

## INTRODUCTION

The world of parks and recreation reaches more than 300 million people in this country. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is dedicated to advancing parks, recreation, and environmental conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people. Public park and recreation agencies across the country seek to ensure a healthy future for America, with the understanding that parks and recreation are powerful catalysts for change—in everything from the economy, health, and conservation. **Here is a closer look at the impact of parks and recreation in the United States.**

## NATIONAL FACTS

- NRPA reports that there are at least 12,000 publically funded state and local park and recreation agencies in the United States<sup>1</sup>.
- In 2011, The Trust for Public Land reported that there are 20,000 individual parks in 100 of the largest cities in the U.S. In addition, the 2011 City Parks Facts Report highlights that the total area covered by urban parkland in the U.S. exceeds one million acres, with parks ranging in size from the small 1.7-acre Post Office Square in Boston, MA to the enormous 490,125-acre Chugach State Park in Anchorage, AK. The use of urban parks is much greater than that of the national parks. The most visited park, New York's Central Park, averages 35 million visits annually which is five times greater than the number of visits to the Grand Canyon<sup>2</sup>.
- It is estimated that U.S. urban park trees alone remove 75,000 tons of air pollutants annually. This translates into an economic benefit of \$500 million each year<sup>3</sup>.

## HEALTH & WELLNESS

- Park and recreation agencies are the second largest public feeder of children, behind schools; park and recreation agencies serve approximately 560,000,000 meals to children through summer and after-school programs each year<sup>4</sup>.
- Studies have found that on average, children who live in greener environments weigh less than children (at the same age and same sex) who live in less green areas<sup>5</sup>.
- Children that have easy access to a playground (less than 2/3 of a mile from their home) are approximately five times more likely to have a healthy weight than children that do not have easy access to playgrounds<sup>6</sup>.
- Easy access to parks and open green spaces is reported to reduce mortality across one's lifespan. The lack of access accounts for approximately half of poverty-related mortality. Recent research revealed that in least green areas, the poorest individuals die at two times the rate of the wealthiest individuals. The rate of death among the poorest is reduced to 1.43 times that of the wealthiest in the greenest areas<sup>7</sup>.
- A 2011 study conducted on Seattle's park and recreation system revealed that Seattle's residents were able to save \$64 million in medical costs as a result of participating in physical activity in the parks<sup>8</sup>.
- A study conducted on the Wilmington, DE park and recreation system in 2009 revealed that approximately 15,498 Wilmingtonians actively participate enough in parks to have a positive impact on their health. Of that total, 13,996 were under the age of 65 while 1,502 were over the age of 65. Residents of Wilmington saved \$4,322,000 in health care costs as a result of park use in 2008<sup>9</sup>.





## ECONOMY

- In 2010, there were approximately 455,000 local and state employees in parks and recreation according to the U.S. Census Survey of Public Employment and Payroll<sup>10</sup>.
- A 2011 study from the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts Amherst highlighted that the construction of cycling infrastructure creates an average 11.4 jobs per \$1 million spent versus construction of road infrastructure which creates an average of 7.8 jobs per \$1 million spent<sup>11</sup>.
- America's State Parks has revealed that in 2009, approximately 725 million visits to 6,000 state parks across the country generated an economic impact of \$20 billion for the communities surrounding the state parks. This return on investment is significant given that the annual nationwide budget expenditure was less than \$2.5 billion<sup>12</sup>.
- To localize the economic impact of parks and recreation, consider an economic study conducted in Long Island that found that the state's parks and open spaces generate an annual economic benefit of \$2.74 billion for local governments and tax payers.
  - ▶ The study also reveals that the development of a new residential area is eight times more costly to the public than conserving Long Island's parks and public space<sup>13</sup>.

## PROPERTY VALUE

- The Trust for Public Land conducted a study on the economic value of city park systems and through their sample found that parks can contribute to the value of residential properties immediately adjacent to a park by as much as a 20 percent marginal value.
  - ▶ For properties further away from the location of the park, parks still can provide as much as a 5 to 10 percent marginal value<sup>14</sup>.
- In Massachusetts, a study conducted on home sales in seven towns through which two trails run, Minuteman Bikeway and Nashua River Rail Trail, revealed that the average number of days on the market for homes near the rail trail was 29.3 days in contrast to other homes in these towns which amounted to an average of 50.4 days on the market<sup>15</sup>.

## SAFETY

- In 2011, in the city of Los Angeles, the Summer Night Lights program, an anti-gang initiative that involves keeping parks open for certain hours at night with extensive programming and free food, has led to a reduction in gang-related homicides in areas surrounding these particular parks by 57 percent. Furthermore, the number of shots fired have decreased by 55 percent and the number of victims shot decreased by 45 percent. The city has increased the number of parks involved in the program from 8 to 24 in a span of 3 years<sup>16</sup>.
- The Kansas City Police Department reported that in 2008 crime decreased by 74 percent in Kansas City's Kessler Park when 2.6 miles of Cliff Drive, a state scenic byway located in the park was turned car-free on weekends<sup>17</sup>.



## ABOUT THE NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION

The National Recreation and Park Association is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing park, recreation and conservation efforts that enhance quality of life for all people. Through its network of 20,000 recreation and park professionals and citizens, NRPA encourages the promotion of healthy lifestyles, recreation initiatives, and conservation of natural and cultural resources.

For more information, visit [www.NRPA.org](http://www.NRPA.org). For digital access to NRPA's flagship publication, Parks & Recreation, visit [www.ParksandRecreation.org](http://www.ParksandRecreation.org).

## REFERENCES

### (Endnotes)

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