**IRB Thesis Proposal Application**

The Community of Member-Based Nature Parks:

An Integration of Spatial, Demographic, and Interview Data in Research

1. The sources of potential subjects come from the membership list for the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. The subject population’s potential demographic information gathered for this study will only include 5-digit zip code geographic identifier for all of the Wildflower Center’s members. This first kind of data will be combined with Census TIGER files to do a spatial analysis of the members based upon their zip codes using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software. To supplement this data, I will also have the Wildflower Center send in their Newsletter to members a request for those interested in participating in an interview to contact me through email letting me know that they are interested in participating in this research. The second kind of qualitative data will be used to understand the ways that members socially construct nature. Thus, inclusion in the qualitative analysis will be based on a subject’s membership status (i.e. he or she is a current member of the Center) and their response to the request for participants sent in the Wildflower Center Newsletter. I anticipate the number of responses to be around 15. However, if the number of responses is greater than 30, I will draw a sample from those who agreed to participate. The sampling frame, should it be needed, will be based on sex (i.e. I would like to have an even number of men and women) and/or location (i.e. the participant lives within a reasonable distance from Austin/San Marcos, so that we are able to meet for the interview). The anticipated age of respondents ranges from mid-20s to late-60s. Anticipated ethnic backgrounds of participants ranges from Caucasian to African American to Hispanic, as well as other ethnicities. None of the participants is anticipated to be mentally impaired or in a state of health that will inhibit their ability to voluntarily consent to participate in this research.
2. The procedures for gathering data are based on consent from and provided by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center located in Austin, Texas. I (Jamie McNiel) contacted the center on July 8, 2010. Dr. Chad Smith and myself, met with Lori Bockstanz on July 16, 2010. A formal request for data was sent to Lori Bockstanz per her request at the July 16th meeting. Consent from the Wildflower Center was obtained on Oct. 1, 2010 (see attached). This involves the quantative and qualitative data. Although, qualitative data will be gathered through email response to the Wildflower Center Member Newsletter request for participants, and then through my own email correspondence with these individuals to set up times and locations for an in-depth interview with them. Upon meeting each participant for an interview, I will first provide them with the consent form (see attached) before asking them any questions relating to this research project. I will also provide respondents with a copy of this consent form at this time as well.
3. The project utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. For the quantitative component, the geographical information provided by the Wildflower Center of members’ zip codes will be graphed using GIS software. Once the data is in the GIS program, I will conduct spatial analysis to determine where the largest amounts of members reside. Once this is determined, census data TIGER files indicating the median income, housing values, level of education, number of single-parent households, percent poverty, and race percentages, will be combined with the geographic data and statistically analyzed using SPSS. This will allow me to draw conclusions about the majority of Wildflower members, but at this larger aggregate unit of analysis. Thus, I can reasonably find any demographic disparities between Wildflower Center members as compared to the rest of the Austin-area population.

Qualitative analysis will consist of in-depth interviews conducted with those members that respond to the request in the Newsletter (see attached interview guide). I will not contact any members directly, but will send out a brief call for participants in the November Wildflower Center Member Newsletter (see attached permission from the Wildflower Center). Thus, this is convenient sampling and participants will only consist of those members who choose to participate in an interview by contacting me.

1. There are some potential risks associated with this study. First and foremost are always psychological or social risks associated with qualitative analysis. Because I am asking some potentially personal questions about member’s views of nature and feelings associated therein, I do recognize this possibility. Another risk is associated with legal risks to the Wildflower Center members. Due to the nature and type of questions I am asking (see attached interview guide), I would estimate the seriousness of these risks to be relatively low as I am only asking participants questions about nature and wilderness.
2. While I do not foresee any legal risks to be a major problem, steps are being taken to ensure that I do not encounter any liability issues with using a member listing from the Wildflower Center. These steps include constant communication with the Wildflower Center, formal letters from them approving the use of their data, and not directly associating my thesis with the Wildflower Center itself (i.e. In my thesis I use the term “Nature Center” and put its location as “Central Texas”). Steps are being taken to reduce the effect of psychological risk through question placement, wording, phrasing, interview setting (i.e. conducting interviews in a situation as indicated comfortable by the participant), providing them with a description of the study itself, and informing them of how their data will be used. I also provide them with contact information for three counseling services in central Texas, should they need them and explain that fees for any such services are the responsibility of the participant. Participants are given a consent form prior to the in-depth interview (see attached). Confidentiality of participants is of high priority, and will be maintained by minimizing who has access to identifying data, storing it in a locked filing cabinet in my (Jamie McNiel) office (Derrick 215), assigning participants a number for analysis purposes, and informing them that their confidentiality will be maintained.
3. The information obtained from this study will not only benefit Environmental Sociologists to gain insight into this aspect of the socio-ecological relationship, but will also provide the Center with valuable insight into the community of those who are active in the member-based park. While this is not a program evaluation and will in no way be directly affiliated with the Wildflower Center, the analysis can still be beneficial to the Center for purposes such as marketing, grant writing, and budgeting. The Center requested a copy of the study, and I have agreed to provide them with one. A possible benefit for members, is discussing outdoor recreation experiences and views of nature that they might not have described prior to participating in the study. Another possible benefit for members is their ability to express their feelings, motivations, and experiences in their own words and allow them to express themselves.
4. There are no compensation/benefits provided to participants.
5. With regard to the psychological risks, the only way to obtain the motivations, feelings, and experiences of members is through interviews; and therefore, I do feel that the potential risks are not great enough to warrant the potential loss of insightful data if not performed. Additionally, any possible social and legal risks, as previously mentioned, I do not foresee to outweigh the potential benefits of this research.
6. The specific agency providing the data is the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. The Wildflower Center is located at 4801 La Crosse Avenue, Austin, Texas 78739. See attached copy of approval letter.
7. This thesis is directly related to my program of study- Sociology. Moreover, this research stems from Environmental Sociology, the main focus for my degree. The committee chair for this thesis is Dr. Chad Smith in the department of Sociology.
8. See attached proposal and approval.
9. This proposed study has not been approved by another IRB.
10. Myself (Jamie McNiel), Dr. Chad Smith, and Lori Bockstanz (Annual Giving Manager- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center)