

Chapter VI

AREAS OF FOCUS

The Major Challenges Facing Outdoor Recreation

Suppliers and participants in Kansas

A major purpose of this plan was to distill from an extensive process a list of manageable issues. Issues and their relative importance emerged from each of the information gathering approaches utilized (national forum, surveys, past strategic plans, comprehensive plans in other states; public input sessions, published outdoor recreation research; available economic and demographic trend data; and SCORP mandated issues).

As in the current Plan, it was predetermined that special efforts would be made to keep the final list short and thereby manageable.

Based upon the advisory committee's input, survey responses, and additional review by KDWP staff the outdoor recreation issues of particular focus for the next five years for the state of Kansas include the following:

Challenges on Which to FOCUS:

- 1. Respond to declining and under-represented participation in outdoor recreation activities by youth, urban and ethnic populations.*
- 2. Communities are lacking non-motorized, shared use transportation/recreation trails.*
- 3. Outdoor Recreation Planning at all levels of supply would be enhanced with improved comparative data.*
- 4. Advocacy, in the form of elevated communication and collaboration with key partners, to advise both the public and policy makers of the values and benefits of outdoor recreation participation to public health and economic vitality is critical.*
- 5. Park and Recreation Agencies need to serve as champions of resource stewardship*
- 6. Strive to supply an adequate level of quality recreation services in a challenging financial period*

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2009

1. Issue: *Respond to declining and under-represented participation in outdoor recreation activities by youth, urban and ethnic populations.*

Recommended Action 1.a: Work to ensure that outdoor instructional programs for children contain an outdoor skills component so that young people have an adequate repertoire of life-long outdoor skills.

The environmental education plan for Kansas is a crucial step to re-introduce young people to nature, but to be life-long the focus must be on affective (emotional) as well as cognitive enhancement. Professionals and the public alike feel parental involvement is key to outdoor skill development so parent/child programs would appear to be of considerable value.

Recommended Action 1.b: Offer new programs modeled after proven best practices templates in existence that are designed to enhance the outdoor recreation participation of minorities....share success stories so good models are repeated.

A multitude of resources exist (public, commercial and NGO) to facilitate skill development of urban and minority participants. New and innovative programs are always welcome but partnering with proven programs at the state and national level is also encouraged and start up grant programs help facilitate new programs of this type.

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2009

2. Issue: Communities are lacking non-motorized, shared use transportation/recreation trails.

Recommended Action 2.a: In the short term (5 years), facilitate (by enhanced project scoring, testimony and written reports) the construction/renovation of shared use trails that meet key standards of design and functionality; in particular those that exhibit the dual characteristics of (1) adequate length to achieve physical/recreational benefit and (2) connectivity necessary to enhance recreation participation and key community elements.

The popularity of trails over some other recreation amenities is undoubtedly influenced by the recent collaborations of park and recreation agencies with health services organizations and agencies, community planners and trail users. It is time to capitalize on these alliances. Walking, biking and the other physical activity that trails facilitate is a current national and state focus. Build upon T-LINK (Transportation-Leveraging Investments in Kansas) recommendations to consider bike-ped in all transportation projects.

Recommended Action 2.b: Work with partners like the Dept of Transportation, KDHE, community planners, and key health organizations to make the “complete streets concept.....or an improved variation of same” a public necessity.

In other words, shared use transportation routes/trails must be moved beyond just recreation amenities to the level of basic public infrastructure.

Recommended Action 2.c: Improve comparative trail data (see also Action 3.a)

As outlined in the State Trails plan, trail planning would benefit greatly from standardization of trail construction criteria; a classification system, and use statistics. The purpose of the comparative data would be the improved ability to answer the key planning and supply questions (e.g. What types of trails are needed and where should they be built, and to what specifications?)

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2009

3. Issue: **Outdoor Recreation Planning at all levels of supply would be enhanced with improved comparative data.**

Recommended Action 3.a: Explore and publish (if developed) level of service guidelines for parks, facilities and trails.

Using GIS, the Rec-Finder database and additional research, a special task force comprised of practicing park and recreation professionals, health specialists and community planners should utilize the examples provided in this SCORP as a guide to explore and discuss in detail the benefits of adopting Level of Service (LOS) guidelines. If guidelines are adopted, standard amenity criteria/definitions will be needed for comparative purposes. If NRPA adopts national GIS standards as planned, these criteria should be modified as appropriate to fit national standards. Given existing city targets/standards like a park within 4 blocks of everyone's home (Denver), or a trail within 10 minutes of home (Metro Green) it is recognized as a useful planning/supply tool and is important that the topic be well explored. A trail classification system, including criteria by class should be part of the process.

Recommended Action 3.b: Modify the existing state outdoor recreation database, Rec-Finder, to include a field or fields identifying a given park's LWCF funding status.

Identified as a target action for SCORPs, this modification is easily made to the existing database by linking the LWCF funding table to the database with a shared feature, most likely Park_ID. Since the NRPA GIS committee is presently discussing these specific features....AND.....several Kansas GIS specialists have already met once on the topic specific to a new Park_ID feature for Kansas, the action was not undertaken as yet, but is underway. A field of protected park (6F) status is part of this discussion and will be added in some form to the Rec-Finder regardless of the NRPA GIS committee action.

Level of Service discussions should include sub-park classification/maintenance levels appropriate for resource management plans (e.g. JCPRD)

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2009

- 4. Issue: Advocacy, in the form of elevated communication and collaboration with key partners, to advise both the public and policy makers of the values and benefits of outdoor recreation spaces and participation to public health and economic vitality is critical.**

Recommended Action 4.a: Continue to advance advocacy efforts initiated during the current planning period by regularly convening a Recreation Roundtable.

Recreation Roundtable templates exist at the National Level (American Recreation Coalition) and State level (Colorado Recreation Roundtable). Members should include but not be limited to public recreation agencies at all levels of government, recreation product manufacturers, health departments and key health organizations, private (both for profit and not-for-profit) recreation suppliers, key lawmakers, and several key statewide organizations and coalitions. It is an opportunity to build partnerships with the common targets of improved recreation supply and participation. It allows for influence at the legislative level beyond the limited capacity of state and local agencies. It is an opportunity to tell our story.

Alliances work in Kansas. They preserve open space in a private land state. They enhance streams and water quality. Hopefully collaborated advocacy will be able to result in adequate and stable (e.g. dedicated funding for recreation infrastructure).

Recommended Action 4.b: Summits on health, the built environment and the outdoors organized by multiple partners have been valuable in solidifying these partnerships and should be continued in some form.

Comments by delegates as to the two previous summits has been positive; particularly as related to the sharing of ideas from different perspectives and the team approach to common problems. Strategies to enhance the roundtable approach are underway for 2009.

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2009

5. Issue: **Park and Recreation Agencies need to serve as champions of resource stewardship**

Recommended Action 5.a: Communicate to public park and recreation suppliers at all levels of government via several sessions at the KRPA state conference and/or a workshop sponsored by the Park and Natural Resources Branch (of KRPA) or other forum, the best practices relative to resource management planning to include but not be limited to invasive species, protected/endangered flora and fauna, renovation techniques, water quality protection and enhancement, and wildlife damage control.

Substantial resources exist but need to be effectively distributed. Resources such as the following Code of Conduct for Public Agencies relative to Invasive Species:

1. Require risk assessment for government-led or financed plant introductions to ensure that no new harmful plant species are introduced, intentionally or unintentionally.
2. Do not distribute existing holdings of invasive plant species to areas where they can potentially do harm; eliminate these holdings or maintain new or existing holdings using appropriate safeguards.
3. Coordinate and facilitate collaboration in databases, early warning systems, monitoring, and other means of preventing invasive plant species problems.
4. Lead and fund (subject to budgetary considerations) the development of environmentally sound methods to control harmful invasive plant species, seek control of such species on public lands and promote their control on adjacent private lands.
5. Develop and promote the use of non-invasive plant species within all government units and to the public.
6. Facilitate, lead, coordinate and evaluate public outreach and education on harmful invasive plant species.
7. Encourage Federal employees and management to participate in ongoing training programs on invasive plant species.
8. Foster international cooperation to minimize the risk of the import and export of potentially invasive plant species.
9. Develop partnerships and incentive programs to lessen the impact of invasive plant species and provide non-invasive restoration materials.
10. Provide a forum for regular evaluation of the effectiveness of these voluntary codes of conduct towards preventing the invasive plant species problem.
11. Enforce invasive plant species legislation at all levels.

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2009

Recommended Action 5.b: Maintain a toolkit of environmental best practices resource links and related archive of best practices on the KDWP and/or KRPA website.

Toolkit elements prepared for the JCPRD resource management/stewardship plan are shown below and should be included at minimum:

- Kansas Forest Service
- Kansas Natural Heritage Inventory
- Mid America Regional Council's Environmental Programs
- Natural Resources Inventory - KS Biological Survey
- USDA National Environmental Compliance Handbook
- USDA Plant Identification Center; Ntl. Invasive Species Information Center
- US EPA Region 7 Environmental Compliance Assistance Clearinghouse
- Kansas CO-OP Fish and Wildlife Research Unit
- KSU Research and Extension (Environment)
- Kansas Water Office
- KS Dept of Agriculture (Plant Protection and Weed Control Program)
- KS Geological Survey
- KS Dept of Health and the Environment (links to Environmental Resources)
- KDWP (Threatened and Endangered Species, Species in Need of Conservation, Controlling Wildlife, Stream Assessments)
- USF&WS Partners for Fish and Wildlife
- Nature Conservancy Invasive Species Control (WIMS GIS software)

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2009

Recommended Action 5.c: Continue existing participation in and expand alliances when appropriate that promote the protection of heritage Kansas resources; particularly tallgrass prairie, wetlands, and water quality.

A partial listing of current alliances includes: Kansas Natural Resource Legacy Alliance, KS Alliance of Wetlands and Streams, Tallgrass Legacy Alliance, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, and the Flint Hills Tourism Coalition's Heritage Task Force.

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2009

6. Issue: Strive to supply an adequate level of quality recreation services in a challenging financial period

Recommended Action 6.a: Continue to educate the public and lawmakers via articles, news releases, and professional association inputs of the value and importance of investment in public recreation infrastructure, especially when an investment in public infrastructure is needed to boost a sagging economy.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Work Projects Administration (WPA) had profound positive impact on not only the Depression Era economic rebound but on recreation infrastructure that is still very evident today. Investment in infrastructure makes work in the short term but the long term benefits of improved facilities extends for decades. Investment in recreation infrastructure can benefit those that truly need it the most where they need it the most.

Recommended Action 6.b: Continue to seek dedicated funding sources at the state level for the supply of quality recreation and park services.

Given the depth of the economic downturn, a challenge expressed by both the professional suppliers and the public was the need to keep recreation experiences affordable despite agency budget cuts. Agencies are caught between a rock and a hard place when continually asked to do more with less. Such a dedicated funding approach at the state level should benefit both state and local agencies; although as noted in this plan, the state supply of experiences is most in jeopardy without assistance. National approaches should likewise be supported. Open space protection should be a component.

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2009

Recommended Action 6.b: *Continue to educate the public and lawmakers via articles, news releases, and professional association inputs that operating budget cuts necessitate a reduction in the breadth of operations and clearly keep the public informed as to the nature of the situation. Explain the need to do less with less.*

The Executive Director and members of the Kansas Recreation and Park Association met during the 2009 KRPA Annual Conference to discuss specific strategies to address recommended reductions to the state's main dedicated fund for parks and recreation - the Alcohol Tax. Beyond the expected utilization of the association's lobbyist, strategies included the compilation of a hit list of notable projects and programs that would be adversely impacted (some eliminated) as a result revenue reductions. Mobilization of users was also considered a significant step in the awareness campaign. The KRPA offered to prepare both a position statement to aid in the information dissemination process and to compile a summary document from the comments and examples received from members.