

TOP TEN RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONSERVATION TASK FORCE

1 Take a leadership role in the community to promote conservation. Park and recreation agencies have a unique opportunity to bring governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, community leaders, and the public together for the cause of working on community-wide conservation objectives—clean water, wildlife habitat preservation, reducing energy use, and improving environmental quality. Park and recreation agencies must lead the way in promoting conservation to diverse and underserved audiences.

2 Lead by example in employing best management conservation practices in parks. Park and recreation agencies should become the catalyst in the community for conservation by showing how best practices can be adopted—not mowing what doesn't need to be mowed, stopping wasteful energy consumption, and reducing pesticide use, for example. Show the public how conservation practices can benefit everyone.

3 Protect natural resources in parks and in the community. A core mission of public parks is to protect land and water resources and to be stewards of natural resources. This means committing personnel and resources to protect natural and cultural resources and creating sustainable long-term methods of funding this conservation mission. Parks and recreation agencies are entrusted with some of the most important public assets of a community and the conservation and long-term protection of this public trust is and should be a core component of every parks and recreation agency's mission.

4 Forge partnerships that foster the mission of conservation. The greatest and most

beneficial conservation successes most often occur as a result of collaboration. Park and recreation agencies should partner with nonprofit and community service organizations, universities and colleges, school systems, other governmental agencies, and non-traditional partners for conservation outcomes. Promote health, education, green jobs, and other goals while working toward a common mission of conservation.

5 Create sustainable landscapes that demonstrate principles of conservation. Use sustainable landscapes to save taxpayer funds, to measurably improve conservation benefits, and to educate the public about conservation. For example, agencies can reduce turf grass and mowing frequency, replace turf with native plants, manage floodplains for multiple uses including conservation and public recreation, enhance wetlands for water filtration and groundwater recharge, plant model landscapes of drought-tolerant native plants adapted to climate and culture, and promote parks as food sources through edible landscapes and community gardens.

6 Engage youth in conservation. Get kids and teens outdoors and enjoying their parks. The experience of nature is inherently rewarding for youth. Set as a goal connecting kids in the community to nature and the outdoors. Conservation should be embedded in every aspect of recreation planning. Children and youth will be fascinated by nature and will develop a lifelong affinity, as well as a conservation ethic, if they have early opportunities to enjoy nature and recreate outdoors.

7 Involve volunteers in conservation and stewardship. Create a sense of belonging

and stewardship for parks by creating a personal sense of ownership and value. Enable people to identify with their parks and natural resources, and to care about their future. Sustain stewardship by creating meaningful public participation in implementation of conservation principles and practices.

8 Establish a strategic land acquisition strategy based on knowledge and awareness of significant natural and cultural resources (watershed protection, unique ecological characteristics, and sensitive natural areas deserving protection). As the largest owners of public land in most communities, park and recreation agencies should lead the way in developing a strategic vision for preserving open space and conserving important landscapes and natural features.

9 Conserve energy in all ways. Park and recreation agencies must lead by example, showing the public how and why they should adopt practices that they can see demonstrated in parks and recreation facilities. Park and recreation agencies should adopt energy conservation measures that make sense and save public taxpayer funds.

10 Utilize technology to promote conservation. Park and recreation agencies need to embrace technology to promote conservation. This is not only in applications such as GIS, but in utilizing social media to engage the public, especially youth. Technology is not to be feared as something that detracts from the conservation mission of parks agencies, but rather it is to be accepted as a means of sharing knowledge and connecting people to conservation and stewardship. 