



# Health

Developing outdoor recreation strategies  
that support community health goals

The National Park Service supports communities that lack access to outdoor recreation opportunities by developing programs and parks that aim to improve the mental and physical wellbeing of their residents.



## The National Park Service

# Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program

### About Us

The **National Park Service**, through the **Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance** program (NPS-RTCA), has supported locally-led conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the United States for more than 30 years. NPS-RTCA assists communities in developing or restoring parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as creating outdoor recreation opportunities and programs that engage future generations in the outdoors. Through an annual application process, community groups, nonprofit organizations, tribal governments, national parks, and local, state and federal agencies can apply for NPS-RTCA technical assistance.

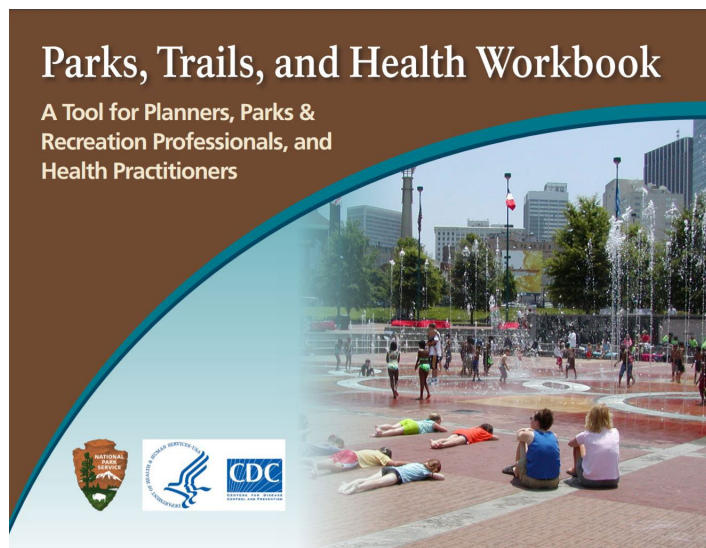
### Our Model

Across the country, NPS-RTCA staff pair their professional planning, design and technical expertise with your team and knowledge experts from the community. Together, our 1 to 2 year-long partnership works to achieve your conservation and outdoor recreation vision. Based on the complexity of the project, we tailor our assistance to meet your needs and help you navigate a path to success. Although NPS-RTCA is not a grant-funding program, we can help your organization identify potential funding sources for your project.

### Community Engagement

As a collaborative partner, we strive to achieve successful project outcomes by engaging communities in the visioning, planning and implementation of each project. We encourage strong community partnerships and facilitate meaningful engagement to ensure your conservation and outdoor recreation projects last into perpetuity.

## Incorporating Health Needs in Outdoor Recreation Planning



Building healthy communities by conserving areas and expanding access to outdoor recreation opportunities is what many NPS-RTCA projects are about. The *Parks, Trails, and Health Workbook: A Tool for Planners, Parks & Recreation Professionals, and Health Practitioners* is a resource to assess the local and regional health needs of residents. Using the workbook to complete health assessments, project planners can develop strategies that will help improve the health of residents through close-to-home parks, trails and conservation areas.

The workbook was developed through a collaboration between NPS-RTCA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – used early in the planning process, the assessment can help guide public discussions about how to achieve community health goals. The outcome is to assist communities in expanding outdoor recreation opportunities and designing parks to promote physical activity, support mental health, foster social interactions and provide environmental benefits.

### Washington

## Developing a Program That Prescribes Parks

Whatcom County is one of the most physically active and healthiest counties in Washington state, yet not all residents are aware of the positive impacts of spending time outdoors, nor share the same access to recreation opportunities that could benefit their physical, mental and social health.

Recreation Northwest collaborated with NPS-RTCA to develop a community program that would get more people outside and active in their parks and trails. NPS-RTCA engaged residents, healthcare providers, and park and land managers in assessing local health needs, evolving a community vision, and inventorying parks and outdoor recreation opportunities.



Guided by public input, NPS-RTCA and Recreation Northwest developed Parkscriptions, a program that encourages health care providers to prescribe time in nature to their patients. With support from NPS-RTCA, an interactive mobile platform with a map of Whatcom County public parks and trails was developed with more than a dozen health care providers participating. Today, doctors have the information they need to prescribe close-to-home outdoor activities to their patients.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Who are we?**

The **National Park Service – Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA)** assists communities, public land managers and nonprofit organizations with conservation and outdoor recreation projects. NPS-RTCA provides professional planning, design and technical expertise to help achieve your conservation and outdoor recreation vision.

## **Does NPS-RTCA provide funding?**

No. NPS-RTCA is not a grant-funding program, but we can help you identify potential funding sources for your project.

## **What kind of projects does NPS-RTCA support?**

Our program staff support locally-led projects that develop or restore parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as create outdoor recreation opportunities and programs that engage future generations in the outdoors.

## **Are NPS-RTCA staff contractors?**

The NPS-RTCA model is to combine the skills of our staff with those of your organization. It's a partnership – we work alongside your team and local knowledge experts to assist with the work that you are leading.

## **How much time do NPS-RTCA staff spend on each project?**

Typically, NPS-RTCA staff collaborate with communities for 1 to 2 years on conservation and outdoor recreation projects. Depending on the complexity of the project and our staffing capacity, the time frame may be extended.

## **Who can apply for assistance from NPS-RTCA?**

NPS-RTCA provides services to established community groups, nonprofit organizations, tribal governments, national parks, and local, state and federal agencies.

## **How can you apply for assistance from NPS-RTCA?**

NPS-RTCA support is provided when we are invited to assist you on a conservation or outdoor recreation project. We encourage you to contact us to discuss your project before applying. The application is available on our website: [www.nps.gov/RTCA](http://www.nps.gov/RTCA)

 [nps.gov/RTCA](http://nps.gov/RTCA)

 [NPS\\_RTCA@nps.gov](mailto:NPS_RTCA@nps.gov)

 [facebook.com/RTCANPS](https://facebook.com/RTCANPS)

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