



Position Statement on the Role of Parks and Recreation in Conservation and the Environment

The mission of public parks and recreation at all levels should support the conservation and stewardship of land, water, and natural resources.

Parks and public lands serve an essential role in preserving natural resources and wildlife habitat, protecting clean water and clean air, and providing open space for current and future generations. Parks provide an essential connection for Americans of all ages and abilities to the life-enhancing benefits of nature and the outdoors.

As the largest source of open space land in the country, parks and public lands are critical to the quality of life for all Americans. The quality of life for every person in every community is improved by clean, green, and accessible parks and open space.

Parks are key to ensuring the health of our environment because they play a critical role in maintaining healthy ecosystems, providing clean water and clean air, and enabling conservation of natural resources.

Park and recreation professionals should become leaders in protecting open space for the common good, and actively lead in sustainably managing and developing land and resources for public use and environmental conservation for the benefit of the public and the resources. In addition, park and recreation professionals should provide education and interpretation of the value of conservation to the public, connect children and youth to nature and the outdoors, and coordinate environmental stewardship with other public and nonprofit entities.

The benefits of conservation and environmental stewardship are many, including:

- Providing carbon-reducing sustainable landscapes that cleanse air and water, replenish aquifers, reduce storm water runoff, and protect wildlife habitat;
- Offering the public access to safe, affordable, and healthy ways to experience and appreciate nature; and
- Contributing significantly to the economic well-being of communities through energy and resources conservation and providing many economic benefits to communities derived from outdoor recreation.

The National Recreation and Park Association's goal is to place public parks and recreation at the forefront of conservation and environmental stewardship nationally by facilitating and promoting conservation leadership in every community. NRPA believes that park and recreation agencies should be leaders in conservation within their communities through planning, stewardship, and public engagement.

Supporting Points

The following support the critical role of public parks and recreation in conservation.

- The annual economic value of outdoor recreation to the nation is estimated at \$730 billion, according to the Outdoor Industry Association.¹
- The return on investment from protecting open space for public benefit from ecosystem services of water filtration, climate change protection, and other aspects of conserving public open space is estimated to be 100 to 1, according to a study by the Gund Institute for Ecological Economies at the University of Vermont.²
- The number of Denver residents in 1980 who said they would pay more to live near a greenbelt or park: 16 percent. The number in 1990: 48 percent.³
- The estimated gross increase in residential property value resulting from proximity to San Francisco's Golden Gate Park is \$500 million to \$1 billion.⁴
- In Pima County, Arizona, wildlife viewing in one year amounted to an estimated \$173.5 million in direct spending; \$90.7 million in salaries and wages associated with 3,196 jobs; and about \$9.9 million in state sales and fuel tax revenue, according to the Arizona Department of Fish and Game.⁵
- Public support for land conservation and open space protection ballot measures has remained above 70 percent passage over the past decade, even during times of economic downturns and recessions.⁶

REFERENCES

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