

TENNESSEE 2020

VISION FOR PARKS, PEOPLE & LANDSCAPES

2009

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STATE OF TENNESSEE

PHIL BREDESEN
GOVERNOR

Dear Tennessee Citizens:

I am pleased to present Tennessee 2020, a 10-year plan for the future of Tennessee's parks, people and landscapes. This plan outlines a number of initiatives, including strategic management of our parks, meeting the recreational and informational needs of the public and conserving vital recreational resources and using them to benefit economic development in Tennessee's rural communities. The importance of long-term, comprehensive planning for recreation and conservation benefitting Tennesseans now and into the future cannot be overstated.

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation developed Tennessee 2020 with strong public support and input from a variety of citizens and stakeholders. I am a strong believer in developing partnerships and leveraging resources to accomplish conservation goals and this plan supports that philosophy through inclusion of strategies for all levels of government, the public, the business community and other organizations.

Working together, we have protected more than 200,000 acres of priority lands in Tennessee since 2003. This was made possible through comprehensive planning and critical partnerships. I pleased to introduce a plan that will carry Tennessee's goals for our parks, people and landscapes forward into 2020.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Phil Bredesen".

Phil Bredesen



STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37242-0435

PHIL BREDESEN
GOVERNOR

JAMES H. FYKE
COMMISSIONER

Dear Citizens of Tennessee:

I am proud to present to you Tennessee 2020, a comprehensive planning document focused on the future of Tennessee's parks, people and landscapes. This plan represents an ambitious undertaking, expanding the scope of previous recreation plans by extending our vision 10 years into the future.

Tennessee 2020 documents the most critical needs facing conservation and recreational infrastructure over the next 10 years. It outlines goals, determined through an in-depth public process, for everything from improving public information about recreational opportunities to improving Tennesseans' health and our state's economic climate through sustainable practices. This plan will serve as a catalyst for the state to work with communities and other stakeholders to maintain the resources we have, prioritize specific needs for the future and take action to meet those needs.

We appreciate all the input received through surveys, public meetings, working groups and more. Tennessee 2020 is designed to help improve the quality of life we enjoy in Tennessee by helping us to work with a variety of partners to protect and improve our recreational assets.

Sincerely,

James H. Fyke
Commissioner





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A list of documents included as background reference for the issues addressed in this plan.

These digital files can be found on the Reference Disc attached to the inside back cover.

PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS

Byron Jorjorian: 97 bottom, 104 both, 106, 112 both, 114

Tennessee State Photographic Services: 4, 6, 10, 15, 16, 20, 22, 23, 24, 29, 30, 33, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 44, 47, 49, 50, 53 both, 54, 55, 66 both, 69, 70, 73, 76, 77, 78, 81, 83, 87, 88, 89, 93, 95, 98, 100 both, 102 both, 103, 109, 111, 117, 118

Chattanooga Parks & Recreation Department: 56, 59, 74, 90, 97 top

Warner Parks Nature Center, Metro Nashville Parks & Recreation Department: 22 top

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INTRODUCTION

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) has prepared a state recreation plan every five years since 1965. In that year the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act established a mandate for each state to develop a set of priorities for federal grants to state and local parks and other recreation projects.

The original focus of a state comprehensive outdoor recreation plan (SCORP) was to compare the projected demand for various kinds of recreation resources in the next five years with the state's existing resource supply and to prioritize the types of recreation investments that were needed. This supply-and-demand model continues to be a component of the SCORPs, since recreation demand continually evolves.

Following the report of the Tennesseans Outdoors Commission in 1985, which addressed a broad range of issues relating to resource conservation and recreation over a 20-year timeframe, TDEC began to expand the scope of recreation planning beyond the confines of supply-and-demand metrics. In the last 20 years, Tennessee has increasingly leveraged the federally funded SCORP process to consider recreation and conservation in the broadest sense as a determinant of Tennesseans' quality of life.

This Tennessee 2020 plan expands the scope of the process to a more ambitious level. It has adopted a ten-year perspective to help maintain continuous improvement of quality in the state's parks and recreation infrastructure. It adopts multi-level strategies for complex, critical issues facing parks and recreation and resource conservation in the years ahead. It sets the state on a path toward becoming a national model in harnessing new technologies to achieve greater efficiencies and to engage the public as never before.

TDEC began this planning process with five primary objectives in mind:

- To review the implementation status of the 2003 Tennessee State Recreation Plan and recommend modifications as needed.
- To identify high-priority issues and trends that will affect recreation and conservation in Tennessee in the next ten years and discover opportunities to address them.
- To develop an issues-oriented vision to serve as a consistent compass for the state's conservation and recreation agenda in the next ten years.
- To develop an implementation-oriented action program to move the state toward achieving this vision in the next five years.
- To satisfy the National Park Service's SCORP plan priorities and qualify the state for continued federal grants from the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Systematic Implementation Approach

The 2003 State Recreation Plan proposed creation of a Tennessee Recreation System. As the 2009 planning process evolved, it became clear that such a system was more critical than ever, as several high-priority issues could not be adequately addressed without the active participation of local recreation agencies. Accordingly, this plan integrates the concept of a seamless recreation

system into the implementation of the Tennessee 2020 vision. Three of this plan's initiatives - Public Health, Children in Nature, and Environmental Education - are to be implemented through state/local partnerships. And since implementation will require strong local partners, this plan proposes three initiatives - Advocacy and Funding, Recreation Information, and Quality Growth - that address the priority needs of these agencies. In addition, one initiative was specifically developed to strengthen the abilities of these agencies to serve as partners in a seamless recreation delivery system.

Sources of Input

The planning process made use of several sources of input to gain understanding of the issues, concerns and priorities relating to recreation and conservation in Tennessee:

- **Seven public meetings.** These were held in the four major metropolitan areas of Tennessee.
- **Online Public Survey.** The opportunity to participate in an online survey was widely advertised among conservation and recreation-related organizations. The respondents were self-selected, making this an unscientific but useful survey.
- **2009 Tennessee Recreation Attitudes and Behavior Survey (TRAB)** This was a scientific survey using randomly selected respondents to represent Tennessee's adult population as a whole.
- **Recreation Provider Survey.** This survey was circulated to all local parks and recreation departments in Tennessee and to all State Parks.
- **Tennessee Recreation Advisory Committee (TRAC).** This committee provided expert input and guidance for the plan.
- **TRAC Working Groups.** Four special-focus groups worked on specific issue areas and developed most of the initiatives in this plan.

Structure of the Plan

This plan's initiatives are organized under three domains - Parks, People, and Landscapes - each with

its own set of stakeholders and its own set of critical issues. The initiatives in the plan are defined in terms of nine statements of need:

Parks

1. The need of decision-makers for accurate information about the value of funding for parks, recreation, and conservation.
2. The need of the State Parks for a comprehensive systems approach to strategic management.
3. The need of Tennessee's cities and counties to provide diverse, close-to-home recreation opportunities for all their residents.

People:

4. The need of the public for more accessible information about recreation opportunities and better ways to participate in advocacy and planning.
5. The need of the public to avoid preventable diseases through increased physical activity.
6. The need of children to interact with nature as a necessary part of their healthy development.
7. The need of students to understand the natural world they will inherit in a time of daunting environmental challenges.

Landscapes

8. The need of rural regions for help in managing growth and preserving their quality of life.
9. The need of communities for more opportunities to enjoy and protect their local rivers, streams, and creeks.
10. The need of rural regions for help in harnessing their recreation assets for economic development.

To address each of these needs, the plan proposes an initiative composed of a Vision statement for 2020 and an Action Plan to be implemented by 2015. Since the critical issues addressed in this plan are interrelated in many ways, each initiative contains Coordination Links to integrate it with the implementation of other initiatives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This plan has been made possible by the many individuals who contributed long hours of effort and many creative ideas to its development. The planning team is grateful for their generous investment of time and their relentless commitment to excellence.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This plan has boiled down a large volume of input from surveys, public meetings, expert advisors, special-focus working groups, and issues research to arrive at 10 Statements of Need. These need statements express the most critical issues facing conservation and the recreation infrastructure in the next ten years in Tennessee. They fall into three domains: Parks, People, and Landscapes.

PARKS

1. *The need of decision-makers for accurate information about the value of funding for parks, recreation, and conservation.*

Parks have been underfunded in Tennessee for many years, yet the state's population continues to grow, and with it demand for more parks and recreation. Tennessee's State Parks produce \$37 in economic impacts for every dollar the state invests in running them, yet at current funding levels, they will be challenged to maintain their high standards of excellence in the future. No source of dedicated funding for parks and recreation exists in the state, leaving the recreation infrastructure vulnerable to further budget cuts in the future. The need to make a stronger case for the value of public investments in parks and recreation was the highest priority issue to emerge in this planning process.

2. *The need of the State Parks for a comprehensive systems approach to strategic management.*

Tennessee's State Park system, cited as the best in the nation in 2007, is facing a more complex array of management issues than ever before. Some types of facilities are an economic drain on the system and may need to be eliminated. Many others are growing old, creating a significant maintenance backlog. The need to implement sustainable practices calls for a sophisticated understanding of emerging solutions. Invasive plants

and pest insects are attacking the parks' biodiversity. New development can threaten the integrity of park boundaries and impair water quality in the park. To address new challenges effectively, park managers need a systems-oriented approach to strategic management. New technologies make such an approach possible for the first time.

3. *The need of Tennessee's cities and counties to provide diverse, close-to-home recreation opportunities for all their residents.*

Access to nearby parks and recreation centers is essential to the well-being of every Tennessee resident. Only local parks departments can deliver critically important opportunities to work recreation into daily life, where it is most needed. An effective recreation delivery system requires a statewide network of professional parks and recreation departments that is able to give all Tennesseans access to the recreation they need, regardless of where they live. The local recreation infrastructure as it currently exists in Tennessee contains wide disparities in the levels of recreation opportunities available to residents of the 95 counties, and all local providers are continually challenged to keep pace with growing demand. Local recreation providers can close gaps in service and expand recreation opportunities economically by using cooperative agreements to leverage existing resources and programs.

PEOPLE

4. The need of the public for more accessible information about recreation opportunities and better ways to participate in advocacy and planning.

Surveys of public participation in recreation activities have consistently identified lack of information as a significant barrier. Information about recreation opportunities is currently fragmented in Tennessee among many different federal, state, and local agencies. Likewise, information about recreation planning, resource conservation, and related legislation is difficult to locate, hindering the public's ability to participate in important decisions. Most of the other needs addressed in this plan also involve a need for a better information delivery system.

5. The need of the public to avoid preventable diseases through increased physical activity.

Nearly two-thirds of Tennesseans are not getting enough exercise to sustain good health, and a sizeable percentage take no exercise at all. Obesity is increasing at an alarming rate in Tennessee, and our state has the nation's highest incidence of diabetes. If the trend of the last 10 years continues in the next decade, the burden of preventable healthcare costs in the state could skyrocket. Increasing levels of regular exercise is now a goal of the highest priority for the entire recreation community.

6. The need of children to interact with nature as a necessary part of their healthy development.

Teenagers are turning away from nature and the out-of-doors in favor of television and computers, and younger children have far less unstructured outdoor play than previous generations. Unstructured play in nature is essential for a child's healthy physical and emotional development, and the lack of it is reflected in the rising incidence of a host of disorders in the young: ADD/ADHA, teen depression and suicide, and obesity.

7. The need of students to understand the natural world they will inherit in a time of daunting environmental challenges.

The environment is not something most of Tennessee's students are learning about in school; and that, coupled with the decline in outdoor play in nature, is giving them little reason to care. They should be learning now what they will need as adults to make difficult decisions in the face of climate change and other environmental issues. At the same time, integrating environmental content into the curriculum has been shown to increase student engagement in all subjects and produce measurable improvements in test scores.

LANDSCAPES

8. The need of rural regions for help in managing growth and preserving their quality of life.

Our state's population has grown rapidly in the last 20 years, but the land consumed by development has grown twice as fast. Water quality, wildlife habitats, and future opportunities for recreation are threatened by rapid conversion of farm and forest land. The burden of runaway growth is falling most heavily on rural counties that adjoin metropolitan areas. Tennessee cannot preserve its cultural heritage, natural environment, and quality of life unless the counties have better ways to deal with growth issues.

9. The need of communities for more opportunities to enjoy and protect their local rivers, streams, and creeks.

There are 60,417 miles of rivers, streams, and creeks in Tennessee, with at least one within half a mile of every community, home and school. All surface waters of the state are property of the state, making them the largest and most widely available class of publicly owned recreation resources in Tennessee. Most of these waterways are not fulfilling their potential for recreational use because they have not been made accessible to the public. Tennesseans can become better stewards of

water quality if they have opportunities to enjoy and appreciate these important assets.

10. *The need of rural regions for help in harnessing their recreation assets for economic development.*

Many of Tennessee's rural counties have lagging economies with high rates of joblessness and poverty. Yet these tend to be the same counties that are richest in recreation assets. Some of these assets - recently acquired conservation lands, State Forests, and Wildlife Management Areas - are not being managed to maximize their value as resources for public recreation. The challenge is to turn these recreation resources into drivers of local economic development.

Tennessee 2020 Initiatives

This plan proposes 10 strategic initiatives to address each of these critical needs. Each initiative is composed of:

- A 2020 Vision to define overarching goals, and
- A 2015 Action Plan to be implemented within the next five years.

Because the needs to be addressed are interrelated in many ways, the plan specifies measures to coordinate these initiatives into an integrated set of strategies. The 10 Tennessee 2020 initiatives are:

I. Advocacy and Funding

2020 Vision

Decision makers at the state and local levels will be fully informed about the economic impacts of parks and recreation in Tennessee, will recognize the value of public investments in this sector, and will be empowered to make sound economic decisions related to parks and recreation.

2015 Action Plan

TDEC will recruit a committee of the state's business leaders to provide advocacy for Tennessee's parks and recreation infrastructure through research to document the total economic impacts of parks and recreation in the state.

The General Assembly should restore permanent funding to the Heritage Conservation Trust, the Local Parks and Recreation Fund and the State Lands Acquisition Fund.

The Tennessee General Assembly should enact a dedicated funding source for parks and recreation.

2. State Parks Management

2020 Vision

Tennessee's State Parks will be a national model of a modernized, strategic park management process characterized by a dynamic, systems-oriented approach that ensures high standards of professionalism and consistency, eliminates wasteful spending, provides superior protection for park resources, and delivers a quality visitor experience.

2015 Action Plan

TDEC will develop a Tennessee State Parks Stewardship System designed to ensure system-wide consistency and provide a streamlined approach for all strategic management decisions.

This initiative will include system-wide core principles, the use of an online Geographic Information System (GIS) to inventory all park resources, and procedures for cost-benefit analysis of facilities. If effectively implemented, this system will more than pay for itself in cost savings.

3. Local Parks and Recreation

2020 Vision

All Tennesseans, regardless of where they live, will have access to consistent recreation services and close-to-home opportunities to enjoy recreation, exercise, and interaction with nature.

2015 Action Plan

TDEC/RES and PARTAS will develop incentives to encourage cities and counties to enter into school-parks agreements that open school recreation facilities to the public; to encourage high growth counties that lack a county-wide department to form one; to encourage creation of local greenways, with an emphasis on con-

nectivity of greenways, bicycle lanes, and sidewalks into local or regional networks; to help underserved counties develop multi-county parks and recreation entities, and to hold a Recreation Summit in 2010 to focus on issues relating to local parks and recreation departments.

This plan's Quality Growth initiative will encourage county planning commissions to recognize recreation resources as significant community facilities in their comprehensive plans, to include parks representatives on their commissions, to include funding for parkland acquisition as part of the subdivision permitting process, and to ensure that undeveloped land will be protected to provide for future recreation needs.

4. Recreation One-Stop

2020 Vision

Tennessee will pioneer the creative use of emerging Internet and geospatial technology to encourage greater public participation in all aspects of recreation. All Tennesseans will have access to a user-friendly source of information about the entire spectrum of the state's recreation opportunities. A vibrant, online community will enable the public to share recreation experiences with others, receive training for new activities, find partners for outings, encourage others to become more active, and get more directly involved in advocacy for parks, recreation and natural resource conservation.

2020 Action Plan

TDEC will establish a public/private partnership to develop a Tennessee Recreation One-Stop website with a user-friendly database of all federal, state, and local recreation resources and programs in the state, organized on a geospatial platform.

This website will include robust search functions, an information-rich page for each site, social networking functions, links to recreation- and conservation-related organizations, user-generated content, and online surveys.

5. Public Health

2020 Vision

TDEC, the Tennessee Department of Health, and the state's network of local parks and recreation departments will be active partners in encouraging the population to increase their levels of activity and exercise. The state will achieve a measurable decrease in levels of inactivity and obesity through a well-coordinated set of intervention strategies on many fronts.

2015 Action Plan

TDEC will assist the Department of Health's Obesity Task Force in developing strategies for integrating the efforts of local parks and recreation providers into the new State Obesity Plan and in improving their ability to provide effective fitness programming and outreach to high-risk groups.

6. Every Child Outdoors

2020 Vision

Tennessee's children will have high-quality, close-to-home opportunities for unstructured play in nature; families will become more engaged in nature and the outdoors; and school children will learn to appreciate the natural world and the need for environmental stewardship.

2015 Action Plan

TDEC will help local parks and recreation departments develop new parks and playgrounds and retrofit existing ones to create more opportunities for unstructured play in nature.

TDEC and the Department of Agriculture will establish a partnership to encourage increased use of native plants by parks, schools, and communities for creating micro-habitats and to encourage the use of farms as places for families to connect with nature.

Tennessee State Parks will establish outreach programs with schools, inner city neighborhoods and community centers to re-connect more children and families with the natural world.

7. Environmental Education

2020 Vision

Tennessee's schools will achieve measurable improvements in student performance by using the interaction of local natural and human systems as an integrating concept in all subjects and all grades, with the assistance of a well-organized, statewide network of professional interpretive specialists and a comprehensive, online information delivery system.

2015 Action Plan

TDEC, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), the Department of Education and the Tennessee Environmental Education Association (TEEA) will form a partnership to develop a State Environmental Literacy Plan.

This plan will use Tennessee's environment as an integrating concept, provide hands-on experiential learning at outdoor classroom sites at each school's nearby streams or creeks, parks and nature centers, and use each school's local watershed as the framework for a Tennessee place-based curriculum.

The TEEA, TWRA and TDEC will organize Tennessee's professional interpretive specialists into an organized network with a consistent, statewide program specifically designed to meet the needs of teachers in implementing the state's Environmental Literacy Plan.

The Department of Education should seek federal



funds for climate change education, if such funding becomes available under legislation now under consideration, and should integrate this program into the State Environmental Literacy Plan.

8 Quality Growth

2020 Vision

Every Tennessee county will incorporate Quality Growth tools and principles in its land use planning and development permitting, so that each county's valuable natural infrastructure - parklands, greenways, streams and buffers, wildlife habitat, and conservation landscapes - will be protected as part of a systematic growth management process. These tools will include greenways and buffers to preserve the integrity of streams and protect state and local parks from impacts of adjacent development.

2015 Action Plan

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), TDEC, and Cumberland Region Tomorrow (CRT) will form a partnership to establish new regional organizations or work with existing ones to implement the CRT Quality Growth methodologies.

The partners will assist these entities in building region-specific GreenPrint geospatial databases of natural infrastructure and region-specific Quality Growth Toolboxes and will help train the staff to use of these tools and provide training and technical assistance for county decision-makers.

9 Recreational Waters

2020 Vision

Tennessee's rivers, streams, and creeks will be the centerpiece of a coordinated approach to water quality regulation, quality growth planning, public stewardship of the environment, and environmental education. Ready access to these resources will be available along greenways and at road crossings. Tennesseans will be proud of their local watersheds and aware of their personal responsibilities to help protect water quality through their everyday actions.

2020 Action Plan

TDOT, TDEC, and CRT will include strategies for developing regional Blueways as part of the Quality Growth Toolbox. TDEC will share watershed data with these partners to facilitate this process. The Park and Float program should expand to meet the need for new boat launch sites.

The Quality Growth Toolbox will encourage communities to provide local stream and creek access along streamside greenways and at bridge crossings. TDEC's local grants priorities should encourage local projects which provide more access to recreational waters.

TDEC will continue pursuing the vision of a watershed-based interagency regulatory framework and make implementation of the proposed online Watersheds GIS database a priority, beginning with a statewide Watershed Conference in 2010.

To continue wetlands protection, regular funding should be restored for TWRA's wildlife habitat conservation programs. The state should establish at least one wetland mitigation bank in each of Tennessee's fifty-four watersheds.

10. Rural Economic Development

2020 Vision

Tennessee's rural regions will gain significant economic benefits from their rich heritage of natural, historic, and cultural resources, will value them as significant assets, and will take steps to preserve and protect them.

2015 Action Plan

TDEC will complete development of the Tennessee State Heritage Areas program and introduce legislation to have the designation formally established.

TDEC, TWRA, the Department of Agriculture, and non-profit organizations will partner to develop a framework for a State Recreation Areas designation and seek legislation to establish the designation. The newly acquired North Cumberland Plateau lands of the Sundquist, Royal Blue, Emory River and Brimstone tracts should be designated as a pilot project under this program.

TDOT will proceed immediately with development of the Tennessee State Scenic Byways Plan.



CONTEXT OF THIS PLAN

Recreation Planning Trends

Of all the possible changes in the recreation and conservation planning in the next ten years, the most dramatic, if the recent past is any guide, will likely occur in the area of information technology. Already, technology is beginning to bring radical change to recreation resource management.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) allow many different kinds of information, previously fragmented among many sources, to be overlaid on a single base map so that interrelationships, conflicts, and opportunities can be readily identified. The capability of this new technology is so great that agencies that once hoarded their data are now eager to share it, allowing new levels of coordination and cooperation. GIS has opened up fertile possibilities for comprehensive, multi-level, regional perspectives. Combining GIS with the Internet makes these data pools completely accessible, with no delays in receiving upgraded information. The most ambitious feature of this Tennessee 2020 plan is its embrace of online GIS inventories to produce solutions that would have been impossible a few years ago. This plan's initiatives will make key use of four online GIS systems, each with a different data set and a different function:

State Parks Stewardship System. An inventory of each park's facilities and resources, combined with an online toolkit, to help managers keep track of all resources they are managing and stay aware of procedures, directives or guidelines that apply to those resources.

Tennessee Recreation One-Stop. An inventory of all state, federal, and local recreation opportunities in the state, to give the public quick, convenient access to information. This GIS site will also support the following initiatives in this plan:

- **Advocacy and Funding.** Opportunities for public participation in advocacy for recreation resources and citizen action relating to pending legislation and recreation planning.
- **Public Health.** Information about close-to-home fitness programming and facilities.
- **Children in Nature.** Information about close-to-home locations where children can engage in unstructured play in nature.
- **Environmental Education.** Information for teachers about outdoor classroom locations and parks and nature centers with interpretive programs near their schools.
- **Recreational Waters.** Information about Blueways, locations for access to creeks and streams, and opportunities for watershed stewardship.

- **Rural Economic Development.** Information for potential visitors about a rural region's recreation opportunities involving natural, historical, and cultural resources.
- **Quality Growth GreenPrints.** An inventory of each region's natural resources, conservation landscapes, habitat corridors, historic sites, infrastructure, and other elements, to allow permitting agencies to foresee potential impacts of their decisions.
- **Watershed GIS.** An inventory of each of Tennessee's 55 watersheds containing all permit information, infrastructure planning information, and natural resources, to allow for a unified, interagency regulatory framework.

This plan is designed to make good use of other emerging features of the Internet as well, such as social networking, user-generated content, mobile computing, GPS uploads, and online surveys. These features can allow dynamic, interactive forms of communication between recreation resource managers and the public they serve, can encourage greater public participation of all kinds, and can place a new focus on individual experiences and needs. By starting now to incorporate these new features, the state will be in a better position to capitalize on future technological opportunities as they emerge.

Many of the concepts incorporated into this plan correspond with an evolution in recreation planning currently underway at the national level. With the Land and Water Conservation Fund due for reauthorization in 2015, professionals in the field of parks and recreation have recently been engaged in assessing the status of recreation in America and developing recommendations for improvements. Two of the most noteworthy are the Outdoor Recreation Review Group and the National Park Service.

Outdoor Recreation Review Group

It has been 20 years since the last major effort of this kind, the Americans Outdoors Commission chaired by Lamar Alexander while Governor of Tennessee. In 2008, Senator Alexander and other leaders in recreation and conservation convened the Outdoor Recreation Review Group (ORRG) to take a fresh look. TDEC's Commissioner Fyke was an active participant in this group. Their report, released in 2009, contains an ambitious new set of proposals. This Tennessee 2020 plan's initiatives reflect five of the eight ORRG proposals:

- Advocacy to promote the value of outdoor resources to community life and their benefits to the economy, public health, and youth education,
- Promoting recreation and nature education for America's youth,
- Use of geospatial planning tools and interagency data sharing to overcome fragmentation,
- Regional planning for landscape-level conservation through partnerships across levels of government, and with land trusts, other nonprofit groups, and private landowners,
- Development of a national network of Blueways and water trails.

National Park Service

The National Park Service has established a goal of enhancing children's interaction with nature through such efforts as the Get Outdoors, It's Yours initiative. The NPS is encouraging state and local projects to contribute to reconnecting youth with the land and water in order to create a new generation of stewards with a public service ethic; improve the mental and physical health of our nation; reduce the cost of health care; increase awareness of the important role that nature and science plays in our lives; encourage a more competent and competitive workforce; and ensure the perpetuation of the resources entrusted to our care. This Tennessee 2020 plan addresses these NPS priorities in three initiatives: Public Health, Children in Nature, and Environmental Education.

Recreation Infrastructure

State Parks

Tennessee's 53 State Parks received the National Parks and Recreation Association's 2007 Gold Medal Award as the best state park system in America. This recognition was the most recent example of Tennessee's long tradition of national leadership in its State Parks system and in resource conservation efforts:

- In 1974, under the visionary leadership of Walt Criley, TDEC's Director of Planning, the department developed the **Tennessee Outdoor Recreation Area System (TORAS)**, a systematic, comprehensive plan for all state park units. This plan was the first of its kind in the US.
- In 1975 Tennessee established one of the nation's first **State Natural Heritage programs**, designed to inventory all occurrences of rare, threatened, and endangered species in the state. The Heritage program gave Tennessee's State Parks the nation's first system for defining park critical habitat zones for protection of biodiversity.
- Tennessee established the nation's first **State Scenic Rivers Program** in 1968, the same year that the National Wild and Scenic Act was passed. The state also enacted one of the nation's first **State Natural Areas programs** in 1971. As of 2009 there are 80 publicly accessible State Natural Areas, and 13 State Scenic Rivers in Tennessee.
- Tennessee has the only state park system in the nation that is participating system-wide in the **All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (ATBI) program**, documenting all species of plants, insects, and animals found in each park. Thirty State Parks are currently collecting this information in order to better manage their natural resources.

This Tennessee 2020 plan builds on this foundation of excellence with a new vision of forward-thinking innovation in the management of State Parks.

Local Parks

There are currently 140 organized parks and recreation departments located in 74 of the state's 95 counties. Local parks fill a critical need for close-to-home places to engage in sports, exercise, play, leisure, and interaction with nature. Local parks also offer programming for important target groups, such as sports leagues for young people and fitness programs for seniors. With Tennesseans increasingly living in urban and suburban settings, the public need for local parks continues to grow. This need is especially pronounced for urban minorities, who show the highest incidence of poor nutrition and lack of exercise and who often lack transportation to reach State Parks.

The network of local parks also appears to represent a psychological safety net for many families. A 2009 Harris poll suggests that the current economic downturn has spurred a sharp increase in public park and

The Cumberland Trail

The Cumberland Trail is an ambitious project of the Tennessee State Parks that began in 1998. Upon completion, the trail will be 300 miles long, crossing 11 Tennessee counties from the Cumberland Gap National Historic Park on the Tennessee-Virginia-Kentucky border, to Signal Point National Historic Park near Chattanooga. It will connect some of the most scenic areas of the Cumberland Plateau, including 13 State Parks, Forests, Natural Areas, and Wildlife Management Areas and four National Park units.

One hundred fifty miles of the Cumberland Trail are now completed and open to the public. Over the next eight to ten years, the state will work in partnership with the Cumberland Trail Conference, an associated organization of the Tennessee Trails Association, and other volunteers to solicit public and private support for acquisition of additional land along the trail.

playground use among families with children, especially those with younger ones. Asked how the recession had influenced their use of parks and playgrounds, 38% with children under 6 reported greater use.

In this plan's TRAB Survey, the number-one reason Tennesseans cited for not getting more exercise was lack of time. The emerging national focus on disease prevention places much stronger emphasis on regular exercise, and achieving this goal requires opportunities to fit exercise conveniently into the weekly schedule. An important solution to the lack-of-time problem is having parks and greenways located near to where people live and work.

TDEC's Recreational Education Services Division (RES) assists local parks departments through four grant programs for development of local recreation projects:

- **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)** grants to local governments and state agencies for the acquisition and development of public outdoor

recreation areas and facilities.

- **Local Parks and Recreation Fund (LPRF)** grants to local governmental entities for the purchase of lands for parks, natural areas, and greenways, for trail development and for capital projects in parks, natural areas, and greenways.
- **Natural Resources Trust Fund (NRTF)** grants to local governmental entities and state areas for outdoor recreation, historical or archaeological sites, and acquisition of lands or waters.
- A related grant program, the **Recreation Trails Program (RTP)**, administered through the Tennessee Department of Transportation, provides grants primarily to government entities for recreation trail projects. Grants totaling more than \$200 million have been awarded to 180 Tennessee communities to build sidewalks, bike and pedestrian trails, and to renovate historic train depots and other transportation-related structures.

To maximize the effectiveness of these grant



programs, TDEC’s Parks and Recreation Technical Assistance Service (PARTAS) works in partnership with local parks departments, offering them planning expertise to address the challenges of changing recreation needs and increasing demand for services. An important component of this service is helping to establish and improve the local government’s ability to deliver leisure services.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

At the time of its passage in 1965, the Land and Water Conservation Fund was intended to serve as the nation’s primary source of funding for resource conservation and recreation. From 1965 to 2009, 718 LWCF grants in Tennessee provided a total of \$71 million to acquire parklands and build recreation facilities in nearly every county of the state.

Beginning in 2000, Congress diverted LWCF funds and applied them to land maintenance needs of federal agencies, historic preservation, state and private forestry programs, and endangered species grants. The amount allocated to the states declined sharply. Tennessee’s annual LWCF funding, formerly in the range of \$5-6 million, steadily decreased over the last ten years and is now less than \$1 million.

As the ORRG report notes, this funding decline has happened “even as population and demographic changes have occurred, as anxieties about childhood obesity and public health have emerged, as community livability concerns have moved to the forefront, and as other urgent and unmet needs at the national, state, and

local level have surfaced.” The result has been a growing backlog of recreation infrastructure needs at both the state and local levels. Accordingly, this plan’s survey of local recreation providers found that inadequate funding for new parks and facilities and for programming and maintenance was their highest concern.

While this plan takes pains to maximize the effectiveness of available recreation funding by leveraging new technology, interagency cooperation and public/private partnerships, much of the important work outlined here will depend on adequate federal funding in the future. The ORRG report concluded that the LWCF is severely underfunded:

“The impact and utility of the LWCF, intended as the main funding mechanism for federal and state land acquisition, has declined because of inadequate, dependable appropriations, making it nearly impossible to plan future projects. This is particularly so for the state share and, in turn, for urban areas, even though states and localities are on the front lines in providing parks and recreation opportunities as elements critical to their economic well-being, community livability, public health, and education.

“Funding levels are woefully inadequate to meet identified needs for land and water conservation and outdoor recreation: the stateside LWCF backlog for acquisition and related facilities development in 2008 was \$27 billion; and demand for recreation facilities to meet the needs of a growing population remains significant. At its peak, in 1977, LWCF was authorized at \$900 million a year. In order to fund LWCF fully at the \$900 million level Congress envisioned in

LWCF Grants in Tennessee, 1965-2009

Grant Type	Number	Amount
Planning	17	1,395,969
Acquisition	97	20,506,534
Development	402	41,803,772
Redevelopment	128	7,618,694
All Grant Types	718	71,324,969

1977, adjusting for inflation, this figure would be \$3.2 billion today.

“Congress should permanently dedicate funding at the highest historical authorized level (\$900 million a year) adjusted for inflation. This financial support is needed to protect natural, historical, ecological, cultural, and recreational resources around the country, including parks, wildlife refuges, forests, and other resource lands and waters.”



Benefits of the LWCF

The LWCF serves a vital national need, the need to get the American public active and healthy, fulfill local conservation priorities, and allow access to close-to-home public lands and recreation facilities.

Funding provided through LWCF stimulates local economies, promotes job creation, and provides community health resources and protects environmental resources.

LWCF State Assistance funds help to develop sports fields, neighborhood parks, community gathering places, as well as the acquisition of green space for state and local conservation and park purposes.

These resources allow park and recreation agencies to play a key role in solving national issues such as climate change, obesity, reduction of crime, and energy and land conservation.

Source: National Parks and Recreation Association

