



“The National Park Service conveys health benefits to the American public by providing places for healthful, physically active recreation in the great outdoors” . . . National Park System Advisory Board Committee on Health and Recreation.

SEVEN PILOT PROJECTS

The National Park Service (NPS) has launched seven health and recreation pilot projects to evaluate a variety of interventions for increasing healthful physical activity by park visitors and/or residents of communities near parks. Based upon recommendations of the National Park Service Advisory Board, in March 2006, and acceptance by the NPS Director, these pilot projects will help determine how the National Park Service can effectively implement the key objectives of President George W. Bush’s *HealthierUS* Initiative.

Funded in the amount of \$500,000 from NPS 20% Recreational Fee Enhancement Program, the pilots consist of three “destination” parks (Sitka National Historical Park, Zion National Park, and Acadia National Park) and four “urban” parks (Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, Point Reyes National Seashore, and Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve).

OUR SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

To date, empirical data is lacking that quantifies and, in turn, validates the value of national parks in promoting and providing for active lifestyles through appropriate recreational activities in the great outdoors. Each pilot project is uniquely tailored to individual park resources and goals and consists of baseline measures, an intervention, and post-intervention measurements. In all cases, evaluations will be conducted using quasi-experimental designs in which baseline measures of physical activity and health awareness are compared with post-intervention measures from the same or equivalent populations. All are scheduled to be completed by December 2007. Promotion campaigns, events and programs for the seven parks are scheduled to take place during high visitation periods during summer 2007.

Pilot Project Highlight: Get Up Get Out Go! at Cuyahoga Valley National Park



“Get Up, Get Out, And Go!” was developed with student leaders and community partners in the Akron area. This engagement process revealed that many children living within blocks of the park had not been to the park, nor were they aware of its existence.

Some children feared the parks’ wooded environment. For example, during one visit to the park, students indicated they were afraid of being attacked by wild animals, such as snakes, lions, and tigers. To overcome these fears and increase awareness of the park, a twice-weekly program of guided recreation activities for youth was pre-tested during the summer of 2006. Based on this experience, the program has been refined for summer 2007.

The pilot projects have been designed using a logic model approach to achieve one or more of the following outcomes:

- Increase awareness of health benefits by park visitors derived from participation in recreation in units of the National Park System;
- Increase healthful recreation/physical activity behavior by park visitors; and
- Increase healthful recreation/regular physical activity behavior as a lifestyle at home.

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A workshop was conducted in February 2007 in Washington D.C. with participation from approximately 30 people including staff and principal investigators working on each of the pilots. This workshop was successful in providing an opportunity for face-to-face dialog to better understand methodologies, protocols and measures for active living research with application for the pilot projects.

Led by two coordinating principal investigators, Drs. Ross Brownson and Christine Hoehner from St. Louis University School of Public Health and Dr. David Buchner, Chief, Physical Activity and Health Branch, Centers for Disease Control, workshop participants agreed to the following set of guiding principles:

- 1) Use the strongest evaluation designs possible,
- 2) Use common and tested measures when possible,
- 3) Create structures for collaboration and sharing of information,
- 4) Publish what we learn in peer-reviewed journals,
- 5) Seek out other forms of dissemination so our findings are used by others.

CLEARANCE FROM THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

The Office of Management and Budget approved the NPS Health and Recreation Initiative pilot projects and studies on May 24 (control number 1024-0253). This approval marks a major milestone in terms of keeping all the seven pilot projects moving forward on time and on budget as originally envisioned by the parks and our partners.

A 25 page supporting statement was prepared as a requisite to this approval in order to justify and explain the work of the pilots, detail methodologies and protocols, and estimate the total annualized cost to the federal government and burden hours to the American public for acquiring voluntary information from visitors to national parks. Copies of this document can be provided upon request.

The seven pilot projects were selected to represent a range of park types, target populations, and recreation activities (see table below).

Summary of Health and Recreation Pilot Project Information Collections, 2007				
Pilot park	Target audience	Trail-intercept survey	Focus groups	Participant surveys
Acadia	General recreation visitors	X		
Point Reyes	General recreation visitors	X		
Sitka	General recreation visitors	X		
Zion	General recreation visitors	X		
C&O Canal	Employees of nearby businesses		X	X
Cuyahoga Valley	Middle school students		X	X
Timucuan	Inner city youth			X

Analysis and Future Applications in the Field

In 2008, a final synthesis report will be prepared by St.Louis University to summarize results both quantitatively and qualitatively across the seven parks. The knowledge gained from the pilot interventions will be used by parks, regional offices, and the NPS Washington Office to develop a plan for implementing the *HealthierUS* Initiative in the National Park System.