

Arkansas Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

2014-2018



Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism

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Fellow Arkansans:

I am pleased to present the 2014-2018 Arkansas Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. This plan identifies how outdoor recreation is available through facilities and programs, and how public needs and interests drive the direction of new recreational opportunities. A core part of this plan is the *priorities*, which are recommendations to guide use and administration of natural, scenic, and recreation resources within our state. Significantly, it establishes goals for the disbursement of state and federal grant funds in Arkansas.

Our lakes, rivers, mountains, forests and parks are the places where we take our families and guests for relaxation and to connect with nature. Arkansas residents value deeply the beautiful landscapes of the environment. These public resources are features that raise our quality of life, and play an important role in attracting and keeping people and businesses in our state.

Ask an Arkansan, or one of the many visitors to our state, what they think of the state's outdoors and you'll hear stories of appreciation, adventure, and praise. I often hear, "I didn't realize Arkansas had so much to offer." Arkansas has variety in its forests, rivers, lakes, mountains and scenery. The great people, history, culture, and geographic location all combine to make our state a wonderful place to live and visit.

We in Arkansas invite business and industry to give us a chance to showcase our state's magnificent and plentiful human and natural resources. Through surveys, workshops, and multi-faceted collaboration, this plan represents our efforts to identify how best to administer and protect outdoor resources.

Join me in taking up the challenges set out in this document to protect our natural, scenic, and recreation resources for our economic benefit and the enjoyment of generations to come.

Richard W. Davies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arkansas has a rich array of natural, environmental and cultural resources which are often used for outdoor recreation. For decades, local and state government agencies have been managing and protecting these resources by investing in land and developing state-of-the art facilities for the enjoyment of local residents and visitors alike. This legacy lives on today, with strong public support for the creation of new, expanded and improved outdoor recreation sites that meet contemporary interests.

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) helps to capture historical and current efforts designed to enhance recreation opportunities in Arkansas. The SCORP brings together voices from the users of recreation sites, planners and developers, government officials, agency managers and elected officials. Together, they have laid out this plan to guide recreation development in a beneficial and sustainable manner.

The United States Department of the Interior's National Park Service (NPS) administers the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State Assistance Program, which allocates federal funds to state governments for acquisition and development of recreation sites. The SCORP is a requirement of that program. The NPS partners with Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism to administer sub-grants to state agencies and local units of government. Arkansas has received tens of millions of dollars through LWCF since the inception of the program in 1965. Local funding of outdoor recreation has been strong as well, with the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Grant and Trust Fund contributing over \$23 million to park grants through the years.

The SCORP examines broad demand for outdoor recreation expressed by citizens, as well as the opportunities that are already present in the form of recreational facilities, programs and agency support.

There is strong interest in outdoor recreation among state residents and guests, as suggested by the increasing levels of park and trail use. A statewide telephone survey of residents was conducted, focusing on interest and participation in outdoor recreation. More than 500 people participated in the survey, and their responses indicated that 61% felt outdoor recreation is very important. Many recreation activities are popular among the respondents, with walking-jogging-hiking in the top spot, nature viewing at second place, and driving or motorcycle riding in third place.

An important issue was illustrated in the survey, with 31% of respondents saying that health and wellness are prominent reasons for their participation in outdoor recreation. The connection between outdoor recreation, physical activity and improved health can be made both intuitively and with documented research. Activity at the national level can be seen in a multi-agency program called *Healthy People 2020*. The National Park Service has its own health-related program, *Healthy Parks Healthy People*. Within the state, the *Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention* is combining efforts of many agencies into a holistic effort toward improved public health.

Outdoor recreation has been shown to be a strong economic engine in the state. Reports indicate that outdoor recreation generated \$10 billion in consumer spending, \$2.9 billion in salaries and wages, 126,000 in direct jobs creation, and \$696 million in state and local tax revenue for the state of Arkansas.

The opportunities for outdoor recreation are vast and varied in Arkansas. The National Park Service operates several parks, as well as supports local recreation efforts through its LWCF State Assistance Program. Other federal agencies include the U.S. Forest Service, with national forests open to recreation, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which operates many lakes, campgrounds and recreation sites in the state.

State agencies provide a tremendous diversity of recreation opportunities. Of primary importance is the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, and its State Parks Division, with over 52 state parks, welcome centers, and countless programs for guests. The Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, play large roles in preserving natural areas, lakes and wildlife management areas, making them available to the public in a protected, sustainable way. While state agencies provide much in the way of opportunities, not to be overlooked are cities and counties across the state which support and maintain thousands of local parks. These local parks, in many ways, are the backbone of outdoor recreation because they are used regularly and often by residents, for everything from team sports to picnicking and walking.

Trails are one of the most popular outdoor recreation facilities in Arkansas, which is mirrored at a national level, too. Arkansas has many types of trails, including urban trails and greenways, water trails for canoeing, backcountry trails, equestrian trails, and accessible trails for persons with disabilities. These trails are used regularly, and throughout the year. Trails are often co-located with local parks and property reserved for public use, making significant recreation resources.

SCORP Priorities

Information from state resources, public input, agency perspectives and recreational trends was formulated into a set of Priorities for the SCORP. They are:

- *Align efforts to improve outdoor recreation with existing conservation, preservation and public good initiatives.*
- *Improve access to, and quality of, health and fitness related recreational areas and facilities.*
- *Improve the quality, accessibility, and availability of outdoor recreational resources on public lands and parks in a sustainable way.*

These priorities reflect important aspects of outdoor recreation development, and are intended to help guide state and local efforts when expanding or improving recreational facilities and programs. The priorities are made tangible through a set of strategies and actions written for each, which guide stakeholders' activities in a positive direction.

The SCORP is a valuable tool for all stakeholders in outdoor recreation, and illustrates a powerful collaboration across many agency and public interests.

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Recreation: refreshment of strength and spirits after work.

- *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

INTRODUCTION

This Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan sets forth ideas about outdoor recreation's role in the state, and examines contemporary considerations for a dynamic environment. Of utmost importance in this plan are the people of Arkansas, those who work, live and recreate here. They are the reason parks are developed and recreation facilities are created and maintained. They are the trend-setters in outdoor recreation interests, and the leaders of policies that help improve state recreation resources. In essence, the SCORP is a service to the public, and provides a resource for participants and public officials involved in outdoor recreation.

Arkansas holds vast resources in its diverse topography, ecosystems, culture and people. An intersection of these resources is *outdoor recreation*, which has grown steadily for decades. Today, the state approaches outdoor recreation with a sense of direction and responsibility, by conducting research, assessment and planning, in part through the framework of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The public and political leadership in Arkansas brought together stakeholders in the outdoor recreation community to contribute to this SCORP, and together they worked diligently to assemble a progressive and realistic plan.

This plan provides a balance between a historical review, an overview of issues, and the need for progress within the state. The contents consider public opinions, political interests, and recommendations from professionals in the field, resulting in Priorities being established, with strategies and action points.

The SCORP is required for Arkansas to be eligible to participate in the Department of the Interior's Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State Assistance Program, through which Arkansas receives an apportioned amount of funding. The Department of the Interior's National Park Service partners with the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism to administer sub-grants to state agencies and local units of government.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

The LWCF State Assistance Program was established by the LWCF Act of 1965 (Section 6, Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, as amended; Public Law 88-578; 16 U.S.C. 4601-4 et seq.) to stimulate a nationwide action program to assist in preserving, developing, and assuring to all citizens of the United States, in present and future generations, such quality and quantity of outdoor recreation resources as may be available and are necessary and desirable for individual active participation.

The program provides matching grants to state governments and, through states, to local units of government for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation sites and facilities. Grant funds are also available, to states only, for fulfilling the statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation planning requirements of the program. The program is intended to create

and maintain a nationwide legacy of high-quality recreation areas and facilities and to stimulate non-federal investments in the protection and maintenance of recreation resources across the United States.

The LWCF role in Arkansas

The LWCF legacy has touched almost every city, county, state and federal park in Arkansas in some fashion. Over 700 state and local projects representing millions of dollars in federal funds, leveraging an equal or greater amount of matched funds, have purchased land and constructed many states parks, ball fields, playgrounds, swimming pools and a wide range of outdoor recreation facilities.

The LWCF laid basic groundwork for the creation of Arkansas's Natural and Cultural Resources Grant and Trust Fund. In the mid-nineteen-eighties Congress debated the proposed American Heritage Trust Act. Language in the proposed act provided an incentive to states that established funding which could be used to match LWCF grants made available to the states and trust territories. Although the American Heritage Trust Act failed to become law, thanks to far-sighted state leadership, Arkansas's legislature created the Natural and Cultural Resources Grant and Trust Fund. The Trust Fund is supported by a portion of the state's real estate transfer tax.

Many of the national parks, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service areas, and national forests in the state have benefited from the LWCF program. More importantly, the LWCF program regulations specify that:

“Property acquired or developed with LWCF assistance shall be retained and used for public outdoor recreation. Any property so acquired and/or developed shall not be wholly or partly converted to other than public outdoor recreation uses without the approval of NPS pursuant to Section 6(f)(3) of the LWCF Act and these regulations.”

“The conversion provisions of Section 6(f)(3), 36 CFR Part 59, and these guidelines apply to each area or facility for which LWCF assistance is obtained, regardless of the extent of participation of the program in the assisted area or facility and consistent with the contractual agreement between NPS and the State.”

“Responsibility for compliance and enforcement of these provisions rests with the State for both state and locally sponsored projects. The responsibilities cited herein are applicable to the area depicted or otherwise described on the 6(f)(3) boundary map and/or as described in other project documentation approved by the Department of the Interior.”

These regulations afford a degree of protection to parks that assures these areas cannot be compromised for short-term gain or political bartering.

PEOPLE – Engaging in Outdoor Recreation

In the United States, outdoor recreation activities have long been popular pursuits for leisure, sport and healthy lifestyles, and these activities gain in popularity each year. With a wide variety of opportunities available on a great array of topography, from the Appalachian Trail to Padre Island beaches to Yellowstone National Park, the beauty of the landscape may be enticement enough for people to explore the great outdoors. Outdoor recreation is part of a national heritage, linked in ways to a sense of American freedom, individualism and opportunity.

The American people go outside for recreation regularly and often, as documented by the Outdoor Foundation. According to its 2013 Topline report, 141.9 million people participated in outdoor activities, an increase over the previous year, which is a participation rate of 49.9% of the population. The report goes on to explain that the most popular activity for adults is fishing, and the most frequented is running and jogging. Outdoor recreation continues to expand in popularity overall, while individual activities exhibit their own shift in numbers.

State participation and trends

The people who live in and travel to Arkansas appreciate the great diversity of recreational opportunities offered across the state. People are active, and spend significant amounts of their free time engaged in outdoor recreation activities. To help understand broad interest in, and support of, outdoor recreation among state residents, a statewide telephone survey was commissioned by the Department of Parks and Tourism, and conducted by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Institute of Government, Survey Research Center.

The survey focused generally on activities, motivations for participation, and perceptions and preferences related to outdoor recreation. There were several major findings in the survey, a few of which are:

- 61% of respondents said that outdoor recreation is “very important”.
- The issue of health and wellness was prominent and 31% of respondents noted this as a reason for participating in outdoor recreation.
- “Walking, jogging and hiking” ranks as the most popular activity.
- Respondents participate in small group activities more often than in large groups or individually.

A small but interesting segment of the survey report deals with reasons for a lack of participation, or as it is phrased, “not visiting a park or recreation area”. Many survey respondents were active in outdoor recreation, while some were not active. The inactive people indicated that “health reasons or disability” is their top reason for not participating. The active people stated this reason to be much lower in importance of why people do not participate, which suggests a difference in perception. Active people chose “don’t enjoy/not interested” as their top reason for not participating. Both groups chose “busy/lack of free time” as their second most important reason.

The survey gathered data on a set of 20 activities, some of which has been aggregated into a differential ranking. The most popular activity among respondents was “walking, jogging or hiking” and the next 19 activities were ranked in order of preference relative to the top activity.

ACTIVITY	DIFFERENTIAL RANKING
Walking, jogging or hiking	1.00
Nature viewing	0.66
Driving or motorcycling	0.65
Picnicking	0.57
Visiting a children's playground	0.52
Fishing	0.51
Swimming or going to a water park	0.49
Boating activities	0.48
Historical and archeological sites	0.47
ATV riding	0.36
Camping	0.28
Hunting	0.27
Bicycle riding	0.20
Playing basketball	0.18
Playing baseball or softball	0.16
Playing golf	0.15
Horseback riding	0.07
Playing soccer or rugby	0.06
Playing tennis	0.05
Skateboarding or playing Frisbee golf	0.04

A portion of the survey dealt with ways to encourage participation in outdoor recreation. The responses stated that having more facilities close to where people live would be an incentive, as would having greater accessibility for persons with disabilities. These responses support the Priorities for greater accessibility and quality of recreational facilities. Other incentives to participation include improved programming for outdoor recreation, organized activities, and better security. These latter efforts may fall more within the purview of local park management and daily operations, but can be legitimate considerations for planning and design of future park facilities, locations, and amenities.

Survey data should be viewed in the context of how it was generated; the 2013 results are representative of the 500+ respondents, and cannot easily be extrapolated to the general public. Some value may be drawn from the general listing of activities and their rank order. Likewise, the general trend seen over the years of surveys may provide some guidance for local park planners when setting out broad development plans.

The 2013 survey asked about the importance of outdoor recreation to the respondent. As mentioned above, 61% said it was "very important." When combined with the response category of "somewhat important," the total response was 86% saying it is important. In either instance the rate is quite high, and may reflect a strong interest in and valuing of outdoor experiences

and the environment. This idea is expressed in the Priority, *Aligning efforts to improve outdoor recreation with conservation, preservation, and public good initiative.*

Public surveys for previous SCORP documents generated rankings of outdoor recreation activities among survey respondents. The table below compares data from surveys conducted in previous years, and may illustrate some general trends. Walking appears to have been at or near the top of these lists consistently over several years. Other activities remained near the top, such as picnicking and driving for pleasure.

2009	1993	1984
Jogging or walking	Driving for pleasure	Walking for pleasure
Driving for pleasure	Walking for pleasure	Fishing
Swimming	Picnicking	Driving for pleasure
Nature viewing and outdoor photography	Fishing	Picnicking
Boating	Swimming	Swimming
Picnicking	Visiting historical sites	Camping/developed sites
Visiting historical and archeological sites	Wildlife observation	Visiting historical sites
Camping	Short hikes	Hunting
Bicycling	Pleasure boating	Baseball / softball
Playing tennis	Bicycling	Jogging / running
	Camping / developed sites	Pleasure boating
	Basketball	ORV driving
	Jogging / running	Bicycling
	Baseball / softball	Canoeing / floating
	Photography	Camping / undeveloped sites
	Hunting	Water skiing
	Other outdoor games	Photography
	ORV driving	Tennis
	Canoeing / floating	Other outdoor games
	Camping / undeveloped sites	Horseback riding

Regional Patterns

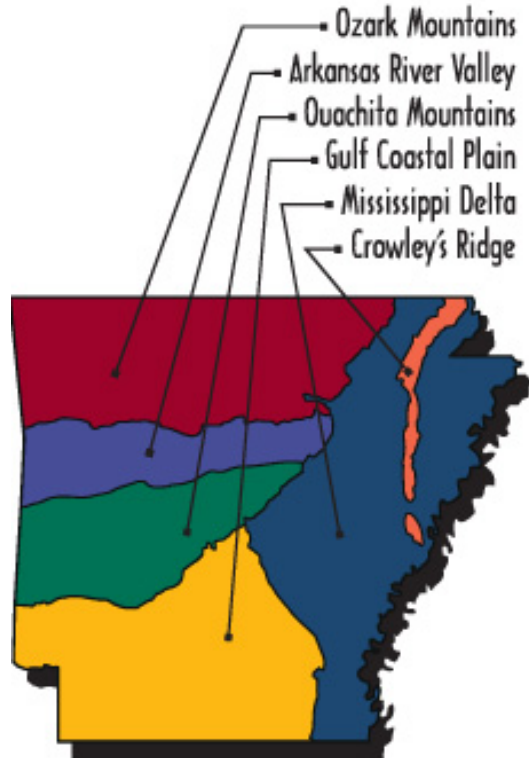
A highly diverse topography exists within Arkansas, and outdoor recreation activities somewhat mirror the type of landscape in a particular area. A map of the state showing the major natural divisions is a convenient way to help describe various topographical regions. The sharpest regional difference is found between the eastern area of the state, the Mississippi Alluvial Plain (also known as the 'Delta'), and the western area of the state including the Ozark Mountains and Ouachita Mountains. Other significant variations are seen in the Arkansas River Valley and the Gulf Coastal Plain.

In the general area of the northwest and west central, within the Ozark and Ouachita mountains, there are many public parks, national forests, lakes, public lands, trails and privately-owned facilities that make use of the beautiful mountains and valleys. The region is characterized by hardwood forests, pristine lakes and waterways, abundant wildlife, and relatively low development. It is home to the Buffalo National River, Ozark National Forest, Ouachita National Forest, Lake Ouachita and Beaver Lake, among other prime recreation sites. People are drawn to this region for its opportunities to camp, hike, observe wildlife, fish and boat, hunt, and generally explore.

The Arkansas River Valley is a broad valley which lies between the mountain regions, extending from Fort Smith in the west to Little Rock and Searcy in the central part of the state. This region's main attraction is the Arkansas River and its tributaries, which are prime bass fisheries, as well as being extremely popular rivers for recreational boating. Cities, counties and agencies with property along the rivers make use of these waterways for riverfront parks, picnic areas, ball fields, and trails. The facilities are positioned for impressive views of the river valley, and offer very pleasant surroundings for family outings.

The Gulf Coastal Plain region is part of the larger coastal plain geology, sloping and extending from the Ouachita Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico. This area is marked by low rolling hills, pine forests, and meandering rivers. A few of the main rivers are the Red River, Saline River, and the Ouachita River. Canoeing and floating on, and camping alongside, these rivers are very popular recreational pursuits. Wildlife is abundant in the southern forests, and many people enjoy hunting and wildlife observation or photography in this region.

A very large portion of the state is within the Mississippi Delta region, encompassing nearly one third of the state's territory along the eastern border. This unique, very flat and deep clay soil geology extends from the northeast corner of the state southwestward to Little Rock, and south



to Louisiana. The area contains extensive acreage of prime agricultural land, swamps and bayous, and some of the largest rivers in the state. Of special note is the White River. In its southern reaches, the river is part of the White River National Wildlife Refuge, a highly diverse and rich area of approximately 160,000 acres in southeast Arkansas.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - <http://www.fws.gov/whiteriver/>

The Mississippi Delta region of Arkansas, because of its agriculture, swamps, and rivers, is one of the prime feeding and resting areas for migrating waterfowl in the Mississippi Flyway. <http://mississippi.flyways.us/>

Hunting, fishing and wildlife observation are top recreational activities in this region of the state because of this unique topography. The large rivers attract people who enjoy boating and kayaking through the many miles of the main rivers and dozens of smaller tributaries.

Demographics

Arkansas experienced modest growth in population in recent years. The U.S. Census Bureau indicates a 2010 population of 2,915,918, an increase of 242,518 people since 2000, or roughly 9.1%. Estimated population in Arkansas for 2012 is 2,949,000, continuing an upward trend. This moderate level of growth perhaps reflects a steadiness of state economics, culture and populations. Neighboring states exhibited some variation: Oklahoma grew by 8.7%, Louisiana by 1.4%, and Texas by 20.6%, with unique drivers or limitations in each of those states. In general population trend, Arkansas has much in common with some Midwestern states that had low to moderate growth, while many western and southeastern states experienced more rapid growth.

Within Arkansas, major metropolitan centers gained the most in population, locations such as the Jonesboro/Paragould area, the central Arkansas/Little Rock metropolitan area, and the Northwest Arkansas corridor of Fayetteville-Bentonville. Some midsize and smaller cities and rural counties lost population. A few selected locations illustrate the pattern of change during the recent period of April 2010 to July of 2012:

- Benton County grew by 4.9%.
- Washington County grew by 4.1 %.
- Craighead County grew by 3.4%.
- Pulaski County grew by 1.6%.
- City of Pine Bluff fell by -4.2%.
- Garland County grew by 0.9%.
- City of Fayetteville grew by 4.5%.
- Drew County grew by 1.3%.
- Polk County fell by -0.9%.
- Stone County grew by 2.2%.
- Union County fell by -1.9%.

U.S. Census Bureau, Arkansas statistics: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/05/05139.html>

The growth of mid-size cities and urban areas in the state, and the loss of population in several rural counties and some cities, creates a concomitant shift in demand for recreational facilities. If these population movement trends continue, city and county governments around the state, along with private sector interests, may face new circumstances in their park planning work and responses to public interests.

Average incomes of Arkansas residents have remained relatively steady across the 10 year time frame of census data collection, although wealth appears to be concentrating in and near the urban centers. Northwest and central Arkansas are the main commercial and urban centers, while smaller centers have had varying levels of growth, such as Texarkana in the far southwest, Jonesboro in the northeast, and Fort Smith in the west. These areas have seen greater population increase and there may be a corollary increase in economic activity. There is at least the potential for greater resources to be allocated toward outdoor recreation facilities, but such decisions are made by weighing a multitude of factors.

More in-depth demographic information is found in *Arkansas 2020*, a research brief from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. The brief indicates that the median age of the state's population was 36.0 years in 2000, with a projected increase to 37.3 years in 2020, or a general aging of the population as a trend. Racial composition of the population has been changing gradually, as well. Historically, Arkansas has had a predominantly white population, currently about 75%, and the nonwhite population about 25%. By the year 2020, the nonwhite population is expected to increase, approaching 30%. African-Americans make up the majority of the nonwhite population, while the Hispanic population makes up a small, but rapidly growing, segment of nonwhites. The report also includes valuable information on growth rates related to urban and rural areas of the state. Urban areas are expected to grow by 44% between 2000 and 2020, while rural areas should grow by 21% in the same time period. For more information on details of specific regions of the state, refer to

<http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/bureau/research/Publications/2020%20Report/Arkansas%202020%20Final%20Report.pdf>.

The SCORP Priorities recognize demographic changes occurring in Arkansas, and are intended to provide a rationale for developing new and innovative ways for people to enjoy outdoor recreation. The Priority, *Aligning efforts to improve outdoor recreation with conservation, preservation, and public good initiative*, will help pave the way.

Environmental changes affecting participation

A significant issue for outdoor recreation is the impact of environmental influences on facilities, how they are used, how often, and which activities and sports are most popular. Natural disasters are part of the mix. There are acute events, such as storms, floods, and wildfires, or chronic changes, such as long-term drought.

The SCORP Priorities are intended to increase interaction and planning between local government and agencies, and in doing so, help improve how environmental issues are addressed in advanced plans and disaster responses. Sustainability of park areas depends significantly on how the lands are used, and with the data available on usage patterns and environmental trends, it may aid in creating reasonable strategies.

Engaging Youth

A significant segment of people engaging in outdoor recreation are youth, and planning efforts can benefit from connecting with young people at use levels, program levels and public policy levels. The idea of engaging youth in these processes is not new. In the 2005 book [Last Child in the Woods](#), author Richard Louv describes concerns about children spending too much time indoors, and the loss of connection to the natural world. Many programs have been developed which are bringing back this important linkage for young children.

For other youth, those in teenage and young adult years, there are national efforts to engage them in an organized way. [Outdoor Nation](#) is a national initiative to help young adults support outdoor recreation in multiple ways; the first 'summit' was held in 2010, and several more in 2013. Becoming a 'member' of Outdoor Nation allows youth to stay connected with like-minded individuals across the country.

Another opportunity for youth to be engaged in the world of outdoor recreation is through the [Ambassador Program](#) in the organization America's State Parks. This program involves young people to promote the national system of state parks, and to get people interested in using their local state parks for a more active lifestyle. Interested youth can apply to the program, and be part of a group that has great experiences in state parks, and shares their stories with others. America's State Parks is made possible by the [National Association of State Park Directors](#).

Within Arkansas, the SCORP encourages the development of youth-friendly facilities and programs in order to help engage young people in the use of parks and outdoors for a healthy lifestyle, as well as become a part of the decision-making process. Young people are the future leaders, policy and decision-makers of outdoor recreation in the state, and should be helped to share their voices in the process.

Public Health and Outdoor Recreation

An important issue in society today is health and fitness, and in particular diet, exercise and obesity prevention. The health effects of lack of exercise and excess weight are well documented in medical science, and now the financial costs in the health care system and in chronic disease costs of sedentary lifestyles are coming to light. These public health issues affect everyone, whether directly or indirectly, and constitute a topic that will benefit from a multi-faceted approach to solutions. Engaging these topics through the SCORP may enrich the discussion and expand the solutions.

This section explores the relationship of health issues and outdoor recreation. A readily apparent connection can be found between physical activity and improved health, and public policies may be able to promote such activity. Outdoor recreation, being a prominent segment of physical activity, naturally can be promoted along with other types of activities, and in the context of the SCORP, will be afforded the assumed benefit that it generally improves health.

National Efforts

Improved health is a central topic in the national dialogue about quality of life for Americans. A holistic approach is being led by a multi-agency initiative called Healthy People.

Healthy People - <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/default.aspx>

The initiative is a collaborative work of several government agencies, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and several others. The group works on a wide range of health issues, and one of their flagship efforts is a 10-year agenda for improving the health of U. S. residents, called Healthy People 2020. The 2020 agenda addresses several topics, including physical activity, which is closely related to SCORP interest in structural environments, especially parks and recreational facilities.

Healthy People 2020 -

<http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/overview.aspx?topicid=33>

It may be intuitive that a more physically active lifestyle correlates to improved health, but the Healthy People initiative brings collective knowledge and extensive research to support this contention. Initiative leaders assert that "regular physical activity can improve ... health and quality of life..." (retrieved 6/24/2013 from

<http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/overview.aspx?topicid=33>)

Reports from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2008 suggest that physical activity may reduce the risk of several diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, depression and diabetes. These positive health effects are some of the benefits sought through strategic actions outlined in the SCORP, and local communities may realize the benefits as well.

Evidence for the benefits of physical activity has been building over a number of years. A report issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, describes the clear benefits found in research and review of studies. Their findings on the health benefits of physical activity include:

- Regular physical activity reduces the risk of many adverse health outcomes.
- Some physical activity is better than none.
- For most health outcomes, additional benefits occur as the amount of physical activity increases through higher intensity, greater frequency, and/or longer duration.
- Most health benefits occur with at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking. Additional benefits occur with more physical activity.
- Both aerobic (endurance) and muscle-strengthening (resistance) physical activity are beneficial.
- Health benefits occur for children and adolescents, young and middle-aged adults, older adults, and those in every studied racial and ethnic group.
- The health benefits of physical activity occur for persons with disabilities.
- The benefits of physical activity far outweigh the possibility of adverse outcomes.

(Retrieved 6/27/2013 from <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/summary.aspx>)

Much interest has been paid to ways physical activity benefits physical health, and the studies and evidence strongly suggest that there are many positive effects. Another aspect of regular physical activity is its impact on emotional and psychological health. J. Thompson Coon, et al, conducted a review of studies which examined the effects of exercise done outdoors, in natural settings versus indoors, and the related influences on mental well-being. Their review suggests that exercising in natural environments rather than indoors may be correlated with improved energy, and less tension, depression, anger and confusion. The review further showed that participants who were studied conveyed that they enjoyed outdoor activity more, and may be more likely to engage in the activity again. These findings further support the idea that routine movement, such as outdoor recreation, has tangible, positive effects on body and spirit.

The wealth of knowledge related to positive health benefits of becoming more active is influencing more than high level policy work. An increasing number of medical doctors are prescribing some type of physical activity to their patients to help treat a wide array of health issues. As the lessons of health and motion come closer to people's daily routines, it will become more important to address opportunities for activity, and access to appropriate facilities. Outdoor recreation facilities can fill a real need in people's lives and communities.

In a 2010 study commissioned by the National Recreation and Park Association, authors Godbey and Mowen reviewed scientific research on the benefits of physical activity. They make a connection between the amount and quality of physical activity that people engage in, and the availability and use of public park facilities. Major health organizations, such as state health departments, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation see "parks and recreation as a health service and part of the healthcare system," according to the authors. The voluntary nature of physical activity in leisure time may play a role in the popularity of recreation in public parks. With the growing importance of recreation as part of improved public health, park development plans made by state and local governments could benefit by reflecting the new interests and needs of the general public.

National Park Service

Healthy Parks Healthy People (HPHP) is a holistic approach to promoting the health and well-being of people and the sustainability of the planet. HPHP is a National Park Service (NPS) initiative to reintegrate human, environmental and ecological health into the mission of public parks and public lands.

Healthy Parks Healthy People website - http://www.nps.gov/public_health/hp/hphp.htm

Although HPHP is based within the National Park Service, it collaborates with national, state, and local parks, as well as innovative business executives, healthcare leaders, scientists, foundations and advocacy organizations to foster the health-related role that parks play in society. The intent of this movement is to consider how the National Park Service can play an influential role to reverse the current trend of poor health among U.S. citizens.

The seven guiding principles of the program are:

1. We promote health and well-being as an interrelated system linking human health to natural landscapes and all species
2. We seek expertise and resources from a wide range of partners in the public and private sectors
3. Our aim includes activities that contribute to physical, mental, and spiritual health, and social well-being
4. Our work takes place both within and beyond park boundaries
5. We encourage uses that promote the health of all species while avoiding those that impair resources
6. We seek to provide equitable access to open spaces and natural places
7. Our commitment to improving public health will be mirrored in internal programs for our workforce

While these principles are written for the NPS staff, the spirit and ideas contained within them may be valuable inspiration for state agencies, local governments, and people involved in developing outdoor recreation facilities in Arkansas. Further reading can be found in the HPHP Strategic Action Plan.

National Park Service - http://www.nps.gov/public_health/hp/hphp/press/1012-955-WASO.pdf

The dual mission of the National Parks Service, *to preserve resources and to provide for the public's recreational enjoyment of these resources*, makes the NPS a vital player in the efforts to improve the health and well-being of U.S. citizens. Within Arkansas, one of the national parks is addressing public health through a review of its programs.

Hot Springs National Park (HOSP) rededicated itself to its original purpose and intent, and a new mission statement was developed: "*The purpose of the HOSP is to protect its unique geothermal spring water and associated lands for public health, wellness and enjoyment*". HOSP staff understood changes would be required, and realized they needed experts in particular areas. HOSP collaborated with Clemson University to assemble a team of experts from across Arkansas and the nation to assist with development of a Strategic Plan for HOSP.

During strategic planning sessions, key themes for action emerged: Park activities should be fun, informative, intergenerational, collaborative, marketable and self-promoting, and goals should be achievable and demonstrable. Through these specific themes several programming ideas emerged, including a comprehensive worksite wellness program for HOSP employees to promote health and wellness through their example, geocaching, Quick Response (QR) codes to create seasonally changing trail experiences, events promoting healthy lifestyles, accessible bike trails, and a tobacco-free park initiative.

Work is being completed on the strategic plan, and staff members are preparing to implement a five-year work plan to guide efforts to better integrate public health and wellness into the park. The efforts bring this park full-circle, back to some of the original

rationale for establishing national parks, which was to address public health. HOSP in particular has always had a health issues focus, and the new plan will bring a contemporary approach to traditional topics.

HOSP is prepared to collaborate with other agencies and local governments to share the work they are developing, and to be partners in bringing successful outreach, facilities, and programs to the public in a meaningful way.

It is collaborative models such as the one at Hot Springs National Park that will help to promote use of recreation for health and fitness. The SCORP Priority, to *Improve access to and quality of health and fitness related recreational areas and facilities*, may benefit greatly from agencies and local governments taking advantage of mutually beneficial collaborations.

State and Local Efforts

Several state agencies are working on the issue of public health and physical activity, and the SCORP seeks to be in alignment with the progressive efforts of these leaders. Agencies of note are the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI) and the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH). These agencies have been working diligently on the topic by convening working groups to discuss elements of the effort, planning and implementing health-promoting initiatives, and setting goals and objectives for improved public health. ACHI and other health-related organizations, as part of its collaboration-building efforts, developed a statewide coalition, the *Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention (ArCOP)*. ADH was instrumental in ArCOP's inception and continues to integrate its CDC-funded physical activity projects into ArCOP's activities.

Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention - <http://www.arkansasobesity.org/>

ArCOP is an independent group formed to address obesity in a holistic fashion and share resources. ArCOP was formed in 2007, emerging from the first Southern Obesity Summit, and brings together partners from across the state to work on solutions addressing various issues relating to obesity prevention efforts in Arkansas. There are over 70 partners in ArCOP, including agencies with national connections, such as Hot Springs National Park; perhaps more parks-related agencies could join, too. Arkansas State Parks is also a member of the coalition, and is bringing a message of healthy living into its programming. These partners represent a wide range of health organizations (see website for full list), public entities, private companies, policy groups and funders that have a stake in improving public health. The mission of the Coalition is to improve the health of all Arkansas communities by increasing physical activity and healthy eating to reduce and prevent obesity. A unique feature of ArCOP's diverse membership is that several members are not affiliated with traditional health-oriented agencies or institutions. However, these partners have realized their role in the large, complex landscape of obesity prevention.

The goal of the coalition is to increase the percentage of Arkansans of all ages who have access to healthy and affordable food and who engage in regular physical activity. One of the focus areas of ArCOP is the Built Environment (BE) committee. The BE workgroup promotes the use of design principles and planning processes to help citizens incorporate physical activity

and healthy nutrition habits into their daily routines. The BE committee works in conjunction with ADH to provide professional development, technical assistance and local policy and environmental changes related to access to healthy foods and beverages and increase physical activity access and outreach. ArCOP plays an important role in developing capacity and promoting access to farmers markets, as well as increasing access to and outreach for physical activity through design of streets and communities designed to foster physical activity.

ArCOP's mission, especially the words "increasing physical activity", is relevant to the SCORP because it deals with the state as a whole, and addresses a public health issue. Public outdoor recreation facilities play a significant role in providing opportunities for people to increase their physical activity, and the SCORP can play a meaningful role in creating the right environment. ArCOP's vision is that Arkansas will value and create opportunities for improving health and by doing so, increase the percentage of all Arkansans who have access to healthy foods and physical activity. Here, again, is a clear intersection of the SCORP interests in creating good recreation environments, and ArCOP's interests in opportunities for physical activity.

ArCOP has sought to achieve its mission through the work of its signature project— Growing Healthy Communities (GHC). The GHC project is an award-winning project that teams community implementers and city leaders to promote activities and policies that address nutrition and physical activities in their communities.

The GHC program started in 2010 and has grown to 27 communities across the state, with the goal of providing a major presence in each of Arkansas' five public health regions. Each GHC site must start with a team of at least eight members: three key city/community decision makers and five community implementers. These teams are brought in for three-day immersion training and then provided on-going technical assistance to fulfill GHC objectives.

They are required to begin their community work plan while attending the training. They are also required to take the two primary goals of ArCOP – increasing physical activity and healthy eating – and create measureable objectives for them, and determine strategies that work best in their community.

Arkansas State Parks has developed programming to support the ArCOP initiative toward healthy lifestyles. An example of this is National Food Day, which is set for October 24 every year. To call attention to this event and to get Arkansans connecting healthy food, healthy activity, and state parks and with family health, the ArCOP's "Access to Healthy Foods" team puts together a "Picnic at the Park" event on or near that date. Information and a healthy foods toolkit are available online. <http://www.arkansasobesity.org/picnic/>

Arkansas State Parks staff members are encouraged to schedule healthy outdoor cooking demonstrations, guided hikes, etc. Participating parks are encouraged to register events at <http://www.foodday.org/>.

Another important program supported by Arkansas State Parks is the First Day Hikes – <http://www.americasstateparks.org/first-day-hikes>. America's State Parks announced that all 50 state park systems will sponsor guided First Day Hike Programs on New Year's Day 2013. This event offered individuals and families an opportunity to begin the New Year rejuvenating and

connecting with the outdoors by taking a healthy hike on the first day of January at a state park. First Day Hikes offer a great way to get outside, exercise, enjoy nature and welcome the new year with friends and family. All Arkansas State Parks with trails were required to offer guided walks and hikes on January 1, at the request of State Parks Director Greg Butts, in order to have a statewide effort and offer healthy opportunities to Arkansans everywhere. First Day Hikes will continue in 2014 and future years.

Arkansas State Parks has a searchable online calendar through which people can access information on programs or activities for outdoor recreation. <http://www.arkansasstateparks.com/events/>. The search function can be customized with keywords or locations. "Heart Healthy" is a feature of the online calendar, indicated by a small, red heart icon, which brings up events or facilities that require some physical activity. Arkansas State Parks frequently provide easy, enjoyable, and inexpensive activities that promote health, such as trail hikes, kayak and canoe tours, wildflower walks, etc.

The SCORP can benefit from the local networking of ArCOP, which partners with many innovative organizations such as the Arkansas Municipal League, American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), and the Clinton School of Public Service. ArCOP has received funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Blue and You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas, and private donors.

The SCORP Priorities reflect this important issue of public health by aligning the robust efforts of the health community with the evident health advantages of physical activity in the form of outdoor recreation. The Priority, to *Improve access to, and quality of, health and fitness related recreational areas and facilities*, will create a natural connection between the current health promotion efforts in the state, and the efforts of agencies, cities, counties and commercial operators to enhance recreation facilities used by the public.

Economics of Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor recreation has a sizeable impact on economies, nationally and locally, contributing in a major way to overall economic vitality. On a national level, outdoor recreation contributed over \$730 billion (in 2006), as well as \$88 billion in federal and state tax revenues; this, according to a 2011 report by Southwick Associates for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The data included a wide range of activities, from camping and skiing to hunting and fishing. In addition, the document explains that 6,435,000 jobs were added that year, through which there is a multiplier effect of the money earned on a multitude of local businesses. The report describes 'outdoor recreation sales' as bringing in \$325 billion, significantly larger than some other major industries.

Economic impact has been studied from other perspectives, as illustrated by the Outdoor Industry Association, in their 2012 report *The Outdoor Recreation Economy*. The study found \$646 billion annual spending in the outdoor recreation sector nationally, an amount tallied from purchases of on recreation equipment, vehicles and travel. Employment is impacted in a significant way, too, with 6.1 million jobs generated in this industry. The jobs created vary greatly, from outfitters and suppliers, to park workers and independent concession workers.

These two main elements of economic activity, sales of goods and services and job creation, combine to create immense extended effects beyond the immediate transaction.

It is clear that outdoor recreation is no small player when it comes to the national economy. Data is available from a number of sources, and another important one is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), which operates many recreational facilities across the nation. The USACE collects data on economic activity related to its parks, lakes and other facilities, and publishes on a website called Value to the Nation.

Value to the Nation website - <http://www.corpsresults.us/recreation/recreation.cfm>

In their data for 2010, the USACE indicates that well over \$11 billion was spent on trips to USACE-managed lakes alone. With a multiplier effect, the total for all sales approaches \$27 billion. The data is further itemized for jobs, by industry sectors, labor, geographic range and other elements. Since this data is limited to USACE facilities, extrapolation to the total effect on state, local and private facilities may suggest that outdoor recreation has a truly impressive impact on the national economy.

In Arkansas, a corresponding effect from outdoor recreation is seen. The USACE data for the state shows total spending on trips to USACE lakes at over \$820 million per year, based on people visiting the sites nearly 25 million times. Over half of the money was captured by local economies and private businesses in direct sales.

Value to the Nation Arkansas Report website - <http://www.corpsresults.us/recreation/fastfacts/stateReport.cfm?State=12>

Through their calculations, the USACE estimates that in Arkansas, visitor trip spending totals over \$731 million in total sales, and more than \$265 million in labor income.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service compiles data on economic activity generated by wildlife-related outdoor recreation each year, and has presented their findings in their [2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation](#) report, with individual state reports available.

The report for Arkansas expressed these broad numbers:

- \$1.8 billion total spent on wildlife-related recreation
- \$496 million spent on fishing-related activities
- \$1.0 billion spent on hunting-related activities
- \$216 million spent on wildlife-watching activities

Highlights of the report can be found at this website:

<http://www.fws.gov/southeast/arkansas/economicimpact-ar.html>

The Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism (ADPT) works progressively in the realm of outdoor recreation, and broadly in state parks, promoting tourism in the state, and historical and cultural preservation. In their annual report for 2012-2013, ADPT published information on the economic impact of travel in the state. While the data is not segmented for outdoor recreation as a unique category, a reasonable inference can be drawn from the figures as to a relevant

amount of impact it may have had. Total travel expenditures of \$5.767 billion were up in 2012, over those in 2011. Responses in an internal study suggest up to 43% of respondents participated in some type of outdoor recreation. A direct correlation cannot be made to the total travel expenditures, however, the data illustrates the popularity of outdoor recreation among the activities of people who travel in Arkansas.

The Outdoor Industry Association also created state-specific reports as part of its 2012 report *The Outdoor Recreation Economy*. The report on Arkansas activities indicates that outdoor recreation generated \$10 billion in consumer spending, \$2.9 billion in salaries and wages, 126,000 in direct jobs creation, and \$696 million in state and local tax revenue. In a further note, the report describes how at least 63% of Arkansas residents participate in outdoor recreation each year (excluding hunting, fishing and wildlife observation).

There is substantial evidence that outdoor recreation contributes in a significant way to the economic health of the nation and Arkansas. With billions of dollars spent each year on goods, services and trips for recreation purposes, it is easy to see how the immediate effect of the spending, as well as the longer-range ripple effects through the economy, make outdoor recreation a major sector in the economy. As recreation activities grow each year, so does the related spending; the past few years have shown a steady if modest growth in activity.

For the SCORP, acknowledging the importance of the economic impact of outdoor recreation can help inform the direction of future recreation investments, particularly in land to be used for parks, and for particular types of facilities. Spending levels seen in the sector could be considered proxy indicators of the general interest the public has in outdoor recreation; the more people spend, the more they are 'investing' in their pursuit of these activities.

OPPORTUNITIES – The Supply of Recreation Activities and Facilities

The capacity for outdoor recreation in Arkansas is large and diverse, from the broad array of opportunities at 52 state parks, to numerous private business facilities, to hundreds of public parks in cities and counties. An overview of the recreation opportunities is provided here, but is limited in scope and does not illustrate all the potential opportunities available to state residents and visitors. However, people have access to many high-quality facilities and attractive sites for recreation, and a few samples of those sites are described here.

Agencies at the federal and state level have been managing public lands, waterways and facilities for many decades, and provide a core framework of sites and opportunities for recreational activities. These agencies have invested in areas that exhibit high value in natural resources and environmental beauty, and have made them available for public enjoyment. Through their research and professional approach to conservation and wise use, the resulting programs and facilities set a high bar to emulate for all park developers.

Federal Agencies

National Park Service

The National Park Service (NPS) is involved in many activities, facilities and sites across Arkansas, from traditional parklands to unique and historic sites. A complete list and detailed information can be found at the NPS website page for Arkansas.

National Park Service / Arkansas - <http://www.nps.gov/state/ar/index.htm?program=all>

Of high importance to the SCORP is the NPS Land and Water Conservation Fund State Assistance Program, which funds land acquisition and park development. During the 40+ years of program operation in Arkansas, over 700 parks have been created and improved. The program is discussed in detail earlier in this document.

The broader array of activities managed by the NPS includes several national parks (e.g. Hot Springs National Park, and the Buffalo National River), the National Register of Historic Places, historic preservation grants, and conservation assistance projects. The NPS' work is a model for preservation, conservation and public access which is a positive influence on state and local efforts. The SCORP Priorities are designed to work in concert with NPS initiatives, in order to preserve state resources for sustainable public use.

U.S. Forest Service

The Forest Service manages public lands in national forests and grasslands. According to their website, <http://www.fs.fed.us/>, the Forest Service has a mission *to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations*. The Forest Service manages three forests within Arkansas through the Ozark-St. Francis National Forest, and the Ouachita National Forest.

Ozark-St. Francis National Forest

The Ozark-St. Francis National Forest is comprised of several parcels of land across a wide area. Visit the website for complete details on forest features - <http://www.fs.usda.gov/osfnf>
The Ozark portion lies primarily in northwest Arkansas, covers 1.2 million acres in the Ozark Mountains, providing exceptional vistas and deep woods. The St. Francis portion is located in Lee and Phillips counties of eastern Arkansas. Covering 22,600 acres, the forest is smaller, but offers unique beauty and biodiversity found only in eastern Arkansas, along the Mississippi and St. Francis rivers.

The Ozark-St. Francis National Forest offers over 30 recreational opportunities on its vast lands. These opportunities can be reviewed in a Recreation Area Directory.
http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsm8_042875.pdf

Ouachita National Forest

The Ouachita National Forest is located in west central Arkansas, covering areas of the Ouachita Mountains, and extends westward into parts of eastern Oklahoma. The forest covers over 1.8 million acres, and is managed for various uses, including timber production and wildlife habitat, as well as diverse recreation such as camping, hiking, fishing and hunting.
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/ouachita>

The Ouachita National Forest has nine recreation areas located across the management area open for public use. Check the website for updates on current conditions, recreation options, maps and other information.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](http://www.usace.army.mil) (USACE) operates 28 lakes and river pool access points, campgrounds or visitor areas in Arkansas, each of which has multiple recreational facilities and opportunities for the public. The most popular facilities are camping and boating, but most sites also have picnic areas, playground equipment, swimming beaches, and multi-use trails.

Using the USACE website tool, one can find information on each of the lakes and the related recreation areas and amenities at that lake. For example, Millwood Lake near Ashdown, AR, is situated on the Little River in the southwest part of the state. Around the lake are 15 recreation areas, like Beards Bluff, with camping, boat ramp, fishing facilities and picnic areas, or Millwood Overlook, with playground equipment.

The facilities operated by the USACE have become mainstays in the range of public outdoor recreation offerings in Arkansas. For decades the sites have been highly popular with residents and visitors, and are known for their picturesque waterfront settings and quality facilities. In many ways, the USACE sites have set a standard in design for good, durable outdoor recreation facilities.

Value to the Nation - <http://www.corpsresults.us/recreation/fastfacts/stateReport.cfm?State=12>
This website is rich with data on the benefits of USACE facilities. Information has been generated for each state in three categories – social, economic, and environmental benefits.

The data for Arkansas shows significant economic benefits (discussed above), but also brings specific numbers to social and environmental benefits. Social benefits discussed are couched in the numbers: nearly 25 million visits per year, including 2.6 million picnickers, 7.8 million sightseers, and 6.5 million people fishing. These visits increase people's physical activity and ties to family and friends. Environmental benefits are described in terms of conducting educational outreach on environmental issues, leading to increased awareness of environmental concerns among the public.

State Agencies

Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism

Throughout the state there are numerous recreational opportunities available to residents and guests, and the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism is a leader in promoting the many engaging and exciting recreation opportunities. The Department publicizes its information through its website, among other communication efforts. www.arkansas.com While the Department of Parks and Tourism promotes many types of recreation, outdoor recreation is an important segment of its overall offerings.

The Department is made up of several Divisions, including State Parks, Tourism, History Commission, Keep Arkansas Beautiful, Great River Road, and Central Administration.

The Great River Road is a scenic byway system that follows the Mississippi River through 10 states that border the river. In Arkansas, the Great River Road follows designated routes over 362 miles. Details on area attractions, maps and other information can be found at the following website. <http://www.arkansas.com/places-to-go/scenic-byways/great-river-road/>

Among the recreational staples in the state there are treasured cultural events that have been popular for decades, such as the King Biscuit Blues Festival in Helena, AR. The festival draws thousands of people in October each year to its outdoor concerts. <http://www.kingbiscuitfestival.com>

Another unique recreation opportunity found in the Delta region is the Delta Heritage Trail. The trail is a 73-mile former railroad corridor in southeast Arkansas which is being converted to recreational trail. The route is near some of the Great River Road byways. The trail conversion work is being done in phases, with several miles of the northern end, near Helena, already complete. Location maps, directions to trail heads, and area features are described at this website. <http://www.arkansasstateparks.com/deltaheritagetrail/>

Arkansas State Parks

The Arkansas state park system is comprised of 52 parks and museums totaling 54,358 acres. Approximately 8.6 million visitors visit these parks annually. The State Parks Division's annual operating budget currently totals \$68 million. Arkansas State Parks employs 44 full-time park interpreters and 10 seasonal interpreters with the specific job description of researching,

organizing, publicizing, and delivering meaningful recreation and education experiences for park visitors.

(http://www.adpt.arkgov.net/central_office/parks/operations/ops_manual/ops_manual.pdf/PD5000.pdf): The purpose of interpretation in Arkansas State Parks is to support and complement each park or museum's overall mission by assisting in managing and researching natural, historical, and cultural resources, and informing and educating the public about the values and management of those resources. Programs relate park/museum resources and heritage to the experience of the visitor and are presented in a manner which enhances the visitor's understanding and appreciation of site resources and the department's managing of those resources. Each park or museum achieves this mission through balanced efforts in the eight components of interpretation: research, programs for park visitors, school programming, non-personnel interpretation, outreach, special events, interpretive resale, and promotion.

Arkansas State Park interpreters routinely schedule programs designed to help Arkansans and visitors have a more meaningful park experience and make memories to last a lifetime. The parks offer over 50,000 family-friendly programs and events each year, including lake tours on park party barges, guided hikes, birding adventures, living history demonstrations, nature games, fall foliage programs, historic site tours, bald eagle watches, spring wildflower walks, campfires, outdoor skills workshops, and more.

Among the facilities within the system are:

- 1,781 campsites, 209 cabins
- four hotel-style lodges with a total number of 218 guest rooms
- three group overnight facilities (at Crowley's Ridge State Park, Historic Washington State Park, and Lake Fort Smith State Park)
- a public airport at Petit Jean State Park that includes a fly-in campground for tent campers
- eight restaurants
- 11 swimming pools
- 10 marinas
- an 18-hole championship golf course at DeGray Lake Resort State Park
- a 27-hole, Andy Dye signature golf course at Village Creek State Park
- 142 trails totaling over 290 miles
- equestrian trails and horse camps at Devil's Den State Park and Village Creek State Park
- access to ATV trails
- two arboretums (the South Arkansas Arboretum at the site of the former El Dorado High School and the Arkansas Arboretum at Pinnacle Mountain State Park)
- picnic sites
- pavilions
- park stores
- gift shops
- swim beach areas
- tennis courts
- playgrounds
- museums



A park interpreter instructs a youth group on the rich natural and cultural resources found in a state park. Education and outreach are important efforts supported and promoted by Arkansas State Parks.

State parks offer access to 27 lakes and 14 rivers. Anglers can enjoy native warm water and trout water fishing. Water sports enthusiasts can take part in a wide variety of water activities. The parks offer an abundance of outdoor adventures. From exciting outdoor sports to adrenaline pumping extreme adventures for thrill seekers, the diverse topography and scenery combine to offer a wide variety of experiences for outdoor sports and extreme adventure enthusiasts. The parks offer something for everyone, from the beginner to the experienced, from those who seek a relaxing adventure to those wanting a physically challenging test of skills that requires stamina.

Volunteerism has always been an important part of the state park system's operation, and today 13 friends groups support individual state parks. These groups provide significant volunteer support for Arkansas State Parks, placing the agency among the top five state agencies in the receipt of volunteer support.

Diversity is the hallmark of the Arkansas state park system. In addition to its wide variety of campgrounds, cabins, hotel-like lodges, museums and collections, trails, and other offerings, the park system includes many unique state natural and cultural treasures. The Crater of Diamonds State Park is situated atop the world's eighth largest, diamond-bearing deposit in surface area. Historic Washington State Park, a 19th-century restoration town, conserves and interprets the historic town of Washington, Arkansas. The Ozark Folk Center State Park at Mountain View, a community dubbed the Folk Music Capital of the World, is an American cultural treasure, the only state park in the U.S. dedicated to the perpetuation and interpretation of the heritage of the Ozark region, its homestead crafts, pioneer skills, music, and folklore.

The park system's Civil War battle sites include Prairie Grove Battlefield State Park, recognized by the American Battlefield Protection Program as one of America's most intact Civil War battle sites. Toltec Mounds Archeological State Park and Parkin Archeological State Park, both operated in conjunction with the Arkansas Archeological Survey, are National Historic Landmark sites that preserve and interpret prehistoric American Indian mound sites and serve as archeological research stations. Jacksonport State Park, the site of a thriving 1800s river port on the White River, features the 1872

Jackson County Courthouse. Mammoth Spring State Park preserves Arkansas's largest spring and the second largest spring in the Ozarks, a National Natural Landmark that is the source of the Spring River. Twenty-two of Arkansas's state parks contain structures or property recognized as a National Natural Landmark, National Historic Landmark or listed on the National Register of Historic Places. And two parks, Logoly State Park and Pinnacle Mountain State Park, serve as regional environmental education centers.

The five categories of park classifications are: natural parks, recreation areas, historic/cultural sites, museums and arboretums. Since its creation, the Arkansas state park system has held true to its basic mission and charges:

- To provide optimum quality recreational and educational opportunities in sufficient quantities and conveniently located to meet the experience needs of state citizens and visitors;
- To safeguard the natural, historical and cultural resources by providing adequate facilities and skilled leadership in state parks;
- To enhance the economy of the state by providing recreation destinations and leisure services closely attuned to the natural, historical and cultural appeal of Arkansas, and;
- To provide responsible leadership statewide for the conservation of valuable state resources.

Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission

Since 1973, the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission (ANHC) has been working to conserve Arkansas's natural landscape. ANHC's professional staff conducts on-the-ground field surveys to locate and evaluate occurrences of natural communities and rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species. Research findings and results are often published in scientific journals and presented at national, regional and state forums. This information is organized, analyzed, managed, and housed in the Arkansas Heritage Program biodiversity database. These field surveys and research projects have provided a wealth of information on more than 900 rare species that can be used to evaluate the relative imperilment of native species and shared for environmental planning purposes. The data is provided to organizations and individuals involved with Arkansas conservation efforts, economic development, scientific research and education.

Based on sound scientific research, ANHC evaluates the state's ecologically important sites to set priorities for conservation in the System of Natural Areas. Stewardship of these lands requires proven techniques to preserve and sometimes restore unique and diverse ecosystems. On the ground, public access to natural areas varies as some have terrain that could be treacherous. While only a few areas contain developed trails, several are suited to low impact activities such as hiking and birdwatching. Many natural areas offer hunting opportunities according to regulations established in cooperation with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. As of June 30, 2012 (the last annual reporting period for FY2012), the System of Natural Areas consisted of 58,082 acres at 70 sites across 46 counties.

ANHC's public outreach efforts strive to make information on biodiversity interesting, easy to find, and easy to understand. High-tech tools are blended with face-to-face presentations conducted by subject matter experts. Educational programming is offered to teachers and

students to address state and national science standards using Arkansas-specific information, while general programs and projects encourage all Arkansans to get outdoors and learn more about the state's natural heritage.

The Commission is made up of 15 members dedicated to conserving Arkansas's natural heritage. The commission provides general direction to ANHC professional staff and supports the work in many ways that conserve state ecosystem biodiversity.

www.naturalheritage.com

The natural areas managed by the ANHC are sometimes available for low-impact public use. The website www.naturalheritage.com/natural-area provides information on accessing these sites, including this overview of the topic:

Natural areas protect the last remnants of Arkansas's original wild landscape. The Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission (ANHC) works to protect the ecosystem and associated animals and plants in these unique landscapes. However, natural areas are managed for varying levels of public usage, and site development varies widely. When compatible with the overall conservation vision of the area, efforts are made to provide safe opportunities for moderate, low-impact public use such as birdwatching, photography, scientific research, education and even public hunting.

The website offers information on 15 natural areas with trails for low-impact use. Descriptions of the areas and links to maps are available.

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

Many outdoor recreation activities intersect with public lands and waters, such as hunting and fishing, as well as nongame activities like wildlife observation. The state agency involved with many of these activities is the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC). Through its management of public resources, a sustainable system of recreation is available within the state.

The AGFC oversees the conservation, protection and preservation of fish and wildlife in the state. The agency's role in outdoor recreation is to provide programs and regulatory structures that allow residents to enjoy hunting, fishing and related opportunities. The AGFC engages the public through educational programs, publishing hunting and fishing regulations, and promoting environmental awareness. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's mission is to conserve and enhance Arkansas's fish and wildlife and their habitats while promoting sustainable use, public understanding and support.

Information on hunting, fishing, wildlife management areas, and other outdoor recreation opportunities available to the public through AGFC can be found on its website at

www.agfc.com.

The AGFC compiles information on several recreational opportunities at facilities across the state; some of these are at AGFC managed sites, other are at other public venues.

[Water Trails](#) As of the writing of this plan, five water trails, designed for day trip use, have been established and offer opportunities for paddling, wildlife viewing and fishing. Sites are mapped on their website, with locations and descriptions of the trail.

[Wildlife Management Areas](#) (WMA) and National Wildlife Refuges (NWR). There are 132 WMA and NWR locations offering access for hunting, wildlife observation and hiking.

[Fishing Sites](#) at lakes, rivers and ponds supported by over 200 public sites are available for fishing, boating or paddling and wildlife viewing.

Boating access with 500 public boat ramps is available on lakes, rivers and ponds.

AGFC Wildlife Viewing Areas, both specifically designated and general, statewide.

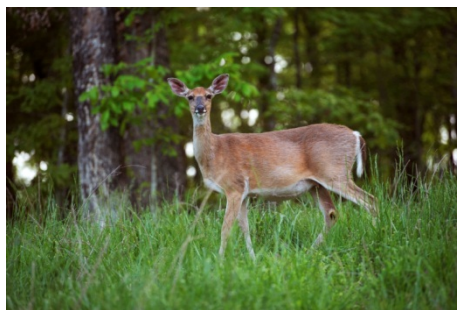
[Firing Ranges](#) AGFC operates four firing ranges for sport and youth shooting training.

[Nature and Education Centers](#) AGFC operates eight nature centers in the state, most having associated hiking/walking trails.

An events calendar listing recreation events may be found on the AGFC website.

AGFC offers a number of recreational programs including Becoming and Outdoors Woman; sport shooting; youth archery; geocaching; youth conservation institute; fishing derbies; fish pond stocking; etc.

AGFC manages hunting and fishing through issuance of permits and licenses. As an indicator of the popularity of these activities, recent annual sales of fishing licenses totaled over 700,000, while hunting licenses were well over 400,000. The licenses are available for purchase online, by telephone, or at hundreds of retail stores around the state. AGFC supports nongame species by managing land reserved for wildlife, and educating the public in their nature centers. These centers offer resources for people to discover wildlife throughout the state.



Arkansas state mammal: white-tailed deer, (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

The white-tailed deer is native to the Americas, and is quite common east of the Rocky Mountains in the U.S. In Arkansas, this native resource is found throughout the state and enjoyed by thousands of consumptive and non-consumptive users. During recent annual hunting seasons, over 300,000 hunting licenses were issued. The statewide deer harvest has risen from 203 in 1938 to 213,000 in 2012, which reflects a healthy and increasing deer population.

Trails

Trails are among the most popular outdoor recreation facilities in Arkansas, maintaining a top-ranking for many years. This popularity mirrors the national trend; according to the National Association of State Park Directors, visitors view trails as one of their most important facilities. Growing interests in improving physical fitness and concerns about environmental quality have resulted in an increase in bicycling and walking for transportation and recreation.

Urban Trails and Greenways

In terms of dollars spent, the development of urban trails and greenways has enjoyed a huge increase in new and expanded trails over the past decade. Central Arkansas, northwest Arkansas, Jonesboro, Hot Springs, Texarkana and Arkadelphia have all seen increased development of trails.



The City of Fayetteville in northwest Arkansas has completed approximately 22 miles of hard-surfaced bicycle/pedestrian trails through the heart of the city, and has plans to construct 2-3 miles of trail each year, depending on funding, until the City's trails master plan is complete. Fayetteville's trails have been funded largely from local sales tax and bond programs, supplemented by Enhancement and Recreational Trails Grants through

the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department.

Cities in northwest Arkansas are collaborating on a "Razorback Greenway", which when completed will be a 36-mile route from Bella Vista through Fayetteville. Several miles of the planned route have been built and are in use, and the remaining sections are in the planning phase. The Northwest Arkansas Razorback Regional Greenway is a project that has been years in the making. The concept of a regional greenway project has been a goal of regional planners, cities, and residents of northwest Arkansas for more than two decades. This vision was supported by the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission (NWARPC), which in 2000 began a long-range planning process that included regional trails as a key component. A task force formed by the NWARPC conducted public meetings and facilitated a coordinated effort among the communities of northwest Arkansas.

These examples emphasize the importance of local commitment and cooperation to develop trails that serve the population's recreation and transportation needs. Urban Trails and Greenways cost more per mile than most trails due to extensive planning, engineering, land acquisition, roadway crossings and other construction challenges with total costs in the range of \$1 million per mile. However, the clear benefits of this type of trail development are providing

healthier, greener and more livable communities, and encouraging alternative transportation, recreation, economic development and more active lifestyles.

Water Trails

Arkansas is known for a wide variety of canoeing and kayaking opportunities. Efforts over the past decade by various natural resource and recreation agencies have led to the creation of water trails within areas they manage. Water trails can provide opportunities for visitors with an interest in floating, but who lack experience. To better accommodate beginners, many agencies and concessionaires provide canoes and kayaks on-site for visitors to use at their water trails.

Examples of water trails in Arkansas that have been developed or planned include those at Cane Creek State Park and Wattensaw Wildlife Management Area. The water trail at Cane Creek State Park was developed on an Arkansas Game and Fish Commission lake, giving visitors a relatively safe and controlled means to get comfortable with a canoe or kayak while getting a close-up view of the cypress stands, water lilies and beaver lodges found in the lake. Planning of the Wattensaw Bayou Water Trail includes a put-in/take out area and signage identifying the trail route. Having the trail marked within the bayou guides visitors to the more scenic areas while reducing the likelihood of the user becoming lost.

Water trails are a relatively low cost means to provide opportunities to the citizens and visitors to enjoy the outdoors. Development needs are limited to vehicular access and parking informational and way-finding signage and construction of launch ramps or other means of put-in/take out.

The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission created their Water Trails program in 2008 and, since that time, water trails have been developed or planned for Wattensaw Bayou, Arkansas Post, Robe Bayou and Bayou DeView. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission plans to develop several miles of new water trails in coming years at Bell Slough WMA, Crooked Creek, St. Francis Sunken Lands WMA and at Cut-Off Creek WMA.

Backcountry Trails

Hundreds of miles of backcountry trails have been developed in Arkansas with the Ozark Highlands Trail and Ouachita Trail being two of the oldest and longest backcountry trails. Each of these trails is, for the most part, routed through U.S. Forest Service lands and is largely maintained by volunteers. The Ozark Highlands Trail Association is the organization responsible for constructing the Ozark Highlands Trail and continues maintaining and expanding the trail. The Friends of the Ouachita Trail (FoOT) was founded in 2003 and its primarily mission is maintenance of the Ouachita Trail.

An organization that commits many of its volunteer hours to trail construction and maintenance is the Arkansas Master Naturalists. Founded in 2008, with five chapters throughout the state, this organization is very active working with land managers in the construction and maintenance of trails on federal, state and local government lands. This organization's work has been valuable to Arkansas State Parks by providing thousands of volunteer hours toward the maintenance of trails throughout the system. In 2013, the Central Arkansas Chapter received

the Conservation Organization of the Year award from the Arkansas Wildlife Federation. Volunteer service in the construction and maintenance of trails will continue to increase in importance due to ever-tightening budgets of outdoor recreation providers while conveying a stronger feeling of ownership by the citizens who care most about the trails.

The Ozark Highlands Trail is a well-developed trail providing access to natural areas for hikers and nature lovers. The North Sylamore Creek Hiking Trail is another example of some of the excellent trails in the state. Developed in large part with volunteer help, these projects represent countless hours of labor contributed by thousands of local volunteers. Such committed support reflects the deep interest people have in ensuring that recreation resources are developed and protected for use by all. An Environmental Assessment done by the Buffalo National River for a segment of the OHT between Hwy 14 and Spring Creek Trailhead concluded that private roads from the Cozahome community in the Spring Creek drainage could be used in lieu of a constructed trail thru the Lower Buffalo Wilderness. The Ozark Highlands Trail Association created a field guidebook with topography maps, route line, waypoints, descriptions and the history of this route. This is a 15-½ mile GPS route utilizing over 12 miles of existing closed roads in the Wilderness.

The Buffalo River/Ozark Highlands Trail is being developed with the cooperation of the Ozark Society and Ozark Society Foundation. When this project is completed, there will be continuous trail from Lake Fort Smith State Park to Matney Trailhead near Norfork. Further plans are to connect the Ozark Highlands Trail to the Ozark Trail (Missouri), which eventually will complete a trail to St. Louis.

Mountain Bike Trails

Arkansans are fortunate to have a variety of mountain bike trails throughout the state providing biking opportunities for beginners to advanced mountain bikers. Generally constructed as narrow single-track natural surface paths, these are often referred to as multi-use trails that can serve hikers, as well.



The Syllamo Trail System is in the Sylamore Ranger District of the Ozark National Forest in north central Arkansas. Underscoring the popularity of the trail for mountain bikers from across the country, it was added to the International Mountain Biking Association's list of Epics Rides. The system of single-track trail is a series of interconnecting loops with a variety of terrain and difficulty appealing to both beginner and experienced riders. The trail was built and continues to be maintained by the U.S. Forest Service with assistance from volunteers.

Another trail on the Epics Rides list is the Womble Trail in the Ouachita National Forest. This 33 mile trail runs from Northfork Lake to Ouachita Lake, with an elevation change from 1000 to 1,600 feet. The [International Mountain Bicycling Association](#) maintains a list of Epics Rides trail throughout the world, and Arkansas is fortunate to have two of them.

Equestrian Trails

Development of equestrian trails has accelerated over the past decade. In Arkansas State Parks, equestrian trails have been developed in Devil's Den, Village Creek, Hobbs and Mount Nebo state parks. Private clubs and organizations that promote and support horseback riding and related activities advocate for dedicated equestrian trails. Single and multi-use trails have been developed in many park areas, and overall use has increased. Future recreation planning should take into account the growing popularity of horseback riding.

Accessible Trails for Persons with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991 and other laws relating to accessibility should influence trail design. By law, all public facilities must be made accessible to the greatest extent possible. Trails with a paved surface and slopes no greater than 5% are typically regarded as accessible. In instances where the entire trail cannot be made accessible due to topography, efforts should be made to make portions accessible. State parks and national parks in Arkansas have taken a balanced approach to accessibility on trails. An example of this is the Buffalo National River, managed by the National Park Service, and located in the Ozark Mountains. This site contains miles of rugged backcountry trails, but a number of shorter trails such as the Lost Valley Trail provide an accessible route to one of the more scenic areas within the river corridor.

Trails Funding

Federal Funding

Since 1991, the Federal Highway Administration has provided a significant amount of funding for shared use paths through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). Over the past several years, the Recreational Trail Program (RTP), administered by the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department, contributed roughly \$1.3 million per year for the construction and rehabilitation of trails in Arkansas, providing 80% of the cost of trail construction. Somewhat related to federal funding for trails, the Safe Routes to School program has provided significant funding for the construction of walkways and related development to provide safe pedestrian-friendly access from residential areas to local schools.

State Funding

State funding for trails over the past decade has been provided through matching grants, Trails for Life grants and Wildlife Observation grants administered by the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism. State funding for trails and trail related facilities are also available through the Arkansas Department of Health and Arkansas Department of Rural Services.

The Matching Grant Program provides funding for outdoor recreation facilities. This grant program is generally not used for trail funding because other state and federal trail grants require either less of or no match by the grantee.

The Trails for Life Grant Program was started in 2004 to provide funding for the development of fitness trails and related trail development to local governments in Arkansas with the focus of encouraging active health lifestyles for the citizens of Arkansas. The program is administered by the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism which works in partnership with the Arkansas Department of Health using funds made possible through the Tobacco Settlement Proceeds Act.

Unfortunately, all of these grant programs are at some risk of being reduced or eliminated. Transportation Enhancement Grants, Recreational Trails Program and Safe Routes to School are federal budget items that are funded at the discretion of Congress and may be rescinded by the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department, as they have on occasion in past years.

Municipal and County Parks

Arkansas has 75 counties, over 500 cities, and many unincorporated communities. Most, if not all, of these local governments own and operate public parks with various types of recreational facilities. Anecdotal and empirical evidence indicates that these parks are used intensively and often, for baseball games, picnicking, walking the trails, or visiting playgrounds. It may be fair to say that these locations support the most common activities and accommodate many people on a regular basis.

More information on cities and counties can be found at these websites.

Cities: <http://local.arkansas.gov/index.php>

Counties: <http://www.arcounties.org/>

People use local parks frequently because the facilities are located closest to homes and residential areas, and are easiest to access by a short walk or drive. Typical facilities in small-town parks include the customary picnic pavilions, ball fields, basketball courts and playground areas, but public interest has driven recreational facility diversity in many parks. Today, parks may have splash pads, Frisbee golf courses, archery ranges, and fishing piers, among a wide range of other amenities. In recent years walking trails have become very popular for their ease of use by people of all ages and abilities, the relative low cost of construction, and ability to connect public use areas through otherwise low-value property.

Local governments are often at the forefront of changes in public interests in park design and facility offerings. Collectively, their experience on trends in popularity of activities, amenities expected in parks, accessibility and safety needs, and changes in population has great value in guiding the direction of efforts. The SCORP Priorities to *align outdoor recreation opportunities with conservation, preservation and public good initiatives*; and *to improve access to, and quality of, health and fitness related facilities*, may provide an avenue for local experience to be manifested in future developments.

PRIORITIES

The Arkansas Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan sets forth these Priorities for the period of 2014 through 2018. Through consideration of key issues, public interest, natural resources and existing facilities and management, leaders in the field of recreation see these Priorities as having the potential to build better and holistic outdoor recreation in the future.

The nature of a statewide plan inherently involves many stakeholders, with varying missions, resources, and public needs to serve. The overall status of outdoor recreation will be improved in a holistic way when each agency, municipality or other stakeholder can make use of appropriate portions the SCORP document or Priorities to strengthen their work in developing and maintaining parks for public use.

Of central importance to the SCORP and the vision for the next five years and beyond is the changing nature of funding for recreational facilities. For many decades, federal agencies such as the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers have allocated significant resources into construction and maintenance of recreational facilities. These facilities made up a substantial portion of the outdoor recreation opportunities available to people in Arkansas.

Increasingly, it appears that funding at the federal level is declining, and with it goes the resources available to operate federal facilities, resulting in park closures, reduced open schedules, or restrictions on certain facilities. The impact on the state is greater pressure from the recreating public to provide alternative facilities, or take over operation of some facilities, along with the attendant fiscal demands.

A question, then, is 'what can or should Arkansas do to address this change?' Perhaps the beginning point is in communication between and among federal and state agencies administering recreational facilities. Deliberate cross-agency collaboration between agencies may result in better understanding of each other's current work and budgets, and provide a critical view of plans for the short- and long-range future. With this type of information sharing, state agencies might be better prepared for budget restrictions and programmatic changes at the federal level.

One way to address these changes may be to become advocates for increased federal funding. This task will fall largely on state and local staff and stakeholders, since federal employees can't lobby for budget increases. People in Arkansas could make concerted efforts to inform their congressional delegation, and ask them to support funding for federal agencies for park and recreational facilities.

PRIORITY

Align efforts to improve outdoor recreation with existing conservation, preservation and public good initiatives.

Strategies:

- Examine current national and state initiatives that may inform local plans for recreation and park development.
- Expand round-table discussions on the connections between health, wellness, and outdoor recreation, with relevant stakeholders.

Actions:

- Provide more opportunities and access to nature trails, natural areas, and connected greenways.
- Promote observation and enjoyment of wildlife and native vegetation.
- Promote and encourage project designs that minimize the disturbance of the existing site while preserving valuable, open space.
- Engage youth in discussions about the future of outdoor recreation through programs such as Outdoor Nation and Youth Ambassador.

PRIORITY

Improve access to, and quality of, health and fitness related recreational areas and facilities.

Strategies:

- Continue collaboration between the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences/College of Public Health/ArCOP in developing recreation-related health and wellness strategies at state and local parks.
- Promote safety within parks, especially playgrounds and trails.

Actions:

- Develop more multi-use and walking trails, paved and soft-surface.
- Create parks and recreation facilities near or in residential areas, with connecting walkways and trails.
- Allocate funding toward playground upgrades to enhance safety of users.

PRIORITY

Improve the quality, accessibility, and availability of outdoor recreational resources on public lands and parks in a sustainable way.

Strategies:

- Explore new and innovative ways to use public lands for recreational use.
- Increase public-private collaborations in park development that complement other park facilities, and encourage activity.

Actions:

- Include natural areas and habitat restoration into park development plans.
- Remove and control invasive and non-native plants.
- Protect riparian areas by developing parks that avoid direct stream-side development, or by restoring natural channels.
- Promote alternative public use areas, such as community gardens.

A Strategy Related to All Priorities

Establish working partnerships with utility agencies, natural resource agencies, watershed management agencies, health agencies, large private land owners and other land management and health agencies.

Actions:

- Identify common goals and objectives of all regional stakeholders and work towards a mutually acceptable strategic plan that is updated regularly and that enhances all stakeholders' interests.
- Establish Board and By-Laws created by representatives from each stakeholder and meet regularly to oversee that policies are maintained, refined and new one initiated within guidelines of master plan.
- Invite public comments in regular and special meetings.
- Use social media to communicate vision and daily operations.
- Coordinate and maintain communication with national agencies sharing same goals and objectives.

APPENDICES

Methodology
Wetlands
Bibliography

Methodology

This SCORP document was developed with input from several sources, including state residents, state agency personnel, private groups, and federal agencies.

Substantial public input was generated through a public survey. In early 2013, the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism contracted with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock to conduct a statewide telephone survey of residents to assess attitudes and interests in outdoor recreation. The survey compiled information from 500 respondents throughout the state, providing insight into levels of interest and general trends. The survey was conducted in late April and early May.

Input also was sought from people who are involved in local park development. The Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism conducted nine grant application workshops across the state, between March 21 and April 16, 2013. The meetings were open to the public, and attended by staff from city or county government, planning and development districts, engineering firms, and consultants. A presentation was made on the topic of statewide outdoor recreation planning, and the audience was invited to participate in the discussion of the status of outdoor recreation, and provide input to the development of the SCORP.

The SCORP document was written by Department of Parks and Tourism staff, and further developed through a collaborative process with a review panel. The panel was made up of over 20 volunteers from planning and development districts, state and federal agencies, and local parks and recreation offices across the state. Draft documents were prepared and circulated to the panel for review, comment and editing. Successive rounds of drafts made for an iterative process and a holistic document development, and further strengthened the effort to provide for 'ample opportunity for public input' to the SCORP document.

Final editorial review was conducted by the Executive Director of the Department of Parks and Tourism and the Director of the State Parks Division. Final approval was given by Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe.

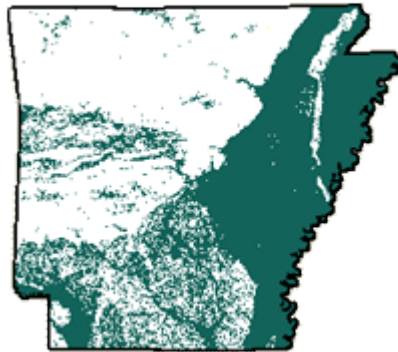
Wetlands

Wetlands are areas where the periodic or permanent presence of water controls the characteristics of the environment and associated plants and animals. They include marshes, swamps, and similar areas found in flats, in depressions in the landscape, on slopes where groundwater emerges to the land surface, and between dry land and open water along the edges of streams, rivers, lakes, and coastlines.

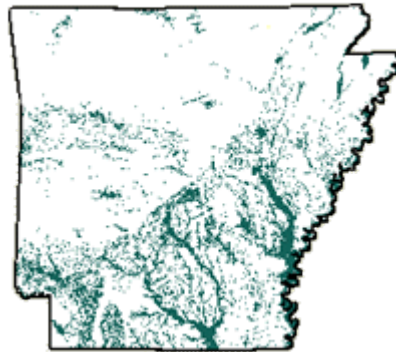
The majority of wetlands in Arkansas are riverine and depressional wetlands associated with the floodplains of the Mississippi River and its major tributaries. Collectively, these areas are commonly referred to as bottomland hardwood forests. While the Mississippi River has been hydrologically altered by a series of levees, many of the tributaries within Arkansas support the best of the remaining floodplain forests. The value of these wetlands is immense, because they are a rich and diverse ecological habitat.

Although Arkansas might be best known for its bottomland hardwood forests and cypress swamps, the state actually has a wide variety of wetland types contributing to its diversity and unique plant and animal habitats. Arkansas is home to five major classes of wetlands based on water source, geology, and landscape position. Some of these wetland types may have similar vegetation, but the fact that they have different hydrology and soil chemistry means that they are able to provide unique combinations of wetland functions.

It is estimated that Arkansas originally had 9.8 million acres of wetlands, representing almost 30% of the total surface area of the state. By the mid 1980's the number of wetlands had dropped to 2.8 million acres (a 72% loss) representing only 8% of the surface area (Dahl 1990). The Arkansas Delta experienced the greatest losses, and now has approximately 875,000 acres of forested wetlands remaining of the original eight million acres, representing an 89% loss. Arkansas has lost more wetland acres than any other inland state in the nation (Dahl 1990).



Arkansas Wetlands circa 1870



Arkansas Wetlands Today

Although wetland losses appear to continue in Arkansas, there has been a significant reduction in the rate of conversion when compared to previous decades. Landowners are choosing to defer wetland conversion and restore marginal cropland and riparian areas. With continued landowner and agency cooperation, the state of Arkansas can attain the national goal of "no net loss" of wetlands and long term net gain.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund permits state and local acquisition of wetlands as a project expense, or to replace converted project properties. Little funding has been apportioned

over the life history of the program due to the fact that Arkansas hasn't had sufficient resources to entice local preservation projects. The Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, however, has used LWCF grants in the partial acquisition of certain wetland properties.

The Multi-Agency Wetland Planning Team (MAWPT) was formed, at the request of the Governor's Office, to focus agency resources on state wetland conservation planning efforts. The MAWPT consists of representatives from six state agencies:

- Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission
- Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
- Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality
- Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission
- Arkansas Forestry Commission
- University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service

Many scientists from both the public and private sectors have contributed their expertise to the effort, and assisted the MAWPT with the development of a state wetland conservation plan. The MAWPT has been funded since 1992 from EPA State Wetlands Protection Development Program monies to conduct statewide planning, develop conservation strategies and implement voluntary, incentive-based wetland conservation initiatives. The Arkansas Wetland Conservation Plan is a comprehensive planning document being developed by the Arkansas Multi-Agency Wetlands Planning Team that combines wetland inventory information and state strategy recommendations to accomplish the following goals:

- Address wetland issues and concerns (i.e. mitigation, Best Management Practices, public outreach, education, etc.)
- Identify priority areas for restoration, protection, and enhancement through individual Wetland Planning Area reports
- Evaluate existing state agency resources, responsibilities, and wetland programs
- Provide recommendations for plan implementation in a State Wetland Strategy

MAWPT's two-pronged approach to developing the plan includes:

- State Wetland Strategy - Non-watershed specific evaluation of statewide issues, objectives, institutional capacities, state resources, and recommended steps for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of Arkansas Wetland Conservation Plan to meet both statewide and watershed objectives; and
- Wetland Planning Area Reports - Identification and prioritization of emphasis areas within the watershed in order to focus voluntary wetland preservation, restoration, and/or enhancement efforts (maximizing the effectiveness of limited funding resources).

More information about wetland efforts in Arkansas can be found at

<http://www.mawpt.org/default.asp>

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