

Chapter 1: Encouraging Outdoor Recreation

The Connecticut Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2005-2010 (SCORP) has been prepared pursuant to the requirements of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965. The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection is the state agency responsible for preparing and implementing this SCORP and for administering the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) applications and projects in Connecticut. Per Connecticut statute, twenty-five percent of the LWCF monies allocated to Connecticut must be disbursed to municipalities for the development of recreational facilities at the local level. The Land and Water Conservation Fund, therefore, supports the enhancement of recreational facilities and opportunities across Connecticut at both the state and local levels.

Although the preparation of a SCORP, and its submission to and approval by the National Park Service, is a requirement of the LWCF Act in order to participate in that program, the National Park Service is only one member of the audience that this plan is intended to address. The substantial effort undertaken to inventory the supply of recreational properties and facilities within Connecticut, including those managed by the state, local governments, non-profit entities, and commercial providers, makes this document a valuable resource to a wide range of government officials and planners. When combined with the detailed analysis of the demand for recreation developed for this report and broken down by thirty individual outdoor activities and by geographic area, the audience for the SCORP is seen as including state legislators, chief elected officials, parks and recreation department directors, regional planning agencies, non-profit organizations including land trusts, and recreation advocacy and user groups.

This SCORP concludes with a detailed set of recommendations to guide the Department of Environmental Protection in its outdoor recreation planning and development efforts over the next five years. The recommendations cover the priority needs for infrastructure maintenance and enhancement, for land acquisition, for the development of new facilities, and for eliminating the obstacles identified in the public outreach process as preventing a broader usage of recreational facilities, both state and municipal. Participation in outdoor recreation offers a wealth of benefits to our citizens. The State of Connecticut intends to do all that it can to maximize the participation of its citizens in outdoor recreation activities.

1.1 The Benefits of Outdoor Recreation

As just mentioned, outdoor recreational activities provide a range of benefits both to participating individuals and to the community. A brief glimpse at the physical, educational, psychological, community, and economic benefits of outdoor recreation furnishes a basis for understanding why providing opportunities for and encouraging participation in such activities is so important.

1.1.1 Physical Benefits

Nationwide, 22% of all adults are obese and 65% are overweight (TFAH, NHANES III qtd. in Ruser et al.). While Connecticut ranks 46th in the nation in its obesity rate, the magnitude of the rate and its upward trend are worrisome (TFAH). The number of obese adults in Connecticut rose from 10.9% in 1991 to 19.1% in 2005 (TFAH, AOA: Obesity in the US). Obesity reduces the quality and length of lives by increasing the risk for many serious health conditions, such as coronary heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and osteoarthritis. According to the American Obesity Association, obesity “is the second leading cause of preventable death in the U.S.” Obesity is also costly. The Trust for America’s Health reports that the United States spends more than \$117 billion per year on the direct and indirect costs of obesity. In 2003, Connecticut spent approximately \$246 per person on obesity-related health costs.



Many factors have contributed to this obesity epidemic. Lifestyles in the current Information Age provide the average person with “access to highly caloric, palatable foods but little impetus or opportunity for energy expenditure” (Ruser, et al.). In theory, evolution favors weight retention. In addition, genetics and lifestyle often play a role in a person’s weight gain.

Most sources agree that a combination of improved eating habits and increased activity are the best way to prevent obesity and to help people to lose weight. While exercise will not result in significant weight loss without a concurrent reduction in caloric intake, it will contribute to long-term weight control and to a lower mortality rate, even in the absence of weight loss, due to increased cardiovascular fitness (Ruser et al.). According to Connecticut’s Department of Public Health, “physical activity may also have beneficial effects on hypertension, diabetes, . . . osteoporosis, anxiety, and depression.”

The 1996 Surgeon General’s Report on Physical Activity and Health estimates that 60% of American adults are not regularly active and another 25% are completely inactive. In a 1994 survey conducted by the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, people claim that time constraints are the main reason they don’t exercise regularly. Having recreational facilities nearby can reduce the time commitment needed for exercise. According to Addy et al., people who had safe places to walk in their neighborhoods and people who “used private recreation facilities, parks, playgrounds, and sports fields were more likely to be regularly active” than people who did not.

1.1.2 Educational Benefits

Outdoor recreation includes both organized sports and natural resource-based recreation (for example, hiking, camping, hunting, and fishing). Both types of recreational activities offer educational benefits to the participants.

Whether or not participants in organized sports achieve higher grades is controversial (Benz). Nonetheless, it is widely believed that athletes develop certain skills and habits that help them to function better in an academic environment. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education claims that [t]hrough participation in recreational sports, students are encouraged to develop critical thinking skills, create new problem-solving strategies, hone decision-making skills, enhance creativity, and more effectively synthesize and integrate this information into all aspects of their lives. In this way, students both perform more effectively in an academic environment and flourish throughout all phases of the co-curricular experience.

Natural resource-based recreation also offers educational benefits to the participants. Myron Floyd, an associate professor of recreation, parks, and tourism at the University of Florida, researched how outdoor recreation and exploration benefited urban youth. He discovered that “exposure to wild lands has a host of developmental benefits, including instilling navigational skills and improving cognitive ability.” In addition, children who participate in natural resource-based recreation are likely to retain their interest in the environment as adults. They are more likely to pursue careers related to the environment and to support land preservation initiatives. They are also more likely to be knowledgeable about environmental issues and to understand natural processes in their adult lives as employees, parents, and voters.

1.1.3 Psychological Benefits

As a result of spending less time outdoors, our society is suffering from what Robert Michael Pyle refers to as



“a degenerative cycle of disconnect and loss. Unable to recognize and value ecological integrity in our immediate surroundings, we care little for its degradation. . . .The consequences are profound, both in terms of the health of our environment and in terms of our own psychological and spiritual health” (qtd. in Meyer).

Reconnecting with the natural environment while participating in outdoor recreation can stop this degenerative cycle. First, all forms of exercise reduce anxiety, counteract depression, and increase a person’s sense of well-being. Second, just looking at a natural landscape reduces stress. Based on twenty years of research, Robert Ulrich states that “even the passive viewing of natural environments has both physiological and psychological benefits.” He showed his

subjects slides of natural landscapes and urban landscapes. Most subjects responded with “wakeful relaxation,” and “lower levels of fear and sadness” while viewing the images of nature (qtd. in Rubinstein). In further studies, Ulrich found that post-surgery patients who could see a vegetated landscape recovered faster and needed less analgesic medication than patients who could only see buildings (qtd. in Rubinstein). Rubinstein reports that these positive psychological effects also result from active exploration of the natural environment.

1.1.4 Benefits to the Community

While some participants in outdoor recreational activities seek solitude, many more participate in group activities. Thus, they have the opportunity to interact and to strengthen their sense of community.

Recreational sports teach the participants to subordinate their own desires for the good of the team and to resolve conflicts. Members learn to express their anger and disappointment appropriately and to accept the authority of their coaches. They also learn to work with people who are, in some cases, very different from themselves. All of these skills prepare the athletes for making positive contributions to their communities. Often, the fans of recreational sports teams develop long lasting friendships and work together to fundraise and to otherwise support the needs of the team.



Similarly, many natural resource-based activities help the participants build important social skills. Wilderness expeditions inspire the participants “to change in the direction of greater independence, self-discipline, patience, and self-reliance” (Rubinstein). Small groups of hunters learn to rely on each other. A sense of camaraderie and community develops in groups of backpackers and kayak campers who share the chores associated with camping and the joys of observing nature.

In addition, outdoor recreational facilities often serve as gathering places for the members of a community. John Hendee comments that “a weekend wave of social campers develops rapidly into a micro-community” and points out that the desire for social interaction is often more important to the campers than the landscape offered by the campground (qtd. in Rubinstein). Other researchers have described “the power of the urban park or plaza to reduce stress, act as a social facilitator, and encourage community cohesion” (Rubinstein).

1.1.5 Economic Benefits

Having high quality recreational facilities makes positive financial contributions to both the private and the public sectors. Outdoor historical sites, state parks, beaches, ski areas, marinas, and boat launches attract both Connecticut residents and out-of-state visitors. Not only will these visitors spend money at these facilities, but they will also

support the nearby restaurants and shops. Merchants benefit from all forms of outdoor recreation. Sales of sports equipment, clothing, and specialty items contribute to the private sector's retail sales figures.

In addition to the parking fees and the increased sales that come from outdoor recreation, outdoor recreation provides jobs. The income earned by the employees finds its way back into the state's treasury as income taxes and into the private sector as purchases.

1.2 No Child Left Inside

In recognition of the need to shift the balance of children's activity more heavily toward outdoor recreation, DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy has unveiled a new outreach, education, and public relations campaign to reach families across Connecticut, especially those in urban areas, and make them aware of the many recreational opportunities available. This campaign has adopted the phrase "No Child Left Inside" as its title and mission. Through this initiative, children and their families will be encouraged to get outdoors, both to partake in physical activity and to make a connection to nature. Not only are many of our children not getting sufficient exercise, but also they are not getting an exposure to the outdoors and an understanding of natural systems. A generation that does not have these experiences and this understanding will be ill equipped to be the environmental stewards of the next generation.

The *No Child Left Inside* initiative will work in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Public Health, the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, and other entities to promote visits to Connecticut's state and local parks for outdoor activities and to build an enthusiasm for continued natural-resource based recreation. Specific facilities and activities will be highlighted in this \$300,000 outreach campaign to give children and families the impetus to get out in nature and to reap the benefits described in the previous section. Commissioner McCarthy notes that people have an increasing tendency to stay inside and look at "a screen saver with a picture of an island and a palm tree on it" instead of going out to enjoy Connecticut's real beaches, such as Hammonasset Beach. This is a significant problem that must be overcome if we are to prepare a physically healthy and environmentally aware generation to take its place in our society.



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