfaction survey for all parks.

**OHIO DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION
Customer Satisfaction Survey
SUMMARY OF ALL PARKS**

As of 10/29/93

	1993	1992	% CHG
Total Surveys Returned:	20,213	9,832	105.6%

	AVERAGE RATING		PERCENT
	1993	1992	CHANGE
OVERALL Average:	4.358	4.283	1.8%
GENERAL PARK Average:	4.321	4.268	1.2%
Appearance:	4.471	4.445	0.6%
Cleanliness:	4.319	4.303	0.4%
Convenience:	4.237	4.229	0.2%
Employees:	4.473	4.412	1.4%
Facilities:	4.030	3.996	0.9%
Experience:	4.323	4.290	0.8%
Services Received:	4.370	4.301	1.6%
CAMPGROUND Average:	4.318	4.244	1.7%
Cleanliness:	4.385	4.336	1.1%
Appearance:	4.419	4.367	1.2%
Employees:	4.465	4.400	1.5%
Facilities:	4.017	3.905	2.9%
CABIN Average:	4.140	4.093	1.1%
Cleanliness:	4.214	4.195	0.5%
Comfort:	4.066	4.099	-0.8%
Facilities:	4.062	3.999	1.6%
LODGE Average:	4.222	4.238	-0.4%
Activities:	4.187	4.145	1.0%
Facilities:	4.225	4.262	-0.9%
Cleanliness:	4.246	4.271	-0.6%
Employees:	4.286	4.316	-0.7%
FOOD Average:	3.941	3.800	3.7%
Quality:	3.906	3.768	3.7%
Service:	3.986	3.842	3.7%
PICNIC Average:	4.277	4.240	0.9%
Cleanliness:	4.384	4.354	0.7%
Facilities:	4.157	4.129	0.7%
TRAIL Average:	4.295	4.360	-1.5%
Cleanliness:	4.346	4.467	-2.7%
Condition:	4.245	4.267	-0.5%
BEACH Average:	3.950	3.941	0.2%
Employees:	4.164	4.158	0.1%
Cleanliness:	3.938	3.944	-0.2%
Facilities:	3.850	3.861	-0.3%
MARINA Average:	4.162	4.101	1.5%
Cleanliness:	4.210	4.141	1.7%
Facilities:	4.063	4.000	1.6%
Employees:	4.255	4.252	0.1%
GOLF COURSE Average:	4.413	4.324	2.1%
Condition:	4.420	4.220	4.7%
Employees:	4.411	4.366	1.0%
Cleanliness:	4.510	4.473	0.8%
ProShop:	4.315	4.295	0.5%

Table 2. Comparison of Write Right and Ohio State Customer Satisfaction Surveys summarizing results for all state parks.

OHIO DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION
 Comparison of "Write Right" and Ohio State Customer Satisfaction Surveys
 Summary for All Parks
 1993

Total Valid Responses:
 "WRITE RIGHT..." 20,213
 OHIO STATE 305

	Average		% DIFF	Number of Responses									
				5 Excel		4 Good		3 Avg		2 Poor		1 Unacc	
	"W/R"	OSU		"W/R"	OSU	"W/R"	OSU	"W/R"	OSU	"W/R"	OSU	"W/R"	OSU
Overall Percent Distribution				49.7%	38.9%	39.8%	52.2%	8.0%	8.3%	1.6%	0.7%	0.9%	0.0%
OVERALL Average	4.358	4.292	1.5%	10,044	117	8,043	157	1,616	25	327	2	179	0
GENERAL PARK Average	4.321	4.174	3.5%										
Appearance	4.471	4.262	4.9%	10,372	112	6,940	159	1,114	27	173	3	43	0
Cleanliness	4.319	4.176	3.4%	8,799	105	7,004	153	1,853	35	395	7	119	1
Employees	4.473	4.239	5.5%	10,440	79	5,062	118	1,316	16	246	4	159	1
Facilities	4.030	4.017	0.3%	6,246	71	7,245	170	2,760	41	928	11	368	1
Services Received	4.370	4.195	4.2%	8,258	75	5,971	140	1,416	25	222	0	155	1
CAMPGROUND Average	4.318	4.270	1.1%										
Cleanliness	4.385	4.323	1.4%	5,991	39	4,318	49	904	8	201	0	86	0
Appearance	4.419	4.320	2.3%	5,946	39	4,262	50	780	8	153	0	55	0
Employees	4.465	4.299	3.9%	6,331	35	3,225	46	747	4	164	1	113	1
Facilities	4.017	4.138	-2.9%	3,890	22	4,381	64	1,551	7	642	1	290	0
CABIN Average	4.140	4.420	-6.3%										
Cleanliness	4.214	4.520	-6.8%	903	15	713	8	233	2	76	0	33	0
Facilities	4.062	4.320	-6.0%	683	10	781	13	302	2	90	0	28	0
LODGE Average	4.222	4.201	0.5%										
Activities	4.187	4.075	2.7%	710	16	707	26	215	10	62	1	17	0
Facilities	4.225	4.169	1.3%	922	22	772	33	222	9	80	1	28	0
Cleanliness	4.246	4.246	-0.0%	987	24	753	34	210	6	92	1	28	0
Employees	4.286	4.295	-0.2%	1,043	23	673	35	196	2	71	0	42	1
FOOD Average	3.939	3.870	1.8%										
Quality	3.904	3.793	2.9%	1,167	20	1,403	58	781	25	217	6	102	2
Service	3.983	3.946	0.9%	1,293	23	1,311	68	642	15	199	4	104	2
PICNIC Average	4.277	4.158	2.9%										
Cleanliness	4.384	4.210	4.1%	5,861	66	4,415	124	947	18	174	2	55	0
Facilities	4.157	4.106	1.2%	4,334	49	4,223	132	1,320	25	414	1	180	0
TRAIL Average	4.292	4.291	0.0%										
Cleanliness	4.343	4.374	-0.7%	3,667	68	2,851	88	672	7	165	0	42	0
Condition	4.243	4.207	0.8%	2,979	51	2,934	98	789	13	188	2	44	0
BEACH Average	3.950	3.710	6.5%										
Employees	4.164	3.789	9.9%	2,882	20	2,818	59	966	28	225	5	106	2
Cleanliness	3.938	3.707	6.2%	2,787	24	3,257	81	1,386	36	582	14	249	2
Facilities	3.850	3.654	5.4%	2,315	18	2,963	84	1,551	38	582	14	250	2
MARINA Average	4.159	4.079	2.0%										
Cleanliness	4.208	4.014	4.8%	1,916	11	1,938	51	560	4	101	3	67	0
Facilities	4.060	4.090	-0.7%	1,609	15	1,814	44	619	7	209	1	103	0
Employees	4.255	4.151	2.5%	1,903	14	1,478	34	478	4	89	1	74	0
GOLF COURSE Average	4.413	3.740	18.0%										
Condition	4.420	4.158	6.3%	810	5	689	12	64	2	23	0	10	0
Employees	4.411	4.053	8.8%	820	3	596	14	106	2	18	0	13	0
Cleanliness	4.510	4.368	3.2%	910	8	553	10	80	1	10	0	5	0
ProShop	4.315	2.125	103.1%	684	0	638	1	148	2	13	11	13	2

OHIO STATE PARKS OVERALL PARK RATING

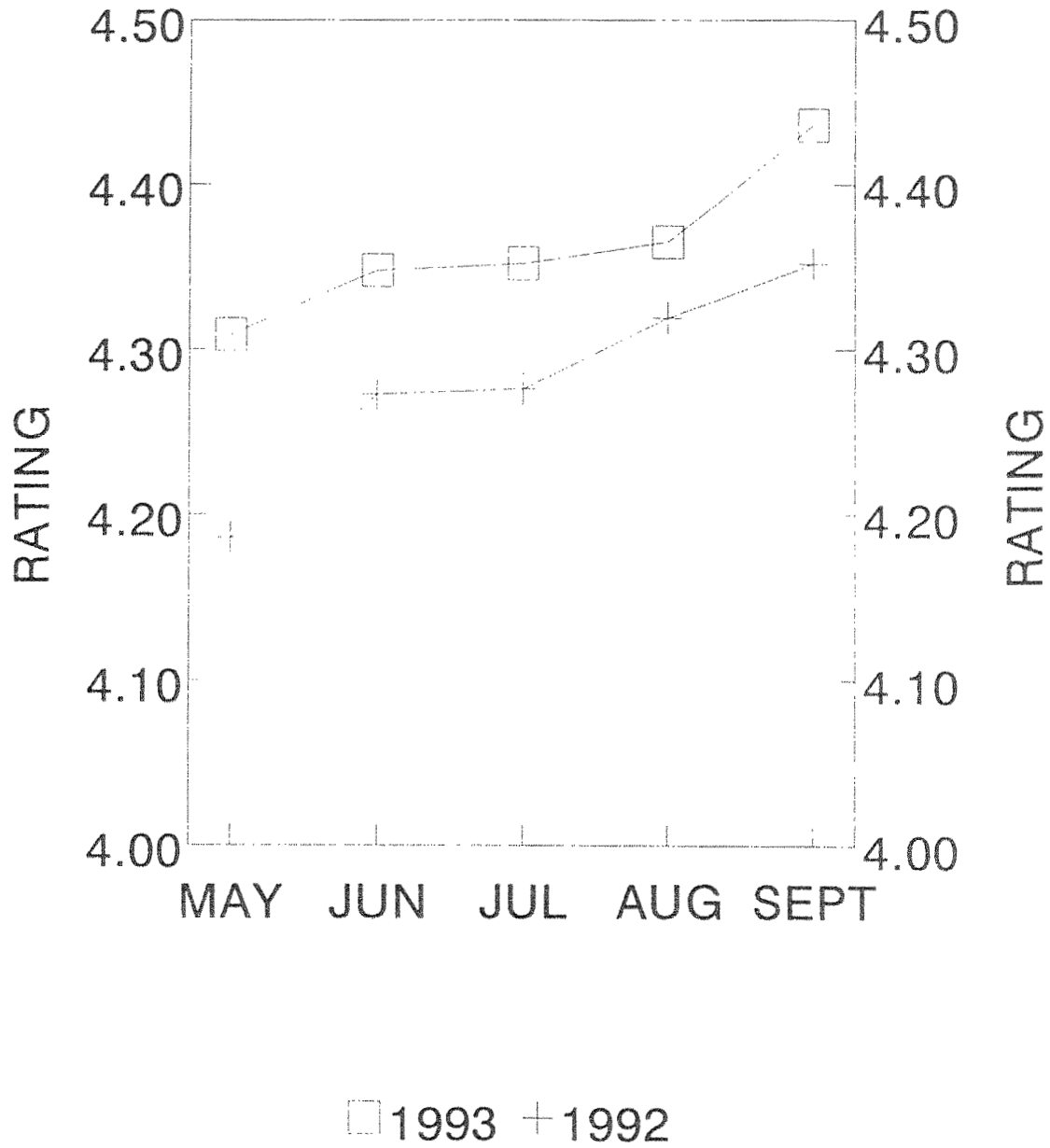


Figure 2. Graphic display of overall park rating for Ohio State Parks for 1992 and 1993.