



Fact Sheet: Urban Parks and Community Green Spaces

From parks and rivers to farmlands and forests, America's great outdoors fuel our national spirit of adventure and independence and help power our economy. Our lands and waters also are where our families go to unwind, to fish, hike, and hunt, and to spend valuable time together.

Today, however, much of America's great outdoors is under intense pressure. Open lands, farmlands and woodlands are disappearing, waterways are polluted, and a changing climate is threatening natural systems. At the same time, many Americans – especially young people – are losing touch with the outdoor places and traditions our country has always treasured. President Obama believes that for America to be at its strongest, we need healthy and accessible lands and waters and healthy and active youth who are connected to them. That is why he established the America's Great Outdoors Initiative in April, 2010, to work with the American people develop a 21st century conservation and recreation agenda.

The America's Great Outdoors Initiative turns the old ways upside down. Instead of dictating policies from Washington, it calls for supporting local, community-driven conservation ideas. Instead of growing bureaucracy, it calls for reworking inefficient policies and making the Federal Government a better partner with states, tribes, and local communities.

During the summer of 2010, senior Administration officials held 51 public listening sessions across the country, 21 of them specifically with youth. Some 10,000 Americans participated in the live sessions and more than 105,000 provided comments. The outcome of this national conversation is a report to the President, *America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations*. Prepared in consultation with the American people, the report reflects their ideas on how to reconnect with America's lands, waters, and natural and cultural treasures, and build on the conservation successes in communities across the nation.

Urban Parks and Community Green Spaces: What We Heard

Parks and green spaces improve a community's economy, health, quality of life and social cohesion. In cities and towns across the country, parks can generate tourism and recreation dollars and improve investment and renewal. Time spent in nature also improves the emotional and physical wellbeing of children and adults alike. Parks and green spaces also have social value as places where people of all ages can come together to recreate and relax at little or no cost.

However, in some communities, the nearest park is miles away and cannot be visited using public transportation. Even in communities with ample open space, a lack of affordable, reliable transportation and safe pedestrian routes can deter people –especially youth and families – from enjoying the outdoors. Many expressed frustration at the outdated infrastructure in some parks and recreational areas, noting that broken water fountains, restrooms, and lamp posts made these places less welcoming. Likewise, many parents voiced concerns about the safety of neighborhood parks.

AGO listening sessions revealed widespread support for investment in parks and open spaces close to where people live, work, and go to school. At a time when the demand for such places far exceeds the resources available to support them, these investments must be strategic, collaborative, and locally-driven. There is a

need for more technical assistance and seed funding from the federal government, and improved coordination among federal, state, and local agencies. One of the most frequent recommendations was to fully fund – and reform the stateside criteria for – the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to better enable state and local governments to create and maintain open spaces and community recreation venues.

Urban Parks and Community Green Spaces: What We Are Doing

Responding to the priorities of Americans, the Obama Administration will take action to:

Invigorate the Land and Water Conservation Fund to better meet conservation and recreation needs in urban settings.

- Provide full funding for the LWCF.
- Focus a portion of federal LWCF funds and broaden guidelines for 5-year Statewide Comprehensive Outdoors Recreation Plans to support urban parks and community green spaces, and river restoration and access.

Enhance and create a new generation of safe, clean, accessible urban parks and community green spaces

- Establish the AGO Great Urban Parks and Community Green Spaces initiative and increase funding for the NPS's *LWCF stateside program* to leverage investment in existing and new recreation venues.
- Work with partners to develop criteria within the stateside LWCF for prioritizing urban parks and community green spaces.
- Target technical assistance support programs, such as the NPS Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA), to enhance and create urban parks and community green spaces.
- Align and coordinate federal investments for urban parks and community green spaces, including grant programs through the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Transportation (DOT), as well as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Connect people to the parks and green spaces in their communities.

- Working with Let's Move Outside!, launch a public awareness initiative to show that experiencing America's Great Outdoors is fun, easy, and healthy.
- Work with the Department of Education and other federal agencies to align and support programs that advance awareness and understanding of the benefits of nature.
- Work with communities and tribes to establish community forests in both urban and rural communities through the USFS Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program.

Empower communities to connect with their rivers and other waterways.

- Establish the AGO National Recreational Blueway Trails Initiative to designate community-scale portions of rivers as recreational destinations that receive special attention for restoration and access.
- Partner with state, local, and tribal government, and the private sector to support community efforts to enhance and restore local waterways and the surrounding land.

For more detailed information and to learn how you can take action in your community, visit:

www.doi.gov/AmericasGreatOutdoors.