

# Parks & Recreation

## DISCOVER

The world of Parks and Recreation touches more than 300 million people in this country. From the largest cities to the most rural communities, public park and recreation agencies around the country are united in their mission to improve health and well being, provide safe and enjoyable recreation opportunities, better the environment, and provide Americans with a higher quality of living. Here is a closer look at parks and recreation in the United States.

### Scope

The National Recreation and Park Association reports that in 2009 there were 9,000 local public park and recreation organizations within the United States.

In a 2004 report issued by the National Association of State Park Directors, there were more than 5,800 state park areas comprising more than 13 million acres and 43,000 miles of trails. In that year there were 827 million visitors to state parks.

The Trust for Public Land lists total acreage of urban parkland in the United States as exceeding one million acres, with parks ranging in size from the 1.7-acre Post Office Square in Boston to the 490,125-acre Chugach State Park in Anchorage. Urban parkland usage surpasses that of the national parks. Lincoln Park in Chicago receives upwards of 20 million users each year. Central Park in New York has 25 million visits annually, which is more than five times as many as the Grand Canyon.

In 2004, funding for state parks represented 0.24% (less than 1/4 of 1%) of total state budgets as cited by the National Association of State Park Directors. Operating expenditures totaled \$1.8 billion, with less than 50% provided by the general fund of states.

U.S. Census Bureau records indicate that in 2002 there were 226,031 local and 36,211 state jobs in parks and recreation. By 2008 that number had been cut to 167,220 local and 27,549 state jobs, a decline of 26% and 24%, respectively.

The National Park Service reports that in 2009 alone, there was more than \$12 billion in unfunded and unmet needs reported to the Land and Water Conservation Fund affecting public parks and recreation in the United States.



### Local Economy

The Trust for Public Land's Center for City Park Excellence found that in 2007 the Philadelphia park system provided the city with revenue of \$23.3 million, municipal savings of \$16 million, resident savings of \$1.15 billion, and a collective increase in resident wealth of \$729 million.

The National Association of State Park Directors reports that America's state park system contributes \$20 billion to local and state economies.

Management-consulting firm KPMG surveyed 1,200 technology workers in 1998 and concluded that a community's quality of life increased the attractiveness of a job by 33%.

### Property Value

In 2007, the Trust for Public Land's Center for City Park Excellence found that Philadelphia properties within 500 feet of parks or recreation land were worth an average of 5% more than land without this proximity. Researchers calculated this total increased value at \$689 million and additional property taxes of more than \$18 million.

In 2001, MIT researcher Andrew Miller investigated land values in suburban communities in north Texas and found that homes immediately adjacent to parks were worth 22% more than homes 2,600 feet away from a park.

A report by New Yorkers for Parks and Ernst and Young on the impact of park renovations on property value in New York City found that between 1990 and 2002, rents for commercial office space around Bryant Park increased from 115% to 225%, while surrounding submarkets saw only a 41% to 73% increase in similar properties.



## Youth Safety

As reported by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, the peak hours for violent juvenile crime are from 3:00 to 6:00 PM. These are also the hours when children are most likely to become victims of crime, be in an automobile accident, smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs. A 2006 survey by the Afterschool Alliance found that three out of four afterschool programs were full or overcrowded and 86% of providers surveyed said children in their communities who need afterschool programs do not have access to them.

Fort Myers police documented a 28% drop in juvenile arrests after the city built a new youth recreation center and started a new recreational and academic program.

Phoenix basketball courts and other recreation facilities are kept open until 2:00 AM throughout the summer. During this time police calls reporting juvenile crime drop by as much as 55%.

Los Angeles, through its Summer Night Lights program, keeps the lights on in 16 high-crime parks and adjoining recreation centers. The city organizes sports, music, food, and connections to summer jobs for participating young people. In 2008, the first year of the program, city officials reported that affected communities experienced significant declines in violent gang-related crimes (down 17%), homicides (down 86%) and aggravated assaults (down 23%).



## Health & Wellness

The number of Americans over age 65 is expected to reach 71.5 million by 2030, twice their number in 2000. In partnership with four other national organizations, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging released “The Maturing of America” report in 2006 that found that only 46% of American communities have begun to address the needs of the rapidly increasing aging population. Survey findings indicate that local governments do not yet have the policies, programs or services in place to promote the quality of life and the ability of older adults to live independently and contribute to their communities for as long as possible.

The California Department of Health Services estimates that physical inactivity costs the state \$13.3 billion per year in medical care, workers’ compensation, and lost productivity. If Californians increased their physical activity and lost 5% of their collective weight over five years, they would save more than \$1.3 billion. Public park and recreation organizations enable residents of all abilities to participate in physical activity.

A statewide study in West Virginia found that counties with greater recreational opportunities (e.g., existence of parks, number of facilities, acres of recreation lands) also had higher rates of physical activity, lower health care expenditures, and lower obesity rates.

As referenced by the U.S. Olympic Committee, Paralympic Division there are 21 million physically disabled Americans, including more than 35,000 military personnel who’ve been severely injured during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Public park and recreation organizations provide vital rehabilitative services to these individuals.

Public park and playground use has increased 30% by families with children during the current period of economic difficulty, as identified in a July 2009 report by the Trust for Public Land.

## About the National Recreation and Park Association

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is a national, not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing park, recreation, and conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people. NRPA and its 21,000 members promote and engage communities in healthy lifestyles, recreation initiatives, and conservation of open spaces and cultural resources. Since 1965, NRPA has been the voice advocating the significance of making parks, open space, and recreational opportunities available to all Americans. NRPA’s vision is that, by 2020, every person in America will have convenient access to safe and affordable public park and recreation opportunities.