

Accessible Recreation

Goal: Implement and maintain services that are high quality, inclusive and accessible to all.

Distance from and physical access to recreational facilities is one of the greatest barriers to getting people outdoors and being active. Not only should facilities be universally accessible and equally distributed throughout our communities, they should be located in areas that will provide the highest use for the greatest number of people. Understanding community character and local demographics plays a key role in helping locate specific amenities and ensure citizens of all ages, interests, economic stature and abilities are served by a park or recreation facilities.

Access for All

The condition of park facilities and the actual pathways to reach a park can also encourage or inhibit park use. Park users are more likely to visit a park that is easy and safe to get to, where the facilities are consistently well maintained and are safe to use. Having attractive natural environmental features in and around parks is a motivator for visitation and use. Supporting infrastructure that ensures safe bicycle and pedestrian passage is particularly motivating for people to use a park and engage in physical activity. More often than not, there are significant gaps in pathway and sidewalk structures that prevent people from safely accessing parks and recreation facilities. Though a critical part of the active transportation infrastructure, many municipal areas lack strong plans and/or codes that address and enhance walkability, bikability and interconnectivity within communities.

Though close to home parks are important for our communities, not all parks will have the same facilities and amenities. Facility diversity is an important factor when planning new parks or conducting level of service analyses within communities. Regional parks are typically larger in size and offer a wider number of recreation opportunities. These parks serve diverse users. Typically located on the outskirts of towns in unincorporated areas of the counties, regional parks, and State and Federal recreational lands can be difficult to access for those users

Top 5 Reasons for Choosing a Specific Recreation Area

1. Live Close By
2. Has specific amenities
3. Aesthetics
4. Clean
5. Safe

Source: 2011 Delaware Outdoor Recreation Participation and Trends Survey

who are unable to drive themselves. Increasing public transportation opportunities to these facilities would increase access for all individuals.

Recommendation:

Create locally specific policy briefs highlighting the importance of outdoor recreation, walkability, and inter-connectivity.

Brief local governments on findings from in-depth spatial analyses and demonstrate the need to update local development codes to improve walkability, interconnectivity, and active recreation.

Provide on-going training to assist agency planners to remain current on best practices for park management and playground safety.

Provide technical assistance to state and local officials during comprehensive planning processes to incorporate trails, parks and recreation spaces in local planning efforts.

Identify and assess outdoor recreation facility conditions to be used in spatial analyses, DTF and LWCF grant distribution and facility maintenance planning.

Obtain a clear understanding of the level of public transportation services to parks and recreation facilities.

Explore a State Park pass loan initiative to encourage park use and promote healthy lifestyles in economically challenged areas.



Moreover, perceived and real safety issues are also factors that influence park use. Perceived safety includes how safe one feels in and around parks while real safety would be the actual rate of crime that occurs in and around parks. Residents who feel unsafe after dusk or who witness signs of disarray in their community such as graffiti, garbage and vandalism are less likely to let their children play in public spaces. In contrast, adults who felt safe in their communities were 60% more likely to let their children play in public spaces. Perceived safety and fear of crime are two factors that drive the 'Not In My Back Yard' (NIMBY) mentality creating roadblocks for planning and developing park and recreation facilities.

Recommendation:

Conduct spatial analyses of park locations juxtaposed to crime incidences.

Access for Underserved Populations

One of several issues regarding the built environment is whether there are adequate places to engage in physical activity within our communities. Nationally, a number of studies have shown that in addition to availability of parks and recreational facilities, other factors impact park use and activity levels. Those factors include: access, distribution, types of facilities and conditions.

Parks and play spaces are important assets in promoting active living and overall health across all segments of the population, yet not all communities and demographics have adequate access to these resources. Research has shown that having a large number of parks nearby increases the likelihood of being physically active; and parks that include specific active recreation facilities such as trails, playgrounds and sports fields stimulate higher levels of activity. Unfortunately, communities with higher poverty rates and communities with higher percentage of minority residents are significantly less likely to have parks and green spaces nearby. This is disheartening when research also suggests that parks and recreation may be

Factors Affecting Park Use

Park Access- Easy access to parks is associated with increased park use.

Park Distribution- Disparities in park distribution are evident in areas with low income and racial/ethnic populations.

Park Facilities- There are certain types of facilities that encourage higher levels of physical activity such as trails and playgrounds.

Park Conditions- Facilities that are consistently well maintained, aesthetically appealing and safe are associated with increased public use.

Source: National Recreation and Park Association

more important in promoting physical activity among lower-income youth than among youth who come from more affluent neighborhoods.ⁱ

Although parks and recreation spaces are available in urban, suburban and rural areas of Delaware, the distribution of these amenities are not uniform. Disparities in distribution and park access specifically characterized by low-income populations and racial/ethnic minority populations need to be evaluated in our communities and throughout the state. This is one of several aspects of the built environment that can be addressed to ensure fair and equitable distribution of park facilities and recreation spaces.

Recommendation:

Gather vital information necessary to complete in-depth spatial analyses of outdoor recreation facilities for underserved and urban populations.

Access for Persons with Disabilities

While leading a healthy lifestyle can be challenging for everyone, individuals with disabilities face additional difficulties: facilities and recreational settings may not be accessible, outdoor programs and activities may not accommodate specific needs, and outdoor recreation information may not be available in alternate formats. Barriers do not need to be disability specific to disproportionately burden individuals with disabilities. Having a disability should not prevent an individual from being healthy, engaging in exercise and physical activity, or enjoying parks and outdoor recreation areas.



With appropriate and accessible service systems in place, individuals with disabilities can achieve and maintain active and healthy lifestyles.ⁱⁱ

Existing data about the number, diversity, geographic distribution, and needs of Delawareans with disabilities are sparse and fragmented. The definitions and types of data collected are not always consistent across agencies, which impedes effective

collaboration and construction of a system-wide accounting of disability related needs. Delaware needs, but lacks, a comprehensive, state-wide database system for tracking needs and services provided for persons with disabilities.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), one of few population-based health surveys in Delaware, includes two questions about disability. Unfortunately, the BRFSS does not collect disability type or needs-specific data and does not include individuals from all disabilities or age groups. While it provides a way to compare adults who do and do not have a disability, it does not allow for examining differences by type of disability or the impact of disability severity or duration.

One question in the BRFSS asks if a person is “limited in any way in any activities because of physical, mental, or emotional problems,” and a second question asks whether he/she uses special equipment. In 2009, BRFSS researchers reported that 18.4% of the Delaware population reported limitations in activity and 7.2% reported

they require the use of special equipment.

While the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 has led to greater access to employment, transportation, public services and accommodations for people with disabilities, some of the ADA regulations have been challenging to apply to public park and recreation settings. A clearer understanding of the actual demographics of persons with disabilities and their specific needs would help outdoor recreation providers in delivering universally inclusive facilities and programs.



Recommendations:

Create an accessibility guide to all public outdoor recreation spaces.

Develop guidance tools that address best practices for universal accessibility to outdoor recreation facilities.

Ensure representation from the disability community throughout the conservation and recreation planning processes.

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<i>RECOMMENDATIONS</i>	<i>IMPLEMENTERS</i>	<i>AGO</i>
1. Create locally specific policy briefs highlighting the importance of outdoor recreation, walkability, and inter-connectivity.	<i>Counties, Municipalities, DPR, DRPS, DelDot, Trail community, GCHP, DE HEAL, OSPC, DLLG, NHPS</i>	
2. Brief local governments on findings from in-depth spatial analyses and demonstrate the need to update local development codes to improve walkability, interconnectivity, and active recreation.	<i>Counties, Municipalities, DRPS, DPR, OSPC, DE HEAL, NHPS</i>	
3. Provide on-going training to assist agency planners to remain current on best practices for park management and playground safety.	<i>DRPS, DPR, Local Parks and Recreation Agencies</i>	
4. Provide technical assistance to state and local officials during comprehensive planning processes to incorporate trails, parks and recreation spaces in local planning efforts.	<i>DPR, DPH, OSPC, DE HEAL</i>	
5. Obtain a clear understanding of the level of public transportation services to parks and recreation facilities.	<i>DART, DELDOT, DNREC, Local Parks and Recreation Agencies</i>	
6. Identify and assess outdoor recreation facility conditions to be used in spatial analyses, DTF and LWCF grant distribution and facility maintenance planning.	<i>DPR, Local Parks and Recreation Agencies.</i>	
7. Explore a State Park pass loan initiative to encourage park use and promote healthy lifestyles in economically challenged areas.	<i>County Library Systems, DPR, Local Parks and Recreation Agencies</i>	
8. Conduct spatial analyses of park locations juxtaposed to crime incidences.	<i>DPR, DNREC, DSP</i>	

<p>9. Gather information necessary to complete in-depth spatial analyses of outdoor recreation facilities for underserved and urban populations.</p>	<p><i>DPR, OSPC, County and Municipal governments</i></p>	
<p>10. Create an accessibility guide to all public outdoor recreation spaces.</p>	<p><i>DNREC, USFWS, NPOs, UD-CDS</i></p>	
<p>11. Develop guidance tools that address best practices for universal accessibility to outdoor recreation facilities.</p>	<p><i>DNREC, USFWS, NPOs, UD-CDS</i></p>	
<p>12. Ensure representation from the disability community throughout the conservation and recreation planning processes.</p>	<p><i>UD-CDS, DPH</i></p>	

ⁱ Active Living Research- www.activelivingresearch.org/node/12518

ⁱⁱ Healthy Delawareans with Disabilities, Bridging the Gap. A Plan for Action: A Strategic Plan for Delaware to Promote Health and Prevent Secondary Health Conditions in Individuals with Disabilities.

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