

A Brief History of the Southeastern Environment and Recreation Research Conference (SERR)

Nationally, in the post-war 1950s and 1960s, interest in and research covering outdoor recreation became a serious rising interest among academics, government agencies, commercial interests, and many others. One outcome of this rising interest was SERR, originally titled the Southeastern Recreation Research Conference, which began in the 1970s. SERR, like many activities of that time, was stimulated by the work of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC). This Commission started its work in 1958 and published its results as a vast series of topical reports in 1962. The work and reporting by ORRRC had a significant impact on the country's conservation and land use priorities and on academic interests in outdoor recreation. The work of the ORRRC drew national attention and highlighted the need for research aimed at better understanding the fast-growing interest in and public demand for outdoor recreation.

In the 50s and 60s, and earlier, there was only a handful of outdoor recreation studies being conducted by university faculty and graduate students and government agencies in the U. S., including the South. The growth of research coincided with the growing number of university park and recreation departments, many of which included outdoor recreation curricula. Examples included Clemson University, North Carolina State University, the University of Arkansas, and Texas A & M University. In these early years, the research topics ranged from economic growth impacts from outdoor recreation in rural areas, to evaluations of national forest management and to recreation use estimation procedures (Graves 1963). Federal and state resource management agencies were beginning to institute recreation research programs in the late 50s. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service and the Economic Research Service were among the agencies that were early to establish recreation research programs in the South (van der Smissen 1963). A few scattered publications were beginning to emerge, covering topics such as use impacts on developed recreation sites, models for estimating use capacity, hunting and fishing use, private land access issues, and how to include recreation in forest planning and management.

SERR came about as a result of rising interest among researchers to have forums where their research could be shared and discussed. Included were a sizeable number of faculty, students, natural resource provider agencies, as well as health provider organizations, and others. During some of those meetings the question arose whether such meetings should continue and become an ongoing event. An early predecessor of SERR was the Southern States Recreation Research Conference. Among others involved as sponsors were North Carolina State University, the Forest Environment Research Division of the USDA Forest Service; and the Southeastern Forest Experiment Station. One part of the Conference was a regional Workshop held to prompt discussions between researchers and recreation managers and planners concerning the relevancy and applicability of research in the Southern States. A special emphasis was on the effectiveness with which researchers were communicating their results to managers, as well as on the effectiveness with which research needs were being communicated from managers to researchers. Prior to these early meetings, researchers and managers had rarely had the opportunity to meet, share, and learn.

As stated in the call for papers (<https://serrconference.org/>), "The Southeast Environment and Recreation Research (SERR) conference provides an exceptional opportunity for researchers and managers within the parks, recreation, and environmental management fields to learn about and discuss each other's projects, research findings, and regional needs. The conference setting supports both formal presentations and informal discussions in a setting that emphasizes student engagement and development, in addition to the friendly exchange of research theories and practices." SERR is the oldest continuously running recreation-focused conference in the country. The conference has been hosted in a variety of destinations, including Asheville, NC; Savannah, GA; Boone, NC; Athens, GA; Wilmington, NC; Greenville, SC; Auburn, AL; and Unicoi State Park in Helena, GA.

This current version of SERR is fulfilling the visions of the early recreation research community in the Southern States. Outdoor recreation has grown tremendously since WWII and since the ORRRC Commission reported on its extensive investigations in 1962. Through SERR (and its northern offshoot, NERR), researchers and managers across the South can share their research and remain in contact with their colleagues. An important aspect of SERR is that it highlights the research work of students, both graduate and undergraduate. This highlight emerged early in the evolution of SERR from largely informal meetings between researchers and managers to a more formally organized and major conference. From all appearances, SERR will continue to grow well into the future.