

Executive Summary

Pennsylvania has long been an outdoors state. Pursuits like fishing, hunting, camping, and hiking are embedded in our history and culture. Today, outdoor recreation of all kinds continues to fuel our minds, bodies, and economies. Our abundance of local, state, and federal public lands provides opportunities to pursue close-to-home or deep-in-the-woods experiences. Protecting these lands and waters and investing in future recreation needs for all Pennsylvanians is the intent of Pennsylvania's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

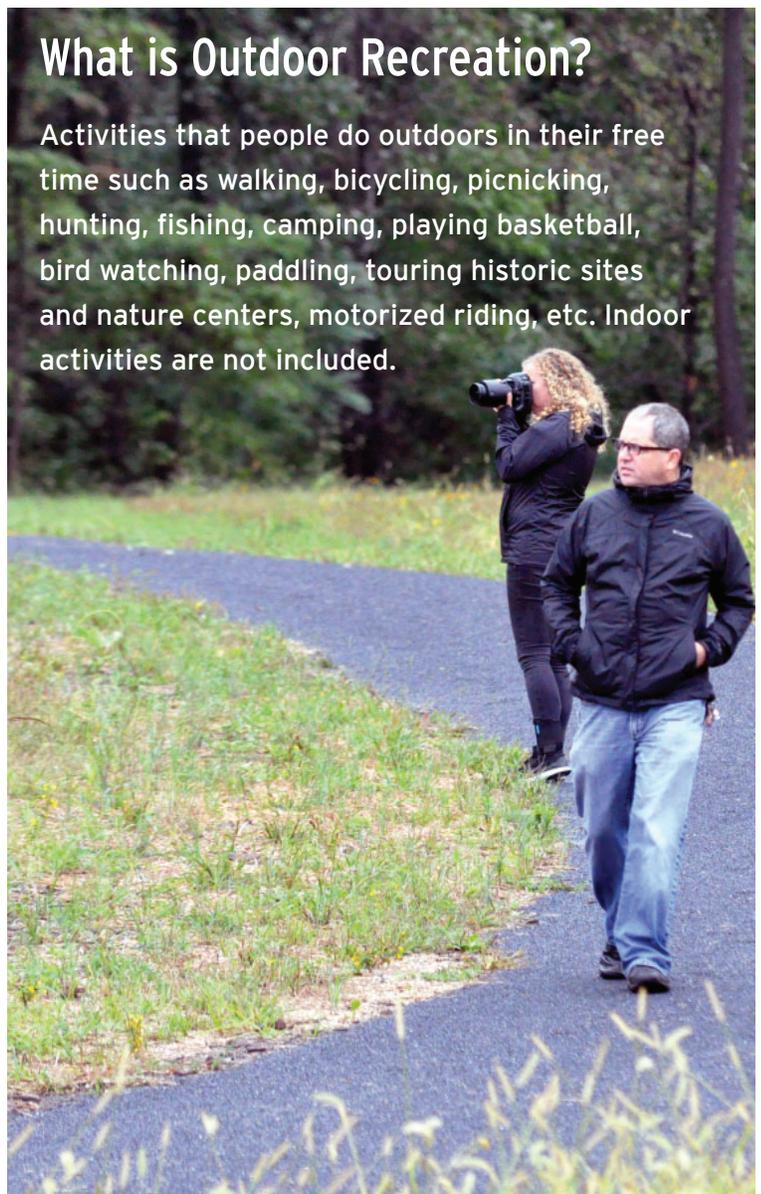
On the heels of two consecutive best-in-nation recognitions, planning for the outdoor recreation needs of Pennsylvanians and visitors continues to be a top priority for the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the agency charged with overseeing the development of Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation plan. This plan provides a five-year blueprint for state and local governments and other providers on how to best deliver and invest in outdoor recreation.

A plan for all people

Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation plan is meant to be a plan for all people, but the challenge is how to hear from the diverse audiences that make up Pennsylvania's population. Plan developers built the 2020 plan by gathering input on Pennsylvanians' outdoor recreation needs and wants from recreation providers, outdoor enthusiasts, the state's general population, and underserved populations through statistically valid and online surveys and face-to-face conversations. In all, about 12,000 people weighed in on the plan. Formed in the early stages of the plan's development, a 40-member Technical Advisory Committee advised and guided the work based on the data received.

What is Outdoor Recreation?

Activities that people do outdoors in their free time such as walking, bicycling, picnicking, hunting, fishing, camping, playing basketball, bird watching, paddling, touring historic sites and nature centers, motorized riding, etc. Indoor activities are not included.



Research and data did not point to any dramatic shifts in attitudes or recreation needs from the 2014-2019 outdoor recreation plan, but demographics do indicate a shift to an older, more racially diverse population. Urban and suburban areas of the state are increasing, while people are migrating away from the rural counties.

With the abundance of resources, it is no surprise that Pennsylvanians like to get outdoors, with 90 percent participating in at least some outdoor recreation activity in the past year. They continued to seek out outdoor recreation at their local parks and open spaces more than any other outdoor venue. Pennsylvanians place a high value on conserving their natural resources and investing in outdoor recreation.

Access remains a challenge to outdoor recreation; only half of the respondents to surveys indicated they can safely walk to a public park or have easy access to water-based recreation like swimming pools, lakes, and streams. However, Pennsylvania's strength as a trail state shows, with more than two-thirds of residents saying they can safely access a trail within 15 minutes of their home. Trails continue to dominate feedback provided on how to improve outdoor recreation in the state. More than three-quarters of outdoor enthusiasts identified community or regional trail systems as their highest priority for facility investment. To specifically address Pennsylvania's trail needs, DCNR has developed the *Land and Water Trail Network Strategic Plan 2020-2024*, which is listed as Appendix I of this report.

Providers of outdoor recreation continue to face many of the same challenges and priorities from five years ago, but with increased fervor. Maintenance and funding issues continue to challenge their ability to provide the highest level of service to their constituents.

New research and data

For the first time in a Pennsylvania outdoor recreation plan, sophisticated mapping data developed by The Trust for Public Land located areas lacking recreational access and used demographic data to locate the populations with the greatest need within these areas. This data will be instrumental in determining equity in access to recreation for years to come.

Development of the outdoor recreation plan coincided with other statewide planning efforts, which helped to inform this plan. For the first time in more than two decades, DCNR's state parks and forestry bureaus are embarking on strategic planning processes. Both planning processes involved public input, which was used in the recreation plan. Strategies from the DCNR/Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society's second Leadership Summit in 2018 were also considered, which pulled in the wisdom of more than 100 recreation and parks professionals to address critical issues facing the profession.



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Priority areas

Early in the plan development process, the plan leadership team identified five priority areas to serve as the foundation for action. These priorities capture the current challenges and opportunities and offer recommendations for supporting outdoor recreation for all Pennsylvanians.

- Health and Wellness
- Recreation for All
- Sustainable Systems
- Funding and Economic Development
- Technology

To help carry out these priorities, key state and local agencies and recreation providers will be guided by the 20 recommendations and 70 action steps found in this plan. A matrix of these action items, along with implementing partners, is found at the back of the plan.

Health and Wellness

Outdoor recreation is key to helping address some of today's pressing health care issues. A growing body of evidence suggests that spending time outdoors can benefit human health. Creating walkable and bikeable communities can encourage active living. An increased focus by the health care community on recreation and opportunities for new partnerships and coordination can lessen our chronic disease crisis. Getting people of all ages connected to the outdoors and nature can have a positive effect on the health and wellness of our citizens. This plan focuses on the growing connection between health and the outdoors, the communication of this connection to Pennsylvania residents, and leveraging partnerships with the health care community to expand nature-based health and wellness programs.

Recreation for All

Ensuring all Pennsylvanians have close-to-home opportunities for recreation is vitally important to the future of outdoor recreation in the state. A plan is not serving all people if there are segments of the population who feel disconnected or unwelcome, or simply don't have easy access to outdoor spaces and amenities. Our age, neighborhood, gender, color of skin, language, ability, or socioeconomic standing should not be barriers to enjoying outdoor recreation in Pennsylvania. This plan strives to provide new parks and green spaces where they clearly are lacking. It aims to ensure that all people feel invited and engaged in our outdoor spaces by developing strategies to overcome real and perceived barriers through enhanced access, amenities, and programs.





Sustainable Systems

Our ability to protect and enhance our public natural and recreational resources grows increasingly challenging as interests diversify, pressures intensify, infrastructure ages, and our climate changes. Recreation providers must plan for how to sustainably manage the resources, while trying to predict the uncertainty of the future. And land managers and conservation leaders must work tirelessly to uphold Pennsylvanians' constitutional right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic, and esthetic values of the environment. This plan outlines strategies to balance the needs of our natural resources with the ever-changing demands of recreation enthusiasts through careful planning and design, innovative solutions and partnerships, and emphasis on stewardship by all.



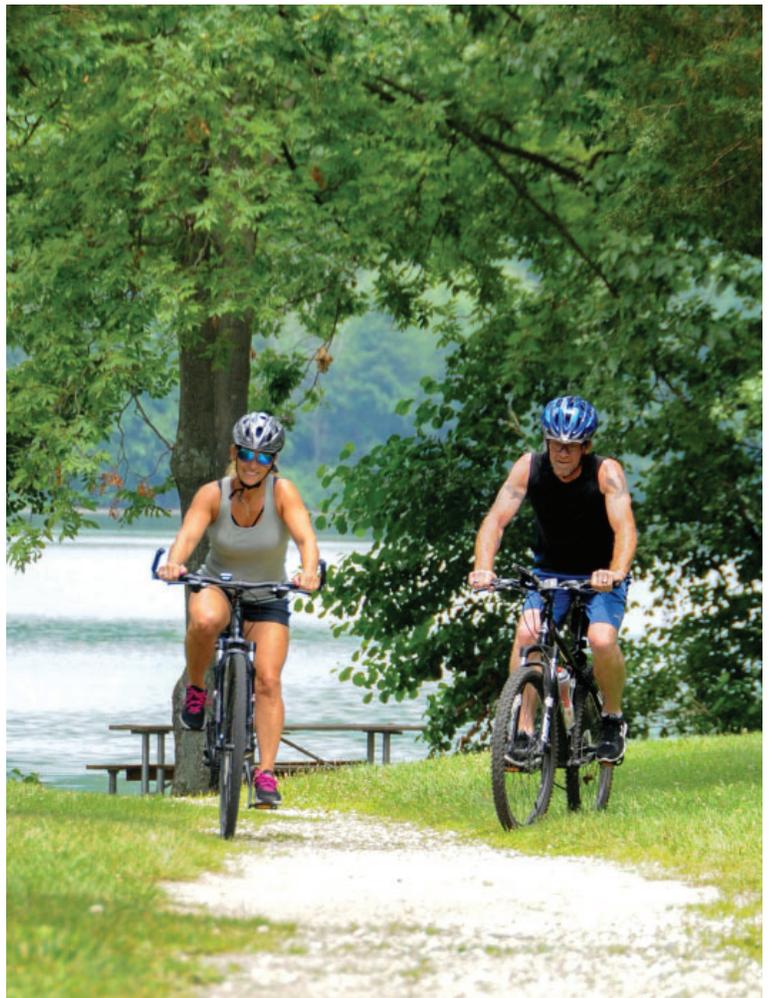
Funding and Economic Development

Our parks, trails, and other recreational amenities create places where people want to live, work, and play. Pennsylvania has plenty of examples where towns and businesses are capitalizing on the benefits of recreational and natural assets. Given the wealth of outdoor assets and successful case studies, the opportunities for the growth of the outdoor recreation economy in Pennsylvania is hopeful, but commitment to investments and prioritization must improve. Infrastructure needs and recreation demands greatly outpace investments at the state and local levels and grow exponentially each year. This plan outlines why safeguarding and increasing investments in outdoor recreation and expanding support for the outdoor recreation economy must be top priorities.



Technology

Over the last decade, advances in technology have had profound effects on how people experience the outdoors. Technology gives the public instant access to information about outdoor recreation opportunities. Advances in technology have allowed for better data collection and analysis. New tools and equipment that enhance the way we navigate and explore are exposing more people to the wonders of nature. At the same time, technological advancements can lead to overuse and overpromotion and detract from the beauty of nature. This plan seeks to set the right balance on how we can use technology to our advantage without it being disruptive or destructive.



Priorities at a glance



Health and Wellness

- 1 Educate on the connection between health and outdoor recreation.
- 2 Support programs that connect health and outdoor recreation.
- 3 Equip health care providers with the tools needed to promote the health benefits of outdoor recreation.
- 4 Create walking and biking networks that provide safe, close-to-home access to recreation and encourage healthy behavior in communities.



Recreation for All

- 1 Provide opportunities for everyone to regularly engage in outdoor recreation.
- 2 Enhance recreational amenities to fit the needs and expectations of underserved people.
- 3 Provide equitable access to outdoor recreation and conservation programs.
- 4 Build a diverse workforce and volunteer base.



Sustainable Systems

- 1 Address infrastructure and maintenance needs in Pennsylvania's existing outdoor recreation areas.
- 2 Protect and conserve lands and waters considering the impacts of climate change on outdoor recreation.
- 3 Foster stewardship for Pennsylvania's recreation areas and natural, cultural, and historic resources.
- 4 Design outdoor recreation areas to minimize impacts on the environment or conflicts among user groups.



Funding and Economic Development

- 1 Protect and expand public and private investments in outdoor recreation.
- 2 Build strategic coalitions to maximize the economic impacts of outdoor recreation in Pennsylvania.
- 3 Market Pennsylvania as an outdoor recreation destination.
- 4 Demonstrate the benefits and impacts of nature-based solutions to addressing community needs.



Technology

- 1 Increase mobile connectivity in outdoor recreation.
- 2 Develop best practices for emerging outdoor recreation technologies.
- 3 Use technologies to support health goals and find places to recreate outdoors.
- 4 Enrich the understanding of the natural, cultural, and historic aspects of the outdoors through technology.