

Healthy Parks Healthy People 2018-2023 Strategic Plan



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service
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VISION STATEMENT

Parks contribute to a healthy, just, and sustainable world.

NPS Healthy Parks Healthy People

Healthy Parks Healthy People is a global movement that harnesses the power of parks and public lands to contribute to a healthy civil society. The idea originated with Parks Victoria, Australia, and was brought to global prominence at the first Healthy Parks Healthy People Congress in April 2010. The National Park Service established Healthy Parks Healthy People in 2011 to advance the role of parks and public lands as powerful health resources serving as a catalyst for bringing about lasting change in Americans' lifestyle choices and their relationship with nature and the outdoors.

The connection between public health and parks is not a new idea. In 1918, Stephen Mather, the first Director of the National Park Service, and Hugh Cumming, the fifth U.S. Surgeon General, entered into one of the oldest inter-agency agreements in the U.S. government, to address drinking water safety in Yellowstone National Park. Since that time, the United States Public Health Service has worked closely with the National Park Service to provide public health expertise to prevent disease and protect and promote health. Today, the National Park Service has more than 400 parks, recreation areas, cultural sites, rivers, trails and historic sites that provide opportunities for individuals to improve their health and general wellbeing.

Parks Are Good For Our Nation's Health

Americans are increasingly disconnected from nature. Lifestyle induced illness and chronic disease are on the rise. There is an increase in alcohol and drug abuse and mental illnesses account for a larger proportion of disability in developed countries than any other cause. Despite research that shows the health benefits derived from spending time in nature, Americans spend an average of 93% of time indoors each day and only 21% of adults get the recommended 2½ hours of physical activity per week.

The average time spent in front of electronic screens is almost 2 hours per day for children under the age of 8 and over 7 hours per day for adolescents and young adults ages 8-18. The increasing burden of chronic disease and associated healthcare costs has sparked renewed interest and support for disease prevention. In the United States, chronic disease accounts for 75% of our healthcare expenditures, and healthcare spending accounts for 18% of our Gross Domestic Product. In addition, the same groups that are most at risk for chronic disease and early mortality are those currently not well represented in the visitor population of our national parks.

Parks are good medicine. Studies have shown the following:

- Living near green spaces reduces mortality even when adjusted for socio-demographic factors.
- Enjoying time in a park by taking a walk or relaxing outdoors influenced healthier behaviors, including eating healthier and less food afterwards.
- Contact with nature improves immune function, and contributes to the general health of adults, children, and cancer survivors.
- Viewing and spending time in nature lowers cortisol and blood pressure and is linked with lowering levels of stress, depression, anxiety, and aggression.
- Access to parks is a social equalizer, benefiting people's health and wellbeing over the course of one's life.



Partnering For Results

Since its inception, NPS Healthy Parks Healthy People has worked with national, state, and local parks, as well as business innovators, healthcare leaders, scientists, foundations, and advocacy organizations to foster and build-upon the role parks play in the health of our society. These partnerships have:

- **Increased awareness and understanding** of how promoting parks as a health resource serves as a public engagement strategy to invite new and first time visitors to parks;
- **Expanded opportunities to share resources and expertise** with the health sector to pursue common goals;
- **Increased investment in parks** to promote programs, projects, and events that advance parks as a health resource;
- **Catalyzed new and innovative approaches** to address health needs in parks and communities across this country and the world;
- **Inspired park systems at national, state, and local levels** to promote parks as places for people to derive health benefits; and
- **Fostered scholarly research** and sparked new research consortiums to better understand and act on advancing the connection of parks and health.

Promising Practices in NPS Health Promotion

As a result of the first five years of innovative program development in parks and communities, the NPS has identified a set of Healthy Parks Healthy People promising practices for broader application nationally.

Promising Practices

Promising practices are pioneering health promotion efforts identified by NPS for expansion nationally.

These programs serve as “gateways to better health” by providing opportunities for people to learn about and practice healthy lifestyles in fun and engaging ways.

The NPS places a high priority on park-based health promotion programs for military personnel, veterans, women, minorities, and underserved communities that have traditionally participated less in outdoor recreation and have comparatively greater health challenges.



“Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life; where they learn, work, play, and love.... caring, holism, and ecology are essential issues in developing strategies for health promotion.”

World Health Organization (WHO)
Ottawa Charter, 1986

Examples of promising practices include:

Park Prescriptions (Park Rx): Doctors across the nation are now prescribing time in parks and green spaces to treat and prevent chronic illness and to inspire patients to take proactive steps to improve their health and wellbeing.

Open Streets/Cyclovia: Parks and communities are closing streets to traffic allowing people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to safely recreate on public roadways to improve their health.

Park Based Fitness Challenges: Parks are establishing fitness challenge programs for visitors to set and pursue their own wellness and fitness goals through activities, such as hiking, biking, and paddling, while earning badges and recognition along the way.

Community Gardens: Gardens located in national parks foster healthy living, healthy eating, and community engagement through growing and harvesting food, some of which may be served to visitors at park restaurants or donated to local food banks.

Healthy & Sustainable Food Program: The National Park Service has established standards, guidelines, tools, and resources to provide healthy, sustainable, and affordable food and beverage options for park visitors.

Smoke Free Parks: Many superintendents are designating areas within their parks as "smoke-free" to protect human and ecosystem health, prevent fires, and improve visitor experience.

Art Therapy: Parks are offering art therapy, which uses the visual and performing arts to promote mental and emotional health, through in-park day programs, Art Therapist-in-Residence, and specialized-care programs.

Nature Play Zones: Parks are designating outdoor play areas for children that foster creativity and movement through unstructured play activities such as nature art, “build it” areas, climbing and crawling, balancing, music and movement, messy play, and water play.

2018-2023 Healthy Parks Healthy People Strategic Plan

In January 2017, an interdisciplinary team of National Park Service staff representing 25 programs convened to develop the next iteration of a strategic plan for Healthy Parks Healthy People to provide overarching direction for health promotion across the NPS. This Healthy Parks Healthy People Strategic Plan shines a light on the opportunities and means for aligning and maximizing efficiencies across parks, programs and divisions to advance the mission of the NPS through the lens of promoting both the health of parks and the health of the people who visit, work in, and live near them.

Our Path Forward - Vision and Goals

The National Park Service has a role to play in improving both the health of the natural and cultural environments within national parks as well as the health and overall wellbeing of visitors to parks, employees of the National Park Service, and the communities adjacent to park lands. The NPS is committed to engaging in sustainable operational practices and encouraging Americans from all walks of life to enjoy the health benefits afforded by park lands and programs.



Ten years after the initial launch of the program, the NPS has learned from its previous experience and through a highly collaborative process has determined its priorities for the next five years in the form of seven strategic goals. These strategic goals fall into two categories: Parks and People. The **“parks”** goals relate to the physical, natural, cultural and social environments of national parks. The **“people”** goals address the desired impacts on individual visitors and employees and the collective benefits experienced by communities and organizations who partner with the NPS to pursue improved health outcomes.

Healthy Parks Goals

1. The NPS is a healthy place to work.
2. Healthy Parks Healthy People contributes to the health of parks and ecosystems.
3. Improvements to and maintenance of, existing and new facilities, programs, and environments optimize overall health benefits.



Healthy People Goals

4. NPS employees are ambassadors for healthy living.
5. People are inspired to improve their health in parks.
6. Community engagement and partnerships amplify health benefits of parks.
7. Healthy Parks Healthy People enhances the economic wellbeing and resiliency of local and regional communities.

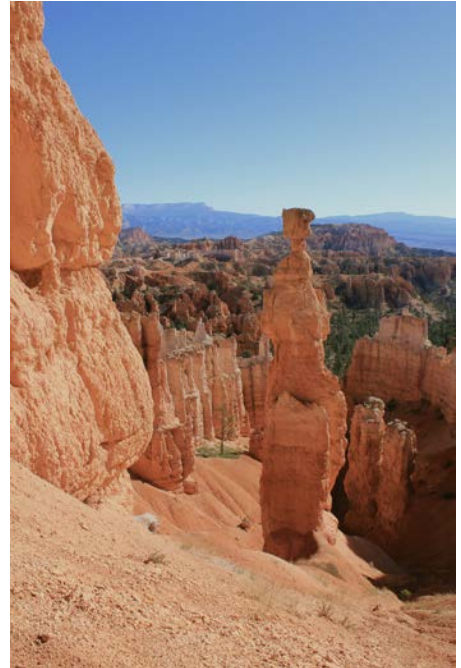
Implementing Our Strategic Plan

The strategic direction, articulated in the Healthy Parks Healthy People vision statement and goals, is supported by a detailed plan describing **over 100 actions** currently underway and planned for the next five years across the National Park Service and in collaboration with partner organizations committed to increasing environmental and human health in the United States.

A series of principles have guided Healthy Parks Healthy People within the NPS since its inception. These principles continue to serve as the foundation upon which implementation of this strategic plan will rest.

Guiding Principles

- We promote health and wellbeing as an interrelated system linking human health to natural landscapes and all species.
- Our work takes place both within and beyond park boundaries.
- We encourage uses that promote the health of all species while avoiding those that impair resources.
- Our aim includes activities that contribute to physical, mental, and spiritual health, and social wellbeing.
- We seek to provide equitable access to open spaces and natural places.
- We seek expertise and resources from a wide range of partners in the public and private sectors.
- Our commitment to improving public health will be mirrored in internal programs for our workforce.



We Are in This Together

Implementing the NPS Healthy Parks Healthy People Strategic Plan will rely on collaboration both within the National Park Service and with a diverse array of external partners. Success will depend on the support of partners committed to improving health outcomes for people and the parks they love.

Taking Action - 11 Ways to Engage

The 100+ actions contained in the Healthy Parks Healthy People Strategic Plan fall into **11 arenas for collaboration**. Each of these arenas provides opportunities for partners internal and external to the National Park Service to share resources and expertise aimed at increasing our collective capability to achieve our strategic goals. Opportunities for collaboration include:

1. **Access to Parks:** Making a healthy park experience easier, more desirable, and relatable to all people;
2. **Recreation:** Offering increased opportunities for health enhancing recreational activities in parks;
3. **Commercial Services:** Aligning visitor service contracts with HPHP strategic goals;
4. **Environmental Sustainability:** Promoting human and environmental health through education and implementation of sustainable practices;
5. **Employee Health & Wellness:** Supporting the health and wellbeing of the NPS workforce;
6. **Community Engagement:** Strengthening relationships with partners to improve overall health outcomes;
7. **Volunteerism:** Engaging volunteers in health promotion efforts;
8. **Research:** Deepening our collective understanding of the health benefits of parks to individuals, communities, and the natural world;
9. **Communications:** Developing messaging and information delivery strategies to support implementation of the HPHP strategic plan;
10. **Technology & Tools:** Developing or updating IT systems and tools to support HPHP strategic goals;
11. **Support:** Reinforcing cross-arena collaboration in order to build capacity to sustain and expand health promotion across the Service and with partners.

Tracking Our Success

The Healthy Parks Healthy People Strategic Plan is managed by the Office of Public Health, which will support implementation of the plan through serving as a convener, an information clearinghouse, identifying opportunities for collaboration, and providing assistance in obtaining resources and support for health promotion efforts across the National Park Service. The Office of Public Health will track, measure, and report on the progress of the actions within each goal and provide periodic updates to leadership, park employees, and external partners as means of recognizing accomplishments, sharing best practices and further inspiring continued and increased participation in the pursuit of Healthy Parks Healthy People goals.

Join The Movement

Improving the health of national parks, park visitors, NPS employees, and gateway communities will take all of us. Do you have actions you want included in the strategic plan? Share them in the [Implementation Actions Form](#). To learn more about Healthy Parks Healthy People go to www.nps.gov/hphp.



For more information, contact:

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This Healthy Parks Healthy People Strategy is aligned with the U.S. Department of Interior Strategic Plan (2018-2022) and supports the Secretary of Interior’s “top-ten” priorities.

NPS Healthy Parks Health People Strategic Plan										
The Department of the Interior Priorities										
Healthy Parks Healthy People 7 Strategic Goals	Secretary of Interior’s Top-Ten Priorities ⁱ									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. The NPS is a healthy place to work.	✓		✓							✓
2. Healthy Parks Healthy People contributes to the health of parks and ecosystems.	✓	✓	✓							✓
3. Improvements to and maintenance of, existing and new facilities, programs, and environments optimize overall health benefits.	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓
4. NPS employees are ambassadors for healthy living.	✓		✓							✓
5. People are inspired to improve their health in parks.	✓	✓	✓							✓
6. Community engagement and partnerships amplify health benefits of parks.	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓
7. Healthy Parks Healthy People enhances the economic wellbeing and resiliency of local and regional communities.	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓

ⁱ Secretary of Interior’s top ten priorities:

- 1) Creating a conservation stewardship legacy second only to Teddy Roosevelt;
- 2) Utilizing our natural resources;
- 3) Restoring trust with local communities;
- 4) Ensuring sovereignty means something;
- 5) Generating additional revenues to support DOI & National Interests;
- 6) Protecting our people and the border;
- 7) Striking a regulatory balance;
- 8) Modernizing our infrastructure;
- 9) Reorganizing for the next 100 years;
- 10) Achieving our goals and leading our team forward.