

Environmental

Seven Dimensions of Well-Being Spotlight



NATIONAL
RECREATION AND PARK
ASSOCIATION

The Vision

Communities promote environmental justice and provide clean air, water and green space to ensure all populations — especially Black, Indigenous, people of color and low-income communities — have access to and can connect with the outdoors in meaningful ways. They are resilient in the wake of climate change and are mitigating against future environmental threats. Community members are aware of how the natural and built environment impacts health; they spend time connecting with the outdoors, and they take action to promote environmental justice.

How Parks and Recreation Promotes Environmental Well-Being

Parks and recreation is vital to a thriving natural world, mitigating against the impacts of climate change and creating an environment that promotes resilience and well-being. This is especially true for low-income communities and for communities where the majority of residents are Black, Indigenous, or people of color who have experienced the long-term environmental inequities caused by redlining, disinvestment and unfair power dynamics. Park and recreation professionals plan, manage and maintain more than 11 million acres of public parks and green spaces nationwide, improving air and water quality, reducing temperatures, and supporting healthy ecosystems and natural habitats.

Examples of Advancing Environmental Well-Being

- Develop a climate action or environmental sustainability plan to ensure parks are addressing the impacts of climate change, adopting energy efficiency practices, and improving environmental and community health outcomes.
- Prioritize park and green space investments and capital improvements that advance environmental resilience in communities most impacted by inequities.
- Incorporate green infrastructure (e.g., bioswales, rain gardens, permeable pavers) and sustainability practices (e.g., composting, solar, electric fleets/equipment, smart irrigation, recycling) into park and recreation facilities.
- Incorporate climate-adaptable and indigenous plants and trees into park projects that support local biodiversity and combat climate impacts.
- Host community science initiatives like a BioBlitz or partner with local environmental experts to provide educational opportunities about local ecosystems to educate the community and encourage local environmental action.
- Offer science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM)-based, environmental education, or natural play offerings, within out-of-school time and early childhood programs.
- Offer youth engagement and exposure to park-associated green jobs that expose and prepare the next generation for innovative and resiliency-focused careers.
- Source local, sustainable food and produce for meal programs or start farm-to-table, farmers markets and CSA programs to increase gardening, local procurement and family engagement to expand resilient food systems.
- Develop an emergency management plan to support community members in the wake of an environmental disaster.

In Practice

In November 2023, San Antonio River Authority (Texas) employees, community volunteers, employees from local Bobcat Company dealerships and National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) staff members gathered to make environmental improvements at the Trueheart Ranch Nature Park.

On that November day, with smiles and dirty gloves, the team that gathered used hand towels and sharpshooter shovels to plant native mealy blue sage, blue grama grass and tropical sage. Overall, 300 indigenous plants were planted that day. One of the functional improvements to the property was the addition of rain gardens adjacent to the parking lot and flanking the historic ranch home located in Trueheart Ranch Nature Park. These rain gardens were made possible by the generous support of Bobcat through NRPA.

Rain gardens are an excellent example of low-impact development (LID), which is the purposeful planning and engineering of land to mimic natural processes to manage stormwater runoff. Rain gardens accomplish many goals — they avert runoff that contributes to flooding/erosion and encourage infiltration of the water back into the water table. They also treat pollutants before re-entering the groundwater and increase the amount of moisture released back into the atmosphere.

The improvements at the ranch not only benefit the local environment, but they also provide local residents with nature-based recreation opportunities in a healthy and resilient park that will provide benefits for years to come.



Native plants are planted at Trueheart Ranch Nature Park in San Antonio, Texas. Photo courtesy of NRPA staff.

Learn More: bit.ly/SanAntonio-In-Practice

Learn more about the seven dimensions of well-being by visiting nrpa.org/CommunityWellnessHubs