

# From Survive to **THRIVE:**

A CASE FOR LOCAL PARKS AND RECREATION IN PENNSYLVANIA

**good for you.  
good for all.**  
PENNSYLVANIA PARKS & RECREATION







# Local Parks and Recreation improves the lives of all Pennsylvanians

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## We know this to be true.

The evidence is overwhelming – from academic articles, news stories, case studies, and entire books – that parks and recreation services enhance the everyday lives of people of all places, ages, and backgrounds. As a core function of state and local governments<sup>1</sup>, parks and recreation in Pennsylvania is:

- Among our most cherished public spaces and experiences that strengthen our sense of community.
- A public investment that contributes to public wellness by enriching the lives and health of all who touch it and the community as a whole.
- Valued for its many uses and benefits – outdoors and indoors – including safe and active play, relaxation, and life-long learning programs, regardless of one's age, ability, or income.
- Environmentally and user diverse, stewarded by volunteers and professionals who work tirelessly to enhance the lives of their neighbors and communities.

<sup>1</sup> Seventy percent of respondents to a Pennsylvania 2014-19 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan survey believe that recreation services should be a core function of state and local governments.





**“Never underestimate the benefit of a scraped knee.”**

**—INSTITUTE ON THE ENVIRONMENT**

The beneficiaries of parks and recreation range from ages 1 to 100. Parks and recreation contribute to character development and economic development, in addition to producing measurable health and environmental benefits.





## THE STATE OF LOCAL PARKS AND RECREATION IN PA

**“It’s nice to have if  
it can be afforded.”<sup>2</sup>**

This is the apt summation in Pennsylvania where expenses for and investment in local parks and recreation is commonly perceived as discretionary. Today, local parks and recreation services are facing increased user fees, reduced services, deferred maintenance, and fewer grant opportunities.

**Have parks and recreation become the Velveteen Rabbits of government services?** They’re worn and tattered, underappreciated, rough around the edges, and yet always there, waiting to be loved.

<sup>2</sup> “Developing Financial Support for Recreation and Parks,” *A Resource Guide for Recreation, Parks and Conservation*





## What we know ...

**Local parks and recreation are our “go to” in PA** – 9 out of 10 residents who participate in outdoor recreation had visited a local park, trail or recreation area within the past year.

**Pennsylvanians prefer close-to-home recreation areas that are safe and clean.** At least 75% of those surveyed ranked clean and safe as very important qualities in trying to pick a spot for outdoor recreation.

**70% of those surveyed believe that recreation services should be a core function of state and local governments.** In fact, 77% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that parks, trails and open spaces are an essential part of our health care system.

**Nearly 1 in 3 children and teens today are overweight or obese.<sup>3</sup>** Lack of physical activity contributes to the epidemic, and inactive children often become inactive adults. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cites physical inactivity and obesity as risk factors for cancer, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, joint and bone disease, and depression.<sup>4</sup>

## Current situation in PA ...

Just 3% of total local government expenditures, on average, are spent on parks and recreation.

Parks and recreation providers agree: “In the face of shrinking budgets and rising maintenance backlogs, the data indicates that providers would like to see future funding opportunities directed towards maintaining the park and recreation areas that already exist to ensure facilities that are clean, safe, and ready to use”.

Tax-supported operational and capital expenses for parks and recreation have remained the same or declined over the past three years. The majority of park and rec professionals believe that retaining the funds allocated for parks and recreation will be a major challenge for the future.

Childhood is the ideal time for young people to acquire the ability, confidence and desire to enjoy being active every day. Yet funding for after-school, evening, and weekend recreation programs is non-existent in many Pennsylvania communities. In urban areas, children have very limited opportunities due to the cost of participation.

<sup>3</sup> Journal of the American Medical Association, February 26, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Trust for Public Health, 2012.





FROM “SURVIVE” TO “THRIVE”

# A Call to Action for Local Parks & Recreation in PA


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Pennsylvania’s 2014-19 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) has made local parks and recreation a major priority. PA residents – those who live here and those who could live here – want thriving parks and recreation opportunities in their backyard.

The need for increased investment in our parks and recreation places, programs, and people is as real as the value that parks and recreation contribute to our communities. Local parks and recreation services across Pennsylvania – and the millions of Pennsylvanians who use these services everyday – deserve equal recognition among core public functions in the state and local government budget process.

Fair financial support now and a commitment to forward-looking investments in local parks and recreation will make Pennsylvania a better place for families to live, for businesses to invest in, and for communities to flourish.



A photograph of a man and a woman walking away from the camera on a gravel path in a lush green forest. The woman is wearing a pink shirt and dark shorts, and the man is wearing a maroon shirt, grey shorts, and a red cap. They are holding hands. The path is surrounded by dense trees and foliage. An orange rectangular box with white text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**LOCAL PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES ARE OUR “GO TO” FOR CLOSE-TO-HOME RECREATION IN PENNSYLVANIA. IN ADDITION TO THE MANY VITAL AND DIVERSE SERVICES THEY DELIVER, LOCAL PARKS AND RECREATION CONTRIBUTE DIRECTLY TO SOCIAL EQUITY AND THE VIBRANCY OF ALL PA COMMUNITIES. CHILDREN ESPECIALLY BENEFIT FROM RECREATION SERVICES, OFFERING THEM AFFORDABLE OR NO-COST OPPORTUNITIES TO PLAY, LEARN, AND GROW. WHEN OUR CHILDREN THRIVE, OUR COMMUNITIES THRIVE.**





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