

range of outdoor recreation opportunities, regardless of their age, gender, ethnic background, economic status, physical or mental ability, or location within the state. The system will be coordinated at the state level with all agencies and suppliers working in tandem, and with ample opportunity for the public to participate in decision making. It will further the public's understanding and appreciation of Florida's environment and outdoor recreation resources.

ISSUES, GOALS AND STRATEGIES: A METHOD FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Three overarching issue areas have been identified as impacting recreation in Florida. In this chapter, each issue is broken down by related topics. A discussion of each topic is followed by specific goals and strategies to address the issues and implement the plan.

ISSUE 1: Raising awareness of the values and benefits of outdoor recreation

- **Goal 1-1:** Highlight the economic impact of outdoor recreation
- **Goal 1-2:** Emphasize outdoor recreation's impact on health and quality of life
- **Goal 1-3:** Ensure and identify future resources for programs essential to recreation

ISSUE 2: Improving public access through agency coordination

- **Goal 2-1:** Maintain and manage adequate availability of resources for a growing population
- **Goal 2-2:** Coordinate recreation providers to better connect lands and opportunities
- **Goal 2-3:** Increase and improve universal accessibility
- **Goal 2-4:** Protect Florida's waters while providing adequate public access

ISSUE 3: Reconnecting people to the outdoors

- **Goal 3-1:** Improve urban recreation opportunities
- **Goal 3-2:** Connect all people to the outdoors

- **Goal 3-3:** Facilitate participation through accessible information
- **Goal 3-4:** Encourage volunteerism, stewardship, and advocacy

Issue One: Raising awareness of the value and benefits of outdoor recreation

Summary: Educating the public on the benefits of outdoor recreation to individuals and communities is integral in maintaining support for recreation programs.

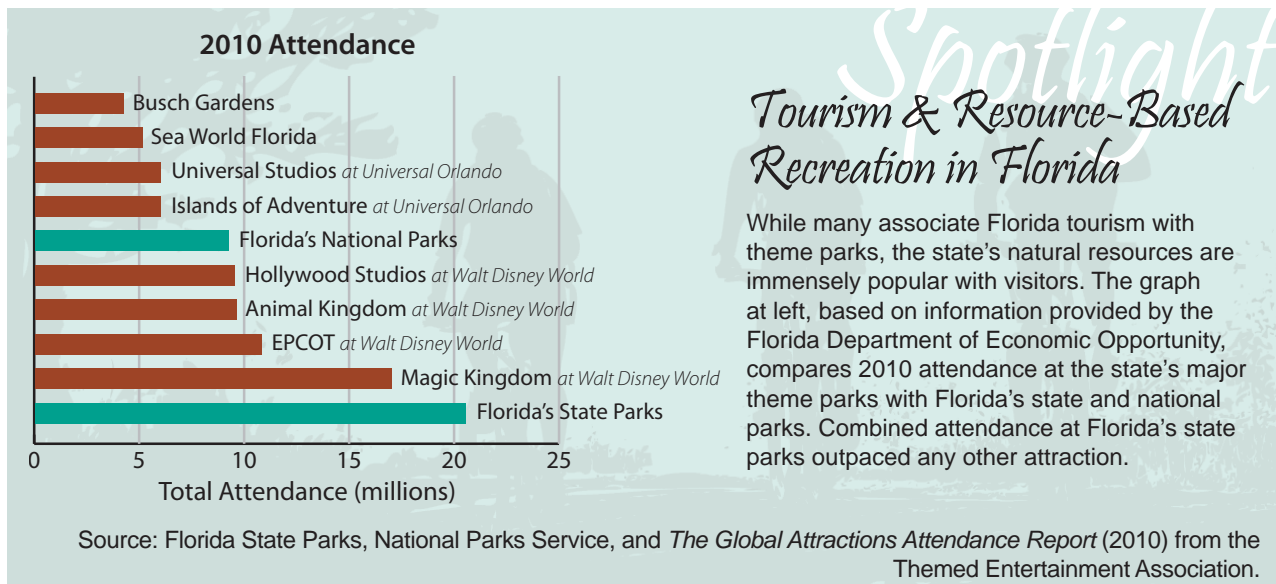
The Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation

For residents and tourists alike, outdoor recreation is an important part of everyday life. Florida's temperate climate, combined with outstanding cultural and natural resources, allows for recreation participation year round. Outdoor recreation stimulates the economy through the purchase of equipment necessary for participation, with money spent on trips and travel and through a host of direct and indirect ways.

Tourism: An Economic Driver

Florida has long been a destination for domestic and international travelers, and outdoor recreation is a major contributor to the state's tourism market. According to VISIT FLORIDA, Florida's tourism rates have seen a steady rise since 2009, leading to an estimated 87.3 million visitors in 2011. In 2011, recreation and/or leisure was the primary reason for more than 88 percent of domestic visits, 81 percent of Canadian visits, and 68.5 percent of international visits, showing the strong link between recreation and tourism. While relaxing and enjoying the outstanding natural and cultural resources that Florida has to offer, visitors are also making a significant contribution to Florida's economy. Total tourism spending was calculated at \$67.2 billion in 2011, creating more than one million jobs to support the industry.

A recent study by the Outdoor Industry Association, *The Outdoor Recreation Economy*, determined that each year



Spotlight

Tourism & Resource-Based Recreation in Florida

While many associate Florida tourism with theme parks, the state's natural resources are immensely popular with visitors. The graph at left, based on information provided by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, compares 2010 attendance at the state's major theme parks with Florida's state and national parks. Combined attendance at Florida's state parks outpaced any other attraction.

more than \$38 billion is spent on outdoor recreation in Florida, supporting 329,000 jobs across the state. In comparison, the Division of Recreation and Parks reports state parks provide a direct economic impact of \$1 billion to local economies each year, while generating 19,347 jobs.

Nature-based tourism is an important component of the tourism industry. Fishing, hunting, boating, paddling and wildlife viewing are among the more popular examples of activities associated with this type of tourism. These activities have a huge impact on the state's economy. According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), wildlife viewing, hunting, boating and fishing provide a total economic effect of \$3.2 billion, creating more than 34,000 jobs. Wildlife festivals, ideal for generating interest, educating the public and distributing information, also provide great boosts to local economies. One example, the 2009 Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival had an impact of almost \$1 million in Brevard County alone.

Quick Fact Every 85 visitors creates one Florida job.
- VISIT FLORIDA®



Weeki Wachee Springs State Park

Recreation, Real Estate and Business Relocation

Parks and open space have been tied to an increase in property values since the 19th Century, and studies have consistently shown connections between property values and proximity to parks, trails and open spaces. Parks and trails are often a central piece in revitalization efforts of towns and neighborhoods, offering sustainable and appealing infrastructure which draws residents to areas previously considered undesirable. This increase in property value

provides additional property tax revenues to further the positive growth of a community.

Parks are also a contributing factor when seeking business relocation. Industry today is increasingly based on high-technology and service-sector companies, where information and knowledge are the main sources of economic growth and wealth. Companies in this industry are extremely mobile and can be more selective in the location of their businesses, and are interested in areas that will retain and attract talent. Quality of life in a community is a considerable contributing factor when making these decisions, with the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities playing a large role.

Raising Awareness

Multiple studies and reports highlight the significant impact of outdoor recreation on the economy. However, these reports are often agency or activity specific and utilize a variety of methods when determining the impact. Recreation providers and advocates could benefit from a comprehensive analysis of the total impact recreation has on Florida's economy, the report serving as a universal platform for educating the public on the importance of outdoor recreation. The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) has contributed to this effort with a website titled The Economic Benefit of Eco-tourism, which compiles economic impact information from various state and federal programs onto one page. State agencies, in coordination with DEO, should look to further this effort. The following strategies will help recreation providers and stakeholders educate the public on the benefits of outdoor recreation to the economy.

Goal 1-1: Highlight the economic impact of recreation.

Strategies:

- 1) DEP and relevant state agencies, in coordination with all recreation providers, should produce a report on the overall economic impact of outdoor recreation in Florida.
- 2) Local recreation providers should work with local economic development councils to promote Florida's recreation opportunities as a means to attract businesses.
- 3) Recreation providers should communicate with private developers on the connection between property values and availability of natural landscapes and recreation opportunities.

Quality of Life

Active lifestyles and time spent outdoors are major contributors to a person's health and overall quality of life, as the connection between good health and physical activity is widely recognized. Public lands and waters provide opportunities for healthy exercise and physical activity, relaxation and solitude, and challenge and risk. Providing and facilitating access to public lands through high quality systems of parks, greenways and other natural areas is a major step towards creating and maintaining active, healthy communities. Even so, more must be done to ensure that the public understands and is receiving the full benefits recreation has to offer. A 2011 report by the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation determined Florida's adult obesity rate to be 26.1 percent, an 80 percent increase over the past 15 years. These striking figures illustrate either the lack of awareness of recreation's

Rising Obesity Rates

Spotlight

Adult Obesity Rates in Florida			
Obesity Rate in 1995	Obesity Rate in 2011	Projected Obesity Rate in 2030 based on current trajectory*	Projected Obesity Rate in 2030 if BMI Decreased by 5%*
14.3%	26.6%	58.6%	51.1%

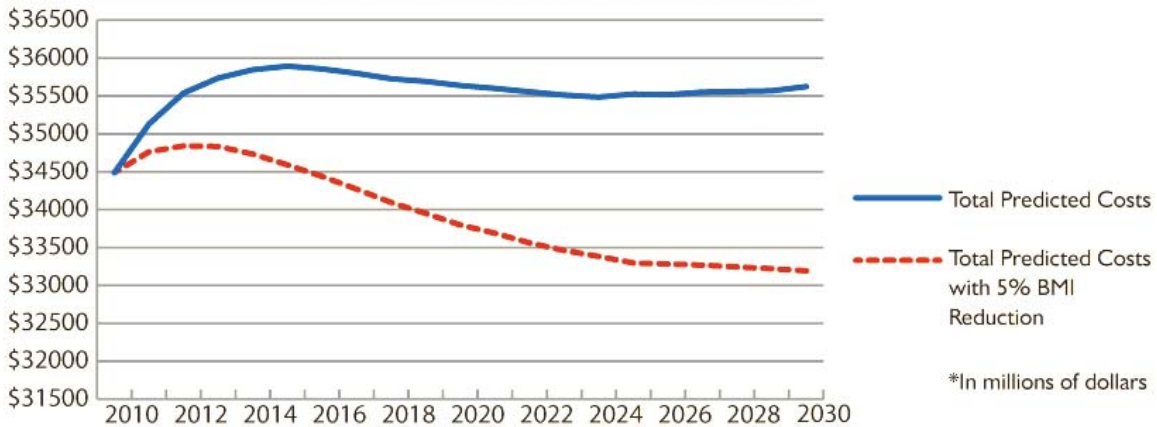
*All ages, all genders, adjusted for self-reporting bias. BMI: Body Mass Index

Source: Trust for America's Health

Rising Costs Related to Obesity

Spotlight

PROJECTIONS FOR ANNUAL OBESITY-RELATED HEALTH SPENDING* IN FLORIDA, 2010-2030



Source: Trust for America's Health

impact on health and quality of life or a lack of motivation to get active. Both of these can be addressed by strengthening ties between recreation providers, public health departments and health care providers.

The outdoor recreation and public health communities, through different approaches,

ultimately seek a similar result: active and healthy communities. The Florida Department of Health's State Health Improvement Plan recognizes this connection, and includes many recreation-related objectives in achieving their overall goal of improving public health in Florida. At the local level, recreation providers are linking up with health care providers to promote spending time outdoors through efforts such as the Whole Child Leon "95210" program, which works with local health care providers to "prescribe" patients a plan for achieving a "happy, healthy life." Working with health care providers and local health departments also provides different avenues for funding by including recreation as part of a greater community-based health initiative. One example is the Community Transformation Grant, a program managed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which encourages community-level efforts to fight chronic disease by promoting healthy lifestyles, of which recreation plays a significant role. The following strategies for federal, state and local agencies will help raise public awareness of and support for recreation as a means to enhance health and quality of life.

Quick Fact
Every \$1 spent on biking trails and walking paths could save approximately \$3 in medical expenses.

- American Heart Association



Bikers on the Florida Legacy Trail
 credit: Darcy Kiefel/The Trust for Public Land

Goal 1-2: Emphasize the impact of recreation on health and quality of life.

Strategies:

- 1) Public recreation providers should partner with county health departments and local health care providers to promote active, healthy lifestyles through community-level health improvement initiatives.
- 2) DEP should assist DOH in implementing recreation-related objectives in the State Health Improvement Plan.
- 3) DOH and county health departments should determine ways to further incorporate outdoor recreation opportunities into community health assessments, utilizing tools such as the Florida Outdoor Recreation Inventory to determine existing opportunities and measure their impact on community health.

Program Support

Continued support for outdoor recreation is an extremely important issue for Florida residents and recreation providers, as increasing population raises the demand for new facilities. Today, recreation providers are exploring a variety of alternatives to supplement traditional state and federal funding sources to support their programs. During the economic downturn, providers at all levels encountered budget limitations which affected parks and recreation services. This led to the development of new strategies for maintaining and improving recreation services, such as increasing the role of the private sector in public recreation areas and creating innovative public-private partnerships. Now, as the economy continues its recovery, these support models are bolstering recreation providers' abilities to meet the needs of the public.

Recreation management agencies should focus on using existing funds with maximum efficiency to ensure the highest needs and priorities are being met. Alternative funding sources, such as private sponsorships should be expanded at all levels of public recreation.

Goal 1-3: Ensure and identify alternative funding for programs essential to Florida's recreation program.

Strategies:

- 1) Recreation providers should seek partnerships with private sector companies that share the common vision of creating healthy, active and livable communities.
- 2) Recreation providers should work with stakeholders and the general public to advocate the provision of adequate funding for existing land and water conservation programs.
- 3) DEP should coordinate with DEO in working with local governments to identify sources of public and private grant funding to meet recreational programming and park development needs.
- 4) The Florida Recreation and Park Association, the Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy and other organizations should continue to provide technical assistance to local governments and citizen groups for identifying alternative sources of funding and enacting local land acquisition programs.

Issue Two: Improving public access through agency coordination

Recreation in Florida can be greatly improved through continued agency coordination in acquisition, management, and programming of public lands.

Access

Access to Florida's existing public lands continues to be an issue with the public. There is a perception that the land is "locked up" after purchase, that access which existed before acquisition is reduced or eliminated once the land comes into public ownership. Most public land is available for some type of public access, but not enough priority has always been given to opening land for appropriate recreational use. Given current economic realities, however, land management agencies are often focusing development efforts towards improving and enhancing existing access points. By focusing on existing infrastructure, limited funds can

be best used to improve and expand existing facilities.

Involving Local Communities

Public land managers can improve access to their lands and water by better involving local communities. Outfitters, guide companies, and other businesses can directly provide supplemental services on public lands, expanding business opportunities while providing better public access. Through effective communication, land management agencies can provide information to help inform communities how they can benefit from public lands, and in return access to these lands can be improved. The following recommendations have been established to help continue to provide public recreational access in Florida.

Goal 2-1: Maintain and manage adequate availability of resources for a growing population.

Strategies:

- 1) Given Florida's current economic situation, public land management agencies should focus efforts on enhancing existing access points and facilities, as present resources allow.
- 2) By working with local business communities, land management agencies should work closely with local recreation suppliers and outfitters on how they can benefit from nearby public lands to stimulate local economies, create jobs and facilitate public recreational access.
- 3) Agencies should ensure that all public lands are open for appropriate public access as soon as possible after acquisition, without compromising the agencies' mission or the resources of the land.
- 4) Resource management and restoration activities on public lands should be greatly expanded. Activities such as prescribed burning, exotic species removal and hydrological restoration are vital to providing and maintaining the natural and cultural resources that support resource-based recreation.



St. George Island State Park

Connecting Opportunities: Agency Coordination

A recurring theme from the public input process was the need to better connect existing recreational opportunities in order to improve the overall quality and availability of recreation opportunities. Improving communication and coordination with community planners, transportation departments, and adjacent land management agencies at all levels of government can result in better-connected opportunities. Proper coordination can also reduce unnecessary duplication of resources or facilities while avoiding any deficits. At a community scale, such coordination can result in better distributed and connected parks and green spaces, as well as linked trail systems providing alternative methods of transportation. A well planned and coordinated park system facilitates recreation participation, providing healthier and more vibrant communities.

Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan

With connection of opportunities, discussion often revolves around trails. A well planned trail system can connect public lands, lengthen and enhance experiences, and provide a viable source for alternative transportation within and between communities. The Division of Recreation and Parks, through the Office of Greenways and Trails, provides a statewide vision for Florida's greenways and trails through the Florida Greenways

and Trails System Plan. This plan determines existing resources, identifies trail gaps, and offers a focused vision on connecting Florida's greenway and trail system. The fulfillment of this plan depends on coordination and collaboration of funding and resources from public, private and non-profit entities.

Goal 2-2: Coordinate recreation providers to better connect lands and opportunities.

Strategies:

- 1) State agencies should work cooperatively with VISIT FLORIDA to create a single, coordinated data source for accessing public information about outdoor recreation opportunities on Florida's public lands.
- 2) DEP, in cooperation with other groups, should continue to strengthen state agency coordination in conjunction with SCORP planning. This will keep open lines of communication on statewide recreation issues and trends and methods of addressing them.
- 3) DEP should pursue efforts to conduct a statewide forum on outdoor recreation to enhance the coordination of efforts among public and private suppliers.
- 4) Recreation agencies should continue sharing information for the SCORP outdoor recreation inventory and periodic assessments of demand to minimize unnecessary duplication of efforts and ensure a single data source that is kept accurate and up to date.

Universal Accessibility

Florida's public lands exist for the benefit and enjoyment of all people. Great efforts have been made by recreation providers across the board in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, but equality of access to public lands and the opportunities they provide still remains an issue. Along with the removal of physical barriers, the act also requires all reasonable efforts be made to ensure that facilities, programs and services are accessible.

The distribution of information is very



Hikers at the Miccosukee Greenway in Leon County, a green space coordinated between multiple agencies

important in providing universal accessibility. Programs and facilities designed for people with disabilities do little good if adequate and accessible information is not made available. Agencies should ensure that accessibility information regarding their parks or natural areas can be easily obtained through a variety of ways,

Spotlight
**Agency Coordination in Action:
Get Outdoors Florida!**

Get Outdoors Florida! is a coalition of public and private stakeholders in outdoor recreation, including federal and state land managers, state conservation, health, and education agencies, educators, healthcare providers, non-profits, and businesses.

The mission of Get Outdoors Florida! is:

“Engaging communities, families and individuals in outdoor experiences to achieve healthier lifestyles and sustain Florida’s natural resources.”



For more information, visit getoutdoorsflorida.com

Goal 2-3: All recreation providers should seek to increase universal accessibility.

Strategies:

- 1) State land management agencies should partner with organizations such as the Florida Disabled Outdoors Association to establish specific programs for visitors with disabilities to be uniformly available throughout the state.
- 2) Outdoor recreation providers should develop and implement schedules for identifying and eliminating architectural barriers in existing facilities under their management.
- 3) Upon construction or renovation of trails, agencies should complete UTAP trail assessments and provide trail accessibility information to the public.
- 4) All recreation providers should stay current on information technology, following best practices for distribution of information to the public.
- 5) Outdoor recreation providers should develop and strengthen partnerships with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities and organizations such as Florida Disabled Outdoors Association to educate themselves and the public, and to provide recreation activities and programs for people of all ages and abilities.



*Kayaking Card Sound Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserve
Credit: Paul Marcellini*

and should consider establishing outreach programs to encourage participation if they have not already done so.

Programs such as the Universal Trail Assessment Process (UTAP) provide guidelines for assessing and reporting trail conditions – like slope, distance, grade and width – which may limit one’s ability to participate. These objective reports provide information that allows potential users to decide if the trail is accessible to them and meets their needs and abilities.

Florida’s Waters

Much of Florida’s recreation participation is centered around water, and preserving these opportunities is essential to the state’s recreation program. Protection of



Credit: FDOA

Florida Disabled Outdoors Association (FDOA)

Miracle Sports Program

The Florida Disabled Outdoors Association is a non-profit organization that seeks to provide access for all through the coordination of six unique programs and by providing accessibility consultation with agencies around the state.

Miracle Sports, an FDOA program in Tallahassee since 2008, provides access to athletics for everyone. The program takes place on a barrier-free field developed through a partnership with the City of Tallahassee, and has logged over 4,200 team sport recreation hours since its inception.

water resources is the most important step in maintaining freshwater and saltwater resources in a swimmable, fishable condition. This involves a complex and science-based system of federal, state, and local regulatory and enforcement programs, which must ensure that the greatest efforts are taken towards protecting and improving the quality of Florida's water resources. Florida's springs, a unique and very popular resource, continue to be threatened by nutrient pollution from sources such as excess fertilizer use, septic systems, and stormwater runoff. Community-based programs which combine regulation and enforcement with education and stewardship opportunities are necessary to ensure Florida's springs remain healthy and available for public use and enjoyment.

Access to Florida's waters faces increased pressure from shoreline development as populations continue to rise. A combined effort by federal, state, and local governments is needed to ensure funding for acquisition of land to provide public recreational access to waters. While the regional analysis of demand and need in this plan is not intended to identify local needs, it is certain that needs remain in the areas of developing additional boat ramps, canoe launches, docks, catwalks and piers, as well as support facilities such as parking areas and restrooms.

Quick Fact

Florida has 1,350 miles of coastline, 12,650 miles of rivers and streams, and 7,700 lakes within its boundaries.

- Florida Department of Environmental Protection



Honeymoon Island State Park, credit Kristin Crawford

Protecting water resources is a central theme in the America's Great Outdoors initiative. This nationwide initiative strives to connect Americans to the outdoors, with a focus on grassroots and community level conservation and restoration efforts. America's Great Outdoors has identified water resources as



Suwannee River State Park

essential to making these connections. Florida has made great strides in protecting and promoting its waterways, notably in efforts such as the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail and the Florida Circumnavigation Saltwater Paddling Trail, which were established through multi-agency coordination and dependent on community involvement and support. Continued community-level promotion, stewardship and support of Florida's key water features will help ensure the preservation of these important resources. The following recommendations are made for protecting water resources and improving public access to Florida's waters.

Goal 2-4: Protect water resources while providing adequate public access.

Strategies:

- 1) All levels of government, working with the private sector, should identify alternative means of meeting public demand for water through developing alternative water supplies such as brackish surface and groundwater, stormwater and reclaimed wastewater.
- 2) DEP should continue to provide funding to support construction of public recreational facilities in springs, monitor spring water quality, and oversee other restoration activities to help ensure that springs remain available for public use.
- 3) DEO should continue to provide planning assistance to local governments protecting Florida's springs, consistent with reports "Protecting Florida's Springs: Land Use Planning Strategies and Best Management Practices" and "Protecting Florida's Springs: An Implementation Guidebook."
- 4) Funding should continue to be made available through the Florida Forever program to acquire land or conservation easements and fund capital improvements for increased public access, to conserve the state's natural and cultural heritage, including working waterfronts, and for environmental restoration, and water resource protection and supply.

- 5) Federal, state and local governments should work to reduce the amount of nutrient pollution that enters Florida's waters through programs that teach the public about where nutrients come from and what they can do to help.
- 6) Public agencies and private organizations should continue clean-up and rehabilitation efforts for specific water bodies, such as Lake Okeechobee, the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Rivers, the Everglades and the waters surrounding the Florida Keys.
- 7) Local governments should maximize the use of local comprehensive planning processes to increase public access to Florida's waters by preserving recreational and commercial working waterfronts and identifying sites for public and private recreation.
- 8) Public recreation providers should identify water areas under their jurisdictions where inadequate recreational access exists or where existing water access can be improved, and give priority to making the needed improvements.

Issue Three: Reconnecting people to the outdoors and enhancing stewardship

Strengthening appreciation and participation in outdoor recreation requires both education and better connections to natural landscapes.

Urban Recreation

Providing recreation opportunities in urban areas is one of the most difficult but also most important issues in connecting people to the outdoors. With approximately 90



Outdoor yoga at the Ybor City Museum State Park

**Nearly 90 percent of Floridians
reside in urban areas.**

- Florida Department of Health



Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserve, credit Dr. D'Alessandro

percent of Floridians living in or near cities, accessing and experiencing the outdoors is heavily dependent on the availability of nearby opportunities. Urban parks and open spaces are vital in providing people opportunities for recreation and solitude, and to generally improve their quality of life. Parks are also important in preserving significant historic or cultural landmarks.

Urban recreation is key to providing an initial connection with natural landscapes. Local green spaces, parks and cultural sites often provide the stepping stone into the great outdoors, and local governments should ensure that these opportunities are provided. The provision of these opportunities cannot rest solely on local governments, however. Support for urban recreation should continue through programs like the Florida Recreation Development and Assistance Program (FRDAP) and the LWCF grant program.

By blending the built and natural environments, urban communities can facilitate and encourage participation in outdoor recreation, while reaping all the community benefits of a thriving, well-

connected system of parks and open spaces. The following recommendations will help urban communities provide stronger connections to the outdoors.

Goal 3-1: Improve urban recreation opportunities.

Strategies:

- 1) Municipal planning and recreation departments, along with FDOT, should continue to incorporate walking and biking into transportation plans, with a focus on safe and connected opportunities.
- 2) Public recreation providers should continue and strengthen all federal, state and local initiatives which support the creation, enhancement and expansion of urban parks and open spaces.
- 3) Cities should create central, cornerstone parks to revitalize their communities and facilitate active, healthy living.
- 4) Communities should attempt to restore abandoned commercial developments, particularly sites of environmental concern, back to their natural state.

Connecting People and the Outdoors

Physical activity is essential to health and quality of life. However, time, competing priorities, and lack of motivation appear to be furthering an ongoing trend of disconnection between people and the outdoors. Recreation providers are always searching for innovative approaches to motivate people to take time to get outdoors through programming, the use of technology, marketing, and similar measures.

Youth

Children are notably susceptible to health-related problems due to sedentary lifestyles, yet many children continue to lack physical activity. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity prevalence among the nation's youth and adolescents has almost tripled since 1980. High obesity rates and inactivity are prompted by a de-emphasis of play time, physical education and outdoor activities in public schools combined with the

popularity of extra curricular activities such as playing video games, watching television and using home computers. Offering programs which reach youth both through schools and outside of school is essential to creating and strengthening ties to the outdoors.

Environmental Education

Environmental education increases public awareness and knowledge about environmental issues and provides the participants in its programs the skills necessary to make informed environmental decisions and to take responsible actions. It involves lifelong learning; its audiences are of all age groups, from very young children through senior citizens. National trends associated with environmental education including climate change, invasive species and sea level rise, are factors that will affect outdoor recreation and thus are trends for the public to be aware of. One of the best ways to connect children to the outdoors is through education-based environmental programs, particularly through the school system. However, budget constraints and a shift in focus have eliminated many programs which once provided children with outlets to structured and unstructured time outdoors. Budgets for field trips are almost non-existent in many cases, and both school boards and



Enjoying the Wacissa River, credit FWC

public recreation agencies must determine new ways to connect children to the outdoors and promote active, outdoor lifestyles. Federal environmental education initiatives include the “More Kids in the Woods” program through the U.S. Forest Service, the “Let’s Go Outside” program through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Services Jr. Ranger and Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program, and the Hands-on-the-Land Network, which seeks to coordinate education on public lands. Statewide environmental education initiatives include the Department of Environmental Protection’s Learning in Florida’s Environment (LIFE) program, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network, the Get Outdoors Florida! Coalition, and 4-H programs. Various private and non-profit programs also exist around the state.

The Department of Environmental Protection’s Learning in Florida’s Environment (LIFE) program is an excellent example of partnering nearby natural resources with local schools to integrate environmental education into everyday learning. The LIFE program strives to reach a more diverse audience by engaging youth through their schools and connecting outdoor recreation with learning to build stewardship for the resource. Once DEP grants expire, programs at these sites continue through alternative funding sources such as private sponsorships, other grants or funding from local school boards. Service Learning is a component of the program, where students can participate in activities

Quick Fact

Sixty minutes of daily unstructured free play is essential to children’s physical and mental health.

- American Academy of Pediatrics



At play on Dr. Julian G. Bruce St. George Island State Park

which apply their learning and allows for students to participate in environmental events such as International Coastal Cleanup Day, Environmental Education Week, Earth Day, National Public Lands Day, World Water Monitoring Day and others. Service Learning can expand into citizen science efforts including LAKEWATCH and other programs, where environmental observations collected by the public can become data useful to land managers and scientists.

Working with the school system is only one of many ways to connect youth to the outdoors. Time away from school is similarly influential on a child's development, and programs which offer enriching outdoor activities to fill this time are important. Recently, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, in partnership with the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, established the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network. This program employs a hub-and-spoke system of Wild Outdoor Centers (hubs) located within 45 minutes of major urban areas, and Near Outdoor Centers (spokes) which offer outdoor experiences closer to home. This concept of building skills and relationships with nature through a convenient, close to home setting while providing opportunities to experience nature at a grander scale is a good approach to getting children outdoors.

These programs are examples of the many environmental education programs that have been initiated by government, non-profit, and private entities. Funding for these programs is often difficult to obtain, and many programs have been successful in reaching outside the public sector for support. It is also important that outdoor connections are not solely focused on the youth, as family-centered programming will help unite different generations with a common sense of stewardship.

Addressing a Changing Population

Florida continues to see a steady rise in population, and the demographic composition is ever-changing. Two of the fastest growing demographics in the state are people of

Spotlight *Emerging Activities:* *Stand-Up Paddleboarding*

Stand-up paddleboarding (SUP) is rapidly becoming a popular activity on Florida's rivers, lakes, and oceans. Stand-up paddleboards are larger and more buoyant than surfboards, incorporating long paddles which allow participants to stand and glide along the water. People are taking to SUP for a variety of uses like fishing, exercising, wildlife viewing and even yoga. The Outdoor Industry Association estimated that 1.24 million people nationwide participated in SUP in 2011, an 18 percent increase from 2010. Sales of stand-up paddleboards doubled between those same years, and many outfitters have begun renting the boards.



SUP in Walton County, credit: waltonoutdoors.com

Hispanic origin and people over the age of 65. Recreation providers must do their best in meeting the needs of these populations in an effort to provide adequate access for all. Like with any demographic, it is important not to generalize a certain population, but instead, to gather input and information regarding this demographic at a local level to make better informed plans and decisions.

The Hispanic population is Florida's fastest growing segment of the population. Census data shows that the Hispanic population in Florida rose 57.4 percent between 2000 and 2010, compared to Florida's overall population increase of 17.6 percent. A majority of Hispanics in the state, approximately 55 percent, live in the Southeast counties of Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, Monroe and Broward. It is important that public recreation providers seek a better understanding of the

trends and barriers of outdoor recreation participation within the Hispanic population when developing future recreation plans.

Another important subset of Florida's population is the 65 and older population. The baby boomer generation, which marked the sharpest period of population growth in our nation's history, is beginning to settle into retirement. Active lifestyles are equally as important for this age group as they are for youth, and ways must be found to keep people active and healthy. In order to do this, adequate and appropriate facilities and programs should be made available to all.

Goal 3-2: Connect all people to the outdoors.

Strategies:

- 1) All public recreation providers should encourage family-centered programming that appeals to both youth and adults. This multi-generational approach will join all ages in a shared appreciation for natural resources.
- 2) Public schools in Florida, in partnerships with Department of Education, should continue to integrate environmental education throughout their curricula to increase awareness of the benefits of and threats to Florida's natural systems. Schools should seek funding through grants, partnerships and sponsorships with public and private entities to fund environmental education-based activities such modeled after best practices identified by the Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE) Program.
- 3) Agencies should establish and promote packaged interest programs, which harness interest in natural and cultural resource-based recreational, interpretive or educational activities to stimulate interest and lead participants to greater participation in the outdoors.
- 4) Recreation providers should adapt recreation programs and facilities to meet the needs of a changing population, particularly the needs of Hispanics and seniors.

Technology and Information

Technology is rapidly advancing and changing

the way we live, learn and even recreate.

Today, the typical participant is equipped with some electronic device when recreating. It is important that recreation providers recognize how technology is used and can be used more in a recreation setting, and then apply this knowledge as one way to better connect with the population.

The advancement and prevalence of smart phones and applications is enormous, and it is important that recreation providers find ways to utilize this technology to enhance, but not replace, outdoor recreation experiences. Smartphone applications, simply called apps, are one of many viable ways to distribute information and education to visitors, and these types of apps should continue to be developed. As of mid- 2012, 13 states, from Wyoming to Delaware, had developed PocketRanger mobile apps for their state park systems. These apps provide information such as park locations, available activities,



Parks by Nature, PocketRanger Mobile App

and wildlife education and are very beneficial in providing quick, accessible information. Technology like this is especially beneficial in connecting with the younger generation.

Following a recommendation from the 2008 SCORP, the Division of Recreation and Parks developed one-stop, comprehensive website for all recreation opportunities in Florida. The site provides an interactive map which features all recreation opportunities entered into the Florida Outdoor Recreation Inventory. The map can be searched by activity, location or agency. Continual development of the site to make it more user friendly, along with the contribution of timely and accurate updates from recreation providers, will make this tool even more beneficial to both the public and recreation planners. The following recommendations are proposed to help ensure recreation providers continue to incorporate technology into facilitating participation.

Goal 3-3: Facilitate participation in outdoor recreation through easily-accessible information and technological advancements.

Strategies:

- 1) DEP should continue to develop and enhance the Florida Outdoor Recreation Inventory website centralizing comprehensive information about outdoor recreation opportunities in Florida.
- 2) Recreation providers should continue to incorporate technological advancements as means to facilitate and encourage outdoor recreation participation, such as smartphone applications and interactive maps online.
- 3) Recreation providers should offer technology-driven programs and events, blending technology with traditional outdoor recreation activities.

Stewardship and Advocacy

Participation in outdoor recreation and enjoyment of natural resources is only one link in fully connecting people to the outdoors. A strong sense of stewardship, volunteerism and advocacy for recreation opportunities and

conservation brings the participant full circle as they not only enjoy the resources, but help preserve them for future generations. User groups, non-profit organizations and citizen support organizations are some of the strongest advocates for recreation and conservation, and given appropriate tools and education, can provide tremendous help in securing support and resources. Volunteerism is another outstanding resource for public programs, as volunteer programs help improve natural areas while connecting people with the resources, and providing a significant financial boost to recreation programs. For example, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2011-2012, 1.4 million volunteer hours, equivalent to 625 full time employees, contributed an effort valued at \$27.8 million to the Division of Recreation and Parks. Volunteers for the Florida Forest Service contributed 58,400 hours in FY 2011-12. By providing meaningful and enjoyable experiences, recreation providers can gather and retain volunteers, an incredible resource during tough economic times.

Goal 3-4: Encourage volunteers, stewardship, and advocacy.

Strategies:

- 1) All park and recreation agencies should maximize the use of volunteers and citizen-based support organizations to supplement their existing resources and personnel. Agencies should develop new, innovative and enjoyable volunteer opportunities that engage all generations and retain volunteers for future projects.
- 2) Agencies should coordinate the distribution of information regarding volunteer opportunities to potential volunteer groups.
- 3) Recreation providers should work with organizations such as FRPA, the Trust for Public Land, and other recreation groups and businesses to educate the public about the benefits of volunteerism on public lands and encourage expanded opportunities for the public to participate in volunteer programs.