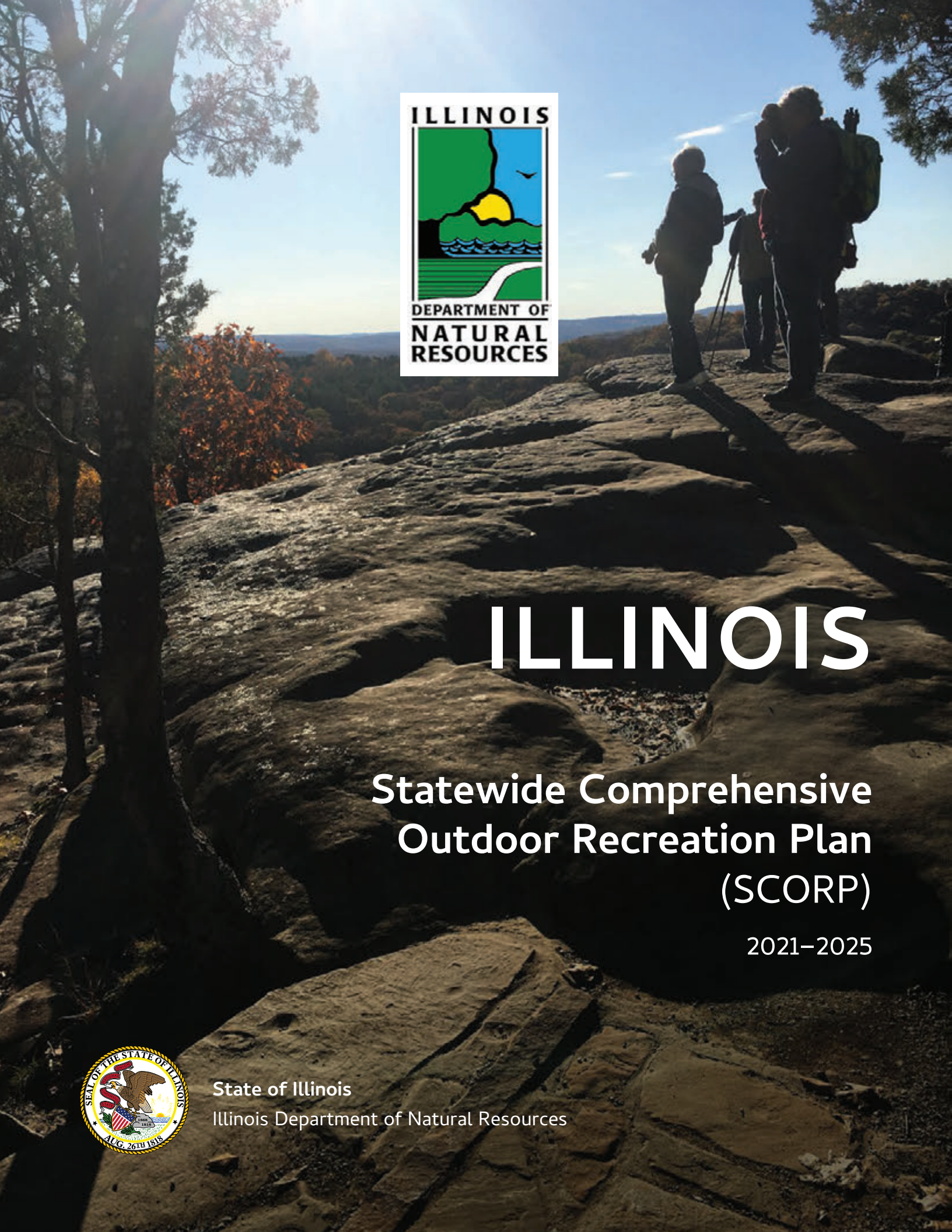



# ILLINOIS

## Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

2021–2025

**State of Illinois**
Illinois Department of Natural Resources



ILLINOIS
DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL
RESOURCES

*To manage, conserve and protect Illinois' natural, recreational and cultural resources, further the public's understanding and appreciation of those resources, and promote the education, science and public safety of Illinois' natural resources for present and future generations.*

ILLINOIS
SCORP



# ILLINOIS

## Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

2021–2025





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The 2021 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is the result of Illinois' ongoing outdoor recreation planning program. The input and assistance of park and recreation agencies and individual citizens to the content of the SCORP is greatly appreciated.

Many thanks to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Office of Recreation and Park Resources. They directed data collection and analysis for the Illinois Facility Park Lands Inventory Survey and the Statewide Resident Outdoor Recreation Survey. The findings from these research studies contributed immeasurably to the SCORP.

Thank you to the 200+ local park and recreation agencies that provided information about their facilities as part of the statewide inventory. Resident input into the SCORP is vitally important and we are grateful for the thousands of Illinois citizens who responded to surveys and provided feedback about the outdoor recreation activities they enjoy.

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Illinois SCORP

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ILLINOIS
SCORP

From one-of a kind bluffs such as the Garden of the Gods in Shawnee National Forest to steep sandstone canyons and awe-inspiring waterfalls at Starved Rock State Park, Illinois the "Prairie State" is host to a tremendous amount of natural diversity and heritage. Illinois' 2021-2025 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) provides aid for recreation professionals in planning the protection, development, and acquisition of additional natural resources. It also guides stewardship of Illinois while simultaneously providing outdoor recreational opportunities to millions of Illinoisans per year. The Illinois SCORP is developed every five years to evaluate the outdoor recreation needs of Illinois residents while considering the state's natural resources, recreational lands and facilities, and evaluating economic impacts to outdoor recreation in Illinois (such as COVID-19 pandemic challenges). This plan also provides an analysis of demographic characteristics of Illinois residents, analyzes outdoor recreation supply and demand through surveys of recreation providers and residents throughout the state in 2020, and suggests recommendations and implementation strategies to further develop outdoor recreation opportunities in Illinois.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

A 2020 survey of 2,700 Illinois residents shows the value that Illinoisans place on their outdoor recreation resources. Eighty-three percent of respondents indicated that outdoor recreation plays an important role in their lives. Walking was the most important outdoor recreation activity both in terms of importance (over 90% of respondents participated in this activity) and participation rates (median=25 times per year). Other outdoor activities deemed important and frequently participated in were running/jogging and bicycling (on roads and on trails) -- aligning with the strong preference for investment in trail maintenance and development among respondents. These outdoor recreation activities were largely engaged at, or near, one's residence (65.2%). Primary motivations for participation in outdoor recreation activities were to have fun, exercise and keep healthy, spend time with friends and family, and to experience nature. Ninety percent of respondents indicated that outdoor recreation resources are important to health and wellness, and 84.6% believed outdoor recreation areas and facilities are important to quality of life and the economic development of their community. Among residents, conservation initiatives were also widely supported. Almost 80% of respondents indicated they want to see more wildlife protected and 77.7% would like to see more natural areas, particularly undisturbed prairies, forests, and wetlands being acquired and protected.

> *"Walking was the most important outdoor activity...*

Additionally, in 2020, a total of 204 Illinois parks and recreation agencies also completed a provider survey. Consistent with the values reported by Illinois respondents in the resident surveys, providers reported that their residents deemed trails as the most important recreational amenity. The provider survey showed that agencies with a trail development plan constructed, on average, almost six times more miles of trails than agencies without a trail development plan. The top funding priorities for agencies related to facilities and programs were inclusive programming and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility. For outdoor recreation and conservation, the top funding priority for agencies was maintaining existing parks, followed by environmental and conservation programs, and, lastly, the development and/or improvement of existing natural areas and other open spaces.

## PRIORITIES

The provider and resident survey findings, outdoor recreation and demographic trends, the current Illinois DNR Wetlands Campaign, and the previous SCORP inform the development of the priorities for the 2021 SCORP. The 2021 Illinois SCORP outlines four priority areas to further meet the recreational needs of Illinoisans. Key themes have been identified within each of these broad categories and primary challenges and opportunities are examined. The priority areas include:

- Improving Health and Wellness
- Access to Parks and Recreation
- Natural Resources and Conservation Management
- Funding and Economic Development

The recommendations and actions found in this plan will guide recreation providers in ways to meet the ever-changing needs of their communities, protect Illinois' natural resources, deal with economic challenges, and promote economic development within their community.



Chapter 1

# INTRODUCTION

ILLINOIS
SCORP

## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The 2021 Illinois Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) represents a vision that resulted from an assessment of Illinois' outdoor recreation resources and needs. Each year, millions of people enjoy Illinois' outdoor recreation sites and facilities, necessitating the continued acquisition, development, and maintenance of outdoor recreation lands and facilities needed to meet public demand. In fact, acquisition, development, and maintenance of open spaces play a pivotal role in helping to meet the needs of the public as visitation rates at Illinois outdoor recreation sites and facilities continue to increase into the millions each year.

The SCORP is prepared as a vision document by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Office of Realty and Capital Planning, in coordination with other Illinois DNR Offices. The Illinois DNR has the authority to represent and act for the State in dealing with the Secretary for purposes of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCF) of 1965, as amended. The plan is a reflection of the extensive network of Illinois' natural resources and recreation characteristics. The state's extensive rich landscapes and land, water, and natural heritage provide the foundation for the SCORP. With input from over 2,700 residents and 204 park and recreation agencies, the SCORP reflects the value Illinois residents

and agencies place on outdoor recreation and the importance of open spaces. The plan provides insight into the provision of parks and outdoor recreation for Illinois. That is, the SCORP is a statewide plan that presents recreational resources, an assessment of outdoor recreation supply, examination of outdoor recreation activities, and attitudes toward recreation in Illinois. Moreover, priority area goals are identified, along with key themes and recommendations, based upon the identification of challenges and opportunities. The SCORP assists parks and recreation agencies in meeting public demand related to health and wellness, conservation of open spaces, and identification of priority land acquisition areas. The SCORP also provides several State and Federal funding sources for park and recreation agencies to consider.

## SCORP PURPOSE

The purpose of the plan is to evaluate the outdoor recreation needs of Illinois citizens and determine how best to meet these needs, considering the state's natural resources, recreational lands and facilities, and socioeconomic factors. The plan is a guide for acquisition, development, and management of land for recreational use and promotes the development of a balanced outdoor recreation system in Illinois.

The SCORP's first and most basic purpose is maintaining Illinois' eligibility for receipt of federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) monies. Each state must have an approved SCORP, updated at least every five years. The SCORP is required by Section 6(d) of the LWCF Act of 1965, as amended, and complies with Chapter 2 of the LWCF State Assistance Program Manual, 2008. The LWCF program in Illinois, when combined with matching state and local agency funds, represents an investment of more than $300 million in Illinois' state and local park system over a fifty-year period. LWCF has enormously influenced the provisions of outdoor recreation lands and facilities in Illinois.

## METHODOLOGY

The SCORP pulls together broad-based information about the public's participation in outdoor recreation activities, issues affecting recreation, and the natural and developed resources that support outdoor recreation. The SCORP, therefore, represents a coordinated process that involves input from many organizations. The Illinois DNR integrated findings from other state agencies, such as the Illinois Department of Public Health, with its own data and plans. Local park and recreation agencies were significant contributors to the SCORP.

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), Office of Recreation and Park Resources (ORPR), administered the Illinois Community Recreation Facilities & Park Lands Inventory (i.e., provider survey). Local park and recreation agencies provided data for the study, which resulted in a representation and evaluation of the lands and facilities available at local and regional parks and preserves. The ORPR also administered a survey to a stratified random sample of Illinois residents and completed the analysis. Additionally, a special interest survey was administered to key stakeholders. Findings offer insights into the outdoor recreation behaviors and preferences of Illinois citizens.

Public involvement in outdoor recreation planning helps guide the selection of priorities and recommendations for action. Public input comes from many sources; councils and advisory bodies with specific outdoor recreation responsibilities, user advocacy groups, special interest organizations, public meetings, and surveys and other studies. The UIUC's ORPR drew from all of these groups as part of its SCORP public participation process.

## INTENT

The 2021 SCORP is a concise and focused planning document that covers the five-year plan period 2021 to 2025. It is an ongoing recreation resource planning process that:

- Identifies the state's major outdoor recreation priorities.
- Describes how federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) monies received by Illinois will help to address these priorities.

Priorities are determined through statewide and community input regarding outdoor recreation needs and preferences as well as statewide planning and conservation priorities taking into account conservation management, developing a variety of open space improvements to serve multiple resident groups, maintenance, safety, user conflict, and accessibility. This public input in outdoor recreation planning is essential to guide the identification of priorities and recommendations for action.

The 2021 SCORP was developed through a collaboration between Illinois DNR and the ORPR at UIUC. The ORPR worked with the Illinois DNR on survey development and implementation and coordinated data analysis and report writing. Several data sources were used to inform the development of the Illinois SCORP: 1) demographic and health data was reviewed and analyzed; 2) outdoor recreation and economic trends were assessed; and 3) resident, recreation provider, and a special interest group survey were employed. These surveys specifically focus on obtaining input regarding outdoor recreation needs, preferences, planning priorities and opinions regarding outdoor recreation issues. This survey was distributed via Qualtrics during the Stay at Home order issued by Governor Pritzker due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Lower than anticipated survey response rate is likely attributed to the challenges of the pandemic and changes in work arrangements for many due to the Stay at Home order. However, responding organizations reported a preference to develop and improve existing natural open spaces, protect endangered wildlife and fish habitats, maintain existing park areas, acquire more land (particularly in critical wetland areas), provide more conservation education programs, and build walking paths, trails and greenways to connect people to places. Global climate change, funding for parks, recreation, and conservation were also mentioned several times as issues of concern to special interest groups.

## RECREATION SUPPLY SURVEY

Researchers expanded and updated the recreation provider database and 574 agencies received the recreation provider survey. While the provider survey was scheduled to be distributed in May, 2020, Illinois still had the Stay at Home order in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, most park and recreation agencies were closed and focused on emergency management (e.g., strained budgets, closed facilities, canceled programs and services). Thus, the provider survey was distributed in July after park and recreation agencies resumed limited operations. Park and recreation agency leaders provided input on priorities for conservation, park development and maintenance, facility investment, and they assessed priorities for funding in the next five years.

While 204 agency representatives submitted their surveys, only 169 park and recreation organizations provided completed surveys. This was lower than the response rate from the 2015 provider survey. The 2020 provider survey was likely affected by the pandemic and the associated recession. Of the agencies that submitted their survey, 66% were from park districts, 29% from park and recreation departments, and 4.5% from county park and recreation agencies (which includes forest preserve districts).



## RESIDENT SURVEY

Many people incorporate outdoor recreation and park use into their daily lives. However, some may not have the time, interest, or access to parks and natural areas, and therefore not experience the many benefits of outdoor recreation (Hamilton et al., 2017; Kaczynski & Henderson, 2007). Thus, the resident survey provides integral data on outdoor recreation needs, attitudes, and behaviors that ensures the SCORP is relevant to Illinois residents. Questions in the 2020 resident survey closely mirrored the 2014 survey so comparisons could be made. Researchers within the ORPR at UIUC worked with Illinois DNR staff to design the survey. A stratified random sample of over 2,700 adults 18 and older completed an online survey that was distributed by Dynata, a survey research firm. While over 2,700 Illinois residents submitted the online survey, 2,177 respondents completed the entire survey. Questions requested input regarding:

- overall recreation participation
- activity-specific participation
- recreation area and facility needs
- funding priorities
- opinions about outdoor recreation and conservation
- demographics

The respondents were older (median age 52) and generally higher income than the median age and income level of Illinois residents. The average length of residency in Illinois was 39.67 years and 84% of respondents completed some form of higher education beyond high school. In terms of race, 75% self-identified as White, 12% Black, 5% Hispanic/Latino, and 5% Asian/Pacific Islander. People of Hispanic/Latino background were underrepresented given they comprise an estimated 17.5% of the population in Illinois (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Research on survey non-response indicates individuals who are Hispanic/Latino are less likely to respond to surveys (Howard et al., 1983; Zapka et al., 1994). Fourteen percent of the respondents are currently unemployed (attributed to the pandemic), while 72% of the respondents reported a minimum of $40,000 per year in household income.

## ADDITIONAL PUBLIC INPUT

In addition to the special interest group, provider and resident surveys, input on all chapters of the SCORP, particularly the development of priority areas and plan implementation, was provided by Illinois DNR staff from several departments (i.e., Realty and Capital Planning, Grants, Impact Assessment, Accountability), Office of Resource Conservation, and National Park Service staff.



Chapter 2

# ILLINOIS' NATURAL RESOURCES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

ILLINOIS
SCORP

Illinois, the "Prairie State," is at the center of the Midwest. The state spans nearly 400 miles from north to south and has approximately 58,000 square miles of land. While there is less than 1,000 feet of elevation difference from 1,235-foot Charles Mound in northwestern Illinois to 279 feet on the Mississippi River in southern Illinois, the state hosts tremendous natural diversity.

## LANDSCAPES

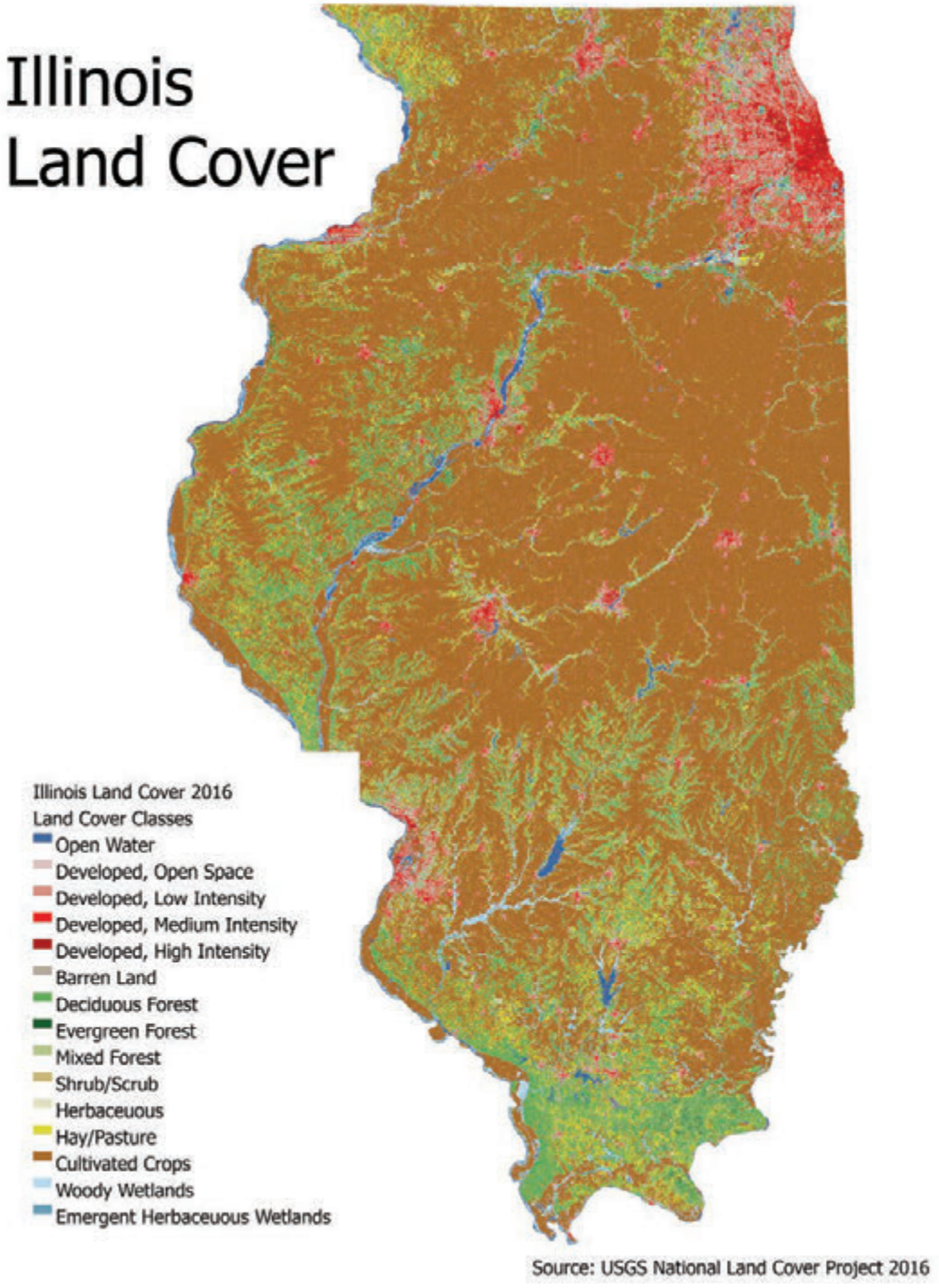
The Illinois Natural Divisions classification system identifies a broad variety of landscape divisions, plus Lake Michigan. These geographic regions are categorized by having unique topography, soils, bedrock, plants, and animals compared to other regions of the state. They are as follows:

***Wisconsin Driftless Natural Division*** – part of an unglaciated area extending from the northwestern corner of Illinois into Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota, bordered by the Mississippi River Bottomlands on the west and characterized by rugged terrain that was originally mostly forested with some prairie.

***Rock River Hill Country Natural Division*** – in north-central and northwestern Illinois, a region of rolling topography drained by the Rock River.



**Figure 2.1. Illinois Land Cover 2016**



***Northeastern Morainal Natural Division –*** in northeastern Illinois, hosting the greatest biodiversity in Illinois and the largest human population. Natural land cover has been extensively altered, but there are distinctive marshes, natural lakes, and bogs with diverse wetland, prairie, forest, savanna, and lake plant communities.

***Lake Michigan –*** one of the Great Lakes, part of the largest freshwater ecosystem in the world. Water quality has improved in recent decades, but declining water levels and invasive animals now pose great threats to the ecosystem.

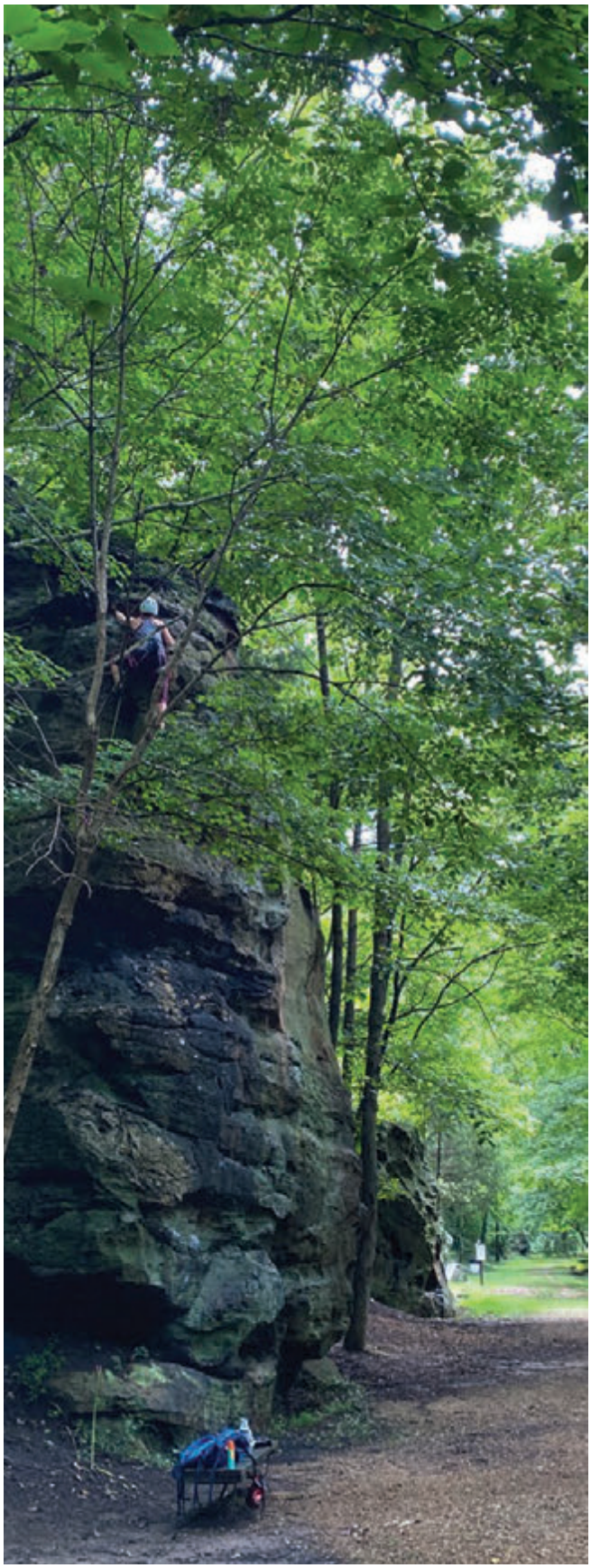
***Grand Prairie Natural Division –*** in central and east-central Illinois, a vast plain formerly occupied primarily by tallgrass prairie, now converted extensively to agriculture.

***Upper Mississippi River and Illinois River Bottomlands Natural Division –*** in western and west-central Illinois, encompassing the river and floodplains of the Mississippi River above the confluence with the Missouri River and the bottomlands and backwater lakes of the Illinois River and its major tributaries.

***Illinois River and Mississippi River Sand Areas Natural Division –*** several discrete patches of sand areas and dunes in the bottomlands of the Illinois and Mississippi rivers and 'perched dunes' atop bluffs near Hanover in JoDaviess County.

***Western Forest-Prairie Natural Division –*** in west-central Illinois, a glacial plain of Illinoian and Kansan age. Forests are predominant in river zones and on steep hillsides, with agriculture and rural grasslands in upland areas.





***Middle Mississippi Border Natural Division –*** in west-central Illinois, a narrow band of river bluffs and rugged terrain bordering the Mississippi River floodplain from Rock Island County to St. Clair County and the lower Illinois River floodplain. Forest is the predominant vegetation, and limestone cliffs are common features.

***Southern Till Plain Natural Division –*** in south-central Illinois, a dissected Illinoisan glacial till plain south of the terminal Wisconsinan moraine. Forest was found along streams, and prairie occupied the level uplands.

***Wabash Border Natural Division –*** includes bottomlands and uplands bordering the Wabash River and its major tributaries in southeastern Illinois.

***Ozark Natural Division –*** consists of the part of the Ozark uplift that extends into southwestern Illinois. It is plateau topography with bluffs along the Mississippi River and a sinkhole plain in the northern section, mostly forested with many hill prairies.

***Lower Mississippi River Bottomlands Natural Division –*** includes the Mississippi River, silt-laden below the confluence with the Missouri River, and its floodplain from Alton to the Thebes Gorge. There are prairies, marshes and rich forests with several southern lowland tree species.

***Shawnee Hills Natural Division –*** extends across the southern tip of Illinois. It is presently the most heavily forested of Illinois' natural divisions and hosts outstanding biodiversity.

***Coastal Plain Natural Division –*** of extreme southern Illinois, a region of swampy forested bottomlands and low clay and gravel hills. Floodplain at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers and Cache and Ohio rivers includes rich bottomland forests, with bald cypress-tupelo swamps a unique feature.

## WATERS

Illinois is outlined by distinct boundary waters; the Mississippi, Ohio, and Wabash rivers and Lake Michigan. The Illinois River is the prominent drainage basin in the north-central and west-central areas of the state. Illinois' 26,000 miles of rivers and streams in their natural state had marshes and vegetation that protected their edges from erosion. Agriculture and development have drastically altered many of the waterways, but efforts to manage for ecological sensitivity have helped to restore health and quality of the rivers; however, work continues to address nutrient loading, sedimentation, and loss of riparian habitat. Lakes and ponds, primarily man-made and ranging in size from small farm ponds to large federal reservoirs, are also abundant throughout the state. Illinois's rivers and lakes provide extensive opportunities for water-based recreation; including fishing, hunting, boating, and swimming. Water-dependent bird-watching is another popular activity.

## WETLANDS

Prior to European settlement, wetlands covered about eight million acres of Illinois, or about 23 percent of the land. Currently about 3.5 percent (1.25 million acres) of the state land cover is classified as wetland. However, only three-quarters of the currently existing wetlands can be considered natural wetlands and representative of the State's original wetlands. The other quarter of the wetland acres have been modified or created by dikes, impoundments, or excavation activities.

Wetlands come in many shapes, sizes, and varieties. These range from the marshy edges of large lakes, to the typical cattail ringed pond that comes to mind for many people when they think of a wetland. However, other important wetland types are often overlooked. These may include low spots in agricultural fields that only hold water for a few days or weeks each spring, but can provide




food and migration habitat for various bird species, as well as forested areas along streams and rivers that only rarely flood, but are an important habitat for many species of wildlife. These types of wetlands may be especially vulnerable to destruction or degradation because they are not the typical habitats most people associate with the term "wetlands." However, this does not diminish their importance.

Wetland related recreation is important in Illinois. Groups such as hunters, fishers, birders and other wildlife watchers, paddlers, hikers, and others visit these habitats to enjoy the outdoors and the opportunities they provide. Many of these groups contribute significantly to local and statewide economies, as well as contributing to wetland conservation initiatives. For instance, over 40,000 Illinois sportsmen and women hunt waterfowl each year, mostly in wetland habitats, and purchase both federal and state Migratory Waterfowl Stamps required to hunt ducks and geese. These stamps alone contribute nearly $1 million dollars each to wetland conservation, and funds are distributed within Illinois, nationally, and in other parts of North America.

## OUR CHANGING POPULATIONS

Illinois is becoming an older and more ethnically diverse state. These demographic changes, among others, will change people's recreational behaviors and the demand for different recreation programs and services. An aging population will increase demand for more passive forms of recreation, while changes in ethnicity could shift recreation behaviors towards a more diverse array of cultural and outdoor sport offerings that are popular amongst different cultures. The ORPR at UIUC analyzed changing demographics in Illinois by comparing 2010 Census data to 2019 Census estimates, and assessed their implications on recreation.



## DEMOGRAPHICS

The population in Illinois declined by 1.2% from 2010 to 2019 (U.S. Census, 2019). Southern Illinois had the greatest decrease (4.74%), while the greater Chicagoland area saw a negligible decrease of 0.06%. Consistent with national trends, the State of Illinois is an aging state. From 2010 to 2019 each age cohort under 61 decreased: 0-20 (-10.01%), 21-40 (-2.20%), 41-60 (-7.54%), while the 61+ cohort increased at a very high rate (+25.84%). The median age of Illinois residents increased by 2.0 years, from 36.6 to 38.6 during this same time span. Illinois is becoming more ethnically diverse as the White (non-Hispanic) population continues to decrease while Hispanic/Latino and other ethnic group populations continue to increase. Comparing 2010 to 2019, White only (non-Hispanic) populations comprised 71.5% of the Illinois population in 2010, compared to 60.8% in 2019 Census estimates. Hispanic/Latino populations increased from 15.8% in 2010 to 17.5% in 2019. The African American population stayed consistent at 14.5% in 2010 compared to 14.6% in 2019, and the Asian population increased from 4.6% in 2010 to 5.9% in 2019. Moreover, family composition has declined slightly from 2014 to 2018 (U.S. Census, 2019). In 2018, the average family size was 3.21 people, compared to 3.56 in 2014. Average household size also declined from 2.64 to 2.56 people.



Chapter 3

# RECREATION SUPPLY SURVEY FINDINGS

ILLINOIS SCORP

Although 204 providers responded to the online survey, 33 agencies did not answer all of the questions. Thus, findings included in the 2021 SCORP are based on the 169 completed park and recreation agency surveys that were submitted. Despite having a larger database with current agency information (e.g., contact name, address, email), the response rate in 2020 was significantly lower than 2013, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, rather than a mailed survey, agencies were reached with an online survey to increase the likelihood they would complete the survey. Several events likely influenced the response rate: 1) park and recreation agencies were closed during the Stay at Home order (March 21 – May 30th); 2) many park and recreation agencies reorganized during that time and many executive directors retired. Approximately 24 retirements were documented by the receipt of auto-reply messages that directed researchers to contact another person in the agency; and 3) park and recreation agencies have prioritized their own planning and operations in the midst of trying to re-open and manage strained budgets.

## TYPES OF PARKS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION PROVIDERS

Illinois' extensive system of local parks provides critical close-to-home opportunities for outdoor recreation. Nearby nature has been an important resource for individuals, families, and communities during COVID-19. Moreover, work from home policies and less hours commuting in 2020 has shaped park use and outdoor recreation. Nearby nature and recreational facilities are also becoming a way for Illinoisans to increase activities to improve and maintain health and well-being. This is especially important due to overweight and obesity prevalence among Illinois residents, particularly among youth (IDPH, 2016).

> ***"Illinois' extensive system of local parks provides critical close-to-home opportunities for outdoor recreation.***

***Community:*** Park districts and municipal parks and recreation departments provide many outdoor venues for recreation, including parks, open lands, and extensive recreational facilities for local and regional area residents. Community parks are places where kids and adults can get outdoors, enjoy activities, or spend quiet time. The greatest value of community parks may be that residents view them as local natural landmarks valuable to their neighborhoods and quality of life.

***County:*** Forest preserves, conservation areas, and/or county level parks and recreation departments normally maintain larger parcels of land and natural areas, than at the community level. This allows county conservation and forest preserve districts to preserve natural resources, offer resource-based outdoor recreation, and usually have a strong conservation education mission. Because county districts are generally in metropolitan counties, they play an important role in providing resource-based outdoor recreation near most of the state's population. Counties are enabled by state statute to form conservation districts and forest preserve districts through public referendum; eighteen counties have such districts. There is one regional (two-county) parks and recreation district, which was established through special legislation.

While national parks may be the pride of the country, individuals are more likely to visit parks and recreation facilities in their own community or region than to travel great distances to visit majestic parks. Nearby nature and close proximity to parks is important and meaningful for quality of life.

### State

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources manages over 470,000 acres throughout the state. Included are a wide range of parks, fish & wildlife areas, conservation areas, recreation areas, and others. State Parks may be considered the jewels of the state's system of outdoor recreation lands. These are areas of exceptional scenic and natural value and major tourism destinations. State Fish and Wildlife Areas are managed primarily for conservation of land and water resources, and provide notable fishing and hunting opportunities. State Natural Areas protect remnants of Illinois' natural landscape. State sites provide recreational opportunities that offer diverse opportunities at many sites, but only simple nature observation at others. Most state sites demonstrate a combination of outdoor recreation with natural resource conservation management practices.

"State Parks, Great Parks" was initiated in 2012 with the passage of sustainable funding legislation. A portion of motor vehicle registrations is now directed to the improvement of state parks, targeting backlogged maintenance projects and site operations.

### Federal

The 280,000-acre Shawnee National Forest across the hilly Ozark Plateau of extreme southern Illinois is the state's largest and most well-known federal site. National Wildlife Refuges along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers; Crab Orchard Lake and Cypress Creek in southern Illinois; and the newest Hackmatack refuge in extreme northern Illinois at the Wisconsin border comprise an exceptional collection of refuges that offer outstanding hunting, fishing, and other fish- and wildlife-associated outdoor recreation opportunities. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers manages three large reservoirs: Carlyle, Shelbyville, and Rend lakes in central and southern Illinois. Constructed for flood control and water supply, they are also major recreation areas with outstanding boating and fishing opportunities.

### Other

Three additional categories of providers are schools, nonprofit, and private entities. They provide unique aspects to the outdoor recreation needs of the community, but were not included in the recent statewide park land and recreation facilities inventory due to the narrow and specific population utilizing their amenities. These organizations may provide athletic fields, walking tracks, playgrounds, campgrounds, hunting areas, and other facilities.

## EVALUATION OF ILLINOIS' SUPPLY OF OUTDOOR RECREATION LANDS AND FACILITIES

The assessment of outdoor recreation lands and facilities is a fundamental part of the SCORP. For Illinois to provide the most accurate representation of outdoor recreation lands and facilities, improved assessment and inventorying techniques have been enabled to ensure the collection of more accurate data. The Illinois Community Recreation Facilities and Park Lands Inventory, initiated in 2007, is Illinois' ongoing assessment of local recreation resources.

### Park Sites and Acreage Inventory

Three categories of providers comprised the agencies that responded to the provider survey: county, department, and park district. Figure 3.1. describes the number of park sites and acres, natural area acres, and leased property acres reported by the providers. Based on 169 responses, providers reported 3,503 park sites under their management. Natural areas accounted for 44% of total park acreage.

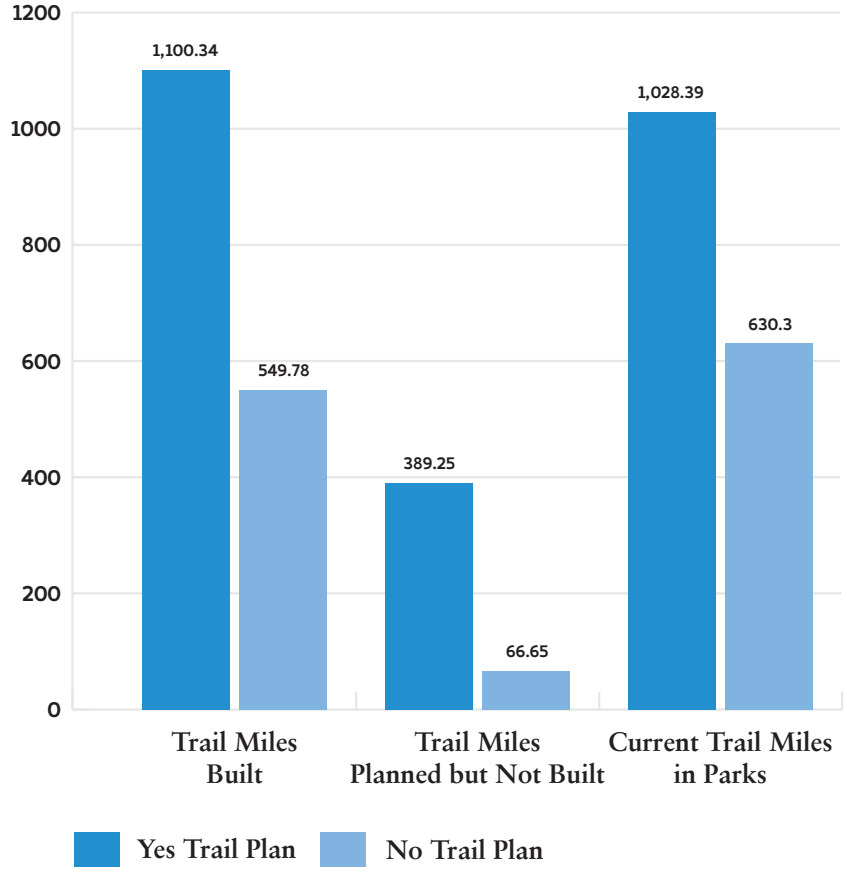
**Table 3.1. Inventory of Illinois' local parks & recreation agencies**

| 2020 | County | Department | Park District | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Number of Park Sites** | 203 | 542 | 2,758 | **3,503** |
| **Acres** | 29,711 | 16,819 | 76,295 | **122,825** |
| **Natural Area Acres** | 20,608 | 8,682 | 24,656 | **53,946** |
| **Leased Acres** | 273 | 842 | 4,804 | **5,919** |

## Trail Development Plans

The survey findings indicate more than 1,650 miles of trails have been built in Illinois. More than half of the county-level and department level providers reported that they have trail development plans, whereas only 36% of park districts have such plans. Figure 3.2. further revealed that providers with trail development plans constructed more trails than providers without these plans. The existence of the plan appears to be especially important for the total number of trails that will be built in the future, indicating an almost six times higher number of miles for providers with trail development plans than those without such plans. This result suggests having a trail development plan is an important factor for an agency's ability to increase their capacity for providing trails for recreation and transportation.

**Figure 3.2. Number of trail miles compared to having a trail development plan**




A close examination of the extent of trails and pathways planned and built (Table 3.3.), indicates a high variance across agencies regarding the number of miles of existing and recently built trails. While on average, about 11 miles of trails exist or were built, the standard deviation (SD) is large for both indicators. This means there is great variability in the length of trails that exist and were built. Thus, many park and recreation agencies have very few (if any) miles of trails, yet others have up to nearly 39 miles of trails. As such, trails in the state may vary in the number of miles and length by provider.



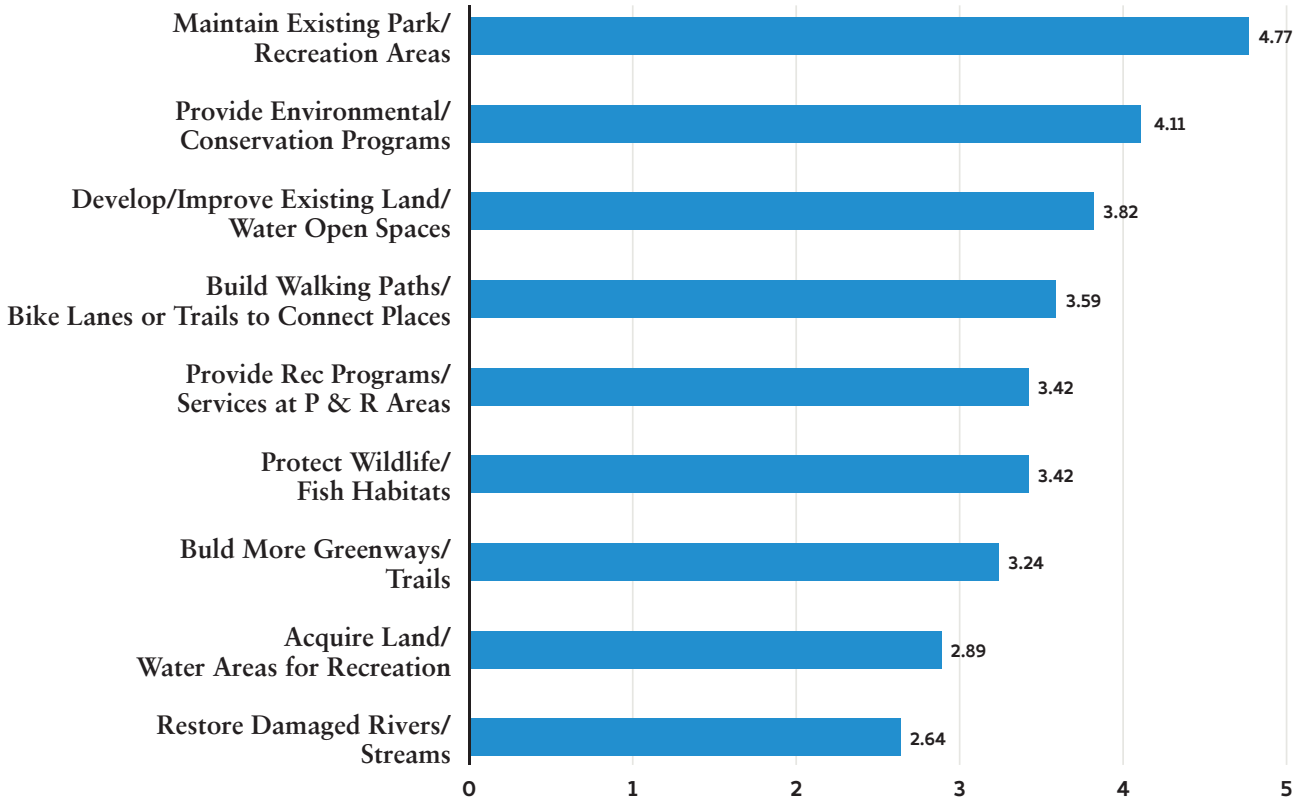
**Table 3.3. Mean and standard deviation of miles of trails**

| | Mean | (SD) |
|---|---|---|
| Built | 11.15 | (27.80) |
| Planned (but not built) | 3.12 | (7.23) |
| Existing trails | 10.77 | (27.15) |
| Outside your park boundary | 5.70 | (18.01) |

## FUNDING PRIORITIES

As indicated in Figure 3.4., providers identified maintaining existing park and recreation areas as their most important funding priority in relation to overall outdoor recreation and conservation efforts. Environmental and conservation programs were viewed as the second most important funding priority. Improving existing land/water open spaces and building walking paths/trails that connect places was found to be the third and fourth ranked funding priorities. Natural areas for recreation and water damage restoration were perceived as relatively low priorities compared with other funding areas rated by providers. However, natural areas for recreation and water damage restoration were ranked significantly higher by the Illinois DNR, United States Army Corps of Engineers, and National Park Service.

**Figure 3.4. Level of priority for funding outdoor recreation and conservation efforts**

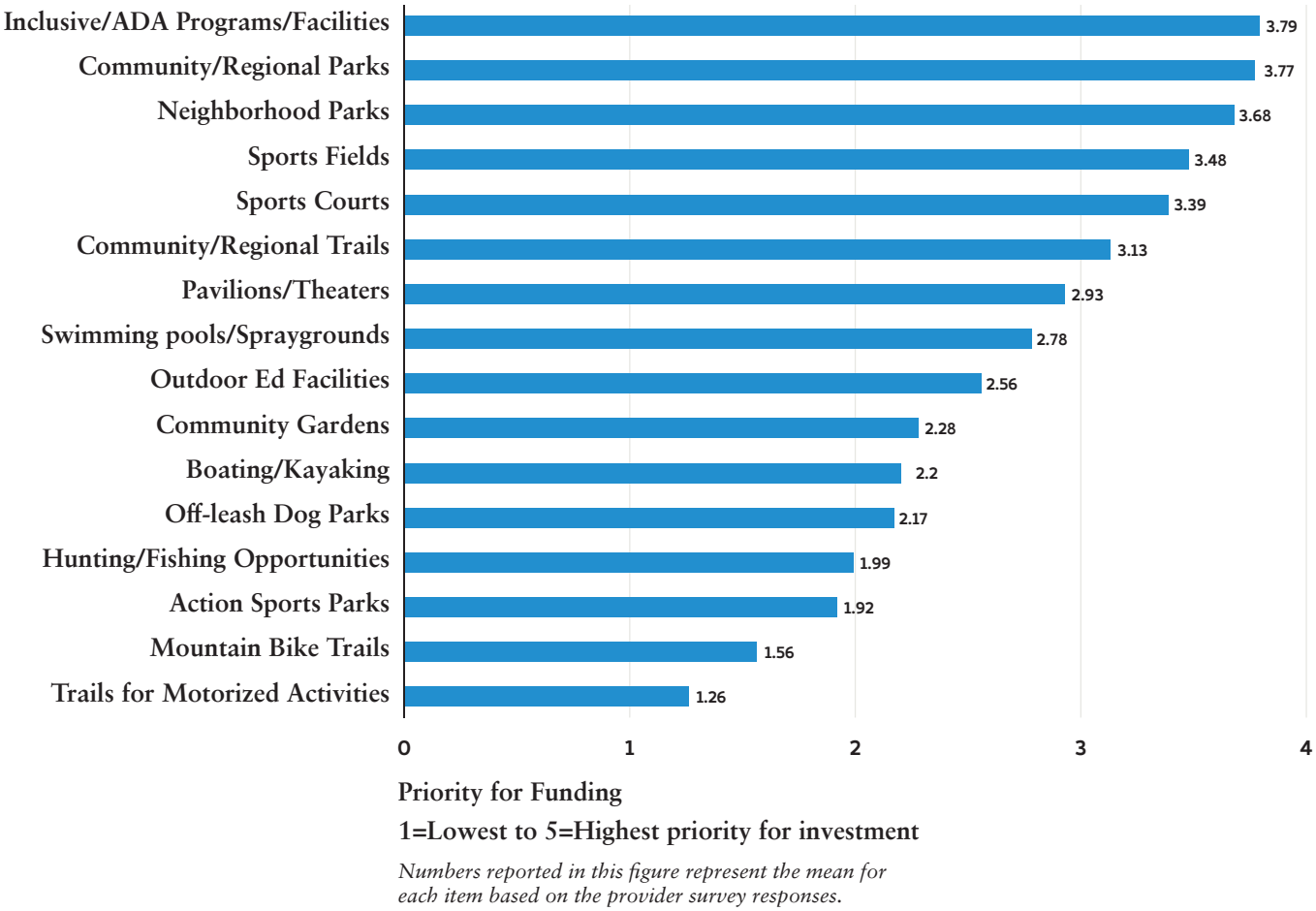



*Numbers reported in this figure represent the mean for each item based on the provider survey responses.*





Figure 3.5. Level of priority for funding facilities




*Numbers reported in this figure represent the mean for each item based on the provider survey responses.*

In terms of priority for investing in facilities (Figure 3.5), inclusive programs and facilities for persons with disabilities were found to be the highest priority; this priority includes enforcing / updating compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design. The second and third highest provider priorities were related to community / regional parks and neighborhood parks respectively, indicating the need to provide additional service at the local-and-community-scale throughout the state. In general, sports-related facilities (e.g., sports fields, sports courts) were considered a high priority while facilities for mountain bike trails and trails for motorized activities were regarded as lower priorities by providers. In specific regions, Illinois DNR reports strong demand for mountain bike trails and motorized activities which are not supported by the provider survey results. Illinois DNR reports some slight variation between regional responses where members of special interest clubs (e.g., motorcycle clubs) may not have responded to the resident survey, thus skewing the overall findings slightly.



Chapter 4

# 2020 ILLINOIS OUTDOOR RECREATION DEMAND

ILLINOIS SCORP

## RESIDENT SURVEY RESULTS

### Importance of Recreation in Everyday Life

Among the over 2,700 Illinois residents that responded to the resident survey, nearly all respondents agreed that they value outdoor recreation resources. Respondents evaluated the importance of recreation opportunities in their everyday lives with response categories that ranged from "not at all important" to "very important." Results indicated that 83.4% of respondents believe outdoor recreation plays an important role in their everyday life, which is comparable to how residents rated the overall importance of recreation in the 2014 survey.

## CONDITION OF RECREATION AREAS

Compared to five years ago, 80% of respondents reported that outdoor recreation areas and facilities are either in the "same" or "better" condition than before, whereas 16.4% rated the condition of recreation areas as "not as good" as before. When comparing 2020 and 2014 resident surveys, analysis of results showed that the condition of outdoor recreation areas is perceived to have improved over the last five years with a 6% decrease in respondents who stated the condition was "not as good."

## ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION AND IMPORTANCE

The category of scenic drives was added to the 2020 SCORP and Resident Survey. Median participation rate of residents for the new scenic drives category was five times per year (Table 4.1; Figure 4.2). Nearly 80% of Illinois residents rated scenic drives as an important activity and indicated the importance of creating new scenic drives. Among the respondents, off-road motorcycling was not as popular as scenic drives, but this activity is important to many Illinois residents. The median participation rate for off-road motorcycling was three times in the last 12 months and 43.8% rated the activity as important.

When comparing to the 2014 and 2020 SCORP and Resident Surveys, the 2020 SCORP and Resident Survey show that similar trends were observed -- both pleasure walking and running/jogging had the highest medians for participation (Figure 4.2). Findings from the 2020 survey also indicate a major decrease (by 20 times/year) in the median number of times that residents ran/jogged compared to 2014. Additionally, in 2014, the median participation rate for pleasure walking was 30 times compared to 25 times/year in 2020. Even with two additional activities in the 2020 survey, the total median participation in outdoor recreation in 2014 was 62 times/year more than the median participation times/year in 2020. It appears that overall participation rates of recreation activities may be on a decline compared to 2014. One explanation for this decline in participation is that the 2015 resident survey sample skewed toward a younger population. Thus, this decline is not representative of the population.



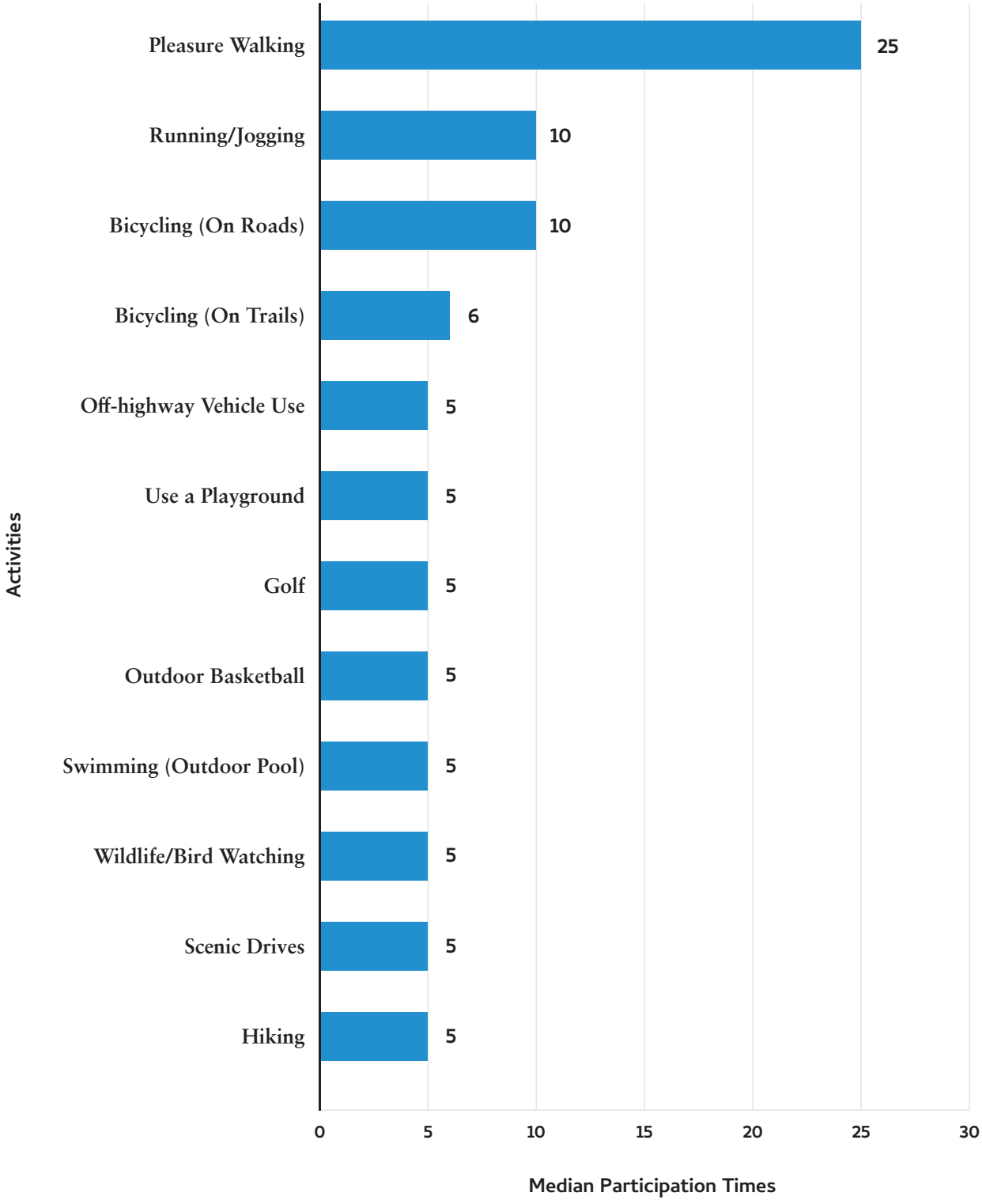
**Table 4.1. Outdoor recreation activity participation in the last 12 months and importance for activities to be made available to Illinois residents**

| Activities | Median Participation Times/Year | Not Important | Somewhat Important | Very Important |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ROAD AND TRAIL ACTIVITIES** | | | | |
| Pleasure Walking | 25 | 8.3% | 22.5% | 69.3% |
| Running/Jogging | 10 | 29.8% | 29.8% | 40.4% |
| Bicycling (On Roads) | 10 | 30.2% | 34.6% | 35.2% |
| Bicycling (On Trails) | 6 | 28.6% | 30.3% | 41.0% |
| Mountain Biking | 3 | 48.3% | 31.0% | 20.7% |
| Hiking | 5 | 27.6% | 34.9% | 37.6% |
| Scenic Drives | 5 | 20.9% | 34.1% | 44.9% |
| **WILDLIFE ACTIVITIES** | | | | |
| Fishing | 4 | 33.5% | 32.6% | 33.9% |
| Hunting | 4 | 53.0% | 25.2% | 21.8% |
| Wildlife/Bird Watching | 5 | 28.6% | 35.9% | 35.5% |
| Trapping | 3 | 66.3% | 20.0% | 13.8% |
| Camping (Tent) | 2 | 36.3% | 33.5% | 30.2% |
| Camping (RV) | 3 | 39.2% | 31.6% | 29.2% |
| **WATER ACTIVITIES** | | | | |
| Motor Boating | 4 | 40.6% | 32.7% | 26.8% |
| Water Skiing | 2 | 44.6% | 31.4% | 24.0% |
| Canoeing/Kayaking | 3 | 37.0% | 34.2% | 28.9% |
| Sailing | 2 | 41.7% | 32.3% | 26.0% |
| Swimming (Lake/River) | 4 | 32.6% | 33.5% | 33.9% |
| Swimming (Outdoor Pool) | 5 | 26.6% | 31.1% | 42.3% |

**Table 4.1 continued. Outdoor recreation activity participation in the last 12 months and importance for activities to be made available to Illinois residents**

| Activities | Median Participation Times/Year | Not Important | Somewhat Important | Very Important |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **SPORTS** | | | | |
| Softball/Baseball | 4 | 35.6% | 32.0% | 32.4% |
| Soccer | 3 | 39.5% | 29.3% | 31.2% |
| Outdoor Basketball | 5 | 36.7% | 32.0% | 31.4% |
| Tennis | 4 | 37.1% | 30.8% | 32.1% |
| Pickleball | 3 | 49.9% | 31.1% | 18.9% |
| Baggo/Bag toss | 4 | 48.1% | 31.1% | 20.8% |
| Lacrosse | 3 | 51.9% | 30.6% | 17.5% |
| Bocce Ball | 2 | 49.0% | 32.7% | 18.3% |
| Horseshoes | 3 | 44.9% | 36.2% | 19.0% |
| Golf | 5 | 34.6% | 29.2% | 36.3% |
| **WINTER ACTIVITIES** | | | | |
| Cross-country Skiing | 2 | 45.6% | 31.7% | 22.7% |
| In-line Skating | 3 | 48.8% | 30.5% | 20.7% |
| Snowmobiling | 3 | 48.4% | 32.3% | 19.3% |
| Ice Skating | 2 | 40.9% | 31.8% | 27.3% |
| **OTHER ACTIVITIES** | | | | |
| Use a Playground | 5 | 31.4% | 25.4% | 43.2% |
| Visit Amphitheater or Band Shell | 3 | 36.5% | 32.6% | 30.9% |
| Picnicking | 4 | 27.2% | 31.1% | 41.7% |
| Horseback Riding | 2 | 42.9% | 33.4% | 23.6% |
| Off-road Motorcycling | 3 | 56.2% | 29.6% | 14.2% |
| Off-highway Vehicle Use | 5 | 54.7% | 28.5% | 16.9% |

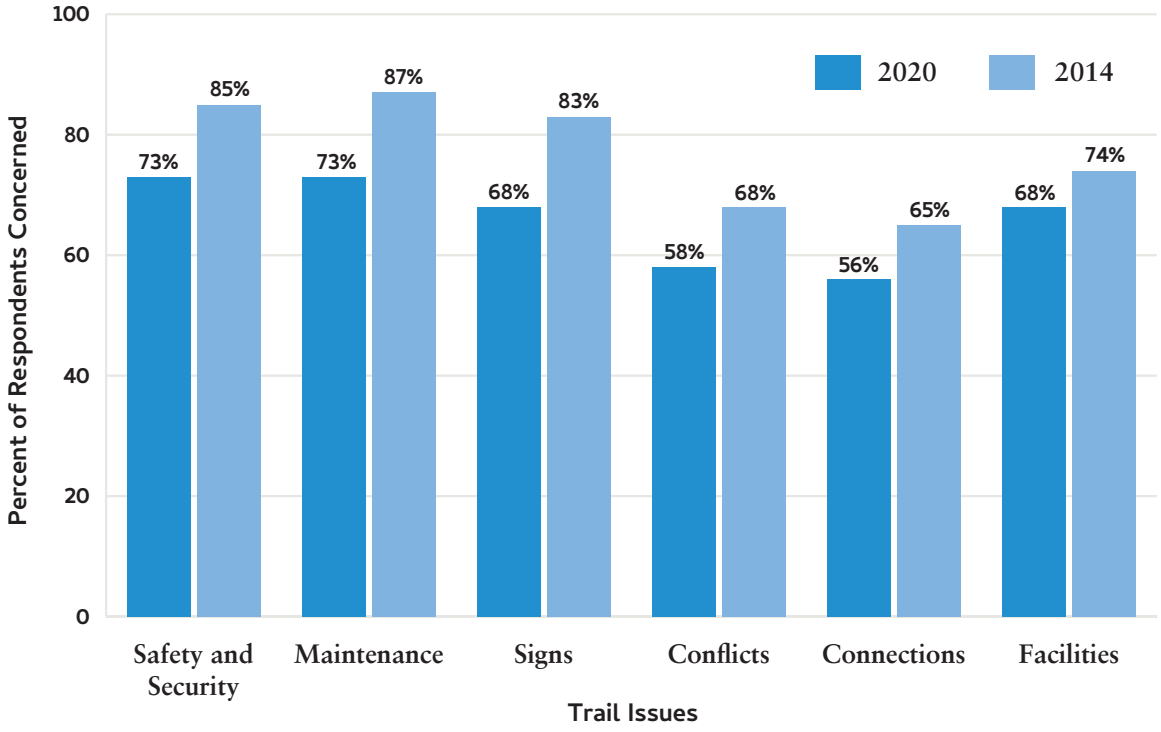
Figure 4.2. Average participation times of recreation activities in the last year



## TRAIL CONCERNS AND ISSUES

Residents were asked to rate how concerned they are about trail related issues in Illinois; residents rated these issues on a 4-point scale from "very concerned" to "not concerned at all." Of the listed issues, respondents were most concerned with safety, maintenance, signs, and facilities, and less concerned with conflicts among trail users and the connection between multiple trails and places for community access. Over two-thirds (72.6% and 72.4% respectively) of respondents indicated that safety and security along trails and maintenance are concerns to them. Another concern reported by two-thirds (67.5%) of respondents was ensuring that trails are properly marked with wayfinding and warning signs. Overall, compared to 2014, the degree of overall trail concerns (combining "somewhat" and "very concerned") decreased around 11% across all trail issues listed in 2020.

**Figure 4.3. Trail concerns and issues 2014 vs 2020**





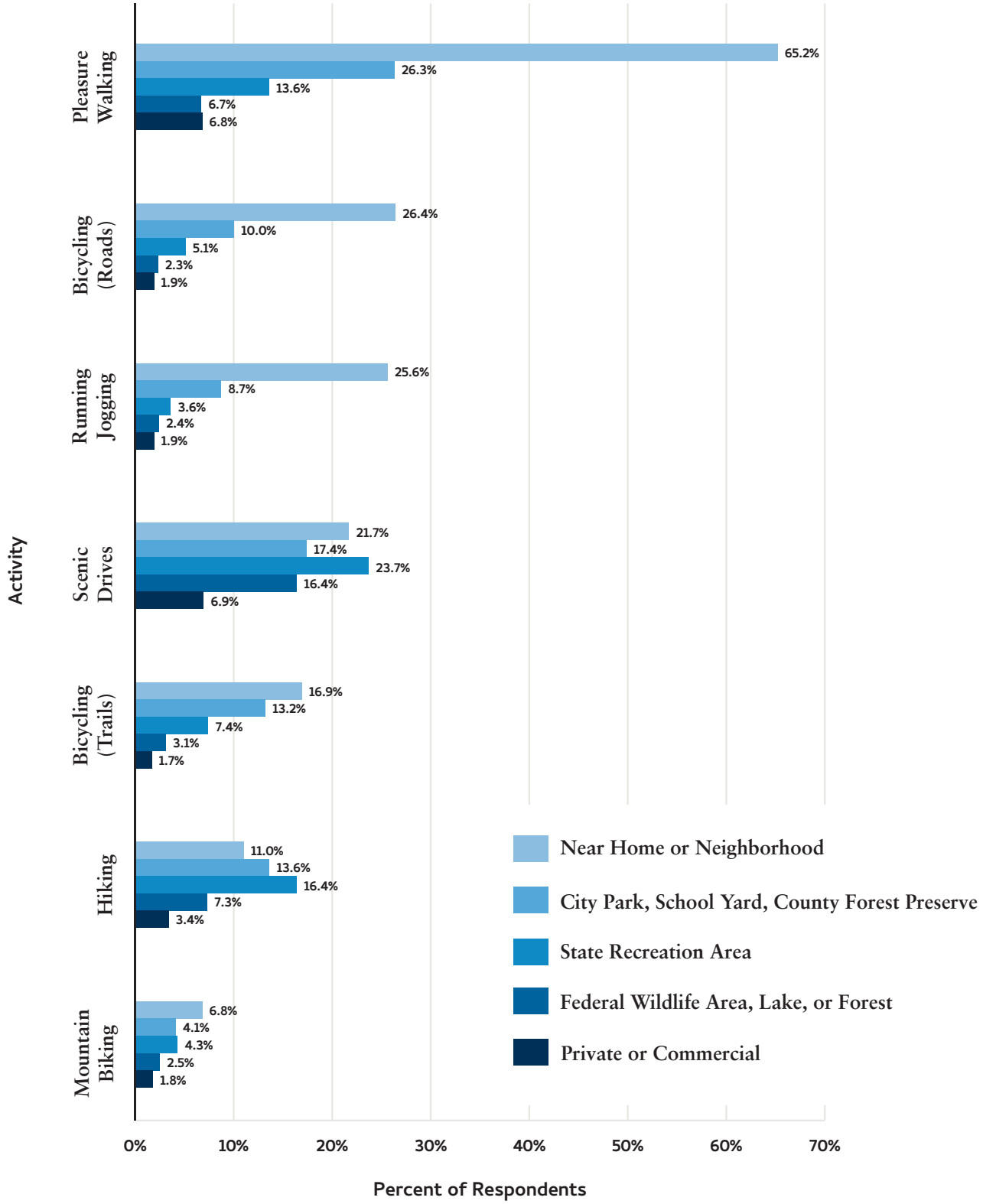

## OUTDOOR RECREATION LOCATIONS

Illinois residents were asked where they primarily participated in outdoor recreation activities in the last year. Residents' primary locations varied depending on the activity, but even so, most recreation activities take place at or around peoples' homes or neighborhoods (Figure 4.4). Two-thirds (65.2%) of respondents indicated they remain close to their home or neighborhood when pleasure walking, while 26.3% go to a community or neighborhood park, school yard, or a county forest preserve for walking and only 13.6% reported they go to a state park or state recreation area. About a quarter (23.8%) of respondents indicated they enjoy observing wildlife and bird watching around their homes. Swimming in a lake or river near their neighborhood was reported by 9.3% of the sample, while 22.8% visit an outdoor pool nearby. On average, 11.8% of respondents stated they would stay around their home or neighborhood when participating in outdoor recreation activities, while 6.9% on average visit community and neighborhood parks, school yards, and county forest preserves to participate in activities. Surprisingly, on average 67.4% did not participate in the activities listed. Additionally, the least popular activities engaged in by respondents were trapping and lacrosse, while the most popular activities were pleasure walking and scenic drives.

More respondents visit state recreation areas over areas close to home to participate in activities such as hiking, camping in an RV or taking scenic drives. Moreover, almost a quarter (23.7%) of respondents went to a state recreation area to hike, while 21.7% stayed around their home or neighborhood. Furthermore, 17.4% expressed that they had utilized a community or neighborhood park, school yard, or county forest preserve with a close 16.4% utilizing federal wildlife areas, lakes, or forests to participate in outdoor activities.



Figure 4.4. Road and trail activity locations



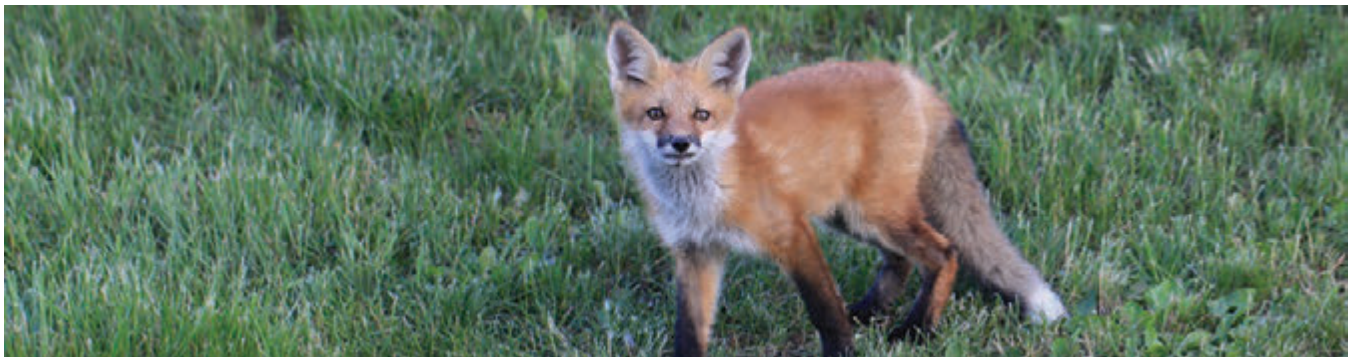
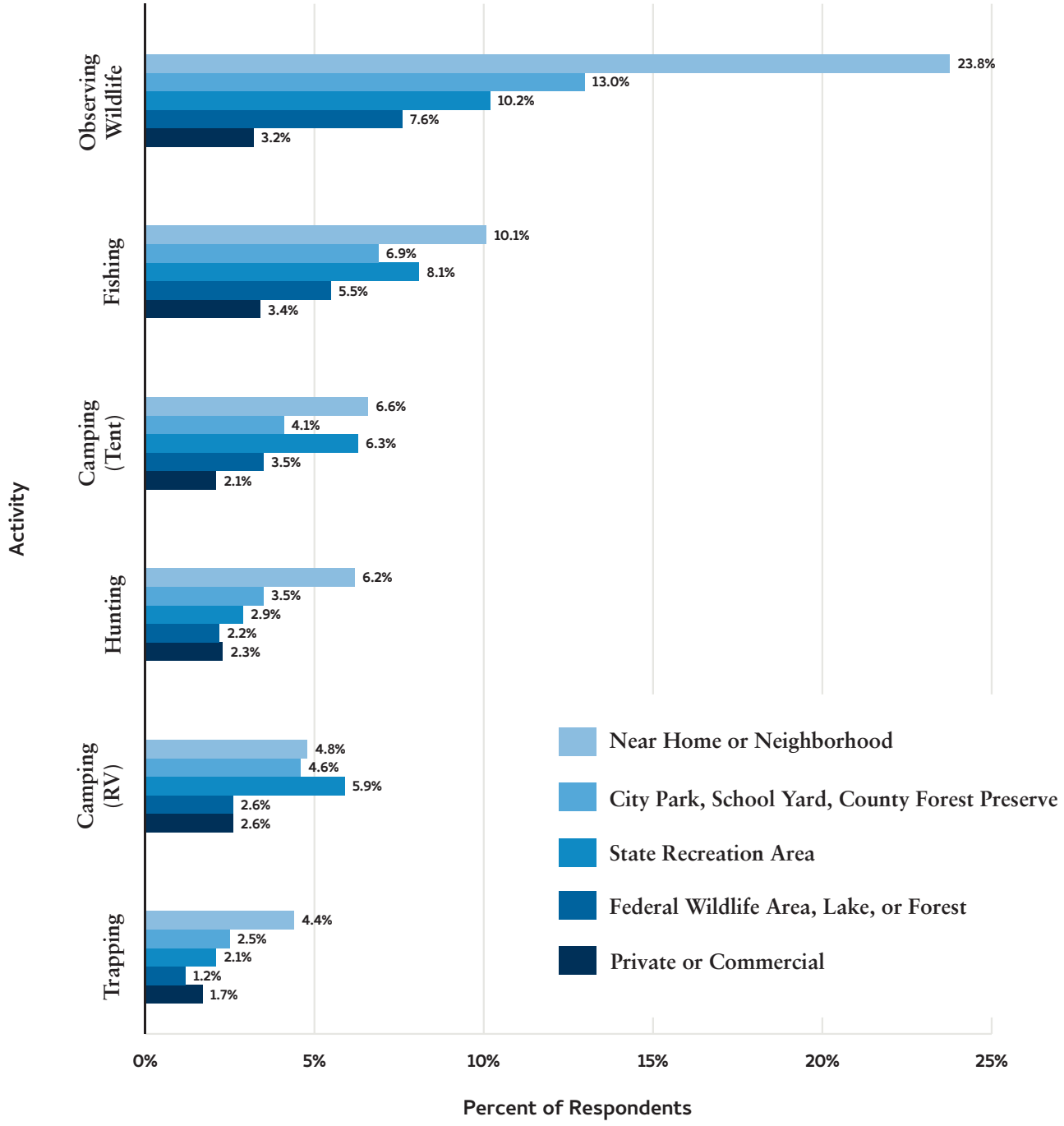


Figure 4.5. Wildlife activity locations





## MOTIVATION FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION ENGAGEMENT

Residents were asked to rate various motivations for engaging in outdoor recreation activities and were given an opportunity to provide an open-ended answer (if applicable). Motivations were rated on a 4-point scale from "not important at all" to "very important" with an option to select "not sure".

Most respondents (over 80%) selected "to have fun", "exercise/keep healthy", "spend time with family and friends", and "experience nature and/or the outdoors" as the most important motivations to engage in outdoor recreation activities (Table 4.6). Although fewer respondents rated "to escape the daily routine" (76.4%), "expose your children or grandchildren to nature" (61.6%), and "to seek new challenges/develop new skills" (48.9%), respondents indicated these motivations were important for their engagement in outdoor recreation.

**Table 4.6. Importance of motivations for engaging in outdoor recreation activities**

| Motivation | Not Sure | Not Important at all | Less Important | Important | Very Important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| To experience nature and/or enjoy the outdoors | 2.6 | 4.3 | 8.8 | 37.1 | 47.1 |
| To exercise and/or keep healthy | 2.4 | 5.2 | 10.3 | 33.5 | 48.6 |
| To spend time with family and/or friends | 2.3 | 5.7 | 11.7 | 35.3 | 45 |
| To seek new challenges and/or develop new skills | 3.9 | 17 | 30.2 | 28.7 | 20.2 |
| To expose your children or grandchildren to nature | 8 | 17.7 | 12.7 | 29.2 | 32.4 |
| To escape the daily routine | 3 | 7.4 | 13.2 | 39.9 | 36.5 |
| To have fun | 2.2 | 3.7 | 9.9 | 34.7 | 49.5 |

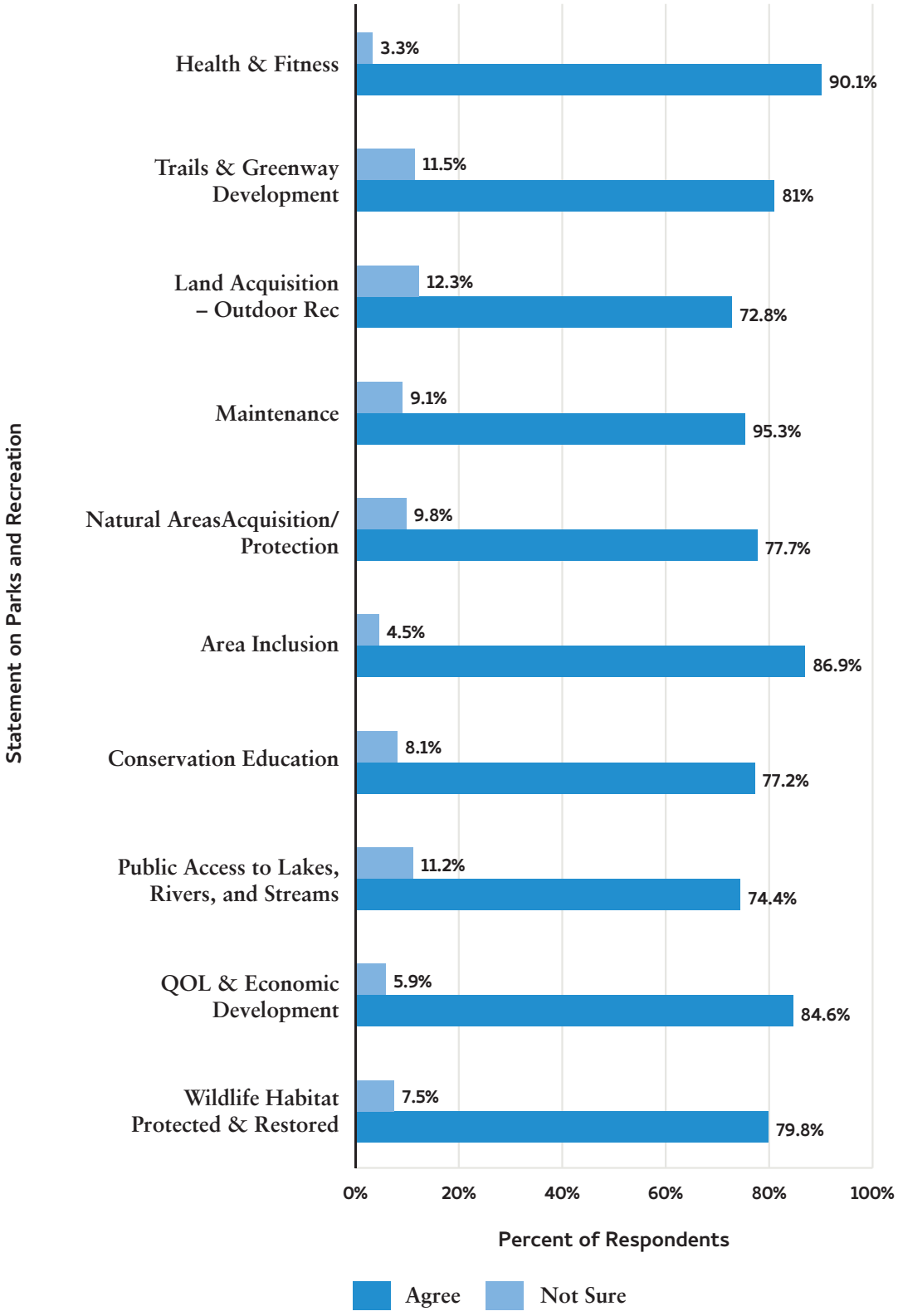
## OUTDOOR RECREATION RESOURCES

Residents were asked to report how much they agreed or disagreed with a variety of statements that pertain to outdoor recreation resources. Figure 4.7 indicates that over 90% of Illinois residents agreed outdoor recreation areas and facilities are important for health and fitness and 86.9% agreed that outdoor recreation areas and facilities should serve all people, regardless of physical ability, ethnic background, or income. Additionally, 84.6% of respondents felt that a community's outdoor recreation areas and facilities are important to quality of life and for the promotion of economic development. Illinois residents want to see more wildlife habitats protected and restored with 79.8% in agreement. Over three quarters (77.7%) of respondents indicated they would like to see more natural areas be acquired and protected – especially high-quality, undisturbed prairies, forests, and wetlands.

Findings suggest residents strongly value outdoor recreation for health, inclusive access to parks and outdoor recreation for all and indicated parks and outdoor recreation contribute to quality of life and economic development in their community. Overall, residents "agreed" and "strongly agreed" that more trails and greenways should be developed, more natural areas should be acquired, and wildlife habitats, should be protected and restored. Respondents also indicated a desire for more conservation of natural areas, environmental education, and outdoor education in Illinois. Respondents also indicated that the state should continue to prioritize park maintenance and that more land should be acquired to provide additional opportunities for outdoor recreation.



Figure 4.7. Opinions of outdoor recreation resources



## CONCERNS ABOUT PARKS AND RECREATION

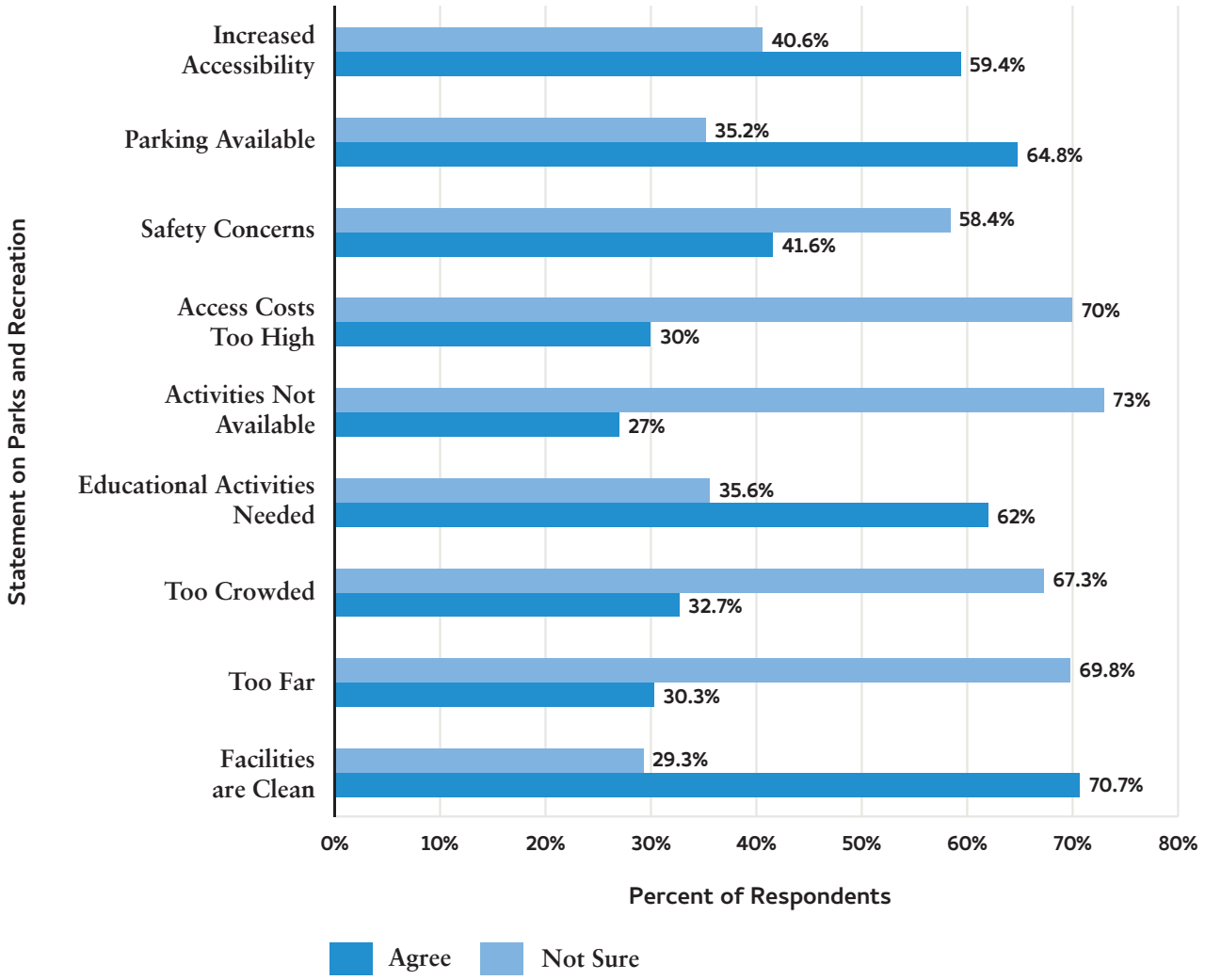
Respondents were asked how much they strongly agreed to strongly disagreed (or are not sure) with statements indicating a range of concerns regarding parks and recreation (Figure 4.8). More than two-thirds (70.7%) of residents agreed that park facilities are clean and well-maintained and 64.8% noted there is enough parking at parks they visited. Additionally, 62% of respondents agreed that more educational activities are desired, including nature programs and guided hikes. Also, 59.4% indicated the parks they like to visit should be more accessible for individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, 41.6% of participants agreed that safety is an issue at parks. Respondents commented in general about safety, suggesting the presence of rangers/park staff provided assurance and they stressed COVID-19 related safety concerns (e.g., distancing, disinfecting equipment). However, only 27% agreed that their favorite activities are not available. Among the activity suggestions were programs for different age groups, volunteer programs and educational programming. Relatively few (30%) respondents agreed that parks and recreation costs are too high.

Interestingly, none of the respondents in the sample "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with any of the listed concerns; rather a large proportion (from 29% to 73%) of respondents indicated they were "unsure" how to respond. This was especially true when it came to their favorite activities being made available and park and recreation costs being too high. A fairly large proportion of respondents also answered "unsure" regarding parks being too far from residents' locations and parks being too crowded. Those who answered "unsure" are also likely to visit parks less frequently, which helps explain their answers.





Figure 4.8. Concerns regarding parks and recreation





## NATIONAL OUTDOOR TRENDS

As one of the nation's largest economic sectors by GDP, outdoor recreation generated $887 billion in consumer spending annually, which is almost as large as the hospital care sector (Outdoor Industry Association, 2017). This spending includes outdoor recreation products ($184.5 billion) and trip and travel spending ($702.3 billion). The Outdoor Recreation Economy report also suggested the East North Central region (Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio) spent $110.3 billion -- creating 959,000 jobs, $7.9 billion federal tax revenues, and $7.6 billion state and local tax revenues (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). Camping, fishing, hunting, motorcycling, off-roading, snow sports, trail sports, water sports, wheel sports, and wildlife viewing comprised the majority of the outdoor recreation economy. While expenditures were not assessed in the resident survey, these activities are popular among Illinois residents, especially in regions (e.g., southern and northwest, western Illinois) where there is greater access to these activities.

Along with the economic significance of the outdoor recreation sector, findings from the Outdoor Foundation survey (2019) indicated that outdoor participation rates and the number of outdoor recreationists increased in recent years with the growth of the U.S. population. Specifically, the outdoor participation rate has increased from 47.4% to 50.5%, with an increase of 5.7 million participants from 2017 to 2018 (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). Despite the increasing trend of outdoor participation, only half of the US population (151.8 million) participated in at least one outdoor activity. In other words, almost half of Americans did not engage in any outdoor recreation activities and therefore, did not receive the health and well-being benefits associated with outdoor recreation participation. The average annual outdoor outings per participant also declined by 7.4 outings over the past year. Nationally, residents indicated that running was the most popular outdoor activity with 57.8 million residents participating in running, jogging, and trail running. Other popular activities included fishing, biking, hiking, and camping. Illinois residents' outdoor recreation participation in 2020 is aligned with some of these national trends. For example, walking, bicycling, and running/jogging were the most frequently participated in activities.

A close examination of the Outdoor Foundation's survey respondents revealed that most outdoor participants typically have at least some college-level education and a higher household income -- at least $75,000. Findings from this national survey also indicated outdoor participation was highest among White residents (73.7%) and lowest among Black residents (3.4%). Among the Hispanic/Latino population, participation growth was the strongest, and Hispanics/Latinos reported the highest average annual outings per participant (62.7 outings). Among children aged 6 to 12, White children had the highest outdoor participation rate (65.9%), and Asians had the highest participation rate among adolescents aged 13 to 17 (64.9%).This finding implies the need for more inclusive outdoor recreation programs targeted to different population groups with lower socioeconomic status and ethnic and racial minorities.



## COVID-19 IMPACT ON RECREATION

### Changes in Recreation Demand and Behavior

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed the way in which people across the globe utilize and value traditional parks, natural areas, and other open spaces. Public spaces have become more widely recognized, both by healthcare professionals and the public, as essential services that are important to our health, well-being and overall quality of life. Nearby nature, parks, and outdoor recreation can decrease stress, improve attention, and serve as an antidote to nature deficit disorder brought on by the prevalence of technology use and being indoors (Kuo, 2015; Markevych et al., 2017). Due to the stay at home order, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a surge in recreation demand across the globe. For example, an Oslo, Norway study estimated that outdoor recreation increased by 291% during the initial lockdown in March, equating to approximately 86,000 extra activities per day within a municipality of 690,000 residents (Venter et al., 2020). Moreover, a survey of 4,484 birders across 97 countries found that birders' activity became more localized due to the pandemic, resulting in increased birding in their own yards, decreased social interactions (birding alone or only with their spouse), and cancelled field trips and society meetings (Randler et al., 2020). These findings show both an increase in outdoor recreation demand and a shift towards more localized forms of outdoor recreation amidst the pandemic.

Outdoor recreation participation also skyrocketed during the pandemic in the U.S. where a study of 111 counties showed an average 2.5% increase in greenspace visitation (Rice & Pan, 2020). This shift towards local recreation and tourism presents the opportunity to market Illinois' natural beauty, culture and heritage (e.g., Amish areas near Arthur, Cahokia and Dickson Mounds, Allerton Park), flora and fauna (e.g., wildlife refuges, Emiquon, natural areas), and agritourism (e.g., wine, lavender farms, orchards), among others that connect outdoor recreation settings with activities sought by tourists (including locals). The pandemic has compelled people to emphasize more local, regional and state destinations. People have increased their use of nearby nature and they have sought parks and natural areas in various regions of Illinois they may have otherwise overlooked. The focus on nearby nature and regional/state trips helps to facilitate individual and community health and well-being. Moreover, since Illinoisans have increased their interest and use of parks, they desire greater equitable access to parks and natural areas and want to ensure the conservation of these natural resources. Doing so will also help to improve funding and demonstrate the economic impact and value of parks and natural areas in Illinois.



Chapter 5

# PRIORITIES AREAS

ILLINOIS SCORP

Rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds are the setting for many outdoor recreation activities. Water is a direct need for fishing, boating, and swimming; and water resources are also valuable for many other activities like picnicking, camping, and wildlife watching. While Illinois' water resources are diverse and extensive – including 26,000 miles of streams, rivers, and creeks in river basins, additional access to waters for recreational purposes is always in demand. However, access to these water bodies for boating, canoeing, kayaking, and day use can be challenging due to extensive private ownership of lands adjoining these waterways. Agriculture and development have drastically reduced the health of Illinois streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes; and conservation and restoration of water resources is a priority to restore, conserve, and protect ecological systems and associated recreation. The water stewardship/access priority therefore involves:

- Protection, restoration, and management of Illinois' water resources, for resource protection and to provide for water-based recreational use.
- Expansion of water-based recreational lands and facilities.

Findings from the 2020 Illinois Outdoor Recreation Survey indicated that more than two-thirds of Illinoisans stated there should be more public access to lakes, rivers, and streams and more than 80% stated that wildlife habitats should be protected and restored, and over 90% stated outdoor recreation is important to their quality of life. Moreover, findings from the recreation provider and resident surveys pointed to several priority areas that are explained in the next section.

# IMPROVING HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Health and wellness are cornerstones of prosperous communities, happy residents and thriving economies. However, the United States and Illinois face several public health crises that have compromised the health and wellness of individuals and economies at the local, state and national level. In 2012, U.S. health expenditures equated to $2.9 trillion dollars, or 17.9% of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (Wolf et al., 2015). Projections for 2015-2025 indicate growth in health spending of 5.8% per year, with health spending projected to grow 1.3% faster than GDP. This means the share of GDP spent on healthcare is expected to rise from 17.5% in 2014 to 20.1% by 2025 (CMS, 2016). While the United States spends more on healthcare than any other country, they consistently rank lower in health outcomes compared to other developed countries (OECD, 2020a, 2020b).

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an economic recession, the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, and countless other issues. However, the U.S. faces other public health issues such as high rates of obesity and chronic disease, an aging population, disparities in healthcare provision and health insurance amongst certain segments of the population (e.g., rural, low income), and inadequate mental health and social services for those who need them most. Tackling these complex health issues requires a shift towards a more asset-based approach to healthcare that utilizes community resources such as parks and outdoor recreation that can improve quality of life, facilitate chronic disease prevention and management, and promote healthy lifestyles. Increasing health expenditures coupled with an overburdened healthcare system are evidence that other social services (such as parks and outdoor recreation) need to be repositioned as auxiliary healthcare service providers (Payne, 2004; Payne et al., 2013).

In what ways does outdoor recreation positively impact health? Parks and recreation promotes physical activity, reduces stress, enhances positive affect, restores attention and promotes socialization (Orsega-Smith et al., 2004; Godbey et al., 2005; Bedimo-Rung et al., 2005). However, many of these benefits are not unique to parks and outdoor recreation. Where parks and outdoor recreation can provide additional benefits is through direct exposure to natural environments. Nature exposure contributes to health in many ways. For example, nature exposure can reduce stress, improve one's overall vitality and subjective well-being, and restore directed attention, which is required to do work (Hurly & Walker, 2019; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Orsega-Smith et al., 2004). In a study comparing groups walking in a forested versus an urban environment, researchers found that even though physical activity levels were similar, those walking in forested environments saw significant increases in certain hormones that are beneficial towards reducing obesity, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cancers and viral infections (Li et al., 2011). In a separate study, it was found that nature exposure helped regulate blood glucose levels and promoted activation of the

> ***"Nature exposure can reduce stress, improve one's overall vitality and well-being, and restore directed attention…."***



parasympathetic nervous system, which shifts the body towards a deeply relaxed state, thus producing stress-buffering and stress relief effects (Kuo, 2015). Additionally, natural elements such as plants and trees contain biological and chemical agents that positively impact human health. One such example is that plants give off phytoncides [antimicrobial volatile organic compounds] which reduce blood pressure and boost immune functioning (Komori et al., 1995; Dayawansa et al., 2003; Li et al., 2009). This list of direct health benefits of nature exposure is by no means all-encompassing and the health impacts extend beyond what was provided in this summary. What is clear from this research is that nature directly impacts physical health and should be understood and communicated by outdoor recreation service providers.

Additionally, Americans live increasingly sedentary lifestyles and leisure time that used to be spent outdoors is increasingly being spent indoors in front of a screen. Advancements in these technologies have shifted from primarily being a passive form of leisure (i.e., television) towards a more immersive experience where people develop and maintain their social networks online (i.e., social media, dating apps etc.), and in some cases even create a new virtual identity (i.e., videogames and virtual reality). Because of this continual increase in screen time and decrease in time spent in natural settings, the health benefits of nature should be promoted by outdoor recreation and park providers, simply because these direct health benefits of nature exposure cannot be substituted through a screen. Effective messaging that conveys the health benefits of nature exposure and park resources should be developed, but the challenge is to reach segments of the population with less access and exposure to nature. Social media marketing may be an effective strategy.

Other outdoor recreation issues include overcrowding in urban parks, which is especially problematic during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, park proximity remains an issue as residents in both Chicagoland, the Metro East area of St. Louis and more rural parts of Illinois often do not have outdoor recreation spaces within close proximity, due to most land being privately owned.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has created significant economic and logistical challenges for parks and recreation agencies, it has also reemphasized the importance of outdoor recreation resources amongst the general public, local officials and healthcare providers. This pandemic has made it clear that parks and outdoor recreation spaces are not just an amenity, but also provides essential physical, mental and socio-emotional health benefits. This is the ideal time to position parks and outdoor recreation services as a part of the healthcare system through park prescription programs and recreation programming such as the NRPA BOKS program (a free physical activity and nutrition program; BOKS Team, 2020), and Every Kid in a Park. Moreover, it is an ideal time to revitalize the NPS Healthy Parks, Healthy People Initiative.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Promote Health Benefits of Nature-Based Activities

Commonly cited benefits of park use and outdoor recreation activities such as physical activity, stress reduction, positive affect and socialization opportunities should continue to be promoted. Additionally, health benefits tied specifically to nature exposure should be cited, as these health benefits are best achieved through parks and outdoor recreation spaces. It is important for parks and outdoor recreation leaders, and residents, to effectively communicate these benefits to position outdoor recreation as an essential service. For instance, with the pandemic, many people who typically use indoor gyms had to switch to using open space, parks and trails since facilities were temporarily closed. Effectively conveying the additional health benefits of natural environments beyond physical activity may make these users more likely to continue to use outdoor recreation spaces for physical activity, stress restoration and other benefits after restrictions are lifted, rather than as a temporary substitute.

### Encourage Communities to Plan for Active Transportation

Even if residents are well aware of the health benefits of outdoor recreation and nature-based activity, structural constraints (e.g., lack of access, lack of transportation) that make parks inaccessible to its residents can affect interest and access to outdoor recreation. Research shows that people are more likely to engage in outdoor recreation and use parks if they are within close proximity (one mile or less) to where they live (Kaczynski, Potwarka, Smale, & Havitz, 2009). Not having a park near home is associated with less park use and outdoor recreation engagement. While the development of new parks (particularly in urban environments) can be challenging (e.g., costs, land availability), creating more walkable communities, connecting trails and greenways and developing smaller "pocket parks" are ways to increase accessibility to open space. Trails also provide safer travel to parks, another important factor in park usage, especially for walkability, in areas where public transportation is either non-existent or unreliable.

### Develop Park and Nature-Based Outdoor recreation Programs that Foster Social Interaction

Often overlooked in health and wellness is the importance of social health. Research indicates that chronic loneliness may be a greater predictor of mortality than other well-known risk factors such as smoking, obesity, and air pollution (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). For example, the UK has recognized loneliness as an epidemic and major public health crisis. To combat this, they have implemented a system of "social prescribing" in which general practitioners prescribe socially based outdoor recreation programs such as community gardening and volunteerism to lonely patients. While this idea is new and needs to be studied further, loneliness and social isolation have been major societal issues well before the pandemic (Cacioppo, 2013) and are increasingly so during the pandemic. People are looking for safe, socially distanced opportunities for real face-to-face social interaction during the pandemic, and outdoor recreation spaces provide the perfect opportunity for this. While some outdoor recreation opportunities are preferable for solitude, promoting other activities in outdoor spaces that provide socialization opportunities may draw in new users who are looking for social connections not delivered through a screen during this time.



## ACCESS TO PARKS AND RECREATION

Providing equitable access to outdoor recreation is fundamental to outdoor recreation planning. Quality access is made possible through ongoing maintenance, land acquisition, prioritizing and communicating the importance of local parks and recreation for health and community services, and ensuring equitable access to parks, trails, and greenways.

Due to infrastructure aging and ongoing maintenance, the state continues to assess ways to maintain parks. But through the "State Parks, Great Parks" initiative in 2012 with the passage of sustainable funding legislation, a portion of motor vehicle registrations is now directed to the improvement of state parks, targeting backlogged maintenance projects and site operations. Though maintenance is a priority, so is the acquisition of open space for public use. Through the acquisition of land and water for parks and recreation, lands are protected against commercial development as state acquired land stays with the state, which enables more opportunities for outdoor recreation in the future.

Framing local parks and recreation as an essential part of residents' health and well-being continues to be of paramount importance to the development of healthy communities. In fact, due in part to parks and outdoor recreation activity being deemed more safe than indoor activity, outdoor recreation has increased in popularity in Illinois. Many believe this recent surge in parks use and outdoor recreation will endure long after the COVID-19 crisis ends. Even before COVID-19, there was an identified need for trail and greenway planning to help connect communities and places while acknowledging that trail/greenway needs vary across urban, suburban, and rural areas.

> ***"Framing local parks and recreation as essential to resident's health and well-being has continued to be essential to community well-being.***

Although park and recreation agencies continue to face challenges, these very challenges also can spur creativity and innovation in parks and recreation planning. There are opportunities for example, for the adoption of more sustainable and low cost maintenance practices. These strategies can open up more opportunities for land acquisition for preservation and outdoor recreation.

While residents may be aware of outdoor recreational opportunities in the state, they may not fully be aware of all the amenities that recreation sites offer and the role these sites play in the community. Thus, partnerships and collaborations with a variety of local and regional organizations (e.g., environmental, health, community) should create more awareness, value, and appreciation for parks and recreation. This can be accomplished through social media marketing and grass-roots initiatives, mobile apps, and websites. Increased awareness can also be important to bring communities, organizations, and people together for trail and greenway planning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As residents' needs for nearby nature continue to be an asset to enhance the quality of community life, it is important the state communicate best practices for the siting, design, and management of parks, open spaces and trails. Doing so will help ensure that current and sustainable maintenance and operations practices are also utilized to manage parks and outdoor recreation.

### Land Acquisition

In 2020, 55 years after the inception of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the first SCORP, Illinois continues to recognize the need for land acquisition, specifically for the OSLAD and LWCF programs, but also to improve the state's legacy of natural lands and outdoor recreational opportunities. Land acquisition continues to play a key role in providing additional outdoor recreation opportunities to the public and ensures the land stays protected under the federal and state's authorities, limiting the development and loss of public land through missed acquisition opportunities. Also, land acquisition for wetlands restoration and protection, along with other important habitats , is a priority for the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan (IWAP). The IWAP identifies species of greatest conservation need, and the particular habitat types those species rely on. In particular, as part of the IWAP, the Wetlands Campaign aims to positively impact these species by advocating for increasing the acreage and quality of these habitats. Wetland conservation within the IWAP is prioritized by Natural Divisions in Illinois.

This priority on land acquisition directs that, for OSLAD and LWCF grant proposals, land acquisition projects are eligible to receive a higher level of funding assistance than development projects. Further, Illinois commits at least 50% and often more of its annual LWCF apportionment to local government land acquisition projects. Other programs, such as the Open Land Trust, over the years have focused their efforts and made progress in acquiring lands for natural resource preservation and outdoor recreation purposes.

### Utilization of Available Resources

While parks and outdoor recreation sites continue to play impactful roles in residents' lives, it is important to continue to convey the essential role these areas play in our communities. To engage and reach a larger audience through available technology and partner organizations, it is important to utilize existing evidence (e.g., peer reviewed published studies, Trust for Public Land and National Recreation and Park Association policy briefs) when appropriate, and access new data to demonstrate the essential role that parks and recreation plays in community vitality and quality of life. This will ensure the agencies utilize data and marketing to develop impactful relationships with the community in ways that strengthen the mission of local parks and recreation.

### Development of Trail Plans

An increased understanding of the value of trail and greenway plans should emphasize the importance of access to parks, trails and greenways that connect people and places. To further promote the development of trail plans, park and recreation agencies are encouraged to emphasize active recreational transportation and/or trail development plans based on the feasibility within their communities. Another strategy is to share case studies and develop an awards program for communities who have been innovative in negotiating challenges in the development of trails and greenways. This will help encourage the development of plans which will aid in providing additional funding and future growth of trails and greenways in the state of Illinois.



# NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

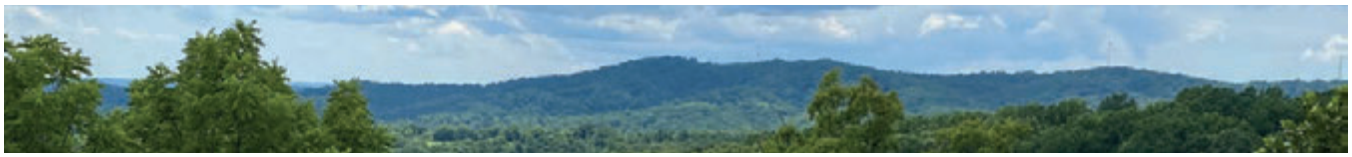
Continuing to maintain existing parks, natural areas, trails, wildlife, and other outdoor recreation facilities is a catalyst to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for communities throughout Illinois. As discovered by the 2020 Illinois Outdoor Recreation Provider Survey, maintaining existing park and outdoor recreation areas was the most important priority for funding outdoor recreation and conservation efforts, indicating the significance of the issue. Parks and natural areas are expected to be well-maintained, clean, and readily accessible for public recreation. In the meantime, it is challenging for park and recreation agencies to address maintenance issues while serving Illinoisan's increased demand for parks and outdoor recreation.

Maintenance factors can be associated with Illinoisans' perceived safety of public parks and natural areas. Wilson and Kelling's (1982) Broken Window Theory emphasized that physical signs of disorder such as unrepaired damage to property can result in the reduced perceived safety of the general public. Accordingly, maintenance should be performed to ensure parks are perceived as well maintained and safe places for citizens to engage in outdoor recreational activities. To secure sustainable funding for ongoing and additional maintenance, park foundations, community groups, donors, and sponsors can supplement the resources needed to maintain parks and natural areas.

Natural resource stewardship – including protection, conservation, restoration, and enhancement – has been emphasized throughout the past SCORP and remains a key priority for this SCORP. With the increasing challenges and the considerable impact on the state's natural resources, stewardship practices will play a significant role in ensuring resource conservation and protection.

Illinois citizens place a high value on preserving natural resources in the state. Consistent with the results from previous Illinois Outdoor Recreation Resident surveys, the 2020 survey found that approximately 80% of respondents believe more natural areas and wildlife habitat should be protected and restored. While Illinois residents consistently support wildlife protection and restoration, there is still a lack of knowledge about protected wildlife and endangered species. Not only in Illinois, but in the USA, environmental literacy is low (Coyle, 2005). This is partially due to the lack of both formal and informal environmental educational opportunities (Johns & Pontes, 2019). Additionally, hunting and fishing are increasingly popular, especially in some regions of the state, which is perceived to be one of the largest threats to wildlife and habitat (Maxwell et al., 2016).

Despite these challenges, park visits and outdoor recreation activities can provide a captive audience to learn about wildlife and endangered species. Thus, parks and outdoor recreation areas have the potential to serve as the places to develop knowledge and values from direct experiences with nature.



### Wetland Recreation

Wetland related recreation is important in Illinois. Groups such as hunters, fishers, birders and other wildlife watchers, paddlers, hikers, and others visit these habitats to enjoy the outdoors and the opportunities they provide. These recreationists contribute significantly to both local and statewide economies and to wetland conservation initiatives. For instance, over 40,000 Illinois sportsmen and women hunt waterfowl each year, mostly in wetland habitats, and purchase both federal and state Migratory Waterfowl Stamps required to hunt ducks and geese. These stamps alone contribute nearly $1 million dollars each to wetland conservation, and funds are distributed within Illinois, nationally, and in other parts of North America.

### Wetland Degradation

Wetland degradation, or loss of wetland quality, continues to be a problem in many areas of Illinois. "An estimate of pre-settlement wetlands for Illinois was 9,412,659 acres. The most recent inventory of wetlands in Illinois reveals that approximately 917,765 acres of natural wetlands remain, of which only 5,000 acres are undisturbed." (Baum, 1995). The majority of remaining wetlands are negatively impacted and fragmented with adversely modified regional hydrology, water quality, invasive species, and sedimentation, which limits floristic quality and support for fish and wildlife. Wetland degradation not only poses risks for the ecosystem and structure of wetlands, but also limits the capabilities of wetland recreation. The Illinois DNR continues to place a high priority on wetland protection and restoration.

### Policies and Programs

Pursuant to the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Act [520 ILCS 10/11(b)] and Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act [525 ILCS 30/17], and as set forth in procedures under Title 17 Ill. Admin. Code Part 1075, the Illinois DNR implements consultation on potential impacts to state protected natural resources (i.e., threatened and endangered species and sites protected under Illinois Nature Preserve Commission programs). Consultation is required on actions funded, authorized, or performed by state and local government agencies which will change existing environmental conditions. Consultation is implemented through the Ecological Compliance Assessment Tool (EcoCAT) developed and managed by the Illinois DNR. The Illinois DNR reviews projects for protected natural resource impacts that it funds or performs itself, such as grant programs, in an internal program known as the Comprehensive Environmental Review Process (CERP).

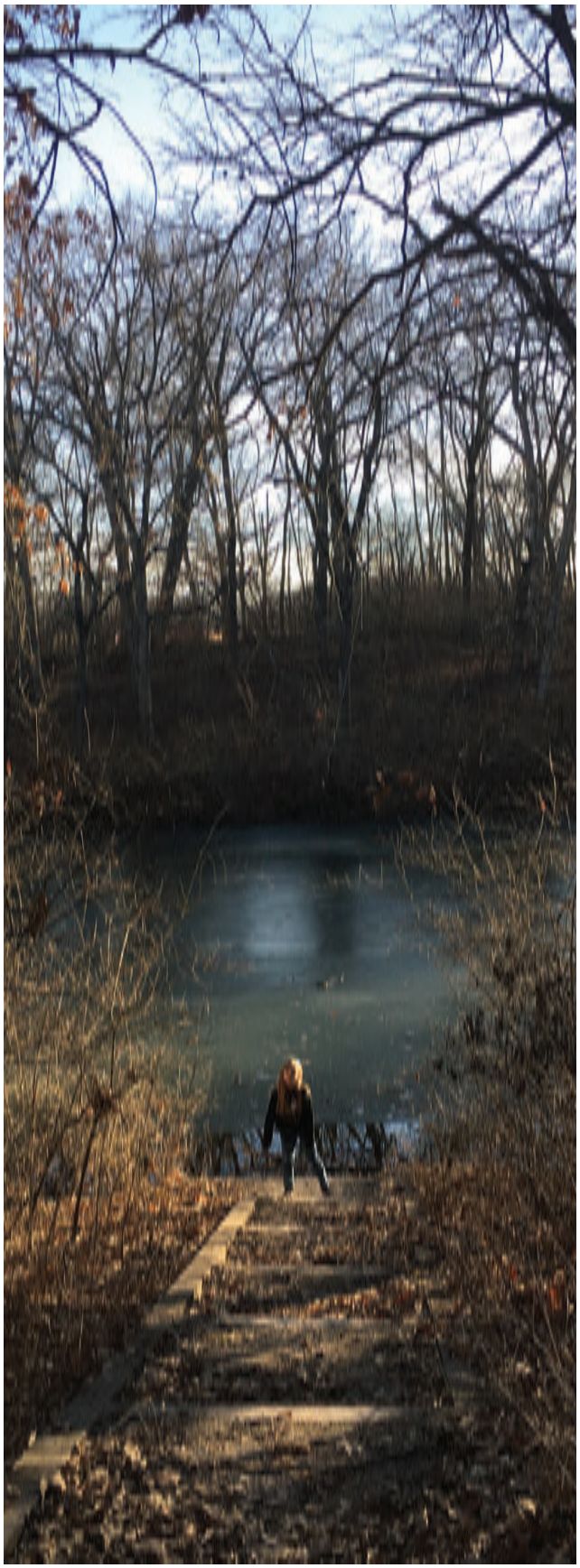
Specifically regarding construction and development activities at parks and outdoor recreation areas, project proponents are able to quickly engage in consultation with Illinois DNR staff to determine what rare and sensitive natural resources may occur in an area, and how to best avoid and minimize impacts, or otherwise comply with these applicable regulations. Given parks and other outdoor recreation areas often support rare, high quality habitats and endangered species, this program helps ensure park infrastructure projects avoid and minimize impacts to state protected natural resources. Such environmental considerations are consistent with survey respondents placing "habitat protection" as a high priority of outdoor recreation areas.

The Illinois Interagency Wetland Policy Act (IWPA) of 1989 [20ILCS 830/ 1-1-4-1] is intended to ensure there is no overall net loss of the state's existing wetland acres or their functional values

resulting from state-supported activities. The Act charges state agencies with a further duty to preserve, enhance and create wetlands where necessary to increase the quality and quantity of the state's wetland resource base. Areas that have been restored or created as the result of mitigation or planned construction projects, and which function as wetlands, are also defined as wetlands under the Act even when all three wetland parameters-hydric soils, wetland hydrology, hydrophytic vegetation-are not present.

The Act applies to any activity that the state funds or performs and is to be implemented through Agency Action Plans and individual projects are submitted for review using the Illinois DNR's Ecological Compliance Assessment Tool (EcoCAT). Illinois DNR Wetland Action Plan addresses the following elements mandated by the Act:

- Provisions for a consultation process.
- Procedures to minimize the destruction of wetlands caused or encouraged by state supported construction, land management, technical assistance, educational and other activities.
- Procedures for the development of a Wetland Compensation Plan.
- Procedures to scientifically monitor the success of wetland restoration and creation projects.
- An acquisition policy related to the implementation of this Act.
- Procedures to increase the quantity and quality of wetlands as a standard component of agency activities including incentives for the creation of wetlands in the agency's regulation of activities for which the Act does not require wetland compensation plans.



Numerous Illinois DNR programs preserve, enhance and create wetlands, and the department promotes a variety of incentives to further the goal of "no net loss," including cost-share programs, technical assistance, and property tax reductions. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Bikeways Acquisition Fund, Partners for Conservation, and various other programs have successfully protected, restored, and enhanced wetlands in many areas of the state.

### Wetlands Campaign

Wetland conservation in Illinois also receives direction from the Wetlands Campaign of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan (IWAP). The Wetlands Campaign consists of partners from around the state who are dedicated to wetland conservation, and the group aims to prioritize conservation to maximize benefits to wetland dependent wildlife and wetland users (Illinois DNR: Wetlands Campaign, 2015) More specifically, the IWAP identifies species of greatest conservation need, and particular habitat types those species rely on. The Wetlands Campaign aims to positively impact these species by advocating increasing the acreage and quality of these habitats. Wetland conservation is prioritized by Natural Divisions within Illinois. The Natural Divisions that received the highest priority for wetland conservation are: Northeastern Morainal, Upper Mississippi and Illinois River Bottomlands, Lower Mississippi River Bottomlands, Coastal Plain, and the Wabash River Border. These areas were identified as the most important to wetland wildlife, such as waterfowl, wetland mammals, and wading birds, and also to the people who use these resources, such as waterfowl hunters and fur trappers. Each of these areas historically had abundant wetlands, and despite severe losses, still have some of the most abundant wetland habitats in the state. These areas also have high wetland restoration potential, with several demonstrated success stories.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Preventive and Ongoing Maintenance

The state continues to prioritize ongoing and preventive maintenance. Preventive maintenance already practiced through regular monitoring of park and recreation facilities is an important strategy to avoid costly repairs and problems. Continuing to take care of aging infrastructure and maintenance in a timely manner has been integral to agencies' ability to fix small problems before a major repair is needed, thus assuring community needs are met. Another recommendation is to develop communication strategies that educate citizens and other stakeholders on the costs and benefits of preventive and low cost maintenance.





### Public Access to Outdoor Recreation

All Illinois citizens should have equitable access to outdoor recreation opportunities. The state can identify regions of Illinois without adequate access to trails, greenways, parks, and natural areas and prioritize these regions. Targeting regions could help take steps to effectively address the challenges of accessibility constraints. Moreover, when applicable, ensuring ADA access to parks, natural areas, and trails as well as developing inclusive programs for people with disabilities will improve and enhance accessibility and use of parks, trails, and natural areas.

### Outdoor and Environmental Education

Considering the lack of K-12 environmental education, the state can collaborate with school and non-profit organizations to promote environmental ethics and provide environmental education resources for K-12 teachers and other public organizations. While it is important to note the value of such formal educational opportunities, it is equally important to emphasize the value of hands-on learning experiences in the outdoors. This can be addressed by designing communication campaigns to educate the public on the environment and keep them engaged in parks and outdoor recreation.

# FUNDING FOR CONSERVATION AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Roth, 2020a) shows the leisure and hospitality sector has been hit the hardest by COVID-19 in terms of employment, peaking at a 50.7% decrease in employment in April 2020, compared to 2019 (Roth, 2020a). Findings from an NRPA study indicated that parks and recreation budgets were significantly impacted by the pandemic and recession. Local and state governments already faced fiscal challenges that will likely continue until a vaccine is widely available and implemented. Findings from a 2017 NRPA study indicated local elected and public officials target park and recreation agencies for budget cuts when they face a major fiscal crisis, despite the fact they agree that parks and recreation significantly benefit their communities (Roth, 2020b). During the last recession, local park and recreation agency funding decreased by an inflation-adjusted 21% between 2009 and 2013 (greater than any other local government service), and funding and staffing were slow to rebound during the economic recovery from this recession (Roth, 2020b).

> ***... numerous opportunities have emerged including a renewed interest in outdoor recreation and an opportunity to promote nature-based recreation activity.***

Park and recreation agencies in part, rely on revenue from fees generated from functions such as programs, services, events, memberships, and facilities. Indeed, while use of parks and protected areas surged in the last nine months, most agencies reduced their operations for many months, invested in safety protocols and personal protective equipment (PPE), and re-opened with restrictions. From day camps and outdoor sports, to health and fitness programs, the ways parks and recreation agencies function changed quickly and the current conditions continue to pose challenges.

While these challenges continue, numerous opportunities have emerged including a renewed interest in outdoor recreation and an opportunity to promote nature-based recreation activity. Resident survey findings noted the increasing popularity of bicycling, wildlife viewing, hiking, and other outdoor recreation activities. For example, since participation in bicycling has increased significantly in 2020 (due in part to COVID-19), people have been buying more bicycles and biking related gear (e.g., clothing, accessories). Consequently, outdoor recreation retailers have benefitted from the increased interest in bicycling and the activities noted above. Thus, park and recreation agencies have embraced this trend by transitioning many programs, services, and COVID-19-friendly events outdoors, and continue to promote parks and natural areas. Moreover, they have given park users clear guidelines on safety, including masks and physical distancing.

The strong interest in nature and parks is timely since the Great American Outdoors Act passed and was signed into law in the summer of 2020. The passage of the Great American Outdoors Act makes the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) permanent and will provide much needed resources for parks and protected areas.



The priority areas identified in the SCORP align well with the goals of the Great American Outdoors Act and should facilitate the fulfillment of these goals.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Resources for Fundraising and Grants

As more resources are made available through grants and other fundraising efforts, the state should convey resources and information about grants, fundraising and grant writing to communities that help facilitate their acquisition and development of open space. Moreover, due to the recession, it is recommended that park and recreation agencies promote the many free and low cost programs and places that residents can access around Illinois. While Illinois recovers from the recession, it is a priority to identify and acquire land and water. In fact, more land is likely to be available due to the recession, which provides opportunities to identify and purchase land and water for natural resource preservation.

### Innovative Partnerships

Partnerships and collaborations offer an avenue to increase agency capacity to acquire and develop land for parks and outdoor recreation. Whether it is inter-governmental collaboration, public-private partnerships or philanthropic initiatives, working together is another way agencies can achieve mutual goals related to land acquisition and natural resource preservation.

### Measure Impacts and Value

Another way to ensure and bolster support for parks and outdoor recreation is by demonstrating the economic impacts that parks and outdoor recreation have on communities, regions and the State of Illinois. This can be done using existing evidence, such as from the report on Illinois Funding Needs and Economic Benefits Report (Illinois Association of Park Districts, 2017), the Outdoor Recreation Economy Report (Outdoor Industry Association, 2017) and Bureau of Labor Statistics. Moreover, it can often be difficult to quantify the economic impact of parks, outdoor recreation, conservation and the preservation of land and water. Thus, it may be useful to emphasize the significant value that parks and outdoor recreation bring in terms of economic, environmental, community and health benefits.



Chapter 6

# PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

ILLINOIS SCORP

Implementation of the SCORP is most directly evident in the administration of Illinois' Land and Water Conservation Fund program. SCORP findings and priorities are a major factor in the evaluation of LWCF projects and use of LWCF funds. While LWCF remains the forerunner of Illinois DNR's local grant-in-aid programs, as federal funding diminished in the 1980's and 1990's the state-funded Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) program was initiated so that land acquisition and facility development would continue. OSLAD's intent at inception was to be a companion to the highly successful LWCF program, and OSLAD's program format mirrored LWCF in every way.

Today, OSLAD has become the state's largest and most valuable grant program for local agencies developing diverse parks projects. Both programs together have had a major impact upon the provision of public outdoor recreation opportunities in Illinois for many decades. OSLAD and LWCF have the same objectives, same program structure, and are administered simultaneously in an annual local grant cycle by the Illinois DNR.

## DISTRIBUTION OF OSLAD AND LWCF GRANT FUNDS

Participation in the OSLAD and LWCF grant programs is available to governmental units with state statutory authority to acquire, develop, and maintain public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. It is the intent of the Department of Natural Resources to continue its policy of passing through a major portion of the annual Illinois LWCF allocation to local units of government. Historically, LWCF monies were used for state parks and other state sites, but recent policy has dedicated the majority of the allocation to local acquisitions and projects. OSLAD monies have always been dedicated for use by local agencies. Both OSLAD and LWCF programs provide up to a 50% grant contribution to qualifying projects. Communities meeting socioeconomic criteria may qualify for up to 90% with the OSLAD program. Sponsor agencies are responsible for the remaining



project funding not covered by the grant. Illinois DNR's goal in distributing OSLAD and LWCF funds is to participate in projects that serve a diversity of needs, including needs important to the local community and needs of statewide significance. Projects that provide a variety of facilities for different types of outdoor recreation experiences are best able to meet public needs. The classic contrast would be development of recreation areas for sports and family activities vs. land acquisition for the purpose of protecting natural resources and providing green space and nature areas. Both types of projects are valuable, serve a recreational purpose, and should be pursued for their multiple benefits to their communities. Each grant issued by the Illinois DNR is reviewed by the internal Comprehensive Environmental Review Process (CERP) to ensure impacts to state protected natural resources (e.g. endangered and threatened species, natural areas, and wetlands) are not adversely impacted.

## OTHER IDNR LOCAL RECREATION GRANT PROGRAMS

Various outdoor recreation grant programs for specific types of outdoor recreation are available through the Department of Natural Resources. Included are:

- **Boat Access Area Development (BAAD)**
- **Illinois Trails Grant Programs, which includes the following:**
  - Illinois Bicycle Path Program
  - Snowmobile (Local Government)
  - Snowmobile Trail Establishment Fund (STEF)
  - Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Program
  - Federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

These programs have objectives comparable with OSLAD/LWCF, to meet identified needs and priorities. For example, Boat Access Area Development is a longtime program dedicated to improving recreational access to the state's waterways.

## OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

OSLAD/LWCF and Illinois DNR's other local recreation grants are offered on a competitive basis according to established application procedures and submittal dates. OSLAD and LWCF grant program guidelines include a discussion of the project evaluation process, specifically stating that funding priorities are established through the statewide outdoor recreation planning process. The Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) is the instrument used to review and evaluate grant applications for both programs. It is designed to make the selection of projects objective and responsive to statewide and local outdoor recreation priorities and needs. By assigning point values for priorities and other variables, applications receive objective scoring which then enables selection of the highest-value projects. The OPSP and Illinois DNR evaluation criteria ensure that applications for funding from these programs are considered in a standardized and equitable manner.

Two current projects exemplify LWCF accomplishments. Both are critical land acquisition projects, one in Northeastern Illinois in Lake County and one in East Central Illinois in Champaign County. Both preserve significant green space in urban landscapes.



## *Wauconda Park District – Phil's Beach Acquisition*

The project consists of acquiring a historic swimming beach and picnic grove property of 3.5 acres, with 2.375 acres being lake front property on Bangs Lake. The purchase of the property will allow the district to expand and enhance active and passive recreational opportunities for the residents of Wauconda and surrounding communities. The district wishes to revitalize the swimming beach and open it to the public. At the same time, it will allow the district to protect more of the lake's shoreline by placing it in protective public ownership. Bangs Lake is a natural glacial take in the Fox Lake watershed. The lake is home to several Ilinois DNR threatened or endangered fish and aquatic plants.

The primary goal of the project is for the district to acquire 3.5 acres of property known as "Phil's Beach," a historic landmark in the Wauconda community. There are 5 separate parcels of land, with 2.37 acres being lakefront property on the shores of Bangs Lake. The district is seeking funding assistance to leverage its extremely limited local financial resources. The impact of this acquisition would be very positive for the Wauconda community. It would create both active and passive recreation for residents, provide economic stimulus to the town and create employment opportunities.

The district will acquire the 5 parcels of property from the landowners who are very in favor of the district's project to open this property back up to public use. This project will help to reestablish a part of Wauconda's history for future generations. Phil's Beach is an iconic landmark. In 1926, the legendary Phil's Beach opened to the public. From the time it opened until the late 1980's the resort was a popular summer destination for many in the Chicagoland area. Well known for its water toys and huge "J" slide, the beach was made more famous by appearing in the movie "The Blues Brothers."







## *Champaign Park District – Human Kinetics Park Acquisition*

The Champaign Park District (CPD) sought funds to purchase 6.48 acres of land for Human Kinetics (HK) Park. CPD anticipates the donation and general funds to finance the project which includes two soccer fields, and one convertible soccer/baseball field, with 3/10 of a mile of concrete pathway connections. CPD currently leases 8.5 acres of recreational land located in north Champaign (just south of Interstate 74) from a neighboring publishing company Human Kinetics Inc., but the aim is for CPD to become owners of the property. The 6.48 acres is on two parcels which have no existing structures on site. The acquisition offers a remarkable opportunity for the entire community-children, teens, adults, and seniors alike. Physically, this site provides linkages to three distinct, yet under-served neighborhoods. Owning this land gives CPD the opportunity to preserve access to green space for these neighborhoods in perpetuity. Moreover, the average household income in this area is approximately $10,000 below the average income for the entire city, and although 17% of Champaign's overall population is under the age of 17, the adjacent areas to HK Park vary from 20-31% youth under 17. Thus, Human Kinetics Park provides much needed access to parks in this neighborhood. This park is also currently open year-round, seven days a week from dawn-to-dusk, and there is no intention of altering hours.







## PRIORITIES

The OPSP implements the priorities of the SCORP. In the OSLAD and LWCF evaluation instruments, Statewide Outdoor Recreation Priorities and Project Need comprises 60% of the evaluation. The 2021 SCORP priorities, discussed in the previous chapter, will be incorporated in the updated grant evaluation processes. Because the 2021 priorities are similar to the priorities which have guided the grant programs in previous years, they should translate well into the OPSP reviews. Successful OSLAD and LWCF project proposals address at least one and usually multiple SCORP priorities. The 2021 SCORP priorities and example actions to support the priorities are:

- Health and Wellness
- Access to Parks and Recreation
- Natural Resource Conservation
- Funding and Economic Development

Two additional priorities are included in the OPSP, as need for these actions persists over the years. These are:

- Trails and Greenways – e.g., protect and/or develop for conservation and recreational purposes linear green spaces in metropolitan and community areas.
- Land Revitalization – e.g., adapt and re-use lands for open space and parks.

## PROJECT NEED

In addition to the priorities, Project Need is another OSLAD and LWCF evaluation criterion that is defined by the SCORP. Project Need relates to the supply of recreational lands and facilities on a per capita basis. SCORP measures, through its statewide supply inventory, the state's median supply of acres and facilities per 1,000 population. Total supply is divided by total population. Local agencies can similarly calculate their supply for the population they serve and compare it to the statewide per capita amount. Agencies having a lower per capita supply are considered to have greater need. This is a simple but meaningful measure of how well existing parks and facilities meet the needs for their areas.

Since Illinois continues to rank among the lowest of all states in terms of per capita supply of outdoor recreation land acreage, acquisition will always be a high priority. Investing grant funds in under-supplied communities will provide a better balance of outdoor recreation opportunities to citizens throughout Illinois. In applications for land acquisition grants, agencies having less than the statewide per capita amount of acres per 1,000 population are given higher priority.

## OTHER

In addition to SCORP-defined evaluation considerations in the OPSP, the scoring instrument also includes:

- Local Planning: Preference is given to projects with adopted local plans and direct public participation in the planning process.
- Site Characteristics and Development: Preference is given to site suitability for the proposed recreational development and good design elements.
- Project Special Considerations: Various considerations include donations, initial access, economic development, previous grants, new agencies, and high-density urban areas.

This SCORP implementation and OPSP discussion should provide guidance to agencies providing park lands and outdoor recreation facilities, if funding assistance will be sought. The SCORP's research findings and related information offer a collection of management considerations for Illinois' outdoor recreation providers.



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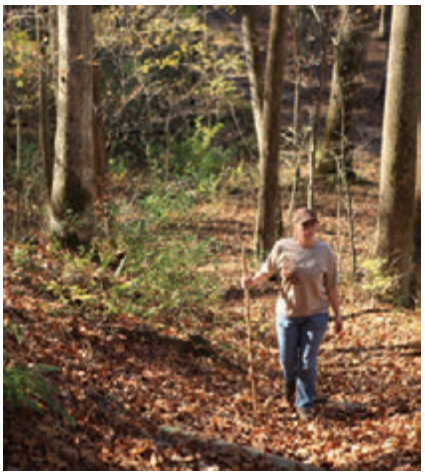
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