

FACT SHEET 2: Reconnect People to the Outdoors and Develop a Stewardship Ethic through Outdoor Recreation Opportunities and Experiences

2009-2013 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

The Pennsylvania Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan for 2009-2013 presents research and recommendations on how to best reconnect visitors and citizens with Pennsylvania's treasured outdoors. This fact sheet outlines the challenges, and opportunities identified through the SCORP process for *Goal 2: Reconnect People to the Outdoors and Develop a Stewardship Ethic through Outdoor Recreation Opportunities and Experiences*.

Building an ethic of advocacy for the outdoors requires an engaged and committed public. A growing body of research indicates a direct link between early and repeated positive experiences in nature and environmental values that result in personal outdoor appreciation and stewardship.

Challenges

Growing Disconnect

Survey data consistently cite a lack of time and knowledge of outdoor areas as the major obstacle to spending time in nature. Poor land-use planning, subdivision/neighborhood regulations, stranger danger and general fear of nature form a second set of challenges. Concerns about crime and social disorder are also deterrents to outdoor play in urban areas. Diminishing recreation opportunities are adding to this disconnect. A focus on standardized testing has dramatically reduced, and in many places eliminated, opportunities for environmental education and recess – often the only outdoor experiences in a school setting.

Need for Stewardship Ethic

Today's youth and families are spending less time outdoors and, consequently, will likely be less personally committed to the importance of clean air and water, open spaces, and public opportunities for outdoor recreation. As tomorrow's leaders, voters and consumers, modern youths' insulation from the natural world holds serious ramifications for the future. Given the current environmental challenges faced in local communities and on a global scale, there is concern about how the next generation's lack of affiliation with the outdoors will influence their choices and decisions.

Getting Kids and Families Outdoors

Attitudes are more difficult to modify as people age, so it is critical youth have meaningful experiences in the outdoors. Besides the potential loss of future outdoor stewards, child advocates also express concern for the physical and mental well-being of children who have not had adequate opportunities to experience nature. The time is right to focus on outdoor recreation opportunities for kids and families.



Get Active!

Youth are exploring the National Recreation Trail in Pittston as one of many stops in a free county-wide program encouraging people to get outside and active at close-to-home parks, trails and events. For more information visit: www.stepstohealthierluzernecounty.org

Opportunities

Enjoy What We Have, and Continue to Make it Better

Pennsylvania boasts plentiful outdoor recreation amenities. From the millions of acres of public land to the playground on the neighborhood

corner, residents and visitors have a broad spectrum of outdoor opportunities at their fingertips. State forest and game lands offer large swaths of land for outdoor discovery and back-country experiences, and state parks serve as special places to camp, hike, fish, or just relax and spend time with friends and family. Local and county park and recreation facilities offer close-to-home recreation opportunities. State and nationally designated Heritage Areas package history with recreation, and a web of rivers and streams provide for world-class fishing and boating.

Make it Easy to Experience and Appreciate the Outdoors

While attempts have been made to share and advertise outdoor recreation amenities, they have met with varied success. Better coordination and focus is needed to be more effective at conveying relevant and consistent messages to all populations living in and visiting Pennsylvania regarding the importance of outdoor recreation. An intensified focus on close-to-home outdoor recreation amenities, such as parks, trails and businesses, is necessary to improve public awareness of convenient opportunities. Using new communication technologies to present relevant outdoor information in a fast efficient way should be a consistent priority.



Maximize School-Based Outdoor Experiences

Schools offer a natural opportunity to engage youth and motivate them as environmental stewards. Schools have the built-in structure to reconnect children to the outdoors based on the significant amount of time children spend at school, and because schoolyards are often the nearest and most familiar green spaces in their lives. After-school programs and service projects should help facilitate outdoor learning; and mentoring programs can function throughout the school system to sustain frequent and consistent outdoor experiences. With subtle changes and upgrades, school grounds can serve as incubators of outdoor introduction and stewardship development.

Recognize the Social Value of Outdoor Recreation

Efforts are needed to reinforce the message that outdoor recreation has a strong social appeal; people like to recreate in groups. Diverse groups

should be thoughtfully connected to create a community of outdoor enthusiasts. Opportunities exist to link specific user groups whose needs interconnect to increase outdoor recreation participation. It is imperative that we seek to better understand cultural and peer-pressure barriers to recreation participation. It is also important to explore new and growing social forums such as *podcasts*, *Facebook* and *Twitter* to enhance and add relevance to current or new programs.

Build a Support System to Get the Work Done

Organizations committed to raising the status of outdoor recreation and quality of experiences and facilities have suffered a long-standing fragmented approach, proving deficient in the organizational infrastructure necessary within and between these entities to properly coordinate the work of connecting people to the outdoors. Serious work needs to be done to strengthen the broad constituency that already exists around outdoor recreation. Recreation-based tours with community leaders, planning and school boards, and elected officials can provide a new perspective for decision-makers. Outdoor recreation amenities are an integral part of every community that need to be recognized, celebrated and improved.

Find out how you can get more involved by visiting www.paoutdoorrecplan.com and send in your comments, suggestions and great project examples.